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Orange Line bus transit is on the way

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By [Mike Hanks](#)



This is a conceptual rendering of the Orange Line station location at Nicollet Avenue in Burnsville. (Metro Transit graphic)

Burnsville to have stations at Nicollet Avenue, Burnsville Parkway

Express bus service between Burnsville and downtown Minneapolis, seven days a week? That's the promise of Metro Transit's Orange Line.

The bus rapid transit project will connect Dakota County to Minneapolis like a light rail line, but will use Interstate 35W instead of a train track. Buses will run frequently and about 20 hours per day, including weekends, with two stops in Burnsville, Bloomington, Richfield and Minneapolis prior to reaching downtown, where there will be four stops.

I-35W is a highly used corridor by rush hours express buses, and the Orange Line will increase the opportunities for access north and south, especially at times when express buses aren't readily available, according to Max Holdhusen, a community outreach and engagement specialist with Metro Transit.

"It deserves that kind of midday service," he said. "It deserves that evening service."

The Orange Line's stations will be developed on a scale that fits the infrastructure and transportation demands of the cities it serves.

Access in Burnsville will be provided at the Nicollet Avenue Station and Burnsville Parkway Station.

A single-platform transit station will be constructed at the southwest corner of Nicollet Avenue and Highway 13, adjacent to Burnsville's Heart of the City redevelopment area. The station will serve as the southern terminus and layover for the Orange Line, with parking available at a nearby existing municipal ramp, according to Holdhusen.

A northbound-only platform will be constructed near the intersection of Burnsville Parkway and Travelers Trail on excess right-of-way, an access requested by Dakota County, Holdhusen noted.

The loading platforms similar to those found along Metro Transit's two light rail lines, according to Holdhusen.

The platforms will have amenities similar to light rail stations, with vending machines for tickets, meaning Orange Line passengers will pre-pay before boarding the bus, and Metro Transit police officers will check for proof of payment on buses. The Orange Line will have three-door buses that aren't currently in use by Metro Transit, and pre-paying for access will expedite the boarding process at each stop, Holdhusen explained.

The platforms along the Orange Line will also have information signs reporting when the next bus will reach the station, shelter areas and accommodations for vision-impaired passengers, he noted.

The Bloomington side of I-494 will feature the American Boulevard Station. Due to the configuration of parcels associated with Southtown Shopping Center, the Orange Line will snake through the area in order to return buses to I-35W at 82nd Street, according to Holdhusen.

The pending redevelopment of the interchange at I-35W and I-494 and the close proximity of the stations to the interchange would have made it too expensive to develop them along the freeway like the stations in Minneapolis, Holdhusen said.

Routing the buses to Penn Avenue and back to I-35W was deemed too time consuming, he noted. "That really slows down the trip."

To help facilitate bus access to the stations, traffic signals will give priority to buses as they pass through the area, according to Holdhusen.

Bloomington's second stop will be at the 98th Street Station that currently provides park-and-ride access to bus lines. Platforms will provide access for both northbound and southbound buses along right-of-ways near the existing parking area.

Northbound buses will be able to pull on and off the freeway, but southbound buses will have to travel over the freeway on 98th Street to access a platform, as there was no feasible location for a bus stop to serve southbound riders on the west side of the freeway. Traffic signals in the vicinity will also give priority to buses passing through, Holdhusen explained.

At 76th Street in Richfield, buses will exit and use Knox Avenue near the Best Buy campus. Instead of returning to the freeway, however, buses will travel to and from Bloomington through an underpass that will be constructed. The underpass will be below the existing grade of Interstate 494, and its use will be limited to bus and pedestrian traffic, as a pedestrian trail will be developed in conjunction with the bus lanes, Holdhusen said.

At 66th Street in Richfield, Orange Line buses will stop where express buses stop now, on exit ramps in each direction.

The Orange Line stations will provide access to other transit services, such as Metro Transit Route 515 at 66th Street in Richfield, which connects Mall of America to Southdale Center in Edina. In Burnsville, the Nicollet Avenue Station will provide access to other MVTA bus lines, such as Route 444, which connects to Savage and Mall of America, Holdhusen said.

The Orange Line will replace Route 535, however, and accommodations will need to be made for access through Bloomington that will be lost as a result. That process will be similar to those that followed the establishment of Metro Transit's light rail lines. The goal is to make connections between local bus service and rapid transit seamless, Holdhusen explained.

The project is estimated at \$150 million. Federal, state, Hennepin County, Dakota County and Counties Transportation Improvement Board funds are all contributing funding to the project.

Information about the project is available online at tr.im/orangeline.

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