

METRO Gold Line Corridor Management Committee

Notes for the October 4, 2018 Meeting

Metropolitan Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Alene Tchourumoff, Paul Reinke, Stan Karwoski, Brian Lamb, Jim McDonough, Lisa Weik (via conference call), Rafael Ortega, Stan Suedkamp, Steve Morris, Darrell Paulsen, Harry Melander, Mary Giuliani Stephens, Andrea Date, Nora Slawik

1. WELCOME (CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, APPROVAL OF MINUTES)

Chair Alene Tchourumoff called the monthly meeting of the METRO Gold Line BRT Corridor Management Committee (CMC) to order at 2:32 p.m. on Thursday, October 4, 2018.

Committee members and other attendees introduced themselves.

Chair Tchourumoff asked if anyone has any comments or questions on the September 6, 2018 meeting notes. No comments on the September 6, 2018 CMC meeting notes.

2. CBAC UPDATE

Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC) Co-Chair; Darrell Paulsen presented the CBAC update report to the CMC.

The CBAC bus tour was informative, and it was good opportunity to see the potential corridor. The people who participated on the tour got a lot out of it. The tour would have been even better if it was slowed down a bit, and participants had the chance to get out.

3. UPDATE ON DOWNTOWN ALTERNATIVES

Chair Tchourumoff gave opening remarks. The objective for today's meeting is to review and have a good understanding of the proposed Downtown Saint Paul routing alternatives.

a) Background

Lyssa Leitner (Gold Line Deputy Project Manager) opened the discussion with an overview of the Gold Line BRT project's original/baseline assumptions. She explained the project baseline 1% Design Concept background exhibit initially presented at the April 2018 CMC meeting. This baseline concept has been in existence since Washington County, Ramsey County and the cities have had leadership over the project. This was prior to the hand-off to Metro Transit, MnDOT and other Gold Line partners, and entry into the Project Development (PD) phase. From an infrastructure standpoint, there were downtown stops, downtown routing, and a stop at the Union Depot with more basic stops in downtown.

Lyssa noted that the service plan and how it was routing through downtown was confusing and difficult to explain to some of the stakeholders.

- During the morning rush hour (time-sensitive trip for riders), the Gold Line bus would route in through downtown, through the back of the Union Depot, lay over at the back of the Union Depot and then back out again.
- During the afternoon rush hour, the Gold Line bus would start at the back of the Union Depot, route through downtown to pick people up and then return out eastbound. Early morning, mid-day and late in the day, the Gold Line would end at the back of the Union Depot, and not route through downtown.

i. Review of Project Baseline Assumptions:

As the counties and cities were preparing to handoff the project prior to entry into the Project Development (PD) phase in 2017, they began discussions to evaluate topics related to the Lowertown area. Serving the Union Depot was always a priority during those conversations. As the project entered into PD, the team reviewed how to refine the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA):

- Saints Stadium and Farmer's Market area – Gold Line's route would have required special event detours for upwards of 60 days each year.
- Streamlining the Service - the difference between the middle of the day service and the rush hour service was confusing and needed to be streamlined.
- Premium BRT stations in Downtown – impacts and costs of this versus basic transit infrastructure.

The Gold Line project team worked through these issues and design modifications through the Committee structure process; Issue Resolution Teams (IRT), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), CBAC and CMC. Timeline-wise, the project is mid-way through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) process defined as Project Development (environmental review, design advancement, public engagement). The two-year Project Development phase has a hard deadline that includes completing all the environmental review in early Q4 2019 so the project can apply and enter the Engineering phase in January 2020.

ii. Update on Issues Resolution Team (IRT) Process:

Charles Carlson (Director, BRT Projects) gave a summary of the Downtown Saint Paul IRT process and refined alternatives. The IRT process included assembling experts and representatives from the key areas affected by the geographic issue locations; Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, City of Saint Paul Planning and Public Works, MnDOT Cultural Resources (significant environmental role), MnDOT Metro District, Metro Transit Service Development, Engineering and Facilities (planning), Street Operations (bus operations and detours), and Gold Line Project Office staff (generating deliverables and facilitating discussions). There have been 13 meetings, about 26 hours of meetings, 28 attendees and over 500-person hours of discussions about Saint Paul.

The IRT team had to balance various factors against each other in order to develop a sensible plan for the downtown project options. Coordination around downtown routing includes balancing the routing factors, making it a convenient trip for riders and making it a more streamlined LRT-type experience for the occasional user. The team also developed station concepts to provide a more premium service in downtown, including improved waiting environments, improved station stops, evaluation of locations and spacing of stops. As noted earlier by Lyssa, the team reviewed issues such as; the Broadway Street detour routing and its significant constraints during Saints games and Farmers Market events, some turning movements do not currently allow for the routing previously assumed, corners are too tight to turn the bus around at Wacouta Street, and opening the Kellogg Boulevard and Wacouta intersection to bus traffic. Ongoing facilities and shelter improvements are also in the works, and Gold Line is interfacing with Metro Transit Facilities Planning on the rollout of the "Better Bus Stops" program around downtown.

The team developed the following concepts to work through downtown routing issues:

1. Bus Deck Downtown Option – The bus would go through the bus deck of the Union Depot, and every trip would then continue through downtown. It would be a consistent all-day routing, but it would have the loop through the bus deck. A concern was that the travel time to make that loop and then go through downtown would add significant delays to reaching the western end of downtown or the employment core.

2. Westbound Slip Ramp Option – This option was developed as a mitigation for the Bus Deck delay. Buses would enter the bus deck and there would be a new access straight on Sibley Street that would allow buses to progress more quickly without the need to backtrack into downtown. The principal challenge is the significant traffic that comes onto Sibley Street from Shepherd Road. This option would not be a functional, because of high traffic volumes, Section 106 impacts to the Union Depot, and impacts to the trail along Sibley Street.
3. Front of Union Depot Option – This option would place the Union Depot Station in front of the Union Depot on 4th Street. The south side of 4th Street was the preferred location, however, the sidewalk slopes there are around 9% (maximum slope is 3%) and would not allow for an accessible bus route.
4. Stop Location on the Far Side – This would be next to the Green Line LRT Station at the Union Depot. Buses would enter downtown, come up Sibley and then progress through downtown, serving the new station stops in the front of the Union Depot.

The Downtown IRT team evaluated the 3 potential alternatives against each other, while staying mindful of the baseline alternative. In May 2018, the IRT recommended the refinement of the LPA, to provide all-day downtown service on a consistent routing, to serve the Union Depot with the new stations in front and to modify downtown routes for special event closures (Broadway Street). To provide a premium service, the process also recommended upgrading stations to BRT stations with a suite of amenities similar to other BRT stations in the region. In July 2018, TAC recommended that alternative, but also added a second option that would terminate all service at the Union Depot Bus Deck. CBAC reviewed the scope in August, and CMC confirmed this two-option approach in September. The intent was to carry both options through the environmental phase, and then decide on the final alignment and routing following environmental clearance. Based on feedback received from the FTA, this decision will need to be made earlier than discussed at the last CMC meeting.

Beginning in August, Gold Line staff reviewed all the proposed corridor-wide design options with FTA staff. FTA evaluated the options and gave feedback that the two downtown routings would be viewed as two different alternatives, not options. In FTA's view, six additional stations/service and one additional mile westward of routing constitute a different project. FTA allows for carrying two options in the Environmental Assessment (EA) document and then deciding later. In the case of alternatives, FTA requires that a preferred alternative is designated in the EA. Both alternatives can be included in the analysis of the document, however one of them must be designated as the preferred alternative.

b) Comparison of Alternatives in Environmental Assessment

Chris Beckwith (Gold Line Senior Project Manager) reviewed presentation slides summarizing the comparison of the downtown alternatives –

- i. Downtown Routing Alternative (begins and ends at the Smith Avenue Transit Center)
 - Leaving downtown; beginning at the Smith Avenue Transit Center, going on 5th Street, turning on Wacouta and on to Kellogg.
 - Coming into downtown; down Kellogg to Sibley, then down 6th Street and terminating at the Smith Avenue Transit Center.
 - For this alternative, rather than having a station on the Bus Deck, the station was relocated to the front of the Union Depot. It went from 7 enhanced downtown stops to 9 upgraded stations with full amenities for a premium BRT service, similar to the A-Line. This would be \$5.8M over the baseline, but still within the \$420M scope. CMC will consider this next year along with all of the other additions and deductions for the entire scope.
- ii. Union Depot Bus Deck Alternative (begins and ends at the Union Depot Center)

This alternative is in line with the vision of the Union Depot as a transit hub. The difference from the baseline is that it would require an upgrade to a full amenity platform, similar to A-line. There would be no additional downtown stops. This would be a cost deduct of \$7.6M.

As different concepts are evaluated in the IRT process, the team continues to pay attention to goals and objectives developed by Project partners approximately 5 years ago as part of the Alternatives Analysis. Goals 1 and 2 (see presentation slides) are primary goals, and Goals 3, 4 and 5 are secondary goals.

Chris Beckwith introduced Chris Weyer (Project Manager, HNTB). Chris Weyer explained that the HNTB (and subconsultants) team has a Project Management Consultant (PMC) services contract with the Metropolitan Council. The PMC team is responsible for tasks including; ridership analysis, traffic demand modeling, FTA criteria and environmental support. As part of the PMC team, Connecticut Transportation Group (CTG) is the firm specifically responsible for traffic analysis and ridership modeling. CTG has a number of experts with over 30+ years of experience in doing that specific type of work. CTG has worked on multiple projects around the country and locally. Similar to the IRT process, traffic analysis/ridership modeling is also an evolving and iterative process.

Chris Beckwith presented the summary of the ridership analyses completed over the past month. She asked CMC members to review the detailed slides at the back of the packet later and send in any questions/feedback.

- Downtown Routing to Smith Avenue - the ridership difference between the two alternatives is at 950+ daily riders. Capital cost difference is a \$5.8M addition from the baseline. Annual Operations and Maintenance (O&M) net cost difference is \$70K. FTA Rating is Medium-High. Current Public Input Preference is about 81%.
- Union Depot Bus Terminus – a \$7.6M deduct from the baseline, due to the elimination of downtown stops. FTA Rating is Medium-Low. Current Public Input Preference is about 19%.

Commissioner Karwoski noted that Washington County supports the Union Depot as a transit hub. The project can serve the Union Depot and still maximize ridership. They do not have to be mutually exclusive or in opposition of each other. Project Partners began the Gold Line project with a commitment of local control and have invested a lot of time into listening to and getting input from constituents over a lengthy period of time. The project has always been sold as a convenient loop through downtown. Washington County and Ramsey County have developed a good partnership, and want to continue that partnership. It's important to settle on an alternative that is going to be medium-high rating in order to get federal funding. The federal government is revising the standards next year, and medium-low will likely not receive funding. He concluded that, unless the data (facts and statistics) tells otherwise, the project should stick with the downtown loop.

Chair Tchourumoff asked when CMC will need to make a decision on the preferred alternative. Chris Beckwith responded that a decision needs to be made in about a month, in order to maintain the project schedule. The draft EA document needs to be compiled and routed for internal review prior to submission to the FTA. The draft EA is due to the FTA for review in January 2019. If no preferred alternative is selected by then, FTA has that it would add about a month or two to the FTA review period by addition another review cycle. There is no float for this delay in the 2-year project development schedule and the project would not meet the FTA requirements to apply to enter the Engineering phase.

Council Member Andrea Date observed that the total of public outreach responses/votes (Slide 22) did not add up to 100% and enquired about the people who did not vote. Lyssa Leitner clarified that some attendees interacted with Gold Line staff, but chose not to vote or indicate a preference. Chris Beckwith added that a number of attendees commented that they did not plan to ride Gold Line necessarily, but were more interested in the Riverview Corridor based on where they live and work so they did not indicate a preference

for Gold Line routing. Commissioner Rafael Ortega commented that from prior experience, a lot of the people at public outreach events/workshops tend to be negative. Feedback can skew one way or another, depending on who shows up for the events.

Mayor Nora Slawik (Mayor of Maplewood) commented that stakeholders have been working on Gold Line for a long time, and the project is getting towards the critical points of moving it forward in the best direction or not. It's very important not to jeopardize the project. She agreed with Commissioner Karwoski's comment that it's important to keep focus on the expectations, especially the medium-high rating. Gold Line has been a topic of discussion on several of her trips to Washington D.C. This stage of the process is about being strategic, moving the project forward and getting the funding needed. She added that there are about 15,000 people per day riding into the 3M campus. These riders need to be able to make those connections, and may not be able to do so if the stop is just at the Union Depot. Council Member Smith (Maplewood) who is not in attendance today will eventually make the decision along with the other CMC members. However, from the Maplewood community's standpoint, medium-high rating and the locally preferred option, which is the loop through downtown would make more sense.

Commissioner Jim McDonough referred to the Downtown Alternatives Summary Data (Slide 21) and noted that the ride difference a few weeks ago was over 1,800, but that has now been cut in half. The model is about 400 rides away from a medium-high rating. He added that with over 18 years of experience on other capital projects, he understands that the project has to work within the FTA process. Operating budget projections and travel times for these projects can get very close. However, the one thing that the traffic models tend to miss dramatically is ridership. The Blue Line and Green Line LRTs exceeded their ridership models from opening day to date. Do we want \$7.6M from the baseline to add flexibility to provide amenities throughout the line and address issues? At the end day, the budget will have multiple potential adds and deducts. The additional \$5.8M cost for routing through downtown could potentially reduce the capacity and flexibility for solving other problems in the future.

Commissioner McDonough added that the bigger picture is that it's vital to be cognizant of the community, what they expect and how it will impact their lives. This is a 50-year investment. Community members may be thinking about the here and now, but his focus is thinking longer term and building a successful system. This community has never had the opportunity to understand what it would be like to be able to maximize comprehensive, intermodal, seamless transition at a transit hub with amenities. Gold Line BRT should be working to provide experiences that not just meet the needs of the transit population, but also gets people on this corridor to move to using the bus. Decisions should not just be based on what we know today, but on what we can accomplish tomorrow. It's important to think strategically and holistically about the whole transit system (LRT, regular, express buses, arterial BRT). Washington and Ramsey are great partners. One of the strengths of this BRT line is the dedicated guideway. The more the bus is taken out of the dedicated guideway, the more the risk of potential schedule impacts/delays due to congestions, accidents etc. The greatest risk of that is in the density of the downtown urban core, where the project is proposing taking the bus out of dedicated Right-of-Way for 1 mile with 7 stops. It may end up providing an experience that doesn't work for riders. It's important to get people to the businesses downtown, connect riders to many locations across the Metro, and the opportunity at the back of the Union Depot provides the ability to accomplish this.

Mayor Reinke commented that he hopes project stakeholders can continue making decisions on behalf of the overall line based on data. He discussed additional items related to the City of Oakdale. The potential expansion to the proposed park and ride lot at the Helmo Avenue Station causes significant concern from a standpoint of highest and best use of land. The existing roadway is already being stressed as part of the city of Oakdale's Transit Oriented Development (TOD). There's also a storm water issue. The city spent a lot of time to get the TOD design to work. Mayor Reinke noted that he would want to make sure there are not any social justice issues if the project does not have the downtown stops.

Chair Tchourumoff asked about the cost contingency at the 15% design. Chris Beckwith replied that the total project contingency is at 30%.

Council Member Andrea Date asked if the proposed new bus stops are shared with other buses, and if there a cost-sharing component. Charles Carlson responded that some of the improved station shelters (Rice Park and Smith Avenue, and front of Union Depot) downtown could be shared with other buses. Other stops would be Gold Line only. On other BRT projects where stops are shared with other routes, have typically been a cost to the BRT project.

Mayor Stan Suedkamp commented that looking to the future is very important. This is an important connection from Washington County. Saint Paul and downtown have several connections that feed in and out of the city. However, from the east side, Gold Line would be the main connection. The growth pattern of the development around the Twin Cities has typically been north, west and south. There's a significant growth spurt happening to the east side, including several areas in Lake Elmo. Thinking about the future requires also thinking about buildout all the way out to St. Croix, and that's really what this BRT line's potential represents. This needs to be done with cost constraints and satisfying funding requirements in mind, while still having an operational system that will have the ridership necessary to keep it successful on a daily basis.

Mayor Mary Giuliani Stephens asked about potential travel time impacts the loop has for travelers heading east out of the Union Depot. Charles Carlson clarified that the time heading east from the Union Depot would not change with either of the two alternatives. The loop is not included in every ride out of the Union Depot.

Mayor Stephens asked for additional clarifications on why the Smith Avenue stop is termed a transit center. Charles Carlson replied that Smith Avenue transit center is an existing transit station. A number of routes coming from the east terminate there. Other routes stop there on their way to points west. It's similar to the Union Depot, but from a transit support facility perspective, the difference between the two is that the Union Depot has a significant customer facility associated with it. Smith Avenue is primarily a bus turnaround and layover location.

Commissioner McDonough expressed concern about using the BRT investment to make the connections through downtown. He noted that in his opinion, making the connection from the Union Depot to the Smith Avenue Transit center with the BRT line does not seem to be a wise investment. How else can we make that connection without using BRT investment? He asked Gold Line staff to put some effort in over the next 30 days, and provide a good amount of data/information that would help the CMC make the best decision possible for the future of the project. The goal is to do a better job than the West Metro has done on similar projects.

Commissioner Ortega asked about the projected ridership numbers at the Smith Avenue transit center. Lyssa Leitner responded that the project does not have the exact number of passengers broken down for every station at this time. Some stations are just a few blocks apart, and with numbers that small, there would be a level of error. She discussed the percentage split of passengers routing through downtown and getting on and off the Gold Line. About 40% are disembarking at the front of the Union Depot, 30% are disembarking at the center of downtown (Lowertown) and 30% are split between the Rice Park Stations (Landmark Center, Smith Avenue Ramp, and stations adjacent to Rice Park). Gold Line staff agreed to provide the breakdown of the ridership numbers for each station/stop for the next meeting.

Mayor Slawik asked about routing for passengers coming from Minneapolis and taking the Gold Line to get to 3M. Lyssa Leitner responded that there would be multiple options, it depends on the exact location where the rider is coming from. A passenger taking the Green Line LRT could get off at Union Depot (at the front or the back), and then walk to the Gold Line. Another passenger coming off the #21 Bus (Selby Avenue and

Lake Street) would get off at Rice Park, the Smith Avenue ramp or Union Depot. and transfer to the Gold Line. Commissioner McDonough added that the #21 bus also goes to the back of the Union Depot.

Mayor Reinke asked if the 950-daily rider number includes all the stops in downtown. Charles Carlson responded that 950 is the difference between the two alternatives. There are more than 950 rides in the downtown routing alternative. Because the Union Depot Bus Deck alternative would terminate there, other people would be coming in on other routes and connecting at Union Depot. The difference because of the transfer penalty, walk distance and other factors, results in a 950-rider difference between routing through downtown and stopping at Union Depot.

Commissioner Karwoski echoed Commissioner McDonough's comment about trying to make this the best transit line possible. He commended the city of Woodbury about migrating towards a potential Park and Ride Station at I-494, because that could be a significant improvement for ridership. Washington County stakeholders including Mayor Reinke and Mayor Suedkamp are also working on station planning. He commended everyone for working on the station stops and continuously trying to make this a better project.

Mayor Giuliani Stephens asked Gold Line staff to address any anticipated travel time delays and scheduling impacts if the bus is taken out dedicated guideway in downtown. Charles Carlson clarified that a significant portion of the downtown routing has a transit advantage lane (bus-only right lane), from Wabasha Street to Sibley and Wacouta. Gold Line has explored options to extend the bus-only lane further to the west. However, the analysis is showing that some of the construction that would be required could overlap with future projects that are planned, such as the Riverview Streetcar project. At this point, Gold Line staff is not recommending taking on that additional scope, because it could duplicate a future change. The project has been conducting sophisticated traffic analysis and modeling around bus volumes through downtown. Today's presentation includes a slide showing existing bus volumes. With the transit advantage lane, there are up to 45 buses in the peak hour now, and adding 6 Gold Line buses an hour does not in the modeling begin to approach the maximum capacity of 80 buses per hour. Based on the existing conditions or in forecasting related to Gold Line, congestion is not considered a significant factor on a recurring basis.

Commissioner McDonough stated that 80 buses per hour maximum capacity seems unmanageable. Charles Carlson responded that it's comparable to some of the streets in Minneapolis that currently have bus lanes. Commissioner Ortega commented that he's lived in Downtown Saint Paul for about 15 years. Downtown population has increased from about 4,000 people a few years ago to the population that it is today. He added that it takes him almost an hour to get to his 4:30p.m. meeting in Arden Hills. About 20 minutes of that time is spent trying to get out of downtown and on to Rice Street. It's not just the buses, but it's the continual population and traffic growth in downtown. Chair Tchourumoff noted that one of the challenges of having this conversation is not having a city of Saint Paul representative present to get their perspective on the potential impacts of the downtown loop on their city. It would be good to have that conversation with the city soon.

Chair Tchourumoff summarized the directions and actions for Gold Line staff, to be provided by the November CMC meeting.

- Ridership breakdowns at each of the downtown stations.
- Additional data on traffic congestion downtown.
- Commissioner Karwoski requested an explanation or narrative of the ridership data, and how it was collected.
- Mayor Reinke commented that the ridership decrease from 1,800 to 950 is a huge drop. Oakdale Helmo Avenue Station is already maxed out as far as TOD is concerned.
- Chair Tchourumoff asked if the project has any data on rider preferences, such as a one-seat ride preference. She asked if this a component of the modeling, and if connecting buses will be at the Union Depot every 10 minutes. To minimize wait time to as close to zero as possible, the model

shows that the Gold Line bus arrives and there's another transit bus waiting to route to other destinations. In order to make the back of the Union Depot alternative robust, mimic premium service and produce the best number possible, staff have input into the model that there would be a connecting shuttle/loop service every 10 minutes going through downtown. Union Depot currently has very good service, so the shuttle would only add 50 rides. Transfer time cannot be changed, and the model will always give a time/ride penalty, because people do not typically like a transfer.

- Commissioner Karwoski asked Gold Line staff to explain how the numbers are created, to ensure that they are legitimate and can be produced/provided.
- CMC members requested data on ridership projections versus opening day and average service performance of other Twin Cities capital projects, such as the Red Line, A-Line, LRT projects and Northstar Commuter Rail. Chris Beckwith noted that the Green Line and Blue Line LRT projects have exceeded ridership projections, but BRT experience has not historically been as successful in comparison with LRTs.

c) Public Outreach Update

Gold Line Outreach Staff have been conducting a fair amount of community outreach. Two Open Houses are scheduled for next week in Downtown Saint Paul (Skyway and Union Depot).

NEXT STEPS/MEETING

The next scheduled CMC meeting is November 1, 2018

- Downtown Routing Discussion

ADJOURN

Chair Tchourumoff adjourned the meeting at 3:54 p.m.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting Agenda, October 4, 2018

PowerPoint Presentation, October 4, 2018

Gold Line Elected Officials Packet

Respectfully Submitted,
Banke Oyewumi, Recording Secretary