

**METRO Gold Line Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC)
Harding High School; East Side Community Center
1526 East Sixth Street, Saint Paul, MN 55106
Notes for the August 23, 2018 Meeting**

Members Present: Chai Lee, Darrell Paulsen, Donald Gonser, Doug Swalboski, Ernesto Ortiz-Diaz, Jessica Johnson, Heidi Schumacher, Nancy Volkman, Regina Rippel, Torin Gustafson

Members Absent: Allison Hawley March, D'Angelos Svenkeson, Hussein Khatib, Jorge Samper Zelaya, Joseph Skeen, Koua Lee, Mary Brandt, Molly Gagan-Vlaisavljevich, Nyagatare Valens, Pat Cosgrove, Rebecca Nelson, Reva Jones-Simmons, Richard Kramer, Robert Crawford, Steve Morris, Tom Giannetti

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Darrell Paulsen, Resident Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and led introductions around the room.

Hally Turner, Interim Gold Line Deputy Project Manager, noted this will be her last Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC) meeting. Lyssa Leitner will be returning from maternity leave to her role as Gold Line Deputy Project Manager in the month of September.

2. CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (CMC) UPDATE

Darrell Paulsen provided a recap of the August CMC meeting. Darrell Paulsen and Steve Morris, Business Co-Chair, both attended the meeting. During the meeting, there was discussion of the project's remaining route and station options. A few members of the committee were vocal about concerns that sections of the line are in mixed traffic rather than running in dedicated lanes. CMC did not get through their entire agenda, but they will review the remaining route and station options at the next meeting.

3. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Liz Jones, Gold Line Community Engagement Coordinator, led an overview of public feedback received during summer outreach. Two corridor-wide open houses and three neighborhood meetings were held in the month of July, and throughout August, staff have been tabling at community events and holding pop up events at various places in the corridor.

Liz Jones said she would recap the community feedback or preferences on the three route and station options during the next topic; however, in the other areas along the route, Gold Line staff heard the following:

- Downtown Saint Paul: Interest in maintaining integrity of downtown, historic buildings, and parks. Desire to design transit stations to reflect downtown characteristics.
- Earl Street: Maintain two lanes of parking for businesses.

- Etna Street: Questions about how the Gold Line will continue to connect to Hudson Road after Etna St. station. Mentioned that there will be a new BRT overpass bridge. The public were interested in which pedestrian connections south of the Etna Street Station would be built by the project. Mentioned that the pedestrian connections to either the neighborhoods to the west or east would be included, but not both.
- Sun Ray: Questions from the public about the existing park-and-ride and if the existing express and local bus routes will remain. Concerns from businesses about sight lines and access during construction.
- Maplewood: Staff are continuing on-going conversations with 3M about access and stormwater and additional technical and design issues related to the Maplewood station in front of 3M.
- Landfall/Oakdale: Comments on bicyclist and pedestrian connections up to 4th Street and 10th Street. Concerns about safety on the 4th Street bridge and a lot of support for a new Helmo Avenue and Bielenberg Drive bridge for buses and other traffic.
- Woodbury: Support for mixed traffic on Bielenberg Drive near the nature preserve. Comments from residents about noise and the existing and proposed park-and-rides, and questions from businesses about access during construction.

Corridor-wide, staff heard comments about safety, park-and-rides and parking at stations, and pedestrian connections. Gold Line staff are working on a report documenting public feedback that was received over the summer, and once that document is complete, it will be shared with CBAC members.

- Doug Swalboski, Sun Ray Business, asked what public turnout has been like at the events? *The corridor-wide open houses had about sixty attendees each. At the neighborhood meetings, there was approximately 15 people at each. Door-knocking in the Mounds/Maria area and the White Bear Avenue area probably reached 80 to 100 people each. While tabling at community events and at pop up events, staff usually engaged at least twenty to thirty people.*

Staff will continue to hold pop ups and meet with neighborhood associations and other groups in August and September.

4. HISTORY OF THE ALIGNMENT

Hally Turner provided a history of how the Gold Line project got to the existing configuration it is today. The Counties started planning for the Gateway Corridor back to when it was called the “I-94 Corridor” in 2010.

From 2010-2013, they were looking at a myriad of options that went from Minneapolis and went out to Hudson and Eau Claire. The Counties determined a total of eight viable transit modes and alignments, and they compared them across different factors including: daily ridership, travel time, cost effectiveness, economic development, property acquisition, travel impacts, etc.

Then from 2013-2016, the project narrowed in on alternatives ending at Manning Avenue in Woodbury because it was most viable for the line to end here in the near-term. However, that doesn't mean that there couldn't be transit service out to Hudson, or Eau Claire in the future. And the project really focused on bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail transit (LRT).

In 2016, Lake Elmo policymakers decided they did not want the project going through their city. The Counties spent 2016 and 2017 re-routing the line and determining the best crossing to get from Oakdale to Woodbury. The Helmo Avenue and Bielenberg Drive bridge was determined to be most viable route. So the project, at its current configuration, was studied to determine where it could be in mixed traffic versus dedicated lanes for cost-effectiveness.

The previous planning process was led by the counties. Beginning in January, the project was handed over to the Met Council. The project has always been rooted in five main goals: 1) Improve mobility; 2) Cost-effective & economically viable; 3) Support economic development; 4) Protect the natural environment; 5) Preserve & protect quality of life. The Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) also defines competitiveness with these criteria.

Gold Line has a committee process that evaluates and responds to issues and opportunities to ensure Gold Line meets these project goals. Committees include the Issue Resolution Teams (IRT), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), Community and Business Advisory Committee (CBAC) and Corridor Management Committee (CMC). The information and decisions will also go to the Counties and Metropolitan Council.

The process Gold Line is moving through will take the project from an idea to a final product and service. The project becomes more refined through community planning, station area planning, environmental assessment scope, local scope and the final Gold Line project scope.

The project scope is being refined through various activities and tasks throughout the summer. In July, the committees reviewed the scope that was submitted in the environmental assessment and in August, committees will discuss or have discussed stakeholder feedback and areas along the route where options exist. In the fall and winter, committees will review updated project costs at 15% design and in 2019, they'll review 30% design, the cost estimate, and funding.

5. PROJECT SCOPE IN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Dedicated Guideway: Some members of the CMC brought up concerns that the project may not be providing a “premium” service if the project continues to move away from dedicated guideways to mixed traffic.

Gold Line is a premium service in that BRT is like LRT. It has distinctive station architecture and design, station amenities like real time signage, uniquely branded buses, regular all-day reliable service, direct connection to METRO system and an exclusive guideway. There are different kinds of guideways, including mixed traffic, curbside running, side running, and center running. Bus lanes can be separated from other lanes by striping, a median or a curb.

There are several areas where the project has proposed running in mixed traffic which is visualized on the mixed traffic vs BRT guideway map.

In downtown Saint Paul, there already are existing curbside running bus-only lanes. Gold Line will operate using those lanes with the other buses in downtown. Otherwise, it will run with mixed traffic in downtown. On the Kellogg Boulevard bridge in downtown, it will be mixed traffic because of the excessive cost of putting bus-only lanes on Kellogg Boulevard. If the Maria Avenue station option is selected, the bus will run in mixed traffic down Maria Avenue because of right-of-way constraints, but if the bus is routed on Mounds Boulevard, it will be in dedicated lanes. The bus will continue in dedicated lanes along Hudson Road until the segment between Etna Street and White Bear Avenue.

The project is proposing this section of Hudson Road runs in mixed traffic because approximately 200 cars per day travel on this road, and only 30% of those cars use in this segment between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Because of the low traffic volume, the project team determined it makes sense for the project to run in mixed traffic to avoid impacts to vegetation and neighborhood character and to reduce capital costs.

- A community member in attendance at the CBAC meeting stated Hudson Road is not a through street now. It dumps cars into the parking lot at Grace Lutheran Church. *The end of Hudson Road is a cul-de-sac which does not connect to Grace Lutheran Church. It is an access road.*

The next mixed traffic segment is at Tanners Lake. This segment has always been proposed to run in mixed traffic because of right of way constraints and environmental impacts to the lake. There is also low traffic volume on this part of the roadway.

The project is also anticipating mixed traffic along Hadley Avenue and Helmo Avenue. This is another segment of low traffic volume. On 4th Street Bridge, the team is considering mixed traffic lanes as well to avoid reconstructing the bridge.

The next section of mixed traffic lanes is in Woodbury by the nature preserve and park and ride. This is another area of right of way constraints and environmental impacts to the nature preserve.

- Donald Gonser, Greenway Avenue Resident, asked that instead of building a bridge at Century Road, why not route down Hudson Road and allow traffic to go straight rather than have to go up on Geneva Ave and take a U-turn? *This is the tradeoff between premium features. From Tanners Lake to Earl Street we have no stop signs and no lights to slow down the buses. If we go through Hudson Road the bus will hit a stop sign or traffic light, and every minute that we add to travel time is riders we lose. Also, if Gold Line does not go through the intersection, then the project can preserve opportunities for other agencies to make improvements to this area in the future.*
- Donald Gonser said the corner going around the Apostolic Bible Institute at Hadley Avenue and Hudson Boulevard is tight. *In the environmental assessment, the project makes the case for flattening this curve because it will slow down buses to make the sharp corner.*
- Darrell Paulsen asked if there is a certain amount of dedicated roadway required by the FTA to receive funding? *Yes, 50% of the route must be dedicated. Gold Line is at 69% dedicated if mixed traffic is selected on the segment of Hudson Road and at 70% if dedicated lanes is selected.*
- A community member in attendance at the CBAC meeting stated that the project received a lot of feedback from residents at the open houses and neighborhood meetings that mixed traffic is preferred on Hudson Road. Since there isn't a lot of traffic or activity on this segment, it makes sense to compromise and listen to the residents by selecting mixed traffic.
- The community member asked how many houses are on this stretch of Hudson Road? *Approximately thirty.*
- Nancy Volkman, Helmo Avenue Resident, said that at the last meeting, members were told the project may be adding more stops in downtown Saint Paul. How much money will that add to the project? *It is included in the \$420 million estimate. The difference is that before, the project was going to run through downtown only during rush hour. During non-rush hour times it would end at Union Depot. It would be confusing for riders to have different terminus at different times, so Gold*

Line is now proposed to run downtown all day. It is the same capital cost, but different operating costs because the bus will run further.

- The community member agreed that the terminus at Union Depot during non-rush hour times would not be enough because riders lose the convenience to be dropped off at their door. *When looking at the data, the highest ridership is when transit users have a one-seat ride through downtown. When you stop at Union Depot, you lose riders.*

The CBAC did not have specific feedback about the percent dedicated guideway and noted that the decisions made about mixed traffic versus dedicated guideway make sense.

Mounds Boulevard and Maria Avenue Station Options: There are two alternatives for the stations and routes in the Mounds Boulevard and Maria Avenue. One, the station could be at the intersection of Mounds Boulevard and 3rd Street, the first stop along the dedicated guideway. The station and dedicated lanes would be located between the neighborhood and Mounds Boulevard, because of how close the route borders homes and apartments, there are potential property impacts in this area. The City of Saint Paul prefers this option if the project can mitigate property impacts.

The project would need to reconfigure the intersection at Mounds Boulevard and 3rd Street and reconstruct the westbound I-94 off ramp. Mounds Boulevard will also lose a lane to accommodate the dedicated guideway. The noise wall that was put in with the I-94 project a couple of years ago will need to be removed and replaced.

The other alternative is at the intersection of Maria Avenue and 3rd Street. Buses would be in mixed traffic on Maria Avenue and the station would be placed between 3rd Street and Conway Street. Buses would be stopping in-traffic and parking and trees would be removed where the stations are located. After stopping at the station, buses would continue in mixed traffic on Maria Avenue until traveling into the dedicated guideway along Hudson Road.

Maria Avenue today is a quiet neighborhood street with a lot of trees, single-family homes, and relatively low traffic volume.

- Nancy Volkman asked what the project team heard while door-knocking in the neighborhood? *We heard there was a preference for routing on Mounds Boulevard. Maria Avenue was not seen as a good option because it's a narrow, residential street. Bus operators said they were concerned about the sharp turn onto Maria Avenue from 3rd Street and the narrow traffic lanes when snow piles up and cars are parked on both sides of the street.*
- Nancy Volkman also stated that residents near Maria Avenue don't have an alternative place to park their cars. *Gold Line would only take parking at the station, so it's not the whole length of Maria Avenue.*
- Regina Rippel, Mounds Boulevard Resident, stated that she was previously concerned about routing on Mounds Boulevard because it is a busy intersection, but after seeing the mock-up of the station and pedestrian amenities, she believes the Mounds Boulevard alternative is the best option for her neighborhood. There is a lot of traffic here coming to and from I-94 and Gold Line construction may provide an opportunity to fix some traffic control issues in this area. However, she is still concerned about tearing down the I-94 noise wall that was just constructed last year. *We heard similar comments from residents at the neighborhood meeting. At first people are concerned about Mounds Boulevard because it is very congested, but once people see the mock-*

Gold Line

up and understand the station will be separated from traffic lanes with a median, they began to think a station at Mounds Boulevard could help make the area more pedestrian-friendly.

- Nancy Volkman noted that there will be transit riders coming from the other side of the Mounds Boulevard overpass to take Gold Line and placing the station at Maria Avenue would make them walk that much further. Mounds Boulevard seems like a better option for the neighborhood south of I-94 to access Gold Line.
- Nancy Volkman asked if one option is more expensive? *Mounds Boulevard is more expensive because it will require reconstructing the I-94 off-ramp. However, it is accounted for in the \$420 million estimate. Maria Avenue is expected to be \$4 million less than the Mounds Boulevard option.*
- Jessica Johnson, Etna Street Resident, noted that a station on Maria Avenue would also be in front of the few businesses in the area. The station would remove on-street parking right by their front door.
- Nancy Volkman asked what it means for Mounds Boulevard to be in the City's station area policy? *Mounds Boulevard has been adopted, so to select Maria Avenue, the City Council will have to go against their policy. There would have to be exceptions, or they update the policy which could be a four-month process.*

CBAC members indicated a strong preference for the Mounds option as a result of feedback from the public, safety and pedestrian improvements expected at Mounds, the ability to preserve parking and safe travel along Maria, and ease of access to the station.

Hudson Road Mixed Traffic or Dedicated Guideway: As explained earlier, a segment of Hudson Road between Etna Street and White Bear Avenue is being considered for either mixed traffic or dedicated bus lanes. It's a quiet, two-way residential road with on-street parking, low traffic volumes, and mature vegetation on both sides of the road.

As the project team completed further analysis on Hudson Road, it was determined that building dedicated lanes would have large impacts on neighborhood character and disruption during construction without a lot of perceived benefit to residents because we're not proposing a station in the area.

The dedicated option would reduce traffic to one westbound lane and take away on-street parking. The road expansion would take place in the existing right-of-way, but it would seem like a pretty major land use of residents' perceived yards.

The project would build a new access road for residents to Hudson Road near the Grace Lutheran parking lot entrance and the pedestrian bridge over I-94 would need to be removed and placed near the new access road.

To prevent these disruptions to residents, the project is proposing a mixed traffic alternative.

- A community member in attendance at the CBAC meeting asked what is the yellow line on the slide of the existing conditions of Hudson Road? *The image was taken from Google Street View, so Google added the guideway line.*
- Donald Gonser asked how far would the pedestrian bridge need to be moved if dedicated lanes are selected? *It be moved about one block, but the blocks are large in this neighborhood.*

Gold Line

- Regina Rippel asked how the mixed traffic option would work? *Buses would be moving with traffic in the existing two-way traffic lanes, and the parking lane would remain for residents.*
- Regina Rippel said she prefers dedicated lanes are curb running rather than center running because she thinks center running may become more confusing to drivers.
- Chai Lee, Sun Ray Resident, asked if most homes in the area access their driveways from Hudson Road? *Many homes have access from Hudson Road and Old Hudson Road. So dedicated lanes would take away parking from Hudson Road, but many people have garages and driveways to store cars, as well as street parking from Old Hudson Road.*
- Doug Swalboski asked what the Gold Line staff heard at the Hudson Road neighborhood meeting? *Residents preferred mixed traffic because it has the least amount of disruption. Resident would be losing on-street parking with the dedicated option and many said that they park on the street.*

If mixed traffic is selected in this segment, then buses would return to the dedicated guideway at the existing cul-de-sac. The mixed traffic option keeps the project from needing to reconstruct the existing pedestrian bridge which saves the project a lot of money. There is an estimated \$7.5 million difference between the mixed and dedicated option.

- Doug Swalboski asked what the traffic volume is on this stretch of Hudson Road? *200 cars a day with 30% of those cars are on this road between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.*

Multiple CBAC members affirmed the mixed traffic option.

- Darrel Paulsen asked if the project selected dedicated lanes in this segment, so the percent dedicated guideway is 70%, will the project be allotted any more funding? *No, but there could be other benefits to the project if dedicated lanes are selected, like decreased travel time.*
- Darrell Paulsen asked why some members of the CMC committee believe that Hudson Road should be dedicated? How do you sell mixed traffic to CMC members committed to dedicated lanes? *The CMC members' concerns come down to delivering a premium service. Moving from dedicated to mixed traffic, or from level boarding to near level boarding is moving the project further from a premium service or what we promised to deliver to the public. There are concerns that if we're already chipping away at feasible options with our big decisions, that further down the road we won't be delivering what was promised.*
- Doug Swalboski asked how long is the proposed segment of mixed traffic on Hudson Road? *Believe it is a half mile or one-and-a-half blocks.*
- Torin Gustafson, Maplewood Business, said he understands the concerns of certain CMC members about delivering a premium service, but since it's a short distance and a minimal change in travel time then why make residents upset by putting in dedicated lanes?
- Doug Swalboski asked what is the difference in travel time? *It won't be a big difference in travel time considering very few cars are driving through this segment.*
- Jessica Johnson asked if there are any pedestrian connections through this segment? *There are sidewalks but none that would connect all the way to the Etna Street Station.*

Gold Line

- Nancy Volkman asked where the bus will go from the cul-de-sac? *The project would open up the cul-de-sac to just buses and continue along a dedicated guideway.*
- Doug Swalboski asked why does the pedestrian bridge have to move in the dedicated option? *The bridge would move because we would impact it during construction, so we would have to reconstruct it. The City prefers that we relocate the bridge to be closer to businesses. The existing bridge is not ADA compliant and the price difference is due in a large part to making the new bridge ADA complaint. MnDOT may still consider replacing the bridge if the mixed traffic option is selected, but Gold Line would not pay for it.*
- Jessica Johnson stated that just west of this segment, they're looking at pedestrian connections to get to the Etna Street Station, so it makes sense to move the pedestrian bridge to the new spot.

The CBAC expressed strong preference for mixed traffic along Hudson Rd between Etna and White Bear indicating the decision provided a good level of service for BRT operations and minimized perceived and real property impacts.

White Bear Avenue Station Location: Looking at either placing a station at Van Dyke Street or at Hazel Street. The Van Dyke Street option is near a memory care facility, apartments and redevelopment site. Once this parcel is redeveloped, the station will be secluded behind a building with poor visibility from the neighborhood. The Van Dyke Street Station is currently in the City's station area policy plan; however, at the time that this was adopted, the City did not know of any plans to redevelop this site.

The Hazel Street option would require the project to build more pedestrian connections to the area. The land near this station option is public land and there is no plan for future development in this parcel. This means there will be more visibility from the neighborhood. There is also a higher residential population near Hazel Street.

- Heidi Schumacher, Woodbury Theater Resident, asked where is White Bear Avenue? *White Bear Avenue is to the west of both station options.*
- Nancy Volkman asked if this station will have a park-and-ride? *No, it's very close to the Sun Ray park-and-ride. People who are driving will likely go there.*
- Darrell Paulsen asked if they have been able to analyze ridership estimates for Van Dyke Street and Hazel Street? *No, this is a hard place for modeling. The station locations are so close that they are in the same zone, so the data pulled is the same. The difference in ridership for one or two blocks is not going to come up.*
- Regina Rippel asked what is the structure near the bus lanes on the Hazel Street mock-up? *That is an existing billboard.*

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) did not indicate a preference for either Hazel Street or Van Dyke Street. During the door-knocking and neighborhood meeting, residents tended to prefer Hazel Street because it is closer to residents. But many notes that they would walk to either one, a block or two does not make a major difference.

- A community member in attendance at the CBAC meeting asked where would someone in a car drop off a person at this station? *Right now, the design does not have any dedicated drop off*

zones, but it's something we will bring back to the project team. We've heard this from other people as well.

- Chai Lee stated west of the station options is a Walgreens where transit riders could be dropped off.
- Regina Rippel asked what the white lines pointing north on the aerial overlay? *They are proposed sidewalks.*
- Torin Gustafson asked why the City preferred Van Dyke Street? *When they completed their planning process in 2015, they weren't aware the new apartment complex would be going into this site. So at the time, it made sense because it is closer to White Bear Avenue, but there was not a strong preference at that time. The City is open to updating their plan. It would just take some time to get through the process because they need a public hearing.*
- Torin Gustafson said that in terms of placemaking, Hazel Street seems like the better option.

There is a difference in cost between Hazel Street and Van Dyke Street. Hazel Street is expected to cost \$400,000 more because of grading and constructing retaining walls.

- Doug Swalboski noted that Van Dyke Street is very close to the assisted living home, and employees and people who live at the home may be more inclined to use Gold Line if it were right outside their door.
- Nancy Volkman also noted that Van Dyke Street is further from the Sun Ray Station. *Hazel Street does overlap a little with Sun Ray Station when looking at the walking shed.*

CBAC members agreed they have a strong preference favoring Hazel Street more than Van Dyke Street because of higher density housing, fewer private property impacts, and more visibility.

6. UPCOMING CBAC MEETINGS

The bus tour will be on Tuesday, September 25. Keep availability open between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. Still looking at pick up location and CBAC members will be informed when that is decided. An invitation to the bus tour may also be extended to the TAC and project staff.

Bus tour will take the place of the regularly scheduled September CBAC meeting.

November and December CBAC meetings fall on holidays. The November meeting will be pushed back until Thursday, November 29 and the December meeting is cancelled.

7. ADJOURN

Darrell Paulsen adjourned the meeting at 7:29 p.m.

Meeting Materials Provided:

Meeting PowerPoint Presentation, August 23, 2018

Gold Line Mixed Traffic vs BRT Guideway Map

Next Meeting: Bus Tour – Tuesday, September 25, location TBD, 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.