

Meeting Minutes: Community and Business Advisory Committee

Date: 10/11/2024
Location: Virtual, Microsoft Teams

Attendance – 11 total committee member attendees, 6 staff members, 1 guest

- John Slade
- Felicia Anderson
- Ianni Houmas
- Joan Ballanger
- Laurie Malone
- Rebecca Nelson
- Torin Gustafson
- Debra Canfield
- Zach Mensinger
- Leah Gayle
- Tim Marino
- Representative Amanda Hemmingsen-Jaeger
- Craig Lamothe
- Stephen Smith
- Liz Jones
- Colin Owens
- Ophelia Washington
- Beth Bartz
- Emilee Roschen

Meeting Notes

Welcome and Introductions

Upcoming Project Milestones

Craig Lamothe shared upcoming project milestones. He shared that the Route Modification Study (RMS) Phase 2 work will finish soon. There needs to be a recommendation for a revised Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). If the LPA is White Bear Avenue, then there will need to be a preferred design concept.

Craig shared that the project had requested an extension for the project development phase and that extension will expire on December 9th. Since the design is not advancing, the project won't be able to complete the Project Development (PD) phase by December 9th. The project would need to request a temporary withdrawal from the program but would seek re-entry after the requirements are completed. The project schedule is nearing the point of incurring another one-year delay. The RMS Phase 2 needs to be completed by February to get into the Presidential budget for fiscal year 2028.

9/23 Maplewood City Council Meeting

Craig shared that the council took three actions – withdraw support for the option of co-locating with the Bruce Vento Trail (BVT) north of Maryland Avenue; White Bear Avenue roadway reconfiguration resolution; flexible public transportation and transportation alternatives. Craig clarified things regarding the third resolution. Arterial BRT lines are a tool for a specific use – replacing high-ridership local routes that are plagued by speed and reliability issues from operating in congested corridors. The Metro micro zones are not free-standing transit service areas, they are anchored on METRO rail or bus lines and transit centers with frequent service. Autonomous transit shuttle vehicle pilots are not fully automated, cover a limited geographic area, have slow operating speeds, and have experienced weather-related and other challenges.

Craig shared that there were several letters of support for the project before this council action. He added that the project team had increased the level of coordination, communication, and outreach with the elected officials and staff when the Phase 2 work started. Craig clarified statements of numbers cited during the council meeting. The Purple Line project is a \$445 million project. When the numbers are broken down, the construction portion would be \$210 million. Craig noted that the federal government requires a large amount of contingency. The money that is appropriated for Purple Line on the county and federal level is not transferrable to other things – can't be used for arterial BRT or Metro micro.

Craig discussed ridership, saying that Route 54 doesn't follow the same route as Purple Line. The actual ridership from the portion from downtown St. Paul to Maplewood is 1,350 average daily riders. A Purple Line modeled with only high frequency service, no high amenity platforms or bus lanes for speed and reliability, would see a ridership increase to 2,740 average daily riders. A Purple Line modeled with high frequency service, high amenity platforms, and bus lanes for speed and reliability would increase to 4,700 average daily riders (2023 forecast). Population and employment forecasts based on existing municipal comprehensive plans feed the ridership forecasts. Station area planning, not yet completed, would likely guide additional people and jobs near stations, which in turn would increase current ridership forecasts. For the traffic analysis, the project used the worst hour of the day and expected about 2,000 vehicles per hour. The modeling showed that all intersections are expected to operate within acceptable levels for urban or suburban areas.

John Slade asked if the CBAC could make a recommendation to the CMC, and added that he favors strongly that the project team continue with the process despite the political situation in Maplewood. John asked if that's a motion that the CBAC would strongly support. Ianni Houmas seconded the motion and asked for clarification about whether the side versus center running question needs to be decided by February. Craig responded that yes, that decision in February would allow the design to start.

Felicia Anderson asked if Maplewood specified why they withdrew their support. Craig said that the BVT action was unanimous, they felt the change of the corridor was something no one supported doing. There was concern over vehicle capacity reduction on White Bear Avenue for the benefit of other users. The ridership was focused on 400 between 2023 and 2045 rather it being 5,000 people using the service daily. There was also concern about cost, which the city would not pay anything for this project.

Leah Gayle stated that she believes the pros outweigh the cons and stands by John and feels that the committee should support this project moving forward. Torin Gustafson stated support for continuing to move the project forward. Liz Jones noted the comments of support in the chat and said that everyone on the CBAC in attendance supports John's recommendation. All CBAC members on the call were in favor of making a recommendation to relay their support of the project to CMC to "strongly support the continued development of Purple Line."

Torin mentioned that for Gold Line, people visited San Diego to see a BRT line in action. He asked if there was a lack of vision and understanding with the city council. Craig said that came up in earlier conversations and that there was a tour done for Rush Line in 2019 in Richmond, Virginia. Liz noted that Madison, Wisconsin recently opened a BRT line and Gold Line is a close option to see in person.

BRT Route Alignment Community Preference/Feedback and Recommendation

Stephen Smith gave a recap of the technical analysis shared with the public. Information that was shared with the public included a corridor comparison; trail co-location; roadway reconstruction; land use, economic development, and destinations; socioeconomic demographics and ridership; property impacts; and environmental.

John Slade asked if Vadnais Heights or Century College extensions were plugged into the new viability numbers. Stephen said that one of the milestones to complete is looking at an endpoint. Both endpoint options are viable under the new proposed FTA guidance. He added that the project team would need to talk with Vadnais Heights and Century College about what it would mean to end at one of these locations. The project team would want to go out to the community as well to understand the merit of these endpoints.

Liz Jones shared an overview of the engagement efforts, she shared various outreach efforts, events that staff attended, and survey results. Liz said the outreach and engagement staff focused on asking the public if Purple Line should run along the BVT or on White Bear Avenue and asked about side versus center running. There were nearly 3,000 people reached during this engagement period (July-August).

Liz shared that display boards were placed at various locations throughout both corridors. This helped give the project a standing presence at different community locations and surveys were offered at these locations. Project information was also available through diverse and ethnic media ads. Project staff engaged in canvassing, visiting 23 National Night Out events along the corridor, and dropping off flyers and surveys. Staff also spoke with residents and people at bus stops in downtown St. Paul and Maplewood.

John Slade asked if canvassing happened in the north end or if the majority was concentrated in the downtown area. Liz said they did a lot of canvassing throughout the corridor but would check on the locations of their canvassing efforts.

Liz talked about Hello Lamp Post which is new to the project and Metro Transit. Hello Lamp Post is an AI feature that utilizes QR codes that were posted in accessible areas in communities. This tool allowed people to get information about Purple Line, leave comments, and ask questions. This tool was used for

about 4-6 weeks, over 200 conversations happened, and over 1,000 people accessed the tool to get information.

Liz shared survey results and takeaways. The survey was available in paper form and online. There were almost 1,400 responses. 993 people indicated that they preferred the White Bear Avenue corridor, and 351 people preferred the BVT corridor. Liz shared that there was a high percentage of people's preference for one corridor because they were opposed to the impacts on the other corridor. Liz provided high-level results from other engagement efforts. Overall, there was a lot of support for Purple Line on White Bear Avenue and a lot of engagement with the BIPOC community but low survey response rate from the BIPOC community. Liz noted that there was a disparity for people who spoke a language other than English as many did not read or write their primary language, making it difficult to complete written surveys.

In the chat, Felicia Anderson asked if overall support for/against Purple Line might change in response to Network Now proposed transit in the east metro. Craig responded that there's a lot of change in the east metro and a lot that's proposed is to help support the Gold Line and future Purple Line. Craig added that they heard Century College liked the proposed changes to Route 219, and that Route 223 is coming back at a higher frequency to connect to the hospital and Rosedale. Stephen commented that Network Now is trying to solve for things that are more immediate and Purple Line is trying to solve for the long term. Liz noted that Network Now acknowledges that it assumes the BVT alignment.

Next Steps and Stay Connected

Craig shared that the project staff is making a recommendation to the CMC on Monday. Craig acknowledges the Purple Line expressions of support and letters of support.

Ianni commented that he was at Maplewood city council meeting, and the tone and sentiment seemed anti-business, the amount of commerce the city has, doesn't culture care for small businesses. The small businesses there would need support to survive construction.

John Slade said that as part of the Purple People Coalition, they strongly support the White Bear Avenue alignment. He noted that the action seems to indicate that the project would be choosing the White Bear Avenue alignment, and that the organization supports that recommendation.

Zach Mensinger thanked the project staff for their work over the course of this project.