

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting date: February 5, 2025

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

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

Ex-officio:

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

☐ = present, E = excused

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the land we currently call Minnesota and specifically the seven-county region is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota Oyate who are present and active contributors to our thriving region. As part of the Metropolitan Council's commitment to address the unresolved legacy of genocide, dispossession, and settler colonialism and the fact that government institutions, including the Metropolitan Council, benefitted economically, politically, and institutionally after the forceable removal of the Dakota Oyate, the Metropolitan Council is dedicated to instilling Land, Water, and People Commitments in regional policy. These commitments support the Dakota Oyate, the eleven federally recognized Tribes in Minnesota, Ho-Chunk Nation, and the American Indian Communities representing over 150 diverse Tribal Nations that call the seven-county region home.

Call to order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:32 p.m.

Agenda approved

It was moved by Vice-Chair Paulsen seconded by member Thorsen to approve the agenda. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. **Motion carried.**

Approval of minutes

It was moved by member Fuglie, seconded by member Thorsen to approve the minutes of the November 6, 2024, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

Business and information items

1. A presentation of **Professional Operator Development Training**. It was presented by Peter Blomgren and Nicole Bond from Metro Transit. They explained that they helped to create and facilitate the Pod 2024 training program for bus transportation, which was rolled out to about 1,600

frontline employees at Metro Transit, as well as their supervisors

The purpose of the training was to provide insights into the program they designed, aimed at improving the culture within Metro Transit, especially after a survey conducted in 2023 revealed some distrust between leadership and other staff. This training sought to address those issues by bringing together leadership and ATU members, focusing on creating a positive and unified culture.

The training began with a survey to gauge the sentiments and perspectives of the operators, followed by videos that discussed various aspects of Metro Transit's mission and vision, including how to better understand and interact with diverse customers and coworkers. They highlighted the importance of understanding support systems within the company, emphasizing that everyone plays a role in supporting one another, whether as operators or relief instructors. They shared that one of the goals was for the participants to gain tools and knowledge to interact more confidently when confronted with differences. Another key goal was to foster a better understanding of customer service, where operators and staff would engage in class discussions to help identify appropriate courses of action in various customer service scenarios.

The training was heavily focused on making Metro Transit a great place to work, guided by three key norms: treating each other with kindness, dignity, and respect; embracing differences in the workplace; and holding oneself accountable for meeting customer needs. These principles were integrated into the curriculum, and participants were encouraged to reflect on their own perspectives and experiences in a safe and open environment.

The training also emphasized the interconnectedness of employee satisfaction, service performance, and customer experience. For example, improved safety on the job directly correlates to better customer service. The training addressed challenges faced on a day-to-day basis, including issues like homelessness, chemical dependency, and increasing complexity in Metro Transit's services. The presenters also noted that service is evolving, with new routes like BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) creating additional challenges, such as helping new passengers understand the payment systems.

One of the critical activities in the training focused on understanding the diverse identities of employees and customers. A social identity activity was introduced to help participants explore their own lived experiences and gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives before considering others' viewpoints. The "intent versus impact" tool was introduced, where participants were encouraged to lead with empathy and understanding when asking questions or engaging with others. This tool encouraged the idea of acknowledging any offense caused by an action and rebounding by validating and appreciating others, thus ensuring relationships remained positive.

The discussion then shifted to unconscious bias, emphasizing how people's assumptions can affect interactions, and the need to be aware of these biases. The training also covered diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), explaining how these concepts go beyond visible differences like race and gender. They highlighted how understanding DEI is essential for creating an inclusive environment where all employees feel valued.

Videos were used throughout the training to reinforce these points, with one video featuring a gentleman named Yasin who shared his experiences of immigrating to the United States and working as a bus operator. His story emphasized the challenges faced by immigrants and non-native English speakers, especially in relation to assumptions others might make based on accents. The video encouraged participants to be themselves and approach others with sensitivity and openness.

The training also covered disabilities in the workplace, particularly in relation to customer service and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). Participants learned about the specific guidelines



for assisting customers with disabilities, including how to help someone board a bus and what to do if a scooter or other assistive device breaks down. The presenters emphasized that it is the operator's responsibility to offer assistance when a customer with a disability asks for help.

Another segment of the training focused on the different types of disabilities, making participants aware that disabilities can be visible (like mobility impairments) or invisible (like Parkinson's disease). This distinction was crucial for building empathy and understanding, as invisible disabilities may not always be apparent to others. The idea was to foster an inclusive mindset that recognizes people's diverse needs, whether those needs are visible or not.

It was acknowledged that while the training focused on a variety of topics, the key takeaway was that everyone is a whole human with multiple aspects to their identity. Disability, like race, gender, or language, is just one aspect of who someone is, and the goal was to integrate all these aspects into the workplace culture. They wanted to ensure that the training did not oversimplify or overlook the importance of disability but presented it as one integral part of the larger conversation about inclusion and respect.

A question was asked from the committee how often the training is given. It was answered that the intent is annually, however COVID has prevented that. The last training was given in 2019. It was suggested that it should be updated with feedback from people with disabilities.

2. A presentation regarding proposed **Nicollet Mall bus changes**. It was presented by Kyle Burrow from Metro Transit and Kathleen Mayell from the City of Minneapolis. Kathleen began by providing context on the project, which stems from the city's vision for a pedestrianized Nicollet Mall, supported by several city-led and external initiatives. This vision is aimed at improving transit in downtown Minneapolis, which aligns with the goals outlined in the city's Transportation Action Plan. The plan's focus includes enhancing the speed and reliability of transit, particularly in downtown areas like Nicollet Mall, which currently serves a high volume of passengers. Approximately 12,000 people board and exit buses on Nicollet Mall every day, with the average speed of buses being just 5 miles per hour.

Kathleen outlined that the city has been working with Metro Transit since 2023 to assess options for relocating transit from Nicollet Mall. She emphasized that the changes are designed to improve downtown transit and contribute to a more vibrant downtown, while also acknowledging concerns about maintaining accessibility and convenience for transit users. The presentation highlighted the goals of making transit faster and more reliable while improving the urban environment for all users, including pedestrians and cyclists.

A survey conducted during Phase 1 of the project received over 1,700 responses, reflecting mixed opinions. While some respondents supported the idea of moving transit off Nicollet Mall, others expressed concern about the changes. Key themes from the feedback included worries about the distance between bus stops and the mall, safety concerns, and a desire to preserve the familiar and convenient transit experience. There were also calls for improving safety and increasing retail presence on Nicollet Mall.

The presentation then delved into three proposed transit options. Option 1 retains the current transit setup on Nicollet Mall but moves routes 11 and 25 to Hennepin Avenue, with plans for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations. Option 2 adjusts the operation of Marquette and Second Avenues, introducing both northbound and southbound transit on each street, though it would require parking removal on Marquette Avenue. Option 3 proposes moving some general traffic lanes on Third Avenue to transit-only lanes, which would improve transit speed but might require additional right-of-way space.

The presenters also shared insights from Phase 2 outreach, including engagement with businesses, neighborhood organizations, and people with disabilities. Feedback from these groups revealed concerns about accessibility, particularly for people with mobility disabilities. Committee members, including Ken and Jasmine, expressed concerns about the challenges posed by having



to walk additional blocks between bus stops, which could create safety risks, especially for blind individuals or those using mobility aids.

In response, the presenters acknowledged these concerns and noted that the final decision would consider the feedback received from both public outreach and technical evaluations. The goal remains to strike a balance between improving transit efficiency and maintaining accessibility, safety, and vibrancy for all residents. They emphasized that the plan for moving transit off Nicollet Mall is part of a larger, ongoing effort to enhance the downtown area, with a potential timeline for implementation starting in 2026.

Member Hendricksen asked with option scores highest according to the project's goals. The answer was option 1 has the least "red" on it.

Members Rodgers and Jasmine stated that from a disability perspective, any change hurts people with disabilities. There is a danger for every street someone with vision impairment needs to cross. Some options would cause riders to have to cross three different streets.

Question from Chair Fenley. Was data on transfers from one route to another looked at, possibly to minimize walking time for transfers. Answer is yes. Chair Fenley also commented that one option would remove accessible parking spots.

3. A presentation regarding the **Stop-Level Signage Evaluation Project**. It was presented by Jasna Hadzic-Stanek from Metro Transit. The presentation discussed an effort to evaluate and potentially improve the signage at bus stops, especially how transit information is conveyed to riders. There are several important concerns and suggestions raised during the discussion.

One suggestion was to include QR codes on bus stop signage. This would allow riders to access more detailed information digitally, making it easier for those with visual impairments to enlarge text or translate it into other languages. However, some attendees raised concerns about QR codes not being fully accessible to everyone, especially those without smartphones or those who struggle with using them due to visual impairments.

Another key point was the consideration of audio and beacon technology. It was suggested that audio announcements at bus stops, which provide real-time information when a button is pressed, could be an improvement. However, it was pointed out that such systems are often not maintained properly, and issues like construction or service delays can render them outdated. While beacon technology was also mentioned, concerns about its reliability due to battery dependence and the potential for maintenance problems made it less appealing.

The need for universal access to information was emphasized, particularly for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. There's a challenge in providing alternative methods for these riders to access information, as technologies like QR codes and beacons may not always work for everyone. Finding a way to offer information through tactile or audible means could be a good solution, but it needs to be carefully balanced so as not to overwhelm riders with too much content.

Finally, one participant suggested thinking outside the box by considering innovative ways to present transit information. Rather than sticking to traditional printed signs, they recommended exploring how information could be integrated into the actual physical structure of the bus stop itself, potentially reducing the need for overwhelming signage.

Reports

Subcommittee

1. Blue Line – Ken Rodgers

There will be a meeting tonight regarding updates including options for the station and crossing near North Memorial hospital. All cities have given municipal consent sent.

2. Gold Line – Darrell Paulsen



Set to open in March.

3. Purple Line – Darrell Paulsen

There is some local opposition to the route down White Bear Ave. Local political leaders are engaging in activities to promote microbusing instead of the purple line possibly as a stall tactic. BRT is needed in the east metro and Vice-Chair Paulsen states it is worth the investment.

Public invitation

No public comment

Member comment

Add recap of member comments discussion.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:12 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 February 5, 2025.

Approved this 4th day of June 2025.

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