

3.0 Downtown Commuter Rail Terminal Evaluation

3.0 DOWNTOWN COMMUTER RAIL TERMINAL EVALUATION

3.1 Potential Terminal Locations

Downtown terminal locations were addressed in the *Kansas City Region Commuter Rail Study* completed in 2002. That study considered potential service on eight corridors radiating from downtown. The three sites examined in the previous study were:

- Kansas City Union Station
- Riverfront (Second and Cherry Street)
- West Bottoms (Third Street East of Broadway)

Of the three, two candidates, Union Station and the Riverfront location were focused on for the purposes of this study. The West Bottoms was screened out in the earlier study. No other suitable site was found in the Central Business District (CBD). The West Bottoms location was the best attempt at having a CBD location. Union Station was the recommended location of that last study but the Riverfront location offers an opportunity to address concerns of the potential hosting railroad as well as suitability to other transportation developments such as the Metro Area Express (MAX) bus rapid transit service.

The current study focuses on service connecting Odessa and points on the I-70 corridor with downtown. The terminal evaluation carries forward Union Station and an alternate Riverfront location, now presumed to be at Third Street and Grand Avenue. These locations were evaluated in terms of several key factors, including:

- Destination accessibility and potential impact on ridership;
- Rail access and capacity;
- Site characteristics – sufficient space, street access; and
- Interface with other transportation services.

3.2 Kansas City Union Station

Union Station served as a rail transportation hub from its opening in 1914, and currently hosts Amtrak's six daily arrivals and departures. Its heritage and atmosphere are unique, and it remains strongly associated with rail travel in the public mind. Union Station serves Crown Center destinations well, with many being accessible via enclosed walkways. Downtown employment destinations are further than most people would choose to walk, but can easily be reached via shuttle busses operating on main streets or by using the MAX service.

A role as a transit center was an important component of the redevelopment of Union Station. Busses call at both the east and west entrances. Union Station is included on the route of the bus rapid transit project, locally referred to as Metro Area Express or MAX that was implemented in 2005. Running north-south, MAX will link the River Market, Government

Center, Convention and Hotel District, Crown Center, Midtown and The Plaza and could serve as a distributor of disembarking commuter rail patrons to those various locations.

Union Station has sufficient space for passenger facilities and amenities, plus it enjoys good access to major downtown streets. Enclosed waiting space, snacks and beverages already exist at this site and reading material and sundries could easily be offered. However, there are a number of constraints to the viability of Union Station serving as the downtown terminus of a commuter rail service. Changes to the surrounding infrastructure, current usage of that infrastructure and concerns of Kansas City Terminal Railway (KCT) all pose serious challenges to the development of commuter rail service to Union Station.

In the intervening years since the 2002 *Kansas City Region Commuter Rail Study*, the track layout in the immediate vicinity of Union Station has changed. Gone is the third station track and adjoining passenger platform, leaving just one passenger platform and two tracks available to serve both Amtrak and commuter rail service as shown in Figure 3.1. In its place KCT has constructed a third main line for freight traffic, which limits access to and the capacity of Union Station for commuter rail trains.

Figure 3.1
Union Station Passenger Rail Platform



Commuter trains from the I-70 corridor could reach Union Station directly from the east by way of KCT Main Tracks. Alternatively, a route consisting of Kansas City Southern railroad (KCS) tracks via Knoche Yard and KCT's Bluff Line could be used, entering Union Station from the west.

Further complicating the access and capacity of Union Station are the on time record of Amtrak trains and the increase of freight traffic in the area. In 2003, short-distance Amtrak trains, those traveling less than 400 miles, had an on-time performance of 77 percent¹. In Fiscal Year 2004 state supported Amtrak trains in Missouri such as the Ann Rutledge and the Kansas City/St. Louis Mule were late 37 percent of the time². The morning peak service period for a prospective commuter rail service currently sees two Amtrak departures: the eastbound Ann Rutledge is scheduled to depart Union Station at 7:30 AM while the eastbound Southwest Chief is scheduled to depart at 7:45 AM. Given the lack of passenger train storage capacity at Union Station, even a minor delay could have an adverse impact on ridership of a newly implemented commuter rail service. Amtrak's demonstrated performance makes conflicts with morning commuter trains a likelihood.

Chronic poor performance can have a negative effect upon commuter rail ridership. A worst case scenario of the impact of delays on ridership was experienced by the Virginia Railway Express (VRE) in 1997 when a CSX derailment caused several long-term delays and multiple cancellations. As a result, ridership decreased 30 percent and growth remained stagnant for a number of years. Meanwhile freight traffic is robust enough that KCT felt the need to build a third mainline at Union Station, which is what has constrained the ability to store passenger trains or to develop additional passenger train facilities.

During the previous study, KCT expressed a concern as to the impact a commuter rail service would have on its operations within the Union Station area. How such a service would reach Union Station and the impact that it would have on KCT's main lines were of primary concern. The easiest way to reach Union Station would be approaching from the east on the KCT mainline. However, this would disrupt KCT operations and consequently the railroad expressed a preference that an alternate approach to Union Station from the west should be considered.

3.3 Riverfront (Third Street and Grand Avenue)

This location offers an easy connection with the MAX bus rapid transit station at 3rd and Grand, which is within the River Market, approximately a half block from the City Market area. The location does not directly serve the downtown (about one mile away) or the Crown Center area (almost two miles away) particularly well, however, its proximity to the MAX station could allow the system to serve as a distributor of disembarking commuter rail patrons as it could with Union Station. A spacious, recently paved parking lot occupies the site (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3) and a future rail layout could be configured to allow for a direct transfer between MAX and commuter rail service. While tying into the MAX service and facilities does allow for a number of synergies, proposed commuter rail service will require its own space as well as its own dedicated connecting downtown bus (feeder/distribution) system.

¹ Bureau of Transportation Statistics

² Amtrak On-Time Performance of Missouri supported trains supplied by Rodney Massman of MoDOT.

Such a configuration would require the rebuilding of a portion of the recently removed 2nd Street rail line. Evidence of its removal can be seen in the foreground of Figure 3.2. The partially rebuilt 2nd Street line could be extended into the parking lot and immediately adjacent to the BRT Station Site at 3rd and Grand, as illustrated in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.2
Riverfront Station
(Southern view showing the River Market in the background)



Figure 3.3
Riverfront Station
(Northern view)



This location does offer one advantage with respect to trains from the Odessa line; instead of crossing the north-south Union Pacific (UP) and KCS main tracks at-grade under the new Sheffield Flyover, they would avoid the Sheffield area entirely by using the KCS via KCS trackage by way of Rock Creek Junction and Knoche Yard. In addition, the congested main tracks of KCT can be avoided as well. The area has ample room for the storage of commuter rail train sets during the day layovers waiting for the afternoon return service to Odessa.

Another advantage associated with the proposed Riverfront Station is that the location is within a few blocks of emerging retail, office and restaurant development along 3rd Street, which may appeal to a prospective commuter rail patron.

Figure 3.4
Riverfront Station Area



Source: Delorme Street Atlas 2005, RLBA.

3.4 Recommended Terminal Location

The proposed Riverfront terminal location at 3rd Street and Grand Boulevard is the recommended downtown terminal location. Neither the Riverfront nor the Union Station downtown terminal candidate sites provide ideal access to the CBD area. Both will require other transit service to provide access to the CBD area. The primary reason for the Riverfront location preference over the Union Station location is better commuter rail access. The possible conflicts at Union Station with a high volume of freight traffic and Amtrak passenger service have a significant likelihood of negatively impacting commuter rail reliability, which is not acceptable when building ridership.