Southwest Light Rail Transitway (SWLRT)
Business Advisory Committee Meeting
March 27, 2015
Southwest Project Office
6465 Wayzata Blvd, Suite 500
St. Louis Park, MN 55426
7:30 AM – 9:00 AM

Meeting Summary

BAC Members/Alternates: Dan Duffy, Curt Rahman, Dave Pelner, Duane Spiegle, Gary Orcutt, Rick Weiblen, Tony Barranco, Joan Suko, Jim Roth

Agency Staff and Guests: Mark Fuhrmann, Jim Alexander, Joan Hollick, Nani Jacobson, Craig Lamothe, Robin Caufman, Sam O'Connell, John Welbes, Sophia Ginis, James Mockovciak, Nkongo Cigolo, Alysen Neese, Greg Hunt, Katie Walker

1. Welcome and Introductions
The meeting was called to order by BAC co- Chair Jim Duffy.

2. Commenting on the SDEIS
Ms. Nani Jacobson, the Assistant Director for Environmental Agreements for the SPO presented an overview of the recently published SDEIS report. Referring to the handout/ PowerPoint presentation, Ms. Jacobson began with general remarks explaining the purpose of the study, it's focus [on changes in the alignment in Eden Prairie, the final OMF location, and the decision to co-locate the SWLRT with current freight lines in the St. Louis Park and Minneapolis segment], and, how the SDEIS reflected and incorporated the comments received from the public after the publication of the DEIS in 2012. In addition, she mentioned the current Public Comment Period for the SDEIS, options to file a comment; the dates and times of the upcoming Public Hearings, and, how to obtain a copy of the report. She concluded her presentation with an overview of the 'next steps' before obtaining the fully funded federal grant and the commencement of the bidding and construction phases. A question was raised as to whether or not a list of upcoming public hearings on the SDEIS report could be forwarded to the respective municipal offices. Ms. Jacobson ensured that would happen.

3. Potential Cost Reduction Evaluation
Ms. Joan Hollick, the Deputy Project Director, spoke next, providing attendees with a brief introduction of the potential proposed cost reductions. This included an outline of the proposal's goals, the SPO's approach, a reminder of the original Scoping Principles, and a review of the process completed thus far. Ms. Hollick concluded with a description of the Project Evaluation Matrix and the Definition of Key Terms. A question was asked about whether or not infrastructure costs (ramps, bridges, etc,) could be mitigated by MnDOT projects supporting the LRT, to which the reply was given that it is not an option.

Mr. Jim Alexander, the Director of Transit Systems Design and Engineering, continued with a more detailed presentation of the categories characterizing the proposed cuts. This included individual slides of the cost savings if changes were made to the Park and Rides in Eden Prairie, Minnetonka/Hopkins, and St. Louis Park. It also included savings associated with Station cuts or deferments, and the impact they would have on ridership models – and, by extension, ridership requirements to maintain the Project's Medium-to-High rating to secure federal funding. A discussion followed about the relationship of ridership models and federal funding, with the reminder that some cost-cutting proposals would have a more adverse affect than others. Another question followed about the impact of Station eliminations on the number of rail cars that would otherwise be required. Mr. Alexander stated that it would have an impact and the exact number could not be determined until the decisions were made and updated forecasting models were completed. Mr. Alexander completed his overview with slides outlining the savings and impact of cuts to Landscaping, Art and Furnishings, Operations, and Trail Structures.

A comment was made about the art being a non-essential cost. The questioner explained that in private business, eliminating non-essential costs are an easy call. He asked if the SPO could we create a list of cuts that do not directly affect the operating costs? Mr. Alexander responded by stating that this was a list that could be provided later, and proceeded to describe the intangible role art has played in building community ownership and pride in local station stops on the other light rail lines. Another question was asked about who the final decision makers are in this process. Mr. Alexander reiterated the SPO's role as transit planners/developers as opposed to decision-makers, and their goal to present all the scenarios possible in order to allow responsible parties to make the most educated, informed decisions. He went on to state that the final decision making body was the Met Council, in conjunction with the recommendations provided by the Corridor Management Committee. An additional question requested information explaining the disparity between maintaining the current Eden Prairie Town Center Station and relocating it. Mr. Alexander responded by pointing out that additional costs of relocating were due to additional infrastructure (roads, ramps, etc,) required to move the station.

4. Project Options Work Plan Deliverable Schedule
Mr. Craig Lamothe, the Project Director, completed the presentation outlining the Project's Next Steps. This included notification of upcoming meetings and a discussion of if/when the BAC should meet to compile their recommendations and perspective to be submitted to the CMC/Met Council in their deliberations on the final package of budget cuts. It was agreed the committee should meet to compile their views to present to the CMC.

Finally, a question was asked if there was any chance federal funding would be available at a later date to complete projects deferred or cut from the current scope. Mr. Fuhrmann answered that it might, but not from the fund associated with the current project. An example was given from the Blue Line. A park and ride structure was built at grade level during the construction phase. Several years later funding made up of local, state and federal grants was ascertained to add several floors and complete it. But the federal funding utilized was not associated with the original funding for the Blue Line.

5. Adjourn