



**METRO Blue Line Extension
Community Advisory Committee Meeting
November 2, 2015
Blue Line Project Office
5514 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 200
Crystal, MN 55428
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM**

Meeting Summary

CAC Members: Steve Schmidt, Gillian Rosenquist, Chris Berne, Carol Vosberg, Ken Rodgers, La Shella Sims, George Selman

Agency Staff and Guests: Dan Pfeifer, David Davies, Juan Rangel, Sophia Ginis, Rachel Haase, Nick Landwer, Loren Olson, Kathryn O'Brien, Sam O'Connell, Emily Carr, MarySue Abel, Paul Danielson, Dan Soler, Laura Baenen, Scott Reed

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chris Berne opened the meeting by asking if there were any comments on the meeting summary from last month. No comments were raised.

2. Revised Project Scope and Cost Estimate

MarySue Abel presented. Tonight's presentation is the second half of last week's combined BAC/CAC meeting presentation.

As the design level increases, the cost uncertainty associated with the project decreases. The DEIS was written with about one percent design; the project is now approaching 15 percent design for municipal consent plans.

The municipal consent process is planned to begin in December. Over the next eight months, the project will be moving towards 30 percent design, and in August 2016 the project will apply to enter the Engineering phase and lock in the project budget.

The DEIS cost estimate was \$1.002 billion, which included 34 percent contingency, a 3 percent escalation factor, and a forecast year of 2017 (assumed midpoint of construction).

The revised cost estimate is \$1.488 billion. The project contingency has been reduced to 30 percent, the escalation factor is 3 percent, and the approximate midpoint of construction is forecast to be 2019.

Project scope refinement during the project development phase included:

- Resolving issues identified by the Technical Advisory Group during the DEIS
- Input and coordination

- Public comments on the DEIS
- Issue Resolution Team meetings (city/county/agency)
- Advisory committees (TPAC, BAC, CAC, CMC)
- Public open houses and community meetings
- Establishing scope for municipal consent plans and FEIS
- Providing context for continued discussions with stakeholders

New scope requirements (not included in DEIS cost estimate) include:

- Olson Memorial Highway reconstruction
- Plymouth Ave Station and vertical circulation
- Grimes Pond and Golden Valley Pond LRT structures
 - Minimizes need for floodplain mitigation in these areas
- Roadway bridge reconstruction at Plymouth Ave, Theodore Wirth Pkwy, Golden Valley Rd, and 36th Ave
 - Primary driver was discussions with BNSF and preserving their ability for capacity improvements
 - Added benefits to the project include ability to align piers to better serve project design, ability to keep tracks in existing location by Golden Valley Pond and Grimes Pond
- Surface park-and-ride facility at Bass Lake Rd Station (170 spaces)
- Pedestrian overpass over freight to platform at 63rd Ave Station
- LRT bridge construction over CR 81 at 73rd Ave
 - Grade separated due to safety concerns
 - Also has maintenance benefits for LRT
- Roadway network north of TH 610 by OMF
- Two additional LRT vehicles over what was proposed in DEIS (28 total)
- Freight rail corridor protection treatments

Gillian Rosenquist asked if a surface parking lot at Golden Valley Rd is included in the scope. MarySue Abel replied that at this time that park-and-ride is not in the scope or the cost.

Project scope reductions from DEIS include:

- Modified split platforms to center platforms
 - Minimizes confusion for riders, consolidates station amenities
- Reduced size of OMF building and site footprint
- Minimized need for floodplain mitigation by building bridge structures over ponds
- Eliminated need for adding floors to existing 63rd Ave park-and-ride ramp
 - With parking at Bass Lake Rd, existing structure should meet needs of project

La Shella Sims asked if the 28 vehicles included those for the existing Blue Line. MarySue Abel replied that they will be used on the whole line, but 28 new vehicles will be needed. Dan Soler added that there are currently 11 trains of 3 cars each serving the existing Blue Line (33 vehicles total), but to keep the service at 10 minute frequencies additional vehicles are needed.

Overall cost estimate methodology:

- Total project costs include capital improvements, right-of-way acquisition, vehicles, engineering and environmental consultants, contingency, and finance costs
- Base year costs: 2015
- Costs are escalated to year of expenditure (YOE)

Ken Rodgers asked if the street would be reconstructed from building to building like was done on University for Central Corridor. Dan Soler said this project will reconstruct back of sidewalk to back of sidewalk (there are not necessarily buildings adjacent to sidewalks like along University) along Olson Memorial Highway and along West Broadway.

Project cost drivers of increase from DEIS estimate to revised estimate:

- Advanced engineering: \$202 million
 - Includes added costs for soils, additional vehicles, etc. that were determined based on additional testing and engineering
- Inflation: \$60 million
 - Going from 2017 to 2019 for midyear of construction at 3 percent escalation per year
- New scope requirements: \$224 million
 - LRT bridges: \$67 million
 - Plymouth Ave Station: \$13 million
 - Olson Memorial Highway reconstruction: \$23 million
 - Project office is having conversations with MnDOT and Hennepin County about cost participation so cost to project may be reduced
 - Road network north of TH 610: \$37 million
 - Project office is having conversations with Brooklyn Park and Hennepin County about cost participation so cost to project may be reduced
 - Freight rail requirements: \$53 million
 - Road bridges: \$31 million

Dan Soler said the piece they've had the most questions about is the advanced engineering. A lot of assumptions need to be made during the DEIS cost estimate, and some of those stay true and some do not. Over the last year, the entire corridor was physically surveyed, which allowed the project office to make much more detailed assumptions about what is needed for construction. The soil borings are also a huge part – at the DEIS stage we didn't know how deep the poor soils were, but now we do. The revised cost estimate has more detail and more accuracy. The \$1.488 billion is what the project office believes will be required to deliver this project.

Carol Vosberg asked if the project office felt this was a pretty good cost estimate. Dan Soler replied that they do feel it's a good estimate based on the current scope and assuming that construction does not get delayed.

Steve Schmidt asked what kind of barriers are anticipated going forward now that there is a revised scope and cost estimate. Dan Soler replied that there are a few challenges:

- None of the money is guaranteed yet. This project is competing nationally for New Starts funding (federal dollars would fund 49 percent of the project). The other 51 percent would come from state and local sources.
- A number of approvals are needed to get to the end of the project (municipal consent, permits, etc.)
- Eight of the 13 miles are on the BNSF corridor, and although the project office believes they have adequately estimated what will be needed for right-of-way acquisition and corridor protection, these are not finalized yet

Chris Berne asked if the project elements that dovetail with the West Broadway project by Hennepin County are included in this cost estimate. Dan Soler replied that the right-of-way acquisition and roadway infrastructure are separate costs. The reconstruction from 74th Ave to Candlewood is included in the Blue Line Extension project, but north of Candlewood is part of Hennepin County's project.

Chris Berne asked where Southwest LRT was when they went into the municipal consent process given the cost escalation that occurred afterwards. Dan Soler said the piece that wasn't fully resolved for Southwest when it went into municipal consent was relocation vs. colocation of the freight rail. Chris said that some of the rationale given for the cost estimate increase was worse soil conditions than anticipated, so do we know more than they did at this stage? Paul Danielson replied that 82 percent of the soil borings for Blue Line have been complete so we have a pretty good picture at this time. A major difference for SWLRT is that the western alignment was largely on private right-of-way, whereas Blue Line is mostly in public right-of-way (except for the BNSF land which we have access to) so we are farther along than SWLRT was in terms of soil borings.

George Selman asked if there were any additional opportunities for cost savings. Dan Soler replied that the biggest one is what the bidding climate will be when the project goes out to bid for construction. Central Corridor saw substantial savings, but that isn't something we can count on.

Cost Effectiveness Index (CEI):

- Measure that is used in federal New Starts process
- Based on estimated ridership, capital costs, and operating costs
- CEI is one of six project justification criteria FTA uses to evaluate projects
- CEI for the Blue Line Extension is anticipated to improve from Medium-Low to Medium under new federal rules (different rules were in place at the time of the DEIS)

Overall project rating is determined by two things: the six project justification criteria and local funding commitments.

La Shella Sims said she thought the cost sharing split was 50-50 between the federal government and local sources. Dan Soler replied that you can request up to 50 percent from FTA, but projects are often more competitive if they don't request the full 50 percent, so this project requested 49 percent and the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) agreed to fund the additional one percent (for a total of 31 percent from CTIB).

Steve Schmidt asked when we'd hear from FTA on funding. MarySue Abel said they will apply to enter the engineering phase in August 2016, and then they will apply for the full funding grant agreement in the spring of 2017. Current project costs are being paid for by CTIB, but because we are following the federal process all of these costs are eligible for reimbursement.

Next steps:

- Seek recommendation/resolution on project scope and cost estimate
 - CMC: November 12
- Request approval on scope and cost estimate (assuming positive action from CMC on November 12)
 - Met Council Transportation Committee: November 23
 - Metropolitan Council: December 9
 - In addition to approval of scope and cost estimate, will also request to move into municipal consent process

Chris Berne asked what the best guess is on what will be included in the recommendation. MarySue Abel replied that at this time they plan to move forward with the scope that was presented to the CMC last week. The park board is making a resolution on some trail connections and roadway improvements on Wednesday night that might require some follow up discussion with the CMC. Dan Soler added that they plan to send to the CMC a few things by the end of the week: an agenda, some additional cost estimates requested by Council Member Snope, and a draft resolution that looks for the CMC to adopt the revised scope and cost estimate. That does not mean the resolution will be passed as sent out; it can be revised during the CMC meeting on the 12th based on discussion.

Gillian Rosenquist commented that it is unfortunate that the park board meeting and the Golden Valley City Council meeting fall on the same night, so the decision of the park board will not be available for public discussion in Golden Valley. The park board may decide on the parking question in Golden Valley, and that is an important issue for Golden Valley residents.

Ken Rodgers asked if this was the time to discuss the number of elevators at stations. MarySue replied that at this time one elevator was assumed. Ken asked what happens when that one elevator breaks. People who aren't mobility impaired would have options, but people who are mobility impaired would be out of luck. MarySue said that now would be a good time to talk about that because vertical circulation is a significant cost. Dan Soler said the question that needs to be answered is how do we provide continuous ADA access to the station platforms? That may not be another elevator, but instead could be an ADA accessible ramp or some other access point. That doesn't have to be decided today, but the project is required to be ADA accessible at all times so that will be discussed more as the project advances. Chris Berne noted that this point can be included in the CAC's position statement.

Schedule moving forward:

- December 2015: submit municipal consent plans for city and county review
- March 2016: complete municipal consent approval process
- August 2016: finalize 30 percent design plans and specs

- August 2016: apply to enter engineering

3. Discussion and Develop CAC Position Statement

Chris Berne said he would like to make a statement about what they feel their role has been and what they expect it will continue to be and provide specific items they would like to reinforce or see moving forward. He provided a draft statement as a starting point for discussion, and asked for thoughts on what people would like to include in the statement.

For the draft bullet that said “Equitable treatment for individual homeowners in the Maplebrook Townhouse Associate in Brooklyn Park,” George Selman suggested adding “continued” to the beginning of the statement. Chris Berne explained that because it is a townhouse association, the individual property owners will not be compensated for the right-of-way acquisition of the communal property, but their property values may go down due to the proximity of the new right-of-way. This issue is not necessarily part of this project but is related. Group discussion led to the statement being reworded to “Satisfactory resolution by Hennepin County of right-of-way acquisition and compensation for individual homeowners in the Maplebrook Townhouse Associate in Brooklyn Park.”

Gillian Rosenquist said it would be incredibly helpful to get data on park-and-rides from around the county and if they alleviate parking on local streets/in neighborhoods, or if it would create a destination and potentially contribute to parking issues in the neighborhood. Dan Soler said that when they were implementing Central Corridor he spent a lot of time on parking loss and the concerns with parking in the neighborhoods. No permit parking has been needed along that corridor to date. Parking is mostly occurring on the cross streets, and in many places parking is limited to one or two hours. In Golden Valley, if no lot is built, people won’t drive there to find a place to park all day. If they are park-and-riders, they’ll go to Robbinsdale. If there is a parking lot, it will generate additional traffic. Dan said he has not looked for studies on this issue, but he doesn’t imagine there is a lot of data on it. Kathryn O’Brien added that impacts of building the station will be covered in the FEIS, and as a worst case scenario they are assuming the park-and-ride will be built so traffic impacts of that parking lot will be evaluated.

Ken Rodgers stated that he would like the project to strive to go above the minimum ADA requirements and look beyond the station platform itself to include routes from bus stops to LRT platforms (having accessible signals, guidance to cross live tracks). There should be as much emphasis on a safe path of travel from sidewalks to stations as there is on the stations themselves. Dan Soler suggested adding “Final design shall meet and where possible exceed ADA standards for safe path of travel to and from station platforms” to the CAC’s position statement. The committee agreed.

George Selman would like to added a statement acknowledging the benefit of transit-oriented development (we look forward to the opportunities for TOD where locally supported), and to have a statement that providing connectivity to underserved areas near the corridor is critical to maximizing the investment of LRT in the corridor.

Gillian Rosenquist said that Golden Valley drafted six positions that Chris circulated to the committee, and she would like the committee's thoughts on those positions. They will be acted on at the November 4th city council meeting. Dan Soler said that they don't believe the park board will take a firm position on parking at their meeting on November 4th but instead will keep options open to keep working with the Met Council. Some of Golden Valley's positions are reflected in the CAC's statement.

Carol Vosberg said she is concerned that the statements are getting so generic that they will have no teeth behind them. It might be worthwhile to take a stand on a few items they feel strongly about.

Gillian Rosenquist said that as a committee they should make a statement on the two Golden Valley stations. Steve Schmidt suggested they make a statement that the CAC supports the scope as proposed (and therefore supports both stations).

George Selman recommended taking out the bullet on the crossing at 39 ½ Ave N since the committee is not taking a specific position. Gillian Rosenquist suggested also striking the park-and-ride at Golden Valley Road since they have not taken a position on that either. The committee agreed.

Chris Berne suggested that the revised statement be recirculated to the members present today before passing it along to the rest of the group for approval. This group should provide feedback by end of day Wednesday, then it will be sent to rest of CAC Thursday. The committee agreed to vote as a whole, not record individual votes on the position statement.

Dan Soler noted that Chris will be provided time at the CMC meeting to walk through the CAC's position statement.

4. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:23 pm. The next CAC meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2015.