



METRO Blue Line Extension

Meeting of the Community Advisory Committee

Wednesday, February 5, 2025
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Microsoft Teams Meeting

CAC Members: H. Ellis Beck, Jeff Guertin, Jonathan Hansen, Ryan Johnson, Ken Rodgers

Agency Staff and Guests: Nkongo Cigolo, Andrew Gillett, Joleen Ketterling, Shahin Khazrajafari, Nick Landwer, Bojan Misic, Joanna Ocasio-Maisonet, Kerri Pearce Ruch, Jason Schmidt, Rattana Sengsoulichanh, Jer Yang

Meeting Summary

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

Jonathan Hansen, co-chair of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), began the meeting at 6:05 pm and welcomed everyone. Nkongo took attendance. Nkongo mentioned that the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meetings going forward will be attended virtually in case CAC committee members are asked by individuals in the community.

The Corridor Management Committee (CMC) will be held on Thursday, February 13 at the Metro Transit campus at 1:30 pm. Nkongo shared upcoming community meetings include 1:1's with property owners in the North Loop area, a meeting with the Twin Cities International School and meetings with a couple of stakeholders on February 10. There will be conversations with directly impacted property owners to advance discussions around traffic improvements and enhanced connections in the area, in collaboration with the Minneapolis partner and project leadership. A meeting will be hosted with 918 Lofts regarding noise and vibration and design aspects on February 24. Nkongo stated in March monthly coordination meetings will be kicked off with 10th Avenue stakeholders and the first open house will happen towards the end of March. Nkongo indicated additional details will be shared with the entire group.

2. Adopt Meeting Minutes

Co-chair Hansen asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes from December 11. Ken Rodgers made a motion to approve the minutes and Ryan Johnson seconded it. No updates to the minutes were voiced. The December 11 minutes were approved.

The agenda for the evening was reviewed and approved.



3. Station Area Planning – Minneapolis

Jason Schmidt, Senior Project Manager with the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) office at Metro Transit, and Rattana Sengsoulichanh, City Planner at the city of Minneapolis, attended the CAC this evening as guests to discuss station area planning in the city of Minneapolis and provide an overview of the awarded Federal Transit Administration (FTA) pilot planning grant that the Metropolitan Council and the city of Minneapolis received from the FTA.

Jason Schmidt shared that the FTA TOD pilot program grants awards to encourage transit oriented development planning around new transit stations. These grants go beyond what a local agency would fund themselves and encourages partnerships to maximize chances for successful TOD implementations. Metro Transit and Metropolitan Council in coordination with the city of Minneapolis applied for a TOD pilot planning grant in 2024 and were awarded \$700k. This grant is specifically for the new Blue Line Extension (BLE) stations in Minneapolis and the work plan focuses on visioning, housing strategy, economic development strategy, multimodal transportation strategy, a climate change strategy and advancing equity and anti-displacement in the area.

Jason stated that TOD focuses on moderate to high-density development served by frequent transit and pedestrian friendly streets in a neighborhood with a mix of uses that allows people to live and work without a car. TOD encourages people to use transit instead of driving. The benefits of TOD include improved health and safety with more eyes on the street, increased economic development within communities and cities, protecting natural systems, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and advancing equity.

Jason provided multiple visuals of maps showing the high frequency transitway areas with a buffer around them. This area covers just 3.4% of the 7-county metropolitan region land area. Since 2009, 38% of regional development has been permitted within those areas. A map of multifamily residential from the last five years was shown. Statistics listed in the upper left hand corner reveal data from the last 15 years. Within that 15-year timeframe, the region has built over 59,900 units which equates to \$10.4 billion in permit value. A similar map of commercial properties was shown and in the last 15 years, development has resulted in \$6.2 billion in permit value which equates to 44% of new commercial value within the region.

To look at this further, Jason provided data on affordable housing production near high frequency transit from 2014 to 2023. Fifty one percent of the new affordable multifamily units are near high frequency transit which equates to 10,710 units. Seventy seven percent are deeply affordable multifamily units near high frequency transit which equates to 1880 units. A bar graph revealed which light rail lines the affordable housing has been built around. The new affordable housing that has been built has been mostly around the Blue Line and Green Line. The Green Line Extension heading west and the Gold Line rapid bus transit have already created the demand for units to go in those areas.



Jason shared a map which showed rent and housing costs related to a one-person household, very low-income individual. The map depicted that rent is a little higher in areas where transit lines are located and results in a higher percentage of that person's income. When looking at the outskirts of the metropolitan area, it is less of a burden on their income. However, if adding in the transportation costs with the housing costs, the inverse happens. Both housing and transportation combined impacts a person's income greater if they live in the outskirts of the metropolitan area.

Rattana Sengsoulichanh shared as a city planner for almost 11 years, his focus is around land use and long-range planning ensuring where economic investments are made are in alignment with the adopted goals and policies in the city of Minneapolis. Rattana indicated he has been working on the BLE project for the last ten years and understands the history behind this project. It is important that planning for investments around station areas is intentional and that businesses and community members get the most benefit from it.

Rattana shared that Hennepin County established the Bottineau Community Works to identify community and economic development opportunities beyond the light rail. Six core topic areas were identified that need to be in place for future investments. These include development plans, infrastructure plans, housing needs, economic development, financing strategies, and community engagement. Rattana shared there is an opportunity for CAC members to follow-up with Hennepin County staff and provide feedback on opportunities that inform the Minneapolis stations as well.

Rattana explained the station area plans center around developing a vision for station areas and ensuring that all stakeholders are in alignment. Rattana shared that community members want to have a diverse community with different housing, retail, goods, and access to jobs along the line. In addition, communities want to ensure there is a walkable area knit together by the design of the BLE. Rattana shared there are existing amenities such as churches and public institutions that will be maintained but where there is opportunity to build out or lift up. In addition, there are opportunities to envision redevelopment as part of creating an equitable TOD. Station area planning involves researching what can be built based on city goals, plans, and regulations.

Rattana shared what community members have voiced is important to them and this feedback includes building on the skills, knowledge and experience of people on the north side, acknowledging that resources are always a constraint, supporting existing businesses along the corridor, creating deeply affordable housing options, and developing city-owned vacant parcels.

Rattana stated the city of Minneapolis will be the project manager for the awarded \$700,000 TOD planning grant. The city will be issuing a call for a request for proposals (RFP) to seek a consultant team to help deliver and produce this stationary planning process. Metro Transit will continue to be the grant administrator reporting to the FTA. Rattana reviewed the task areas representing the core deliverables that the consultant team will be asked to produce. Political champions from elected



officials and community organizations will be needed to explain to developers what the community would like to see and explain to lenders and banking institutions as part of seeking financing the vision for why to support these projects. Rattana shared that at a high level this will require a lot of community and stakeholder engagement ensuring there is consensus on the vision for the stations within Minneapolis. Identifying opportunities for redevelopment and prioritization mapping will be requested. Market analysis and feasibility studies will need to be conducted for housing and commercial development. Supporting an economic development strategy and West Broadway cultural district planning will be needed. The city of Minneapolis has areas called cultural districts which are defined as areas that contain many small businesses with a rich cultural identity. One of those areas is West Broadway. The task will be to use this distinction to help develop what the station area looks like while preserving and highlighting the cultural identity. In addition, a multimodal action plan will be requested to look beyond what the BLE plans to build and plan such things as streets that intersect, roadways, sidewalks, and the last mile connections to help people navigate to the stations via walking and biking. Finally, a climate change and resiliency strategy will be necessary to achieve goals in the reduction of carbon emissions.

Ken Rodgers stated there are some very vocal community members who are against the BLE project. With that in mind, Ken asked how the CAC committee members can have conversations with community members about TOD without over-selling something that cannot actually be produced. Ken asked if there was a foundational map or base knowledge of what properties are available to develop. Rattana responded that many people have challenges of accessing high wage jobs at employment centers that are beyond and away from where their home is today and not near transit. There is an opportunity to share those stories and use those lessons to inform the why. Rattana shared this is about generational investments and figuring out how to make transit the easy choice versus the negative connotations people think about now around safety, accessibility, delays, shortages of operators, etc. Rattana feels there is an opportunity to be vulnerable and talk about the opportunities to plan for light rail and economic development beyond the light rail. Rattana shared this isn't just about transit, it is about weaving in the history of all public transportation from MnDOT to local government and our role in impacting factors such as the appreciation of property values after these light rail projects are completed.

Ken asked if we are limited to the current vacant parcels or whether he was limiting the scope of what can be done through TOD. Rattana replied that strategically vacant parcels directly along the light rail alignment will be reviewed first. Interested third parties who have a surface lot or an interest in redeveloping will also be looked at. Rattana added there is data about vacant parcels, the buildings that need to be part of right-of-way acquisitions, and partners who are acutely aware of the opportunities in Minneapolis and across the corridor.

Jonathan Hansen asked for clarification regarding development opportunities and asked if vacant properties will be focused on now but if there are parcels nearby where there might be interest in



selling to combine into a larger more attractive renovation, would this also be considered. Rattana responded yes, it is about having conversations about what we want to see, feel and experience.

Jonathan Hansen mentioned the concern by community members regarding the lack of parking and wondered if that was something the city of Minneapolis is pursuing. Rattana replied that parking concerns will be navigated as part of the station area planning process and that it has been a consistent concern raised by businesses. Rattana stated there has been an ask about whether the city will support a parking structure or off-street parking solutions. Rattana stated that at the very least, it is understood there will always be a demand for parking and discussions will be necessary to determine how to create a mixed use project and be included as part of a future condition around stations.

Ken Rodgers indicated there is currently a pilot program in a defined area in downtown Minneapolis looking at curb management and trying to develop a curb policy defining what is appropriate in terms of parking and usage. Ken indicated this is of great interest to him as he is representing people with disabilities. Ken is concerned about the possibility of removing disability parking which has a great impact. Ken stated the pilot project is a co-project with the city of Seattle, Washington and wondered if there was a way to piggyback off their work so we don't have to recreate the wheel to create curb processes. Rattana replied yes, and there are core staff members from the public works department who are working on the micromobility piece and curbside management. These individuals are integral to the work on the BLE project in engineering design. Curbside management will be weaved into conversations that are already happening about ADA requirements and the needs as it relates to parking and passenger drop-offs.

Rattana reviewed the deliverables that are critical to support implementation which include community and stakeholder engagement to inform shared goals, outcomes, and implementation steps, communicating the opportunities for development and investments along the corridor, identifying needs and strategic steps that will address the gaps to implementation and how we overcome them, and producing a station area plan that will provide recommended steps for implementation to be adopted by the City Council.

Rattana shared the city of Minneapolis will be issuing a call for RFPs in quarter 1 of 2025. The skills and knowledge necessary in the RFP will include diverse experiences that focus on community engagement, engagement with all target stakeholders, and facilitating hard conversations. Experience will be needed in community and transportation planning and conducting market and feasibility analysis. A consultant team will be onboarded in quarter 2 of 2025.

Rattana asked for feedback regarding how to engage with the CAC going forward. Jonathan Hansen asked what type of meeting frequency is warranted for this topic. Rattana replied that it depends on the level of interest by this committee. Rattana indicated updates can be provided but some in-

person conversations may be needed with the topic of station area visioning. Ken Rodgers responded that as a focused stakeholder group, the CAC should be treated as any other stakeholder group and if that means periodic meetings as a CAC, these should be scheduled. Ken shared he is concerned about just getting summaries. Nkongo added a description in the meeting chat about cultural placekeeping and looking for committees from each of the cities. Jonathan Hansen replied that we need people to be engaged and provide input. Rattana thanked everyone for their time and provided his contact information.

4. Environmental Update

Nkongo Cigolo, BLE project team, shared that the environmental team is continuing to advance the development of the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS) in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Recently there have been federal-level policy updates from the new administration which will impact the SFEIS, particularly related to environmental justice. The FTA is providing direction and guidance regarding this. Continued coordination with project partners is occurring to ensure project success for the community. Nkongo also added next steps on Section 4(f) will proceed in spring 2025.

Jonathan Hansen asked about section 4(f) and what this entailed. Nkongo replied that as environmental analysis advances, there is a section 4(f) pathway that specifically determines how to deal with impacts to parkland and recreation areas. An example of this is the Lowry Avenue Station which is near recreation areas as well as the North Hennepin Community College. Section 4(f) is a specific pathway where there is collaboration with those entities to determine the magnitude of the impact and how to move forward with the environmental coordination process.

5. Design Update

Bojan Misic shared that the BLE Design Team has spent most of the last year on 30% plan review from all the Cities along the corridor. Those plans were mostly two dimensional showing the roadway and where the track was going. Bojan stated the municipal consent plans were reviewed by the public and based on the comments received on the 30% plan review, municipal consent, and public meetings, the BLE Design Team in the latter part of 2024 started working towards 60% plans. The 60% plans will differ and involve a lot more technical detail. Each city will have a separate package and the Lowry Station Area will have its own package. Each package will have 12 volumes and include typical cross sections, dimensions from the track, roadway, bridge, walls, utilities, traffic, drainage, urban design, lighting, stations. Contractors will be using these plan sheets as well. Contours of the existing land and how much grading will occur to build the project will be shown on the plans as well as call outs for the beginning and end of curves. Each plan package will be delivered to project partners on a staggered schedule. Plan packages will be reviewed individually with partners starting with Brooklyn Park in May, Crystal in June, Robbinsdale in July, and Minneapolis in August. Plans for park and rides and buildings associated with the alignment will be available in early 2026. Bojan indicated project partners will have 45 days to review the plans and provide comments. Biweekly



meetings with project partners will continue. The 60% design plans are important as they are the basis for the project scope and budget. Bojan added that advancement of the design plans to 90% is scheduled to be complete in early 2026.

Ken Rodgers inquired about the physical planning of each station and asked where the CAC gets involved with the current proposal for the station layouts and providing input. Bojan replied that there are 13 station locations along the corridor and the design team is hoping to get as much technical input as possible from anybody on the call. Nick Landwer, BLE Design Team, added that for the CAC, the design plans will be available for review and feedback and if there is a particular section the CAC is interested in reviewing, this could be added to as an agenda topic. Nick stated the design team is working with the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee (TAAC) and performing accessibility review of the stations, particularly crossings.

Ken Rodgers stated that with BLE 1.0, there were workshops on each of the station designs and the team laid out physical attributes, so we all understood what was being proposed. Ken shared that he has a major issue with mid-block crossings and wants those discussions at the CAC level. Nick responded that accessibility reviews are being completed through the TAAC, but workshops will continue on station designs as the project is advancing. Nkongo added that the engagement team is also working on meeting with all property owners along the alignment and is cataloging the changes that are happening. Nkongo stated this will materialize as design work is advanced on this project.

Nick Landwer provided an update on the Lowry Avenue Station design. Nick stated in the last six months, the project has received input from both the municipal consent process, the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) comment period and the project's continued design. The project team has been working through design coordination to respond to stakeholder concerns. Nick shared a summary of the comments received on the preliminary design plans. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) has voiced a concern related to the at-grade crossing of the parkway and impacts to the park property. North Memorial Hospital has expressed concerns about vehicle access to the hospital due to the gate at Lowry and Oakdale Avenue. The city of Minneapolis has echoed the concerns shared by the MPRB and North Memorial Hospital and asked for a review of the station design. The city of Robbinsdale has echoed concerns shared by North Memorial Hospital. Community members have expressed concerns regarding the gated crossings, hospital access, and impacts to the parkway continuity.

In response to the initial comments, a stakeholder workgroup was brought back together to continue evaluation of the Municipal Consent design and explore alternative design options. Nick stated the stakeholder workgroup includes members from the MPRB, North Memorial Hospital, city of Minneapolis, city of Robbinsdale, Hennepin County and Metro Transit. Through the design review, nine options were evaluated.



Nick shared that in the last six months continued community engagement has been conducted and two public open houses have been hosted with over 90 attendees. An online survey has also provided good input from community members. Nick shared that through all these forums, there have been two options discussed the most which include Option A, a light footprint in the area with the existing infrastructure, and Option H, which is an at-grade station with no crossing at parkway and Lowry. Nick summarized the overall concerns by community members such as the gates at parkway and Lowry, construction disturbance, duration, noise and vibration, maintaining the parkland, safety and security and traffic impacts on County Road 81. Feedback on Option H was mixed based on the parkway not connecting to Lowry Avenue.

Nick shared the identified objectives from the stakeholder workgroup which include providing transit service to park patrons, improving transit access to the hospital, increasing transit service to the adjacent neighborhoods and providing a station that integrates into the surrounding park environment.

Nick reviewed each of the 9 station options that were developed for the Lowry Avenue Station. Nick shared that Option H addresses most of the concerns and is also rising to the top as an option of interest. Nick stated an evaluation matrix with a series of criteria was reviewed against each of the nine options. The criteria included station accessibility, park and trail impacts, hospital traffic/access, area traffic operations, neighborhood connectivity, impacts to new bridges, constructability, and cost.

Option A, which is the option presented in the Municipal Consent design, is an at-grade station with gates at both roadway crossings. Nick indicated there are moderate impacts to the new bridges over Lowry and the station is visible and accessible to the community. This option creates more usable park space by opening the area up underneath but does require rerouting of emergency response vehicles around the gated crossing to get to the emergency room. Option A is also currently identified in the SDEIS.

Option H includes an at-grade station but there are no crossings at the parkway or Lowry Avenue. More bridge work is required with this option as the design removes and reconstructs 2 bridges, adds 2 new bridges, and modifies 1 existing bridge. This option creates more usable park space. Nick also stated this option includes a new intersection at Lowry and County Road 81 and the parkway and trail travel underneath. Option H adds at least one year to construction and increases the cost between \$30-50 M.

Nick reviewed the next steps which involve identifying which design option will advance into the design and be reflected in the SFEIS. Nick stated these slides will be shared with the MPRB this week. Continued conversations will occur with project partners including at the February 13 Corridor Management Committee (CMC). The Project Decision Board (PDB) which includes policy makers from Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County, will meet on Feb 19 to select the option to advance



into the design process. The Section 4(f) process and Section 106 consultation will continue. The BLE Project Team is open to exploring other potential mitigation such as transferring the fee property (where the parkway is realigned), adding more parkland or making parkland more usable, and reducing the transportation easement.

Jonathan Hansen asked if removing the connection with the parkway from Lowry and Oakdale will increase the time it takes to get to North Memorial. Nick responded any changes in routes will have a change in travel time, but it is likely not that big of a change.

6. Schedule Update

Nick Landwer provided a brief update of the schedule for 2025. Nick shared there will be less CMC meetings in 2025. The CMC meetings are anticipated in February, April, July, October, and November. Nick shared the environmental work will mainly be preparing and reviewing the SFEIS with the goal to publish this in July and to obtain the record of decision. The design work continues to move forward as Bojan mentioned with 60% design review and comments and moving towards 90% design by the end of the year. In August, a rating submittal will be sent to the FTA. Cost and ridership will follow along with the 60% plans. Anti-displacement coordination and public engagement will continue throughout the entire project.

Jonathan Hansen asked if there will be a CAC meeting in March based on the decreased schedule for CMC meetings. Nkongo replied that the BLE project team will keep the BAC and CAC meetings on a monthly schedule and as topics of interest are collected to discuss, they will be brought to the co-chairs. If there is not enough to discuss, the co-chairs will determine if a particular meeting should be cancelled.

7. Discussion and Members' Feedback

Co-chair Hansen asked if anyone had anything additional to discuss. No further comments were made.

8. Next Meeting: March 5, 2025.

Co-chair Hansen thanked everyone for attending and providing feedback and comments.

9. Adjourn

Co-chair Hansen asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. H. Ellis Beck made a motion to adjourn and Ryan Johnson seconded it. The meeting adjourned at 7:53 pm.

Meeting Materials: Agenda, Slides, December 11 Meeting Summary

Administrative Lead: Joleen Ketterling



Meeting Chat:

H Ellis Beck: *Sorry I'm late! I work in taxes and this isn't exactly the slowest season...*

Jonathan Hansen:

Agenda:

1. Call to Order and Welcome (5 minutes)
2. Upcoming Meetings and Attendance (10 minutes)
3. Review of December CAC Meeting Summary & Approval of Meeting Summary (5 minutes)
4. Station Area Planning – City of Minneapolis
5. Environmental Update
6. Design Update
7. Schedule Update
8. Discussion and Members Feedback (30 minutes)
9. Next Meeting: March 5, 2025

H. Ellis Beck: *Classic dog move.*

Nkongo Cigolo: *How will the Blue Line Extension honor and celebrate local cultures and traditions?*

Join a cultural placekeeping design group for Brooklyn Park.

Cultural placekeeping for the Blue Line Extension means working with the community to ensure the project reflects and celebrates the diverse cultures of the communities it will serve.

The Metropolitan Council is looking for people with a connection to one or more cultures and communities along the Blue Line Extension to co-design visual elements of the project such as architectural styling, streetscapes, lighting, decorative infrastructure, landscaping, and other design elements near future stations.

These cultural placekeeping design groups will be organized by city. Participants should expect to attend monthly meetings over six months starting in early spring 2025.

[Learn more and apply](#)

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