

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS PHASE

MEETING #5



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MEETING SUMMARY

Date: November 29, 2018

Time: 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Location: Maplewood Community Center – Banquet Rooms A & B

ATTENDEES

Name	Organization	Present
Committee Members		
Randy Anderson	School District 622	
Erin Bailey	Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare	X
Councilmember Mara Bain	City of Forest Lake	X
Ling Becker	Vadnais Heights Economic Development Corporation	X
Council President Amy Brendmoen	City of Saint Paul	X
Tom Cook	Metropolitan State University	X
Paris Dunning	East Side Area Business Association	
Mayor Jo Emerson	City of White Bear Lake	
Jose Gonzalez	LatinoLEAD	
Councilmember Craig Johnson	City of Vadnais Heights	X
Sheila Kauppi	Minnesota Department of Transportation	X
Sheila Kelly	White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce	
Supervisor Bob Kermes	White Bear Township	X
Councilmember Jim Lindner	City of Gem Lake	X
Patrick Opatz	Century College	X
Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt	Ramsey County	X
Councilmember Sandy Rummel	Metropolitan Council	X
Mayor Nora Slawik	City of Maplewood	X
Terri Thao	Nexus Community Partners	X
Shannon Watson	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Alternates		
Councilmember Kevin Edberg	City of White Bear Lake	
Commissioner Blake Huffman	Ramsey County	
Councilmember Bryan Smith	City of Maplewood	
Pakou Yang	Century College	
Yao Yang	Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce	

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Agency and Consultant Team Staff

- Andy Gitzlaff, Ramsey County.
- Frank Alarcon, Ramsey County.
- Scott Yonke, Ramsey County.
- Barbara Howard, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Ed Sanderson, Minnesota Department of Transportation.
- Jessica Laabs, Kimley-Horn.
- Chelsey Hendrickson, Kimley-Horn.
- Rachel Dammel, Kimley-Horn.
- Jeanne Witzig, Kimley-Horn.
- Beth Bartz, SRF.

Members of the Public¹

- Lois Page.
- Florence Bengtson.
- Ken Vollbrecht.
- Kansas Romportl.
- Craig Capeder.
- Jay Langer.
- Linda Treeful.
- Dave Anderson.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Slawik welcomed the committee members and other attendees and asked the committee members to introduce themselves.

2. Overview of Project Activities and Coordination

The project advisory committees went on a tour of the corridor on November 14. Mayor Slawik and Commissioner Reinhardt noted that it was very helpful to see the project area in person, particularly the station areas. Andy Gitzlaff noted that there was a county videographer present who will be producing a video.

At the September 27 Policy Advisory Committee meeting, the committee confirmed the elements to be studied in the Environmental Assessment with a recommendation to carry out additional analysis and public engagement to determine the location of the Downtown White Bear Lake station.

Coordination has been a large part of the efforts over the last two months. The Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project team has been coordinating with the METRO Gold Line Project, which is another dedicated BRT project in the east metro. The two projects may share some stations in downtown Saint Paul and are coordinating station design and approach to environmental analysis.

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

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The project team also met with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the four watershed districts that the project is located in, and the Saint Paul Planning Commission to provide an update on the station area planning work.

3. Public Engagement Update

Public engagement has continued this fall. Recent activities include having a presence at two community meetings regarding the proposed Bruce Vento Trail extension, two listening sessions in downtown White Bear Lake, a presentation to the Railroad Island Task Force, a pop-up at Century College and attendance at the Maplewood Community Business Breakfast. Themes from public engagement during September and October include:

- Safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Improvements related to pedestrian safety and mobility around Highway 61.
- Questions about the station location in downtown White Bear Lake and its potential impacts.
- Enthusiastic support for improved transit service options in the northeast metro.

There is currently an online mapping tool on the project website that allows people to leave comments associated with specific geographic locations and see the comments that others have left. The project team has received over 200 comments to date.

Upcoming public engagement activities include:

- Additional public engagement to be planned for White Bear Lake.
- Activities as part of the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Master Plan process.
- Outreach with Hmong Village leadership, Karen and Latino organizations.
- Updates to Saint Paul District Councils.
- Next Community Advisory Committee meeting scheduled for January 17.

Councilmember Lindner asked if the comments on the map are responded to or just compiled. Beth Bartz replied that the map comments are being compiled, and the map directs people who want a response to email info@rushline.org. Emailed comments receive a response unless the commenter elects not to receive one.

Mayor Slawik asked if the link to the map could be shared via Twitter or other means. Beth Bartz said it is posted on rushline.org so it can be shared. Frank Alarcon added that the project team will coordinate with partners to share it through their channels.

4. Health Impact Assessment Update

Transportation and health are inextricably linked so the project is conducting a Rapid Health Impact Assessment to identify ways that Rush Line could have a positive impact on people's health. The goals of the Health Impact Assessment are to educate policymakers and community members on the project's ability to achieve social equity, environmental and economic development goals and to build capacity among planners, engineers and public health officials in achieving positive health outcomes throughout the corridor.

The process was initiated at a workshop on October 30 with advisory committee members and public health professionals. Participants divided into small groups based on geography, reviewed demographic and income data, noted differences throughout the corridor, and discussed how they might be related to health and ways the Rush Line could help address the issues. The participants selected three topics for assessment in the Health Impact Assessment:

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- Connectivity, including physical connections to Rush Line stations.
- Access/accessibility, including destinations people can reach with Rush Line (e.g., health care, fresh food, parks and open space).
- Employment/jobs, including areas of unemployment and how Rush Line might be able to connect people to opportunities.

Other relevant topics such as noise and air quality will be covered as part of the Environmental Assessment.

Next steps include performing the technical analysis based on available data and literature, preparing the report and recommendations, and sharing the draft with the advisory committees and partner agencies. The recommendations can inform land use planning, workforce development and housing at a local level.

5. Environmental Analysis Update

The purpose and need statement is the cornerstone of the environmental analysis and project decisions. A summary handout of the purpose and need was provided to the Policy Advisory Committee at a meeting this spring, and today a draft technical memo is included in the committee packet.

The four project needs and supporting data include:

- Planning for sustainable growth and development.
 - Forecast population and employment growth.
 - Commute patterns.
 - Local and regional objectives for growth and development.
- Serving the needs of people who rely on transit.
 - Age distribution.
 - Income.
 - Vehicle availability.
- Expanding sustainable travel options.
 - Policies at state and regional level that support investment in multimodal transportation.
- Meeting increasing demand for reliable, high-frequency transit.
 - Metro Transit ridership trends.
 - Factors that increase travel time reliability.

The technical memo documents the supporting data, which will be summarized in the Environmental Assessment, and it has been reviewed by the Project Management Team and Technical Advisory Committee. The draft is currently under review by the Federal Transit Administration. Comments on the draft are requested by December 13.

Supervisor Kermes noted that the focus of the data is from Saint Paul to White Bear Lake and asked if there is any consideration regarding extending the corridor further north in the future as part of this. Jessica Laabs replied that the purpose and need focuses on the project as currently defined as part of the Federal Transit Administration process. Commissioner Reinhardt added that while this committee is focused on the first part of the project, the Rush Line Corridor Task Force is still looking at the

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larger corridor. Councilmember Rummel asked if the connection to Forest Lake was still part of the project. Andy Gitzlaff replied that we will be discussing potential connecting bus service next, and the project team can look at the purpose and need statement to see if there is a place to address the potential extension north. Councilmember Bain noted that we need to be consistent in our communication so the northern elements of the project are not perceived as being left out.

To advance the environmental analysis, the project team has been conducting field activities including traffic counts, a wetland field review and cultural resources work. The cultural resources work has included soil coring in the Ramsey County rail right-of-way, and starting this week there are archaeology investigations on Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Ramsey County property. The project team is also continuing the architectural inventory outside of downtown White Bear Lake. Mayor Slawik asked if results can be shared at the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting if there is anything remarkable. Jessica Laabs said that findings can be shared.

6. Draft Connecting Bus Service Concept Plan

Andy Gitzlaff noted that the information presented today reflects early concept plans that are by no means set in stone. This is the first step to see what could be changed or added to the bus network. The project team will be meeting with Metro Transit in December to discuss the concept plan in more detail.

Chelsey Hendrickson added that the reason we start thinking about the connecting bus plan early on is to maximize the investment in the transitway and make the best connections. Three different bus network scenarios are created for the Federal Transit Administration as part of the environmental process: the 2040 network, a budget neutral scenario where the number of service hours is the same as today and an opening day scenario that typically has 3 to 4 percent higher service hours than existing. Metro Transit will complete a much more detailed service planning process two years before the opening day which will include public engagement.

Considerations when developing a connecting bus network include the existing service in the study area, Metro Transit's Service Improvement Plan and other transit-supportive factors such as transit market areas and demographic and employment factors. For the Rush Line BRT Project, the project team is also coordinating with METRO Gold Line's 2040 draft bus network.

There are two express routes (270 and 272) that currently operate in the project area and serve the park-and-ride at Highway 61 and County Road C. If that park-and-ride is relocated to Rush Line's proposed Highway 36 station, Routes 270 and 272 could be modified to use the guideway between Highway 36 and Maplewood Mall. Refinements to the existing Route 265 express route are also being explored.

There are three potential new routes that the project team will continue to discuss with Metro Transit. One would operate on County Road E and connect to Century College, one would connect Maplewood Mall via White Bear Avenue to downtown White Bear Lake then to the west, and one would connect downtown White Bear Lake to Forest Lake with a stop in Hugo. These potential new routes are conceptual ideas that the project team will work on with Metro Transit.

Considerations when determining route frequency are cycle time, which is the time it takes to get from one end of the route and back again, and what the market would support in terms of ridership. The cycle time from White Bear Lake to Forest Lake is 30 minutes in each direction, so the current thought is that the potential new route to Forest Lake would operate every 60 minutes.

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Councilmember Bain asked what the next steps are in evaluating if a route to Forest Lake would end at a park-and-ride versus in a retail/residential area. Chelsey Hendrickson replied that Metro Transit would look at that during their evaluation two years before opening day.

Ling Becker asked if the size of the bus can be customized to match the ridership. Chelsey Hendrickson replied that the most expensive part of a bus route is the operator rather than the vehicle, but Metro Transit does consider ridership when determining what vehicle to use. Ling added that it could be a perception issue if there is a large bus with only a few people on it so a bus that is more appropriately sized might help, especially in a community that is not used to transit.

Councilmember Lindner asked how we can provide more fast options for reverse commute or off-peak trips. Andy Gitzlaff replied that while the express routes are peak direction only, Rush Line will provide all day bi-directional service. Commissioner Reinhardt added that other projects are in the works around the region, such as the Riverview Corridor, that would expand the fast, reliable service that is available.

7. Downtown White Bear Lake Station Update

Beth Bartz provided a recap of how the project arrived at the proposed Downtown White Bear Lake station location presented at the September 27 Policy Advisory Committee meeting. Between April and August of 2018, a station area planning working group formed by city leadership evaluated numerous potential downtown station sites with the project team, including station area planning expert Crandall Arambula. The project team also had over 20 one-on-one meetings with stakeholders. Key considerations for the station location at that time included end of line facilities for the operator and having a turn-around location for the bus as well as consideration of a joint city project to provide additional downtown parking. The working group narrowed the location options to three downtown sites and one northern site, and of those four the working group recommended the Clark Avenue site adjacent to US Bank.

Subsequently, the city received additional input from the community about the Clark Avenue location. There were concerns raised about the character and size of the parking facility that was shown in some visualizations as well as concerns about the potential effect of frequent transit service on the character of downtown.

In response, the project team held listening sessions on October 11 and 12 and heard concerns about compatibility with the historic downtown character, potential traffic impacts of the joint parking facility and the proximity to residential neighborhoods. There were also questions about BRT service and ridership, the project timeline and the decision-making process. The project team presented this information to the White Bear Lake City Council on October 23 and received direction to look at additional station location options.

Since that time, the project team conducted one-on-one interviews with local stakeholders that had been identified by city staff and convened a multi-agency team to further evaluate location options. This group is now focusing on what the project needs rather than accommodating additional joint use parking, namely 1) station platforms to serve downtown riders, and 2) a location for the bus drivers to have a brief break and turn the bus around for the south-bound trip. Additional engagement with the public and business community is planned for December and early January, and the findings of the evaluation and engagement are expected to be presented to the Technical Advisory Committee, White Bear Lake City Council, and Policy Advisory Committee at their January meetings.

Terri Thao asked if we know how many parking spaces will be made available for transit use at the station location. Beth Bartz replied that the project team is working on the park-and-ride demand

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modeling now, but it would probably be in the range of 20 to 50 spaces. However, the evaluation could result in a recommendation to not provide any parking spaces and instead direct park-and-riders to other stations.

Shannon Watson noted that if parking is not provided it might have an unintentional side effect of people using other business or residential parking instead. Beth Bartz said that the communities would need to implement parking management strategies, such as time-limited parking, to dissuade park-and-riders from using unregulated parking. Population and economic data do not show a high demand for parking in White Bear Lake, but the ridership modeling will help refine that understanding. Mayor Slawik added that St. John's Hospital is also concerned about transit riders using hospital parking, but there are various strategies that could be implemented to manage that. Andy Gitzlaff said that is part of the reason we also spend time looking at bike and pedestrian connections and connecting bus service to encourage this form of access to stations. These issues are not unique to downtown White Bear Lake, and the project will look at them on a broader scale as it moves forward.

Andy Gitzlaff commented that in their conversations with stakeholders so far, the scaled back station options without a structured parking facility have been received more favorably. The station area planning work showed development opportunities that could happen, but now we want to focus on what is needed for the transit project, which is a station platform, a driver rest facility and a place for the BRT vehicle to turn around and layover. The project team wants to get direction from the White Bear Lake City Council on their preferred station site to be studied in the Environmental Assessment before the next Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

8. Schedule Review

Taking time to identify the preferred station location in downtown White Bear Lake will extend the schedule. The project team currently anticipates distributing the Environmental Assessment in the spring of 2020 rather than December 2019 as initially scheduled. Other elements of the project are continuing to move forward, and more detailed analysis in downtown White Bear Lake will be conducted once the preferred station site is identified.

9. Public Comment

Ken Vollbrecht stated that he still has concerns about the Downtown White Bear Lake station location. He does not know anyone that supports the Clark Avenue location and does not see the need for more parking as it is not an issue for the 2,500 people that attend Market Fest every Thursday night during the summer. His wife takes the bus to downtown Saint Paul for work, and there are usually only two people on the bus. He understands the need for driver facilities but thinks it is absurd to ruin the character of downtown White Bear Lake so a driver can use the bathroom. He hopes the project team will look closely at the ridership because he does not think it will be high, and he does not want to ruin historic Clark Avenue for a few riders. He is not against public transit, but we shouldn't do a project just because financing is available and we have a schedule to keep. He has lived on Clark Avenue for 35 years, so this will make a big difference in his life.

Mayor Slawik stated that there is still a lot of engagement that will happen, and she is optimistic that we will find a solution that residents and the business community can feel good about.

Commissioner Reinhardt said that it is important to note that we heard the message loud and clear about White Bear Lake, which is why we are looking at other possibilities. We heard what was said, and we are trying to find something that does work.

NEXT MEETING

January 31, 2019

2:30-4:30 p.m.

Location to be determined