A federal government shutdown will not immediately impact any Ramsey County services.

METRO Purple Line clears major environmental hurdle

The METRO Purple Line (formerly the Rush Line) – a planned bus rapid transit project that will serve the East Metro beginning in 2026 – has received environmental clearance from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

This month, the FTA issued a favorable environmental decision based on the project's Environmental Assessment. The decision document, called a "Finding of No Significant Impact", is the final stage of the environmental review process for the Purple Line project under the National Environmental Policy Act. In addition, Ramsey County has issued a "Findings of Fact and Conclusions" document to comply with the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act. Both documents are available on the project website.

The Purple Line will be a high-quality transportation option that provides fast, frequent and reliable service as part of the regional METRO system. The 15-mile route connects communities in Saint Paul, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, White Bear Township and White Bear Lake. Construction is scheduled to begin in early 2024, leading to the start of service in late 2026.

Over the past three years, project staff have taken in thousands of comments, connecting with more than 3,400 community members at in-person and virtual events, pop-up meetings, open houses, and a variety of other efforts. In 2020, the cities of Saint Paul, White Bear Lake, Vadnais Heights, and Maplewood approved resolutions of support for the preliminary plans for the project.

The FTA Environmental Assessment was carried out in partnership with Ramsey County and the municipalities the project will serve, as well as the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office. The Environmental Assessment was open for public comment in May and June of this year. All comments received during the public comment period, and responses to substantive comments, can be found in the Finding of No Significant Impact document.

The FTA's environmental decision is a key milestone required of projects readying for or advancing through FTA's Capital Investment Grants Program. Ramsey County has committed to providing local matching funds and the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority voted last week to commit $39 million to the next phase of the project, which is expected to fully transition from Ramsey County to the Metropolitan Council by late 2021 or early 2022. As the region's leading transit provider, the Metropolitan Council has the experience and expertise to lead final design and construction for the project, then operate the Purple Line as part of the regional METRO system.

The Purple Line will connect people to jobs, housing, transit stations and key destinations such as Union Depot and downtown Saint Paul, Regions Hospital, Hmong Village, Phalen Regional Park, St. John's Hospital, Maplewood Mall and downtown White Bear Lake.

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