

City of San Antonio



Minutes Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

2023 – 2025 Council Members

John Courage, Dist. 9, Chair
Dr. Sukh Kaur, Dist. 1 | Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, Dist. 2
Melissa Cabello Havrda, Dist. 6 | Marina Alderete Gavito, Dist. 7

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

1:30 PM

City Hall

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convened a regular meeting in the City Hall Council Briefing Room beginning at 1:33 p.m. Executive Assistant SueAnn Reyes took the Roll Call noting a quorum with the following Committee Members present:

Members Present: John Courage, *Chair*
Dr. Sukh Kaur, *Member*
Jalen McKee-Rodriguez, *Member*
Melissa Cabello Havrda, *Member*
Marina Alderete Gavito, *Member*

Members Absent: None

Approval of Minutes

1. Approval of minutes December 17, 2024, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda moved to Approve the minutes of the December 17, 2024, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting. Councilmember Alderete Gavito seconded the motion. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Courage, McKee-Rodriguez, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito
Absent: Kaur

Public Comment

Briefing and Possible Action on

2. VIA Metropolitan Transit update on the Keep San Antonio Moving (KSAM) Projects. [John Peterek, Interim Assistant City Manager; Catherine Hernandez, Director, Transportation]

Department]

Rod Sanchez, VIA Senior Vice President for Planning and Development, introduced his staff who would be presenting on the Silver Line.

Chair Courage acknowledged Bus Operators Appreciation Day.

Manjiri Akalkotkar, VIA Major Capital Program Officer, provided a project overview of the VIA Rapid Silver Line which connected the East Side neighborhoods to the West Side neighborhoods. She stated that the route was 7.3 miles long with 26 stations with a 10-minute weekday frequency and a 15-minute weekend frequency. Akalkotkar stated that the route had bus friendly traffic signals, dedicated bus lanes and off-board fare collection. She noted that the total cost was estimated to be \$289.2 million which covered the future assumption of cost escalation.

Akalkotkar provided a timeline of the project schedule and stated that the project started in early 2022 and revenue service was expected to open at the end of 2029. She indicated that the project was about 40% designed. She reported that the next milestone would take place in 2026 when VIA would formally apply for a small start grant. She stated that the award was expected at the end of 2026 and construction would begin in early 2027, which would keep them on target for the opening date at the end of 2029.

Akalkotkar noted that the financial plan included the expectation of 50% in Federal funding at \$145.3 million, Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG) Funds of \$2.4 million, Small Starts Grant – pre award \$8.1 million, Small Starts Grant of \$134.8 million, VIA Project Funds of \$43.4 million and a commitment from Bexar County for \$100.5 million.

Akalkotkar reported that input was received from various stakeholders and as a result, they moved the station initially located at Zarzamora and East Commerce closer to the HEB and were looking at installing new traffic signals, enhanced sidewalks, and linking the two stations. She added that the project scope would also include a sidewalk or ADA improvements.

Akalkotkar stated that VIA was requesting an interlocal agreement related to the Silver Line Project to establish a cooperative partnership between the City of San Antonio and VIA. She mentioned that it would establish roles and responsibilities for staff, but VIA would be the project sponsor and would essentially take responsibility for the design, construction, and operations of the Project. Akalkotkar indicated that the City would be the regulator due to its ownership of the right-of-way. She commented that VIA would provide a design submittal.

Akalkotkar stated that the agreement would cover the timelines, the permitting, and the details. She noted that the difference between the Green Line and the Silver Line agreement was that the Green Line had design milestones to meet and Federal target deadlines to secure funding by December 2024. Akalkotkar explained that the Outreach Plan,⁰ which involved office outreach, individual and phased business outreach, grassroots outreach, and community conversations.

Akalkotkar provided an overview of the second Fixed Route Operations and Maintenance Facility noting its location at Flores/Myrtle, which was the largest system operating out of a single depot. She mentioned that the facility was designed to accommodate roughly 200-250 vehicles. Akalkotkar

stated that VIA had outgrown the facility and it needed improvements and VIA needed space for a new facility. She indicated that VIA had been looking at a second location for a second facility, which was within the City of San Antonio, on vacant land, within three miles proximity to the ART corridors, and access to an arterial or freeway.

Akalkotkar noted that VIA was in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) stage of the Project and as soon as it was completed, VIA would be looking at land acquisition. She stated that a public meeting would be required at that point, and she indicated that construction was expected to start in 2027 with completion in early 2029. Akalkotkar added that the preferred site program requirements included service to articulated buses, a design to add additional standard bus capacity, 52 articulated vehicles, and 50 standard Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) vehicles.

Akalkotkar provided an update on the Green Line Project. She highlighted that the service operated from the Airport through downtown, covering the Project limits, and extended to the Brooks Development Area with a 10-minute weekday frequency and 15-minute weekend frequency. She stated that additionally, there were 25 stations connecting the north and south, passing through the airport and downtown, which were two major employment centers. She noted they were currently working to complete 95% design which was expected to be completed in late May. Akalkotkar stated that the service opening date was expected to be at the end of 2027.

Akalkotkar reported that 55% of the funding was acquired through Federal Funds, with the remaining portion sourced locally, including revenue bonds from VIA totaling \$153.7 million.

Akalkotkar reviewed the 2025 Outreach Plan which included school outreach, bi-annual open houses, individual and phased business outreach, and grassroots outreach.

Sandip Sen, VIA Director of Planning and Scheduling, provided an overview of the Better Bus Line Plan. He noted that the Plan improved the bus system through design enhancement expanding the VIA Link services and exploring additional innovation transit solutions. He explained that the Plan was providing more frequent service, increased access to better service across the county, improved access to job opportunities, and advances across to transit with minimal impact to existing stops. Sen stated that when the Plan was fully implemented, it would provide 30 minutes or better service between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays and 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. on weekends across the service area.

Sen reviewed the timeline noting that the final Service Plan would be shared in the spring of 2025. He noted that in April of 2025, the Plan would be finalized, and the adoption of the Service Plan would be considered. Sen added that the Plan would be activated in summer 2025 over a five-year period through 2029.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Courage asked how many buses VIA had and how the new buses would be powered. Sen stated that there were currently 500 plus buses and that the new buses would be the same as the CNG buses used currently. Chair Courage asked how the new buses would be powered and if any electric buses were considered for use in the new corridors. Sen stated that they currently had eight electric buses and most services in the corridor would be provided by CNG buses and that the electric buses could be

looked at during the fleet replacement process. Chair Courage stated that he would like to see VIA looking at a plan for electric buses and asked for a comparison at a future meeting on what was being used in other countries and why it was not working here. Sen stated that VIA did have electric buses but the technology in place was lacking, and he noted that VIA wanted to expand electric buses in the future.

Chair Courage stated that he did not understand why there were so few public meetings and stressed the importance of educating the public in order for them to support City Council when making these decisions.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked about the mixed traffic lanes and felt that if the mixed traffic lanes were prone to the same traffic problems as everyone else, and individuals would be less likely to ride the bus. She proposed partnering with Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez to help set realistic expectations for residents regarding the upcoming transit service and to clarify that residents would not see a dedicated bus line but rather a bus operating in regular traffic, alongside other vehicles. She expressed concern about over selling the service to residents when the reality was that buses would be stopping at regular stoplights as opposed to operating in a dedicated lane.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito asked whether the Federal Grants for the Silver and Green Lines were secure. Akalkotkar stated that the grant for the Green Line was secure, and the Silver Line was on track, and VIA would also apply next year. She stated that it was being monitored closely at the Federal level and VIA had not heard anything that led them to believe the grants were in jeopardy.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito stated that she felt that a partnership with CPS Energy would be beneficial for underground utilities.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda spoke in support of the Plan and asked for clarification regarding the different design milestone percentages. Akalkotkar explained that when the design packages reached each completed percentage they were typically sent for review. Councilmember Cabello Havrda stated that she was excited about the service to the grocery stores. She asked how they were providing better bus service and Sen stated that it was through frequency. She felt that outreach was being critical and supported the use of electric buses.

Councilmember Kaur expressed the importance of reaching out and communicating with the community and businesses as far out as they could go regarding construction which included detailed notification with a number to call for help at night and on the weekends. Councilmember Kaur requested an update on the construction plan along with which business were not going to be accessible via left turns.

Councilmember Kaur asked which lessons were learned from the Green Line that were implemented for the Silver Line. Thomas Marks, Vice President of Government Affairs and Community Engagement with VIA stated that one lesson was that event-based marketing was not the only thing that they should be doing, but VIA was also focusing on proactive one-on-one outreach and block walking with a bilingual team. Councilmember Kaur suggested demonstrating that the feedback was acknowledged.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez suggested bringing back the discussion of a Council Consideration

Request (CCR) # 2023-0005 on high infrastructure utility projects submitted by himself and Councilmember Cabello Havrda to the Committee next month or in May. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez spoke in support of the VIA Link but also expressed that the challenge was not removing vehicles off the road and how it could be used as a tool to transition people who were not using buses. Sen explained that they had seen an increase in the use of the VIA Link Zone due to better frequency. Marks stated that the purpose was to use it for smaller trips and to connect individuals to the larger system.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked about the Federal Funding for the Silver Line. Akalkotkar stated that the funding was in the recommended Budget from the Biden Administration. She indicated that the Project was expected to be in the 2026 Budget and was expected to be on target and VIA was looking at all capital projects and a Plan B for the Project.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked and if there was room for a rail system in future planning. Marks stated they would continue to look at those opportunities.

Councilmember Alderete Gavito stated she felt that as a City, they needed to get aggressive about what they wanted to see from the utilities like CPS Energy and SAWS and if they wanted to see a pretty City they would need to demand it.

Chair Courage suggested offering an incentive to car owners with insurance for discounted rides or free passes to encourage bus transportation.

3. Proposed creation of the Multimodal Transportation Commission. [John Peterek, Interim Assistant City Manager; Catherine Hernandez, Director, Transportation Department]

Catherine Hernandez, Transportation Department Director, provided a briefing on the creation of a multimodal transportation committee. She reported that the City Council adopted the Bike Network Plan with the requirement to form a transportation commission to provide input and recommendations to City Council on policy and other issues affecting pedestrians and bicyclists. Hernandez noted that City Council also adopted the Complete Street Policy update, the Vision Zero Action Plan update and the Transit Oriented Policy Framework. She indicated that all of the policies recommended a committee to provide input and recommendations for policies and implementation steps.

Hernandez stated that in addition to the City Council district appointments, it was recommended that a VIA and Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization appointee be appointed by the CEO. She recommended that the categories be represented similar to how the Historic Design and Review Commission appointments were made to fill the categories of three transit riders, three cyclists and one traffic engineer. She added that for the remaining council district slots be selected to provide their perspectives on the implementation of Complete Streets, Vision Zero, and Transit-Oriented Policy.

Hernandez stated that the responsibly of the commission would include reviewing and updating policies, procedures, and amendments to City Code, serve as adviser to the Transportation Director on exceptions to the Complete Streets Policy, and receive regular updates on Transportation Department plan, policies and projects. She stated that it was also recommended that the commission meet quarterly at a minimum and as needed, and the Transportation Department would also be responsible for staffing the commission.

Hernandez indicated that staff recommended that the Item be recommended to the City Council for adoption of appointments.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Courage asked for clarification regarding whether the appointees would need to either be a transit rider, cyclist, or traffic engineer. Hernandez clarified that seven of the eleven slots would have to meet those requirements but that the other four were not a requirement for those categories.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked how the committee proposal would take place. Hernandez stated that it would run through the Transportation Department.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez asked if it were possible to require the VIA or MPO appointee to be a traffic engineer and the transit rider. John Peterek, Assistant City Manager, stated that the idea was to make sure core work had representatives from those communities therefore requiring transit riders and cyclists. Hernandez stated that the Transportation Department would assist in the recruitment of the categories.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda asked how the spots were going to be first come, first served for recommendation. She stated she would like to see space for better representation of different communities that relied on transit. She stated that she would like to see the special needs category as a requirement.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda made a friendly amendment to recommend and forward the Item to the full City Council for consideration to include two transit riders, two cyclists, a traffic engineer, and one member from the disabled community.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez requested a memorandum addressing the changes being made to the committee.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez moved to recommend and forward the Item for the adoption of the appointments to the City Council for consideration. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Alderete Gavito. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: Courage, Kaur, McKee-Rodriguez, Cabello Havrda, Alderete Gavito

4. Potential increase to non-consent tow rates regulated by Chapter 19, Motor Vehicles and Traffic, Article XI Wrecker Service, Division 3 Fees of the City Code. [María Villagómez, Deputy City Manager; William P. McManus, Chief of Police]

Rick Riley, Assistant Director for the San Antonio Police Department, provided a briefing on non-consent towing. Riley gave examples of non-consent towing which included towing vehicles parked on private property, parking in a no parking zone, and unpaid parking in a parking lot. Riley noted that State and Federal Law authorized cities to regulate the price and safety of non-consent tows.

Riley provided an overview of rate tiers with the light duty rate of \$177, the medium duty rate of \$196,

and the heavy-duty rate of \$602. He reported that the focus would be on light duty tows, which were the most prevalent, according to towing companies. Riley explained that the City received a request from the non-consent tow companies in 2021 and in 2023 for a tow fee study. He stated that in 2021, the request lacked the financial information required to conduct the study and after several attempts the City was unable to obtain the requested information and therefore was not able to conduct the study.

Riley reported that in 2023, the City met with the non-consent towing companies to discuss financial information needed, and based on the financial information provided, the study showed the rate was comparable with other large Texas cities and did not result in a recommended tow fee increase. He noted that the towing companies responded with an administrative fee proposal which included three scenarios based on 60,000 tows: 1) The proposed rate of \$210 with an administrative fee of 3.33% or \$7 per tow with a proposed revenue of \$420,000, 2) The proposed rate of \$244.85 with an administrative fee of 3.33% or \$8.15 per tow with a proposed revenue of \$489,000, and 3) The proposed rate of \$272 with an administrative fee of 3.33% or \$9.05 per tow with a proposed revenue of \$543,000.

Riley stated that the staff recommendation was to work with non-consent towing companies and develop a recommended rate adjustment based on projected operating costs and labor increases for 2025 and 2026, and to present the recommendation to City Council in April 2025. He indicated that non-consent towing companies would have 48 months to provide complete financial information as requested by the Finance Department to conduct a tow fee study consistent with the current Ordinance and to maintain a balanced approach to set appropriate rates that allowed towing companies to operate while also considering financial impacts on consumers.

DISCUSSION:

Chair Courage asked how many companies were no longer in operation or discontinued. Riley stated he did not know but that currently there were 208 currently in operation. Chair Courage stated that he would like to see the reevaluation of companies and cost of operations and recommended consideration of how it balanced with what the City paid employees.

Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez stated that his concern was for individuals experiencing financial hardships, predatory towing regulations, and how the City was preventing and regulating those instances. He requested a response memorandum that included the existing regulations and accountability measures. Councilmember McKee-Rodriguez felt that it was an important time to reevaluate and have new regulations accompany any fee increases, and for residents to know that they were not being exploited financially for private gain and that the City was looking out for their best interests. He asked about the administrative fee and what it would be used for. Riley stated it would be placed in the General Fund unless explicitly directed to go elsewhere.

Councilmember Kaur stated that she received a significant number of calls on predatory towing. She stated that she did not agree with putting the burden on the residents who were having a hard time going to places because of their cars being towed and at this time was not in support of the increase.

Councilmember Cabello Havrda stated that she did not feel that it was fair to the consumer and would like to focus on the predatory companies. She stated that she would like to see the administrative fee focused on oversight and enforcement of the predatory towing companies. Councilmember Cabello

Havrda stated that public input was important as well, even if it was just a survey.

Chair Courage requested that the City take another in-depth look at the top 20 or 30 instead of the top three, look at the big picture of industry and report back to the Committee.

Councilmember Kaur asked if a process could be created for individuals who felt they were wrongfully towed to be able to provide the evidence and get their fee back in full.

Councilmember Courage asked if the towing companies could be City-licensed and that maybe the administrative fee could be used pay back the fee to wrongfully towed customers like a compensation fund.

Chair Courage encouraged Councilmembers to send any questions to Riley and maybe he could provide them with an outline of how the department would revisit the request.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:32 p.m.

Approved

John Courage, Chair

*Debbie Racca-Sittre
City Clerk*