

CHAPTER 1: STUDY BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The regional public transit system is the backbone of the Metropolitan Council's 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) to accommodate the population and employment growth forecast for the region. The purpose of the Highland Park Transit Service Study is to evaluate the current transit service.

In anticipation of the Ford Site redevelopment in Highland Park Metro Transit is reviewing current transit service in the Highland Park area. During the past decade, the City of St. Paul developed a plan for the Ford site and the adjacent CP Rail Property. The vision for the site is a connected, livable, mixed-use neighborhood that looks to the future with clean technologies and high quality design for energy, buildings and infrastructure. This site will be woven into the existing community, and support walking, biking and transit, and provide services, jobs and activities that every generation can enjoy.

During the past decade, more emphasis has been placed on creating integrated residential and employment development together in a pedestrian and transit friendly environment. The Ford Site, located in the southwest quadrant of St. Paul, offers a unique urban opportunity for Transit Oriented Development (TOD).

Likewise, future land use in the City of Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan is intertwined with transit service. The city is intending to focus its growth, including the Ford Site, around transit and would like to see ongoing investment in the high frequency transit, further building off the success of the Green Line and A Line.

Metro Transit has successfully used a sector-based approach to address the emerging transit needs within the region. As shown in **Appendix A**, the region is broken into nine transit planning sectors with this study area part of Sector 5. Sectors 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 and most recently the Central Corridor have undergone prior sector level planning studies.

The Highland Park study area has undergone many route and schedule improvements as a result of the larger Sector 5 Plan implemented in 2004 and Central Corridor plan implemented in 2014. In 2016 Metro Transit introduced the first Arterial Bus Rapid Transit route (A Line Rapid Bus) on Snelling Avenue and Ford Parkway through Highland Park. Bus service in Highland Park has also routinely been adjusted as part of Metro Transit's routine quarterly route and schedule adjustments. Below are highlights of these planning studies and summary of bus service improvements that have been implemented by Metro Transit from some of these efforts.

Scope

The Highland Park Transit Service Study will examine existing transit service performance. The study area is bordered by West 7th Street on the east, Randolph Avenue on the north, the Mississippi River to the west and Hwy 5/ Shepard Rd. to the South. The routes in the study include all those which operate a portion of their total service in the study area, including 23, 46, 54, 70, 74, 83, 84, 87, 134 and A Line.

A map of the study area is in **Figure 1**.

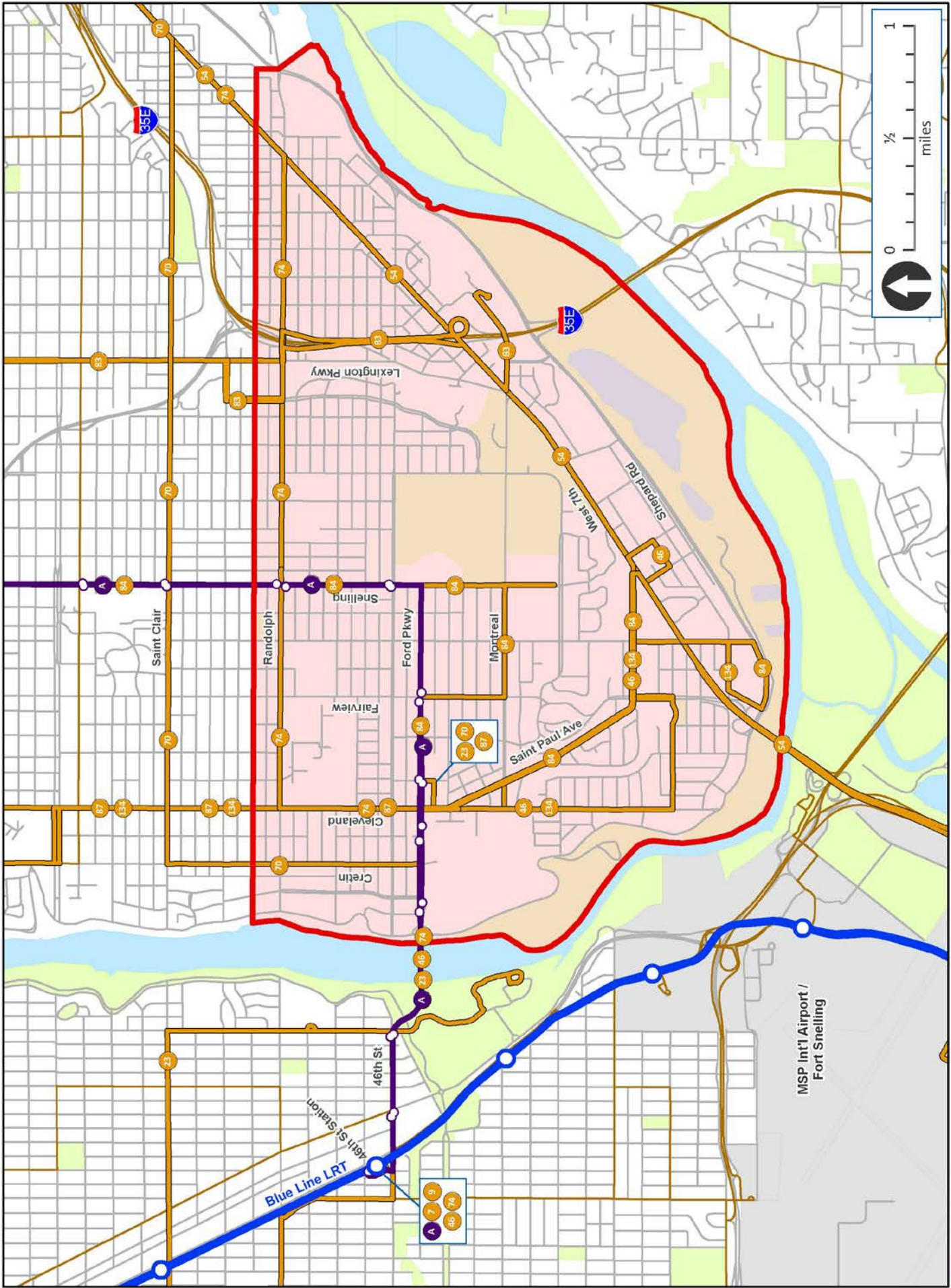


Figure 1: Study Area

Relevant Transit Plans and Projects in the Study Area

Regional and local planning work influence transit service in the study area. Priorities for the regional transportation system are set in the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP). The plan sets policies for the regional transportation system based on the goals and objectives in Thrive MSP 2040, the region's development guide. Metro Transit's Service Improvement Plan (SIP) builds on the TPP by identifying and prioritizing specific local and express bus improvements.

Metro Transit continually reviews and updates individual bus routes to reflect the changing nature of development and travel in the Twin Cities. In addition, Metro Transit occasionally performs transit sector studies, which review a group of routes at a sub-regional level to comprehensively evaluate transit service and needs, determine market opportunities and restructure service and facilities to better address those needs and opportunities.

There is currently one transitway project underway in the study area. The Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority (RCRRA) Riverview Corridor Locally Preferred Alternative for West 7th Street is a modern streetcar line that would operate between the Mall of America and the downtown St. Paul Union Depot. This corridor is in the process of being adopted into the TPP by Metropolitan Council. Assuming funding availability and no substantial delays, service could begin in the late 2020's. This corridor is in the process of being adopted into the TPP by Metropolitan Council. Assuming funding availability and no substantial delays, service could begin in the late 2020's.

2040 Transportation Policy Plan

The 2040 TPP is the region's long-range transportation policy and investment plan. In addition to transit, it addresses highway, aviation and other forms of surface transportation for at least a 20-year planning horizon. The region's first priority is to preserve, maintain and operate the existing transit network. It also establishes a framework from which to evaluate potential transit changes, improvements and investments.

Objectives and investment factors from the 2040 TPP that influenced the transit planning in Highland Park include:

- Operate the regional transportation system to efficiently and cost-effectively connect people to destinations
- Increase the availability of multimodal travel options
- Increase transit travel time reliability and predictability
- Improve multimodal travel options to jobs and other opportunities
- Provide equitable access to opportunity for people of all ages, abilities, races and socio-economic groups

The TPP identifies the region's transit market areas, which help guide decisions about the types and level of transit service most appropriate for a given area. They are determined by using an index of population density, employment density, and automobile availability. The Highland Park study area is entirely within Market Area II. More information about market areas is available in Chapter 2.

2015-2030 Service Improvement Plan

Metro Transit's Service Improvement Plan (SIP) builds on the TPP by identifying and prioritizing specific local and express bus route improvements if additional operating dollars are available. The SIP identifies opportunities to add new routes and improve the frequency and span of service on the existing route network. It includes a specific and prioritized list of improvements, all requiring additional operating funds. The SIP identifies the evaluation factors and measures used to prioritize these bus service investments, as well as timing and resources needed to make them.

Highland Park Projects in the current SIP include:

- Route 23: Improve frequency to Highland Park on weekdays and weekends to every 20 minutes. (High Priority)
- Route 54: Improve frequency to every 10 minutes during the day and every 15 minutes early morning and late evening; add earlier morning and late-night service for connections to non-traditional work shifts. (High Priority) Note: Earlier morning and late-night service was implemented in 2017, and weekday rush hour service was improved to every 10 minutes effective June 2018 as part of the route extension to the East Side of St. Paul.
- Route 74: Add route to the high frequency network with improved weekday and weekend service every 15 minutes during rush hours and during the midday; add service early in the morning and late at night for improved connections to non-traditional work shifts. (Medium Priority)

Starting in 2019, Metro Transit's SIP will be updated and potential Highland Park service improvements near the Ford Site will be evaluated. This Report will inform that process. As the redevelopment plan for the Ford Site is refined over the coming years the SIP will continue to be updated and bus service and facility improvements at the Ford Site may be recommended.

Central-South (Sector 5) Transit Study

In 2004, Metro Transit implemented service changes in the southwestern quadrant of Saint Paul including Highland Park, South Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, and Edina. The goals of the Central-South transit restructuring study were to redesign service to better meet community needs and goals and integrate service with the opening of the new METRO Blue Line. Service improvements in the Highland Park area included the following:

- New Route 46 crosstown service between West 7th and St. Paul Avenue in Highland Park to south Minneapolis and Edina was introduced, with timed connections to the METRO Blue Line 46th Street Station.
- Route 54 limited stop service was introduced on West 7th Street between I-35E and downtown Saint Paul with more frequent service seven days a week. The previous route operated on I-35E from West 7th Street to Kellogg into downtown St. Paul, bypassing much of West 7th Street.
- Route 74 and Route 84 service was extended from Highland Park across the Ford Bridge and 46th Street to the new METRO Blue Line 46th Street Station in Minneapolis, making connections with the METRO Blue Line and five Minneapolis and suburban bus routes.
- Route 87 from Rosedale to Highland Park was restructured via Fairview, Cleveland, Raymond and replaced Route 67 on Cleveland Avenue in St Paul to Highland Park. The restructured route offered a new crosstown route between Highland Park and Roseville.
- Route 134 was realigned in Highland Park, moving from Cretin to Cleveland Avenue for a more balanced geographic coverage through Highland Park.

Central Corridor METRO Green Line

In 2012 Metro Transit began the Central Corridor Transit Service Study. 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 Saint Paul and the University of Minnesota and covering many neighborhoods of Minneapolis and St. Paul including Highland Park.

The routes in this study include all those which operate a significant portion of their total service in the study area and which would provide a connection to the new METRO Green Line service. Routes in this study area that also serve Highland Park included routes 84, 87 and 134.

Recommendations from the Central Corridor Transit Service Study Final Plan:

- 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 and connections to other study area bus routes.
- Improve bus service to major destinations. Major destinations were identified by public input forms.

Central Corridor Transit Study service improvements implemented in 2014 that serve Highland Park included the following:

- New Route 83 was added on Lexington Parkway and Hamline Avenue between West 7th Street and Montreal and the Roseville Super Target near Co. Rd. B and Snelling Avenue. The new crosstown service on Lexington Parkway enhances the north-south grid network, filling a two-mile gap between Snelling and Dale.
- Route 84 on Snelling Avenue was improved to operate every 10 minutes on Snelling Avenue and Ford Parkway between Rosedale, Highland Park and the METRO Blue Line 46th Street Station. Some trips also serve St Paul Avenue to the West 7th and Davern neighborhood.
- Frequency was improved on Route 87 operating on Cleveland and Fairview Avenues, which serves Highland Park, the METRO Green Line Raymond Station, and the U of M's St. Paul campus.
- Route 134 route changes as noted above were part of Sector 5. The extension to 7th and Davern occurred after the Central Corridor changes.

[A Line Rapid Bus – Ford Parkway and Snelling Arterial Bus Rapid Transit](#)

In June 2016 Metro Transit introduced the region's first Arterial Bus Rapid Transit route service between the 46th Street METRO Blue Line Station in south Minneapolis and the Rosedale Transit Center in Roseville via 46th Street, Ford Parkway and Snelling Avenue. The new A Line service has essentially the same level of service as Route 84 with improved travel speeds and amenities. Similar to the former Route 84 the A Line makes connections with many Minneapolis and St. Paul bus routes and the METRO Green Line at University Avenue. A Line customers pay fares before boarding so A Line buses spend less dwell time at the station. Customers get on and off the bus through both doors, further speeding boarding. Stations are spaced further apart and the A Line uses Transit Signal Priority to hold traffic lights longer. It all results in a 20% faster trip and an enhanced experience at the station. Service operates every 10 minutes during most times of the day and slightly less frequency early in the morning and late at night. Since implementation combined Route 84 and A Line corridor ridership has increased by about 30% compared to the former Route 84 service alone. Combined Route 84 and A Line total weekday ridership stands at about 5,800 daily rides. A Line on-time performance is generally in the 90%-95% on-time.

Riverview Corridor

The Riverview Corridor Study is currently being led by the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority (RCRRA). The Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) recommends a Modern Streetcar service between downtown Saint Paul and the Mall of America. The recommended LPA alignment follows West 7th Street to a junction with the Metro Blue Line at Fort Snelling. As this planning proceeds it will require a bus service planning effort in order to model various bus service route structures to determine the highest ridership and most convenient service for customers. This is a process that has been followed in the previously referenced studies.

The Riverview Corridor project produced a memorandum titled “Focused Evaluation of Rail Alternatives by River Crossing” which documents the travel market for Highland Park. Downtown Minneapolis (27%) is by far the largest travel market for Highland. Due to this finding, the Policy Advisory Committee (as noted, below) recommended a follow-up study in addition to this report to study the “Ford Corridor” which would link the Ford Site to both Blue Line and the Riverview Corridor. This study should evaluate, at minimum, connecting to the 38th and 46th street stations on the Blue Line and to the Randolph, Montreal, and Madison stations on Riverview Corridor.

A Riverview Corridor Policy Advisory Committee Resolution adopted 11/29/17 an amendment stated:

WHEREAS, Metro Transit, working closely with the City of Saint Paul and the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority, are committed to studying and implementing feasible, near-term transit improvements to better serve the existing Highland Park area; and

WHEREAS, the City of Saint Paul, Metro Transit and the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority are committed to undertaking an evaluation of how best to serve and connect the Ford Corridor, including a future potential redeveloped Ford site, to a future potential Riverview Corridor Modern Streetcar line, the existing Blue and A Lines, and the greater existing transit system with new transit options (such as regular route transit, arterial bus rapid transit, and rail transit) or restructured existing regular route bus service that will include the following benchmarks:

- *Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority to develop a work plan and management structure by April 30, 2018*
- *Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority to secure funding for the analysis by April 30, 2018.*
- *Establishment of a Policy Advisory Committee, Technical Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee by August 30, 2018*
- *Completion of the study prior to seeking municipal consent for the Riverview Corridor.*

Relevant City of Saint Paul Plans

2040 Comprehensive Plan – Saint Paul for All: The draft 2040 Comprehensive Plan calls for the City of Saint Paul to grow around transit and by adding density around “Neighborhood Nodes,” located at transit stops, many of which historically developed around old streetcar stops. The plan also prioritizes pedestrians, bicycles and transit over automobiles in the process of street design.

Highland Park Neighborhood Plan: The Highland Park Neighborhood Plan identifies neighborhood priorities for ongoing development and reinvestment. This plan is adopted as a chapter of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. The plan includes a policy to “maintain transit access to both Downtown St. Paul and Downtown Minneapolis from Highland Village.” This plan is currently in the process of being updated.

Ford Site Zoning and Public Realm Master Plan: This plan guides the development of the 122-acre Ford Site. It lays out the desired street network, public spaces and development blocks. Redevelopment is expected to provide up to 1,500 jobs and 2,400-4,000 residential units, 20% of those affordable.

Safe Routes to School Policy Plan: This plan guides overall decision-making to support walking and biking to school. There are several schools in Highland Park.

Future infrastructure improvements completed as part of transit projects will need to be in conformance with adopted City plans.