

SAPCC Transportation Committee meeting - DRAFT
March 29, 2022

Present: Pat Thompson, Karen Nelson, Bailey Waters, Nick Sudenski, Joseph Kendrick, Kim Frair, Betty Wheeler

Guests: Alex Burns, Our Streets Minneapolis (presenter,), Jane Gehan, Tracy Kugler, Mindy Keskinen, Scott Jackson, Mary Boyd-Brent, Catherine Reid Day, Mary Sage, Mimi and Len Jennings, Kit Canright

The meeting was called to order at 7:01.

Waters moved to approve minutes from February 22, 2022. Nelson seconded. Approved unanimously.

Twin Cities Boulevard presentation

SAPCC is being asked to sign onto a letter in support of the Twin Cities Boulevard as part of the Rethinking I-94 process. The letter can be seen here:

<https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org/announcing-the-twin-cities-boulevard-sign-on-letter>. Alex Burns transportation policy director for Our Streets Minneapolis presented.

- We are in a critical spot in the Rethinking I-94 process, with the amended Purpose and Need documents to be published before June 2022.
- The Boulevard would replace I-94 with a surface level, multi-modal boulevard between the downtowns of St Paul and Minneapolis (Marion Street in St. Paul to Hiawatha in Minneapolis), returning highway land to the surrounding communities
- The concepts were initially drawn up using a location in the Seward neighborhood in mind, but it would look similar along other locations.
- He reviewed the history of the corridor and historical documents
- Twin Cities Boulevard would improve community health. Alex shared information from the <https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org> website on health effects and pollution along Twin Cities highways, including I-94.
- South SAP particularly has about 4 times the rate deemed harmful by MDH for certain pollutants.
- What will happen to traffic? Traffic is not like water, it doesn't just flow somewhere else. There is a documented phenomenon called Traffic Evaporation, also known as reduced demand. All other examples of freeway to boulevard conversion have shown that traffic congestion decreases.
- There are examples of freeway removal in the U.S., such as the Embarcadero in San Francisco, Milwaukee, Rochester NY, and upcoming in Syracuse and Detroit. Internationally in Paris and Seoul, where a very high traffic double-decker expressway was converted back to linear park and stream.
- Why not build a freeway lid or "land bridge" over I-94. This would mean rebuilding the freeway for another 50+ years, and while there would be benefits for the immediate area where a lid is built, it would not benefit all of the rest of the corridor, cost a lot of money, and still keep the health and climate harms.
- Our Streets has been doing community engagement and door knocking as they go
- SAPCC can sign on to the letter
- Individuals can sign to the petition (<https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org/get-involved/sign-the-twin-cities-boulevard-petition>) and/or send an email (<https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org/get-involved/email-project>)

Questions can be sent to alex@ourstreetsmpls.org Alex Burns, transportation policy director

Questions from attendees

What was the scope of Rethinking I-94's Phase 1 "Community Engagement?" (2016) Were Our Streets and/or other organizations involved in that phase? Were ideas beyond the status quo discussed in that phase?

Our Streets Mpls was not involved in this, nor was St. Anthony Park Community Council. Seward neighborhood was involved in this process but all of this engagement appears to have been either disregarded or lost. The Livability Framework the MnDOT has adopted came out of that phase. This is the report from Phase 1. https://talk.dot.state.mn.us/rethinking-i94/news_feed/phase-1

Given the industry in South SAP, how do you sort the pollution out between highway and industrial?

You cannot sort it out exactly, but you can see the highway trend in other places without industry adjacent to the freeway, so it's not unreasonable to think there is an association.

<https://mpca.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f5bf57c8dac24404b7f8ef1717f57d00>

Do we know how many of the vehicles on this portion of 94 at anyone one time are through traffic vs traffic going to or leaving from Minneapolis and Saint Paul?

The Phase 1 study area looked at this, but it included all of Minneapolis and St. Paul. We have not seen revised numbers for the current corridor from Hiawatha to Marion. Community advocates want to get those numbers as soon as possible. There is some expectation that many trips are to be short local trips.

Inspired by the Seoul example, what might we be able to restore in the watershed?

The watershed organizations are definitely at the table on this project. The possibilities are endless, especially with a linear park. Comment from the chat to include local tribes, think of Bridal Veil Falls.

Thinking of past efforts to sway transportation planners on community vision for people-centered streets, we didn't get what we wanted. How to we influence in this case?

This project has not yet been funded and so whoever the elected officials are at the time of the project will have the most sway. Keep on top of it and make your voice heard through organizing.

How do we accomplish making our views known to elected officials?

Send an email is the most effective thing at this time. All of the ways of getting involved, including email are here: <https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org/get-involved>

Does the Transportation Committee want to sign on to Twin Cities Boulevard letter?

Waters moved that SAPCC sign onto the following letter, second by Kendrick.

<https://www.twincitiesboulevard.org/announcing-the-twin-cities-boulevard-sign-on-letter/>

Wheeler asked what the cost differential is between this option and a land bridge. Alex Burns said he has heard estimates that the land bridge could cost about \$5M for 5 blocks. This would be 5% of the project area and still leaves a lot of the harms in place. Wheeler tried to get a sense of which is more expensive, rebuilt freeway with land bridge vs filling in the trench/boulevard. Burns answered that when looking at other examples, boulevard conversions were comparable in cost compared to rebuilding the freeway without lids, and then cheaper in the long run in terms of maintenance, since there are not bridges and retaining walls to maintain.

Our Streets Minneapolis is working to get St Paul and Minneapolis to get funding (currently available from the federal government) for a study to do a freeway to boulevard conversion.

Committee members raised the issue of our neighborhood needing to consider the truck connection between Pierce Butler and Energy Park Drive.

Studenski expressed concern about one aspect of the letter and the Boulevard description, which includes having zero fare, electric buses running along the corridor. It seems like adding in too many elements. Burns responded that electric buses are reasonable to add in the post-2027 timeline we're working with.

Zero fare transit is proven to increase ridership, and if the idea is to encourage the most space-efficient travel along the corridor, making the transit option free encourages that. Also 28% of people in the corridor that cannot afford a car

Vote: The motion to sign onto the letter was passed unanimously.

Metro Transit E Line final comments

(You can see the change they have made to the Berry Street station in Westgate here:

<https://www.metrotransit.org/university-berry>. The whole corridor plan is here:

https://www.metrotransit.org/Data/Sites/1/media/e-line/recommendedcorridorplan/ELine_RecommendedCorridorPlan_Final.pdf)

Nelson moved that SAPCC comment to Metro Transit to endorse the revised Berry Street station and to urge Metro Transit to have all possible sections of the corridor include bus-only lanes, that is to move the sections that say “for future consideration” to “implement in near term.” Waters seconded.

Vote: The motion passed unanimously

Joint district council Transportation Committee meeting

There will be a joint meeting of district council Transportation Committees on Wednesday, April 6, 1:00 p.m. on Zoom. It's open to anyone who is interested. Here's the link!

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84808727437#success>

County road speed limits

We had heard there was a bill to allow counties to lower speed limits, so that their streets could be in line with city street speed limits. In SAP, that would mean Raymond and Como (and possibly University) could be 25mph. Wheeler and Thompson had been asked to testify at a House committee hearing, which was delayed because of an amendment.

Thompson explained that by the time the hearing happened, the bill had been amended to narrow the language down so it only applied to a small subset of county roads in the suburbs, where speed limits are higher, and it would allow Ramsey County to lower the limit to 30mph. Wheeler still testified about the need for lower speed limits on county roads in dense areas and explained all the safety considerations. She has optimism about the comments of the legislator who proposed this law and from other commissioners who have said they are impressed by our proposals on reducing speed limits and the safety impacts. She hopes the commissioners will feel empowered to make these changes on roads in urban areas. The commissioners are working on a session that might be April 19th, a Tuesday. Thompson will let committee members know when a date is firm. This could impact Como and Raymond for sure, future Cleveland. Not sure about University.

Health Effects of Highways working group update

Nick reported that they did some planning of the event at the last meeting he attended. They were reaching out to parks & rec on where to hold it. Weekend was preferred for the date.

Territorial Road project updates

A muralist was selected on a clear vote – Kada Goalen, who designed and led the Seal Street painting will be the muralist painter. Very excited to see what she comes up with. There will also be a Chroma Zone mural on the Terra Firma building half a block to the west, with that artist working at the same time.

The art bench at Carleton was approved at City Council and is on schedule. The day after the approval, Public Works received an email that someone would've been there to oppose the bench. He complained about the trash along Territorial, among other things. Jessica sent them an email response, building connection. We should consider trying to get public trash cans placed along Territorial. There also aren't enough generally in the area, given the increased number of residents and change from an industrial area to a more residential area. The city has not kept up with this change, as with the lack of street lights on Raymond south of University. Additional concern is that this bench will provide a good smoker's location. We could ask Murphy Rigging to get a smoker's pole to deal with the butts, which would be their responsibility to empty.

Saturday, June 11 launch event. Morning seems like the better time? We will discuss this event plan at our April meeting with Jessica.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05.