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Orange Line vision coming into focus

May 2nd, 2013 by [Drew Kerr](#)

Planners have spent a decade looking at ways to address congestion on Interstate 35W, which could become home to the state's second Bus Rapid Transit line. Now, things are starting to get serious.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation and Metro Transit are working to complete enough engineering to apply for federal funding next spring that would allow BRT plans to move forward. The BRT line is estimated to cost between \$150 million and \$200 million and the federal government could cover up to \$75 million of project costs.

If funding is obtained, officials say construction on what's being called the Orange Line could begin in 2016 and completed by 2018. Buses would run between the Burnsville Transit Station, at I-35W and Highway 13, and the "Marq2" bus lanes on Marquette Avenue and 2nd Avenue South, in downtown Minneapolis.

Like light rail transit, service would run all day at regular intervals. The latest estimates suggest the system could attract as many as 3.4 million annual riders by 2030.

Attention is now focused primarily on station planning for the I-494 and Lake Street interchanges, where MnDOT is working on improvements that will provide an opening to bring transit into the mix.

Like the \$4.5 million station at I-35W and 46th Street that opened in 2010, the stations would go in the middle of I-35W. Lake Street designs are already around [30 percent complete](#), but plans for the I-494 interchange are less certain.



A planned Bus Rapid Transit line between Burnsville and downtown Minneapolis would run along Interstate 35W. (Map courtesy: Metro Transit)

April Crockett, a MnDOT project manager working on the [I-494 interchange](#), said a station would likely go somewhere between American Boulevard and 82nd Street but a specific site hasn't yet been identified. The station is being considered as part of a phased \$240 million overhaul of the interchange, among the most congested and accident-prone in the state.

Planners are also working to narrow in on a location for a park-and-ride near that could be connected to the station through a skyway.

Stations at 66th Street in Richfield and 98th Street in Bloomington are also included in the planned Orange Line but are slated to go on the periphery of I-35W instead of being in the middle of the corridor.

As planning ramps up and designs become clearer, Metro Transit will begin hosting public meetings about the project later this year, said Christina Morrison, a project manager with Metro Transit's new BRT and Small Starts office who is working on the plan.

The state's first BRT line, the Red Line between Apple Valley and Bloomington, is scheduled to begin operating on June 22.