



**METRO Blue Line Extension  
Community Advisory Committee Meeting  
June 1, 2015  
Blue Line Project Office  
5514 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 200  
Crystal, MN 55428  
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM**

**Meeting Summary**

CAC Members: Rich Baker, Kate Catron, Carol Vosberg, Justin Youngbluth, Gene Bakke, George Selman, Giuseppe Marrari, Chris Berne, Daniel Bonilla, Steven Schmidt, Catherine Fleming, Ticiea Fletcher, La Shella Sims

Agency Staff and Guests: Dan Pfeiffer, Sophia Ginis, Juan Rangel, David Davies, Alicia Vap, Kathryn O'Brien, Rachel Haase, Jim Toulouse, Ryan Wilson, Nick Landwer, Laura Baenan, Dan Soler, Cindy Sherman, Janet Kennison

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Dan Soler welcomed the committee members. Dan Pfeiffer asked if any committee members would be interested in being co-chairs of the CAC. Chris Berne, Kate Catron, and Rich Baker indicated interest. Chair Duinick will appoint the co-chairs from the nominees.

**2. Outreach Update – Open Houses**

Dan Pfeiffer gave an overview of the upcoming open houses.

- June 4<sup>th</sup> – Minneapolis and Golden Valley – Harrison Recreation Center
- June 11<sup>th</sup> – Robbinsdale – Robbinsdale Middle School
- June 17<sup>th</sup> – Brooklyn Park – Brooklyn Park Community Center

These three upcoming meetings are hosted by Hennepin County. BPO staff won't give a formal presentation, but they will be staffing BLRT boards and layouts.

The open house in Crystal was held on May 28<sup>th</sup>. Dan Soler stated that the Crystal open house went well, and it was the first LRT open house for a lot of attendees.

Dan Pfeiffer provided the key takeaways from the comments received at the Crystal open house:

- LRT will bring better access to other parts of the metro and local/regional shopping areas
- Good for businesses within in a few blocks; potential negative impacts to other businesses
- Concerns about safety and crime, parking in the neighborhoods
- Concerns about changing city character by introducing new demographics, density, gentrification
- Concerns about traffic disruptions and congestion

- Access to stations is important to local residents
- A few expressed that the project should be done faster

Justin Youngbluth added that a lot of new people attended the open house since it was the first one in Crystal. People often show up to voice disapproval, but he hopes to get the word out to come learn more about the project and see the benefits of LRT.

### 3. Design Update/Discussion

#### 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue Park & Ride – Recommendation

Technical Issue #8 – Alicia Vap presented.

The Draft EIS showed the existing Metro Transit parking facility, a split platform station north of 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, and pedestrian access from 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. The existing bus turnaround would remain. The existing two-story parking ramp has 566 spaces; the Draft EIS called for 160 spaces to be added with a third level on the parking ramp.

The current design recommendation includes the following:

- Platform configuration changed from split platform to center platform
- Pedestrian overpass from the parking ramp over the freight and LRT tracks to the platform
- Pedestrian access from 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue
- Bus stops on 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue allows use of current bus turnaround for park-and-ride expansion

The existing ramp wasn't designed to accommodate a third level; that would require a lot of reinforcements and have substantial cost implications. The ridership model indicates a demand of 800 spaces. Two other options were considered:

- Adding structured parking where the bus turnaround currently exists
  - Would add 208 spaces
  - Add a pedestrian overpass between the two ramps
  - Total spaces: 749
- Adding surface parking instead of a new ramp
  - Would add 149 spaces
  - Add a pedestrian overpass in the middle of the lot/ramp
  - Potential extra capacity (36 spaces) in a water holding area
  - Total spaces: 715

Rich Baker asked what the confidence level was in the 800 spot demand. Dan Soler explained that the model takes into account a variety of factors so 800 isn't an exact number but it provides a guidelines.

Justin Youngbluth asked if building a lot across the street had been considered. Dan Soler said Metro Transit doesn't own the land across the street.

Catherine Fleming asked if ride share or bicyclists were taken into account. Dan Soler stated that this part of the model only predicts park and riders, but the full ridership model takes into account other types of riders.

Justin Youngbluth asked if the bus turnaround was needed. Alicia Vap replied that buses can be accommodated on the street, but bus bridging (i.e., when LRT is shut down, buses are brought in to replicate LRT service as best they can) may be more difficult without the turnaround.

Rich Baker asked what the difference is in the walking distance between the second structure and surface lot options. Alicia Vap replied it would be about the same unless you're parking in the far corner of the surface lot, which is why the pedestrian overpass is needed.

Justin Youngbluth asked if staff had thought about swapping the freight and LRT tracks so pedestrians don't have to cross over the freight tracks. Alicia Vap said that since different stations are on different sides of the tracks there would still be a cross over issue at some stations. Ryan Wilson added that continuity is very important to BNSF. They have not expressed interest in weaving the tracks and want to minimize their liability.

Chris Berne asked why split platforms were included in the Draft EIS if center platforms are preferred. Nick Landwer said that split platforms keep the track running straight and can compress crossing distances. Center platforms take a little more right-of-way because the tracks curve out around the station. Alicia Vap added that at the time of the Draft EIS, Central Corridor wasn't operating yet, but now with that experience operations staff have expressed a strong preference for center platforms.

Catherine Fleming asked if there are strategic plans to provide easy access to businesses in the area. Alicia Vap replied that it depends on the station location, but we are trying to make safety improvements where we can. Dan Soler added that each station area will vary in terms of how much area there is to develop and what the nature of the station area is (e.g., neighborhood vs. business district).

Alicia Vap stated that the recommendation for the 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue park-and-ride is to advance the surface lot option due to compatibility with the neighborhood area, it is a more cost-effective option, and, if needed, a 36 space surface lot can be added in the future.

Daniel Bonilla asked what the difference is in cost between the second parking ramp and the surface lot. Alicia Vap responded that the cost for structured parking is at minimum \$10,000-15,000 per space. Dan Soler added that he didn't know the exact numbers off the top of his head, but the cost for structured parking would be seven to eight times more than surface parking. Daniel said that it would help to know the actual estimated costs to put that in perspective.

Rich Baker asked where the 36 spaces additional spaces would be. Alicia replied that those are the potential future spaces in the water holding area. Cindy Sherman added that the City of Brooklyn Park is looking at development in that area, and that additional parking could also be used for future development.

Steven Schmidt asked how many buses are expected per day. If buses are loading/unloading on the street, will there be a bump in? The Waterford senior housing complex uses emergency vehicles many times a day, so if buses and cars are stacked up it may present issues. Alicia Vap replied that the express bus route would be eliminated. She believes that would leave two routes serving the

park-and-ride, but she didn't know the frequency off the top of her head. Dan Soler stated that he expects that one of the routes will come from the Brooklyn Center park-and-ride.

Justin Youngbluth asked if the green space between the existing ramp and road needs to be maintained. Cindy Sherman replied that the City has talked about having a plaza-type setting in this area so eliminating some green space and having a pull off may work with that.

#### Brooklyn Boulevard Station – Recommendation

Technical Issue #9 – Alicia Vap presented.

The Draft EIS showed a split platform station with pedestrian access from Brooklyn Boulevard.

The current recommended design includes the following elements:

- Center platform south of Brooklyn Boulevard (changed from split platform)
- Pedestrian access from the traffic signal at Brooklyn Boulevard and from the traffic signal at 76<sup>th</sup> Avenue
- Bus stops on West Broadway and Brooklyn Boulevard
  - Staff is continuing to analyze the Starlite Transit Center operation at its current location or a location closer to the platform

Dan Soler noted that one of the problems with center platforms is that people don't always use the marked crossing locations, so design will need to take safety issues into consideration. Steven Schmidt added that he can see there being pedestrian problems at this station if people to grab food at McDonalds or other restaurants near the station and wait for train then dash across to platform when they see it coming, especially in the winter. Dan Soler said that fences can be put up, but that isn't good for snow removal.

Carol Vosberg asked if an overpass can be constructed like at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue station. Alicia Vap replied that an overpass could be a barrier to development and accessing businesses planned as part of the station area planning process.

Steven Schmidt asked if there will be barriers on the side of the rails. Dan Soler replied that that is undecided at this point.

Ticiea Fletcher added that there is no fencing at Government Plaza station, and people come in and out of the government center all day long. Dan Soler noted that the street is closed there and there is a pedestrian barrier between the tracks and signs directing riders to the crossing.

Rich Baker noted that in other cities the rail is a few feet lower than the platforms to prevent crossings.

Carol Vosberg asked if we needed to understand the station area planning before doing too much more design. Alicia Vap replied that this is about as far as we'll go for now, and more advanced design will come next year.

Daniel Bonilla noted that in Istanbul the LRT system has barriers that come down to prevent pedestrian crossings.

### Freight Rail Update

Ryan Wilson presented. BPO staff have two railroads to coordinate with: CP (has tracks east/west across Crystal) and BNSF (primary freight line BLRT will share space with). The portion of the project in the BNSF corridor is 7.8 miles long and about 100 feet wide. The proposal has LRT operating in the eastern 50 feet of the corridor and shifting the BNSF tracks to the western 50 feet.

BPO staff have been meeting with BNSF regularly for a number of months with discussions focused on what improvements are necessary to complete the BLRT project (i.e., what does our 50 feet need to look like and what does their 50 feet need to look like?).

The direction BPO has received so far from BNSF includes the following:

- BNSF intends to own and operate freight trains on the western 50 feet
- Need to protect BNSF's ability to make future freight track or capacity implements within the western 50 feet
- Shift and build freight tracks closer to LRT tracks
- Design and build appropriate physical barrier to ensure safe operations

The Draft EIS showed shifting freight rail tracks to west with service/access road for BNSF in between the freight and LRT tracks. BNSF has stated that they would prefer that the freight track be constructed closer to the LRT track because they would prefer their access road not be adjacent to the LRT.

Safety is a shared goal for BPO and BNSF. BNSF wants to be confident that if there is an incident there is room to address it. Options considered include:

- Increase separation between freight and LRT tracks
- Intrusion detection system for space between tracks
- Crash wall
- Moat
  - Essentially a ditch between the freight and LRT tracks, don't know what depth would be but potentially 6-8 feet deep
- Retained embankment

Carol Vosberg asked what the benefit of a moat would be. Ryan Wilson replied that it would add space between the freight and LRT tracks, and, in the worst case scenario, the drop would help control a derailment.

Rich Baker asked what the benefit would be of a moat over a crash wall. Dan Soler replied that the cost of a moat would be less. Ryan Wilson added that moat is more acceptable from visual and maintenance perspectives. Rich asked if a wall would be better at stopping a derailed train than a moat. Dan said that they aren't yet sure what a crash wall would look like or how big it would be. Rich replied that a moat would take up more space than a crash wall, and a wall would reinforce the division between what's for the LRT and what's for freight. Justin Youngbluth added that since Met Council wouldn't own the land (it would be a permanent easement) the project needs to work with BNSF and can't just do what they want.

Dan Soler stated that the proposal so far has been that permanent easement would be purchased on the eastern 50 feet, and the project will replace BNSF's single track in the remaining 50 feet. Fifty feet is enough for all LRT facilities needed and for BNSF's future capacity improvements. Adding a crash wall could add \$100 million to project (based on quick estimating). Ryan Wilson added that a key variable in the cost is completing borings to determine soil types; the results could drastically change the cost estimate. Dan said that BPO staff thinks there are a range of tools that could be used so we want to leave our options open.

La Shella Sims asked if the moat would go all the way to the Plymouth Avenue bridge. Ryan Wilson replied that there would be some treatment, but it may not be the moat. La Shella asked if the moat or other treatments would fit in the 100 feet. Dan Soler replied that they aren't looking at any options that would require additional right-of-way purchases outside of the 100-foot corridor.

Catherine Fleming asked if the negotiations included anything on what type of cargo the freight trains can carry. Ryan Wilson replied that we don't have the ability to negotiate that item. Catherine said that even if you can't control what their cargo is maybe you can ask for notifications. Dan Soler said that railroads may have to file notifications for certain cargo types but he wasn't sure. George Selman said that he believes notice is only required if trains are carrying radioactive material. Catherine Fleming asked if it is possible to require new technology such as being required on Amtrak trains for automatic stopping. Ryan Wilson said that we can't require BNSF to adopt additional measures beyond what is required by federal law.

Kate Catron said that she understands that the wall is more expensive and may not be visually appealing, but if additional trains come through in the future and carry oil, would the neighborhood be satisfied with a moat? It's hard to make that decision based on only current operations.

Rich Baker asked if we know anything about the future of rail maintenance. Does BNSF really need an access road or do they just want to hold on to as much space as possible? Ryan Wilson said that they don't have an access road today, but it is extremely difficult to access the tracks between TH 55 and 36<sup>th</sup>. That stretch could be accessed if there were a second set of tracks.

La Shella Sims said that she believes there are some federal requirements for notification of freight content.

Dan Soler stated that we don't know much about BNSF's future plans, but we know today it runs from the Monticello power plant into Minneapolis and hooks up with the Wayzata subdivision. There is one track with four to five trains per week. We know they want to hook up to the CP tracks, but that looks to be off the table currently. The railroad believes they will outlast LRT, so they are happy to let LRT operate in an easement, and when eventually LRT is abandoned BNSF can use the corridor for freight again.

La Shella Sims asked if anyone has done research or asked what federal rules they have to follow? Dan Soler replied that they don't have to tell us anything. Steven Schmidt said it is safe to assume they are complying with federal guidelines. He then asked if drainage was figured into the moat design. Dan Soler said that yes, drainage would be taken into account.

Daniel Bonilla ask what happens if BNSF doesn't want to negotiate. Dan Soler replied that the project relies heavily on our ability to get to a negotiated agreement with BNSF, and if that doesn't happen it would put the project back to the drawing board. George Selman added that Commissioner Opat got some strong commitments from the railroad probably 8-10 years ago when this alignment was being developed. Dan Soler said that when this alignment was chosen out of the Alternatives Analysis (AA), there was a strong understanding that BNSF was willing to work with us. None of issues being discussed today are deal breakers, but some options may cost more than others.

Catherine Fleming asked if we have first right of refusal if BNSF decides to sell their 50 feet. Dan Soler said that the only party he can think of that would be interested in purchasing it is Hennepin County.

La Shella Sims asked what the benefit is to BNSF from allowing LRT in their corridor. Dan Soler said its financial benefits.

Ryan Wilson stated that there is no best treatment or one size fits all approach, and different portions of the corridor may require different treatments. Project staff will explore these options.

There are approximately 10 locations where the corridor is less than 100 feet because BNSF has sold off pieces of land over the years. These areas will necessitate varying design treatments. Three of these areas are more significant than the others:

- South of 71<sup>st</sup> Avenue – West Broadway Avenue road and sidewalk
- West Broadway Avenue crossings of BNSF corridor – parking lot at Steve O's Bar and Grill
- North of 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue N – parking lot at Sawhorse Designers & Builders (approx. 10 feet)

Staff need to work through impacts in these areas.

La Shella Sims asked if it possible that this project would end up in the same cost situation as SWLRT. Ryan Wilson replied that a lot of these elements in some form have been included in previous cost estimates. Dan Soler added that in July they want to bring to this group a presentation of estimated costs, what's included, what's not, and risks.

Freight rail next steps include:

- Continue monthly coordination meetings
- Advance improvements necessary for BLRT
- Ensure improvements covered in Final EIS
- Meeting with BNSF Fort Worth representatives in late June

#### Preliminary Park & Ride Space Demand

Nick Landwer presented. Staff is currently modeling ridership and park and ride demand. The confidence of the park-and-ride modeling is in the 90% range; the numbers are as accurate as the regional model.

The Draft EIS assumed three park-and-rides:

- 93<sup>rd</sup> Avenue (now at Oak Grove Pkwy): 800 spaces
- 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue: 725 spaces (565 existing, 160 new)

- Robbinsdale: 500 spaces
- Total spaces for corridor: 2,025

The ridership model uses a horizon year of 2040 and uses 2020 for opening day. It uses population, employment, and travel behavior to generate trips and estimates travel modes of riders to each station (walking, bus, park-and-ride). We can “constrain” or limit the capacity of a park-and-ride facility in the model.

Ticiea Fletcher asked how you keep track of how many spaces are available each day in the park-and-rides. Nick Landwer replied that some park-and-rides have signs if the lot is full. We haven’t gotten that far into design yet for this project, but we want to make sure we can adequately park the demand.

Park-and-ride space demand was modeled for a number of scenarios as shown in the table below.

| Park-and-Ride Station             | Draft EIS 2030 Forecast | 2040 Build Capacity Unconstrained | 2040 Build Capacity Constrained | 2020 Build Capacity Constrained |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Oak Grove Pkwy</b>             | 800                     | 725                               | 725                             | 550                             |
| <b>63<sup>rd</sup> Ave</b>        | 725                     | 800                               | 775                             | 675                             |
| <b>Robbinsdale Transit Center</b> | 500                     | 850                               | 525                             | 450                             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                      | <b>2025</b>             | <b>2375</b>                       | <b>2025</b>                     | <b>1675</b>                     |

The constrained parking scenario resulted in loss of 2 daily rides per parking space

There is a strong relationship between BLRT and the need for park-and-ride facilities to accommodate ridership. Oak Grove Parkway and 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue have the ability to absorb the necessary parking spaces to meet demand. The Robbinsdale park-and-ride is constrained by its downtown character and opportunities for structured parking. Constraining the ramp size also has trade-offs for ridership patronage. Staff is working to figure out what the right solution is for Robbinsdale without negatively impacting the LRT project.

Next steps include:

- Continuing to work with Robbinsdale to locate and size the park-and-ride
- Analyzing other possibilities to locate park-and-ride spaces to meet ridership demand in the corridor
- Completing analysis by end of July for all park-and-ride facilities for base project inclusion

Dan Soler said that we could build a 2,000 space ramp at 63<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, but that won’t make up for the people that want to park at Robbinsdale because they won’t drive north to take the train south.

La Shella Sims said that by 2040 a lot of cities will likely use public transportation for students rather than school buses and asked if those numbers are taken into consideration in ridership. Nick Landwer said that we’re currently working on those ridership numbers, but he’s guessing that the potential for students from other cities aren’t included. Kathryn O’Brien added that in the next couple of months a ridership presentation will be given to the CAC.



Kate Catron said that she's concerned about people parking in neighborhoods around the Robbinsdale station if they can't fit in the park-and-ride. Dan Soler said that we are looking at other location options for park-and-rides. We need to put them in the right spot, and what we're learning from the model is that people south of Robbinsdale will just continue the drive to Minneapolis.

George Selman added that they are looking at enhancing the overall parking plan in Robbinsdale.

Chris Berne asked what the model is showing for hide-and-rides. Nick Landwer said that the model doesn't assume illegal behavior, but if needed there are ways to curb hide and rides. Dan Soler added that they have not heard of any complaints from neighborhoods along Central Corridor about hide-and-rides.

Steven Schmidt asked if the analysis of spots needed at park-and-rides considers satellite park-and-rides already in existence near the corridor (e.g., the park-and-ride at Oak Grove Parkway is only about two miles away from the park-and-ride at Nobel and 610). Nick Landwer replied that the model does take that into account, and they didn't find much connection between the two park-and-rides since there are good transit connections out of the Nobel park-and-ride. Dan Soler added that those riders would show up in the model as transit trips not park-and-riders.

Catherine Fleming asked if there will be spaces for bicycles at park-and-rides. Dan Soler said that bicycle parking will be at all stations. Nick Landwer added that they haven't gotten that far in design yet as to know what exactly the bike parking will look like. Catherine Fleming said that there needs to be more space on the trains, and it would be nice for skis to be accommodated for trips to Theodore Wirth Park. She also asked if park-and-ride spaces will be free. Dan Soler replied yes, spaces are first come, first served.

#### **4. Member and Committee Reports/Public Forum**

Dan Pfeiffer stated that the CMC meeting is on June 11<sup>th</sup> and will have the same agenda as this CAC meeting. The next CAC meeting will be July 6<sup>th</sup>.

#### **5. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm.