

Court International Building, Ground Floor-RM #150 2550 University Avenue West St. Paul

Meeting of the Central Corridor Business Advisory Committee

Monday, October 20, 2008

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Kay Baker, Kathy Bjerke, Lori Fritts, Sharon Johnson, Jim Roth, David Youmans.

Others Present: Dan Soler, Eve Vang, Robin Cauffman, Jessica Hill, Hue Pham, Shoua Lee, Rita Rodriguez, Karri Plowman, Jonathan Sage-Martinsen

1. WELCOME

Karri opened the meeting at 4:05PM and noted that the Co-Chairs Lori Fritts and Jim Roth were on their way. Today's agenda includes the University Avenue Traffic Study, the Washington Avenue Bridge, and an update on the first business listening session held at the Hallie Q. Brown Center in Minneapolis. Two more will follow this month in Saint Paul.

BAC members discussed the business listening sessions format and notification. The listening sessions include a brainstorming exercise to gather ideas on comments/concerns, communication strategies, training needs, general resources, and marketing.

Sharon Johnson suggested that the CCPO notify BAC members ahead of time so they can help get the word out about the business listening sessions. Kathy Bjerke offered to put the flier up on their message board.

Ms. Johnson suggested that we hold a business listening session on the West Bank and offered to insert the information in the local newsletter at Westbank-Cedar Riverside area. Karri appreciated the suggested and said he and Jessica Hill would look at scheduling a second business listening session the first or second week of November in Minneapolis.

Mr. Plowman shared one of the ideas shared in the first business listening session, identifying 10-15 businesses that would be willing to maintain a public bulletin board. He stated that several businesses have posted meeting information on their bulletin. Every so block, we've put up fliers. Perhaps a similar thing can happen on the West Bank.

Jessica Hill pointed out that fliers can be put up at Maps Coffee in the room downstairs.

The Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers (MCCD) a group of its members, and the Hmong Central Collaborative are working with the Metropolitan Council, and the cities to create a business mitigation and retention plan. The MCCD collaboration will offer a range of workshops; classes and one-on-one technical

assistance to help businesses in and along University Ave. in St. Paul prepare now and thrive after construction. Participating Community Development Corporations include Neighborhood Development Center, Aurora St. Anthony NDC, Sparc, Greater Frogtown CDC, and Selby Area CDC, with each serving a defined area. MCCD will offer similar services for interested businesses in Minneapolis. . The Metropolitan Council will be mitigating construction, signage, etc... The business listening sessions are meant to collect data that will indicate what kind of help and resources businesses will need. We will be simulating the brainstorming exercise to collect parts of that data from you today.

2. PROJECT UPDATES

Washington Avenue Bridge

Dan Soler gave an update on the Washington Avenue Bridge in place of Gary Erickson. He reviewed slides # 14-21. We are currently inspecting the bridge, including: the underwater columns, the pedestrian deck, and the superstructure underneath the deck. Problems were found with the columns connecting the superstructure to the pedestrian deck. The columns will need to be retrofitted to provide redundancy.

Mr. Plowman asked about the timeline for making the improvements? Preliminary design will conclude at the end of the year 2008. However, certain phases will last the extent of the project or will only take 2-3 years of the four years of construction.

The Washington Avenue Bridge is essentially two bridges. The bridge will have to be reconstructed before the track work. During construction, it is anticipated that one side of the bridge will be worked on, while the other will still allow two lanes of traffic.

Will there be any modifications made to the pedestrian bridge after? We are not anticipating further improvements.

Ms. Johnson asked what role the UofM will play during construction. These details are being worked out in a second agreement with the UofM and project partners. We will coordinate with the UofM on mitigation such as such as detouring traffic and avoiding construction during peak traffic times such as move-in week.

What is the vehicle of communication between the project and the UofM and/or surrounding businesses so they know what elements of construction are happening next? The vehicle of communication will continue to be the Central Corridor Project Office outreach staff. Your Community Outreach Coordinator will be you key point of contact now through construction.

Mr. Plowman stated that mitigation programs and services will be implemented to provide resources before construction happens.

Ms. Johnson stated that parking issues will be pertinent and that the earlier notifications are put out in advance of construction, the better. Signage will help mitigate

Kay Baker asked if the business listening lesson fliers were sent out electronically. Yes, it was attached to the BAC Agenda. Karri Plowman sent out fliers to his network in downtown Saint Paul and the outreach coordinators sent it to their email lists.

Baker requested the Community Outreach Coordinator send her information directly in a separate email, Information in the form of e-mail is becoming overwhelming. She also requested that the downtown St., Paul community outreach coordinator come talk to the block club downtown again.

Mr. Plowman stated that we are looking to hold a business listening session downtown Saint Paul and will follow up with Kay Baker to set it up.

Traffic Modeling

Dan Soler gave an update on the traffic modeling studies on University Avenue using SYNCHRO and VISSM. He reviewed slides #3-12 of the presentation (see presentation). It models anticipated impacts of future roadway, LRT impacts, etc... The scenarios include 31 intersections on University Avenue in 2008 with existing conditions, 2030 with LRT, and 2030 without LRT. The Level of Service (LOS) E or F indicates traffic backup where people will experience more delay getting through that intersection.

Lori Fritts asked if the failing intersection could be a result of people trying to get to Ayd Mill Road. Mr. Soler responded that problem could be due to people backing up from I-94 with people trying to get to Selby.

How can the traffic modeling program fix the problem in 2030 but not now? The model is putting in current information including existing traffic signalization. For 2030, the study is based on assumptions such as future growth as well as signalization timing improvements.

Mr. Plowman asked if the study will consider outliers such as events like the Wild games. They do not. The variables considered are intended to represent average weekday traffic volumes.

Is this the same tool you used for the traffic study for the UofM? Yes.

These intersections at LOS E or F will continue to have delayed traffic without some level of improvements in signal timing, adding a turn lane if necessary, or some other form of mitigation during AM/PM peak hour, with or without LRT.

Mr. Plowman asked if the model takes into consideration the signalized or unsignalized pedestrian crosswalks and whether that will slow down the timing. The modeling does not consider the unsignalized pedestrian crossings, just the signalized intersections because it really looks at individual intersection locations and the turning movements that take place through them. Are we making the assumption that these are due to north/south traffic flow for example on Lexington Avenue? It's due to the traffic volume north and south.

Lori Fritts asked whether the right hand lane on the north/south streets be affected. Only streets at or east of Marion Street where the alignment shifts to running along the south side of University Avenue. The challenge with traffic modeling is keeping the train moving and not delaying traffic on to the north south streets.

VISSM is different from SYNCHRO because it tries to minimize the travel time from east to west on the corridor. We're going to use the results from both studies to find which intersections will need improvements.

Mr. Plowman asked if there will be a dedicated truck delivery lane on the corridor. Would it affect this traffic study model? Yes. Trucks and busses stopping are characterized differently in the model and are considered in the study.

Jim Roth inquired if this traffic model tool was used on Hiawatha LRT? No, because Hiawatha LRT was design build and it operates differently.

3. BUSINESS IMPACTS/RESOURCE EXERCISE

See attachment for a summary of the brainstorming exercise.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting: Monday, November 17, 2008.

Attachment 1: Brainstorming Exercise

BAC members were asked a series of 5 questions and given 3 or 4 minutes per question to write down answers on sticky notes. Everyone was asked to post their sticky notes on the wall, which were then organized and summarized by Karri Plowman. Below is a summary of the comments:

1. What comments/concerns do businesses have about light rail?

- Parking issues for bus drop off and history theater
- Parking issues for funerals at St Louis Church
- Parking
- Loss of parking.
- Parking will be limited for businesses
- Business interruption during construction
- How long before the light rail will operate after construction in front of my business?
- Design seems to have a lot of flexibility for the length of the corridor.
- When will construction start and end?
- Bus Schedules.
- Snow Removal
- Route misses half of downtown.
- Vibrations on Cedar MPR.
- Noise level on Cedar Avenue bells etc., affecting MPR St Louis Church and Central Presbyterian.
- Grants?
- Signage?
- Security at the wait station. Compensation within the time frame on the block.
- Will I have to pay extra assessments for any streetscape for the light rail?

2. Identify communication strategies that would be most effective to communicate project and construction updates to you.

- Local newspapers
- Outreach coordinators communicate.
- Coordinators need to give updates more often and attend block club meetings.
- Make sure CCLRT website has current information.
- What happened to most of our group?
- Chamber newsletters.
- Meetings with businesses.
- Weekly meetings in immediate area of construction.
- Flyers delivered door to door.
- Email
- Email
- Emails to designated persons.
- Is there a point person at every company? If not there should be.
- Have several groups forward official information to their contacts as well as through Met Council etc. Multiple efforts on if information is good/accurate.
- Multiple methods for each issue. Make sure it is clear who correspondence is from. Someone with authority, i.e., Met Council.

3. Identify training needs to help businesses them prepare for construction

- How to educate suppliers Re., access to the business?
- Time line, what happens and when?
- How to seek financial help for CCLRT related expenses.
- Budgeting and cash flow.
- Financial – Plan for downtown due to construction, low interest loans, access to financial advisors pre/during and after.
- Perhaps a speaker or two from a Hiawatha business fro a perspective. What did they wish they knew sooner?
- How to educate customers Re., Access to the business?
- Weekly meetings in immediate area of construction.
- Flyers delivered door to door.
- Email
- Email
- Emails to designated persons.
- Is there a point person at every company? If not there should be.
- Have several groups forward official information to their contacts as well as through Met Council etc. Multiple efforts on if information is good/accurate.
- Multiple methods for each issue. Make sure it is clear who correspondence is from. Someone with authority, i.e., Met Council.
- Marketing – How to reach customers so they know they are open/how to access. Incentives to keep people coming in if inconvenient to access. Online or other new ways to doing business.
- Marketing and communication.

4. Identify other resources to assist businesses

- Grants!
- Low interest loan funds for GAP Financing.
- Cash flow loans.
- City Financing and government programs (STAR, MHFA, HUD).
- Marketing or communication graphics for customer Relations.
- Coordinated marketing, “We’re Open”.
- Joint marketing efforts in areas on similar businesses.
- In Minneapolis it is very convenient to twins and Target Center, far away from Hockey and Xcel Center.
- Downtown issue – how does other part of downtown get served?
- Help with station design options.
- Timing! When will construction be at the front door, how long?
- Periodic publishing of CCLRT timelines.
- Should they look at new business modeling to capitalize on new potential customers or exposure from LRT riders?
- Detailed resource book of who to call for what with any expenses clearly defined. Maybe approved bank, insurance, consultants, etc., so we know what they are getting.
- Help with actual communication with customers and suppliers.
- One on one training and advice.
- Insurance – properly insured for construction accident, etc.
- Business interruption insurance.

5. Identify potential marketing strategies

- Poster board with route, time line and stops to set up in our lobby or cafeteria.
- Joint marketing efforts organized thru local DCD, Chamber, etc.
- Marketing should start now to bolster businesses and gain customers before construction esp. with poor economy now.
- Email copy (text) help regarding access and availability during construction.
- If all efforts are failing will there be a safety net of any kind, a “rescue” team of sorts?
- Copy writing help for specific business communication issues.
- Graphics re access routes.
- Coordinated “menu” of services.
- Coordinated events (to bring shoppers).
- Billboards on who is open during construction.
- Community newsletters.
- Collaborative effort that is flexible to acknowledge those businesses who don’t feel it is geared toward them.
- Coordinated signage.
- Signage!