

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #12



MEETING SUMMARY

Date: May 28, 2020
Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Location: Virtual meeting (Zoom)

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	
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
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.
- Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County.
- Caroline Ketcham, Ramsey County.
- Amy Schmidt, Ramsey County.
- Brian Isaacson, Ramsey County.
- Barbara Howard, Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit.
- Ryan Wilson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Nick Olson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Daniel Pena, Metropolitan Council.
- Anne Kane, City of White Bear Lake.
- Mark Finken, City of Saint Paul.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Alicia Valenti, SRF.
- Beth Bartz, SRF.
- Dan McNeil, SRF.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.

Members of the Public¹

- Bob Morse, Community Advisory Committee co-chair.
- Leslie Rosedahl.
- Craig Capeder.
- Angel Chelberg.
- Kevin Berglund.
- Dave Anderson.
- Arlin Becker.
- Mary Buerkle.
- Scott Reed.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Virtual Meeting Procedures

Chair Emerson reviewed the virtual meeting procedures for the Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

2. Welcome and Introductions

Policy Advisory Committee members and Ramsey County staff introduced themselves.

¹ This list includes members of the public who logged in to the meeting on Zoom.

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3. Recap of January Policy Advisory Committee Meeting and March Update

Andy Gitzlaff provided a recap of the January meeting, which was the last time the committee met in person. At that meeting, project staff provided updates on recent and planned public engagement, potential refinements to the 15 percent plans and ongoing coordination, field activities and project milestones. Barbara Howard from the Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit also provided an overview of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the status of survey and evaluation efforts.

The March Policy Advisory Committee meeting was scheduled for around the time the state's stay at home order went into effect, so in lieu of the March meeting an update was sent to committee members via email and posted on the Rush Line website. Information was provided on public engagement activities, refinements to the 15 percent plans, the municipal support process for the 15 percent plans, city station area planning guides and the environmental schedule and field activities. Links were also provided to documents that had been posted to the [project library](#), including the [15 percent plans](#) and the [Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide](#).

Jim Gersema walked through the refinements to the 15 percent plans that were included in the March Policy Advisory Committee update. They included:

- Shifting the 10th Street northbound platform location and reducing the platform size to avoid impacting a driveway access to the Metropolitan Center for Independent Living.
- Refining the Robert Street design to retain some on-street parking spaces in coordination with the city of Saint Paul and Minnesota Department of Transportation. Property owners on Robert Street had expressed concern about parking loss in the area, and the refined design can accommodate the business access and transit (BAT) lane and on-street parking.
- Refining the Phalen Boulevard and Payne Avenue intersection to optimize the design for transit, traffic and pedestrians. The southbound BAT lane would start west of the intersection to reduce the pedestrian crossing distance and still retain the transit advantage.
- Refining the Maplewood Mall Transit Center design in coordination with Metro Transit to accommodate additional buses proposed as part of Rush Line and make more efficient transfers at this transit hub.
- Adding a trail from Cedar Avenue to County Road F on the east side of Highway 61. This trail segment will be evaluated in the Environmental Assessment but ongoing coordination with project partners will be required to determine feasibility, identify potential sources for the non-federal funding share and develop a maintenance plan prior to including the trail segment in the project scope.
- Refining the 8th Street and Highway 61 intersection design to include pedestrian improvements and a traffic signal at 8th Street. The design would prohibit southbound left turns at 7th Street.

Overall, changes to the 15 percent plans included refinements to the following:

- Platform locations to provide maximum transit accessibility for both local service and BRT while minimizing potential impacts.
- Platform height (recommended 10 inches) to provide equitable, safe and efficient transit access.

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- Dedicated guideway and intersection design to minimize parking and traffic impacts while providing efficient transit operations.
- Inclusion of additional pedestrian and bicycle facilities to improve station accessibility.
- Adjusted BRT and Bruce Vento Trail design within the Ramsey County rail right-of-way to improve safety and reflect public input.
- Design refinements to Maplewood Mall Transit Center facility to efficiently serve both existing service and Rush Line BRT and improve customer experience.
- Agreement to review the project with and without the Highway 36 park-and-ride in the Environmental Assessment.
- Commitment to continue coordination with cities, Minnesota Department of Transportation and Metro Transit as design advances.

4. Public Engagement Update

Frank Alarcon provided an update on public engagement. Over the past few years we have done a great deal of in-person community engagement, but it is now being conducted online to eliminate in-person contact due to COVID-19. We are keeping the overall project timeline on track by shifting meetings to online platforms. Other transit projects in the region are also proceeding while following public health guidelines.

Recent comments received via email have been about the proposed features of the Highway 36 park-and-ride and concerns about traffic in that area and have expressed interest in improved bicycle and pedestrian connections on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Upcoming public engagement is focused on social media and other online communications. Project staff are developing an online station design survey to gather input regarding how people expect to access stations, the time of day they would anticipate using the BRT service, what amenities they would like to see at stations and what they want the experience to be like. The survey is being translated into Spanish, Hmong, Karen and Somali then will be released online and promoted via online channels.

5. Community Advisory Committee Update

Bob Morse, Community Advisory Committee co-chair, gave a recap of the May 12 Community Advisory Committee meeting. Project staff provided updates on the engineering and environmental processes. The committee discussed elements of station design and looked at best practices from Gold Line and A Line. They also reviewed the upcoming station design survey to help refine the questions.

The Community Advisory Committee members expressed a desire to put their own stamp on the stations in their communities and emphasized the importance of ongoing public engagement throughout the planning process to see how attitudes might change and continue to bring people together around common goals.

The Community Advisory Committee adopted the following statement on station design:

As the design of Rush Line BRT stations advances in future project phases, the Community Advisory Committee supports a station design process that balances these two priorities:

- *Community engagement that gives communities along the route the opportunity to influence station design elements so Rush Line stations reflect the communities they serve.*

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- *Sufficient design consistency across Rush Line stations to facilitate efficient transit operations and maintenance and establish a recognizable transit system brand identity along the route.*

6. Engineering Update

Andy Gitzlaff provided an update on engineering activities. Project staff are continuing to meet approximately monthly with the issue resolution teams. The project has also started the Minnesota Department of Transportation's official staff approved layout process. Other recent meetings have included a monthly update call with the Federal Transit Administration and a project overview meeting with the Federal Highway Administration. The project might need permits from the Federal Highway Administration for the Interstate 694 and Highway 36 crossings, so it is important to engage with them early in the process.

Project staff have been checking in with city councils along the Rush Line route now that we have more design detail. Resolutions of support have been received from the following municipalities:

- White Bear Lake (April 14).
- White Bear Township (April 20).
- Maplewood (May 11).
- Vadnais Heights (May 19).

Project staff presented to the Saint Paul Parks & Recreation Commission on May 14 and received a resolution of support. Next steps include presenting to the Saint Paul Transportation Committee and Saint Paul Planning Commission prior to Saint Paul City Council action. Project staff are working with city staff on applications of BAT lanes on city streets and hope to have clear direction on whether additional refinements need to be made soon. A presentation to the Gem Lake city council has not yet been scheduled. Project staff will continue to coordinate and keep the Policy Advisory Committee posted.

Platform height is about the customer experience in addition to the actual curb height. It affects the ability to deploy ramps and the flexibility of other buses to serve BRT stations. Metro Transit tested different platform heights and found that 10 inches is the ideal height for the BRT platform. At 10 inches, if the bus kneels it can achieve a roll-on boarding at the front door compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Anything taller introduces complications with ramp deployment. The recommendation is to pursue the 10-inch platform standard where feasible. Project staff are still working through platform height on Highway 61 where there are higher travel speeds, but 10-inch platforms are preferred at every station to provide a consistent boarding experience.

Ramsey County is coordinating with municipal and agency partners on the maintenance and ownership of infrastructure assets associated with the Rush Line. There is currently a matrix that will be the basis for a technical report. Additional discussion is needed related to BAT lane maintenance for both the pavement and potential red paint. For the Ramsey County rail right-of-way there might be layers of ownership between Ramsey County and Metro Transit, and those discussions are in process. Project staff are also looking at alternative ownership arrangements for the Highway 36 park-and-ride and if the county has an ownership role going forward. Project staff will convene a broader group to review the proposed maintenance and ownership structure.

The project hosted a ridership workshop on May 6 and convened a group of five modelers to provide a peer review of the ridership model. They identified some areas where we can take a closer look at inputs to refine the model. Project staff will coordinate with the Federal Transit Administration and can then start sharing the results with a wider audience.

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The project also had a risk workshop this week. The Federal Transit Administration will require a formal risk workshop later in the process, but this was an initial effort to identify potential risks and how likely and how severe each risk might be to inform the project as it moves forward.

Next steps for engineering include refining the capital cost estimate, advancing the stormwater analysis to identify ponding locations where needed, working through the Minnesota Department of Transportation's layout process and beginning the preliminary bridge plan review process (the Minnesota Department of Transportation reviews all bridges in the state).

7. Environmental Update

Jeanne Witzig provided an update on the environmental analysis. Project staff have been coordinating with the Federal Transit Administration, and efforts have been focused on completing the overall environmental analysis, which looks at community, transportation and physical resources.

The project is also doing a very detailed assessment of potential historic resources and the project's impact on those. This process is known as Section 106. We reached an important milestone in having some reports (architecture, archaeology and the Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad Corridor) completed and reviewed by the Federal Transit Administration. The Federal Transit Administration owns these documents and will send them to the State Historic Preservation Office to review. The State Historic Preservation Office typically has 30 days to review, but given the current working from home constraints, their review time may be extended. We are working through how to address this without impacting the overall environmental schedule. The Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit on behalf of the Federal Transit Administration will assess the effects of the project on historic resources this summer, and the findings will be included in the Environmental Assessment.

Project staff completed a first draft of the Environmental Assessment and are working with the Technical Advisory Committee to review supporting technical documents. Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Transportation reviewed the draft Environmental Assessment so we could draw on the technical expertise of our partnering agencies. We are targeting mid-June for submittal to the Federal Transit Administration to begin their series of reviews, which will take from June to mid-December, then we will publish the Environmental Assessment and supporting reports for public review. There will be a 45-day comment period and public meetings after publication. We are working towards a final environmental decision by the end of April 2021.

Scott McCune asked if given the current environment, the ridership model will be updated to evaluate if people will not want to ride BRT as much due to fears about COVID-19. Andy Gitzlaff replied that this question was posed to the ridership workshop panelists, but no one really knows the long-term impacts yet. The Federal Transit Administration may want more assurances that projects will be financially solvent and could ride out future pandemics if they occur. Rush Line is still at a point in the process where we can be flexible and adjust moving forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kevin Berglund

Kevin Berglund is with Citizens Reporter News. He stated that he wanted to alert Chair Emerson and Andy that although he submitted a registration request for this meeting, he did not receive an email confirmation. He tried again today and finally got something. Because of this he missed the beginning of the meeting so he assumes the full meeting will be posted online. He believes transparency is a huge issue for this project and process. He has requested raw data previously and has not received

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any of it yet. From his experience, everyone he has talked to disagrees with this project. After the COVID-19 issues, he hopes we will rereview everything as public transportation in this new era will be a whole new ballgame. He said it would only be respectful to determine if this half billion dollar investment is the correct use of money. He said the project is putting out lots of misinformation, and he hopes it will change moving forward. He has been following this whole process carefully, and the information that has been coming out from Ramsey County has been an abuse to the process. He needs to know at some time that there will be a commitment to transparency. He said that it has not been easy to provide public comment and that this meeting needs to be rescheduled to find true comments. He stated we have to rework the process because of opportunity cost.

Leslie Rosedahl

Leslie Rosedahl represents five businesses on Robert Street (Black Sheep, Keys Café, Camp Bar, Sawatdee and Tin Whiskers). She thanked Andy and team for meeting a few times and working through the parking issues to find additional parking spots. She appreciates the efforts to help the business community. She will be sending the results of the customer survey the businesses completed. They received over 800 responses and were hoping for more, but with COVID are operating at about 5 percent of their normal revenue.

NEXT MEETING

July 23, 2020
2:30-4:30 p.m.
Virtual meeting