

Minutes of the REGULAR MEETING OF THE TAAC COMMITTEE

Wednesday, May 5, 2021

Committee Members Present: Chair David Fenley, Vice Chair Darrell Paulsen, Sam Jasmine, Patsy Murphy, Ken Rodgers, Kari Sheldon, John Clark, Heidi Myhre, Claudia Fuglie, Trevor Turner, Erik Henricksen and Richard Rowan.

Committee Members Absent: none.

Committee Members Excused: Christopher Bates, Jeffrey Dains and Diane Graham-Raff.

Council Staff Present: Metropolitan Council Member Phillip Sterner, Doug Cook, Andrea Arnoldi, Mark Newell, Leah Janz, Bre Grand, Lyssa Leitner, Elizabeth Jones, Jason Tintes, Andy Streasick, Guthrie Byard, Christine Kuennen, Brooke Bordson and Alison Coleman.

Public Present: none.

CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Committee Chair Fenley called the regular meeting of the Council's TAAC Committee to order at 12:34 p.m. on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

It was moved by Fuglie, seconded by Jasmine to approve the agenda. **Motion carried.**

It was moved by Rodgers, seconded by Jasmine to approve the minutes of the April 7, 2021 regular meeting of the TAAC Committee. **Motion carried.**

BUSINESS & INFORMATION

1. Gold Line

Liz Jones, Outreach Coordinator

Chris Beckwith, Gold Line Project Director

Andrea Arnoldi, Gold Line Project Architecture Lead

Liz Jones spoke to the TAAC committee. I just wanted to give a project update as well as a follow up on one main issue that came up that we have been working through the last time that we were at the TAAC meeting, as well as a couple of other issues that came up. So, project updates and a follow up to date. I will turn it over to Chris Beckwith, our Project Director. She will give an update on where the project is today.

Chris Beckwith spoke to the TAAC committee. We have some really great feedback from this committee. We look forward to giving a brief update. So our topics here. This is a quick update. We have some follow up items that actually will be presented.

The scope is still the same as you last saw it. it is still a 10-mile long corridor with about 21 new stations. There are four park-and-rides. We are targeting a 2024 opening. This is the regions first dedicated busway. They are a new kind of Bus Rapid Transit.

I do have some really great news to share today. This is a little bit of in the weeds. For those of us who live and breathe the Federal Transit Administration's new funding program. There are new starts projects for the New Starts Program. You have several gates you have to go through. So project development is usually two years. For us, it was a little over three years because we did have to have an extension to get into engineering. The reason for that extension was just to resolve some issues with our ridership and our project rating, which we

were successfully able to do with the FTA (Federal Transit Administration), which means we are now in the next phase. Really great news. It happened a couple of weeks ago. So we were all doing back flips virtually. It really does make the project that much more real. So we are actually at about 90 percent design for our plan set. We included a draft of that 90 percent and then we are still making adjustments. We are still making the rounds with the TAAC and some of our local partners just to make sure that we don't have to do any fine tuning at the end.

Construction then. We hope that it will start to take shape next year. There might be a little bit of early construction this year. We are still trying to figure that out. That will be two or three years. And then the revenue service or opening day sometime in 2024. If everything else stays on track.

That is all I have. I am going to turn it back over to Liz who will do a little bit of framing before handing it over to Andrea.

Jones said like I said in the beginning. The main topic for today is follow up. When we met with you folks a few months back, we were at 60 percent design. Between 60 and 90 percent and had a lot of station access questions and pedestrian crossing and things like that. We had a really great conversation a few months ago. Our design has advanced, but no. The changes we did incorporate. Some feedback from you folks at that meeting. So one of the main issues that came up was at our Greenway Station and a split station crossing of the roadway and guideway west. The particular type of signal that we heard at that meeting was not very accessible. After that meeting, we had a lot to go through. We had a really great discussion.

I wanted to dive into the issue at hand a little bit further. A few of you in a smaller group, thank you again for meeting with us and having further upline conversation that we wanted to have to truly get to the issue and understand the concerns and have dialogue on what we can do to address the issue.

So that is our main topic for the day. I have Andrea Arnoldi, who is our Architecture Lead and Engineer. She is going to go through some of those designs. Some of those design changes that we have undertaken. But I did want to share that we were able to remove what is called the RRFB (Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon) we shared the issues on that. It is not accessible, but we were able to put in an accessible intersection.

I am going to kick it over to Andrea, who will go through the design details of what we had previously made some design adjustments at that station that we are still working on. We are still working on some of the changes that we did to update that signal.

Andrea will describe the design details from 60 percent to what we have now, which is almost 90 percent.

Arnoldi said what we have on screen right now is the plan that we have brought forward on the last time we met. So this was more indicative of our 60 percent design level. Because of the rendering and it is a little bit more legible. So this is the graphic to speak from. I did want to note that there is a beacon that is identified right now. That was the previous design that shows a full signalized intersection. Much of the core design of the station and its access is all the same. I am just going to touch on a couple of things that are final. So the T intersection along with Greenway is now going to have a signal and a push button at all corners. On the north side of Hudson at Greenway. It will allow for the crossing. It will be a signalized crossing that will allow you to cross north on Hudson and go eastbound on the platform. The median refuge that you have onscreen will also have a push button. Should someone not be able to make it across the entire way. They would have the ability to trigger that signal again.

The length themselves are still being evaluated. We do have right now a tree lane in the right turn lane. We are still going to be advancing a little bit more until it is past 90 percent. The core difference here is that we have a full signalized intersection. Otherwise, all the stations that we talked about and the access is still the same and on platform seating and shoppers and everything else. That is the key that I wanted to highlight.

I will be able to answer any questions you have about access to this station.

Chair Fenley said it was three months ago that this was brought up. A small group of us met with Liz and some other folks at the Gold Line and had a pretty in-depth discussion about this particular intersection. And why the full signal would be safer and better for folks with disabilities. So I wanted to commend you on taking our recommendations into consideration and moving forward on the full signalized intersection. So thank you for that.

Arnoldi said similar to what the LRT has. We do have a digital display that will be indicating when the next bus is to arrive. That hangs from the shelter canopy. Similar to the LRT model. We have the digital display. There

is a sign that will be indicating when the next bus is to arrive. That hangs from the shelter canopy. Based on the LRT model. And that would be visible from either end of the platform. There is also going to be signs for the schedule that are going to be in the shelters.

Jones said I will share Heidi's concerns with Metro Transit. Andrea will talk about what we are planning for the Gold Line.

Arnoldi said there are three different ways you can see the information as a passenger. One is the digital display. Another is the visual static signs that you will see near the shelter. The way our platform is oriented, all signs will be at the platform. We are not allowing people to step behind the shelter and seen from different angles. We will be very cognizant of the feedback and look at the fine placement there. The third way is an audible message that is part of the pylon that repeats what the sign says when the next bus will be coming. Those are the three different ways to get that information.

Rodgers said I want to get this on record. In respect to the pedestrian signal, My question is when someone travels in Minneapolis and crosses the accessible pedestrian signal and engages it, it indicates the name of the street you are about to cross. In Saint Paul, you get the wait audible signal. Then you get what I call a machine gun sound, which is a rapid percussive sound that indicates the light is on and you can cross the street. There is no confirming statement that says the street you are about to cross. There are some proposed new rules that are suggested for the MUTCD that are in the comment period right now. MnDOT has requested that the percussive sound not be used. There are two reasons for that. That percussive sound lends too much to the surrounding environment. It can be drowned out by traffic noise and other sounds. It is not dark enough. It doesn't give a blind person informatory information to cross the street.

So my suggestion and my urging is that signal be set not to use multipurpose sound. But to use the statement that confirms the street that someone is about to cross.

Chair Fenley said I would guess that it is going to be Oakdale that controls the APS here. But I could be wrong. But my question would be more broadly. Does Metro Transit install and make decisions on these accessible pedestrian signals anywhere in the system? Or is it all on the municipality the signal is in?

Jones said it is not Metro Transit. I cannot speak of it with 100 percent certainty. But the project that I know of to date, where they are sitting at signals and Metro Transit was not in control.

Rodgers said it is my understanding that whoever does the construction and the first installation of the signal, often sets the APS. This is part of the confusion in Minneapolis and Minnesota. Does anyone know who has jurisdiction over this? It could be the county, it could be the city, it could be the state. My recommendation is that you forward that information as long as we need to express this. If you don't have any control with this, then so be it. I would like Metro Transit to be at the gate where the announcement of the street names verses the sound.

Jasmine said there is one more comment I would like to add to that note. If you are going to be passing this forward. There is also a switch that turns on and off. The countdown. So if you are in the middle of the street, and you don't know how long that light is going to be green, it will start telling you how much time you have before the light changes. I personally find that very valuable to know when the light is going to change so I can avoid getting hit. If you can make sure that they have that countdown switch on because I know that some instructors have asked that it be turned off. I feel that it is detrimental to people who are traveling to not know everything that a sighted person can see when crossing the street.

Rodgers said some background information. The countdown timers that are installed visually at some intersections, used to include an auditory component. The MUTCD, Manual for Uniform Traffic Control Devices at its last meeting. That is the bible that tells communities how to set their traffic devices. In the last revision, said audible countdown timers must be turned off. I did some research to see why it was changed. They said blind people have to be able to listen to traffic. They don't need extra distractions. Low vision and blind people listen to a lot of things at the same time. A countdown timer is not going to confuse us while we are listening to traffic. I have sent in comments to the State of Minnesota that the auditory component needs to be turned back on. Turning the auditory signal off is discriminatory to low vision and blind people.

Arnoldi said we are going to look at the next station. This is a center platform. What we have at the roadway intersection, which is shown in gray on your screen is on Old Hudson Road just north off I-94 at the Sunray Shopping Center. The intersection on Patterson and Old Hudson Road would be a stop indicator for all three directions. It will be an all-way stop. It is an indicator stop. Then at the crossing at the guideway, when the

pedestrian is at the median refuge between the road and the BRT guideway. There is a push button signal there for folks who will stop the bus. There will be an audible indicator that is phased across to the center where the platform access is. And then walk up to the platform. It will be a push button in the median space and on the platform side for crossing at the guideway. Which is from the feedback we have here. This is the biggest update from the summary. And this platform, as you may recall, is the eastbound and the westbound movement you will see from the platform.

Chair Fenley said Is this a dedicated BRT?

Arnoldi said yes it is.

Rodgers said just some clarification. Is the push button close to the platform? Or is it before you cross the street and approach the platform?

Arnoldi said if you are on the north side of Old Hudson, the general roadway traffic is controlled by a stop sign. So there is no push button on the north side of Old Hudson. You would cross at the center section like you would elsewhere, with a full stop. All vehicles have to stop. When you get to the median before you hit the dedicated guideway for the BRT. That is where the push button is directly within the crossing, similar to what you see in other signalized intersections. And then on the platform side, the push button is right before the crossing.

These are full pedestrian signals. I don't believe they are being modified.

Henricksen said it is a really unique intersection to have the back to back median crossings or street crossings. The stop is three ways. Then you get to this other median and you have a push button indicated by rapid flashing. What is exactly there again?

Arnoldi said it is a signal for the buses. The buses will be required to stop when the push button is indicated, they will get a signal to stop.

Henricksen said just because of the atypicalness, I am wondering how the blind will recognize that they have to push a button. There is not a typical pedestrian refuge. It just seems not typical that a stop, how someone would know when they are approaching into that median portion for the audio.

Arnoldi said I would have to follow up with how that push button is an indicator that can be located. Because that is the version of the signalized crossings. That is where you first encounter it. I can put that as a follow up item.

Chair Fenley said I would imagine that there will be truncated domes on either side to let folks know they are exiting or entering a roadway. But still, I don't think they will get to the heart of your question, Erik, which is how do they know that there is going to be a button there?

Henricksen said I just wonder how people going from the shopping center going south to try to get back on. I think it is how to find a button to push to get across. If you are going north. It is not a typical pedestrian refuge.

Arnoldi said yes, it does not address the button condition on locating it.

Rodgers said I think that is the reason why I asked about the indicator tone. That would be why the travelers can identify the crossing. I appreciate your comment because these are things we try to avoid, and we just seem to avoid them. The thing that is most concerning safety wise is when all of the stops are in one particular version and there is one stop that is way different. That is a recipe for disaster. Because it is not handled the same as one would expect if they are traveling as the first time. I really urge that whenever that is different from the norm, there really must be educational component to this station when it is open. There has to be some real education so people can understand. This is a unique setting. People may expect it to be the same as every other stop setting. It is the locator tone that is going to be the largest identifier that this is a button stop for some reason. Anytime they have to cross tracks to get onto a platform, it is always dangerous. It is always nerve racking. We have them all over the city and having this one is different and there is going to have to be some education on how this works.

Henricksen said I can see how it could actually be some additional confusion when you are headed northbound because you may push the activated push button on the south side but then you cross to the median and you are going to hear another push button. I think that might make someone question that I might need to push another button to get to the other side, when it is actually a stop required.

Myhre said this is a lot of learning right now and I have to figure out how to process everything you guys talked about. I understand when I get on the train and certain bus stops because we make it similar. But when certain people have processing problems, and really want to be out there, the more confusing you make it the harder it is to teach. And you don't want to lose people going out the door.

Clark said back to your celebration about the infrastructure. I am wondering what advocacy is occurring to that infrastructure spending as applied to disability. Is there an ongoing effort to address the issue of standardization? Are you involved in that?

Chair Fenley said John are you referring to federal infrastructure proposed?

Clark said I am wondering if that applies. Because I was referring the funding that you are getting.

Chair Fenley said I don't actually know. I think that is a much broader question than what we are discussing now.

Arnoldi said I just wanted to check my notes. It is your standard APS.

Chair Fenley said just a question for the presenters. Do you have more slides and more information?

Arnoldi said yes. I wanted to go to the next topic.

Pylon Push Button Annunciator. Jones said this reads off the real time information and whether or not there is a locator tone somewhere at the APS crossing. I don't have a lot to share. I have been in conversation with Metro Transit, who is working on this technology. They are looking at something new. So I have been advocating for this feedback to have that locator tone so folks know where that button is to press to get that information. It is progressing pretty quickly. I am still in an email chain including this morning. So by keeping and advocate for that change. It looks pretty promising that there is potential to make a change on what we currently have. Conversations are still ongoing. I spoke to that so when we come back to the TAAC, the new technology is signed on to figure it out. And then when I get feedback, I will get that information and share that as well. I will let you know that it is something that I am still inquiring about and working on for the Gold Line. And then it would be relevant on other BRT projects as well.

Myhre said a lot of these work well with blind people but how about deaf people? I wear a hearing aid. Has anyone done a study on people like us?

Chair Fenley said the locator signals are for push button that will auditorily express information that is being visually displayed already. So for people who are hard of hearing or deaf, they would see the information. But the blind has an option to find this button, which I am sure that all the presenters know were we stand on the locator. This has been going on for a long time now. We definitely support this.

Next slide – Project Look Ahead. Beckwith said what to expect with the Gold Line. We have our Project Management Team meeting after this. We will bring our notes from this meeting to the Design and Construction teams as well. The next steps here. I just wanted to mention we just completed the draft of the 90 percent plan set. So the feedback we are getting today and any final adjustments that we can make to that plan set. We would incorporate that into 100 percent plan set. Hopefully it would be later this summer to update all the plans. It could advance a little bit past the summer as well. We would then put the plans out to request for bids from contractors. We are not exactly sure when that would start. It could be late this year into early next year. They are advertised for a couple of months. It would take a little bit of time to put those prices together. It is a long process. At least six months to get those bids back. And then we might do a little advanced utility work as I mentioned. We might do a little bit this year. Get a few smaller items out of the way before we move into a heavy construction in 2022.

2. Marketing & Transit Information Equity & Inclusion Group

Leah Janz, Senior Graphic Designer

Bre Grand, Project Management Specialist, Transit Information

Bre Grand spoke to the TAAC committee. We wanted to provide a quick overview about what we are presenting today. I will provide time for questions at the end. We are here today primarily to talk to this committee about our division to improve how we integrate accessibility into our work. And ask for any committee members who might be interested in us. Informing our group to join us. I will explain more about this at the end of the presentation. After we provide a little bit more background and context.

The departments that Lea and I work in are both part of a Marketing and Transit Information Division which will provide a little more information about some more context about what we do on a day-to-day basis. We will then go over the background about this accessibility and integration project along with some current accessibility project, update the projects that we are working on at the moment, as well as the proposed next steps forward.

Next slide. Marketing and Transit Information Division. Lea and I are with Metro Transit's Marketing and Transit Information Division. Our division consists of four departments. Transit Information, Commuter Programs, Market Development and Creative Services. I will talk a little bit more about each department. But as a whole, our division works is to attract new customers whether they ride the bus, train, carpool/vanpool and bike. And maintain and increase their satisfaction and riding frequency of existing customers through strategic marketing, powerful branding, and effective customer information.

The Transit Information Department. That is the department that I work for. Our department works to ensure that customers understand where and when the transit service operates. Our department operates our call center to assist customers with trip planning and is responsible for maintaining various transit service information. For resources and tools such as our online schedules and our online trip planner. Our bus stop signs. Information on our electronic signs and our annunciators. Our printed schedules, our real time next trip departure information signs and our electronic rider alert. Bus route closures and bus detours.

Next slide. Commuter Programs. The Commuter Programs Department administers various programs that help commuters make sustainable travel choices such as ride matching for carpools and vanpools. And preferential carpool parking. Bike locker rentals and partnerships with metro area employers.

Janz spoke to the TAAC committee. I will go over the other two departments in our division. The first one is Market Development Teams. They work on six areas. The Media Planning develops media and promotional plans for all marketing products and communication. Campaign and Market Development is about developing and implementing annual ridership building initiatives, brand and product awareness campaign. The team builds strategic and community event and community partnerships and support brand awareness. Market Research allows us to gather the target market and get opinions and feedback from customers about their interest and satisfaction in their product or transit service.

This team also provides Metro Transit Division support. Various agency divisions provide to further promote their project and or message. The last area of the responsibility is Transit Advertising Revenue Management. They collaborate with the current vendor intersections, to generate revenue and sales using transit assets.

So within the campaign is the Market Development Work Area. Specialists have five general areas to focus their campaign efforts on. 1. GoTo card and Specialty Pass Marketing (TAP, Metropass, Student Pass). 2. Route Marketing builds ridership or awareness on specialty GoTo products. This slide shows two of the passes that are marketed. A blue and yellow GoTo card and a blue and white Metropas. Route marketing creates significant service changes. A new route on Northstar and metro lines service. 3. Sports Partnerships sponsors good relationships with sporting teams to encourage attendees to consider taking transit to the games or stadium events. 4. Technology Promotions market tools such as the mobile app, next trip or text for safety. 5. Events and Community Partnerships often have a marketing component (ie: State Fair). This slide is showing an example of a State Fair ad from several years ago. It shows a fair goer boarding in the background.

Next slide. Market Development Divisional Support Examples. As mentioned earlier, the Development Team also provides support to other departments and divisions. Some examples of this include customer safety awareness. So an example of the bus I add one of the slides show the tactics used in a safety campaign. It shows an illustration of a man running after a black bus on a red background. Yellow text says: "Stay aware, stay alive." The rest of the text says: "Never EVER run after a bus. Safety is a shared responsibility." Then there is a small logo in the lower right corner along with a URL.

The team supports operator's recruitment and hiring. As an example of that added on this slide too. It shows one of the tactics used in the campaign.

This ad shows a photo of a bus operator with buses in the background. The left of the photograph is a text with a dark blue background with letters in full text, reading: "We're hiring bus drivers." Underneath that is smaller white text that says: "Start at \$20.44 an hour." Then there is a logo and a website URL that shows on top of the photo in the lower left corner.

This team also helps communicate planned rail disruptions, which includes posters and announcements. On another example shown here as divisional support includes transit, projects and support materials, such as Network Next, planned transit improvements, etc. for example, is an interior bus ad that shows one of the tactics used in the Network Next campaign. The colors are white, blue and red. The text is in blue on a white background on the right side. There is a red toned image on a bus on the right side. The headline on a bold helps Metro Transit envision a picture of bus service today. The text below reads: "Learn about Network Next, a 20-year plan for expanding and improving the bus network and how you can get involved." It shows the Network Next logo and the project URL and the Metro Transit logo is on the bottom on a blue background.

Next slide. Creative Services. The last department in this division is Creative Services, which is the group that I am in. We work with nearly every division in the agency. But we work very closely with the other departments that I described earlier. In 2020, Creative Services completed over 1000 requests for 24 different departments. Those requests touch the five different work areas. That includes copywriting, which focuses on writing and campaigning for digital projects. Graphic design, which focuses on writing printed photography as well as managing production and delivery of materials. Photography and videography produces assets and campaign projects for social media posts. Social Media. This area manages the social media accounts and the contents for those posts. Web design & development area, which includes user experience and interface and we design and post website pages with assets in other screen reading media.

Next slide Creative Services produces a lot of materials that range in size and in format. This list is a handful of items that are produced for campaigns or general information. So literature includes pocket schedules, brochures, fact sheets and reports. These can be printed or digital.

Advertisements can include printed ads, vehicle side panels, shelter/station posters, digital ads: posted on digital screens displayed at stations, and websites and social media.

Signage includes schedule posters that list the route schedules at each stop, facility identification signage, decals/ground clings, A-Frames signage often used for sporting events, and banners.

Maps can be static or interactive, printed or digital and creative route information, transit planning, detours and route marketing.

Emails are sent out to promote transit signs or provide customers with information on upcoming route changes.

Direct mailers are to promote market programs and to increase ridership.

Next slide. Accessibility Integration Project Background. So that now we have provided what a background division does, I will explain why we are here and what the Accessibility Integration Project is and how it started. In September 2020, our division formed an internal Equity and Inclusion work group to collect ideas and recommend projects to help our division more thoroughly integrate equity into our work.

By December of that year, our group presented six project recommendations to the marketing director, Bruce Howard. All six projects were approved to move forward. "Integrate Accessibility" was one of the six recommended projects.

Next slide. Accessibility Integration Project Brief. So what is this project? Our needs were to ensure the work of our division serves customers who have physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities. Our scope is to identify gaps and determine best practices and opportunities. The benefits are customers receive the information they need in a manner they can understand. The goal is the Marketing and Transit Information Division has a clear and actionable accessibility goals and can track progress toward meeting them.

We already have a few accessibility projects that fall outside of the scope of this project. In the next slide I will talk briefly about those.

Next Slide. Current Projects Addressing Accessibility. We have been working on some current projects. We wanted to share some quick updates on one of these that we are just kicking off. It is a project to highlight the use of AIRA. A technology for blind and low vision customers. AIRA is a livestream wayfinding service pilot project that provides on demand connection with a live agent who can access a user's camera on a mobile device to provide wayfinding and navigation assistance. We are planning to conduct a six-month testing period with AIRA. Currently anticipated to occur sometime approximately from June to December of this year. During which time the service will be free for any Metro Transit customer.

We started connecting with some local organizations such as Vision Loss Resources for feedback through focus groups and surveys and evaluate service. Doug has been working with some members of this committee as well. We are planning to discuss some virtual information with focus groups discussions before and with the pilot. As well as a wide-ranging survey. People who had used the service to gain feedback and evaluate it for potential longer-term use.

Another project we have been working on is a Website Accessibility Audit and Implementation effort. A cross agency group called the Digital Accessibility Advocacy Team is managing a multi-year split contact with Ricoh and Accessible 360. Ricoh audits are websites for digital accessibility issues. And Accessible 360 has provided the Council with recommendations for implementing greater digital accessibility across our programs including transit information and marketing.

Current projects involve reviewing and updating document templates for accessibility and ensuring that the Metrotransit.org website is accessible according to web content accessibility guidelines 2.0 level AA.

Another project that you are likely aware of that we are working on this year is a Priority Seating Awareness campaign. To remind people and reinforce the message that the designated seating campaign are reserved for seniors and folks with disabilities. At this stage, Pam Steffen is currently leading a working group to get that project kicked off.

Next slide. Next Steps. As far as next steps for the new Accessibility Integration Project that Leah talked about. What we are proposing is forming a working group with a few committee members from TAAC. We want to start meeting in June and get some input on what direction we want to go to address this. We want to renew our current rules and practices to help generate and prioritize ideas for how we can make sure that we are considering and incorporating accessibility as a standard way and a standard component in all that we do.

I already noted from the previous discussion and the last presentation where some good feedback and good ideas are even mentioned and that is exactly what we are hoping for. We want to use those ideas and experiences to formulate a work plan for 2022 and the years ahead.

Next slide. Working group request. This project is all about collaborating with TAAC members. So we are looking for 3 to 4 TAAC members to join this group. Time commitment is 4 to 6 months. Frequency of meetings – one meeting a month. Meeting length 60 to 90 minutes. Format virtual via Teams. Effort review documents and provide feedback in between meetings.

After this work group finishes, we probably will be reporting back there with an outcome planner moving forward.

We can take questions now. If you are interested in this project, you can let us know now or let Doug know.

Chair Fenley said I think in interest of time, I do want to give TAAC members 10 minutes for questions and to volunteer. If you have specific ideas, bring those ideas to the meetings.

Sheldon said that there are already three TAAC members that are on this committee. We are going to be working on a video.

Chair Fenley said there are three members and Pam Steffen working on the accessible seating committee. But this is a different committee. This addresses more broad access of Metro Transit. Is that correct?

Janz said yes. We want to meet once a month but there might be some documents to look at in preparation to the meeting.

Heidi Myhre, Kari Sheldon and John Clark said they would like to attend this committee.

Chair Fenley said could you give us a brief description on what the committee will be doing specifically?

Janz said we are trying to fill a work group to look at what we have done. And try to look at the gaps that we have. Identify those and propose best practices and opportunities. We see it as reviewing current documents and finding ways to improve those. That would also lead to creating best practices to inform future projects.

Chair Fenley said, so, we have Heidi, Kari, and Richard emailed me and said he would be interested. I like, if at all possible, to spread out the activities of TAAC members. So, folks aren't spread too thin. And also, so other members have the opportunity to participate in work groups. These types of work groups are something that we haven't done a lot of in the past. But we are ramping up now. It is a way for more TAAC members to have a say in what the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit do. I am happy that we are putting more of

these together. I am happy that there is interest from the TAAC members. But if there are folks who do not currently serve on another subcommittee or another work group, I would like to give them preference when it comes to any new work groups that we put together. How I see this moving forward. We haven't implemented this yet, but I would like to have, whether it is done by me or the TAAC members that serve on one of these work groups or committees, semi-regular updates at the TAAC committee meetings. It is my part to get it on the agenda. Just to keep the entire TAAC apprised to what is happening in these work groups and subcommittees. That is my responsibility and I will make sure that happens.

You don't have to volunteer right now. You can send me a message. But if you do know you want to do this now, we can just nail down who is going to be on this work group. I will say the names again. I have Patsy Murphy, Richard Rowan, John Clark and Heidi Myhre. Is that the four folks from TAAC? I will write this down. I can make sure that information is received by Bre and Leah.

3. Legislative Update

Brooke Bordson, Senior Project Coordinator Intergovernmental Relations. I don't have any breaking news at this point. There is less than two weeks left until the constitutional adjournment deadline for the legislature. We are in the 24/7 time of year for what is happening at the capitol. I believe the last time I joined you we talked through the House and Senate Transportation bill. Since that time, the transportation committees passed those bills, largely unchanged from the previous descriptions. They were also passed by the full House and Senate. At the end of last week conference committees were appointed. So those are committees with House members and Senators who are appointed from the House and Senate to work out the differences between the bills. They started meeting just this week. They are actually meeting right now. So I left two windows on my screen at the moment. At their first couple of meetings on what is in the bill body. Yesterday they had testimony from the six commissioners of public safety before the conference committee. They take on a lot of the issues that are of interest to this group. Primarily being the different financial approach taken by the House and Senate. Some addressed some concerns with the Senate approach of nearly eliminating the general funding appropriations from the capitol through fiscal year 2025 and using federal funds to back a bill for responsibility of transit service and Metro Mobility.

The Chair also touched on his concern about a Senate provision that would require the Council to request of the FTA that the Northstar commuter rail line would be terminated. We reiterated our support for our proposals that would allow the Council to establish an administrative program for fare enforcement. That was included in the House bill but not included in the Senate bill. We are still hoping the conference committee can find an agreement and get that included in the final bill. We are also hoping that authorization for regional transit capital funds gets included in the final bill. Again, that will be in the House bill but not the Senate bill. So that would allow the Council to issue \$48.4 million in 2021, and \$50 million in 2022, Regional Capital Bonds that are for fleet replacement and that includes Metro Transit and the Opt Out suburban providers and Metro Mobility. So, it is not the most exciting topic for legislators, but it is very important for our operations.

The other thing I wanted to make sure to touch on was during the House transportation bill. An amendment was adopted that would make Metro Mobility a forecasted program within the state budget. That is something the conference committee will be working on. Everyone agrees that it is a good idea. The challenge is working that into the big picture budget. Not just for the next couple of years but structurally getting that bill into the budget. So I mentioned that conference committees are meeting now. They are sort of in limbo a bit as the leadership from House and Senate try to negotiate the big picture budget agreement. Research the US Global market. Basically, the conference committees are waiting for their target so that they can really truly start negotiating the budget, so they know what they have to work with financially. So, that is sort of where we are. The discussions are ongoing. The goal was to get the targets this Friday so that conference committees could really get to work with getting details on a budget agreement. I don't know if that is realistic or not.

This is my 7:30 session with the Council. I worked at the House a few years back and I have been surprised both ways. I don't have any predictions at this point. But I am happy to answer any questions from members.

Turner said do you know anything about funding for Metro Transit and Metro Mobility and the Transportation Omnibus bill? It does cut funding for Metro Transit and Metro Mobility, obviously planned it with federal funding. But I think my concern is that after the 2025 fiscal year ends, will Metro Transit and Metro Mobility have to go back to the legislature and ask for a restoration of their funds? Would they give 600 to 700 percent budget increase from \$5 million to \$35 million, which is their current operating budget?

Bordson said to the point that the Chair testified to yesterday, we know that Metro Transit and Metro Mobility in current law are set up with a pretty significant structural deficit. We have been able to use these federal funds to limp through these problems for the current year and actually for this current biennium. We do know that the structural deficit is looming. So the Chair's testimony is basically knowing that we are walking up to this cliff. Now is not the time to take the approach that is in the Senate bill that pushes that deficit forward by making a sort of terms for these funds in the immediate term.

The House is not interested in an agreement that would eliminate our general fund and make this problem worse and make it imminent. That is where the party stands right now. We obviously are opposed to a budget deal that would make this problem a significant problem significantly worse. That is sort of where the larger negotiations and budget targets come in. I don't foresee a negative target for this committee that they wouldn't make some anywhere. It is just a matter of prioritizing where these limited general fund dollars for transportation go.

For transit specifically. The House bill included a metro area sales tax. So that is a new source of revenue. That would take care of a lot of general fund problems. The Senate has no interest in pursuing new revenue for transit. It just illustrates how very different the House and Senate regard our transportation bills.

Turner said did they say, did they give any projections on how much the sales tax, if passed, would raise for Metro Transit?

Bordson said it is a half-cent sales tax. It is around \$200 million per biennium, I believe. I can send the Chair the spreadsheet that would have that.

Vice Chair Paulsen said my concern is this. When the governor took office, he did separate Metro Mobility funding. He took it out of the general fund and gave it its own separate seat. Because the Senate is maneuvering and creating a back billing with some Covid19 dollars and some federal relief dollars, is that separation of financials is that at risk of being lost or combined again? Will they have to come back in 2025 and ask for additional money?

Bordson said I understand your concerns. You are correct. In the last budget, one of the really good things in the last budget was that Metro Mobility received its own line item for general fund money from the state. Though the Senate bill does nearly eliminate that until fiscal year 2025, it does keep that a separate line item. Whereas the previous 2019 budget, the Council got one general fund appropriation that was labeled for transit operations. Even in the Senate bill, there is one line item for Metro Mobility. There is a separate line item for bus and rail operations. Those are kept separate. Even in the Senate bill, the concern is just as those are brought down to almost zero. Through fiscal year 2025. We did maintain that separation.

To the second part of your question. The concern is when you fund Metro Mobility, the amount is never the same from one year to the next. You know that it is going to go up because the demand for the service goes up. If you bring that amount down to almost zero, what you need to request in the next visit it goes up by tens of millions of dollars. We know that what happens in one area impacts another.

Chair Fenley said one quick point on this budget discussion. Paratransit is federally mandated. It won't go away but what it does is it puts the Council and Metro Transit in a tough position to have to make decisions with dollars. It is unfortunate that we see these types of bargaining chips at the capitol. But that is what their jobs are up there is to negotiate these types of things.

Vice Chair Paulsen said given the fact that we have already lost over \$100 million in revenue. Those numbers were about four months ago. In fares that we haven't been able to recoup because of transit numbers being down. Are there any creative ways and what are we to do as citizen transit users and how can we help you in the less than two weeks when the legislature session ends? How can we, as transit users, make sure that we can increase ridership and gain some of the losses that we are experiencing due to Covid19? Our ridership is down because of people are not traveling back and forth to work as much. Because they are doing telecommuting. How can we get those dollars back?

Bordson said the legislators are wrestling with this too. We don't really know what the economy is going to look like post pandemic. We have had other times when it looks like where the work force is going to a more telework style. It didn't really turn out that way. Now we have been doing it for a year, so if there is going to be a significant change, what would that look like? How will we adapt our service as these things change? I believe our message is still essential trips only.

Vice Chair Paulsen said essential trips only. But those of us are vaccinated. I want to ride the transit system. Because if we make sure that somebody who needs to use it for an essential service. It is there and there are some of us that I just have to ride the system to make sure that it works for people that can use it when they need it.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

1. Blue Line

Ken Rodgers said the Blue Line met last month after our TAAC meeting and primarily with our business committee. We had a joint meeting. Typically, we got together last week to set parameters around the alternative route.

2. Green Line

This item was not presented.

3. Gold Line

This item was not presented.

4. Rush Line

Vice Chair Paulsen said they have completed their environmental assessment phase. They are about two years behind the Gold Line. I will give a more detailed update next month.

Bus Priority Seating TAAC Work Group

Doug Cook said we met a few times and right now we are in a holding pattern until we get a script for the video and other things done. Basically, all the meetings are cancelled right now until we have that. Then I will be setting up new meetings for everybody when we get to that point.

Vice Chair Paulsen said we will be circling back in the next few weeks or so. Is that right?

Cook said yes. I am going to get together with Pam and see where she is at. Then we will set up a new meeting with staff.

CHAIRS REPORT

This item was not presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Andy Streasick said I just wanted to point out something that you said. I wanted to provide some additional clarification. Metro Mobility is obviously federally mandated. It is important to keep in mind that about a third of our service is not. So we do have some vulnerabilities that we need to be aware of should the state shift a few points at the importance of transportation for folks with disabilities in addition to the third of our service that is potentially on the chopping block subject to state fiscal decisions. It is also important to bear in mind that we don't currently enforce conditional eligibility. Even for people who live in the urban core. There could be very real changes that impact access to the service should the state decide to play financial hard ball. And all of a sudden, say Darrell may be found ineligible for a trip if there are curb cuts and he is able to get back and forth in the summertime without an accessible carrier to travel. So there are things that we need to keep in mind there. In terms of staying vigilant in protecting the service.

Myhre said are we going to end up like that and you have to find the right person to qualify you and they were rejecting people? Then you had to go over to Metro Mobility and you guys could do it to a certain point. You could go everywhere. Are you going to end up where they are going to change the rules and there are certain things where you don't get the help that you truly need?

Chair Fenley said if this is looking like there are decisions that have to be made because of a reduced budget, I think that is going to be a full agenda item. We don't have the time or the information. It is all proposed budget decreases only in the Senate. Like Brooke said, the House does not agree with it. I would imagine that the governor is the same way. They are bargaining chips in a bigger omnibus bill. If it does come that discussion

has to happen, Heidi, that will be a pretty large agenda item at a future TAAC meeting. You can always go up to the legislature and do this as an individual. This is vital to your independence for you to live in a metro area.

MEMBER COMMENT

Henricksen said Ken brought up a good point. It is open for Google and go to their website and get into the public docket. That would allow you to have any comments or guidance that you wanted to try to get in there to address it. It is still open. The date that it closes is in nine days, May 14, 2021. There are still a few days if you want to voice your concern about traffic control devices that MUTCD you want to shore up.

ADJOURNMENT

Business completed, the meeting adjourned at 2:32 p.m.

Alison Coleman
Recording Secretary