

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 Green Line customers will ride bus service to LRT stations.

Prior to implementation of Green Line LRT service, Metro Transit is conducting a study of bus service in the Central Corridor. This report provides a concept plan for expansion and integration of the current bus service network with 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

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 Green Line. This includes routes 2, 3, 6, 8, 16, 21, 50, 53, 62, 63, 65, 67, 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 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 crosstown 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 IN CONCEPT PLAN DEVELOPMENT

As part of evaluating existing service and gathering community input for the 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 hired by the District Councils Collaborative of the Saint Paul and Minneapolis (DCC)

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

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

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 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 plan:

- Provide convenient and reliable bus and train connections at key Green Line stations.
- Generally improve the frequency of connecting bus service to every 20 minutes seven days a week, which is compatible with the Green Line's 10-minute frequency.
- Expand the hours of service for all bus routes that connect with the 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 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 Concept Plan is to reduce service on bus routes whose trips will be operated by 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. Ideally, frequencies should be compatible with those of the Green Line to provide reliable and consistent connections.

The Concept Plan includes the following service proposals:

University Avenue Corridor (Routes 16, 50, 94)

The 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 Green Line between downtown St. Paul and Oak Street on the east end of the University of Minnesota campus. Between approximately 1:00 a.m. and 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 Green Line begins operations, Route 94 will operate only during weekday rush hours, operating non-stop between the two downtowns.

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

East-west routes that parallel the University Avenue corridor will be adjusted to improve connections with the Green Line. 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 LRT) 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 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 West 7th Street and Energy Park Drive, and on Energy Park and Snelling Avenue to Como Avenue. The new service on Lexington Parkway enhances the grid network, filling a two-mile gap between Snelling and Dale.

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. Route 87 will be rerouted to more directly serve Raymond Avenue Station.

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, with alternative service available via Route 84 and the Green Line.

No Significant Changes (Routes 2, 3, 6, 21, 53)

Based on the results of the study, no route structure or major change in frequency or span of service is planned on routes 2, 3, 21 and 53. There will be a minor route extension on Route 6 from Oak Street and Washington Avenue to Stadium Village Station.

Huron Station (Routes 50, 94, 134, 353, 355, 365, 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. Since the Green Line will replace Route 50, Metro Transit will no longer provide a local bus connection between Huron Station and campus. The U of M is considering having a campus circulator route serve the station and provide this link.

PLAN IMPACTS

The Metro Transit team worked extensively to refine the proposal to minimize negative impacts on current customers. While retaining good coverage, this Concept 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 almost 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 increased slightly in the cities of Falcon Heights and Roseville due to the span of service increases to regular routes found in the 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.

This concept service plan has also been evaluated in accordance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Title VI and Metropolitan Council guidelines to understand its impacts on low-income and minority populations. This evaluation finds that the recommended changes are non-discriminatory and do not have a disparate impact on these populations in the Study Area.

TRANSIT SERVICE RESOURCES

The bus service proposed in the Central Corridor Transit Service Study Concept 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.