

VII. Transportation

The historical function of the Midtown Greenway as a freight rail corridor is physically evident in its linear orientation and its grade separation from the City's street grid above. Today, the Greenway still serves as a transportation corridor by providing a paved trail for bicyclists and pedestrians who use the Greenway as a commuting route and place of recreation. This function makes the Greenway a unique transportation amenity that highlights the City's commitment to the provision of multi-modal transportation opportunities for its residents.

Hennepin County purchased the Greenway corridor because of its value for accommodating transit that links commuters from the southwest metro with employment centers downtown, and provides an east-west link between the Chain of Lakes and the Hiawatha Light Rail line. While the future mode has yet to be determined (light rail, bus rapid transit or streetcar), the County remains committed to the provision of increased transportation choices to the neighborhoods in South Minneapolis, the City and the region.

The likely locations of future transit stations in the Midtown Greenway are well understood from the various studies that have been done. They will link with strong local bus service at each of the north-south commercial corridors that cross the greenway, and link as well with anticipated future bus rapid transit on I-35W.

The following recommendations were drafted within this evolving transportation context and its relationship to the neighborhoods and development surrounding the Midtown Greenway. They include recommendations for reconnecting and enhancing 29th Street on the south side of the Greenway, a public pedestrian circulation route of promenades and sidewalks above the Greenway, enhanced transit station areas at each future station location in the Greenway and provisions for public access to the Greenway.

29th Street Recommendations

29th Street is a local street parallel with the Midtown Greenway. It exists in some parts of the study area, and in some parts of the study area it is absent. Where it exists, it serves to provide internal circulation for automobile traffic that takes pressure off Lake Street and nearby residential neighborhoods. It also provides on-street parking for area businesses, and can potentially offer pedestrian sidewalks along the Midtown Greenway edge. Public sidewalks adjacent to the Greenway are recommended in the Lake Street/ Midtown Greenway Corridor Framework Plan. They are important for offering a continuous and robust street-level pedestrian network and for providing visual connections between the greenway and adjacent spaces. This enhances the place-making value of the Midtown Greenway and improves public safety.

Key Recommendation:
Acquire 29th Street right-of-way between Dupont and Emerson Avenues.

Key Recommendation:
Allow the vacation of 29th Street between Pleasant and Blaisdell in support of high-quality development fronting the Greenway.

29th Street exists in the following locations:

- On the south side of, and immediately adjacent to, the Midtown Greenway between Lyndale and Fremont Avenues, except for the block between Dupont and Emerson, which was vacated to support development of a grocery store. The width of the ROW is 40 feet in these blocks.
- On the south side of, and immediately adjacent to, the Midtown Greenway between 2nd and Portland Avenues south. The ROW width is 40 feet in these blocks.
- On the south side of, and immediately adjacent to, the Midtown Greenway between 10th and 18th Avenues south. The ROW width is generally 40 feet in these blocks.
- On the north side of, and separated by development from, the Midtown Greenway between Pleasant and 1st Avenues South. The ROW width is about 74 feet in these blocks.

In support of the objectives outlined above, 29th Street should be reestablished at two key locations along the south side of the Greenway—in the block between Emerson and Dupont Avenues and, as proposed in the Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan, between Portland and Chicago Avenues west of the Midtown Exchange development project (see Figure 6). More specific recommendations are as follows.

- Lyndale to Fremont Avenues – Maintain all segments of existing 29th Street. Acquire and re-construct 29th Street between Emerson and Dupont avenues. The right of way should be widened to accommodate pedestrian sidewalks along the Midtown Greenway. Street design recommendations can be found in Chapter VIII.
- 2nd to Chicago Avenues – Maintain all segments of existing 29th Street. Acquire 29th Street ROW between Portland and Chicago avenues as recommended in the Midtown Minneapolis Land Use and Development Plan.
- 10th to 18th Avenues. Maintain all segments of existing 29th Street. The right of way should be widened to accommodate pedestrian sidewalks along the Midtown Greenway. Street design recommendations can be found in Chapter VIII.
- Pleasant to 1st Avenue. The 29th Street segments connecting Nicollet Avenue to Blaisdell Avenue on the west and 1st Avenue on the east provide essential connections to Lake Street, and even after the anticipated re-opening of Nicollet Avenue will provide important internal circulation for Nicollet/Lake businesses. The street segments between Blaisdell and Pleasant, however, have limited value because 29th Street ends at Pleasant Avenue—just three blocks from Nicollet Avenue. These segments of 29th Street are not adjacent to the Greenway, and limit the redevelopment potential of the property between 29th Street and the Midtown Greenway by constraining the depth of that property to around 85 feet. The vacation of 29th street for these two blocks could be considered to support redevelopment of property along the Midtown Greenway. Redevelopment and street vacation would have the ancillary benefit of allowing a pedestrian promenade to be constructed along the

Key Recommendation:
Support the provision of public promenades in association with new development that fronts the Greenway as indicated on the Proposed Public Realm Map.

Midtown Greenway in these two blocks. There has also been interest on the part of the Midtown Greenway Coalition in the creation of an enhanced greenway access point at this location.

Public Promenades and Sidewalks

A primary recommendation of the Midtown Greenway Land Use and Development Plan is providing a linear public “promenade” or walkway wherever possible between private development and the Midtown Greenway. Promenades have similar value to sidewalks in that they create a street-level pedestrian network, mobility along the Greenway’s edge for better access to trail entrance ramps, and visual connections between the Midtown Greenway and adjacent spaces. Promenades are most easily provided in association with new development along the Greenway; however, it may also be possible in some instances to arrange for a new promenade where existing development abuts the Greenway. From the standpoint of creating a public edge to the Greenway and providing mobility along its edge, the segments of the Greenway in the greatest need of promenades are those segments where 29th Street does not exist and it is not currently possible to go block to block at street level along the Greenway without diverting a block north or south to a parallel street.

Figures 5, 6 and 7 show the locations where promenades should be developed as events allow. They encompass most parts of the Midtown Greenway where it is bordered by private development rather than street. Where promenades cannot be located directly along the Greenway, such as where existing or new buildings directly address the Greenway acting as the Greenway wall, a mid-block pedestrian promenade is recommended. Despite not being located directly alongside the Greenway, a mid-block promenade still has value in that it supports the larger pedestrian network.

Promenades should be carefully designed so as to provide a high-value pedestrian environment while clearly distinguishing between public and private areas. Design guidelines for promenades can be found in Chapter VIII.

Transit Station Areas

Future transit stations are proposed for the Midtown Greenway corridor at several locations. The stations would be located at the Greenway level and, where grade separated from the street level, would provide vertical access between Greenway-level transit and the street-level bus system and pedestrian environment. Potential transit station locations include:

- West Lake Street and the Greenway
- Hennepin Avenue (currently the Uptown Transit Station)
- Lyndale Avenue South
- Nicollet Avenue South
- I-35W or 4th Avenue South
- Chicago Avenue South
- Bloomington Avenue South

Transit station areas provide important opportunities for place-making. Aesthetic enhancements can be provided. Commercial goods and services can be integrated. These possibilities are constrained, however, by challenges related to funding, physical space, and the difficulty of synchronizing private development with transit development. Development guidelines and challenges related to transit station areas are further explored in Chapter VIII.

While the primary function of transit station areas is to provide universal access to and from the transit stop in the Greenway (whether light-rail transit, bus rapid transit or streetcar), they can also serve as expanded and enhanced public spaces associated with adjacent development (as illustrated in Case Study #2 in Chapter V. Case Study Sites). Transit plazas in the Greenway can play host to neighborhood activities and gathering spaces by providing amenities that include landscaping, seating, lighting, public art, rest room and event facilities, bike racks/lockers and limited service-oriented retail that can be used by nearby residents, employees and users of the Greenway path. Where located in the grade-separated part of the Midtown Greenway, an expanded physical space allows for an easing of the Midtown Greenway walls, making it possible to provide more comfortable pedestrian access to the transit stations, and increasing the perceived proximity of Greenway-level transit.

Key Recommendation:
Acquire and preserve
property adjacent to
future transit station
locations

The first requirement for transit stations is physical space. Although it may be possible in most future station locations to develop a transit platform and elevators to street level within the existing Midtown Greenway property lines, additional property will be required if ridership is to be optimized or additional objectives are to be achieved. Existing development at Lyndale and Chicago Avenues makes the property to the west of these streets most conducive to the development of an expanded transit station, although a desire for a rail station to be on the same side of Chicago Avenue as Midtown Exchange (the east side) may impact station siting discussions. At other station locations the most opportune future station location will be on the south side of the greenway, but its exact location is less clear. In each of these locations, serious consideration should be given to buying or otherwise controlling land contiguous to the greenway as opportunity arises. This requires vigilance as property is developed privately so that new buildings are not located where they would significantly diminish the opportunity to provide appropriately scaled public spaces.

Future Greenway Access Points

Midtown Greenway access points (ramps, stairs and at-grade) are currently provided at 18 locations (see Chapter III for a list of existing access points). Additionally, at least five additional access points have been proposed by private parties and citizen-based organizations (see Figures 5, 6 and 7 for locations). These include access points proposed by a developer at Girard Avenue at the future Mozaic redevelopment project and by the Midtown Greenway Coalition near Pleasant/Pillsbury Avenues. Three additional access points are proposed in the eastern subarea of the project area east of

Chicago Avenue near the Midtown Exchange development, at the CEPRO site at 11th Avenue and near Bloomington Avenue.

The CEPRO site, formerly grain elevators located between 10th and 11th Avenues on the north side of the Greenway, provides an illustration of the potential for enhanced open space in association with a Midtown Greenway access point. Hennepin County has been working with the neighborhood and the Midtown Greenway Coalition to design a space that provides access to the Midtown Greenway via ramps and stairs, but that offers landscaping, public art and open space enhancements. It also offers a window on the challenges that are involved in pursuing these types of enhancements. While Hennepin County has made a commitment to the incorporation of open space here, issues of ownership, management and funding of enhancements have not been resolved, resulting in an uncertain timeline for enhancements.

Criteria for Future Greenway Access Points

There does not seem to be a tipping point where the provision of additional public access to the Midtown Greenway has negative value. For this reason, where the challenges of cost, ownership and management of Greenway access points is resolved, as where an additional public connection to the Greenway is being proposed in association with private development, such new access should be encouraged and supported.

Future access points to the Midtown Greenway should, however, benefit the general public to the extent possible, and not just one property owner or a group of owners. One exception is a Greenway building type that opens up down in the trench, where access from retail or residential suites to the trails should be allowed and encouraged if certain conditions are met such as attempts to also provide public access using stairways from adjacent avenues. Thus, the following criteria should be considered when additional Greenway access points are proposed (including those listed above and included on the Public Realm Features Diagram):

Future Midtown Greenway access points shall fit at least one of the following criteria:

- Originate from the public right-of-way;
- Originate from a publicly-used promenade;
- Be part of a publicly-used green space; or
- Be part of a transit station area

Recommended implementation strategies related to providing additional and enhanced Midtown Greenway access points are located in Chapter IX.