Grant Application Summary

November 1, 2019

Advanced Station Area Planning for the Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project seeks to maximize economic development opportunities, identify needed multimodal connections and promote affordable housing within Rush Line station areas (generally defined as the areas within a half-mile of each station). A Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) would enable Ramsey County to complete Advanced Station Area Planning for the Rush Line BRT Project, in collaboration with current project partners Metro Transit, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the cities of Saint Paul, Maplewood, Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake and White Bear Lake. The Advanced Station Area Planning process, expected to last 18 to 24 months and be completed before Rush Line construction begins, includes five key tasks that utilize technical analysis and community input in the development of implementable station area plans:

Task 1: Public engagement

A public engagement plan will articulate goals, specify where community input is needed to guide the direction of the plans, and outline approaches to gathering input from and sharing information with residents and employees, businesses and property owners, and elected and appointed officials, with a focus on traditionally underrepresented groups. Existing advisory committees for the Rush Line BRT project will be integrated into the engagement process where applicable. The Rush Line BRT Project Community Advisory Committee will guide and provide feedback on public engagement efforts and staff intend to contract with a community group(s) to execute the public engagement plan. The Rush Line BRT Technical Advisory Committee with staff from local, regional and state agencies will meet regularly to review deliverables, provide input, gather data and build capacity to advance plan outcomes within their organizations. The Rush Line BRT Policy Advisory Committee composed of elected officials will review and approve Advanced Station Area Planning deliverables as needed.

Task 2: Real estate market analysis

The real estate market analysis will evaluate current uses, land availability and prices, vacancy rates, rents and growth rates in the study area. This technical analysis will be supplemented by focus groups and interviews with brokers, city staff, developers and property owners. The market analysis will be used to assess commercial, residential and institutional real estate potential (re)development opportunities in the short and long terms, with an emphasis on Opportunity Zone sites.

Task 3: Housing gap analysis

A corridor-wide housing inventory will be developed and compared to the growth assumptions from the market analysis to identify gaps between current and future housing availability and needs. Cities, Ramsey County and the Metropolitan Council will collaborate to develop targets for the addition and preservation of units within the study area that are affordable at a range of incomes below area median income. Affordable housing developers and stakeholders will be engaged to identify barriers to housing development, and

strategies, tools and policies to mitigate these barriers. Strategies for preserving existing affordable housing will be developed for areas at risk of residential displacement.

Task 4: Station concepts and development plans

Current conditions in station areas, including zoning and existing land use and housing plans and policies, will be documented. Physical features such as pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, building design, public realm, infrastructure and streetscape will also be evaluated.

A visioning process regarding station character and areas of change and stability will be conducted with community members and agency stakeholders to inform station concepts. The process will identify the desired scale and types of development as well as values for other aspects of the built environment.

Missing network links and impediments to an optimal walking, biking or rolling experience will be identified along with recommended network improvements that enhance access for people with disabilities, pedestrians, transit riders and bicyclists.

Land use and development policy changes will be recommended to encourage transit-supportive development near stations.

The outcomes of these four subtasks will be synthesized into unique station area plans that will convey the future condition of each station and provide the basis for the implementation plan.

Task 5: Implementation plan

A phased implementation plan will include short- and long-term actions, identification of planning and finance tools and the agencies responsible for achieving desired outcomes. The implementation plan will address: technical assistance for zoning and other land use policies; utilities and stormwater infrastructure investments; TOD financing strategies such as tax increment financing; and identification of sites that are market ready and can be developed in conjunction with the Rush Line project as an FTA Joint Development.