

## Project partners announce new direction for METRO Blue Line Extension

Metropolitan Council media contact: Trevor Roy, 218-590-2465, Trevor.Roy@metrotransit.org  
Hennepin County media contact: Kyle Mianulli, 612-596-9875, kyle.mianulli@hennepin.us

**MINNEAPOLIS, Minn.** - August 3, 2020 - After years of unsuccessful discussions with BNSF Railway regarding colocation of light rail transit and freight rail in the Bottineau Corridor, BNSF Railway remains unwilling to allow the METRO Blue Line Extension (Bottineau Light Rail Transit) project to be built on its property. Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council now feel it is time to work with agency and community partners to explore opportunities to advance this critical project without using BNSF Railway right of way.

Hennepin County and Metropolitan Council staff, along with elected leaders, have worked hard to build on a long history of cooperation with BNSF Railway on this project. Unfortunately, over the last four years, this cooperation stopped, and the railway is unwilling to find solutions to move the project forward together.

Our commitment to the METRO Blue Line Extension LRT project has not changed. We are frustrated and disappointed in this outcome, and we recognize the time and effort agency and community partners have invested in this project over many years. These investments will remain valuable. We look forward to working together to find ways to complete this project as soon as possible.

We are optimistic that moving this project in a new direction presents an exciting opportunity to revisit and improve the METRO Blue Line Extension project to serve even more people and destinations, while maintaining as much of the existing alignment as possible.

The need for light rail that serves corridor cities including, North Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park, is greater than ever. As the next leg of our planned regional light rail network, this line will connect people to opportunities for employment, education and health. The economic benefits the METRO Blue Line Extension will bring to these communities, the Twin Cities metro and the state of Minnesota cannot wait any longer.

The communities this project will serve are the most diverse in the metro area and have the highest rates of transit-dependent households. People in these communities continue to be harmed by historic patterns of systemic racism that are compounded by a lack of transit and transportation infrastructure. Now, in the face of multiple crises disproportionately impacting communities of color, transformational investment is more urgent than ever.

"This project is a critical element in meeting our transportation needs for a growing region," said Metropolitan Chair Charlie Zelle. "Our commitment to the Blue Line Extension has not changed and I look forward to working with project partners and community stakeholders as we chart our new pathway forward."

"For more than a decade Hennepin County has led planning for the Bottineau LRT line in close partnership with agency and community partners at all levels," said Hennepin County Commissioner Mike Opat, District 1. "The cities have been particularly strong partners and done amazing work to prepare for this transformative project. Local elected leaders have been more than patient as we tried

to complete a deal with the railroad, who once conducted themselves as partners in this endeavor. BNSF's new obstinance cannot deter our work any longer. The time to forge ahead is now. These cities and the region, as a whole, need this LRT project."

"This light rail line is more than just a project to advance—it is a commitment to the residents and communities along the corridor for robust engagement and investment for years and decades to come. The Blue Line Extension will further our region's transit vision, and it will connect students to schools, workers to jobs, and patients to health care," said Hennepin Commissioner Irene Fernando, District 2.

We remain deeply committed to working closely with community and city partners to determine the best course forward for the METRO Blue Line Extension project. Advancing this project will require continued strong partnerships and sincere collaboration.

Given current public health constraints, we recognize the need to be thoughtful and flexible in engaging communities. We are committed to a full and open public engagement process that honors and builds on the years of previous community work.

As a next step, Met Council will convene a meeting of the Corridor Management Committee on August 13, where project partners will discuss next steps including community conversations and engagement opportunities in the weeks and months ahead.

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