

CITY OF BLOOMINGTON  
2215 WEST OLD SHAKOPEE ROAD  
HENNEPIN COUNTY, MINNESOTA 55431

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Approved Minutes  
Special Joint Meeting w/ TTAC, Planning, & Port Authority  
Meeting #16A

5:30 p.m.  
May 22, 2003  
Fire Station #1

Call to Order                    The special joint meeting was called to order at 5:41 p.m. by the following chairs: Mayor Gene Winstead for the City Council, Jan Schneider for the Planning Commission, Bob Erickson for the Port Authority, and Jim Meyers of the Traffic & Transportation Advisory Commission.

Roll Call                        Council Present:                    Mayor Winstead, Councilmembers D. Abrams, S. Elkins, M. Fossum, H. Harden, S. Peterson, and V. Wilcox.

   Planning Commission:            Doug Bruce, Cheryl Lewis, Jan Schneider, Dennis Sathre, and Eldon Spencer.

   Commissioners Absent:            Jim Knutson and Stephen Peper.

   TTAC:                                Laura Amundson, Craig Carlson, Jan Dittbrenner, Steve Mahowald, Jim Meyers, and Chuck Suggestud.

   Commissioner Absent:            Andrew Tasi.

   Port Authority:                    Rick Collins and Robert Erickson.

   Commissioners Absent:            Amy Grady, Dana House, and Tim Keller.

Public Comment Period        The Public Comment Period is not usually open during special meetings.

Purpose of the Meeting and Introductions        Winstead explained that the purpose of this meeting is for the City Council and the various commissions to receive an update by the Hiawatha Project Office (HPO) on the proposed Light Rail Transit (LRT) alignment into the Mall of America for eventual recommendations by each of the commissions to the City Council. He explained that a public hearing on the proposed plan modification is scheduled by the City Council on June 2, 2003.

   Charlie Honchell, Director of Public Works, described the materials provided to the commissioners: A study item explaining the LRT plan modification and the advantages and disadvantages of such a modification, layouts of the existing and proposed Mall of America alignment and station design and existing and proposed Mall of America lower level parking, a draft resolution that might be considered by the City Council, and a list of issues that have been brought to the LRT leaders by staff in previous and ongoing discussions. He introduced Ed Hunter, Project Manager with the Hiawatha Project Office.

Hiawatha Project Office Presentation            Hunter began by stating that entering into the third construction season, the LRT project is approximately 70% complete and that to date, the project is on time and within budget, which was mandated to him at the beginning of 2001. Phase IA (from Fort Snelling to Downtown Minneapolis) is scheduled to open in April 2004. As history, he stated that all of the project partners (City of Bloomington, City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Dakota County, Metropolitan Airport Commission (MAC), and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) were requested to consider a better design for the end of the alignment station in Bloomington. He stated that this is the final proposal for the realignment and that if the Bloomington City Council approves this realignment and provided that suitable construction costs can be negotiated, and provided that appropriate funding will be received, a formal recommendation will go before the Corridor Management Committee on June 9, at which time regional concurrence will be requested from all of the partners that the realignment should be pursued, funding issues notwithstanding. Met Council, as the federal guarantee, would then make a final determination on the availability of funds and costs to the project for seeking of a federal grant amendment.

Hunter proceeded to describe the current design for the Mall of America (MOA) station that would diagonally bisect the Avis property, run west along East 82<sup>nd</sup> Street to dead-end at 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue with a skyway connection to the MOA across 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue and into the east parking ramp, with users needing to go down three levels to the Transit Station in order to make a bus connection. He stated that the proposed park and ride would only provide 200 spaces and that future access to the Kelly Farm parcel and access onto and around 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue has proven to be problematic.

Hunter continued to describe the proposed realignment that removes the station and the park and ride from the Kelly Farm parcel and locates it onto the entire Avis parcel owned by MAC, which would provide surface park and ride capacity of 500-600 vehicles. He stated that the station platform at the park and ride facility would represent the deferment of the American Boulevard Station at 80<sup>th</sup> Street & 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue South, due to cost measurers. Deferring funds for the American Boulevard Station would allow the construction of the platform and station at the proposed enhanced park and ride. This site would allow for buses to stage and make connections to park and ride or LRT and could provide a convenient connection to future Bus Rapid Transit. The alignment opens up the Kelly Farm parcel for prime access off of 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue and off of East 82<sup>nd</sup> Street. He explained that the Avis site would allow for future expansion of the park and ride facility if needed in the future.

Regarding the intersection of 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue South at Killebrew Drive, Hunter explained that an at-grade crossing of 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue South would be required and that a traffic consultant has been engaged by HPO to do a traffic study of the entire area as it relates to LRT operations into the year 2020 (which includes full build out and development of MOA Phase II, full development of the Kelly Farm parcel, and the McGough Development parcel to the east along Ceridian Drive) and that a service level of D or better can be maintained at all of the major intersections around the project. Full railroad crossing signals and gates would be utilized to safeguard the passage of the train vehicles across that intersection. He explained that full bus operations would continue at the MOA Transit Station along with LRT and described the relationship between the two. He stated that LRT operations would cross the intersection at 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue South in a one-way direction every 7½ minutes during peak rush hour conditions, every 15 minutes during mid-day and evening operations, and in 30-minute intervals later in the evening. The average crossing frequency being 15 minutes or greater during the day. This concluded Hunter's design overview.

Hunter restated that the project funding or schedule cannot be compromised by this proposed change and that non of the local partners have been requested to come up with additional funding for this improvement and there is no intention to do so. As nearly two-thirds of a mile of additional track is being added to bring LRT into the MOA parking ramp, it will require the purchase and development of three times the right-of-way that was proposed under the current design, therefore adding associated costs. He stated that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), upon being presented with the proposed realignment, has indicated that there are identified federal pots of money that will be available to finance this change. As the additional right-of-way and improvement enhancements cannot be made within the project budget of \$675.4 million, the FTA has indicated that this is a worthwhile project that warrants additional federal funds. He explained that the FTA has indicated that for the entire cost of the improvement, they will make 80% of the funds available so the remaining 20% has to be in the form of local match, which HPO has indicated would be through a combination of existing funds that the project has already received from a number of local communities (amount approved through previously executed agreements with other local partners and exclusively funded by that local partner). The remaining amount of the local match, would come in the form of the value of the required real estate needed within the MOA east parking ramp for which a long-term lease/operations/maintenance agreement is currently being developed in which the MOA would donate the entire value of the property needed to build the improvement. With a combination of those funds, the entire local match requirement has been satisfied or exceeded. Therefore, the State of Minnesota or any of the local partners will not be requested for additional funds. The financing of the remaining balance of this project will come from the FTA.

Regarding the schedule, Hunter explained that even with the proposed alignment, the project still needs to be delivered by December 31, 2004, and that there is no more time to spare, as a formal request to the FTA needs to be made soon.

In response to Honchell's request that Hunter explain what HPO is asking the City of Bloomington to consider, he restated the deferment of constructing the American Boulevard station as currently proposed at 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue & 80<sup>th</sup> Street. He stated that the construction process is too far along on the north side of the airport to provide any opportunities to back away from a scope of work in exchange for the proposed enhancements and that the only opportunity for cost savings is in Bloomington. Regarding the Ceridian Station, he explained that McGough has requested and is getting alignment improvements through an agreement and that McGough is providing full funding for the improvements. He stated that Met Council considers the McGough Development to be a sterling example of transit-oriented development. He explained that the design of the American Boulevard station, construction of the track and construction of the systems, will allow for the future construction of that station at a later date. Regarding the crossing at 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Hunter restated that full railroad signals and gate arms will be utilized and proceeded to describe the two basic types of crossing scenarios that the City will need to make a decision on - a priority signal system (traffic lights run through their normal phases and the LRT vehicle is urged to stop and wait for the normal sequence of traffic lights before given the green light to cross) or a pre-emption signal system. He stated that the priority signal system has been demonstrated to actually create more of a hazard than a safety enhancement with the gates. Therefore, a priority design would dictate that the intersection not have gate arms and traffic signals would be relied upon for traffic control.

Hunter stated that although embedded track is proposed across the Kelly Farm in the existing proposal, HPO is requesting that they be allowed to install ballasted track on the adjoining parcel in the proposed design due to the increase in track length and associated cost and that MAC doesn't have an issue with it. It would include a full ballasted curb along both sides of the track that would enable the installment of pre-cast panels within the track bed for future development of that parcel.

Winstead inquired as to a timeframe regarding the deferment of the American Boulevard Station.

Hunter responded that there is no exact time and that it will be a function of money or if ridership levels dictate the need is urgent, Met Transit could seek additional federal funds at a later date to finance adding that construction back in. If the local community or private enterprise had funding to add it back in, it would be considered immediately. He stated that the existing grant obligates HPO to build 17 stations and that with the redesign the obligation is still being satisfied and that the deferment of the American Boulevard is merely a place to hopefully save some money. To address the cost issue, Hunter stated that under the base design contract, the design contractor has \$1.5 million toward the construction of the American Boulevard station (foundation, platforms, canopies, communications, speakers, cameras, and signs) and that the cost to install the system to support all of that would not be one that would be expected when adding this station back in later. To address Winstead's inquiry regarding the additional cost for the added parking spaces at the Mall, Hunter replied that there is a difference of \$5 million that is needed to acquire the property.

Winstead stated that although most people were uncomfortable with the number of parking spaces in the proposed park and ride station, a significant number of spaces are being added in the new proposal and requested a detailed breakdown of those costs. He also inquired as to how much of a surplus is there in the local fund match.

Hunter replied that there could be as much as \$1.5 million in overmatch. He stated that for every \$.20 of local match, \$.80 cents in federal dollars is received. He explained the federal money that the FTA has authorized for utilization of this project. The money in the current grant is called "New Start Money," which comes from congressional appropriation and the FTA has stated that there will be no more of that type available for this re-alignment of the MOA Station. He described the various funds that are available for transit funding (Formula 57 Funds, Fixed Guideway Funds, and others.) The FTA has stated that one of the funds already committed to Metro Transit must be used, thereby diverting Met Transit funds to finance this LRT change. Therefore, for every \$2 spent of the local match, the Met Transit is spending \$8 out-of-pocket.

Wilcox stated that his concern is that when light rail was originally approved in Bloomington, the Mall wasn't supportive and McGough wasn't there to support it, but those along 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue were supportive and that it may not have passed without their support. And now that station is being taken away. He stated that the Mall of America is a winner, HPO is a winner, and McGough is a winner and believes the people on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue at least deserve an accounting of how the costs break down and doesn't believe it's fair to ask the City to approve the proposed change without more detailed figures.

Hunter stated that the credit is taken straight off the bid package that was developed when the contract was entered into. Therefore, the contract dollars for the value of the 80<sup>th</sup> Street station are realistic and basically in tact. Regarding the cost of the Mall of America station that was originally designed with a skyway compared to re-aligning it into the existing MOA Transit Station, Hunter stated that HPO is in the process of negotiating in good faith with the contractor and is not prepared to talk about the final costs or what might be recommended to Met Council in the form of a grant amendment.

Collins stated that the difference between the cost of future parking ramp stalls that may have needed to be built on the Kelly Farm site compared to the 400 surface stalls being proposed on the Avis site may amount to several million dollars, and that avoided is the need for future public dollars that would have otherwise been committed by putting \$1.5 million on the private sector to build a station at 80<sup>th</sup> Street & 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Hunter stated that it's impossible to please everyone and that there are more positives than negatives with the proposed Mall of America re-alignment.

Wilcox inquired if this new alignment for the Mall Station locks future expansion into an alignment going down the west side of Old Shakopee Road and down Cedar Avenue to Dakota County.

Hunter explained that the re-alignment and utilization of the Avis park and ride platform would allow for future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) with Dakota County and the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) is excited about that possibility.

Amundson inquired as to the safety aspects of the pre-emptive signal system versus the priority signal system.

Hunter explained that using a priority signal system, the LRT vehicle may be asked to stop until the signal system gives it a green light and it is accomplished by the use of traffic signals. No gate arms are utilized. However, the free-right turn lanes at the intersection make it harder to get vehicles to stop at the free-right turns. Under a full-gated system, which the HPO designers are advocating, once the gates are triggered, the train is going to run right through the intersection and it's going to clear and open everything up again. Replying to Spencer's inquiry regarding the future possibility of tunneling under 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Hunter stated that tunneling would be very expensive.

Since Planning and TTAC members had to leave for their regularly scheduled meetings, Bernhardson requested that if members had questions, they should forward them to Charlie Honchell for a response.

Elkins inquired if any of the federal funding from Met Transit was coming out of the same pools earmarked for the Sector 5 transit design.

HPO Presentation  
continued

Hunter replied that the traffic study projected to 2020 included all of the Sector 5 modifications that will be implemented within the next several months, therefore, none of the considered funds for this improvement would affect the planned Sector 5 modifications. He stated that with the Sector 5 changes and with the streamlining and reduction of existing routes due to the incorporation of LRT, the same number of vehicle trips will be provided into the MOA ramp but passenger loading will increase by nearly 9,000 riders per year.

Wilcox inquired if anything needed to be done to the ramp itself to accommodate the LRT and what the liability to the City might be, as the Bloomington Port Authority owns the ramps.

Hunter replied that the train would be operating at approximately 5 miles per hour once it crosses 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue and enters the MOA ramp. He stated that the concrete slab would need to be peeled back to allow for the installation of embedded track in the ramp. No significant utilities will need to be relocated in the ramp and the existing ventilation system and the existing lighting layout will not need to be changed either. He stated that fencing on both sides of the track inside the parking garage would be considered along with a couple of pedestrian crossings across the track.

The Planning Commission, Traffic & Transportation Advisory Commission and Port Authority adjourned their meetings at 7:15 p.m.

Bernhardson informed the City Council that the new council chamber would not be ready for the June 2 city council meeting and that staff is looking at an alternative place to meet in the new Civic Plaza. The location of the June 16 meeting will need to be determined at a later date.

Mayor Winstead adjourned the city council meeting at 7:21 p.m.

Barbara Clawson  
Council Secretary