



**METRO Blue Line Extension
Community Advisory Committee
April 9, 2018
Blue Line Extension Project Office
5514 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 200
Crystal, MN 55428
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM**

Meeting Summary

CAC Members: Jason Greenberg, Justin Youngbluth, Catherine Fleming, Steve Schmidt, Giuseppe Marrari, Tonja West-Hafner, Tim Davis (sitting in for Vicki Moore), La Shella Sims, Stefan Watkins, Ken Rodgers

Agency Staff and Guests: Sam O’Connell, David Davies, Juan Rangel, Rachel Dammel, Nick Landwer, Dan Pfeiffer, Jim Toulouse, MarySue Abel, Alicia Vap, Kenya McKnight-Ahad, John Sutter, Kerri Pearce Ruch

1. Call to Order/Welcome and Introductions

Catherine Fleming called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm and asked everyone in the room to introduce themselves.

2. Approval of January 8 Meeting Summary

Justin Youngbluth motioned approval of the meeting summary, and Tonja West-Hafner seconded. The meeting summary was approved with no revisions.

3. Education Corridor Initiative

Kenya McKnight-Ahad from Summit Academy OIC presented. Kenya has worked in transit development planning and regional policy from an equity lens for many years, including on the Blue Line Extension project. She helped establish the Blue Line Coalition.

Summit Academy OIC does workforce training and is located on Olson Memorial Highway, so the Blue Line will run right in front of it. Summit wanted to think through how to highlight the assets in north Minneapolis along this route, and identified that there is a natural flow of educational institutions. These institutions have about 450 employees and serve 3,600 people, 2,700 of which are children. For this reason, Summit wants to brand the area as an educational corridor.

Summit convened stakeholders from the three neighborhood groups and at least 10 of the institutions in the area, and these stakeholders are supportive and excited about the educational corridor branding. They want the educational corridor to be recognized by the City of Minneapolis, similar to Eat Street, so it is known as a destination and encourages collaboration. There is currently a resolution under review by Councilmembers Ellison and Cunningham, and they hope to have it introduced in early May. Assuming they do receive the designation from the City, they will have a

celebration and start a long-range planning process. A number of organizations have written letters of support for the educational corridor, and they are looking for the support of the CAC as well.

Stefan Watkins asked what the name of the corridor would be. Kenya said it is proposed to be the Northside Educational Corridor, but it may change based on conversations with the councilmembers.

Tim Davis said that the Harrison Neighborhood Association has already written a letter of support and asked how can they help going forward? Kenya said that preliminary conversations with stakeholders have generated some initial ideas, such as hosting a big back to school festival, so that is the short-term focus. Beyond that, they are looking to better leverage the work of the institutions in the corridor, and the more detailed long-range planning will come after the City approves the resolution.

La Shella Sims asked what Summit and the corridor would get out of the official recognition – anything financial? Kenya said Summit is not asking for any money for the establishment of the corridor. After the long-range plan is developed, they will look at how other organizations can support the work through grants and other means. For example, MnDOT offers grants to help with artwork and signage. Justin Youngbluth added that the benefit would be the name recognition to draw people and businesses to the area.

Jason Greenberg asked if they envision that there will be additional institutions added to the 10 or so Kenya already mentioned. Kenya said they do believe more institutions will get involved, and that they currently have three levels of partnerships. The primary level is neighborhood group support, the second level is faith based organizations and other community institutions that have educational programs, and the third level is other people that support the corridor and want to be involved.

Catherine Fleming asked how we can support this effort. Kenya said Summit would love to have a letter of support from the CAC. CAC members are also welcome to attend their meetings if they are interested. Support letters can be addressed to Northside Educational Corridor stakeholders. Catherine said they would take the request under advisement. Kenya noted that they would appreciate a response by the end of the month.

4. 90% Cost Estimate

MarySue Abel presented. In December and January the project team was finishing up 90% plans, and then in January the 90% cost estimate was finalized. At this level of design there is now less cost uncertainty.

The total project budget did not change between 60% and 90% plans – it is still \$1.536 billion. The project contingency has gone down from 25% to 21%, which is appropriate as around 20% contingency is expected for 90% design. The 21% contingency equals \$262 million.

The primary cost drivers include:

- Design refinement: \$10-15 million
 - Bridges/retaining walls
 - Brooklyn Park OMF

- Contaminated soil
- Systems integration
- Schedule refinement: \$15-20 million
 - Revenue service date moved from 2021 to 2022
- Finance charges: \$10 million
 - Revised local funding disbursement schedule

There are four main categories of risk:

- Requirements
 - BNSF negotiations. The project office wishes this was farther along, but BNSF did ask for the design plans to review, which is good news.
 - Xcel transmission towers. We need to make sure BNSF is ok with our assumptions in their right-of-way.
- Design
 - Mitigated risks previously identified (floodplains, soils, utilities)
- Market
 - Construction bids
 - Right-of-way
 - Schedule delay
- Construction
 - Unforeseen conditions
 - Contaminated soils

The project needs contingency for its entire duration right down to when the line opens.

Steve Schmidt said that it seems like the 2022 opening date is not confirmed yet, and asked what plan B is if the delays continue. Does Hennepin County have a plan B to finish the West Broadway reconstruction without the LRT? Is there any chance FTA could award us a grant but less than what was requested? MarySue Abel said that there is good news on the FTA funding as the budget did include funding that the Metropolitan Council thinks would cover both SWLRT and BLRT, although no appropriations have been made yet. For Brooklyn Park, there have been some discussions about how to deal with the reconstruction of West Broadway if the LRT is delayed, but no decisions have been made. Nick Landwer said the County plans to move ahead with the West Broadway project or without LRT, but they fully intend to build the LRT.

La Shella Sims asked whose budget the maintenance of the LRT falls into. Jim Toulouse said Metro Transit will operate and maintain the line, and the funding for that primarily comes from a Hennepin County transit tax. MarySue Abel added that the operations budget is separate from the construction budget she presented earlier.

Jason Greenberg asked how typical it is for a railroad to stall in negotiations. MarySue Abel said it is very typical, and we know from working with BNSF on SWLRT that things took longer than we had hoped. Discussions with BNSF have been going on for years, but the negotiations aren't as far along as the Council had hoped. Some of the language being negotiated for SWLRT could also be applied

to BLRT, which could help move things along. Sam O'Connell added that BNSF wants to get through SWLRT negotiations first as it is a capacity issue for them, but when they get to BLRT they will be serious about the negotiations.

La Shella Sims asked if will we lose funding or if costs go up so we don't have enough funding if BLRT is delayed due to SWLRT. MarySue Abel said delays do cost money, but we are trying to be very cautious with how we proceed. We won't take design to 100% until things are figured out with BNSF, and we are trying to mitigate additional costs as much as possible.

5. Olson Memorial Highway Design

Roadway Design

Jim Toulouse presented. Olson Memorial Highway currently has six lanes with a wide median. Due to traffic volumes, it will remain as six lanes but the design includes some elements to slow cars down, including a 35 mph speed limit and narrower lanes.

Traffic signals and left turns lanes will be located at:

- Lyndale Ave
- Bryant Ave
- Van White Memorial Blvd
- Humboldt Ave
- Morgan Ave
- Penn Ave
- Thomas Ave (new)

In addition to crossing at traffic signals, pedestrians will be able to cross at three mid-block crossings at Russell Ave, the secondary station access at the Penn Ave station, and James Ave.

Lighting along Olson Memorial Highway will include high/low fixtures based on City of Minneapolis standards, meaning it will also include pedestrian level lighting.

From south to north, the roadway will include a 6-foot sidewalk, 10-foot boulevard, three through lanes of traffic, a left turn lane in some locations, two LRT tracks, a median, three through lanes, 10-foot boulevard, a separated bike lane, and a 6-foot sidewalk.

Ken Rodgers said it distresses him greatly that there will be mid-block crossings since it has been brought up repeatedly that those are unsafe for some people. He understands that the mid-block crossings might not be the only ways to access the stations, but he doesn't understand why we can't come up with a solution that is safer. Jim Toulouse said that on Olson Memorial Highway all three mid-block crossings will have full traffic signals, not rectangular rapid flashing beacons, so they will be safe for everyone to cross.

Catherine Fleming asked how long people will have to get across the street. Jim Toulouse said the signals are timed to be able to cross the entire street in one walk cycle if you start when the walk signal comes up, which gives you about 45 seconds. The timing is based on the speed of the average walker. Catherine asked if that was a federal guideline. Jim said it is based on design guidelines, but the signals can be tweaked by whoever operates them going forward. Giuseppe Marrari asked what

the current time is to cross Olson Memorial Highway. Jim said he doesn't know how its timed off the top of his head but he will look it up.

Stefan Watkins asked if pedestrian bridges would be feasible instead of mid-block traffic crossings. Nick Landwer said they did look at pedestrian bridges, and in locations where they are successful there is a grade difference but Olson Memorial is flat. People want to take the shortest way across, and evidence shows that people won't take a pedestrian bridge across a flat crossing. Plus, the ramps to get up to the crossing height would be excessively long since there is not a grade change. Building a pedestrian bridge then having people run across without an at-grade crossing makes things less safe, so the design instead focused on making safe at-grade crossings.

Tim Davis asked why are there so many additional crossings of Olson Memorial where people don't normally cross. Nick Landwer said they wanted to focus on getting people to cross where they should be crossing. Thomas Ave needed a signal due to the roadway geometry so people will likely cross there in the future because it has a signal. For the mid-block crossings, there will be fencing to prevent people from crossing the tracks, and other existing mid-block crossings will be removed. Providing a few mid-block crossings will allow people to not have to walk to the next signalized intersection to cross. Tim asked what the change in travel time will be from Wirth Park to I-94 for cars. Nick said they can pull that information, but now during rush hour traffic goes about 20 mph so that likely won't change much, but it will slow down traffic during off-peak hours. Sam O'Connell added that they received a lot of comments from the community that people were concerned the LRT would sever the neighborhood and that they wanted safe ways to get across.

La Shella Sims said she doesn't think there should be a six-lane highway going through a neighborhood. This may be beyond the control of the project since MnDOT owns the road, but she would like the agencies to consider removing some of the lanes. She is concerned about safety and said that slowing down traffic is not the same as eliminating lanes. Nick Landwer said that in the first year and half of the project, the project office had weekly meetings with MnDOT, the city, and the county to discuss how to make Olson Memorial Highway better. Reducing lanes was considered, but it would cause a capacity issue and traffic would reroute through neighborhoods instead, and the agencies would rather keep the traffic on the trunk highway.

Pedestrian and Bike Facilities

Alicia Vap presented. There will be a continuous bike facility from Wirth Park to 7th Street. The width will vary from 8-feet wide to 10-feet wide. Bike racks will be located at the Penn and Van White station areas. The 2-foot buffer between the bike facility and sidewalk will be textured using tooled concrete to draw attention to it. There is no standard for these buffers in the city, but there have been lots of conversations with the TAAC, the city, and other stakeholders.

Ken Rodgers asked if the bike lanes would be at sidewalk level or street level. Alicia Vap said they will be at sidewalk level. Ken asked what the separation material will be. Alicia said it is concrete that is tooled so to make it textured, and the depth of the tool gets deeper as you get closer to corners. Ken asked what separates the bikes from the cars. Alicia said there will be a 10-foot boulevard that will include trees and other streetscape elements. The pedestrian won't need to walk over the buffer. Ken asked what there will be to stop bike traffic on the corners. Jim Toulouse said

the bike facility will primary be bituminous, but it will change to concrete where it approaches the pedestrian facility to provide a visual cue to bicyclists that pedestrians will be crossing in front of them or mixing in that area. This is similar to what was done at Hennepin/Lyndale. Alicia said they will keep an eye on how the facility on Hennepin/Lyndale is operating. It is fairly new but the initial feedback is positive.

La Shella Sims asked what will happen to the service road. Jim Toulouse said the service road will mostly remain in place where it is today. Some portions will be removed because it wouldn't provide access to anything, and two areas will be narrowed slightly. Because the existing right-of-way is so wide, everything can fit in the existing right-of-way, and the service roads won't get any closer to the homes along Olson Memorial Highway.

Catherine Fleming asked if there would be a connection to the greenway on Humboldt. Tim Davis noted that it is called the Northside Greenway. Alicia Vap said she isn't familiar with it but will look into it.

Alicia Vap said the I-94 bridge will also have wider sidewalks to accommodate increased bike and pedestrian traffic.

Median and Landscaping

The City has agreed to take on maintenance of the medians. Medians will include plantings with irrigation at station areas and mid-block crossings. The designs have built on lessons learned from City of Saint Paul staff from maintaining the medians along University Ave.

Medians will also include permeable pavers for stormwater collection and aggregate intertrack fence to deter pedestrian crossings. The design team is continuing to investigate where these materials will go and what size of rocks to use.

The project office staff has been working closely with park board staff on a tree replanting plan. They will be planting over 240 trees in the boulevard with multiple varieties to frame the street.

Justin Youngbluth asked if the trees will be smaller when they start out than the existing trees. Alicia Vap said the park board prefers smaller trees be planted and believes they will be about the same size in about five years as if you planted larger trees.

In the median area about 50 trees will be taken out and relocated to nearby parks that the park board has selected. There is an optimal size for relocating trees so this can't be done with all trees that will be impacted.

Stations

Van White and Penn are sister stations so the architecture is very similar, just color and texture will separate the two. At Van White, there will be coppery colored shingles on the canopy. It won't be too bright to blind people but will provide visual interest. The ends of the canopies will light up and provide a nice glow. The Van White station is next to a historic property so the design needed to fit in with the historic context, which is why the design is a little more muted.

At Penn Avenue, the color scheme is blue and green and also has panels at the end of the canopies that will light up.

OCS Poles

About 50 poles between Sheridan and Bryant will be treated to enhance and tie the stations together. Project office staff started sharing initial concepts with the community in the summer of 2017 and are now down to two concepts that will be finalized this spring.

Concept A is painting the poles from top to bottom and transitioning the color from one end of the corridor to the other from green to blue to purple. The colors fit within the color families of the two stations. Poles will be striped at mid-block crossings to draw attention to them.

Concept B reflects the rise and fall of the Olson Memorial Highway corridor. Poles would be painted various heights in a purple color. Striping would indicate mid-block crossings with this concept too.

Giuseppe Marrari commented that doesn't think anyone would notice concept B.

Catherine Fleming asked if any of the plants would be year-round. Alicia Vap said there are shrubs and grasses that will be year-round, and the flowers will bloom at different times in the spring.

Ken Rodgers asked when you walk from the center of a station to the end of a platform towards the intersection, what will be there as a barrier to prevent someone from going too far? Alicia Vap said on either side of the ramp there will be a curb and railing. The curb and railing will be perpendicular to the cross walk so you would run into that before you got into the street.

La Shella Sims said she anticipates Van White will be the busiest station along Olson Memorial Highway and asked if there was any additional consideration to deal with that extra traffic. Alicia Vap said all the platforms are the same dimensions and can accommodate the various passenger loads. La Shella asked if things can be changed later on if people's behavior isn't what was anticipated. Alicia said they can add additional fencing, low concrete walls, or signage as needed.

Tim Davis said that the Harrison neighborhood will be served by both Blue Line and Green line, but the pole color doesn't reflect very much blue. Would that be an issue? Alicia Vap said there will be plenty of signage to indicate which line you are on so she does not think it will be an issue.

Jason Greenberg asked if there were plans for public art. Alicia Vap said that there is a federal provision that prohibits using funds for public art so that would need to be funded some other way. Jason noted he likes concept B for the OCS poles.

6. City of Crystal Update

John Sutter, Crystal's community development director, presented.

The Bass Lake Road streetscape project will occur this year. This area is an old fashioned main street, and the streetscape out front is falling apart and is not serving the businesses well. The City decided to rip it out and start over. Construction should go from May to September 2018. There will be a mini plaza at the corner of Elmhurst Ave and Bass Lake Road. There will be more space for landscaping, which will be concentrated at end of each block. The project will add an on-street parking bay in middle of the block. Four feet of space will be reserved next to businesses that they can use for outdoor seating or other uses.

Jason Greenberg asked if the building façade will change at all. John Sutter said they feel that if they fix the public realm that the private property owners and their tenants will respond in kind. The City feels that the streetscape has been holding the businesses back, so they want to fix that part first. Even if this area is redeveloped, the new streetscape will serve future development too.

The Becker Park project will be under construction from late 2018 to fall of 2019, and it will completely redo the park. The project will provide a straight shot between the LRT station and Bass Lake Road. It will also have trails in the park for people that want more recreational opportunities. There will be an active water feature, accessible playground, bathroom building, and picnic shelter. The idea is make it a place that everyone can use almost all the time, like a new town square. It is a \$4.5 million project, including \$2.5 million for stormwater and \$2 million for the park itself. The City hopes the park project will be a catalyst for reinvestment in existing properties and redevelopment in the future.

The City of Crystal also has two policy changes, a new zoning ordinance and a proposed transit-oriented development (TOD) overlay district.

The new zoning ordinance is a unified development code. The focus is on streamlining and regulating only what makes sense. The max apartment density went from 22 to 40 units per acre, and the maximum height for apartment buildings went from 3 to 5 stories. The minimum single family lot width was reduced from 60 to 50 feet to promote infill residential development, and the lot width for duplexes was reduced from 100 to 80 feet. The City now allows accessory dwelling units (basement apartments, tiny houses, etc.), and they will be allowed for both rental properties and owner occupied properties. The goal is for the market to create more naturally occurring affordable housing without changing the feel and layout of neighborhoods. The City believes this new code will support and reinforce the transit investment. Sam O'Connell asked about the timing of these change. John Sutter said the uniform development code has already been adopted and is currently in effect.

The City also has a proposed TOD overlay district for the non-single family area around Bass Lake Road station. The overlay would focus on the form of development in relation to other properties and the public realm. "We don't want our zoning ordinance to stand in the way of TOD if that's what the market wants." Current uses are allowed to exist if that's what the market wants but is ready to respond as the market wants. It would be a form based code focuses more on design than type of use.

7. 2018 Look Ahead

Federal New Starts Report and Federal Appropriations

MarySue Abel presented. BLRT is part of the New Starts program. The president approved a budget that does provide funding to the program, so the next step for us is to get to a full funding grant agreement (FFGA).

Over the past five to seven years the funding for the program has generally grown. The total budget for the Capital Investment Grant program is \$2.65 billion, with \$399 million for new New Starts projects like BLRT and SWLRT. There are five projects currently in the engineering phase across the

county – those five projects will be the most competitive for the \$399 million but there should be enough to go around. We're in a good position to apply for our FFGA, and it is now up to FTA to decide on appropriations.

There was a meeting in DC last week with the mayor of Brooklyn Park, Target corporate representatives, Commissioner Opat, Chair Tchourumoff, and Mark Fuhrman to advocate for the BLRT project. They don't expect FTA to do appropriations for New Starts for a few months, but Alicia Vap noted that FTA put out news releases today that three Small Starts projects got funding.

Catherine Fleming asked if it would be an issue that we have two projects in our region. Sam O'Connell said that it has happened in other cities and FTA recognizes that will happen as regions work to build up their system.

Justin Youngbluth asked if the FTA commits funding each year. MarySue Abel said the FFGA will be for the full amount unless they change the structure of the program. FTA does cap the annual amount at \$100 million per year, so funds will be received over multiple years and even after construction is complete.

BLRT Schedule Look Ahead

MarySue Abel said the major focuses for this year include:

- Complete critical third party agreements (including BNSF)
- FTA financial capacity assessment
- FTA risk assessment
- Complete 90% Franklin OMF design
- Complete 100% civil design
- Complete 100% systems design
- Complete 100% Brooklyn Park OMF design
- Complete 100% Franklin OMF design
- Submit advanced construction LONP request to FTA
- Apply for FFGA

Kerri Pearce Ruch noted that Hennepin County now has a survey online on the Bottineau community works website so people can provide input on places they travel to and provide thoughts on how biking and walking is around the stations. The County did a series of community workshops and pop-up events and will have one more in May. She will discuss what they heard at the May CAC meeting.

8. Adjourn

Catherine Fleming asked about next steps for the letter of support for the educational corridor. Giuseppe Marrari made a motion to provide a letter of support. Ken Rodgers seconded. All members were in favor. Catherine will work with Chris Berne to draft a letter.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:08 pm. The next meeting is currently scheduled for May 7, 2018.