

METRO Purple Line BRT Corridor Management Committee  
Notes for the March 7, 2024 Meeting  
Held Virtual through Webex

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Zelle, Vice Chair Victoria Reinhardt, Chai Lee, Mai Chong Xiong, Nikki Villavicencio, Ianni Houmas, Nick Thompson, Gail Cederberg, Brad Larsen, Nelsi Yang,

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Laurie Malone, Jennifer Lor, Bill Walsh, Khani Sahebjam

**GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT:** Craig Lamothe, Stephen Smith, Sarah Pflaum, Colin Owens, Sam O'Connell, Lesley Kandaras, Chief Ernest Morales III, Nat Gorham, Jennifer Jordan, Jer Yang, Jason Tintes, Khani Sahebjam

## 1. WELCOME (CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL)

Chair Charlie Zelle, Metropolitan Council, called the meeting of the METRO Purple Line BRT Corridor Management Committee (CMC) to order at 1:04 PM on March 7, 2024. Chair Zelle welcomed everyone and reviewed housekeeping rules for virtual meetings; and noted the Purple Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) website <https://www.metrotransit.org/purple-line-project> where the meeting agenda and presentation can be downloaded, and the recording of the meeting can be viewed.

Chair Zelle noted that the minutes from the January 10, 2024, CMC have been circulated. If there are any editing requests, please communicate them to Chair Zelle or Craig Lamothe, Project Manager, Metropolitan Council before the finalization and posting on the project's website.

## 2. State of Transit System Safety & Security

Lesley Kandaras, General Manager of Metro Transit (GM), introduced herself and mentioned that Chief Ernest Morales III of the METRO Transit Police Department (MTPD) will commence the meeting by presenting the Safety and Security Action plan, and guide members through some of the initiatives launched over the past few months.

Chief Morales explained that Metro Transit's strategy involves responding to and investigating all reported crimes on transit. He conveyed that the MTPD currently has 110 full-time officers out of the required 171, as well as 14 Community Service Officers (CSOs) out of the necessary 70. Chief Morales emphasized the successful implementation of CSOs on the light rail system for fare enforcement, which has proven effective in reducing crimes. The goal is to extend fare enforcement operation to BRT lines, enhancing the process by incorporating Transit Rider Investment Program (TRIP) agents.

Chief Morales showcased the 2023 data reflecting overall crime totals from the first quarter to the fourth quarter, indicating a 25% decrease in transit-related crimes. In comparison to 2022, there was a 32% increase in crimes. However, he emphasized that the higher percentage in 2023 was accompanied by a substantial increase in policing activities. Officers were consistently present on platforms and riding light rails throughout the year, actively addressing

Metro Transit's code of conduct (COD), issuing citations, and responding to crimes. This proactive approach has contributed to a reduction in crime and an enhanced presence of MTPD on transit.

Furthermore, Chief Morales provided information on the seven most frequently occurring crimes on transit in 2023, including homicide, sex offenses, robbery, assault, larceny/theft from a person, motor vehicle theft, and burglary (breaking and entering). MTPD observed a consistent decline in these activities, amounting to an overall 13% reduction by the fourth quarter. Chief Morales then presented a year-to-year comparison of total reported crimes, revealing a 32% increase from 2022 to 2023, with a cumulative total of 7,800 crimes reported. Notably, there was a 45% increase in police officer-initiated responses to crimes.

GM Kandaras provided an update on the Metro Transit Safety and Security Action Plan, underscoring its incorporation of 43 action items across three areas of focus. The initial phase involved extensive community and employee engagement to understand their perspectives on transit safety. In February 2022, a workgroup was formed by the Metropolitan Council, dedicating six months to establishing a framework. This effort culminated in the current Safety and Security Action Plan, addressing three key areas: enhancing conditions within the systems, training and supporting employees, and fostering engagement with customers and partners.

GM Kandaras shared that each quarter Metro Transit does report its Safety and Security Action Plan update and progress back to Metropolitan Council, noting that all 43 action items are in some stage of implementation, some are already implemented and ongoing, and five completed.

GM Kandaras recognized that with 43 items in this action plan, it might seem like a substantial amount of work, making it challenging to pinpoint the top priorities. She emphasized that, following the community engagement efforts from 2020 to 2021, Metro Transit discovered that riders expressed a desire for increased police presence, constituting a crucial aspect of the action plan. This involves ensuring more visible and present officers.

GM Kandaras highlighted that the array of MTPD presence includes the Homeless Action Team (HAT), Community Service Officers (CSOs), Supplemental Security Officers, Transit Service Intervention Project (TSIP) Partners, and TRIP personnel.

GM Kandaras mentioned that in 2023, MTPD added non-sworn, non-armed security officers stationed at seven locations identified with high ridership and patterns of frequent police calls, contributing to a reduction in problematic behaviors.

Furthermore, MTPD introduced the Transit Service Intervention Project (TSIP) under the "Transportation On the Bus" legislation, enacted and signed by the governor in the summer of 2023. TSIP Outreach aims to enhance COD and law enforcement on the overall METRO transit systems. GM Kandaras highlighted that MTPD has contracted with ten community-based organizations to provide officers on METRO transit systems.

In February 2024, MTPD initiated TRIP, also a component of the "Transportation On the Bus" legislation. GM Kandaras explained the two facets of TRIP. Firstly, it alters how fare non-compliance is addressed, shifting from a criminal offense to an administrative one. This change allows MTPD to employ non-sworn officers for fare inspection. The second aspect involves providing customer service training to TRIP personnel. GM Kandaras emphasized that the initial TRIP cohort commenced their training on February 23, 2024, with plans to gradually increase staff numbers to ensure coverage with 24 personnel available for a continuous 24-hour shift each day.

GM Kandaras introduced another aspect of how Metro Transit conveys expectations to riders. In December 2023, the Metropolitan Council approved a new COD, and Metro Transit is currently initiating the "Take Pride in Your Ride Campaign." A recent initiative within this campaign included an anti-smoking campaign, featuring a recorded message from youth played at platform stations. Furthermore, there are ongoing efforts to improve visibility signs, streamlining the process for riders to report issues to Metro Transit.

Mai Chong Xiong, Ramsey County Commissioner, thanked Chief Morales for the thorough presentation and suggested incorporating the reporting of issues through the text messaging line along with the provision of a QR code. Chief Morales acknowledged the increased usage of Text for Safety, with officers promptly responding to messages. He encouraged riders to be specific in providing details about the incident and individual descriptions to assist officers in locating suspicious individuals.

GM Kandaras mentioned that the Text for Safety also facilitates reporting other action items, such as incidents of vandalism at the bus stations such as broken glass shelters.

Chief Morales provided the Text for Safety line for Metro Transit to the members, and it is 612-900-0411.

Nikki Villavicencio, Council Member (CM) of the City of Maplewood, expressed her reservations about addressing the fare non-compliance change, asserting that it does not contribute to safety and security. CM Villavicencio pointed out the absence of representation from the disability community among the listed advocacy group partners. As someone working for a nonprofit organization serving the disability community, she finds this aspect of the action plan troubling. She highlighted that many individuals in the homeless communities also have disabilities, revealing what she perceives as the Metropolitan Council's treatment of the disability community as second-class citizens. CM Villavicencio observed that none of the seven targeted stations seemed to be on the Saint Paul side. As an avid transit rider, she voiced concerns about crime impacting the purple line. CM Villavicencio recognized improvements in transit but urged that these initiatives must be inclusive, specifically emphasizing the need to include considerations for individuals with disabilities.

GM Kandaras clarified that both TSIP and TRIP will cover both Saint Paul and Minneapolis. Chief Morales supplemented this information by mentioning the assignment of a command captain from

the West Command to the East Command, providing oversight for Saint Paul areas and implementing safety and security initiatives.

Commissioners Xiong echoed CM Villavicencio's concerns and inquired about considerations for accessibility in these safety and security action plans. Chair Zelle acknowledged these concerns and committed to revisiting them.

### **3. Community & Business Advisory Committee Report**

Ianni Houmas, Co-Chair of the Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC), provided a summary update from the February 23, 2024, CBAC meeting. Co-Chair Houmas mentioned that the CBAC reviewed the second phase of route modification, along with ridership and cost information. They also received an overview of the project benefits for the communities and reviewed engagement plans for upcoming sessions.

Co-Chair Houmas shared some concerns from the CBAC, which included worries about construction delays, comparisons to the existing Route 54, discussions about the Arcade Street station, the center-running options, and questions related to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) budget and ratings.

CM Villavicencio asked about engagements with minorities in Maplewood. Co-Chair Houmas reported that at the last engagement meeting, only seven people attended.

Commissioner Xiong inquired about addressing the concerns mentioned, especially those related to the FTA assessment. Co-Chair Houmas stated that the project staff responded to the raised concerns.

### **4. Recent and Upcoming Outreach & Engagement Activities**

Colin Owens, Community Outreach and Engagement, Metropolitan Council, presented an overview of the events organized by the Community Outreach team with various communities and stakeholders. Colin also mentioned that the Outreach staff has been actively supporting the Transit Assistant Program (TAP) along the corridor.

Additionally, Mr. Owens highlighted upcoming community events, outlining plans for door-knocking outreach in multi-family housing areas, senior communities, and minority communities. The Outreach staff has also distributed postcards and mailers to disseminate more information to the communities.

Mr. Owens shared that the Outreach team is actively working to establish connections with property owners potentially impacted by the project.

CM Villavicencio asked if there will be outreach efforts where the Bruce Vento trail. Mr. Owens stated that Outreach staff will consider it.

Commissioner Xiong asked how engagement is measured in terms of successful engagements. Mr. Owens shared that there is a development outreach plan, and the first group of

engagements were with city officials to start the conversations, followed by key stakeholders, and businesses. There are plans to involve communities to attend upcoming open houses.

Council Member Gail Cederberg, Metropolitan Council shared that will be at the upcoming Maplewood Open-House and commended the engagement team for doing a fantastic job at the previous one. Many community members felt welcomed and actively engaged during the outreach efforts.

## **5. White Bear Ave Corridor Differentiators**

Stephen Smith, Deputy Project Manager, Metropolitan Council, updated on the Purple Line Corridor evaluation, noting that it has been approximately nine months since the project began assessing the Maryland Ave and White Bear Ave alignment. Mr. Smith then progressed with the presentation, outlining the key differences identified among the four options.

In the White Bear Ave evaluation, Mr. Smith highlighted the numerous criteria considered, emphasizing the benefits. He pointed out that all the options studied provide both transit and non-transit advantages, which are sometimes not discussed sufficiently. Mr. Smith affirmed that the Purple Line offers more frequent, reliable, and faster service, improved stations, safer pedestrian crossings, comfortable walking sidewalks, and increased foot traffic in the corridor.

Mr. Smith conveyed that safety considerations for the alignment include the introduction of new medians, turn lanes, signals, and a reduction to single lanes on each side of the traffic, aiming to create a more comfortable experience for the community. The plan also incorporates opportunities for green spaces, and an environmental benefit is anticipated, as it will enhance transit services, potentially reducing overall driving. Mr. Smith presented visual exhibits illustrating the anticipated appearance.

Mr. Smith discussed some of the criteria that do not differentiate among the options, emphasizing factors such as land use, environmental considerations, concept dimensions, and parking impacts.

He went on to report that the project has identified five differentiator criteria, and he will delve into specifics about these five factors. He noted that during public engagements, boards will be used to highlight these key trade-offs.

The first differentiator is pedestrian and station access. After a thorough study, it was determined that there are no significant differences in Saint Paul. However, in Maplewood, challenges arise, particularly with the center platform, which may pose difficulties for safe access. Trade-offs between center running and side running were identified during the assessment.

The second differentiator is Safety. The project presented nine pedestrian refuges in Saint Paul, with the key difference lying in the shorter crossing distance. This is achieved through the side running option, which comprises just a single lane compared to the two-transit lane option that requires space for left turns. The single lane necessitates mitigation for median barriers to discourage by-passers from weaving into oncoming traffic. In Maplewood, the center running option offers a natural pedestrian refuge with a total of 19 stations, while the side running option

provides only one to two opportunities for pedestrian refuge. In the center running option, left turns are restricted to protected signals, and the right-turn lane would also be closed, which will help reduce crashes. On the other hand, with side running, the right-turn lane can utilize the transit lane.

The third differentiator is Traffic Operations. Regarding traffic considerations in Saint Paul, both the center running and side running options show minimal changes, except for the inclusion of one corporate left turn lane that provides additional opportunities to identify locations for adding left turn lanes. However, in Maplewood, the project found that the center running option could lead to increased delays due to more interactions, primarily arising from protected left-turning signals, as illustrated in the accompanying image.

The fourth differentiator is Transit Operations. Mr. Smith noted that there isn't a significant difference in travel time between the two options, although the single transit lane may result in slightly slower traffic on the southbound side where there is no dedicated transit lane. It's important to consider the presence of both the H-Line and Purple Line. However, it does offer more reliable transit lines. In Maplewood, travel time for the Center-Running option is faster compared to the Two Side-Running options.

The final differentiator is Property Impacts. Mr. Smith provided a high-level overview of potential property impacts, categorizing them into three levels: strip/minor, major, and total takes.

Commissioner Xiong raised a question in the chat: *"How frequently are the stations maintained?"* Mr. Lamothe replied, explaining the hierarchy in maintaining transit stops. Light rail stations hold the highest priority, followed by Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) platforms, and then the standard individual bus shelter bus stops, noting the advantage of BRT Line. Nick Thompson, Metro Transit echoed this response and mentioned that Metro Transit is incorporating additional requirements into the existing Public Facilities Maintenance standards.

Mr. Smith continued with Property Impacts and shared that the project's overall goal is to minimize properties impacts. Mr. Smith shared ariel map for both options and its property impact for both Saint Paul and Maplewood, the full view can be accessed in today's presentation packet, [page 37-39](#).

Commissioner Xiong inquired about the status of the center running option in St. Paul, asking if it has been eliminated or is under consideration for elimination. Mr. Smith responded, stating that it has been eliminated due to the significant number of properties being impacted; however, it is still under study.

Commissioner Xiong posed another question, inquiring whether CMC Members would receive updates at upcoming meetings. Mr. Smith responded, suggesting that the project could share the information at the April CMC meeting or schedule a separate meeting to review it.

Nelsie Yang, Council Member of the City of St. Paul, added that she would appreciate updates related to the Center-Running option before April 15, 2024, before she goes on leave. CM Yang emphasized the existing support for the Center-Running option and wanted to ensure her staff could continue to support the Purple Line. She sought clarification on the plan for transit riders if there were sudden overflows, questioning where riders would wait for the bus with the Center-Running option. If a thorough study hasn't been conducted yet, she encouraged the project to



conduct more research for its success. Mr. Thompson responded that the project would look into it and conduct additional studies.

## 6. Next Steps

Mr. Lamothe provided an update on the project schedule, indicating that not much has changed but efforts are underway to finalize a recommended design concept for the White Bear Ave corridor. This concept will be shared with CMC members in early May 2024. The project is actively studying costs and ridership, and surveys are being conducted to gather feedback from communities. He mentioned that all design options boards will be accessible on the project's website on Monday, March 11, 2024, prior to the Open Houses.

Mr. Lamothe presented ridership numbers in travel and transit, highlighting differences from pre-pandemic figures. Average weekday systemwide and Park and Ride (P&R) ridership is lower than 2019, ranging from 46% to 84%. Over the last two years (2021-2022), regional ridership has increased by 21%, with BRT lines carrying 15% of regional ridership.

Emphasizing the importance of transit for vulnerable populations, Mr. Lamothe shared that 50% of riders are from 0-car households, up from 35% in 2016. Additionally, 43% are from low-income households, a 38% increase, 13% represent the disability community, a 9% increase, and 55% are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, marking a 42% increase. Noting, BIPOC individuals constitute 29% of the regional population.

Mr. Lamothe reported on Purple Line ridership on the White Bear Ave corridor, estimating it at 3,400 to 4,100 riders per day using the FTA Simplified Trips-on-Project Software (STOPS) model. He reminded members that ridership numbers will continue to evolve.

Explaining the significance of securing federal funding for a project of this scale, Mr. Lamothe highlighted the rarity of regional transit-ways exceeding \$112 million since the Red Line. Currently, there are 60 projects nationwide seeking this funding, emphasizing the competitive nature of the process.

Mr. Lamothe presented an initial cost estimate for the Purple Line on the White Bear Ave corridor, indicating a 5% cost estimate with a 10% increase for extending the alignment to St. John's Hospital. The base costs range between \$275 million and \$287 million, with a contingency cost of \$104 million to \$109 million for the stretch between Union Depot and Maplewood Mall. For the alignment from Union Depot to St. John's Hospital, the base cost is estimated at \$306 million to \$318 million, with a contingency cost of \$117 million to \$123 million. The total difference in base cost is \$31 million, and the total difference in contingency cost is \$13 million to \$14 million. This yields a preliminary total cost of \$379 million to \$396 million for Union Depot to Maplewood Mall and \$423 million to \$441 million for Union Depot to St. John's Hospital, with a total difference in end-point cost of \$45 million.

Mr. Lamothe mentioned that in the early stage of design, the project is required to transition from a New Start project to a Small Start project. This transition ensures continued eligibility for FTA funding, but it does involve some adjustments in the project's nature. Consequently, certain

aspects of the project scope need to be modified to align with the criteria of the Small Start program.

**7. Other Items**

**8. Adjourn**

Chair Zelle announced that the upcoming Purple Line CMC meeting is set for April 4, 2024, and concluded the meeting, adjourning it at 2:32 PM.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, March 7, 2024

CMC PowerPoint Presentation,

Respectfully Submitted,

Jer Yang, Purple Line Administrative Lead