

Official transcript, June 5, 2008, public hearing, Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, St. Paul, Minnesota

CENTRAL CORRIDOR LRT PROJECT
MUNICIPAL CONSENT HEARING

Lao Family Community of Minnesota
320 University Avenue West
St. Paul MN 55103

June 5, 2008
5:00 p.m.

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PRESENTATIONS

Opening Statement: Dr. Suzanne Walfoort 3

Welcome: Commissioner Jan Parker 3

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SPEAKERS

Veronica Burt 11

Benita Warns 13

Jim Schueppert 17

Carol Swenson 21

Lori Fritts 24

Pete Vang 27

Brian McMahon 30

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1 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. We'll start with a
2 brief welcome from Ramsey County Commissioner Chair Parker.
3 Also in attendance are Ramsey County Commissioners Carter
4 and Rettman.

5 COMMISSIONER PARKER: Hi. As she said, I'm Ramsey
6 County Commissioner Jan Parker and it's my honor to welcome
7 you all here tonight on this beautiful spring night, summer
8 night. Again, Commissioner Janice Rettman is in the
9 audience. Wave your hand.

10 COMMISSIONER RETTMAN: I'm waving.

11 COMMISSIONER PARKER: And Commissioner Toni
12 Carter. Wave.

13 (Commissioner Carter waves.)

14 COMMISSIONER PARKER: We are really pleased to
15 hold this public hearing. Part of the process of
16 developing this kind of an extremely important addition to
17 the community's infrastructure is to make sure that we are
18 listening to the community and that we are aware of what
19 some of the issues are so that we can try to work around
20 them, that we can try to satisfy as many as we can.

21 I want to reassure you that even if the weather gets
22 bad, I was told that there will be people here until 7
23 o'clock. Even if we get done testifying and you decide to
24 testify and you go home; your neighbor says, "Oh, I forgot.
25 I was going to come"; you can still send them over and

1 there will be people here right until 7 o'clock no matter
2 what. So we really appreciate your coming.

3 This is really an exciting time for us in Ramsey
4 County. I think everybody recognizes the importance of
5 this discussion about the Central Corridor connecting the
6 two major downtowns in the state, and we are very aware
7 that this is a decision that is going to last probably for
8 a hundred years. Okay? So we want to do it right. We
9 want to make sure that we are understanding what the issues
10 and concerns are and that we will work with them as much as
11 we possibly can.

12 So with that I understand we're going to have a very
13 short presentation on the project and then we will be
14 opening it up for testimony and we will stay here as long
15 as people would like to testify. So thanks for coming.

16 DR. WALFOORT: I'm Suzanne Walfoort. I'll be
17 facilitating the meeting and I want to introduce now Robin
18 Caufman from the Metropolitan Council.

19 (PowerPoint presentation.)

20 MS. CAUFMAN: Good evening, everyone and thank you
21 for coming out on such a stormy night. My name is Robin
22 Caufman and I'm the manager of public involvement for the
23 Central Corridor LRT project. Tonight before we turn it
24 over to allow the community to provide some comments, I
25 wanted to just give a quick overview about the process and

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1 what this is all about tonight.

2 The purpose of today's meeting, public hearing, is to
3 provide community members the opportunity to provide
4 comments on the preliminary design plans. Those are the
5 plans that you see around the room here that you can look
6 at. These comments will be used by Ramsey County to inform
7 their review of the plans and provide their comments to the
8 Metropolitan Council. They're going to be deciding whether
9 or not to approve the plans and also provide comments to us
10 on them.

11 In addition to this series of public hearings on the
12 design plans, the Metropolitan Council will also be holding
13 some public hearings on the supplemental Draft
14 Environmental Impact Statement and that will be later in
15 July or August. So there will be another opportunity for
16 comment at that time.

17 This is just a map showing the route and the 15 new
18 stations that we're working on and is the focus of this
19 meeting.

20 Just a little bit about this process. This is what's
21 known as the Municipal Consent Process. It's actually
22 required under state law and it basically gives the local
23 jurisdictions, the cities and the counties, an opportunity
24 to review these plans and provide approval of them. They
25 will have two options at the end of this process and that

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1 will be either to approve the preliminary design plans or
2 disapprove them and provide comments for changes that they
3 would like to see and that's where public comments come in.
4 They will be taking those comments and deciding which ones
5 they want to forward on or what ones they want to forward
6 on to us.

7 The preliminary design plans that we have here today
8 show a lot of different detail and level of information,
9 specifically more engineering level information, about the
10 project. These maps are going to show things like the
11 track location, the station location, and the layout;
12 roadway features like the turn lanes; the lane width;
13 traffic signals, where they'll be placed, as well as
14 pedestrian signals; showing us the location and width of
15 sidewalks, where there will be pedestrian crossings, and
16 other system elements like the communication towers and
17 substations, electrical substations; and this is really the
18 focus of today's meeting and public hearing and the kinds
19 of things that we would like to have comments on.

20 Once this process is done we'll continue, of course, to
21 do engineering. We've got actually a few years left to go
22 and we're going to continue working on different aspects of
23 the project. Two of the ones that we're just starting on
24 are station design and public art. We're going to be
25 spending about eight months working on these two elements

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1 and really spending a lot of time with these and seeking a
2 lot of public input in the process.

3 We're also starting to work on streetscaping issues,
4 what the streetscape will look like. We're just starting
5 to work on the construction phase. I know we get a lot of
6 questions about that and what parts are going to be going
7 first and how this is going to work.

8 Along with that we're going to be working on our
9 mitigation plans and we'll be working on construction
10 mitigation, letting people know, you know, when roads are
11 going to be closed or buses are rerouted as well as trying
12 to mitigate some of the on-street parking issues that we've
13 been recently studying as well as property access. There's
14 a lot of people that are concerned about maintaining access
15 to the buildings. So we're looking at those issues as
16 well.

17 And, finally, we're also looking at utilities, the
18 impacts to utilities and relocation of those elements.

19 So as we continue studying all of those elements, we're
20 going to continue to have opportunities for the public to
21 review and comment on them. As I mentioned earlier, we'll
22 have the supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement
23 and, again, that will have periods of public hearings as
24 well as opportunity for people to review the plans.

25 Once that's done we'll be working on the Final

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1 Environmental Impact Statement and that will be the
2 document that includes the mitigation plans and we'll be
3 working on that later this fall and winter.

4 And then finally, again, as we go through this entire
5 process there will be plenty of opportunities. As the
6 manager of public involvement, I can assure you that we
7 will include the public in those discussions.

8 And this is just one final slide just talking about the
9 process. We did put these plans out over a month ago,
10 giving people an opportunity to review them. They're in
11 the libraries and on-line and, of course, here today to
12 review. The cities have also been reviewing them and
13 providing us their comments.

14 Once this hearing process is done, the cities and
15 counties will have some time to review your comments,
16 collect written comments as well, and to make their
17 decision. They need to make their decisions by July 13th
18 and forward their recommendation to us.

19 And then the Metropolitan Council, on August 27th, will
20 be taking final action, basically deciding on a final
21 locally preferred alternative. It's basically confirming
22 the route and station locations and the details and then
23 all of that is in advance of us submitting our next
24 application to the federal government to secure the federal
25 funds for the project.

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1 So it's just a quick overview of this process. I think
 2 I'm going to turn it back to Suzanne who's going to talk
 3 about some ground rules and then give the community an
 4 opportunity to provide some feedback.

5 DR. WALFOORT: We'd like to hear from as many of
 6 you as possible so we've established some ground rules to
 7 keep the meeting moving. First of all, attendees will be
 8 called two at a time to the podium here. There's two seats
 9 in front.

10 And the ground rules are posted up here. We would ask
 11 you to direct your attention up here just so you can read
 12 the ground rules; that people wishing to speak please
 13 register at the desk with your name, your contact
 14 information, and if you are representing an organization,
 15 please identify that. I do have the speaker list as I have
 16 it now, but you can continue to sign in if you wish at the
 17 back.

18 You'll be given three minutes, any individual. If you
 19 are representing a group it is expanded to five minutes.
 20 The timekeeper next to me will hold up a card letting you
 21 know you have 30 seconds remaining from your allotted time.
 22 Please respect that.

23 Written statements in addition to oral comments are
 24 accepted. Please limit the scope of your comments to the
 25 Central Corridor LRT Project.

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1 Again, all of those things, if you want to be reminded,
 2 will remain up on the wall there to keep things moving.

3 Okay. Shall we begin? The first person who has signed
 4 in requesting to testify is James Sherrill and then we'll
 5 have Joe Chouinard on board second. Are you James?

6 MR. SHERRILL: Yes.

7 DR. WALFOORT: You prefer -- you're passing?

8 MR. SHERRILL: Yeah.

9 DR. WALFOORT: Okay. Joe. Joe Chouinard.

10 MR. CHOUINARD: Pass.

11 DR. WALFOORT: Okay. Veronica Burt. Okay. Have
 12 a seat. Jan Parker. I'm sorry. No, no. That's our
 13 Commissioner. Okay. Who else has signed in? Benita
 14 Warns. Benita.

15 MS. WARNS: Benita.

16 DR. WALFOORT: Benita. Please, why don't you have
 17 a seat up here and we'll have you on second. Veronica, are
 18 you representing a group?

19 MS. BURT: Yes.

20 DR. WALFOORT: Oh. What is your group?

21 MS. BURT: To preserve -- the Historic Rondo
 22 Committee.

23 DR. WALFOORT: Benita, are you representing a
 24 group?

25 MS. WARNS: I represent my business, Mr. Michael

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1 Recycles Bicycles.

2 DR. WALFOORT: I don't think the time is going to
3 be a real issue. Okay. Veronica.

4 MS. BURT: Okay. Thank you. Hello. My name is
5 Veronica Burt. I'm a cultural organizer with a project
6 called Just Equity organized -- African-Americans for Just
7 and Equitable Development and I'm working to preserve with
8 the Historic Rondo Committee and African-Americans based on
9 concern of impact on community members on the eastern end
10 of the proposed light rail project.

11 And just to start off, I really want to express how,
12 you know, a lot of members in our community have been
13 concerned about a lot of attention that, you know, the
14 University has been getting and feeling like a lot of our
15 concerns haven't been met by the project.

16 To start off, you know, preferably a lot of folks wish
17 that this alignment, you know, like the University of
18 Minnesota, you know, was on a northern alignment, Pierce
19 Butler or, you know, taking a look at I-94, but if this is
20 the project, something that we have to live with, a number
21 of the concerns that folks have expressed is that the
22 current proposal isn't providing any kind of transportation
23 fairness or convenient access.

24 The stops in our community are like a mile apart.
25 Certainly if they're going to reduce the bus service from

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1 10 to 20 minutes, folks in our community should be able to
2 get on the light rail and walk from the community, you
3 know, but the downside to that is a lot of the induced
4 redevelopment that it would bring at those intersections;
5 you know, the loss of parking. And so being able to
6 mitigate all of those factors because, you know, it just
7 doesn't seem like there's kind of a win-win outcome.

8 So mitigating that commercial parking loss and as well
9 as mitigation for parking loss or any kind of traffic
10 congestion that would go down the residential streets. A
11 lot of our community members have talked about that. And
12 over the long haul, looking at mitigation for short- and
13 long-term business loss.

14 Certainly there will be needs during the construction
15 phase, but even after the construction phase there's a lot
16 as property values continue to rise. You know, we're not
17 wanting to see, you know, our ethnic communities,
18 low-income folks kind of pushed out of the neighborhood and
19 out of your businesses and certainly even out of their
20 affordable housing.

21 So providing some mitigation for businesses short- and
22 long-term as well some kind of mitigation or something that
23 can help even preserve affordability, promote continuous
24 affordability with housing along the alignment.

25 And two other points I want to raise is in looking at

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1 the current plans, the design plans, you know, we are
 2 realizing that a lot of these traction-powered substations
 3 are, you know, within our community and, unfortunately,
 4 there's a lot more of those kind of powered substations
 5 than there are, you know, access -- convenient access to
 6 the rail line and we wanted to raise that and not wanting
 7 to be kind of burdened with a lot of, you know, additional
 8 energy creation mechanisms.

9 And then looking at the boulevard, I just wanted to
 10 also raise a point of, you know, wanting -- if University
 11 is going to be redeveloped, wanting to have more green
 12 space certainly along that boulevard, you know, kind of
 13 separating between the traffic and the pedestrian
 14 sidewalks. So, again, you know, if we want to add
 15 attraction to the boulevard also keep in mind we want that
 16 attraction to be green.

17 I'll also submit written comments that will be a lot
 18 more detailed, but thank you.

19 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. Ms. Warns.

20 MS. WARNS: Yes. My name is Benita Warns and I am
 21 the owner of a small business, Mr. Michael Recycles
 22 Bicycles, which is located right near the intersection of
 23 Prior and University. We have found some very affordable
 24 space to run -- what we do is we give away bicycles and
 25 then we sell other used stuff to pay the bills so that

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1 bicycles can be free. Our clientele are primarily
 2 low-income people. Many of our clients are homeless and
 3 they need to be able to get to our store; and oftentimes if
 4 they're going to bring a bicycle in for repair or come to
 5 pick up a bicycle they -- you're not going to ride the
 6 broken bicycle to our store.

7 So we need to maintain the parking in the area
 8 because -- and we also bring in a car with our trailer in
 9 it to get to our business. So it's a very important thing
 10 for us to be able to come and go.

11 I'm also concerned for all the other businesses up and
 12 down University Avenue and even though I'm not right on the
 13 avenue, I'm close enough. I'm concerned for the small
 14 businesses that don't have enough parking right now.
 15 They're going to lose their street parking and that parking
 16 is their lifeblood because that train's not going to stop
 17 at every corner like that bus does and that bus is only
 18 going to come once every 20 minutes.

19 So, consequently, those people are going to have a
 20 lot -- they're going to lose business because if they don't
 21 have their parking -- people are still going to drive their
 22 cars. This train is not going to make cars go away and I
 23 think that they're naive to think so.

24 Another thing is the St. Paul Bicycle Advisory Board
 25 conducted a survey of the bicycling community. They had

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1 over 1200 responses and I happened to have been the one to
2 tabulate that survey and in that survey the bicycling
3 community overwhelming wants a bicycle route on University
4 Avenue. They do not want some side street with a bunch of
5 stop signs on it. They want to be able to ride on
6 University Avenue because it is the most direct route for
7 them and I honestly believe that if we are forced to live
8 with a train down the middle of University Avenue that I
9 would be much more in favor of dedicating one of those
10 lanes to bicycles than for cars.

11 Now, granted, it's going to kind of slow down the car
12 access, but the point being that cars would get something,
13 bicycles would get something, pedestrians would get
14 something, and then they can have their train.

15 Now, the thing that really has bothered me about this
16 whole process is back in 1991 there was a citizen task
17 force that was convened specifically to study the
18 alignments of light rail. They overwhelmingly
19 recommended -- in fact, unanimous recommendation was that
20 if light rail was built it was to be put in the I-94
21 corridor.

22 In April -- I believe the date was April the 6th -- of
23 1990 -- and I could be wrong about that date, but that's
24 pretty darn close to when it is and I have the paperwork at
25 home. On that date the Ramsey County Regional Rail

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1 Authority voted unanimously to adopt the recommendation of
2 that task force.

3 Now, fast forward to October of 2002. The current
4 Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority made a decision
5 without convening a citizen task force with citizen input
6 and they decided -- not us who live here -- they decided
7 that it should be University Avenue instead of I-94.

8 Now, why should they be able to make that decision?
9 The people that made that decision in 1991, they thought
10 the matter was settled and many of those business owners
11 and members of the community still live in the area. I
12 mean I've got the membership list for those committees and
13 for that task force; and what has been done here is that
14 the elected officials and the people that -- the powers
15 that be have decided that they want to impose their will
16 upon us. They should have reconvened a citizen task force
17 at that time.

18 Be that as it may, if we're forced to live with this
19 train we need to be able to continue to cross University
20 Avenue north and south every place that we can right now
21 with the same frequency that we do right now and the bus
22 needs to come as frequently as it does right now and
23 anything less than that is going to make our lives
24 difficult; those of us who live here, those of us who work
25 here and own businesses here.

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1 And so I caution you. You make sure that you include a
 2 whole lot of this stuff in this final design. Don't make
 3 our -- you're already charging us taxes for this. Don't
 4 make our lives more difficult to get around than it already
 5 is and I believe that this train is going to be an
 6 impediment to north-south travel and I don't think that the
 7 train is going to bring us all the benefits that everybody
 8 says that it's going to. Thank you.

9 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. The next two speakers
 10 would be Jim -- Schueppert?

11 MR. SCHUEPPERT: Schueppert.

12 DR. WALFOORT: And Carol Swenson. I'm sorry. I
 13 forgot to remind you. Please state your name, address, and
 14 organization. The court reporter needs to get it down for
 15 the public record. Thank you.

16 MR. SCHUEPPERT: My name is Jim Schueppert and
 17 I've been a property owner here in St. Paul for the last 32
 18 years. I'm a member of the Church of St. Louis, King of
 19 France which has been in the 10th and Cedar neighborhood
 20 since 1868, a hundred and forty years.

21 Indeed, St. Louis is an older church as is our neighbor
 22 at Central Presbyterian; and these structures are really
 23 architectural gems and may not be duplicated today.
 24 Central Presbyterian is on the National Historic Register
 25 along with the Exchange Building across the street. Our

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1 church is eligible for selection and was designed by the
 2 famed architect Emmanuel Masqueray who also designed the
 3 St. Paul Cathedral and the Basilica in Minneapolis.

4 Over the 18 years I've been a member of St. Louis, we
 5 have invested over \$5 million in the church with a new
 6 roof, new bell tower, new bells, a new organ, air
 7 conditioning, interior renovation, et cetera. Recently we
 8 elected to invest another half a million dollars to replace
 9 the hundred-year old boiler that was in the property.

10 Why do I say this? No, we are not being evicted, but
 11 many of our members who attend church there are elderly who
 12 live downtown or who live on the outskirts of the city and
 13 who drive downtown and attend church there. These older
 14 people, some of them are handicapped. We do not believe
 15 that the light rail coming downtown here is going to assist
 16 these people. It's probably going to -- they are very
 17 concerned about parking, they are very concerned about
 18 access to the church, and we'll just find safety issues as
 19 well.

20 There's a question of how we will conduct funerals. If
 21 you look out the door, once this thing is completed that
 22 light rail will be 10 to 15 feet right outside our front
 23 door. This will make it very difficult to conduct
 24 funerals, weddings, and so forth, particularly when there's
 25 a train running by every ten minutes. In addition, we have

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1 about 75 people who attend daily mass there who find it
2 very difficult right now today with the limited parking. I
3 mean how long are these people going to attend.
4 I want to now say that, you know, St. Paul -- Downtown
5 St. Paul is a changed city. I mean a lot of the attorneys,
6 a lot of the accountants, the bankers, et cetera have moved
7 out of Downtown St. Paul. I mean there's big office
8 buildings down there, but by and large most of the recent
9 buildings have made Downtown St. Paul more of a residential
10 area and I think this all has to be taken into
11 consideration when you're trying to develop a mass transit
12 system to service these people.
13 In addition, the hospitals downtown -- United, St.
14 Joseph's, and Ramsey -- have all invested heavy sums of
15 money in the last ten years. I would estimate it's a half
16 a billion dollars. And really I don't see how -- I mean
17 that's where the employees are and the people who attend
18 these -- you know, who visit at the hospital there, I mean
19 there's no service for these people. I mean they're going
20 to have to walk, you know, six, seven blocks I mean to get
21 access.
22 In addition, we have new facilities downtown. We've
23 got the new Xcel Center. We've got -- may I make a
24 comment? Everything seems to be in a big rush around here.
25 I mean to try and railroad this thing through as fast as

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1 possible. I'd be willing to come back for another three
2 minutes, but I mean you people need to take the time to
3 listen to people I mean rather than trying to keep
4 expediting and rush this thing through.
5 As I was saying, there are a lot of new -- excuse me.
6 I don't know whether I should continue or what that means.
7 DR. WALFOORT: Why don't you finish up just
8 briefly. If you'd like to sign up again I guess you can
9 come back when every --
10 MR. SCHUEPPERT: Well, I mean I think that's kind
11 of foolish really.
12 DR. WALFOORT: Well, I'd like to give respect to
13 time --
14 MR. SCHUEPPERT: Right. I understand that. I
15 understand that, but, you know, if you don't want to take
16 the time to listen to the whole thing then what's the use?
17 DR. WALFOORT: I think we'd be glad to listen to
18 more of what you have to say after others who have been
19 waiting have spoken.
20 MR. SCHUEPPERT: Well --
21 DR. WALFOORT: Please, sir, if you want to --
22 MR. SCHUEPPERT: I just want to --
23 DR. WALFOORT: -- sign up again.
24 MR. SCHUEPPERT: I just want to summarize here. I
25 think there's some destinations Downtown St. Paul that

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1 aren't being serviced by this light thing. I think the
2 whole thing is just being rushed through and haste makes
3 waste.

4 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. If you'd like to sign
5 up again, sir, please do. Ms. Swenson.

6 MS. SWENSON: Thank you. My name is Carol
7 Swenson. I am the community liaison for the District
8 Councils Collaborative of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Our
9 business address is 1080 University Avenue West.

10 The DCC is made up of representatives from ten St. Paul
11 District Councils and five Minneapolis neighborhood
12 associations. We appreciate the opportunity to present
13 testimony as part of the Municipal Consent Process and will
14 be submitting written comments.

15 Today we would like to address three topics of
16 particular concern to our member organizations: One,
17 stations at Western, Victoria, and Hamline; two, the
18 importance of providing a pedestrian-friendly environment
19 with easy access to light rail; and ensuring the inclusion
20 of neighborhood stakeholders in the decision-making process
21 for station design and public art is our third point.

22 First, stations at Western and Victoria and Hamline.
23 We applaud the decision to include the infrastructure for
24 these stations, but want to stress that neighborhoods on
25 the eastern end of University Avenue will not fully benefit

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1 from the light rail until these stations are built out.
2 The DCC strongly supports construction of future station
3 platforms aboveground and opposes paving over the station
4 infrastructure. Aboveground station platforms will help to
5 ensure quick and cost-effective build-out of the in-field
6 stations.

7 Two, the pedestrian-friendly environment. Pedestrians,
8 bikes, disability access, and safety along and across the
9 light rail is a major concern for the DCC and its
10 constituents. The DCC believes that pedestrians must be
11 able to cross safely at any intersection along the line.
12 We urge the county to ensure that either signalized or
13 nonsignalized pedestrian crossings be provided at every
14 intersection.

15 Sidewalk width is another issue of concern to the DCC
16 as it relates to the pedestrian-friendly environment.
17 Preliminary engineering plans indicate many areas where
18 sidewalks will be less than 10 feet. This runs counter to
19 the goals of St. Paul's Central Corridor development
20 strategy which calls for 12- to 14-foot sidewalks along
21 University Avenue. The DCC is also concerned that proposed
22 sidewalk widths on Cedar Street in Downtown St. Paul are
23 dangerously narrow.

24 Wide sidewalks allow for rows of shade trees, benches,
25 pedestrian lighting, and other amenities to provide for an

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1 attractive pedestrian-friendly environment. To this end,
2 the DCC recommends that Ramsey County staff work with
3 project office staff to explore ways to provide for wider
4 sidewalks. We also support further consideration of
5 narrowing traffic lanes or even removing one travel lane
6 which would allow for wider sidewalks and have the
7 additional benefit of returning some on-street parking to
8 University Avenue.

9 Third, station design and public art. We recognize
10 that station design details and public art are not included
11 in the current preliminary engineering plans.
12 Nevertheless, the public is being told that station designs
13 and plans for a public art process at a 30-percent level
14 will be part of the September submission to the FTA.

15 The DCC wishes to call attention to the fact that the
16 project office has begun planning for station design and
17 public art with no inclusion of neighborhood stakeholders
18 in the decision-making process despite multiple community
19 requests for early involvement of neighborhood
20 representatives.

21 The DCC is also concerned about the cookie-cutter
22 approach to station design which severely limits
23 opportunities for public art to reflect the characteristics
24 and qualities for each individual neighborhood.

25 We strongly recommend that Ramsey County review its

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1 current station design proposals and plans for a public art
2 process and work to ensure that neighborhood
3 representatives and public artists are included in
4 decision-making for public design and for all aspects of
5 designing and overseeing the public process as a condition
6 of approval for the preliminary engineering plans.

7 We also would like to call attention to the substations
8 that were previously mentioned. Many of those may be
9 located in areas that are close to residential properties
10 and in prime commercial areas and the design and exterior
11 attention to the stations so that they blend in with the
12 surrounding area is also a major concern for the DCC.

13 We want to thank you for the opportunity and look
14 forward to participating in the ongoing design and
15 preliminary engineering for the corridor.

16 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. Lori Fritts and Pete
17 Vang. Again, just to remind you to state your name, if you
18 represent an organization, and your contact information.
19 Lori.

20 MS. FRITTS: Lori Fritts. I'm at 2153 Knapp
21 Street, St. Paul. I'm the president of the Midway Chamber
22 of Commerce. I'd first like to thank Ramsey County, the
23 staff and the commissioners, for their dedication of time,
24 energy, and resources for the Central Corridor. I know
25 that their work on the project has extended far beyond the

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1 five years that I've been involved on behalf of the Midway
2 Chamber.
3 The Chamber's been involved directly with the Met
4 Council, City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, their efforts
5 along the way, but the most productive effort has been
6 through the Central Corridor partnership in collaboration
7 with businesses and the many government agencies involved
8 in this project which the county is an active member as
9 well.
10 Through this collaboration it was agreed to form the
11 Business Advisory Council or BAC to specifically deal with
12 issues related to the businesses that would be impacted by
13 the construction of light rail. Working closely with the
14 Met Council, our goal is to identify negative impacts,
15 impacts that provide direct input from business leaders to
16 the engineers as they work to mitigate the problems,
17 followed by working with the city and/or county to come up
18 with solutions beyond the actual engineering.
19 The loss of parking has been determined to be
20 significantly higher than thought for the past several
21 years of planning and meeting with the communities. Many
22 alternatives are in the study. Solutions will need
23 assistance and mitigation resources. We ask that this
24 issue continue to receive the cooperation and effort of all
25 partners throughout the planning, construction, and after

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1 the rail is operational.
2 By the unique nature of the avenue, construction
3 impacts will be most intensely felt by the small diverse
4 businesses along University Avenue. Allowing for the
5 construction of University Avenue to be the last phase of
6 construction will ease some of those impacts.
7 First, it would allow for those businesses to access
8 street parking for as long as possible. Second, the
9 shorter transition time from construction to actual
10 operation of the trains the more likely businesses will
11 recover economically with the increase of pedestrian and
12 transient customers. Having to endure the loss of parking
13 and no light rail for months or years could in itself be
14 more devastating than the actual construction impacts.
15 We would also request that contractors considered for
16 this project be able to demonstrate thoroughly their
17 ability to minimize construction impacts and their ability
18 to plan the segments to be built along the avenue with the
19 needs of businesses in mind.
20 Another important issue that engineers are currently
21 working on, how the loss of right-turn lanes will impact
22 trucks and their ability to safely continue to use
23 University Avenue. Trucking for deliveries as well as the
24 significance to the industrial areas makes this safety
25 issue a high priority.

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1 Finally, the Midway Chamber has been a strong advocate
 2 for the Central Corridor and we will continue our efforts
 3 in support of it. We understand that this is a project
 4 that will be a major boost for the east metro overall and
 5 will also generate economic development that will
 6 positively impact the local communities. We appreciate the
 7 opportunity to express our concerns and, again, thank you
 8 for your assistance now and as we proceed with this
 9 important project.

10 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. Again, state your name,
 11 affiliation.

12 MR. VANG: My name is Pete Vang. I am currently
 13 the board chair of the Hmong Business Association and I'm
 14 also the business manager at Vang Dental Clinic. Vang
 15 Dental Clinic is on University Avenue at 225 University
 16 Avenue. We've recently moved to our new clinic which is in
 17 the old Saxon Ford building, the main dealership. Our old
 18 clinic which -- and the building that it's in which we
 19 still own is at 365 which is across the street.

20 Basically I just wanted to say that I've lived and
 21 worked in Frogtown since 1986. Basically grew up here and
 22 I'm very familiar with this neighborhood. All I know is
 23 when we came here in '86 I remember as a kid driving by,
 24 riding the car scene -- the Faust, you know, the Belmont
 25 Club and the other adult bookstores along University and

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1 down -- everyday. So, obviously, you know, University
 2 wasn't very pretty in the mid-'70s to the '80s there.
 3 And with the, you know, influx of the Hmong and the
 4 other Southeast Asian community into this city, we put a
 5 lot of our time and energy into building businesses,
 6 purchasing properties, renting, and basically building
 7 businesses from literally the ground up. Today there's no
 8 question that the Hmong and Asian-American community have
 9 resurrected commerce along University Avenue.

10 This is definitely apparent by, you know, all these
 11 banks that are growing. Well, there's a reason. Because
 12 their customer base definitely increased because of the
 13 Asian-American community.

14 Our biggest concern really is the lost parking. Any
 15 lost parking on University will hurt all small businesses.
 16 The Asian-American community and the Hmong community rely
 17 heavily on automobile traffic. I don't have any hard data
 18 or numbers, but I'm certain not very many ride the city bus
 19 as it is now. Small businesses aren't big-buck stores like
 20 the Wal-Marts and the Targets and the Cubs and all those
 21 down there that have big parking lots. So any lost parking
 22 is going to really hurt us, especially with the proposed
 23 stops not even stopping in our neighborhood. They
 24 basically just bypass all of our businesses.

25 Inconveniences from construction will definitely deter

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1 our customers from coming to our businesses. I mean it's
 2 just common nature that if there's an inconvenience or if
 3 there's something that's not going to be, you know, easy
 4 for you to get to, you will just go somewhere else. I mean
 5 that's just human nature. People don't like dealing with
 6 traffic jams. They don't like dealing with anything that's
 7 going to make their trip tougher.

8 Another thing that we are worried about is increased
 9 assessments for all the street work and the sidewalk
 10 repairs. We already know that the sidewalks are all going
 11 to have to be redone. There's going to be quite a bit of
 12 street construction, too, and that's really going to hurt
 13 the small businesses again because small businesses are
 14 small for a reason. We have real small operating profit
 15 margins. So any increases in assessments and even the
 16 future property tax increases are going to hurt us.

17 So what we really want to know is will there be any
 18 funds or assistance set aside to assist small business
 19 owners during and after construction to ensure that we
 20 survive this process? We know that it's going to -- we're
 21 going to have to do something. I mean small businesses.
 22 We're going to have to try and reach a different customer
 23 base and expand our customer base from what it is now in
 24 order to make up the business that we will lose as a result
 25 of the construction. Thanks.

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1 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. Brian McMahon and Khue
 2 Yang. Did I pronounce that correctly? Brian McMahon.

3 MR. McMAHON: Yep.

4 DR. WALFOORT: Okay. And Khue Yang.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He left.

6 DR. WALFOORT: Please state your name, your
 7 affiliation if any, and your contact information.

8 MR. McMAHON: Thank you very much and good
 9 evening. My name is Brian McMahon. I work for University
 10 United, which is a coalition of ten community organizations
 11 along University Avenue and seven individual businesses.
 12 We are very supportive of light rail and we generally
 13 approve the alignment and the proposal. We do have several
 14 concerns, some process-related and some substantive, and
 15 let me start with the process.

16 As you can see from the wonderful array of drawings
 17 around the room, the materials are being presented in a
 18 very engineering -- civil engineering format which does
 19 make it very, very difficult for many to really understand
 20 what this project is all about. So I think it's very
 21 important that for future that we try to make sure that the
 22 graphic materials that are being presented are done in a
 23 way that is much more easily understandable. We have a
 24 capacity to do some of that graphic work and through our
 25 storefront planning center called U-Plan we have actually

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1 converted many of these drawings into three-dimensional
2 interactive wonderful images that include photographs.

3 I can't display these publicly, but I think I'll leave
4 some of these in the back. We hope to actually do the
5 entire corridor in this format; and, again, when you get it
6 at this level, you really start to understand the project
7 and I think that's something we want to keep in mind to
8 make it easy for people to understand.

9 As you look at some of the images here, you start to
10 see things that are not clearly apparent in the civil
11 engineering drawings; and in particular we did one station
12 area just to kind of try out this translated graphic and
13 that is the Snelling to Fry station. So it's west of
14 Snelling. And what we see as we look closely is that if
15 the rider or the pedestrian were to approach the platform,
16 not from the Snelling corner but from the Fry corner which
17 is the western end -- in fact, the back end of the
18 station -- the pedestrian would have to cross at Fry, but
19 then get on a 10-foot wide sidewalk that goes all the way
20 from Fry to the back of the platform. It's almost a block
21 long.

22 This little walkway is only 10 feet wide. On one side
23 you've got the light rail train. On the other side you've
24 got trucks and buses. So I am concerned about not only the
25 safety, but what will probably be ending up a major design

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1 issue which is the aesthetics of how do you now protect the
2 rider walking along this walk and make it a little bit more
3 aesthetically pleasant experience for a rider.

4 I am concerned that we may end up with walls with
5 fences and things of that sort and it's probably not just
6 at this station. It's probably at a whole series of
7 stations along the corridor. I don't know, but we do not
8 want to see a lot of walls and fences along University
9 Avenue.

10 On some other -- and, by the way, these drawings we
11 have posted on our website for those that might be
12 interested and that's www.u-plan.org, u-plan.org.

13 We have some other concerns. We are, like some of the
14 other speakers, very concerned about the loss of street
15 parking and there are two aspects of this. One is, of
16 course, safety. Pedestrians always feel much more
17 comfortable walking along a sidewalk where there is a
18 buffer to the street. You take away the parked cars and
19 the pedestrians, mothers with children and the like, are
20 literally by feet away from buses and trucks and cars
21 moving at a fairly rapid pace and this presents a really
22 uncomfortable pedestrian environment which is the last
23 thing we want to see on University Avenue as we are
24 transitioning to transit-related corridor development.

25 We also feel that there are some economic impacts, as

1 Pete Vang had just mentioned and others. The loss of
 2 street parking will have a very serious economic impact on
 3 their businesses. Many of these small businesses in
 4 particular have no off-street parking. They rely on
 5 on-street parking. So to take that away is literally to do
 6 economic harm to them.

7 And there is a loss in the economic -- measurable
 8 economic impact not only to these businesses, but I think
 9 to the city and the larger community. To replace the
 10 off-street parking is going to be expensive and we would
 11 like to see some consideration, some mitigation and moneys
 12 for that.

13 We strongly want to also agree with the desire to build
 14 in three additional stations at Western, Victoria, and
 15 Hamline. We are concerned also about the loss of community
 16 process or input and the lack of community process on
 17 station design, public art, streetscape. These are the
 18 kinds of things that are very, very important to the
 19 community.

20 I do have some written comments and I'd be glad to
 21 leave these with you. Thank you.

22 DR. WALFOORT: Thank you. Phillip Tran. (Pause)
 23 Phillip Tran. (Pause) KaHoua Yang, would you be
 24 interested? There was a question mark whether you wanted
 25 to comment. KaHoua Yang. (Pause) Phillip Tran. (Pause)

1 I just wanted to give him -- Phillip Tran. (Pause)

2 Okay. We will be here till 7 p.m. if you change your
 3 mind, if you would like to sign up again or if you would
 4 like to sign up the first time to speak. So we will be
 5 here till 7:00 to listen as will the Commissioners.

6 (Hearing concluded at 5:47 p.m.)

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Linda Oman, Court Reporter