

Minutes

Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee



Meeting Date: July 5, 2023

Time: 12:30 PM

Location: 390 Robert Steet

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
- Rachel Garaghty, Precinct H

Attending from Home

Ken Rodgers

- Trevor Turner, MCD
- Erik Henriksen, MCD
- Diane Graham-Raff, MAAA
- Patty Thorsen, MAAA
- Heidi Myhre, MCCD
- Claudia Fuglie, MCCD
- Richard Rowen, AARP MN

Excused

Sam Jasmine
Christopher Bates
Claudia Fuglie
Erik Henriksen

Ex-Officio:

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

Absent

Rachel Garaghty

Public

Russell Bailey

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 Paulsen, seconded by Thorsen 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 Paulsen, seconded by Thorsen to approve the minutes of the June 07, 2023 regular meeting of the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee. **Motion carried.**

Business & Information Items

1. Purple Line

Elizabeth Jones, Senior Community Outreach Coordinator
Craig Lamothe, Director, Guideway BRT Projects

Craig Lamothe spoke to the TAAC committee. I am the Purple Line Project Manager. I have not been before this committee for the Purple Line. But I have been with Metro Transit the better part of a couple of decades. The last time I was before this committee was a long time ago. For Southwest LRT. Before it got the title of Green Line Extension. I am here today to talk Purple Line along with Liz Jones. The last time this project was before you was probably when it was led by Ramsey County. So the Council has been leading this project for about a year and a half. A lot has changed since we were here about this body. That is what we will be talking about today

as well as talking to you about how to get your involvement as we move forward from where the project sits today.

Next slide. I will spend a couple of slides giving a project overview. Then I will spend a few slides talking about the BRT Route Modification Study or RMS Phase I Update. That is work that we have been doing mostly last year. Liz will talk about Early BRT Modification Study Phase II, which is work we are just now embarking upon. But we have done some engagement before getting into the technical work.

Then I will spend a few slides. Probably a dozen or so talking about what is the Phase II work that we are going to be starting here in July. And how long is it going to take us to complete?

Then Liz will talk about the engagement plan for this Phase II work that we are going to be doing.

Next slide. As the Council took the project over in late 2021, that is when it got assigned the Purple Line. So that became the Metro Purple Line rather than what it was known as the Rush Line. If you know a little bit about this project. The planning for this project expands about two decades. The first time it was ever discussed was when it was part of a MnDOT study back in 1998. There is a lot of history with the Rush Line. And now Purple Line.

Shortly after the Council took the project over at the end of 2021, there was an election at that same time that brought in a new set of elected officials in White Bear Lake, which was the northern end of the line. That new City Council and new Mayor took some votes in March of 2022. A three to two vote opposing the project. The language of that resolution is here on the slide. Essentially, they were asking us to not bring the project into the City of White Bear Lake.

So that is about the same time that we were bringing consultants onboard to help the Council advance the project. So we had to deal with the change of direction. So that was what came to be known as RMS Phase I. It was really looking at how to truncate Purple Line to some other place than Downtown White Bear Lake. That was much of last year that we focused on that. Then we were looking at ending either at Vadnais Heights, over at Century College or at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center.

Next slide. This doesn't do it justice. That 20 years I mentioned before. Really isn't shown. It goes off the left side of this screen. But the Pre Project-Development Phase that the County led, really ended in 2017 with a selection of that Purple Line to Downtown White Bear. Then the County continued to lead the project between 2018 and 2021 in the environmental analysis phase. They advanced the project to Downtown White Bear to 15 percent design. And then environmentally cleared it through the Federal Environmental and State Environmental Processes. Then they handed the project to us at the end of 2021.

We are now in the Federal program that funds these projects. We were entered into that program in mid-December of 2021. We are in the project development phase. That phase concludes this December. But as a result of RMS Phase II, which I will talk about later, we are going to be seeking an extension of that two-year period of time from the Federal Government so that we can stay in the federal program but can complete the work that needs to be done.

Next slide. This map is something that this group has probably seen several times. This is the existing metro network in addition to the future metro network. Hopefully, most of which will be implemented and operational by 2030. So the Purple Line, you can see right there, is over on the right hand side. Serving that missing link. The Metro Network, serving the northeast portion of the metro area. The Purple Line that we are looking at right now, will share a segment of Maryland Avenue with the H-Line. And then it shares Robert Street, just outside this building with the future G-Lines.

So there are segments of the Purple Line that will have extra service because of another BRT route. Sharing part of the alignment.

Next slide. I will talk a little bit about that Phase that we spent about 10 months doing in response to that city resolution that we got from White Bear Lake. Essentially, our goal was to still have a Purple Line Project that met the needs of the community. But also, was compliant with the



wishes of the elected officials in White Bear Lake. So find someplace that makes sense to logically end the line that wasn't Downtown White Bear Lake.

Next slide. As I mentioned earlier, we looked at three endpoints shown on this map. A park-and-ride off of I-35E in Vadnais Heights City Center. That is an existing Metro Transit facility. The Transit Center at the Maplewood Mall and then Century College.

So we looked at those three endpoints. We looked at many different ways to route to those three endpoints. That is what is over on the right-hand side. So we have an A and a B. Two different ways to get to the park-and-ride. And an A, B, C and D, which are four different ways to get to the mall. And then, by extension, anything that went to the mall would also go on to Century College. We have an A, B, and C there.

We looked at all of those. We actually started with a greater bucket of options early in the process. These are the finalists that made the most sense to explore deeply and to talk to the public about.

Next slide. So what we learned by late last year. Factoring in things like ridership and travel has changed since coming out of the pandemic. Different than what it was coming out of 2019. And we are also seeing inflation that we hadn't seen since the 80's. So, factoring that all into the calculus. What we discovered was in order to stay eligible for federal funds through the federal program, the project is in that we could only get to Maplewood Mall Transit Center by two of the four routings. All other options did not work. It does not mean that there weren't needs for better transit service to Vadnais Heights. Or to the Century College. We heard that loud and clear from folks at those two endpoints. It is that we could not make the metrics work within the federal program that we are seeking funding for. Which is the primary funding source for these transitway projects.

Next slide. If there are any questions about what I have talked about. I can answer any questions you may have about the work we have been doing.

Dains said why couldn't you get the federal funding?

Lamothe said so, the feds evaluate these types of projects through a certain set of criteria. It is criteria that looks at. It is heavily weighted on ridership and costs. But it looks at land use. It looks at other considerations as well. But essentially, you have to score a "C" level. You have to get a medium. In their nomenclature, you have to score at least a medium or higher to be eligible for federal funds through the federal program. If you can't score at least that medium rating, then you have to find another way to fund the project and then you fall out of the program.

This project is planned to being funded 50 percent roughly federal funding and 50 percent local. Ramsey County local. So Ramsey County is the local funding partner. We really wanted to seek federal funds. And we support that through this federal program. And we couldn't make the metrics work. Particularly as it is related to two things that really changed on us. Cost inflation and post pandemic ridership changed.

As you all know, a lot of the commuter market has been very, very slow to come back. You don't see as many express buses or full express buses or full park and rides. So, particularly further north we went with Purple Line. We encountered more and more of the market was coming from that express downtown work commute that just isn't there anymore. So the Vadnais Heights park and ride didn't make as much sense because we weren't generating all that much between the Mall and Vadnais Heights.

Century College was more of a function of. We serve a lot of colleges with a lot of the transit service that we have. Including transit ways LRT and BRT. But most of those facilities are in the middle of the line. So they are great ridership generators when they are in the middle of the line. But there is not much else up in the Century College area other than the FedEx facilities who were having a rough time being able to show enough ridership from the mall to Century College year around. That is the dynamic with the colleges. Heavy fall semester. A pretty decent spring. Not a lot going on in the summer. And for Century College, not a lot going on during the weekends either.



It is challenging to serve with a BRT line. Not saying that there wasn't a better need for better transit service.

Chair Fenley said will this Purple Line not being extended into White Bear Lake affect the range of Metro Mobility? Are there bus routes there that would allow Metro Mobility to function in White Bear Lake?

Lamothe said that is a great question. This is something that was brought to our attention last year as we were looking at the three different endpoints. At the time, their service, pre-pandemic, that extended to White Bear Lake. I think that is all being analyzed through the Network Now process that Metro Transit has underway now. Resetting what the transit system wants to be between now and 2027. So it might be more of a function of what the outcome of that process is.

Chair Fenley said it is still unclear if it is going to lessen the range of Metro Mobility.

Myhre said some of the routes are shortened or discontinued. It makes it difficult to get to where I need to go.

Chair Fenley said folks with disabilities have to rely on public transit. If it is not going to stay or it is not going to be extended upon, we are probably the first folks to lose independence.

Streasick said I just wanted to clarify for everybody. While it would have been potentially possible to expand Metro Mobility service hours in White Bear Lake. They are currently really robust. We serve White Bear Lake Monday through Friday on the Met Mo side 5:00 a.m. to midnight. Saturday 5:15 a.m. to 1:15 a.m., and Sunday is 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. it is not a shell service. It would not be in keeping Metro Mobility's past practice to remove service overall from the community if it lost bus service all together. So if regular route service, just for example, just fully stopped in White Bear Lake, on a permanent basis. Post pandemic. That service would become non-ADA service, but it would still be within the Metro Mobility service area footprint. We would continue to provide service there in a non-ADA capacity.

Metro Mobility has chosen not to incorporate yet any of the service cuts that took place during the pandemic. Because we are looking at that as sort of a situation that is in flux. It has been a slow process to decide what service is coming back on fixed route and what normal is going to be in the longer term. So the last times that we imposed any kind of changes to our service area is reflected of fixed route cuts would be cuts made in 2019, pre-pandemic.

Chair Fenley said to clarify my question was asking was if service will not be expanded because this was not going to happen in White Bear Lake. But Metro Mobility already has a pretty decent service area and time coverage of White Bear Lake. As far as I know, there are no cuts happening. Just a lack of expansion happening.

Liz Jones spoke to the TAAC committee. I am the Outreach and Engagement Link to the Purple Line. I have been in front of many of you before. I work on the Gold Line projects and other projects that David mentioned.

I am just going to talk a little bit today, right now and then later in our presentation about how we have been chatting with folks including yourselves and starting to talk about this new potential route for the Purple Line. So when we have been out, we try to meet people where they are at and where they are coming. So committees like this, we do also have a Community and Business Advisory Committee for our project. Darrell represents the TAAC on that committee. So we are appreciative that he continues to serve on all of these committees.

We have elected and appointed officials committee of Met Council members and elected officials throughout the cities that Purple Line will run through. We also have been chatting with city councils and other neighborhood and district councils to let folks know where the Purple Line is at. We try to pop up into the community spaces as much as we can. So, farmers markets, existing bus routes and bus stops. There are a few adult ESL programs in this White Bear Avenue, Maryland Avenue, where we are looking at a potential new Purple Line Route. And also canvassing and stopping by and chatting with folks who live and work in this area to really let folks know that this is a new area. This Maryland and White Bear Avenue area in Saint Paul and



Maplewood is a change from the previous Rush Line and the previous Purple Line. So really just spreading awareness that the Purple Line is looking to serve this new area. Any comments or questions that you folks might have as we continue to get more information and feedback. We will have more information to share with folks, including you as well. We really want to be out in the community and here today. To let you all know where the project is at and how we might continue to engage with you as we go through this process.

We have project newsletters. We have our digital communications and social media. We try to do website updates. Canvassing existing routes in this area. Routes 80, 64 and 54. So hopping on those buses and Chatting folks who take existing routes in this general area.

Next slide. Some of the big buckets that we have been hearing from folks during this initial May, June and early July timeframe. A lot of comments and questions about safety and security. Metro Transit as a whole. We are continuing to hear. I am sure many of you are familiar with Metro Transit Safety and Security Action Plan. So we have been able to share some information with folks on that as well.

We want to know where folks are going to and coming from. Where folks work, live, where they travel to for errands and appointments. Things like that. in this area. The Purple Line and just existing conditions. White Bear Avenue and Maryland Avenue are busy areas. Lots of businesses lots of organizations and lots of people. Just getting that feedback from folks on existing conditions of the area.

Also, transit services in general. Similar to comments you made, Heidi. Some of the frequency and reliability concerns on Metro Transit as a whole. And that real need for existing frequent service. And the unfortunate declines in service in some of the route cuts Metro Transit had to make. Collecting all that information from folks throughout the communities. These are the big feedback areas that we have been hearing.

Next slide. This is just a little bit deeper dive into some of these comments. This is primarily to that Maryland and White Bear Avenue area for the Purple Line. So there has been a lot of support from folks that we have chatted with so far to look at White Bear Avenue. A lot of comments from folks that there are a lot of businesses. There are a lot of community services and folks who live in these areas. An existing service that would be great to connect to. Also, a lot of concerns for safety. There are busy areas that are not pedestrian friendly. Safety concerns are certainly exacerbated and have further implications on folks who have different abilities. So that is something that we want to look at as well.

Overall, though, a lot of positive support for folks to look at this area and how we can best serve this area of the community.

I can address any questions you have so far.

Myhre said are you looking at the vandalizing of the Green Line Station? One side looks beautiful, and the other side has been vandalized.

Jones said just to clarify. Just looking at more of the design layout to deter some vandalism. Is that what you are looking at?

Myhre said yes. How do you work with that. Also, the drainage is getting clogged. There was a fire on one side.

Jones said thank you. Those are great comments and questions. I know Metro Transit as a whole has their facilities maintenance folks. So if somebody on staff or a member of the public sees an issue, or a vandalism, etc., please feel free to contact Customer Relations. Maintenance staff come by, and checks stations and stops regularly. So they a lot of times see issues themselves and respond as soon as they can and then go through those protocols. But for future projects and us on the planning side. We do try to take into account how can we best design and implement things to deter some of the vandalism and things like that? Knowing that we cannot fully deter that. We try to design the best we can. We really rely on our great maintenance folks to try to get in there and make repairs or fix and remove vandalism as best we can. So I would



just encourage you, if there is something that you notice, please contact us. We take into consideration certain materials. There might be other materials that last longer and might deter some of the vandalism.

Vice Chair Paulsen said my question is you are doing some public engagement around Maplewood. Particularly for three weeks. Then you are to compile that. When does that start? How can we be more proactive with the new possible route alignment. We know that this is not the preferred route. The feds will approve the route.

Lamothe said I think that some of those questions will be answered in the slides that we still are planning to go through here. I think staying engaged. I think you will see the schedule we are planning on. This is going to be a long process. There is going to be a point where we will compare this new route, that we are all excited about exploring. Back to the old route because the old route still is the project of record. A decision will need to be made after the benefit of full information is available. It will be at least another year.

Next slide. We are embarking upon RMS Phase II. As mentioned, we did a little bit of the work in May and June to start things. Things that had to be critically done. Like getting the word out that we were exploring White Bear Avenue and Maryland Avenue. Liz's team led that effort. We also had to get traffic counts all up and down Maryland and White Bear Avenue before schools let out. And not do those counts in the summer.

But this is in direct reaction to a public process that was led by the City of Maplewood in reaction to the work we had done last year. They desired us to take a little bit more time and to get more public feedback. And what ended up happening was they wanted to lead the process themselves in February and March. As that process was coming to an end at the end of March, it was clear. We were hearing from folks who did not want to lose the green space. That is the linear corridor today that the Bruce Vento Trail is in. In hearing that, Ramsey County introduced a letter to the city. Ramsey County, as the local funding partner for this project. Saying that we would take this pause, step back and look at whether it was feasible and viable to have Purple Line be on White Bear and Maryland Avenue.

But specifically with dedicated lanes, which is important for speed and reliability. And it would come with lane configuration. Which that means that this was different than what was looked at in 2015. Because it was looked at for Rush Line. The predecessor project. But there, it was looking at taking all of the homes and businesses on one side of White Bear Avenue or the other in order to get those dedicated lanes. Because back in 2015, it was somewhat taboo to talk about taking away roadway capacity from personal vehicles. So that is different than what we are looking at now. We are actually going to stay within the public right-of-way and reduce the number of lanes on White Bear Avenue and replace them with dedicated transit lanes. That is the concept that we are now exploring.

We need to bring that concept up to a point where we can make an informed decision. Or the policy makers can on whether it should be the Bruce Vento Trail co-located corridor or White Bear Avenue and Maryland Avenue. In the subsequent slides you will see that that is going to take a lot of work and a lot of time to be able to provide that information and make that informed decision. But that is the goal of this new phase of work that now is going to be taking off. Gas pedal to the floor. Here in July.

Next slide. This is just a graph showing what we are looking at. We are now looking at that thick purple line that runs east/west down toward the bottom left of the screen. That is along Maryland Avenue. From basically Cub Food over to White Bear Avenue. That is the segment that will also carry the future H-Line. Which coincidentally will be built about the same time as the Purple-Line would be as well. That runs the full length of Maryland Avenue.

Then the H-Line would go south on White Bear. Purple-Line would go north on White Bear up to the transit center. So that is the other thick purple line. So that is the focus of our team right now. is to try to figure out. We were between 30 and 60 percent design complete on the co-located Bruce Vento Trail option. We are now starting at zero on White Bear and Maryland. We don't know much. We are starting to learn and understand what that corridor is all about.



So we will be looking at that. And then if we can show we have a Purple-Line on that alignment that goes effectively to the transit center, we may explore some of the questions we explored last year. Which is could we possibly go any further north to Vadnais and or Century College?

Next slide. So one of the things that we are doing is this is not a new project. This is just simply a different alignment that is one mile to the east of the previous alignment. So we are staying consistent with why this project is needed. So these needs and purpose were established back in 2015 as part of the environmental process and they still hold true today. Even in a post-pandemic world.

Next slide. So we spent much of May and June scoping out this Phase II work. What are all the things we need to look at and understand in order to make and provide an informed decision to the policy makers?

So we have been working with all of our partners on this. They are represented on the screen. I won't read them all but the two cities, the county and several departments within Metro Transit.

Nex slide. So this is the work. I will talk first about work and second about schedule. So these six planks that we have been referring to are the major steps in this phase of work. We are just now in that first plank at the top of the screen. We are reviewing existing conditions and quarter characteristics. There is not much consistent on White Bear Avenue. If you are familiar with that corridor between Maryland and Beam Avenue. By some miracle, there is no on street parking in that entire segment. But that's about it. Otherwise, it ranges from about 67 feet of public right-of-way to 140. Some places it is four lanes, undivided. To six lanes divided up at the north end. So, there are alley loaded neighborhoods on one side of the certain street segments. On the opposite side on the same street segment, it is all mailboxes. So verry different conditions. We have a lot to figure out.

So we are just starting here in July to develop some design options. Meaning how would we relay out the roadway? To reduce lane capacity and accommodate transit. We are hoping to get down to the most promising design options for the road by the fall. And then we would spend the winter and fall talking to the public and really deeply evaluating the most promising options. Sometime next spring we would get to a preferred concept for re-laying out the roadway of White Bear Avenue and Maryland Avenue.

Then to the point that Darrell had mentioned, we do need to compare back to the Co-located Bruce Vento Trail Corridor. So we are going to have two comparisons. Apples to apples between the two. And then figure out what the public wants and what the policy makers want. Then ultimately, by next fall, more than a year from now, we would get to a recommended decision on Purple Line. Where does Purple Line want to end, and which alignment does it want to be on? We will be doing public engagement and outreach throughout that process.

Chair Fenley said at what time will that be decided?

Lamothe said right now, we have penciled in September of next year. On that final decision.

Myhre said when you said penciled in, do you mean it could get erased or be removed?

Chair Fenley said it's a very loose end date.

Lamothe said we think we have a realistic schedule. And if we can hold to that schedule, we will get to that finish line September of next year.

Next slide. This graphic you may have seen before. This is the process we use for these projects. Really starting on the left-hand side. Working through those technical issues, which there are a lot of. The White Bear Avenue segment, for example, is the highest safety corridor in the Ramsey County roadway system.

We are taking away lanes. We are basically, reconstructing the roadway. It could be curb-to-curb. It could be building face to building face. We still don't know what that looks like. But the street is going to look different. This isn't just routing a transit line down an existing street. We are going to be rebuilding all that street. So there is an opportunity to make it better for all modes.



Particularly pedestrians and bicyclists deal with areas that we know there are high safety issues and crashes and deaths occurring along the corridor.

Myhre said my question is you are going to be doing all this redesigning. But is it going to work for the person who has to cross the street? Regardless of their disability. You have many systems everywhere and each one is different.

Lamothe said we are going to be taking all those things into consideration. Both the county and the Council have policies in place to focus on all abilities and to be able to make sure it works for all populations. So that will be a big focus of ours. We will not be doing a lot of design in this phase. So questions about push buttons and such things will come in a subsequent phase. But we will be taking into consideration. Making sure that the street works for everyone. We are hearing it does not work for a lot of people right now, the way it is currently designed. The way it operates. The vehicles travel at a much faster speed than the posted speed limit today.

Vice Chair Paulsen said is there a way to do dedicated lanes but not in the center?

Chair Fenley said we might be getting ahead of ourselves in terms of design. Can you come back when there is some design in place?

Lamothe said on Darrell's comment. I think it would be good to come back when we get down to developing some of these design options. Because we are looking at center running, side running, most likely a whole mixed bag stuff that was indicated before when we were dealing with tight right-of-way and wide right-of-way. It is easier to do certain things in certain locations and less easy in other locations.

Myhre said my other question is if Minnesota is going a certain way with the crosswalks and buttons and certain things. Most areas should have the exact same thing. Some areas have buttons that talk, and some don't. We need to teach people how to cross safely.

Chair Fenley said it is my experience that Metro Transit picks high quality APS associated accessible pedestrian signals. While they won't be everywhere in this region, they will definitely be on this corridor when they do the rebuild.

Lamothe said next slide. These are all things that you would naturally expect to see when you are rebuilding an entire street. So we will be considering a right-of-way generally. We are not looking to acquire a right-of-way. Except for possibly at where the stations are located at the intersections. But not between stations. We need to figure out things about how to navigate highways 36 and that bridge crossing.

There is on street parking on Maryland, if you are familiar with that segment of Maryland. We need to figure that out. Traffic and property accessing packs. Taking two lanes off of White Bear Avenue means inherently current traffic today is going to go somewhere else. Maybe it goes away completely, transfers to a different mode. But it may get dispersed elsewhere. We need to understand that. We need to figure out what this guideway looks like. Saying that there is going to be one lane in each direction, dedicated for buses is an easy thing to say verbally, but harder to actually make things work. So, to figure that out.

One of the first things we are going to be doing here, in the coming weeks, into July and August, is figuring out where the stations want to be. We don't really have to answer that question with the previous alignment because it was a former freight rail corridor. We had a station at every place. The former road system crossed that former freight rail corridor.

We are actually expecting instead of four stations in this linear distance, have eight to 10 stations. So we will be serving more people, more locations than the other corridor was proposed to do. There is more opportunity. And then, as previously mentioned, we are going to be focusing on pedestrian and bicycle because it is a full street reconstruction.

Next slide. Station locations. One of the first things that we are going to be diving into here in July and August. We are hoping to get to a point from a policy maker on a recommendation or concurrence on where staff proposes the stations to be in September. So we are going to spend a lot of time looking at what makes sense. A lot of these bullets here drive that. Public feedback.



We are planning on going out. I think you will hear from Liz here. We have some open houses already scheduled for late July and August. To get public feedback on the proposed station locations. But generally, this route, now where it is being routed, would be a replacement for the Route 54. Route 54 is a limited stop route, as many of you know. It is spaced about half a mile between stops, which is what you would want for BRT. That would be the closest you want BRT stations to be. So that is our starting point for the discussion here in July.

The question here is what the best feedback is to get from the TAAC on BRT station locations and design elements going forward. There are several groups that have wanted us to meet with them later this summer but before we get to policymakers. Concurring with station locations in September. We just want to figure out how best to get this group's feedback. If this group wants to weigh in on those station locations.

Chair Fenley said I know folks who live in this area. So, I would lean on them. But is it a thing that you want offline feedback? Do you want to come back when you have some locations in place? Do you want our two cents on that?

Lamothe said I think we could go either way. We should wait a few weeks until we have some dots on a map to share and get reaction to. We could either come back before this entire body or as you indicated, there are certain folks that more represent that corridor or that area, maybe it is best spent with a smaller group setting. We can do that.

Liz is also going to talk about her last couple of slides about public coordinate, which is an online tool for getting public feedback on many aspects including station locations.

Chair Fenley said I think either one would work. The offline one. Maybe a smaller group. We have done that before. That might be a little more efficient. Not to say that we all should have input. We can weigh those two options.

Lamothe said next slide. So this is the overall schedule which I have already covered a lot of. We envision that this is work that is going to run from all the way through Labor Day or so of next year. What this shows here. I will touch on a few things. We just talked about the work plan for this work with our Corridor Management Committee body of policymakers for this project mention we are planning to go back to them in September for concurrence on proposed station locations.

Then, we are hoping in October. And this is another potential engagement point with this body in some way, shape or form. We hope in October to share what we think are the most promising concepts for laying out the roadway. Maybe three to four most promising concepts. We would be spending the winter, late fall, and early spring on analyzing those most promising concepts and soliciting public feedback.

Then ultimately in March, we hope to come back and be at a point where we can recommend one design layout for White Bear and Maryland Avenue. And then start sharing things like ridership costs and federal viability in the springtime frame. And then, we would likely be to the point of spending a lot of next summer asking the public. Now you have all the information before you. Bruce Vento Trail co-location or White Bear Avenue. Which would you prefer? Then that would lead up to a decision by the policymakers by September of next year. After the benefit of both technical and public feedback.

Myhre said is there going to be a really good explanation on how to understand this? So you get the real answer to the question.

Chair Fenley said my understanding is that you have your technical experts and then you have people who actually live in the area and want to provide input. You weigh both of what they say then the policymakers hear Metro Transit. The ones that actually make the decisions on where the routes are going to go. Then that will happen. Then you are thinking that would be September 2024, right?

Lamothe said next slide. I think we may have covered this a little bit. I will turn it over to Liz to talk about the engagement plan going forward. She talked earlier on about what we did in May and June. We have a plan for going forward. This may answer some of these questions about when



we might want to be back before this committee.

Jones said building off of what I already chatted about with you all earlier today. We are still going to be out in the community throughout later in July, August and September. The slide here talks about some of the materials. So Darrell, I know you mentioned the map and putting post it notes down. We really like that material when we are talking to people in person. We will continue to have activities like that. Handouts when we canvas. We have door hangers. We will have specific surveys and questions for businesses. Really around that business access. There are existing challenges and concerns with the existing corridor. All of our digital materials. We have translated materials as well. We can get as much feedback as we can from folks.

Next slide. This just talks a little bit more about strategy. So again, we will continue to have our popups and partnering with community organizations and groups and committees. We also have an interactive map. It did go live on our website. We are preparing a newsletter. That will go out to our newsletter base. Feel free to sign up for our updates. I know Darrell shares some with all of you. it's a nice tool to be able to look at a map and provide some feedback directly throughout the corridor. It is really open ended on any and all comments on this area as well as specific questions about how folks travel. Or any challenges or issues that they may already have experiences in this area of White Bear Avenue and Maryland Avenue, that we are looking at.

We are also planning for some open houses. And we will also be doing some corridor walking, rolling and mobility device tours later in the fall once we have a little bit more information.

And to your point, Heidi. The steps along the process on how best to get plugged in so we will come back and chat. Whether it is this full group or offline about those station locations. Then we will have some further opportunities to refine those later this fall. Then we will want to continue to talk with you all in this group. Once we have the actual design and layout of what things might look like. So building on the station locations and what that wants to be over this summer and fall timeframe is what we are looking for from folks.

Next slide. Darrell, I know you mentioned earlier about where do I need to be? What do I need to do? We do have a couple weeks where we are trying to get as much feedback as we can. So, everything we have gotten throughout May and June and this early July timeframe. We will continue and build on as we talk to more people and have more technical information to share out. But this July 24, through August 11, we are planning to have some specific open houses. So I will be sure to send those out to Darrell and David. If you don't mind sharing with your networks.

We will have one in Saint Paul and one in Maplewood and one virtual option. We will continue. Like we have been out to have popups in public spaces again with interactive tools that we have in person with folks. Like I have mentioned. The interactive map will continue to get feedback from as many places, people and tools as we can. Then we will start to home in on more specific station areas. A big bubble homing in to a smaller. And where those station locations might be.

Next slide. We kind of talked about this already. Beyond how to engage with you. Whether that is coming to this committee. Breaking off into smaller groups. We can certainly do that. But if there is any other feedback on that. Otherwise, we can chat offline about what would be the best for this group. We can chat with you David and Darrell.

Vice Chair Paulsen said I would recommend that you guys come back in September. You can give us feedback from the open houses from the 24th to the 11th.

Jones said we will still have some activities in September. But I think that there will definitely be a lot to share throughout the rest of July and then August. Certainly, as we continue to refine. Maybe it makes more sense a little bit later on to do some of those smaller group breakouts.

Chair Fenley said keep us plugged in. if we need to adjust, we can.

Myhre said my comment is making sure you reach out to people with disabilities. Then do the young generation, then the adults and then the elderly. And make sure that their voices are heard. Make it a wide variety of disabilities.

Murphy said do you think that September may be too close? Should we make it October?



Lamothe said October we would be able to share those most promising concepts, which might be interesting. The station locations. We could obviously share that as well. The CMC would have already concurred with. These would be proposed potentials. So this is something for us to evaluate. Because as we build cross sections that are side running or center running. We need to know whether there is a station at a location or not. It doesn't mean that they are locked in. As evident with the prior phases of this project. There was never a Cook Avenue station served among village. We found out in the last phase that that was a mistake of a previous phase to not include a station served among village. So things can change. So don't get worried that we are not locking things in. I think we could deal with getting feedback on station locations from more of a small group setting. We can come back before this committee with the most promising concepts for the roadway and get feedback there in October.

You can always reach out to Liz and me at any time with questions.

2. Instruction Center Bus Operator Training

Dan Stoffer, Manager of Bus Instruction, spoke to the TAAC committee. I am here to represent Metro Transit's Training Center. Some of you have been on some of our videos that we have created. My plan for today is I want to give you an idea of who I am. Kind of a high-level picture of our training program. Then I am going to drill it down and talk specifically about Accessibility Training. And then answer any questions that you folks might have.

My name again is Dan Stoffer. I am the Manager of Instruction for Metro Transit. I came to Metro Transit in 2003. I was hired to be a part of the startup program for Hiawatha Light Rail at the time it was called. So I was there when there were no train tracks. And where there were no trains. After several years of working on that project, I decided to move over to the bus side. And I was the Assistant Manager of Training. I worked under a lady named Maria. She was the manager at that time.

When Maria retired in 2014, I was honored to become the manager. I was promoted and that is where I am today. Prior to that I was a conductor on Amtrak's Empire Builder Train 7 and 8 that ran through town. Prior to that I was a high school teacher. I taught overseas at the International School of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. Then I taught in the state of Iowa.

I have a close tie to accessibility. My son has epilepsy. That means that my world is a father of somebody that needs help as well. I have that close to my heart.

Next slide. The training program has come leaps and bounds since 2008. When I first arrived at Metro Transit, the training program was what I would call a one-legged stool. It was out of balance. We focused all of our energy on safe driving. Which is very important as you know. We want to get to our destination in a safe way. But we really didn't have anything on customer service. Which entails accessibility training. And we really didn't do anything about the personal wellbeing of the operators. We have really put a lot of energy into those two legs of the stool.

Right now, we have a nice, well rounded program. We focus a lot of our energy on customer service. And we focus a lot of our energy on the wellbeing health of our operators. Arguably, as you hopefully agree with me, that is all intertwined. If you are not taking care of yourself. If you are not getting proper sleep. You are not exercising. You are not keeping your mind active. Then you might be a little bit crabby. When somebody gets on your bus, you might interact with them in a more negative way. When interaction is negative, sometimes you start to drive angrily. And you drive with emotions.

So, we really wanted to have a holistic approach or well-rounded training program. So now we focus on the three legs, which is safety, customer service and the health and well-being of our operators.

We are proud to say or boast a little bit. That several years ago, Metro Transit was asked by the federal government, to be a part of a process where we looked to get an apprenticeship program for bus operators. So, carpenters, electricians and plumbers are all journey workers. And they are recognized as skill laborers. Bus drivers were never that way. And we were one of 12

organizations to be invited to be on this national program and so we learned all about the apprenticeship program. We sold it to our executive leaders, and I am proud to say that we are the second in the United States to be a certified program. And we are a certified program by the State of Minnesota and the Department of Labor.

So the Department of Labor comes in all the time and audits us. And audits our curriculum. And audits our time that we are giving our operators behind the wheel. And specific topics. If we don't live up to their expectations, then they pull that certification from us. The certification is nice because once a bus operator graduates, they receive a Journey Worker's card from the State of Minnesota and the Department of Labor, and they are officially recognized as a skilled laborer.

Our program is two years in length. When I first took over the program in 2008, our training program was five weeks. Now we have moved our training program to two years. What I like about it is it follows adult learning concepts where you will give somebody a topic. You will teach them all about the topic. And then they will go out in the field, and they will have immediate application of that particular topic. That's how adults learn. You just can't pour water on them and hope that things get absorbed. You have to have an opportunity for them to go out and practice and come back and that is what the apprenticeship is all about.

Within the apprenticeship program, also we do offer mentors. And the mentor is a built-in friend. Somebody that the union and management have both elected to be a part of our mentor program. It is an opportunity for a new hire. We consider the new hires are the first two years. It's an opportunity for them to have somebody to rely on. a shoulder to cry on when things aren't going really well. And they need somebody to pick them up. And a high-five for somebody that's doing a good job. And it is that built-in friend.

Next slide. Within our training program, we offer many topics that deal with accessibility training. One of the topics that we have is in our first level, the apprenticeship program, and it is our half a day training focused on mobility device securement and ramp use. This is where the class will go into a classroom. We have a mock setup. And we have a wheelchair securement envelope that looks just like the ones that are on the bus. And each student goes over the SOP. They watch a video. And then they are able to secure somebody into a wheelchair securement envelope.

We don't stop there though. Because that is one of those things where we need to have people practice on a bus. So after they kind of get efficient with that, then we answer all their questions. We take them out on a bus, and we drive them down to the 7th Street ramp or the 5th Street garage. We drive them different places and then they get to work with a wheelchair on the bus and they take turns. They partner up and one person is in the wheelchair, and they lower the ramp for that person. And they bring them up into the bus and they take them back to the wheelchair securement area. And they practice securing that device down.

We also do what is called a Metro Transit, and I would also say a state pre-trip. It is a policy of Metro Transit that everybody that drives a commercial vehicle has to do a pre-trip. And they are looking to make sure that the equipment is safe. In the Metro Transit pre-trip training, we focus heavily on making sure that the wheelchair securement area and the ramp and all those sorts of things work properly. So that when they do get out on the route, that they can ensure that there is not going to be any hiccups on the operation of that. if there is, they are trained on how to do a bus change.

We also do what is called in-service training. This is where we take the classroom, and we add that to the CDL experience. And now we start picking up real live people. There's no more classroom. It is you are out there, and you are operating a bus. Doing a route. You guys probably have seen them before. It usually says, "In Service." And then it says, "Training." Those are brand new folks within the first five weeks of training. And they are being monitored and graded by the instructor on how safe they operate the bus. And how they interact with people. Disabled people and non-disabled people.

We also offer garage level training. Garage level training is where we send them to their garage that they have picked. And during garage level training, they get certified on the piece of equipment that they are going to be driving. So, if you pick a route that requires one of those long



buses, those articulated buses, we train you on that. If you pick a piece of work that requires you to run one of those tall buses, the coach buses, we train you on how to do that. Hybrid bus. We train you on how to do that. So that is what happens at the garage level.

Next slide. We have several videos. One of the things that I like to follow is when you are learning, there are different learning styles. Some of you are readers. When you read something, it clicks. You got it. Some of us are watchers. You need to watch somebody do it. And then you got it. and some of us are doers. We need to get our hands dirty and actually do something. We try to implement those concepts at Metro Transit's Training Center because we recognize that not everybody is the same. Everybody learns differently.

One of the things that we do is show these videos. Let me describe some of these videos to you. First off is the video "How to Ride the Bus." We show that to every new student that comes through our door. We thank you guys for your collaboration on that.

The Accessibility video. That is a video that covers how to use accessibility features on Metro Transit vehicles. BRT buses and Light Rail trains. It covers how to board. How the driver will assist. Service animals, mobility devices and blind and deaf needs.

The next video is the mobility device video. This talks about ADA responsibilities. Metro Transit rules and policies. And how to make a call to the TCC. It covers how to make a stop. Basic securements of wheelchairs, scooters, Q-Pod, exiting. People who are in a wheelchair device and segways.

The next video is the ADA bus stop video. That is a four-minute video that demonstrates where buses should stop for a person who is disabled. Specifically, the blind or blind/deaf.

We show the Winter Driving video. This covers keeping passengers and pedestrians safe. Safe stopping in bus stops with snow and ice. Pulling up and stopping in a crosswalk. Stopping in a cleared path. Lowering the ramp in a clear area where it is level and also kneeling the bus. Everyone, including those that are in mobility devices.

And then we also show the Driving Weather video. That is provided to us by the Smith System. Which is a nationally renowned defensive driving school out of Houston, Texas.

I will pause and take some questions.

Myhre said when you were talking earlier about training, and you were also talking about safety. I have seen drivers eating when they were driving. I have a hard time getting on and off the bus correctly.

Stoffer said one of the things you brought up was buses. There are all kinds of buses out there. That's what makes our program challenging. Because we have hybrids and BRT buses, coaches and articulated buses, low floors and different manufacturers. Each bus has its own issues or intricacies that we have to teach on. Most people can. If you are trained on an articulated bus, you can probably drive most any bus. It's like driving a Ford F150 and then going to a Chevy Silverado. There's a lot of similarities. But some of the buttons and knobs and how it handles coming in and out of curbs can be tricky. So when somebody picks a piece of work that requires a certain bus, we always make sure we offer training to them and say "Are you able to drive this bus?" And many times, people are like "You know what, I would like to have a refresher on it."

So we take them out and around just so they can familiarize themselves with the dials and the knobs and how it handles.

We have to identify that gap between the 5X8 platform that is not only safe but clear of objects. That is what we have to train our drivers to do. Customer Service is where you call to report problems. Call Pam Steffen's staff and she can dispatch a public facility person out to that area to make sure that area is cleaned.

Vice Chair Paulsen said we need to stop bus jumping. It causes problems. Drivers do it all the time.

Stoffer said I want to revert back to the one video. It is the ADA bus stop video. It is a four-minute



video that describes the bus should stop for a person who is disabled. We show that in specifically. I do that training. We have a bulletin that is called "Where to stop" bulletin. Then I do that training, or my colleague does that training. We do that because we have them sign for that particular training. We go up to the dry eraser board. We talk about bus jumping, clearing the stop. Don't put your peddle to the metal and just sake off. Make sure that you observe the bus stop. If there is somebody there who is disabled or not, you have to stop. You have to announce your route. You have to make sure that they know that you are there.

The "Where to Stop" bulletin. We issue that to them. We read the bulletin to them. And then we take any questions that they might have. Then we have them sign off for that. That is put into their employee jacket. That four-minute video was produced by a gentleman that sits behind me in the gallery. He made it a silent video because we get to play that all of the time out in the garages. It's a silent video because then it is not Dan narrating the same stuff every four minutes. It is a silent video that plays and has images of how to stop your bus. We do take that very seriously. And we will continue to do that.

Committee members Darrell and Heidi, I will make sure that I bring up some of the examples that you are experiencing, when I teach that.

Rodgers said I specifically want to talk about a newer video that was recently created that identifies how a bus passes a resting bus. I know, say the highest priority for bus drivers. I am grateful for that. I applaud that. But safety for riders that have disabilities is also critically important. There is a new video that shows it is appropriate in some instances, for a bus to jump another bus. But they must pull out, and as they start to pass the parked bus or the waiting bus, they need to stop just a little bit beyond, in the middle of the street. And call out to a disabled passenger who is standing on the curb in front of the other bus, to identify that they are out in the street, ready to be boarded. If that person is waiting for that particular bus.

I'm guessing that you are familiar with the video I am describing. But that may involve safety issues related to the driver. But it does not take into account the safety issues related to the passenger. I am a blind passenger. I use a guide dog. I would never, ever, consider walking in front of a parked bus. Knowing that that bus could move at any moment. To board a bus that is waiting for me in the middle of the street without being able to see that myself.

If somebody is yelling at me and telling me to move forward to enter the bus, I don't know if that is some crank person across the street, yelling. Or if it is a bus driver. I can't validate that on my own. So that is an unsafe move. And I am never going to walk in front of a parked bus unless I could visually make contact with that driver who knows, and I know that that person sees me. So he is not going to take off if I step in front of that bus.

There are all kinds of things wrong with the safety concerns from a passenger perspective, when we have to board a bus that is standing in the middle of the street. Because they are trying to pass a parked bus.

I know at one time we were all informed that passing buses is not allowed. And now all of a sudden, it seems like it is allowable. So can you 1. Clarify if that is allowable and may comment on the video that is new, that is out there. That describes how a driver passes another bus. But it doesn't take into consideration the safety perspective of the disabled person or the passenger. And how do we correct that?

Stoffer said thank you for bringing that up. That actually is the video that I am referring to. It is that four-minute video that was made back in 2017, 2018. It does demonstrate that the vehicle at time. When the vehicle in front is disabled or is holding for time. You do have the permission to leapfrog that bus to move. And it describes where you are supposed to stop the bus. And you are supposed to announce the route after you clear your spot.

Now, with that said, I do know that there have been several discussions about that video. And within the blind and the blind/deaf community. I know that my executive leadership is looking at a lot of different possibilities on that. They have heard concerns and they are looking at how they can remediate that potential issue. Nothing has been brought to my level yet. But I can reassure you



that I just heard this same discussion last week at a very high-level management. We were talking about it. The difficulty, I guess, would be that we also have to operate a transit system. And we have to make sure that the transit system is moving in a precise movement. I don't think it's possible for us to wait at a bus stop for a bus to potentially move when it could be broken down. We just have to wait until that moves so we can move forward.

But, with that said, there are other alternatives that we can do and continue to work with it. Tack on different ideas and strategies to where it meets your needs. But it also meets the needs of a transit company.

Rodgers said it does concern me a little bit that you have heard this discussion at a high-level management team. Yet, no one has reached out to talk to us about what our concerns are. About a bus stopping in the middle of the street. Calling out and saying it is safe to cross. And we have to walk in front of a parked bus to get to a presumed waiting bus in the middle of the street. Nobody has had any conversation with us about that and what that is a concern of ours. So again, "Nothing About us Without us" is a mantra that we espouse. And I would urge you to share that with whomever you need to share it with.

I don't doubt for a minute or question the validity of keeping a system running on time. We have multiple bus routes that use the same streets, the same stops. We have an inherent difficulty. But think the solution is bringing everybody together to talk about it. hearing what the safety concerns are for the passengers. And then figuring out collectively, what we can do together to make it work.

We have the ability to do that. But we have not been included in the conversation. And that is what is really irritating to me. We are here as the TAAC. We are here as individuals. We can be brought into conversations. We can be interviewed. We can be questioned. But no one has bothered to do that. And I think, again, I don't doubt that everybody has safety in mind. But we need to combine the safety of the passenger with the safety of the operation of the bus.

Vice Chair Paulsen said Ken, to your point, I believe you are right. I believe that we were told a few months ago when we talked about bus jumping. And we brought it up very specifically. They did tell us that they weren't going to allow the second bus to move around the first bus. Without making sure that they hit that first mark. Where they were supposed to land. Sometimes the first bus is just loading a wheelchair or mobility device and the second bus doesn't want to wait.

Chair Fenley said do you collect data on bus jumping and the reason for bus jumping? It has to happen at some point because buses do break down. It seems like maybe it is happening more than what is driven is allowed? In terms of internal policies. Do you all note every time that bus jumping occurs?

Stoffer said the training program doesn't do this. I would assume that the Business System Analysts and Customer Service probably do that. As far as training, we do not. We don't have access to that.

Murphy said. You are talking about the bus jumping. I see that a lot. Out of curiosity, I stood in line and watched the buses coming. One was stopped and loading and unloading. Another one just went around it. it was a whole different route number. Then there were people screaming at the bus that just left. That was just last week. It is happening all the time. One time a driver lowered the lift onto a pile of snow. A person trying to get off with their walker, fell. The bus driver lifted up their lift and continued on. Many times, I have seen that type of thing. What are the drivers supposed to do when something like snow is in the way?

Stoffer said in that winter driving video that I referred to a little while ago, it is specifically showing that the driver is supposed to pull up into the intersection or find a clear spot to let somebody off. It is a visually, specifically talked about that. They are never supposed to let it down as you described.

Chair Fenley said we need to move on. We only have six minutes left.

Stoffer said I have quite a bit left of my presentation. I will send it to you and you guys can look it over if you would like. You can contact me with any questions. It tells you about what we are doing

at the Instruction Center.

Chair Fenley said given that we don't have time to finish what is left in your presentation, I think more could be unpacked. Would you like to come back next month?

Stoffer said I will have to look at my calendar and see. I think during the next few months, I am busy those days that your committee meets. I will look and see what I can do.

Chair Fenley said in the meantime, I would like to get more specific solutions or discussions based on Ken's experience. Based on Darrell's experience when it comes to the training that occurs. I think it really brings us back full circle to your opening of the presentation. Bus drivers are humans. Understand that. Let's try to minimize that level of passing up folks.

3. **Legislative Update**

This item was not presented.

Reports

Subcommittee

1. **Blue Line – Ken Rodgers**

This item was not presented.

2. **Green Line – Christopher Bates**

This item was not presented.

3. **Gold Line – Darrell Paulsen**

Vice Chair Paulsen said work and construction. Woodbury along the lines. Throughout the middle of the night, over the last couple of weeks they did line construction.

4. **Purple Line – Darrell Paulsen**

This item was presented earlier.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

This item was not presented.

Chair

This item was not presented.

Public Invitation

None.

Member Comment

Vice Chair Paulsen said I would love to see all of you, some of you or any of you on July 13, on the north end of the capitol lawn for Disability Pride Day. It is being sponsored by ACT, Advocating Change Together. It will be the first time in Minnesota State history. We will have claimed July as Disability Pride Day, in Minnesota. Folks who are on the DD, the Developmental Disabilities side.

What they do is they provide a training structure to engage folks. And their civic and political responsibilities. They teach them what a law is and what laws do. Then they teach them how to engage with their lawmakers in an appropriate and rational way.

So, July 13th. We are working with Congresswoman, Betty McCollum's office, to make it a national holiday. That she wanted to do it earlier this year. We told her that yes, we are willing to do it.

Come on out between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on next Thursday. There will be games and food.

Myhre said I want somebody to come talk about the Green Line, and the vandalism, and how they



are handling some of that. it seems like lately; it is getting worse. Are they going to fix it? there is also flooding of the drains. A combination of a bunch of different stuff. And spray painting. One side looks worse than the other side.

Adjournment

Business completed; the meeting adjourned at 2:33 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 July 5, 2023.

Approved this 05 day of July 2023.

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