Testimony of Forrest Claypool
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Before the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

Hearing on
"Examining the Current and Future Demands on
FTA's Capital Investment Grants"

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Chairman Petri, Ranking Member Norton, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Forrest Claypool and I am the President of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA). The CTA is the nation's second-largest transit agency with over 1.7 million rides per day in the City of Chicago and 35 suburbs, and I am here today to talk about the importance of Core Capacity projects.

As you know, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act contained a provision that allowed Core Capacity projects to be eligible for the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) 5309 Capital Investment Program. Core Capacity projects expand capacity within the existing footprint of a transit network to meet current and future ridership demand. Per MAP-21, eligible Core Capacity activities include adding infill stations, expanding platforms, double tracking, improving signal systems, increasing electrical power, and other activities that increase capacity by 10 percent or more. Previous experience with core capacity projects in Chicago has proven that core capacity is a cost-effective way to increase transit ridership and improve the efficiency of transit services throughout the country.

Chicago Experience with Core Capacity

Due to ridership gains of nearly 80 percent from 1980 to 2000 on its Brown Line, the CTA undertook plans to add capacity by extending the Brown Line 6-car platforms to 8-car platforms and by reconstructing stations to allow for full accessibility. This $522 million project was listed as a 5309 Capital Investment project in The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and subsequently received a $245 million FTA Full Funding Grant Agreement in 2004. The CTA completed construction by 2010 on time and under budget.

Pre-construction ridership projections forecasted a 22 percent increase in weekday ridership by the year 2020, but that target was surpassed by 2011, less than two years after the project was complete. Ridership has increased by 36 percent compared to 2003 pre-construction levels, while at the same time, CTA systemwide ridership has increased only 14 percent. That 36 percent increase equates to 30,000 rides each weekday.

The Brown Line Capacity Expansion Project not only surpassed expectations in moving more people to and from their destinations, but it also had a profound impact on economic development. In 2011 one-quarter of all City of Chicago building permits issued were within a half-mile of Brown Line stations. In addition, median home value near the Brown Line increased by 40 percent from pre- to post-construction. As you can see from the CTA map in your attachments (*Attachment A*), the Brown Line is a very small part of the City's footprint, but the high number of building permits, subsequent new development, and the increase in home values demonstrates the beneficial impact this project has had on the surrounding neighborhoods.

Next Priority Core Capacity Project: Red and Purple Lines

Chicago's Red and Purple lines are the backbone of our transit network, providing 300,000 rides each weekday extending north and south through the City and into the northern suburbs from the Linden Purple Line station in Wilmette to the 95th/Dan Ryan hub in Chicago. (See *Attachment B* - the Purple Line operates in Evanston and Wilmette and also operates as express track alongside the Red Line from the city limit to Belmont Station and further south into downtown).

Much of the northern section of the Red Line corridor is more than 100 years old – built by private enterprises in the late 1800s and early 1900s and composed of the famous elevated tracks, narrow platforms, and curves for which Chicago transit is known. Unfortunately, only 6 of 21 stations are ADA accessible. This corridor, from Belmont to Linden, serves 130,000 rides a day and well-known landmarks such as the Chicago Cubs' Wrigley Field, and universities such as Loyola and Northwestern. While the age and unique features of our transit system may be endearing to some, they are costly to maintain and make it harder for the system to meet ridership demands in an economically thriving, growing, diverse, and densely populated section of the region. (*Attachment C* – aerial photograph of Red-Purple corridor and surroundings).

Over the last decade, ridership in this corridor has increased each year to the point where we are at capacity and cannot accommodate all passengers from the platform onto the train during rush hour, as you can see by the attached series of photos that were taken last week (*Attachment D* – pictures of CTA Addison Station). Constraints on our signaling and power system do not allow CTA to put more train sets on this line to de-crowd these rail cars and meet demand. Further, even if we could put more trains on this line, the aforementioned curves and a bottleneck called "Clark Junction" south of Wrigley Field – as seen on the *Attachment B* map where the Red, Purple, and Brown lines meet - would delay the extra trains from proceeding to their destination (*Attachment E*: Chart Showing Capacity Constraints).

To increase capacity, the CTA plans to:
1) Widen platforms to improve circulation and speed passenger de-boarding and boarding;
2) Extend platforms to allow an increase from 8-car trains to 10-car trains;
3) Modernize the signal system to decrease travel time;
4) Add new electrical substations to increase capacity for adding more trains to the corridor;
5) Straighten curves to increase train speed;
6) Add track to decongest bottlenecks, and
7) Add ADA accessibility at all stations

This project would be constructed along with a state of good repair project that would rebuild track and elevated structure in the same corridor. Since the Red and Purple lines need to be rebuilt, it only makes sense to add capacity for the next 80 years. The combined project would cost roughly $4 billion, with $2-3 billion for the Core Capacity elements.

The CTA estimates that if all of these capacity enhancements were undertaken, capacity would more than double on this corridor. Our previous experience on the Brown Line suggests that transit riders will utilize all of this added capacity in just a few years – that would equate to 130,000 new rides each weekday. Moreover, the Brown Line experience highlights the vast economic development opportunities available along the Red and Purple lines.

The FTA recently approved the CTA's request to enter the Red and Purple Line project into Project Development. I would like to thank Administrator Rogoff and his team at the FTA for their support of Core Capacity, and we look forward to working with the FTA to move this project forward.

Widespread Support for Core Capacity

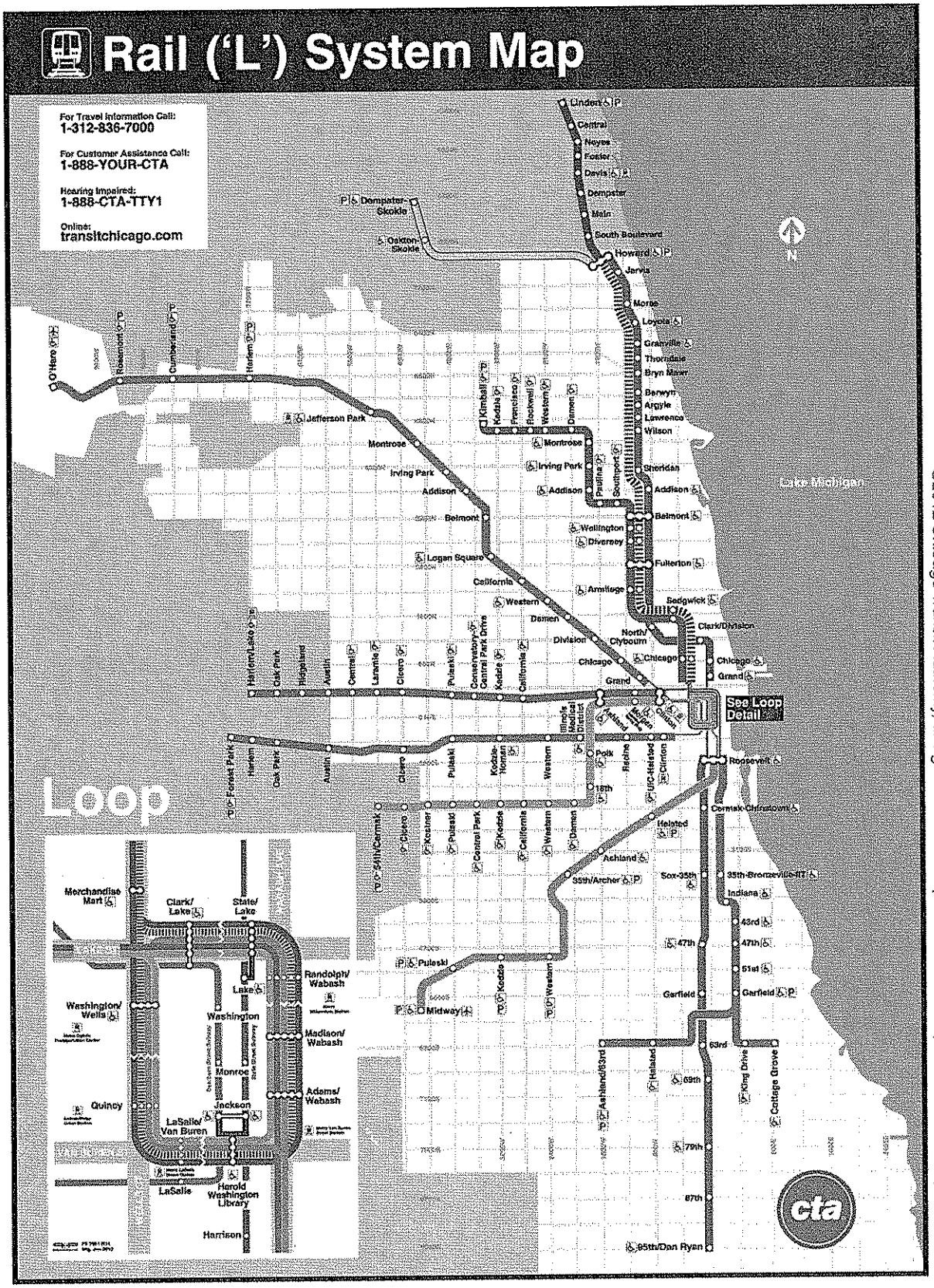
Before I close, I want to highlight the fact that Chicago is not alone in pursuing a Core Capacity project. Transit agencies from New York, Philadelphia, Washington DC, San Francisco and Charlotte -- to name just a few -- are also planning Core Capacity projects. Adding capacity within a transit agency's existing footprint is important for both older and newer systems, as lengthening platforms to allow for longer trains or adding infill stations to accommodate growing neighborhoods will likely have exponentially beneficial effects on transit ridership.

The widespread support for Core Capacity raises the reality of financial constraints for these types of project investments. Everyone in the transit industry understands that there are a host of worthy transit expansion and Core Capacity projects, but there is a limited amount of funding each year for these initiatives. A well-funded MAP-21 reauthorization bill should seek to increase funding for the 5309 Capital Investment Program.

Conclusion

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the CTA. I hope I have given this subcommittee some insight into the benefits of Core Capacity projects. If any of you or your staff are ever in the Chicago area we would be happy to show you, firsthand, our Red Line Core Capacity project. I am happy to answer any of your questions.

Attachment A: Map of CTA Rail System



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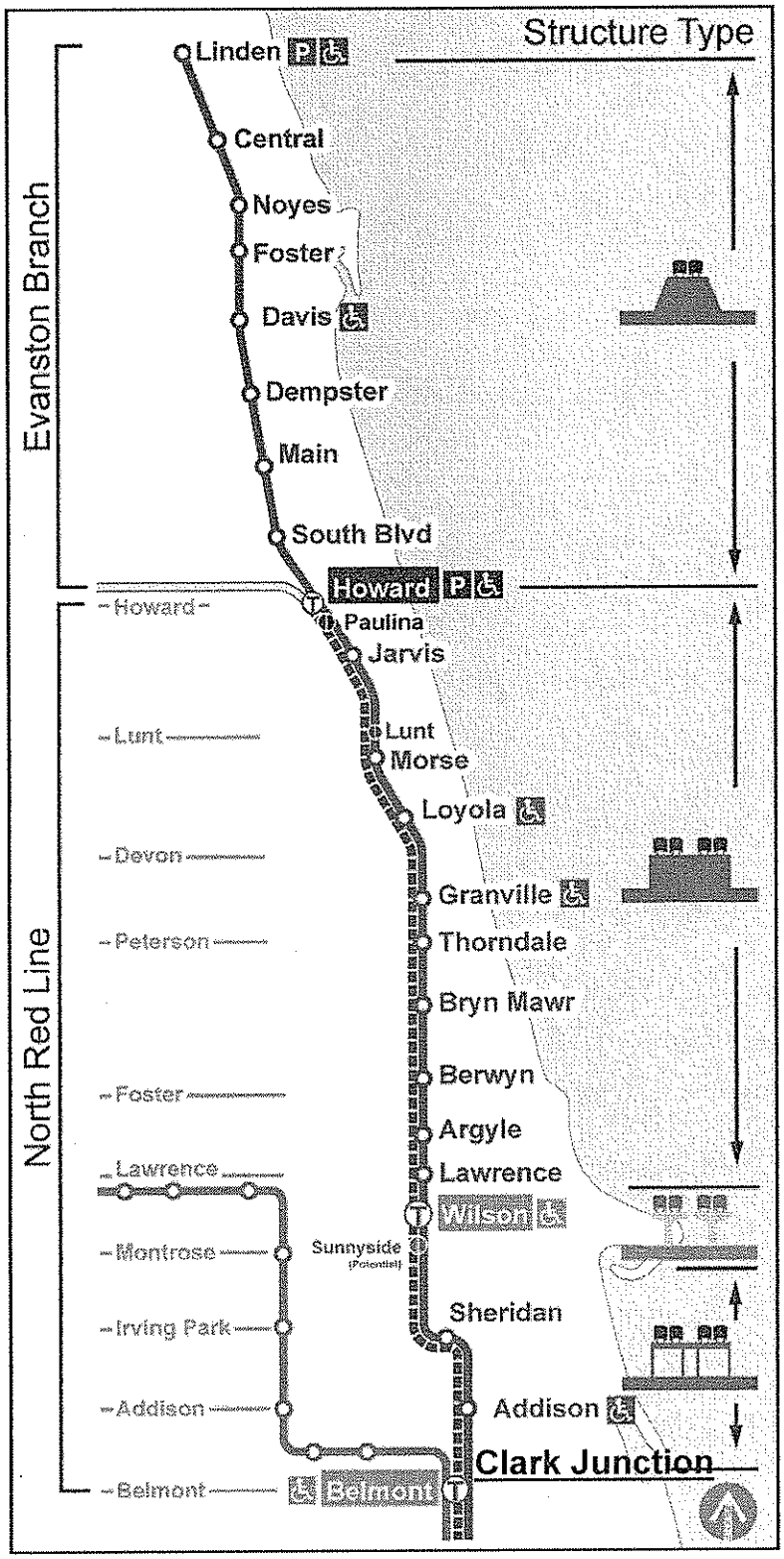
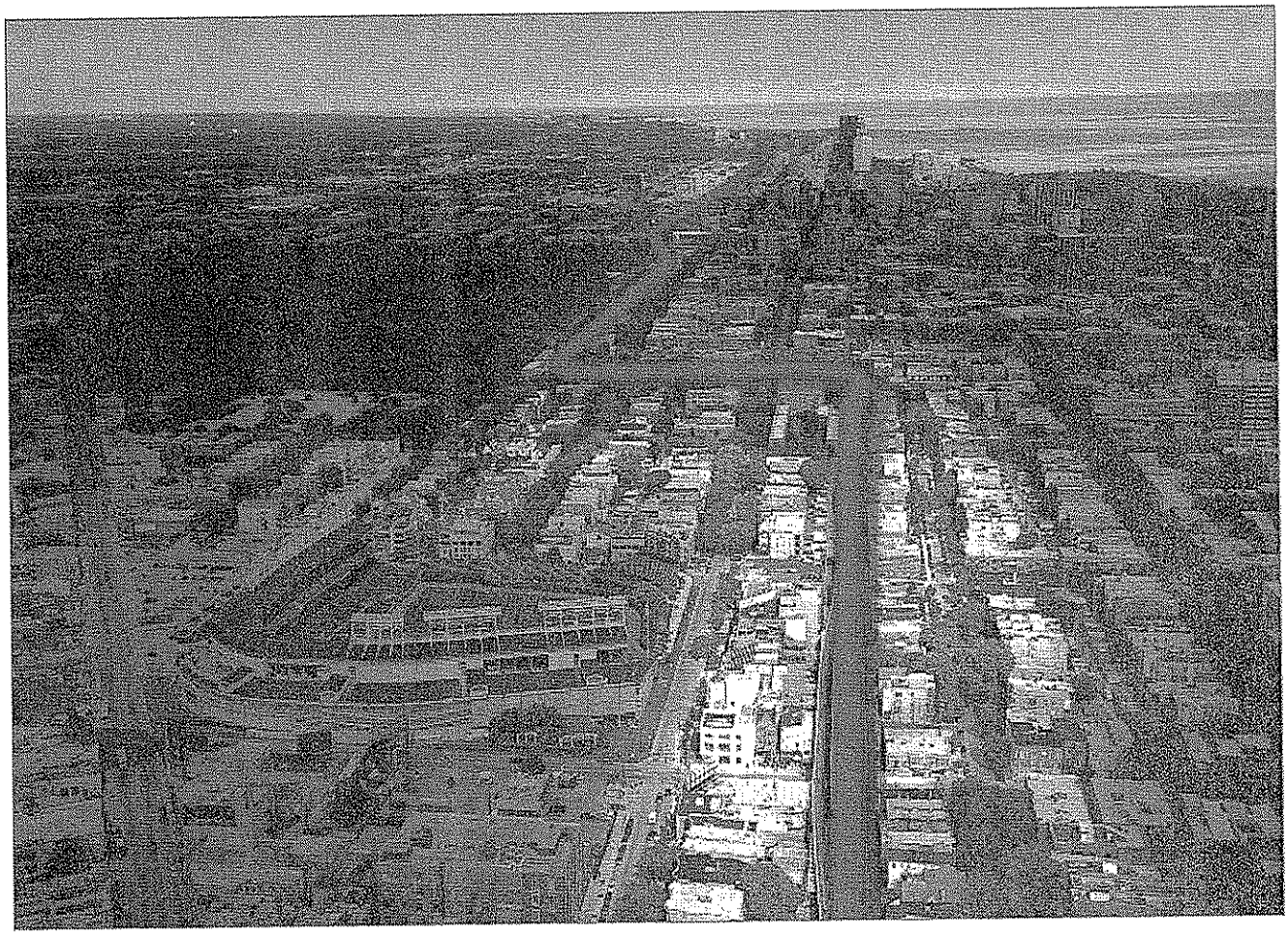
Attachment B: Red and Purple Core Capacity Project Map

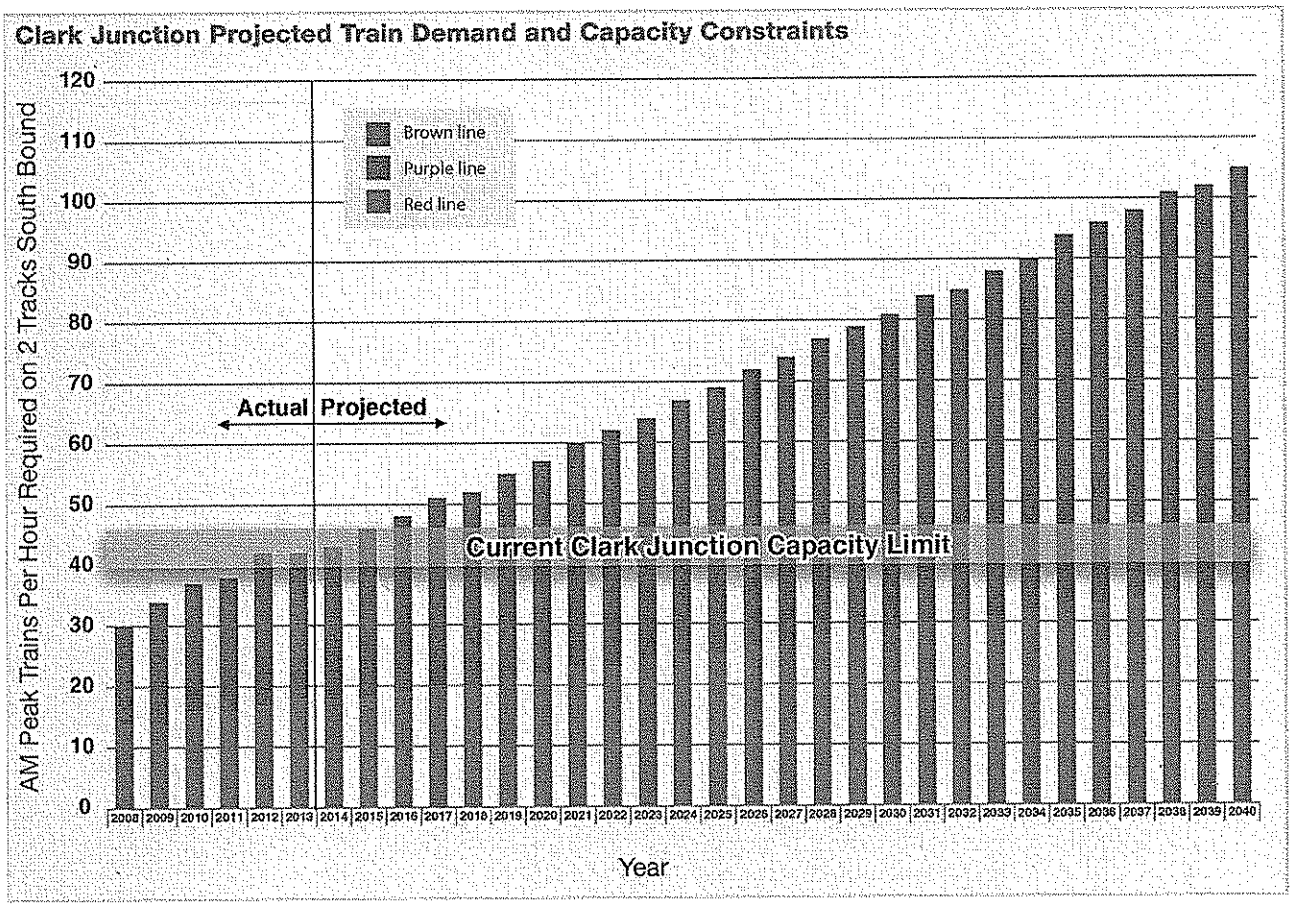


Attachment C: Aerial Image of RPM Corridor showing neighborhood



Customers waiting for train on crowded platform

Customer unable to board train already at capacity

Customers watching full train depart

Attachment E: Clark Junction