

# POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #4



## MEETING SUMMARY

**Date:** September 27, 2018

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

**Location:** Maplewood Community Center – Banquet Room C

### ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	Present
<b>Committee Members</b>		
Randy Anderson	School District 622	
Erin Bailey	Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare	X
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	
Paris Dunning	East Side Area Business Association	X
Mayor Jo Emerson	City of White Bear Lake	X
Jose Gonzalez	LatinoLEAD	X
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	X
Councilmember Jim Lindner	City of Gem Lake	X
Patrick Opatz	Century College	X
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt	Ramsey County	X
Councilmember Sandy Rummel	Metropolitan Council	X
Mayor Nora Slawik	City of Maplewood	X
Terri Thao	Nexus Community Partners	X
Shannon Watson	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	X
<b>Alternates</b>		
Councilmember Kevin Edberg	City of White Bear Lake	
Commissioner Blake Huffman	Ramsey County	
Councilmember Bryan Smith	City of Maplewood	
Pakou Yang	Century College	
Yao Yang	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	

# ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

## 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.
- Ted Schoenecker, Ramsey County.
- Brian Isaacson, Ramsey County.
- Christina Morrison, Metro Transit.
- Mark Finken, City of Saint Paul.
- Ellen Hiniker, City of White Bear Lake.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Beth Bartz, SRF.
- Marc Valencia, NewPublica.

## Members of the Public<sup>1</sup>

- TraNeicia Sylvester, Community Advisory Committee co-chair.
- Robert Morse, Community Advisory Committee co-chair.
- Ken and Donna Beck.
- Paul Capeder.
- Craig Capeder.
- John Kuderka.
- Brad Steen.
- Ken Vollbrecht.
- Ed Cox.
- Jay Althof.
- Graham Boyd.
- Mike Tomme.
- John Wazlawik.
- Dave Anderson.
- Pat Ryan.
- Terri Draxten.
- C. Cervenka.
- Debra McGuire.

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<sup>1</sup> This list only includes members of the public who signed in.

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Slawik welcomed the committee members and other attendees and asked the committee members to introduce themselves.

### 2. Overview of Project Activities and Process

Jeanne Witzig provided an overview of project activities. The environmental analysis phase is a roughly two-year process, and we are currently in the second part of the first year. To date, the project team has been focused on defining various project elements through the issue resolution teams and station area planning workshops and stakeholder interviews. The project definition is important to continue to do technical and engineering analysis, including project ridership and cost.

Since April, the project team has had a number of stakeholder coordination meetings. Through this presentation, the project team will bring forward what has come from those discussions thus far and what the next steps will be.

### 3. Public Engagement Update

Marc Valencia provided an update on public engagement activities. The project team continues to have conversations across the corridor and is focused on making them intentional and inclusive. Public engagement continues to create and build awareness of the project, and there is a lot of input coming from the area around the Bruce Vento Trail in Maplewood and in White Bear Lake. From March through September 2018, the project team has conducted or staffed 87 events, engaged with over 1,300 community members, businesses owners and other stakeholders, and recorded over 700 comments. More detail on these public engagement activities are included in the public engagement summary that has been provided to the Policy Advisory Committee.

Main themes from public engagement to date include:

- Support from transit users and non-transit users.
- Value to residents, employees and visitors.
- Accessibility of the Rush Line BRT.
- Connectivity to stations by bus, walking and biking.
- Changes to the Bruce Vento Trail.

Input received is being used to refine the station locations and routing and shape the design of the guideway and potential additional stations.

The project team will launch an interactive map to receive input online and will continue to have in-person engagement.

### 4. Community Advisory Committee Update

The Community Advisory Committee co-chairs, Bob Morse and TraNeicia Sylvester, provided an update on the Community Advisory Committee. TraNeicia is a parent and community health advocate who lives on the east side of Saint Paul. Bob is a business banker who lives in Vadnais Heights. At the last Community Advisory Committee meeting on September 18, 13 committee members attended and went through the proposed route with the project team. Notable topics that were discussed included infrastructure concerns and impacts to residents near the Bruce Vento Trail and impacts to the commercial area in White Bear Lake. Everyone was engaged, and it was great to hear what

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people know about their neighborhoods. The meeting summary will be provided to the Policy Advisory Committee.

### 5. Overall Project Walk Through

Jeanne Witzig noted that the project's purpose and need was used as the basis for evaluating refined project elements. She also noted the importance of keeping the project competitive for federal funding, which is driven by capital and operating costs and the number of riders. Defining the project elements for the Environmental Assessment sets the framework for additional technical analysis and agency participation, allows for effective public engagement and is the next step in the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts process.

As the project has gone through the issue resolution team, station area planning and public engagement processes, proposed refinements to project elements were identified. The project team expects more conversations and refinements as the environmental and engineering analyses advance. Jim Gersema and Beth Bartz provided a walk through of the project. The exhibit numbers referenced below correspond to the concept plans provided.

#### EXHIBITS 1-2

The routing in downtown Saint Paul has been refined and includes one-way pairs on 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Streets and Sibley/Wacouta Streets. Station changes associated with this refined routing include having three platforms for Union Depot (at the bus deck, on Sibley Street and on Wacouta Street). There would also be platforms on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets near Robert Street.

The project team will continue to coordinate with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on their planned Robert Street project. There are two options for the transit lanes on Robert Street between 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets that the project team is having ongoing conversations about with the city of Saint Paul and the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

#### EXHIBITS 3-4

The location of the Regions Hospital/Green Line station platforms has been refined so that the platforms are closer to Regions Hospital on 14<sup>th</sup> Street. This location would provide a better connection to a major employer and for patients and visitors.

As the project continues on Jackson Street there are two options: business access and transit (BAT) lanes and mixed traffic. The project team is continuing to coordinate with the city of Saint Paul on traffic operations on Phalen Boulevard.

#### EXHIBITS 5-6

The station design at Payne Avenue would accommodate traffic volumes at the Payne Avenue/Phalen Boulevard intersection.

The routing to the Arcade Street station has been refined, with the route on Neid Lane and the station at the intersection of Neid Lane and Arcade Street. There would be a new bridge for the BRT to get from Arcade Street to Phalen Boulevard.

#### EXHIBITS 7-9

Station area planning was focused on drawing on the expertise of residents and businesses in the community to determine where the platforms would be best located. At Phalen Village, the station area planning working group looked at station locations at Maryland Avenue and Johnson Parkway. The working group identified benefits and tradeoffs to both but ultimately recommended placing the

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station at Maryland Avenue. This station location made the gap between the Arcade Street and Maryland Avenue stations apparent, and it is important to provide access to this area as it is currently underserved by transit. The project team looked at adding a station south of Johnson Parkway, and the working group recommended adding a station near Cook Avenue across from Hmong Village. The project team will look at this station further in the ridership modeling and environmental review.

The dedicated guideway would go over Johnson Parkway on a new bridge before returning to serve the Maryland Avenue station at grade.

### EXHIBITS 9-11

The guideway would follow the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way where it would be co-located with the Bruce Vento Trail. There is currently an underpass at Arlington Avenue that would potentially be closed. The exiting street crossing at Idaho Avenue will also be evaluated for potential closure to limit the conflict between vehicles and the guideway.

The Larpenteur Avenue station area includes proposed pedestrian improvements to review in the environmental document.

### EXHIBITS 12-13

For the Frost Avenue station, both platforms would be located north of Frost Avenue based on input from the station area planning process. Frost Avenue is part of the city of Maplewood's Gladstone redevelopment plan.

North of Frost Avenue, the guideway would cross the Gateway State Trail. Two options are under consideration for this crossing: an at-grade, signalized crossing and a grade-separated crossing with the BRT going over the trail. The guideway would also cross an existing trail connection at Weaver Elementary School, where a grade-separated crossing is being considered.

### EXHIBITS 14-15

The BRT guideway would go over Highway 36 on a new bridge, with the Highway 36 station located north of Highway 36. A park-and-ride location at this station is under evaluation. The project team is working through how many parking spaces are needed and how it may fit into the adjacent properties.

There is an existing trail crossing north of County Road C. There are two options under consideration for this crossing: an at-grade, signalized crossing and a grade-separated crossing with the BRT going over the trail.

### EXHIBITS 15-19

The BRT would exit the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority right-of-way and turn onto Beam Avenue, serve the Maplewood Mall Transit Center then return to Beam Avenue to Hazelwood Street. The BRT would continue north on Hazelwood Street to serve the St. John's Boulevard station. This station is now closer to the front door of St. John's Hospital and to new development in the area.

Two options are under consideration for how to cross I-694: utilize BNSF property north of I-694 and utilize private property east of the BNSF property and Bruce Vento Trail.

Adding a station at Buerkle Road came out of station area planning conversations. Improvements are proposed to the Highway 61 and Buerkle Road intersection so it operates better for all users.

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### EXHIBITS 19-20

On Highway 61, the shoulder would be converted to BAT lanes. The project team will continue to work with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on the needed traffic analysis.

At the County Road E station, the project team is continuing to evaluate the location and size of the parking facility. Both platforms would be located south of County Road E to limit the number of street crossings to get to/from platforms as most of the demand is on the south side.

### EXHIBITS 21-22

The Cedar Avenue station platforms would be located on the north side to limit the number of street crossings to get to/from the development that is concentrated on the north side of Cedar Avenue. Pedestrian connections to the future Bruce Vento Trail extension are being evaluated.

### EXHIBITS 23-24

At the Marina Triangle station there would be roadway improvements/reconstruction on Highway 61. Highway 61 is adjacent to BNSF property, so the project would slide the roadway to the east to make space for the southbound platform. These improvements provide the opportunity to extend the BAT lanes north to the Marina Triangle station (they previously stopped at White Bear Avenue) and provide additional space to improve the pedestrian crossing of the railroad at Whitaker Street. The project team will conduct traffic analysis to determine if a traffic signal is warranted at Whitaker Street and Highway 61.

The potential location of the Downtown White Bear Lake station was discussed through the station area planning working group, which recommended locating the station at 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Clark Avenue. A portion of Highway 61 would be reconstructed to facilitate pedestrian improvements at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street crossing.

## DISCUSSION

Mayor Slawik noted that the project definition is a work in progress that is not done yet.

Commissioner Reinhardt said that this is an initial recommendation to move forward for further analysis. She acknowledged the thoughtful feedback provided by the station area planning working groups and the public. She noted that there has been a lot of discussion regarding the Downtown White Bear Lake station. The county wants to figure out what will work there while honoring the work of the station area planning working group. Nothing is set in stone yet, and things could change as the project team moves forward with analysis and receives more input. Commissioner Reinhardt met with Mayor Emerson to discuss what to do with the Downtown White Bear Lake station because we want to get it right. She noted that it is important that the station fit into the character of the downtown so now is the time to provide public input. Comments can be provided at this meeting or online ([www.rushline.org](http://www.rushline.org)), by calling or by writing. The Policy Advisory Committee wants to hear what people have to say because it does make a difference.

Mayor Slawik stated that from Maplewood's standpoint, the recent refinements have improved the project and it has been helpful to see the station area planning work. She asked what the timeline is for when the cities will next vote on the project. Andy Gitzlaff replied that the initial vote was last fall on the type of transit and general route. The county anticipates going back to the cities in the summer of 2019 when they can share more refined engineering plans through the municipal collaboration process. The next phases include about five more years of final design and engineering before construction would start.



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Beth Bartz noted that the development concepts shown as part of the station area planning work represent illustrative ideas and are not part of the project definition. The project definition is what is in the concept plan booklets provided today. The project is not yet at a stage where we know architectural design or landscaping.

Councilmember Lindner asked if there had been consideration of preserving any of the old railroad track along the route, especially at County Road D, for historical preservation or if the track would be torn up as part of the reconstruction of the Bruce Vento Trail. Jeanne Witzig replied that as part of the Environmental Assessment the project team will look at historic resources throughout the corridor, and the rail corridor is a historic resource under evaluation. The project team is working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit, the State Historic Preservation Office and the Federal Transit Administration on cultural resources. It is an important part of the analysis to bring forward the history and minimize impacts. Mayor Slawik requested that the project team include updates on that process to the Policy Advisory Committee.

Councilmember Bain asked about potential connections between the Rush Line and communities north of White Bear Lake. She understands it is a different scope but would like to see some mention of when that would be considered. Andy Gitzlaff replied that the service planning portion of the project will be discussed at the next meeting, which includes connector bus from White Bear lake to Forest Lake. It is more an operations element rather than infrastructure, but it is part of the project scope to look at that. Commissioner Reinhardt asked if the service planning will also include an east-west connection on County Road E to Century College. Andy Gitzlaff replied that that is part of the service planning as well and will be discussed at the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

### NEXT STEPS

Next steps include additional public engagement on the refined project, technical analysis for the Environmental Assessment (including traffic analysis, visualizations, landscaping, historic resources, noise analysis and more) and corridor-wide analysis (including connecting bus service, travel time, ridership and capital and operating costs). The project team will also coordinate with agencies that will ultimately review and approve project permits and will continue coordination with the Federal Transit Administration.

### 6. Public Comment

Ken Vollbrecht is a resident of White Bear Lake and is concerned about impacts to the historic downtown from the potential parking ramp. He stated that traffic is bad on Highway 61 already, and he does not see how it can be widened to fit another lane in without closing businesses. He does not see the need for a parking ramp, and the historic Clark Avenue boulevard is not the place for a park-and-ride.

Ed Cox is a resident of White Bear Lake and has lived there his whole life. He is a general contractor in downtown White Bear Lake and currently has four projects in the area. His wife is a real estate agent who has recently listed a few homes in the area. Rush Line popped up in the White Bear press a few weeks ago, and no one thinks the station location on Clark Avenue is good idea. No one wants to see downtown affected. They do need more parking in downtown but they don't need it fed by a transit station. Ed stated that a bus turnaround every 15 minutes is absurd, and the hybrid buses that run on diesel motors will be noisy and cause pollution. Clark Avenue is the quaintest part of White Bear Lake. The city can handle the parking issue internally as they have a great city staff. His clients that live in downtown are very concerned about this, and we need to look at the impact to the city and historic setting. He is not against busing, but he is against the massive structure.

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Jerene Bailey is business owner in downtown White Bear Lake. She stated that the project will ruin Clark Avenue by putting a park-and-ride there. The homes and business in the area will be worth nothing, and she would not have bought her salon there a few years ago if she had known about this.

Jay Althof lives on Lake Avenue in White Bear Lake. He said he had the same sinking feeling when he read about the potential park-and-ride on Clark Avenue and wanted to reinforce what others have been saying. He wants to make sure the community is engaged early enough to impact the results and wants to learn more about how to get information to the project team so the neighborhood is satisfied with the result. He stated that the churn of buses every 10 minutes seems excessive for that area and that his neighborhood was unaware of the project.

David Whitlock has lived in White Bear Lake in the same house for 40 years and is kitty corner to where the potential parking ramp would be located. He stated that this is a similar situation to when the library was rebuilt. The house next door was torn down, and he had a difficult time accessing people to discuss his concerns. He would like the project team to come out and engage with the community in an accessible way, possibly quarterly, and present on their plans and listen to feedback. This is different than anything else downtown, and they will have to live with it. You will be able to see it for blocks, and a lot of people don't know about it or are unable to attend a meeting at 2:30 but would like to come talk about it.

Mayor Slawik stated that we are hearing what you're saying. This project is truly community based.

## **7. Policy Advisory Committee Action**

Andy Gitzlaff stated that the recommendation is to confirm the Technical Advisory Committee recommendation on the project elements to be studied in the Environmental Assessment, which reflect input from the advisory committees and public engagement efforts. The next steps include additional public engagement and advancing environmental and engineering analysis.

Commissioner Reinhardt said she wanted to make sure everyone understands that the downtown White Bear Lake location will be discussed further, and the project team will potentially look at one other location as part of this process. The recommendation is for the project elements. Mayor Slawik added that the project elements are not set in concrete; this is just the next step to keep moving ahead.

Council President Brendmoen motioned approval of the recommendation, and Jose Gonzalez seconded. All committee members were in favor, and the recommendation passed.

## **8. Next Steps and Upcoming Activities**

Andy Gitzlaff reviewed next steps. A health impact evaluation workshop is scheduled for 3-5 p.m. on October 30. All three advisory committees (Policy, Technical and Community) are invited to participate. The project team is also organizing a corridor tour for all three advisory committees on November 14 and will follow up with more details. Additional public engagement events will be held throughout the corridor, and there will be more targeted public engagement for downtown White Bear Lake.

## **NEXT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

November 29, 2018  
2:30-4:30 p.m.  
Maplewood Community Center  
2100 White Bear Avenue