

**METROPOLITAN COUNCIL**  
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**T**RANSPORTATION **A**CCES**S**IBILITY **A**DVISORY **C**OMMITTEE **M**EETING  
Wednesday, May 4, 2011

**1. Call to Order**

At 12:35 p.m. the meeting was called to order by Chair Ron Biss. **Public present:** Cynthia Lothenbach. **Council staff present:** Pam Steffen, Jan Dietrich, Paul Colton, Mike Kuehn, Robin Kaufman, David Russell, Andy Streasick and Alison Coleman.

**Members Present:** Ron Biss, Dave Bruflodt, Christian Knights, Margot Imdieke Cross, Wayne Wittman, Bruce Lattu, Darrell Paulsen, Jerolyn Pofahl, Rozanne Severence and Nichole Villavicencio. **Members Absent:** James Williams, Heidi Myhre and Willie Daniels. **Members excused:** None.

Paul Colton introduced David Russell, the new ADA Paratransit Evaluator for Metro Mobility.

**2. Approval of the Agenda**

Severance moved to approve the agenda. Lattu seconded the motion.

**3. Approval of April 6, 2011 Minutes**

Paulson moved to approve the minutes. Villavicencio seconded the motion.

**4. CCLRT Update**

Robin Kaufman spoke to the TAAC committee. Last week we had the full funding grant agreement signed by the FTA. That is basically the federal government committing their \$480 million to the project. Federal FTA Administrator Rogoff came out and gave a speech. Chair Haigh was the emcee for the ceremony. Among those speaking was Commissioner McLaughlin, Commissioner McDonough, Mayor Rybak, Mayor Coleman, Rep. Betty McCollum and Senator Al Franken.

We have broken the contracts into two parts. The Minneapolis segment is called Civil West. That is a little less than \$180 million contract. So they are doing all of the work in Minneapolis including the Washington Avenue bridge. Then we have the Civil East contract, which is everything in Saint Paul. That is about a \$220 million contract. That is the replacement of all the streets, sidewalks, track, stations, etc.

The next biggest contract is we are rehabbing the former Gillette building down in Lowertown. We are rehabbing that for our operations and maintenance facility. So that work is underway as well.

As far as the staging, we are breaking it into segments. So it is not all under construction at one time. The strategy is to have small segments that the contractors hit hard over one construction season and then they are done at the end of the construction season. They can open up the road again fully to

traffic, and the sidewalks are also open. Then going on to the next segment instead of dragging it out over two years over the entire corridor.

Fourth Street is almost done. It is going to be the first area where they are going to be laying the track. That will be some time in June. They are just finishing building the guide way, which is the structure to lay the tracks in. Then they are going to be putting in the tracks in June, starting on the east side of Broadway and then moving towards Minnesota.

They started some utility relocation on Cedar Street, which has affected some of the bus routes. That is going to start heavy construction in June. So June 1, Cedar Street is going to be closing and the buses are going to be rerouting. There will be some transit folks on the ground making announcements on the buses and handing out brochures. We have a website that has all of the details. It is right on Metro Transit's home page. That work on Cedar Street will take two years.

The Capitol area has been under construction for about a year. We will have another year to go. Hopefully by the end of this year Robert Street will be back open and we will have the tracks and the station and everything in place.

We have broken University Avenue into two segments. So between Rice Street and Hamline, that is going to be starting construction next year. So we will start in May of next year and the work will be done in November. So by the end of November of next year that whole segment will be complete. What we are working on right now is from Hamline to Emerald. The construction is underway. We are working on the south side of the street. We will be working on the south side of the street for about 150 days total. Then we will flip to the north side. So we are always maintaining traffic and sidewalks. So that is the Saint Paul side of the timeline.

When we have that three mile segment, we are breaking it into one mile segments. They have crews that hit that one mile segment really hard and then move on to the next one mile segment. They will be starting on the south side and then move on to the north side in the June/July time frame.

On the roadway we have 120 feet to work in. We are keeping about five feet of sidewalk on University Avenue, right up against the building face. We are taking out some of the sidewalk and then about 2/3 of the street is under construction. So we are working on doing the utilities. We are building the foundations for the stations. We are doing the storm water treatment. That work will take 150 days or less. Once they are done with that work they will be able to put the street, sidewalks, curbs, gutters back. Then they will flip to the north side and do the exact same thing. Once that is done they will be able to open the street and sidewalk fully. The landscaping will be done. Then they can start laying the track down the middle of the street with traffic going on each side of the road. By the end of November the sidewalks and the roadway should be fully open and usable again.

In Minneapolis it is a little different. They have already started at the Metrodome area. They are working on doing a new bridge over I-35W. It is just north of where the existing Hiawatha bridge is. So you will have two bridges where Central and Hiawatha tracks will split apart. Over the summer they will have to close down I-35W over the weekend a few times. They will close it down at 10:00 p.m. on Friday and open it up at 5:00 a.m. on Monday so they can fully construct the bridge. So they are working on that right now. Some of the ramps are closed while we are working on that.

From there we will be starting to work on Washington Avenue. The trench between Cedar/Riverside and Seven Corners. They are working on rebuilding that. Those ramps on Cedar will be affected as well. We are working on the Washington Avenue Bridge. That will take about two years to reconstruct. They are moving all the traffic on the north side of the bridge so there is one lane in each direction on

the north side. Then they are working on the south side. At the end of the year they will flip so the south side will be reconstructed and traffic will move there while they are working on the north.

The big change is Washington Avenue will be closing to through traffic on May 16. If you go across the Washington Avenue Bridge you will be forced to go on the ramp around the Weisman Museum and then go down to East River Road. That goes through Oak Street. That has a significant impact on the bus routes. When the train starts operating the buses will be restored. It will take two years to complete all the work between Pleasant and Oak.

We are going to be working inside where the businesses are in Stadium Village this year. That starts on May 16. We will be starting to reconstruct the Huron intersection. They are also working on the U of M transitway this year. That will start May 16, as well. The goal is to have that work on the transitway completed by the time of the State Fair. The State Fair uses that area and the parking lots to get people to and from the State Fair. That should be done by the end of August.

The Minneapolis section of University Avenue should be starting May of next year and go until the end of the construction season.

When Washington Avenue is closed there is going to be signage directing people to the medical clinics and other places. We will allow traffic to cross some of the main streets. Most of the streets are going to turn into two way streets for the duration of construction. They will phase them so there will at least be one or two of the streets open between Oak/Walnut and Harvard. They will be open for pedestrian movement as well. They will have all of Washington Avenue under construction at the same time. They will retain enough space on the sidewalk. They will stage the sidewalk so that there is always a section open at any given time. When the sidewalk is under construction there will be a ramp or temporary access to the buildings.

With Washington Avenue closed the buses will have to be rerouted off of Washington. The current plan is to take buses so they come into the West Bank area up Nineteenth and then come down University and Fourth Street. If it is a 16 they will continue on University. Metro Transit will have staff on campus starting next week. They will help direct people around. We are working closely with the U of M and the medical facilities and the clinics to make sure they are able to communicate with their customers. At the same time the U of M is looking at making changes to their internal circulator.

Right now several of the ramps are closed. The most significant one that is closed is the one going from north I-35W on to the East Bank campus. Eventually the ramps on to and off of Cedar and Washington Avenue itself are going to be closed. They are going to turn the south ramps into a two lane road so everyone will be diverted up to Cedar. The bus stops will be up at the top of the ramp and then direct people back down to Washington. That will be happening in the next month or so.

We are 12 percent done. Towards the end of the year we will be 50 percent complete. We have designated the outreach coordinators into two person teams. So there is always a person to help.

We are maintaining vehicle and pedestrian access. We make sure the contractors are ADA compliant. We have limited the construction to 150 days in any given area. The sidewalk has to be replaced within 15 days.

We established a contractor incentive program where we have community based committees come together every two weeks and discuss issues with the contractors. On a quarterly basis we have the groups come together and evaluate the contractors based on safety, accessibility, communication, maintenance of access, etc. Based on that they are eligible for a monetary incentive to reward them for that work.

We have communication committees based by the areas. So we have one for downtown, the capitol area, University Avenue, East Bank and West Bank.

We have been working with the City of Saint Paul on the off street parking issue. They have issued about \$1.3 million in parking grants to businesses. They awarded those last spring or summer. Several of them have been built. Three of the 25 have been built. Now this spring they have gone out for bid and they are supposed to be implemented this spring or summer. Most of the parking lots are east of Hamline or Snelling so they are not in the construction zone this year. They will be on next year's construction schedule. So they will get them done in advance of construction. One of the criteria was to take some of the existing parking lots and trying to consolidate them. One of the requirements was that they add ADA accessible parking spots.

All of the sidewalks should be ADA compliant. There crossings are at 90 degree angles. They have the tactile strips. We have audible tones at all of the pedestrian crossings.

## **5. Legislative Update**

Mike Kuehn spoke to the TAAC committee. The governor told the legislature to pass their balanced budget and to get it to him. That will be the basis of the start of the negotiations. Today there is a meeting of the conference committee. The three agencies that are mostly impacted by the Transportation Finance Bill are the Council, MnDOT and Public Safety. The heads of those agencies have been asked to appear up there. We have been asked to only express our concerns about that particular bill.

One of the areas we have concerns about is the funding. There is \$32 million underfunded from the previous biennium in the Senate bill. There is \$130 million underfunded in the House bill. We have made it clear to them what that means. A 45 percent reduction in weekday service potentially with that magnitude of cuts. A possible elimination of all Saturday and Sunday regular route service. Elimination of the dial-a-rides. Layoff of 550 people. We continue to make them aware of the House position. We hope that something will come closer to the Senate side. We could use some of our Livable Community funds and our Right of way Acquisition Loan Funds that we do property tax levies for. We have some reserves there that we could use to bring that gap closer together. Probably at some time during that two year cycle we probably would be looking at a fare increase. Though there is nothing established on that. Those combination of things would close that gap of \$32 million the Senate recommends to maintain the current level of service.

The Senate bill takes \$8 million of the money that the Opt Outs would get from the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax revenues but it redistributes it to Greater Minnesota Transit Systems. We are saying it should go into the general pool and be used for the region. Part of it is based on the auditor's report that shows fairly substantial fund reserves in the Opt Out fund balances. However they provide about five percent of the service in the region of the regular routes. Metro Transit provides about 95 percent. There is several millions of dollars that is potentially there that could be used someplace to plug some funding gaps for this biennium.

We also have in the House bill where we could use some of the CTIB money that ¼ cent metro sales tax for additional operations that we are pointing out today. We already get operational funding from CTIB. They pay 50 percent of the light rail and commuter rail and the BRT operations. That balance that they have beyond that has been put in place to provide needed debt service not only for the Central Corridor but for the expansion of our future growth of our transitways in the region. We also make it clear to the legislators today and the conference committee that these funds are collected through the regional property taxes and they are really unrelated to transit operations.

We also have in the House bill the ability to take 100 percent of the Council operating budget for government affairs. Our communications office, our regional planning and use 100 percent of those salaries and dollars we use for that to help close the funding gap as well. Those funds are collected through the property taxes needed for the Council to administer the metropolitan planning activities of the region and provide support for other Council functions.

The position of our agency is to have legislative leaders and the governor negotiate this. The agencies have been asked not to individually negotiate that because it is a bigger picture of \$5 billion. Our official position is the governor's position of no cuts to transit.

Our regional bonding authorization to secure \$35 million in regional bonding to match federal dollars and bus replacement is tied to our five year transit capital plan. That bill was heard today in the House Tax Committee. It was sent to the floor. We did a lot of informational work with the committee. They are also going to place that in the Local Government Public Finance Bill. This is an annual request. If they don't pass it this year we will be back next year with double the amount requested. That is how we have to make our capital program work.

They have produced a Transportation Policy Bill that just emerged this week. There are two small items in it. One deals with somewhat repealing the language that prohibits us to include the Dan Patch commuter rail service in planning documents. They can only include it in planning documents that are of regional or statewide significance. We can't specifically plan for it.

There is language in there that allows local road authorities (cities and counties) that they could also approve the use of bus shoulder lanes. Right now that is the responsibility of MnDOT. If a local government does that they need to get some engineering analysis and other recommendations. It is in the House version of the Transportation Policy Bill.

The governor is trying to get a large state bonding bill together. He sees it as a job creations bill as well.

Our transit operating budget annually is about \$350 million to \$360 million. What we get from the state general fund is about 1/6 of the operations costs.

Streasick said in case of a state shutdown, if Metro Transit's buses stay on the street, Metro Mobility also stay on the street.

## **6. Task Force Update - CCLRT**

Bruce Lattu spoke to the TAAC committee. I will continue to forward on the construction schedule for Fourth Street.

## **7. Metro Mobility Statistics**

Andy Streasick spoke to the TAAC committee. The stats show that ride time performance for the month of March is 58.66 percent of all ridership were rides of less than an hour. We are hoping to shoot for stats in the 80's.

Dave Brufloft has decided not to seek reappointment to the TAAC. He has been both Chair and Vice Chair. The Chair of the TAAC or someone appointed by the Chair serves as the chair of the appeals panel for ADA eligibility appeals. He thanked Brufloft for his many years of service.

The status of the Metro Mobility service area change that will affect reservations. We attempted to go live with the standby, non standby change. Our software was not yet prepared. We are looking at doing that within the next month. The vast majority of non ADA rides are going to be going on standby.

## **8. Member Comment**

The committee discussed scheduling ride times. Streasick said people should not be paying for rides that are longer than 1½ hours.

Indieke Cross said at the legislature our disability parking bill went to the floor. The guardianship language that we are opposed to in the election bill has been separated from the main bill and is currently not going anywhere, which is a good thing.

Knights said on health care the legislature and the governor really haven't come up with anything. The House and Senate have \$1.6 billion cuts to Health and Human Services and \$1.7 billion cuts that will drastically affect services for people with disabilities. When you throw in potential cuts to transit and other areas some of the commitment that Minnesota has to keeping people living in communities and keeping people independent is a problem. It could push people into institutional care.

## **9. Public Comment**

Pam Steffen said starting May 14 the detours start.

Indieke Cross asked Steffen about the computer hook ups on the Northstar train. It is a civil rights issue. If there are operational computer laptop hookups in the upper level then there need to be hookups in the lower level where the wheelchair spots are. Steffen will look into it.

Streasick said Metro Mobility got a list of the folks who applied for the TAAC committee so we could weigh in and give support to incumbents and take a look and make sure we reach that legislatively mandated 50 percent ADA paratransit certified number. The final determinations are made by the Met Council. We are still seeking applicants from areas C and A or B.

## **10. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 2:28 p.m.