

COTTAGE GROVE CITY COUNCIL

12800 RAVINE PARKWAY SOUTH

COTTAGE GROVE, MN 55016

SPECIAL MEETING - TRAINING ROOM - 6:00 P.M

October 16, 2024

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Bailey called the Special Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Administrator Levitt stated Roll Call was done. Mayor Bailey noted Council Member Garza had not yet arrived but was en route.

3. AGENDA

A. Metro Transit Network Now - Draft Plan

Staff Recommendation: Receive the presentation from Metro Transit.

Mayor Bailey stated we're joined this evening by representatives from Metro Transit who will be speaking on what is now called Metro Transit Now. I was at TAB (Transportation Advisory Board) today, and there were a couple people from the Metropolitan Council sitting in, and they asked me what do you think about that? I said I'm going to hear more about it tonight because they're going to be at my meeting. He introduced Cyndi Harper and Scott Thompson with Metro Transit and thanked both of them for coming tonight to share some concept ideas from Metro Transit that will incorporate Cottage Grove.

Cyndi stated I'm the Manager of Route Planning for Metro Transit, and Scott Thompson is a Senior Planner for the Highway 61 corridor, including Cottage Grove. I'll start off with an overview of what the process is in general, a little background information, and then Scott's going to give information on probably what you are more interested in, which would be what's actually happening in Cottage Grove.

Mayor Bailey said I'm sorry to interrupt, but I should have had the City Council Members and City staff introduce themselves to you so you know who they are, and that was done.

Cyndi asked so what is Network Now and why are we doing it? There are truly four reasons that Metro Transit has embarked on this project: 1) The last four-or-five years have been a very pivotal time in our history with COVID and unprecedented workforce shortages. We've seen a lot of our ridership decline, about 50% between 2019 and 2020; we are slowly rebounding, but this has also been tied to about a 30% decrease in the number of service hours that we operate per day. Also, this has resulted in us having just about 60 bus routes around the region that have been suspended; most of them are commuter and express routes, most were suspended in March 2020, when COVID first hit. So, we know that we have had that out there. 2) We have also seen, really in the last 4.5 years, that traffic patterns have changed coming out of COVID. We are definitely seeing in our commuter express market the impact of increased telecommuting, at least some days of the week, and the Metro Transit routes that have been mostly affected in terms of ridership, those routes that run all day that serve a variety of trip purposes. 3) Workforce has also been very important. We have had struggles with having enough operators, and I think we finally turned the corner on that with changes with our union contract, the wages, a few of the things in the economy and the marketplace that have changed; so, like many companies, back in 2021 and 2022, we were trying to hire as quickly as we could, but it was still causing us to miss a significant amount of scheduled services. So we ended up having to right size our service to match our workforce level. 4) Finally, we are growing; that's the other

reason we're doing this project. There's a regional sales tax that took effect last fall that covered transit. Also, we have currently four different major capital projects that are under construction, three of them are Bus Rapid Transit lines and then one is a light-rail line extension. Generally, we've not had more than one major capital project at a time; so, to have four, three of which open next year, is a pretty significant change for us.

So, the short-term projects are really meant to last just between now and 2027, and it's a vision or a framework, a plan that has really two angles: First of all, we need to resolve the status of these bus routes that are suspended. Also, many of those commuter express routes are supported by facilities, such as Park and Rides; so, we also need to figure out are we going to close those Park and Rides and dispose of the land, or what is it we're going to do in terms of facilities as well as some bus stops around the region that we don't have space as transit climbs up. Right now, we just kind of stick around but if there is no bus service, we need to resolve that as well.

To get to the more fun part of this, is our opportunity to improve service with the new routes as well as redesigning the existing bus routes. Opportunities to improve frequency of service and stay on the service on the existing routes, how often the bus runs or the train runs, as well as how early in the morning, how late in the evening the service operates. Also, preparing for new metro transitways, so that would be light rail and Bus Rapid Transit. Then also opportunity for us to expand a new type of service for us, called Metro Wide Roads micro transit. So, as I mentioned, this is meant to be short-term plan revisions for 2027; it allows us to expand service regionally, we're going to have about a 35% increase of in-service hours by the end of 2027, which is a significant increase in service, including coverage and mobility, both by expanding fixed route bus service and also metro micro service. It's also an opportunity for us to redesign our express commuter services in order to meet the travel patterns that we're seeing post-pandemic.

The foundation for this work, summarized in a report that was released last fall, *Establishing the Foundation*, is really three pillars to this network reset: Performance, Policy, and Engagement. We started this project in early 2023, with significant public engagement, including over 6,000 comments in regard to surveys, community workshops, and other online engagement. I want to also point out the chart here, on the right, is a chart from our report, a sample of one of the significant changes that we have observed since the pandemic; the XX that's across the bottom is hours, time of day, so this represents one 24-hour period, an average weekday, and then the YX is hourly boarding. The light-gray line is before the pandemic, what we were seeing in terms of ridership by hour. So, as you can see, there are two peak periods, corresponding roughly to 6-to-9 a.m. and 3-to-6 p.m., otherwise known as the a.m. and p.m. rush hours. The black line is what we're seeing today. So, a couple of takeaways: Our ridership overall is still about 60% of what it was pre-COVID, so ridership overall is down, but particularly in the a.m. rush hour, where now we're seeing much more of a gradual, kind of all-day build up to our busiest time of day, still in the evening. That difference between the peaks and the off peaks is much less than it was prior to the pandemic.

So, all of the data that's in that report, the trends that we've pointed out and the feedback that we received from the public resulted in these five guiding principles that we used to draft our Concept Plan; they include: 1) Adapting service to changes in market; 2) Preparing for new metro lines; 3) Maintaining reliability of our scheduled service; 4) Building on success to grow ridership; 5) Providing access for opportunities to focus on advancing equity.

A couple of slides at the regional level here, hopefully these items in bold look somewhat familiar because these are our guiding principles. So, this Concept Plan is a good opportunity to grow ridership, including 65 existing routes where we have either frequency and/or span improvement, so that's all the blue lines you see on the map; including 15 routes where we're going to have service that runs every 15 minutes or better, we call those our high-frequency routes. Also restoring service on the blue and green lines, our light-rail lines, back to every 10 minutes. Also opportunity for additional service coverage; we have 8 new micro-transit domes, that's what these green circles kind of all around the perimeter here represent. Micro is an on-demand service, it uses a much smaller bus, it's not a fixed route, it just operates within a small doughnut of point-to-point service, and you use an app on your phone in order to request a bus arrive and come and get you. We have one of those domes right now in North Minneapolis, and we're looking to add 8 more over the course of the next 3-to-3.5 years. The idea is the first last mile connection in areas where a traditional fixed route has challenges because there's maybe not enough population and point of density to support that. This will bring those two transit centers and transitway stations to connect in with the rest of the network.

Also, more than 20 routes, either covering the new areas in our new routes or existing routes where we're doing extensions or changes, so that's all these orange lines on the map. And all of this results in a 25% increase in the number of jobs that are accessible riding transit within 45 minutes for the average resident in the region.

Also an opportunity for us to adapt service to meet these travel patterns; so, as mentioned in that chart with the curves on it, a couple slides ago, one of the primary differences that we've seen for 2019 is less a.m. rush hour activity, lower express ridership demand overall, and a significant decline in Park and Ride use. Prior to the pandemic, we had just over 18,000 cars a day that would park in a Park and Ride in the metro region somewhere, now we're down to about 4,300 cars a day. That just shows you really how the bottom has dropped out of that traditional 9-to-5 office worker in the downtown Minneapolis, downtown St. Paul markets.

As a result, we're using Network Now as an opportunity to shift our strategy in how we serve the commuter express market; it's something we are calling the Key Express Network, those are the purple lines that are on the map here. You can see there are 7 rows of routes that go into that network, that means that we will be essentially consolidating service in order to free up resources to reinvest elsewhere. So, the idea is that in each of the major corridors serving downtown Minneapolis, primarily, and to some degree also downtown St. Paul, there would be one Park and Ride and one express route that has service at least every 15 minutes during the rush hours, as well as having midday service. So, the idea is that there is still a collection point in each of these major corridors. Some folks maybe have to drive a little further to get to that collection point, but if you do, then the idea is that there's service that is very usable for a commuter express market, but certainly not to the degree that we had had prior to the pandemic. This, paired along with our metro network, so that's all the other colored lines you see on here, the green line extension, the orange line, the blue line, so on and so forth, it really kind of comes together to provide a network for all day, high frequency, limited-stop service, anchored at Park and Rides.

I'd also like to point out the ridership line on the map here are other community express routes; these are also operating today and will continue to do so, but are not part of this Key Express Network in terms of having service every 15 minutes. Trips in the midday have much more limited service, and Scott will talk a little bit more about that with the Highway 61 corridor.

So, this is the map that shows the overall change to commuter-oriented services: The blue routes are either Key Express Network routes or our normal metro transit lines and light-rail lines. The red lines are all the different lines that are proposed to be continued use under the Concept Plan here; there are a lot of red lines on the map, but you'll notice many of them are pretty thin. The lines on this map correspond to the amount of service; so, what this really says is there are a lot of routes that we are proposing, and they are all currently suspended, none of these are operating today but we're now proposing to restore. There are a lot of those routes, but many of them only had a handful of trips for each of those routes.

Finally, the last slide before I turn it over to Scott to talk about the details for Cottage Grove: In our report, we did a lot of analysis in order to help us figure out what was the right balance for the routes that we put in the Concept Plan. So, this is just one example of charts that you'll find in the report, out on our website, if you take a look. This particular one shows the number of people that will have access to high-frequency service; we define high-frequency service as every 15 minutes, and in this case it's a 5-minute walk or roll to the bus stop for transit stations. So, the top chart refers to the entire region, all populations, the middle is just for people of color, and the bottom is representing low-income communities. All three of these are set up the same way with the number of people across the bottom and then the various plans are what you see from top to bottom. So, in all cases, the red is our Concept Plan, and the number of people that would be within a 5-minute walk or roll to more frequent service is significantly higher for what we're proposing than either what we have today or what we had prior to the pandemic.

Cyndi said now I will go ahead and turn this over to Scott to talk through Cottage Grove itself.

Council Member Thiede said just out of curiosity, a few years ago, I attended most of the sessions for the DOT and the amount of vehicles, the 20-year-plan of vehicles and infrastructure and how those two things would be coming together and things like that. Have you kind of factored any of that into some of your stuff, where it may not be right today but there may be some decisions you make today that could accommodate the future when potentially you could get more autonomous? Obviously, the straight back and forth, if it's a fixed route, is a lot easier than

let's say your micro, when you get to a certain point where you said people would get on it and put their destination. So, I'm just curious whether or not you've kind of factored that or if you're looking at any of that.

Cyndi replied yes, that's a great question. A couple of thoughts on that: First of all, just a reminder this is a near-term plan, this is just for 2027. So, not directly taking any sort of autonomous vehicles into this. I will note, though, that there is one of the other suburban transit providers in the region, Southwest Transit, out in the Eden Prairie area, that actually just acquired an autonomous vehicle that they're going to be using for their version of micro. It's still very much in the testing phase and actually there still has to be a person on board the whole time, so it kind of defeats that purpose, but hopefully the idea is that technology will come along. Considering that labor is by far the most expensive part of providing transit service, that is certainly going to be a game changer. So, in terms of what's in our plan today, I would say micro is sort of heading that way, but we don't have anything in there that will preclude that. But, yes, I think when the technology comes along to the point where that's actually a viable alternative at a mass scale, that's when it will be taking the entire industry to develop that.

Council Member Thiede said I know White Bear has their kind of pilot autonomous vehicle program, and I think it's still running. Cyndi replied okay, and I know there's one up in Grand Rapids as well. Council Member Thiede said but with White Bear, I'd have to look it up to find out what the actual, but they had some autonomous transit as well. Cyndi replied okay, that's good to know.

Scott stated so, as Cyndi said, what you really want to know about is what's happening in Cottage Grove, what are we proposing here? So, this is a snapshot of what I'm going to detail in a moment. First of all, the map and route on the left-hand side is the commuter express service, Route 363, that is going to continue to operate as it does today. The new local Route 301, which is proposed from Cottage Grove up to Woodbury, and then discontinued service, Routes 361, 364, and 365; I want to preface that Route 363 has replaced those two routes, 361 and 365, since during the pandemic.

So, here's the proposed Route 301, and this is a new connection from Woodbury to Cottage Grove and operating through the center of Cottage Grove, connecting a number of destinations here, including Park High School, and it would originate at the Walmart at the south end. Then it will follow 80th Street across to Hinton Avenue-Radio Drive, ultimately to Valley Creek, and terminating at the new Gold Line station; so, it's both a connection between Cottage Grove and Woodbury, but also a connection to the Gold Line. It's operating every 60 minutes, weekdays only right now, as this is a test, this is a beginning.

Council Member Thiede asked do you have some sort of agreement with Walmart for people parking at Walmart and getting on that?

Scott replied well, this is really early on; this is a proposal, this is a Concept Plan, and it's an important distinction here to say that these are concepts and proposals that we're bringing to you and the public, and we want your feedback on it. Does this do what we really want it to do, connect the places that we want to? We're also, Council Member Garza is part of the Red Rock Corridor, and we presented to those commission members a couple weeks ago, so we're also aware of the Red Rock Corridor Concept Plans for this area. So, there's a number of things here that we could consider; this is a connection that we've talked about for quite a long time as a possibility between Cottage Grove and Woodbury. Certainly, with the addition of the Gold Line, that really makes that an important new connection.

Council Member Garza asked are we proposing micro runs in Cottage Grove as well or is that just in Woodbury?

Scott replied not at this time. Right now, we have proposed eight micro zones, and most of those, as you heard at the Red Rock Commission, those are connected to mostly our aBRT (Arterial Bus Rapid Transit) or regional aBRT service and transit centers.

Council Member Garza asked so if we are having the one pickup at Walmart and it looks like we're just running down Radio Drive, what about the other side of Highway 61 or our senior living or any of those things? How are we looking to get our community accessible, up to Walmart?

Scott replied that's a good question, and this is one option for service from Cottage Grove to this connection to Woodbury, but certainly, as you know in the Red Rock Corridor study, there's other possibilities for connections from Cottage Grove up to Woodbury.

Cyndi said if I could add to that as well, please, two other things: So, first of all, there is also Transit Link service that serves Cottage Grove today that is open to anybody, and that is a system where you need to call ahead and

make a reservation, it's not on demand, so that's a little bit different. But that service I'll just say will continue to run, the Transit Link. Then also micro is, in every single community that we've been out to talk to, everybody wants micro. So, we're going from one design in the past 3.5 years, we think that's a good place for us to start, but it looks like that will not be the end of it. Like I said, every community we've been to they want to know when they're going to get micro, and so this is where we're starting, we needed to kind of get our feet underneath us. We're going from essentially 5 buses to 50 buses that do micro, so that's a significant increase, but there's also a difference between each of these elements it's maybe 5-or-6 square miles, they're relatively small. So, we do that because we want to keep the average wait time under 30 minutes. So, it's one thing, and many of the other suburban providers already have this type of service as well, it's one thing for them to figure out how to do that in a one-community basis, we're still working on how you do that on a more regional basis. I think we've heard definitely Cottage Grove would potentially be a good market for it, in terms of certainly land use patterns to support travel patterns and such. So, but I think right now we're just trying to figure out how do we start this off, so the idea of connecting the transitways is where we start with that, but there'll be another round of this stuff certainly.

Council Member Garza said and you guys are aware that we are building a lot of new homes, single-family homes, different mix type of homes out there, so that's going to increase, having some in Newport, too. Do you guys remember that there were roads to a circulator 30 years ago or so? So, that looks like a micro route that you guys had back then, I don't know, I never utilized it, but do we still, didn't we have those, we stopped, and now we're going back to micro routes?

Cyndi replied my understanding is at that time, 25 years ago, those were fixed routes. So, if there was a more micro aspect to that, that predates.

Scott replied actually, no, I think it was a little bit more extensive than what is out there today; the 225 and 227 are kind of the remaining routes from that, but it had more coverage, but they were fixed routes, yes.

Cyndi said and the Route 301 is kind of a similar idea, in terms of we don't necessarily do branding by individual cities anymore, like we did for Roseville and Edina had something similar, so we integrated them into our regular network.

Council Member Khambata said so, at the bottom of that route where it intersects 80th and Hinton, we're building 54 senior affordable housing units that are going to be a two-block walk from that bus stop. There's also another cluster of apartments there that you can also service, so, I think the placement of that is good. The only thing I wish was different is, and this is a question for you guys, does this route just double back on itself, like it just goes up and down the same route?

Scott replied yes.

Council Member Khambata said rather than doing that, if it had some way to like jog a half mile down and catch the other senior complexes, that would be huge; but also, we have DARTS that runs one day a week. So, there might be an opportunity with our kind of local service that we do have to kind of funnel some of those people who are utilizing that service and coordinate it with this route. So, I think that's something to look into. Rather than having a separate micro route, we already have a DARTS service that's meant to serve people and get them just kind of around the community; but if that service can coincide with the timing at some of these stops, I think that could be another useful tool for them.

Scott replied right, and again, this is a proposed route concept, and it doesn't necessarily mean that we need to follow exactly what's on the map here. But as we work with the cities on your Comprehensive Plans, your future plans, that's really an important element that we want to consider as we're looking at new service. I was impressed by the development that's happening on the old City Hall site.

Council Member Khambata said yes, I think there's a lot of potential users very close to where and probably by no coincidence where you guys kind of wanted this to drop down into Cottage Grove.

Mayor Bailey said so, let's say the southern end there, by the Walmart parking lot, is there a plan then to be stops as it's going all the way back up to Woodbury? Scott replied yes. Mayor Bailey said so, like Target, and then it would go up? Scott replied yes, correct.

Mayor Bailey said okay, so that's one; two is, and I'll call it the elephant in the room if you want, because we hear about it, I'm on TAB, so I hear about this all the time, too, so crime. Crime is moving out to the suburbs, it appears and it feels that way, at least the way we're hearing it from some TAB members, who are mayors and council people in some of these other suburbs. I do have a fear, a concern, that there's going to be crime coming across and then they're going to be dropping down into Cottage Grove. I do know in talking to the mayor of Woodbury, there's already some concerns there, even just with a bridge that's crossing to Oakdale and Woodbury, which is crazy to think a bridge is doing that. Is there a thought process on, I know you guys have Metro Transit police and so on, is there a plan to have coverage or?

Cyndi replied so, a couple thoughts on that, and that speaks to what we hear all the time as well. On our website we have a whole list, a huge list of all the various initiatives and plans, and we've dealt with that. I would say I'm not especially concerned about this particular route, or this type of route, for a couple reasons: Most of what you're hearing the concerns about is on the transitways, so the light rail lines or the services, which only have the presence of a driver in the front of the bus; even though they're not police, it really does have a big, I'd say, calming effect. Also, the likelihood of somebody who takes the Gold Line maybe out of St. Paul, all the way to Woodbury, and then transfers to come here, that's not something that people are planning to do; that's just not what we're seeing, in terms of the crime on that is more when you have some people who are unhoused and don't have anyplace else to really be going. The fact that this is not running in the evenings I think cuts down on quite a bit of that. These routes, and we have these type of routes all around the region, these are not the routes that we're having issues with when you hear about some of the things that are in the media and such. So, I think Woodbury is more concerned about that because that is the light transitway connection between them and St. Paul, downtown. But we have a lot of these types of routes, and these aren't the ones that are causing concerns.

Mayor Bailey said and then you had alluded to, I think you called it, is it Metro Link? Cyndi said, Transit Link. Mayor Bailey said we have some, and I'm just going to make my pitch, even though I know it's just a pitch, the one biggest challenge I do hear from some of the people that use that in our community, especially our seniors, is a lot of them want to go to St. Paul, but the service doesn't run past 6 o'clock? Cyndi said it runs from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Mayor Bailey said and it doesn't run on the weekends; Cyndi said that's correct. Mayor Bailey said so if there is a pitch, I would just share with you I hear that a lot from our senior communities in Cottage Grove. As a matter of fact, there's a particular individual that I think has me on email with Sue Vento, whom we both know very well, and our County Commissioner, Karla Bigham, just because of the concern of why can't I get to my family over in St. Paul on the weekends for a birthday? Somebody has to come and get me, you know, those kind of things. So, I just want you to be aware of that. And in case we haven't really officially said it as a City, I would be ecstatic for my family. So, don't think, I don't want you to get away from here going hey, Cottage Grove didn't bring it up, either. You can add us to the list with everybody else because; Cyndi said I figured that was the case, and we did just bring that yesterday at the Washington County Board as well. Cyndi said yes, it's duly noted.

Council Member Garza said thank you for the opportunity to give us boarding events from up here, and you've seen the space that we use for the State Fair, our Park and Ride was packed beyond capacity. And I'm not thinking that our sporting events are going to bring us to that, but it would be nice to be able to connect to all of our sporting events that are happening here on the weekends because we don't have any way to get there, so it's just a thought.

Scott said all right, so Route 363, this is a route that's been operating since or during the pandemic; it was changed from the 361-365 combination, 361 is express service to downtown St. Paul, 365 to Minneapolis. With the changes in travel patterns that Cyndi described, the ridership just isn't there right now to support two separate routes. So, we're going to continue the 363 as it is today, serving the Cottage Grove Park and Ride and the Park and Ride at Lower Afton and then downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis. One of the new elements to this, and it isn't unique to this route, is recognizing that there's been a change in the way people want to travel to and from work, maybe they want to come home in the middle of the day; that's kind of a new deal, so recognizing that on the 363, we're going to introduce a new midday trip to serve that travel desire.

Council Member Garza asked do you know the proposed route that it would go up and down? Is there any opportunity to make it rather than up and down, so that means cut across to the other side of Highway 61 and come back up? Is that a typical route, or is it just the one that's going up to Woodbury?

Scott asked are you talking about the 301?

Council Member Garza replied yes, if it could swing back around and come back on that side of Highway 61 and come back around, and I don't know what St. Paul Park and Newport are using, or if it's stopping there, but that would be a good way to connect those lines.

Scott replied yeah, that type of service is one of the proposed routes, as you know, in the Red Rock Corridor that would do that. At this point, that's not part of this, but that's why we're out here, to take comments about that kind of thing.

Council Member Garza said well, I just want to make sure both side of Highway 61 are going to be covered; Scott replied right.

Scott said lastly, discontinued service; as I said, we're consolidating routes to just the 363, 361, 364, which had done some of that coverage that you described, and the 365 to Minneapolis. The other element of the 361 that is part of the discontinued services are what we call a local tail on the route, and the local tail came across 80th Street and up into north of 80th Street, is not coming back. Back in the day, the local tail was operated on both north and south of 80th Street; as the Park and Ride got more popular and of course the Park and Ride that we had originally was at 80th Street and Highway 61, at the shopping center. And then we went a number of places trying to find a permanent home for the Park and Ride, finally, we bought the property that we have now, it was Washington County's proposed site. What we found was as that Park and Ride, even though it's on the other side of Highway 61, with that new Park and Ride and the facility that we have and no space constraints at all, people voted with their feet. The local tails, both north and south, the ridership just kind of went away; we hung onto the north extension to pre-pandemic, but we were talking about maybe 3 or 4 a day on that segment, so that's the rationale for that also.

Council Member Khambata said I have a question about that. So, with Cottage Grove, St. Paul Park, the south end of Woodbury, and Newport, we're talking about a population that's got to be creeping up on 70,000 or 80,000 people. I guess I was a little surprised that ridership is so low. With that amount of people, our other demographics depict and tell us that there is a greater need than the number that's actually utilizing it. So, I guess my question is, as somebody who grew up in Cottage Grove my whole life, I never went on public transit until I moved to Chicago, and then it was a matter of economics; because to drive through downtown took 2.5 hours, it didn't matter what time of day, and the L-train was a 55-minute ride at the time. So, is it like a habit thing or human nature thing, like what's driving people to not utilize the service even though there's clearly a demonstrated need?

Ryan replied there's a couple pieces to that answer, I think there's more than 2; but one of them, first of all, is generally all of our ridership on the express service is way, way down. We were at over 350 rides on the 365 prior to the pandemic, and now we're at about 130, so, we lost a lot of ridership. And then the other important piece here, it kind of partially gets to your point of what's going on here, the economics; downtown St. Paul has always been way cheaper to park than downtown Minneapolis. Now, our ridership to downtown Minneapolis is 82% of that, 135 rides per day are going to Minneapolis, and we've only got less than 20 people that are destined for downtown St. Paul. Although parking in both downtowns is now cheaper because of demand, parking in Minneapolis has always been way more expensive, and our office used to be in downtown St. Paul. I like to tell the story that back in the late 1970s, when we were in the now Ramsey County building, the American Center building, you could park downtown for about \$1.50; 30 years later, you could still park in the parking lot over at Broadway and Kellogg for about \$2. So, even as inflation has gone up, the real cost of parking in downtown St. Paul has gone down, and that has a direct relationship of peoples' decision on whether or not to take transit, as you know from Chicago parking prices.

Council Member Khambata said and I think it's a timing thing, right? So, if I want to drive to St. Paul for a Wild game, I need to give myself 15, 20 minutes, and you're right, parking, even for events is pretty reasonable in St. Paul. And it's like if I was going to take a bus there, I mean it would take me at least an hour; so, the fiscal requirements and the time don't add up to just driving. I think that's the only reason why I would think that people don't opt to use it.

Cyndi said yeah, that's the challenge with transit service for our outlying suburbs is the land use patterns for the most part, you have lower density; you are certainly more widely distributed, you don't necessarily have always a good pedestrian network in terms of sidewalks and things like that to be able to access it. Generally, and this is going to be stereotyping and I don't want to do that, but many of the riders who use our local service are right in Minneapolis and St. Paul are doing it because either they don't have other good options available or because they live in areas where parking is tough; the University of Minnesota, for example, or it's more expensive. Free parking is a huge deterrent, I guess I would say, to using our transportation. If you have an option, once you have a vehicle, you're most likely to use it. So, the idea involves being fiscally competitive in the travel time because you have to have enough people, a number of people in small areas to be able to make stuff up; otherwise, you're having to try to catch your ridership all the way along. In order to do that, it means you're stopping at stops all along the way, which then slows it back down. So, yeah, that is definitely the challenge. For the most part, in a market area of 3 or 4 forms of transportation policy plan, like with Cottage Grove, would be those are areas that generally don't support a significant amount of all day, high-frequency service; they're more of an express market because your rates of auto ownership are high. So, they're maybe taking a higher than desirable amount of a budget to do that, but once you have a car, you don't have to put a dollar into the ignition every time you start it; so, people kind of start to separate the difference on that. Residents in this area tend to use transit for economic benefit or if it's just because they don't want to deal with congestion to get into downtown. There are definitely areas where there a fair number of more service industry-oriented type jobs in Cottage Grove that generally don't pay quite as well, just like you see in many other cities. So that's also a two-way thing, bringing people into the community to work as well as where are the residents trying to get; but the land use is definitely based on part of the infrastructure out here and we're trying to fit in with that. It's been a big challenge for 50 years.

Council Member Khambata asked have you guys been able through your policies and routing in older, kind of legacy suburbs particularly, Fridley, Maple Grove, Brooklyn Park, where you're still kind of out of the city center but a similar distance? Like how were you able to mitigate or are you still facing those same challenges in some of those other communities that are a little bit older and more established than we are?

Cyndi replied that's a great question. So, a community like Maple Grove, for example, doesn't have all-day service, it's express service only, and that's just from the population perspective we're looking at. With both Brooklyn Park and Maple Grove, there are over 70,000 residents in each of those cities. In the case of Maple Grove, we actually had to cut their routes as well, as Maple Grove doesn't support all-day service because of the land usage. Brooklyn Park is a little different story, because there's something else to Brooklyn Park; you have the part of Brooklyn Park I would say that is south of about 85th Avenue, or certainly south of Highway 610, that is much-higher density. When you look at your demographics, you look at income and a number of things, like the number of renters, things that are all showing higher-density factors that show a higher tendency to use transit. The southern part of Brooklyn Park in some ways matches up a lot more closely with Brooklyn Center and parts of North Minneapolis. So, that's really a button door of the newer areas, I guess I would say, in Brooklyn Park, that 25 years ago were still agriculture. We have the same challenges in those areas, they just tend to be single-family homes that are for the most part starting at \$400,000; if it goes by larger-increment lots with the streets, so to get from Point A to Point B it's not a great network, so it's much more challenging with only one way in and one way out in many of the subdivisions.

Next Steps: Cyndi said this is our timeline; we're at the point where we released our plan back in September, we are accepting public comments through November 15. There are lots of different ways for people to give comments, we have our folder for it out on the website, along with an electronic comment card, so that's kind of the main way that people are communicating with us. But we also are out riding buses and trains with those paper copies of the comment cards and talking to customers, do you know what's going on? Here are some changes. We also have pop-up events at transit centers and other locations throughout the region, popular gathering locations where we're talking with customers. Certainly, any opportunities using social media and some of those channels as well. Any other opportunities in terms of being able to get feedback on other efforts that we have obtained that is helping us make sure that we hear from some of those groups that tend to be more underrepresented when it comes to communicating in a traditional outreach process. So, we're really making sure that we hear about our process in all of our communities and also to provide transit.

Council Member Olsen asked are you taking comments from municipalities, for example? I would assume, Jennifer, we would put one together based on what we heard here today. Administrator Levitt replied absolutely.

Mayor Bailey said to add to that, Jennifer, maybe we could do some type of community outreach to funnel people their way, because I do believe kind of what's been said here, real quick, is I have zero concerns with what you're doing, adding that transit way, other than maybe a safety concern. But I do think somehow looping the other side of the highway; there's a uniqueness in our community where one side feels different than the other side of our highway because we get all this and you guys get all that. It's like I don't know how we'd figure that out, but if there is an option, so I think when we get it out to the community, I think you're going to hear that from ours. It's like yep, love it, but can you do something to get me over to that line so I can go into Woodbury.

Council Member Garza said even with our Park and Ride, that's not walkable, you can't walk over there.

Mayor Bailey said thank you to Cyndi and Scott for presenting this, and congratulated Scott on his upcoming retirement. Council Member Olsen said it's good information, appreciate it.

3. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Judy Graf and reviewed by Tamara Anderson, City Clerk.