

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
Office of Transportation and Transit
390 Robert Street North, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1805
Telephone (651) 602-1000 TDD (651) 291-0904 FAX (651) 602-1739 Metro Info (651) 602-1611

TRANSPORTATION **A**CCESSIBILITY **A**DVISORY **C**OMMITTEE **M**EETING
Wednesday, May 2, 2012

1. Call to Order

At 12:33 p.m. the meeting was called to order by Chair Ron Biss. **Public present:** Karen Hubescher from H.S.I., Anne White and Rick Cardnes. **Council staff present:** Pam Steffen and Jan Dietrich, from Metro Transit, David Russell, Andy Streasick, Paul Colton, Elaine Koutsoukos, Mike Kuehn and Alison Coleman.

Members Present: Ron Biss, Kim Kang, Kjensmo Walker, Wayne Wittman, Heidi Myhre, Darrell Paulsen, Jerolyn Pofahl, John Lund, Chad McGuire, Diogo Reiss, Nichole Villavicencio and Willie Daniels. **Members Absent:** Margot Imdieke Cross, James Williams and John Schatzlein. **Members excused:** Bruce Lattu.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Lund moved to approve the agenda. Wittman seconded the motion. The motion carried.

3. Approval of April 4, 2012 Minutes

Paulson moved to approve the minutes. Lund seconded the motion. The motion carried.

4. Legislative Update

Mike Kuehn spoke to the TAAC committee. The legislature is constitutionally required to meet 120 days within the two year cycle. So far they have had 114 legislative days. They need the final one to adjourn. They can't pass legislation on the last day. They are down to five days they can be in session in the House and the Senate.

The Governor is going to be meeting on the stadium bill. There is another plan out there that would change the revenue stream for the state's portion from the charitable gaming revenue back to the debit service where it would be state bonding.

The Senate is running out of money. They had to make substantial reductions in their budget. They took budget cuts in the legislature last year. They don't have any money left to pay the session only employees. They will but then they will have to furlough some of their permanent employees later in the year for some days to make up and balance the budget.

The bonding bill for transit has never been acted on in the House or Senate floor. Neither bill has any money for Southwest LRT. The Governor had recommended \$25 million. The Southwest is also a priority for the Governor in the bonding bill. The bonding bill in the new stadium proposal would sell \$200 million in state bonds to help fund the stadium. There would be another \$200 in for renovation of the state capitol. This would still leave another \$200 million for other projects and programs that are needed in the state. They need 60 percent votes to pass a bonding bill.

The Omnibus Transportation Policy Bill passed the House late last week. It passed the Senate yesterday. It will be going to conference committee by Friday. There are a couple of things on the House side on the bill that the Council has concerns about. It is dealing with the Opt Out transportation programs. One part of that bill would allow additional communities that meet certain conditions to have the next three years to decide whether they want to Opt Out and create their own transit programs. There is another part of that that changes the budget agreement that was reached last year that deals with transit. Where the Opt Out's had their funding reduced by \$1.65 million and also had their amount that they were funded frozen at 2011 levels. They would restore that. This has a fiscal impact of \$4.1 million. Assuming some communities over the next couple of years would look at Opt Outs, we took a couple of median programs like Maple Grove and Plymouth. Between them the operational costs are about \$4.8 million. This could have an impact in future years of somewhere between \$8 million and \$10 million of shifting programs. There is no new money tied to it. It would shift money around.

A veto letter was drafted for the Governor if they do have those elements in there to encourage his consideration of a veto of the bill. The legislative auditor's report last year showed that the Opt Outs have good substantial fund balances. This is not going to take away or reduce their services the way the budget agreement was made last year.

On the floor of the Senate they put language in that same bill that provides \$10 million to MnDOT out of trunk highway bonds to deal with flood mitigation for a project which was identified as Highway 101 leading into Scott County. It is also in the bonding bill but the bonding bill may not happen. So they stuck it into this bill.

Regional Transit Bonding Authorization is tied to the Regional Transit Capitol Plan. The Council was seeking \$35.4 million this year. They are trying to get an amendment on the Senate floor to get it added to a technical tax bill still out there. There are some years where they haven't issued the bonding authorization in the past. They just double the request next year. At this time there is about \$60 million in bonds that hasn't been sold yet. The purchases and specs takes about a two year cycle. They don't want to start it unless the money is guaranteed to do some of those things.

The bill that allowed the Metropolitan Council to have four year staggered terms passed. The Governor vetoed it. He said the structure now where the Council members serve at the Governor's pleasure and are appointed with his terms is the best way because it creates the best accountability under the current structure.

There should be no impact on fares or service at this point for the next year.

5. Coordinated Action Plan

Elaine Koutsoukos spoke to the TAAC committee. They are doing an update of the Public Transit and Human Services Transportation Coordination Action Plan. This came out of SAFETEA-LU in 2007. They were required to prepare this plan. She gave an update on what was done in the past, what the requirements were and where they are in the process of updating the plan.

SAFETEA-LU is the transportation reauthorization bill. It required that they do a coordinated action plan beginning in 2007. That was when the last one was prepared. They were asked to do one every four years in the cycle when they do a solicitation for funding. The FTA requires the plans to access funds for projects that coordinate improved transportation service. The plan is used as a means for distributing funds for the Jobs Access Reverse Commute program, New Freedom and 5310, the vehicle funding. The projects must be covered under the strategies identified in the plan. The plan also identifies coordination opportunities. It must be updated prior to solicitation. They do their solicitation every two years. They will be doing the solicitation this fall. All the projects must be new. They

cannot duplicate existing service. This is especially under the ADA service. They can't replace the ADA.

There are three types of program eligibility: 1.) The Jobs Access Reverse Commute Program provides service for operating capital funds for services that serve low income individuals that are looking for jobs. The service can also serve the general public. 2.) New Freedom funding provides operating capital funds for services for people with disabilities. These services must go beyond the regular ADA requirements. It can't replace existing ADA service or it can't be used to fulfill ADA service. It is above and beyond. 3.) Elderly persons and persons with disabilities, section 5310. This is the capital funding for services for older adults and persons with disabilities. It is all the vehicle services. This program is right now handled by MnDOT.

The possible uses of funds to purchase leased vehicles. It could add mid day, late night or weekend service. Funds nonprofit shuttle service to day programs and employment services. It provides volunteer driver stipend, mobility management services, and increases accessibility beyond ADA requirements. An example of something funded in the past was Minneapolis and Saint Paul used the funds to put in accessible pedestrian signals. It can be used to put improvements around the transit stop for accessibility.

Right now they are in the plan development process. They had an oversight steering committee. There were several meetings last fall. They hired a consultant to help with an online survey with all the transit providers and then the human service providers. The online questionnaire needs assessment. They also held a stakeholder workshop in November.

The needs assessment was identified as mobility barriers. There were lower levels of service in some areas. This includes both time and location. There were inadequate transit connections to human service sites such as hospitals, nursing homes and centers. The mobility options for the unemployed persons and entry level jobs, which would be funded with the reverse commute service. There are inadequate transfer facilities and limited information is available. There is a lot of information out there for all the different transit services, even the human service agencies but it is not getting out to the public to use.

Service fragmentation, regulatory issues hinder service coordination. There is a lack of service for short distance travel outside ADA service areas. There was limited ability to get on the dial-a-ride service at certain times. They fill up quickly. There were limited options for low or no cost transportation services. There was limited affordable housing in transit-oriented development areas. There was limited door-to-door service. There were limited options for same-day service. Many of these mobility barriers were identified four years ago. They didn't find any new things that they identified.

There are proposed strategies to the plan. By putting these strategies in the plan they do have solicitation for projects in the fall. These strategies will identify what can be applied for. They coordinate services to maximize ridership. They address insurance issues related to shared transportation. They will establish a mobility manager. Improve awareness of information sources. That could be by website, or coordinator or information resource person. They are doing travel training. Increase off-peak transit service. Expand ADA service hours. Establish more circulator services. Increase dial-a-ride capacity. Promote carpool programs at worksites and retirement communities. Change cancellation policy from one hour to two hours to allow more same day reservations. Pathway enhancements like sidewalks to transit service, accessible pedestrian signals, free or reduced cost bus passes and expand volunteer driver programs and transit service within and between suburbs.

The next step will be to finalize writing up the strategies, release the draft for public comment which they are anticipating it to be June, and then take it through the approval process to the TAB and the Metropolitan Council. That should be by August. Then the solicitation would be in the fall.

This is all predicated on what happens with the new reauthorization bill. They were hoping to have something done by then. This plan is a requirement of the past bill. They don't know if there will be funding in the future or whether the programs will change.

They do have a whole section on demographics and transit service. They have mapped employment areas and overlaying it with transit service to identify gaps. So if someone is coming in for a project they would have to identify what gap they are filling so that they wouldn't duplicate existing service. They also mapped human service agencies like hospitals and clinics.

6. Walkability

Anne White spoke to the TAAC committee. She is on the board of The District Councils Collaborative. It is a collaborative of all the planning councils in both Saint Paul and Minneapolis that are along the Central Corridor line. They have been in operation since 2006. They are funded entirely by grants. Initially looking at the planning that was going forward and making sure there was community input into that. Now they are focused on construction and doing what they can to make sure that access is maintained and that signage is good and that there are places to report things that are seen that are out of order. They are now looking to the future. This is where the walkability survey comes in. That is actually going to launch Sunday, May 6.

Over a three week period they are going to be gathering information on walking routes from the neighborhoods to the light rail stations. They set a goal of getting 100 people to walk to each light rail station. They are going to 15 stations. That is a total of 1,500 surveys that they hope to collect. They are having people look at what the walking environment is. They will evaluate sidewalks, whether there is enough time to cross at signalized crossings, whether there are marked crosswalks, whether there are shade trees and if it feels safe and comfortable. They will ask if people would be encouraged to walk to the light rail station. Projections say that 50 to 80 percent of people who ride the light rail will be walking to the station. Their interest in collecting the data is to see what the patterns are and see if there are certain areas that have disinvestment in their pedestrian realm and need special attention to bring it up to par. Then see if there are some issues that need to be addressed the length of the corridor.

Lighting is a big issue. The lighting on the streets that lead up to the Central Corridor is in many cases is inadequate. People don't feel safe walking at night to and from a light rail station. Another issue that has been raised regarding the University Avenue section is how people get from the south if they are south of Route I-94 how do they get under or over the freeway to get to the station. They see many opportunities to improve that access from the south.

They will accumulate all the data, and determine some priorities and see where the greatest needs are and setting those priorities to help guide the city and MnDOT and the Met Council in making those improvements. They are being attentive to how they can fund some of the needed improvements. One of the places that they are looking to as a possibility is some of the contingency funds that will be released as the Central Corridor project comes closer to conclusion. There is likely to be a release time probably about November. They hope to do with the survey report is get the priorities in, get the cities and counties to support getting some funding to fix the pedestrian environment.

The surveys that the disability community turns in are the most important surveys they will get. There are compliances that are required by law that relate to the disability community. The more evidence they can gather of needs the stronger the impetus will be to attend to those needs.

The kickoff will be Sunday, May 6. They will have an event at the end. The walks will all start from different stations at 2:30 p.m. Then people will fill out their surveys and they will gather from all the stations at the Central Corridor Resource Center, which is at the old Lexington Library at 1080 University Avenue.

Rick Cardnes spoke to the TAAC committee. They received one of the Corridor's of Opportunity grants which phased in over the winter. Right now it allowed them to participate in some of the things that are going on with the Central Corridor LRT. The walkability survey is one of those things that has heightened the importance of access to all of the stations. He lives in downtown Saint Paul and works at Fairview and University and rides the bus back and forth along University. There are a number of buildings that are totally inaccessible for persons with mobility disabilities. There are also very few group homes that are along the corridor. There are some identification problems that will be present for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He suggested a different color for each station. There will be new housing along the corridor in the future.

White said that the survey will run over a period of three weeks. It can be done any time within the three week period. There is a different survey for each station. There is a map of the area around each station. They request that the person filling out the survey to draw on the map where there are problems.

The main crossing streets are the city's responsibility. There are some state and county roads that are involved. MnDOT is responsible for rebuilding the pedestrian bridges over I-94. They want people to look at if the pedestrian bridges are in the right place and see if they need some pedestrian and bicycle bridges over I-94. They are working with all the different government entities that might need to be involved in this.

Once the data is collected they will put it all together and set some priorities. There are certain communities where there has been a lot of disinvestment in the community. The walking conditions in these communities are much worse than in some other communities where there has been more investment over time. A certain amount of focus will be on those communities with the most disinvestment. They will be looking at high rises and large groups of people who need to walk to the light rail. There are a number of affordable housing complexes that they are working with to make sure they do the survey to determine what their needs are to be able to get to the light rail.

7. Member Comment

None.

8. Public Comment

None.

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.