

TH55 Transit Study – Policy Advisory Committee Meeting #1

Date: 03/06/2025

Time: 10:30 AM-12 PM

Location: Teams Meeting

Attendees: See Introductions

Purpose of meeting: To introduce study scope and schedule, purpose and need, evaluation framework

Welcome and Introductions

Metropolitan Council Member Judy Johnson chaired the meeting. She began with an overview of the agenda and a round of introductions. Participants included:

- Project Management Team (PMT)
 - Ryan Heath (Metro Transit)
 - Adele Hall, Eavan Moore (SRF Consulting Group)
 - Jessica Laabs (Kimley-Horn)
 - Max Wilson (Hennepin County)
- Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)
 - Judy Johnson, Anjuli Cameron (Metropolitan Council)
 - Irene Fernando, Kevin Anderson (Hennepin County)
 - Gillian Rosenquist (City of Golden Valley)
 - Bethany Turnwall (City of Minneapolis, representing Jeremiah Ellison)
 - Todd Albers (City of Medina)
 - Ryan Wilson (MnDOT)
- Agency Staff
 - Jonathan Ahn, Laura Greteman (Metro Transit)
 - Nur Kasin, Lori Sommers (City of Plymouth)
 - Elias Montesa, Bradley Bobbitt, Michael Sund (Metropolitan Council)
 - Bria Fast (City of Minneapolis)
 - Mackenzie Turner Bargen (MnDOT)
 - Dusty Finke (City of Medina)

Overview of the Transit Study

Adele Hall gave an overview of the transit study.

- Purpose
 - The purpose is to study enhanced transit in the Highway 55 corridor between downtown Minneapolis and Medina.
 - Adele pointed out that the study area overlaps the study area for a Highway 169 study beginning later this year. The two studies will be coordinated.
- Tasks
 - The study will evaluate four alternatives.
 - Alternative 1 is the No Build alternative: retaining the service that exists or is currently planned for this corridor.
 - Alternative 2: Highway BRT between downtown Minneapolis and Medina.
 - Alternative 3: Highway BRT between downtown Minneapolis and Plymouth.
 - Limited stop bus service between downtown Minneapolis and Plymouth. The limited stop service was planned as Route 757 pre-pandemic.
 - For the two BRT alternatives, only station locations west of Penn Avenue will be studied; locations in downtown Minneapolis are assumed to be co-located with existing C Line stations.
- Schedule
 - The study is about one year long. It started in January and will be wrapped up in December.
 - The PMT consists of Metro Transit and Hennepin County staff working closely with the consultant team.
 - A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is composed of agency staff from each of the agencies represented on the PAC. The TAC meets monthly and vets the information seen at PAC meetings.
 - Technical work produced by the consultant team will be vetted by the TAC and PAC. The definition of alternatives phase will run through the spring. The next PAC meeting is anticipated to be in late April and will focus on alternatives definition.
 - The alternatives as defined will then be evaluated, and the results of the evaluation will be brought to the PAC at a late August meeting. The PAC could make a recommendation at that point, but if it is not ready to decide, the schedule allows for another meeting in the fall.
 - A quality control process follows each written deliverable. A series of memos will document in greater detail everything shared in the presentation format.

- The study will culminate in a final report.

PAC Roles and Responsibilities

Ryan Heath discussed the expectations for the PAC. It will meet 3-4 times between March and December 2025. Roles include:

- Approve goals, objectives, and evaluation criteria
- Comment on and approve alternatives recommended by the TAC for evaluation
- Review evaluation results and recommend next steps

Project Goals

Jessica Laabs presented the PAC with goals for the study.

- She began by giving an overview of the purpose of developing goals, which include establishing a vision for the project and what success looks like, guiding the planning process, guiding the development of BRT alternatives, informing the evaluation framework, and enhancing transparency of decision-making.
- One example of the way that goals guide the development of BRT alternatives is that they may help identify which type of BRT would suit the corridor. BRT types include arterial BRT, which operates in mixed traffic on local roads; guideway BRT, which primarily operates in exclusive bus lanes; and highway BRT, which primarily operates in dedicated carpool/transit lanes.
- Jessica Laabs showed an example of a typical BRT station. One big differentiator is offboard fare payment. Many stations also feature raised platforms for easier boarding.
- Jessica Laabs highlighted two terms that appear in the goals.
 - Mobility: How far you are able to travel in a given amount of time
 - Access: Your ability to easily reach desired destinations and services
- Irene Fernando asked whether Highway 55 is eligible for more than one type of BRT. Her understanding was that the character of the road determined the type of BRT.
- Adam Harrington replied that the BRT slides describe a range of options in the region. The goal of the study is to screen them out. Once the study team arrives at a screened recommendation of pros and cons then it can understand how to approach the project.
- Ryan Heath added that the goals will help address different flavors of BRT – such as half-mile or five-mile stop spacing – and help the project team understand the best fit for the vision.
- Irene Fernando said that the way this line and the C Line interact with each other will be meaningful. The region needs this connection, especially with the amenities like Theo Wirth near Golden Valley.

- Irene Fernando added in the chat that the bus she uses most often is the C Line at the Penn/55 station. She is very excited to have a westward option for her one-car household and would likely use a westbound BRT on TH 55 twice a week if it were available.
- Irene Fernando also asked whether the project was considering the distinctly different pedestrian environments in study area cities. Ryan answered that one of the proposed goals is about leveraging infrastructure investments. This reflects the substantial new investment in sidewalk connections and trail connections in the study area, such as park & ride improvements at Station 73 and trail investment by Three Rivers. The project team will want to hear the importance of leveraging those investments to connect people to transit.
- Judy Johnson said that these were great questions. She said that as communities redevelop/get more dense over time, Plymouth and Medina have not had those opportunities that Minneapolis and Golden Valley have had, but they are doing good work now. On Highway 55 there are apartments with affordability built in, for example. She believes Plymouth is becoming more aligned with closer-in communities.
- Judy Johnson added another good sign is that suburban providers are actively working on microtransit right now. She is hopeful that this study will continue to inform everybody on the corridor and beyond.
- Irene Fernando said that she appreciated Chair Johnson's highlighting the pronounced legislative continuity on this corridor as well as the infrastructure investments.
- Ryan Heath said that he wanted to reinforce the point that access, infrastructure, and development is a live discussion in this corridor, and the project team is trying to take all of that into account. Examples include a recent property purchase by the City of Plymouth for redevelopment and the City of Golden Valley's study of pedestrian accessibility in its downtown core.
- Jessica Laabs said that this was a great discussion, and she hoped that the PAC would see some of these thoughts reflected in the goals. She then presented the full list of proposed goals as seen below.

Table 1. Draft Project Goals

Goal	Potential Criteria
Improve transit access to activity centers and destinations	Regional job and activity centers served
Improve transit access to jobs and residences between downtown Minneapolis and suburban communities	Residents and jobs served, types of jobs, growth anticipated Travel time, service frequencies, differences from current route(s)
Improve suburb to suburb transit access	
Identify improvements that benefit people who rely on transit	

	Zero car households, low incomes, lower-wage jobs, people of color, youth, different abilities served
Improve access to the regional transit network	Connections to regional routes
Leverage existing/planned economic development and areas of opportunity for transit-oriented development	Number of viable development/redevelopment parcels (vacant/undeveloped lots or buildings); known plans for new development or redevelopment; transit-supportive zoning
Improved station amenities and enhanced customer experience	Accessibility; integration with other routes/modes (easy transfers)
Leverage other infrastructure projects and studies to advance transit	Alignment with other projects and studies

- Jessica explained that the potential criteria include data the project team can reference in evaluating how well alternatives perform on meeting these goals.
- Jessica described a push and pull between alternatives, as they serve somewhat different needs. The evaluation matrix will show how well each alternative performs on different measures. The project team will talk to the PAC and TAC about priorities. It could be a question of, is our number-one priority a fast downtown trip or serving an area just off the corridor that adds travel time but increases potential to serve people and places? Having an evaluation framework will help facilitate discussion.
- Irene Fernando mentioned in the chat that she favors the latter option.
- Todd Albers asked if there is a baseline for stop spacing and travel time.
- Adele Hall returned to the slide in which travel time is proposed as an evaluation measure. She said that transit studies often ask how to compare transit travel time to car travel times and how expectations can be aligned. This region is fortunate in having sophisticated transit planning practices. Regional plans and guidelines have specific standards for transit travel times by the type of service. Using these standards, we can say how we expect a given alternative to compare to car travel and we can identify a competitive travel time for transit, relative to driving a personal vehicle.
- Todd Albers asked whether the project team has information on what people consider an acceptable amount of time to add to their daily commute.
- Adele Hall said this information is an input into the ridership forecasting model, which is very sensitive to travel times and to pricing. It considers factors like walk time to a station, travel time on the bus to downtown, and the average price of parking downtown. The model represents behavioral trigger points: the moment where someone changes travel mode because they are sensitive to time or price.
- Daniel Soler remarked that when transit time is close to auto time, other factors can really tip the scale.

- Irene Fernando said that congestion could also be incorporated into this. Alleviating congestion was one of the key motivators for this project.
- Irene Fernando also suggested that broadband is a consideration to weave in. When Hennepin County has put in broadband, it has done it at the same time as infrastructure projects.
- Judy Johnson said that was a well-taken comment, and that fiber is now showing up as well. If you are going to dig up the right-of-way, you make sure everyone can get in and out at the same time if possible.
- Gillian Rosenquist said that she is excited about this. She is pleased to see the work and the conversations to date being reflected in the materials presented to the PAC. She asked if there is data used to understand the changing transit patterns post-pandemic. Golden Valley's transit infrastructure was built around a 9-5 downtown commute model and that does not seem to be the way people are working anymore. What kind of data do folks have and how is that being incorporated into the goals and the study?
- Adam Harrington said that is a great question, and he has been thinking about that relative to congestion as well. A shift Metro Transit has seen is that the market to downtown is not as strong as it was because of remote work, but there are more all-day transit markets in areas where there are multipurpose trips. That strength of market is from late morning to late afternoon/evening on weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Network Now will focus some new investments in that market. The market shift will need to be considered in this corridor.
- Judy Johnson said she is encouraged by investment in housing and other uses of downtown.
- Ryan Heath said a number of the criteria that the project team is considering also help break out of the traditional 9-5 workday. The criteria take into account activity centers and access to shift work. The move away from serving the 9-5 market is baked into the criteria from the beginning.
- Judy Johnson mentioned that there have always been a lot of job vacancies in the western suburbs, and that is a source of angst.
- Kevin Anderson said that a major infrastructure investment like this also generates jobs and interest from private industry. It is a part of the whole development cycle. Investment in these amenities spurs additional growth and makes it more attractive for a business to set up shop. That is why we want to make sure we're preparing for long-term growth in patterns that will follow it. Not just serving what is, but what will be.
- Judy Johnson said that the new transit sales tax is very welcome, as is the Imagine 2050 plan. A lot of these considerations are woven into that plan, too.
- Todd Albers asked whether Metro Transit or the Metropolitan Council have reached out to Federal Reserve Banks that might be doing some economic studies on transit.
- Ryan Heath answered that they have not been approached directly. They and other economic research groups have looked at the economic impact of transit. The project team can provide that

to this group. Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council also pull data on jobs created by high frequency transit, so that is information they would be happy to provide.

- Judy Johnson said that it would be good to see investment in housing in this corridor.
- Judy Johnson asked if the PAC was ready to adopt these project goals. She thinks they would advance the study in a big way.
- Irene Fernando moved to adopt the project goals, noting that the PAC had a robust discussion and at its next meeting there are likely more goals than what is listed here. Judy Johnson seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Next PAC Meeting

- Adele Hall said the project team would like to reconvene the PAC relatively soon. The next meeting will review three service alternatives: two BRT alternatives and Route 757. By then station locations and service plans will have been developed.
- Adele Hall proposed Tuesday, April 29 from 10:30 to noon, in person at Golden Valley City Hall.
- Irene Fernando said that might be problematic, as the Hennepin County board meets later that day. The morning before a County board meeting is usually busy with last-minute requests.
- Judy Johnson asked about meeting earlier in the morning. Irene Fernando said that would make it easier. She added that she is mindful that not everyone on the PAC is full-time. It used to be common to meet very early in the morning to accommodate work schedules. That is not her desire, but it is how they made it possible for everyone to attend.
- Bethany Turnwall noted that the City of Minneapolis has committee at the same time on Tuesday mornings.
- Judy Johnson asked staff if they could send out a poll to the people who manage calendars for each entity. The meeting might have to be moved off Tuesday. However, this week is the general timeframe proposed.
- Adele Hall said that the project team would follow up on scheduling, whether it is earlier on this day or trying to find a different day that week.
- Judy Johnson asked whether there were any lingering questions or comments.
- Irene Fernando asked how all this connects to Network Next, Network Now, and Metro Transit's BRT planning. Robbinsdale and Rosedale would also be impactful connections. A Lowry-to-Rosedale route would really interact favorably with the system.
- Anjuli Cameron suggested that it might be helpful to have Adam present that information at a future meeting.

- Adam Harrington said that the Network Now framework will be brought to Transportation Committee on Monday and does have funding for Route 757. It is a later part of the plan because Metro Transit wants to have it informed by this work. An arterial BRT plan is being updated, and of course Lowry Avenue will be part of that evaluation as well.
- Judy Johnson said that she is leaving the development committee for the transportation committee, so she is excited about that and hopes to be an advocate for that work.

Action Items

Task	Responsible Party	Date Due (Status)
Send scheduling poll to PAC members for PAC meeting #2	PMT	ASAP (in progress)
Complete scheduling poll for PAC meeting #2	PAC members or staff	3/14/2025
Send out PAC #1 slides and meeting summary	SRF staff	3/11/2025 (in progress)
Complete Tech Memo #0: Goals, Objectives and Evaluation Framework	Consultant team	3/11/2025 (for initial review by PMT)