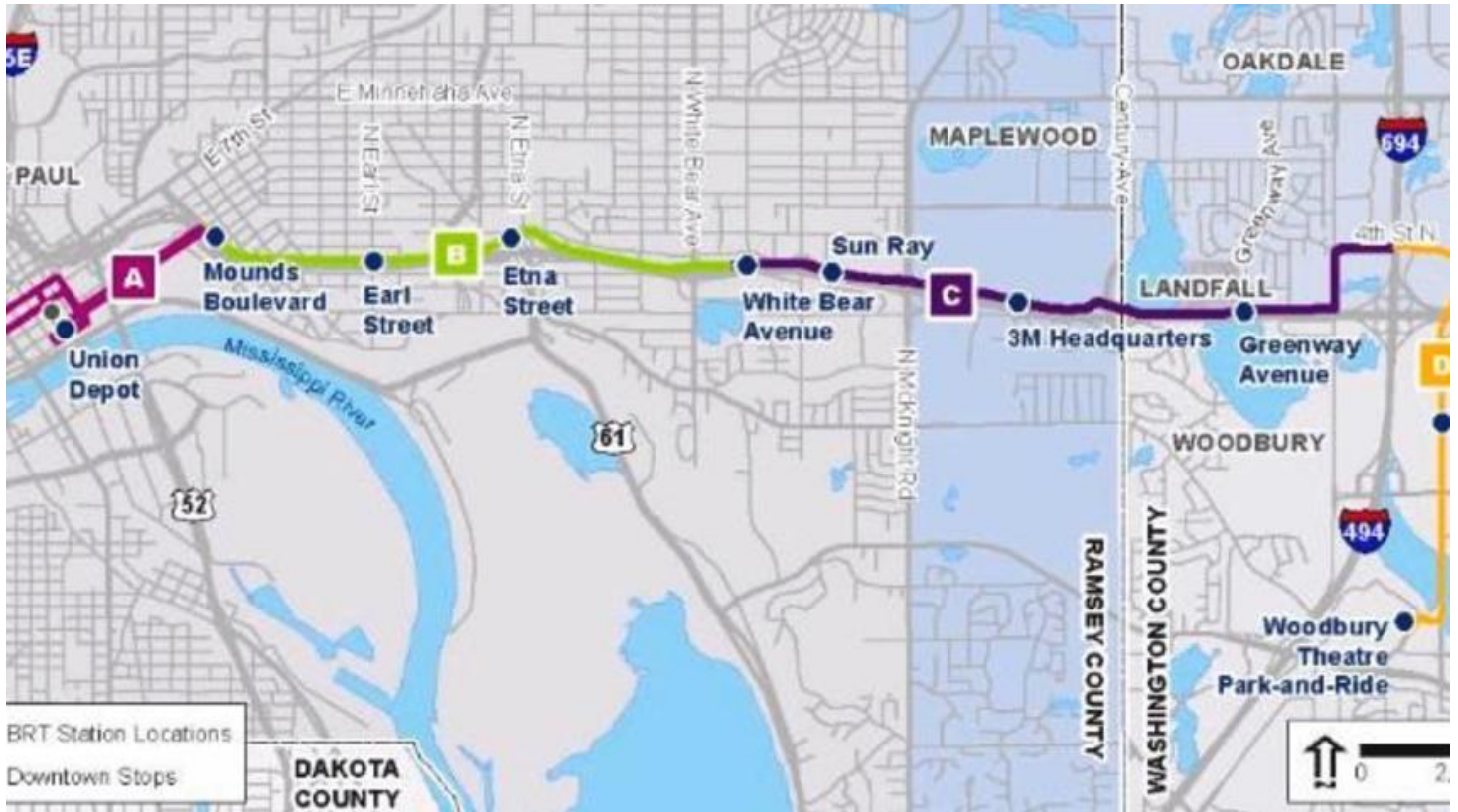


Gold Line gets green light from Oakdale, Woodbury

By Youssef Rddad Today at 11:36 a.m.

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The Gold Line will soon move into a deeper planning phase following Woodbury and Oakdale's approvals of the new bus rapid transit (BRT) route.

The Gateway Corridor Commission, who is the body planning the project, needed the two cities to pass resolutions -- a set of conditions -- before the project moved to the next phase. The Woodbury City Council approved its resolution Wednesday, and Oakdale pledged its support during its Nov. 22 meeting.

With resolutions passed, the project will move into the engineering phase, which includes more detailed analysis on the route, environmental impacts and a number of public meetings before construction begins in about two years.

Woodbury's resolution included a number of stipulations for the line, including a desire for more buses feeding into the BRT route, continued support for east metro transportation systems, safety and support of existing express buses.

Cities the Gold Line passes through will again vote on whether they support the project in about two years.

Officials said they anticipate the Gold Line could be operating by 2023.

The Gold Line will run in both directions from Union Depot in St. Paul through the city's East Side, Maplewood, Landfall and Oakdale before terminating at Woodbury Village.

The route was originally intended to pass through Lake Elmo and end somewhere near Manning Avenue in Woodbury, but the city opted out of the project leaving the route's eastern end in question.

Despite backtracking to find an alternative route, Oakdale Council Member Lori Pulkrabek said last Tuesday she prefers the new route more than the original.

"I was not a big fan of the previous route, and am so pleased we have this new route," she said. "Thank you, Lake Elmo, for pulling support because, frankly, this worked out great."

Woodbury Council Member Christopher Burns, who cast the lone no vote for the city's resolution, said in an email Thursday that he's still not convinced the alternative route is best for Woodbury and the east metro.

He said he would prefer more express buses and lanes along Interstates 94, 469 and 694.

"I think the eastern suburbs have long been not treated as well as the western suburbs on transit dollars and favor other infrastructure investments," Burns wrote. "That said, this will come back to us several more times for additional approvals, and I will keep an open mind."

The route would turn south into Woodbury from Oakdale and requires a new bridge to be built connecting Helmo Avenue and Bielenberg Drive over Interstate 94.

Buses travel along dedicated bus-only lanes and arrive more frequently than express or regular buses. Similar to light rail, riders pay the fare before boarding.

Officials estimate the project would cost about \$420 million factoring future inflation in 2023, with operating maintenance costing roughly \$9 million, not factoring for inflation.

The Gateway Corridor Commission will hold its next meeting Dec. 8 in Woodbury.

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