

## MEETING SUMMARY

**Date:** April 13, 2020  
**Time:** 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.  
**Location:** Virtual Meeting

### ATTENDEES

Name	Community of Residence or Affiliation	Present
<b>Committee Members</b>		
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	X
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	
Brent Peterson	Saint Paul	X
Eric Saathoff	Saint Paul	
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	
Cyndy Whiteford	Saint Paul	X
<b>Project Staff and Other Attendees</b>		
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
Kathryn O'Brien	HDR, Inc.	X

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

### Welcome and Introductions

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

### Project Updates

#### *Ridership and Cost*

Jim Gersema provided an update on the ridership forecast for the project. Jim shared the capital cost estimate and the operations and maintenance cost estimate, and described the factors that were used to develop each.

#### *Capital Investment Grants Program*

Andy Gitzlaff explained the process and criteria used by the Federal Transit Administration to rate transitway projects including the Rush Line BRT Project. Mark Lynch asked if the ratings shown are official. Andy said that these are anticipated ratings, as the project we not undergo an official FTA rating process until late in the process (2022 at the earliest). John O'Phelan noted that economic development and affordable housing are a major focus of the Riverview Corridor. John said that a part of the story will be the connection between Rush Line BRT and Riverview Corridor and that this should be highlighted in project communications. Andy shared the economic development criteria and explained how it addresses the topic of economic development. Andy noted that the financial commitment rating may change as a result of budget constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cindy Whiteford asked how President Biden's infrastructure proposal could help the project. Andy said that it would depend on the details of any infrastructure legislation that Congress approves and the president signs, but that it is likely an infrastructure bill will include funding for transit projects. Therese Sonnek asked if there is any guidance about whether the project would pay for itself based on fares and ridership. Andy said that fares would be the same as standard Metro Transit fares and clarified that the cost estimate does not include other sources of revenue such as advertising. John O'Phelan noted that most mass transportation is publicly subsidized and asked whether the cost effectiveness rating was focused on minimizing the public subsidy. Andy explained that the cost estimate annualizes 30 years of capital and operations costs and divides these costs by anticipated ridership to produce a cost effectiveness number. Andy said that 30 percent farebox recovery is typical, but all transportation infrastructure is subsidized to some level.

### *Environmental Assessment and Advanced Station Area Planning*

Frank Alarcon shared an update on the upcoming publication of the Environmental Assessment. Frank said advanced station area planning is expected to begin later in 2021 and that there would be several opportunities for public involvement.

### **Section 106 Process**

Barbara Howard provided an overview of the Section 106 process evaluating historic and cultural resources. Barbara shared the number of cultural resources that were identified through the Section 106 process and gave an overview of those that would have No Adverse Effect, those that would have No Adverse Effect, with conditions, and those that would have an Adverse Effect. Barbara explained the conditions to avoid adverse effects and the resolution of adverse effects.

Barbara shared that the original analysis found no adverse effects at the Moose Lodge, but consulting parties disagreed, so measures will need to be taken to make sure the property is not affected by the project. Therese asked if there were plans to tear down the Moose Lodge for housing. Barbara said that Ramsey County has coordinated with the City of Maplewood to address this. Because the development proposal is not a part of the Rush Line BRT Project, it is not considered in the Section 106 evaluation. Barbara clarified that the City has jurisdiction over changes to the property, though its Heritage Preservation Commission may consider the historic status in future decisions.

Barbara provided an overview of the five adverse effects in the project area, which are all associated with the LS&M Railroad Corridor Historic District. Barbara shared that three railroad segments that date to 1868 were discovered within the corridor and described the process used to resolve the expected adverse effects to these resources. Barbara said that the project design may be further refined to avoid impacts to two of the segments and that the railroad remnants are important because of what they can reveal about 1868 railroad construction. Barbara stated that if impacts to the railroad can be avoided, consulting parties will conduct another design review; if not, archaeologists will do data recovery to learn as much from the railroad remnants as possible.

Therese asked what data recovery is. Barbara said it is an intense archaeological survey that may look for artifacts or document soil profiles to help understand how railroads were constructed in the 1860s. Therese asked if any remnants would be visible. Barbara said that currently, the Bruce Vento Regional Trail was mostly built along roadway constructed in the 1880s, which in turn replaced the original railroad roadway from 1868. The railroad built in 1868 was smaller and in a slightly different location than the 1880s roadway, so there are some remnants outside the latter roadway. Mark asked what would happen to the 1868 remnants if the guideway were redirected away from them. Barbara said they would be left in place and protected during construction. Barbara added that the remnants are mostly located within Ramsey County rail right-of-way, though some are on private property. Artifacts on public property are protected by state law; those that are on private land are not protected in the same way. Mark asked if there would be archaeological digs to examine the remnants in the future. Barbara said it depends on what projects might come into play and that the remnants may provide an opportunity for historical societies that are consulting parties to do more study. Barbara shared that preservation in place is the preferred alternative for archaeological features because technological advances in the future may allow us to gather more data than we could today. Bob noted that there are Indian Mounds along White Bear Lake and near Lake Avenue. Barbara said that they are aware of these and the project is not anticipated to impact them.

Barbara shared that an interpretive planner, historian and graphic designer will coordinate to incorporate interpretive elements at Rush Line BRT stations. Barbara shared examples of interpretive

panels that were developed for the METRO Blue Line Extension. Barbara noted that artistic and other elements could also be incorporated into station design. Barbara shared the schedule for developing and executing the Memorandum of Agreement. Therese said that the Frost Avenue station would be historic because of the intersection of two historic railroad routes. Barbara said that a comprehensive excavation was conducted at this site and that she expects interpretive signage will be used to share that history.

### **Tree Inventory and Landscape Design Approach**

Tom Harrington described the purpose, location and limits of the tree inventory as well as the process used to conduct the inventory, and the data included. Bob asked if ash trees could be eliminated before becoming an issue and whether black walnut could be maintained because it is desirable. Tom said horticulture information was used to determine how trees are classified and agreed that some type B and type C trees are attractive, but that national standards were used to evaluate trees. Tom stated that many ash trees are being lost to emerald ash borer and that the approach to controlling invasive species and large-scale issues such as the emerald ash borer is a complex issue that will need to be addressed through thoughtful planning. Tom explained how the existing trees were mapped and shared that if necessary, the guideway could be moved to avoid impacting high-quality trees in good health.

Tom led discussion about trees and vegetation in the Ramsey County rail right-of-way. Therese said she thinks that a lot of people appreciate the canopy on the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, regardless of whether the trees providing canopy are invasive or in poor health, and that the removal of trees is a source of concern for the public. Sam said that it is appropriate to consider fast-growing, invasive species as harmful, but that fast-growing trees with soft wood have some benefits because they still provide carbon sequestration, shade and habitat. Tom clarified that the terminology used in the tree inventory is standard in the field of horticulture and that it helps describe how long a tree will survive and how it will fare in strong winds and other harsh conditions. Tom added that these descriptions do not necessarily focus on the present use of such trees or how they contribute to the feeling of an area.

Bob said the timing of replacement should be a consideration and asked whether maples would be used because they provide a lot of shade and have a sturdy root base. Bob added that it would be great to add a variety of trees native to Minnesota like what is found in Como Regional Park. Tom said it is wise to consider diversity in tree selection to promote sustainability and longevity of the trees. Therese noted that it is important to consider how different types of tree might affect use of the trail, noting that acorns would negatively affect trail users. Zack Mensinger said this would be a good time to deal with invasive species where possible, such as buckthorn and creeping bellflower. Tom said there are many small buckthorn trees in the corridor and noted that they provide significant screening for adjacent properties.

Tom introduced the Design Approach, explained its purpose and described the information included in the approach. Tom summarized the previous project studies and the public engagement input used to guide the development of the Design Approach. Tom said that each recommendation is specific to the unique geographies along the Rush Line BRT route and shared example preliminary station site plans.

Bob reiterated his idea for using a mix of trees through the project area and suggested adding sumac in the area. Bob also suggested working with Vadnais Lake Area Watershed Management Organization on implementing rain gardens and native vegetation. Therese suggested adding lilacs if they would contribute positively to the ecological health of the area. John voiced support for native Minnesota vegetation and wildflowers and noted that MnDOT recently released a grant program to

encourage planting pollinator-friendly species adjacent to highways. Tom said it would be fun to tell a story and create an identity for the Ramsey County rail right-of-way using vegetation. Sam suggested replacing buckthorn in phases to maintain screening for adjacent properties and improve ecological health. Therese added support for planting maple trees. John suggested using goats to eat the existing buckthorn.

### **Project Next Steps**

Frank provided an overview of next steps for the project, including the publication of the Environmental Assessment in May 2021 and the anticipated transition of the project from Ramsey County to the Metropolitan Council in late 2021.

### **Closing Remarks**

Frank, TraNeicia Sylvester and Bob gave closing remarks to the group and thanked committee members for their involvement in the project.