



METRO Blue Line Extension Project Decision Board Meeting Minutes

Date & Time	May 15, 2024 9:00 – 10:00 am
Location	Blue Line Extension Project Office, North Conference Room, 6465 Wayzata Blvd, Suite 600, St Louis Park, MN 55426
Members	Charlie Zelle, Irene Fernando, Anjuli Cameron, Lisa Cerney, Reva Chamblis, Marion Greene, Peter Hanf, Ben Schweigert
Project Staff	Dan Soler, Nick Thompson, Shahin Khazrajafari, Nick Landwer, Kjerstin Yager, Kelcie Young, Jer Yang

1. Call To Order

Chair Charlie Zelle, Metropolitan Council, called the METRO Blue Line Extension Project Decision Board (PDB) Meeting to order at 9:09 am, and welcomed members to the meeting.

2. Minutes from April 17 Meeting

Chair Zelle asked for a motion to approve the April 17, PDB minutes. Reva Chamblis, Council Member (CM), Metropolitan Council, made the motion, which was seconded by Irene Fernando, Commissioner, Hennepin County. The minutes were officially approved.

3. Project Schedule Update

Chair Zelle shared that members will receive project updates on the METRO Blue Line Extension (BLE) project.

Dan Soler, Hennepin County, informed members that today's focus will be on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDIES) and the municipal consent process.

Shahin Khazrajafari from Hennepin County reported that the SDEIS is on track with the Federal Transit Administration's reviews, aiming for publication in June 2024. Mr. Khazrajafari highlighted the project timeline, noting that members will receive updates on the recent Value Engineering workshop for the BLE project. Looking ahead, the focus will shift to the municipal consent process, which will be a major priority this year.



Mr. Khazrajafari also noted that following municipal consent plans, the BLE project aims to advance its design plans to 60%, progressing alongside the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and municipal consent processes. The 90% design plans are anticipated to for 2025.

Mr. Soler shared a question raised during his meeting with the FTA in Washington, D.C. The FTA asked if the BLE Project plans to submit a Rating request under the FTA Rating cycle this August. Mr. Soler responded that the BLE Project intends to send an off-cycle Rating request to the FTA, as indicated in the project's timeline, for January 2025 based on the current SDEIS schedule. Mr. Soler added that the goal is to submit the request in January 2025, receive an initial rating, and then be ready to submit for FTA review in order to be included in the presidential budget for August 2025. Nick Thompson, Metropolitan Council, added that the BLE Project reviews this process with the FTA monthly.

Chair Zelle asked if the BLE project has an idea of where it stands in the FTA rating, given that the project is aware of the required criteria. Mr. Soler responded that the BLE Project is confident it will achieve a rating of medium or higher on the FTA rating scale, based on the route and cost.

Marion Green, Commissioner, Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority (HCRRA), inquired about the potential consequences if the Rating does not go for submittal in January. Mr. Soler clarified that there is nothing lost, highlighting the uniqueness of the BLE Project, which has taken a step back to the beginning of the Environmental phases from BLE 1.0.

Ben Schweigert, Hennepin County, raised a question regarding the timeline for finalizing the new FTA Rating criteria. Mr. Thompson responded that, to his knowledge, agencies will provide comments to the FTA in June, and the FTA cycle is expected to conclude this year. When submitting for Rating in January, the BLE Project will be rated based on the new criteria.

Dan highlighted a point on the project schedule: in August 2025, there will be an FTA review to lock in federal match funds. The submission next August is when the project will lock in the full budget.

Chair Zelle noted that the project cost and federal match is sequential and not concurrent.



Mr. Soler said that the project's progression hinges on timely completion of the SDEIS. Additionally, he highlighted that the efforts throughout the rest of the year, including refining costs, ridership estimates, and making design decisions, will culminate in the best preparation for the FTA rating submission.

4. SDEIS Update

Mr. Soler informed members that the FTA is the publisher of the SDEIS document and stated that Friday is the only date for publishing. This Friday date is what will trigger a public hearing date for the BLE project.

Kjerstin Yager, Metropolitan Council, informed that while it is not required to have full representation, it would be appreciated to have some policymakers present. Mr. Soler added that the SDEIS hearing will be structured with public testimonies afterward.

Mr. Thompson also points out that after the publication of the SDEIS, there is a 45-day public comment period, and it's crucial to have a method for recording comments. He mentioned that there will be other opportunities for commenting during this period.

5. Municipal Consent Update

Mr. Soler highlighted the next crucial date is the municipal consent schedule, which is dependent on the environmental schedule. He stated that the BLE Project cannot begin municipal consent plans before the SDEIS publication. The plan is to release municipal consent and start the process by July 26, 2024. Mr. Thompson noted that this date marks the beginning of the municipal consent process per state statute. He mentioned that there will be a joint hearing by the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, and HCRRRA, scheduled for August 26, 2024. Additionally, each corridor city and county will have their own process for municipal consent approval.

Mr. Soler noted that there will be some action items for Municipal Consent for the Metropolitan Council and HCRRRA Board in July.

Commissioner Fernando requested that the BLE project staff send a placeholder to the Commissioners' calendars to ensure they allocate time to be present during these major hearings.

Mr. Thompson shared that the BLE Project plans to submit a comprehensive packet of design plans detailing the Anti-Displacement measures and other efforts for each of the corridor cities. He also noted that Minneapolis has identified Anti-Displacement as one of their primary concerns.



Dan shared the tentative municipal consent schedule for each city, highlighting that Minneapolis aims to hold its public hearing on September 26, 2024, and take Council action on October 1, 2024, ahead of the 45-day municipal consent deadline on October 10, 2024.

6. Value Engineering (VE) Study

Mr. Khazrajafari provided an update on the Value Engineering (VE) workshop, a component of the BLE project aimed at enhancing project quality. He explained that VE was incorporated into the project's early phase, around the 15% design stage, with another VE planned at the 60% design stage. The BLE Project completed the first VE earlier this year, facilitated by the project's consultants over a two-week period.

Mr. Khazrajafari described the workshop process, noting that it began with a risk perspective to identify key risk factors, which drove the workshop's focus. During the first week, the team reviewed how to maximize project efforts, proportionally increase value, explore ways to mitigate risk, and determine what alternatives should be studied. In the second week, the VE team presented the BLE project leadership with 16 proposed alternative opportunities.

Mr. Soler stated that through the VE exercise, while some additions may raise costs, the overall added value would exceed the cost.

Commissioner Fernando asked how many times the VE study is conducted. Mr. Khazrajafari responded that the VE study is performed twice during the project.

CM Chamblis asked whether the VE study includes expanding the 21st Ave bridge over Hwy I-94, adding another station, or modifying the bridge near North Memorial Hospital. Mr. Khazrajafari responded that these were not alternatives proposed by the Value Engineering team, except for studying reconfiguration options for the Lowry station near North Memorial Hospital. He noted that the BLE Project staff will review the other two items mentioned.

Mr. Thompson added that the issues concerning the bridge and the potential additional station are being discussed through the municipal consent process and noted that there is ongoing coordination with Minneapolis and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

Chair Zelle mentioned that the expansion of the bridge over I-94 could address some of the Anti-Displacement themes.



7. Next Meeting: June 27, 2024

Mr. Soler mentioned that the next PBD meeting conflicts on Hennepin County's end and stated that the BLE project will reach out to reschedule the June PBD.

8. Adjourn

Chair Zelle concluded the meeting and adjourned it at 10:07am.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, May 15, 2024

Meeting Summary April 17, 2024

PDB PowerPoint Presentation

Respectfully Submitted,

Jer Yang, Blue Line Ext. Administrative Lead

DRAFT