

Rail to Where? Storytelling in Twin Cities Planning and Policy

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Abstract

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Southwest LRT is a light rail expansion project in Minneapolis, set to be completed in the late 2020's. When deciding the alignment of the route, planners in Minneapolis had to decide whether to build the alignment near areas of the city that had already been developed, or those that could undergo transportation oriented development in response to the project. After long deliberation, they chose to build the alignment away from existing development, with access to recreation and potential transportation oriented development highlighted as reasons why. In this thesis, I ask if it is better for light rail transit to serve areas that have already been developed, or areas that have the potential for development, and how has this thought process changed over time for government officials and community members? Furthermore, if government agencies were to choose to build in developed areas, what measures should be taken to prevent displacement?

To answer this, I used archival research such as government documents (environmental impact statements, policy suggestions) and news articles to paint a picture as to what planners were thinking at the time of project development. I also interviewed multiple stakeholders across Minneapolis, including those in surrounding neighborhoods of light rail projects as well as

workers at various government entities in the area. Lastly, I conducted personal observations of numerous neighborhoods throughout the Twin Cities region, both where light rail had already been constructed or was currently being constructed. Through this research, I attempted to visualize a story from the beginning of light rail expansion in the Twin Cities to now to understand the thinking of planners in where they chose to build their alignments, how potential conflicts with community members may have shaped their choices, and if certain policies have been created to address potential conflicts. Through this analysis I found that differing priorities and lessons learned from past projects have led to differing outcomes in current projects. Projects such as 2014's Central Corridor connecting Minneapolis and St. Paul had mixed results, with undeveloped areas growing into thriving communities, while already developed areas suffered from gentrification. Projects since the Central Corridor, including Southwest LRT and the Blue Line Extension, have focused on building transit in areas of least resistance, but displacement issues remained. Once the Blue Line Extension was rerouted through higher density areas though, anti-displacement policies began to be brainstormed with the help of community stakeholders, providing an example for other cities across the country in how to build transit without inducing gentrification.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....7

Literature Review.....12

Transit and the Surrounding Urban Fabric.....12

Redevelopment in Minneapolis (Overview).....13

Redevelopment in Minneapolis (Housing).....14

Redevelopment in Minneapolis (Jobs/Retail).....15

Property Values Around Transit Stations.....18

Transit and Recreation.....19

Storytelling in Transit.....20

Methods.....25

How Planning Works in the Twin Cities.....35

 Government Stakeholders.....35

Hiawatha Line History and Current State.....40

Green Line History and Current State.....48

Prospect Park.....49

Midway.....53

Conclusion.....59

Southwest LRT Plans and Current State.....61

Western Suburbs.....68

Alignment 3A - Bryn Mawr/Harrison.....71

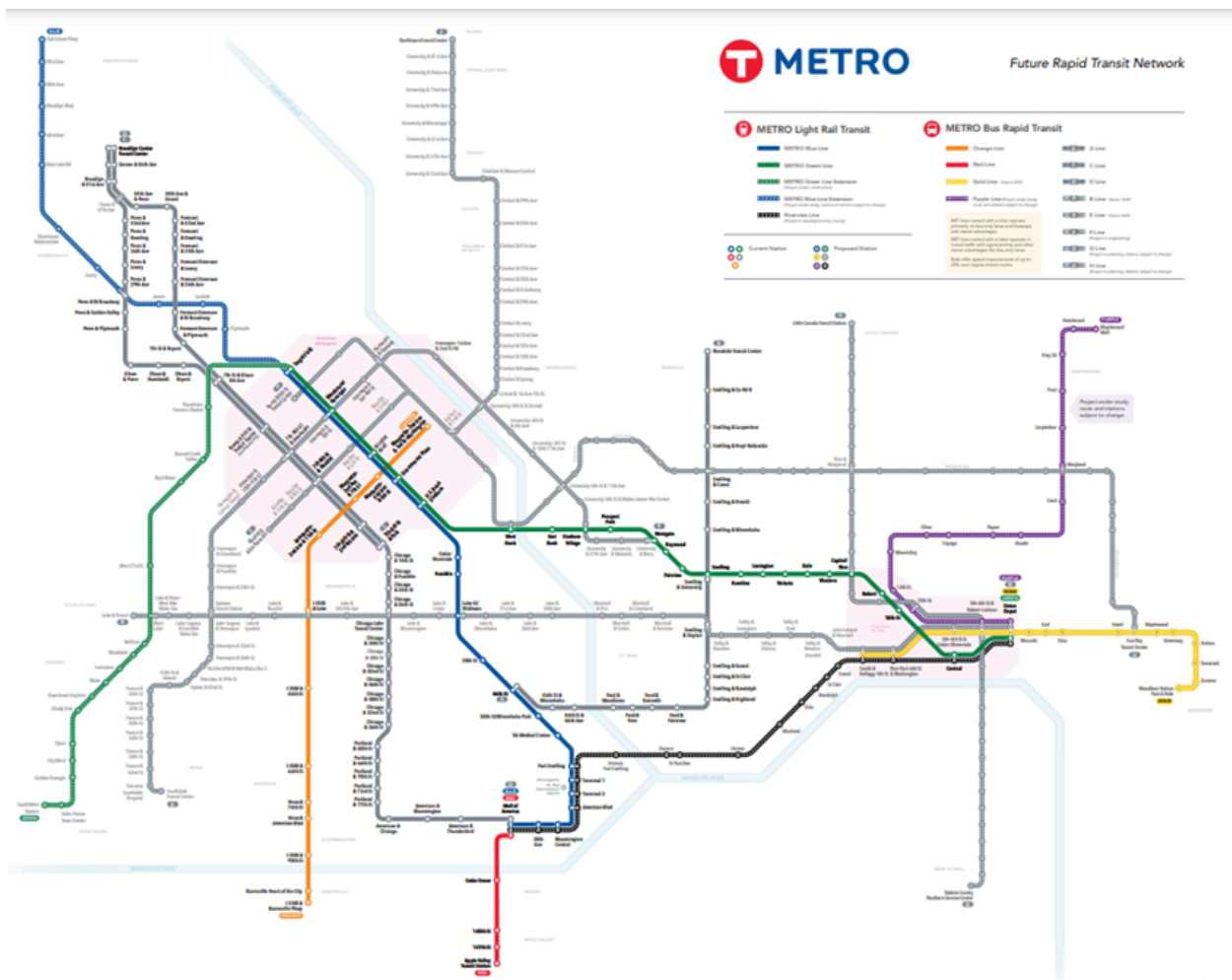
Alignment 3C - Uptown/Whittier.....76

Conclusion.....82

Blue Line Extension Plans and Current State.....	84
<i>Robbinsdale</i>	85
<i>Anti-Displacement</i>	86
Discussion.....	98
Conclusion.....	101
Appendix.....	104

Introduction

The Twin Cities are an area seeing rapid transit expansion. While its first two lines, known as the Hiawatha Line and the Central Corridor opened ten years apart (2004 and 2014 respectively), extensions of these two lines are both planned to be operational by 2030. The Hiawatha Line and the Central Corridor each had start and end points that made it easy to choose alignments (connecting Minneapolis to the airport and connecting the Twin Cities together), but more options existed for potential expanded lines.



Map 1: Metro Transit Map¹

¹ Metro system map - future rapid transit network, 2022.

https://www.metrotransit.org/Data/Sites/1/media/metro/360611_metro_diagrammap_vision.pdf

While numerous potential routes for the Green Line Extension (dubbed Southwest LRT) were considered, two routes that had much in common were considered the best choices. The routes, known as 3A and 3C, shared the same alignment through the entirety of Minneapolis' southwest suburbs, but diverged within the western portions of the city. Alignment 3A would go along the Kenilworth Trail, a bike trail that had space next to it that was earmarked for potential transit. The alignment would also provide direct access to beaches along Cedar Lake and the Bryn Mayr neighborhood, which had numerous transit oriented development plans. On the other hand, Alignment 3C would travel along the Midtown Greenway and Nicollet Avenue, providing access to some of the most popular neighborhoods in the city, Uptown and Whittier.² Due to the differences in alignment, there was and continues to be debate about which route would be better for the city. In 2010, Alignment 3A was chosen as the preferred alternative of the environmental impact statement, and construction eventually began in 2018. I will examine why this was, both on a macro level through planning policy, as well as a micro level based on effects of previous projects.

These sets of events are nothing new. Rail projects are constantly being planned, designed, and implemented both in the U.S and abroad. While these projects are being planned, there are numerous factors at work that help decide an alignment such as access to new and existing jobs, housing, recreation, and other transit connections. We are currently seeing these debates happen in cities such as Seattle. Depending on the particular city though, there can be various nuances that should be explored. Reasons for a choice in one city could be very different from a reason in another city, even if the choices are similar. Why was this choice made in Minneapolis, how does this choice relate to past and future projects, and does it make sense to prioritize building transit projects in places with *potential* for development versus those that are

² *Metropolitan Council. Southwest LRT Final Environmental Impact Statement, Metropolitan Council, 2016*

already developed. While there are papers that discuss rail's impact on economic activity and transit oriented development, there is very little literature about Southwest LRT beyond its tunneling methods, I believe this is a topic that will be of interest to planners and policymakers working through transportation planning and policy issues.

To answer the question of why this alignment was chosen, I examine various aspects of urban planning and policy throughout the light rail history of the Twin Cities. I explore the different priorities light rail projects have had in the region, from connecting downtowns to important features such as airports and tourist attractions, to light rail acting as a commuter route for those working and living in urban and suburban areas. Furthermore, I discuss how planning agencies in the Twin Cities engaged with residents about these projects. To do this, I divide my attention between three sections: historical archival research based around news articles and government reports, interviews with stakeholders, and my own observations. Archival data will provide qualitative stories of those who I am unable to interview while also providing quantitative data such as social and economic effects (such as displacement rate), and environmental effects of city light rail projects.

Directly interviewing stakeholders will be able to give me various details about communities and planners that can help us understand why the Kenilworth alignment was chosen. Factors such as construction impacts to housing and businesses is something that can't fully be understood with just qualitative data. While I was particularly interested in interviewing people from major planning agencies, such as Hennepin County (the county where Minneapolis is located), the Metropolitan Council (the metropolitan planning organization in the area), and Metro Transit (the light rail operator) as well as community members in the Uptown, Whittier, and Bryn Mayr neighborhoods, of Minneapolis, I was open to interviewing more people as I

grew more knowledgeable about the transit history in the region. This way, I have first-hand accounts of how people in Minneapolis reacted to these potential alignments, as well as their excitement and concern about a major light rail project potentially going through their neighborhood. Types of stakeholders that I planned on interviewing included neighborhood associations, small businesses owners, and people who travel through the neighborhood often. I believed interviews would be a better way for me to gather data compared to surveys because it allows for a greater variety of answers. For example, having someone give a long form answer regarding their concerns over noise on their small business would be much more detailed than answering “very concerned” to a question about construction impact concern. With interviews to government agencies, I believed I’d be able to obtain a comprehensive understanding as to why planners made their decision. Furthermore, by hearing from community stakeholders across the Twin Cities, will be able to show the importance of making proper planning decisions, and the impact choices in alignment made to certain communities, including new social and economic opportunities as well as potential displacement.

Also, I believe mapping data could be used to enhance both the qualitative and quantitative sides of my data. Mapping data could be used to give helpful background information on where these lines are, the differences in density between different potential alignments (both for Southwest LRT and other local light rail projects). These maps can either be made by me using ArcGIS, or could be cited through local planning sources such as the Southwest LRT Environmental Impact Statement.

All of these facets will come together to create a story of light rail in the Twin Cities. My goal is that storytelling can be used as a way to explain planning decisions in the region. I believe no decision is made in a vacuum, and it is likely that the results of previous projects have

played a role in the decision making surrounding Southwest LRT. I also believe that decisions made regarding future light rail projects may be inspired by the effects of Southwest LRT. By understanding this history, I plan to create a plausible storytelling framework showing why planning decisions are made the way they are, where projects have seen success and failure, and what policies can be put in place to ensure that projects create new opportunities without displacing vulnerable residents and communities.

Literature Review

Transit and the Surrounding Urban Fabric

In any city, the opening of transit stations and alignments creates a disruption to local property. The only question is whether this disruption is temporary, and the urban environment returns to a semblance of its past, or the disruption is permanent and the way land around the station is used is changed for a long period of time. Zhuang writes that land use around transit stations in Los Angeles vary widely based on attractions around stations and the neighborhood demographics surrounding the station.³ Stations in low income neighborhoods are more likely to have high amounts of residential land use near stations since individuals living in these neighborhoods may have less access to cars. Many of these low income neighborhoods also have multi-family housing and other forms of zoning, such as commercial (schools, hospitals, etc). This mix of variable use and a captive population leads to higher ridership when compared to lines in more affluent neighborhoods, where people are more likely to have cars and live in single family homes.

Land use around transit stations is only going to see long term change though if the proper conditions are met. Dong notes that these conditions include a developable land, supportive zoning and planning policies, a transit friendly built environment, supportive local governments and residents, right station locations, and a healthy local economy.⁴ This paper uses case studies in Los Angeles and Minneapolis, as well as a detailed case study in Portland, Oregon to see how transit oriented development and land use changes accompany transit expansion. Portland saw extreme residential development compared to both of the other cities

³ Zhuang, Zhewu. "Correlation between Land Use and Metro Rail Ridership in Los Angeles." *Correlation Between Land Use and Metro Rail Ridership in Los Angeles. Thesis, 2014.*

⁴ Dong, Hongwei. "If You Build Rail Transit in Suburbs, Will Development Come?" *Journal of the American Planning Association* 82, no. 4 (September 22, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2016.1215258>.

due to the existence of vacant land that could be used for residential use. Much of this development though occurred at stations that had already been built before 2004, though it should be noted that much of Portland's public transit system since 2004 has either been in areas with little ability to expand housing (along highways), or had opened just prior to the publication of this paper and therefore its effects could not be fully clarified in time for publication. Regardless, vacant land was by far the most important factor when seeing what would spur residential development along transit corridors, especially if that land were to be used as mixed use development that is deemed desirable by urban planners today. This is extremely important for planners to decide where to build transit alignments, especially in cities where transit systems are being built out quickly such as Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Redevelopment in Minneapolis (Overview)

Land use changes are largely driven by redevelopment, and for redevelopment to occur, zoning changes are often needed. Ellis compared various cities across the U.S to see what zoning changes occurred along with their transit oriented development.⁵ Ellis discussed numerous possible changes, including minimum density requirements, parking minimums and maximums, and the prohibition of low density zoning. In Minneapolis, Ellis specifically highlighted mixed uses in various districts, including Uptown. Other recommendations for Minneapolis included maximum setbacks for buildings and minimum density requirements. This will be especially important as the Bryn Mawr neighborhood gets redeveloped as part of Southwest LRT.

In many areas of the city, redevelopment would require upzoning. Davis, Rong, and Huennekens discuss the sentiments of Minneapolis community members on upzoning, and the

⁵ Ellis, Bradley E. "Zoning for Transit-Oriented Development in Minneapolis: Challenges and Opportunities," 2005.

potential changes that they could provide to their neighborhoods.⁶ The paper used various qualitative variables, including public comment, to understand sentiment, as well as statistics to predict sentiment based on neighborhood characteristics. It was found that while most people in the city were for upzoning, members with Southwest Minneapolis, particularly near Alignment 3A were against upzoning. On the other hand, people in Uptown and Whittier were found to be more favorable to upzoning, even though they already are one of the densest areas of the city. The idea of current density playing a role in support for upzoning is also supported by the area near Alignment 3A being largely single family homes, and a fear of development that can come with the addition of light rail. With this in mind, it is understandable that the only neighborhood on Alignment 3A slated for major redevelopment is the Bryn Mawr neighborhood, which has less affluent single family homeowners compared to those living on other sections of Alignment 3A.

Redevelopment in Minneapolis (Housing)

Hurst and West discuss the issues above but from strictly a Twin Cities perspective. Changes in land use were measured after the opening of the METRO Blue Line, variable land use changes were found.⁷ On one hand, the amount of multi-family homes within a half mile of a station increased by approximately 16 percent, while the amount of industry around stations decreased by 4%, but otherwise single family homes and commercial development remained relatively stagnant. The existence of light rail was also found to not reduce the amount of vacant land when compared to the development of vacant land away from light rail alignments. While

⁶ Davis, Jenna, Helena Rong, and Joseph Weil Huennekens. "Perceptions toward Upzoning: A Parcel-Level Analysis of Public Sentiments toward the Minneapolis 2040 Plan." *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, November 10, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456x231205584>.

⁷ Hurst, Needham B., and Sarah E. West. "Public Transit and Urban Redevelopment: The Effect of Light Rail Transit on Land Use in Minneapolis, Minnesota." *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 46 (May 2014): 57–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2014.02.002>.

this is less pertinent for Southwest LRT due to a lack of vacant land in the Chain of Lakes area (due to the presence of the lakes). Overall though, Hurst and West's study on the Blue Line strongly suggests that light rail will not drastically affect land use in Minneapolis, although it did not take into account redevelopment occurring more than a half mile away from the Hiawatha Line, such as Highland Bridge.

Redevelopment in Minneapolis (Jobs/Retail)

The above hypothesis is challenged more when it comes to job accessibility. In a study done by Fan and Guthrie in collaboration with the Metropolitan Council, it was found that easy access from transit increased the likelihood of employees wanting to work for an employer, and that employers considered transit access when choosing where to house their offices.⁸ A statistic of note is that “even the largest employers often seek to locate in an area where they will not employ more than 7-10 percent of their total labor force within the 45-60 minutes of travel time”. With the time it can take to transfer between transit services, ensuring that jobs can be reached on Southwest LRT without a transfer could have serious economic ramifications. This puts large amounts of pressure on areas of Alignment 3A that can be developed (primarily Bryn Mawr) since other areas along the alignment cannot be developed due to single family densities and surrounding lakes. Meanwhile, when interviewing community members in Minneapolis, Uptown was repeatedly cited as the most popular place for highly skilled workers to live. By not building light rail in the neighborhood, the Metropolitan Council has squandered its opportunity to create

⁸ Fan, Yingling, and Andrew Guthrie. *Achieving System-Level, Transit-Oriented Jobs-Housing Balance: Perspectives of Twin Cities Developers and Business Leaders, Corridors of Opportunity/Metropolitan Council, Aug. 2013, conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/190065/CTS%2013-24.pdf?sequence=1.*

an easier commute for numerous skilled workers, and potentially prevent an increase in job opportunities in the neighborhood itself.

The Owen and Kadziolka reading looks at previous light rail expansions in the city (in this case the Green Line) to see its impact on job accessibility. The authors mapped how many jobs were now accessible to populations in Minneapolis within 30 minutes with the opening of the new line, and found that numerous locations along the West Bank of Minneapolis, particularly near University Avenue (the street the Green Line runs on), was now within a 30 minute transit ride for most locations in the city.⁹ Workers living in Saint Paul also saw major benefits, with residents now reaching 2,136 more jobs within 30 minutes by transit than they could previously. Like the Hurst and West reading before it though, this paper also measured accessibility throughout the entirety of the Twin Cities to as an average, which could have hid larger accessibility gains along the Green Line route. When applying this knowledge to Southwest LRT though, it's important to note that at least around the Kenilworth Corridor, there is less room for job growth, and that the current urban form is largely single family homes. This could limit job growth specifically in these areas, and mean that less people (due to single-family homes versus multi-family) could be taking the train to jobs elsewhere. It is expected that other areas of Southwest LRT though, such as Hopkins and Eden Prairie where stations are located at large park and ride or downtown stations, should see greater job accessibility.

Meanwhile Schuetz discusses how the addition of transit stations impacts retail activity in the U.S. It was found that retail use around stations was directly tied to ridership of those stations.¹⁰ Either new establishments are added, or establishments are relocated to the transit

⁹ Owen, Andrew, and Margot Kadziolka. "Green Line LRT: Job Accessibility Impacts in Minneapolis and Saint Paul." *Green Line LRT: Job Accessibility Impacts in Minneapolis and Saint Paul*, Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota, 1 June 2015, conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/199907.

¹⁰ Schuetz, Jenny. *Do Rail Transit Stations Encourage Neighbourhood Retail Activity ...*, 9 Sept. 2014, journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0042098014549128.

station to account for the expected increase in traffic. It was found though that retail *employment* went down after urban rail stations were opened, and went up after commuter rail stations opened. This is likely because in the case areas used (Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose, and Sacramento), stations were built in low density areas. This is similar with Southwest LRT though, with the Kenilworth corridor being largely low density, while other stations being constructed (as well as those that would have been built in Alignment 3C) being of higher density areas.

The idea of density and its suitability for jobs and retail also plays a part in a study done by Nick Myers. In an attempt to curb sprawl, Meyers used GIS to find areas of Minneapolis that would be suitable for mixed use development.¹¹ The main variables used to determine this was current land use, including existing commercial corridors as well as future growth centers, as well as transit (particularly light rail and bus rapid transit). It was found that corridors along Alignment 3C were rated to be suitable based on land use and current community features, but had only medium suitability in regards to transit. It was also found that neighborhoods along Alignment 3A had low suitability for transit and community features, and did not even appear on the map for land use suitability (likely due to the extreme low densities in the area). Interestingly, the paper specifically hypothesized that suitability scores in Uptown would be even greater had Southwest LRT been built in the neighborhood, but did not mention any neighborhoods along Alignment 3A. Ultimately, this research paper does support the hypothesis that transit along developed corridors such as those in Uptown and Whittier would increase job accessibility, and it is up to the City of Minneapolis to bring similar development to Alignment 3A.

¹¹ *Meyers, Nick. Using GIS to Identify Suitable Areas for Smart Growth and Transit Oriented Development (TOD) for Specific Areas within the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota., 2010.*
<https://gis.smumn.edu/GradProjects/MeyersN.pdf>.

Property Values Around Transit Stations

As land use around transit stations changes, so will property values. Diaz notes that in affluent neighborhoods of the Bay Area, the addition of transit led to higher rents within a quarter mile of a transit station.¹² In cities that are not considered affluent though, no major changes in rent was noticed. Property values did change regardless of whether or not the neighborhood was considered affluent or not, but those immediately adjacent to the transit station varied as to whether there was an increase in value due to potential noise and traffic that would accompany the station. Whether or not the station was elevated or at ground level (and therefore would have noise) or underground likely played a role in this variance. Other factors that were found to play a role was pedestrian accessibility of units to transit, the transit stations access to employment, and other developmental impacts. Regardless, these results vary based off of metropolitan areas, with ones that value transit such as the Bay Area or Portland seeing greater shifts in values due to an increase in transit, while others that are more car dependent saw less of a change, likely due to transit being less of a draw that will cause a shift to the housing market in these communities.

The idea that a city's car dependency affects the impact of property values as TOD develops is supported by a study done by Kay, Noland, and DiPetrillo.¹³ The authors studied the effects of transit on property values in New Jersey, both along commuter rail and light rail. It was found that the addition of light rail led to increased property values near stations, while not right next to stations (due to increased activity and noise). This affirms what was stated in the Diaz reading. It was also found that forms of transit such as bus rapid transit (BRT), which is now

¹² Diaz, Roderick B. *Impacts of Rail Transit on Property Values - Reconnecting America*, www.reconnectingamerica.org/assets/Uploads/bestpractice083.pdf

¹³ Kay, Andrew I., Robert B. Noland, and Stephanie DiPetrillo. "Residential Property Valuations near Transit Stations with Transit-Oriented Development." *Journal of Transport Geography* 39 (July 2014): 131–40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2014.06.017>.

being built near Alignment 3C, actually decreases property values. Overall, this article confirms that there are numerous variables at play when predicting whether transit will increase, decrease, or not impact property values, including the type of transit, the frequency of transit, and whether or not this transit connects people to places they want to go. Some of these effects are already beginning to be seen in Minneapolis, where community members have noted rising property values near under construction light rail stations.

Transit and Recreation

While most readings focused on transit, land use, and its relation to transportation oriented development, the Engström and Qviström reading focuses on transit and its relation to recreation. Access to recreation can have a large impact on people's lives, including increased physical activity and lower BMI.¹⁴ Engström and Qviström used Sweden as a case study for how transit could be integrated with the recreational environment. When adding transit in a Swedish city, planners made sure to increase the amount of park space nearby, as well as the amount of biking and walking trails. By doing this, the neighborhood was balanced between being heavily dense and having adequate recreation. Even in Sweden though, the areas immediately surrounding the transit stations had mixed use development, something that may be challenging in Minneapolis since recreation is not simply an open plot of park, but instead large lakes that cannot be developed. Furthermore, access to recreation on the Kenilworth Corridor is currently limited due to the construction of the light rail, making recreation more difficult in Minneapolis. Therefore, it will need to be studied further as to whether Alignment 3A truly is better for recreation compared to Alignment 3C, which also passes close to various lakes and trails.

¹⁴ Engström, Amalia, and Mattias Qviström. "Situating the Silence of Recreation in Transit-Oriented Development." *International Planning Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 2, 2022): 411–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563475.2022.2129598>.

Storytelling in Transit

The choice of light rail alignment is not always a choice made in a vacuum, but a choice made in response to previous choices. For example, the choices made in planning the Hiawatha Line could have an impact on the planning of the Green Line, which in turn could have an effect on the planning and goals of Southwest LRT. This ‘story’ of planning in the Twin Cities relates to the practice of storytelling in planning. Storytelling in planning is not simply a retelling of events, but trying to find compelling attributes about a project to see how it affects later projects. Leonie Sandercock writes that all planning has a core story from someone’s vision where they are the likely protagonist. In her paper “Out of the Closet” she uses the example of the settlers versus indigenous people and their battle against European settlers.¹⁵ For indigenous people, their story is the land that they lost at the hands of the antagonists (the settlers) while settlers saw themselves as brave pioneers and their own protagonists. Neither of these statements are inherently wrong, but it supports the idea that different actors are going to have different views of the core story, and it is the intersection of these views that should be studied.

Storytelling also gives people a greater understanding of a process. Sandercock compares storytelling to a mediation, where community members were able to come together to discuss what a certain place meant to them. According to Sandercock, this process “encouraged [people] to tell their story, of the meaning of the land, the place, to them and their families, past, present and future, the land whose multiple and conflicting uses they were ultimately to resolve. It was this story-ing that got people past ‘my needs versus your needs’ and on to some ‘higher ground’, moving toward some common purpose”. This focus on collaboration is shown further in readings by Gahl and Haxjija’s. Their reading takes the storytelling ‘of and for planning’ model

¹⁵ Sandercock, Leonie. “Out of the Closet: The Importance of Stories and Storytelling in Planning Practice.” *Dialogues in Urban and Regional Planning*, October 28, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203314623-14>.

introduced by Sandercock further by creating an analytical framework for this way of thinking. They define storytelling of planning as a linear process where one knowledge is simply transferred from one party to another, with the recipient party the audience being explicitly told something and providing little in return.¹⁶ The storytelling for planning model instead follows a cyclical process, where two groups come together to share a vision, with both the parties sharing

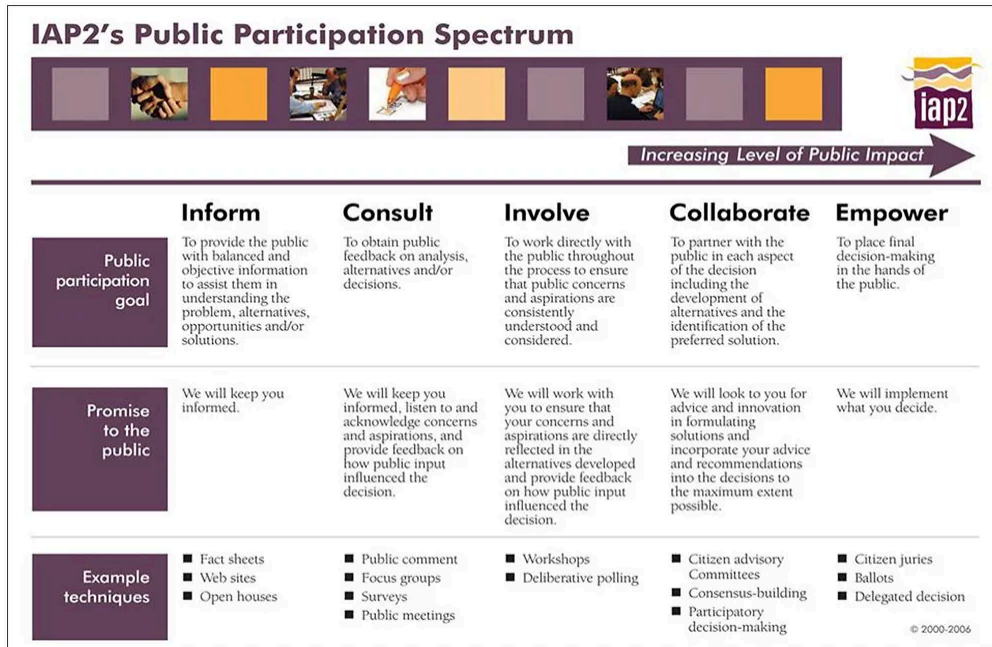


Figure 1: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum¹⁷

importance as characters.

These ideas correlate with the IAP 2 Spectrum of Public Participation, with instances of informing and consulting the public being more like a storytelling of planning model, while involving, collaborating, and empowering the public follows the storytelling for planning model. These ideas of involving, collaborating, and empowering require effective detailing of plans

¹⁶ Gall, Tjark, and Sindi Haxhija. "Storytelling of and for Planning. Urban Planning through Participatory Narrative Building." *Proceedings of the 56th ISOCARP World Planning Congress, November 2020.* <https://doi.org/10.47472/btym1702>.

¹⁷ McCallum, Steph Roy. "Re-Imagining the IAP2 Spectrum." *Medium, May 30, 2017.* <https://medium.com/@RedheadSteph/re-imagining-the-iap2-spectrum-9d24afdc1b2e>.

without the use of heavy technical jargon (which Gall and Haxhija called layering), an ability to inspire collaboration, and an understanding of what forms of conversation and media an audience might respond to most effectively. A planner's ability to provide these three things are what changes a planning process from being one of simple informing (planning of) to one that is more two-way (planning for), which can prevent displacement and increase support for the planning project. Therefore, seeing how the storytelling model in the Twin Cities potentially shifts to or from a 'planning of storytelling' and a 'planning for storytelling' will be important to track.

Furthermore, the authors also use the paper to study the 'how', 'what', and 'why' as the focal point of storytelling. Specifically, the justification for the project (the why), the way it is implemented (the how), and the consequences of said decisions (the what). Any story in planning has to have an end goal, and this end goal can be seen differently depending on who the stakeholders are. A certain stakeholder's main goal may be to effectively connect commuters to and from the suburbs to the city. Another may want to ensure that their neighborhood is served by light rail. Another may prefer to travel by car and would rather light rail not exist at all. As mentioned before, having these varying views will mean that certain groups will have different perspectives on who is the protagonist versus who is the antagonist of the story. How ideas are presented, both in this paper and throughout other forms of media will also play a large role in how the general public sees protagonists versus antagonists.

Merlijn van Hulst moves away from the storytelling of/for planning model and discusses a model of their own. Specifically, four potential kinds of stories are discussed in the article "Storytelling, a model of and a model for planning" centered upon the planning of a new town square in the fictional "Heartless-Town".¹⁸ Since most in the town agree that a new square is

¹⁸ Hulst, Merlijn van. *Storytelling, a model of and a model for planning*, August 2012. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258178798_Storytelling_a_model_of_and_a_model_for_planning.

necessary for the town to have ‘a heart’ there is a universally agreed upon core story. This is described in the “missing heart story”, which notes that there are two potential sites to focus on, with an equal number of people supporting a certain location. Location 1 is the expansion of a center previously built, while Location 2 is an entirely new location which currently has a park with various facilities. Over time though, various actors attempted to become the new ‘main protagonist’ of the story. For example, a new elected official can have a differing view compared to a previous elected official, even though they play the same role in the story. The shifting view of ‘the protagonist’ can readily impact the story. In the “back to basics story”, someone has been elected that focuses on pragmatic planning to build a fast, realistic city center regardless of which location is chosen. The argument used by the official was that this was a “now or never” opportunity, and that an unambitious option was best to get the process started as fast as possible. This is language that is often used by elected officials when talking about transportation, which ignores the fact that large transit infrastructure projects are difficult to undo and can create a worse transit system than if the more time consuming, ambitious plan was waited for and accomplished.

This idea of planning not only for the next ten to twenty years but for the next hundred years is called the “future story”. The “future” story notes that neither location is perfect and that planners should take time to find a third, more ‘perfect’ site. All of this back and forth though creates the opportunity for a ‘cynical story’ where planning and bureaucratic delays have left people cynical and underwhelmed, and do not believe a city center is necessary anymore. Through these stories, we are shown how different thought processes can lead to a watered down potentially ineffective plan or potentially no plan at all, and therefore how storytelling cannot alone be what’s used as a main guide in planning. Stories give context to what different

neighborhoods find meaning in, whether that be the character of a city or corridor, the redevelopment of a large site, or a specific planning measure (such as an anti-displacement measure). This does not mean that ‘back to basics’ stories need to be endorsed immediately, but ensuring that plans do have a ‘back to basics story’ and ‘future story’ option immediately may allow for a more immediately productive planning process. Comparing back to basics and future stories, and how they connect to storytelling of/for planning models will be extremely useful to track throughout light rail projects in the Twin Cities.

Beyond the four types of stories van Hulst also discusses the dichotomy of storytelling as a model of planning versus a model for planning. In the model of planning situation, the planning tells the story through documents such as an environmental impact statement or a site plan. Using storytelling as a model for planning inverts this, instead using core stories from a variety of sources to attempt to improve planning practice. This involves listening to people’s opinions about a potential project before, during, and after completion of said project while also investigating potential quantitative measures tied to a project, such as the amount of businesses in the area before, during, and after construction. This is especially important when core stories of different actors contradict each other, and planners need to figure out what the real truth is (it is likely a mix of both).

Methods

To answer my research question as to why Alignment 3A was chosen over Alignment 3C, I want to use the how, what, and why storytelling model, along with the ideas of using storytelling for planning to understand the history of light rail planning in the Twin Cities, the goals of public agency actors in their choices, as well as how the actions and beliefs of community organizations may have led to evolving choices over time. As shown in my literature review, authors have studied light rail in the twin cities through a housing and development lens, but have largely ignored directly investigating stakeholders and allowing them to show how planning and policy has directly affected them. Each of the lenses like jobs and retail are limiting and fragmented parts of the whole story. I wanted to allow stakeholders to draw upon elements that are important to them to tell a full story, and by doing so, allowed me to answer the question as to whether it's better to build light rail in developed or undeveloped areas, and what policies could be put in place to make light rail communities successful.

To do this, I decided to conduct my studies using three main modes: archival research, interviews, and observations. Archival research would provide the basis of information regarding planning in the Twin Cities. Examples include Environmental Impact Statements for all light rail projects, news articles about effects of those projects, community outreach statistics, and more. These statistics made up most of the quantitative data used for my findings. I also used archival research to understand discussion on specific policy, both in regards to how transit is planned as well as the effects of transit on community issues (jobs, housing, etc). Specifically, as the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban Affairs (CURA) continued to be mentioned by interviewees as key stakeholders, I looked to see if there were previous examples of universities playing roles in transit projects where they were not being directly served (almost as a mediator),

but found very little. The University of Washington has an office focused on regional and community relations, but their main focus on transit has been stations surrounding the University, the last of which opened in 2021. CURA's website themselves states that while "many universities established centers like CURA, most of these have shifted their focus" and that "CURA, in contrast, remains a thriving center for community-engaged research, always evolving with community needs".

I chose to conduct interviews with various stakeholders who played a key role in the planning of the four major light rail projects in the Twin Cities: Hiawatha Light Rail, University Avenue Light Rail, Southwest LRT, and the Blue Line Extension. I conducted interviews both virtually and in-person, and took copious notes of all interactions. At the end of each interview, I asked interviewees for any recommendations on who to interview in the future. By doing this, I was able to speak to both government officials and community members for all projects described above. Originally, most of my interview questions only pertained to the Minneapolis section of Southwest LRT (as seen in Appendix 1), but as time went on and the trajectory of the thesis moved more towards storytelling, I began to base questions off of previous interviews while still having a base set of questions as to what people's roles were, and how they believed each project played off of previous projects. As discussed in the Sandercock reading, I expected that different stakeholders would have differing opinions, which is described in the results section. By conducting these interviews, I hoped to be able to paint a reliable picture of how planning is undertaken in the Twin Cities, the relationships between agencies and community members that help shape decisions, and how these developments and relationships have led to changes in planning from project to project. I also hope to be able to hear responses that are more detailed than simply, "I was in favor/opposition" to this project, like a result that may come from

a closed-survey. The openness of the survey may present a challenge though, since not having the same questions being asked could compromise results. That is why it's important to ask baseline questions that can be compared while still getting as much data out of each interviewee as possible. To ensure that all questions are asked, each interviewee will be contacted after the interview to confirm that notes taken were correct, and allow them to add anything that they see fit. A list of people interviewed, along with a tree of how I found these interviewees, can be found below:

1. Steve Mahowald (Metro Transit)
2. Craig Lamothe (Metro Transit)
3. Robin Cauffman (Metro Transit)
4. Sam Rockwell (Move Minnesota)
5. Dan Soler (Hennepin County)
6. Tim Sandvik (City of Robbinsdale)
7. Mitchel Hansen (Harrison Neighborhood Association)
8. Barry Schade (Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association)
9. Stephen Klimek (Towerside Innovation District)
10. Catherine Day (Creative Enterprise Zone)
11. Anonymous Business Owners from Midway
12. Matt Privratsky (Green Line Resident)
13. Sean Walther (City of St. Louis Park)

A model below of who led me to what interviewee can also be found below. Government officials are labeled with a square, while community members are labeled with a circle.

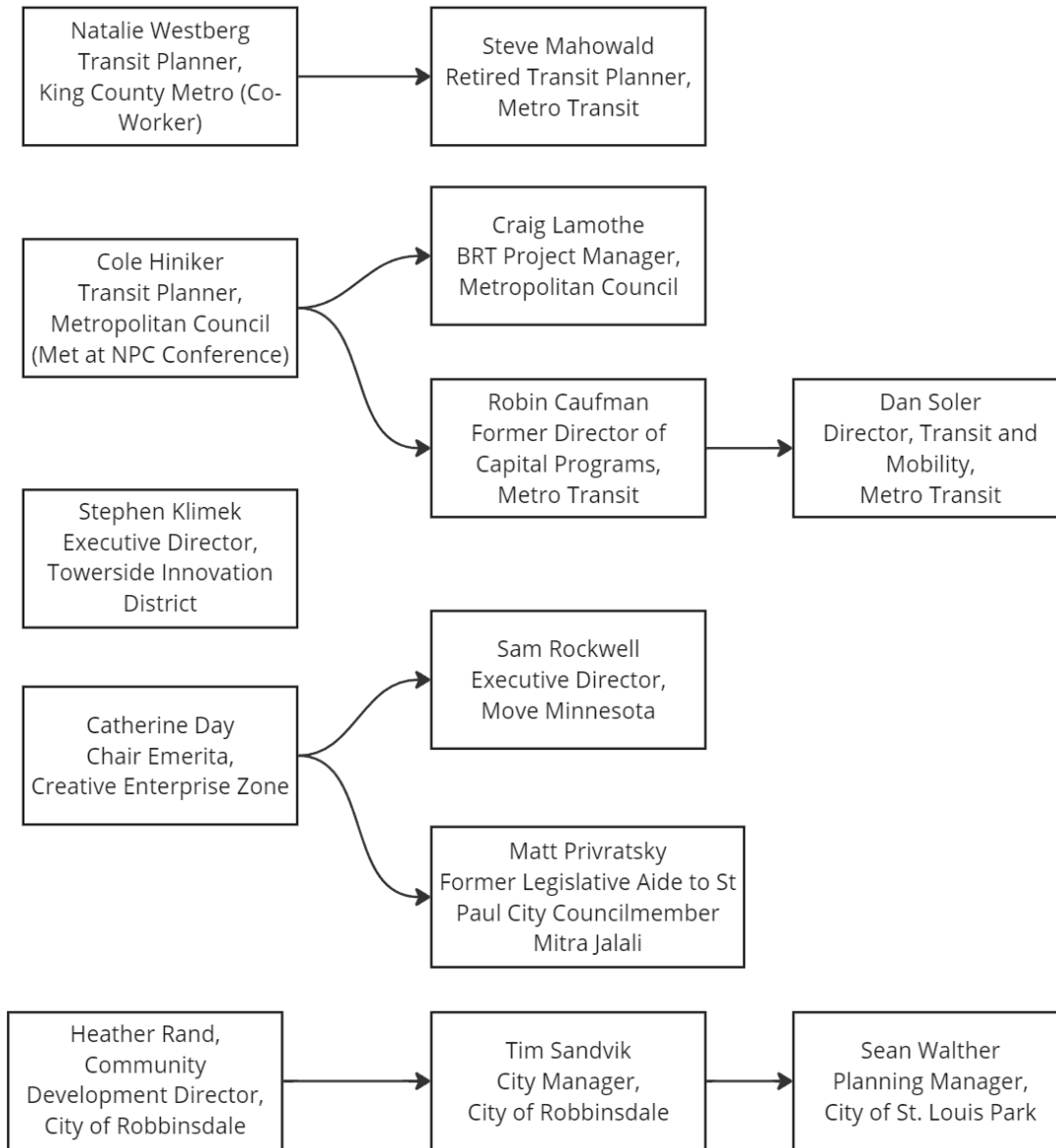


Figure 2: Interview Web, Government Stakeholders

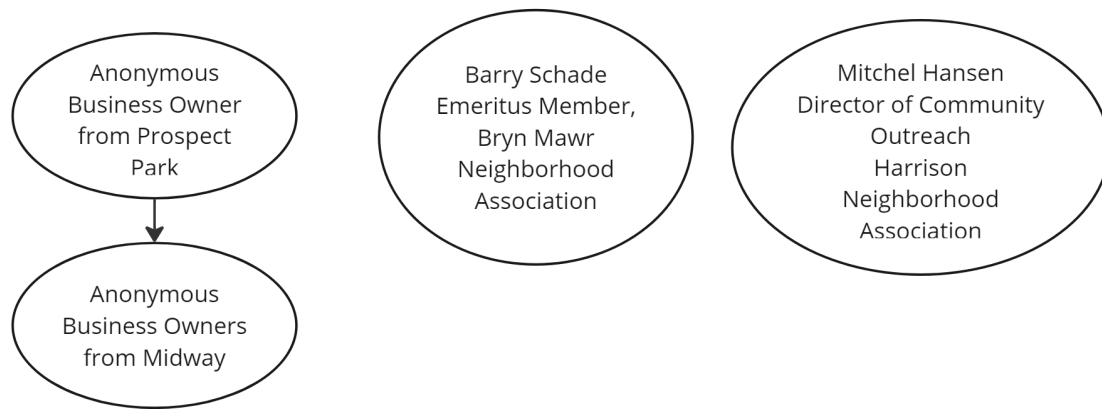


Figure 3: Interview Web, Community Stakeholders

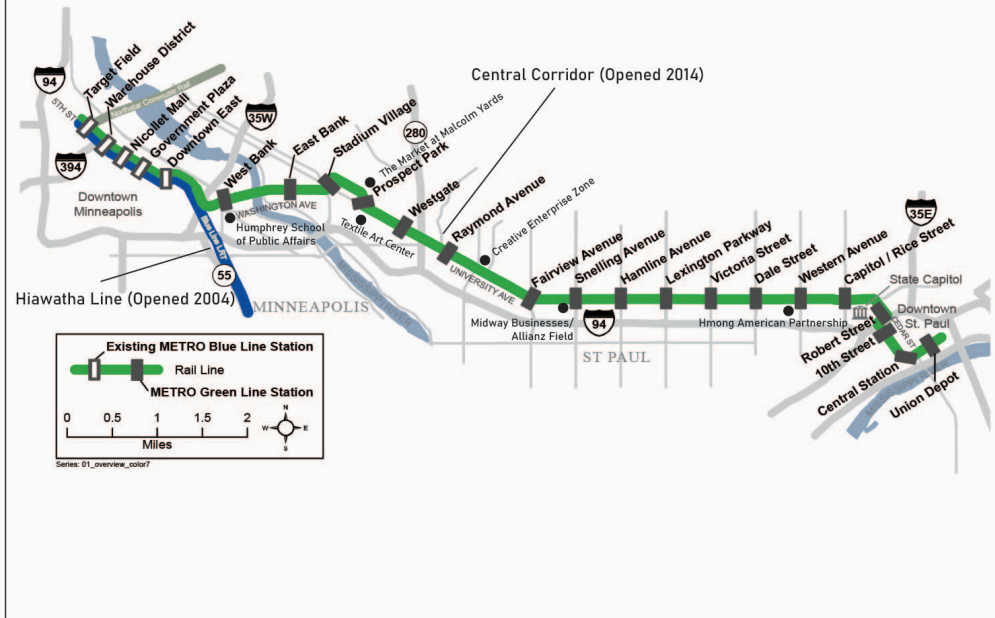
As a check/foil to these interviews, I conducted observations throughout the Twin Cities. From April 11th, 2024 to April 16th, 2024, I was able to travel to the National Planning Conference (NPC) in Minneapolis. While not in sessions I was able to travel to numerous locations throughout the twin cities. Due to its central location and its importance to this thesis, I chose to base myself in the Uptown neighborhood near the Uptown Transit Center (which unfortunately was closed at the time due to a long-term closure of Hennepin Avenue). I was able to travel to the following places to conduct observations:

- Hiawatha Line (Existing Blue Line)
 - Lake Street Midtown Station
 - Hi-Lake Shopping Center
 - Minnehaha Center
 - 50th St - Minnehaha Station
 - Minnehaha Park
 - Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport Station
 - Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport

- Mall of America Station
 - Mall of America
- Central Corridor (Existing Green Line)
 - West Bank Station
 - Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs
 - East Bank Station
 - Dinkytown
 - Prospect Park Station
 - The Market at Malcolm Yards
 - Textile Art Center
 - Raymond Ave Station
 - Attempted to reach Creative Enterprise Zone (not there)
 - Snelling Avenue Station
 - Allianz Field
 - Various businesses
 - Western Ave Station
 - Attempted to reach Hmong American Partnership (not there)
- Southwest LRT (Green Line Extension)
 - Royalston Ave/Farmers Market Station
 - Minneapolis Farmers Market (closed)
 - Bassett Creek Valley Station
 - Harrison Neighborhood Association
 - Bryn Mawr Station

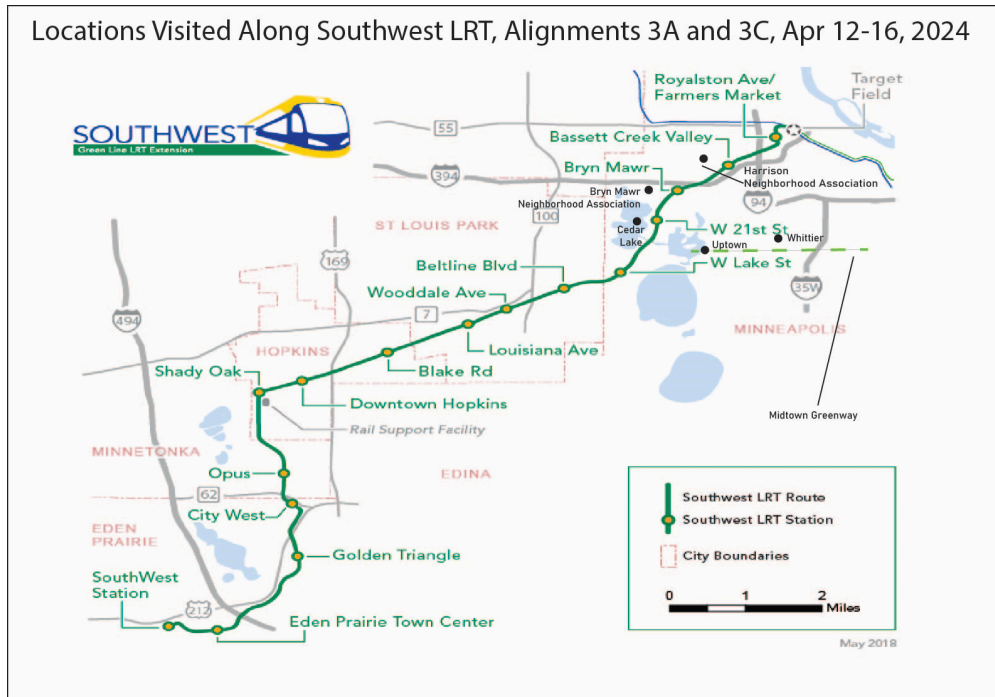
- Bryn Mawr Association (not there)
 - W 21st St Station
 - Cedar Lake
 - W Lake St Station
 - Chain of Lakes
 - Midtown Greenway
 - Beltline Blvd Station
 - Wooddale Ave Station
 - Louisiana Ave Station
 - Blake Rd Station
 - Downtown Hopkins Station
 - Shady Oak Station
 - Eden Prairie Town Center Station
 - SouthWest Station
- Other
 - Ford Site (A Line)
 - I-35w & Lake St Station (Orange Line)
 - Diamond Lake Neighborhood (D Line)
 - Uptown Neighborhood (Base)
 - Uptown Association (not there)
 - Whittier
 - Nicollet Mall

Locations Visited Along Central Corridor, April 13-15, 2024



Map 3: Locations Visited along Central Corridor (Base Map²⁰)

Locations Visited Along Southwest LRT, Alignments 3A and 3C, Apr 12-16, 2024



Map 4: Locations Visited along Southwest LRT (Base Map²)

²⁰ Minneapolis Green Line Light Rail Systems Railfan Guide, n.d. <https://railfanguides.us/mn/hiawatha/green/index.htm>.

At many of these locations, I was able to take notes and list observations about the urban form surrounding the station, and the amounts of housing and businesses in the area. These observations will be elaborated upon throughout the thesis. Unfortunately, I did not visit any locations along the Blue Line Extension since at the time, the project was not seen as part of the thesis. Through these methods, I was able to construct a story for how light rail in the Twin Cities developed, analyze the stories told to me by interviewees, as well as what I gathered through observations and research, and determine what type of planning (storytelling of vs. for, as well as back to basics vs. future), was best for those involved.

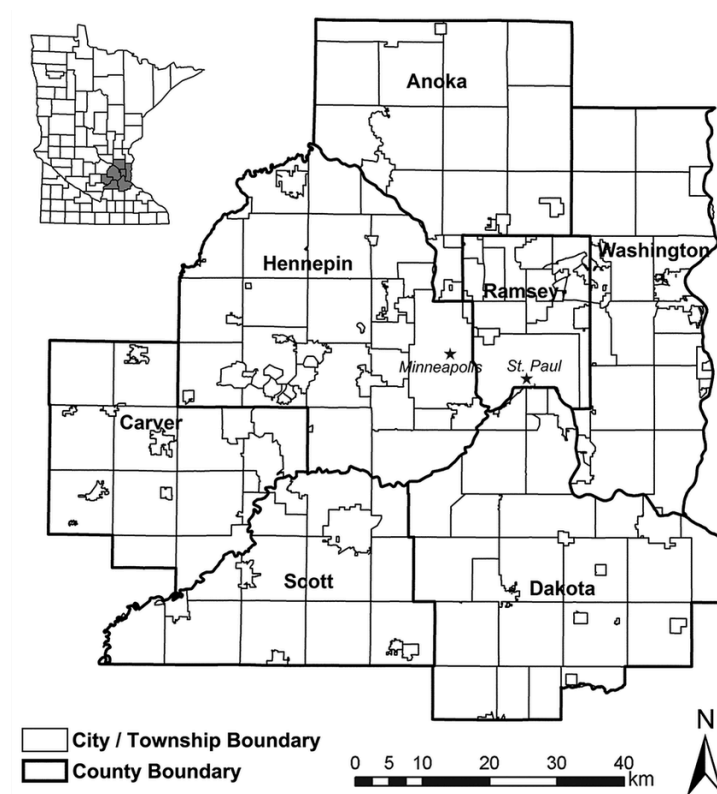
How Planning Works in the Twin Cities

When understanding the stories associated with different plans, it's important to understand the stakeholders involved and their motivations. For example, with Southwest LRT there are government agency stakeholders such as Hennepin County, who plan the line, METRO Transit, who operates the line, commuters (both from Minneapolis and the suburbs) who will use the line to get to jobs throughout the full alignment, as well as residents in the neighborhoods that the line passes through, businesses along the alignment, and the neighborhood associations that support residents and businesses. All of these stakeholders are likely to believe different core stories, and may play different roles in the story of the planning of said line. This will be discussed in detail in the analysis section of the thesis. Some stakeholders' story may end in no action, but not necessarily as a negative consequence of inaction. For example, according to Steve Hahowald at METRO Transit, the City of Edina lobbied to have a light rail station within their limits, but it was determined that including the city in the alignment would not make geographical sense, and a BRT line between Edina and Minneapolis, known as the E Line was allocated to them instead. Unlike the choice between Alignment 3A and 3C, where one area is far more dense and highly used than the other, the cities of Edina and Hopkins are relatively similar, with Hopkins even having a less sprawling downtown, ideal for light rail service. Therefore, there is a clear 'why' in the story process.

Government Stakeholders

As mentioned above, the Twin Cities are made up of numerous government stakeholders. The counties focus on alignment choice, planning, and land acquisition from businesses, private freight lines, or homeowners. They receive much of their funding from taxes. Prior to 2017,

counties in the Twin Cities region were a part of the County Transportation Improvement Board (CTIB). This was a ‘joint powers board’ made up of members from Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota, Anoka, Washington, Carver, and Scott Counties. Together, these counties (but especially the first five) taxed its residents to fund transportation initiatives in the entire Metro region.



Map 5: Map of CTIB Counties²¹

According to Hennepin County’s Director of Transit and Mobility Dan Soler, while CTIB helped fund projects such as planning for Southwest LRT, the distribution of public transportation projects was seen as unequal. In fact, much of the planned LRT and BRT lines in the Metro Transit system would only serve the fringes of the outlying counties, with much of the routes

²¹ The seven-county twin cities metropolitan area of Minnesota. | download scientific diagram, n.d. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-seven-county-Twin-Cities-Metropolitan-Area-of-Minnesota_fig1_288684001.

only serving Hennepin or Ramsey counties. Below in Table 1 a full list of existing and planned Metro Transit projects and the counties they serve.

Project	Project Type	Opening Year (Projected)	County
Hiawatha Blue Line	Light Rail	2004	Hennepin
Red Line	Highway BRT	2013	Hennepin, Dakota
Central Corridor Green Line	Light Rail	2014	Hennepin, Ramsey
A Line	Arterial BRT	2016	Hennepin, Ramsey
C Line	Arterial BRT	2019	Hennepin
Orange Line	Highway BRT	2021	Hennepin, Dakota
D Line	Arterial BRT	2022	Hennepin
Gold Line	Dedicated BRT	(2025)	Ramsey, Washington
B Line	Arterial BRT	(2025)	Hennepin, Ramsey
E Line	Arterial BRT	(2025)	Hennepin, Ramsey
Southwest LRT Green Line	Light Rail	(2027)	Hennepin
Blue Line Extension	Light Rail	(2030)	Hennepin
Purple Line	Dedicated BRT	(TBA)	Ramsey
F Line	Arterial BRT	(TBA)	Anoka, Hennepin
G Line	Arterial BRT	(TBA)	Ramsey, Dakota
H Line	Arterial BRT	(TBA)	Hennepin, Ramsey

Table 1: Public Transit Project Timeline

With every project serving one of Hennepin and Ramsey counties, and only four of the sixteen projects ever serving a county other than Hennepin and Ramsey counties, numerous counties chose to withdraw from CTIB to instead fund transit measures themselves.

According to the independent newspaper *Minnpost*, the dissolving of CTIB was originally seen as a win-win by many. Hennepin and Ramsey counties were able to raise their sales tax, while outlying counties were able to have taxes from their citizens go directly to transportation projects that would benefit them.²² Still, CTIB funds were not enough to fully fund these projects, and Hennepin County had to look for funds from the federal government to construct their light rail lines, particularly the New Starts Program. The New Starts Program is the federal governments' main funding program for any project costing more than \$400 million.²³ With Southwest LRT originally estimated to cost around \$1.25 billion²⁴ and the Blue Line Extension to cost nearly \$3 billion, these light rail projects squarely fall into the New Starts Program.²⁵

To prioritize funding in the program, the federal government created a way to score projects on various criteria, with different criteria having a different weight. Criteria include mobility improvements, cost-effectiveness, reliability/capacity and more, but one of the most important ones is economic development. According to the New Starts Program, economic development is measured based on “the extent to which a proposed project is likely to induce additional, transit-supportive development in the future based on a qualitative examination of the

²² Callaghan, Peter. “Turns out, Killing off CTIB Kinda Screwed over the City of Minneapolis.” *MinnPost*, February 9, 2018.

<https://www.minnpost.com/politics-policy/2018/02/turns-out-killing-ctib-kinda-screwed-over-city-minneapolis/>

²³ About the Program | FTA, n.d.

<https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grant-programs/capital-investments/about-program>.

²⁴ Southwest Light Rail Transit: Project Budget and timeline, n.d.

<https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/sreview/SWLRTbudgettimeline.pdf>.

²⁵ Moore, Janet. Cost of blue line extension in Twin Cities could exceed the Southwest Light Rail, February 29, 2024. <https://www.startribune.com/cost-of-blue-line-extension-could-exceed-the-southwest-light-rail/600346957>.

existing local plans and policies to support economic development proximate to the project”.²⁶

By having this as a main form of criteria (with an estimated 16.6% weight), cities are highly encouraged to build routes in areas where development can occur instead of areas where development already exists.²⁷ Instead, areas where development already exists may receive smaller projects that do not rely on the New Starts Program, such as the B Line and E Line which have an estimated price tag of \$65 million²⁸ and \$60 million,²⁹ respectively.

²⁶ New and Small Starts Evaluation and Rating Process Final Policy Guidance, August 2013. https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/gap/fedreg/Documents/NS-SS_Final_PolicyGuidance_August_2013.pdf.

²⁷ Section 5309 Capital Investment Grant Program New and Small Starts Evaluation and Rating Process, August 2013. https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/Final_Policy_Guidance_outreach_slides_-_August_2013_FINAL.pdf.

²⁸ The Metro B Line, n.d. <https://www.metrotransit.org/Data/Sites/1/media/b-line/2019-10-28-b-line-fact-sheet.pdf>.

²⁹ E line project, n.d. <https://www.metrotransit.org/e-line-faqs>.

Hiawatha Line History and Current State

The first light rail line to be built in Minneapolis was the Hiawatha Line, running from Downtown and Southeast Minneapolis to the Minneapolis St-Paul International Airport and the Mall of America in neighboring Bloomington. While the line was projected to have less ridership than a line between Minneapolis and St. Paul, the Hiawatha Corridor was chosen due to its straightforward alignment next to Hiawatha Avenue (State Route 55), potential land development along the corridor, and the fact that it accomplished the goal of connecting Minneapolis with its airport (as well as one of its biggest tourist sites, the Mall of America). This makes it a “back to basics” due to the fast nature of the project. Station Area Master Plans were created for most station areas, including East Lake Street, Franklin Avenue, Cedar-Riverside, and more.⁷ However, only minor land use changes resulted from the introduction of the Hiawatha Line in 2004, with the most notable change being a 16% increase in multifamily housing within a half mile of stations along the line.



Figure 4: Hiawatha Line, taken from Midtown Greenway

These findings could be seen through my observations of the Hiawatha Line. While the line shifts from a more urban to suburban nature as one moves south, the amount of development is roughly equal throughout the Minneapolis alignment. Uses other than housing include an industrial plant along 38th St and a Target along East Lake Street. This section of Lake Street is facing new redevelopment in the wake of riots after George Floyd's murder. Numerous businesses along East Lake Street near Hiawatha have not yet been redeveloped, and the area zoned for mixed use development, both housing and jobs can be expanded in the area. Specific redevelopment plans within a half mile of Lake Street Station can be found below:

Address	Former Business	Current/Future Business	Property Owner	Status
2116 E Lake St	Hi Lake Shopping Center	Multiple Businesses	Hi-Lake LLC / Wellington Management, Inc	Partially reopen (Burlington, Dollar General, + eateries)
3000 Snelling Ave	Arby's	Raising Cane's Chicken Fingers	The Harstad Ltd Ptnshp	Complete/Open
3000 Minnehaha Ave	MPD 3rd Precinct	None	City of Minneapolis	Vacant Building
2900 26th Ave S	Minnehaha Crossing Apartments	Minnehaha Crossing Apartments	Minnehaha Crossing LLC / Wellington Management, Inc	Rebuilt
2843 26th Ave S	7-Sigma	None	Black Mountain Holdings LLC	Vacant Building

2801 26th Ave S	Dominos	None	Prades LLC	No Plans
2610 E Lake St	AutoZone	AutoZone	Minnehaha Holding Assoc LLP	Rebuilt
2931 26th Ave S	Wendy's	Wendy's	Minnehaha Crossing LLC	Rebuilt
2613-2619 E Lake St	Minnehaha Lake Wine Spirits & GM Tobacco	None	M&E Inc	No Plans
2621 E Lake St	Chiropractor	None	Michael Shoff	No Plans
2629 E Lake St	Midori's Floating World Cafe & LV's Barber Shop	LV's Barbershop	Shoa Motamedi	Vacant Building
2700 E Lake St	Coliseum Building	None	2700 Longfellow Coliseum LLC	Under Construction
2709 E Lake St	Oddfellows Building / Multiple Businesses	None	Adenal Investment LLC	No Plans
3009-3013 27th Ave S	Gandhi Mahal	None	Msr 27th Ave LLC	No Plans
3017 27th Ave S	Migizi	None	Holy Trinity Lutheran Church	Initial Planning
3037 27th Ave S	US Postal Office	None	Ehlen Associates	Initial Planning
2716 E Lake St	Victory in the	None	Longfellow	Vacant Building

	Truth Ministry		Investment LLC	
2726 E Lake St	MaX it PAWN	None	Gray Dog Holdings	Vacant Building
2800 E Lake St	US Bank	None	First Building Corporation	Initial Planning
2815 E Lake St	T-Mobile	None	Truher LLC	No Plans
2905 E Lake St	O'Reilly Auto Parts	None	F9 - 2905 Lake Street LLC	Vacant Building

Table 2: Business Plans near Lake Street and Hiawatha Ave³⁰

Near Minneapolis’s southern border, there are two areas near the Hiawatha Line that deserve particular notice: Minnehaha Park and the former Ford Plant along 46th Street, known as Highland Bridge. The former is one of the few existing connections to recreation in the METRO system. Unfortunately, the Minnehaha Park light rail station has not seen high ridership, with the station only receiving an average of 258 daily riders in 2023, making it the 35th most popular station in the system (out of 37).³¹ This could be because while the station does provide access to recreation, it provides access to little else, with few food options and single family homes dominating the area around the station.

³⁰ “Redevelopment on Lake Street.” Visit Lake Street - Lake Street Council, n.d. <https://www.visitlakestreet.com/redevelopment>.

³¹ “Transit Stops Boardings and Alightings.” Minnesota Geospatial Commons, n.d. <https://gisdata.mn.gov/dataset/us-mn-state-metc-trans-stop-boardings-alightings>.



Figure 5: Minnehaha Falls, located next to Hiawatha Line

Meanwhile, Highland Bridge is one of the biggest redevelopment sites in the Twin Cities, albeit a mile and a half away from the Hiawatha Corridor. A Bus Rapid Transit connection known as the A Line exists between the Hiawatha Corridor and the Ford Site though, allowing connections between the two areas in approximately 5-10 minutes, and a trip from Highland Bridge to Downtown Minneapolis via BRT/light rail taking approximately 30 minutes. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the A Line saw upwards of 6,000 riders a day,³² with estimates now a little more than half that, but developments such as the Ford Site may allow for ridership to reach the previously projected 8,000 by 2030.³³ Transit within the new neighborhood is focused on

³² Performance, n.d. <https://www.metrotransit.org/performance#aline>.

³³ “Property Values Remain Stable after Opening of Twin Cities Bus Rapid Transit Line.” Property values remain stable after opening of Twin Cities bus rapid transit line | Center for Transportation Studies, January 25, 2022. <https://www.cts.umn.edu/news/2022/january/bus>.

bike and pedestrian infrastructure, which may incentivize people to not use cars and instead use BRT/light rail to get to/from important destinations in the region from the site. While the site is not fully completed as of 2024, numerous properties have opened, including numerous affordable housing sites, and other apartment/senior living communities. A list of these sites can be found in Table 3. All infrastructure, including sidewalks, bike lanes, and parks are expected to be completed in 2025 with construction of new buildings continuing into the 2030's.

Housing Type	Name	Number of Units
Affordable Apartment (62+)	CommonBond Communities’ The Lumin ³⁴	60
Affordable Apartment	PPL’s Nellie Francis Court ³⁵	75
Affordable Apartment	PPL and Emma Norton’s Restoring Waters ³⁶	60
Rowhomes	Pulte ³⁷	320
Apartment Communities	Collection at Highland Bridge ³⁸	230
Custom Homes	Highland Bridge Custom Homes ³⁹	Final Total Unknown
Senior Living	Marvella at Highland Bridge ⁴⁰	125

Table 3. Highland Bridge Developments

With these advancements, it is the hope of the city that ridership along the Hiawatha Corridor can continue to increase, and that more sites such as these can be used to incite development and increase transit ridership. Nevertheless, this development did not coincide with

³⁴ Swanson, Hannah. “The Lumin: A New Horizon for Seniors.” CommonBond Communities, May 1, 2024. <https://commonbond.org/the-lumin-a-new-horizon-for-seniors/#:~:text=The%20Lumin%20%E2%80%93%20a%2060%2Dunit,helping%20to%20meet%20this%20need.>

³⁵ Nellie Francis Court at Highland Bridge – minnesota housing partnership (MHP), n.d. https://mhponline.org/mhp_projects/nellie-francis-court-at-highland-bridge/#:~:text=Nellie%20Francis%20Court%20will%20include,include%20%20newly%20designed%20St.

³⁶ Porter, Evette. Restoring affordable housing in St Paul’s Highland Bridge Area: Minnesota spokesman, February 1, 2023. <https://spokesman-recorder.com/2023/01/17/restoring-affordable-housing-in-st-pauls-highland-bridge-area/#:~:text=Emma%20Norton%2C%20the%20developer%20of,support%20services%20in%20their%20recovery.>

³⁷ Melo, Frederick. First Rowhomes at Highland Bridge to open at \$594K-\$763K during two-day bidding war, December 3, 2021. [https://www.twincities.com/2021/12/02/pulte-rowhomes-at-highland-bridge-to-open-at-594k-763k-during-two-day-bidding-war/.](https://www.twincities.com/2021/12/02/pulte-rowhomes-at-highland-bridge-to-open-at-594k-763k-during-two-day-bidding-war/)

³⁸ “A Look into the Progress at Highland Bridge.” Ryan Companies, April 24, 2023. <https://www.ryancompanies.com/news/look-progress-highland-bridge.>

³⁹ “Lot Sales Launch at Highland Bridge.” Ryan Companies, February 11, 2021. <https://www.ryancompanies.com/news/lot-sales-launch-highland-bridge/#:~:text=The%20122%2Dacre%20development%20at,square%20feet%20of%20office%20space.>

⁴⁰ Johnson, Brian. “Future Site of Highland Bridge Senior Housing Sells.” Finance & Commerce, November 28, 2023. [https://finance-commerce.com/2023/11/future-site-of-highland-bridge-senior-housing-sells/.](https://finance-commerce.com/2023/11/future-site-of-highland-bridge-senior-housing-sells/)

the light rail opening, and since little record of outreach to nearby neighborhoods exists, one can assume that the Hiawatha Line is an example of “storytelling of” planning.

Green Line History and Current State

Much like the Hiawatha Line, the Green Line (then known as the Central Corridor), was planned with one simple goal in mind: to connect the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul. While the two had previously been connected by an interurban along University Avenue, that streetcar was replaced by bus service (known as Route 16) in the 1950's.⁴¹ While the line was planned to begin design and operation in the late 1980's, delays occurred due to local fears that the line would lead to displacement and a change in local's way of life, especially after I-94, which had similar effects when it was completed in 1968.⁴² Planners instead focused on building the Hiawatha Line. Once planners were ready to begin designing the line again, two main alignments were proposed as part of the Central Corridor project: an alignment on University Avenue that would largely replace Route 16 and an alignment following Interstate 94. After much back and forth, the alignment was chosen to be on University Avenue, with the hope that industrial neighborhoods along the road (especially those near the University of Minnesota) would be able to be redeveloped, while other working class neighborhoods would be able to maintain their way of life.

⁴¹ Route 16: The original Minneapolis-St. Paul Connection - Metro Transit, n.d. <https://web.archive.org/web/20161108195257/http://www.metrotransit.org/route-16-the-original-minneapolis-st-paul-connection>.

⁴² Longworth, Nick. Rethinking I-94' looks to reconnect St. Paul neighborhoods, residents, July 17, 2023. <https://www.fox9.com/news/rethinking-i-94-looks-to-reconnect-st-paul-neighborhoods-residents>.



Map 6: Green Line Map⁴³

Prospect Park

The Western neighborhoods surrounding University Avenue are neighborhoods of transformation. Bounded by the University of Minnesota to the west, the Mississippi River to the south, and the working class neighborhood of Midway to the east, the neighborhoods of Prospect Park (and its eastern neighbor St. Anthony Park) are examples of the drastic change that can occur when light rail enters undeveloped neighborhoods. The area, described by Stephen Kilmick of the Towerside Innovation District as “the backyard of both of the Twin Cities” was once largely industrial, with railroad tracks criss-crossing the area connecting various grain elevators and lumber mills. This is distinct from the Ford Site along the Hiawatha Line, since land was owned by numerous owners, allowing for a variety of projects involving a variety of developers. Kilmick mentioned that while there was incredible potential for multi-use zoning throughout Prospect Park, the level of coordination between planners, developers, and architects was low, with government entities doing a poor job at bringing stakeholders to the table. Instead,

⁴³ “The Metro Green Line.” Metropolitan Council, n.d.
<https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/Projects/Current-Projects/Central-Corridor.aspx>.

Towerside Innovation District, a local-nonprofit was created by locals to create a sustainable, repeatable developed area primarily in Prospect Park. To do this, Towerside partnered with numerous stakeholders in the area, from the University of Minnesota, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Prospect Park, the Mississippi Watershed, and others to facilitate development along the Green Line and to create a place out of an area one former developer noted “if I squint very hard I can see [your vision]”.

Without the challenge of redeveloping already developed land (unlike the Midway neighborhood to the east), Towerside got to work on creating a place where people wanted to be. Using a plan known as Prospect Park 2020 as a framework, various stakeholders got to work on making the vision a reality. UMN and Blue Cross Blue Shield worked together on placemaking, ensuring that all uses came together cohesively. Challenges, such as a stormwater management system in the area, were used to bring groups together to brainstorm solutions while also allowing them to agree on how maintenance would get shared. Prospect Park 2020 called for parks and progressive urban design elements, mixed-use development along both sides of University Avenue (while still preserving existing single family homes), gathering spaces with a retail focus near stations, and a specific plan for 4th Street to become a residential street with row houses and high-rise residences.⁴⁴ With this plan, developers hoped that the area could become a center of activity near the University of Minnesota, with the Green Line spurring most of the development.

When visiting Prospect Park in 2024, one can see that many of these goals came to pass. For one, the neighborhood has seen a large increase in mixed use development, with numerous apartment buildings dotting University Avenue, 29th Avenue SE, and parts of 4th Street. A large

⁴⁴ Prospect Park 2020, n.d. <https://www.nrp.org/prjimg/PRO/30412/30412.html>.

grocery store now acts as an anchor of the neighborhood, with its building footprint right next to the light rail station. More than anything though, the five minute ride to the University of Minnesota campus and fifteen minute ride to Downtown Minneapolis and its access to various opportunities have been the biggest drivers for change in Prospect Park. When meeting with a worker at the Textile Center, a local fiber art gallery/museum, she mentioned that the light rail had “been a great driver of business”. Even new businesses were born out of the new light rail station, with a prominent food hall known as The Market at Malcolm Yards being established in an old industrial building near the light rail station.⁴⁵



Figure 6: Mixed use development in Prospect Park

⁴⁵ Flats at Malcolm Yards | Custom Page, n.d. <https://www.flatsatmalcolmyards.com/history-of-malcolm-yards>.



Figure 7: The Market at Malcolm Yards

Certain challenges mentioned by those at Towerside are noticeable though. Kilmick mentioned the intersection between University Avenue and 29th Avenue SE is difficult to cross, perpetuating the idea that the light rail acts as a divider between the north and south parts of the neighborhood. During my observations, I also noticed that there is also a distinct lack of wide open green space (there is a park surrounding the water tower, but it lacks the expanse of the parks bordering the Mississippi River twenty minutes to the south). Furthermore, Kilmick noted that while single family homes remain in the southern area of the neighborhood, the elimination of single family zoning in 2018 as part of the Minneapolis 2040 plan has left homeowners nervous about the future of their homes. The biggest question that remains though is one that has been the focal point of Towerside's work: is this repeatable? Prospect Park has undoubtedly been a success. It is one of the few transit developed neighborhoods that provides clear access to jobs, housing, and retail, but with fewer full industrial sites being redeveloped (besides the aforementioned Ford Site), few opportunities exist, at least in areas where you are completely

starting over. Instead, these attributes will need to be attained in non-industrial areas, either in already developed cities/towns, or ‘somewhere else’.

Midway

The neighborhood of Midway is one of a past and a future. Centered around the intersection of University Avenue and Snelling Avenue, the neighborhood always had an industrial and working class background. This is most notably shown by a nine-story warehouse and distribution center for Montgomery Ward, which was built there in 1921. While planning events such as the construction of I-94 cut the neighborhood off from areas such as Hamline (which Midway officially still shares in its name), the working class background remained for many years. The various railroads surrounding the neighborhood were a boon to Montgomery Ward and other industrial firms, and the mall boom in the late 20th Century saw Montgomery Ward add a retail store at the bottom of their distribution center. As business changed, the industrial nature of Midway became neglected and began to need redevelopment. Montgomery Ward closed in 1995 and was demolished in 1996, leaving a large plot of land surrounding the intersection of University Avenue and Snelling Avenue.



Figure 8: Montgomery Ward, St. Paul, 1933⁴⁶

As mentioned, the potential for redevelopment here as well as other neighborhoods such as Prospect Park led to the University Avenue corridor being chosen, though certain businesses were unhappy. In a 1999 flier written by business owners in Midway who preferred to remain nameless, they mentioned fears that light rail would lead to two to three years of street disruption on University Avenue, a permanent loss of parking throughout Midway, a reduction in traffic lanes, the loss of Route 16 (along with the Route 94 Express Bus), as well as the destruction of homes and small businesses throughout the entire alignment (the full flier can be found below in Figure 9). Many of these fears have not come to pass. Route 16 continued to operate along University Avenue, providing local service along the road every twenty minutes until its suspension due to pandemic related driver shortages.⁴¹ Route 94 has also continued to operate, providing an express connection between the two downtowns.⁴⁷ Also, according to a 2018 traffic

⁴⁶ Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. Montgomery Ward & Company Northwestern Catalog House, University Avenue west, Saint Paul, Ramsey County, MN. Ramsey County Saint Paul Minnesota, 1933. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mn0541/>.

⁴⁷ Schedules - Metro Transit, n.d. <https://www.metrotransit.org/route/94>.

study done by the Minnesota State Department of Transportation, while the Midway section of St Paul saw approximately 13,000 vehicular trips a day after the Green line opened, comparable streets with two lanes in each direction such as Larpenteur Avenue saw an even greater amount of traffic (around 18,000 trips a day).⁴⁸ Furthermore, the 13,000 vehicular trips was far less than the 66,000 drivers that would pass through the Midway neighborhood to and from the Montgomery Ward in the early 20th century.⁴⁹ Lastly, according to the Creative Enterprise Zone, putting the railway in the median of the roadway was a purposeful decision made to prevent businesses from closing, and while numerous businesses did close (the total amount is contested), Catherine Day mentioned that more would have likely closed if the alignment was not in the street median.

⁴⁸ 2018 publication traffic volumes - Saint Paul, n.d.
https://www.dot.state.mn.us/traffic/data/maps/trunkhighway/2018/cities/2018_Publication_Traffic_Volumes_-_Saint_Paul.pdf.

⁴⁹ Montgomery Ward & Company Northwestern Catalog House, Saint Paul Minnesota, April 7, 2022.
https://www.historic-structures.com/mn/st_paul/montgomery_ward_catalog.php.

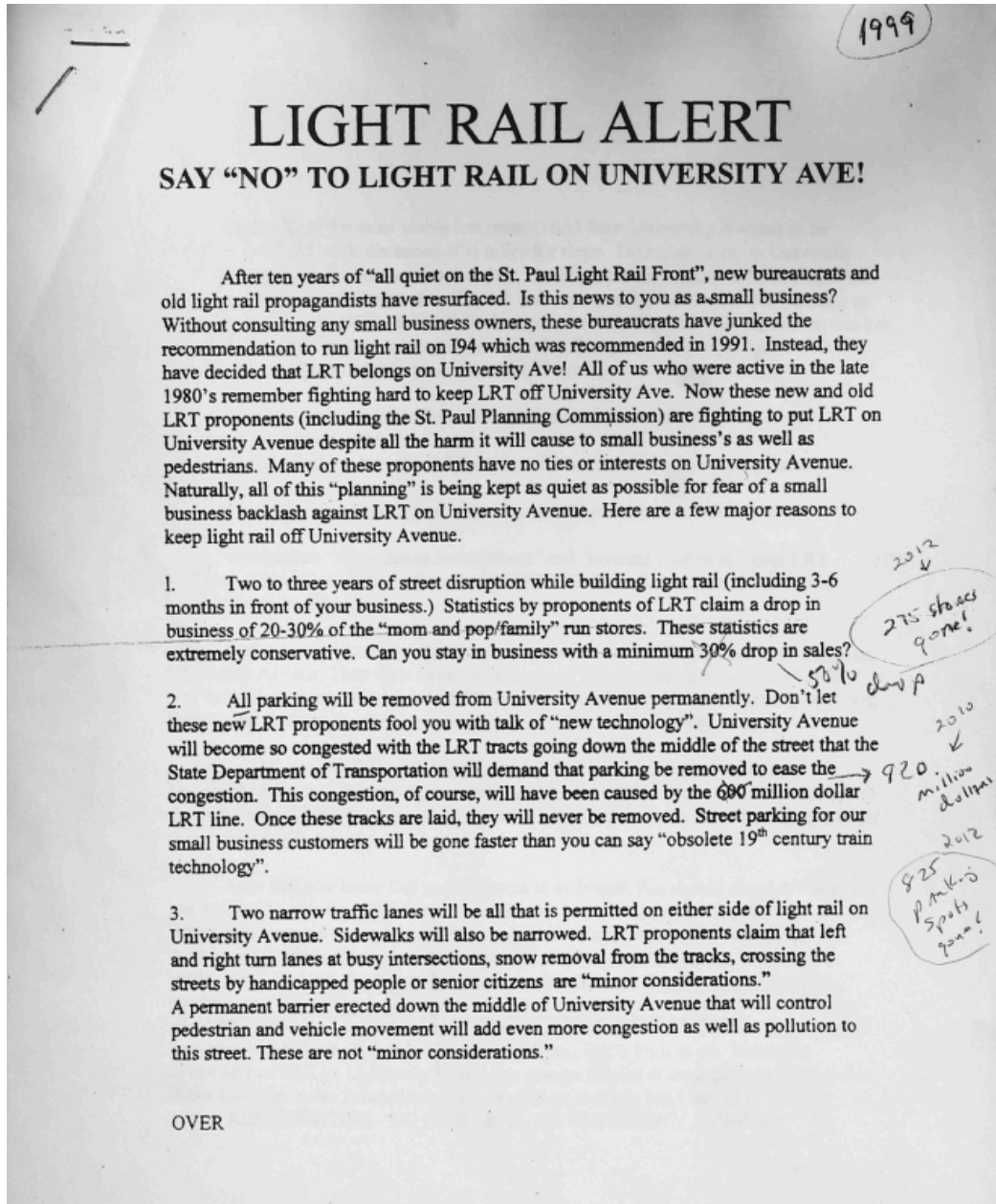


Figure 9: Anti-light rail flier in Midway

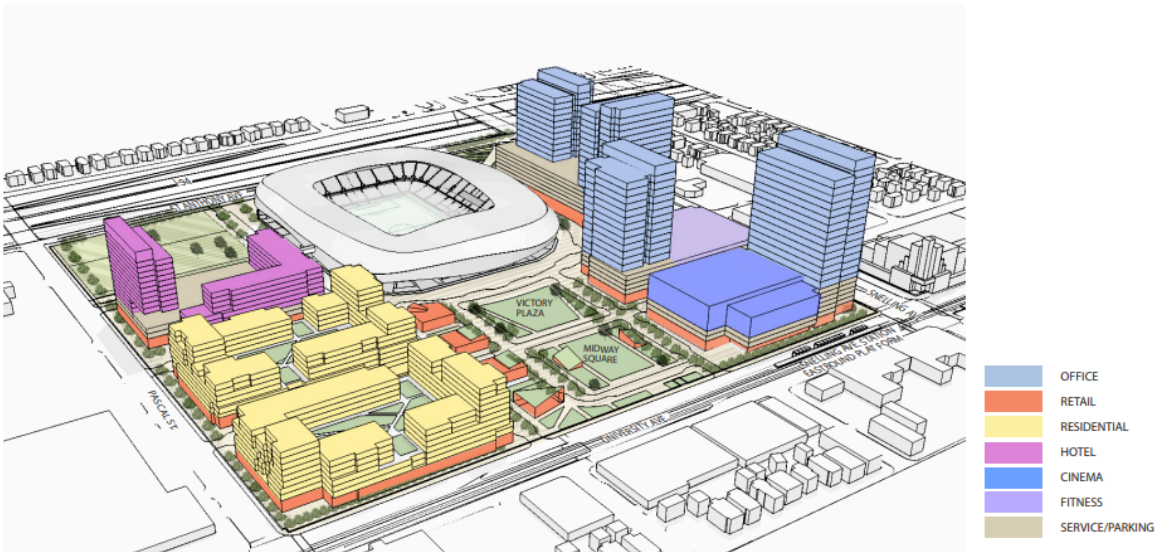
Regardless, there are still certain factors brought up in the flier that have rung true. Disruptions did occur along University Way with closures occurring for over two years as light rail was installed in the median of the roadway. The alignment also has acted as a divide in Midway, with areas north of University Avenue remaining working class while areas south of the road have either seen retail redevelopment (such as a large Cub Foods location as part of the old

Montgomery Ward site) or large mixed use development, such as the opening of Allianz Field in 2019. Unfortunately, much of this redevelopment has moved slowly, with the area surrounding the soccer stadium being made up primarily of open lots. While the goal of both the city and Minnesota United F.C (the owners of the land) is to build a large multi-use district, all that has opened besides the stadium is an interactive playground on the eastern end of the site (and even this just opened in June 2024, after I observed the site). While the end result will likely bring more people to Midway (as envisioned by the construction of the Green Line and the Metro A Line BRT on Snelling Avenue), the delays in construction, along with the lack of completion date means that lots in Midway are likely to remain empty, something that was mentioned when talking to Catherine Day at Creative Enterprise Zone.



Figure 10: Current Allianz Field Photo

PROGRAM DIAGRAM



RK MIDWAY



S9 ARCHITECTURE

POPULOUS

THIS CONCEPTUAL STUDY IS FOR PLANNING PURPOSE ONLY. SITE SPECIFIC INFORMATION SUCH AS SURVEY, EXISTING CONDITIONS, ZONING REQUIREMENTS MUST BE VERIFIED.

MIDWAY, ST. PAUL, MN
APRIL 18, 2016
(REVISED MAY 24, 2016)
23

Figure 11: Proposed Allianz Field Site⁵⁰

When traveling through Midway, it is also difficult to avoid the homeless issue in the area. During the two times that I visited the neighborhood on afternoons between April 12th and 16th, 2024, I witnessed numerous homeless people, as well as people walking on the light rail tracks and committing other illegal activity. According to the Towerside Innovation District, this level of crime has led to an increase in people driving instead of taking the train, although whether this is explicitly backed up in ridership statistics is unknown due to ridership trends pre and post-pandemic. What is known though is that the appearance of homeless people along the Green Line have left certain residents angry, with two business owners believing that “people are being left to die” and that “nobody [had business owners’ backs]”. Regardless of the crime in

⁵⁰ Snelling Midway Redevelopment Site Master Plan, May 24, 2016.
https://www.stpaul.gov/sites/default/files/Media%20Root/Planning%20&%20Economic%20Development/Snelling%20Midway%20Master%20Plan%205-24-16_1.pdf.

Midway, one thing that is evident is the divide that exists between pro light rail advocates and those that believe it has created negative impacts in their neighborhood, whether it be development or crime, and even as some of those negatives are debunked, the possibility of changing minds will not likely happen anytime soon.

Conclusion

When I asked Catherine Day from the Creative Enterprise Zone whether or not light rail should be built in developed vs undeveloped areas, she mentioned that “whichever it is, it is a long and painful journey”. This is most evident by the Central Corridor. While the Hiawatha Line’s choice to run near a highway limited the amount of potential discontent from residents, the “long and painful journey” of building light rail on University Avenue has had major impacts in neighborhoods in Minneapolis and St. Paul. When looking back at the goal of connecting the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, it is hard to see the Green Line as unsuccessful. The line created a (mostly) high speed and predictable line between the two downtowns, connected diverse populations, and even led to successful development in Prospect Park. But while the line did what it set out to do, there are certain aspects where the line has struggled, particularly in regards to speed and access to recreation, both of which were success points of the Hiawatha Line. There will be many opportunities in the future to potentially right the wrongs of certain aspects of the Green Line. For one, I-94 may be redeveloped, and MNDOT lists multiple alternatives that would allow for new transit and development opportunities. These include reducing the number of lanes in the freeway to accommodate one lane for Bus Rapid Transit in each direction between the downtowns. The three stops planned would be fewer than the stops

along the Green Line, providing an express service between Minneapolis and St. Paul, negating the long travel time of the light rail.

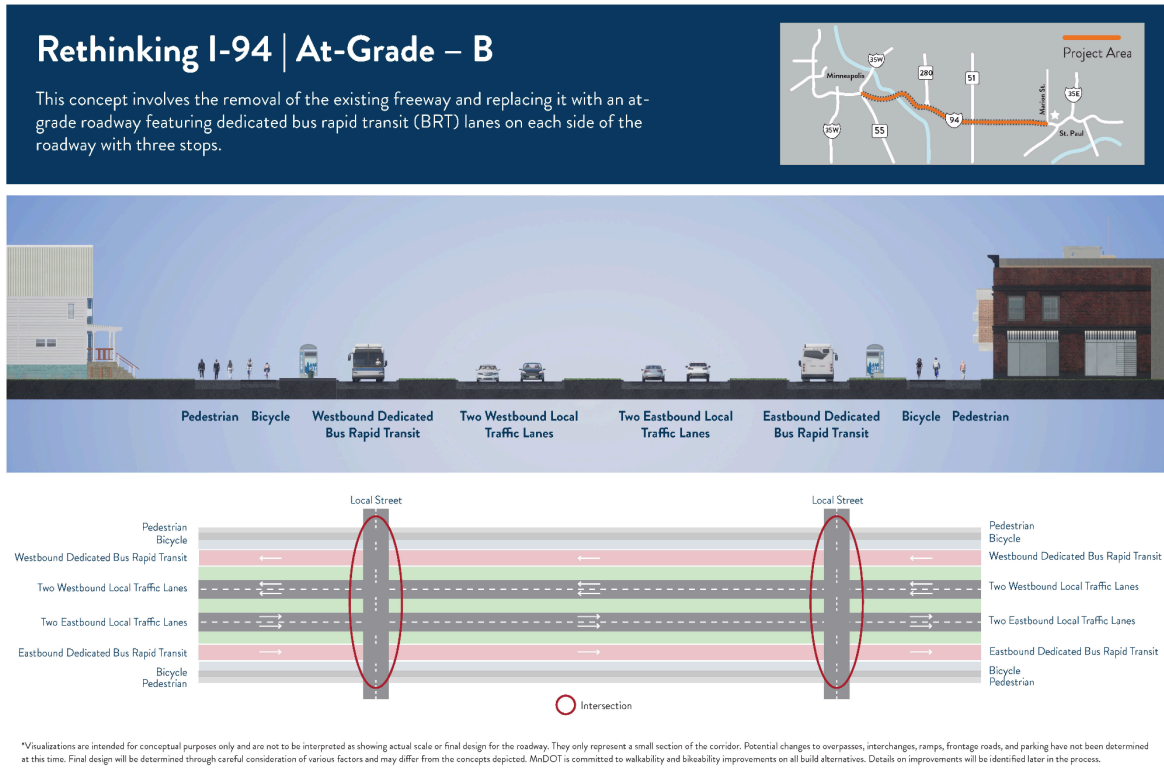


Figure 12: Alternative for Potential I-94 Redevelopment⁵¹

Regardless of future plans though, the Green Line’s connections to the neighborhoods around it, as well as its impacts to future light rail planning in the region (which we will see), clearly makes it an important facet of the regions transit infrastructure, even if the fact that little to no community outreach occurred makes it a case of “storytelling of planning”.

⁵¹ “Alternatives.” Let’s Talk Transportation - MnDOT, July 18, 2023. https://talk.dot.state.mn.us/rethinking-i94/news_feed/alternatives.

Southwest LRT Plans and Current State

As with the first two projects, the story of Southwest LRT begins with a clear goal in mind from planning authorities: connect affluent southwest suburbs to and from Minneapolis and St. Paul. Unlike the previous two lines though, there is not a specific highway or street that the light rail can parallel for the entire journey, meaning that alignment decisions are more complicated than that of the previous two lines, which simply followed important road corridors. According to the Southwest LRT Environmental Impact Statement, government agencies focused on serving the suburbs of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, and St. Louis Park, along with the City of Minneapolis.⁵² While the center portion of the extension following Excelsior Blvd through Hopkins and St. Louis Park was consistently part of all alternatives, varying alignments were considered in Minnetonka/Eden Prairie (dubbed 1, 2, and 3) and in Minneapolis (dubbed A and C) plus two bus rapid transit routes. Five goals were used to evaluate these alternatives: improving mobility, cost effectiveness/efficiency, ability to protect the environment, preserve quality of life, and economic development. The first two goals were used as a screening tool before using the last three goals to further evaluate top candidates. This full evaluation can be found below.

⁵² Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) - Chapter 2, May 2016.
https://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Green-Line-Extension/Publications-And-Resources/Environmental-Documents/FEIS/Main/SWLRT-FEIS-Chapter-02_Alternatives-Considered.aspx.

EXHIBIT 2.2-2

Evaluation Results of the Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis

Alternatives	Tier 1 Goals			Tier 2 Goals			Recommendation
	Goal 1: Improve Mobility	Goal 2: Provide a Cost-Effective, Efficient Travel Option	Results	Goal 3: Protect the Environment	Goal 4: Preserve and Protect the Quality of Life in the Study Area and Region	Goal 5: Support Economic Development	
Enhanced Bus (Baseline)	Carry forward as Baseline alternative (Required)			Carry forward as Baseline alternative (Required)			Carry forward as Baseline Alternative
BRT 1 - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, HCRRRA	●	●	Does not meet Tier 1 Goals; Do not carry forward				
BRT 2¹ - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, Golden Triangle/Opus/TH 169/HCRRRA	●	●	Does not meet Tier 1 Goals; Do not carry forward				
LRT 1A - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, HCRRRA/ Kenilworth/ Royalston	⊙	⊙	Meets Tier 1 Goals; Carry Forward to Tier 2	⊙	⊙	⊙	Carry forward for further analysis
LRT 2A¹ - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, I-494/HCRRRA /Kenilworth/Royalston	⊙	⊙	Meets Tier 1 Goals; Carry Forward to Tier 2	⊙	⊙	⊙	Other alternatives better meet Tier 2 Goals. Do not carry
LRT 3A¹ - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, Golden Triangle/ Opus/ HCRRRA/ Kenilworth/ Royalston	⊙	⊙	Meets Tier 1 Goals; Carry Forward to Tier 2	⊙	⊙	○	Carry forward for further analysis
LRT 4A - Hopkins to Minneapolis, HCRRRA/ Kenilworth/ Royalston	●	⊙	Part of full alternative. Do not carry forward				
LRT 1C - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, HCRRRA/ Midtown/ Nicollet	⊙	●	Does not meet Tier 1 Goals; Do not carry forward				
LRT 2C - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, I-494/ HCRRRA/ Midtown/ Nicollet	⊙	●	Does not meet Tier 1 Goals; Do not carry forward				
LRT 3C - Eden Prairie to Minneapolis, Golden Triangle/ Opus/ HCRRRA/ Midtown/ Nicollet	⊙	⊙	Meets Tier 1 Goals; Carry Forward to Tier 2	⊙	⊙	○	Carry forward for further analysis
LRT 4C¹ - Hopkins to Minneapolis, HCRRRA/ Midtown/ Nicollet	●	●	Part of full alternative. Do not carry forward				
¹ Estimated not modeled							
Evaluation Breakpoints							
● Does not support goal				Supports goal on fewer than 4 of 6 measures	Supports goal on fewer than 7 of 10 measures	Supports goal on fewer than 3 of 4 measures	
⊙ Supports goal				Supports goal on 4 of 6 measures	Supports goal on 7 of 10 measures	Supports goal on 3 of 4 measures	
○ Strongly supports goal				Supports goal on all measures	Supports goal on all measures	Supports goal on all measures	
¹ Estimated not Modeled							

Source: Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis Final Report, 2007.

Figure 13: Southwest LRT Alternative Analysis⁵²

The goal evaluation led to three alignments being carried over into further study:

- Alignment 1A, which would follow a direct route from western Eden Prairie (near the Chanhassen border) along the Minnesota River Bluffs Regional Trail towards Hopkins, where it would meet up with the mainline corridor along Excelsior Blvd. In Minneapolis after W Lake St, the alignment would begin following a former freight alignment along the Kenilworth Corridor, passing through the Chain of Lakes and other western neighborhoods until connecting with the current Green Line at Target Field.
- Alignment 3A, which would connect Downtown Eden Prairie with Hopkins via a more north/south alignment, passing through numerous corporate campuses/business parks in

northeastern Eden Prairie and Minnetonka. In Minneapolis, the light rail would use the Kenilworth Corridor like in Alignment 1A.

- Alignment 3C, which would have the same alignment between Eden Prairie and Hopkins as Alignment 3A, but would run via Lake Street and Nicollet Mall to Downtown Minneapolis. This alignment would pass through the developed neighborhoods of Uptown, Lyndale, and Whittier in Minneapolis before either terminating in Downtown Minneapolis (in an alignment called 3C-1) or running along North 11th or 12th Street to Target Field, where it would connect to the current Green Line.

To further analyze and differentiate the alignments, transit agencies sought to evaluate each alignment based on metrics such as planning compatibility with city/neighborhood plans, their ability to integrate into the rest of the transit system, ridership, cost, implementation factors, and critical environmental resources.

After analyzing all alternatives, Alignment 3A was chosen for its high ridership, easy ability to integrate with the rest of the transit system, and easier implementation compared to Alignment 3C. The Hennepin County specifically noted that:

- Alignment 3C would cost an estimated \$500 million more than Alignment 3A and \$800 million more than Alignment 1A
- Alignment 3C would not be able to fully supplant current bus lines in the “saturated transit market” of Uptown, and a duplication of transit service would lead to “higher operating costs and sub-optimal resource allocation and utilization and reduced transit ridership increases”. Furthermore, Hennepin County mentioned they “could not replace the existing bus service operating in Midtown Corridor because this would be detrimental to the existing service levels and disenfranchise current transit riders.”

- Alignment 3A would have fewer right of way acquisitions, in part due to light rail taking over the Kenilworth Corridor from BNSF
- Alignment 3A would have less construction in areas with “historic resources, contaminated properties, and potential noise and vibration receptors”

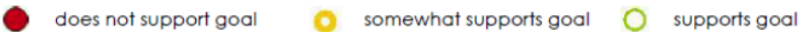


Figure 14: Kenilworth Corridor

In summary, Alignment 3A would be less connective to currently developed areas, but the alignment would be “less disruptive to the current transit network and provide enhanced transit service to areas currently underserved by the network”. Unfortunately, BNSF refused to leave the

Kenilworth Corridor, citing “economic, operations, or safety concerns”.⁵² In response, instead of moving the alignment away from the Kenilworth Corridor, Hennepin County instead created a new alternative, Alignment 3A-1, and conducted further evaluations based on previous criteria. This evaluation can be found below.

EXHIBIT 2.2-8
Summary of Evaluation of Alternatives within the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

	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							
	●	●	○	○	●	●	●
							

Source: Southwest Transitway Draft EIS.

Figure 15: Southwest LRT Alternatives vs. Goals⁵²

With passenger and freight rail “co-locating” on the Kenilworth Corridor, the goals of improved mobility, environmental protection, quality of life, economic development, economic competitiveness, and overall performance all declined. Furthermore, Alignment 3A-1 was now rated equally to Alignment 3C-1 and worse than 3C-2. Alignment 3A-1 was rated better for cost-effectiveness while Alignment 3A-2 was rated better for economic competitiveness. Furthermore, Alignment 3A-2 was rated more highly when it came to mobility. In the Southwest

LRT EIS, the following points were made as to why Alignment 3A-1 was better than Alignment 3A. No detailed comparisons were made between Alignment 3A-1 and Alignment 3C-1/2

- Alignment 3A-1 would result in less harm to Section 4(f)-protected properties (compared to the displacement of the Park Spanish Immersion School playground with freight rail relocation)
- Alignment 3A-1 would permanently displace approximately six fewer acres of wetland
- Alignment 3A-1 would avoid the displacement of residents and businesses in St. Louis Park and Minneapolis (compared to the full acquisition of approximately 32 residential, commercial, and institutional parcels under freight rail relocation)
- Alignment 3A-1 would minimize the reconstruction of freight rail tracks and related adverse impacts
- Alignment 3A-1 would include design refinements that will help avoid diminishing the potential for TOD around light rail stations in close proximity of freight rail tracks
- Alignment 3A-1 would provide safe and convenient pedestrian crossings of freight rail tracks at the proposed Wooddale, Beltline, and 21st Street stations

These facts lead to the question as to why the Kenilworth Corridor continued to be the choice of agencies in the area, especially since economic development was rated similarly between the Alignments 3A-1 and 3C. A potential answer can be found from Sue Sanger, a city council member in St. Louis Park who spent 11 years on the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Advisory Board. In an op ed for MinnPost, Sanger asserts that Hennepin County purposefully misled the planning process for Southwest LRT in numerous ways. First, before alignments were finalized, the county [declared] "that the question of whether the freight rail traffic should be rerouted was not relevant to the LRT route choice, and [refused] to permit discussion on this

topic.” Second, the county “[declined] to do any environmental, engineering, or economic analysis regarding possible rerouting of the freight trains, (simply declaring that the reroute would occur), until forced by public outrage to hire an engineer to review this option”.⁵³ Third, the county “[included] the cost of a tunnel potentially needed for the Uptown route in a cost benefit analysis but not the cost of a potential tunnel along the Kenilworth Corridor thus skewing the financial analysis. The tunnel did end up having to be built. Furthermore, Sanger mentions that “while calculating the cost benefit ratio, arbitrarily [Hennepin County excluded] all potential riders who lived in Minneapolis between West Lake Street and downtown, for the stated (but highly questionable) assumption that all such riders would prefer to take the bus, thus further skewing the analysis”. Lastly, Hennepin County “[dismissed] the objections raised by residents regarding the impact of LRT construction on the condominium buildings adjacent to the Kenilworth corridor”. This fear came true in 2022 when cracks began to appear on varying floors of a condo building along the Kenilworth Corridor.⁵⁴ Since construction along Kenilworth Corridor, Southwest LRT has been mired in construction difficulties, including the installation of light rail tracks too close to existing freight tracks, continued opposition from community members along the Chain of Lakes, and a price tag that has risen from \$1.25 billion to \$2.86 billion.⁵⁵ With these facts in mind, it’s important to look at how the project is seen today by community members, and how neighborhoods have adapted to Southwest LRT coming through or bypassing their neighborhoods.

⁵³ Sanger, Sue. “Let’s Tell the Full Story When It Comes to the Southwest Light Rail Route.” MinnPost, February 6, 2024. <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2022/09/lets-tell-the-full-story-when-it-comes-to-the-southwest-light-rail-route/>.

⁵⁴ Moore, Janet. No end in sight for Minneapolis condo owners’ dispute over Southwest LRT, September 13, 2023. <https://www.startribune.com/settlement-over-southwest-lrt-and-minneapolis-condo-owners-still-unclear/600304175>.

⁵⁵ Moore, Janet. New price tag for southwest light-rail line: \$2.86 billion, January 9, 2024. <https://www.startribune.com/new-price-tag-for-southwest-lrt-2-86-billion/600333486?refresh=true>.

Western Suburbs

As mentioned earlier, the main goal of Southwest LRT was to connect people in the western suburbs of Minneapolis to and from both cities' downtowns. Unlike many public transit systems, which are simply designed for commuting in the peak direction, in some ways Southwest LRT is designed specifically for reverse commuters, with stops near the corporate campus of healthcare provider Optum (City West Station), Opus Business Park (Opus Station), the private Blake School (Blake Road Station), and Park Nicollet Methodist Hospital (Louisiana Avenue Station). Alongside commuting, attempts have been made to turn many stations into development hubs, such as Beltline Blvd Station and Wooddale Avenue Station in St. Louis Park, and Downtown Hopkins Station in Hopkins. Lastly, numerous stations, especially in Eden Prairie focus on being park and ride stations for people heading towards downtown. These stations include Golden Triangle Station and Southwest Station in Eden Prairie.

With such a diverse rider base, I attempted to contact multiple companies and municipalities in the western suburbs for interviews, but few materialized. I attempted to reach out to the commute trip reduction team at Optum to gauge how they believed light rail would impact worker trips, but I was unable to secure an interview. I also was not able to hear from anyone from either the City of Hopkins, nor any business in Hopkins, and while I wasn't able to speak to any business or neighborhood group in St. Louis Park, I was able to secure an interview with Sean Walther, their Planning Manager. Walther describes St. Louis Park as a suburb that has followed an unfortunate planning trend. The city originally was a streetcar suburb, but as the automobile began to dominate the transportation landscape post WW-II, passenger rail tracks were dismantled, leaving only freight trains to pass through the area. 80% of the growth in St. Louis Park also occurred post WW-II, creating a sprawling urban form highly dependent on the

automobile. This can also be seen in the sheer amount of neighborhoods in St. Louis Park, with 38 neighborhoods having their own neighborhood association. In the past 20-30 years though, St. Louis Park has seen greater redevelopment, particularly in areas with high rail and automobile transit. These include the station areas of Southwest LRT, as well as areas near the intersection of State Route 7 and Highway 169. State Route 7 and State Route 100, and Interstate 394 and State Route 100. Furthermore, areas that used to be home to older commercial and industrial firms have been repurposed into newer commercial forms, such as gyms and distilleries. He lists numerous examples of what excites him about the light rail, including future development (especially since it will add value to the city), less freight noise/disruption, and expanded collaboration between the city and neighborhood groups in identifying shared interests. Still, Walther said the project was not perfect, especially when it came to parking and the environment. He specifically mentioned the New Starts Program, and how it only measures parking:rider as a 1:1 ratio, meaning that 1 Parking Spot = 1 Rider, not taking into account potential carpooling and increasing the number of desired parking spaces by government agencies. This has led to numerous stations along the line having small park and ride lots beyond the stations with larger lots listed above, such as Louisiana Avenue shown below.

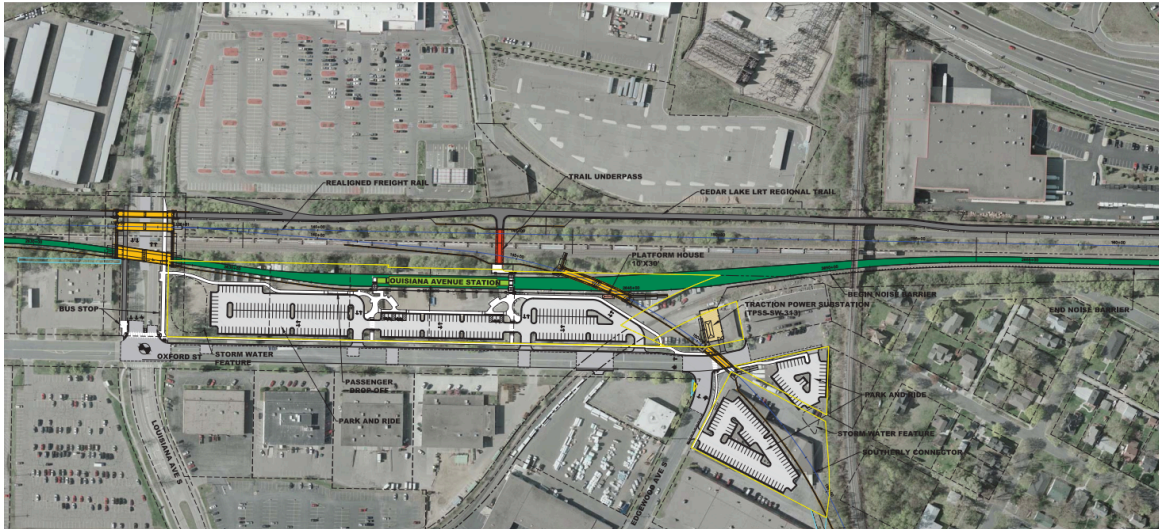


Figure 15: Louisiana Ave Station Diagram⁵⁶

The alignment was also an issue that Walther stressed. Before Southwest LRT was constructed, the regional trail connector to the north was bordered by numerous tall trees. These trails were removed though during construction, with no plans to replant due to potential hazards involved with trees coming into contact with the rails. The alignment in St. Louis Park also involves passenger rail being colocated with freight rail, which has hurt the accessibility of the project from developed areas such as the corner of Monterey Drive and Excelsior Blvd (near Beltline Blvd Station). With the light rail station located between fifteen and twenty minutes away by foot, Walther calls the development transit adjacent development instead of transit oriented development, with little desire to implement greater development closer to the station due to potential noise from freight trains. Instead, bus connections and transfers will have to be utilized, which may lead to some potential users continuing to drive or at least park in a nearby park and ride.

⁵⁶ Louisiana Avenue Station, June 2017.
<https://www.stlouisparkmn.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/22347/637783744508200000>.

During my travels to the Twin Cities in April 2024, it was not my intention to go to the western suburbs of Minneapolis. While I was speaking with Steve Mahowald of Metro Transit though, he offered to drive me to every station along Southwest LRT, which I accepted. While Steve had less to say about the stations in Minneapolis since there was very little job development planned, he was very excited to show me the stations along the rest of the alignment. We first traveled to the Beltline Blvd Station, where as mentioned in the last paragraph, transit adjacent development, including multi-family homes have been established as well as a Trader Joes and a gym. Following stations felt similar, with station areas featuring little walkability except for the Downtown Hopkins Station, which as the name implies, is within a five minute walk to most locations on the city's main street. Stations are instead mostly used for parking, or feature long walks to their intended destination, such as the transit adjacent development on Excelsior, the Optum Campus at City West, or the hospital on Louisiana Avenue. Therefore, while this part of Southwest LRT accomplishes the goal of connecting people to their jobs, making the stations an inviting place is something that still needs work, and may not be accomplished without the relocation of freight off of the shared corridor.

Alignment 3A - Bryn Mawr/Harrison

The neighborhoods of Bryn Mawr and Harrison are a study of contrasts. The neighborhoods share two similarities: both were heavily affected by the construction of Interstate 394, with the highway bisecting Bryn Mawr and leaving two of their sub-neighborhoods cut off, and both are receiving their own light rail stations (Bryn Mawr and Bassett Creek Valley respectively). Beyond this though is a skepticism and tension between two neighborhoods, and well as differing beliefs in who the light rail is for. The source of this tension can be seen from

statistics, interviews with neighborhood association members, as well as simple observations. According to the U.S Census Bureau, Bryn Mawr is 82% White, and only 3% of residents speak English “less than very well”. 67% of households earn over \$100,000, and 9.5% of residents live below the poverty line.⁵⁷ On the other hand, in Harrison only 26.6% of residents are White, nearly 21% of residents speak English “less than very well”, 39% of households earn less than \$35,000, and more than 34% of residents are below the poverty line.⁵⁸ When walking down the street, one notices that Bryn Mawr’s streets are paved, while Harrison’s streets feature cracked pavement. Bryn Mawr’s fences are made of wood, Harrison’s are made of metal. Yards in Bryn Mawr are generally well kept, while many in Harrison feature weeds or dead grass.

When talking to Barry Schade of the Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association, he speaks highly of the light rail. While he mentions that the neighborhood is made up of people who are “in love with the automobile”, he unequivocally supports the project and has been involved with the planning process for over twenty years. He mentions though that the main goal of Southwest LRT is to connect Downtown Minneapolis with the western suburbs, and that “the city had very little to say in county meetings compared to the suburbs”. This makes it seem like planning for light rail along Alignment 3A was an afterthought compared to planning in western suburbs, which is unfortunate since the Kenilworth Corridor is what has led to cost increases of nearly a billion dollars. Instead, planning for the area has been left to the Redevelopment and Oversight Committee of Bassett Creek Valley (ROC). According to the Bassett Creek Valley Master Plan, The ROC consists of “residents, Valley business people, City Councilmembers and mayoral representatives”,⁵⁹ but neither Bryn Mawr nor Harrison consider The ROC an official

⁵⁷ “Bryn-Mawr.” Minnesota Compass, n.d. <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/minneapolis/bryn-mawr>.

⁵⁸ “Harrison.” Minnesota Compass, n.d. <https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/city/minneapolis/harrison>.

⁵⁹ Bassett Creek Valley Master Plan, n.d. <https://minneapolis2040.com/small-area-plans/bassett-creek-valley-master-plan/>.

organization. The ROC’s main goal is to create a new, mixed-use neighborhood surrounding the Bassett Creek Valley Station, which would also be the main station serving the Harrison neighborhood. One of the largest developments is led by Wellington Management, which has developed land across five sites near the Bassett Creek Valley station. Through these developments, Wellington intends to add 1,000 new mixed income homes, 3,000 jobs, and 9 new acres of green space.⁶⁰ The specifics of these developments can be found in Table 4:

Name	Type of Use	Former Use	Completed Date
Leaf North	Office	Industrial Laundry	2019
Northside Artspace Lofts	Multi-family Affordable Housing (60% or below AMI)	Former Brownfield	2021
Townhomes @ Leef	Affordable Townhomes (60% or below AMI)	Unknown	2022 (sold to City of Lakes Community Land Trust and Habitat for Humanity to further the redevelopment vision of the Bassett Creek Valley)
Currie Commons	Affordable Housing (30%-80% AMI)	Vacant Site	Unknown
Leaf South	Office	Vacant Site	Unknown
2nd & Van White	Office/residential/production spaces	Former Brownfield	In development

Table 4: Wellington Developments⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Bassett Creek Valley District Plan Vision, 2016.
https://wellingtonmgt.com/uploads/220221_Bassett_Creek_Valley_Vision.pdf.



Figure 16: Rendering of Currie Commons, Bassett Creek Valley Redevelopment⁶¹

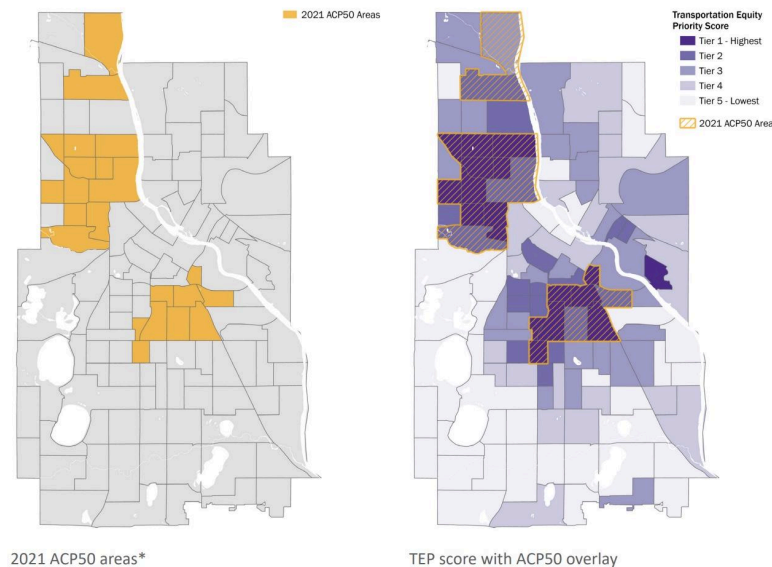
These developments have led to fears of gentrification in Harrison, something that the Mitchel Hansen of the Harrison Neighborhood Association believes has already begun and is being actively encouraged by local government agencies. I first met with Mitchel at his office in Harrison, we're both dripping wet from a large rainstorm, and I'm taking notes on my phone. He immediately comes off as an extremely passionate worker and loyal ambassador for his neighborhood. He touches on his experience being homeless, and how his main goal is to reinstate healthy home grants in Harrison, which are grants implemented by the Department of Health to improve home conditions (especially homes considered hazardous) that have disappeared in recent years.⁶² He is also a vehement light rail antagonist, referring to it as “the new highway” (which is especially damning given the effects of I-394 in the neighborhood). Furthermore, he sees light rail and the gentrification it brings (as shown by the Bassett Creek Valley development) as a threat to the neighborhood, with community activists losing their

⁶¹ “Currie Commons.” Collage Architects, n.d. <https://collagearchitects.com/currie-commons>.

⁶² The Effect of the Defect - Housing Hazards Identified in the Healthy Home Rating System, n.d. <https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HHRSCHART.PDF>.

homes to people who would have never wanted to be in the neighborhood otherwise. One of his biggest concerns is with how neighborhoods are measured by diversity to receive extra funding. He explains that the Twin Cities measures the minimum number of people of color in a neighborhood to receive a particular type of funding, with that funding previously being 40%, well below the 73% POC population in Harrison. Recently though, the city raised that minimum to 50%, which Mitchel worries will become an issue as more and more white residents move in as Harrison gentrifies. Without this funding, Harrison will face a more difficult challenge in staving off gentrification, potentially crippling the neighborhood even further.

Comparing ACP50 areas with Transportation Equity Priority (TEP) areas



Map 7: ACP50 Map vs TEP Map⁶³

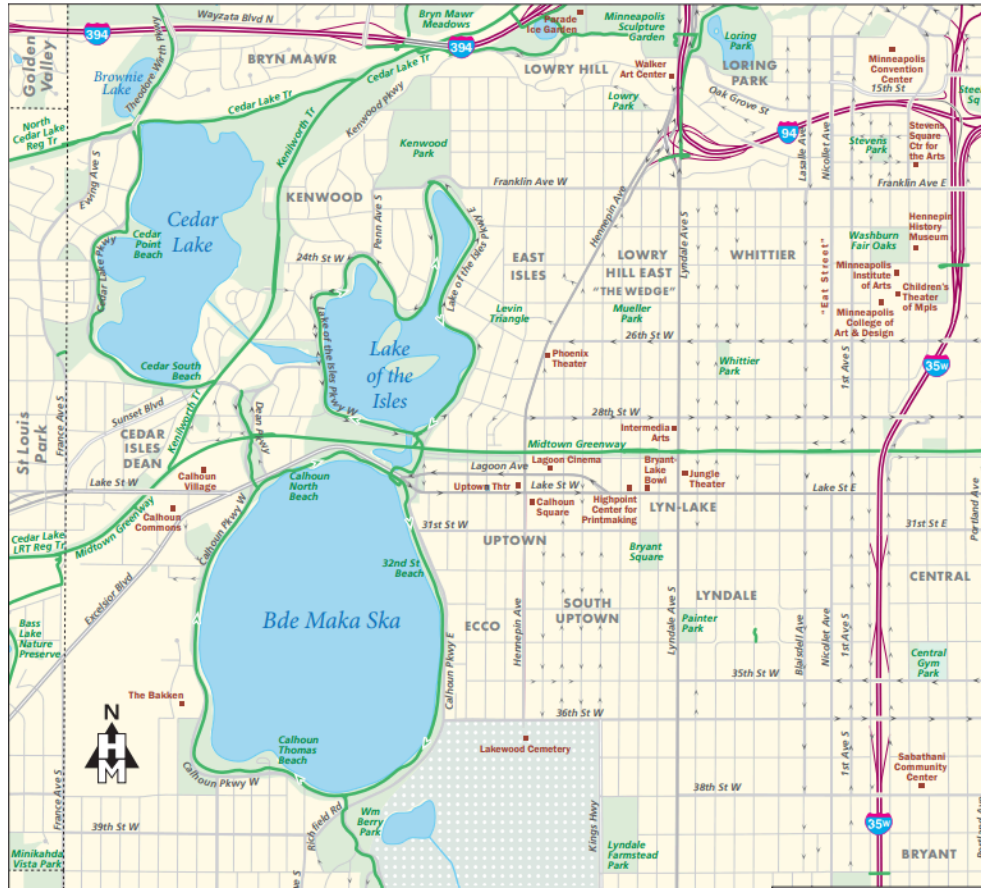
⁶³ Racial Equity Framework for Transportation, 2023. <https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/media/content-assets/www2-documents/residents/TEP-Areas-and-metrics.pdf>.

Harrison shows that even light rail alignments that are designed to interfere with the least amount of people can still have adverse effects. It also shows that even neighborhoods that border each other can have vastly different experiences when it comes to the planning process. These differences can also affect relationships between neighborhoods, with Barry Schade describing the relationship between Bryn Mawr and Harrison to be “strained” due to the “different caste systems of the neighborhoods”. While Barry says he would like to bridge the gap between the neighborhoods, a disconnect still exists between the neighborhoods as well, with Barry believing that Harrison had little to no fears about light rail transit in their neighborhood. To bridge this disconnect and create a dialogue, it will be up to Bryn Mawr to understand the gentrification Harrison is standing down, and meet them where they’re at to discuss possible solutions.

Alignment 3C - Uptown/Whittier

The neighborhood of Uptown has a unique ability to change. Located south of downtown bordering the Chain of Lakes, the neighborhood saw redevelopment in the 1960’s from industry towards more commercial and residential needs, including hotels, offices, and mixed income homes and apartments. Interestingly, the 1956 plan mentioned that “The railroad, being depressed near and adjacent to the center presently, is of no apparent use for the immediate business area”.⁶⁴ This area would become the Midtown Greenway, one of the most famous city rail to trail conversions in the U.S.

⁶⁴ Hodne, Thomas H. Thesis. *A Study for the Redevelopment of an Intermediate Commercial Center: Uptown, Minneapolis*, 1956.



Map 8: Map of Uptown/Whittier⁶⁵



Figure 17: Photo of Uptown Theater

⁶⁵ Minneapolis Chain of Lakes, 2019.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/meet-minneapolis/craft/cms/convention-center-hedberg2019.pdf?mtime=20190716114503>.



Figure 18: Photo of Midtown Greenway

Uptown is known for its distinctive artist subculture, which according to Southwest Voices grew as “a place for youth to gather together in search of community”. Neighborhood landmarks such as the Uptown Theater would draw people from across the city, while the Prince song “Uptown” would “[introduce] Uptown to the world”.⁶⁶ While civil unrest has occurred throughout the early 2020’s due to the killings of George Floyd, Winston Boogie Smith, and Deona Marie Knajdek, as well as a vehicle ramming attack during a protest for one of the killings, Uptown has overall continued to thrive.⁶⁷ The neighborhood is a poster child for mixed

⁶⁶ Mohamed, Abdi. “A New Uptown Era?” Southwest Voices, June 6, 2022.
<https://www.southwestvoices.news/posts/a-new-uptown-era>.

⁶⁷ FOX 9 Staff. “Woman Dead, 3 Others Hurt after Suspect Drives into Protesters in Uptown.” FOX 9 Minneapolis-St. Paul, June 15, 2021.
<https://www.fox9.com/news/woman-dead-after-suspect-drives-into-protesters-in-uptown>.

use development, with swanky apartments atop a mix of chains and small businesses. Much of the nicest residential development is focused along the Midtown Greenway, which as mentioned earlier formerly acted as a freight railroad through the city. The Greenway acts almost as a bicycle highway, connecting Uptown to the rest of the Chain of Lakes, the Lake Street-Midtown Blue Line light rail stop, and the Mississippi River, all within a ten to fifteen minute bike ride. The bike trail also only occupies half of the space in the Greenway, allowing for potential future transit to use the Greenway corridor (which is what was proposed under Alignment 3C). While I was unfortunately unable to secure an interview with anyone from Uptown (I reached out to the Uptown Alliance multiple times and did not hear back), it is my hope that Uptown continues its trajectory of growth despite the choice to not build light rail through the neighborhood, that other transit projects in the neighborhood prove successful, and that if light rail (or a streetcar) were to be built along the Midtown Greenway, that those with residences nearby remain pro-transit.

Alignment 3C - Whittier

Much like Uptown, Whittier is on the precipice of a large amount of change. The neighborhood was one of the first in Minneapolis to receive the streetcar, which operated on Nicollet Avenue between Downtown Minneapolis and just south of Lake Street, as car travel became dominant in the 1950's, the streetcar was dismantled and the neighborhood came in close contact with Interstate 35W, which opened in 1967.⁶⁸ While the neighborhood worked tirelessly to increase retail opportunities in the area by courting major retailers such as Target, much of Nicollet Avenue remained "abandoned buildings and adult bookstores".⁶⁸ Even when a major retailer (K-Mart) moved in the late 1970's it came with a caveat: the intersection with Nicollet

⁶⁸ "History of Whittier." Whittier Alliance, December 2009. <https://www.whittieralliance.org/history-of-whittier.html>.

and Lake Street had to close to make way for parking, and a wall had to be constructed facing the new store since there was no rear entrance. Doing this meant that anyone traveling from Nicollet Avenue had to make a quarter mile detour to use the store, and residents in Whittier began to refer to the wall as the “Berlin Wall”. Even with the store, Nicollet continued to be neglected, with crime rising and housing declining.



Figure 19: Photo of K-Mart Site

The neighborhood began to develop more in the 1990’s, with neighborhood associations such as the Whittier Alliance looking at innovative ways to revitalize the neighborhood. Whittier Alliance leaned into the international nature of the neighborhood (Vietnamese and Hmong populations had established themselves in the neighborhood in the prior decade), and began advertising Nicollet as Eat Street.⁶⁹ This included the advertising of numerous international eateries along the road, but now has expanded to include a food festival and a large food hall,

⁶⁹ Wolfe, Morgan. “Eat Street Crossing Brings Food Hall to South Minneapolis.” Kare11, March 3, 2023. <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/eat-street-crossing-brings-food-hall-concept-to-south-minneapolis-nicollet-avenue/89-e1b6aefd-db6c-4f7b-ab3c-caeb77920ff3>.

which opened in 2023. The Whittier Alliance also helped initiate mixed-use development in the neighborhood, including health clinics and community spaces along with the increase in restaurants. The revitalization of Whittier will culminate in the redevelopment of the former K-Mart, which closed in 2020. While full specifics of the project are unknown, the redevelopment will reconnect Nicollet Avenue to Lake Street, knocking down the “Berlin Wall” and replacing it with green space paralleling the Midtown Greenway.⁷⁰



Figure 20: Map of one of the new K-Mart Redevelopment proposals⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Ki, Nicole. “Minneapolis Debuts Design Options for Redevelopment of Former Kmart.” MPR News, October 11, 2023. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2023/10/11/minneapolis-debuts-design-options-for-redevelopment-of-former-kmart>.



Figure 21: Nicollet Streetcar Rendering⁷¹

What this revitalization did not bring to the neighborhood though was light rail, but alternatives have been proposed, including a reintroduction of the Nicollet Streetcar. While we could not reach anyone from the Whittier Alliance to comment on the chances of the streetcar being built nor their opinions on Southwest LRT, the fact that there Nicollet Avenue is once again an economically thriving street where people want to be shows that whatever form public transit takes in the neighborhood, there will be people wanting to go there.

Conclusion

After studying the project and speaking with planners both in the area and for Metro Transit, it is clear that Southwest LRT accomplished its goal of transporting people to and from jobs around the corridor. Where planners have failed is in the access to housing, retail, and recreation, but after reading the history of the Kenilworth Corridor as well as Sue Sangers article, it's clear that development has not been a top priority of Hennepin County, justifying their

⁷¹ Lindeke, Bill. "Nicollet Ave. Project: A Zombie Streetcar and Pot of Minneapolis Money That Nobody Wants to Talk About." MinnPost, February 6, 2024. <https://www.minnpost.com/cityscape/2021/01/nicollet-ave-project-a-zombie-streetcar-and-pot-of-minneapolis-money-that-nobody-wants-to-talk-about/>.

purchase of the BNSF freight corridor was (somewhat like van Hulst's "now or never" story). By allowing themselves to pigeonhole themselves into this alignment after BNSF reneged and stayed, Hennepin County chose not to move the alignment elsewhere, instead following an alignment that would lead to transit adjacent development a twenty minute walk away from a station instead of transit oriented development close within the station area. This has limited the housing and retail access that may have come with building an alignment where people want to be. Furthermore, while the Kenilworth Corridor allows for better access to recreation than an Uptown/Whittier alignment, planners chose to not advertise Cedar Lake in their station names (unlike Minnehaha Park being labeled on the Hiawatha Line), instead calling the station only W 21st St. This means that riders unfamiliar with the area may bypass the lake entirely, taking away the access to recreation the alignment provides. Still, neighborhoods have taken it upon themselves to achieve better transport infrastructure, whether it be bike trail improvements in St. Louis Park or a Nicollet Streetcar revival in Whittier. Because of grassroots efforts, neighborhoods that have either been spurned by Southwest LRT or have only realized part of their potential can continue to grow and stay connected throughout the region. This choice to build without the understanding of core stories from neighborhoods like Harrison shows that Southwest LRT is mostly an example of "storytelling of planning", even if western suburbs received greater engagement and could be considered "storytelling for planning".

Blue Line Extension Plans and Current State

The original plans for the Blue Line Extensions are shockingly similar to those of Southwest LRT. Wanting to connect Downtown Minneapolis to the northwestern suburbs for job access, Hennepin County opted to have the line run along a freight alignment. The line would have run along Olsen Highway, a major road through the Harrison neighborhood before turning north on a BNSF alignment towards Brooklyn Park, with stations in Harrison, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Center before terminating at Target's northern campus in Brooklyn Park.⁷² In 2020 though, it was announced that co-locating light rail with freight rail on the BNSF corridor would not occur due to BNSF being unwilling to share the corridor with light rail trains.⁷³ This provided an opportunity for a "future story" story, as van Hulst would put it, where instead of building a quick, realistic light rail line along an existing right of way, a more thought out, future focused project had to be created, and an alignment through numerous high density corridors such as West Broadway and Bottineau Blvd. With this quick change, the Blue Line Extension was able to avoid much of the delays Southwest LRT had to face.

Before choosing this alignment though, planners followed the same New Starts Program criteria used for Southwest LRT. Through numerous community engagement processes in neighborhoods bordering the proposed line, planners learned that potential riders wanted efficient, well connected transit that could be useful to those without a car.⁷⁴ Furthermore, residents were able to voice their concerns about potential traffic impacts to Bottineau Blvd (also known as County Road 81), the main road the new alignment would likely use instead of the

⁷² "BLRT FEIS Executive Summary." Metropolitan Council, July 2016.

<https://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension.aspx>.

⁷³ "Project Partners Announce New Direction for Metro Blue Line Extension." Metropolitan Council, August 3, 2020.

<https://metro council.org/News-Events/Transportation/Newsletters/Blue-Line-Extension-new-direction-2020.aspx>.

⁷⁴ "Engagement Data." Metropolitan Council, n.d.

<https://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension/Community-Engagement/Reports-and-Comments.aspx>.

BNSF corridor. This new alignment would still have similar benefits to the BNSF alignment, such as serving Target's northern campus, but it also allowed already developed areas such as Downtown Robbinsdale, North Memorial Hospital, and North Minneapolis to have direct light rail access. This pivot towards building light rail along major road corridors through established areas harkens back to the Central Corridor and University Avenue, but the question remained whether the planning/engagement process would be different.

Robbinsdale

To the average person, the City of Robbinsdale may seem like just another Minneapolis bedroom community. The first ring suburb, located five miles northwest of Downtown Minneapolis, faces a specific challenge though. The city, according to its City Manager Tim Sandvik is over 99% developed, has little to no opportunity for pure new transportation oriented development. Instead, the City is being opportunistic, looking to redevelop much of its downtown area in conjunction with the construction of light rail through the City. This will bring numerous opportunities to the neighborhood, including the ability to purchase and redevelop blighted homes, and accelerate growth by building new multi-use developments on sites currently used for non-residential use (Sandvik specifically cited a large bank location looking to downsize, a church, and a funeral home). With much of Downtown Robbinsdale currently zoned for business and other commercial uses, the opportunity to morph into a more mixed-use downtown is there, but numerous concerns still exist.

Robbinsdale's concerns can largely be broken down into two areas: town infrastructure and displacement. The alignment, which is slated to travel along Highway 81, will lead to certain public works projects, such as moving sewer and stormwater infrastructure, as well as changes to

snowplowing due to the planned at-grade alignment. Like with the Green Line Extension, the light rail is seen as a divider between the city, one that was explained plainly by Tim Sandvik who mentioned “Half of our firefighters live on the west side [of town], half lives on the east”. As potential mitigation, the City requested that a grade separated alignment be studied since such an alignment would “[limit] takings required for a grade running line, and will also mitigate traffic and pedestrian (to include bicyclists) movements across those intersections”.⁷⁵ The City went on to say that a grade separated alignment would increase response times of public service vehicles, such as the firefighter example given above. Unfortunately, Metro Transit did not choose to provide grade separation along the route, citing engineering difficulties and the fact that a grade separated alignment would not provide an inviting atmosphere for pedestrians and bicyclists.⁷⁶ Furthermore, Metro Transit mentioned the approximate delay for emergency responders on an at-grade alignment would be only seconds higher than one of a grade separated alignment. During our interview, Sandvik highlighted that the cost of the project would have likely gone up by “hundreds of millions of dollars, " but “what’s a couple hundred million dollars in a billion dollar project?”. Since these discussions in Summer 2023, no discussions have occurred about the chances of a grade separated alignment through Robbinsdale.

Anti-Displacement

A bigger concern in Robbinsdale is what the specific result of all this development will entail. With the light rail and redevelopment bringing in more people to the city, both for leisure and to live, the City is left asking how its infrastructure will face the change. Sandvik specifically

⁷⁵ Sandvik, Tim. Letter to Christine Beckwith. *City of Robbinsdale – Design Comments on the METRO Blue Line Extension*, March 30, 2023.

⁷⁶ Letter to Tim Sandvik. *City of Robbinsdale – Design Comments on the METRO Blue Line Extension*, August 23, 2023.

mentioned questions about how local watersheds and traffic systems would hold up with the introduction of light rail, and the need for the city to be able to look out and advocate for themselves. Luckily, Sandvik also noted that they were receiving more help from Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council, with bi-weekly meetings occurring that “go into the weeds”. Furthermore, there is a good amount of respect and dialogue between the governments, as shown by the discussion on grade separated alignments. While Sandvik notes that “[Robbinsdale] may not get what it wants all the time”, he describes the relationship as “healthy”.

Beyond relationships between city governments and planning agencies along the Blue Line Extension, it is just as important to ensure proper communication and policy to prevent the displacement that occurred as part of the Central Corridor and Southwest LRT projects. As part of the new Blue Line Extension, greater priority has been placed on anti displacement procedures and policies by local and county government agencies. This can be seen by government agencies putting in more effort into community outreach, with 900 total engagement events having occurred so far for the Blue Line Extension,⁷⁴ and only approximately 60 meetings on record for Southwest LRT.⁷⁷

This effort can also be seen through greater partnerships. Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Council, and city governments from Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Brooklyn Park, and other jurisdictions partnered with the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) to establish an anti-displacement framework for the Blue Line Extension, which in turn could be used as a template for future transit expansion anti-displacement efforts.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “Public Meetings and Events.” Metropolitan Council, n.d. <https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Green-Line-Extension/Public-Involvement.aspx>.

⁷⁸ “Met Council Equity Framework Building a Reparative Justice Informed Equity Framework.” Center for Urban Affairs, n.d. <https://metrocouncil.org/Council-Meetings/Committees.aspx>.

To create an anti-displacement framework, CURA gathered planners and community stakeholders to five Saturday workshops (likely since a weekend would allow for more community members to attend). The five topics are as follows:⁷⁹

1. Lessons from Previous Light Rail in the Twin Cities
2. Housing Displacement
3. Business and Cultural Displacement
4. Developing Anti-Displacement Recommendations
5. Finalizing Anti-Displacement Recommendations

The CURA report was based around three main equity principles: contextualization, community centered work, and reparative work. Contextualization revolves around previous knowledge, including what has been said by community members along the Blue Line Extension, but also other projects throughout the region. This includes the idea of learning from other projects in the region, what they did right, and what complications may have arisen from them post-construction (much like the concept of storytelling for planning). Furthermore, contextualization aims to identify areas of potential harm, either by the disinvestment that will come from moving away from the previous alignment or simply understanding the demographics of cities and neighborhoods along the new alignment to see where investment may be needed to prevent displacement.

According to CURA, their community centered work focuses on “empowering [marginalized communities] to take ownership of the vision [in their neighborhood] to be carried out. This involves allowing communities to choose what specific anti-displacement efforts they

⁷⁹ Rep. *Blue Line Extension Anti-Displacement Recommendations*. Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2023.

would like to see invested in their communities. While not all policies have been enacted currently, policies mentioned by CURA that could possibly be used include:⁷⁹

- **Mandatory Relocation Assistance**, whereby renters who are evicted not for cause (such as the use of their property on a public transit alignment) are allowed to be paid relocation assistance from their landlord. This ensures that landlords are held accountable when receiving money on eminent domain projects instead of keeping the money for themselves. It also ensures that displaced residents have a form of means to search for new housing. According to CURA the City of Portland provides relocation assistance where “tenants in a studio or SRO receive \$2,900, \$3,300 in a 1BR unit, \$4,200 in a 2BR, and \$4,500 for a 3BR or larger”. On the other hand, the Metropolitan Council currently provides relocation assistance based on the number of rooms with an apartment, with 1 room apartments (such as a studio) receiving \$575 and increasing by \$200 for each additional room. This assistance is also only available if one's property is acquired for the building of light rail, while in Portland one can receive assistance due to rent increases of over 10%, landlord changes, and other factors. CURA mentions adopting a more comprehensive set of standards for assistance like Portland, but no change in the amount of assistance was mentioned.
- **Tenant Opportunity to Purchase**, whereas under the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA), renters are given the opportunity to purchase their building if a landlord puts it up for sale or if the landlord attempts to have a third party acquire the property. This reduces displacement by giving opportunity to residents to build wealth through homeownership/investment in the building. While there are no TOPA policies currently in place throughout the Twin Cities, a TOPA policy in Washington D.C led to “1,391

affordable housing units [being preserved] from 2002–13”. Furthermore, CURA notes that TOPA policies are most successful in areas where tenants are educated on what their housing rights are and landlords understand potential consequences for not following TOPA. Implementing these educational procedures is something that can be done soon in communities along the Blue Line Extension.

- **Limiting investor purchasing/corporate ownership**, including limited liability corporations and other management agencies who service multiple properties throughout the Twin Cities area. The lack of a specific landlord can lead to lapses in upkeep, difficult communication, and higher eviction rates. While no steps have been taken in the Twin Cities to directly reduce investor purchasing, efforts have been made along the Blue Line Extension to improve access to homeownership, which CURA says is threatened by the rise of investor purchasing. Still, more specific solutions such as the creation of registries highlighting available homes on local government websites or regularly scheduled inspections could further improve access to homeownership or simply create better standards at current apartment complexes. Another option is to have non-profit organizations purchase apartments. While certain non-profits already do this throughout the Twin Cities, such as Trellis Management, many have purchased multiple complexes, which can lead to the difficulties described from corporate ownership (less communication, more places to upkeep). Having nonprofits purchase one property to manage may help in reducing this potential.⁸⁰
- **Land Disposition Policy Reform**, where unused city or county property will be prioritized for affordable housing or mixed-use development instead of being “sold to the

⁸⁰ “About.” Trellis, October 15, 2021. <https://trellismn.org/about/>.

highest bidder”. As with other reforms, no policy yet exists along the Blue Line Extension.

- **Right to Return**, whereby people who are displaced are granted the first opportunity to access housing in the redeveloped area, either in similar units for the previous rent, or having the government cover any potential differences in rent for former tenants. According to CURA, this “allows displaced people with historic ties to a neighborhood preference for affordable housing opportunities”. CURA did mention though that right to return policies can make it difficult for those outside the neighborhood looking for affordable housing to move to that neighborhood. Currently, no right to return policies exist along the Blue Line Extension
- **Rent Stabilization**, which ensures that landlords do not charge tenants large rent increases, allowing those currently living in buildings to remain living there even after light rail expansion opens up, which could drive housing price increases without stabilization. According to CURA, new construction is generally excluded from this policy, at least for a short period of time after the expansion is complete. Rent stabilization is usually covered either in state law (such as in Oregon) or city law. In 2021, the City of Minneapolis approved a charter amendment studying rent stabilization techniques in Minneapolis. In the coming years, the City will create a proposal and citizens will vote on whether the proposal should be passed. There are no other proposals in jurisdictions along the Blue Line Extension.
- **Commercial and Residential Land Trusts**, used by nonprofits to ensure that there is space for community priorities such as affordable housing or small businesses. They are seen as a way to take control of land without the expenses of land ownership. Nonprofits

will own the land, while a person will own the house that the land is on, making the home more affordable. According to CURA, there are currently six land trusts in the Twin Cities area, with a prominent one being located near the Central Corridor in the Rondo neighborhood of St. Paul.⁸¹

- **Protection of the Right to Organize**, where tenants are allowed to organize to fight grievances against landlords under the Tenants Right to Organize Act. While no communities along the Blue Line Extension feature the right to organize, state laws currently exist in Minnesota protecting the right to organize in subsidized buildings and manufactured homes, but this is limited and there is a lack of education surrounding the topic.
- **Zero/low Interest Loans** for longtime residents who fall under a certain income and have lived in a neighborhood for a certain amount of time. Numerous jurisdictions in Hennepin County, including Minneapolis and Brooklyn Park provide monetary assistance to homeowners and renters so they can maintain their homes or rented properties.
- **Small Business Grants**, which will make it easier for businesses to stay through and after construction of light rail, while still allowing for new businesses to potentially move in. Grants can also be used to reimburse businesses for potential loss of customers due to construction, as seen in CURA's case study of Seattle, Washington. In this case, "loss is calculated by subtracting the revenue during construction period to revenue during a comparable period of time", although the specific number of businesses that were saved due to this is unknown. All four major cities along the Blue Line Extension (Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park) have some sort of grant system available to businesses. Some are specific, with Crystal's simply being for facade improvements

⁸¹ "Our Spaces." Rondo Community Land Trust, n.d. <https://www.rondoclt.org/commercial/our-spaces>.

during construction, while others such as Brooklyn Park and Minneapolis are more far reaching. Minneapolis has their Great Streets program, which provides support grants for businesses located in a variety of priority population areas (diverse, low income, etc). Much of the Blue Line Extension alignment is covered by the Great Streets program, including all of the alignment along West Broadway. Still, it is up to local jurisdictions to ensure that businesses along West Broadway and other eligible areas educate businesses about avenues they can take advantage of.⁸²

- **Workforce/Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Programs** ensures that a number of businesses/construction firms helping build the Blue Line Extension are minority owned. According to a Star Tribune article about the rebuilding of Lake Street, numerous obstacles exist for BIPOC construction firms to be on an equal playing field compared to their non-minority counterparts.⁸³ Challenges include the fact that minority owned firms are usually smaller, have greater difficulty receiving bank loans, and are not unionized, preventing them from receiving contracts that require union labor. To counter this, the Metropolitan Council has kept a list of DBE businesses. Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis take this a step further, with the County providing exclusive opportunities to DBE firms (and creating affirmative action policies at non BIPOC firms) while the City has a Small and Underutilized Business Program, where any contract over \$175,000 must have at least one minority owned firm working on the project. While these steps are helpful, allowing BIPOC firms a road to unionization will open up more opportunities and bids.

⁸² Great Streets Eligible Area Map, n.d.

<https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/government/programs-initiatives/great-streets/eligible-area-map/>.

⁸³ Rao, Maya. "Minority-Owned Firms Seek Leading Role in Reconstruction of Twin Cities." Star Tribune, September 15, 2020.

<https://www.startribune.com/minority-owned-firms-seek-leading-role-in-rebuilding-businesses-damaged-in-riots/572409212>.

- **Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) Preservation**, whereby municipalities protect the amount of market rate affordable housing by incentivizing landlords to keep prices competitive, or acquiring properties outright that are at risk of being transitioned out of affordable housing. A local example of this is the NOAH Impact Fund, which is heavily invested in by Hennepin County despite being part of the statewide housing fund. According to CURA, the City of Minneapolis has used NOAH funds to preserve 96 units across 6 facilities, although other cities along the alignment have yet to use these resources.
- **Inclusionary Zoning** is a policy where under a new development, a certain percentage of that development must go to affordable housing. In return, properties are allowed to be built at a greater density than normal or are given permits that allow them to build at a quicker rate. In Minneapolis, inclusionary zoning policies allow for the following options:
 - Provide 8% of units affordable at or below 60% Area Median Income (AMI) for 20 years, with no City financial assistance
 - Provide 4% of units affordable at or below 30% AMI for 20 years, with no City financial assistance
 - Seek City Revenue Loss Offset financial assistance from the City, in which case 20% of the units must be affordable at or below 50% AMI for 30 years.

Furthermore, in Brooklyn Park “inclusionary zoning that is affordable to people at 30% area median income, and utilizes subsidies to support inclusionary zoning”. Still, greater funding support from larger government entities such as Hennepin County and the

Metropolitan Council will allow for these programs to expand to other populations in these cities, and potentially other cities entirely.

- **Universal Basic Income**, where citizens are given a monthly stipend to be used as an income floor. This was piloted by the City of Minneapolis, who gave \$500 a month to 200 low income households over a two year span. It was found that UBI allowed 48% of citizens to be more food secure, compared to just 32% who did not receive UBI. The study found that those who received UBI had greater housing stability and psychological distress.⁸⁴ Still, larger studies with a greater sample will likely need to be conducted, especially to gauge the effectiveness of UBI in non-urban areas such as the rest of the Blue Line Extension.
- **Right to Counsel**, whereby tenants who face eviction have the right to a lawyer. According to CURA, only 3% of tenants have legal representation when facing eviction proceedings, compared to over 80% of landlords. This is despite the fact that “renters who have attorneys win or settle their cases 96% of the time, while those without legal help win or settle just 62% of the time”. Currently, Minneapolis is the only city along the Blue Line Extension that offers the right to counsel, but enacting this policy across the other cities along the Blue Line will be extremely helpful in preventing displacement due to light rail implementation.
- **Tenant Screening Reform/Fair Chance Reform**, which would give potential renters a ‘fair chance’ at receiving a rental. According to CURA, tenant screening companies can currently report seven years of arrest and eviction records in most cases, drastically

⁸⁴ “One Year of Basic Income in Minneapolis: Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.” Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis: Pursuing an Economy that works for all of us., January 18, 2024. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2024/one-year-of-basic-income-in-minneapolis>.

affecting the ability for certain people to rent. Furthermore, biased policing has led to a larger number of people of color appearing on criminal statistics, affecting vulnerable populations even further. CURA suggests limiting reports to no more than three years for misdemeanors, seven years for felonies, and ten years for drastic felonies. By doing this, it is hoped that diverse populations are able to rent, but although there have been a few case studies throughout the U.S on this issue (notably in California with the Tenant Protection Act) results of this type of program are still unknown.

- **Cultural Placekeeping/Placemaking**, where communities “[embed] arts and cultural infrastructure [from their] already creative community to keep the place from disappearing culturally” in the wake of possible gentrification. CURA mentions three possible ways to accomplish this: access to anti-displacement capital, where local small businesses can have access to lower cost financing and enhanced business support, which could allow them to maintain their space as a cultural centerpiece in the neighborhood. Another option are Memorandums of Understanding’s (MOU’s) and Community Benefit Agreements (CBA’s), which are contracts signed between businesses and government agencies ensuring that historic business needs are met post-redevelopment, and that new businesses continue to represent the neighborhood. An example of this that CURA mentions is “United to Save the Mission [in San Francisco], which has worked to draft MOUs for new businesses...covering everything from hiring local employees, to creating spaces that are visually in line with the Mission’s cultural history, to having lower-priced items on the menu”. Lastly, cultural corridors can be created by creating art, cultural, and other community sites in neighborhoods. This can be used to prevent cultural gentrification and displacement. Numerous examples of cultural corridors exist

throughout the Twin Cities, including the Intertribal Cultural Corridor along 7th Street in St. Paul,⁸⁵ which features numerous indigenous street art exhibits, and the East Lake Street Corridor, which is rebuilding following the George Floyd Riots in 2020.⁸⁶ As part of the Minneapolis 2040 Plan, Minneapolis plans to establish new cultural corridors throughout the city.

Beyond these programs, CURA and government agencies in the Twin Cities hope that the anti-displacement process can be a reparative process after displacement that occurred in previous planning projects. This specifically involved conducting interviews with stakeholders along the Central Corridor where issues such as funding, communication, and business/housing support were discussed. Stakeholders mentioned that building relationships before construction, constant communication, and grants and other investments in neighborhoods bordering light rail (both on a community level and on an individual building level) would be needed to adequately prevent fears of displacement like what was seen in Midway and Harrison. While the full effect of these anti displacement measures will be unknown until the line opens, the response from communities has been positive, with Tim Sandvik believing that the Blue Line Extension was “setting precedent”.

⁸⁵ “Intertribal Cultural Corridor.” Indigenous Roots, n.d. <https://indigenous-roots.org/intertribal-cultural-corridor>.

⁸⁶ “East Lake Street.” Meet Minneapolis, n.d. <https://www.minneapolis.org/cultural-districts/districts/east-lake-street/>.

Discussion

All four light rail projects in Minneapolis are either examples of storytelling of planning or storytelling for planning, and all either are an example of a back to basics story or a future story. Through what I learned in these four projects, I am able to construct a story of planning in the Twin Cities.

	Storytelling of Planning	Storytelling for Planning
Back to Basics Story	Hiawatha Line, Southwest LRT	Blue Line Extension
Future Story	Central Corridor, Southwest LRT	No Project

Table 5: Storytelling Matrix

The Hiawatha Line should be considered an example of storytelling of planning, as well as a back to basics story since it was a pragmatic project that was designed to be easy and fast to build. This guided the choice to build the line paralleling a major highway while still allowing for development to occur, although the lack of collaborative engagement makes it an example of “storytelling of” planning, where planners simply informed community members of what was to come.

With more thought put into the Central Corridor, both in its alignment and potential redevelopment, I believe the corridor is an example of a future story. This redevelopment includes the past redevelopment plans that transformed the Prospect Park neighborhood, as well as the future plans proposed by Minnesota United F.C that would impact the Midway neighborhood. Unfortunately, as mentioned by business owners in Midway, much of the outreach done to these areas was less collaborative, with groups such as Towerside Innovation District choosing to foster relationships themselves, and businesses in Midway left with the fallout of

light rail being constructed. Because of this, the Central Corridor falls under storytelling of planning, and may have led some planners to avoid Alignment 3C to avoid potential displacement in the Whittier neighborhood (along with wanting to justify the purchase of the Kenilworth Corridor as well as New Starts funding).

On the surface, Southwest LRT should be a simple example of a future story, with the justification for building on the Kenilworth Corridor partly being due to the development opportunities in the corridor. Looking deeper though, the choice to build the alignment on the Kenilworth Corridor even after BNSF chose to remain on the alignment shows a fear of delays and a choice to build on what already was purchased. This shows that Southwest LRT is in fact a back to basics story under the veil of a future story. Furthermore, while Southwest LRT did outreach (mostly in the form of open houses), this outreach was used to inform community members and focused little on collaboration. Therefore, the project is another example of “storytelling of” planning.

Lastly, the Blue Line Extension is an interesting example of both back to basics planning and storytelling for planning. The Blue Line Extension was supposed to be similar to Southwest LRT, with the train running next to a freight alignment, with similar amounts of collaboration to Southwest LRT likely planned. The change from the BNSF corridor to the Bottineau Blvd corridor meant that planners had to move quickly to as to not delay the project, making it a back to basics story based on speed alone, but it also fostered collaboration seen in storytelling for planning (and was the only project in the Twin Cities to do so). Why this was could be up for debate. It could be an example of storytelling, taking what was learned from previous projects and applying it to the Blue Line Extension (this is supported by having workgroup discussion about previous projects as part of CURA’s workgroups), but the onset of this choice could be a

multitude of other reasons such as the focus on equity following the murder of George Floyd. Nevertheless, it does show that while anti-displacement collaboration seen in storytelling for planning examples should come from well thought out, future story driven ideas, they also can be used quickly in a “back to basics” situation, allowing for better community results regardless of factors that could inhibit the planning process (such as issues with BNSF).

This leads me to a question: what does an ideal “storytelling for planning” project look like? For one, a story should never be based around the “back to basics story” or “future story” model. The back to basics story asks us to build a line that is fast and pragmatic, which can curtail creativity and forward thinking ideals. “Future stories” ask for a project to achieve perfection in the choice of an alignment, which is a near impossible task to live up to. Ideally, a site is able to serve a mix of places that have already had dense development, while still allowing opportunities for new development. In the planning for this new development, following the anti-displacement framework and principles that were used in the Blue Line Extension could be used to protect current residents and businesses, while still allowing for the benefits of light rail to permeate through communities of all types. With this in mind, I do believe that if money were no object and anti-displacement principles could be implemented, Alignment 3C through Uptown and Whittier would be an ideal transit alignment following the storytelling for planning model.

Conclusion

My goal for this thesis was to answer the question of whether it is better for light rail transit in the Twin Cities to serve areas that have already been developed, or areas that have the potential for development? I also wanted to ask how this thought process changed over time for government officials and community members. Through my research, the answer is that it depends. Light rail can bring great change to neighborhoods that were once undeveloped and used for industry, such as Prospect Park. It can also bring about little change in undeveloped areas, such as W 21st Street and Cedar Lake. It can hurt working class neighborhoods of varying densities, such as Midway and Harrison, and can lead to increasing opportunities in suburbs such as St. Louis Park and Robbinsdale. What's most important is moving from a "storytelling of planning" model based on informing the public on what you want to do, to a "storytelling for planning" model based on empowerment.

One of the most prevalent trends I saw from my interviews was that government officials were excited about light rail, while still understanding the potential challenges that it would bring to their towns. Businesses and neighborhood groups in wealthier communities also seemed to be mostly pro-light rail, while still having concerns about issues such as speed and safety. Poorer neighborhoods on the other hand are overwhelmingly against light rail, albeit sometimes for different reasons. All this proves Sandercock's beliefs that everyone is the protagonist of their own story. Members of government agencies are the protagonist of their story, trying to build a comprehensive transit network for an entire region. Mitchel Hansen is the protagonist of his story, trying to protect his neighborhood from gentrification and anti-housing policies. At the end of our second interview, I asked him the question: what is the right way to do this? His answer: collaboration, specifically in the form of government agency departments staffed by community

members from throughout the region. He stressed diligent community outreach years in advance to ensure buy-in from communities, and to avoid displacement at all cost. This idea is echoed in the Gall and Haxhija reading where they wrote that by collaborating with others, “narratives through stories can strengthen the communal agency of the citizen [and] can be used to improve the perspectives of other stakeholder groups”. While this requires disagreeing in good faith, there are numerous examples of this beginning to occur in the Twin Cities, from anti-displacement work groups that feature vulnerable residents, government agencies, community organizations, and neutral mediators, to people such as Mitchel Hansen serving on the Metropolitan Council Equity Advisory Committee. By doing this, positive change can endure that did not exist when past light rail lines were planned. An era of “storytelling for planning” can begin, which is far more important than level of development.

Light rail can do many things for communities. Tim Sandvik of Robbinsdale said he was most excited about being ten minutes away from a Twins game. Barry Schade from Bryn Mawr mentioned trains being able to take pressure off the region's highways. Still, questions remain about ensuring that projects bring more positive change than negative change, and that positive change is able to drown out negative situations. The media in the Twin Cities must do a better job at highlighting transportation issues. In an interview with local transit advocate Matt Privratsky, Matt mentioned that the media can come off as naive at best to hostile at worst in its attitude towards transit. He also mentioned that media opinions can swing wildly depending on what discourse is popular at the time. For example, when the Green Line first opened, he mentioned that the dominant discourse was that the 45-50 minute ride between Minneapolis and St. Paul was too long. While it is true that there are numerous limitations along the route, mainly a lack of signal priority along University Avenue, the media's coverage of the issue brought so

much attention to this fact that Metro Transit eliminated trip estimates from its station maps. Once the line got popular though, the media's tune changed to be more supportive of light rail, but that changed again during the pandemic when drug use increased along the train. This variance in support can have direct impacts not only on the consequences of one project, but the 'how', 'what', and 'why' of future projects. While the media does not need to always be pro-light rail, feeding into negative discourse with talks of delays and crime only furthers the idea that public transportation is a nuisance that only exists to serve the poor.

Also, while anti-displacement work with CURA is a good start, there is no disincentive for agencies such as the Metropolitan Council to simply ignore CURA's ideas and potential policies, and even if they do, it's unknown what the results of these policies will be in Minneapolis. While light rail planning in the Twin Cities seems to be reaching a close (the Blue Line Extension has already reached the planning stage of municipal consent, meaning they can begin establishing right of way and move utilities before construction), lessons can still be learned for the planning of BRT lines as well as potential future light rail projects in the Twin Cities or elsewhere. As said earlier, precedent is being set by what CURA has accomplished in bringing people together, and by implementing Mitchel's goals of greater collaboration, maybe protagonists and antagonists can join together to create something better, regardless of the current level of development a line is going through.

Appendix

Interview Questions:

For those along Alignment 3A:

- Who are you and how do you relate to this project?
- Did you agree with the decision to build light rail through the Kenilworth corridor?
- What excites you about light rail along the Kenilworth corridor?
- What concerns do you have about light rail along the Kenilworth corridor?

For those along Alignment 3C:

- Who are you and how do you relate to this project?
- Were you happy with the Metropolitan Council's decision to not build light rail in Uptown/Whittier?
- What opportunities exist for Uptown/Whittier because the light rail will not run through there?
- What concerns do you have about light rail not running through Uptown/Whittier?

For those at the Metropolitan Council:

- Who are you and how do you relate to this project?
- How did the Metropolitan Council go about its decision to build light rail in the Kenilworth corridor?
- What factors were most important to you in deciding between Alignment 3A and 3C?
- What stations in Alignment 3A have the greatest opportunity for job growth, housing growth?
- What stations in Alignment 3C do you believe would have seen the most development if light rail ran on that Alignment?

For those who live or work near existing light rail stations:

- What is your relationship to the project?
- How has light rail changed your neighborhood for the better?
- How has light rail changed your neighborhood for the worst?
- In the future, do you believe light rail should run through already developed areas, or areas where future development can occur?

For those along Blue Line Extension:

- Who are you and how do you relate to this project?
- Did you agree with the decision to build light rail through Robbinsdale?
- What excites you about light rail along Robbinsdale?
- What concerns do you have about light rail in Robbinsdale?
- What has Hennepin County/Metro Transit done to talk with community members/businesses
- How does Robbinsdale compare to other suburbs who are receiving light rail?