Meeting Summary

Policy Advisory Committee Meeting #4

**Date:** July 15, 2021

**Time:** 9:30-11:00 a.m.

**Location:** Virtual

# Attendees

## Committee Members

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Organization | Present |
| Mike Barnes | Minnesota Department of Transportation | X |
| Tyler Blackmon | Community representative | X |
| Tim Busse | City of Bloomington |  |
| Kris Fredson | Metropolitan Council | X |
| Debbie Goettel | Hennepin County |  |
| Bill Huepenbecker | Saint Paul RiverCentre | X |
| Pat Mancini | Business representative |  |
| Terry Mattson | Visit Saint Paul |  |
| Steffanie Musich | Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board | X |
| Rebecca Noecker | Saint Paul City Council |  |
| Rafael Ortega, Chair | Ramsey County Commissioner | X |
| Jill Ostrem | United Hospital |  |
| Bridget Rief | Metropolitan Airport Commission |  |
| Seth Taylor | Local 563 | X |
| Jamie Tincher | City of Saint Paul |  |
| Chris Tolbert | Saint Paul City Council | X |
| Shannon Watson | Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce | X |

## Agency and Project Staff

* Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County.
* Melissa Barnes, MnDOT.
* Mona Elabbady, consultant team.
* Sarah Ghandour, MnDOT.
* Adam Harrington, Metro Transit.
* Anton Jerve, City of Saint Paul.
* Ken Iosso, Ramsey County.
* Brian Isaacson, Ramsey County.
* Jennifer Jordan, Ramsey County.
* David Kelliher, Minnesota Historical Society.
* Jessica Laabs, consultant team.
* Haila Maze, consultant team.
* Sara Pflaum, MnDOT.
* Anna Potter, City of Saint Paul.
* Mike Rogers, Ramsey County.
* Kevin Roggenbuck, Ramsey County.
* Heidi Schallberg, Metropolitan Council.
* Jon Solberg, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
* Alicia Valenti, consultant team.
* Lyssa Washington, consultant team.

## Members of the Public[[1]](#footnote-1)

* Ebtehal Bahnasy.
* Douglas Carnival.
* Dalton Danielson.
* Michelle Leonard.
* Spencer Ludtke.
* Mike Luke.
* Sara Maaske.
* Jane McClure.
* Lisa Moe.
* Janet Moore.
* James Schoettler.
* Jay Severance.
* Suzanne Sobotka.
* Nick Thompson.

# Discussion Summary

## Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Rafael Ortega, committee chair, called the meeting to order. Mike Rogers led introductions.

## Virtual Meeting Procedures and Plan for Future Meetings

Jessica Laabs provided an overview of virtual meeting procedures.

## Community Engagement Updates

Lyssa Washington provided an overview of community engagement strategies and timeline. Lyssa provided a summary of community engagement efforts conducted from January through June 2021, including outcomes of the virtual open house held on June 23 and feedback heard throughout the six-month period.

Kevin Roggenbuck described the purpose and composition of the Community Advisory Committee as well as major issues for the committee to address. Kevin shared proposed changes to the Community Advisory Committee and Station Area Planning Task Force, as one Community Advisory Committee member resigned and new additions are recommended for both groups. Chair Ortega entertained a motion to approve the proposed changes to the Community Advisory Committee and Station Area Planning Task Force. Shannon Watson moved to approve changes to the two groups and Kris Fredson seconded. All Policy Advisory Committee members present were in favor.

## Purpose and Need Updates

Jessica provided an overview of the review process for the draft purpose and need statement and shared that the Policy Advisory Committee would be asked to endorse submittal of the statement for review by the Federal Transit Administration. Jessica summarized tribal comments on the draft purpose and need statement. These comments shared appreciation for the additional detail added to the statement regarding project goals and objectives and incorporation of tribal considerations. The Metropolitan Council assisted with refining the language in support of tribal interests and made recommendations for strengthening need statements. The Cities of Saint Paul and Bloomington provided minor comments related to goals and objectives, and Saint Paul provided additional safety data and other information to strengthen the needs statements.

Lyssa summarized the 45-day tribal review and comment period and described how the purpose and need statement was shared with stakeholders and the community. Lyssa provided an overview of the comments received on the purpose and need statement and of the feedback gathered through the open house.

Jessica shared that during the comment period, Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council suggested strengthening the need statements especially as they relate to the economic competitiveness of Saint Paul and how the Riverview Corridor Project can bolster this competitiveness. Comments also reflected a desire to emphasize connections to downtown, the airport and the Mall of America, as well as the local significance of the corridor. Jessica described changes to the purpose and need statement in response to public comments, noting that the purpose statement has not changed much. The third need statement was revised to focus on the corridor’s economic competitiveness rather than a gap in existing transit service. The data used in developing the purpose and need statement supports the focus on the economic competitiveness of Saint Paul and the corridor overall. The fourth need statement was updated to address the need for expanded transit options.

Jessica requested that the Policy Advisory Committee endorse submittal of the purpose and need statement for review by the Federal Transit Administration. Chair Ortega invited a motion. Kris Fredson moved to endorse submittal of the purpose and need statement for review by the Federal Transit Administration and Shannon Watson seconded the motion. All Policy Advisory Committee members present were in favor.

## Refinement of Locally Preferred Alternative

Jennifer Jordan provided an update on the issue resolution team approach. The four issue resolution teams initially met once a month; the West 7th and Downtown Saint Paul teams have been paused to focus on questions in the Bdote/Fort Snelling and Airport/Bloomington issue resolution teams. Jessica noted that decisions related to Bdote can have an influence on the full project, so project staff are working to resolve questions in this area before advancing work in other parts of the corridor. Jessica said that project staff are also meeting with representatives from the City of Bloomington on a monthly basis. The goal is to resolve all issues with the appropriate people and use this information to develop two Build Alternatives by early 2022 and begin advancing engineering and environmental work. Jessica stated that at least one Build Alternative would be rail-based and may include more than one option, adding that if evaluation of a bus option is needed then there would also be a bus-based Build Alternative.

### Airport/Bloomington Issue Resolution Team

Jessica shared that the Airport/Bloomington issue resolution team has been working to determine how the Riverview Corridor Project would interact with the existing airport tunnel, how it would interline with the METRO Blue Line in Bloomington and how to connect to the Mall of America. Jessica summarized progress on resolving these questions and next steps for the issue resolution team. Jessica noted that the Mall of America is not part of the issue resolution team because these teams are comprised by agency and project staff and said that project staff are working to with Mall representatives to identify potential connections to the Mall. Jessica said the goal is to have this question resolved in advance of the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

### Bdote/Fort Snelling Issue Resolution Team

Jessica showed the connection through Bdote and Fort Snelling as identified in the locally preferred alternative as well as additional options that are under consideration. Jessica explained the priority order for working through technical issues. The first issue to address is how to use the Highway 5 tunnel crossing the river and whether it can be expanded. Jessica noted that tribal partners are concerned about additional disturbance in that area. The second issue to address is the connection to the METRO Blue Line, which includes interlining at the existing Fort Snelling station and tunnel operations.

Jessica provided a progress update for Bdote. Project staff are working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and with tribal partners to understand the current condition of the tunnel and areas of previous disturbance. Project staff are coordinating with the issue resolution team to develop evaluation criteria for the four tunnel connection options. Jessica shared that there are some competing interests with the aim to protecting environmental and cultural resources while balancing these goals with operational concerns. Project staff are working through these with the issue resolution team and higher-level staff at partner agencies.

Jessica shared that project staff are meeting with partners to understand needs for the METRO Blue Line connection and the alignment through Fort Snelling. Jessica said that questions include property ownership challenges, potential for bluff disturbance, and potential disruption to the Upper Post development, which is an ongoing historic site refurbishment overseen by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources with historic and architectural concerns.

### Next Steps

The next steps for refining the locally preferred alternative are to:

* Apply evaluation criteria for decision-making.
* Discuss conflicting priorities of project partners with the Strategic Management Team.
* Identify areas to maximize ridership and limit costs.
* Identify most competitive streetcar alternative.

Tyler Blackmon asked if there is a timeline for this decision-making. Jessica said the initial goal is to have clear direction for Fort Snelling by the end of the year and that ongoing work regarding ridership and cost will influence this direction. Project staff are working toward identifying Build Alternatives by early 2022. Jennifer added that the ongoing work will allow for decision-making to proceed in the fall of 2021. Tyler asked if the Build Alternatives will identify the amount of dedicated right-of-way for the project. Jessica said that dedicated right-of-way is currently under discussion and that project staff will focus on how much of the project will use dedicated right-of-way once Build Alternatives are identified.

Mike Barnes said that the Minnesota Department of Transportation has been meeting to monitor activities and work through topics such as assessing bridge conditions. Mike stated that MnDOT will request additional data about traffic and potential impacts to the regional system resulting from new traffic signals, lane reductions or other changes. Mike noted that tribal coordination also has implications for the relationship between the state government and tribal partners. Mike said MnDOT may request additional data and appreciates the partnership. Jessica said that traffic questions have been raised in issue resolution team and Strategic Management Team meetings. Jessica noted that Sarah Ghandour has passed along the message that MnDOT will request additional data. Mike said that traffic impacts, road design features and other changes will influence who will own and operate Highway 5.

## Station Area Planning Task Force Updates

Frank Alarcon gave update on station area planning work. Frank explained that the station area planning work focuses on the area within one-half mile of each station in Saint Paul. Station area planning considers land use and opportunities to improve the public realm as well as bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure at and around stations. The Station Area Planning Task Force includes community members who live in, work in or have other ties to the Saint Paul portion of the Riverview Corridor. Frank noted that the Station Area Planning Task Force has met each of the last three months and described the purpose of each meeting.

## Cultural Landscape Study Update

Jennifer described the purpose of the Cultural Landscape Study and noted that the study area begins at Bdote and encompasses the area within a two-mile radius of the site on both sides of the river.

## Public Comment

### Jay Severance

Jay said that there appear to be two alternatives: one with streetcar and one with bus rapid transit in the event a streetcar connection through Fort Snelling is not feasible. Jay stated that he did not see the utility of eliminating rail as an option and noted that other alternatives for crossing the river have been suggested, which he said may be less expensive than crossing at Fort Snelling. Jay asked whether these alternatives might be evaluated or if rail would be eliminated from consideration if a solution for crossing at Fort Snelling is not found.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting may be held in person. The date has yet to be determined.

1. This list includes members of the public who signed in. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)