



METRO Blue Line Extension Corridor Management Committee

Minutes of the Thursday, August 13, 2020 Meeting

Present: Jim Adams, Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, Michael Barnes, Denise Butler, Jan Callison, Reva Chamblis, Phillipe Cunningham, Jeremiah Ellison, Irene Fernando, Shep Harris, Mike Opat, Wes Koostria, Shawn Kremer, Robert Lilligren, Jeffery Lunde, Chris Meyer, Candace Oathout, George Selman, Matthew Rentsch, Gillian Rosenquist, Abdi Salah, Ricardo Perez, Wynfred Russell, Charlie Zelle, Catherine Fleming

Not in attendance: Regan Murphy, Jacob Frey, Nichole Buehler, Myron Frans, Jacob Frey, Olga Parsons, Joo Hee Pomplun, Kale Severson, Aasim Shabazz

Several elected officials were recognized, including state legislators, county commissioners, and city council members.

AGENDA

1. **Call to Order and Introductions**

Chair Zelle welcomed everyone and convened the meeting at 1:36 PM. Chair Zelle directed attendees to share public comments via email to Sophia.Ginis@metrotransit.org through Friday, August 20th.

2. **Approval of the Meeting Minutes from July 19, 2019**

Chair Zelle asked the committee to approve the July 19, 2019 minutes. Mayor Lunde motioned to approve, with Mayor Adams seconding the motion. Meeting minutes were approved.

3. **Chair's Update/Discussion**

Chair Zelle thanked the committee for their commitment to this project over the past years. He reflected on the efforts that himself and many others put forth to negotiate with BNSF. He said that now there is an opportunity to look forward, commit to action, and make an even better project.

Commissioner Opat stated that there is not another option given the railroads position, that County Board has exhausted their ability to negotiation with BNSF and unless other political pressure was applied an alternative route would need to be sought. Commissioner Opat recognized and thanked local leaders for their commitment to this project.

Chair Zelle asked for any discussion from the committee.

Mayor Harris thanked Chair Zelle for meeting with city leadership and thanked the County for their efforts to get BNSF to negotiate. Mayor Harris asked what efforts were made to influence BNSF, including regulatory and legislative efforts.



Mayor Lunde talked about efforts to advocate for other transit lines, knowing Bottineau was also in line. He wished that more community engagement and engagement with the cities had occurred months before this announcement and that the best efforts to pressure BNSF still needed to be perused. He emphasized that BNSF would be the last to the table. Mayor Lunde also stated the importance of this project, especially in regard to increasing equity within communities. Mayor Lunde suggested that political leaders could negotiate with the railroads while simultaneously exploring other routes. Mayor Lunde finished by saying that equity issues in Minnesota will not be fixed without access to affordable transit.

Councilmember Atlas-Ingebretson stated that she believed they are stronger together than apart. She reflected on her experiences with other projects and added how everyone must be at the table to execute the best outcomes. Councilmember Atlas-Ingebretson added how it would be beneficial to compile a document that outlines all the investments that communities have made into this project, as this tool would be useful moving forward.

Mayor Harris echoed Mayor Lunde's comments and stated the cities up and down the line believe more can be done to negotiate with BNSF. He gave examples of legislation that could be put forth. Mayor Harris made a motion to direct the Met Council, the Governor, and the County to coordinate a multi-government effort to exhaust all options with BNSF first, while looking at other alternatives. He is open to looking at other alignments but that more also needs to be done with BNSF. He reiterated the city's support of LRT. He asked to be in the room as those discussions were happening. He reiterated all the efforts cities had put forth to get to municipal consent. Mayor Harris' reiterated his motion as twofold: one to exhaust all options with BNSF while perusing alternative alignment; and to include all these stakeholders going forward and part of the decision making.

Chair Zelle asked for confirmation on the motions presented. To exhaust all options with BNSF and to engage with Mayors and community. That these activities don't preclude looking at alternative alignments.

Mayor Harris responded by emphasizing that they believe the priority should still be with BNSF.

Chair Zelle noted the motion and acknowledged the frustration. He talked about his history with BNSF discussions and clarified a few statements he had been hearing. One that SWLRT got an extra push that BLRT did not. He stated that they both got equal pushes, but BNSF position was different on the alignments and it was long hard negotiation. He also acknowledged that there were many conversations but that when you have a CEO and a Governor talking, not a lot of people are always in the room. Chair Zelle reemphasized that there was a full-hearted effort to negotiate with BLRT, which included local, state, and federal elected officials, as well as business and community efforts. He stressed that it wasn't the lack of commitment from Minnesota Senators or the Governor. He gave examples of solutions that were offered to BNSF such as buying the corridor or building another bridge over the river. But BNSF has continually said that colocation on the corridor impedes on their business strategy. It is unlikely, despite tremendous pressure, that the BNSF would change their mind and progress on the project should not be further stalled.



Chair Zelle then asked if there was a second on the motion.

George Selman from Robbinsdale seconded the motion.

Commissioner Fernando asked for clarification on the motion since it was not on the agenda and asked if she could see something written. She expressed that she does not support the first component of the motion, which was returning to the BNSF alignment. However, she supports the second component of the motion to have a more upfront and public process as the committee has not been meeting as often as the charter as written. The Commissioner added that at the next CMC meeting the charter should be reviewed and amended in a way that the body can follow.

Chair Zelle asked if the authors of the motion would be willing to split the motion into two separate motions.

Mayor Harris asked if other members of the committee have an opinion.

George Selman asked to vote on the amendment as it was moved.

Abdi Salah spoke on behalf of Mayor Frey and supports the pursuit of all viable options. They recognize the time and commitment that has been invested into this project and support exhausting the options to reach an agreement with BNSF. Salah added that those efforts should be continued, while also starting a conversation with the public on the possibility that a new alignment will be necessary. He stated his support of splitting the motion.

Denise Butler shared sentiments of wanting to preserve the efforts that communities have made in station area planning and broader engagement corridor wide. She does not work to be wasted. She emphasized that the community supports this alignment as is and that community have fought for it. She spoke in support of the motion as moved.

Councilmember Chamblis thanked communities for their work and investment into the project. She added that she was concerned that momentum will be lost if the project does not move forward. She emphasized the importance of transit investment for a thriving corridor that contributes to close the gap on equity opportunities. Councilmember Chamblis added the importance of moving forward and not slowing down progress on the project. She supported splitting the motion.

Candace Oathout shared her concerns with the project as is. Which included environmental and safety concerns. Oathout spoke of protecting the environment, especially Theodore With Park.

Chair Zelle asked if Mayor Harris would write his motion into the chat.

Minneapolis Park Board Commissioner Chris Meyer shared that the Park Board welcomed the alignment to Wirth Park. However, does not want to alignment to be delayed indefinitely and spoke in support for splitting the motion as he supports community engagement but does not want the project to continue to be stalled.



Chair Zelle added that the Council is committed to a robust community engagement moving forward and suggested that due to time constraints to continue with the agenda and then come back to the motion.

4. **Project Framework**

Dan Soler reflected on the work communities have put into the project. He emphasized that the goal of the project is still the same, with the change to avoid BNSF right-of-way. He reviewed the draft alignment and community engagement principles.

5. **Next Steps**

Sam O'Connell shared the 2020 work plan. O'Connell outlined meetings and engagement opportunities. Dan Soler offered that it is important to get feedback from community engagement efforts to develop the best plan. O'Connell added that at the end of the year, a reappointment process for the advisory committees would occur. She stated that the charters would be reviewed and refreshed. She added that this was an initial presentation of 2020/21 work activities and is seeking feedback. Chair Zelle added that this will all be on the website and stated that the involved engagement will continue.

Return to Agenda Item: Chair's Update Discussion

Chair Zelle returned to the discussion on the motion and noted that Councilmember Ellison had been waiting to speak.

Councilmember Ellison thanked the Chair for providing space for discussion, adding that he joined the meeting to get a sense for where the project was. Councilmember Ellison shared that exhausting efforts with BNSF could stretch resources away from progressing the line forward. He added that alignment mitigation is in order because of BNSF is immovable. He discussed how times have changed, how attitudes have changed, representation on the north side has changed and that he wants to ensure that the residents in his ward are served.

Councilmember Cunningham stated the importance of ensuring transit connectivity and access to intentionally ease the decades of systemic disinvestment and separation of North Minneapolis. The Councilmember added that this is an opportunity to be invest equitably. The Councilmember stated that his community has a very low car density and low, equitable investment in terms of building up his community. He discussed the opportunity to invest in transit connectivity and asked the CMC to remain open to alternative routes that would better serve North Minneapolis. He stressed the importance of including Ward 4 residents in discussion.

Mayor Elliot of Brooklyn Center echoed the sentiments of Councilmember Ellison and Councilmember Cunningham. He emphasized that equity has to be the center of this work and that community members are included in all stages of the project to truly engage with the community. That community members need to be involved at the points in which decisions are being made. He also stressed the need for patients and not leaving people out.



Chair Zelle called to vote on the Mayor Harris' motion. He suggested that the motion not be split. He explained including stakeholders is in our plan, that part is in place. The question is about continuing to engage with BNSF.

Commissioner Fernando stated that she wanted to speak in favor of what staff had proposed as the path forward.

Mayor Harris thanked the Chair and staff for their presentation and added if the motion is passed it would be important to create a plan forward to exhaust all options, similar to the one staff just presented.

Chair Zelle stated that he wants to clarify and that he will be voting no for the motion, because he worries with limited resources this motion would deter from progressing the project, and that it is extremely unlikely that BNSF will change their mind and that we need commitment to move forward.

Commissioner Opat stated that he will continue his friendly disagreement and that there should be more efforts to get BNSF to negotiate. He gave examples of how elected leaders pushed the railroad for other projects. He commented on how badly the railroads have treated the community and gave examples along the corridor.

Sam O'Connell took the roll call for the vote. The motion failed with 11 nays, 6 ayes, and 1 abstention.

Senator Ann Rest stated she was disappointed with the decision and ensured that they will continue to fight for LRT to be brought to their communities.

6. **Adjournment**

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 3:12 PM.

Next CMC Meeting: October 8, 2020