

Business Item

Transportation Committee



Committee Meeting Date: June 24, 2024

For the Metropolitan Council: June 26, 2024

Business Item: 2024-162 SW

METRO Blue Line Extension – Authorize SDEIS Public Hearings

District(s), Member(s):	District 2 (Reva Chamblis) District 7 (Yassin Osman) District 8 (Anjuli Cameron)
Policy/Legal Reference:	23 C.F.R. Part 771, Minnesota Rule 4410.3000, and Council policy 2-2b: Public Hearing procedure
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Lesley Kandaras, General Manager, 612-349-7513 Nick Thompson, Deputy General Manager, 612-349-7507 Nick Landwer, BLE Director of Design and Engr, 651-373-3847 Kelcie Young, BLE Environmental Manager, 612-373-3886
Division/Department:	METRO Blue Line Extension Project Office (BPO)

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council authorize scheduling and conducting public hearings for the METRO Blue Line Extension (BLE) Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) on July 16, 2024, from 5 to 7 p.m. at NorthPoint Conference Center, 1256 Penn Avenue North, Suite 5200, in Minneapolis and on Tuesday, July 23 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Brooklyn Park Library, 8500 West Broadway Avenue in Brooklyn Park.

Background

The BLE project would extend the METRO Blue Line light rail line from downtown Minneapolis to the northwest serving the communities of Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park.

The BLE project was given approval to enter into the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Project Development Phase by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on August 22, 2014. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was released in July 2016, followed by FTA's issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) in September 2016 and then Entry into the Engineering Phase on January 19, 2017. On June 22, 2022, the Metropolitan Council took action to advance a proposed route modification which does not utilize freight rail right-of-way, as outlined in the 2022 Route Modification Report (see Business Item 2022-158). FTA determined that the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act Class of Action required for addressing the route modification was to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

The purpose of the SDEIS is to evaluate design adjustments developed since the publication of the FEIS and ROD.

The FTA approved the SDEIS for publication on June 14, 2024. Comments will be accepted through August 5, 2024, through a variety of methods, including email, voice mail to a comment hotline, in writing at events, and through verbal testimony at a public hearing. The comment period must remain open a minimum of 10 days following the hearing according to Minnesota Rule 4410.2600, subp 9.

In addition to public hearings, a learning session and office hours are scheduled to help ensure robust public awareness and participation. These dates include:

- SDEIS Virtual Learning Session, Thursday, June 27, 5:30 p.m., Microsoft Teams

SDEIS Office Hours:

- Thursday, June 27, 3:30-5:30 p.m., Brooklyn Park Library
- Tuesday, July 2, 3–5 p.m., Robbinsdale Transit Center
- Tuesday, July 2, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Rockford Road Library
- Tuesday, July 9, 11 a.m.–1:00 p.m., Capri Theater
- Thursday, July 11, 11 a.m.–1:00 p.m., North Loop Garage, Training Room 104

Rationale

Holding a minimum of one public hearing is a requirement of state and federal environmental regulations. Comments will be received at the public hearings, as well as during additional community events, by email, online, or by voice mail.

Thrive Lens Analysis

The public hearing is a necessary step in the environmental review process that must be completed in order to continue advancing the BLE project. Investment in high-quality transportation options like the BLE Project will advance the Thrive outcome of prosperity by making the region more economically competitive through increased workers' access to employment, and support to employers by increasing available workforce with affordable, convenient transportation.

The BLE project advances the Equity outcome by distributing transit resources throughout the region and improving access to jobs, educational opportunities, and health services to diverse communities.

Advancing the BLE project addresses the Livability outcome by increasing access to transit connections to the greater METRO system, including current and planned light rail and bus rapid transit lines, for communities in the region.

Funding

Local funding is fully provided through the executed Capital Grant Agreement #22I068 with Hennepin County and the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority and incorporated into the Council's Authorized Capital Budget under Project #61403

Small Business Inclusion

There are no direct impacts to small business with this action.

