

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: December 8, 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	
Romi Slowiak	Saint Paul	
Therese Sonnek	Maplewood	X
TraNeicia Sylvester	Saint Paul	
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
Jim Gersema	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Caroline Ketcham	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
Tom Harrington	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Caroline Ketcham	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Alicia Valenti	Rush Line BRT Project Staff	X
Barbara Howard	Minnesota Department of Transportation	X
Craig Johnson	Vadnais Heights resident	X
Tristan Tate	WSP	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

Jim Gersema provided an update on coordination activities. Jim said that project staff are continuing to hold Issue Resolution Team meetings with project partners to examine issues, refine the project design and coordinate between agencies. Jim explained that project staff are currently working on coordination to determine how business access and transit (BAT) lanes will be marked and treated. The markings will follow standards established in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Jim said that project staff are still working to determine whether one or two white lines will be used to demarcate BAT lanes. Jim said that red lane markings are being considered as a supplemental treatment and clarified that red is the standard color. Jim said if red paint is used, it must cover the full width of the lane, though it can be dashed where access across the BAT lane is available for all drivers.

Mark Lynch asked if the red lane treatment could be used only along busier parts of the route such as downtown Saint Paul and downtown White Bear Lake, but not in quieter areas such as the Ramsey County rail right-of-way. Jim said that project staff are currently discussing this option and said that if the supplemental treatment is used in only parts of the route, it would be applied in the most appropriate places, such as busier areas with more access points and greater potential for confusion. Jim added that project staff are considering using the red treatment on the separated guideway at points where it crosses side streets. Frank clarified that project staff are not considering the use of red paint in downtown White Bear Lake because Rush Line BRT would operate in mixed traffic there.

Bob asked how the project would address safety concerns at the intersection of County Road E and Highway 61 and said that the Vadnais Heights City Council brought up the idea that the intersection will be high risk for drivers turning from northbound Highway 61 to eastbound County Road E and for drivers turning from southbound Highway 61 to westbound County Road E in the event that they do not see pedestrians. Jim said that the project would include pedestrian improvements at this intersection and provided an overview of proposed Highway 61 pedestrian improvements. Jim said that project staff, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and other agency stakeholders extensively discussed pedestrian safety and crossing at Highway 61. Jim noted that removing right turn islands and tightening corners shortens the overall crossing distance for pedestrians and slows down right turning movements. Jim added that project staff are proposing a wider crosswalk on the

south side of the intersection to make it more visible, as there are the most pedestrians in that area, many of which are walking to access TCO Sports Garden. Jim said that the median would also be widened to allow space for people to wait safely if they are unable to cross the full highway in one light cycle. Jim said that adding countdown timers to signals will also help people determine whether they have time to make it through the intersection.

Zack Mensinger asked if there are any good points along the route to implement Dutch-style roundabouts to help with pedestrian safety and noted appreciation for the elimination of right turn islands. Jim said that traffic volumes precluded consideration of roundabouts in the area and noted that roundabouts do not necessarily enhance pedestrian safety, particularly in high-traffic areas.

Brent Peterson also stated his support for the removal of right turn islands. Therese Sonnek asked if right turns on red would be eliminated on County Road E. Jim said that this change is being considered and that supplemental traffic signals would be added to display when buses are approaching so that drivers do not turn in front of an oncoming bus. Cindy Whiteford said that one of the most dangerous aspects of walking or biking in downtown areas is right turns on red and voiced support for eliminating right turns on red. Jim said that it can be considered through the next phases of the project. Mark acknowledged the safety benefit of eliminating right turns on red and said that it would be very unpopular with the public because of the length of the light cycle at this intersection.

John O'Phelan asked if the Highway 61 and County Road E intersection was the location of the future Hy-Vee. Bob clarified that Hy-Vee is no longer planning to build at this intersection, and instead is planning a new store in Maplewood.

Jim shared that lanes would also be narrowed to accommodate the wider median. Dave Anderson noted that at certain points of the day, there is tremendous pressure at the intersection because of the constraints presented by the lakes to the north and I-694 to the south, and asked what impact narrowing lanes would have on traffic. Jim said that width reductions are primarily planned for left turn lanes and are not anticipated to negatively affect traffic. Bob said that Hoffman Road connects Highway 61 and County Road E to the east and asked if it could be used to accommodate traffic. Jim said that project staff have examined this option and that it presents jurisdictional challenges, as it is not owned by the Minnesota Department of Transportation or Ramsey County. Jim added that it would also change traffic patterns and would likely be confusing for road users. Bob said that on I-35E, there is space for buses to pull off the highway to serve bus stations and asked if similar facilities had been explored for Rush Line BRT. Jim said that as project staff have navigated those questions, they developed the design presented in the meeting. Jim added that optimizing travel times while maintaining safety was a priority and noted that station platforms are wider and deeper on Highway 61 than in other locations.

Therese said that when traveling westbound on County Road E and turning right to travel north on Highway 61, the turn angle is already so tight that it is challenging to safely merge onto Highway 61 and said that banning right turns on red would resolve this issue. Jim said that right turns on red are a popular issue for discussion in the realm of pedestrian safety and noted that even when they are banned, people often still turn right on red.

Bob asked how increasing development in the area would affect traffic volume in the future and whether Highway 61 would have sufficient capacity to serve future traffic. Jim said that as part of the environmental process, project staff conducted a traffic study to evaluate future conditions and said that the intersection would remain busy, but there are no county or state plans to increase or widen roadways. Jim said that the footprint of the highway is expected to remain the same and that project

staff will consider data about how traffic patterns and mobility will change in the long-term as a result of COVID-19 as that data becomes available.

Mark asked why the crosswalk would not be widened on all sides of the intersection and inquired whether it was a cost or maintenance issue. Jim affirmed that while it would not be a cost issue during construction, it would not be a part of regular Rush Line maintenance and would therefore need to be maintained by the local roadway owner. Jim said that any features requiring repetitive maintenance call for some sensitivity to the capacity of the roadway owner to manage such maintenance.

John asked whether any other high-pedestrian businesses were being considered in the design and said there may be new development at the site of the former planned Hy-Vee. Jim noted that the *Gem Lake 2040 Comprehensive Plan* guides for a higher-intensity use that would support Rush Line BRT and transit in general.

Brent asked if queuing issues at near-side stops would be a concern for delaying transit service. Jim said that this would not be a major concern because the same issue could be present at far-side stops, and while there is some concern about delay for drivers because of boarding, there are only six buses per hour in each direction there would not be any significant delay.

Jim said that upcoming engineering activities would address stormwater analysis, red pavement areas, station site design and bridge plans. Jim said this information would be used to refine capital, operation and maintenance costs.

Cindy asked what kind of analytics being used to forecast future ridership, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jim said the answer would be presented later in the meeting and that project staff are following guidance from the Federal Transit Administration to determine future ridership.

Environmental Assessment

Frank provided an update on the environmental process. Frank said that the technical reports in support of the Environmental Assessment (EA) have been completed and that the Federal Transit Administration began their review in summer 2020. Frank said the EA is expected to be published for public comment in May 2021. The public comment period will include a public meeting, which may be held in person or online depending on public health guidance at that point in time. Frank said a Finding of No Significant Impact is the anticipated environmental decision.

Frank shared that the Section 106 process involves consulting parties in the environmental analysis phase. Consulting parties may be municipalities, state agencies or historical societies, among other entities. Frank said project staff have been organizing consulting party meetings to review effects of the project and determine how to avoid or mitigate adverse effects. Therese asked if project staff had found any interesting historical artifacts. Barbara Howard said that project staff have identified 28 historic properties within the area of potential effect, including roadway remnants from 1868 that are still visible. Barbara said that these segments could be found near Harvest Park, near Weaver Elementary School and just south of Beam Avenue. Barbara added that a popular resource is the Polar Chevrolet bear. Barbara noted that Moose Lodge 963 has a fascinating civil rights history and that Weaver Elementary School has a unique design. Barbara added that Weaver Elementary School may also have significance for its role in education history and the education techniques used there. Therese asked if Moose Lodge 963 is being demolished to build apartments. Barbara confirmed that it is, but because the apartments are not part of the Rush Line BRT Project, the demolition is not considered an adverse effect for the EA.

Advanced Station Area Planning

Frank provided an update related to the advanced station area planning effort. Frank said work is expected to begin in the fall of 2021. Frank provided an overview of the key tasks and asked which community priorities could be addressed through advanced station area planning. Sam Crosby said that walkability and connectivity would be very important. Bob said that safety and security is a big concern and suggested that lighting and cameras should be a priority for the project. Therese said bicycle storage and bicycle infrastructure around the Bruce Vento Regional Trail would be important. Therese emphasized the need to maintain the natural atmosphere of the trail.

COVID-19

Alicia Valenti described local changes in ridership resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and whether the pandemic is anticipated to affect Rush Line BRT. Mark asked why ridership during the pandemic had shifted from a morning and an afternoon peak to one peak in the afternoon. Caroline Ketcham said that the shift occurred because while typical 9-to-5 commuters are not riding transit as much, people who are still using transit for errands tend to do so in the afternoon. Sam asked why ridership declined 100 percent for a few days in June. Alicia said that this dip occurred because Metro Transit suspended service in the days following the death of George Floyd. Dave suggested that the afternoon peak may also be a result of parents needing to be home while their children are attending virtual classes. Therese suggested that given the emphasis on reaching medical facilities, demand for Rush Line BRT may increase because healthcare is an essential service. Alicia said that project staff would consider these suggestions and continue to monitor ridership trends during and after the pandemic to inform development of the project.

Alicia described national ridership trends. Bob said he attended a national real estate seminar focused on real estate trends in the Twin Cities and said that downtown office vacancy rates are increasing as companies move to the suburbs for lower rents.

Visual Quality Manual

Tom introduced the Visual Quality Manual, its purpose and its elements, and described the limits of the document and the guidance used in its development. Tom explained that the Visual Quality Manual accounts for existing conditions and the unique context and character of six segments of the Rush Line BRT route that were identified to have varied characteristics, geography, or adjacent land use. Tom said that project staff have prioritized fiscal wisdom in developing the Visual Quality Manual and that they plan to match existing conditions where possible. As an example, Tom said the Visual Quality Manual provides guidance for new bridges to be designed to match nearby existing bridges.

Tom said that the Visual Quality Manual also addresses the different types of fencing that can be used to keep people safe, act as a retention wall or provide visual screening. Tom shared that lighting will meet Metro Transit standards and that the design team for the next phase of work will be expected to follow these design criteria. Tom shared that the illumination of stations and shelters should range from two to seven footcandles. Tom said the illumination at shelters would be seven footcandles, which is the Metro Transit standard for transit shelters, and that other areas such as sidewalks, the guideway and bicycle parking would be illuminated to five footcandles. As a benchmark, Tom said that a well-lit parking lot is illuminated to two footcandles.

Sam asked if the Visual Quality Manual would guide against blue lights – expressing a preference in warmer temperature light sources Tom said that high-Kelvin (4000-6000K) lights are challenging and that 3000K is preferable because it is warmer. Tom said that sense of place has been a priority in conversations and that providing warmer light is more appropriate for the corridor. Mark asked if the

areas beyond the station platforms and its immediate surroundings would be lit. Tom said that project staff are currently planning for much of the guideway to remain unlit, though a final decision has not been reached. Tom noted that some of the input provided to date requests that the guideway not be brightly lit to maintain the character of the area, while others think it should be brightly lit to promote safety. Frank affirmed that the discussion is ongoing, and that operations and maintenance would be considered as well as the preference of Metro Transit operators.

Bob asked what people with disabilities might prefer for lighting. Darrell Paulsen said that lighting provides a perception of safety and that in a place with long winters, good lighting is necessary. Darrell said that the full corridor may not need to be lit, but that maintaining some level of light would provide a sense of safety.

Tom said that at the May Community Advisory Committee meeting, Andrea Arnoldi shared some information about progress designing Gold Line BRT. Tom said that Gold Line BRT Project staff have just reached at point at which they can share information including station and guideway lighting, though it has not been finalized. Tom said the Rush Line BRT Project would likely use the same approach.

Darrell said that it often seems like heating is an afterthought after a lot of work has been done for a transit project. Darrell said that because of the length of winter, heating should be prioritized as much as lighting and visibility to make sure people are comfortable while they wait for the bus. Tom said that cameras and heating will be included at each station and that while the project will not include fully enclosed shelters with doors, there will be windscreens and radiant heaters to provide a safe, comfortable waiting environment. Tom noted that heaters are placed overhead, to provide as much heat as possible while remaining out of reach to prevent damage and safety hazards. In the virtual chat, Zack asked whether all the stations would have heating. Frank confirmed that they would. In the chat, Therese and Darrell suggested heated benches or heaters under the seats because hot air rises.

Mark asked how the trail itself will be lit and whether lighting would differ depending on proximity to the guideway. Tom said the trail is currently unlit and that Scott Yonke, Director of Ramsey County Parks and Recreation, said that the County does not typically light trails and does not intend to light the full length of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

Tom said that the Visual Quality Manual would be finalized by early 2021. Therese said that when you are in a lighted area, it is difficult to see beyond the area, and asked whether it would be difficult to see the trail from stations. Tom said lighting will be brightest at the station and will gradually lower moving away from the station to allow eyes to adjust.

Bob asked if stations would include QR codes that would connect to information about nearby destinations. Tom said that it is not something Metro Transit is considering for Gold Line BRT and that the Rush Line BRT Project has not been advanced far enough to begin discussing specific station features such as QR codes. In the chat, Bob said that QR codes would be a unique design feature that could be used to promote community businesses and events.

Station Site Design Update

Tom reviewed station site design information that was presented to the Community Advisory Committee at previous meetings. Tom defined the station site as station platforms, sidewalks immediately next to the platform and other features on the platform or adjacent to it. Tom shared that when the Rush Line BRT project will advance past the current project, it would likely follow the

example and approach of Gold Line BRT, which is approaching 90 percent design and in the process of finalizing station designs.

Tom summarized the results of the station design survey conducted in summer 2020. Tom noted that safety and security were top priorities for survey respondents as well as pedestrian and bicycle connections, convenience, secure bicycle parking, wayfinding signage, public art and landscaping. Tom added that maintaining the natural feel of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail was a common theme.

Tom said that Rush Line BRT design reached 15 percent completion in July 2020 and that station site plans are being developed now, while design of vertical station elements will begin in the next project phase, which is expected to begin in late 2021. Tom shared that project staff have traveled to each of the station sites to inventory existing conditions and identify unique features and characteristics that might influence design.

Tom presented the Cayuga Street station as an example of ongoing efforts to assess existing conditions and develop designs that create an accessible, comfortable, safe station environment. Tom shared that the openness adjacent to the railroad trench could be uncomfortable and that the current station site plan illustrates a more solid, visual screen to provide separation and a visual barrier in order to provide a sense of safety and comfort. Tom noted that people often cross the street at places that are not safe, so the plan also illustrates a deterrent fencing or another barrier to discourage unsafe crossing. Zack said that the Cayuga Street intersection is unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists and suggested that curb extensions be used at this location. Frank said that he would share this comment with the design team for consideration.

Tom then described the design considerations for select station site concepts – Larpenteur Avenue and County Road E stations. Tom noted that at the County Road E station, the expansiveness of the corridor and the speed of the roadway suggest the design approach should provide a visually recognizable station area. This could be achieved by using more lighting, larger scale vegetation or other treatments. Tom shared that project staff are also evaluating buffering options to ease the transition from Rush Line BRT platforms to surrounding building, and that design will facilitate good connections to the park-and-ride facility and to the future extended Bruce Vento Regional Trail. Mark asked if there was a way to connect directly from a station to nearby businesses, such as the Hy-Vee that was previously proposed for this location. Tom said that project staff anticipate that more intensive uses might be built closer to the roadway in the future, and that private sidewalks may be built to connect such buildings to public infrastructure. Mark asked if this type of decision would be made during the station area planning process. Tom said that it most likely will, and that recommendations about pedestrian access, land use and urban design may be developed through the station area planning. Mark asked if this type of infrastructure would be part of station design at some points and part of a municipality's jurisdiction at others. Tom said that when large-scale infrastructure projects are constructed, one of the goals is to replace anything that is disturbed, and that construction of Rush Line BRT will disturb some sidewalks on Highway 61. Tom said that project staff are working to connect to existing resources such as the park-and-ride facility and Bruce Vento Regional Trail as much as possible, though without knowing what development will occur in the future, it is difficult to identify additional connections to make. Tom added that in the next few years of project design, there may be additional development interest that allows for synergy between the project and developers in providing infrastructure.

Tom asked if there were any additional considerations that project staff should be aware of in designing stations. Mark said that there are businesses on three of the four corners at the County Road E and Highway 61 intersection, noting that there is a car dealership that uses its proximity to the highway to promote its products. Mark said that the use of landscaping may block some of their

visibility, which may not be critical at this location, but that in other locations it may be harmful. Alicia noted that this type of impact has been considered throughout the environmental analysis phase through engagement with businesses and the visual impact portion of the Environmental Assessment.

Therese noted that part of the right-of-way that will be occupied by Rush Line BRT is currently used for snow storage and asked where snow will be moved once the project is constructed. Tom said the design will address this question. In the review of the Larpenteur Avenue station site concept, Therese noted that one of the concerns of people who live adjacent to the Ramsey County rail right-of-way is the separation between stations and their yards. Tom said that project staff have been discussing how to address this, though a decision has not yet been made. Tom said that both lighting and fencing will play a role in maintaining safety along this segment of the route and that this aspect of design would be addressed in the next phase of the project. Mark asked when other stations would have station site plans like the ones displayed during the meeting. Tom said that approximately 12 station site plans were 90 percent complete and that project staff would bring them to Issue Resolution Team meetings in the coming weeks with the intent of finalizing plans by early 2021.

Future Agenda Items

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