

June 2025



T METRO Purple Line

Route Modification Study

Phase II Report Executive Summary

RAMSEY COUNTY **T MetroTransit**



White Bear Avenue south of County Road C

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

This report recommends modifying the METRO Purple Line BRT alternative alignment from the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor to the White Bear Ave Corridor for its support of the Project goals:

- ✓ Increase the use of transit and its efficiency, accessibility, and attractiveness for all users
- ✓ Develop and select an implementable and community-supported project
- ✓ Contribute to improving regional equity, sustainability, and quality of life
- ✓ Improve sustainable travel options between and within the study area communities
- ✓ Enhance connectivity of the corridor to the regional transportation network
- ✓ Support sustainable growth and development patterns that reflect the vision of local and regional plans and policies

OVERVIEW

This Route Modification Study Phase II document outlines the evaluation of the White Bear Ave Corridor as an alternative alignment to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor for the METRO Purple Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project (the Project). The White Bear Ave Corridor follows Maryland and White Bear Avenues through the cities of Saint Paul and Maplewood, using Ramsey County-owned roadways.

Following the Corridor Management Committee (CMC) decision to suspend advancement of the Purple Line to White Bear Lake in Spring 2022, the Project entered a Route Modification Study (RMS). RMS Phase I sought to determine a new northern endpoint using the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor through the City of Maplewood. However, this evaluation was paused to begin RMS Phase II following concerns expressed by the City of Maplewood regarding the alignment, and Ramsey County and CMC actions to recommend the study of an alternative to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor.



Route Modification Process

The Project conducted RMS Phase II over the course of 2023 and 2024, culminating in the release of this report in Spring 2025. The RMS Phase II process included:

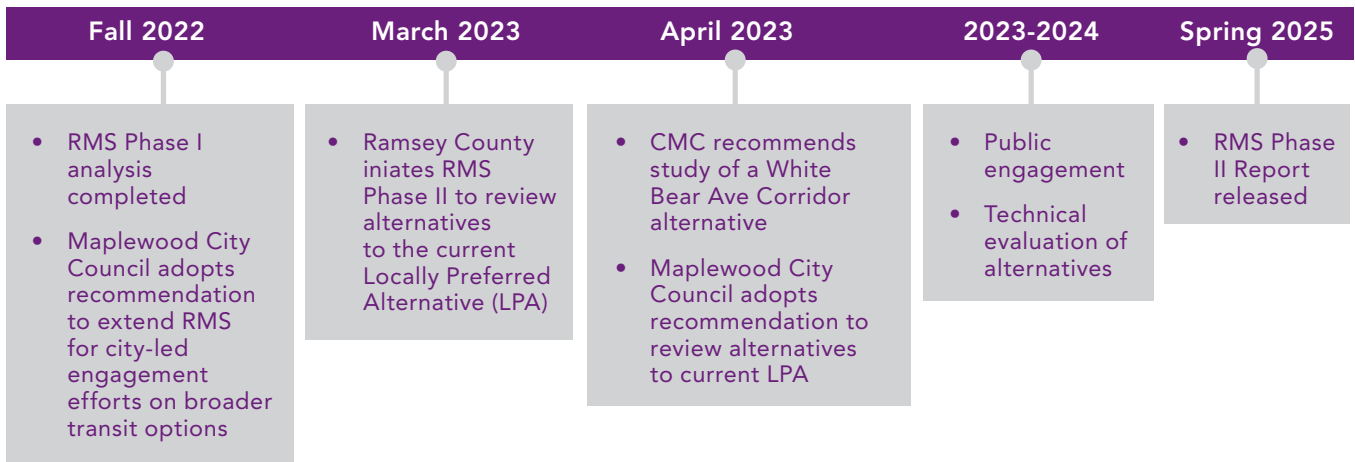
Defining the Project for the White Bear Ave Corridor including the identification of station locations and roadway cross sections that accommodate dedicated transit lanes and vehicle traffic.

Defining evaluation criteria based on the Project's Purpose and Need statement.

Completing an evaluation of Project concepts with those criteria.

Engaging with key stakeholders and the public to share the evaluation results and inform the CMC recommendation.

Schedule



Decision-making Process

The decision-making process for the Project includes a deep connection between design considerations and feedback from project stakeholders (including county partners, city partners, and community and business organizations), strategic management team (SMT), advisory committee members (Technical Advisory Committee [TAC], Community and Business Advisory Committee [CBAC], and Corridor Management Committee [CMC]), and leadership from project partners including Ramsey County, the Metropolitan Council, and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). This process incorporates community engagement from the general and traveling public alongside these stakeholder groups.



Corridors Evaluated

In April 2023, the CMC recommended a modified BRT routing alternative to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor using Maryland and White Bear Avenues be considered as part of RMS Phase II. The study area is Maryland Avenue, between Johnson Parkway and White Bear Avenue, and White Bear Avenue, between Maryland Avenue and the Maplewood Mall area.

Defined Corridor

The alignment between Downtown Saint Paul and Maryland Avenue is defined by the Locally Preferred Alternative for the Purple Line and included in the Project's 2021 Environmental Assessment report. This 5-mile portion of the alignment was not re-evaluated during RMS Phase II.

Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor

This corridor was previously identified as the Locally Preferred Alternative.

The route would collocate with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail along the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority right-of-way between Maryland and Beam Avenues, then travels on Beam Avenue to the Maplewood Mall Transit Center. Buses would primarily run in dedicated guideway and serve 5 stations.

White Bear Ave Corridor

The route would run along Maryland Avenue between the Bruce Vento Regional Trail and White Bear Avenue, along White Bear Avenue between Maryland Avenue and Beam Avenue, and along Beam Avenue to the Maplewood Mall area. Approximately 13 stations would be served. RMS Phase II sought to determine the bus lane configuration for this corridor; however, all options involve the repurposing of general traffic lanes for dedicated bus lanes.

The corridor was broken up into segments based on the city and roadway type:

- **Saint Paul:** Maryland and White Bear Avenues south of Larpenteur Avenue.
- **Maplewood:** White Bear Avenue between Larpenteur and Beam Avenues.
- **Endpoint:** Beam Avenue between White Bear Avenue and Hazelwood Street, and Hazelwood Street between Beam Avenue and County Road D. The evaluation considered two endpoint options: the Maplewood Mall Transit Center and a new station just north of County Road D.



CORRIDORS EVALUATED IN RMS PHASE II

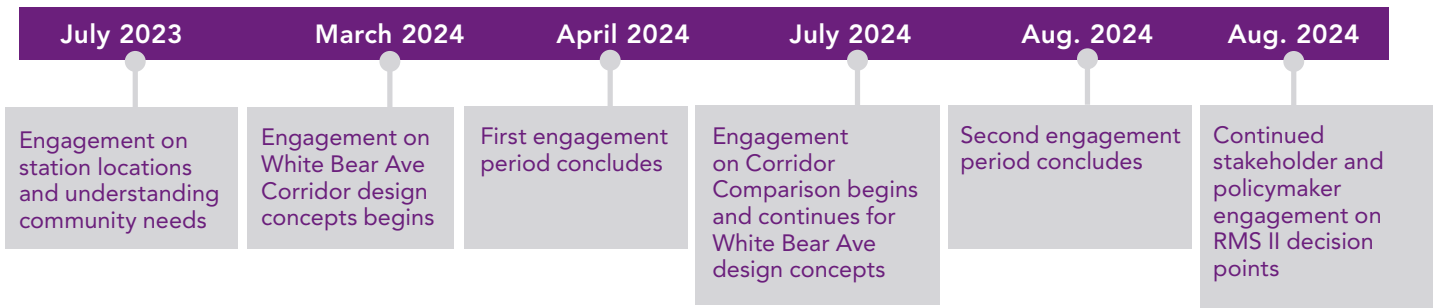


ENGAGEMENT

Public Involvement

Between July 2023 and September 2024, Project staff conducted engagement with the public, including residents, workers, business owners, and other stakeholders, to share the roadway and transit design options for the White Bear Ave Corridor as a part of RMS Phase II. Project staff informed and received feedback from community groups, business representatives, municipal committees, organizations, corridor residents and property owners, municipal staff, elected officials, and other project partners.

Engagement Schedule



Stakeholder Involvement

Project staff communicated regularly with elected officials and staff at the City of Saint Paul, City of Maplewood, and Ramsey County. Project staff met bi-weekly with city staff to provide updates on the Project and answer any questions, and delivered monthly project update memos to city staff, Met Council councilmembers, state legislators, and other policymakers. In addition to public agencies and corridor residents, Project staff engaged with several other community organizations and businesses.

Saint Paul and Ramsey County staff and policymakers have remained supportive of the Project and the transportation benefits it will bring to Saint Paul's East Side. Maplewood City Council and staff had historically been a supportive project partner. However, at a meeting on September 23, 2024, the Maplewood City Council voted to unanimously withdraw support for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor and voted 3-2 to withdraw support for the White Bear Ave Corridor.

The Project will continue to engage with the City of Maplewood and other project partners to determine paths forward. Municipal support for Purple Line helps to inform the process for amending Purple Line's locally preferred alternative in the region's long-range transportation plan, a federal requirement for continuing to advance the project.

For a summary of engagement methods used and feedback received, see the Engagement Summary on the [Project website](#).

Over the course of the two engagement periods, Project staff:



Engaged over 3,700 people



Hosted 7 open houses



Attended approximately 90 community meetings and events



Received over 1,500 survey responses and 45 interactive map comments



Shared project information across 7 diverse media outlets in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali

WHITE BEAR AVE CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Station Locations

Project staff identified proposed station locations for BRT service. Most station locations are in the vicinity of current Route 54 stops. Staff identified a ½ mile station spacing to provide reasonable 5-minute walk access coverage throughout most of the corridor.

During the summer of 2023, Project staff engaged with the public, business owners, and stakeholders to share information about the Project, answer questions, and seek input regarding station locations.

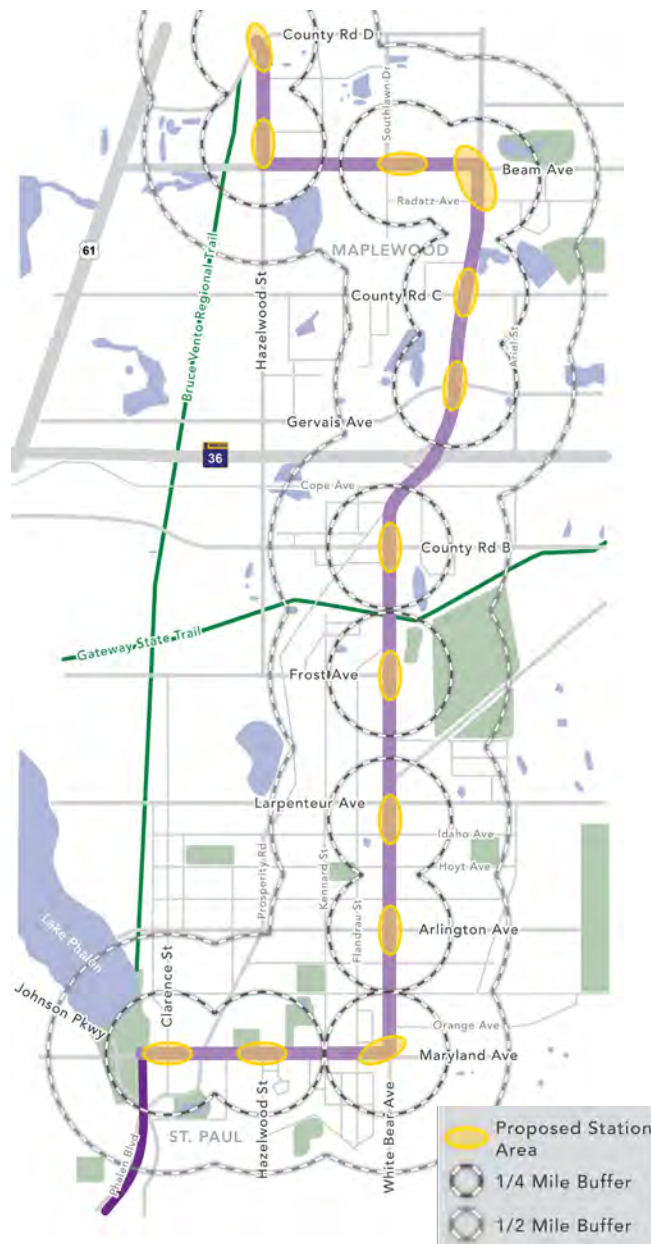
In September 2023, the CMC concurred with the staff recommendations to advance the study of twelve proposed station locations as shown. The station at Larpenteur Ave was shifted south to Idaho Ave after CMC action in January 2024. A station north of County Road D was added when that endpoint was introduced.

Narrowing the Design Concepts

The RMS Phase II evaluation was comprised of four stages in which Project staff narrowed the varied design concepts at each stage to inform the decision on a revised LPA. At each stage the Project engaged and updated the Advisory and Decision-Making Committees to ensure that the outcomes would be in alignment with stakeholder needs and the Project Purpose and Need.

The Project established a set of cross sections based on the needs of the Purple Line corridor. Cross sections were developed to fit within the right-of-way of at least one segment of the White Bear Ave Corridor.

The first stage screened out two cross sections, primarily because of challenges with efficient transit operations. The second screening stage further explored the design options and identified feasible cross sections for each segment along the White Bear Ave Corridor.



PROPOSED STATION AREAS



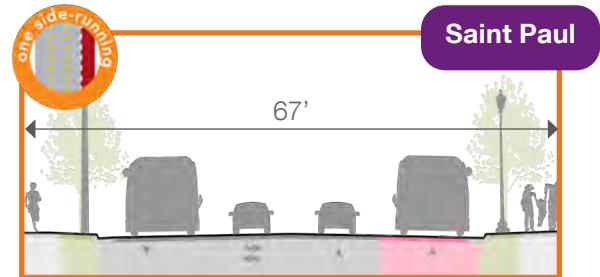
White Bear Ave Design Concepts

Three preferred design concepts were identified through screening. The concepts are described below.

ONE SIDE-RUNNING

Saint Paul

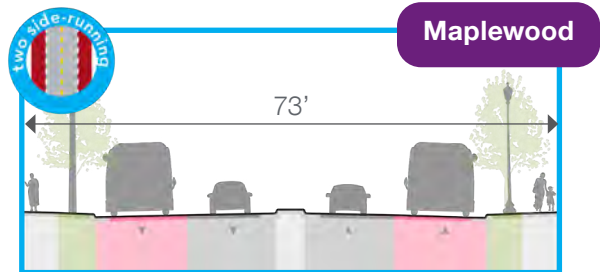
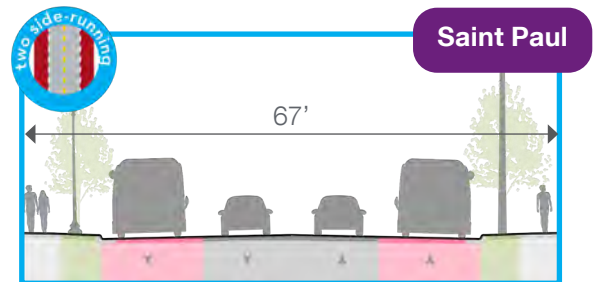
The bus lane can be used for local access and transit. The remaining road is a 3-lane roadway for general traffic with the center lane used for left-turning traffic. Buses will use the bus lane going northbound and travel in mixed traffic going southbound.



TWO SIDE-RUNNING

Saint Paul & Maplewood

The bus lanes can be used for local access and transit. There is one lane for general traffic in each direction plus left-turn lanes at busy intersections. A median will be constructed along some stretches of the corridor to provide safety benefits.

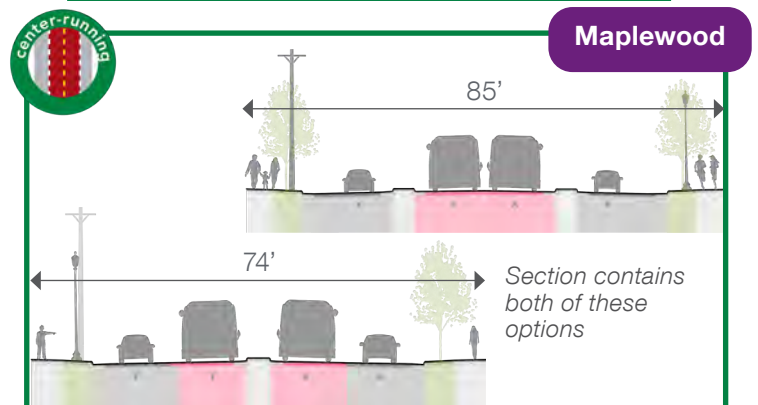
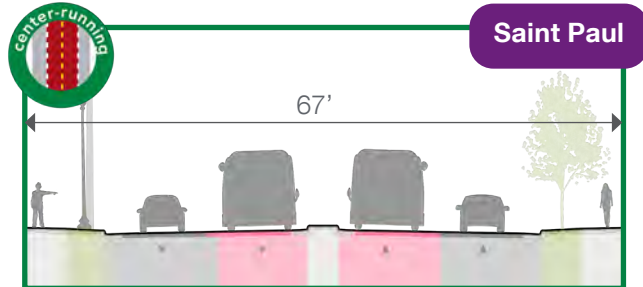


CENTER-RUNNING

Saint Paul & Maplewood

The bus lanes can be exclusively used by transit and emergency vehicles only. There is one lane for general traffic in each direction and left-turn lanes at busy intersections. Due to the position of the bus lane, general traffic will only be able to turn left at signalized intersections.

This design option was originally screened out for Saint Paul because of potential full property acquisitions and reduced vehicle access. However, community leaders advocated for reconsideration of a center-running cross section. Following initial Project staff study and recommendations, the CMC concurred on studying a narrowed center-running option in Saint Paul.



Evaluating the Design Concepts

The design concepts for the White Bear Ave Corridor and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor were evaluated using several criteria across 16 criteria themes, listed below. These criteria were developed based on the Project's Purpose and Need statement.

Purpose and Need

The Purpose of the Project is to "Provide transit service that satisfies the long-term regional mobility and accessibility needs for businesses and the traveling public and supports sustainable development within the study area." Four primary factors contribute to the Need for the Project:

- Serving the needs of people who rely on transit
- Meeting increasing demand for reliable, high-frequency transit
- Planning for sustainable growth and development
- Expanding multimodal travel options

The Project Purpose and Need are detailed in the 2021 Environmental Assessment and remain unchanged.

Evaluation Criteria Themes



Property Impacts



Pedestrian & Bicycle Access



Cost



Parking Impacts



Transit Operations



Safety



Concept Dimensions



Public Needs



Traffic Operations



Socioeconomic Demographics



Environmental



Ridership



Public Support



Land Use & Economic Development



Federal Funding Viability



Station Access



Key criteria for design concept and corridor evaluation



Key criteria for design concept evaluation












Key criteria for corridor evaluation



Design Concept Evaluation Results

The greatest differences between the White Bear Ave Corridor design options are summarized below.

	One Side-Running 	Two Side-Running 	Center-Running 
	Larger medians for pedestrian and bike crossing safety	Preferred by disability advocates for consistency of station configurations	More pedestrian refuges at crosswalks and medians throughout the corridor
			
	Fewer property impacts from left-turn lanes and medians	More property impacts than the One Side-Running option from left-turn lanes and medians	More property impacts on Maryland and White Bear Avenues than the side-running options
	More traffic delay for cars and trucks in the southbound direction due to the shared lane	Fewer impacts to general traffic	Prevents left-turns and through-traffic at unsignalized intersections
	Less reliable transit service in the southbound direction, more opportunity for buses to be delayed by cars and trucks	More opportunities for for buses to be delayed by cars using bus lanes for right turns, but easier for maintenance staff to access stations	Faster and more reliable transit service
	Concerns about bus reliability and longer crossing distances at stations	Support from people who prioritize bus operations and consider pedestrian safety	Concerns about station configuration and property impacts, particularly in Saint Paul

All design options, to some degree, will see the following impacts or benefits:

- Pedestrian improvements such as filling in sidewalk gaps, restoring or improving boulevards as design allows, improving sidewalk conditions, adding crosswalks, creating more visible crosswalks, reducing crossing distances, and improving bicycle connections.
- Stop consolidation and sharing between the Project, METRO H Line, and local bus service.
- Some degree of impact to all properties along the corridor during construction. Permanent impacts will vary across the options.
- Reduced lane capacity on White Bear and Maryland Avenues will result in fewer vehicles using White Bear and Maryland Avenues but more vehicles using nearby parallel roadways.
- Minimal impacts to environmental and historic resources along the corridor.
- Removal of on-street parking on Maryland Avenue. This is the only on-street parking in the corridor.

Evaluating the Corridors

The White Bear Ave Corridor was compared to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor to determine a preferred route for the Purple Line between Maryland Avenue and the Maplewood Mall area. The same criteria themes described in the previous section were used to perform the Corridor Comparison evaluation.

Compared to the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Corridor, the White Bear Ave Corridor has:



More destinations within a 10-minute walk or roll of stations



More public and stakeholder support



More impacts to future traffic operations



More property impacts and slower construction



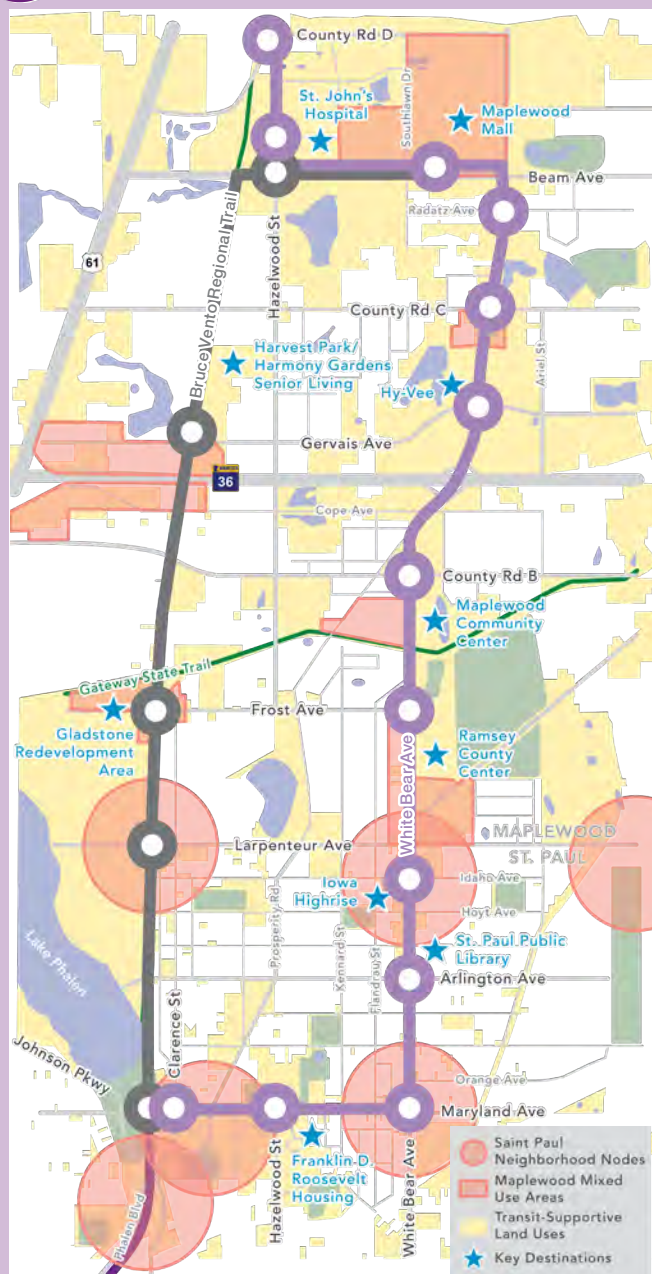
Longer transit travel times from Union Depot to the Maplewood Mall area



Higher cost



More existing and future transit-supportive development



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

At their October 2024 meeting, the CMC decided **the Purple Line Project will no longer advance the route alignment for collocating the Purple Line BRT with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail north of Maryland Avenue.** This decision was made based on the following factors that correspond to the Project goals:

- **Weak public support for the route alignment collocating the Project with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail north of Maryland Avenue.**
 - ✓ Develop and select an implementable and community-supported project
- **Less people served on the route alignment collocating the Project with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail north of Maryland Avenue compared to the alignment on White Bear Ave Corridor.**
 - ✓ Increase the use of transit and its efficiency and attractiveness for all users
 - ✓ Improve sustainable travel options between and within the study area communities
 - ✓ Enhance connectivity of the corridor to the regional transportation network
- **Strong support for the Project.**
 - ✓ Contribute to improving regional equity, sustainability, and quality of life
 - ✓ Support sustainable growth and development patterns that reflect the vision of local and regional plans and policies

Other decisions made at this time include a conditional endpoint at County Road D and removing the One Side-Running transit lane option from consideration. **There is no revised locally preferred alternative (LPA) for the Purple Line at this time and the White Bear Ave Corridor will remain under study.** The Project will continue its work toward a revised LPA and approval of a concept layout.

STAY CONNECTED!

SIGN UP FOR EMAIL UPDATES: metrotransit.org/purple-line-project

For project questions contact:

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CALL US: 651-602-1955



Visit metrotransit.org/purple-line-project for more information, to sign-up for the project newsletter, and share your comments, questions, and concerns.

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