



## Meeting Minutes

Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)  
February 11, 2009, 8:00 to 9:30 AM  
St. Louis Park City Hall

### PAC Members and Alternates

Robert Lilligren, Acting Chair	City of Minneapolis	Member
Jan Callison	Hennepin County Commissioner	Member
Sue Sanger	City of St. Louis Park	Alternate
Jim Benschhoff	Eden Prairie Chamber	Member
Amy Vennewitz	Met. Council	Alternate
Jean White	City of Edina	Member
LuAnn Toliver	Minnetonka	Alternate
Dan Duffy	Twin West Chamber	Member
George Puzak	Cedar Lake Park Association	Alternate
John DeWitt	Midtown Community Works Partnership	Alternate
Ralph Remington	City of Minneapolis	Member
Travis Bunch	Minneapolis Regional Chamber	Alternate
Bob Corrick	Midtown Community Works Partnership	Member
Gary Aiken	Twin West Chamber	Alternate
Tony Wagner	City of Minnetonka	Member
Brian Willette	Cedar Lake Park Association	Member
George Puzak	Cedar Lake Park Association	Alternate
Bob McFarlin	Met. Council	Member
Bruce Rowan	City of Hopkins	Member

### Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Members & Agency Staff

Katie Walker	Hennepin County Study Manager
Steven Hay	City of Minneapolis
Regina Herron	City of Eden Prairie
Meg McMonigal	City of St. Louis Park
Steve Stadler	City of Hopkins
Adele Hall	Hennepin County



## Consultant Team

Oscar Gonzalez      HDR Engineering  
Ann Wolff              KLD Consulting

**Other Attendees** Art Higinbotham (Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhood Association (CIDNA)), Kim Malrick (City of Minneapolis), Kerri Pearce-Ruch (Hennepin County), Janet Jeremiah (City of Eden Prairie), Jackie Cherryhomes (Cedar Shores Townhomes), Thatcher Imboden (Uptown Association), Anita Barnett (Perkins and Will), Jason Flohrs and Bill Schreiber (Messerli & Kramer).

## **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Acting Chair, Minneapolis City Councilmember Robert Lilligren opened the floor for approval of the meeting minutes from the January 21, 2009 PAC meeting. Dan Duffy (Twin West Chamber Member) made a motion to approve the minutes. Motion was seconded by John DeWitt (Midtown Community Works Partnership Alternate) and carried unanimously.

## **II. DEIS—Process to Evaluate Alternatives**

Hennepin County Study Manager Katie Walker presented an overview of the process for completing the DEIS process and determining the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). Ms Walker reminded the group that at the end of 2006, the Southwest PAC did not recommend an LPA rather they recommended that the three (3) best performing LRT alternatives (LRT 1A, LRT 3A and LRT 3C) be included in the DEIS process during which the LPA would be recommended. The decision to hold off on recommending an LPA was due in large part to the potential impact of the upcoming local comprehensive plan update process, especially in the city of Minneapolis. In addition, there was an interest in assessing some of the more critical environmental impacts before making a recommendation. Ms. Walker reported that now that the local comprehensive plans have been update, the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) has been updated and the Southwest DEIS Scoping Process is completed, an evaluation of the LRT alternatives can be conducted with the goal of identifying the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The next step is to go through the initial evaluation of the alternatives, select an LPA, and then take the LPA through the detailed DEIS process.

Ms. Walker continued her presentation, reviewing the evaluation process. First, the alternatives will be screened, then an LPA will be selected, after which physical, social, economic and transportation impacts, as well as mitigation options will be identified for that alternative. In the initial evaluation the critical issues will be: the changes in land use, development, and transportation since 2006 when the AA was completed; refining the New Starts based criteria by rerunning ridership forecasts, refining capital and operating costs, and recalculating the CEI; and, identifying critical environmental issues that may force the project to pursue an alternative to avoid them or may have a bearing on the viability of the project as a whole.

Major changes since 2006 include changes to local and regional plans such as the potential for Nicollet Avenue to reopen in Minneapolis, and development changes such as the Eden Prairie developments in Twin West and at United Health Group, the Twins Ballpark in Minneapolis, and the Central Corridor LRT line.



Refinements to New Starts based criteria includes updating the 2030 ridership based on new socio-economic data, updating the 2030 new transit rider numbers, recalculating the capital and operating costs (inflated to 2015 dollars), and recalculating the Cost Effectiveness Index (CEI).

The critical environmental impacts include impacts to historical and cultural sites, parkland and recreation areas, natural resources, water resources, hazardous contamination sites, unstable geological conditions, and major noise and vibrations.

The process for selecting an LPA will be as follows. The HDR consulting team will recommend an LPA to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC will consider the recommendation and make their own recommendation to the PAC, which will in turn make a recommendation to the HCRRA board. The HCRRA will then forward the LPA decision to the Metropolitan Council, with a request that the Transportation Policy Plan be amended to include the LPA. The DEIS will be completed focused only on the LPA.

Jim Benshoof (Eden Prairie Chamber Member) asked if, after choosing an LPA, a substantial environmental impact or impact to the CEI is found for that alternative, what will happen. Ms. Walker answered that the key environmental issues are being considered now, before the LPA is selected. The rest of the environmental work will review more familiar impacts where there should be no surprises. Robert Lilligren (Acting Chair) suggested that perhaps Mr. Benshoof was asking if there is a contingency plan. Mr. Benshoof confirmed that he is concerned about the costs of acquiring right of way in Eden Prairie and Minnetonka. Mr. Gonzalez confirmed that right of way acquisition is important, but there is some design flexibility that can help minimize effects. Ms. Walker added that the contingency for the right of way acquisition is 100 percent, meaning that two times the assumed cost of acquisition has been allotted in the project budget.

Ms. Walker then reviewed the social factors that will be reviewed in the DEIS. They include land use and socioeconomics, neighborhoods and communities, acquisitions and displacements, cultural resources, park and recreation areas, aesthetics, safety and security and environmental justice. The environmental effects were then reviewed, which include groundwater and soils, water resources, biota and habitat, threatened and endangered species, air quality, noise and vibration, hazardous and regulated materials, electromagnetic fields and utilities, and energy.

Next Ms. Walker presented the economic effects that will be considered in the DEIS including capital costs, operating and maintenance costs, estimated mitigation costs, economic development, and station area development. Tony Wagner (Minnetonka Member) asked how far from the stations is development considered related to the LRT. Ms. Walker answered that station area planning is occurring in half mile radii around the stations.

Ms. Walker then reviewed the transportation effects considered in the DEIS. These include transit effects, roadway effects including traffic and access, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, parking, and the intermodal station.

Ms. Walker then moved on to the NEPA mitigation policies which are: first, mitigate unavoidable adverse impacts; second, the mitigation sequence is first avoid, then minimize, then mitigate impacts; third,



mitigation must have a causal and direct relationship to the impact; and finally, mitigation and betterments must be distinguished.

George Puzak (Cedar Lake Park Association Alternate) asked where the maintenance facilities will be located. Ms. Walker answered that the Alternatives Analysis allocated money toward the facility, but no site has yet been selected. HDR is working to identify a site by late spring of this year. Also, if the Bottineau Transitway project chooses LRT for their mode, there may be an opportunity to share a maintenance facility. Sue Sanger (St. Louis Park Alternate) asked why more than one facility is needed if all of the LRT lines connect. Ms. Walker answered that the Franklin Yards are just not big enough. Mr. Gonzalez added that the facilities need to store vehicles, as well as have space to perform maintenance. With additional lines, there are too many vehicles for one facility.

Jim Benshoof (Eden Prairie Chamber Member) commented that the schedule of selecting a locally preferred alternative in April seems aggressive. Ms. Walker responded that the intent is to bring information to the group so that the decision can be made. There is some flexibility, but the decision does have to be made. Bob Corrick (Midtown Community Works Partnership Member) commented that if the CEI information is not available until April, the PAC will need a month or two after that to make a decision. Jean White (Edina Member) asked if there will be a public hearing on the DEIS. Ms. Walker responded that there is a public hearing on amending the Transportation Policy Plan to include the LPA, and another at the end of the environmental process. Meeting attendee Thatcher Imboden commented that his hope is that the PAC would reach out for public preferences on the LPA. Since scoping was not the time to express alignment preference there is a need for outreach so that people can express their opinion and the project can avoid backlash. Sue Sanger (St. Louis Park Alternate) spoke up to reiterate the need to have public comment before the LPA is chosen. Ms. Walker stated that over the last eight years, decisions have not been made without public comment. The process is such that April/May is the beginning of identifying the LPA, not when the Rail Authority takes action. Ms. Sanger responded that once the recommendation is made it seems like the decision is complete. Tony Wagner (Minnetonka Member) commented that it might be a good idea to invite people to the PAC meetings. Ralph Remington (Minneapolis Member) commented that public input is important, but it must be clear that this decision is not a referendum. Ms. Sanger agreed that this would be more of an opportunity for education.

The group expressed concerns regarding the schedule for selection of the LPA and requested that the HCRRRA consider additional public outreach to ensure the public is made fully aware of the decision. Ms. Walker responded that she would work with the consultant team to develop a public outreach plan that will be shared with the SW PAC at their next meeting.

### III. Update—Freight Rail Study

Ms. Walker informed the PAC that Hennepin County Leasing and Land Management, which manages HCRRRA properties, contracted with TKDA to look at freight rail issues from Louisiana Avenue in St. Louis Park to where the Kenilworth Corridor meets the Burlington Northern Santa Fe in Minneapolis. This is a two-to-three month technical analysis to ascertain where freight should be located long term. The analysis will consider capital costs, operations issues, and rail upgrades in both the M&S and Kenilworth Corridors. The freight rail relocation is the result of the implementation of the TH 55 roadway project and as such is a separate, disconnected project from the Southwest LRT project. Freight rail service in the



Midtown Corridor was severed to allow for construction of the TH 55 roadway project which was funded partially through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). At the time the route was severed the freight service was relocated to the Kenilworth Corridor in Minneapolis as a "temporary" measure until a determination could be made on a permanent location for freight rail service. A study was completed in 2000 through the St. Louis Park Freight Rail Relocation Task Force evaluating options for a permanent resolution to the freight rail location issues. Also, recently, TCW who operates on the Kenilworth tracks requested that the HCRRA reevaluate the quality of those tracks and considered replacement and upgrades to ensure the continued "safe, efficient and effective" movement of freight to St. Paul. The permanent location for freight rail service through this area is a separate, unconnected project to the Southwest LRT project with a separate time schedule and budget. No Southwest LRT funds will be used for the freight rail project. This issue was discussed with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) staff on December 19, 2008, and they (Julie Atkins) concurred with this interpretation of the situation.

Robert Lilligren (Acting Chair) confirmed that the cost of relocating the freight traffic is not part of the LRT project. Ms. Walker replied yes, because this is a result of a Federal Highway project. Jean White (Edina Member) asked if the Federal Highway Administration would pay. Ms. Walker responded that the Federal Highway Administration was willing to pay once to relocate the freight and they already have done so. Other funding sources will need to be found. George Puzak (Cedar Lake Park Association Alternate) and Jan Callison (Hennepin County Member) confirmed that the study does not extend past Louisiana Avenue in St. Louis Park.

#### IV. Other Updates

##### 1) BAC Being Formed

Jason Flohrs introduced himself and indicated that he will be moving forward with setting up a Business Advisory Committee. Initial meetings with business groups will take place at the end of February or beginning of March and other projects with BACs are being looked to with regard to structuring the Southwest BAC. Robert Lilligren (Acting Chair) commented that both Uptown and Nicollet Avenue have special service districts that should be contacted. Janet Jeremiah (Eden Prairie Alternate) asked if the group will reach out to individual businesses that are not in groups. Mr. Flohrs responded that they will start with groups, but will also go beyond that to businesses within a geographical radius. Ms. Jeremiah suggested that city staff could be a valuable resource for making contact.

##### 2) Workshop on Accelerating Transitways

Commissioner Callison began her remarks by stating that while public input is important, that must be balanced with keeping Southwest in the queue. Ms. Callison then gave a brief overview of the Accelerating Transitways Conference, held January 23 in the Twin Cities. Transit planning staff from Denver and Salt Lake attended, as well as Representative Oberstar, via video. Regarding the CEI, Ms. Callison commented that Rep. Oberstar stated that he does not want the CEI to be the touchstone of transitway projects. She mentioned that there is a wider variety of federal funds to be tapped into and that the region needs to expand our thinking on funding. Denver and Salt Lake City staff focused heavily on creating a system, not just a line.

George Puzak (Cedar Lake Park Association Alternate) commented that the LRT system here is planned for four lines, but there is talk of need for five or six. Ms. Callison responded that the transportation system plan calls for other types of transit so that the system will be multi-modal. Robert Lilligren (Acting Chair)



commented that applying for funding as a system eliminates process redundancies. Dan Duffy (Twin West Chamber Member) asked if Rep. Oberstar discussed what would replace the CEI if it was eliminated. Ms. Callison responded that Rep. Oberstar did not say the CEI would be eliminated, but that other components of projects would become more important.

Mr. Lilligren added that the local reliable revenue source from the .25 percent sales tax has engendered competition between lines for money. The local queue is important. John Dewitt (Midtown Community Works Partnership Alternate) commented that when considering elimination of the CEI we must consider system applications, since the applications approved will likely change. Mr. Gonzalez added that our goal remains to put together a good local and national project.

### 3) PAC Meeting Schedule

Acting Chair Robert Lilligren indicated that another meeting has been added to the PAC schedule on May 13.

### V. Legislative/Congressional Update

Bill Schreiber updated the group on the state legislature. The state is currently in a \$4.8 billion dollar deficit. This session will be a challenging time for legislators, since they will have to make cuts. The federal stimulus package may help the state some, but it is still uncertain. The revenue forecast for March will not be positive; based on this forecast the budget will be \$1 billion less than the budget projected in November.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) will likely receive some stimulus money, to be used for a list of projects in 2010. Amy Vennewitz (Metropolitan Council Alternate) reported that the Metropolitan Council is developing a similar list of transit projects with a priority on filling the gap in the operations budget.

The successor legislation to the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act-A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) should be in place by October 2009, though the focus right now is on stimulus money. The highway trust fund is empty because of low gas tax revenues, but there is no political desire to raise gas taxes.

On the state level there is usually a small odd-year bonding bill; Governor Pawlenty is not proposing any bonding in 2009.

Amy Vennewitz (Metropolitan Council Alternate) clarified that the Metropolitan Council queue does not include transitways because transitways are all in study phases. The stimulus bill does not fund studies, just capital projects. Jean White (Edina Member) asked if there was a focus on high speed rail. Ms. Vennewitz answered that nationally there is, but there are no projects in this region that are ready. Mr. Schreiber emphasized that the key is to have projects ready. The planning must be complete. Currently the Minnesota bonding bill has been introduced and sent to the capital investment committee. The first hearing will be tomorrow, February 12, 2009. Senator Scott Dibble is chairing the rail bill in the senate.

The Southwest Transitway DEIS is technically fully funded by the HCRRA at \$2.5 million, but when the DEIS is complete and Preliminary Engineering starts, the project transitions to the Metropolitan Council.



**SOUTHWEST**  
transitway

green means go.

Robert Lilligren (Acting Chair) asked if there will be any changes that will open up more funding for transit. Mr. Schreiber said maybe. John DeWitt (Midtown Community Works Partnership Alternate) asked what percentage of funds for transportation are likely to go to highways, and what percentage to transit. Amy Vennewitz (Metropolitan Council Alternate) answered that Mn/DOT will get a pot of money which will be distributed between metro area projects and greater Minnesota. The Metropolitan Council will also get some funding, which will go to transit operators. There will also be some Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Funding that is transit specific and has several applications in the region. Jean White (Edina Member) asked if the legislature dictates how money is spent by Mn/DOT. Mr. Schreiber answered no. Bob McFarlin (Metropolitan Council Member) commented that some money coming to the state will have to be appropriated by the state legislature. He hopes that the federal guidelines are clear about where the money goes. Some will go through the legislature, some not. Mr. Schreiber added that in every category general money will be allocated.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned by Acting Chair Lilligren at 9:40 am. The Southwest PAC will meet next on March 11<sup>th</sup> at 8 am in the St. Louis Park City Hall.

