

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, September 2, 2020

Committee Members Present: Chair David Fenley, Vice Chair Darrell Paulsen, Sam Jasmine, Patsy Murphy, Ken Rodgers, Jeffrey Dains, Kari Sheldon, Heidi Myhre, Patty Thorsen, Diane Graham-Raff and Erik Henriksen.

Committee Members Absent: None

Committee Members Excused: Christopher Bates, John Clark, Claudia Fuglie, Kody Olson and Richard Olson.

Council Staff Present: Robin Kaufman, Doug Cook, Clarissa Schleichert, Kyle Burrows, Met Council Member Wendy Wulff, Andy Streasick, Christine Kuennen and Alison Coleman

Public Present: None.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:32 p.m. on Wednesday, September 02, 2020.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Dains, seconded by Jasmine to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Murphy, seconded by Jasmine, to approve the minutes of the August 05, 2020 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

BUSINESS & INFORMATION

1. Metro Transit Update

Robin Kaufman, Director of Administration at Metro Transit, spoke to the TAAC committee. I will give an update about Metro Transit activities. The first item is that starting September 12, we are going to be doing some significant service adjustments. We are starting to get the word out now. But we are going to be basically increasing the frequency of our popular rides. We have been monitoring what routes are seeing high ridership and we are going to be resuming near full weekend schedules for a handful of routes. It is too long of a list to send. What I can do is send a link to the press release so people can look up those specific routes that they are interested in. Along with that we will also be increasing our LRT service. It will be going back to 10-minute frequency. So that is another big change.

There are buses we are going to be tweaking a little bit as far as what their frequency is but not going all the way back to the full schedules. Then there is about a little over 50 routes. Mostly express commuter routes that are going to continue to be suspended. The reason for that is we are not seeing demand on these routes. Those are going to continue to be suspended.

Also, I just wanted to give an update on that. We are going to be getting information out on our website. We did a press release. We have social media, rider alerts and we updated our website. So we just wanted to make sure that people have that information and can help us get the word out. That things are going to be changing on September 12.

Vice Chair Paulsen said is the frequency of the light rail going back to 10 minutes? What is it right now?

Caufman said right now the light rail lines are operating at about every 15 minutes. So that is going to increase to 10 so that is a change. And then for the number of riders per bus. We are sticking with the guideline of 10 for a 40-foot regular bus. And then 15 passengers for an articulated bus.

Vice Chair Paulsen said when that is not being adhered to most often, like during rush hour, who gets that information, and what happens?

Caufman said for the buses, if someone were to submit the complaint. You can do that on our customer service line or do that online. We have been providing a daily report to our operations staff. So our bus operations director would receive an email that has any complaints that we received during that day. And then we can also review it over the course of a week and see if there are trends or anything. We have been monitoring the routes that are increasing are the ones that have a high frequency. With an increasing of buses that are running those routes, we will see less of an overflow from the seating of 10 or 15 passengers.

Jasmine said is this going to open up and happen regardless of the number of Covid cases in Minnesota? Does it matter what the numbers are? Does the change happen regardless?

Caufman said I think this change is going to occur on September 12. We are watching Covid cases and we are taking direction from the Governor's office. If there are any changes as far as orders, we would comply and make sure that we got it out to our customers.

Jasmine said how do you know how many besides somebody decides to pay, what the numbers are on the LRT or the buses? Is the driver, who is busy driving, actually counting. How do you know when it is too full? Is it just through customer complaints?

Caufman said I would have to look at the specifics, but the operators are generally tracking that and if there is an overflow bus, they can communicate to the Transit Control Center that they need to get another bus out there. And that there are customers waiting. We do have our fare. We are able to track the fares too.

Myhre said the transit people I made a complaint to said that they really can't do anything because I have seen ever since you got the plexiglass thing it has been an issue since you switched over to the front of the bus to pay. Not everybody is boarding in the back like you are supposed to. I heard a long speech when I called to see if I can actually get a ride to go to where I wanted to go. People don't always wear a mask.

The handicapped seats are being used for all the wrong reasons. We need to talk about that. More and more people are getting on the bus. St. Paul has road construction and you didn't put up signs saying where we can and cannot stand for the buses. We don't know how long there is going to be the road construction. You never put the updated bus schedule up. It is routes 75 and 68. They only go to Signal Hills in a loop. Ever since we got the plexiglass, things have been falling apart.

Caufman said I will look into those and see if we were aware of the construction and how long it is going to last. I will check into boarding in the back of the bus instead of using the front door. As far as masks, we expect people to wear them unless there is a problem with that. It is hard to have the operators in the position of enforcing that. We are taking more of an approach of education. We have been out at the bus stops and have distributed over 70,000 masks to our customers. So if we see someone without a mask, we do provide them. We are trying to ask people to wear masks as much as possible. But then they may have a reason where they can't wear them, or they are not able to wear them. We are taking the education and provision approach.

Chair Fenley said Heidi, we will address the accessible seating in today's agenda. There is really no good answer to the masks. You have public health concerns. You have paranoia.

Vice Chair Paulsen said not all of your drivers wear masks. Many drivers and passengers do not buy into it.

Caufman said we did a compliance check with our drivers and observed all the drivers and found well into the 90's percentile of people complying. Keeping in mind that there are times when drivers have reasons like asthma or health concerns where they are unable to wear a mask. That is why we have the plexiglass and the protection. And also, masks are difficult. I have glasses and wearing a mask can steam up your glasses. There are some drivers who are unable to wear a mask because it is unsafe to have the glasses fog up. Taking that into consideration, we have nearly perfect compliance.

Dains said I have a question. Has there been a change in security on the light rail? What are your observations about security in the light rail?

Caufman said I have not heard of any updates on light rail security. That might be something I need to look in to.

Dains said I have had people ask me how safe it is. Since the social unrest. Has there been any change in security? Do they say anything to people about wearing a mask or not wearing a mask?

Vice Chair Paulsen said I do ride light rail. I was just on it yesterday for about six or seven trips. It seems to be user friendly. I have had problems with music and people asking me for change.

Myhre said there are people on the bus who have mental issues.

Caufman said maybe this is something I can take back and have someone from our police department come and speak to us at a future meeting. We do have some training that our drivers go through. We do have a program called Red Kite. It focuses training on how to diffuse situations and to handle conflict. That is a program we do make available to our drivers.

Claire Schleichert said it is called Red Kite. It is a three-day, eight hour a day class. They get a full 24-hours of that training.

Vice Chair Paulsen said does that training encompass any kind of equity training and what that looks like when you are dealing with different segments of populations? Different ages. Different abilities.

Caufman said I would have to look at the exact program. I am not that familiar with it.

Vice Chair Paulsen said we could do that with the policeman that will be coming in.

Caufman said if I could go back pretty quick to the last item was the construction that Heidi mentioned. I will look into that. I will look and see if we have notices about construction and see if we need to do a detour. I will follow up with operations.

Myhre said thank you. People were asking if this was a bus stop or not. Cars and buses were going down that street, but I was wondering if they should go around it. In St. Paul you are usually good about telling us where to stand. Whenever the suburbs do a big thing then the suburbs need to do something. They should tell you if you take a bus. It is just a popular stop.

Caufman said the final comment was about fares being paid. Some people will be paying onboard. We are still trying to encourage people to use hands free touch free fare payments. We are still encouraging people to as much as possible to pay using the app or if they are near a LRT station to tap their card. People can pay when they board. Some people may pay by app, so they don't pay when they board the bus.

Chair Fenley said I am not sure the fare payment is in the scope of this committee. Also, when it comes to perceived uptick of criminal activity. I would like to have. Is there data that shows that things are less safe? If not, then I do not think it is necessary for us to talk about it. If people don't feel safe, then it is something we can discuss.

Caufman said maybe that would be a good jumping off to the second item I was going to give an update on. The last time I was here we talked about listening and learning through crisis engagement process. The survey just closed on the 27th. So we haven't had time to delve into the data yet. But we did receive over 1,400 surveys via online Survey Monkey survey. Then we had 423 in person conversations at transit centers, bus stops and light rail stations. We have almost 1,800 people that we talked to and we are eager to delve into the question. Because one of the questions was what are your primary concerns and what are your priorities right now? We are eager to delve into the concerns about safety, security and health. I hope that by our October meeting I might have some results or summaries that we can share with you all. That would be a good indicator of what we can do for our customers.

Myhre said I hope this will make some changes in a way that we can move forward in a way that we can clean up some things that we have wanted to clean up for a very long time.

2. Network Next Project Update

Kyle Burrows, Senior Planner in the BRT Transit Office at Metro Transit, spoke to the TAAC committee. I will thoroughly describe what is on the slides I am presenting. This is to provide an update on the Network Next project. Do you remember the presentation I gave last September to provide an update? Some things have changed since that point. So, I will go through that.

On the agenda today, I just wanted to talk a little bit about reminding you of what Network Next is and talk about how we are adapting this project to the Covid-19 crisis. Then talk a little about the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) portion of the Network Next project in terms of the planning process that we have developed as well as the schedule and talk a little bit about the BRT lines that are under consideration for implementation.

Then Robin will talk a little bit about the engagement in the Next Steps associated with this project.

A reminder of what Network Next is. It is essentially Metro Transit's 20-year plan for the future of Metro Transit's bus network. It does not encompass rail, but it focuses on the express bus network and it is based on improving and expanding our bus network as well as thinking about incremental investments over time. It does require additional operating resources and capital resources. It is not a reorganization of the bus network, which is what would we do if we had additional resources available to us to make improvements?

It is guided by three primary pieces of information. Metropolitan Council policy, primarily in the form of applied MSP 2040 and the Transportation Policy Plan. The performance of our existing transit network. Where are the bright spots on our bus network? Where are the challenges that we are facing and how can we address those? Then input from our customers and communities that we serve in terms of doing public engagement and to better understand the priorities of our riders and the general public.

It has two primary planned outcomes. First is to identify the plan of local bus networks or 2040. This is a long-ranged plan. Focusing 20 years into the future by trying to identify where are the steps we need to take between now and then to get to that point. It will identify the frequency and span of service on our existing bus routes as well as identify areas without service today where they should be new routes or extensions to existing routes. It will also update the arterial BRT network. You may be familiar with the currently operating Metro A Line and the Metro C Line that just recently opened.

We will be identifying as part of this project, the additional priorities for new Arterial BRT lines. To be implemented after the currently planned Metro E Line, which is the last line that is currently identified to be implemented. That line is planned for implementation in 2023. The updated Arterial BRT network will be identifying the BRT line that will be implemented after the E Line. So, 2023 and beyond.

A lot has changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. As we are all aware of. Certainly, it has impacted the Network Next process in our timeline. Both in terms of the overall limitations that we have experienced in adaptations we have had to make on planned engagements as well as the uncertainty that the pandemic introduces into what are the long-term effects on the local and express bus networking. We need to better understand how ridership and how our community overall will respond to the pandemic and how that will factor into what our bus network will look like into the future.

To adapt to those situations we will place the development of 2040 local and express bus network on hold right now so that the progress at that point we hope we can resume next year, in 2021 when we have a little bit more understanding of how ridership will respond in a little bit more capacity to adequately do that work.

We are continuing to work on the Arterial BRT network. That is the identification of the F, G and H lines and beyond. We hope to complete that work in the Spring of 2021. So in the March and April timeframe in 2021. That is what the work that we have been doing so far has been focused on. That is the focus of the rest of this update is on. That is the work that we have been doing. Planning for the rest of the BRT network.

We have taken a four-step approach to the Arterial BRT planning process. The first step is to identify a larger group of potential Arterial BRT corridors to be screened and evaluated for their overall fit for the Arterial BRT implementation. Then the next step is to coordinate that screening. We did that this summer of 2020. Narrowed that group down to a smaller group the most promising candidates for the Arterial BRT to evaluate and prioritize with a little bit more detail into a little bit more manageable group. That is what we

will share today. The results of that screening process. So we will show the corridors we identified and then the line that we will do additional work on. Who made it through that screening process.

We will begin evaluating those corridors identified in step 2 this fall. And then we hope to prioritize those, essentially identifying the top three or so lines that will be identified as the F, G and H lines. The next lines to be implemented. We will be doing that over the Winter and Spring of 2020 and 2021.

To do all this work we applied four broad principals to our BRT planning process. These principals helped us identify the initial candidate corridors as well as the evaluation criteria, the screening criteria we used to narrow them down. It will help us guide the evaluation criteria as well. To help us identify those top three lines. They are to advance equity and to reduce regional disparities in our region. To build on success where we are seeing high ridership today. Grow ridership in the future. The third is to design a network that supports a transit oriented lifestyle. This is potentially to help support walkable communities that are easy to access transit to get to and from where you are going. From the bus stop out to your destination. In having a little bit more denser residential area.

Then it is to ensure the long-term sustainable growth of the bus network. We want to make sure that the surveys we are putting out there are something that we can sustain over the long run. And continue to have it out there.

We identified 19 initial corridors that were based on those principles just talked about. We specifically used Metro Transit's existing high-frequency network of local routes that run every 15-minutes or better for most of the day on weekdays and Saturdays. We used higher rider corridors that are not currently part of the high-frequency network. Where we are at is a lot of people are not a part of that network yet. We looked at corridors that were previously studied for Arterial BRT. And we looked at network balance. This is looking at the location of these corridors across the entire region. Across the East and West metro and the North and South metro. As well as the role that a particular corridor plays in the bus network.

So we know a lot of routes go into downtown. Usually they are higher ridership routes. We often hear from communities and people that use our network that we need to pay more attention to routes that provide crosstown service that don't necessarily go into downtown. And go from suburb to suburb as well. We want to make sure that those route types were reflected in this evaluation as well.

This map shows the 19 initial corridors under consideration. I will quickly describe in a high level where each of these corridors goes to and from. Working from the Northwest to the Southeast across our region.

The first is the corridor of 63rd Avenue and Zane, which is approximately the route 724, running from the Starlight Transit Center to Brooklyn Center Transit Center via Brooklyn Boulevard, Zane Avenue, 63rd and Xerxes.

The second is the Lowry Avenue corridor which is approximately the Route 32. Now it runs from Robbinsdale Transit Center to Rosedale Transit Center via West Broadway, Lowry Avenue, New Brighton Boulevard and County Road B2.

Then we looked at the West Broadway/Cedar Avenue Corridor, which is approximately the Route 14 and the Route 22, running from Robbinsdale Transit Center to 38th Street Station via West Broadway, Washington Avenue, Cedar Avenue and 38th Street.

Then we have 2nd Street Northeast, which is the northern part of Route 11. Running from the Columbia Heights Transit Center to downtown Minneapolis, via 40th and University and 2nd Street.

Then we have the Central Avenue Corridor, which is primarily Route 10. Running from the Northtown Transit Center to downtown Minneapolis via University Avenue, 53rd Avenue and Central Avenue.

Then the Johnson/Lyndale corridor, which is primarily the Route 4, running from Silverlake Village to Southtown Shopping Center and the future Orange Line Station at Knox Avenue and American Boulevard via 37th Avenue, Johnson Street, 8th Street SE and into downtown. Then Lyndale Avenue, 50th Street, Penn Avenue and American Boulevard.

Then we have the Franklin and University Avenue Corridor, which is primarily the Route 2. That runs from the future Green Line Station at 21st Street Station to Central Avenue via Franklin Avenue, Riverside Avenue, Washington Avenue, 4th Street and University Avenue, 10th Avenue, and 8th Street SE.

Then we have the North Snelling/Lexington Corridor which is primarily the Route 225 today: Running from Rosedale Transit Center to the future Rice Creek Commons redevelopment in Arden Hills via Snelling Avenue North, Hamline Avenue, Lexington Avenue, and County Road 96.

Then we have the East Hennepin/Larpenteur Corridor which is the Route 61: Running from downtown Minneapolis to White Bear Avenue via Hennepin Avenue, Larpenteur Avenue, and Parkway Drive.

Then we have the Como/Maryland Corridor, which is primarily the Route 3. Running from downtown Minneapolis to SunRay Transit Center via Washington Avenue, 15th Avenue, Como Avenue, Maryland Avenue, White Bear Avenue, 3rd Street, and Ruth Street.

Then we have the Nicollet Avenue Corridor, which is primarily the Route 18. Running from downtown Minneapolis to American Boulevard via Nicollet Mall and Nicollet Avenue.

Then the 38th Street Corridor, which is primarily the Route 23 today. Running from Uptown Transit Station to Highland Village via Hennepin Avenue, 38th Street, 46th Avenue, and Ford Parkway.

Then we have the 66th Street Corridor, which is primarily the Route 515 today. Running from Southdale Transit Center to the Mall of America via 66th Street, Bloomington Avenue, 77th Street and 24th Avenue.

Then we have the American Boulevard Corridor. Running from SouthWest Station to the Mall of America via I-494, American Boulevard, and 24th Avenue.

Then we have the West 7th/White Bear Corridor, which is primarily the Route 54 today. Running from the Mall of America Station to Maplewood Mall Transit Center via MSP International Airport, West 7th Street, 5th and 6th Street in downtown Saint Paul, East 7th Street, Arcade Street, Maryland Avenue, White Bear Avenue, and Beam Avenue.

Then we have the Randolph/East 7th Street, which is primarily Route 74 today. Running from Highland Village to SunRay Transit Center via Cleveland Avenue, Randolph Avenue, West 7th Street, 5th and 6th Street in downtown Saint Paul, East 7th Street, Hazel Street, Minnehaha Avenue, and Ruth Street.

Then we have the Grand Avenue Corridor, which is the western portion of the Route 63 today. Running from West Gate Station to Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul via University Avenue, Cretin Avenue, Grand Avenue, Smith Avenue, and 5th and 6th Street.

Then we have the Rice/Robert Street Corridor, which is Route 62 and Route 68 today. Running from Little Canada Transit Center to the Dakota County Northern Service Center via Rice Street, 11th and 12th Street, Robert Street, and Mendota Road.

Then we have the Century Avenue Corridor, which is the Route 219 today. Running from Maplewood Mall Transit Center to Woodbury Theater Park-and-Ride and future Gold Line Station via Lydia Avenue, McKnight Road, County Road E, Century Avenue, Woodwinds Hospital, and Valley Creek Road.

That is a description of all of the 19 corridors we considered for screening. We screened all those based on a quantitative screening approach using five screening criteria based on the BRT principals. So looking at the percent of people experiencing poverty in a route, which is associated with advancing equity and reducing regional disparities. Looking at the average daily corridor boardings. How many people are using the corridors today? Not just building on the success of ridership. Designing a network that supports a transit oriented lifestyle, which supports the corridor propensity to use transit.

Looking at the number of factors and looking at how likely it is that people will use transit in the area and then the future of planned land use around that particular corridor.

Then looking at the existing service out there today compared to BRT service for the long-term sustainable bus network. We also looked at the overall route structure of the underlying routes to see how we can apply the BRT concept to them. Based on that qualitative screening ruled out two of the corridors that we are considering. The 2nd Street NE corridor, Route 11 and the corridor which is the Route 2. Both of those were removed because the design of the underlying routes has an indirect route design. So we can't straighten them out. To apply BRT design principles without really reducing the overall quality of service in those corridors and defeating the point of those routes. Which is to serve the areas that they are serving today.

This is a map of the BRT corridors to advance. I will just list the 11 corridors that are shown in blue for additional consideration. Nicollet Avenue, Central Avenue, West Broadway/Cedar, Como/Maryland, West 7th Street/White Bear Avenue, Randolph/East 7th Street, Johnson/Lyndale, 63rd/Zane, Rice/Robert, Grand Avenue, Lowry Avenue. That is based on the results of both the quantitative evaluation criteria and the qualitative evaluation criteria that we applied to these criteria.

Robin is going to talk about some steps in engagement.

Caufman said I will give an overview of our engagement plan. That we are literally just rolling out today. We just updated our website. So we have a lot of information on our website. We have an interactive map that Kyle mentioned, and we have some of the background recommendations to post on our website. We have the interactive story map that people can go through and look at the different alignments and get some of the history. There is a link to an online survey so individuals can go through and look at the map and then provide feedback on the routes. The questions that we are really asking are of these 11 routes, which are the ones that you would be most likely to use? Are there any adjustments or tweaks that we would make to those and then also as we narrow down these lines, what are the priorities that are highest to you? Are there any adjustments or is there something we are missing?

We are hoping to do some sort of virtual meeting. We are still working on the details of that. But as soon as we have that meeting, we certainly will share that with folks. We will post it on our website and promote the meeting. We are also open similarly to what we did with listening and learning. If there are community organizations that are interested in having this conversation and getting this presentation, please let us know and we would be happy to present it virtually and we can talk through the questions and help with the link to the survey and to the website.

You are the first to see this publicly and we will present this to the Committee of the Whole later this afternoon. We are also working with the City Partners and counties to help us to push out the information and work with communities to get feedback. We are using social media. So we will push out the links to the survey and the website. Then, similar to what we did with the listening and learning. We will ask questions in the social media and see if we can have a little bit of discussion as well. That is the plan right now and most of this is going to take place through the month of September. The survey closes on October 9. We have a little over a month to provide feedback.

Myhre said are you talking about Route 75?

Burrows said the Route 75 was not considered for Arterial BRT. But that does get at the other part of Network Next that was not presented today. That was to delay until 2021. That is improvements to other local and express bus routes. So just because a route is not identified for Arterial BRT, does not mean it is not a good candidate for other upgrades for service. I think the 75 would be a candidate for other improvements or potentially extensions to other parts of West Saint Paul. So that work will be happening beginning again in 2021. If folks do have thoughts about specific route improvements, that would be open to those that would be banking those comments and saving those for use in 2021.

Rodgers said the points that you used to evaluate these alignments you identified. I believe there were six points. The first one was the equity piece. None of those lenses you identified involved climate or the environment. Do you guys have discussions about these?

Burrows said you observed correctly that specific climate effects are not directly captured in the screen criteria. However, I think in general, the feel that more people are riding transit the better it is for the overall climate matrix. So looking at things from building on success to transit ridership and trying to increase ridership when we can is already successful, is a good way to grow transit ridership and then potentially be pulling people out of their cars with sustainable modes and similarly be designing a network that supports a transit oriented lifestyle criteria that will help people use transit for more trip purposes other than the standard nine to five commute, which I think is perhaps over represented in how people think about transit, will also help people use transit for other trip purposes which will have beneficial effects on climate.

Rodgers said I appreciate that but all of those are second to climate change. I was just wondering if there wouldn't be more emphasis on criteria looking at climate change and the environment.

Burrows said something that would be helpful for us beginning today, the evaluation of these additional lines. There is another evaluation step to help us prioritize these 11 corridors that we have advanced. If committee members have specific thoughts on evaluation criteria that might capture that thought.

Dains said my question, you mentioned being walkable. I didn't understand exactly what that particular evaluation meant. Can you explain that a little more?

Burrows said that was under the design and network that supports a transit oriented lifestyle overall criteria. And I should say trying to capture a more pedestrian friendly environment. So the propensity to use transit measure takes four factors into consideration. One of those is an overall pedestrian friendliness at a particular area. We know, for example, that areas that have better sidewalks that are easier to access the bus stop; from places but access destinations from the bus stop lead to better transit use and better transit outcomes and an overall better experience. We want to be making sure that we are making transit investments in those areas that exist today. Then also encouraging more of those areas to be developed by our local government partners who are in charge of sidewalks. That is something we want to improve as part of these investments. I think that is a part of a package overall.

Vice Chair Paulsen said we talked a little bit today about perceived safety and perceived security issues. That brings it back to Ken's point about the climate issue. About climate change. We have really strong weather in Minnesota. Either it is really hot or it is really cold. Folks with disabilities don't often operate very well in both of those extremes. We are not even looking at lighting or perceived safety issues along the corridor. There are many routes along the Route 11 that you mentioned. That if we would just improve some lighting at the intersection there. That would give the perception that this bus line is a little safer or this route is a little safer. Until actual staff makes an investment in lighting and understands that just putting some lighting out there gives the perception that this is a little safer. I think it would be a lot cheaper than investing in real time monitoring along the station or Light Rail. Investing in real time monitoring there at times but I think lighting is a lot cheaper.

Burrows said that is a really good point. Not really part of the evaluation process for these corridors. But as part of the investment that these corridors represent. There are significant improvements to the overall stop and search experience. This includes quite a bit of investment in lighting that will improve both the real and perceived safety environment. So each of these lines would have upgraded stations that would have lighting improvements, signing improvements, accessible transit information, and arrival time information, shelters from inclement weather. All of the shelters at each of these stations have heat and space to wait inside the shelter.

I completely agree that those types of investments can make a big difference in the overall experience using transit. That is part of the point of these investments. We are excited to implement as many of these as we can.

Myhre said I did the walkability before Covid-19 where we were down at the library in Minneapolis. We ended up going around and giving what we liked and what we didn't like about sidewalks. Some of the things you talked about. Is that the same thing? The other thing is you said you were going to upgrade. Or thinking about doing it. Are you going to be looking at vandalism? I have been at bus stops that did not have heat or lights for years. Then across the street is another one that has been fixed. So I don't get your operation and how you do things.

Burrows said I am not aware of the event you experienced. It was a walk around downtown as an accessibility to sidewalks and that type of thing. When I was referring to walkability, I should have called it pedestrian friendliness. I think it does try to get at some of the type of things but at a higher level. So not necessarily specific features of sidewalks. At this level of analysis, rather looking at the presence or absence of walks. I can say while designing this we were implementing and designing the stations. We do review the best practices for accessibility and welcome the input from this committee and overall best practices and the design of these things.

With regards to your second question around maintenance. I will have to get back to the committee on overall maintenance practices. We genuinely try to address maintenance issues as we identify them. Robin, can you address this?

Caufman said I can take a stab at the question. Our engineering and facilities do routes and double check the status of shelters and stuff. They will note and do repairs as needed. Sometimes it will take a little time to order parts or get materials. So that may take a few weeks to do. People can submit comments or call our Customer Relations hotline and people can report when they see a station damaged. They can get it on the list to be monitored.

In addition to that we have a program that is where we do Better Bus Stops. We have been going through and making improvements and identifying stops that need some repairs and grading. Maybe they need some light or heat. They look at ridership volumes. They usually look for those stations or stops and put them on a list and budget for them. Order the parts and then normally they would have already ordered the parts this year. Because of Covid we got a little bit behind. They are now just getting out and making those upgrades as necessary. They are just starting now.

Every year there is an example of shelters and stations that we do those repairs. It is more of a significant investment. We turn the heat off in the summertime. There were some plans to do some improvements. I don't know which shelters. Due to Covid, some of them are pushed back until next year. So I am not sure about any one in particular.

Rodgers said I have a suggestion. I think you have successes in places you have to address issues. You do a very thorough job of educating the public on some important pieces that could be addressed. If there were several signs. They could be pretty signs or appropriate signs in shelters that say: "If you see something, say something." Just some method of educating the public on a way that they can be involved more in this process. I think that would go a long way. People don't know what to do. I think we could help people recognize that there is something they can do. We have these programs in place.

Dains said in regards to the suburb to suburb concept that was presented. It goes back to what Ken said about climate change and being green. There are not very many buses that connect suburb to suburb. I heard it is based on the percentage of ridership. But what are you really looking at with that? Is there any real support for that? That becomes a funding issue when it is based on percentage of ridership. I certainly hear from a lot of people in suburbs who want to go to another suburb. Instead of having to ride a bus all the way downtown.

Like the 10 you can take all the way down to 61. You take 61 over to 62 to go to Shoreview. If you want to go from Fridley all the way to Shoreview. There really isn't any accessible routes that work in regards to that. I wonder what that concept is about going from suburb to suburb.

Burrows said you have described that concept; exactly. It is trying to go from one suburb to another or one point in a suburb to another without having to go downtown. It is something we hear about quite a bit. Those routes tend to be relatively low ridership. That is just a rule in the network. It is just fewer people going from one suburb to another. To points spread apart from each other in the suburbs. It is harder to serve that overall market with a transit line that is a fixed spot.

Certainly, we try to incorporate some of the highest performing routes. For an evaluation for Arterial BRT and then going forward with our next process for local and express bus routes in 2021. It is also something we are considering is how to improve that experience while at the same time making sure that we are not reducing the usability and usage of our core highest ridership routes that serve the most people. So certainly, it is a challenge.

Henricksen said back in the quantitative screening. I noticed that the percent of people of color and percent of people in poverty were taken into account. All these underlying routes at any time were there people with disabilities taken into account?

Burrows said not in this initial screening, but certainly we have a more detailed evaluation process ahead of us. Where I think people with disabilities will be considered as part of that solution.

Chair Fenley said just a quick note about Erik's question. Gathering statistics on folks with disabilities is a little more difficult than other minority groups. But I do know that the Met Council is sympathetic to using that data as well and our assessment and screening of this.

Letter of Accessible Assigned Seating

TAAC Chair, David Fenley, spoke to the TAAC committee. In March we passed two motions. That was the culmination of many years of discussing in regards to accessible seating issues that have always been something that this committee has revisited quite frequently over many years.

In using those motions, using the advice of the Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen, that we send a letter. Essentially telling what the motions are that we passed and giving some background in that to the Chair and the Metropolitan Council for our members.

So what I am going to do is read it to you all. I am going to read the two motions first. Everything in the letter has to fit into the two motions. Given that that is what the body agreed with. So I am going to read the letter out loud for folks. I would like input for content of the letters. Not necessarily where things are in the letter for grammar. But I will look for some content inclusion or context to the letter. Then after that, I would like either two or three volunteers to work with me to then do the formal drafting of the letter based on the content that we just discussed. Maybe over the next couple of weeks. Then we will submit the letter to the Chair and to the full Council.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I did have a separate meeting with the folks from the Council. Robin Cauffman was on that call as well. I did put them on notice that the letter was coming. And yes, we did expect a formal response to our letter. They seemed to be awaiting our letter and welcoming our letter and can't wait so see what is in it.

Myhre said is he allowed to do that?

Chair Fenley said yes, as long as it is about a motion that has passed. If you are speaking as someone who uses transit. If you are speaking as a member of TAAC, it has to be something that has been approved by the majority of TAAC members.

So I am going to read the letter that I have. Remember it is a draft. So we can do wordsmithing later. I am asking for content inclusion here right now.

Chair Zelle and Metro 'Council Members,

On March 4 2020, two motions were passed. I will list the motions. I will read them right now to you. The motions are:

The first motion is: TAAC supports increasing the amount of priority and accessible seating on fixed route buses

The second motion is: TAAC supports an awareness campaign on the uses of priority and accessible "seating and its importance to people with disabilities, transportation and the general public.

So those are the two motions we passed. The following letter I am going to read to you is within the scope of those two motions. I am going to read the letter to you now

The fixed route bus system is for everybody. Workers, shoppers, people with disabilities, parents, etc. Priority seating, mandated by the ADA, is for folks with disabilities and those who are aging. Metro Transit is in full compliance with the ADA. If someone needs priority seating because of a disability, and the priority seating is full, the bus driver is required to ask somebody to move. If they do not, if the bus driver does not ask this of people in priority seating, then they are out of step with the procedures of Metro Transit and they should be disciplined and have training. Not all disabilities are visible. Therefore, the bus driver cannot make a determination on those who do not have a disability.

A "pass up" is when there is no spot for someone on a bus. It is a policy a driver call in every pass up. That would be call in every pass up situation. And then the bus driver makes sure that there is space on the next bus. And that bus is no more than 30 minutes away. If it would be more than 30 minutes, the driver is required to call in another form of transportation for the person that was passed up.

Then I go into some data on pass ups.

January through June of 2019, there was a total of 766 pass ups. Three hundred and sixty of which were somebody who uses a wheelchair. Therefore, in the first six months of 2019, 47 percent of the pass ups were folks who use a wheelchair.

That is the data. And we can update the data. I will work on updating the data. This is from our March meeting. Guthrie Byard. He can give you the updated data.

I will jump into some anecdotal evidence that we have now as well based on some personal experience. Things that we have seen and heard. The first one is that not every pass up is necessarily called in. also, the 30-minute rule is not necessarily followed. Bus drivers do not always ask people in the priority seating to move if there is somebody waiting to get on the bus who clearly needs one of those seats. Also, there are a lot of those things that end up in priority seating. Those items would be furniture items, folks with more than two large grocery bags and strollers.

That is the extent of the letter so far. Does anybody have anything they would like to add or take away? I am going to go to committee members first. Then I can work with other Metro Transit and Metropolitan Council staff.

So committee members. Is there anything you would like me to add to the anecdotal evidence? Or to the verbiage that I read to you.

Myhre said can you add that there have been some minor altercations on the bus when somebody is asked to move.

Vice Chair Paulsen said that has happened to my family. That brings me to another point. Is there another way that we can incentivize individuals that have the ability to maybe move who don't have to move? Maybe give them a free bus ride. I have seen it done in Las Vegas and in California.

Chair Fenley said as far as I know, and I think that actually is possible. But I don't know to what extent it occurs.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I don't see it happening unless I ask for it.

Chair Fenley said do bus drivers have the ability to offer a free ride to somebody who is in priority seating and does move? Is that even an option for a bus driver? I am going to wait for an answer.

Schleichert said drivers are encouraged to use free ride coupons to encourage people to move. They are trained on this as part time operators and when they go to full time as well.

Chair Fenley said I will include that in here.

Vice Chair Paulsen said can we get some data on that because you make a valid point of the 46 percent of pass ups are people in chairs. If we can get some data around how many times they offer free rides to people who move. That could either make our point or break our point. I want to see either way.

Henricksen said do we want the letter to hone in on the scope or breadth of public outreach? I think the second motion is to publicly get the message out there the importance of the seat. So do you want to help define that or shape that? I don't know how much good that would do.

Chair Fenley said I think that is a good question, Erik. I don't see why not. I think that maybe we could do a bulleted list of some suggestions. Whether it is a video that we could help contribute to. I do have one bullet point here under the particular motion that says:

TAAC is willing to contribute to the content and production of the materials. I think a list here wouldn't be bad. I would like for there to be a video. I think that is something good because they can see us using the bus.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I think a 30 second video goes a long way.

Myhre said if we are going to do a video, it should have all different kinds of people and different languages. So they can read it in Hmong and Spanish. I see everybody abusing the priority seats. It doesn't matter where you are from.

Chair Fenley said so Claire did clarify in the chat. And I will read it for folks who are on the phone:

"There is no way to track the operator who is giving out free coupons or why the operators give out free ride coupons. They go for a whole lot of things. They don't currently track that."

Myhre said can we ask about it?

We can make formal requests of the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit about anything. So if we want to say: "can you track that data?" They might say: "No we can't." And that is the end of it. We can ask.

Vice Chair said do you think that would be a legitimate thing that we should be tracking?

Chair Fenley said my answer would be it is more work than it is worth. But it is something we can address at a future meeting as an agenda item.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Blue Line.

This item was not presented.

2. Green Line

This item was not presented.

3. Gold Line

This item was not presented.

4. Rush Line

This item was not presented.

CHAIRS REPORT

This item was not presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Streasick said I am the public. If everybody scrolls up to the first comment on the Chat. You would see that Metro Mobility was recently made aware of a Lyndale/Whittaker bike lane project. So we reached out to make sure that we would still need to use the bike lane occasionally to park, to pick up and drop off. The City is aware of that and is cool with it. But they also mentioned that the public comment period for that is open. So I just wanted to make sure and bring that to TAAC. A variety of ways of contacting both the planner and the engineer are included in the Chat. It is not our project and I don't have much information on it. You can reach out to the City of Minneapolis and they can help you with that.

MEMBER COMMENT

Jasmine said in regards to the tracking of the giving out the free coupons given out by the bus drivers. I would suspect that would be hard to track because the bus drivers would have to do it. They are under a lot of pressure right now and it is one more thing that they would not want to do.

Chair Fenley said I agree with you.

I am going to send out this letter to the TAAC members. Be aware that it is a draft of the letter.

Schleichert said one thing I wanted to mention was it is not just Metropolitan Council or Metro Transit procedure that the drivers ask people in the priority seating to move. It is the law. It is written in the FTA circular. I can get that for you if you would like the language on that.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary