

Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission

Meeting date: September 5, 2019

For the Community Development Committee meeting of September 16, 2019

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of September 25, 2019

Subject: Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail Master Plan, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Review File No. 50126-1

District(s), Member(s): MPOSC District D, Catherine Fleming

Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 473.313; *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, Chapter 5, Planning, Strategy 1, Master plan requirements

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

Division/Department: Community Development / Regional Parks and Natural Resources

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Approve the Grand Rounds Missing Link 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 Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Division.

Background

The Grand Rounds is the nation's largest urban scenic byway stretching 50 miles and circling three-fourths of Minneapolis. The Grand Rounds contain park-like roads, biking and walking trails, and green open spaces. The Missing Link is between St. Anthony Parkway in Northeast Minneapolis and East River Parkway in Southeast Minneapolis (see *Figures 1, 2 and 3*).

The Missing Link is the one uncompleted section of the Grand Rounds Parkway System. Early construction of the Grand Rounds followed the key scenic areas of the Mississippi River, Minnehaha Creek, and the Chain of Lakes. Initially, the presence of wetlands in the Missing Link area deterred construction. Later, a large and profitable gravel mine was an obstacle to parkway development. When gravel mining ceased in the 1950s, the area was developed with industrial uses. Active railroad lines and a major rail yard north of the University of Minnesota were and continue to be impediments.

Today the area is developed with a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, public, and institutional uses. Industrial uses are located east of I-35W and along railroad lines. Commercial and high-density residential buildings are near the river and along major roadways, with the University of Minnesota is located in the southern portion of the area.

The terrain varies from flat urban streetscapes to the scenic Mississippi River Gorge. Much of the housing was built from 1900 to the 1940s. Industrial development occurred later in the 1950-1970s. Gross Golf Course, the Mississippi River, Ridgway Park, Demming Heights, Luxton Park, and Hillside Cemetery are the primary green spaces within the study area. Bridal Veil Creek used to be a prominent feature with the area moving through many wetlands, ponds, and finally over the Bridal Veil Falls into

the Mississippi River. Today the creek is almost completely underground in pipes and has pollution and water quality issues.

There is a shortage of trails and parks east of the river in Minneapolis and the adjoining communities in the search corridor for the Grand Rounds Missing Link. Due to the proximity to the University of Minnesota, this area has a high volume of bike commuters.

The Grand Rounds Missing Link is considered a regional linking trail. The trail will provide both on- and off-road alternatives for people to travel for commuting or recreation, with local connections to Ridgway Parkway, St. Anthony Parkway, Northeast Diagonal, and Columbia Parkway regional trails; North Mississippi, Above the Falls, and Central Mississippi Riverfront regional parks; other amenities like Gross National Golf Club, Deming Heights Park, and Columbia Park and Golf Club; multiple neighborhoods including Prospect Park, Como, Mid-City Industrial, Audubon Park, and Columbia Park; St. Anthony Village; the University of Minnesota; and downtown Minneapolis.

Rationale

The Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail Master Plan is consistent with the requirements of the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, particularly Planning Strategy 1, and other Council policies.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The Grand Rounds Missing Link 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. The partnership between the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB), City of Minneapolis, City of St. Anthony, Hennepin County, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the University of Minnesota on this project exemplifies the Thrive principle of Collaboration.

Funding

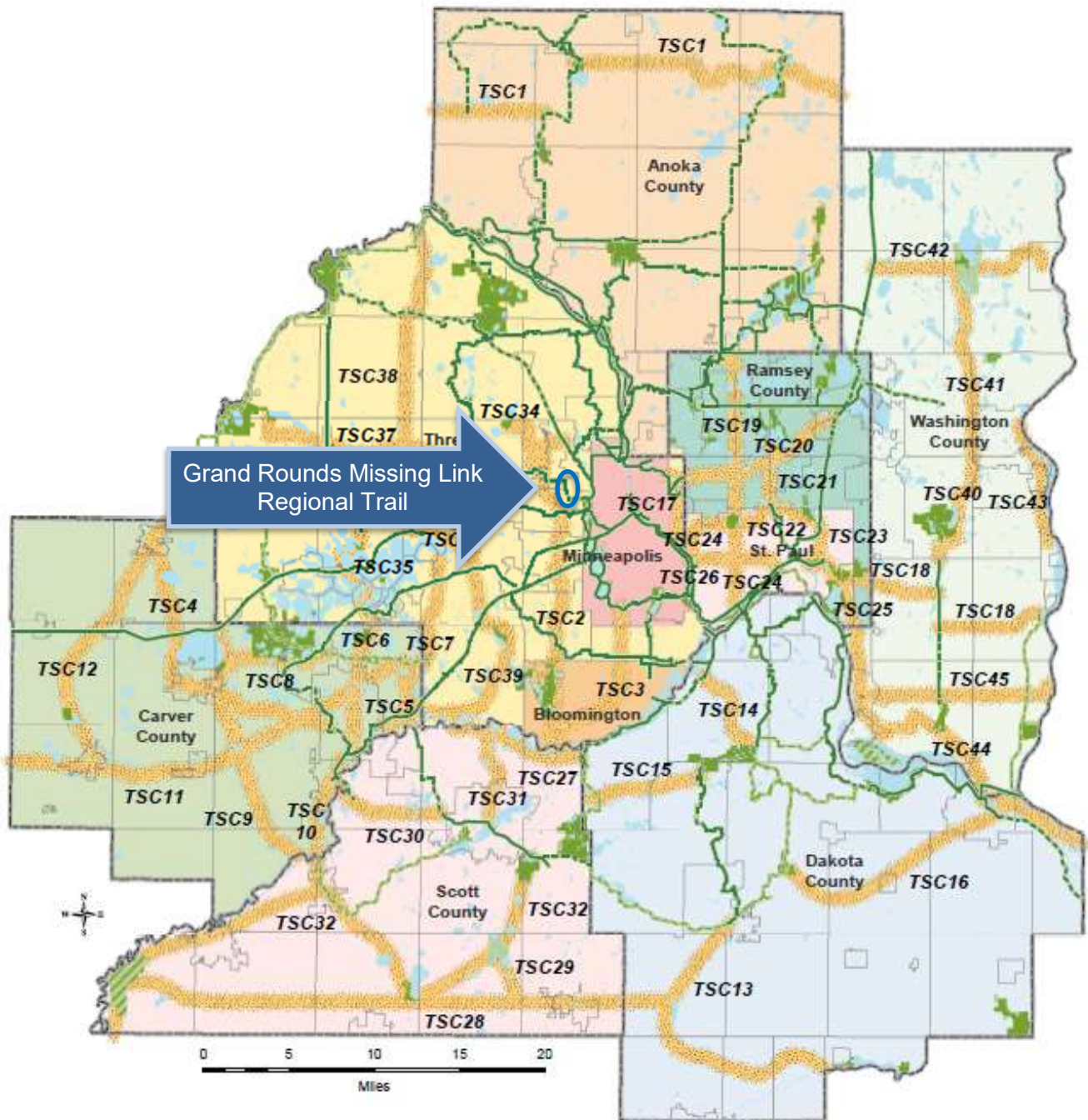
The estimated acquisition and development cost to implement the master plan is \$52,710,164. \$18,779,918 is estimated for the acquisition of 11 parcels or easements. \$31,767,600 is estimated for development of the trail, including bridge construction, paving, drainage, and lighting. \$2,162,646 is estimated for the development of nine “amenity sites” along the route, to include naturalized areas, benches, drinking fountains, trail signage, and bike maintenance stations. With regard to trail development, MPRB notes that “expenditures would be met through cost share with other public agencies.”

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.

Known Support / Opposition

MPRB passed a resolution of support in March 2019 for the East of the River Park Master Plan, which includes the Grand Rounds Missing Link Master Plan. There is no known opposition to the Master Plan.

Figure 1: Regional Trails Search Corridors (2018) and Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail (MPRB) location

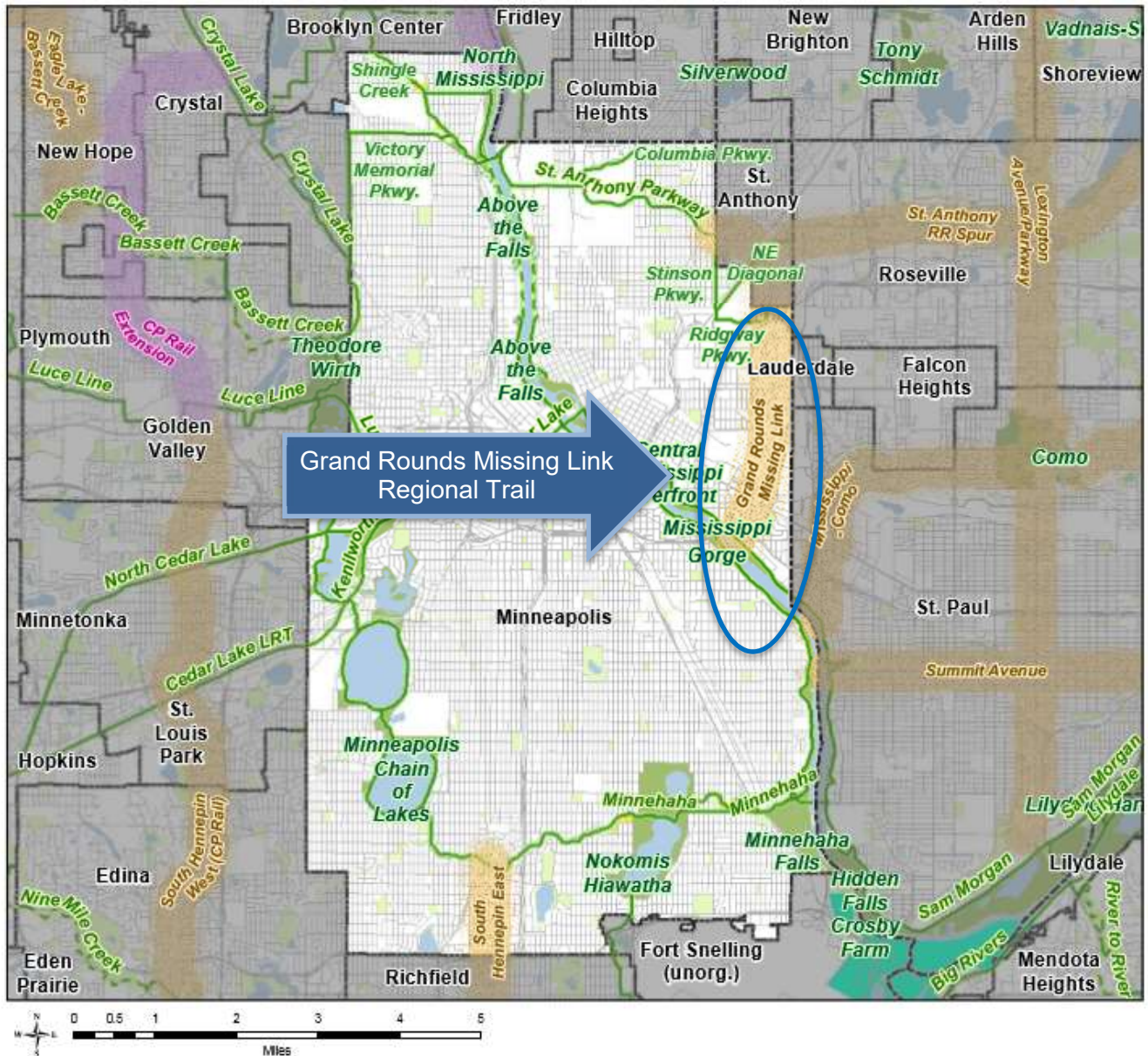


Numbers Correspond to List in Table 3-9

- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- Regional Parks (Open to the Public)
- Regional Parks (Not Open to the Public)
- Planned Parks (Not Open to the Public)
- Regional Trails (Open to the Public)
- Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)
- Planned Regional Trails (Not Open to the Public)

- County Boundaries
- City and Township Boundaries
- Lakes and Rivers

Figure 2: Regional Parks System: City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County and Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail (MPRB) location



Regional Parks

- Existing
- In Master Plan
- Planned Parks and Reserves

Regional Trails

- Existing Regional Trails
- Planned Regional Trails
- Regional Trail Corridor Land

Regional Park Search Areas and Regional Trail Search Corridors

- Boundary Adjustments
- Search Areas
- Regional Trail Search Corridors
- Regional Trails - 2040 System Additions

- Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge
- State Parks
- State Wildlife Management Areas (Publicly Accessible)
- Scientific and Natural Areas (SNA)
- Other Parks and Preserves
- Existing State Trails
- Street Centerlines (NCompass)
- Lakes and Major Rivers

Figure 3: Local Context: Grand Rounds Missing Link 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. The section that follows evaluates the proposed master plan in addressing each of the eleven items.

Boundaries and Acquisition

The preferred route for the Missing Link passes through a variety of land use types, and through both public rights-of-way and privately-owned properties (see Figures 4 and 5). The University of Minnesota is one of the major land holders along the route and owns and operates the University of Minnesota Transitway, which the regional trail will cross. Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) also owns railroad lines along the route.

Right-of-way along the route is owned by multiple public agencies including Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, and the City of St. Anthony. Coordination with those agencies has been central to the planning process. Formal agreements will be developed with the corresponding agency prior to implementation.

The completion of the Missing Link and the addition of trailside amenities are likely to occur in phases over a period of years depending upon funding, construction sequence, coordination with other public projects, and land availability.

Figure 4: Right of Way Ownership

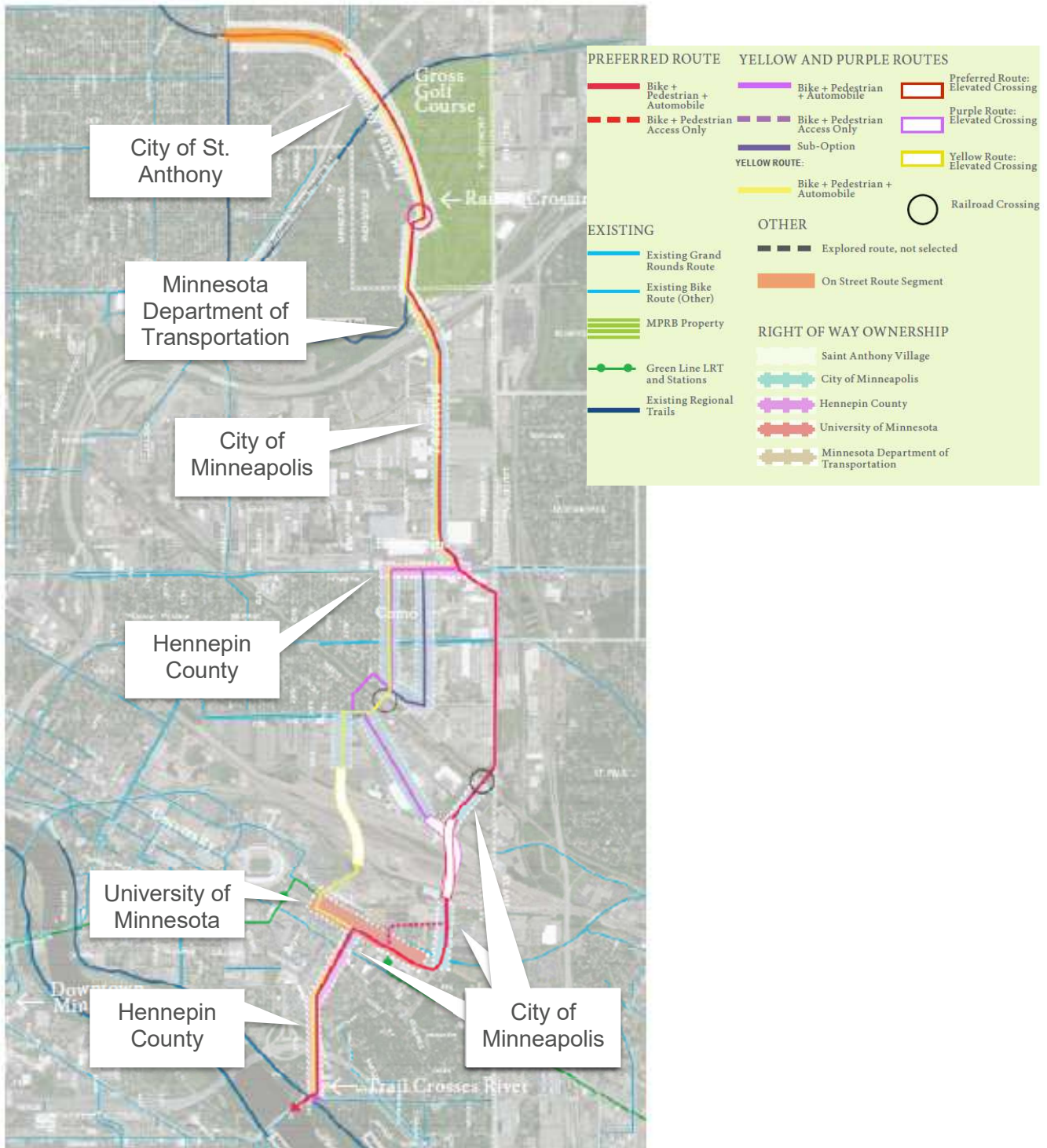
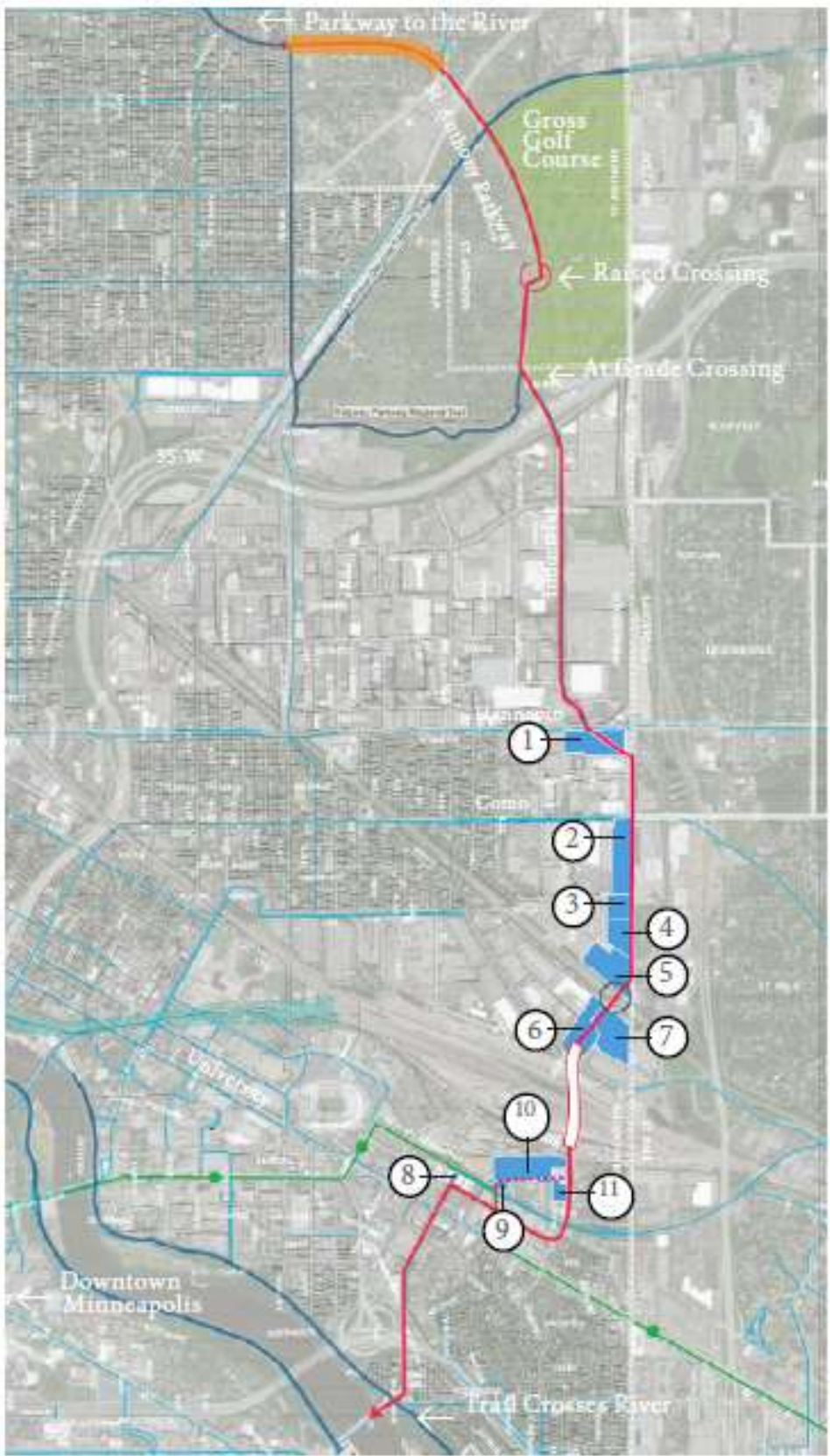


Figure 5: Easements and Acquisitions



Demand Forecast

The City of Minneapolis as a whole is growing, and the need for additional infrastructure to support an increase in population is critical to the quality of life in the city and region. The City of Minneapolis is expected to grow by approximately 50,000 residents in the next 20 years, and the region's population is expected to grow by almost 10% every decade by 2040. The Grand Rounds Missing Link will provide a much-needed regional trail connection to meet the needs of our growing population.

There are several regional trails linking to or near the proposed Grand Rounds Missing Link route that collectively forecast demand for the linking trail. At the northern edge of the proposed trail, St. Anthony Parkway regional trail had an estimated 209,400 users in 2017. Moving south, the next intersecting regional trail along the route, Ridgway Parkway regional trail, had an annual user rate of nearly 27,000 in 2017. The average of Ridgway Parkway and St. Anthony Parkway would put the proposed annual usership rate of the Grand Rounds Missing Link at 118,150.

Of course, trail use is driven largely by connections, so the use of the regional trail is expected to increase significantly with the implementation of the Grand Rounds Missing Link. Two trails that also move through industrial areas that help illustrate the potential usership of the trail include nearby Northeast Diagonal Regional Trail with 156,600 users and Cedar Lake Regional Trail with 500,600 users, both in 2017. Another important factor to take into account is the high visitation rate of Mississippi Gorge Regional Park, which would connect to the southern part of the trail corridor. It is estimated that 1,189,000 people visited Mississippi Gorge in 2017.

Development Concept

The construction of the Missing Link will fulfill a 120-year civic vision of creating a grand loop of green space, regional trail, and parkways through Minneapolis and the adjoining communities. The Missing Link will connect the east side of Minneapolis to the Mississippi River; Theodore Wirth, Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, and Minnehaha regional parks; and many other amenities. It will bring needed connections and parkland east of the river and to the adjoining communities.

Portions of southeast and northeast Minneapolis lack access to parks, and this regional trail provides an opportunity to bring more parklike spaces to this area. At its core, the regional trail will focus on creating a safe and welcoming experience for cyclists and pedestrians to move through the city. It will link trail users from the river to St. Anthony Parkway. It will also provide opportunities for gathering, wayfinding, and stormwater management along the route, as well as other trailside amenities to bring park spaces to the underserved neighborhoods.

Although trucks and freight are not allowed on most parkways, since the Missing Link route will go through an existing industrial area, the MPRB's truck access policy will need to be examined on a site-specific basis to decide if and where truck use of the parkway is appropriate or necessary.

There are three routes proposed for the Grand Rounds Missing Link, and one preferred route to be approved as the route by the Metropolitan Council (see Figures 6 through 8). These were supported by the East of the River Park Master Plan Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and open for public comment. The Preferred Route was the recommended route of the Regional Trail Workgroup who worked closely with staff over the course of several months on the route possibilities. The CAC made a recommendation of the route and considerations to provide a framework for MPRB in the development of the Grand Rounds Missing Link with the understanding that MPRB cannot do this work alone, and that ongoing coordination with the local neighborhoods, business owners, the City of Minneapolis, the City of Saint Anthony, Hennepin County, the University of Minnesota and other stakeholders is the only way forward to realize the Grand Rounds vision.

Figure 6: Grand Rounds Missing Link Route Alternatives – Red is the Preferred Route

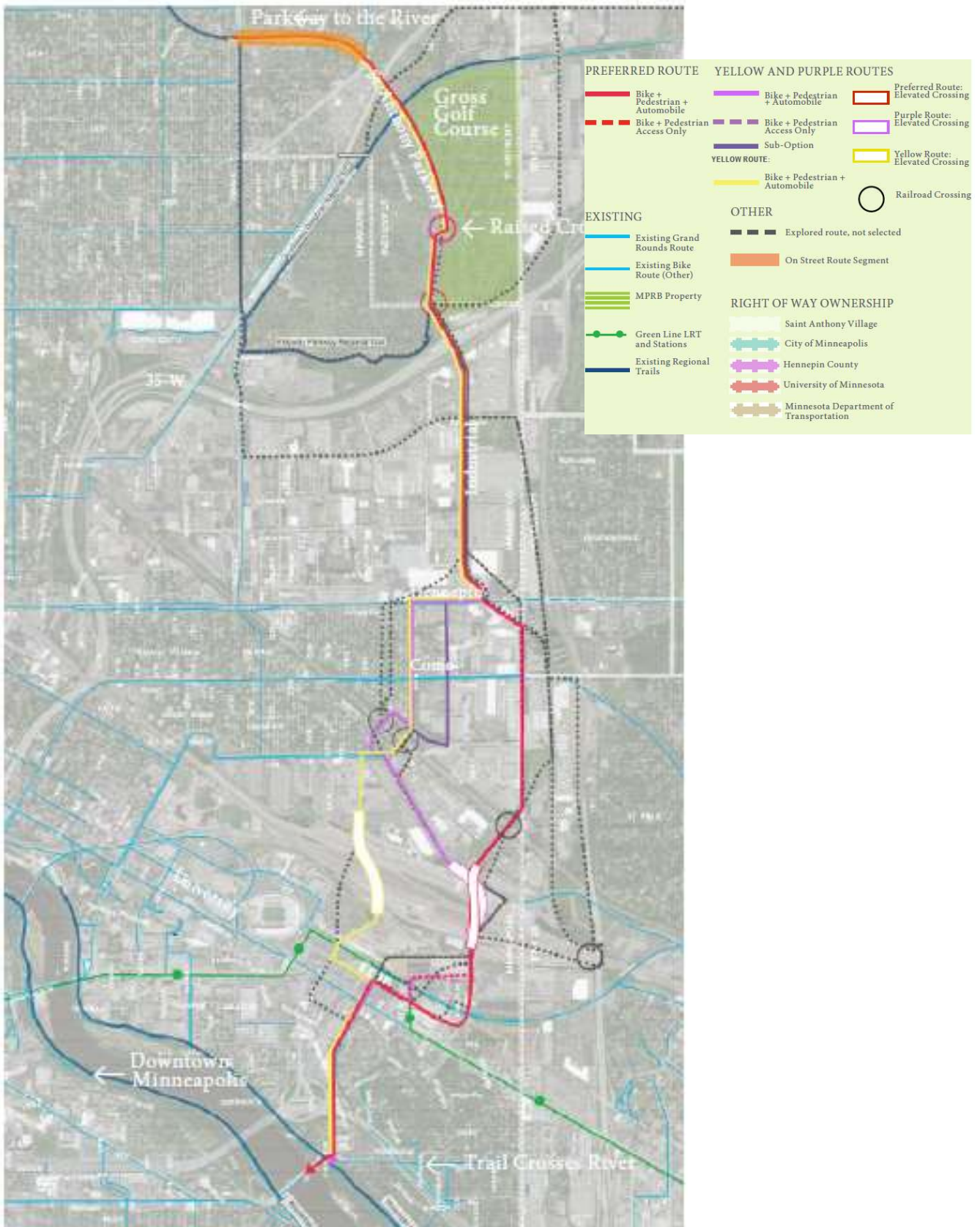


Figure 7: Development Concept Example – 27th Avenue SE and Luxton Park

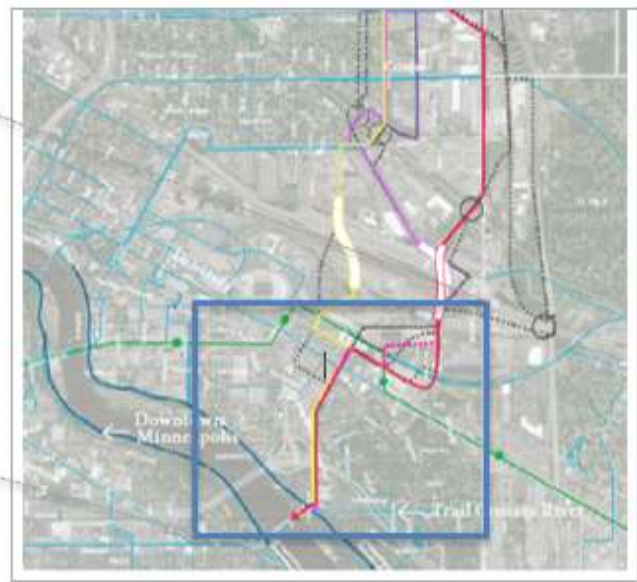
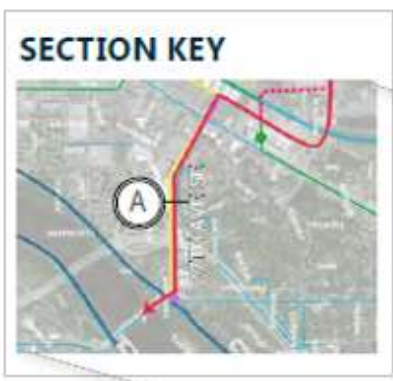
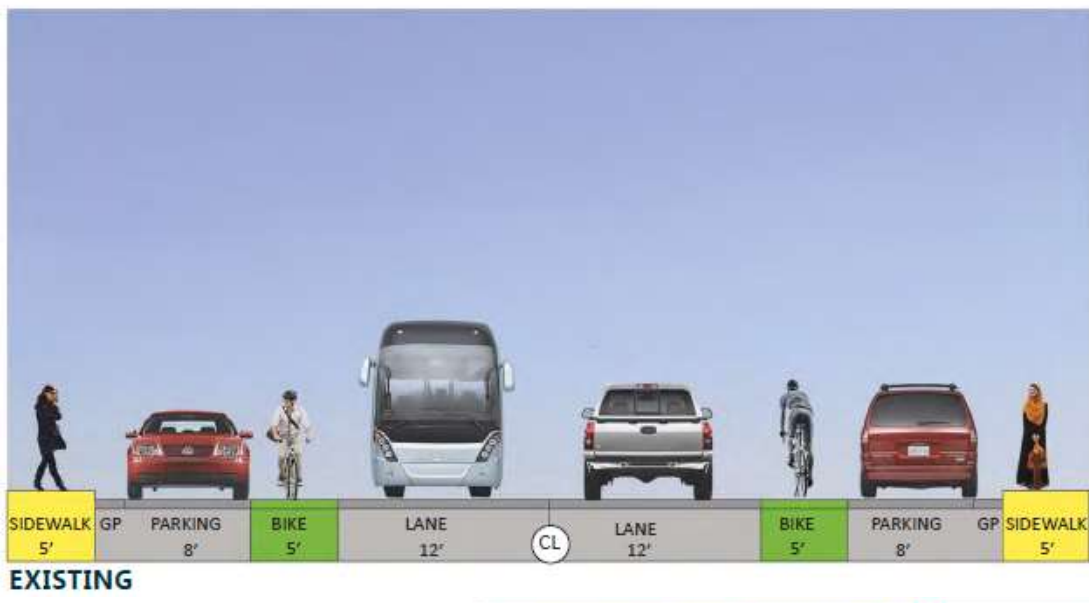
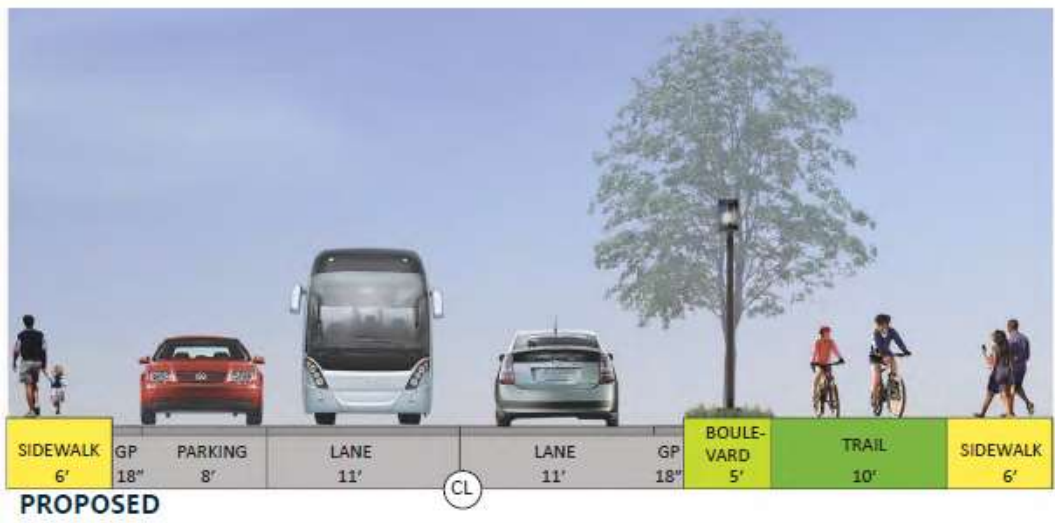
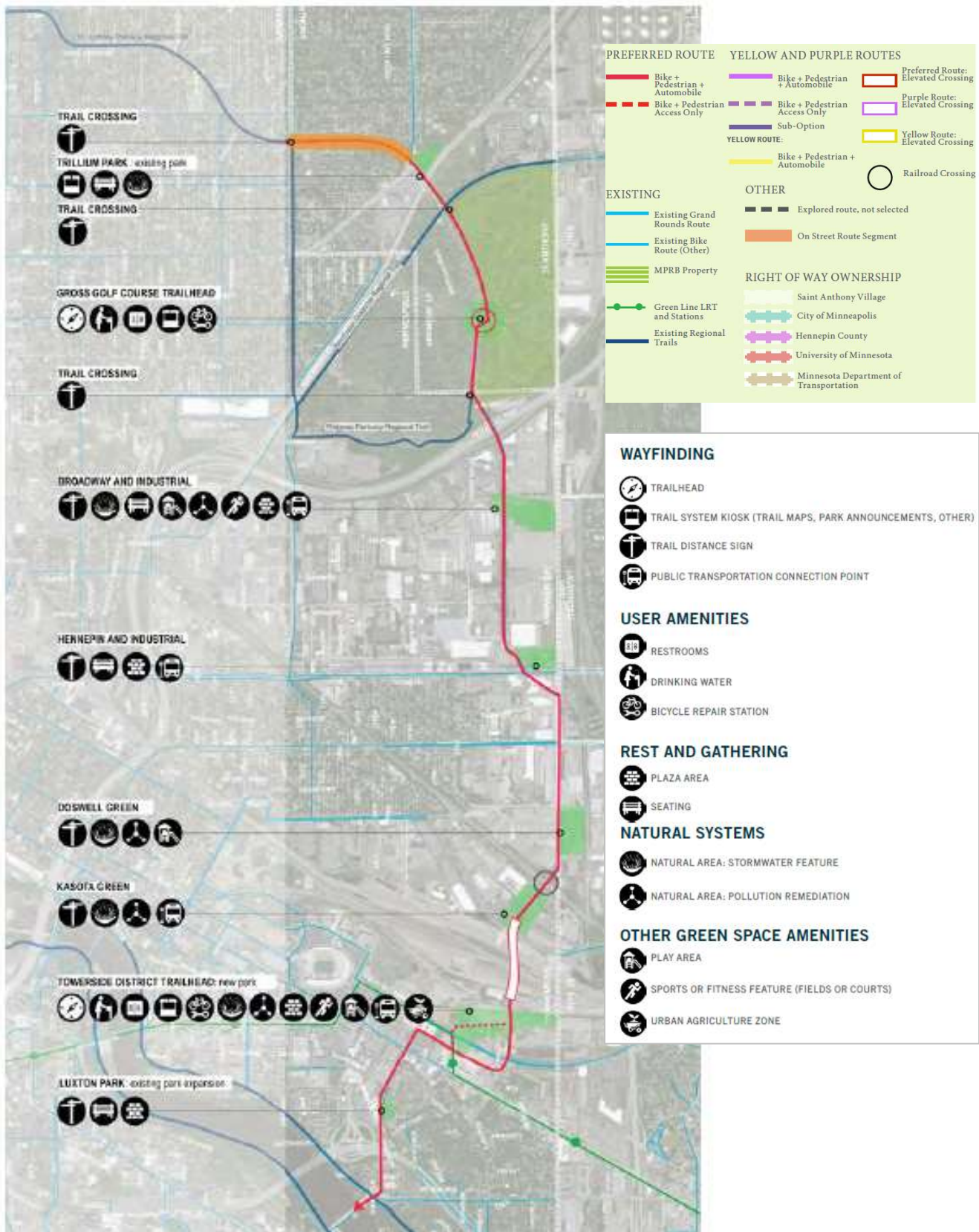


Figure 8: Preferred Route Plan: Trailside Amenities



Conflicts

Initially, the presence of wetlands in the Missing Link area deterred construction and later a large and profitable gravel mine was an obstacle to parkway development. When gravel mining ceased in the 1950s, the area was developed with industrial uses. Active railroad lines and a major rail yard north of the University of Minnesota were and continue to be impediments.

Land use, funding, ownership, and easement, maintenance, and operations agreements will need to be established with private and public entities along the route prior to implementation. Agreements in the form of council resolutions or Joint Powers Agreements will be developed with agencies along the route prior to implementation, including Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, the City of St. Anthony, railroad entities, Metro Transit, and the University of Minnesota.

One segment of the route has been implemented as part of the Ridgway Parkway Regional Trail on Industrial Boulevard, and MPRB and the City of Minneapolis developed an agreement that may serve as a template for future agreements.

The Industrial Boulevard trail is a result of the City of Minneapolis and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) entering into an agreement in 2018 to construct a shared-use trail segment on MnDOT right of way along Industrial Boulevard in the City of Minneapolis, and MPRB was invited to participate in the trail improvement project.

On the southern segment of the route, in the Towerside District, MPRB has developed two Memoranda of Understanding with developers working on realizing the vision of the mixed-use district. With significant park dedication fees in place and ample community support for new parkland in the emerging district, there are also immediate opportunities for implementation of the regional trail, contingent on master plan approval by MPRB and the Metropolitan Council.

Significant coordination with state and local agencies and the University of Minnesota will be required prior to implementation of the route.

Public Services

Given much of the trail route falls on an existing street network, the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and MPRB will collaborate on capital improvements depending on ownership. The exact ownership of each segment will be determined upon implementation, but the current preference on the existing street network is for the current owner of the right-of-way (ROW) to continue to own the ROW and for MPRB to maintain and operate the trail on the City and County ROW. This model has been established through a Shared Agreement with the City and MPRB, a copy of which may be found in Appendix A of the master plan. Interagency staff representatives should be established and maintained for all owners and operators in perpetuity to ensure quality ownership and operations.

Operations

Regional parks and trails fall under the jurisdiction and ownership of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, an independent board established by the legislature and city charter. The MPRB owns and operates over 6,400 acres of park land and over 50 miles of parkways and trails. All rules, regulations or ordinances adopted by the Park Board will be enforced within the Grand Rounds Missing Link.

The MPRB will be responsible in providing daily routine and long-term maintenance and operations of the Missing Link and its associated open spaces. This will include such maintenance as mowing, horticultural/ arboricultural practices, debris removal, lighting, restroom maintenance and cleaning, etc.

Solid waste, such as litter, garbage or trash, will be collected from waste containers on a scheduled basis along the trail and at key locations along the new trail.

The future facilities of the regional trail will be overseen by professional public safety, operations, and maintenance staff. Services and maintenance staffing levels increase as needed and as funding permits through the employment of seasonal staff. MPRB Park Police Officers provide public safety services and will include the route on their daily patrol of the park system. As parkland and trails increase, additional police will also need to be hired to oversee the system. There has been no determination at this time what level of police staffing increases are needed for the proposed trail.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board Planning Services and Environmental Stewardship staff agree to maintain the proposed trail as part of the Grand Rounds. MPRB maintenance will include routine or seasonal maintenance including plowing, mowing and sweeping as needed. Lighting along the trail will require additional electrical service. Snow removal service on the trail will be provided by MPRB, but sidewalks and streets will be maintained per Minneapolis ordinances around municipal and private landholder seasonal maintenance requirements. The trailside amenities proposed in the plan will be maintained by MPRB including seasonal and long-term repair and replacement including benches, bike racks, stormwater BMPs, wayfinding, and other features adjacent to the trail.

Any MPRB owned lighting and trailside amenities adjacent to the path will be maintained and replaced by MPRB. For the segments of trail owned and operated by MPRB, long-term capital replacement will be the responsibility of MPRB. At the end of the trail or amenity life cycle, the Park Board will rehabilitate the trail surface, replace benches, improve landscape, and make other repairs and replacements as needed.

Partner Engagement

The draft master plan was submitted to Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, the City of St. Anthony, Metro Transit, MnDOT, and the University of Minnesota prior to submission to the Metropolitan Council. Appendix A of the master plan includes a summary of Technical Advisory Committee comments during the public comment period and primarily focus on route and design preferences. As mentioned previously, there is no known opposition to the Master Plan.

The preferred Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail route was determined based on ongoing agency coordination and continued coordination with these stakeholders with be required to fully implement the regional trail master plan.

While much of the master plan engagement involved the review and discussion of potential routes with state and local agencies, the engagement activities with the University of Minnesota – particularly related to the broader East of the River Park Master Plan – went further. Reaching out to the student body, staff, and faculty was a core strategy for outreach which included appointing a student to the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and presenting on the East of the River Park Master Plan in university courses.

The University of Minnesota has also expressed support for the East of the River Park Master Plan in July 2019 via a letter from the University's Director of Planning.

Public Engagement and Participation

The Grand Rounds Missing Link is intertwined with the neighborhood facilities in the East of the River Park Master Plan project area, as well as other current and planned regional trail connections.

The East of the River Park Master Plan is the result of more than one-and-a-half years of planning and design by MPRB staff, the community, and hired technical consultants. More than 90 community

engagement events were held and several different stages of input garnered thousands of individual comments on park plans, guiding principles, and the planning process itself. The backbone of community engagement was the 19-member CAC, a group of community members appointed by MPRB Commissioners, City Council members, and Neighborhood Organizations. The CAC met 12 times as a group.

Throughout the process, MPRB staff expended significant efforts to reach out to community members often left out of planning processes, namely youth, seniors, and people of color. Staff and design team members attended numerous community events, both within and outside of parks, door knocked, and often visited parks on busy days to talk to users.

CAC members also created a Regional Trails Work Group to address the regional trail system and the Grand Rounds Missing Link specifically. The Regional Trail Work Group met four times in spring and summer of 2018, and all meetings were open to the public. The work group was largely composed of residents from neighborhoods along the Grand Rounds Missing Link potential route. The work group has offered ongoing insight and received staff updates on the process of the Grand Rounds Missing Link interagency coordination.

The work group discussed Grand Rounds Missing Link route options and developed a set of trail planning considerations, which were approved by the East of the River Community Advisory Committee in October 2018. The trail planning considerations will guide the route and design of the Grand Rounds Missing Link.

The work group and CAC also recommend that as it is completed, the regional trail should be called Bridal Veil Regional Trail as it will no longer be a missing link of the Grand Rounds. It will increase needed park space and regional trail access to underserved areas of Minneapolis.

Public Awareness

Per the 2019 MPRB Community Engagement Policy, the design and construction of the trail will require a community engagement assessment prior to implementation. The assessment will outline the level of engagement required for the project and provide details to the public and the board around how the public will be engaged throughout the process. It is likely that this project will fall under the “Consult” category of engagement and require a Community Engagement Plan (see *International Association of Public Participation Spectrum of Public Participation*). Community Engagement Plans will require staff to assess who is a stakeholder in the process and how that stakeholder will be communicated with and engaged throughout the process. The plan is data driven and established through an equity framework and requires an evaluation of the engagement after the project is completed.

During design and construction, it is standard practice for MPRB to notify the public of the trail improvements through news releases, on-site signage, a project website, and e-mail. Following completion of improvements, additional press releases and public announcements are anticipated. These will occur through MPRB’s established contacts and methods, such as website, e-mail system, contact with local press and neighborhood groups, and regular mailers and newsletters. Additional innovations and modes of engagement will be determined through the Community Engagement Plan template prior to implementation. The Community Engagement Plan and Assessment templates are included in the Appendix of the master plan.

Accessibility

All facilities within this proposed regional trail will be developed in accordance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

MPRB updated its ADA Action Plan in 2018 and has committed to the following which will inform the development, design, and ongoing operations of the regional trail:

- Recreation is for everyone: MPRB is committed to the spirit and intent of the ADA. In accordance with the requirements of Title II of the ADA, the MPRB will not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities on the basis of disability in its services, programs, or activities.
- Employment: People with disabilities are encouraged to apply for seasonal employment, full-time and volunteer opportunities. The MPRB does not discriminate on the basis of disability in its hiring or employment practices and complies with all regulations promulgated by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under title I of the ADA.
- Effective Communication: The MPRB will, upon request, provide appropriate aids and services leading to effective communication for qualified persons with disabilities so they can participate equally in MPRB programs, services, and activities, including qualified sign language interpreters, documents in Braille, and other ways of making information and communications accessible to people who have speech, hearing, or vision impairments.
- Modifications to Policies and Procedures: The MPRB will make all reasonable modifications to policies and programs to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to enjoy all of its programs, services, and activities. For example, individuals with service animals are welcomed in all MPRB facilities, even where pets are prohibited.

The MPRB will not place a surcharge on a particular individual with a disability or any group of individuals with disabilities to cover the cost of providing auxiliary aids/services or reasonable modifications of policy, such as retrieving items from locations that are open to the public but are not accessible to persons who use wheelchairs.

MPRB is committed to ensuring that its programs, policies, services and facilities are accessible to everyone who lives, works and plays in Minneapolis. This commitment is inherent in their mission—to provide places and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate and engage in activities that promote health, well-being, community and the environment.

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) – Council staff suggest the MPRB consider integration of lighting (with battery-based storage systems) via solar panels into roof shades of trail wayfinding structures in locations where sun access is available and trail users would be most likely to benefit. As this regional trail is within the core of the urban area, it is likely to be in use anytime during the day or night and would benefit from the ability to provide kiosk lighting for at least a limited period of time past dusk to illuminate displayed trail maps or a bike repair station for unfamiliar users caught out unexpectedly past available daylight on an unfamiliar section of the regional trail system. Council staff recommend considering a facility similar to those available at http://sundialenergy.com/se_css_pages/product_bus_shelt.htm. As this master plan is only for one segment of the overall trail, we suggest the MPRB staff consider the potential need and value of integrating these types of facilities into other trail segments.

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 this project, contact Tim Wedin, Interceptor Engineering Assistant Manager (651-602-4571) at the Metropolitan Council Environmental Services Division.

Metro Transit (Steve Mahowald 612-349-7775) – No additional comments.

Transportation Planning (Russ Owen 651-602-1724) – No additional comments.

Local Planning Assistance – Land Use (Michael Larson 651-602-1407) – The Grand Rounds Missing Link Regional Trail is a Linking Trail. Consequently, its impacts relate primarily to the ability of the trail to connect the region’s residents, workers, and visitors to other trails and natural resource-based elements of the Regional Park System. The connectivity of the Grand Rounds in general, and the Missing Link Trail in particular, contributes to direct and indirect access to regional destinations including job centers. In these ways, the trail implements policies related to Orderly and Efficient Land Use; and Access, Mobility, and Transportation Choice. The proposed trail alignment provides direct access to a concentration of industrial jobs, and it improves bicycling conditions connecting south from Ridgway Parkway/St. Anthony Parkway where there are no sidewalks, and on-street right-of-way is currently constrained for bicyclists (i.e., outside lane is narrow).

The Minneapolis 2040 Plan acknowledges and supports the planning for the Grand Rounds Missing Link and shows a conceptual future alignment. Nothing in the land use policies or implementation suggest City activities that would contradict implementation of this regional trail.

The City of St. Anthony 2040 Plan acknowledges planning for the Grand Rounds Missing Link but states that the “Village has passed a resolution opposing an off-street bike facility along St. Anthony Boulevard between Stinson Boulevard and New Brighton Boulevard.” (p. 94)