

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #6



B R T

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: February 28, 2019
Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Location: Maplewood Fire Station

ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	Present
Committee Members		
Mayor Marylee Abrams	City of Maplewood	X
Randy Anderson	Independent School District 622	
Ruby Azurdia-Lee	Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)	X
Erin Bailey	Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare	
Ling Becker	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corp.	X
Council President Amy Brendmoen	City of Saint Paul	X
Tom Cook	Metropolitan State University	X
Paris Dunning	East Side Area Business Association	
Mayor Jo Emerson	City of White Bear Lake	X
Monte Hilleman	Saint Paul Port Authority	
Councilmember Craig Johnson	City of Vadnais Heights	X
Sheila Kauppi	Minnesota Department of Transportation	X
Sheila Kelly	White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Councilmember Jim Lindner	City of Gem Lake	X
Supervisor Scott McCune	White Bear Township	X
Councilmember Kelly Monson	City of Forest Lake	X
Patrick Opatz	Century College	X
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt	Ramsey County	
Councilmember Sandy Rummel	Metropolitan Council	X
Terri Thao	Nexus Community Partners	X
Shannon Watson	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	
Alternates		
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	

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Agency and Consultant Team Staff

- Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County Public Works.
- Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County Public Works.
- Darren Tobolt, Ramsey County.
- Ann Kane, City of White Bear Lake.
- Ellen Hiniker, City of White Bear Lake.
- Daniel Pena, Metropolitan Council.
- Maggie Jones, MnDOT CRU.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammell, Kimley-Horn.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Adele Hall, SRF.

Members of the Public¹

- Kansas Romportl.
- Darwin and Linda Demeny.
- Craig Capeder.
- Barb and Jim Dow.
- Cindie Bloom.
- V.J. Carrigan.
- James Watson.
- Terri Draxten.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Emerson, acting as chair in her role as vice chair, welcomed the new committee members and thanked the committee members who have transitioned off the committee. She asked the committee members and other attendees to introduce themselves.

2. Election of Officer(s)

With Mayor Slawik's appointment to the Metropolitan Council she is no longer serving on the Policy Advisory Committee, so the committee needs to elect a new chair and vice chair.

Mayor Emerson called for nominations for the chair. Terri Thao nominated Mayor Emerson, and Councilmember Rummel seconded. No other nominations were made. All committee members were in favor, and Mayor Emerson was elected the Policy Advisory Committee chair.

Mayor Emerson called for nominations for the vice chair. Mayor Emerson nominated Councilmember Lindner, and Terri Thao seconded. No other nominations were made. All committee members were in favor, and Councilmember Lindner was elected the Policy Advisory Committee vice chair.

¹ This list only includes members of the public that signed in.

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3. Overview of Project Activities and Process

Jeanne Witzig provided an update on the coordination with partner agencies project staff are conducting as part of the environmental analysis phase.

On February 14 project staff had a call with the Federal Transit Administration. The discussion focused on the Federal Transit Administration's role and the review schedule. Project staff will continue to coordinate with the Federal Transit Administration on a monthly basis.

On February 13 project staff had a coordination meeting with the US Army Corps of Engineers, which is the federal agency that regulates surface water resources, including wetlands. Based on a preliminary assessment, wetland impacts are anticipated to be minimal so a lower level of coordination is likely needed.

Project staff are also coordinating with the watershed districts in the corridor to discuss potential stormwater treatment opportunities. Potential locations for stormwater treatment are being reviewed along with future development or redevelopment opportunities in those locations.

Potential impacts to parkland are being coordinated with Independent School District 622, Ramsey County Parks and the project area cities.

Project staff are working with agencies at all levels on the technical analysis, including working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit and the Federal Transit Administration on the cultural resource analysis.

4. Public Engagement Update

Adele Hall presented on the project's continued public engagement efforts. In December public engagement focused on Saint Paul and the addition of the Cook Avenue station. In January the focus was on public engagement to support the decision-making around the location of the Downtown White Bear Lake station. Project staff also provided updates to Saint Paul District Councils 2 and 5 (Greater East Side and Payne-Phalen), met with leadership of and had a pop-up table at St. John's Hospital, and attended the Saint Paul Winter Carnival's Family Day. In addition, a survey for Hmong Village vendors has been distributed, and the online interactive map on the project website is available for people to leave comments. Upcoming public engagement events are planned in Saint Paul, Vadnais Heights and Maplewood, including events with Weaver Elementary School.

Councilmember Lindner asked to clarify if the addition of a station at Cook Avenue meant that another station had been removed. Adele Hall replied that the Cook Avenue station was added to the project as part of the Policy Advisory Committee's action in September, and no stations were removed as part of that action.

Mayor Abrams noted that project staff have done a good job engaging with residents and suggested conducting additional engagement with businesses near the Highway 36 station.

5. Health Impact Assessment Update

Frank Alarcon provided an update on the Health Impact Assessment. The goals of this process are to create a tool to help educate policymakers and community members on the project's ability to achieve social equity, environmental and economic development goals and to build capacity among planners, engineers and public health officials in achieving positive health outcomes throughout the corridor. The Health Impact Assessment process began in October 2018 with a workshop with the project advisory committees to narrow down the focus of the assessment. Project staff are currently preparing

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a report with recommendations that will be shared with the committee. A preview of the recommendations are being shared today and are organized into four topics.

Connectivity is a broad topic area that includes physical connections, neighborhood cohesion and influencing the ability to use active transportation. Draft recommendations include connecting streets where possible to make a more complete street grid and exploring transit priority treatments (such as signal prioritization) for routes connecting to the Rush Line.

Access/accessibility includes the ability to reach desired goods and destinations that people need to be healthy, such as healthcare and recreation. Language limitations are often a barrier to accessing these goods and destinations. Draft recommendations include adding wayfinding signage that reflects the linguistic diversity in the corridor, prioritizing pedestrian and bike improvements during street reconstruction projects near planned stations, expanding language assistance to increase accessibility for riders and exploring increasing the frequency and service span of routes connecting to Rush Line BRT.

Jobs and employment are another focus of the Health Impact Assessment as unemployment is a barrier to improved health. A draft recommendation is that workforce programs in the area should take into consideration the residents and employers along transit corridors to better match workers with opportunities along the corridor.

Affordable housing was the fourth topic area addressed as housing is a factor affecting stress and health. A draft recommendation is to increase support for production and preservation of affordable housing near stations.

The next steps for the Health Impact Assessment include finalizing the report and distributing to the advisory committees. Project staff will continue to collaborate with agency partners on the recommendations.

Ruby Azurdia-Lee suggested that the non-profit sector be considered as a potential group to implement these recommendations. She noted that in addition to workforce services, there are many English classes and health services offered by non-profits on the east side of Saint Paul that people travel to.

Terri Thao asked if the wayfinding recommendations included using symbols for people with low literacy. Frank Alarcon replied that symbols were included as part of the recommendation.

6. Community Advisory Committee Update

Frank Alarcon provided an update on the Community Advisory Committee, which meets approximately every quarter and consists of about 20 residents and business representatives from along the corridor. The Community Advisory Committee's last meeting was January 17 and included a mix of project updates and small group discussion to gather feedback. The discussion focused on the Health Impact Assessment recommendations and the upcoming Ramsey County rail right-of-way master plan process. The next Community Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for April 8.

7. Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Master Plan Process

Jeanne Witzig introduced the Ramsey County rail right-of-way master plan process. As the engineering and environmental analysis advance, the project will take a close look at the unique section of the corridor where the dedicated BRT would be in Ramsey County rail right-of-way parallel to the Bruce Vento Trail. This process is not starting from scratch. During the pre-project development phase the county heard about people's concerns about the co-location of the trail and BRT, then last

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summer and fall project staff did additional public engagement to talk with people that live near and use the trail. Key takeaways from that public input included that trail users were generally positive about transit but there were concerns about lighting, safety, wayfinding, noise and visual impacts.

The master plan will cover topics such as landscaping, lighting, wayfinding and safety at intersections. This will be a living document that lays out the vision that will advance with the project.

Preparations for the master plan process began in January, and a workshop with the project's three advisory committees is planned for the end of March to gather input and begin to develop a vision for this segment of the project. Following the workshop will be public engagement this spring and summer, incorporating the design into the engineering concepts and finalizing the master plan towards the end of summer. An invitation for the workshop will be going out in the coming days.

Council President Brendmoen noted that spring break for public schools is the first week of April so there might be participation issues if the workshop date coincides with that.

A member of the public asked if there is a place they can view a typical cross section of the trail and BRT. Jeanne Witzig replied that has been included in previous Policy Advisory Committee presentations, which are posted on the project library tab on the project website. Frank Alarcon offered to follow up with them if they provide their contact information after the meeting.

8. Peer Review Process and Recommendations

Andy Gitzlaff introduced the peer review process. After project staff developed the initial concept plan that was presented to the Policy Advisory Committee in September 2018, the county brought in an independent team of experienced professionals in transit planning, engineering and environmental planning to conduct a peer review. Through this process, recommendations were developed to finetune the design. These recommendations were shared with staff at the relevant partner agencies in order to determine which recommendations to pursue, which not to pursue, and which to defer until a more advanced stage of the design. All of the recommendations will be documented in a report that is currently being prepared.

Jim Gersema walked through the peer review recommendations from south to north that the Technical Advisory Committee recommended incorporating into the project design.

The September 2018 concept plan included two options on Jackson Street – dedicated transit lanes and mixed traffic. The recommendation is to carry forward the dedicated transit lane option and eliminate the mixed traffic option to provide for improved BRT operations. Project staff will continue to coordinate with the city of Saint Paul on the design on Jackson Street.

On Phalen Boulevard there is pinch point at Forest Street, and the September 2018 concept plans included a one lane bi-directional guideway in that location. The peer review recommended maintaining a two-way guideway in that location to improve BRT operations. This would require locating the trail and fence slightly to the north as it passes under the Forest Street bridge. Andy Gitzlaff noted that the county owns the property just on the north side of the existing fence parallel to the trail.

Through the northern portion of Saint Paul the Bruce Vento Trail would be located to the west of the busway, and the concept plan showed the trail crossing to the east side at Arlington Avenue. The peer review recommended making the shift from west to east at Larpenteur Avenue instead to improve safety for BRT and trail users.

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At the Larpenteur and Frost Avenue stations, the concept plans included offset platforms north of the intersection with a crosswalk in between. The peer review recommended using parallel platforms to provide a consistent station configuration and eliminate mid-platform crossings.

The September 2018 concept plans included two options to cross I-694. The peer review recommended advancing the BNSF right-of-way avoidance option and eliminating the BNSF right-of-way utilization option. Andy Gitzlaff noted that the White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce sent a letter supporting the BNSF right-of-way avoidance option.

Councilmember Johnson asked if the new bridge over I-694 would be wide enough to accommodate a trail in the future. Jim Gersema said that is under consideration as they evaluate bridge types, but it has not yet been decided.

9. Downtown White Bear Lake Station Update

Andy Gitzlaff provided an update on the Downtown White Bear Lake station process. At the September 2018 Policy Advisory Committee meeting, concerns were raised about the site and scale of the Downtown White Bear Lake station so the Policy Advisory Committee advised project staff to do more public engagement and evaluate more options. There has been a process since then to get to a preferred site for the downtown station that will be studied in the environmental document. One of the changes made during this process was to not include a park-and-ride with this station. The station would include an 80-foot by 20-foot platform with a shelter, a driver facility and a bus turnaround.

Six options were evaluated that were identified based on public input and technical analysis:

- Option A: 7th Street and Washington Avenue.
- Option B: 4th Street and Division Avenue with 4th Street or 7th Street routing.
- Option C: 4th Street and Highway 61 (inline platform).
- Option D: 2nd Street and Clark Avenue.
- Option E: Banning Avenue and Highway 61.
- Option F: Arrive at 4th Street and Highway 61; depart from 7th Street and Washington Avenue.

There were a number of events to collect public input, and over 400 comment forms and online survey responses were received. While the response was robust, the results do not reflect a statistically valid random sample. Key takeaways from the responses include the following:

- Option A had the most first choice responses for the preferred location. “Other” also received a number of responses, which included a mixture of people against the project and people suggesting other station locations. However, four out of five people selected one of the sites in the downtown area.
- The age of respondents was fairly evenly distributed. About half of the respondents live or work in downtown White Bear Lake, and most of the remaining respondents live or work elsewhere in White Bear Lake.
- Respondents identified compatibility with the existing downtown character, access to activity and employment centers, and safety as the top elements to consider when selecting a station location.
- The top response regarding expected benefits of the project was having a reliable, frequent connection, which is consistent with the trend lines for ridership throughout the region. Access to jobs, healthcare and education was also identified as a benefit.

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The technical evaluation of the station location options used five criteria, including station accessibility, proximity to high-intensity development, efficient transit operations, minimizing traffic impacts and minimizing property impacts. Key findings from the technical evaluation include the following:

- Option A: 7th Street and Washington Avenue.
 - This location is the farthest from the downtown core, and riders would need to cross Highway 61 to reach the station. Pedestrian improvements would be needed.
 - This option is near senior housing, the arts district to the north and the downtown core to the south.
 - It would add a couple minutes in overall travel time, has minor sightline issues and there is potential delay from turning left from 8th Street onto Highway 61.
 - Parking for the Bear Town Bar and Grill would be impacted. Project staff met with the owners, and they are concerned about impacts to parking and service delivery vehicles. Project staff would look at those impacts in more detail if this option moves forward.
 - The Technical Advisory Committee determined that Option A is a technically viable option.
- Option B: 4th Street and Division Avenue.
 - This location has two routing options (4th Street or 7th Street).
 - It is close to downtown, but riders would have to cross Highway 61.
 - The existing sidewalk network is good near this location but is limited to the north.
 - There would be delay from the left turns and additional travel time associated with the 7th Street routing.
 - This option would impact a parking area for businesses but no buildings.
 - The Technical Advisory Committee determined that Option B is a technically viable option.
- Option C: 4th Street and Highway 61.
 - Riders would have to cross Highway 61 to access the southbound platform from the downtown core.
 - Buses would stop in mixed traffic on Highway 61, and the dwell time would be about 10 seconds.
 - The bus turnaround and layover would be to the north.
 - This option would require shifting the roadway to the east, which would impact Railroad Park.
 - The Technical Advisory Committee determined that Option C has technical issues due to park encroachments that impact viability.
- Option D: 2nd Street and Clark Avenue.
 - The existing walkshed around this option is extensive.
 - It is near medium- to high-density uses.
 - There would be delays near 2nd Street and Highway 61, but there are no sightline or turning radius issues.

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- This version without the park-and-ride would not impact private property, but it would impact public on-street parking.
- The Technical Advisory Committee determined that Option D is a technically viable option.
- Option E: Banning Avenue and Highway 61.
 - This option includes a unique intersection configuration and would require a U-turn movement to get back on Highway 61 that is a safety concern for both vehicles and pedestrians.
 - The platform location could encourage mid-block crossings, which is a safety concern.
 - This option would impact CVS's parking.
 - The Technical Advisory Committee determined that Option E has traffic operations issues that impact viability.
- Option F: Arrive at 4th Street and Highway 61; depart from 7th Street and Washington Avenue.
 - The biggest issue with this option is rider confusion since riders would get dropped off in one spot and would board in another.
 - It would avoid the impact to Railroad Park associated with Option C.
 - The Technical Advisory Committee determined that Option F has transit operational issues that impact viability.

The Technical Advisory Committee met on February 14 and concurred that Options C, E and F should no longer be pursued because they have technical issues that affect their viability. The Technical Advisory Committee recommended that the preferred site be determined based on direction from the city of White Bear Lake.

A resolution passed the White Bear Lake city council on Tuesday, February 26 to advance Option A as the Downtown White Bear Lake station location. A copy of the resolution and letters from the White Bear Lake Economic Development Corporation, White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce and the owners of Bear Town Bar and Grill were provided to the Policy Advisory Committee.

Commissioner Reinhardt was not able to attend the meeting today, so she asked her assistant Darren Tobolt to speak on her behalf. Darren stated that Commissioner Reinhardt wanted to express her support for the location chosen by the White Bear Lake city council. They have heard from technical experts and the community, and this location is the most feasible and is recommended by all involved. Throughout the process Commissioner Reinhardt has talked about how important it is to get this right since it is a once in a generation decision. She believes it is important to have these thoughtful conversations and that this is the best option in the long term because high quality transit is compatible with the interests of the community. Commissioner Reinhardt would like to thank everyone who shared thoughtful feedback throughout the process, especially the White Bear Lake city council. She looks forward to continuing the conversation as the project moves forward.

10. Public Comment

Darwin and Linda Demeny are White Bear Lake residents who have lived in White Bear Lake for 40 years because they love the atmosphere of the downtown and the schools. They got involved in this process late, so they have a number of questions. They understand the US Bank site was taken out because it did not fit. They attended the last three city council meetings to get an idea of what the reason is for doing this project. Ellen Hiniker said there will be 90 buses a day, and some residents

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have a problem with that many buses traveling through downtown White Bear Lake. Downtown is very busy during rush hour, and they do not know how another six buses an hour can fit into the traffic. Roughly 100 buses a day is very different from the current conditions in downtown White Bear Lake. They heard a reason for this project was development, but it is hard to find a parking spot now. They assume the option at the bank included a parking ramp because parking would be needed for people coming to White Bear Lake, but now the options shown would eliminate parking. Washington Avenue is too narrow for a bus and a car to drive past each other, and there are houses there that the buses would drive by. They would not like that if they lived there. School buses also use those streets.

Cindie Bloom commented that she does not want buses through downtown at the proposed frequency. She discussed the bus layover with project staff at the open house in January, and her understanding is that there will be three buses sitting there at any given point in time with the 10 to 15-minute frequency so the station would need a lot more space than for one bus. How much extra space will be needed to house 3 buses all day long? She asked the committee to keep a curious mindset as to the long-term purpose and result of this project and not just think about the next two years as part of this process. What happens if ridership tanks? What adjustments could be made?

Project staff noted that there would be no more than two buses at the platform at any given time but usually one.

11. Policy Advisory Committee Action

PEER REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The requested action is for the Policy Advisory Committee to confirm the project refinements brought forward through the peer review process for further evaluation in the Environmental Assessment based on the recommendation from the Technical Advisory Committee. Councilmember Rummel motioned for approval, and Councilmember Lindner seconded.

All committee members were in favor, and the action passed.

DOWNTOWN WHITE BEAR LAKE STATION

The requested action is to confirm Option A as the Downtown White Bear Lake station location for further evaluation in the Environmental Assessment based on the recommendation from the Technical Advisory Committee and the city of White Bear Lake, which reflects input from public engagement efforts. Councilmember Lindner motioned for approval, and Terri Thao seconded.

Councilmember Lindner asked if it would be possible to add a bus to the station graphics to give a feel for how they would fit. Andy Gitzlaff noted that project staff will be doing some visualization work to help the public better understand what a station and bus operations look like.

Sheila Kauppi commented that there was great outreach regarding the station location. She asked if the breakdown of the “other” station location preference only reflected those who picked it as their second choice. Adele Hall replied that slide 33 of the presentation shows both first and second choices, and slide 34 shows the reasons people gave for not selecting Options A through F.

Councilmember Johnson asked if the charts were showing that the second most popular choice was somewhere other than downtown White Bear Lake. Adele Hall replied that about 105 respondents indicated Option A was their first choice. About 80 percent of respondents chose a one of the identified station options and the other 20 percent chose “other”. Andy Gitzlaff noted that project staff are working on a summary of the survey and the public engagement process that will be posted on project website and provided to the committee.

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Councilmember Johnson asked if we should look at two station options so the project does not get behind schedule if the selected option does not work out. Andy Gitzlaff said that the Federal Transit Administration would likely not accept multiple options in an environmental document in order to be transparent, so the decision today is to focus on one option. Councilmember Johnson asked if we would then be so invested in the option that it would be hard to change to another option if needed. Andy Gitzlaff said that since we are still about five years away from construction there is inherent risk throughout the corridor that things could need to be modified, but we have reasonable confidence that this is the site to move forward with based on the technical analysis, public input and guidance from the White Bear Lake city council.

All committee members were in favor, and the action passed.

12. Upcoming Activities

Jeanne Witzig provided a summary of upcoming activities for the project. While the White Bear Lake process has been going on, project staff have been working on the technical analysis in the rest of the corridor to minimize the time delay to the overall project. Upcoming activities include:

- Public engagement throughout corridor.
- Project visualizations that will be used for public engagement and shared with the committees.
- A market assessment and watershed analysis for the stations.
- Advancing engineering and technical evaluations based on the direction received at the September Policy Advisory Committee meeting and today.

Sheila Kelly asked if there will be a visualization of the Downtown White Bear Lake station. Andy Gitzlaff replied that is one location where a visualization is planned. Project staff will also create animations in some areas.

Andy Gitzlaff noted that the project staff will look at the meeting schedule going forward since we are now off by a month as we want to maximize the use of everyone's time.

NEXT MEETING

March 28, 2019 (*note that this meeting has been rescheduled for April 18, 2019*)

2:30-4:30 p.m.

Maplewood Community Center