



**METRO Blue Line Extension
Business Advisory Committee Meeting #8
January 12, 2016
Blue Line Project Office
5514 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 200
Crystal, MN 55428
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM**

Meeting Summary

BAC Members: Brad Clift, Charlie Jacobsen, Denny Walsh, Jeff Washburne, Jim White

Agency Staff and Guests: Paul Danielson, David Davies, Andrew Gillett, Sophia Ginis, Erik Hansen, Jessica Laabs, Nick Landwer, Dan Pfeiffer, Juan Rangel, Scott Reed, Alicia Vap, John Welbes

1. Regional Metro System Overview – Alicia Vap

Reviewed Blue Line, Green Line LRT and Red Line BRT as existing systems. Average Green Line daily ridership has been well above ridership forecasts, and started in Fall 2015 to exceed 2040 projections. This includes weekday and special event service.

Walsh: How does that translate into revenue?

Vap: Assuming with increases in ridership, the fare box recovery corresponds.

Walsh: Would be interesting to see how it corresponds to revenue, because there may be people who aren't paying to ride.

Green Line has stimulated over \$3 billion in private development. This does not include any public projects, i.e. major sports facilities.

Many Fortune 500 companies are on existing or planned transitways (11 of 17 in the metro area). Blue Line Extension has Target North Campus. Sports venues and regional attractions (Mall of America, airport, etc.) are also clustered along transit lines. The airport is actually the busiest Blue Line station, with Mall of America being 3rd busiest. A benefit of the Blue Line is that you can board in Brooklyn Park, and get all the way to the Mall of America or any number of other regional destinations.

Walsh: This is a great graphic (showing regional destinations on the Metro System)

Clift: How close does a business have to be to be considered for this map? Looking at General Mills, not really served by LRT.

Pfeiffer: That is served by a bus line that connects to LRT.

White: You might label the Northstar Line as well.

2. Project Development – Nick Landwer

Project timeline was reviewed. The big focus this year will be municipal consent and environmental.

Walsh: Isn't it that the Feds make their decision in January 2017? Their funding decision? Thought it was something different that the federal transportation bill; there was some kind of sign-off in January 2017 that made it possible for the project to move forward.

Landwer: MarySue does have the information, we will revisit.

The Full Funding Grant Agreement brings us into heavy construction, with heaviest years 2018-2019. Year 2020 would be testing, with revenue service in 2021.

Last year was a very successful year with the Issue Resolution Teams, working through issues and getting to the municipal consent date. The two-year project development timeline began August 22, 2014; so need to be done by August 22, 2016.

Municipal consent plans were distributed December 15, 2015 and BPO will start receiving comments from cities this week. After municipal consent, the next big milestone is publication of the Final EIS in June 2016, with a Record of Decision (ROD) by August. The hope is that FTA grants entry into engineering in the 4th quarter of this year.

Walsh: What does it mean for FTA to grant entry into engineering? Just saying OK or providing funding?

Pfeiffer: Entry to engineering is 2nd phase of New Starts program. This is the FTA's OK to proceed into a higher level of engineering. Local funding partners need to carry the project through until the Full Funding Grant Agreement.

Vap: That's why it's so important to get local support and work closely with the county and CTIB.

Walsh: So basically it's an assurance that you're on the right path – keep going.

Washburne: What percentage of projects nationwide have gotten the OK for the engineering phase but had to wait or didn't get fully funded?

Danielson: Fundamentally, if you make it through a Record of Decision and Project Development, FTA has not refused a project.

Walsh: So they've got a good track record of once it's going, it's going.

Pfeiffer: Yes. Entry to engineering is a much higher level of review and information; FTA wants to make sure everything is in line before they commit to funding.

Vap: Typically when projects fail, it happens earlier in the project, so that's why FTA puts a lot of the responsibility on the locals earlier in the project, before federal funding is committed.

We are in the municipal consent phase – there is a full schedule of open houses, work sessions, and council/board actions through early March.

There are several design items to be discussed and resolved in 2016 to create plans:

- January – municipal consent process check-in, PE plans/schedule, BNSF update, utilities, bridges design, noise walls, pedestrian facilities, grade crossings, secondary platform access.
- February – signal/communication house locations (TPSS), water resources, bus stops/passenger drop-off, station design.
- March – noise walls, TPSS locations, bike facilities, fencing, bridge design
- April/May – utilities, BNSF update, start discussion on landscape/vegetation, lighting, retaining wall design, traffic (signal systems, striping, etc), station/platform design, station site plans

We’ve done a lot of work, but there is still a lot to do. This set of plans is even more detailed.

3. Hennepin County Community Works Update – Andrew Gillett

Hennepin County is currently reviewing draft reports for some stations.

Crystal Design Workshop – Jan 5th

The city of Crystal design workshop included a broad range of stakeholders and from that, started creating design plans. Focus on pedestrian environment: how peds can cross at-grade, how peds connect to station. A connection to downtown via a “promenade” was considered, as well as ped overpass.

Ideas for Becker Park – it’s doesn’t get a whole lot of day-to-day use. Three different options were considered for how to activate and better use this park. Strategies for how to infill new development north of Bass Lake Road were also reviewed.

Important to remember these are long-term changes, and this is setting the stage for the cities to own that process.

Washburne: In Minneapolis, I think we’ve missed some opportunities downtown. Good for growth, but struggling with where affordable housing can go. Need to make sure we balance with how to incentivize development to create affordable rental and ownership housing.

Gillett: My message in terms of housing has been to think of life cycle housing – families with little kids to retirees. Communities should think about a balance of housing.

4. Future BAC Topics

Walsh: From a BAC standpoint, probably most important to make sure the environment is inviting for bikes, peds, drop-offs. We can talk about the business stuff, but if the other systems aren’t in place, the other stuff doesn’t matter. Not just about the platform but getting to the platform.

Washburne: Have there been studies looking at impact to businesses? As ridership is up on Green Line, have there been lessons learned about impacts to businesses?

Pfeiffer: Central Corridor Funders Collaborative does annual reports (last one in spring 2015) and has done a lot regarding impacts to businesses.

Welbes: Kept a lot of data during and after construction of Green Line. A lot of it looked like organic movement whether or not the LRT went in. Anecdotally, businesses currently seem to be thriving with the increased ridership.

Walsh: Would be helpful to have something with the high points/quick bullet points about benefits and drawbacks. Keep it simple and focus on a one-pager or bullet points. Cities all along the corridor would appreciate this.

White: Cub told him they had some issues with signage, etc. but worked through that with the project. Smaller businesses are different, and Robbinsdale and Crystal has a lot of these. Lessons learned would be a good thing, and also connecting with Central Corridor.

Vap: The Funder's Collaborative is actually doing a lessons learned presentation next week.

Erik Hansen: Based on experience, early and frequent communication is the best. Give businesses time to prep and plan. It's not always just the LRT construction, but other roadway projects or other projects being done by the municipality that are disruptive to business. We also have to remember the Green Line through St. Paul is the worst case scenario – this project will be disruptive, but it's not going to be as divisive or intense.

Clift: Do you hear other businesses talking about planning?

Hansen: There are two businesses in Brooklyn Park that see LRT as a benefit and are purchasing new or additional buildings.

Clift: What information can be provided to businesses about how they can get employees to work?

Hansen: More modes to your place of business has generally been perceived as a positive, the issue is getting through construction. The high point of Blue Line is it's a one-seat ride to downtown.

Pfeiffer: BPO staff is doing a presentation to a relocation group, finding housing for future employees. There are a lot of different groups and organizations interested in benefits of transit.

White: Employers who are expanding don't want to build parking ramps. They want other options.

5. Member and Committee Reports/Public Forum

No comments.

6. Adjourn

Next regularly scheduled BAC meeting will occur February 9th.