

Transportation Committee

Meeting date: February 26, 2007

ADVISORY INFORMATION

Date:	February 20, 2007
Subject:	Central Corridor Proposed Downtown St. Paul Loop
District(s), Member(s):	7-Annette Meeks, 8-Lynnette Wittsack, 13-Rick Aguilar, 14-Vacant
Policy/Legal Reference:	FTA Guidance on New Starts Policies and Procedures
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Arlene McCarthy – Director, Metropolitan Transportation Services (651-602-1754) Mark Fuhrmann – Deputy Director, Metro Transit (612-349-7513)
Division/Department:	Metropolitan Transportation Services and Metro Transit

Proposed Action/Motion

That the Metropolitan Council affirm that the proposed Downtown St. Paul Loop will not be considered for evaluation as part of the Central Corridor preliminary engineering process unless and until the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority presents evidence demonstrating the Loop alignment is consistent with the Council-adopted principles for major scope changes.

Issue(s)

- Recent media coverage and advocacy of a proposed Central Corridor Downtown St. Paul Loop by the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority (RCRRA) has raised questions and confusion within the local business, residential and general public communities regarding the Central Corridor alignment.
- In October 2006, the RCRRA commissioned a \$40,000 contract with DMJM Harris, AECOM and Connetics Transportation Group to evaluate the alternative LRT loop in downtown St. Paul. The evaluation determined that the Loop reduces ridership, reduces travel time saved, increases both capital and operating costs, and increases the federal cost-effectiveness index (CEI) value.
- On February 13, 2007, the RCRRA passed a resolution authorizing a \$100,000 communications contract for the purpose of, in part, “ensuring that the loop alignment is constructed in downtown St. Paul.”
- The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved the Central Corridor project into the Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase based on the alignment and mode selected by the Council in June 2006 following the Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) process. Ongoing advocacy of major alignment deviations sends mixed messages to the FTA regarding the status of the Central Corridor project at the local level and readiness of the project to conduct PE and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).
- The proposed Loop is not consistent with the principles for Central Corridor major scope changes to be acted on by the Council at its February 28, 2007 meeting:

To be considered, the proposed major scope change shall generally:

1. comply with current federal and state laws and guidelines;
2. not adversely impact the project schedule or project delivery;
3. positively impact (increase) ridership;
4. positively impact (increase) travel time saved;
5. positively impact (decrease) capital cost;
6. positively impact (decrease) annual operating cost;
7. positively impact (decrease) the FTA cost-effectiveness index (CEI) value; and
8. include documented public input garnered through a public hearing process conducted by the project partner sponsoring the proposed change.

Overview and Funding

On June 28, 2006, the Council selected the Washington/University Avenue alignment and LRT mode for the Central Corridor project. This selection was based on the federally required AA/DEIS process which mandates a comprehensive examination of alternatives and a public input process. The downtown St. Paul segment of the selected alignment is two-way on Cedar and 4th Streets terminating with a station at the Union Depot. The selected alignment has an estimated capital cost of \$932 million and a \$24.84 CEI value based on a 2014 opening.

The proposed Loop alignment is a one-way loop generally traversing the perimeter of downtown St. Paul. The Loop alignment is detailed in the December 7, 2006 draft *Technical Memorandum: Evaluation of Proposed Downtown St. Paul LRT Loop* commissioned by the RCRRA (and posted on the Council's website). Council staff prepared a [February 8, 2007 memo \(attached\)](#) assessing the *Technical Memorandum*. Staff generally concurs with the consultant's analysis and conclusions: the Loop reduces ridership, reduces travel time saved, increases both capital and operating cost, and increases the CEI value to approximately \$27.27. Staff considers the cost estimate increases a "best case" scenario that may be underestimated.

The project CEI value must be reduced to \$22.99 or less through the PE process for the Central Corridor LRT project to advance into Final Design and apply for a federal full funding grant agreement (FFGA) which secures 50% federal funding.

The Loop alternative is a significant change to the AA/DEIS alignment. Conducting the necessary AA/DEIS analysis and public input processes – essentially re-opening the AA/DEIS phase - will cause delay and cost escalation to the project.

The Preliminary Engineering phase must proceed on a clearly defined alignment to keep the project on schedule for the 2014 opening. A decision regarding the proposed Loop is necessary to focus efforts on advancing the engineering and design work in a cost-effective manner and clarify the Central Corridor alignment for the broader community.

At its February 14 meeting, the Central Corridor Management Committee discussed the proposed Loop. Ramsey County Commissioner Toni Carter requested additional time for the Loop to be considered in light of RCRRA's communication contract. No other members spoke in favor of the Loop. They expressed the importance of principles in decision-making, that there is confusion and concern among the business community regarding the status of the Loop, that the project budget and schedule must be adhered to, that supporting the Loop because it ensures LRT will serve the Union Depot is not the right reason to support the Loop and that the project will be in jeopardy if the AA/DEIS process is re-opened.