

Richfield City Council endorses Orange Line

By Andrew Wig

A new express bus line under development has the official support of the Richfield City Council.

The May 27 declaration of support for Metro Transit's planned Orange Line, part of the Bus Rapid Transit system that is being rolled out, helps pave the way for planners to solicit federal funds for the project, and further cements Richfield's preferences for the route's design.

Running along Interstate 35W from Burnsville – through Bloomington and Richfield – to downtown Minneapolis, the Orange Line is expected to offer quicker travel to and from downtown, with more frequent trips. Metro Transit expects to have the new line open for service in late 2019, with construction beginning in 2016.

As it endorsed the Orange Line, the council further defined the city's route preference, which is to deviate from 35W at the Interstate 494 interchange. The route would use Knox Avenue between 82nd and 76th Streets. With the other option, the route would stay on 35W as it passes the interchange.

Planners of an interchange redesign project, which will coincide with the Orange Line project, also prefer the Knox Avenue route.

It would mean for slower travel time than allowed by staying on 35W, but would be less expensive, provide convenient access to more residents, and would still be 45-55 percent faster than the current comparable route, according to an April project update published by Metro Transit.

In all, the Orange Line is expected to provide access to 162,000 jobs and 64,000 residents, running seven days a week for at least 16 hours a day. Stop frequency during peak hours is expected to be 10 minutes. Off-peak frequency would be 15 minutes.

The Knox Avenue alignment also allows for stations on both sides of 494 – at 76th Street and 82nd. Another Richfield station is planned for 66th Street along the 35W ramp.