

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #15



B R T

MEETING SUMMARY

Date: April 22, 2021
Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Location: Virtual meeting (Zoom)

ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	Present
Committee Members		
Mayor Marylee Abrams	City of Maplewood	X
Councilmember Laurel Amlee	City of Gem Lake	X
Randy Anderson	Independent School District 622	
Ruby Azurdia-Lee	Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)	
Paris Dunning	East Side Area Business Association	X
Mayor Jo Emerson	City of White Bear Lake	
Councilmember Erik Goebel	City of Vadnais Heights	X
Monte Hilleman	Saint Paul Port Authority	
Sheila Kauppi	Minnesota Department of Transportation	X
Sheila Kelly	White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Supervisor Scott McCune	White Bear Township	X
Liz Moscatelli	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corp.	X
Patrick Opatz	Century College	
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt	Ramsey County	X
Andrea Stoesz	Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare	X
Terri Thao	Nexus Community Partners	
Councilmember Hanna Valento	City of Forest Lake	X
Councilmember Susan Vento	Metropolitan Council	X
Shannon Watson	St. Paul Area Chamber	X
Councilmember Nelsie Yang	City of Saint Paul	X
Alternates		
Councilmember Rebecca Cave	City of Maplewood	
Councilmember Kevin Edberg	City of White Bear Lake	
John Perlich	St. Paul Area Chamber	
Jon Solberg	Minnesota Department of Transportation	
Pakou Yang	Century College	

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

Agency and Consultant Team Staff

- Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County.
- Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County.
- Sara Pflaum, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Sarah Ghandour, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Nick Olson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Barbara Howard, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Charles Carlson, Metro Transit.
- Chelsa Johnson, Metro Transit.
- Brett Hussong, City of Saint Paul.
- Jimmy Shoemaker, City of Saint Paul.
- Jim Gersema, SRF.
- Dan McNeil, SRF.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Haase, Kimley-Horn.

Members of the Public¹

- TraNeicia Sylvester, Community Advisory Committee co-chair.
- Ciara Schlichting.
- Robin Horkey.
- Dave Anderson.
- Tim David.
- Laurie Malone.
- Kathryn O'Brien.
- Karen Poppa.
- Jack Byers.
- Debra Neutkens.
- Cindie Bloom.
- Joann Ellis.
- Greg Lees.
- Dan Wachtler.
- Doug Cook.
- Lisa Dunnigan.
- Bob Jensen.
- Samuel Wegner.
- Romi Slowiak.

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

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Reinhardt opened the meeting and noted that Mayor Emerson was not in attendance because she was not feeling well. Commissioner Reinhardt called for the election of the Policy Advisory Committee vice chair. Mayor Abrams nominated Councilmember Yang. Shannon Watson seconded the nomination. All committee members were in favor, and Councilmember Yang was elected as the vice chair.

Andy Gitzlaff reviewed the virtual meeting procedures.

2. Recap of Project Update Distributed to the Policy Advisory Committee in March 2021

Andy Gitzlaff noted that the Policy Advisory Committee meeting dates were adjusted so that this meeting would be held prior to publication of the Environmental Assessment. He summarized the project update that was distributed to the Policy Advisory Committee in March, which included updates on the Environmental Assessment, engineering activities, Visual Quality Manual and public engagement. Project staff received a request to translate the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide video (available [here](#)) into Hmong, and the translated version will be available shortly.

3. Community Advisory Committee and Public Engagement Update

TraNeicia Sylvester, Community Advisory Committee co-chair, provided a recap of the Community Advisory Committee meeting on April 13. The committee received updates on cost, ridership, the Capital Investment Grants Program and the Environmental Assessment. There was also discussion of the Section 106 process, tree inventory and landscape design approach. This was the last Community Advisory Committee meeting during this phase of the project. Andy Gitzlaff stated that the input from the Community Advisory Committee has helped shape the project and make it better moving forward.

Frank Alarcon provided an update on public engagement activities. Project staff presented to the Metropolitan Council Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee on April 7, which is a committee that advises the Metropolitan Council on the needs of people with disabilities. On April 14, project staff met with SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc., which is an organization that serves Hmong veterans and their families and will be partnering with Ramsey County to help get the word out about the Environmental Assessment publication. On April 27, project staff will be sharing a project update with the Payne-Phalen District Council.

A project e-newsletter was sent out on April 15. The project has also continued to receive emails from community members, and comment themes have included the following:

- Interest in stations locations.
- Concern about long-term ridership impacts from COVID-19.
- Interest in vehicle choice.
- Concerns about changes to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

Frank noted that the project is planning for electric vehicles and that information on the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide and efforts to make sure the Bruce Vento Regional Trail remains safe and attractive was provided to those with questions about the trail.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

Sheila Kelly noted that there have been lots of letters to editor about the project in the *White Bear Press*. She asked if there were any upcoming engagement activities where project staff could address concerns. Frank Alarcon replied that there will be upcoming engagement opportunities with the Environmental Assessment. Andy Gitzlaff added that project staff are happy to meet with the chamber of commerce or other organizations that are interested. Project staff have also provided project information to the school district and the arts district to share when they do public engagement. Sheila asked if project staff could provide talking points to help committee members discuss the project with people. Frank said that project staff will send talking points to the committee.

Supervisor McCune commented that future engagement in downtown White Bear Lake would be helpful to be proactive in addressing the concerns being raised. He noted that he believed project staff had attended Market Fest in the past, and that event may be a good opportunity again even if it is different this year due to the pandemic.

Commissioner Reinhardt noted that we do not have anything that corrects the misperceptions in the letters to the editor and there should be something we can do to give accurate information. She welcomes all opinions, positive or negative, but some information presented in the letters is not accurate. The Environmental Assessment will address some questions raised. It would be helpful to clarify the roles of Ramsey County, the city and the Metropolitan Council. She requested that project staff look at the letters and provide committee members with talking points to address the issues that have been raised. She wants people to have correct information when forming their opinions. Frank Alarcon said staff can provide talking points.

Councilmember Vento added that it is crucial to get the facts out there. She suggested compiling information in a format that the *White Bear Press* could use or cities could include in their newsletters. She also noted that the project could identify supporters in White Bear Lake to counter some of the negative opinions being presented because there are people in White Bear Lake who are looking forward to this project.

Liz Moscatelli stated that project staff have presented to the Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corporation in the past, and recently there have been questions related to post-COVID ridership. She would like to have information on that topic to share.

Councilmember Yang asked project staff to also share information on the Bruce Vento Regional Trail with the committee as her constituents have had questions on that portion of the project.

4. Environmental Update

Jeanne Witzig provided an update on the environmental process. Before the Environmental Assessment is released, she wanted to take a step back to review the agencies involved and then discuss next steps.

Given that the project anticipates receiving federal funding from the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Transit Administration is the lead federal agency and will sign the Environmental Assessment. The Federal Highway Administration is a partner, called a cooperating agency under the federal environmental process, because it will be issuing an approval later in the process related to the I-694 crossing. The project is also meeting state environmental review requirements, and under the state process the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority is the responsible governmental unit.

The Environmental Assessment has other documents that accompany it as part of federal requirements. One is a Section 4(f) evaluation, which discusses impacts to parks and recreation resources and historic resources. The project is also following the Section 106 process, which

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

evaluates impacts to historic resources. The Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement covers what will happen as the project moves forward to address adverse effects to historic resources.

The Federal Transit Administration's review process has been lengthy as it conducts very stringent reviews to make sure the project is meeting administrative and legal requirements. The final reviews are in process, and project staff are targeting May 11 for the official publication of the federal Environmental Assessment and state Environmental Assessment Worksheet. Under the state process, publication in the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board's *EQB Monitor* starts the public review period, which will be 45 days from May 11 to June 25. After the review period and prior to the final decision by the Federal Transit Administration, the Section 4(f) process and Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement will be finalized.

Project staff will respond to the comments received on the Environmental Assessment and Environmental Assessment Worksheet, then the Federal Transit Administration will review the comments and responses and issue the final environmental determination. Following that, Ramsey County, as the state responsible governmental unit, will take into consideration the same elements then issue the state environmental decision. The Federal Highway Administration, as a cooperating agency, will issue a separate federal determination so it can advance the approval process for the I-694 crossing. The project will transition from Ramsey County to the Metropolitan Council after the environmental process is complete.

The Environmental Assessment is around 100 pages, with a tremendous amount of supporting information in technical reports if folks want to dive into more detail. Project staff are working on a flier that will be translated into Hmong and Spanish and are also preparing a video on where the project is in the process, the purpose of the Environmental Assessment and how to comment. This information will also be communicated through social media posts, a legal notice of availability, a press release, a mailing to directly adjacent property owners and e-newsletter updates. The project advisory committee members will also be asked to share information about the comment opportunity with their communities.

The Environmental Assessment will be submitted to agencies as required by the state process as well as partner agencies. Hard copies will be provided at libraries and city halls as permitted by COVID safety protocols. It will also be available on the project website.

Project staff are planning for two online public meetings in early June and are looking into holding one in-person meeting in mid-June if we can confirm a location that will allow a meeting and can provide appropriate social distancing. The goal is to share as much information as we can at those meetings and provide an opportunity for folks to ask questions and talk with project staff.

5. Cultural and Historic Resource Process (Section 106) Update

Barbara Howard from the Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit provided an update on the Section 106 process. The process includes four steps: initiate the process, identify historic properties, assess effects, and resolve adverse effects, if any. The project is now on the fourth step.

A key element of the process is including consulting parties throughout. The project has had four consulting party meetings to date. Tribes were notified of the undertaking, and none asked to be part of consultation, but they can be brought in later if requested.

During the second step, identification of historic properties, survey efforts identified 28 properties listed or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

Once we know what historic properties we have in the corridor, we assess anticipated project effects. To do that, we make some general assumptions since the project is only at 15 percent design. One assumption is that a preservation professional will review the project plans at critical design stages. Another is that the Federal Transit Administration will assess the need for adjustments or additional reviews along the way.

The assessment of effects was completed last fall. The project will have No Adverse Effect on 14 historic properties, No Adverse Effect, with conditions, on 9 historic properties, and an Adverse Effect on 5 historic properties associated with the Lake Superior & Mississippi (LS&M) Railroad Corridor.

The No Adverse Effect findings considered the assessments completed for the Gold Line and Robert Street projects, which are also federal undertakings.

A finding of No Adverse Effect with conditions means that the project will be developed in a specific way to ensure there is no adverse effect to the property. These specific requirements have been discussed with the consulting parties and are included in the draft Memorandum of Agreement. There are three types of conditions:

- Design requirements, which the Federal Transit Administration ensures are met and do not go back to consulting parties for review.
- Consulting party review according to Secretary of Interior Standards.
- Construction Protection Plan for Historic Properties, which are implemented as part of construction to make sure no damage is done to historic properties.

The conditions for the Rush Line BRT Project include:

- Design requirements at Union Depot will avoid an adverse effect to the Union Depot and to the Lowertown Historic District.
- Consulting party review of project elements near the Cayuga Street station. The Federal Transit Administration and consulting parties will decide if construction protection measures are needed by the 60 percent plans.
- Design requirements for vegetative screening between the Arcade Street station and the Saint Paul Stillwater & Taylors Falls/Omaha Road railroad corridor.
- Consulting party review of physical barriers at the Forest Street Bridge. The Federal Transit Administration and consulting parties will decide if construction protection measures are needed.
- Consulting party review of the Johnson Parkway Bridge, including trail connections. The review will look at the scale and design of the bridge, and the goal is to make sure the parkway still has a park-like setting as much as possible.
- Design requirements for vegetative screening and for the trail connection in Phalen Park. A Construction Protection Plan for Historic Properties will be required for East Shore Drive.
- Design requirements for project elements at Moose Lodge 963. Design of the station, guideway and grade separation must meet Secretary of Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.
- Consulting party review of project elements near Weaver Elementary School. The focus will be on the trail underpass, trail connections, guideway and stormwater management area on school property.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

The Adverse Effect finding was made for resources associated with the Lake Superior & Mississippi (LS&M) Railroad Corridor Historic District, including the segment of the historic district from Saint Paul to White Bear Lake, the segment from White Bear Lake to Hugo, and three railroad remnants from 1868. Resolution of adverse effects includes the following:

- Data recovery of the 1868 alignment between Eldridge Avenue and County Road B East. Data recovery is an archaeological investigation to get all the information we can out of the ground.
- Possible avoidance of the 1868 alignment between Gervais Avenue and County Road C. If avoidance is not possible, data recovery will be conducted.
- Possible avoidance of the 1868 alignment between Kohlman and Beam Avenues. If avoidance is not possible, data recovery will be conducted.
- National Register evaluation of the LS&M between Saint Paul and Duluth.
 - The evaluation will determine whether the corridor remains National Register-eligible after completion of the project and whether any segments are individually eligible.
 - It will document associated properties at the Phase I level and recommend individual evaluation, if appropriate.
 - Evaluation must be completed two years after revenue service operations.
- Incorporation of interpretive elements at BRT stations.
 - Plan for interpretation includes type, number and exact locations of the interpretation, as well as themes, schematic plans and draft text and graphics.
 - Elements have to be incorporated into construction plans and posted on the Metropolitan Council's website.
 - Efforts on the Blue Line LRT Extension interpretive planning will serve as a road map for Rush Line.

The draft Memorandum of Agreement will be published with the Environmental Assessment in May and will be finalized after public review.

An attendee asked the following question in the chat: "To what extent can natural resources (i.e. waterways with proven history as cultural resources) be considered as part of the 106 process? Phalen Creek (formerly connecting Lake Phalen to the Mississippi River) was a travel route and source of food and other resources for Dakota people. Phalen Creek intersects the Rush Line BRT path at multiple points, and there are multiple ways in which this project design would affect any attempts to daylight Phalen Creek at various points." Barbara Howard replied that although cultural resource surveys did not identify Phalen Creek as a National Register-eligible historic property, there has been a lot of coordination between the Rush Line project team and the Lower Phalen Creek Project.

6. Engineering Update

Jim Gersema provided an update on engineering activities. Project staff have continued to coordinate with partners over last few months, including meeting with the Highway 61 and Saint Paul Issue Resolution Teams. Project staff also met with Hmong Village on April 3 to coordinate activities on Phalen Boulevard and with the White Bear Lake Area School District to coordinate on improvements in White Bear Lake.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

There are four layouts progressing through the Minnesota Department of Transportation's staff approved layout process. The Highway 36 layout signature process complete, the Arcade Street final signature is in process, the I-694 crossing layout has been updated and resubmitted, and the Highway 61 layout is being updated to address comments received.

Project staff are also coordinating with the Minnesota Department of Transportation on preliminary bridge plan reviews. One change that came out of this review process is that the bridge span length of the I-694 crossing was reduced. This reduction will provide a capital cost savings for the project and will not impact future operations of the interstate corridor.

Councilmember Yang commented that she has been hearing from constituents who want to see a redesign of Arcade Street and asked if the project work is separate from that. Jim Gersema replied that the layout review is limited to where the Rush Line project overlaps with Arcade Street. As part of the layout review process, project staff discussed future improvements planned by the Minnesota Department of Transportation to make sure project improvements are not conflicting with what we know now about future plans. Councilmember Yang agreed that it is in everyone's best interest to coordinate.

Shannon Watson asked if the I-694 bridge is physically shrinking. Jim Gersema said that the design initially provided more clear space to make sure the project did not preclude future interstate improvements. Through coordination with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration, project staff were able to finetune the design and bring the ends of the bridge closer to the highway. This shortened the length of the proposed bridge over the interstate.

An attendee asked the following question in the chat: "What will the Rush Line look like and what possible options will occur should public resistance to the project in White Bear Lake be successful?" Andy Gitzlaff replied that project staff have been working with White Bear Lake and the other municipalities along the line from the beginning of the process. The last check point with the city was about a year ago when the city endorsed the 15 percent plans. Project staff will continue to work with the city council, who can provide guidance on whether changes should be made as the project moves forward. Frank Alarcon added that the project produced an animated video of the proposed station in downtown White Bear Lake and encouraged those who are interested to view it [here](#).

7. Landscape Design Approach

Jeanne Witzig discussed the project's landscape design approach. This is one of the areas project staff have focused on to prepare for the project's transition to the Metropolitan Council. The goal is to find a balance between having a consistent identity and honoring the local context, all the while considering cost and maintenance. The design recommendations are tailored to complement the existing landscape character, natural environment and surrounding land use.

The Landscape Design Approach document includes analysis of existing landscape conditions, a summary of public engagement outcomes, and recommendations on landscape design that take into account the context of the area and project elements. This document built off the work completed for the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide, the corridor-wide Visual Quality Manual, and the tree inventory summary. It also took into account Metro Transit's design criteria, Ramsey County standards and applicable requirements from municipal codes and ordinances.

Public engagement responses informed landscape design recommendations, including utilizing native landscape features for buffers and screening, maximizing green space, protecting and enhancing vegetation for screening and wildlife habitat, using natural methods of stormwater treatment, and safety and security. The recommendations provide guidance for landscape within specific zones,

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

including stations, at-grade crossings, stormwater facilities, BRT and trail segments, and grade separation. Preliminary station site plans that include lighting, fencing, pavement markings, transit elements and plantings are included in the Landscape Design Approach document.

The tree inventory was conducted to identify and document the existing tree cover in the Ramsey County rail right-of-way between Johnson Parkway and Buerkle Road, except for Beam Avenue to County Road D. The tree inventory identified the type, size and condition of trees. Type C trees, which were defined as invasive, fast growth/weak wooded and pest susceptible, were the most prevalent in the corridor, with about three-fourths of trees in that category. Nearly two-thirds of trees were in good health at time of the survey, and about two-thirds were within the smallest size category (6- to 11-inch diameter at breast height). Project staff mapped the data from the inventory on the concept plans. The goal is to avoid Type A (durable, slow growth, hard-wooded, seasonal interest) and Type B trees (common, medium growth, seasonal interest) and larger trees to the extent practicable as design advances. The land use along the route will also be considered to keep as much vegetative screening as possible by residential properties while taking into account safe design and operations. The tree inventory will be a valuable tool to use as the project design advances.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Councilmember Yang thanked attendees for taking time to join the meeting today. She noted that committee members will not answer questions asked during the public comment period and asked that commenters limit their statements to 3 minutes. People can submit additional comments or questions to project staff at info@rushline.org.

Cindie Bloom

Cindie stated that she is from White Bear Lake and is one of the letter writers in the *White Bear Press*. In her opinion, the project will have a great impact to the city. Previously she had asked the project team to stay curious and stay engaged on what impact the project has to White Bear Lake and other communities along the line. Based on the discussions today, she realized that the cities along the line and Ramsey County aren't the deciding factor, the Metropolitan Council is. At any point during this, especially because of significant changes due to COVID, where is the opportunity or requirement for a re-look at the data points? Based on the things she has been looking at, there are changes to the information being used and assumptions made. In any large project, there needs to be some point where facts are reassessed. Sometimes that requires pulling back or adjusting the length of the line or the duration of service. From a community member perspective, it feels like voices aren't being heard. When reviewing comments, what is going to be the process to respond to them? Project staff talked about community events and virtual events coming up. From a resident of White Bear Lake's perspective, it feels a little bit like you can make a comment, but project staff aren't going to do anything about it.

Greg Lees

Greg stated that he couldn't agree more with Cindie. There was a meeting that was held a couple years ago at White Bear Lake city hall that allowed people to come look at conceptual drawings of potential station locations and vote on station locations. The implication was "we're going to do this to you, you guys get to pick." The most telling thing was the most successful location was the least obvious location for White Bear Lake. He felt summarily ignored by Commissioner Reinhardt and others at that meeting. Since that time, he has seen many people writing letters to the *White Bear Press* questioning the efficacy for White Bear Lake and impacts, especially with the high school expansion which will create lots of traffic. Rush Line was conceived years ago when it was supposed

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

to be a rail line between downtown Saint Paul and Rush City, and it has morphed into this. The idea of taking a hiking and biking trail and widening it to run buses on it doesn't make any sense, especially in a COVID world where ridership on public transit is tanking. He's hoping the citizens of White Bear Lake can come together and put a stop to this coming to White Bear Lake.

NEXT MEETING

July 15, 2021
2:30-4:30 p.m.