

Gold Line route takes first big step to end in Woodbury

By [Youssef Rddad](#) on Oct 13, 2016 at 4:16 p.m.



The proposed Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) took its first step in turning south into Woodbury.

A Gateway Corridor advisory committee approved Thursday a route for the BRT line that would terminate at Woodbury Village along Bielenberg Drive.

The Gold Line would run from the Union Depot in St. Paul through the city's East Side as well as Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale and Woodbury. It would be the first BRT to travel along dedicated lanes.

The commission unveiled these routes in August following Lake Elmo's decision to opt out of the project earlier this year, which left the project's eastern terminus in question. The decision comes after officials weighed five potential routes for the line's eastern end.

With initial estimates of \$485 million for the entire project, officials say the new route would trim about \$25 million off that cost. Officials will conduct a cost and ridership analysis with the selected route.

Daily ridership for the route is projected at about 7,500 for its 2023 anticipated completion, which is less than the route's original projections when passing through Lake Elmo.

Officials determined that three of the potential routes were not feasible in recent meetings, leaving only the route along Bielenberg Drive and another that would terminate on Inwood Drive in Oakdale as viable options.

The Inwood Drive option would have cut about \$75 million off the project's cost at a lower projected ridership, officials said.

Construction of a new bridge between Oakdale's Helmo Avenue and Woodbury's Bielenberg Drive would move 3,000 to 6,000 away from Radio Drive, said Washington County Planner Lyssa Leitner.

The bridge will have dedicated lanes for the busses, as well as walk, bike and vehicle lanes.

Woodbury Mayor Mary Giuliani Stephens, who chaired the Policy Advisory Committee, said the new route will strengthen Woodbury's connection with the rest of Twin Cities. "This route includes healthcare services, financial and real estate services, shopping, dining and hotels," she said. "It will help boost economic activity and access to jobs."

Still, some critics in Oakdale have expressed strong objection to the project that would run along residential areas on Fourth Street.

And for critics like Woodbury resident Bob Tatreau, who said he favors reverse commuting options to suburbs from St. Paul, the cost of the project could be better used for other

transit options.

Washington County Commissioner Lisa Weik said residents she's talked to in Woodbury have expressed wishes that the project be completed faster, while others have told her that they would prefer a light rail instead of busses.

The Gold Line would be Minnesota's first bus rapid transit line to use a dedicated busway. Buses will arrive at stations throughout the day and every 10 minutes during peak hours.

Similar to the light rail, passengers pay their fares before boarding.

With Thursday's decision, a 30-day public comment period has begun.

The commission will hold a public hearing from 5:30-6:30 p.m. On Nov. 10 at Woodbury City Hall.

Officials expect to make an official decision on the project before the end of the year.

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