



# METRO Orange Line Connecting Bus Study

## *Concept Plan*

JANUARY 2021

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: METRO ORANGE LINE CONNECTING BUS STUDY

The METRO Orange Line is scheduled to open in late 2021. It will substantially replace Route 535 with frequent (every 10-15 minutes), all-day service in the I-35W South corridor between downtown Minneapolis and Burnsville. There will be 12 stations in the 17-mile corridor serving Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, and Burnsville as shown on a map in **APPENDIX A - Figure 1**.

This Concept Plan builds on recommendations based on an evaluation of current transit service in the study area conducted in 2019. The Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Existing Conditions Report determined the market conditions, effectiveness, and efficiency of existing transit service and set the foundation for exploring potential new connecting service with the Orange Line, transit market opportunities, and facility needs. The report uses common transit planning terms such as “frequency” and “span.” Frequency is defined as the amount of time between trips in the same direction on a route; span is the amount of time per day a route operates, otherwise stated as the first departure on the first trip to last arrival on the last trip.

## Study area

The study area, shown in **APPENDIX A - Figure 2**, is bounded by the Mississippi River on the east, I-394 on the north, Highway 169 on the west, and the Minnesota River on the south. The Study Area is urban in the northern half, including downtown Minneapolis, and covering many neighborhoods in south Minneapolis, and suburban in the southern half, covering Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield. Although the Orange Line extends to Burnsville, this study will not include areas south of the Minnesota River because this area is served by a separate transit provider, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), so it will be conducting the transit service planning there.

## Project goals

Goals of the Orange Line Connecting Bus Service Study include:

- Link significant concentrations of residents, jobs and services with the METRO Orange Line
- Retain existing customers, grow ridership. Prioritize service for communities of color, people experiencing poverty and those who rely on transit the most
- Simplify the route network by emphasizing directness and avoiding branches
- Enhance the mobility and connectivity of the transit network
- Complement existing commuter and express service in the corridor

## A note on COVID-19 and impacts on the planning process

While the long-term ridership impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are not known, the short-term effects have been significant. The Existing Conditions Report and Concept Plan are based on ridership patterns that existed before the crisis, which may change in the long-term as people adapt and new travel needs emerge. To the extent possible and given the information available, the Concept Plan has considered potential long-term impacts to ridership and travel behavior in response to the crisis. However, the plan may need to be adjusted and the timeline for implementing certain changes may need to be modified later in the planning process based on market conditions at the time the Orange Line opens.

## Recommended Concept Plan

There are 25 routes in the study area: Routes 4, 6, 7, 11, 18, 21, 27, 46, 53,\* 146,\* 156,\* 515, 535, 537,\* 538, 539, 540, 542,\* 552,\* 553, 554,\* 558,\* 578, 579,\* and 597. Note that routes marked with an asterisk (\*) have been suspended since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving 16 routes.

- 21 routes already serve a future Orange Line station south of downtown Minneapolis. (Routes 4, 11, 18, 21, 27, 46, 53,\* 146,\* 156,\* 515, 538, 539, 540, 542,\* 552,\* 553, 554,\* 558,\* 578, 579,\* and 597)
- No changes are recommended on 13 routes in the study area, so they are not described further in this report. (Routes 4, 6, 11, 18, 21, 46, 53,\* 156,\* 552,\* 554,\* 558,\* 578, and 579\*)
- Changes to route structure, frequency or span of service are proposed on 11 routes (Routes 7, 27, 515, 535, 537,\* 538, 539, 540, 542,\* 553 and 597)

There are two scenarios outlined in this report – Scenarios A and B. Scenario A is equivalent to resources available in Fall 2020 and Scenario B represents the significantly higher Fall 2019 (pre-COVID) resources.

## Proposed Changes on Existing Routes

**Route 7:** All remaining trips will be extended from 34th Ave. S. to Cedar Point Commons Shopping Center on 66th St. at Cedar Ave. in Richfield. It will replace Route 515E between 34th Ave. and the 66th St. corridor.

**Route 27:** All trips will be extended to directly serve I-35W & Lake St. Station, providing a connection with the Orange Line and other I-35W express routes. This link will re-establish access to large employers such as Abbott Northwestern Hospital, Allina, Children’s Hospital, and Wells Fargo Home Mortgage.

**Route 515:** It would be simplified from three variations to one with no branches. Route 515B service on Longfellow Rd. is proposed for elimination. The 515E branch serving VA Medical Center would be replaced with a transfer between Route 515 and METRO Blue Line at Mall of America.

**Route 535:** The route will be largely replaced by the Orange Line. Areas currently served by four local branches will be replaced by new service:

- 535B, 535C, 535D via 76th St., Penn Ave. and American Blvd., by Route 540 on 76th St.
- 535E via Lyndale Ave. in Bloomington by Route 534
- 535B, 535C, 535D via 94th St. and Lyndale Ave. by Route 534
- 535C via 94th St. and James Ave. by Route 534
- 535C, 535D via 98th St. and Normandale College by Route 539
- 535E via 102nd St. by Route 553

**Route 537:** This route is currently suspended due to the pandemic. In Scenario B service is restored along France Ave. between Southdale, Normandale College, and Valley West Shopping Center.

**Route 538:** No routing changes are proposed. With Scenario B, service would be improved from every 30/60 minutes to every 30 minutes in the midday.

**Route 539:** This route will connect Normandale College, 98th St., Old Shakopee Rd. and Mall of America with the Orange Line. Route 539 would be simplified so all trips follow the same path via 98th St. between 98th St. Station, Normandale College, and Normandale Village.

**Route 540:** The route would be simplified so all trips follow the same alignment. In Richfield, service would use the new 77th St. underpass to serve 24th Ave. S. and Mall of America. Service would be eliminated on 12th Ave. S. and on American Blvd.; alternate service is on Routes 5 and 542.

**Route 542:** This route is currently suspended due to the pandemic. The route would be restored under either scenario. It would remain south of I-494 to provide a connection with American Blvd. Station. Service would be extended west via American Blvd., E. Bush Lake Rd. and 78th St. to Hwy. 169, providing new bus access to employers located west of E. Bush Lake Rd. Scenario B would add midday, night and weekend service.

**Route 553:** This route would be re-oriented south of 98th St. to replace existing Route 535E via 98th St. Station, Lyndale Ave., 102nd St. and Portland Ave. There would be no service on 104th St. between Nicollet and Portland avenues.

**Route 597:** This route will be replaced by the Orange Line between 98th St. Station and downtown Minneapolis. New routes 547 and 548 will replace local service west of I-35W in Bloomington.

## Proposed New Routes

**Route 534:** This new route would connect with the Orange Line at both 98th St. Station and American Blvd. Station. It would serve Lyndale Ave. destinations between 98th St. and American Blvd., including peak-only service to 94th St. & James Ave. employers. Scenario B would add weekend service.

**Route 536:** This new route will serve the American Blvd. Station. It would connect Normandale College, France Ave., Valley West Center, Old Shakopee Rd., Penn Ave. and American Blvd. in Bloomington. It would replace most of existing Route 539 west of I-35W.

**Route 547:** This route would replace Route 597C and Route 597E. It will connect the Orange Line with southwest Bloomington employers on Old Shakopee Rd. and residents on Auto Club Rd., Normandale Blvd., 110th St. and 98th St. at 98th St. Station.

**Route 548:** This route would replace current Route 597B and connect residents along Hyland Greens Dr., Normandale Blvd., W. 102nd St., and Old Shakopee Rd. with the Orange Line.

## Service equity analysis

The results of the service equity analysis show no disparate impact to minority populations and no disproportionate burden to low-income populations as a result of service changes under either Scenario A or Scenario B of the Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Concept Plan. Though the quantitative results alone suggest the changes proposed in Scenario B would come close to resulting in disparate impact and disproportionate burden, this is due to limitations of the service equity analysis methodology and the current disruption of service due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Putting the analysis in this context provides further confidence in the conclusions of this service equity analysis: that neither Scenario A nor Scenario B of the Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Concept Plan would result in disparate impact to minority populations or disparate impact to low-income populations. The complete Title VI Service Equity Analysis report is available at [metrotransit.org/OLCB](https://metrotransit.org/OLCB).

## Public outreach and next steps

The Concept Plan will be brought to the public for review and comment in early 2021. There will be an official public comment period from Jan. 25 to Feb. 22 to allow transit customers and other stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback. Due to the pandemic, most engagement will be virtual or electronic with some in-person intercept surveys. The primary engagement tool will be an online survey that will be promoted through a variety of channels to ensure we engage a diverse cross-section of existing and potential riders.

Metro Transit will use different outreach strategies to ensure broad public engagement. Information about the project and the service changes proposed in the Concept Plan will be provided to current transit riders and the general public in several ways:

- Notification of public hearings will be provided in in the *Star Tribune* and in *Connect*, Metro Transit's customer newsletter.
- Partner with community-based organizations, Normandale Community College and major employers via the I-494 Transportation Management Organization
- Website
  - Concept Plan Report
  - Video presentation
  - Map-based survey to guide feedback
- In-person intercepts at transit stops and centers
- Target ethnic and local media
  - Social Media
  - News coverage in local papers
- Invitations to virtual meetings, hearing
- Materials: one-page flyer for distribution, postcard mailer, shelter signage
- Use existing tools: *Insights*, newsletters, Metro Transit app and Go-To Card list, Riders' Club

The public hearing and two community meetings will be conducted virtually:

- Virtual community meetings Feb. 6 and 9
- Virtual public hearing on Feb. 10

The concept plan will be modified based on the feedback received in the spring and the Metropolitan Council will be asked to approve the final plan in mid-2021. These service changes are planned for implementation with the opening of the Orange Line in late 2021.

Please visit [metrotransit.org/OLCB](https://metrotransit.org/OLCB) for project updates.