

## Union Park District Council Transportation Committee Meeting

Monday, 09.11.2023, 6:30pm - 8:30pm, Via Zoom

**Committee Members Present:** Jerome Benner, Scott Berger, KC Cox, James Johnson, April King, Lisa Mueller, Lisa Nelson, Barb Thoman, Mary Morse Marti, Austin Wu

**Committee Members Absent:** Amy Gage, Sean Ryan, Allen Saunders, Barb Thoman

**Guests:** Melissa Barnes (MnDOT), Izzy Goldfarb (MnDOT); UPDC Board members: Sarah Dvorak, Kirsten Fryer, Rachel Callanan

**Staff:** Leah Timberlake Sullivan

### 1. Agenda and Minutes

- September agenda and August minutes approved unanimously

### 2. Follow-ups and UPDC updates

- Leah reminding attendees about Ice Cream, Peanut Butter & Jam, with transportation committee present.
  - a. Cargo bikes will be available for viewing
  - b. MnDOT will also be available with a table
  - c. Children will be making signs to celebrate neighborhood
- ICBPJ needs more volunteers, short on volunteers for setup given the number of tables
- CLUED has organized 1% sales tax forum, announcement coming soon – Mayor Carter will be on the panel
- STAR grants, looking for path on branded bike racks for UPDC placemaking
- Ward 4 Forum, Ward 1 Forum + League of Women Voters (September 28th)
- Midway Peace Park Fall Fun Day (September 30)

### 3. Rethinking I-94 (Melissa Barnes & Izzy Goldfarb)

- Project location: Highway 55 to Marion Street (by Capitol)
- Goal is to improve mobility for people and goods across the corridor, for all modes, while enhancing safety
- Livability goals were adopting into project
- Environmental process runs until 2027, approvals and design in 2027, construction in 2028
- Currently in “Scoping Decision Document” phase of environmental process
- Would likely be many projects done over a series of years
- There is currently no identified funding for this project, would happen later
- Interchange / intersection modifications not determined yet
- Committed to walkability and bikeability
- Reconnect Rondo included as part of project given federal funding
- General Maintenance A, B: Existing infrastructure; A is maintaining existing, B replaces infrastructure to allow transit on shoulders
- At-Grade A: lower speed road, with BRT, and traffic intersections, would likely be some grade separation but that would be TBD, transit in center lanes, current frontage roads would be incorporated
- At-Grade B: Same as above, moves BRT to outside
- Local / Regional Roadways: four lane in trench, buses on shoulder, limited access for entrance and exit, rest of vehicles would on local system on slower speed

- Reduced Freeway A: Two general general purpose lanes, plus lane with EZ Pass / BRT, either with or without retaining wall
- Reconfigure Freeway A: Three general purpose lanes, one EZ Pass
- Expanded Freeway A: Rebuild freeway, four general purpose lanes, plus EZ Pass / managed
- Expanded Freeway B: As A, but EZ Pass is instead general purpose
- Updated website and survey, closing date is October 31st
- Rondo Community Event, ICBPJ, other upcoming meetings with Chambers of Commerce
- Are all proposals within MnDOT right of way, or would MnDOT have to acquire land?
  - None of these proposals are to scale, we don't know if it would impact surrounding land
- What has been presented does not have any evaluations yet, we need to do further modeling
- About half of Union Park is within the project area
- Comment: It's very hard to make comments on the project without any of the pros or cons on each of the options
  - There is no set criteria on what is most important
- How was transit (BRT) decided over regional rail (not light rail), when lane expansion was kept on the table?
  - At-grade alternative came out of scope from public and local government feedback
  - LRT was eliminated as ridership too low, that may have eliminated regional rail?
  - Road removal was also eliminated, as was lower speed limits (as they have to happen with road redesign)
  - We do have a full transit report on what was modeled
  - MnDOT is required to evaluate expanded highway options as part of planning process
- Comment: Merriam Park started as a commuter parkway, used to be able to get to downtown Minneapolis and Saint Paul in only 11 minutes, light rail with a lot of stops isn't the same as LRT.
- At what point in the process start to be taken out of consideration?
  - Alternatives will be eliminated as we move through modeling, possibly as soon as next summer
- Will the evaluation and study require additional new traffic studies, the phase 1 studies are pretty old
  - A new full traffic study is possible, new numbers would be useful, we have new street lights that will affect that
  - Looking at potential freight study
- MnDOT does not weight criteria?
  - We can't meet every evaluation criteria
  - There will be trade-offs
  - In ways of safety, yes? Mobility of all users is important, walking and biking will show up in different way
- What happens with the frontage roads if the highways are kept?
  - Not entirely part of the project, maintenance may not be acceptable, they are undefined and fast in a strange way
  - The expanded highway would look at the frontage roads
- Is there a criteria that directly addresses climate change?
  - We have greenhouse gas evaluation criteria, noise pollution, public health
- Is VMT reduction part of the goals?
  - It will be part of the analysis, MnDOT has a VMT reduction goal

- Comment: When I-94 was built, a lot of buildings were demolished as well as commercial corridors, does MnDOT include the ability for right-of-way to be returned as part of the process?
  - We have laws we have to abide by when we sell land, we also don't control zoning
- Comments: It's really hard to have an ability to make comments without details like additional crossing that affect my life more
  - NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)
- Bridge condition (and the cost of replacing them) part of the evaluation criteria
- MnDOT will get back to the committee on where safety analysis stops and starts, especially given high speeds leaving exits
- Costs tend to be very very high level, mostly as an awareness piece and not a decision piece
- Comments: How are municipality concerns (traffic flow, etc.) handled when in conflict with MnDOT evaluation criteria?
  - We talk to the city a lot, weighs pretty heavily in our decisions
- Comments: Is it really a "rethinking" of I-94 if we are primarily considering options that preserve the status quo?
  - There are options that reduce the highway and make at-grade, the name comes from our outreach
- Comment: The "rethinking" page talks about how we made a mistake to bulldoze Rondo, it really doesn't seem like we are undoing much of our mistakes. How is MnDOT going to help those people?
  - To help those people, we have to get through it. We listened for two years, developed the liveability framework.
- Even after vision is done, we may need to reopen environmental evaluation process
- Comment: Is there a point after which you couldn't go and add back in rail options? Especially with rail from Minneapolis to Duluth, has Amtrak been part of the discussion?
  - When we met with the City of Saint Paul, they asked if we could leave room for rail as a what-if
  - MnDOT does not see this corridor as a rail option any time soon
  - Can look into whether or not Amtrak has been part of the discussion
- rethinkingi94project.dot@state.mn.us

### 3. Open Forum

- Follow-up on I-94:
  - a. Surprise that there seems to be some change around MnDOT caring about more than simply building roads
  - b. Very little feedback seems to involve "true rethinking"
  - c. It's not clear whether MnDOT is considering induced demand
  - d. People are thinking more about "today" and not connections or possibilities for what might happen – would like to hear some visionary, informed people
  - e. Alternatives are not to scale, so makes it difficult to evaluate
  - f. UPDC has a responsibility to amplify community feelings
  - g. Important to invite people who can come and talk to us about what it was like before the highway
  - h. Bethlehem Lutheran is offering to host a discussion about I-94
  - i. Would love to get recordings of the people above

### 6. Additional Follow-ups

- Mike Hahm has committed to bi-weekly cleanup all the way to the fence line

- a. Have brought a dumpster on-site
  - b. Hoping to have city enact external accountability system
- World Trash Cleanup, with Allianz Field
  - a. Having flags so you can call for sharps cleanup
- Wabash sidewalk: come to September 26th I-94 walk, see sidewalk gap
- Hoping to run pilot polling program with Wes at Black Hart, asking how people transport themselves in UPDC
- Capitol Improvement Budget projects - start thinking about ideas

Meeting adjourned at 8:30pm.

### Next Meeting:

Next meeting Monday October 9th, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm via videoconference.

### Additional answers sent post-meeting via email, from Melissa Barnes (Rethinking I-94 Project Director):

There were a couple questions last night that I owe this group answers on. Here is some more of that information:

- There was a question about safety analyses beyond the freeway/interchanges:
  - *We looked at safety a quarter of a mile north and south along the connections to 94. Our evaluation criteria has a higher-level review of crashes at this early Scoping Stage. We also have a qualitative analysis if the alternative will address number and severity of crashes along the corridor. For walking and biking related items we have distance between crossings and travel times. In the Tier 1 analysis we will look at safety on the intersecting streets more clearly – that includes crashes and crash rate reduction and crash cost reduction. See attached spreadsheet of exact measures.*
- There was a question about climate evaluation criteria.
  - *We are looking at greenhouse gases as part of the project and there is a new state law that may impact this project as well.*
- The transit report is large but I am happy to share it if folks want it. I'd prefer to send it to one email to not break everyone's email. Let me know if you'd like it.
- There was a question of whether we'd coordinated with Amtrak
  - *We have not coordinated directly with Amtrak. Our leads on the transit study are out at the moment and I know that they did coordinate with our statewide rail group. I am waiting for them to be back in to provide more information.*