

OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE REGIONAL RAILROAD AUTHORITY
WASHINGTON COUNTY, MINNESOTA
OCTOBER 2, 2007

The Washington County Regional Railroad Authority met in regular session at 9:05 a.m. in the Washington County Government Center, County Board Room. Present were Commissioners Peterson, Pulkrabek, Kriesel, Orth, and Hegberg. Absent none. RRA Chair Peterson presided. Also present were James Schug, County Administrator; George Kuprian, Assistant County Attorney; Don Theisen, Director of Public Works; Mike Rogers, Associate Planner; Keith Potter, Facilities Manager; Ted Schoenecker, Transportation Engineer; Mjyke Nelson, Information Technology Director; Kevin Corbid, Director of Property Records and Taxpayer Services; Harley Will, Financial Services Director; Tom Adkins, Community Services Director; Sheriff Bill Hutton; Chief Deputy Sheriff Mike Johnson; Captain Steve Pott; Ann Pung-Terwedo, Sr. Planner; and Steve Nelson, Public Information Coordinator II.

The Regional Rail Authority recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

MAY 15, 2007 REGIONAL RAILROAD AUTHORITY MINUTES

Commissioner Hegberg moved to approve the May 15, 2007 Regional Railroad Authority meeting minutes. Commissioner Kriesel seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

UPDATE ON THE RED ROCK CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS STUDY

Mike Rogers, Associate Planner, presented a brief update on the Red Rock Corridor Alternatives Analysis Study. The corridor is thirty miles long and travels from Hastings through St. Paul and on to Minneapolis. The Commuter Rail Feasibility Study that was done in 2001 assumed the following: to build the 30 mile corridor capital costs in 2010 would be \$421,000,000; there would be approximately 6,000 daily riders; would cost \$8 million a year to operate; the corridor was feasible when compared to other systems throughout the county; and it would include the entire corridor, Hastings to Minneapolis.

October 2, 2007

Mr. Rogers stated that part of the alternatives analysis is to figure out the purpose and need of this corridor. This would include: provide a choice for travelers to avoid congestion and reduce their travel time; a need to provide increased modal alternatives and multimodal options; and increase mobility for peak-hour travel to employment in the study area. Transit modes that meet the purpose and need would be the express bus, bus rapid transit, and commuter rail. The Alternative Analysis provided the following results:

Ridership Forecast – Model Changes

Mode Choice – In 2001, it was assumed that 50% of the people in the Red Rock Corridor would take transit going to either of the two downtowns. Metropolitan Council has since performed more quantified data, survey and analysis and found that for St. Paul it would be about 20% and Minneapolis it would be about 35%. The lower percentages are due to transit cuts and removal of a mid-day bus.

Rail Bias – In the old model there was an unsubstantiated rail bias which means that rails tend to have more riders than bus. Hiawatha has shown that. The new model does not have that in there because the Federal government will not allow it until the region opens a system that can demonstrate based on quantifiable numbers that the bias is there. For Red Rock, they will need to wait until the Northstar Corridor is up and running before that bias can help it out.

Corridors – In 2001 it was assumed that Red Rock was the only connection between the two downtowns. Central light rail didn't exist. The new model has Central light rail in it so it changes the dramatics of ridership.

Fewer Stations – These were cut in the new model from ten down to eight. One of the important stations lost was in Northeast Minneapolis.

Finally, 2000 census data was used instead of 1990 data.

October 2, 2007

Ridership Forecast

The model used for this study was approved by the Federal government. It includes Northstar, Central, and Southwest Corridors. They used 2020 bus plan updates and 2030 projection timelines. They expanded the corridor coverage to include both Goodhue and Pierce Counties.

Express Bus: Enhances No-Build

This was to try and get a comparable comparison between bus and commuter rail. They looked at enhanced service routes on 361 Hastings to St. Paul, 364 is a local circulated service in the Cottage Grove/St. Paul Park/Newport area, and 365 directly to Minneapolis. Ridership along that corridor was 900 a day.

Additional Bus Options

Three options were tested. Bus rapid transit where there is a 20% improvement in overall travel time; increase the frequency from 30 minutes to 15 minutes between buses; and extend the bus only shoulders all the way to Hastings. These options lead to 2,200 to 3,200 in riderships. They didn't look at these options from an operating cost standpoint. It only looked at the maximum ridership they could get out of the model.

Commuter Rail

They tested five options. One was a Hastings to downtown St. Paul, with Central Corridor light rail taking people to Minneapolis or points west of downtown St. Paul. They looked at going all the way to Minneapolis on both the Canadian Pacific and Burlington Northern routes and stopping between the two. Ridership ranged from 1,600 to 3,100 depending on the option. The more frequent the service, the higher the ridership.

October 2, 2007

Capital Costs

Northstar has worked with Burlington Northern Santa Fe to get their corridor in place. Red Rock is slightly more difficult because it has Canadian Pacific, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and Union Pacific all on this corridor. There is more freight traffic than Northstar and the Hoffman Yard and Union Depot issues on the freight end. On the highway improvement side, a lot of improvements are going into the Wakota Bridge area, but after that there isn't as much.

The capital cost for bus, Hastings to St. Paul, is estimated at \$18 to \$74 million. This range is given because there are already existing maintenance facilities for buses, there may be buses they can use out of Metro Transit's existing system. This figure does not include the right-of-way for highway improvements.

Commuter rail costs would be \$350 million from Hastings to St. Paul which includes all the stations, parking lots, maintenance facilities, trains and passenger cars. The St. Paul to Minneapolis would be \$200 million to \$225 million depending on the route.

Operating costs would include vehicle and facility maintenance, employee costs, insurance, marketing and administration. Commuter rail from Hastings to St. Paul is estimated at \$6.7 million. The existing express bus from Cottage Grove to both downtowns costs about \$1.4 million a year today. All the bus options developed in the ridership model start at five times as expensive as the current service and can go up to eight times as expensive.

Mr. Rogers concluded that the alternatives analysis shows that the new starts process is not a good fit for the Red Rock Corridor because it does not analyze system wide benefits or economic development. Red Rock as a corridor by itself is a good corridor, but once it is connected to Northstar, Central, Rush Line, Cedar Avenue, and to the Southwest Corridor, it starts to be a larger regional transit system to get people from Point A to Point B a lot easier. Economic development in the current Federal process does not really look at what economic development may come out of this corridor and the benefits to being

October 2, 2007

close to some of these stations. Travel time is 17 minutes faster than baseline service. There is significant long-term growth potential, but the ridership needs to be worked on to reach that potential and go beyond what this model is showing. He believes that the Red Rock Corridor will use a phased in approach with the Hastings to St. Paul section first and then connect St. Paul to Minneapolis when other corridors start coming on line.

Mr. Rogers briefly described the implementation schedule. He also mentioned the High Speed Rail project. This train will travel between 90 and 110 miles an hour between the Twin Cities and Chicago. There would be six daily trips and it would cut down travel time from downtown to downtown from eight hours to five and one-half hours. It is a way of using an existing freight rail track to improve frequency and speeds for another option of moving people.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Regional Railroad Authority, Commissioner Pulkrabek moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Hegberg and it was adopted unanimously. The Regional Railroad Authority adjourned at 9:40 a.m.

Myra Peterson, Chair
Regional Railroad Authority

Attest:

James R. Schug
County Administrator

