

SCFP SUBCOMMITTEE ON TWIN CITIES FACILITIES AND SUPPORT
SERVICES (STCFSS)
MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 16, 2007

[In these minutes: Central Corridor and Parking Update]

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: George Wilcox, chair, Keith Carlson, Anne Falken, Bernadette Corley Troge, Steve Fitzgerald, Denny Olsen, Laurie Scheich, Andrea Backes, Gary A. Davis, Gordon Girtz, Lyndel King, Howard Towle

REGRETS: Sean Hanner, Michael Berthelsen, Patrice Morrow

ABSENT: Lorelee Wederstrom, Daniel Malmo

GUEST: Bob Baker, director, Parking & Transportation

I). The meeting was called to order.

II). Bob Baker, director, Parking and Transportation, provided the committee with a light rail and parking update. Handouts to supplement his presentation were distributed to members.

Mr. Baker reported that within the last month, the preliminary engineering phase of the Central Corridor light rail project began. The design principles for this project include:

- The optimal operation of the Central Corridor LRT line is vital to a strong, regional, multi-modal transportation system.
- Safety is fundamental to the successful operation of the line.
- The Central Corridor LRT should realize development opportunities while reducing impact to the urban environment. For example, the University believes there are opportunities to add green space and enhance certain plaza areas.
- The functionality and aesthetics of the University campus must be enhanced –
 - Arrival to campus by LRT should be a memorable experience that enhances the University's identity.
 - Washington Avenue should become a world-class street animated with campus life.
 - Disruptions to campus life and operations should be minimized.

Mr. Baker expressed a concern he has regarding the line and its functionality, which is that in his opinion, too many stops are being proposed for the line. Too many stops translates into a slow line, which people will not use.

The Central Corridor LRT will be an 11-mile stretch of line connecting downtown Minneapolis to downtown St. Paul. The line will cross the Mississippi River on the Washington Avenue Bridge, which will take out the two center lanes of traffic on the bridge. Mr. Baker used a series of diagrams to illustrate the route of the LRT and the impact to the campus.

There will be issues to address relative to the West Bank station. The West Bank community is concerned about the location of the station, and does not want to have the station location put in an isolated area like the Hiawatha Line stop behind Cedar-Riverside. This community wants the stop at Cedar Avenue.

Mr. Baker noted that the University has about 8,000 passengers per day taking transit at Blegan Hall. Cedar Avenue is about 900 feet west of Blegan Hall in the wrong direction from where people are currently using transit. The University plans to propose a compromise, which Mr. Baker indicated he would address later in his presentation.

The East Bank station will be across from Jackson Hall and Amundson Hall and the Stadium Village station will be at 23rd Avenue and University. The Stadium Village station will serve not only the various athletic facilities but the entire east gateway district, which is expected to expand over the next few years.

West Bank station design opportunities, noted Mr. Baker, include:

- Potential infill development both north and south of Washington Avenue.
- Reconnection to the West Bank community.
- West Bank station must be an arrival point to campus. The station design will incorporate a welcoming influence.
- Linkage to campus bus system.
- Connections to interior building circulation, i.e. pedestrian tunnel system.

A concept design diagram of the West Bank station was shared with members.

East Bank station design opportunities assuming the LRT is underground:

- A welcoming center to campus.
- Linkage to campus buses.
- Connections to the Gopher Way tunnel system.
- Integration with existing plaza and courtyards off Washington Avenue.
- Catalyst for mixed land use development.
- Additional sidewalk area and bike lanes with reduced road width.
- Redevelop/enhance street character above the station.

The Moos Tower and Coffman Memorial Union stops on East Bank currently serve approximately 13,000 passengers per day. Members' attention was turned to a couple concept design diagrams of the East Bank station.

There has been a great deal of discussion regarding whether the LRT should be at-grade or in a tunnel. The University is very sensitive to the fact that having the LRT run in a

tunnel will cost more than having it run at-grade. Mr. Baker stated that this line will be built to have an expected life of 75 – 100 years. With this said, it is also the University's position that the line be built right, and not necessarily at the cheapest price.

Washington Avenue information, noted by Mr. Baker:

- October 2005 pedestrian counts from noon to 1:00 p.m. - 1027 pedestrians crossed Washington Avenue and 2169 pedestrians crossed Harvard Avenue. This is one of the highest volume pedestrian areas in Minnesota.
- On a daily basis, approximately 23,580 vehicles travel between the West Bank and University Avenue. Based on University car counts, 80% of these vehicles have a University destination, which means they will not find alternative routes even if the LRT is put at-grade.
- Route 16 Metro Transit Commission buses use Washington Avenue, which translates into 958 buses per day.
- There are 539 Campus Shuttle trips per day on Washington Avenue.
- 606 buses use Washington Avenue between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m.
- Emergency vehicle access using Washington Avenue to get to the University Hospital and campus is mandatory.
- Since 2002, there have been 237 reported accidents on Washington Avenue between Pleasant Avenue and Huron Boulevard.

General University travel facts highlighted by Mr. Baker:

- Up to 80,000 people visit the University campus each day making the University the third largest trip generator in Minnesota.
- At least 400,000 people visit the University of Minnesota Hospital and Clinics each year. This number is expected to increase by 200,000 based on the Academic Health Center's plans to build a new Ambulatory Care Clinic.
- Sixty-eight percent of daily University commuters arrive on campus using transportation other than single-driven vehicles.
- In the 2005 – 2006 academic year, U-Pass sales were 38,125.
- Twenty-six percent of the University's population lives within two miles of campus.

If the LRT is put at-grade on Washington Avenue, issues that need to be considered include:

- Pedestrian safety.
- Traffic signal operations would need to be timed perfectly.
- The eastbound vehicular left turn lane at Harvard would need to be shared with the train.
- Emergency vehicle access necessary.
- Event management traffic needs to be factored into this model.
- Corridor congestion.
- Noise and vibration mitigation.
- Eminent domain/land acquisition will be necessary.
- Enough vertical clearance at the Northrop Mall pedestrian bridges.

Design opportunities for the Stadium Village station:

- East "gateway" location.
- Catalyst for mixed-use development, i.e. retail, entertainment, housing.
- Multimodal facility integrating rail, buses, cars, bikes and pedestrians.
- Close proximity to athletic facilities and new biomedical science facilities.
- Enhancement of the street character.

Concept design diagrams of this station were shared with the committee.

Next steps and future issues according to Mr. Baker include:

- Preliminary engineering is projected to take 18 – 24 months.
- University staff will continue to serve on the Central Corridor LRT Management and Project Teams.
- Several key issues related to this project have been identified; examples include:
 - Tunnel versus at-grade.
 - Connection to the Union Depot in St. Paul.
 - Building-face to building-face development along University Avenue.
 - Connection to the Metrodome Station.
 - Infrastructure issues related to the Washington Avenue Bridge.

Resolving the key issues will ultimately define the scope of the project. Once the scope of the project has been determined, then a cost can be calculated. In terms of the line running at-grade or in a tunnel, while a tunnel will be costly, there are also significant costs associated with mitigating at-grade issues. Initially, the thought was that the tunnel would need to be 40 feet deep, but the University is proposing a 20 foot tunnel be considered, which would reduce excavation, ventilation, storm water and groundwater costs. Also, shortening the tunnel is under investigation. The University has been working diligently to objectively look at both the at-grade and tunnel options.

Questions/comments from members:

- Please speak to the groundwater mitigation issues. Mr. Baker stated that there is an environmental team and design team working on this issue. Also, a work group will be formed to look very closely at this issue, but it has not started meeting yet.
- How will the tunnel be dug? Mr. Baker stated the 'cut and cover' technique would be used. It is cheaper than drilling.
- How long would it take to cut a tunnel? It is still 2 – 3 years before there will be an answer to this question.
- Is it more likely the line will be at-grade or in a tunnel? No decision has been made stated Mr. Baker. He added that the University serves on the Corridor Management Committee, which is chaired by Peter Bell of the Met Council. Membership on this committee includes the City of Minneapolis, City of St. Paul, Hennepin County, Ramsey County, MnDOT, Met Council, local businesses and members of the community. This committee, as prescribed by state statute, reports to the Met Council and MnDOT. For this particular project, MnDOT is

traffic signals in urban areas, variable message signs), and event management issues.

Turning members' attention to another handout, Mr. Baker highlighted the following:

- Historically, the University has had about 2,900 daily rate parking spaces. Currently, the University has about 3,100 daily rate spaces. Mr. Baker noted that these figures include the expansion of Lot 108 (fairgrounds lot) by 900 spaces. Surface space in the district has been lost, and to adjust for this, surface space was increased on the fairgrounds lot on the St. Paul campus.
- The number of contract spaces has remained virtually unchanged.
- The University has unused capacity in its parking inventory. A lot of people are using public transportation, as well as bikes, and other forms of transportation to get to campus.
- There are plans to add more parking to the inventory. The Bedford Lot, located behind KSTP off University Avenue, is expected to open in fall 2008, and add about 500 new spaces to the inventory. Also, at some point, another facility will be constructed adjacent to the stadium, which will add 300 – 400 parking spaces.

Lastly, Mr. Baker reported that UPass sales are at 19,705 as of yesterday, October 15th. This is up 6% from last year when sales were at 18,619. MetroPass prices were dropped as part of the University's plan to deal with the traffic implications of the 35W bridge collapse. Current MetroPass sales are at 1,944 and last year they were at 1,418.

Member's questions/comments continued:

- If someone parks on West Bank for a stadium event and takes the light rail to the East Bank, will he/she have to pay to ride the LRT? Mr. Baker stated that the University has asked that the 3 University stations (West Bank, East Bank and Stadium Village) be a 'free-fare' zone. He noted, however, he is unsure whether this will actually happen without the University having to pay for this service. Part of the University's rationale for proposing this is to try and get as many buses off Washington Avenue as possible for safety reasons.
- Will the at-grade proposal use the transit way? Mr. Baker stated that it will parallel the transit way. He added that discussions have occurred around putting a tail-track (storage track) in the transit way area so that extra LRT trains can be parked for easy access to handle the extra demand resulting from sporting events.
- Will the current level of bus service continue be continued once the LRT is operational? Mr. Baker stated that the DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) for the Central Corridor calls for continued bus service, but at a reduced level. Mr. Baker estimated that bus service will likely be reduced by 70% from today's numbers.
- How does inter-campus bus service fit into the LRT plans? Basically it will remain same with buses linking via the transit way, noted Mr. Baker. At some point, the University will likely explore how it can connect the campus to the Central Corridor LRT more directly via Snelling Avenue or some other route.
- Would above-grade walkways cost the same to build as walkways in a tunnel? Mr. Baker guessed the costs would be similar. The issues, he added, would be

aesthetic and there would be height considerations to take into account as well. If the costs are similar, the University would prefer tunneled walkways because it believes aesthetically this is more pleasing.

- How will personal safety be handled if the walkways are underground? Mr. Baker stated that the University already has an expansive tunnel system for pedestrians on campus. These tunnels have cameras, safety intercoms, are well-lit and monitored by the Department of Central Security. Mr. Baker assumes that the University would monitor the LRT walkways in the same fashion.
- Is groundwater running under Washington Avenue? Yes, stated Mr. Baker. He added that a geological study is currently underway, but generally the water table is at 20 – 25 feet. Another member noted that the water table at Lions Research Building is at 9 feet below grade and near Oak Street it is at 12 feet below grade. Mr. Baker noted that the stations would be designed to channel water.
- What is a realistic estimate for when the line be up and running? Mr. Baker stated 2014 is realistic, but asked members to keep in mind that nationally cities across the country are wanting to have LRT. With this said, there is a lot of competition for federal money.
- When will a decision regarding whether the train will run at-grade or below grade will be made? Mr. Baker stated that this decision is expected to be made by the end of this year.
- Who will be responsible for maintaining the line? This will be the Met Council's responsibility noted Mr. Baker.

Professor Wilcox thanked Mr. Baker for his presentation.

V). The committee unanimously approved the September 18, 2007 minutes.

VI). Hearing no further business, Professor Wilcox adjourned the meeting.

Renee Dempsey
University Senate