

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #7



B R T

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: April 18, 2019
Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Location: Maplewood Community Center

ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	Present
Committee Members		
Mayor Marylee Abrams	City of Maplewood	
Randy Anderson	Independent School District 622	
Ruby Azurdia-Lee	Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)	X
Council President Amy Brendmoen	City of Saint Paul	X
Mary Buerkle	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corp.	X
Tom Cook	Metro State University	
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	
Supervisor Scott McCune	White Bear Township	X
Councilmember Kelly Monson	City of Forest Lake	X
Patrick Opatz	Century College	
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt	Ramsey County	X
Terri Thao	Nexus Community Partners	X
Councilmember Susan Vento	Metropolitan Council	X
Shannon Watson	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	X
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.
- Barbara Howard, Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit.
- Kathryn Hansen, Metro Transit.
- Mark Finken, City of Saint Paul.
- Ellen Hiniker, City of White Bear Lake.
- Marc Valencia, New Publica.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Adele Hall, SRF.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.

Members of the Public¹

- Bob Morse, Community Advisory Committee co-chair.
- Linda and Darwin Demeny.
- Barb and Jim Dow.
- James Watson.
- Rolf W Parsons.
- Fran Knothe.
- Len Pratt.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Emerson welcomed the committee members, including new members Susan Vento of the Metropolitan Council and Mary Buerkle of the Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corporation, and asked the committee members and attendees to introduce themselves.

2. Recap of February Policy Advisory Committee Meeting

At the February Policy Advisory Committee meeting, Mayor Emerson was elected chair and Councilmember Lindner was elected vice chair. Project staff provided updates on environmental coordination, the Health Impact Assessment and the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Visioning Framework. The Policy Advisory Committee also took two actions:

- Confirming the project refinements brought forward through the peer review process for further evaluation in the Environmental Assessment.
- Confirming the Downtown White Bear Lake station location for further evaluation in the Environmental Assessment.

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

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3. Community Advisory Committee Update

Bob Morse, a Community Advisory Committee co-chair, provided a summary of the Community Advisory Committee's last meeting. The committee met on April 8 and discussed the Section 106 (historic resources) process, different guideway configurations and the Environmental Assessment. They also discussed station design elements and the importance of the community making the stations feel like it is theirs. The co-chairs also emphasized the responsibility of the committee members to engage with their communities and attend public engagement events.

4. Public Engagement Update

Marc Valencia summarized recent public engagement activities and highlighted three recent events.

- Hamm's area business engagement.
 - Project staff had an event with local businesses in the Hamm's area in Saint Paul. Eight business representatives attended, and they expressed interest in improving connectivity for bikes and pedestrians in the area as well as support for transit for employee and customer use. The event provided for great engagement with small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Hmong Village vendor survey.
 - Hmong Village is located by the planned Cook Avenue station. Project staff distributed a survey in English and Hmong to vendors at Hmong Village and received 25 responses.
 - Additional engagement ideas for Hmong Village include attending a vendor meeting to conduct the survey live and provide linguistic assistance as needed, doing a pop-up for customers and working with Metro Transit to do an educational campaign about nearby transit options. There are opportunities to learn more about transit users in this community.
- Northeast Metro Community Expo.
 - Project staff spoke to more than 50 people from White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights and Gem Lake. Responses generally ranged from neutral to positive about the project, and there was interest in the Downtown White Bear Lake station location decision. Many people expressed support and excitement for improvements to transit options in the northeast metro.

Adele Hall discussed upcoming public engagement activities. At the last Policy Advisory Committee meeting, Mayor Abrams of Maplewood asked project staff to engage with business owners in the Highway 36 area, and outreach to businesses is currently underway. In downtown Saint Paul, project staff have done some engagement in conjunction with Gold Line but will be putting more focus there, especially along Robert Street and around Pedro Park. There are many different types of stakeholders in downtown Saint Paul, so Rush Line BRT Project staff will focus on businesses and those who live along Robert Street and will work with Gold Line to reach out to large employers. The third focus area for upcoming engagement is the area between Arcade Street and Beam Avenue along the Ramsey County rail right-of-way where the BRT and Bruce Vento Trail will be co-located. Project staff will talk about what the corridor could look like and ask questions about landscaping, lighting and other features. Engagement will take a few different forms, including "Tuesdays on the Trail" events in June to engage with trail users and neighbors in the early evenings, a mailing to

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property owners approximately a block of the right-of-way, and attending a Weaver Elementary School parent's night and carnival. Project staff also want to reach populations of color around the right-of-way and are determining events to attend.

Shannon Watson noted that many of the vehicles parked at Robert and 6th Streets are unmarked police vehicles.

5. Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Visioning Framework Update

Jeanne Witzig provided an update on the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Visioning Framework. This effort was previously called the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Master Plan and was changed to the Visioning Framework to distinguish it from other Ramsey County efforts. Project staff held a workshop on March 27 and invited advisory committee members and stakeholders that have expressed interest in the topic. Participants had small group discussions about how the BRT and trail will fit in the right-of-way and were asked for input on concerns and what is most important. A visual preference survey was conducted to better understand what the vision is for this area and what are potential design solutions we can focus on now and as the project advances. There are a variety of approaches to each design element and they can change as the context of the corridor changes. It will not be a one-size-fits-all approach for the whole right-of-way.

Major takeaways from the workshop included:

- Maintenance is a common concern.
- Context is important. Look to residents and adjacent property owners for additional guidance.
- Opportunity to showcase the historic nature of the rail corridor.
- Preference towards maximizing green space and natural features.
- Desire to maximize permeability and pedestrian access to and across the corridor.
- Safety and wayfinding continue to be areas of importance.

Commissioner Reinhardt noted that the workshop participants covered a lot of topics and had good discussions. Councilmember Johnson said what struck him was seeing more detail on the grade separated crossing at Johnson Parkway, near the proposed Maryland Avenue station. Andy Gitzlaff replied that project staff will be meeting with Realife Cooperative and adjacent townhomes to give residents more detail on what the project will look like. Project staff are trying to get stations as close to intersections as possible where buses would need to stop anyway and to provide more eyes on the stations.

The workshop input will be shared as part of public engagement activities this spring and summer, and project staff will start incorporating design recommendations into the engineering plans. The Visioning Framework will continue to inform design as the project advances.

6. Vadnais Sports Center Area Parking Study Update

Andy Gitzlaff provided an update on the Vadnais Sports Center parking study.

The study found that there was adequate parking on site during the business day and that weekday evening demand is manageable because some businesses are closed except for event nights. There are about a dozen high demand weekend games throughout the year that result in over-capacity parking conditions. The parking counts were conducted when the dome was closed, so the analysis included estimated parking for the dome.

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Rush Line parking demand is estimated to be about 50 cars, which would park from about 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. Park-and-ride and business parking would decrease as sports center parking increases. The county plans to replace the dome facility with a smaller footprint, which could open more area for parking. Other potential improvements include signing and marking to improve navigation, better utilizing the roadway and parking south of the sports center, and implementing a pedestrian management plan to improve pedestrian flow during peak periods. It is not cost-effective to build ramps for peak events. Instead, the county will work with adjacent property owners to implement a parking management plan. A park-and-ride could be in a portion of the parking lots in the northeast quadrant of the sports center site not owned by People's Bank.

Waiting until Rush Line is built to solve the existing parking issues is not the best approach, so the county will look at doing some on-site parking improvements when the dome is replaced to help with the overall flow of the site. There is currently a funding gap for the dome, so it would be up and running next year at the earliest.

Mary Buerkle asked how many spaces could be added with the reduced dome footprint. Andy Gitzlaff replied that approximately 60 spaces could be gained from reorienting parking and another 50 or so could be added with a smaller dome.

7. Engineering Updates and Visualizations

Jim Gersema shared project visualizations with the committee. The purpose of these visualizations is to assist with decision-making and build public understanding of the project.

One location where project staff created visualizations is the pedestrian underpass near Weaver Elementary School. The BRT guideway would go over the existing trail connection to the school. There are two design options under consideration for the orientation of the wing walls, 45-degree (angled) walls or 90-degree walls (parallel to the guideway). Visualizations were also prepared of the intersection of the guideway and County Road B. The intersection will look similar to a traditional intersection with pedestrian push buttons and signals, but signs and markings will distinguish that the guideway is BRT only.

Councilmember Vento asked if lighting was an option for the underpass at Weaver Elementary School. Jim Gersema replied that lighting will be evaluated in the underpass and at the trail intersection, similar to what is considered as part of the visioning framework.

Andy Gitzlaff noted that project staff selected Weaver Elementary School for a visualization because it is similar to other grade separation locations, including at the Gateway Trail and at Fitch Road, and County Road B will be similar to other intersections throughout corridor. Visualization locations are selected strategically since they are time intensive to develop. Project staff are also considering creating visualizations near the Downtown White Bear Lake station and the bridge over Johnson Parkway. If Policy Advisory Committee members have other ideas for locations that would be valuable to visualize, let project staff know and we will evaluate the options.

Over the last few months project staff have also been working to refine the design in the Marina Triangle area where the Whitaker Street station would be located. Rush Line BRT Project staff are coordinating with the Bruce Vento Trail Extension Project to accommodate both projects in the design, and are also working with the city of White Bear Lake and the Minnesota Department of Transportation on the reconstruction of Highway 61 through this segment. The Bruce Vento Trail would follow the railroad on the west side of Highway 61, and the road would need to be shifted to the east to stay out of railroad right-of-way.

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Sheila Kauppi noted that there are stairs that go up to the existing pedestrian crossing of the railroad and asked what that crossing would look like in the future condition. Jim Gersema replied that it would be an accessible crossing.

8. Station Design Discussion

Jim Gersema provided an update on the station design process. At this stage, the focus is on platform size and location. Standard features will be included at every platform for consistency throughout the system, including real time departure signs, raised platforms, maps, benches, heat, lighting, bike racks, ticket machines and trash and recycling bins. There are many elements to consider in station design, including safety and security, design and aesthetics, additional station amenities, sidewalk and trail connections, and accessibility. Potential added amenities include a designated vehicle drop-off and pick-up zone, bicycle lockers, bicycle tune-up stations, wayfinding signage to local attractions, landscaping, WiFi hotspots and design features.

Station design was discussed with the Community Advisory Committee at their April meeting, and the conversation will continue throughout the next year.

9. Station Walkshed and Bikeshed Analysis

Jeanne Witzig provided an overview of the station walkshed and bikeshed analysis. Pedestrians are typically willing to walk ½ mile or about 13 minutes to get to a transit station, and bicyclists are typically willing to ride 3 miles. Project staff have been evaluating what the project can do to help make each station more accessible.

The analysis looked at existing infrastructure and planned improvements that were included in the project's September 2018 concept plans. Project staff then asked the cities if they had programmed improvements that should be included in the analysis. This information was then incorporated into a walkshed and bikeshed modeling tool developed by Toole Design Group, a member of the consultant team for the project.

The walkshed analysis at the Larpenteur Avenue station was shown as an example. Proposed sidewalks on Larpenteur Avenue and English Street would allow a broader area to reach the station with a 13-minute walk. The walkshed information will be used to have further conversations with the cities and county about ways to improve access either as part of Rush Line or as separate city or county projects.

The bikeshed analysis for Maryland Avenue station was also shown as an example. The bikeshed analysis focuses on the stress level for a bicyclist to get to a station, taking into consideration factors such as separation from vehicles and travel speed. With improvements, areas previously identified as high stress connections would be reduced to lower stress connections. Project staff will collaborate with cities on other connections and improvements that could be made to enable more low stress bicycle connections.

10. Schedule Review

Jeanne Witzig reviewed the project schedule. The Federal Transit Administration is a key participant in the project and will hopefully be a future funding partner, so the project is preparing a federal environmental document. The Federal Transit Administration has a stringent review process and is implementing a more risk-reduced approach to reviewing analysis, so the project schedule has been shifted accordingly. The first review of draft Environmental Assessment by the Federal Transit Administration is anticipated in early 2020. The document will undergo multiple reviews by the Federal Transit Administration, with an anticipated release date for public review in the fall of 2020. The final

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environmental decision is anticipated in the spring of 2021. Andy Gitzlaff added that the Federal Transit Administration wants more things done earlier in the process to minimize risk. The county does not see this impacting the overall project delivery schedule, but it will extend the environmental analysis phase.

As part of the municipal collaboration process, the 15 percent plans will be shared with the cities in late summer or early fall after Technical Advisory Committee review. Project staff are coordinating with city staff to present to councils if so desired. Project staff anticipate walking through the 15 percent project elements with the Policy Advisory Committee in July and will start to share preliminary environmental analysis findings in fall 2019.

11. Public Comment

Fran Knothe commented that she lives in White Bear Township, and there are a lot of children in the neighborhoods. She is very upset about the decision to build a station at 7th and Highway 61. Bear Town is a very successful business and needs all the land they have. Having a station in their parking lot will make it difficult for them to do business. Further up the road is Central Middle School, where there are school buses and parents picking up and dropping off kids, so buses going through that area would be scary.

Mayor Emerson noted that 7th Street and Washington Avenue is the site that has been selected for the Downtown White Bear Lake station, but we are still working out the details.

Commissioner Reinhardt added that with every station we need to look at what is happening in the neighborhoods to see where there might be other issues. We are looking at safety concerns and are working with business owners. This is not unique to White Bear Lake as there are complex issues throughout the corridor. Public comments are important, and the Policy Advisory Committee is aware of and concerned about the same things. The Policy Advisory Committee exists to dig into the details and work through the issues.

Terri Thao added that there are a lot of lessons that we've learned from other transit projects in the metro, so we have the experience of doing this detailed work and working with small businesses. This experience will make this a better project for everyone.

12. Upcoming Activities

Upcoming activities include ongoing public engagement and advancing the engineering and environmental analysis. Project staff will come to future Policy Advisory Committee meetings with more details.

Councilmember Vento asked how often the Policy Advisory Committee meets. Andy Gitzlaff replied that it typically meets every other month on the last Thursday of the month. The meeting schedule is adjusted as needed based on project milestones.

NEXT MEETING

May 30, 2019
2:30-4:30 p.m.
Maplewood Community Center