

# Blue Line/Riverview Connection Study

## Evaluation Analysis and Findings

The Blue Line / Riverview Connection Study was initiated to assess the need for improved transit connections in the Greater Highland Park Neighborhood between the Metro Blue Line light rail (LRT), the Metro A-Line bus rapid transit (BRT), the future Riverview Modern Streetcar Corridor and other regional attractions outside Highland Park.

### INTRODUCTION

The need for this assessment was identified by the Riverview Corridor Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), the City of St. Paul and the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority (RRA) in response to the anticipated buildout of the Highland Bridge site and other expected growth in Highland Park and the surrounding Twin Cities Region. The study's goal of developing a transit vision for the greater Highland Park Neighborhood relies on assumptions of the ongoing Riverview Modern Streetcar study, past Metro Transit studies and plans for new or improved service through the area. A total of seven transit investment options were evaluated through a two-stage screening process using a combination of high-level qualitative criteria (Level 1) and detailed quantitative criteria (Level 2).

This report presents the final methodology and results for the Performance Evaluation Framework and Evaluation Criteria used to assess and compare potential transit investment options for the greater Highland Park Neighborhood, as well as a summary of the top performing investment options.

The evaluation framework used was designed to define, measure, and weigh the conceptual benefits, impacts, costs, and risks of each of the transit improvement options. To understand the appropriate transit service levels and need for additional transit investments, transit options were developed and evaluated using a two-tier evaluation process. The study also included a public engagement process to gain insights into what type of transit investments the community is interested in and to get feedback on transit options explored.

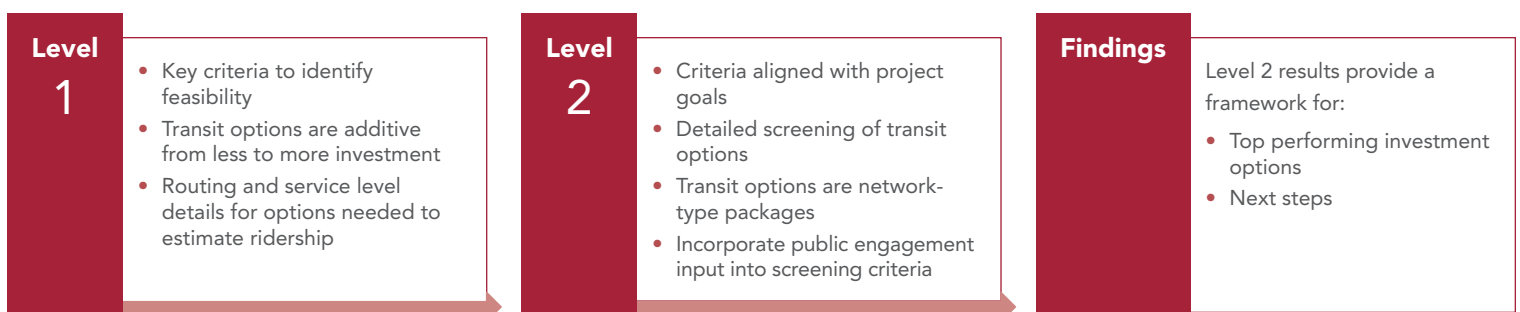
The result of the evaluation provides a preliminary planning level assessment of various investment options, which may include a combination of bike/pedestrian improvements, bus network improvements, or local bus/BRT capital projects. Top performing options would need to be further evaluated as a next step to this study.

### BACKGROUND

The Blue Line Riverview Connection Study explores how to best serve and connect the greater Highland Park Neighborhood to future activity sites and transit services in the region. More specifically, it explores connectivity between and to the Metro Blue Line LRT, the Highland Bridge site, the A-Line BRT corridor and West 7th Street, which is the proposed Riverview Modern Streetcar Project (Riverview) corridor. The study area is generally defined by those corridors to the west and east, respectively, as well Saint Clair Avenue to the north. The study area is predominantly residential with commercial along Minnehaha Avenue, Ford Parkway, Randolph Avenue and W 7th Street.

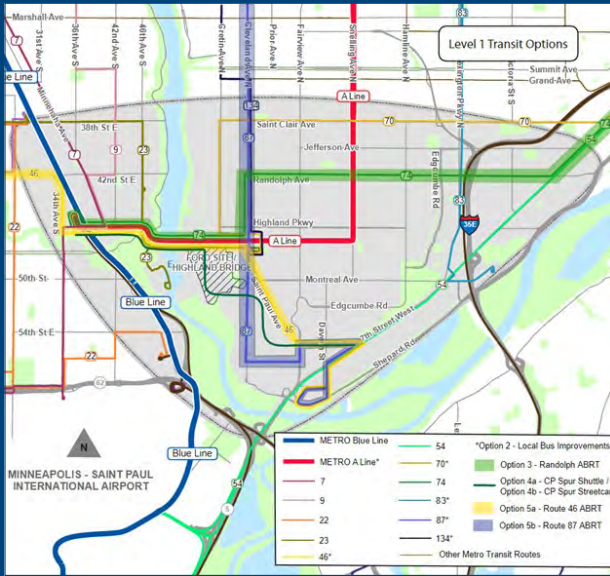
The Highland Bridge site is being actively redeveloped into a mixed-use facility with residential townhomes, condos, apartments, commercial office space and retail. While other sites in the study area and region will also drive population and employment growth, the Highland Bridge site will have the most notable impact on the study area. The implementation of the Riverview Modern Streetcar project is expected to also spur development on West 7th Street. The study explored the impacts of these projects on transit demand over the course of three timeframes: short- (2021-2026), mid- (2027-2032) and long-term (2033-2040). The study evaluated various levels of transit improvements to identify an appropriate level of investment for the Highland Neighborhood. The Highland Bridge site is anticipated to be completely built-out by the end of the mid-term timeframe. The evaluation process considered appropriate transit options to align with build out of this site.

### SCREENING PROCESS



# TRANSIT OPTIONS

Seven transit options were developed in coordination with key stakeholders and range in investment size, mode and area(s) served.



Option	Option Name	Description	Assumptions
1	No Build	No change to system operating characteristics, network design, or supporting infrastructure.	June 20221 Metro Transit Network as the base network.
2	Local Bus* + Multimodal Infrastructure (MM)	Improvements to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure connections to transit, as well as transit speed and reliability improvements. This option also includes bringing back into service currently suspended local bus routes (Route 70 and 134).	June 20221 Metro Transit Network as the base network.
3	Randolph BRT	Upgrade Route 74 to Arterial BRT on Randolph as identified in Network Next. Arterial BRT includes approximately 1/3-mile stop spacing, enhanced stations, and transit signal priority or queue jumps, but does not include BRT right of way.	Option 2 improvements included
4a	CP Spur - Shuttle Bus	Automated Vehicle (AV) / Shuttlebus investment utilizing the CP spur in the southeast corner of the Highland Bridge site. The service would operate as a connector service between Highland Bridge and the Riverview Streetcar corridor at West 7th but would not be interlined along the entire West 7th corridor.	Option 2 and Option 3 improvements included
4b	CP Spur - Streetcar	Streetcar investment utilizing the CP spur in the southeast corner of the Highland Bridge site. The service would operate as a connector service between Highland Bridge and the Riverview Streetcar corridor at West 7th but would not be interlined along the entire West 7th corridor.	Option 2 and Option 3 improvements included
5a	Route 46 BRT	Arterial BRT investment following the Route 46 alignment in the study area. Arterial BRT includes approximately 1/3-mile stop spacing, enhanced stations, transit signal priority or queue jumps, and does not include BRT right of way.	Option 2 and Option 3 improvements included
5b	Route 87 BRT	Arterial BRT investment following the Route 87 alignment in the study area. Arterial BRT includes approximately 1/3-mile stop spacing, enhanced stations, transit signal priority or queue jumps, and does not include BRT right of way.	Option 2 and Option 3 improvements included

## LEVEL 1

The Level 1 screening was based on a high-level strategic framing of how well the transit alternatives met the criteria described in this section. Each criterion was scored from 1 to 3, with 1 representing the lowest score and 3 representing the highest score. The numerical values were translated into a color-coded symbology for visual presentations, with red indicating low, yellow indicating moderate, and green indicating high. The total scores for each option were reached by adding together the scores for each individual

criterion on an equally weighted basis. Ratings were based on local and industry knowledge and data, best-practice, and past experience implementing similar strategies or projects.

Options which performed at 50 percent or lower of the overall total points possible were not advanced to Level 2. Two options did not meet this threshold: the CP Spur shuttle (Option 4a) and CP Spur streetcar (Option 4b). Options 1, 2, 3, 5a, and 5b were advanced to the Level 2 screening.

Criteria		Option 1: No Build	Option 2: MM+Local Bus	Option 3: Randolph ABRT	Option 4a: CP Spur Shuttle	Option 4b: CP Spur Streetcar	Option 5a: Rte 46 ABRT	Option 5b: Rte 87 ABRT
Aligns with future demands	Short-term	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
	Mid-term	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
	Long-term	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
Implementation timeline	Short-term	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
	Mid-term	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
	Long-term	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
Enhances connectivity to regional destinations		■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
Improves access to transit		■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
Capital cost		■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
Engineering/ROW constraints		■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>		<b>87%</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>60%</b>

Performance: High: ■■■ Medium: ■■■ Low: ■■■ Costs and constraints levels: High: ■■■ Medium: ■■■ Low: ■■■

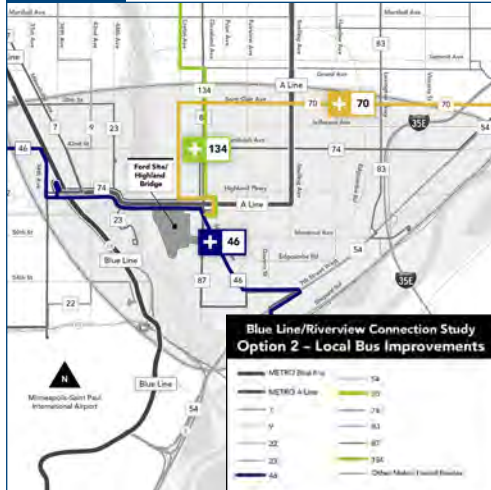
## LEVEL 2

### What would Option 2 – Local Bus Improvements potentially look like?

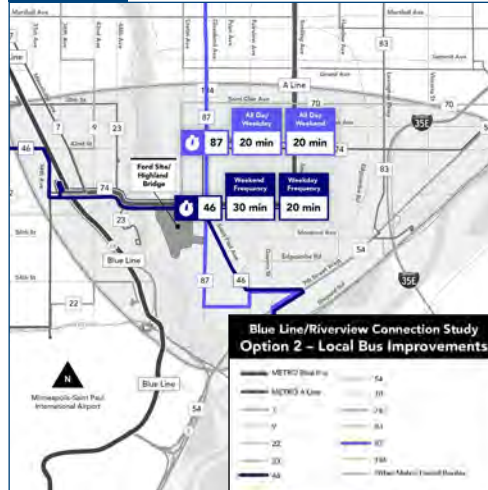
The Level 2 screening assessed the options advanced from the Level 1 screening. The 20 Level 2 screening criteria were developed to identify investment options that are appropriate for the growth of the area and which align with

project goals. Additionally, the remaining options were further refined to include details about the multimodal improvements and reflect Metro Transit BRT station spacing standards.

**Map 1** Bringing service back



**Map 2** Increased service levels



**Map 3** Other improvements



Project Goals	Criteria	Option 1: No Build	Option 2: Local Bus	Option 3: Randolph BRT	Option 5a: Rte 46 BRT	Option 5b: Rte 87 BRT
Reliability	Travel speed	Low	High	High	High	High
	Frequency of service	Low	High	High	High	High
Transit Markets Served	Activity centers served	High	High	High	Low	Low
	Addresses service gap (coverage)	Low	High	High	High	High
	Aligns with future demand (ridership measure)	High	High	High	High	High
	Transit access to employment	Low	High	High	High	High
	Auto diversion / VMT reduction	Low	High	High	High	High
Multimodal Connectivity	Connections to high frequency network	High	High	High	High	High
	Bicycle accessibility to transit	High	High	High	High	High
	Walk accessibility to transit	Low	High	High	High	High
	Walk accessibility to high frequency network	Low	High	High	High	High
	Advancing neighborhood nodes/mobility hubs	Low	High	High	Low	Low
Cost Effectiveness	Capital cost	High	High	Low	Low	Low
	Operating cost	High	High	High	Low	Low
Transit & Land Use Compatibility	Existing & future transit supportive land use	Low	Low	High	High	High
	Existing & future employment	High	High	High	Low	Low
	Existing & future population	High	High	High	Low	Low
Safe & Equitable	Population in area of persistent poverty	High	High	Low	High	Low
	Communities of color served	High	High	Low	High	Low
	Areas with high transit propensity served (Metropolitan Council Equity Index)	High	High	High	Low	Low
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>		<b>63%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>57%</b>

High: ■ ■ ■ Medium: ■ ■ ■ Low: ■ ■ ■

The results show Option 2 has the greatest number of high scores and fewest number of low scores, and is the best solution for the study area through 2040. Option 3 has the most moderate scores, with some high and a limited number of low scores as well. Option 1 has a mix of low and high scores, and Options 5a and 5b have mostly low and moderate scores, with only some high.

Options 5a and 5b scored the lowest. Both options feature high capital costs and high long-term operating costs without serving high density population or employment areas or advancing an equitable transit network (both scored low in terms of serving areas with high transit propensity, BIPOC populations, and populations living in poverty).

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Because there is not a one-size-fits-all solution, multiple approaches, strategies and phases went into the engagement during this project. We developed authentic relationships in communities to help build trust, share knowledge, and created connections to engage throughout the project. We considered many factors when developing engagement activities, such as accessibility in locations, language, and technology.

The project team's strategy was structured around one guiding principle: instead of bringing the community to the project team, we will bring the project team to the community. This approach allowed the team to connect authentically and organically with people in the community with no barriers to participate. In addition, multiple forms

of engagement were offered including pop-up events, community open houses, virtual options to provide input through an online engagement platform, passive opportunities through an interactive kiosk, and creating art as a form of input. By offering multiple ways to engage, our team gathered input from people who reflect many backgrounds in the Highland Park area.

Unique to this study, local artists joined the engagement team and participated in each phase of engagement to develop materials that simplified complex ideas and concepts and offered new ways to provide input, recognizing that art can play a vital role in engaging with community.



3

Phases of online engagement



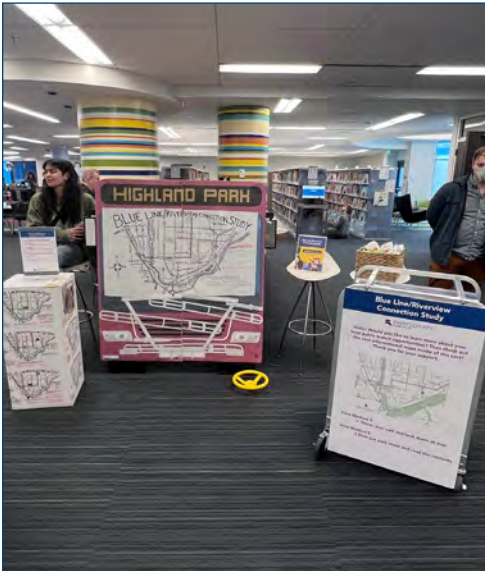
2

Community open houses



6

Pop-up events



## NEXT STEPS

Metro Transit's 2023 "Network Now" initiative will determine what local bus service will look like in the short-term (0-5 years) for the Highland Park neighborhood and other communities in the Twin Cities Region. These Metro Transit decisions will be based on public input along with technical considerations.

Some of the key discussion topics of the Network Now process will be feasibility, need to bring back key local bus routes currently suspended as a result of COVID ridership declines, how to best assign a limited number of bus operators to maximize system performance, and determine need for any new local bus service changes systemwide. Metro Transit's "Network Next" plan will also continue to be the region's strategic transit footprint for longer-term investment strategies through the year 2040, such as Randolph BRT.

Multimodal investments assumed in Option 2 of the Blue Line-Riverview Connection Study will be the responsibility of the City of Saint Paul and Ramsey County, depending upon the jurisdiction of the roadway.

These investment decisions will be guided by:

- Long range planning documents
- Transportation studies
- Development review requirements
- Projects identified in city and county Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs)
- City of Saint Paul Bike Plan updates
- Ramsey County All-Abilities 2050 Transportation Plan currently under development