

Union Park District Council Transportation Committee Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 14, 2022 , 6:30-8:00 p.m., Via Zoom

Committee Members Present: Scott Berger (co-chair), Gene Christenson, Amy Gage, Debbie Meister, Lisa Nelson (co-chair), Sean Ryan, Barb Thoman, Ben Swanson-Hysell, Claire Warren

Committee Members Absent: Mike Mechtenberg, Rob Vanasek, Dan Elenbass, Jerry Clendenin.

Guests: Henry Parker (board member), April King (board member), Jane McClure (The Villager), KC Cox.

Staff: Leah Timberlake Sullivan.

1. Agenda and Minutes

- Meister moved to approve, Gage seconded motion to approve tonight's agenda and minutes from the January meeting. Both Motions approved unanimously.
- Meeting started with introductions and a committee overview.

2. Open Forum

- none

3. Follow-ups: UPDC board and committee meetings, city actions

Yum! Parking lot status update

- Yum! We got a written response from Joe Peris at Ryan in response to the letter sent by UPDC. We would like to find out a bit more about what action they're planning to take. Mr. Peris noted a list of reasons why this happened in the first place, but no explanation or plan for the future. Will revisit in the future.

Student Overlay

- Board voted to uphold CLUED vote for variance request for student housing overlay district. City council will hear on Wednesday on whether students will be allowed to stay until May.

I-94 Update.

- Project remains ongoing. No significant updates.
- An I-94 consultant company conducting interviews, Berger and Thoman had volunteered, can take up to 45 minutes for each interview. If you're interested on a more individual basis, look up "Rethinking I-94" at MnDOT.
- There has been a hint that MnDot might be considering freeway removal (boulevard).

CIB.

- Nelson and Berger each submitted ideas to St. Paul Capital Improvement Budget request site. Every other year the city lets you send in ideas to make capital improvements. This time the theme is crime prevention through environmental design, i.e., things to make people feel more safe in the city.
- For this process, the city has a million dollars to spend on selected ideas.

4. Ramsey County Transit Study -- *Scott Mareck, Ramsey County*

- Mr. Mareck provided a summary of Riverview Blue Line connection study. Study got off ground due to Riverview modern streetcar, from 7th to Downtown, out to MSP, and out to mall of america. Modern streetcar being analyzed, scheduled for roughly 2030.
- Discussion of historic corridor options, West 7th won out over Ford corridor for Riverview. As part of the decision, it was determined that there was a need for extra transit development in the Ford (Highland Bridge) site. Lots of activity with Blue Line, plus aBRT. Identified long term what we might need in addition to these major transit ways. And to connect neighborhoods.
- This led to resolutions being approved by Riverview PAC and Ramsey County, and Saint Paul, led to Riverview study. We hired Ramsey County (and firm) to do study. Shows project duration from Nov 2021 to May 2023.
- Next, there will be a process for mid to long term, 10-25 year time frame, looking at needs in addition to Blue Line and A line. Do not anticipate any major rail based transit ways coming out of this process. Improving fixed routes, enhancing aBRT lines. Maybe another aBRT line, bikeways, etc. Will go through the process of developing over summer-fall, then evaluate, Jan-May of 2023 will finish and identify recommendations and next steps. No assumption that they will recommend additional service.
- Ramsey County will meet with Highland and Longfellow to get word out about study. Have set dates for virtual open houses (Mar. 31, 2022 at 7:00 p.m.). More info to come.
- Shows flow chart of decision-making process and of the project stakeholders. Shows website just made live “Ramsey County multimodal planning,” under that find “Blue Line riverview connection study.” Will stay in touch and make sure that UPDC gets a virtual link, but it will also be on the website.
- Berger inquired into “micro-transit” or “micro mobility.” Ramsey County will look at how people get from where they live to these transit routes. Making sure there are adequate sidewalks and bikeways. Looking at all last mile connection modalities. All options are being considered.
- Gage notes that she represents Saint Thomas, and they are looking at Highland Bridge site for possible athletic activities, but we’ve heard about concerns for traffic. How will this study impact it and when can we weigh in?
- This isn’t addressing roadway traffic, only mid to long term transit needs. For specific questions about the Ford site, he would recommend talking to city planning staff.
- Nelson inquires: when looking at the future of transit use, do you look at climate goals and shifting from cars? Climate change and greenhouse gas reduction are being considered. We look at communities’ growth plans, city growth plans, transit and land use plans. All of those are considered when doing analysis. Plus how COVID has changed people’s driving and transit behaviors.
- Swanson-Hysell thanks Mr. Mareck. Wonders why Ramsey County is hosting this, instead of Met Council, etc.? Origins of this are Riverview modern streetcar study,

decided they still needed to look at Ford Parkway due to transit demand. Because of that, Ramsey County leadership took initiative to look at. Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority budgeted funds to do study, hence the origins. The Ramsey County issued a RFP. We worked with consultants and cities to make it a joint effort, financially by Ramsey County.

- Nelson asks for clarification about funding. At this time, there is no funding for whatever they come up with. This is about deciding if we need to do something. Like many RC projects, they have unmet project needs and have to apply for grants for, bond, etc.
- Parker inquires about north-south connections between West 7th and Ford Parkway, is it bike or transit, the only offroad dedicated bike lanes are Mississippi Blvd, or Ayd Mill, or 83 on Lexington, 87 on Cleveland. Difficult to get to West 7th from Northern. He hopes this study will take a look at that. That's a common thread, about north-south transit, down to West 7 corridor, we're definitely looking at that.
- Berger inquires about B-line aBRT. Seems like it might be transformative. Bikes, buses, etc. interactions. Talks about bike usage on streetcar, very excited to hear more.
- Mr. Mareck offers to come to more meetings during studies, can provide updates, encourages to attend the virtual open house.
- Berger hopes for return of transit with the end of COVID. Nobody is quite sure yet. Lots more WFM, we assume a gradual return to normal after we pull out of COVID. TBD what that will look like.

5. Metro Transit Zero-Emission Bus Transition Plan -- Daniel Pfeiffer, Zan Associates

- Mr. Pfeiffer states that he is working with Metro Transit to work on Zero Emission Bus plan. Legislature placed it as a requirement in statute last session, MT started working last session, and submitted plan to Legislature on Friday. It's a living document. Part of it is that zero emission technology is very new. Still learning.
- Plan outlines guiding principles, milestones and goals, long-term strategies. Bus types, charger types, locations.
- Zero tailpipe emission is battery electric, or hydrogen fuel buses. With our climate, aux diesel heaters can be used to keep bus warm in winter to extend battery range. H2 fuel cell is even newer, Metro Transit is focusing on battery electric (BEV) buses.
- In North America, about 3% of buses are zero emission, very few are hydrogen fuel cell. Longest running fleet is just hitting 10 years, federal funding standards say buses should last 12-14 years.
- Bus block is an operational unit of measure that describes what a bus can do in a day. 672 weekday blocks covering 145 routes, from 10-345 miles in length. Average is 132. Range on buses isn't to 345, so looking at shorter blocks. Shows some blocks.

- Guiding principles: less about propulsion, more about fully in use, few issues, surveying our riders. We need to partner with Xcel for charging, equity and investment, focusing on areas with financial equity, not sending out buses that break down. Plus fiscal impact.
- Benefits: Less fuel, fewer greenhouse gasses, quieter, more comfortable.
- Challenges: Tech readiness, fleet lifecycle, facility changes. Time on charger.
- Unsure if Feds will change rules from 14 years, 10 years is the longest operation in existence. We had challenges with battery electric in the first two years, chargers were first serial numbers from manufacturer, lots of lessons learned. They are back in service after lots of fixes. Helping out other transit authorities.
- We have many inequities in the Twin Cities, we want to make sure we target them since they're going to be most affected by climate change. Created equity score calculation, population characteristics by environmental factors.
- Created Met Council Equity Considerations Dataset, density, zero-car households, years of poverty, BIPOC %, heat island effect, lifetime risk from air toxins.
- Of 300 survey results, 89% rated transition to zero-emission as important. MT prioritizes highest density, air quality concerns, and ridership routes. Should consider noise, food deserts, etc.
- Asked people to rank factors, cancer, density, and BIPOC % rated most important. We weighted by those votes. Identified which areas to prioritize by ZEB by bus blocks, largely covers dense city areas. Will put buses on bus blocks in those areas best served. Can learn more at metrotransit.org/electric-buses. We own 8, purchasing 8 40-foot buses, beginning in 2023. From the new garage near Target Field. Then the C-line. Eventual purchase up to 130 buses between now and 2027. Depends on how the first 8 do.
- KC Cox inquires about safety related to battery-electric buses in general. Warren states that community service officers may be hired, but not related to electric buses per se.
- King asks about battery constraints. Long lead time buffers MT from battery shortages.
- Thoman appreciates the provided map.
- Swanson-Hysell is curious if you can go into route planning, are super long routes not feasible? There are kind of two answers - 8 go into new routes, as more go into new areas, operational changes would perhaps change how blocks work. Of blocks in the system, about half would meet requirements for electric.
- Swanson-Hysell inquires about how much charging is needed for an entire bus block day of usage. C line has on route, future buses are charged in garages. Comes down to Xcel Energy needs and time to build service for on-route. Much easier to service in garages. Overhead bus charging is possible..
- MT owns over 900 buses, at 12-14 years for life expectancy. Don't want to get rid of usable buses. A number of buses we don't own but don't necessarily operate due to less transit service with COVID? If it goes back up, then buses go back onto the system.

- Swanson-Hysell asks will there be plans to change fleet type? Like double deckers? MT owns from 40-ft buses up to coach buses, for express. Also Diesel Hybrids, a lot comes down to manufacturer. RFP for how buses options get delivered, articulated buses, etc.
- King asks when will fossil fuels be gone entirely? Depends on technology advancement, reliability, in 2007 they added particulate trap filters, 2010 added NOX filters. Based on MPCA, buses account for 1% of GHG emissions in MN, balance of cost and technologies. No hard dates provided.
- Berger appreciates the visit and encourages others to consider the potential of rapidly advancing electrification technology moving forward.

6. Wabash Avenue Sidewalk Inquiry -- All

- For Wabash Ave, there is an effort ongoing to get a sidewalk gap filled by Lake Monster. Not many neighbors to talk to in the immediate area. Would we survey businesses? As Barb was letting us know offline, MT maybe hasn't responded yet?
- Thoman sent a letter to MT and hopes they'd be supportive given that they want people to walk, maybe they could use their money when the city couldn't. We got a letter back from the city, Mr. Lee, not a high priority area for the city, don't have a lot of money for sidewalk installation. Concern is that it might take the city a long time.
- Warren: There was a meeting about it, haven't heard any update, maybe update the project managers and nudge them? Preliminary concern is that we're actively bringing buses in, concerns about safety of pedestrians, water cooler talk. We'd expect a formal letter at a certain point. We should follow up.
- Nelson adds that we should wait for MT first.
- Thoman notes that it might be worth sharing with Lake Monster about our sidewalk advocacy? There's nowhere to walk, no signage, we'd need signage.
- Nelson adds that she would rather walk on a sidewalk instead of the street. Asks if Thoman can coordinate with S Anthony Park?
- Warren: Wako sent original communication. We can ask him to follow up.
- Thoman states we're not asking the city, we're asking MT directly, even though the city responded to us. Berger adds that it's good to know that the city isn't opposed. Number of other tenants in that complex. If that matters to process, we'd probably get as many as we need.
- If MT is making the argument that buses entering and exiting is important, DT is full of similar situations.
- Ryan notes that this is outside UPDC boundarie. Berger adds that this is a sort of no-man's land.

7. Approve 2022 Work plan

- Berger introduces work plan that was previously sent out and asks for questions or clarifications. If no comments or concerns we can put approval to a vote:
- Thoman moves to approve the work plan for 2022. Meister seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

7. Planning for March E-newsletter and next committee meeting - *All*

- Gage will write up proposed 2022 committee work to encourage others in the Union Park community to join our committee.

8. Adjourn

Next Meeting:

Next meeting is March 14, 2022.