

CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL WORK SESSION
December 7, 2021 following regular meeting which starts at 7 pm
Robbinsdale City Hall
4100 Lakeview Avenue North

AGENDA

1. CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION CALLED TO ORDER BY MAYOR PRO TEM
2. ROLL CALL: Kline, Webb, Selman, Backen, Mayor Blonigan
3. DISCUSSION: Consideration of letter to BNSF regarding light rail alignment
4. RECESS – Closed Session for discussion of Attorney/Client Privilege information related to the BLRT Extension project.
5. ADJOURNMENT

December 7, 2021

Mr. Warren Buffett
Chief Executive Officer
Berkshire Hathaway Corporate Headquarters
Kiewit Plaza
3555 Farnam Street
Omaha, NE 68131

Dear Chairman Buffett,

We write to you today as elected officials of the City of Robbinsdale, Minnesota. Robbinsdale is a small and thriving suburb of Minneapolis. We have a population of just over 15,000 with an authentic, human-scale and popular Main Street. We would love it if you visited us to see the energy we have created and the excitement people have for our city.

We write to you today out of desperation.

For years, we and our Hennepin County officials have worked with your Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad company to plan for a long needed Light Rail Transit (LRT) line to serve our part of the region. For more than 20 years we have planned to share the massive right of way (100 feet wide) to accommodate both desperately needed LRT transit and BNSF freight needs. At present, those needs on the corridor, called the Monticello Spur, consist of one 5-10 car train per day, five days per week. The corridor sits idle the rest of the time.

For years, we and the Hennepin County and Metro Transit Authority planned how to share the corridor. We developed and shared technical documents, discussed necessary safety improvements and even hosted actual, in-person, rail demonstrations on the line. All the while it appeared that BNSF was on board with the eventual co-location of LRT, with reimbursement to BNSF for its costs. All FTA application processes were followed, and the project was approved and is in the queue for federal investment to match the nearly \$1 billion local investment.

Some months ago, however, BNSF staff communicated that the company would no longer entertain any participation in the LRT line. They suddenly opposed co-location, any short-line accommodation, and any discussion of a sale of the spur.

This has been a debilitating blow to our city. Without a rail line alignment, any LRT project will have to run on City or County roads and result in a massive and divisive physical "gash" that will completely divide the city, much like 1950s and 1960s freeways through many metro areas in the country divided

and destroyed minority neighborhoods. Instead of wonderful stations that capitalize on nearby shops and commerce, stations in a new alignment will likely be in the middle of road medians. Asking transit riders to wander into road medians in a Minnesota January is something we simply cannot approve for Robbinsdale.

We desperately want to participate in the long-planned and until recently almost universally accepted and even enthusiastically championed, regional project—which at an approved \$1.498 billion is amongst the most expensive capital investments in Minnesota history. But we will not approve a project that will cut our city in half—especially when there is an immensely better option available.

In your wonderful June 23, 2021 News Release on philanthropy you describe, “The most admirable philanthropists” as, “Those who give their personal time and effort...who give their love and devote precious hours to community betterment.” Many Robbinsdale residents gave their time over many years to plan and design the Light Rail Alignment in the rail corridor which has been here since the 1880s. We respectfully ask that you personally engage with our City and our Hennepin County colleagues to find a way to save this vital project. Whether through a sale of this little used corridor to the public, or a reasonable co-location agreement, there is a way for BNSF and the public agencies to work together for a better future that benefits all parties.

Like you describe yourself in the June 23 release, we are optimistic. We love our city, and we know you would love Robbinsdale. Please consider a visit! But until then, please work with us to build an incredible future.

Sincerely,

William A. Blonigan
Mayor of Robbinsdale

Tyler Kline
City Council Member – Ward 1

Sheila Webb
City Council Member – Ward 2

George Selman
City Council Member – Ward 3

Pat Backen
City Council Member – Ward 4

cc: Senator Amy Klobuchar



City of Robbinsdale

TO: Mayor and City Council
FROM: Marcia Glick, City Manager
DATE: December 7, 2021
RE: Information from City Attorney – Council request regarding Blue Line project

Background

On November 2, 2021, the Robbinsdale City Council requested a closed meeting with the City Attorney to discuss litigation options against the metropolitan council regarding the Blue Line project. The City Attorney has prepared a confidential report.

It is anticipated that the December 7, 2021 work session meeting will be closed for this item pursuant to Minnesota Statutes, section 13D.05, subd. 3 on the basis of attorney-client privilege to discuss the above referenced communication.

The special work session will be recessed for the discussion of this item and the city council will return for closing procedural matters.

Marcia Glick, City Manager