

BEST: Gratiot Avenue

Previous and Current Planning and Construction Efforts

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1 Introduction

The Building Equitable Sustainable Transit (BEST): Gratiot Avenue Corridor Study represents a crucial early step in the development of enhanced transit along Gratiot Avenue. This 12-month study is being led by the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan (RTA); it includes the development and evaluation of multiple rapid transit alternatives between Downtown Detroit and M-59 (Hall Road). The study area spans the 23-mile Gratiot Avenue corridor that serves portions of Wayne and Macomb counties. BEST: Gratiot Avenue was initiated in April 2015 and the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is anticipated in March 2016.

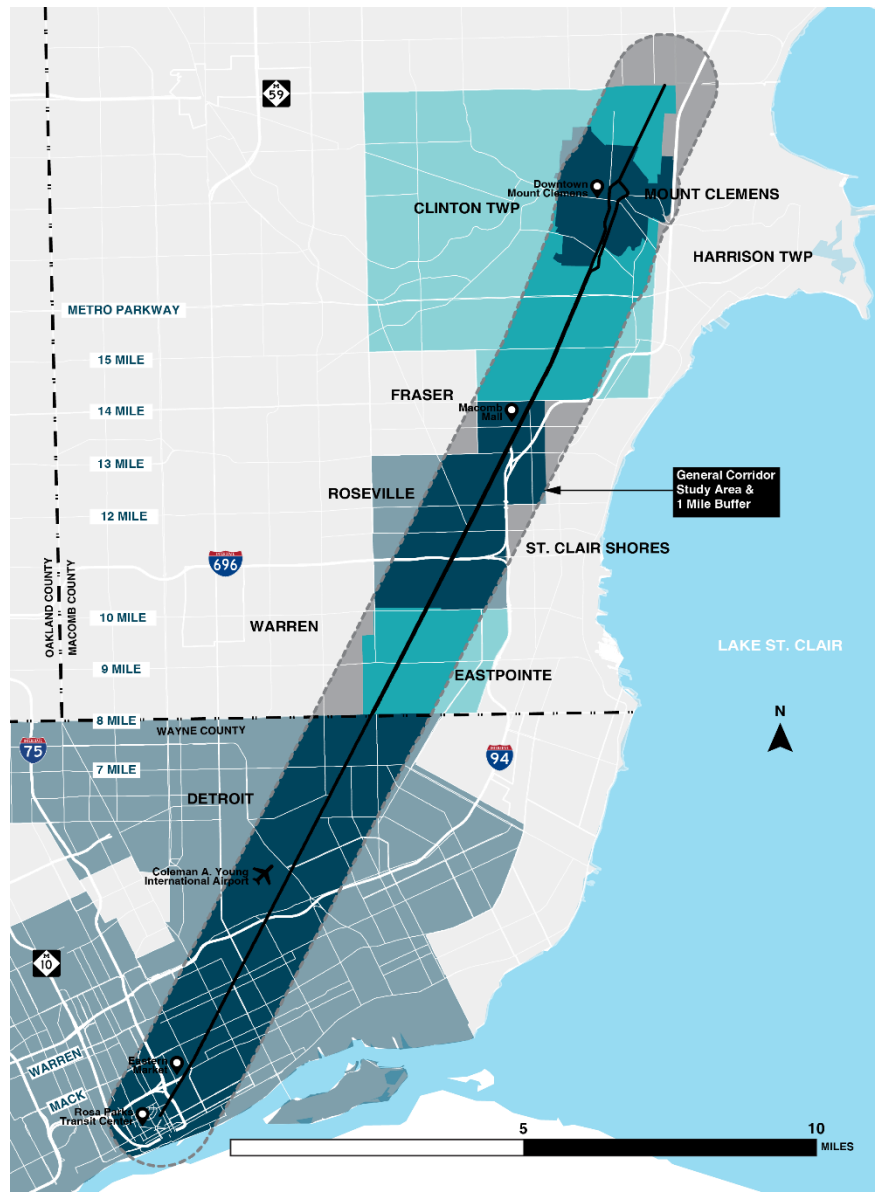
The corridor communities along Gratiot Avenue include five cities and townships in Wayne and Macomb Counties:

- Clinton Township
- Detroit
- Eastpointe
- Mount Clemens
- Roseville

As represented in Figure 1-1, the main study area extends from Downtown Detroit in the south to M-59 (Hall Road) in the north.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the previous and current planning efforts that have or are occurring along the corridor. This includes transit plans, land use plans, non-motorized and transportation plans. This document also summarizes any current or proposed construction efforts that may impact the Gratiot Avenue corridor.

FIGURE 1-1. BEST: GRATIOT STUDY AREA



2 Planning Projects

2.1 Transit Planning Projects

2.1.1 Improving Transit in Southeast Michigan, SEMCOG, 2001

In 2001, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) adopted a regional transit framework plan and incorporated it into the RTP. The plan recommends an approach to developing regional transit service that:

- Establishes regional rapid transit service along high-use corridors, including along Gratiot Avenue from Downtown Detroit to M-59 (Hall Road)
- Improves fixed-route bus service to provide greater frequency, reliability and safety
- Expands community transit coverage, particularly in rural areas
- More detailed plans by the providers
- Corridor analyses to determine rapid transit option and preferred alternatives
- Connects urbanized areas through regional connectors.

<http://semcog.org/desktopmodules/SEMCOG.Publications/GetFile..shx?filename=ImprovingTransitInSoutheastMichiganAFrameworkForActionOctober2001.pdf>

2.1.2 Comprehensive Regional Transit Service Plan, Regional Transit Coordinating Council (RTCC), 2008

This additional transit study featured a more detailed analysis of Gratiot Avenue. The study determined that Gratiot Avenue has the potential for “Arterial Rapid Transit” (ART). Characterized as a hybrid of the current bus route and a dedicated bus rapid transit (BRT) line, ART would offer a higher level of transit service to riders along the corridor.

http://rtamichigan.org/uploads/3/5/7/2/3572358/comprehensive_regional_transit_service_plan.pdf

2.1.3 Detroit Transit Options for Growth Study, Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT), 2009

A transit alternatives analysis which reviewed transit service within the City of Detroit and concluded that three regional corridors are candidates for higher level transit; Gratiot was identified as the second highest priority corridor.

http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9621_11058_62342-293690--,00.html

2.1.4 Building Equitable Sustainable Transit: Regional Master Transit Plan, RTA, 2015

The BEST: Regional Master Transit Plan will be a transit vision developed for the four county southeast Michigan region, guiding how transit will be expanded and improved in the next twenty years. This plan will provide a vision on improving bus service, coordinating existing service providers, and introducing rapid transit corridors throughout the region, including Gratiot Avenue.

<http://www.rtamichigan.org/best-projects/master-plan/>

2.1.5 Building Equitable Sustainable Transit: Woodward Avenue, RTA/SEMCOG, 2012-2014

BEST: Woodward Avenue is currently in entering into environmental review following the selection of a locally preferred alternative (LPA) that resulted from the Woodward Avenue Rapid Transit Alternatives Analysis (AA), conducted from 2012 to 2014. The LPA recommends BRT along the 27-mile Woodward Avenue corridor from Downtown Detroit to Downtown Pontiac that will operate within the existing right-of-way, servicing 26 stations primarily on Woodward Avenue through 11 communities in Wayne and Oakland Counties.

<http://www.rtamichigan.org/best-projects/woodward-avenue/>

2.1.6 Building Equitable Sustainable Transit: Michigan Avenue, RTA, 2015-2016

BEST: Michigan Avenue is a planning study to evaluate a wide range of transit options to connect Wayne and Washtenaw counties with safe, modern and efficient public transportation services. The conclusion of the study will be to determine a LPA between Ann Arbor and Downtown Detroit defining the type of mode, the alignment, and station locations. The LPA is expected to be selected in early 2016.

<http://www.rtamichigan.org/best-projects/michigan-avenue/>

2.1.7 Ann Arbor to Detroit Regional Rail Project, SEMCOG, 2005-2015

Originally a transit alternatives analysis started in 2005, the eventual recommendation proposed commuter rail service in the Detroit to Ann Arbor corridor with stops in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Detroit Metropolitan Airport, and Detroit. The project takes advantage of existing infrastructure where possible and requires adding new station stops in Ypsilanti and at Detroit Metro Airport. Rail cars have been purposed and tracks are currently being upgraded. It is unknown when service will begin. The Detroit station will be located at the Amtrak station in New Center.

<http://semcog.org/Plans-for-the-Region/Transportation/Transit/Ann-Arbor-to-Detroit-Regional-Rail-Project>

2.2 Land Use and Transportation Plans

2.2.1 Gratiot Avenue Corridor Improvement Plan, SEMCOG, 2008

Nine Gratiot communities within Macomb County banded together to develop the plan. It provided a vision for corridor management to restore and preserve road capacity, improve safety conditions, and support the long-term vision for expanded regional transit including potential streetcar or BRT, non-motorized systems, and sustainability.

<http://archive.semcog.org/uploadedFiles/PlanReport.pdf>

2.2.2 Gratiot Avenue Pilot Corridor, SEMCOG, 2014

As part of SEMCOG's Creating Successful Corridors initiative, Gratiot Avenue – from Downtown Detroit to M-59 (Hall Road) – was selected as a pilot corridor in which to apply and test components of the Corridor Redevelopment Toolkit. This document details SEMCOG's collaboration with government representatives and other corridor stakeholders to conduct two walkability/bikeability assessments, two neighborhood and housing assessments, and apply other tools on a corridor-wide and segment-level basis along Gratiot Avenue. The variety of recommendations ranged from improving roadway access for pedestrians and cyclists to preparing for future rapid transit service and creating a coordinated communication strategy.

<http://www.semco.org/desktopmodules/SEMCOG.Publications/GetFile.ashx?filename=CreatingSuccessfulCorridorsGratiotAvenuePilotCorridorMarch2014.pdf>

2.2.3 City of Eastpointe: 2010 Master Plan

The Master Plan describes Gratiot Avenue as a main commercial corridor that is largely automobile oriented and unappealing for pedestrians. The area of Gratiot and 8 Mile has been identified as a commercial area in need of redevelopment. Public input during the planning process revealed an interest from residents and business owners for a walkable community, a vibrant downtown, and a revitalized Gratiot Avenue corridor. Participants were proud of the 9 Mile/Gratiot area, but discontented about the 8 Mile/Gratiot area and walkability along the corridor. Goals along the Gratiot corridor include creating a defined gateway at 8 Mile, redeveloping and consolidating sites, reorganizing land to create defined districts, and protecting existing residential properties.

http://cityofeastpointe.net/vertical/Sites/%7B7C4055DF-73E1-4D03-A393-4A1D90A24F1D%7D/uploads/EP_Master_Plan.pdf

2.2.4 City of Mount Clemens: 2010 Master Plan

The Master Plan describes the north and southbound Gratiot Avenue pairs as commercial corridors with many developments exposed to traffic on both the front and back sides of their buildings. The plan suggests an analysis of converting the pairs from one-way to two-way as they are bad for businesses and confusing to drivers. The planning process solicited public input, which included the need for improving the corridor image, creating a walkable downtown, and implementing traffic calming measures.

<http://mountclemens.macombgov.org/sites/default/files/content/pdfs/MasterPlanFinal20100405.pdf>

2.2.5 City of Roseville: 2010 Master Plan

The Master Plan describes Gratiot Avenue as a commercial corridor with many challenges, such as fragmentation in the commercial fabric, lack of a traditional downtown area or focal retail, and pedestrian safety and desirability issues. A visioning workshop during the planning process solicited public input, which included the need for more mass transportation, bus lines, walkability, and the creation of a Mainstreet condition along Gratiot. The Plan presents a strategy to promote redevelopment and reinvestment in the Gratiot corridor. Planning objectives in the plan include reorganizing commercial land along Gratiot Avenue to create defined districts, introduction of mixed-uses, a long range opportunity to create a historic Town Center and walkable neighborhoods, and incorporating access management techniques.

<http://www.ci.roseville.mi.us/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=yCoYQCJN6xk%3d&tabid=514>

2.2.6 City of Detroit: Detroit Future City

The Detroit Future City plan, though not officially adopted by Detroit City Council, is a framework that offers insight into the planned and forecasted land uses of the City. This document outlines the Gratiot

Avenue corridor as a transit corridor that supports a variety of landscapes, ranging from higher density mixed-use within the Eastern Market area to Green Residential with ecological and productive landscapes in between. Gratiot connects the Downtown, Eastern Market, and Mt. Elliot employment districts. Much of the land surrounding the corridor is vacant and planned for reuse as productive, ecological landscapes, parks, and blue and green infrastructure.

<http://detroitfuturecity.com/>

2.2.7 CLINTON TOWNSHIP: 2008 MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan calls out Gratiot Avenue as a major commercial corridor and regional thoroughfare. The Township has a DDA established along Gratiot south of the City of Mount Clemens and has interest in establishing another designated area north of the City. The plan calls for more dense commercial development patterns oriented towards the street with parking at the side and in the rear of the building. New development should focus on pedestrian access and connections.

2.2.8 I-375 /MDOT, 2013-2015 Alternatives Project, Detroit Economic Growth Corporation

I-375 between I-75 and Jefferson Avenue was built nearly 50 years ago and is in need of reconstruction. The purpose of the I-375 Alternatives Project is to evaluate alternatives that will meet the existing and future needs of resident, businesses, and visitors within the context of a revitalized Downtown Detroit. Alternatives thus far have included keeping the freeway as-is to fully or partially converting the freeway to a surface street. All of the options keep I-375 and Gratiot Avenue grade separated, which is the current configuration. However, some options remove the I-75 connector to Gratiot Avenue and change access points between Gratiot Avenue and I-75.

<http://www.detroiti375.com/>

2.3 Non-Motorized Plans

2.3.1 City Of Detroit Non-Motorized Plan, City of Detroit, June 2006

The current Detroit Non-Motorized Plan shows a number of cross streets that are planned or already have bike connections along Gratiot Avenue, including shared bicycle/vehicular lanes (sharrows) along Grand Avenue, the Dequindre Cut, the Hamtramck Connector, bike lanes along Warren and Forest, the Conner Creek Project (off-road path) and proposed bike lanes along Outer Drive. The majority of connections to Gratiot Avenue are before Conner Street. Northeast of this road is predominantly local roads along residential neighborhoods that do not necessarily require on road bicycle facilities.

<http://nacto.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/City-of-Detroit-Non-Motorized-Transportation-Plan-2006.pdf>

2.3.2 Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel Plan for Southeast Michigan, SEMCOG/MDOT

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel Plan for Southeast Michigan, a joint effort between SEMCOG and MDOT (Metro and University Regions), identifies Gratiot Avenue, from Downtown Detroit to Chesterfield Township, as a regional bicycle and pedestrian corridor. The corridor connects multiple walkable urban centers, such as Eastern Market, Eastpointe, and Mount Clemens. While the plan identifies the corridor as a Tier 4 roadway with high stress and low comfort, it is considered to be the only viable route for pedestrians and bicyclists looking to head north or south from their residence. The plan suggests that facilities, such as bike lanes or paved shoulders, be included to better manage and coordinate bicycle traffic with proposed BRT service.

2.3.3 Macomb Non-Motorized Plan, Macomb County, 2015

The Macomb County Non-Motorized Plan is currently in the process of being updated. Communities along the study area have all identified Gratiot Avenue as a major opportunity to enhance local connections and to improve walkability throughout Macomb County. In Mount Clemens, coordination between redevelopment and any improvements made to Gratiot Avenue is key in accommodating connections into the larger system.

3 Current and Future Construction Projects

3.1 M-1 Rail Woodward Streetcar Project, M-1 Rail, 2014-2017

Construction on the M-1 Rail Woodward Streetcar project began in 2014 and service is expected to begin in late 2016 or early 2017. Stretching 3.3 miles (6.6 miles round trip) along Woodward Avenue, the modern streetcar will connect 20 stations serving 12 locations from Congress Street in Downtown to West Grand Boulevard in the north end. Figure 3-1 illustrates the proposed station locations.

<http://m-1rail.com/>

3.2 Gratiot Avenue Reconstruction, MDOT, 2019

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is expected to reconstruct part of Gratiot Avenue from Common Road to 14 Mile Road in Macomb County. Part of the reconstruction will include modifying the ramps to and from I-94 near Masonic Boulevard. Construction is expected to occur in 2019.

3.3 I-94 Modernization Project, MDOT, 1994-2036

Nearly 30 years ago, MDOT recognized the need to reconstruct I-94 in Detroit. In the 1990s, the department conducted an extensive Environmental Impact Study (EIS) aimed at building community consensus on how to repair I-94. In 2005, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a record of decision that approved the reconstruction of a 6.7-mile segment of the freeway from just east of the I-96/I-94 interchange to west of Conner Avenue. Construction on the Gratiot Avenue bridge over I-94 is expected to occur in 2017 with construction of the freeway expected to begin in 2019 and last until 2036.

http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9621_11058_53088_53115---,00.html

FIGURE 3-1. M-1 RAIL STATION MAP

Source: M-1 Rail



4 Conclusions

Numerous previous transit planning efforts within the region has proposed enhanced transit along Gratiot Avenue between Downtown Detroit and M-59 (Hall Road), including plans from SEMCOG, RTCC, and DDOT. Other planning studies have also suggested enhanced transit including the Gratiot Avenue Corridor Improvement Plan and the Gratiot Avenue Pilot corridor study. Several other transit planning projects are also occurring within the RTA region, which are in the vicinity of Gratiot Avenue, including studies along Woodward Avenue and Michigan Avenue. Several non-motorized plans have been developed which proposes that Gratiot Avenue should have enhanced non-motorized connections. All communities along the corridor have master plans which proposes higher land use densities along Gratiot Avenue in support of enhanced transit. Lastly, construction efforts within the study area include the M-1 Rail Streetcar, the reconstruction of the I-94 bridge in the next few years and continued of construction of I-94 in the next few decades, and the expected construction of Gratiot Avenue in Macomb County in a few years.