Parks Comprehensive Plan Task Force

Meeting Summary
April 18, 2007
Topic: Transportation

Task Force members present: R.D. Brown, Chuck Evens, Erick Goodlow, Maggie Lindorfer, Pete Regnier, Kathy Schubert, Carrie Wasley, Jenny Winkelman

Members absent: Steve Gordon (excused), John O'Connell, Brian Pelc (excused), Victor Vang

Staff: Vince Gillespie, Mike Hahm, Rich Lallier, Jody Martinez, Jess Rosenfeld, Ruth Schumi, Eric Thompson

Panelists: Tony Smith, Dan Bercham, Al Lovejoy, Dan Breva

Dan Bercham/Tony Smith, West Side Circulator
The West Side Circulator is a bus route that provides transportation between agencies that serve youth during the summer and for five hours after school during the school year. It has a fixed schedule and runs every 30-35 minutes. Ridership is fairly consistent: 116 riders/day on average. It creates a culture of learning that brings youth to opportunities. One of the other strengths of the WSC is that it brought various agencies on the West Side together to talk about how to best program for youth. Some parents are concerned about the bus being unsupervised, but there is a consistent driver throughout the summer who gets to know the kids that use the WSC. It is funded through grants from the McKnight Foundation, which isn't necessarily a sustainable funding source. McKnight is planning on funding more circulator buses on the East Side (one bus each in Districts 4 and 5). The circulators are not a replacement for MetroTransit buses; they bring youths and families to places that aren't connected by transit.

Al Lovejoy, Saint Paul Public Works
Saint Paul parks are very accessible by car, although parking can be an issue. The City has done a good jobs of building a bicycle network that serves the city's four regional parks and some (not all) of its recreation centers. Saint Paul is not great at dealing with pedestrian needs, although there is an increasing desire to ensure that major transportation projects (like Central Corridor) do a better job of accommodating pedestrians. When kids walk, they choose the most direct route; recreation centers could benefit from the development of a network of diagonal connections. The bus system is in bad shape. In spite of the passage of MVST in the fall, more cuts to transit are likely before the end of the year. Non-peak bus frequency is particularly bad: on a Sunday, 1/4 of routes have no service at all and others come every hour or so. There is more promise in alternatives like the circulators described above. For transit, you can't look at ridership numbers and make a decision about whether the provision of service is worth it or not. For the transit-dependent population, transit is a lifeline.

Mike Hahm, Como Campus
Recreation services have a major transportation issue; lots of time is spent trying to making sure that people who want to use recreation services can get to the services they desire. Parks have different issues. At Como, 1.7 million people go through the park a year; on a nice weekend day, ~10,000 people visit. There are 1,100 parking spots available. On Sundays and holidays, buses come every 30 minutes or 1 hour, and there is no bus shelter within the park. Como needs to find a sustainable way to deal with its transportation challenges without creating a disincentive for people to visit the park.

Dan Breva, DNR
Neighborhood parks are different from regional parks; they are generally accessible to the neighborhoods they are in. Pedestrian connections across I94 that connect parks to other parks are not particularly pleasant. We need to look outside the boundaries of individual parks to figure out how to improve access. There is the potential to extend "green tentacles" out from parks to calm traffic in areas around them. The trail system is better than it looks in maps, but signage is key. It should be clear how to get to parks from bike routes and trails.

Eric Thompson, Bike/Ped Coordinator
Recreation centers need to be connected to the community and to each other, but they can also influence behavior through education; there is an opportunity to do programming for biking and walking. There are 80 miles of parks trails, and maintenance is the biggest challenge. We have money to build trails, but no money to maintain them. As part of our transportation system, trails need to be built to a new standard, with 10-12 foot widths, striping, and a standardized signage system. We also need better information on our Web site.

<u>Comp Plan Implications</u>
General transportation issues:
-The Parks Plan should inform the Transportation Plan, and vice versa.
-Strengthen language on the importance of connecting the parks system to schools, transportation (including Central Corridor), major facilities, and special events.
-Along major corridors, encourage development of more privately-owned and maintained green areas.
-Improve the information on the Web site to give better directions on accessing parks properties for people who don't arrive by car.
-Explore opportunities to connect parks (especially Como) to Central Corridor.
-Encourage special events organizers to educate and encourage people to leave their cars at home by working with MetroTransit to provide transit access and providing bike parking.
-Transportation issues at Como must be addressed. Explore options for encouraging visitors to take transit, ride bikes, etc.
-Circulators fill in gaps where MetroTransit service is inadequate and provide access to valuable programming and facilities. Permanent funding sources should be found to ensure that circulator service is sustainable.

Bikes and trails:
-Gaps in the trail system should be closed, for transportation purposes as well as recreation.
-Downtown should be explored as a potential place for new bicycle hubs (at Union Depot, Smith Ave. Transit Center).
-Consider addressing separate trail/transportation needs of children as commuters, adults as commuters, and recreational users.
-Include language on building trails need to a new standard, with 10-12 foot widths, striping, and a standardized signage system.
-Use innovation in building and maintaining trails.

Recreation centers:
-Consider the roles of recreation centers in providing transportation amenities and services. Consider options for connecting recreation center users to transit options (by selling bus passes, providing education on transit use, etc.).
-Bike racks should be installed at all recreation centers, and should be functional, accessible, and strategically located.
-Increase recreation programming and education around alternative transportation modes, including biking and walking.

Jody Martinez
Jody gave the task force a brief description of the National Great River Park initiative. A new chapter of the Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework, which covers the National Great River Park, is complete and is on its way to adoption by the City Council. It covers Saint Paul's 17 miles of river and the 16 existing parks in the river corridor. The next step is a National Great River Park Master Plan, for which an RFQ has been issued. The legislature is currently reviewing a funding request for $500 million to cover some of costs of master planning.

FUTURE MEETINGS: May 16th, 4 – 7 p.m., at the Linwood Recreation Center
June 20th, 4 – 7 p.m., at the Dayton's Bluff Recreation Center