

Transportation Committee

Meeting date: November 23, 2020

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of December 9, 2020

Subject: Authorization of Public Hearing for Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Concept Plan

District(s), Member(s): District 5- Molly Cummings, District 6 Lynnea Atlas-Ingebretson, District 7 Robert Lilligren, District 8 Abdirahman Muse

Policy/Legal Reference: Public Accountability Policy 2-1, Public Hearings Procedure 2-1b, Transportation Service Changes and Restructuring 1-3a, Public Involvement in the Transportation Planning Process 1-3b

Staff Prepared/Presented: Wes Kooistra, General Manager 612-349-7510; Adam Harrington, Director of Service Development 612-349-7797; Cyndi Harper, Manager of Route Planning 612-349-7723; John Dillery, Senior Planner 612-349-7773

Division/Department: Metro Transit/Service Development

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize a public hearing to accept comments on proposed service changes outlined in the Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Concept Plan.

Background

METRO Orange Line BRT is scheduled to open in late 2021 between Minneapolis and Burnsville. The 17-mile Orange Line will replace Route 535 in the I-35W South corridor with frequent, all-day service between downtown Minneapolis, south Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington and Burnsville. Many Orange Line riders are expected to transfer from bus or rail service to reach a BRT station, so high-quality connecting bus service will be essential.

Metro Transit's Orange Line Connecting Bus Study evaluates existing service and opportunities for improvements and new connections at Orange Line stations. The study area includes the I-35W corridor area in south Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington and Edina, as shown on the attached map. This study does not include Burnsville but staff is coordinating changes with the service provider in this area, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA).

Goals of the study:

- Link significant concentrations of residents, jobs and services with the Orange Line
- Retain existing riders and grow ridership. Service will be prioritized for under-represented communities and those who rely on transit the most
- Simplify the route network
- Enhance mobility and connectivity
- Complement commuter express service in the corridor

The project started in Fall 2019 with an Existing Conditions Report and public engagement activities. In early 2020 staff was developing the proposed service changes and the Council had approved a public comment period scheduled for mid-April. However, the project was put on-hold due to COVID-19. We are resuming work on the project

now so that the final service changes can be approved prior to the opening of the Orange Line.

Staff is currently updating the proposed service changes to reflect the changes in resources, travel patterns and demand and ridership markets resulting from the pandemic. This may include introducing new routes, improving frequency and/or span on existing routes and/or eliminating existing routes or route branches and will be presented to the Council in advance of the public hearing.

Project timeline:

- Mid-January: present concept plan to Council; release to the public
- January 25-February 21: public comment period
- Spring: Modify concept plan based on public comment
- June: present final plan to Council for approval
- Late 2021: implementation of service changes (in conjunction with opening of Orange Line)

Rationale

Council policy requires authorization for a public hearing 45 days in advance. State law requires public notice of the hearing at least 30 days in advance. Due to the pandemic the Met Council will be conducting community meetings and public hearings remotely. In order to improve public review and participation, staff is proposing two virtual community meetings in addition to the official public hearing. The proposed hearing and meeting dates and times are listed below. Additional community meetings may be added as details of the concept plan are finalized. Additional opportunities for engagement that are not based online will also be available.

Public Hearing (virtual)

Wednesday, February 10, 2021
5:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

Community Meetings (virtual)

Saturday, February 6, 2021
11:00 a.m.-noon

Tuesday, February 9, 2021
Noon -1:00 p.m.

Thrive Lens Analysis

Community meetings and a public hearing to discuss the proposed service changes align with the Equity outcome by engaging a full cross-section of the community in decision-making. The Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Outreach Plan will ensure all members of the community, especially historically under-represented groups, have several channels to provide feedback on the proposed changes. In addition to online engagement, staff will also emphasize non computer-based engagement options.

Funding

The public hearing, community meetings and service changes resulting from the project will be funded within the Metro Transit Council-approved operating budget.

Known Support / Opposition

There is no known opposition to scheduling a public hearing for this study.

Study Area Routes

- All Day Service
- ⋯ Peak Only Service
- Orange Line
- Other Service
- ▭ Study Area

ACP50*
Census tracts where 40% or more of the residents have family or individual incomes that are less than 185% of the federal poverty threshold **and** where 50% or more of the residents are people of color (ACP50s).

Service operating as of Fall 2019.

