

Committee Report

Transportation Committee



Committee Meeting Date: July 22, 2024

For the Metropolitan Council: July 24, 2024

Business Item: 2024-122-SW

METRO Blue Line Extension (BLE) – Authorize Municipal Consent Joint Public Hearing

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

- Authorize a joint Municipal Consent public hearing with Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority and Hennepin County on August 26, 2024, at 6:00pm at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Conference Center, 1256 Penn Avenue N, Suite 5200, Minneapolis, MN 55411 to discuss the physical design components of the preliminary design plans for the METRO Blue Line Extension light rail transit project; and
- Direct staff to prepare Blue Line Extension Municipal Consent Plans and submit them to Hennepin County and the cities of Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park.

Summary of Transportation Committee Discussion/Questions

Metro Transit Deputy General Manager - Capital Programs Nick Thompson presented this item. Chair Barber asked if there is a role for Council members to play at the public hearing. Thompson stated all Council members are invited to participate and that it's a space for them to receive comments from the public. Thompson added that the public hearing will be co-chaired by Chair Zelle and a Hennepin County Commissioner. Cameron and Chamblis stated how important this step and public engagement is for this project.

Motion by Cameron, seconded by Morales. Motion carried.

Business Item

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METRO Blue Line Extension (BLE) – Authorize Municipal Consent Joint Public Hearing

District(s), Member(s): All
Policy/Legal Reference: Minnesota Statutes § 473.3994
Staff Prepared/Presented: Lesley Kandaras, General Manager, 612-349-7513
Nick Thompson, Deputy General Manager, 612-349-7507
Nick Landwer, BLE Director of Design and Engr, 651-373-3847
Annie Xiong, BLE Agreement Manager, 651-602-1996
Division/Department: METRO Blue Line Extension Project Office (BPO)

Proposed Action

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- Direct staff to prepare Blue Line Extension Municipal Consent Plans and submit them to Hennepin County and the cities of Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park.

Background

The proposed Blue Line Extension light rail transit project (Project) will extend the existing Blue Line from Target Field Station and connect and serve the communities of Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park.

The Project received approval from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to commence the Capital Investment Grant Project Development Phase on August 22, 2014. Following this, the Final Environmental Impact Statement was issued in July 2016, with the FTA granting a Record of Decision in September 2016. Subsequently, on January 19, 2017, the Project transitioned into the Engineering Phase. At its meeting on June 22, 2022, the Metropolitan Council took action to advance a proposed route modification which does not utilize freight rail right-of-way, as outlined in the 2022 Route Modification Report (see Business Item 2022-158). As of March 2024, project staff has advanced the engineering and design of the route and stations to 30% design completion.

Under Minnesota law, the physical design components of a proposed light rail transit facility in the metropolitan area must go through a Municipal Consent process before final design plans can be prepared.

The Metropolitan Council will submit to Hennepin County and the cities along the proposed route the physical design components of the preliminary design plans for the Project (Plans) and it will

conduct a joint Municipal Consent public hearing with Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority on the Plans. This public hearing will also serve as the public hearing for Hennepin County. The hearing will take place on August 24, 2024, at NorthPoint Health and Wellness Conference Center, 1256 Penn Avenue N, Suite 5200, Minneapolis, MN 55411 at 6 pm. Residents can provide public comments from the date of the hearing to October 10, 2024.

Rationale

Minnesota Statutes Section 473.3994 outlines the procedure for Municipal Consent for each proposed light rail transit (LRT) facility in the metropolitan area. Before the final design plans are prepared for an LRT project, the Metropolitan Council and the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority must hold a joint public hearing on the Plans to ensure that affected parties have an opportunity to present their views at the hearing. At least 30 days before the joint hearing the Metropolitan Council will submit the Plans to each city or county in which the route is proposed to be located. Within 45 days after the joint hearing, each city and county shall review and approve or disapprove the Plans for the route. A local unit of government that disapproves the Plans shall describe specific amendments to the Plans that would cause the local unit to withdraw its disapproval.

Thrive Lens Analysis

Investing in high-quality transportation options will bolster the Thrive outcome of prosperity by enhancing the region's economic competitiveness. This will be achieved through improved access to employment for workers and by assisting employers in accessing a larger workforce through affordable and convenient transportation options.

The Project contributes to the Equity outcome by equitably distributing transit resources across the region. It aims to enhance access to jobs, educational opportunities, and health services for diverse communities.

Advancing the BLE Project aligns with the Livability outcome by expanding transit connectivity to the broader METRO system. This includes existing and planned light rail and bus rapid transit lines, benefiting communities throughout the region.

Funding

There is no funding directly associated with this action.

Small Business Inclusion

There are no direct impacts to small business with this action.

