

Riverview Corridor Comments
St Paul City Council
March 7, 2018
Joan Pasiuk
1984 Jefferson St Paul

Oral testimony:

Enthusiasm for enhanced transit on W 7th is well placed. I speak in support of a thriving Riverview Corridor and in opposition to the proposed locally preferred alternative.

1. A more physically, economically and socially connected city

During most of the extensive planning of the Riverview Corridor a local rapid bus line was an idea, then an experiment. Now the A-Line has been called a "star performer" and is the basis for the Met Council's development of 10 more routes. W 7th should be among them. But the Riverview project, without a commitment and working plan for a contiguous E 7th route, will only deepen the E/W rift in our city. Some say the E side will be well served by the proposed Gold Line and Rush Line -- routes designed to whisk people through St Paul neighborhoods to/from suburbs. An extended Riverview Corridor project is our opportunity to mend the heart of the city, linking east and west neighborhoods and the city center. Indeed it is the only corridor that can. Building community is the compelling value of a BRT route that spans E and W.

2. Equitable development

The Ford site is of course a critical development focus but so is the much longer-languishing former 3M property on Arcade. An E/W 7th Street transit route would serve both properties, surely making the 3M site more attractive to developers and making possible investments that will strengthen neighborhoods as communities of opportunity.

3. Visionary infrastructure

A spectacular capital city bikeway, pending new bikeshare system, and then no safe way to travel by bike on W 7th??? Fixed rail and bicycles do not play well together. Tunnel? A new bridge over the river?!! -- irresponsible uses of resources and timeline when the climate change clock is ticking so ominously. And have we really looked at the new prospect of trackless trains?

Among all the agencies and jurisdictions creating momentum for this project, this body in this room has to be the most vigilant champion of what will best benefit the residents of St Paul. The vote you take is a defining moment for our city. To look beyond the streetcar and to support BRT would not be a "no" vote. It would be a "Yes, and" vote. Yes to transit that serves regional interest; yes to addressing commute options; yes to convention and tourism business; AND yes to more sustainable, equitable, resilient, and thriving St Paul neighborhoods. Please look very critically at what a streetcar can accomplish and consider how we can be better served with BRT.

Full comments:

I am enthusiastically supportive of enhanced transit on W 7th but I comment in opposition to the modern streetcar plan.

1. **Think bigger, broader.** If we are trying to make transit a stronger option, we cannot focus only on one side of the equation. Overall driving wins if gas is cheap, parking is cheap and readily

available, and a brisk economy makes car ownership more affordable. Metro Transit's research suggests that a \$1 drop in gas prices leads to a loss of 300,000 rides each month. We can anguish over mode or route on Riverview but they really won't matter in trip shifting if as a region we aren't tending to the most important upstream policy work. So how much are we willing to invest in expensive transit projects when we are not adjusting gas taxes to reflect the true cost of driving, or developing regional policies that reduce free parking? Many cities and regions are tackling these tough questions and we should too.

2. **Rapid buses are proven here.** During most of the extensive planning of the Riverview Corridor a local rapid bus line was an idea, then an experiment. But the A-Line has been called a "star performer" and is the basis for the Met Council's development of 10 more routes. W 7th should be among them.

3. **This project should bridge neighborhoods.** In a city long plagued with an E/W rift a contiguous E/W 7th Street link is the only responsible investment. A W 7th corridor should not be built without a plan underway to promptly add the E 7th leg.

4. **Do not let high-end routes distract us from the mobility justice of a highly functioning bus system.** The best and most equitable transit network works hard across the whole urban core and serves people who have been marginalized. Saint Paul should care about rail and BRT assets but these only serve well if the connecting bus service is frequent, reliable and well maintained. The most equitable and transit-enhancing investments would be signal prioritization for all transit vehicles and excellent maintenance (lighting, snow removal, real time info) at all transit stops. With the dissolution of CTIB, we should ensure that the additional sales tax collected enhances the system overall not just new projects.

5. **A changing transportation ecosystem challenges our vision.** First, bicyclists deserve easy access to, and will contribute to, a thriving W 7th. The City of St Paul plans to issue an RFP for one or more bike share vendors. A dockless, electronic-assist system is a transportation game changer, making low-cost bicycle trips possible in all areas of SP – even the hilly parts. A fixed rail project will reduce and perhaps eliminate future inclusion of a quality bike facility on W 7th. Second, a shared economy -- Before the 2027 projected opening of the Riverview project the shared vehicle and perhaps even autonomous vehicle future will be upon us. Finally, trackless trains -- Numerous cities, including Miami and LA, are installing trackless trains – much less expensive to build and with all the benefits of streetcars. A fixed rail project does not complement or align with these significant changes.

6. **Climate change demands timely and prudent action.** A rapidly changing climate urges us to act swiftly and to use resources carefully. Any project on the Riverview corridor that requires construction of a new bridge should not be considered. Projects that bring more transit trips sooner, rather than those that prolong implementation and delay sustainable benefits, are demanded.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Riverview Corridor Transit Study Comments

March 7, 2018

Subject: Considerations for Implementation of the Approved Locally Preferred Alternative.

Multiple discussions have been held with the project team and PAC promoting more robust approaches to transit within the corridor, to encompass the Ford site and connect the “transit triangle” with an LRT solution.

Given that another alternative has been chosen, it is important that the development work going forward is not constrained to considering only the specific routing and infrastructure envisioned in the Preferred Alternative. There are several revisions which should be considered, that address areas of concern within the Preferred Alternative, and which remain within of the scope of the project.

- Congestion from Grand/Ramsey at 7th to 5th and Cedar, and 6th and Cedar to Grand/Ramsey at 7th. - Apart from considering a Smith Avenue routing, which has major hospital noise concerns, there has been little discussion of how to deal with this issue. We have offered alternatives including a Forbes-Exchange-Kellogg-Minnesota route to and from Central Station, a tunnel, and a bluff side/river balcony route. In addition, purchase of the CP Merriam Park subdivision to provide an alternate route to Union Depot. These possibilities should be kept on the table. If not immediately utilized, they may provide an answer to eventually developing a full-LRT route.
- Congestion and slow travel on the preferred 7th street shared-right of way – Strong consideration should be given to the utilization of the CP Spur from Randolph to the West . This would minimize disruption in the construction process, and effectively create a dedicated right-of-way for most of the route. Potentially, in the future this could be extended East using the Merriam Park subdivision to the SPUD, or tunnel, or alternative route, for a full LRT ROW. The project should not be burdened with the full cost of acquisition of the CP Ford Spur property, considering that the city has intention of acquiring it for other uses.
- Cost and disruption due to the construction of a new Mississippi River bridge and tunnel at Highway 5. - The rationale and justification for constructing a new bridge from the Ford site to 54th-55th street are discussed in Jim Schoettler’s commentary. It can be justified within National Park Service regulations, would enable the use of the CP Spur to the Ford Site, plus eliminate the need for a separate transit project to serve the Ford Site. A much smaller project could deal with the 7th street needs, probably though an improved route 54 service.

These suggestions have been put forth previously, but are not included as part of the Locally Preferred Alternative. However, they are valid concerns and should be adequately considered in the design process.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jay Severance – 350 St Peter St – Unit 409 – St Paul, MN - 5510

My name is Emma Pachuta with the recently merged St. Paul Smart Trips and Transit for Livable Communities. We are a regional transportation advocacy organization based in Saint Paul, with thousands of members who will be directly impacted and served by the Riverview Corridor.

Our staff has spent more than a year actively engaging communities along the corridor to better understand what residents and transit riders want and need from this project. We had a goal of engaging diverse populations along the corridor and hearing about specific barriers and concerns from different communities.

Through one-to-ones and community conversations, and the 251 survey responses we collected from people in Saint Paul's West 7th, Highland Park, and Downtown neighborhoods, we heard overwhelming support for better transit service.

We heard loud and clear that timely and reliable transit, better sidewalks and street crossings, and more green space are top priorities for people who live, work, and frequent this corridor.

This intentional on-the-ground work in 2016 and 2017 has strongly informed our organization's own stance on this project. Our official position was adopted by our board of directors in September 2017.

St. Paul Smart Trips & Transit for Livable Communities supports the draft Locally Preferred Alternative, which would bring modern streetcar service to West 7th Street.

We believe that this route must first serve residents along W. 7th Street based on community need, density, and population—and that any route alignment must take maximum advantage of W. 7th to increase access and economic development along the corridor.

Additionally, we support a direct connection along 46th Street to the Ford Site. Both connections are important and must be served adequately and timely.

Any streetcar solution must include implementation of a Bicycle-Rail Assessment to define safe bicycling connections with diagonal rail lines.

Any route alignment must provide quality walking and bicycle connections for all ages and abilities.

Transit signal priority should be given at every intersection to minimize travel time.

Bus and rail should be accommodated within the existing right-of-way rather than prioritize current traffic levels and on-street car storage.

A Community Benefits Agreement should be completed to ensure the communities and businesses impacted by this project benefit from it. The agreement should address, at a minimum: affordable housing, small business loans, green space, safety, and local hiring.

TLC-Smart Trips firmly opposes a "no build" option, or any option that would solely rely on local bus service and does not improve walking and bicycle networks.

We reject the divisive rhetoric out there that pits people against each other based on how they get around. This isn't about cars vs transit vs bikes vs crossing the street safely. This project is an incredible opportunity to connect communities with transportation OPTIONS--options that have the power to improve people's daily lives.

We look forward to continuing to work with community members to shape this exciting project as it moves forward! Thank you for your time.

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Supporting Survey Data [not to include in statement, but to have on hand as backup]:

- Seventy-three percent of survey respondents (or 3 in 4 people) said Yes, they would like to see better transit service that connects downtown Saint Paul to the Mall of America.
- Less than 10 percent of community members who responded to our survey were opposed to increased transit along the corridor.
- When asked about top priorities of features for this project, over 90 percent of respondents checked "Transit that is reliable and on time" and "More/better sidewalks and safe ways to cross the street" as either Important or Very Important, and 84 percent of respondents identified "More green space to use" as Important or Very Important.
- Over 70 percent of the people we spoke with had strong ties with the area, which included: being a resident of the West 7th, Highland Park, and downtown Saint Paul neighborhoods; working along the corridor; owning a business along the corridor; frequently shopping/running errands; or having family in the area.
- The demographics of the people we spoke with matched the demographics of these neighborhoods: about 75 percent of respondents identified as white or European American and 25 percent identified as a person of color. This 25 percent included African America, Asian, American Indian, African, Hispanic/Latinx and Other Ethnicity, with the majority identifying as African American or Latinx.
- Forty percent of the people we surveyed had not heard of the Riverview Corridor project before our speaking with them. Those that knew about the project had misconceptions that it was only a light rail project and that many people were against it. Once people heard that bus rapid transit (BRT) and streetcar options were on the table, they were interested in learning more about it.

Public testimony

Re: Riverview Transit LPA

7 March 2018

Good evening, my name is Andrea Kiepe. I live at 3220 5th Avenue S in Minneapolis. I work, shop, dine and enjoy the arts in Saint Paul. I'm also a member of the Twin Cities Transit Riders Union. **I urge you to support better transit on West 7th.** This proposal helps restore part of the historic streetcar network in place since the founding of Saint Paul. We need great transit in this corridor.

Why should the Saint Paul City Council listen to me, someone from Minneapolis? Two reasons: First, I remember when they built the Blue Line near my neighborhood. The reaction then was similar to the reaction from some opponents of Riverview now. I won't bore you with details, but the worst case scenarios they worried about never materialized. It's fine. Neighbors like the Blue Line. Businesses are doing well.

Second, and I think most importantly, transit riders like me need you to build this so that we can have access to high quality transit that covers more and more of the Twin Cities with better service.

There's a reason that two light rail lines carry over 40% of Metro Transit ridership. People like the high quality, frequent, reliable service that rail projects provide. They have the capacity to move a lot of people in a small footprint.

There are many thousands of drivers out there frustrated with traffic or who would like to give up their cars because they are getting older.

There are younger people who've never been fascinated with car culture. Owning a car is an expensive hassle. They'd love to avoid getting one.

Give these people a realistic alternative and they'll drive much less. That's will reduce air pollution, protect our health and make our neighborhoods safer and more pleasant. **Let's do that!**

If you vote yes today, the community will have many years to thoughtfully prepare for the new line and development it will encourage.

You can put in place protections for truly historic buildings.

You can change zoning to ensure new projects to go in the right places – replacing underused sites like one story fast food chains and parking lots.

You should plan for much more truly affordable housing that maximizes the use of valuable land on or near the line.

You should take care that changes to the corridor make it safe and easy for people to walk, use mobility aides and ride bikes.

You should build a great transit connection between Riverview and the Ford Site.

As good as the Blue Line is, it could have been even better had Minneapolis made greater efforts toward the changes like these. Even now, in the midst of housing scarcity, new one story buildings with large parking lots are being built on Snelling Avenue, which is getting great transit service from the newish A-Line. We can't let mistakes like that fritter away the expenditure for this new high quality line.

Please vote to support the LPA for Riverview. Please keep pushing for prudent changes over the next ten years to ensure the new transit line is successful and makes Saint Paul an even better place to live and work.

Thank you for your consideration!



March 7, 2018

RE: Support for Riverview Corridor LPA

Council President Brendmoen and City Councilmembers,

The Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce continues to support the Riverview Corridor project connecting downtown Saint Paul to the airport and the Mall of America. Specifically, we encourage you to vote for the proposed Locally Preferred Alternative: modern streetcar along the Highway 5 route to the airport.

The Riverview Corridor will provide a much needed connection for the East Metro, facilitating increased growth opportunities for businesses and their employees. Transit has become essential for businesses to attract new employees, and high quality transit in a dedicated guideway will create value for employers, employees, clients, customers, and residents along the corridor.

We support modern streetcar because fixed rail permanent infrastructure is more encouraging to developers and will enhance the economic development along the corridor. Fixed rail provides the long-term stability that developers need when investing in new projects. In addition, streetcar will have nearly twice the daily ridership of bus rapid transit – almost 10,000 more riders each day. We understand that it is more expensive to build and maintain streetcar infrastructure, but know that the expense and temporary disruption will be a benefit to the economic development of the area in the long term.

We advocate for the Highway 5 route because it allows businesses more direct access to the airport and downtown and faster end-to-end travel time. As has been discussed recently, we strongly support a second leg of the line to the Ford Site and look forward to making that a reality through a separate process.

In order for the corridor to see maximum economic development and opportunities for businesses and their employers, we urge you to approve the proposed Locally Preferred Alternative.

Sincerely,

B Kyle
President & CEO