



METRO Blue Line Extension Meeting of the Business Advisory Committee

Tuesday, November 7, 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, Jamez Staples, Christopher Webley

Agency Staff and Guests: Nkongo Cigolo, Neha Damle, Catherine Gold, Joleen Ketterling, Nick Landwer, Ixchel McKinnie, Joanna Ocasio-Maisonet, Emilee Roschen, Kerri Pearce Ruch, Rattana Sengsoulichanh, Kaja Vang, Kjerstin Yager, Kelcie Young

Meeting Summary

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

Co-chair Dan Doerrer called the meeting to order at 8:04 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. Project Update

Nick Landwer, Metropolitan Council, reviewed the outline of the project which consists of 13.5 miles of Blue Line Extension (BLRT) and 12 new stations connecting Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park. The BLRT will run an all-day service. The project's focus is building on disparity. Nick indicated the high-level timeline involves ridership, the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) in Spring 2024, Municipal Consent in Summer 2024, an updated cost estimate in 2024, final design in 2024-2025, and the start of construction towards the end of 2026 with an anticipated opening in 2030.

Nick provided an overview of the timeline from now into next year. Nick shared that the Anti-Displacement policy recommendations are helping to develop, review and finalize the implementation framework. The SDEIS is under a first review with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The SDEIS will be reviewed by the FTA 3 times. The plan is to publish the SDEIS this spring. There will be a comment period for people to review and the comments will feed into the Final Environmental Impact Statement. At the request of the Minneapolis Park Board, a Supplemental Section 4(f) is included as it coincides with the SDEIS work that is happening. Supplemental Section 4(f) pertains to park & recreation lands, wildlife & waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. A draft of the Supplemental Section 4(f) will be published at the same time as SDEIS.



KB Brown asked where along the line parks are involved. Nick stated usually each city is responsible for its parks. Minneapolis parks are separate from the City and they have their own board. We bring them into the Minneapolis Issue Resolution Team (IRT) meetings, and they are involved regularly with the project.

4. Federal Transit Administration Project Rating Overview

Nick 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. The project anticipates half of the funding will be provided through local funds and the CIG will provide the remaining funding. The CIG program funds light, heavy, and commuter rail, bus rapid transit and streetcar projects. The BLRT is a New Starts project (>\$400 M). Nationally, there are 65 current projects in the CIG program. Minnesota is one of the states with multiple projects.

Nick reviewed the FTA's New Starts process. The BLRT is currently in the Engineering Phase (phase 5), about midway through the process. The project never dropped out of the engineering phase; we are going back and completing some supplemental work done in pre-project development. Engineering will take a couple of years and then we will be applying for a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA). When in the engineering phase, we have annual submittals to show how we are doing with the project. Once we get the FFGA, we can begin construction.

Ridership is only one component of all the items we get rated on for a project. The rating criteria is divided between two categories: Project Justification (50%) and Local Financial Commitment (50%). Projects must achieve a "Medium" or higher rating to proceed. If a project is rated "High" in some of the operational categories, it is likely a project in a city with high density. Nick stated that the project, on the local financial commitment side, looks really good. We need to do more work on the project justification side. Next year we will have more information as to what the rating will be.

Nick indicated the project team is working on the ridership right now. The FTA has a new standardized ridership forecasting model called the STOPS model which is intended to level the playing field for all grantees applying for the funds. This model is very conservative. Previously, in the first iteration, ridership was done under a Regional Travel Demand Model (TDM). The TDM model used was very conservative as far as what it projected for ridership. The STOPS model is calibrated nationally, and it takes into account all of the different projects across the nation and how they rate. The FTA does not want to overestimate ridership and underdeliver. Local data is input into the model such as transit onboard surveys, official population and employment forecasts, transit schedules, and walk infrastructure.

To put things into perspective, in 2017 the project was using the older model (TDM) based on about 26,600 trips per day. When we took the same data from the previous project and converted it to the FTA's STOPS model, it resulted in a 30% lower ridership projection (18,600 trips per day).

Co-chair Dan Doerrer asked whether the lower ridership expectation was based on the reality that more people are working remotely and less people are using public transportation. Nick said they are waiting for guidance from the FTA. Not sure if it is accurately predicting what ridership will be. We are seeing a rise in ridership but are not sure at what rate. We do know the new model will consider the 2022 survey which is post-pandemic. What we don't know is if there will be some weighting on that or compensation for the numbers. Cathy Gold, Hennepin County, said the 2022 numbers are going to be lower than they are today as ridership is going up.



In 2017 we used our TDM model to compare our existing Blue Line and Green Line ridership taken 1-year pre-COVID; the actual ridership on Blue Line was 133% of that model and Green Line was 125.2% of that model. This demonstrates that even our own TDM model underestimated our actual numbers.

5. Anti-Displacement Update

Cathy Gold, Hennepin County, indicated her group has been meeting corridor wide with local agencies since August to come up with a collective legislative strategy to advance the anti-displacement efforts. Cathy went into detail regarding what they have been concentrating on including funding and resources, land use, commercial and business development, culture and community vibrance, housing, and workforce development.

KB Brown asked if the project is looking at using land trust. Cathy responded that it's a possibility. There may be a way to create opportunities for people to own their own property. KB's concern with land trust is equities in the building and values of the property. KB stated that land trusts don't seem to allow the building owner the ability to attain the land. KB stated that if the project plans to do this, he requests that the building owner is allowed to acquire the land at some point. Cathy said that they can look into that. She stated it does provide an opportunity for people who have limited resources. KB said it is a good option, but he wants to make sure there are long-term benefits for community wealth.

Chris Webley stated some people may not want to own the land. He stated he wouldn't be interested in a building if he wasn't able to own the land as well. Different people will be at different points in the process. Chris stated he would like to concentrate on zoning as he thinks it is one of the most influential pieces for developers. He indicated that we need zoning that allows builders to build well. As much as affordable housing is nice, he added that there also needs to be nice developments in the neighborhood with zoning that reflects the community's needs. The earlier that zoning can start to be looked at, the better. Cathy stated these were all good comments.

Chris Webley noted that he didn't see anything mentioned regarding assistance for real estate taxes. He stated that with the light rail coming through and it being in a Targeted Zone, it is the marrying of two storms. Operations will be impacted, and he has seen businesses go out of business because a street was being dug up. Chris feels it would be helpful to have funding specifically for assistance with real estate taxes. Cathy recalled that Chris talked about this a few months back as well. She has been thinking about this and how new developments may impact neighboring properties. Cathy added they are having conversations with local agencies who also have an element of the taxation piece and are looking at the overall county impact. There will need to be a larger conversation at the localized level to gain an understanding of what the project is trying to do through the anti-displacement strategies.

Cathy indicated that independent of the anti-displacement efforts, agencies are having other conversations as they are trying to meet the needs of their own communities and discussing how they see this work advancing.

Cathy provided a quick update on how the framework is being developed to support action planning and strategy. Three initial topics were identified to build the framework around relocation and right-of-way, community ownership, and workforce.

Cathy shared that a Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)/Workforce Mixer was facilitated on Tuesday last week at UROC. There were about 30 individuals there engaged in great conversation. At the Mixer, the group continued advancing the work done in June regarding obstacles of contracting with a big project like this and how they could do things better. They also discussed how to get the community members connected to the



jobs and training. Cathy reviewed the feedback that has been provided and topics for future mixers. The group is trying to think differently as to how they deliver this project.

Chris Webley asked if this is for people who help with construction. Cathy indicated it is kind of the whole thing, what do we need to deliver the project. Chris stated any time you get state funding, there are prevailing wage and civil rights minority goals that need to be met. Cathy said yes that is all applicable to this project. If we put things in place, more people will be interested in joining our workforce in addition to making it easier to contract with us.

Rita Endres also wanted clarification regarding the term “workforce” and whether it was people who are constructing the project or who work in business. Cathy explained it is the people hired to construct this project but not only skilled laborers but professionals, such as those who work in this office or contracting with individuals outside of the office. Nick said the project is already doing this. He indicated there are apprentices working on the models at public events which is part of the workforce development. Cathy stated they are also looking for internship opportunities.

Chris Webley felt like the project should spend more time on getting kids hired and trained versus spending energy on DBE certification. Cathy said they will be doing all of that but they have to do the DBE piece as well. Nick stated the project has a DBE goal of twenty percent.

KB Brown stated the City of Minneapolis does not prioritize businesses within the city limits and DBE is nationwide. He stated using DBEs does not guarantee that the people in the community benefit from it. Cathy said she would like to look at how the project can prioritize local DBEs first.

Terry Austin stated that a lot of DBE contracts are going to minority white women. He stated it would be interesting to see how these numbers correlate with minority white women and individuals of color. He also wondered if data could be shared on whether there are individuals within the city limits getting the contracts versus individuals from outlying areas.

KB Brown stated the City of Minneapolis has statewide reports regarding what Terry is requesting. Terry Austin would like to get that information and leverage it so they can ensure the project is giving local individuals opportunities. KB Brown said he would find the report and share it.

Cathy stated her group is doing their own analysis on a zip code basis trying to understand the communities the project is serving. Terry asked who would be collecting the data. Cathy said Hennepin County is collecting and she believed it was in the disparity reduction area but she will confirm. KB Brown asked if they could expect a follow-up on the analysis results next month. Cathy said they have to get the data and build the model and she gave them a December to January timeframe. Cathy will provide an update on this when she gets the data.

6. Elevate Hennepin Overview

Ixchel McKinnie from the Community Economic and Development group presented information on the Elevate Hennepin Program. 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.

This program is available to all Hennepin County businesses. They have business advisors who are experts in a variety of areas (marketing, technology, finance, legal). The Business Advisory Council suggested that there were two things that businesses needed – A curated hub where businesses could find information about resources and programs; Professional resources and services that could be made available to all Hennepin County businesses.

Ixchel reviewed the services that Elevate Hennepin offers. The professional business resources available include 1:1 business advisory service, 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 is designed to serve businesses in various stages 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).

KB Brown asked how the advisory services were acquired. Ixchel indicated they used RFPs in various categories for which they needed advisory services. The last RFP was done in the last six months and they added about 10 new advisors. KB Brown said he didn't see any that were North-side specific. Ixchel said some of them may not have been interested in submitting RFPs for this.

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.

Terry Austin asked how impactful the personal navigation piece has been with only allowing 15 minutes. Ixchel said they say 15 minutes, but the navigators will give them whatever time they need. For example, she just met with a person and suggested he meet with an attorney first. She then handed him off to a business strategist to look at his business model and from there a marketing strategist. The actual time spent was closer to 20-30 minutes, but it is based on the conversation. If they want to reconnect to a navigator, they can do that. When they meet with an advisor, the advisor often does an intake to diagnose what the business needs. This may result in the individual getting directed to a new advisor.

Terry Austin indicated his only concern is that 15 minutes can be very disheartening for a person starting a business. Ixchel explained that they are passed on to someone who will do the advisory piece which is 25 hours. This helps the person understand what items they need to do. About twenty percent of the people who come to the Elevate Hennepin website read through the advisory services and identify who they want to connect with.



KB Brown asked how Elevate Hennepin ties into the Blue Line. He stated most businesses are not start-ups, most are trying to figure out how to get through the construction process. Ixchel stated a company on the Blue Line might be concerned about lease agreement or something of that nature and they can tap into our advisors. Most of the work done in Elevate Hennepin is with established businesses. For example, marketing and possibly developing a strategy of how they deal with the challenges around the BLRT. Ixchel stated this program is not specifically designed for the BLRT but rather is an overall program for all Hennepin County businesses.

7. Engagement Update

Nkongo Cigolo, Metropolitan Council, 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 reduce pollution. 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. We are collecting feedback on this video and currently working towards making it available in other languages.

Nkongo reviewed recent engagement activities that were facilitated such as art events and business canvassing. The engagement team is meeting with businesses and collecting information to help advance design and construction planning. Two large community meetings were held recently. One was in the North Loop Community and there were many questions about the project itself and all the impacts associated with the route going along 10th. Another meeting was held regarding the 21st Avenue route. Nkongo stated the engagement team is continuing to engage with various community members so we can complete the environmental process and build the alignment.

Nkongo reviewed the various ways to provide input or feedback. The interactive map is online, and people can go to a specific area on the corridor or a specific design element and provide input. There are a couple of surveys going on. The project wants to continue to collect input and provide information to the engineering and environmental team.

Throughout the month of October, the engagement team has been doing business canvassing by way of a survey sent through our newsletter. Nkongo reviewed some of the questions we are asking as we are doing business canvassing. With this information they are looking at impacts and how they could work with the businesses to ensure their locations continue to be accessible during construction. 110 surveys have been completed electronically; they also have some surveys that were handwritten and being input into the system.

In addition to voicing concerns, some of the business feedback received includes opportunities businesses see such as a reliable means of transportation, redevelopment of the area, reduced traffic, improved accessibility, and new client base. The main concerns are access, noise, safety, and parking.

Nkongo indicated they will be hosting the next quarterly meeting tomorrow evening at the Metro Transit North Loop Garage at 5:00 pm. They will also have a virtual meeting scheduled on November 14th to provide an opportunity for individuals who were not able to attend the in-person meetings. Elevate Hennepin has 2 workshops upcoming as well.

Nkongo gave a brief update on the Cultivate Arts Program. Nkongo shared they have selected 10 artists and 16 events have been held already. This program provides the opportunity to share BLRT planning efforts with the community in a fun and unique way. Nkongo shared information on upcoming Cultivate Art events.



8. Environmental Update & Next Steps

Neha Damle, Metropolitan Council, gave a quick update on the environmental justice analysis. She stated they are collecting input from the environmental justice (EJ) communities regarding their concerns, impacts and benefits of the project and where they are located. Next steps will be assessing these impacts and benefits of the project with the EJ communities. All cohort members and community outreach are doing extensive work to reach out to these communities.

Discussion and Members' Feedback

Co-chair Dan Doerrer mentioned the CMC meeting is this Thursday. Dan wanted to share that he heard most of the dialogue and questions were around the anti-displacement update. He will do his best to echo the concerns about land trust, zoning, taxation, and questions raised about how much DBEs will play into the project. He will look back at the minutes and make sure he is representing the discussion. KB Brown asked if they need to ask for some decisions to be made on anti-displacement. Cathy stated intergovernmental relations will also be present at the CMC to explain the process and overview the strategy.

9. Next Meeting: December 5, 2023.

10. Adjourn

Rita Endres made a motion and KB Brown seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:32 a.m.