



AGENDA

Rush Line Corridor Task Force Meeting

February 18 at 4:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Web access / call-in instructions to be sent separately

	<u>Item:</u>	<u>Action Requested:</u>
<i>Chair Victoria Reinhardt</i>	1. Call to Order/Introductions	
<i>Chair Victoria Reinhardt</i>	2. Approval of the Agenda	Approval
<i>Chair Victoria Reinhardt</i>	3. Summary of July 23, 2020 Meeting	Approval
<i>All</i>	4. Member Updates	Discussion
<i>Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County Public Works</i>	5. State and Federal Legislative Update	Information
<i>Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County Public Works</i>	6. 2021 Draft Workplan and Budget	Information
<i>Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County Public Works</i>	7. Rush Line BRT Project Update	Information

Pursuant to Minn. Stat. § 13D.021 and 13D.04 Subd. 3, the Chair of the Rush Line Corridor Task Force has determined that an in-person meeting is not practical or prudent because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the declared state and local emergencies. Committee members will participate by telephone or other electronic means. In addition, it may not be feasible to have any committee members, staff or members of the public present at the regular meeting location due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the declared emergencies. The meeting broadcast will be available online and a link to view the broadcast can be obtained by registering here. Members of the public and the media will be able to watch the public meeting live online.

For questions related to this material, please contact Andy Gitzlaff at 651-266-2772 or andrew.gitzlaff@co.ramsey.mn.us.



**Rush Line Corridor Task Force Meeting
July 23, 2020, 4:30 – 6:00 pm via ZOOM
Draft Meeting Summary**

MEMBERS:

Tom Fischer, Little Canada Councilmember	Ben Montzka, Chisago County Commissioner
John Mikrot, Pine County Commissioner	D. Love, Centerville Mayor
Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey County Commissioner (Chair)	Linda Nanko-Yeager, Wyoming Councilmember
Scott McCune, White Bear Township Supervisor	Frank Storm, Rush City Councilmember
Marylee Abrams, Maplewood Mayor	Fran Miron, Washington County Commissioner
Nelsie Yang, Saint Paul Councilmember	

OTHERS:

Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County Public Works	Joe Ayers-Johnson, Washington County
Cassie Fitzgerald, Ramsey County Government Relations	Joseph Scala, Hennepin County
Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County Public Works	Peter Dahlberg, MnDOT
Caroline Ketcham, Ramsey County Public Works	Mark Statz, Centerville
Tori Nill, MnDOT	Jeanne Witzig, Kimley Horn
Brad Griffith, General Public	

1. Call to Order / Introductions

Chair Reinhardt called the meeting to order at 4:35 p.m. Introductions were made by the Task Force members and attendees.

2. Approval of the Agenda

A motion to approve the agenda was requested. Councilmember Nanko-Yeager moved for approval. The motion was seconded by Supervisor McCune. The motion passes.

3. Summary of November 21, 2019 Meeting

A motion to approve the meeting summary was requested. Councilmember Nanko-Yeager moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Mayor Abrams. The motion passes.

4. Member Updates

Each Task Force member provided a brief update on transportation-related activities in their community.

5. Federal Transit Administration Transit-Oriented Development Grant Award

Frank Alarcon gave an update about the FTA Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grant the Rush Line BRT Project recently received. Rush Line's application for \$1.25 million for transit-oriented development planning along the corridor was approved by the FTA. This will fund advanced station area planning and allow communities to engage with residents and other stakeholders to envision future land use around Rush Line stations. This planning process will consider economic development, housing, market analysis, community needs and desires, and access to transit via biking and walking connections. Meaningful engagement with communities of color and other historically underrepresented communities is a priority. Ramsey County will lead the two-year process from early 2021 through 2023. All the cities along the route will be involved in the process. Ramsey County will release a request for proposals later this year. Commissioner Reinhardt noted that this is an important milestone for Rush Line and helps us make the benefits of BRT real for communities.

6. 2020 State Legislative Recap

Cassie Fitzgerald summarized recent activity at the state legislature. The second special session of the summer ended early in the morning on July 21st. The Senate legislature passed a police reform accountability bill, which was signed by the governor. The bonding bill failed to reach a two-thirds majority in the House at six votes short. This bill did not include Rush Line funding, but did include funding for priorities near the Rush Line corridor, including improvements at the I-35E/County Road J interchange and the Highway 36/County Road 15 interchange. It is likely that these projects will remain in future versions of the bill. Another special session is anticipated around August 12th, when the governor's emergency powers need to be renewed. The outcomes of this session may be influenced by the Minnesota primary on August 11th, for which many legislators in both parties have challengers. The substance of the third special session and the future of the bonding bill are uncertain, but the Task Force will be updated as more information emerges.

7. Presentation on MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation Activities

Tori Nill, director of the Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT), gave an overview of OTAT's role in promoting transit in greater Minnesota. OTAT's mission is to provide partners and communities with leadership and resources to support access to bike/walk/transit options. OTAT covers the 80 counties in Minnesota outside of Metro Transit's seven-county district. There is a transit presence in every county, with 25 county and multi-county transit systems, five small urban systems, seven urbanized systems, and six tribal systems. Strategic direction for transit in greater Minnesota includes the following objectives:

- Transit service is attractive and viable for greater Minnesota
- Improve coordination of services
- Increase transit usage

- Ensure fiscal responsibility
- Support MnDOT’s vision for an integrated multimodal transportation system

About 25% of funding comes from the federal government; the rest is state funding from taxes on vehicle sales and leases via the Transit Assistance Fund. Investment categories include operations, vehicles, facilities and large capital, new services, the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council, and marketing and technology. Tori highlighted Arrowhead Transit and Chisago-Isanti County’s Heartland Express. These agencies provide dial-a-ride services with good coverage over the entire week, and Heartland Express has seen 8% growth in ridership over the past 12 months.

8. 2020 Workplan and Budget Approval

Andy Gitzlaff led Task Force members through the list of items in the 2020 workplan. The Task Force’s general activities include coordination, support and advocacy for large projects like Rush Line. An additional activity included in the 2020 workplan is to seek input on all forms of transportation, including roadways; this was always implied but is now clearly stated. Coordination with the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit will continue for Route 275 in order to improve its performance and advocate for it during lean budget times. A motion to approve the 2020 workplan and budget was requested.

Commissioner Miron moved to approve and Mayor Abrams seconded. During discussion, Commissioner Miron stated that the workplan is comprehensive and provides many opportunities for collaboration. The motion passes.

9. 2020 Insurance Renewal

Andy Gitzlaff summarized the Task Force’s insurance coverage through the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust. Staff recommended that the Task Force maintain its current level of insurance coverage, not waive statutory tort liability, and continue to split the cost of the insurance premium among counties according to the predetermined formula.

A motion to approve this recommendation was requested. Commissioner Montzka moved to approve and Mayor Abrams seconded. The motion passes.

10. Rush Line BRT Project Update

Andy Gitzlaff provided an update on the project status. The project is currently in the Environmental Assessment Analysis Phase, which is estimated to wrap up in 2021. A draft Environmental Assessment has been submitted to FTA and will be published for public comment in December.

The project is ongoing and on schedule despite challenges from COVID-19. Public engagement activities and project meetings have moved online, and environmental and EA/engineering milestones continue to be met. Other major transit projects in the region are operating in a similar way.

Public engagement has shaped the project in several significant ways, including the addition of stations at Cook Avenue and Buerkle Road and the development of a right-of-way design guide the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-way Design Guide. Overall public feedback is positive, focusing on access to stations, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, and maintaining the quality of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail. An online station design survey is live until August 1st and is available in Spanish, Somali, Hmong, and Karen.

15% design plans have been finalized and have received resolutions of support from White Bear Lake, White Bear Township, Maplewood, and Vadnais Heights. Resolutions of support from Saint Paul and Gem Lake are in process. Frank Alarcon reported on this. The grant application was due November 18th and our application went in on November 15th. The grant is for \$1.25 million with a local match of 20% by RCRRA.

Meeting attendee Brad Griffith asked about the tentative bus rapid transit schedule between White Bear Lake and Forest Lake. Andy Gitzlaff replied that the main portion of the route (Saint Paul to White Bear Lake) will operate from 5am-midnight Monday through Saturday, with more limited hours on Sunday, at a 10-minute frequency during peak hours and 15-minute frequency throughout the day. Service between White Bear Lake and Forest Lake is not part of the current BRT route, but bus hourly service is being looked at for the future.

Commissioner Montzka complimented Chair Reinhardt for all her hard work, care and concern along the entire corridor and for the financial backing by Ramsey County.

The meeting adjourned at 6:01 p.m.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Rush Line Corridor Task Force Members
FROM: Staff
DATE: February 16, 2021
RE: Member Updates

Members will be asked to share one or two transportation-related updates from their respective County, City or Township. Updates could include transportation or multi-modal projects, initiatives or service improvements as well as economic development activity that has occurred near recent transportation investments.

Action Requested: Information



MEMORANDUM

TO: Rush Line Corridor Task Force Members
FROM: Staff
DATE: February 16, 2021
RE: State and Federal Legislative Update

Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County Public Works, will provide an update on current state and federal legislative activities.

Action

Information



RUSH LINE CORRIDOR TASK FORCE DRAFT 2020 WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

NOTE: INDICATES PROPOSED CHANGES FROM 2020 APPROVED WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

WORK PLAN

The 2021 Rush Line Corridor Task Force (Task Force) Work Plan will include the following items:

1. GENERAL ACTIVITIES

The Task Force will work with corridor counties, municipalities, transit agencies, the Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to continue the advancement of the Rush Line Corridor. To accomplish this, the Task Force will do the following:

- a. Coordinate corridor studies with MnDOT, Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, and others.
- b. Monitor progress and offer guidance on studies that impact the Rush Line Corridor.
- c. Offer formal comments.
- d. Continue to educate public officials along the Rush Line Corridor on corridor and regional transit and transportation developments.
- e. Local government coordination including the encouragement of the adoption of the Rush Line Corridor Joint Powers Agreement and ex-officio membership, to increase attendance at Task Force meetings, and to increase information sharing amongst corridor communities.
- f. Seek input on all forms of transportation, including roadways, transit, rails and trails, at Task Force meetings.

2. RUSH LINE BRT PROJECT

The Rush Line Corridor has undergone extensive technical analysis, community engagement, and inter-agency coordination at both the staff and policymaker level through the Pre-Project Development study led by the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority on behalf of the Task Force. The Pre-Project Development study resulted in the selection of a locally preferred alternative that best meets the needs of the communities along the corridor.

The locally preferred alternative is defined as bus rapid transit within a dedicated guideway generally along Robert Street, Phalen Boulevard, Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way and Trunk Highway 61 from Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul to downtown White Bear Lake. It would be co-located with the Bruce Vento Trail through the portion of the route that utilizes the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way. A connector bus from White Bear Lake to Forest Lake and other bus service improvements will continue to be explored.

The current phase of the Rush Line BRT Project includes environmental analysis under the Federal and State environmental review processes to avoid, minimize, and mitigate potential impacts while maximizing mobility, accessibility and surrounding economic development opportunities. The public will continue to be engaged throughout the environmental review process and subsequent design, engineering and construction phases to ensure that the project is reflective of the needs of the diverse communities within the Rush Line Corridor. The environmental analysis phase of the project began in early 2018 and will take approximately three years to complete. Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority will continue to be the lead agency for the environmental phase and funding will be provided by Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority. The Technical and Policy Advisory Committees will continue to meet through the duration of the next phase. Membership in these committees reflect the geography of the 13-mile Rush Line BRT Project, and thus differ somewhat from the committees that operated during the PPD Phase.

The Task Force will:

1. Receive project updates from the project team and will be provide input at key project milestones.
2. Continue to engage the various affected interests along the Rush Line Corridor.

Upon receipt of a Record of Decision for the Environmental Assessment from the Federal Transit Administration in late 2021 the Environmental Analysis Phase will be complete allowing for the lead agency role for the Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit Project to transition from the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority to the Metropolitan Council. The Metropolitan Council will lead the project through engineering and construction and will ultimately be the operator of the line. Ramsey County will remain the lead for the Advanced Station Area Planning Work which will begin in late 2021 and continue until late 2023.

3. ROUTE 275

The Task Force will continue to coordinate with the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit to monitor the performance of route 275.

4. CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS AND PROJECTS

Local Government/Agency Coordination:

The Task Force will coordinate with corridor counties, municipalities, transit agencies, MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council to identify potential capital improvement projects along the Corridor, including supporting communities' implementation of land use tools to preserve land for the identified capital projects.

Rush Line Corridor Transit Service:

Encourage Metro Transit, the Metropolitan Council, Chisago-Isanti Heartland Express, Arrowhead Transit and others to provide additional bus service in the Rush Line Corridor as demand warrants. This includes, but is not limited to, improved bus service along I-35E to the northern portion of the Rush Line Corridor, circulator bus service, the planned route 54 extension and other improvements along the East 7th Street and White Bear Avenue corridor.

Funding:

Work with Task Force members to identify corridor improvements eligible for state and federal funding and seek funding for their completion. Assist local governments in the preparation of grants for corridor improvements. Work with funding recipients to ensure the timely expenditure of funds on corridor projects.

Corridor Preservation:

The Task Force will work with corridor communities to preserve the former and existing freight railroad corridor and adjoining properties for future transportation uses. The Task Force is committed to the co-existence of the rail corridor with other transportation modes, including multi-use trails and bus transit.

I-35E MnPASS expansion

MnDOT added new MnPASS express lanes on both directions of I-35E between Cayuga Street and Little Canada Road in 2015. The MnPASS lanes were extended north to County Road J (northbound) and Highway 96 (southbound) in 2017. This is the first MnPASS investment in the East Metro area and an essential link for people commuting between downtown St. Paul and the suburbs to the north. The Task Force will continue to work with MnDOT to promote the implementation of the service.

5. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Task Force will continue to provide information to the public on the corridor. It will work with Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority to coordinate outreach efforts with the Rush Line BRT Project to increase corridor awareness and to maintain consistent messaging.

6. ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATIVE COORDINATION

The Task Force will continue to develop policy positions and advocate for improved transit to serve the Rush Line Corridor and the Twin Cities region. Task Force activities include:

- a. Informing legislators of the need for transitway improvements in the Rush Line Corridor
- b. Advocating for increased transit capital and operating funding to improve and expand the existing transit service in the corridor
- c. Coordinating legislative initiatives with other transitway corridors
- d. Establishing positions on legislative initiatives that affect the Rush Line Corridor
- e. Coordinate legislative initiatives with corridor regional railroad authorities, counties, and municipalities for the advancement of the Rush Line Corridor.

7. MANAGEMENT, POLICY, AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

Commission activities will include:

- a. Prepare and adopt the annual Work Plan and Budget
- b. Prepare the annual financial report
- c. Review insurance needs and procure appropriate insurance
- d. Provide Task Force and staff administration
- e. Manage Task Force expenses
- f. Manage the consultant(s) selected by the Task Force for completion of various work tasks

2021 Budget

Revenues/Sources of Funding

General corridor funding for administrative functions and staffing committees and corridor advocacy is provided through “in-kind” contributions of staff time to the Task Force. Funding for insurance is provided through regional railroad authority and county member contributions.



Agenda Item #7

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rush Line Corridor Task Force Members
FROM: Staff
DATE: February 16, 2021
RE: Rush Line BRT Project Update

At the Task Force meeting, Ramsey County Public Works staff will provide an update on the project and solicit input from the Task Force members.

Project Description

The Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project is a proposed 15-mile transit route with stops between Union Depot in Lowertown Saint Paul and downtown White Bear Lake. The Rush Line BRT Project includes further exploration of connector bus service north to Forest Lake, along with other transit system improvements. See the handout in the packet for details on the needs for the project. A short video of the project is also available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99rZ1A00M1U>

Environmental Analysis Phase Update

The purpose of the environmental process is to define the project in enough detail to understand its potential benefits and impacts, reduce those impacts as much as possible, and prepare an environmental document that explains why the project is needed, the alternatives that were considered, the project's impacts to the natural and built environments, and mitigation strategies for those impacts. The Environmental Analysis Phase is underway and is expected to be complete in 2021. It includes the following key tasks:

- Environmental analysis.
- Preliminary engineering.
- Station area planning.
- Community engagement.

Action Requested:

Information



B R T

The Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project is a proposed 14-mile transit route between Saint Paul and White Bear Lake. It includes 21 stations that would serve the communities of Saint Paul, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, White Bear Township and White Bear Lake. The analysis and design of this transit route is being led by Ramsey County.

Purpose

The purpose of the Rush Line BRT Project is to provide transit service that satisfies the long-term regional mobility and accessibility needs for businesses and the traveling public and supports sustainable development within the study area.



Why is the Rush Line BRT Project Needed?



SERVING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO RELY ON TRANSIT



MEETING INCREASING DEMAND FOR RELIABLE, HIGH-FREQUENCY TRANSIT



PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT



EXPANDING MULTIMODAL TRAVEL OPTIONS

Learn more about why the Rush Line BRT project is needed

Sign up for email updates. Provide comments. Ask questions. Learn more.

rushline.org info@rushline.org 651-266-2760 [facebook.com/rushline](https://www.facebook.com/rushline) [@rushlinetransit](https://twitter.com/rushlinetransit)

WHY IS THE RUSH LINE BRT PROJECT NEEDED?



SERVING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WHO RELY ON TRANSIT

The number of people in the study area who rely on transit to meet their transportation needs is increasing.

Transit-dependent populations

AGE:

65+ fastest growing AGE GROUP

Growth in the 65+ age group is increasing the need for access to medical services and ability to maintain an active and mobile lifestyle without having to rely on a personal automobile.

INCOME:

Individuals below poverty



The percentage of residents below the poverty level is higher in the study area than in Ramsey County or in Minnesota, meaning there are more people who rely on transit to access jobs, education and other services.

VEHICLE AVAILABILITY:

From 2014 to 2040, the number of households without a vehicle is forecast to grow at a faster rate than the total number of households in the study area.

2014 → 2040



MEETING INCREASING DEMAND FOR RELIABLE, HIGH-FREQUENCY TRANSIT

Demand for reliable, high-frequency transit service is increasing, and the existing high-frequency network does not currently serve the study area outside of Saint Paul.



Only **3 of 41** existing routes within one mile of the proposed Rush Line BRT route are high-frequency.



Metro Transit has seen an increase in ridership on high-frequency routes, including the highly successful A Line BRT.

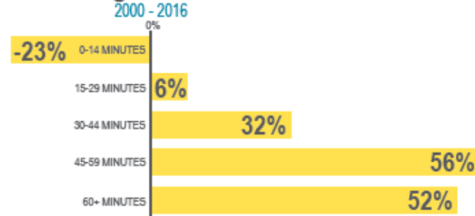


PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Population and employment are forecast to grow in the study area. As concentrations of jobs and residents grow in different communities, the need to travel between these communities will increase.



Percent Change in Commute Time

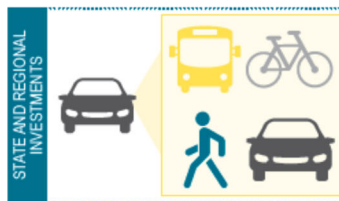


EXPANDING MULTIMODAL TRAVEL OPTIONS

State and regional transportation policies identify the need to provide multimodal transportation options.

The state of Minnesota and the Twin Cities region are shifting away from investing in cars only to investing in multiple modes including cars, transit, walking, biking and more.

This promotes greater travel choice and flexibility and provides opportunities for benefiting health.



Regional transportation plans include the Rush Line BRT Project as one of multiple METRO lines to be built in the next decade.

