

METRO Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit Project

Public Engagement Plan

May 13, 2016



1.0 Introduction

The METRO Orange Line is a planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project on I-35W between Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, and Burnsville. A future extension to Lakeville is planned as a separate project. Transit improvements on I-35W will benefit existing riders and help attract new riders with more reliable and frequent service, 7 days a week. The METRO brand will increase the visibility of transit along the corridor and provide easy-to-use amenities like ticket vending machines and electronic displays with bus in. Additionally, service improvements to bus routes that connect with the METRO Orange Line will attract new riders to the entire transit system.

The all-day, frequent service of the METRO Orange Line will complement local and express bus routes along I-35W by providing competitive travel times for station-to-station trips and a new option for commuters who live in the urban core and work in the suburbs, or “reverse-commuters”. Express bus riders will also benefit from new stations and bus-only lanes on I-35W. As a part of the METRO system, the Orange Line will connect people across the region to job centers, housing options, and destinations in the corridor. This new transportation option will expand accessibility and promote and complement compact, walkable neighborhoods in the station areas.

1.1 Purpose and Goal

The Public Engagement Plan (PEP) outlines how the Orange Line Project Team will engage and educate the public, policymakers, stakeholder groups, and Metro Transit staff on the METRO Orange Line project. A well-informed and engaged public strengthens the project and helps create a more useful transit system for all. The PEP will focus on communities that are traditionally underrepresented in transit planning processes including transit riders, people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other historically marginalized groups. The PEP will also lay out how and at what point in the project we will engage with community. Public engagement will focus on connecting with communities at existing neighborhood and employer events, on-board transit and through existing community organizations. The PEP will aim to create long-lasting relationship with under-represented communities and to build the capacity of existing community organizations.

1.2 Definitions of Key Terms (Glossary)

It is important to clearly define terms to set expectations for the public and staff involved in the project. Words such as engagement, outreach, involvement, and input are often used interchangeably, but each term implies a different end goal.

Engagement- promotes participation in community life, especially by those who are usually isolated or excluded, by engaging them in collective action to create a healthy community. Relationship and trust-building is the key to a strong engagement process. Strategies include one-on-one conversations, listening sessions, collaborative design exercises, and workshops.

Outreach- A means to disseminate information, educate and build awareness. Strategies include presentations, social media, print media, distributing flyers, and open houses. Outreach is an important first step to introduce the public to the project.

Involvement- When stakeholders participate in the designed planning or engagement activity. An engaged stakeholder is involved in the process, but involvement does not guarantee relationship-building or an increase in community capacity.

Input- Information and feedback provided by the public, communities or stakeholders to the planning staff. Input is an important aspect of engagement, but on its own it is insufficient because it does not require planning staff to relay information back to those who provided input or details on how their input influences decision making.

Community- For the purpose of this PEP this is defined as a group of individuals that share a common geography or a particular characteristic. Examples of community could be a classroom, an apartment building, the disability community, or the Latino community.

Under-represented community- Within every community there are members whose voices are under-represented in decision making. This often includes communities of color, disability communities, renters, youth, and transit riders.

Stakeholders- Organizations, communities, governments, property owners, businesses, transit riders, employees and members of the public that the project impacts or benefits.

The public- Everyone.

2.0 Timeline and Engagement Opportunities

The project timeline for the Orange Line provides multiple opportunities for meaningful engagement with communities, stakeholders, transit riders and the public.

Many important decisions will be influenced by the expertise Metro Transit staff learns from community engagement. These decisions include station amenities and station design, identification of neighborhood assets near stations, project environmental work, and connecting bus service to the Orange Line. Later in the project, extensive outreach will assist transit riders and community stakeholders in navigating construction and transit detours.



2.1 Opportunities for Engagement

The majority of engagement will occur in two phases of the project, “Public Engagement in Design” (2015-2017) and “Bus Service Restructuring Plan” (2018-2019). Educational outreach on the project will happen throughout this timeline.

Identification of Local Assets (2016) - “Asset mapping” will be done with local stakeholders and underrepresented communities to identify the most important community resources and features of the neighborhood; the places that define the station area. This work will help define the station naming process and future marketing programs.

Station Design (2016) - While the architectural design of the station will be rather uniform; the location of amenities like ticket vending machines, bike racks, and information kiosks are not set in stone and community voice can help decide where they will be most useful. Accessibility concerns will also be addressed.

Walkability (2016) - Some station areas lack important pedestrian/bicycle connections to the METRO Orange Line stations. Community stakeholders will have an opportunity to identify deficiencies and work with local agencies to discuss these issues.

Station Naming (2017) - After local funding is acquired from all local funding partners a community process can begin to discuss the naming process for each METRO Orange Line station. Meetings will be organized for local residents and small businesses. Station naming requirements will be explained and the community findings found during “Identification of Local Assets” will be used to influence the discussion.

Local Bus Service Restructuring (2018) - Transit riders and community members will be asked to provide input on their travel patterns to ensure useful bus connections to the Orange Line from local bus service. Meetings will be held and a survey will be available to gather this important information.

Key questions include:

- Where did you start your trip?
- Where are you going?
- What time do you make this trip?

2.2 Engagement Strategy

Orange Line Stations are geographically disconnected from each other because of their location along a major freeway, I-35W. The 17-mile long corridor includes suburban and urban residential areas, employment centers, and the downtown core. Population demographics vary greatly along the corridor, with high-income and low-income residential areas in both Minneapolis and the suburbs. The Lake Street Station area also is home to predominately people of color. The diversity of station areas requires a nuanced engagement strategy.

Station-Area Tailored Engagement

Instead of a corridor-wide community advisory committee, engagement will be organized around individual station areas and will be contextual to the nearby communities. Working groups will be established around some stations, whereas others will have community-specific engagement without a working group, other stations will have engagement occur at pre-existing community meetings. Stations areas will be split into three tiers based on the impact of the Orange Line project to the neighborhood and the presence of under-represented communities. Station specific stakeholders are listed under each station, but **engagement with transit riders, residents and small businesses will occur at every station.**

2.2.1 Tier One Station Areas

Lake Street Station -

Engagement will build off of the work done by the former Public Advisory Committee (PAC) for the I-35W Transit/Access Project, which included key neighborhood stakeholders. This work included station and street design, visual quality, and project components. Extensive educational outreach around the larger I-35W Transit/Access Project and its relation to the City of Minneapolis' municipal consent process occurred in early 2016. Future engagement will finalize station design and station amenities, the potential for public art, and local bus restructuring.

Stakeholders

- Lake Street Council
- Whittier Alliance/ Whittier Business Association
- Phillips West Neighborhood Organization
- Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization (CANDO)
- Lyndale Neighborhood Association
- Latino Economic Development Association
- African Development Corporation
- Minneapolis College of Art and Design
- Harriet Tubman Center
- Christo Rey Jesuit High School
- Midtown Greenway Coalition

Coinciding Projects

I-35W Transit/Access Project

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, and Metro Transit are coordinating the large-scale reconstruction of I-35W between I-94 and S. 42nd Street. Orange Line's Lake Street Station is part of this project and its design, engineering and construction is included in MnDOT's contract, rather than Metro Transit's Orange Line contract.

MnDOT will coordinate the engagement of the I-35W Transit/Access Project. The primary opportunity for outreach and engagement will occur during the public comment period associated with the environmental review.

Neighborhood Organization Outreach—February-April 2016

To bring attention to the upcoming public open houses and the municipal consent process Metro Transit, Hennepin County and City of Minneapolis gave presentations and answered questions at neighborhood organizations. These took place during regularly schedule standing meetings and all three agency partners attended unless otherwise noted.

Organization	Date	Present Agencies
Lyndale Neighborhood Association Annual Meeting	April 8 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit
Whittier Alliance Annual Meeting	March 24 th , 2016	Metro Transit
Elliot Park Neighborhood, Inc.	March 17 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit, Minneapolis
Lyn-Lake Business Association	March 15 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit, Minneapolis
Whittier Alliance	March 14 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit
Whittier Business Association	March 9 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit, Minneapolis
Steven’s Square	March 8 th , 2016	Metro Transit, Minneapolis
Phillips West Neighborhood Organization	March 3 rd , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit, Minneapolis
Ventura Village	February 25 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Metro Transit
Bryant Neighborhood	February 23 rd , 2016	Hennepin County, Minneapolis
Citizens for a Loring Park Community	February 22 nd , 2016	Hennepin County, Minneapolis
Lake Street Council	February 18 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Minneapolis
Central Neighborhood Development Organization	February 9 th , 2016	Hennepin County, Minneapolis

Approval Schedule

The following schedule lays out the approval process for the environmental assessment and municipal consent by the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County.

Release EA to Environmental Quality Board-- March 28th, 2016

Comment period begins—March 28th, 2016

Open House-- April 5th, 2016

Open House-- April 19th, 2016

Comment period ends-- April 27th, 2016

City of Minneapolis Transportation and Public Works Committee Approval —May 3rd

Hennepin County Public Works Approval- May 3rd

Summary of Public Comment—May 4th

Hennepin County Board Consent- May 10th

City Council Municipal Consent- May 13th

2.2.2 Tier Two Station Areas

46th Street Station- Engagement around this pre-existing station will occur later in the project schedule and will include asset identification and local bus service restructuring.

Non-residential Stakeholders-

- Kingfield Neighborhood
- Tangletown
- Field-Regina-Northrop
- Field Community School
- Washburn High School
- Ramsey Middle School

66th Street Station- Engagement will include the station design, asset identification, and local bus service restructuring.

Non-residential Stakeholders-

- City of Richfield

76th Street/Knox Station- engagement will be focused on the location of the exact station platform south of 76th Street, the design of the bicycle/pedestrian link in the Knox Underpass, neighborhood asset identification and local bus service restructuring. Best Buy and its employees will be a major stakeholder in these activities.

Non-residential Stakeholders

- Major Employers
 - Best Buy
 - Health Partners
- 494 Commuter Connections
- Richfield Middle School
- City of Richfield

American Boulevard Station- Engagement will be focused on station design, local asset identification and local bus restructuring. Extensive negotiations with multiple landowners will be necessary to define the routing from I-494 to American Boulevard.

Non-residential Stakeholders

- Property Owners
 - Kraus Anderson
 - Lupient Automotive Group
- Stuart Co.
- 494 Commuter Connections

98th Street Station- location of amenities on station platform, local asset identification, pedestrian connections, and local bus service restructuring will be discussed at this station area.

Non-residential Stakeholders

- Volunteers Enlisted for Assisting People (VEAP)
- Normandale College
- Kennedy High School
- City of Bloomington

Nicollet Avenue Station- Engagement will focus on pedestrian connections, station design, asset identification, and local bus restructuring.

Non-residential Stakeholders

- Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA)
- City of Burnsville
- Dakota County
- Ames Center
- Diamondhead Education Center

Burnsville Parkway Station- Engagement will focus on station design and asset identification.

- Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA)
- City of Burnsville
- Dakota County

2.2.3 Tier Three Station Areas

The four stations (5th Street, 7th Street, 9th Street, 11th Street) in downtown Minneapolis will have little impact or footprint on the surrounding area. There will also be little connecting bus service restructuring in downtown therefore less engagement will be done in the downtown neighborhoods. An informational community meeting will be held later in the process with the local community councils.

Stakeholders-

- Elliot Park Neighborhood
- Loring Park Neighborhood
- Downtown East Neighborhood
- West Downtown Neighborhood

- Downtown Council

2.2.4 Other Areas with Engagement Strategies

A few areas outside of the station areas merit an engagement focus because they will not have direct access to the Orange Line, but are near or connected to the transitway alignment.

Normandale College- Students currently access the Bloomington campus via Route 535, this route will be eliminated and replaced by the Orange Line. Students will transfer at 98th Street Station and American Boulevard Station to access the campus. Students and staff will play an important role in the redesign of local bus service in the area to ensure that the connection at 98th Street and American Boulevard meet their needs.

38th Street- The lack of a station at 38th Street will require community expertise to design useful connections to the Orange Line at 46th Street or Lake Street. Community meetings and an origin-destination study will be held to better understand this under-represented community's needs.

Stakeholders-

- Central Area Neighborhood Association (CANDO)
- Lyndale Neighborhood Association
- Bryant Neighborhood
- Powderhorn Neighborhood Association

Franklin Avenue- The neighborhoods around Franklin Avenue will be heavily impacted by construction of the I-35W Transit/Access Project. An Orange Line station will not be built at Franklin Avenue and community expertise will ensure useful local bus connections to the Orange Line at Lake Street, Downtown, or 46th Street so that residents can access destinations to the south.

Stakeholders-

- Steven's Square Neighborhood
- Ventura Village
- Hope Community
- Franklin Avenue Business Association
- Whittier Alliance

Corridor-Wide Stakeholders

- MnDOT
- Hennepin County
- Dakota County
- Municipalities
 - City of Minneapolis
 - City of Richfield
 - City of Bloomington
 - City of Burnsville

- Metropolitan Council
 - Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee (TAAC)
 - Transportation Advisory Board (TAB)
- Current Transit Riders
 - Route 535 and other I-35W routes
 - Crosstown routes and connecting service

3.0 Outreach Strategy

Metro Transit's outreach strategy will focus on regular, transparent communication to the general public and project stakeholders. The primary form of outreach will be done on the website and via the quarterly newsletter, which currently has over 400 subscribers. Newsletters will help with documentation of decision making and will be saved on the project website. Corridor bus tours with stakeholders have also played an important role in educating partners about the Orange Line.

3.1 Media and Communications

Online and print media outlets have kept a close eye on the planning phase of the Orange Line. The media is an important source of information for the general public and it needs to be utilized. Pre-existing relationships between media outlets and the Metropolitan Council will continue to tell the story of the Orange Line.

Important project milestones and engagement opportunities will be highlighted and discussed on social media sources. Twitter, Facebook, and local blogs will be utilized. Metro Transit's social media coordinator will help develop and implement this strategy.

3.2 Marketing

Orange Line specific marketing will focus on the community assets that were identified in the engagement process. Special attention will be given to small businesses, schools and non-profits that contribute to a unique sense of place within a station area. Marketing campaigns will ramp up closer to the opening of service operations and messaging will be created to help direct transit riders during construction and detours.

3.3 Languages

The Orange Line corridor has a high percentage of residents who speak a language other than English. Spanish-speaking communities are located throughout the corridor, but are clustered in South Minneapolis and Richfield. Somali-speaking communities are also located in South Minneapolis near Lake Street and Downtown Minneapolis. Our main print materials are available in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. The website and newsletter are available in other languages through online translation. Interpreters will be used as needed in community meetings.

3.4 Reporting Back to Community

One of the most important parts of community engagement is to document and report back to community stakeholders. Documentation holds Metro Transit accountable, gives communities all of the information they need to fully participate, and creates institutional memory for Metro Transit and

stakeholders. Every engagement activity with community will be documented and sent back to participants and co-creators within a timely manner.

4. Decision-Making

It is imperative to clearly state decision-making processes so that a community can be engaged and hold Metro Transit accountable.

4.1. How are decisions currently made?

Decision making is complex and almost every important decision is made in a different way. We aim for every decision to be made in a transparent way that allows the public to understand why it was made and what the consequences of that decision are. Decisions are shaped by technical considerations, political and stakeholder influence, and local community feedback. Decisions are thoroughly discussed by Metro Transit's Orange Line's Project Team with the understanding that sometimes political voice or technical considerations have a greater influence than community engagement. Metro Transit Orange Line project staff will communicate these considerations to stakeholders and the greater public.

4.1.1 Technical Considerations

Technical considerations include the quantitative and legal frameworks that shape the project. This includes regulations, cost and site constraints, and data used in planning.

Regulations

Federal, state and local regulations dictate some design and planning process outcomes. For example all infrastructure must be accessible to those with disabilities, including the visually-impaired and those with assisted mobility. The layout of the station must meet federal standards for accessibility.

Another example is Section 106 of the National Environment Protection Act (NEPA). The Section 106 process requires consideration of potentially historic properties near the Orange Line. All design aspects of the Orange Line cannot negatively affect adjacent historic architecture or cultural resources.

Cost-Effectiveness/Site Constraints

The Project Team aims to create the most cost-effective project for the corridor with the goals of serving the most people, reliability and speed. Physical constraints, paired with cost effectiveness, of a site or road can lead to changes in the route or station location. For example, limited highway right-of-way and high costs might require a station off of I-35W and on a nearby frontage road. Access to destinations and transit might increase, while speed and costs will decrease. Locating stations and roadway improvements should also minimize impacts to any nearby existing residential or commercial properties, and be compatible with planned transportation and development projects.

Planning, Modeling and Forecasting

Data and maps inform where routes and stations will serve the most people while maintaining speed and reliability. Places with existing or planned high employment and residential density, connections to

other routes, and strong current ridership are important factors. Ridership data will also help determine the frequency of service, and how late or early into the night it will run.

4.1.2 Political and Stakeholder Influence

Partner agencies or other governing boards sometimes have different priorities than Metro Transit. Differing priorities can affect the planning and implementation of a project. For example, a local authority might prefer bike lanes or parking over transit lane. The schedules of nearby construction projects can also affect Metro Transit projects. Metro Transit and municipal partners share constituents so community engagement informs all government staff. However, this requires continued coordination amongst agencies on their public processes.

4.1.3. Local Community Influence

Community-Initiated Engagement

Sometimes residents or community groups contact Metro Transit with their concerns and ideas. Examples include a neighborhood group upset about cleanliness at a bus stop or an idea to bring a bus route to a senior center. Community-led coalitions can influence and change previously made decisions. If the primary engagement strategy is to respond to local concerns then this is a **reactive** strategy.

Project Team- Initiated Engagement

This Public Engagement Plan focuses on project team- initiated engagement with an emphasis on building relationships with under-represented community stakeholders. Decisions will be made collaboratively and community will have access to all of the tools they need to fully participate. The Orange Line Project Team will focus on **proactive** team-initiated engagement and frequent community check-ins rather than reactive responses to local concerns.

4.2 Orange Line Project Team

Charles Carlson - Orange Line Project Director
Christina Morrison - Project Manager
Jim Harwood - Design Lead
Rebecca Fabunmi - Principal Engineer
Max Holdhusen - Community Outreach and Engagement
Natalie Westberg - Planner

4.3 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC advises project planning, and has representatives from county, city and state agencies, Metro Transit, MnDOT, MVTA and the Metropolitan Council Accessibility Advisory Committee. Its purpose is to

provide technical guidance and assist in the resolution of technical issues in their field. TAC representatives should report back to their communities and decision makers with the latest information. The TAC meets quarterly for project updates and meetings are open to the public.

4.4 35W Solutions Alliance

The [35W Solutions Alliance](#), established in 1989, is a multi-jurisdictional Joint Powers Agreement among the cities of Bloomington, Burnsville, Elko New Market, Lakeville, Minneapolis, Richfield, Savage and Dakota, Hennepin and Scott Counties, and partner agencies the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, and Minnesota Valley Transit Authority. The 35W Solutions Alliance members and agency partners support funding, building, operating and maintaining a robust multimodal transportation system that reduces congestion and improves safety.

The 35W Solutions Alliance has made METRO Orange Line a top priority, and serves as a non-voting policy oversight committee for the project. In this role, the group will advise the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit on project components, providing a comprehensive corridor- and region-wide perspective.

Conclusion-

A thorough public process requires community engagement that listens and respects community stakeholders, especially those that are historically under-represented in the transit planning process. It is important for Metro Transit staff to be clear how expertise learned during engagement will be used in decision-making. Metro Transit staff also need to be honest of when technical decisions or political power is more influential than community voices.