

# Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting date: May 01, 2024

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

## Members present:

- Chair, David Fenley, at large
- Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen, Precinct F
- Sam Jasmine, Precinct A
- Christopher Bates, Precinct B
- Patsy Murphy, Precinct C
- Ken Rodgers, Precinct D
- Jeffrey Dains, Precinct E
- Kari Sheldon, Precinct G

## Attending Online

Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates, Ken Rodgers, Michele Severson

- Michele Severson, MCD
- Erik Henriksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, M CCD
- Claudia Fuglie, M CCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN

## Excused

Diane Graham-Raff, Richard Rowen

## Ex-officio:

- Andy Streasick, Metro Mobility
- Cheryl Schmidt, Metro Mobility Service Center (interim)
- Douglas Cook, Metro Transit Customer Advocate
- Anjuli Cameron, Metropolitan Council

## Absent

Anjuli Cameron, Jeffrey Dains

= present, E = excused

## Call to order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:31 p.m.

## Agenda approved

It was moved by Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen, seconded by Patty Thorsen to approve the agenda. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. Motion carried. The agenda was amended mid-meeting; information items three and four were switched.

## Approval of minutes

It was moved by Patsy Murphy, seconded by Patty Thorsen to approve the minutes of the April 3, 2024, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. Motion carried.

## Business and information items

1. A **Metro Transit Forward** presentation was presented by Lesley Kandaras, General Manager of Metro Transit as outlined in the 05.01.24 TAAC Presentation Metro Transit Forward document to the committee and meeting attendees. Presenter Kandaras opened the presentation summarizing that the committee would be provided public safety and Metro Transit updates and an overview of a new strategic framework being developed to ensure all Metro Transit employees understand the direction the company is going. Kandaras emphasized that external engagement will be more prevalent than in past strategic initiatives and key policies and decisions will be made on several projects within the strategic initiative.

Numerous Metro Transit updates were announced: Ridership is up sixteen percent from 2022, although not back to pre-pandemic levels. Three bus rapid transportation routes, the Gold, B

and E Lines are scheduled to open in 2025. Public safety highlights noted were the Safety and Security Action Plan implementation advances, an increase in official presence which has been included in a quarterly update to the Council, and the establishment of newly added communications in the Take Pride in Your Ride campaign. Due to the current high number of job vacancies, The Metro Transit Workforce Taskforce has been launched to develop a unified strategy throughout Metro Transit to recruit, retain, and develop employees within the Great Workplace Project which was developed to improve workplace culture. The public engagement phase of the Network Now program will begin later this year. Staff will be more visible throughout the entire transit system to find out what is going on through engagement activities such as the “Great Day in Transit” and light rail listening tours. Kandaras shared her commitment to ride every route in the system within one year.

Kandaras prefaced an overview of the Metro Transit Forward program explaining that the additional funding passed by the legislature in 2023 has enable Metro Transit to plan further into the future which has resulted in a need to look at how they will evolve and to develop a bold vision noting this program is not the same as a decision that goes to the Council for approval. This program will guide decisions made by Metro Transit staff and provide more opportunities for public input and engagement with the goal of adding more routes and providing safer, cleaner, and more reliable trips. The new Metro Transit vision and mission statements and the three emerging strategic priorities - employees, experience (Safety and Security Action Plan) and service (Network Now) - were reviewed. It was noted that Metro Transit Forward is a continuation of the Stronger Better strategic plan originating from the summer of 2020 and will include continuing foundations: equity, sustainability, communications and engagement, and performance measurement and continuous improvement. Kandaras concluded the presentation encouraging comments and questions relating to what Metro Transit is doing and thinking as well as the public safety information shared at the April committee meeting.

**Discussion** - Member Myhre opened the discussion suggesting that Metro Transit should get this information out at public events such as the Gay Pride Festival and the Minnesota State Fair as opportunities to bring awareness of Metro Transit metrics to the public. Chair Fenley expressed agreement with this suggestion. Vice Chair Paulsen questioned if the Metro Transit Forward program interweaves with other Council long-term plans (for example, 2040) leveraging funding to other areas in the region with a focus on long-term stability versus specific areas such as Micro Transit and whether it considers the cold climate. Kandaras explained that strategic plans take Council policy guidance and operationalize plans to align with the broader regional goals of the Council underscoring that strategic framework must have clear linkage to the broader work of the Council. Member Bates questioned if Metro Mobility is getting any funding through tax dollars on behalf of a community member. Kandaras clarified that Metro Mobility is currently funded by state general fund dollars and will be shifting to another state fund/program. Chief Fenley thanked Bates for bringing community interest to the committee. Member Henricksen requested clarification on whether the Metro Transit Forward plan will create strategic priorities that will impact the makeup of the strategic plan. Kandaras responded, “yes” however they are working on several components of the plan and emphasized that it will not be a full-fledged strategic plan or a duplication of another plan; current efforts are focused on framing the ‘big picture.’ Henricksen recommended adding specific examples to the Metro Transit Forward Vision and Mission Statements to provide more meaning and understanding of the program to community members. Kandaras expressed agreement with this suggestion.

2. A **Legislative Update** was provided by Hannah Pallmeyer, Government Affairs Liaison, Metropolitan Council. Following an introduction, Pallmeyer announced that she would cover the legislative schedule, policy bills, budget bills, and a potential bonding bill. Schedule deadlines were reviewed noting omnibus supplemental budget bills are going to the floor for votes by both bodies. Session adjournment is May 20. A written summary of what passes at the legislature will be provided to Chair Fenley for presentation to the committee at the June



meeting as Pallmeyer will not be available.

**Policies** - Transportation Policy Bill, House Bill #3436 - Pallmeyer announced that both bodies agreed last week to the final version of the conference committee report noting it cannot be amended on the floor of the House and Senate. Both bodies will vote on the conference committee report and then it goes to the Governor. Included in the language in this policy is the State Agricultural Society Policy, the State Fair Transportation Plan which is a multi-module state transportation plan the Metropolitan Council is working on that will be implemented this summer and provide various transportation options. It was noted that the State Fair Transportation Plan will be distributed to the public and lead by the State Agricultural Society.

**Supplemental Budget Bill** (to supplement 2023 budget bills) – The House and Senate have joint budget targets, two million for transit and one-time general fund spending. The supplemental budget bill has not gone to the floor in either body. A conference committee is likely after floor votes pass to discuss language around zero bus emissions, arterial bus transit design and funding, financial review and reporting requirements for the Council to the legislature, and the Senate Anti-displacement Community Prosperity Program for the Blue Line extension, the reappropriation of ten million in funds from the Blue Line Extension Project 2023 to this program. The Minnesota Department of Transportation will report on Metro Mobility enhancements and other transportation options in Minnesota.

**Bonding/Capital Investment Bills** – It was noted that 2024 is a biennium year. Both the House and Senate released a package for discussion this week. The House has three hearings scheduled this week. The Senate discussed bills pertaining to a smaller general fund bill and larger general obligation dollars bill on Tuesday. Governor Waltz’s recommendation for thirty-seven million dollars for the H Line Bus Rapid Transit is still not contained in the current versions of the Capital Investment Bills in both the House and Senate. Both bodies are currently voting on other Met Council initiatives.

**Discussion** - Vice Chair, Paulsen initiated discussions requesting the current number of bus rapid transit lines; Pallmeyer and Member Cook verified that there are currently five bus rapid transit lines in service. Henricksen inquired about the objective of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) and Metro Mobility partnership questioning why MNDOT would be involved as they operate in different realms. In response, Pallmeyer shared the language of the amendment to the Transportation Bill adding it was likely a legislative initiative to have MNDOT do this work. Murphy requested the bill number; Pallmeyer provided the bill number, Supplemental Budget Bill - Senate File #5284 Omnibus Transportation Housing and Labor Supplemental Finance Bill. Myhre asked why the disability community is not involved in MNDOT’s work. Chair Fenley clarified, this is probably a constituent bill arising from issues reported by riders and unlikely a Council initiative. Bates asked whether funding has been proposed for electric conversion for Metro Mobility and Metro Transit. Pallmeyer responded that conversations are occurring noting that planning is coming from the Council initiative but there is no funding around this topic. Member Rogers added that Metro Transit has announced the introduction of twenty-five electric buses will be happening soon but has not heard from Metro Mobility.

3. A **Transportation Policy Plan** presentation was presented by Heidi Schallberg - Planning Analyst, MTS Planning, Metro Transit as outlined in the May 2024 TAAC TPP document to the committee and meeting attendees. Following an introduction, presenter Schallberg announced that the presentation would be an update on the long-range 2050 Transportation Policy to include information on their goals, investment plans, policies, actions, and next steps. An overview of the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan including the Council’s role in the plan was provided noting the plan will look at all means of transportation with two main purposes of planning investments and to serve as a guide for local planning partners in implementing regional vision and goals. Schallberg emphasized the importance of the committee’s role in advising the Council on long range transportation planning as committee input is included in the policy plan process and added that the Advisory Working Group includes representation

from Council members and the Minnesota Council on Disability who are focused on the work being done on decision-making and policy levels.

During the review of investment plan chapters, Schallberg pointed out that pedestrians will no longer be combined with bicycling in one chapter; pedestrians will have its own chapter focused on walking and rolling. The Council's role in identifying key issues and challenges during planning work and providing resources and guidance to local implementing agencies to ensure accessibility, convenience and safety throughout the region was reviewed. Issues identified included a lack of facilities throughout the region, improved accessibility for the disability community, winter maintenance issues and safety. Schallberg highlighted that Planning work has identified a need to provide a greater focus on persons with disabilities, noting one in eleven residents has a disability and the existence of intersectional equity in our communities. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) both locally and nationally requires agencies to have ADA transition plans or self-evaluations, and this is also a requirement in applying for national transportation funds. Draft investment plan chapters will be released for public comment later this summer and will run through early fall; the chapters will be revised based on feedback received during the public comment period. It was noted that the goal is to have the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan adopted in early 2025.

An update on actions and next steps included the announcement of the Public Right of Way Access Guidelines final rule adoption in 2024 noting a key focus of this plan is that universal design will be going beyond ADA compliance to meet the needs of riders. During the review of the equitable and inclusive objectives, Schallberg pointed out that the goal of the new initiatives within the five policies is to go beyond ADA requirements to fully meet the needs surrounding disabilities, gentrification, and anti-displacements resulting from transportation investments. The new initiatives will delve into how investments can repair harms and encourage partners to use a structured approach to find out who is living in various areas and their transit needs. It was noted that health objectives will be included in the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan for the first time. Policies and actions overviews were provided to inform the committee on the policy development process, policy teams and stakeholders, policy considerations, the five policy objectives, and corresponding new, past (like) and replaced or removed approaches.

During the review of next steps, Schallberg summarized that chapters are currently being revised, the posting for technical committee review and recommendation for public comment release will occur in June and reiterated that the public comment period will start in August and close in early October noting these dates might change. Schallberg closed the presentation with two questions for consideration by the committee: What is important to include when discussing universal design and going beyond minimum ADA requirements? Should the equity and inclusion goal of the elimination of racial inequities and injustices by historically marginalized communities lead to a common timeline in the region to strive for meeting ADA compliance no later than 2050?

**Discussion** - Myhre opened discussions asking if all types of disabilities including hidden disabilities are being considered in the plan and whether the project team considers environmental impacts to suburbs throughout their work. Presenter Schallberg requested clarification on what might have been overlooked regarding disabilities. Myhre stated there is a lack of uniform accessibility standards that can make it difficult to navigate, learn and teach others on navigating transit systems. Member Thorsen echoed Myhre's concern for representation of all disabilities and its importance relative to universal design.

Member Henricksen requested clarification relating to the policy of equity and universal design going beyond ADA standards. Schallberg explained that this relates to what their partners should be considering or what might get missed. Member Rodgers added that although universal design has a set of principles, the specifics are not known requesting inclusion in the language of universal design planning. If contractors are encouraged to go above and beyond ADA minimal requirements within their contracts, the pressure is on planners to create a more universal design to accommodate all users, therefore the disability community should be involved in usability testing. Thorsen questioned whether there is a process in place if a





process malfunctions – someone to report to and to fix the problem. Schallberg concurred there should be a network of communication when a process malfunctions. Henricksen added to Rodgers’ comment questioning how this is achieved by planning beyond impacting the language of universal design to go beyond ADA requirements. Fenley suggested the language that is developed by designers use the term “must attempt” in collaboration with organizations involved in the planning process.

Member Bates commented that the Southwest Light Rail Green Line Extension project design team took input from the disability community noting their feedback was utilized locally and nationally and questioned if the 2050 Plan includes better use of the North Star Line, namely, expansion. Referencing a lack of inclusion of the disability community in years past, Myhre expressed concern that bidders from outside Minnesota may not understand the environment and communities well enough to do the work. Schallberg responded those disparities of the past are no longer prevalent in our communities therefore not likely by 2050 underscoring that this reality has impacted the universal language. Chair Fenley added that the Council oversees and ensures ADA compliance and can deny bidders.

Henricksen suggested that the plan should bolster communities with ADA transition plans in place to ensure universal guidelines are met prior to 2050. Chair Fenley requested connecting offline to discuss the topic further.

**Purple Line Dedicated Bus Lanes Update** was presented by Elizabeth Jones - Senior Community Outreach & Engagement Lead Metro Transit and Craig Lamothe - Director BRT Projects & Project Manager, Metro Transit as outlined in the PPT\_TAAC\_20240501 document to the committee and meeting attendees. Following presenter introductions, Presenter Jones announced that the presentation would include where things are with the Purple Line project, a focus on design options, and the placement of bus lanes noting the main goal of the presentation was to provide an update on the Purple Line Dedicated Bus Lanes Project located on Maryland and White Bear Avenues and to look at which option would work best.

The presentation was initiated with a look at the history of Purple Line project phases with emphasis on the decision to run the Purple Line on Maryland and White Bear Avenues and options referred to as the White Bear Avenue corridor or the White Bear Avenue and Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor. It was noted that a decision will be made during the Fall of 2024. During the review of proposed station locations, key takeaways included: the Maryland and White Bear Avenue stations would be those currently located on Route 54, half-mile spacing between stops and more stops than on the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor thus providing greater accessibility. The status of decision-making and various options for committee and community input were reviewed.

Due to time constraints, Chair Fenley requested a focus on the St. Paul – Maryland Avenue one side running option and mentioned the committee workgroup meeting scheduled in May to discuss the center and side-running options. Presenter Lamothe provided historical project information explaining that the center-running option was screened out for White Bear Avenue due to impact to properties adding the main concern was minimizing property impacts by staying within and the widening of the right-of-way. Maplewood eventually requested new options for the center-running option concept. The project team responded by evaluating similar projects done by other cities (e.g., Albuquerque) to come up with a narrowed center running option in St. Paul. This option is now being developed and will be presented for public feedback this summer.

The pluses and minuses of a one side-running lane and two side-running lanes were reviewed noting minimal property impacts and it would be a full roadway reconstruction with stations and safety considerations. The center running option would provide a center median (versus no median with the side running option) with no left-hand turns permitted to ensure pedestrian safety. In concluding the presentation, Lamothe shared those various areas involved in the project such as Operations, Maintenance and the public have differing views on each of the



three options underscoring that these groups are not collectively agreeable to one option.

Jones announced that the project team is looking for feedback from the committee on the center-running and side-running options and workgroup discussions will focus on the center-running design adjusted to a narrower environment. The committee was encouraged to let Chair Fenley know if they are interested in participating in small group discussions and possible participation in Purple Line meetings; Jones and Paulsen will confirm the meeting dates. Vice Chair, Paulsen will be providing future Purple Line updates to the committee and the project team will return to provide an update to the committee later this year.

## Reports

### **Subcommittee**

1. Blue Line – Ken Rodgers  
No report.
2. Green Line – Christopher Bates  
No report.
3. Gold Line – Darrell Paulsen  
No report.
4. Purple Line – Darrell Paulsen  
No report.

### **Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group**

No report.

### **Chair**

No report.

## Public invitation

None.

## Member comment

Chair Fenley announced there is a Metro Mobility Community Conversation event on Thursday, May 30 at 11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at Westwood Hills Nature Center at 8300 West. Franklin Ave. There will be a virtual event on Tuesday, June 4. Information will be provided in an e-mail.

Vice Chair Paulsen requested workplan progress and a priority seating video update.

Myhre questioned if the Office of Legislative Auditor's Report on Metro Mobility will be shared out. Chair Fenley responded that it will be sent out to the committee for discussion next month.

## Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:34 p.m.

## Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting of May 01, 2024.

Approved this 29th day of May 2024.

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**Council contact:**



Rhoda Chaffe, TAAC Recording Secretary  
rhoda.chaffe@metc.state.mn.us  
651-602-1701

David Fenley, TAAC Chair  
david.fenley@state.mn.us  
651-361-7809

Darrell Paulsen, TAAC Vice Chair  
darrellpaulsen@yahoo.com  
651-455-3013

