

10.0 EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

This chapter summarizes the evaluation of the proposed changes to the Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (LRT) Project, based on the information presented in the previous chapters. These changes are described in detail in Chapter 2. The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the benefits, costs, and environmental consequences against the project’s goals and objectives as presented in Chapter 1.

Section 10.1 presents an evaluation of the proposed changes to the AA/DEIS LPA relative to project goals and objectives.

Section 10.2 describes an overview of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) New Starts Criteria.

Section 10.3 presents a list of the issues to be resolved once a revised LPA is adopted and prior to the circulation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

10.1 Evaluation Relative to Project Goals and Objectives

In Section 1.4.1, a summary of the goals and objectives for the Central Corridor Transit Study was presented. The project goals include:

- Supporting economic opportunity and investment
- Preserving and enhancing communities and supporting a healthier environment
- Improving transportation and mobility

The Central Corridor Alternatives Analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) identified LRT as the alternative most consistent with the goals and objectives of the Central Corridor LRT Study Area that are presented in Chapter 1 of this document. An LRT alignment connecting downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis on University and Washington avenues was adopted as the LPA based on this conclusion.

Table 10-1 summarizes differences in performance relative to the project goals and objectives for the No-Build Alternative, the AA/DEIS LPA and the proposed changes to the AA/DEIS LPA.

Table 10-1 Summary of Effects Relative to Project Goals and Objectives

	No-Build Alternative	AA/DEIS LPA	Proposed Changes To AA/DEIS LPA
Goal 1: Support Economic Opportunity and Investment			
Compatible with Existing Land Use	Yes	Yes	Yes
Consistent with Comprehensive Plans	No	Yes	Yes
Compatible with Planned Development	No	Yes	Yes

	No-Build Alternative	AA/DEIS LPA	Proposed Changes To AA/DEIS LPA
Economic Effects	No	Expansion in payroll and employment is anticipated with construction spending and recurring O&M costs	Same as AA/DEIS; analysis of revised LPA will be documented in the FEIS
Development Effects	Existing development trends should continue	Increases in commercial and residential development densities is expected	Same as AA/DEIS
Goal 2: Preserve and Enhance Communities and Support Healthier Environment			
Community Facility Impacts	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
Community Cohesion	No Impact	No Impact	No Impact
Number of Property Acquisitions	None	114 partial, 11 total and 12 non-residential buildings	68 parcels and 31.48 acres, 2 non-residential buildings are related Key Project Elements
Potential Adverse Effects-Archeological	None	Undetermined; Phase II recommended	None anticipated
Potential Adverse Effects-Historic Properties	None	Undetermined; Phase II required	TBD- ongoing coordination
Section 4(f) Impact	No impact	None anticipated	1 Temporary construction impact; 1 ROW acquisition; other potential impacts to be determined
Potential Visual Effects	No impact	Temporary construction impacts; introduction of overhead contact system (OCS) and new station facilities	Same as AA/DEIS LPA with the exception of visual changes due to construction of vehicle maintenance and storage facility in downtown St. Paul and at-grade transit/pedestrian mall at the U of M
Disproportionate Impacts to EJ Communities	Minority, low-income and transit dependent populations would not be served	None anticipated	None anticipated

	No-Build Alternative	AA/DEIS LPA	Proposed Changes To AA/DEIS LPA
Groundwater Effects	No impact	Potential construction impacts	Same as AA/DEIS LPA
Wetlands (Acres)	No impact	No impact	Same as AA/DEIS LPA
Floodplains (# of 100-year crossings)	No impact	No impact; permit required	Same as AA/DEIS LPA
Effects to Habitat and Biota	N/A	Minor impact	Same as AA/DEIS LPA
Effects to Threatened and Endangered Species	N/A	No impact	No impact
Contribution to Regional Air Quality Goals	Higher emissions due to increased traffic congestion	Reduced emission of CO and VOC, slightly higher NOx emissions	Similar to AA/DEIS LPA; detailed analysis to be completed during FEIS
Noise Receptors Above FTA Criteria	N/A	11 Category 2, 1 Category 3	Same as AA/DEIS LPA
Vibration Receptors Above FTA Criteria	No impact	None anticipated	Coordination with owners of vibration sensitive receptors is on-going; impact and mitigation to be detailed in the FEIS
Goal 3: Improve and Increase Transportation and Mobility			
Peak Period Headways (minutes)	N/A	7.5	7.5
Off-Peak Period Headways (minutes)	N/A	10	10
Number of Intersections at LOS F (PM)	7	17	14
Travel Times (minutes)	N/A	35	39.6
Annual O&M Costs (2007 dollars)	N/A	\$60.7 Million	\$53.9 Million

No-Build Alternative

The No-Build Alternative would not meet the goal of supporting economic opportunities and development in the Central Corridor LRT Study Area. The No-Build Alternative would be inconsistent with local and regional comprehensive plans, which specifically identify LRT as a critical element in shaping development in the Central Corridor LRT Study Area and supporting regional economic development goals. This alternative would avoid potential disruption to neighborhoods, commercial districts, and historic areas in the corridor. The No-Build Alternative would not include potential improvements to community character or improved transit service with connections to major destinations. The No-Build Alternative would not meet the goal of improving and increasing transportation and mobility in the

Central Corridor LRT Study Area. It would not improve regional transit system connectivity, nor would it increase transit ridership.

AA/DEIS LPA

The AA/DEIS LPA represents a permanent transit investment in the Central Corridor LRT Study Area that could act as a catalyst in furthering community plans for the area. The AA/DEIS LPA would serve previous development investments and is close to developable and redevelopable land. It would provide potential improvements to community character including superior transit service and connections to major destinations and new transit-oriented development. Traffic congestion would increase at a slower rate as transit ridership increases, further improving community character. The AA/DEIS LPA would maximize regional transit system connectivity between downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis and transit ridership would increase in the Central Corridor LRT Study Area.

Proposed Changes to the AA/DEIS LPA

The proposed changes to the AA/DEIS LPA are consistent with the goals and objectives developed for the Central Corridor LRT Study Area. Similar to the AA/DEIS LPA, the proposed changes to the AA/DEIS LPA represent a permanent transit investment in the Central Corridor LRT Study Area; therefore, the evaluation relative to the project goals and objectives is consistent with the evaluation for the AA/DEIS LPA.

10.2 New Starts Criteria

The Section 5309 “New Starts” program is the federal government’s primary program for providing financial support to locally-planned, implemented, and operated fixed guideway transit major capital investments. The New Starts evaluation process is used in conjunction with the evaluation process under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for which this Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) is being prepared. This section describes the New Starts process and the associated methods that the FTA uses to evaluate and rate fixed guideway transit projects seeking federal funding, and describes the current criteria ratings for the Central Corridor LRT Project.

Each year, the FTA submits its Annual Report on Funding Recommendations to Congress as a companion document to the annual budget submitted by the President. The report provides recommendations for the allocation of New Starts funds under Section 5309 of Title 49 of the United States Code. As required by Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act—A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the FTA uses the following project justification criteria to evaluate New Starts projects: mobility improvements; environmental benefits; cost-effectiveness; operating efficiencies; transit-supportive existing land use, policies, and future patterns; and other factors. The FTA must also consider the local financial commitment for the proposed project.

FTA reviews the project justification and local financial commitment criteria for each candidate project and assigns a rating for each criterion. For some of the project justification criteria, the proposed project is compared against a “Baseline Alternative.” The Baseline Alternative for purposes of the New Starts program consists of improvements to the transit system that are relatively low in cost and the “best that can be done” to improve transit without major capital investment for new infrastructure. A candidate project is given an overall rating of “high,” “medium-high,” “medium-low,” or “low,” based on ratings assigned by FTA to each of the project justification and local financial commitment criteria described previously.

On June 30, 2006, the Metropolitan Council submitted an application to the FTA for approval to enter preliminary engineering (PE). This application was based on the LPA adopted on June 28, 2006. On December 13, 2006, the FTA approved the Metropolitan Council to begin PE. The Metropolitan Council will update its New Starts Application in summer 2008 to include a revised LPA which is the result of the PE efforts and as documented in this SDEIS.

10.3 Issues to be Resolved

The SDEIS will be distributed to appropriate federal, state, and local agencies, as well as to the public for review and comment. The SDEIS, together with comments from the public and involved agencies, will provide the informational basis for a decision by the Metropolitan Council to adopt a revised LPA. Once the LPA is adopted and prior to circulating the FEIS, every reasonable effort will be made to resolve interagency issues related to the proposed action. The unresolved issues that will be addressed prior to the FEIS include:

- Coordination with local communities to address outstanding issues related to facility design, potential effects, and mitigation;
- Coordination among Metropolitan Council, State of Minnesota, Hennepin and Ramsey counties, and the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul regarding financial planning and funding;
- Further coordination with local, state, and federal agencies regarding design, construction, and permitting requirements;
- Consultation with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) based on the draft programmatic agreement currently being developed between SHPO, the FTA, and the Metropolitan Council; and
- Initiate local municipal consent process as required by the State of Minnesota.

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