Facts and Frequently Asked Questions
about
Southwest Light Rail

Where will the Southwest Light Rail line run?

The Southwest LRT line would serve the rapidly growing southwest metro, running 15 miles from Minneapolis through St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie, and serving many additional communities through bus connections and park and ride. (Map on the back.)

Why is this route the next proposed line in the Twin Cities metro area?

This corridor is projected to add 60,000 new jobs by 2030, more than any other part of the region after the Central Corridor. Even with planned highway expansion, roads in this area cannot accommodate that many new workers.

Southwest LRT is the next line because it is the furthest along in project development. It is the only regional line that is currently in “Preliminary Engineering,” a necessary step to receiving federal funding.

What is the projected ridership for Southwest LRT?

30,000 weekday rides per day by year 2030, more than 10 million rides/year.

How will Southwest LRT be funded?

Construction is projected to cost $1.25 billion. The state share would be $125 million, or 10%.

$125 million from state will produce

- $1.125 billion in other funds
- A 9 to 1 return on state investment

Total payroll of $329 million is larger than state contribution

The 90% would come from transit-dedicated sources: the Federal Transit Administration, the Counties Transit Improvement Board, and the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority.

None of the 90% can be spent on roads.

Total payroll of $329 million is larger than state contribution.

Why was LRT chosen for the Southwest Corridor?

Business leaders recognized the need for new capacity in this part of the Twin Cities. Starting in 2002, businesses, citizens, and governments around the region began studying how best to provide new capacity.
A detailed Alternatives Analysis, completed in 2008, looked at options that included doing nothing, “enhanced bus” (on existing roads), “bus rapid transit,” and “light rail.” All of these options were considered in light of numerous additional highway improvements that are moving forward. The answer was clear that light rail best fulfilled the growing transportation needs of the southwest metro, and would do so most cost-effectively.

**Why not buses?** The Alternatives Analysis looked at additional bus service and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT: buses on their own right-of-way) for the Southwest Corridor. Neither would work as well, or be as cost-effective as light rail, in part because of the size of the demand, and in part because of the geography of roads in this area. Express buses on existing highways could not take advantage of the shorter, direct route that the new LRT right of way uses. BRT would incur the cost of a new right-of-way without the operational savings of rail. LRT is far less expensive to operate per passenger than buses. This is currently true with Hiawatha compared to buses, and will be the case for Southwest LRT.

Given the geography, and the number of jobs and residents in the Southwest Corridor, LRT is the best way to add new capacity.

With that answer, Minnesota then applied to the Federal Transit Administration for some of the transit construction funds it distributes nationally.

**What was the process for Southwest LRT to gain initial approval from the federal government?**

Southwest LRT applied to the federal “New Starts” program. By law, New Starts projects undergo a rigorous federal review that includes cost-effectiveness. Due to intense competition, the federal government only approves the most cost-effective projects, and those with characteristics that produce success. Southwest LRT was one of only 12 projects nationally (out of 100 applicants) to get approval to enter into the Preliminary Engineering phase of work as of the end of 2011.

As the Federal Transit Administration describes it:

FTA emphasizes that the New Starts planning and project development process is, at its core, simply a “common sense” approach to problem solving, and should answer questions like: “What is the problem in need of solving?; What are potential solutions?; What are their benefits?; What do they cost?; and, Which alternative is the best solution, given available resources, to address the problem?

As a legislator, Tim Pawlenty was a light rail skeptic. As Governor, he took the approach that transportation projects should be evaluated on their merits and cost-effectiveness. Governor Pawlenty signed into law funding for Northstar Commuter Rail, Central Corridor LRT, and the initial planning funds for Southwest LRT. He became convinced the FTA required a rigorous, objective analysis, and if a project met their strict criteria, it was a good project worthy of state and local support.

**What are the operation expenses for Southwest LRT?**

Operations and maintenance are projected at $32 million/year. This would be paid from:

- Fares
- State, according to state law: Half of remaining after fares.
- Counties via CTIB: Half of remaining after fares.

Each is projected to cover roughly a third of costs.
Why does the business community support Southwest LRT?

The Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, the TwinWest Chamber of Commerce, the Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce, and the Edina Chamber of Commerce support Southwest LRT because:

- It will serve 210,000 jobs in this corridor alone the day it opens.
- It will connect the Southwest suburbs with a single-seat ride to the U of M and jobs in Saint Paul.
- For businesses to continue to grow, we need additional transportation capacity in the southwest metro and to downtown Minneapolis and Saint Paul, and this is the best way to provide it.

We cannot add enough capacity to highways to support projected job growth in this region, and we do not want to lose those jobs.

Why does business support transit investment generally?

In addition to supporting SW LRT specifically, the business community supports a robust transit system.

*Businesses rely on transit to get many employees to work*

- 40% of Minneapolis downtown workers use transit. Examples: US Bank - 50%, Ameriprise - 60%.
- 80% of all metro-area transit users are going to work or school
- 250+ employers use Metropass for their employees

*Businesses need transit to recruit talent*

Greater MSP, the regional economic development organization, reports that the most frequent question they get from businesses thinking of moving to the Minneapolis-St. Paul region is about transit. And we are far behind our competitor regions.

The public supports state investment in SW LRT and regional transit

The public understands these benefits to state investment in transit and supports it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support state funding for SW LRT</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statewide</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012: 61%</td>
<td>2013: 70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metro</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012: 64%</td>
<td>2013: 75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy percent of voters statewide and 75% of voters in the seven-county metro region support dedicating $118 million in state funds to move forward with the Southwest Light Rail line.¹

This support has increased since the same poll was conducted in 2012.
Transportation for SW: serves and connects job centers

2000: 210,000 jobs
2030: 270,000 jobs