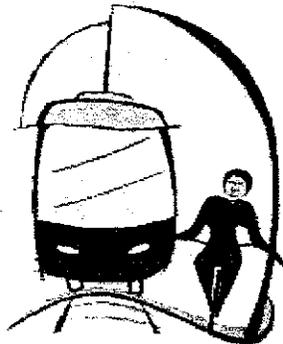


SOUTHWEST NEWS

Volume 5

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**Southwest Corridor
Rail Transit Study**

STUDY PARTNERS

Hennepin County
Regional Railroad
Authority

Eden Prairie

Minnetonka

Hopkins

St. Louis Park

Minneapolis

Metro Transit

Southwest Metro Transit

Metropolitan Council

Three Rivers Park District

Local Chambers of
Commerce

The Southwest Rail Transit Study was a joint effort of the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) and the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, and Minneapolis. The purpose of the Study was to determine if rail transit is a feasible part of the overall transportation solution for the Southwest Metro Area. In July 2003, the Study concluded with a recommendation to continue further study of light rail transit (LRT) alignments.

THE PROBLEM FACING THE REGION

The Region Has Strong Residential and Employment Growth = Increased Congestion

GROWTH

According to the US Census, this region added 430,000 new residents and 290,000 new jobs between 1990 and 2000, which equates to a 17% increase in population and a 23% increase in jobs. During this same period, cities in the Southwest Metro Area added 34,000 new residents and 37,000 new jobs.

By 2030, this region will add 635,000 more people, 320,000 more households and 312,000 more jobs. Cities in the Southwest Metro Area are expected to add another 63,000 residents and 79,000 jobs. In 2030, these cities will account for 25% of all regional employment and 17% of residents.

CONGESTION

At the same time that the region is growing, congestion is projected to worsen at a faster rate than in the past due to increases in the amount of travel per person. Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is expected to increase faster (+38%) than population growth (+28%) over the next 25 years.

The Texas Transportation Institute found that the Twin Cities' area is tied for second with Atlanta in the growth of congestion. Currently, 65% of freeway travel in the Twin Cities occurs under congested conditions.

THE CHALLENGE

This region must accommodate the projected growth while maintaining a competitive business environment and improving the region's quality of life.

According to Mn/DOT, due to financial, physical, environmental and social constraints, roadway expansion to solve congestion is severely limited. Plans developed by Mn/DOT and the Metropolitan Council to manage the region's transportation system include both roadway and transit improvements. A Southwest transitway was included along with improvements to area roadways such as Interstate 494 and Highways 100, 169, 62, and 212 in those regional transportation plans.

SOUTHWEST TRANSITWAY GOALS

- ➔ Improve mobility.
- ➔ Provide a reliable/competitive travel choice.
- ➔ Serve population and employment concentrations.
- ➔ Provide for a seamless, integrated transit system.
- ➔ Reasonable cost.
- ➔ Enhance the environment.
- ➔ Enhance the Study area & region's quality of life.
- ➔ Promote economic development and redevelopment.



STUDY PROCESS

The Study process included:

- Soliciting input from the public, elected officials and agencies.
- Evaluating rail transit technologies.
- Evaluating rail transit routes.
- Identifying potential social, economic and environmental impacts.
- Estimating ridership and costs.

A Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) guided the Study. The TAC provided technical input and prepared a technical recommendation based on Study findings. This TAC recommendation was submitted to the Southwest PAC, which provided policy oversight for the Study. The Southwest PAC was composed of elected officials or their representatives from Hennepin County, partner cities, agencies, and area businesses. The PAC concluded their work in July 2003 with a set of recommendations (see page 3) that were forwarded to the HCRRA.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A key component of the Southwest Rail Transit Study was to engage and involve the public.

- Thirteen community meetings were held to inform the public about the Study and to dialogue with them regarding rail transit.

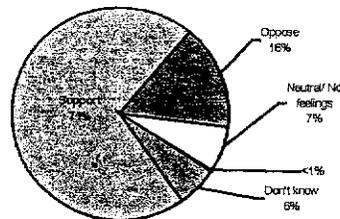


- Over 25 special meetings with neighborhood, community, and business groups were held.

- 8 news releases were produced, resulting in more than 50 articles in local newspapers.
- Five newsletters were mailed to interested persons.
- A web site was maintained with Study reports and meeting information.

A statistically valid survey conducted in October 2002 showed that about 70% of area residents support building LRT to serve the Southwest Metro Area.

Percent of Residents who Support or Oppose Light Rail in This Area



KEY STUDY FINDINGS

IMPROVE MOBILITY

- A Southwest rail transitway is estimated to carry between 16,500 and 19,500 trips per day, and to reduce travel hours by 90,000 to 330,000 hours per year.

COMPETITIVE TRAVEL CHOICE

- A Southwest rail transitway would provide afternoon rush hour travel times that are competitive with the private automobile. Travelers would also benefit from a travel choice not subject to delays caused by weather, congestion and accidents.

REASONABLE COST

- The cost to construct a Southwest rail transitway is estimated to range from \$431 to \$926 million in 2010 dollars.

- The annual cost to operate a Southwest rail transitway is estimated to range from \$7 to \$26 million.
- In terms of capital and operating costs, a Southwest rail transitway is in the mid-range when compared to operational LRT lines across the country.

TRAILS & RAILS CO-EXISTENCE

- Trails and rails co-exist in many places around the country, including the Southwest metro area.
- Existing right-of-way is wide enough for both trails (10 to 14 feet) and rails (30 to 35 feet).

PERFORMANCE

- When compared to operating LRT systems across the country, a Southwest rail transitway ranks in the middle in terms of cost-effectiveness, service efficiency and service effectiveness.

SERVICE TO POPULATION & EMPLOYMENT

- A Southwest rail transitway would serve over 31,000 households and over 200,000 jobs, which are currently located within a 1/2-mile radius of proposed stations.

THE ENVIRONMENT

- A Southwest rail transitway is projected to reduce carbon monoxide emissions by 72,000 to 180,000 tons annually.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/ REDEVELOPMENT

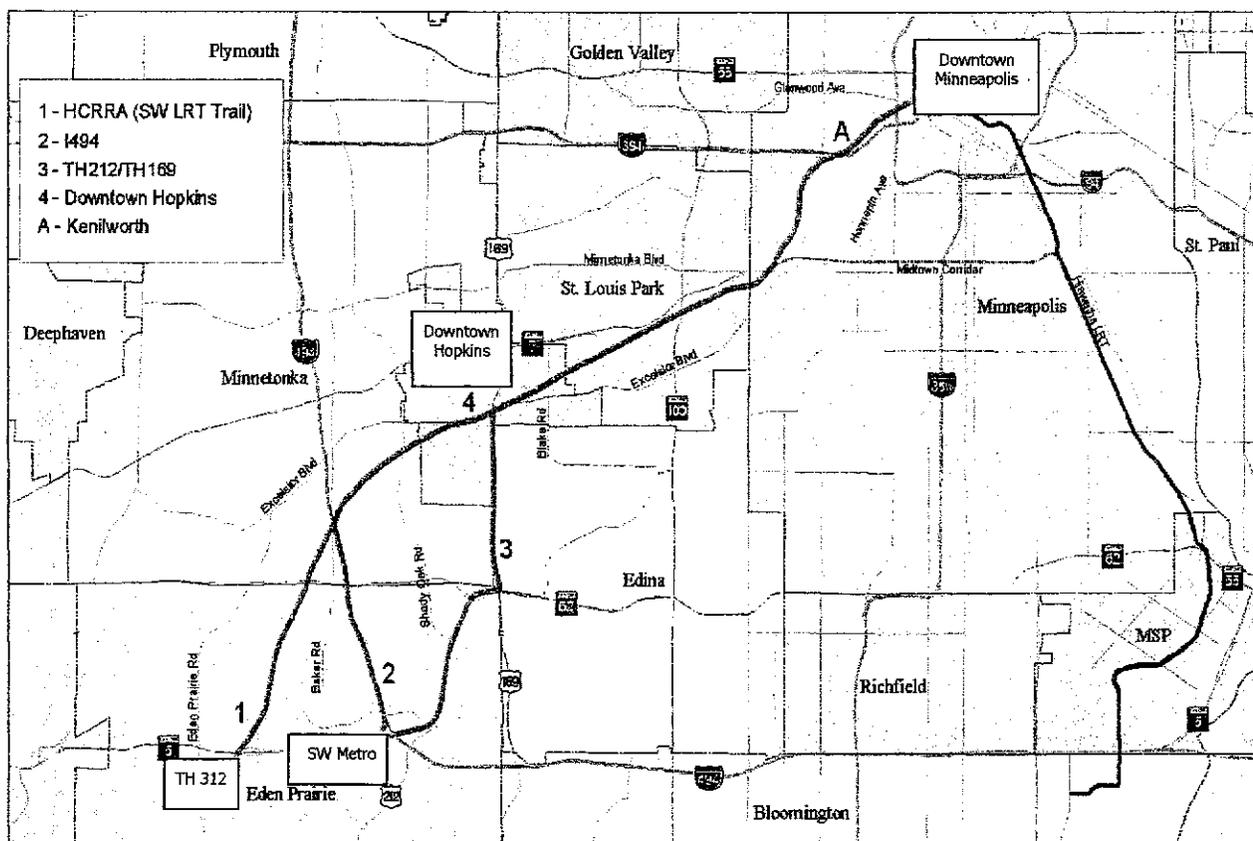
- Opportunities exist at the proposed stations for development and redevelopment that is compatible with rail transit service. Examples include the Elmwood area of St. Louis Park, downtown Hopkins, the Golden Triangle in Eden Prairie and the Opus area of Minnetonka.

POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Southwest PAC, a group composed of representatives from the County, the cities, transit agencies, trail agencies and businesses, met six times during the course of the Study and developed a recommendation for consideration by the HCRRA. The Southwest PAC recommended that study continue for LRT for the following four alternatives:

- 1A:** from TH 312 in Eden Prairie to downtown Minneapolis via the HCRRA property and the Kenilworth Corridor.
- 2A:** from the Southwest Metro Transit Station in Eden Prairie to downtown Minneapolis via I-494, the HCRRA property, and the Kenilworth Corridor.
- 3A:** from the Southwest Metro Transit station in Eden Prairie to downtown Minneapolis via the Eden Prairie Center Mall, the Golden Triangle, Opus, downtown Hopkins, the HCRRA property, and the Kenilworth Corridor.
- 4A:** from downtown Hopkins to downtown Minneapolis via the HCRRA property and the Kenilworth Corridor.

In addition, the next study phase will address a rail transit connection along the Midtown Greenway Corridor, environmental impacts and mitigation measures, public involvement, and retention of the trails.



The Southwest PAC also recommended that the Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) technology and LRT on Lyndale Avenue no longer be included in future studies.

NEXT STEPS

1. The Southwest PAC recommendations and the Study findings were presented to the HCRRA on July 22, 2003.
2. During August/September 2003, the Study findings and recommendations will be presented to the five city councils.
3. In October of 2003, a staff recommendation on the next Study phase will be presented to the HCRRA for action.

For more information, visit the Southwest Study web site at www.co.hennepin.mn.us/tcw/swhome.html, or call 612-348-9260.



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