Minutes of the
REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

Committee Members Present: Acting Chair Nichole Villavicencio, Rozanne Severence, Kjensmo Walker, Margot Imdieke Cross, Bob Anderson, Robert Platz, Heidi Myhre, John Lund and Patty Thorsen.

Committee Members Absent: David Fenley

Committee Members Excused: Darrell Paulsen

Council Staff Present: Paul Lamb, Mark Benedict, Mike Maddio, Brian Funk, John Paul Zanaska and Pam Steffen from Metro Transit; Andrew Krueger and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: Anna Flintoft from the City of Minneapolis.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Acting Committee Chair Villavicencio called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:35 p.m. on Wednesday, March 4 2015.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Anderson, seconded by Walker to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Severence, seconded by Anderson to approve the minutes of the February 4, 2015 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

INFORMATION & BUSINESS

1. Modern Streetcar Update

Anna Flintoft spoke to the TAAC committee. She is a Transportation Planner for the City of Minneapolis. The City of Minneapolis has been leading the streetcar planning efforts in Minneapolis for a number of years including the Nicollet-Central modern streetcar project. There are some important milestones coming up in 2015. She is looking for some input on some of the projects they are developing. The corridor runs from Lake Street on Nicollet Avenue then running north through downtown on Nicollet Mall. It crosses the Mississippi River on the Hennepin Avenue Bridge. Then it runs one way on Hennepin and First Avenues which are one-way streets just north of the river. Then it goes on to Central Avenue a couple of blocks to Eighth Street Northeast. It is a 3.7 mile corridor. That is the corridor that will be talked about today.

They have been working for the last year and a half on the environmental assessment for the project. That is a federal requirement. It is a document that is available to the public for public comment that describes the potential environmental impact that might be associated with the project. There is a draft environmental assessment document that is being reviewed by the Federal Transit Administration. By this summer the document will be available for public review via public comment period and public meeting. They are going around to all of the stakeholder organizations this winter and spring to give everyone a heads up on that public comment period. This should result in a FONSI (Finding Of No Significant Impact) later in 2015. That environmental assessment also includes a section 106 process that is another federal requirement related to historic and archeological properties.

The second thing they are working on right now is working with the Metropolitan Council to adopt that locally preferred alternative (LPA) of the streetcar into the Transportation Policy Plan. They do expect that to happen in 2015 as well. Those two steps are critical steps in order for the project to compete for federal funds. When those two steps are done they expect the Metropolitan Council to apply to the Federal Transit

Administration to enter the Federal Small Starts Project development process at the end of 2015 or early 2016. They are continuing to work with the state legislature and others to secure funding for the project. It is a $200 million project. The City of Minneapolis has committed $60 million to the project. The maximum federal request through the Small Starts process is $75 million. That leaves a $65 million gap. That gap will have to be filled with new revenue. There are also operations and maintenance costs that will have to be covered through new revenue. The City is working closely with the legislature to support the proposed transit sales tax increase.

The streetcar vehicle looks similar to the LRT vehicle. It is electrically powered. It has overhead wires like the LRT vehicles. It has tracks that are imbedded in concrete in the street. The difference between LRT and streetcars is that it is a shorter vehicle. It runs in mixed traffic. It runs in the same traffic lanes as cars and buses. It is a single streetcar vehicle. Not like the connected vehicles in the LRT.

They are looking at a range of vehicles. They are not looking at just a single vehicle. These vehicles are used in Portland, Seattle, Tucson and Washington, DC. It is 67 feet long. It is about the length of an articulated bus. It has three doors. It has two wide level boarding doors in the middle and one smaller door on the end. They are also looking at a longer vehicle, which is 80 feet long. It has four double wide doors. It also has doors on both sides of the vehicle. The doors can open on the left side or the right side depending on where the stop is located. They are looking at level boarding for at least the two center doors. Not all streetcar projects have level boarding. Some of them have plates that the driver can deploy.

The streetcar obeys the traffic signals like a bus would. Cars could drive down the tracks. She spoke with a traffic engineer in Portland, Oregon. They are finding that they do not have a lot of crashes between vehicles and streetcars and pedestrians and streetcars. Sometimes a bicyclist will slip on the tracks when there is no streetcar around. The tires could get caught in the tracks.

On about two-thirds of the corridor the stops would be located on the right side of the street. There is a curb extension from the sidewalk. There will also be a traditional parking lane with cars parked on the right side between the curb extensions. There will be access from the sidewalk to the transit stop. About two-thirds of the 19 sets of stops in the corridor that are on Nicollet Avenue and Nicollet Mall would be connected to the sidewalk on the right side of the street.

Then when they get north of Nicollet Mall and north of Washington Avenue there are a couple of stops on First Avenue and Hennepin Avenue NE, which are one way streets. The streetcar tracks would be on the left side of the street in that case. There would be a similar curb extension into the parking lane. But instead of being on the right side of the street it would be on the left side of the street. That is true at two stops. And then there is a couple of other stops where they would need to place a stop in the center median so there would be pedestrian access to that median in the center of the street for a couple of stops. Then there is one more stop at a development site. It would probably be in a public plaza in the middle of the development site. The majority of the stops are in the curb extensions.

There will be ramps in the boarding area. There may be only one ramp on one end of the platform, depending on what are the constraints for each particular site. They haven't gotten into that level of design. It is possible they could have one ramp on both ends.

There will be real-time information signs showing when the next streetcar will be arriving. There will be off board fare payment and off board ticket machines. You could purchase your ticket on the platform and board through any door. There would be on board fare enforcement just like the LRT. It would be fully integrated with the Metro Transit fare system. They are trying to have level boarding for at least the two center doors. Buses will be stopping at those stops as well. Most of the streetcar projects that they have seen across the country have a 10 inch high platform with a bridge plate that deploys. They haven't selected a vehicle yet. In some of the vehicles the doors are not all accessible.

There are some corridors where light rail won't physically fit. Nicollet Mall is one of them. The Transitway Guidelines don't currently address streetcars. There is currently no need for tie downs on the streetcars. Their typical speed is 30 miles per hour. The stops are located about every other block. On Nicollet Mall the stops would be at the same location as they are today. The streetcar would also have free ride service along the Nicollet Mall. Buses are configured to have more seating area. Light rail vehicles and streetcars are configured to have more standing area so they have more capacity than buses. The capacity for wheelchairs depends on the vehicle. The 67 foot vehicle used in other cities have two dedicated wheelchair spaces and can hold 115 people. The other vehicles have four. An articulated bus has 68 seats.

The TAAC committee members asked if they could be part of the planning process.

2. Bus Stop Improvements/Ladders of Opportunity

Paul Lamb spoke to the TAAC committee. He is the Senior Project Coordinator for Metro Transit. Every year Metro Transit puts out new bus shelters and upgrades. Providing enhancements to shelters and ADA pads for some locations for boardings where there is no concrete. The Ladders of Opportunity program combines a $3.26 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration with state and local funds to invest in bus stop improvements. They are using these funds to expand areas and get more shelters on the ground. They are retrofitting some existing shelters with some enhancements like light and heat and some sidewalk pedestrian safety improvements at various intersections.

Program goals are to create a quality waiting area somewhere safe and accessible where people feel like waiting for buses. Also to provide accessibility and to enhance access to areas of employment, education and services. The focus is for improvements for this particular push and areas of opportunity based on the grant that they received. It is focusing these investments for this year and next year in areas of color and low income people. This is a push for the greater bus stop improvement project, which is providing shelters and improvements throughout the metro area.

Finally they want to engage the community in neighborhoods and community groups about the long term investments policies and procedures to create an equitable transportation system and whether those improvements and our investments do make sense. In terms of the scope of this two year push they want to get 150 new shelters in locations. They will enhance 75 existing shelters. A lot of these are in areas where there are enough boardings to justify a shelter but there are physical constraints at the site and trying to take care of those to get enough area to get a shelter in. They will be enhancing some of the shelters that they currently have out with light and in some areas heat. In some areas they would have enhanced transit information. They use the boarding criteria of 100 boardings per day to install heat. They can't use the same source of electricity for heat as they do for light. They have a different voltage. Sometimes getting heat in a shelter is a lot more expensive than the shelter and the infrastructure itself.

They are going out to these sites and looking at shelter locations and what the sidewalk is like and whether there are ramps at the intersection. So people with vehicles can get on the sidewalk from the street to the shelter. They will be improving transit information. The areas they are looking at are identified in the grant.

With this grant they are hiring two new maintenance staff getting more people out to take care of the shelters. They will coordinate funds. There is only so much money for taking care of the shelters. They are making connections for light and power. They have to pay for the electricity for that. They are planning to spend the funds in two years. After that they will be looking for other sources of funds to get enhancements and shelters in other locations.

They are going to deploy enhanced transit information providing more information at shelters and bus stops throughout the region. This spring they are starting out with a test corridor in North Minneapolis and Brooklyn Park. They will be putting up some more signs and getting feedback from users in order to find out if it works or not. They want to know how to tweak the design to make it better. They are trying to have this information out to the bus stops within the next three years. He talked about getting the next time information to know when the next bus is coming and other signs at the tiered bus stops.

Tier 1 is for low boarding, stand alone stops. Additional information: phone and website, routes serving the stop, stop number and NexTrip instructions.
Tier 2 is for higher boarding, stand alone stops. Additional information: phone and website, stop number, NexTrip instructions, route info: destination, frequency and maps.
Tier 3 is for customer waiting shelters. New bus stop sign and route numbers. Within the shelter: route descriptions, maps, NexTrip instructions, route schedules and fare information.

He will get back to the TAAC committee about the heights of the signs and where they are in the design process.

Part of the grant requirements is improved pedestrian access. They will be looking at the slope of the sidewalk and the relationship to the curb. Whether there are cutouts at the edge of the block. They will be installing ADA compliant ramps/curb cutouts, improved pedestrian signage and crosswalks. They will be coordinating with Cities, Counties and MnDOT for partnered improvements. They will be improving bus stops with ADA compliant pads. There will be high-volume limited mobility boardings. The small shelter

design for site-constrained sites will be at the U of M School of Architecture Design Studio. The conceptual design nearing completion, will be moving into full design. The installations will be in 2016.

Imdieke Cross asked about benches in the shelters for the other people with disabilities and children to sit on. Some shelters don't have them.

Lamb said they are looking for input from various sources.
MT Planning: Does stop meet boarding requirements?
MT Engineering & Facilities: Will a shelter fit? Can a shelter be maintained?
MT Service: Are there major changes to route planned?
MT Bus Operations: Will location work for boarding, access and driving?
Public Safety: What public safety issues should be considered?
Cities: Are there construction project impacts? Does it block sightlines?
Heritage Preservation Commissions and State Historic Preservation Office: Does it impact historic character?
Property Owner (if shelter is on private property): Will I allow a shelter there?
They are trying to get the 150 new shelters in before the next winter/snow season.

They are working through the site design stage right now. Then they will be rolling out new standard shelters later this year in coordination with the community engagement piece. The smaller shelters will not be hitting the streets until 2016.

Imdieke Cross asked if he would, in the enhancement stage, monitor and collect information on the number of ones that they provide accessibility improvements to and what the nature of those accessibility enhancements are. To come back and let the TAAC committee know of the 75 that received enhancements.

He will be coming back to the TAAC when the smaller shelters are in the design stage.

3. Winter Weather Preparedness

Mark Benedict spoke to the TAAC committee. He is the Director of Rail Systems Maintenance. He will inform the TAAC how the Metro Transit staff prepares for, plans and executes for the winter events they respond to each year. Each day in the nine county service area, Metro Transit turns out about 1,400 buses. There are over 250,000 boardings on these buses. Northstar is charged with five runs for each of the rush hours. Our light rail systems have 72 train cars on the Blue Line and the Green Line, which accounts for about 60,000 additional boardings each day.

More than 100 lots are cleared using contractors for the winter weather season. They clear 20,000 slots at park and rides. The facilities department is responsible for snow removal at the 12 Metro Transit facilities, which include the five bus garages, four rail facilities and the three support facilities.

Mike Maddio spoke to the TAAC committee. He is the Manager of Construction Services. One of the things they work on to get ready for the winter season is looking at what they can do to prepare themselves to handle the events they know will happen. They start preparing for the snow season at the completion of the previous season. Once the season is over they meet to discuss things that they thought happened well and what they thought needed to be improved. His group and the facilities group are responsible for clearing the bus platforms and the rail platforms, clearing the facilities themselves and getting the buses out of the garages. At the end of the season they look at the equipment to see what needs to be repaired, including the buses.

They enter into contracts for snow removal and sometimes remove the snow themselves. They work with MNDot to order salt, which guarantees delivery of salt. They purchase about 2,000 tons of salt before the season arrives. They look at past problems and try to rectify them.

Brian Funk spoke to the TAAC committee. He is the Director of Light Rail Operations. They monitor weather forecasts to determine what is coming in and what preparations they need to make. They have a three phase system for winter weather events. In Phase 1 they are insuring they have adequate staffing. The form that they use to send across the agency to identify what is the forecast coming up over the next 48 hours, who are going to be the in-charge staff, what are going to be the staffing problems, to make sure they have the right people to run the operation and what do they have for extra buses to fill in if something gets stuck. All of the drivers get winter weather training. The communications go out in a number of

different ways. The Operator Bulletin is sent out to all of the bus operators and service providers, reminding them to refresh their training and procedures and to check into training before winter weather arrives and they get on the street. There is a website to direct customers in case of inclement weather and what to expect in inclement weather. Some of the routes have pre-planned detours in case of snow reroutes. The operators know this in advance and they try to make sure the customers know about this as well.

Once they are notified by the Transit Control Center they are going to be looking at their staffing levels. They have to determine what the best time to deploy is. They don't want to be out too early or too late. If the snow is going to hit overnight they can deploy the cleanup crews early so that things are cleared before rush hour starts. Sometimes snow hits during rush hour and they have to do their work during peak boarding periods. Some of the maintenance trucks have chains on them. When they go out and rescue buses that are stranded they can do so with the best traction possible. These also have tow straps and shovels to help free a bus that is stuck. Facility maintenance will also deploy their vehicles. That includes the plows for the facilities. Sometimes a car may get stuck on the tracks, which will stop the light rail vehicles. A truck will be deployed to free the vehicle.

Phase 2 is when there is freezing rain or sleet or snow accumulation of three inches or more or blizzard conditions. They go through a process where each department designates an in-charge person for the duration of the event. This is to insure that there is communication for each of the areas. There are internal communications that are going on. They use the webpage that takes the online communication data from all of the buses to monitor the system across the metro area. It is broken down into corridors to take a snapshot every 15 minutes of how the bus routes are doing in an area so they know where to focus their efforts. Sometimes the snow hits one area of the metro harder than other areas.

They also have winter weather snow delays. When buses are late throughout the system they send out messages to indicate how long the delays will be.

The Transit Control Center is the heart of the bus operations. They monitor the late service and incoming calls and try to put out replacement service. Communications wise, in recent years they started to expand how this works. The Public Information Officer and his staff, including folks from Pam's group, are in charge of keeping customers informed on what is going on. They rely heavily on social media. They have over 14,000 twitter followers and 28,000 facebook followers. They use that to provide delay information as it is going on so people have an idea of what to expect before they leave the house or get onto the street. They also do the messaging for the Northstar out of their Rail Control Center.

Phase 3 is the large scale service curtailment. There is always going to be the need for bus detours for certain areas that they cannot get into. In 2010 there was 18 inches of snow. They had over 100 buses stuck. They had to pull in the buses. There were employee safety issues they had to consider. They can deploy up to 10 trucks. They are in radio contact and can be deployed from scene to scene.

The post event is where the bus and rail services are starting to resume. The supervisors are out lifting detours and directing buses back to the routes. They notify customers as to what the service condition is at that point. The bus supervisors stay connected to the Cities. They let people know where the trouble areas are in the system. They clear snow from the operating facilities and the park-and-rides. They make sure the infrastructure is free of snow and ice.

Then they have a debrief to determine what went right and what went wrong and what they can do in the future to avoid some of the issues.

Imdieke Cross discussed the situation of someone waiting at the door on a light rail vehicle, the door should open for them if they can't open the door themselves.

In extreme weather, hot or cold, the doors stay closed until someone opens them. The operators are trained to look for people at the doors and to open them if they see someone there. They are trained to do an observation before they depart. There is a button on the inside where you could call the train operator if there is an emergency. It is something that can be reinforced. He will send out a memo regarding this situation.

4. NexTrip/Realtime Rail Update

Brian Funk spoke to the TAAC committee. He is the Director of Light Rail Operations at Metro Transit. This discussion will cover the newly turned out NexTrip and train arrival information. It all starts with the SCADA

(Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) Program. It is what is tracking the trains and allows them to interact with the system elements that Mark's group maintains. It allows them to route trains through switches that controls the track and power, controlling the signaling system. All of those systems in the field they are able to control in the office.

He showed the schedule information monitored by the Rail Control Center. It shows the train ID, direction of the train, which cars are on the train, if it is on time or not and the track.

NexTrip can be chosen by the route direction, station location and stop ID number. It shows the next two departures and after that the scheduled time. They make their data available to third party developers. There are a number of third party applications that are out there right now. It is all the same data. It is just a matter of how it is communicated. Customers requested NexTrip information more than 87.5 million times in 2014. That is a 78 percent increase from the year before. Just between the hour of 4:00 and 5:00 p.m. on weekdays there are 15,000 NexTrip requests. That is 250 requests every minute. That is busier during winter weather. In January 2015 there were over nine million requests. That is another 20 percent over the previous year. There is platform messaging where it tells when the next train is arriving and on which line when the Blue Line and the Green Line share the same tracks.

The platform train arrival is what people are familiar with. It will not predict the time of arrival until the train is on the move from the previous station. Sometimes there is a special situation where there is a delay or two trains on one track going in opposite directions. The signs will help communicate that.

The MAC service shuttle runs overnight between the terminals of the airport. At the end of the line most people are concerned with when the trains are leaving, not when they are arriving. At Union Depot sometimes there are two trains at the same time. They are still working on how to tell the passengers which train to board. They are still working on how to inform the customers when there are service disruptions. There are on call staff available to fill in when necessary.

Third party developers (not Metro Transit) currently have access to the data and have apps that exist. Metro Transit Marketing is also developing apps that enhances the information on their site and should be available soon. Google Transit does participate with the Metro Transit feed. The trip from Union Depot to Target Field is 45 minutes long.

There are cameras at the station that are monitored to look for any problems there. Transit Police are on the trains and at the stations at times to monitor any problems.

MEMBER COMMENT

The Central Light Rail Station elevator is being locked at 9:00 p.m. Imdieke Cross said I would like to make a motion. I recommend that we go on record that we are in opposition to this time limit. The Central Station elevator would be open and available during times of operation for the LRT. If there is a security problem that they bring in security guards, cameras or whatever means necessary. Reducing access is inappropriate. Anderson seconded the motion. **The motion carried.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary