

Metra commuter rail station coming to Oswego?

Yorkville engineering firm hired to draft plans for extension of service

By John Etheredge

An engineering firm for Metra has begun work preparing plans for the extension of commuter rail service from downtown Aurora to the current site of Oswego's Park-n-Ride facility at the northwest corner of Orchard and Mill roads, State Rep. Tom Cross, R-Oswego, said Monday.

In addition, Cross said Montgomery Village President Marilyn Michelini and Yorkville Mayor Valeria Burd have voiced support for an Oswego Metra station as part of a long-term effort to secure stations for their respective communities.

Cross said he discussed the Metra service extension project with Michelini, Burd and Oswego Village President Brian LeClercq during a meeting Monday morning in Oswego.

Also present for the meeting was Paul Pagano, executive director of Metra.

"We had a good meeting," Cross said.

Over the past several years, officials in each of the municipalities have been lobbying Metra and area state lawmakers to site a Metra station along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway's main line tracks in their respective communities.

"Valerie (Burd) has wanted a station in Yorkville, and, obviously Oswego already has its site at the Park-n-Ride and Marilyn (Michelini) has wanted a station in Montgomery," Cross said. "But it appears now we have some consensus that we will do that one site out at Orchard and Mill (in Oswego) now and call it like the 'Tri-Cities Station.'"

Cross continued, "The three mayors, I believe, have agreed to work together on Oswego as the first site, but then, obviously, down the road the Oswego station would not preclude the opening of another station further west in Yorkville or going back towards Montgomery."

Referring to the mayors, he added, "They all three agreed that to get Metra out here is important and to look at this from a regional standpoint."

Michelini confirmed Monday evening that she and the other area mayors agreed to work jointly to have Metra service extended initially to Oswego.

"We're looking at it as a way for us to get our foot in the door to get the service out this way and Tom (Cross) thought that regional approach was a good way to go," she said.

Cross said Metra has hired the Yorkville-based engineering firm of Smith Engineering, Inc. (SEC), to prepare the engineering plans for extending its service west from its current terminus at the Aurora Transportation Center in downtown Aurora to Oswego. He said an SEC representative, Jason Popen, also attended Monday's meeting.

Cross said it will take about two years for the firm to complete the plans.

In the meantime, Cross said he and other lawmakers must act to secure funds for the project in the federal highway transportation bill that was signed into law by then President George Bush in 2005.

Cross said former U.S. Rep. Dennis Hastert, R-Plano, had about \$75 million placed in the bill as the federal share of the cost to extend Metra service into Kendall County from Aurora. But Cross noted that the Illinois General Assembly must approve additional matching funds to secure the federal funds for the project.

Cross said he is going to seek the support of other area state lawmakers including State Sen. Linda Holmes, D-Aurora, State Sen. Chris Lauzen, R-Aurora, and State Rep. Kay Hatcher, R-Yorkville, for the project.

Holmes has already indicated she will support the effort, according to Cross.

Referring to the other lawmakers, Cross said, "We will reach out to them."

Not planning a 'big, fancy station'

Cross said the bulk of the federal and state dollars that would be spent on the Oswego station project would go towards track improvements between Aurora and Oswego. Metra trains operate on a triple track between Aurora and Chicago, but the triple track is reduced to a double track west of the Aurora Transportation Center.

"We're not looking at a big, fancy station out here (in Oswego)," Cross said. "We're talking about a station that would be largely a platform."

Cross said Pagano commented at Monday's meeting that the Oswego

station would be similar to the Metra station opened in Elburn a few years ago as part of an extension of the agency's Union Pacific west line from Geneva. That station features a parking lot and an enclosed platform.

Securing the development of a Metra station has been a planning goal for officials in Montgomery and Oswego dating back to the early 1990s.

Oswego took a major step towards achieving that goal by obtaining grants and constructing the Metra Park-n-Ride facility at Orchard and Mill roads in 2004.

In the meantime, a consulting firm for the Village of Montgomery is currently preparing a study on the siting of a Metra Park-n-Ride and a full-fledged station somewhere in the village's downtown area. The village obtained a grant to pay for the study in 2006.

Montgomery's bid to secure Metra facilities dates back more than a decade. The siting of a station was first recommended as a transportation improvement in a comprehensive land use plan adopted by the village board in 1991.

A study released by Metra the following year also targeted the village as a potential commuter station site. The study noted a station in Montgomery could serve commuters from the village and neighboring communities, including Oswego.

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State Rep. Tom Cross
R-Oswego
Republican House Leader

Another study, completed in 2002 for the Kendall County Metra Ad Hoc Study Committee, confirmed the feasibility of extending Metra service west along the BNSF main line to Montgomery, Oswego, Yorkville and Plano.

That study, prepared by a Chicago-based consulting firm, estimated the total capital costs for siting stations in Montgomery, Oswego, Yorkville and Plano at \$102.8 million in 2002 dollars. The estimate included the cost for purchasing additional locomotives and passenger cars.