FTA model determines ridership numbers

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires all projects seeking federal funding to use an FTA-approved computer model to estimate ridership on transit projects. The model uses travel time and ease of access to determine the mode of transit (LRT, bus, etc.) and the route.

Route options that incur time penalties under the FTA formula include transfers and underground stations, e.g., a five minute penalty for a transfer involving an underground station. In the federal model urban ridership would drop because the Uptown alignments could not match the efficiency of the existing frequent urban bus service and LRT service from south Minneapolis to downtown would be slower and less frequent than current buses. These conditions also lengthen the suburban ride time on those alignments, which further reduces ridership numbers.

Brief history of freight rail in the corridor

Prior to the mid-1990s, freight trains ran through the Midtown Corridor to St. Paul. When Highway 55 (Hiawatha Avenue) was reconstructed in the 90s, MnDOT and the Federal Highway Administration decided to sever the freight rail line, and freight trains were temporarily routed through the Kenilworth Corridor.

Between 2008 and 2010, MnDOT, Hennepin County and St. Louis Park evaluated options for a permanent home for the freight rail trains. At the same time that LRT was being evaluated, the FTA directed that freight rail be separately evaluated.

In 2011 when the FTA admitted the Southwest LRT project into its New Starts program, it directed the region to consider freight rail as part of the LRT project.

The selected LRT route requires addressing freight rail in the corridor; changes to freight rail alignments need approval by all affected railroads.

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Identifying the best route

Why this route was chosen in 2009-2010

An analysis starting in 2003, coupled with more than 300 public meetings, led the six cities on the corridor, Hennepin County, Metropolitan Council and the business community to choose the Kenilworth corridor as the superior light rail route because:

- It is the least costly to build and operate. A difference of $2 million each year would cost more than $40 million over 20 years of operations (without inflation).
- Creates a seamless ride from Eden Prairie, through the University of Minnesota, to St. Paul, with no transfers. Residents in Frogtown, North Minneapolis and Harrison can get to jobs in St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie.
- It is the most efficient for moving people, integrates with the region's rail system.
- It provides the best opportunity for new economic development.
- It creates the least harm to businesses, residences, parks and other amenities.
- Provides new transit service, rather than replacing current bus service.
- Preserves options for future transit solutions along the Midtown Greenway corridor, ensuring fast and efficient cross town access to the Blue Line (Hiawatha LRT).

Why the other routes were dismissed

Numerous routes were considered before the locally preferred alternative route was selected. The other routes were dismissed due to:

- Higher capital and operating costs for equivalent or lower projected ridership.
- Greater potential harm to businesses and residents.
- Greater risk of harm to environmental, historical, cultural resources and the Greenway trail.
- Duplicating existing bus service on Hennepin, Lyndale, and Nicollet avenues.
- Less potential for economic development and redevelopment.
- Increased construction burden with closures of major streets.
- More negative concequences to low-income and minority residents without improving transit access or travel times.

SWLRT (Green Line extension) route evaluation criteria

Capital costs
The capital costs of the projects are taken into consideration in the federal funding formula. These costs include design, construction and land acquisition.

Operating costs
These are the day-to-day costs for operating the line. These costs will be included in the Metro Transit budget.

Ridership
These are the projections of riders on the line. Computer modeling determines these numbers based on a variety of factors, including population density and destinations.

Technical issues and efficiency
Technical issues would affect major infrastructure changes or impact the overall Metro system design. These can include bridge impacts, tunnels, utilities or roads, and the overall transit system.

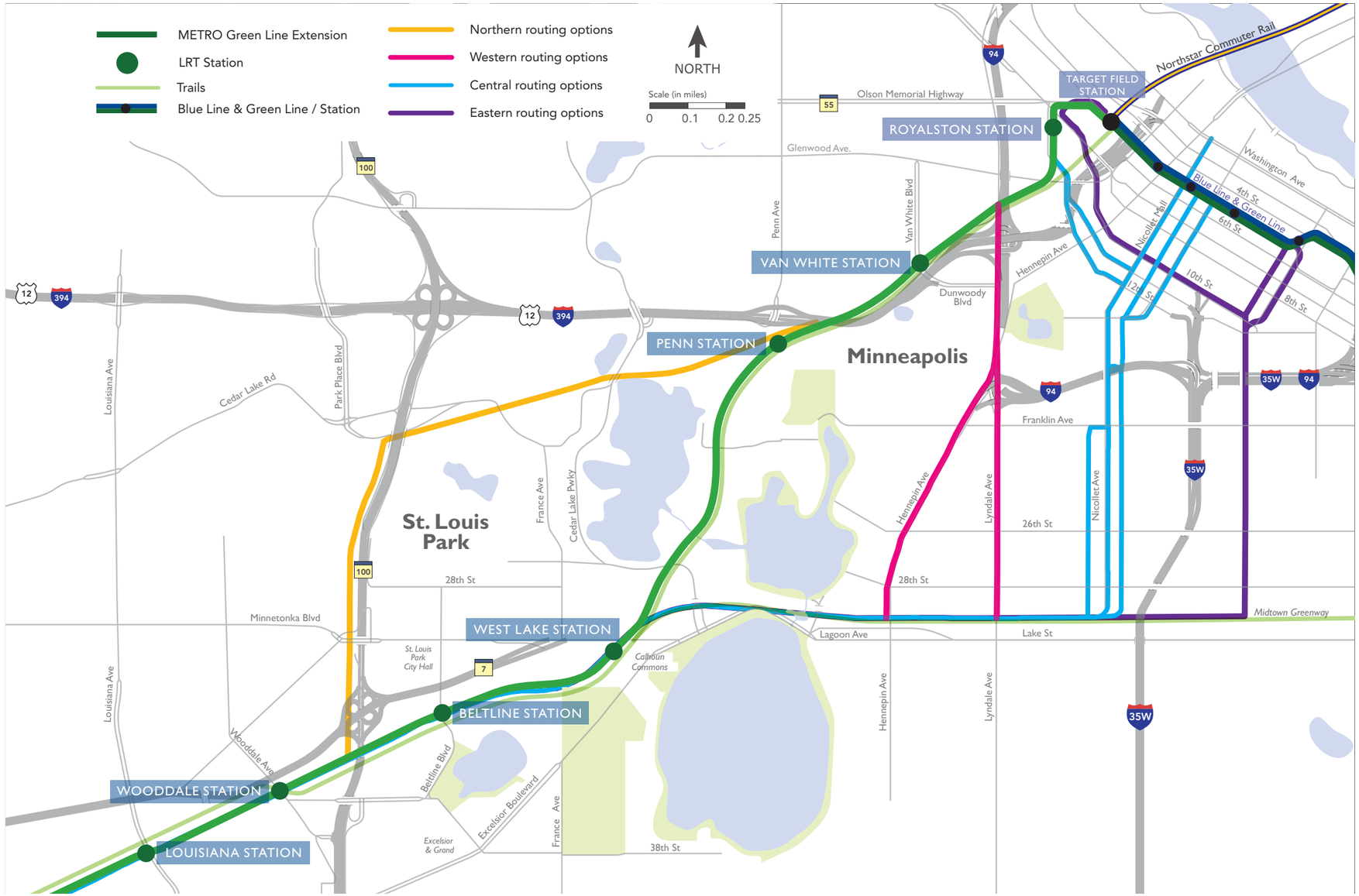
Residential
Impacts on homes were also included in the evaluation of the route. This includes effect of construction and operations after the line is running.

Business concerns
Impacts on businesses were also included in the evaluation of the route. This includes effect of construction and operations.

Effects on air, land, and water quality
Environmental impacts were also included in the evaluation of the route. This includes effect of construction and operations.

Economic development
The routes were evaluated for the potential economic development in the area.

Community equity
This weighs the potential consequences/repercussions residents experience during construction and operation against benefits, including better access to jobs for residents throughout the region.



SWLRT locally preferred route and other options

Relative ranking
Good
Fair
Poor

More information available at:
www.southwesttransitway.org

Green Line LPA
Capital cost
Operating cost
Ridership
Technical issues
Residential
Business concerns
Effects on air, land and water quality
Economic development
Community equity

Northern route
Capital cost
Operating cost
Ridership
Technical issues
Residential
Business concerns
Effects on air, land and water quality
Economic development
Community equity

Western route
Capital cost
Operating cost
Ridership
Technical issues
Residential
Business concerns
Effects on air, land and water quality
Economic development
Community equity

Central route
Capital cost
Operating cost
Ridership
Technical issues
Residential
Business concerns
Effects on air, land and water quality
Economic development
Community equity

Eastern route
Capital cost
Operating cost
Ridership
Technical issues
Residential
Business concerns
Effects on air, land and water quality
Economic development
Community equity