



Special Metropolitan Council Meeting

Executive Summary

SW Item: 2008-245

Meeting date: September 3, 2008

ADVISORY INFORMATION	
Date:	August 27, 2008
Subject:	Selection of Central Corridor Preferred Alternative, Resolution 2008-26
District(s), Member(s):	All
Policy/Legal Reference:	Federal Title 23 CFR, Part 771, FTA New Starts Process
Staff Prepared/Presented:	Brian J. Lamb, General Manager 612-349-7510 Mark W. Fuhrmann, Deputy General Manager 651-602-1942 Rich Rovang, Deputy Project Director, 651-602-1941 Kathryn O'Brien, Principal Contract Administrator, 651-602-1927
Division/Department:	Metro Transit / Central Corridor Project office

Proposed Action/Motion

That the Metropolitan Council adopt the attached resolution selecting light rail transit as the preferred alternative for the Central Corridor, refining the project budget at \$914.9 million and directing staff to submit a New Starts application to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as part of the process of requesting permission to enter into Final Design in early 2009.

Background

Upon receiving approval from the FTA to enter into preliminary engineering in December 2006 on the locally preferred alternative for the Central Corridor, established as light rail transit operating on Washington and University avenues, the Council established a Central Corridor Project Office. The project office has been working since that time to develop preliminary engineering plans and the environmental documentation required to advance the project into construction. As part of this process, a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) was developed and published consistent with Federal and State requirements. The SDEIS was published on July 11, 2008 and a formal 45-day public comment period ensued, concluding on August 25, 2008. A record of all comments received has been compiled and published for review. Coincident with the environmental documentation, engineering plans were advanced to 30 percent completion and cost estimates were revised for submittal to FTA as part of the New Starts process.

Rationale

Approving a Preferred Alternative for the Central Corridor is a milestone of the environmental review process. Approving a revised project budget and CEI that will achieve a "medium" CEI rating from FTA is a requirement to earn FTA approval to enter Final Design in early 2009.

Funding

Local capital funding will be provided by four funding partners: (1) the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB); (2) the State of Minnesota; (3) the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority (RCRRA); and (4) the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority (HCRRA). The Federal Transit Administration will commit to fund 50 percent of project costs with execution of a Full Funding Grant Agreement. CTIB funds will be used to pay 30 percent of project costs, the State of Minnesota will fund 10 percent of project costs, RCRRA will fund 7 percent of project costs, and HCRRA will fund 3 percent of project costs.

Known Support / Opposition

Ramsey County, Hennepin County and the cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis unanimously approved, via Municipal Consent action, the Central Corridor LRT preliminary design plans this summer.

Comments submitted in response to the SDEIS and testimony from three public hearings has been provided to members of the Council. The response to these comments will be provided in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Issues most frequently mentioned as part of this process included concerns about loss of parking on University Avenue, ensuring the equitable distribution of project benefits, building the three infill stations at Hamline, Victoria, and Western as part of initial construction, maintaining the existing frequency of Route 16 service, ensuring pedestrian safety and connectivity across University Avenue, and general concerns related to noise, vibration, construction impacts, traffic impacts and long-term impacts related to changing neighborhoods.

Metropolitan Council
390 North Robert Street, St. Paul , MN 55101

RESOLUTION No. 2008-26

**SELECTING THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR
PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND ELEMENTS FOR SUBMITTAL FOR A NEW STARTS
APPLICATION TO FTA ON SEPTEMBER 5, 2008**

WHEREAS, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is expected to grow by about 1,000,000 new residents and 560,000 new jobs between 2000 and 2030; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council has established a goal to increase year 2000 transit ridership by 50 percent by year 2020 to help address future transportation challenges and mitigate traffic congestion increases generated by this projected population and employment growth; and

WHEREAS, the Central Corridor is identified in the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan as one of five dedicated transitways needed to achieve the 2020 transit ridership goal; and

WHEREAS, a Central Corridor Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement (AA/DEIS) was released for public comment in May, 2006 with the subsequent selection by the Metropolitan Council of LRT as a locally preferred alternative operating on University and Washington avenues (Resolution # 2006-15); and

WHEREAS, upon receiving formal permission from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Metropolitan Council entered into the process of preliminary engineering for the locally preferred alternative LRT mode in late 2006 and identified key changes from the DEIS which had the potential to result in significant environmental impacts; and

WHEREAS, a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) documenting and disclosing potential environmental impacts of the key changes from the AA/DEIS was prepared and released for public comment on July 11, 2008 with three public hearings held the week of August 4, 2008 and with a record of all comments received up to the comment closing date of August 25, 2008 published; and

WHEREAS, the FTA requires the submittal of a New Starts application on September 5, 2008 as part of the process of formally seeking permission to enter into Final Design in early 2009; and

WHEREAS, the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul and Hennepin and Ramsey counties have unanimously passed resolutions adopting preliminary design plans for the Central Corridor LRT as part of the Municipal Consent process and these plans have been refined by staff to a 30 percent-level of engineering design for submittal to FTA; and

WHEREAS, total project costs and budget which will be contained in the New Starts application have been developed and refined based on design plans during the Preliminary Engineering phase and are critical factors in meeting FTA cost-effectiveness index requirements to qualify for New Starts funding; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council considers the Central Corridor project primarily as a transportation project, but also recognizes that good land use and economic development decisions, which are the responsibilities of the affected local entities (Minneapolis, St Paul and the University of Minnesota), can enhance the viability and success of the project; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council is deeply committed to active public involvement throughout project design, construction and start up phases;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL that:

- 1) The LRT mode is selected as the Preferred Alternative for the Central Corridor operating at-grade on Washington and University avenues, passing north of the State Capitol and turning south on Robert Street, turning west at 12th Street to Cedar Street and then continuing south on Cedar Street into downtown St. Paul turning diagonally at 4th Street and continuing east to end at St. Paul's Union Depot with tail track leading to an operations and maintenance facility farther east; and
- 2) Staff is directed to submit to the Federal Transit Administration a New Starts application as part of the formal process of seeking permission to enter into Final Design in early 2009 providing information including preliminary engineering plans, ridership, operation and maintenance costs, a project budget of \$914.8 million and other information resulting in a cost-effectiveness index (CEI) for the Central Corridor LRT project of \$24.41; and
- 3) The Council will continue to provide for active public involvement in all phases of the project; and
- 4) The Metropolitan Council commits to delivering this project on time, and on budget.

Adopted this 3rd day of September, 2008.

Peter Bell, Chair

Pat Curtiss, Recording Secretary