

METRO Gold Line Corridor Management Committee

Notes for the November 1, 2018 Meeting

Metropolitan Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Alene Tchourumoff, Paul Reinke, Stan Karwoski, Brian Lamb, Jim McDonough, Lisa Weik, Rafael Ortega, Jane Prince, Sheila Kauppi, Stan Suedkamp, Steve Morris, Darrell Paulsen, Harry Melander, Andrea Date, Nora Slawik

1. WELCOME (CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, APPROVAL OF MINUTES)

Chair Alene Tchourumoff called the monthly meeting of the METRO Gold Line BRT Corridor Management Committee (CMC) to order at 2:30p.m. on Thursday, November 1, 2018.

Committee members and other attendees introduced themselves.

Chair Tchourumoff asked if anyone has any comments or questions on the October 4, 2018 meeting notes. No comments on the October CMC meeting notes.

2. REVIEW ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON DOWNTOWN ALTERNATIVES

Chair Alene Tchourumoff gave opening remarks. The objective of today's meeting is to review additional data/information on the Downtown Saint Paul routing alternatives. Gold Line staff have pulled additional technical data and information together based on the discussions and requests for additional information at the last CMC meeting. Some of the information will be presented today, with additional information in the reference materials packet provided. Staff is available to answer questions on any of the material.

Chris Beckwith (Gold Line Senior Project Manager) presented the timeline and status of downtown alternatives. In 2016, the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) was approved. In May 2018, a refined LPA was presented to the CMC showing a downtown routing with adjustments to avoid special event traffic issues, all-day service downtown and stops in front of the Union Depot. In July 2018, a second alternative was requested by Ramsey County, with a terminus at the Union Depot Bus Deck, in support of Union Depot as an important regional transit hub. The Gold Line Project is nine and a half months into the two-year Project Development (PD) phase (January 2018 to January 2020), and is currently on schedule. Project staff hope to move forward with a path that allows the project to remain on schedule.

Lyssa Leitner (Gold Line Deputy Project Manager) discussed the Environmental Assessment (EA) timeline. Gold Line staff have received a number of questions about the EA and why decisions must be made about what is being evaluated in the document. The EA is a required Federal Transit Administration (FTA) document, that is signed by FTA and Met Council. The project needs to follow the schedule and review timelines set by FTA. The EA has approximately 1000 pages, six appendices, nine Technical Reports and hundreds of figures/maps and tables. The first segment of the PD timeframe was the Issue Resolution Team (IRT) process. The IRTs are responsible for defining the scope for the environmental analysis and the associated technical work/analysis. Any changes made to the environmental project scope could potentially impact multiple chapters in the EA study document. For example, parking changes impact multiple chapters including; Traffic, Environmental Justice (EJ) etc. Based on the FTA schedule, the EA document needs to be submitted by January 2, 2019, in order for FTA staff to get through all their review, for project staff to respond to/resolve comments, for legal review prior to the

public comment period in July 2019 and the development and signing of the Decision Document about three months before PD ends.

Gold Line outreach staff conducted a lot of community engagement related to the downtown alternatives in a short period of time. Staff interacted with over 570 people on this topic. It was a mix of two traditional open houses (in the skyway and at the Union Depot) and a series of pop-up events at multiple libraries, transit stations, a yoga event, farmer's market etc. across the entire corridor. The online survey was a successful tool, with over 300 participants. Additional comments were submitted via email. Chris Beckwith sent the public feedback summary report to the CMC via email this morning. The outreach feedback general summary is as follows:

- People preferring Downtown Routing (~78%)
 - Feedback in favor included; being able to get to destinations throughout downtown, and that they would not take Gold Line if they had to walk or transfer.
- People preferring Ending at Union Depot (~22%):
 - Feedback in favor included; preference for lower cost, would transfer or walk, or they live or work near the Union Depot, better personal safety at the bus deck as opposed to the street.

Gold Line staff reviewed potential impacts to Environmental Justice populations (Percent Low Income and Percent Communities of Color) associated with the two downtown alternatives. Based on the ridership model discussed at the last CMC meeting, the 950-rider difference between the two alternatives includes about 250 riders from zero-car households. Low Income residents have higher percentages living on the west side of downtown. Communities of Color are dispersed throughout downtown. All these populations are still served by transit (walk, bike, scooter, bus or Green Line LRT) to the Union Depot, but it would not be a one-seat ride.

Charles Carlson (Director, BRT projects) reviewed the FTA New Starts Project Rating. Based on the EA scope recommended by the CMC in September, ending at Union Depot is borderline Medium-Low/Medium-High rating and downtown routing is solidly at a Medium-High rating. Project staff also reviewed ridership and determined that there are ways to fully optimize the model to get both alternatives to Medium-High project rating. The consistent differentiator between the two alternatives is overall ridership difference, with more riders in the downtown loop alternative. This is ultimately subject to FTA review and approval, and subject to changes to ratings criteria over time.

Another question raised by the CMC was about the location of transit advantages in the downtown area. Charles reviewed the map showing an overlay of the locations of existing bus stops on 5th Street and 6th street, Gold Line project and other transit projects planned for downtown Saint Paul; Rush Line, Riverview Corridor and existing Green Line. Riverview is notable, because even through the configuration is not yet known, it could be an opportunity for downtown to be in a transit-advantage lane, as coordination proceeds. For the current local bus routes/system, most of what impedes on-time performance/travel time actually occurs outside downtown. The transit advantage lanes in downtown would help to keep the Gold Line bus on time.

Another point of significant input has been discussions around level boarding and station features in the downtown area. Regardless of the platform height, the scope recommended by the CMC would include full/premium station amenities. The three typical platform heights options are:

- Level Boarding (14-inch curb) – buses would be required to dock within 3 inches of the curb. The bus ramp may or may not need to be deployed. Ramp deployment adds time to boarding and off boarding. This will be reviewed further. Level boarding is a premium BRT amenity, but the configuration would be for BRT buses only. Non-BRT buses could not use the same platform, because their doors open out and would hit the curb.

- Near Level Boarding (9-inch curb) – this is a slightly raised curb, similar to the A Line project. The ramp would be deployed. There is a smaller stepping height than a standard curb. This is also a premium BRT amenity and is compatible with all bus models.
- Standard Boarding (6-inch curb) – this is for constrained conditions. The ramp would be deployed. This is compatible with all bus models.

Additional information provided to the CMC includes; Ridership Forecasting 101 packet, Research Brief done locally on waiting time perceptions, Fall Public Engagement Summary and additional reference slides.

3. CBAC & TAC UPDATE

Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC) Co-Chairs; Darrell Paulsen and Steve Morris presented the October 25, 2018 CBAC meeting update. CBAC had a lively discussion. CBAC members present unanimously preferred the downtown routing/loop alternative. Some clear reasons in favor of the downtown loop include; people want to be as close to their destinations as much as possible, especially in hot and cold weather. A lot of the populations are also low income and minority populations from the western part of the community. CBAC also discussed the capacity of other similar transit lines in downtown and even with the addition of Gold Line, bus volumes would still be at under 50% of total capacity. CBAC members, especially East Metro, Washington County and Woodbury residents expressed the preference for a one-seat ride. CBAC also walked through some of the concerns expressed at the October CMC meeting, including potential congestion, cost concerns, and they still strongly supported the loop.

Marc Briese (Gold Line Design and Construction Project Manager) recapped the Gold Line Committee structure process; IRT, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), CBAC, CMC, Counties and Met Council. TAC members at the October 24, 2018 meeting expressed a preference for downtown routing, from a technical perspective, but deferred the formal recommendation and discussion to the CMC.

4. DISCUSSIONS/QUESTIONS

Chair Tchourumoff opened the discussion up for comments and questions. It is important for the Committee to come to a consensus today on the downtown alternatives and provide project staff with clear direction to move forward.

Councilmember Jane Prince commented that based on discussions with the City of Saint Paul's Mayor's office and Councilmember Rebecca Noecker, there is a clear preference for the downtown loop. Conversations with the community also indicate that they prefer the downtown loop, and would not take Gold Line if they had to transfer or walk further to reach their destinations.

Commissioner Stan Karwoski noted for the record that, Washington County affirms the downtown routing alternative and also support evaluating level boarding in downtown Saint Paul with the goal of achieving premier stations at every stop.

CMC members discussed the language used in the summary bullet point that addresses level boarding and near level boarding at stations. Councilmember Rafael Ortega asked for clarification on the meaning of "case by case basis", and whether all the stations would be equal in terms of amenities. Commissioner Jim McDonough and Mayor Paul Reinke agreed that there may be some ambiguity in the way the item is worded.

Commissioner McDonough asked for clarification on the process for the final decision on a recommendation for level boarding or near level boarding. Gold Line staff responded that the intent is to implement level boarding at

most stations, except as evaluated by staff at specific stations. Exceptions would then need to be technically evaluated in the design advancement process and brought to the CMC for discussion and a final decision.

Chair Tchourumoff asked whether the language has schedule implications. Everyone is sensitive to the 2-year Project Development schedule. From a schedule perspective, there are four downtown stations that overlap with the Rush Line project that will be evaluated as level boarding in the EA because there is zero impact to schedule. Moving to level boarding with the other downtown stations would impact schedule. Short block lengths, that become shorter as the project moves west would potentially cause challenges. Exceptions need to be technically evaluated, and it would take Gold Line staff some time to work through the design changes. The first coordination meeting with staff from Rush Line, Ramsey County, Metro Transit, MnDOT, City of Saint Paul and Gold Line is scheduled for November 13, 2018. Coordination will continue as design advances through the Engineering Phase. Due to the importance of this issue, it will also be presented for public feedback and transit accessibility advisor committee input.

Councilmember Ortega noted that he understands and is willing to accept Gold Line staffs' language change, however, it is important to have clarity. He brought up the example of the Green Line Central Station vertical circulator issue. A minor adjustment to the language for evaluating level boarding was offered.

Chair Tchourumoff read out the summary language for the two actions/motions to be voted on:

- i. Downtown Routing, as recommended by the IRT, is the preferred alternative. The Union Depot Bus Deck Terminus alternative will be evaluated in the EA and reevaluated at a later date, if warranted by changes in project assumptions.
- ii. All stations will be evaluated for level boarding, including those downtown. Near-level boarding will be considered only on a case by case basis with input from the project advisory committees.

Motion By: Councilmember Ortega

Seconded By: Commissioner Weik

Motion passed unanimously.

5. NEXT STEPS/MEETING

The next scheduled meeting is December 6, 2018. GPO staff will provide an update on corridor-wide issues resolutions. Other upcoming meeting(s) will review 15% design, updated Cost Estimate and final Project Scope.

Today's meeting is Chair Tchourumoff's last CMC meeting as Chair of the Met Council. Committee Members thanked Chair Tchourumoff for her leadership. The new Chair is scheduled to be present at the next CMC meeting.

6. ADJOURN

Chair Tchourumoff adjourned the meeting at 3:20p.m.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, November 1, 2018

CMC PowerPoint Presentation, November 1, 2018

CMC Meeting Briefing Packet, October 25, 2018

Ridership Forecasting 101 Presentation, October 17, 2018

Downtown Alternatives Engagement Summary and Comments Received, Fall 2018



Gold Line

CTS Research Brief - Perception of Waiting Time at Transit Stops (University of Minnesota), February 2018

Respectfully Submitted,
Banke Oyewumi, Recording Secretary