



METRO Blue Line Extension

Meeting of the Business Advisory Committee

Tuesday, August 6, 2024

8:00 AM – 9:30 AM

Blue Line Project Office

6465 Wayzata Boulevard, Suite 600

St. Louis Park, MN 55426

BAC Members: Ian Alexander, Rita Endres, Jamar Smith, Jamez Staples, Dr. Tara Watson

Agency Staff and Guests: Nkongo Cigolo, Neha Damle, Eric Gustafson, Joleen Ketterling, Shahin Khazrajafari, Nick Landwer, Rattana Sengsoulichanh, Nick Thompson, Kaja Vang, Graham Zuehlke

Meeting Summary

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Introductions

Nkongo Cigolo called the meeting to order at 8:15 a.m. Nkongo welcomed everyone to the meeting and reviewed the agenda.

2. Adopt Meeting Minutes

Nkongo shared that the June 25 meeting minutes would be circulated for approval via email.

3. Anti-Displacement Update

Eric Gustafson, Hennepin County, shared an update on anti-displacement. Eric stated that Hennepin County has continued the planning activities to support the outcomes of the Anti-Displacement Work Group report. A Coordinated Action Plan (CAP) has been developed by the cities in the corridor, Hennepin County, and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board. The CAP is a compilation of activities that includes almost 70 programs and initiatives. Over 50 of these programs and initiatives already exist to address the needs of the corridor communities. Eric shared that the CAP is currently under review and will be published for public review and comment in mid-August after the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) comment period wraps up. Eric indicated that Hennepin County is participating in a workforce development program to place people on light rail transit (LRT) jobs. In addition, Hennepin County worked with the communities to successfully lobby state legislation for \$10M in funds to support anti-displacement work. The Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Board has met three times to date and is working to identify priorities. Eric shared that the funding awarded from the state legislature is important progress towards sharing successful stories and outcomes and will assist in securing more funding as policymakers meet with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) at a federal level.



Jamar Smith asked if the Anti-Displacement Working Group is still meeting. Eric replied that the legislation named the original Anti-Displacement Work Group as members of the board. The board is very active, and members are now in a different role in supporting implementation.

4. Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement Summary of Comments

Neha Damle, Environmental Team for the Blue Line Extension (BLE) project, provided a summary of the comments that have been submitted on the SDEIS as of 8/2/2024. Neha shared that comments have been received through various commenting methods and that most comments are coming in through the online method. As of 8/2, approximately 200 comments had been received and from last Friday to now, more have been received. Neha stated the comment period is ending tonight. In addition, the environmental team has been receiving comment letters from agencies and just received a few in the last few days.

Dr. Tara Watson asked if Neha could share the top three comments being submitted. Neha replied that the themes and final comment count will be discussed at Thursday's Corridor Management Committee (CMC) and would wait to share to be respectful of the comment period still going on.

Neha reminded everyone that the SDEIS comments being submitted and analysis for design changes related to 30% design will inform the development of the next phase of review which is the Supplemental Final Environmental Impact Statement (SFEIS). The environmental team is moving ahead with a mitigation work plan which will provide the specific additional technical analysis, outreach and design development that needs to happen. Neha indicated conversations will continue at the Issue Resolution Team (IRT) meetings and other partner agency coordination meetings. Outreach around mitigation will occur in the Fall of 2024. The environmental team is anticipating publishing the SFEIS in mid-2025.

5. Municipal Consent Update

Nick Thompson, BLE Project Team, provided an update on municipal consent. Nick stated this is a state level process where each of the cities along the alignment and the county are asked to provide an official action in support of the design of the project (currently at 30% design) including the number of stations, locations, and alignment of the track.

Nick shared that the municipal consent process itself started a week ago when the actual design plans were submitted. Nick stated that meetings have been occurring for the past few years with each of the cities and the county to discuss the design plans. On August 26, a joint public hearing is scheduled between the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, and the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority. According to state statute, the public hearing must occur within 30 days of submitting the design plans. Each of the cities along the corridor and the county have 45 days to take official action. The process for how official action will take place is decided on by each city. Nick shared that all open house and public hearing dates are in the process of being confirmed. The public can review the design plans online or at city libraries and the council actions will occur at regularly scheduled city



council meetings. The official action must occur before October 10 and the three options to vote on are 1. support the project as is 2. take no action 3. no to the design but must provide a list of the changes requested in design that if occurred would result in providing approval.

Nick stated that municipal consent is a check-in to see if the project is on the right track but is not the last point where each of the cities or county has a say in the project. Weekly meetings will continue after municipal consent. As more information is obtained about what is being built, designs will be refined over time. Official review will happen again at 60% and 90% design. After municipal consent, more information is learned about utilities, traffic, and mitigation elements that may impact or change the design. The design of the project will become more refined as work progresses towards construction. Nick added that municipal consent is a unique process for Minnesota but is also used on major highway projects.

Dr. Watson asked if municipal consent is more about what the design elements will be and not if the city or county wants the project. Nick replied yes, municipal consent is the process followed to determine how the light rail transit will work in each of the communities and whether the design being planned will support that.

Ian Alexander asked for more details on what the process looks like if one of the jurisdictions chooses not to move forward. Nick replied that the state statute is prescriptive. If one of the jurisdictions says no, a list of items of actual design changes that need to occur to turn the no into a yes needs to be provided. The BLE project team would perform analysis and present a report to the Metropolitan Council. The Metropolitan Council would then decide whether to accept each change or for technical reasons indicate why the change cannot be accepted. This information then becomes part of the design. Consent is then deemed to be provided because the changes have been accepted.

Ian Alexander asked what the timeline looks like if the project needs to go down the road of re-design. Nick shared that the timeline depends on what the change would be and the complexity of the request. Some requests may have no impact on the schedule while some may delay construction. For example, if a city requests a new station, the design team would need to determine how the station would work and an analysis would need to be performed of the environmental impact.

Ian Alexander asked if any prep work for alternatives is being completed based upon conversations the project team has already received. Nick replied that weekly meetings with each city are being conducted and a list of potential alternatives to the current design is being created. Nick shared examples of this. Another station has been requested by the City of Minneapolis and the BLE project team has started preliminary design. The City of Robbinsdale has had discussions regarding an elevated track. Some analysis has been performed on this. In the City of Crystal there are two issues being addressed: 1. change the county road to a city road and improvements be made after project completion and 2. highway 100 interchange. The Lowry Avenue Station near North Memorial Hospital is another topic with a great deal of discussion.



Ian Alexander asked what the process is for issues that are not design related such as anti-displacement or social oriented impacts. Nick replied that this was a good question and relayed one example is that the City of Minneapolis has communicated to the BLE project team that as part of municipal consent for the city, assurance that anti-displacement is advancing on a good path will be needed. Nick stated the city will need to indicate what needs to change in this regard. Nick also shared that these types of requests have been made on past projects and efforts have been made to try and find a path to accommodate.

Ian Alexander stated that the challenge with the municipal consent process is that it is very engineer driven and asked if there is a process that exists for the non-design elements to be addressed and align with the actual requirements for municipal consent. Nick replied there is a prescriptive way through the SFEIS as a mitigation element and an item that is a mitigation element can have a dollar value. Nick also shared that the \$10M for anti-displacement plus the \$10M match is for items that are outside of the project. Nick stated the Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Board has not made decisions on the allocation of those funds yet. Mitigation items are official and committed to in the SFEIS. Nick shared that municipal consent is just one step but there are other items that will keep evolving the project and require a change in the design.

Nick Landwer clarified that municipal consent is a tool used to look at the engineering side of things. The project environmental work is more pertinent to anti-displacement, project impacts, and the mitigation for impacts.

Dr. Watson asked how businesses are supposed to know the steps that need to happen for the businesses to stay along the alignment. Dr. Watson stated even though I'm active on these advisory boards, it feels like things are happening to me and my business and the project is continuing to move without the people it is intended for. This brings about trust issues.

Ian Alexander replied to Dr. Watson's comment and stated everything you said is exceptionally valid. Ian shared there is still an opportunity to bring all groups together and discuss what businesses want to see out of this. Nick Thompson replied that the CAP will come out next week which has ideas that the Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Board will act on and determine where funding should go. Nick stated that if municipal consent is granted, this is the major milestone that will accelerate all things such as allowing the project to get very detailed as far as individual properties and the coordination of that. Nick shared there are two full years before any construction will start and some properties may not be impacted for four years.

Dr. Watson asked who decided on the \$20M for anti-displacement. Nick Thompson replied that the state allocated \$10M and every portion of the \$10M must be matched. Nick shared there is a lot of funding within the project itself and none of the \$20M is for infrastructure or property acquisition or mitigation elements; that funding is in the project budget. Nick shared that the \$20M allocated for anti-displacement is the floor; and more funds are being sought after. Neha Damle shared that the



environmental team with the anti-displacement group is looking at the elements from anti-displacement that can be pulled into the project. Neha shared until the record of decision is made, the right of way process cannot be started. Neha also shared this fall outreach for mitigation input from business owners will begin. Nkongo added that part of the anti-displacement work will include business engagement and conversations to understand the business needs.

Ian Alexander shared that he feels there is a path forward, but it will take collaborative work. Dr. Watson stated it will be important that planning happens before the funding and resources are available.

Ian asked Nick Landwer how many properties are being touched in Minneapolis. Nick replied that he did not know the answer off the top of his head but would find it. Nick also stated that the project team will be working with every property owner along the alignment. Ian stated that a collective effort needs to be made to coordinate the groups of government and get money pooled and leveraged for West Broadway. Nick Thompson replied that one thing about a project like this is that the project itself is a coordinated function. Once there is a signal that this is a real project (like municipal consent), then all agencies start aligning funding. The Metropolitan Council has transit-oriented development grants available for properties near light rail. The project itself can become a coordinating device for these other funding sources. Ian stated no one has aligned the pieces appropriately. Ian stated if municipal consent is obtained, the right people need to work together to coordinate next steps. Ian's fear is if this doesn't happen, everyone will become disengaged.

Rita Endres shared her perspective as a business owner in the City of Crystal. Rita shared that she is hopeful light rail will be great for businesses along the corridor. Rita indicated she resonates what has been said and feels by the time she is informed about what is happening, she will be scrambling to decide how to adapt to the situation. Rita shared that more touchpoints of actual people sitting down and sharing the process with us would help ease some of our anxiety.

Ian extended a thank you to the BLE project staff for the work completed on this project. Ian shared that he would like to play a more active role in a coordinated effort to align funding coming from federal sources for businesses on West Broadway.

Discussion and Members' Feedback

Co-Chair Tara Watson asked the group if there were any additional questions or comments.

Jamez Staples asked what could be done to ensure the government starts working together to access the funds available and if there is a coordinated strategy. Nick Thompson replied that from the project level, the most coordinated elected body is the CMC, and that committee will continue on as an entity. Nick shared the new Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Board is an accountability group to the government and the other main board is the Hennepin County Board who is the local funder of the project. Nick added the Hennepin County Board is doing a lot of coordination regarding



workforce, property, development, and grants. Jamez asked how active the commissioners are. Nick responded that they are very active and have a huge decision regarding the substantial local funds required for this project. The commissioners want to make sure the project maximizes benefits and are ready to make those commitments.

Dr. Watson stated she doesn't see the CMC as a working board and that information is documented and put on record, but items are not voted on in real time. Nick Thompson replied that the CMC is a table where all the entities get together. The CMC is structured as an advisory board and the BLE project team brings items to the advisory board to guide the project. Nick shared that the CMC board can evolve and will as the project progresses. Nick stated there are similar boards on other projects that all behave a bit differently. For example, the Gold Line has a CMC but hasn't met in two years. The Green Line meets frequently to provide input on major changes in the project.

Dr. Watson asked the BAC members what items they would like her to share at this week's CMC and whether she should bring the topic up about how to get more out of the CMC. Jamar Smith and Jamez Staples replied yes. Jamez indicated we should be very specific in what we want.

Jamez stated the \$20M for anti-displacement should be viewed as a floor number and that more than this match is needed. Nick Thompson replied that the Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Board has only been in existence for six weeks and is still developing the bylaws. This group recognizes the need to make decisions quickly. Jamez asked who resides on the board. Nick replied that Ricardo Perez is the chair and there are no elected officials on it. This group are the deciders of the allocation of funding.

Dr. Watson reiterated that businesses need an assessment and discussion of what it is going to cost to keep these businesses whole. Nkongo asked if the BAC wanted to address the Anti-Displacement Community Prosperity Board at some point. The group replied yes. Nkongo indicated the request will be forwarded to the chair. Nick added that Eric Gustafson can be a coordinating representative from the County. KB Brown from the BAC is on that committee.

6. Next Meeting: Nick stated there is the potential that the September CMC may be cancelled; if the September CMC is held, the next BAC will be September 3, 2024

7. Adjourn

Co-Chair Tara Watson adjourned the meeting at 9:26 am.

Meeting Materials: Agenda, Slides, June 25 Meeting Summary

Administrative Lead: Joleen Ketterling