

# MEETING NOTES

## POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #9

**Date:** February 29, 2024  
**Time:** 1:00pm-2:30pm  
**Location:** Union Depot Red Cap Room

### ATTENDEES

#### Committee Members

Name	Organization	Present
Rafael Ortega, Chair	Ramsey County Commissioner	X
Pat Mancini	Business Representative	X
Tim Busse, Mayor	City of Bloomington	X
Jill Ostrem	United Hospital – Allina Health	X
Bridget Rief	Metropolitan Airport Commission	X
Seth Taylor	Laborers Union, Local #563	X
Russ Stark	City of Saint Paul	X
Amanda Duerr	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Brad Larsen	Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)	X
Debbie Goettel	Hennepin County Commissioner (District #5)	X
Becky Alper	Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board (MPRB)	X
Tyler Blackmon	Community Representative, Highland Park	X
Saura Jost	Saint Paul City Council Member (Ward #3)	X
Toni Carter	Metropolitan Council (District #14)	X
Rebecca Noecker	Saint Paul City Council Member (Ward #2)	X
Bill Huepenbecker	Saint Paul Arena Company	X

## Agency and Project Staff

- Alan Robbins-Fenger - National Park Service / Mississippi National River & Recreation Area
- Nick Thompson, Ryan Heath - Metro Transit
- Kyle Fisher - Metropolitan Airports Commission
- Mike Rogers, Jennifer Jordan, Kevin Roggenbuck – Ramsey County
- Bill Emory - Hennepin County Railroad Authority (On behalf of Chair Irene Fernando)
- Sean Kershaw, Anna Potter - City of Saint Paul
- Steven Brown, Christian Campbell - HNTB
- Ryan Bauman - HDR
- Jessica Laabs, Grant Wyffels - Kimley-Horn
- Mona Elabbady - SRF Consulting
- Lyssa Washington - 4RM+ULA
- Michael Sund - Perkins and Will
- Grant Martin - LoCi Consulting
- Christina Slattery - Mead & Hunt
- Michelle Terrell - Two Pines Resource Group
- Raquel Strand - Bolton & Menk
- Kara Johnson – NEKA Creative
- Dan Soler – Hennepin County

## Members of the public

- Paul Hardt - Chair of Transportation Committee, Fort Road Federation
- Julia McColley - Fort Road Federation
- Fred Melo – Pioneer Press
- Janet Moore – Star Tribune
- Katie Nicholson
- Patrick McNamara
- Jay Severance
- Joe Landsberger
- Timothy Marino
- Mathews Hollinshead
- Jim Schoettler
- Ken Iosso
- Adam Schwalbe
- Everett Ross Dalton
- Crystal Holt
- Sara Fleetham
- Kent Patterson

- Spencer Ludtke
- Greg Struve

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

### Welcome and Introductions

- Commissioner Ortega welcomed members and introductions were given.

### Land Acknowledgement

- Read by Jennifer Jordan (Ramsey County).

### Agenda Summary

- Jennifer provided a high-level project status overview.

### Project Overview and Upcoming Milestones

- Upcoming engagement schedule – Jennifer Jordan
  - After public consultation in the summer, the PAC will review feedback in the fall. The project is in its pre-environmental phase with following stages of analyzing data and advancing engineering. A key milestone is the PAC decision today, which will determine the options to present to the public.

### Additional Streetcar Information

- Additional streetcar information – Jessica Laabs, Kimley-Horn
  - Additional information on the streetcar project provided, including parking, traffic, construction strategies for businesses, and ridership data. Discussion of options for a modern streetcar operation and maintenance facility (OMF), with initial criteria including proximity to the streetcar, non-residential land use, and a minimum of five acres. Meetings with the City of Bloomington, Metro Transit, and the City of Saint Paul have identified potential sites in Saint Paul and the Fort Snelling area.
  - Visualizations were presented for streetcar options 1 and 2. These videos were provided as examples of what would be used for public outreach.

### Review of Bus Option

- Issue Resolution Process – Jessica
  - The team has also reviewed a Dedicated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) bus option, but it didn't advance due to limited opportunities for pedestrian public realm elements, parking impacts, bus operations, and limited transit advantages. The recommended Arterial BRT design includes 16 stations, shared lanes with traffic, nine downtown platforms, and uses the Gold Line (BRT) dedicated infrastructure.

- Russ Stark asked if capacity for downtown Gold Line infrastructure would accommodate extra buses. Jessica replied more detailed study would be needed. Initially Riverview could be accommodated.
- Travel time, ridership, cost – Mona Elabbady, SRF
  - Assumptions are as follows: calculating travel time, including peak hour traffic, mixed traffic variability, station dwell time, acceleration/deceleration, and delays at signalized intersections based on traffic volumes. The posted speed limit along the corridor is also considered.
  - The travel times compare the ABRT and Route 54 services. Ridership models use pre-Covid data from 2019 and considers factors like employment, modal switch, and land use. It was mentioned that updates to the model will be made in the future, but it's unclear when these will be complete. There's currently no developed ridership model for Route 54 as they are waiting on the Met Council for a regional ridership model.
    - Rebecca asked when updated models will be ready. Mona replied that Met Council is working on it concurrent to this study/phase.
    - Tim Busse asked if we have ridership for Route 54 post-pandemic. Mona replied yes, and that we can provide existing counts for Route #54 as a supplement. There are not models / forecasts for that route however.
    - Tyler Blackmon asked if Transit Signal Priority (TSP) was assumed. Mona, confirmed that yes it is assumed.
  - Overall cost assumptions for ABRT assumed 2023 as the base year, with 2030 revenue operations and a total capital cost of \$121 Million (2030).
    - Tyler asked if capital cost includes the reconstruction of west 7th street. Mona replied that it does not and it only assumes work at the area surrounding the stations. Tyler suggested in the future it will need to be included for a fair comparison and that information needs to be demonstrated to the public.
    - Tyler asked if the streetcar alternative includes road reconstruction. Mona confirmed yes it does.
  - Comparison by the numbers of Route 54 vs ABRT Differences were noted in the operation of ABRT. There was a consolidation of stations, with the number of stations being reduced by five. This was accompanied by an increase in service frequency, extending operating hours to start earlier and end later. As a result of these changes, the overall travel time on ABRT was decreased. Assumptions of comparison include regular dwell times and an electric fleet.
    - Russ noted that he is supportive of Battery Electric Buses (BEB) and asked if those costs were reflected. Mona replied yes, but there are additional details to be worked out with electric buses.
- ABRT Alignment by segments – Jessica
  - Bloomington stations have been consolidated due to low ridership, a decision supported by the IRT team. The bus service will serve Terminal 1, while the streetcar

will serve Terminals 1 and 2. The bridge's structure remains unchanged with ABRT. However, Fort Snelling Station is not included, and no new bike or pedestrian facilities are introduced.

- Davern/Norfolk Avenue Station, which has a different alignment, has piqued the interest of the City of Saint Paul due to the high-density development in the area. Lastly, the downtown area will see a different alignment compared to the streetcar route. Traffic studies will be key, parties have agreed to concentrate service downtown.
- Review of bus option and comparison to streetcar options – Jennifer
  - A graphic was presented to illustrate this comparison numerically. One key finding was that the service frequency is consistent across both options. However, there was a concern raised about the streetcar operating in mixed traffic.
    - Toni Carter asked that in terms of capital cost, how much of that is street construction. Jennifer replied that forecasts are \$100-\$200 million for street construction costs in addition to ABRT costs.
    - Russ asked what the difference in passenger capacity is. Jennifer replied that based on a one car model, for a streetcar it is roughly 140 (full car) and the ABRT has capacity for 48 people. Frequency remains the same. Russ added that Route 54 already has crush loads.
    - Tyler suggested these are misleading capital costs and travel time. ABRT should include street reconstruction costs, and many people do not ride a line end to end. Tyler suggested we need to see data on travel times within Saint Paul alone.
    - Saura Jost (Ward 3) asked whether costs broken up by segment. Costs in Saint Paul, costs of bridge reconstruction. Jennifer replied that BRT is anticipating using the east metro garage and that as we are talking about Route 54, we should continue to add data for each row and column.

## Comparison of West 7<sup>th</sup> Streetcar Options and ABRT

- Comparison of high-level differentiators between options - Jennifer
  - The comparison of the two streetcar options with BRT reveals several differentiators and value trade-offs
  - Streetcar Option 1: The catenary wire would be centrally located, reducing conflicts with trees. However, left turn lanes and through-movements are restricted to signalized intersections, and on-street parking would be removed.
  - Streetcar Option 2: Some believe this option is more pedestrian-friendly due to curb-running stations. However, there's a trade-off between reliability and traffic movements. Delivery parking is more flexible but would require further study in the next phase.
  - ABRT: This option offers a better chance of reliability as it's not confined to a track. All traffic movements are allowed at intersections as they currently are, and there's minimal parking loss.

- Citizen Advocates for Regional Transit (CART) member asked to elaborate on project schedules. Metro Transit would work out the ABRT timeline. Streetcar timeline is looking for 2033 revenue service date.
- Bigger picture differences. ABRT – street reconstruction would not be funded at the federal level. Bridge reconstruction would not be funded at federal level.
  - Amanda Duerr asked for clarification, on compatibility for streetcar if sharing alignment with Blue Line. Jennifer replied yes as they are similar vehicles, and Riverview can utilize existing infrastructure with blue line today.

## Economic Development Analysis Results

- Overview of results comparing high-level differentiators between options – Grant Martin
  - The economic development of the project is being analyzed with a focus on the appreciation of real estate value and new development spurred by new transit investment. This analysis is not a “return on investment” study and is solely focused on the City of Saint Paul. It does not compare Streetcar Option 1 and 2, as developers, residents, and businesses are primarily interested in good accessibility.
  - Four studies have been conducted, including the West Broadway study, Oklahoma City streetcar, Denver, and Dallas. The review of these studies finds that market conditions and supportive public policy, such as zoning, have the most significant impact.
  - In terms of development trends in the Twin Cities Metro Area, the quality and frequency of transit are critical. However, developers have expressed concerns about crime and ridership
  - ABRT is more valuable in dedicated transit lanes. Are there data/studies that show the difference between dedicated BRT and mixed traffic BRT in terms of development?
  - These are not options currently on the table to use for understanding development trends. This is a high-level analysis so we did not want to focus on questions that may not have definitive answers.
    - Tim asked if there was consideration of dedicated guideway BRT development impacts. Grant replied this study did not consider that.

## Community Advisory Committee (CAC) update

- Overview of engagement activities to date, report and plan forward – Kevin Roggenbuck, Ramsey County
  - On Tuesday, February 27th, the CAC met. This committee discussed the potential loss of parking on West 7th Street, maintaining the affordability of housing (property tax increases) on West 7<sup>th</sup>, the community’s desire to maintain a 10-minute frequency for public transit until 11pm to accommodate events, and understanding the benefits of streetcar and ABRT beyond just development/investment.
  - The community engagement plan was another key topic discussed during the meeting. The plan emphasizes in-person engagement, which includes a variety of events and meetings. These include open house public meetings, pop-up events

held twice a month, District Council briefings, and a special event for the Highway 5 mill and overlay project. Additional focus will be paid to underrepresented groups, pedestrians and transit riders, and local project area businesses

### **PAC Action item: Approve new CAC member**

- Paul Hardt – West 7<sup>th</sup> Ford Road Federation (appointed).
  - Paul’s goal is to keep the process moving, as he is worried the project will continue to lose engagement the further the process is prolonged.

### **Public Comment**

- Paul Hardt (Speaking as resident in the neighborhood, not for on behalf of the Fort Road Federation) Stated that the Frogtown neighborhood was heavy into building LRT in 2008-2010. We can learn a lot from past transit projects. Important to support businesses during construction of LRT. I would not be favor in taking away most parking and is vital to businesses. Build parking ramps
- Katie Nicholson (Lives in Highland Park) Stated ABRT and Streetcar are not ideal for this corridor. Lack of connection to Terminal 2 is devastating. TSP should be considered for the whole corridor.
- Greg Struve (CART) Stated the summary only leaves you with two rationale alternatives. Either continue increase Route 54 service or ABRT service. Discard rail alternatives. The construction of the streetcar would severely harm their 7<sup>th</sup> street business.
- Patrick McNamara (Works at MSP Terminal 1) Stated that Delta has increased bus service since public safety concerns of Terminal 1 LRT Station. The bus station at the airport is very busy already. As a frequent rider of Route 54, the corridor is important to immigrant communities and is a supporter of the ABRT option.
- Joe Landsberger (President of District 9 community council) Opposes rail on 7<sup>th</sup> street. Joe who was on the station planning task force, stated the cost to businesses and their customers must be evaluated. There is a strong existing business community.
- Jay Severance stated neither streetcar options bring enough benefits to out-compete the ABRT options. Capacity to is critical to comparative advantage of streetcar. We need to evaluate ridership and capacity issues.
- Adam Schwalbe stated we should look to the future; think long term. Believes streetcar options are the best options we have on the table. Adam added they are a student who hopes to stay in Saint Paul.
- Tim Marino stated their interest in community engagement process. Tim expressed there is a lot of frustration on options presented. Tim wants consideration for LRT and rail options that are faster that bring real time benefits. Tim is concerned with 40% contingency for rail and wants to see bridge replacement costs included in total costs. Tim stated what qualifies for federal money is essential. Wants to see the

public have real alternatives that represent full array of options and the true trade-offs.

- Mathews Hollinshead (On station planning task force) Asked has it been considered in combining BRT options with the gold line and purple line routes (one seat rides from MOA to Gold or Purple line terminus). Matthew asked if there is consideration to combining construction as to only tear up the street once.
- Jim Schoettler (Member of CART) Stated that Riverview is one of the most important corridors in the metro area. Ramsey County pays focus on the local link, but not as a true regional link. The 7<sup>th</sup> street corridor needs a local transit option that is important, though the project must receive regional consideration.

### **PAC to release Streetcar and ABRT options to the public**

- Approved

### **Next Steps**

- Public Engagement Spring/Summer 2024
- Summer/Fall – PAC action on next steps for the project