11.0 EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

This chapter summarizes the evaluation of the No Build and Build Alternatives considered for the Southwest Transitway based on the information contained in the previous chapters. These alternatives are described in detail in Chapter 2, Alternatives Considered. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and compare the benefits, costs, and environmental consequences of each alternative with the project's goals and objectives as presented in Chapter 1 to inform the decision makers of the environmentally preferred alternative.

11.1 Evaluation Relative to Project Goals and Objectives

The evaluation of alternatives considers the extent to which each alternative would satisfy the purpose and need for the proposed transportation improvement (Section 1.3). The No Build and Build Alternatives (Section 2.3) are evaluated in this Draft EIS.

The evaluation criteria used to compare the alternatives reflect the project's purpose and need and the project's goals and objectives (Section 1.4). They include the desire to improve mobility within the corridor and to connect **major activity centers** and destinations through improved transit service in the corridor. A major objective is to increase transit ridership by providing a cost effective and efficient travel option. Because the implementation of the Southwest Transitway project requires financial partnership with the federal government, the project must be cost-effective and achievable as defined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The Southwest Transitway would be developed to avoid as much disruption as possible to neighborhoods, commercial districts, and historic areas in the corridor. In accordance with many local plans, another objective of the Southwest Transitway project is to support public and private economic development while preserving the quality of life in the study area and the region by providing a permanent transit investment in the corridor. Finally, the project should support an economically competitive freight rail system for the metropolitan area and the State of Minnesota.

A "major activity center" is a place of significant employment, retail, or entertainment activity.

Table 11.1-1 presents a summary of the differences in performance and effects—based on conceptual engineering—relative to the project goals for the No Build, Enhanced Bus, and Build Alternatives. This evaluation framework supports the decision making process for Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority (HCRRA), the Metropolitan Council, and FTA, as it is expected that federal funding would be sought when the final preferred alternative is selected for implementation.

Table 11.1-1. Alternative Performance Summary^

Goal and Evaluation Measure	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)#	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Goal 1: Improve Mobility							
Number of transit trips using the project (daily boardings)	N/A	13,000	24,850	28,700	28,700	24,550	28,850
User benefits in hours of travel time savings	N/A	2,492 (compared to No Build)	4,995 (compared to Enhanced Bus)	6,726 (compared to Enhanced Bus)	6,726 (compared to Enhanced Bus)	5,657 (compared to Enhanced Bus)	6,654 (compared to Enhanced Bus)
Traffic Impacts							
Number of Intersections in 2030 at LOS E/F (AM/PM)	0/1	0/1	0/1	2/5	2/5	2/5	2/6
Maximum queue lengths (in vehicles) at freight rail at-grade crossings	20	20	78	78	179	78	78
Goal 2: Provide a cost-effective, efficient travel option							
Total System Cost per Passenger Mile (2012 dollars)	N/A	N/A	$211.34	$210.94	$210.94	$213.02	$211.90
End to End Travel Times (minutes)	N/A	50/35*	26.0	31.5	31.5	39.5	40.8

Goal and Evaluation Measure	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)#	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Goal 3: Protect the environment							
Cultural Resources							
Architecture/ History individual properties	None	None	16	16	14	26	23–26
Architecture/ History historic districts	None	None	7	7	7	6	8-11
Archeological survey areas	0	0	29	44	41	36	37
Parklands (long-term in acres)	0	0	0.002 long-term	0.227 long-term	1.12 long-term	0.32 long-term	0.32 long-term
Section 4(f)							
Properties potentially used permanently (acres)	0	0	1 property, and 1 historic channel (0.002) (*de minimus*)	1 property and 1 historic channel (0.227) (*de minimus*)	4 properties (including 0.81 acres of Cedar Lake Park) and 1 historic channel (1.120)	3 properties, 3 historic bridges, 1 district, and 1 historic channel (0.320) (*de minimus*)	3 properties, 3 historic bridges, 1 district, and 1 historic channel (0.320) (*de minimus*)
Properties potentially impacted temporarily†	0	0	0.076 acre parkland	0.016 acre parkland	0.016 acre parkland	0.45 acre parkland	0.45 acre parkland
Water Resources							
Wetlands impact (acres)	N/A	N/A	Approx. 2.80	Approx. 2.90	Approx. 0.90	Approx. 2.30	Approx. 2.30
Floodplain impact (acres)	N/A	N/A	Approx. 3.83	Approx. 3.19	Approx. 1.19	Approx. 3.19	Approx. 3.19

Goal and Evaluation Measure	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)#	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Biota and Habitat Native habitat impact (acres)	N/A	N/A	1.13	0.95	1.05	0.94	0.94
Air Quality impact	Higher emissions due to increased traffic congestion	Higher emissions due to increased traffic congestion	Modest improvements to air quality	Modest improvements to air quality	Modest improvements to air quality	Modest improvements to air quality	Modest improvements to air quality
Noise – Number of parcels with potential severe residential impacts (with use of quiet zones for the FRR Segment)	N/A	N/A	358	201	267	262	302
Potential Vibration impacts (Units)	N/A	N/A	258 (370)	151 (492)	150 (491)	105 (584)	106 (585)
Hazardous/ Regulated Materials (number of sites)	N/A	N/A	116	115	98	161	195
Construction Impacts	N/A	N/A	Medium	Medium	High	High	High

Goal and Evaluation Measure	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)#	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Goal 4: Preserve and protect the quality of life in the study area and the region							
Community Cohesion	None	No impact	No impact	No impact	Slight adverse impact	Slight adverse impact	Slight adverse impact
Property Acquisitions Full and partial parcels	0	0	65	125	175	384	364 to 384
Environmental Justice	No change to existing conditions.	Minority, low income, and transit dependent populations would experience marginal service improvements.	Minority, low income, and transit dependent populations would be served, no disproportionately adverse effects anticipated.	Minority, low income, and transit dependent populations would be served, no disproportionately adverse effects anticipated.	Minority, low income, and transit dependent populations would be served, no disproportionately adverse effects anticipated.	Minority, low income, and transit dependent populations would be served. Disproportionately high and adverse effects are anticipated associated with: Acquisitions and displacements Community Cohesion Construction Effects Traffic	Minority, low income, and transit dependent populations would be served. Disproportionately high and adverse effects are anticipated associated with: Acquisitions and displacements Community Cohesion Construction Effects Traffic

Goal and Evaluation Measure	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)#	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Goal 5: Support economic development							
Land Use Consistent with Comprehensive Plans	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Compatible with planned development	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Economic Effects	None	No substantial change	Beneficial effects	Beneficial effects	Beneficial effects may be diminished at stations where freight operations continue	Beneficial effects	Beneficial effects
Development Effects	Existing development trends would continue	Existing development trends would continue	Localized development surrounding alignment and station areas	Localized development surrounding alignment and station areas	Localized development may be diminished at stations where freight operations continue	Localized development surrounding alignment and station areas	Localized development surrounding alignment and station areas

Goal and Evaluation Measure	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)#	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Goal 6: Support economically competitive freight rail system							
Safe, efficient, and effective movement of freight throughout the region, state and nation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Continuous flow of freight rail throughout the study area	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Source: HDR Engineering, Inc., 2012

^The freight rail relocation effects are included in this table for LRT 1A, LRT 3A (LPA), LRT 3C-1, and LRT 3C-2 because the freight rail relocation is a part of each of these Build Alternatives.

#Please see Section 2.1.2.1 of this Draft EIS for why LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative) is included in this Draft EIS.

†Temporary impacts have not been calculated for the Segment FRR or Segment A for the co-location alternative. These impacts will be determined during Preliminary Engineering and reported in the Final EIS.

11.2 Summary of Alternatives

Table 11.2-1 presents a summary of the evaluation of the No Build, Enhanced Bus, and Build Alternatives for the Southwest Transitway project. Each alternative was evaluated against the project's goals that were derived from the project's Purpose and Need Statement.

11.2.1 No Build Alternative

Although the No Build Alternative would avoid potential disruption to neighborhoods, commercial districts, and historic areas in the corridor, the No Build Alternative would not adequately support the goals and objectives of the Southwest Transitway. The No Build Alternative would maintain the existing conditions and future changes as outlined in future transportation system plans with the exception of the Southwest Transitway project, and the development trends as outlined in the land use plans in the Southwest Transitway study area. The No Build Alternative would be inconsistent with local and regional comprehensive plans. It would not improve mobility, provide a cost-effective efficient travel option, or support economic development and an economically competitive freight rail system. Therefore, the No Build Alternative is not recommended as the preferred alternative for the Southwest Transitway project.

11.2.2 Enhanced Bus Alternative

Like the No Build Alternative, the Enhanced Bus Alternative would also avoid potential disruption to neighborhoods, commercial districts, and historic areas in the corridor. By definition, the Enhanced Bus Alternative is a low capital cost alternative that provides the best transit service to the corridor without a major capital investment. The Enhanced Bus Alternative would not adequately support the goals and objectives of the Southwest Transitway. The Enhanced Bus Alternative would only marginally improve the existing conditions. Again, the Enhanced Bus Alternative would be inconsistent with local and regional comprehensive plans. It would only marginally improve mobility, and it would not provide an efficient travel option, or support economic development and an economically competitive freight rail system. Therefore, the Enhanced Bus Alternative is not recommended as the preferred alternative for the Southwest Transitway project.

Table 11.2-1. Evaluation of Alternatives

	No Build	Enhanced Bus	LRT 1A	LRT 3A (LPA)	LRT 3A-1 (Co-location)	LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)	LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)
Goal 1: Improve Mobility							
	●	●	◎	○	◎	◎	○
Goal 2: Provide a cost-effective, efficient travel option							
	●	◎	○	○	○	●	●
Goal 3: Protect the environment							
	○	○	◎	◎	●	●	●
Goal 4: Preserve and protect the quality of life in the study area and the region							
	◎	●	○	○	●	●	●
Goal 5: Support economic development							
	●	●	◎	○	◎	◎	◎
Goal 6: Support economically competitive freight rail system							
	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
Overall Performance							
	●	●	◎	○	●	●	●

● does not support goal ◎ somewhat supports goal ○ supports goal

11.2.3 LRT 3A (LPA)

LRT 3A (LPA) best meets the Southwest Transitway project's Purpose and Need Statement as expressed by the goals of improving mobility, providing a cost-effective and efficient travel option, preserving the environment, protecting quality of life, supporting economic development, and developing and maintaining a balanced and economically competitive multimodal freight system. In addition, LRT 3A (LPA) minimizes construction-related impacts.

The implementation of LRT 3A (LPA) would introduce new elements to the Southwest Transitway study area resulting in environmental impacts as presented in this Draft EIS. These changes, however, would result in benefits that could not be achieved without the associated impacts to the environment in comparison to the No Build and Enhanced Bus Alternatives. Specific effects associated with the freight rail relocation portion of the Southwest Transitway project are included in Table 11.1-1and apply not only to LRT 3A (LPA) but also to LRT 1A, LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall) and LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street). These effects include:

- A slight increase in freight rail traffic along the MN&S Spur resulting in sporadic traffic queues at roadway and freight rail track at-grade crossings.
- A slight increase in freight rail traffic along the MN&S Spur resulting in noise impacts of which all severe noise impacts would be mitigated through the institution of a Quiet Zone.
- Potential for additional water resource impacts along the MN&S Spur and the BNSF Wayzata Subdivision.
- Potential to encounter more hazardous and regulated materials sites along the MN&S Spur and the BNSF Wayzata Subdivision.

The overall benefits derived from LRT 3A (LPA)—including increased transit ridership and enhanced mobility—outweigh the potential adverse environmental impacts. Specifically, the LRT 3A (LPA) will:

- Improve access and mobility to the jobs and activity centers in the Minneapolis central business district (CBD), as well as along the length of the corridor for reverse-commute trips to the expanding suburban employment centers.
- Provide a competitive, cost-effective travel option that will attract choice riders to the transit system. The competitive travel time for LRT 3A (LPA) is attributed to the diagonal nature of the line compared to the north-south/east-west orientation of the roadway network and to the increasing levels of congestion of the roadway network.
- Provide a travel option that contributes to the quality of life and economic health of the study area and region, enhances access to public service and recreational facilities, and ensures fair distribution of benefits and adverse effects of the project for the region, communities, and neighborhoods adjacent to the project area.
- Provide a travel option that supports economic development and redevelopment with improved access to transit stations, local sustainable development/redevelopment goals, facilitates more efficient land development patterns and saves infrastructure costs, and accommodates future regional growth in locations consistent with local plans and the potential for increased transit ridership.

- Provide a direct connection between CP Bass Lake Spur and the MN&S Spur which represent an improvement to the freight rail network. The direct connection improves the efficiency by providing an alternative to the Skunk Hollow switching wye and provides for two route options for TCW to access St Paul, one via the Wayzata Subdivision and the other via CP's Humboldt Yard.

Therefore, LRT 3A (LPA) is recommended as the environmentally preferred alternative for the Southwest Transitway project.

11.2.4 LRT 1A

Like the other Build Alternatives, the implementation of LRT 1A would introduce new elements to the Southwest Transitway study area resulting in environmental impacts as presented in this Draft EIS. These changes, however, would result in benefits that could not be achieved without the associated impacts to the environment in comparison to the No Build and Enhanced Bus Alternatives.

LRT 1A provides TC&W a safe, efficient and economical connection to St. Paul thereby preserving an efficient freight transportation system for the Twin Cities area.

The evaluation of the alternatives shows LRT 1A is a viable alternative that is second only to LRT 3A (LPA). Although LRT 1A satisfies the Purpose and Need Statement of the Southwest Transitway, its anticipated ability to support the improved mobility and economic development goals is inferior to LRT 3A (LPA). LRT 1A has the lowest travel time and the lowest capital cost of the Build Alternatives. However, the projected ridership for LRT1A is one of the lowest of the Build Alternatives causing LRT 1A to not be a cost effective alternative. Contributing to its low ridership is its lack of compatibility with the study area's comprehensive plans. LRT 1A travels through lower density developments that are not intended to become denser over time as outlined in approved comprehensive plans. Therefore, LRT 1A is not recommended as the environmentally preferred alternative for the Southwest Transitway project.

11.2.5 LRT 3A-1 (Co-location Alternative)

As stated in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2.1, this alternative was introduced at the request of the City of St. Louis Park. FTA, in response to the public comments received, requested the Metropolitan Council and HCRRA to include a discussion of an alternative that co-locates freight rail and LRT operations in the Kenilworth Corridor in the Draft EIS, in considering the "full range of alternatives" under NEPA (23 CFR 771.111(f)).

Like the other Build Alternatives, the implementation of LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative) would introduce new elements to the Southwest Transitway study area resulting in environmental impacts as presented in this Draft EIS. These changes, however, would result in benefits that could not be achieved without the associated impacts to the environment in comparison to the No Build and Enhanced Bus Alternatives. However the benefits derived from LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative)— including increased transit ridership in a cost effective manner— do not outweigh the potential adverse environmental impacts. Specifically, the LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative) partially meets the Southwest Transitway project's Purpose and Need Statement by:

- Providing a cost-effective and efficient travel option thereby increasing transit ridership. However, lengthy traffic queues at several at-grade intersections of roadways and the freight rail tracks somewhat off set the benefits of increase transit ridership.
- Providing a travel option that supports economic development and redevelopment with improved access to transit stations. However the beneficial effects and localized development may be diminished at stations where freight operations continue.

The potential adverse environmental impacts associated with LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative) cause this alternative to fail to rise to the environmentally preferred alternative They include:

- The necessity to acquire Cedar Lake Park property owned by the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board would cause a Section 4(f) impact.
- Failure to provide a direct connection between the CP Bass Lake Spur and the CP MN&S requiring freight trains to navigate the cumbersome and noisy Skunk Hollow switching wye to complete this maneuver.
- High construction related impacts because of the complex construction staging required to rebuild the freight rail tracks.
- Economic development and the potential for transit oriented development will be diminished because of the close proximity of freight rail operations to station locations.
- Pedestrian safety at the Wooddale, Beltline, and 21st Street LRT Stations would be affected by the need to cross the freight rail tract between the LRT stations and park and ride facilities.
- The economic impact of acquiring over 60 units of primarily high quality, high income multi-family housing by the West Lake Street station makes this alternative inconsistent with state, regional, and local policies and adopted plans.
- Retention of freight rail operations in the Kenilworth Corridor will continue to divide neighborhoods while its removal will allow the Southwest Transitway project to bring the areas together and improve community cohesion.

The use of park property is significant. Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966, codified at 49 U.S.C. § 303 and 23 U.S.C. § 138 prohibits the Secretary of Transportation from approving a project that requires the use of publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, state, or local significance, or land of an historic site of national, state, or local significance (as determined by the federal, state, or local officials having jurisdiction over the resource), unless the agency can demonstrate that:

- There is no feasible and prudent alternative to the use of the land; and
- The action includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the property resulting from such use.

The acquisition of 0.81 acres of Cedar Lake Park needed to co-locate the freight rail tracks that is associated with LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative) would constitute a Section 4(f) use. Because this Draft EIS has presented other feasible and prudent alternatives to LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative), this alternative cannot be recommended as the environmentally preferred alternative.

As evident in the previous chapters of this Draft EIS, LRT 3A-1 (co-location alternative) does not meet the project's purpose and need and is not a practicable alternative due to the environmental impacts associated with the development of this alternative. Therefore, the LRT 3A-1 (co-location) alternative is not recommended as the environmentally preferred alternative.

11.2.6 LRT 3C-1(Nicollet Mall)

Like the other Build Alternatives, the implementation of LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall) would introduce new elements to the Southwest Transitway study area resulting in environmental impacts as presented in this Draft EIS. These changes, however, would result in benefits that could not be achieved without the associated impacts to the environment in comparison to the No Build and Enhanced Bus Alternatives. However the benefits derived from LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall)—including increased transit ridership, supporting economic development, and supporting an economically competitive freight rail system— do not outweigh the potential adverse environmental impacts. Specifically, LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall) partially meets the Southwest Transitway project's Purpose and Need Statement by:

- Providing of a travel option that supports economic development and redevelopment with improved access to transit stations.
- Provide a direct connection between CP Bass Lake Spur and the MN&S Spur which represent an improvement to the freight rail network. The direct connection improves the efficiency by providing an alternative to the Skunk Hollow switching wye and provides for two route options for TCW to access St Paul, one via the Wayzata Subdivision and the other via CP's Humboldt Yard.

The potential adverse environmental impacts associated with LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall) cause this alternative to fail to rise to the environmentally preferred alternative They include:

- LRT 3C-1 (Nicollet Mall) has the second highest capital cost with lowest ridership which makes this alternative less cost effective.
- This alternative is not compatible with approved comprehensive plans including the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Policy Plan and Minneapolis' Access Minneapolis Plan because of potential disruptions to regional roadway such as Nicollet Mall and impacts to pedestrian facilities.
- This alternative has high construction related impacts because of the extensive in-street and tunnel construction.
- Disproportionately high and adverse effects on low income and minority populations are anticipated associated with:
  - Acquisitions and displacements (255 parcels from environmental justice Census block groups versus 127 parcels from non- environmental justice Census block groups)
  - Community Cohesion (impacts on environmental justice populations resulting from a separation in the seamless trail network along the Midtown Greenway)
  - Construction Effects (disruptions associated with the construction of a cut-and-cover tunnel in environmental justice areas)
  - Traffic (intersection in environmental justice area degrades from level of service "A" to "E")

11.2.7 LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)

Like the other Build Alternatives, the implementation of LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street) would introduce new elements to the Southwest Transitway study area resulting in environmental impacts as presented in this Draft EIS. These changes, however, would result in benefits that could not be achieved without the associated impacts to the environment in comparison to the No Build and Enhanced Bus Alternatives. However the benefits derived from LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street)—including increased transit ridership, supporting economic development, and supporting an economically competitive freight rail system— do not outweigh the potential adverse environmental impacts. Specifically, LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street) partially meets the Southwest Transitway project's Purpose and Need Statement by:

- Providing of a travel option that supports economic development and redevelopment with improved access to transit stations.
- Providing a direct connection between CP Bass Lake Spur and the MN&S Spur which represent an improvement to the freight rail network. The direct connection improves the efficiency by providing an alternative to the Skunk Hollow switching wye and provides for two route options for TCW to access St Paul, one via the Wayzata Subdivision and the other via CP's Humboldt Yard.

The potential adverse environmental impacts associated with LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street) cause this alternative to fail to rise to the environmentally preferred alternative They include:

- LRT 3C-2 (11th/12th Street) has the highest capital cost with ridership just slightly higher than LRT 3A (LPA) making this alternative less cost effective than the LPA.
- This alternative is not compatible with approved comprehensive plans including the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Policy Plan and Minneapolis' Access Minneapolis Plan because of potential disruptions to regional roadway such as 11th and 12th Streets and impacts to pedestrian facilities.
- This alternative has high construction related impacts because of the extensive in-street and tunnel construction.
- Disproportionately high and adverse effects on low income and minority populations are anticipated associated with:
  - Acquisitions and displacements (241 parcels from environmental justice Census block groups versus 127 parcels from non- environmental justice Census block groups)
  - Community Cohesion (impacts on environmental justice populations resulting from a separation in the seamless trail network along the Midtown Greenway)
  - Construction Effects (disruptions associated with the construction of a cut-and-cover tunnel in environmental justice areas)
  - Traffic (intersection in environmental justice area degrades from level of service "A" to "E")

11.3 Environmentally Preferred Alternative

At the conclusion of the LPA selection process, the LRT 3A (LPA) alternative was determined to be cost competitive, easier to implement, and in best alignment with overall Metro area transit planning. Therefore, LRT 3A (LPA) was recommended for selection as the LPA because it best met the Southwest Transitway project's Purpose and Need Statement as expressed by the goals of improving mobility, providing a cost-effective and efficient travel option, preserving the environment, protecting quality of life, supporting economic development, and developing and maintaining a balanced and economically competitive multimodal freight system.

LRT 3A (LPA) will introduce a new, premium transit service in the Southwest Transitway study area. The most beneficial effects from building the Southwest Transitway improvements would be improved accessibility and travel times to regional activity centers. Because the LPA will be a permanent investment, this new transit service has the potential to positively influence economic development in the study area consistent with community plans. In addition, LRT 3A (LPA) improves the regional freight rail network consistent with the *Minnesota Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan* (State of Minnesota, 2010).

This Draft EIS has described the transportation and environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of the Southwest Transitway project. The effects of the No Build, Enhanced Bus, and Build Alternatives were evaluated and compared across a range of subject areas related to both natural and man-made environments. This evaluation did not reveal any substantive issues that would alter the LPA decision. LRT 3A (LPA)meets the purpose and need of the Southwest Transitway project as defined in Chapter 1 and shown in Table 11.2-1, and is recommended as the environmentally preferred alternative for the Southwest Transit project.

The environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that will cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources. The public and other agencies reviewing this Draft EIS can assist the lead agency to develop and determine environmentally preferable alternatives by providing their views in comments on this Draft EIS.

11.4 Next Steps

Copies of the Draft EIS will be distributed to appropriate local, regional, state, and Federal agencies as well as the public for their review and comment. Public comment will play a role in the preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). Throughout the planning and environmental process, local elected officials and the public have been and will continue to be kept apprised of project status through public, advisory committee and stakeholder meetings and individual briefings. Elected officials and the public will have the opportunity to provide input to the decision-making process as the next steps are addressed.

The major next steps that will be undertaken and addressed in the Final EIS include:

- Selection of an Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF) site.
- Completion of appropriate archeological surveying
- Determination of adverse effects to Section 106 properties
- Completion of Section 4(f) Analysis
- Completion of environmental site assessments