

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting date: March 06, 2024

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Street

Members present:

- Chair, David Fenley, at large
- Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen, Precinct F
- Sam Jasmine, Precinct A
- Christopher Bates, Precinct B
- Patsy Murphy, Precinct C
- Ken Rodgers, Precinct D
- Jeffrey Dains, Precinct E
- Kari Sheldon, Precinct G

Attending from Home:

Sam Jasimine, Christopher Bates

- Michele Severson, MCD
- Erik Henricksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, MCCD
- Claudia Fuglie, MCCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN
- Anjuli Cameron, Metropolitan Council

Other Council Employees:

Berry Farrington, Sonja Burseth, Paul Lamb, Julie Martinez, Michael Mechtenberg, Christine Kuennen, Michael Sund

Ex-officio:

- Andy Streasick, Metro Mobility
- Douglas Cook, Metro Transit Customer Advocate
- Guthrie Byard, ADA & Title VI Administrator
- = present, E = excused

Absent:

Ken Rodgers, Precinct D

Excused:

Richard Rowen, AARP MN
Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA

Public:

Brittany Hoff, Dakota County

Call to order

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee to order at 12:32 p.m.

Agenda approved. It was moved by Vice Chair, Paulsen, seconded by Patsy Murphy to approve the agenda. Committee members did not have any comments or changes to the agenda. **Motion carried.**

Approval of minutes

It was moved by Erik Henricksen, seconded by Claudia Fuglie to approve the minutes of the February 7, 2024, regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.** Vice Chair Paulsen expressed appreciation for Rachel Hawley's (outgoing Recording Secretary) contributions to the committee.

Business and information items

1. A Bus Stop Accessibility Update was presented by Berry Farrington Program Manager of Better Bus Stops and Sonja Burseth, Senior Planner-NR, Engineering and Facilities, Metro Transit, presentation, 2024 03 06 TAAC Better Bus Stops program update.pptx was reviewed. Presenter Farrington prefaced the presentation with a Better Bus Stops program overview followed by a review of program goals and the criteria constituting an accessible bus stop. Four presentation topics, 2023 Accomplishments, Bus Stop Accessibility 5-Year Plan, Shelter Placement Guidelines, and Design Guide Update were outlined and reviewed individually.

2023 Accomplishments included four major areas of bus stop capital improvements: the

addition of new and replacement shelters, light, heat, and eighty-two accessible boarding areas. The opening of twenty-nine shelters along the upcoming B Line route service was announced. Following a review of bus shelter maintenance, the committee was informed of the new Comment Form (URL) for reporting shelter issues and provided the electronic link address: <https://www.metrotransit.org/cleanliness-facilities-form>. (This link replaces the link provided on the Bus Shelter Maintenance slide.) The QR code is available at stations and stops. The 2023 Pilot Projects review highlighted the fifty percent (approximate) reduction of glass breakage at shelters due to the addition of artwork applied to the glass and placement of solar lights on roof panels. Polycarbonate was a new material introduced in 2023 as an alternative to glass. The 2023 Pilot Projects will be expanded due to their success.

Key takeaways of the Bus Stop Accessibility 5-Year Plan included that the plan is a 5-year list of bus stops under consideration for design and construction projects versus a year-by-year list as done in the past. The goal for the Five-Year Plan is to list sixty bus stop improvements per year; previously the plan included thirty bus stop improvements per year. The plan is currently in a data analysis phase focused on looking at prioritizing bus stops based on ridership, mobility fares, bus ramp use, confirmed transit service and transit stops, and construction considerations.

Following a review of the Shelter Placement Guidelines, an update was provided on how three major changes have affected the adaptation of the guidelines: bus rapid transit (BRT) expansion is causing movement of customers, post-pandemic transit systems and travel patterns, and an increase in funding and commitments from the 2023 legislation. The Network Now plan will be available in the summer of 2025. Bus stop facilities will be aligned with the plan. The Design Guide was reviewed noting the Arterial Bus Rapid Transit and Rail Transit have different guidelines. In closing, three questions were presented to the committee to gather feedback on what information the project team should use for: prioritizing bus stops in the 5-Year Plan, accessibility improvements, Bus Stop Design Guide topics, and information the committee would like to receive from the Better Bus Stops project team on a regular basis.

Chair Fenley initiated discussions asking how 2023 improvements compared to previous years. Presenter Farrington responded, the goal has been to add twenty shelters and thirty boarding pads per year. The program exceeded its boarding pad goal in 2023; however, the addition of shelters goal was not met due to construction delays and partnerships. Member Myhre asked if the new glass can handle vandalism. Farrington stated the glass should not break but pointed out that it could be damaged. Myhre suggested considering improvements to bus stops placed in grassy areas.

Referring to the bus stops list, Member Thoreson brought up an example where an accessible bus stop for an outgoing ride exists without accessibility at the bus stop for a return ride questioning how a disabled rider would be able to complete their trip. Farrington responded that both stops should be accessible, and the project team should look at the data in terms of pairs of stops along routes. Member Fuglie added that some bus stops lack room on sidewalks to alert drivers and for riders to access ramps due to inadequate space between the shelter and sign. Fuglie suggested that transit figure out a way to provide visibility for drivers and more accessible bus stops noting ramps/ lifts often place a rider on grass rather than a sidewalk. Fenley added there should be an ADA Pad where there is none, and Vice Chair Paulsen emphasized that drivers are supposed to drop the ramp at the sign. Member Cook suggested moving the shelter if the space between the shelter and sign is too narrow. Farrington shared these concerns and responded that operators might be unable to see a person in a wheelchair due to numerous riders approaching a stop stating that shelter placement can impair a good site line and it's an urban design challenge. The committee was encouraged to use the online form to identify shelters with accessibility issues. Member Myhre mentioned this accessibility issue also affects those with hidden disabilities sharing that it can be difficult to figure out how to navigate while de-boarding a bus. Member Sheldon requested sending the link to the online form to the committee for the purpose of providing pictures of bus stops with accessibility concerns; Chair Fenley



responded the link to the online form and instructions would be sent out to the committee via e-mail.

Member Henricksen thanked presenters for finding opportunities to invest in accessibility issues and requested additional comparisons to unitize in assessing 2024 goals and identifying further opportunities. Henricksen recommended the Sequent Mix software because it is user-friendly, might do the same work as the new form, and enable work with cities that are currently using this software. Henricksen questioned if the 5-Year Plan improvements were included in the ADA Transition Plan as potential areas for accessibility improvements. Farrington clarified that the ADA Transition Plan did include site-specific assessments and barrier improvements throughout Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit facilities but not bus stop-by-bus stop evaluations. The project team is collecting data to identify deficiencies and improvements. Henricksen suggested providing a work session for further committee and ADA community involvement and the opportunity to provide design input for the Design Guide. Henricksen requested clarification on the location of bus stops in roundabouts; Presenter Burseth clarified that bus stops are placed prior to roundabouts, not inside them and recommended a work session on design input to tap into the committee's expertise.

Member Dains inquired as to how the project team works with cities and counties and whether there is funding from them. Presenter Burseth explained that the project team maintains professional relationships with city and county project management teams and advisory committees during each step of the design phase at thirty, sixty and one hundred percent noting the project teams tries to comment on plans at each step to insure correctness in anchoring bus stops. Dains asked if the team is alerted when new senior housing is being built. Burseth informed the committee that inter-departmental groups such as Street Operations and Route Planning look at destinations and what they entail in terms of mobility. Farrington added that the Metro Transit Design Guide is actively shared with cities and their developers therefore residents can get access to the guide from their city office. Thoreson questioned if the project team and colleagues are engaged in outreach with executive directors of senior living communities suggesting that this type of outreach might broaden an awareness of what services Metro Transit offers and is doing in communities.

Referencing 2023 projects, Member Bates asked if cost savings from the use of solar lights has been determined and suggested that savings could be used for other Metro Transit accessibility needs. Farrington responded that the project team is looking at the financial piece but asserted that electrical connection costs can vary by the distance from an electrical source to the shelter noting solar is less cost per unit than electrical lighting. Following an introduction to the committee, Staff Guest Paul Lamb of Engineering and Facilities, Metro Transit, explained that the variance for underground, hard wired electrical connections can be between \$4,000 and \$15,000 depending on the source of power and distance and whether heat is included in the connection. Fenley clarified that solar is the cheapest and most efficient form of lighting.

Member Streasick asked if the Better Bus Stops project team is tracking L tags to prioritize bus stops, manual keys for service-connected disabilities, and the new Metro Mobility free rides fare. Farrington requested clarification on the new fare product. Following clarification from Streasick, responded she did not know if these areas are being tracked but agreed they should. Streasick questioned if there are enough maintenance staff to maintain accessibility for new improvements at bus stops. Farrington responded she did not know if there is adequate staffing to maintain accessibility, however assured available maintenance staff are called on to clear stops when needed noting the challenges with stop placement due to barriers. Streasick stated the essential element of maintaining bus stop accessibility should be that they are adequately staffed when barriers occur. Streasick suggested returning to focusing on benches for those who need to sit down while waiting for a ride. Paulsen requested they look at receptacles, lighting, and heating placement relating to safety and comfort, questioning if heaters could be covered to prevent vandalism as a top priority when replacing them. Paulsen asked if agreements with cities and counties are being reviewed



when new agreements are initiated, explaining the resolution of these issues might lead to some Metro Mobility riders transitioning to Metro Transit. Farrington recommend having this topic put into a workshop format.

Member Murphy brought up former issues with multiple buses showing up simultaneously at a stop and then pulling away when full. Fenley clarified that when a bus does not pull up to the bus stop completely, this is called bus jumping and drivers should not be doing this. Streasick stated there are efforts being made to stop bus-jumping noting a dramatic decline and stated this feedback should go back to drivers and the disability community Fenley stated this topic will be discussed in the future.

Myhre asked whether a new shelter is being added on the Green Line citing a concrete obstruction in the middle of a sidewalk near downtown St. Paul. Farrington responded this could be Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) construction issue on the B Line and will bring this concern back to the managing construction group. Myhre also requested more consideration regarding accessibility issues that arise when boarding both the front and back of a bus. Member Murphy shared accessibility concerns that occur when disembarking the back of bus to an area with no ADA pad and/ barriers exist.

2. A Better Bus Route 4 presentation was provided by Julie Martinez, Community Outreach Coordinator, Metropolitan Council and Michael Mechtenberg, Program Manager, Route and System Planning, Metro Transit; the Route 4 BBR overview slides TAAC.pptx document was reviewed. Presenter Mechtenberg prefaced the presentation with an overview of the Better Bus Routes program noting that only highest ridership routes were initially included in the program. Since the start of the pilot in 2018, one second-tier local bus route each year has been added to the program. Also of note, some bus rapid transit (BRT) strategies have been applied and are being implemented at a lower cost and faster rate than bus rapid transit (BRT).

Mechtenberg emphasized that project goals have been formed to improve rider experience on local bus routes and to provide easier navigation, reliable schedules, and better recovery time for operators. A key improvement to accessibility - bus stop consolidation - was reviewed and defined as stopping up to one-quarter mile while maintaining and improving accessibility to ensure all stops and pedestrian networks leading to bus stops are ADA compliant. The Better Bus Routes project team project team performs an audit of bus shelters on the route prior to their work to ensure ADA compliance and potential accessibility improvements and works with cities/ counties to make accessibility changes at the appropriate time. Other areas of improvement were ensuring shelter placement at bus stops meets boarding requirements and making routes easier to navigate by reducing indirect route branches which is called route simplification.

During the review of proposed Route 4 changes, Mechtenberg underscored that over ninety percent (approximately ninety-four percent) of Route 4 riders will be served despite the removal of seventy-five bus stops. It was also noted that there will be no changes to route alignment and frequency which dropped during the pandemic but cannot increase due to a lack of operators, not funding. Project timeline tasks that started in third quarter 2023 and run through third quarter 2024 were highlighted noting the project team is currently in the public engagement phase seeking feedback. Presenter Martinez informed the committee that she is leading the outreach to Route 4 riders. The project team will consider feedback from the public and city on proposed changes to Route 4 via a survey located at, <https://metrotransit.org/route-4>. Final recommendations will be made in late spring; changes will be implemented in early August. It was noted that all stops to be eliminated have been posted.

Chair Fenley opened discussions questioning whether the seventy-five bus stop removals were based solely on usage data. Presenter Mechtenberg explained the process of determining which bus stops would be removed involved working with cities and counties as



well as looking at ridership and key transfer points. Fenley asked whether the survey considers the situation of a disabled rider unable to utilize a route due to the removal of a bus stop, if word about the survey is getting out to the Route 4 community, and if the project team is looking at who is using the stops during varying parts of the day. In response, Mechtenberg emphasized the project team seeks to obtain rider feedback through the survey or Metro Transit Customer Relations because changes are made based on this feedback, and they try to be mindful of recommendations. Presenter Martinez informed the committee of the survey QR code which is accessible to all. Martinez shared that she has been on the route getting feedback from riders, operators, and various neighborhood organizations as the leader of community outreach. Mechtenberg added the project team has been engaging with operators and instructors to get their initial input through small group interviews and meetings with instructors. Fenley stated the survey analyzes who is on the route and considers who is being served in coordination with other jurisdictions.

Member Henricksen acknowledged the importance of balancing needs of riders and drivers and asked whether the removal of access matters if it affects one rider. Mechtenberg explained that the volume and intensity of comments received are considered. If one person has an intense concern like a safety issue, it will be taken seriously. It was noted that not every comment received is fixed. Convenience and safety are taken very seriously while trying to attain the balance of achieving project goals and genuine public engagement. Henricksen questioned whether the fourteen bus stop improvements and route changes are linked to the Better Bus Stops Program – whether there is collaboration between the two programs. Mechtenberg clarified that both teams work in collaboration to identify bus stop locations in need of improvements.

Henricksen inquired about what type of innovation is implemented to optimize efficiencies during route planning. Mechtenberg explained that route or alignment change recommendations are taken very seriously due to significant impacts to riders so there is an additional layer of engagement with impacted riders to gather feedback. Project decisions are based on this feedback. It was noted that route planning has different approaches requiring a lot of engagement.

Referencing the Key Improvements – Improved Accessibility slide, Paulsen stated accessibility issues might exist due to the dirt area and proximity of the storm drain to the bus stop. Mechtenberg and staff guest, Paul Lamb, Engineering and Facilities, Metro Transit stated that sod will replace the dirt area pictured on the slide. Lamb added that the ADA standard requires re-sodding or seeding of dirt areas, noting the sodded area will be checked in the spring.

Streasick mentioned that short lines in urban areas were originally developed to accommodate specific communities and provided a few daily rides, noting it's not a Route 4 issue. The project team was asked to be mindful of this while planning future route projects.

3. A Disability Day at The Capitol Update was presented to the committee by Chair, David Fenley. The event will be held on Wednesday, March 27 at 9:30 a.m. (pre-rally) with a rally at 11:00 a.m. The information will be sent to the committee via e-mail. The event is not a TAAC-specific event; it's put on by the Consortium of Persons with Disabilities. A webinar is available prior to the event.

Reports

Subcommittee

1. Blue Line – Ken Rodgers
No report.
2. Green Line – Christopher Bates



No report.

3. Gold Line – Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen
Construction does not have a significant impact on this committee as the work generally runs from late Friday night through early Monday morning or Sunday night. The committee will receive an update and meeting minutes in the future.
4. Purple Line – Vice Chair, Darrell Paulsen
An extensive amount of work is currently being done on the Purple Line. Paulsen will be attending two Purple Line meetings this week and will be updating the committee at the April 3-24 Transportation Accessibility and Advisory Committee meeting.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

None.

Chair

None.

Public invitation

None.

Member comment

Member Myhre shared Metro Mobility Taxi ride issues and the importance of reporting them.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:24 p.m.

Certification

I hereby certify that the foregoing narrative and exhibits constitute a true and accurate record of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee meeting of March 06, 2024.

Approved this 27th day of March 2024.

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