

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #9



B R T

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: July 25, 2019
Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Location: Maplewood Community Center

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)	
Kit Brady	Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare	
Council President Amy Brendmoen	City of Saint Paul	
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	
Sheila Kauppi	Minnesota Department of Transportation	
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	
Liz Moscatelli	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corp.	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	
Alternates		
Councilmember Kevin Edberg	City of White Bear Lake	
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.
- Cassie Fitzgerald, Ramsey County Public Works.
- Helen Schuda, Ramsey County Public Works.
- Scott Yonke, Ramsey County Parks.
- Ed Sanderson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Maggie Jones, Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit.
- Mark Finken, City of Saint Paul.
- Daniel Pena, Metropolitan Council.
- Ellen Hiniker, City of White Bear Lake.
- Adele Hall, SRF.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.
- Brian McClung, MZA & Company.

Members of the Public¹

- Patricia Schoff.
- Jim Watson.
- Stephen West.
- Sara Moore.
- Peter Nielsen.
- Sharon Anthony.
- Maggie Youngberg.
- Loretta Wheeler.
- Mary Woodrich.
- John Kuderka.
- Melanie Kleiss.
- Ian Buck.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Emerson welcomed the committee members and attendees and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

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

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2. Recap of May Policy Advisory Committee Meeting

At the May Policy Advisory Committee meeting, Kathryn Hansen from Metro Transit provided information on transit-oriented development planning resources for cities. Project staff also provided updates on public engagement and coordination activities and the city staff review process for the 15 percent design plans.

3. Public Engagement Update

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Since the environmental analysis phase of the Rush Line BRT Project started in March 2018, project staff have attended over 140 in-person events, recorded more than 1,200 comments and conversations and conducted three online surveys. The input received has resulted in notable changes to the project, including the addition of two stations (Buerkle Road and Cook Avenue) and refinements to station platform locations.

Since the last Policy Advisory Committee meeting, recent public engagement activities have focused on the Ramsey County rail right-of-way visioning framework, including four pop-ups on the Bruce Vento Trail (referred to as Tuesdays on the Trail) and pop-ups nearby at Sun Foods and Hmong Village. Other events included Train Day at Union Depot, WaterFest and Dragon Festival at Phalen Regional Park, a presentation to employees of the Minnesota Department of Transportation materials lab in Maplewood, a meeting with residents of Cardinal Pointe senior cooperative in Maplewood and a pop-up at the Vadnais Heights farmers' market.

In addition, project staff hosted an event specific to the Hmong community that lives near the corridor in Saint Paul and Maplewood on June 26th. A mailing was sent to residences that had Hmong surnames, and the event was promoted through the Hmong American Partnership. The event had low turnout but project staff did gather ideas on other ways to reach the Hmong community from those that did attend.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT THEMES

Drop-in discussions and one-on-one stakeholder meetings related to the 10th Street station were held in May. Based on public input and the opportunity to co-locate BRT and local bus service, the southbound platform has been shifted from the far side of the intersection adjacent to Pedro Park to the near side of the intersection adjacent to Lunds & Byerlys. This shift was recommended by the Saint Paul Issue Resolution Team and Technical Advisory Committee.

Related to the Ramsey County rail right-of-way visioning framework, project staff have been seeking input on how people use the Bruce Vento Trail today and how they want to use it in the future, design of the right-of-way and potential trail amenities. A number of opportunities were provided for input, including four Tuesday on the Trail events, the Hmong community gathering, pop-up meetings and an online survey. Broad themes from the input received include:

- People want to continue to use the right-of-way for recreational use and transportation.
- Popular amenities include trash and recycling receptacles, drinking fountains, information kiosks and seating.
- A top priority is maintaining as much of a natural atmosphere as possible with shade and high-quality vegetation.

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Project staff are using the input received to develop the visioning framework, which is the plan for how the trail and BRT will interact within the Ramsey County rail right-of-way. There will be a second round of engagement after the draft plan is available.

Project staff met with a few residents of Cardinal Pointe, a senior cooperative in Maplewood, who had questions and concerns about what it would mean to have a BRT line on Hazelwood Street in front of their building and asked about alternative routing.

At Mt. Airy Homes, people expressed excitement for improved transit options in the area and some concern about walking to and from the station given the steep grades in the area.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Upcoming public engagement activities include MarketFest in White Bear Lake tonight (July 25), National Night Out with Hmong American Partnership and possibly with the District 2 Community Council in Saint Paul, and CLUES Fiesta Latina. Project staff are also working to schedule pop-up events at Regions Hospital, the METRO Green Line Robert Street station and public housing along the route.

Scott McCune asked how much feedback has been received on the Ramsey County rail right-of-way and what will be done with the information on preferred amenities. Frank Alarcon replied that a few hundred comments have been submitted between the online survey and in-person events. The preferred amenities will be evaluated based on what is feasible and the project budget. Andy Gitzlaff added that Ramsey County Parks is preparing a master plan amendment for the Bruce Vento Trail, so the input received as part of Rush Line will also inform the master plan for the overall trail.

4. Coordination Activities

Project staff have been working closely with municipal and agency partners to advance the engineering and station area planning work. The main goal is to not have any surprises when they review the design plans and Environmental Assessment. At the federal level, project staff have monthly coordination calls with the Federal Transit Administration, and in August Federal Transit Administration staff will be visiting and will take a tour of the project area. At the state level, project staff are working closely with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on their design review process and are coordinating details with their functional groups. At the regional level, the project is coordinating with Metro Transit on park-and-ride sizing.

Over the last few months project staff have also been holding briefings with the cities and township in the project area to share overall project information and provide details on the route and stations within each community. The last briefing will be with the city of Gem Lake.

5. Community Advisory Committee Update

The Community Advisory Committee, which meets about once a quarter, had its fifth meeting on July 17th. Project staff shared updates on the 15 percent design plans, discussed the visioning framework and Bruce Vento Trail and provided an overview of the Environmental Assessment preparation process. Project staff have looked to the Community Advisory Committee to provide input on the visioning framework as several members use the Bruce Vento Trail and live close to it. The Community Advisory Committee will have the opportunity to provide input on the draft visioning framework before it is finalized.

6. Engineering Updates

Jim Gersema provided an overview of the 15 percent plans. The plans are similar to what was presented to the Policy Advisory Committee in September 2018 with the addition of profiles, cross sections and platform details. Key points from south to north include the following:²

- Sheets 4-5:
 - There would be three platforms for Union Depot (at the Union Depot bus deck, Wacouta Street and Sibley Street).
 - Rush Line would share the proposed METRO Gold Line routing on 5th, 6th, Sibley and Wacouta Streets.
 - Project staff continue to coordinate with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and city of Saint Paul on the Robert Street design.
- Sheets 5-7:
 - The southbound 10th Street station platform was from the far side of the intersection to the near side based on public input and the benefit of co-locating BRT with local bus service.
 - The 14th Street station would be located near the METRO Green Line and Regions Hospital.
 - Project staff are coordinating with the city of Saint Paul on the city's project on Jackson Street.
- Sheets 7-8:
 - The route would continue on Phalen Boulevard in business access and transit lanes with stations at Olive and Cayuga Streets.
 - The northbound Cayuga Street platform was shifted slightly to the northeast to get the grading to work.
- Sheets 8-9:
 - The project would include intersection improvements at Payne Avenue.
 - The route would turn from Phalen Boulevard onto Neid Lane to serve the Arcade Street station. The northbound platform was shifted from Arcade Street to Neid Lane to simplify operations.
 - There would be a new guideway bridge from Arcade Street to the Ramsey County rail right-of-way, which is where the guideway would start to be co-located with the Bruce Vento Trail.
 - Project staff are coordinating with the Lower Phalen Creek Project and Capitol Region Watershed District on how Rush Line can work with future daylighting of Lower Phalen Creek.
- Sheets 9-10:

² The referenced sheets refer to the sheet numbers in the 15 percent plan set that was provided to the Policy Advisory Committee.

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- The route would continue along Phalen Boulevard with the dedicated guideway on the north side of Phalen.
- Sheets 10-12:
 - At the Cook Avenue station, a pedestrian crossing would be added across Phalen Boulevard to Hmong Village.
 - A new bridge would be constructed over Johnson Parkway for BRT and trail users. The design reflects a three-span bridge, which is more cost-effective than a single-span and also keeps views more open.
- Sheets 12-14:
 - The reconstructed Bruce Vento Trail would be located on the west side of the guideway south of Larpenteur Avenue. At Larpenteur Avenue, the trail would shift to the east side of the guideway.
 - South of Arlington Avenue, there is an existing pedestrian underpass that would be closed.
 - The project includes pedestrian improvements on Larpenteur Avenue to improve connectivity to the station, and the platforms would be located on the north side of Larpenteur Avenue.
- Sheets 14-17:
 - The Frost Avenue station would look similar to the Larpenteur Avenue station. The project is taking into account the city of Maplewood's current Frost Avenue improvement project.
 - The Gateway State Trail crosses the guideway north of Frost Avenue. The 15 percent plans show a grade-separated crossing at the Gateway State Trail and near Weaver Elementary School.
 - The project would include a park-and-ride at the Highway 36 station. In the plan set presented to the Policy Advisory Committee in September 2018, the location of the park-and-ride had not yet been determined. Project staff have made progress since then in coordination with the city and adjacent property owners, including Truck Utilities and the Minnesota Department of Transportation Materials Lab. The park-and-ride location and design have also been discussed extensively with the Maplewood Issue Resolution Team, and project staff are still working with Metro Transit on the size of the park-and-ride. The 15 percent plans show the new parking facility on Harvest Park, which presents an opportunity for the project to coordinate with the city to have a shared use facility that accommodates both park and transit users. The project would relocate some or all of the current park parking and convert the existing surface lot to park space, resulting in no net loss or a small gain of parkland. The city will also be preparing a master plan for Harvest Park in the near future.
- Sheets 17-19:
 - The route exits Ramsey County rail right-of-way at Beam Avenue, and the guideway would be center running on Beam Avenue.

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- Sheet 20:
 - The 15 percent plans show improvements at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center to accommodate additional transit service. Project staff are coordinating with Metro Transit on these improvements.
- Sheets 19, 21, 22:
 - The route would continue north on Hazelwood Street with a grade-separated crossing of I-694 and a station at Buerkle Road.
 - Project staff are coordinating with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on the business access and transit lanes on Highway 61.
 - Business access and transit lanes convert the existing shoulder into a new auxiliary lane that transit can use. This is a new but increasingly common practice across the country.
 - Business access and transit lanes would increase the visual presence of transit, so drivers expect a bus on their right side. It would also provide an approximately 30-second travel time improvement through this section of the route.
- Sheets 22-24:
 - The County Road E station would be located adjacent to the Vadnais Sports Center, and the platforms would be on the south side of County Road E where the bulk of pedestrian connections are anticipated.
 - The plans show a joint use parking lot with up to 70 parking spaces.
 - Sheila Kelly asked if there would be pedestrian improvements across Highway 61. Jim Gersema replied that pedestrian improvements include shortening the crossing distance by narrowing lanes and improving the crosswalk markings. Project staff are continuing to coordinate with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on the pedestrian improvements.
- Sheets 24-26:
 - The Cedar Avenue station platforms would be located on the north side of the intersection.
 - The plans include pedestrian improvements to connect to the future Bruce Vento Trail extension.
- Sheets 26-28:
 - The project would reconstruct Highway 61 from White Bear Avenue to just north of Whitaker Street and shift the roadway to the east to make more space between the railroad and the road.
 - The northbound Whitaker Street platform was shifted to the north side of Whitaker Street.
- Sheets 28-29:
 - BRT would travel in mixed traffic on Highway 61 from Whitaker Street to the Downtown White Bear Lake station.
 - The plans include pedestrian improvements at 7th and 8th Streets across Highway 61.

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Adding detail to the plans has been an iterative process as project staff have received input from the public and partner agencies. Next steps for the 15 percent plans include requesting a recommendation from the Policy Advisory Committee to advance the plans for evaluation in the Environmental Assessment and for city and Metro Transit staff review. The Minnesota Department of Transportation has its own layout review process, and review of the 15 percent plans will be the first step in that process. The timeline for the environmental analysis phase initially assumed the project would transition to the Metropolitan Council after the 15 percent plans, but given the extra time needed to complete the federal review process, Ramsey County is planning to advance the design to 25 percent before the transition to the Metropolitan Council. Review of the 15 percent plans is a good checkpoint in the process to identify any issues we want to address as the plans move forward.

Commissioner Reinhardt said she assumed the Metropolitan Council is okay with Ramsey County advancing the project to 25 percent design and asked if that was correct. Councilmember Vento replied that is correct as far as she knows. Andy Gitzlaff added there is benefit because with a more advanced design the Metropolitan Council will have a better understanding of cost and risks when they take over the project. From a local perspective, advancing the design provides a better understanding of the project. Councilmember Vento noted that she would like the project to keep up the robust public engagement as the design advances.

7. Public Comment

PETER NIELSEN

Peter lives four blocks away from the Downtown White Bear Lake station by the north campus of White Bear Lake High School. He stated that there are traffic problems now just from the school with over 1,000 cars a day, and there are problems with people trying to cross the highway. Putting a station near Bear Town will require turning Washington Avenue into a one-way street, and it is a narrow street to start with, which will make it too difficult to get onto the highway. He asked how mass transit is supposed to work with no parking. People will come from Hugo to take the bus and have no place to park. There are enough parking problems as is in downtown White Bear Lake. The Big Bear Car Wash, a retirement residence and many personal residences are close to the bus station. Is there some kind of provision being made for parking in the future? Peter stated that he thinks this is a bad location for the station. Another possible location is at the old city works property. There are a lot of things going on with the school so he does not see the station location being feasible and does not want to pay for it with his taxes because it seems like a lot of infrastructure will need to be built.

JOHN KUDERKA

John is a resident of the Phalen Village Realife Cooperative. He is familiar with the project from previous meetings at the cooperative and he has a couple of concerns. One is the closeness of the transitway to his building and what that will mean in terms of traffic and people walking and biking nearby. His second concern is about the height of the new bridge over Johnson Parkway and the visual impacts of that. He said he knows that electric buses are not really noisy but they are not silent, and he is concerned about what that may mean given the closeness and height of the transitway to their 4-story building.

LORETTA WHEELER

Loretta lives on County Road E in White Bear Lake. She said she agrees with the things that have already been said. She loves riding the bus but does not see why we need to fix the route we already have. There is a bus that goes from Maplewood into White Bear Lake and by the time it gets to White Bear Lake there are only 7 people on the bus. If we want to build this, we need to pick another place

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for it. With Marketfest and other events downtown, people will be running across Highway 61 and they will not be safe with the bus. The bus will disrupt elderly people and school kids in particular so we need to find another area for the Downtown White Bear Lake station, maybe by Hugo or on Hoffman Road. There is too much chaos in the area around the station. Her biggest concern is the children and school buses.

SHARON ANTHONY

Sharon lives on 8th Street in White Bear Lake. She did a tally of cars coming through the area, and there are about 1,000 cars that come down 8th Street on a daily basis to go to the junior high and high school. There are already lots of traffic clogs and with the signal on 7th Street, if another signal is added at 8th Street it will add to the congestion. She talked to the White Bear Lake school district, and there are currently 1,200 students at the high school with a future projection of 3,400 students, which means traffic will almost triple on those streets. Students are one of our most vulnerable assets. Do we want them to be able to access a place like this so close to the high school? Zoning for White Bear Lake talks about conserving and developing natural resources, but the project will take down houses and trees that are over 150 years old in the station area. She is very concerned about what is happening on 7th and 8th Streets. She talked to three senior residences, and one said no one would ride the bus and another has their own system of transportation. She does not think seniors will get on a bus to travel downtown. She will be doing more investigating and looks forward to seeing what happens.

JIM WATSON

Jim lives in Maplewood and is a cyclist that uses the Bruce Vento Trail on a daily basis. He noted that the stretch of Bruce Vento Trail from Phalen to the northern end is a forest about 4-miles long and 100-feet wide and asked if there was a plan for reforesting it. Frank Alarcon replied that some trees will need to be removed. The project will preserve what trees it can, and there will be a revegetation effort to offset what will be displaced, including looking at species that will be the most appropriate to have long and healthy lives. Jim said his second question is if there will be a plan to minimize disruption to the trail during construction. Frank Alarcon replied that the project is not far along enough to have construction phasing figured out but minimizing disruptions and closures will be a priority and will be limited to the extent possible. Jim said that the trail now ends at Buerkle Road and asked if there will be a way to get to Cedar Avenue. Andy Gitzlaff said that an extension of the trail is planned, and Ramsey County's website has more information on the extension. Jim noted that he likes what the project is doing on the trail.

MAGGIE YOUNGBERG

Maggie lives on Washington Avenue and agrees with what her neighbors have said. She asked why a busy residential street was chosen for the Downtown White Bear Lake station given the issues and concerns with traffic. She commented that because of the parked cars and school buses, you already have to be really careful when you bike out there. She is amazed that this area would be considered for a station.

Commissioner Reinhardt noted there have been hours and hours of meetings with different groups and the public for each of the station locations, including Downtown White Bear Lake. The station location decision may be newer to some, but each community has vetted the plans. Information on the results of the meetings can be provided. This station location has already gone through the city council.

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IAN BUCK

Ian lives in Frogtown in Saint Paul. He noticed on the maps that the Bruce Vento Trail is marked as joining with Rush Line at Arcade Street, but there is a section that continues west along Phalen Boulevard, so he wants to make sure that it will not go away. This project would be a fantastic opportunity to extend the Bruce Vento Trail farther west along Pennsylvania Avenue because it currently ends under I-35E and cyclists are left in 40 mile per hour car traffic.

KEVIN BERGLUND

Kevin is a Maplewood resident. He stated that there has been very little engagement and transparency in this process and that 95 percent of people in Maplewood are against it. There has virtually no real engagement or information provided including no recordings of meetings. He reiterated that 95 percent of people are against the project and stated that in White Bear Lake it sounds like even more people are against it. He thinks the project should be light rail, but if it is going to be a bus that takes longer than the local bus it should run on Highway 61 and not in people's backyards. There is very little information on the project website, plus no recordings of all these meetings people keep referring to because they did not deliver what you say they would. He believes the Maplewood city council is rigged with three out of five members and the mayor appointed. The project will decimate all the trees.

8. Action

Mayor Emerson asked if there was a motion to affirm the Technical Advisory Committee recommendation to advance the 15 percent plans for evaluation in the Environmental Assessment and staff review by the Rush Line BRT Project cities/township, Minnesota Department of Transportation and Metro Transit. Councilmember Lindner motioned, and Councilmember Vento seconded. All Policy Advisory Committee members present were in favor.

9. Upcoming Activities

Ramey County is planning a peer system visit to the Pulse BRT in Richmond, Virginia this fall. The Pulse system opened in 2018, runs about 7 miles and, like Rush Line, connects suburban communities to retail, healthcare services and a business and government center downtown. The purpose of the trip is to see the Pulse in action and talk to project leaders and stakeholders to learn from their experience. Since it opened in 2018, it has had double the expected ridership, so Ramsey County is hoping to learn from their success with ridership and economic development. Ramsey County is offering stipends to members of the three project advisory committees to help defray the costs of travel. Details are provided in the email sent to advisory committee members.

Councilmember Vento noted that will not able to attend, but she hopes that the stakeholders we hear from include riders. She would like that we ask all stakeholders what they would do differently. She also recommended that we get kiosk technology options in front of people before making a financial commitment because the systems are not always intuitive.

Other upcoming activities include performing technical analysis for the Environmental Assessment, preparing the Ramsey County rail right-of-way visioning framework and ongoing public engagement.

NEXT MEETING

November 21, 2019
2:30-4:30 p.m.
Maplewood Community Center