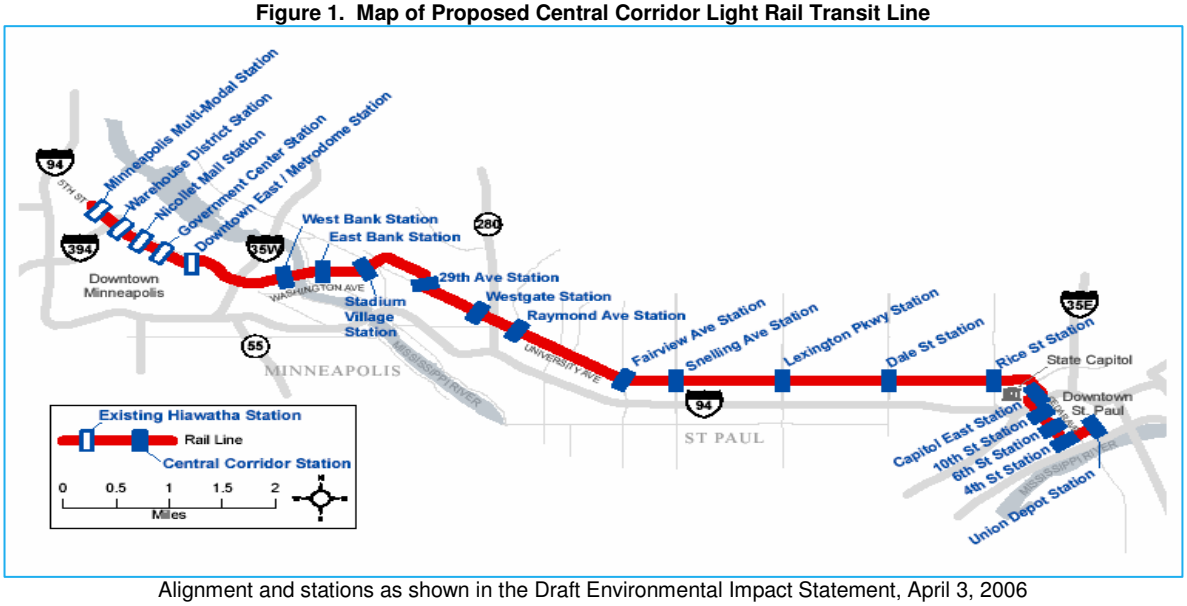
CENTRAL CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: A CHAPTER OF THE SAINT PAUL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

What is the Central Corridor Development Strategy?

Central Corridor represents a tremendous opportunity and challenge for Saint Paul. If the community takes full advantage of plans to construct LRT on University Avenue, linking downtown Saint Paul with the University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis, the result will be stronger businesses, more vibrant neighborhoods, and a more beautiful urban place.

Figure 1. Map of Proposed Central Corridor Light Rail Transit Line



Alignment and stations as shown in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, April 3, 2006

Process

In mid-2006 Mayor Coleman asked the Planning Commission to establish two community-based task forces to prepare the *Central Corridor Development Strategy*, a vision and set of strategies for how University Avenue, the Capitol area, and downtown should grow and change over the next 25-30 years in response to the planned investment in light rail transit (LRT).

The University Avenue and Capitol/Downtown Task Forces each included 18-20 people who are representative of area residents, businesses, and communities of color, as well as those with interest and expertise in areas such as affordable housing, real estate, urban design, finance, sustainability, and transit-oriented development. They met over a period of nine months, using focus group discussions, public open houses, presentations, and other community meetings to gather community input and develop the vision, strategies, initiatives, and other recommendations found in the *Development Strategy*.

Contents

The *Central Corridor Development Strategy* is divided into 4 sections:

- **Section 1: Where We Are Today** introduces the *Development Strategy* and answers a series of important questions on the study area, process and intent.

- **Section 2: What We Want** describes the community's Vision and Objectives for the future of the Central Corridor.

- **Section 3: What It Should Look Like** outlines and illustrates current and future building types, streetscapes and open spaces located along the Corridor.

- **Section 4: How We Get There** presents implementing policies, programs and strategies to guide future decision-making so that investment and growth in the Corridor are compatible with the Vision for the future of the Corridor as set out in Section 1.

Key concepts from each section are highlighted below.

Our Vision for the Future of the Corridor

The Central Corridor will build on its assets to become a place that has stronger businesses, more vibrant neighborhoods, and more beautiful urban places. Along University Avenue and in the downtown, the Corridor will invite residents, shoppers, employees and visitors to linger on safe, pedestrian-friendly, attractive, tree-lined boulevards; establish a home and sense of community in stable and diverse neighborhoods; and work and invest in an area that provides a range of employment and economic opportunities.

The vision is grounded in the **six principles** described below. These are the "Big Ideas" that public investment in the Central Corridor LRT should help achieve.

1. Reposition Saint Paul in the Region
2. Benefit and Strengthen the Diverse Communities Along the Corridor
3. Link and Foster Economic Activity
4. Improve People's Mobility Throughout Their Community
5. Improve the Image and Quality of Life Along the Corridor
6. Collaborate from Design to Operation

Each of the six principles describes a "Big Idea" for the Corridor as expressed by area residents, businesses and stakeholders. The *Central Corridor Development Strategy* also describes the many objectives – the goals and desired end results - that will help achieve each principle. Objectives describe the things the community wants to see happen or change over time. Each objective is further followed by a set of strategies, which represent individual actions, opportunities, investments and partnerships that will assist Saint Paul in realizing its vision for the Central Corridor over the next 30 years. Please refer to the full text of the *Development Strategy* for more information.

Figure 2. Photo of the Central Corridor University Avenue Task Force

Public Spaces and Places

Streets, parks and squares are the civic glue that we all share in cities. These are the places that become enriched with distinctive heritage and culture; they are the gathering zones for planned and serendipitous meetings; they become the front and side doors that frame development and make the transit experience expedient and enjoyable.

The *Development Strategy* contains a recommended Public Realm Framework that integrates five key components:

- LRT Zones
- Remarkable Streets
- Connecting to the Corridor
- A Central String of Parks
- Distinguishing Features and Places

Defining Areas of Change & Stability

LRT has the potential to result in many positive changes along the Corridor; identifying where change is likely and ways to manage this change are the primary aims of the *Development Strategy*. The Areas of Change and Stability diagram (pp. 37-38 in the document) outlines the area that will most likely be the focus of change as a result of LRT and areas where the existing characteristics – whether low-rise residential or employment – are intended to be protected from change.

Key Principles For All New Development:

Making Development "Fit"

- Design new development to provide a transition in scale and ensure it fits into its surroundings, improves existing street conditions, and integrates well with existing neighborhoods and communities.
- Achieve minimum ground level floor-to-ceiling heights of 13' along major streets such as the Avenue and at important intersections.
- Fill gaps in the street with new buildings or by grouping buildings to create walkable clusters of activity that will animate the public realm.

Transit-Supportive Land Uses & Densities

- Promote a mix of transit-supportive uses, such as medium-to-high density residential, small-format retail, restaurants and institutions.
- Provide a range of housing types and sizes that will cater to both new and existing members of the community.
- Animate the street by positioning entrances to individual units at grade and by locating active uses such as restaurants and retail on the ground floor.

Transit-Supportive Access, Circulation & Parking

- Locate parking so that it does not detract from the image of the area by placing it internal to the block, within parking ramps, inside buildings or below ground.
- Seek opportunities to consolidate parking, access and servicing.
- Seek to develop balanced and coordinated networks of movement that allow for a mix of pedestrian, bicycle, LRT, bus, and vehicular circulation.

A Green, Attractive & Connected Pedestrian Environment

- Design open spaces as a focus for new development and work towards improving pedestrian amenities along the Corridor, especially adjacent to stations.
- Extend existing streets, open spaces and open space linkages to strengthen connections with the surrounding community.

Six Development Types

The *Development Strategy* defines six development types illustrating ways that development could respond to the range of distinct site characteristics along the Avenue, through the Capitol Area and in downtown. Please refer to the full document for an elaboration on the unique set of characteristics, principles and design directions for each.

Type 1: Urban Villages
Type 2 - Market Intensification Sites
Type 3 - Larger Front & Back Sites
Type 4 - Half-Depth Infill Sites
Type 5 - Full-Depth Infill Sites
Type 6 - Urban Infill Blocks

In Downtown

As the line leaves University Avenue and turns south through the Capitol District into downtown, the nature of the Central Corridor LRT noticeably changes. No longer separated from pedestrians by several lanes of traffic, and running along much narrower rights-of-way, the "downtown leg" becomes primarily a transit and pedestrian corridor with limited vehicular movement along its route. LRT through downtown creates an opportunity to redefine several key streets within the city center, promote a greater balance between pedestrian and vehicular traffic, enhance transit connections, re-activate the street level, and pave the way for a number of new developments that together will help reposition downtown as a vibrant, contemporary urban center.

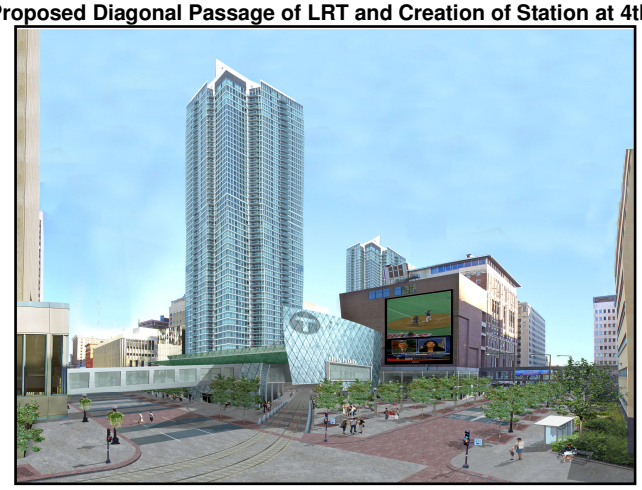
Key strategies in this section include:

- A Pedestrian-Friendly LRT Zone
- Park Streets - Extending the Pedestrian Network
- Improving Public Spaces along the LRT Corridor
- Connecting to the Entertainment District

Fourth and Cedar

The diagonal passage of LRT and the creation of a station across the Athletic Club Block at 4th and Cedar provide an opportunity to create a unique landmark development focused on a dynamic new public plaza in the heart of the city (see Figure 2). A development on this block could house important new amenities to serve the growing downtown residential population and act as major destination along the Corridor.

Figure 3. Proposed Diagonal Passage of LRT and Creation of Station at 4th and Cedar



Union Depot

LRT provides an important opportunity to reinstate Union Depot as a prominent gateway to the city and a multi-modal hub in the Twin Cities regional transport network. As both the beginning and terminus of LRT in Saint Paul, Union Depot and the areas around it will take on heightened significance in the future as not only the heart of the Lowertown Urban Village but as an important regional destination.

How We Get There

This section focuses on a new concept for the Central Corridor: the Transit Opportunity Zone. This multi-faceted, geographically-defined zone is intended to support and encourage opportunities for improvement and investment along the Corridor. The Transit Opportunity Zone (TOZ) is composed principally of two policy layers – an enabling layer that establishes a priority approach for a range of financial and policy incentives, planning efforts, infrastructure investments, economic development initiatives and capital improvements; and a regulatory layer that contains a set of transit-supportive planning and development directions.

Figure 4. Proposed LRT Station and Development at Dale and University

Implementation: 20 Community-Building Strategies

The many principles, ideas, concepts, investments and initiatives identified in this document will require partnerships on many fronts to realize their implementation and success. The implementation section contains 20 Community-Building Strategies to help these partnerships begin, including: a green & sustainable corridor with recommendations for streetscaping and green building design guidelines; an inclusive housing strategy with options and incentives for promoting affordable home ownership; a parking management strategy with suggestions for maximizing available parking while minimizing conflict with non-auto uses and activities; options for strengthening local businesses and promoting building ownership; ideas and agreements that ensure the local community benefits from LRT; techniques for mitigating disruption through the LRT construction period; and 15 others. Each should be used to help frame a dialogue around priorities, establish who is responsible for what, and identify future partnerships and collaborations.

Questions or More Information?

A complete copy of the *Development Strategy* may be viewed or downloaded from the City's website at www.stpaul.gov/centralcorridor. Under "Breaking News", click on the link to the Urban Strategies website and follow the directions. You may also request a copy of the document on a CD by contacting Donna Drummond at 651-266-6556 or donna.drummond@ci.stpaul.mn.us.