

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting date: December 06, 2023

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

Members present:

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

Attending from Home

Sam Jasmine, Christopher Bates, Ken Rodgers

- Trevor Turner, MCD
- Erik Henriksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, MCCD
- Claudia Fuglie, MCCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN

Excused

Diane Graham-Raff, Trevor Turner

Other Council Employees

Christine Kuennen, Christina Morrison, Jenny Ackerson, Kelly Morrell, Gwen Reoch

Ex-officio:

- Phillip Sterner, Council Member Liaison
- Andy Streasick, Metro Mobility
- Douglas Cook, Metro Transit Customer Advocate
- Guthrie Byard, ADA & Title VI Administrator
- = present, E = excused

Public

Melissa Barnes, Alyssa Kruzel, MNDOT, Brittany Hoff, Dakota County, Robert Hobson, DEED

Call to order

Without a quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:31 p.m. The approval of the agenda and minutes was delayed allowing time for online committee members to join the meeting and form a quorum.

Agenda approved

It was moved by Chair Fenley, seconded by Thoreson to approve the agenda. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. **Motion carried at 1:48 p.m.**

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Vice Chair Paulsen, seconded by Murphy to approve the minutes of the November 1, 2023, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried at 1:49 p.m.**

Business and information items

1. Blue Line Rail Renovation Project Update

The committee was introduced to Christina Morrison, Principal Project Coordinator and Jenny Ackerson, Planner Engineering & Facilities, Metro Transit, presenters of the Lake Street Midtown Renovation Update. The 2023 12 06 Blue Line Lake Midtown TAAC document was displayed for review. Morrison opened the presentation with an overview highlighting the purpose, scope, goals, and timeline of the renovation project. The need for renovation due to

the station approaching 20 years of service was noted. The purpose of the project originated from the risk and inherent concerns from adding a track crossing; this was the basis for designing a ramp crossing, the proposed Center Ramp. The geometric feasibility study was done on the Hennepin Avenue Bridge Ramp to ascertain the feasibility of adding a ramp. The formal design is scheduled to be presented to the Metropolitan Council the week of 12-11-23 for approval – a design contract. The purpose of the presentation was to seek TAAC advisory input on the accessibility design elements of the proposed pedestrian ramp concepts.

Ackerson provided an overview of pedestrian ramp concepts, the Landform Ramp (previously presented to TAAC) and the Water Works Pavilion Ramp noting that due to TAAC and staff feedback, the project team is mindful that the addition of a ramp to the Midtown station would not be useful to all riders as some would prefer to use elevators to access the platform. It was also noted that a ramp would be a supplement to the new elevators, not a replacement. Morrison added that there is no ramp option, which would include the addition of two new elevators with one located on each side of Lake Street and concluded the presentation requesting feedback on the proposed ramp concept options: the Landform Ramp, Center Ramp, and no ramp. Chair Fenley thanked Morrison and Ackerson for keeping the committee updated on the Lake Street Midtown Renovation Project.

Jasmine opened discussions questioning whether existing elevators would be updated or new elevators would replace them. Morrison clarified that the renovation project would include new elevators replacing the current elevators and the ramp as an additional piece. Vice Chair Paulsen asked if an eight-foot path and a covering could be installed to keep seasonal clutter from reducing travel space on the ramp pointing out that a covering would be more cost-efficient than heated pavement. Chair Fenley, verified that there are two different designs under consideration - a ramp and track crossing/ no ramp. Myhre shared concerns over ease of navigating the station as well as possible safety issues with the stairways. Chair Fenley questioned whether the project team is looking for an official recommendation from the options provided. Morrison recommended a collection of comments relating to both options that would include coverings.

Streasick shared feedback from TAAC members and the disability community summarizing that two elevators are not sufficient as both elevators at Midtown Station as well as others have been out of commission simultaneously making stations totally inaccessible. They are questioning if the addition of a third elevator could be possible and the validity of a ramp versus no ramp.

Chair Fenley queried the committee on whether they prefer a ramp that is wider or a no track crossing. Vice Chair, Paulsen added that heating and lighting systems across the entire system need to be improved no matter which design is approved, and a wider path is needed for better maneuvering noting those with sight impairments should have the first say on the proposed designs. Myhre reiterated navigation concerns with a ramp and agreed there could be potential lighting issues. Fuglie stated there should be an option available if the elevators break down and shared a personal experience in this type of situation. Murphy shared concern over safety issues with the Center Ramp design concept due to potential dark areas and expressed that travel on a ramp would be better if movement is on a straight line. Vice Chair, Paulsen summarized that two elevators are not sufficient and recommended pursuing both design options with a covering element as well as addressing current heating and lighting issues. He expressed the importance of committee input and the impact it would have on the project.

2. Bus On-Board Announcements Evaluation

Kelly Morrell announced that she was filling in for Laura Matson and joined by colleague Gwen Reoch, an Intern with Metro Transit who led most of the project. The TAAC Report Back Onboard Announcements was displayed for review. Morrell provided an outline of the presentation: the presentation goal to share preliminary findings on the automated on-board announcement system, the background on why the evaluation was done, and a brief overview



of how the system works underscoring that guidance from the committee on prioritizing next steps to improve this source of customer information was of high importance. Morrell recapped prior TAAC involvement in the evaluation: Metro Transit's Marketing and Transit Information worked with the committee and certain disability community members in 2021 to identify ways to better serve customers with disabilities and insure representation in educational and promotional materials.

Reoch provided an overview of the on-board announcement evaluation and project goals - to evaluate performance of bus on-board announcements and to identify opportunities to improve performance and follow-up questions for TAAC to guide improvements. It was noted that announcements must comply with ADA standards. Stop requested, public service courtesy and safety messages are available and all necessary components of successful announcements; every Metro Transit bus has an on-board announcements system. Ninety-five percent of announcements played correctly with only a few routes accounting for the low percentage of announcement inaccuracy. Morrell added that bus operators are instructed to make announcements if automated announcements do not work and have access to multiple channels to communicate announcement issues so staff can address them.

Morrell summarized that data quality issues made it difficult to reach any definitive conclusions about system-wide performance; however, they were confident with the results of the onboard announcements evaluation because they could witness its performance in real time. Metro Transit staff are committed to improving the accuracy and reliability of onboard announcements through continued onboard auditing and data analysis. Bus operator training has been updated to highlight the importance of making announcements when system announcements are not working. Ongoing engagement and feedback from TAAC and transit riders who depend on the announcements will help with prioritization of improvements to the system. The committee was presented ongoing engagement questions: What should Metro Transit prioritize in improving onboard announcements? What is your expectation for reliability and accuracy? How should Metro Transit get additional feedback from the committee and the broader community of transit riders who rely on audio?

Chair Fenley opened discussions questioning how timely the issues are addressed. Morrell responded that issues go immediately to staff who can fix the issues but acknowledged timeliness is dependent upon when the bus returns to the garage for a download. In response to Murphy's question on how long it takes to fix issues, Morrell explained that technology has not been updated in part due to a lack of funding and has not been prioritized over other critical priorities therefore impacting how quickly issues can be resolved. Jasmine encouraged setting the bar high for blind or visually impaired as the rider would need to know the terrain of any alternate stop if an announcement does not play. Jasmine mentioned drivers may not know what to do if the auto-announcement does not work and asked whether drivers are turning off announcements and what action is taken if drivers do not make the announcements. Morrell reiterated that bus operators know that they must perform manual announcements if auto-announcements malfunction and explained that bus operators can turn off announcements for various reasons, such as a technical issue or when announcements are not correct during detours but will check on disciplinary action. Jasmine responded that there must be a 'plan B' in those cases. Reoch added that a prompt goes to Transit Control staff and bus operator supervisors if an auto-announcement does not play or is disabled.

Morrell thanked the committee for feedback as Metro Transit needs to know when the system is not working, underscoring that bus operators and customers must alert Transit Control because data disappears after a day and there is no other alert system in place. Reoch added that due to the scope of the project, the customer contact review focused on bus audio announcements. Issues pertaining to ticker boards were identified but not included in the focus of this review.

Vice Chair, Paulsen thanked Reoch for working on the project and suggested there may be more issues during evening rides and rides through construction zones. He posed several



questions: Who determines what messages are played, where, when, how often, what messages are valuable and invaluable and further questioned when the committee will get to recommend specific announcements suggesting running less announcements and prioritizing them and the time of day they are played. Reoch informed the committee that onboard soft announcements are automated and played by GPS location; stop messages are regulated by the ADA. Vice Chair questioned whether high priority system announcements within multiple categories can cause those announcements to play more often. Morrell explained that announcements are set up in patterns based on trip patterns and underscored that determining whether announcements are playing or not is the highest priority. The purpose of the project was to seek feedback on which announcements are important to riders and which announcements should play and when.

Streasick shared that The United Blind organization reached out to him to find out more about announcements interrupted by the stop requested notification and whether this notification could be set up in a que to play after the stop location announcement has played. If this would not be possible, could TAAC connect with the ATU regarding training to ensure that bus operators know to call out stop locations in this situation. Morrell responded that there are significant but not insurmountable safety concerns since this option would shorten bus operator reaction time; allowing announcements in these situations could potentially cause safety concerns and missed stops. A consensus needs to be reached between stakeholders on the customer and operations side as to the best idea. Vice Chair, Paulsen concurred this is a safety issue for the bus operator who might not be able to stop on time and the rider who needs to get off at a specific stop. Chair Fenley concluded the discussion thanking the presenters for their presentation.

With a quorum being present, Chair Fenley returned to the approval of the agenda and 11-01-23 minutes (refer to page 1, Agenda approved and Approval of minutes).

3. Rethinking I-94

Melissa Barnes, Rethinking I-94 Project Director provided an introduction announcing that Renee Raduenz from Communications & Public Engagement was not able to attend and Alyssa Kruzel of Communications & Public Engagement would also be presenting. The TAAC 12-6-23 Rethinking I-94 Presentation was displayed for review followed by an overview of presentation highlights: project location, purpose and goals, schedule, ten alternative concepts, public engagement, and the I-94 Community Leaders group.

Barnes informed the committee that they are in a period of getting project awareness out, however feedback is currently not being sought. The committee was invited to provide input moving forward, and then the project team will return for feedback. The project team hopes to learn the needs and perspectives of the project from members of the disability community with disabilities - visible or not - to form a foundation of knowledge that will enable them to form opinions on the project. A formal public comment period as well as more information on the ten alternative concepts will be available during the summer of 2024. The project team is currently in the scoping phase which will run through the summer of 2024, possibly into the fall when the Scoping Decision document with the ten alternative concepts will be finalized. The ten alternative concepts were reviewed.

Kruzel provided a public engagement update to the committee. The ten alternative concepts were presented to the public during the past summer through numerous community events, presentations and two in-person Open Houses. The public survey started in mid-July and closed on October 31, 2023 with over 3,200 responses. It was noted that survey respondents did not identify as having a disability. The Public Engagement Summary Reports will be shared out this winter. A Community Voices initiative is coming to find out how the I-94 corridor is impacting everyday life, to ensure diversity and provide opportunity for shared experiences. Public comment will be held during the summer of 2024. Construction is expected to begin in 2028; it was noted that the project cost has not yet been determined.



Efforts will be focused on detailed regional considerations.

The committee was informed that they are looking for Community Leaders to serve as liaisons between their communities and the Minnesota Department of Transportation and one Community Leader is currently representing the disability community. Community Leader roles were reviewed. Interested committee members or someone they know who might be interested in this role were encouraged to reach out to Melissa Barnes, Chair Fenley, or Alyssa Kruzel. Kruzel shared the I-94 Project website <https://talk.dot.state.mn.us/rethinking-i94> offers historical and engagement information and project e-mails.

Due to time limitations, Chair Fenley requested questions focused on the Community Leader (from the disability community) role and initiated discussions asking whether a Community Leader would need to be part of an organization versus an individual from the community. Kruzel responded that interested individuals should be connected to an agency or community-based organization to ensure that information can be shared with a broader community or membership base. Chair Fenley correlated the time commitment of representatives from various organizations within TAAC to the Community Leader role as it would also involve a significant time commitment given the large scope of the project.

Vice Chair, Paulsen questioned if there are identification markers with priorities and how many differing identity markers within the disability community are serving in the Community Leader role to assure the committee that the voice of the disability community is being heard.

Chair Fenley noted the time, 2:30 p.m. and allowed for two additional meeting minutes.

Kruzel informed the committee that there is no set number of Community Leader seats but there are currently thirty to forty seats available. Currently there is one Community Leader connected to the disability community. They are looking for two to four representatives from the disability community to provide the perspective that is missing – the voice that is needed when project design decisions are being made. Barnes added, holistic feedback is being sought from broad areas of the community; their focus is on connection points to reach different stakeholders rather than exact numbers or percentages. Chair Fenley questioned if there is a geographical requirement or representation being sought within the project area only. Kruzel explained that a Community Leader would not be required to live within the project area but should be connected to an organization serving people within the project area. Chair Fenley concluded the discussion offering to work with the committee to find potential Community Leaders from the disability community.

Reports

Subcommittee

4. Blue Line – Ken Rodgers

No report.

5. Green Line – Christopher Bates

No report.

6. Gold Line – Darrell Paulsen

The new bridge on 494, the Bielenberg Bridge opened on Monday, November 27. The opening event was well attended. The bridge is open and connected to the Gold Line.

7. Purple Line – Darrell Paulsen

The CBAC, Community and Business Advisory Committee meets tomorrow, 12-07-23.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

No discussion.

Chair

No discussion.



Public invitation

No comments.

Member comment

Myre shared a bus ride experience where the bus operator handled a difficult situation very well.

Streasick announced Metro Mobility fare reimbursement for fares collected on Go To Cards if picked up outside the window, in a Metro Transit free fare zone, or over max appointment time. Fares will be automatically reimbursed back to Go To Cards monthly. It was noted that if cash was paid or in a max OBT situation, the customer would need to call Metro Mobility Customer Service.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:37 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 December 6, 2023.

Approved this 27 day of November 2023.

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