

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #2



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MEETING SUMMARY

Date: May 31, 2018

Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Location: Maplewood Community Center, Conference Rooms A/B

ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	Present
Committee Members		
Randy Anderson	School District 622	
Erin Bailey	Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare	
Councilmember Mara Bain	City of Forest Lake	X
Ling Becker	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corporation	X
Council President Amy Brendmoen	City of Saint Paul	X
Tom Cook	Metro State University	X
Paris Dunning	East Side Area Business Association	
Mayor Jo Emerson	City of White Bear Lake	X
Jose Gonzalez	LatinoLEAD	
Councilmember Craig Johnson	City of Vadnais Heights	X
Sheila Kauppi	Minnesota Department of Transportation	X
Sheila Kelly	White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Supervisor Bob Kermes	White Bear Township	
Councilmember Jim Linder	City of Gem Lake	
Patrick Opatz	Century College	X
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt	Ramsey County	X
Councilmember Sandy Rummel	Metropolitan Council	X
Mayor Nora Slawik	City of Maplewood	
Terri Thao	Nexus Community Partners	X
Shannon Watson	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Alternates		
Joyce Coleman	Century College	
Councilmember Kevin Edberg	City of White Bear Lake	
Commissioner Blake Huffman	Ramsey County	
Councilmember Bryan Smith	City of Maplewood	
Yao Yang	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	

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Agency and Consultant Team Staff

- Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority.
- Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority.
- Mike Rogers, Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority.
- Mark Finken, City of Saint Paul.
- Charles Carlson, Metro Transit.
- Daniel Pena, Metropolitan Council.
- Tom Riedesel, White Bear Township
- Ellen Richter, City of White Bear Lake.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Beth Bartz, SRF.
- Marc Valencia, NewPublica.
- Luke Soiseth, MOD.
- Amber Dorneman, MOD.

Members of the Public

- Denise Bricher.
- Janet Munson.
- Melanie Kleiss.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Emerson welcomed the committee members and other attendees.

2. Overview of Project Activities

Andy Gitzlaff provided a summary of the March 29 Policy Advisory Committee meeting. The chair and vice chair were elected, an overview of the project and schedule was provided, and there was discussion of the project working groups and committees.

The project is currently in the second phase of the transitway development process, the environmental analysis phase. The first six months of this phase places particular emphasis on station area planning work to inform decision-making and engineering and put investments in the right locations.

The locally preferred alternative was adopted at the end of the previous phase, the Pre-Project Development Study, and it is about 90 percent dedicated guideway. It generally uses city streets or Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way (co-located with the Bruce Vento Trail). Connector bus to Forest Lake and other service improvements will also be considered.

The decision-making structure for the project is led by Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, which is advised by the Policy Advisory Committee. The Technical Advisory Committee and Community Advisory Committee will advise the Policy Advisory Committee. The Technical Advisory

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Committee is made up of agency staff and will provide technical recommendations. The Community Advisory Committee will bring in other perspectives, including area residents and businesses. The chair of the Community Advisory Committee will be asked to provide updates to the Policy Advisory Committee.

The project will have its first call with the Federal Transit Administration on June 11 to discuss the approach to the environmental work.

Terri Thao asked when the project will apply to the New Starts program. Andy Gitzlaff said the project needs to complete the environmental work first. The first step in the New Starts process is called project development, which has a two-year timeframe. The end of this phase will include the initial New Starts application. This process will be discussed more at the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

Station area planning is generally a three-stage process. The first stage includes talking to stakeholders and identifying opportunities for platforms and bike and pedestrian connections. In the second stage, initial concepts are presented for feedback. The third stage will occur this fall and into next year and includes developing more detailed concept plans and visions with the project area cities.

Station platforms will be level or near-level boarding and will have shelters, ticket vending machines, real time departure signs and other amenities.

The station area planning working groups have been defined by geography and include White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights/Gem Lake, Maplewood, and Saint Paul. The following station working group meetings have convened and discussed stations as noted below:

- White Bear Lake:
 - Downtown White Bear Lake station.
 - Marina Triangle station.
 - Cedar Avenue station.
- Vadnais Heights/Gem Lake:
 - County Road E station.
- Maplewood:
 - Highway 36/English Street station.
 - Frost Avenue station.
 - Larpenteur Avenue station.
- Saint Paul:
 - Phalen Village station.

These stations have more flux in where the station platform will go, whereas many of the other stations are more defined. Maplewood is doing a small area plan for the St. John's Hospital/Maplewood Mall area, so for those stations the city process will take the lead.

April station area planning activities included White Bear Lake stakeholder interviews and working group meeting, a County Road E stakeholder meeting, and meetings with Saint Paul and Maplewood staff. May station area planning activities included working group meetings for County Road E, Maplewood and Saint Paul for the Payne Avenue and Arcade Street stations.

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3. Community Advisory Committee Update

Frank Alarcon presented. He will be the main staff contact for the Community Advisory Committee. At the March Policy Advisory Committee meeting, the committee provided direction to form the Community Advisory Committee. The county collected applications starting March 30. Notice of the application process was distributed through the project e-newsletter, website and social media and through existing community networks.

The county received 63 applications. The Policy Advisory Committee formed a sub-committee to recommend about 20 members. The sub-committee met May 9 and consisted of Policy Advisory Committee members from Ramsey County, the project area cities, Nexus Community Partners and LatinoLEAD. The sub-committee recommended 23 members that represented the geography of the corridor and different demographic groups. The recommended action is to approve the recommended appointments to the Community Advisory Committee. Andy Gitzlaff noted that one recommended applicant representing the Maplewood area has withdrawn for personal reasons, and the project team recommends leaving that spot open for Maplewood to fill if desired. The county also recommends leaving open the possibility of adding more members later to address gaps in representation.

Mayor Emerson asked for a motion to approve the recommendation. Sheila Kauppi motioned and Terri Thao seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Commissioner Reinhardt asked if any future members added later will need to be approved by the Policy Advisory Committee. Mayor Emerson confirmed that they would not need Policy Advisory Committee approval.

4. Public Engagement Update

Beth Bartz discussed the Communications and Public Engagement Plan. The purpose of the plan is to articulate the goals for public engagement, strategies to engage the public and how to incorporate input into the decision-making process. The intent is to be open in the communications with the public and be responsive to questions. The plan also includes specific strategies to engage with communities that are typically underrepresented in planning processes. Beth asked the Policy Advisory Committee to provide comments on the draft plan by June 8. The plan will then be finalized and posted on the project website.

Marc Valencia presented on engagement activities done to date and upcoming activities. The project team is focusing on face-to-face engagement, especially with communities that are hard to reach. The project team is going to locations within underrepresented communities where people often frequent and are having smaller events with one-on-one conversations. The goal is to lay the groundwork for the project and develop relationships along the route to get input on in the short term and build relationships in the long term.

One recent event the project team attended was the Cinco de Mayo parade on the West Side of Saint Paul. The event was attended by lots of transit users, materials were provided in English and Spanish, and the project team heard a lot of support for the project.

The project team has also done walk-and-engage events in Hmong Village and Mt. Airy. A Johnson Senior High School student is helping with engagement with the Hmong community and providing translation. The project team also went to an event at the Mt. Airy Hi-Rise. As the project team engages with this community, they aim to provide culturally and linguistically relevant materials. The project team also presented at a Johnson Senior High School leadership class. Many of those students are already taking transit and can be influencers in their families to get others to use transit.

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Themes from engagement activities so far have included:

- Concerns about winter maintenance, especially for wheelchair users.
- Maplewood Mall is popular destination for youth, who like the idea of being able to get there without a car.
- Hmong Village is vibrant destination. Locals do use the bus now but are looking forward to better and faster connections.
- Hmong elders are not comfortable with transit. The project team will continue to engage with that community on how to make transit more inviting.
- Opportunity to explore new areas along route.
- Connecting bus service is important.
- Safety and walking conditions, especially in Mt. Airy station area, are important. The project team will go back to the Hi-Rise in a few weeks to learn more about the concerns of that community.

Beth Bartz highlighted an upcoming bike and walk event in Maplewood on June 16 on the Bruce Vento Trail. The project team will answer questions and give attendees a sense of how much room is needed for the BRT and how the bus guideway and trail can exist together. Beth encouraged the committee members to take and share the event flyers.

5. Review Refined Purpose and Need

Jeanne Witzig discussed the project purpose and need. The purpose and need was defined in the previous study and is the building block that defines the goals of the project. It is an important element of the project that the Federal Transit Administration will be looking at, as it provides the foundation of the project.

In this phase of the project, the purpose and need will be not changed, but rather, refined slightly. Proposed refinements include putting the need statements in active voice and updating the data to support the needs. The Technical Advisory Committee has reviewed the proposed updates, and the project team will discuss them with the Federal Transit Administration on June 11. If the committee members have any comments, please provide them by June 8.

Terri Thao noted that for the sustainable growth and development need it would be helpful to add current rents and vacancies and laborshed information.

Shannon Watson said that for the data on traffic volume growth, we could also discuss taking other cars off the road, which benefits those that do not use transit.

Ling Becker asked if there will there be links to this data so people can view and share it. Andy Gitzlaff said that the county's strategic communications consultant will be helping to develop messaging to share with specific communities. Commissioner Reinhardt added that there is a new Ramsey County portal that has budget information and supporting data, so we should be able to make this data available if people want it. Mike Rogers said that the project team can work on a frequently asked questions document that includes technical data. Andy Gitzlaff clarified that the handout provided to the committee is an outline of a document that will be developed as part of the environmental assessment. Jeanne Witzig added that purpose and need is a chapter of the environmental document that tells the story and includes supporting data.

6. Project Walk Through

Jeanne Witzig said that the purpose of the project walk through is to give a snapshot of what has been happening with the issue resolution teams and station area planning process. Jim Gersema and Beth Bartz presented key elements that the project team is currently looking at as they continue to define the project.

In downtown Saint Paul the focus is on how Rush Line will interact with the Gold Line BRT route and stations. The project team is also coordinating with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on their planned improvements to Robert Street in downtown.

At the Regions/Green Line station, the project team is finetuning placement of the station to best serve the capital, Green Line and the hospital. The project team is also working with the city of Saint Paul to coordinate with planned bicycle improvements on Jackson Street.

Olive Street is the first station on Phalen Boulevard. In this location, the BRT would travel within the existing roadway.

At Payne Avenue, there is connecting bus service. The character of the roadway starts to change in this location. It narrows to one lane in each direction to the east, and Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way is located on the north side of Phalen Boulevard so the route starts to shift to the north side of the road.

The intersection of Arcade Street and Phalen Boulevard is not at grade; Arcade Street goes over Phalen Boulevard. The station area planning working group for this station will get started at the end of June and will discuss if the station should be at Phalen level or Arcade level and how that would affect access to residents and jobs and facilitate economic activity. The project team is also exploring a route that would more directly serve the Seeger Square area based on community input during the Pre-Project Development Study. The Route 54 extension will run on Arcade Street, so this is anticipated to be a high transfer station.

The Phalen Village station location has flexibility. It could go as far north as Maryland Avenue where there are opportunities for bus connections or as far south as Johnson Parkway. The station area planning working group discussed tradeoffs with station locations at their May meeting and found pros and cons to both. The project team will do more engineering work in this area and take that back to the working group in July.

The route continues north in Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way, co-located with the Bruce Vento Trail. The project team is evaluating how best to allocate space for the guideway and trail. Near Larpenteur Avenue, the existing condition includes a shared used trail in the center of the right-of-way. One concept has the guideway in the center with the trail shifted to the east to keep a larger buffer between the guideway and the residential properties to the west.

Councilmember Johnson asked if the space between the bus and trail has been considered for winter snow storage. Jim Gersema said that is one of the considerations. Six feet would be the minimum separation, and they are looking for more space than that wherever possible.

The station area planning working group for the Larpenteur Avenue, Frost Avenue and Highway 36/English Street stations met in May, and most of the working group's interest was in the Frost Avenue station. The Gateway Trail is nearby, there are older commercial businesses along Frost Avenue and there are recent investments in the area. The working group sees the project as an opportunity to revitalize this part of Maplewood.

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The Highway 36/English Street station is a potential park-and-ride location. The park space near the station is used for community gardens and there is senior housing planned in the area. The project provides an opportunity to provide access to areas that people might not be able to get to without car.

A member of the public asked how wide the existing bridge across Highway 36 is. Jim Gersema said the BRT would be on new bridge constructed for the project adjacent to the existing bridge.

In the St. John's Hospital/Maplewood Mall area, the project team is exploring routing options to best serve both the hospital and the mall. Andy Gitzlaff noted that Beam Avenue is the back door to the hospital, and St. John's Boulevard is their front door. The project team has met with the hospital and is working to get the station in the best location, which may include adjusting the routing between the two stations.

North of County Road D the guideway will cross I-694 on new bridge. The Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way ends on the south side of I-694, and BNSF owns the right-of-way to the north. The project team is evaluating route options, some of which utilize the BNSF right-of-way and some of which follow alternative routes.

Commissioner Reinhardt asked how you would get to Maplewood Mall if the route goes on Hazelwood Street. Jim Gersema replied that the route would go to the mall first then loop back to Hazelwood Street.

Andy Gitzlaff noted that the project team is working with the city of Vadnais Height on Buerkle Road. There are some existing traffic issues that need to be addressed before Rush Line BRT Project is built. In addition, the Technical Advisory Committee and station area planning working group raised the question of a station near Buerkle Road. The Pre-Project Development Study considered stations at Buerkle Road or County Road E and landed on County Road E, but the project team will take a fresh look at a possible station near Buerkle Road.

Multiple guideway configurations were considered, and on Highway 61 the project will operate in business access and transit lanes. The project team is working closely with MnDOT for the design on Highway 61.

Sheila Kelly asked why the team decided on outside lanes on Highway 61. Jim Gersema said it would allow the project to utilize shoulder space and leave the general traffic lanes. Sheila Kelly asked if there would be locations where there are stations and cars trying to make right turns. Jim Gersema said that station platform locations have not yet been decided, but the business access and transit lanes would also be used for right turns.

The County Road E station is surrounded by existing uses that are not typical markets for transit ridership, including car dealerships and the sports center. There is employment in the area, however, and transit could benefit employers and employees. The project team is evaluating if the station should be right at the intersection or further south or north and focusing on how pedestrians will get across Highway 61. The project will include at-grade improvements, and the team is evaluating a grade-separated crossing.

Commissioner Reinhardt noted that parking at the sports center is an issue the county knows it needs to deal with and acknowledged that that is part of this conversation. The project team is looking at a parking structure near the County Road E station that could be used as shared parking with the Vadnais Sports Center.

Patrick Opatz said that Century College is concerned about how to get from the County Road E station to the college and asked if there are connecting bus routes. Jim Gersema said the project

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team will work closely with Metro Transit on connecting bus service and the operations plan. Maplewood Mall nearby also has connecting service that could get people to Century College. Beth Bartz noted that the project team talked with Newtrax as part of the station area planning process. Newtrax is a service for developmentally disabled adults and is looking for opportunities to use their fleet of vehicles to make short trips outside of their service windows.

At the Cedar Avenue station, pedestrian crossings are a focus like at County Road E. There are employment concentrations located north of Cedar Avenue.

North of White Bear Avenue the route would transition from business access and transit lanes to mixed traffic.

At the Marina Triangle station, the project team is talking with the property owners about possible redevelopment opportunities to better support transit use. There is a former city public works site on the west side of Highway 61 that is an opportunity for additional development.

The Downtown White Bear Lake station has flexibility in where the platforms and park-and-ride are located. The goal is to integrate the station and park-and-ride into the historic downtown context. The project team is exploring sites between 2nd Street and 8th Street, and the second working group meeting scheduled for June 27 will discuss different locations.

Commissioner Reinhardt said that the arts district on 8th Street should be part of the conversation. We also need to keep a connection to the trail system. Ramsey County Parks is working on extending the Bruce Vento Trail through this area as well.

Jeanne Witzig said that the intent is to come back in July with recommendations and refinements to the project definition based on the issue resolution team input and station area planning work.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Melanie Kleiss, Lower Phalen Creek Project, said that the corridor walk through was helpful. She wants to make sure that the project team keeps in mind that Arcade Street is where her organization would like to bring the creek back to the surface and would like to stay in touch on this topic.

ACTION ITEMS

Action Item	Responsible Party	Timeline
Review and provide comments on the draft Communications and Public Engagement Plan	Policy Advisory Committee members	Due June 8
Review and provide comments on the purpose and need refinements	Policy Advisory Committee members	Due June 8

NEXT MEETING

July 26, 2018
Hiway Federal Credit Union
840 Westminster Street
Saint Paul, MN 55130