

## **METRO Gold Line Corridor Management Committee**

### **Notes for the February 14, 2019 Meeting**

#### **Metropolitan Council Chambers**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Nora Slawik, Andrea Date, Sheila Kauppi, Stan Karwoski, Wes Kooistra, Jim McDonough, Rafael Ortega, Darrell Paulsen, Jane Prince, Paul Reinke, Bryan Smith, Stan Suedkamp, Lisa Weik

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

Chair Nora Slawik called the monthly meeting of the METRO Gold Line BRT Corridor Management Committee (CMC) to order at 2:32 p.m. on Thursday, February 14, 2019.

Committee members (and other attendees) introduced themselves and each were asked to mention one important thing about the Gold Line. CMC member comments included; connectivity for east metro city residents and access to jobs and opportunities, all-day 7-days a week bi-directional service to downtown Saint Paul, and investment and development opportunities along the corridor, including Transit Oriented Design housing.

Chair Slawik gave opening remarks and introduced herself as the new Chair of the Metropolitan Council and the CMC. She has been working with MnDOT Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher and Governor Tim Walz on the governor's budget/transportation funding package to be rolled out next week. Budget details cannot be disclosed yet, but it includes investments in transit and a number of other benefits.

Gold Line is a key part of the plan to invest in regional transit for future generations. It is important because it's visionary and because of the partnerships involved in making the project work. Chair Slawik expressed appreciation to funding partners; Washington County, Ramsey County, local elected officials, city staff and community members. The project is at the important 15% design mark, which is the first look at the updated costs that will help inform decisions about project scope and local funding commitments. An initial cost estimate was developed at the 1% design, and although Gold Line can be built for close to that initial estimate, project partners have the opportunity to make this project even better for the communities it serves. There's also an opportunity to consider additional investments that pay off bigger dividends for riders and communities in the long run.

#### **2. REVIEW NOTES FROM NOVEMBER 1, 2018**

Chair Slawik asked if anyone has comments/edits to the November 2018 CMC meeting notes. No comments.

#### **3. 2019 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE (FEDERAL SHUTDOWN UPDATE)**

Chris Beckwith (Gold Line Senior Project Manager) presented the federal government shutdown's impacts to the 2019 Environmental Assessment (EA) schedule. The EA was intended (before federal shutdown) to be completed three months prior to the end of the defined two-year Project Development (PD) phase. The Draft EA was submitted for FTA review on January 1, 2019, however FTA staff were unavailable to review due to the furlough. Chris highlighted current EA schedule changes, based on post-shutdown coordination with FTA:

- NEPA process/EA timeline is still on track to be completed within the PD Phase, but completion is now pushed out to the end of PD
- FTA extended their 1<sup>st</sup> Administrative Review from 4 weeks to 5 weeks

- FTA added a 3<sup>rd</sup> Administrative Review (2-3 weeks)
- FTA Legal Staff is also assessing the schedule/review timeframes

#### **4. 2019 ENGAGEMENT UPDATE**

Liz Jones (Gold Line Outreach Lead) reviewed the outreach/engagement activities held and planned in 2019. Three pop-up community events occurred in the first six weeks of 2019. Outreach staff talked with about 160 people and received feedback that included support and excitement about the project/BRT, and interest in connectivity further east, beyond the current Gold Line corridor.

2019 outreach/engagement will focus on the following major aspects:

- General project information
- Outreach related to the EA process - two open houses during the EA public comment period (30-days)
- Public feedback/input to inform architectural and BRT design concepts

Commissioner Stan Karwoski noted the importance of public outreach and commended Liz Jones and the outreach team for their creativity and efforts to reach the communities on the corridor.

Councilmember Bryan Smith asked staff to continue to think creatively about how they reach the community. Staff should focus on the how, whom, what and style of presenting project technical information, in order to prevent people from feeling disengaged or talked down to. Chair Slawik agreed and encouraged outreach staff to connect with Councilmember Smith to further discuss his feedback and ideas.

Councilmember Jane Prince expressed appreciation for the outreach work done so far. It has really been important and valuable that Gold Line materials have been translated into various languages. Councilmember Prince offered to work with Liz Jones to discuss different ways to connect with the several communities of color and new American communities (e.g. Hmong and East African).

#### **CMC members discussed highlights and observations from the San Diego tour/trip.**

Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC) Co-Chair, Darrell Paulsen reported that it appeared that disability access was an after-thought. State of Minnesota has the opportunity to avoid the same mistake, by bringing disability to the forefront and using it to champion the need for a service like Gold Line.

Councilmember Rafael Ortega agreed with Darrell Paulsen's comments. Accessibility is a critical issue. He was also struck by the bi-directional single lane bridge decision, which hurts operations.

Councilmember Andrea Date noted that one of the perks of going on the trip was the opportunity to learn about their mistakes and lessons learned. The trip reinforced the importance of stops as destinations, particularly at the end of the Gold Line in Woodbury. In addition, every stop along the Gold Line benefits every other stop, and making sure they are inviting is important to the viability of the line.

Mayor Paul Reinke agreed with Councilmember Ortega's comment about the one-lane bridge. It was a short-term decision with long term negative impact. It's important for Gold Line to avoid making permanent, long-term short-sighted decisions. In addition, riding the San Diego bus in the dedicated guideway was a more pleasurable experience than in mixed traffic.

Commissioner Karwoski expressed that interacting with the diverse Gold Line group with wide-ranging backgrounds was invaluable. It reinforced that the project team is heading in the right direction and may end up being even better than the San Diego line, particularly if good thought is given to pedestrian and bikeway access. The San Diego line was also distinctive (e.g. landscaping, dedicated guideway). As the project progresses, the team should also consider ways to make the Gold Line route distinctive.

Commissioner Jim McDonough appreciated and emphasized the value of the diverse Gold Line group. It was valuable for the business and community groups to experience and get a deeper knowledge. He echoed previous comments about the one-lane bridge. These transit lines are being built for 40-50 years, and the impacts are long-term. Lack of level boarding was another observation on the trip. Their horizontal gaps at stops were large, and this plays into the experience of the user. It's important to avoid similar issues early on.

Commissioner Lisa Weik reported that it was a great transit-immersive experience. It was interesting that the San Diego line is the first dedicated BRT system in a dedicated guideway in Southern California. The diverse group (including CBAC members) was also appreciated. Economic development around the station stops was exciting to observe. It is exciting to envision the prospect of new companies being attracted to the Gold Line corridor, and bringing in job opportunities. Commissioner Weik also echoed previous comments about stations as destinations, with unique identities at stops (Eugene, Oregon example), such as artwork, railing designs etc. It was interesting to hear about funding mechanisms. The San Diego team's walkthrough of advantages and disadvantages and other inputs during the last day's debrief was valuable. She was also glad to discuss the idea/example of a station stop with library services (electronic library lockers/kiosks).

Chris Beckwith stated that she enjoyed the opportunity to see a different system. Some negatives were the notable gap away from the platform, sharing the light rail line with freight, trains that extend out into crosswalks, because platforms aren't long enough and the use of different materials in the guideway which is confusing to motorists. She was struck by how well Minnesota implements transit projects in avoiding these kinds of design trade-offs before they become a problem in construction and operations. The buses/vehicles, stations and economic developments along the corridor were impressive.

Charles Carlson (Director, BRT Projects) noted that he took an optional tour to observe an older BRT line that runs in a more built-up urban environment.

Marc Briese (Gold Line Design and Construction Project Manager) was struck by the economic development that happened before the line came through and after the line was developed. It was also interesting to see some of the residential developments were extremely close to the line.

## 5. UPDATE ON PROJECT SCOPE AND COSTS

Chris Beckwith and Marc Briese presented the update on project scope and costs.

**Gold Line Corridor Map Update** – The Transportation Policy Plan amendment reflecting the new Woodbury I-494 Park and Ride station and 10 full amenity level-boarding platforms in downtown Saint Paul is in progress.

**Cost Uncertainty by Project Phase** – Projects tend to have a lot of volatility in cost and uncertainty early on, particularly at the 1% design stage. It's important to note that the federal share match is locked in once the project enters the Engineering phase.

**Gold Line Cost Estimating Process** – In 2019, project scope decisions and funding identification need to be made. FTA will require resolutions and letters documenting that the project has the funding committed. The New Starts Report submittal due in September 2019 will be used by the FTA to assign the project rating.

**2018 Design Refinements** – Every station has added or replaced station pedestrians connections. Downtown stations have been upgraded to full amenity level boarding platforms. Park and Rides are refined at three locations. Two BRT grade-separated crossings have been added at tunnel under Ruth St. and bridge over McKnight Rd. Two regional bridges have been pursued; Helmo Avenue/Bielenberg Bridge and 4<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. The project has reviewed bus propulsion assumptions (diesel vs. hybrid vs. electric), and there are unique opportunities to move towards an electric bus fleet at Metro Transit.

**Project Cost Update** – Project Base Costs - 2016 Estimate (\$420.7M) versus 2019 Update (\$415-\$439M). Project cost drivers reflected in the 2019 Update include; modified forecast year from 2023 to 2024, design

refinement (e.g. level boarding, heating elements due to weather), bus propulsion (fully electric fleet), Helmo-Bielenberg Bridge Regional Solicitation funding, right-of-way, updated professional services costs and updated finance charges.

Marc Briese reviewed the major cost drivers and cost increases or decreases between the 2016 Estimate and the 2019 Update.

**BRT Guideway & Sitework** – cost decrease

**Retaining Walls** – cost increase

**Noise Wall** – shown as an increase, but is now closer to cost neutral or potentially a cost decrease

**Traffic Signals** – cost increase, two new traffic signals and two BRT traffic signals.

**Bridges and Grade Separations** – cost decreases at Earl Street, TH 61 Interchange, Maple Street Ped (underpass) and Hazelwood Street Ped bridges. Cost neutral at McKnight Road bridge (overpass). Cost increase at Ruth Street bridge.

**Stations** – cost increase at Downtown stations. cost decrease at other stations.

**Right-of-Way (non-Park-and-Rides)** – cost decreases due to removing the need for ROW acquisition or property impacts at various properties

**Park-and-Rides** – cost decrease at Sun Ray. cost increase at Helmo (move from 4<sup>th</sup> St. to 2<sup>nd</sup> St.) and cost neutral at the new Woodbury I-494 Park and Ride.

**Vehicles** – cost increases for Bus Fleet (1 additional bus) and additional contingency for future bus propulsion decision (i.e. electric). Charles Carlson reported that the first electric buses will be debuting this year on C-line BRT project in Spring 2019. Gold Line Staff plan to learn from the operational experience of those buses and continue to watch the significant and rapid growth of the technology and configurations going into the market. This is not the right time to make final Gold Line decision, but the cost is included in the overall project budget as additional cost contingency to cover electric and would be eligible for federal match. If electric isn't pursued, the additional cost contingency wouldn't be needed.

Commissioner McDonough asked if the Metro Transit bus fleets for each BRT line and arterial line (e.g. Gold Line, Orange Line, A-line, C-Line) will be different/unique. Charles Carlson replied that Metro Transit is moving in the direction of having a single BRT fleet across the lines, to maintain a consistent premium bus experience.

Councilmember Smith requested additional information in the future outlining the comparisons between standard buses and BRT buses.

Commissioner Weik asked if Gold Line staff are considering buses that could have bike racks inside the buses. Charles Carlson responded that the level of detail for that type of component would be later down the road, when the final decision is made in 2023/2024. At this time, Gold Line staff haven't located a bus with a suitable onboard bike rack system, mainly because of the seat trade-offs.

**Other Costs** –

- Operations and Maintenance facilities – no changes. The plan is still to use the East Metro Garage.
- Professional Services – contracts and agency staffing plans are in place
- Finance Charges

Chris Beckwith reviewed the EA Scope and Funding Update Map (one-pager handout). All items represented and listed are eligible for the federal match.

Chair Slawik opened the discussion up for comments and questions

Commissioner McDonough asked about the total amount of add-ons. Gold Line staff confirmed that the total sum of add-ons (costs listed in red, purple and green) is \$26M. Commissioner McDonough noted that he has been actively involved on multiple metro projects including Central Corridor LRT and Southwest LRT.

Southwest LRT budget initially started at \$1.2B, and is currently at over \$2B. Gold Line has done a good job on the budget. The project should not be short-sighted by solely focusing on the dollar value, but also focusing on the value it brings to the community. It's more difficult to add costs/scope the further the project advances. The higher quality alignment we provide, the better for the users and the long-term outlook of the Gold Line.

Commissioner Weik commented that scope items included can be removed later, as necessary. Chair Slawik added that some other revenue options will potentially be unveiled in the governor's upcoming budget. Chris Beckwith clarified that the project needs to lock in the cost for the federal share/match at entry into Engineering in late 2019/early 2020.

Councilmember Smith agreed with Commissioner McDonough's comments. The project should avoid making nickel and dime decisions. It's critical to think long-term and also think about how the areas around the system are being set up for future developments.

Commissioner Karwoski noted that Washington County board members as funding partners also have to be convinced to be supportive of the scope/budget changes. Commissioner McDonough clarified that it is a relatively small amount that the Washington County board needs to be convinced to support.

Mayor Reinke reiterated project partners' desires for a highly connected and highly accessible transit line. There are things that have occurred in the planning and evolution from 1% to 15% (e.g. trail connections for connectivity). If he had to choose between the Century Avenue at-grade underpass and the Century Avenue bridge, the bridge would be the safer element. The need for a Tanners Lake trail is significant at Greenway station. Project staff should ensure suitable accessibility for able or disabled users. Right-of-Way property acquisition at Helmo Avenue is fairly significant, so the resale could potentially generate net dollars. Lastly, the touchdown issues identified on the north side of the existing pipeline at the new bridge over I-94 should be prioritized as design advances. Mayor Reinke thanked the project team for the work done up to this point, and for helping him understand the implications.

Mayor Suedkamp stressed the importance of the continuity of development, in terms of optimizing/maximizing the project's construction bid pricing. If we're going to do it, we should do it right, and do it in a timely continuum.

Commissioner Weik commended the good work by Gold Line staff as the project has advances from 1% to 15%. As the project advances from 15% to 30% design, the team will have to make some harder decisions. Public engagement and input will also be expected to occur this Summer. It's important of the team to review the possibility of private investments and branding (e.g. Maplewood Station branded as "3M Station"). The team also needs to ensure that design elements are included well ahead of the Engineering Phase.

Mayor Reinke echoed the comments about construction continuity. The unintended negative consequences of not doing the 4<sup>th</sup> Street bridge reconstruction now and doing it later would be disruptions during construction on businesses in the Hy-Vee and Cub Foods area.

Councilmember Ortega asked if Gold Line staff have had conversations with the city of Saint Paul on aligning the Kellogg bridge project with the Gold Line project. Chris Beckwith answered that project team has been working with Saint Paul staff including Bill Dermody and Mark Finken. Councilmember Prince noted that this is a top legislative priority and she has been tracking the issue. Commissioner Ortega added that it be incumbent upon everyone to be supportive of the city's legislative agenda/action.

**Motion called to put together a Gold Line CMC "Letter of Support" supporting the Kellogg Street Bridge project and strongly suggesting that both projects work together.**

**Motion By:** Commissioner Ortega

**Seconded By:** Councilmember Prince

**Motion passed unanimously.**

Chris Beckwith agreed to develop a draft Resolution/Letter of Support for review and approval. Commissioner Ortega and Commissioner McDonough suggested that the sponsors of the bill also receive a copy of the letter. *(Update: a letter template was prepared and transmitted to Gold Line TAC members on 3/15/19 to be individually transmitted by CMC members. In addition, the Gold Line Partners as an advocacy group have transmitted letters of support in the past for the Kellogg Bridge and will continue to look for ways to support the bonding request going forward.)*

Commissioner Karwoski suggested that the Saint Paul Chamber of Commerce would be a good advocate for the 4<sup>th</sup> Street bridge. Commissioner Karwoski requested a “fact sheet” of the add-ons that he can share with County board members. Many of the add-ons give future riders a better experience and better value. The 4<sup>th</sup> Street bridge is an example of an add-on that could win over hundreds of residents and riders from day-one.

Sheila Kauppi (MnDOT Metro District Engineer) thanked all project partners and was very encouraged by today’s CMC discussion. It’s important to recognize the value of these additions, especially pedestrian connections. She reiterated the need to include the additional scope earlier on than later.

**6. NEXT STEPS/MEETING**

The next scheduled meeting is March 7, 2019. *(Update: this meeting was cancelled to allow project partners more time to consider the additional scope requests.)*

CMC to discuss the Scope Recommendation Process on March 7, 2019 and recommend project scope and associated funding at the April 4, 2019 or May 2, 2019 meetings.

**7. ADJOURN**

Chair Slawik adjourned the meeting at 4:03 p.m.

**Meeting Materials Provided:**

Meeting Minutes, November 1, 2018

Meeting Agenda, February 14, 2019

CMC PowerPoint Presentation, February 14, 2019

Scope and Funding Update – January 2019 handout, February 14, 2019

Respectfully Submitted,  
Banke Oyewumi, Recording Secretary