



## **2.0 PUBLIC AND AGENCY PARTICIPATION**

### **2.1 Introduction and Goals**

The public involvement process for the Rush Line Corridor Alternatives Analysis (AA) was critical to the successful development of a study to explore the potential for introducing rapid transit in the Corridor. The Rush Line Corridor Task Force, made up of elected officials from county and municipal governments along the Corridor, conducted the Rush Line Corridor AA to implement a rapid transit system based on regional planning efforts. The Rush Line Corridor Task Force focused on developing a rapid transit system that will effectively serve current and future population and employment centers in the Corridor.

The foundation of the public involvement effort was the contention that an educated and aware community, inspired and empowered to effect change, is an essential ingredient to the delivery of a successful transit plan for the Rush Line Corridor. The goals of the public involvement process for the Rush Line Corridor AA included the following:

- Provide the public with a foundation of knowledge about the planning process and the specific decisions that are to be answered in the process;
- Provide decision-makers with relevant input to their discussion and consideration;
- Demonstrate to the public that their concerns and priorities are being considered and build their ownership in the end product; and
- Encourage all decision-makers and stakeholders to listen and learn from one another.

### **2.2 Project Participants**

Project guidance was carried out by the Rush Line Corridor Task Force and Rush Line Study Team that met throughout the Study process. Meetings included discussion and review of interim project results and products. Project milestones included the development of Purpose and Need statements; Study Goals and Objectives; detailed definition of alternatives; ridership forecasts; and order-of-magnitude capital and operating and maintenance costs. Overall project management was provided by the Rush Line Corridor AA Project Manager, a technical staff member of the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority (RCRRA).

## 2.2.1 Rush Line Corridor Task Force

The Rush Line Corridor Task Force met bi-monthly to provide project oversight regarding Corridor and regional policy issues. Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt chaired the Task Force. Task Force members included elected representatives from county and municipal along the Corridor. Task Force members played key roles that included facilitation of group discussions, participating in stakeholder “listening sessions” and addressing the Rush Line Corridor in their daily roles as elected officials. Task Force members were the primary point of contact for their community’s constituents in the Study process.

## 2.2.2 Rush Line Corridor Study Team

The Rush Line Study Team served as the project’s technical committee. It met monthly and at key milestones throughout the project to provide technical guidance, discuss interim results and review draft products.

## 2.3 Public Participation Process

The purpose of the public participation process was to support decision-making efforts and encourage an open, collaborative approach regarding a balanced transportation system. The key was to actively involve the community to create enthusiasm and consensus for rapid transit within the project area. The Rush Line Corridor AA public participation process approach was to fulfill the following principles:

- Communicate with and involve local residents in refining the proposed alternatives.
- Communicate with and educate the public, neighborhoods, and agencies in the project area on the opportunities and impacts the proposed alternatives present for their community and/or area of interest.
- Involve local residents in the decision-making process, thereby creating a sense of public ownership of the project.
- Gain insight into the issues of greatest concern or interest to the public and municipalities of the Study Area and incorporate them into decision making process.
- Meet or exceed the requirements and intent of federal, state, and local public involvement policies in a manner that is consistent with the federal NEPA process.

The public participation process is detailed in the Public Involvement Plan included as **Appendix B** of this report.

### Task Force Representatives

Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt – Chair  
Anoka County Commissioner Rhonda Sivaraja  
Chisago County Commissioner Ben Montzka  
Pine County Commissioner Doug Carlson  
Washington County Commissioner Dennis Hegberg  
Centerville Mayor Mary Capra  
Columbus City Council Member Renae Fry  
Forest Lake City Council Member Susan Young  
Harris City Council Member Diane Miller  
Hinckley City Council Member Dave Hopkins  
Hugo City Council Member Tom Weidt  
Little Canada Mayor Bill Blesener  
Maplewood Council Member Will Rossbach  
North Branch City Council Member Theresa Furman  
Pine City Council Member Paul Janssen  
Rock Creek City Council Member Lee Raudabaugh  
Rush City Council Member Mick Louzek  
Sandstone City Council Member Leonard Bonander  
St. Paul City Council Member Dave Thune  
Stacy City Council Member John Daher  
White Bear Lake City Council Member Bryan Belisle  
White Bear Township Supervisor Bob Weisenburger  
Wyoming City Council Member Linda Nanko-Yeager

### Study Team Representatives

RCRRA – Mike Rogers  
Anoka County RRA – Kate Garwood  
Chisago County – Joe Triplett  
Pine County – Vacant  
Washington County RRA – Ann Pung-Terwedo  
City of North Branch – Julie Dresel  
Mn/DOT Metro District – Bob Vockrodt  
Mn/DOT Office of Transit – Gerry Weiss  
Metro Transit – Scott Thompson  
Metropolitan Council – Connie Kozlak

## 2.4 Outreach Techniques

Meaningful public input is not possible if constituents are uninformed about the project, or think it does not affect them. In the context of public outreach, the term ‘community’ is often not synonymous with cities or townships. Communities are best defined as people with common interests or interactions, sometimes along lines that include cultural background, racial or ethnic identity, language, recreational pursuits, and professional or advocacy interest. Each community and stakeholder group needed distinct attention in the engagement process. This attention took the form of communication that was most familiar, comfortable and convenient to these groups.

The Project Team assembled a list of stakeholders to whom outreach techniques were directed. **Table 2-1** lists the stakeholders identified by the Task Force.

Outreach techniques, therefore, were intended to solicit a range of opinions from Corridor stakeholders in a forum or through a technique guaranteed to provide the most accurate and comprehensive input. The techniques included:

- **Rush Line Corridor Task Force member activities:** Task Force members facilitated group discussions and addressed the Rush Line Corridor in their daily roles as elected officials.
- **Public meetings:** Two sets of open houses were held throughout the Corridor – one set in October 2008 and another in June 2009.
- **Powerpoint presentations:** Slide shows were used to communicate to large groups of people in public settings and convey information when posted on the project website.
- **Engaging stakeholder groups:** Study Team and Task Force members presented Study information to gathered stakeholders.
- **Newsletter and fact sheets:** The Rush Line Corridor AA produced these materials to keep people informed on the progress of the work.
- **Project website:** The website ([www.rushline.org](http://www.rushline.org)) allowed the public to send requests and questions via email, and to fill out comment forms online. All project materials, meeting notices and summaries were posted on the website.
- **Media/press releases:** Press releases to area media outlets announced public meetings and major project milestones.
- **E-mail and RCRRA listserv:** Regular updates on the Alternatives Analysis were sent to an e-mail distribution list as well as to subscribers of RCRRA’s GovDelivery listserv.
- **Databases:** RCRRA staff maintained databases which included data regarding general participants, mail and electronic distribution lists, and stakeholder lists.
- **Surveys:** Corridor residents were queried on the location of their home and work places and preference for particular transit alignments and station locations.

**Table 2-1: List of Stakeholders**

Group/Organization
Residents
Counties, Cities and Townships
Planning Commissions
Federal, State, and local officials
Metropolitan Council
Transportation agencies including Mn/DOT and the Federal Transit Administration
Public and private transportation operators (e.g. Metro Transit, Jefferson/Greyhound)
Railroad owners and operators
Chambers of Commerce and business owners
Educational institutions
Tribal members and government
Environmental advocacy groups
Recreational uses and advocacy groups (e.g. biking, hiking, snowmobiling, ATV, horseback riding)
Farm Bureau
Property owner and real estate agents
Civic organizations
Senior groups
Disability advocacy groups

## 2.5 Public Meetings

Comments received at the following public meetings informed the technical analyses undertaken in this AA. Specifically, evaluation criteria developed for the project included Public Sentiment as a key performance indicator for a particular alternative. Following is a summary of the materials presented at each open house as well as key findings garnered at these meetings.

### 2.5.1 October 2008 Public Open Houses

The open houses were held at the Maplewood Community Center and the North Branch Area Library within the Corridor to gather public opinions from a broad geographic area. The presentation content at each location was identical. The open houses were advertised in local newspapers, through the project listserv and on the internet. A press release announcing the set of open houses was also issued to area media outlets. At each venue, signs were placed outside to direct people to the meeting site. Members of the Rush Line Task Force, Study Team and the consulting team greeted people, explained the meeting format, and answered questions.

Through a Powerpoint presentation and display boards, Open House participants received an introduction to the Study and were informed on the progress of the Task Force in evaluating potential alignments and transit modes. First, the presentation offered information regarding the Study goals, structure and schedule. The introduction continued with the regional planning context for initiating a high capacity transit mode in the Corridor and possible alignment end points. The presentation also contained a primer on high capacity transit modes and the Task Force's criteria for evaluating their appropriateness within the Corridor. The presentation explained that the Task Force had already eliminated specific transit modes and retained several modes deemed appropriate for the Corridor.

Before and after the presentation, information stations, staffed by the Rush Line Study Team and consulting team members, were available to facilitate Open House participants learning about different aspects of the Study and the FTA project development process. The stations were as follows:

#### Station 1 – Welcome/Sign-in

Participants were welcomed and asked to put their name and other information on the sign-in sheets. The Study Team and consulting team distributed the Rush Line Newsletter and a Corridor Fact Sheet. Additionally, they were asked to complete the questionnaire.

#### Station 2 – Project Development Process

At this station, information was presented regarding the Federal Transit Administrations (FTA) Project Development Process. An overview of the schedule for the Rush Line Corridor Project and the project's goals and objectives were presented, as well as how the Rush Line Corridor fits into the larger Twin Cities Metropolitan regional planning context.

#### Station 3 – Transit Modes

Photographs of several transit modes were displayed, with a brief description of each mode and examples of cities where the system is in operation. More detailed information and examples were presented regarding the four modes the Rush Line Task Force has decided to pursue as possible modes for implementation in the Rush Line Corridor. The Task Force evaluated the modes based on capital cost, travel speed, stop spacing, and successful implementation in similar corridors. One display board contained an image of a sieve to graphically demonstrate the decision process that narrows a "universe of alternatives" to a few chosen alternatives for further analysis and evaluation.

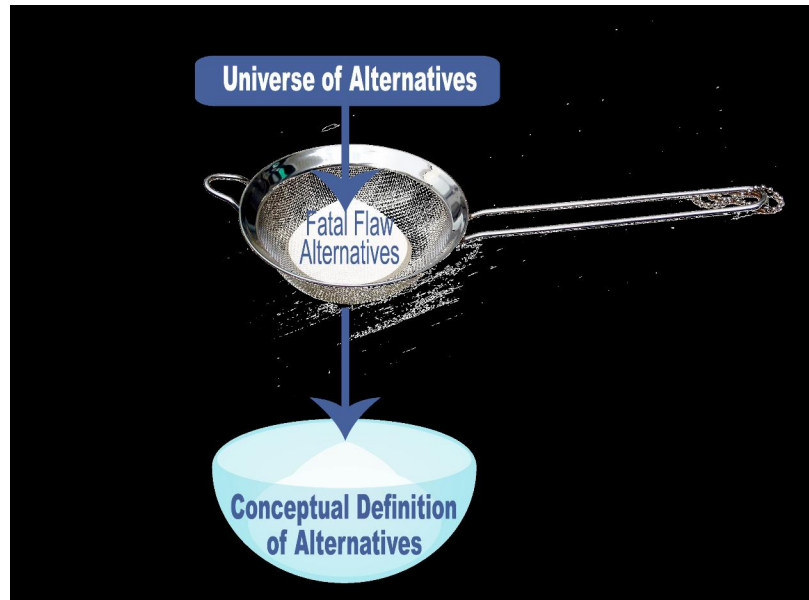
## Transit Modes Analyzed

- Conventional Bus
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
- Commuter Rail
- Light Rail Transit (LRT)

## Other Transit Modes Considered

- Heavy Rail
- Magnetic Levitation (Maglev)
- Modern Streetcar
- Personal Rapid Transit (PRT)
- Monorail
- Automated Guideway Transit (AGT)

**Figure 2-1 Filtering of Alternatives**



## Station 4 – Alignment Alternatives

Maps of the eight alignment alternatives, four BRT alignment alternatives, two commuter rail alignment alternatives, and two LRT alignment alternatives were displayed. The Rush Line Task Force selected the eight alignment alternatives with the best potential for implementing rapid transit in the Corridor. The criteria used for selecting the corridors included population, employment, population below poverty, population over the age of 65, consistency with community plans, availability of right-of-way and impacts to existing transportation infrastructure.

## Station 5 – Evaluation Criteria

The final station presented the next steps in evaluating the alternatives as well as the criteria that will be used to evaluate the alternatives. The alternatives will be evaluated based on Transportation and Mobility, Economic Opportunity and Investment, Communities and Environment, and Public Involvement.

## Open House Questionnaire and Results

As part of the Public Participation Plan, the FTA requires input from the public regarding their desires and needs for public transportation. A questionnaire was offered to acquire input from area citizens on their preferences for rapid transit in the Corridor. There were a total of 19 questionnaires completed, five of which were sent to RCRRRA via mail or e-mail following the Open Houses.

The first question on the questionnaire was "How much do you favor each of the following modes of transit? (Strongly Favor, Somewhat Favor, Somewhat Unfavor, or Strongly Unfavor)"

- Conventional Bus
- BRT
- Commuter Rail
- LRT

Questionnaire respondents viewed all of the transit modes positively. Weighting respondents' responses from 1-4, with four as Strongly Favor and one for Strongly Unfavorable, all of the alternatives were evaluated. There was a slight preference for bus transit over rail transit. The average views were 3.1 for Conventional Bus and BRT; 2.9 for Commuter Rail and LRT.

Respondents were asked which of the alignment alternatives they favored. The most popular alternative was BRT Alignment Alternative 1A, which utilizes the existing right-of-way (ROW) for Interstate 35E (I-35E) and I-35 from downtown St. Paul to Hinckley (**Figure 5-3**). It should be noted, however, that on several of the forms respondents wrote items such as "Must start with bus to build and know ridership." Or, "If a bus line could run from Pine City to downtown St. Paul until something is built – that would be great!" This seems to imply that some of the respondents may look at BRT/buses as temporary solution until the demand and money can be raised for rail transit.

**Table 2-2: Respondents preference for Alignment Alternatives**

<b>Alignment Alternative</b>	<b>Percent of Respondent who favored</b>
BRT Alignment Alternative 1A	57.9%
BRT Alignment Alternative 1B	5.3%
BRT Alignment Alternative 2A	0.0%
BRT Alignment Alternative 2B	0.0%
Commuter Rail Alignment Alternative 1A	21.1%
Commuter Rail Alignment Alternative 1B	0.0%
LRT Alignment Alternative 1A	5.3%
LRT Alignment Alternative 1B	10.5%

An interesting item is that the longer routes were the more popular routes. This, along with higher attendance at the North Branch open house which is further north, seems to indicate the strong desire for transit service from the communities in the northern part of the Corridor to the downtown areas.

The questionnaire also asked which five of the proposed station areas are most important to the respondent. The three most popular proposed stations were Forest Lake Transit Center, downtown St. Paul/Union Depot, and North Branch, as seen in **Table 2-3**. It is assumed that these stops were evaluated highly due to their proximity to one of the Open Houses and recent publicity regarding the recently-opened Forest Lake Transit Center Plans (January 2008) and the ongoing planning to convert the Union Depot into a multi-modal transit hub. It was interesting however, that three of the four closest station locations to the Maplewood Community Center did not receive any votes.

**Table 2-3: Proposed Stations Ranked by importance to Respondents**

Station	Station Rank
Forest Lake Transit Center (Forest Lake)	1
Downtown St. Paul/Union Depot	2
North Branch	3
Highway 96 RCRRA ROW/TH 61 (White Bear Lake)	4
Wyoming	4
Hinckley	4
Harris	7
Pine City	7
Highway 96 & I-35E (White Bear Lake)	7
E6th/7th Streets (St. Paul)	10
Beam Avenue & RCRRA ROW	10
County Road E RCRRA ROW/TH 61 (Vadnais Heights/Gem Lake)	10
Hugo	10
Stacy	10
Rush City	10
County Road E & I-35E (Vadnais Heights)	16
E7th Street/Metropolitan State University (St. Paul)	16
Maryland Avenue & I-35E (St. Paul)	16
Larpenteur Avenue & I-35E (St. Paul/Maplewood)	16
County Road C & I-35E (Little Canada)	20
Maryland Avenue & RCRRA ROW (St. Paul)	20
Frost Avenue & RCRRA ROW (Maplewood)	20
Highway 36 & RCRRA ROW	20
Ash Street & I-35E (White Bear Lake Twp/Lino Lakes)	20
C.S.A.H. 14 & I-35E (Lino Lakes)	20
Rock Creek	20

The final question on the questionnaire asked for general comments and concerns. None of the comments received at the Open Houses were negative in tone regarding the project progress or with the direction of the project. Several comments expressed impatience at the pace of the project: “Can’t build it soon enough;” and “Get it started!!!” Other comments were more specific about how the line should function, such as “Parking points need to be more near town centers (e.g. Forest Lake Transit Center is too far from town);” and “Prefer rail source to have no or low emissions (clean energy).”

However, those who mailed or e-mailed the questionnaire to the RCRRA following the open houses expressed strong concerns regarding the importance of preserving the existing multi-use trail in the RCRRA ROW. Some of these comments continued on discussing the need to preserve “...wild life, nature, and park systems and putting in commuter rail or LRT through our residential area, trails, and natural habitats.” Others expressed concerns over noise and safety of operating transit in the RCRRA ROW. The final comment was opposition to spending taxpayers’ money on rail transit. An important note is that current plans have not eliminated the possibility of retaining a bicycle trail in the Corridor.

A detailed description of the October 2008 Open House is included as **Appendix C** of this report.

### **2.5.2 June 2009 Public Open Houses**

As with the October 2008 Open Houses, the open houses were held at specific locations within the Corridor to gather public opinions from a broad geographic area. The second set of Open Houses were held at the North Branch Area Library, Hugo City Hall, and White Bear Lake City Hall. The

presentation content at each location was identical and the means to advertise the meetings were similar to the October open houses. At each Open House members of the Rush Line Task Force, Study Team and the consulting team greeted people, explained the meeting format, and answered questions. Each of the open houses featured five stations staffed by the Rush Line Study Team and the consulting team. The stations were welcome/sign-in, project development process, transit modes, alignment alternatives and results of analysis.

Through a Powerpoint presentation and display boards, Open House participants received information about the Study. The presentation contained the same introductory information as the October 2008 Public Open House presentation; then continued with new information regarding the progress of the Task Force in evaluating potential alignments and transit modes. Open House participants learned about the evaluation criteria and were offered a summary of evaluation for each of the nine transit alternatives,<sup>1</sup> identifying the BRT alignment on I-35/35E to Columbus/Forest Lake and the LRT alignment on RCRRA ROW to White Bear Lake as receiving the highest scores. The presentation concluded with a series of recommendations for implementing transit in the Corridor and identified potential “next steps.”

Each of the open houses featured four information stations staffed by the Rush Line Study Team and consulting team. The stations were as follows:

#### Station 1 – Welcome/Sign-in

Participants were welcomed and asked to put their name and other information on the sign-in sheets. The Study Team and consulting team distributed the Rush Line Corridor Fact Sheet, Rush Line Corridor Implementation Program, Alternatives Analysis Results Summary Handout, and a Rush Line Commuter Coach Fact Sheet. Additionally, they were asked to complete the questionnaire.

#### Station 2 – Project Development Process

At this station, information was presented regarding the Federal Transit Administrations (FTA) Project Development Process. An overview of the schedule for the Rush Line Corridor Project and the project’s goals and objectives were presented, as well as how the Rush Line Corridor fits into the larger Twin Cities Metropolitan regional planning context.

#### Station 3 – Transit Modes

Photographs of the four transit modes the Rush Line Task Force has decided to pursue as possible modes for implementation in the Rush Line Corridor were displayed, with a brief description of each mode and examples of cities where the system is in operation was presented. A table with basic information regarding modes that were considered but previously removed from consideration due to infeasibility to meet the Corridor’s needs was also presented. The Task Force evaluated the modes based on capital cost, travel speed, stop spacing, and successful implementation in similar corridors.

#### Transit Modes Analyzed

<sup>1</sup> In the interim between the October 2008 Public Open House and the June 2009 Open, an additional LRT sub-option was added (Modified 1-B) to take advantage of the ability to interline with Central Corridor tracks in downtown St. Paul.

**Figure 2-2 Picture from Public Open House in White Bear Lake**



- Conventional Bus
- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)
- Commuter Rail
- Light Rail Transit (LRT)

#### Other Transit Modes Considered

- Heavy Rail
- Magnetic Levitation (Maglev)
- Modern Streetcar
- Personal Rapid Transit (PRT)
- Monorail
- Automated Guideway Transit (AGT)

#### Station 4 – Alignment Alternatives

Station 4 presented three with maps of the nine build alternatives; four BRT alternatives, two commuter rail alternatives, and three LRT alternatives. Included on the maps was the station-by-station 2030 forecasted ridership, operating cost, and capital cost.

#### Station 5 – Results of Analysis

At the final station presented a matrix used to evaluate the No-Build Alternative, Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative, and the nine Build Alternatives. The evaluation matrix compared the nine alternatives based on the following criteria:

- Length of Alignment (miles)
- Number of Stations
- Transportation and Mobility
  - 2030 Average weekday ridership (roundtrips)
  - 2030 New Corridor Riders vs. No-Build
  - Capital Cost (2008 dollars)
  - Cost per new Corridor Rider vs. No-Build
- Economic Opportunity and Investment
  - Population near Stations
  - Employment near Stations
  - Transit-Oriented Development at Stations
  - Economic Development Potential at Stations
- Communities and Environment
  - Transit-Dependent Population within One-Half Mile of Station
  - Potentially Affect Households within 100 feet of Alignment

- Potentially Affected Natural Environment within 100 feet of Stations
  - Change in Vehicle Miles Traveled
  - Change in Carbon Emissions
  - Connections to Non-Motorized Transportation
  - Right-of-Way Restrictions
- Public Sentiment

#### Public Sentiment Expressed at the Open House

Public sentiment was mixed with regards to the proposed alternatives and the progress of the project. Several people spoke up in support of rapid transit, both for implementation in this Corridor and throughout the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. Those who attended the Open House in North Branch seemed to have a preference for BRT/bus service. This was most likely due to the comparably high capital and operating costs and relatively low ridership associated with the Commuter Rail alternatives and that the Light Rail alternatives did not make it as far north as North Branch, approximately 40 miles from downtown St. Paul. The BRT alternative which received the most positive feedback was 1B which traveled through North Branch to Hinckley.

Other individuals at the North Branch and White Bear Lake Open Houses and e-mailed comments expressed support of LRT, in particular of modified LRT Alternative 1B, which included sharing Central Corridor LRT tracks through downtown St. Paul.

However, several residents – at the Hugo and White Bear Lake Open Houses and through e-mails – whose properties abut the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority (RCRRA) right-of-way expressed concern regarding the impacts that LRT might have on property values, safety, proximity to Weaver Elementary School, and loss of the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, which was built as an interim use along the RCRRA right-of-way. Many of these people received a postcard in the mail regarding the Open House. This postcard stated that a decision to replace the Bruce Vento Regional Trail with a Light Rail Transit was being made in July 2009. Rush Line Task Force members, project staff and consultants advised these individuals that a decision whether or not to place LRT along the RCRRA right-of-way and the selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative would be made later and would at least entail the conduct of an Advanced Alternatives Analysis. An Advanced Alternatives Analysis would likely take 18 months to complete and the funding for such analysis has not yet been obtained. In addition, the public was reassured that if the Locally Preferred Alternative is LRT along the RCRRA right-of-way, the existing multi-use trail would remain, although it would likely be moved within the RCRRA right-of-way to also accommodate LRT. Some of these individuals expressed support for BRT on I-35/35E, while others seemed to oppose any form of rapid transit being built in the Rush Line Corridor.

A common theme mentioned by several people, both those for and against implementation of rapid transit in the Corridor, was relief/happiness over the Rush Line Corridor Task Force's commitment to preserving a multi-use trail along the RCRRA right-of-way. A detailed description of the June 2009 Open House is included as **Appendix D** of this report.