

Metropolitan Council

Business Item

Item: 2008-64

Meeting date: February 27, 2008

ADVISORY INFORMATION

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| Date: | February 27, 2008 |
| Subject: | Central Corridor LRT Scope Decisions |
| District(s), Member(s): | All |
| Policy/Legal Reference: | |
| Staff Prepared/Presented: | Mark W. Fuhrmann, Deputy General Manager, 651-602-1942 |
| Division/Department: | Metro Transit/CCPO |

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council adopt the proposed Central Corridor Action as attached directing the Central Corridor Project Office to:

Proceed with preliminary engineering and make application to the Federal Transit Administration to move the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit project to final design with the features as itemized in the attachment; and

Continue to work with project stakeholders on mitigation measures, and other unresolved issues, throughout the balance of preliminary engineering.

Background

The Metropolitan Council approved the Locally Preferred Alternative for the Central Corridor to be light rail transit on June 28, 2006. This action was the culmination of a multi-year effort to conduct an Alternatives Analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Statement as required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Subsequently, Metropolitan Council submitted a New Starts application to FTA to move the project into preliminary engineering. FTA authorized the project to enter preliminary engineering on December 13, 2006.

FTA recommended re-estimating the project budget to include a higher inflation factor, additional contingency and finance costs while at the same time achieving a Cost Effectiveness Index (CEI) rating of “medium.” Current FTA guidelines require New Starts projects achieve a “medium” or higher rating which requires a CEI value of less than or equal to \$23.99.

The Central Corridor Project Office was created, engineering and environmental consultants were contracted and preliminary engineering was initiated in 2007. The purpose of preliminary engineering is to more precisely define the scope elements and corresponding cost estimates working from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement identified scope. Numerous scope elements have been evaluated in more detail with a dozen items requiring policy direction from the Council.

Rationale

Staff has created a number of scope scenarios with different combinations of scope elements and evaluated them with stakeholder staff. Evaluation has included design, cost and impact to the Cost Effectiveness Index. Examples of key scope elements include at-grade or tunnel along Washington Avenue in the East Bank area of the University of Minnesota, potential infill stations along University Avenue and the alignment through downtown St. Paul connecting with the St. Paul Union Depot. Each scope element required cost estimates which were bundled in unique scope scenarios. Ridership forecasts and Cost Effectiveness Index calculations were generated for each scenario. Due to the FTA requirement of achieving a CEI value less than or equal to \$23.99 to be eligible to advance the project into final design and to secure 50% of the funding from FTA, Scenario B satisfies the CEI requirement with a value of \$23.80 at a capital cost of \$909.1 million.

This scenario features at-grade trains along Washington Avenue through the East Bank, infrastructure for three future infill stations and trains that serve the eastern terminus of the LRT line at the front of St. Paul Union Depot.

Council approval of Scope Scenario B will provide specific direction to staff to proceed with more detailed preliminary engineering that will serve as the basis for a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) and local stakeholder hearings and approvals of the plans through summer 2008. Met Council will need to approve the SDEIS document and amend the Locally Preferred Alternative in August 2008 as the basis to apply to FTA to advance the project in to the final design stage of project development.

Funding

Scenario B is estimated to cost \$909.1 million in year of expenditure dollars. This action does not directly require a funding commitment from the Council or state and county funding partners at this time. It must be stressed that FTA will expect firm funding commitments totaling at least one half of the required local match, \$227.275 million, by August 2008 to demonstrate the local partners' funding commitments to the project.

Known Support / Opposition

Project partners Minnesota Department of Transportation, Ramsey County, Hennepin County, city of St. Paul, city of Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota generally support Scope Scenario B. The Council is committed to working with project stakeholders to further develop mitigation measures and other unresolved issues as preliminary engineering moves forward.

Local public input has demonstrated a strong desire to fully construct three infill stations on University Avenue. Scope Scenario B provides for the below-grade infrastructure for future build-out of the three stations.

Central Corridor Action

The Central Corridor Management Committee recommends to the Metropolitan Council that the Project Office proceed with preliminary engineering and make application to the Federal Transit Administration to move the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (CCLRT) project to final design, with the following features:

- Fifteen new stations along approximately 11 (eleven) miles of track, with a western terminus at the Minnesota Twins Ballpark, and an eastern terminus in front of the St. Paul Union Depot;
- a vehicle maintenance facility will be constructed under the Lafayette Bridge, connected by double tracks to the eastern terminal station in front of the Union Depot;
- three stations in downtown St. Paul including 10th Street, front of Union Depot and a station on the diagonal connecting Cedar Street / 5th Street with Minnesota / 4th Street;
- three-car platforms;
- infrastructure below grade for three infill stations at Hamline, Victoria and Western avenues;
- Washington Avenue Bridge modifications;
- University of Minnesota at-grade Transit Mall;
- Improved Hiawatha LRT connection placing CCLRT on structure over 35 W and interlining with Hiawatha south of 11th Avenue;
- Mill and overlay of University Avenue travel lanes including reconstruction of approximately 85% of the curb, gutter and sidewalks;
- total Project mitigation costs of approximately \$39 million;
- total Project cost of approximately \$909,100,000 with a CEI \leq \$23.99;

Furthermore, the CCMC recommends that the Project Office continue to work with project stakeholders on mitigation measures, and other unresolved issues, throughout the balance of preliminary engineering.