

**Minutes of the  
REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, December 5, 2012

**Committee Members Present:** Ron Biss, Kjensmo Walker, Margot Imdieke Cross, Heidi Myhre, Darrell Paulsen, Jerolyn Pofahl, John Lund, Chad McGuire and Nichole Villavicencio.

**Committee Members Absent:** Kim Kang, Wayne Wittman, James Williams and Bruce Lattu.

**Committee Members Excused:** John Schatzlein and Willie Daniels.

**CALL TO ORDER**

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Biss called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:37 p.m. on Wednesday, December 5, 2012.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES**

It was moved by Imdieke Cross seconded by Lund to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Villavicencio, seconded by McGuire to approve the minutes of the December 5, 2012 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

**BUSINESS**

None

**INFORMATION**

**Robert Street Alternatives Analysis**

Joe Morneau spoke to the TAAC committee. He is a Transit Specialist with Dakota County. He has been working on the Alternatives Analysis for the Robert Street Transitway. He showed a map that is part of the Metropolitan Council 2030 Transportation Policy Plan. It lays out the long range vision for transitway development. A few are already in operation like the Hiawatha line. The Cedar Avenue BRT in Dakota County will be upcoming. The map defines the Robert Street corridor as part of the policy plan.

The study area that they are looking at for the alternative analysis was adopted by their steering committee. It entails a good part of northern Dakota County. This has West St. Paul, South St. Paul, all of Inver Grove Heights, all of Rosemount, the City of Eagan to the East of I-35E, Mendota Heights East of I-35E and Lilydale.

Previously there was a streetcar in the area. They had four lines extending from downtown St. Paul into South St. Paul and West St. Paul. Typically when they got away from the denser areas they supplemented the streetcar service with bus service starting about in the 20's. The lines were taken out of service and replaced by buses. The last of the lines were gone around 1955. Since that time there has not been any kind of rail transit in the study area and in Dakota County.

They are predicting a 21 percent increase in population from 2010 through 2030. They are looking at an aging population much like any other area nationwide and a wider income range.

There are several distinct travel markets for transit based on where you are. In the southern area it is primarily express service to both of the downtowns. In West St. Paul and South St. Paul it is predominately local service. There is also a reverse commute need that is seen in the northern Eagan area. Those needs are met to a degree by some reverse commute service put on the road by MVTA. It is also somewhat of an unmet need. There is also a demand for people to come from Dakota County west into the airport area in downtown Minneapolis.

They have been underway for six months. They are looking to go through the study until early 2014. The New Starts Program is a program with the FTA that assists localities in the capital costs of developing major transit investments. This can be anything from a Bus Rapid Transit system something similar to what they are constructing on Cedar Avenue with the Red Line. It can also look at rail investments as well. This can include light rail or commuter rail.

This is a well defined analysis. They take a top down look where you see what your problems are, what issues you are going to face, what your trends are and what the transportation needs are with respect to those changes. You work down from there and define what your goals are and then look at what possible alternatives can fit the needs as you define them. It is more of a best fit. It estimates ridership, costs and gets an in depth idea of what it would take to build and operate a system. All stages of the process are informed by public input. There was one open house so far to get some comments on the study framework where they have the purpose and needs statement. There will be a couple more throughout the duration of the Alternatives Analysis to get more alternatives to the public and get some comments on how they meet the needs and how people feel they will improve the area or otherwise impact the study area.

This particular Alternatives Analysis is being jointly conducted with Dakota County and Ramsey County Regional Rail Authorities. Both of them are overseeing the project consultant for the project and are directing the overall process with the cities. The cities within the study area and the Metropolitan Council and the transit operators in the area (MVTA, Metro Transit and DARTS) are all involved in the process either on the steering committee or the Technical Advisory Committee. The Technical Advisory Committee is reviewing the technical documents and the processes as they are developed. The steering committee is handling the policy level study as far as the study framework and the purpose and need document.

The FTA designed the program to be locally driven as far as the project goals and needs. They allow us to develop our own framework for analyzing things. They do have a couple of high level of federal measures for when we are looking at alternatives in terms of cost effectiveness and environmental impacts.

They are about 1/3 of the way through the alternatives analysis. They started in June. The first task is to develop that purpose in each statement. Right now they have had a couple of drafts of it that they ran by the steering committee and they held an open house to get some input on that. The Technical Advisory Committee with the cooperation of the Metropolitan Council is revising that to make sure it is a thorough and usable document as they proceed. They are looking to have that to the steering committee at the next meeting in January to finalize that and a couple of other documents. So they can look at some different alternatives and start developing those.

They are defining the need for a better transit infrastructure in terms of amenities and service levels for the area. This is to meet mobility and accessibility needs. The one big move they made with the Purpose and Needs Statement is they are identifying a north/south orientation for any kind of alternative they are going to consider. The need to get to the West Metro area is part served by getting access to the

Central Corridor. The northern area will be defined as downtown Saint Paul. This alternative would feed into the Union Depot.

They see that there may be an increase in the transit dependant population in the area. In addition to that, there is just general population employment. They are looking at a 20 percent increase over the next 20 years. In addition there are the regional objectives in the Transportation Policy Plan that do apply here and that do identify Robert Street as a corridor to study further. From that purpose and need they identified these goals to improve mobility and accessibility, enhance the effectiveness of transit service in terms travel speeds, frequency of service and improvements for amenities and reductions in transfer times when that applies. It also must be cost effective.

Other parts deal with environmental health and land use. One consideration is the impacts that transit improvement could have on land use as far as more dense development and more access to different land uses, different services and more residences. These are considered separate from direct transportation impacts.

Right now they are starting a high level look at the different feasible alignments within the study area. They are looking at any kind of roadway or any right-of-way available out there that might be usable for any of the modes under consideration (BRT, LRT or Commuter Rail). They will consider accessibility and constructability. If there are too many hurdles from an engineering perspective they are not going to look at those. They will get down to six or seven alternatives that they can analyze and look at costs and identify the best two to four. They will then look at ridership modeling, station construction and right-of-way impacts and overall cost effectiveness.

At the end stage (a year from now) they hope to identify those goals and objectives that are directed by the Purpose and Needs Statement. From there both Regional Railroad Authorities will recommend the alternative to the Metropolitan Council. The Metropolitan Council will need to adopt that into their Transportation Policy Plan if they agree with the findings. That is what the FTA looks at. It gives them the green light to advance this to later stages of development. That will include the environmental assessment, preliminary engineering, which is about where Southwest Light Rail is with their development, and then later on construction.

The New Starts Program, depending on the cost of the system, fund anywhere from 30 percent to 50 percent of the capital costs of construction. They will have to look at the New Starts process and determine if it is the most feasible way of proceeding with the project. There are other funding sources and depending on the scale of the project there could be another option in terms of funding.

They are looking at March to have a couple of open houses. To contact Joe: robertstreettransit.com. or phone 952-891-7986.

## **Metro Mobility Operations Update**

Paul Colton spoke to the TAAC committee. He provided a recap of 2012 in terms of customer service and operations, discussing some of the things that have changed in Metro Mobility and some of the initiatives that they took on. He discussed what they anticipate what will happen in 2013 and an update on the technology process. He shared stats comparing the first 11 months of 2012 with the first 11 months of 2011 to show people where they are at with some of the key statistics of Metro Mobility and things that they measure and keep track of both at a high level and a ride to ride level.

At the Metro Mobility Service Center Andy and his staff have done a very good job with how they handle calls and situations. The level of respect has been very good. One of the initiatives in Customer Service that Andy and his staff have taken on is to implement some cold calling from his staff to

customers who utilize the service. They randomly select people to contact. They get an evaluation from that person's perspective on how their ride went and how the service is working for them.

With the new technology, the Metro Mobility staff are scanning all of the new applications and recertifications into the system. The staff will have easy access to that to be able to talk about information yet it is in a more protected area.

They had the largest order of vehicles ever in the history of Metro Mobility. They replaced about 180 vehicles system wide. Part of that was driven by the whole agency fleet getting replaced by the new contract that started July 1. There was a move to get away from diesel fuel and some of the challenges that they have had with that over the past few years. They have had great success with the longevity of the gasoline engines since 2008. The fleet is completely gas engine operated.

Metro Mobility is investigating a different kind of vehicle that may replace the sedans. It is a low floor SUV with one wheelchair space on the passenger side in the front next to the driver. It can seat up to three passengers comfortably. It is a ramp system instead of a lift system.

One of the down sides this year was the purchase of the hybrid fleet. The company who supplies the hybrid system went out of business. They have no access to parts or service. As the agency fleet came out of service they were able to use those buses to replace the hybrid fleet. It has been able to keep up with the ridership without having any service failures and challenges. The hybrid vehicles will be either sold or scrapped.

The Radio Board was concerned with the amount of air time that Metro Mobility is using on the emergency system (that is what First Transit and Transit Team use). Metro Mobility has just signed a contract with Trapeze both for their AVL MDC module, which is automat vehicle location and mobile data computer software module. It is supposed to be Trapeze's best module. They are also investing in IVR (Interactive Voice Response). This means they can push out messages to the customers like: "Your ride is going to arrive in 15 minutes." It is all through an interactive voice recognition.

They will be evaluating Project Manager résumés for someone to help implement these projects. In addition they will be implementing the Cubic Fare Collection System at Metro Mobility, which will have a sizeable customer service outreach component. The Project Manager will be helping with that as well. The Cubic system is the system used by Metro Transit. There will be a fare card (Go-To card). People won't need to have tickets anymore. People will be able to purchase the fare the same way they do their tickets or online or by credit card. It can be used as a city bus card.

Under the federal law, ADA complementary paratransit service does not have to build service around peak only commuter oriented service. In this region that is the peak express service going to the downtowns. That is a commuter market. Metro Mobility has established default hours for those communities that offer service. They go above and beyond what the ADA requires. The Northstar has commuter service between St. Cloud and Minneapolis but it is outside the federal jurisdiction. The Federal law says if it is outside of your defined political jurisdiction you are not responsible for providing the ADA service around that. Some of the other counties may have to provide the three quarter mile service around the stations that it stops at outside of our area. Within three quarters of a mile from the station is where the accessibility complementary service has to be.

The stations outside of the seven county region on Northstar are exempt from paratransit service according to federal law. If those counties decide that is how they want to handle it they can do so. If the station is within the transit taxing district Metro Mobility will provide the three quarter mile ADA service area around that station. The new Ramsey station is outside of the transit taxing district and Metro Mobility is not going to provide service around that station but Anoka County is going to provide

service as part of their Transit Link program. There is some level of dial-a-ride service that is beyond the Metro Mobility service that a person could access. With Transit Link you could live beyond the three quarter mile and if there is space in their schedule they could get someone to the station. It is not an ADA guaranteed ride.

## **Metro Transit Updates**

Pam Steffen spoke to the TAAC committee. Starting this Saturday (December 8) is the new pick where new drivers will be on different routes. It is a time where there were some small changes in the schedules. That will take place also on Saturday. She handed out a list of all of the routes that will be affected and talked about highlights. There will be no Northstar service on Christmas Day or New Years Day. Metro Transit will be running a reduced service day on Christmas Eve. The Rosedale park-n-ride service has been discontinued. They are starting new service from Rice Street/Hwy 36, which is on Route 263.

Routes will be returning to Cedar Street in downtown Saint Paul on Saturday, December 8. There will also have some routes moving from the layover spot of Kellogg and Lafayette to the new Saint Paul Union Depot. Metro Transit is assuming the Route 285 from Forest Lake starting Monday, December 10. It used to be run by a private provider. The Ramsey station opened on the Northstar on November 14. The Northstar schedule was tweaked a little bit.

Metro Transit is partnering with the Target Holidazzle Parade. There will be free rides on buses and light rail on Saturday, December 8 and December 15. Those free rides are available from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. They are not offering free rides on the Northstar.

## **Member Comment**

None.

## **Public Comment**

None.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:36 p.m.

Alison Coleman  
Recording Secretary