



**METRO Blue Line Extension**  
**Joint Meeting of Community and Business Advisory Committees**  
**Monday, September 14, 2020**  
**6:00 PM – 8:00 PM**  
**WebEx Meeting**

**CAC Members:** Catherine Fleming, George Selman, Giuseppe Marrari, Jason Greenberg, Ken Rodgers, La Shella Sims

**BAC Members:** John Hacker, Mark Steinhauser, Mathew Rentsch, Alison Pence

**Agency Staff and Guests:** Andrew Gillett, Cathy Gold, Dan Soler, Paul Danielson, Sam O'Connell, Trevor Roy, Kerri Pearce Ruch, Kyle Mianulli, Joan Vanhala, Sophia Ginis, Liz Morice, Nick Landwer

**Meeting Summary**

**1. Call to Order/Welcome and Introductions**

Sophia called the meeting to order at 6:05. Participants on the call introduced themselves. Sophia shared logistics of the meeting and guidelines.

**2. Approval of September 2019 Meeting Summary**

Sophia shared that there were technical difficulties with the past meeting minutes, approval of the meeting minutes would be forthcoming.

**3. Project Update**

Dan Solar shared that he has heard a lot of concerns and emotions regarding the news and status of the METRO Blue Line Extension Project. Dan shared in his experience that there has been great rapport on the project between agencies, cities and community groups. But that right of way challenges with the railroad made eight miles of the 13 miles impassable. Dan shared that the Hennepin County Board and the Council feel positively about finding an LRT solution in the corridor. That it is time to look at a new route that does not use Burlington Northern right of way. The project has not even been able to get to the table with the Burlington Northern. Hennepin County would like to get back together with project partners to see if there is a way to build a line from Downtown Minneapolis that does not use Burlington Northern. Dan shared that any project done needs to be grounded in certain principles, and Hennepin county and the Blue Line Extension project team are looking for feedback on these. Dan acknowledged that there is anger and sadness and also hope and possibility to find a new path.

Jason said there was long history of BNSF supporting the project in their corridor. Why did they change their mind?

Dan reviewed history of discussions with the railroad.

Catherine asked if route could avoid the railroad by using Highway 55?



Dan said that if we were not to use railroad right of way then somewhere in Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Golden Valley and Crystal there would be changes to the alignment. In the north part of the alignment the project could put it on county road 81, as the line moves south through Robbinsdale and Minneapolis, the route will have to change significantly.

#### 4. Draft Alignment Principles/Discussion

Sophia turned the conversation over to Nick Landwer.

Nick Landwer shared a set of draft alignment principles for discussion. Nick shared its important to keep the same purpose and need for the FTA and funding. As part of New Starts Nick said, we need to make sure we are maximizing ridership and minimize travel time. These go hand and hand. We want to work to maximize the project rating by following these principles. The project is trying to mitigate by maintaining existing alignment as much as possible. They want to mitigate some impacts in the project and complement some of the new projects: the C Line for example was not in place when the project started, and the project alignment will want to avoid redundancy with other transit. Nick shared they also want to minimize residential impacts.

Nick also shared the need to have meaningful engagement with stakeholders. Staff want to honor and engage the community they have worked. This includes tailoring engagement practices to meet the needs of the community. Nick shared they want to engage, inform, and consult diverse communities to co-create project solutions that reduce disparities.

Nick then asked for feedback invited discussion through the following questions: What else should we be considering? What do you see as opportunities to improve transit in this corridor? What do you want us to know?

Catherine shared that the community she's been reaching out to is concerned most about the economic development possibility that is not possible with the previous (existing) route. Other routes such as one that goes through West Broadway offers more opportunity for that community. The route she is talking about is one that uses Olson Memorial Highway but hopefully maintains other parts of the alignment. There are new projects like the Terminal Harbor that have new potential in that area.

George state that is important thing to keep the support of the communities that are on this line. George says now they are teetering on the edge. George shared he has been on the committee for 16 years and has seen a lot of options such as Penn and Oliver where people were concerned that their neighborhood would be cut in half. He referenced Rondo and the concern people had about that repeating that.

Jason Greenberg said from his perspective there was a lot of work that went into all the site plans and the route as it is. He would like to know what the options are, in terms of keeping it similar (like 81) versus further south where it may change a lot. He felt like all the cities were in the alignment with the alignment and it feels like those plans were abandoned. He would also like to know about express trains, versus stopping so often and he thinks that is worthwhile for service to these communities.

Dan said that what George mentioned is right, that the impacts that would be caused by the other routes made the current alignment rise to the top. The problem is that since BNSF will not move, and the project team are now needing to look again at what else is possible. There are many things that have changed and



impact this such as housing, Covid, and many other factors. Dan said again there is no movement with the railroad. He said they need to look at it with fresh eyes now that the BNSF route is not possible.

Sophia added that the up and downside of LRT is that they take a very long time. She said they know more about LRT than they did when they started planning the Blue Line Extension. They didn't have Green Line/Central Corridor. They didn't have Southwest then. Time has changed perception of the LRT. There is a feeling that they are abandoning the push, but they have tried in many ways to move BNSF. Chair Zelle is able to name all the ways that the project has tried to get BNSF to move.

Mark Steinhauser said that he hasn't been privy to what has happened in the last year. He wonders if there has been any shift on the paradigm regarding the CP property. Could there be a reversal on that?

Dan Soler said that BNSF has changed their plans and they have said that isn't what is stopping them now. Hennepin County has gone as far as offering to buy the railroad, and operating freight and LRT. At every step Hennepin County has been met with resistance.

Catherine asked Dan, you said that this was the best decision, are you saying in terms of economic development, bypassing North Minneapolis was the best route?

Dan said that in terms of concern for private homes, and impacts especially on Penn, it was the best option. Penn required so many homes to be purchased that there were concerns about that impact.

Catherine said that that does not seem insurmountable. Is there another railway to use?

Dan said their other option would be to build on another railway again. He would never advocate that again because of the experience with BNSF (on Southwest as well).

Sophia said that this year is about finding out what do the communities want to see. Where can this work? What are the options going forward?

La Shella believes the county has done everything they can. However, BNSF is not impervious. The community should have a letter from BNSF that goes on record about why they are doing this because they are going through the communities. They are accountable to someone. The community deserves a letter that states the official reasons of why they are not negotiating.

La Shella said there are also other entities besides Hennepin County and the project office, and the community's concerns with them should be addressed. They owe the community more information.

Catherine asked Sophia if it is possible for the office to provide a list of factors that would derail the project.

Sophia shared, that is an ongoing list and went back to the principles. She said that this is a question that will continue to be answered as they look at all options.



Dan said that the biggest things they have heard up to date is the mode and the Purpose and Need. If the project were to change to BRT, it would be at a different starting point. It needs to have the same termini. As long as those two things stay the same, then the FTA will let it move forward and continue to work with them.

Catherine said that does change and limit our options.

Giuseppe asked about if there is a budget for acquiring properties or is that limited too?

Sophia said they are not at that point yet. They try to avoid taking entire properties by looking at the options. They are trying to determine are there ways with engineering or ways to make it limited in taking?

Giuseppe said that taking properties will also take time. Is there a time limit?

Dan said that it is going to take time and we have to compare that to going to court with BNSF for example. The time isn't unlimited.

Catherine asked when is the next approval with the FTA? Dan said the current project cleared the environmental process and has the record of decision that moved the project forward. The FTA will give the project a timeline to clear the environmental process.

Jason asked at what point are the communities going to give feedback? Sophia said that is part of ongoing and next steps.

## **5. Draft 2020 Workplan and Next Steps/Discussion**

Sophia shared the workplan and next steps. She said one of the key things that will happen is that the team will be contracting with organizations in the community at large. The community supported project is fundamentally key to the project. That is not just the Cities but the people. They care about existing community members. They are pulling in groups to co-create. At the next meeting Joan will have more details to share with everyone. Sophia said that they are just sharing the beginning parts of the engagement plan but that is the core tenant now. They are checking in with the cities soon and the BAC & CAC (tonight). The plan is to have another CMC in October. Its been a long time, and there might be new people who should get involved. There will be some new appointments.

Jason Greenberg shared that the timeline is helpful. Jason shared that when he first started there was regular communication and felt that it stopped when the negotiations stopped. It is important going forward to make sure, on whatever basis, that there are still meetings and involvement.

Sophia said they are still gearing up, and there will be a much more regular cadence, as the committees are revitalized. Dan said there are some lessons learned and recognizes there will have to be better communication.

La Shella asked, how much value is the upcoming election having on this process, city, county and state level? La Shella shared she does not want this to go on and on and wonders the impact of the election.



Sophia said that the election does pull people away and the community is being asked a lot right now in terms of the campaign and that's why beginning engagement is important now, but in 2021 people will be able to focus on transit and get into the deep work.

Catherine wonders is the city of Minneapolis going to be involved on this?

Sophia said that the City of Minneapolis will be involved. Joan Vanhala said the project leads are definitely looking at destinations and where development is already happening. That is something they have a chance to revisit. How can we connect this line to new opportunities and new growth? Joan stated that her goal is to have a community-informed process developed now and to have community engagement in 2021. Part of that will be to have stakeholder list and learning what their priorities are for engagement in 2021.

George said the CAC was very insistent on North Minneapolis have connection throughout the process. George asked who does this advisory committee advise?

Sophia said that they advise the Corridor Management Committee.

George said the Blue Line Now Coalition is meeting with Governor Walz tomorrow and feels that the governor has not made it a priority. George thinks that pushing the current alignment and advocating for that should be the first priority before the other alignments. George made a motion for that in the committee. La Shella seconded. Mark Steinhauser said that he also feels he agrees. Ken and Jason said they do too.

Dan shared that in the past the chair of the CAC and BAC shared the consensus of the group to the CMC.

George asked if the committee had bylaws. Sophia shared that they have a charter. Catherine is the Chair of the CAC. Matt is the chair of the BAC. The CAC/BAC are meeting jointly today but sometimes the committees have different perspectives that they bring up to the CMC. Typically, the CMC has a discussion and the BAC and CAC share their points in that discussion. This is an advisory committee and those ideas are brought to the CMC, and they further the conversation with discussion of these ideas rather than votes.

La Shella said that since the CMC was last month it was in reverse order. Catherine shared that she was there. George said that they made votes and resolutions all the time in the past and wants to do the best possible job advising. George said a major issue in the past attendance was difficult and that required voting by cities may help encourage attendance.

Dan pointed out that Brooklyn Park, Golden Valley and Crystal members were not in attendance tonight. Catherine said that a year ago there was strong representation. Sophia said that there are people who messaged and said that they wished they could attend.

La Shella would like to know how CAC and BAC advisory committee members are invited. Sophia shared that a few times the committees have been appointed. There are the member cities and the Park Board who find members. The business community is the same in terms of their representation. Typically, the committee is involved during a phase of the project and then when the phase changes then new people are invited. Members interests sometimes change and depending on the phase or people's lives their commitment might change.



Catherine asked George about the meeting with the governor. George said the meeting is virtual and its to see support from the governor. George hopes the governor will encourage Klobuchar to support. George believes there is no champion at the federal level. George lobbied in DC for the project.

Dan suggested that the CMC report be on the CAC and BAC committee agenda and that the chairs give a report back to the groups.

Mathew Rentsch asked that they schedule a separate meeting for the BAC and CAC because it's a big group and it would be good to hear more. Catherine agreed.

Sophia said they will take that feedback and work with it. They will get back into the rotation that the CAC/BAC happens first, and the CMC follows.

George said with the influx of the new members coming, it would be great to get a history lesson of the project so that the questions they might ask the group initially, are already answered for them (this way time will be used most efficiently for everyone).

Sophia said they are working on a new project one-pager. The first meeting with new members will be more administrative, catching folks up to speed, reviewing the charter etc.

John Hacker said that he is one of the newest members. John brought up that there has been a lot of changes since the initial questions have been asked (initial alignment was planned) on the corridor. The state and communities have changed in the years of planning, even since the pandemic. The committee has to start over because BNSF won't meet. It is important to keep an open mind to changes to the alignment because of these reasons.

Sophia asked for feedback. Giuseppe said he wants to hit the ground running and make sure the community is included in the process and not make the same mistakes as in the past. Ken said that he has been quiet since he's trying to get up to speed. He said that he wants to get back in the rhythm as soon as possible.

## **6. Committee Housekeeping**

Sophia shared that next steps are that the BAC/CAC opinions will be shared with the CMC. The goal will be to give people as much time as possible to get the meetings on the calendar.

Dan said that their time and input is appreciated.

## **7. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:59.