

Transportation Committee

Meeting date: June 14, 2021

For the Metropolitan Council meeting of June 23, 2021

Subject: Approval of METRO Orange Line Connection Bus Study Recommended 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 Hearing 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 Service Development 612-349-7779; Cyndi Harper, Senior Manager Route Planning 612-349-7723; John Dillery, Senior Planner 612-349-7773

Division/Department: Metro Transit/Service Development

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council approve the service changes in the METRO Orange Line Connecting Bus Study Recommended Plan for implementation with the opening of the Orange Line BRT project, and related Title VI analysis.

Background

The Orange Line is scheduled to begin new Highway Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service in the I-35W corridor in south Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, and Burnsville later this year. The Orange Line Connecting Bus Study (OLCBS) project has reviewed bus routes in the area to improve service and maximize connections with the Orange Line, knowing many customers will use transit to access the service. The Recommended Plan details planned service changes that will meet the project goals of growing ridership in an equitable way, simplifying routes, enhancing the mobility of the transit network, and linking the Orange Line with a significant number of residents, jobs and services.

Study Area

The study area is bounded by the Mississippi River on the east, I-394 on the north, Highway 169 on the west, and the Minnesota River on the south. The study area does not extend south of the Minnesota River where Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) is the transit service provider.

Recommended Plan

When the Orange Line opens, changes are recommended on eleven bus routes: 7, 27, 515, 535, 537, 538, 539, 540, 542, 553, and 597. New routes 501, 534, 546, 547, and 548 would be implemented at the same time. In comparison to current service levels, there is nearly a 20% increase in service hours in the project area (not including the Orange Line), which includes frequency improvements on seven routes and the restoration of two routes that are currently suspended, and service during the midday, evenings and weekends. Orange Line will mostly replace existing routes 535 and 597, and there will be replacement service on all local segments of these two routes.

The Recommended Plan is based on a mix of current ridership patterns and those that existed prior to the pandemic, which may change in the long-term as new travel needs emerge. Given the information available, the Recommended Plan has considered potential long-term impacts to ridership and travel behavior. However, this plan may need to be adjusted during or shortly after implementation based on market conditions at the time the Orange Line opens. Routes 53, 146, 156, 552, 554 and 558 remain suspended.

Public Input Process and Modifications to Plan

Several outreach strategies were used to ensure broad public engagement even during a pandemic. The project website included a customer survey, presentation video and various reports. Social media links promoted the Concept Plan, and there were articles in the Star Tribune and Sun Current and ads in several local and ethnic media. Due to COVID the two public meetings and one public hearing were held virtually. A postcard was mailed to residents along routes with significant changes proposed, and staff partnered with key stakeholders to get the word out, including some limited in-person outreach at key bus stops. A complete report of all [outreach and engagement work](#) is available online.

Nearly 600 comments were submitted about the proposal. There was strong support for the Orange Line, the restoration of service on routes 537 and 542, the simplification of routes 515 and 540, the frequency and span improvements on seven routes and the continuation of coverage on all local segments of Route 535. Primary areas of concern were the proposed elimination of service on routes 515B, 515E, 597 and on 90th St in west Bloomington and new transfers introduced in areas that are currently a one-seat ride.

Staff revised the plan based on the feedback received to address the concerns. Most of the concerns were addressed with these changes. However, the Recommended Plan still includes the elimination of a direct connection between southwest Bloomington and downtown (Route 597) as well as between the 66th Street corridor and VA Medical Center (Route 515E) in south Minneapolis.

Title VI Service Equity Analysis

The Title VI analysis of the Recommended Plan shows no potential for disparate impacts for people of color. The average resident in the study area will see a 27% increase in the number of weekly trips available. The analysis does indicate potential for disproportionate burden in areas where low-income populations reside. However, this plan improves access to jobs and other key destinations, particularly in the off-peak for BIPOC and lower-income communities, which is not reflected in the initial analysis that only uses residential census data. Additional detail regarding the analysis is provided in Chapter 4 of the project report.

Rationale

The Recommended Plan improves transit service within the Orange Line corridor and the region by building a stronger local route network that connects those who rely on transit the most with nearly 50,000 jobs outside of downtown Minneapolis. A large share of Orange Line riders is expected to access stations using transit, using this enhanced bus route network.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The plan addresses the five Thrive outcomes by leveraging transit investment with higher expectations of land use (Stewardship), encouraging redevelopment and infill development (Prosperity), operating the region's transit system sustainably (Sustainability), aligning resources to support transit-oriented development (Livability), and creating real choices in where we live, how we travel, and where we

recreate for all residents, across race, ethnicity, economic means, and ability (Equity).

Funding

The Recommended Plan was developed and will be operated within existing Metro Transit and Metropolitan Council transit service resources.

Known Support / Opposition

The OLCBS Recommended Plan has received support from many stakeholders in the project area, including the I-494 Transportation Management Organization (TMO) and the cities of Bloomington, Richfield, Edina and Minneapolis.