

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: May 2, 2019

For the Community Development Committee meeting of May 20, 2019

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of June 12, 2019

Subject: Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Review File No. 50120-1

MPOSC Districts, Members: District C, Margie Andreason and District D, Catherine Fleming

Council Districts, Members: District 6, Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson and District 7, Robert Lilligren

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* Planning Policy – Strategy 1

Staff Prepared/Presented: Colin Kelly, AICP, Planning Analyst (651-602-1361)

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Planning

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan.
2. Require that the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, prior to initiating development of the regional trail, send preliminary plans to the Engineering Services Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division, for review in order to assess the potential impacts to the regional interceptor system.

Background

The Luce Line is an existing regional trail corridor that connects the Cedar Lake Regional Trail in Minneapolis through Theodore Wirth Regional Park and then farther west to other regional parks and trails in the Three Rivers Park District System. The portion described in the Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan (Master Plan) is operated by Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB).

The Master Plan is the result of nearly two years of community engagement as part of MPRB's North Service Area Master Planning (NSAMP) effort, a project to create new vision plans for all neighborhood parks on the north side of Minneapolis as well as three regional trails. The Master Plan was designed as a stand-alone section of the overall NSAMP document.

Currently MPRB's portion of the Luce Line Regional Trail exists entirely within other park properties, and not within its own trail right-of-way or separate parcel definition. In its current form, the trail takes a disjointed route from Theodore Wirth Regional Park to the Cedar Lake Regional Trail, with several segments of the trail on-street. Presently, the Luce Line Regional Trail lacks clear signage and mapping and offers little in the way of visitor comfort, such as benches, restrooms or drinking fountains.

A critical need for this regional trail has been a more straight-forward routing without on-street segments. Recently, a railroad abandonment created the opportunity to establish a similar but improved corridor for the Luce Line Regional Trail. This Master Plan proposes an improved route and provides associated acquisition and development activities, including support facilities, and available cost estimates.

The Luce Line Regional Trail is planned as a linking trail. The trail will provide an off-road alternative for people to travel for commuting or recreation, with connections to Theodore Wirth Regional Park, local amenities like Bassett's Creek Park and Bryn Mawr Meadows Park, and downtown Minneapolis via the Cedar Lake Regional Trail.

Rationale

The Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, including Planning Strategy 1, and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region.

Funding

The estimated development costs to implement the master plan are \$4,155,315. This figure does not include the cost to acquire the rail corridor, due to pending negotiations.

Approval of the master plan does not commit the Council to any funding at this time. The acquisition and development costs based on this master plan may be awarded through the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund, the Regional Parks Bonding Program, and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund. Further Council action is required to approve the Regional Parks Bonding project list, the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund project list, and specific grants to MPRB.

Known Support / Opposition

MPRB passed a resolution of support for the NSAMP, which includes the Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan. There is no known opposition to the Master Plan.

Figure 1: Regional Trails Open to the Public (2018) and Luce Line Regional Trail (MPRB) location

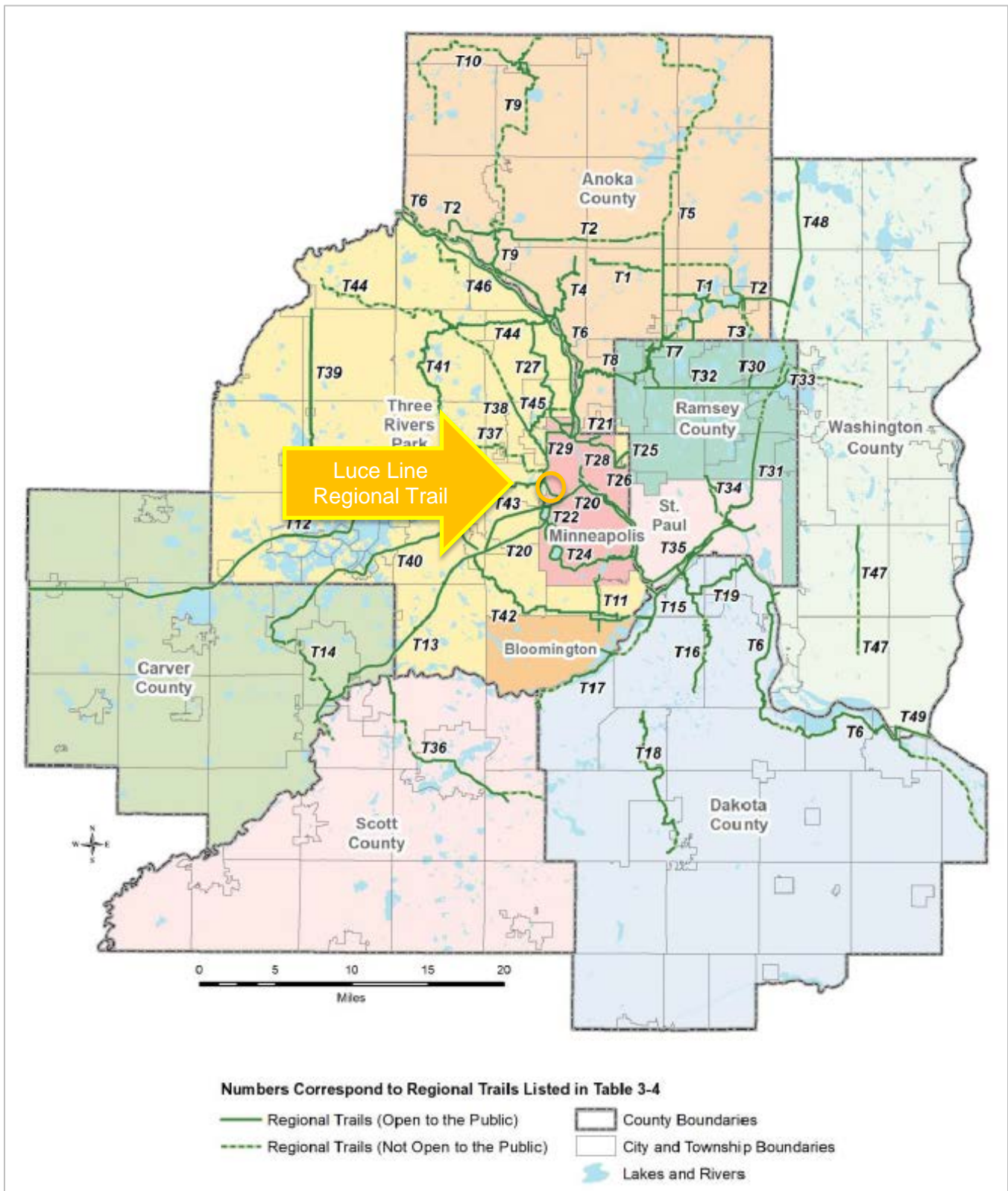


Figure 2: Regional Parks System: City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County and Luce Line Regional Trail (MPRB) location

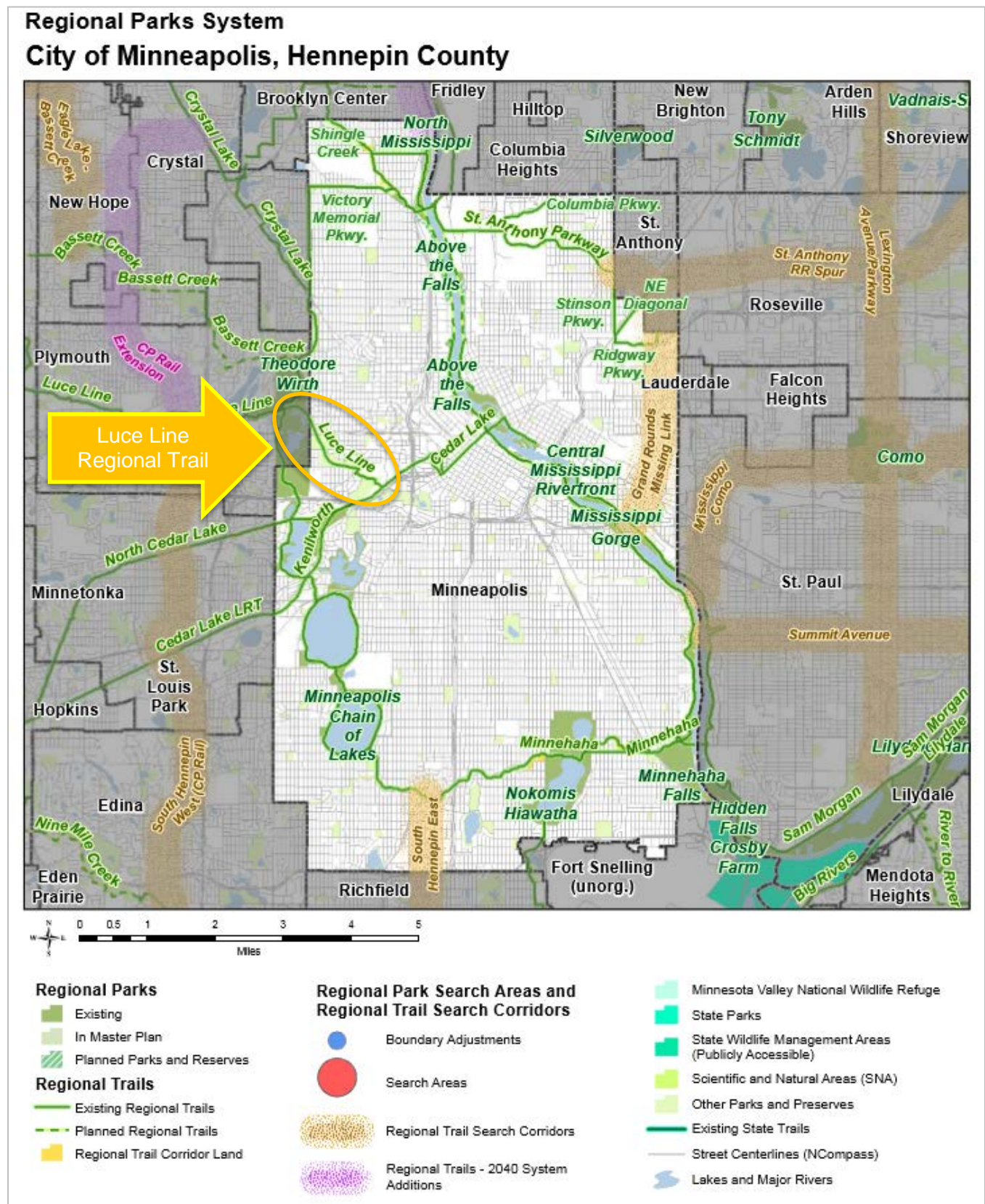


Figure 3: Local Context: Luce Line Regional Trail (MPRB)



Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* requires that master plans for linking regional trails address the eleven items listed below.

Boundaries and Acquisition

The Luce Line Regional Trail will travel 2.32 miles through Golden Valley and Minneapolis, providing direct connections to Theodore Wirth Regional Park and the Cedar Lake Regional Trail.

Acquisition Needs: In order to create a more streamlined corridor for the Luce Line Regional Trail, MPRB proposes to acquire, in collaboration with partners, all or a portion of the abandoned CP Rail/Soo Line corridor that runs through Bassett's Creek Valley. This rail line most closely parallels the historic Luce Line and provides the greatest opportunity for safely connecting the regional trail without on-road segments. The following describes the regional trail corridor segment-by-segment and notes opportunities for collaboration. The proposed regional trail alignment is shown in Figure 4, on the next page.

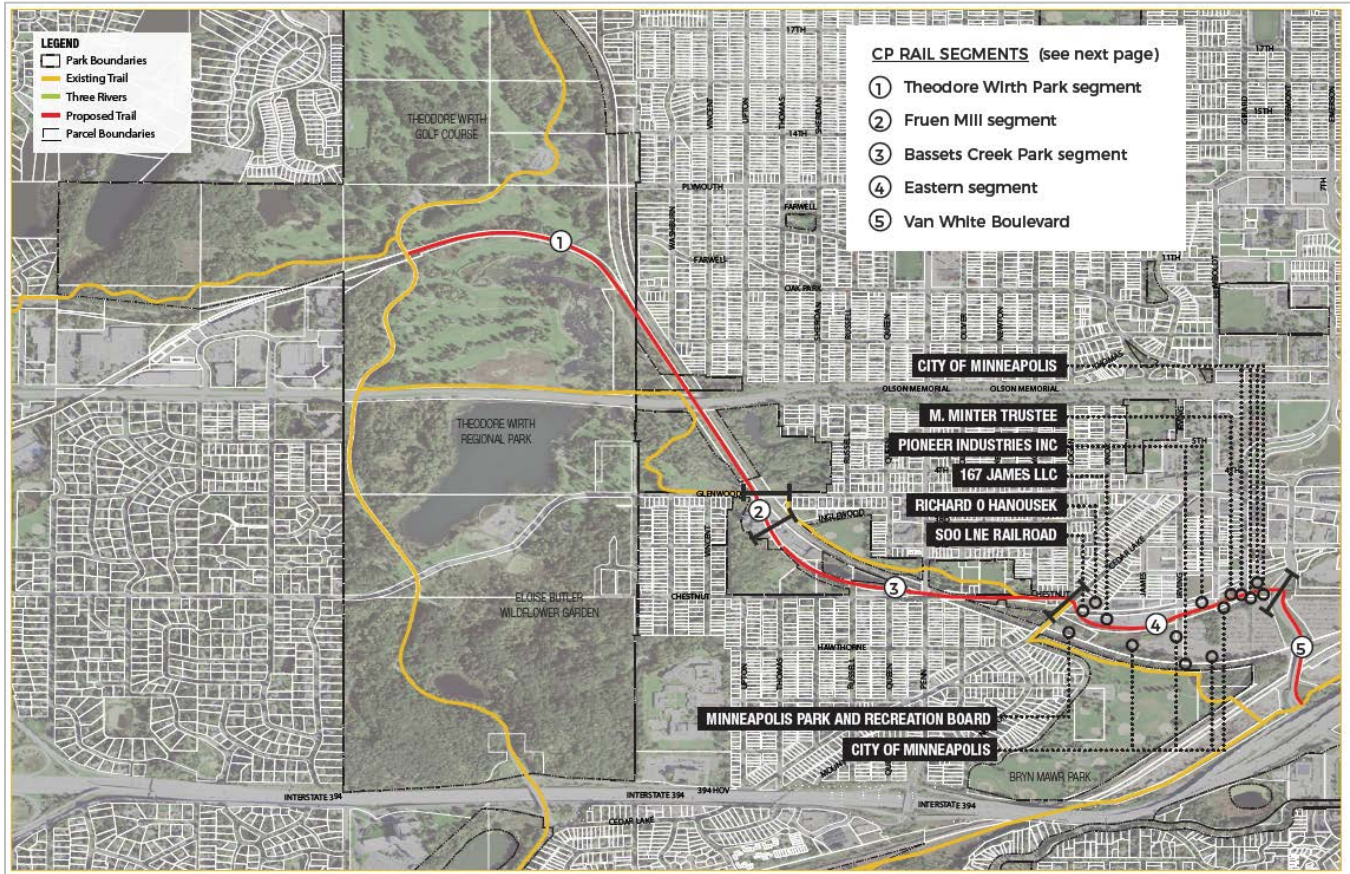
1. Theodore Wirth Regional Park segment: The CP Rail corridor runs through the middle of Theodore Wirth Regional Park from the western park boundary to Glenwood Avenue. This land is identified in the Theodore Wirth Regional Park Master Plan as an inholding in the park. The Luce Line Regional Trail Master Plan proposes acquisition of this segment as part of Theodore Wirth Regional Park, with the Luce Line Regional Trail surface running through that larger Regional Parks System facility.
2. Fruen Mill segment: South of Glenwood Avenue is a commercial development site on the old Fruen Mill site. This segment extends only from Glenwood Avenue to the first railroad bridge over Bassett's Creek. MPRB currently has a collaborative relationship with private development entities in this area and is willing to work with them on the best routing for the trail. The trail may not need the entire railroad right-of-way width in this segment. Therefore, this master plan proposes acquisition of this segment in a collaborative effort with private development entities and retention of a minimum 20-foot trail right-of-way or permanent easement at an exact location to be determined.
3. Bassett's Creek Park segment: Between the Fruen Mill bridge and Cedar Lake Road, the master plan proposes acquisition of the rail corridor as Luce Line property, not neighborhood park property. One key piece of this acquisition will be the assurance of an at-grade crossing of the BNSF railroad just east of Penn Avenue.
4. Eastern segment: After passing underneath the Cedar Lake Road bridge, the proposed trail leaves the rail corridor behind and begins to follow Bassett's Creek. MPRB is currently working collaboratively with the City of Minneapolis and private developers as the industrial land between Cedar Lake Road and Van White Boulevard redevelops. All parties intend to preserve the corridor of Bassett's Creek as public green space. This green space corridor will be acquired by MPRB as sites redevelop, potentially through park dedication. The trail will run in this newly acquired corridor. Properties acquired would become part of Luce Line property, not the neighborhood park.
5. Van White Boulevard segment: At the end of the eastern creek segment, the proposed trail follows existing very wide pedestrian/bicycle facilities on the Van White Boulevard bridge as it crosses the Minneapolis impound lot and railroad tracks. The Luce Line Regional Trail will connect to the Cedar Lake Regional Trail at its intersection with Van White Boulevard or as part

of the new Green Line Extension light rail transit station, when implemented. This segment will run within existing public right-of-way.

This master plan proposes to establish a dedicated land area for the Luce Line for the first time in this segment of the regional trail. Between Glenwood Avenue and Van White Boulevard, the trail would run in its own dedicated land area. North of Glenwood Avenue it would run through Theodore Wirth Regional Park, and on Van White Boulevard it would run in existing public right-of-way that would not change hands.

Costs for acquisition are not included at this time as an MPRB-ordered appraisal is still being reviewed and discussed with partners.

Figure 4: Property Owner Map: Luce Line Regional Trail



Demand Forecast

The Luce Line Regional Trail has approximately 125,000 visits per year, according to the 2017 Regional Parks System Use Estimate. This places the Luce Line at the lower end of the spectrum among MPRB’s regional trails (see *Table 1* on the next page). The Luce Line serves primarily as a connector between Theodore Wirth Regional Park (805,400 visits) and the Cedar Lake Regional Trail (500,600 visits), the latter of which provides a connection to downtown Minneapolis and Central Mississippi Riverfront Regional Park (2,782,800 visits).

As part of a series of interconnected loops that includes the historic and well-connected Minneapolis Grand Rounds, the Luce Line could have higher use. However, its rather disjointed and poorly marked current route is likely a barrier for those seeking a true regional trail experience. MPRB expects that local and regional use will increase once the trail route is streamlined, as proposed in this master plan.

Table 1: Estimated Annual Regional Trail Visits, Metropolitan Council (2017)

Regional Trail	Total Visits
Cedar Lake	500,600
Columbia Parkway	77,800
Kenilworth	746,400
Luce Line	125,000
Minnehaha Parkway	1,386,200
Northeast Diagonal	156,600
Ridgway Parkway	26,900
St. Anthony Parkway	209,400
Shingle Creek	146,600
Victory (Wirth) Memorial Parkway	524,200

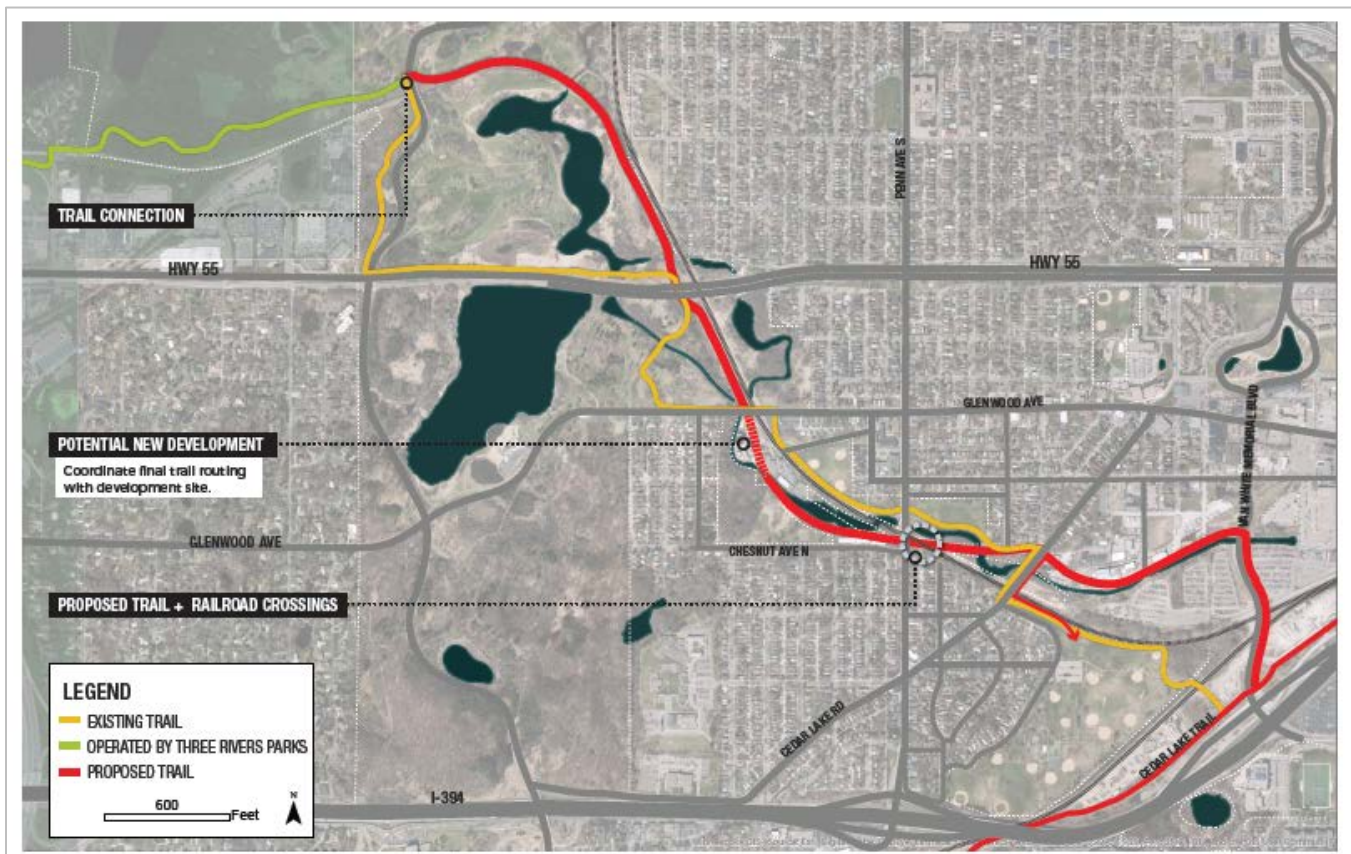
Development Concept

The primary feature of the Luce Line Regional Trail is the trail surface itself. A new 12-foot wide multi-use trail will run from Wirth Parkway to the Cedar Lake Trail where it intersects with Van White Boulevard. The new trail will run primarily in a corridor to be acquired from CP Rail and partly on industrial land currently redeveloping. The total length of new trail is approximately 2.32 miles. The general routing of the trail is described in the boundaries and acquisitions section above. This section describes several other categories of improvements.

Table 2: Regional Trail Cost Estimate

Item	Estimated cost	Notes
Acquire rail corridor	--	Acquisition cost not provided at this time, due to pending negotiation
Creek corridor enhancement	\$94,919	Eastern segment between Cedar Lake Rd. and Van White Blvd.
Paved multi-use trail	\$2,232,415	Approximately 2.3 miles
Paved pedestrian trail	\$151,870	Eastern segment between Cedar Lake Rd. and Van White Blvd.
Renovate 4 existing rail road bridges	\$911,220	
Develop 2 new bridges on Bryn Mawr spur	\$455,610	
Signalized trail crossing of BNSF corridor	\$227,805	
Misc. signs, trees, furniture	\$81,477	
TOTAL (less acquisition of rail corridor)	\$4,155,315	

Figure 5: Proposed Plan: Luce Line Regional Trail



Crossings and Bridges:

- Bassett’s Creek bridge within Wirth Park: renovation of existing railroad bridge for trail use
- Golf path underpasses within Wirth Park: renovation of existing railroad bridges for trail use
- Bassett’s Creek (old channel) bridge north of Highway 55: renovation of existing railroad bridge for trail use
- Highway 55 underpass: limited trail-related improvements under existing bridge
- Glenwood Avenue underpass: limited trail-related improvements under existing bridge
- Bassett’s Creek bridge near Fruen Mill: renovation of existing railroad bridge for trail use
- BNSF railroad crossing: at-grade pedestrian bicycle crossing with safety approaches and possible signalization
- Bassett’s Creek bridge at eastern end of Bassett’s Creek Park: renovation of existing railroad bridge for trail use
- Cedar Lake Road underpass: limited trail-related improvements under existing bridge
- Van White bridge: limited trail-related improvements on existing Van White Boulevard bridge

Connecting Trails and Split Corridors:

- Eastern Bassett’s Creek Park: trail connection ramp to Chestnut Avenue, similar to existing condition for current Luce Line Trail corridor.
- Bryn Mawr Park connection: east of Cedar Lake Road, a critical trail spur will cross Bassett’s Creek on a new bridge, ascend a slope to an MPRB-owned parcel, then cross BNSF railroad on another new bridge into Bryn Mawr meadows. The railroad corridor is lower than both MPRB parcels, so this second bridge will have level approaches.

- Within the eastern segment between Cedar Lake Road and Van White Boulevard, the pedestrian and bicycle corridor will separate. The bicycle corridor will stay on the northern side of the creek, while the pedestrian corridor will cross over the creek on the bridge leading to Bryn Mawr, follow the south side of the creek, and cross back over near Van White Boulevard.

Trailside Amenities:

- Directional signage included at each end of trail corridor, at spur trails, and where trail turns to follow Van White Boulevard
- Trailside seating within the Bassett's Creek Park segment adjacent to the creek

Conflicts

Two potentially significant conflicts exist related to the development concept for the Luce Line: land ownership and commercial developments. Ownership of the CP Rail line is critical to the implementation of the new Luce Line corridor, and the railroad has expressed interest in selling. However, coordination with the railroad has not yet begun and unknowns always exist in such conversations. To resolve this potential conflict, MPRB plans to convene a coalition of buyers—including public and private sector entities—to work collaboratively on acquisition.

Two commercial development areas flank the proposed route of the Luce Line: the Fruen Mill area near Glenwood Avenue and the Bassett's Creek Valley area between Cedar Lake Road and Van White Memorial Drive. Implementation of the Luce Line through these areas will require coordination with two different developers working in these areas. MPRB has established positive working relationships with each and has even collaborated and provided input on an overall development plan for the Bassett's Creek area. Both developers, in fact, are likely participants in the coalition of buyers described above. As these projects do develop, MPRB plans to retain its seat at the table (along with the City of Minneapolis) to ensure desired trail connections are accomplished.

Public Services

The Luce Line is located in a developed urban area with extensive public services. No additional public services are necessary for the implementation of the trail.

Operations

As an existing part of the well-established Minneapolis park system, the Luce Line is already being maintained as part of MPRB's overall budget. This will continue under the new development concept. Because the trail length is roughly the same as the existing trail, MPRB expects a generally similar maintenance need and cost. All MPRB's ordinances will apply to the revised trail alignment, as they do today.

Public Engagement and Participation

Extensive community and partner engagement took place with the Luce Line Regional Trail, as part of the North Service Area Master Planning effort. The engagement process unfolded over more than 18 months and involved a wide variety of initiatives, more than 100 direct engagement events, and personal contacts with thousands of park users and area residents. The development plan was finally vetted in a series of public Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings in June and July of 2018, which resulted in a recommendation by the CAC to support the development concept. The summary of the engagement process is included in the project introduction section.

Within that overall process the Luce Line was included in one of the targeted work groups. The Bassett's Creek Valley Work Group convened multiple times to help envision and design the Luce Line

and associated neighborhood parks. The community had direct involvement with the project throughout the design process.

Partner agencies were consulted throughout the planning process and comments were incorporated into the development concept as it evolved over 18 months. Specifically, MPRB consulted with the City of Minneapolis (multiple departments including transportation, planning, and economic development), Bassett Creek Watershed Management Commission, Three Rivers Park District, and Metro Transit.

Public Awareness

MPRB will make the public aware of improvements to the Luce Line over time through e-notifications, press releases, direct communication with community engagement partners, and on-site signage. MPRB has a robust notification process and will apply this notification infrastructure to the Luce Line. Furthermore, MPRB is initiating a project (funded by Parks and Trails Legacy dollars) to better connect transit riders to the regional parks. This project may include on-transit advertising and mapping, at-station information, and/or ambassadors. It is expected to roll out in 2019 and 2020.

Accessibility

The new Luce Line trail will be constructed to meet or exceed ADA standards, as applied to accessible routes, trailside infrastructure, restrooms, and other regional trail amenities. The development concept will in fact allow for improved accessibility by eliminating the multiple on-street segments, street crossings, and curb ramps. A more streamlined route that retains neighborhood connections will be a vast improvement in accessibility over existing conditions.

Review by Other Council Divisions

Transportation – Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (Steve Elmer 651-602-1756) – No additional comments.

Community Development – Environment and Surface Water Management (Jim Larsen 651-602-1159) – No additional comments.

Environmental – Sewers (Roger Janzig 651-602-1119) – The construction of any new or updating of existing trails may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council Interceptors in multiple locations. To assess the potential impacts to our interceptor system, prior to initiating any proposed project, preliminary plans should be sent to Tim Wedin, Engineering Services Assistant Manager (651-602-4571), at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services for review and comment.

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – MPRB should continue to work with the Green Line Extension project office regarding the Luce Line and the Green Line Extension LRT station.

Transportation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1724) – The master plan should acknowledge that trail Segments 1, 2, and 3 that follow the CP Rail line are included on the Regional Bicycle Transportation Network as a Tier 2 alignment. This designation in the *Transportation Policy Plan* includes this as a regional priority for investment via regional transportation funds.

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Michael Larson 651-602-1407) – The proposed trail and alignment are consistent with regional Land Use Policies in *Thrive MSP 2040*. In particular, the master plan implements policies related to Orderly and Efficient Land Use (aligning infrastructure and coordination with redevelopment planning), Natural Resources Protection (coordination with Bassett Creek improvements), and Access, Mobility, and Transportation Choice (providing connections integrated with other transportation and providing access to regional destinations including job centers and open space resources).