



Tracking the Blue Line Extension

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www.BlueLineExt.org

Metropolitan Council approves refined 11-station scope and \$1.496 billion cost estimate for Blue Line Extension project

Metropolitan Council members in early December approved a project scope with 11 stations and a \$1.496 billion cost estimate for the planned METRO Blue Line Extension.

The updated project scope includes necessary infrastructure adjustments, focused on addressing safety concerns, as well as potential traffic and floodplain impacts for the 13-mile line, which promises to connect thousands of residents in the corridor with jobs.



Above: The revised project scope includes a park-and-ride at the Golden Valley Road Station.

The project's Corridor Management Committee approved the \$1.496 billion updated cost estimate on Nov. 12. The elected officials and public representatives on the committee recommended including a park-and-ride at Golden Valley Road Station, reconstructing the intersection of Golden Valley Road and Theodore Wirth Parkway and improving trail connections to the station.

The project updates and cost estimates are based on a 15 percent level of detail, which is a standard engineering prac-

Next step for Blue Line Extension is local approval of line's physical design

In mid-December, staff will submit municipal consent plans for the planned Blue Line Extension LRT for review and approval by Hennepin County and the corridor cities of Minneapolis, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park.

Plans will be available for public view in the Blue Line Extension Project Office on the second floor of the Crystal Gallery Shopping Center at 5514 West Broadway Ave. in Crystal as well as libraries on the corridor and on the project's website, www.bluelineext.org.

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...tice for estimating and revising the cost of large public works projects. The updated cost estimate also adds two years of inflation at a 3 percent escalation factor per year, due to the more accurate timeline for construction of the project. The previous cost estimate and scope developed by the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority in 2012 was based off very early and limited information available at just 1 percent of engineering work. At this point, project partners have not committed funding for construction of the line.

When completed, the expanded METRO Blue Line will offer a one-seat ride from the Target Northern Campus in Brooklyn Park to the Mall of America in Bloomington, with stops throughout Minneapolis and at the VA and MSP International Airport. With its cross-metro reach, the Blue Line Extension will assist residents from Minneapolis and the northwest communities in getting to work and school. About half of the corridor's residents are people of color, and the project area communities are some of the region's most rapidly diversifying areas.

The map on the next page shows route and proposed stations for the Blue Line Extension.

Cost estimate in line with peer projects around the country

The updated cost estimate of \$1.496 billion for the 13-mile, 11-station Blue Line Extension is at the low end of peer projects around the country.

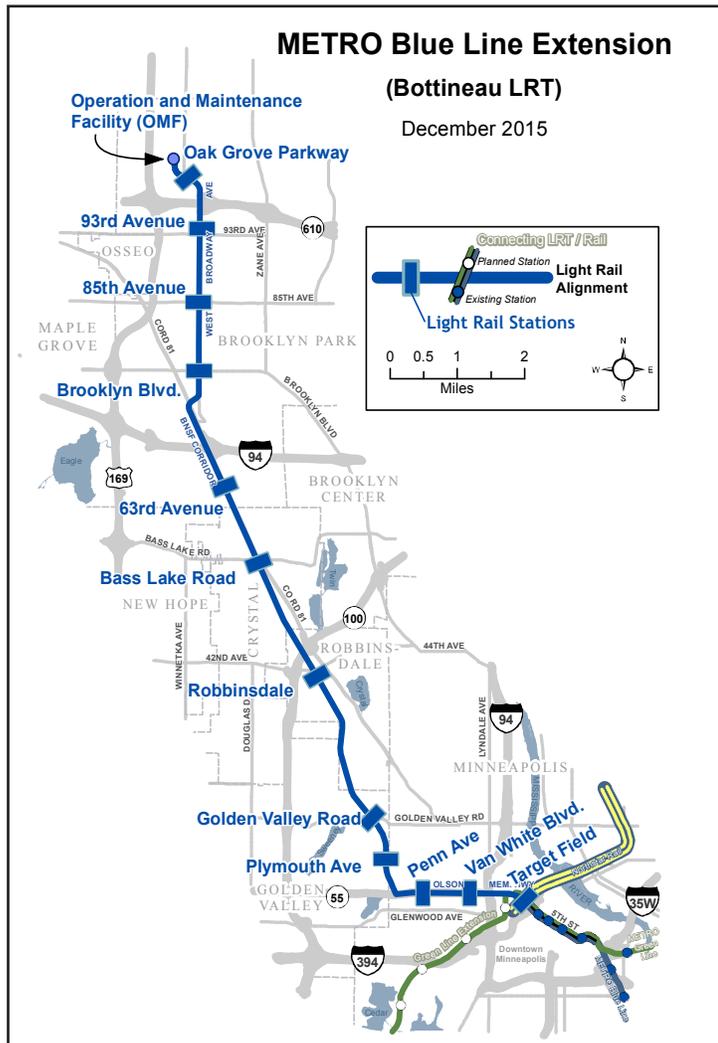
The 7.3-mile, 10-station Milwaukie LRT Project in Portland, Ore., has a \$1.49 billion budget after receiving its Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA), the federal government's contract to pay half of the capital costs.

Houston's 11.3-mile, 19-station University Corridor LRT Project, which is in the Engineering phase, has a \$1.563 billion cost estimate.

San Diego's 10.9-mile, nine-station Mid Coast Corridor LRT Project, which is also in the Project Development phase like Blue Line Extension, has a \$2.112 billion cost estimate.

Projects have cost estimates until receiving an FFGA, which is when their budgets are set.

The cost estimate for the revised project scope is based on a review of the \$1 billion cost estimate included in the project's Draft EIS in light of additional engineering and environmental work. For more about this process, see page 4.



Above: The revised project scope includes 11 stations. Cities along the proposed route will review detailed plans during the municipal consent process.

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A guide to reading the plans will be produced and available on the website, and outreach staff will be available by appointment to help understand the documents, which are engineering blueprints for the line. To contact them, see: <http://bit.ly/1S9tQo>.

A Minnesota state law (473.3994) requires municipal consent, which means local approval of an LRT system's physical design components including tracks, bridges, stations, roads and support structures.

The municipal consent process allows for public input on the preliminary design plans. Input from the public can come at the public hearings that each city and Hennepin County will hold, by email, online submissions or written comments. For each city, comments from the public should focus on the physical design of the LRT alignment within the municipal boundaries.

On Jan. 19, 2016, the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority will hold a joint public hearing at 6 p.m. at Hennepin County's Minneapolis Central Library at 300 Nicollet Mall, in Minneapolis. The meeting will follow a public open house beginning at 5 p.m.

By early March 2016, the five corridor cities and the county would need to act on plans for their jurisdictions. Each city and the county will announce the dates, times and locations of their municipal consent meetings on their websites.

Then, in August 2016, staff will finalize 30 percent design plans and specifications and apply with the Federal Transit Administration to enter the Engineering phase of the project.

Necessary infrastructure includes more bridges, retaining walls, additional station

Within the updated scope, project staff now recommend eight additional bridges for a total of 14 (eight LRT, five roadway and one pedestrian), more retaining walls, full reconstruction instead of partial reconstruction of Highway 55, an additional 11th station (Plymouth Avenue), freight rail requirements and soil mitigation.

Also recommended are two additional light rail vehicles and a park-and-ride at Bass Lake Road Station in Crystal.

These adjustments are based on engineering work and environmental studies over the past year by project staff; project advisory committees made up of community and business representatives; county and city public works; planning and community development staff; and elected officials.

Scope changes in each city include:

Minneapolis: The Blue Line Extension's route down Highway 55 will also include the reconstruction of the highway, along with pedestrian improvements. The project office is working closely with the city of Minneapolis and MnDOT on the design of these new elements.

Golden Valley: The Plymouth Avenue Station, including a structure for an elevator and stairs, is now part of the design. There are also notable changes at the Golden Valley Road Station. Those include a park-and-ride facility, reconstruction of the intersection of Golden Valley Road and Theodore Wirth Parkway, and improved trail connections.

Robbinsdale: New LRT bridge structures are needed to cross Grimes Pond and Golden Valley Pond; those have been added since the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). In downtown Robbinsdale, a park-and-ride facility is planned, and the location and design of the ramp will accommodate transit-oriented development.

Crystal: A park-and-ride surface lot is now in the design at the Bass Lake Road Station.

Brooklyn Park: New elements since the Draft EIS include an LRT bridge crossing over Bottineau Boulevard at 73rd Avenue North. Also, a pedestrian bridge across freight rail at the 63rd Avenue Station is planned, and improvements at the Brooklyn Boulevard Station area are being coordinated with Hennepin County. Near the operations and maintenance



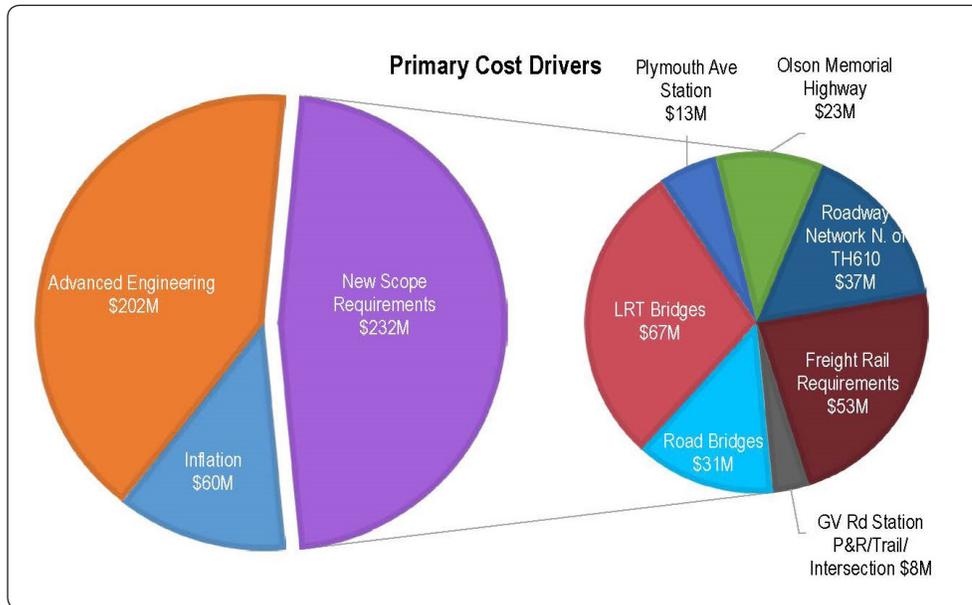
Intersection of Highway 55 and North Seventh Street looking east toward downtown Minneapolis. Blue Line Extension LRT trains would operate in the middle of Hwy. 55.



Looking west toward Golden Valley, Blue Line Extension LRT trains would operate in the middle of Highway 55 until reaching BNSF Railway right-of-way where the LRT trains would descend to operate on the east side of the freight tracks for eight miles.

facility, which is the line's northern terminus, the road network in that area will also be built or rebuilt to provide a smooth traffic flow.

Advanced engineering, new requirements, inflation drive revised cost estimate



The primary cost drivers for the revised project cost estimate include advanced engineering, new scope requirements and inflation. "New scope requirements" include necessary adjustments to address safety, traffic, floodplain impacts and project partner requirements. "Advanced engineering" reflects adjustments made due to environmental investigations, engineering studies and 15 percent level of design. The revised cost estimate also adds two years of "Inflation" at a 3 percent escalation factor per year, due to the updated timeline for construction.

Additionally, new work at Golden Valley Road station is now included in the total. A park-and-ride lot, reconstruction of the intersection of the Golden Valley Road and Theodore Wirth Parkway intersection, and trail connections, are estimated to cost \$8 million.

Next steps

Future project scope updates and cost estimates will be done at the 30 percent, 60 percent and 100 percent

phases, and that information will be shared with the Federal Transit Administration, project partners and public.

Project costs to be split nearly 50-50 with federal government

Current plans are for 49 percent of the project's budget to come from the Federal Transit Administration, 31 percent from the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), 10 percent from Hennepin County and 10 percent from the state. Counties Transit Improvement Board has committed \$27.6 million and Hennepin \$17.4 million for Project Development, while the state has provided \$1 million for Project Development in 2014. However, none of the three has committed any funding for Engineering or construction.

The Council, along with the state's Department of Transportation, transit advocates and businesses plans to pursue a dedicated funding source for transit at the Legislature in the 2016 session.

How recommendations, cost estimate developed from county rail authority

The Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority was the lead local agency from 2007-2014. The railroad authority, in partnership with the Metropolitan Council, local governments and community organizations analyzed several routes and transit modes before selecting LRT and a route that received resolutions of support from all city councils and Hennepin County.

The Federal Transit Administration granted the project, previously known as the Bottineau LRT Project, entry into its New Starts program in 2014. This made the Metropolitan Council the primary local project sponsor and allowed it to advance the project development work. The Blue Line Extension plans to advance to the next New Starts phase, Engineering, in late 2016.

Metropolitan Council staff reviewed what the Draft Environmental Impact Statement's \$1 billion cost estimate included and advised the Counties Transit Improvement Board, Hennepin County and corridor cities this year on items not included in that early estimate. They then established a process and schedule for updating the cost estimate and shared that with these project partners and the public in summer 2015.



Mapping firm's reach expands due to Southwest, Blue Line Extension LRT work

Pointmap was an established mapping firm with a solid reputation for work on environmental projects when one of its engineering firm clients urged founder and owner Peggy Johnson to become certified as a Minnesota Disadvantaged Business Enterprise.



Peggy Johnson, founder and owner of Pointmap.

While Johnson did become certified in 2007, she didn't do much marketing around the DBE program, because she was concerned it would send the wrong message.

"I want you to hire my company because we do good work," Johnson said she told her company's clients.

But Johnson did notice that the DBE program expanded Pointmap's reach. A few years ago, when bids went out for environmental testing for the Southwest Light Rail Transit project, eight or nine companies contacted Pointmap to inquire about hiring the firm as a subcontractor.

That type of response convinced Johnson the program has value for a small company, even though she's not a fan of the word "disadvantaged." She wants Pointmap to get hired for the same reasons it has over the years – its high-quality work and her four-person staff's commitment to clients.

Pointmap does computer-aided design (CAD) and moved into geographic information system (GIS) work as well in the late 1990s. Johnson and her employees don't go out in the field. Instead, they use mapping resources online and information from contractors.

"We start out with many different maps, sometimes it's a survey map," she said. Aerial and topographic maps are a common starting point. States, cities and counties often have

historical documents and aerial photos available as well. The maps may show historical industrial sites where hazardous materials may have been used or show locations of on-site testing and whether hazardous materials were found.

From St. Paul Technical College to business owner

After earning a civil tech degree from St. Paul Technical College in 1982 and working on survey crews for the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the city of Roseville, she struck out on her own in 1993 and started Pointmap. Some of Pointmap's clients have GIS mapping or drafting opera-

tions in-house, but they hire Pointmap to free up staff time or to meet a tight deadline.

The firm has worked on long-running environmental projects around the country, such as Superfund sites, brownfield projects and bulk-storage facilities. Pointmap has also provided CAD and GIS for several high-profile projects in Minnesota, including the Twin Cities Army Ammunition Plant site in Arden Hills and the Port Authority's Beacon Bluff site in St. Paul. Working closely with American Engineering Testing Inc. of St. Paul, they have provided maps and figures for Target Field and the Interchange transit project in downtown Minneapolis.

Part of the Southwest, Blue Line Extension LRT project teams

On the Southwest LRT Project, Pointmap is working for SEH Inc., a St. Paul-based engineering firm. Pointmap's work was tied to early environmental testing on the Southwest LRT Project, which involves historical mapping of parcels along the proposed line that stretches west from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie.

Pointmap is also a subcontractor for Braun Intertec Corp., which is doing environmental testing on the Blue Line LRT Extension project.

About the DBE program

Requirements for participating in the DBE program include limits on personal net worth (less than \$1.32 million), and participating companies need to meet Small Business Administration size standards as measured by annual gross receipts. Those standards vary by indus-

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try. Also, ownership must be at least 51 percent minority or female.

For the Green Line Extension LRT Project's advanced design contract and for the Blue Line Extension engineering contract, the DBE goal is 19 percent.

It's worthwhile for businesses in the DBE program to pay attention to state projects and DBE hiring efforts, Johnson said. There are classes on the DBE program offered through state agencies, such as MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council, that are valuable, Johnson added. "People there go out of their way to be helpful."

More information about the DBE program is available on the Council's website at metro council.org/DBE.

Andrew Larson, who works with the DBE program, can be reached at 612-373-3896.

The Metropolitan Council's website offers in-depth information about the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program at metro council.org/DBE.

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 proposed 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 and Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA).

Blue Line Extension Project Office

5514 West Broadway Avenue, Suite 200

Crystal, MN 55428

PHONE: 612.373.5301

WEB: www.BlueLineExt.org

EMAIL: BlueLineExt@metrotransit.org

TWITTER: twitter.com/BlueLineExt