



1 Purpose and Need

This chapter gives an overview of the proposed METRO Blue Line Light Rail Transit (BLRT) Extension project, including its location and setting within the local communities and the region, and the context of previous planning studies. It also describes the purpose and the need for the project. The Alternatives Analysis, *Bottineau Transitway Alternatives Analysis Study Final Report* (Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority [HCRRA], 2010), was completed in 2010 and the *Bottineau Transitway Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS)* (Federal Transit Administration [FTA], HCRRA, and Metropolitan Council [Council], 2014) was completed in 2014. This Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) updates the purpose and need in light of currently available data.

Changes to This Chapter since the Alternatives Analysis and Draft EIS

This chapter follows the general format of Chapter 1 of the Draft EIS.¹ The Final EIS updates population, employment, and travel demand to 2040, consistent with the Metropolitan Council's (Council's) updated regional plans, including *Thrive MSP 2040* (Council, 2014a) and the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan (2040 TPP)* (Council, 2015a). The Draft EIS had used a 2030 horizon year, which was consistent with regional planning documents available at that time.

In addition, in March 2014 the Council completed a Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA) in accordance with the requirements of the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant provided by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The FHEA is titled *Choice, Place and Opportunity: An Equity Assessment of the Twin Cities Region* (www.metrocouncil.org/Planning/Projects/Thrive-2040/Choice-Place-and-Opportunity.aspx). The FHEA analyzed Areas of Concentrated Poverty (ACPs) within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, looking at the level of public investment, policies, and affordable housing availability. By providing a more complete picture of equity and access to opportunity in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, the FHEA provides input into key public planning policies, including the availability of transit in ACPs. The FHEA's information regarding the locations of ACPs supports the purpose and need for the proposed BLRT Extension project's Final EIS. The information presented in the FHEA is also used as a component of the evaluation of alternatives (**Chapter 12**) of this Final EIS.

1.1 Project Description

1.1.1 Project Location

The proposed BLRT Extension project would provide transit improvements in the highly traveled northwest area of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The proposed BLRT Extension project would be located in Hennepin County, Minnesota, extending approximately 13 miles from downtown Minneapolis to the northwest, serving north Minneapolis and the suburbs of Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park. The light rail transit (LRT) is anticipated to serve a

¹ A discussion of goals and objectives was included in the Draft EIS and is not included in this Final EIS chapter. Consideration of the goals and objectives was primarily used and presented in the Alternatives Analysis and the Draft EIS to support the identification of the locally preferred alternative (LPA) and to compare the LPA with other alternatives being evaluated.



broader area to the northwest, including the communities of New Hope, Brooklyn Center, Maple Grove, Osseo, Champlin, and Dayton.

Figure 1.1-1 illustrates the proposed BLRT Extension project area. Key transportation facilities within the proposed BLRT Extension project area include the highways shown as well as the BNSF Railway (BNSF), Canadian Pacific Railway (CP), Crystal Airport, Bottineau Boulevard (County Road 81), West Broadway Avenue (County State-Aid Highway 103), and Penn Avenue.

1.1.2 Project Setting

The character of the area surrounding the proposed BLRT Extension project transitions from a moderately dense urban setting in north Minneapolis to a less dense suburban setting starting in Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, and Crystal, and extending through Brooklyn Park at the north end of the corridor. The proposed BLRT Extension project area includes a variety of land use patterns that have been influenced by the transportation-oriented history of the corridor. Low-density, auto-oriented land uses have heavily influenced existing development patterns in the corridor, which primarily reflect highway-oriented regulations and traditional suburban development forms. Additionally, the presence of the existing railway lines influenced the development patterns and settings in the proposed BLRT Extension project corridor (e.g., development set back from the rail right-of-way).

Development in north Minneapolis and Robbinsdale reflects the history of West Broadway Avenue as a commercial streetcar corridor, with strips of auto-oriented commercial activity developed more recently. Residential neighborhoods are located along the proposed BLRT Extension project in Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park. In Brooklyn Park, south of 73rd Avenue and in northern Crystal, development adjacent to the proposed BLRT Extension project includes highway-oriented commercial activity and the Crystal Airport. In Brooklyn Park, north of 73rd Avenue, development adjacent to West Broadway Avenue includes mixed commercial and retail, commercial office/corporate campus (Target North Campus), residential, and institutional use (North Hennepin Community College and Hennepin County Library under construction).

As illustrated in **Figure 1.1-2**, several activity centers are located along the proposed corridor, including downtown Minneapolis, Theodore Wirth Regional Park, downtown Robbinsdale, the Crystal Shopping Center, the Brooklyn Park commercial strip, and North Hennepin Community College. In addition, large commercial developments with substantial employment concentrations are anticipated by 2040 in Brooklyn Park (surrounding the Target North Campus north of Trunk Highway [TH] 610).

1.1.3 Regional Transit System

The proposed BLRT Extension project area is presently served by a mix of express and local bus service provided by Metro Transit, the region's largest transit provider. Key existing transit facilities within the corridor, illustrated in **Figure 1.1-3**, include the Starlite Transit Center in Brooklyn Park, the 63rd Avenue Park-and-Ride in Brooklyn Park, and the Robbinsdale Transit Center at Hubbard Market-place in Robbinsdale. Additional transportation infrastructure in the proposed BLRT Extension project area includes bus-only shoulders on most of Interstate Highway 94 (I-94) in both directions between Minneapolis and northern Maple Grove.



Figure 1.1-1. Proposed BLRT Extension Project Area

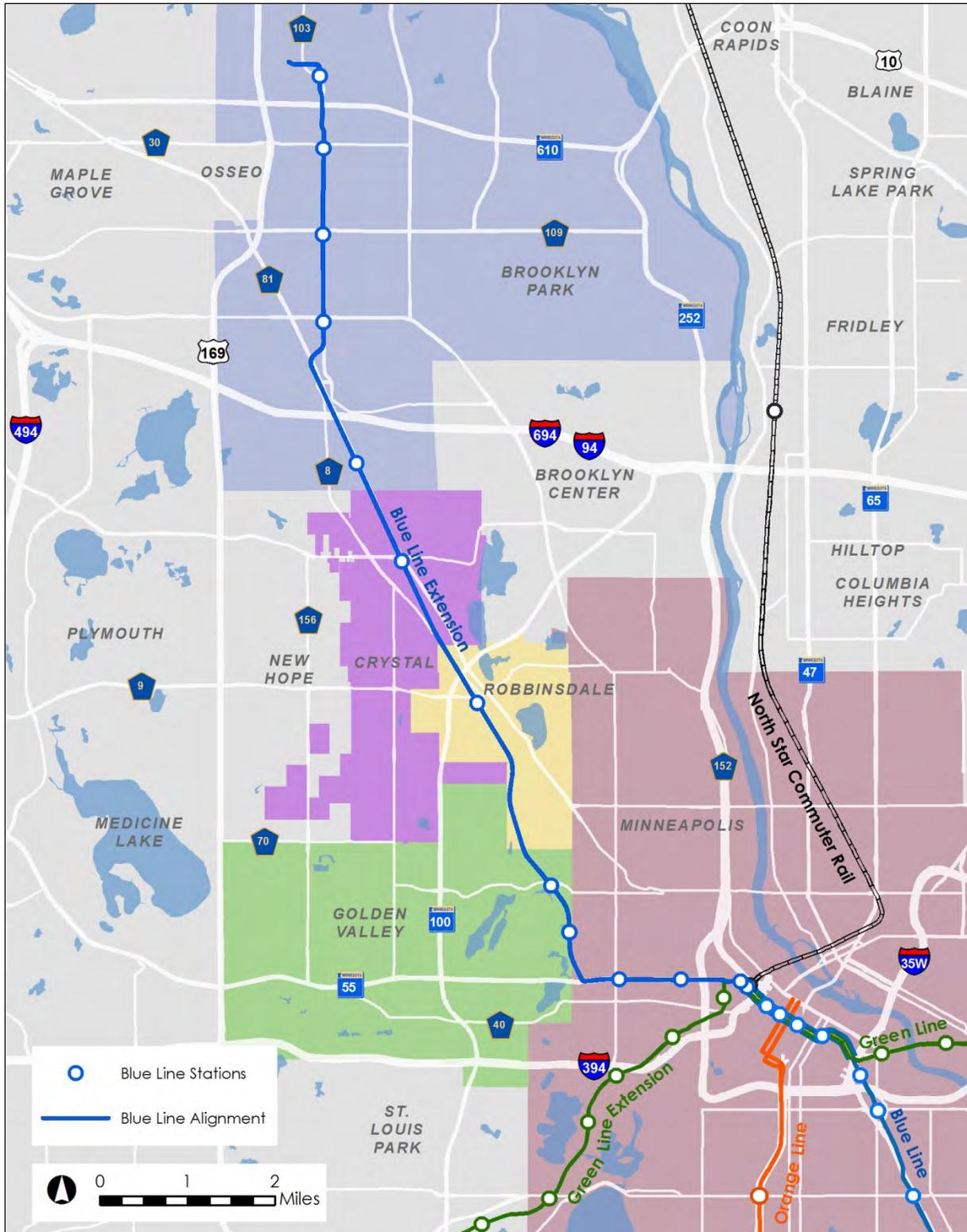
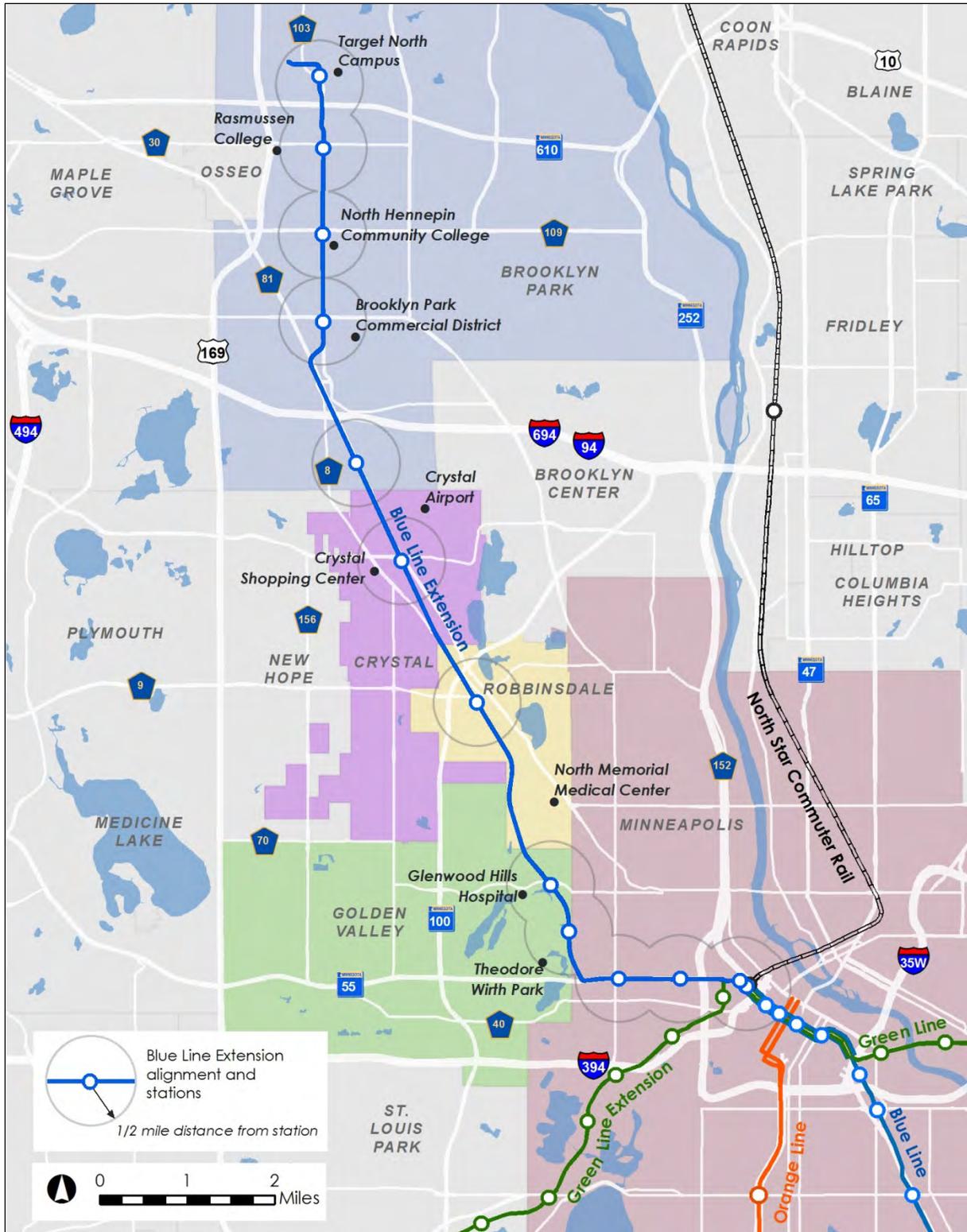




Figure 1.1-2. Proposed BLRT Extension Project Area Activity Centers





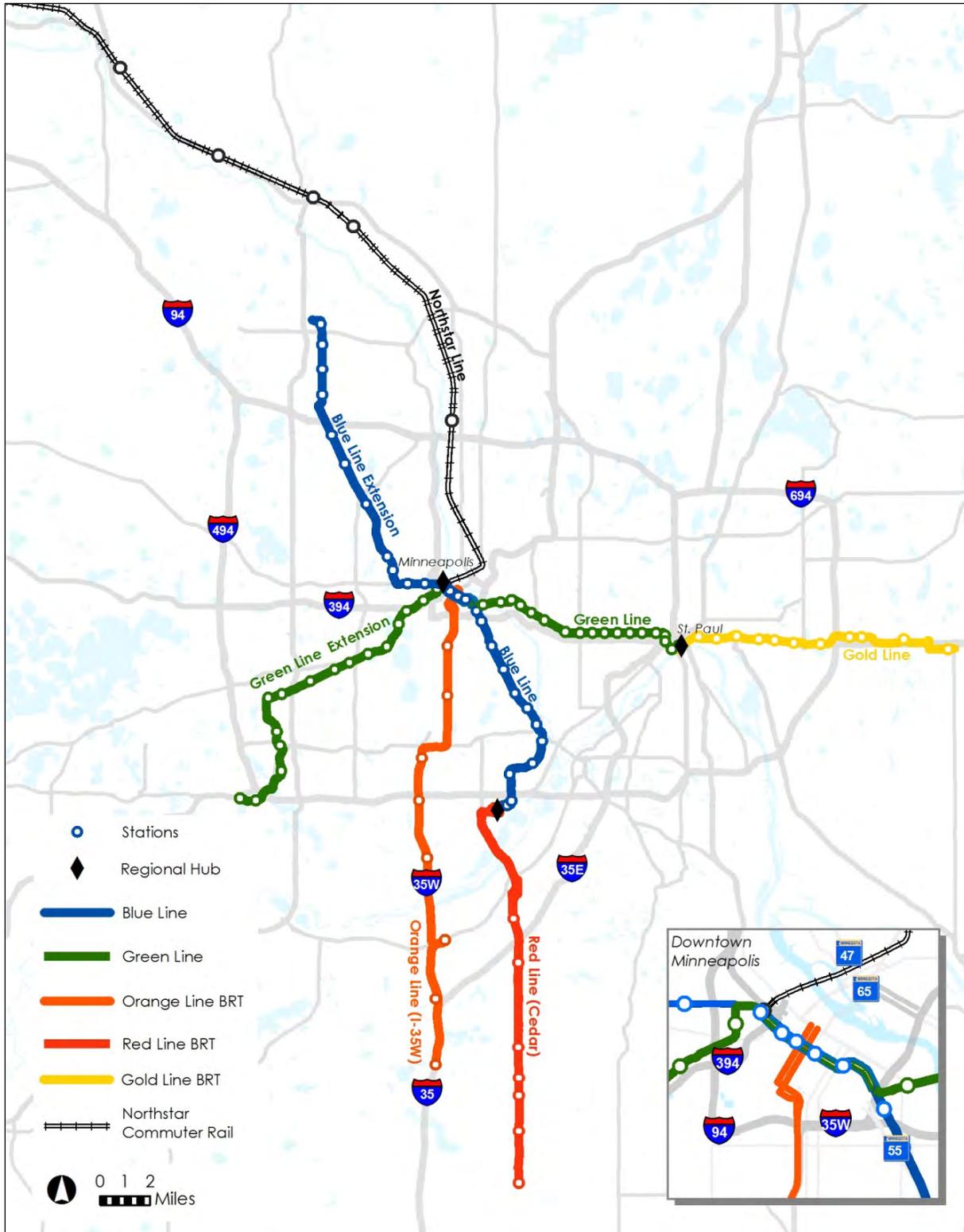
Metro Transit service in the proposed BLRT Extension project area consists of urban local routes serving north Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center, and suburban local and peak-period, peak-direction express service in suburban communities to the north and west. No bus routes currently operate on Bottineau Boulevard north of 29th Avenue North or serve mid-length trips in the general northwest-southeast direction in the proposed BLRT Extension project area.

The Council's *Thrive MSP 2040 TPP* envisions further development of the regional transit system, with opportunities for the expansion and improvement of bus service and transit facilities. In addition, the *2040 TPP* shows the Twin Cities region moving toward a regional system of transitways to improve service in high-demand corridors, meet mobility needs, and increase transit system ridership. A transitway is a combination of infrastructure and transit service improvements that allows transit customers to avoid congestion on roadways and connect to regional activity centers, and boosts the potential for transit-oriented development.

The proposed BLRT Extension project would connect north Minneapolis and the region's northwest suburbs with the region's system of transitways that consist of existing LRT on the Blue Line (Hiawatha) and Green Line (Central Corridor and the planned Southwest line), bus rapid transit (BRT) on the Red Line (Cedar Avenue) and Orange Line (I-35W South), the Northstar Commuter Rail, and express bus routes as shown in **Figure 1.1-4**. Development of the proposed BLRT Extension project would include bus service revisions focused on maintaining and enhancing overall transit service in the corridor.



Figure 1.1-4. Regional Transitway System





1.2 Project Background

1.2.1 Early Planning Efforts

Transportation and land use studies in the proposed BLRT Extension project area date back to the late 1980s. Previous studies include regional system studies, corridor studies, and site-specific studies. The proposed BLRT Extension project (previously identified as the Bottineau Transitway and before that the Northwest Transitway) has consistently been included in local and regional transportation system plans. Many different alignments and modes, including BRT, LRT, and commuter rail, have been considered and evaluated in corridor-specific plans and studies. Previous studies provide a valuable base of information for the proposed BLRT Extension project EIS process. **Figure 1.2-1** summarizes the studies conducted to date in the Bottineau/Northwest corridor.

The region's current long-range transportation plan, *Thrive MSP 2040*, targets the year 2022 for completion of the proposed BLRT Extension project and initiation of operations. The recommendation for the proposed BLRT Extension project is based on findings from the Council's *2030 Transit Master Study*² (Council, 2008) to address and accommodate the transit travel demand in the Bottineau (Northwest) Transitway. These findings are consistent with previous regional transportation system plans including the *Regional Transit Board LRT Plan* (Council, 1990), *Transit 2020 Master Plan* (Council, 2000), *2025 Transportation Policy Plan* (Council, 2001, amended 2002), and *2030 Transportation Policy Plan* (Council, 2004).

1.2.2 Environmental Review Process

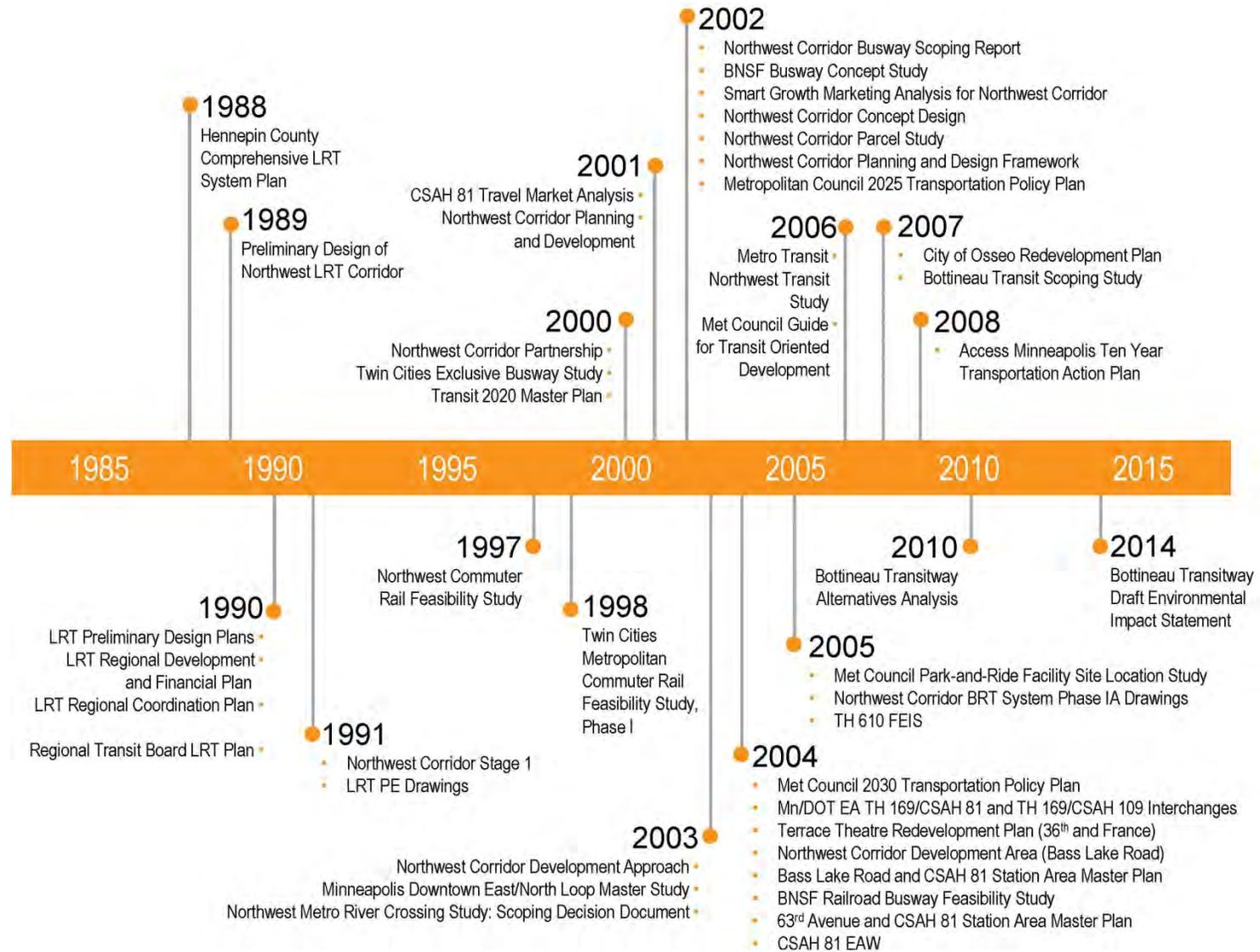
The Council is pursuing federal funding from FTA for the proposed BLRT Extension project and as a result, FTA is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Council is the local public agency, and is required to comply with the requirements of the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) (Minnesota Statutes 116D.04 and 116D.045). The Council is the project sponsor and federal grantee and would lead the process for preliminary engineering, final design, and construction. FTA, as the Federal Lead Agency, and the Council, as the local project sponsor, have prepared this Final EIS to satisfy both NEPA and MEPA.

The intent of the NEPA and MEPA processes is to ensure that potential social, economic, and environmental impacts are identified and considered in the decision-making process. The primary purpose of the Final EIS is to assist decision-makers in the assessment of impacts associated with the proposed BLRT Extension project. The Final EIS documents the purpose and need for the project, presents a discussion of the alternatives considered, provides full disclosure of the anticipated social, economic, and environmental impacts, and proposes appropriate mitigation measures.

² The *2030 Transit Master Study* indicated that “[t]wo corridors had sufficiently high ridership, available right-of-way, and satisfactory costs that showed potential for transitway implementation. The Southwest and Bottineau [the BLRT Extension project] Transitways should continue advanced study towards implementation.” Other corridors were recommended for additional study as well.



Figure 1.2-1. Summary of Previous Bottineau (Northwest) Corridor Studies





The Final EIS serves as the primary document to facilitate review by federal, state, and local agencies and the general public of the proposed project. Following the publication and circulation of the Draft EIS for public review, this Final EIS was prepared to: document and address public and agency comments; present design refinements and commitments to mitigate adverse impacts of the project; and document evidence of compliance with related environmental statutes, Executive Orders, and regulations.

NEPA also requires engaging the public in the environmental review process. In addition, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) requires the development of a coordination plan to outline how the environmental process for the proposed BLRT Extension project would engage the public, Tribal governments, and local, state, and federal agencies with an interest in the project. Certain state, local and tribal agencies were also invited to have a more formal role in the environmental review process as Cooperating and/or Participating Agencies. A complete discussion of the public and agency engagement process, including the identification of Cooperating and Participating Agencies for the proposed BLRT Extension project, can be found in **Chapter 9 – Consultation and Coordination**.

As a Cooperating Agency, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has the ability to adopt the Final EIS for its own NEPA compliance while providing input relative to project development and the associated environmental impacts. This helps USACE determine whether the proposed project is in compliance with the Clean Water Act (CWA), which allows them to issue a permit. USACE has its own process for determining the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA), known as the NEPA/404 merger process. As part of this process, USACE evaluates the project and issues four points of concurrence: (1) Purpose and Need and Alternative Screening Criteria; (2) Alternatives to be Evaluated in Detail; (3) Preferred Alternative and LEDPA; and (4) Permit Application and Avoidance and Minimization.

To date, USACE has provided concurrence with Points 1, 2, and 3 (see letters in **Appendix I**). Specific to Point 1, in a letter dated June 19, 2013, USACE reviewed and concurred with the purpose and need statement for use in NEPA documentation for the proposed BLRT Extension project. USACE also concurred on the array of alternatives considered for the proposed BLRT Extension project and the alternatives that had been carried forward for further review (Point 2). In a letter dated October 1, 2013, USACE issued concurrence on the identification of the Preferred Alternative (Point 3). The Council submitted a Section 404 permit application to USACE on May 17, 2016. USACE will make a decision on approval of the permit application using information disclosed in this Final EIS.



1.3 Project Purpose

The purpose statement below specifically defines the fundamental reasons why the BLRT Extension project is being proposed.

The purpose of the proposed BLRT Extension project is to provide transit service, which will satisfy the long-term regional mobility and accessibility needs for businesses and the traveling public.

1.4 Project Need

This section outlines the foundation for the project purpose defined in **Section 1.3**. More specifically, this section identifies the problems or “needs” that the proposed BLRT Extension project is intended to address and the underlying causes of the defined “needs.”

The proposed BLRT Extension 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.

Due to a continued increase in travel demand coupled with few highway capacity improvements planned for regional roadways in this area, congestion is expected to worsen by 2040.³ While transit investment is recognized regionally as one of the key strategies for managing congestion, transit would offer many other benefits to address the needs of the proposed BLRT Extension project area residents and businesses. Residents and businesses in the proposed BLRT Extension project area need improved access to the region’s activity centers to fully participate in the region’s economy. Access to jobs in downtown Minneapolis and northbound reverse commute transit options to serve jobs in the growing suburban centers are crucial to continued economic vitality. Current transit options in the proposed BLRT Extension project area offer a limited number of travel-time competitive alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle. Without major transit investments in the corridor, it would be difficult to effectively meet the transportation needs of the travelling public and businesses, manage highway traffic congestion, and achieve the region’s 2040 goal, as identified in the *2040 TPP*, of increasing transit ridership by providing multi-modal options that are supported by appropriate land uses.

Five factors contribute to the need for the proposed BLRT Extension project:

- Growing travel demand resulting from continuing growth in population and employment
- Increasing traffic congestion and limited federal, state, and local fiscal resources for transportation improvements
- An increase in the number of people who depend on transit to meet their transportation needs
- Limited transit service to suburban destinations (reverse commute opportunities) and time-efficient transit options
- Regional objectives for growth stated in *Thrive MSP 2040*

³ *Thrive MSP 2040 TPP*



1.4.1 Growing Travel Demand

To illustrate patterns of growth in communities served by the proposed BLRT Extension project, communities are grouped into Corridor Communities and Contributing Communities,⁴ as represented in **Figure 1.4-1** and the subsequent tables. Corridor Communities are those adjacent to the locally preferred alternative (LPA), and include Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park. Contributing Communities are those that are not on the corridor, but are anticipated to contribute to travel demand and ridership. These include New Hope, Brooklyn Center, Maple Grove, Osseo, Champlin, and Dayton. This breakdown of communities illustrates that each area has a distinct pattern and rate of growth. As shown in **Table 1.4-1**, between 1990 and 2010, Brooklyn Park experienced population increases, with greater growth in the outlying suburbs of Maple Grove and Champlin. According to the Council's *Thrive MSP 2040* forecasts, between 2010 and 2040, corridor communities served by the proposed BLRT Extension project are expected to grow by approximately 110,000 people. Other contributing communities that may also potentially be served by the proposed BLRT Extension project (New Hope, Brooklyn Center, Maple Grove, Osseo, Champlin, and Dayton) are projected to grow by approximately 39,000 people.

Employment in the proposed BLRT Extension project area is also expected to increase in coming years according to *Thrive MSP 2040* (see **Figure 1.4-2**). Approximately half of all jobs in the proposed BLRT Extension project area are located in downtown Minneapolis, which is currently the region's largest travel demand generator with approximately 74,000 jobs anticipated to be added by 2040. The remaining employment in the proposed BLRT Extension project area is dispersed throughout the proposed corridor, mainly along regional highways. Large employment concentrations outside downtown Minneapolis are located at North Memorial Medical Center in Robbinsdale and the TH 610 development area (including the Target North Campus and other office, commercial and residential development) in Brooklyn Park. The contributing communities are expected to experience the highest percentage of growth in employment in the proposed BLRT Extension project area by 2040. These trends are shown in **Table 1.4-2**.

Growth in population and employment in the proposed BLRT Extension project area and beyond is expected to result in increased transportation demand. Thus, significant growth in traffic volumes is anticipated within the proposed BLRT Extension project area.

Population growth in the collar counties⁵ (the 12 counties adjacent to the seven-county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area) coupled with employment growth in the proposed BLRT Extension project area (see **Figure 1.4-2**) will result in a sizable increase in trips between these areas. In 2010, collar county residents from Sherburne and portions of Wright counties made an estimated 23,000 trips per day to destinations within the proposed BLRT Extension project area. By 2040, this number is expected to increase by 37 percent, to nearly 31,500 trips per day, as shown in **Table 1.4-3**.

⁴ Corridor Community and Contributing Community information has been updated in this Final EIS to reflect more recent projections and to focus on the communities in the area of the proposed BLRT Extension project alignment.

⁵ mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/population-data/our-projections



Figure 1.4-1. Corridor and Contributing Communities

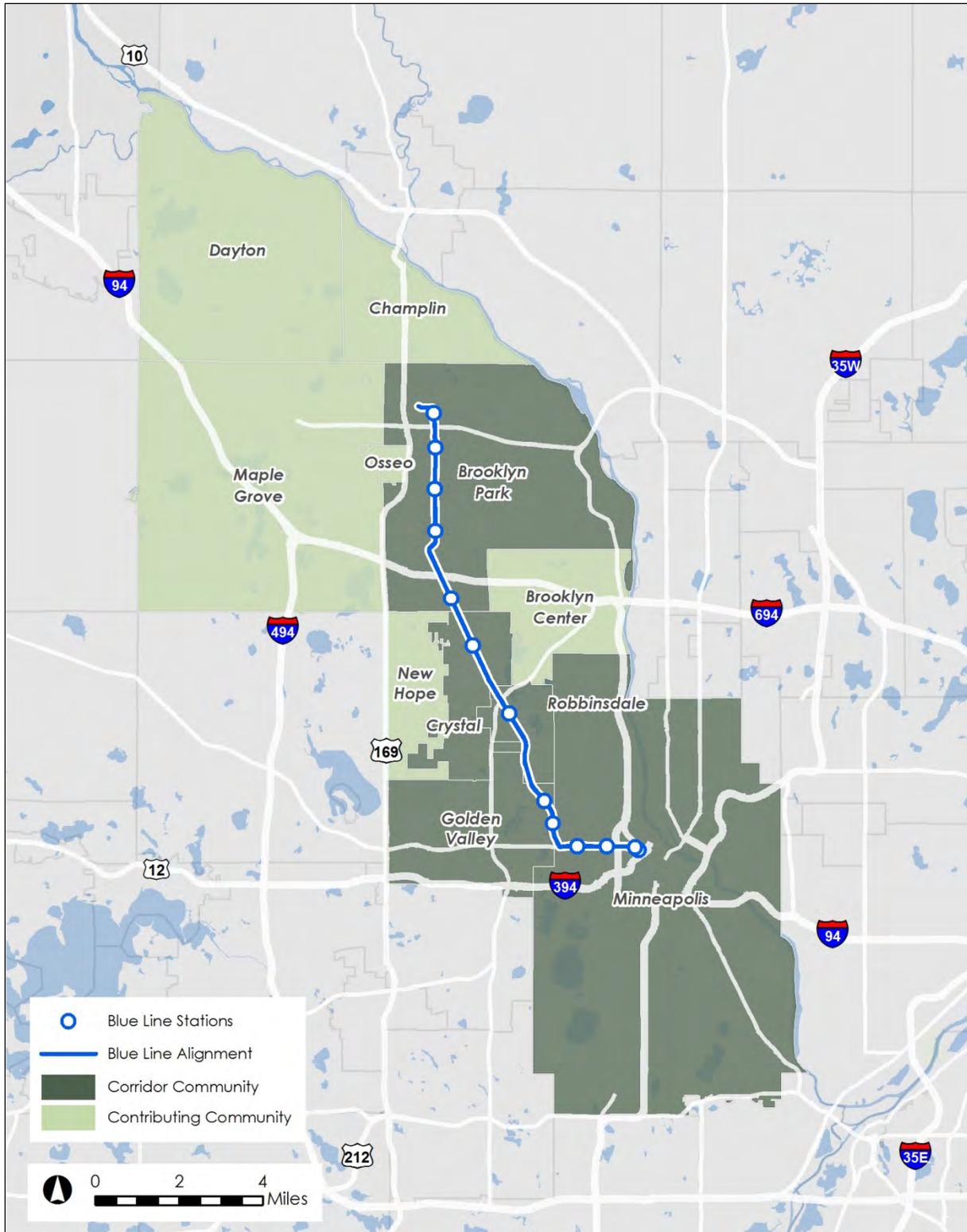




Figure 1.4-2. 2010 to 2040 Employment Forecast

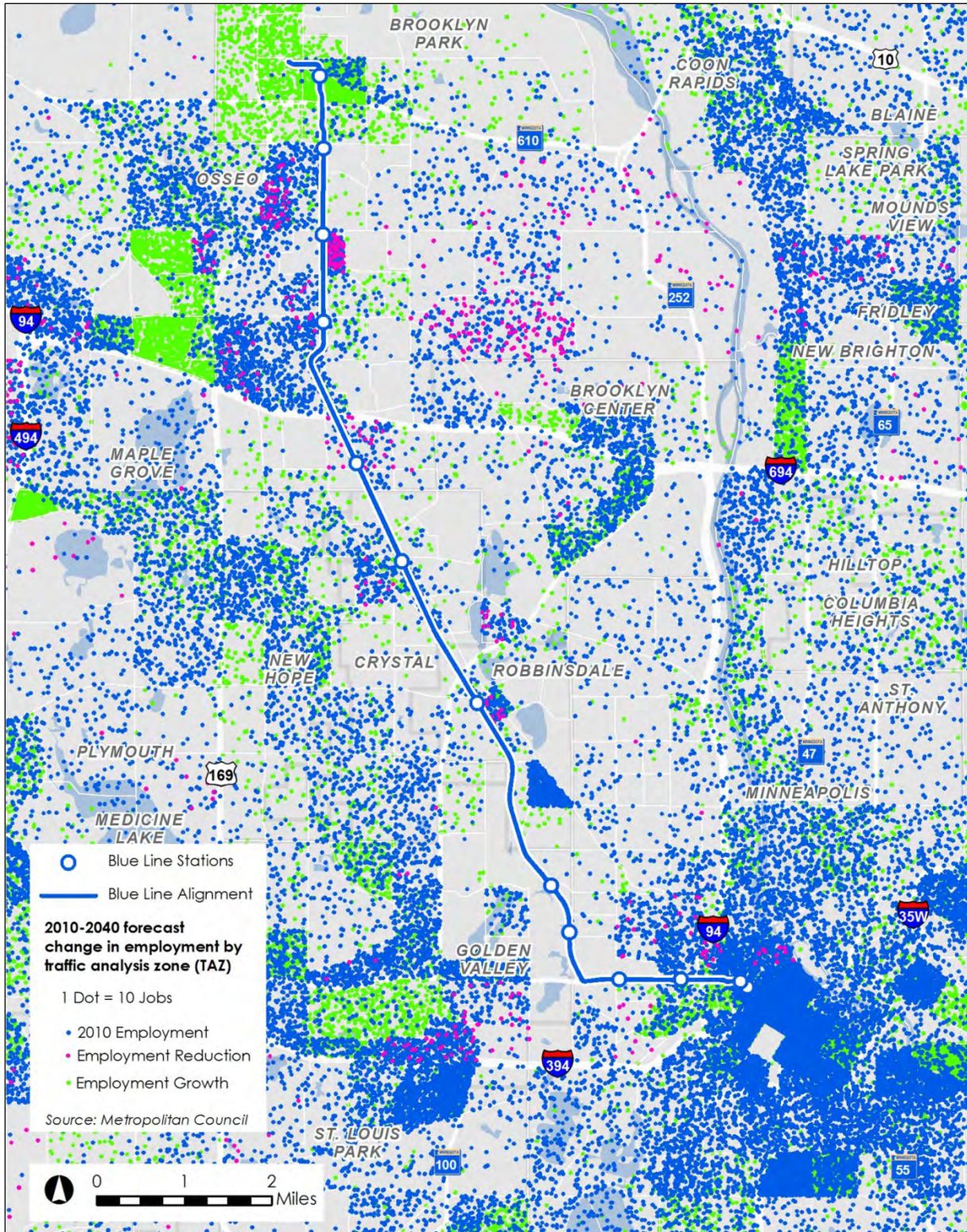




Table 1.4-1. Historic Population Change and Future Population Forecasts within the Proposed BLRT Extension Project Area

	Historic Population			Future Population Forecast			Percent Change	
	1990 ¹	2000 ¹	2010 ¹	2020 ²	2030 ²	2040 ²	1990–2010	2010–2040
Corridor Communities	483,919	507,108	514,834	568,200	602,100	624,800	6%	21%
Minneapolis	368,383	382,618	382,578	424,700	449,500	466,400	4%	22%
Golden Valley	20,971	20,281	20,371	22,000	23,200	24,300	-3%	19%
Robbinsdale	14,396	14,123	13,953	14,600	14,800	15,300	-3%	10%
Crystal	23,788	22,698	22,151	22,800	23,100	23,300	-7%	5%
Brooklyn Park	56,381	67,388	75,781	84,100	91,500	95,500	34%	26%
Contributing Communities	113,421	129,723	142,146	154,560	167,100	181,500	25%	28%
New Hope	21,853	20,873	20,339	21,100	22,000	22,800	-7%	12%
Brooklyn Center	28,887	29,172	30,104	31,000	32,900	34,700	4%	15%
Maple Grove	38,736	50,365	61,567	69,300	76,000	84,800	59%	38%
Osseo	2,704	2,434	2,430	2,660	2,900	3,100	-10%	28%
Champlin	16,849	22,193	23,089	23,900	24,200	25,500	37%	10%
Dayton ³	4,392	4,686	4,617	6,600	9,100	10,600	5%	130%
Proposed BLRT Extension project area total	597,340	636,831	656,980	722,760	769,200	806,300	10%	23%
Hennepin County	1,032,431	1,116,200	1,152,425	1,264,460	1,354,040	1,431,300	12%	24%
Twin Cities Metropolitan Area	2,288,721	2,642,062	2,849,567	3,123,430	3,395,060	3,675,660	25%	29%

¹ US Census Bureau, 1991, 2001, 2011

² Metropolitan Council Thrive MSP Forecasts, October 15, 2014

³ A small portion (less than 1 percent in 2000) of the City of Dayton lies within Wright County; hence, it is not included in the population figures reported in this table.



Table 1.4-2. Historic Employment Change and Future Employment Forecasts within the Proposed BLRT Extension Project Area

	Historic Employment			Future Employment Forecast			Percent Change	
	1990 ¹	2000 ¹	2010 ¹	2020 ²	2030 ²	2040 ²	1990–2010	2010–2040
Corridor Communities	336,451	374,708	349,797	407,940	426,370	452,600	4%	29%
Minneapolis	278,438	308,127	281,732	324,000	334,500	356,000	1%	26%
Golden Valley	28,589	30,142	33,194	37,500	38,900	41,500	16%	25%
Robbinsdale	6,813	7,109	6,858	7,300	7,400	7,600	1%	11%
Crystal	6,019	5,638	3,929	4,640	4,970	5,500	-35%	40%
Brooklyn Park	16,592	23,692	24,084	34,500	40,600	42,000	45%	74%
Contributing Communities	42,633	54,704	58,640	73,300	80,450	91,330	38%	56%
New Hope	14,149	13,565	11,080	12,400	13,600	15,300	-22%	38%
Brooklyn Center	17,006	16,698	11,001	12,900	13,900	15,400	-35%	40%
Maple Grove	7,750	18,309	29,877	39,500	43,100	49,500	286%	66%
Osseo	2,120	2,312	1,749	2,130	2,280	2,530	-18%	45%
Champlin	1,110	2,734	4,012	4,860	5,500	5,600	261%	40%
Dayton	498	1,086	921	1,540	2,070	3,000	85%	226%
Proposed BLRT Extension project area total	379,084	429,412	408,437	481,270	506,820	543,930	8%	33%
Hennepin County	723,105	877,375	805,089	944,230	1,001,200	1,066,260	11%	32%
Twin Cities Metropolitan Area	1,272,773	1,606,994	1,543,872	1,820,710	1,955,580	2,102,090	21%	36%

¹ Metropolitan Council Community Data, 2015

² Metropolitan Council Thrive MSP Forecasts, October 15, 2014



Table 1.4-3. Collar County Travel Demand for Trips Ending in the Proposed BLRT Extension Project Area

Zone	2010 Average Weekday Person Trips	2040 Average Weekday Person Trips	2010–2040 Increase	2010–2040 Percent Increase
Downtown Minneapolis	3,634	5,041	1,407	39%
North Minneapolis	2,423	2,430	7	0%
Robbinsdale, Golden Valley, Crystal	5,212	6,070	858	16%
Brooklyn Park	6,641	11,620	4,979	75%
Proposed BLRT Extension project area total	22,992	31,441	8,449	37%

Source: MnDOT Collar County Travel Demand Model, 2015⁶

Growth in population and employment in the proposed BLRT Extension project area and beyond is expected to result in growing travel demand. The roadway system configured within the area’s natural and built environment focuses high mobility demand on a limited number of facilities including I-94, Interstate Highway 694 (I-694), Interstate Highway 494 (I-494), TH 100, and US Highway 169 (US 169). Although TH 610 and its connection (currently under construction) between US 169 and I-94 would increase capacity for some of the east-west demand in the proposed BLRT Extension project area, it is not expected to address the increasing northwest-southeast oriented mobility needs in the proposed BLRT Extension project area travelshed or relieve demand on I-94. Additionally, a managed lanes study is underway for the I-494 corridor and a third lane currently under construction on I-494 to increase capacity and reduce congestion.

1.4.2 Increasing Traffic Congestion

Growing travel demand is expected to increase traffic congestion on the region’s highways and in downtown Minneapolis. In the past, the region responded to increased demand by constructing new roadways or expanding existing ones. In recent years, however, roadway expansion in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area has not kept pace with mounting travel demand and is not anticipated to keep pace in the future (Council, 2015a).

State policy, outlined in the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s (MnDOT) *Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan* (MnDOT, 2012b) and different modal investment plans under the *Minnesota GO Vision* (MnDOT, 2012a), and regional policy, outlined in the *2040 TPP*, recognize the importance of a balanced approach to addressing travel demand that includes maintaining the existing transportation system and public transportation improvements such as the proposed BLRT Extension project.

⁶ The collar county model is a modified version of the Twin Cities regional travel demand model developed by MnDOT to better estimate travel demand in portions of the Twin Cities area. The better estimations were developed by including additional refinements to the roadway network and trip making analysis of the 12 counties that surround the seven-county metro area. Note that the communities identified in the table do not constitute all of the proposed BLRT Extension project area communities; therefore the project area total is not the sum of the individual communities in the table.



Specifically, the *Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan*⁷ includes overarching key objectives of “Transportation in Context” and “Critical Connections” that highlight the importance of a multimodal system. Key strategies in support of these objectives include working with other regional and local agencies to:

- Improve accessibility and safety for everyone traveling on, along, and across roads
- Define priority networks for all modes based on connectivity and accessibility
- Improve the connections between transit services to provide greater transportation options for travel within and between cities
- Define priority networks for all modes based on connectivity and accessibility

The need to optimize mobility through strategies that manage highway traffic congestion is relevant to the proposed BLRT Extension project. The proposed BLRT Extension project area contains several major regional highways that experience congestion today. Because many regional highways are already experiencing congestion and this situation is expected to worsen, many local arterial roadways paralleling the regional highway system are likely to absorb increases in traffic by 2040 as the regional system nears capacity.

In recent years, MnDOT, the Council, and Metro Transit have cooperated to provide transit investments along the roadway system, one of the key strategies for managing congestion. In the case of I-94 in the proposed BLRT Extension project area, as well as other freeways in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, transit advantages in the form of bus-only shoulders and ramp meter bypass lanes have been implemented. As the I-94 corridor approaches capacity, even minor fluctuations in traffic demand could have a major impact on the performance and level of congestion of the facility overall. With no planned roadway capacity improvements along the I-94 corridor in the proposed BLRT Extension project area, transit investments will play an increasingly important role in effectively managing traffic congestion.

Policy direction at the local level has also concluded that continual roadway expansion is unsustainable. Specifically, the city of Minneapolis comprehensive plan, entitled *The Minneapolis Plan for Sustainable Growth* (City of Minneapolis, 2009a),⁸ states that “Minneapolis will build, maintain, and enhance access to multi-modal transportation options for residents and businesses through a balanced system of transportation modes that supports the city’s land use vision, reduces adverse transportation impacts, decreases the overall dependency on automobiles, and reflects the city’s pivotal role as the center of the regional transportation network.” The plan presents land use policy 1.3, which states that the city will “ensure that development plans incorporate appropriate transportation access and facilities, particularly for bicycle, pedestrian, and transit.” In addition, the *Citywide Action Plan* (City of Minneapolis, 2009b), a component of the *Access Minneapolis Ten Year Transportation Action Plan* (City of Minneapolis, 2016),⁹ “reflects an urban vision that gives high priority to meeting pedestrian, bicycle and transit needs within a multimodal transportation system.”

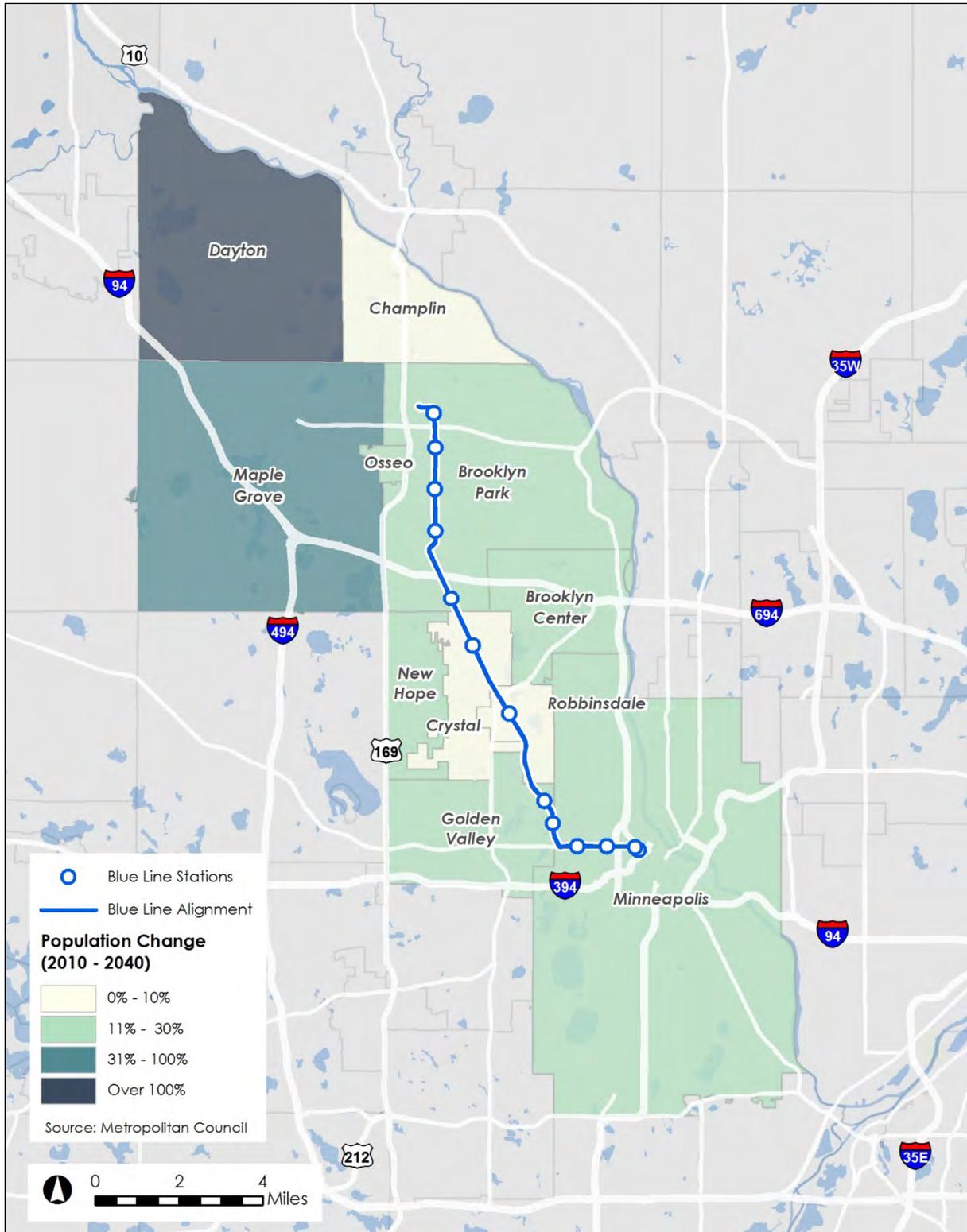
⁷ www.dot.state.mn.us/minnesotago/SMTTP.html

⁸ www.minneapolismn.gov/cped/planning/cped_comp_plan_update_draft_plan

⁹ www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/publicworks/transplan



Figure 1.4-3. 2010–2040 Population Change in the Proposed BLRT Extension Project Area





1.4.3 Needs of People Who Depend on Transit

The proposed BLRT Extension project area is home to a large number of people who depend on transit to meet their transportation needs. Based on US Census information, 14 percent of households in the proposed BLRT Extension project area do not own a vehicle. This is nearly double the metropolitan area average of 8 percent, as shown in **Table 1.4-4**. **Figure 1.4-4** illustrates the distribution of households with no vehicles and highlights the presence of areas in north Minneapolis and portions of suburban communities in the corridor where these percentages are the highest. In some areas of north Minneapolis, the number of zero-car households exceeds 35 percent; in areas of New Hope and Brooklyn Park, the number exceeds 20 percent. The high proportion of people without access to vehicles underscores the need for transit access in these parts of the proposed BLRT Extension project area.

In addition, seniors (people over the age of 65 years) represent an important market segment for public transportation. In the proposed BLRT Extension project area communities of Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and New Hope, seniors make up a larger share of the population compared to the makeup of the overall regional population, as shown in **Table 1.4-4** and **Figure 1.4-5**.

Table 1.4-4. Transit-Dependent Population as a Share of Community Population

	Households ¹	Zero Vehicles Available ²	Percent Zero-Vehicle	Total Population ³	Population Over 65 ³	Percent over 65
Corridor Communities	215,597	33,743	16%	514,834	47,629	9%
Minneapolis	165,438	30,064	18%	382,578	32,106	8%
Golden Valley	8,685	416	5%	20,371	4,367	21%
Robbinsdale	5,999	756	13%	13,953	1,814	13%
Crystal	9,133	585	6%	22,151	2,989	13%
Brooklyn Park	26,342	1,922	7%	75,781	6,353	8%
Contributing Communities	55,513	2,938	5%	142,146	15,698	11%
New Hope	8,622	861	10%	20,339	3,816	19%
Brooklyn Center	11,354	1060	9%	30,104	3,945	13%
Maple Grove	23,768	550	2%	61,567	5,103	8%
Osseo	1,144	160	14%	2,430	663	27%
Champlin	8,946	284	3%	23,089	1,661	7%
Dayton	1,679	23	1%	4,617	510	11%
Proposed BLRT Extension project area total	271,110	36,681	14%	656,980	63,327	10%
Hennepin County	481,263	48,771	10%	1,152,425	136,343	12%
Twin Cities Metropolitan Area	1,117,749	90,372	8%	2,849,567	322,838	11%

¹ Metropolitan Council Community Data, 2015

² 2009–2013 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates

³ 2010 US Census



Figure 1.4-4. Percent of Households with Zero Vehicles

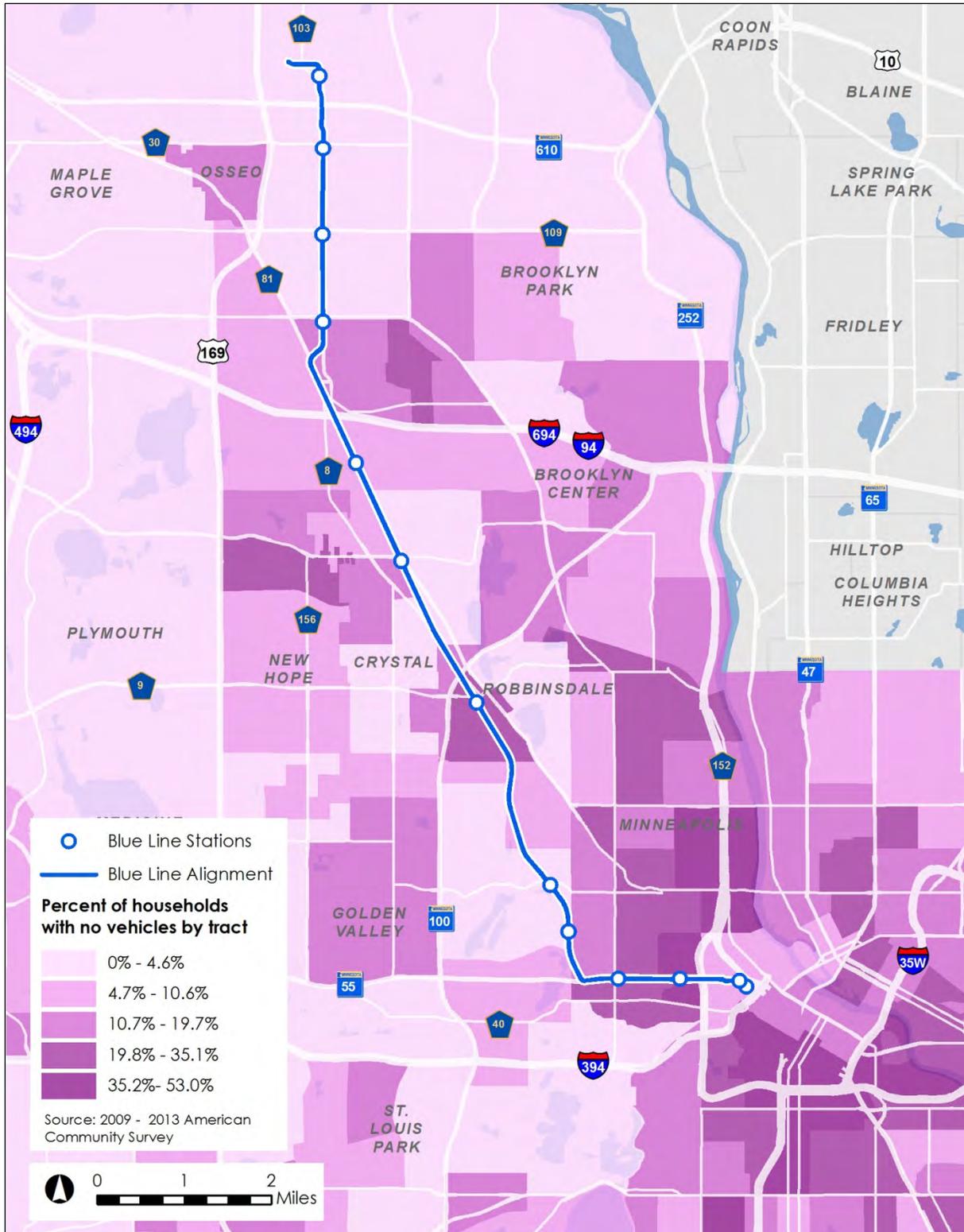
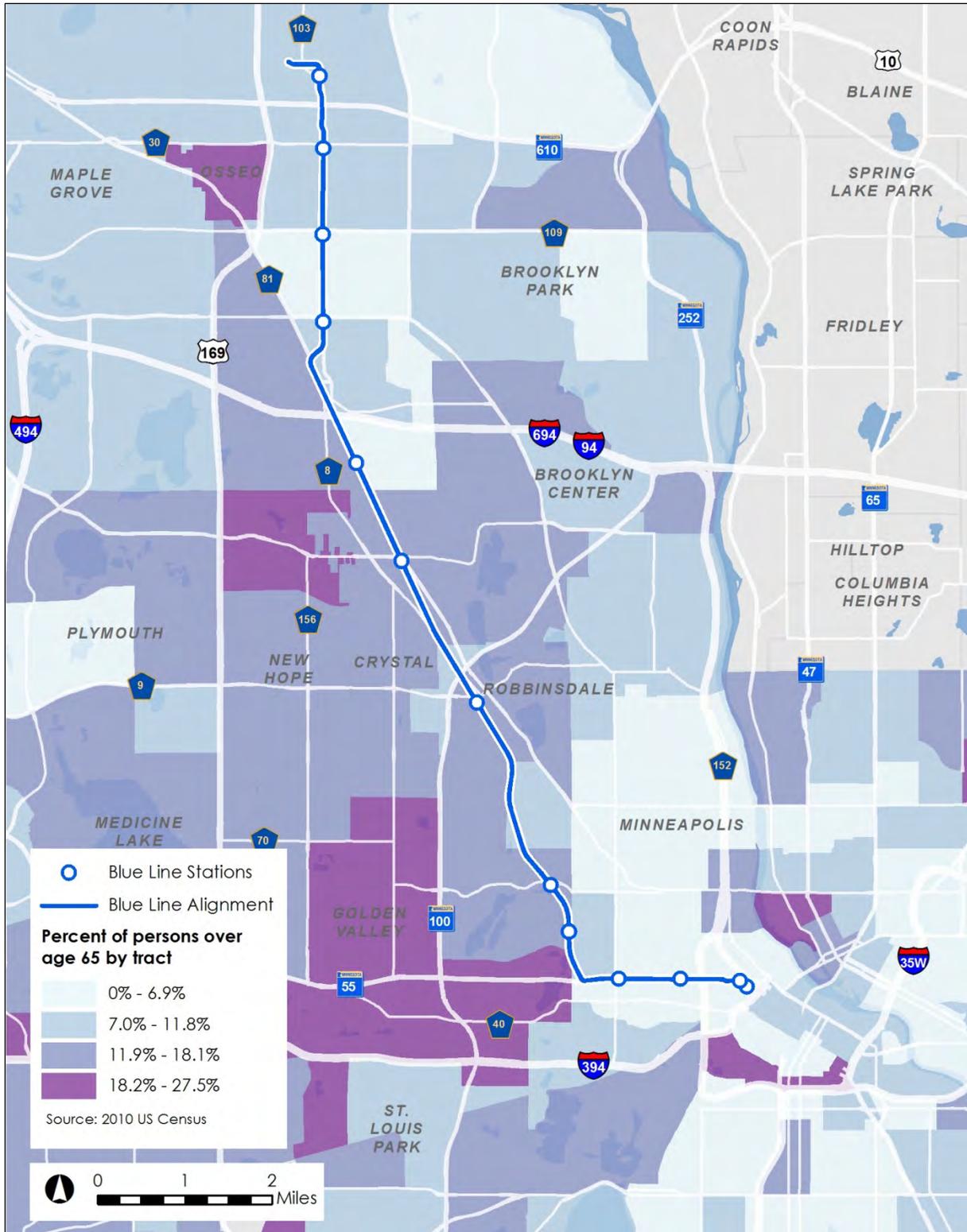




Figure 1.4-5. Percent of Population over Age 65





The information presented in [Table 1.4-4](#) and [Figures 1.4-4 and 1.4-5](#) is supported by the results of the FHEA. According to the FHEA analysis, over the past two decades, poverty in suburban and rural areas in the Twin Cities region has increased by 85 percent. Areas of concentrated poverty exist today in cities where they did not a decade ago; the cities of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park are two of the three suburbs where ACPs have emerged.

Without access to opportunities for education and employment, the economic mobility of residents who live in ACPs is diminished, which makes these areas more likely to stay poor across generations. The FHEA, in addressing the need for citizens in ACPs to have access to education and employment, highlights the importance of transit. Specifically, the FHEA states that transit is an essential public service that connects people to opportunities such as jobs, education, social services, and retail (Council, 2014c). The proposed BLRT Extension project would help connect residents in the Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, and North Minneapolis ACPs to these opportunities.

1.4.4 Limited Transit Service to Suburban Destinations (Reverse Commute Opportunities) and Time-Efficient Transit Options

Currently, the dominant commute pattern in the proposed BLRT Extension project area is inbound from suburban areas during the morning peak period to serve traditional employment destinations in downtown Minneapolis.

For suburban commuters originating beyond the I-694/I-494 beltway, several Metro Transit services deliver suburban commuters to downtown Minneapolis jobs via large suburban park-and-rides on the Brooklyn Park end of the corridor. Express buses in the proposed BLRT Extension project area benefit from a robust system of transit advantages, consisting of ramp meter bypass lanes and bus-only shoulders, to ensure travel time reliability and shorter trip times during periods of congestion on the highway system.

Even within the peak commute period, however, travel-time competitive transit options are limited for some proposed BLRT Extension project area travel markets, specifically inside the I-694 ring (including the communities of Crystal, Robbinsdale, Golden Valley, and north Minneapolis neighborhoods). This limits transit's ability to compete with automobile travel times, leaving a significant gap in travel options for residents of this area.

Although the dominant commute pattern in the proposed BLRT Extension project area today is oriented toward downtown Minneapolis, a notable potential for reverse commute exists from Minneapolis and the corridor communities of Robbinsdale, Golden Valley, and Crystal to developing areas such as Brooklyn Park. As illustrated in [Figure 1.4-2](#), job concentrations exist throughout the proposed BLRT Extension project area. This reverse commute pattern of job distribution is expected to continue to grow between now and 2040, as the northern suburban employment nodes gain jobs.

Although proposed BLRT Extension project area communities are served by a network of local and express bus routes, fast and convenient transit options to access schools and jobs outside of downtown Minneapolis are limited. Direct bus service from Minneapolis to suburban communities



in the proposed BLRT Extension project area is provided by two limited-stop and express routes. Residents of Minneapolis and the proposed southern corridor communities do have other transit options for accessing activity centers in Brooklyn Park and surrounding areas via three transit centers located within the proposed BLRT Extension project area (Robbinsdale Transit Center, Brooklyn Center Transit Center, and Starlite Transit Center). While providing good access, these suburban local routes also stop frequently and often require transfers, resulting in long overall travel times.

Although regional plans call for improved local and express bus services in the future, the overall configuration of transit service in the proposed BLRT Extension project area is not expected to change significantly by 2040. Future service improvements will focus on the existing network of park-and-rides served by peak period, inbound express routes, and a suburban local service operating out of regional transit centers. Forecast demand for mid-length and reverse commute trips on transit within the proposed BLRT Extension project area will not be met by 2040.

1.4.5 Regional Growth

The Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is working to ensure the orderly, economical development of its seven-county area and the efficient use of four regional systems: transportation, aviation, water resources (including wastewater collection and treatment), and regional parks and open space.

The *Thrive MSP 2040 Plan* establishes a regional policy of five desired outcomes that define the regional vision.

- Stewardship advances the Council’s longstanding mission of orderly and economical development by responsibly managing the region’s natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region’s future.
- Prosperity is fostered by investments in infrastructure and amenities that create regional economic competitiveness, thereby attracting and retaining successful businesses, a talented workforce, and, consequently, wealth.
- Equity connects all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change.
- Livability focuses on the quality of our residents’ lives and experiences in our region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes our region a great place to live.
- Sustainability means protecting our regional vitality for generations to come by preserving our capacity to maintain and support our region’s well-being and productivity over the long term.

The proposed BLRT Extension project, as part of a regional transitway system, would be a step toward achieving these desired outcomes.