1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1 DESCRIPTION OF STUDY AREA

The 11-mile long Central Corridor runs between downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis (Figure 1.1-1: Study Area). It is a vibrant and busy area, packed with strong neighborhoods, institutions, businesses and attractions. Along with the two downtowns, major centers of activity include the University of Minnesota and the Midway area. The Central Corridor is bordered on the north by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line and the Canadian Pacific (CP) Short Line rail line on the south.

The Central Corridor is key to the region's connectivity. The corridor has regional, statewide and national significance. Interstate 94 (I-94) and University Avenue are major arteries for car traffic. There are three freight rail lines in the corridor. Amtrak runs along one of them. Major north/south connections include Interstate 35W (I-35W), I-94 (North of Minneapolis), Interstate 35E (I-35E) and Trunk Highway (TH) 280.

Transit service in the corridor is provided by buses, which have extremely strong ridership and serve many people who depend upon transit for their trips.

An improved public transit option in the Central Corridor would connect with the extremely successful Hiawatha light rail line and the soon to be constructed Northstar commuter rail line.

Graphics for Chapter 1.0 are included together at the end of the chapter.

1.2 NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

1.2.1 Background

Throughout the last two decades, the Central Corridor has been the focus of several studies regarding the feasibility of various mass transit technologies and their location within the corridor. Each of these studies has identified the Central Corridor as the region's priority corridor for mass transit investment.

For the past 20 years, the Central Corridor has consistently been identified as a location where mobility and capacity should be improved. This corridor is the backbone, the critical main link in the existing transit system. It is one of the strongest transit corridors in the Midwest, with ridership rivaling that of any transit corridor between Chicago and the West Coast. It links some of the largest traffic generators in the Twin Cities, including the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, the University of Minnesota campus, the Midway area, and the State Capitol. The corridor connects two dense employment districts and is home to significant population, employment, education and cultural districts.

Transit options were explored as alternatives to traditional roadway improvements because the physical constraints in this developed corridor and funding constraints would make expansion of the existing roadway system costly and socially and environmentally disruptive. Better transit options could divert people from the roadway system, thereby reducing congestion increases, increasing mobility and offering better options to both choice and current transit riders. As the core of the overall regional network, the high ridership in this corridor represents one of the region's best opportunities for a significant capital investment that can be leveraged to raise the ridership and impacts of the entire transit system.

1.2.2 Growing Issues in the Corridor

DEMOGRAPHICS

Similar to other metropolitan areas in the United States, the Central Corridor Study Area is experiencing rapid population and employment growth. The seven-county metropolitan area had a population in 1997 of 2,515,119[1] and ranked as the 16th most populated metropolitan area in the U.S. According to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, 119,755 people lived in the Central Corridor Study Area in 2000. This Study Area has one of the densest populations and number of households in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, with a high concentration of transit-dependent people as illustrated in Table 1.2-1: Central Corridor Demographic Characteristics.

Table 1.2-1: Central Corridor Demographic Characteristics

Category	*Seven County Metropolitan Area*	*Corridor Total*	*Percent of Seven County Metropolitan Area Population or Households*	*Percent of Corridor Population or Households*
Total Population*	2,642,060	111,654	100.0%	100.0%
Total Households*	1,022,025	46,823	100.0%	100.0%
Minority Population	442,635	44,406	16.8%	39.8%
Mobile Youth (12-18 years old)	265,751	9,609	10.1%	8.6%
Elderly (65+ years)	254,505	9,456	9.6%	8.5%
Mobility Limitation	83.861	5,497	3.2%	4.9%
Zero-car households	85,690	12,969	8.4%	27.7%
Low-income Households (<$12,500)	75.955	10.386	7.4%	22.1%
Persons Living Below Poverty Level	162,305	19,287	6.1%	17.3%

Source: Twin Cities Metropolitan Council

[1] Metropolitan Council State of the Region Report, 1999

As shown in the table, the Central Corridor Study Area has a high percent of the population that depend on public transit for mobility. Over one-third of the households do not own a car and substantial percentages of the population depend on transit to get to work, health care, shopping, and other daily uses. The Study Area has one of the highest percentages of population that have zero-car households, persons living below poverty level, persons with mobility limitations and minorities in the Twin Cities. Concentrations of population with mobility limitations can be found throughout the Study Area, especially near the downtowns and between Snelling Avenue and Dale Street. Regardless of their statistical attributes, much of the population in the Study Area depends on public transit, which results in one of the highest transit ridership routes in the seven county metropolitan area.

This corridor is home to some of the most prominent corporations in the nation, including American Express, Wells Fargo, Minnesota Life, St. Paul Companies, and others. Employment in the Central Corridor Study Area has been on a continuous rise, as the trend of people moving to a large metropolitan area continues. The connected intermodal transportation system has been instrumental in establishing the economic dominance of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, where 14 of the Fortune 500 companies reside.

Downtown Minneapolis is projected to have an increase in jobs of approximately 31 percent between 2000 and 2020, as shown in Table1.2-2: Jobs by Employment Centers. Downtown St. Paul is also projected to have a significant 17 percent increase in employment. Overall, the entire Central Corridor Study Area is projected to have an average employment growth of 21 percent through 2020.

Table 1.2-2: Jobs by Employment Centers

Area	*2000*	*Projected 2030 Employment (# of jobs)*	*Change (# of jobs)*	*Percentage Change (%)*
Downtown Minneapolis	*146,474*	*193,560*	*47,086*	*32%*
University of Minnesota/Westgate area	*29,726*	*33,592*	*3,866*	*13%*
Downtown St. Paul area	*61,959*	*83,954*	*21,995*	*35%*
Remainder of Corridor	*51,371*	*62,621*	*11,250*	*22%*
Total Study Area	*289,530*	*373,727*	*84,197*	*29%*

Source: Twin Cities Metropolitan Council

The highest concentrations of urban activity, government, commerce, education, regional services, transit and highways are all located in the Central Corridor Study Area. Examples include the State Capitol complex, Metrodome, Xcel Energy Center, Target Center, Convention Center, University of Minnesota, and several hospitals. These entities represent significant investment in public and private facilities, which must be maintained if the corridor is to remain economically strong. Land use issues are of extreme importance for the transportation plans and regional quality-of-life goals of the Twin Cities as "Smart Growth" initiatives have been established throughout the region.

Growth in the number of households is also projected to occur throughout the Study Area. The greatest growth in households is projected to occur in the two downtowns and riverfront areas, and new developments are already beginning to occur. Overall, the Study Area is projected to have a 34.1 percent growth in the number of households by 2030.

LAND USE

The Central Corridor Study Area has a diverse mixture of land uses, similar to the diverse mixture of population statistics. The Study Area is home to a variety of businesses, public associations, and a diverse mix of land uses such as:

- National corporation headquarters and regional offices
- State government and local buildings
- Small local businesses
- Established industrial areas
- Senior-citizens high-rises
- Mature medium-density neighborhoods
- Cultural and historic districts
- Sports and arts venues
- Libraries, nonprofits and social service agencies
- Parks and recreational destinations
- Schools and community centers
- Restaurants (both local and chain)
- Local retail shops and small cafes
- Large chain superstores
- Hospitals and clinics
- Colleges and universities

The Central Corridor Study Area is a diverse mix of population, employment centers, and land uses. Each neighborhood has its own character, with little homogeneity between neighborhoods. The population is made up of a variety of people with a high percentage of minorities, a high percentage of households without automobiles, and a high percentage of people with low incomes or households below poverty level. Much of the population in the corridor depends on transit for mobility and access to jobs. As previously indicated, rapid growth in population, employment, and households are projected for 2030. Given these diversities within the Study Area, a more sustainable transit and pedestrian oriented corridor would promote economic development, alleviate traffic congestion (specifically single and low occupancy vehicles), promote more livable developments, and decrease the focus on automobile use.

1.2.3 Specific Transportation Problems and Needs in the Study Area

The Central Corridor Study Area is located at the core of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Travel in the corridor includes over 900,000 daily trips, according to the Twin Cities Regional Model. As can be seen in Figure 1.2-1: Year 2000 Person Trips Beginning and Ending in the Study Area, 702,000 of these trips were either external or internal trips, with either the origin or destination within the Study Area. In addition, 210,000 trips had both origins and destinations in the Study Area. This amount of daily traffic explains the need for transit improvements, which would uphold the mobility and vitality of the corridor.

Traffic congestion is already a problem for the Central Corridor, especially on I-94. As indicated in the Twin Cities Regional Model, between 1996 and 2020, the VMT on I-94 is projected to increase by an average of 48 percent (Figure 1.2-2: Historic and Projected Daily Traffic on I-94). This would

result in as many as 200,000 total vehicles per day, if unconstrained by capacity. Engineering and environmental issues prevent lane additions to I-94 and the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the next twenty years does not include plans for expansion of I-94.

The Central Corridor has had tremendous increases in traffic demand, exceeding the amount of population and employment growth in the Study Area. Between 1990 and 1998, there was an increase in daily traffic volumes of between 29,000 to 40,000 vehicle trips at seven locations along I-94 within the Central Corridor Study Area. This amount of growth is projected to continue if there were no constraints on the amount of available capacity. From these traffic demand forecasts for 2020, nearly all portions of I-94 located in the Study Area will reach capacity. Even for the estimated traffic demand for the year 2000, all locations on I-94 were projected to be near capacity or at capacity. With continued traffic demand increases, it may be expected that a breakdown of the transportation system served by I-94 would occur and divert traffic onto parallel routes, potentially causing system-wide congestion or breakdown.

University Avenue and Washington Avenue are the main east-west arterial routes located in the Central Corridor Study Area. As previously indicated for I-94, these arterial routes have similar capacity restraints. Half of the locations on both University Avenue and Washington Avenue were projected to be operating near capacity in the year 2000 (Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, 2000). The projections for the year 2020 shows traffic demand growth at every location along these arterial roadways. Although none are projected to reach the existing roadway capacity, it may be anticipated that breakdowns and congestion of the system will occur on both Washington Avenue and University Avenue, causing increased travel times and safety concerns within the Study Area.

The corridor is currently served by several major bus routes. Route 16 provides local service along University and Washington Avenues. Route 50 provides limited stop peak hour service along the same route. Express service is provided on Interstate 94, which parallels University Avenue. Several other routes serve parts of the corridor. Average weekday ridership on Routes 16 and 50 combined is over 20,000, up from 1997 ridership of about 16,000. Unlike other typical radial route corridors, University Avenue has multiple major origins and destinations along the entire length of the corridor. The characteristics of the corridor have resulted in service quality and reliability problems that have necessitated a variety of service changes. Articulated buses were used on the route to add capacity and the limited stop Route 50 was implemented. Increases in ridership from employer pass programs and student pass programs have caused overloads, bus bunching, and passing up passengers. Additional trips from downtown to the University of Minnesota have been added and the Route 50 and 16 buses have been scheduled to provide six minute headways at major stops. Additional running time continues to be required to reflect slower service caused by the increasing ridership.

Another concern within the Study Area is the lack of available and affordable parking. New developments have reduced the amount of surface parking spaces, so new parking structures have to be developed as replacements. These parking structures are more costly and take more time to build than surface parking spaces. In downtown St. Paul, a 1998 study reported a 2,340 parking space shortage. Typically, a transit system can reduce the demand for parking spaces, especially within the two central business districts (CBDs). Furthermore, it is projected that additional new developments in the CBDs will add nearly 5-million square feet of office space, one million square feet of retail space, over 1,300 new housing units, and nearly 1,300 new hotel rooms. This amount of explosive

growth with a limited amount of available parking presents a large need that would be alleviated by an improved transit system.

1.2.4 Planning Context

Transit improvements and developments are important to the Twin Cities, as indicated in the many local and regional transportation modes and transit-oriented development as a sound investment strategy for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

State and regional studies have long recognized the importance of the Central Corridor. It is seen as a critical link in the existing transit system, serving the most intensive all day transit ridership in the metropolitan area.. It is addressed in the following studies:

- 2030 Transportation Policy Plan, Metropolitan Council, December, 2004
- Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study, Phase I, Summary Report, Office of Freight, Railroads and Waterways, Minnesota Department of Transportation, January, 1998
- Twin Cities Metropolitan Commuter Rail Feasibility Study, Phase II, Final Summary Report, Office of Freight, Railroads and Waterways, Minnesota Department of Transportation, January, 19999
- Commuter Rail System Plan, Minnesota Department of Transportation, January, 1999
- Transit 2020 Master Plan, Metropolitan Council, February, 2000
- Central Corridor Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement, 1994
- Midway Corridor Light Rail Transit Draft Environmental Impact Statement, 1991
- Regional Blueprint, Metropolitan Council, 2030.

Transit 2020, Regional Transit Master Plan

In response to a directive by the 1999 Minnesota Legislature, the Metropolitan Council published Transit 2020 Master Plan, February 1, 2000. The plan describes strategies and an implementation program for the Twin Cities region future transportation system. Evolving from earlier regional transportation plans, the Transit 2020 plan includes the goal to "develop dedicated transitways, (including) exclusive busways, light rail transit, and commuter rail" as components of an integrated, region-wide system.

As the region moves to invigorate its transit network, moving up the scale from a single mode transit system to one employing multiple features from the family of transit modes, the application of modes appropriate to the intensity of the work to be performed by Metro Transit in any given corridor becomes an important issue of public policy. The potential investment of capital in the improved performance of key regional transit corridors is an important public opportunity. The Central Corridor gives the region an opportunity to demonstrate transit's capabilities at its best.

2030 Transportation Policy Plan, *December, 2004*

In 2004, the Metropolitan Council adopted the 2030 Transportation Policy Plan for the region. It identifies several high priority corridors for implementation in the near term, including the Central Corridor. It also includes the Northwest, Cedar Avenue, and I-35 bus rapid transit corridors that would connect with the Central Corridor. The plan also calls for improvements to arterial bus services that feed these corridors.

1.2.5 Summary of Transportation Issues to be Addressed

All across the Twin Cities, traffic and transportation problems are increasingly on people's minds. The 2000 Metropolitan State University Civic Confidence Survey *found that 31.2 percent of respondents felt that traffic and transportation are the biggest problems facing the region. That was more than twice the next most popular concern. The following factors affect the demand for improved transit services in the Central Corridor:*

- Traffic is already congested. Between 1990 and 1998, daily traffic volumes rose more than 24 percent along I-94 in the Central Corridor. The traffic increases cause congestion and breakdowns in the system. This traffic growth is expected to continue.
- Bus transit service is prevalent in the corridor and is well used. It is a sign of strength of this transit corridor that its heavy ridership is not limited to peak hours alone, but is spread throughout the day; more than 80 percent of the ridership is off peak ridership. The Central Corridor is a two way all day transit corridor with heavy ridership now and a demand for more transit services in the future.
- Further rapid growth is predicted. The corridor is densely populated and the number of people living in the area is expected to grow. In addition, employment growth has been occurring and is expected to continue. Between 2000 and 2020, employment is expected to grow 22 percent through the total corridor with a 17 percent increase in downtown St Paul and a 31 percent increase in downtown Minneapolis.
- Lack of parking limits growth. New housing and commercial projects continue to be built throughout the area to house all this growth. Further redevelopment in the downtown would cause additional pressure on already limited parking, reducing opportunity for additional redevelopment.
- There is limited ability to expand either the roadway or the bus system in the corridor to meet demand because of the physical constraints in this developed area. The social and community impacts would be unacceptable.

The purpose of the Central Corridor transit project is to meet the future transit needs of the Corridor and the region and to support the economic development goals for the corridor.

1.2.6 Initiation of the Central Corridor Transit Study

The Central Corridor Coordinating Committee (CCCC), established by state law, initiated the Transit Study to determine the preferred transit alternatives for the corridor. The initial Transit Study had two parts, (1) a feasibility study for commuter rail and (2) a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for baseline, LRT and BRT in the corridor. It was recognized that the market for commuter rail and bus or LRT services is quite different in the corridor and that both strategies may be justified.

The commuter rail feasibility study was completed in December 2001, for the corridor. If additional work is done on commuter rail, it will be conducted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), which would complete a DEIS for commuter rail from Hastings to Minneapolis.

Additional work on implementing the baseline, BRT or LRT Alternatives will be led by the Metropolitan Council or Mn/DOT.

The DEIS was conducted to further evaluate the alternatives for the Central Corridor recommended by the public during the scoping process. Two alternatives representing very different approaches were evaluated in the DEIS. The LRT Alternative traverses the existing roadway network in a variety of alignments, including running on the side of the street in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, in a tunnel through the University of Minnesota Minneapolis campus, and operating in the median along University Avenue. The BRT Alternative navigates within the existing roadway network, operating in semi-exclusive median along University Avenue and in mixed vehicular traffic in downtown St. Paul, downtown Minneapolis and through the University of Minnesota campus.

The CCCC began work in 2000. The committee makes recommendations on issues about the alternatives analysis, DEIS, public involvement and locally preferred strategy for the corridor. The CCCC includes representatives of the Mn/DOT, Metropolitan Council, Ramsey County, Hennepin County, City of St. Paul, City of Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, Red Rock Corridor (voting only on commuter rail issues) and Northstar Corridor (nonvoting member).

A project management team (PMT) comprised of staff of the affected units of government has met during the course of the Central Corridor Transit Study to advise the CCCC.

1.3 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Given the issues in the Corridor today, local and regional governments recognize that alternatives need to be developed to address those needs and further growth. Goals and objectives were developed to serve as the framework for the study and for decision making for the future of the corridor. The goals and objectives are:

GOAL 1: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND INVESTMENT

Objective: Support investments in infrastructure, business, and community that sustain the heart of the region.

Investment and reinvestment in the Central Corridor Study Area is a consistent theme, in both city and regional plans. The identified investment and reinvestment opportunities include industrial areas, the University of Minnesota, hospitals, schools, parks, affordable housing, local and regional businesses, and the CBDs of Minneapolis and St. Paul. According to the *Regional Blueprint*, adopted by the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, investment will be encouraged to foster economic growth and create jobs in the core areas. The St. Paul Port Authority, for example, is promoting 15 office parks in the St. Paul area, many of them located within the Central Corridor Study Area.

Historically, the existing transit system and the existing economic development occurred concurrently, and in some instances, the relationship occurred as far back as the beginnings of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Consequently, the transit system and the existing economic development and related activities are inter-dependent. The implementation of a more reliable and convenient transit system would directly contribute to continuing economic opportunity and investment as the transit system promotes transit ridership, meets mobility needs, contributes to easing traffic congestion, promotes economic development in the core, and creates a more livable and sustainable community.

Objective: Promote a reliable transit system that allows an efficient, effective land use development pattern in major activity centers which minimizes parking demand, facilitates the highest and best use of adjacent properties, and gives employers confidence that employees can travel to/from work.

The current development pattern in downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis has significant areas for surface parking lots, which provide relatively inexpensive parking. As the downtown development continues to grow and new buildings replace the surface parking lots, the surface parking supply will shrink. Alternatives include expensive parking structures or very long walks from new surface parking lots. This situation makes it difficult to attract new employers into the core downtown areas. A viable transit system can help to alleviate this cycle and result in an efficient and effective development pattern without publicly subsidized parking structures. Some or all of the public financing allocated for additional parking structures could then be applied to investment in the proposed transit system.

Additionally, substantial increases in employment, population, and number of households in the Central Corridor Study Area are projected. Multiple development and redevelopment proposals or programs have been proposed and are considered important in enhancing the livability in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Efficient transit is one of the key components of the Smart Growth Initiatives program that has been established.

Another important factor for sustained development of the Central Corridor Study Area is access from outside the corridor to destinations within the corridor. Transit improvements would foster the growth of downtown businesses that lack parking, cater to businesses that depend upon transit to attract employees, and bring customers through the doors of stores and shops that rely on quality transit service for their patronage. An effective transit system would attract residents and businesses into the Study Area.

GOAL 2: COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT

Objective: Facilitate the preservation and enhancement of neighborhoods in the Central Corridor.

Transit in the Central Corridor is a crucial part of implementing the principles of smart growth and enhancing community livability. Enhanced transit designed to provide a broader range of mobility options would meet the needs of resident working populations from all economic levels, create sound and efficient alternatives modes of transportation, promote air quality improvements, promote land preservation, and foster attractive, livable communities.

The Central Corridor's proposed transit alternatives would move people safely and efficiently, and also offer a unique opportunity to embody the economic, functional, and strategic goals of the region. The Hiawatha LRT system serves as a good local example of preservation and enhancement of neighborhoods located along its alignment. The line serves downtown Minneapolis, Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport, the Mall of America and many neighborhoods adjacent to the corridor. Design teams studied the social, cultural, and historic identity of each station sites environment, enlisted the surrounding community, and designed stations in accordance with each community's identity, character, and desires. Transit improvements proposed for the Central Corridor can build upon the Hiawatha LRT experience in integrating both transportation needs and the enhancement of the character of each Central Corridor community.

Today's workforce consists of both people who choose to be transit users and transit dependent populations. Transit is a necessity for transit dependent populations to access jobs, education, health-care, and other important destinations. Transit can also be a mode of choice, for those who have a choice, if the quality of service is good enough. Today's livable communities have attracted a quality workforce by providing multimodal travel opportunities for both choice transit users and transit dependent populations. In the Central Corridor Study Area, proposed transit would promote infill growth in designated transit-oriented development areas, and de-emphasize less dense growth, or "sprawl," on the fringe of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

Objective: Acknowledge the individual character and aspirations of each place served, and of the region as a whole.

Better transit service would play a pivotal role in acknowledging the character and aspirations of places in the Study Area and in the region as a whole. The Central Corridor has local neighborhoods that collectively form the heart of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. This distinction is expressed, for example, in the annual Rondo Days festival. The Rondo area, one of the city's most diverse communities, was virtually destroyed when it was cut in half in the 1960s to build I-94 between Minneapolis and St. Paul. The festival began in 1983 to remember and celebrate the neighborhood and its positive impact in the region. It continues today with increasing attendance, drawing people from throughout the Twin Cities area and from several states. This is a clear indication of the significance and meaning of the neighborhoods in the Central Corridor, and the need to make transportation improvements that reflect community aspirations.

A community's character or identity is something that gives its people a sense of pride that comes with a sense of belonging to their neighborhood. This has been shown to be a very important factor for the social and economic success and long term viability of the community. Better transit for the

Central Corridor could support and be embraced by the communities it serves and become a focal point in acknowledging individual community aspirations for its next generation of residents.

Objective: Support regional goals for cleaner air and water, more efficient energy use and a safer and healthier environment.

Transit has been demonstrated to have a large role in creating a cleaner atmosphere because of its pollution reduction capabilities. Central Corridor transit good enough to attract choice riders would decrease the amount of pollution emitted by low-occupancy vehicles, by reducing the number of vehicles on the roadway. Transit buses utilize significantly less fuel, and emit significantly less pollution than it takes to transport the same number of people by personal vehicles. LRT vehicles would emit the least amount of pollutants of the transit options considered in the corridor because they are electrically powered and consume less energy per passenger mile.

The transit industry has taken the lead on choosing cleaner-burning fuels, such as clean diesel, electricity, and other technologies that decrease air pollution. These technology developments include quieter running engines that reduce noise, further promoting livability goals. The proposed transit improvements would increase mobility, foster business growth, and increase development density in targeted areas while supporting regional goals for cleaner air and water, more efficient energy use and a safer and healthier environment in the Study Area.

GOAL 3: TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Objective: Create transportation improvements that add people carrying capacity, minimize operating costs, improve operating efficiency, provide high quality modal alternatives and reinforce the region's transportation system.

The Central Corridor Study Area is the base of the region's rail, water, roadway and transit network. Travel demand within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is increasing disproportionately throughout the corridor, making it a prime candidate for transportation capacity improvements. Yet there are few, if any, opportunities to create extra capacity for automobiles. As the 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan states; the economic, social, and environmental costs would be too great; therefore, operating improvements must come from the transit network.

Increased traffic congestion in the Central Corridor Study Area will cause a multitude of problems including increased sprawl of population and businesses, loss of existing businesses and corporations from the area, reduced economic vitality of the existing businesses, and reduced services to the most transit-dependent population. An improved transit system that increases ridership in the corridor will promote economic development and revitalize the core of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The proposed transit alternatives would provide additional people carrying capacity, minimize operating costs, improve operating efficiency, provide high quality modal alternatives and reinforce the region's transportation system. Enhanced trunk capacity will make it possible to reorient current local bus hours from a downtown truck capacity function at both ends to routes that can provide better local mobility to and between non-downtown locations in the corridor.

Additional transit capacity on the Central Corridor will provide an option for trips within the corridor and free up capacity on the parallel, but congested, Interstate 94. The Central Corridor connects with Hiawatha at the Metrodome station and with the Northstar commuter rail corridor. In its bus rapid transit configuration, it operates parallel to Hiawatha in downtown Minneapolis. As a light rail line, it operates on the same tracks as Hiawatha in the downtown area. Analysis has shown that there is adequate capacity to operate both Hiawatha and Central light rail on the same track in the downtown area.

University Avenue has a large number of routes that cross the corridor and a large number of passengers transfer to their ultimate destination. As noted elsewhere, providing reliable connections with bus service has become increasingly challenging due to ridership increases and the resulting capacity problems. In addition, light rail on the Central Corridor would provide convenient rail service to most of the major traffic generators in the region.

Objective: Expand opportunities for all users to move freely to, through, and within the Central Corridor.

Travel demand on I-94 is increasing at a significant rate, and as many as 209,000 vehicles per day are forecasted to utilize the interstate by 2020, which will impede the movement of people and goods in the Central Corridor and begin to threaten the vitality of the area. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, nearly one-third of the households in the corridor did not own a car, resulting in many people depending on public transit for mobility. A projected increasing population over 65 years of age and under 16 years of age also increases the need for transit improvements.

I-94 has numerous transit express bus routes through the corridor, generating over 6,000 person trips per day. University Avenue offers both local and express bus transit services, generating over 18,000 person trips per day, the second highest single ridership route in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Enhanced transit alternatives will provide a welcome choice for commuters and Central Corridor residents during congested traffic conditions. Transit service quality may also decrease with increased congestion if improvements to the existing system are not developed and implemented. Congestion also increases the costs of operating the bus service, and cost effectiveness of transit services is important to the success of the corridor.

As stated previously, the proposed Hiawatha LRT system has had a significant impact on the mobility of the residents in its service area. A key component of the transit investment strategy for the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is A network of transitways that provide high quality service throughout the region. The proposed Central Corridor transit facility is a critical part of this network This line is important because of the amount of people who access this area everyday, especially with the growing concerns for projected employment and population increases in the area. With these corridor transit improvements and potential connections to other transit systems, Central Corridor residents would have expanded opportunities to move freely through and to travel to and between many locations in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

The Central Corridor is a place people travel through. Yet it is also home to tens of thousands of people many of whom, whether by choice or not, rely on the region's public transportation service,

which is at its best here. A characteristic of the transit service in the corridor is that it is overwhelmingly oriented to serving the two downtowns, that is to say the main bus lines, the 16 local, the 50 limited stop, both on University Avenue, and the 94 routes serve both Downtown St. Paul and Downtown Minneapolis, with routes and service levels governed by that characteristic. On the other hand, most trips actually being made by people who live in the corridor are not downtown oriented. As a result, transit development in the corridor must address two diverging considerations; the need to provide additional capacity to accommodate growth to the two downtowns and the ability to provide for a reorientation of bus hours in the corridor to meet other, non-downtown mobility needs.

Objective: Enhance the existing transportation infrastructure to serve the high number of transit dependent persons in the Central Corridor.

As shown in Table 1.2-1, the Central Corridor has a relatively high percent of minority populations, zero-car households, low-income households, persons living below the poverty level, and persons with mobility limitations as compared to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Transit service is important to this transit-dependent population, as this is the only means of mobility or access to jobs. Enhancing the transportation infrastructure and service to transit dependent persons by increased access to higher quality jobs and/or other opportunities can have positive impacts on their lives as well as the economic vitality of the region. By providing a service good enough to attract customers who have a choice, better corridor transit service also offers the best there is in public transportation to those who have no choice.

1.4 TRANSIT SYSTEM LINKAGES

Multiple transit initiative studies are being conducted, including commuter rail, LRT, and bus transitways. Transit facilities being constructed or planned in the Metropolitan Area are described below.

HIAWATHA CORRIDOR

As the region moves to upgrade its entire transit network, the Hiawatha Corridor is the first light rail corridor in the region. This 12-mile LRT line was opened in December of 2004 and serves downtown Minneapolis, the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, and the Mall of America area. A reorientation of local and regional bus routes that was providing downtown-oriented capacity in this corridor has allowed Metro Transit to better meet other transportation needs in the region and attract additional riderhship to the total transit network. The Hiawatha LRT line has exceeded ridership expectations by over 60% and has promoted private investment and growth in the corridors.

NORTHSTAR CORRIDOR

The proposed Northstar Commuter Rail line, an 40 mile-long corridor, will connect downtown Minneapolis with cities to the northwest, using the BNSF right-of-way. This corridor is one of the

fastest growing urban to suburban corridors in the nation, creating a need for better transportation services.

RED ROCK CORRIDOR

The Red Rock Corridor, has completed a feasibility study to analyze the potential for commuter rail passenger service between downtown Minneapolis, downtown St. Paul (Union Depot Station) and Hastings, Minnesota. The main purpose of the Red Rock feasibility study is to analyze the potential for transit facilities to foster a more sustainable development to accommodate the expected growth in the area.

OTHER PROJECTS

Several bus rapid transit corridors are in various stages of development including the Northwest busway, Cedar Avenue Corridor and I-35W. The Central Corridor will serve as a distributor for all of these corridors. In addition, the restoration of the Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul has been designated by Congress as a project of national and regional significance. The Central Corridor light rail line is projected to end at the Union Depot

1.5 PARTICIPATION PROCESS

PURPOSE

The purpose of the public participation process is public outreach to inform decision-making efforts and encourage an open, collaborative approach regarding the development of a balanced transportation system by actively involving the community. The program has worked to create enthusiasm for the transit within the corridor and sustainable development along the corridor. The program approach is to:

- Communicate with and involve local residents in refining the proposed alternatives
- Communicate with and educate the public, neighborhoods, and agencies in the Study Area on the opportunities and impacts the proposed project presents for their community and/or area of interest
- Gain insights into issues of greatest concern or interest to the public and municipalities of the Study Area and incorporate them into the decision-making process
- Involve local residents in the decision-making process thereby creating a sense of public ownership of the project
- Meet and exceed the requirements and intent of federal, state, and local public involvement policies in a manner that is consistent with the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process

PUBLIC OUTREACH

During the initial stages of the Central Corridor Transit Study the public was invited to participate in the process through public information meetings, telephone surveys, and other outreach activities.

Two initial public outreach actions were initiated to gather views and opinions from the public. First, a telephone interview survey process was completed to gather as many opinions about the Central Corridor as possible. The second contact included hosting of community forums and business meetings to meet with the public and discuss the transit needs of the Study Area. The meetings were conducted to outline the purpose of the Transit Study and allow open discussions for people in the community to ask questions, voice concerns, and share ideas about the proposed project.

During the Transit Study, a telephone survey of 601 randomly selected residents in the Central Corridor was completed in August 2000. Over 81 percent of the respondents favored more transportation choices and 83 percent felt that investments to improve the public transportation system would be good. Over 90 percent of the respondents felt that to be successful the public transit system must be safe, provide frequent service, be within comfortable walking distance, and fares would need to be low. The transit system must also be less time-consuming than driving a car, according to 68 percent of the residents.

Community forums and meetings with businesses were conducted to obtain a wide variety of views from Study Area residents and business people. Overall, multiple ideas and viewpoints were collected and some of the dominant themes that were developed from the input given by local citizens include:

- Integration between transit alternatives will be important to make it easy for riders to transfer from one system to another (i.e., buses, LRT, and commuter rail).
- Transit can enhance the quality of the environment and reduce residential traffic, but the system should not disrupt the existing transportation network.
- Safety and predictability of transit service is important to residents.
- The current east-west bus service is strong and needs to remain strong. North-south bus service needs to be improved.
- Transit improvements would benefit the local area, in terms of access to jobs and serve as catalyst for business development.

Overall, people within the Central Corridor Study Area support a strong public transit system. They feel service improvements to the existing transit system should be made to provide more predictable and reliable service.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

As detailed in Chapter 8.0 Public and Agency Involvement Program, a coordinating committee was formed at the start of the Central Corridor Transit Study to provide policy direction and to assist in

decision-making and technical analysis. The committee met regularly throughout the process. It guided the study and public participation process

OUTREACH TECHNIQUES

The following outreach techniques have been utilized throughout the proposed project schedule to communicate with and educate the public:

- Web Site – updated frequently with Central Corridor information
- Newsletters – published periodically
- PowerPoint Presentation – for public presentations
- Media Alerts and News Releases – to generate interest in and educate the public on Central Corridor progress
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Survey of residents within the Central Corridor
- Presentations at meetings of neighborhood and business groups within the corridor

SCOPING PROCESS

The initiation of the EIS for the proposed Central Corridor project began with a formal Scoping Process. The Scoping Process was used to publicly announce the alternatives being considered for inclusion in the Draft EIS and to seek out additional alternatives which could be examined. The purpose of scoping is to determine the scope and significance of the social, economic, environmental and transportation issues associated with the alternatives and proposed action. The process provides opportunities to inform the public, government agencies, elected officials, organizations and businesses that the EIS Process is commencing and to hear about issues of concern to notified participants. In addition to initiating dialog on the alternatives, scoping is instrumental in identifying issues to be considered and/or resolved during the EIS.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS on the project was published in the Federal Register on June 5, 2001. In addition, the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Central Corridor Scoping Booklet and announcements of the Scoping Meetings were published in the Minnesota EQB Monitor on June 11, 2001 which began the scoping period. The formal scoping comment period extended from June 11 to July 20, 2001. The Coordinating Committee distributed over 800 scoping booklets to federal, state and local agencies having jurisdiction in the project, all interested parties on the Coordinating Committee mailing list, elected officials, neighborhood organizations and civic groups. The scoping booklet included descriptions of the project, alternatives, and issues identified for consideration in the EIS.

In addition to appearing in the June 5, 2001 Federal Register and the June 11, 2001 Minnesota EQB Monitor, public notices were placed in the following newspapers on the indicated dates:

• Star Tribune	June 11, 2001	• Highland Villager	May/June 2001
• St. Paul Pioneer Press	June 11, 2001	• Merriam Park Post	May/June 2001
• Asian American Press	May/June 2001	• North End News	May/June 2001
• The Bulletin	May/June 2001	• Seward Profile	May/June 2001
• Frogtown Times	May/June 2001	• Southeast Angle	May/June 2001
• Grand Gazette	May/June 2001	• Spokesman-Recorder	May/June 2001

In addition to the Federal Register publication and notices in local newspapers, the public was given notice of the Scoping Meetings in the following ways:

- Letters of invitation to the Scoping Meetings were sent to federal, state, local agencies, and elected officials involved in the proposed Central Corridor project.
- The Central Corridor Scoping Booklet with meeting notices was mailed to approximately 800 people on the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority (RCRRA) mailing list which includes federal, state and local agencies having jurisdiction in the project, all interested parties, elected officials, neighborhood organizations and civic groups.

SCOPING MEETINGS

Four Scoping Meetings were held in the Study Area, as follows:

- Public Scoping Meeting

  June 26, 2001

  8:00 to 9:30 AM

  Sheraton Midway – St. Paul

- Public Scoping Meeting

  June 26, 2001

  5:00 to 8:00 PM

  Lifetrack Resources Job Search Center – St. Paul

- Public Scoping Meeting

  June 27, 2001

  5:00 to 8:00 PM

  Radisson Metrodome - Minneapolis

- Interagency Meeting

  June 26, 2001

  2:00 to 4:00

  Sheraton Midway – St. Paul

Each of the Scoping Meetings included a presentation of the results of the tiered screening process for the Central Corridor. The alternatives recommended to be considered for inclusion in the EIS, the issues to be considered in the EIS, the schedule for EIS completion, and the public and agency involvement program to support EIS activities. Information packets were distributed at the meetings and included an agenda, comment sheet, and Central Corridor Scoping Booklet. Display boards of the EIS Process and preliminary alternatives were available for viewing before, during, and after the presentation.

Table 1.4-1: Scoping Meeting Participation, shows the meeting place/date, number of attendees, and number of speakers who provided verbal comments at each meeting.

Table 1.4-1: Scoping Meeting Participation

Place	Date	Time	Number of Attendees	Number of Speakers
Sheraton Midway 400 North Hamline Avenue St. Paul	June 26, 2001	8:00 to 9:30 AM	35	7
Lifetrack Resources Job Search Center 709 University Avenue West St. Paul	June 26, 2001	5:00 to 8:00 PM	24	12
Radisson Metrodome 615 Washington Avenue SE Minneapolis	June 27, 2001	5:00 to 8:00 PM	23	6
Interagency Meeting: Sheraton Midway 400 North Hamline Avenue St. Paul	June 26, 2001	2:00 to 4:00 PM	10	0
Totals			**92**	**25**

Verbal questions and comments were solicited from both public and agency Scoping Meeting participants. Written comments were encouraged through the use of formal comment sheets, which were available at the meetings, and verbal comments were transcribed by a court reporter.

All written and verbal comments received at the formal public Scoping Meetings, by mail, or via the web page during the scoping period are recorded and addressed in the Central Corridor Scoping Summary Report. Comments made during the Scoping Process were incorporated into the selection of the proposed alternatives for inclusion in the EIS and into the design of the impact assessment criteria to be used in evaluating the alternatives. In addition, comments received were used to help define the social, economic, environmental and transportation factors to be addressed in the EIS, and the types of technical analyses to be completed.

1.6 ROLE OF DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) IN PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The primary purpose of the Draft EIS is to assist the decision-makers and the public in the assessment of impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed transit alternatives. The Draft EIS documents the "Purpose and Need" for the proposed project and presents a discussion of the alternatives considered for implementation. It addresses in detail the potential social, economic, environmental and transportation related impacts of each of the proposed alternatives and describes the recommended mitigation measures to offset the unavoidable impacts.

1.7 DECISION AT HAND

In accordance with federal regulations, full consideration of environmental effects as disclosed during the NEPA process is required before the project can be advanced to the funding stage for final design, right-of-way acquisition, equipment and facilities and system construction. This Draft EIS will determine the environmental effects and a Record of Decision (ROD) is required from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for advancement to the subsequent stages noted. This Draft EIS document will be circulated for review by interested parties, including private citizens, community groups, the business community, elected officials and public agencies in accordance with federal and state requirements. A public hearing will be held to provide a forum for agency and citizen participation and comment.

After consideration of the comments received during circulation of the Draft EIS and the public hearing, more detailed engineering design will be completed to resolve outstanding issues and concerns. This more detailed design will be used by the CCCC to make a final decision on the selection of locally preferred strategy. The result of these decisions will then be documented in the Final EIS, which will also include responses to comments received during circulation of the Draft EIS. Following the filing of the Final EIS by FTA, in conformance with NEPA, if a build alternative is selected as the locally preferred strategy, additional work will be done on implementing that alternative.

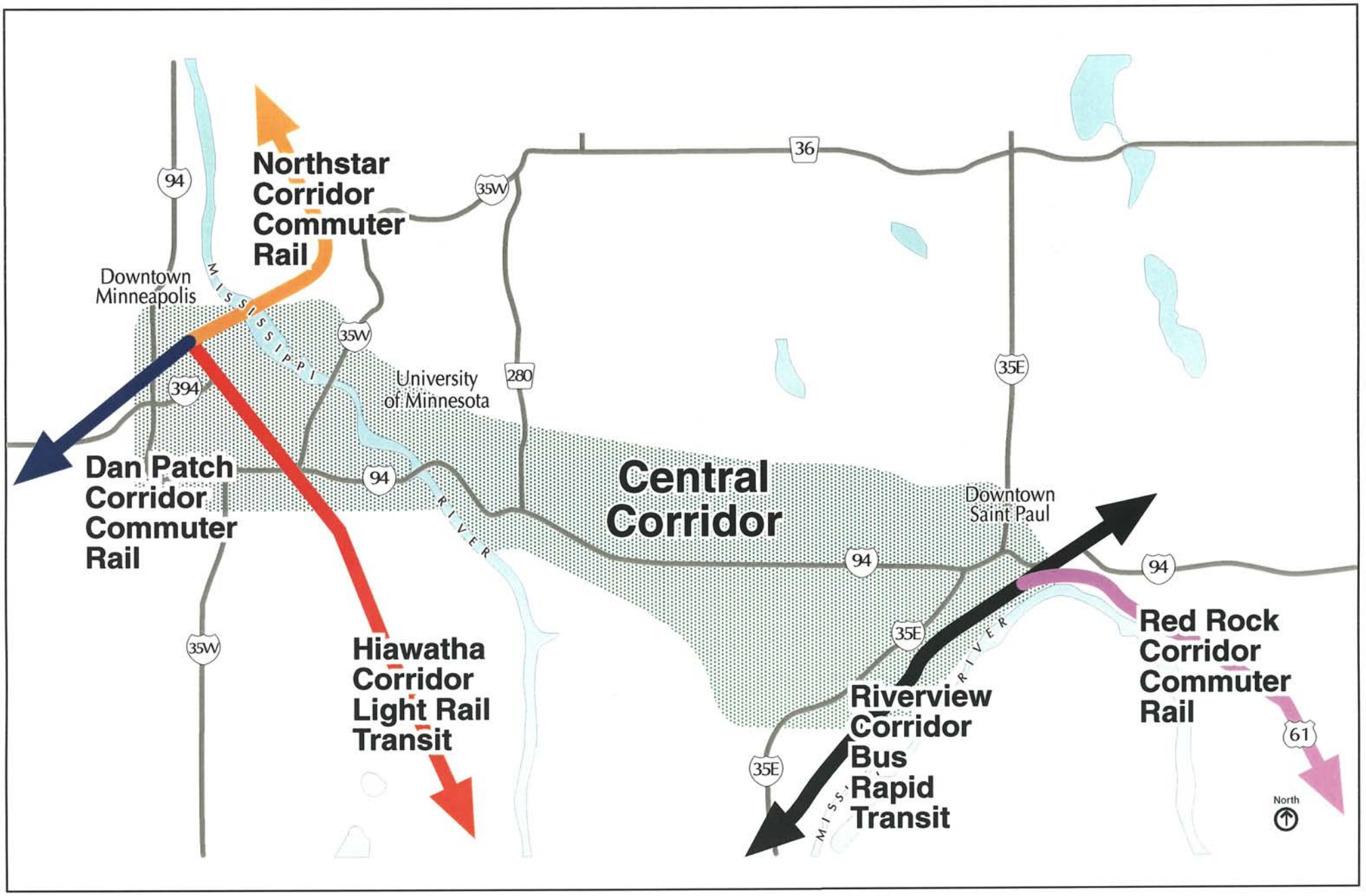
The FTA will not grant approval for the project to enter into final design and construction phases of the project until preliminary engineering is considered complete and the FTA has issued a ROD, as required by NEPA.

1.8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) SCHEDULE

The project milestones and schedule for completion of the EIS for the proposed Central Corridor project are outlined in Table 1.4-2: Project Milestones.

Table 1.4-2: Project Milestones

Activity	Date
NOI to Prepare EIS	June 5, 2001
NOA of Scoping Booklet and Scoping Meetings in *EQB Monitor*	June 11, 2001
Interagency Scoping Meeting	June 26, 2001
Public Scoping Meetings (3)	June 26, 2001 8:00 AM June 26, 2001 5:00 PM June 27, 2001 5:00 PM
Close of Scoping Comment Period	July 20, 2001
Scoping Decision	October 11, 2001
Draft EIS NOA	April, 2006
Public Hearing on Draft EIS	May, 2006
Draft EIS Comment Period Ends	May, 2006
Final EIS NOA published in the *Federal Register*	Early 2008
FTA ROD	2008
Minnesota Adequacy Determination	2008

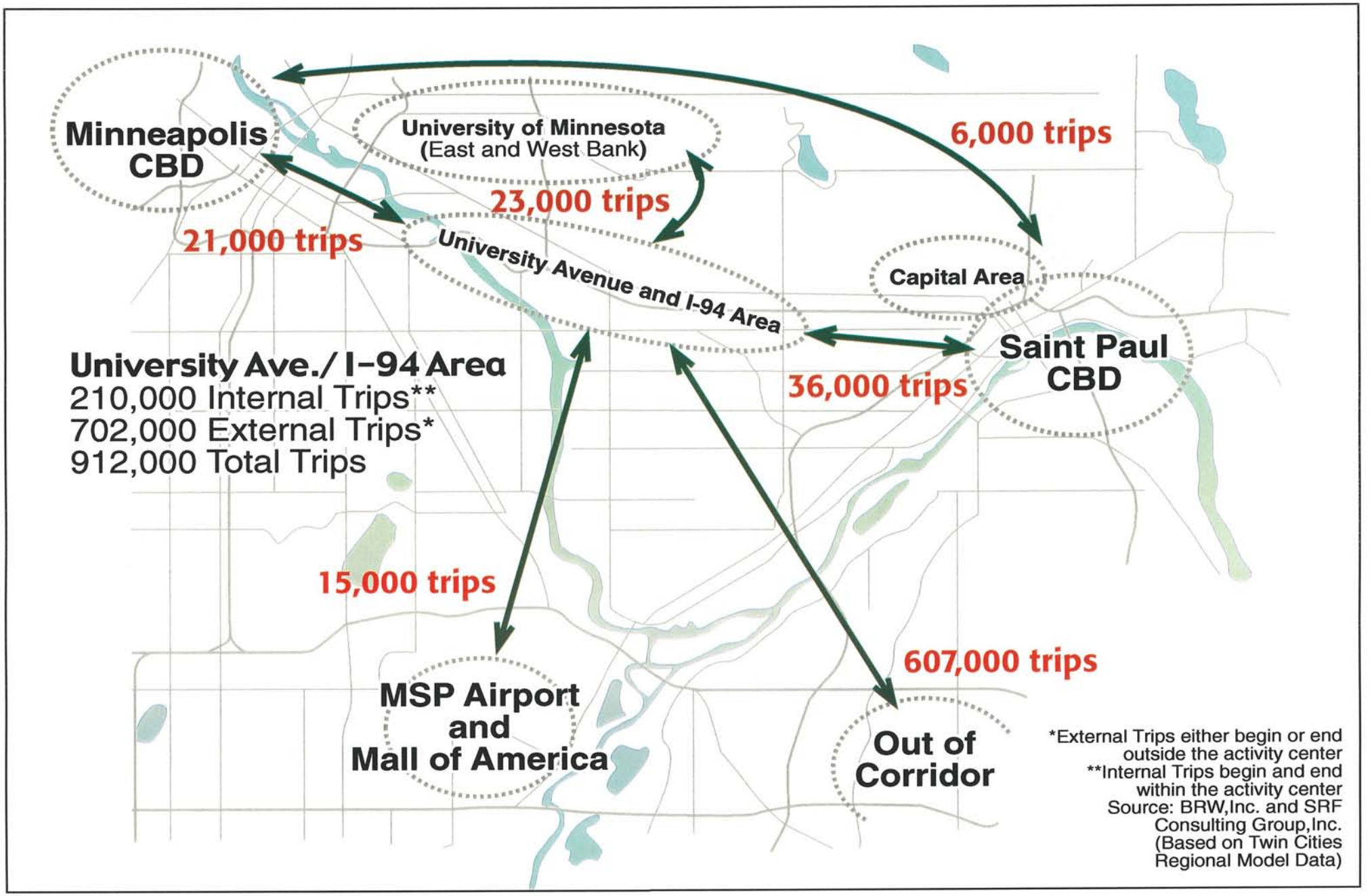


THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR

Study Area

April 2002 *revised May 2002*

Figure 1.1-1

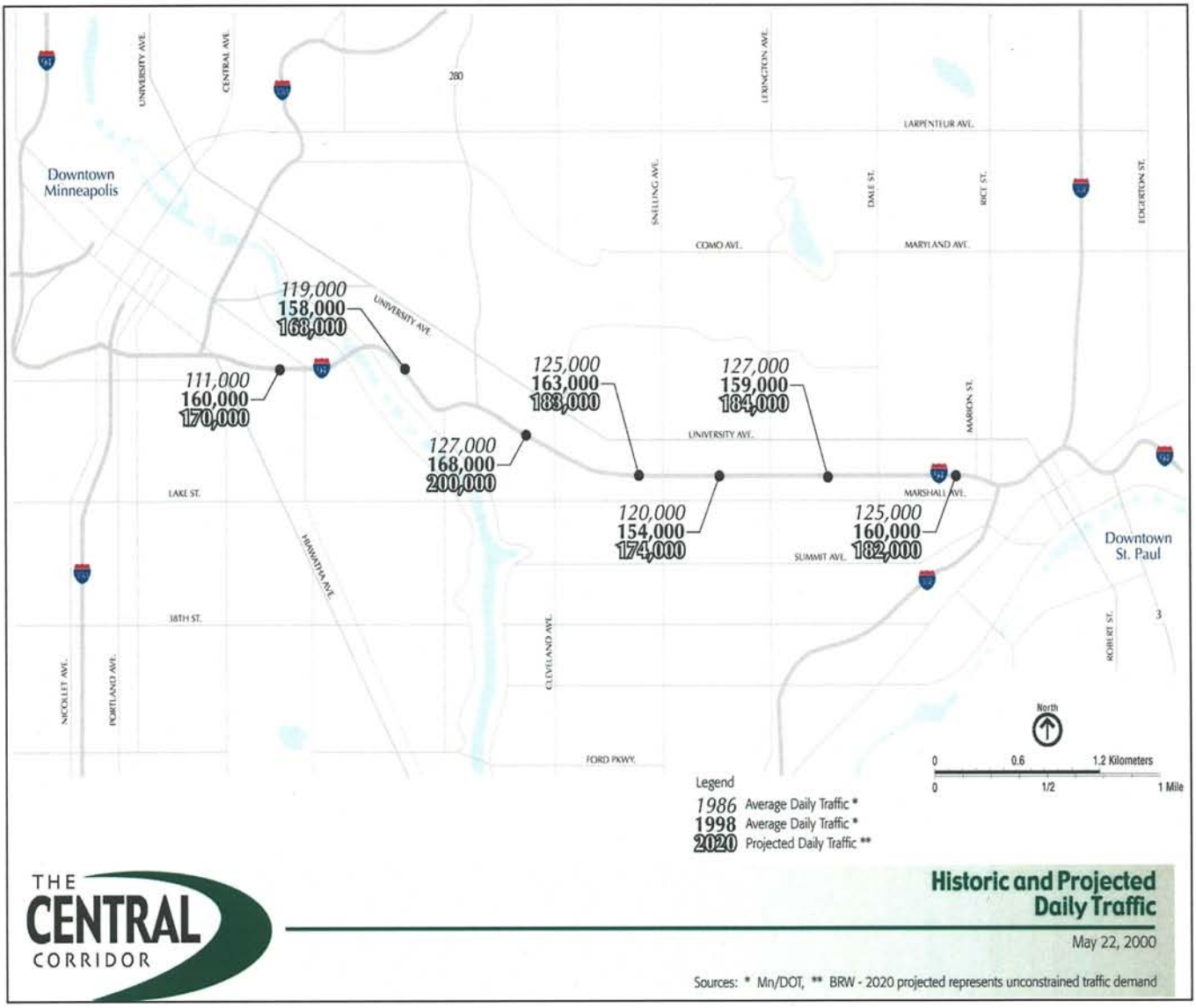


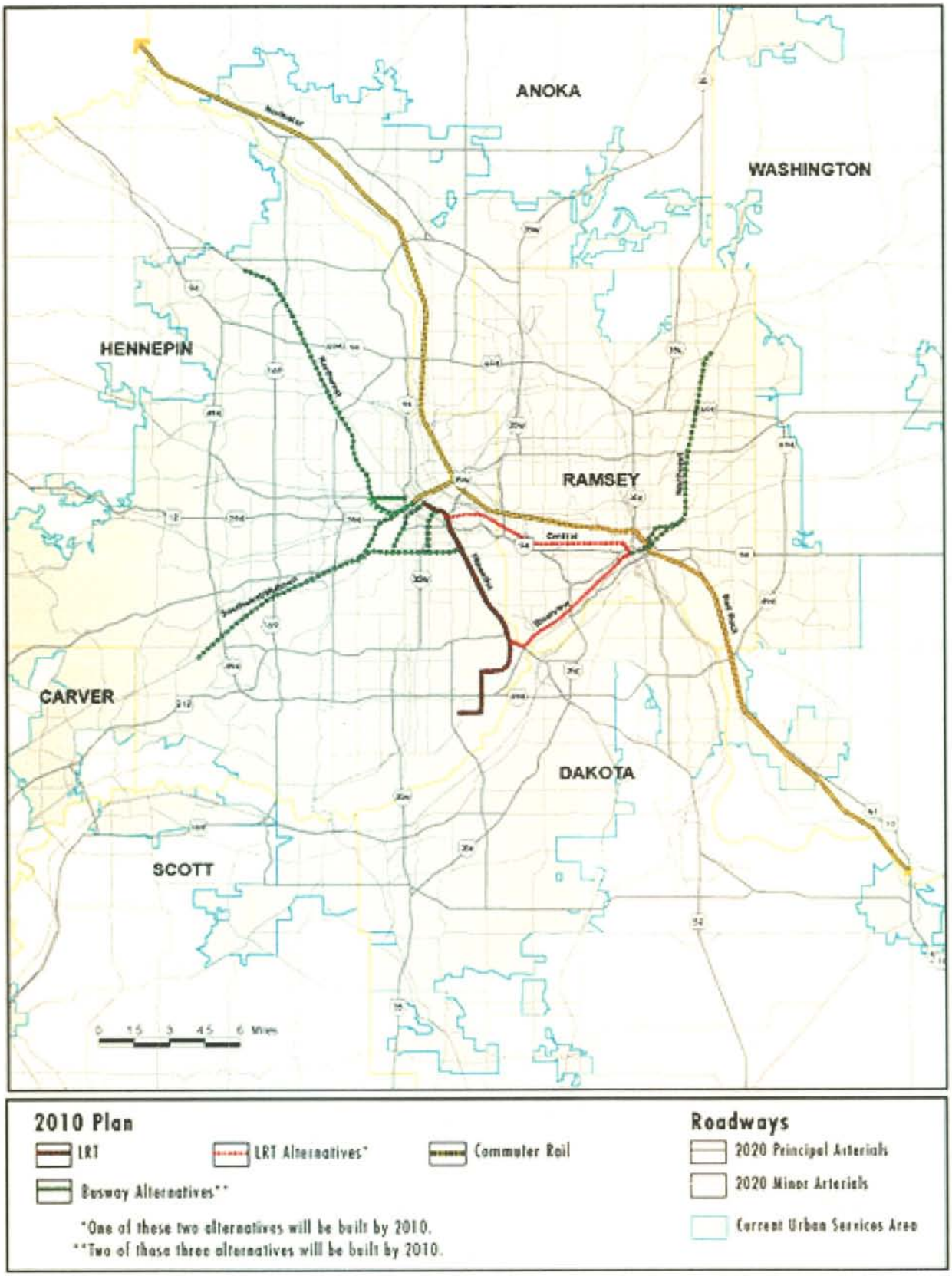
THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR

Year 2000 Person Trips Beginning and Ending in the Study Area

April 2002 *revised May 2002*

Figure 1.2-1


Downtown Minneapolis
UNIVERSITY AVE.
CENTRAL AVE.
280
LEXINGTON AVE.
LARPENTEUR AVE.
SNELLING AVE.
DALE ST.
RICE ST.
EDGERTON ST.
COMO AVE.
MARYLAND AVE.
119,000
158,000
168,000
111,000
160,000
170,000
125,000
163,000
183,000
127,000
159,000
184,000
127,000
168,000
200,000
120,000
154,000
174,000
125,000
160,000
182,000
MARION ST.
LAKE ST.
MARSHALL AVE.
SUMMIT AVE.
Downtown St. Paul
HIAWATHA AVE.
38TH ST.
CLEVELAND AVE.
ROBERT ST.
NICOLLET AVE.
PORTLAND AVE.
FORD PKWY.
North
0 0.6 1.2 Kilometers
0 1/2 1 Mile
Legend
1986 Average Daily Traffic *
1998 Average Daily Traffic *
2020 Projected Daily Traffic **
THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR
Historic and Projected Daily Traffic
May 22, 2000
Sources: * Mn/DOT, ** BRW - 2020 projected represents unconstrained traffic demand



Transitways on a Dedicated Right-of-Way - 2010 Plan

Figure 1.2-3

THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR

May 2002