

METRO Purple Line BRT Corridor Management Committee  
Notes for the August 1, 2024 Meeting  
Held Virtual through Webex

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Charlie Zelle, Vice Chair Victoria Reinhardt, Chai Lee, Mai Chong Xiong, Nelsie Yang, Ianni Houmas, Laurie Malone, Nick Thompson, Laurie Malone, Khani Sahebjam, Len Cacioppo, Erik Goebel, Gail Cederberg, Kathleen Murphy

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Nikki Villavicencio, Gretchen Artig-Swomley, Scott McCune, Luke Schlegel, Bill Walsh, Lesley Kandaras

**GUESTS/OTHERS PRESENT:** Craig Lamothe, Stephen Smith, Sarah Pflaum, Liz Jones, Jennifer Jordan, Galen Ryan, Nat Gorham, Liz Sund, Jason Tintes

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

Chair Zelle, Metropolitan Council called the meeting of the METRO Purple Line BRT Corridor Management Committee (CMC) to order at 1:05 PM on August 1, 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 June 6, 2024, CMC have been circulated. If there are any editing requests, please communicate them to Craig Lamothe, Project Manager, Metropolitan Council before the finalization and post them on the project's website.

### 2. Community & Business Advisory Committee Report

Ianni Houmas, Co-Chair of the Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC), provided an update from the July 26, 2024, CBAC meeting. He reported at the July CBAC they discussed the two endpoint options at either Maplewood Mall Transit Center or County Rd. D, and shared feedback from project partner stakeholders and surrounding interested parties. They also discussed the RMS Phase II corridor comparison, walked through the information that is shared through public engagement, and discussed concerns around loss of vegetation in the corridors.

### 3. Community Outreach & Engagement Update

Liz Jones, Community Outreach and Engagement, Metro Transit, provided an overview of the community outreach and engagement period we are currently in. We have been doing outreach and engagement comparing the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor and White Bear Ave Corridor and providing key characteristics of each corridor. Bruce Vento Trail has fewer impacts on future traffic operations and properties, quicker construction, shorter transit travel times, fewer destinations, less transit-supportive development, and change in the trail character with ped improvements to trail crossing and roadway intersections. White Bear Avenue has impacts to future traffic operations and properties, slower construction, longer transit travel times, more

destinations and transit-supportive development, and full roadway reconstruction with infrastructure improvements.

Ms. Jones talked about the engagement plan between July-August. The purpose is focused on narrowed center running options in St. Paul and corridor wide engagement of Bruce Vento Regional Trail co-location and the White Bear Avenue Corridor Route Alternative. She provided samples of some of the materials including flyers, postcards, survey questions, social media, and display boards.

In addition, Ms. Jones provided an update on the Johnson Parkway engagement and the next steps. We realized we needed additional time for engagement and evaluations with the feedback we received.

Councilmember Yang, City of St. Paul, inquired about the feedback we received regarding the Johnson Parkway Bridge. Ms. Jones responded that concerns include the proposed addition of new roadways, potential changes to traffic flow, and safety issues. However, there is also support for the bridge. Councilmember Yang shared that she has heard similar feedback and expressed the need for further discussion and updates regarding the bridge.

#### **4. White Bear Avenue Corridor Northern Endpoint Recommendation**

Craig Lamothe, Project Manager at Metro Transit, presented two potential northern endpoint options for the White Bear Avenue Corridor: Maplewood Mall Transit Center, County Road D, and Hazelwood Street. He shared that Metro Transit's program, Network Now, is an initiative that, if approved, would be implemented before Purple Line. Route 223, which used to exist pre-pandemic, is being suggested to be reintroduced as part of the Network Now and a micro zone, encompassing the northern end.

Mr. Lamothe reviewed the investment options for the endpoint locations. Ending at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center with the bus operating in mixed traffic is estimated to require a \$10 million investment. For County Road D, there are two potential endpoint options. The first option is side-running transit lanes with an estimated investment of \$51 million, but project staff believe it could be reduced to \$25 million. The other option includes a side-running guideway with a \$55 million investment, which project staff also think could be lowered to \$25 million.

Mr. Lamothe also shared feedback from project partners and stakeholders regarding the endpoint options. Metro Transit Operations/Maintenance/Route and System Planning prefers the endpoint at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center, while the Maplewood City Council, M Health Fairview Administration Staff, and Vadnais Heights Staff all prefer the endpoint at County Rd. D.

Metro Transit has concerns ending at County Rd. D instead of Maplewood Mall Transit Center. They believe this could lead to extra costs for additional facilities, duplicate layover/turnaround areas, and driver restrooms already available at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center.

Additionally, this change would increase the route length resulting the need for additional buses and bus operators.

Mr. Lamothe provided information about regional hospitals as ridership generators and the average daily boardings projected in 2045. He also discussed the M Health Fairview St. John's Hospital expansion and the Vadnais Heights Workforce Housing development. These two future developments could potentially contribute to Purple Line ridership, but they were not accounted for in the 2045 forecast.

Mr. Lamothe highlighted feedback from interested parties, including the Cardinal Point Senior Cooperative Living Community Residents, Legacy Village Residents/HOA, and Real Estate Equities Project Staff. He also shared feedback from the community. Notably, people with disabilities and seniors expressed their opposition to receiving a one-seat ride to the hospital if it would make the user experience less accessible at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center for other transit services. The general public's response to both options was mixed.

Key considerations for a recommendation are federal funding eligibility, additional ridership against the additional one-time capital costs and additional ongoing operations and maintenance costs, tradeoffs and concerns leading to mixed preference from project partners and stakeholders, interested parties, and community members, as well as connections to healthcare facilities/employment centers has been a long-term goal of Purple Line and has become a priority for FTA /proposed federal funding program guidance.

If the Purple Line route is recommended to operate in the White Bear Ave corridor and not be collocated with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, then the contingent preferred northern endpoint in Maplewood is recommended to be County Road D Station. Mr. Lamothe noted the contingencies.

Commissioner Reinhardt mentioned that it's early in the design phase, but we should continue to work with the hospital and proceed with the recommendation.

Commissioner Xiong asked how the ridership number would decrease after stopping at the Maplewood Mall and then continues to other stations. Mr. Lamothe stated that some riders prefer to avoid transferring but believe about two-thirds of the riders would continue.

Commissioner Xiong also asked if accessibility would be part of the project to make it more accessible during the transfer station at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center. Mr. Lamothe clarified that the project is currently at 1% design and stressed the importance of enhancing convenience and accessibility.

## **5. Bus Lane Compliance and Enforcement Peer Review**

Galen Ryan, Transit Planner, presented the research conducted on bus lane compliance and enforcement related to the use of red paint and enforcement strategies. The presentation provided an overview of the effects of red paint on traffic violations in bus-only lanes, along with effective bus lane management techniques and local and national research. Mr. Ryan discussed effective bus lane management techniques, including stakeholder coordination, enforcement, legislation, education, and monitoring.

He shared the past findings from the Hennepin Ave South bus lane pilot that Metro Transit conducted, showing that adding a new bus lane with red paint decreased travel time, decreased passenger delay, and increased reliability.

He presented statistics from before-and-after studies conducted in several cities adding red paint to bus-only lanes that already existed. The study shows that red paint decreased violations and had a positive impact on safety in the corridor (reducing the rate of collisions).

While red paint has proven to be effective, we are exploring different enforcements methods, including types of violations and strategies. Preliminary studies have shown that enforcement improves the return on investment.

Six agencies were interviewed about bus lane camera enforcement, and key themes included strong momentum toward video/automated enforcement, key considerations for designing an operations and maintenance framework, developing vendor criteria, conducting outreach and engagement methods, and developing legislation.

The next steps for bus lane enforcement research are to develop a final report with program recommendations. Metro Transit will take time to evaluate the report and consider pilot logistics, then Metro Transit will engage regional partners to authorize a pilot. Metro Transit could move forward with a pilot in 1-2 years.

Chair Zelle emphasized the important information and expressed gratitude.

Commissioner Xiong inquired about potential racial disparities in enforcement based on the research. Mr. Ryan clarified that the bus lane study on red paint did not cover those specifics and solely focused on the impact on transit service. Commissioner Xiong encouraged Metro Transit to include communities in the planning and design.

Ianni Houmas expressed concerns about photo enforcement and disparities. Councilmember Lee clarified that the state only allows photos of the license plate, not the driver, and expressed appreciation for the staff's presentation.

## **6. Next Steps**

Craig Lamothe, Project Manager, Metro Transit provided an update on the revised RMS Phase II schedule and a preview of upcoming Purple Line CMC meetings.

## **7. Other Items**

Chair Zelle expressed gratitude to everyone and mentioned that a lot of information had been shared. Vice Chair Reinhardt inquired about the timeline for applying for the Small Starts project. Craig Lamothe explained that we are currently classified as a New Starts project, but the federal government has proposed new guidance. We will need to wait for the final guidance to determine if we will remain a New Starts project or transition to a Small Starts project. If we do need to change to a Small Starts project, we will need to submit a letter seeking redesignation before December.

Commissioner Reinhardt commended the staff for their work acknowledged the comprehensive information presented.

## **8. Adjourn**

Chair Zelle announced that the upcoming Purple Line CMC meeting is set for September 5, 2024, and concluded the meeting, adjourning it at 2:29 PM.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, August 1, 2024

CMC PowerPoint Presentation,

Respectfully Submitted,

Liz Sund, Purple Line Administrative Lead