



BI2025-178: Northstar Commuter Rail Suspension and Replacement Service Plan

Adam Harrington | Director, Service Development

Proposed Action

- That the Metropolitan Council authorize the suspension of Northstar Commuter Rail service pursuant to all applicable contracts, agreements, easements, and licenses, and approves enhanced bus service serving the Northstar Corridor within the seven-county Metropolitan area to be incorporated in Network Now.

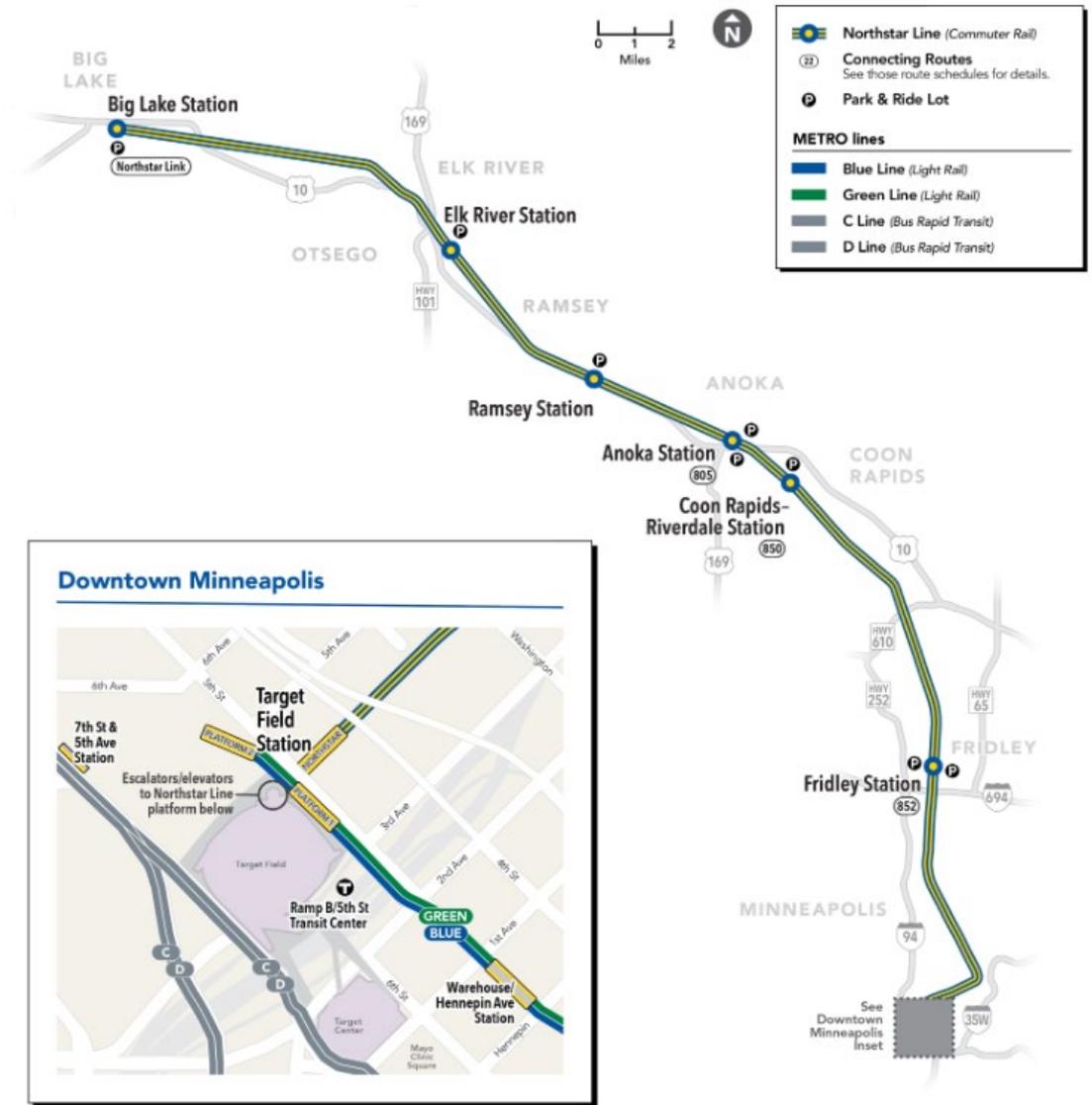
Northstar Background

- Ridership
 - Pre-pandemic: maximum of 2,660 average weekday rides
 - 2024: 430 average weekday rides
- 2023 subsidy per ride: \$116.60 vs \$16.07 for commuter bus
- 2025 operating budget: \$18.6M
 - Not including insurance and capital expenditures

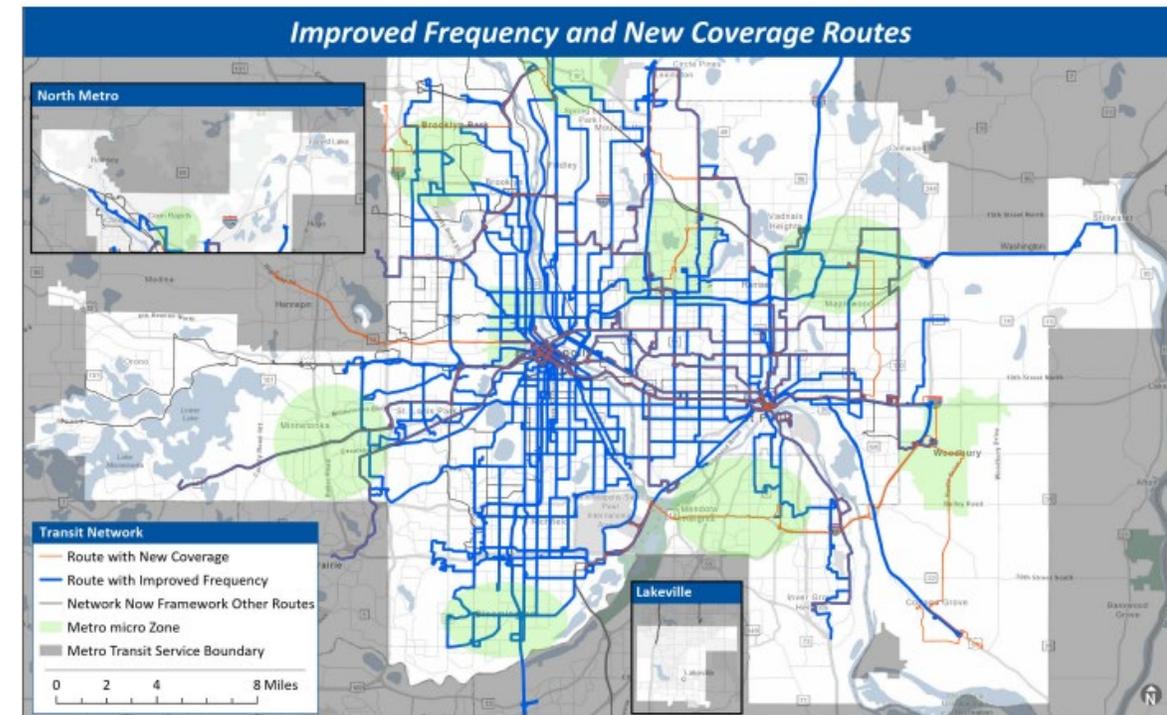
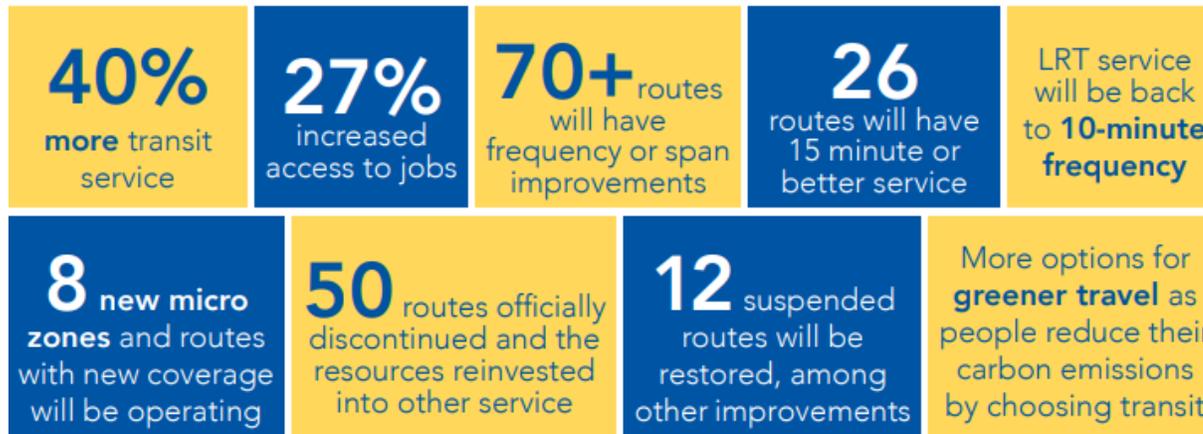
Northstar Service Levels

| | Weekday | Weekend |
|--------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Pre-COVID | 12 daily trips | 6 daily trips |
| 2020-2023 | 4 daily trips | 0 trips |
| 2023-Present | 8 daily trips | Special Events only |

- Weekday rush hour only
- One reverse-commute trip
- Special events (Twins, Vikings, Concerts)
- Service levels constrained by BNSF contract
 - No regular midday or evening trips
 - Limited options for changing travel patterns



Network Now – framework for service improvements through 2027



Network Now engagement 2024

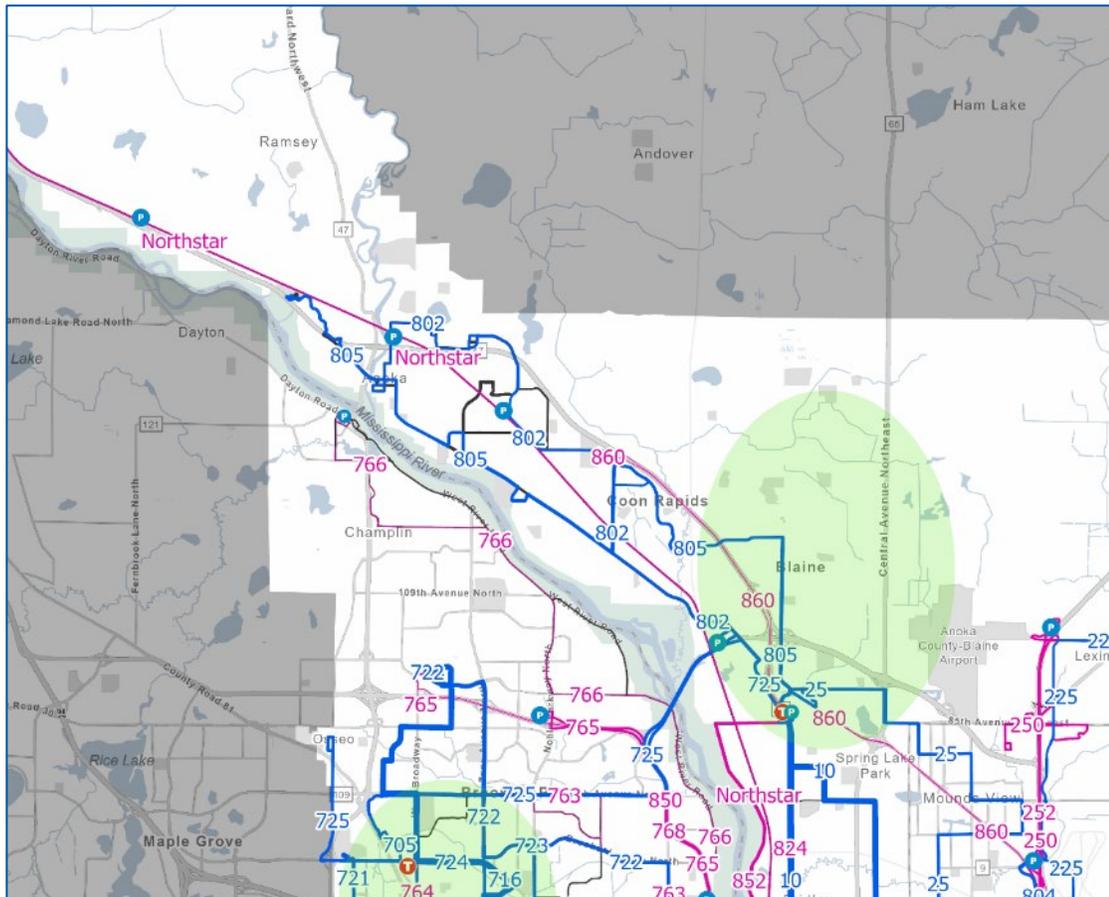
- 25 community events
 - Includes events held primarily in other languages
- 35 municipal and county public briefings
- 15 committee and other presentations
- 150 hours of onboard and transit center intercept work with material handed to over 2,000 customers
- Great Day In Transit: 65 ambassadors working 270 hours shared Network Now information, interacting with 20-50 people per shift
- Rider alerts, interior cards, newsletters, social media, partner collaboration and more



2024 Network Now Engagement - what we heard from Anoka County/communities

- Shared plans and invited meetings with each city
- Met with Blaine staff, Anoka County Transportation Commission
- Community event and listening session at Northtown
- 151 comments related to Anoka County service
 - 39 Northstar comments
 - More bus express and Northstar frequency, all day service, extend to St. Cloud
 - Local connections via Rt 805

Network Now Framework (endorsed March 2025)



March 2025 begin Northstar transition planning

- Metro Transit constrained to Metro Area by Statute (7-county)
- MNDOT authority to provide service outside Metro Area
- Develop service concept for Route 827 and 888
 - Ramsey, Anoka, Coon Rapids, Fridley, downtown Minneapolis
 - 30-minute rush hour
 - Hourly all day
- Community engagement

Northstar bus transition engagement April-May 2025

- Survey open April 10-May 11
 - 1,455 responses
 - 23 written (paper) comments
- Four public meetings held, over 175 attendees
 - Two in-person (Anoka, Fridley)
 - One virtual
 - One onboard



Response to Alternative Bus Service (Likelihood and timing)

- Many of the people that responded have more traditional commuter hours (but not all) or only use special event service
 - Those that use Northstar most often tend to have more consistent schedules
- 46% of daily riders are **more likely** to use service every 30 minutes between 6-8:30 a.m. and 4-6:30 p.m.
- Hourly bus service 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.
 - 33% of riders **not likely at all to use**
 - More than 50% riders somewhat likely to use
- 70% of daily riders would need to **arrive in downtown Minneapolis between 6-8:30 a.m.**
 - For those that use Northstar sometimes or not at all 44% need to be downtown during that time range

Enhanced bus service 2026

New Route 888

Coach bus serving Ramsey, Anoka, Coon Rapids stations and Minneapolis

Weekdays

| Direction | Time Period | Frequency |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Southbound (Inbound) | Before 6 am | 1 trip |
| | 6:30 am – 8:30 am | 30" |
| | 9 am – 6 pm | 60" |
| Northbound (Outbound) | 6 am – 4 pm | 60" |
| | 4 pm – 6 pm | 30" |
| | After 6 pm | 2 trips |

Saturday and Sundays

3 trips inbound: 10:30 am, 12:30 pm, 5:30 pm

3 trips outbound: 2 pm, 7 pm, 11 pm



Enhanced bus service 2026

Route 827 (replace current Route 852)

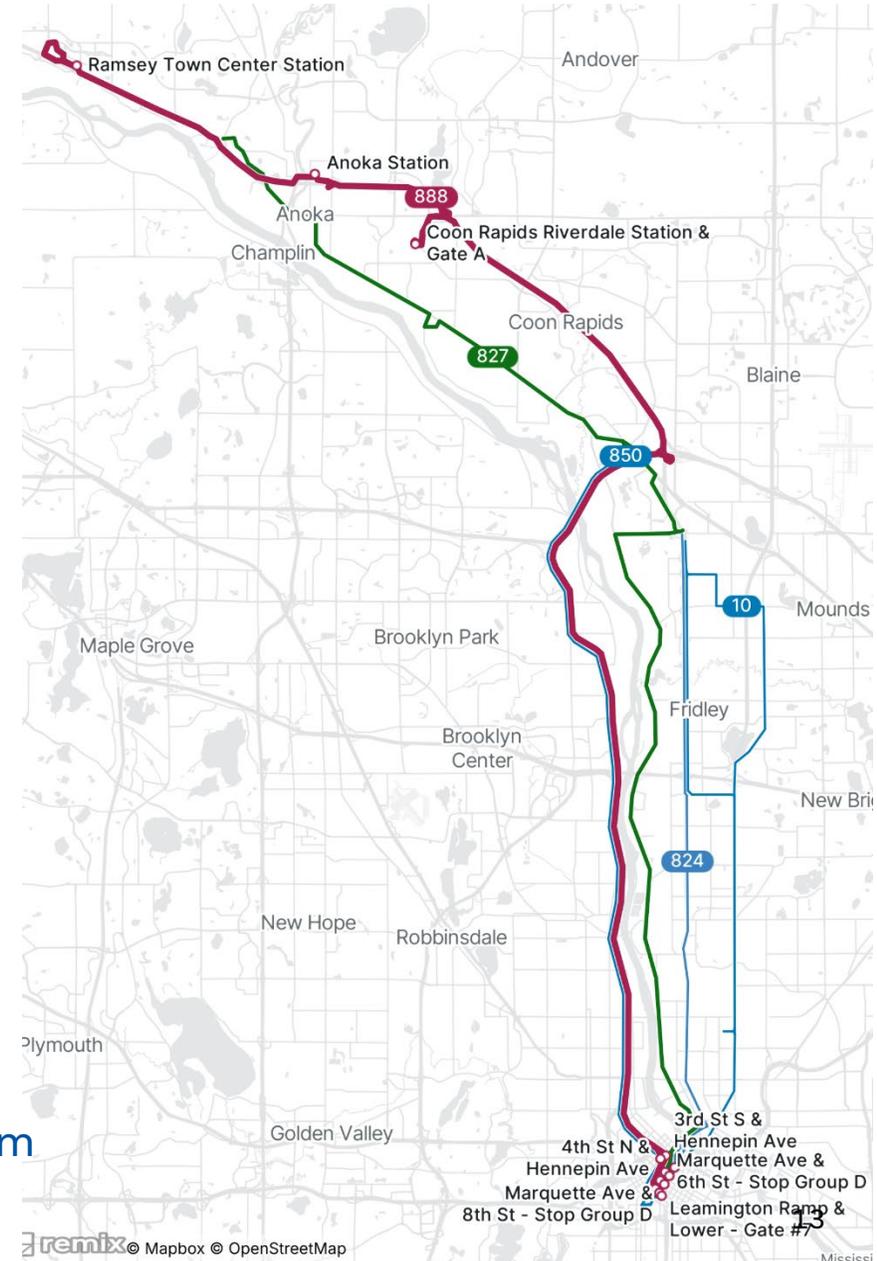
Limited stop bus serving Fridley Station @ East River Road to Minneapolis

Weekdays

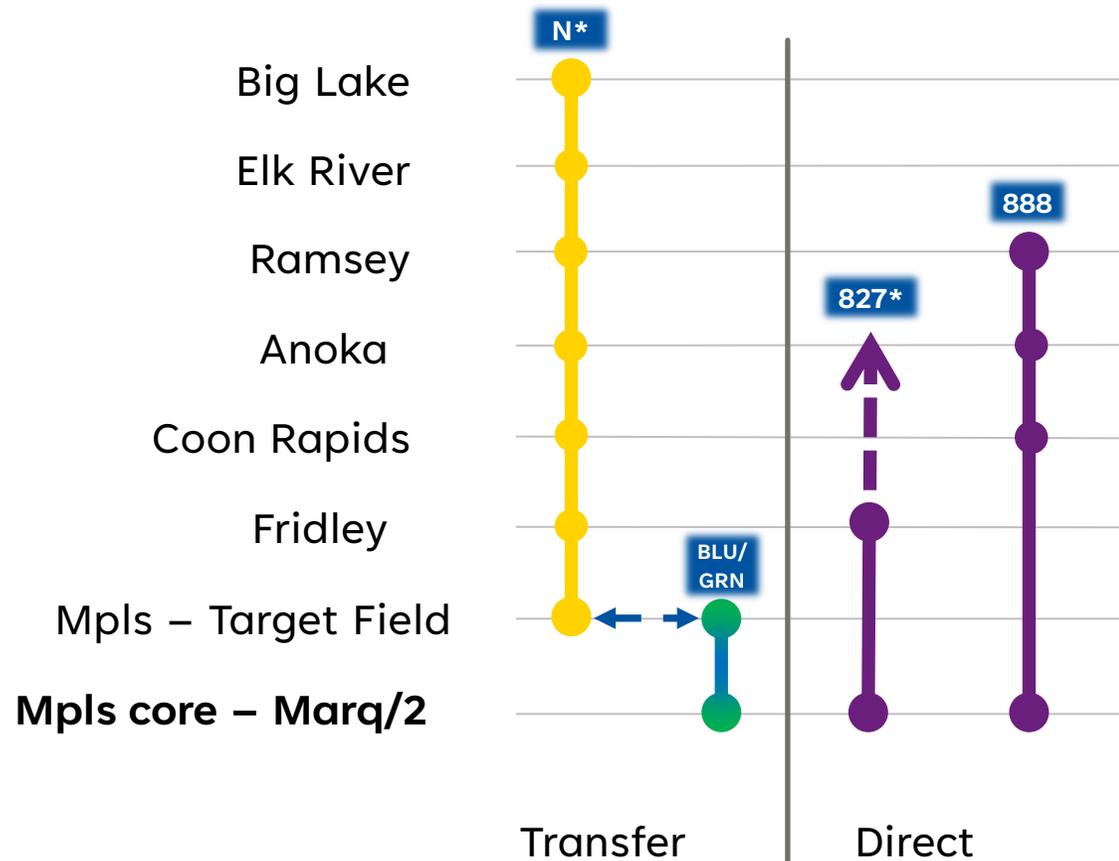
| Direction | Time Period | Frequency | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Southbound Weekday (Inbound) | 6 am – 9 am | 30" | Northtown-downtown |
| | 9 am – 9 pm | 60" | |
| Northbound Weekday (Outbound) | 5 am – 3 pm | 60" | Downtown-Northtown |
| | 3 pm – 6 pm | 30" | |
| | After 6 pm | 3 trips | |

Saturday

Inbound: hourly 8:45 pm – 6:45 pm; Outbound: hourly 9:30 am – 7:30 pm



Service Comparison



Travel time comparison

| Origin Station | Northstar-LRT to 5 th & Nicollet | Bus to 5 th & Nicollet |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Ramsey | 45 minutes | 63 minutes |
| Anoka | 42 minutes | 49 minutes |
| Coon Rapids-Riverdale | 39 minutes | 41 minutes |
| Fridley | 29 minutes | 33 minutes |

Connections improved

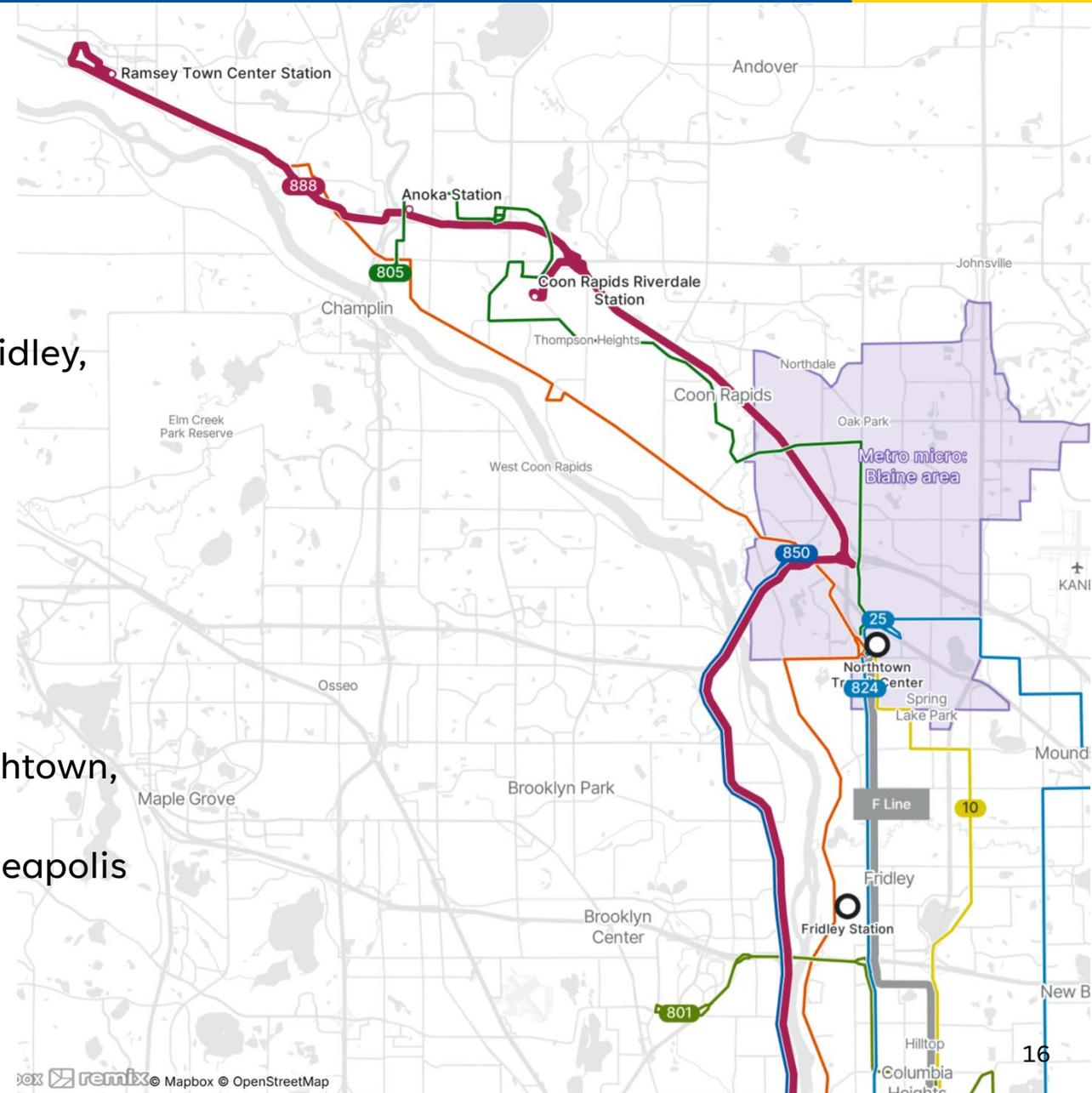
- Nicollet Station - Blue & Green Lines
- Marq/2 - Orange, 645
- 7th/8th Streets - C, D, 5, 9, 14, 22, 94

Rail to bus service comparison

| | Current rail schedule | Planned bus schedule |
|--------------|--|--|
| Weekdays | 8 trips per weekday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 southbound AM • 3 northbound PM • 2 reverse trips, one AM and one PM | Route 888 (Ramsey, Anoka, Coon Rapids, Minneapolis) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 southbound 5:00 am – 6:00 pm • 16 northbound 6:00 am – 7:00 pm Route 827 (Fridley, Minneapolis) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 southbound 6:00 am – 9:00 pm • 19 northbound 5:00 am – 8:00 pm |
| Weekends | None, except special events | Route 888 Saturday & Sunday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 southbound 10:30 am – 5:30 pm • 3 northbound 2:00 pm – 11:00 pm Route 827 Saturday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 southbound 8:00 am – 6:00 pm • 11 northbound 9:30 am – 7:30 pm |
| Weekly total | 40 trips | 379 trips |

Planned bus service

- 2025
 - Route 805 Anoka-Riverdale-Northtown
 - Route 852 Anoka, Coon Rapids, Northtown, Fridley, Minneapolis
 - Route 850 Coon Rapids-Minneapolis
 - Route 860 Anoka, Coon Rapids, Northtown, Moundsview, St. Paul
 - Metro Micro
- 2026 Enhanced service
 - Route 827 (old 852) Anoka, Coon Rapids, Northtown, Fridley, Minneapolis
 - Route 888 Ramsey, Anoka, Coon Rapids, Minneapolis
- Transit Link across Anoka County

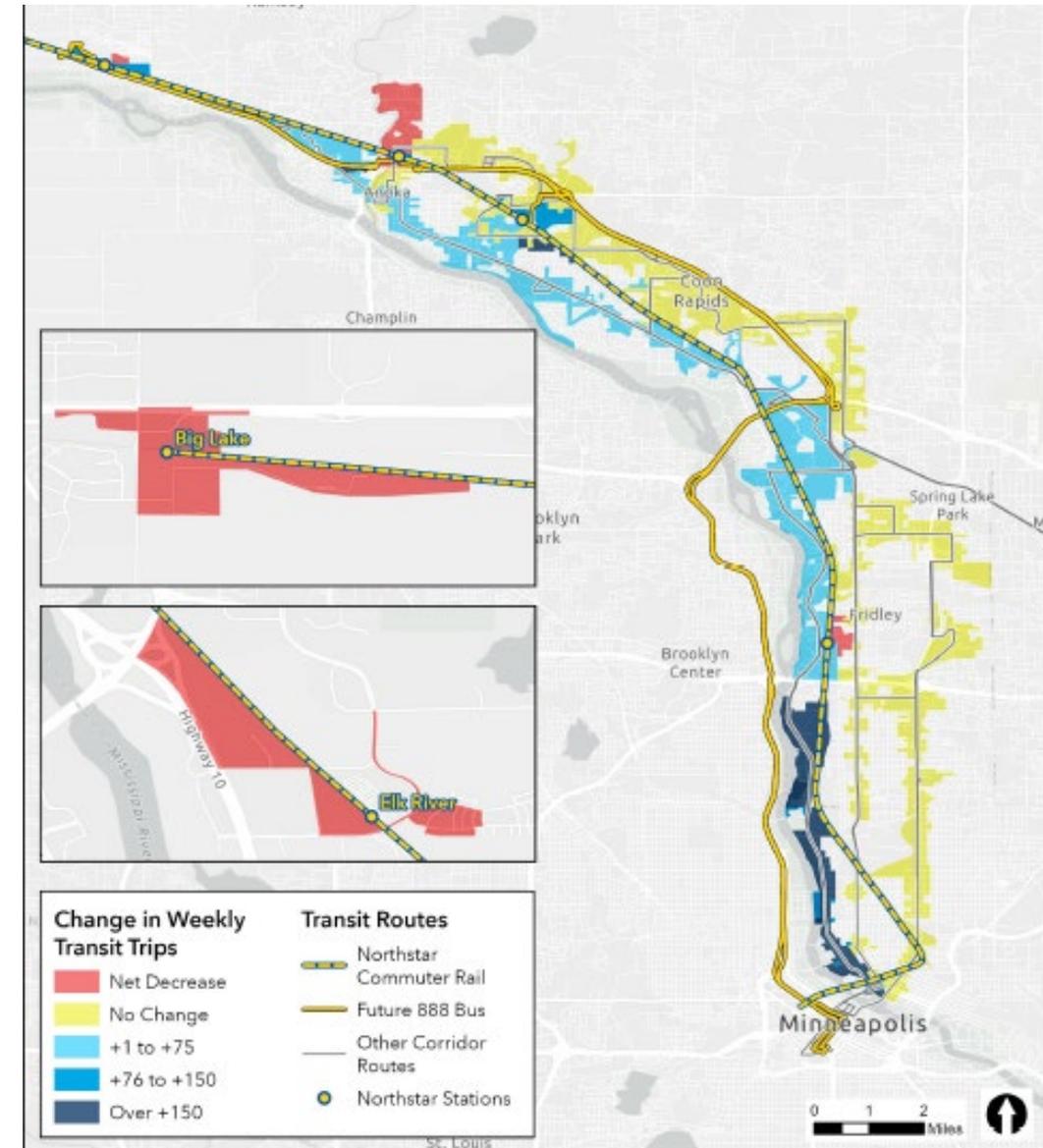


Title VI Analyses

- Federal law requires transit agencies to show they are not discriminating when providing transit service or changing fare.
 - Council's **Disparate Impact & Disproportionate Burden (DI/BD)** policy requires analysis of impacts by race and income (i.e. BIPOC and non-BIPOC, Low Income and Non-Low Income)
- Service Equity Analysis (SEA): change in number of scheduled trips available nearby to average resident in corridor
- Fare Equity Analysis (FEA): average change in fare to passengers
- Analyses do not consider mode, vehicle size/amenities, park-and-ride access, travel time

Title VI Results

- Service Equity Analysis
 - Service increase East River Rd/Marshall
 - Customer survey reflects Rt. 852 (future Rt. 827) ridership is 43% BIPOC and 63% low income.
 - East River Rd service included in Network Now, system wide improvements



Title VI Results

- Service Equity Analysis: potential DI/DB
 - Trip availability/residential area increased more for non-low income and non-minority populations.
- Fare Equity Analysis: potential DB
 - Lower fares for long-distance passengers benefit non-low income riders
- Recommendation: Proceed with service change

| | DI Index | | DB Index | |
|-----|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | # Trip Change | % Trip Change | # Trip Change | % Trip Change |
| SEA | 0.71 | 0.78 | 0.82 | 0.84 |
| | High Level | Fare Media | High Level | Fare Media |
| FEA | 1.82 | 1.50 | 0.87 | 0.76 |

Potential DI/DB if index <0.9

Proposed Action

- That the Metropolitan Council authorize the suspension of Northstar Commuter Rail service pursuant to all applicable contracts, agreements, easements, and licenses, and approves enhanced bus service serving the Northstar Corridor within the seven-county Metropolitan area to be incorporated in Network Now.

Thank You!

Adam Harrington

Adam.Harrington@metrotransit.org