



January 25, 2011

Ms. Wendy Wulff  
Chair, Transitway Guidelines Advisory Committee  
Metropolitan Council  
390 Robert St. N.  
St. Paul, MN 55101

Dear Ms. Wulff:

In preparation for the February 7 meeting of the Transitway Guidelines Advisory Committee, the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) is taking the opportunity to offer comments regarding the guidelines and the process followed to develop these guidelines.

Rushing approval of these transitway guideline documents only reinforces the findings of the recent Office of Legislative Auditor's report on Transit Governance in the Twin Cities Region. The OLA report states that coordination of all involved parties is difficult and a central governance issue has been the Metropolitan Council's lack of credibility with elected officials and other transit stakeholders.

In our letter of October 28, 2010 to Transportation Committee Chair Robert McFarlin we acknowledged the value of having a common set of guidelines to provide best practices to all agencies involved in the development of regional transitways. Cooperative, continuing, and comprehensive discussions between the Council, the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), MnDOT, the individual counties and associated Regional Railroad Authorities, Suburban Transit Authorities, individual cities, and corridor commissions are essential to finding a shared vision of the different types of operations that are classified as transitways.

However, we believe this process was rushed, leading to conclusions that were not consistently adopted by the individual technical committees. From the beginning, the project was to be complete in spring 2011, but in the third quarter of 2010, recommendations were being generated by committees for approvals before year end. This is a disservice to the number of people participating in the process and gives the appearance of the process being a sham.

The work done appears to be guided in every step by Council staff, with little consideration to other groups involved in the process. Given the staff-lead process, it is unclear how the leadership from the advisory committee (many elected officials) is reflected in the final documents. Further, at least from the MVTA staff perspective, there is little ownership in the final documents rather than sharing in the pride of participation in such a process. And, significant work done by a variety of leaders along the Cedar Avenue Corridor, for example, is now being prescribed as to the color of the line, and the look of the vehicles so there is little opportunity to celebrate the uniqueness of an individual corridor.

There are concerns regarding fare collection issues – on-board vs. off-board? We want riders to have a positive experience and to not be confused about how to pay their fare based on mode of travel. There has been discussion of all “pay board” on BRT, including lines into downtown Minneapolis. But the Standard Operating Procedures for Marquette and Second that were recently adopted requires ALL buses to be pay exit as they leave downtown Minneapolis.

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Finally, we understand that these guidelines are to be incorporated into the Transportation Policy Plan update and that adds to our concerns that these "guidelines" are written more in the format of "regulations" and thus do not allow flexibility.

A new Council is expected to be named by March 1. There is no reason to rush these approvals before a new Council is seated. We urge further deliberation as there are still many unanswered questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Will Branning".

Will Branning  
Chair, MVTA Board of Directors

c: MVTA Board  
Sarah Helleckson, STA Alternate to Transitways Advisory Committee