

### 3.6 Visual Quality and Aesthetics

This section describes the visual characteristics and aesthetic resources of the Central Corridor LRT project, the potential for impacts at various locations along the proposed alignment, and proposed mitigation of potential impacts. Table 3.6-1 below summarizes the potential visual and aesthetic impacts of the Preferred Alternative.

#### 3.6.1 Methodology

The discussion of visual quality and aesthetics is based on a qualitative review of the existing and proposed environment surrounding the Central Corridor LRT alignment. The study area for this analysis includes the surrounding environment of the proposed track, stations, and associated facilities (electrical catenary, TPSS units). Visual and aesthetic resources within the study area were identified by reviewing aerial photographs and field study. These resources include historic, residential, and commercial structures and parklands (see Section 3.4 Cultural Resources and 3.5 Parks and Recreation Areas). Existing conditions and long-term effects are discussed by planning segment.

This analysis rates the potential impacts of the Central Corridor LRT on the visual quality of the project area as “minimal,” “moderate,” or “high.” These ratings are based on the following criteria:

- High: Introduction of new elements that could substantially affect the quality of the visual/aesthetic resources
- Moderate: Introduction of new elements that may have an impact on the quality of the visual/aesthetic resources
- Minimal: Introduction of new elements that are not likely to have an impact on visual/aesthetic resources

**Table 3.6-1 Summary of Potential Visual/Aesthetic Effects for the Preferred Alternative**

Segment	Potential Impacts			
	Alignment and Catenary System	Stations	Transfer Power Substations (TPSS)	Operations & Maintenance Facility (OMF)
Downtown St. Paul	Minimal to Moderate	Minimal with the exception of: a) Moderate effects from a transit station as a new element in front of the historic Union Depot, b) Moderate effects from the 4 <sup>th</sup> and Cedar Streets Station and diagonal alignment on the block bordered by 4 <sup>th</sup> -Cedar-5 <sup>th</sup> -Minnesota Streets	Minimal: where TPSS placement will alter visual quality the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods to develop appropriate screening.	Minimal to Moderate
Capitol Area	Minimal	Minimal, with the exception of: minimal to moderate effects from the Rice Street Station on adjacent park areas near the Capitol	Minimal: where TPSS placement will alter visual quality the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods to develop appropriate screening.	NA

Segment	Potential Impacts			
	Alignment and Catenary System	Stations	Transfer Power Substations (TPSS)	Operations & Maintenance Facility (OMF)
Midway East	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal: where TPSS placement will alter visual quality the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods to develop appropriate screening.	NA
Midway West	Minimal	A transit station will be a new element in a historic district at the intersection of Raymond Ave. and University Ave. every measure will be taken to ensure that the station design is appropriate to the setting of Historic District.	Minimal: where TPSS placement will alter visual quality the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods to develop appropriate screening.	NA
University/Prospect Park	Minimal with the exception of a) moderate effects of the Transit/Pedestrian Mall; the effect of diverting auto traffic from an area of heavy pedestrian and bicycle use would be a moderate, but positive, impact	Minimal with the exception of a) the change to the existing streetscape from the removal and replacement of trees and other features	Minimal: where TPSS placement will alter visual quality the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods to develop appropriate screening.	NA
Downtown Minneapolis	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal: where TPSS placement will alter visual quality the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods to develop appropriate screening.	NA

### 3.6.2 Existing Conditions

Existing conditions for the Central Corridor LRT are presented below. Existing conditions were updated to include facilities added after the AA/DEIS was completed. These include the TPSS, alignment and stations, the Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) and the Transit/Pedestrian Mall with accompanying roadway mitigation. In the following summaries of the six segments, visual and aesthetic resources are described from east to west along the Central Corridor LRT alignment starting in Downtown St. Paul.

### 3.6.3 Downtown St. Paul

#### 3.6.3.1 Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF)

The proposed location of the OMF is shown in Figure 2-4 (in Chapter 2). Figure 3.6-1 (photo) shows the existing conditions at the proposed site. The vacant building has two sections: 1-story on the south, and 2-3 stories on the north. The views from the proposed facility include the St. Paul Farmer's Market to the west (in use alternately as a market and parking lot); to the south and southwest are historic buildings once used for manufacturing, now containing offices, residences, and limited commercial activity. The views to the east include the Lafayette Bridge, Kellogg Boulevard, and surface parking lots. To the north from the east side of the facility (the portion that will not be enclosed) are the interstate highways I-94 and I-35E. The eastern portion of the site is located in an area with industrial characteristics (train tracks used by BNSF, high voltage electric power lines, fences, and a trunk highway bridge).

**FIGURE 3.6-1**



View of the south side of the Diamond Products site for the proposed OMF.

#### 3.6.3.2 Downtown St. Paul Alignments and Stations

The view looking west on 4<sup>th</sup> Street at the intersection with Broadway Street is of a narrow 2-lane street with parking lanes on the north and south sides (Figure 3.6-2 and Figure 3.6-3). The St. Paul Farmer's Market is located on the north side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and helps to open the view of the area because of its one-story roof covering the parking area used seasonally for the sale of farm goods. The sidewalks adjoin the curb with no boulevard area between, though some small trees have been placed near the driveway entrances to the Farmer's Market. The red awnings above storefront windows on the St. Paul Rubber Company Building provide an inviting storefront area for pedestrians. The combination of vintage street lighting fixtures, exposed cobblestone street, and paved brick sidewalk on the north side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street help to create a historic-feeling streetscape. This aesthetic effect

continues west, though the building on the southwest corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Wall Streets is set back farther from the street, opening up the narrow street a bit.

**FIGURE 3.6-2 AND FIGURE 3.6-3**



Left, view from intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway: looking west on 4<sup>th</sup> Street. Right, view from intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Wacouta Street: east on 4<sup>th</sup> Street (to Operations and Maintenance Facility)

The generous setback of the historic St. Paul Union Depot train station opens the viewing area looking east on the south side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street from Wacouta Street. Doric columns stretch across the Union Depot’s front façade and up to the second story level. A landscaped lawn and circular drive are in the foreground. Looking to the north, brick industrial structures and a two-level parking deck can be seen. South and west of the Union Depot, the U.S. Post Office is visible. Directly west from Wacouta and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets are historic buildings on the south side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street, which are intermixed with the more modern Kellogg Square (Figure 3.6-4 and Figure 3.6-5).

**FIGURE 3.6-4 AND FIGURE 3.6-5**



The Union Depot then and now; at left circa 1920, and at right in 2008

The ROW in front of the Union Depot on 4<sup>th</sup> Street is wider than the ROW to the west; the open space in front of the depot allows sunlight for street trees on the north side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 3.6-6).

**FIGURE 3.6-6**



From the intersection of Wacouta and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets in front of the Union Depot: Looking west on 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

East of Jackson Street and between Kellogg Boulevard and 5<sup>th</sup> Street, one can see buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places within the Lowertown Historic District. On the southwest corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Sibley Street, the view includes the St. Paul Radiology Center (a modern structure) and the mural on the east façade, which overlooks a playground owned by the City of St. Paul. Decorative lamps lining the streets distinguish the Lowertown Historic District.

On 4<sup>th</sup> Street, between Robert and Jackson streets, the brick façades of the Pioneer and Endicott buildings are visible, as well as a skyway across 4<sup>th</sup> Street connecting both buildings to the Federal Courts building. A multi-story parking ramp is visible at the northwest corner of Jackson and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets. Views from 4<sup>th</sup> Street to the north at Minnesota Street and Robert Street include large office buildings; to the south one has a view of the sky at the river bluff, but the river itself is not visible. Looking east on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, a surface parking lot is visible on the northwest corner of 4<sup>th</sup> and Minnesota Streets. This open landscape allows a clear view of the façade of the First National Bank building, which faces Minnesota Street on the west and 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south. A skyway across 4<sup>th</sup> Street connects the First National Bank building to Kellogg Square and constrains views down the street. Views to the west on 4<sup>th</sup> Street are enclosed by the Qwest Towers, which follow the curve of the road. Two skyways also cross 4<sup>th</sup> Street west of Cedar Street.

To the east between 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> streets, the concrete and glass façade of a now vacant building on the southeast corner of Cedar and 5<sup>th</sup> streets can be seen next to the brick and stone façade of the University Club Downtown Clubhouse (formerly known as the St. Paul Athletic Club). The Pioneer Press building is visible to the west, but a mid-block skyway limits the view. The grade of Cedar Street begins to rise from 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Streets. South of 7<sup>th</sup> Street, the view is nearly enclosed due to the blank walls of the Macy's store (southwest side of Cedar) and the Town Square building, and because of the parking ramp that extends

over Cedar Street between 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets. The result is long shadows and minimal streetscaping, creating a dark environment.

Wells Fargo Place (formerly the Minnesota World Trade Center), the tallest building in Downtown St. Paul, rises above Cedar Street at 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and appears to be paired with the UBS Plaza across Cedar Street to the east. Wells Fargo Place and UBS Plaza create a canyon effect on Cedar Street constraining the view of buildings farther north accentuating the perspective. A skyway crosses Cedar Street connecting Wells Fargo Place and UBS Plaza. A grassy open space area can be seen on the northwest corner of 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Cedar, and the new offices of Minnesota Public Radio are across the street to the east. The landscape rises north as Cedar Street approaches Exchange Street. Here the view is enclosed on the east side by parking garages that have office space above, and on the west side by the older brick Exchange Building (known historically as St. Agatha's Conservatory of Music and Fine Arts) and a public parking ramp. Looking north along Cedar Street near Exchange Street, the State Capitol's dome can be seen.

### 3.6.3.3 Capitol Area

#### **Viewshed to the State Capitol**

Following the Central Corridor LRT alignment north along Cedar Street, the double cupola towers of the St. Louis Catholic Church next to the steeple of Central Presbyterian Church may be seen across from the Exchange Building on the south corner of Cedar and Exchange streets. Looking north from Cedar and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, a wide boulevard with grass-covered medians and an elaborate covered sidewalk promenade on the freeway overpass can be seen. This view extends all the way to the Capitol Mall lawn.

After crossing I-94, government office buildings dominate the viewshed. The proposed Capitol East Station is located between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbus Avenue – closed to traffic access at the Robert Street intersection. The new Freeman Building is visible on the west side of Robert Street at 12<sup>th</sup> Street. Looking south from the station site down Robert Street gives a broad view of downtown St. Paul. The view is flanked by new office buildings and surface parking lots. Looking north on Robert Street, state office buildings and the State Capitol can be seen, but the view is constrained by a steep rise in terrain toward the north. Cass Gilbert Park and the observation platform are seen from Robert Street and University Avenue. University Avenue passes under the graceful arch of the Cedar Street Bridge as University Avenue quickly descends to Robert Street. Heading west on University Avenue, the State Capitol building can be seen to the south. An aging concrete parking garage can be seen to the north of the State Capitol building.

The State Capitol is built on the top of a rise, and has a view overlooking the Capitol Mall to the south. The State Capitol building is bordered by Aurora Avenue directly to the south (front), Cedar Street to the east, and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to the west. Views from the State Capitol across the mall are to the freeway corridor and downtown St. Paul. To the west of the mall, views include state office buildings fronting on Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and John Ireland Boulevard. To the east of the mall, the view is of a long office building fronting on Cedar Street. Careful attention has been paid to creating and controlling views of the State Capitol façade: the mall is designed with a primary axis aligned to the center of the State Capitol façade and a bilaterally symmetrical apron expanding out from the State Capitol axis to the framing streets of John Ireland Boulevard and Cedar Street.

Leif Erikson Lawn, on the southwest corner of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and University Avenue, creates a green foreground for views of the State Capitol dome. The

historic Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, with its unique coloring and twin towers, provides the feeling of an earlier time in St. Paul. Approaching the park from the west on University, vegetation and mature trees constrain views to the south until Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard; there the State Capitol can be seen across the landscaped Capitol Mall and along the curve of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard.

At the intersection of Rice Street and University Avenue, in the area of the State Capitol, the character of development changes from office buildings and institutions to commercial buildings and parking lots. The large, arched windows and a clock tower of the League of Minnesota Cities building are notable features of the northwest corner.

#### 3.6.3.4 Midway East

Proceeding west on University Avenue, vacant car dealerships and other businesses for sale on both sides of the street create wide-open spaces interspersed with groups of brick storefronts—many with billboards mounted on their roofs. These interrupted spaces can be seen from Rice Street all the way to Western Avenue. Some vacant buildings have recently been rehabilitated into businesses, providing new vitality to the street. Two examples exist at the intersection of Marion Street and University Avenue; a one-story office of a previous auto dealer has become the Hmong Professional Building, across the street a former office building is a MacDonald's restaurant. Glimpses of frame houses are possible to the north of University Avenue from Rice Street to approximately Aldine Street.

Surface parking lots (some in use, some abandoned car sales lots) dominate the intersection at Marion Street and University Avenue. One- and two-story storefronts border the parking lots.

At the intersection of University Avenue and Dale Street, surface parking lots occupy almost one block on the southern side. Looking east from Dale and University, groups of brick storefronts, many with billboards mounted on their roofs, are seen from Western Avenue all the way east to Rice Street. Much of the area appears to be in a state of transition, which gives it a wide-open and empty appearance.

The steeple of the Rock of Ages Baptist Church, one block north of Dale Street, can be seen from the intersection of Dale Street at University Avenue. At Dale Street, a handsome set of two-story brick storefronts with awnings extending over the sidewalk is visible on the northwest corner. The newly constructed four-story Rondo Community Outreach Library and housing dominates and updates the appearance of the southwest corner of the Dale-University intersection. The tile and metal façade of the Unidale Mall, on the southeast corner of Dale Street, can be seen beyond a surface parking lot, and a high-rise housing tower is visible behind it.

A wide variety of commercial structures and groups of older frame houses are visible along University Avenue from Dale Street to Lexington Parkway and around the site of the proposed (future) Victoria Street station.

A mixed-use development with housing, office, retail, and a restaurant occupies the north side of University Avenue at Victoria Street. A gas station is located on the southeast corner of University Avenue and Chatsworth Street, and one- and two-story storefronts are interspersed with parking lots. Single-family houses are located on the south side of University Avenue.

Automobile parts stores, car wash signs, gas stations, and fast food restaurants can be seen north of University Avenue at Lexington Parkway. Recently, the view to the southwest has been updated with the attractive addition of the Wilder Foundation Headquarters, set

back from Lexington Avenue. To the south of University Avenue, behind the historic St. Paul Casket Company Factory building and new commercial construction and surface parking lots (two blocks west of Lexington Parkway), the large Skyline Tower apartment building presents rows and columns of windows against the sky on the I-94 freeway horizon. To the east of the apartment building (on Dunlap Street) is the rectangular brick mass of the Central Medical building.

Vacant surface parking lots of former car dealerships face University Avenue east and west of Hamline Avenue. East and north of Hamline an active used car lot is across from the massive parking lot in front of the Super Target store.

Surface parking lots are the most prominent feature in the views to the south from University and Snelling Avenues. The view toward I-94 (to the south) is interrupted by big box stores such as Wal-Mart, Cub Foods, and Borders Books. One block east of Snelling Avenue, a major shopping center area extends along the south side of University Avenue from east of Hamline Avenue to Snelling Avenue (slightly less than one-half mile), and the open space of the freeway corridor is apparent to the south. Approaching the intersection of Snelling and University Avenues, the view is of a major intersection with turn lanes and heavy traffic. To the south, the stepped massing of the Spruce Tree Centre culminates at a four-sided clock tower. The green glass and tiled façade provides an aesthetically interesting presence that wraps around the intersection.

Since the AA/DEIS was published, the northwest corner of Snelling and University avenues has become stylistically similar to the retail area in the southeast. The view of the modernist-style American Bank building across Snelling Avenue (to the east) complements the view of the Spruce Tree Centre. A new chain-drugstore building provides contrast to the older, smaller storefront on the northeast corner, which exhibits variety in height, materials, and architectural details. While the older storefronts enclose the viewshed on the northeast corner of University Avenue, an area of big box retail outlets on the southeast corner opens wide and long views across large surface parking lots.

The repeated spacing of cobra-head streetlights creates a visual rhythm along the length of University Avenue in St. Paul. Traffic signal arms extend into the avenue's viewshed at major intersections. Electric utility wires frequently cross University Avenue but are rarely strung along it. As a whole, the character of University Avenue west of Snelling Avenue is utilitarian, but it displays the vitality of the marketplace and life of the community with a mix of retail, hospitality, office, and industrial land uses. The buildings' appearance and associated signs are often old-fashioned, but touches of color, culture, and history can be seen in individual buildings and groups of structures. The wide variety of old and new, urban storefronts and shopping malls, cars, buses, and people offer a variety of visual experiences.

#### 3.6.3.5 Midway West

Northwest of the intersection of Fairview and University avenues, the view includes vacant land. On the southwest corner, a new senior housing complex offers an attractive new façade, with older apartment buildings and newer office buildings visible to the south. The view north on Fairview Avenue shows the transition from industrial buildings to residential neighborhoods. The Griggs Building, on the northeast corner of Fairview Avenue, is a visually interesting conversion from an industrial plant to retail and office uses, while across University Avenue, on the south side, the large signs of fast food restaurants are designed to attract passing motorists. Dickerman Park, a narrow, landscaped strip with mature trees, is located in front of the Griggs Building, the YMCA, and the Community Learning Center.



Four blocks to the east of Fairview on the south side of University Avenue, mature trees in front of the HealthEast Midway campus mask the true size of this large medical facility.

One- and two-story industrial buildings with surface parking lots can be seen west of Fairview and University. A Menard's store (with surface parking lot) is on the north side of University and one- and two-story commercial buildings with brick and window façades are on the south side of University Avenue.

The 1919 University building is the tallest structure visible in the area—about seven stories—is located east of Prior Avenue on the north side of University. On the south side, views of Iris Park from University Avenue are limited by its narrow frontage. Signs of all types are one of the prominent features along University Avenue. The derby-topped pig's head sign for Porky's Drive-In is a highly visible landmark and remnant of post-war automobile culture.

East of Prior Avenue, older storefronts adjacent to the sidewalk enclose the view for a half block, and include views of motels on each side of the street in front of more industrial buildings. University Avenue is below-grade west of Prior Avenue where it goes under a railroad bridge between Cleveland and Prior Avenues. The Minnesota Commercial Railway (MCRR) Bridge and the general area are historically referred to as the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company District. Views beyond University Avenue are of brick, concrete, and sheet metal industrial structures, with associated railroad spurs and truck depots.

As one proceeds west from Fairview, the view has a mix of commercial buildings fronting University Avenue, including a fast food restaurant on the north side, the one-story University Crossing, and a showroom building, which is on the south side of Vandalia Street. Ascending from Vandalia Street, at-grade structures at the intersection with Raymond Avenue come into view. Trees have been planted to surround the surface parking lots serving the brick and concrete commercial buildings in this neighborhood. The University-Raymond Commercial Historic District is generally located along University Avenue between Highway 280 and Hampden Avenue East of Raymond on University Avenue, there are one-story storefronts, and the Midway Industrial District's buildings come into view on both sides of University Avenue. The handsome brick buildings are set close to the sidewalk, with façades that round the corner from University Avenue onto Raymond Avenue. South of the Raymond Avenue intersection, more industrial buildings are visible.

Looking to the east, the view opens as University Avenue crosses over TH 280. This expanse, without structures framing the roadway, creates a visual separation between the Westgate and Raymond Avenue areas.

At the St. Paul and Minneapolis city limits, University Avenue crests a hill and descends, opening a broad view to the Westgate area and beyond. On the north side, the view of the Westgate Business Center is of two-story structures with long façades and picture windows that are typically found in mixed-use business parks. On the south side, the view includes a pair of large structures: one is an eight-story office building with square massing, and the other is a four-story structure built with red brick and divided windows in a style common to mid-twentieth century industrial plants.

#### 3.6.3.6 University/Prospect Park

The University/Prospect Park segment's eastern boundary (see Figure 1-2 in Chapter 1) is located northwest of the proposed Westgate Station and just west of the Minneapolis-St. Paul border. The median that separates traffic on University Avenue terminates at

Emerald Avenue, and the industrial land use that characterized the area around the proposed Westgate Station changes to offices interspersed with multi-unit housing.

University Avenue defines a viewshed consisting of multiple drive lanes with no median, parking lanes, sidewalks and building frontage.

East of Tower Hill Park, the view along University Avenue includes a handful of older frame houses that are set between commercial buildings on the north side of the street. The commercial buildings in this area lack distinguishing architectural features. Radio and television transmission towers on the north side of University Avenue are a visual indication of the city limits. Narrow grass-covered boulevards with occasional mature trees are present to the west of Bedford and University and continue to the 29th Avenue intersection. Rising above treetops, the "witch's hat" tower in Tower Hill Park is the most prominent landmark in the residential area to the south of University Avenue. The nine-story, hexagonal University Park Plaza office tower is a landmark at 29th Avenue SE and University Avenue. A large industrial area including railroad tracks and large grain elevators is visible to the north of 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. The University of Minnesota Transitway is visible as a ribbon of blacktop running along the edge of the industrial area. Views in the 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue Station area are of industrial structures located north of the alignment. There are numerous overhead electric lines and the industrial buildings of various vintages and sizes—some look old and abandoned, and others are surrounded by new fences, curbs, and sidewalks. A portion of the site has views of vacant treeless land. A portion of the view to the north is of single-family residences surrounded by trees on 4<sup>th</sup> Street SE.

The three-story University Village development, with its retail shops on the ground floor and apartments above, occupies the view to the south of the Transitway between 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> avenues SE.

Near 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue between University Avenue and Washington Avenue, new streets and sidewalks have been constructed to accommodate the TCF Bank Stadium. The streetscape has newly planted trees and shrubs and the pedestrian-level light fixtures are traditional luminaries atop a metal pole. The open landscape in this area consists of parking lots surrounding the stadium along with one to four story buildings.

Views in this area at the intersection of University and 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue consist of surface parking lots, office buildings of various ages and recent apartment buildings. The open-air football stadium with capacity for 50,000 people dominates the view to the west with its associated parking lots, and additional athletic facilities further west on University Avenue.

As the alignment turns west on to Washington Avenue there are views of a four-story apartment building to the south and a one-story strip mall with various stores and restaurants to the south. Power lines span the south side of the street on wooden T-posts. The street has two-way traffic with metered parking on both sides of the street.

In Stadium Village at Oak Street and Washington Avenue, the buildings are smaller commercial structures. The views on Washington Avenue include a busy, narrow city street lined with parking meters and electric poles and lines on the south side. The overhead electric lines continue to clutter the view until just east of Harvard Avenue where the lines cross the street (to the northwest) and end at Harvard and Washington. Sidewalks vary in width, and some wide sidewalks dominate the view. Landscaping and trees along the street break up the views of concrete and brick commercial building walls. The building heights and setbacks vary. Parking lots adjacent to the sidewalks in front of the buildings create a more expansive feeling. Views to the areas beyond Washington Avenue are of multi-storied brick office, classroom, and parking ramp buildings.

From Harvard Street looking west on Washington Avenue, the biological science campus and University Medical Center present a dense mass of buildings on the south side of the street (Figure 3.6-7).

**FIGURE 3.6-7**



Looking east on Washington Avenue toward Church Street, from East Bank footbridge (note the multi-storied medical building on the top right of the photo)

Northrop Mall opens to the north of Washington Avenue. This landscaped green space is flanked by some of the oldest buildings on the U of M campus. Views of this area are of the crossroads of daily campus activity. To the south of Washington Avenue, stairs lead from the Coffman Union plaza and upper bridge deck down to street level where bus transit stops are located. Existing visual elements that impair views include the concrete median topped with iron fencing located in the middle of Washington Avenue (Figure 3.6-7) and extending from Church Street west to the Washington Avenue Bridge.

The views from the Washington Avenue Bridge include the Mississippi River and the sandstone bluffs, which are on the east bank of the river. The configuration of the bluffs are reflected in the architecture of the Weisman Art Museum designed by Frank Gehry, which is located immediately south of the east end of the bridge. The west bank of the river presents an expanse of parkland with lawn next to the river and then an area of forest covering the bluff. The bridge ends where it meets the West Bank Campus of the U of M under the land bridge that shelters Washington Avenue and the transit waiting areas. Stairs lead from the lower level where bus transit stops are located on Washington Avenue to the campus plaza above.

### 3.6.3.7 Downtown Minneapolis

Looking west from Washington Avenue as the alignment ascends from below-grade at the West Bank station area on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue, a large freeway interchange with I-35W on a bridge above Washington Avenue and several entrance and exit ramps can be seen. The views

are primarily of interstate highway, the ramps that connect them, and the open grasslands that separate them. Views farther to the north include brick apartment buildings that vary in height from 2 to 4 stories. After the alignment passes over the freeway, the Metrodome comes into view along with the Hiawatha LRT bridge. As the alignment descends to an at-grade position, surface parking lots with commercial buildings within two blocks to the north become visible.

The views around the Metrodome/Downtown East Hiawatha LRT station, where the Central Corridor LRT would merge with the Hiawatha LRT, are characterized by large surface parking lots adjacent to both nondescript and architecturally significant structures. The views also include the large plaza surrounding the Hiawatha LRT station, which has crowds of riders during Metrodome events. The Metrodome itself is an unadorned stadium superstructure capped by a white, inflated fabric roof.

### 3.6.4 Long Term Effects

#### 3.6.4.1 No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would have no additional visual or aesthetic impact, nor would it improve existing conditions.

#### 3.6.4.2 Preferred Alternative

The visual impacts of the Preferred Alternative are described below. For visual effects on historic buildings, see Section 3.4 Cultural Resources, Table 3-4-3.

The proposed Central Corridor LRT would be constructed in an existing urban transportation corridor. Much of the Preferred Alternative would follow a similar alignment to that of the former streetcar network operated in the Twin Cities (Diers & Isaacs, 2007). The new OCS infrastructure would be more or less visible from corridor residences and businesses, depending on the visual screening between the corridor and adjacent land uses and the angle from which the track-area is viewed. Impacts to visual resources would most likely be limited to the following new physical elements associated with the project:

- Overhead Contact System (OCS) – the catenary poles and wires will create a vertical element in the middle of the ROW (occasionally on the side of the ROW), and add a new element to the streetscape. The poles and overhead wires will introduce a new visual element to nearby residents, but they are consistent with the existing transportation corridor, ancillary structures, and street lighting or transmission lines in the corridor. Methods will be employed to blend the OCS with the various settings such as narrow downtown streets or the wide-open boulevard of University Avenue.
- Track – the light rail vehicles (LRVs) will operate on standard gauge railroad embedded (level with the roadway pavement) track. The embedded track would place concrete around the steel rails in the roadway, creating a visual effect similar to the existing medians, but with movement and activity. Ballasted track will be used along the University of Minnesota Transitway generally located between the 29<sup>th</sup> Avenue Station and the Stadium Village Station.
- Traction Power Substations (TPSS) - The substations consist of a single-story building approximately 40 feet by 20 feet constructed on a limited access site approximately 45 feet wide by 80 feet long (about 40,000 square feet) (See Figure 3.6-8). There would also be overhead contact lines connecting the TPSS with the OCS. All substation buildings would be secured, limited access facilities and typically

located near similar land uses: industrial, light industrial, parking, or commercial structures to more easily integrate with the surroundings. They would also be sited so that adjacent features may assist in obscuring the structures (e.g. existing buildings, vegetation, or bridges).

**FIGURE 3.6-8**



Additional treatments will be applied to integrate the facility with the surrounding community.

- Signal Bungalows - Ten signal bungalows are proposed as part of the Preferred Alternative. These facilities are small sheds that hold the equipment to operate and monitor the signals that regulate train movement on the alignment. Signal bungalows need to be placed near special track work, such as turnouts and crossing diamonds, to minimize installation costs and power demand and to reduce power losses. They will be co-located with TPSS at three locations and the others will be located in obscured areas and in underutilized parking lots.
- LRT Vehicles – the appearance of the LRT vehicles will be consistent with those operated by Metro Transit on the Hiawatha LRT line (Figure 3.6-9).
- LRT stations – perhaps the most visible element of the LRT system, the individual stations, include staging platforms, ticket vending machines, wind screens, canopies, and lights. Because the station canopies would be raised, they have the most potential for visual effects. Stations and canopies may limit the view across the street, including views of storefronts and business signs. The Metropolitan Council has recently hired a group of experienced local and national public transit artists and established station art committees to design aesthetically pleasing station areas that reflect the culture and character of the adjacent community.
- Track crossings – new pedestrian crossings for access to stations and track crossings, including active traffic control or warning devices, at many intersections would add new visual elements to the streetscape (see Figure 3.6-18 through Figure 3.6-20). These new track crossing technologies would be incorporated into the redesigned streetscape façade of University and Washington Avenues, and likely unnoticeable.
- Grade separated structures – there will be new elements added to existing structures to facilitate LRT operations. In the case of the Washington Avenue Bridge, to help

ensure it becomes a structurally redundant bridge, improvements will be made within the envelope of the existing structure. Elements will be added to the Cedar Street bridge over I-94 in downtown St. Paul, to the University Avenue bridge over State Highway 280, and to the 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue bridge in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. A new bridge will be constructed over I-35W. The existing skyway, which crosses over 5<sup>th</sup> Street (close to Cedar Street in downtown St. Paul), would be reconfigured.

- Vehicle Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) – this facility will reuse a portion of the existing Diamond Products Building. Measures would be taken to treat the building façade so that it is compatible with the surrounding architecture.
- Additional physical elements constructed for LRT, including landscaping and streetscaping.

The elements listed above would be designed and constructed to maintain visual consistency with existing transportation uses.

**FIGURE 3.6-9**



Computer generated photo of a light rail vehicle consistent with HLRT.

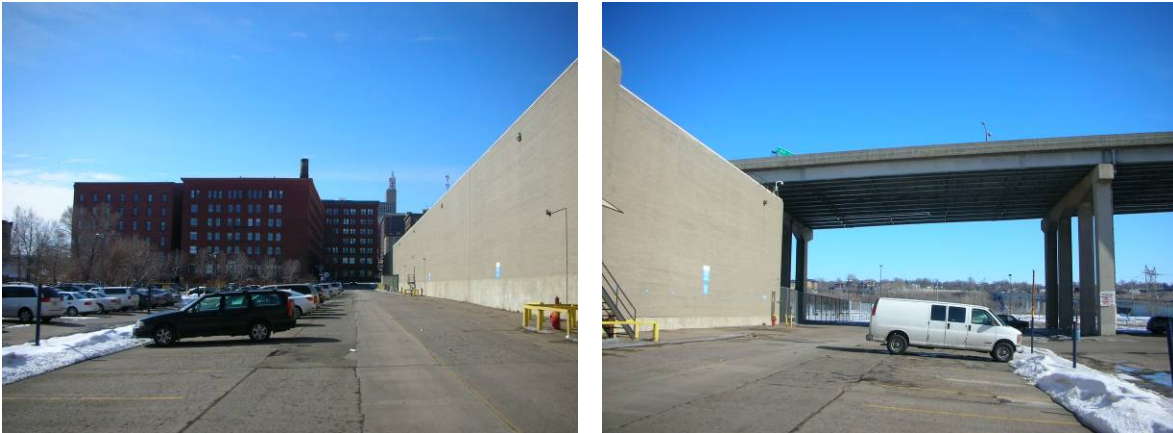
#### 3.6.4.3 Downtown St. Paul

##### Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF)

The use of the one-story portion (south side) of the Diamond Products Company manufacturing facility as the OMF for the Preferred Alternative, as described in Section 2.2 and depicted in Figure 2-4, would have a minimal to moderate visual effect on the view toward the site from the Lowertown Historic District (see Figure 3.6-10 and Figure 3.6-11). The building was a manufacturing facility through 2004 when it closed. The outdoor portion of the facility (tracks with turn-around area for the trains, employee parking, and stormwater pond) will be situated on the existing parking lot that was used for the manufacturing company and is located east of the building.(Figure 3.6 12 and Figure 3.6 13). These

features will be located under the Lafayette Bridge (State Highway 52), which will be reconstructed and expanded starting in 2011.

**FIGURE 3.6-10 AND FIGURE 3.6-11**



At left, the Diamond-Gillette Building (white windowless building) south side, looking west, and at right, south side, looking east (with Lafayette Bridge)

Viewers who will be affected by the OMF will be the workers in the industrial building on 4<sup>th</sup> Street (a one-story building situated just east of the Lafayette Bridge, see Figure 3.6-12), Bruce Vento Trail users, commuters on Kellogg Boulevard and the existing residents of the Northern Pacific Railway Warehouse located on Kellogg Boulevard. The view from the river to the OMF is obscured because of the elevated parking lot and multi-story buildings.

**FIGURE 3.6-12 AND FIGURE 3.6-13**



At left, a view of eastern portion of proposed OMF (and the one-story commercial building, seen through the fence). At right, view from the OMF toward Kellogg Boulevard (and the river, which is blocked by the elevated parking ramp).

### Track Alignment and Stations

The new tracks, catenary poles, and wires required for operation of the LRT would introduce new visual elements into the corridor. Historically, there were similar elements present, including tracks servicing the streetcars transporting passengers to the Union Depot train station. As the train enters and exits the OMF on 4<sup>th</sup> Street, the overhead line equipment (OLE) and tracks may have a moderate to high impact on the historic buildings between

Broadway Street and Wacouta Street. The visitors and customers of the St. Paul Farmer's Market may experience the highest impact. This will be a seasonal effect, because the Market is in operation on Saturday and Sunday mornings between April and December. Because of the market's outdoor setting the OCS and trains will be visible during the visitor's trip to the market.

The tracks, OCS, and LRT vehicle movements on Wacouta and 4<sup>th</sup> streets (See Figure 3.6-6), would likely constitute a moderate visual intrusion. 4<sup>th</sup> Street has a narrow ROW (starting at 4<sup>th</sup> and Sibley Streets, and proceeding west to Minnesota Street) lined by tall buildings, creating a canyon effect. The addition of LRT OCS would influence the ground level viewshed on 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

The proposed station location in front of the Union Depot would create a moderate visual change to the aesthetics of the area. The station platform, windscreens, and canopy would change the viewable landscape in front of the Union Depot.

Visual impacts between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets at Minnesota would be moderate. The project would introduce trains and a transit station plaza on this block (Cedar Avenue – 4<sup>th</sup> Street – Minnesota Street – 5<sup>th</sup> Street) (Figure 3.6-14, Figure 3.6-15 and Figure 3.6-16). There are, however, existing bus transit shelters on 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Minnesota, and the introduction of a light rail station would be in character with the existing landscape. The station plaza could enhance the visual environment by replacing a large surface parking lot with the addition of upgraded stations and lighted areas with increased activity.

The remaining building on the same block, the University Club of St. Paul – Downtown Clubhouse (known historically as the St. Paul Athletic Club) would remain on the southwest corner of the block. The visual impact on this historic structure would be minimal. The renovation of the Clubhouse building has eliminated the windows on the east side of the building (see Figure 3.6-15 and Figure 3.6-16) and added a skyway extending through the building on 5<sup>th</sup> Street across the block to 4<sup>th</sup> Street. There are no views to the east from the building addition on the north side of the Clubhouse. The view from the station would include the back of the University Club Downtown Clubhouse toward the southwest, and other office and commercial buildings to the east and north.



**FIGURE 3.6-14**



Looking west on 4<sup>th</sup> Street at 4<sup>th</sup> and Minnesota.

**FIGURE 3.6-15 AND FIGURE 3.6-16**



At left, the east side (back) of University Club building. At right, the view from the 5<sup>th</sup> Street/ Minnesota Street intersection to Cedar/4<sup>th</sup> Street diagonal alternative.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and Cedar Streets Station would result in the removal of one building on the southeast corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Street and Cedar (Figure 3.6-17).

**FIGURE 3.6-17**



View from 5<sup>th</sup> and Cedar streets, looking at SE quadrant and the building to be removed.

LRT OCS would have a moderate impact on the aesthetic qualities of Cedar Street in downtown St. Paul.

The proposed 10<sup>th</sup> Street Station would have a minimal visual impact on the churches at 10<sup>th</sup> and Cedar Streets because of its location between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets just northwest of the churches. The grass median will be replaced by the train tracks and station platforms. The proposed 10<sup>th</sup> Street Station would have low visual impact on the Elmer L. Andersen Human Services Building, which was constructed in 2005.

#### 3.6.4.4 Capitol Area

##### **Capitol Area Alignment and Stations**

The tracks crossing over I-94 on Cedar Street would have low impact for viewers on the train and for those on the interstate. On the south side of the State Capitol, an extensively landscaped mall allows long views to the south façade. LRT infrastructure would have a low impact on the visual environment of the Capitol Mall and the south façade of the State Capitol during the brief moments that the trains turn at 12<sup>th</sup> and Cedar streets. LRT OCS would be visible in views of the State Capitol from the east side of Cedar Street in this block.

The long-term effect of the Capitol East Station and associated LRT alignment would be minimal. The Preferred Alternative reduces the visual impact on the view from the State Capitol Building and mall. Because 12<sup>th</sup> Street follows the I-94 corridor, virtually no visual impact will occur from the southeast. The area in front of the new Freeman Office Building was specifically designed to accommodate an LRT station (see discussion in Section 2.2.2.3). Installation of OCS wires would add a new element to the streetscape, but the

overall effect would be positive because of the wide street, wide sidewalk and boulevard with trees.

The effect to the view on the north side of the State Capitol of the installation of OCS and tracks on University Avenue would be minimal, based on the level of design and placement of OCS poles. Views from areas bordering University Avenue are from parking lots and parking ramps. The movement of the train would add motion to the view and vibrancy to this side of the State Capitol.

The long-term effect of the location of the Rice Street station would result in a pleasant effect for the users of the Central Corridor LRT because they will be loading and unloading next to Leif Erikson Lawn—an extension of the Capitol Mall. The long-term effect for the users of Leif Erikson Lawn would be moderate, because a bus stop is already at this location, thus transit activity would continue through the introduction of a canopy, ticketing machines, and lights.

#### 3.6.4.5 Midway East

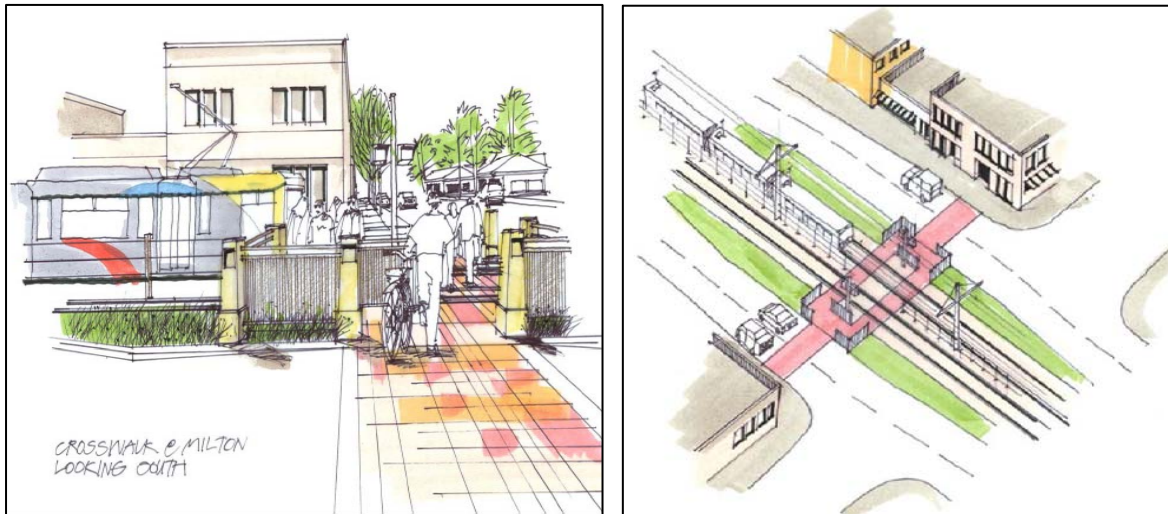
The addition of the tracks, the OCS, and associated improvements to University Avenue with its wide ROW, median, and streetscape would have a minimal long-term effect and may improve the aesthetics of the ROW.

The overall impact on the visual environment along University Avenue would be positive. The proposed embedded tracks would add a new visual element in the middle of a bleak, wide ROW by replacing a median along most of the length. The Preferred Alternative will include a complete rebuilding of the street, curbs, and sidewalks, and would include aesthetic improvements in the form of landscaping, pedestrian and streetscape improvements, interpretive art in station designs, commemorative public art installations, new public spaces, bicycle infrastructure, and improved lighting.

The introduction of OCS catenary poles would create a vertical element in the middle of the ROW, thereby reducing the perceived width. Embedded track would place concrete around the steel rails in the middle of the roadway, creating a visual effect similar to the existing medians. The LRT vehicles are nearly twice the length of semi tractor-trailers and would create movement in the ROW median. Installation of OCS wires would add a new element to the streetscape.

New pedestrian crossings for access to stations and track crossings at all intersections would add new visual elements to the streetscape. As described above, the Preferred Alternative would reconstruct University Avenue, and thereby improve the environment for pedestrians and the visual quality of the streetscape. (Figure 3.6-18 through Figure 3.6-20)

The overall impact on the visual environment along University Avenue would be low, except in station areas where the impact would be moderate. Stations are likely to create the most prominent visual effect along University Avenue. Most stations would have platforms on both sides of major intersections. Elements on the platforms would include ticket vending machines, windscreens, canopies, and lights. Because the station canopies would be raised, they have the greatest potential for visual and aesthetic impact. Stations and canopies may block the view across the roadway, including views of storefronts and business signs.

**FIGURE 3.6-18 AND FIGURE 3.6-19**

Ground level and aerial view of a non-signalized pedestrian crossing at Milton, three blocks east of Lexington Avenue.

**FIGURE 3.6-20**

Sketch of a non-signalized crosswalk.

#### 3.6.4.6 Midway West

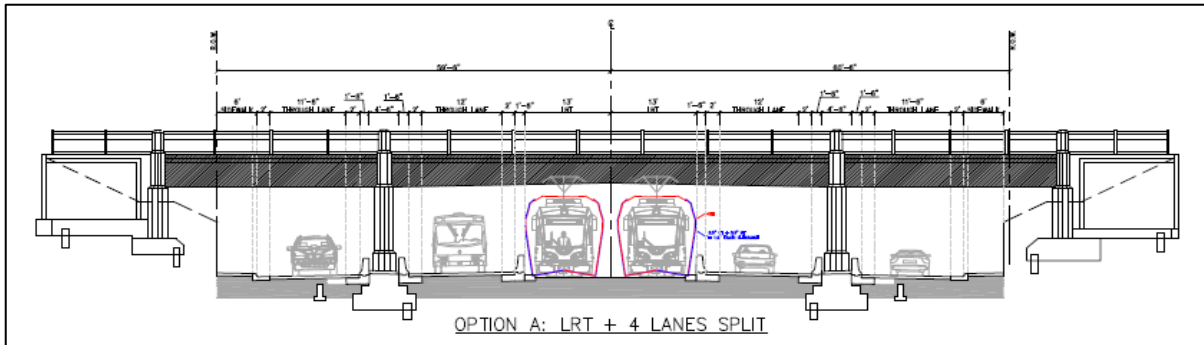
##### **Track Alignment and Stations**

The effects of the alignment within this segment would be similar to those described in the Midway East segment. The addition of the tracks, OCS wires, and associated improvements to University Avenue with its wide ROW, median, and streetscape would have a minimal long-term effect and may improve the aesthetics of the ROW as discussed below.

This segment of the alignment contains a higher variety of uses and structures than the segment to the east. The LRT vehicles will cross under the historic railway bridge between Cleveland and Prior Avenues. The proposed configuration of OCS, tracks, and traffic will

result in a low visual effect because, although the bridge will not be altered in any significant way, pedestrian access will be improved with 10-foot wide sidewalks (Figure 3.6-21).

**FIGURE 3.6-21**



This profile of vehicles crossing under the historic railway bridge between Cleveland and Prior avenues illustrates the relative heights of the LRT vehicles and buses.

There will be a low impact on the two parks the LRT vehicles will pass; Dickerman Park and Iris Park. Construction of the LRT will provide the opportunity to add new landscaping enhancements, improving the park user's experience.

#### 3.6.4.7 University/Prospect Park

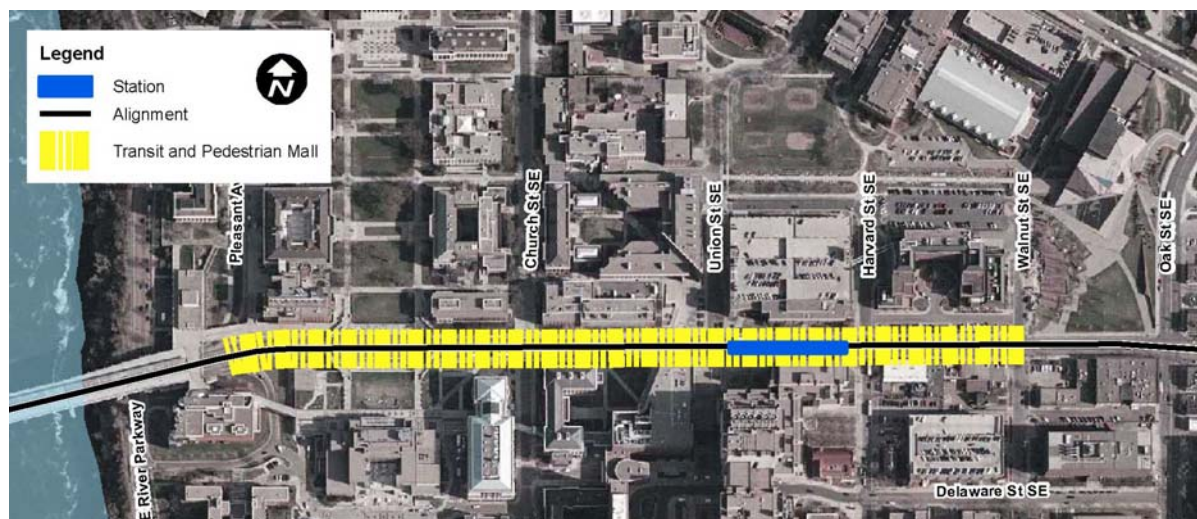
##### **Track Alignment and Stations**

The concrete median on University Avenue between Eustis Street and Emerald Street will be replaced with tracks, poles, and OCS. On-street parking would be eliminated on much of this segment. Boulevards will remain with new tree plantings. The effect on the visual environment will be minimal.

The impact of the LRT between the 29th Street Station and the Stadium Village Station would be minimal. The Preferred Alternative will follow the Transitway (partly industrial and partly an old railroad corridor) for most of this segment (Figure 3.6-22). The new TCF Bank Stadium presents a major change to the visual environment. The stadium is under construction less than a block to the west of the 23rd Avenue segment of the tracks (completion is scheduled for 2009). The proposed Stadium Village Station will be located between the Transitway (to the north) and University Avenue (to the south). The stadium and its associated facilities diminish the long-term visual effect on the general setting of the revised Stadium Village Station location, because the size and dimensions of the stadium overwhelm the addition of the light rail system. In addition, the alignment location will occupy former parking lots rather than cross through commercial neighborhoods and thus, result in fewer building removals than identified in the AA/DEIS.

The overall impact to the visual environment on the U of M East Bank campus would be minimal to moderate: LRT tracks, poles, and OCS would be visible in the middle of Washington Avenue, from Huron Street to the Washington Avenue Bridge. Washington Avenue is an historic streetcar thoroughfare, so this could be considered a return to the original character of the streetscape rather than a new impact.

FIGURE 3.6-22

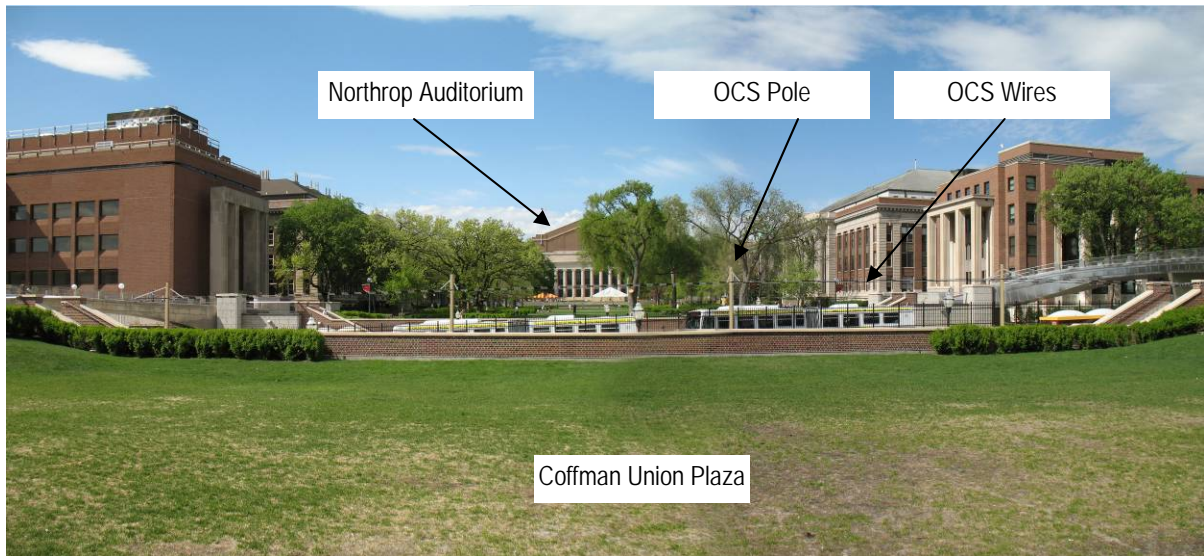


Transit/Pedestrian Mall at the University of Minnesota.

The long-term effect of the proposed Transit/Pedestrian Mall, located between Walnut Street and Northrop Mall, would be minimal and be dependent on the design and locations of LRT facilities. The introduction of the LRT tracks, poles, and OCS would be evident in the middle of Washington Avenue because of the narrow dimensions of the ROW and the proximity of the campus buildings. The introduction of the trains would not present major differences in traffic elements contributing to the visual character because of the many buses that currently travel Washington Avenue (See Figure 3.6-24 which indicates the relative height of buses and LRVs). Existing visual elements, concrete median with iron fencing, (Figure 3.6-7) will be replaced with center running tracks and OCS, resulting in a moderate effect for viewers who are adjacent to the alignment. For viewers farther from the corridor the effect will be minimal (Figure 3.6-23).

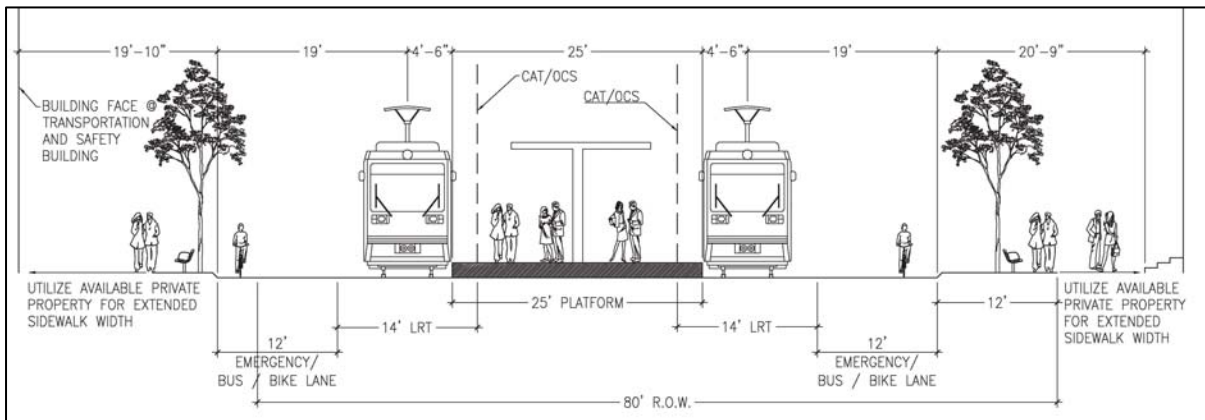
In the AA/DEIS the proposed East Bank Station was planned and described as a below-grade tunnel with stairways and elevators for access; located in the vicinity of Northrop Mall and Coffman Union (Figure 2-8 in Chapter 2). The East Bank Station included in the Preferred Alternative is now planned as an at-grade center station located on Washington Avenue between Union Street and Harvard Street (Figure 2-8). Elements of the station platform include ticket vending machines, canopies, and lights. The lights and canopies have the highest potential for visual and aesthetic effects. Pedestrian crossings for access to the platform would add new visual elements to the streetscape. The redirection of traffic away from Washington Avenue in this area would remove automobile traffic and reduce visual distractions, which would improve the environment for pedestrians.

**FIGURE 3.6-23**



Visualization of OCS looking north from Coffman Union toward Washington Avenue and Northrop Mall.

**FIGURE 3.6-24**



Cross section of transit/pedestrian mall.

The introduction of the East Bank Station between Union and Harvard Streets would have a moderate impact when viewed from the Northrop Mall and the Coffman Memorial Union areas (see Figure 3.6-7 for existing conditions). Existing views from the surrounding ROW (sidewalks for pedestrians, planned bikeways, and bus lanes) will be modified with the addition of the station, as well as OCS poles and wires. Views from the adjacent classroom, office, and medical services buildings will be modified as car and truck traffic is replaced with LRVs and a LRT station platform is added to the bus shelters. Impacts from the addition of rail facilities would be offset by the removal of general traffic from Washington Avenue. The University East Bank station is to be located east of the U of M Campus Mall Historic District, far enough away so the design will not have a visual impact on cultural resources in the vicinity.

To accommodate LRT, improvements must be made to the Washington Avenue Bridge; the Preferred Alternative includes major rehabilitation of the bridge. No changes to the bridge's appearance would be visible or apparent from motorists or observers at the roadway or pedestrian levels. An observer standing directly under the bridge (or boating on the river) would see the new structural elements including the bridge piers with additional concrete to support the new structural members. All of the improvements proposed for the bridge superstructure would take place within the envelope of the existing structure and therefore create a minimal visual impact.

The West Bank Station would add a substantial new element at the approach to the Washington Avenue Bridge, including overhead mezzanines allowing access from 19th Avenue, via elevators and stairs, down to Washington Avenue. These changes may improve the aesthetic quality of the area by providing visible connections to the areas above Washington Avenue, and visually reducing the width of the existing roadway depression.

### **Washington Avenue Traffic Re-route and Mitigation**

In addition to the specific elements of the Preferred Alternative, the project has potential visual and aesthetic effects on adjacent roadways. The rerouting of traffic away from Washington Avenue (Chapter 6, Figure 6.2-7) and the subsequent mitigation strategies would add substantial new elements—auto traffic, lane additions, and traffic signals—to these roadways and the surrounding community. Traffic signals would be installed, one of which will be on East River Parkway. Turn lanes are proposed for the following streets that access (or intersect) the Parkway: Arlington Street, Washington Avenue eastbound ramp, Harvard and Delaware streets, and East River Parkway at the Harvard Street intersection. All of these elements could result in visual impacts for views toward this area and views from East River Parkway ROW. The parkway is intended to be a slow-moving scenic alternative to city streets—a narrow thoroughfare intended only for automobile traffic in harmony with the adjacent pedestrian/bike trails and parkland bordering the river.

Three locations on East River Parkway would sustain the highest number of alterations. The intersections of East River Parkway and Arlington Street, East River Parkway and the eastbound exit ramp from Washington Avenue, and East River Parkway at Harvard Street. These locations would have turn lanes added. Signals would be installed at the East River Parkway and Arlington Street intersection, with stop signs added at the Harvard and East River Parkway intersection, to create an all-way stop intersection.

Potentially impacted viewsheds include:

- Views from the buildings to the west toward the parkway
- Views from the river to the east toward the parkway
- Views from the pedestrian-bike trail toward the parkway to the east
- Views from vehicles traveling along the parkway to the surrounding area

Views eastward and southward from the campus buildings would result in low to high visual effects. Many of the buildings in this area are sufficiently set back from the parkway, or the windows are few or not oriented toward the parkway, and there is adequate tree canopy for screening preventing a direct view to the parkway. Some buildings, however, are situated very close to the parkway and views will include increased traffic. Views from the river would have low visual effects. The river is sufficiently separated by the bluff and the parkway is so close to the edge of the bluff that users of the river will notice little or no change in the view. Trees and shrubs along much of the riverside of the trail provide screening from the river.



The parkway users (pedestrians and bikers in particular) may experience changes in visual character because of the change in vehicle traffic patterns from cars and trucks routed away from Washington Avenue, the added traffic signals, and expansion of the roadways with turn lanes. See Table 6.2-9 in Chapter 6 for results of traffic effects for the off-corridor intersections. Additional discussion of this facility is included in chapter 7.

#### 3.6.4.8 Downtown Minneapolis

##### **Track Alignment and Stations**

The Preferred Alternative would be adjacent to Currie Park on the park's northwest border. (See Figure 7-3 in chapter 7). Because of the steep slope (descending from the park area to the corridor), the LRT vehicles would travel on an alignment lower than the park area. Visual intrusion would be minimal. The area of the park closest to the alignment is a parking area, thereby reducing the effect even further.

#### 3.6.5 Short Term Construction Effects

Construction-related visual impacts along the corridor between downtown St. Paul and the Downtown East/Metrodome Station in Minneapolis will occur due to the placement of construction staging areas and equipment/materials storage in viewable areas from sensitive uses such as residences and recreational areas abutting the alignment. Vibration, noise, traffic, and visual impacts would be experienced during construction through all segments. These impacts would be short-term and temporary. Mitigation for construction related impacts would be implemented as for all other portions of the project.

Construction abutting historic resources would be carried out to avoid disturbing the primary architectural façade of these structures to the greatest extent possible. Construction activities and equipment may cause a temporary alteration of the setting of these resources. This effect, however, would be temporary and depending on placement of the TPSS, there may be construction impacts. (See Short Term Construction Effects in Section 3.4.5.2)

The Metropolitan Council requires contractors to comply with appropriate federal, state, and local regulations concerning the removal of existing vegetation. Prior to construction, a plan for protecting existing trees and vegetation that could be injured during construction activity would be developed. The Metropolitan Council would also assess the need for additional landscaping to mitigate potential visual intrusion or privacy impacts following vegetation-clearing activities during construction.

Project construction would be multi-phased and would occur in different locations at different times. All construction activities would involve the use of a variety of construction equipment, stockpiling of soils and materials, and other visual signs of construction. While evidence of construction activity would be noticeable to area residents and others traveling through the corridor, such visual disruptions would be short-term and are a common feature of the urban environment. Work would also be conducted during off-peak periods and on weekends to minimize disruptions. Some construction would be accomplished at night. Metropolitan Council would require the project contractor to ensure that construction crews working at night direct any artificial lighting onto the work site, to minimize "spill over" light or glare in adjacent residential areas.

#### 3.6.6 Mitigation

The Preferred Alternative would have minimal visual effects because the project is located in an existing transportation corridor. The project would introduce new visual elements within

an urban and existing transportation corridor setting. These new elements are predominantly in proximity to commercial and industrial uses, and a university campus area.

Methods for avoidance, minimization, or mitigation of impacts to historic properties are addressed during the Section 106 consultation process.

In general, mitigation treatments for visual impacts will be developed during the final design process through discussions with affected communities, resource agencies, and stakeholders. Artists selected by the artist selection committee and approved by the Metropolitan Council will assist with the final station designs and public art that will be included with the Preferred Alternative. The following paragraphs describe mitigation strategies that will be employed along the alignment, as appropriate.

### **Traction Power Substations**

The proposed locations for the TPSS are shown in Figure 1-2. The proposed TPSS locations would be sited to minimize impacts to the surrounding properties; and therefore the locations are subject to change during final design. The Metropolitan Council will track any changes in the proposed locations and identify mitigation, as needed. Where TPSS placement will alter visual quality, the Metropolitan Council will work with the respective neighborhoods/business districts to develop appropriate screening. Specific design elements, including site selection, will be incorporated during final design to mitigate potential adverse effects.

Efforts have been made to limit the land use impacts associated with the placement of TPSS. As described in Section 3.1.4.3, potential sites for the TPSS have been restricted to underutilized land, such as surface parking lots, to prevent the displacement of existing residential and commercial buildings. Further, in certain locations, underutilized areas to the north and south of the alignment were selected to maintain development opportunities along University Avenue.

### **Operations and Maintenance Facility**

To ensure that surrounding residential and commercial uses are not adversely affected by the reuse of the Diamond Products site for an OMF, mitigation proposals include façade treatments to the Diamond Products building and a study of LRT operations relative to traffic and access requirements for the adjacent St. Paul Farmers Market. Treatment of the southern and western façades of the Diamond Products building will be compatible with surrounding development, which may include the placement of architectural treatments to break up the building façade. Efforts will also be made to ensure that openings in the Diamond Products building, including those used by LRVs, will be appropriate for the surroundings. Potential treatments will be developed in partnership with the City of St. Paul and other stakeholders, and the analysis of LRT operations pertaining to the Farmers Market will be completed by the Metropolitan Council, with any required operational procedures in place prior to beginning revenue service.

### **Downtown St. Paul: Union Depot Station and 4<sup>th</sup> and Cedar Streets Stations**

Every measure will be taken to ensure that the station design is appropriate to the setting of the depot. The depot will retain its architectural design and its historic function as a transportation depot. Architectural treatments could be selected for the Union Depot Station to compliment the Union Depot and its function as an historic passenger rail depot.

Construction of the LRT in downtown St. Paul would include reconstruction of wide portions of the public ROW at the 4<sup>th</sup> and Cedar Streets Station. The station platforms would be

located on an existing surface parking lot. The reconstruction offers an opportunity to improve the streetscape on Cedar Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street.

#### **Raymond Street Station Area**

Measures will be taken to ensure that the station design is appropriate to the setting of the University-Raymond Commercial Historic District.

#### **Washington Avenue Transit / Pedestrian Mall on the U of M Campus**

The proposed at-grade LRT configuration through the U of M campus would improve visual and aesthetic conditions by removing heavy vehicle and truck traffic from a relatively narrow local street. Measures will be taken to ensure that the associated facilities would be carefully designed to create a pleasing visual and aesthetic environment appropriate to the setting of the University.

#### **East River Road Parkway**

The Parkway is currently a transportation facility and minor upgrades will be incorporated to manage traffic that will be diverted from Washington Avenue. These roadway improvements would change the traffic patterns with the existing character of the parkway remaining intact.

#### **Prospect Park Area**

As part of advanced preliminary engineering for the Central Corridor LRT project, a design plan for streetscaping improvements is underway. This plan is being created with input from all project partners and stakeholders, as well as the public.

Existing boulevard trees that are removed due to the construction of the Central Corridor LRT will be replaced consistent with city policies. The preliminary design plans, as illustrated in Appendix L, provide space within the corridor for vegetation, and the streetscaping design plan will provide guidance and criteria for placement of additional vegetation. Other elements identified in the streetscaping design plan include criteria for lighting standards, way finding signs, street furniture, and public art.

#### **General Mitigation Measures for Visual Effects**

Elements of this plan that are currently part of committed as part of Preferred Alternative include installing improved pedestrian crossings at signalized intersections, as well as installing non-signalized pedestrian crossings at many of the other street intersections. University Avenue, and other streets in which the Central Corridor LRT will operate, will be reconstructed to provide an enhanced vehicular and pedestrian environment. In addition, all sidewalks adjoining the streets will be completely reconstructed. Existing street lighting will be relocated as part of the street reconstruction. If relocation is not feasible, existing street lighting will be replaced. The Metropolitan Council executed an MOU between the Metropolitan Council, Regents of the University of Minnesota, the City of Minneapolis, the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority, and Hennepin County concerning mitigation of traffic and other environmental impacts in and around the U of M.

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