

intransit

Rainbow Rider: Serving all six counties, five days a week

By BRADLEY R. SCHOENHEER, Freelance Writer

Sitting near lakes Mary and Reno, less than 20 miles south of Alexandria and Hwy 94, lies the small city of Lowry, MN. It is here that Rainbow Rider (RR) places its buses, offices and equipment, but don't let its small town roots fool you. RR serves the surrounding counties of Traverse, Grant, Stevens, Douglas, Pope, and Todd, which have a combined population of more than 91,000 people.

Rainbow Rider had its humble start in 1995, and has continued to expand its ridership, routes, and services ever since. Adding Todd county in 2009, Grant county in 2010, and an intercity bus service from Morris to Alexandria last August, RR is always looking for new ways to serve their riders. RR delivers an average of 634 riders a day.

"The intercity bus service had a slow start," said Harold Jennissen, Director of Transit Services for Rainbow Rider. "However, as students are returning to the UMM, we're beginning to see increases in ridership for this route. Some days are better than others, but I'm confident that this will become a regular route that students and professionals alike will depend on."

While providing service to all six counties, RR has learned first-hand that effectively running bus services to each is a challenging feat.



"Because some counties are more rural in nature, and others are more urban, finding the right system to serve all



has been a real challenge," said Jennissen. "However, the system we have in place has shown fantastic results, and it looks like what we're doing is working."

Things get interesting when you start to delve into how one uses and rides Rainbow Rider from destination to destination. Rather than finding your route on a map, individuals must call ahead and schedule their rides with a dispatcher. No forms or paperwork are required from passengers to use this service. Much like a dial-a-ride system, drivers look at all the destinations for a given day, and coordinate their routes using a new system called RideMatch.

"We implemented RouteMatch just last August, and after fixing a few bugs, it has been running almost flawlessly," said Jennissen. "Drivers are very pleased to see their routes and destinations on the tablets which are equipped in each of our 31 buses, and we have plans for the future that will allow riders to schedule rides directly using their phones and tablets as well."



The system is constantly compared to a taxi service, says Jennissen. That is something RR has taken a liking to, going so far as to put "taxi services" in their website title. This connection becomes more apparent when you explore their ride share program, which utilizes volunteer drivers to areas outside of the six counties.

Bringing the personalization and ease of use of a taxi, and melding it with the affordable and friendly services of a public transit system is something that RR prides itself in accommodating every day, as they continue to meet the demands of the six counties they serve.



Tony Kellen
President

Minnesota Public Transit Association

President's Column

It's hard to believe that this will be my last InTransit President's Column. As I move on to new challenges and reflect on the last 8 years as MPTA President, I would like to thank everyone in the association who has contributed to our work in advocating for transit in Minnesota.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association has taken on a more prominent role at the legislature and with the rest of the transportation community thanks to all of the work we have done over the years. Having a stronger voice for transit – particularly transit in Greater Minnesota – has translated into real increases in funding and an expansion of transit service so that many more people are able to access transit service today. That's what our work is all about and your partnership in this effort has allowed me to leave a legacy that we can all be proud of.

It's very heartening to be able to leave on a high note:

- The 2013 Minnesota Public Transit Conference was a great success with strong support from transit industry vendors and great participation from transit systems;
- MPTA has been chosen to receive a \$5,000 grant from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) for outreach work related to the local option sales tax for transportation;
- Strong membership representation of transit operators, funding partners, and vendor organizations providing goods and services to our industry;
- The association can boast strong financial stability in a changing environment;
- MPTA is working closely with a number of coalitions and alliances to forward a united voice pushing for increased transportation funding;

- We have a new web site, new look and new communication tools to stay in contact with members and advocate for transit with decision makers and the public;
- MPTA has a new part-time staff person with Laura Eash as our new Program Coordinator;



Welcome to MPTA Laura!

- Funding for transit systems around the state has rebounded and is projected to increase into the future.

Look for more information on the 2013 conference and be sure to mark your calendars for the 2014 conference scheduled for September 9-11, 2014 at the River Centre in St. Paul. I plan to be there in my new capacity with Wendel. I am working on business development initiatives with public transportation and in particular, working to manage new or current facility renovation projects involving compressed natural gas (CNG) and fueling system installations.

Thank you all for the great memories and the opportunity to make a difference for transit in Minnesota. I'm looking forward to working with you in my new position with Wendel.



Margaret Donahoe
Advocacy Director

Minnesota Public Transit Association

Legislative Report

We're gearing up for the 2014 Legislative Session in anticipation of another effort to pass a transportation funding bill that provides a permanent increase in dedicated funding for transit. However that will be a big lift for this session. It requires a lot of local support for legislators to vote yes for additional transit and road funding which requires tax increases.

MPTA will be contacting you and asking for your assistance in reaching out to local legislators and news media as we work to educate decision makers about the cost increases for transit systems, the increased demand for transit service, and the need for additional funding. Your voice can make a real difference in ensuring that Minnesotans have access to transit service all across the state.

As you know, last session, bills were introduced to increase the sales tax for transit in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and to dedicate revenue from the sales tax on leased vehicles for Greater Minnesota transit. While an increase in transit funding was provided in the final transportation budget bill, it was only for the current biennium. MPTA remains committed to working on legislation that will provide more stable and sustainable funding for the future.

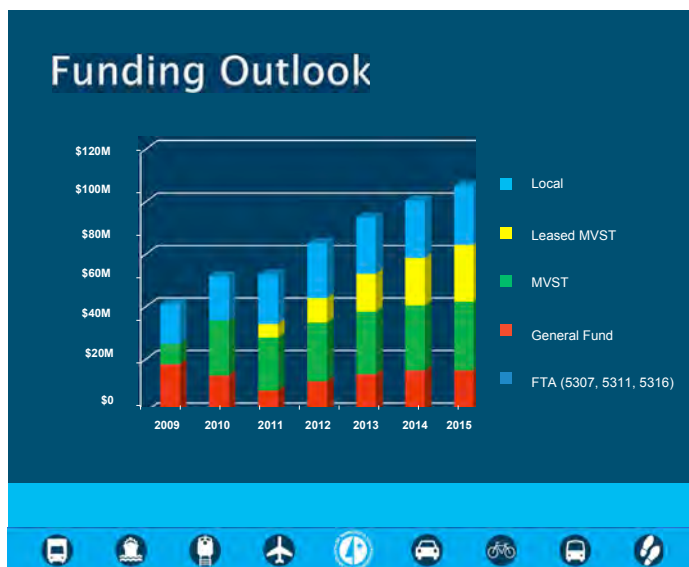
For Greater Minnesota transit, the funding outlook is positive for the next couple of years, which is important given that ridership is up considerably since 2008. For Metropolitan Area Transit, drastic cuts in general fund dollars have been restored for now and we're anticipating a positive budget forecast for the general fund with the November, 2013 Budget Forecast.

The 2014 Session is considered the "bonding year" and we'll be focusing on funding for capital projects as part of the capital bonding bill. The legislature has received many funding requests – over \$2 billion in requests – but

will probably pass a bill more in the neighborhood of \$850 million. We'll be pushing for transit projects to receive as much funding as possible in the context of this capital bonding bill.

At the federal level, we'll be watching what happens with the budget process now that the federal government shutdown has ended and the Federal Transit Administration is back in business.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recently announced the availability of \$29 million in competitive research funds for innovative public transportation projects that will help ensure safe and reliable transit service for riders of America's public transportation systems. The grants will help transit agencies strengthen operational safety, better withstand natural disasters and other emergencies, and improve emergency response capabilities.



Funding outlook for greater Minnesota transit for 2014

Legislative Report Continued...

Funding proposals will be considered in three areas:

- **Operational Safety:** Projects that develop and demonstrate new or improved technologies, methods, and practices that will increase the operational safety of public transportation services. Examples include electronic intrusion detection systems, remote rail monitoring and train undercarriage inspection systems.
- **Resiliency:** Projects that increase the resilience and robustness of public transportation systems so they can better withstand natural disasters and other externally caused emergencies. Examples include increasing a system's resistance to corrosion from exposure to saltwater, mitigating the impact of flooding and severe weather, and increasing the ability to withstand extreme temperatures.

- **All-Hazards Emergency Response and Recovery:** Projects to improve communications with emergency responders and demonstrate promising methods for restoring transit service in the wake of a major disruption. Examples include improving ways to locate and communicate with distressed passengers as well as transit workers, and using transit assets to assist with emergency response and recovery efforts.

The \$29 million combines FTA research funds from Fiscal Years 2012 and 2013. FTA expects to announce projects selected for funding in 2014.

We'll be providing Updates on the latest action in Washington and in St. Paul on a regular basis, so please read our Constant Contact Updates from MPTA.

Albert Lea Transit: Small scale, big impact

By BRADLEY R. SCHOENHEER, Freelance Writer

About an hour south of Rochester MN, lies the small city of Albert Lea, with a population of about 18,000. Here, Albert Lea Transit runs an operation that provides transit options to the Albert Lea and surrounding area. But what makes this system shine is the service they provide to those who need it most.

“Albert Lea Transit doesn't operate like your average public transit system.” Said Gary Hart, Director of Transit Services. Hart and his team have simplified the experience to make riding their buses attractive, inviting, and, well, simple. Instead of having to learn multiple routes to carry you around the city, there are only two routes; the Red route and the Blue route. The Blue route connects the more rural, residential sections of the city to the downtown area, while the Red route transports individuals throughout downtown Albert Lea. Both routes are set up to complement each other for a convenient ride. Over 250 people depend on and use these routes each month.

On June 2013, Albert Lea Transit added additional routes to some of the more rural areas on the outskirts of town. “These routes have seen steady ridership,” said Hart. “But we're expecting more riders as people get more familiar and comfortable with the routes.”

Albert Lea Transit began operation in January 2004 due to a demand for transportation for the disabled and elderly.

“Albert Lea Transit is different than other agencies because of the number of individuals in wheelchairs we transport

each day,” said Hart. “On a typical day, we transport over 15 different people who have mobility concerns that use a chair—We get a lot of use out of our lifts.”

Albert Lea Transit also works closely with the Head Start/Even Start program, offering transportation to their facilities, which enable individuals with English as a second language to get the help they need. While many different demographics use ALT, the elderly and disabled are still the primary users of the service, according to Hart.

Every year since its inception, ALT has seen increased ridership and expanding routes. From three buses to four, from 29,563 riders in 2004 to 42,793 riders in 2012, and a brand-new transit facility completed this year, growth is definitely a popular trend for the agency.

The new facility stores the agency's buses, supplies, offices, and more. Hart sees a lot of potential in the facility, from travel training and security, to easier transfers for individuals looking to get a ride to work, and holding community meetings, there are many possible uses for the building.

With its new facility in place, a strong foundation for success and service expanding far and wide, Albert Lea Transit continues to make a difference seven days a week. While it may not be as large an operation as some of their bigger-city counterparts, ALT offers an affordable, alternative transit option for any in the community who desire or require it.

MATBUS promotion increased 'choice' ridership

By LORI VAN BEEK AND GREG SCHILDBERGER, MATBUS

MATBUS implemented a 14 week campaign, called Lunch & Ride with the F-M Metro's Best," to target residents who lived, and employees who worked in Downtown Fargo last May. It's success was due to the targeted nature of the promotion and the collaboration with local radio stations and the Downtown Community Partnership organization.

Each week, different businesses were picked up at their offices by MATBUS, given a brief "Intro to MATBUS" and were then taken to Island Park to enjoy a fantastic lunch.

In the past, marketing efforts that targeted the Downtown area "en masse" via direct mailings, billboards and emails have not delivered the results ultimately being sought. In planning for this campaign, it was decided that more targeted/one-on-one outreach and marketing would be more successful. Also, it was determined that a partnership with the Downtown Community Partnership (DCP), which is a private sector development corporation devoted to improving the downtown district, would improve the success of the event. Additionally, MATBUS utilized its trade agreements with local top-rated radio stations to bring its "talent" to help promote the event.

The weekly campaign was a 14-week venture that took Downtowners (employees, supervisors, managers, owners & residents) out to lunch. The event began by picking up the group(s) of about 25 people at their individual businesses or residences. MATBUS and the DCP introduced the passengers to transit on-board the bus. Passengers were given a tour of the environmentally-friendly bus maintenance facility and one of the new 40-foot hybrid busses. During each leg of the trip, MATBUS

and passengers interacted and had a great time. Passengers were then taken via MATBUS to a park gazebo, where lunch was provided by a Downtown restaurant. Radio talent from Y-94 and BOB 95 (and mascot) was there to meet and greet participants, in

addition to capturing their first experiences on the radio for the entire metro to hear.

Ridership by "choice riders" in Downtown Fargo has increased tremendously since this campaign began. The incorporation of the radio talent (and the live radio broadcasts) created excitement among participants and also generated fantastic "first experience" reactions that we can utilize in future marketing efforts targeting Downtowners. Also, the awareness of MATBUS services (and safety/cleanliness/convenience of the system) has been brought to the forefront by this campaign. The partnership of the DCP, and its relationship with Downtowners, was a very important component to this campaign. Additionally, through the collaborative relationship created by this campaign with the DCP, MATBUS has its boarding locations denoted on all of the DCP's Downtown Walking Maps and Brochures.



MATBUS Lunch & Ride 2013 with JT from Y94 – Wells Fargo



MATBUS Lunch & Ride 2013 with Jane & Blake from BOB95 – Park Company Realtors and C. Lizzy's

This novel campaign has been extraordinarily successful and will be a model for structuring future MATBUS marketing efforts. Upon its completion, over 325 different Downtowners will have taken part in this targeted campaign and the response has been phenomenal. The following is just a sampling of the many responses we have received: "It was so fun, everyone loved it and enjoyed the tour too. What a great way to introduce people to the great bus system we have – most of our group (all but one) had never been in a city bus!" "We appreciate the great food, fun and conversation!" "It was certainly an eye-opener from the days I rode the bus, some 25 years ago!" "It definitely put MATBUS as a strong consideration for alternative transportation for us all!" "I'm riding MATBUS to work tomorrow!"

More people commute by catching the Link, benefits include cost savings, stress-free ride

By JOHN MENTER, Sherburne County Public Works Director

People are hopping on board the Northstar Link Commuter Bus in record numbers to travel in the highway 10 corridor between St. Cloud and Minneapolis. Link ridership in September reached a new high, with more than 5,400 rides, an 18 percent increase over September 2012.

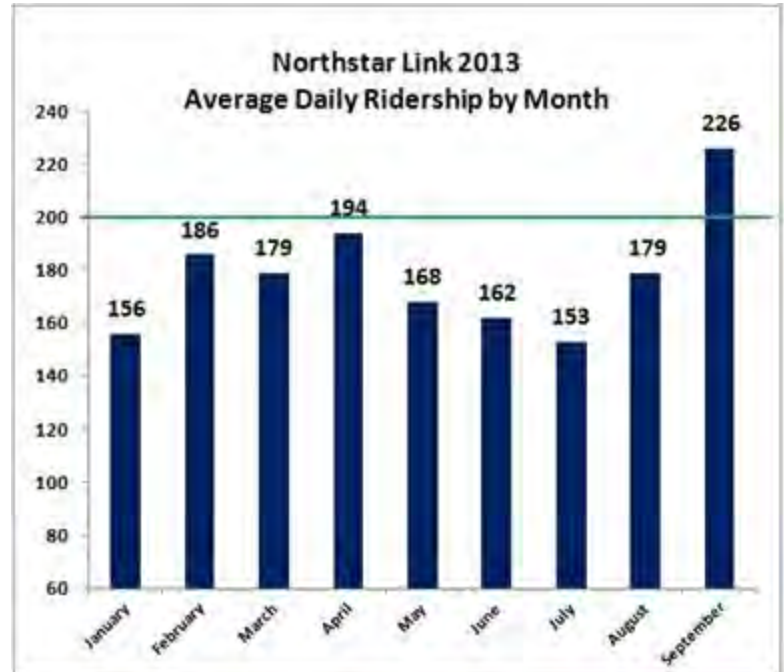
The Northstar Link Commuter Bus, which has stops between St. Cloud and Big Lake, coordinates with most Northstar Commuter Rail train arrivals and departures at the Big Lake Station seven days each week. The train schedule primarily serves commuters during rush hours, and offers limited weekend service plus some special events, including Twins baseball and Vikings football games.

The number of commuters on the train also is growing. September 2013 ridership was up about seven percent over September 2012.

The top three reasons people use Northstar Link are cost savings, stress-free travel, and convenience, according to Stearns County Commissioner Leigh Lenzmeier, chair of the Northstar Corridor Development Authority, which is the group that oversees the Link.

“I give some of the credit for the increased ridership to the efforts of the St. Cloud State Mass Communications students last year,” Commissioner Lenzmeier said. “As a class project, they helped build awareness on campus for the Link and train services. Now it’s common to have Sunday evening buses full of students headed back to SCSU.”

Commissioner Lenzmeier went on to say that the majority of riders use Link services more than one day a week, which he believes is helping to manage congestion on highways 10 and 94.



Average daily ridership on the Northstar Link surpassed 200 in September. Ridership on the Northstar Link reached a record high in September, an 18 percent increase over September 2012 and more than an 100 percent increase over the first September in 2010.

There is one weekday bus trip that isn't tied to the train schedule. Northstar Link makes it possible to work a half day or make a short, leisurely trip on Fridays. The Fabulous Friday midday bus service starts in St. Cloud at 10:15 a.m. and ends in Minneapolis at 12:45 p.m., with stops in between at Becker and all Northstar train stations, except Fridley. The bus leaves downtown Minneapolis and heads north at 1 p.m. with stops at all Northstar stations, except Fridley.

Information on schedules and fares, which range from \$1.25 to \$5.50 one way, can be found at www.CatchTheLink.com or by calling 877.LINK.010.

Minnesota Public Transit Association 2013 Award Winners



Transit Professional of the Year

Helen Pieper, Timber Trails Public Transit

Distinguished Career

Silas Sharp, Metro Transit
David Tripp, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Transit System of the Year

AMCAT (Austin/Mower Area Transit)

Management Innovation

Metro Red Line-Cedar BRT, Metropolitan Council/
Metro Transit, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority, Dakota
County, Transit Asset Management Plan, Southwest
Transit

Friend of MPTA

Tony Kellen

Minnesota Bus Operator of the Year

Tony Taylor, Metro Transit

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Greg Negard, Paul Bunyan Transit

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Chad Gessel, RiverRider Public Transit

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Tom Jay, Brainerd & Crow Wing Public
Transit

Board members elected:

2014 - 2016 – Kevin Raun, DARTS

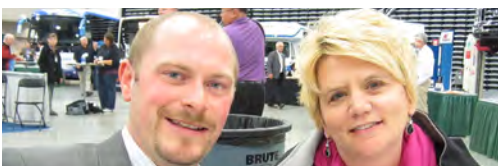
2014 - 2016 – Tim Kirchoff, Anoka
County Transit

2014 - 2016 – Daryn Toso, Transit

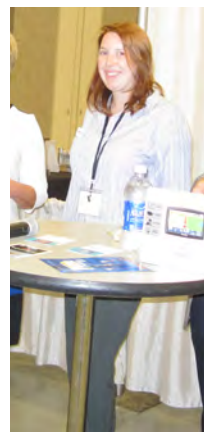
2014 - 2015 - Erlene Welshons,
SEMCAAC Transportation

2014- 2015 - Melinda Estey, Steele
County Area Transit (SCAT)

Fall Conference 2013



InTransit



Thanks for the memories and see you next year!

MVTA celebrated Customer Appreciation Week Sept. 9-13

By ROBIN SELVIG, MVTA

Customers were the “top dogs” at the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) Customer Appreciation Week, Monday-Friday, Sept. 9-13.

“We are here to meet our customers’ need for transportation,” said MVTA Board Chair Gary Hansen (who also serves as an Eagan council member and chair of the Suburban Transit Association). “We want to take a pause, personally interact with the riders, and thank them for using our services,” he said.



MVTA customers enjoyed healthy snacks during the Customer



SouthWest Transit opens East Creek Station

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

SouthWest Transit’s newest Park and Ride, East Creek Station, officially opened for service on Monday, September 23, providing express service to downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota.

Two days earlier the public was invited to celebrate the new facility with a ribbon cutting ceremony, hot dogs, roasted corn and beverages, music, a car show and various vendors.

Located in Chaska, East Creek Station has 675 stalls. The station/passenger waiting area is climate controlled, with vending machines and TV monitors for customer viewing as well as for disseminating up to date information. The station is equipped with Wi-Fi and a state of the art security system.

The ramp and station are ecofriendly. A number of energy saving measures have been included in the construction most notably the LED lighting.

The station will be staffed one day per week for customers to purchase and/or re-load their Go-To Card.

A heated platform in the passenger boarding area will help avoid ice and snow packed surfaces during the winter months.

SouthWest has partnered with the City of Chaska and the station and ramp will be identified and used as a trail head for access onto the many local bike and hiking trails. As a trail head, a biker and/or hiker can park their auto and will have access to restrooms and shelter in the event of an unexpected storm.



Solar power lighting Metro Transit's buildings, shelters

By DREW KERR, Metro Transit

Three separate solar energy projects are in the works as part of an effort to cut in half the amount of energy purchased for Metro Transit facilities by 2020.

In October, construction is set to begin on a 40-kilowatt rooftop array at Metro Transit's Light Rail Support Facility, located at Hiawatha Avenue and East 24th Street in Minneapolis. Expected to be complete in November, the solar panels will feed directly to the facility powering the building and augmenting energy purchased from the grid.

Next year, a 40-kilowatt solar array will be built on the new Park & Ride at Highway 610 and Noble Parkway. When complete, the 1,000-space Park & Ride will feature LED lighting, a geothermal heating and cooling system and charging stations for electric vehicles.

In addition to those larger projects, a series of solar panels are slated to be installed at 15 bus shelters in north Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park in October and November. The solar panels will power motion-sensored lights at the shelters, located on Xerxes Avenue, Brooklyn Boulevard, Fremont Avenue, Lyndale Avenue and Olson Memorial Highway.

In 2012, Metro Transit installed similar arrays at 10 Minneapolis bus shelters, largely along Franklin Avenue. The shelter systems include a battery pack that stores the energy during the day and can supply up to 30 hours of light when fully-charged.

Though not as powerful as the larger arrays, the solar-powered shelters are a high-visibility sign of Metro Transit's commitment to renewable energy and efficiency.

"It's definitely noticeable," said James Harwood, a facilities engineer with Metro Transit. "People see that it's (the shelter) powered by solar and I think that says something about the agency."



The Franklin Avenue installations were part of the Energy Innovation Corridor – a federally-funded effort aimed at energy improvements near the METRO Green Line. Rebates from Xcel Energy were also used.

The solar systems going in at shelters this fall, each costing about \$4,500, are being funded through a federal grant focused on transit improvements in the northwest metro. Federal funding is also being used to pay for the solar arrays at the Park & Ride at Highway 610 and Noble Parkway and the Rail Support Facility.

Taken together, the installations will not only help Metro Transit reduce the amount of purchased energy but also help meet a goal of installing 500 kWh of renewable energy generation by the end of 2020.

Future solar additions could come in the form of public-private partnership at some of Metro Transit's large support facilities. The Metropolitan Council is using a similar model at the Blue Lake wastewater treatment plant in Shakopee.

"I think as we develop all of our new projects we're going to be looking at sustainability," said Robert Rimstad, another Metro Transit engineer who has been involved with the solar project. "We're always looking for new ideas."

METRO UPDATE



Regional travel report says residents are traveling less, but using transit more

Although the Twin Cities metro area population grew by more than 200,000 people from 2000 to 2010, residents are making fewer trips overall, but more trips using transit. [Read more](#)

Northstar now offering onboard Wi-Fi

The “cab car” of each train will be marked with graphics inside and out that designate it as the location for free customer Wi-Fi access. Northstar commuter trains have between four and six passenger cars and cab cars are always located furthest from the locomotive. Each passenger car seats about 145 customers and can accommodate many more standing; each three-level car also has ten electrical outlets throughout. [Read More](#)

Southwest Light Rail: Shallow tunnels recommended along the preferred route in Minneapolis

Building shallow tunnels for light rail along the preferred route in Minneapolis is the most cost-effective solution and best long-term investment for the region, METRO Southwest LRT (Green Line Extension) planners said.

The project’s new cost estimate is \$1.56 billion, up from the earlier \$1.25 billion estimate that did not include any cost to address the location of freight rail in the corridor. In 2011, the Federal Transit Administration directed the Metropolitan Council to study options to keep freight rail in the LRT route through the Kenilworth neighborhood of Minneapolis in addition to studying how to reroute freight trains to St. Louis Park, adding the cost of dealing with freight rail to the LRT project. [Read More](#)



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Metropolitan Council Newsletter