



Second BRT line to Dakota County is being planned

Article by: Laurie Blake
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Planning is underway to begin bus rapid transit on Interstate 35W by 2019, giving Dakota County residents all-day, evening and weekend bus service between Burnsville and downtown Minneapolis similar to service that began last year on Cedar Avenue between Apple Valley and the Mall of America.

The I-35W BRT, which would be known as the Orange Line, would be a Metro Transit bus service from Minneapolis to Burnsville with stops in south Minneapolis, Richfield and Bloomington. With that service added to existing commuter express buses on the freeway, planners say I-35W transit ridership could increase from about 14,000 a day now to about 20,000 by 2030.

New BRT stations that would cost a total of about \$140 million are under design for Lake Street in Minneapolis, 66th St Richfield and on either side of Interstate 494 in Richfield and Bloomington, Metro Transit Project Manager Christina Morrison recently told the Dakota County Board.

The Lake Street Station, which will have 100 buses an hour passing through it, will be built in the freeway median to express stops and keep buses on schedule, Morrison said. The two stations near I-494 will be off the freeway on Knox Avenue. plan is to dip Knox, which runs parallel to I-35W on the west side, under I-494 for a quick trip between the two stations.

The southern terminus of the line is proposed to be the Burnsville Transit Station at Hwy. 13 and Nicollet Avenue, which is owned and operated by the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA). With a 1,428-vehicle parking ramp connected to the station, the Burnsville Transit Station is the largest park and ride on I-35W. The station already is packed at rush hours, the parking ramp is sometimes 80 percent full. Adding Metro Transit BRT service would require adding one bay for bus parking, a boarding platform for passengers and ticket vending machines and schedule boards in the waiting area.

Metro Transit and MVTA officials are discussing how to combine the services. The MVTA owns the station and has the word on whether the BRT service will stop there or in a lot catty corner from the station on the south side of Hwy. 13, Morrison said.

Metro Transit doesn't currently run in Burnsville. The city is served by the MVTA, whose buses transport about 55 percent of the transit riders commuting on I-35W. It offers 217 daily trips from Burnsville Transit Station, including 27 during the peak hour.

Asked how Metro Transit would avoid duplicating the suburban service, Morrison said that I-35W has a lot of commuter service provided by MVTA, Southwest and Metro Transit, but that still leaves room for frequent, reliable midday, evening and weekend service.

Dakota County Administrator Brandt Richardson questioned why Metro Transit would consider an off-freeway station at Knox Avenue in Richfield and Bloomington when an off-freeway station for the Cedar Avenue line in Eagan has proved to be such a time-consuming stop that it will be replaced with a center freeway stop at a cost of \$14 million.



Early morning commuters boarded a bus at the Burnsville Transit Station, about a block east of Interstate 35W or 13. With an adjacent 1,428-vehicle parking ramp, the station has the largest park and ride on I-35W. Plans are being made to make the station even busier.

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Morrison said the ridership that would be gained by locating the stations off the freeway in Richfield and Bloomington would offset trip delays. A stop in the center median would have required people to walk more than a half mile to get to jobs at Buy and the Southtown area, she said. What the Knox stations will look like will be further defined in the next year, Morrison said. The pair of stations are expected to cost about \$30 million.

Dipping Knox under I-494 might also provide an opportunity for a pedestrian and bike trail under the freeway, and there would be a new park-and-ride lot at American Boulevard, she said. The Knox dip would be done in similar fashion to the way that American Boulevard dips under Hwy. 77 (Cedar Avenue) near the Mall of America, she said.

In a future phase of I-35W BRT service, Lakeville will be the southern terminus.

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