



# METRO Blue Line Extension Corridor Management Committee Minutes of the October 8, 2020 Meeting

## **Virtual Meeting**

**Present:** Jim Adams, Mike Barnes, Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, Irene Fernando, Jacob Frey, Jeffrey Lunde, Regan Murphy, Denise Butler, Nichole Buehler, Chris Meyer, Charlie Zelle, Catherine Fleming, George Selman, Mike Opat, Reva Chamblis, Robert Lilligren, Jan Callison, Gillian Rosenquist, Tim Walz, Matthew Rentsch

**Special Guest:** Tim Walz

**Not in Attendance:** Joanie Clausen, Mike Elliott, Wes Kooistra

## **Meeting Minutes**

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

Metropolitan Council Chair Zelle convened the meeting at 1:33 PM. Chair Zelle welcomed the committee members and alternates. Chair Zelle reviewed best practices for the video calls. He shared that public comments can be sent to Sophia Ginis before October 16. Members introduced themselves by organization. Chair Zelle introduced Governor Walz.

### **2. Governor Walz**

Minnesota Governor Walz thanked everyone on the call and everyone who is a part of this virtual table. He recognized the years of work and thanked the members for their work. Governor Walz shared he believes in the Blue Line Extension. He shared he believed in the benefits to communities being served by the lines. That the Blue Line Extension will support an equitable future and the full administration is in full support. That its equitable, economic development, affordable housing, sustainable transportation and will make a huge difference. That the corridor community mayors have demonstrated incredible leadership throughout this. The state of Minnesota will not turn away from the investments that they have made and will shape the future. The position of Burlington Northern will not change. It's time to make the alignment that can go forward and it's time to create our own futures. The project team has done everything they could with the negotiations and worked nobly. Now it is time to move forward. This is a project worthy of a long-term investment. The state sees itself as partners in this.

Commissioner Zelle welcomed comments from the committee.

Hennepin County Commissioner Fernando thanked Chair Zelle and Governor Walz. She shared that she echoed the words of Walz and Zelle. This line, our communities and their future possibilities will be transformed through this project. She shared the urgency and persistence that people have been



working decades towards. The demonstrated unity has been incredible. She shared she is excited about the partnership with all layers of government. With equity at the center of this, the Blue line Extension will move the corridor forward and connect many people, students, to work, to healthcare. She appreciates Walz's presence and the partnership to continue success moving forward.

Minneapolis Mayor Frey emphasized the support of Minneapolis for the BLRT extension project and believes it's time to move forward. Minneapolis is interested in some of the opportunities that could arise from reevaluating alignment options, especially in North Minneapolis. He said this could benefit constituencies in North Minneapolis, who rely on transit, which many of the residents do. He shared that the number one bus line in the state (Route 5) runs through North Minneapolis. Mayor Frey said we have reached a point where there will be no negotiations with BNSF, so we owe this to our constituents to move forward and work to get this done. We should embrace this opportunity to engage the public. We recognize the work that has gone into this by so many communities and stakeholders. Mayor Frey said if we work in collaboration, we can get it done.

Brooklyn Park Mayor Lunde would like to thank everyone for their support of this line. He said many of us have worked on this project for many years. He said, sometimes we have been working so long on the what and where, we forget the why and the who. There are so many people who will benefit from access to affordable transportation along this line. That there is an opportunity for Brooklyn Park to be more globally competitive. Brooklyn Park has worked with DEED, the Mayo Clinic, the U of Mn—to bring in companies like Decatur Pharmaceutical, Tesla and Amazon. We know that to be competitive globally we need a transit system that represents what businesses want to invest in. Brooklyn Park is not wavering in support, but ready to roll up sleeves and get to work because we know who is benefiting from this.

Governor Walz reiterated that we will do this together. This is the right thing to do for so many reasons. Chair Zelle thanked everyone and moved to the next section.

### **3. Approval of August 13, 2020 BLRT CMC Meeting Summary**

Chair Zelle asked for edits or other comments that the group may have on the meeting minutes. Chair Zelle asked for a motion to approve the minutes.

Councilmember Selman moved to approve the minutes. Councilmember Atlas-Ingebretson seconded this. The meeting minutes were approved.

### **4. Committee Reports/Updates**

#### **Chair's Update (Chair Zelle)**

Transit has been hit hard by the pandemic. Metro Transit reduced service over the summer and is thinking about the future. They spent time in the community near our core routes to understand how transportation and people's lives are impacted during this time. This outreach



was done through surveys, virtual and socially-distant meeting—over 1,800 people in total—41% was with black, indigenous or people of color.

They learned they need to be flexible and agile about how they engage. There is so much stress out there. The businesses and organizations have a lot in their lives right now. The project team needs to be smart about outreach. They need to operate with an even higher level of empathy right now. If they do, they can engage thoughtfully without creating additional burden.

### **CAC/BAC Joint Meeting Report (CAC/BAC Co-Chairs)**

CAC co-chair Catherine Fleming and BAC co-chair Matthew Rentsch shared the report from their last meeting. Mr. Rentsch shared that the BAC and CAC had a joint virtual meeting September 14. A number of viewpoints, opinions and the full range of emotions were shared. All were disappointed about the extended timeline of this project and the feeling about the absence of communication throughout the last year. Members agreed the need for review of the BAC and CAC charters and schedule regular meetings with full attendance by all communities represented. Particular disappointment was shared by members who made significant time investments into the original alignment.

Long time members shared a history on the decisions made in the past in the original review of the past alignment. Other members said that the planning that occurred on this project happened over a decade and may not be as applicable today. They shared priorities for:

- continuing support of the communities along the line
- engaging stakeholders in a meaningful way
- proceeding cautiously knowing the impacts of a new line
- mindful of other obstacles that may cause setbacks
- keeping an open mind on alignment
- optimism was expressed regarding the potential a new line could offer in terms of economic development to underserved areas

These members are ready to start engagement and the process, but it was stressed that regular communication is critical to the success of the process moving forward.

Catherine Fleming shared that Harrison had specific concerns that if the alignment was going to move they would like to have the harm recognized to be aware of what has happened already and to make neighborhoods whole again if there has been harm done to them and there is a change of the alignment.

Councilmember Atlas-Ingebretson asked what the impacts have been to Harrison. Catherine Fleming referred to Nichole Buehler, representative of the Blue Line Coalition, for this information. Ms. Buehler shared that gentrification and displacement do not occur just when a line is constructed. As soon as the line was announced it increased land values, property taxes and rent, which have already impacted residents. The up-zoning has also already happened; for example, at the Van White Station up-zoning was approved and that has impacted development to support transit-oriented development. Ten units of naturally occurring affordable housing



were destroyed in a recent development and those residents were displaced. The harm has occurred, and the neighborhood may not be seeing the benefits and job opportunities within the neighborhood and outside of the neighborhood as now the alignment has changed. The investment of affordable housing, retail—particularly a grocery store and promises made about safety improvements to Olson memorial highway that have existed since 1937 when it was constructed and ripped apart the near north neighborhood. Before the team looks at alternative routes, some of these things need to be recognized and remediated in Harrison and the near north.

### **Engagement Contract Report**

Joan Vanhala, Hennepin County Engagement Specialist, said that it is very clear that engagement will be essential to the success in the Blue Line Extension. Hennepin County has had a long history of engagement and working with and contracting cultural and community groups to engage their community members, in recognition of their expertise, networks and ability to connect. The team is continuing that effort moving forward. Sophia Ginis and Joan Vanhala will be working together as a team. Ms. Vanhala shared that they are here to connect residents to the people who have answers and information that community members need. They will have an engagement team that will include metro transit and Hennepin county. The first phase is to create a 2021 engagement framework. The Alliance and Juxtaposition Arts will be contracted, and they have extensive transit outreach experience. The team will be updating the community contact list and holding one on ones with stakeholders. They will be hosting 2-3 engagement sessions and an online survey to learn about what the issues and opportunities to inform the engagement framework and what to do moving forward.

Catherine Fleming shared that she has reservations about online surveys. She does not believe they are effective for the neighborhood. She shared that in the past they've done door-knocking and realizes Covid changes this but would like to know what else will be done. Joan shared that she is open to recommendations for in-person Covid safe engagement. Hennepin county has an engagement van. The engagement contracts begin October 20<sup>th</sup>, so the timeline is compressed. Joan is committed to an iterative process where they move forward and learn at the same time. Catherine, Joan and Sophia will talk more offline.

## **5. Committee Information and Discussion**

### **Alignment and Engagement Principles**

Dan Soler has worked with the METRO Blue Line Extension project since 2013 and spent a great deal of time trying to advance this project. He was happy to hear the governor share support and recognize the work completed. While past efforts have not come to fruition, he feels a sense of hope and felt and understands the need to build this corridor. He shared that as they move to the next decision, they need to work to create a list of principles for their shared vision.

Dan Soler shared the draft principles and some additional thoughts:



- Keep this project as a federally competitive project and that is no easy task- maintaining ridership, purpose & need, and needs to maintain the existing alignment as much as possible.
- The mediation measures enacted so far will need to be done again if the alignment is moved. They will review existing transit service which is different than it was initially (METRO C& D lines for example)
- There is a strong desire to minimize residential impacts
- There has been a lot of community engagement in the last 10 years. The project team wants to build upon this work and recognize that past while including all communities. Engagement is not a one size fits all. Our engagement has to be tailored to who and where they are working.

Dan recognized comments received from members and asked for more feedback and thoughts from the group.

George Selman shared that Robbinsdale attached a draft to their resolution that proposes changes and support for the existing alignment. This includes continuing conversations with Burlington Northern for the current alignment. The City of Robbinsdale also supports alignment through the existing cities. Where it said minimize residential impacts in the principles, they also shared they would like to minimize retail and criminal impacts. Minimize engagement surrounding previously considered and rejected routes and minimize engagement around routes that are not viable. They also included tailor engagement to existing communities along the corridor.

Chair Zelle shared that the comments are helpful and will be taken under full consideration. They will be incorporated, and the set of principles will be revised based on these thoughts.

Golden Valley Councilmember Rosenquist shared that the City of Golden Valley will have a meeting and conversation about their position in January. They see that deviating from the rail line may mean deviating from Golden Valley all together.

Dan Soler shared that these principles are a working document that gives the project a guide. These principles will help mold the project and these principles will be reworked based on the comments and they will be reflected in a revised document that will be shared with the group. He shared that community engagement is the next step and more feedback will be gathered from the public. Sam O'Connell and Dan Soler are available to talk with cities as needed.

#### **Advisory Committees: Roles and Responsibilities**

Sam O'Connell reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the advisory committees. She reviewed the structure of how input is shared and works to support decision making. She reviewed the structures of all the groups and the order of input and feedback they provide. She reviewed the makeup of the committees and the cities and organizations involved. The State of Minnesota mandated the creation of the CMC and which phases they needed to be active for. She shared examples of how issues had been reviewed, feedback was incorporated and



communicated out throughout the corridor in the past. She shared examples of the different committees and their members. BAC and CAC members served a two-year term and provided valuable input from their communities and reported back on the work that the project team was doing. Other capacity building efforts included the Corridors of Opportunity Engagement Grantees.

### **Advisory Committee Reappointment Process**

Sam O’Connell shared that there is an opportunity to reevaluate this model. The team is looking for thoughts and comments about the structure. The METRO Blue Line Extension team is also sharing reappointment letters in the November and December like other years and will reconvene again in January or February. Chair Zelle welcomed comments in the meeting.

Commissioner Fernando shared that she appreciated that cities had shared input about the principles in between the meetings and thanked everyone for their ongoing input. There is an opportunity to revisit things that might not quite fit, but the urgency is still there. The need in the corridor has only grown and only grown more complex. There is an opportunity to support equity and now is the time to right historic disinvestments, but its also important to maintain urgency.

Councilmember Rosenquist shared she appreciates the need to build on past engagement, her community really turned out for past efforts. She wanted to make sure that as they look at the alignment that they need to connect with the underserved communities identified in the first process (Courage Kenny for example) to opportunities and facilities they do not currently have (connection to trailheads for example). She emphasized that the project needed to make sure these communities and stakeholders will not be cut out of good transit options if rail is not an option any longer.

Chair Zelle emphasized that transit is about a network of options. He thanked the committee for their passion and commitment. He reiterated next steps: engagement, ongoing meetings, and reappointments. He reviewed how to engage with the project between meetings and shared project contact info. The next meeting is Thursday, December 10<sup>th</sup>.

## **6. Adjournment**

Chair Zelle adjourned the meeting at 2:50.

**Next Meeting: Thursday, December 10, 1:30 – 3:00PM**  
**VIRTUAL**