



# **METRO Blue Line Extension**

## **Meeting of the Business Advisory Committee**

**Tuesday, October 8, 2024**

**8:00 AM – 9:30 AM**

Blue Line Project Office

6465 Wayzata Boulevard, Suite 600

St. Louis Park, MN 55426

**BAC Members:** Ian Alexander, John Barobs, KB Brown, Dan Doerrler, Dr. Tara Watson, Chris Webley, Sabrina Williams

**Agency Staff and Guests:** Nkongo Cigolo, Neha Damle, Cathy Gold, Joleen Ketterling, Shahin Khazrajafari, Nick Landwer, Rattana Sengsoulichanh, Dan Soler, Nick Thompson, Kaja Vang

### **Meeting Summary**

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

Co-Chair Dan Doerrler called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **2. Adopt Meeting Minutes**

The August 6 meeting minutes were motioned for approval by Dan Doerrler and seconded by KB Brown. The August 6 meeting minutes were approved.

#### **3. Outcomes of Municipal Consent**

Nick Thompson, Blue Line Extension (BLE) Project Team, provided an update on the outcomes of municipal consent. Mr. Thompson shared that the municipal consent process has been successfully completed with the last resolution received from the city of Minneapolis yesterday. Mr. Thompson indicated all four cities and Hennepin County approved the design of the BLE project. Municipal Consent is a state law, and the process involves the Corridor cities and Hennepin County approving the physical design of the light rail transit (LRT) project. Mr. Thompson shared there were a lot of questions by the public regarding why municipal consent was being asked for during 30% design. The answer was communicated that this timeline enables the Corridor cities to be able to influence the design by indicating their priorities early in the project.

Mr. Thompson indicated it was a hard effort to get to this point and there was not unanimous support in the community and city officials were feeling the pressure. In addition, it was the first time many community members had ever gone through the municipal consent process. Mr. Thompson



shared that in partnership with City staff, each Corridor city made a municipal consent action and documented their priorities to change the project going forward and reflect what is important. Mr. Thompson indicated 33 of the 38 votes were for approval and of all the municipal consent votes that have happened on past projects, this was the strongest majority of votes seen.

Mr. Thompson summarized the station design changes for the project which include the addition of a station at Washington and West Broadway in Minneapolis and relocation of the 40<sup>th</sup> Street station in Robbinsdale to the north side of the intersection. Mr. Thompson indicated that the city of Minneapolis, city of Robbinsdale and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board asked the project team to continue to work on the Lowry Station design. These entities felt it is important to have a station at Lowry but would like to evolve the design. Mr. Thompson shared that if a new design is developed at this station, this specific change may have to go back to the cities of Robbinsdale and Minneapolis for approval. Mr. Thompson also shared that all design changes will be reflected in the final design plans and that the Corridor cities do not need to vote on the final design plans except for the city of Minneapolis which will vote to approve the additional station.

Visuals of the West Broadway station, Lowry station, and the 40<sup>th</sup> Street station were shared. Nick Landwer, BLE Project Team, stated work groups are being conducted to review the Lowry Station. KB Brown asked Mr. Landwer to clarify the issues surrounding this station. Mr. Landwer indicated one of the issues is emergency access to North Memorial Hospital and crossing Lowry Avenue. Gates will be needed on the LRT for safety and sight distances. Once the gates go into operation, there will be a time where emergency vehicles will not be able to get through. The work group is also looking at an alternative that elevates the station.

Ian Alexander asked about the on and off ramps at the West Broadway station and whether the designers are working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to mitigate the issues in this area. Mr. Landwer replied that this area is being evaluated with MnDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Evaluation regarding whether lanes need to be lengthened or there needs to be a change in the timing is occurring. Mr. Landwer indicated there is no design change to the on and off ramps. Mr. Thompson added that the 21<sup>st</sup> bridge to the north of West Broadway will change some of the traffic flow in the West Broadway area.

Mr. Landwer shared there was positive feedback from Robbinsdale residents to make the change of moving the 40<sup>th</sup> Street station to the north side of the intersection as it would enable a more direct access to the park and ride station.

Next steps were reviewed and include continued collaboration with each project partner on the path to final plans. The BLE project team will refocus the Issue Resolution Teams (IRTs) to Design Resolution Teams (DRTs). Mr. Landwer stated additional funded city staff will be supported in the project. It is anticipated that 60% design will be reached in early 2025 and traffic impacts during construction will be determined between 60% and 90% design.



Dan Doerrer asked if only details within the designs that were approved during municipal consent may change. Mr. Thompson replied that if something is discovered related to engineering and a change needs to happen, the project may need to go back and ask for reapproval for that specific change. Mr. Thompson stated this has occurred in the past on other projects.

KB Brown expressed concern that so far in the meeting there had been no mention of anti-displacement. Mr. Thompson replied that part of the municipal consent approval was continued focus on anti-displacement and what needs to happen. Mr. Thompson also indicated that Hennepin County recently passed a resolution with next steps on anti-displacement and there is a separate entity, the Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Program Board (ACPP) that will be continuing anti-displacement work outside of the project. Mr. Thompson emphasized that the project's commitment to anti-displacement has not changed. KB Brown suggested that anti-displacement be talked about with each project update. KB Brown shared now that municipal consent is complete, community members feel they have no more control. Whether this is right or wrong, that is the impression the community has. Cathy Gold, Hennepin County, responded that as the BLE project team starts to work on the mitigation options for environmental, the environmental team will be providing specific details on how anti-displacement fits into that work. Outreach within the community will also occur to gather additional suggestions on mitigation that will be included in the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS). KB Brown stated he has had five business owners approach him asking when someone from the project was going to come talk to them. Cathy Gold responded the project will be wanting a lot of feedback from businesses to understand accessibility during construction to ensure the infrastructure developed will be better than it is today.

Dr. Tara Watson asked if there is a timeframe or dates for when anti-displacement funding will be made available and if there will be an actual dollar amount and funders coming forward. Dr. Watson also asked how people will get the information and stated she understands there is going to be community outreach but feels people would feel better if the timeframe was communicated and starting now. Cathy Gold indicated Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council alongside the city of Minneapolis presented to the board in September and want to be a conduit to funding the anti-displacement work that needs to be done for the community. There are requests for proposals out at Hennepin County right now to connect people to the benefits and these awards will be announced soon. The ACPP board will be prioritizing where the funding will go. Cathy shared these types of conversations have been happening in the background. Cathy also shared the project will do as much as possible to answer to the comments in the anti-displacement report and the environmental team will begin to provide details on mitigation strategies. Dr. Tara Watson asked if anyone has done a cost analysis to get a good dollar amount to make the community whole. Cathy Gold replied that it is going to take years to ensure the dollars are in place and potentially revisiting legislation to request additional funding.



KB Brown stated he is on the ACPP board and there is a requirement that the person applying for dollars must have a match. KB Brown shared his biggest concern is that this requirement eliminates many. KB Brown asked if there was going to be some type of review of the Request for Proposal (RFP) process because currently the process does not prioritize people that are actually in the city. Cathy Gold replied that Hennepin County is committed to this work and Eric Gustafson of Hennepin County is leading this effort. Cathy indicated this question should be directed to him. Cathy replied the process is geared to make sure whoever applies is identifying the needs that are being asked of the entity.

Ian Alexander asked what the disposition process will be for areas where there is adjacent development to the parcels being taken for LRT. Ian explained he had asked about the adjacent parcels on Broadway and wasn't receiving a clear answer and asked for transparency on this process. Mr. Landwer replied that until municipal consent is done, no property is purchased. Identifying the transit need for any property purchased needs to occur and if some property is available to be developed, the County or city would work on this. Mr. Landwer added that Metro Transit has requirements regarding this process. KB Brown replied that this is the entire purpose of anti-displacement; to eliminate large developers from buying up property. Chris Webley shared that he thinks members of the BAC can influence this and zoning in the area. Chris stated this makes development on the north side more viable.

Dan Doerrer summarized that concerns have been voiced regarding various processes and about not having anti-displacement on the agenda and asked if this type of information could be included in subsequent meetings. KB Brown added that any discussion about design should be married with anti-displacement.

#### **4. Environmental Update**

Neha Damle, Environmental Team for the BLE project, shared next steps for the environmental work on the project. Neha shared that the environmental team is in the phase of preparing the SFEIS and shared a brief update of what happens in this process. Neha stated analysis updates and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) coordination is happening this fall into the spring of 2025. Multiple administrative reviews by the FTA will occur. Some mitigation options are specifically geared toward environmental justice (EJ) communities and the environmental team is trying to go above and beyond what has happened in past projects. Community outreach will begin in the fall of 2024 through spring 2025. The outreach plan is being prepared and November is when project team members will be going out into the community. Neha shared that the anticipated publication of the SFEIS is summer of 2025 with implementation of mitigation starting thereafter.

Neha shared next steps with the SFEIS include additional noise and vibration analysis and historic and cultural surveys. The analysis updates are based on city comments and validating the preliminary results of the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) as well as design



advancements. Agency coordination with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), city partners and permitting agencies is continuing. The SFEIS will include design updates to reflect 30% plan coordination and municipal consent. Based on the comments received, the environmental team knows the buckets of where more effort is needed.

Neha shared that the mitigation commitments for environmental justice that are a part of the project must be vetted through the FTA first and would then be funded by the project. Adverse impacts to EJ communities include business impacts during construction, loss of parking, community character, and indirect displacement. Neha also shared the mitigation options under development currently include funding for community programs, cultural placekeeping design groups, storefront/virtual resource center, workforce development, business support during construction, and parking solutions near Penn and West Broadway. Neha stated the environmental team is seeking more input from the community regarding all of these.

Ian Alexander asked if parking solutions will cover more than just Penn and West Broadway (as mentioned). Neha replied this is one example based on community input. Mr. Landwer added that opportunities will be identified as the engineering team designs for parking solutions. Mr. Landwer indicated workforce development is being considered now such as internship programs, training, and developing the workforce in design, construction and operation of the system.

Dr. Tara Watson asked if there has been any conversation about potentially having shuttles as a parking solution. Mr. Landwer replied this was a good suggestion. Dan Doerrer wanted to echo the sentiments of a preference for local investors and admires the goal and priority of local hiring incentives.

Ian Alexander stated that he wants to see something positive and good happening but doesn't feel there is strong coordination or leadership. Mr. Landwer replied that coordination always needs to happen and there are requirements the project must meet. Mr. Landwer added that anti-displacement will continue to be a coordinated effort.

John Barobs had additional questions regarding the storefront/virtual resource center. John asked if it would be a building that would be leased during the time of construction and then serve as a community resource center for business owners that have direct needs and challenges and if the Blue Line Project would staff it. John also asked if there was something similar for the Green Line Project and if there were successes or challenges of anti-displacement during that process. Dan Soler, Hennepin County, answered that there was a community resource center for the Green Line project but no level of anti-displacement work that will likely occur on this project. Dan stated the Lexington Library owned by the city of St. Paul was the resource center and a place where community meetings and open houses were conducted. Dan sees the storefront/virtual resource center for the BLE project as two-fold; it could serve the project in terms of having maps,



construction plans, and hosting meetings but could also staff community resource individuals from Hennepin County, Metropolitan Council or the project to guide people on business needs.

Nkongo Cigolo, BLE project team, shared that the project is developing a mitigation outreach framework which will identify mitigation measures to be rolled into the SFEIS. The bulk of this work will include going out into the community to collect input on how to advance the mitigation plan. Nkongo stated there will be a focus on the EJ community and the topics shared previously. The mitigation framework will be a published document and comments will be solicited.

## **5. Project Schedule**

Shahin Khazrajafari provided a brief schedule update for the BLE project. Shahin stated it has been a very busy year and many key milestones have been accomplished such as publishing the SDEIS and completing municipal consent. Looking ahead, Shahin covered the major project milestones to complete in the next couple of years. Shahin shared that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) coordination continues with reviews between now and June 2025. Shahin stated this hopefully will then lead to receiving an amended record of decision in July of 2025. Sixty percent design is currently moving forward and 90% design is anticipated to be complete by fourth quarter 2025. Shahin stated these dates are fluid and a lot of coordination is happening post municipal consent to continue progress on the priorities for each City. Hard constraints for the project include the project rating application request being sent to the FTA in August 2025 and the subsequent project risk assessment with the FTA that would be completed in September 2025. This would keep the project on track to submit the full funding grant application in the first quarter of 2026. Anticipated construction contract award would occur by fourth quarter 2026.

Dr. Tara Watson stated that because this project is a federal project, there will be a need for federal certifications in order for smaller businesses to bid on the work and be part of the workforce. Dr. Watson asked if there was a line item to help these individuals get certified and prepared. Dan Soler appreciated the question and stated there are resources within Hennepin County who could develop preparation sessions for this. Mr. Landwer replied that the Metropolitan Council's Office of Equity and Equal Opportunity could be engaged as well. Neha responded that training ideas are being considered in the mitigation plan. Dr. Watson asked if there was a way to streamline the process and help these small businesses meet the requirements. Neha replied that the mitigation buckets have different starting times and priorities can be assigned.

## **6. Discussion and Members' Feedback**

Dan Doerrer asked the group if there were any additional questions or comments. Mr. Landwer replied that the Office of Equity and Equal Opportunity can be pulled back into the project for specific



needs. Cathy Gold added that Hennepin County is committed to supporting this process and will draft documents and update based on small business feedback.

Dr. Watson shared that a personal fear of hers as a business owner is how this project will impact her business when things are shut down. Dr. Watson isn't sure where to go if her numbers are down and income is not being generated. Dr. Watson stated nobody experiences it like the business owner and that becomes their new job, keeping their business running.

Dan Doerrer responded that what Dr. Watson just shared touches on everything that was highlighted in the meeting today. Dan Doerrer requested that Dr. Watson share this at the Corridor Management Committee (CMC) when highlighting the concerns of the BAC. Neha thanked Dr. Watson for sharing this as it provides more details for how to support small businesses during construction. Neha indicated that the individuals who will staff the resource center will be the group to answer these types of questions about the project.

**7. Next Meeting: November 5, 2024**

**8. Adjourn**

Co-Chair Dan Doerrer asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Tara Watson motioned, and John Barobs seconded it. Co-Chair Doerrer adjourned the meeting at 9:22 am.

*Meeting Materials: Agenda, Slides, August 6 Meeting Summary*

*Administrative Lead: Joleen Ketterling*