

Network Next Proposed BRT Corridors Community Engagement Summary

11/10/2020

Background

The Network Next project will develop and communicate Metro Transit's vision for the 2040 bus network, which will guide the expansion of service across the spectrum of network and service quality investments. Network Next planning efforts have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the ongoing public health emergency, some changes have been made to the overall approach to this project:

- Planning for improvements to the local and express bus network is on hold. This will allow us to better understand the pandemic's effect on transit needs and incorporate changing ridership patterns into our planning efforts. We hope to restart local and express bus network in mid-2021.
- Planning for the future arterial bus rapid transit (BRT) network is continuing. This work will identify the next arterial BRT lines that will open after the METRO E Line, planned to open by 2024. The goal is to recommend the next three BRT lines – the F Line, G Line, and H Line. The outreach and engagement work summarized in this document is focused around BRT planning.

Since concluding initial engagement in late 2019, the customers and communities we serve have experienced several crises that may impact transportation needs and demands over the next twenty years. This includes increased unemployment, teleworking, health concerns and shared space, and public safety.

These events have shifted many conversations in the region around equity and priorities. Starting in September, Metro Transit followed up with those who provided initial feedback and engaged the broader community served by our core transit service.

Purpose and Goal

The purpose of this outreach was to re-engage the community to assist in developing long range plans for transit improvements:

- Identify community needs and desires regarding the future of BRT
- Develop and apply criteria for prioritizing future BRT Lines
- Review priorities and confirm if they still apply or have changed

The goal is to engage with the community and receive at least 2,000 responses and 45% of the responses from Black, Indigenous or people of color (BIPOC). The target audience is transit users and communities served by the core and suburban local routes.

Methods of Engagement

The targeted audience was riders, potential riders, general community and the 2019 Network Next grantees. There were a variety of challenges to engaging the public, including:

- Inability to hold or unwillingness of people to attend meetings due to COVID 19
- Access to technology for virtual engagement
- Limited community capacity that decrease interest or ability to engage in transportation discussions

Communications

DATE	ACTIVITY
9/1	SurveyMonkey survey goes live
9/1	Website posted with information about Network Next, previous reports, interactive map and how to get involved.
9/2	Blog post General Manager's message:
9/2	Email to organizations that had received engagement grants for previous phase of Network Next. Email included update and link to the website, interactive map and survey. (See attachment A)
9/3	Network Next e-newsletter update to people that have signed up for Network Next email updates.
	Information packets with materials, maps, graphics and presentation to cities and counties so that they could updates to their elected officials and push information out via their newsletters, social media and website. (Note: 14.2% of respondents said that they had heard about the survey through city or county social media)
9/9	Included Network Next project update and link to the website, interactive map and survey in the METRO Orange Line monthly newsletter.
9/15	Riders Club e-newsletter with project update and link to the website, interactive map and survey.
9/15	Email to 40,000 Go-To card users and Metro Transit App users that use at least one of the 11 routes that mimic the proposed BRT corridors.
9/16	News article on MetroTrasnsit.org website.
9/9	Included Network Next project update and link to the website, interactive map and survey in the METRO Gold Line monthly newsletter.
9/23	Article included in the Metropolitan Council's monthly e-newsletter.
9/24-9/30	Published ad in Spokesman Recorder with link to survey
10/2	Connect email sent out with update on Network Next and how to submit comments.
	Published ad in Spokesman Recorder about the Listening and Learning through Crises outreach effort and link to survey.
10/6	Reminder email to Go-To card and App users of the Route 724 to complete survey since this was one of the zip codes that hadn't received a high number of surveys completed.

Social Media

Social media was used to get word out about the survey. We also used it in a new way to prompt an online discussion. We posed a question and encouraged people to respond in the comment. Many of the questions received good response.

DATE	POST DESCRIPTION	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	OTHER
9/3	FB and Twitter posts with a map and encouraging people to complete the Network Next survey	46 shares 48 comments 56 likes/hearts	5 comments 46 retweets 47 hearts	
9/4	FB and Twitter posts announcing the Network Next survey	4 shares 22 comments 19 likes/hearts	3 retweets 7 hearts	
9/7	Posted on LinkedIn followed by shares of colleagues and community groups (Robin Caufman)			21 likes 1,313 views
9/8	FB and Twitter reposted a map and encouraging people to complete the Network Next survey	44 shares 29 comments 31 likes/hearts	4 comments 36 retweets 30 hearts	
9/24	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 724/63 rd and Zane	3 shares 6 comments 12 likes/hearts	1 heart	
9/25	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 10/Central	5 shares 10 comments 24 likes/hearts	2 comment 2 retweets 5 hearts	
9/28	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 3/Como/Maryland	2 shares 6 comments 20 likes/hearts	7 retweets 15 hearts	
9/28 TO 10/9	Paid post in Spanish in Vida y Sabor FB page with link to survey; reposted several times	3 shares 2 comments 35 likes/hearts		
9/29	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 63/Grand Avenue	1 share 10 comments 13 likes, 1 sad 1 angry	1 comment 5 retweets 12 hearts	
9/30	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 4 Johnson/Lyndale	2 comments 10 likes/hearts	5 hearts	
9/30	Instagram post with map			215 likes 31 comments
10/1	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 32/Lowry	4 comments 6 likes/hearts	6 retweets 9 hearts 1 comment	
10/2	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 18/Nicollet Avenue	2 shares 11 likes 3 comments	2 retweets 3 hearts	
10/5	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 74	2 shares 12 likes 5 comments	6 retweets 10 hearts 3 comments	

DATE	POST DESCRIPTION	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	OTHER
10/6	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 62/68	1 share 21 likes 5 comments	3 retweets 26 hearts 2 comments	
10/7	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 54	2 shares 7 likes 2 comments	6 retweets 12 hearts 2 comments	
10/8	FB and Twitter posts asking for feedback on Route 14/22	4 shares 12 comments 11 likes	3 retweets 11 hearts 7 comments	
10/8	FB and Twitter posts reminding people that the survey is closing 10/9	2 shares 8 likes	10 retweets 9 hearts	

In person surveys

Staff went to busy transit centers, LRT stations and bus stops to survey people in person. People that completed the survey were offered a free ride pass. In addition to the in-person surveys, we had business cards printed with the URL and QR that directed people to the survey.

DATE AND TIME	LOCATION	STAFF
9/21/2020 3-5 PM	Downtown Mpls – Nicollet and 9th Downtown St Paul - Minnesota St and 5th St	Jae Halverson Anj Olsen
9/22/2020 3-5 PM	Capitol/Rice Station Rosedale Transit Center	Anj Olsen Yumi Nagaoka Joanna Hubbard-Rivera
9/23/2020 3-5 PM	Minneapolis – 46th St Station Columbia Heights Transit Center Nicollet Ave and Franklin Ave	Charles Carlson Mark Patzloff Rachel Dungca Robin Cauffman Jae Halverson
9/24/2020 3-5 PM	Rice St & Larpenteur Ave Mall of America Transit Center St Paul - 7th St W & Jefferson Ave	Doug Cook Karen Underwood James Holt Juan Rangel
9/28/2020 10 AM-NOON	Columbia Heights Transit Center S Minneapolis - Nicollet Ave and Franklin Ave	Yumi Nagaoka Joanna Hubbard-Rivera Juan Rangel Eric Lind
9/29/2020 10 AM - NOON	Uptown Transit Center Mall of America Transit Center St Paul - 7th St W & Jefferson Ave	Linnae Nelson-Seys Yumi Nagaoka Scott Thompson Kelci Stones Cyndi Harper
9/30/2020 10 AM - NOON	Uptown Transit Center	Juan Rangel John Dillery
10/1/2020 10 AM - NOON	Starlite Transit Center Rosedale	Victoria Dan Doug Cook Kristin Thompson

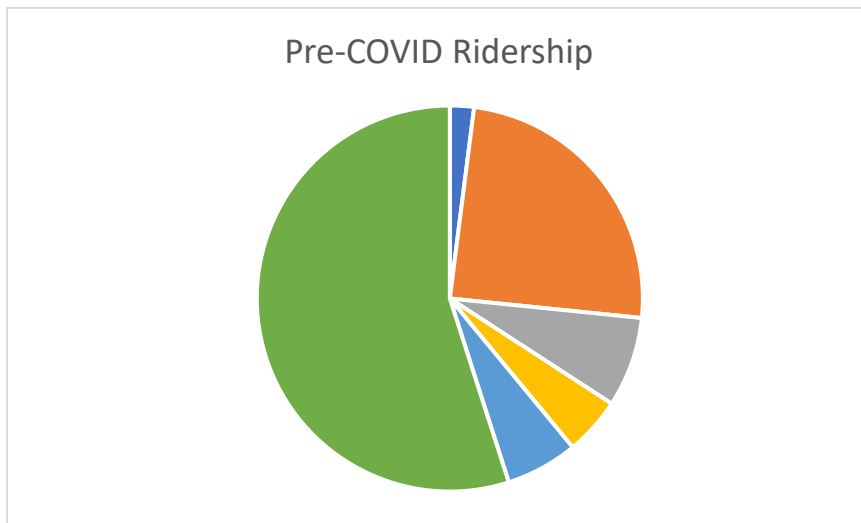
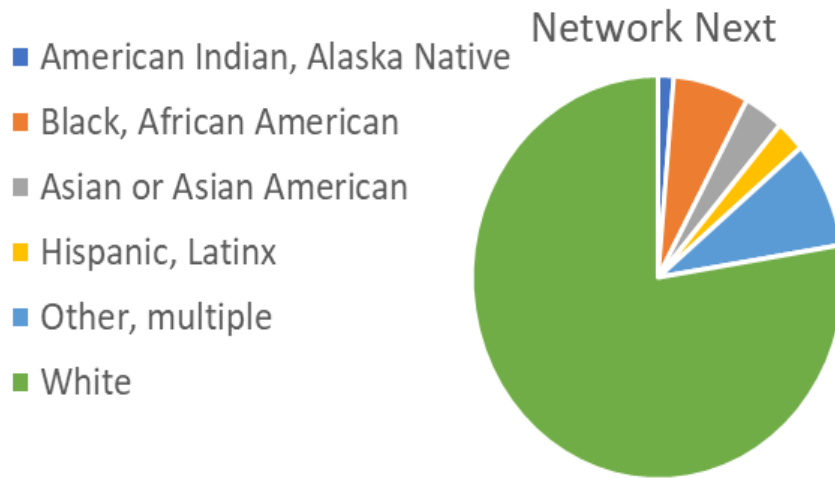
Community and virtual meetings

Staff reached out to roughly 75 community groups and neighborhood organizations to let them know about Network Next and invited them to participate. We anticipated that most organizations would not be able to host a meeting, so we provided them with a range of options for participating including reposting social media posts, including information in an upcoming newsletter or having us present at a planned meeting. Of the groups we reached out to, approximately 20 indicated that they would help promote the survey via social media, email or their newsletters. Here are the groups we presented to:

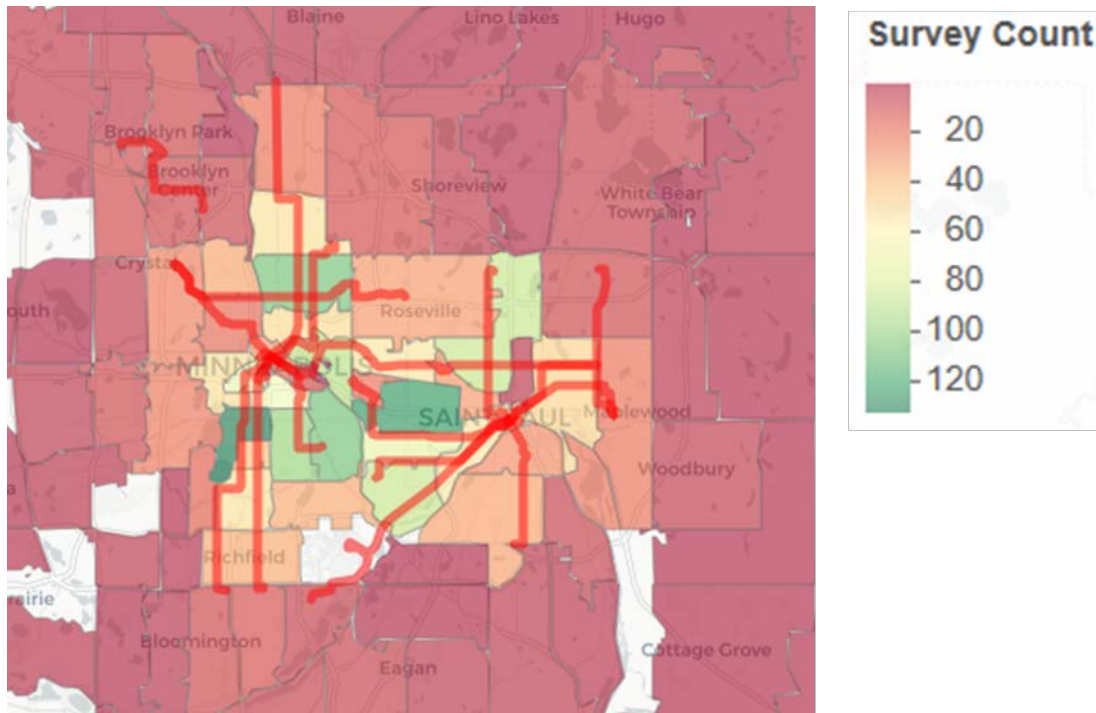
DATE	ACTIVITY
8/19	Transportation Advisory Board
9/2	Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee: Kyle Burrows and Robin Caufman presented; asked committee members to help promote the link to the website and survey.
9/2	Metropolitan Council presentation of Network Next and the outreach plans.
9/11	Dakota County Social Services Doug Cook presented an overview and shared how to complete the survey
9/11	Hastings Family Services Doug Cook presented an overview and shared how to complete the survey
9/15	Equity Advisory Committee overview of Network Next and engagement strategies Rice and LarpentOUR event where we had TAP sign up and surveyed event goers
9/30	Sierra Club Transportation Committee virtual meeting: Katie Roth and Robin Caufman presented
10/20	Equity Advisory Committee discussion

Survey Respondents

Over the course of a month, we heard from over 2,663 people, 125 in person and 2,538 online. BIPOC respondents accounted for 22% percent of the total surveys completed; this was half of our goal of 45%.



Our second measurement of success was to engage communities that are served by our suburban core and local bus routes. We collected zip code data in our online and in person surveys and mapped the responses that shows the respondents with highest concentration of responses were from areas served by core and suburban local service.



Analysis and Key Themes

The following includes analysis and high-level discussion about the key themes that we heard on these topics:

- Priorities for selecting BRT corridors
- BRT corridor ranking
- How people heard about the survey

Priorities for selecting BRT corridors

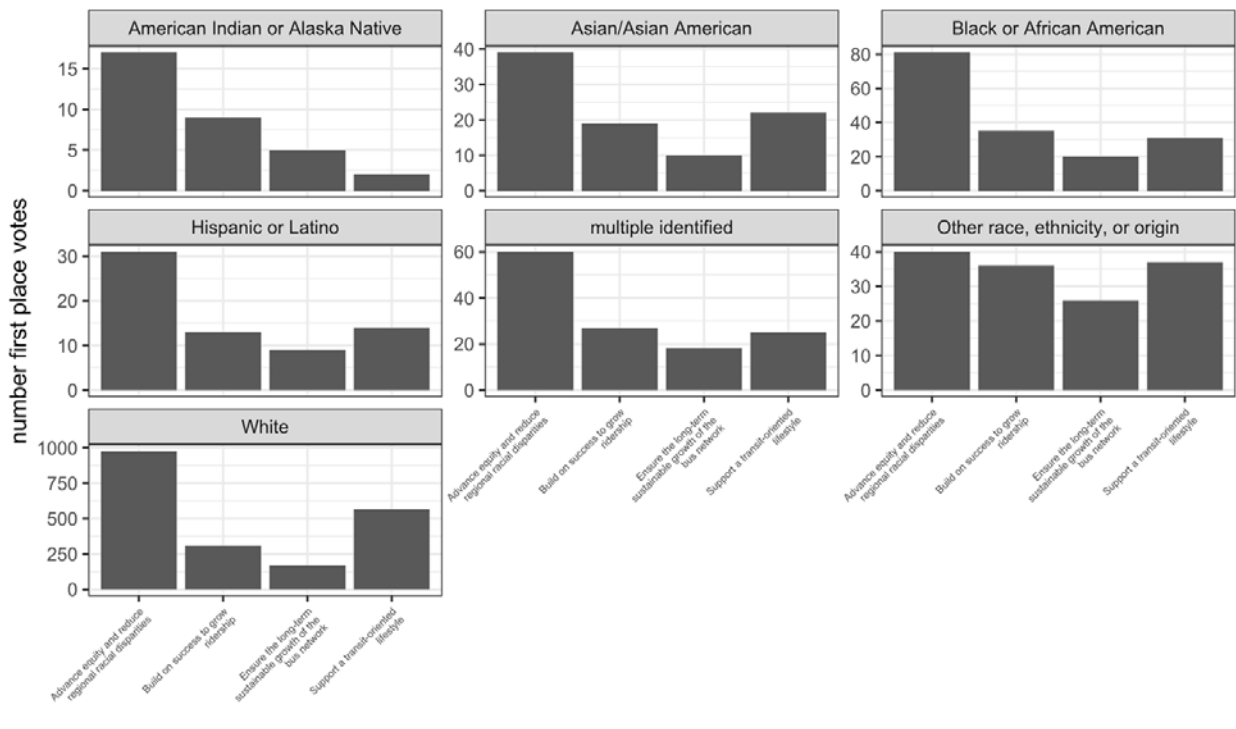
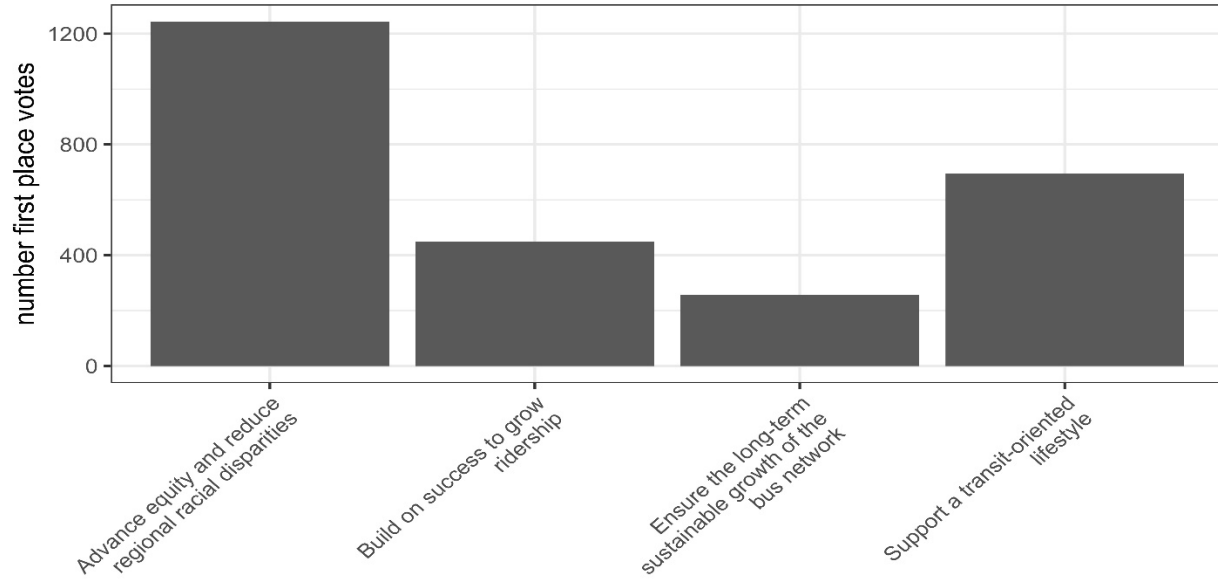
Survey participants were asked to rank the four BRT Principles in order of their importance for selecting BRT corridors. The BRT Principles are:

- Advance equity and reduce regional racial disparities
- Build on success to grow ridership
- Ensure the long-term sustainable growth of the bus network
- Support a transit-oriented lifestyle

The themes below are identified based on responses to this question.

Equity Identified as Top Priority

Advancing equity is a top priority for participants. Nearly half of survey respondents identified advancing equity and reducing regional disparities as their most important priority for selecting BRT corridors. This result is consistent across self-identified racial or ethnic identity.



Many people added comments that provide more insight into why it was selected as the top priority. At the Equity Advisory Committee's suggestion, the comments are broken out by those made by BIPOC respondents:

- No but I just want to highlight that along with the Advance equity principle you need to be able to provide affordable fees that low-income households can utilize. This is not just an infrastructure solution.
- The environmental benefits of these updates to our transit system should be included in the principle of advancing equity and reducing regional racial disparities. As we transition to an electric/hybrid bus fleet, the routes that are provided with the portions of the fleet that produce less pollution should go to areas that serve people of color and indigenous communities, and low-income residents, and so on.
- Advance equity for those of us with disabilities
- Advance equity and reduce regional racial disparities.
- Equity is #1 and I am happy to see that principle on the list.
- Lowry is poor choice people living on Lowry will have get to other routes so picking this routes for equity reason is absurd when this is low ridership route

And comments made by white respondents:

- Nope, really appreciate the equity focus
- Provide a supportive environment for local, independent (and) small businesses: design transit routes to support employment and patronage at local restaurants, stores, services, and other enterprises. Related to the advancing equity principle, reduce disproportional environmental impacts on communities from transport-related air, water, sound, and visual pollution. Also, promote connections between neighborhoods and communities rather than routing all transit through downtown - tied to the small business principle as well.
- I'm not sure I can have a position on #2-4 without more understanding of what they mean. Advancing equity is for sure #1. I would say ""Support a transit-oriented lifestyle"" but I *don't* necessarily agree that the subtitle of that one ""build more brt lines that serve walkable areas with higher population and employment densities"" is what that means. It could, but I could also see enabling more car-dependent, but less wealthy suburbs get around within their own areas or get to and from other areas will be a really important piece of getting them out of their cars.
- I would love to see something about gender and ability included in the point about equity. People who Have a disability or who identify as transgender, non-binary, or women have a very different experience and level of comfort/safety riding the bus (from the walk to the stop, to waiting, to the actual ride, etc).
- I think all of those are important. Advancing equity is definitely my #1. I am happy with the service on the bus route I took to work pre-pandemic but, generally speaking, I'd like all of the city to be more accessible by public transit, for there to be more incentives for more people to use it for work and leisure.
- No, but I want to stress that I think ""Advance equity and reduce regional racial disparities"" is absolutely the most important principle on the list, far above the other three.
- I think this is embedded in ""advance equity and reduce regional racial disparities"", but to make it more explicit: people in these communities need reliable access to areas with stores, grocery markets, and well-paying jobs. Building rapid transit lines to, from, and through these communities is beneficial to everyone.
- There have been times in my life when I rode transit multiple times a week. However, nowadays I do not often ride transit because it's very rarely more efficient than biking. However, I really /like/ ride the bus (and don't actually like winter biking all that much) and would gladly start

using transit more if it were quicker. I also think that metro transit can work towards advancing equity and supporting a transit-oriented lifestyle in one fell swoop. Transit should be designed with an eye towards increasing the number of neighborhoods where it's possible to live without a car.

- Do "Advance Equity" and "Support Lifestyle" imply that those two would add routes in areas where there aren't already high levels of ridership? If so, nothing to add. If that isn't implied, I think it would be worth looking at some of the newer developments going into "transit deserts" that seem to be happening under the 2040 plan. Several developers are being granted exceptions to not have the recommended number of parking spots for their properties, even when there isn't strong bus service in close walking distance. I also think that the "Build on Success" and "Ensure Growth" descriptions make them sound pretty similar - "lots of riders today" and "demonstrated transit demand" sound pretty synonymous. Including both of these may skew your results. Happy to talk more about this. 612-807-8059.
- It's touched on with the goal of "advancing equity," but I think accessibility for low-income neighborhoods is a top priority
- I think you need to make sure you have an expansive idea of what is "equity." Transit lines that serve low income communities -- and do not serve other types of neighborhoods -- has a segregating effect. I would consider a better definition of equity to be one that connects low income and high income neighborhoods efficiently.
- Not that I can think of. Wanted to mention that I believe ensuring long term growth and supporting transit-oriented lifestyles will naturally advance equity and reduce regional disparities.
- I don't understand the difference between "build on success" and "ensure long-term sustainable growth". I think advance equity/reduce racial disparities should include something about ensuring Black and brown and indigenous people and those with lower-incomes are well-connected to higher-wage jobs. The low wage is the issue. Well-paid jobs do not require high-skill necessarily and we must be connecting those with less "training" with well-paid jobs that they can be trained/train for but if they can't access them, they can't get to them. so...serve those people so they can get to good paying jobs
- Two things 1) Similar to growing ridership - but more specific - don't just grow ridership generally by getting more people near rapid bus routes and more rapid bus routes near people - but specifically have such a great network of attractive, quick aBRT that it draws people in these areas that have options, cars, to use transit more. Equity and serving existing transit riders better are most important goals, but to protect environment, reduce pollution, we must coax people with options out of cars. LRT and aBRT do this, ridership increases often because people prefer it to driving, even when they can drive. 2) Transit is such an important support in improving land use efficiency, for economic benefit of region and for reduce pollution and carbon emissions. In my neighborhood around Westgate, we couldn't be building the new density developments without Green Line and other bus routes - if all transport was by cars, not possible. The denser land use makes infrastructure more affordable per resident/business, allows more affordable building, housing supply, less parking lots, less wide roads. Transit also spurs general development to make neighborhoods thrive. Metro Transit is with Met Council and transit is such an important part of regional success and cost effective and thriving cities via efficient land use and development.
- Equity and access
- Equity.
- No, but these principles are weird. I would think currently successful routes with high ridership are also the ones with the poorest riders so improving those would help equity anyway. But

OTOH don't base everything on demonstrated demand. Frequency, reliability, and speed beget demand. If you increased those on currently underutilized routes, there would be more ridership.

- Accessibility! Attention to accessibility that is sincere and well-rounded, that doesn't just stop with repeatedly patting yourself on the back that someone can more easily roll a wheelchair onto a bus. Route changes to BRT I have experienced so far (such as the BRT on Snelling) have been drastically detrimental to accessibility and usability, especially in the winter and when I must transfer buses or wait for long periods at stops without seating because stop elimination made me walk much farther to my transfer point and I missed my connection. I am terrified my local bus will be ""upgraded"" this way and prevent me from getting to my job or force me to risk my life walking in the street to get to a stop much farther away. You brag about how great the accessibility is because someone can roll a stroller straight onto a BRT bus, while at the same time you are actively harming people who use walkers, canes, and crutches by making us walk farther to less frequent stops, often over long stretches of icy sidewalks and snow-mounded crosswalks that you do not clear or maintain. Transferring becomes difficult, physically painful and exhausting, and sometimes actively dangerous because of these conditions, and the added distance really matters. There's a very condescending, dismissive attitude taken toward disabled riders who point out these problems, like we're just trying to spoil your fun rather than bringing up things that cause us physical harm and thus negatively impact our ability to do other basic tasks of daily living -- it's the same young, able-bodied urbanist snide dismissal one sees on these topics in forums such as streets.mn, where someone who has never lived with a disability talks down to us to tell us what they think we need rather than listening to actually disabled people. It's not okay to sacrifice accessibility for disabled riders (and that includes those of us who don't use wheelchairs!) to give able-bodied people a slightly faster route or to attract new riders (who you evidently prefer because they are able-bodied), but for all the talk about equity from Metro Transit, nobody seems to care about this aspect of BRT, and this problem is blithely dismissed or ignored in every BRT-route-conversion follow-up report or presentation I have seen.
- No, but I want to say: if you focus on riders you will also benefit equity.

These comments are reminders that equity also includes people of all abilities and people living in poverty.

Ranking of the Other Three Priorities

Supporting a transit-oriented lifestyle is the next highest priority for most participants. One-quarter of respondents identified supporting a transit-oriented lifestyle as their most important priority for selected BRT corridors. However, you can see that Indigenous and Black/African American respondents ranked growing ridership as slightly higher priority based on numbers.

Building on success to grow ridership and the long-term sustainability of the bus network were lower priorities for majority of survey respondents. Overall, approximately 10 percent of respondents selected one of these two priorities as their primary priority.

In addition to the selections that can be easily analyzed with charts and graphs, it's also important to look at the thousands of comments that people added. There were nearly 700 comments regarding priorities.

Priorities Overlap

It is clear from reading through the comments, that people see the overlap in the 4 priorities and that they are not mutually exclusive. Here are a sample of some of the comment's respondents made:

- “Wanted to mention that I believe ensuring long term growth and supporting transit-oriented lifestyles will naturally advance equity and reduce regional disparities.”
- “The environmental benefits of these updates to our transit system should be included in the principle of advancing equity and reducing regional racial disparities. As we transition to an electric/hybrid bus fleet, the routes that are provided with the portions of the fleet that produce less pollution should go to areas that serve people of color and indigenous communities, and low-income residents, and so on.”
- All these principles are excellent, and I don't believe they conflict very much. For instance, POCI communities are also often high ridership communities
- All four are heavily interconnected. You can't just leave one of them out.
- I don't understand the difference between the last three options above. Higher densities, existing ridership, transit demand--aren't these one and the same?

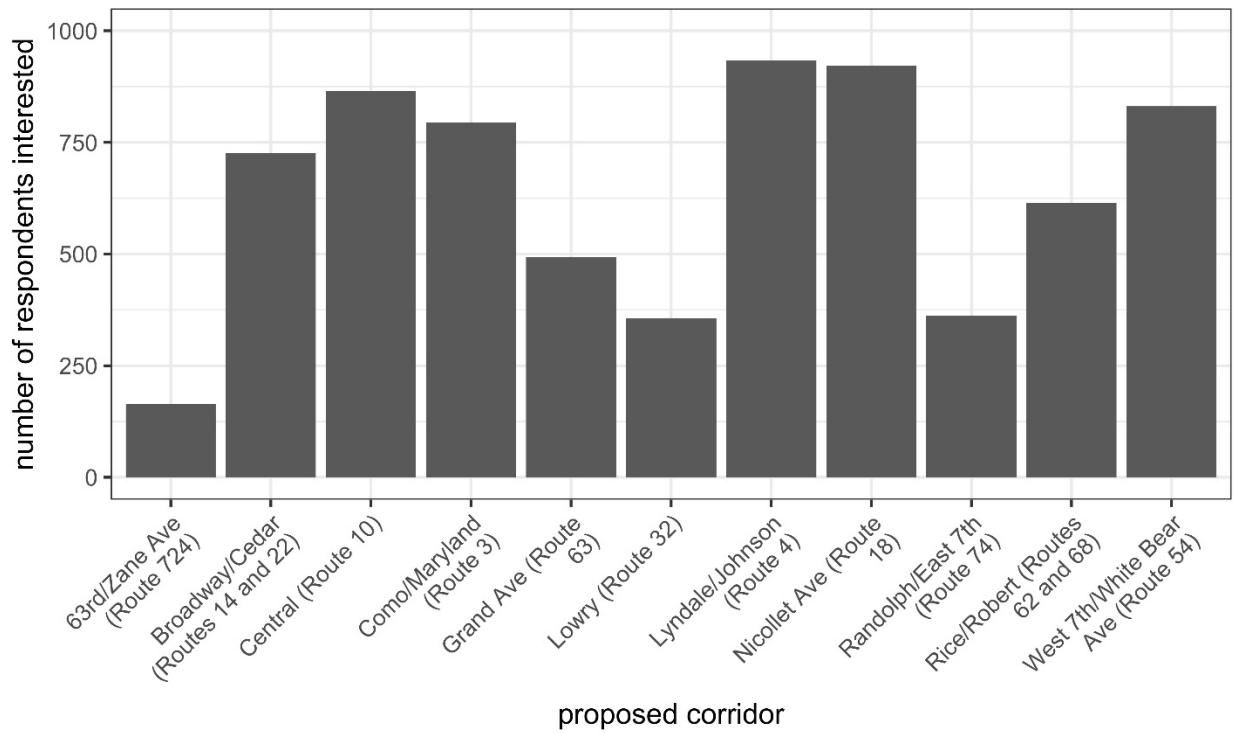
Other Suggested Priorities

Common suggestions for other priorities to be considered as part of the selection and corridor prioritization process, include:

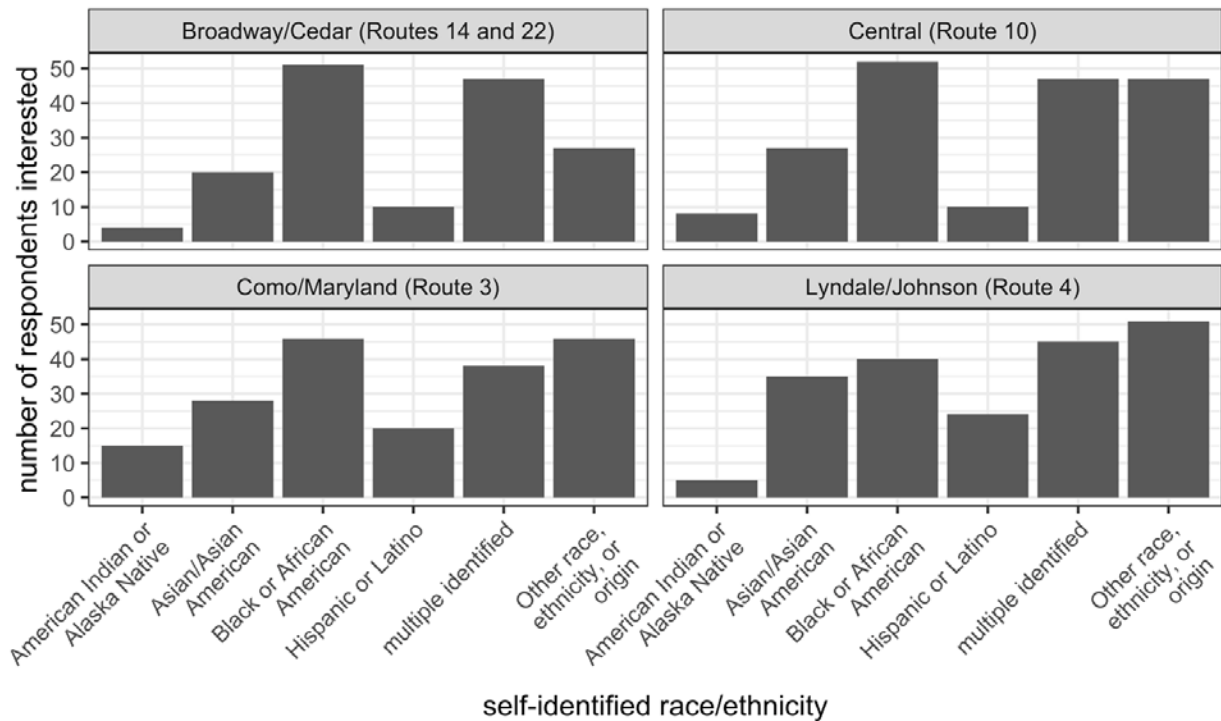
- Safety and security
- Faster service, prioritize routes where ABRT would have greatest impact on speed
- Environmental considerations and reduction of greenhouse gases
- Increase access to jobs and job centers
- Bike access and trail connections

BRT Corridor Ranking

Participants were also asked to identify the three BRT corridors that they'd most like to see implemented. The top-rated corridors in order of highest number votes was Lyndale/Johnson (Route 4), Nicollet (Route18) and Central (Route 10).



Given that nearly half the respondents said that equity was a top priority, it is also important to look at the top corridors selected by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).



There were nearly 1,000 comments related to the corridor selection. Many comments mention the existing Route 5 and 21 as well as Lake Street, which are the areas that will be served by the planned METRO D and METRO B Lines.

Engagement Strategies

Overall, the top four ways that people heard about the survey and Network Engagement process was Metro Transit email/newsletter, Metro Transit social media, Metro Transit website and city or county social media. If you break it down by race/ethnicity, there are slight changes.

- Black/African America: website, newsletter, social media, in person
- Hispanic/Latinx: newsletter, social media, website, or city/county social media
- White: email/newsletter, social media, city or county social media or website
- Asian: Newsletter, website, social media

Engagement Lessons Learned:

Half of the Indigenous American/Native Alaskan (47%) and a third Black/African American (30%) responses were from in person surveys. This is an important lesson as we develop the engagement plan for Phase 2 and future phases; in order to increase responses from indigenous and black or African American people, we need to conduct more in-person engagement.

We also learned that some engagement strategies were more effective, and others were less effective. For example, we placed simple ads in Spokesman Recorder and Vida y Sabor but didn't include articles; as a result, we only received five completed surveys in Spanish for Network Next versus 150 for Listening and Learning through Crises. For Listening and Learning through Crises, we had an advertorial in Spanish in print paper along with a QR code to take the Spanish survey. Providing some context regarding why the survey is important and how the information will be used provides more incentive for people to participate. Further, the simplicity of a QR code with a direct link to the survey makes it effortless to take the survey.

In the interest of mixing up the time we surveyed to get a variety of voices, we conducted in-person surveys at bus stops and transit centers mid-morning and afternoon. However, the ridership mid-morning is relatively low or people didn't have time to talk so we were not able to conduct many intercept surveys. As a result, we did not get many in-person responses. Previous experience shows that ridership increases during the day and throughout the afternoon and that mid to late afternoon is a better time to conduct in person intercept surveys and to get more responses.

Mass emails are a great way to get a high number of responses, but they are not necessarily reflective of our riders. By emailing the App and Go-To Card users that use routes that form the basis of the proposed 11 corridors, we received nearly 900 completed surveys in one day. However, 91% of the respondents identified as white. We will continue to use this method because it is an easy and no-cost way to hear from our customers. But it is important to continue asking demographic questions so that we can filter responses by different demographics and look for differences and similarities.

It is hard to engage people about long range plans and planning principles, especially when people have other priorities and demands on their time and energy. During the in-person surveys, many people declined taking the survey or agreed to take the survey only after offering them a free ride voucher. Further, many people weren't familiar with Arterial BRT or the existing METRO A and C Lines. For future

engagement phases we will provide more information about ABRT and the benefits as well as why participating in Network Next engagement activities is important to them.

How We are Using what We Heard

This report will be shared with the public by posting online and presented to stakeholder groups.

The data is being used by transit planners to prioritize the 11 proposed corridors into Near Term, Mid Term and Longer-Term corridors for implementation.

The data has also been shared with staff working on the Blue Line Extension project so that they can look for any comments and concerns as they resume planning and engagement for that project.

The lessons learned from the engagement process are being applied to the Phase 2 Network Next engagement process as well as other engagement processes on other projects.