



METRO Blue Line Extension
Community Advisory Committee Meeting
March 22, 2021
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Meeting Summary

BAC Members: Alex Burns, J. Kevin Croston, Ian Alexander, Jimmy Loyd, Kenya McKnight-Ahad, Mike Steinhauser, Ryan Borne, Felicia Perry

CAC Members: Kathy Fraser, Cory Funk, Craig Gottschalk, Jason Greenberg, Gene Montanez, Scott Booher, Felipe Sosa, Cathy Spann, PeggySue Imihy, Catherine Fleming, Ken Rodgers, Adam Hutchens, John Wolhaupter, Ellis Beck, Brett Buckner

Agency Staff and Guests: Sophia Ginis, Jason Tintes, Jesse Struve, Jim Voll, Joan Vanhala, Kristine Stehly, Kyle Mianulli, Nick Landwer, Trevor Roy, Sam O’Connell, Andrew G Gillett, Nick Landwer, Daniel Soler, Kerri Pearce Ruch, Liz Morice, Cathy Gold, John Sutter

1. Welcome and Introductions

Sophia Ginis, Metropolitan Council, began the meeting at 6:05 PM and went through the group members list. Sam O’Connell, Metropolitan Council, welcomed and thanked the group for attending. She said they would be listening tonight and acknowledged recent events that make this a difficult time.

2. Timeline for Adopting A Community Supported Route

Sophia Ginis shared a high-level review of the approach to determining the route and the timeline. She reviewed the tiers of evaluation that can be anticipated in the coming months. There is first the initial screening, then route evaluation, and the recommended route. With the goal of is to adopt a community supported alignment by the end of 2021. After 2021 project details will continue to be advanced.

3. Potential Route Options

Nick Landwer, Metropolitan Council, shared background information on the initial route evaluation. He reviewed some considerations for each area of the corridor. Area 1 includes the north portion of the route where the old alignment and stations can be preserved. On the north end of this is an operations and maintenance facility. Area 2 is the middle of the corridor. There are several geographic barriers that influence the route here. The goal is also to serve the major destinations

previously served here by the former route. Additionally, North Memorial campus can be served by the new route. The route here would be ideally center running and at grade, for accessibility reasons. As the route moves towards Minneapolis, it begins to get further from the old route. The goal here will be to minimize impacts and serve the community. Area 3 is the area of the route that is in Minneapolis. This area has more options for consideration. This is where Project Principles are used extensively to assure effective route options. The routes were determined with a number of factors. Public right of way and zoning helped inform these options. There are two main routes for consideration here, West Broadway and Lowry. There are various links that connect the two routes to the Target Field Station.

A few participants shared questions in the chat. Alex Burns asked, would these route options be at grade? Felipe Sosa asked how these options affect current bus routes into downtown. Would bus routes change to get to potential train stop locations? Nick said that service planning will be an important part of this, and they have not yet gotten to that level of detail but will. Felicia Perry asked, what metrics or determinants are Met Council engineers using to determine what type of structures to use for alignments? (i.e., bridge, at grade, etc.) Nick said that several things going into consideration including how pedestrians access the stations.

Cathy Fleming asked what are the options for the Red route? Nick said that these links do overlap. The Red Link might follow the pink route to Target Field. These are a few options, and there could be a combination of these routes. Nick said that Lyndale between West Broadway and Lowry is narrow, and there would be significant impacts to homes in this area if light rail were implemented in that section. Felicia Perry asked how was the BSNF alignment a better option (considering the reasoning for not recommending Olson to Highway 100 now). Nick highlighted that Olson Memorial Highway to Highway 100 would be a longer route and it would change travel times. It also does not serve as many riders or destinations. Nick said that the old alignment did go up Olson Memorial and served north through there. Felicia Perry asked where North Minneapolis would have been served along that railroad. Nick talked about the Plymouth and Golden Valley Stations and how this was an opportunity to serve more North Minneapolis residents.

4. Committee Discussion and Feedback

Sophia Ginis shared some of the next steps with the alignment including ways to have more community engaged. She also shared content that will be available on BlueLineExt.Org. There are multiple ways to share feedback online and they hope to have more input. There are some upcoming virtual townhalls March 25th and March 30th.

Jason Greenberg facilitated a discussion. PeggySue Imihy asked a few questions about the Lowry Route. She asked why Washington Avenue was selected. Nick Landwer shared that Washington Avenue had the Right of Way and although it is industrial, it offers more opportunity than 94. PeggySue shared that Upper Harbor Terminal is a huge opportunity, and they have a lot of parking currently planned there. Dan Soler also mentioned that 94 could have BRT additionally. Scott Booher

said that he is looking forward to the next few months and the work. How does the project team do that analysis for community supported routes? Does the project team have a framework? Sophia Ginis said that the next conversation on April 12, there will be more discussion about anti-displacement. There will be discussions following this about how to review community benefits and evaluation. There is not an exact forecast, but the project team will be bringing forward more exact engineering proposals. There will also be a review of the criteria for the project. Sam O'Connell said that after April there will be more information and more feedback to process for this evaluation. Sophia Ginis said this year will have the biggest decision broadly, and there will be more granular decisions going forward. Jason Greenberg asked if there will be more information about how to do engagement. Sophia said it is an ongoing process with three major stages, including the route release, draft report, and final route report. Jason Greenberg summed up that the individuals should reach out to the project team to help facilitate public meetings. Dan Soler also mentioned that this is in part the work of the Community Cohort.

Mike Steinhauser said that the biggest impact for businesses will be road closure and how will they be displaced and who will put back. Dan Soler asked which phase he was looking at. Mike Steinhauser said he is asking about construction and the final phase. Dan Soler said that some of the details of closures will not be known yet. It is very important to know what the concerns are and how to address initial concerns. Mike said he was most concerned about permanent road closures but will be waiting for the next phase for information on this. Alex Burns asked if a subway was considered. Gene Montanez answered Alex Burns' question. There is a lot underneath the road, and it is not as easy as pulling back the surface. Nick Landwer confirmed that there is a lot of infrastructure at varying levels. Nick said they are considering a lot of options now. Nothing is off the table and they do not want to price out the project either so structure would need to be evaluated. Nick shared that for accessibility at grade is preferable. Center running is easier for traffic management. Felicia Perry said that the community needed to be engaged as part of this before options are not pursued. Nick Landwer said that is a good point. Sophia shared that what Metro Transit means about preferred options is to have physically accessible options for people with mobility concerns and what is easiest for the system to maintain. Alex Burns said that it would be good to have the information about how things are priced and what the cost is. Janson Greenberg said that it would be good to have more information for the committee to consider. Gene Montanez said that he understands why having a straight light works. Gene Montanez asked if this will be beneficial to business growth. Nick Landwer said that that this is supposed to be compatible with community and business growth and that is the point. Nick Landwer said that to say it will be the same is not true. There will be impacts that need to be mitigated and issues will need to be addressed.

Adam Hutchens asked if this would not be a divider in the community given traffic concerns and the way it runs through the community. Nick Landwer said a more comparable example would be Central Corridor (Green Line). There are things design-wise such as mid-block crossings, and improved pedestrian infrastructure. Traffic-wise it might be similar as well. Dan Soler said that they learn all the time how to make improvements to traffic. When Central Corridor was developed, it

was first suggested that it have a fence down the corridor. They ended up changing it to bollard and chains. It's a good question of whether it divides the neighborhood. Kenya McKnight-Ahad said she is interested in learning about the business opportunities and is excited about the opportunity. They have endured a lot already in North, and she talked about messaging. She wondered how the opportunities would be evaluated and shared with the community. Kenya said that there are a lot of people who need transit in the corridor. Dan Soler said that some of these things will be reviewed when there is station area planning. Kenya said that she is excited for the opportunities and she does not want the narrative to be all about fear. Sam O'Connell said that part of the work that needs to be done and shared is to bring best practices and case studies that are relevant from around the country and the two light rail lines that are already done (Green and Blue Line).

Ryan Borne said that the County Road 81 changes to be at some point to very fast traffic speeds. He wonders how the connection to the stations will be made. Crossing at high speed versus where it is more south will be different. Dan Soler said that these are all considerations, and it will change based on the area. Ryan also asked a question about budget. Dan Soler said that originally the budget that was estimated was 1.5 billion for light rail. The budget will change for this new route. It is too early to say how much this will cost and what the budget is. The project still needs to be evaluated for benefits versus cost. Is the project going to create enough benefits to offset the costs? Then they will find the money. Sophia shared that they will also dive more into traffic calming. Ellis Beck said that he talked to be people about sharing input on the website and on the project, and he said they want to see what it will be like. Is there a design or examples that could be shown? Is there an expectation of improvements and adaptations that they can expect? Sophia Ginis said that it will be about looking at how the project fits in each area. There is curb to curb redesign and Metro Transit wants riding to feel stations are accessible and nicely situated. Dan Soler said that light rail cannot be designed without considering the whole area.

Catherine Fleming said she is moving to the Warehouse District. She is wondering who is going to represent the people who live on Washington Avenue. Sophia Ginis said that they will reach out to those businesses and impacted areas. Dan Soler said they have not spoken to the people in the North Loop other than the city council person. PeggySue Imihy asked if there is a favorite route or why there are two routes here, and if one route is just for the FTA process. Nick Landwer said that this gets down to right of way space and there really aren't many great options. Nick said they would like to have more options, and that is part of why they are asking community for more input. Sophia said that they are not bringing them forward just to have two options. PeggySue said it doesn't feel like there are more options available; it feels like this is it. Sam O'Connell said that is exactly the feedback they need. This needs to be communicated more effectively. It also sounds like the environmental process should be shared more clearly. She said she appreciates the feedback from Catherine about people to talk to.

Gene Montanez asked if it is too soon to understand where the station will be in Robbinsdale. Dan Soler said that it is not too soon. They understand that there should be a station near North Memorial hospital and there should be one serving downtown Robbinsdale. Gene said that it is very

narrow. Dan Soler said they are looking at a variety of ways it could fit in the right of way so it will minimize impact.

5. Adjourn

Jason Greenberg asked if there were more questions from the group. He offered to adjourn the meeting at 8:02. After the meeting staff stayed on to be available for more questions. Jason asked if there are more resources for social media. Sophia Ginis said that she can support social media. Twitter, Facebook, and Next Door all have different features and they are sharing information differently on these. Kenya asked if they are using the newer platforms. Sam O’Connell shared that the Community Cohorts are using their existing networks to help on this front because government is slow to adapt to new platforms and develop the networks needed, and the community groups are nimbler.

Next Meeting

BAC: Tuesday, April 6, 2021 (8:00 – 9:30 AM)

CAC: Wednesday, April 7, 2021 (6:00 – 8:00 PM)