

## Meeting Minutes: Community and Business Advisory Committee

**Date:** 12/6/2023

**Location:** Hybrid: Metro Square & Microsoft Teams

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### Attendance - 24 total attendees

- Jack Byers
  - Rebecca Nelson
  - John Slade
  - Zachary Mensinger
  - Brent Peterson
  - Ian R. Buck
  - Joan Ballanger
  - Ianni Houmas
  - Shelly Hauge
  - Torin Gustafson
  - Patrick Horan
  - Felicia Anderson
  - Leah Gayle
  - Alberto Bertomue
  - Craig Lamothe
  - Stephen Smith
  - Sara Pflaum
  - Colin Owens
  - Liz Jones
  - Amber Lee
  - Megan Danielson
  - Marc Valencia
  - Marcia Barcelata-O'Neill
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### Meeting Notes

Liz Jones welcomed everyone to the meeting, including six new CBAC members. She presented the meeting agenda and led introductions of staff and members.

### Project Update

Craig Lamothe shared RMS Phase II updates since the last meeting. The last meeting covered staff's proposal of 12 station along the White Bear Ave Corridor that will replace route 54 bus stops. Station locations were evaluated through public engagement and technical evaluation. Project staff are now proposing to move the Larpenteur Ave station to Idaho Ave. The project will show platform (boarding) locations in early 2024. Platform locations will be informed by bus turning movements and property impacts.

The updated project schedule was shared that shows the project is currently in Tier 2 evaluation. Results from the Tier 1 screening of roadway and transit lane concepts were shared with members.

John Slade asked why there were no dedicated bus lanes south of Larpenteur Ave and how that affects federal funding. Craig clarified that semi-exclusive lanes are for transit use and for left/right turn use for

cars, so it's not classified as fully dedicated lanes; however, for federal funding, semi-exclusive lanes do count.

Shelly Hauge asked if there were plans to widen the road, especially south of Larpenteur Ave where the road is very narrow. Craig responded that there are no plans to expand the road. Sarah Pflaum explained lane reduction is intended to slow down traffic, helping improve driving and pedestrian safety. Pedestrian safety is a priority. Safety improvements also include new physical barriers, such as center medians, that also slow down traffic. Shelly asked about where cars will go if the road becomes backed up. Stephen Smith shared that traffic diversion is part of the traffic study being conducted. Results will be shared during the engagement period in the spring.

Joan Ballanger shared in the chat: my concern is Maryland Ave East to Hawthorne to Ivy to McKnight will be a place for cars to go to avoid White Bear Ave.

Patrick Horan asked if the project has considered mitigating traffic flow when buses stop at the stations and riders are paying bus fare. Craig mentioned that with BRT, buses move through the intersection then stop at the platform. With BRT, similar to light rail, riders buy their ticket at the platform before the bus arrives to ensure efficiency. Security monitors will be put into place to monitor that people are paying.

Alberto Bertomue mentioned that north of Larpenteur Ave has a lot of driveways on White Bear Ave. and asked how that area would be affected with dedicated transit lanes. Each segment along the corridor is different, the team is evaluating access to driveways.

A member asked about ridership along White Bear Ave. Project staff shared they are running a ridership analysis now. Alberto asked that if Purple Line is going to run on the current bus route 54, what is that data of ridership and can that be used to get a sense of what Purple Line ridership would be? Stephen said that they do take that into consideration, but how BRT runs and serves riders is different than a local bus.

The committee discussed the expectation of how much traffic will remain on White Bear Ave after the Project opens. Stephen again mentioned they are still running traffic analysis and will not know until it is completed. Members mentioned that with less lanes traffic should slow down.

Torin Gustafson shared that as a project, we first need to decide who is this avenue for. Is this community, business, pedestrian, or transit focused? Ianni Houmas shared that he knows as a long-time resident, there have been fatalities on White Bear Ave, and wants to do anything we can do to reduce cars and speed.

A member expressed concern that the project staff have sold this idea of Purple Line BRT different to the business owners in the community. Alberto mentioned that there has been a lot of talk about stopping traffic and slowing down the corridor, but business owners have invested in the community with the number of cars and traffic that currently drive on Maryland and White Bear Ave. He felt that project staff are now wanting to change that and telling business owners to "deal with it;" business owners are not always living off the local residents, but people coming to Maplewood and St. Paul. When you change traffic, you are changing that dynamic. John Slade responded by saying he understands the environment

will changes, but the deaths and damages on White Bear Ave outweigh those concerns, but he would support having more conversations with business owners.

Stephen shared that purpose of this meeting is to share what we are doing now, and that we don't have all the numbers yet. This is part of the study process, and we want to bring the right and best solutions to the public. Liz wrapped up the conversation on design and moved onto tier 2 schedule and next steps.

Craig presented the Tier 2 schedule. Project staff will conducting the technical evaluations of the options that were shown today. Results will be shared in the spring, then staff will seek public feedback.

A question was asked about how options were identified and the decision-making process. Stephen shared that it would be helpful, especially for the new members of the committee, to be given the decision-making flow chart to help understand the process.

With limited time remaining, Liz moved the Johnson Parkway updates on the agenda to the next meeting.

### **Engagement update**

Colin Owens shared the variety of activities that have been done recently, including engaging with the Iowa Hi-Rise and St. John's Hospital, conducting business/resident canvassing, and conducting corridor walk/rolls. He also shared upcoming events.

Liz thanked everyone for joining and sharing their ideas and options then adjourned the meeting.

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### **Action Items**

- The next CBAC meeting will be in January to review Johnson Parkway updates, as well as updates on northern end alignment options.