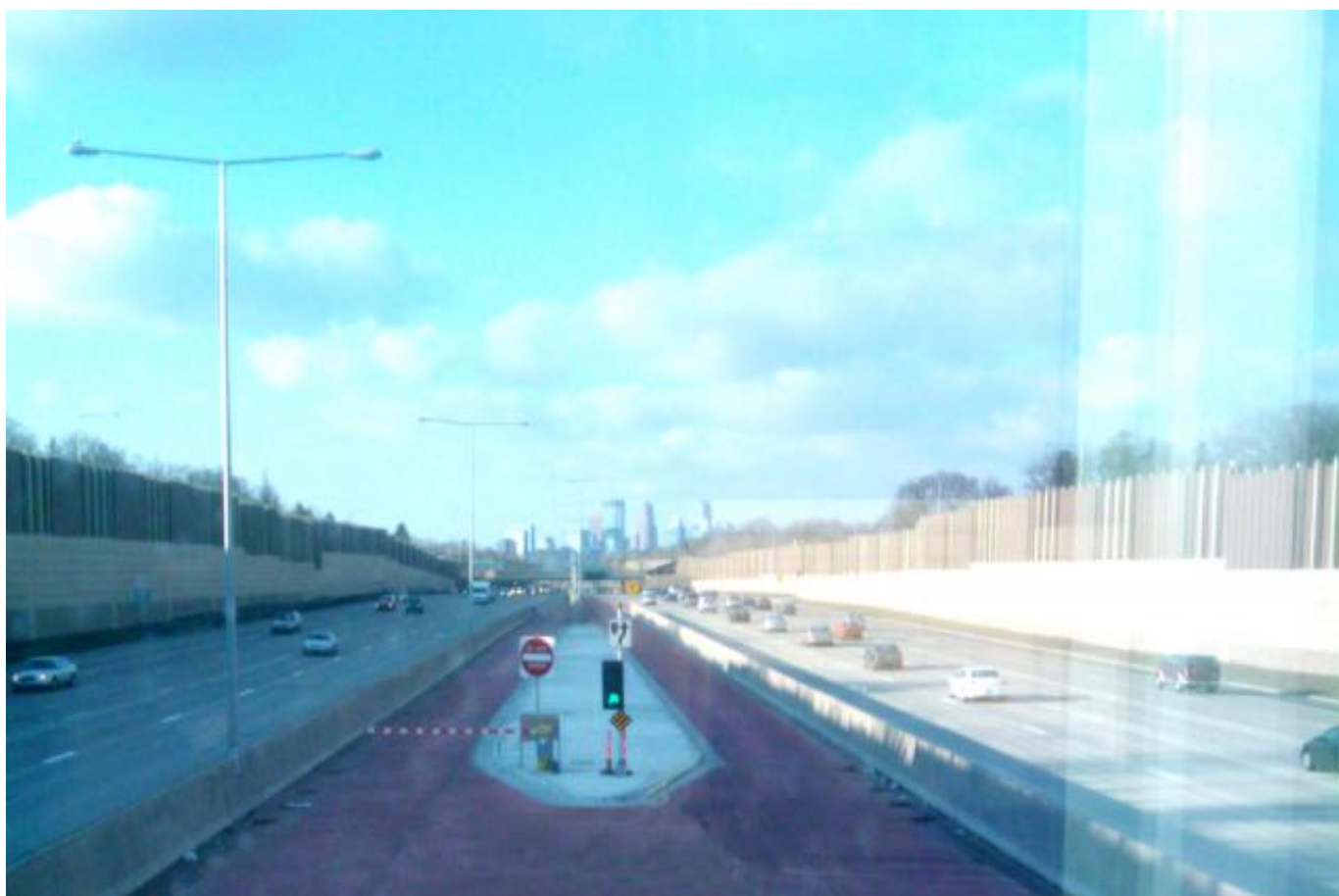


# MINNPOST

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## Retooled I-35W project would add Lake Street bus rapid transit station

By **Karen Boros** | 09/26/12



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Here's the view looking out from the bus rapid transit station at 46th Street. A proposed Lake Street one would allow buses to pick up and drop off passengers without exiting the freeway.

The “freeway expansion project” that was endorsed by the Minneapolis City Council in 2007 has been pared down and retooled with bus rapid transit as the No. 1 priority.

The 2007 price tag also has been cut from \$500 million for the freeway expansion to \$114 million for a bus rapid-transit station on Interstate 35W and improvements for bus transit and two freeway exit ramps to access the Lake Street area.

“People’s eyes rolled,” said Council Member Elizabeth Glidden, recalling her early days on the

council when she explained the massive project to constituents.

In 2007, the \$500 million 35W project called for construction of nine bridges between Franklin and 38th Street, three ramps at Lake Street and space set aside for a future transit station at Lake Street on the freeway. The City Council could only accept or reject the plan. Now, most of that plan is off the table.

“This is a much different project than we had in 2007,” said Glidden. “Make no bones about it — this is a critical moment for the city.”

“It’s a whole lot easier to find \$114 million than half a billion,” said Mayor R.T. Rybak. “Getting this right means it will finally be possible to have bus rapid transit in this region.”

When complete, bus rapid transit will be available on 35W from downtown Minneapolis to Lakeville with buses traveling at freeway speeds. Currently, there is a 35W bus rapid transit station at 46th Street, but buses must move out of the rapid transit lane to the far-right lane for the stops at Lake Street.

Council members held a special meeting Tuesday to [endorse the plan](#) (PDF) after being informed by the federal government that the city would lose \$8.9 million if they did not endorse a plan for the project by Oct. 1.

The city received updated estimates for the project earlier this summer, but “we still needed to tighten our belts,” said City Engineer Steve Kotke. At that point, the cost came to \$151 million, but a decision was made to drop a northbound freeway entrance ramp from Lake Street, shaving \$37 million off the total.

Currently, the 35W bus stop at Lake Street is accessible only by stairs, with a small, partially enclosed shelter at the edge of traffic for riders to wait for buses.

The proposed transit station will be in the center of the freeway, as is the case at 46th Street, with access by stairs or elevator to the enclosed shelter. Buses will not have to leave the rapid transit lane to pick up passengers at Lake Street.

“This is a critical missing gap in bus rapid transit,” said Glidden. Bus rapid transit was to have been in place this year, but that has not been possible without a center-lane transit station at Lake Street.

Improvements to public transit at Lake Street and 35W also are seen as another step toward attracting developers to the area.

“This is another catalyst to reopen Nicollet,” said Council Member Meg Tuthill, who promised she would be there when the street reopened no matter what.

“The day Nicollet goes through I want to be there with a sledgehammer,” said Rybak, adding later that developers now reject the area because Lake Street access from 35W is difficult and there is no bus rapid transit.

The council voted 11 to 1 in favor of the project, with Council Member Robert Lilligren the only “no” vote. Lilligren said he thought the northbound exit ramp at 28th Street was not needed.

The vote endorses the city’s plan as it continues to work with Hennepin County, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Council on the overall final plan

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**COMMENTS (1)**

**CM Lilligren is correct**

SUBMITTED BY **MATT BRILLHART** ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2012 - 1:36PM.

The NB ramp providing direct access to 28th Street is not needed, and I was under the impression that it had been dropped from the initial phase of this project. If one looks at a map, you can see that there is a

pretty exclusive and direct route to 28th Street via a frontage road known as 2nd Avenue S (mistakenly labelled E 28th St by Google maps). Providing direct access to 28th Street from 35W will cost millions more and result in another ugly flyover ramp to save commuters ~2 minutes on their way to Wells Fargo Home Mortgage or the hospitals further to the east.

While this project is getting underway, I think now is the time to have a serious conversation and traffic analysis study about converting 26th and 28th streets back to 2-way streets. I would think it would be a lot cheaper to figure that particular issue out now, rather than after building new highway ramps. Commuters love these mini-freeways through our neighborhoods, but current traffic counts do not support their continued existence. It's time to reclaim neighborhood streets from commuter cut-through traffic.

The rest of the project is great and I look forward to both a SB exit ramp directly to Lake Street and the new 35W Orange Line BRT station. However, I would have liked to see some assurances in the city's resolution that they intend to eventually close the dangerous 35th/36th Street access and move it to 38th Street, with another BRT station. The 2 miles between Lake Street and 46th Street is too far and is not BRT. The station spacing on the Orange Line should be consistent with the Blue Line (Hiawatha) and provide connections to the existing crosstown (east-west) bus routes.

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