

## Meeting Minutes: Community and Business Advisory Committee

**Date:** 5/22/24 and 5/24/24 (Two meetings, each 1-hour, same discussion topics)  
**Location:** Hybrid: Metro Square & Microsoft Teams

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### Attendance – 9 total committee member attendees, 6 staff members

- John Slade (5/24)
  - Patrick Horan (5/22)
  - Leah Gayle (5/22)
  - Joan Ballanger (5/22)
  - Ianni Houmas (5/22)
  - Kailey Mo Becker (5/22)
  - Torin Gustafson (5/24)
  - Felicia Anderson (5/24)
  - Darrell Paulsen (5/24)
  - Craig Lamothe (5/24)
  - Stephen Smith (5/24)
  - Sara Pflaum (5/24)
  - Liz Jones (5/22)
  - Galen Ryan (5/22)
  - Leila Bunge (5/24)
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### Meeting Notes

#### Transition to Small Starts (5/24 Meeting Topic)

##### From 5/24 Meeting

Craig Lamothe started the meeting asking what topics the group wanted to discuss from the agenda. John Slade asked for more detail about the project's transition to small starts. Craig explained that project staff had to switch to small starts because of ridership projections, explaining that across the country ridership is down post-pandemic. White affluent workers are not working downtown. Staff are estimating somewhere between 3,000-4,000 riders to St. Johns/Hospital via either White Bear Avenue or Bruce Vento Trail corridor, which is about half of the ridership that we previously projected. The project corridor has been shortened to a 10-mile line but at the same cost as the route going to White Bear Lake. Materials cost have also increased. These factors together do not give Purple Line a rating for new starts. A small starts project does have a cost limit of \$400 million so any of the options that are more than that will need some adjustments to reduce the cost.

Craig explained that in a future CBAC meeting staff can talk about station ridership. That is a difference seen depending on corridor; however, the overall ridership is in roughly in the same ballpark. With the Bruce Vento Trail corridor, there are only 4 stations and travel time is faster compared to White Bear Ave corridor with 12 stations.

Felicia asked is the golf course considered in the ratings process. Craig explained that we need to look at the city's comprehensive plan and can include things that haven't been built yet if it's identified as future development in the plan (i.e., using jobs/people estimates). Staff have met with the developer previously and understand that the plan is potentially to build affordable housing. Stephen Smith explained that if something gets built now and wasn't in the city's comprehensive plan that's hard to include in the model; however, staff do refresh the model.

John asked if staff are using the new model that FTA is rolling out. Stephen explained that they are.

John asked if student housing is considered in the modeling for a rating and Craig explained that they are different work trips (i.e., students going from home to school, they would be captured). This is why there is difficulty with ending Purple Line at Century College because the potential transit activity only happens during the school year and nothing during the summer. Having two different service plans is easy to do with a local route but not as feasible with a transitway project (harder to justify). Project staff are still committed to serving Century College with a potential extension.

Sara explained that Washington County has been interested in studying arterial BRT up Century Ave from Gold Line to at least Century College. Metro Transit is also studying what the arterial BRT lines could be (H, K, L lines).

John asked if FTA would recognize that since everywhere across the country is experiencing lower ridership post pandemic, will there be a shift in modeling? Stephen explained that FTA does give you a recovery rate bump in ridership. Metro Transit is seeing a year over year recovery too. When we model, we're using 2030 numbers, there's a 16% increase (we are slightly better than the country). We expect this year to be the same.

John asked how high would ridership need to be to be new starts? Stephen explained there's a lot of factors that need to be considered, not just ridership and it's more discretionary. Craig explained Purple Line won't be able to get a medium rating (we lost a suburban market, Park and Ride ridership has gone down); however, there's still community benefits even if we don't score as high in the federal program.

John asked to have staff present the criteria for the project's transition to small starts that was discussed in the April 4 CMC. Craig said we can and send the slides and video to CBAC members.

### **New Center-Running Option in the Saint Paul section.**

Sara Pflaum presented the new center-running option in the Saint Paul section that is under design and technical evaluation. This new option is anticipated to extend the schedule for selecting a preferred White Bear Ave corridor concept.

Sara displayed the typical cross-section for the new center running option that is more narrow than the center-running layout in the Maplewood section to fit within the limited right of way on Maryland and White Bear avenues through Saint Paul.

Sara presented the draft layout at several points along the corridor. At Maryland and Hazelwood, the station platforms (shown in yellow) are off-set, one on each side of the intersection. Concrete medians (in

blue) provide pedestrian access to and protection on the platform. This area has fewer impacts to adjacent properties than the rest of the Saint Paul section but it will impact the front yards of properties on the south side of the street.

At Maryland and Flandrau, staff determined that the station should move closer to Flandrau to preserve reasonable traffic operations at the intersection of White Bear and Maryland. Flandrau will be a bike boulevard in the future. This area has some green space; staff are working to include green space where feasible. This option has less green space than the other option in Saint Paul.

Kailey asked if Flandreau is planned to be a bicycle boulevard, would that mean that it's going to be bikes and pedestrians only? Sara responded that it's a City of St. Paul project. It would be bike, pedestrian, and local traffic, so the crossing at Flandreau would be closed, making it more difficult for cars outside of Flandreau to cut through. Vehicles won't be prohibited. Ianni Houmas added that Flandreau may be closed to areas near schools – closed during school hours and only open for drop off and pick up, which would allow for bikeways and for the schools to use the outdoor nature spaces. Ianni said that this project to be determined because the project is number 23 on the city's capital improvement project list. Kailey said that she likes having a station at the Flandreau cross streets as opposed to being closer to White Bear Avenue.

At Ivy and White Bear, staff are considering removing the signal and left turn lane and block cross traffic to prevent impacting buildings. This would also potentially require an acquisition of the smoke shop on the corner the rest of the buildings would remain, and the intersection still would function well with traffic and would be an improvement for pedestrians crossing.

At Arlington and White Bear, the sidewalk is moved further west, closer to building fronts, in order to avoid impacts to Hayden Heights Library.

Staff are working through the evaluation of the option. So far we're seeing more property impacts and potentially more full takes than other options even with a narrowed configuration. There is similar traffic flow at signalized intersections but reduced neighborhood connectivity. Driveways and unsignalized intersections will be right-in/right-out. There is anticipated to be improved safety due to reduced left-turns. Staff are still evaluating what this option entails for the trade-offs.

With this option, we are still providing the same pedestrian-enhanced crossings as with the other St. Paul options but every side street would become right in right out to access Maryland. Traffic operations would have roughly the same level of service but left turning will become harder and would be allowed every half mile at a signalized intersection and a waiting left turn arrow. Transit operations would be improved since we're not slowing down BRT for right turning vehicles.

Kailey asked if the project team is still deciding whether to do center or side running. Sara responded that yes, they are still deciding. Sara explained that this newer option came out from feedback from the community. The City of Maplewood would be getting an option for center running that really prioritizes transit in the corridor and makes more of a safety improvement with reducing opportunities for the left turn conflicts. This option has been added to the mix but it's lagging behind the others. About every quarter mile, intersections are being closed to prioritize the pedestrian crossings. This decision won't be

made until end of July/early August. Liz encouraged members to provide comments and feedback and added that the project team would be doing broader public engagement this summer before the October timeframe to decide on a White Bear Avenue or Bruce Vento Trail alignment.

Kailey said that as a citizen, having full takes or eminent domain would be the last case scenario. Kailey added that she'd like to see the least number of complete takes as possible but hasn't seen the side running plans yet. Liz said that there are more property impacts with the center running option in Saint Paul but there are still impacts in the side running option. Craig explained that this project could be viewed more as a street reconstruction project than just a transit project. The county's street reconstruction process would replace pavement in poor condition and rebuild sidewalks and doing so would touch every parcel that fronts the street, which is what's reflected in the project's plans. There are at least temporary easements needed to have enough space to rebuild sidewalks during construction. Even with side running, there are full property takes in Maplewood and Saint Paul. Sara added that these impacts don't rise to the level that we assume need to be whole property takes, but the project is bringing sidewalks close to people's homes, especially at the station locations. Liz explained that with this new option, since there has been support for it, there's been a shift in value systems, so the project team is presenting the trade-offs, more property impacts, more traffic operational impacts, more boulevard and green space impacts. The project staff are collecting feedback on all the options on what community prioritize the most. Sara shared that this scenario, at Ivy, would take the smoke shop on the northwest corner. There are several properties with major impacts and can see property owners saying the impacts are so great that they feel it would be a full taking of the property.

Kailey asked if the side running option would be a reconstruction of the street regardless. Sara responded yes it would be. Kailey asked if there would also be lane extensions of White Bear Avenue – two lanes for buses and one to two lanes for either direction of traffic. Sara explained that no it would not have lane extensions. The project studied in 2017 widening the roadway to add more lanes for the bus transitway but that essentially would take out all homes and businesses on one side of the corridor and it was ruled out. The county was asked to look at a four-to-three conversion. The county asked the project team to look at converting two of the general-purpose lanes to bus lanes and see if it would work to allow the Bruce Vento Trail to remain a trail. Liz added that the project would essentially replace the existing general lanes with bus lanes. There would be some changes to right-of-way impacts but it would stay in the similar footprint. Craig explained that the general the areas of impact are where stations are, they widen things out. Left turns are the other areas where property impacts come in any scenario.

Staff continues to evaluate all options to determine the preferred design of the White Bear Ave Corridor.

Staff have finalized layouts and are planning to go out for engagement in July.

From 05/22 Meeting:

### **Arcade Street Station**

Project staff presented a brief overview of the history of the Arcade Station options. The project is also conducting a new market analysis of adjacent private property to inform any new alignment opportunities that would require participation by the property owner.

Staff displayed several vantage points and new visualizations since the last CBAC meeting.

There will be more engagement with the CBAC about the Arcade station area and the planning process.

#### From 5/22 Meeting

No discussion.

#### From 5/24 Meeting

Craig went through the new visualizations for Arcade and explained how the station would be located for A2. He explained that these show what Purple Line is proposing to build but there's still room to make changes such as additional landscaping and possibility of affordable housing could be built in the future to the left of the station. Staff are working with ESABA, the Port Authority, and city to study redevelopment options. Staff plan to meet with the Glimcher Group later this summer (Seegar Square owner) to see their interest in partnering together to build a station at the shopping center.

### **Other topics discussed**

#### From 5/24 Meeting

Craig mentioned a few things that are coming up for project decisions: Johnson Pkwy options and Arcade Station design. For Arcade Station, the project is planning to carry two station design options through the environment clearance process then decide prior to 100% design. Staff are keenly focused on working toward a preferred design for the White Bear Ave Corridor and determining the revised locally preferred alternative (which corridor). These decisions will come up at different CMC meetings over the next several months (August through October). June CBAC will probably be a preview of public engagement materials for narrowed center running and open house boards for BVT and WBA (including ridership and cost).

The decision on White Bear Ave Corridor or Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor will take place at the Sept 27 CBAC meeting and Oct 3 CMC meeting.

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### **Action Items**

- Distribute April CMC presentation (video and slides)