

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: August 24, 2020
Time: 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Location: Virtual Meeting

ATTENDEES

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Committee Members		
Dave Anderson	Vadnais Heights	X
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	
TraNeicia Sylvester	Saint Paul	X
Yin Thong	Maplewood	
Julie Vang	Saint Paul	
Carolyn Wensman	White Bear Township	X
Michael Werner	Vadnais Heights	
Cyndy Whiteford	Saint Paul	X
Project Staff and Other Attendees		
Frank Alarcon	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Beth Bartz	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Jim Gersema	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Caroline Ketcham	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Dan McNeil	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Ciara Schlichting	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Alicia Valenti	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Welcome and Introductions

Frank Alarcon began the meeting. Bob Morse led an icebreaker for committee members and Rush Line BRT Project staff.

Project Updates

Engineering

Frank provided an update on coordination activities. Jim Gersema described design refinements on Jackson Street and at the Gateway State Trail crossing. Mark asked to clarify if Rush Line BRT would operate in mixed traffic on Jackson Street. Jim confirmed that this would most likely be the case based on the available right-of-way and Saint Paul city goals for providing more space for pedestrians and bicyclists. Cyndy asked if Rush Line BRT would operate on Mt. Airy Street. Jim clarified that it would serve Mt. Airy Street at the station but would not operate on this street. Eric Saathoff asked if the city would build bike lanes along Jackson Street. Jim said that the city has not made a decision yet, but bike lanes or a shared-use trail are possibilities. Frank said that the city plans to reconstruct Jackson Street before Rush Line BRT begins operations and that construction may begin as early as 2022. Zack Mensinger noted that there is relatively low traffic on Jackson Street and said it would be surprising if operating Rush Line BRT in mixed traffic along this portion of the route caused any slowdowns.

Ownership and Maintenance

Jim provided an update on progress toward developing the Ownership and Maintenance Plan for the project and upcoming engineering activities. Frank explained upcoming engineering activities for the project.

Municipal Resolutions of Support

Frank provided an update on resolutions of support from project area communities. The cities of Saint Paul, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights and White Bear Lake, and White Bear Township, have provided resolutions of support for the 15% plans.

Environmental Assessment

Frank described the schedule for upcoming Environmental Assessment milestones.

Station Design Survey

Alicia Valenti described the feedback obtained with the the station design survey. The online public survey was open from the last week of June until August 1. The survey was translated into multiple languages, including Spanish, Hmong, Karen, and Somali. The project team promoted the survey via social media, e-newsletters and yard signs along the Bruce Vento Trail.

The survey received 471 responses, and asked respondents to answer questions as if travel patterns were not altered by COVID-19. Respondents were asked to share their thoughts on safety and security at stations, landscaping, bicycle access, enclosed shelters and parking.

Frank noted that work on the Ownership and Maintenance Plan is starting early in part because maintenance of visible pieces of infrastructure is clearly a priority for the community. Cyndy Whiteford said that she feels it has become more unsafe to walk around downtown Saint Paul since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic because people are driving faster. Cyndy emphasized the need for prioritizing pedestrian and cyclist safety in Rush Line BRT station design because a perception of danger may make people less likely to use the BRT. Alicia said that pedestrian and cyclist safety is considered and prioritized in station and guideway design. Bob asked when the survey was available. Alicia said the survey was live from June 24 to August 1. Frank added that project staff will use information collected through the survey to keep community members engaged and incorporate feedback into the design where appropriate. Frank said a summary of the survey results will be included in an upcoming e-newsletter.

Transit-Oriented Development Grant Updates

Frank provided an updated on the Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning grant and next steps for station area planning. Bob asked if the Metropolitan Council would be leading station area planning. Frank said that the Metropolitan Council and Ramsey County will enter an agreement so that Ramsey County can lead the station area planning process in coordination with the Metropolitan Council, project area communities and other project partners.

Bikeshed and Walkshed Analysis

Ciara Schlichting described the walkshed analysis methodology used for the Walkshed and Bikeshed Analysis. Cyndy asked about the basis for the estimated walking speeds. Ciara said that a speed of 3.5 feet per second is the approximate average speed at which the general population walks and that a speed of three feet per second or less would be more appropriate with people who have mobility challenges or small children. Mark Lynch asked if the walkshed analysis information would be available for perusal following the meeting. Frank said that he would include the drafts of all maps for each station in his email following the committee meeting. Ciara said that project staff will update the walkshed analysis this fall and incorporate feedback from the meeting.

Darrell Paulsen asked if the walkshed analysis addresses the provision and quality of lighting. Ciara said that this analysis does not account for lighting, though it is a key factor for making a pedestrian space feel comfortable. Beth Bartz clarified that people are interested in the quality of the pedestrian experience while Ciara is currently focused on functional accessibility and an assessment of walkable infrastructure within one-half mile of stations. Beth said that the purpose of the walkshed analysis is to identify places that could be connected to stations within a five- or ten-minute walk by new sidewalk additions. Beth noted that the walkshed maps indicate the greatest extent of the potential 12-minute walkshed while recognizing that the walkshed is smaller for people who walk more slowly. Beth added that desire paths are a good indicator of where infrastructure improvements would be beneficial, as they show where people want to walk but do not have dedicated pedestrian infrastructure. Darrell noted that a 12-minute walk in cold weather would not be as doable as it would in more mild weather, especially for those with mobility challenges. Darrell said that seating on pedestrian routes from stations to destinations would be helpful for those who need to rest along the way. Ciara agreed that this would be helpful, though it may not be part of the project. Ciara added that the walkshed analysis

tool allows use of a walkshed scenario for people who travel more slowly because of weather or mobility challenges to identify how the walkshed would differ for these people.

Ciara provided examples of the walkshed results from each project area community. Mark asked how the analysis accounts for low-volume streets without sidewalks where people walk in the street. Ciara said that the analysis only examined dedicated pedestrian facilities.

Ciara described the bikeshed analysis methodology and provided examples of the bikeshed results from each project area community. Mark asked why areas near the Bruce Vento Regional Trail still presented as part of the high-stress bikeshed. Ciara said that in the model, if a trip necessitates use of a high-stress street, then it is considered part of the high-stress bikeshed; however, if the trip can exclusively use low-stress streets, even if this would result in an indirect route, the bikeshed is considered low-stress. Mark asked if the model has been run for future connections to see how the low-stress bikeshed would expand for areas like Birch Street. Ciara said that this analysis has not yet been completed and clarified that only projects identified in capital improvement programs are included in the analysis. Ciara added that future population numbers can be used to show how many more people would be served by various walkshed or bikeshed improvements.

Eric Saathoff said that there used to be a Birch Street bridge and asked if a new pedestrian crossing has been discussed. Eric added that there is a goat path from Wells Street to the East Side YMCA and that a sidewalk serving this area had been removed. Eric said this would be a good pedestrian and bicycle connection, though elevation may present a challenge, and asked if Arcade Street has any planned bicycle improvements. Ciara shared the Arcade Street station area bikeshed. Eric asked why the bikeshed is shown as low-stress when Arcade Street is a high-stress street. Ciara said that this is because Neid Lane provides a low-stress connection to Arcade Street. Frank noted that the Minnesota Department of Transportation an Arcade Street project in its capital improvements program, though its scope has not been defined yet. Frank clarified that this project is under their purview because Arcade Street is part of the state highway system.

Eric asked if any improvements are recommended for the area and what route would be used to access the Arcade Street station from the north. Ciara said that the model assumes a cyclist could take a circuitous path on low-stress streets to access the station. Eric asked if this would be the recommended route. Ciara said the analysis does not address this, as it is mostly focused on improving pedestrian environment in scope, and added that bicycle infrastructure will be a key part of advanced station area planning. Cyndy said the bikeshed analysis could be a way to inspire change by encouraging communities to create better bicycle infrastructure and facilitate connections to stations. Cyndy noted in downtown Saint Paul, bicyclists will use sidewalks in areas where roads do not feel safe, causing conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians and stated that high-quality bicycle connections to stations would be helpful. Zack Mensinger and Brent Peterson expressed their agreement.

Mark stated that to avoid streets considered high-stress, someone who lives two blocks south of the Arcade Street station around Minnehaha Avenue E would have to bike approximately a mile to the east and loop back to get to the station safely and said it would be helpful to show one-mile bikeshed for super convenient access. Eric added that Arcade Street is six lanes wide in this area and that it is a dangerous part of the road. Eric said it would be great to have a future bike lane to connect through that area and suggested that the possibility be evaluated in advanced station area planning. Frank said that it could be. Mark asked if it would be possible to illustrate an economic development incentive in addition to the quality of life improvement for creating safer bicycle infrastructure on Arcade Street from Minnehaha Avenue E to Neid Lane. Ciara said that the analysis could be used to

show that an improvement would serve a certain number of people, zero-car households or other specific demographic groups.

Brent said that a lot of intersections are difficult because of signal phasing, which often requires that a person press an actuated pedestrian signal in order to cross. Brent said that this presents a particular challenge for cyclists, who have to dismount their bicycle to reach the signal and find a safe way to reenter the street. Brent stated that several intersections in Saint Paul have recently been upgraded to include fixed-time signals that automatically cycle through pedestrian phases, but at key intersections that lack this infrastructure, people often cross the street illegally because of the lack of appropriate infrastructure. Brent said that communities should be encouraged to consider the way that intersections are designed when implementing new sidewalks. Eric noted that there is a Safe Routes to School plan evaluating 4-to-3 conversion on Arcade Street, although the area under consideration is north of the segment from Minnehaha Avenue E to Neid Lane that was previously discussed. Ciara agreed that it is important to consider intersections when implementing sidewalks. Mark asked if fully separating pedestrians from vehicles results in higher traffic speeds and more dangerous street crossings. Ciara said that this could happen without the appropriate design treatments and that slower speeds can be encouraged with treatments including narrower travel lanes and the addition of street trees. Mark asked if such treatments would help on a street like Arcade Street or Cedar Avenue. Ciara said that sidewalks and bike lanes would be important infrastructure in such an area. Zack said that it would be helpful to incorporate improvements into the project design to implement as many as possible during construction so they are in place when BRT service begins.

Cyndy asked how planning for the project has changed as a result of COVID-19, noting that fewer people come to downtown Saint Paul for work or recreation and that there is an increase in the number of unsheltered people. Darrell said that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, downtown Saint Paul had experienced steady growth in population and employment and predicted that employees and visitors would return once public health conditions permit normal activities to resume. Cyndy asserted that it would be important to understand the effects of COVID-19 and how long it might last. Darrell said it might last one to two years and claimed it might make the project more expensive. Cyndy agreed and added that changes resulting from COVID-19 would also make the project more important. Beth said that it is currently difficult to understand how long-term travel patterns will change as a result of the pandemic, so project planning is currently proceeding as usual. Frank added that project staff are monitoring changes, but long-term changes due to COVID-19 in transportation, employment and residential patterns are unknown at this time. John O'Phelan noted that Metropolitan Council estimates anticipate that the region's population will grow by 400,000 to 500,000 people by 2035 and that there will be more people who need transportation for work, shopping and other activities. Sam Crosby said it would be good to include shelter and housing into station area plans for people with the greatest need. Frank said that housing is central to station area planning, as living near transit allows people to forgo car ownership and save a major cost, and added that a key goal of station area planning will be to maximize the benefits of the Rush Line BRT Project.

Future Agenda Items

Frank invited committee members to suggest topics for discussion at the next Community Advisory Committee meeting.