

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Central Corridor light-rail transit (LRT) project will open in 2014 and operate between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul, serving the University of Minnesota and University Avenue corridor. The new line – known as the METRO Green Line – is expected to provide an estimated 13.2 million annual rides by 2030 and models project that about 40 percent of METRO Green Line customers will ride bus service to LRT stations.

In anticipation of the opening of METRO Green Line service, Metro Transit conducted a study of bus service in the Central Corridor. This report provides the recommended plan for expansion and integration of the current bus service network with METRO Green Line service to maximize the overall effectiveness and efficiency of transit service in the area and ensure that overall transit service is maintained or improved for neighborhoods along the line.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND EXISTING SERVICE

The Central Corridor Transit Service Study Area is bounded by the Mississippi River on the south, I-35E on the east, Larpenteur/East Hennepin avenues on the north and by Hiawatha Avenue, East Lake Street and the Mississippi River on the west. The Study Area is almost completely urban, including downtown Minneapolis, downtown St. Paul and the University of Minnesota, and covering many neighborhoods of St. Paul, Minneapolis and the suburbs of Lauderdale, Falcon Heights and Roseville. The population of the Study Area is about 246,000 and as of 2008, there were about 357,600 jobs in the Study Area. This represents about 8.6 percent of the population and 22 percent of the employment in the entire metropolitan area.

The Study Area is particularly known for its concentration of post-secondary educational campuses and the concentrations of student populations. There are about 91,000 students at the colleges and universities in the Study Area. Significant educational institutions include the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis and St. Paul campuses), Augsburg College, Concordia University, Hamline University, Macalester College, St. Paul College, St. Catherine's University, the University of St. Thomas and William Mitchell College of Law.

The routes included in the study include all those that operate a significant portion of their total service in the study area and also provide a connection to the METRO Green Line. This includes routes 2, 3, 6, 8, 16, 21, 50, 53, 62, 63, 65, 67, 68, 71, 84, 87, 94, 134, 144 and 262. Express routes 353, 355, 365, 375 and 452 are also included because they serve Huron Station. Several other routes provide service in the study area but do not provide a connection to the METRO Green Line. These routes are not included in the study, but are included on maps and other materials for reference. Public transit service provided by the University of Minnesota, including the Campus Connector and circulator routes, are not included in this study.

The Central Corridor Transit Service Study Existing Conditions Report examined the markets and unmet opportunities that exist for current transit service in the Study Area.

It documented the development patterns, major attractions and destinations in the Study Area as well as current and future travel patterns. The service assessment identified that routes in the study area are characterized by

- Good overall existing route network design and coverage,
- Some gaps in the cross-town grid network,
- Good ridership during all times of the day and day of week, and
- A lack of adequate frequency and span of service on some routes.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Pre-Concept Plan Outreach

As part of evaluating existing service and gathering community input to develop a concept plan, Metro Transit worked with stakeholders, including transit customers and community/neighborhood groups, to share the Central Corridor Transit Service Study objectives, gather feedback on how transit is currently performing and identify opportunities for improvements to transit service. This included gathering data regarding existing travel behaviors in the study area.

The four primary ways used to gather public input for the study were:

1. A series of meetings with neighborhoods and community groups, residents and businesses
2. Three public open houses
3. A public input form on the Metro Transit website
4. Trusted Advocates contracted by the District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis (DCC)

Major travel patterns and service improvement themes voiced by stakeholders included:

- Frequency improvements on Raymond Avenue and Dale Street
- Easier neighborhood-to-neighborhood travel without having to transfer in downtown
- Better timed connections in general
- New cross-town routes, such as on Lexington Parkway in St. Paul

Concept Plan Outreach

Staff used the feedback received during the pre-Concept Plan outreach to develop a concept service plan, which became the topic of a formal public review period. As in the previous phase, Metro Transit used several different outreach strategies to reach different stakeholders to ensure broad public engagement. The five primary ways used to communicate the concept plan and gather public input were:

1. Contact neighborhoods and community groups, residents and businesses
2. Notices to current customers and general public
3. Five public meetings
4. A variety of public input methods, such as comment cards and email
5. Trusted Advocates

Metro Transit received more than 800 comments from 650 contacts. Feedback from stakeholders and public comments identified areas in the plan that warranted modification. The greatest number of comments were about proposed Route 83. There were 176 comments regarding this route, including a mix of positive and negative feedback. Most of the negative feedback came from residents on Lexington Parkway south of Jefferson Avenue. One of the common suggestions was to extend Route 83 north to Como Park. Other comments suggested that the route extend farther to serve those living north of the park.

Route 94 was the route that received the second highest number of comments (85). The primary concerns with this route were the loss of midday service, a longer commute time, and loss of Route 94 stops at Marion Street near Ravoux Hi-Rise and at Snelling Avenue. Other concerns included the elimination of Route 144, the potential loss of Huron Station connections to the U of M, clarification regarding the future of the Route 62 deviation along Demont Avenue and safety on light rail and University Avenue.

The Concept Plan was modified to address many of the concerns highlighted by public comments, while staying within the project operating budget. Specifically, five routes were altered in response to public comment. An open house was held on Oct. 10, 2012 to share Concept Plan modifications with the community.

KEY PLAN OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Evaluation of existing conditions in the Study Area and consideration of the most common topics from the public input process suggest five primary opportunities to improve the productivity and effectiveness of transit service in the Study Area:

- Strengthen the bus route network grid. Connect bus routes with trains at key METRO Green Line stations.
- Improve service frequency. Given a choice, most people will choose more frequent service within reasonable walk distances.
- Enhance off-peak service. Increasingly, people need to travel outside the traditional rush-hour commute periods.
- Improve bus-to-bus connectivity. Improve connections to other Study Area bus routes.
- Improve bus service to major destinations. Major destinations were identified by public input forms.

These basic observations led to the following service design principles in the concept and recommended plan:

- Provide convenient and reliable bus and train connections at key METRO Green Line stations.

- Generally improve the frequency of connecting bus service to every 20 minutes seven days a week, which is compatible with the METRO Green Line's 10-minute frequency.
- Expand the hours of service for all bus routes that connect with the METRO Green Line seven days a week.
- Reduce transit service redundancy between bus and LRT in the Central Corridor and shift resources from reduced bus service on University Avenue and I-94 to improve connecting bus service.
- Improve the transit connectivity among the many colleges and universities in the Study Area.
- Provide faster, more direct service to major destinations in the Study Area.
- Fill in the north-south cross-town bus route network.

PROPOSED SERVICE CHANGES

The primary emphasis of the Recommended Plan is to reduce service on bus routes whose service will be replaced by METRO Green Line trains and to shift those resources into improved coverage, frequency and hours of service on bus routes connecting with rail. Improving the frequency of service will improve the reliability of the routes and connections between routes. Bus frequencies should be compatible with those of the METRO Green Line to provide reliable and consistent connections.

The Recommended Plan includes the following service proposals:

University Avenue Corridor (Routes 16, 50, 94)

The METRO Green Line will be the primary east-west service in the corridor and will replace existing Route 50 limited-stop bus service. A scaled-back local Route 16 will continue to operate parallel to the METRO Green Line between downtown St. Paul and Oak Street on the east end of the University of Minnesota campus. Route 16 will be re-routed via Marion Street and the St. Paul College area, no longer directly serving the State Capitol. From approximately 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., when rail service will not operate, Route 16 will be extended to downtown Minneapolis.

Route 94 currently provides express service on I-94 between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul. Select trips also serve Snelling Avenue and/or Marion Street and the State Capitol area. After the METRO Green Line begins operations, Route 94 will operate only during weekday rush hours and midday, operating non-stop between the two downtowns.

East-West Connections (Routes 3, 8, 63, 67)

East-west routes that parallel the University Avenue corridor will be adjusted to improve connections with the METRO Green Line. Route 3 will be re-routed from Wabasha to Minnesota Street from Kellogg to 10th Street. Route 63 will be extended from the University of St. Thomas area to Raymond Avenue Station via Cretin Avenue.

Route 8 will be combined with Route 67. The new Route 67 will serve Franklin Avenue between Hiawatha Avenue (METRO Blue Line) and University Avenue, University

Avenue between Raymond Avenue Station and Fairview Avenue Station, then follow the existing route on Fairview and Minnehaha avenues to downtown St. Paul, ending there. Existing Route 67 service south of downtown St. Paul will become part of Route 62 and will maintain current levels of frequency and span of service.

North-South Connections (Routes 65, 83, 84, 87)

The north-south routes that currently intersect the University Avenue corridor at Dale Street, Snelling Avenue and Raymond Avenue will be improved to make more frequent connections with the METRO Green Line, and a route on Lexington Parkway will be reintroduced.

Route 65 will continue to operate from Rosedale Transit Center via County Road B and Dale Street to Selby Avenue. Route 65 will no longer directly serve downtown St. Paul via Selby Avenue and instead will continue on Dale Street to Grand Avenue.

New Route 83 will operate on Lexington Parkway between Jefferson and Horton/Como Avenue at Como Park. The new service on Lexington Parkway enhances the grid network, filling a two-mile gap between Snelling and Dale. South of Jefferson Avenue, Route 83 will travel via Jefferson Avenue - Edgumbe Road – Randolph Avenue – I-35E – W. 7th Street – Montreal Avenue. North of Como Avenue, Route 83 will be extended via Horton Avenue to Hamline Avenue to Larpenteur and Lexington avenues.

Route 84 on Snelling Avenue will be improved to operate every 10 minutes between Rosedale and Ford Parkway. South of Ford Parkway, two local routings (D and H branches) will be combined into one branch serving both Montreal Avenue and the West 7th and Davern Street area using current routings. Service to 46th Street Station (METRO Blue Line) on Ford Parkway will continue to operate.

Route 87, which serves Rosedale, Raymond and Cleveland avenues and the U of M's St. Paul campus, will also provide more frequent service. New evening and weekend service will be added.

Limited Stop Commuter Routes (Routes 134, 144)

In addition to all-day local service, Metro Transit currently operates rush-hour only commuter-oriented service on both Snelling and Cleveland/Cretin avenues. The span of service on Route 134 on Cleveland/Cretin avenues will be reduced on the fringe of rush hours but will remain unchanged for the most popular work start and ends times. Route 144 will be eliminated. Alternate service is available via Route 84 and the METRO Green Line.

No Significant Changes (Routes 2, 6, 21, 53, 68, 71, 262)

Based on the results of the study, no route structure or major change in frequency or span of service is planned on routes 2, 21, 53, and 262. There will be a minor route extension on Route 6 from Oak Street and Washington Avenue to Stadium Village Station. Routes 68 and 71, which were not included in the Concept Plan, will be re-routed via 14th Street between Jackson and Robert streets to make direct connection with the METRO Green Line at Robert Street Station.

Huron Station (Routes 50, 94, 134, 353, 355, 365, 375, 452)

Currently, select westbound express routes serve Huron Station at I-94 and Huron Boulevard between 7:30 a.m. and 9:20 a.m., offering a connection with Route 50 to the U of M campus. A local connection between Huron Station and the U of M main campus will be provided.

PLAN IMPACTS

The Metro Transit team worked extensively to refine the proposal to minimize negative impacts on current customers. While retaining good coverage, the Recommended Plan reinforces the simplified route structure implemented in earlier Sector plans and reinvests resources into areas and at times of the day where additional service is warranted.

There are several segments of routes where service is eliminated or reduced. In all cases, alternate transit service is within a quarter-mile of residents and businesses along these routes.

Metro Mobility service hours within the study area may be impacted by changes outlined in this plan. This door-through-door service for the disabled is mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act and is provided by the Metropolitan Council. Since Metro Mobility's service hours and areas are determined by the fixed-route transit network, changes to the fixed route service hours or routings impact Metro Mobility's complementary paratransit services as well.

The Recommended Plan has also been evaluated in accordance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Title VI guidelines to understand its impacts on low-income and minority populations. This evaluation finds that the recommended changes do not disparately impact these populations.

TRANSIT SERVICE RESOURCES

The bus service proposed in the Central Corridor Transit Service Study Recommended Plan is generally equivalent to existing bus service levels in the Study Area. Resources saved by reducing or eliminating bus routes whose trips will be served by the new rail service will be shifted to improve the coverage, frequency and hours of service on bus routes connecting with rail. Some additional service improvement priorities are included in the "Future Considerations" section of the plan and may be implemented when funding is available.