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**Request for City Council Committee Action
From the Department of Public Works**

Date: April 25, 2002
To: Transportation and Public Works Committee
Referral to: none

Subject: Northstar Commuter Rail – FEIS

Recommendation:

1. Approve the attached City staff comments related to the Northstar Commuter Rail Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) documents (Exhibit A)
2. Direct City staff to submit the FEIS comments to MnDOT within the required 30-day comment period that ends May 5, 2002.

Previous Directives:

- 06/28/2001 City Council Action – Preliminary Engineering
- 03/02/2001 City Council Action – Supplemental Environmental Info
- 12/29/2000 City Council Action – Northstar DEIS
- 10/13/2000 City Council Action – Northstar Advanced Corridor Plan

Prepared or Submitted by: Jon Wertjes, Transportation Engineer, 673-2614
Mike Larson, City Planner, 673-2423

Approved: David J. Sonnenberg, P. E., City Engineer, Director of Public Works

By: Greg Finstad

Presenters in Committee: Jon Wertjes

Financial Impact (Check those that apply)

- No financial impact - or - Action is within current department budget.
(If checked, go directly to Background/Supporting Information)
- Action requires an appropriation increase to the Capital Budget
- Action requires an appropriation increase to the Operating Budget
- Action provides increased revenue for appropriation increase
- Action requires use of contingency or reserves
- Other financial impact (Explain):

Request provided to the Budget Office when provided to the Committee Coordinator

Community Impact

Neighborhood – Previous neighborhood involvement; Numerous individuals and neighborhoods submitted comments to the DEIS and these comments were responded to in the FEIS

Comprehensive Plan – Three of the eight City of Minneapolis goals from the adopted “The Minneapolis Plan” are met with this project and listed as follows:

Goal 5. Improve public transportation to get people to jobs, school and fun.

Goal 7. Market downtown as a place to live, work, play and do business.

Goal 8. Strengthen our city through infrastructure investments.

Background/Supporting Information

Previous Actions:

Respectively in 2000 and 2001, the City Council took action to submit comments for the Northstar Corridor Advanced Corridor Plans, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Supplemental Environmental Information and the Preliminary Engineering (PE) documents regarding the Northstar Project.

Northstar 7th Street Station Community Task Force Report

Subsequently, MnDOT, NCDA (Northstar Corridor Development Authority) and City staff met numerous times with the 7th Street Station Community Task Force to discuss their concerns and issues. The Task Force produced a report and said report was transmitted to City Council Members and others on April 6, 2001. The FEIS responses to every comment and letter received.

Northstar Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)

City staff has reviewed the FEIS documents and has developed the attached staff response. City staff recommends:

- Approve the attached staff comments related to the Northstar Commuter Rail Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) documents (Exhibit A)
- Direct City staff to submit the FEIS comments to MnDOT within the required 30-day comment period.

April 19, 2002 **DRAFT**

Mr. Mike Schadauer
Office of Passenger Rail Transit
Minnesota Department of Transportation
395 John Ireland Boulevard, MS 475
St. Paul, MN 55155-1899

RE: FEIS Northstar Commuter Rail

Dear Mike:

Here are the City of Minneapolis comments on the FEIS for the Northstar Commuter Rail project.

General Comments

Downtown Station -- Planning activities in the vicinity of the Downtown Multi-Modal Station include the Downtown East/North Loop Master Plan (currently underway) and Hennepin County's Multi-Modal Station Area Master Plan. Both planning processes have explored specific and general concepts for a new mixed-use district that mitigates the presence of freeway infrastructure and integrates this area with both downtown and the Warehouse District. Further, the site of the Downtown Station platform remains the City's preferred location for a new professional baseball stadium. The final location and design of Downtown Station commuter rail facilities and the LRT extension should account for these potential development plans.

Northeast Station -- The City appreciates inclusion and consideration of the Northstar Community Task Force (7th St. NE) materials in the appendices and looks forward to working with Northstar project staff on the final design of the station and associated facilities.

Summary

Page S-17, Minneapolis Downtown Station

Please add a reference to Section 8.6.5 after the words "Programmatic Agreement".

Page S-19, Pedestrian Access, 1st paragraph

Add that "The Ford Centre falls within the Minneapolis Warehouse Historic District (NRHP)."

Create a new paragraph that includes the last sentence of the first paragraph plus the following text: "The City continues to express a desire to explore alternatives that preserve vehicle access to 5th Avenue North and consider the visual and aesthetic relationship of bridge reconstruction to this district property (as per the Programmatic Agreement)."

Page S-25, Table S.6-3

The Minneapolis Downtown section refers to 5th Street South. This should be 5th Street North.

Section 2.0

Page 2-17, Table 2.2-6, Proposed Feeder Bus Routes

The two listed routes serving the Minneapolis station should have included the other bus routes listed on pages 5-31 and 5-32.

Page 2-22, Changes to Downtown Minneapolis Multi-Modal Connector

While the City of Minneapolis concurs with the identified location of the multi-modal station, the City has indicated that there are numerous historic, transportation, and development factors that may change future location and design of both the commuter rail and LRT stations. The City requests that MnDOT as part of the future design process address these and other factors that may influence this station location and its design.

Figure 2.2-2A, Downtown Minneapolis Site Plan

The LRT platforms and tracks are labeled "(By Others)". Please delete this reference since this is part of the overall project.

Section 3.0

Page 3-7, Employment for the Northstar Primary Service Area, 3rd Paragraph

This paragraph references data in Table 3.1.9. The forecast of 76,000 or 55 percent employment growth differs from what is indicated in the table.

Page 3-9, Table 3.1-9

This table differs from the Draft EIS, and indicates a considerably larger employment base as part of the Primary Service Area than what was assumed in the DEIS. This table also is inconsistent with Table 3.1-8, which provides a breakdown by employment type. It appears that employment in downtown Minneapolis was newly included in Table 3.1-9, but not explained or updated in the text and this other table.

Page 3-21, Minneapolis Northeast Station, Major Trip Generators
This section should have mentioned the Mid-City Industrial Opportunity Area, a major trip generator that will be accessible via commuter rail via bus transfer.

Page 3-28, Minneapolis Downtown Station Neighborhood,
Text should be added to this section regarding the ballpark being a possible future pattern of land use.

Page 3-28, Minneapolis Northeast Station Neighborhood, 2nd paragraph
Change "initiated" to "discussed".
The FEIS should not include a reference to the initiation of a "master planning process when only discussions have been held. It is true that there will be continued community involvement in the final design of the station, feedback and input regarding the operation of the station, and also with regard to changes in public infrastructure and proposed development and redevelopment in the area.

Page 3-60, Minneapolis Northeast Station at 7th Street Northeast
This section should have noted the concurrence of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) that the Northwestern Furniture Mart Building (Banks Building) meets National Historic Register criteria.

Page 3-62, Paragraph 2
This section should have acknowledged a commitment by the project, in cooperation with the City, to explore possible alignment and geometric alternatives that minimize visual and aesthetic impact, as well as access to, the Ford Centre (as per Section 106 Programmatic Agreement).

Figure 3.1-17
The figure should show the proposed ballpark as a possible future pattern of development. Please use the "sports arena star" along with the office denoted for the parking lot where the commuter rail station is located.

Section 5

Page 5-10, Minneapolis Downtown Station and Multi-Model Connector
The City wishes to explore options to the proposed configuration of the Downtown Commuter Rail and LRT extension in order to meet a number of planning objectives in the area. Numerous alternatives have been discussed with MnDOT staff related to the potential commercial/office/housing developments, the proposed ballpark,

existing historic properties and access to the 5th Avenue North to/from 5th Street North. These alternatives include but not resolved are:

- Construct the LRT station platform on the south side of the 5th Street railroad bridge, with vertical circulation on the same side and separate the 5th Street railroad bridge profiles for vehicles traveling on the north side of the bridge, thereby maintaining access to 5th Avenue North
- Integrate the multi-modal station (commuter and LRT) infrastructure into the proposed ballpark and/or other mixed-use developments
- Relocate only the LRT station from the 5th Street railroad bridge east to the 5th Street freeway bridge and build a new “grand central station” over the I-394 freeway across from the 5th Street TAD garage.

Section 7

Page 7-5, Section 7.6

The City appreciates the commitment to the establishment of a security plan, including the staff and financial participation of the owner and operator of the line.

If you have further questions about the letter, please feel free to contact Jon Wertjes at (612) 673-2614.

Respectfully,

Jon Wertjes, P.E.
Minneapolis Public Works

Michael Larson
Minneapolis Planning

cc: David Sonnenberg, Chuck Ballentine, Brian Lokkesmoe, Greg Finstad, Heidi Hamilton, Bob Morgan, Peter Wagenius