

Extending TRACKS



Sen. Franken calls for state legislature to complete Southwest LRT funding

U.S. Sen. Al Franken appeared at the Downtown Hopkins Station site, along with Metropolitan Council Chair Adam Duinick, Hopkins Mayor Molly Cummings and representatives of the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce to appeal for Minnesota legislators to fund the remaining \$135 million local match for the Southwest LRT Project.

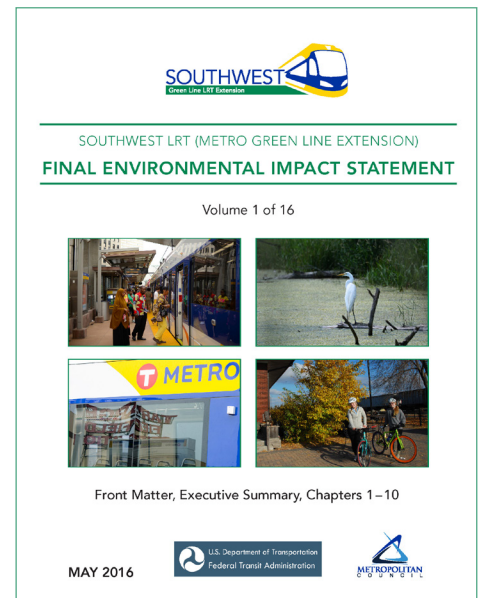
Final Environmental Impact Statement released on Southwest LRT

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) published the final environmental document on the Southwest LRT Project on May 13, 2016, marking a major step closer to realization of the \$1.79 billion project. This comes after years of public feedback and technical analysis, done in conjunction with project staff from the Metropolitan Council.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) responds to comments received on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Supplemental DEIS, released in 2012 and 2015, respectively. The FEIS shows how the design was advanced to avoid or minimize impacts and identifies mitigation measures for impacts that cannot be avoided or minimized. It further outlines the Council's commitments to deal with those impacts throughout construction and operation of the Southwest LRT Project.

"Input from the public directly shaped the Southwest LRT Project," said Metropolitan Council Chair Adam Duinick. "The public raised concerns about noise, visual quality impacts, water resources and safety, among other issues. Project staff has worked with federal, state and local partners to make the appropriate design changes and incorporate them into the project plans. The Southwest LRT Project today is stronger – and enjoys broader support – because of the public's input."

"This is a major step forward for the communities who have supported this project for years. It reinforces the need for the State Legislature to take action in the next week to provide the remaining \$135 million to help us leverage \$895 million in federal funds; without action, those federal funds will go to a transit project somewhere else in the country."



Above: The Southwest LRT Final EIS, including appendices and supporting documents, is available online and at libraries and public offices. See metro council.org/swlrt/feis to download documents or learn where review copies are available.

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Key adjustments analyzed in the FEIS

Installing resilient track fasteners in a Minneapolis LRT tunnel, adjusting horn and bell usage and building sound walls are among steps outlined in the FEIS to reduce or eliminate noise and vibration along the future Southwest LRT Project.

Additionally, the following provisions were identified through staff evaluation, consultation with cities along the route and in response to public comments on the Draft EIS and the Supplemental DEIS. Key adjustments include:

- Moving the alignment south in Eden Prairie to address concerns about impacts to business entrances along Technology Drive and bringing the line closer to Eden Prairie Center mall and the city's core commercial and retail district.
- Building sound walls along portions of the route in St. Louis Park, Hopkins, and Minnetonka to mitigate noise impacts to residences.
- Selecting the final location for the operations and maintenance facility in a light industrial area in Hopkins and away from private residences. Floodplain impacts at the site will be mitigated by replacing lost water storage in the same or nearby areas, where feasible, in coordination with local agencies.
- Avoiding and minimizing wetland impacts through design refinement.
- Mitigating unavoidable wetland impacts by buying wetland bank credits as the preferred strategy to meet federal, state and local mitigation requirements.
- Adjusting the operation of horns and bells at several road crossings and positioning bells to minimize impacts to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Installing resilient fasteners on the track in the Kenilworth LRT tunnel in

Minneapolis to mitigate vibration from LRT operations.

FEIS details freight rail plans, safety measures

The FEIS describes the decision to co-locate freight rail and LRT in the existing rail corridor in St. Louis Park and Minneapolis based on extensive public input and analysis of freight railroad location and water resources.

Based on that analysis, Southwest LRT advisory committee recommendations and public comments, the design for

the Project was adjusted in April 2014 to keep freight rail in the existing corridor along with LRT tracks. In order to retain the freight rail and trail in the corridor and avoid taking residences, the Project includes a shallow LRT tunnel to be built just under a half-mile in length between West Lake Street Station and south of the Kenilworth Channel. The LRT tracks will return to grade just south of the Kenilworth Channel and cross over the channel on a new bridge.

"The project design is sensitive to the natural areas within the corridor and

The Final EIS describes measures to mitigate impacts, including preserving the shed and sign at The Depot in Hopkins (below) and crossing Prairie Center Drive near SouthWest Station on a bridge to avoid traffic disruptions (bottom).



New development near planned Southwest LRT station in Hopkins

Metropolitan Council member Jennifer Munt (center) joined executives from the Doran Companies and Southwest LRT staff on Monday, May 16 at the groundbreaking for the Moline apartment development in Hopkins.

Munt praised the cooperation of the Southwest Project Office, the City of Hopkins and Doran Companies on the 241-unit project, located across the street from the planned Downtown Hopkins Station.

The Moline will have 189 public park-and-ride spots for light-rail users in its parking garage.



FINAL EIS FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

includes safety measures for trails, light rail and freight rail operating in a shared corridor," said Jim Alexander, acting project director.

The FEIS describes that farther west on the route, beginning east of Excelsior Boulevard in Hopkins, the existing freight rail tracks owned by Canadian Pacific Railway will be shifted north about 45 feet. This will allow the light rail tracks to be built south of the freight tracks and make LRT stations more accessible to local centers of activity, while retaining the trail.

31-day public comment period

While state law requires a minimum 10-day period for the public to submit comments on the document's adequacy, the project is providing 31 days. June 13 is the comment deadline.

"Community engagement has been critical in assuring the concerns of the public are heard and addressed. Thousands of people have weighed in over the last few years. Results from this extensive public input process have been incorporated into the FEIS and have helped to fine tune the final report

resulting in a stronger project, sensitive to the needs and desires of those the Southwest LRT will serve," Hopkins Mayor Molly Cummings said.

"The Southwest LRT Project today is stronger – and enjoys broader support – because of the public's input."

***Adam Duinick,
Metropolitan Council Chair***

Next steps

To complete the environmental review process, the Federal Transit Administration will need to issue a Record of Decision and the Council will make a Determination of Adequacy. Comments on the FEIS will be addressed as appropriate in these documents. Once these actions are taken, the Council can advertise construction contracts and apply for federal funding for half the capital costs so heavy construction can begin next year.

With the completion of the environmental review process, public engagement will shift from the planning and design process to informing the public on what to expect from construction, such as temporary detours or lane closures. Communication methods will include construction updates that can be viewed on mobile devices and the project's website, www.swlrt.org.

The FEIS process

The Southwest LRT Project's environmental review process studied resource areas, including – but not limited to – land use, acquisitions and displacements, noise, vibration, safety and security, and geology and groundwater resources.

The FEIS responded to nearly 1,200 comments submitted by the public and government agencies following the earlier publication of the Draft EIS and the Supplemental DEIS. Comments were received at public hearings and through e-mail and letters.

Real estate figures show access to transit is a major factor for today's homebuyers

Residents increasingly seeking out housing near transit lines

New real estate figures show access to transit is increasingly becoming an asset for homebuyers. The Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors has studied the impact of the METRO Blue Line LRT on housing prices, and says more and more, people are considering transit when evaluating where they want to live.

"We regularly hear from our members who work with millennials and boomers alike that today's buyers want the option to take transit to the airport, to entertainment, to work, to sporting events or even for an evening out with friends or family," said David Arbit, Director of Research and Economics for the Minneapolis Area Association of Realtors. "Today's buyers want the option to not own a car, or if they do own a car, the option not to use it every single day."

Arbit says his research shows that the value of homes in neighborhoods near Blue Line stations in Minneapolis continue to be higher than homes in neighborhoods not connected to the region's first LRT line. In January 2015, the median value in an LRT-connected neighborhood was \$220,000, and the median-valued home was \$194,000 in a non-LRT neighborhood.

"The Minneapolis light rail neighborhoods continue to outperform the rest of the city," said Arbit.

Dynamic likely to be replicated along Green Line and planned expansions of LRT system

Arbit says realtors are now seeing a similar dynamic along the METRO Green Line LRT. Home values have performed better in the Green Line area than in the city of St. Paul as a whole and when compared to the

metro region as a whole since the line's 2014 opening. Compared to the rest of the metro, he says he's expecting the same to happen in communities along the planned Southwest LRT line, with the exception of the Kenwood of Minneapolis, where the price effect is expected to be minimal due in part to low turnover rates of homes and the existing price point.

"I think values in St. Louis Park and Hopkins will perform quite well, similar to values along the Hiawatha line. I'd expect Minnetonka and Eden Prairie values to perform in the middle, somewhere between St. Louis Park/Hopkins and Kenwood," he said.

Balance needed to ensure affordable housing options along transit lines

Met Council Member Gary Cunningham says while the increase in home values demonstrates the desire for people to live near transit lines, it also underscores the need to ensure there is available affordable housing along public transit. Median household incomes within a half-mile of the planned Green Line Extension's planned 15 stations is \$50,580, well below the metro-wide figure of roughly \$80,000.

"We have a great need for more affordable housing in this region," said Met Council Member Gary Cunningham. "While many critics claim residents along Southwest corridor are wealthy compared to other residents in the area, the fact is that there are many working-class families in need of affordable housing all along the line. We need to work together with stakeholders to ensure the people who need to access transit can do so."

Hennepin County Commissioner Jan Callison agrees there's a misperception that the cities along the Green Line Extension are more prosperous. "If you dig below the impression, you'll see they're quite diverse, and many of them have a history of affordable housing."

A Hennepin County task force is working to ensure that one-third of the new housing units expected along Green Line Extension by 2030 are affordable for people with low and moderate incomes to prevent gentrification.

Projections estimate 11,200 new apartments, condos, and homes.

Residents increasingly seeking out housing near transit lines

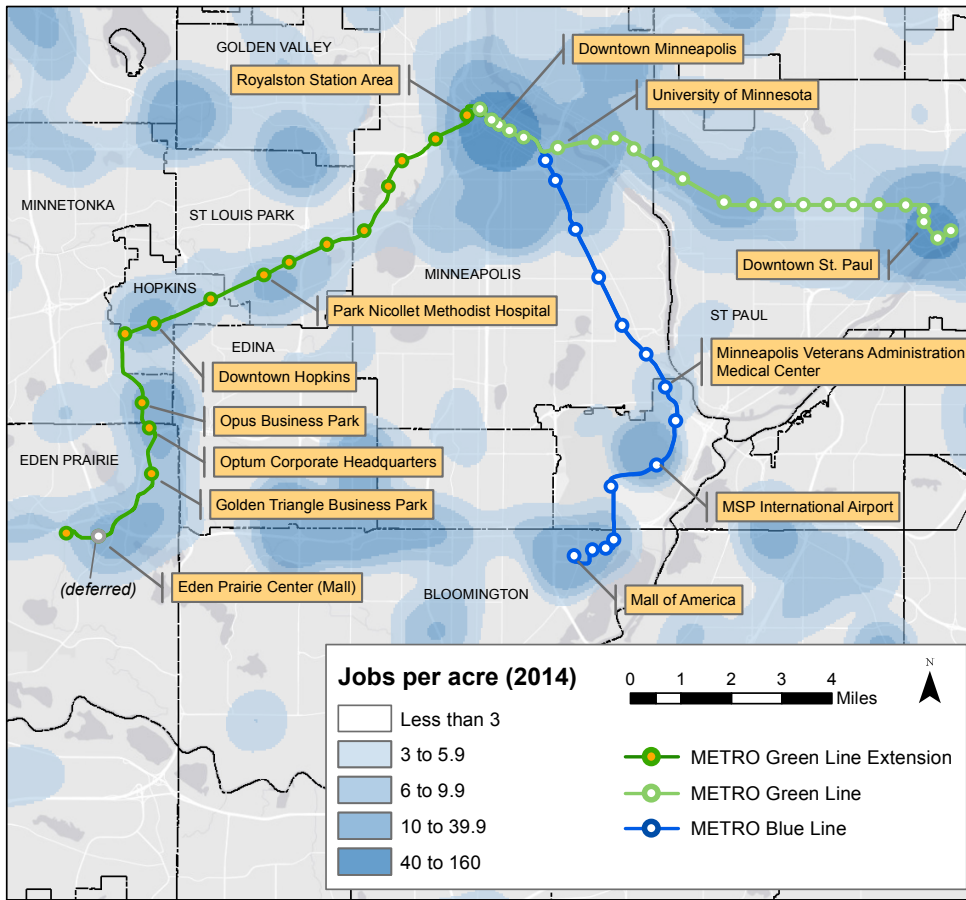
A national study by the Rockefeller Foundation finds that 66 percent of millennials say access to high-quality transportation is one of their top three priorities when considering a move to another city.

"People rely on public transit to get to work, to school, to opportunities," said Met Council Chair Adam Duinink. "It's clear that many people are deciding where to live and work based on access to transit. If we are going to compete for the top talent in the country, we must continue to build out our regional transit system and provide people more options to get around."

Older residents are also increasingly attracted to housing near public transit. Marvin Plakut is President and CEO of Episcopal Homes. He says many residents sought out the independent living center at the Fairview Avenue

REAL ESTATE CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Employees, employers train their sights on Southwest LRT for better access



Above: The METRO Green Line Extension (Southwest LRT) line would extend light rail transit service to several major employment concentrations in the southwest metro area, including the Opus and Golden Triangle areas.

A reverse commuter from northeast Minneapolis who works at one of the largest employers in Minnesota, the CEO of a family-owned company, a senior housing official and a pizza restaurant manager have one thing in common.

They all want the proposed Southwest LRT (METRO Green Line Extension) to be built to improve access to the 175,000 jobs already located along the corridor. Another 64,000 new jobs are expected to be added by 2035 within one-half mile of the planned new stations and five existing stations in downtown Minneapolis.

Reverse commuting

Peter Janelle reverse commutes from his home in northeast Minneapolis to his job as a senior financial consultant for UnitedHealthcare in Minnetonka. His family only owns one car, so he rides a bus most days. Janelle says he would appreciate the greater frequency of LRT trains over buses, especially when he has to arrive at work early before his company's intercampus shuttle is operating.

"Southwest Light Rail would make my commute a bit shorter and more direct," said Janelle, who takes buses three days a week to Shady Oak Road

and Highway 62 and drives his family car two days a week. "It's more of a challenge in the winter months to try to piece together the commute. If the express bus doesn't work out, I take the city bus route 12. If I work late, I have to walk three-quarters of a mile which is OK for me but for people who are older it would be a bit tougher."

UnitedHealthcare's location in Opus Business Park is among several job-rich centers on the Southwest LRT line. The others are Eden Prairie Center (mall), Golden Triangle Business Park and Optum Corporate Headquarters in Eden Prairie; Downtown Hopkins; Park Nicollet Methodist Hospital near the future Louisiana Avenue Station in St. Louis Park; and Royalston Station Area in Minneapolis.

Southwest LRT would give Janelle and other commuters access not just to those centers, but to locations all along the existing Blue and Green lines, including: downtown Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, downtown St. Paul, the Veterans Administration Medical Center, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America.

Broadening the pool of prospective employees

Nordic Ware CEO David Dalquist realizes that an expanding transit network will increase the area from which employers can draw employees in the future.

Dalquist said about 50 of his employees, who number from 350 to 400 depending on the season, would benefit from building out the network.

Southwest LRT "will provide us greater access to the geographically spread-out Twin Cities workforce which, in turn, will make us more competitive in the job market. There's no question that there's upside to having a public transit

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ACCESS FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

system situated adjacent to a business," said Dalquist, whose St. Louis Park-based company's bakeware line includes the Bundt pan.

"Though we currently have ample on-site parking, if some employees were commuting each day via LRT, it would reduce our need for parking spaces," he added.

A draw for people of all ages

TowerLight Senior Living and Child Day Care is near the future Wooddale Station in St. Louis Park, and it promotes that proximity on its website's home page. "Located near future light rail stop. Don't feel like staying in? Board light rail and explore other parts of town."

Greg Zoidis, TowerLight's manager partner, says they are interested in seeing Southwest LRT approved for funding.

"Part of the health of our metro area is investment in transportation infrastructure."

***Brad Meier, President,
TwinWest Chamber of Commerce***

"Providing quality care begins with hiring and retaining the best possible staff. Not all of our 50-plus employees currently have dependable private transportation, which creates stress for them and our leadership team. A fully functioning LRT will expand our labor pool and reduce stress among our caregivers, which translates directly to better care for our seniors and children," Zoidis said.

"In addition, we have many senior residents who no longer drive. The ability to offer activities accessible by LRT will create excitement and energy for both our day-care children and their grand friends," he said.

At Pizza Lucé in Hopkins, a popular stop by the future Blake Road Station, general manager Bucky Jaszewski is looking forward to the arrival of Southwest LRT.

The restaurant and bar has about 105 employees of all ages, and many of them use their bikes and the adjacent Cedar Lake Regional Trail to get to work. In the winter, though, Jaszewski says that doesn't work out so well.

"To have the light rail come here is going to be a big bonus for us," he said.

Customers will use the line too, he said, as the restaurant is already a popular lunch and after-work stop.

Jaszewski lives a block from the restaurant and says the looming arrival of LRT has been a draw.

"It's kind of a big thing moving out to this area, knowing LRT is coming," he said, adding that easy connections to downtown Minneapolis are attractive.

The business case

The TwinWest Chamber of Commerce has long supported Southwest LRT, which will serve three of Minnesota's 17 Fortune 500 companies: C.H. Robinson, SuperValu and UnitedHealth Group. Six other Fortune 500 companies are on the existing LRT lines in



Above: UnitedHealthcare employee Peter Janelle looks forward to riding Southwest LRT for the improved reverse commute it would provide him from northeast Minneapolis to his job in Minnetonka and Eden Prairie.

downtown Minneapolis (Ameriprise Financial, Target, Thrivent Financial, US Bancorp and Xcel Energy) and downtown St. Paul (Ecolab).

(Target's Northern Campus is located on the planned Blue Line LRT Extension, Maplewood-based 3M is on the proposed Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit line and Richfield-based Best Buy is on the proposed Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit line. Target has locations on two transitways but is counted only once on the list of Minnesota's Fortune 500 companies.)

"Part of the health of our metro area is investment in transportation infrastructure," TwinWest Chamber President Brad Meier said. "The TwinWest Chamber understands that growth of business, jobs and people in the area requires a transportation system for the future that improves roads, bridges and transit.

"We believe businesses will grow the economic base of the area, and we know a strong transit infrastructure along with roads and bridges will support job growth in the west metro."

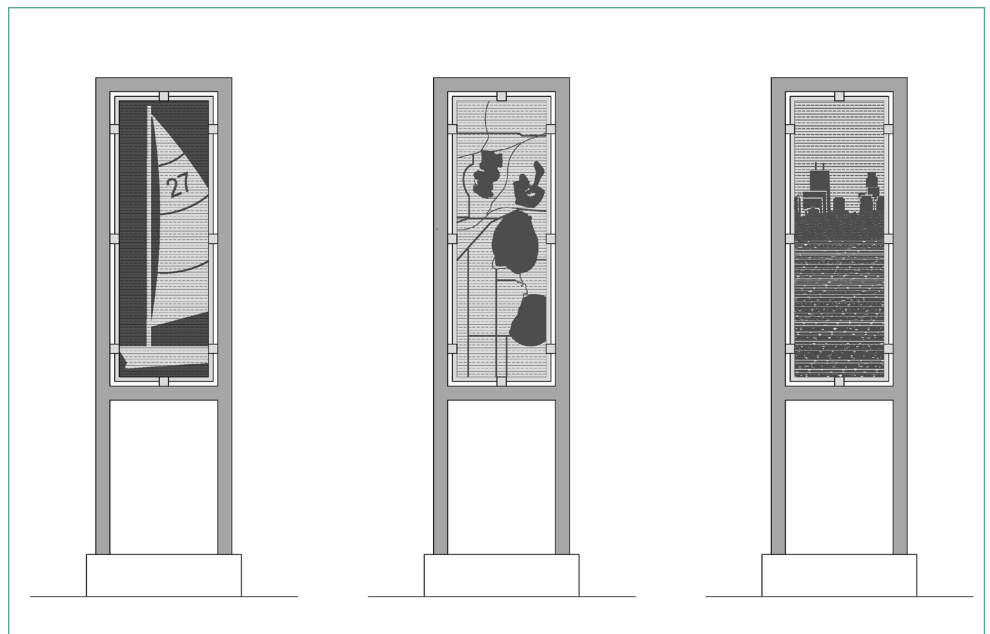
Stations will have individuality through panel designs

Panel designs based on a station's context will lend identity to Southwest LRT stations

Vertical panels will be installed at all stations except Eden Prairie's South-West Station, which is within a parking structure. The size and number of panels depends on station design. Materials that they will be fashioned out of include etched stainless steel mesh and laser/jet cut metal.

Staff obtained design inspiration from the public through open houses and neighborhood meetings, the project's advisory committees of community members, business representatives and technical staff from the county and cities on the line. Historical and community identity themes were among the suggestions.

For example, the West Lake Street Station panels show a sailboat, a map of the Chain of Lakes and the Minneapolis skyline. The Bryn Mawr Station panels depict meadow plants that grow in the station area.



Top right: The locations of vertical panels at the proposed West Lake Street Station.

Right: Panel designs for the West Lake Street Station reflect the identity of the surrounding area.

REAL ESTATE FROM PAGE 4

Station in St. Paul because of its proximity to the Green Line.

"LRT had a major positive impact on our Episcopal Homes campus and our residents and staff. It brought more than just transportation and increased independence. It brought excitement and vibrancy and a sense of newness and urban chic," said Plakut. "Our Episcopal Homes campus expansion filled up prior

to opening our doors last year, and we have long waiting lists. Nearly all guests inquiring about our offerings are saying that a significant part of their interest is a result of the light rail line stopping right in front of our campus door."

The Southwest LRT website is a resource for information about the Project where you can find news, environmental documents, information about station design, contact information for Project staff, and more. Visit www.swlrt.org today.

SOUTHWEST LRT

- Environmental
- Environmental Impact Statement
- Scoping
- Draft EIS
- Supplemental Draft EIS
- Final EIS
- Noise and Vibration
- Section 4(f) Compliance
- Contact Southwest LRT
- Southwest LRT News

FINAL EIS

Southwest LRT Final Environmental Impact Statement

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Metropolitan Council (MTC) released the Southwest LRT Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) on May 13, 2016. The Final EIS identifies impacts and provides information on how to avoid, minimize and mitigate these impacts. The Final EIS is the result of the Metropolitan Council's Section 106 Memorandum of Agreement, and responds to comments received during the public review process.

The complete Southwest LRT Final EIS is available on this page as PDF documents. Copies of the Final EIS are also available for public review at the locations listed below.

CHAPTERS

Final EIS Chapters

The main body of the Southwest LRT Final Environmental Impact Statement consists of 10 chapters. The **Executive Summary [PDF]** presents an overview of the Southwest LRT Project and the environmental impacts evaluated in the Final EIS.

- SWLRT Final EIS Signature Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, Introduction, Acronyms PDF 750 kB
- SWLRT Final EIS Executive Summary PDF 848 kB
- SWLRT Final EIS Chapter 1: Purpose and Need PDF 3.9 MB
- SWLRT Final EIS Chapter 2: Alternatives Considered PDF 4.9 MB
- SWLRT Final EIS Chapter 3: Environmental Analysis PDF 20 MB
- SWLRT Final EIS Chapter 4: Transportation Analysis PDF 6.1 MB
- SWLRT Final EIS Chapter 5: Environmental Justice PDF 6.2 MB

SOUTHWEST LRT

STATIONS

- Stations
- SouthWest
- Golden Triangle
- City West
- Opus
- Shady Oak
- Downtown Hopkins
- Blake Road
- Louisiana Avenue
- Wooddale Avenue
- Beltline Boulevard
- West Lake Street

As currently proposed, the METRO Green Line Extension (Southwest LRT) will begin passenger service with 15 new stations. Construction of a sixteenth station at Town Center in Eden Prairie will be deferred, with foundations and underground infrastructure constructed to facilitate adding the station after the line is in service. At Target Field Station in downtown Minneapolis, the Southwest LRT line will connect to the METRO Green Line (Central Corridor LRT) and METRO Blue Line (Hiawatha LRT).

The Southwest LRT Project hosted a series of open houses in April 2015 to provide an opportunity for community residents to learn about station design and give feedback to project staff. Information on these open houses, and meeting materials, are listed below.

Station design and siting will be advanced during the Project Development phase and will be finalized during the Engineering phase.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The planned Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT) Project (METRO Green Line Extension) will operate from downtown Minneapolis through the communities of St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie, passing in close proximity to the city of Edina. The line will connect major activity centers in the region including downtown Minneapolis, Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, downtown Hopkins and the Opus/Golden Triangle employment area in Minnetonka and Eden Prairie. Ridership in 2040 is forecasted at approximately 34,000 average weekday boardings.

The project will interline with the METRO Green Line, which will provide a one-seat ride to destinations such as the University of Minnesota, state Capitol and downtown St. Paul. It will be part of an integrated system of transitways, including connections to the METRO Blue Line, the proposed METRO Blue Line Extension, the Northstar Commuter Rail line, a variety of major bus routes along the alignment, and proposed future transitway and rail lines. The Metropolitan Council will be the grantee of federal funds. The regional government agency is charged with building the line in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

The Southwest Corridor Management Committee, which includes commissioners from Hennepin County and the mayors of Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie, provides advice and oversight. Funding is provided by the Federal Transit Administration, Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), state of Minnesota and Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) and other project partners. The Southwest LRT Project website is www.swlrt.org.

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