

**Rush Line Corridor Task Force Meeting
January 15, 2009
Meeting Summary**

Members:

Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey Co. RRA	Therese Furman, North Branch
Dennis Hegberg, Washington Co. RRA	Paul Janssen, Pine City
Rhonda Sivarajah, Anoka Co. RRA	Linda Nanko –Feager, City of Wyoming
Ben Montzka, Chisago Co. RRA	
Renae Fry, Columbus	
Bill Blesener, Little Canada	
Will Rossbach, Maplewood	

Others:

Mike Rogers, Ramsey Co. RRA	Bill Malin, Chisago County
Linda Jungwirth, Asst. to Ramsey Co.	Joseph Scala, Hennepin County
Mark Sather, City of White Bear Lake	Bob Vockrodt, Mn/DOT
Ann Pung- Terwedo, Washington Co. RRA	David Christianson, Mn/DOT
Carol Becker, Metropolitan Council	Jim Schooter
Kate Garwood, Anoka County	
Julie Dresel, North Branch	

Victoria Reinhart, Chair, welcomed the group in the White Bear Lake Council Chambers and added that following the State Rail Plan presentation the Task Force would meet in upstairs conference room.

Intercity Rail / Statewide Rail Plan Presentation

Dave Christianson from Mn/DOT's office of Freight, Rail and Waterways gave a presentation on the Intercity Rail/Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan that Mn/DOT is developing. Mr. Christianson discussed the various types and speeds of passenger rail service, current Amtrak service, federal passenger rail programs, and Minnesota projects. He also discussed future possibilities for a nation network as proposed by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. He concluded the presentation with a discussion on upcoming project milestones and next steps. A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is included with these minutes.

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Reinhardt called the meeting to order at 3:05 p.m.

2. Summary of November 20, 2008 Meeting

A motion was made by Councilmember Fry to approve the November 20, 2008 meeting summary. Councilmember Furman seconded. Commissioner Sivarajah asked for some clarification to the minutes under item #4. She clarified that while she did say that the fare for the Route 288 was \$4.75 each way, it was not the only factor affecting the drop in ridership. Gas prices, which had dropped by half, were also affecting ridership. This change was added to the motion.

All in favor. **Approved**

3. Election of Officers

Vice Chair Montzka requested a motion for Chair. Commissioner Hegberg made a motion to elect Commissioner Reinhardt as the Chair of the Task Force. Seconded by Councilmember Fry, all in favor. **Approved**

Chair Reinhardt requested a motion for Vice Chair. Commissioner Montzka made a motion to elect Commissioner Hegberg as Vice Chair of the Task Force. Seconded by Commissioner Sivarajah, all in favor. **Approved**

4. Review of 2008 Accomplishments

Mr. Rogers distributed a copy of the Draft 2008 Rush Line Annual Report. He provided a summary of the document and asked for any changes that Task Force members would like to see incorporated into the document. Discussion ensued on potential changes with the Task Force asking that the following changes be made:

1. Add all members to the Corridor map
2. Clarify that the membership list on page three is for 2008
3. When discussing Route 288 clarify that it also stops in Columbus

A motion to accept the document was made by Councilmember Blesener. Seconded by Councilmember Fry, all in favor.

Councilmember Janssen introduced himself to the Task Force as the new representative for Pine City. He asked for clarification on a number of Corridor items that were discussed in the draft annual report. Following discussion on Councilmember Janssen's items, Chair Reinhardt informed members that if they had any additional comments or questions they should contact Mr. Rogers.

5. Legislative Update

a. State Update

Chair Reinhardt informed the Task Force that the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority is requesting \$1 million in State Bonding for improvements in the Rush Line Corridor. Commissioner Hegberg added that the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) is also requesting funding for the Corridor, but that it is for \$500,000 and not \$1 million.

Following discussion on the requests, Commissioner Montzka made a motion to request \$1 million in State Bond funds for infrastructure improvements in the Corridor, seconded by Councilmember Rossbach, all in favor. **Approved.**

b. Federal Update

Mr. Rogers distributed an updated memo from Lockridge Grindal and Nauen on the status of Federal activities impacting Twin Cities transitways. Mr. Rogers walked the members through the memo highlighting the upcoming stimulus package and projects that may be included in it.

Mr. Rogers next directed members to the memo in their packets regarding the reauthorization of the Rush Line Corridor in the next six-year federal transportation bill. He walked through the memo detailing the reasons for reauthorization. A motion was made by Councilmember Furman to seek reauthorization of the Rush Line Corridor as part of the next six-year federal transportation bill, Seconded by Renae Fry, all in favor. **Approved.**

6. Rush Line Commuter Coach

Chair Reinhardt discussed the proposed Rush Line Commuter Coach to St. Paul. Mr. Rogers reviewed the staff recommendation provided in the memo that was included with the agenda packet. He provided a map of the proposed routing noting that it originated at the Forest Lake Transit Center, utilized county Highway 61 and County Roads to get to the White Bear Lake Theatre park and ride prior to taking I-35E to downtown St. Paul. Once in St. Paul the route would travel on Cedar Street prior to ending at the Union Depot. He added that there are other options available including the addition of a stop at Running Aces Park and Ride in Columbus and different street routing in downtown St. Paul.

Councilmember Nanko-Feager asked why the line did not go to Hinckley. Mr. Rogers stated that the Alternative Analysis that is currently underway for the Corridor is looking at long-term options for serving Hinckley, but that the existing proposal would only bring bus service as far north as the Forest Lake Area.

Commissioner Sivarajah stated that Anoka County is unable to utilize Regional Rail funds to provide bus service along the Corridor, but that the County did identify funds that could be used to provide the service. She added that these funds were contingent upon a stop being provided in Anoka County. She also expressed her concern that the proposed fare of \$3 would require a higher subsidy and that the subsidy for the service should be as low as possible. Commissioner Sivarajah was also concerned that it would not be fair to the other longer-distance commuter routes that charged a greater fare of their passengers.

Chair Rhinehardt stated the Running Aces Park and Ride in Columbus could be added to the Request for Proposals so that it was a mandatory stop instead of optional. Mr. Rogers added that the \$3.00 fare would be the same as what Route 288 fare was when it was a demonstration project. Additionally, the proposed service will have more stops than Route 288 resulting in a longer travel time than a purely express route into downtown St. Paul.

Chair Rhinehardt asked if there was a need to include the fare in the Request for Proposals. Mr. Rogers said that it should be included. Carol Becker, Met Council, added that an option could be to reference the Regional Fare Policy which is currently \$3.00 for an express trip. This would also allow for the fare to change in the future in line with changes to the Regional Fare Policy.

Commissioner Hegberg added that Forest Lake and Hugo were discussing joining the Transit Taxing District. If they were to join and the route ultimately taken over by the Met Council, the fare would be based on the Regional Fare Policy.

Commissioner Sivarajah asked if the Metropolitan Council could absorb this cost of this service in the future. She raised the concern due to the current budget deficit that the Met Council was running. She asked if another option to fund the route would be to utilize Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding. Staff responded that CMAQ funding was an option, but it would likely delay the start of service due to CMAQ funding being awarded through a regional solicitation process. This process would begin this summer with grant awards being made in the winter. Additionally CMAQ funding is for years 2013 and 2014 and if awarded someone would have to advance the funds for the service if it was to start in 2009 or 2010. If no one advanced the funds, then service would need to wait until 2013 and 2014.

Commissioner Hegberg stated that the Running Aces Park and Ride in Columbus should be a stop in the Request for Proposals. Chair Reinhardt said that it made sense to start the service in Columbus and that it could be added to the Request for Proposals if the Task Force directed staff to do so.

Jim Schottmer questioned if the proposed transit line would be self sufficient. Chair Rhinehardt stated that this line is for the public good and that fares were not expected to fully cover the cost of the service. Commissioner Sivarajah added that the Task Force could explore ways to make the service more self-sufficient.

Chair Reinhardt clarified that the Task Force would be providing the following regarding the Rush Line Commuter Coach Service:

1. This is a one-year commitment from the start of the service
2. The Regional Rail Fare Policy will be used
3. The Task Force will seek additional funding for the long-term operation of the service through
 - a. Transit Taxing District
 - b. Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Funding
 - c. Counties Transit Improvement Board Funding
 - d. Economic Stimulus Package
 - e. Federal Funds.

Commissioner Montzka made a motion to approve the routing presented by staff with the addition of the stop at Running Aces Park and Ride in Columbus and for the fare to be consistent with the Regional Fare Policy. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Hegberg, all in favor. **Approved**

7. Rush Line Corridor Funds

Mr. Rogers directed the Task Force to the memo in the agenda packet regarding Rush Line Corridor funds. He discussed how the Task Force had utilized its funding to date and how much funding was still available. He also discussed how some of the funding was nearing its sunset date and needed to be spent on projects or it would be lost. To avoid the loss of funding, staff is proposing that a list of projects be developed that could be implemented along the Commuter Coach route. Projects may include bus shelters/transit stations, security upgrades, and transit advantages including bus pullouts.

A motion was made by Commissioner Hegberg to direct staff to develop a list of potential projects that would utilize the remaining state and federal funds to provide service enhancements to park and ride facilities that will be served by the commuter coach. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Blesener, all in Favor. **Approved**

8. Alternatives Analysis Update

Mike Rogers gave an update that ridership forecasts were being completed for the Corridor and that they would be provided to the Task Force along with Capital and Operating cost estimates at a future meeting.

9. Other

Being there was no further discussion the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.