

TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD  
Metropolitan Council  
390 N. Robert St., St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1805

Notes of a Meeting of the  
**TAC-PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
April 9, 2015

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Holly Anderson, Jack Byers, Paul Czech, Innocent Eyoh, Lisa Freese, Jack Forslund, Hillary Holmes, Michael Larson, Steve Mahowald, Kevin Roggenbuck, Ann Pung-Terwedo, Katie White, Bob Paddock

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Steve Peterson (MTS), Dave Vessel (MTS), Cole Hiniker (MTS), Carl Ohrn (MTS), Dennis Farmer (CommDev), Nathan Kosler (Minneapolis)

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Lisa Freese.

**2. Adoption of the Agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

**3. Approval of the Minutes**

**4. Information / Presentation Items**

• **Modern Streetcar Policy (Cole Hiniker)**

Cole gave a presentation on Streetcar and Light Rail Design Differences as a way to clarify the issue when the term 'streetcar' is being used for the region. He indicated that design differences are generally tied to the markets being served by each technology. Streetcars are more focused on local access and are intended for short connections within a compact setting; light rail's focus tends to be more on mobility and longer-distance travel.

The markets being served influence the design (right-of-way needs, station spacing, etc). Streetcars do not require their own right-of-way, while light rail typically has its own right-of-way. Streetcars have stations every couple of blocks, while light rail often have stations every mile or so. Loading platforms differ. Streetcar vehicles are usually smaller than light rail vehicles and travel at lower speeds. The tracks for streetcars are shallower and allow for tighter turns. Power sources are different, with streetcars having a single contact wire as opposed to a double-wire overhead system for light rail. Accompanying signal systems differ in that streetcars obey existing traffic signals, while light rail typically has its own signalization system for grade crossings.

Both streetcar and light rail designs may vary over the system. They might include street-running segments in the downtown area and have dedicated right-of-way in the suburbs. The streetcar system can be designed to have less or greater infrastructure and less or more complexity in its operation. Light rail can be similar in that it can have both street-running and exclusive right-of-way design. To know which rail technology is more appropriate, one needs to determine the market being served (length of trip, mobility versus access) and the right-of-way type that may be available (dedicated corridors or in-street options).

In the case of streetcar versus local bus, the two can have similar speeds, operating environments and station/stop spacing. Streetcars provide greater capacity; buses provide operating flexibility.

Various questions were posed during the presentation, including whether or not the streetcar has advantages over bus and why light rail was chosen in contrast to streetcars. Cole indicated that the primary reason was to correct a misconception of LRT versus streetcar versus trolley. A comment was made that citizens often think of trolleys when the issue of streetcars is raised. The issue is one of understanding the differences among them. A comment was made that there is often confusion on this when looking at light rail in the downtowns. It was noted that a question raised 'in public' is why spend new money on streetcars when there is a push to have buses on BRT. Decisions are expected to be made as to when it is best to fund one mode versus another.

- **Policy Development**

Cole spoke on policy development for streetcars. It helps in defining the sources suited to the streetcar project. Minneapolis and St. Paul are proposing long-term streetcar networks. A work program element will consider modern streetcar regional policy. Some policy considerations include defining the role of streetcars in the system as a transportation investment as well as economic development investment. It will consider how to prioritize streetcars within the region or community. There are multiple projects competing for federal funds. This would be another one.

There are plans to produce a survey that would collect information on perceptions about streetcars as well as ask what other information might be needed. There will be political hurdles. There was a review of similar projects at peer regions, and Cole listed nine case studies. It was noted that decision-making differed by region and that MPO and regional views varied. Costs varied, but so did the funding sources, making it difficult to compare.

Questions arose. Does demographic and age play a part? Cole indicated that this is a conversation topic. The question of value capture was raised. There is a need to determine how a region would fund an operation before actually proceeding to do so. It was asked whether this would be an amendment to the Policy Plan. Cole responded that it provides a guideline and a process for adding into the Plan any streetcar project.

- **System Statement Timeline (Michael Larson)**

Mike distributed a map of the Council's Sector Representatives for the region and spoke on the subject of the '2015 System Statements'. The 2010 census provided information that went into the *Regional Development Guide* (2013-14), which was incorporated into the system and policy plans for the region (2014-15). The System Statements and Local Planning Handbook (now underway) are to be used in the development of the local comprehensive plans. The plans are due in 2018.

The System Statements are individualized for the local unit of government and explain the implications of the system plans and capital budgets in each community; they also include forecasted growth and general development expectations. The System Statements will include information from Thrive, the TPP, water resources, and regional parks and open-space.

- **Forecast Revisions (Dennis Farmer)**

Dennis distributed a handout on the regional forecasts and the upcoming revisions to local forecasts. He indicated that forecasts change over time, given changes in the alignment with national-level forecasts, updates of the regional data on demographic and economic conditions, programming improvements to the forecast model, and validations of regional assumptions.

The latest revisions for the region show a population growth from 2,850,000 for the seven-county region in 2010 to 3,633,000 by 2040. Households are expected to grow during this same period from 1,118,000 to 1,485,000. Employment is expected to rise from 1,548,000 to 2,016,000.

Dennis indicated that there have been opportunities for local government input since this latest process has been underway from September 2013 onward. Draft revised forecasts were scheduled to be out April 9<sup>th</sup>; comments are requested by May 8<sup>th</sup>. The next steps will be for the Community Development Committee to recommend adoption of the local forecasts in June, a Council adoption in July, and the issuing of the statements in September.

- **Principal Arterial Intersection Conversion Study (Steve Peterson / Paul Czech)**

It was noted that Principal Arterials make up the National Highway System. For the region, PAs represent 4 percent of the roadway miles but 50 percent of VMT. They are critical for mobility of passengers as well as freight. Freeways carry more traffic faster and safer than non-freeway facilities.

Grade separation is a high priority for many agencies, but it has been difficult to identify what is a regional priority for such projects. The study for this was included as a Work Program item in the 2040 TPP. There are a number of study corridors identified in all the region's counties.

A major question asked in this effort is, "Where in the region is there a potential for a grade-separation?" The Goals identified are to analyze the benefits, costs and impacts of converting key intersections to grade-separated facilities, with a focus on the non-freeway Principal Arterials, and to prioritize locations and corridors on a regional level.

There is no plan to **rank** from high to low any identified project. Objectives are to form a common short and long-term vision, prioritize intersections and corridors, to inform funding programs and the next TPP, help meet MAP-21 safety and mobility targets, and provide direction for local planning efforts. The study is funded with about \$500,000, so it is not a major study.

Three tasks are identified: Project Management, Local Interests, and Identify Data for Analysis. It is expected that the bulk of the effort will be placed on Task #3. Asked who is on the Project Management Team, it was noted that it would include people in and outside the agency. Local government representation will be included. The initial invitation will be to county engineers. It was suggested that freight movement be included in this effort. It was noted that freight is in the scope but not shown on the handout. Another question raised asked if there were considerations for land uses and/or multi-modal elements. In response, the answer was 'Yes'. It was suggested that other transit providers be included in the team. It was suggested that the study should look around the country for other interchange configurations that might differ from our standard here. Asked what the

“Final” was supposed to be, Paul responded that High, Medium and Low are to be identified. It was also noted that at-grade solutions, as opposed to interchanges, is being looked at by FHWA.

**5. Other Business**

Chair Freese asked the committee to think on other agenda items for future committee meetings with a thought on how to get the committee engaged in these projects. She asked that any thoughts should be sent to her.

Possible items include: Freight, CMSP-4, Transitway Prioritization and Park & Ride Plan

**6. Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 PM.

Bob Paddock, Secretary