

Meeting Minutes: Community and Business Advisory Committee

Date: 7/26/2024
Location: Virtual, Microsoft Teams

Attendance – 8 total committee member attendees, 7 staff members

- John Slade
- Joan Ballanger
- Ianni Houmas
- Torin Gustafson
- Felicia Anderson
- Zach Mensinger
- Leah Gayle
- Kailey Mo Becker
- Craig Lamothe
- Stephen Smith
- Sara Pflaum
- Liz Jones
- Beth Bartz
- Colin Owens
- Emilee Roschen

Meeting Notes

RMS Phase II Anticipated Decisions and Timeline

Liz Jones shared a list of upcoming meetings for the CMC.

John Slade asked if the CMC membership changed and asked where the current list of members can be found. Liz Jones responded that the membership didn't change, Mahtomedi and Vadnais Heights are included, so they're still part of the CMC. Craig said he added the link to the chat. The only one that's not current is the MnDOT representative.

White Bear Ave Corridor Northern Endpoint

Craig Lamothe discussed the two possible endpoint options – Maplewood Mall Transit Center or County Road D. Craig shared the project team has gone out to the public to share the options and to collect feedback. Craig added that Metro Transit's program, Network Now, is an initiative that if approved, would be implemented before Purple Line. This initiative would introduce eight micro zones and one of those zones would encompass the Maplewood north end area.

Craig reviewed the investment options that could be at both endpoint options. Ending at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center with the bus running in mixed traffic would have an estimated investment of \$10 million. County Road D has two possible endpoint options. One option would be side-running transit lanes with an estimated investment of \$51 million, but project staff think the cost could be brought down to \$25

million. The other option would include a side running guideway with a \$55 million investment, but project staff also think the cost could be brought down to \$25 million.

Craig shared project partner and stakeholder feedback heard based off the endpoint options. Metro Transit Operations/Maintenance/Route and System Planning prefers ending at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center. Maplewood City Council, M Health Fairview Administration Staff, and Vadnais Heights Staff all prefer the endpoint at County Rd. D.

Craig shared some information about regional hospitals as ridership generators and shared the average daily boardings that are projected in 2045. Craig discussed the M Health Fairview St. John's Hospital expansion and the Vadnais Heights Workforce Housing development and how these two future developments could contribute to Purple Line ridership, noting that ridership did not account for these developments in the 2045 forecast. Craig highlighted feedback heard from interested parties of Cardinal Point Senior Cooperative Living Community Residents, Legacy Village Residents/HOA, and Real Estate Equities Project Staff. Craig shared feedback from the community. People with disabilities and seniors were not in favor of gaining a one-seat ride to the hospital if it came at the cost of a less accessible user experience at Maplewood Mall Transit Center to other transit services. The general public had mixed support for both endpoints.

Zack Mensinger commented in the chat that six buses an hour in each direction doesn't seem likely to impact traffic in a meaningful way, especially if at least one trip is being replaced by the bus, which would make it neutral.

Zack asked if there was a possibility to go up to County Road D but not end there and loop back to the Maplewood Mall Transit Center. Craig responded that they had an option with a station at County Road D and a layover at the Transit Center. There would still be additional looping which would trigger additional buses and operators and would pick up additional O&M costs.

Torin Gustafson asked if the line were to terminate at the Transit Center, would those riders not exist or how would they be accounted for. Craig responded that if Purple Line was implemented now, those riders would have to walk to get to the hospital. With the Route 223 coming back and Metro Transit micro by 2027, riders would have to transfer from Route 54/Purple Line to get to the hospital.

Craig shared that the Purple Line staff recommends the White Bear corridor endpoint be County Road D, with contingencies. The contingencies include the Real Estate Equities implementation of the proposed Workforce Housing Project, M Health Fairview implements priced parking and engages with the Metro Transit Employer Services team, and the Maplewood Mall Transit Center Station design advancement focuses first and foremost on maximizing usability for mobility impaired customers.

Zach Mensinger asked if the parking ramp at the hospital is bound to the parking minimums in Maplewood and if they are required to add more parking. Craig said that part of the hospital's expansion is to replace the surface parking lot.

John Slade commented that he didn't like the project's second contingency. John said he didn't see the data as supporting paid parking. John also noted that this is a public project but two of the contingencies include private parties.

Torin Gustafson commented that there's a slope near the County Road D endpoint and asked how that would be dealt with. Torin said that it looked like there was an extended driveway that could be extended to go through the station. Craig said the trail to the north is within the County-owned right-of-way and the extension could easily go north. Stephen Smith added that this is something the project and Ramsey County Parks could coordinate and connect to the Bruce Vento Trail.

RMS Phase II Corridor Comparison

Stephen Smith reviewed the comparisons between the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor and the White Bear Ave Corridor. If on White Bear Ave, the Purple Line project would be a full roadway reconstruction, and if co-located with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, the trail would be reconstructed only through the portion of the Purple Line route that uses the Ramsey County rail right-of-way.

Ianni Houmas asked if the conflicts on White Bear Ave were overall. Stephen said they are overall conflicts; they are trying to capture the differences. There are fewer conflicts with center running but people turning left would need a protected left. With side running, we'd have to account for the cars in the right lane. The Bruce Vento Trail corridor would have less conflicts.

Torin Gustafson asked what portion of the Route 54 ridership is contained in the White Bear Ave numbers and demographics, and what the new net ridership is from the Route 54 versus the new net ridership with Bruce Vento Trail. Torin also noted that there are a lot of people concerned about losing the nature in the Bruce Vento Trail corridor – is there a way to mitigate people's reactions to seeing trees and wildlife gone? Stephen said they will see an increase in ridership for the Route 54 and Purple Line. They are seeing an overall net increase and almost more than double of the Route 54 ridership. Craig Lamothe added that landscaping would be done. In the Bruce Vento Trail corridor, the tree canopy would be removed, and it would take time for that to grow back.

Torin asked what boulevard trees and landscaping would look like in the White Bear Ave corridor. Stephen said the project's overall goal is to provide as much boulevard space as possible but are not far enough into design to know how many trees and landscaping can be done. The design is showing some curb impact and that would impact the trees. Sara Pflaum added that several sections don't have any boulevard trees today. The tree placement will need to follow city and county rules and will depend on if they can fit in the boulevard or if they'll need to be placed elsewhere in the corridor. The White Bear Ave and Maryland corridor tree replacement may be in the low hundreds, but the trail corridor could be in the thousands. There would be plantings at the stations and in some places to provide screening in the neighborhoods.

Joan B asked in the chat if she would need to transfer to get to the Mall of America and the airport if Route 54 goes away. Stephen said Route 54 would be truncated to potentially Clarence and Maryland. There would be a transfer that would connect to other destinations. Liz Jones added that Route 54 would have a stop and could go to the mall or airport. Sara Pflaum noted there are other projects planned and that may mean there's not a one-seat ride to the airport.

Engagement Approach

Liz Jones shared they're having 3 project open houses and doing pop-ups, tabling, and canvassing throughout the entire Purple Line corridor. There are a lot of display boards out in different buildings in the community, and copies of the surveys are available to allow people to engage with the project in their spaces. The project is also doing promotions through different media outlets.

Additional Q&A

Ianni Houmas asked if there's a link for a waiting room, other than YouTube for people to view the CMC meetings. Liz said they use Webex, and the live stream is through YouTube but can check if there are other mechanisms. Ianni said some folks would like to view and possibly ask questions during the meetings and if there is time allowed to get to the questions. Liz said they could look into a way to incorporate questions into the CMC. John Slade added Blue Line meetings are publicly held.

Action Items

-