



Southwest Transitway Meeting Notes

Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)
March 19, 2008, 8:00 to 9:30 AM
St. Louis Park City Hall

PAC Members and Alternates

Gail Dorfman	Hennepin County, PAC Chair
Jean White	Edina
Jim Brimeyer	St. Louis Park
Dan Duffy	Twin West Chamber
Jim Benshoof	Eden Prairie Chamber
Ralph Remington	Minneapolis
Robert Lilligren	Minneapolis
Amy Vennewitz	Metropolitan Council
Brian Willette	Cedar Lake Park Association
Bob Corrick	Midtown Community Works Partnership
John DeWitt	Midtown Community Works Partnership
Brian Lamb	Metro Transit
Kathy Nelson	Eden Prairie
LuAnn Toliver	Minnetonka
Nancy Tyra-Lukens	Southwest Transit

Other Attendees

Katie Walker	Hennepin County Study Manager
Meg McMonigal	St. Louis Park
Elise Durbin	Minnetonka
Kim Malrick	Minneapolis
Art Higinbotham	CIDNA
George Puzak	Mpls
Robert Vockrodt	Mn/DOT
Ellen Hacker	Hennepin County
Blair Tremere	Hennepin County
Jim Aiken	Barr Engineering
Steve Mahowald	Metro Transit
Kathie Doty	KLD Consulting
Adele Hall	KLD Consulting

I. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Gail Dorfman, SW PAC Chair, opened the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves. She reported on a recent Hennepin County public hearing to solicit comments on the proposed ¼ cent sales tax increase for transit; comments received were overwhelmingly positive. Commissioner Dorfman also reported that \$500,000 for Southwest is included in the House and Senate versions of the bonding bill. Nancy Tyra-Lukens encouraged members to contact their Hennepin County commissioners if they support the ¼ cent sales tax for transit.

II. Legislative Update

Katie Walker presented an update on our current federal funding request. Southwest Transitway has a \$1 million dollar request in the federal appropriations bill, which is almost to the conference committee now. Commissioner Dorfman mentioned that since the bill with the sales tax for transit was passed, there have been misconceptions about whether State funding will be needed for transitway projects. Katie Walker explained that 50% of funding for the Southwest Transitway will have to come from local sources: 10% from the local rail authorities, 30% from the sales tax, and 10% from state sources (likely bonding). This local support is necessary to secure the matching 50% from the federal government.

Katie Walker updated the Committee on communications with the FTA. Hennepin County has received comments from the FTA on the Alternatives Analysis documents. The County responded to the comments and were given the go-ahead for issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Katie Walker also provided an update on the SW Community Advisory Committee work to date. This committee is focusing their attention on possible community impacts specific to their neighborhoods, helping to identify impacts and recommend mitigation actions if needed. A list of possible environmental and community issues was prepared and will be attached to the RFP for the DEIS.

Other discussion ensued before returning to the main agenda: Art Higinbotham asked about how issues will be formulated for study through the DEIS. Commissioner Dorfman responded that the purpose of the DEIS is to address issues raised by communities. She also discussed a recent resolution passed by the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission that references the SW project and issues of **access to Minneapolis residents living in the heavily minority neighborhoods**. Commissioner Dorfman indicated that she plans to offer to present information about the Southwest project to the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission at their April or May meeting. Bob Corrick indicated that he had read the resolution and did not think the Commission had considered alternative views before acting. He suggested that a connector along the Midtown Greenway could serve transit dependent neighborhoods along that route, and stressed the importance of considering light rail as a part of a larger metropolitan system.

Mr. Higinbotham offered that the Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhood Association (CIDNA) is preparing a proposal for another route ("3E"). Commissioner Dorfman replied that all alternatives suggested will be looked at in the context of the DEIS scoping process. Council Member Remington indicated that he understands the concerns raised by CIDNA but agrees that we must take a system view. He said that it will be important to identify funding sources for a streetcar to connect Southwest and Hiawatha via the Greenway. Kathy Nelson indicated that the interlining feature of Alternative A is very important to the suburbs, and pointed out that, since there are 41,000 jobs in Eden Prairie, trains could be just as full leaving Minneapolis as going towards downtown. Council Member Lilligren supported Commissioner Dorfman's plan to make a presentation to the Minneapolis Civil Rights Commission, saying that the discussion at the meeting where the resolution was passed was lacking balance. He offered to participate when the presentation is set up.

LuAnn Toliver asked Katie Walker to present an estimated timeline for the project. Katie Walker responded with a best case scenario. First quarter 2008: RFPs for consultants on the DEIS will be issued. She anticipates 5-7 local and national firms will submit proposals. Representatives from the cities, County, Met Council, and Metro Transit will sit on the review committee for the proposals. Scoping meetings will take place in late May or June. There will be a minimum of 3 meetings where staff will present to citizens and relevant agencies such as the DNR and MnPCA. Jim Brimeyer asked if the DEIS will be prepared just for the 3 alternatives recommended through the Alternatives Analysis. Ms. Walker responded that, at the DEIS scoping meetings, staff will present information on the work undertaken to date, and how the 3 alternatives were developed. Community members can suggest that other route alternatives be studied, and the obligation of the County is to respond to those suggestions. The County will work with the Southwest Technical Advisory Committee to develop a recommendation to the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee. The SW PAC will recommend to the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority, and the HCRRRA will work with the Metropolitan Council and the

Federal Transit Administration to make a determination as to whether to include suggested routes to the DEIS or not. Commissioner Dorfman asked when a recommendation would be coming to the SW PAC. Ms. Walker responded possibly by July or August. Jim Benshoof underscored that the scoping process is very important; from that point forward, no major changes in route will be considered. He added that the scoping process is concluded with a formal Scoping Report.

In response to questions about the DEIS, Ms. Walker indicated that the technical consultants will be directed to begin their analysis with the Minneapolis alternatives. Under the best case scenario, we may have a decision on the Minneapolis alignment by the end of 2008. The DEIS will be finished mid-late 2009, Preliminary Engineering finished in 2010, Final Design in 2012, and construction in 2013-2015.

Dan Duffy asked if, with delays to Central, the Southwest Alignment will be able to stay on track. Katie Walker responded that federal funding will be much more difficult to secure. The Twin Cities region would have to prove to the FTA that the area has the funds to support two projects at once. A discussion of public private partnerships and local fund raising options ensued. Some consultants think PPP is the way to go, as in Denver. Railroad authorities are limited by law in the amount that they can contribute. An option is to bond and front money for a project that will eventually get federal funds.

III. Station Master Planning

RFPs for station master plans in the suburban locations will be issued soon. RFPs for Minneapolis locations will not be issued until alignment is decided. The consultants will be asked to examine the potential for development in a half-mile radius around each station and the accessibility of the station by multi modes of transit.

Bob Corrick asked Katie Walker to address mitigation. The approach suggested by the FTA is to avoid, minimize impact, then mitigate if necessary. Cities must agree with the mitigation plans. At the end of the DEIS processes there will be a mitigation plan and budget. Commissioner Dorfman mentioned the necessity of considering freight through St. Louis Park as a mitigation issue.

IV. Closing

It was agreed that the minutes from the PAC and CAC meetings would be shared. The next SW PAC meeting will be held on May 21, 2008 at St. Louis Park. By then scoping meetings will be scheduled and DEIS consultants chosen.