

MEETING SUMMARY

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #6

Date: February 24, 2022
Time: 9:30-11:00 a.m.
Location: Virtual

ATTENDEES

Committee Members

Name	Organization	Present
Mike Barnes	Minnesota Department of Transportation	
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	X
Rafael Ortega, Chair	Ramsey County Commissioner	X
Jill Ostrem	United Hospital	
Bridget Rief	Metropolitan Airport Commission	X
Seth Taylor	Local 563	X
Jamie Tincher (alternate Russ Stark)	City of Saint Paul	X
Chris Tolbert (legislative aide Adam Yust attended in his place)	Saint Paul City Council	X
Shannon Watson	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	X

Agency and Project Staff

- Jay Demma, Perkins+Will.
- Mona Elabbady, SRF Consulting.
- Ken Iosso, Ramsey County.
- Jennifer Jordan, Ramsey County.
- Catherine Judd, HNTB, Inc.
- Jessica Laabs, Kimley-Horn.

- Haila Maze, Bolton & Menk.
- Mike Rogers, Ramsey County.
- Kevin Roggenbuck, Ramsey County.
- Alicia Valenti, SRF Consulting.
- Lyssa Washington, 4RM+ULA.
- Grant Wyffels, Kimley-Horn.
- Kristen Zschomler, Mead & Hunt

Members of the Public¹

- Dalton Danielson.
- Bill Emory on behalf of Hennepin County Railroad Authority Chair Irene Fernando.
- Kevin Gallatin, Community Advisory Committee Co-Chair.
- Sarah Ghandour, Metro Transit.
- Joe Gladke, Hennepin County.
- Adam Harrington, Metro Transit.
- Mathews Hollinshead.
- David Kelliher, Minnesota Historical Society.
- Spencer Ludtke.
- Sara Maaske, Metropolitan Council.
- Scott Mareck, Ramsey County.
- Jane McClure.
- Erin Mitchell, Metro Transit.
- Sara Pflaum, MnDOT.
- Anna Potter, City of Saint Paul.
- Heidi Schallberg, Metropolitan Council.
- James Schoettler.
- Fay Simer, MnDOT.
- Jon Solberg, MnDOT.
- Greg Struve.
- Nick Thompson, Metro Transit.
- Two call-in attendees.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

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

2. Virtual Meeting Procedures and Plan for Future Meetings

Jessica Laabs provided an overview of virtual meeting procedures.

3. Blue Line Riverview Connection Study

Scott Mareck provided an overview of the Blue Line Riverview Connection Study, which is examining connections between the METRO Blue Line, METRO A Line and the Riverview Corridor Project. Scott outlined the project schedule and described ongoing and upcoming public engagement efforts, including a public meeting scheduled for March 21. Scott described the project management approach and decision-making process. Russ Stark noted the waterfront marina project that is planned and under development and asked if circulation and connections in this area were being considered. Mike Rogers confirmed that the study would consider this area. Kris Fredson asked if the project team has been in touch with the Highland Park District Council. Scott said project staff would meet with the Highland Park District Council

¹ This list includes members of the public who signed in.

on March 18 and with the Longfellow Community Council on March 3. Scott noted that staff already met with the Union Park District Council on February 14.

4. Station Area Planning Task Force Update

Jay Demma provided an update about the Station Area Planning Task Force. Jay noted the station areas and topics that the task force is currently focused on. Jay said that in addition to meeting with the Station Area Planning Task Force, the station area planning team has been conducting broader public engagement efforts including online surveys. Jay summarized results of the survey that was conducted in November and December 2021 and gave an overview of station area planning next steps for March through May 2022.

5. Engineering and Pre-Environmental Update

Airport/Bloomington Issue Resolution

Jessica Laabs shared an update on the Airport/Bloomington Issue Resolution Team (IRT). The IRT is examining two options for the Mall of America Transit Center, both of which are aligned along 82nd Street; one is at grade and one is elevated. Metro Transit wants to make sure these options address user preferences and project staff are continuing conversations with the Federal Transit Administration about removing existing METRO Blue Line tracks south of 82nd Street. Jessica provided an overview of next steps for the Airport/Bloomington IRT. Bridget Rief asked if the diverging diamond at 34th Avenue and I-494 was being evaluated. Jessica confirmed that project staff are conducting some traffic analysis in this area. Shannon Watson asked if the World's Fair was being considered in the planning process. Jessica clarified that the World's Fair site is next to the Mall of America and that while it will be held in 2027, before the Riverview Corridor Project is constructed, it has been part of the conversation.

Bdote/Fort Snelling Issue Resolution

Jessica described key topics for the Bdote/Snelling IRT including an update on coordination with tribal partners. Jessica said the IRT has ongoing meetings to investigate issues beyond the tunnel including options for the bridge and alignment. Jessica described the technical issues that led to elimination of the “transit flyover” option. Kris Fredson thanked the group for following up on this option. Jessica described the single-track and mixed-traffic alignment alternatives and said these options are being evaluated further.

Jessica provided an overview of three concepts for a pedestrian and bicycle crossing over the Mississippi River. Concept 1 requires a cut into the rock that is considered sacred by Native communities, which is a cause for concern among tribal partners. This option also includes switchbacks, which are not ideal for pedestrians and bicyclists. Concept 2 offers the most flexibility for creating viewing areas and allowing separation between pedestrians and bicyclists. Tribal partners have said this option could provide space for events and activities. Concept 3 provides a more direct connection for pedestrians and bicyclists to the Fort Snelling area and the area of remembrance, shown in pink in the presentation.

Shannon asked if there would be any safety benefit or drawback to adding a lid on the bridge span to protect vehicles from the elements. Jessica said that it would prolong the tunnel effect

along this segment, though it would be open on the sides. Jessica added that there would be higher fences in this concept to prevent pedestrians and bicyclists from throwing items. Grant Wyffels said that the lid might change sound reflection but would not create a safety issue. Shannon asked if a lid would help prevent the bridge from getting icy and unsafe in the winter. Jessica said that project staff would ask MnDOT partners for more information on this topic.

Russ Stark asked if Concept 2 would cause disturbance like Concept 1 does. Jessica replied that Concept 2 would be constructed mostly in areas that have already been disturbed. Russ asked the same for Concept 3. Jessica said that project staff need to conduct more analysis to determine potential effects and noted that tribal partners also asked this to be investigated. Rock cut could possibly be avoided but more investigation is needed.

Rebecca Noecker asked how much each alternative would affect the overall project cost. Jessica said project staff would conduct this evaluation as a next step in this work. Rebecca asked if there would be an order of magnitude cost difference between any of the concepts and how each alternative would affect the bridge itself. Grant responded that Concept 2 and possibly Concept 1 would require a new bridge, noting that a lot of structure would be added adjacent to the bridge with reinforcements and widened piers. Grant said the extent of this work would help determine whether a new bridge or a retrofit would be more appropriate. Concept 3 would most likely require only an extension of piers and a new, separate pier structure, and therefore it is the concept for which using the existing bridge is most viable. Grant shared that Concept 2 would be the most expensive of the three. Rebecca noted that there were estimates in the Pre-Project Development Study for the cost of different bridge options and asked if the cost of these concepts is consistent with the initial estimates. Grant confirmed that preliminary figures are within the range established in the Pre-Project Development Study and noted that project staff have not yet created a more detailed cost estimate. Jessica added that project staff are coordinating with the MnDOT structures group to understand the work that bridge improvements would require. Rebecca expressed that she would like cost estimates to be completed in parallel with other aspects of concept evaluation. Rebecca requested that there be an opportunity for the Policy Advisory Committee to discuss any estimates exceeding the Pre-Project Development Study values. Rebecca said she did not want to advance a design that would not be feasible because of cost. Jessica stated that project staff would advance cost estimates to avoid this issue.

Russ Stark asked if the cost of the two Mall of America concepts was also compared with estimates from the Pre-Project Development Study. Grant confirmed that this comparison was made and that the revised costs are generally consistent with or slightly greater than the initial estimates. Grant noted that the cost would depend on how the elevated structure in this area is implemented and said that if this station becomes a signature station with many amenities, additional funding will be needed or costs will need to be reduced elsewhere.

Bridget Rief asked if certain river crossing concepts would require an entirely new bridge only because of pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure or if construction of the streetcar itself would require a new bridge. Bridget expressed concern about the impacts to the transportation system caused by reconstruction of the bridge. Jessica said that project staff are working with MnDOT to identify the improvements that could be made to the existing bridge to accommodate modern streetcar. Grant added that project staff are coordinating with MnDOT to identify the conditions

under which construction of a new bridge would be needed instead of enhancements to and reinforcement of the existing bridge. Grant shared that Concepts 1 and 2 are more likely to require a new bridge, while Concept 3 could require either reinforcements or reconstruction. For clarification, Jessica asked if a new bridge would be required to accommodate only the streetcar. Grant said that if the pedestrian infrastructure were left in its current condition, likely only bridge modifications (not a new structure) would be required to accommodate the additional load.

Jessica shared that the IRT has identified two options to carry forward to evaluate for the connection to the METRO Blue Line. One option travels under the METRO Blue Line while the other passes over at Highway 55. These options are similar to the two identified in the Pre-Project Development Study.

Saint Paul Issue Resolution

Grant provided an overview of the current focus of the Saint Paul IRT for the West 7th Street portion of the route, which includes streetscape features, consideration of off-wire streetcar, and a feasibility assessment for dedicated right-of-way along the route. Grant said that any decisions would be consistent with existing planning documents adopted by the City of Saint Paul. Grant provided an overview of next steps for the IRT.

Tyler Blackmon asked what assumptions are being used for evaluation of the CP Spur option and what public engagement has been conducted. Mike Rogers said that Ramsey County is working to determine whether there is a need to purchase the spur for the Riverview Corridor Project. Mike said that if there is a clear need, Ramsey County will consider buying it, but if not, the acquisition would have to be for a separate project. Mike added that the County has not discussed the spur with Canadian Pacific since the Pre-Project Development Study and noted the estimated cost of acquisition is \$40 million or more.

Kris Fredson asked for more detail about off-wire streetcar. Grant said there is new technology that allows streetcar to run off batteries for a short period, depending on the number of cars, weather and the distance between charging stations. Grant noted that there are several streetcars around the country that go off-wire for a mile or more and that project staff will conduct a technology review and present their findings to the IRT. Jessica added that if there is interest in off-wire technology, project staff will assemble materials to share with the Policy Advisory Committee or present findings at a future meeting. Kris said he also wanted to know about powering the streetcar through the tunnel and that the additional background information was helpful.

Grant provided an overview of the alignment through downtown Saint Paul and presented example engineering concepts for in front of Union Depot, noting that there is insufficient space in front of Union Depot to store trains for both the Riverview Corridor Project and METRO Green Line. Grant said that new in-line stations could be added in front of Union Depot or that more track could be built for train storage. Grant provided an overview of the impacts and benefits for each of the options and said it is possible to construct something in front of Union Depot, though it would be very challenging a require substantial property impacts. The City of Saint Paul has also expressed concern about the changes to the pedestrian environment of Lowertown that

would be required if Riverview served the front of the Depot. Grant said project staff along with the IRT are exploring other downtown alignment options that are outside of the Locally Preferred Alternative alignment. Jessica added that project staff have asked partner agencies for their priorities in downtown to aid in the evaluation of other alignments. Jessica noted that these priorities are included in the presentation and requested to move forward to community engagement updates to conclude this meeting on time.

6. Community Engagement Updates

Kevin Roggenbuck introduced the community engagement update agenda item and provided a brief summary of the February 17 Community Advisory Committee meeting. Kevin Gallatin, co-chair of the committee, expressed appreciation for project staff and the comprehensive information provided throughout the process. Kevin Gallatin shared that members of the Community Advisory Committee members are interested in the CP Spur west of West 7th and the University of St. Thomas offer to purchase this land. Kevin said committee members would like to see a public option for this land. Kevin noted it is somewhat difficult to provide input for station area plans without knowing the exact station locations and shared that there was some surprise regarding the consideration of using West 7th Street for downtown routing that would approach Lowertown from the north. Kevin said that eliminating Option 1 at the river crossing seems to be beneficial from a cultural resources perspective and that the blufftop crossing would better accommodate people with disabilities and people with longer bikes or bike trailers. Kevin shared that there is consensus that bus and streetscape improvements along West 7th Street should be prioritized while Riverview Corridor Project planning proceeds.

Lyssa Washington provided an overview of recent public engagement activities as well as current and upcoming engagement opportunities.

7. Cultural Resource Update

Kristen Zschomler provided an update on the cultural resources process. Kristen shared that a Cultural Landscape Survey for the Bdote area is underway, which is significant because while the area is already considered historic, the contributing resources are mostly significant for European Americans. The Cultural Landscape Survey will identify the elements that tribal partners find valuable as well and aim to achieve same level of historic protection for these elements.

The Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the Section 106 evaluation will be determined later in 2022. The APE is used to identify historic properties that may be affected by the project. Kristen noted that the route and station locations will need to be more defined before the APE can be established. Once complete, Phase I of the Section 106 evaluation can begin. Kristen noted project staff are using an online mapping tool to conduct engagement regarding cultural resources.

8. Public Comment

Greg Struve

Greg is a resident of Saint Paul who has been following the Riverview Corridor Project for the past seven years. Greg shared his appreciation for Councilmember Noecker's attention to the cost estimates developed in the Pre-Project Development Study, which was completed in 2017. Greg said that the travel times and the impact of different options on travel times should be an even more important consideration. Greg noted that the best bus alternative would probably be faster than modern streetcar and asserted that if travel times become slower, ridership will be seriously affected. Greg said he has serious concerns about capacity impacts on Highway 5, given its importance as a connection to Saint Paul from Bloomington and the airport and that he would appreciate if these impacts were considered

James Schoettler

James said that a majority of the issues discussed during the meeting are the result of the decision to cross the Mississippi River at Highway 5. James said he wanted to remind the Policy Advisory Committee that for some reason Ramsey County has chosen to ignore consideration of a new crossing, such as a crossing at Highland Bridge, which James claimed would eliminate Fort Snelling area issues and add thousands of passengers because of the Highland Bridge development and the broader Highland Park neighborhood. James encouraged Policy Advisory Committee members to push for consideration of all crossing opportunities and said the Metropolitan Council is struggling with the METRO Blue and Green Line extensions because of bad decisions made by Hennepin County. James said the use of Highway 5 would create another bad situation and asked Ramsey County to open up analysis for a new river crossing.

9. Next Meeting

Date to be determined.