



Community Engagement Framework for the Blue Line Extension

Project Overview

The new route for the METRO Blue Line Extension will extend the existing Blue Line light rail transit from Target Field Station along West Broadway Avenue in Minneapolis to Bottineau Boulevard (County Road 81) in Crystal and Robbinsdale, and along West Broadway Avenue (County Road 130/103) in Brooklyn Park (see Figure 1). The next steps for the project including advancing the route through environmental review, engineering, and station area planning over the coming years.

The line will connect with existing and future light rail and BRT service of the METRO system, including direct connections to the Green Line, Blue Line, C Line, D Line, as well as local and express bus routes (see Figure 2).

This line will:

- ✔ Connect people to new opportunities and regional destinations.
- ✔ Link people more efficiently to educational and employment opportunities, reduce transit commute times, and increase access to goods and services in an area where building community wealth is a priority.
- ✔ Improve public health and reduce pollution by connecting people to quality health care and providing clean active transportation options.
- ✔ Make a generational and unprecedented transit investment in a corridor that has experienced a history of systemic racism and high percentage of zero-car households.



Figure 1. Route Map



METRO BLUE LINE EXTENSION (BLE) Community Engagement Framework

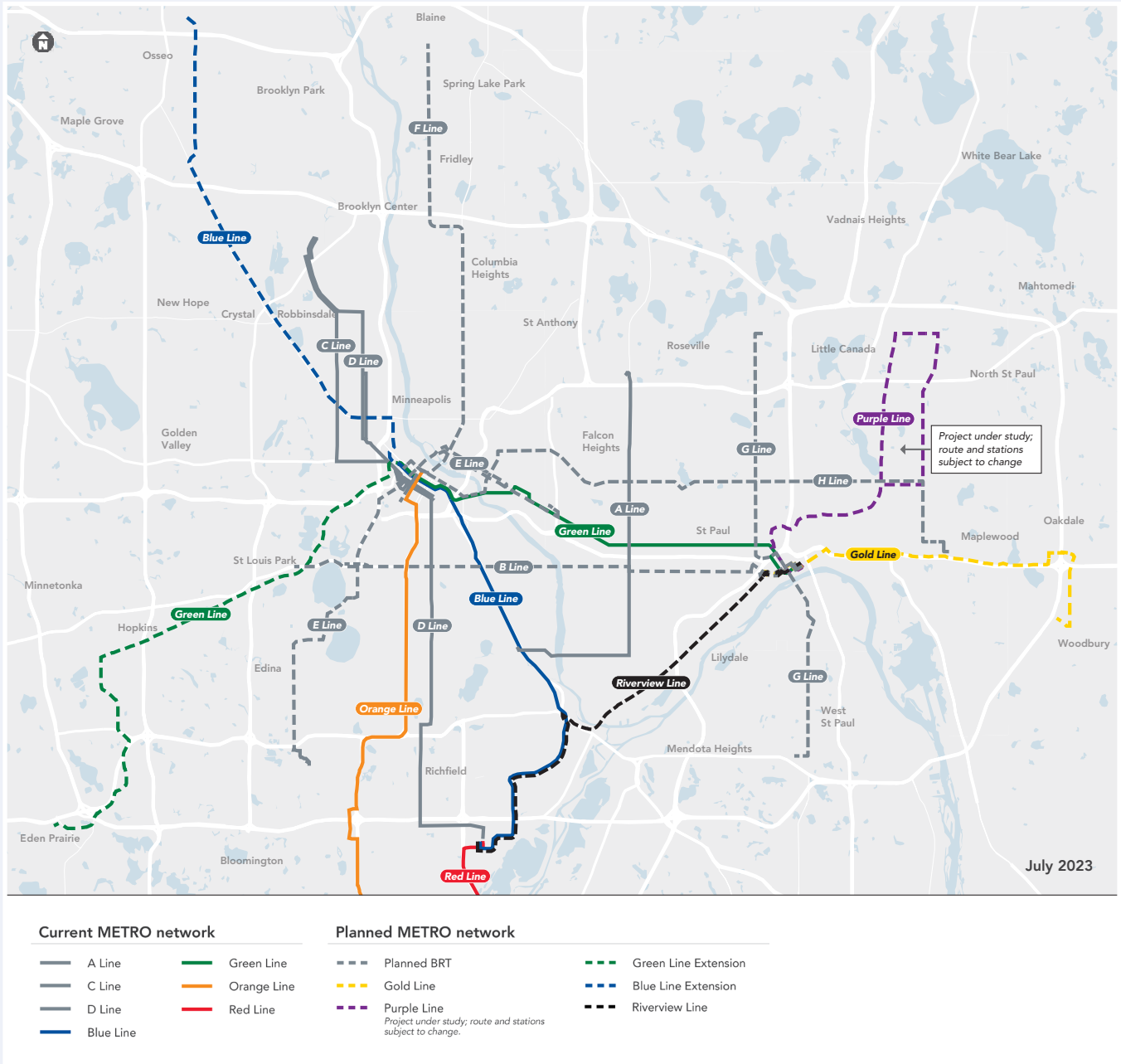


Figure 2. Metro Network



Next Steps

The schedule below shows the anticipated project timeline.



Purpose of this Document

The Community Engagement Framework builds on the existing engagement and communications work that has been completed for the Blue Line Extension to date and describes the context for how and why project staff engage and communicate with the multiple audiences within the corridor and across the region. A well-informed and engaged public strengthens the project and helps create a more useful transit system for all. The Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit and the project’s local funding partner, Hennepin County, understand the need to engage corridor stakeholders in the development of project details and in fostering broad support for the project as a necessary investment to improve access and mobility to employment, educational and economic opportunities within the corridor and beyond.

The purpose of public engagement for this project is to establish and maintain ongoing dialogue with local stakeholders and the corridor communities. Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County are committed to implementing thoughtful, effective, and broad-reaching engagement by ensuring stakeholders and the public are well informed and have clearly identified opportunities to provide feedback, ideas, and concerns. This document provides the framework to guide ongoing public engagement efforts and is considered a living document and will continue to be refined to reflect input received and to remain consistent with the purpose and goals of the project.



Environmental Justice¹

Historically, public investment opportunities have often disproportionately adversely affected communities of color, low-income communities, people with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), people with disabilities, elderly, and other historically marginalized groups. These historic choices have and continue to create environmental and socioeconomic disparities for residents living in these communities.

One of the goals of community engagement is to identify opportunities to repair existing and prevent future environmental injustices. Outreach techniques identified in this Framework Document are and will be coordinated towards strategies to meet this goal. This includes inclusive public outreach strategies that are tailored toward ensuring that all populations are aware of project activities and given meaningful opportunities for input into the project's decision-making process.

Blue Line Extension project staff (project staff) will continue to seek to engage corridor residents, businesses, key stakeholders, and organizations in the project planning process to solicit their input and address their needs and concerns. Concerted effort will also be given to communities that have been traditionally underrepresented in transit planning processes.

Engagement Principles

The following engagement principles were adopted in 2020 as the project began the process of identifying a new community supported route:

- ✔ Honor and build on previous robust community engagement
- ✔ Tailor engagement practices to meet the needs of the individual communities
- ✔ Ensure corridor communities of all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities are engaged so all share in growth opportunities
- ✔ Use community goals, priorities, and criteria for growth to inform decision-making
- ✔ Adjust strategies and approach as needed to ensure corridor communities are fully represented in engagement efforts

¹ Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Source: <https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>. Related to the environmental review process, Executive Order 12898, issued in 1994, established the responsibility of each Federal agency to “make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations.” Source: <https://ceq.doe.gov/nepa-practice/justice.html>



Prior Engagement Phases

Initial engagement efforts to begin identifying a new community-supported route started in August 2020. Below is a list of the project's progress with the focus of the community input since August 2020:

- **August 2020 through January 2021:** Input on project goals, concerns, opportunities, and thoughts on potential new routes
- **March to June 2021:** Input on new route options released as part of the Initial Route Modification Report
- **July to August 2021:** Input on the connections that light rail would make within communities and station locations within those areas
- **September to December 2021:** Input on updated design concepts and potential opportunities and impacts of light rail options
- **April to May 2022:** Input on the route recommendation as part of the Final Route Modification Report
- **September to December 2022:**
 - September – Input on three route options between Target Field Station and West Broadway and four route options between Washington Avenue and Irving Avenue in Minneapolis.
 - October – December – Input on route options that will be studied in the environmental document, share updates on the anti-displacement working group's work, and discuss next steps for the project.
- **January 2023 – present:** Input collected through several in-person community workshops and open houses on the two route options between Target Field Station and West Broadway (East of I-94 or Lyndale Avenue) and two route options between Washington Avenue and Irving Avenue in Minneapolis (21st Avenue or West Broadway). Updated designs and options were also presented in Brooklyn Park, Crystal, and Robbinsdale for feedback.

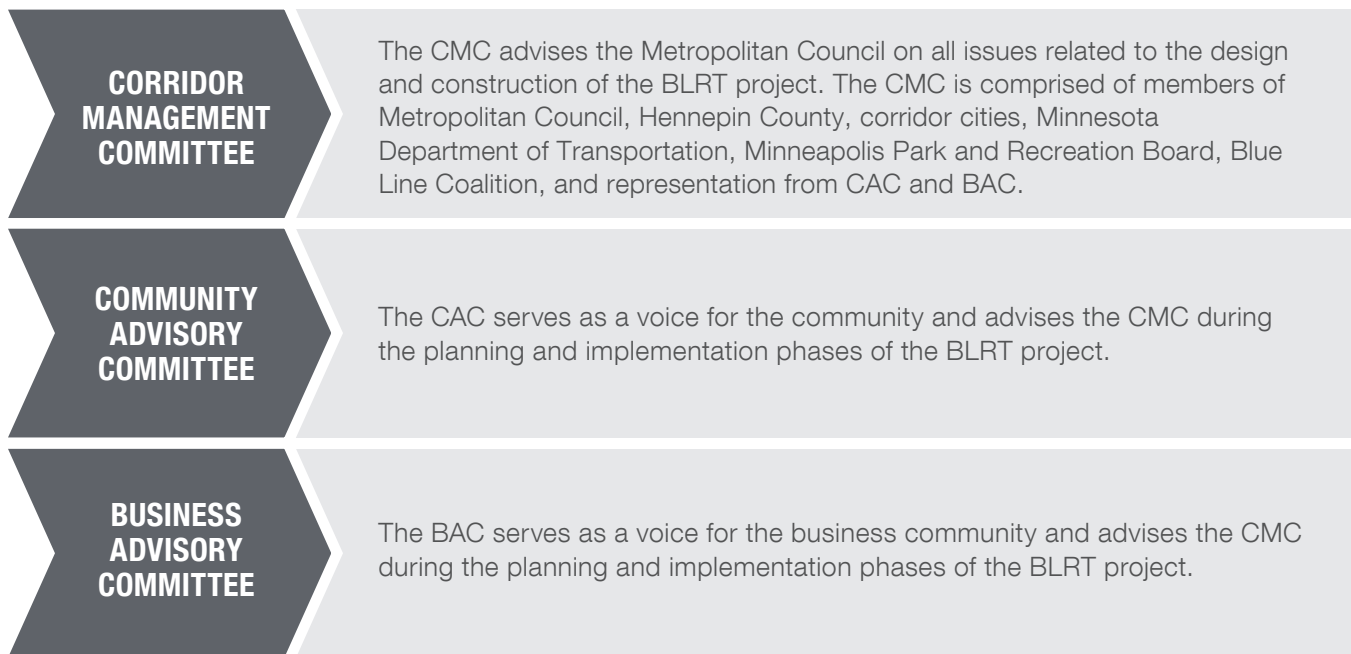
For a history of all the engagement efforts completed to date and summaries of feedback received, visit: <https://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension/Route.aspx>



Organizational Structure

Advisory Committees

The decision-making process includes a deep connection between design considerations and feedback from project stakeholders (including city partners and organizations), advisory committee members (Business Advisory Committee [BAC], Community Advisory Committee [CAC], and Corridor Management Committee [CMC]), and leadership from project partners including the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, and the FTA. A technical meeting with government staff also occurs prior to each month's committee format. The roles of the advisory committees are described below:



Community Cohort

Since 2020, the project has contracted with community and cultural organizations to support a robust engagement and communications effort. The community organizations were selected to reflect constituencies identified in project stakeholder analysis along with their geographic focus within designated project areas, prioritizing low-income communities and communities of color. These organizations are using multiple methods to best reach their constituencies such as pop-up information tables at community events, hosting virtual, in-person listening sessions, community presentations along with amplifying BLRT Project communications through community based social media networks. The project is on the fourth contracting phase. Here is a list of the community organizations and cultural groups that have been contracted since 2020:

BLRT COHORTS 2020 - 2023:

- **Phase 1:** Blue Line Coalition, Harrison Neighborhood Association, JUXTA
- **Phase 2:** Asian Media Access, CAPI USA, Center for Leadership & Neighborhood Engagement, Encouraging Leaders, Harrison Neighborhood Association, Hawthorne Neighborhood Council,



Jordan Area Community Council, JUXTA, Lao Assistance Center, Liberian Business Association, NEON, NRRC, West Broadway Coalition

- **Phase 2.5:** Asian Media Access, Encouraging Leaders, Lao Assistance Center, Liberian Business Association, NEON, Pueblos Dde Lucha Y Esperanza
- **Current Phase 3:** A Mothers Love, Asian Media Access, Encouraging Leaders, Heritage Park Neighborhood Association, JUXTA, Lao Assistance Center, Liberian Business Association, NEON, Pueblos de Lucha Y Esperanza, West Broadway Coalition

Anti-Displacement

In response to community concerns of displacement within the planned Blue Line Extension corridor, Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council launched a first-of-its-kind community oriented anti-displacement initiative.

To lead the initial phases of this work, Hennepin County contracted with the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs to convene an Anti-Displacement Work Group that centered community voices and brought together diverse stakeholders to study and recommend anti-displacement strategies to help ensure the value of light rail will benefit current corridor residents and businesses, and minimize physical, cultural, and economic displacement. The work group's 26 members include residents and business owners, people with lived experience of displacement, and people from the philanthropic community and government agencies. Community engagement related to anti-displacement efforts has been integrated throughout since the Work Group formed in fall 2021.

After meeting for more than a year, the work group published their recommendations in May 2023. Read the report and share your input at: yourblueline.org/anti-displacement

Hennepin County will continue to lead this work with community to further develop, refine, and advance these recommendations, bring together partners for funding and implementation, and begin exploring more ways to maximize community benefits of light rail for current corridor residents.

Cultivate Arts

Cultivate Arts is an initiative that engaged communities along the corridor throughout 2022 to build artist capacity, demonstrate arts and placemaking tools, and activate the creative economy through culturally representative arts-based activities. Between July and November, Cultivate Arts led 31 culturally representative arts-based engagement events in communities along the Blue Line Extension corridor. The events, centered around music, dance, paint, photography, and interactive art installations, educated communities on the Blue Line Extension project, while informing a corridor-wide plan for long-term public art. Through these efforts, Cultivate Arts staff engaged over 5,000 residents from a diverse range of ages and cultural backgrounds. More information on Cultivate Arts is available at: yourblueline.org/Cultivate. Look for more events from the Cultivate Arts program in 2023.

Elevate Hennepin

Blue Line Extension staff are partnering with Elevate Hennepin on engagement to businesses along the Blue Line Extension corridor to support local businesses before, during, and after construction. Elevate Hennepin is a resource hub powered by Hennepin County to connect local businesses and entrepreneurs to trusted resources and expert advisors at no cost. More information is available at: www.elevatehennepin.org



Engagement Strategies & Why We Do Them

Project staff are committed to engaging with the public through the duration of planning, design and construction of the project in multiple communication and public engagement strategies. All these activities described in the table below are opportunities for the public to ask questions and provide feedback on the project. The table below lists the current strategies used by the project to engage with the community and community groups:

Engagement Activity	Purpose of Activity	Virtual, In-Person, or Both
One-On-One Meetings	Individual conversations to receive specific comments from property owners or other directly impacted individuals	Both
Door-Knocking or Canvassing	To reach specific affected properties and to drop off meeting notices	In-Person
Intercept Surveying	To intercept transit riders or related activities to solicit their feedback	In-Person
Community Workshop	Used to engage community about a specific topic(s) and have in depth discussion about the opportunities and benefits of the options/topics. These are used leading up to major project decisions to understand community's preferences, opportunities, and/or concerns with the options presented	Both
Group Engagement	Meeting with existing organization and businesses groups on target issues, including asking groups to host discussions	Both
Public Meeting/Open House	To share project updates, answer questions, and solicit public input with interactive items or comment cards/sticky notes on materials	Both
Public Townhall	Includes a presentation, questions/discussion, and is more formally facilitated	Both
Public Listening Session	To allow for community members to provide verbal and written feedback to project staff with a discussion	Both
Public Hearing	Presentation with a court reporter present to transcribe public comments and comments are made publicly available after the hearing	In-Person
Community Event Participation (Tabling/Pop-Up Events)	To provide project details and input opportunities at spaces where people are already gathering within the community. This can include tabling, community events, pop-ups and other active event participation	In-Person
Arts Engagement	Arts activities and products (i.e., zine and videos) to engage the public and homeless populations regarding current project considerations	In-Person



Engagement Activity	Purpose of Activity	Virtual, In-Person, or Both
Video Interviews	Video shorts on current project topics both of project staff and community members	Virtual
Project and Outreach Coordinator Publicly Shared Emails	To receive general comments or specific responses to a solicited issue	Virtual
Online Surveys or Comment Forms	To survey community on project options or alternatives as part of an outreach event or separate initiative	Virtual
Youth Outreach	Outreach with youth through pop-ups, community block parties, newsletter, survey opportunities and other coordination with schools and youth-focused activities/groups (i.e., PCYC and Juxtaposition Arts, nearby schools)	Both
Interactive Feedback Map	To share design plans, route options, property impacts and solicit location-specific feedback from the public	Virtual
Project Advisory Committees	Advisory committees are a key avenue through which the Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County receive public input. Project advisory committees enable the project team to receive advice and feedback from policymakers, government entities, community groups, businesses, and citizens	Both
YourBlueLine Website	Hennepin County hosts a website for this project that includes forum boards and other opportunities for the public to submit feedback at: YourBlueLine.org	Virtual

Blue Line Extension Quarterly Meeting

A quarterly meeting will be hosted by Blue Line Extension staff to provide regular project updates to keep communities groups and individuals along the Blue Line Extension route informed, including the Lyn-Park, Willard-Hay, Jordan, Near North, Hawthorne communities. Topics will include project status, schedule, anti-displacement efforts, impacts, and decision-making opportunities coming up and will include a facilitated discussion with attendees. Materials and project updates will be available for the whole route but will be focused on Minneapolis. Project staff will reach out to community groups to solicit topics for these meetings in advance. Meeting minutes will be provided following each meeting, shared with committees, and posted on the Blue Line Extension website.

Documentation of Community Feedback Received

Community and stakeholder feedback received via public meetings will be documented in meeting minutes and comment summaries each month and shared with the project committees and on the project's website.



Communication Methods

Communication Method	Purpose of Method
Project Website	Includes a landing place for all project updates. Includes a description of the project, timeline, map, frequently asked questions (FAQs), video, public engagement activities, and meeting dates and agendas for advisory committees. The websites are updated frequently to provide the latest information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blue Line Extension’s website: BlueLineExt.org • Hennepin County’s website: YourBlueLine.org
Fact Sheets and Brochures	Handouts that include the project description, benefits of project, route map, timeline and FAQs
Emailed Newsletters	Delivers via email information about the project and decisions to community members that have signed up to receive updates. To sign-up to receive upcoming newsletters, visit BlueLineExt.org and at the bottom of the page click on the button to sign-up for email or text alerts
Social Media	Provides brief project updates and notice of upcoming meetings. Project partners and Community Cohort members aid in amplifying messaging. Promoted Facebook posts to reach a wider audience, as well as posts that are targeted by zip code to reach additional residents along the corridor.
News Releases and News Advisories	To metro-area print and broadcast media outlets including BIPOC, college and neighborhood newspapers and radio stations serving audiences within the corridor
Bipoc Radio Ads/Interviews	Brief audio announcements and/or interviews on city and community communication outlets
Visualizations, Including Videos and Renderings	Posted on the project website, interactive map, brought to meetings and included in public presentations to provide a visual of a project element being proposed.
Mailed Postcards/Letters	Notification for upcoming meetings, major project decisions, and input opportunities
Translated Online and Printed Materials	Notices, handouts, and other materials online and for in-person use are translated into Spanish and other languages are translated by request
Library Stands	Boards, surveys, and comment forms are available at libraries for community members to interact with on their own time

Communications and Outreach staff document public identified issues, concerns, and opportunities regarding the project. This documentation informs BLRT Project staff in the various planning processes. In addition, community input is considered for communications and helps to focus the community engagement strategies described above as the project continues to progress and issues change.



Feedback on this Document

This Community Engagement Framework was made available for public review, and comments were accepted through **June 30, 2023**. The Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County carefully reviewed the input received and made the following modifications to this document:

- ✓ Increased the size of the text for readability
- ✓ Translated this document into Spanish
- ✓ Added a focus for reaching and providing access to project information to the elderly
- ✓ Added a section for how to request meetings/events from the Project’s Outreach Coordinators
- ✓ Added a section about our partnership with Elevate Hennepin

To provide additional feedback on outreach activities, request a meeting with project staff or invite us to an event, please reach out to the Blue Line Outreach Coordinators listed below.

Stay Connected!

There will be many opportunities for the public to participate in all these next steps.

For project questions or to invite us to an event, contact:

Brooklyn Park/Crystal:

Joanna Ocasio-Maisonet – Joanna.Ocasio-Maisonet@metrotransit.org *(Se habla español)*

Robbinsdale:

James Mockovciak – James.Mockovciak@metrotransit.org

Minneapolis:

Kaja Vang – Kaja.Vang@metrotransit.org

Join the conversation at: yourblueline.org



Visit BlueLineExt.org for more information, to sign-up for the project newsletter, and share your comments, questions and concerns on our interactive feedback map.