



METRO Blue Line Extension

Meeting of the Business Advisory Committee

Tuesday, December 5, 2023

8:00 AM – 9:30 AM

Blue Line Project Office

6465 Wayzata Boulevard, Suite 600

St. Louis Park, MN 55426

BAC Members: Terry Austin, KB Brown, Dan Doerrer, Rita Endres, Chris Webley, Jamar Smith, Ian Alexander, John Barobs, Dr. Tara Watson, Donna Sanders

Agency Staff and Guests: Catherine Gold, Joleen Ketterling, Nick Landwer, Joanna Ocasio-Maisonet, Rattana Sengsoulichanh, Kaja Vang, Kjerstin Yager, Kyle Mianulli, Ryan Kronzer, Bojan Mistic

Meeting Summary

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

Co-chair Dan Doerrer called the meeting to order at 8:11 a.m.

2. Adopt Meeting Minutes

Co-chair Dan Doerrer asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. KB Brown made a motion, Rita Endres seconded the motion. The meeting minutes were approved.

3. Metro Transit General Manager Update

Lesley Kandaras, Metro Transit General Manager, will be present at the December CMC meeting and providing an update. Everyone is invited to listen to the update via the link provided either live or after the meeting.

<https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension/Committees/Corridor-Management-Committee.aspx>

4. New Employee Introductions

Nick Landwer, Metropolitan Council, introduced new employees to the project team.

Kyle Mianulli, Hennepin County Communications Administrator, is supporting the Blue Line Extension Project. He has been supporting this project for several years but as of September, he is on the Blue Line Extension Project full-time. Kyle has a background in public communications and has worked with projects such as the Central Corridor and Green Line. He has experience managing communications for transit, housing, and economic development.

Ryan Kronzer, Assistant Director of Engineering and Design for Metro Transit, has recently joined the Blue Line Extension project. Ryan has experience in light rail and design having worked for the past 11 years on the Green Line Extension project. Ryan is a 25-year practicing architect who has experience in stationary planning and other elements of light rail along with urban design and land use.



Shahin Khazrajafari, Deputy Project Director, Hennepin County, will oversee the administrative side of the project in the areas of finance, risk, outreach, etc. Shahin is a civil engineer with an MBA.

Nat Gorham, Transit Director for the MnDOT Metro District, has joined the project. Nat is an architect with experience in structural analysis.

Cathy Gold also introduced Richelieu (Rich) Morris, Community Engagement Specialist.

5. Design Update

Nick Landwer, Metropolitan Council, gave an overview of the design of Lowry Avenue Station. This is a key station along the alignment as the Blue Line transitions from Minneapolis into Robbinsdale. This station provides access to the Grand Rounds Trail, Victory Memorial Park and North Memorial Hospital. Nick reviewed the original concept that had been discussed for the past couple of years with the train running with traffic down the center of W. Broadway and resulting in an elevated station platform at Lowry Avenue. There are only 2 stations in our existing light rail that are not accessible at-grade. Nick reviewed the challenges that exist with an elevated station. Riders would need to take stairs and/or an elevator to access or leave the station. With the station elevated, it is hidden behind the existing bridges and visually hard to see where and how to access it. A bridge is required with an elevated structure. The physical touchpoint to the park is visually impacted. Overall, there were many stakeholders who are not in support of this elevated station.

Nick mentioned they are working with various partners in the design of the station such as Hennepin County, the city of Robbinsdale, the city of Minneapolis, and the Park Board. Together they met to discuss other potential concepts and how this area could be designed better.

A new concept being proposed is designing an at-grade station platform at Lowry Avenue. This would involve slight enhancements to existing bridges and extending the bridges farther south a few hundred feet to open the area underneath allowing for better access. The intersection would be pushed to the east of the bridge to line up better for pedestrian, bike, and vehicle traffic.

Improved station access will offer more direct routes to the station, provide better access for people of all abilities, and provide a connection to North Memorial Hospital without crossing the roadway.

Nick presented three visuals to better demonstrate how the Lowry Station at-grade concept would look. The existing bridge structure is above, and the existing piers will remain in place. We would shave some of the bridge deck off to allow for space for the light rail.

Nick reiterated that these are all concepts. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done but the design team feels we are going in the right direction to make this a much better station location. The design team will continue to work with project partners, determine roadway and intersection configuration and advance design for better access and connectivity for the community.

John Barobs asked if there is a pedestrian or bike path on the existing bridge on West Broadway today. Nick said no; the southbound bridge was built with extra room for a potential trail connection; however, he doesn't ever see the path being up on the bridge.

6. Communications Update

Kyle Mianulli, Hennepin County, Communications Administrator, provided an update on the communications provided in 2023 and what they are planning for 2024. Most of the communication outlets utilized were



newsletters, social media, the project website, or print materials. Kyle reviewed statistics on the usage and engagement of these communication outlets. Print materials are still an effective method. Kyle indicated previously we only focused on sharing project information, events, etc., but in 2024, would like to diversify the content we are sharing to include storytelling and finding new ways for people to relate and connect with the project.

Dr. Tara Watson asked which platforms would provide responses to questions. Kyle replied that the project will be doing more in 2024 to address questions. The next newsletter being launched will have a common questions section on the project website and direct detailed responses can be provided. Kyle indicated they do compile and share all comments they receive on the project website. He also mentioned they are creating a new engagement dashboard that will track how many people they have talked to and at a high level what they have heard. As they are producing content for the newsletters, they will share out through social media as well.

In 2023, the communications team piloted awareness campaigns which they will be building on in 2024. Hennepin County led two campaigns in 2023; both focused on driving engagement and raising awareness. The message was there is still time on this project to make changes and meet community needs better. The communications team had a broad strategy in 2023 focusing on printed materials, radio, digital and out of home channels (ads at bus stops, transit stations and gas station TVs). The focus was on local cultural media outlets. Ads were produced in English and Spanish. Geographic areas were targeted with the goal of hearing from as many people as possible in the corridor and BIPOC audiences.

Terry Austin shared that communications should utilize the radio more to share information, specifically within North Minneapolis. He indicated a lot of people get their information through the radio and suggested some in person interviews. Kyle thanked Terry for the good feedback and mentioned partnering with KMOJ to not only run ads but have people on a radio show with a host to talk about the project.

KB Brown asked who is going to answer questions with these engagements and how are we tracking the interaction. Effective engagement takes two people with questions asked and answers given. Kyle indicated if a call comes into the radio, the person answering the questions would be the individual being featured on the radio show. Kyle also indicated Hennepin County has someone monitoring the social media site and when a question comes in, Kyle gets pinged. He then reaches out to the appropriate individual to get assistance in answering the question. One area of growth on the social media platform is improving engagement. Currently we don't get a lot of engagement with posts. Kyle believes in sharing different types of information and providing community storytelling with project updates, better engagement may be achieved.

KB Brown said it could be possible that there have been a lot of questions and very little answers to questions so at some point people stop asking. Kyle is excited that there will be more answers coming through as we get through the environmental process and have more information to share.

Dr. Tara Watson stated when you have a lot of information being blasted on every possible platform, it becomes overwhelming. Some people won't open the material because it looks the same as something they have already read. Communication for a project this size with so much information to deliver is challenging as people are at different places and levels with how they view and understand the project. It is our responsibility to get as creative as possible when distributing the information so our audience can receive it, understand it, and understand how it impacts them. Dr. Tara Watson indicated we also need to make sure the information is uniform, and everyone is getting the same message.



Kyle agreed and said this is exactly what we are looking to address in 2024, which is creating more ways for people to engage with the project. Sharing information that people are interested in getting is important. Kyle stated we have a lot of technical staff and tend to get bogged down in technical details. We have also heard we put out way too much information in writing. Kyle stated the communications team will look to produce a lot more video content in 2024 and will be launching a podcast. With a project of this size, it is a real challenge to make the information digestible for people. Dr. Tara Watson also said the information cannot be all glitter and gold. Kyle agreed and stated all information will be shared and they will make sure the information shared is accurate.

Chris Webley asked if Kyle and his team partnered with Juxtaposition Arts. Kyle replied yes. Chris stated this is a prime opportunity to loop them in. He also indicated we shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel of community storytelling but rather be more strategic about using community partners to be that voice for us. Kyle agreed and stated there are many great partners to do this with.

Kyle shared the major outlets that were used for advertising in 2023. Throughout the campaigns, we received 13 million views. The goal is to make sure it is hard for anyone to say they didn't hear about this project. In terms of cost per click and click through rates on digital ads, we far outperformed industry standards. This indicates people are really interested in this project and are paying attention.

A Campaign Recap video was shared with the group. The video is a combination of all community testimonial videos done in 2023. These were broad communication campaigns corridor wide trying to reach a broad audience.

In 2024, the communications team is looking to refine and build on the campaign strategies. Instead of very broad messages, they will be looking at more specific topics and audiences. Kyle shared that the concerns in Robbinsdale and Crystal may be very different than North Minneapolis. In 2024, there will be efforts made to engage the youth in the corridor and bring them into this work and the campaigns. They are looking to create more ways for people to connect with this project. More videos will be produced to share project messages and stories. The communications team will continue to partner with the community and corridor residents. As mentioned earlier, a podcast will be launched as another way to provide detailed project information in a conversation accessible way. The podcast will host project experts, businesses and community partners who will talk about various topics specific to the project.

Terry Austin asked how long and how effective each video will be. Kyle replied that they will be doing different types of videos. Some of the more detailed videos might be as long as 5 minutes. Every video created will be modular, which means you can watch the entire video or watch smaller 15 or 30 second clips that can be posted on social media. The shorter clips will provide a link to access the full video. Terry shared that as this content is being created, we should be intentional about who is being represented especially in regard to North Minneapolis and the BIPOC communities. Kyle stated representation is key and they do this by talking with people who are in the corridor.

Donna Sanders asked when the details on the project will be shared such as parking, traffic, timeline, etc. Donna shared that Dr. Tara Watson had mentioned earlier there are a lot of questions we are not getting answers to. Kyle said from a communications perspective, they will answer as soon as they have it. Nick indicated that the details will come as the plans are developed. The process is incremental and currently the design team is working on 30% plans that will go into municipal consent. More detail will be available in late spring or early summer. This is challenging as we want to get answers to the people but we have to make sure we have the answers and are sharing accurate information.



Dr. Tara Watson stated there are opportunities for businesses that are going to be impacted and need the help, but deadlines for these resources are now. Dates are not matching up. People are expected to try to figure out how they could rebuild but for something that may or may not happen. The perception is nobody is in communication, it is a free for all, and we don't have our stuff together. Nick responded that it has taken us a while to determine where the line is going to be. Once determined, we build on that and identify who is going to be impacted along the property. As design gets refined and we advance, things will change. A good example is the Lowry Station presented today. That has evolved substantially as we have been working on it. Dr. Tara Watson understands there must be checks and balances for things to be successful, but the details that are needed to manage the project and the timelines for the business owner, community and who is affected are not lining up. There needs to be the opportunity for people to participate, get the support they need and navigate the resources available. Dr. Tara Watson stated she wants to make sure there will be funding and resources available when we get to the final alignment and within the right timeline for those businesses being impacted.

Donna Sanders stated there are facts that everyone is going to need to know such as how much room is needed for the train on the corridor, how close will the train be from buildings, and what do you have to tear down to make this happen but when I attend these meetings, there are no details provided. She asked why the City isn't doing a parking study on Penn and West Broadway to figure out what will happen when the on-street parking is removed. People cannot prepare. Nick replied that we have detailed drawings as far as where the trains are going to go but there is still a lot of work we need to do. Our roll plots have the general information, we know the properties we are impacting and have met with the building owners on that. We are working on 30% plans and incrementally will build up to 90% plans. Nick indicated information is being shared as soon as we have it. Kyle stated there is importance regarding the interplay between communications and engagement. For example, it is not of interest to 99% of the corridor that the train will be "X" amount of feet away from a particular business, but the business owner of that business is very engaged. Determining what to share as public communication versus outreach and engagement is important.

Kyle asked which funds they were referring to. Donna indicated the Promise Act Funds are the resources they have been talking about. Kyle thanked them for this helpful information he can share. He also indicated we have partnered with Elevate Hennepin and have been doing a lot of outreach to businesses along the corridor. As additional resources are available, we are sharing this information with the businesses.

7. Anti-Displacement Update

Cathy Gold, Hennepin County, provided an update on the corridor partnership collaboration who has been meeting monthly since August. She indicated they have a legislative platform for 2024 that was developed together. It focuses on outcomes from the Anti-Displacement Work Group. This was a big accomplishment. Cathy shared they are working toward the workplan (framework) that the CMC requested they develop. Utilizing the recommendations report, this group is diving into the details and identifying goals on how to achieve the outcomes. As they are gathering the information, they will identify an array of subject matter experts both inside and outside of the project. The team is starting with certain topics that fit within our timeline and then determining the path forward and action steps. The topics developed will encompass all the outcomes and these will be the chapters of the workplan framework.

Cathy reviewed the workplan framework matrix. The matrix arranges the topics into buckets so people understand what is inside of the project, what is outside of the project and what happens now and what will come later.



Chris Webley indicated he mentioned this at the last meeting too but reiterated the idea of zoning being a key influence of how we can show up in a more thoughtful way for being futuristic. Chris stated zoning will be a key item that we will not want to miss given there are so many financial impacts such as higher taxes, construction, etc. Cathy indicated the workplan will help outline who does what and those things will be identified such as land use, taxation assessments, etc. Jurisdictions are different for each of these items.

KB Brown stated zoning and parking are important but asked if those two things are within the project's control. Nick said zoning is a City jurisdiction. Chris Webley indicated we can make recommendations and lobby. Cathy shared internally we are collaborating with the City and County to talk about strategies around parking. KB Brown asked if we could have someone here from the City at the next BAC meeting to ask some of these questions. Nick shared that we know this is a key issue that needs to be addressed now. Donna Sanders stated either Hennepin County or the City needs to do a parking study to evaluate the businesses impacted and determine how much parking will be needed.

Terry Austin shared it is going to be imperative that as you are strategizing and coming up with solutions for the parking issue that the community is at the table at the front end of the conversations. This is a major decision. Nick stated that is the intent; there will be meetings to get our house in order first and right after we will meet to discuss potential solutions. Dan Doerr shared that Robbinsdale has the same questions. KB Brown stated there are multiple cities affected but we don't have City officials here. Cathy Gold shared that the BAC chairs are included on the CMC to make sure your voices are heard. Donna Sanders shared that at the CMC more often you are sitting there listening and not expressing the concerns of the community. Nick stated the BAC chairs also bring this information to the CAC. KB Brown indicated it would carry more weight to have City representation in person at this meeting so they can hear the actual conversation. KB Brown stated we have no idea what our city's position is because they are not here. Nick said this message will be delivered and we will try to make this happen.

Dr. Tara Watson suggested that in the workplan being developed by Cathy's group, she would like to see that everyone impacted (especially the businesses and community) are assigned to a development and preservation team to walk them through the process and help them be successful. Cathy mentioned she heard this message a few months ago and has navigators in the workplan. Cathy indicated the navigator will bring the person from A to Z realizing those benefits. Kyle Mianulli indicated Hennepin County is doing that now. The TOD Predevelopment Assistance, which is new in the last year or two, provides support to help people navigating the process. Kyle will send a link. Dr. Tara Watson mentioned she is familiar with this.

8. Discussion and Members' Feedback

Kyle Mianulli indicated he is hearing the different levels of communication that are needed; not only broad but the targeted information that organizations and business owners along the line need to hear.

Co-chair Dan Doerr asked the group if there was anything else that needed to be emphasized based on today's discussion. KB Brown stated the City and County need to be more involved.

9. Next Meeting: January 2, 2024

10. Adjourn

KB Brown made a motion, Dr. Tara Watson seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:32 a.m.