



METRO Blue Line Extension
Meeting of the Community Advisory Committee
Wednesday, October 9, 2024
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Microsoft Teams Meeting

CAC Members: Ellis Beck, John Chambers Dunn, Jason Greenberg, Jeff Guertin, Jonathan Hansen

Agency Staff and Guests: Nkongo Cigolo, Neha Damle, Andrew Gillett, Cathy Gold, Shahin Khazrajafari, Nick Landwer, Kerri Ruch, Menno Schukking, Nick Thompson, Kaja Vang, Joan Vanhala, Jer Yang, Graham Zuehlke

Meeting Summary

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

John Chambers Dunn began the meeting at 6:05 pm and welcomed everyone. Nkongo Cigolo took attendance.

2. Adopt Meeting Minutes

Nkongo notes that there are not enough committee members present to approve meeting minutes. At least 3 additional CAC members would be needed to have the quorum. They will be sent by email for vote of adoption.

John stated that if the group sees the amount of people in the meeting rise to 19 or 20, they can circle back to this issue.

3. Outcomes of Municipal Consent

Nick Landwer, director of engineering and design for the Blue Line Project Office (BPO), provided updates on Municipal Consent outcomes, sharing that the plans were issued on July 26th, allowing 30 days for public hearings to occur and 45 days for city councils to vote, and approval was reached within this timeline. Municipal Consent required the corridor cities to approve the physical design of the light rail project in terms of its location, location of termini, and dimension at 30% design. Thirty-three out of thirty-eight votes were approval votes, and each vote included priorities to be reflected in the final design plans for the project to focus on. These priorities include the addition of the Washington Avenue and West Broadway Station, relocation of the 40th Avenue station to the north side of the intersection, and evaluation of the Lowry Avenue station.



Jason Greenberg asked for clarification on whether the priorities are the same as the commitments to the project as sometimes priorities are said but commitments are made. Nick stated that the commitments that have been made have been reflected in plans to reaffirm the project will do it. The project has a list of things they must commit to and therefore future changes will also be reflected in the plans.

Nick shared more details on the design changes that will come as a result of Municipal Consent. He talked about how future development in that area would support the Washington Avenue and West Broadway Station. Before going into the final design, the project will set the scope and budget for this addition. The Lowry Avenue station will be evaluated to better serve the North Memorial Hospital to maintain emergency access and minimize impact to the parkway. The existing configuration is not off the table, but as the discussion develops, the design team will come back with a recommendation.

Nick explains the image in the presentation at John's request. John wanted to clarify that the station is at the level of the hospital with County Road 81 going over the train, to which Nick affirmed. Nick noted that next time they will have more images and emphasized that the design wouldn't eliminate movement, but the design team is considering other outcomes of the station's designs, including gates for crossing. Even though, as Jeff notes, emergency vehicles have certain powers to get through. Nick said that gates will still stay down for the duration of their cycle and limit movement flexibility. Jason remarks that there is talk of an elevated road or a tunnel for the train, to which Nick replied that these are considerations that have been made, but due to the surrounding bridges' construction, things keep evolving.

John asked if there are similar existing stations that are close to hospitals in a similar project. Nick mentioned that the University of Minnesota has a light rail train that is close to their hospital on the Green Line. There are solutions, but the design team needs to get the right one for the solution. John stated that he knows there are others like the Lowry Avenue Station and this station could be better than others in terms of its proximity to the hospital. Then, he asked how much of a disruption would the Blue Line Extension (BLE) be to the area. Nick replied that construction for Lowry Avenue would be a lot of work, including opening up the area to create open and usable space. In terms of grading, there would not be a lot of impacts, but a tunnel could be a more impactful process. Jonathan Hansen stated that he hopes that regardless of configuration, Lowry Avenue and the Parkway intersection will be out from under the bridge, allow the lights to be out of the shadows, and help people notice the traffic lights more than they do now. Nick said that is part of the design considerations and the CAC will be part of the evaluation process.

In terms of the 40th Avenue Station, Nick reviewed the details and benefits of the change produced by Municipal Consent. The station will be moved north of the intersection on Bottineau Blvd which will reduce right-of-way acquisition requirements, allow Elim Church to continue its development plans, be closer to downtown, and align with the park-and-ride, which provides an opportunity for



direct pedestrian crossing. The park-and-ride would be at grade with West Broadway and would have no more than 290 stalls with bus transfers.

John notes that even though Robbinsdale gave Municipal Consent, he sees signs go up that show the public thinks they can make Robbinsdale and Crystal vote no to stop the BLE from going through Robbinsdale. The committee members need to be stewards of this plan by talking about the benefits of the project and helping the community understand that this plan is going to happen. Jonathan says that part of the issue is that these signs are placed on city property without the city addressing them. Jonathan would report the problem, the sign might be removed but then replaced. He notes that code enforcement needs to do its job. Jeff mentions that there is a banner at 40th Avenue that has people who appealed to keep the sign up. People think there is an option to stop the BLE and turn it into a BRT, but once they were educated on the true options, they just wanted a no vote in general. Jonathan says that the impression he had from speaking with residents at 40th Avenue and Bottineau Blvd were that they were resigned to it happening, but they just wanted it to move north and kept the banner. However, he is mostly talking about city property and right of way.

Jonathan asks a question about whether five right-turn lanes will be removed throughout Robbinsdale. Nick confirmed that they will be eliminated and turned into shared right-through lanes since this change wouldn't impact volume, improves pedestrian safety, and minimizes right-of-way acquisition. If the right turn lanes were maintained, it would increase right-of-way acquisition and could be unsafe because drivers would roll through the turn. Eliminating right turn lanes slows traffic down and narrows conflicts with pedestrians in the roadway.

John circles back to the public's knowledge of the Municipal Consent status by pointing out that Jeff said in the chat that people don't know the possibility of a no-vote is gone. John asked if this information has gone out to the media to say that Municipal Consent has been reached and how this information was shared with the local public. Nick replied that Kyle Mianulli isn't in the meeting, but he is the one who keeps in contact with the news and has reached out to announce the results. The results have been shared, but BPO can't control if it is run as news. There have been dozens of conversations with the public at open houses to explain the process. Feedback from the public is one of the reasons the 40th Avenue station was moved north. John reiterates that this change is due to direct feedback, but people won't always be happy because it is political, and the election cycle is happening.

Nick talked about the next steps. The project is in the design stage now. BPO is still accepting input from project partners for collaboration between the design resolution team and dedicated city staff. The design team needs the city to make sure everything is done correctly because there will be utilities impacted.

Jeff asked if a project change log that is publicly accessible is maintained so people can see the changes made from their feedback. Nick stated that the project team doesn't post a log, but they



have posted comments received during the review process. The design team documents change but would need to put it in a format that can be easily distributed to the public to call it “significant design decisions” to give to city staff and the public. The project team doesn’t put it in a book or online, but that is something that could be a good idea. Nkongo Cigolo, engagement team manager for BLE, says the project team has made a first attempt to share design decisions influenced by engagement done with community members. He can send it to committee members for talking points. The team can create a document and an article that can be shared through several channels.

Jeff suggested making this something the public can access to help the project team be open and get ahead of the misperception that the project team is doing this behind closed doors. Jason notes that there needs to be more communication from the project team about what is going on. He isn’t sure why there is hesitancy to announce this information when it is something to be proud of. He emphasizes that there is never enough communication and committee members are always asking for more information to tell the public. Jonathan added that people claim that they don’t have input and the BLE hasn’t changed, which isn’t true. Nick supports this claim by mentioning that is why the project team developed a station on 21st Avenue and that Nkongo is working on putting it together. Nkongo noted that the engagement team is working on how to move forward with communication and engagement to build trust now that the project is switching gears. This next level would be communication about topics that aren’t as fun to talk about like construction and impact, so they are working on a plan to prepare people for what to expect. The engagement team is working through details on how to talk about design, environmental, and mitigation updates, which will be shared with the committee before it goes live.

Nick closed out by noting that the project team will have meetings regularly with each corridor city to talk about commitments and priorities with city staff. From these conversations, it will be determined whether these changes are related to scope or design. As the design team moves forward to 60% and 90% design, there will be opportunities for each city to look through the work to make sure things are done properly and fits with existing infrastructure.

4. Environmental Update

Neha Damle, environmental staff for the BLE, described where the project team is in the environmental review process. The Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) was published, received comments, started working on the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS), and now working on the Record of Decision (ROD). During this process, an updated analysis is needed which includes the updated design as well as comments from the SDEIS. In terms of the analysis, there have been and will be noise and vibration analyses due to design changes. There will also be additional historical and cultural surveys as part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) due to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements. Multiple administrative reviews will be conducted and are expected to start in a few weeks and go until the Spring of 2025. Mitigation outreach will begin in Fall 2024 and last until Spring 2025. The project team has received a lot of input from the public and city partners about potential impacts and will



need to do more outreach to get into the details of what the developing mitigation plan should include. The goal is to have solid mitigation commitments in the SFEIS with the anticipated publication, based on 30% design, in the summer of 2025 and the implementation beginning after publication.

Jason asked to confirm that the SFEIS will stay at 30% design influence during documentation. Neha replies that the SFEIS must be based on the level of design done at the time of documentation. The level of design could be different in certain areas, so the document will work with what is the most recent amount of design at the time to evaluate all environmental impacts. Nick also adds that knowing where the tracks are allows the environmental team to do a noise analysis on the area to determine impacts which comes back to help with designing mitigation for any issues. Jason asked if the process order is Municipal Consent, SFEIS, approval, then 60% design. Nick replied, no. Neha clarified that NEPA is meant to help design adjust based on environmental impacts and that it is a combined team effort to advance the design and environmental impact.

Neha continued the presentation by going over the mitigation plan development for environmental justice areas including NEPA's requirement to do so and the list of areas of impact the environmental team is reviewing. There is anti-displacement and environmental justice work embedded in the project as it is committed to mitigation, but project funding is subject to FTA approval. The environmental team is working on getting ideas from the community for mitigation strategies and continues to list some considerations they are looking at, such as funding organizations that do mitigation work, cultural placekeeping design groups, and storefront construction information resource centers. The framework will begin in October 2024; outreach will start in November 2024 and last until Summer 2025; and implementation will take place in the Summer of 2025.

Jason said he likes the idea of the storefront resource center with an accessible person because websites can be hard to navigate and there will be a lot of questions. He asked to clarify the overlap between anti-displacement and environmental justice in terms of business support and determine what category it falls in. Neha said the mitigation team is looking at what can be added to the project with FTA approval. Strategies that wouldn't be approved by the FTA would go into the anti-displacement plan. Nkongo noted that as the environmental team advances with the mitigation plan, the environmental justice component will be a focus for outreach in addition to other mitigation issues. It will be clear what the anti-displacement plan will be addressing and how the SFEIS has taken input. The SFEIS will give a standard as to what people should expect in terms of environmental impacts.

5. Schedule Update

Shahin Khazrajafari talked about the schedule, noting that a lot happened this year. The project team is on track thanks to efforts towards Municipal Consents and NEPA. Since the SDEIS has been published and comments have been received, the project team is transitioning to the SFEIS. The FTA can move forward with the amended Record of Decision to wrap up the NEPA process. Design and engineering will occur next year alongside the coordination of the corridor cities and partners to incorporate the priorities established from the municipal consent process. Some hard dates the



project has are the project rating application request to the FTA and the project risk assessment with the FTA in order to get full funding in 2026. At that point, the project hopes to award the construction contract in the later quarters of 2026 and begin construction in 2027 with operation projected in 2030.

There were no questions or comments on the schedule.

6. Discussion and Members' Feedback

John appreciated all the comments, concerns, and answers. He asked for final feedback or if there was anything anyone would like to share.

Jeff asked about the order and asked, since the group didn't have a quorum, are they able to approve the last meeting's minutes at the next meeting if there is a quorum. Nkongo reminds everyone that the meeting minutes will be sent by email to get an email vote.

Jason thanked everyone for attending.

Jonathan asked how the over-tenure and reactions were with the cities since he knew that the Robbinsdale city council meeting got rowdy from people who don't support the BLE. Nick replied by saying there was a straightforward discussion with Crystal's votes being five to two, Brooklyn Park having only one no vote, and Minneapolis was surprisingly unanimous. The outcome was good and there is a lot of work to do. Jonathan notes that there were three different Hennepin County commissioners and other representatives at the Robbinsdale vote. Jeff says that Brooklyn Park had four community members speak on the topic, three of which opposed the BLE because of the cost. He continues to say that there was a good round of discussion in these meetings, but the group doesn't always get direct communication from the meetings. He asked if there is a method to capture what happens. Nkongo mentioned that the project team is putting a document together with everything that happened during Municipal Consent including links, agendas, meeting minutes, and a compilation of comments from partners that will be shared. Jeff emphasized that for some meetings, it can take hours to get through and the talking points don't always stick to the agenda so the project team should have a summary of the meetings to give to the committee members. Nkongo says that the project team is still collecting comments since the comment period technically ends tomorrow and what was collected will be posted online, sent in newsletters, and through committee member channels.

Jeff asked who takes the notes at these committee meetings. Nkongo says that various people take notes throughout the meeting, but today the designated person is Antoinette. Jeff suggests a note-taking hack that teams can produce a transcription of meetings that you can put into chat GPT and get action items and summaries from the AI formatted.

7. Next Meeting: November 6, 2024.



John thanked everyone for attending and providing feedback and comments.

8. Adjourn

John made the motion to adjourn, and Jason seconded it. The meeting adjourned at 7:43 pm.

Meeting Materials: Agenda, Slides, August 7 Meeting Summary

Meeting Minutes Support: Antoinette Uzamere



Meeting Chat:

[5:57 PM]

Meeting started

Kaja Vang

brb

back

Jeff Guertin

How many needed for a quorum?

What actions are limited?

Ellis Beck

Hello all, sorry I'm late. My day job turned into a day and evening job.

Nkongo Cigolo

Welcome, Ellis! Glad you could join us this evening.

Ellis Beck

Snapshot of google maps showing the intersection of Lowry and Victor Memorial Parkway.

Jeff Guertin:

Some members of the public are either not aware or unhappy with the reality that the possibility of a No vote went away nearly a decade ago.

We have the difficult task of informing them of this reality.

Jonathan Hansen

That was the biggest thing I've heard, that the station needs to be north of 40th

That's a great idea Jeff!

Jeff Guertin

Bingo Jason. This is our Charter mission -advise and communicate.

Neha Damle

NEPA= National Environmental Policy Act