

CHAPTER 1: STUDY BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The public transit system is the backbone of the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) to accommodate the population and employment growth forecast for the region. The purpose of the West End and Route 9 Transit Study is to recommend service changes to better accommodate existing population and employment in the study area as well as forecasted growth.

There has been transit service along Glenwood Avenue and serving the Bryn Mawr neighborhood since the late 1800s. After World War II, with Minneapolis still the major focus of employment in the metro, service on the Glenwood and Bryn Mawr routes were extended further west to accommodate residential development in Golden Valley and St. Louis Park. Express service to downtown Minneapolis was added in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Employment patterns have shifted dramatically. While downtown Minneapolis is still a major regional employment node, many of the region's jobs are located at dispersed car-oriented suburban employment nodes with free parking and poor pedestrian infrastructure. In 1960, about 60 percent of workers living in Golden Valley and St. Louis Park were employed in Minneapolis; today, it is less than 30 percent.

Within the past decade, more emphasis has been placed on creating suburban nodes that integrate residential and employment development together in a pedestrian and transit friendly environment. The West End in St. Louis Park, located in the southwest quadrant of I-394 and Highway 100, is a good example of this type of development which is often referred to as Transit Oriented Development (TOD).

Scope and Purpose

The West End and Route 9 Transit Study examines existing transit service and opportunities for improvements along Route 9 (Glenwood Avenue, Cedar Lake Road) and near the growing high-density job and residential opportunities in the West End development. The study includes parts of Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Golden Valley and Minnetonka. Specifically, the study area is bordered by I-94 to the east, Glenwood Avenue on the north, County Road 73 (Hopkins Crossroad) to the west and Cedar Lake Road/26th Street to the south. A map of the study area is in **Figure 1**.

Routes 9, 25, 604, 615, 643, 649, 663 and 675 all operate some level of local service in the study area. Routes specifically under review for this project include Route 9 west of downtown, Route 25 along France Avenue, Route 604 east of the Louisiana Avenue Transit Center, Route 649 and Route 675 east of Louisiana Avenue Transit Center. Routes 615, 643, 663 and several express routes that operate non-stop on I-394 and Highway 100 through the study area are not included in the project.

Goals/Objectives

The transit study focuses on simplifying Route 9, providing better connectivity between the West End and downtown Minneapolis, improving the reliability and productivity of service in the study area, and ensuring that under-represented communities that rely on transit share in the benefits of service improvements. Goals and objectives include:

- Improving the performance of Route 9 by eliminating low ridership branches and streamlining the route making the route easier to understand.
- Creating routes and schedules that are more reliable and efficient, providing better on-time performance
- Improving transit access for those reliant upon transit to both services and jobs.
- Improving transit system connections – particularly between downtown Minneapolis and the job rich West End

- Supporting transit-oriented development
- Compatibility with future plans in the study area (e.g., Service Improvement Plan, METRO Blue and Green Line Extension connecting bus plans, C Line rapid bus line)

Evaluation Criteria

Recommended service changes are considered based on how well they meet the goals outlined above, which can be measured using criteria that evaluate productivity, social equity and connectivity. The criteria below are designed to help review and prioritize specific service changes and the investment of limited resources.

- Improved route structure and network
 - Route 9 structural improvements-more direct, easier to understand with fewer variations
 - Schedule reliability and network efficiency
 - Faster off-peak travel time between downtown and West End
- Service performance
 - Passengers per in-service hour
 - Grow ridership by attracting new riders, retaining existing riders
- Equity and market considerations
 - Low-income communities, people of color and people with disabilities
 - Auto availability
 - Population and employment density data, especially access to jobs paying less than \$40,000 a year

These criteria are supported by the direction laid out by the Metropolitan Council in Thrive MSP 2040 and the 2040 TPP.

Relevant Transit Plans and Projects in the Study Area

Regional and local planning work influence transit service in the study area. Priorities for the regional transportation system are set in the 2040 TPP. The plan sets policies for the regional transportation system based on the goals and objectives in Thrive MSP 2040, the region’s development guide. Metro Transit’s Service Improvement Plan (SIP) builds on the TPP by identifying and prioritizing specific local and express bus improvements.

Metro Transit continually reviews and updates individual bus routes to reflect the changing nature of development and travel in the Twin Cities. In addition, Metro Transit occasionally performs transit sector studies, which review a group of routes at a sub-regional level to comprehensively evaluate transit service and needs, determine market opportunities and restructure service and facilities to better address those needs and opportunities.

There are currently three transitway projects also underway in the study area: two light-rail extensions and a new rapid bus line. Changes proposed in this study will meet not only the near-term needs in the study area, but will also be flexible enough to lay a foundation for these transitway projects.

2040 Transportation Policy Plan

The 2040 TPP is the region’s long-range transportation policy and investment plan. In addition to transit, it addresses highway, aviation and other forms of surface transportation for at least a 20-year planning horizon. The region’s first priority is to preserve, maintain and operate the existing transit network. It also establishes a framework from which to evaluate potential transit changes, improvements and investments.

Objectives and investment factors from the 2040 TPP that influenced the Route 9 and West End Transit Study include:

- Operate the regional transportation system to efficiently and cost-effectively connect people to destinations
- Increase the availability of multimodal travel options
- Increase transit travel time reliability and predictability
- Improve multimodal travel options to jobs and other opportunities
- Provide equitable access to opportunity for people of all ages, abilities, races and socio-economic groups

The TPP also identifies the region’s transit market areas, which help guide decisions about the types and level of transit service most appropriate for a given area. They are determined by using an index of population density, employment density and automobile availability. Market Areas I, II and III are represented in the West End and Route 9 Transit Study area. More information about market areas is available in Chapter 2.

2015-2030 Service Improvement Plan

Metro Transit’s SIP builds on the TPP by identifying and prioritizing specific local and express bus route improvements if additional operating dollars are available. The SIP identifies opportunities to add new routes and improve the frequency and span of service on the existing route network. It includes a specific and prioritized list of improvements, all requiring additional operating funds. The SIP identifies the evaluation factors and measures used to prioritize these bus service investments, as well as timing and resources needed to make them.

Projects included in the SIP for the West End and Route 9 Transit Study area include improvements on Routes 9, 604, 615, 643, 649, 675 and several new or restructured routes that would serve METRO Green and Blue line extension stations in Minneapolis, St. Louis Park and Minnetonka.

Three Cities Transit Restructuring Plan

In 2000, Metro Transit conducted a study of transit restructuring for Hopkins, St. Louis Park and Minnetonka, with a goal of redesigning service to better meet community needs and goals. The study highlighted issues with existing service structure and identified four key areas for improvement:

- Develop and strengthen community-to-community and intra-community transit connections
- Improve and expand employment-oriented reverse commute services, including serving earlier and later work shifts
- Improve efficiency and effectiveness of commute service to downtown Minneapolis
- Develop and improve transit facilities, such as Transit Centers

Other than streamlining the Louisiana Avenue crosstown service, existing routes in the West End study area were not significantly impacted by the plan. However, a new crosstown service was introduced, Route 607, which provided service from St. Louis Park’s West End to the Park Commons area via 26th Street, France Avenue, Minnetonka Boulevard and Belt Line Boulevard. The service has since been discontinued due to low ridership.

West Suburban Service Changes

The West Suburban Service Changes project included the cities of St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, Deephaven, Greenwood, Excelsior, Shorewood and Tonka Bay. The two principal objectives of the 2013 project were to improve local circulation and access for transit-reliant communities and to improve overall performance of existing express service by eliminating segments of route duplication or low productivity and fringe of the peak period trips with low ridership. Other objectives included strengthening the regional network, enhancing off-peak service frequency, improving service to major destinations and in general providing levels of service appropriate for each specific area.

Service changes included increasing the hours of service on Route 615 and extending two Route 9 evening roundtrips to the “N” terminal in the County Road 73 and Greenbrier Road area of Minnetonka. The express route consolidation blended five routes into four routes. The West Suburban Plan did not change the structure of routes in the West End and Route 9 Transit Study area.

METRO Green Line Extension-Southwest Corridor Light Rail

The extension of the Green Line between downtown Minneapolis, the southwest suburbs and Eden Prairie includes two light-rail stations in the Bryn Mawr and Harrison neighborhoods, one at Van White Boulevard just north of I-394 and the other just south of the intersection of Penn Avenue and I-394. Connecting bus service to these stations will be considered as part of a public outreach process that will begin in earnest after the Green Line Extension is under construction. The Green Line Extension is expected to open in 2020, pending full project funding. For details on the Green Line Extension visit metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Current-Projects/Southwest-LRT.aspx

METRO Blue Line Extension-Bottineau Light Rail

The extension of the Blue Line between downtown Minneapolis, the northwest suburbs and Brooklyn Park includes two light-rail stations just north of the study area along Olson Highway, one at Van White Boulevard and the other at Penn Avenue. Connecting bus service to these stations will be considered as part of a public outreach process that will begin in earnest after the Blue Line Extension is under construction. The Blue Line Extension is expected to open in 2021, pending full project funding. For details on the Blue Line Extension visit metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Current-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension.aspx

C Line Rapid Bus Service

The C Line includes a package of transit enhancements that adds up to a faster trip and an improved experience on the existing Route 19, one Metro Transit’s busiest bus routes. The C Line will operate between downtown Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center via the Penn Avenue corridor. The C Line is scheduled to open in 2019 with temporary stations on Olson Memorial Highway. Implementation of the METRO Blue Line Extension service on Olson Highway east of Penn Avenue prompted a review of shifting C Line service from Olson Highway to Glenwood Avenue between Penn Avenue and downtown Minneapolis. As a result of this review, the permanent alignment of the C Line will shift to Glenwood Avenue after the METRO Blue Line Extension opens for service on Olson Highway and C Line stations are completed on Glenwood Avenue. For details on this long-term realignment of the C Line to Glenwood, visit metrotransit.org/c-line-project.