

METRO Purple Line Corridor Management Committee  
Notes for the September 16, 2022 Meeting  
Held Virtual through Webex

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Charlie Zelle, Vice Chair Victoria Reinhardt, Sue Vento, Eric Goebel, Bill Walsh, Scott McCune, Nick Thompson, Nicole Frethem, Luke Schlegel, Nelsie Yang, Ianni Houmas, Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Sheena Denny, Mike Barnes

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Nikki Villavicencio, Len Cacioppo

**GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT:** Mike Rogers, Peter Grafstrom, Sam O'Connell, Sara Pflaum, Liz Sund, Craig Lamothe, Colin Owens, Sarah Ghandour, Sophia Ginis, Jim Gersema, Liz Jones

### 1. Welcome (Call to order, Roll Call)

Chair Charlie Zelle called the meeting of the METRO Purple Line BRT Corridor Management Committee (CMC) to order at 12:36 PM on September 16, 2022. Chair Zelle welcomed everyone. Chair Zelle provides housekeeping rules for virtual meetings and the Purple Line 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.

Rollcall is taken.

### 2. New Member Introductions

Chair Zelle introduced new CMC members:

- Luke Schlegel, City Council, Mahtomedi
- Ianni Houmas, CBAC Co-char

### 3. Community & Business Advisory Committee (CBAC) Report

Ianni Houmas provided an overview of the first two CBAC meetings. July was the first meeting, and a project overview was provided and an introduction to the Route Modification Study. Ianni shared that there were questions regarding the environmental assessment and what was studied, ridership calculations, local service, and the White Bear Lake city council action. There were comments about an interest in serving White Bear Lake and the original LPA, safety concerns at crossings in Vadnais Heights at Buerkle Road, and the importance of a transit service and connections.

The second CBAC meeting was in September. The main topics from this meeting were about updates of the Route Modification Study and an introduction of the Arcade Street Station. There were questions about coordination with the MnDOT project around Arcade, CIG rating calculations and process, Route Modification Study timeline to select a new route and overall project timeline. Comments heard from the meeting were about interest in serving Century College and the communities around the college, willingness to help with Arcade from members who represent St. Paul community and business organizations, and interest in connecting with others including bicyclists beyond the walkshed.

#### 4. BRT Route Modification Study (RMS) Update

Craig Lamothe gave an overview of what the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program is. The program is over 40 years old and is a discretionary program for transit projects. This is an A-typical program because federal funding is made available at the start of construction, and expenses are federally matchable, eventually, different from other federal programs. There are three types of programs but only two of them are applicable to projects in the region – Small Starts and New Starts. Purple Line is currently a New Starts project. The FTA is required to evaluate and rate the project, but all must receive a medium rating.

The biggest differentiator of the projects is how big it is – greater than \$400M or less than \$400M, and how many federal funds are being sought for the project, less than \$150M or greater than \$150M. Many projects in this region have been New Starts projects. Not all our region’s transit projects have been funded through this program, some have been funded outside this program.

FTA evaluates and rates New Starts projects at two milestones. When a project requests to exit the project development phase (24 months long) to enter the engineering phase, and when seeking the construction grant agreement. The Small Starts project development phase does not have a timeframe, and the rating can be requested at any moment in time during the first year. The FTA is required to evaluate and rate the Small Starts project when it’s seeking the construction grant agreement. New Starts must occur in the fourth week in August.

The rating has two halves to it, a Project Justification half, and a Local Financial Commitment half. Both must score a medium to be considered for a full funding agreement. On the Project Justification side, there are six rating criteria:

- Land Use
- Economic Development
- Congestion Relief
- Environmental Benefits
- Cost Effectiveness
- Mobility Improvements

On the Local Financial Commitment side, there are 3 rating criteria:

- Current Condition
- Commitment of Funds
- Reliability/Capacity

The Local Financial Commitment for Purple Line, we are not expecting changes, it’s been stable. We continue to project a rating that mirrors a rating that Gold Line received, which is a *high* rating. For Project Justification, we received a *medium* rating. Due to recent changes, the initial project ratings for the 3 alternative endpoints fell short of achieving a medium rating.

Endpoint 1 is at an existing park and ride in VH, endpoint 2 is at the existing Maplewood Mall Transit Center, and endpoint 3 is at Century College campus in White Bear Lake and Mahtomedi. In July, all three endpoints fell short of the medium rating for federal eligibility, the project team has been making modifications. As of now, we have an endpoint 1 in New Starts rated as a *medium low*, an endpoint 2 in New Starts rated as a *medium low*, an endpoint 2 in Small Starts rated at a *medium*, and an endpoint 3 in New Starts rated as a *medium low*. The project team believes they can get all three endpoints to be federally eligible and will be presenting those results in the November meeting. We see changes can be made to the ratings with improvements to environmental benefits and cost-effectiveness criteria ratings. To get to federally eligible projects for the other endpoints with a *medium low* rating, more substantial

changes would be needed. Things such as the elimination of additional stations, reduction in the span of service, and reduction of frequency of service.

We would like to reconvene this group in early November. After the next meeting, we are planning to take this information out to the public for review and comment. Then meet again in January and we will be looking for a non-binding recommendation from this group.

Council member Luke Schlegel asked if all 3 options will be brought through public review and comment period and use that as well as the scoring to determine the revised LPA. Craig said yes, we are not planning on taking anything off the table. Earlier this year we established what the scope of that study would be. We'll continue with 3 potential endpoints.

## 5. Arcade Street Station

Sara Pflaum shared that the team has been advancing the design of the project in areas that are not in question. As the designs are being advanced, meetings with stakeholders have been going on. Stakeholders requested a change in design at the Arcade Street Station and thought pedestrians and cyclists should be accommodated on the ramp to keep them off the bus guideway. This led the team to look at different options, now narrowed down to three options. Some of these stops are relatively in the same place, and one moves further east.

Option A would be the most similar to the original design, keeping the station up at Neid and Arcade Street. Option B keeps the station to the grade of Phalen Boulevard, and the bus would stay at that grade and run under the bridge rather over. A pedestrian connection would be built to get up to Arcade Street. Option C moves the station over to Wells Street. Arcade and Payne Avenue are both served by other transit routes but this neighborhood by the proposed Wells Street Station is not in the walkshed of those transit routes. The Wells Street Station helps bridge a gap in walksheds. The station evaluation criteria will be the same:

- Increase Transit Use
- Implementable Project
- Improve Quality of Life
- Improves Sustainable Transit Options
- Enhances Regional Connectivity
- Supports Local Vision

Sara gave an overview of the Arcade Street Station evaluation and engagement timeline:

- Summer: Technical evaluation and identification of station location options.
- Mid-September – Mid-October: Public review and comment period.
- Late October – Early November: Share with Project Committees and collect feedback.
- January: New Arcade Street Station location confirmed.

Liz Jones provided an overview of the upcoming engagement efforts. Some of these efforts included targeted neighborhood-scale engagement with broader East St. Paul and corridor outreach. Preliminary engagement (before going live with options) with City of St. Paul staff, conversations with Council member Nelsie Yang, met with the owner of Seegar Square, and pop-up events at St. Paul Eastside YMCA. The outreach and engagement period will consist of:

- Mailing to the surrounding community
- Survey, canvassing in the neighborhood
- Website, newsletter, and targeted social media
- Open house and pop-up events

- Community organizations
- Individual property owner/stakeholder meetings

Council member Nelsie Yang expressed her gratitude to the staff and said they have considered concerns heard. She thanked the team for being receptive and having a diverse way of getting the information out to people. Council member Yang shared that she thinks there are good options that would provide good benefits to the communities. It comes down to hearing from residents and commuters who would use the Purple Line.

Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt thanked the staff for the work that's been done. Reinhardt is looking forward to the community's reaction on this station and for the different options.

## **6. Purple Line Connector Update**

Craig Lamothe shared that there's not a clear source of funding at this time for the capital side or transit operation and maintenance for the connector. Ramsey County and Metropolitan Council are exploring non-county and no council funding opportunities. Craig added that the Purple Line Connector is unlikely with the start of the Purple Line BRT operations in 2027.

## **7. Next Steps**

Craig Lamothe stated the next CMC meeting would be November 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup>. The following CMC meeting would be in late January, the week of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Craig shared that they would be looking to welcome a new CMC member in November from Washington County.

The next CMC meeting will cover all the technical evaluation results for laying out what it'll take to get to a federally eligible project for each of the three endpoints. In January, we'll review feedback received from the public about the Arcade Street Station and the three potential endpoints and ultimately make a recommendation.

## **8. Adjourn**

Chair Zelle addressed that there's a lot of work ahead. Commissioner Reinhardt agreed, there's a lot of work to be done and getting feedback will help make future decisions. She also emphasized that the project website has a lot of answers and encouraged members to point people to the website to get accurate information, and to encourage people to ask questions.

Chair Zelle adjourned the meeting at 1:41 PM.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, September 16, 2022

CMC PowerPoint Presentation, September 16, 2022

Respectfully Submitted,

Emilee Roschen, Purple Line Administrative Support