Public open houses set for June 13 on freight rail issue

ST. LOUIS PARK, Minn. – May 28, 2013 – Two public open houses will be held June 13 on engineering concepts for resolving the location of freight rail in the design of Southwest LRT (Green Line extension).

(Open house details appear in boldface toward the end of this advisory.)

The concepts explore various possibilities for co-locating freight and LRT tracks in Minneapolis, as well as options to reroute freight rail traffic in St. Louis Park to make way for LRT tracks. The relocation concepts to be presented will be different than the one described in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

The Federal Transit Administration, which would fund half the $1.25 billion line, directed the Metropolitan Council’s Southwest LRT Project Office to design for both the freight rail co-location and relocation options prior to recommending one. The Metropolitan Council is then expected to decide the freight rail issue by late summer following input from citizens, businesses and the various committees.

How engineers developed their concepts

In addition to reviewing public comments on the DEIS, project engineers and consulting engineers have met a number of times since the beginning of the year with technical staff from the affected parties. These meetings involved
technical staff from BNSF, Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) and Twin Cities & Western Railroad (TC&W), as well as technical staff from Hennepin County, the cities of St. Louis Park and Minneapolis, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Three Rivers Park District, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District and St. Louis Park School District. The purpose is to understand the challenges and opportunities presented by both co-location and relocation and to get technical input on how best to design both options.

The co-location option involves building LRT tracks next to freight rail tracks where TC&W currently operates trains along the Cedar Lake Trail in St. Louis Park and through the Kenilworth area in Minneapolis.

The relocation option involves relocating TC&W’s trains to CP’s Minneapolis, Northfield & Southern (MN&S) track in St. Louis Park and BNSF’s Wayzata line in St. Louis Park and Minneapolis. This freight reroute would make room for the addition of Southwest LRT tracks through the Kenilworth area.

Both co-location and relocation options would have impacts on residences and businesses, including the freight railroads. The goal is to choose one option and design it in a way that is safe and operationally efficient for both LRT and the freight railroads and cost effective.

**Details of the co-location, relocation concepts**

In no particular order, the six co-location concepts being presented involve the following in the Kenilworth Corridor in Minneapolis:

- Building LRT tracks along the freight tracks and trail, with all modes at ground level.
- Relocating the trail out of the corridor between the Midtown Greenway and Cedar Lake Parkway.
- Elevating the trail.
- Building a shallow tunnel for LRT tracks.
- Building deep twin tunnels, with one tunnel for each LRT track.
- Elevating LRT tracks.

Both relocation concepts for rerouting freight rail traffic in St. Louis Park would connect TC&W freight trains from CP’s Bass Lake line to the existing MN&S line. To allow for safer movements of TC&W’s long freight trains through St. Louis Park, the new reroute concepts have gentler curves and a flatter alignment than the reroute as outlined in the DEIS. In no particular order, the two concepts involve the following:

- Building freight tracks through the existing St. Louis Park High School football field, which would be relocated to reunite it with the main
campus. This reroute concept is referred to as the Brunswick West freight rail relocation alignment.

- Building freight tracks that skirt the field to the east. This reroute concept is referred to as the Brunswick Central freight rail relocation alignment.

Outreach staff at the Southwest LRT Project Office is beginning to notify business owners and residents whose properties could be fully or partially acquired by any of the co-location or relocation concepts.

What happens next?

Project engineers will present details of their concepts and seek public feedback at the two June 13 open houses. They will be held from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 4:30 to 7 p.m. in the Commons Cafeteria at Benilde-St. Margaret’s School, 2501 Highway 100 South, in St. Louis Park. For directions, see: http://www.bsmschool.org/about-bsm/directions1/

Individuals who require assistance to participate should contact Sophia Ginis, Southwest LRT community outreach coordinator, at Sophia.ginis@metrotransit.org or 612-373-3895. Requests for special assistance should be made a minimum of seven business days in advance of the scheduled meeting.

Public input at open houses will be summarized and shared with project engineers as they advance the designs. The feedback also will be shared with members of the project’s business and community advisory committees, the Corridor Management Committee and the Metropolitan Council to help them understand the issues around co-location and relocation as they provide input.

Additional open houses later in June will cover stations and other project elements.

Cost impacts of the co-location and relocation concepts will be developed and presented in midsummer.

About the Southwest LRT Project (Green Line Extension): The Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT) Project will operate from downtown Minneapolis through the southwestern suburban cities of St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie, passing in close proximity to the City of Edina. The proposed alignment is primarily at-grade and includes 17 new stations and approximately 15.8-miles of double track. The line will connect major activity centers in the region including downtown Minneapolis, the Opus/Golden Triangle employment area in Minnetonka and Eden Prairie, Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, the
Eden Prairie Center Mall, and the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes. Ridership in 2030 is projected at 29,660 weekday passengers. The project will interline with Central Corridor LRT (Green Line) which will provide a one-seat ride to destinations such as the University of Minnesota, state Capitol and downtown St. Paul. It will be part of an integrated system of transitways, including connections to the METRO Blue Line, the Northstar Commuter Rail line, a variety of major bus routes along the alignment, and proposed future transitway and rail lines. The Metropolitan Council will be the grantee of federal funds. The regional government agency is charged with building the line in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation. The Southwest Corridor Management Committee, which includes commissioners from Hennepin County and the mayors of Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie provides advice and oversight. Funding is provided by the Federal Transit Administration, Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), state of Minnesota and Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA). The Southwest LRT Project website is [www.swlrt.org](http://www.swlrt.org)