



**METRO Blue Line Extension**  
**Meeting of the Community Advisory Committee**  
**Wednesday, November 1, 2023**  
**6:00 PM – 8:00 PM**  
Microsoft Teams Meeting

**CAC Members:** Ellis Beck, Brett Buckner, John Chambers Dunn, Kathy Fraser, Jason Greenberg, Jeff Guertin, Jonathan Hansen, Ryan Johnson, Mary Limbeck, Audua Pugh, Kenneth Rodgers

**Agency Staff and Guests:** Chris Beckwith, Nkongo Cigolo, Neha Damle, Cathy Gold, Joleen Ketterling, Nick Landwer, Ixchel McKinnie of Elevate Hennepin, Kyle Mianulli, Bojan Mistic, Kerri Pearce Ruch, Menno Schukking, Koehl Simmons, Joan Vanhala, Kjerstin Yager

### **Meeting Summary**

#### **1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions**

John Chambers Dunn, began the meeting at 6:03 p.m. Nkongo Cigolo took attendance.

#### **2. Adopt Meeting Minutes**

John Chambers Dunn made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from last month's meeting, Brett Buckner seconded the motion, the motion was approved.

#### **3. Project Update**

Chris Beckwith reviewed high-level project timelines for the METRO Blue Line Extension project (BLRT). The Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is being prepared now and will be published next year. The Municipal Consent process will be complete next summer. An outcome of the Municipal Consent will be the final alignment. Design and construction will happen after that and the BLRT opening is still planned for 2030. A resolution was passed in September that acknowledged the route we are moving forward with. This is out for public comment before a final decision is made.

There are Anti-Displacement Policy Recommendations to develop, review, and finalize an implementation framework. The first draft of the SEIS is being reviewed by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). There will be 2 more reviews by the FTA of the SEIS. The Minneapolis Park Board is interested in including Supplemental Section 4(f) because it runs concurrently with the SEIS and will be published with the SEIS. Section 4(f) pertains to park and recreation lands, wildlife/waterfowl refuges and historic sites.

Chris provided an overview of the FTA Project Rating. The Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program is the largest discretionary grant program to fund transit capital investments. She stated the project is a New Starts project (greater than \$400 million). Nationally, there are 65 projects in the CIG program right now. Minnesota is one of the states with multiple projects. Of the 65 projects, 42 are Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and 7 are light rail. Minnesota has 2 CIG projects under construction grants currently, a light rail and a BRT project.



Chris reviewed the FTA's New Starts Process and the BLRT is currently in the Engineering Phase (phase 5) which is about midway through the process. Engineering will take a couple of years and then we will be requesting a full grant agreement. The FTA rates a project annually every August. We were not ready this August to request a rating. We will request a rating later in the process. The rating is important because it confirms we are eligible to be in the grant program. The rating criteria are divided into two categories: Project Justification and Local Financial Commitment. Projects must achieve a "Medium" or higher rating to proceed. Kenneth Rodgers asked if a designation could be made with the rating chart as there is no accessible way to review colors. Chris thanked Ken for his feedback and responded that the colors equate to a 5-point scale. When we begin to color in the graphic, we will add numbers along with the color.

Chris explained the model the team is required to use to do a project rating, the FTA Ridership Forecasting Model (STOPS model). This model is intended to level the playing field for all grantees applying for FTA funds. This model relies on local data. When we converted to FTA's STOPS model from our original Regional Travel Demand Model, it resulted in a 30% lower ridership projection. The FTA's STOPS model is deliberately conservative, as they do not want to overestimate ridership and underdeliver.

Jason Greenberg asked a question as to whether the new model itself, predicting a more conservative number, will be based on post-COVID numbers and what we use to submit for federal funding. Chris Beckwith responded that the ridership is going to be lower based on post-COVID data and the new STOPS model. The 2017 route alignment was pre-COVID and used a different model. Jason followed by asking if this is being submitted for federal funding and will be compared to other similar projects and where their ridership is as well. Chris responded yes, that is correct. The FTA knows that everyone is in the same scenario, and they are taking a look at their criteria. There may be some changes as early as next year. We will be watching for that.

Jonathan Hansen asked if the 2017 regional travel model will also be tabulated. Chris Beckwith said we do not use that model anymore. We converted over to STOPS fully and it takes a full month to do that. Jonathan stated that traffic patterns are showing rush hour is not as significant in the morning but in the evening, traffic is back, he then asked if the team thinks that will influence more people to use transit in the evening. Chris replied that this was a good question and there are a lot of new patterns. Peak travel times have shifted. Not sure how it will impact transit. We have seen some choices to maybe not have a second car and there are more midday trips. We have not come out on the other side of what our new traffic patterns will be. We are designing the Blue Line for the future.

#### **4. Anti-Displacement Update**

Cathy Gold provided a Corridor Partner Collaboration meeting overview. They are working to finalize a collective legislative strategy to advance recommended outcomes toward implementation. They are concentrating on funding and resources, land use, commercial and business development, culture and community, housing, and workforce development. The CMC had provided a resolution that asked for us to develop a framework. To initiate this work, we identified goals, objectives, and action steps to achieve recommended outcomes. Three initial topics were identified to build the framework around relocation and right of way, community ownership, and workforce. A DBE/Workforce Mixer was held on October 31 (second event). Our first event was facilitated to update our key stakeholders and corridor partners about the Blue Line Extension and timeline. We have been working from June until now to put the Best Minds document together for how we will advance this work. In the mixer yesterday, we received valuable feedback on DBE



certification training, engaging small businesses, wage compensation for contractors and childcare reimbursements. We plan to enhance these areas and do what we can to make sure people have what they need to be successful. We also brainstormed topics for future mixers to include retention in the workforce, MnDOT recruitment, support network for BIPOC-owned DBEs, and generating community interest.

Jason Greenberg asked a question about obtaining additional federal funding, “Are there ways to say this project costs x amount of dollars based on the trains, tracks, and construction and we also want to account for making sure we can pay for these programs?”. Cathy Gold indicated there are a lot of opportunities for receiving grants, including one opportunity for city partners to gain funding at the end of November. There is great interest in the federal area regarding this project and advancing equity. We are looking at all opportunities. Conversations are happening and they are watching what we are doing. We have a good chance to attain additional funding.

Kenneth Rodgers stated in anti-displacement dialogues when doing the Green Line, some of the anti-displacement funding was given to businesses that might have had a barrier to the entrance of their business and it was integrated into the construction costs to remove the barriers in the construction zone. Any discussions on this yet? Cathy indicated this is not a specific item that has been voiced by this workgroup. There will be similar funding opportunities outside of the project that we will work toward and join in with philanthropic nonprofits to help with this.

Brett Buckner asked who is on the current Corridor Partner Collaboration committee. Cathy stated we are working with local government representatives. In addition, we have brought in intergovernmental relations staff to get the right language together and coordinate the work.

## **5. Elevate Hennepin Overview**

Ixchel McKinnie from the Community Economic Group attended this meeting to talk about Elevate Hennepin. The goals of Elevate Hennepin include making Hennepin County one of the best places in the nation to start and scale ventures that build shared wealth and prosperity. This group was born out of challenges the businesses were faced with during COVID. Elevate Hennepin provides needed resources to businesses so they can adapt to the changes in the marketplace. Elevate Hennepin has been reaching out to businesses in the corridor to share what they can offer and specifically to help them navigate the change. Specific outreach activities have included door knocking, hosting webinars and in person events, and attending community events such as this to help businesses become aware of what we have to offer.

Elevate Hennepin created a centralized HUB representing multiple agencies with content that is valuable for businesses to scale and grow. There are professional business resources available to all Hennepin County businesses such as 1:1 business advisory services, peer learning, and content connection. If a business is struggling to find what resources are available, a navigator is available who will provide a 15-minute consult and guide them to where the resources are. Elevate Hennepin will work with businesses during any stage whether it be emerging, early stage or established.

Ixchel provided more detail regarding professional advisors who provide 1:1 consulting and the services they provide such as business planning, legal, marketing, financial, human resources, and technology. There is no cost to the businesses (offer up to 25 hours per advisor).



The Advisor Network consists of 39 business advisors who provide learning opportunities, consulting services and 1:1 business advising to support local businesses.

Workshops and peer learning opportunities include CEO Growth Series, Elevate Tech Essentials, and specialized support. The CEO Growth Series helps businesses develop strategic plans and take their business to the next level. Elevate Tech Essentials is a service that helps incorporate technology into a business. Specialized support includes 1:1 consulting in specialized services such as construction industry experts. They also have a Certified Access Academy so Women of Color can participate in contracts with the government and corporate entities.

Jonathan Hansen asked if there has been thought to expanding the amount of time for small businesses, especially along West Broadway and 21st during this project. Ixchel responded there are 25 hours per advisor and the potential to extend another 25 hours which is quite robust.

## **6. Engagement Update**

Nkongo played a project video on the Blue Line Extension describing a summary of the project and who it will serve. Project partners are working with cities and philanthropy to help prevent displacement. New electric trains will improve the health of our environment. The goal is to create safer and more welcoming places for people to be and move. This project will generate thousands of jobs and bring many new improvements. Nkongo indicated they are collecting feedback on this video.

Jonathan Hansen felt the video encapsulated a good summary of the BLT. Kathy wants to know if it is available in other languages as well. Nkongo said the video was just recently completed and we can make it available in other languages.

Nkongo reviewed recent engagement activities that the BLRT team facilitated where there was discussion regarding ways we can start planning ahead. Multiple one-on-one meetings with various businesses have been completed. We also had a few large-scale community meetings. Community members have voiced concerns about the project such as traffic, accessing the area, noise, vibration, safety, parking, property value and taxes. Some individuals have also voiced their concerns regarding the alignment. On Oct 30<sup>th</sup> we had a community meeting hosted by council member Ellison that was well attended. At this meeting we heard concerns regarding parking along the corridor and people were up front with us regarding how they will prepare for the project. We are continuing to engage with various community members so we can complete the environmental process and build the alignment.

Nkongo reviewed various ways to provide input or feedback. He stated the interactive map is online and you can go to a specific area along the corridor and provide input. The other method is to scan the QR code and complete a survey. We want to continue to collect input and provide information to the engineering and environmental team.

Throughout the month of October, we have been doing business canvassing, and that survey was also sent through our newsletter. With this information we are looking at impacts and how we could work with the businesses to ensure their locations continue to be accessible during construction. 104 surveys have been completed. In addition to voicing concerns, some of the business feedback included opportunities they see



such as a reliable means of transportation, redevelopment of the area, reduced traffic, improved accessibility, and new client base.

The upcoming engagement activities were mentioned including the quarterly community meeting in Minneapolis next week. On Nov 14<sup>th</sup>, there is a virtual meeting opportunity for individuals who have not been able to attend in person. Elevate Hennepin is hosting two workshops as well.

Nkongo reviewed information regarding the Cultivate Arts Program. This program has come back to life and 10 artists have been selected to attend events August through December of 2023. We are continuing to add more events as we figure out where these artists would like to be. Goals are to continue to inform the community about the BLRT project, provide different ways to engage community members and build local artist capacity in arts engagement, public planning and creative economy. Nkongo presented photos of events recently held and reviewed upcoming Cultivate Events.

Jason Greenberg noted that all cities were represented except Robbinsdale. He asked if there is an opportunity to get Robbinsdale connected to the Cultivate Arts program. Nkongo replied that we have hosted previous Cultivate Arts events in Robbinsdale and are trying to host another event in Robbinsdale and currently figuring it out with the artists. Nkongo will share this feedback with the Engagement Team.

## **7. Environmental Update and Next Steps:**

Neha Damle provided an update on the environmental justice analysis. She stated that the census data we get is good, but we also need to get more granular information to identify project impacts and benefits to EJ communities. The Blue Line Coalition is providing us with great input. Neha asked everyone to help identify the locations so they can get input directly about the concerns the EJ communities have. A link was posted in chat to the survey map. For example, looking at seniors, individuals with disabilities, those with English as their second language and people who are completely transit dependent. We will study this information and look at how the project will benefit and impact them from their perspective.

Neha reviewed next steps: the anti-displacement engagement plan is ongoing; SDEIS will be published early spring 2024; SFEIS will be prepared by summer/fall 2024; municipal consent summer of 2024, and ongoing engagement. The next CAC meeting is planned for December 6.

## **8. Discussion and Members' Feedback**

John Chambers Dunn asked for final feedback or anything anyone would like to share.

Brett Buckner asked with the route adjustment has there been discussion about a potential stop along Washington that would open opportunities near the river. Chris Beckwith responded that we are looking at a couple of locations in Minneapolis for stations; one on Washington. We will be meeting with the City. They are letting us know some of their long-term plans for redevelopment in that area. We need to model what the travel time and ridership would look like with an additional station.

Jason Greenberg mentioned there was a meeting with the North Loop Community and asked what feedback we were hearing regarding the alignment. Chris stated we presented at a recent meeting in the North Loop. We used to have a line that was pink in color on the map and some individuals showed up with pink hats that



said pink line on them (those in support of us going in that other route). There are individuals who want us on the former pink line and an equal number who live in the North Loop who want the other option. We are evaluating both options.

Jonathan Hansen indicated that he has seen pro Blue Line Extension signs pop up in Robbinsdale. He stated this was good to see. Also, he attended the CMC meeting in September; it was interesting and one thing that came up was a request for an additional stop by the parkway (North Memorial) and an additional stop at Washington. Is there the potential for being able to skip stops at times or does it stop at every stop each time through? One of the big talking points against the Blue Line is that from one end to the other it is going to take an hour. Chris responded that this is the second time she has received this question in the past couple of weeks. She is going to do some research on this. Nick responded that operationally it becomes very hard for us because if you skip a stop, we could potentially start catching up with the next train as we run on 10-minute headways. We are doing an evaluation re: travel times, acceleration, deceleration, how many intersections, times at stations, etc. Chris indicated very few trips take the Blue Line end-to-end, most stops are in between. This is the type of service we would be delivering. Jonathan stated the north side is one of the heaviest users of transit; and to go from there to downtown, it is obviously a bit shorter. Nick stated we have a lot of different pieces to our light rail system, and they are all intended to work together.

Neha reminded everyone to remember why we are building the light rail and there will be trade-offs. We are not building it to be the fastest train in the world; but we are doing more things to incorporate more factors and needs. John agreed and said it is not about the trains, it is about the people.

#### 9. Next Meeting: December 6, 2023.

John Chambers Dunn indicated the next meeting would be December 6, 2023.

#### 10. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

#### Meeting Chat:

Kathy – great video! Is it also available in other languages?

