

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: October 30, 2019
Time: 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Location: Maplewood Fire Station, 1955 Clarence Street

ATTENDEES

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Committee Members		
Dave Anderson	Vadnais Heights	
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	X
Sandy Matzdorf	White Bear Lake	
Zack Mensinger	Saint Paul	X
Bob Morse	Vadnais Heights	X
John O'Phelan	Maplewood	X
Darrell Paulsen	Maplewood	X
Brent Peterson	Saint Paul	X
Eric Saathoff	Saint Paul	X
Romi Slowiak	Saint Paul	
Therese Sonnek	Maplewood	X
TraNeicia Sylvester	Saint Paul	X
Yin Thong	Maplewood	
Julie Vang	Saint Paul	
Carolyn Wensman	White Bear Township	
Michael Werner	Vadnais Heights	
Cindy Whiteford	Saint Paul	X
Project Staff and Other Attendees		
Frank Alarcon	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Kevin Berglund	Put Your Hands Together Media	X
Mark Bradley	Maplewood	X

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Cassie Fitzgerald	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Jim Gersema	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Andy Gitzlaff	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Tom Harrington	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Maggie Jones	Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit	X
Diana Longrie	Put Your Hands Together Media	X
Joe Petschauer	White Bear Lake	X
Alicia Valenti	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Joe Waters	Put Your Hands Together Media	X

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Welcome and Introductions

Bob Morse brought the meeting to order and TraNeicia Sylvester facilitated introductions among meeting attendees. Mark Lynch noted that someone was filming the meeting and asked about this. Diana Longrie said that Put Your Hands Together Media is filming. Diana explained that Put Your Hands Together is a local media organization that provides news coverage of various community meetings for people who are unable to attend in person and said that their coverage is broadcast on cable and online.

Project Updates

Environmental Process

Frank Alarcon provided an overview of progress on the Environmental Assessment and supplementary technical reports.

Recent and Upcoming Public Engagement

Frank described recent and upcoming public engagement efforts and the feedback that community members and stakeholders have provided. Frank noted that in late 2019, the public engagement team would be meeting with resident councils from Saint Paul Public Housing Authority communities. Bob asked what the intent of these meetings is. Frank explained that meeting with public housing residents is of value because people living in public housing are often transit-reliant and likely have an interest in improved transit options. Frank said that these meetings would consist of a brief project overview and short question-and-answer session. Bob asked if these residents face mobility challenges that present a barrier to accessing services. Frank confirmed that some do. Bob encouraged committee members to attend events and engage with their communities.

Harvest Park

Frank shared a proposed concept for Harvest Park that involves relocating most or all parking to the south end of the park near the proposed Highway 36 station. Frank noted that there would be no net loss of green space and that the facility would have capacity to serve both park users and transit riders, though its exact capacity has not been determined. The parking facility could potentially have

two or three levels. Frank said that the concept has been shared during three pop-up meetings in the park and that the response has generally been neutral. Darrell Paulsen asked if this would be the only station with new parking. Frank said that a new surface lot is proposed near the Vadnais Sports Center on property owned by Ramsey County. Therese Sonnek said that this arrangement may serve park users better by increasing the distance between ball fields and parked cars, avoiding damage to vehicles caused by foul balls.

Bruce Vento Trail Signage Update

Frank described new signs that will be installed along the Ramsey County rail right-of-way with information about the Rush Line BRT Project and contact information to report trail maintenance issues. Eric Saathoff asked if the new signs would exclusively replace existing signs or if they would be installed in new locations. Frank said they will mostly replace existing signs but there are a few spots where new signs will be added. Darrell said that he likes the new signage and stated that it is important to respond to communications from trail users. Mark Lynch observed that the new signs appear modular and asked if the lower sign, addressing the future co-location of Rush Line BRT with the Bruce Vento Trail, would be removed when the project is constructed. Frank explained that the new signs will be in place until the Rush Line project is built and will be replaced at that time with a new signage program for the BRT and trail. Frank said the signs deliberately note that the Bruce Vento Trail is being reconstructed to reduce the misconception that the trail will be removed. Therese suggested adding QR codes for the Ramsey County Parks & Recreation and Rush Line BRT websites so that trail users can quickly access these sites. Eric said it would be nice to have these signs in Saint Paul, though they would have to be updated to reflect that the city maintains the portion of the trail within its limits. Frank said that there will be new signs along the Saint Paul portion of the right-of-way and they will list Saint Paul Parks & Recreation as the contact. Therese said trash receptacles attract more trash and litter. Darrell countered that if there are more receptacles, more trash will be placed in receptacles. Therese said that there are currently receptacles strategically placed approximately one half-mile apart.

Platform Height

Jim Gersema described key elements of BRT platforms, including pylons, real-time arrival signs, shelter, ticket vending machines and validators, and tactile warning strips. Jim said another key element is the height of the platform relative to buses. Jim noted that raised platforms can minimize or eliminate barriers for riders with disabilities and also improve the experience for other riders with strollers, grocery carts, canes or other devices.

Jim described three general platform heights: approximately 14 inches, which allows for level boarding; 9 to 11 inches, which reduces the vertical gap between bus and platform to 3 to 5 inches; or 6 inches, which is the standard curb height. Jim stated that project staff are considering 14" platforms to allow level boarding, but noted that there are operational challenges associated with level boarding that need to be considered before a final decision is made about platform height. Challenges include the height difference between the front and back doors of a bus as well as the bus operator's ability to dock the bus with a sufficiently small horizontal gap. Jim added that implementation of 14-inch platforms may prevent standard buses from stopping at platforms, requiring a separate stop location for local bus routes.

Jim stated that the advantage of 9-inch platforms is that the vertical gap for boarding BRT buses is smaller than in the case of a standard 6-inch curb, though a ramp can still be deployed if needed, and local buses are able to share the stop. Jim said that Rush Line BRT platforms will not use standard 6" curb height. Eric asked if the ramp would deploy any faster with a 9- to 11-inch platform than with a

standard curb. Jim said it would take the same amount of time. Zack Mensinger asked if buses would still have ramps if level boarding is used. Jim confirmed that they would, as ramps are a standard feature and buses may stop at stations without elevated platforms. Mark Lynch asked if there would be changes to local routes and how local routes would connect with BRT. Jim said there are a few BRT stations where local buses might also stop and shared that project staff are considering platforms with a higher area that serves BRT buses and a lower area serving local buses.

Jim asked the committee for input about what design choices can make Rush Line BRT a premium service for all users. Darrell said that level boarding is one such feature. Darrell said level boarding saves time and gives the appearance of equitable service. Darrell noted that it makes buses easier to board and eliminates the need for deploying a ramp, though near-level boarding will suffice in places where level boarding is infeasible. Darrell said that a three- to five-inch vertical gap is acceptable, but a gap closer to three inches is better for people with disabilities, especially those with push chairs or canes. Darrell asserted that level boarding is preferable even if more expensive than the alternative because implementing high-quality service from the start is critical. Eric said that on the peer system visit to Pulse BRT in Richmond, Virginia, he noticed that buses slowed down when approaching stations, but he was unsure how much additional travel time this added. Darrell said he noticed this as well and that he talked to operators and fare enforcement officers who said that some operators slow down more than others.

Therese asked if there are maintenance issues associated with level boarding in winter. Jim said that regardless of platform height, maintenance, and winter maintenance in particular, is a factor. Jim added that the maintenance plan may differ for near-level platforms as opposed to level platforms. Therese asked if any existing transit routes in the region use level boarding. Jim confirmed that the METRO Red Line BRT uses level boarding, as well as the METRO Green and Blue LRT lines, though level boarding is implemented differently with trains than with buses. Darrell said that winter maintenance can be a safety issue and shared that he has gotten stuck on the light rail tracks because of ice.

Eric asked if there are other BRT systems that use level boarding and articulated buses. Andy Gitzlaff said that Grand Rapids, Michigan is constructing a BRT line with level boarding with will utilize 60' articulated buses. Andy said that project staff are communicating with staff at several transit systems including the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority to learn about their experiences with level boarding. Darrell asked if there is a reason to not push for level boarding throughout the project area. Bob asked if cost is a reason. Jim said that level boarding increases capital costs marginally and that the difference is minor compared to scale of project. Jim stated that operational costs are of greater concern because the cost of snow removal and maintenance of the air suspension system would increase with higher platforms, and there is a greater risk of damage to buses. John O'Phelan asked if heated concrete platforms, potentially solar-powered, could save money compared to the cost of workers clearing platforms. Jim confirmed that heated concrete is a consideration for both Rush Line and Gold Line BRT and clarified that snow on the street is of greater concern because it can present a challenge for buses approaching the platform. Mark Bradley noted that vehicles at Disney World have hydraulic shocks and asked if these would be an option and noted new "electric eyes" can automatically adjust the height of a bus using reflective or color-coded visual markings. Mark Lynch noted that even if snow prevents successful use of this feature, buses can still deploy ramps if necessary. Jim clarified that if the vertical distance between the bus and platform is too small, the bus may have difficulty deploying its ramp.

Richmond, Virginia Pulse BRT System Visit Debrief

Cassie Fitzgerald presented on the peer system visit to Pulse BRT, which is operated by the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC) in Richmond, Virginia. Cassie stated that average weekday ridership on the route is double initial projections and that system-wide ridership is also on the rise. TraNeicia said that the project had a significant focus on the community and shared that each station had a QR code that displayed events and businesses unique to each station. TraNeicia added that the line is clearly well-used, and that people enjoy the experience. Cassie described the real-time arrival signage and explained the QR code system in greater detail. John noted that the committee had previously discussed ways to share information about events and businesses near stations and said this is a great way to provide current information without needing to update physical signage. TraNeicia added that this information helps keep the community engaged. Darrell said that there was a lack of activity at the ends of the line and that increased development in these areas would improve the corridor overall.

Bob asked how long Pulse BRT has been operating, how long planning took, how GRTC handles marketing and communications, and if there is level boarding throughout the corridor. Cassie said that Pulse BRT began operations in spring 2018. Darrell stated that the planning process took approximately ten years and part of the project cost was covered by a TIGER grant from the federal government. Cassie said that GRTC focused on sharing its construction phase communication efforts, which included meeting with residents and business owners affected by temporary closures, loss of parking and other changes—however they didn't share much about their public engagement during the planning process. Darrell stated that the marketing was expertly executed and well-received by the public. Eric asked if the BRT system's branding is sponsored. Cassie confirmed that VCU Health and Bon Secours Health sponsor the system and receive advertising space on buses in return. Cassie also confirmed that there is level boarding throughout the corridor.

Darrell said that he liked that the branding was so different from the local bus routes because some people with disabilities have issues with orientation and differentiated branding helps people navigate between local bus and BRT. TraNeicia asked how frequently the bus runs. Darrell said that the typical headway is six minutes. Bob asked if the frequency had been adjusted based on the robust ridership. Darrell said that they deploy additional buses mid-route if needed, noting that this may not be feasible in the Rush Line BRT Project area. Mark Lynch asked if the Pulse BRT buses include advertising like Metro Transit buses. Cassie confirmed that Pulse BRT buses had some healthcare advertising. Jim added that because the buses are healthcare-sponsored the advertisements are exclusively healthcare-related.

Transit-Oriented Development Planning Pilot Program

Frank provided an overview of the Federal Transit Administration's Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning Pilot Program. The program is competitive and provides funding to integrate land use and transportation planning with transit capital investments. Mark Lynch asked if TOD planning would be centered on one station or set of stations or if it would address the full project area. Frank said it would cover the whole project area, with the most emphasis on stations outside of downtown Saint Paul, since downtown Saint Paul station area planning has already been largely completed as part of the Green Line LRT project. Darrell asked what the size of the grant is and whether it would be used for improvements such as lighting and bicycle fix-it stations in the pedestrian right-of-way. Frank said that TOD planning would address pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and clarified that grant funds are only for planning, not to build or install anything. Frank said that Ramsey County is planning to request between \$1 million and \$1.25 million. Frank noted the requirement for a 20 percent local

match, which would consist of funding from Ramsey County and dedication of staff time from Rush Line BRT communities and other project partners.

Bob asked if the funding would be dedicated to Rush Line BRT or used for projects throughout Ramsey County. Frank responded that the funding would be applied exclusively to the Rush Line BRT Project. Frank said a decision from the FTA is expected in early 2020 and that if the grant application is successful, work would likely begin in late 2020 and last until mid to late 2022. Therese asked if the grant would offset the cost of work that would occur regardless or if the receipt of funding would result in additional work. Frank said the TOD planning needs to be done regardless of whether federal funding is received because it is helpful to the success of the project, but that the TOD grant would allow the work to happen soon and in a coordinated fashion. Therese asked if this would reduce costs for local governments. Frank confirmed that it would. Eric asked how competitive the program is. Frank said the FTA has said that in past funding cycles, the program has been undersubscribed, so the Rush Line's chances of receiving a grant are pretty good.

Bob asked if the full Community Advisory Committee should sign the letter of support for the grant application. Frank recommended that only the co-chairs sign it. Cindy Whiteford asked if the TOD plans would address green space like the METRO Green Line station area plans did. Frank confirmed that the plans would address green space. TraNeicia asked if the committee would have input on public engagement strategies through the TOD planning process. Frank confirmed that the committee would be involved at least until the project transitions to Metro Transit in 2021. Bob requested a motion. Eric moved to approve the Community Advisory Committee letter of support for the grant application. Mark Lynch seconded the motion. Kevin asked Bob if he would accept public comment on the motion. Bob said no, confirmed that there was no further discussion and called for a vote. All committee members in attendance voted to pass the motion.

Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide

Frank introduced the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide, which was previously called the Visioning Framework. Tom Harrington explained the history of the right-of-way and described the Design Guide process and associated public engagement efforts. Kevin asked if there would not be any fences. Tom said that would be addressed later in the presentation. Mark Lynch asked if there would be discussion of natural vegetation. Tom confirmed that there would be. Mark Lynch asked if the right-of-way graphic shown was a preliminary rendering of a typical cross-section. Tom confirmed that it was and clarified that planting and other features would be shown later. Therese asked if the cross-section reflected conditions near Lake Phalen. Tom confirmed that it was a typical cross-section and that it could represent the corridor near Lake Phalen. Eric asked if there would be retaining walls anywhere in the right-of-way. Tom confirmed that retaining walls may be necessary in certain places. Therese said the committee had not discussed this. TraNeicia said the Visioning Framework workshop held in March 2019 addressed retaining walls and other aspects of the right-of-way. Frank noted that the Design Guide is still in draft form and that it includes a summary of public engagement and input. Therese expressed a desire to see how changes to the right-of-way would affect her property. John stated that he would like to see more information about the Design Guide and specific changes that are planned. Bob and TraNeicia suggested adding a summary of right-of-way public engagement to the agenda for the next meeting. TraNeicia noted that the Design Guide identifies the preferred appearance of the right-of-way, the type of materials to use and other broad aspects of the design, but does not identify where walls, trees or other specific features will be located. Frank noted that at previous meetings, project staff have provided updates regarding the right-of-way and Design Guide and asked for feedback as process has progressed. Frank clarified that the project is still in

early phases of the design process and that while the Design Guide will inform site-specific design, engineering has not progressed enough to know exactly how specific properties will be affected.

Tom described the input sought in the Design Guide Workshop that was held in March 2019 and the visual preference survey conducted to obtain input. Kevin asked if the public was able to vote. TraNeicia confirmed that the workshop was open to the public and said there was an interactive online activity that allowed people to express their design preferences. Kevin asked if the responses from the activity were available. TraNeicia said they are not included in the presentation but can be shared in the future.

Tom provided an overview of the draft recommendations for buffers, screening and landscape character. Mark Lynch asked why the recommendations call for using deciduous trees. Tom said they provide plentiful shade and are generally consistent with existing vegetation. Mark Lynch asked if deciduous trees are the predominant type of tree in the region. Tom confirmed that they are the predominant type of tree in the region and in the right-of-way. Tom explained that project designers will be considering replacement of the type of vegetation currently found in the right-of-way. Tom noted that existing vegetation is “volunteer vegetation” that grew by chance and includes invasive and non-native species. Tom said the draft Design Guide recommends that invasive species not be replanted.

Tom explained the recommendations for lighting, noting that visibility and safety would be considered in selecting and placing lighting. Therese asked if greenways and animal crossings were being considered. Tom indicated that the Design Guide provides information on designs that consider existing animal crossing and habitat reestablishment. Kevin asked if the entire trail would be lit. Tom said the draft Design Guide recommends minimizing light pollution by placing lighting at station areas and crossings and minimal lighting in between. Zack asked if there would be an option for motion activated lights. Tom said it could be considered. Andy added that parks typically close an hour after sunset and have not previously had lighting, and that the conversation about how to implement new lighting is ongoing.

Tom described the draft recommendations for safety, including safety at crossings. Eric said that along Phalen Boulevard, it would be nice to have tabled, or raised, intersections. Zack added that tabled intersections improve the bicycling experience. Eric noted the additional traffic calming benefits of tabled intersections. Tom confirmed that tabled intersections are beneficial for pedestrians and bicyclists. Therese asked how tabled intersections would affect maintenance. Zack said they can ease the snow plowing process. Tom clarified that tabled intersections make it easier to plow trails but more challenging to plow roads. Kevin asked if any decisions have been made about tabled intersections. Tom said that the draft Design Guide recommends considering tabled intersections. Therese asked if the Department of Natural Resources has provided guidance regarding wildlife crossings. Mark Lynch said that specifics of the design will be determined later and asked if people who live adjacent to the trail would have the opportunity to provide input specific to their area or if the design would be focused on continuity. Tom said that addressing location-specific input can be challenging because consistent and continuous design facilitates easier and less expensive implementation and maintenance.

Sam Crosby stated that the draft Design Guide document includes the results and summary of the March workshop. Therese asserted that the Community Advisory Committee had not discussed the workshop. Sam said that the Design Guide and workshop were covered during previous discussions. Brent confirmed that the committee has reviewed this work. Sam requested that the Design Guide be placed last on the agenda if it is discussed at the next meeting so that members who are familiar with the work can leave. Therese said she has attended every meeting and does not remember the discussion. Frank said he will share the workshop summary with Therese.

Tom described the draft stormwater management recommendations. Kevin observed that there is not a recommendation addressing restrooms. Tom proceeded to outline the next steps for the draft Design Guide and stated that it would be available for public comment in December. Tom shared that there would be drop-in discussion events and an online overview of the draft.

Future Agenda Items

Frank asked for future agenda items and noted that the suggestions made throughout the meeting have been recorded. Bob suggested having a conversation about parking in the project area. Frank said he will coordinate with the committee to schedule the next meeting for early 2020.