



# METRO Blue Line Extension

## Meeting of the Community Advisory Committee

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Microsoft Teams Meeting

**CAC Members:** Ellis Beck, Lex Brand, Brett Buckner, John Chambers Dunn, Kathy Fraser, Andrew Gillett, Jason Greenberg, Jeff Guertin, Jonathan Hansen, Jericho Huggar, Ryan Johnson, Giuseppe Marrari, Ken Rodgers, Steve Spaulding

**Agency Staff and Guests:** Nkongo Cigolo, Neha Damle, Catherine Gold, Joanna Ocasio-Maisonet, Nick Landwer, Bojan Mistic, Trevor Roy, Koehl Simmons, Joan Vanhala, Kjerstin Yager, Jer Yang

### Meeting Summary

#### 1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

Co-chair Jason Greenberg called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

#### 2. Upcoming Meetings and Attendance

Nkongo Cigolo, Metropolitan Council, asked if members would prefer another email the day of the CMC as a reminder. John Chambers Dunn stated that the email at the beginning of the month is enough.

#### 3. Review of March Meeting Minutes

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#### 4. Project Update

Nkongo Cigolo stated that the project team is working on the Draft Environmental EIS. He stated that each month has a city to focus on, and this month will focus on Robbinsdale. Nkongo provided an update of the current environmental phase of the project and gave a summary of recent engagement. Nkongo shared the project timeline and stated that the goal is to have the alignment open between 2028 and 2030.

Ken Rodgers asked whether the project team is updating the previous EIS or filling in the gaps. Nkongo responded that the environmental team is adding the areas that were not studied in the previous EIS. Neha Damle, Metropolitan Council, stated that the project team will be evaluating environmental and social impacts in all four of the cities, even though Brooklyn Park has not changed much.

Nkongo reviewed the route recommendation schedule. Nkongo discussed that the schedule has shifted, and May will now be focused on the reporting of the anti-displacement work. It was intended to add a second CMC meeting in April to report on the anti-displacement work but there is a national event being held in the Metro area, and scheduling would be difficult. So, the schedule has shifted a month resulting in Minneapolis shifting to June and anticipating a CMC recommendation in July. John Chambers Dunn asked how to use the project schedule to get beneficial feedback from the public, he wanted clarity over what decisions have been

made already and where is the project still open to changes. Nkongo stated that although the project team has finalized some decisions, they are open to all feedback and comments, he noted that as the alignment is refined, some input is more helpful than other input. John made a point to everyone on the call that the window of opportunity for feedback is always getting closer to closing. Nick Landwer, Metropolitan Council, stated that at some point the team will want to put to bed the questions of alignment and at this point station design input is really helpful. Jason asked if there was a connection between community feedback and federal funding. There is not a connection, but community feedback informs the project's design and decisions made.

## **5. Environmental Update**

Neha Damle, Metropolitan Council, provided the environmental update. She stated there will be a public comment period after each step in the environmental process. Neha reported that the project is working with the FTA on a federal register notice, a parallel step to the Minnesota EQB step from the fall. The FTA advised the project to hold off on the federal notice because it starts a particular federal regulation step. Neha stated that the project is now working with the FTA to publish the notice, possibly this week or the following week. Once the notice is published, a 30-day comment period would follow.

Neha shared that this month's chapter focus is on Environmental Justice. Neha reported that the first step is to determine the presence/location of environmental justice communities using Census block group level data and information gained through outreach activities.

## **6. Robbinsdale Design Elements**

Nick Landwer reviewed the Project Design Principles. Nick discussed how the Design Decisions Document outlines key decision-making processes, input, considerations, stakeholders, and other outstanding issues. This document is helpful to inform both the design and environmental work.

Nick reported that the Robbinsdale alignment is proposed to be center-running on County Road 81, at-grade whenever possible in the downtown area. The project is evaluating the configuration in the downtown area, working to understand the potential of elevating the line through the downtown. In Robbinsdale, there would also be a reconstruction of a portion of the bridge over Highway 100. The project is considering a downtown station, a Park-and-Ride downtown, and a station at Lowry Avenue. John said that one of the things they heard from Robbinsdale is they wanted it to match a certain aesthetic and asked if that is one of the design considerations. Nick stated that each city has a list of design considerations and that is one of them for Robbinsdale.

Nick shared layouts of the alignment through Robbinsdale. John asked if the new construction of the bridges along County Road 81 in Robbinsdale supports a train, Nick stated it does not. Nick reported key decisions for the City of Robbinsdale – configuration of the guideway, location of the downtown LRT station, incorporating transit connections of the Hubbard transit center, and the station at Lowry Avenue.

Nick shared the downtown station options with the Park-and-Ride. He stated that the city council's preferred option is a station on the south side of 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue with a Park-and-Ride on the northwest corner of County Road 81 and 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The city believes this would best serve the downtown and the higher density residential housing in the area. Jason stated in some conversations in the city, people stated they would prefer limited parking, rather than a large Park-and-Ride. Nick stated that the previous alignment included a 500-space Park-and-Ride, and that this previous design would have also served other needs in Robbinsdale.

Jonathan Hansen stated that there are parking needs in Downtown Robbinsdale that may be served by the Park-and-Ride. Jason asked if the project team is still exploring elevated tracks at 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Nick stated the project team will continue to work with the City to make sure that the right infrastructure is there. Jonathan asked if the station is at-grade at 40<sup>th</sup>, Nick said that it is. Jason stated that in earlier designs the team was looking at an elevated station but that was determined not to make sense, but an elevated crossing at 42<sup>nd</sup> street may provide some safety benefits. Nick stated there have been some challenges in the area due to the topography of this area that the project team is working through in refining the design. John asked about Bass Lake Road and how it compares to this interchange. Nick stated that Bass Lake Road has much higher traffic volumes than 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Jason asked if updated traffic and ridership numbers is an active project. Nick stated that traffic is a constant thing, the county does regular traffic counts and the project supplements this. Ridership is a whole different thing, and they will use the best data available in building this model and will be comparable to previous numbers. Jason stated there have been a lot of people saying ridership is down even after the pandemic, and it would be good to get numbers showing that this is not true. Nick stated there may be new numbers coming out soon that demonstrate this.

Nick shared that the project team tried to get light rail between the roadway at Lowry Avenue but could not get it to fit. Nick stated the current alignment elevates the light rail over Abbott Avenue south of County Road 81 between North Memorial Hospital and Victory Memorial Parkway before coming back at-grade east of the park. Jonathan stated this is good because there have been a lot of concerns with emergency vehicles. Nick stated there is a designated frontage road for access to the hospital for emergency vehicles. Lowry Station would have a vertical circulation on either side of the station, with good connections to the hospital and surrounding Robbinsdale and Minneapolis neighborhoods. Nick stated that the project would continue to collaborate and work on these designs with the North Memorial campus, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, the City of Robbinsdale, and the City of Minneapolis. Jonathan asked about a direct connection between the project and the hospital. Nick stated that earlier on in the project, the hospital expressed desire for a direct connection to the station but reconsidered it later. Johnathan asked who the target audience of the Lowry Station would be. Nick said it would be residents as well as hospital staff. Nick stated that next steps are that the project will also continue coordination with the City of Robbinsdale to refine station locations design, existing traffic, right-of-way, and reducing the project's footprint and impact. Nick stated that the project will make sure to right size the Park-and-Ride and incorporate the existing transit center. Nick added that the project will continue to address safety and security.

Nkongo Cigolo presented community feedback from the March 6, 2023, open house in Robbinsdale. Nkongo reported that the themes were similar as to what the team has been hearing in Robbinsdale with previous outreach. This included questions about why the project is not on the freight corridor and why the project did not apply eminent domain over the freight corridor to build the alignment, rather than building within County Road 81. John asked what the feedback from other cities has been, Nkongo responded the feedback has been similar with regards to the why not freight corridor. Nick added that the project team has moved on from the rail corridor. Jason stated in other communities this is not as big of a deal as it is in Robbinsdale. Jason stated that people in the community are still unaware this change has happened despite the amount of work that has been done to reach the community. Catherine Gold, Hennepin County, emphasized that the County really tried to work with BNSF, but the railroad refused to negotiate and so the County needed to move on.

Nkongo reported that in May, committee meetings would be focused on the anti-displacement work. Nkongo then previewed the Minneapolis design decisions for June.

**7. Anti-Displacement Update**

Catherine Gold, Hennepin County, shared the timeline for the anti-displacement work. Catherine reported that the draft report, being prepared by CURA, will be available for corridor representatives and workgroup members to review and provide feedback in mid-April. A final report will be available at the end of April. Catherine stated that the anti-displacement work would be the focus of the May advisory committees and CMC meeting. Catherine added that the second phase of the anti-displacement work would begin at the end of May and begin in June.

**8. Discussion and Members Feedback**

Jason stated that moving forward, there will be time for discussion at the end of the CAC. Kathy Fraser stated that the committee is told how there are design changes made based on community feedback, but these changes are not widely communicated to the public. John stated that the notes taken during the CAC are helpful to see answers to questions asked during the CAC. Catherine stated that Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) may be helpful in addressing some questions as well and those FAQs can be shared out to the CAC members.

**9. Next Meeting: May 3, 2023**

**10. Adjourn**

John Chambers Dunn motioned to adjourn the meeting. The meeting ended at 7:56 p.m.

**MEETING CHAT**

**[April 5 6:16 PM] Ellis Beck (Guest):** If I am the only one, I absolutely do not need the email! Ton of work for just me

**[April 5 6:16 PM] Yager, Kjerstin:** No worries, Ellis Beck (Guest)! We'll figure out a good system.

**[April 5 7:25 PM] Cigolo, Nkongo:** [Performance - Metro Transit](#)

**[April 5 7:29 PM] Jonathan Hansen (Guest):** That was a really good open house!

**[April 5 7:38 PM] Joan M Vanhala:** The BLRT Cohort has also helped out by sharing out project information through their social media networks

**[April 5 7:56 PM] Ellis Beck (Guest):** Great idea, think it will be helpful