

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the purpose and need for the gateway corridor?

Transportation projects begin with a document called Purpose and Need. Technical evaluation and decision making always revert back to this document. The full document can be viewed on the Transit Study page but the basic purpose and need statements are below. The full document is 30 pages of data that supports these statements.

The purpose statement below specifically defines the fundamental reasons why the Gateway Corridor project is being proposed.

The purpose of the Gateway Corridor project is to provide transit service to meet the existing and long-term regional mobility and local accessibility needs for businesses and the traveling public within the project area.

The following primary factors contribute to the need for the Gateway Corridor project:

- Limited existing transit service throughout the day and demand for more frequent service over a larger portion of the day
- Policy shift toward travel choices and multimodal investments
- Population and employment growth, increasing access needs and travel demand
- Needs of people who depend on transit
- Local and regional objectives for growth and prosperity

How are decisions made and who makes them?

The Gateway Corridor Commission, a joint powers board made up of the cities and counties along the route, are the decision makers for the project. They came together in 2009 to find a solution to the purpose and need statements above. Every decision that has been made to date is part of a locally driven process with technical, policy, and community inputs. The Minnesota Department of Transportation, Metro Transit, and the Metropolitan Council have been at the table but the cities and counties have been driving the decision process.

What is happening on the gateway project right now?

A draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is currently being completed. The DEIS gets the project to 1% engineering and will find information about the potential impacts of the project and how to mitigate those impacts. Some of the areas that will be investigated as part of this federal and state process are impacts to; noise levels, historic resources, parks and public land, air quality, traffic, economic development and land use, and visual qualities of communities.

As part of the DEIS process, the project needs to establish a locally preferred alternative (LPA). The LPA is general route description that defines what seems to be the preferred route at 1% engineering. The route decision is locally driven based on the decision making process described above. All six cities and both counties approved the LPA in fall 2014 with a commitment to further refine the route on the east end.

What is the overall timeline to engineer and build the gateway corridor and can things change?

A 12-mile transportation project that crosses six cities and two counties is very complex. Right now it is at 1% engineering with a commitment to the LPA based on this level of information. The next phase of the project is called Project Development where the final EIS and engineering to 30% will be

completed. Sometime during this two year Project Development process the cities will go through a municipal approval process. At this time there will be much more information about what the project will look like in each city and each city will have much more time to understand what transit means to their local planning process. Over this two years process the route can change if a city determines that transit does not make sense for their vision.

After Project Development there will be another two years of the final engineering and then construction. Gateway Corridor would be operational by early 2023.

Why not just add more buses?

Express bus service in the corridor today only provides people an opportunity to leave Washington County communities to work in downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis. There is no all-day service that operates throughout the entire corridor. Data has shown that there is a demand for this type of service.

Simply adding all-day buses on existing roads would not achieve another goal of the Gateway Corridor Commission: to increase economic development activities in the corridor. The Commission has learned that development is not attracted to normal bus routes. Development investments follow infrastructure investments. Constructing a permanent bus guideway and stations would attract development to station areas.

If congestion is one of the problems, why not just add more lanes to I-94?

No transportation improvements will solve congestion. There are just ways to manage it better. The Minnesota Department of Transportation has no plans between now and 2033 to add lanes to I-94 in the east metro. MnDOT plans to focus on preservation of existing assets, not adding more freeway lanes. The lack of programmed major projects in the corridor is consistent with highway funding constraints locally and nationally.

The Gateway Corridor Commission feels strongly that the east metro has to provide travel choices for residents. The Gateway Corridor as an alternative to driving will not erase congestion on I-94 altogether, it will offer many travelers a competitive option that will result in time savings and added convenience for many trips. As laid out in the Purpose and Need document, this is consistent with the region's policy shift towards travel choices and multimodal investments.

How will Gateway Corridor affect property values?

It is impossible to predict the long-term property value impacts to station areas, but we can learn from other corridors. For example, the University of Minnesota studied commercial and industrial properties near METRO Blue Line (Hiawatha LRT) stations and found that prices increased from an average of \$36 to \$56 per square foot. This impact was seen within one mile of a station area. Property values increased faster near the line than elsewhere.

As developers gain experience with the demand for property near transit, prices are increasing in advance of transit projects. Near a future Southwest LRT station location in Minnetonka, a warehouse building near the Opus station was valued at \$8 million but just sold for \$18 million in anticipation of Southwest LRT. Elsewhere in the country, communities have seen robust development come to BRT.

As for residential properties, the National Association of Realtors found that home values preformed 42 percent better when located near public transportation during the 2000s recession. They also found that there is a transit premium for properties near fixed transit routes, like the Gateway Corridor. Depending on local factors, this premium can be anywhere from a few percentage points to 150 percent. It is a common misperception that transit attracts only low-income housing. In fact it is typically the opposite and many cities work very hard to keep lower rate housing around transit so they don't price out current residents.

High-quality, fixed transit is a permanent amenity. Like any community amenity, the impact on property values will depend in part on how it is designed. Gateway will work closely with the communities in the corridor to have the line and the stations reflect and support community identity and goals.

Why is transit so important to commercial development? How does transit help attract good, high-paying jobs?

Historically, the eastern suburbs have not been a very competitive market for office development. Better access to high quality transit can improve their attractiveness of suburban locations to employers. This dynamic can be observed on other transit lines in the Twin Cities region. For example, one-third of Blue Line LRT riders are “reverse commuters” traveling to jobs outside of downtown Minneapolis.

Locally and nationally, firms are competing for workers as Baby Boomers retire and companies face worker shortages amid shifting demographics. Increasingly, firms in knowledge-based industries seek to locate in areas that offer their workers a high quality of life, including access to high quality transit.

Do transit stations bring in more crime?

A number of studies have been conducted around the nation about this question. In cities like San Diego, Denver, Los Angeles, and Durham, North Carolina they have found no significant increase in crime due to the presence of a transit station. We can provide information about these reports if you wish.

Project planners spoke with the City of Woodbury police force and they informed us that the current park and ride lots have some of the lowest crime rates out of any parking lot in the city.

How is the project funded?

The Gateway Corridor intends to apply for federal New Starts funding. If the Corridor receives federal funds, the Federal Transit Administration would fund 45%, the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) 35%, the State of Minnesota 10%, and Washington and Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authorities 10% of the capital costs. The federal dollars and CTIB funds can only be invested in transit. After its construction, Metro Transit will operate the Gateway Corridor and funding will be split 50/50 with CTIB and Metro Transit.

Will the gateway corridor result in increased costs to cities through maintenance or safety services?

No. Gateway Corridor will be operated by Metro Transit which includes Metro Transit police services that are dedicated to the regions transit system.