Meeting Minutes

January 31, 2024, 4:30 p.m.
St. Paul Park City Hall

Commission Members	Agency	Present
Karla Bigham	Washington County RRA	X
Mai Chong Xiong (Alternate)	Ramsey County RRA	X
Monique Garza	City of Cottage Grove	X
Cheniqua Johnson	City of St. Paul	X*
Char Whitbred-Hemmingson	City of St. Paul Park	X
Dave Pemble	City of Hastings	X
Marvin Taylor	City of Newport	X

Staff	Agency	Present
Andrea Rehm	Washington County RRA	X
Lyssa Leitner	Washington County RRA	X

Other Attendees	Agency	Present
Emma Lucken	Ramsey County	X
Will Schroeer	East Metro Strong	X
Matthew Parent	MnDOT	X
Tim Marino	St Paul Resident	X

**Present for Agenda Item 8 onward.*

Agenda Item #1: Introductions / Roll Call

Chair Bigham called the meeting to order. Quorum was met.

Agenda Item #2: Pledge of Allegiance

The Commission stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Item #3: Election of Chair

Pemble nominated Commissioner Bigham for Chair. No other nominations were made. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion carried.

Agenda Item #4: Election of Vice Chair

Bigham nominated Councilmember Taylor for Vice Chair. No other nominations were made. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion carried.

Agenda Item #5: Approval of Agenda

Pemble moved approval of the agenda. Garza seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion carried.

Agenda Item #6: Approval of October 2023 Minutes

Taylor made a motion to approve the minutes. Pemble seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion carried.

Agenda Item #7: Recognition of Out-Going Members

Garza made a motion to approve Resolutions 2024-01, 2024-02, and 2024-03 thanking outgoing commission members Mayor Dingle, Councilmember Khambata, and Councilmember Prince, respectively. Whitbred-Hemmingson seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion carried.

Agenda Item #8: Presentation: Red Rock Corridor Overview

Rehm presented the attached overview (Attachment 1) of the Red Rock Corridor.

Xiong asked if the Commission has been involved or commented on the State's current study of Highway 61.

Leitner noted that staff have met with the Highway 61 Study's project team. She stated that the study's southern boundary is at Lower Afton Road. She also noted that Matt Parent, the MnDOT project manager, is in the audience and available for questions or to provide more detail.

Bigham added that another important consideration in discussing the Red Rock Corridor is its connection to the Gold Line, and an east-west connection.

Agenda Item #9: Presentation: Red Rock Corridor Vision Refresh – Final Report

Will Schroeer, Executive Director of East Metro Strong, presented the attached presentation (Attachment 2) about the Red Rock Corridor Vision Refresh – Final Report.

Schroeer stated the goal of the vision refresh was to respond to developments since the Commission adopted the 2017 Implementation Plan, and make sure the Commission is pursuing a transit system that serves the Red Rock communities as they are today.

He noted that the vision refresh process did not try to recreate all of the public engagement that was done for the 2017 Implementation Plan, rather, update it through surveys of residents and employers, as well as conducting focus groups. The public input underlined what was heard in 2016 and 2017, but the need was even stronger than before for several reasons, including the cost of transportation / maintaining a personal vehicle, employer workforce needs, and congestion reduction / environmental concerns.

He noted that corridor has some challenging land uses to serve by traditional transit, and some significant physical barriers such as the divided highway and railroad. Another layer of analysis was to consider where people live and work, and the data shows that people many begin or end their trip outside of the corridor—thus previous planning efforts solely along Highway 61 will not serve their needs.

He presented a refreshed vision for the Red Rock Corridor:

1. **Serve the whole corridor.** Transit will connect people to all parts of the communities in the corridor.
2. **Connect the corridor to other places**. Transit will connect people to and from other regional destinations and transit services.
3. **Work closely with employers and residents**. Transit providers will include employers and residents in planning and providing services.

He offered several service concepts that might fulfill the vision, noting that they were only concepts and demand further study. He also recommended to 1) continue working with stakeholders to develop expanded and new transit options; 2) advocate for those options; and 3) explore the creation of a Transportation Management Organization to help implement recommendations.

Garza voiced her support, noting her positive experience with a circulator shuttle in her youth and how it opened opportunities to her that would not have otherwise been possible, and connected communities.

Pemble stated there is continuing growth across the St Croix River, and thus there is increasing commuter traffic between the river and Highway 61. He added that this, in combination with growth southeast of Hastings, is creating a bottle neck at the High Bridge in Hastings. He voiced his support for exploring ways to relieve this pressure, such as direct service from Hastings to the western communities like Eagan.

Johnson asked how Sunray could be included in station planning.

Schroeer stated that while he shares the opinion that Sunray ought to be an important node in the transit network in the east metro, these concepts were high level and station planning would require more study.

Bigham added that it is important to consider Sunray as an opportunity for connection, especially from cost and efficiency perspectives.

Bigham stated she has met with Mayors in her district, and they all highlighted transit as a priority for their communities. Specifically, she mentioned a conversation with St Paul Park about how they are in the transit taxing district but have no transit service—this is a problem that needs to be rectified. The same problem exists in Newport with the Newport Transit Station. She added that Cottage Grove needs transit to support economic development and fulfill the workforce needs. She noted that Washington County is currently working on their direction to spend additional money from sales tax. She emphasized the mutually beneficial relationship between the Red Rock Corridor and Gold Line.

Bigham added that service to St Paul Park is critical for many reasons, including from a jobs perspective as it relates to the refinery, and from an equity perspective because of the food shelf.

Xiong added that the east metro needs transit service and to build the Gold Line without any additional connections would be a disservice to us all. She emphasized that transportation costs are often a household's second largest expense—creating options to reduce this cost benefits other regional efforts, such as helping folks afford housing.

Rehm stated that staff recommend the approval of the vision refresh final report, noting that approving the report means accepting the new vision, but that the concepts Schroeer presented only demonstrate possibilities and do not commit the Commission to any particular model of service.

Garza made a motion to approve the Red Rock Corridor Vision Refresh Final Report. Taylor seconded. All were in favor. **Approved.** Motion carried.

Agenda Item #10: Communications Update

Rehm reviewed the information provided in the packet.

Agenda Item #11: Other

Taylor stated that a 52-unit affordable housing complex is opening next to the Newport Transit Station, and a concept plan exists for a third apartment building. The City of Newport continues to continue to pursue their long-term vision for the site and look forward to when transit is reinstated to support their vision.

Johnson stated her excitement to be on the Commission and work with others across the east metro. She also stated she is looking forward to continued conversations about how to connect people to jobs and housing, and hearing more about the efforts of neighboring communities.

Garza noted recent conversations she had been a part of related to making the most of the river and developing along in. Bigham echoed her excitement for expanding bike and pedestrian opportunities along the river. Taylor noted that Newport staff are currently working on a trail plan to connect to a new river park, that also links to the Newport Transit Station.

No other updates.

Added Agenda Item – Public Comment

Tim Marino, an East St Paul resident, thanked the Commission for continuing to keep the Red Rock Corridor alive. He noted some concerns about the concepts presented for the vision refresh related to service consistency; federal funding eligibility; capacity and cost for micro transit elements; and accessibility of the system in terms of awareness and ease of use (e.g. understanding many branching routes). He emphasized the importance of connections to existing and planned transit lines.

Agenda Item #12: Adjourn

Chair Bigham adjourned the meeting.

Red Rock Corridor Overview

RED ROCK
SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR

Red Rock Corridor Commission Meeting

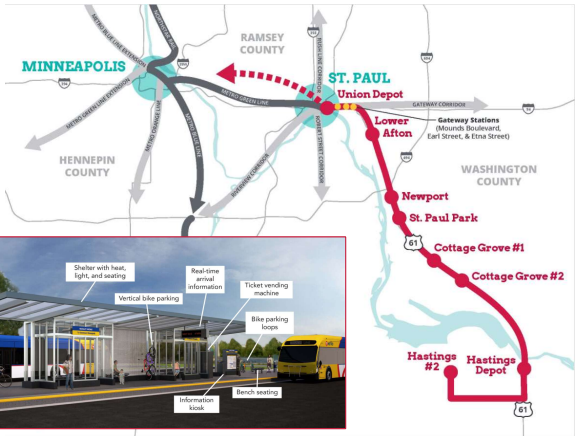
January 31, 2024

St. Paul Park City Hall

1

Red Rock Corridor Description

- A growing portion of Ramsey and Washington Counties in the communities of Saint Paul, Newport, St. Paul Park, Cottage Grove, and Hastings along Minnesota Highway 61
- Regional, statewide, and national significance as a primary transportation route for automobile, truck, and rail travel



RED ROCK
SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR

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Brief History

- **1990s-2014**
  - Considered for commuter rail
  - Station area planning; monitor other regional projects and trends; monitor ridership
- **2014 - Alternatives Analysis Update**
  - Considered land use, growth projections, forecasted ridership, estimated costs, and corridor goals and objectives
  - Concluded that BRT was best alternative for the corridor
- **2017 – Implementation Plan**
  - Further studied BRT in corridor
  - Developed near- and long-term recommendations
- **2023-2024 – Vision Refresh**

Milestone	Date(s)
Alternatives Analysis Study (AA)	2007
Station Area Planning	2009-2011
Alternatives Analysis Update (AAU)	2013-2014
Implementation Plan	2015-2017
Small Area Plans	2017-2018
Vision Refresh	2023-2024

RED ROCK SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR

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2024 Work Plan

General Activities

- Inform legislators of the need for improved transit service in the Red Rock Corridor.
- Offer guidance, monitor progress, and prepare formal comments on studies that could have an impact on the activities in the Red Rock Corridor.
- Work with state and local agencies to identify regional priorities for all transportation modes in the corridor.

Vision Refresh Next Steps

- It is anticipated that 2024 activities will focus on coordination efforts and further investigation of recommended next steps.





RED ROCK SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR

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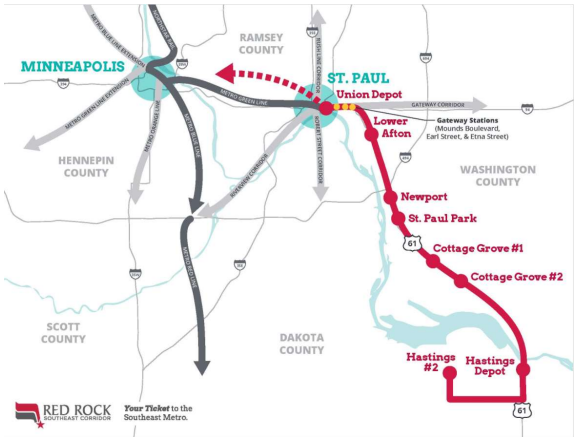
Questions?

Thank you!



Andrea Rehm
Red Rock Corridor Project Manager
Planner, Washington County
andrea.rehm@co.washington.mn.us

RED ROCK SOUTHEAST CORRIDOR

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A Refreshed Vision
for
Serving and Connecting the Red Rock Corridor

Review and
Draft Recommendations

January 31, 2024

East Metro STRONG

HUITT ZOLLARS

ZAN ASSOCIATES

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Agenda

I. Goal for Vision Refresh

II. What we learned
- Public input - Corridor analysis

III. Vision and service concepts

IV. Recommendations

V. Discussion

VI. Request for Commission Action

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I. Goal for Vision Refresh

Red Rock Corridor Commission embarks on "Vision Refresh"

In 2016, the Red Rock Corridor Commission adopted an Implementation Plan that outlined steps to implement bus rapid transit in the corridor. Since that plan was developed, the COVID-19 pandemic and other developments have changed what residents and employers in this corridor need from their transportation system. In 2023, the Red Rock Corridor Commission is gathering insights from employers, residents, and other stakeholders to refresh the Vision for this corridor.

The goal of the Vision Refresh is to better understand travel needs in the communities and describe a Vision for a transit service that can help meet those needs, support economic growth and development, and improve residents' quality of life.

https://redrockcorridor.com/news/red-rock-corridor-commission-embarks-on-vision-refresh/

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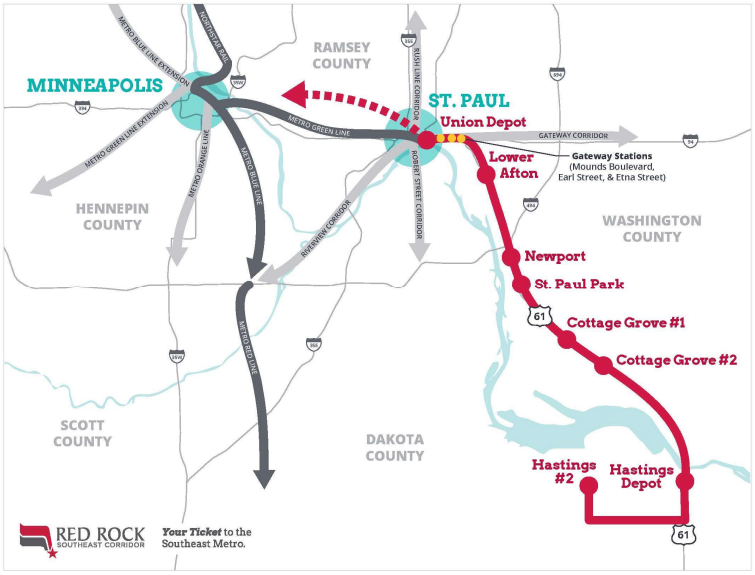

2014 - 2016 Implementation Plan

Highway BRT serving stations

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II. What we learned: Public and employer input

Goal: update outreach done 2014 - 2016

Public engagement

- On-line surveys
  - Employers
  - Employees
  - Residents
- Hastings Party in the Park

Focus groups

- Renewal by Anderson
- 3M Cottage Grove
- Ramsey County Workforce Solutions

Meetings and other stakeholder input

- Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce
- Hastings Family Service
- Payne-Phalen District Council

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Public and employer input

What we learned

Surveys from public, employers, employees

- People say they *need* and *want* to use transit.
- People who say they wouldn't use transit recognize the need and value.
  - Other people need transit
  - Reduces congestion for me and others

Focus groups with employers and employees

- Employers:

  We're losing applicants because of lack of transit
- Employees:

  We're spending too much on transportation
- As industrial jobs grow, so does the need for transit

Other focus groups

- Workforce Solutions (potential employees):
  - We need transit to access your jobs
- Hastings Family Service (residents)
  - We need transit to access services
- Existing transit services don't work well

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What we learned

The public and employers know what they're talking about

Since 2016:

- Cars and fuel are much more expensive
- People can't afford it

"Among the pandemic's many casualties is the affordable used car, which has nearly vanished from the used car marketplace"
- Forbes

Bloomberg

Car Owners Fall Behind on Payments at Highest Rate on Record

By **Claire Ballentine**, October 21, 2023, 9:00 AM EDT

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II. What we learned

Corridor analysis

Land uses



Residential

Newport: apartments + Transit station



Employment

Cottage Grove: AirGas and Renewal by Andersen

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Corridor analysis

Station areas



Downtown

Saint Paul Park



Downtown

Saint Paul

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Corridor analysis

Unique barriers



Newport

Highway 61

Railroad

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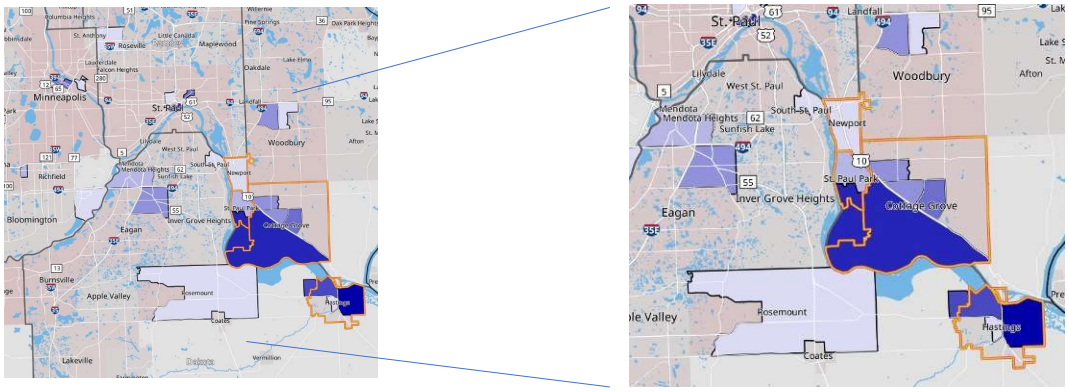
Corridor analysis

Where people who live in the corridor work



(Not including residents of Saint Paul.)

Areas with darker shades have more employees from the corridor. Note destinations in Eagan and Mendota Heights.

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III. How best to meet the needs of people living and working in the Red Rock Corridor?

Draft Refreshed Vision and possible service concepts

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A Vision for Serving and Connecting the Red Rock Corridor

Transit for the Red Rock Corridor will:

- ***Serve the whole corridor***

  Transit will connect people to all parts of the communities in the corridor.

- ***Connect the corridor to other places***

  Transit will connect people to and from other regional destinations and transit services.

- ***Work closely with employers and residents***

  Transit providers will include employers and residents in planning and providing services.

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III. What service concepts might fulfill this Vision?

- Goals for service concepts
  - *Illustrate concepts* that would fulfill one or more parts of the Vision
  - *Spur thinking* about service concepts to investigate further
- These examples need further study
- Goal tonight is not to pick one

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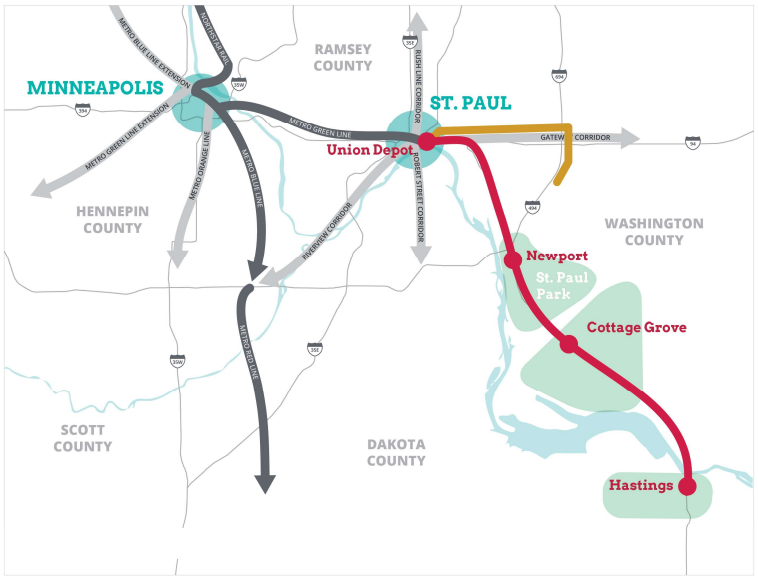

Vision concept

Freeway express bus
Downtown Saint Paul to Hastings stopping at transit centers only

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Microtransit zones
centered on transit centers

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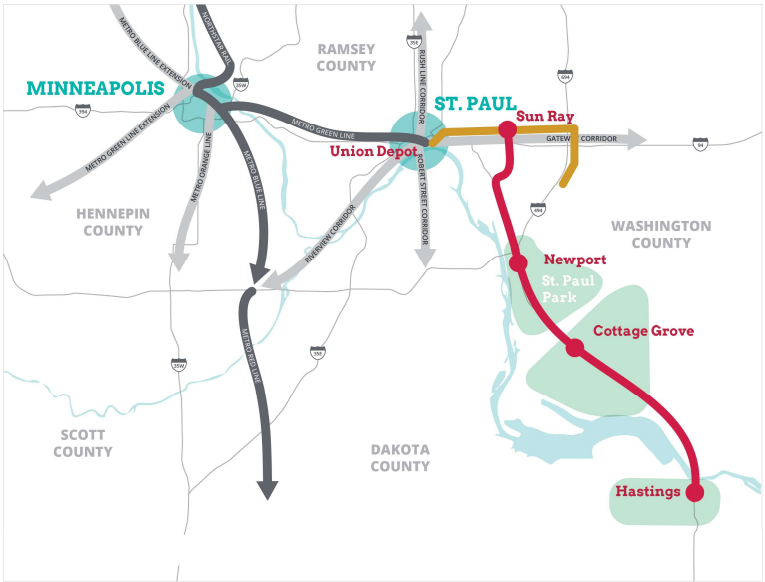

Vision concept

Serve and connect people more directly to Gateway jobs

Freeway express bus
Sun Ray to Hastings stopping at transit centers

+

Microtransit zones
centered on transit centers

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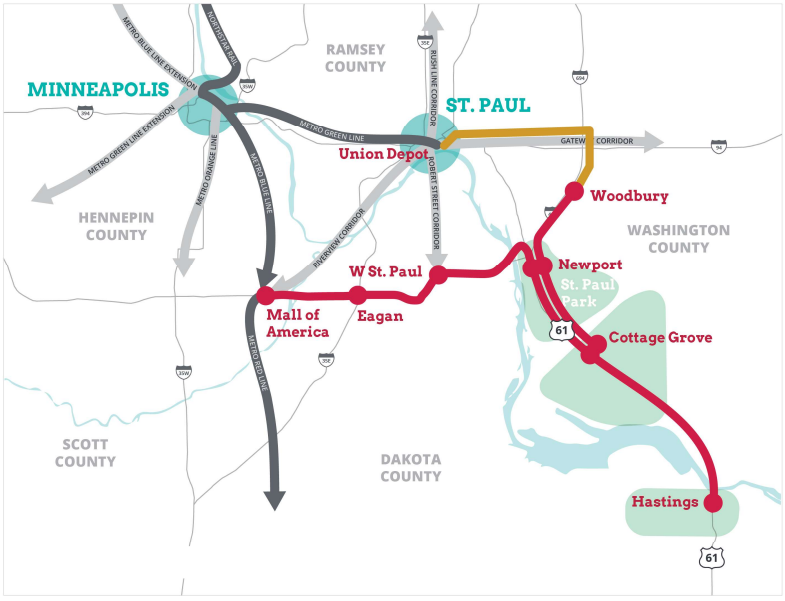

Vision concept

Connect people East and West using two routes

Freeway express bus

- *Woodbury to Cottage Grove*
- *Mall of America to Hastings*

+

Microtransit zones *Serving transit centers*

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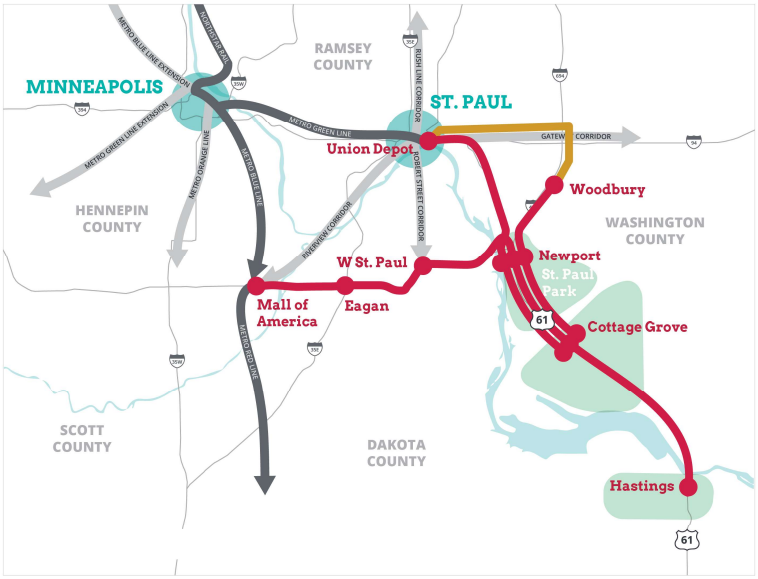

Vision concept

Connect people with three routes

Freeway express buses

- *Saint Paul to Cottage Grove*
- *Woodbury to Cottage Grove*
- *Mall of America to Hastings*

+

Microtransit zones *connections to and from transit centers*

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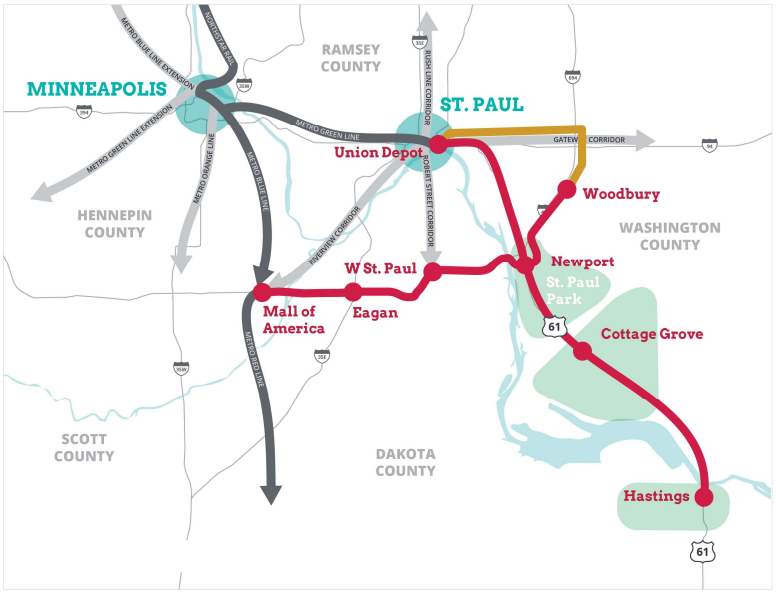

Vision concept

Freeway express bus

- *Saint Paul to Hastings*
- *Woodbury to Mall of America*

+

Microtransit zones *centered on transit centers*

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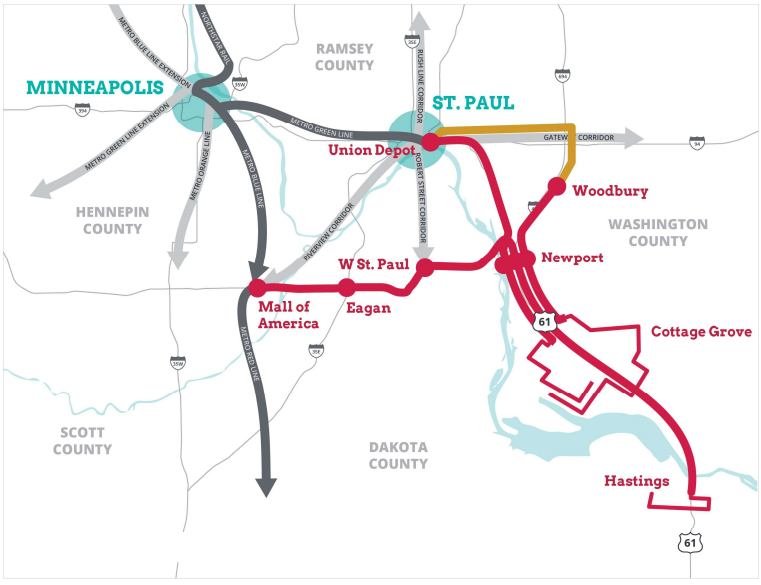

Vision concept

Freeway express +local bus

- *Saint Paul via Newport continuing as local service*
- *Woodbury via Newport continuing as local service*
- *Mall of America via Newport to Hastings continuing as local service*

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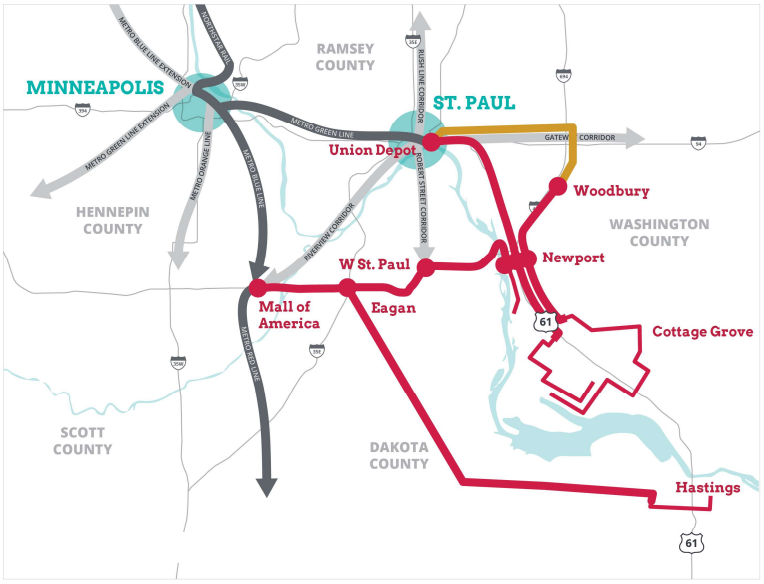

Vision concept

Freeway express +local bus

- *Saint Paul via Newport continuing as local*
- *Woodbury via Newport continuing as local*
- *Mall of America to Newport continuing as local*
- *Eagan to Hastings continuing as local*

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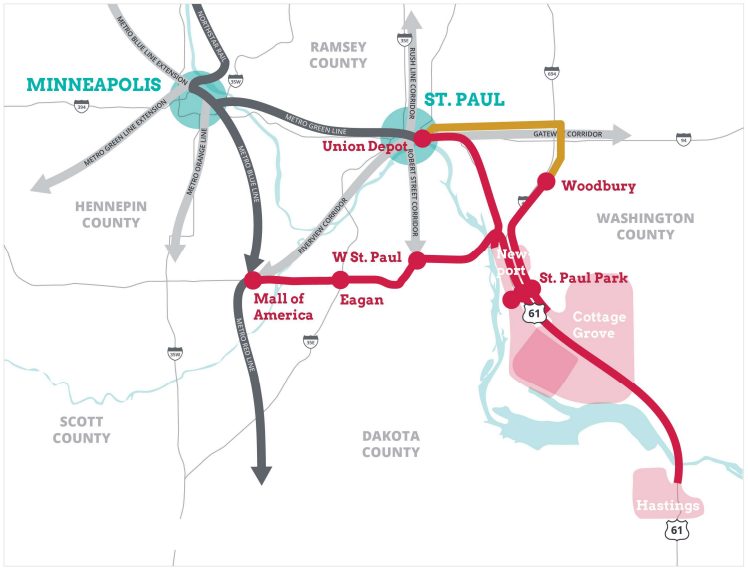

Vision concept

Deviated fixed route

Freeway expresses +local bus

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IV. Initial Recommendations

- Work with stakeholders (including Metro Transit, counties) to develop *expanded* and *new* transit options
  - Can use Service Concepts as guidance
- Advocate for those options
  - Leverage new regional sales tax to *develop* and *implement* expanded and new options
- Investigate creating a Transportation Management Organization (TMO) to fund and implement recommendations

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IV. Initial recommendations

Investigate creating a TMA or TMO

What is a Transportation Management Association/Transportation Management Organization?

- A locally controlled organization that helps manages the transportation needs of a district, community, or region. Helps people and organizations *use existing transportation resources* and *develop and implement new ones*.

  Example work:

  - Promote and inform people about options: how to use existing transit, where to park, etc.
  - Support residents and employers in creating and running vanpools and carpools
  - Organize members to advocate for new services
    - Develop specific service proposals
    - Support applications for funding
- TMO: Typically, a government organization
- TMA: Typically, independent non-profit organizations, controlled by members. Governments can be members.

  Terms are not used consistently. Both exist in this region.

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IV. Initial recommendation: Investigate creating a TMA or TMO

TMO/TMA funding

Possible sources of funding

- Counties and/or cities
- Federal grants administered through Metropolitan Council / Transportation Advisory Board "Regional Solicitation"
- Employers and other stakeholders
- Some TMOs seek state funding at the Legislature

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V. Discussion

- Discussion and feedback on
  - Recommendations
  - Draft Final report

VI. Request for Commission Action

- Staff recommend Commission approval of final report, "A Vision for Serving and Connecting the Red Rock Corridor."

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Thank you

Will Schroeer

Executive Director

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East Metro STRONG

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