



SOUTHWEST transitway

green means go.

southwesttransitway.org

Scoping Information Booklet

in support of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)
for the Southwest Transitway Project

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRRA)
September 2008

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
What is a draft environmental impact statement, and what is scoping?	1
Tell me more about the project; why is a Southwest Transitway needed?	2
Has the Southwest Transitway been studied before?	3
What alternatives are being considered?	4
How can I be part of the process?	6
When, where, and how can members of the public comment?	6
How can I be involved after the scoping period?	7
How will my comments affect the process?	7
What government agencies are involved?	7
What environmental topic areas will be considered?	8
Scoping Comment Form.	9



Introduction

The Southwest Transitway is a proposed transit project intended to improve mobility in the southwest part of the Twin Cities metro area including the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, Edina, St. Louis Park, and Minneapolis. It is the intent of the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) to partner with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as lead agencies to develop the Southwest Transitway as a major transit capital investment.

As the public agency responsible for completing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the HCRRA is required to comply with the requirements of the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) pursuant to the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) (Minn. Stat. §116D.04 and 116D.045). The project will also pursue federal funding from the FTA. As a result, the FTA is required to undertake environmental review in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The FTA, as the federal lead agency under NEPA, and HCRRA, as the state lead agency under EQB, have determined that the Southwest Transitway project may have significant environmental impacts. To satisfy both NEPA and EQB requirements, the HCRRA and the FTA are preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Southwest Transitway project.

This Scoping Information Booklet contains a description of the scoping process, an overview and status update of the Southwest Transitway project DEIS, and information on how the public can get involved in scoping.

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The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) [42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.] was signed into law on January 1, 1970. The Act establishes national environmental policy and goals for the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of the environment, and it provides a process for implementing these goals within the federal agencies. NEPA requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions.

The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) plays a vital role in Minnesota's environment and development. The board develops policy, creates long-range plans, and reviews proposed projects that would significantly influence Minnesota's environment. The EQB writes the rules for conducting environmental reviews. The EQB's environmental review duties are directed by Minnesota Environmental Policy Act Laws 1973, Chapter 412 (MEPA) Minnesota Statutes 116D.04.

What is a draft environmental impact statement, and what is scoping?

A DEIS documents the potential social, economic, and environmental benefits and impacts of a proposed project or action and proposed measures to mitigate any adverse impacts in compliance with NEPA. The DEIS is released to the public and interested agencies for review and comment. The DEIS and the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) compose the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under NEPA.

Scoping is the first step in the NEPA/EIS process. Scoping is designed to inform the public, interest groups, affected tribes, and government agencies of the DEIS (including opportunities for public involvement) and to present the purpose and need for the project, the proposed alternatives to address the

needs identified, and potential benefits and impacts for public and agency review early in the NEPA/EIS process.

The purpose of scoping is to confirm the purpose and need for the project, identify appropriate alternatives for addressing the needs, and identify the potentially significant environmental issues associated with the proposed alternatives that should be analyzed in depth in the DEIS. The scoping process is also intended to eliminate detailed study of issues that are not significant and/or have been addressed by prior studies.

This scoping process includes three (3) formal public meetings at which anyone may have their verbal comments recorded and/or provide written comments. Scoping comments should focus on the purpose and need for the project, the proposed alternatives, and the potentially significant environmental benefits and impacts that should be analyzed in the DEIS.

An overview of the purpose and need for the project can be found on page 2 of this document, descriptions including a map of the proposed alternatives can be found on page 4 of this document, and the list of environmental areas that will be analyzed for potential environmental benefits and impacts can be found on page 8 of this document.



Tell me more about the project; why is a Southwest Transitway needed?

The Southwest Transitway is a proposed 14-mile light rail transit (LRT) line in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region, connecting downtown Minneapolis to the high growth areas to the southwest. The LRT line will add system capacity in an area of high demand, respond to travel demand created by existing and planned residential and employment growth, provide a competitive travel option that will attract choice riders, and serve transit dependent populations. This line will also be an expansion of the region's transitway system (Hiawatha LRT line, Northstar Commuter Rail (under construction), and Central Corridor LRT line (proposed)).

Overview of the purpose and need for the project

Three primary factors make the Southwest Transitway project important for people who live and work in the southwest metro area: 1) growing roadway congestion; 2) lack of competitive, reliable transit options for choice riders and transit dependent persons; and 3) lack of reverse commute transit service.

Mobility: The study area is experiencing significant roadway congestion resulting from high residential and employment growth and limited infrastructure improvements. In terms of travel, currently 27 percent of all regional trips begin or end in the corridor, and 65 percent of all trips originating within the study area stay within the study area—people who live in the study area, also work in the study area. The study area is also home to many major employers. Downtown Minneapolis is the region's largest employment center with over 140,000 jobs (78 jobs/acre), and the Golden Triangle is the region's sixth largest employment center with over 50,000 jobs (10 jobs/acre). In addition to the high employment growth, this area has also experienced high residential growth with over 31,200 new residences since 1980—new homes in Eden Prairie accounted for more than half of this number.

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Mobility deficiency rating. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) Metro District, which is responsible for transportation investments within Metro District's eight-county metropolitan area, categorizes all highways as having a high, medium, or low deficiency rating. Because most of the highway system experiences congestion, the severity (miles and duration) of congestion for a highway is a critical factor for prioritizing and selecting mobility enhancement projects.

Bus shoulder-lanes look and operate like any other roadway shoulder, but Mn/DOT permits certain buses to use the shoulders to bypass congestion, and to provide faster and more reliable transit commutes in congested corridors.

Ramp meters are traffic signals on freeway entrance ramps that allow traffic onto the freeway in a measured or regulated amount.

Ramp meter bypass lanes offer incentives to carpools and bus riders and present the possibility for time savings, and ultimately reductions in vehicle miles traveled.

As a result of this strong residential and employment growth, travel on area roadways has increased between 80 and 150 percent in the past 25 years. A number of study-area roadways—TH 100, TH 169, TH 62, I-494, I-394, and TH 7—have been identified by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) as having a high mobility deficiency rating. According to Mn/DOT's long-range transportation plan, the Transportation System Plan (TSP), there are no plans for major expansions or improvements to roadways in the study area.

Suburban express bus ridership in the area served by SouthWest Transit and Metro Transit has more than doubled in the past 10 years and surpassed 1 million annual riders for the first time in 2007. Transit advantages, including bus shoulder-lanes, park-and-ride lots, and ramp meter bypass lanes have been implemented throughout the area, but bus speeds remain limited, even on shoulder-lanes, to a maximum of 35 miles per hour (mph) under congested conditions.

Due to lack of planned highway capacity additions and transit facility capacity limitations in downtown Minneapolis, future demand increases for autos and buses will not be adequately met.

Lack of competitive, reliable transit options for choice riders and transit dependent persons: Due to congested roadways—the same roadways used by the bus system—it is difficult to provide the significant travel time advantages that would attract choice riders (who have a choice between transit and driving) to the transit system and to adequately serve transit-dependent people in and around downtown Minneapolis.

The study area roadway network is oriented north-south/east-west whereas development patterns have radiated outward from downtown Minneapolis on a diagonal. This causes additional travel time to be added to vehicle and transit trips due to the geography of the roadway system. In an attempt to reduce travel time for transit, the Twin Cities has become a national leader in the use of bus shoulder lanes. Currently, the Twin Cities has over 250 miles of operating bus shoulder lanes. These facilities provide buses with a travel time advantage over the private automobile during peak travel periods, but state law limits their use to situations where the roadway is operating at 35 mph or lower and the bus cannot travel more than 15 mph above the speed of the roadway. As stated previously all major roadways in the study area are identified by Mn/DOT as experiencing

mobility deficiencies during peak travel periods. This negatively affects the ability of the bus transit system to provide the travel time advantage that would attract choice riders from suburban locations to the transit system.

The number of transit-dependent people is growing in the study area, primarily in and around downtown Minneapolis. The areas of growth include the North Loop, Harrison, and Bryn Mawr neighborhoods. The geography of the roadway network in these areas, especially Harrison and Bryn Mawr, makes it difficult to provide competitive transit travel times. The roadway network through these neighborhoods is circuitous and has many one-way streets. In many cases, people who live only a few miles from downtown Minneapolis have transit travel times ranging from 9 minutes to 13 minutes because of the roadway network used by the bus system.

Lack of reverse commute transit

service: In addition to the strong job growth in downtown Minneapolis, the other cities have experienced, and are projected to continue to experience, substantial job growth into the future. This trend is evidenced by the 65 percent of the trips generated in the study area remaining within the study area. Many of these trips are reverse commute trips from the near-downtown neighborhoods to job centers in suburban locations. Currently these job centers are largely inaccessible by transit.

Has the Southwest Transitway been studied before?

In the early 1980s, the Southwest Transitway was considered a potential LRT line to serve communities from Minneapolis to Hopkins. Mobility issues in this corridor, as described in the previous section, have been well documented since the early 1980s. Previous studies include:

- Comprehensive LRT System Plan for Hennepin County (1988)
- Draft Environmental Impact Statement Hennepin County Light Rail Transit System (1988)

- 29th Street and Southwest Busway Feasibility Study (2000)
- 29th Street and Southwest Corridors Vintage Rail Trolley Study (2000)
- Transit 2020 Master Plan (2000)
- Twin Cities Exclusive Busway Study (2000)
- Transit 2025 Master Plan for Transit (2001)
- Southwest Rail Transit Study (2003)
- Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis (2007)

More recently, the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan, the region's long-range transportation plan, identified the Southwest Transitway for implementation prior to 2030. Furthermore, each of the study area communities has referenced the Southwest Transitway within their local comprehensive plans.

Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis, 2007

In 2007, the HCRRA completed a federally required study called an Alternatives Analysis, which was a continuation of the *Southwest Rail Transit Study, 2003*. The *Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis (AA)* compared the benefits, costs and impacts of a range of transitway alternatives (modes and routes) to identify those which would meet the needs of the communities as expressed in the Purpose and Need Statement.



To aid in determining which alternatives met the area needs, five goals tiered by importance were developed.

1. Improves mobility.
2. Provides a cost-effective, efficient travel option.
3. Protects the environment.
4. Preserves the quality of life.
5. Supports economic development.

The transitway alternatives were evaluated to determine if they met the five goals. After evaluating one bus alternative, two bus rapid transit alternatives, and eight light rail transit alternatives, it was concluded that LRT was the preferred mode of transit and three of the eight LRT routes could meet the five established goals. In addition, the bus alternative, called the Enhanced Bus, was retained, even though it did not perform as well as the LRT alternatives, to continue to evaluate the possibility of addressing the increasing mobility needs of the area through improved bus service rather than LRT. The AA concluded that mobility improvements could best be addressed through the development of one of three possible LRT alternatives that would connect the residential, commercial, employment, and entertainment activity centers within the study area.

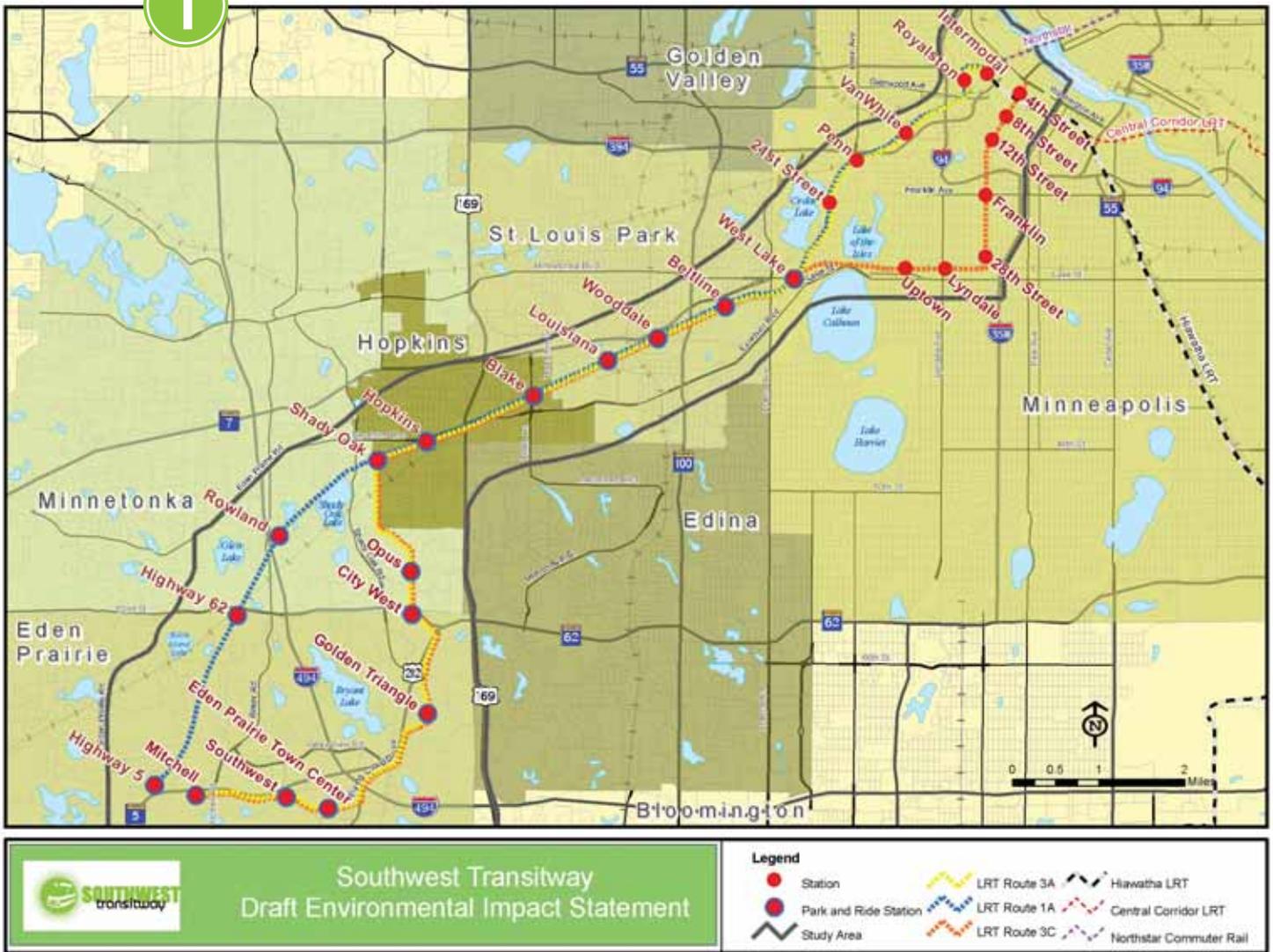


A **choice rider** is someone who does not need to use transit for daily trips, but who chooses to use it because of convenience, time savings, cost savings (no parking fees), or some combination of these factors.

A **transit-dependent person** is someone who must rely on public transit for daily trips. The Federal Transit Administration defines transit-dependent persons as those 1) without private transportation, 2) elderly (over age 65), 3) youths (under age 18), and 4) persons below poverty or median income levels defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Reverse commuting means that you live in the center city and work in the suburbs. This is the opposite of the regular commute where a person lives in the suburbs and travels to work in the city.

figure 1 Light Rail Transit (LRT) Alternatives



The AA is the starting point for the DEIS and forms the basis for this scoping process.

What alternatives are being considered?

Based upon the AA, three LRT alternatives and one Enhanced Bus alternative are proposed for inclusion in the DEIS.

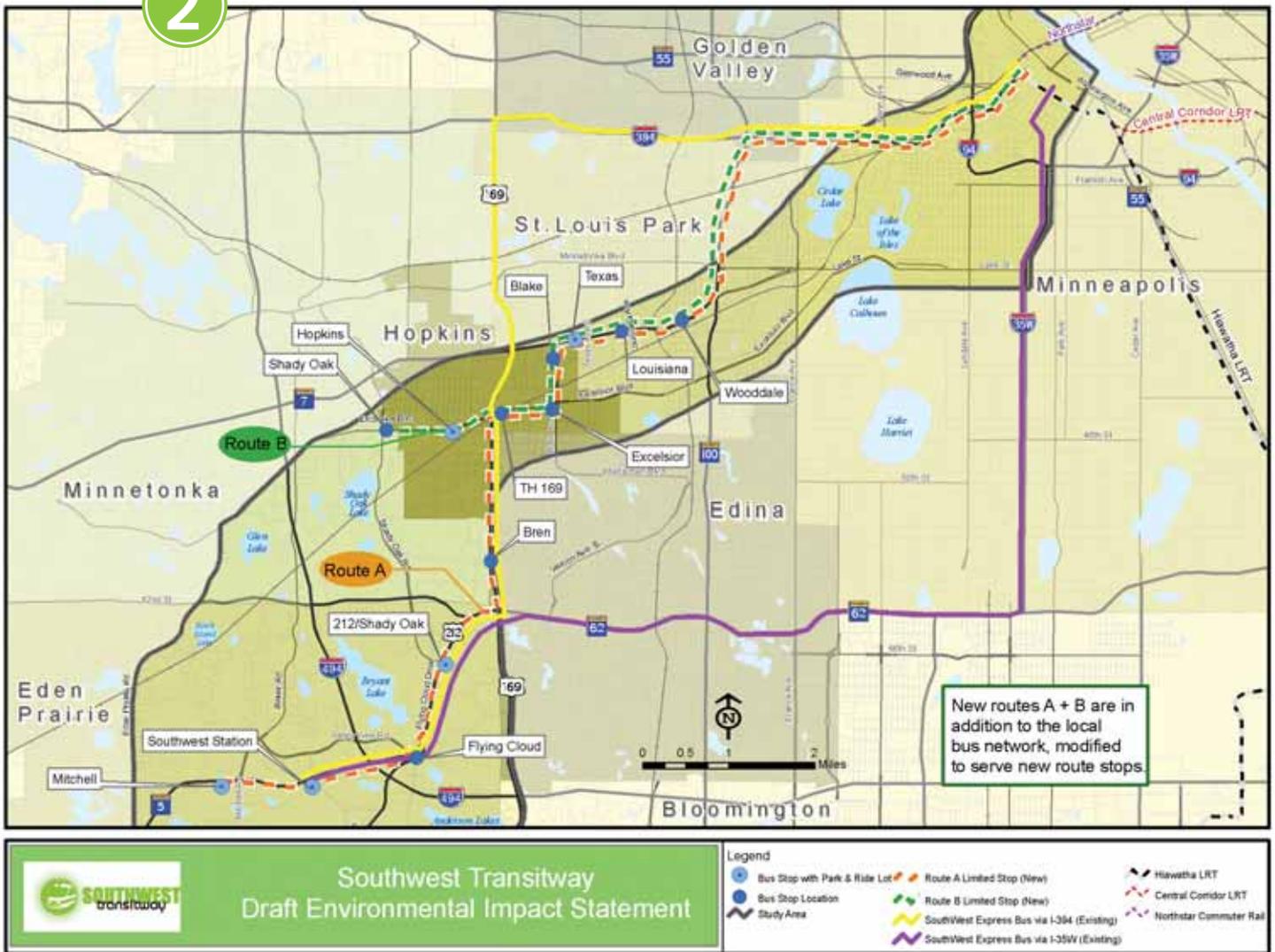
The alternatives include proposed station locations, park and ride facilities at stations, and routings between stations. An LRT maintenance and storage facility is assumed, but a location is yet to be determined.

Light Rail Transit 1A: This alternative would operate from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie (TH 5) via an extension of the Hiawatha LRT tracks on 5th Street, past the downtown Minneapolis Intermodal Station to Royalston Avenue, to the Kenilworth Corridor through Minneapolis and the HCRRA property through St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka and Eden Prairie terminating at TH 5 and the HCRRA's property. Stations are proposed at Royalston Ave., Van White Blvd., Penn Ave., 21st St., West Lake St., Beltline Blvd., Wooddale Ave., Louisiana Ave., Blake Rd., downtown Hopkins, Shady Oak Rd., Rowland Rd., TH 62, and TH 5. Alternative 1A is shown in Figure 1.

Light Rail Transit 3A: This alternative would operate from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie (Mitchell Road/TH 5) via an extension of the Hiawatha LRT tracks on 5th Street, past the downtown Minneapolis Intermodal Station to Royalston Avenue, to the Kenilworth Corridor through Minneapolis, the HCRRA property in St. Louis Park and Hopkins, to new right-of-way through the Opus/Golden Triangle area terminating at TH 5 and Mitchell Road. Stations are proposed at Royalston Ave., Van White Blvd., Penn Ave., 21st St., West Lake St., Beltline Blvd., Wooddale Ave., Louisiana Ave., Blake Rd., downtown Hopkins, Shady Oak Rd., Opus, City West, Golden Triangle, Eden Prairie Town Center,

figure 2 Enhanced Bus Alternative

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SouthWest Station, and Mitchell Rd. Alternative 3A is shown in Figure 1.

Light Rail Transit 3C: This alternative would operate from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie (Mitchell Road/TH 5) via Nicollet Mall to Nicollet Avenue (tunnel from Franklin Avenue to 28th Street), the Midtown Corridor through Minneapolis, the HCRRA property in St. Louis Park and Hopkins, to new right-of-way through the Opus/Golden Triangle, the Eden Prairie Major Center area terminating at TH 5 and Mitchell Road. Stations are proposed at 4th St., 8th St., 12th St., Franklin Ave., 28th St., Lyndale Ave., Hennepin Ave., West Lake St., Beltline Blvd., Wooddale Ave., Louisiana Ave., Blake Rd., downtown Hopkins, Shady Oak Rd.,

Opus, City West, Golden Triangle, Eden Prairie Town Center, SouthWest Station, and Mitchell Rd. Alternative 3C is shown in Figure 1.

Enhanced Bus: The Enhanced Bus alternative, also known as the Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative, is designed to provide lower cost, operationally-oriented improvements to address the project's purpose and need as much as possible without a major transit investment. It includes minor modifications to the existing express service, and would augment Metro Transit and SouthWest Transit service between Minneapolis and Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, and St. Louis Park. This alternative will serve as the New Starts Baseline against which

the cost-effectiveness of the proposed project will be measured, and includes improvements identified in the No-Build Alternative. The Enhanced Bus Option is shown in Figure 2.

No-Build Alternative: The No-Build Alternative includes all roadway and transit facility and service improvements (other than the proposed project) planned, programmed, and included in the Financially Constrained Regional Transportation Policy Plan to be implemented by the Year 2030. It includes minor transit service expansions and/or adjustments that reflect a continuation of existing service policies as identified by the Metropolitan Council. The No-Build Alternative serves as the NEPA baseline against which the potentially significant

environmental benefits and impacts of other proposed alternatives, including the proposed project, will be measured.

How can I be part of the process?

Anyone who has an interest in the Southwest Transitway and the potentially significant environmental benefits and impacts is encouraged to take part in the scoping process. Comments should be provided during the scoping period, which ends on November 7, 2008 at 5:00 PM. To participate in the process, first read this booklet to learn more about what is being proposed. Second, attend a scoping meeting to learn more and share your thoughts, ideas, and comments. Third, provide input regarding the proposed alternatives to be studied, any potentially significant social, economic, or environmental impacts for evaluation in the DEIS, and comments on the purpose and need for the proposed project.

Comments can be presented verbally to the HCRRA at any of the three (3) formal scoping meetings or submitted in writing via U.S. mail, fax, or email no later than 5:00 PM. on November 7, 2008. For your convenience a public comment sheet is attached to this report. Comments may also be submitted directly via the Southwest Transitway Web site, www.southwesttransitway.org.

A comprehensive Public Involvement Program and a Coordination Plan for public and interagency involvement that address how the Southwest Transitway project will involve the public and agencies throughout the DEIS process will be available at the scoping meetings and is also available on the Southwest



Make comments on:

- Alternatives to be studied,
- Any significant social, economic or environmental issues for evaluation, and
- Purpose and Need statement.

TO DO:

- Read this booklet
- Attend a scoping meeting (optional)
- Tell us what you think should be studied.



Transitway Web site or by contacting Ms. Katie Walker, Transit Project Manager.

When, where, and how can members of the public comment?

The formal comment period for the Southwest Transitway DEIS will end on November 7, 2008 at 5:00 PM. During that timeframe, the public and agencies are encouraged to submit comments in writing via U.S. mail, fax, e-mail, or Web site (see contact information below) or verbally at three scheduled formal scoping meetings.

Formal scoping meetings are scheduled for the following dates and locations:

Tuesday, October 7, 2008
2:00 PM open house
3:00 PM public hearing
Hennepin County Government Center
300 South 6th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415

Tuesday, October 14, 2008
5:00 PM open house
6:00 PM public hearing
St. Louis Park City Hall
5005 Minnetonka Boulevard
St. Louis Park, MN 55416

Thursday, October 23, 2008
5:00 PM open house
6:00 PM public hearing
Eden Prairie City Hall
8080 Mitchell Road
Eden Prairie, MN 55344

Please note: During the open house portion of the formal scoping meeting, project staff will be available to answer questions. Formal testimony before the HCRRA will begin with the public hearing portion of the scoping meeting. To ensure that all those who wish to address the

HCRRA are given the opportunity each person will be given three (3) minutes to address the HCRRA.

Auxiliary aides, services and communication materials in accessible formats and languages other than English can be arranged **if notice is given at least 14 calendar days before the meeting** by contacting Ms. Katie Walker at the address, telephone number, or e-mail address below.

Comments may also be submitted in writing by:

Mail: Ms. Katie Walker, AICP Transit Project Manager, Hennepin County, Housing, Community Works & Transit, 417 North 5th Street, Suite 320, Minneapolis, MN 55401

Fax: 612-348-9710

E-mail: Katie.Walker@co.hennepin.mn.us

Web site: www.southwesttransitway.org

Telephone: 612-348-9260

Comments must be received by 5:00 PM on November 7, 2008.

For more information on the scoping process, contact Ms. Katie Walker at the address, telephone number, or e-mail address above.

Written materials, project updates, and materials used at the public scoping meetings will be available on the Southwest Transitway project Web site: www.southwesttransitway.org.

Government agencies will be invited to a separate scoping meeting.

How can I be involved after the Scoping Period?

Although the formal scoping period ends November 7, 2008, opportunities for public involvement in the DEIS will continue. Involvement opportunities will include ongoing meetings with members of the public, tribes, business and community groups, and government agencies.

Opportunities for community interaction and input will occur during important periods throughout the study process (see DEIS Schedule on page 8).

How will my comments affect the process?

Public and agency comments will ensure that the purpose and need for the project is adequately defined, that appropriate alternatives are being evaluated, and that the potentially significant environmental benefits and impacts are being considered before a decision to proceed with the project is made. Comments can be made during the scoping period on the purpose and need for the project, the proposed alternatives, and the environmental topic areas that will be analyzed for potentially significant environmental benefits and impacts. The scoping period will end on November 7, 2008.

After the scoping period has concluded, the DEIS lead agencies (the HCRRA and the FTA), in consultation with the participating agencies, will review all comments received, respond to those comments, and use those comments to finalize the purpose and need, refine the proposed alternatives and identify all environmental topic areas to be analyzed in the DEIS. The comments received, responses, and their impact on the DEIS will be documented in a Scoping Report which will be made available to the public and participating agencies.

What government agencies are involved?

At a minimum, the following government agencies will be asked by the lead

agencies to participate in the preparation of the DEIS:

Federal Agencies: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT)/ Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Federal Railroad Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Homeland Security.

State Agencies: Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Indian Affairs Council, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Office

of the State Archaeologist, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Commerce, State Historic Preservation Office, and the Minnesota Historical Society.

Regional Authorities: Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, Three Rivers Park District, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, Nine Mile Creek Watershed District, Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District, and the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization.

Hennepin County: County Administrator.

Hennepin Conservation District

Local Government: City of Minneapolis, City of St. Louis Park, City of Hopkins, City of Edina, City of Minnetonka, and City of Eden Prairie.

Others: Native American Tribes, and school districts.



What environmental topic areas will be considered?

The purpose of the DEIS process is to explore in a public setting the effects of the proposed alternatives on the physical, human, and natural environment. We will evaluate all of the potentially significant environmental, social, economic, and transportation benefits and impacts of the proposed alternatives, which include the following topic areas:

- Ecosystems and natural resource benefits and impacts including geology and soils, air quality, water resources including hydrology and water quality, noise, and vibration;
- Land use, zoning, and economic development;
- Demographics and socioeconomic factors;

- Displacements and relocations;
- Neighborhood compatibility, community facilities and services, and environmental justice;
- Visual quality and aesthetic characteristics;
- Cultural resource benefits and impacts, including those related to historical and archaeological resources, traditional cultural resources, and parklands/recreation and Section 4(f) resource areas;
- Hazardous materials;
- Energy use;
- Construction effects; and
- Transportation benefits and impacts (including transit, roads and highways, railroads, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities).

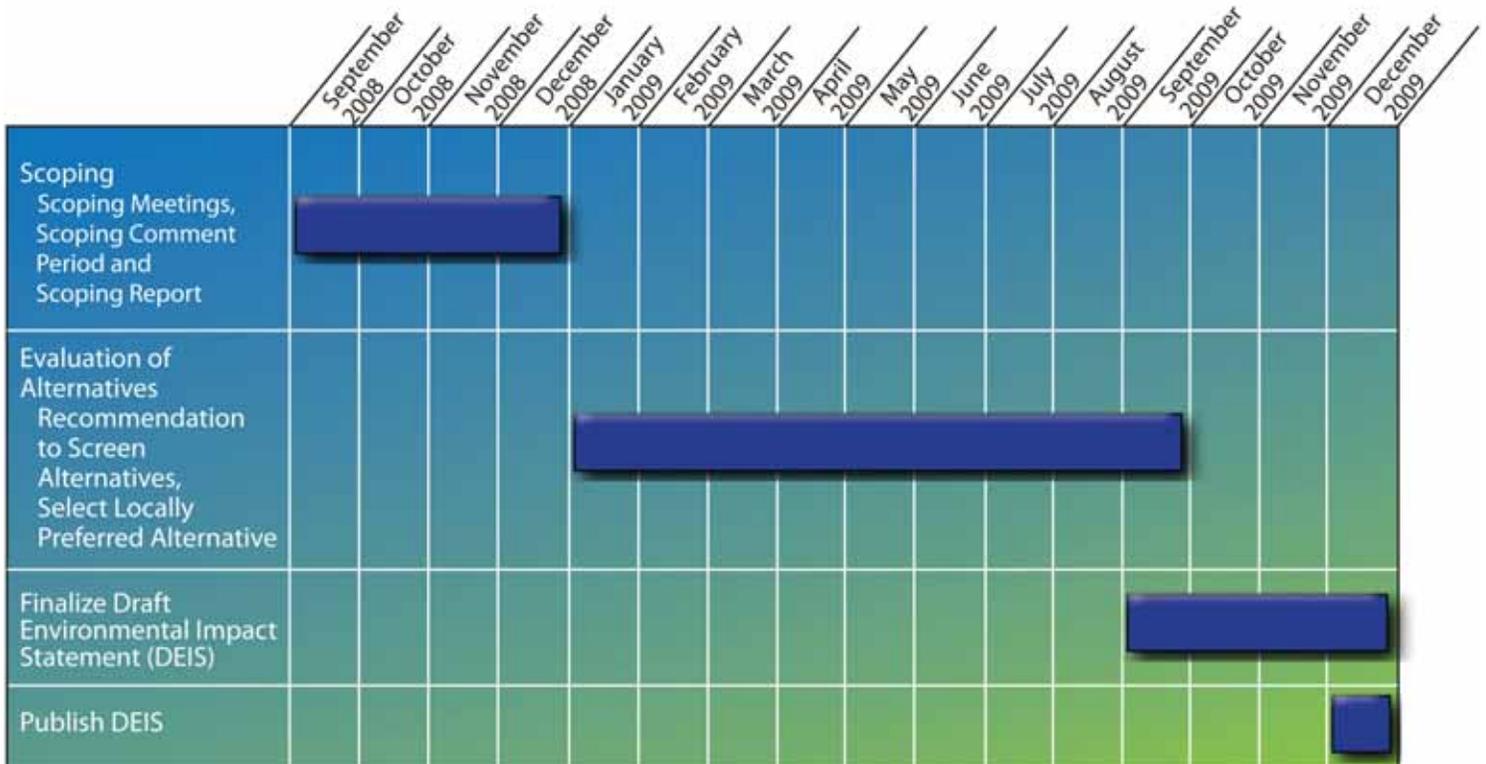
The schedule for the DEIS is shown below.



Measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate all adverse impacts will be identified and evaluated.



In addition to documenting the potential benefits and impacts to the physical, human and natural environment, the DEIS will also refine capital and operating cost estimates, ridership forecasts, and the station locations as well as identifying a location for the required LRT maintenance and storage facility.





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