

New vision for Union Station

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Residents who take the Metra to downtown Chicago may see changes soon at the end of the line.

A vision for the future of Union Station — the third busiest railroad terminal in the country — includes handling the growing number of riders by running more trains on platforms previously used for mail. The plan would also handle congestion by converting some unused baggage platforms into wider passenger platforms and even creating access to the platforms from Canal Street.

Orchestrated by several agencies including the city's Department of Transportation and Amtrak, the Chicago Union Station Master Plan was first introduced to the public in December and was presented to the Metra board Friday.

No decisions were made, but board members simply wanted to know a little more about the study, Metra spokesman Michael Gillis said.



The Great Hall at Union Station played host to a performance by pop group Maroon 5 and singer Sara Bareilles on March 1. | SCOTT STEWART-SUN-TIMES

A top priority is dealing with massive growth, with a 40 percent increase in Metra and intercity ridership expected by 2040. The problem: Expansion will be difficult because Union Station is beneath a major high-rise office building.

The plan is broken into short-, medium- and long-term projects and hopes to

evaluate the capacity of the concourse, the tracks serving train operations and the platforms.

One short-term idea has already received funding. The city's Central Area East-West Bus Rapid Transit project will give buses their own priority lanes, and priority at intersections on Canal, Clinton, Washington and Madison.

Also of note as a possible change for Union Station commuters — but not part of the study — is a proposal made last month that would allow riders to wait in the Great Hall when unforeseen delays occur.

That comes after a Jan. 9 debacle — caused by a signaling problem — that left hundreds of commuters stranded.