SECTION 4

Citizen's Guide to DEIS

This page intentionally left blank

The Central Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Citizen's Guide May 2006

THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR

Contents

Contact the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee

Ask questions or share your views on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement:

RCGC West, Suite 665
c/o Steve Morris
50 West Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55102

Project website:

www.centralcorridor.org

E-mail:

deiscomments@co.ramsey.mn.us

Questions: 651.266.2760

Comments: 651.266.2776

Comment sheet:

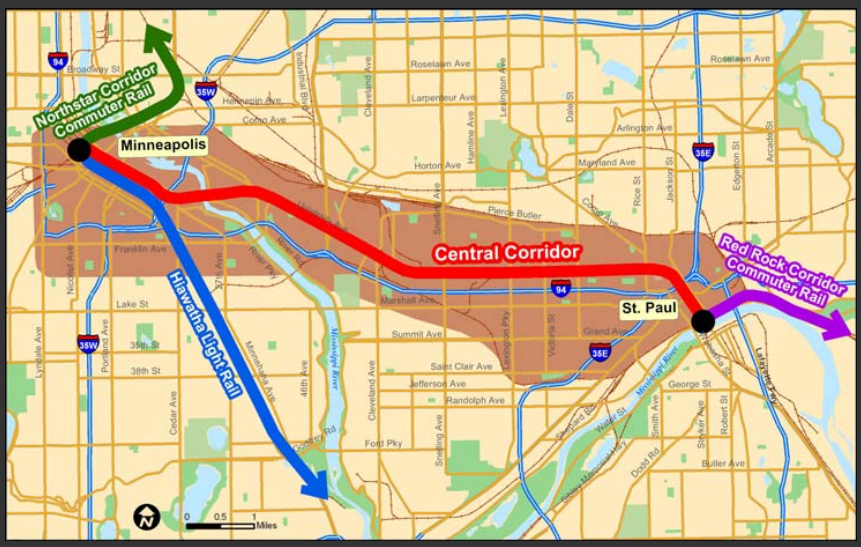
Complete and drop in the “Comments” box at a public hearing, or mail to the address above so it is received by June 5, 2006.

Verbally:

Register to speak at a public hearing and address the other participants or have a word with project staff individually.

Read the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on-line at www.centralcorridor.org

Project Overview



The Central Corridor is bordered on the north by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe rail line and on the south by the Canadian Pacific Short Line rail line. A new transit facility would connect the Twin Cities and link up with commuter rail, light rail, and bus rapid transit lines.

The 11-mile-long Central Corridor is the primary east-west route between downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis. Not only a key connector in the Twin Cities, the Central Corridor has statewide and national significance as well; Interstate 94, Interstates 35E and 35W, U.S. 52, Amtrak, and three freight rail lines intersect with the corridor. The Central Corridor is one of the busiest, most diverse, and economically successful urban areas in the U.S. Along with the two downtowns, the corridor is home to the State Capitol, the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Children's Museum, the West Bank Theater District, Frogtown, Midway, many strong residential neighborhoods, and numerous entertainment districts and activity centers.

The Central Corridor project is a joint effort of city, regional, and statewide agencies. Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority (RCRRA) is managing the study with funding from the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority and the Federal Transit Administration. The Central Corridor Coordinating Committee (CCCC), which is made up of policy-makers representing Ramsey County, Hennepin County, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and the University of Minnesota, along with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Council, provided policy direction for the study.

But the most important players in the project are the members of the public, who live and work in the study area and would be using the proposed transit improvements on a daily basis. Now that the Federal Transit Administration has approved the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee is seeking public comment. The Committee will use public opinion to help form a recommendation, which it will submit to the Metropolitan Council.

It's important for the Central Corridor planning effort to reflect community views about transportation, redevelopment, and other issues affecting the community. Be sure to have your say in these matters by participating in public hearings or by contacting the project team directly (see opposite page for contact details).

Purpose and Need, Goals and Objectives

Two Decades in the Making

For the past 20 years, the Central Corridor has been identified as a place where mobility and transportation capacity should be improved. It is one of the strongest transit corridors in the Midwest, with ridership rivaling that of any urban area between Chicago and cities on the West Coast. It links some of the largest traffic generators in Minnesota, including the employment districts of downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, the University of Minnesota, the State Capitol, sports venues, theaters, museums, and significant residential population centers.

Physical constraints in this developed corridor would make expansion of the existing roadway system costly and disruptive. Transit options could reduce pressure on the roadway system, easing congestion, increasing mobility, and offering more choices to existing transit riders and attracting new riders to transit. As the core of the overall regional transit network, high ridership in the Central Corridor represents one of the region's best opportunities for a single capital investment that can carry over into increased positive impacts for the entire transit system.

A Growing Corridor

The Central Corridor is experiencing rapid population and employment growth. Nearly 120,000 people—many of whom are transit-dependent—lived in the corridor in 2000. Of these, 8.5 percent were elderly, 22 percent of households were classified as "low income," and almost 28 percent of households did not own a car. This demographic mix means that the corridor has a high number of residents who depend on public transportation for mobility. Population in the corridor is growing quickly and is expected to increase 34 percent by 2030.

The corridor is also home to a dense concentration of commercial, government, educational, health care, and cultural activities. Some of the most prominent companies in the U.S. are based here, and a connected, inter-modal transit system has been instrumental in establishing the economic success of the Twin Cities. St. Paul is expected to see a 17 percent increase in jobs by 2020, while Minneapolis is predicted to have a 31 percent rise during the same period.

These significant jumps in population and employment point to the need for transit improvements, which will help preserve the mobility and vitality of the Central Corridor for years to come.

To measure the effectiveness of transit improvements in the corridor, the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee developed a set of goals and objectives to serve as the framework for the study:

Economic Opportunity and Investment

- *Support investments in infrastructure, business, and community that sustain the heart of the region*
- *Promote a reliable transit system that allows an efficient, effective land use development pattern in major activity centers that minimizes parking demand, facilitates the highest and best use of adjacent properties, and gives employers confidence that employees can travel to and from work*

Communities and Environment

- *Facilitate the preservation and enhancement of neighborhoods in the Central Corridor*
- *Acknowledge the individual character and aspirations of each place served, and of the region as a whole*
- *Support regional goals for cleaner air and water, more efficient energy use, and a safer and healthier environment*

Transportation and Mobility

- *Create transportation improvements that add to carrying capacity, minimize operating costs, improve operating efficiency, provide a high quality choice of modes, and reinforce the region's transportation network*
- *Expand opportunities for all users to move freely to and within the corridor*
- *Enhance the existing transportation infrastructure to serve the highest number of transit-dependent people*

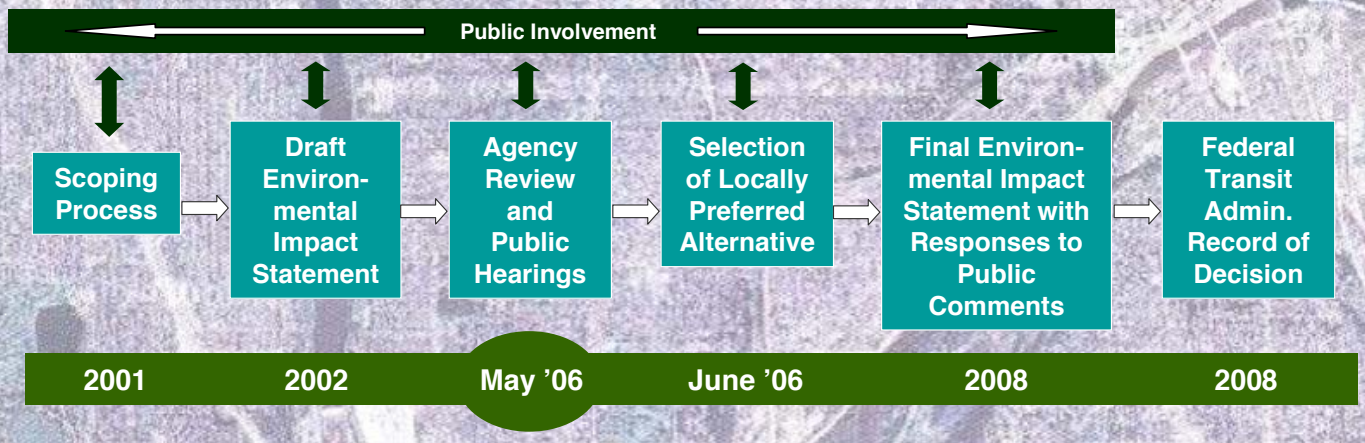
The Environmental Study Process

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Central Corridor Transit Project is a federally mandated requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and is sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The EIS phase of the transportation planning process allows for the careful consideration of the design, benefits, and costs of proposed transportation improvements. It also allows for the examination of social, economic, transportation, and environmental impacts that may result from the implementation of the project.

The analysis contained in the EIS:

- **Refines the proposed transportation improvements**
- **Assesses social, economic, and environmental impacts** such as land use, acquisitions and displacements, traffic, community effects, parklands, visual and aesthetic conditions, historic and archaeological resources, safety and security, area planning and development opportunities, and noise and vibration
- **Identifies cultural resources** to evaluate and determine impacts to standing structures and archaeological sites as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act
- **Analyzes transportation system impacts** such as effects on roadway operations, bus system operations and facilities, parking demands, railroad operations, and pedestrian and bicycle issues
- **Prepares capital cost estimates** including engineering, design, right-of-way acquisition, and the purchase of transit vehicles
- **Estimates and analyzes** operating and maintenance costs, ridership demand, and revenues

The project team is working closely with representatives of communities potentially affected by the proposed transportation improvements. Communication with the public will continue during the process through newsletters, meetings, the project website (www.centralcorridor.org), and other outreach efforts.



Alternatives Considered: Vehicles

In the early stages of the study, the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee conducted a preliminary screening of transit modes based on characteristics such as capital costs per mile, vehicle capacity, average trip length, running surface, speed, power supply, and proven technology. Based on these criteria, the project team screened out eight modes for this corridor: Commuter Rail, Diesel Multiple Unit, Heavy Rail, Monorail, Automated Guideway Transit, Personal Rapid Transit, Magnetic Levitation, and Streetcar. Two modes remained—Light Rail Transit and Bus Rapid Transit—and have been recommended for further study and potential implementation in the Central Corridor.

Light Rail Transit

LRT Vehicle Characteristics:

- Usually powered by overhead wires
- Short trains of up to four cars
- Can run in railroad, highway, or street right-of-way
- Usually operate in an exclusive or semi-exclusive right-of-way (i.e., not mixed with motor vehicles)
- Corridor lengths typically run between 10 and 20 miles
- Stations are located from 1/4 mile to 1 mile apart
- An example of an LRT system is the Hiawatha Line between downtown Minneapolis and the Mall of America
- Other LRT systems in the U.S. include Dallas, Denver, Houston, Portland, St. Louis, and Salt Lake City. Dozens more cities in North America are building or planning light rail systems at this time.

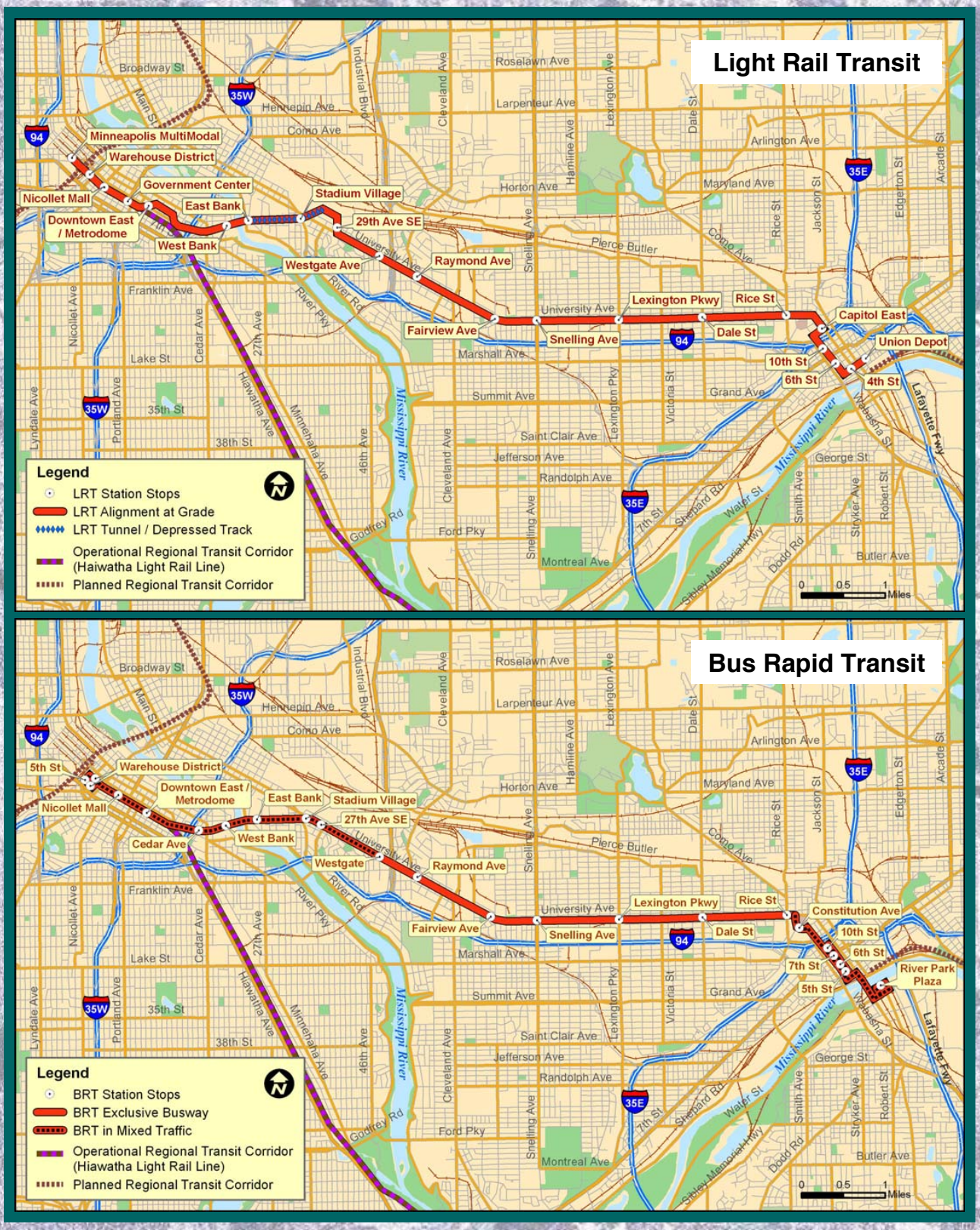
Bus Rapid Transit

BRT Vehicle Characteristics:

- Have rubber tires and can run on diesel or alternative fuels
- Designed to carry heavier passenger loads than conventional buses
- Often operate longer-distance trips than short-trip local buses
- Have multiple doors and use off-board fare collection speed up boarding and alighting at stops
- Can operate in mixed traffic or in exclusive rights-of-way (separated from other motor vehicle traffic)
- Stations are usually 1/2 mile to 1 mile apart
- Station amenities and quality of ride are often comparable to rail vehicles
- Other BRT systems in the U.S. include Boston, Los Angeles, Orlando, and Pittsburgh. Many cities, including the Twin Cities, are considering BRT.

Opposite page: As a part of the study, the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee narrowed down the choice of alignments. The study team considered multiple alignments at the beginning of the project, and more alignments were suggested by the public during the scoping process. The study team has recommended an alignment that runs primarily along University Avenue for both the light rail and BRT options.

Alternatives Considered: Alignments



Social, Land Use, and Environmental Impact Analyses

Social and Land Use Impacts

Transportation improvements have the potential to affect the residents, economy, and environment of the places in which they are implemented.

The EIS looked at local plans and zoning codes in the study area and determined that they support transit improvements as a positive contribution to local goals.

The analysis also reviewed potential displacements and adverse effects on neighborhoods, community services, and community cohesion. It determined that the proposed improvements would offer benefits such as greater mobility, station area enhancements, and redevelopment opportunities. Although negative effects may include limited displacement of structures, some loss of on-street parking, and changes to traffic patterns, the median alignment within the University Avenue right-of-way would minimize impacts to existing land uses. The EIS also found that the alternatives would have no impact on adjacent parklands.

Light rail would affect visual and aesthetic conditions in the corridor by the presence of overhead wires, fixed guideways, and substations; however, the reconstruction of University Avenue would create a major opportunity to improve the environment for pedestrians and the visual quality of the streetscape. Bus Rapid Transit would result in fewer visual impacts, but it would also not result in full reconstruction of University Avenue. In either case, construction would, of course, result in temporary visual impacts.

Safety and security issues were also examined in the EIS. Pedestrian safety would be provided through the use of sidewalks, traffic signals, and signage, and at-grade crossings would be protected with warning signs and possibly automatic roadway crossing warning systems. Metro Transit Police would assign officers along the line to deter crime and vandalism.

Environmental Impacts

The EIS examined a set range of potential environmental effects such as soils, geology, and topography; hazardous materials contamination; air quality; noise and vibration; ecology and habitat; and water quality and floodplains.

Soils, geology, and topography are not anticipated to be affected by the build alternatives, and proposed construction is not expected to impact existing structural foundations in the corridor. Soil erosion and pollution of surface water during construction would be addressed in the design and permitting phase of the project.

The analysis identified 316 sites with potential contamination within 1,000 feet of the proposed alignments, primarily hazardous materials and petroleum. The light rail alternative, which would require some excavation, has a medium or high potential to affect ten of these sites. The Bus Rapid Transit alternative has a medium or high potential to affect seven sites. Mitigation measures would be determined following the selection of an alternative and additional site visits.

No alternative would exceed allowable emissions set by state air quality standards. Noise and vibration effects were analyzed according to Federal Transit Administration standards. Light rail would exceed noise standards at 12 locations in the corridor, while Bus Rapid Transit would exceed noise standards at 113 locations. Neither alternative is expected to cause unacceptable vibration. Noise mitigation techniques would be explored after the selection of an alternative.

Both build alternatives are expected to have a marginal effect on vegetation and urban wildlife. No wetlands would be affected in the study area, as rights-of-way are located on already impervious surfaces. Both alignments would cross the Mississippi River at the Washington Avenue Bridge.

Read the full Draft Environmental Impact Statement on-line at www.centralcorridor.org

Economic and Transportation Impact Analyses

Economic Impacts

The EIS asserts that the Twin Cities' existing intermodal transit system is a strong factor in the economic success of the region, and that, given the projected increases in population and employment and the Central Corridor's high number of residents with mobility limitations, the proposed transit improvements would have a positive effect on local economic conditions and encourage opportunities for sustained growth in the study area.

One such opportunity comes in the form of transit-oriented development (TOD). TOD is a building and land use pattern where the center of a neighborhood is a transit station surrounded by dense development, with progressively less-dense development spreading out from the center. This encourages transit use, pedestrian activity, and a relatively active street life.

Around the U.S. and the world, improved transit networks have increased development and redevelopment potential and energized the economic life of communities. The EIS confirms that such a boost could be given to the Central Corridor with the proposed transit improvements in place.

What is NEPA?

NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, is the legal framework in which agencies must operate if they are to receive federal funding for their public works projects. NEPA requires agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and to evaluate reasonable alternatives to those actions. For more information on NEPA, please visit www.epa.gov/compliance/nepa/index.html.

Transportation Impacts

Modifications to roadway geometry may be required at points along the path of the light rail or Bus Rapid Transit line. Light rail or BRT vehicles would operate with the traffic signal system. Bus operations would change for either build alternative, as either light rail or BRT would replace some existing service.

Models indicate that by 2020, it will take 73 minutes to travel between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul using existing Bus Route 16. By contrast, the trip would take 35 minutes with light rail and 42 with Bus Rapid Transit in 2020. By 2020, light rail transit daily ridership would be 38,100. Bus Rapid Transit would be over capacity at 31,200.

Is it possible to widen Interstate 94?

Traffic congestion is already a problem for the Central Corridor, especially on I-94. In the Twin Cities Regional Model, VMT (vehicle miles traveled, an accepted measure of total highway demand) is expected to increase 48 percent between 1996 and 2020. However, expansion of the highway would be difficult and expensive and is not included in any long-range transportation plans.

Evaluation of Alternatives by the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee

Goals and Objectives	Baseline* Alternative	Build Alternatives	
		Light Rail Transit	Bus Rapid Transit
Goal 1: Economic Opportunity and Investment			
Objective A: Support investments in infrastructure, business, and community that sustain the region			
Previous Investment – Transportation	⊘	●	●
Previous Investment – Development	⊘	●	●
Proximity to Developable and Redevelopable Land	⊘	●	●
Goal 1 Objective A, Average:	⊘	●	●
Objective B: Promote a reliable transit system that allows an efficient, effective land use development pattern			
Proven Technology	●	●	●
Consistency with Land Use Patterns	⊘	●	●
Service to Major Travel Markets	⊘	●	●
Proximity to Planned Development	⊘	●	●
Parking	⊘	●	●
Major Employment Centers Served	●	●	●
Business Community Sentiment	●	●	●
Goal 1 Objective B, Average:	⊘	●	●
Goal 2: Communities and Environment			
Objective A: Facilitate the preservation and enhancement of neighborhoods in the Central Corridor			
Residential Population Served	●	●	●
Consistency with Local Plans	⊘	●	●
Community Sentiment	⊘	●	●
Noise and Vibration	N/A	●	●
Goal 2 Objective A, Average:	⊘	●	●

⊘ The alternative does not support the objective

○ The alternative somewhat supports the objective

● The alternative supports the objective

● The alternative strongly supports the objective

Goals and Objectives	Baseline* Alternative	Build Alternatives	
		Light Rail Transit	Bus Rapid Transit
Goal 2: Communities and Environment			
Objective B: Acknowledge the individual character and aspirations of each place served, and of the region			
Compatibility with Community Character	⊘	●	●
Potential to Support Smart Growth and Livability	⊘	●	●
Goal 2 Objective B, Average:	⊘	●	●
Objective C: Support regional goals for cleaner air and water, energy use, and a safer/healthier environment			
Environmental Impacts	⊘	●	●
Existing Right-of-Way Utilization	●	●	●
Goal 2 Objective C, Average:	⊘	●	●
Goal 3: Transportation and Mobility			
Objective A: Create transportation improvements that add to carrying capacity, minimize operating costs, improve operating efficiency, provide a high-quality choice of modes, and reinforce the regional network			
Capacity	○	●	○
Operating Costs	●	●	○
Efficiency	⊘	●	●
Consistency with Regional Plans	⊘	●	●
Intermodal Connectivity	○	●	○
Goal 3 Objective A, Average:	○	●	○
Objective B: Expand opportunities for all users to move freely to, through, and within the corridor			
Regional Connectivity	⊘	●	●
Goal 3 Objective B, Average:	⊘	●	●
Objective C: Enhance existing transportation infrastructure to serve the most transit-dependent people			
Diversity of Population Served	⊘	●	●
Travel Time Savings	⊘	●	●
Goal 3 Objective C, Average:	⊘	●	●

** The baseline alternative serves as a basis for comparison to the build alternatives as part of the FTA's "New Starts" process. It is designed to be the "best that can be done" to improve transit service in the corridor without a major capital investment in new infrastructure (i.e., the build alternatives). The baseline alternative includes all existing transit in the study area, the creation or extension of local bus routes, and bus service frequency enhancements.*

Public and Agency Involvement

The study team has conducted an extensive outreach program to include the views of local agencies and the public during the decision-making process. The program was developed in the initial stages of the Central Corridor study to encourage an open, collaborative approach to building a balanced transportation system and creating sustainable development in the corridor. The specific objectives of the program were to communicate with and involve local residents in refining the proposed alternatives; educate the public and agencies about potential opportunities and impacts facing the corridor; gain insight into issues of great concern to residents and businesses; foster a sense of ownership among the public; and meet or exceed public involvement requirements set forth in local, state, and federal policy.

At the outset of the project, the study team conducted interviews with a diverse group of policy-makers, advocacy groups, business leaders, and community organizations in the corridor. These interviews yielded many suggestions on how to engage the public, use the media and public relations in reaching the broadest audience possible, and identify the most critical issues to be addressed in the process. Over the past several years, the public and agency involvement program provided numerous opportunities for communication, education, and public comment at key decision points. In addition to holding scoping meetings as required by federal policy, the study team held community and agency meetings, published newsletters and a website, sent out media alerts and press releases, and conducted other outreach activities. These efforts were instrumental in gaining feedback that would help shape the alternatives.

Connecting the Twin Cities: would the proposed transit project be successful in meeting the Central Corridor Coordinating Committee's goals and objectives? Feedback from the public helps agencies make important decisions.

New Starts and Potential Funding

During the public hearings for this project, and in the accompanying visual and written materials, participants may hear and see repeated references to "New Starts." What is the New Starts program and how does it affect the Central Corridor project?

The U.S. Department of Transportation, through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), allocates federal funds for major transit capital investments through a program called Section 5309 New Starts. The FTA evaluates each proposed project using the following New Starts criteria:

Project Justification

- Mobility improvements
- Environmental benefits
- Operating efficiencies
- Cost-effectiveness
- Transit-supportive land use
- Other factors

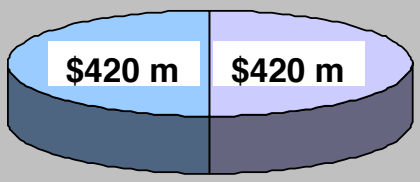
Local Financial Commitment

- Proposed share of total project costs
- Stability and reliability of the proposed capital financing plan to construct the project
- Ability of sponsoring agencies to fund the operation and maintenance of the entire system as planned

Based on FTA's review and evaluation, an overall rating is assigned to the project. This rating is used to make decisions for advancing a proposed project in the New Starts project development process and recommendations for funding. The FTA must approve the project for entry into preliminary engineering, final design, and ultimately construction with a full funding grant agreement. If a locally preferred alternative is selected for the Central Corridor project, a New Starts evaluation report will be submitted to the FTA seeking approval to enter preliminary engineering.

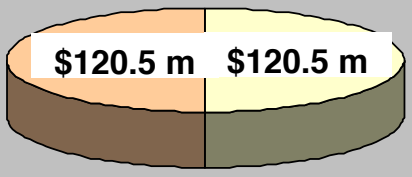
The Central Corridor project is estimated to receive 50 percent funding of capital costs from federal New Starts, matched by 50 percent from state and local sources.

Light Rail Transit



- Federal Transit Administration
- State and Local Sources

Bus Rapid Transit



- Federal Transit Administration
- State and Local Sources

For more information on FTA New Starts, please visit www.fta.dot.gov

Project Summary and Implementation Strategy

Summary of Project Characteristics	Baseline[1] Alternative	Build Alternatives	
		Light Rail Transit	Bus Rapid Transit
Vehicles and Operations			
Length of Alignment	N/A	11 miles	11 miles
Number of Stations	N/A	21	22
Capacity	N/A	320[2]	160[3]
Service Frequency (peak/off-peak)	depends on route	7.5 min/10 min	6 min/10 min
Exclusive Lanes	N/A	yes	partially
Projected Ridership[4]			
Daily Ridership Forecast, 2008	28,400	32,100	26,500
Daily Ridership Forecast, 2020	33,700	38,100	31,200
Total Daily Transit Boardings, 2020	382,000	390,300	386,200
Peak Hour Travel Times Between Downtowns, 2020	73 minutes	35 minutes	42 minutes
Estimated Costs[4]			
Capital Costs (based on a 2008 opening)	N/A	$840 m	$241 m
Annual Operation and Maintenance Costs[5], 2008	$56.7 m	$60.7 m	$58.7 m
Annual Operation and Maintenance Costs[5], 2020	$90.8 m	$97.2 m	$94 m

[1] The best transit service improvements that can be made without major capital investment such as light rail or BRT
[2] Two articulated cars with a capacity of 160 passengers each; may be expanded to three-car trains in the future
[3] Two articulated buses with a capacity of 80 passengers each
[4] Figures to be revised during preliminary engineering and final design
[5] Includes all transit service in the corridor

Final EIS	FTA Record of Decision	Preliminary Engineering	Final Design	Begin Construction	Service Begins
2008	2008	2008	2009	2009	2012

Next Steps: Central Corridor Implementation Strategy

Comment Sheet

Name :_____ **E-mail:**_____

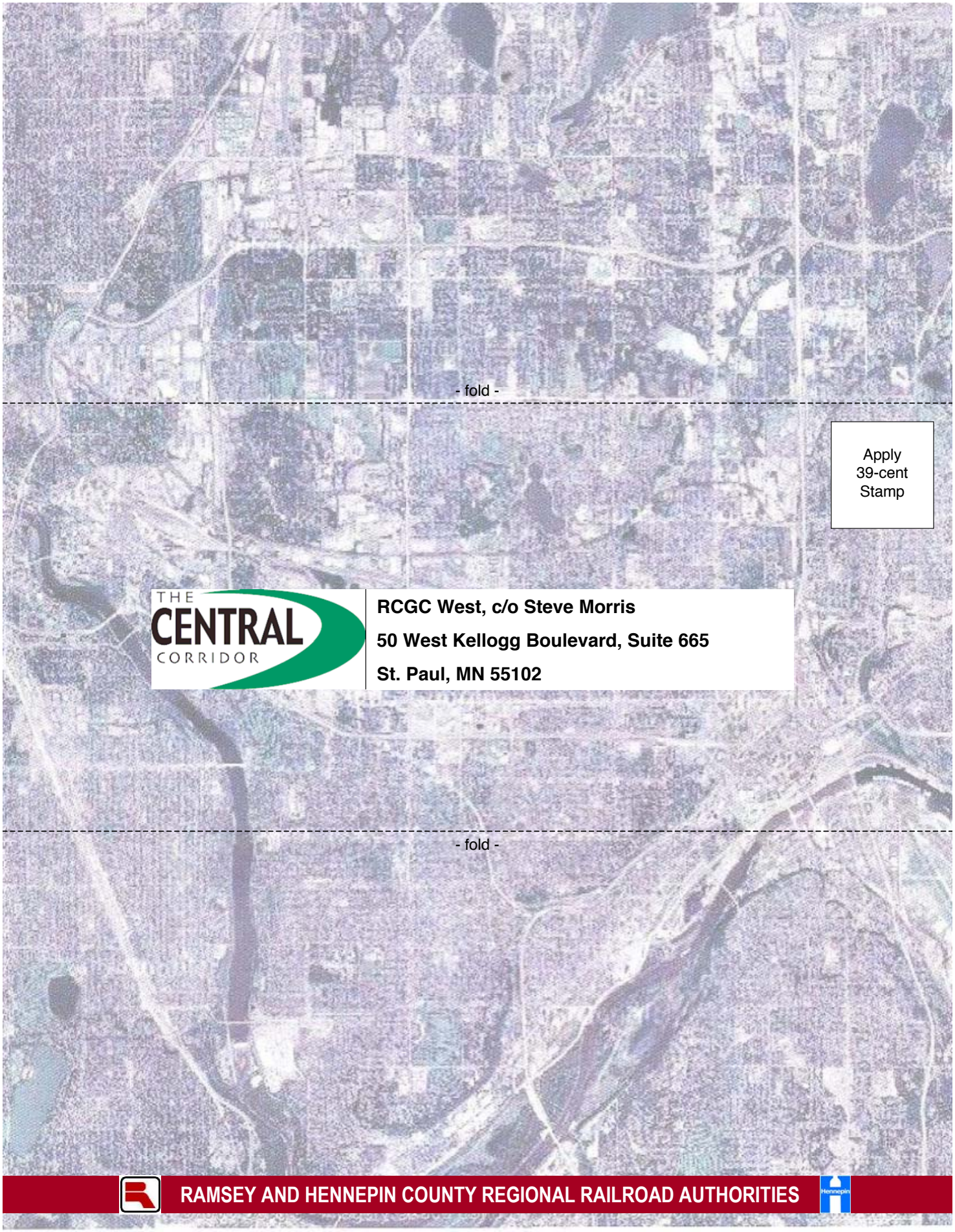
Address:_____

Please take a moment to share your views with us about the Central Corridor project. Your comments and/or questions will be transcribed in the public hearing record and responded to in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Include your name and address if you'd like to be added to the project mailing list and notified of future Central Corridor public meetings. Thank you for your interest in this important transit project!

Please detach this page from the summary booklet, fold and seal as indicated on the reverse, and add postage. Mailing address: Steve Morris, RCGC West, Suite 665, 50 West Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102

You may also e-mail your comments to deiscomments@co.ramsey.mn.us; use the comment form on the project website: www.centralcorridor.org; or leave your comments by phone on RCRRA's comment line: 651.266.2776.

The final date to receive comments is June 5, 2006.



- fold -

Apply
39-cent
Stamp

THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR

RCGC West, c/o Steve Morris

50 West Kellogg Boulevard, Suite 665

St. Paul, MN 55102

- fold -