

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: April 8, 2019
Time: 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Location: East Side Enterprise Center, 804 Margaret Street

ATTENDEES

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Committee Members		
Dave Anderson	Vadnais Heights	X
Curt Cooper	Vadnais Heights	
Samantha Crosby	Maplewood	X
Lisa Freese	Saint Paul	
Richard Johnstone	White Bear Lake	
Laura Keithahn	Maplewood	
Mark Lynch	White Bear Lake	
Sandy Matzdorf	White Bear Lake	
Zack Mensinger	Saint Paul	X
Bob Morse	Vadnais Heights	X
John O'Phelan	Maplewood	X
Darrell Paulsen	Maplewood	
Brent Peterson	Saint Paul	X
Eric Saathoff	Saint Paul	X
Romi Slowiak	Saint Paul	
Therese Sonnek	Maplewood	X
TraNeicia Sylvester	Saint Paul	
Yin Thong	Maplewood	
Laura Torres	Saint Paul	
Julie Vang	Saint Paul	
Carolyn Wensman	White Bear Township	X
Michael Werner	Vadnais Heights	
Cindy Whiteford	Saint Paul	
Project Staff and Other Attendees		
Mayor Jo Emerson	Chair, Policy Advisory Committee	X
Ed Wensman	White Bear Township	X

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Frank Alarcon	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Beth Bartz	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Jim Gersema	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Alicia Valenti	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Welcome and Introductions

Bob Morse brought the meeting to order. Mayor Emerson made opening remarks and highlighted the upcoming Policy Advisory Committee meeting, which will be held at 2:30 on April 18. Bob asked what the location will be and Mayor Emerson said it will be at the Maplewood Community Center.

Project Updates

Field Activities

Beth Bartz provided an overview of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, covering the purpose of the law, the National Register of Historic Places and the Section 106 review process. Beth defined the area of potential effects. Therese Sonnek asked how big the area of potential effects for historic properties is. Beth said it varies and is typically a 200- to 500-foot radius around the planned route. Beth added that the study area for archaeology is based on ground disturbances such as excavation or grading. Beth described Phases I and II of the Section 106 process. Beth stated that fewer than five full property acquisitions are anticipated, which reduces the likelihood of direct impacts to any historic properties, though indirect effects such as visual impacts are possible. Beth said that some of the Phase II properties are corridors, including the Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad.

Therese asked if water resources are evaluated. Beth confirmed that stormwater and other water resources are considered. Bob asked which firm is conducting the cultural resources research. Beth responded that Mead and Hunt, a Wisconsin-based engineering firm with a local office, is doing this work. Therese asked if their contract is with the Federal Transit Administration. Beth said their contract is with Ramsey County and that the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration and State Historic Preservation Office provide oversight. Bob asked why the project isn't using a local firm and whether there was a request for proposals. Beth reiterated that Mead and Hunt has a local office and added that they were part of the project team on the proposal.

Downtown White Bear Lake Station

Frank described the public engagement effort regarding the Downtown White Bear Lake station that led to the selection of 7th Street and Washington Avenue as the preferred station location. Therese asked if there would be a stop at 4th Street or only at 7th Street. Frank said the only downtown stop would be at 7th Street. Therese said that would be a long walk from downtown. Frank said project staff will examine bicycle and pedestrian connections to the station and evaluate how to effectively facilitate access. Carolyn Wensman asked if a parking lot would be necessary. Frank said the station is not assumed to have parking included. Frank noted that there are park-and-ride stations elsewhere along the route and that park-and-ride users would be encouraged to use those facilities. Frank said project staff will also assess potential parking impacts at the new downtown White Bear Lake station location and whether there are opportunities to add some new parking nearby. Bob highlighted that there are a few homes proximate to the new station location and asked if the nearby restaurant

owners also own these homes. Frank said the homes are owned by other people. Bob asked if the project is planning to buy any of the homes. Frank said there is currently not a need to take any buildings to fit the station in this area.

Bob stated that White Bear Lake has some old burial mounds and asked if project staff are looking for things like arrowheads. Beth confirmed that the archaeological survey will note findings of artifacts; burial sites are very sensitive and historical records as well as physical evidence will be thoroughly evaluated to determine if there are potential burial sites in the corridor. Therese noted that Beartown Bar and Grill is located at 7th Street and Washington Avenue and asked if the restaurant would remain once the project is constructed. Beth confirmed that the restaurant would not be demolished. Brent Peterson asked if the 7th Street and Washington Avenue station location is the only one being studied or if there are other options. Frank confirmed that this is the only location being studied. Eric Saathoff asked if bicycle connections are being evaluated and whether any added bicycle connections would require parking changes. Frank said that the Bruce Vento Trail may be extended on the west side of Highway 61, which would provide a major bicycle connection, and that Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project staff are closely coordinating with that project. Dave Anderson noted that if there are safety concerns around crossing Highway 61, those issues exist regardless of whether the guideway is to the east or west of the highway, and that crossing around County Road E in Vadnais Heights is particularly challenging. Frank said that project staff are closely examining each intersection on Highway 61 and working to make improvements so people can cross safely.

Policy Advisory Committee

Frank provided an update on actions taken by the Policy Advisory Committee to refine the project definition:

- Confirmed the downtown White Bear Lake station location based on recommendation from the Technical Advisory Committee and the City of White Bear Lake.
- Confirmed peer review recommendations:
 - Eliminate mixed traffic option on Jackson Street.
 - Eliminate single-lane guideway under Forest Street bridge.
 - Shift the change in trail/guideway configuration from Arlington Avenue to Larpenteur Avenue.
 - Use parallel platform configuration at Larpenteur Avenue and Frost Avenue stations (both north of the respective cross streets).
 - Eliminate the BNSF right-of-way alignment option just north of Interstate 694.

Frank described the variety of guideway configurations in the corridor and began with a description of outside-running dedicated lanes. Eric asked if outside-running lanes are separated by paint. Frank said yes, and there are sometimes right turns allowed through outside-running lanes. Jim Gersema added that the segments of the guideway with outside-running dedicated lanes have few access points, which reduces potential conflicts. Frank said outside-running lanes and BAT lanes can function very similarly. Eric asked if the lanes would be enforced using police, signage and/or other methods. Frank confirmed that both police and signage would be used to enforce the dedicated lane. Therese asked how dedicated lanes would be marked in the winter, when road paint is often not visible. Frank said there would be clear markings signage in more visible areas. Zack Mensinger asked what would happen with cars parked in the guideway. Jim said enforcement would be easier for illegal parking because it would be longer-term and cars could be ticketed and/or towed. Jim noted that the advantage of using paint to separate outside-running and BAT lanes from car travel lanes is that

buses can get around broken down vehicles and other obstacles. Therese asked if the guideway would be constructed in existing lanes or shoulders. Jim said both approaches would be used and provided Phalen Boulevard as an example, where a westbound travel lane would be converted to a bus lane while the eastbound shoulder would be widened to add the bus lane. Therese asked if there had been resistance to reducing travel lanes. Jim said there had not been pushback from neighborhoods but that city traffic engineers have raised the concern on behalf of residents.

Frank described center-running lanes. Eric asked if there is traffic congestion on Beam Avenue from Highway 61 to Southlawn Drive. Jim said there is not congestion in that area. Dave asked if emergency vehicles serving the hospitals and medical centers in the area would be impacted by the project. Jim said the dedicated lanes are seen as an advantage for emergency vehicles because they would be able to use the lanes to bypass traffic. Frank described dedicated guideways, business access and transit (BAT) lanes, and mixed traffic lanes.

Public Engagement

Alicia Valenti described the public engagement efforts made by project staff from January 18 through April 7. Alicia summarized input heard from businesses around the Hamm's District, vendors in Hmong Village and employees at St. John's Hospital. Alicia provided examples of changes made in response to public input and highlighted upcoming events and opportunities for providing input.

Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Visioning Framework

Beth summarized the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Visioning Framework Workshop, design elements considered and major takeaways from the workshop. Beth gave an overview of the Visioning Framework work schedule. Therese requested that public events be held in the evenings to increase accessibility for people who work during business hours.

Environmental Assessment

Beth explained the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 and stated that because the Rush Line BRT Project intends to pursue federal funding, project staff must complete an environmental document for the project. Beth outlined the three different levels of environmental analysis and the purpose of environmental work. Therese said that the top complaint among her neighbors is that there doesn't seem to be a need for this investment because buses are often empty. Beth said the Environmental Assessment will explain why BRT will work better and have higher ridership than express buses. Dave noted that there seems to be a positive trend of ridership exceeding projections for this type of transit project.

Beth provided an overview of the topics included in an Environmental Assessment, such as environmental justice and visual resources. Therese said that a lot of people are concerned about losing trees that may take 50 years to fully grow back, then asked what trees would be saved and how many would remain. Jim said that amount has yet to be determined. Therese stated that it could change the whole character of the trail. Jim said a lot of trees will have to be removed, including some, like ash trees, that are likely to become diseased anyway. Beth clarified that the right-of-way will not be clear cut. Eric said several people are invested in the daylighting of Phalen Creek and asked if successful completion of that project would create conflicts in the Environmental Assessment. Beth said project staff have been coordinating with the Lower Phalen Creek Project. Jim added that the Phalen Creek area and the guideway overlap from Arcade Street to Earl Street. Eric asked if the creek would be considered an existing natural feature. Jim said it would not but that the project would be included in the Environmental Assessment along with other projects requiring coordination. Eric asked about a wetland area near the Realife Cooperative of Phalen Village. Jim said the wetland is on

park property. Beth added that the Environmental Assessment will delineate wetlands and other water resources in order to avoid cutting off water supply to wetlands and mitigate or avoid other impacts.

Dave asked if there are any areas in the right-of-way where fencing and other barriers might impact animal species that sometimes cross the trail. Beth said that species in the area are largely urban animals such as coyotes and foxes and that the guideway design will seek to minimize risk for buses, people and animals. Beth said mitigation measures for habitat impacts, even those caused by features such as retaining walls, would be evaluated. John O'Phelan mentioned that in Alaska, tunnels are often built specifically for animals to safely cross roads. Beth said the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has recommended these crossings on various projects to provide grade-separated crossing and can also engineer curbs to be accessible for small animals such as turtles. Sam noted that LED lights are often excessively bright and blue-hued and asked if it was possible to use a warmer hue. Jim said it would be an easy change but that decisions related to lighting will not be made until later in the project.

Dave asked what the snow removal process would be with less space for snow storage. Beth said winter maintenance is not discussed much in the Environmental Assessment but is being considered during the design process. Zack said that the effect of salt on freshwater is also a matter of concern. Dave added that even if you substitute sand for salt it can impact natural water flow. Therese said that there should be vegetation as a buffer between the trail and transit lanes and asked where snow would go if there are plants in that space. Jim said plants would be selected carefully to tolerate snow accumulation and grow in the summer. Therese asked what the distance between the trail and the guideway would be. Jim said it would be at least seven to eight feet, leaving space for snow storage.

Station Design

Jim provided an overview of the station design process, explained that some station features are included at every station and noted that additional features and amenities may vary based on community input, surrounding physical environment and other factors. Jim listed the standard station feature, described elements that are considered in station design and identified amenities that could be added. Standard features include raised platforms, lighting and bicycle parking. Eric stated that he supports bicycle parking and asked if it gets used often. Jim said it is used less than anticipated, but sheltered bicycle parking is used more often. Therese asked if people use bicycle lockers. Jim said that lockers are also not very popular and that Metro Transit is considering bicycle cages with GoTo card access because of increased demand for this style of bicycle parking. Therese noted that people are concerned about parts of their bicycles being stolen. Jim said this concern is frequently the reason racks are underused but that they are maintained so that if anyone does want to lock their bicycle at a station, there is a designated space for it. Zack added that he avoids locking his bicycle at stations because he is concerned about security or because the racks are too far from the station. Jim said that BRT stations are much smaller than light rail stations, which would significantly reduce the distance between the platform and the bicycle parking.

Zack asked if elements of station design vary with the agency that controls the adjacent road, citing Highway 61 and the Minnesota Department of Transportation as an example. Jim said that this can happen to an extent, but that station design varies more based on the context of the environment. Jim provided the example that stations near Highway 61 would likely look different than stations in the Ramsey County rail right-of-way but that platform layout will generally be consistent throughout the route. Dave asked if any elements considered in station design address pedestrian-oriented traffic signal phasing. Jim confirmed that light timing would be addressed and noted that the question with adjusting traffic signals is how far out from the route changes should be made.

Following the overview of the station design process, meeting attendees split into two small groups to discuss station design. Attendees provided the following input on station features and design:

- General station elements and design.
 - Materials used in station design should be durable.
 - It might be nice to have a more natural or woodsy look in the Ramsey County rail right-of-way.
 - Any station art/details should be designed by the community to promote a sense of ownership and celebrate the surrounding neighborhood.
 - The station is too hospitable to people experiencing homelessness.
 - Station should be identifiable from a distance.
- Information kiosk.
 - The kiosk should include a full system map with connections to other transit routes, or at least high-frequency routes.
 - The kiosk should be comprehensible to people using the system for the first time.
 - The kiosk should be under the shelter.
 - Question about including wayfinding information for local businesses and amenities.
- Pylon station marker.
 - The station marker is too tall.
 - The logo should be reversed if lit from within.
 - The station marker should include an emergency call button.
- Shelter.
 - The shelter should provide wind protection.
 - The shelter should be fully enclosed to protect transit riders from the elements.
 - Glass wraps should be used to display changeable designs on the shelter.
 - Questions about the height of station roof and lighting.
- Bicycle parking.
 - Bicycle parking should be included, but not in excess.
- Textured warning strip and raised curb.
 - It may be beneficial to use a tactile ground treatment for increased traction on the entire platform.
- Other amenities and input.
 - It would be nice to include a television for entertainment while waiting.
 - Variable messaging should be used to promote local events.
 - Questions about having ad space for purchase in the shelter.
 - Little Free Libraries or book lockers for local library systems would be nice.
 - Include “Handbook of the Streets”, a resource guide for people experiencing homelessness produced by St. Stephens, at stations.
 - Maintenance should be a priority.