

From: ward2

Sent: Wednesday, November 24, 2021 10:43 AM

To: Kara Coustry

Subject: Re: notes from last night

Attachments: Rush Line Vote 11-23-21.docx; Biehn Amendment 11-23-21.docx

Here you go,
Doug

From: Kara Coustry

Sent: Wednesday, November 24, 2021 8:49 AM

To: ward2

Subject: notes from last night

Good morning Councilmember Biehn,

If your notes from last night's meeting are electronic, would it be possible to get them so I can copy them to the minutes?

Thank you,
Kara Coustry

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RUSH LINE

As many of you know I had a 28-year career as a Peace Officer with the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office – first as a Deputy, then Sergeant, then Lieutenant and retiring with the rank of Commander.

There are skills that I learned in those years which I use to make decisions in my service on the City Council and, for that matter, as a parent of five children, and in life in general.

I would often have groups of people who were in very emotional situations providing information that they believed to be true – often from what someone else told them.

Inevitably I would get different versions of the event from different people who were all convinced that they were right, and the others were wrong.

It was my job to get the real facts and make my decisions based on those facts.

In the matter before us here today there has been a great deal of conflicting information.

I have made my decision based on the facts and will always respect those who have differing opinions based on those facts.

I agree with the late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who would say to his colleagues during debate in the Senate Chamber – “You have the right to your own opinion, but not the right to your own facts.”

Therefore, I think it is important that everyone understand the basis for my vote.

First, I have heard the statement that Rush Line has been misnamed because it will take approximately 45 minutes to get from here to downtown St. Paul.

The facts are:

- 1) Rush Line was named because Rush City was its original terminus. Soon after being formed in 1998, the terminus was extended to Hinckley.
- 2) In addition, Rush Line is an 80-mile corridor, with the first portion from St. Paul to White Bear Lake being renamed through Metro Transit as the Purple Line.
- 3) It is not uncommon to spend 45-minutes in rush hour traffic, which does not rush either, to get to downtown St. Paul. At least on the BRT you can use that time spending 45 minutes to work, read or catch up on personal business.

Second, I have heard that Rush Line is being rushed without public input.

The facts are:

- 1) The Rush Line Task Force was established in 1998.

- 2) During the past 23 years there have been many, many open houses, hearings, public information meetings, presentations, surveys and other opportunities to get public input.
- 3) The White Bear Press has carried the announcements and provided coverage over the last two decades regarding these discussions.

Third, I have heard that resident's concerns were not taken seriously.

The facts are; numerous changes have been made over the years to address the resident's preferences.

- 1) For example, it was changed from light rail to electric-battery powered buses, so it would be clean, quiet, less disruptive during construction and be more economical for the projected ridership.
- 2) Stations have been relocated and redesigned to preserve and enhance our beautiful downtown.

Fourth, I have heard that the Bruce Vento trail will be destroyed.

The facts are:

- 1) For decades the development of the Bruce Vento trail and the Rush Line corridor have been tied together. They are both part of Bruce Vento's legacy as a great environmental leader who was dedicated to reducing pollution and protecting our environment.
- 2) For twenty years there have been signs on the Bruce Vento trail noting that it is aligned with a future transit corridor.
- 3) Under the leadership of our Met Council representative Sue Vento, the extension of the Bruce Vento trail into White Bear Lake is part of Rush Line.

Fifth, I have heard that the Rush Line will bring crime to White Bear Lake.

- 1) As a retired command level peace officer, I have seen criminals do some stupid things, but it would be ironic to expect criminals to travel to White Bear Lake to commit a crime and to wait for an electric bus to escape. Not even taking into consideration that the bus route is known, and the bus will have video cameras observing the bus interior.
- 2) My wife and I have raised five children in this neighborhood. I take exception to those who would accuse me of being willing to endanger my family.

Sixth, I have heard that the dedicated buses will be diesel powered rather than electric.

The facts are:

- 1) The Metro Purple Line bus fleet will be electric battery powered vehicles from day one when it is scheduled to begin operations in 2026, at the soonest.
- 2) This fact has been affirmed many times.

Seventh, I have heard that the impact of the pandemic on ridership has not been considered.

The facts are:

- 1) The Federal Transit Administration has detailed requirements regarding ridership, the environment, economic impact, congestion relief, and cost effectiveness.
- 2) The Metropolitan Council's job is to continually re-evaluate all transit projects to meet or exceed the requirements. They are doing their job.
- 3) It is fully expected that re-evaluation will result in changes during the next phases of the project, just as they did during the phases leading up the transition to the Metropolitan Council.

Eighth, I have heard that the money for the project could be spent for other things in the community.

The facts are:

- 1) The money cannot be spent on other things in our community. The funding is dedicated to transit projects that meet all federal requirements; if not in our community, then it will be spent on transit projects in another community.

Ninth, I have heard that there will not be enough ridership, and that there will be too many people coming into our downtown.

The facts are:

- 1) I don't know the mathematical trick that simultaneously has too few and too many riders.
- 2) Ridership projections are continually being studied and the level of service will be designed to meet the demand.

Tenth, The proposed resolution calls for the Metropolitan Council to pause activity on the Purple Line until the legislatively mandated study is complete and such data is incorporated into the updated ridership forecasts.

The facts are:

- 1) This vote has no legal effect.

- 2) The Metropolitan Council is legally required to use a \$1.25 million grant to evaluate ridership, the environment, economic impact, congestion relief, and cost effectiveness prior to submitting for final approval.
- 3) The Metropolitan Council makes the decisions on this matter. White Bear Lake can, and should, influence the project to move it forward in a way that is best for our community, which is what I have always done during my 12 years on the City Council.

Finally, rather than go on about misinformation, I will briefly describe what I call “missed” information.

I have chosen just two historical references to what people thought would happen and the actual impacts on our quaint downtown White Bear Lake charm.

The first is from about 100 years ago. Paved streets were seen as the destruction of our quaint downtown and resort image. After all, those people from St. Paul would bring crime along with their roadsters and we would lose our small-town charm. I think we can all agree that paved streets were essential to moving into the 20th century.

The second is from about 25 years ago, when the development of the buildings just north of this City Hall were under consideration. The biggest concerns at that time were that the Cup ‘n Cone would be destroyed, and that people would be killed trying to cross Highway 61. Again, I think we can all agree that Cup ‘n Cone is doing gangbuster business and that people have learned to cross Highway 61 when the stop light says “walk.”

A few weeks ago, I was called a “traitor” because of voting my conscience to ensure a Met Council transit project would help alleviate a pedestrian crossing nightmare at Whitaker and Highway 61. If the City Council were to have voted against improvements to this intersection, the Met Council has aggressive appeal opportunities, or it could move its proposed stop to an alternate location without improving the Whitaker intersection. I will give the person yelling “traitor” the benefit of a doubt and propose they were speaking out of emotion and not knowledge, but it is still my responsibility to vote my conscience based on the entirety of the facts.

In closing, I believe the best thing I can do for my children and future generations in White Bear Lake is to cast a vote to show support for what I believe will retain our downtown charm and make White Bear Lake’s future vibrant and bright.

AMENDMENT TO PROPOSED RESOLUTION

I would like to begin by thanking Councilmember Walsh for the proposed resolution.

Whether opposed or supportive of the Purple Line, I believe we all agree that updated data on all aspects of this project, but especially ridership, is needed.

As stated in the memo from City Manager Hiniker, the Metropolitan Council is already obligated under the rules of the Federal Transit Administration to again assess ridership prior to submitting final application for funding.

I appreciate this acknowledgement of the Federal Transit Administration requirements.

However, the proposed resolution does not go far enough, because it only addresses ridership. In addition to ridership, the Metropolitan Council is also obligated to reassess

- 1) Cost-effectiveness
- 2) Environmental Benefits
- 3) Congestion Relief
- 4) Land Use, and
- 5) Economic Development

Eligibility for funding is based on the ranking received across all 6 categories.

The work being done moving forward regarding the Purple Line is the evaluation of these 6 categories which is being done with the assistance of a \$1.25 million competitive grant received from the Federal Transit Administration. There is no mechanism in this grant to “pause” the reevaluation of these 6 factors, and the 5 factors I am proposing to be added to the resolution, in addition to ridership as pointed out by City Manager Hiniker need to ALL be reevaluated prior to submitting final application to the Federal Transit Administration for funding.

Just as the City of White Bear Lake is doing its due diligence on all aspects of the major investment in our Public Safety facility, I think we can agree that all aspects of the major investment in any BRT project should be required to do the same.

For our Public Safety facility, the City is contracting with professionals to work with our staff to plan for and implement a facility that will meet our needs into the future. Again, the Metropolitan Council is contracting with professionals to provide the required analysis with the help of the \$1.25 million competitive grant.

I see transportation planning and activity throughout the metropolitan area to be an ongoing process integrating all aspects of transportation infrastructure. Requesting the

Metropolitan Council to “pause” activity for a project that impacts the entire East Metro and not just White Bear Lake is not achievable. Just as the Metropolitan Council has no jurisdiction to have the City “pause” our Public Safety facility planning, especially on only one aspect of the data we need, we should not, and in actuality, cannot, ask the Metropolitan Council to “pause” the reassessment that it is mandatory to complete by requirement of the \$1.25 million competitive grant it has received.

With that said, I am supportive of requesting that the Metropolitan Council include the findings of the legislatively mandated study by the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota related to the impact of the pandemic on public transportation, in the required updated assessment of all six criteria, when submitting to the Federal Transit Administration for its consideration.

Again, I agree with, and sincerely appreciate Councilmember Walsh’s request to strongly reinforce to the Metropolitan Council the need to rigorously evaluate the impacts of the pandemic on public transportation, in this case, the Purple Line.

My amendment is intended to expand and make stronger the need for updated data and analysis on ridership, so that it includes the same level of evaluation on cost-effectiveness, environmental benefits, congestion relief, land use and economic development.

Finally, my amendment is actionable and would keep the Metropolitan Council in compliance with the requirements of the Federal Transit Administration, and provide our constituents with the much needed, updated, accurate data and analysis.

The proposed action is consistent with my position regarding the Purple Line throughout my 12 years on the City Council. We have influenced many aspects of this project. Even though we don’t have control over the Purple Line decisions, we must continue to exert influence.

At this time, I respectfully move the “NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED” paragraph in the proposed resolution be amended to read as follows:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of White Bear Lake that *no sooner than February 1, 2023*, the Metropolitan Council *incorporate into its submittal of the updated analysis on all required criteria to the Federal Transit Administration as part of the Capital Investment Grant Application Process, any available results of the legislatively mandated study by the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota related to the impact of the pandemic on public transportation, which is scheduled to be completed by February 1, 2023.*