



METROPOLITAN  
C O U N C I L

# Northstar Rail Corridor Post Pandemic Study

Transportation Committee

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# Introduction



## Future of the Northstar Corridor

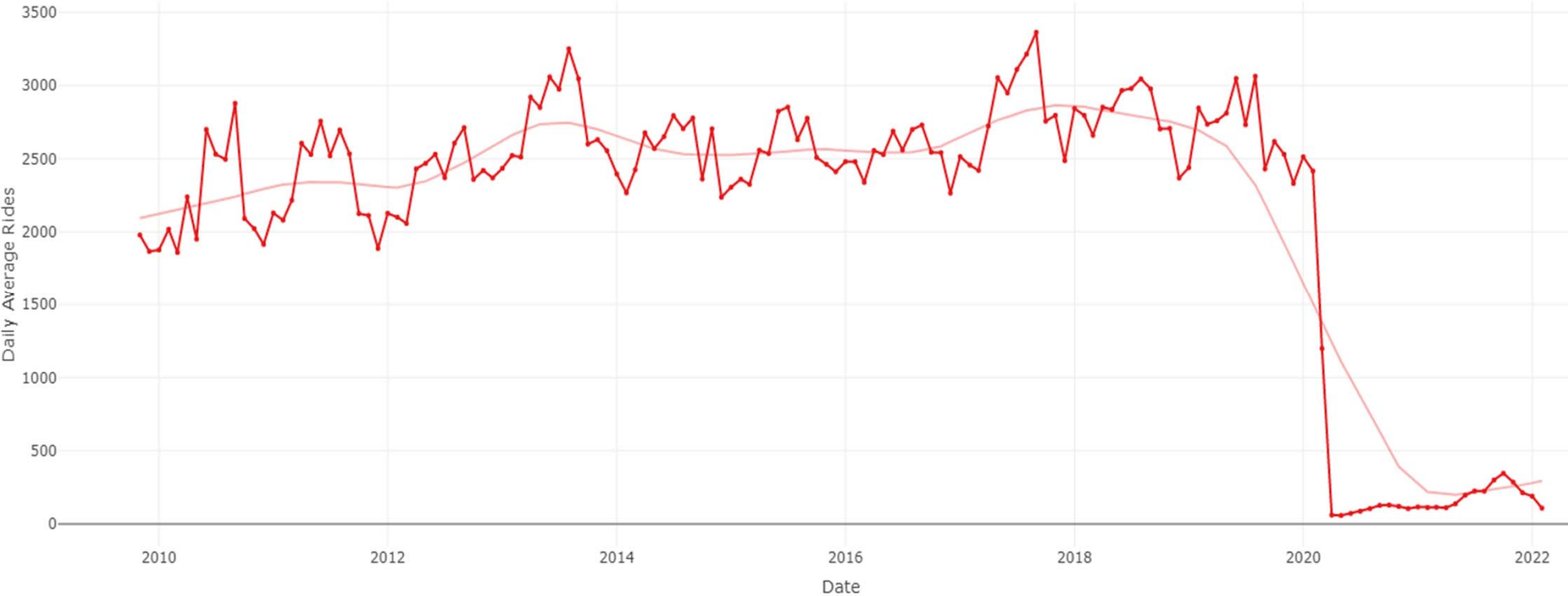
- Exploratory study to gather information for corridor partners to consider
- Not intended as a decision-making study; will not produce recommendations

### Study questions:

- What are the recent trends in the corridor?
- What are peer agencies thinking about similar corridors in their regions?
- What are some reasonable transit scenarios for the future of the Northstar corridor?
- What are impacts of the scenarios on ridership, finances, land use, access to transit, vehicle miles traveled?
- Which groups may be impacted by these scenarios based on geography and socio-demographics?

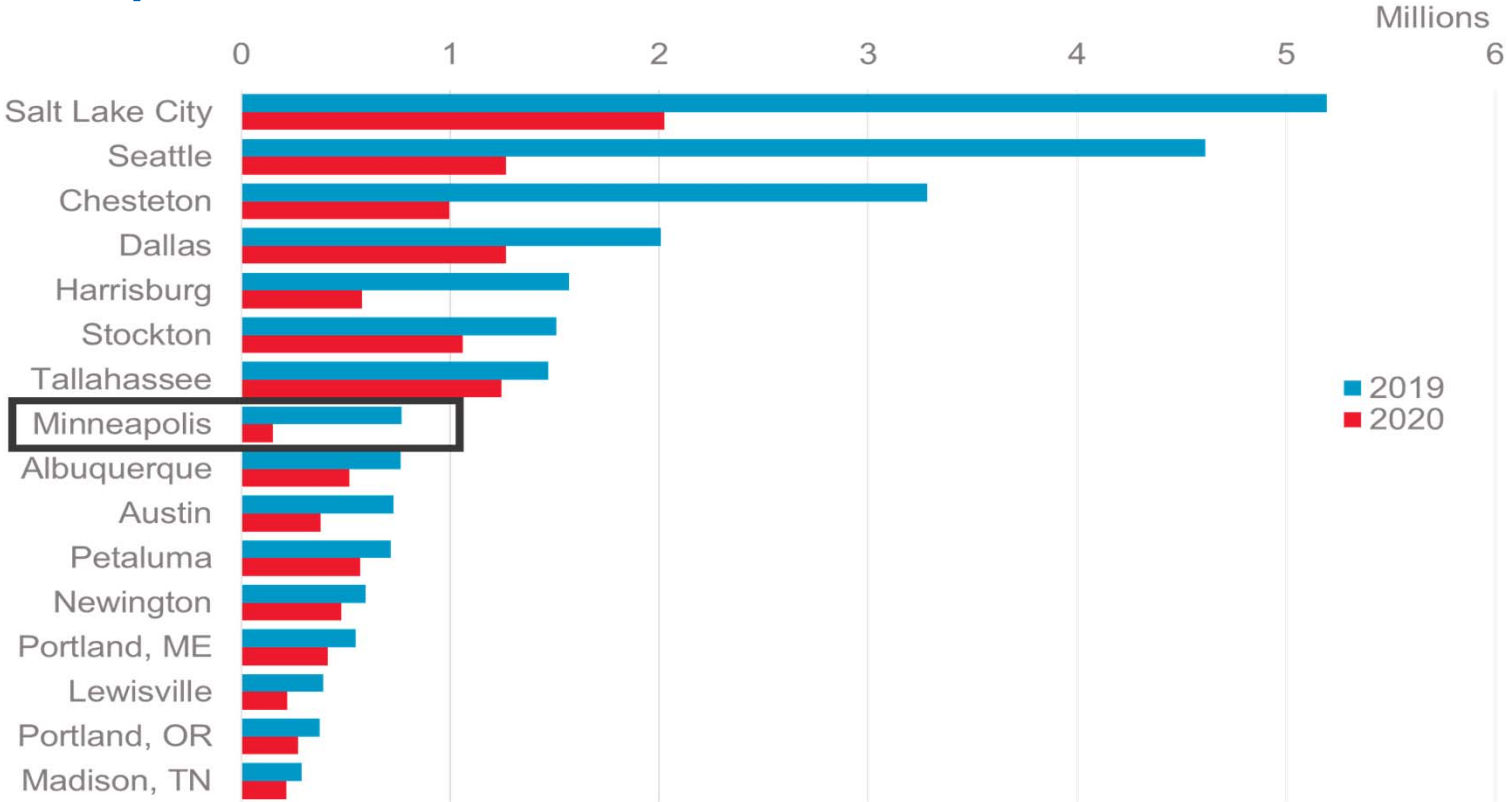
# Background

## Northstar Rail Average Weekday Ridership



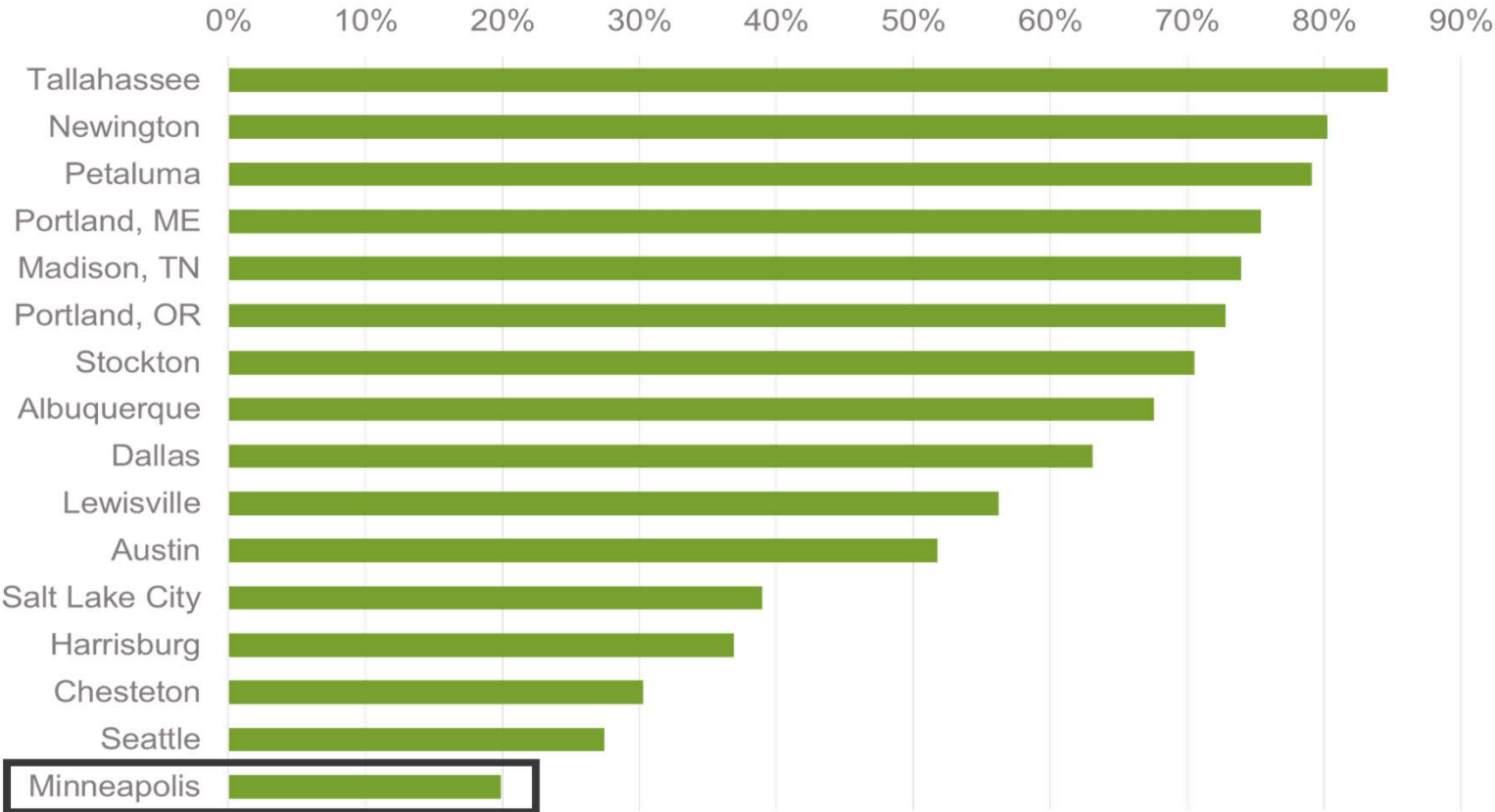
# Background <sup>(1)</sup>

## Ridership on Similar Commuter Rail Lines, 2020 vs 2019



# Background (2)

## Ridership on Similar Commuter Rail Lines, 2020 as percentage of 2019



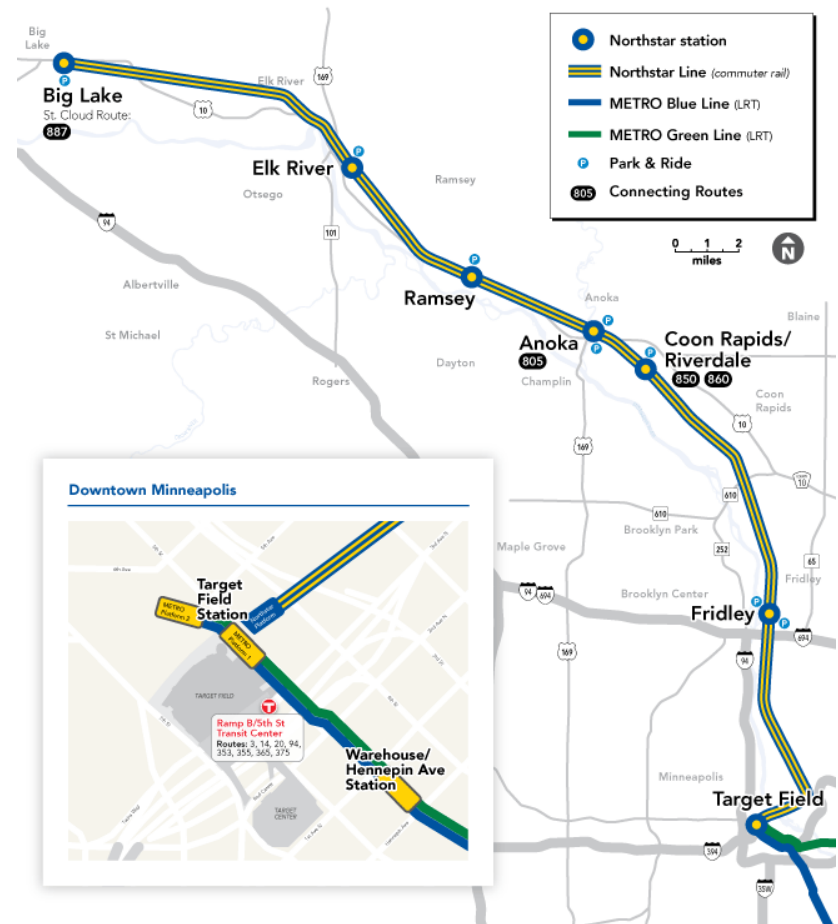
# Elements of the Study



# Project Work Scope (1)

## Task 1: Project Management

- Metropolitan Transportation Services will manage the consultant contract
- Project management team will include staff from all the project operating funding partners:
  - Metro Transit
  - MnDOT
  - Anoka County
  - Hennepin County
  - Sherburne County
- Technical advisory group will also include staff from affected cities along the line



# Project Work Scope (2)



## Task 2: Document History and Existing Conditions

- Review past planning studies for transit in or adjacent to corridor
- Summarize implementation planning context, early expectations for corridor performance/development
- Review local plans to assess land use changes in the corridor among corridor communities
- Review/document performance of Northstar under pre-pandemic and pandemic conditions



# Project Work Scope <sup>(3)</sup>

## Task 3: Assess Peer Region Rail Corridors

- Evaluate similar commuter rail lines in United States and document performance characteristics before and during the pandemic
- Conduct interviews with staff from peer regions on their strategic thinking regarding the post-pandemic future of their commuter rail lines
- Peer regions may include commuter lines in
  - Salt Lake City
  - San Diego
  - Fort Worth
  - Seattle
  - Austin
  - Hartford

# Project Work Scope <sup>(4)</sup>

## Task 4: Develop Corridor Service Scenarios

- Create up to six service scenarios that illustrate different investment opportunities and include options for rail, bus, and/or a mix of both modes
  - Will include operating schedules for Northstar and connecting transit service at all stations
  - Will address weekend and holiday service
  - All scenarios will assume continuation of special events service (Vikings, Twins, Gophers, etc.)
  - At least one scenario to include passenger service to Saint Cloud
  - Scenarios to be developed in collaboration with Northstar funding partners

# Project Work Scope <sup>(5)</sup>

## Task 5: Analyze Corridor Service Scenarios

- Evaluate transit scenarios and determine near-term and long-term (2040) outcomes to compare relative impacts
- Technical analysis elements will include:
  - Financial impacts (revenue impacts, overall cost effectiveness)
  - Transportation impacts (impacts to corridor vehicle miles traveled)
  - Land use assessment (impacts to corridor development & local plans)
  - Sociodemographic analysis (impacts to disadvantaged groups, including access to opportunities via transit)
- Technical analysis factors will be developed in collaboration with agency partners

# Project Work Scope <sup>(6)</sup>

## Task 6: Create Post-Study Evaluation Framework

- Create evaluation tool to facilitate post-study decision-making process
- Simplify the detailed technical analyses into easy-to-digest considerations for a lay audience

## Task 7: Produce Draft and Final Study Reports

- Document potential benefits/opportunities for transit service and compare against impacts and implementation challenges

# Study Engagement

## Agency engagement to be key component

- This study is not a decision-making process, but agency engagement will be essential for clear understanding/general agreement on study elements
- Policymaker group of corridor funding partners engaged at key milestones
- Technical advisory group (including corridor cities' staff) will meet regularly throughout the study

# Project Schedule

## Tentative Schedule

Summer 2022 – Existing conditions, peer corridor assessments, service scenarios development

Fall 2022 – Service scenarios evaluation

Winter 2022-2023 – Final results and report



# Contacts

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