

Bottineau project looks for better outreach

by Bill Clements

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Using social media in hope of averting CCLRT problems

As Mary Anderson live-blogged from a meeting on the Bottineau transit corridor Thursday evening, she was pleased to note that some 75 people had logged on to her blog.

That's about as many people who attended the event in person at the Brookdale Library in Brooklyn Center.

"A lot of people logged on and said they didn't know much about the light rail project and hadn't heard about the meeting," said Anderson, who is a community organizer with the Brooklyn Park-based African American Action Committee and program director for a Brooklyn Center nonprofit called Village Child.

"One guy said that if he'd known about the meeting, even though his wife was out of town and he had his kids with him, that he would have arranged things so that he could have gone to the meeting," she said. "It was a great experience. We are definitely looking to use it further."

Joe Gladke, Hennepin County's manager of engineering and transit planning, said he and planners on the Bottineau Corridor project are working to incorporate social media into an effort at deeper outreach along the route of the Bottineau transitway.

Planners believe better outreach during the Bottineau project will help them avoid problems the Central Corridor project has had with businesses and the community as that LRT line is being built.

Gladke said they are updating the project's [website](#) to make it "more proactive," for example, notifying people when new material about Bottineau is added to the site rather than requiring people to check the site for updates.

"We want to make it easy for people to connect with us, and social media allows us to reach out beyond the traditional communication methods, such as news releases," Gladke said.

Some of the initial steps project planners are taking include posting information about upcoming meetings to Hennepin County's Facebook and Twitter accounts and adding "share" buttons to the website so people can let others know about project events.

Hennepin County and the St. Paul office of Cary, N.C.-based consultants Kimley-Horn and Associates are doing what's known as a draft environmental impact statement involving either bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail transit for the Bottineau Corridor.

The impact statement is an early step in the long process of persuading the federal government to pay for half of a transit system that advocates say is critical to improve transportation in one of the fastest-growing areas of the state — the northwest Twin Cities suburbs.

Planners put the cost of a light rail system at nearly \$1 billion and a bus rapid transit system



Mary Anderson, who live-blogged at a meeting about the Bottineau Corridor this week, is shown Friday at a Caribou Coffee on Bass Lake Road in Brooklyn Center. (Staff photo: Bill Klotz)

at \$500 million. The earliest it could be built would be late 2018.

Financial consultant Eric Rothman, president of New York-based HR&A Advisors, told the participants at Thursday's meeting that increases in the real estate values — and thus the tax base — and transit-oriented development are not automatic with the building of a major transit line like Bottineau.

But they do happen in ways that benefit the local economy when transit projects are planned right.

Rothman said studies have shown that construction of transit lines can increase the value of residential real estate by 2 percent to 20 percent, and commercial real estate by 10 percent to 30 percent.

And, he added, studies have shown that every \$1 of public investment can yield \$2.50 of new development investment value.

"This is not a given," Rothman said. "Transit-oriented development is not a panacea."

But Rothman said studies have shown it will bring good development if four keys accompany transit construction:

- quality transit connections to jobs and entertainment sites;
- supportive local land-use policies;
- real estate market support (resulting rents have to support new construction); and,
- land that becomes available has to be suitable for development.

If all goes as regional planners hope, Bottineau would be the metro area's fourth LRT system — after Hiawatha, the Central Corridor and the Southwest Corridor.

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