



Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Engagement Summary

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Background

The purpose of the METRO Orange Line Connecting Bus Study is to review service in the study area in conjunction with the opening of the Orange Line and recommend service changes to maximize access to the Orange Line and improve service in the area. The Orange Line is scheduled to open in late 2021. It will substantially replace routes 535 and 597 with frequent, 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. Transit is the backbone of the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) to accommodate population and employment growth forecast for the region.

Metro Transit analyzed existing bus service with public comments received during pre-concept plan engagement in 2019 and to the extent possible considered potential long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on ridership and travel behavior to develop a Concept Plan of route redesign. The Concept Plan, published in January 2021, proposes changes to route structure, frequency, or span of service for 11 routes (routes 7, 27, 515, 535, 537, 538, 539, 540, 542, 553, 597). The plan also proposes four new routes (Routes 534, 536, 547, and 548).

Metro Transit held a public comment period Jan. 25 – Feb. 22, 2021 to seek feedback on the Concept Plan's proposed service changes.

Purpose and goal

The purpose of this outreach was to engage the community by informing stakeholders about the concept plan and seeking feedback on the plan:

- Summarize background and process
- Communicate how the plan restructures routes and provides connections to Orange Line stations
- Seek input on:
 - key destinations
 - pre-pandemic travel behavior
 - likelihood to use the Orange Line and proposed routes post-pandemic
 - concerns about the Concept Plan
 - prioritization of service improvements should more resources become available

Feedback received will assist staff in developing a Recommended Plan for Metropolitan Council approval in summer 2021 and implementation in late 2021.

The goal was to engage community and receive at least 100 survey responses with at least 30% of the responses from Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). The target audience was transit users, especially those that use the affected routes, and communities served by the core and suburban local routes.

Methods of engagement

The targeted audience was riders, potential riders and the general communities within the study area. Inability to hold or unwillingness of people to attend meetings due to COVID-19 continued to be a challenge. However, Metro Transit continues to try strategies to engage a diverse set of stakeholders.

- Direct people to an online map-based survey that both informs and seeks feedback with engaging visual content and easily understandable maps. The survey was available in English, Spanish, and Somali.
- Posters with a QR code link to the survey were put at key transit centers and stops that would experience significant changes due to proposed plans.
- Emails to current transit users.
- Target ethnic and local media via social media, website, print ads, and advertorials in local publications
- In-person intercept surveys as reasonable given COVID-19 and limitations.
- Virtual public meetings and virtual public hearing.
- Feedback via calls or emails to Metro Transit Customer Relations, emails to project staff, voicemails to the Metropolitan Council's public information line.

Communications

Date (2021)	Activities
1/10	Public Hearing Notice published in <i>Star Tribune</i>
1/25	Updated project webpage metrotransit.org/OLCB with information about the Study, the Concept Plan Report, video about the Study, and link to the survey
1/25	Online survey goes live in English, Somali, and Spanish
1/25	Posted to project webpage and social media
1/25	<i>Star Tribune</i> publishes Concept Plan article
1/25	Publish an article Metro Transit news website
1/25	Post Met Council's website
1/25 – 2/15	Concept Plan ads run in local and ethnic media (<i>Sahan Journal</i> , <i>Vida y Sabor</i> , <i>MN Spokesman Recorder</i> , <i>Access Media</i>)
1/26	Email to Riders Club
1/26	Rider Alert posters installed at key transit stop
1/26	Distribute communication packet to key stakeholders (e.g. cities, schools, neighborhood associations) to amplify comment period among their constituents
1/26 – 2/10	Emails to community groups, Go-To Card users and Metro Transit app users of study area routes
1/28	Publish article in Metropolitan Council's e-newsletter
1/28	Electronic message boards at transit center
1/29	Publish article in Metro Transit's <i>Insights</i> employee newsletter
1/25	Direct mail postcard to residents within ¼ mile of key segments
2/5	Publish article in Metro Transit's <i>Connect</i> customer newsletter
2/11	Bloomington <i>Sun Current</i> publishes Concept Plan article

Social Media

Posted	Post Description	Facebook	Twitter
1/25	FB and Twitter posts about concept plan YouTube video and Concept plan survey. 787 views on YouTube	37 likes 25 shares 12 comments	11 likes 4 shares 1 comment
2/1	FB and Twitter posts about Route 27 proposals and link to survey	14 likes 4 shares	8 likes 4 shares 1 comment
2/1	FB post about virtual public meeting	4 likes 86 people interested	
2/3	FB and Twitter posts about route 7 and 515 proposals and link to survey	8 likes 2 shares	1 like 1 share 1 comment
2/4	FB and Twitter posts about virtual public meeting	8 likes	4 likes 3 shares
2/9	FB and Twitter posts about route 534, 535, and 553 proposals and link to survey	7 likes 3 shares 3 comments	2 likes
2/11	FB and Twitter posts about route 535, 536, and 539 proposals and link to survey	8 likes 1 comment	2 likes
2/17	FB and Twitter posts about route 538, 540, and 542 proposals and link to survey	10 likes 2 shares 2 comments	3 likes 1 comment

In-person outreach at bus stops

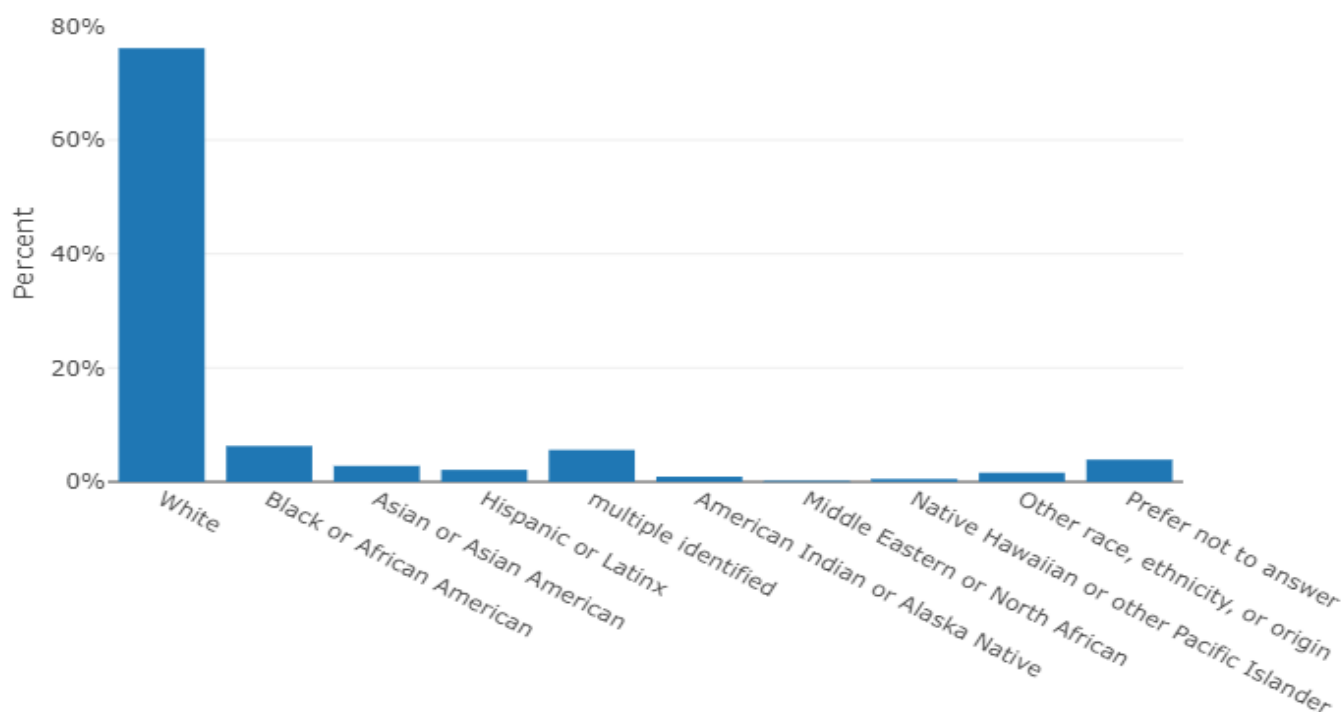
Date (2021)	Location
2/3	South Bloomington Transit Center
2/4	Marquette Ave & 8th St.
2/5	Mall of America Station
2/10	Southdale Transit Center
2/17	VA Medical Center
2/18	Marquette Ave & 6th St.
2/19	Mall of America Station
2/20	Southdale Transit Center

Survey respondents

Over the course of a month, 582 people submitted a project survey. BIPOC respondents accounted for about 20% of the total surveys completed.

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9%
Asian/Asian American	2.8%
Black/African American	6.3%
Hispanic/Latinx	2.1%
Middle Eastern or North African	0.2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.5%
Multiple Identified	5.6%
Other Race/Ethnicity	1.6%
White	76.1%
Prefer not to answer	3.9%

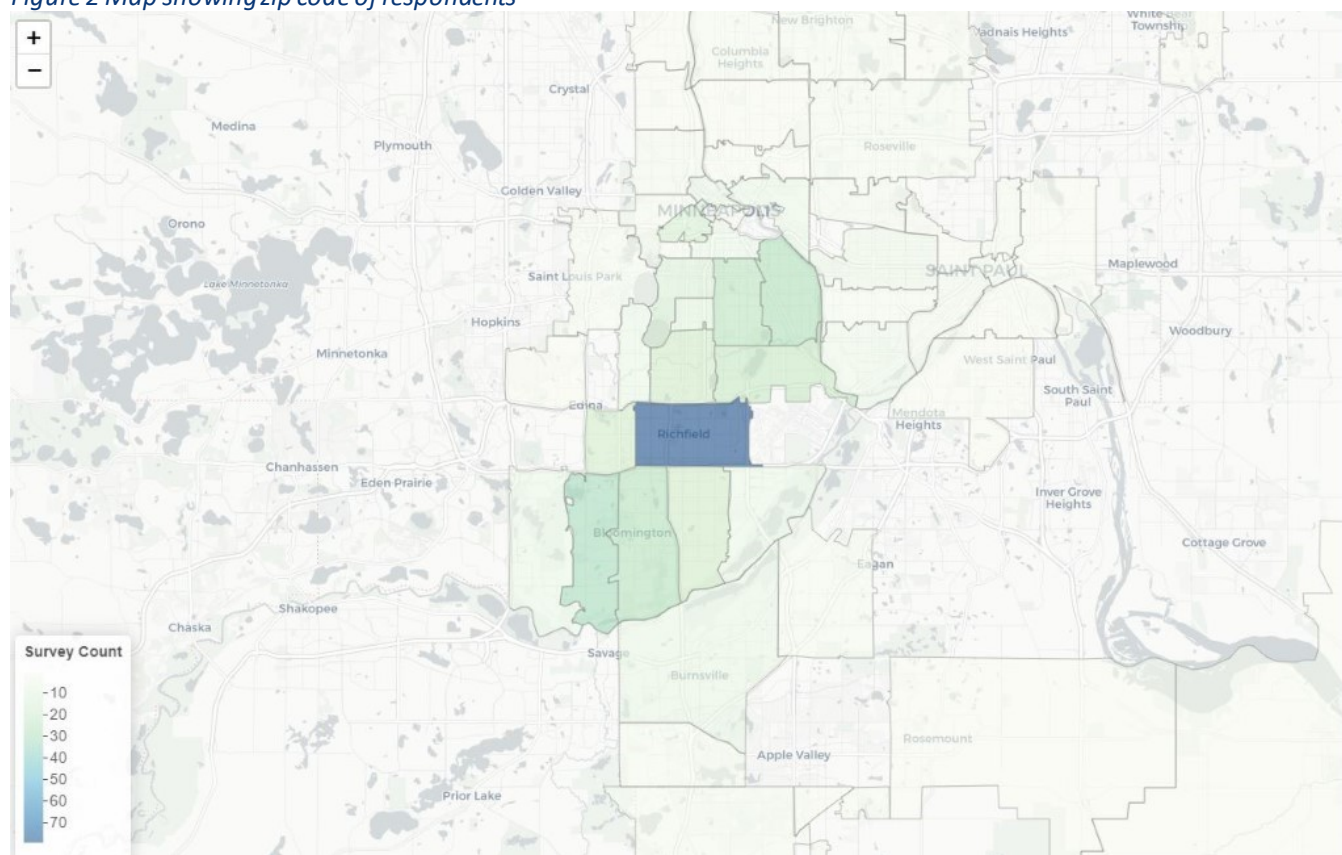
Figure 1 Race/ethnicity of respondents



How do you describe your race, ethnicity and/or origin? [Select all that apply]

We collected ZIP code data in our online surveys and mapped responses that show the respondents with highest concentration of responses were from Richfield, southeast Minneapolis, and Bloomington, the areas that would experience the most changes under the proposed concept plan.

Figure 2 Map showing zip code of respondents



Analysis and key themes

Metro Transit received a total of 600 comments, primarily from the online survey but also through Customer Relations and via email and phone. The most common concerns were related to the proposed elimination of the B and E branches on Route 515, elimination of service at 90th/France, and longer travel times for existing route 539 and 597 riders by adding a transfer. There were 177, or a significant 30% of all responses, that asked for changes to the concept plan to address concerns about access by transit in terms of routing or frequency or span.

This summary will help identify modifications to the service plan that focus on the essential connections to support the Orange Line and minimize negative impacts. This memo lists the number of comments received by route and by theme. The charts illustrate the travel purposes they have by the route changes they wanted.

Multiple trip purposes are common for most of these respondents, which implies they are requesting that bus service be provided both during rush hours and non-rush hours.

Please note that about 15 responses looked to be from one individual offering the same suggestion multiple times, so these responses were counted once for each route or theme.

Routes 7 and 515

- 515E branch
 - Keep this branch (21 comments)
 - VA Medical Center is a key destination (13 comments)
 - Keep service on E. 54th St. (8 comments)
- Support the Route 515 simplification to/from MOA (14 comments)
- Frequency/connections
 - Concern about Route 515 connections (10 comments)
 - Route 515 should operate every 15 minutes on weekdays and Saturdays (3 comments)
 - Improve Route 7 to every 20 minutes, at least on weekdays (4 comments)
- 515B branch
 - Keep this branch via Longfellow Ave. (6 comments)
 - Maintain/improve service to FedEx, UPS air cargo depots (4 comments)
- Support having all trips on routes 7 and 515 serve Cedar Point Commons (5 comments)
- Continue Route 515 service to apartments at 77th St./12th Ave. S. (5 comments)
- Other comments include terminating Route 7 downtown, diverting Route 7 to serve the VA, having all Route 515 trips serve the VA, extending Route 7 instead of Route 515 via Bloomington Ave. to Mall of America (1 comment each)

Route 27

- Support the improved connections to the Orange and Blue lines (11 comments)
- Frequency
 - Too low for an urban route (3 comments)
 - Should run every 20 minutes or better (1 comment)
- Route 27 is too circuitous/confusing (3 comments)
- Request service timed to serve 2nd and 3rd shifts at hospitals (1 comment)

Routes 534 and 553

- Route 534
 - Support improved service span (9 comments)
 - Prefer Route 4L to be extended instead (4 comments)
 - Need weekend service (3 comments)
 - All trips should serve James Ave. (2 comments)
 - Service not needed during non-rush hours (2 comments)
 - VEAP near 96th/Lyndale is a very important destination (1 comment)
- Route 553

- Improve span, route coverage on 104th St. (6 comments)
 - This route is not needed because riders can park and ride at 98th St. Station (5 comments)
 - Concern about capacity at the 98th St. Park & Ride (1 comment)
- Related request to restore Route 552 (2 comments)

Routes 536, 537, 539

- Valley West Shopping Center
 - Service to Valley West via Route 539 is important (12 comments)
 - Riders east of I-35W prefer not to transfer (4 comments)
 - Keep the one-seat ride between 98th St. Station and Valley West (4 comments)
- 90th St. & France Ave. area
 - Continue to serve with Route 539 or a restored Route 537 (9 comments)
 - Daily service is important to residents of six moderate-rent apartment buildings
- Transfers
 - Transfers between routes 536 and 539 must be convenient and reliable (4 comments)
 - Normandale College and 98th St. & Penn Ave. transfers need to work well
- Route 536
 - Extend to serve 76th St. Station via Penn Ave. (4 comments)
 - Support proposed all-day service (2 comments)
 - Improve service to every 30 minutes during non-rush hours too (1 comment)
 - Service not needed during non-rush hours (1 comment)
- Support Route 539 proposed changes (2 comments)
- Combine Lyndale and Penn Ave. into one circulator route around I-35W (1 comment)

Routes 538, 540, 542

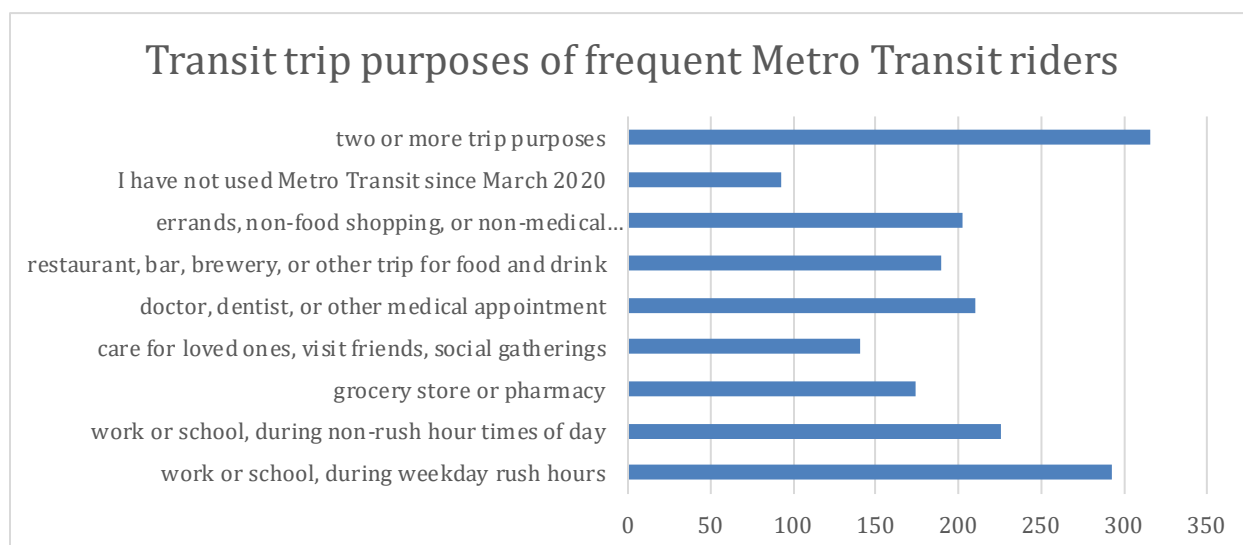
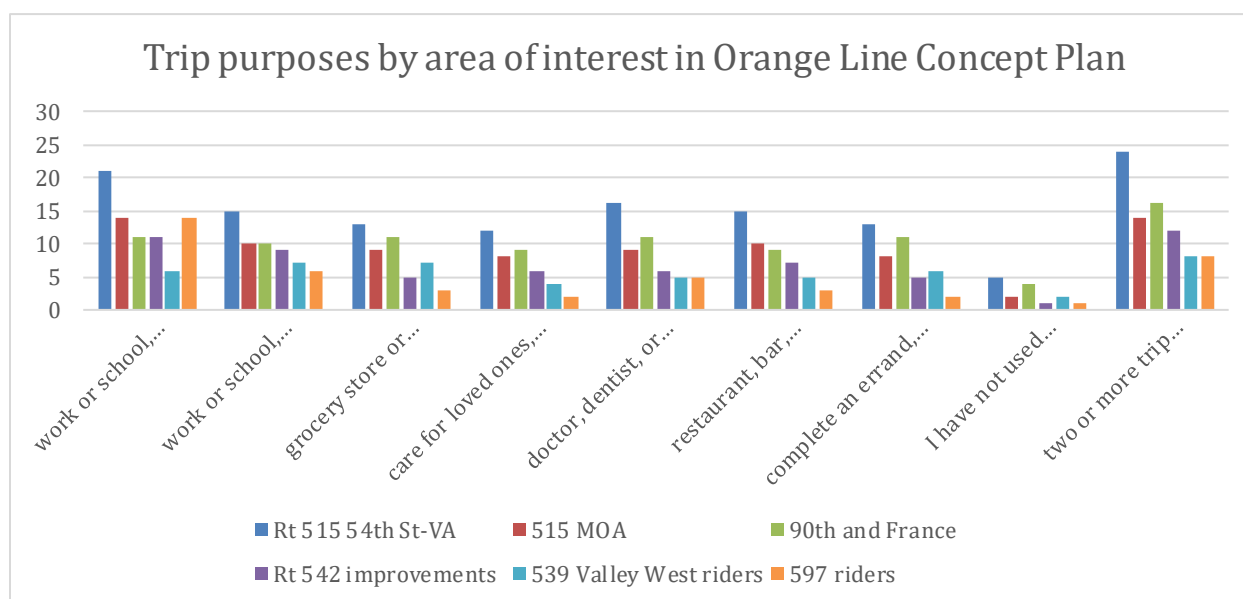
- Extend Route 542 to Eden Prairie Mall (8 comments)
- Add all-day, weekend service on Route 542 (4 comments)
- Concerns about Route 540 on-time performance (3 comments)
- Support the simplification of these routes (3 comments)
- Late night, weekend service is important on these routes (3 comments)

Routes 547, 548, 597

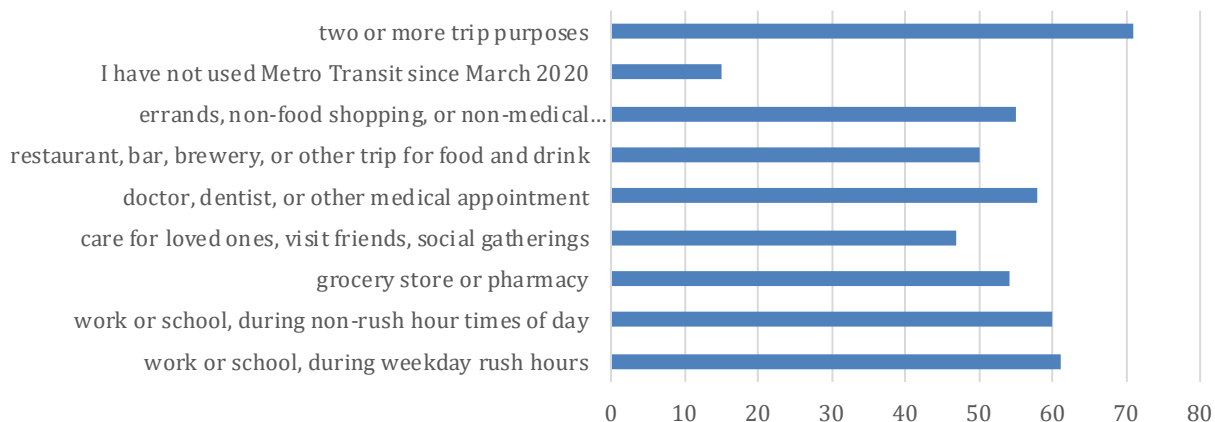
- Route 597
 - Concerns about the elimination of route, new transfer to the Orange Line, increased travel time (14 comments)
 - Will stop riding if a transfer is needed (1 comment)
- Routes 547 and 548 need to have an adequate span of service for commuting to jobs downtown and in SW Bloomington industrial area (13 comments)
- Workers at Quality Bike Products are multimodal bus/bike commuters and need an adequate span of service (4 comments)

Trip Purposes

Most of those surveyed indicate they use transit for multiple trip purposes and diverse reasons, especially for those who ride most frequently. This implies a need for bus service in both the rush hours and non-rush hours. The trip purposes are most diverse for those interested in Routes 515, 539, and 542. BIPOC rider respondents are also riding transit for slightly more diverse reasons with somewhat less emphasis on rush-hour commuting than do white riders.



Trip purposes of BIPOC respondents

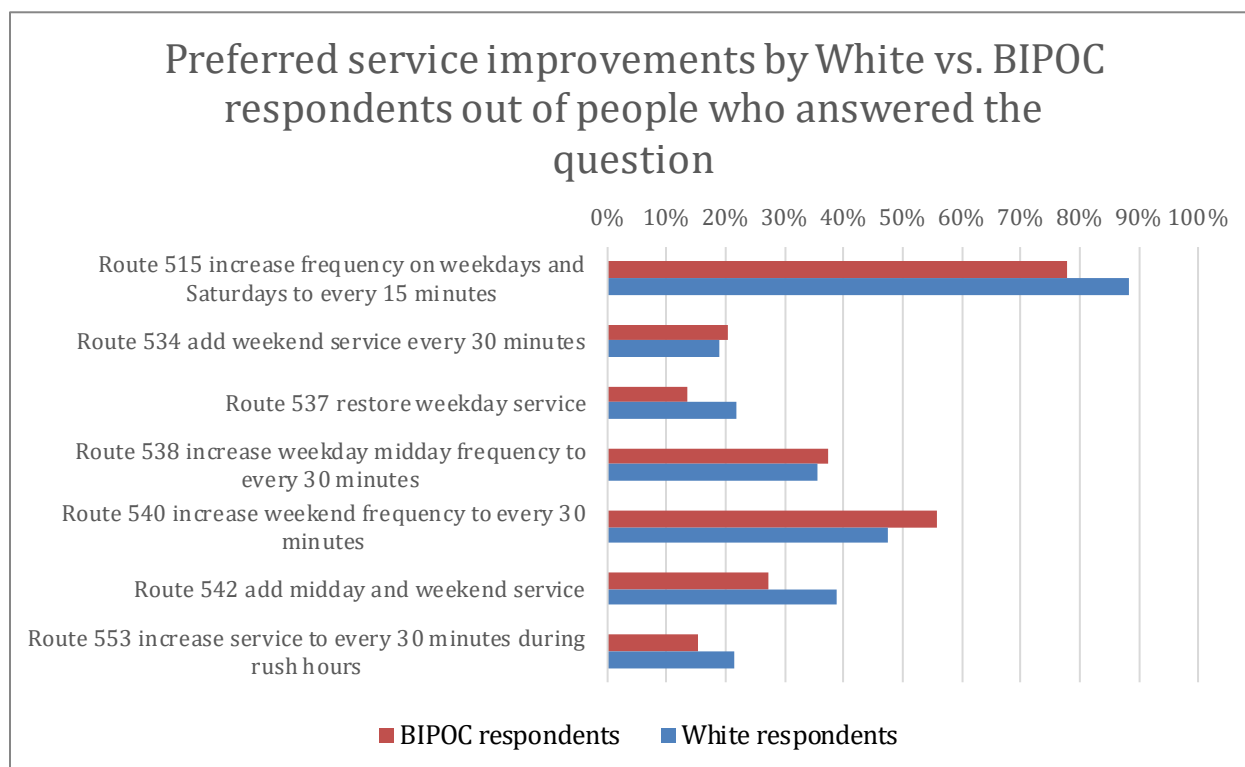


Trip purposes of White respondents



Scenario B

The concept plan identified changes that could be implemented if additional resources are available. The survey asked which improvements should be prioritized. Our respondents agree on their first choice – improving frequency on Route 515 to every 15 minutes on weekdays and Saturdays – and their second choice of non-rush hour service improvements to Route 540. Third and fourth choice service improvements were flipped between racial groups with White respondents closely favoring Route 542 midday and weekend service over Route 538 midday service while BIPOC respondents preferred Route 538 midday service to Route 542 midday and weekday service. The chart below highlights these preferences and shows percentages based on who answered the question.



Conclusions

The respondents clearly support the proposed route and service changes that are *most* essential for success of the METRO Orange Line. These are the routes making direct connections at an Orange Line station that are required to access the Orange Line and to replace routes 535 and 597. Respondents' support for the concepts diminishes for the route changes not directly essential to the Orange Line, such as the simplification of Route 515, due mainly to the imposition of new transfers and uncertainties of running time and reliability. Moving forward, the planning focus should consider how to reduce these impacts and prioritize the most essential service changes required to support the Orange Line.



During the comment period, 582 people completed an online survey, 10 people submitted comments to Customer Relations, five people emailed transit staff, and three people left voice messages on the Metropolitan Council's public info line.

Attendance for the two public meetings and public hearing totaled 29 people, while attendance at the Commuter Services webinar totaled 30 people.

How we are using what we heard

This report will be shared with the public by posting it online and presenting it to stakeholder groups. The data will be used by Service Development staff to develop a recommended plan. The data was shared with staff working on overlapping transit improvement projects so that they can look for any comments and concerns as they plan and engage community on those initiatives.

Appendix A: sampling of comments

Routes 7 & 515

"Strongly support the proposed changes to these routes. The 7 extension to Cedar Point Commons is a great new connection, and a major upgrade from the status quo. The 7 extension adds a transit link to the already deep connection between south Minneapolis / Nokomis area and Cedar Point Commons in Richfield."

"Timed transfers are necessary in order for it to be acceptable for people to transfer from the 7 to the 22 going between Richfield and VA Medical Center."

"515 would be useful as a fairly frequent and mostly direct connection between Mall of America Station and Southdale. I like that it would be one route path instead of a random branch to VA."

"Yes, you need to continue the 515 run to the VA and back."

"The elimination of Route 515E will require that I have to make a transfer somewhere to either Route 22 or the Blue Line to get to the VA Medical Center with ONLY Route 22 Currently (unless you change that too) going into the circle exactly at the Medical Center. Using the Blue Line means I would have to walk from the VA Med Center Station to the circle at the VA Medical Center---a distance that would exacerbate my medical conditions prior to any appointments I would have there. As a partially disabled veteran I totally object to this"

"Eliminating the 12th Ave branch of the 515 would make my commute more difficult. I work near American Blvd and Chicago Ave."

"Current 515 route takes people close to Walmart and Ikea, new route doesn't."

"I think this is a good change, increased service on Bloomington [Ave] makes a lot of sense"

Route 27

"Run the bus route later for 2nd & 3rd shift workers at the hospitals."

"This route is useless may benefit a few rush riders otherwise it should be eliminated Many routes are nearby 2 5 11 21 7 9 14 22 Improve these routes before adding trips to useless routes"

"It would make jobs, shopping, going to medical appointments and visiting friends easier."

"Connecting Blue to Orange line, and hitting up all the hospitals and Wells Fargo along the way is great! Personally, Blue Line to Orange Line is the key! If there is a coffee shop or restaurant along the way, I would like frequent stops. I don't know if running every 30 minutes is enough, ""post""-pandemic...in about a year when we hit herd immunity people will go out more, maybe consider running more often."

Routes 534 & 553

"Route 534 should extend to James Ave at all times. Don't complicate things by only serving a large chunk of employers only at rush hour; give them all-day service."

"Local service on Lyndale is useful. Too bad you're not doing 7 days/week."

"553 needs more southbound trip in the evening. Another at 630 would work"

"I don't like that 553 would eliminate service on 104th between Nicollet and Portland is eliminated. I think at least some busses should continue that section of service. It's handy for the Bloomington neighborhoods."

"553 isn't needed so riders can have one-seat ride at a high cost while there are other routes with dire need for improvements"

"Replace 534 by extending 4L branch to 98th St Station. 534 as a separate route that often is waste for the amount of ridership."

Routes 536, 537 & 539

"I like high frequency and late night and early morning routes"

"I really want a bus between 98th and 66th on France!!! Why can't we have that bus? Most of our medical appts are on France near Southdale, and so is a lot of our shopping. We need 537, like, NOW!!"

"Short wait times at penn/98th and/or normandale for 539 & 536 transfers for riders along France, OSR & Penn"

"536 would work for getting me to Valley West Center area. I'd just transfer at the American Blvd stop instead of the 98 St stop. Wouldn't be an issue. Glad to see evening and weekend service as that's been a problem for using these routes in the past."

"Appreciate direct service from OL to Normandale CC"

"It will be nice to have a direct connection from southwest Bloomington to South town"

"I NEED service at 90th and France in order to get to work! I depend on transit entirely, and this would absolutely cut me off from any form of transportation! I also need the 539 for my daily tasks, such as groceries, doctor's visits, and regular outings. If the 539 ran in the route it is currently in, with a stop at 90th/France, but ran every 20 minutes, that would be a significant improvement."

"Will need a good transfer point where 536 and 539 cross Should be safe and easy, timed for shorter wait times Need smooth way from 98th St station to Southtown on Penn Maybe Orange line will provide good access to Southtown from 98th St station"

Routes 538, 540 & 542

"The changes completely bypasses apartment buildings and business along American Blvd. in Bloomington."

"I think streamlining the 542 route is a good idea. I typically ride the Blue line to MOA and then take 542 to France, so this would speed up my ride and potentially cause me to take transit more often."

"These routes make it so I don't need to drive at all, I can go right from home. THANK YOU!"

"542 should extended to Eden Prairie to connect with the Green Line extension. I have no way to get from South Minneapolis to Eden Prairie currently."

"Add midday service on 542 too"

Routes 547, 548 & 597

"The lower-paying warehouse positions at QBP operate well outside the ""standard rush hours"" that are proposed. If this is the only transit access, I would not be able to work there."

"547 is too limited of service to accept much work in this area."

"Longer commute times and reliable transfers are a concern."

"Before the pandemic, I used 597C daily to commute to downtown. As long as the timing is done well so that it doesn't take longer to get downtown (ie waiting 15+ minutes for a transfer from 547 to Orange line), which would create a significant impact to those who rode the 597C, the above changes appear to be satisfactory."

Appendix B: Sampling of social media & news



The forthcoming bus rapid transit line through Bloomington and Richfield will affect local service buses in each city, and Metro Transit is collecting



City of Minneapolis Retweeted

Metro Transit @MetroTransitMN · Feb 1

Route 27 rider? To more easily connect to the future METRO Orange Line, Route 27 will be restructured. Other bus routes in south Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington and Edina will also be restructured.

Go to surveymonkey.com/r/OLConnecting... for details and to take a short survey.

1 4 8

City of Bloomington @bloomington_mn · Feb 4

Commuter Services and Metro Transit will host an online presentation about the connecting bus plan for the METRO Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service Thursday, February 11, from 1-2 p.m.

us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register...

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City of Bloomington Retweeted

Metro Transit @MetroTransitMN · Jan 25

How will you connect to the the upcoming METRO Orange Line? This Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line will mostly replace Routes 535 and 597. Find out more details on current route restructuring and take a quick 10 minute survey at surveymonkey.com/r/OLConnecting...

Learn about changes to bus routes that connect to ...
In late 2021, the METRO Orange Line is scheduled to begin new bus rapid transit service in the I-35W ...
youtube.com

2 4 11

Commuter Services @CommuterService · Feb 2

Learn about changes to bus routes that connect to the METRO Orange Line fb.watch/3ps7eM_ucl/ via @FacebookWatch

Learn about changes to bus routes that connect to ...
The upcoming METRO Orange Line will mostly replace Routes 535 and 597. Other bus routes in ...
facebook.com

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