

METRO Purple Line BRT Corridor Management Committee
Notes for the April 4, 2024 Meeting
Held Virtual through Webex

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Zelle, Vice Chair Victoria Reinhardt, Chai Lee, Mai Chong Xiong, Nikki Villavicencio, Nelsie Yang, Gail Cederberg, Ianni Houmas, Nick Thompson, Laurie Malone, Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Khani Sahebjam, Scott McCune, Luke Schlegel

MEMBERS ABSENT: Lesley Kandaras, Bill Walsh

GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT: Craig Lamothe, Stephen Smith, Sarah Pflaum, Liz Jones, Mike Rogers, Liz Sund, Jason Tintes

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 1:02 PM on April 4, 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 March 7, 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. Community & Business Advisory Committee Report

Ianni Houmas, Co-Chair of the Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC), provided a summary update from the March 29, 2024, CBAC meeting. Co-Chair Houmas mentioned that the CBAC discussed design options for St. Paul and Maplewood, including conversations regarding roadway space and improving sidewalk gaps, traffic delay analysis for St. Paul and Maplewood sections of the White Bear Ave corridor, evaluation criteria, and ways to provide feedback during the comment period.

3. Arcade Street Station Update

Craig Lamothe, Project Manager, Metro Transit, provided an update on the Arcade Street Station's current and upcoming activities. The project team is continuing to advance engineering for the Arcade St Station at the staff recommended and CMC concurred (April 6, 2023) location from 15% design to 30% design by the end of May. Community leaders continue to advocate for a station location at the Arcade St and Neid Lane intersection. The project team issued a work order to HR&A Advisors for a site redevelopment feasibility analysis funded by the BRT project with concurrence and support from Ramsey County. The project team hopes to complete the study by the end of the month and bring the information to the Community Council for presentation and discussion in late May.

4. Narrow Center Running Option in St. Paul

Craig Lamothe, Project Manager, Metro Transit, gave a presentation on the history of the center running options in St. Paul. In October 2023, the center running option was eliminated because it required complete property acquisitions at non-station locations and would have reduced vehicle access. In mid-January, some community leaders began expressing a desire for a reconsideration of a narrower cross-section as an alternative. In March 2024, the project team created a conceptual design layout, conducted a high-level assessment, and shared it with agency project partners. Earlier today, agency project partners and community representatives met to review tradeoffs and discuss concerns.

Ianni Houmas, Co-Chair of the Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC), talked about the request to study a center running option in St. Paul. The motivation for the request is safer streets, slowing down traffic, and increasing ridership. Slowing traffic down builds better visibility for small businesses and increases revenue.

Nelsie Yang, Councilmember, City of St. Paul, expressed gratitude to staff and committee members for evaluating this option and expressed excitement. She's looking forward to hearing feedback and conversations with stakeholders, businesses, members of the disability community, and diverse community members. She restates her support for their staff members and in making the best possible choice.

Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey County Commissioner, appreciates staff responsiveness and listening to community folks. Commissioner Reinhardt stated that the schedule would be tight, but it's her understanding that we will bring something back to the Corridor Management Committee on May 2, 2024. Chair Zelle noted that this will create a little delay in the near term but not in the long term.

5. Recent and Upcoming Outreach & Engagement Activities

Liz Jones, Community Outreach and Engagement, Metro Transit, provided an overview of the current public comment period from March 11 to April 12. Additionally, Jones discussed recent and upcoming community events and topics covered and engagement materials such as virtual storyboards, display boards, flyers, handouts, and the survey. She provided a status update on engagement with potentially impacted properties and early feedback from the public comment period.

Mai Chong Xiong, Commissioner, Ramsey County, asked how many people took the survey. Jones responded 90-95 as of April 3, 2024.

Nikki Villavicencio, Councilmember (CM), City of Maplewood, asked if the survey had a question about people's use of public transit or dependence on public transit. Liz Jones said it's an important question, and we will include it in the next efforts. CM Villavicencio also asked about two upcoming events in Maplewood. Liz Jones said one is taking place at Maplewood Mall and HealthPartners, and she will send CM Villavicencio information.

Commissioner Xiong emphasized the significance of gathering demographic data. She suggested placing a QR code on the White Bear Ave buses. Liz Jones said we do not ask for demographic data when talking to people. She said we include it in surveys or questionnaires that people can fill out if they are comfortable. Currently, QR codes are not available on buses. Nevertheless, they are working on implementing a new tool that will enable them to have QR codes in more visible community spaces.

Commissioner Xiong asked how many people are currently canvassing, and Jones said that typically 2-4 people are doing it at a time. Xiong recommends increasing the team or finding strategies for door-knocking and having targeted social media ads to encourage people to take the survey.

6. Purple Line as a Small Starts Project

Stephen Smith, Deputy Project Manager, Purple Line, provided an overview of the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program and talked about the difference between the New Starts and Small Starts process, the CIG Program BRT eligibility key differences, the current FTA CIG projects, and Small Starts project comparison across the country.

The CIG Program is the largest FTA discretionary grant program (5309 Funds). It has a complex statutory framework and three types of eligible projects: New Starts, Small Starts, and Core Capacity.

Mr. Smith explained the difference between New Starts and Small Starts. A New Starts project is greater than \$400M or seeking greater than \$150M in CIG funds and is a fixed-guideway project. A Small Starts project is less than \$400M and seeking less than \$150M in CIG funds and is a fixed-guideway or corridor-based project.

In terms of schedule and process, there is no time limit for the project development phase, no engineering phase, and a single FTA evaluation, rating, and approval for a Small Starts project.

Furthermore, Mr. Smith explained that the FTA has a role in overseeing the project development (PD) for Small Start projects. Generally, the Oversight Plan is developed after the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is identified. Formal oversight starts at least six months before receiving a Grant Agreement. During this time, the FTA conducts major reviews, reviews the critical third-party agreements, and readiness to execute the Small Starts Grant Agreement.

Additionally, Mr. Smith talked about what it means for the Purple Line BRT on White Bear Ave to be a Small Starts project. He noted, the project needs to be fixed guideway project, under \$400 Million and seek less than \$150M from federal funding. The project scope will need to be reduced to maintain future federal funding eligibility.

Currently, we have two design options for St. Paul, one side-running and two side-running transit lanes, and two design options for Maplewood, center-running and two side-running transit lanes, for the White Bear Avenue corridor. He also presented the two endpoint options in Maplewood - one ending at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center and the other ending at County Rd D and Hazelwood Street. Both options vary in cost.

Mr. Smith further explained the CIG project rating and point system. He stated that in order to qualify for a funding grant agreement, the Project Justification and Local Financial Commitment must score medium or better. He also presented some scenarios for gaining back points for Maplewood Mall Transit Center and County Road D Layover end points, including cost-effectiveness, congestion relief, environmental benefits, and land use.

The next steps for the Project's CIG process involve updating ridership modeling with 2023 regional ridership, defining an approach to reduce the BRT Project scope below \$400M, and working through the remaining RMS Phase II schedule.

Commissioner Xiong requested clarification on the CIG chart and the criteria for rating the Project Justifications. Mr. Smith explained the Project Justification criteria.

Commissioner Reinhardt expressed gratitude and asked whether the electric buses are included under the environmental benefits category. Mr. Smith confirmed that they are included.

Luke Schlegel, Council Member, City of Mahtomedi, asked if transitioning to the Small Starts program will remove Century College as an end point. Mr. Smith clarified that the first step is to select a preferred alternative option and then study it further. The outcome is not yet known.

7. Next Steps

Craig Lamothe provided an update on the RMS Phase II Schedule. He stated since adding the third option in St. Paul today, our schedule will shift, and we will bring an updated schedule to the committee.

8. Other Items

Chair Zelle expressed appreciation for the work done by the staff and acknowledged that the information presented was extensive. The chair encouraged the staff to be contacted if there are any questions.

Commissioner Reinhardt expressed appreciation for the effort put in by the staff, shared her enthusiasm for the project, and mentioned that they could now concentrate on Small Starts.

9. Adjourn

Chair Zelle announced that the upcoming Purple Line CMC meeting is set for May 2, 2024, and concluded the meeting, adjourning it at 2:33 PM.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, April 4, 2024

CMC PowerPoint Presentation,

Respectfully Submitted,

Liz Sund, Purple Line Administrative Lead

