

Metro Transit gives update on faster bus service for Richfield, Bloomington

By **Andrew Wig** on August 7, 2013 at 3:32 pm

Life for public transit users in Richfield and Bloomington could get easier by the end of the decade with new bus service set to run through the cities.

Metro Transit staff updated the Richfield City Council on the plans during a work session in July. As part of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system being rolled out, Richfield and Bloomington would get enhanced service via the “Orange Line,” which would stretch from downtown Minneapolis to Burnsville – and potentially beyond – via Interstate 35W.

The new bus line, planned to be operational by 2019, would be greet riders with “ultra premium” services and would be a “major expansion” on current services, said Charles Carlson, senior manager of the BRT initiative. Between BRT routes and express routes, limited-stop buses would run all day, likely at 15-minute intervals during non-peak hours and at 10-minute intervals during peak usage, Orange Line Project Manager Christina Morrison said.

“A huge component of this is just expanded service, more service,” Morrison said.

It might even help some Richfield and Bloomington residents ditch their cars, suggested Richfield Mayor Debbie Goettel. Public transportation is currently not an option for a whole group of workers, such as those who commute to the Mall of America and travel during non-traditional business hours, Goettel noted.

Further evidence of the need, she added, is that “we have some of the highest ridership right here (in Richfield).”

According to Metro Transit, the 16-mile corridor to be traversed by the BRT Orange Line is the most heavily travelled express bus corridor in the transit system, with about 14,000 rides a day.

Aside from the higher frequency, bus rapid transit is expected to speed up commutes with ticket stations at bus stops that would allow passengers to buy tickets ahead of time, and be able to board through any door.

Those buses themselves would likely be longer, “articulated” vehicles that bend in the middle, and would stop at transit stations that feature far more amenities than a standard bus stop, Morrison said.

“This would be a branded service that would have a sort of defined look that would be different from a regular bus stop,” she said.

How that will all take shape is still early in the planning stages, but 10 transit stations are expected along the line. They would include stations at 98th Street and American Boulevard in Bloomington and at East 66th Street in Richfield. A possible extension would take the line to Lakeville.



The 66th Street station may bring some complications, though, Richfield City Manager Steve Devich said. With no park-and-ride option there, riders who already board the bus there park on the streets in surrounding neighborhoods.

“We get complaints from neighbors saying, ‘I can’t even park in front of my own house,’” Devich said.

However, that is not necessarily a reason to seek an alternative site, he emphasized, but that “it is a fact of life. It’s a pretty big impact on the people who live near that area.”

The area “is not what you would call walker-friendly either,” Goettel said, suggesting that would reduce the number who would otherwise walk to the stop.

Metro Transit hopes to have a detailed plan on the new BRT route to present for federal funding next year, and to begin construction in 2017. Planning and work on the new bus infrastructure is taking place in conjunction with planned improvements to the 35W-Interstate 494 interchange.

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