

# Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: August 5, 2021

For the Community Development Committee meeting of August 16, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of August 25, 2021

**Subject:** Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment, Ramsey County, Review File No. 50042-2

**MPOSC District, Member:** District F, Cecily Harris

**Council District, Member:** District 11, Susan Vento

**Policy/Legal Reference:** Minnesota Statutes § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*: Chapter 5, Planning Strategy 1

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

**Division/Department:** Community Development/ Regional Planning

### Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve Ramsey County’s Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment.
2. Inform Ramsey County that, when Segment 4 alignments have been finalized, it must submit a future master plan amendment to update regional trail boundaries and acquisition costs.
3. Require Ramsey County, prior to initiating any new development of the regional trail corridor, to send preliminary plans to the Metropolitan Council’s Environmental Services Division Assistant Manager.

### Background

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail is located near the center of the Regional Park System, extending 13.3 miles from downtown Saint Paul to County Road J at the northern border of Ramsey County (Figure 1).

Currently seven miles of the trail are constructed from Fourth Street East in St. Paul to Buerkle Road in Maplewood. The southern portion of the trail is under the jurisdiction of the City of Saint Paul. From Larpenteur Avenue to its future terminus at the border with Washington County, the trail is under the jurisdiction of Ramsey County (Figure 2).

The Ramsey County portion of the Trail is the focus of this master plan amendment; segments 2B, 2C, 3 and 4 (Figure 3). This master plan amendment does not address the City of Saint Paul’s portion of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail; segments 1 and 2A.

Collectively, Segments 2A, 2B, and 2C are the “Rush Line Collaboration.” Segment 3 is the “Buerkle Road to White Bear Avenue Extension.” Segment 4 is the “Future Extension Segment.” More information on individual segments can be found in the Development Concept section of the Analysis.

The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department is seeking to amend the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan to accurately reflect boundary adjustments, long-term acquisition, natural resource improvements, public participation, equity analysis, trail corridor realignment, long-term regional trail improvements, and coordination with Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) improvements.

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment updates the 1993 Ramsey County Master Plan for the Burlington Northern Regional Trail Corridor. It is written to fulfill the Metropolitan Council's requirements for regional linking trails as outlined in the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* and to meet the expectations set forth in the 2018 Ramsey County Parks and Recreation System Plan.

### **Rationale**

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, particularly Planning Strategy 1 (Master plan requirements) and Planning Strategy 2 (Enhanced multimodal access).

### **Thrive Lens Analysis**

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment advances the Thrive outcome of Livability by increasing access to nature and outdoor recreation, which enhances quality of life in the region. Also, it seeks to advance the Thrive outcome of Stewardship, responsibly managing our region's finite resources, including natural resources, and leveraging transit investments with higher expectations for land use.

### **Funding**

The total estimated cost of acquisitions in Segments 3 and 4 of the regional trail is between \$71,000 and \$421,000. The variability in this estimate is because the final alignment of Segment 4 has not yet been established. The total estimated cost associated with the construction and maintenance of Segments 3 and 4 is \$15,810,000. The total estimated annual operating budget is \$64,400.

Altogether, the total estimated cost associated with this master plan amendment is between \$15,945,400 and \$16,295,400.

### **Known Support / Opposition**

Resolutions or letters of support have been obtained from the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners; the cities of White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, and Gem Lake; and White Bear Township (Attachments 1-6).

The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Commission provided a letter of support and concern (Attachment 7), supporting the approved plan but raising concerns with "the historical planning and community engagement process."

Figure 1: Bruce Vento Regional Trail (Ramsey County) location in the Regional Parks System

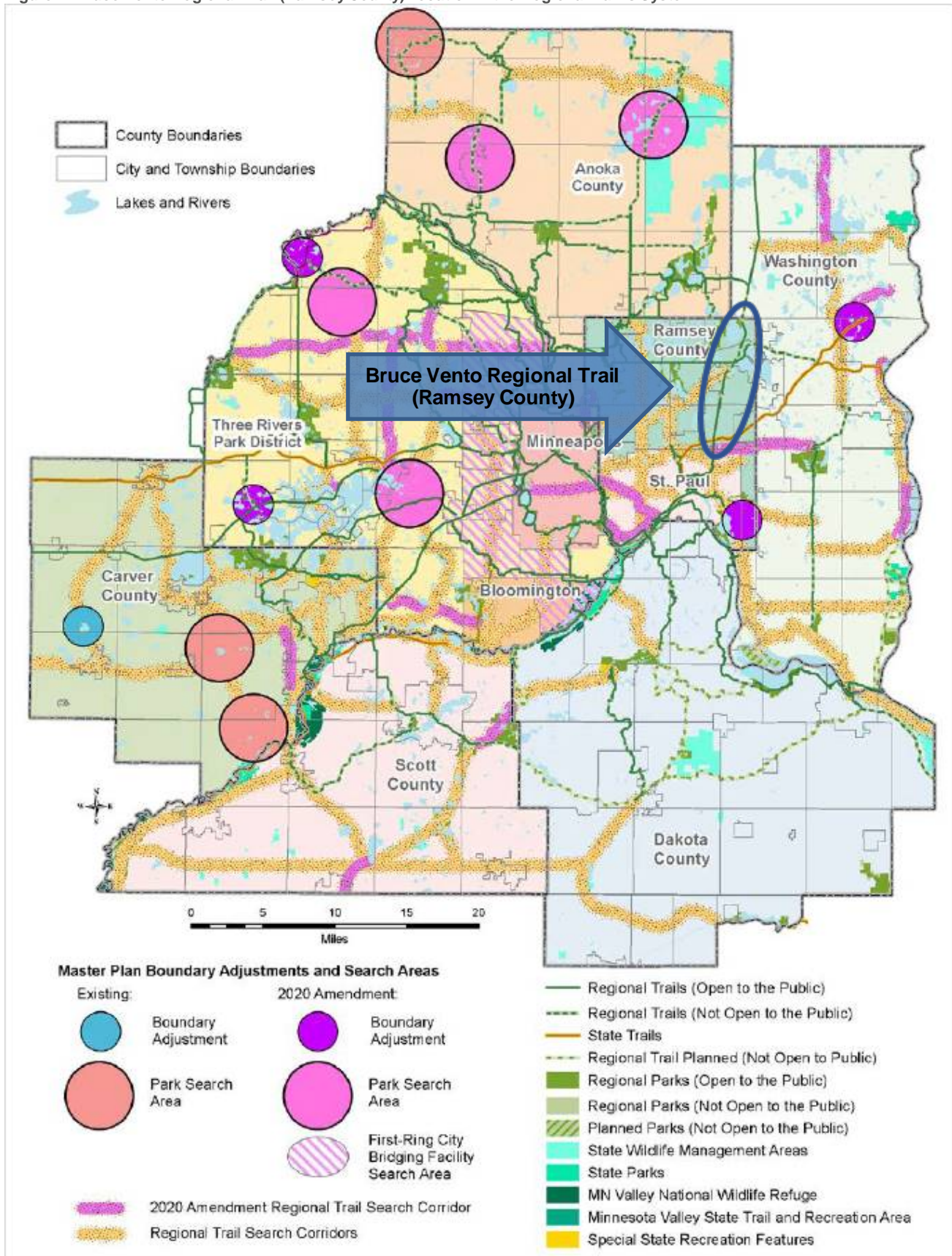




Figure 2: Regional Parks System, Ramsey County – Bruce Vento Regional Trail location

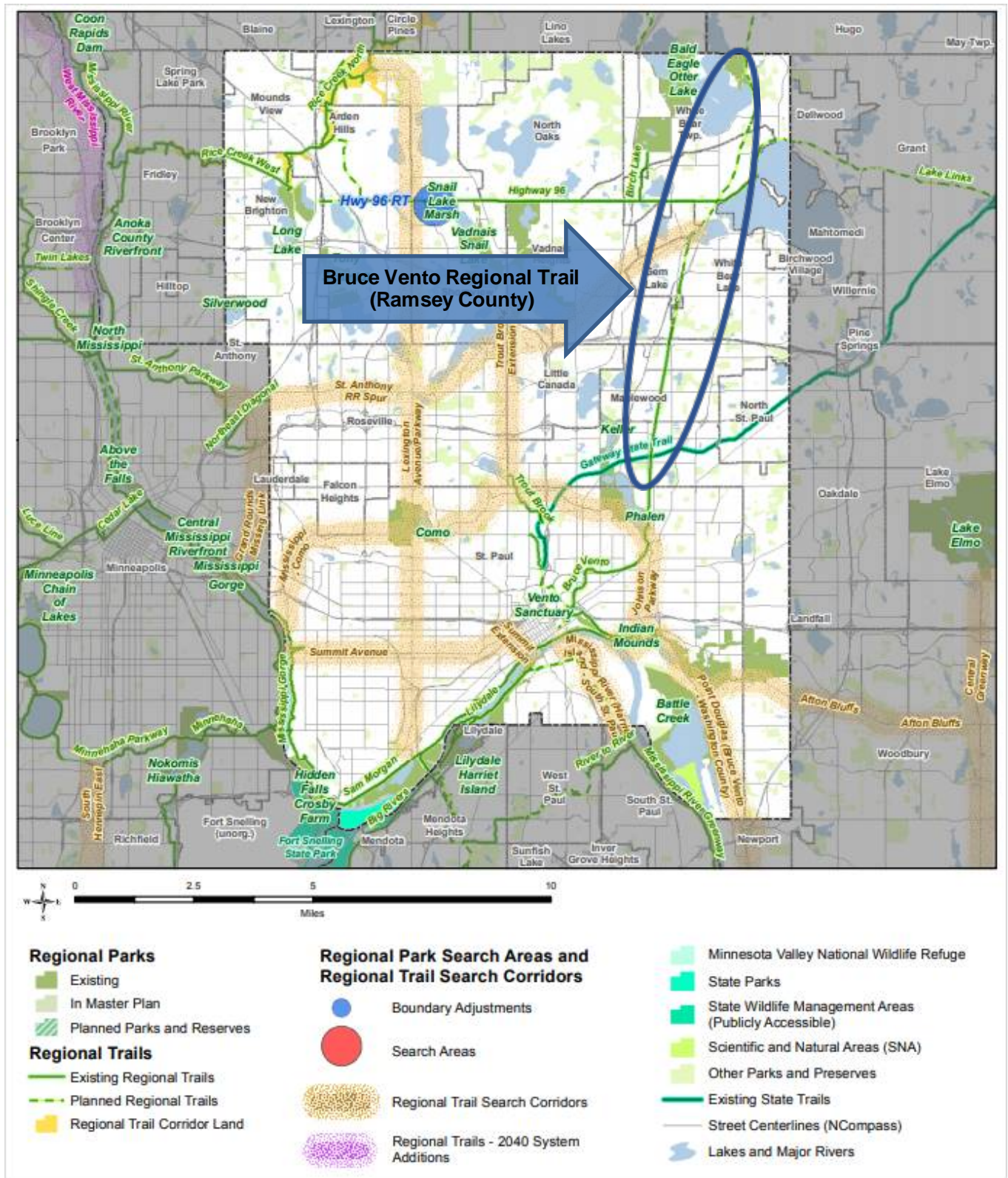


Figure 3: Bruce Vento Regional Trail Alignment and Segment Status (MPA Fig. 1)





## Analysis

Planning Strategy 1 of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan requires that master plans for linking regional trails address 11 items: boundaries and acquisition costs, demand forecast, development concept, conflicts, public services, operations, partner engagement, public engagement and participation, equity analysis, public awareness, and accessibility. The following analyzes the master plan amendment against those requirements.

### Boundaries and Acquisition Costs

Acquisitions are anticipated only within Segments 3 and 4. Within Segment 3, portions of one parcel are anticipated to be acquired to construct the proposed trail.

Parts of property owned by entities other than Ramsey County are anticipated to require agreements, ownership transfer via turnback processes, or permits to construct Segment 3 improvements. Those entities include Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad, Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES; portion of a lift station parcel), City of White Bear Lake (portions of Willow Lake Marsh), White Bear Township (portion of old township hall site), and right-of-way on city streets.

As Segment 4 (Future Extension Segment) planning only recently established a preferred conceptual alignment, the need to acquire specific parcels is undetermined at this time. When Segment 4 alignments have been finalized, the County will need to update the Master Plan to reflect the preferred alignment and related information, including boundaries and acquisition costs.

As with Segment 3, portions of property owned by entities other than Ramsey County Parks and Recreation are anticipated to require agreements, ownership transfer through turnback processes, or permits to construct the Segment 4 improvements. Those entities include White Bear Lake Area School District, White Bear Township, and right-of-way on city streets.

Temporary construction easements may be needed for construction of the trail. These will be identified as the projects approach construction.

Table 1: Acquisition Costs by Segment (MPA Table 4, pg. 58)

Segment	Property	Ownership	Amount
3	1755 Buerkle Road, White Bear Lake	Private	\$16,000
3	Lift Station Parcel	MCES	\$0
3	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad	BNSF	\$2,500 <sup>1</sup>
3	Portions of Willow Lake Marsh, Hoffman Rd.	City of White Bear Lake	\$0
3	Portion of Old Township Hall Site	White Bear Township	\$0
	<b>Total</b>		<b>\$18,500</b>
4	Private Parcels	Multiple	\$50,000-\$400,000
4	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad		\$2,500
	<b>Total</b>		<b>\$52,500-\$402,500<sup>2</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Trail construction in BNSF property will be by permit/lease, actual costs anticipated to be related to licensing process vs. easement acquisition and will not be based on square foot.

<sup>2</sup> Acquisition costs for Segment 4 will be dependent on the final route selected north of Whitaker Street. This value will be examined further in depth as part of studies beginning in 2021 to determine acquisition needed.

### *Demand Forecast*

Park and trail usage in Ramsey County and the greater metropolitan area is growing. As of 2018, Bruce Vento Regional Trail saw 279,560 visits<sup>3</sup>, which is expected to increase once the trail is fully built. The trail extension to the north of Buerkle Road to County Road J will add multiple trail connections to other Ramsey County Parks and Recreation facilities, which will increase access and usage for multiple communities within Ramsey County and for other users of the regional park system. Additionally, the Metropolitan Council projects an 8.2% increase in population in Ramsey County from 550,120 in 2020 to 595,220 in 2040. The growing population will be served by the enhanced trail connectivity of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

### *Development Concept*

#### **Rush Line Collaboration (Segments 2A, 2B, 2C)**

Portions of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor will run adjacent to the proposed Rush Line BRT. From Arcade Street to Larpenteur Avenue (Segment 2A), the existing trail facilities will be removed and realigned. This portion of the trail is not under the jurisdiction of Ramsey County Parks and Recreation.

From Larpenteur Avenue to Buerkle Road (Segment 2B), the trail will be reconstructed and realigned and is under the jurisdiction of Ramsey County Parks and Recreation. Further north, from Whitaker Street to White Bear Avenue (Segment 2C), a Rush Line BRT station will be constructed alongside a short segment of new trail which will connect to future trail facilities.

In order to facilitate construction of the dedicated BRT guideway within the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority corridor segments 2B and 2C, the regional trail will need to be reconstructed in a new alignment within the existing corridor as a part of the Rush Line Project. These portions of the trail corridor will be reconstructed to current design standards and will provide convenient access to adjacent BRT stations.

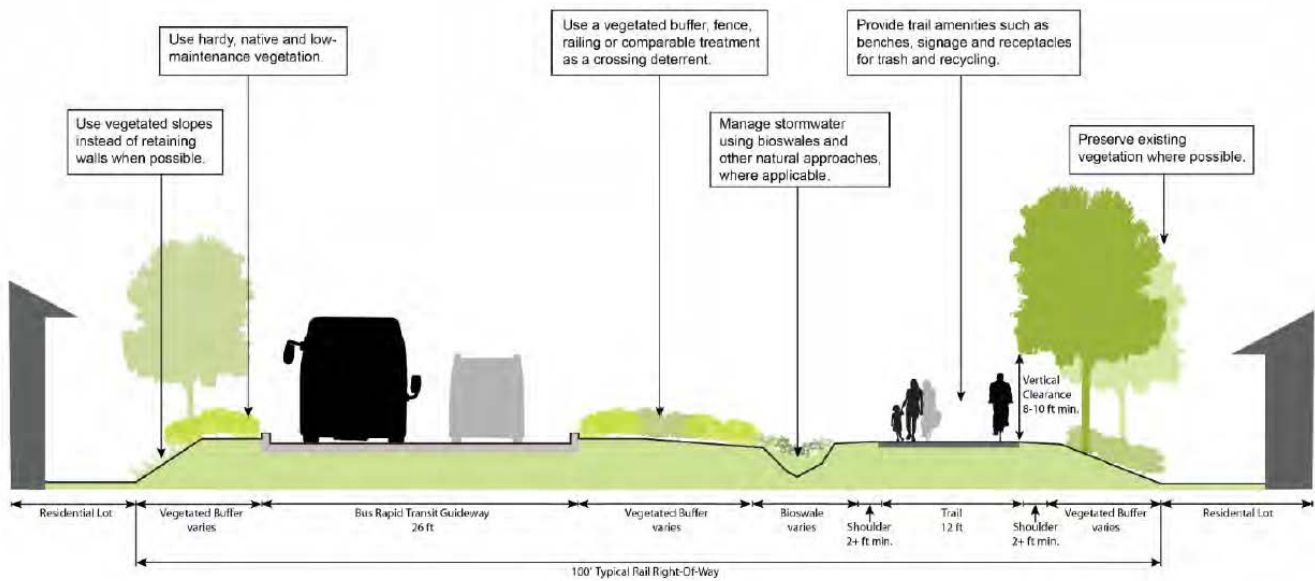
Access includes improved pedestrian crossings and access points, reconstruction of existing trail crossings, updated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) infrastructure, new trail amenities, and related improvements such as revegetation of disturbed landscaping and stormwater management facilities. These plans also include a potential trailhead facility south of the Frost Avenue Station. If this concept is advanced, a partnership with the City of Maplewood and Rush Line BRT will be necessary.

The master plan amendment includes a “Design Guide Section Showing the Typical Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Corridor” (Figure 4). As the plan amendment notes, the inclusion of the graphic is only intended for reference and the plan amendment does not alter the design intent of the Rush Line BRT segments. The graphic shows a typical section, which may vary through the corridor depending on existing conditions and as plans for the Rush Line BRT advance.

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<sup>3</sup> From the Metropolitan Council's 2018 Use Estimates for the Regional Park System.

Figure 4: Design Guide Section Showing the Typical Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Corridor (MPA Figure 19)



**Buerkle Road to White Bear Avenue Extension (Segment 3)**

Segment 3 is a 2.7-mile segment being designed and constructed separately from the reconstructed and new Bruce Vento Regional Trail implementation as part of the Rush Line BRT project. This project is led by Ramsey County Parks and Recreation and extends from Buerkle Road to White Bear Avenue. This project is the first of two segments to eliminate half of the remaining six-mile trail gap in the regional trail system and will also set the stage for future connections north of Whitaker Street to County Road J to connect to the Hardwood Creek Trail.

Between Buerkle Road and White Bear Avenue, detailed design has been completed. This segment of the trail is planned for construction in 2024 or 2025 depending on funding availability. The proposed trail will use the approximately 0.5 mile of existing BNSF railway right-of-way with the remaining portion constructed within Ramsey County right-of-way.

The trail is planned to be a 12-foot-wide trail section consisting of bituminous pavement, trail underpasses utilizing existing roadway bridges at County Road E and Highway 61 and one at-grade crossing at Scheuneman Road. The design includes narrowing of segments of Hoffman Road to accommodate the trail and boulevard. The project includes fencing, landscaping and restoration, wayfinding and safety signage, and site amenities. The project is intended to be constructed in conjunction with Rush Line BRT improvements which will include intersection safety improvements at Buerkle Road, Hoffman Road/Highway 61 and the at-grade crossing of the BNSF tracks at Whitaker Street.

Trail amenities envisioned as a part of Segment 3 construction include wayfinding, wayside rest areas with benches and trash receptacles, landscaping for buffers, and vegetation replacement.

A potential trailhead location is envisioned near County Road E and Hoffman Road in conjunction with a City of White Bear Lake redevelopment. Another potential trailhead location has been identified near Goose Lake in conjunction with redevelopment of a vacant White Bear Township parcel. Ramsey County will continue to work with local cities and the township on potential planning and design of future trailheads.

During the design process, efforts were made to provide a trail that meets ADA and other accessibility



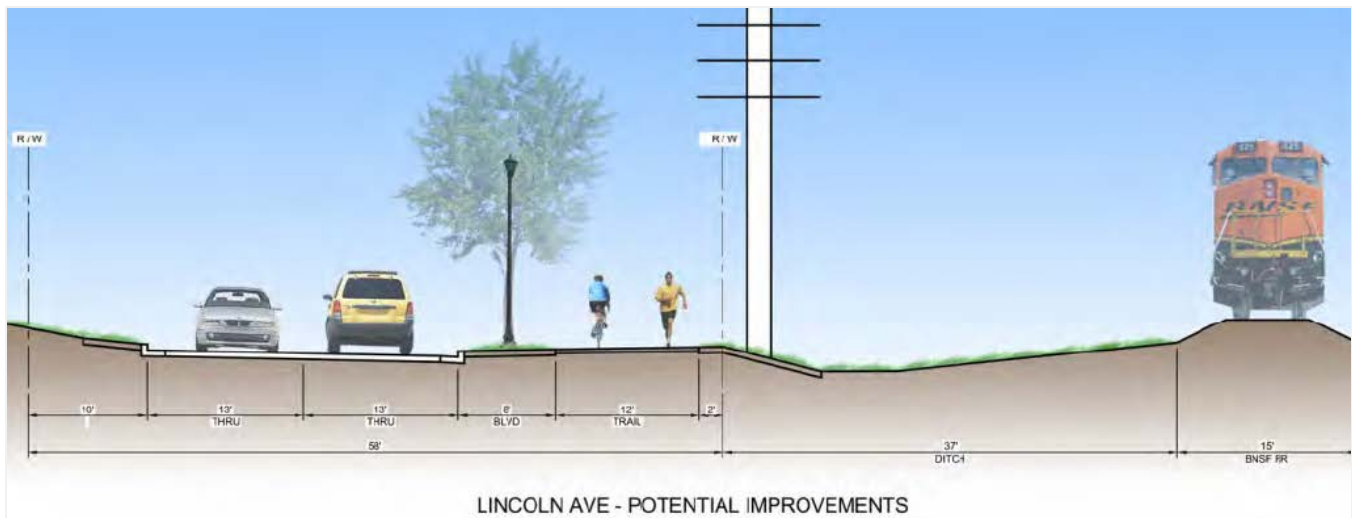
goals, reduces impacts to vegetation and other natural features, provides interesting and diverse trail user experiences, and provides opportunities to improve adjacent community infrastructure that includes drainage and roadways.

#### **Future Extension (Segment 4)**

Ramsey County Parks and Recreation is currently planning the second of two segments to eliminate the six-mile trail gap in the regional trail system as described in Segment 3. It extends from Whitaker Street in White Bear Lake north to County Road J.

For a short length of this trail segment from Whitaker Street to Highway 96, the Bruce Vento Regional Trail is planned to be located within City of White Bear Lake Lincoln Avenue right-of-way, and adjacent to the BNSF railroad corridor (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Section Illustrating the Bruce Vento Trail within the Lincoln Ave Right-of-Way Between Whitaker Street and Highway 96 (MPA Fig.25)**



For the remainder of this segment from Highway 96 to County Road J, eight different routes and alignments were studied over a two-year period. A major component of this study was investigating the feasibility of locating the Bruce Vento Regional Trail within or adjacent to the BNSF right-of-way and Highway 61 corridor through the heart of downtown White Bear Lake, a consistent choice expressed by many in the community. Numerous design alternatives were prepared for work sessions with BNSF railway staff and conversations with City of White Bear Lake staff related to potential public and private property impacts. Two primary routes were studied adjacent to the Highway 61 corridor, one located on the west side and the other on the east side of Highway 61. Both alternatives revealed numerous conflicts with BNSF right-of-way, City of White Bear Lake roadway, and adjacent private property improvements. It was concluded that there were no feasible solutions for locating the trail within the BNSF right-of-way or the Highway 61 corridor.

Based on community outreach feedback, accessibility, trail user experience considerations, cost of construction and overall feasibility, "Route 1" was determined as the preferred route.

Route 1 was identified as the preferred route through the downtown area for connection to Hugo Road, extending along Bald Eagle Avenue to Bald Eagle Boulevard to Taylor Avenue, and making its final connection into Hugo Road. Buffalo Street could be considered as an alternative trail corridor for connection onto Hugo Road depending on the possible conversion of Bald Eagle Boulevard into a one-way street. In the event Bald Eagle Boulevard is not feasible, an alternate sub-route utilizing White Bear

Schools property, Division Avenue, and Park Avenue can be utilized to connect the trail from Bald Eagle Avenue to Hugo Road.

Funding has not been secured for the implementation of Segment 4, however Ramsey County Parks and Recreation is actively exploring potential funding opportunities to construct all or portions of Segment 4.

### *Conflicts*

No major conflicts will affect the viability of the master plan amendment recommendations. Adjacent land uses include residential, commercial, and railroad. Ongoing coordination with the railroads, road authorities, and private properties will be necessary in order to complete the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

Final design of Segment 3 will need to be approved by the BNSF railway in order to proceed with construction. Recently, BNSF has provided correspondence to Ramsey County documenting their conditional approval of the regional trail being located adjacent to and within the rail right-of-way. Segment 4 includes an at-grade crossing of a Canadian Pacific track as well as a section of alignment within BNSF corridor along Hugo Road. Coordination with the railroads will be necessary to finalize plans for this segment.

The trail design for portions of Segment 3 and 4 located within local road right-of-way (Hugo Road, Taylor Avenue, West Bald Eagle Boulevard, Bald Eagle Avenue, Lincoln Avenue and Hoffman Road) will need to be reviewed and approved by the appropriate roadway jurisdiction (Ramsey County, White Bear Lake, White Bear Township) as the trail construction will require narrowing of some streets. In addition, the Segment 4 alignment may require conversion of Bald Eagle Boulevard from two-way traffic to one-way traffic to facilitate trail construction to desired standards. Ramsey County is in discussion with the City of White Bear Lake and White Bear Township regarding potential turnback of Hoffman Road and Bald Eagle Boulevard which may impact the design of the trail.

Segment 3 includes only one private property easement to construct and initial discussions with that owner indicate a willingness to cooperate on the project. As design progresses on Segment 4, additional easements with private property owners may be required in areas to facilitate desired trail construction.

### *Public Services*

The construction of segments 2B, 2C, 3, and 4 of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail all include significant coordination with County and local road authorities as well as the Metropolitan Council in order to incorporate roadway modifications, (narrowing, realignments, conversion to one-way) that will be necessary to provide the intended physical space for the trail. The trail construction will also include modifications to existing storm drainage infrastructure and construction of new storm drainage infrastructure in conjunction with roadway modifications. Stormwater quality infrastructure will also need to be incorporated into Segments 2B, 2C, 3, and 4. Construction plans will be developed and coordinated with the appropriate road authorities to ensure that completed roadway infrastructure meets the required standards and maintenance operations are established for roadway, drainage, and trail.

### *Partner Engagement*

Ramsey County staff maintains working relationships with public agencies with jurisdiction over the trail corridor including the cities of Saint Paul, Maplewood, White Bear Lake, and Vadnais Heights, and White Bear Township. Planning activities related to the trail corridor are communicated with the appropriate agency staff for input and feedback. Ramsey County also coordinates with the Minnesota

Department of Natural Resources relative to the intersection of the Gateway State Trail and Bruce Vento Regional Trail in Maplewood, and watershed organizations with jurisdiction over construction activities.

Ramsey County staff served as members of the Rush Line Project Management Team, participating in decision-making on Rush Line issues, specifically those that required coordination with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail planning and design. More information on coordinated engagement activities may be found in the Public Engagement and Participation section below.

As a part of the development and refinement of plans for Segment 3, Ramsey County convened a Project Management Team which consisted of representatives from the cities of White Bear Lake and Vadnais Heights, White Bear Township, BNSF Railway, Ramsey County Public Works, and Rush Line leadership. This group provided feedback and direction on plan alignment alternatives, typical section details, and identified planned local projects for consideration in the design of Segment 3 of the trail.

The proposed trail alignment is adjacent to the existing BNSF Railway-owned railroad for the entire length of Segment 3 and approximately half the length of Segment 4. Ramsey County Parks and Recreation initiated meetings with BNSF Railway and Minnesota Commercial Railway representatives to discuss project issues, given the proximity of the proposed Bruce Vento Regional Trail to the railroad corridor. The first set of railroad engagement meetings were held from 2014 to 2016 as part of the preliminary design study. As part of later design meetings, four more meetings occurred with representative of Ramsey County public Works, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation, BNSF Railway, and Minnesota Commercial Railway in 2018 and 2019.

### *Public Engagement and Participation*

Public, stakeholder, and agency engagement for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail occurred over the development of multiple projects and planning studies over the course of several years. In general, the County's approach to public engagement focused on the following guiding principles:

- Direct engagement of the diverse communities living in the corridor
- Direct engagement with property owners that abut the existing and proposed regional trail corridor
- Direct engagement with businesses that abut the existing and proposed regional trail corridor

To achieve the public engagement goals, the project team actively reached out to the following communities:

- Hmong people (primarily living in Saint Paul and Maplewood)
- Latino people (primarily living in Saint Paul)
- Other communities of color
- Public housing residents
- Senior housing residents
- Trail users (commuters and recreational)
- Residents in White Bear Lake, White Bear Township, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights, and Gem Lake
- Businesses along the corridor
- Residential property owners along the corridor

### **Engagement Specific to Rush Line BRT Segments (Segments 2B, 2C)**

The Bruce Vento Trail project team coordinated engagement activities with Rush Line project staff to develop traditional engagement methods as well as methods tailored to each unique group above in the



segments that overlapped between projects. The project team has strived to connect with historically underrepresented communities living and working near the trail corridor. Historically underrepresented communities are those whose input has been disproportionately unheard in public decision making, including people of color, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes. The project team developed and prioritized events to attend using the following criteria:

- Equity
- Inclusivity
- Maximizing voices heard
- Geographic representation

The information gathered from this outreach provided the foundation for the development of the Ramsey County Rail Right-of-Way Design Guide document, which includes general to detailed design treatment objectives for both BRT and trail facilities. The following is a summary of findings from these engagement efforts which are incorporated into the master plan amendment:

- Prioritizing safety and security along the trail, particularly in locations where the trail is co-located with Rush Line BRT or the BNSF right-of-way.
- Support to maintain the natural character of the corridor (segments 2B, 3) including preservation of tree canopy and use of landscaping to provide as much separation from the BRT as possible.
- Using BNSF right-of-way and existing crossing structures (such as underpasses and crossing locations) to reduce the impact of realigned trail facilities, where feasible (Segment 3).
- Support for the advantages provided by connecting communities in northern Ramsey County to Saint Paul, both through a multimodal trail and through its connection with Rush Line BRT.
- Inclusion of screening fencing to both retain the natural character of the corridor and provide a buffer to adjacent residential properties (segments 2B, 3).

### **Engagement Specific to Other Segments of the Regional Trail (Segments 3, 4)**

While Segments 3 and 4 are separated into different design projects, engagement events were held in order to facilitate public input on both the current design project (Segment 3) and the future northern alignment to County Road J (Segment 4). Engagement events were held prior to the identification of Rush Line BRT station areas and included discussion of trail alignments between Buerkle Road and Highway 96. Ramsey County Parks and Recreation held two initial public open houses for the trail extension north of Buerkle Road alignment of Bruce Vento Regional Trail in May 2016. The public meetings offered an opportunity for residents and other stakeholders to provide input on the proposed alignments and design considerations related to a future extension of the regional trail.

When it became clear that the future Bruce Vento Regional Trail could not be constructed in railroad right-of-way due to the continued operation of BNSF rail north of Buerkle Road, engagement events were held to further refine alternative options for getting the trail to County Road J on alternative corridors. In 2018, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation initiated a planning study to refine alternative regional trail alignment corridors outside of the right-of-way and provide a basis for this master plan document. This second study was specific to the trail between Highway 96 and County Road J (Segment 4) and included two engagement meetings in October 2018.

The alignment of the future trail segment was further refined following the two rounds of 2018 engagement. Over the following year, the concept was further narrowed down to a single alignment following an additional open house in November 2019. The comments received in the final open house informed the preferred alignment, as well as two potential alternative alignments, for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

## *Equity Analysis*

In addition to addressing the Metropolitan Council's equity analysis requirement, the Bruce Vento Regional Trail will fulfil specific equity goals set forth by Ramsey County. The County recognizes its role and responsibility in advancing racial and health equity within the county. The Ramsey County Racial Equity Policy specifically aims to advance racial equity by taking the following action: "to apply an equity lens in all county programs, services, and decisions with an emphasis on transparency and inclusivity."

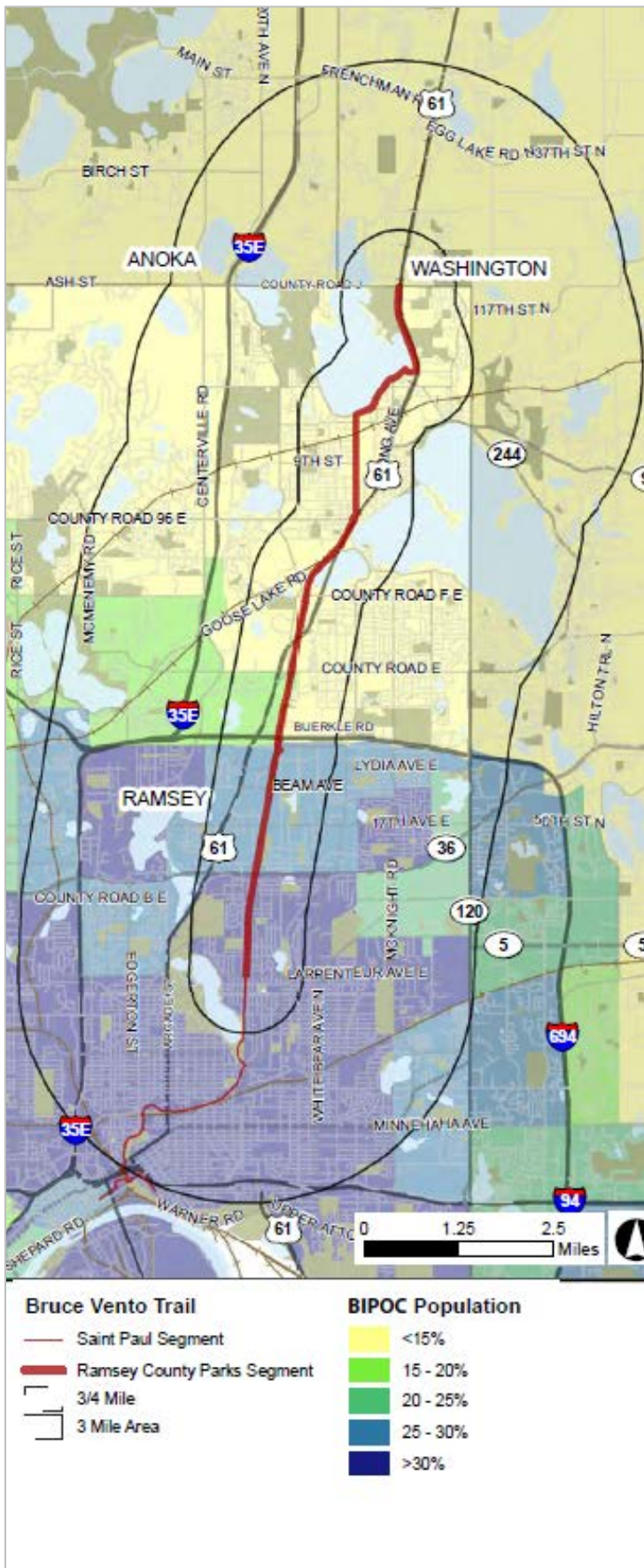
The Bruce Vento Regional Trail project included multiple rounds of community engagement in order to ensure that the future alignment of the trail will best meet the needs of the communities that that it seeks to serve. Preliminary studies for the regional trail also included identification of low-income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations within the County that will be served directly by the trail and the enhanced multimodal access to those communities that are more likely to not own a car. The trail will include links to local and regional park systems, in order to provide recreational access for residents whose mobility is limited by lack of vehicle ownership. The outcomes of engagement were accessible to the public and published on Ramsey County's website to generate transparency in the planning process.

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail benefits people with low-incomes, minority populations, populations with disabilities, youth, and elders by providing a safe, multi-use trail that connects housing, shopping, schools, jobs, services, and transit facilities. The trail corridor is primarily residential, with pockets of commercial and industrial developments at Frost Avenue, Highway 36, Highway 694, Buerkle Road, and near the Maplewood Mall area. Because the trail is directly linked to Rush Line BRT, the trail will provide enhanced transit access to communities and businesses in these job centers, as well as to the residential areas to the north and south.

The income in the area of the trail in Ramsey County is typically between \$50,000 and \$75,000, 50-75% of the area median income for the Twin Cities metropolitan area. In Saint Paul, the trail passes through a large job and activity center, as well as a large Area of Concentrated Poverty. The regional trail will enhance access for communities of low-income in Saint Paul with communities, jobs, and activity centers in northern Ramsey County. In White Bear Lake, the trail corridor includes median income slightly higher than Saint Paul. The trail's planned connections to Rush Line BRT and to the existing Metro Transit Route 265 (Saint Paul to White Bear Lake) will provide safe and comfortable bicycle and pedestrian network for transit riders in Ramsey County, which will benefit low-income populations more likely to rely on foot, bicycle, or transit to reach their destinations.

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail will provide significant multimodal access to BIPOC populations living near the proposed trail (Figure 6). The trail alignment includes two areas in White Bear Lake with higher-than-average shares of the population that are people of color. Additionally, the southern end of the trail at Larpenteur Avenue connects neighborhoods in northern Saint Paul with high concentrations of People of Color/BIPOC populations (greater than 30% of the population) to northern communities in northern Ramsey County. The full alignment of the regional trail will greatly enhance multimodal connectivity throughout the region, allowing communities in Saint Paul to reach Maplewood, White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, and White Bear Township on new facilities that enhance connectivity across the RBTN. The trail will provide long-term benefits to populations that are more likely to rely on public transit or multimodal facilities to reach their destinations.

Figure 6: Percentage of Black, Indigenous and People of Color Population near the Bruce Vento Regional Trail (MPA Fig. 16)





Disabled populations will benefit from the Bruce Vento Regional Trail with its close connection to the Rush Line BRT. High concentrations of people with disabilities live in White Bear Lake, which aligns with higher concentrations of elderly populations as described in the previous section. White Bear Lake census tract 404.01 identifies 15% of residents living with a disability. Rebuilding the trail in coordination with the Rush Line will improve transit access for those populations getting to and from Saint Paul and provide separated, ADA-accessible trail facilities for people with disabilities looking to access communities in northern White Bear Lake. There are ten Rush Line BRT station-stops that will be directly adjacent to the regional trail and at all of these locations enhanced pedestrian crossings, improved ADA infrastructure, and multimodal design will increase intermodal access throughout the region. These locations will include ADA improvements to ease the transition between the multimodal trail and transit facilities for users with disabilities.

The Bruce Vento Regional Trail will serve populations of all ages, from youth to elderly along the trail. There are a number of pockets with high populations of youth under 18 near the trail at its southern terminus at Larpenteur Avenue and another pocket near the commercial area adjacent to Highway 494. At its northern terminus, the project provides a connection for a substantial population of children in White Bear Township census tract 405.04, where 20% of residents are under age 15. The regional trail provides a safe walking and biking route to families and children within a half-mile of multiple schools including Willow Lane Elementary, White Bear Lake Area High School, White Bear Lake Area Middle School, Weaver Elementary, Frassati Catholic Academy, and Central Middle School.

There are also significant populations of elderly over 65 in White Bear Lake and White Bear Township, which will equally benefit from multimodal trail access in order to access the regional trail system and the Rush Line BRT. Several senior housing properties are located within a half-mile of the trail, including the Walker Methodist Pioneer Manor, the Waters of White Bear Lake, the Willow Wood Apartments, the Ecumen Seasons at Maplewood, and Gracewood Senior Living. Expanded trail and transit access provided by the trail will allow these populations more recreation opportunities and access to places to shop, work, and play.

### *Public Awareness*

The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation department will use a variety of tools to promote awareness and use of the regional trail system. Ramsey County Parks and Recreation will develop strategies to increase public awareness of the trail opening as well as how to access the trail by transit. This communication includes electronic and print communication methods such as websites, trail maps, brochures, email notification, Twitter, Facebook, and press releases to local newspapers.

Ramsey County Parks and Recreation will also collaborate with the cities of Saint Paul, Maplewood, Gem Lake, White Bear Lake, White Bear Township, and with the Metropolitan Council to promote the trails through their websites, newsletters, and brochures.

Wayfinding signage within the trail corridor will be updated as needed following the existing Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Department Wayfinding Master Plan for consistency with other regional parks and trails.

### *Accessibility*

Ramsey County Parks and Recreation is committed to providing universal accessibility at all trail facilities and are free of charge. Ramsey County is part of the Ramsey County Active Living Communities partnership which works to bring about and sustain changes in design, transportation, and public/private policies to cultivate and support a way of life that makes physical activity in Ramsey

County neighborhoods and communities safer and easier. Ramsey County uses the following to assess and implement these changes:

- ADA Transition & Implementation Plan - The department is implementing a plan to bring its sites and facilities into compliance with the requirements of Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990, and updated 2010 standards.
- Ramsey County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan - The Plan, developed through collaboration between Active Living Ramsey Communities, Ramsey County Parks and Recreation, and other county departments, municipalities, state agencies, residents, and other organizations, establishes a vision and strategy for providing safe and comfortable facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout the county.
- All-Abilities Transportation Network -The All-Abilities Transportation Network unifies regional transportation efforts under a shared vision and implementation strategy to realize an integrated and fully interconnected multi-modal transportation system providing safety, health, mobility and connectivity for residents of all abilities.

Bruce Vento Trail will be designed and built following the most current ADA standards in order to provide accessible trail facilities to all trail users.

### **Consistency with Other Council Policies and Systems**

**Community Development – Forecasts** (Todd Graham, 651-602-1322) – The regional trail master plan amendment is informed by, and appropriately cites and uses, the Metropolitan Council’s socioeconomic forecast and by recent usage of existing and connected trails.

**Community Development – Housing** (Ashleigh Johnson, 651-602-1106) – The master plan amendment is consistent with the Council’s 2040 Housing Policy Plan.

The plan amendment does not require the acquisition of private residential land that could affect single or multi-family housing. Within a half-mile of the trail there are at least fifteen affordable housing developments, primarily in the City of Saint Paul, serving various household income levels at or below 30-80% of Area Median Income. The proposed trail would directly affect various populations living in these developments; many residents have families with children, are seniors, live with disabilities, and/or need supportive services at their residence. The public engagement process detailed in the plan did a great job discussing how public housing, senior, and low-income groups were engaged, specifically where most of the affordable housing near the trail is located.

**Community Development – Local Planning Assistance** (Jake Reilly, 651-602-1822) – The Ramsey County Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment is complete and consistent with regional policy. Council staff appreciate the thoroughness of the plan’s outreach, engagement, and equity analysis.

**Community Development – Solar Energy and Natural Resources** (Cameran Bailey, 651-602-1212) – Council staff recommend that “elements such as trail/BRT separation, grade separation, landscaping, stormwater treatment, fencing, buffer/screening” be designed and structured to serve multiples of these purposes simultaneously. For example, trail/BRT grade separation designed as stormwater infrastructure amenity, such as a swale or raingarden, and the vegetation and landscaping selections being driven by the need for fencing, screening, or buffering.

Council staff also recommend the consideration of stand-alone, solar photovoltaic and battery storage, lighting installations for new and existing segments of the trail where new lighting is being considering

for construction. The installation of these systems is becoming more common in the Upper Midwest Region. They provide the opportunity to reduce short and long-term construction, operation, and maintenance costs, avoid greenhouse gas emissions, serve as a form of public education, and increase the operational resilience of Regional Parks and Trails.

Regarding the safety fencing between selected locations between the trail and BRT facilities, Council staff also recommend considering natural vegetative fencing in lieu of metal, plastic, or wood fencing materials where possible. This would support the public engagement finding “to maintain the natural character of the corridor (segments 2B, 3) including preservation of tree canopy and use of landscaping to provide as much separation from BRT as possible.”

Regarding trail amenities such as trash and recycling receptacles and benches, Council staff recommends attempting to source as many biodegradable, reusable, and recyclable materials sourced from within the metro region as possible. This provides great leadership and education to users and the public that protecting and preserving the natural environment and feel of the trail is also influenced by what materials and processes are used to construct and maintain the human and natural amenities of the trail.

**Environmental Services – Sewers** (Roger Janzig, 651-602-1119) – The construction of any new or updating of existing paths, trails, bridges, or any other construction project may have an impact on multiple Metropolitan Council interceptors. To assess the potential impacts to the Council’s interceptor system; prior to initiating any project, preliminary plans should be sent to Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services.

**Environmental Services – Water Resources** (Joe Mulcahy, 612-913-8864) – The plan is accurate and complete from a water resources perspective, and potential water resource impacts are addressed appropriately.





# Board of Commissioners Resolution B2021-112

15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55102  
651-266-9200

**Sponsor:** Parks & Recreation

**Meeting Date:** 5/18/2021

**Title:** Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment

**File Number:** 2021-242

**Background and Rationale:**

The Parks and Recreation department has prepared a master plan amendment for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail to accurately reflect boundary adjustment, long-term acquisition, natural resource improvements, public participation, equity analysis, trail corridor realignment, long-term regional trail improvements, and coordination with Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) improvements. The Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor extends 13.3 miles from downtown Saint Paul to County Road J at the northern border of Ramsey County. Currently seven miles of regional trail is constructed from Saint Paul to Buerkle Road in Maplewood.

This master plan amendment amends the 1993 Burlington Regional Trail Master Plan for the Ramsey County section of regional trail north of Larpenteur Street to County Road J. It is written to fulfill the Metropolitan Council requirements for regional linking trails as outlined in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan and to meet the expectations set forth in the 2018 Ramsey County Parks and Recreation System Plan.

The Parks and Recreation department worked in coordination with Metropolitan Council staff throughout the master plan amendment development process. If approved by the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners, the master plan amendment will be forwarded to the Metropolitan Council for review and approval. Once the master plan amendment is approved by the Metropolitan Council, costs associated with all improvements identified in the master plan amendment will be eligible for reimbursement through grants administered by the Metropolitan Council for Regional Parks and Trails.

For more information on the Bruce Vento Trail Master Plan, please visit:

<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/parks-recreation/parks-planning-projects/bruce-vento-regional-trail>

**Recommendation:**


The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners resolved to:

1. Approve the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment dated April 23, 2021.
2. Authorize submission of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment to the Metropolitan Council.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Reinhardt, seconded by Commissioner McDonough.

Motion passed.

Aye: - 7: Carter, Frethem, MatasCastillo, McDonough, McGuire, Ortega, and Reinhardt

By:   
Abby Goldsmith, Interim Chief Clerk - County Board

**RESOLUTION NO. 12640**

**RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE BRUCE VENTRO REGIONAL TRAIL  
MASTER PLAN 2020 UPDATE PREPARED BY RAMSEY COUNTY**

**WHEREAS**, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul established a joint master plan for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail in 1989; and

**WHEREAS**, Ramsey County has submitted a master plan update for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail master plan section between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J; and

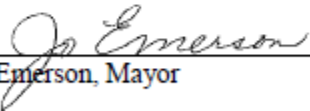
**WHEREAS**, the 2020 master plan update incorporates several changes to the regional trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J to address, boundary expansion and acquisition, trail alignment changes, long-term site and infrastructure improvements, recreation improvements, and additional recreational opportunities throughout the Ramsey County section of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of White Bear Lake staff have reviewed the plan and supports the master plan update for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J; and

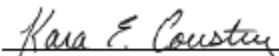
**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of White Bear Lake that the Council fully supports Ramsey County’s Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan update and encourages the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and Metropolitan Council to approve the Master Plan Update.

The foregoing resolution, offered by Councilmember **Biehn** and supported by Councilmember **Jones**, was declared carried on the following vote:

Ayes: Biehn, Edberg, Engstran, Jones, Walsh  
Nays: None  
Passed: October 13, 2020

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jo Emerson, Mayor

**ATTEST:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kara Coustry, City Clerk



## City of White Bear Lake

4701 Highway 61 • White Bear Lake, Minnesota 55110

Phone (651) 429-8526 • Fax (651) 429-8500

[www.whitebearlake.org](http://www.whitebearlake.org)

October 13, 2020

Scott Yonke, Director of Planning and Development  
Ramsey County Parks and Recreation  
2015 Van Dyke Street  
Maplewood, MN 55109

RE: 2020 Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan update

Dear Mr. Yonke:

This letter is to share our support for Ramsey County Parks and Recreation's plan to extend the Bruce Vento Regional Trail north of Highway 96 on Bald Eagle Avenue, around Bald Eagle Lake to the County's northern limits at County Road J. Staff believes this proposed trail improvement project will be of tremendous benefit to the community and will help create a connected and safe regional recreation and transportation system that serves all modes of transport.

The 13-mile planned regional trail corridor extends from the east side of downtown St. Paul to the north County line in White Bear Township spanning through the cities of Saint Paul, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, White Bear Lake and White Bear Township. The Ramsey County portion of the regional trail between Larpentuer Avenue to County Road J has approximately 6 miles of undeveloped trail north of Buerkle Road. This undeveloped section is a critical trail gap for the northern communities of Ramsey County.

This project will set the stage for future connections north of Highway 96 to County Road J, provide connections to the Highway 96 Regional Trail, Lakes Line Regional Trail, South Shore Trail, and will provide a future connection to the Hardwood Creek Trail at County Road J. This project will also complete a major gap in the National US Bike Route 41 (USBR 41) for connections north of Ramsey County to the Canadian border, since the Bruce Vento Regional Trail is the designated USBR 41 route through Ramsey County. Another important aspect for this project is providing critical pedestrian connections and removing significant barriers to the proposed Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) between Buerkle Road and Highway 96. The Bruce Vento Trail will provide pedestrian access to these station stops

The trail improvement project is extremely important to the County and Regional system, and is also unanimously supported by the White Bear Lake City Council (Resolution of Support enclosed).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen Hiniker". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ellen Hiniker  
City Manager

**CITY OF VADNAIS HEIGHTS  
COUNTY OF RAMSEY  
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

**RESOLUTION NO. 20-10-156 D**

**RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT FOR THE BRUCE VENTO REGIONAL TRAIL  
MASTER PLAN UPDATES**

**WHEREAS**, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul established a joint master plan for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail in 1989; and

**WHEREAS**, Ramsey County has submitted a master plan update, attached as Exhibit A, to update the Bruce Vento Regional Trail master plan section between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2020 master plan update incorporates several changes to the regional trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J to address, boundary expansion and acquisition, trail alignment changes, long-term site and infrastructure improvements, recreation improvements, and additional recreational opportunities throughout the Ramsey County section of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Vadnais Heights staff have reviewed the revised master plan and supports the update for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of Vadnais Heights, Minnesota, supports the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan update.

This Resolution was declared duly passed and adopted and was signed by the Mayor and attested to by the City Administrator this 6<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2020.

Attest:

  
Heidi Gunderson, Mayor

  
Kevin Watson, City Administrator

(SEAL)



City of Gem Lake  
 Ramsey County, Minnesota

RESOLUTION NO. 2020-0013  
 BRUCE VENTO TRAIL SUPPORT – CITY OF GEM LAKE

**WHEREAS**, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul established a joint master plan for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail in 1989; and

**WHEREAS**, Ramsey County has submitted a master plan update to update the Bruce Vento Regional Trail master plan section between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2020 master plan update incorporates several changes to the regional trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J to address, boundary expansion and acquisition, trail alignment changes, long-term site and infrastructure improvements, recreation improvements, and additional recreational opportunities throughout the Ramsey County section of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Gem Lake’s City Council have reviewed the plan and supports the master plan update for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J; and


**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of Gem Lake, Minnesota, supports the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Plan update within the City of Gem Lake.

The foregoing Resolution was offered by Councilor Lindner and was supported by Councilor Kury and was declared **adopted** based upon the following vote:

NAME	ARTIG-SWOMLEY	AMLEE	CACIOPPO	KUNY	LINDNER
<b>Vote</b>	yes	yes	Yes	Yes	yes

**Attest**

I, Gloria Tessier, the duly qualified Acting City Clerk for the City of Gem Lake, County of Ramsey, State of Minnesota, do hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution is a true and accurate representation of action taken by the City Council of the City of Gem Lake on the date first written.

	October 20, 2020
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GLORIA TESSIER, City Clerk



EXTRACT OF MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE TOWN  
BOARD OF THE TOWN OF WHITE BEAR, MINNESOTA,  
HELD ON NOVEMBER 2, 2020

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Regular meeting of the Town Board of the Town of White Bear, Minnesota was duly held at Heritage Hall in said Town on November 2, 2020.

The following members were present: Prudhon, Ruzek, McCune; and the following members were absent: None.

Supervisor McCune introduced the following Resolution and moved its adoption:

**RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE MASTER  
PLANNING OF THE BRUCE VENTO REGIONAL TRAIL**

WHEREAS, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul established a joint master plan for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail in 1989,

AND WHEREAS, Ramsey County has submitted a master plan update, attached as Exhibit A, to update the Bruce Vento Regional Trail master plan section between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J,

AND WHEREAS, the 2020 master plan update incorporates several changes to the regional trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J to address boundary expansion and acquisition, trail alignment changes, long-term site and infrastructure improvements, recreation improvements, and additional recreational opportunities throughout the Ramsey County section of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor,

AND WHEREAS, White Bear Township Board has reviewed the plan and supports master planning for the Bruce Vento Regional Trail corridor between Larpenteur Avenue and County Road J,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Board of the Town of White Bear, Minnesota that White Bear Township supports the Bruce Vento Regional Trail Master Planning.



March 17, 2021  
Ramsey County Board of Commissioners  
Ramsey County Board Office  
15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

RE: Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Commission Letter of Support and Concern - Bruce Vento Trail

Dear Commissioners:

The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Commission supports the Bruce Vento Master Plan Amendment. This support is for the approved plan - technically and physically. However, our commission members have concerns with the historical planning and community engagement process. Our Commission prides itself on being collaborative and deliberative, often coming to unanimous decisions. This Amendment has received a split vote of 4-2, with some reservations held by all members of our Commission.

We have strategic level concerns about the pattern of engagement, or lack of qualitative community engagement, on this and past planning efforts. We continue to have concerns related to equity at every level of the planning process. We recognize that many planning efforts require additional community engagement, after the approval of an initial master plan, and to be done prior to project completion. We further recognize that many projects pre-date recent progress in the County's furtherance of equity and enhanced community engagement reforms. However, it is critical for us to see acknowledgement and documentation on gaps and needed future engagement within presented materials, including planning efforts. We seek transparency on areas that are below expectations in equity and qualitative community engagement, as well as documentation and communication on these deficiencies. The community engagement process of the Bruce Vento Trail plan is insufficient compared to what we have been told are the Department's own practices and goals.

Since December 2019, we have been informed at commission meetings that the Parks Department has committed to implementing use of the GARE racial equity toolkit to assist with Equity Analysis of parks planning efforts. Implementation of the GARE toolkit has been on the Parks and Recreation Racial Equity Leadership Team (PRRELT) work plan since 2019. However, the GARE toolkit has not been utilized, consulted, or alluded to in the Bruce Vento Trail Master Plan Amendment document. The Equity Analysis of the plan is insufficient compared to what we have been told are the Department's own practices and goals.

While we understand that the Bruce Vento Trail planning and other similar projects have been in development for many years, and before these department level changes to equity and community engagement policies were adopted, we respectfully expect that plans we are asked to review and approve integrate these concepts. We do not expect immediate perfection - we do expect implementation and progress.

We ask that the following be documented in all planning efforts:

- **Acknowledge shortcomings.** We know that some planning efforts have been in progress for years. We want to see an open, honest, and transparent assessment of how planning differs from current equity and community engagement process expectations.
- **Mitigate.** We want to see, explicitly and concisely laid out in the planning reports, how the department is reconciling and mitigating the differences in how the planning was developed vs. current known and adopted best practice. Please articulate what actions the department has taken to ensure that the process is getting as close to best practice as reasonably possible?



- **Move Forward.** State specific actions to be taken as planning unfolds to conduct equity analysis review utilizing the GARE tool kit and current known best practices regarding qualitative community engagement as projects proceed towards completion .

We wish to see movement and progress on equity goals and qualitative community engagement in every planning effort. It is our vision and desire to work with the parks and recreation department on plans and projects to support the department in achieving their goals. We hope you agree and will join us in this vision.

Respectfully,

The Ramsey County Parks and Recreation Commission

Melissa Wenzel (District 6)

Leah Shepard (At-Large)

Metric Giles (District 4)

Brian Tempas (District 3)

Jordan Nelson (District 2)

Michael Berger (At-Large)

Absent- Candy Peterson (District 7)