

Transit planners regrouping on Gold Line busway after taking hits

By David Peterson (<http://www.startribune.com/david-peterson/10645651/>) Star Tribune |

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Transit planners are regrouping on plans for a Gold Line busway, after citizen blowback in Oakdale and Lake Elmo's decision to withdraw altogether.

But officials insist there's a role for transit in an area that's already congested and heading for thousands of more cars.

Swatches of Oakdale are headed for as much as 1 million square feet of new commercial development, which translates to 5,000 additional cars, said Bob Strettar, that city's development chief.

Commercial development is planned "whether bus rapid transit arrives or not," Strettar tells a small group of citizens on a video posted to the Gold Line's website. "There's no plan to change that to housing; and even if we did, it would be of a high enough density that the added traffic would be similar."

This week, transit planners began inviting local residents to weigh in through July on some basic questions aimed at guiding new station locations. Among them:

- What types of activities (jobs, shopping, housing, recreation, education, medical services, etc.) do you want to get to or from by transit?
- Based on your answer above, what specific locations in Oakdale and Woodbury do you think would be good for transit stations?

Comments can be left online at <http://tinyurl.com/zlhenbr>.

The busway is supposed to run from downtown St. Paul's Union Station to Woodbury. But the number of canceled and postponed meetings on the project suggests it has been thrown into confusion.

The latest route map to be published wipes away every proposed station east of the Crossroads/Oaks Business Park district, where many of those jobs are headed.

Previous plans called for it to take heavy advantage of the blank canvas provided by open fields in Lake Elmo, which has been militantly kept rural even as neighboring Woodbury has exploded with suburban development.

"I'm here as an elected official for the folks of Lake Elmo who want to keep this rural community pretty rural looking," Council Member Jill Lundgren said in January.

The question of station locations has been contentious in Woodbury as well. Should they go in areas already teeming (on a suburban scale) with stores and multifamily housing? Or should they go in open undeveloped areas that could become high-intensity urbanized transit zones? Both?

In Oakdale, neighbors have objected to the potential bus traffic and the possibility of low-income passengers bringing in crime.

Transit planner Lyssa Leitner told Oakdale citizens in March that she finds a lot of bewilderment even now, after years of debate, over what is planned for the I-94 corridor.

"It's not light rail," she said. "There's a lot of confusion on that. There's to be a bus lane in each direction with stations similar to light rail but shorter. There's a high curb for strollers and wheelchairs and you pay before you get on. It's not bogged down in traffic; it's quick, frequent and reliable, and half the cost of light rail."

A working group has been assembled to ponder station locations, Leitner said, "and we're talking to Oakdale and Woodbury about what are the right routes going forward."

A new route on the eastern end is to be fixed this year.



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_1424831202197)
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Alan Dale, president of Minnesota Tile and Stone, at left, outlines plans for a "nuclear blast" of development in Woodbury during a...

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