

MEETING NOTES

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #8

Date: January 31, 2024
Time: 9:30 – 11:00am
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	Mayor, City of Bloomington	X
Jill Ostrem	United Hospital	X
Bridget Rief	Metropolitan Airports 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
Tyler Blackmon	Community Representative, Highland Park	X
Bill Huepenbecker	Saint Paul Arena Company	X
Steffanie Musich	Commissioner, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board	X
Khani Sahebjam	MnDOT Metro District Engineer	X
Chai Lee	Met Council District 13	X
Jaime Lucke Hendrickson	Visit Saint Paul	X
Saura Jost	Ward 3, Saint Paul	X

Agency and Project Staff

- Alan Robins-Fenger (Mississippi National River and Recreation Area) - National Park Service
- Nat Gorham, Sara Pflaum - MnDOT
- Kyle Fisher – Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)
- John Pacheco (Rep District 5), Elias Montesa (on behalf of Council Member Lee), Robbie King - Metropolitan Council
- Nick Thompson, Adam Harrington, Ryan Heath - Metro Transit
- Mike Rogers, Jennifer Jordan, Kevin Roggenbuck, Josh Olson - Ramsey County
- Bill Emory (on behalf of Commissioner Irene Fernando), Joe Gladke - Hennepin County
- Sean Kershaw, Anna Potter - City of Saint Paul
- Kevin Gallatin - Co-Chair, Community Advisory Committee
- Lyssa Washington - 4RM+ULA
- Steven Brown, Jason Gottfried - HNTB
- Ryan Bauman - HDR
- Jessica Laabs, Grant Wyffels - Kimley-Horn
- Christina Slattery - Mead & Hunt
- Michelle Terrell - Two Pines Resource Group
- Nicole Crossley - Raquel Strand - Bolton & Menk
- Kara Johnson - NEKA Creative

Members of the Public

- Sean Perlich - Saint Paul Area Chamber
- Paul Hardt – Chair, Transportation and Land Use Committee, Fort Road Assoc.
- Megan Duhr – President, Fort Road Association/West 7th Neighborhood
- Spencer Loettke – Transportation and Land Use Committee, Mac-Groveland Council
- Jay Severance - CAC Member/ Citizen Advocates for Regional Transit
- Jordan Frank-Shannon - West 7th Business Owner
- Janet Moore - Star Tribune
- Jiahong Pan – Freelance journalist
- Jane McClure - Villager Newspaper
- Johan Penn – Freelance journalist
- Damien Goble – Community Reporter
- Ken Stigley – Business Representative
- Dave Thune
- Christian Noyce
- Henry McDaniels
- Katie Nicholson

- Timothy Marino
- Paul Hardt
- Jay Severance
- Patrick Donahue
- Ben Turchi

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.
 - Review of the project in terms of where we're at with this phase and the upcoming milestones that we're anticipating in February and beyond.

Project Overview and Upcoming Milestones

Jennifer summarized the two Streetcar Options, with Option 1 having dedicated transit lanes from Mall of America (MOA) to Grand Avenue that transition from center running to side running with shared lanes from Grand Ave to Union Depot and 20 stations. Option 2 is substantially similar but features additional shared lanes from Otto Ave to Grand Avenue and two additional stations at Smith and Jefferson (22 stations total). Option 2 was more focused on Saint Paul priorities of narrowed pedestrian crossings, preserved parking, and wider pedestrian streetscapes. Both options would interline with Blue Line LRT (MOA to Fort Snelling/Bdote), and include a new elevated station at MOA, and new Highway 5 bridge with elevated ped/bike deck.

Recap of Streetcar Options

- Jennifer summarized the two Streetcar Options
 - Option 1 has dedicated transit lanes from Mall of America (MOA) to Grand Avenue, transitions from center running to side running with shared lanes from Grand Ave to Union Depot, and includes 20 stations.
 - Option 2 was developed in concert with Saint Paul priorities and is the same as Option 1 except for shared lanes from Otto Ave to Union Depot and two additional stations at Smith and Jefferson (22 stations total).
 - Both options would interline with Blue Line LRT (MOA to Fort Snelling/Bdote) and include a new elevated station at MOA and a new Highway 5 Bridge with elevated ped/bike deck.

Travel Time, Ridership and Cost

- Mona Elabbady, SRF Consulting summarized analysis results
 - Travel times were calculated at peak hour, accounting for mixed traffic variability, station dwell time, etc., using a speed limit of 25 mph on Kellogg Blvd, and 30 mph along W 7th St.
 - Travel times were comparable between the two options; both options and both directions are between 43 and 45 min. Both options have slightly longer travel times westbound than eastbound, and Option 2 is approximately 90 seconds longer than Option 1 in both directions.
 - Ridership modeling was based on 2019 existing conditions, with trips projected for 2019 and 2040. Projected trips are fairly comparable for both options. In 2040, Option 1 shows 11,600 trips, and Option 2 shows 11,200 trips. While Option 2 has two additional stations, ridership gains from the additional stations are offset by increased travel time.
 - Met Council is still in the process of developing the post-pandemic regional STOPS model. Ridership will be updated in the future with the new regional model when available.
 - Capital cost used 2023 as a base year and was escalated to year-of-expenditure (YOE) assuming a 2033 projected opening year. Option 1 is \$2.10 Billion, and Option 2 is \$2.12B. Estimates for both include a new elevated station at MOA, new Highway 5 bridge, track work, operations and maintenance facility (OMF), roadway reconstruction, other bridge work, stations, utilities, right of way (ROW), vehicles, etc. and 40% contingency.
 - Operating and maintenance (O&M) cost assumed frequencies of 10 minutes during the day and 30 minutes late night for both options. Annual O&M costs for Option 1 are \$34 Million in today's dollars, compared to \$34.5 M for Option 2 with the difference being the two additional stations.

Comparison by the Numbers

- Jennifer provided a snapshot comparison between the two streetcar options
 - Number of stations - 20 vs 22
 - Dedicated lanes – 87% vs 72%
 - Service frequency - Same
 - Travel time Westbound - Similar
 - Travel time Eastbound - Similar
 - 2040 ridership – 11,600 vs 11,200 using 2019 Data with new ridership forecasts using post pandemic data.
 - Capital Cost (2033) – similar with differences largely a result of number of stations.
 - Operations and maintenance cost (2023) – similar with differences largely a result of number of stations.
- Further ways to differentiate

- Balance of parking, access and mobility needs.
- Pedestrian access, opportunities behind the curb (pedestrians, trees, etc.) business access, vehicle turning movements (left turns are limited to signalized intersections in Option 1).
- Russ Stark asked whether the 40% contingency would lead to an actual project estimate closer to \$1.5 billion, and whether the total capital costs include the full reconstruction of West 7th Street? Jennifer replied that the total capital cost for streetcar does include the full reconstruction of West 7th Street.
- Khani Sahebjam asked if the total capital costs are estimated for the time of letting the contract or when the system would be operational in 2033 and whether the O&M cost includes snow and ice control. Mona replied that the cost estimate is based on the actual anticipated costs in the years of expenditure, and the O&M costs would reflect the snow and ice removal and maintenance.
- Tim Busse asked whether the ridership numbers include only end to end trips or also shorter trips. Mona replied that ridership presented includes all trips that use the project. Most riders will not ride the entire length of the line.

Mall of America to Highway 5 River Crossing

- Jessica Laabs, Kimley-Horn summarized details of the following segments
 - Elevated station along 82nd St above 24th Ave. at Mall of America. The existing station and rail across 24th/Killebrew would be removed, eliminating added delay at intersection for all modes, reducing Blue Line run time by two minutes, and allowing for additional developable land in the vacant parcel east of the mall.
 - Fort Snelling/Bdote Area / Interlining with Blue Line: Riverview can be accommodated with an additional MOA-bound track and platform at the existing Fort Snelling station to reduce disruptions to existing Blue Line operations.
 - To accommodate additional trains through the tunnel, the current operating rule of only one train in the tunnel at a time will need to be changed. This is an ongoing conversation with MAC and Metro Transit.
 - The project would result in the removal of the WB Highway 62 to SB Highway 5 ramp. The team recognizes that the MAC has concerns about this because 1,600-2,100 vehicles per day use this ramp, most heading to the airport. The ramp removal does allow a land connection to Historic Fort Snelling.
 - Proposed mitigation for the ramp removal would be to re-route traffic to Highway 55 and back, which minimizes environmental impacts compared to other options that were evaluated. Additional modelling is required to fully understand traffic impacts.
 - The project would include full replacement of the Highway 5 bridge with a new double-deck bridge; the full cost of this is included in the project cost estimate, though the team anticipates cost sharing opportunities.
 - Tribal and community programming could be accommodated on the upper deck of the bridge.

- The bridge would have two lanes dedicated for streetcar and three lanes for general traffic. The team evaluated whether to have the third lane flowing toward Saint Paul or toward the airport.
 - Only one lane toward Saint Paul introduced significant traffic safety and operational concerns with a high-speed merge near an on-ramp. Therefore, the project team concluded that the third lane should flow eastbound toward Saint Paul, with only one lane toward the airport.
 - The MAC would prefer the third lane flow toward the airport.
 - Saura Jost asked whether the cost estimate was based on the material shown in this concept and whether other materials were evaluated. Jessica replied that the team can make the estimate available.
 - Highway 5 Bridge transition point: some geometric changes would be required east of the bridge as the streetcar transitions from side-running on the bridge to center-running on West 7th Street.
 - A rendering was shown of the proposed Davern Street Station.
 - Tyler Blackmon asked whether there would be logistical/scheduling challenges for interlining with Blue Line. He has concerns over reliability with mixed traffic in particular. Jessica replied that the project is designed to maintain Blue Line reliability.
- Chai Lee asked about the process for the tribal engagement and about the agreement between MAC and Metro Transit regarding trains in the airport tunnels. Jessica noted that four tribes are part of the IRT for the Bdote Fort Snelling area and the team held separate meetings with the tribes. The bridge reflects their input to date. Additional National Park Service requirements and protections impacts design. Jessica added there are ongoing conversations with MAC and Metro Transit. Riverview would like to see changes to the tunnel to allow for appropriate ventilation, though there is ongoing conversation regarding this.
- Khani asked if there was consideration given to splitting the transit lanes to make them share the roadway. Jessica noted that the team did look at mixed traffic operations and providing one dedicated and one mixed streetcar lane so that there could be two lanes for general traffic in each direction. Grant Wyffels added that the project team looked towards directional flow with the concept of two dedicated lanes and three traffic lanes. What was learned was that traffic all day is bi-directional (evenly split throughout the day). Secondly, project team looked at mixed traffic lanes and the transitions looked to be challenging with how you get off of Highway 5. This resulted in introducing a traffic signal on the south side of the Bridge at Fort Snelling which was problematic for MnDOT. Went back to two dedicated lanes as preferred.
- Khani stated concerns with the discussion of the river bridge which may be interpreted as agencies priorities pitted against each other. He emphasized that we need to ensure we end up with a solution that balances all priorities.

West 7th Street

- Transition point from center-running guideway to side-running in mixed traffic is approximately Grand Avenue for Option 1 or Victoria Street for Option 2.
- Typical Section at Station (Randolph):
 - Russ stated concerns with Option 1 and the narrow sidewalk widths, which shows a width less than 10 feet. We are tracking that closely as that is a concern.
- Typical Sections (Victoria to Forbes) and Streetcar Option graphics comparisons (Randolph, Jefferson, Smith)
- Further Ways to Differentiate
 - Risks to speed and reliability: Option 2 has higher risk of vehicle blocking track and more sensitive to traffic congestion.
 - Balance of parking, vehicle access, pedestrian movement and green space: Option 1 has longer crossing distances and pedestrians must cross traffic lanes to access station, whereas Option 2 has shorter crossing distances and opportunities for curb extensions and access to station from curb.
 - Tyler Blackmon stated that concerns with greater pedestrian crossing distances can be mitigated with infrastructure (median refuges). Jessica noted it is possible but only at signalized intersections.
 - Access and streetscape comparisons (Otto Ave to Grand Ave)
 - Option 2 offers more opportunities for greenspace, boulevard space, snow storage, and separate pedestrians from the roadway.
 - Option 1 keeps around 35 parking spaces while option 2 keeps about 400 spaces
 - Option 1 prioritizes dedicated rail space and vehicular separation whereas Option 2 largely maintains vehicular access north of Otto Avenue
 - Streetcar Option 1 more dedicated equals more reliable transit service. Option 2 has more variability in travel times but shorter pedestrian crossings and wider pedestrian/streetscape realm. More potential for tree/catenary conflicts with Options 2, but Option 1 would leave less space for trees in boulevard.
- Russ expressed appreciation for the detailed discussion of the differences between the options and that it is important to understand tradeoffs between the speed and reliability of a regional transit trip. Saint Paul prefers Option 2 as a much better option in the local context of the corridor that services a regional transit connection. He added that Option 1 makes West 7th Street unrecognizable to many, with such limited pedestrian space and loss of local context.
- Tyler stated that stakeholders he hears from are deeply concerned about the erosion of dedicated ROW. Ideally people would like to see 100% dedicated ROW. He has concerns about unpredictability for people getting to work, etc. and emphasized the need to think of future ridership growth. He feels that lack of speed and reliability will be a hard sell for an expensive project.

- Pat Mancini stated that the presentation has not addressed construction concerns for any of the options. For transparency, it would be important to highlight the impacts of construction on the community and businesses affected.
- Chair Ortega added that these were all good points; having lived through Green Line, people need to know what the construction impacts will be. Jessica noted that we want the opinion of this group on what we should take to the public. Chair Ortega asked if it is possible to document the impacts and potential mitigation before going to the public. Jessica replied that the project team can give general terms at this point (length of construction, types of activities, etc.) and look to other projects for best practices.
- Bill Huepenbecker asked whether there will need to be a complete reconstruction of West 7th Street regardless of whether it is rail or bus. Jessica clarified that the bus option will not require reconstruction of the entire street while the streetcar will. Russ stated that while the bus option may not require a full reconstruction, the street will need that at some point. It would be best to do these projects during one time while we are out there doing work. Chair Ortega concurred.

Downtown Saint Paul

- Jessica stated that there is a lot more to be understood on Kellogg Avenue. If center-running on West 7th is chosen, rail could still be side-running on Kellogg, or vice versa. There are a number of interrelated projects with multiple Kellogg Bridges and the construction of the Capitol City Bikeway that may influence process/decisions moving forward.

Comparison of Streetcar Options

- Jennifer provided a recap of the quantitative and qualitative differences between the streetcar options. Largest differentiators are:
 - Number of stations
 - Lengths of center running (dedicated) vs. side running (mixed traffic) on West 7th Street
 - Preservation of street parking
- Chai asked how would the running times compare to Bus Route 54.
 - Mona replied that Route 54 travel time can be about 43 minutes during the peaks; both streetcar options are slightly longer (one to two minutes).
- Summary of qualitative differentiators
 - Option 1 does not conflict with trees though there is less room for a boulevard space (and vice versa).
 - Option 1 only allows for right in and right out turns at non-signalized intersections. Option 2 would not limit turning movements.
 - Option 1 removes on-street parking (35 spaces to remain vs 400 to remain with Option 2).
- Steffanie Musich asked about the impacts to mature trees, and the anticipated increase in costs with reduced surface space for newly planted trees to be successful. Jennifer

replied that Option 1 would have less impacts as a result of wires, though construction could still impact trees. Option 2 could have challenges with conflicts of the catenary wires and the existing mature trees, though space in the boulevard would help with new trees. It will be a block-by-block process during final design.

- Steffanie asked whether engineered soils would be considered with additional green infrastructure. Jennifer replied that these considerations will be looked at during the environmental phase, depending on the decision of the PAC to move forward.
- Bridget Rief asked about traffic diversion from the river bridge, and other tradeoffs between one lane versus two lanes in each direction, and if that is information that the public will have access to. Jennifer clarified that there is a report with those details that can be made available to the PAC and the public.

Community Advisory Committee Update

- Kevin Gallatin, Co-Chair of the CAC, summarized the recent CAC meeting and comments/responses from the group on the latest presentation:
 - Concerns towards the overall cost estimate and the extended timeline to the project planning phase.
 - Challenging geometry including potential vehicle backups, safety, onramps onto the highway.
 - Discussion of tradeoffs:
 - Closing some intersections could reduce travel times – conceptual idea.
 - Restriction of pedestrian crossing with the center alignment – tough to digest.
 - Drastic reduction in on-street parking for businesses is a concern – Suggestion to look at parking beyond West 7th (parking in the whole travelshed).
 - Truck access for unloading and loading for the many small businesses – encourage project team to evaluate.
 - Minimal travel time difference between Option 1 and 2 was surprising.

Next Steps

- Next meeting is in-person, Thursday, February 29 from 1:00-2:30 pm. at Union Depot. The subject of this meeting will be:
 - The bus option / comparison of the streetcar options to the bus option.
 - Presenting the outcomes of the economic impact analysis concerning the impact of streetcar and bus on West 7th and through Downtown Saint Paul.
 - The PAC will be asked to take action on going to the public with options, whatever configuration that will be. This would result in public engagement efforts in spring/summer.
- Tim Busse stated that there are examples here in the Twin Cities (Blue, Green Lines) that can be applied to topics we have talked about today, and issues such as pedestrian safety, electromagnetic interference, business impacts, unforeseen impacts, etc. that we can glean going forward.

Public Comment

- Katie Nicholson, a Highland Park resident, expressed support for a dedicated rail option, and did not support arterial bus rapid transit (aBRT) due to the lack of dedicated lanes, which are critical for maintaining reliability and speed. Katie stated that dedicated lanes are most critical in the most congested part of the corridor (closer to Grand Ave). Katie recognized concerns over removal of parking but stated there are ample parking ramps adjacent along the corridor. Katie stated that rail is a great benefit to residents and businesses, especially on game days during home Wild games and that transfers from transit lines like Purple and Gold line are a concern with less-than-optimal reliability/capacity along Riverview.
- Tim Marino, a Dayton Bluff resident, stated that while the price tag is high, a train can be worth the investment if we give it the priority it needs. Tim stated that a pedestrian crossing dedicated rail space (bells and warning signals, etc.) is safer than crossing vehicle lanes. Tim added that sidewalks would be narrower, but only near stations, and suggested the possibility of widening sidewalks by reducing lane widths which has worked well in Minneapolis. Tim observed that adding stations loses more riders than it gains with slow speed and reliability, and this speed matters because getting ridership up is important for federal funding. Tim noted that with dedicated right-of-way a train can move at higher speeds to make up time and there is no need for two lanes in each direction on West 7th and Kellogg Boulevard. He cited the East 7th project between Mounds Boulevard and Arcade Street that is going to have a four to three lane conversion and has 2,000 more cars per day than West 7th in this stretch, and added that MnDOT recommends four to three lane conversions when traffic counts are less than 20,000. 44 minutes end to end is disappointing as it has no gain from Route 54 travel times today. Tim questioned how Option 1 is only 90 seconds less than Option 2 with dwell times of 30 seconds for two new stations. Tim stated the need to present a possible option to the public, but not including any options with fully dedicated lanes is not showing that best potential alternative. Tim questioned spending \$2.1 Billion without fully dedicated right-of-way.
- Jay Severance, a member of Citizen Advocates for Regional Transit, questioned why there wasn't any discussion as to which option is safer from a vehicular standpoint. Jay stated that Option 2 and non-dedicated rail space converging with vehicle/ped access at non-signalized intersections would be a new feature in the Twin Cities and with a lot of unknown risks. Jay considers Option 1 to be safer. Jay added that after looking at the bridge and approaches and the modification of access to Highway 5, he cannot understand how in 2033 a 3-lane bridge is going to satisfy vehicular traffic without a lot of problems. Jay questioned whether there is an opportunity to for another river crossing other than the existing Highway 5 Bridge.
- Megan Duhr, representing the West 7th Fort Road Federation (District Council Representative President), stated they are eagerly awaiting more of the specifications of the BRT option. Megan stated the group is not taking an official stance for the foreseeable future. Megan stated that most of the mature (Ash) trees on West 7th have

already been removed. Megan added their concerns over reduced space for trees to live in the future is a big concern because of already dealing with a tree-less landscape. She understands the need and urgency for solutions to the climate crisis, but seeing these ridership projections and the travel time stacked against the cost and the impacts to the neighborhood are hard to justify to the community. Megan stated that there is a difference between light rail and streetcar, but from the resident perspective they are similar and all alternatives include loss of trees, no bike lanes, reduced pedestrian crossing, reducing parking, and the same travel time and perhaps even reduced ridership compared to the existing bus line plus a \$2 billion dollar price tag. Megan stated the community is already very skeptical of light rail and suggested it is going to take a lot of work to explain those tradeoffs.

- Jordan Frank-Shannon, a Business Owner on West 7th Street, encouraged the committee to think about safety in the corridor in regard to the pedestrian experience and the impact on local business.
- Christian Noyce, a Saint Paul resident (written comments), stated the desire to select the streetcar option with maximum right-of-way delegated to the streetcar. Christian suggested that the project minimize shared use lanes and parking. Christian also requested the project team consider amenities such as trees and loading zones within these parameters. Christian stated the project team needs to manage time and agenda better as they've been to two Riverview meetings in the last week that closed off and they didn't get to comment or ask questions in the timeframe presented by the agenda.