SDEIS Overview

For Metropolitan Council Transportation Committee
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Kelcie Young – Senior Environmental Manager
Nick Thompson - Deputy GM Capital Prgm
Project History
Project Background

- **2014**
  - Bottineau Transitway Draft EIS

- **2016**
  - METRO Blue Line Light Rail Transit Extension Final EIS and Record of Decision

- **2020**
  - Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County issue a joint statement on advancing BLE without freight rail right-of-way

- **2022**
  - Notice of Intent to prepare supplemental draft EIS
  - Route Modification Report

- **2024**
  - BLE SDEIS Published
Project Description

- The BLE connects downtown Minneapolis, north Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park

- Includes LRT stations, pedestrian bridges, bike facilities, and park-and-rides
About the SDEIS

• An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a document that details the impacts of a proposed project as part of the NEPA process
  - The EIS for the original Blue Line Extension was completed in 2016

• This includes an evaluation of:
  - Social impacts and benefits
  - Economic impacts and benefits
  - Environmental impacts and benefits

• A Supplemental EIS is required if there are significant changes to a project or if new impacts and benefits are discovered after the finalization of the EIS
Purpose and Need

• 2016 BLE Purpose Statement:
  
  "The Project is needed to effectively address long-term regional transit mobility and local accessibility needs while providing efficient, travel-time-competitive transit service that supports economic development goals and objectives of local, regional, and statewide plans."

• Purpose has not changed since 2016, but has been updated in response to community interest

• 2024 Purpose includes investment in areas experiencing history of systemic racism, improved connectivity/access for communities, and advancement of local and regional equity
Purpose and Need

- Updated Need Factors (2024):
  - Growing travel demand
  - Reducing local pollution with a balanced transportation network
  - Increased reliance on transit
  - Improved transit service in black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities
  - Changing travel patterns from Covid-19
  - Regional objectives for growth
Alternatives Studied and Build Alternative
Alternatives Development

• 2016 Alignment
  ▪ Included freight rail right-of-way

• Route Modification Process (2020-2022)
  ▪ Identified revised alignments that avoided the freight rail right-of-way portion of 2016 Alignment

• Evaluation of Alignment and Design Options (2023)
West Broadway Ave - Brooklyn Park

• The proposed LRT elements including stations, park and ride, Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF), and track remain the same as in the 2016 FEIS and ROD

• However, the reconstruction and expansion of West Broadway (from north of Brooklyn Boulevard to 93rd Avenue), which was previously studied as a separate project is included in the SDEIS
County Road 81: 73rd Ave to 63rd Ave in Brooklyn Park

In southern Brooklyn Park, the SDEIS evaluates proposed station at 63rd Avenue
County Road 81 at Bass Lake Road - Crystal

• SDEIS evaluated a conventional at-grade intersection with a pedestrian bridge to access the station and a grade-separated elevated structure carrying County Road 81 over Bass Lake Road

• The proposed alignment along County Road 81 remains parallel to the 2016 Alignment, but distance ranges from 1,000 to 4,000 feet to the east of the freight rail right of way
County Road 81 - Robbinsdale

• Downtown Robbinsdale Station location
  ▪ North of 40th Ave N and South of 40th Ave N
    Station locations were evaluated

• Downtown Robbinsdale park-and-ride location
  ▪ U.S. Bank Site

• Lowry Ave Station location
  ▪ At-grade and elevated station options were evaluated
Minneapolis

- Track routing on Lyndale Ave N or east side of I-94
- Track routing on W Broadway Ave or N 21st Ave approximately between Knox Ave N and Lyndale Ave N or I-94
- East side of I-94 location: adjacent to I-94 right-of-way or along N Washington Ave and N 10th Ave
- One or two stations between Knox Ave and I-94
Build Alternative

• Brooklyn Park: new station at 63rd Ave
• Crystal: grade separated interchange at Bass Lake Road
• Robbinsdale: downtown station at 40th Ave
• Minneapolis:
  ▪ Alignment east of I-94 along 10th and Washington Ave and over I-94 to 21st Avenue
  ▪ New bridge to connect to 21st Avenue
Findings of the SDEIS
Community

Impacts

• Minor impacts to community amenities would occur in Brooklyn Park, Crystal, and Robbinsdale
• Relocation of seven community amenities in Minneapolis
• Loss of on-street and off-street parking
• Visual, noise, and vibration impacts in certain locations would affect community character (see other sections)

Mitigation

• Additional community character mitigation to be developed in collaboration with community (21st Ave)

Benefits

• Improved transit, pedestrian, and bicycle conditions would improve community cohesion and the accessibility of community amenities

Definitions

Community Amenities: Community centers, restaurants, essential goods/services

Community Cohesion: The aspect of togetherness and bonding exhibited by a community. Affected by neighborhood boundaries, location of residences/businesses, demographics, economic, and social history

Community Character: Interactions among persons/groups, social patterns

SDEIS Chapters

• Purpose and Need
• Alternatives
• Transportation
• Community and Social Analysis
• Physical and Environmental Analysis
• Indirect and Cumulative Impacts
• Environmental Justice
• Section 4(f) and 6(f)
• Consultation and Coordination
• Financial Analysis
Property

Impacts (Partial and Full)

- **Brooklyn Park**: 158 parcel impacts (67.4 acres), 2 relocations
- **Crystal**: 15 property impacts (4.2 acres), 6 relocations
- **Robbinsdale**: 31 property impacts (3.1 acres), 1 relocation
- **Minneapolis**: 142 property impacts (7.0 acres), 27 relocations
- **Continued efforts to minimize and avoid property impacts** – finalized in SFEIS

Mitigation

- Payment of fair-market compensation for impacted property, relocation advisory services and reimbursement for moving and reestablishment expenses for commercial relocations
Business/Economic Effects

Impacts
• Increase in property values and associated property taxes
• Business access disruptions
• Potential for displacement of property owners and renters due to rising prices

Mitigation
• Implementation of anti-displacement measures and policies within the Project
• Close coordination with key stakeholders and members of the public during construction

Benefits
• Positive economic impact in the local economy
• LRT operation and maintenance job creation and earnings
Visual/Aesthetics

Impacts

• Adverse visual impacts in Brooklyn Park, related to the proposed operations and maintenance facility

Mitigation

• Mitigation could include screening, lighting design, and context-sensitive design elements for the OMF
Historic Properties – Section 106

Impacts

• Identification of properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, evaluation of impacts underway via Section 106 process

Mitigation

• Mitigation will be identified in the SFEIS

Robbinsdale Library building - listed on the National Register of Historic Places
Transportation

Impacts
• Temporary sidewalk and bike facility closures, disruptions/changes to vehicle traffic/operations, loss of parking

Mitigation
• Restriping, adding turn lanes, allowing U-turn movements, signalization, traffic management strategies

Benefits
• Transit improvement – light rail service
• Improvements to pedestrian and cyclist safety, comfort, accessibility

LRT service in downtown Minneapolis
Water Resources

Impacts

• Approximately 12.2 acres of floodplain impacts

• Approximately 8.56 acres of wetland and stormwater basin impacts, which is less than what as identified in the 2016 EIS

Mitigation

• Minimize floodplain impacts through design and create replacement flood storage areas

• Permanent wetland impacts will be mitigated through wetland credits

Benefits

• Replacement flood storage areas would improve overall flood management of affected basins
Soils and Geologic Resources

Impacts

• Dewatering
• Soil erosion
• Temporary fill

Mitigation

• Adhere to permit requirements
• Special design considerations
Plants and Animals

Impacts

- Wildlife disruption due to construction noise and physical disturbance, habitat fragmentation or loss, soil disturbance may cause spread of noxious weeds

Mitigation

- Adhere to permit requirements
- Special design considerations

Image depicts a flower and bee

SDEIS Chapters
- Purpose and Need
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- Section 4(f) and 6(f)
- Consultation and Coordination
- Financial Analysis
Contaminated Properties and Hazardous Materials

Impacts

- 152 high risk known or potentially contaminated sites
- 288 medium risk known or potentially contaminated sites

Mitigation

- Additional study will be conducted and documented in the SFEIS to evaluate groundwater contamination

Benefits

- Opportunity to remove contamination and potentially reduce future exposure risks
Noise

Impacts

• Moderate noise impacts at 2 institutions and 27 residential properties (244 dwelling units), most of which would be in Minneapolis

• Severe noise impacts at 15 properties (173 dwelling units), all within Minneapolis

Mitigation

• Noise mitigation will be considered in the SFEIS

Image depicts LRT during construction
Vibration

Impacts

• The Build Alternative would result in vibration impacts at 2 residential properties (28 dwelling units)
• All vibration impacts are located within Minneapolis

Mitigation

• Vibration mitigation will be considered in the SFEIS
Section 4(f)

Section 4(f) is a federal law protecting publicly-owned parks and wildlife refuges and significant historical sites from conversion to transportation use.

- **Section 4(f) Impacts**: Anticipated *de minimis use* for six parks and temporary occupancy use determinations for seven parks.
  - *de minimis* means the activities, features, and attributes of the park are not adversely affected.
  - Comments will be considered prior to making Section 4(f) determinations.
Environmental Justice
EJ Process

Identify EJ Communities and past harms

Assess impacts to EJ Communities

Avoidance, Minimization, Mitigation

Publish in SDEIS

SDEIS includes preliminary Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation

Engagement with EJ Communities throughout entire process

2025 - SFEIS documents committed mitigation plan
What is an EJ community?

EJ communities are any populations that have a significant proportion of people who have low incomes or are otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality and who experience disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental burdens.

Some examples include:
- Low-income individuals
- Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color (BIPOC) individuals
- Individuals with disabilities
- Households with high housing-cost burden
- Households without access to a car
- Individuals 65 years or older
- Individuals with limited English proficiency
Justice40 Initiative

• Federal government effort to deliver at least 40% of the overall benefits from certain federal investments to EJ Communities

• The Justice40 Initiative’s investment areas, including clean transit, are especially relevant in the context of transportation
  ▪ Provides an opportunity to address gaps in transportation infrastructure and public services
How are Project Impacts to EJ Communities Determined?

• Determine project impacts for the entire population in the project area for all environmental categories (noise, vibration, water, community character, etc.)

• Identify ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate impacts if they exist

• If there are impacts remaining after measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate have been identified, determine how much of these impacts would be borne by EJ populations

• Identify any benefits of the project that would offset impacts primarily borne by EJ populations

• Compare any EJ-borne impacts with off-setting benefits to determine if the project has “disproportionately high and adverse” effects on EJ populations

• If it is determined that project impacts would disproportionately and adversely impact EJ populations; determine additional mitigation commitments
Topics with identified adverse impacts to EJ communities

- Adverse impacts that warrant mitigation:
  - Community impacts – along 21st Ave
  - Property
  - Businesses
  - Transportation - parking
  - Noise and Vibration
  - Economic effects – indirect displacement
EJ Benefits

• Transportation
  ▪ Improved transit service
  ▪ New bike and pedestrian infrastructure
  ▪ Reconstruction of roadways that are shared with LRT (and West Broadway in Minneapolis) would provide:
    o Refresh pavement, gutters, and drainage systems
    o Widened sidewalks provide space for street cafes, landscaping, directional signage, and improved street lighting, which can greatly enhance the pedestrian experience and contribute to the overall livability of the area
    o Curb extensions improve pedestrian safety by reducing crossing distance and enhancing sight line for drivers
EJ Benefits (continued)

• Jobs/Economic

- Opportunity for community land ownership and redevelopment of land vacated for light rail
- Generation of thousands of jobs through planning and construction of BLE
- Small businesses can attract more employees and customers through improved transit options
EJ Benefits (continued)

• Environmental/Health
  - Opportunities for new stormwater infiltration and green space
  - Reduced pollution compared to gas powered vehicles
  - Improved public health by connecting people to quality healthcare and active transportation options
  - Safety and more comfortable pedestrian-scale lighting
  - Improved safety by reducing vehicle use and traffic accidents
SDEIS Comment Period and Next Steps
What will we do with comments received during the SDEIS comment period?

• After the comment period ends, project staff will compile, consider, and respond to comments received regarding the SDEIS

• Comments received will inform the SFEIS

• Responses to comments will be published in the SFEIS
Commenting on the SDEIS

• Providing a written comment
  ▪ **In-Person:** Complete the “SDEIS Comment Form”, available at the public hearing in July and at office hours/community events with project staff, or other comments in writing
  ▪ **Online:** Visit the Metropolitan Council’s Blue Line project website (BlueLineExt.org) to complete the online comment form at any time during the comment period
  ▪ **Email** (BlueLineExt@metrotransit.com)
  ▪ **Mail:** Blue Line Extension Project Office, Attn: Neha Damle, 6465 Wayzata Blvd, Suite 600 | St. Louis Park, MN | 55426

• Providing a verbal comment
  ▪ **Online:** Call the SDEIS project hotline (612-373-3970) and leave a message to submit a verbal comment at any time during the comment period
  ▪ **In-Person:** Provide a verbal comment at the public hearings in July

The SDEIS comment period will close August 5, 2024