



**METRO Blue Line Extension**  
**Joint Meeting of Community and Business Advisory Committees**  
**November 28, 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:** Steve Schmidt, George Selman, Chris Berne, La Shella Sims, Justin Youngbluth, Sten Pearson, Nestor Garcia, Stefan Watkins, Tonja West-Hafner

**BAC Members:** Matt Rentsch, Candace Oathout, Ben Colglazier, Aiyisha Mustapha

**Agency Staff and Guests:** Nick Landwer, Sam O’Connell, Alicia Vap, Dan Pfeiffer, Rachel Dammel, Juan Rangel, Dan Soler, MarySue Abel, Kerri Pearce Ruch, Andrew Gillett, Kyle Mianulli

**1. Call to Order/Welcome and Introductions**

Chris Berne called the meeting to order at 6:09 pm and asked committee members and staff in attendance to introduce themselves.

**2. Approval of April Meeting Summaries**

BAC: Candace Oathout introduced, minutes approved with no changes

CAC: Chris Berne introduced, minutes approved with no changes

**3. Met Council Transition**

Sam O’Connell provided an overview of the Metropolitan Council transition following the November elections and new Governor taking office in January. Sam also noted that Chair Tchorumoff is stepping down from the Council to take a position at the Minneapolis Federal Reserve. The Secretary of State noticed the Council vacancy in November. The Governor must appoint the Council by March 4. The Council is currently preparing information for the new Governor and new Council Members. Dan Soler discussed transitions, noting that the incoming Minnesota Speaker of the House is a representative from Brooklyn Park and there are new representatives to Congress in Rep. Omar and Rep. Phillips.

Chris Berne asked if the current Council stays in place or if their term ended with the notice of vacancy. Dan Soler responded that the Council stays until a new Council is appointed. Dan also noted that Metropolitan Council Vice Chair Melander will assume the Council Chair’s responsibilities until Governor-elect Walz appoints a new chair.

#### 4. BLRT Project Update

MarySue Abel provided an update on the status of the BLRT project. The 90% plans are largely done and the project office is making sure the specifications and environmental work are caught up with the 90% plans. Going into 2019 the project will enter a slow down period while the Council has more meaningful conversations with BNSF. Looking ahead, major milestones include:

- Complete critical third-party agreements, including with 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 Letter of No Prejudice request to FTA
- Prepare application for Full Funding Grant Agreement

The Council has reached out to BNSF multiple times and continues to hear same message that the project does not meet BNSF's principles at this time. Communications will be put on hold until get the new administration is in place.

Candace Oathout commented that co-locating passenger rail with freight rail is a hazard when trains carry oil. MarySue replied that the trains that BLRT would be co-located with do not carry oil. Candace said that they have in the past and might again. MarySue added that corridor protection is planned along the entire corridor to separate freight from LRT.

La Shella Sims asked to confirm that the trains do not currently carry hazardous materials. MarySue said that is correct, it primarily carries lumber and there are only a few trains a week. Dan Soler added that it is common around the county for passenger rail and freight rail to share the same corridor or the same tracks. The project needs to provide a certain level of safety regardless, and we believe that the design is safe. Justin Youngbluth noted that each city has a plan for what can be transported through their cities and how to deal with hazards that the public can access if interested. George Selman said that the cities in the corridor, BPO, and the committees have demonstrated that they have done everything they can to make sure the project is safe. He suggested that La Shella reach out to the city for specific concerns about how Minneapolis deals with potential freight hazards.

#### 5. Next Steps Discussion

MarySue Abel provided an overview of next steps, which include:

- Design remaining elements to 90% (park-and-rides)
- Support cultural resources (Section 106) efforts on 90% design
- Support SPO on Franklin OMF design
- Continue FTA coordination
- Allocate staff time to other projects and Council departments

Justin Youngbluth asked if this project would still pay for staff that are working on other projects. MarySue said no, the other projects would fund that. For instance, SWLRT has some open positions that BLRT staff will fill.

Deferred activities include:

- Railroad design coordination
- Right-of-way acquisition activities
- Preparation of 100% plans and specifications
- Preparation and submittal of FFGA application
- Floodplain mitigation advanced construction

Nestor Garcia commented that there is still a lot of concern among Harrison residents about the safety of crossing Olson Memorial Highway and asked if this issue will be addressed with the project design. Nick Landwer replied that the project office worked with the City of Minneapolis and MnDOT to make Olson Memorial Highway as safe as possible while keeping it a trunk highway. Improvements will include reducing lane widths from 14-17 feet to 10 feet, introducing geometry to slow traffic down, making crossings safer by upgrading signals and adjusting the crossing time, and adding pedestrian refuges. Dan Soler added that the road reconstruction comes with the LRT project so we need to decide if we are building the LRT project before those improvements will get underway.

Stefan Watkins asked if there is anything similar to what is used at the airport to usher people across Olson Memorial Highway. Nick Landwer said no, but there will be crosswalk timers, wider crosswalks, slower traffic, and push buttons to improve safety.

La Shella Sims said she thinks a six-lane roadway through a neighborhood will always be unsafe and asked if traffic could be redirected somehow. Nick Landwer said they did look at alternatives for traffic but Olson Memorial Highway is a reliever for I-394, which is past capacity so traffic can't be diverted back. If traffic does divert, it goes into the neighborhoods which they wanted to avoid.

Chris Berne noted that Hennepin County has already acquired the six-plex on West Broadway even if other right-of-way acquisition has been deferred. The question now will be if there is a plan for the county to move forward with their part of the project with the LRT delayed. Dan Soler said he has talked with the county about that, and they do not want to put the community through two separate construction projects if they don't need to. The next six to eight months for this project will be the most critical, and the project office will be working diligently with policymakers to work with BNSF. If we aren't going to build in the BNSF corridor, we'll need to figure out something different. The current sentiment is that it is not yet time to explore other options. There is no BNSF negotiation without politics, so we need to let that play out. Dan said he sees three possible outcomes: BNSF is willing to work with us and we move forward, we explore other options (different routes, different modes, different transit improvements), or the project doesn't happen at all. We think we have a great design and a great project but can't build it without the railroad.

Candace Oathout asked how difficult it would be to adapt the current design to bus rapid transit. Dan Soler said those questions will be asked as we look at what the future of the project will be.

La Shella Sims asked how long we can be on hold before we start losing our place in the queue for federal money. Dan Soler said there are only four or five projects currently in the same phase as BLRT, but there are other projects around the county in Project Development that will keep moving so we want to keep moving too.

## **6. Hennepin County Community Works Update**

Kerri Pearce Ruch, Andrew Gillett, and Kyle Mianulli presented. Two major funding sources supported their 2018 work: an FTA TOD Advanced Planning Grant and a McKnight Foundation Grant. Community works had a busy year in 2018 and plans to have a busy year in 2019, even if the project office work needs to slow down. The FTA grant goes through February 2020 and the McKnight grant is through 2019.

In 2018, key studies included:

- Housing and development
  - Focused on suburban cities
  - Gaps analysis goes into some detail on where there are areas of need
  - Also did commercial market feasibility and site analysis in station areas, which fed into TOD zoning districts. Having appropriate zoning in place is an important step in achieving a city's vision for station areas.
- Infrastructure planning
  - Bike/pedestrian demonstration projects were conducted in each city through a BlueCross BlueShield grant
  - With FTA funding, reviewed bike and pedestrian projects already identified in local plans then went through a screening process to identify the 10 top projects. The county will get these 10 projects to 60% design then hand them off to the cities to continue to move forward.
  - Also did a shared mobility study, and the final report and recommendations will be available at the end of the year
- Placemaking
  - Part of McKnight Foundation grant
  - The county has a contract with Springboard for the Arts to identify local artists and fund small projects. About 2/3 of the funding is left for 2019.
  - The county launched Twitter and Instagram accounts to share information about the artists and efforts in the corridor
  - The effort is designed to partner artists with businesses or community institutions in station areas
- Implementing best practices
  - Also funded through the McKnight grant was efforts to connect theory to practice for corridor policymakers and staff
  - Drew on technical assistance and best practices from local and national experts
- Community engagement
  - Community engagement runs through all of these efforts

- The county is trying to build on the successes of the station area planning process and also looked for innovative opportunities

Cities are taking the work completed in 2018 and moving to implement it. Brooklyn Park passed a TOD zoning ordinance in July 2018, and the remaining suburban cities will bring TOD ordinances to their councils in early 2019.

Looking ahead to 2019:

- Continue Cultivate placemaking
- Partners to look at infrastructure plans and determine which projects to move forward
- Start wayfinding work
- Small business support
  - Goal is to support small businesses in station areas with targeted technical assistance and access to resources
  - Reviewing proposals now, anticipate starting in early 2019
- Innovative financing strategies
  - Work will be led by Met Council TOD office
  - Focus will be on equitable business and housing development
  - Goal is to attract and deploy capital along the corridor
  - RFP will be issued in January and work will wrap up at the end of 2019
- Corridor marketing and branding
  - Place branding is the process of discovering and defining the unique qualities of a geographic location to inform development of an authentic identity that distinguishes it from other places and appeals to target audiences
  - This grant will focus on discovering and defining what is unique and valuable in the corridor
  - Why brand Bottineau?
    - Reintroduce communities along the METRO Blue Line Extension to the region
    - Leverage LRT to attract and guide investment
    - Collection of vibrant communities can become a regional destination
    - Develop sense of shared identity and ownership throughout the corridor
  - Keys to success
    - Co-creation and authenticity
    - Complements existing local identities and city brands
    - Process and product represents diversity and values of corridor communities
    - Broad buy-in and ownership of final product
  - Next steps
    - Release RFP next week
    - Convene branding and marketing work group (will review proposals and select consultant and in the future will help bring the brand to life)
    - Procure contractor in early 2019

- Engagement/creative work in spring 2019
- Brand development in spring/summer 2019
- Brand launch in fall 2019

Aiyisha Mustapha asked how many local community organizations will be used for the engagement work associated with the branding effort. Kyle Mianulli said that will be determined in collaboration with the consultant once one is selected. He added that there are not specific selection criteria included in the RFP as those will be developed by the work group.

La Shella Sims commented that she thinks this is a great idea and she is looking forward to seeing specific ideas geared toward the corridor and North Minneapolis.

Stefan Watkins asked what opportunities will be available during the brand launch to involve organizations and businesses out of state. Kerri Pearce Ruch said part of the 2019 work will include working with Greater MSP to connect with national and international site selectors. Kyle Mianulli added that the deliverables will be tools that Greater MSP and other economic development organizations can use to market the area to businesses.

George Selman commented that this is very exciting because he hasn't seen this on transitways in other cities.

Chris Berne asked if there has been a comparable process for SWLRT. Kerri Pearce Ruch said there was some early work but it was scaled back in coordination with city partners a few years ago.

Ben Colglazier asked if there is currently an inventory of assets along the corridor or if that is part of the work to be done. Kyle Mianulli replied that since there have been so many other studies conducted for this corridor the first task will be to review the previous work to determine what has already been compiled.

## **7. Adjourn**

Dan Soler noted that he expects there will be a check-in with the BAC and Community Advisory Committee in the February/March timeframe, but regular meetings for 2019 will not be scheduled at this point.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 pm.