

Central Corridor Management Committee Approves Revised Alignment

At its August 27th meeting, the Central Corridor Management Committee agreed to several alignment revisions. The Met Council will act on these revisions on September 3rd, and a revised New Starts Application will be submitted to the Federal Transit Administration on September 5th. The revised application is part of the Met Council's request for authorization to advance the Central Corridor LRT Project into Final Engineering. Major alignment revisions include:

- Washington Avenue at-grade with transit/pedestrian mall
- 15 new stations plus infrastructure for 3 future stations at Hamline, Victoria, and Western
- Station in front of Union Depot
- Improved Hiawatha LRT connection
- Maintenance facility in Saint Paul, east of the Union Depot concourse with two track connection
- Washington Avenue Bridge retrofit
- Diagonal at Cedar Avenue and 4th Street
- 3-car platforms
- Public Art

DCC Submits SDEIS Comments

At its August 13th meeting, the Governing Council approved comments on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS). The SDEIS addresses nine key elements of the alignment that were changed, added to, or omitted from the DEIS, plus other elements. A summary of the DCC's comments follows.

Key Element 1. Hiawatha/Central Corridor Connection

Issue — The proposed alignment hinders long-term redevelopment opportunities in the Cedar-Riverside Community. The West Bank CDC and other community organizations would like to explore options for adjusting the alignment to create larger parcels of developable land.

DCC Core Comment:

- The CCPO should work with the neighborhood to identify and test alignment adjustments that would retain the maximum amount of developable land and not preclude reconnecting 15th Avenue across Washington Parkway.

Key Element 2. Washington Avenue Transit/Pedestrian Mall on East Bank of the University of Minnesota

Issue — Closing Washington Avenue will increase traffic on local streets, especially those that connect to river crossings; worsen operations at critical intersections; and potentially diminish the livability of neighborhoods surrounding the University. Mitigation strategies outlined in the SDEIS do not adequately address neighborhood concerns. Also, the SDEIS does not sufficiently address the cumulative traffic impacts of proposed development projects in the area around the University nor does it address impacts of proposed transportation projects.

DCC Core Comments:

- The CCPO must conduct additional traffic studies that include cumulative effect evaluations and identify suitable mitigation measures to ensure that traffic impacts will not result in negative impacts to area neighborhoods, area businesses, University students and staff, and others driving through the area as well as pedestrians and bicyclists.

Key Element 3. Stations at Western, Victoria, and Hamline

Issue — The SDEIS identifies many socio-economic, land use and neighborhood benefits that would be gained from the construction of stations at Western, Victoria, and Hamline. However, it only proposes to construct infrastructure for the stations. The SDEIS finds no disproportionate adverse impacts and no disproportionate delay in the receipt of benefits for Environment Justice populations if the stations are not built out.

DCC Core Comments:

- The DCC continues to support build-out of all three stations and disagrees with the conclusion that there are no disproportionate adverse impacts or delays in the receipt of benefits for Environmental Justice neighborhoods if the stations are not built. The FEIS must provide further analysis of disproportionate impacts or delays in benefits for Environmental Justice neighborhoods and propose appropriate mitigation strategies if the stations are not built out. The FEIS must also disclose adverse impacts on Environmental Justice populations resulting from the reduction in #16 bus frequency. The DCC supports maintaining current service frequencies for the #16.

Key Element 4. Capitol Area Alignment / Stations

Issue — To negotiate the turn from University Avenue onto Robert Street, the tracks have been shifted to the south side of University between Marion and Robert Street. There are several consequences of this alignment change. The following consequences are of concern to the DCC.

- The LRT station has been moved to the east side of Rice Street and oriented to Leif Erikson Lawn on the State Capitol Campus. This orientation reduces cohesion with the neighborhood commercial district on Rice Street just north of the station.
- Bus Route # 16 will need to be re-routed. Most likely it will be moved from Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard to Rice Street. This will lengthen walk trips for bus riders visiting or working at the Capitol and surrounding buildings.
- Properties on the south side of University Avenue between Marion and Rice will no longer have access from University.

DCC Core Comments:

- The DCC calls for the CCPO to identify LRT station and station area design strategies that will make strong connections to the Rice Street commercial district and surrounding residential communities; to analyze impacts of re-routing the #16 and develop appropriate mitigation measures to ensure pedestrian safety and pedestrian realm improvements to accommodate longer walk trips for bus riders, and to detail mitigation measures for those businesses that no longer have direct access from University Avenue.

Key Element 5. Downtown Saint Paul Alignment

Issue — The downtown Saint Paul alignment on Cedar Street will cause considerable disruption of daily activities for two religious congregations: St. Louis, King of France and Central Presbyterian. The Cedar/4th Street diagonal will remove a key link in the downtown skyway system.

DCC Core Comments:

- The DCC supports preservation of existing community fabric and community cohesion—religious institutions are part of this fabric. The FEIS must detail mitigation measures to minimize loss of community cohesion. The FEIS must detail mitigation measures to restore the skyway system.

Key Element 6. Traction Power Substation Locations

Issue — Several Traction Power Substations (TPSS) are located in areas where there is significant potential for mixed-use redevelopment and/or where there is single-family and multi-family housing nearby. Some TPSS facilities will be near residential or business towers where people will be looking down on the facility. Three TPSS facilities are clustered between Lexington and Marion where there are small-scale commercial buildings and residential properties as well as Environment Justice populations.

DCC Core Comments:

- The DCC calls for the CCPO to disclose the final location of all TPSS facilities and detail mitigation strategies for visual impacts and to disclose the rationale behind the close spacing of TPSS facilities between Lexington and Marion and detail mitigation measures.

Key Element 7. 3-Car Train Requirement

Issue — The FTA urged the project to consider 3-car trains to accommodate anticipated ridership demand. The CCLRT project will begin with 2-car trains and 300' platforms, which are long enough to accommodate 3-car trains in the future. Where blocks are 600' long, platforms stop mid-block creating safety issues for pedestrians. Three-car platforms contribute to additional loss of on-street parking.

DCC Core Comments:

- DCC supports 3-car platforms in anticipation of future 3-car trains. Building them now is more cost-effective and less disruptive to future LRT operations. The FEIS must detail safe pedestrian access to both ends of the platforms and mitigation strategies to alleviate impacts of on-street parking loss.

Key Element 8. Vehicle Maintenance Facility

Issue — The Conesco site east of Union Depot is the preferred option for the Vehicle Maintenance Facility. A facility on this site may be in conflict with the City of Saint Paul's Comprehensive Land Use Plan and neighborhood level plans for this area. It may also reduce visual, pedestrian, and bicycle connections to the riverfront.

DCC Core Comment:

- DCC calls for the FEIS to further review this option for consistency with the Comp. Plan and neighborhood plans, to evaluate whether or not it would impact visual and/or physical connections to the Mississippi River, and to propose appropriate strategies for addressing any impacts found.

Key Element 9. Washington Avenue Bridge

Issue — The Washington Avenue Bridge needs repairs and retro-fitting to ensure that it has the structural capacity to carry LRT trains and the necessary redundancy. The SDEIS notes that further studies will be reviewed and disclosed in the FEIS with appropriate mitigation strategies to make it structurally sound.

DCC Core Comments:

- The DCC remains concerned that the age and condition of the bridge are not congruent with the new LRT facility to be built. Also, delaying disclosure of the repairs needed and their costs until the FEIS is published does not allow for adequate public review and for decision-makers to receive public input on the bridge before making their decision.

Additional Comments

A. Loss of On-Street Parking

Issue — The current alignment results in the loss of about 85 percent of on-street parking on University Avenue in St. Paul. The DCC shares community and business concern about the severity of this loss and the adverse impacts it will have on small and minority/immigrant-owned businesses, University Avenue residents, and the vitality of University Avenue as a whole.

DCC Core Comments:

- The FEIS must provide complete documentation of the impacts of on-street parking loss and propose mitigation strategies.

B. Reduction in Bus Route #16 Service Frequency

Issue — The SDEIS does not fully disclose the adverse impacts this service reduction will have on the disproportionate number of riders who are transit dependent, low-income, or persons of color.

DCC Core comments:

- The FEIS must disclose the adverse impacts and propose mitigation measures sufficient to meet the needs of bus transit riders in the Central Corridor.

C. Community Involvement

Issue — The CCPO developed an elaborate community involvement plan that includes a Community Advisory Committee (CAC). However, the CAC and the general public have little opportunity to influence project decision-making or to have their voices heard in a meaningful way. This is a particular concern to the DCC because public participation in decision-making is a proposed mitigation strategy for Environmental Justice impacts. Similar concerns have emerged with respect to public engagement in public art and station design processes.

DCC Core Comments:

- The DCC reiterates its SDEIS Work Scope comment that there should be an outside review of the public involvement plan and its implementation. An outside review would allow for the CCPO and the public to speak openly about concerns and experiences and the development of revisions that would strengthen citizen and business engagement.

Work on DCC Priority Issues

Washington Avenue Transit/Pedestrian Mall, At-Grade Alignment

The DCC Washington Avenue Alignment committee participated in two workshops with transportation consultants from Howard R. Green. SDEIS comments and identification of potential mitigation strategies to preserve and enhance livable neighborhood streets were the products of these workshops. One of the consultants specializes in Environmental Impact Statements and offered new information on cumulative impacts, an issue of special concern to the committee.

Advocacy for Stations at Western, Victoria, and Hamline

The Transportation Equity/Stops for Us Campaign met with City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County elected officials to press for the inclusion of stations in the September 5th New Starts application and to identify other sources for funds to build-out stations. Transportation Equity and the Central Corridor will be the centerpiece of ISAIH's statewide meeting October 12th from 3:00 to 5:30 PM in Roy Wilkins Auditorium in downtown Saint Paul. They anticipate 4,000 people. The Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy has been assisting the group by producing GIS maps, which display data that compare stations that are included the project with those that are excluded.

LRT Station Design and Public Art Engagement Process

Ten public art finalists presented to a special meeting of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) held July 31. In addition to CAC members asking questions of finalists, finalists asked questions of CAC members. Artists were interested in hearing about CAC member concerns about the project and the process. As part of their project proposal, artists will outline a public participation process and submit concept plans for stations. According to the RFP, artists will be selected by mid-to late September and the design process will begin in November 2009.

Access Within and To the Corridor

Analysis of data from a 2005 Metro Transit Ridership Survey yielded interesting information about #16 bus riders: 40 percent of #16 riders have household incomes of \$15,000 or less, 43 percent of the riders are from households with no vehicle, 60 percent of #16 trips occur in off-peak hours, 25 percent are home-to-work trips, 31 percent are home-to-college/university trips, 57 percent of the trips involve one or more transfers, and 48 percent of the riders are under the age of 24. All of these characteristics differ substantially from system-wide characteristics. The committee will be looking at other cities in greater depth in its next phase of research.

Loss of On-Street Parking

Robin Cauffman presented a progress report on work completed over the last month. Central Corridor Outreach Coordinators have continued to collect data from business and property owners. As of August 13, 43 percent of the businesses had been surveyed. They are now preparing block-level data summaries that show the number of businesses and how many participated in the survey. Summaries also show the number of on- and off-street parking spaces, cross street parking spaces, parking needs, and proposed solutions. This analysis has narrowed the number of critical areas for parking from 15 to 4: Westgate, Hamline, Lexington, and Dale. The City of Saint Paul has compiled a list of short-, middle-, and long-term parking management strategies, which includes among other things: increased use of side streets for customer parking, acquisition and application of new parking management technologies, evaluation and revisions in the City's permit parking program, and Parking Improvement Districts at station areas. CCPO traffic studies indicate that reducing University Avenue to one lane in each direction is not a feasible solution for restoring on-street parking and that off-peak parking may be possible in the evening hours. Craig Blakely is the City of Saint Paul's point person on parking. He can be reached at 651-266-6697. The Met Council will continue its information gathering efforts and work with the City and business owners on resolving parking problems.

CCLRT Planning Process and the Met Council

- ❖ **CC Management Committee (CCMC)**—The CCMC met on August 10 and 27, 2008 to discuss and agree on what will be included in the September 5th New Starts Application. The outcome of these meetings was reported in a special DCC Bulletin emailed August 27th. Many projects elements have been cutback significantly in order to meet the "medium" CEI of \$24.49. These elements may be added back in as contingency funds are released. Infrastructure for the three stations remained in the project Work Scope, but build out of one station was not included.
- ❖ **Community Advisory Committee (CAC)**—The CAC met on August 21st. Staff presented updates on: the SDEIS public hearings and comments received, a review of changes to the CEI and Project budget, work to identify and resolve on-street parking problems, and University Avenue traffic studies.

DCC Executive Committee and Staff: **Anne White**, Chair, Union Park; **Steve Wilson**, Vice Chair, Summit-University; **Bob Spaulding**, Secretary, CapitolRiver Council; **Ron Lischeid**, Treasurer, University District Improvement Association; **Phil Anderson**, Member-at-Large, Prospect Park East River Road Improvement Association; and **Carol Swenson**, Community Liaison.

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