

Downtown Saint Paul Station Area Plan



City of Saint Paul
Christopher Coleman, Mayor

**URBAN
STRATEGIES
INC**



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1.0 Introduction

The City of Saint Paul is planning for light rail transit along the Central Corridor, a spine that will connect the downtowns of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota, and the diverse neighborhoods along University Avenue. The *Downtown Saint Paul Station Area Plan* applies the broader Vision, Principles, and Design Directions of the *Central Corridor Development Strategy (CCDS)*. Building on this community-based and City Council-adopted foundation, the *Downtown Station Area Plan* creates a more detailed framework for integrating decisions affecting future built form, land use, the public realm, and movement (including LRT, buses, cars, pedestrians, and bicycles) within downtown.

As an introduction to this Station Area Plan, Chapter 1 begins by describing **The Opportunity** that LRT creates for enhancing Saint Paul as a vibrant and interesting place to live, work, and visit. It goes on to describe **Why a Station Area Plan** is an important part of planning for LRT and related investments in downtown Saint Paul, and describes the study process that led to this document.

The Alignment of the planned LRT is then described in detail, followed by a summary of the **Planning Context** that has shaped successful growth and investment in downtown Saint Paul in recent years.

This introductory chapter concludes with **Real Estate Market Considerations**, including a series of recommendations for capturing the potential of LRT to enhance the vitality and economic health of downtown Saint Paul.

1.1 The Opportunity

The insertion of LRT in downtown Saint Paul creates a signature opportunity to reinforce and enhance downtown Saint Paul as a contemporary, vibrant heart of the city for living, working, and culture. It is an opportunity to put downtown Saint Paul “on the map” through a series of targeted city-building initiatives: strengthening and distinguishing downtown’s development market; promoting large and small place-making efforts; and improving mobility options and access to jobs, housing, and community services.

Over the past decade, there have been a number of positive investments that have helped revitalize downtown. The introduction of new open spaces and streetscaping has transformed the Rice Park area into a regional gem and destination for arts and cultural attractions. The transformation of former warehousing into residential and artists’ lofts as well as spaces for creative industry has breathed new life into Lowertown. The addition of Wacouta Commons, a new residential neighborhood in the northeast quadrant of downtown, has brought hundreds of new residents to enliven downtown day and night. Each of these important developments has helped strengthen the attraction, vitality, and economic position of downtown.

There are a number of ways in which LRT has the potential to build upon and strengthen these initiatives. These include:

1. rebalancing movement opportunities in favor of pedestrians and cyclists;
2. strengthening links between the current activity clusters to create a stronger “Downtown” brand comprised of a collection of enjoyable, distinct places and attractions;
3. acting as a catalyst for the re-facing of streets in

downtown with new or renovated buildings that open up and embrace activity at the street; and

4. supporting new uses and activities that will seek to locate in vibrant downtown settings with strong transit linkages to the wider Twin Cities region.



Figure 1.1 When completed, the Central Corridor LRT will be a central organizing element for new developments along its length and help to strengthen downtown Saint Paul’s position as both a destination and gateway within the Twin Cities.



Figure 1.2 Downtown contains the highest building density within the city. The string of blocks on either side of the LRT line (highlighted above in green), and areas within a 5-minute walk of LRT (highlighted in white), illustrate the potential of LRT to serve the highest concentration of uses and people within downtown.

1.2 The Station Area Plan



Figure 1.3 The Station Area Plan study area.

Why a Station Area Plan?

Many community and City staff discussions have taken place around the issues and opportunities associated with the addition of LRT to downtown. The *Downtown Station Area Plan* captures these many ideas, articulates how LRT should fit within the fabric of downtown, and summarizes a range of opportunities that result from this investment in order to maximize the benefits to downtown.

The planned 11-mile Central Corridor LRT will extend from downtown Minneapolis, across the Mississippi River, and through the heart of many of Saint Paul's diverse residential and business communities. From its first Saint Paul stop at Westgate Station, it will follow University Avenue to the State Capitol campus, cross I-94 and thread its way into Saint Paul's compact and urban downtown core, where it will connect to other transit modes at the historic Union Depot.

The *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, a vision and set of strategies for how the Central Corridor should grow and change in response to the investment in LRT, was adopted in October 2007 as a chapter of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan. Building on the foundation provided by the *Development Strategy*, the *Downtown Station Area Plan* addresses two of the three proposed downtown station areas – Central Station (on the block bounded by 4th Street, Cedar,

Minnesota, and 5th Street), and Union Depot. This amalgamated study area is generally defined by 7th Street to the north, the western edge of the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary to the east, the Mississippi River to the south, and Wabasha Street to the west. The *Station Area Plan* also updates and replaces the 1994 *Lowertown Small Area Plan*.

The *Downtown Station Area Plan* focuses on city-building opportunities related to the integration of LRT within downtown. It represents the City's ongoing commitment to transit-supportive development by exploring opportunities in downtown to:

- 1) enhance the public realm;
- 2) improve options for mobility, with a strong emphasis on pedestrian movement;
- 3) identify appropriate future land development opportunities and built form; and,
- 4) analyze market potential for long-term development.

Created with the input and endorsement of community members and stakeholders, and adopted as part of the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, the *Downtown Station Area Plan* is a useful tool to guide the following decision-making processes:

- policy and development review in response to

infrastructure design and investment in LRT and transit-supportive development;

- on-going discussions with the Metropolitan Council related to final LRT design through downtown Saint Paul, particularly related to long-term access to buildings and desired streetscape conditions;
- continued outreach and education amongst downtown residents, businesses and employees with respect to the LRT design and construction process, operation, and future potential benefits and impacts;
- priority-setting for public investment in city building and infrastructure; and
- the review and update of the Lowertown Small Area Plan in light of the renewed opportunity LRT creates for this downtown neighborhood.

The Study Process

The Central Corridor LRT design and development process is being undertaken in a partnership between the Metropolitan Council, the cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Hennepin and Ramsey counties, and the University of Minnesota. The Metropolitan Council's longer-term process for planning the design,

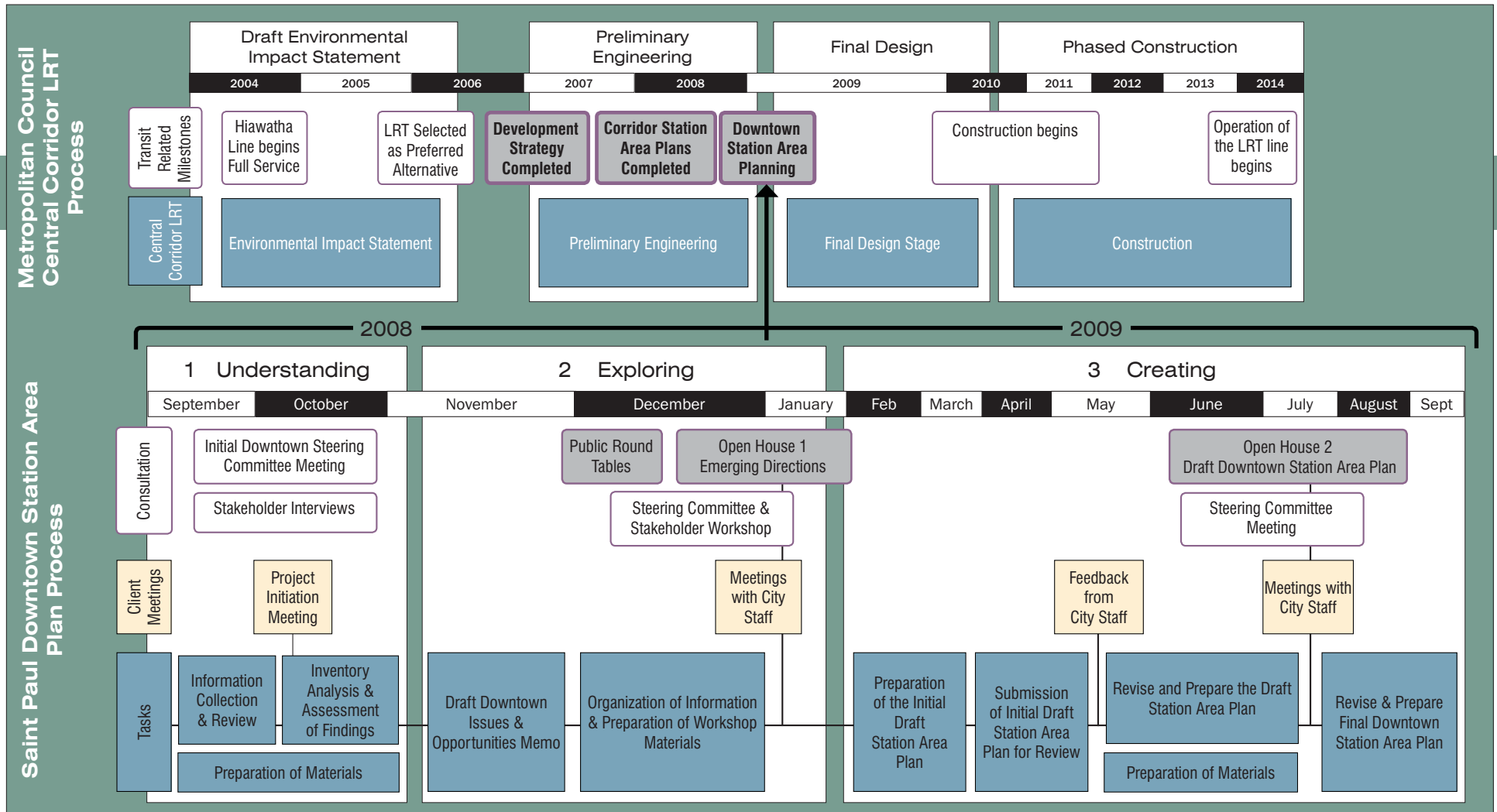


Figure 1.4 Two concurrent and mutually-supportive processes for planning LRT in downtown Saint Paul are featured above.

construction and operation of LRT is illustrated in the upper portion of Figure 1.4.

The Metropolitan Council is responsible for making decisions regarding the LRT route alignment; the number, location, and design of station platforms; future road configurations; property acquisition; and other design and construction issues that are beyond the scope of the station area planning process.

The *Downtown Station Area Plan* builds on the overall direction of the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*. It has been undertaken in consultation with key stakeholders, agencies, land owners, businesses, and community members in downtown. The preparation of the Plan was guided by the Downtown Steering Committee and City staff.

The lower portion of Figure 1.4 illustrates how the City of Saint Paul's downtown station area planning process fits into the bigger picture of planning for LRT. This document is the result of this process, and is designed to focus on the associated benefits and impacts that LRT will bring to downtown Saint Paul, as opposed to the design of the LRT alignment itself.

1.3 The Alignment

LRT inserts itself into downtown along existing streets. It will include three stations beginning at Union Depot, which will in the future also connect to a larger inter-modal transit network. The LRT alignment described in Figure 1.5 and illustrated in Figure 1.6 transforms the character of Cedar and 4th streets into balanced streets with a strong emphasis on transit and pedestrian movement.

LRT will have a much different impact and relationship to downtown Saint Paul than the remainder of the Central Corridor line. Functionally, the downtown portion of this alignment will have more similarities with the Hiawatha LRT alignment in downtown Minneapolis than with neighboring stops on University Avenue. While University Avenue is generally wide enough for LRT to be added within the existing right-of-way, the insertion of LRT into downtown Saint Paul's narrow rights-of-way will require a more sympathetic response to a denser, more complex existing urban fabric.

These constraints will require coordination with and consideration of neighboring businesses, residences, institutions, pedestrians, and motorists who rely on the same tight spaces for access, address, and circulation. Each user will need clear indications, through some combination of traffic signals, signage, paving materials, bollards or other sensitively-designed features to identify permitted routes, traffic direction, approaching trains, and safe crossing points. Additionally, stations and related LRT infrastructure will need to be streamlined to preserve limited space.



01: From the Capitol, the alignment will run down the center of Cedar Street until the 10th Street Station, where it will shift to the eastern side of the street.



02: The alignment will continue along the eastern side of Cedar until 5th Street, preserving a single lane along the west side of the street for southbound traffic and buses.



03: At 5th Street the alignment will run diagonally through the block bound by 5th, Cedar, 4th and Minnesota. This will be the site of the Central Station.



04: The alignment will run along the south side of 4th Street, preserving one westbound traffic lane along the north side of the street.



05: The alignment will continue along the south side of 4th Street in front of Union Depot. The Union Depot Station will abut the existing front lawn of the station.



06: East of Union Depot, the alignment will shift to the center of the street, preserving one traffic lane in each direction up to the Operations and Maintenance Facility at Broadway.

Figure 1.5 The LRT alignment will have a variety of configurations as it travels through downtown.

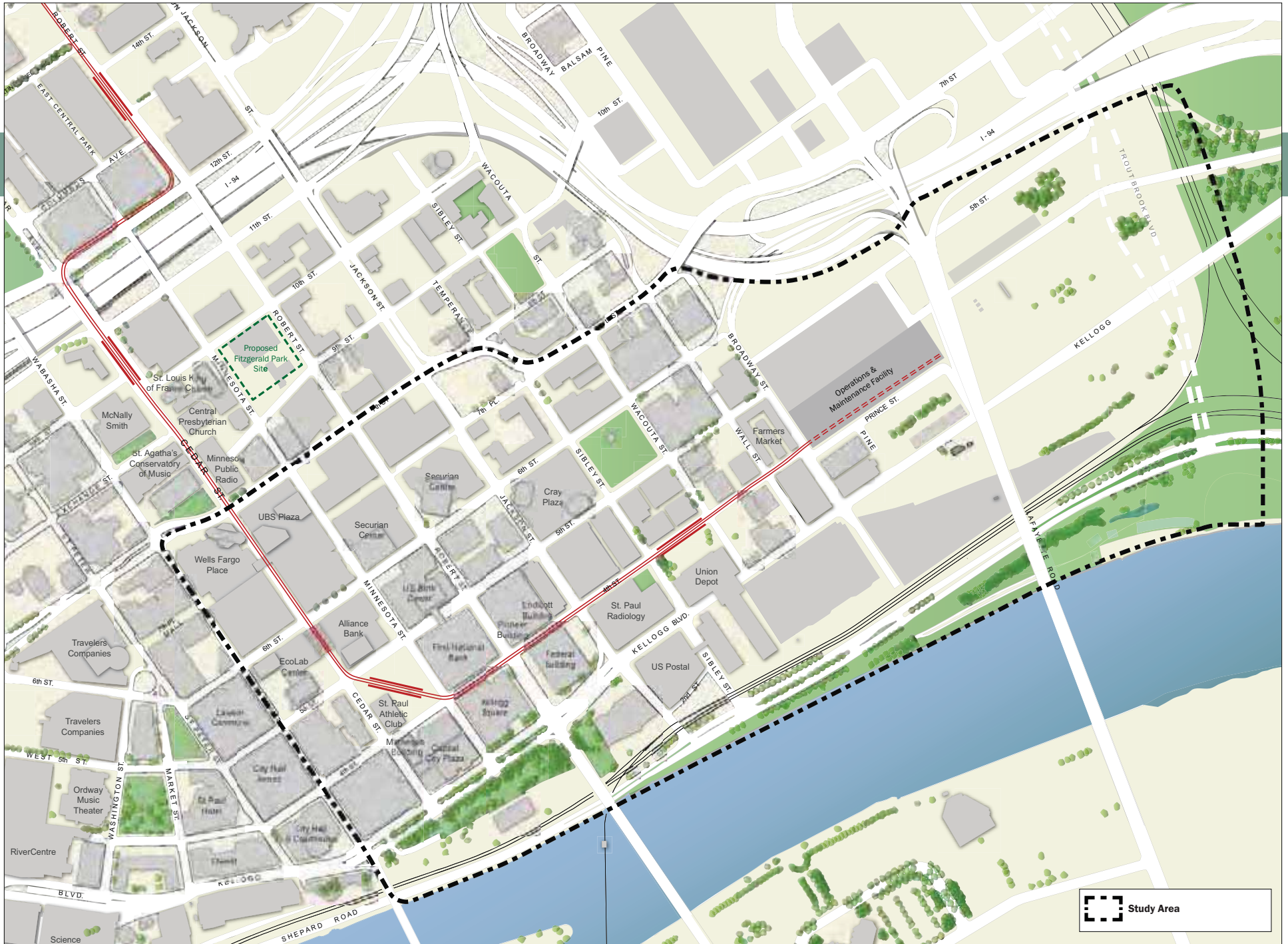


Figure 1. The LRT alignment through downtown serves the office core, residential, and live/work neighborhoods (such as Lowertown), and connects to the Union Depot multi-modal hub.

1.4 The Planning Context

Numerous plans, studies, and initiatives have shaped the positive transformation of downtown Saint Paul over the last 20 years. The *Downtown Station Area Plan* does not exist in isolation from these documents, but rather provides a lens through which to re-examine past ideas and recommendations in light of the planned insertion of LRT, and identify the many new opportunities this investment affords to achieve the long-term vision for downtown Saint Paul as a revitalized, vibrant and complete community.

This document carries many of the ideas from existing plans forward, with a revised emphasis on the place-making and reinvestment potential of LRT. The following summarizes where the *Downtown Station Area Plan* is aligned with, and informed by, its predecessor documents including:

- the Central Corridor Development Strategy;
- the Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework;
- the Downtown Development Strategy;
- the Historic Lowertown Small Area Plan;
- the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation's Urban Village Vision; and
- the Report of the Diamond Products Task Force.

Central Corridor Development Strategy (2007)

The *Central Corridor Development Strategy* (CCDS), a vision and set of strategies for how the Central Corridor should grow and evolve in response to the investment in LRT, was adopted in October 2007 as a chapter of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Saint Paul. The *Downtown Station Area Plan* is designed to be fully consistent with and complementary to the higher-level objectives of the CCDS, particularly the downtown-specific opportunities described in Section 3.4 of the CCDS. Where relevant, the *Downtown Station Area Plan* revises and expands upon these recommendations in light of new information and/or recent planning or development activity, including the final location of LRT stations and nature of platform amenities, a confirmed LRT alignment and relationship to existing transportation patterns, the location of the Operations and Maintenance Facility (OMF), and additional detail on an expanded pedestrian and bicycle network.

Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework (1997)

The *Development Framework* outlines ten principles for guiding future development in downtown Saint Paul. The *Downtown Station Area Plan* incorporates the general intent and meaning of these principles into Directions and Place-Specific Opportunities

outlined in Section #3. In particular, principles related to *Improving Connectivity* by improving linkages and mobility routes through downtown, and “*Providing a balanced network for movement*,” which refers to the design of streets that are shared equally amongst vehicles, pedestrians, buses, bicycles, and trains, are explored in more detail in the *Downtown Station Area Plan*.

Saint Paul Downtown Development Strategy (2005)

The *Downtown Development Strategy* builds on the *Development Framework* core principles of improving connectivity between neighborhoods, downtown and the river; and designing a more balanced network of streets. Key directions described in the *Strategy* with particular relevance to the station area planning process include:

- enhancing Cedar and 4th Streets as balanced streets that accommodate LRT, pedestrians, and other forms of mobility;
- improving the experience of moving through downtown at street level;
- creating unique transit stops, and improving the configuration and safety of transit stops at Cedar and Minnesota; and

- designing transit so that it makes a positive contribution to the downtown area.

The *Station Area Plan* draws guidance from the key moves described in the *Downtown Development Strategy*, and elaborates on these to illustrate how LRT will contribute to place-making and community-building downtown.

Lowertown Small Area Plan (1994)

The *Lowertown Small Area Plan* was adopted in response to the significant revitalization of the area from a manufacturing/warehouse area to a mixed-use/residential neighborhood. The main purpose of the Plan was to describe a vision for this Saint Paul community and to focus on securing the necessary ingredients to support its evolution, including new residential amenities, an improved pedestrian environment, and balanced approaches to dealing with issues of traffic and parking. However, the *Lowertown Small Area Plan* was written in advance of planning for LRT and does not therefore anticipate the opportunity this investment brings to attract new investment in buildings or redevelopment sites, nor the need to reconsider movement patterns downtown.

The *Downtown Station Area Plan* carries forward the core community-building aspects of the existing plan, while updating them to describe the positive role LRT can play in advancing the community's vision of a culturally vibrant and complete downtown community. It calls for the subsequent preparation of a *Lowertown Master Plan* in order to address in more detail the new private development and public realm opportunities triggered by LRT in Lowertown. Once the *Lowertown Master Plan* is adopted, the *Lowertown Small Area Plan* will be decertified.

Urban Village Vision (2005)

In March 2005, the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation created the *Urban Village Vision*. Though never formally adopted as City policy, the vision document contains many worthwhile directions relevant to the station area planning process, including:

- improved connections from Union Depot to the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, and between Lowertown and the river valley;
- enlivened frontages on Wall and Broadway streets through new active gallery uses; and
- exploring the long-term reuse of the Diamond Products site for residential or employment uses.

The *Downtown Station Area Plan* carries many of these core recommendations forward, including the proposed extension of Lowertown's flexible grid pattern east of Broadway, and the potential re-use of the northern portion of the former Diamond Products Building.

Report of the Diamond Products Task Force (2005)

The former Diamond Products site, located between the Lowertown neighborhood and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary, is of strategic importance given its scale as an anchor on the eastern edge of downtown. The *Report of the Diamond Products Task Force* describes the area's long-term potential for transit-supportive development, and the desire to reduce the barrier created by the existing site configuration through the introduction of a finer-grained network of blocks and streets enlivened with active uses on the ground floor. The *Downtown Station Area Plan* carries this ambition forward, and outlines parameters for redevelopment of the site so that it contributes positively to the historic fabric of Lowertown while achieving the objectives above.

1.5 Real Estate Market Considerations

While the introduction of LRT in downtown will not create new markets where they do not already exist, this significant investment has the potential to amplify and reposition real estate and market demand. In downtown, over a dozen key strategic redevelopment sites have been identified (Figure 1.7) for their potential to redevelop. The introduction of LRT will positively influence the form and potential of this reinvestment.

Building on the real estate and development analysis previously completed for the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, the station area planning process revisited and refined 20-30 year market forecast overviews for downtown Saint Paul (Figure 1.8) and found that:

- **There is potential for significant new housing, particularly new rental infill units.**
More modest amounts of office, retail and hotel uses are anticipated. For each use, LRT will help facilitate high-density development that does not require valuable, centrally-located land for the parking of automobiles.
- **It is anticipated that downtown Saint Paul could accommodate up to 2.3 million square feet of new office space.**
However, with or without LRT, downtown Saint Paul is not likely to see any new office building development over the next 20 years unless it can attract and secure a significant anchor tenant or corporate user to trigger the construction of

such a project. Speculative office development, as historically practiced, where financing was awarded and construction commenced once 50% - 75% of the proposed floor area was pre-leased or firmly committed, is not likely to re-occur in downtown Saint Paul in the foreseeable future.

- **The 4th and Cedar block holds good potential for a signature office development.**
Going forward, the underwriting of Central Business District office towers is likely to be much more constrained. Notwithstanding these market constraints, the introduction of LRT through the 4th and Cedar block creates a competitive advantage for this future redevelopment site. A targeted economic development campaign to promote the site as a high-profile national headquarters may assist in expediting investment here.
- **Housing and neighborhood development offers the greatest opportunity for new investment.**
Over the next 30 years, as many as 6,000 new rental and 1,200 new ownership units are forecast for downtown. In addition, there could be a market for up to 300 new hotel units. The expansion of housing options and continued strengthening of downtown neighborhoods, with the resultant increase in demand for local retail, services, and amenities, is downtown Saint Paul's greatest opportunity to expand investment in the city's core. Residential development in downtown Saint Paul should be successful at sites where

there is an interesting "view" of some landmark like the riverfront and river valley, State Capitol, Saint Paul Cathedral, Mears Park, and Rice Park.

- **Young people and empty nesters are the prime markets for urban living.**
Future demographic trends indicate that, with access to convenient transit, young single professionals, childless couples, and empty nester baby boomers will be attracted to vibrant, active downtown urban cores to live. Downtown Saint Paul, with its spectacular riverfront and soaring river bluffs, can capture this emerging residential market segment.
- **New residential uses will drive future retail potential.**
Approximately 100-150,000 square feet of new retail uses are projected over the next 30 years. As retailers have borne the brunt of the dramatic economic slowdown in the U.S., retail development in downtown is likely to be stagnant for the next five years. However, an increase in the number of people living downtown will continue to generate demand for neighborhood-based retail and services – a vital component to re-activating the street throughout evening hours and weekends.

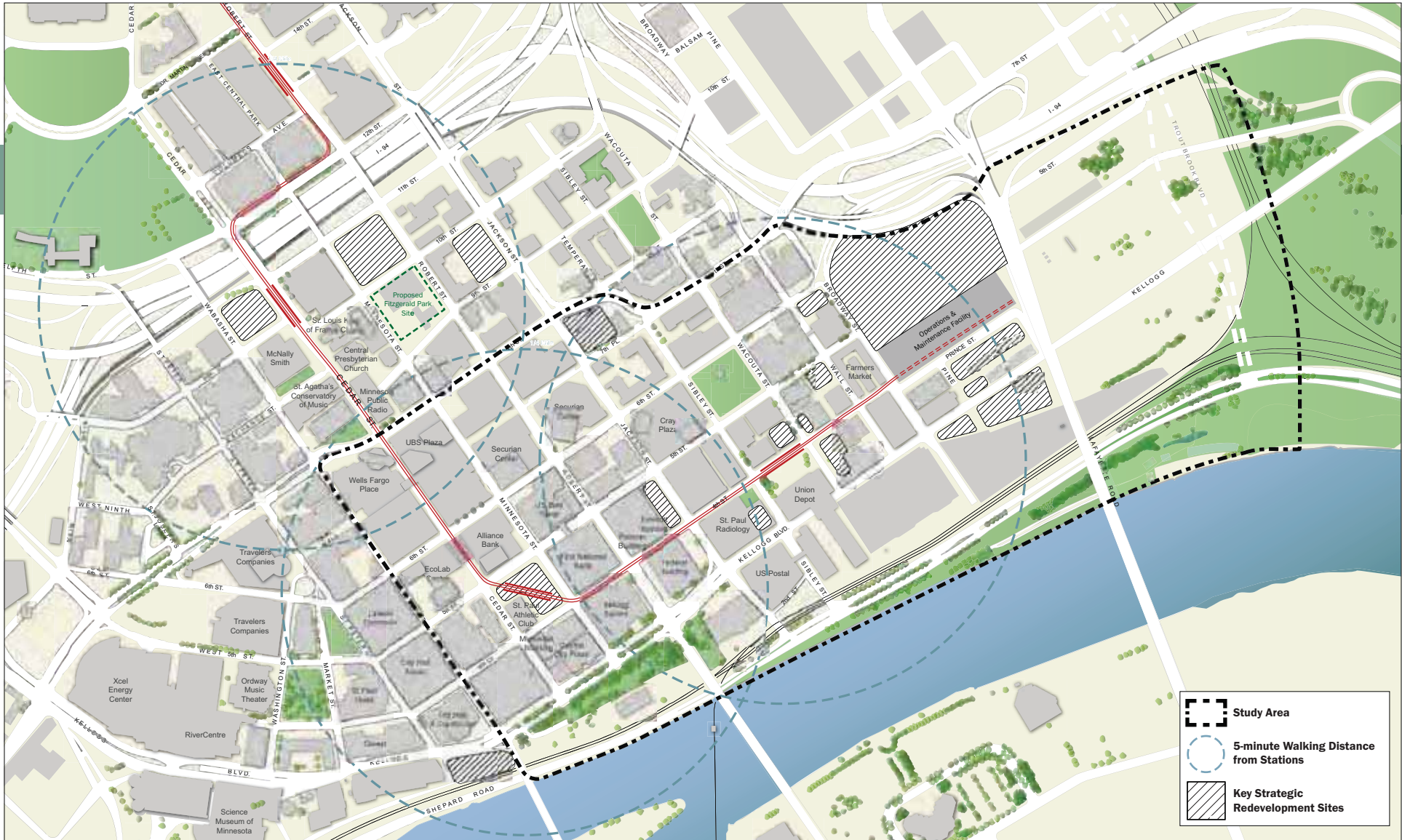


Figure 1.7 A number of vacant or underutilized sites within a 1/4 mile of the stations have the potential for new real estate development in close proximity to LRT.

Residential Potential Number of Units		Office Potential New Office Space (GFA)	Retail Potential New Retail Space (GFA)	Hotel Potential Number of New Rooms
Rental 5,000-6,000	Ownership 750-1,200	1,880,000 sq ft	100,000-150,000 sq ft	300

Figure 1.8 Estimated Long-Term Development Potential of the Downtown Station Areas.



LRT Downtown

2.0 LRT: Investing in the Future of the Downtown

The insertion of LRT into downtown Saint Paul is a remarkable opportunity to not only refresh the physical and economic foundations of downtown, but also to breathe new health and vitality into the heart of the city. If leveraged properly, it has the potential to re-position Saint Paul from a relatively quiet center to a lively, vibrant destination and desirable place to live, work, and visit.

LRT represents an opportunity to effect a paradigm shift in the way people move, see, experience, build, relax, and live in the core: a shift that makes downtown a neighborhood, a place to do business, and a destination of choice for a distinctly urbane and vibrant experience.

The following section builds on the *Central Corridor Development Strategy* to describe this paradigm shift (brought about, in part, by the introduction of LRT) and identifies a series of directions that will guide downtown policy decisions. The discussion is framed around four core themes:

- **Mobility:** the ability to move to, from, and within downtown Saint Paul by a variety of modes (as pedestrians, on bicycles, by transit, or by car);
- **Land Use:** the range and integration of uses, services, activities, and destinations throughout downtown that help create vitality;
- **Built Form:** the design and configuration of buildings within downtown's environment of narrow streets, blocks and open spaces in order to create a human-scaled and attractive built environment; and
- **Public Realm:** the interconnected network of streets and open spaces that tie downtown's neighborhoods together, and create the civic glue that connects people, places, and activities to one another.

2.1 Mobility

Downtown Saint Paul is a series of distinct and attractive places – neighborhoods, parks, cultural institutions, and employment centers – structured and connected by a strong pedestrian-scaled grid of streets and blocks.

While this grid has historically provided an excellent foundation for movement throughout downtown, decades of over-reliance on the automobile as the principal mode of transport have eroded the character and place-making quality of the street system. While areas of downtown have emerged as striking and distinct places for people, auto-dependence, coupled with the skyway system, has resulted in the emergence of a street network that puts too much emphasis on vehicular movement, and in many places neglects the basic needs of pedestrians and cyclists.

Enhanced mobility is particularly important in light of the introduction of LRT, which in and of itself will be a significant generator of additional foot, bicycle, and bus trips.

The following Directions describe the potential for LRT to positively impact and transform current movement patterns throughout downtown.

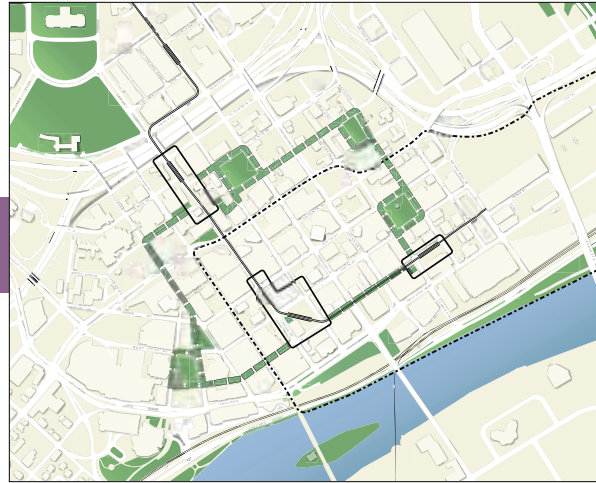


Figure 2.1 A ring of Neighborhood Park Streets will help to connect existing and emerging neighborhoods with LRT.

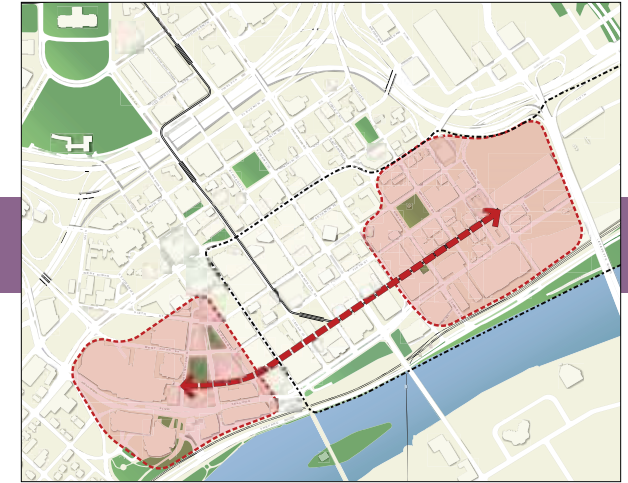


Figure 2.2 The 4th Street Artway will be an important pedestrian connection linking the Lowertown and Rice Park Entertainment Districts.

1 Expand Neighborhood Park Streets

Aimed at enhancing street-level pedestrian movement, Neighborhood Park Streets will connect the key public spaces anchoring the major neighborhoods in downtown. Building on the directions in the *Central Corridor Development Strategy* and *Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework*, the system has been extended to capture Rice Park to the west.

The three downtown LRT station areas are integrated as key new places within this ring of park streets. Comprised primarily of local streets, these streets should demonstrate a consistent streetscape palette of plantings, pedestrian amenities, and signage to rebalance streets in favor of pedestrians and cyclists. Expanding the park-like quality of these streets will offer people attractive routes to walk and encourage non-automobile movement throughout downtown.

2 Advance the 4th Street Artway

Fourth Street is evolving as an increasingly important downtown street. Already a spine linking two of downtown’s most important assets, the cultural district and the Lowertown community, 4th Street also links two planned LRT stations, many heritage buildings and public institutions. As such, it should continue to be promoted as a significant walk of arts, culture, and entertainment.

While the reconstruction of 4th Street will provide an important starting place for the re-imagining of the street, this initiative should be extended east and west of the LRT corridor to create a clear connection between Rice Park and the Farmers’ Market. Though narrow in places and constrained by existing areaways below grade, opportunities should be pursued where feasible to create a truly “green” street through planting and landscaping investments, including green walls, hanging baskets, and street trees.