



**Southwest Light Rail Transitway (SWLRT)  
Business Advisory Committee Meeting  
October 18, 2017  
Southwest Project Office  
6465 Wayzata Blvd, Suite 500  
St. Louis Park, MN 55426  
7:30 AM – 9:00 AM**

**Meeting Summary**

**In Attendance:**

*BAC Members/Alternates:* Co-chair Dan Duffy, Co-chair Will Roach, Lou Wack, Rick Weiblen, Gary Orcutt, Duane Spiegle, Stuart Ackerberg

*Staff and Guests:* SPO's Jim Alexander, Dan Pfeiffer, James Mockovciak, Sophia Ginis; Met Council Chair Alene Tchourumoff, and SLP's Gregg Hunt

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order by BAC Co-chair Roach. Mr. Roach thanked the Chair for attending and provided an overview of the BAC's role, and its history with the SWLRT project.

The Chair thanked the committee for the invitation. She stated the importance of demonstrating the local business community's support here and in Washington D.C. to secure federal funding. She added the Council is planning a trip to D.C with members of the business community to stress that the regional and local business community understand the critical role of a robust transit system to Minnesota's future economic growth.

Mr. Weiblen asked if the state might still help fund the LRT projects

The Chair said she would be surprised if that happened for these [LRT] projects. However, she added that the Council has yet to see the State's position on the other transit projects like the Orange, Gold, Riverview and Rush Lines. Ms. Tchourumoff continued by highlighting current transit funding challenges with the dissolution of CTIB, a lack of State funding, and the changing relationship of the Council with the counties taking on a larger share of the project's local funding - including more responsibility for ongoing capital maintenance and upfront capital costs. She also mentioned the decrease in State funding for Metro Transit, and the uncertainty of funding in future legislative sessions.

Co-chair Roach asked the Chair what the business community could do to generate support for federal funding. Ms. Tchourumoff referred to studies done highlighting alternative transportation options. It's important, she said, to recognize and emphasize that buses don't provide the volume needed when compared to an LRT system.

Co-Chair Duffy asked if FTA would still see this project as viable if the resolicited bids were higher. The Chair explained that FTA empathized with the bid rejection, adding that it has happened before. FTA still



considers SWLRT a strong project.

Mr. Spiegle asked if the BLRT project could begin before SWLRT. The Blue Line project still has additional design work and rail negotiations to complete.

## **II. Project Update**

Jim Alexander presented a PowerPoint overview of the proposed corridor protection wall. Utilizing maps and photos he described the background, design, public outreach, and environmental review process. Mr. Alexander explained the timing of the recently announced corridor protection wall. Negotiations, he said, couldn't begin until after ROD. BNSF was concerned about shared corridors and non-FRA vehicles operating alongside their own. The barrier wall will protect the LRT from a rail derailment.

Co-chair Duffy asked if the wall was part of the LRT budget? The wall has not been added to the budget at this time.

Chair Tchourumoff asked if there would have been a fence to prevent pedestrians crossing the alignment Mr. Alexander replied there would be a fence. He described the safe access points for crossing the track and a station-by-station overview of the impact of the wall

Mr. Weiblen asked if there were walls in other locations with the same guidelines. Mr. Alexander replied there were. The proposed corridor protection wall triggered additional analysis under the Section 106 guidelines due to its location near the railroad historic district which is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Co-chair Duffy asked if it included plantings to prevent graffiti. Mr. Alexander replied that vegetation is challenging to maintain. But that SPO was meeting with the Minneapolis Park Board to evaluate alternatives.

Mr. Ackerberg asked if SPO considered working with local arts groups to 'turn the negative [of graffiti] into a positive'. Mr. Alexander mentioned that FTA doesn't look at public art as part of the project. Like SPO's work with project partners to design the station wickets, we hope to consult with community groups and city staff to address the wall aesthetics.

Mr. Alexander continued his presentation describing the wall and tail track, noise considerations, ground water and soil considerations in more detail. In addition, he described the public outreach efforts since the announcement of the proposed wall.

Mr. Alexander continued with an overview of the Section 106 National Historic Preservation environmental review process. He addressed the background of the federal requirements, the Met Council's and MnDOT's Cultural Resource Unit's role in the review and mitigation process. In addition, he described the post-ROD environmental review underway.

Co-chair Duffy asked if this was a precedent setting process for other/future LRT lines? Several members had seen large retaining walls along the Denver LRT system and asked if the corridor protection wall



would look similar. Mr. Alexander stated the proposed wall discussed look similar to the wall in Denver. He added that railroads have been reevaluating how they share their corridors with passenger trains across the nation. Co-chair Duffy asked if there was any chance the railroads might share in the cost of the proposed wall? Mr. Alexander replied no. He added the wall was a condition set by the railroad for SWLRT to share the rail corridor.

### **III. Civil Construction Update**

Mr. Alexander highlighted the modifications in the Civil Bid Framework. He listed the revised specifications, and potential modifications to increase bidding interest in the contracting community. Co-chair Roach asked what the cost drivers were. Mr. Alexander listed labor, materials and the impact of recent flooding around the nation. Mr. Weiblen asked if all 4 original bids were over SPO estimates, and what drove the significant differences in the bid numbers. Mr. Alexander stated that since the bids were in an active procurement process, he could not discuss additional details on project estimates or the responsiveness issues of bids that might explain the differences in the bids. He added SPO was hoping for 2-3 new bids. He added that SPO has pursued feedback from the industry to identify bidding price premiums to determine ways to reduce risk and cost in the upcoming framework. He added SPO was also pursuing an increase in the initial LNTP amount to raise contractor confidence.

Duane Spiegle asked if SPO could be a privately held line to remove any regulatory constraints and possibly simplify the project? Mr. Alexander replied the current system does not allow that. Mr. Weiblen asked if there could be a 'shared savings approach' in the upcoming bidding. Or, if that were possible after the bid is awarded. Mr. Alexander said current regulations precluded that. SPO would take the low bid assuming it was both responsible and responsive. Co-chair Duffy asked if the project could be split up into two phases and allocated to 2 contractors, like what was done on the Green Line. Mr. Alexander replied that each project is different. The Met Council had looked at this option and decided one contractor would be best. It would be more productive for one entity to source and coordinate this project.

Stuart Ackerberg asked what will happen if the new bids were higher than the original bids. Mr. Alexander acknowledged that could occur. But SPO was confident the modifications to the bid framework could mitigate that possibility. Mr. Orcutt asked if an original bid had met the Councils criteria, was the money there to begin construction as scheduled? Mr. Alexander replied, that if that happened SPO would have moved forward and gone through the same process of asking for an LNTP to begin next year. The FTA would help squeeze out unnecessary risk, approve a Letter of No Prejudice and the county would be prepared to fund the project. Mr. Spiegle asked when revenue service would begin. Mr. Alexander said in 2022.

### **VI. Next Steps**

Mr. Alexander highlighted the project schedule. Co-chair Roach adjourned the meeting.