



## METRO Blue Line Extension Corridor Management Committee (CMC) Meeting Minutes

Date & Time	September 14, 2023      1:30 – 3:30 PM
Location	F.T. Heywood Chambers, 560 N 6th Ave, Minneapolis
Attendees	Charlie Zelle, Reva Chamblis, Lesley Kandaras, April Crockett, Bill Blonigan, Gillian Rosenquist, Jim Adams, Xp Lee, Meg Forney, Karla Arredondo Payan, Ricardo Perez, Jonathan Hansen, Dan Doerrer, Tara Watson, Jeff Lunde, Irene Fernando, Jacob Frey, Jeremiah Ellison, Marion Greene
Project Staff	Chris Beckwith, Cathy Gold, Dan Soler, Jer Yang

### 1. Call to Order and Welcome

Chair Charlie Zelle of the Metropolitan Council called the meeting to order at 1:34pm.

Chair Zelle extended a warm welcome to the Corridor Management Committee (CMC) members and allowed members to introduce themselves.

Chair Zelle mentioned that today's meeting materials can be found on the project's website at [bluelineext.org](http://bluelineext.org). Furthermore, he conveyed that public comments can be submitted to Nkongo Cigolo, Metropolitan Council until September 22, 2023.

Chair Zelle then stated that the meeting would commence with a 15-minute public comment segment.

### 2. Public Invitation

During the public comment segment, various individuals spoke in the following order: Wendy Sullivan, a member of the public; Mike Miller from The Hitching Company; Kristel Porter, the Executive Director of the West Broadway Business and Area Coalition (WBC); followed by public members Ron Williams and John Westcott.

Council Member Jeremiah Ellison, City of Minneapolis stated that he wished to underscore the significance of addressing Anti-Displacement, especially in light of North Minneapolis having the highest ridership. Council Member Ellison conveyed the concerns voiced by North Minneapolis residents and businesses that have reached his office.

### 3. Approval of August 10, 2023, BLRT CMC Meeting Summary



Chair Zelle requested a motion to endorse the minutes from August 10, 2023 CMC Meeting. Commissioner Irene Fernando, Hennepin County initiated a motion for approval, and Commissioner Jeff Lunde, Hennepin County seconded it. The minutes were approved.

#### **4. Community and Business Advisory Committee Reports**

Community Advisory Committee (CAC) member Jonathan Hansen presented an update from the recent CAC meeting, which took place on September 13, 2023. During the meeting, CAC members engaged in extensive discussions regarding various aspects of the light rail project. The topics covered included the placement of stations, particularly the station in Robbinsdale in relation to Park and Ride (P&R) facilities. There was a strong emphasis on ensuring that the station remains conveniently accessible by foot, with considerations even extending to the potential construction of a pedestrian flyover bridge connecting the station to the P&R. Additionally, discussions touched on Anti-Displacement measures and determining the optimal timing for engaging with businesses to propose potential solutions. Mr. Hansen highlighted overall satisfaction from the CAC members with the alignment recommended by staff.

Co-Chair Tara Watson of the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) provided an overview of the recent BAC meeting, which took place on September 12, 2023. During this meeting, members were presented with the route alignment presentation that included visual representations of stations and highlighted investments around some of these stations. Members observed these investments and assumed that the light rail project would stimulate growth in all areas of the alignment. Discussion ensued, with members questioning why North Minneapolis was not offered a P&R facility, in contrast to Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park, which were provided with parking options. This raised concerns about building trust within communities, particularly when North Minneapolis seemed to be lacking in equitable development. Co-Chair Watson emphasized the significant investments made by local businesses and communities in North Minneapolis and the ongoing parking challenges along West Broadway Avenue North, advocating for a parking solution for North Minneapolis communities.

BAC Co-Chair Dan Doerrer chimed in to mention that equity became a prominent topic during discussions, especially in relation to the outer areas. BAC members suggested that the Blue Line Extension Project seize this opportunity to consider parking solutions along the entire alignment and set an example for future transit projects. Co-Chair Watson stressed the importance of turning these discussions into actionable items, not just inclusion in meeting materials, but also in the budget and ongoing conversations.

Mayor Jim Adams, City of Crystal emphasized that development should prioritize equity and pointed out that Crystal currently lacks viable transit options, and the primary means of accessing light rail for its communities is by car, necessitating the provision of parking spaces for riders. Mayor Adams expressed the importance of documenting this



concern as discussions regarding the light rail development for this alignment progress. He also stated his desire to witness enhancements in public transit within Crystal.

Commissioner Fernando expressed gratitude for the input concerning the parking issue in Minneapolis and acknowledged the request from Crystal. Commissioner Fernando also wanted to draw attention to a letter included in today's CMC packet from Golden Valley, which echoed a similar request for transit improvements.

Commissioner Lunde suggested the exploration of a future date to continue the conversation about a comprehensive transit system plan for the metro area. This comes in response to numerous inquiries about transit possibilities from both the east and west, as well as the need for improved public transit connections.

## **5. Project Overview**

Chris Beckwith from the Metropolitan Council mentioned that within today's packet, there is a collection of letters received from the public and various cities. These letters include correspondence from The Hitching Company, The West Broadway Business Area Coalition, Minneapolis Regional Chambers, and the letter from Golden Valley. Additionally, the packet includes a summary of the Quarterly Engagement meeting, as mandated by legislation, where the project is obliged to report back to the CMC.

Ms. Beckwith provided an overview of the proposed alignment for the Blue Line Extension, which extends the current Blue Line from Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park. She presented the staff-recommended alignment map, which depicts the Blue Line Extension as a single-track alignment starting in Brooklyn Park. Currently, this alignment features 12 stations and covers a distance of 13.4 miles, creating connectivity among communities in the North Metro area through fast, frequent, and all-day service. Importantly, it offers a seamless journey as it seamlessly transitions into the existing Blue Line, providing access to downtown Minneapolis, Minneapolis Airport (MSP) and the Mall of America (MOA). This project places a strong emphasis on addressing disparities in communities through Anti-Displacement strategies, both before, during, and after construction.

Ms. Beckwith outlined the forthcoming steps in the project's timeline. The team is currently engaged in assessing post-Covid ridership and will be adopting a blended approach, combining pre-Covid and post-Covid ridership data as mandated by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) model. The aim is to compile and analyze this information and make it available in early 2024.

Ms. Beckwith emphasized the significance of the diverse methods employed by the project to establish connections with the communities, utilizing a range of communication channels. The objective is to ensure that communities are heard whether they are in support of or opposed to the project. These engagement efforts encompass activities such as distributing postcards, conducting surveys, setting up pop-



up information tables, door-to-door outreach, and collaborating with various community partners including Community Cohorts, Elevate Hennepin, Cultivate Art, and the Anti-Displacement Working Group (ADWG).

Ms. Beckwith delivered an overview of the Quarterly Engagement Meeting that took place at the Capri Theatre on August 23, 2023. She outlined the key discussion topics, which encompassed traffic, safety and crime, displacement, station placement, route selection, and a question-and-answer session on decision making. These details are included in the packet, as previously mentioned.

Ms. Beckwith wrapped up the project overview by discussing the project's timeline. Ms. Beckwith mentioned that there haven't been significant changes, but the project is eagerly awaiting the votes from CMC members on the draft CMC Resolution 2023-02 (which is included in today's packet). This vote will aid in advancing the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) process. She also pointed out that a draft SEIS is nearly complete and ready for submission to the FTA. Ms. Beckwith further noted that the analysis of route alignment options will continue to be a subject of study.

Mayor Bill Blonigan from City of Robbinsdale inquired about the availability of travel time estimates for review, after hearing about ridership estimates. In response, Ms. Beckwith clarified that the estimated travel time from station to station will be included as part of the ridership study.

President Meg Forney of the Minneapolis Park Board and Recreation (MPBR) made a request to include the 4F process on the project's timeline, emphasizing its importance alongside the draft SEIS. Ms. Beckwith responded by informing members that the project team is in the process of revamping the project's website and assured them that there will be a dedicated page specifically addressing the 4F process.

## **6. Anti-Displacement Update**

Cathy Gold, representing Hennepin County, presented an update regarding the Anti-Displacement timeline. Currently, the Anti-Displacement team is in the process of drafting the Implementation Framework, and they anticipate releasing it soon, with the aim of finalizing and releasing the official version in Spring 2023. Ms. Gold mentioned that Hennepin County has listed a position for leading the Anti-Displacement efforts.

Ms. Gold shared that on August 26, 2023, the Anti-Displacement group met with the Community Agency. This meeting centered on creating a joint intergovernmental approach, enhancing advocacy efforts, liaising with philanthropic communities, refining the preliminary framework, and presenting actionable steps. A follow-up meeting has been scheduled for September 25, 2023, to continue the deliberations on formulating anti-displacement policies.



Ms. Gold underscored the five key areas from the Anti-Displacement report crafted by the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) for future actions. She noted that three of these five steps are already in the implementation phase. Progress on the remaining two is ongoing, and efforts to fulfill all the outlined steps will persist

Commissioner Fernando emphasized that by establishing a position to lead the ADWG, it stands as a powerful affirmation of the project's significance and the county's disparities. Meanwhile, Council Member Reva Chamblis of the Metropolitan Council expressed her gratitude for the efforts put into the Anti-Displacement initiative. She is eager to witness the progression of community engagement and looks forward to a more detailed account of the expected outcomes and milestones.

Ricardo Perez, a member of the Blue Line Coalition, expressed his curiosity about the Community Prosperity Advisory Committee, mentioning it was his first-time hearing of it. Ms. Gold clarified that the concept is still in its nascent stages, and more details will emerge as the Anti-Displacement initiative advances.

Council Member Xp Lee, City of Brooklyn Park, inquired whether there's a specific radius of displacement being assessed by the project. Ms. Gold responded that such considerations are in progress and form a part of the study on how impacts and potential displacements are evaluated.

## **7. Review Track Alignment and Stations for Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

Dan Soler from Hennepin County showcased the favored route alignment for the Blue Line Extension, emphasizing the design principles that have guided the project in determining the optimal alignment for this corridor.

Mr. Soler initiated the discussion on the alignment from the northern end, mentioning that the Light rail would commence in Brooklyn Park. He then delved into the advantages and potential enhancements. This alignment paves the way for transit-oriented development zoning, facilitates road and safety upgrades, ensures short walking distances to the light rail, and augments pedestrian crossing provisions.

Mr. Soler detailed the extensive engagement initiatives undertaken with the Brooklyn Park communities and shared the feedback garnered from these outreach activities.

Mr. Soler touched upon the alignment, highlighting that Brooklyn Park will have a total of four stations, with the first one being the Oak Grove station. This station will feature a sizable P&R and an operational maintenance facility. He stressed that the P&R will serve communities on both sides of Highway (Hwy) 169, applauding the effective collaboration between the city's station planning consultant team and the project team. Furthermore, there are continuous initiatives to incorporate an underground parking



level and additional structures connected to the P&R facility. The plans entail that the underground parking will be situated beneath these additional buildings.

Commissioner Fernando requested clarification regarding the stationary consultant and inquired whether all cities have equal opportunities to engage with the stationary consultant. In response, Mr. Soler explained that the project offers opportunities to all cities and collaborates with each city's planning team.

Council Member Chamblis requested clarification regarding the design concept of the supplementary structure and its intended purpose. Mr. Soler conveyed that the decision regarding its use will be made by Brooklyn Park.

Mayor Blonigan asked for information regarding the number of parking spaces that will be accommodated at the Oak Grove P&R. Mr. Soler replied that there will be approximately 950 parking spaces available.

Mr. Soler proceeded with the presentation, explaining that the light rail will extend southward along West Broadway Avenue, utilizing a flyover bridge to transition onto Hwy 81 and center running track. It will then descend to ground level and arrive at the last station in Brooklyn Park which is 63rd Avenue Station. This design incorporates a pedestrian crossing with grade separation to facilitate access to the existing P&R at 63rd Avenue.

Mr. Perez asked whether the draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) studies would reflect the current environmental conditions. Mr. Soler explained that since the initial study for the draft SEIS began in 2016, numerous changes have occurred, and the study is now being conducted based on the current environmental conditions.

Mr. Soler presented the design alignment for Crystal, emphasizing the advantages and opportunities that were explored within the Crystal area. He explained that the light rail would maintain its center-running, at-grade configuration along Hwy 81, including a station at the intersection of Bass Lake Road and Hwy 81. Mr. Soler also summarized the community engagement activities in Crystal, emphasizing that numerous conversations revolved around subjects like traffic management, safety measures, and improving station accessibility.

Mr. Soler provided additional information about the proposed design at the Bass Lake Road option, explaining that it would involve a grade-separated interchange. This means that vehicular traffic on Hwy 81 will flow uninterrupted over Bass Lake Road without any stops. The light rail, on the other hand, will remain at-grade to ensure convenient access to the light rail station and provide a safe pedestrian crossing.



Mr. Soler also emphasized that the Bass Lake Road station would feature a see-through design to allow for natural light. Additionally, this station would include a parking lot with a capacity for 150 spaces, offering a Park to ride option.

Mayor Adams expressed that a few years ago, during the transition away from BNFS and the introduction of this new alignment, the topic of trust was paramount. He wanted to convey that in the current process, there is a need to rebuild that foundation of trust, as he believes that both the city and the project have not yet fully achieved it.

Mayor Adams wished to underscore that safety has consistently been marginalized, and it hasn't received the attention it deserves. Communities have raised concerns about safety related to the light rail, and requested a prompt response on how safety measures are being evaluated. Mayor Adams reported that there are currently no traffic issues, and he stressed the importance of maintaining this status with the proposed option.

Chair Zelle expressed gratitude to Mayor Adams for raising the issue of safety and suggested that it would be a topic that METRO Transit will include in future CMC briefings.

Mr. Soler continued to provide an overview of the alignment as it extended into Robbinsdale, highlighting similar benefits and opportunities that were explored within the Robbinsdale area. The community engagement efforts placed a significant emphasis on topics such as safety measures, potential impacts, noise concerns, station placement, and P&R facility.

Mr. Soler conveyed that the proposed plan is to maintain the light rail as center-running and at-grade throughout the route, extending all the way to Lowry Avenue North. In addition, there is a proposed station in downtown Robbinsdale. There was a study conducted regarding the possibility of a P&R facility at the current U.S. Bank lot, considering its size and the number of parking spaces required. After careful deliberation, the project is recommending a joint development site, primarily dedicated to parking but also featuring a bank branch and housing above the P&R.

Furthermore, an additional study is exploring the relocation of the current Transit station at Hubbard to the new P&R station area.

As we progress to the Lowry Avenue station, Mr. Soler explained that the project is actively exploring design solutions for a track alignment and station location that align with the requirements of project stakeholders. Given the elevated nature of this area, there is consideration for establishing a station at 29th Avenue North. Mr. Soler also noted that there will be a substantial amount of work involved in the environmental study moving forward.



President Forney posed a question regarding whether the project has explored the possibility of having a parking solution at the Lowry Ave Station area. Mr. Soler replied that there has been some consideration of this idea. North Memorial Hospital mentioned that they have surplus parking, which raised the question of how to separate this parking space from the hospital.

Council Member Gillian Rosenquist, City of Golden Valley requested that METRO carefully review the letter submitted by Golden Valley, emphasizing the city's strong desire for consideration of transit system improvements within Golden Valley.

Mr. Soler shifted the conversation to Minneapolis, underlining the advantages and opportunities present in the city. He then detailed the community engagement efforts in Minneapolis, highlighting the extensive discussions centered on issues like business and residential displacement impacts, as well as the importance of transparent communication.

Mr. Soler went on to provide a more detailed explanation of how the light rail will transition from West Broadway to James Avenue, then to 21st Avenue, and subsequently onto Washington Avenue North, before proceeding to 10th Avenue, Oak Lane, 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and ultimately arriving at Target Field.

Mr. Soler mentioned that parking remains a persistent concern in the vicinity of Penn Avenue area. However, he underscored that the Penn Avenue Station will provide vital transit connections to the METRO C-Line, servicing both the Capri Theater and NEON Food Incubator businesses.

Mr. Soler expanded on the details of the light rail route, highlighting its path along 21st Avenue. It's important to emphasize that this initiative encompasses more than just 21st Avenue; it's known as the West Broadway and 21st Avenue Connections project. This comprehensive plan includes a proposed station at James Avenue, designed to serve North Commons Park, the Davis Center, as well as local businesses and residents in the vicinity. Continuing along 21st Avenue, the plan involves another station at Lyndale Avenue. Additionally, part of this project's scope entails the reconstruction of West Broadway, which is expected to enhance the area, especially in conjunction with the implementation of the light rail system, benefiting the local communities.

After the light rail crosses Lyndale Avenue, Mr. Soler detailed the proposal to construct a bridge over Hwy I-94. This bridge is intended to facilitate the connection of the light rail train from the west side of I-94 to the Washington Ave side. Moreover, the bridge will offer access to cyclists and pedestrians, serving as an integrated Transit mall system. After crossing the bridge, the light rail will then proceed to turn onto Washington Avenue North, running in the center at grade with a station located at Plymouth Avenue. Following the Plymouth Station, the light rail will make another turn onto 10th Avenue. Mr. Soler mentioned that ongoing engagement and continued studies are



addressing concerns related to traffic management on 10th Avenue North between Washington Avenue and 4th Street North. Mr. Soler emphasized that if the project is unable to resolve these issues, there is an alternative option depicted on the map as a blue dotted line.

Mr. Soler presented two options under consideration for 10th Avenue. The first option is a Transit Mall accessible for light rail, cyclists, and pedestrians, while the second option involves one-way northbound traffic. Mr. Soler noted that both options come with their respective traffic impacts. Following 10th Avenue North, the light rail will proceed to make a turn onto 7th Street and continue to the Target Field station.

President Forney raised concerns about the omission of the 4F in the study and proposed an amendment to the resolution to include them.

CM Lee expressed enthusiasm for the project and encouraged engagement with communities and neighboring cities. Additionally, Brooklyn Park wishes to amend the Resolution to incorporate both the East and West connections.

Mayor Jacob Frey, City of Minneapolis expressed appreciation for the project's responsiveness. He acknowledged that there are lingering doubts and requested further study regarding the proposed alignment on 21st Avenue North and Washington Ave North, as it is relatively new. Mayor Frey emphasized the importance of increased engagement and feedback gathering, along with a need for specific promises and guarantees before municipal consent can be granted.

Additionally, Mayor Frey pointed out that the mention of the 29th Avenue North and Memorial Parkway station was new information to many. He stressed the importance of receiving more detailed information about the exploration of the 29th Ave North option and the area around Washington Avenue North near the I-94 crossing. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of finding ways to make the North Memorial stop at-grade.

Mayor Frey also emphasized the need to attentively listen to communities that wish to remain in their current locations both before, during, and after the project's construction. For those who may need to relocate due to displacement caused by the project, he stressed the importance of providing appropriate compensation.

Mayor Blonigan expressed that Robbinsdale as a community is generally supportive of the project, despite a vocal contingent of individuals who are opposed to it. Mayor Blonigan highlighted that the recent announcement regarding the potential replacement of North Memorial with 29th Avenue could be problematic for Robbinsdale. He emphasized that the city's preference is to have a flyover in the vicinity of the 40th Avenue Station, as it would offer improved connectivity for the city compared to the current situation.



**a. Resolution #2023-02**

Roll call voting was conducted, and draft Resolution #2023-02 was approved with requested amendments.

**~~8. Environmental Update & Next Steps~~**

**9. Next Meeting: October 12, 2023**

Chair Zelle conveyed that the CMC meeting scheduled for October 12 might be canceled.

**10. Adjourn**

Chair Zelle concluded the meeting and adjourned it at 3:33pm.