

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #11



MEETING SUMMARY

Date: January 23, 2020
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	
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	
Supervisor Scott McCune	White Bear Township	X
Councilmember Kelly Monson	City of Forest Lake	
Liz Moscatelli	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corp.	
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
Councilmember Nelsie Yang	City of Saint Paul	X
Alternates		
Councilmember Kevin Edberg	City of White Bear Lake	
Councilmember Bryan Smith	City of Maplewood	
Jon Solberg	Minnesota Department of Transportation	
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.
- Ryan Wilson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Nick Olson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Alice Messer, City of Saint Paul.
- Dia Vang, City of Saint Paul.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.
- Jessica Laabs, Kimley-Horn.
- Brian McClung, MZA+Co.

Members of the Public¹

- Mark D Bradley Sr.
- Kevin Berglund.
- Leslie Rosedahl.
- D. Neutkens.
- Dave Anderson.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Emerson welcomed the committee members and members of the public in attendance. She noted that there is a public comment period at the end of the meeting and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

2. Recap of November Policy Advisory Committee Meeting

Andy Gitzlaff noted that the last Policy Advisory Committee meeting was in November. At that meeting, project staff and the committee discussed lessons learned on the Richmond trip. Ramsey County has since produced a video about the trip (available [here](#)) so that those that could not attend can learn from it as well. A written summary of the trip is also available [here](#).

Platform height was another topic of discussion. Since the last meeting, Metro Transit has built a test platform in one of their garages to test different heights between 10 and 12 inches. Project staff expect to have a recommendation on a standard platform height at the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

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

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Project staff also provided updates on the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide and upcoming public meetings and discussed the transit-oriented development grant application. Ramsey County expects to hear from the Federal Transit Administration about the grant in early 2020.

3. Public Engagement Update

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Frank Alarcon provided an update on public engagement since the November Policy Advisory Committee meeting. One population project staff have tried to connect with over the last few months is residents of public housing, especially in downtown Saint Paul, as many are transit riders. Project staff connected with two public housing resident councils in December, at Valley Hi-Rise and Wabasha Hi-Rise. Project staff shared information on the project and received input on how residents use transit today and how they would like to use it in the future.

In December project staff hosted a series of events related to the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide. Draft guiding principles and recommendations were developed using input receiving from the public over the summer, so at the December meetings project staff shared how they used the summer input to develop recommendations and guiding principles for the right-of-way. There were two meetings on the east side of Saint Paul at Hmong Village and CLUES and one at the Maplewood fire station.

Other public engagement activities included:

- Joining Gold Line project staff for a pop-up at the Saint Paul Farmers Market on December 12.
- Meeting with leadership of the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living, an organization that serves the disability community, on December 16.
- Participating in a neighborhood meeting organized by the city of White Bear Lake on January 7 for residents of the immediate area around the proposed Downtown White Bear Lake station. A mailing was sent out to neighbors, and staff showed an animation of the station and routing to show how bus operations into and out of the station would work.
- Attending a community open house on January 21 hosted by the city of Maplewood related to the Harvest Park Master Plan. Project staff are coordinating closely with the city on the future of the park, which is adjacent to the proposed Highway 36 station. There is a proposed joint use parking facility in the park to serve both transit and park users. Mayor Abrams noted that the open house was a good opportunity for the community to see the plans and how the park and transit project will integrate.

Councilmember Vento commented that she would like to see the White Bear Lake animation. Frank Alarcon replied that he would send out the link (available [here](#)).

Supervisor McCune asked roughly how many people in total attended these events. Frank Alarcon said that the White Bear Lake neighborhood meeting had about a dozen attendees, the Harvest Park open house had about 25, the resident council meetings had 10 to 15 each and the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide discussions had about 20 each.

Councilmember Vento asked if there had been a follow-up meeting at the housing complex at Johnson Parkway and Phalen Boulevard (Realife Cooperative). Frank Alarcon replied that project staff attended their coffee hour a few times in 2019. The last time they were there, about 30 residents attended and project staff brought visualizations of the bridge that would carry Rush Line over the

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intersection. As design advances, project staff will continue to ask for input from those residents. Councilmember Vento asked if their concerns had been resolved or if they had a greater understanding of the project. Frank Alarcon replied that they did have a greater understanding. The biggest concerns are from residents whose balconies would face the bridge, and those concerns may never go away but project staff will continue to go back to that group to collect feedback on the design of the bridge and surrounding landscape to create the best situation we can.

Themes from recent public engagement activities have included:

- Saint Paul residents, businesses and employees:
 - Excitement for increased transit service on the east side of Saint Paul.
 - Localized concerns related to access and parking on Robert Street.
 - Interest in changes to Bruce Vento Trail.
- White Bear Lake residents:
 - Concerns and misconceptions about traffic impacts of the Downtown White Bear Lake station along with planned expansion at White Bear Lake Area High School campus. Project staff are coordinating with the school district, city of White Bear Lake and Minnesota Department of Transportation on changes.

Commissioner Reinhardt noted that there was an interesting comment at the White Bear Lake neighborhood meeting that the only reason things changed was because the owner of Beartown complained a lot, which is not the case. The project has these meetings to resolve issues, and people seemed to appreciate the fact that they had a voice in the process. Staff and elected officials are there because we really want to hear what people have to say.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

In the spring of 2020, project staff are looking to do targeted engagement with the Hmong community and other communities of color in the project area. Throughout 2020, project staff will continue to attend community events to increase general awareness about project.

4. Engineering Update

Jim Gersema provided an update on the 15 percent plans. Key refinements that project staff have been discussing with partner agencies include:

- Providing a traffic signal or gates at three intersections along Phalen Boulevard (Mendota Circle, Wells Street and Frank Street).
- Potentially keeping the existing underpass at McAfee Street open based on input from the city of Saint Paul.
 - Commissioner Reinhardt commented that we should keep it open if possible if it is used by the neighborhood. Andy Gitzlaff said that currently there is grass on either side, but the city is looking at making improvements in that area.
- Utilizing a stop sign instead of a signal at Arlington Avenue to make a more seamless north/south route for BRT and trail users.
- Switching the Bruce Vento Trail from the west to the east side of the guideway at the Gateway State Trail rather than at Larpenteur Avenue. The project would also add roundabouts to the trail intersection to promote safety at the intersection of these two trails.

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- Evaluating two options for the Highway 36 station in the Environmental Assessment: platforms only and platforms plus joint use parking (surface lot plus one level) in Harvest Park.
- Adding sidewalk on the south side of Buerkle Road through the railroad crossing west to Fanum Road.
- Integrating the business access and transit (BAT) lane into Highway 61 in coordination with the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Coordination is ongoing related to pedestrian enhancements around stations and the Highway 61 bridge over the railroad.
- Adding sidewalk on the south side of Cedar Avenue from Hoffman Road to Linden Avenue.
- Adding sidewalk from Linden Street to County Road F to tie into future city improvements.
- Adding sidewalk on the north side of 8th Street between Washington Avenue and Highway 61.

Project staff and partner agencies are having ongoing conversations on the following topics:

- Robert Street (minimizing parking and access impacts).
- Jackson Street design.
- Payne Avenue station (platform location and intersection design).
- Phalen Boulevard design and consistency with the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan.
- Larpenteur Avenue station area sidewalk connections.
- Guideway/trail crossings of low-volume streets in Maplewood.
- County Road E platform location and design.
- Maplewood Mall Transit Center design.
- Platform height.

Commissioner Reinhardt commented that she attended Maplewood's state of the city event last week, and it was really interesting to hear about what is happening to transform the Maplewood Mall area.

Supervisor McCune asked what the conversation is related to Whitaker Street geometrics. Jim Gersema said that the project would reconstruct Highway 61 near Whitaker Street to avoid the railroad and is looking to offset the roadway to fit the station in. Project staff are working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on the design and incorporating refinements into the plans.

Councilmember Yang asked if project staff could share more about the discussion related to the Payne Avenue station. Jim Gersema said that the project is proposing converting a general-purpose lane to a BAT lane on Phalen Boulevard, and there are concerns about balancing impacts to roadway capacity with impacts to the pedestrian environment. Adding a lane to improve roadway capacity would make the pedestrian crossing distance longer, so we are trying to find a balance.

5. Environmental Update

Jessica Laabs provided an update on field activities. Earlier in the project, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment was completed to see what parcels might have contamination. Based on that, soil borings on parcels that had a medium or high potential for contamination are being conducted. The soil borings will also provide geotechnical information that will be helpful for structural design. The soil boring activity started in early January in public right-of-way, and we are working with the appropriate jurisdictions on permits. We will also be coordinating with about 25 private property owners.

Barbara Howard from the Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit presented on Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Section 106 requires federal

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agencies to take historic properties into account as they plan projects. Historic properties include those that are eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places. They have to be 50 years or older and significant under at least one of four areas:

- Criterion A: Association with a historically significant event.
- Criterion B: Association with the lives of significant persons.
- Criterion C: Design or construction type, style or method.
- Criterion D: Potential to yield important historical or prehistorical information.

Historic properties include both architecture and archaeology.

The first step is to determine where we look, which is called the area of potential effect and takes into consideration both direct effects and indirect effects such as visual and noise. Next, historic properties are identified. Once we know what historic properties are in the area of potential effect, we then assess impacts. If any there would be any adverse effects, which are things that would impact a property's ability to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places, then we resolve them through consultation. Resolution of adverse effects could mean avoiding effects by changing the project or minimizing the effect through design changes. If we can't avoid and can't minimize the effect, then we mitigate it, meaning that we make up for the fact that we adversely affected the property. Mitigation can be done through documentation of the resource, excavation of an archaeology resource or interpretive signage to explain why it was significant, for example.

Terri Thao asked if properties needed to meet multiple criteria to qualify as historic. Barbara Howard replied that they only need to meet one but are evaluated for all four.

The Section 106 process involves consultation. The Federal Transit Administration is involved as the lead federal agency. They commonly work with the State Historic Preservation Office, which has a chance to review and comment on project plans. The Federal Transit Administration also extended invitations to Native American tribes. At the federal level, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation can provide technical assistance or help with disputes. Local government officials and historic preservation commissions are also consulting parties.

One of the primary cultural resources for this project is the Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad Corridor Historic District. It was an important early direct connection between Saint Paul and Duluth that was completed in 1870. The Saint Paul to White Bear Lake segment is eligible under criteria A, C and D. It is rare to have such old tracks still in existence. Within the area of potential effect, there are exposed areas of the 1868 roadbed. Quite a bit of the 1868 roadbed is buried under an 1880 roadbed that has been altered over the years as the railroad changed. The period of significance is 1870 to 1970. Contributing features include structures, depots, retaining walls and a sense of path between destinations.

Commissioner Reinhardt asked if Union Depot was included. Barbara Howard replied that Union Depot is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but it is outside the boundary of this district because of the way the railroads operated in the 1870s and 1880s. Union Depot will be looked at separately.

The area of potential effect for Rush Line has been delineated, and the final area will be going to consulting parties later this month. The survey and evaluation efforts are ongoing, and 700-800 standing structures have been surveyed. The consulting parties want more information on 27 of those. The archaeology work is complete. No Native American sites were identified. Full evaluations were completed on privy sites associated with the railroad that are not eligible. The Lake Superior &

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Mississippi Railroad survey is also complete. Reports are in draft stages and will be submitted to consulting parties this spring. After the reports are submitted, there will be a consulting party meeting to discuss the findings.

Next is the assessment of effects. The primary focus is on the Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad Corridor Historic District and historic properties near stations and bridges. The assessment of effects will be submitted to the consulting parties in the summer of 2020, and there will be meetings to discuss how to resolve any adverse effects. Resolution of effects will go into a Memorandum of Agreement, and a draft will be published with the Environmental Assessment.

Andy Gitzlaff asked if the Maplewood and Saint Paul Historic Preservation Commissions are consulting parties that will be invited to meetings. Barbara Howard replied that they are consulting parties by right.

Commissioner Reinhardt asked how other groups such as historical societies will be engaged. Barbara Howard said other groups can be part of the conversation as well.

Councilmember Vento commented that sharing information on the historic properties in the corridor with public is important and exciting. Andy Gitzlaff added that project staff are working with Barbara to incorporate Section 106 information into the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide. The report is almost complete, after which it will be sent to the advisory committees and posted online for the public to view.

6. Schedule Update

Andy Gitzlaff provided an update on the project schedule and upcoming milestones, which include:

- Completing the 15 percent plans – March 2020. This will be the basis for the environmental analysis.
- Ownership and Maintenance Technical Report – spring 2020. This will discuss snow removal, landscaping, etc. to help answer questions. There was a similar report prepared for Gold Line.
- Station area planning documents (city specific) – spring 2020. The results of the market study, bike/pedestrian gap analysis and health impact assessment will be put into a guidebook for each city to use for future phases of station planning.
- Staff Approved Layout submittal to the Minnesota Department of Transportation – March to June 2020. This will start the process for changes to the state's trunk highway system.
- Visual Quality Manual (corridor wide) – summer 2020. This document will look at the aesthetics of the infrastructure and the communities it goes through.
- Preliminary bridge plans – fall 2020. The Minnesota Department of Transportation's bridge office will review the plans.
- 15 percent plan resolutions of support from municipalities – anticipated summer 2020. Ramsey County anticipates going to each city council for a resolution of support related to the project plans as early as this summer. The approach will be tailored to each community. The resolutions are not a requirement for the Environmental Assessment, but it is a requirement for Ramsey County to transition the project to the Metropolitan Council.
- Environmental Assessment:
 - Publication – December 2020.
 - Comment period and open houses – December 2020 and January 2021.

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- Environmental decision – April 2021.
- The Environmental Assessment is another opportunity for all partner agencies and the public to comment on the project. Ramsey County is working with the Federal Transit Administration to develop a draft, and it is ultimately their document. Project staff have been sharing technical reports with city staff as they are drafted. Along with the finalized 15 percent plans, project staff will provide a summary of what environmental impacts and mitigation strategies might be to inform decision-making.

As we work through the environmental process, we will advance the project where we can, including bridge design and stormwater, so in April 2021 when the project transitions to the Metropolitan Council it can hit the ground running.

Commissioner Reinhardt asked if the project would become the Purple Line when the transition to the Metropolitan Council takes place. Andy Gitzlaff said that is our understanding.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Carol Hunn-Gregory

Carol is the owner of Keys Café and is representing the Rossmor building. The project is proposing parking impacts on Robert Street, and they will not have one parking spot around the whole building. This will be extremely detrimental for the businesses. They are doing a survey of their customers to see who would come without parking available and also want to do an economic impact study on the businesses. They are asking for the project to not include a BAT lane on Robert Street and keep the parking on those two blocks. It would keep the businesses alive. If people see spots out front they think they can get there. The nearby parking ramps are filled with state and federal employees during the day. There are no plans for more parking at their end of town, so they are asking for consideration to not take away parking on Robert Street.

Councilmember Vento asked Carol which businesses are in the Rossmor. Carol said it includes Black Sheep, Keys Café, Camp Bar, Sawatdee, Scott Miller Hair Salon and Tin Whiskers. It is one of the most successful blocks downtown. Lund's is not happy either. They have parking underneath their store, but employees use it and they had to hire a full-time police officer for security.

Terri Thao asked Carol if she knew right now if access to businesses was mostly by car or foot traffic. Carol said they just started the survey but will share the results when they have them.

Kevin Berglund

Kevin stated that he has not found anyone who is happy with the project and asked to be provided with the names of anyone who is happy with it. He said that the Chair mentioned that there has been no nefarious activity, but there has been an incredible amount of nefarious activity. It began with the election of the new Saint Paul city council member. Mayor Emerson stated that the comments need to stay on the topic of the Rush Line BRT Project. Kevin said that the project is a disaster and a mistake because of the decision-makers that are involved. The public has said time and time again they are in opposition to the project. It is not transparent, meetings are not recorded and everything has been in secret. The project doesn't share the minutes of the Technical Advisory Committee, and the public doesn't know when or where they meet.

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Mark D. Bradley Sr.

Mark asked who is responsible for the cost of constructing the project. How does the federal, state and local financing break down? There is an overpass going in – what is the cost of that? By the auto dealers on Buerkle there is supposed to be a bus stop, but there is no diagram to give a concept of the cost. The White Bear Lake station does not have any real parking since bus drivers will be making rest stops or exchanges there. There should either be a multi-story parking facility on site or more parking off-site. Those costs go to taxpayers. Everyone has added to the burden to taxpayers, and he is one in Maplewood. What are the actual physical costs and how are we picking them up?

NEXT MEETING

March 26, 2020

2:30-4:30 p.m.

Maplewood Community Center