

**Rush Line Corridor Task Force Meeting
July 16, 2009
Meeting Summary**

Members:

Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey Co. RRA	Therese Furman, North Branch
Dennis Hegberg, Washington Co. RRA	Paul Janssen, Pine City
Dick Lange, Alt., Anoka Co. RRA	Linda Nanko –Yeager, City of Wyoming
Renae Fry, Columbus	Diane Miller, Harris
Susan Young, Forest Lake	Doug Carlson, Pine County
Will Roszbach, Maplewood	Ben Montzka, Chisago County
Bryan Belisle, White Bear Lake	Bob Kermes, White Bear Township
Tom Weidt, Hugo	

Others:

Mike Rogers, Ramsey Co. RRA	Julie Dresel, North Branch
Dan Meyers, URS	Mike Robinson, Chisago County
April Manlapaz, URS	Linda Jungwirth, Ramsey County
Ann Pung- Terwedo, Washington Co. RRA	Joesph Scala, Hennepin County
Kate Garwood, Anoka County	Bob Vockrodt, Mn/DOT
Jack Forslund, WSB & Associates	Scott Thompson, Metro Transit
Joe Triplett, Chisago County	Connie Kozlak, Met Council
Mary Karlsson, Met Council	Arlene Mc Carthy, Met Council

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Reinhardt called the meeting to order at 3:40 p.m. The group members introduced themselves.

2. Summary of May 21, 2009 Meeting

Motion was made by Dennis Hegberg to approve the meeting summary of May 21 2009, Seconded by Linda Nanko-Yeager, All in favor. **Approved**

3. Legislative Update

Mike Rogers began by giving an overview of the \$21 million in state bonding provided to the Metropolitan Council for transitways. The Metropolitan Council provided a draft list of projects to receive funding from the state bonding to the Counties Transit Improvement Board as required by statute. This list included:

- Central Corridor - \$8.5 million
- State Capitol Area - \$313,000
- Cedar Avenue - \$2.877 million
- Maplewood Mall Park and Ride Expansion - \$3.8 million
- Southwest Corridor - \$5 million

CTIB discussed the list of projects and had questions on the relevance of the Maplewood Mall project to the Rush Line Corridor including a concern that the project arose on short notice. Discussion followed on the status of the Maplewood Mall project and its relation to the Rush Line Corridor. Task Force Members also expressed their support for geographical balance to the distribution of bonding funds. Following the discussion, the Task Force directed staff to develop a letter to be sent to CTIB providing a background on the Rush Line Corridor, the Task Force, its previous commitments to the Maplewood Mall Transit Center, and support for additional funding for the project without identifying a specific dollar amount.

Mr. Rogers reviewed the Federal Update memo provided in the agenda packet. He highlighted that House committees had their first mark up of the transportation reauthorization bill. This bill currently provides \$450 billion for surface transportation including \$337.4 billion for highways and \$99.8 billion for

public transit. The bill would also create a National Infrastructure Bank to pay for projects that improve mobility in metropolitan areas, advance high speed rail, and fund projects of a national significance. The passage of the bill by the September 30th, 2009 expiration of SAFETEA-LU is unlikely given the 18 month extension of the current bill endorse by the Senate and Administration. This extension will give the Administration and Congress time to focus on health care reform. Mr. Rogers next discussed the Fiscal year 2010 appropriations bills working through congress. The House bill includes funding for the following Minnesota Projects:

Bottineau: \$250,000
Minneapolis: \$400,000
Northern Lights: \$500,000
North Star: \$200,000
I-94: \$250,000

Mr. Rogers provided an update on High Priority Projects (HPP) submitted by the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority. These requests included funding for the Union Depot and High Speed Rail and reauthorization for Rush Line and Riverview Corridors. Any HPP funding/authorization would be part of the next six year transportation bill.

4. Alternative Analysis Update-URS

Dan Meyers, URS introduced himself and updated the Task Force on the open houses held for the Rush Line Alternative Analysis study. Approximately 30 people attended the three open houses. Questionnaires were distributed at the meetings for attendees to fill out and turn in or to fill out in mail in later. Overall, the sentiment of those in attendance was supportive of transit improvements. However, based on the open house location, the mode preference was different. In North Branch attendees preferred to have Bus Rapid Transit over Light Rail Transit as this option would directly serve the city. In White Bear Lake LRT received more support, though questions were raised about its relationship with the existing trail, impact on property values, and its proximity to an elementary school. Mr. Myers added that these concerns could be addressed as part of future analysis done on the Corridor. Additionally, all the comments received at the open houses will be compiled and included as part of the final report.

Mr. Meyers went on to discuss the upcoming schedule for the project including an August Study Team meeting where staff will review the draft final report in preparation for its presentation to the Task Force in September and that a Final Report would be presented for approval at the November meeting. Chair Reinhardt added that the Final Report will include a recommendation that BRT to Forest Lake along I-35E/35 and LRT to White Bear Lake along the RCRRA right-of-way move forward into an Advanced Alternatives Analysis. The Final Report will also be sent to the Federal Transit Administration.

Will Rossbach stated that the postcards distributed to some residents along the Corridor indicated that the Task Force would be making a decision on keeping or removing the trail at its August meeting. These postcards got the attention of Maplewood residents and though not distributed by the Task Force were helpful in getting people interested in the open houses so that correct information could be given to them. Mr. Rossbach asked about the process to proceed and the timetable. Mike Rogers stated that after Northstar Opens this year, the next regional priority will be to complete the Central Corridor which is scheduled to open in 2014. Following Central, it is likely that Southwest Corridor will be next as it is the furthest along in the implementation process. After Southwest, the regional priorities are not set, but it typically takes 3-4 years to construct a transitway. Many things could happen between now and then to speed up the transitway implementation process so that multiple corridors can be constructed at once. CTIB is proof of this since two years ago it and its dedicated funding source didn't exist. Mr. Rogers reiterated that following the Alternative Analysis the next step will be to compete an Advanced Alternative Analysis.

5. Rush Line Commuter Coach Update

Chair Reinhardt discussed the proposed demonstration service to St. Paul. It has recently come to the attention of staff that the federal funds identified for the service may not be eligible to be used for the service. Currently the Task Force has identified \$196,000 to pay for 80% of the lease cost for the bus

service. While this is an eligible use of federal funds, the earmark language associated with the Rush Line funds may make it an ineligible use. Staff is working with Mn/DOT, FTA, and the legislative delegation to determine the eligible uses for the funds. Until a final answer is known, the start of the service will be delayed.

Chair Reinhardt recommended that the RFP be distributed to Mn/DOT for review and that the project continue to move forward. This will give all those involved in the project a better understanding of the administrative issues and running of the service. We will eventually resolve the funding issue. No action was taken.

Mr. Rogers added that as the service gets closer to implementation a number of other items will need to be approved by the Task Force. These include a grant agreement with Mn/DOT to access federal funds and a fare reimbursement with the Metropolitan Council. Dick Lange added that there is a state law relating to the fares that Disabled Veterans can be charged.

Renae Fry asked about the language change and the timetable to get the buses up and running. It is very important that this service begin as soon as possible.

6. Arlene McCarthy, Met Council Met Council Role for Service

Arlene McCarthy, Director of Transportation Services at Met Council gave an update on the Metropolitan Council's role in transit services. She began by stating that the Rush Line Corridor should be looked at like any transportation corridor in the metro area. She thanked Renae Fry and Susan Young for keeping the Forest Lake route going.

Ms. McCarthy discussed the upcoming budget deficit for the Met Council. In the next state budget there is a forecast deficit of \$62.4 million dollars because of a decrease in the receipts from the vehicle sales tax and other revenue sources. Additionally, new funding will be needed to pay for the operations of Northstar and Hiawatha Corridors. She added that the existing Met Council budget is \$6 million less than originally budgeted which may impact the Livable Communities Demonstration Accounts, the Tax Base Revitalization Accounts and, those levies for transit operations that sunset in 2011.

The Council's budget challenges include unstable revenue sources, the economy's impact on ridership (currently down 6-10%), committed service increases, volatility in fuel pricing, health care costs. Given these challenges and the forecast \$6 billion SFY2012-13 deficit the Met Council's budget shortfall will be hard to solve. To address near-term budget issues, the Council will utilize one time budget opportunities include acceleration of the MVST share, federal stimulus funds, flexibility to position levy revenue. Longer-term budget challenges need to be address systematically due to a systematic imbalance in the state's budget.

Renae Fry sated that funding for the Rush Line is important. She thanked everyone in the room for their hard work on transit.

7. Other

Since there was no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.