
Sponsor: Public Works

Meeting Date: 6/10/2025

Title: Support for the METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit Extension

File Number: 2025-218

Background and Rationale:

The METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (METRO Gold Line BRT) is a 10-mile, mostly dedicated bus rapid transit route between Woodbury and downtown Saint Paul, which began service on March 22, 2025. Metro Transit is proposing a 10-mile extension, METRO Gold Line BRT Extension (Project), which will extend METRO Gold Line service westward to downtown Minneapolis in 2027. The Project would replace existing Route 94 service and connect the existing METRO Gold Line and the METRO C and D lines at shared stations in downtown Minneapolis. It will provide BRT stations near U.S. Bank Stadium and an interim station at Snelling Avenue in Saint Paul.

Route 94, which operates in I-94 corridor, currently features limited-stop express service and uses a mix of bus-only lanes and shoulders. The METRO Gold Line BRT Extension is intended to respond to the high demand for reliable transit service and regional goals for bus rapid transit expansion.

The extension of the METRO Gold Line to downtown Minneapolis represents a significant service shift from Route 94's limited stop express service to all day, high frequency BRT with amenities such as real time messaging, offboard fare collection, and shelter waiting area. While the METRO Gold Line provides a dedicated transitway between Woodbury and downtown Saint Paul, the Project will primarily operate in mixed traffic and rely on existing METRO C, D stations in downtown Minneapolis. This makes the extension fundamentally different in scope, service characteristics, and operating environment than the METRO Gold Line. Any travel time, frequency or reliability issues created by the Project's mixed traffic operations may negatively impact the existing METRO Gold Line between Saint Paul and Woodbury, a project that Ramsey County and Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority provided approximately 50% of the non-federal funding for METRO Gold Line BRT. Additionally, implementing a temporary station at Snelling Avenue is inconsistent with the existing METRO Gold Line user station expectations.

To protect the county's investment and ensure the continued success of the METRO Gold Line, it is recommended that county support for the METRO Gold Line Extension (Project) be contingent upon the following:

- Metro Transit's implementation of a structured monitoring plan to track the Project's impact on METRO Gold Line including its impact on ridership, travel time reliability, service levels and user experience. The monitoring plan must include pre and post Project ridership, pre and post Project travel time, pre and post Project service levels and surveys of pre and post Project riders' experiences for Metro Transit Route 94 and METRO Gold Line.
 - Ridership patterns on existing Route 94, Gold Line BRT, and proposed Gold Line Extension.
 - Reliability metrics such as on-time performance and travel time variability.
 - Rider experience, including surveys before and after implementation.
 - Service levels, to ensure that transit service is maintained or enhanced as part of the Gold Line Extension.
 - This effort will include:

- A baseline phase, once Gold Line ridership stabilizes in 2025.
 - If Metro Transit Network Now service changes are implemented on Route 94. Otherwise, the baseline phase will be based on the current Route 94 in 2025.
 - A post-implementation phase, after the extension is in full service.
 - A plan will be created in collaboration with Ramsey County staff.
- Permanent Snelling Avenue station consistent with amenities provided at METRO Gold Line stations between St. Paul and Woodbury to ensure a consistent and seamless rider experience.
- Improvement to travel time reliability along I-94 through the adoption of near term and long-term strategies by Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Transportation to improve bus travel time reliability through options such as restriping and bus only shoulders.

These conditions will strengthen the Project allowing its success to build on METRO Gold Line's success without negatively impacting METRO Gold Line, existing transit service, or the county's investment in METRO Gold Line as a high frequency, high quality and transformative all day transit service.

Recommendation:

The Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority resolved to:

1. Support the METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit Extension (Project), contingent upon:
 - a. Metro Transit's implementation of a structured monitoring plan to track the METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit Extension Project's impact on METRO Gold Line including its impact on ridership, travel time reliability, service levels, and user experience. The monitoring plan must include pre and post METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit Extension Project ridership, pre and post Project travel time, pre and post Project service levels and surveys of pre and post Project riders' experiences for Metro Transit Route 94 and METRO Gold Line.
 - i. Ridership patterns on existing Route 94, METRO Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit, and proposed Gold Line Extension.
 - ii. Reliability metrics such as on-time performance and travel time variability.
 - iii. Rider experience, including surveys before and after implementation.
 - iv. Service levels, to ensure that transit service is maintained or enhanced as part of the Gold Line Extension.
 - v. This effort will include:
 1. A baseline phase, once Gold Line ridership stabilizes in 2025.
 2. If Metro Transit Network Now service changes are implemented on Route 94. Otherwise, the baseline phase will be based on the current Route 94 in 2025.
 3. A post-implementation phase, after the extension is in full service.
 4. A plan will be created in collaboration with Ramsey County staff.
 - b. Permanent Snelling Avenue station consistent with station design and amenities provided at METRO Gold Line stations between St. Paul and Woodbury to ensure a consistent and seamless rider experience.
 - c. Improvement to travel time reliability along I-94 through the adoption of near term and long-term strategies by Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Transportation to improve bus travel time reliability through options such as restriping and bus only shoulders.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Xiong, seconded by Commissioner McMurtrey. Motion passed.

Aye: - 7: Jebens-Singh, McGuire, McMurtrey, Miller, Moran, Ortega, and Xiong

By: 

Jason Yang, Interim Chief Clerk - County
Board