



# Tracking the Blue Line Extension

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[www.BlueLineExt.org](http://www.BlueLineExt.org)

## Goals to finish designs, apply for federal funds in 2018



*Rendering of the 63rd Avenue Station looking northwest showing two LRT tracks and one freight rail track*

The Blue Line Extension LRT is focused on some major milestones in 2018, including completing the 90 percent designs and applying for the federal government to pay nearly half the construction costs.

Those goals are conditioned on BNSF Railway's approval of the project's plans to build eight of the LRT line's 13.5 miles on the east side of its right-of-way. Project staff have provided BNSF with engineering designs to review as the freight railroad requested and continue to work on securing the critical agreements.

The project also plans this year to apply for a Full Funding Grant Agreement with the Federal Transit Administration to allow it to begin heavy construction in 2019. The FFGA is the federal government's contractual commitment to pay 49 percent of the project's cost.

## Design for Hwy. 55 aims to slow traffic, improve safety



*Rendering of the view looking southeast from Van White Boulevard Station in Minneapolis*

Lowering the speed limit and adding curves, an additional signalized intersection and three mid-block crosswalks are planned for Highway 55 in Minneapolis to slow cars and trucks when light rail tracks are built in the median.

Comments from residents of the Harrison, Heritage Park, Near North, Sumner-Glenwood and Willard Hay neighborhoods led to these design changes for improving safety.

While Highway 55 will remain a six-lane roadway, the speed limit would be set at 35 mph in Minneapolis for the safety of pedestrians crossing the highway and transit customers trying to reach the Van White Boulevard and Penn Avenue stations in the median. Crushed rock and a fence between the two LRT tracks would be added to deter pedestrians from crossing the highway at locations other than crosswalks.

Bicyclists will benefit from the addition of a continuous two-way path from Wirth Park to Seventh Street and bike racks at Penn and Van White Station areas.

The design also includes installing permeable pavers in the median for storm water treatment, plantings with irrigation at LRT station areas and mid-block crossings.

Median plantings designed with input from the city of Minneapolis, which will maintain the greenery, will include colorful shrubs, perennials and ornamental grasses. The project is also working with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board to relocate more than 50 existing median trees to nearby parks

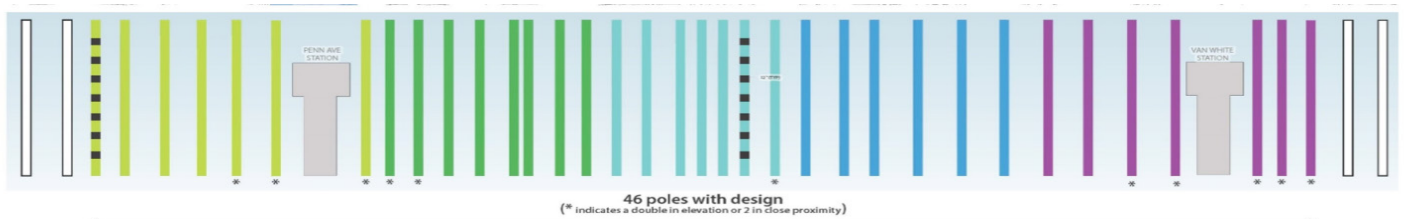
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in north Minneapolis. Subject to park board tree-spacing guidelines, the project will replace a large majority of the more than 450 trees being removed from the public right-of-way on Highway 55. A variety of trees will be replanted to line the road, framing it and providing a canopy.

Later this spring, project staff will share the final concept for the look of the poles that will hold up the overhead wires for powering the LRT trains. They held meetings in 2017 with the public where they shared early concepts and received feedback on how to use vibrant colors and stripes on the poles to show movement and a continuous pattern or transitions and a localized pattern.

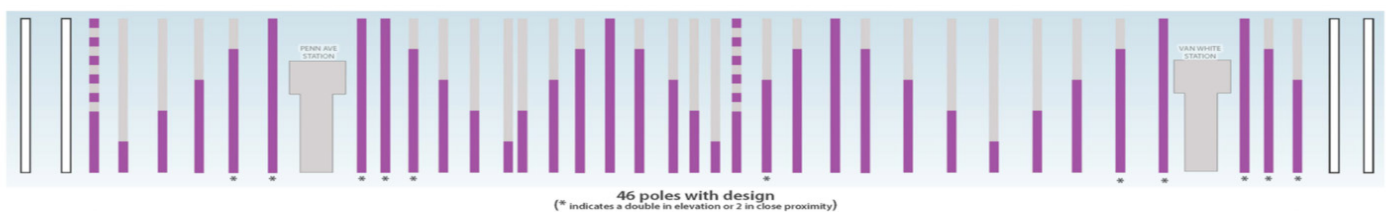


**(A) Transitions + Localized Pattern**  
 • Range of complimentary colors along corridor  
 • Pattern emphasis at mid-block crossings

DRAFT-WORK IN PROCESS

Top: Poles concept A

Bottom: Poles concept B



**(B) Movement + Continuous Pattern-Alternative**  
 • Emphasis on one vibrant color, varies bottom-up along corridor to show movement  
 • Pattern stripe repeats consistently along the top of the poles throughout corridor

DRAFT-WORK IN PROCESS

## LRT station panels to tell northern Hennepin County history



Potatoes with freight rail: Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society

Panels being developed for the Blue Line Extension LRT stations will tell the history of the railroad that linked northern Hennepin County's farms to the nation, and the legacy of Theodore Wirth and the century-old park on the Minneapolis-Golden Valley border that bears his name.

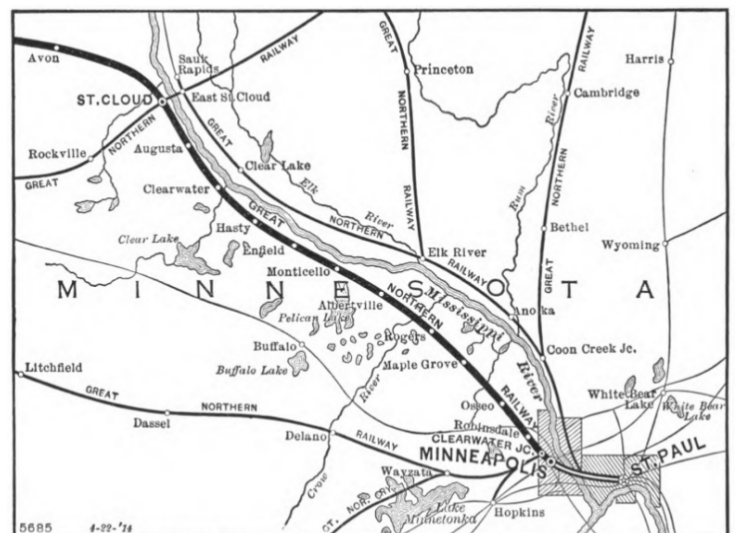
The Federal Transit Administration and Minnesota Historic Preservation Office agreed the panels should be used to offset the effects of building the LRT extension on or near the Osseo Branch of the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway (StPM&M)/ Great Northern (GN) Railway Historic District and the Grand Rounds Historic District's Theodore Wirth segment.

Staff is working with the state Department of Transportation's Cultural Resources Unit and the Minnesota Historic Preservation Office on the panels' content and design. All five corridor cities, Hennepin County and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board were also involved in the process, with some providing help locating photos to use on the panels. The panels will draw their typefaces and color palettes from the paint schemes and lettering on the trains that once operated on the 13-mile Osseo Branch from Osseo to Minneapolis and from the park's brand identity and nature-inspired tones. In addition to being featured on panels at stations in Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park, the content will be placed on the historic preservation office's website or on the website of the Minnesota Historical Society to make it accessible.

## Osseo Branch helped expand northern Hennepin County potato farming

Light rail transit will be the latest form of transportation in this corridor. Earlier forms of transportation have been over an American Indian trail, the Minneapolis & Northwestern (Osseo Branch) Railroad line, a road first known as the "Bottineau Road/Bottineau Prairie Road" and then County State Aid Highway 81, aka Bottineau Boulevard. A few freight trains each week still ply the corridor today on a stretch of BNSF track known as the Monticello Subdivision.

The Osseo Branch is part of a railroad line built by the Minneapolis & Northwestern Railroad (M&NW), which was incorporated by James J. Hill (aka the Empire Builder), between Minneapolis and St. Cloud in 1881-82. The Osseo Branch consists of an approximately 13-mile segment of the original M&NW mainline, beginning at Lyndale Junction and extending through Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park to Osseo.



St. Paul and St. Cloud along the West Bank of the Mississippi

Osseo Branch Map



This rail corridor is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because it established a connection that did not previously exist and resulted in a significant expansion of the potato-growing region in northern Hennepin County. The period of significance begins in 1881 with construction of the line. It concludes in 1931, which marks the peak of the potato production in the Osseo area as well as a severe decline of the potato industry.

The M&NW's Osseo line was taken over later by the St. Paul-based Great Northern Railway's Osseo Branch. It formed part of the transcontinental railroad network that made Minneapolis into the world's flour-milling capital from 1880 to 1930. The Osseo Branch's connections with the larger GN network also helped Hennepin County become one of the predominant potato-growing areas in the state. Between 1899 and 1909, the farmland in Hennepin County devoted to potato production nearly doubled to 17,471 acres.

## First public golf course, first city park playgrounds among Wirth's legacy



*Wirth Chalet: Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society*

The Grand Rounds Historic District, which was designated a National Scenic Byway in 1998, has been previously determined eligible for listing on the National Register. Its period of significance is documented as 1884 to 1942 and is undergoing evaluation to determine if it possesses significance within the period from 1943 to the mid-1970s. The district's Theodore Wirth segment extends from the intersection of Lowry Avenue North and Theodore Wirth Parkway to Wayzata Boulevard and the bridge over Interstate 394, north of Cedar Lake Parkway. Some key contributing features close to the Blue Line Extension LRT Project include Theodore Wirth Park, Theodore Wirth Parkway, the Chalet, Bassett Creek Lagoons and Valley View Park and smaller features such as tables, walls and signs.

As superintendent of Minneapolis parks from 1906 to 1935, Wirth designed Glenwood Park, which was renamed for him in 1938, following Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's Central Park model of a country park in an urban environment. It is the largest park in the Minneapolis system and the largest individual component of the Grand Rounds, as envisioned by landscape architect Horace Cleveland. Wirth developed and expanded the Grand Rounds from 1,800 acres to more than 5,200 acres. It is one of the country's longest continuous park systems.

Wirth's 1914 plan for the park that bears his name included features that influenced the community, including active recreational areas such as walking and hiking trails and a golf course. An advocate for playgrounds, Wirth took the lead in creating the first playgrounds in the Minneapolis parks system. The first public golf course in Minneapolis was established in the park in 1916. The park included facilities for skating, tobogganing, sleighing, skiing and ski jumping, swimming and canoeing. The Swiss-born Wirth also influenced the Magney & Tusler firm's design of the Chalet, which was built in 1922-23 as a Swiss-style clubhouse for the park's public golf course.

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Wirth Chalet in modern times

**IMAGE IN CIRCLE •** Minnesota's steam era lasted nearly a century. The Great Northern Railway retired the last of its steam locomotives in the late 1950s, replaced by diesel trains like the one crossing the Stone Arch Bridge in Minneapolis.

**GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY**

**BASS LAKE RD.**

**OSSEO BRANCH**

**EARLY TRANSPORTATION**

**"After the Northern Pacific was completed...Red River [ox] carts disappeared from Minnesota. For at least half a century they had played a considerable role in transportation..."**

**EDWARD VAN DYKE ROBINSON, Economist | 1915**

**MANY EARLY MINNESOTA COMMUNITIES** grew along the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers. The rivers were the easiest way to travel long distances and move goods. Wagon roads, often following old footpaths, also connected these communities. The Bottineau Road was named for Pierre Bottineau, a guide who led parties that settled along the road. Appearing on maps as early as 1860, the Bottineau Road ran northwest from Minneapolis through Hennepin County. The rail line built on this same corridor in the 1880s passed through Crystal Lake and Maple Grove Townships and the community of Osseo on its way to St. Cloud.

**LEFT •** The introduction of the railroad revolutionized both transportation and settlement in the Midwest. By the late 1800s, Minnesotans could ride Great Northern Railway passenger trains, like the one passing through Wright County, as far as Seattle or Chicago.

**TRAILS TO RAILS**

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Red River Ox Cart trail system transported goods northwest of the Twin Cities. Steam-powered riverboats carried cargo north to St. Paul. Traders relied on early foot and wagon trails to travel northwest across the state to Pembina, North Dakota, and Canada. Red River ox carts followed a route on the eastern side of the Mississippi River, known as the Metropolitan Trail. The first rail line from Minneapolis to St. Cloud later paralleled this route. Other overland trails were later replaced by railroads, including Great Northern as it expanded to the north and west.

**ABOVE •** Mid-1800s road networks, like this one (marked with a red line) that ran from Minneapolis to St. Cloud, connected communities in the Crystal Lake area and Chass. The road system ensured constant movement of people, mail, news, and goods.

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRANSIT**

The growth of Minnesota and much of the Midwest in the nineteenth century revolved around transportation. In the 1800s, Minnesotans used foot trails, cart and wagon networks, and steamboats for the movement of people and goods. Steamboats traveled on the Mississippi River, connecting Minnesota with southern markets. As railroad networks grew in the late nineteenth century, they became the most efficient transportation option linking goods and people from St. Paul to Seattle, Washington.

**RED RIVER OX CART TRAILS** linked the north-flowing Red River and the south-flowing Mississippi River and their respective markets.

**WAGONS AND CARRIAGES** connected those Minnesota communities and the Mississippi River and its steamboats. Poor road construction and maintenance, however, impeded wagon travel and increased travel time.

**STEAMBOATS** like these in St. Paul provided faster and cheaper transportation than wagons. The boats depended on stable river conditions as droughts or flooding could delay travel.

**RAILROADS** were faster and more reliable than other forms of transportation. Passengers and information traveled farther and more quickly. Trains also carried larger amounts of freight—farm agriculture to building materials—safely and on regular schedules.

**LEGEND:** HISTORIC RAILROAD LINE, LIGHT RAIL STATION, METRO BLUE LINE LIGHT RAIL

**BLR-OB-01**

Example of graphic panel for Osseo Branch at Bass Lake Road Station in Crystal

For another example of a graphic panel, see last page



## Investment grows to more than \$8 billion along existing, future LRT lines



*Hampton Inn and Home2Suites in Brooklyn Park near the 93rd Ave. Station on the Blue Line Extension*

Developers are increasingly choosing to invest along light rail transit (LRT), as witnessed by the \$8.4 billion in reported new investments along existing and future LRT lines in the Twin Cities metro region. That's an increase of \$1.6 billion in just a year.

The Metropolitan Council tracks developments proposed, under construction or completed along the METRO Green and Blue Lines, as well as the proposed Green and Blue Line Extension LRT projects (Southwest LRT and Bottineau LRT). As of the end of January 2018, total development is at least \$8.4 billion, and likely even higher, given that many developments along the routes have not publicly disclosed their project value.

"In the past year alone, we have seen an increase of \$1.6 billion for a total of \$8.4 billion in development along LRT lines," said Metropolitan Council Chair Alene Tchourumoff. "Businesses and developers choose proximity to light rail because they know that residents and workers of all ages are increasingly demanding access to transit – whether for housing, work, school, or entertainment."

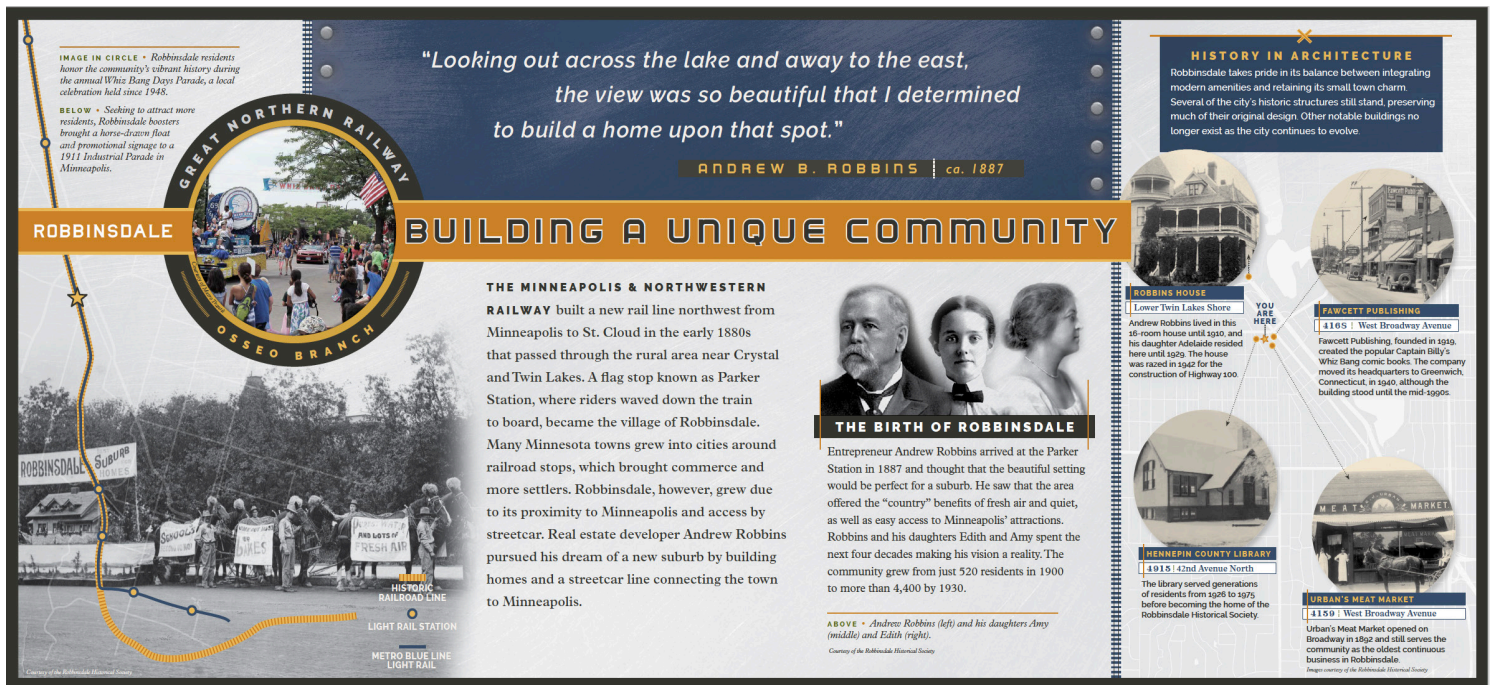
Planned and recent development along the Blue Line Extension tallies up to \$522 million in invest-

ment, up from \$489 million reported in January 2017. Commercial, industrial and hotel development is occurring north of Interstates 94/694 to Highway 610 at the line's northernmost point. Projects under construction on the Blue Line Extension include the approximately \$16 million 610 Commerce Center phase 2 and the \$16 million Capstone II office/industrial buildings, both near the 93rd Avenue Station in Brooklyn Park, and the \$8 million Brooklyn Boulevard Industrial Center near Brooklyn Boulevard Station.

Experienced developers who have developed projects close to existing LRT lines have already been inquiring about sites along the proposed Blue Line Extension in Brooklyn Park, said Kim Berggren, Brooklyn Park's community development director.

"Our businesses and educational institutions, including North Hennepin Community College, recognize the importance that the next generation of workers places on access to frequent transit service. The Blue Line Extension will give Brooklyn Park a competitive advantage in attracting young talent. Design Ready Controls and Takeda Pharmaceuticals are two of our businesses who cite the Blue Line Extension as a reason for locating in Brooklyn Park," Berggren said

To read more about development along planned and existing LRT lines, please visit, <https://bit.ly/2oreRG0>



Example of graphic panel for the light rail station in Robbinsdale.

## About the project

The planned METRO Blue Line Extension (Bottineau) light rail transit project will operate about 13 miles northwest from downtown Minneapolis through north Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park, drawing riders northwest of Brooklyn Park. The alignment will have 11 new stations in addition to Target Field Station where it will continue as the METRO Blue Line, providing one-seat rides to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America. It will connect Minneapolis and the region's northwest communities with existing LRT on the METRO Green Line, future LRT on the METRO Green Line Extension (Southwest LRT), bus rapid transit on the METRO Red Line, the Northstar commuter rail line and local and express bus routes.

The Metropolitan Council will be the grantee of federal funds and is charged with building the line in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The Blue Line Extension Corridor Management Committee, which includes local officials from Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, Brooklyn Park and Minneapolis, provides advice and oversight. Funding is provided by the Federal Transit Administration, Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), state of Minnesota, Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) and Hennepin County.

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