

EXAMINING MINNESOTA'S TRANSIT PRIORITIES

FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

EXAMINING MINNESOTA'S NEED FOR RELIABLE, EFFICIENT, AND
AFFORDABLE TRANSIT OPTIONS

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TUESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
Minneapolis, MN.

The Subcommittee met at 10:00 a.m., at the Fred T. Heywood Office Building and Garage, 560 North Sixth Avenue, Minneapolis, MN, Hon. Tina Smith, Chair of the Subcommittee, presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIR TINA SMITH

Chair SMITH. Good morning. The Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development will come to order.

I am delighted to convene this Subcommittee in my hometown of Minneapolis and in the great State of Minnesota. This will be the first field hearing of this Subcommittee in more than 7 years, and I believe it is the first time that Minnesota has hosted a Field Committee ever of this Subcommittee, or any Committee of the Banking Housing Committee. So I cannot imagine a better place to have that than here in Minnesota.

And I also would like to thank the Metropolitan Council for the gavel because it turns out this is supposed to be an official Banking Housing Committee gavel. However, the gavel was confiscated by TSA on the way to Minnesota, so I'm glad to have this. Thank you so much, Chair Zelle, for use of your gavel, and I promise to return it when—I know, you need this gavel.

When I joined the Senate 3 years ago, I pledged to Minnesotans that I would work for you and give you a voice in Washington and put Washington to work for all of us. And in that spirit, it is terrific to welcome FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez to this hearing to discuss the transit priorities of our region.

Administrator Fernandez and I had an opportunity to meet virtually at first and then in person this year before her confirmation hearing before our Committee, and during our meeting I was deeply impressed by her command of transit policy issues as well as her deep operating experience.

She gets the policy, but she also understands what it's like to do implementation at the local level, and that is why she is such a strong nomination for the Biden administration for this crucially important role.

I immediately asked her to join me in Minnesota for a field hearing, and she agreed, pending her confirmation, which I'm delighted

to say has occurred. And now that she is confirmed by the Senate, I'm just so happy that she is here with us today.

Minnesotans, like all Americans, need reliable, efficient, affordable options for getting around. This is true whether you live in big cities, the suburbs, whether you live in regional centers like Rochester or Duluth or Moorhead, or whether you live in small towns and rural places. From Dial-a-Ride services in small towns to intercity bus service connecting rural and urban areas to light rail, bus rapid transit and bus service, folks rely on these modes of transportation every single day, and transit makes life work for countless Minnesotans.

Transit options are essential for people to get to work or school or to the doctor and to buy groceries or to fill a prescription. Transit connects people to jobs and opportunity. Transit is the engine that drives regional economies.

As Chair of this Subcommittee, I have three priorities when it comes to transit, priorities I've learned from all of you here in Minnesota.

The first is that transit needs to reach all Minnesota. It needs to work in big cities like Minneapolis and in small towns and rural places like the Arrowhead. This means we need to be flexible about mode, from light rail and bus rapid transit to fixed-route bus lines, and in some cases, Dial-a-Ride services.

Rural transit has been an area of strong bipartisan cooperation in our Subcommittee since I became a chair of the Subcommittee at the beginning of this year. And I'm grateful to my Ranking Member, Senator Mike Rounds, from South Dakota, who has been a terrific colleague.

Two months ago Senator Rounds and I partnered on a Subcommittee hearing focused specifically on transit needs of rural communities and in tribal regions, and with Brandon Nurmi from the Arrowhead Transit Organization in northeastern Minnesota, he was one of our witnesses, which I was grateful for. Senator Rounds and I are working together right now on investments in the Rural Transit Act to support transit systems in small towns and rural areas.

Second, I am a strong advocate for Minnesota transit projects and Minnesota transit needs. I push to make sure that the bipartisan infrastructure bill includes more money for capital investment grants, the source of Federal funding to build out new light rail and new bus rapid transit funding in Minnesota. The bipartisan infrastructure bill increases annual funding for capital investment grants by \$700 million, bringing the total to \$3 billion a year, and this new money will help projects like the Orange Line Extension get off the ground.

I've also been pushing for the Public Transit Capital Investment Relief Act to become law, which would provide relief for grant recipients who have experienced construction delays as a result of COVID-19, which has been a challenge, for example, for Southwest LRT.

Third, we must see and understand the connection between transit and equity and reflect this understanding in our actions. Minnesotans of color are over two times more likely to rely on transit than other Minnesotans, and because they also live with deep in-

equity, inequality, transit is especially important for connecting Black and Brown and indigenous communities and all communities of color to home, to work, to health care, to child care, to groceries, to parks and to recreation. We have an opportunity and an obligation to use transit as a tool for addressing the systemic inequities in our society, inequities that are especially pronounced in this State that I love so dearly.

So we started planning for this hearing several months ago, but as it happens, the timing couldn't be better. Just 2 weeks ago the United States Senate passed an historic bipartisan infrastructure investment bill. This bipartisan bill which passed the Senate with 69 votes, something that does not happen a lot in the United States Senate, includes the largest investment in transit programs that we have seen in a generation. For Minnesota, this will mean at least 856 million in funding for transit as well as urgently needed resources to repair roads and bridges, ports and airports, and inland waterways. And it also includes support for high-speed and affordable broadband internet access, which is so important.

The bipartisan infrastructure bill includes important updates to transit policies also, which I fought for, including measures to reduce violence against bus drivers, to expand electric transit vehicles, and to support transit-oriented development practices.

This new funding could make a huge difference for projects like the Metro B Line, the Metro E Line, and the Orange Line Extension, help those projects get off the ground. And I'm very hopeful and optimistic that the House will soon pass this key measure and that it will be signed by the President into law.

Before I introduce our witnesses, I would like to extend again a thank you to Ranking Member Rounds, who was unable to be with us here but has been, as I said, a great partner in leading this Subcommittee, and I appreciate his willingness to let this Subcommittee hearing happen here in Minneapolis even though he can't be with us.

I'd also like to enter into the record several statements that I received from local stakeholders, including the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005 and New Flyer.

And I also understand that Minnesota Senator Scott Dibble and Minnesota Representative Frank Hornstein, who have joined us this morning, will be submitting statements for the record also, and I'm glad they'll be joining us for lunch later today. Without objection, so ordered.

With that, I am now very excited to introduce our witnesses. I will introduce all of you at once and then recognize you in turn for your opening statements.

When you're recognized, you will have 5 minutes or so for your opening statement. I'm advised that it is fitting with the Metro Transit rule that you can remove your mask if you're comfortable for the speaking part of your testimony.

Your entire written statement will be made part of the record. Please monitor your time, which will be shown on a clock in front of you. When you are recognized, the light in front of you will turn green. I will turn—and it will turn yellow when you have 1 minute remaining and then turn red when your time is up. When the first

panel is finished, we will take a very brief break while we set up for Administrator Fernandez. Thank you.

So our first panel will include Margaret Anderson Keller—we’ve only known each other for 40 years; I’m so excited—Margaret Anderson Kelliher, who is the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation, a role she has held since 2019; Charlie Zelle, who is chair of the Met Council and who previously served as Governor Dayton’s Transportation commissioner; Irene Fernando, who is Hennepin County Commissioner, also is chair of the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority; Ms. Alison Zelms, who is the city administrator of Rochester, and in that role she leads Rochester Public Transit; Grace Waltz, who is the vice president of public policy at the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce; and Cassandra Johnson, who is a regular transit rider and is a resident of Brooklyn Park and has been riding transit in the metro area for many years.

Thank you to all of you for agreeing to testify, and I look forward to hearing from each of you. And the testimony can begin with Commissioner Kelliher.

STATEMENT OF MARGARET ANDERSON KELLIHER, COMMISSIONER, MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Ms. ANDERSON KELLIHER. Good morning, Chair Smith, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you, and thank you for the FTA administrator also being present today and all the other honorable presenters today. It’s an honor to share this with you.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify about mass transit and particularly policies in Minnesota affecting rural Minnesotans, although I will make some other comments as well.

Again, I’m Margaret Anderson Kelliher. I am the Commissioner of Transportation for the State of Minnesota.

MnDOT’s Office of Transit and Active Transportation works with more than 40 Greater Minnesota transit systems and five tribal governments. Our program for transit alone is \$150 million.

Our mission is to provide our partners and communities with leadership, tools, and resources that support access to high-quality transit options. We do this to enable people to live independently and to be engaged and connected to their communities.

We know that transit plays an important part in helping provide an equitable and sustainable transportation system across the State. While Minnesota consistently ranks as a top place to live and work, this is not true for everyone. And these inequalities threaten our long-term competitiveness as a State.

Our Government needs to focus on preparing for the next generation of Minnesotans to work and to lead in a rapidly changing world. This means we need a Government centered around our children, their families, and that Minnesota can be the best place for every child to grow up.

I want to talk a little bit about the benefits of transit and the impact of the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act.

In its current form, and hopefully its final form, this bill will represent a 63 percent increase in funding for transportation. For the Federal formula programs that we depend on for Greater Minnesota, we estimate up to a 30 percent increase in funding levels

within the first year. It will allow us, with our partners, to expand transportation access, more rapidly modernize the fleets and the facilities, and expand transit's role in advancing transportation equity objectives and addressing climate change. The cost-benefit ratio for investment in transit is estimated to be, in dollars, 2.1 to \$1 for rural transit and 2.6 to \$1 for small urban transit, a good return on investment. This is based on a study compiled by NDSU's Upper Greater Plains Transit Institute in 2018.

There's also benefits to the climate. The transportation sector, as you know, is the leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions today in our country. Public transportation is critical to be able to have a strategy to reduce those emissions. Public transportation produces significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions per mile traveled than private vehicles. And you will hear this Commissioner of Transportation often say, we need our partners at the local level to be doing more on transit. We need a better transit system.

We're beginning to see the greening of the transit fleet with battery electric buses operated in Duluth and the Twin Cities and across the metro, also coming soon in Rochester as well.

Rural transit agencies will begin to see deployment of battery electric buses soon.

The City of Morris and Arrowhead Transit in northeastern Minnesota have been awarded clean transportation grants by the State of Minnesota to be able to purchase electric vehicles and support infrastructure in the next year. We're working with our partners at the Met Council and other transit providers to reduce the vehicle miles traveled.

Rural transit cost share is one of the biggest barriers that local communities face, so I want to thank you for this Rounds-Smith Act, and that it would really benefit those communities who tell us that the biggest barrier to implementing a better transit system is the cost share. Impoverished communities, communities with low tax base, the local match requirement can be a significant barrier.

Finally, I just want to speak briefly about COVID-19 and the effect on transit.

We know that transit ridership fell incredibly across the State, not only in the metro area, but also in local communities. Those local communities and their transit operators stepped up. They were able to provide local food shelf delivery, local door-to-door food delivery for people. They were able to give critical rides to people who needed health care. It is so important that we were able to work with them in a flexible way in this pandemic to be able to deliver those services.

We prioritized with our transit providers being able to keep transit operations working as those farebox revenues fell. We do see that with the help of the CARES Act, as well as the CRRSAA funds and the American Rescue Plan, that the local share of operating budgets were really bolstered by those funds. So I want to thank you for that, Senator Smith. That was critical to being able to continue to deliver transit services in rural Minnesota.

We are interested in continuing to work with tribal governments, and we are actually working on some innovative ideas to be able to deliver those Federal funds to tribal governments in new ways.

Finally, we are striving to bring the digital age to transit in rural Minnesota as well using a Mobility-as-a-Service platform and being able to work with our partners to deploy that.

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee, and Honored Guests, thank you for allowing me to speak today, and I'd be happy to answer your questions.

Chair SMITH. Thank you. Chair Zelle.

STATEMENT OF CHARLIE ZELLE, CHAIR OF METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Mr. ZELLE. Thank you, Chair Smith. And on behalf of Met Transit, welcome to our building, and I also want to welcome Administrator Fernandez and other distinguished guests to have this hearing here.

The Metropolitan Council is the policymaking body, planning agency, and provider of essential services for the entire seven-county area. We also act as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the region, and we plan for and operate transit and paratransit. Metro Transit is a division of Metropolitan Council, and it's the largest transit provider in the State.

You know, like transit across the country, Metro Transit's ridership was significantly affected during the pandemic. You know, we had a deep drop in ridership, but that doesn't tell the whole story. Even just recently, we're operating and carrying as many as 100,000 rides on a weekday. It shows how essential this service is to our economy and to our metro area.

I want to really thank Senator Smith and our Federal delegation for the appropriating of Federal COVID relief dollars which accounted for, with the three different acts, as much as \$725 million for this region.

I also want to thank the FTA for helping administer and delivering those funds. Without it we would not be able to have our transit on the streets, and providing 3,000 Metro Transit jobs currently employed. So we passed out a map, and this shows our vision. This map represents a 2030 network of light rail and bus rapid transit. It is really a tremendous growth, which has been planned for 4 years and is really going to be implemented in the next, you know, 9 years. With the help of the Federal partners, we have made significant progress.

The Senator mentioned the Orange Line, the bus rapid transit corridor, is completing construction, and we anticipate having a ribbon-cutting later this year. The line runs along 35W. It received \$74 million in Small Starts grant in 2019.

Continuing clockwise, the Green Line Extension, or as we know it, the Southwest Light Rail, is under construction and 50 percent complete. I could go on and on. It is the largest infrastructure project ever in the State of Minnesota and it will have significant impact.

Just a note, we have had, through June of this year, over \$155 million for Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and professional services. So our commitment to equity is throughout in every one of our lines.

The Blue Line Extension light rail project is undergoing alignment review. We are exploring new ways to connect with the north

side of Minneapolis, near where we are now, and the northern communities, so we are able to appropriately connect with those communities and neighborhoods that have been for so long marginalized and forgotten. I know my compatriot, Commissioner Fernando, will discuss this in greater length, but we are doing a new kind of deep engagement with the community to ensure we get it right.

Moving to the right side of the map, the Purple Line is a dedicated guideway BRT project. We anticipate an environmental decision from FTA in the next 2 months, and the Council will seek entry into the New Starts Project Development this fall.

The Gold Line project is a dedicated guideway BRT corridor running east from St. Paul, and we are so pleased that the President's 2022 budget recommendation included \$100 million for this project. Design work is completed, and the FTA will conduct a review of the project's readiness for a Full Funding Grant as early as next week. So we're eager to move toward a Full Funding Grant Agreement in the next year and start construction as soon as next summer.

The Riverview project is beginning environmental analysis as a rail corridor and that will advance, connecting St. Paul with the airport and the Mall of America.

So connecting all of these lines, and you'll see them with the letters, is our arterial bus rapid transit. Over half of our bus system rides are in corridors which we plan to transition toward this enhanced bus system. We have two operating arterial BRT lines in place, the A Line and the C Line. The D Line is under construction, and the B and the E Lines are fully funded and moving toward construction. So this map is not a dream. It is real, it's funded, and it's happening.

When our full 2040 network is constructed, LRT and BRT services will connect 28 percent of the region's residents, 44 percent of all jobs in the region. This network will connect 46 percent of the region's BIPOC residents and 60 percent of the region's renter households.

Transit makes a difference for helping solve the issues of disparities we suffer from in this metro area.

So we expand on that work, we're taking intentional steps to increase the diversity of contractors and working with both of our partners and our own programs to foster entrepreneurship for people of color and women. We support on-the-job training. We are working through a Mentoring Protege program and to help develop better BIPOC business as well.

So looking ahead with that wonderful infrastructure bill, I have to mention that we have made significant investments in battery electric bus infrastructure with the help of FTA's Low and No Emissions Program grants, we've had some experience, and we are committed to a zero emissions future. We think this will make a difference.

So in closing, I want to take the opportunity to thank you, Senator Smith, and our entire Federal delegation for the partnership you've given and shown us. Without it, our success today and, more importantly, this future, would not be possible. Thank you so much.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much, Chair Zelle.

Now I'm excited to hear from Commissioner Fernando.

**STATEMENT OF IRENE FERNANDO, COMMISSIONER,
HENNEPIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

Ms. FERNANDO. Thank you, Chair Smith, Ranking Member Rounds, Members of the Committee, and Administrator Fernandez.

I extend my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to speak and for all the work you do.

My name is Irene Fernando, Hennepin County Commissioner and Chair of our Regional Railroad Authority. And as a commissioner, I am dedicated to advancing equity by advocating for those who are marginalized or structurally disenfranchised.

I am proud to represent District 2, which includes Golden Valley, Medicine Lake, Minneapolis, Plymouth, and St. Anthony Village. I am in my first term in office, I am the youngest woman to serve on Hennepin's board, and alongside Commissioner Angela Conley, we are the first and only commissioners of color in Hennepin's 169-year history.

Today I'm excited to talk about a project that will make an incredible difference locally, with potential benefits across the country.

The Blue Line Extension, which has been in the works for over 30 years, is a 13-mile light rail project that will further our region's transit vision and will affordably connect students to education, workers to jobs, patients to health care, and families to resources.

We're deeply committed to the Blue Line Extension because it's more than a project to advance. It's a commitment to the residents and communities along the corridor, for ongoing engagement and economic investment for years and decades to come.

To visualize this need, I have two maps here and several more in your materials. The first map to my right looks at concentrations of People of Color & Transit Commuters. As you can see, the proposed Blue Line Extension serves communities who are relying on transit as well as the most racially diverse communities in Hennepin. The second map to my left looks at Home Value and Adult High School Degrees. This corridor shows lower home values and lower degree attainment for adults 25 plus. We know that property valuation connects to disinvestment, and of course we know there's a strong relationship between education and income.

The Blue Line Extension will change the trajectory of what's possible for so many of my neighbors today and for generations to come. It will ignite much needed and long overdue economic development for small businesses, while building wealth for working families.

For example, I live in North Minneapolis, which is 16 percent of the city's population and about 70,000 residents, and if I wanted to host you all tonight for a sit-down dinner, I couldn't. There aren't places for people to celebrate life milestones, nor spots for my neighborhood kids to get their first jobs. It seems inconceivable to have this many people in an area without restaurant choices, access to jobs, or spaces to celebrate.

After a century of disinvestment, racial covenants, and redlining, we have a duty to ensure that current residents, small businesses,

and cultural institutions are both engaged in and able to benefit from the increased development in their neighborhoods.

The communities of this corridor have suffered disproportionately over the past year due to the pandemic, the resulting job and housing disruptions, and historic harms that must be repaired.

This is why Hennepin and Met Council are proud to establish an Anti-Displacement Workgroup that centers community voices and convenes diverse partners and stakeholders, to develop robust anti-displacement measures that can counter the unintended harm from large-scale infrastructure projects, with specific goals to reduce racial disparities and to create more equitable economic strategies.

Our teams work deliberately every day to ensure the Blue Line Extension benefits corridor residents and minimizes physical, economic, and cultural displacement.

Our anti-displacement goals closely align with the Biden-Harris administration's Justice40 Initiative, which commits 40 percent of Federal climate investment to benefit disadvantaged communities. Transit is a climate investment, and to benefit disadvantaged communities, intentional focus on anti-displacement is required.

We hope the Committee's goals align and look forward to the possibility of partnering. We can achieve transformational benefits for our communities with Federal support, and I am confident that this work has the opportunity to be scaled to other jurisdictions due to Hennepin's size, experiences, assets, and shortcomings.

In partnership, we can ask questions and create replicable frameworks to center residents who have been historically marginalized, to meaningfully incorporate climate change, and to address quantifiable patterns of disinvestment through affordable housing, growing local businesses, and access to jobs.

Thank you again for the time today, and I look forward to hearing your questions or reactions to these ideas. And thank you, Chair Smith.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much, Commissioner Fernando.

Welcome to Alison Zelms, who is the City Administrator from the City of Rochester.

STATEMENT OF ALISON ZELMS, CITY ADMINISTRATOR, CITY OF ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

Ms. ZELMS. Thank you. Madam Chair, Members of the Subcommittee, and those other fellow people testifying here today, thank you for everything you've shared. I share many of your sentiments.

I'm Alison Zelms, City Administrator for the City of Rochester, Minnesota. And for the record, we are located just about an hour south of the metro area. We represent approximately 119,000 residents and typically over 3 million visitors each year receiving world-renowned medical care at the Mayo Clinic.

We operate 32 fixed routes and complimentary paratransit service for persons with disabilities 365 days a year over a 28-square mile coverage area in Rochester.

Like many others, I'd like to begin by expressing gratitude for recent congressional actions that really helped us keep moving. Namely, the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan Act have

been critically important sources of emergency transit funding for us.

Ridership on Rochester public transit regular routes fell 90 percent in the early days of the pandemic and is still 65 percent below the 2019 levels. Federal emergency funding allowed us to keep our current bus routes running and to implement extensive safety measures to keep our operators and patrons safe.

Federal CARES capital funding allowed us to purchase 10 replacement buses without depleting local reserves further than they already were. And without the CARES and American Rescue Plan Act, we would not have been able to safely operate essential transit for the many essential workers that we serve and who rely on us in Rochester. In fact, our bus system actually—on the hottest days of the year actually serves as a cool place to be for many of our most vulnerable residents who don't have shelter, and we've seen that this summer.

So we do appreciate the consideration as well of the Congress and the President for U.S. Department of Transportation 2022 budget funding that currently includes \$56.1 million for Rochester's Bus Rapid Transit project.

Rochester's bus rapid transit project is locally now known as The Link, and it's a transformational public transportation project currently in the design phase and has applied for FTA Capital Investment Grants Small Starts program funds.

The Link is a critical 2.6 mile transit project that will connect downtown Rochester, the Mayo Civic Center, Mayo Clinic campuses, and the Rochester Olmsted County Government Center. This corridor is one of our most heavily traveled, carrying more than 21,800 vehicles and 13,000 transit riders every day.

It will provide service every 5 minutes during peak times and every 10 minutes other times of day, and the travel time will consistently be less than 15 minutes from end to end.

This project will significantly reduce congestion, connect people to jobs, health care, education, recreation, and support economic development in the region. Which the Honorable Chair knows well, it pairs with the Destination Medical Center initiative, which is the largest public-private economic initiative in Minnesota's history.

The Link is a once-in-a-generation project and it will have a broad impact in our community. It advances the environmental sustainability, economic health, and social equity.

For example, the electric powered fleet will reduce our city's environmental footprint and help the city transition away from fossil fuels.

It will encourage investment and better land use in high-density, affordable, mixed-use development along our transit corridors, and it will be a signature amenity that residents and visitors can use, providing a superior transit experience.

On social equity, it will have a long-term halo effect, strengthening the overall Rochester Public Transit system and providing the opportunity to improve access to transit-dependent people.

I was also asked to speak specifically about challenges and opportunities of a transit system outside the metro area.

Obviously the pandemic continues to have a significant adverse impact on transit ridership. And while the principles that shape

our mobility strategy remain in place, a high degree of uncertainty exists. When will people feel more comfortable? When will this health crisis subside and we return to more normal routes? And how will remote work impact our system and our ridership?

We are confident, though, that demand will return and grow. We anticipate the rate of growth may need to be reevaluated, however.

So the pandemic has also sped up the rate of change and encouraged innovation, leading to an opportunity to reconsider and improve many aspects of transit service delivery, including bus rapid transit.

For example, the disinfection onboard on filtration technologies are needed to improve customer comfort long term. Touchless mobile fare payment technology has accelerated. It's always been important to us, but that's coming much more quickly than we anticipated. And vehicle technology continues to advance with battery electric vehicles and on-street piloting of autonomous transit vehicles in Rochester.

So I'd ask the Members of this Subcommittee to support continued Federal resources for local transit agencies to help us in metro and in more rural communities emerge healthy and build our infrastructure for the future.

Federal capital programs like the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan, as well as the ongoing transportation-specific programs are essential to implement sustainable and equitable mobility that solves for congestion management, social equity, affordable housing, economic development, and climate action.

Thank you for the opportunity and for your time.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much. Ms. Waltz.

STATEMENT OF GRACE WALTZ, VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLIC POLICY, MINNEAPOLIS REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Ms. WALTZ. Chair Smith and Administrator Fernandez, thank you for the invitation to speak this morning about the importance of investing in a strong transit network.

The Minneapolis Regional Chamber is the largest local chamber in Minnesota with nearly 2,300 members in the 11-county metro region. Over the past 10 years the Minneapolis Regional Chamber and our partners have commissioned two studies from national experts to assess the expected return on investment from building out our region's transit system. These reports have confirmed that in addition to providing more and better ways to get around, investments in transit pay off, both for those who use transit and those who use our roads and highways.

Building a comprehensive transit system in our metro area will provide a major return on investment, more than 9 billion in positive direct impacts.

Improved public transit is a key component to eliminating access barriers to equitable employment and economic disparities. Employers and employees have been seeking better transit, and this report shows that it's also the smart thing to do from a monetary perspective.

It's important to note that our most recent study found that 81 percent of the benefits of a better transit system would be enjoyed by people and businesses using the region's street and highway

system due to reduced traffic, thus avoiding inconveniences like shipping delays and long daily commutes.

Beyond the clear economic benefits, public support for improved transit access is incredibly high. A 2018 poll commissioned by the Minneapolis Regional Chamber shows that 74 percent of all respondents said that they would support the State of Minnesota making additional investments in transit, including buses, trains, and light rail.

There is also strong support for making transit easier to use. Fifty-eight percent said they would like to use public transit such as rail or buses more often, but it is not convenient to or available from their home or work.

Nearly two-thirds believe that transit is necessary to compete with other metro areas for jobs. Sixty-four percent said that Minneapolis-St. Paul needs a better regional transit system in order to compete for jobs with peer cities, such as Denver, Salt Lake City, Dallas, and Portland that have more complete transit systems.

These results make it clear that Minnesotans recognize that transit is good for our economy and their day-to-day lives, making our State stronger and more competitive.

It also must be noted that the way we think about our transit system looks different than it did just 17 months ago. The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to remote work decimated demand for public transit in the Twin Cities and across the country. Even while some companies have begun the process of bringing their workers back to the office, continued uncertainty has delayed the return for many companies, and there continue to be some who may never bring their workers back to prepandemic levels.

As we think about the transit system of the future, we need to think about building systems that are more than getting people to and from work. We need transit systems that allow people to use transit to go to a doctor's appointment, the grocery store, out to dinner, or to a sporting event. To put it plainly, it is no longer enough to build a system that only gets people from point A to point B. We need a system that gets people from point A, to C, D, E, F, back to A again.

Federal, State, and local leaders recognize that we are at a unique moment in time when it comes to making innovative investments. We know that businesses prefer to locate near transit, where employees and customers will have more travel options. There is momentum for transit investments here in Minnesota that strengthen our economy and make our State an even better place for business and employees.

Investing in transit now will generate a positive impact for our economy for decades, including additional State and local tax revenues of nearly the same magnitude as the investment costs.

Economic benefits aside, the recent United Nations climate report painted a terrifying picture of what is to come if we do not change the way we treat the planet, and transit plays a major role in a cleaner future. Over this past summer Minnesotans have witnessed the devastating impacts of climate change in our own backyards, which is to say nothing of the impacts in other parts of the country and around the world.

The Minneapolis Regional Chamber has been advocating strongly for transit investments, and this ROI information only strengthens our resolve and desire to make this happen. We are hopeful that policymakers will recognize the significant benefits that come with transit and will make smart choices in support of investments that benefit our economy, employees, and everyone in the region.

Thank you, Chair Smith and Committee Members, for focusing on this very important issue. I am happy to answer any questions.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much.

And now we turn to Ms. Johnson. Thank you for being with us.

**STATEMENT OF CASSANDRA BELYEU JOHNSON, TRANSIT
RIDER, BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA**

Ms. BELYEU JOHNSON. You're welcome. Hello. Hello, and thank you for your time today as I talk about what public transportation means to me and the community of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park.

My name is Cassandra Belyeu, and I am a resident of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, on the borderline of Brooklyn Center, where I have resided for the past 4 years. I am a passionate advocate for transportation access. I am here today to share my perspective with Senator Tina Smith and the panel.

Transportation is lacking in my area. I feel the need to be addressed. My research as—as on Metro's website has revealed that only four buses that I am aware of service the city of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park. Anyone who misses or—one of these buses will be forced to wait an hour for the next arrival or walk a long distance of potentially over a mile. During the Minnesota winter, such a long wait or walk can be an extremely difficult challenge.

Without access to reliable transportation, simple tasks like shopping and receiving a haircut can be—occupy signature [sic] portion of someone's day.

While I have personal access to a car today, I didn't always. I can still recall spending half of my day planning a haircut due to lack of access to transportation, arriving a full hour early just to secure my spot with my barber.

I would also rely on family members to pick me up and to take me home afterwards if my haircut appointment was in the evening when the buses were less available. During the weekend, I also had to get a ride because buses were even more unavailable than during the week.

My story is so far more only—the only one, and the time it occupied in my day shows necessary [sic] of reliable transportation in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area. We currently—where currently it is lacking. My story raises the question of what happens to other Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center residents like me who either temporarily or permanently rely on public transportation.

I also spoke with some friends in order to hear their perspective on what the public transportation means to them. I have a friend who would love to move to the northwestern suburbs, particularly Brooklyn Park, but finds it's such—more difficult due to the lack of transportation.

My friend's story shows the public transportation is not only a means of offering access to numerous locations and current residents, but also a means of bringing people into the community.

In addition to knowing people who are unsure about moving to the area, I also know people who live in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center who have been stranded and needed me for a ride home because they couldn't get home from the Brooklyn Center transit. Instead, I had to pick them up where they were. No buses ran close to their home, meaning they would have had to walk miles if I hadn't picked them up and if it had been bad weather.

Access to public transportation is extremely important to children and during holidays. During Halloween and other public activities, children often have trouble arriving because the events are so far spread out.

I am here to say that the transportation situation right now is not working for many people in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area. I would also like to demand that the buses in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center run longer hours, including hours that go beyond the rush hours into the evening and the weekends, specifically Sundays, where they often do not run at all. That bus often has more—buses that have more stops also, particularly in the underprivileged communities.

Even though I have a car, I would still like to use public transportation from time to time. During trips to the mall, I still use public transportation. My example that—shows that even people with access to personal transportation can still benefit from stronger public transportation.

My story and the stories of the countless Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center residents raise questions of what access to public transportation means for the residents and tremendously affect in the community—in the community.

And thank you for having me and listening to my testimony today.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much. Thank you.

So I'm going to take about 15 minutes or so to ask questions—I'm making sure I've got the right instructions here—and then we will just take a brief break to bring Administrator Fernandez up here. And I'd like to start—thank you so much for your testimony. I think you did a compelling job of helping to understand how people's lives don't work if there isn't that infrastructure of transportation, including transit there. And it makes me want to come back to, first, some of the issues that Chair Zelle and Commissioner Kelliher raised.

What would have happened to our capacity to provide transit during the pandemic had not our transit systems in Minnesota gotten the infusion of support that we provided through the CARES Act and the American Rescue Plan? What would have happened to our ability to provide transit even though we need to be doing more?

Just briefly, Commissioner Zelle, and—I'm sorry, Chair Zelle, and Commissioner Kelliher.

Ms. ANDERSON KELLIHER. Well, Senator Smith, I'll begin. This is Commissioner Kelliher. And understandably, Chair Zelle was com-

missioner of DOT under the Dayton Administration, so—yes, we will go—we will answer to whatever.

I want to say that I think for those rural transit systems, particularly the smallest, most vulnerable, they would have had to shutter. They would have had to just shut down, and there would have been no service available in those communities. And then the restart of those services would have been very, very difficult because we understand that this is a—this is a necessary life service that when it shuts down, then people start to question whether you need it again. And of course you need it.

I think that Ms. Johnson's testimony today about what the experience has been in Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park could be extrapolated out to the rest of the State in terms of—

Chair SMITH. I think that's right.

Ms. ANDERSON KELLIHER. —what would happen.

Chair SMITH. I think we would have heard similar stories. And could I—I'm going to come to you in a second, Charlie. Could you explain to us how your needs for transportation changed during the pandemic, if they changed? Maybe they didn't change.

Ms. BELYEU JOHNSON. Well, I would say during the pandemic—actually, during the pandemic, I had to have car repairs, so then therefore it was—and my car was down for maybe like four days, so—and I needed to like really go somewhere and I couldn't, so I had to have somebody take me because bus transportation out there is very limited.

And then like I'm—so like in the evening time—you have to get up early in the morning in order to make sure that—in order for me to make it back to my apartment, I would have had to have been up like early in the morning and then go out early during the daytime while my car was down, so—but if I had to do it in the evening, I would always have to have somebody to come pick me up.

So it is—and then a lot of—and then when—and a couple of the tenants that live in my building, they didn't have transportation, so when my transportation was up, I also took them out to get a ride also—

Chair SMITH. You were helpful and kind of filling in for—

Ms. BELYEU JOHNSON. Yeah, because there's such a problem.

Chair SMITH. There was, I think, a perception in some corridors that the demand—and certainly the demand for public transportation did go down during the pandemic with people doing more remote working, but your stories are really demonstrating how, for a lot of people, just the logistics of figuring out how to get to where you need to get to didn't really change at all. In fact, in some circumstances, I think it was harder because of—because of the pandemic.

Chair Zelle, the testimony that we've just heard I think really illustrates the importance of baseline bus service, and we pay a lot of attention, as well we should, to building out this system. It's extremely important. But could you talk briefly about how the infrastructure package that we are supporting is going to help address some of the problems that Cassandra has just described where there's—and the service that we have is just not enough of what we need?

Mr. ZELLE. Well, no question. And I appreciate the questions.

You know, during the pandemic, the COVID emergency funding were a lifeline to keep the system operating, and really I'm talking about the regular route bus system, because even during a period of time when it kills a career bus person like me, that were advertising not to take the bus, essential workers only, and yet still 80 to 90,000 trips a day.

We're not just about getting to jobs. It's getting to grocery stores, it's getting to medical care, getting to school. And these were folks who have no other options. And having a car, Ms. Johnson, you have some options, but honestly, many don't.

And we realized how important it was to maintain service. We actually increased service in order to maintain social distancing.

We put in 60-foot buses on routes that normally were only 40-foot buses. So it wasn't just scaling down. We actually scaled up in some corridors. We realized this was where the essential bus service was so critical.

A large drop in our ridership was the express buses. These are the folks who could telecommute, and were. And so although express buses, and Northstar down as much as 90, 95 percent, our regular buses were down quite a bit less. In fact, the A Line and C Line were down the least because people really counted on them.

So when you think about the future interconnected system, the question about this infrastructure package, it is not about just a point here to a point there. It is how it all fits together, that it provides access to more than just jobs, to living people's lives. And whether it's going to the mall, as you pointed out, or where you actually need to get to food. I mean, there's so many areas of the metro, even under our currently fully running system, which are left in either food deserts or in life deserts because we think about transit as a way to live your life as opposed to just, you know, the morning commute.

And really this map kind of shows how it all fits together; that the light rail are the spines, the arterial bus rapid transit becomes kind of the lifeline to every neighborhood.

Chair SMITH. Thank you. Commissioner Fernando, in my opening comments, I talked about how investments in public transportation can be a tool for addressing systemic inequities, lack of opportunity to—lack of access to opportunity and how this is a challenge that we have here in our community, and disproportionately large.

I'm really interested in your comments about your efforts to present displacement as a result of the very investments that we're making in transit that could—and how to make sure that those investments are benefiting the community that they go through. Could you tell us a little bit more about kind of what are some lessons learned from this work that you're doing and how we might apply that to other situations?

Just parenthetically, we were talking earlier about the impact of massive infrastructure projects on communities, especially communities of color, I think talking about the Rondo neighborhood, and so this is something that I've spoken with Secretary Buttigieg about as well, but I'd love to hear a little bit more about what you're working on.

Ms. FERNANDO. Yeah, thank you, Chair Smith. And I also noted that your third priority is connection between transit inequity, and really appreciated how you stated that this priority needs to be reflected in our actions. I certainly think that's true programmatically and then from a policy standpoint, so thanks for that—for including that as among your transit priorities.

The work that we're embarking upon, Metropolitan Council and Hennepin jointly through the Blue Line Extension project office, is first to be able to sit back and ask the question, what happens here when we—when we center community voices and the feedback that they've been providing for decades?

What we're embarking upon is unfortunately not new. Large-scale infrastructure projects produce displacement. Residential displacement is a big factor because of property valuation. And so there ends up being this kind of interagency question because if transit, which is meant to bring communities together and bring livelihood to households, actually inadvertently produces housing instability, you know, so therein lies a very important question about how do we sit back and ask these questions with enough breath and enough specificity to take it to an actionable space?

And so lessons that we've learned already and in hope—you know, my hope is that in partnership we can learn—we can learn lessons together and then create replicable frameworks that impact other areas.

Lessons that we've learned already is the impact of cultural displacement specifically. It isn't—it doesn't take very many interviews truly in a community to realize how decimating our redlining, the broader kind of redlining and housing policy.

Lack of income policy. There's a lot of households that are decreasing their income, increasing their housing cost, and then being pushed further and further away from transit.

So the lessons that we have are to listen as deeply as possible to the feedback we've already received. We've received a lot of feedback—the Government has received a lot of feedback, especially over the last year and a half, about what works and what doesn't work. And so how can we incorporate into the project itself actions to kind of counter that?

So investments in economic development, investments in strengthening cultural institutions, and investments in ensuring that people who already live in a place should be able to enjoy the amenities that are coming through and not be pushed out as time moves on.

And so the last thing I'll say about the replicable frameworks part is Hennepin is the 33rd most populous county out of 3,100 in the country, and so I believe we're a really strong size to be able to test some innovations and to really consider how innovations and ideas that can occur here might be able to be more readily applied to other metros across the country, and from that standpoint, really make a difference for some of our most vulnerable Americans.

Chair SMITH. Let me follow up on that by asking a question about how these projects can benefit communities that have been—you know, experience systemic inequity and what opportunities we have, especially around contracting.

I know that this has been a priority—I suspect that this has been a priority in all of the communities that are represented here today, Hennepin through Metro Transit, MnDOT, and also through the work that you are doing in Rochester.

So if I could just ask each of you to say briefly a little bit about your work around increasing access to contracting opportunities for communities of color; small, minority owned businesses; women-owned businesses and what benefit that is providing to the community.

And maybe, Ms. Zelms, I'll start with you.

Ms. ZELMS. Chair Smith, thank you for that question. We've been doing a lot of work in Rochester, especially with our partners at Destination Medical Center, Mayo Clinic, and elsewhere to really advance opportunities and access to construction positions, and that's a really wide array of positions. The construction industry isn't just building buildings. It comes everywhere from the planning to the design to the outfitting of a building to the street infrastructure, water and wastewater, all of those things. And so we have a really strong commitment. In fact, today is our 2-year anniversary of bringing all those different industries together, with a focus on BIPOC and other minority-opened small businesses.

And so I see this as only, you know, the tip of the iceberg of the opportunity as people are building the actual future of the community. We've seen that be successful even on the very front end of community codesign for a bus rapid transit system. And our community aptly named our next investments in the actual transit infrastructure to get downtown and around downtown The Link for a reason. And I think, aptly stated, it's a connection point. It's not just getting from point A to point B. And people who are relying on or choose to rely on public transit really deserve to have that rapidity and constant comfort that they're going to be able to get their ride.

So I think that's a key component that as we're building in these opportunities and the flexibility of our system in a more rural part of Minnesota, we're giving people not only the confidence that they're getting to a point where they can actually elevate and have economic mobility based on the systems that they provide, but they can be a huge part of building that by having access to additional economic opportunity through construction-centered jobs, connection points, and being connected to people who can help elevate them and networks that can assure that they are successful, not just in the beginning of their new career but on into the future.

Chair SMITH. Thank you. Would anyone else like to comment on that, the question of contracting?

Ms. ANDERSON KELLIHER. Thank you, Senator Smith, for the question. The soon-to-be complete 35W/94 Crosstown to downtown project, we are on track to meet many of our goals on contracting, and that has come because MnDOT has taken a new approach, specifically on breaking contracts into smaller increments. And that is one of the things that we have found successful to do is really gaining that foothold for the minority or woman-owned contractor to be able to have success.

But I will say highway-heavy contracting is challenging still today, and so we need help. We need the help of the Federal Gov-

ernment. We need the help of others in being able to invest more in those certificate programs, in technical training, particularly our State college and university system, and union apprenticeship. That is going to be key. I hear this from each of my CEO friends of DOTs around the country. It's one of our biggest concerns, is that the workforce of the future needs to be more diverse and people need to be able to share in the economic benefits and opportunity of the construction and maintenance industry. And so that is a goal of ours as well.

Thank you.

Chair SMITH. Thank you.

Mr. ZELLE. And just to add on to what Commissioner Kelliher has described and MNDOT, which I know well, which is rethinking how 25 we develop those business enterprises by reducing the size of the contract, but also looking at what other assistance, everything from working capital to training, these are huge challenges, and the workforce challenge is even more challenging. And I know for Met Council it becomes an overall agency philosophy; that we have to go beyond just compliance. They can't just expect our DBE program, which is excellent—I mentioned the Southwest number, over 100 contracts with 86 separate DBEs. But what else can we do in terms of procurement? What can we do by partnering with other agencies and other, frankly, nonprofit groups who are very interested in this area?

And I think it's something that the region—and I think in the past year after George Floyd's murder, there is a resounding interest in the private, nonprofit foundation and nonpublic partners coming together and on the conclusion with the Chamber, with Better MSP. I mean, at least kind of aligning around we have an issue; how do we work together and not just follow the programs, but—and we need resources. We may need some of those rurals, which would create in public sector barriers.

We can't do what Target Corporation does. We've had contractors come and testify before Met Council saying, I'll work for Target because they don't require bonding, but you guys need it because you're a public sector entity.

So we have to kind of look at where are those barriers, and we may actually need to kind of start thinking about—those barriers need to be really looked at because are they really providing a public purpose or are they actually standing in the way?

Chair SMITH. That would be a great thing for us to follow up on and continue to talk about as we go forward.

Mr. ZELLE. Absolutely.

Chair SMITH. Yeah. Commissioner Fernando, would you like to comment on this briefly?

Ms. FERNANDO. Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. And so I just want to echo that from on our construction side, we certainly need to be much more aggressive with our contractors and subcontractors. We need to be realistic about what living wage means in different areas around the State and locally and also need to position the organizations for those expectations. So what I mean by that is if we were to think more broadly about procurement as a whole, if for some reason we're seeing a certain population not being represented, then we need to interrogate that and then create pro-

gramming to support all people and communities and organizations to be able to succeed in the way that Government works.

We've been able to see some success in this in our anti-displacement work group. We've been breaking up contracts much smaller than typical with our community engagement cohort and have seen a lot of success by—instead of saying one big contract, how are we breaking it into smaller pieces not only to get more voices around the table, but then to learn what types of support might be needed.

The last comment I'll make about this, because construction on the workers' side also means at times implications for business owners and organizations during construction. And so we talked about with the Blue Line Extension what would it look like to create—to apply existing Hennepin programs towards the corridor. We run a CEO Next program. What would it look like for a corridor to receive kind of entrepreneurial support in alignment with a project, or what would it look like if we invited—invited a way that—for all businesses along a corridor before construction to have online services, and if we support that in a way to really think more wholistically, not just the particular point in time that the challenge is being presented.

Chair SMITH. Thank you very much. So I'm going to just ask one last question and then we're going to move to our second panel, which I'm also very excited about. Earlier this morning we were talking about how—it seems to me, in the real world, transit is not a republican or a democratic issue. People are trying to figure out how to get around. They don't care. You know, it's not a party thing. But sometimes in the political world it becomes partisan.

And I'm going to just ask this question of Ms. Waltz, who's probably wondering how could she ask me this question right now. But the reason I want to turn to you is just for this last question is that it is my perception amongst many, many businesses—I bet it would be the same in Rochester, in other communities in Hennepin County, in other communities around the country, that they see transit as a—as part of their competitive advantage and not as a political or partisan issue.

And I'm just wondering if you could comment on this—you got at it some in your testimony—about how Minneapolis Chamber members see transit not as a political issue but as a competitive issue.

Ms. WALTZ. Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the question. And I don't have the precise percentages in front of me, but in the 2018 poll that I referenced, we did test for kind of that exact question, and you are exactly right. People do not think of this as a partisan view and has equal support for both Democrats and Republicans if we want to think about it that way.

But also, again, you're absolutely right that it is a competitive advantage question. And in the 2019 report that we commissioned, part of that report was evaluating the relocation choices of over 500 companies, and 11 of those companies specifically located to downtown Minneapolis or downtown St. Paul in part because they had expanded transit options.

I think particularly as we're moving in—slowly inching forward in a post-pandemic world, or at least hopefully inching in that direction, we're seeing a big shift to employers really listening closely

to what their employees are asking for. And we know that there's a massive demand for options, particularly, and as everyone has noted, the workday looks different, so that kind of traditional 9:00 to 5:00 service is not enough for most people. And as Chair Zelle noted, we're seeing really high ridership numbers that more resemble weekend hours as opposed to the traditional day.

So I think if we're thinking about continuing to bring more businesses to the Twin Cities area and around the State, a very comprehensive system that doesn't just work for that—again, that traditional 9:00 to 5:00 sector but can really serve everyone's needs is highly, highly important.

Chair SMITH. You're making a great point that it's not just transit needs and for core cities are not just around commuting. They're around all the other businesses, the entertainment venues, for example, that are downtown. I know this is an issue in Rochester because of my experience with the Destination Medical Center.

And similarly, I'm sure there are businesses in Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center that wish that they had better access to—that their employees and customers had better access to transit because that's going to be a competitive advantage for them. And I know that this is the case in cities all over the State, so it's made the point very well.

I want to just thank all of our panelists in our first panel for being here today and providing such excellent testimony.

I am going to just dismiss this panel. We will take a brief break while the panel changes and the staff has an opportunity to reorganize the table here, and then I will be very excited to welcome Administrator Fernandez to testify.

Thank you so much.

[A break was taken from 11:11 a.m. until 11:17 a.m.]

Chair SMITH. Welcome, Administrator Fernandez.

Nuria Fernandez is the 15th administrator of the Federal Transit Administration. She was confirmed for this position on June 10th of this year.

Before joining the FTA, she led the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. She has previously held senior roles at the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the Chicago Transit Authority, and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, and served as acting administrator of the FTA during the Clinton administration.

As I said in my opening statement, when we met earlier this year, I was so struck by the wonderful combination of operating experience and policy know-how, and I immediately asked her to come visit Minnesota for this opportunity that we have for our first Subcommittee field hearing in this Committee in over 7 years.

So it is just fantastic to have you join us here for this Subcommittee hearing. I'm very happy that you're here. And you may start your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF NURIA FERNANDEZ, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Thank you very much, Senator Smith, and good morning to you. And also I would like to recognize Ranking Member Rounds, who's not with us today, and all the Members of the

Subcommittee of the Senate Banking, Housing, Transportation, and Community Development. Thanks so much for inviting me to appear before you today in the Twin Cities.

This is truly a pivotal time for our Nation's public transportation systems. I want to thank you for your diligence and that of your colleagues for all the hard work. The Senate recently passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This legislation includes 550 billion in new Federal investment in America's roads, bridges, rail, water infrastructure, resilience, internet, and more. The transit industry will receive almost 90 billion in guaranteed funding, the most significant Federal support for transit in our Nation's history. That proposed funding is not just an abstract number. It will improve people's lives throughout the Nation.

Here in Minnesota, 11 percent of trains and buses in the State are past their useful life. So it's clear that the State of Minnesota is going to benefit greatly from more than 818 million designated under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to improve public transportation.

I want to take a moment to also thank Chairman Sherrod Brown of the Senate Banking Committee and Members of that Committee for all that was done to shepherd this vital infrastructure bill through the Senate these last few months. I know it was not easy.

With the passage of the infrastructure bill through the Senate, I am more optimistic than I have ever been. This level of Federal investment will touch lives in every corner of the country, including here in Minnesota and throughout the Midwest. At long last, transit systems will have the resources to expand, modernize, and offer the type of 21st century technology solutions and services that Americans deserve and should expect to help get them to jobs, school, and vital services.

From right here in the Twin Cities region to smaller urban and rural communities throughout Minnesota, we want to ensure safe and efficient transportation for everyone.

The legislation also includes funding dedicated to zero emission vehicles and funding to train transit workers who maintain and operate those vehicles, advancing the Administration's climate and job creation goals.

So as we continue to switch from fossil fuels to electric power, we're going to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that play such a big role in our planet's rising temperatures.

This work is more important than ever, as was mentioned earlier by Ms. Waltz, given the recent alarming report from the U.N. panel on climate change, which declared our last decade the hottest in history and confirmed carbon dioxide as the leading contributor to climate change. In fact, according to the report, unless we sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a lot of bad things are going to happen and the consequences are going to be dire.

The people of Minnesota know all about this. This summer has been drier than any since 1980, and we are grateful for today's rain. So you have all walked outside to the haze of a sun blotted out by the smoke of wildfires, and the evidence is crystal clear: We have no more time to waste.

The Federal Transit Administration's Region 5 Administrator, Kelley Brookins, who leads our work in Minnesota, is here with me

today. And Kelley and her team partner with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and 51 transit agencies throughout the State to fund public transportation serving all 87 Minnesota counties.

As part of her work, she administers close to 394 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan, which was signed by President Biden earlier this year. These funds are helping transit agencies across Minnesota to continue to operate, despite significant losses in ridership and revenue due to COVID. We're supporting the travel needs of workers in St. Cloud, helping college students in Mankato get to class, enabling members of the White Earth Band of Chippewa Indians to get to doctor's appointments, and so much more.

Here in the Twin Cities, the Met Council has made a commitment to expand transit, and six new high-capacity lines are on the way, which will truly transform communities in the region by closing gaps in service and offering mobility options to more people in those communities. Through our Capital Investment Grants Program, FTA has helped support the amazing successes seen by the bus rapid transit program here in the Twin Cities, and Met Council is creating a BRT system that can help—can be held up as a standard to other cities.

These opportunities truly open up for everyone who calls the Twin Cities and the suburbs home. Equity is a critical issue to FTA and to the Biden-Harris administration, and that is why I am so proud to be working in transit. As I've often said, transit is the greatest equalizer. It opens doors and you step onboard and everyone has the same opportunity to go to where they need to go and get to places they want to get to.

So with that, I think I've run out of time, and I would like to thank—

Chair SMITH. You can take as much time as you need, Administrator Fernandez.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. I want to be mindful of the clock.

But I just wanted to say that transit wouldn't just be changing lives here in the Twin Cities. To the southeast, we look forward to seeing the City of Rochester launch its first bus rapid transit line. And we are also proud of the great work by Charlie Zelle at the helm of Met Council and Wes Kooistra for their vision and leadership in setting Minnesota and the Minneapolis cities area on the right path.

So with that, I would like to thank the Subcommittee once again for this opportunity, and I'm happy to take your questions.

Chair SMITH. Thank you very much.

I have to—I have to tell everyone that, you know, in the United States Senate, everything tends to work by seniority, and typically at a Committee hearing, I ask my questions towards the end of the Committee hearing as a result, so it's really quite delightful to be up here and able to ask the questions first, middle, and last also.

Administrator Fernandez, I have often been struck by something that a Minnesotan said to me at the beginning of the pandemic, where he said: With COVID, we're all in the same storm, but we're not all in the same boat. And it really drew out for me how every-

body has been impacted by this pandemic but not everybody is impacted in the same way.

There has been, I think, a focus on kind of what has happened with ridership during the pandemic, but maybe not enough focus on how essential transit has been to so many people during the pandemic. And I'm wondering if you could comment a little bit more on that and draw in the impact on transit systems around the country, and in Minnesota, the impact of the Rescue Plan dollars and CARES Act dollars, and then where we go from here.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes, and that's such an important question because we're still in the midst of the pandemic. The pandemic has not only affected people's lives, it's also disrupted our economy and it has disrupted public transportation.

But one of the things that I have been saying time and time again is that as the country came to a standstill, public transportation continued moving. Why? Because the pandemic has taught us that not everyone has an office job or could work from home. And people who are providing essential services, whether it was emergency response, in health care, or stocking grocery stores or getting goods to their destination, have to get to their place of work, and the majority of them were relying on public transportation.

Public transportation agencies across the country didn't know where they lived, so they have to continue providing service. So clearly, the relief fund starting with the CARES Act followed by CRRSAA and then the American Rescue Plan was a lifeline to ensuring that public transportation services could continue. But it also highlighted, to your point, that COVID affected people differently. And as we heard today from Ms. Johnson speaking about her community, when you think about the availability of services, it also highlighted areas that we label transit deserts, where there is a need to start thinking about how we can connect and close gaps. So there is an opportunity and a lesson that we should really heed to and implement as we are rolling out our strategies.

Chair SMITH. As we think about the opportunities for new investment that the bipartisan infrastructure package provides, I can't help but remember that in 1999, I worked with Representative Hornstein at the Metropolitan Council as we were starting to envision a transit network—a true transit network in the metro area. That was a long time ago. It takes a long time to build out these projects, and sometimes I think one of the big challenges many often—big challenges is shortage of funds and the lack of a really—you know, the need that we have for a strong Federal partner.

So could you address how the infrastructure package that I trust the President will be signing into law before too much longer, how that will help us to address this sort of transit system network that we are intent on building here in the metro area?

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is going to be transformative in a significant way because, for the first time public transportation is going to get more funding and be able to not only focus on fixing the investment and ensuring that there's a state of good repair, but also planning for those very same parts of our network that need to be closed, the opportunities for expanding that network. So those additional dollars are going

to open up an opportunity for transit agencies to plan—not just react, but to plan so that they can, in fact, at the end of the day, 5, 10 years from now, look back at many of those projects and programs that were viewed as a dream and have now become a reality.

Chair SMITH. As Lieutenant Governor and now as Senator, I have heard the—heard about how important it is to build these transportation systems, not only in the metro area, but in rural small towns in Minnesota. You and I have spoken about this. The infrastructure package includes support for building out rural networks and also supporting tribal transportation options.

Could you just talk about this a bit more? I think a lot of times people just don't link—don't think about the necessity of public transportation outside of big cities and suburbs.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. And, you know, that's a very important point because rural communities just don't have the same options as you would find in urban and in some suburban areas, so it's very limited. It's either you drive your car, get your neighbor to get you to where you need to go, or rely on rural transportation services.

And it's important also because people are aging in place, and we have a large senior population that lives in rural communities. We also have individuals that are disabled and need access to medical services and access to grocery stores and to just be connected with family and friends. So that is why it's so critical.

And in our tribal regions and tribal nations it's much more highlighted because you have the opportunity, through these transportation services, to be able to go out of your community and have access to jobs, education, and other possibilities that would not have been possible in your own community.

So clearly when we think about transportation, it's a full approach to how everything comes together and moves. It's not just looking at a city or a county or a locality. It's how the entire network ties together for the betterment of the State.

Chair SMITH. And, similarly, often when people talk about transit, it's almost as if there's like the roads and bridges system over here and then the public transportation system over there and never the twain shall meet. And I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about how you at the FTA think about making that connection so that the entire transportation system is working together.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. Transportation, in fact, is a network, and it is our responsibility—my responsibility at the Federal Transit Administration, working together with my colleagues at USDOT, is to ensure that we can connect the network so that the possibilities are just limitless. Working with the Federal Highway Administration on complete streets, working with the Federal Railroad Administration on closing gaps between where public transportation is and where commuter rail is, I think that is what starts to speak to an investment that, even within transit, closing gaps and building a network of rail and buses that feed into that rail and that go into neighborhoods and communities that are not served by either, but coming together, in the end is a richer product because it provides so many options. And when you have options, then the

opportunity to grow and to better your own personal situation is expanded.

Chair SMITH. Right, right. I was really quite interested in the testimony from Commissioner Fernando about the work that Hennepin County is doing as we contemplate the Blue Line around—focusing on anti-displacement and creating strategies for making sure that projects that are, you know, going through communities are actually contributing to communities and not just dividing them.

Could you talk a little bit about how the FTA is prioritizing anti-displacement efforts and how we in Congress can support—can support this work?

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. One of the things that the Biden administration has made very clear from the very beginning is the emphasis on equity and ensuring that the investment in Federal dollars benefits all. And as we look at projects like working on the Blue Line and focusing on what are some of these things that are going to be necessary to minimize displacement to ensure that businesses are not impacted and that people's lives are not disrupted is where we would sit down with the project sponsor, and in this case, with Met Council and others, to talk about the type of strategies that need to be developed. This is not something that is unique to this community and this project. It's been experienced by many projects around the country. So there are some lessons and best practices that can be brought to bear.

But working from the U.S. Department of Transportation perspective together with the President on Justice40, it's significant because as we invest in communities through these mega projects, we want to make sure that as Justice40 is defined, that the benefit also comes to the communities that have been underserved and overburdened.

Chair SMITH. The history in our country of major infrastructure projects having the impact of dividing communities, especially communities of color, Black and Brown communities, poor communities, is so clear, and we see it every day as we drive between Minneapolis and St. Paul, and we see, you know, the old Rondo neighborhood, which was, you know, sliced through by the I-94 freeway. And this is not a transit issue so much, but it is an issue that I've spoken with Secretary Buttigieg about, and I'm grateful to see the emphasis that the Biden administration is putting on this as we go forward, figuring out ways of not doing that again and then, of course, repairing the damage that has been done by those communities that were ripped apart.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. And if I may just say something to that point. It is really distressing that these things happened decades ago, but we have an opportunity today to fix it. And with the funding that will become available through the infrastructure bill, there is such an opportunity, working with colleagues at the Federal Highway Administration, to not only identify but also work with those States to find solutions to remove those infrastructures that have separated.

Transportation is supposed to connect. That is what it's supposed to do. It's a tie that binds. And when it starts to divide and dis-

advantage segments of our communities, then that's just not the right transportation policy and certainly not the right plan.

Chair SMITH. Yeah, I couldn't agree more. And, in fact, I've taken the opportunity to lobby Secretary Buttigieg about this in the elevator of the apartment building that we both live in.

We also heard from our first panel about the necessity of finding ways for the FTA and local transit authorities to do business with diverse contractors and subcontractors. And as Commissioner Kelliher said, this is often challenging for these big projects that are heavily capital-intensive projects, and it's also really important that these diversity and inclusion efforts around contracting are truly benefiting diverse businesses and not creating kind of the illusion of benefit.

Could you talk a bit about what you have learned about this challenge, the opportunities they are—in your role at the FTA as well as your role as a former—you know, in the operating side, and what advice you would give to Congress for how we could make sure that the rules that we have in place are, as Chair Zelle said, really necessary, and not unnecessary barriers to creating opportunities for Black and Brown businesses?

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. As we look at the billions of dollars that are going to become available for investment in transportation, those dollars equate to contracts and projects in communities that should be benefiting the people in those communities, the businesses in those communities.

We're very fortunate at the U.S. Department of Transportation that we've just hired Shelby Scales. She is the director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization that's going to help us and all of the modes of transportation to refocus on our disadvantaged business programs. What I heard this morning was there's a need for assistance with certification. Not every community has the resources and the capacity to do certification and bring more small businesses. We need more forums where large companies and large businesses are in the same room so that the small contractors will have an opportunity to get to know and develop relationships with the small businesses as well so they can be part of the progress.

But all of the other things that were mentioned this morning are true. And that is a lot of the small businesses have great ideas and they have experience, but they also need back office support with Administration and performance bonds and other things that become a burden and, in some cases, discourages them from moving forward with these opportunities that they should be part of.

Chair SMITH. Yeah, yeah. Let me ask you a question. I appreciate—I appreciate your answer to that, and I think that this is something that we have to really continue to focus on.

I have to also say, it's not only an issue in transit projects but in other large Federal projects. I'm thinking particularly on the Banking Housing Committee, I ask this question all the time when it comes to creating opportunities for folks that are living in public housing projects and how can they have some opportunity to benefit from the employment opportunities that are generated from those—you know, from those places where they live that are in their community.

Let me ask you a question about buses, a matter that is very important here in Minnesota, and this is a question around the Transit Infrastructure Vehicle Security Act. In the last few years, Chinese bus manufacturers have been opening facilities in the United States and are seeking to, I believe, undercut U.S. bus producers. We certainly need a competitive market for buses, but the concern is that these Chinese firms are often benefiting from Government backing from their country, and they end up having an unfair competitive advantage. And because of the way—you know, we have to be so careful of the way we—we're getting opportunities. This is, of course, an important issue in Minnesota because we have an excellent bus manufacturer in Minnesota that does manufacturing electric buses.

So 2 years ago I worked with a bipartisan group of senators to enact the Transit Infrastructure Vehicle Security Act to prevent Chinese bus companies from unfairly taking advantage in the U.S. transit bus market.

Could you talk a little bit about what steps the FTA will be taking to implement this law and what do you think we need to be doing to make sure that we are creating opportunities for American-made buses, especially electric buses, as we move forward?

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. And, Senator, thank you. I am aware that you have championed that act. And I just want to say that the Federal Transit Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation is committed to implementing the law, to protecting our national security, and also to ensure and preserve our domestic manufacturing. So having said that, when Congress provided the National Defense Authorization Act prohibition for Federal funding in procurements that involve companies that have ties to countries that the U.S. trade representative identified, in this case, China, we have complied with that.

And one of the things that I have done since coming back to the Federal Transit Administration is I had the opportunity to meet separately with the bus manufacturers, the domestic bus manufacturers, to talk about their plans for scaling up, given the major emphasis on the transition from fossil fuel to electric or low-no emissions and to make sure—because we're talking about tens of thousands of buses over the next 9 years. In 2030 we want it cut by 50 percent, and then by 2050 to have a net-zero. And public transit is in the best position to make that possible on the public transportation side because we still have a large amount of vehicles that are diesel powered.

Chair SMITH. Right, right. I was really struck, as I suspect that you were as well, from the testimony from our first panel and how every single person that I think I can remember raised the power of transit as a tool for not only fighting the battle for more equity but also fighting the battle for addressing climate change. And the President and Vice President have made it clear that they want to see us reach a goal of 80 percent clean in the power sector by 2030. I'm working very hard on that in another sphere. But the power of transit to address our climate change needs is just so evident, with transportation being the largest emitter of carbon.

I believe that when it comes to climate change, and climate change is happening, it's caused by human activity, and we need

to take bold action to address it, and if we do so, we can lead on this issue rather than following. And there's great power in leading because it means that we have more innovation, more competitive advantage. All good things flow from that.

Could you talk just a bit more about how you see this from the perspective of leading the FTA and what you'd like to see as we think about the impacts of climate?

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Thank you. You know, as we were dealing with climate change that's affecting also communities—I mean, think about the flood, the lack of resiliency in the infrastructure, the lack of resiliency in the placement of the bus and maintenance facilities. They're always looking for land that is available. We also have to realize that it's very difficult to build new transit. Everyone wants transportation, but they don't want transportation in their backyard. They don't want to see that construction happening.

So when you start looking at the areas where you can put in these critical systems, they're always in low-lying areas or areas that are vulnerable to natural disasters. And that's why I see our role today as it relates to climate is to reinforce and harden our public transportation infrastructure and to provide the funding so that those facilities that are low-lying areas can be relocated and the investment protected. I think it is just critical, that we need to start there if we want to see our system continue to thrive.

Chair SMITH. How do you think about this question of transit as we emerge, God willing, from—ultimately as we emerge from the COVID pandemic? And I'm asking you to link up what has happened with ridership on transit and what we need to do to be moving towards, you know, increasing ridership again. And I think you have a good perspective on this. We talked a little bit about this earlier.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. Yes. It's unfortunate what has happened to public transportation. The ridership fell dramatically last spring. We saw systems that lost almost 90 percent of their riders overnight.

Now, the positive thing is that there's an uptick in ridership. And as communities are opening up, as schools are starting back, ridership now is becoming more of a focus on making sure that people feel safe on public transportation. And every single transit agency is taking the necessary steps to ensure just that: To provide a safe environment both from a cleaning perspective and sanitizing, to also for protecting the security of their riders.

But what is going to be necessary is for us to move quickly because what we're seeing is that people have become so dependent on their automobiles during the pandemic that as the economy opens and the congestion starts back up, people are going to try to figure out how do I keep driving through this congestion?

And one point I just want to make is that public transportation helps all. When people ride public transportation, others can get to where they want to go in their cars goods can get to market through trucking. I mean, so it's this wholistic approach to transportation in general that is going to keep our cities, our communities moving.

The Federal Transit Administration is hosting a series of transit renewal webinars where we're bringing together transit agency CEOs, we're bringing law enforcement, we're bringing labor union

and stakeholders, to talk about what steps are necessary for us to welcome back all of our riders and then pull together some best practices and lessons that other transit agencies across the country can use as they're putting together their welcome-back toolkits. There are a lot of great things that are happening today, and we want to make sure everyone has access to it.

Chair SMITH. That's fantastic. For my last question, I know that President Biden and Vice President Harris feel very strongly about issues around Buy American, as do I. I think it's critical that we keep a strong U.S. iron and steel industry and that when taxpayer dollars are used for transit projects, that those dollars are going to create American jobs and supporting American industry.

So could you talk to us a little bit about what about your agency is doing to strengthen Buy America rules to make sure that that's happening, and can you also maybe touch on how the bipartisan infrastructure bill that the Senate just passed will strengthen Buy American rules?

Ms. FERNANDEZ. This is also very important, of course, because when there's an influx of that large amount of money and there's such an imperative to put the money to work and create jobs and opportunities for many, there may be those tendencies to hurry up and get things done, and one of the things that we will continue to monitor and enforce is the Buy American rules.

As you may know, Senator, the Federal Transit Administration has very clear rules around its procurement of rolling stock and the percentage of domestic products that need to be part of that rolling stock. That will continue.

One of the things that I have been doing is working with my colleagues not only at the U.S. Department of Transportation, but also with Energy and Commerce to talk about what is manufacturing? What does the supply chain look like? What needs to happen so that we can, in fact, create these transitions that we have committed to the American people through not only the executive orders that President Biden has issued around workforce, but also in the delivery of those services. And the infrastructure bill gives us a tremendous opportunity to get there.

And one of the things I want to highlight as part of Buy America is using that American labor force. The Federal Transit Administration has awarded a contract to the International Transportation Learning Center for their Transportation Workforce Center to hire, train, and retain the union labor as we are transitioning to a different type of climate-friendly energy in our buses and our trains. And what that does is once we get the labor force trained and fully equipped and reskilled and upskilled, we can also take that opportunity to build a labor force that is building things in America for America.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much. I'm going to wrap this up. I first want to just turn to you, Administrator Fernandez, and ask if you have any parting comments or anything else that you'd like to—you'd like to share.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you so much, Chair Smith, for inviting me to be here. It's my first field hearing since I've been confirmed.

Chair SMITH. Mine too.

Ms. FERNANDEZ. And I am just really excited about all the great things that are happening, not only in the Twin Cities area but throughout the State of Minnesota.

I want to thank Commissioner Kelliher, the Met Council Chair and all the other witnesses for sharing their strategies and their plans.

I am familiar with half a dozen projects that already landed at the FTA in some form along our pipeline for funding, and so I know that there is going to be a lot of mobility connections happening and that Minnesota is really at the forefront right now in setting the stage.

And I want to work with you. I want to work with you and your colleagues as we think about how we solve the problems that were brought up by Ms. Johnson and others. And how do we make sure that this great wealth of opportunities and contracts and results through services are enjoyed by all.

Chair SMITH. Thank you. Thank you so much. I am so grateful for your coming to Minnesota and to the Twin Cities to hear about how we think about transit, how central transit is to the work that we're doing.

I think we heard today certainly that—how important it is that transit reaches all Minnesotans, whether you live in big cities, suburbs, small communities, and rural places, and how important it is that we see transit as a tool for addressing the deep inequities in our community and also as a tool for addressing our need to take strong action on climate. It is powerful in that regard also.

I appreciated the comments from all of my Minnesota colleagues about the really important transit projects that we have in the pipeline, and I'm grateful for the support that FTA has been providing and look forward to that continued support as we work hard to build out a transportation network that links up bus rapid transit and rail and buses with biking and walking and roads and cars and the people at the center of our strategy and not cement.

So this has been a great hearing.

I'm so grateful. I want to just close with a few concluding statements for the record.

I want to first thank all of our witnesses for being with us today and for providing your testimony.

For senators who are not here but will have opportunity to know what happened at this Committee, I want to make sure that they understand that they can submit questions for the record and that these questions are due to us 14 days from today, on September 7th.

For all of our witnesses, if you have questions that are submitted to you, you will have 45 days to respond to any questions for the record, and that time will start as soon as the question submission period has closed.

So thank you again.

I also just want to take a moment to thank the Committee staff and my personal staff that worked hard to make this all work, including Cameron Ricker, who came from Washington, DC, from the Committee.

My gratitude goes out to also Senator Sherrod Brown, who has been such a terrific partner on all issues related to transit.

And to Tim Everett and Emma Kloskey and Jake Schweitzer, who are here in the room, and my State director, Sara Silvernail, who was also here, and to Mark Kimball as well. It takes a whole village to put together something like this.

Many thanks to the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit for hosting us.

And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Prepared statements, responses to written questions, and additional material supplied for the record follow:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARGARET ANDERSON KELLIHER

COMMISSIONER, MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

AUGUST 24, 2021

Chair Smith, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding mass transit systems, projects and policy in Minnesota.

My name is Margaret Anderson Kelliher and I am honored to serve as Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) works with more than 40 greater Minnesota transit systems and 5 tribal governments. Our program has an annual budget of approximately \$150M.

Our mission is to provide our partners and communities with leadership, tools and resources that support access to high-quality transit options. We do this to enable people to live independently, and to be engaged and connected to their communities.

We know that transit plays an important role in helping provide an equitable and sustainable transportation system.

While Minnesota consistently ranks as a top State to live and work, this is not true for everyone, and these inequities threaten our long-term competitiveness as a State.

Our Government needs to focus on preparing the next generation of Minnesotans to work and lead in a rapidly changing world. This means we need a Government centered around our children and their families, so that Minnesota is the best place for each and every child to grow up.

Transit Impacts and Benefits

- *Impact of Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*—In its current form, this bill represents a 63 percent increase in funding for public transportation. For the Federal formula programs that we depend on in Greater Minnesota, we estimate up to a 30 percent increase in funding levels within the first year. It will allow us to expand transportation access, more rapidly modernize our fleets and facilities, and expand transit's role in advancing transportation equity objectives and addressing climate change.
- *Economic impact of transit*—The benefit to cost ratio for investment in transit is estimated to be \$2.21 to \$1 for rural transit and \$2.86 to \$1 for small urban transit (pop. 50,000–200,000) This is based on a study completed by NDSU's Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute (2018).
- *Climate benefits of transit*—The transportation sector is now the leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Public transportation is a key element in our strategy to reduce emission. Public transportation produces significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile than private vehicles. We are beginning to see the greening of the transit fleet with battery electric buses in operations in Duluth and the Twin Cities metro area and coming soon to Rochester. Rural transit agencies will begin to see deployment of battery electric buses. The City of Morris and Arrowhead Transit in northeastern Minnesota have been awarded Clean Transportation grants to purchase the electric buses and supporting infrastructure in the next year.
We're working with our partners at the Met Council and other transit providers to reduce vehicle miles traveled by offering transit options people want.
This effort supports the work of the Sustainable Transportation Advisory Committee, which was formed to reduce carbon pollution from the transportation sector.
- *Rural transit cost share (the Rounds-Smith Investments in Rural Transit Act)*—The Rounds-Smith Act would benefit impoverished rural communities. In rural areas, transit can be a lifeline for carless households or people that cannot drive, connecting individuals to jobs, health care, education, essentially to their communities. In impoverished rural areas, local match requirements can be a significant barrier to meeting needs. The Rounds-Smith Act would go a long way toward removing that barrier.

Current Program Updates

- *Responding to COVID*: At the height of the pandemic, transit ridership fell significantly. Transit systems throughout the State turned their attention to assisting their communities in other ways. This included providing food delivery service in support of local food shelves while maintaining essential service for trips to and from doctor appointments.

As vaccination levels increase and the economy reopens, transit systems are seeing ridership levels rebound but not yet to Pre-COVID levels. MnDOT and its transit partners understand that this will not happen quickly. We are committed to maintaining access to jobs, education, health care, and shopping, while collectively working to regain the confidence of the public. Transit is and will continue to be a safe and healthy transportation option.

- During COVID, MnDOT prioritized maintaining transit operations throughout the State. Farebox revenues fell to near zero and local governments were challenged to meet their local share requirements. MnDOT used Federal Emergency Relief funds (CARES Act, CRRSAA, American Rescue Plan Act) to cover local share of operating budgets (typically 15 percent or 20 percent) in 2020 and 2021. After consultation with local partners, MnDOT has agreed to extend coverage of local share through Calendar Year 2022. We are committed to maintaining access to jobs, education, health care, and shopping, while collectively working to regain the confidence of the public.
- MnDOT is also interested in using Federal funds to provide additional support to Tribal transit agencies, perhaps through the creation of a transit vehicle replacement program. This is a conversation we will be having with Tribal authorities in the near future.
- *MnDOT is striving to bring rural transit into the digital age.* The Office of Transit and Active Transportation received an FTA innovation grant to build a regional Mobility-as-a-Service platform with seven public transit agencies in and around Rochester and Mankato. The open source trip planning, booking, and tracking platform will test the impact on travel choices while developing new data standards for the transit industry.

Madam Chair and Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHARLIE ZELLE

CHAIR OF METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

AUGUST 24, 2021

Chair Smith, Good morning. I'm Charlie Zelle, the Chair of the Metropolitan Council. Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

I want to welcome you, FTA Administrator Fernandez, and other distinguished guests to Metro Transit.

The Metropolitan Council is the policymaking body, planning agency, and provider of essential services for the seven-county Twin Cities region. The Metropolitan Council is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for our region, and we plan for and operate transit and paratransit. Metro Transit is a division of the Metropolitan Council and is the largest public transit provider in Minnesota.

Transit is essential to our region. Investing in transit builds community prosperity, improves our quality of life, connects people to opportunity, and plays a critical role in advancing equity and addressing climate change. Embedded in our practices is the belief that inclusive contracting creates opportunity by growing small businesses and jobs.

Like transit agencies across the country, Metro Transit's ridership is significantly down due to the pandemic. But the drop in ridership doesn't tell the full story. Even now, Metro Transit provides nearly 100,000 rides each weekday. The pandemic highlighted how indispensable transit service is to essential workers and to others who rely on transit to meet their daily needs.

I want to thank Senator Smith and our Federal delegation for appropriating Federal COVID relief funding for transit through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act. And thank you to the Federal Transit Administration for their tremendous work in distributing these funds.

In total, our region has received over \$725 million to support transit operations during the pandemic. These funds are keeping essential transit services on the street and over 3,000 Metro Transit workers employed.

We believe successfully emerging from the pandemic requires us to continue investing in our region's transit network. Our experience shows that investing in fast, frequent, reliable, and safe service increases ridership and strengthens the role transit plays in our communities.

The map on the screen illustrates this vision. This map represents our planned 2030 network of light rail and bus rapid transit lines.

With the help of our Federal partners, we are making significant progress on each of these corridors. I'll provide a quick update on them.

Beginning with the Orange Line bus rapid transit corridor, we are completing construction, and we anticipate opening for service later this year. This line runs along I-35W. The project received a \$74 million Small Starts grant in 2019 and an additional \$11 million ARPA grant in June.

Continuing clockwise, the Green Line Extension, or Southwest LRT is under construction. This is the largest infrastructure project in State history, and work continues throughout the corridor. Just through June 2021, our Southwest contracting efforts have resulted in spend to Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) of \$155,277,877 in construction services and professional services with 100 DBE contracts and 86 unique DBEs.

The Blue Line Extension light rail project is undergoing an alignment review. We are exploring new ways to better connect the north side of Minneapolis and northern communities to the line and are conducting an extensive public engagement process on a modified alignment. When completed, the Blue Line extension will serve chronically underserved communities and help ensure the benefits of transit are available to neighborhoods that have been passed by for too long.

Moving to the right side of the map, the Purple Line dedicated guideway BRT project anticipates an environmental decision from FTA in the next 2 months, and the Council will seek entry to New Starts Project Development this fall.

The Gold Line project is a dedicated guideway BRT corridor running east from Saint Paul. We are so pleased the President's 2022 budget recommendation included \$100 million for this project. Design work is completed, and the FTA will conduct a review of the project's readiness for a Full Funding Grant next week. We're eager to move toward the Full Funding Grant Agreement in the next year and start construction next summer.

The Riverview project is beginning environmental analysis as a rail corridor that will advance in the future, connecting downtown Saint Paul with the airport and Mall of America.

Connecting all these lines are our arterial bus rapid transit corridors represented in letters. These have been successful upgrades to local bus services that have seen significant ridership growth. Half of our bus system rides are on corridors planned for arterial BRT. We have two operating arterial BRT lines, A Line and C Line. The D Line is under construction and the B and E Lines are fully funded and moving toward construction.

When our full 2040 network is constructed, LRT and BRT services will connect 28 percent of the region's residents and 44 percent of all jobs in the region. This network will serve 46 percent of the region's BIPOC residents and 60 percent of the region's renter households.

This kind of access to opportunity with high quality and affordable transit service is a central focus of our plan to reduce regional racial disparities. We understand the benefits these transformational investments provide. We're also fully aware it takes a concentrated effort with our local, regional, statewide, and Federal partners to keep our residents and businesses thriving during project development and construction. The Council is committed to producing tangible results in the area of anti-displacement and seeking opportunities to heal our communities from past injustices. The Council and Hennepin County are partnering with community members and agency stakeholders to convene a diverse Anti-Displacement Working Group to bring attention to these very issues as part of our Blue Line LRT Extension work. The Anti-Displacement Working Group will develop implementable recommendations to prevent multiple forms of displacement and promote equitable development, during the construction phase of the project and beyond.

As we expand our network, we are taking intentional steps to increase the diversity of contractors building our transit projects. This includes depositing funds with financial institutions committed to fostering entrepreneurship for people of color and women business owners, supporting on-the-job training that exposes more people to careers in construction, and connecting firms through our Mentoring Protege program, which increases opportunities for subcontracting and prime awards.

Looking ahead, we are watching the infrastructure bill that passed the Senate. If the bill becomes law, it will be a historic investment in transportation for our region and for the Nation. For one example, the bill's focus on transitioning to zero emissions fleets aligns with our commitment to expand our electric bus program. Metro Transit has made significant investments in battery electric buses and infrastructure, in large part thanks to the FTA's Low or No Emissions Program

grants. The Senate-passed infrastructure bill would further support our transition to a zero-emissions future.

In closing, thank you for this opportunity to share our progress and our vision towards building a strong transit network—a system that provides people across our region with more high-quality options to get where they need to go. We appreciate all the support we receive from our Federal partners. You truly are essential to our current and future success.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF IRENE FERNANDO
COMMISSIONER, HENNEPIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

AUGUST 24, 2021

Thank you Chair Smith, Ranking Member Rounds, and Members of the Committee: I extend my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to speak and for all the work you do.

My name is Irene Fernando, Hennepin County Commissioner and Chair of our Regional Railroad Authority. And as a commissioner, I am dedicated to advancing equity by advocating for those who are marginalized or structurally disenfranchised.

I am proud to represent District 2, which includes Golden Valley, Medicine Lake, Minneapolis, Plymouth, and St. Anthony Village. I am in my first term in office; I am the youngest woman to serve on Hennepin's board; and alongside Commissioner Angela Conley, we are the first and only commissioners of color in Hennepin's 169-year history.

History

Since the 1970s, the Twin Cities 7-county region has envisioned and pursued a regional light rail transit system. Over the years, light rail meaningfully complemented buses to create high-quality transit connections for residents and visitors. This work occurs in partnership with community and all levels of Government, with the Metropolitan Council as our regional planning organization leading to implement these important projects.

During the 1990s, Hennepin County steadily increased our commitment to affordable housing and economic development. This work enhanced light rail projects through Hennepin's Community Works program, which tailored housing and economic development investments to directly partner with local municipalities during major transportation and transit projects.

And through today, Hennepin continues to deepen and broaden our commitment to these areas by approving record investments to increase affordable housing and access to home ownership, to promote more transit oriented development, as well as to support entrepreneurs and grow small businesses.

In partnership with the Metropolitan Council, other counties, and the State, the Twin Cities 7-county region has achieved a multimodal transit system to address the various needs of our residents. From light rail transit and arterial bus rapid transit to ensure fast and frequent connections, to local service for denser communities, to bus rapid transit that connects across urban and suburban areas, to Metro Mobility which offers public transit for riders with needs due to a disability or health conditions—we are proud of this multiagency commitment to delivering high-quality transportation system that connects residents and visitors to our entire region.

Still with all of this progress, it is clear that there is much more to do to advance a regional and multimodal transit system that meets the needs of our diverse communities, by incorporating equity and environmental justice into the design, construction, and operating of transit projects.

- Design can occur more equitably when we center additional transit users. Historically, our system too heavily prioritized suburban commuters coming in and out of downtown, as well as riders who are able to choose transit. Given the shifts in work locations and patterns, as well as a growing chasm in household income levels, equitable design requires deeper commitment to workers and families—so that night-shift health care workers can travel safely, elderly can ride confidently, and a mother with grocery bags and a toddler can efficiently get home.
- Construction can occur more equitably when we establish even more aggressive diversity and inclusion benchmarks for contractors and subcontractors, as well as position organizations and workers for success with these expectations. We need to be data-informed and diligent in ensuring true living wages, and we

must partner with existing organizations who have already been training local residents to learn these important trades.

- And operating can occur more equitably when we meet residents' needs with a restorative response. We know that many transit riders may also benefit from human services offered by counties, so intentional partnership between transit operators and counties can work to improve conditions for everyone.

We are hopeful for how transit can transform lives through projects like Southwest Light Rail Extension, Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit, and Arterial Bus Rapid Transit improvements like the B, E, and F lines. And we are grateful and energized for the opportunity to partner to rise to meet the challenges in our communities.

Specifically, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act can serve Minnesotans by expanding transit service to underserved communities across the metro, making system upgrades and repairs to aging infrastructure, as well as improving air quality by expediting the transition to electric buses. It will also bring numerous construction jobs into the region, which we will benefit the stability of their households and communities.

Blue Line Extension

Today, I am excited to talk about a project that will make an incredible difference locally, with potential benefits across the country. The Blue Line Extension, which has been in the works for over 30 years, is a 13-mile light rail project that will further our region's transit vision, and will affordably connect students to education, workers to jobs, patients to health care, and families to resources. It will bring transformational benefits to residents of the corridor, connecting Brooklyn Park, through Crystal, Robbinsdale, North Minneapolis to downtown Minneapolis.

We are deeply committed to the Blue Line Extension because it is more than a project to advance—it is a commitment to the residents and communities along the corridor for ongoing engagement and economic investment for years and decades to come.

The project was in a holding pattern for a number of years due to the original alignment's colocation with the freight rail. After numerous strategies to resolve this, it became clear that delivering high-quality transit connections to our residents, in a timely manner, must be the priority.

So about one year ago, in August of 2020, Hennepin County and Metropolitan Council jointly began the community process needed to revise the alignment, in order to move away from the colocation with the freight rail. This need to revise the alignment afforded us a unique opportunity to engage communities, during a pandemic, which resulted in insightful and alarming feedback around equity, gentrification, access to resources, disinvestment, and climate.

The Corridor

This project is positioned to serve among the most racially and economically diverse communities in Minnesota, while also connecting transit-reliant residents to the broader regional transit system.

The Blue Line Extension will serve communities with long-standing disinvestment and disparities. This corridor has high concentrations of Cost Burdened Households, have felt the lasting impacts of Historical Redlining, experience more COPD Hospitalizations due to air quality, and feel the devastations of premature death as measured by Years of Potential Life Loss (see our "Advancing Equity Along the Blue Line Extension" PDF).

To visualize this need, I have two maps here and several more in your materials. The first map to my right looks at concentrations of People of Color & Transit Commuters. As you can see, the proposed Blue Line Extension serves communities who are reliant on transit, as well as the most racially diverse communities in Hennepin.

The second map to my left looks at Home Value & Adult High School Degrees. This corridor shows lower home values and lower degree attainment for adults 25+. We know that property valuation connects to disinvestment, and of course, we know there is a strong relationship between education and income.

It seems regardless of the measurement, along lines of environmental justice, health outcomes, education attainment, housing stability, or economic success, these maps and data tell a consistent and compelling story:

The Blue Line Extension will change the trajectory of what's possible for so many of my neighbors today and for generations to come. It will ignite much needed and long overdue economic development for small businesses, while building wealth for working families.

For example, I live in North Minneapolis, which is 16 percent of the City's population at about 70,000 residents. And if I wanted to host you all tonight for a sit-down dinner—I couldn't. There aren't places for people to celebrate life milestones,

nor spots for my neighborhood's kids to get their first jobs. It seems inconceivable to have this many people in an area without restaurant choices, access to jobs, or spaces to celebrate.

Extending to suburban communities in this corridor, they demonstrated greater population growth in the 2020 Census than anticipated. The largest suburb is Brooklyn Park, where the Blue Line Extension will terminate, which grew nearly 14 percent between 2010 and 2020. And in the same period, Brooklyn Center grew by over 12 percent. With ever-increasing population densities, the suburban communities in this corridor are more ready for transit investment today than ever before.

Anti-Displacement

After a century of disinvestment, racial covenants, and redlining, we have a duty to ensure current residents, small businesses, and cultural institutions are both engaged in and able to benefit from the increased development in their neighborhoods.

The communities in this corridor have suffered disproportionately over the past year—due to the pandemic, the resulting job and housing disruptions, and historic harms that must be repaired.

This is why Hennepin and Met Council are proud to have established an Anti-Displacement Workgroup that centers community voices and convenes diverse partners and stakeholders, to develop robust anti-displacement measures that counter the unintended harm from large scale infrastructure projects, with specific goals to reduce racial disparities and to create more equitable economic strategies.

The Anti-Displacement Workgroup is comprised of community leaders, business owners, residents, and experts. Together, Hennepin and Met Council issued a Request for Proposals to identify a community organization who will lead this bold effort to build in creative ways to incorporate community in the design, construction, and operation of this large scale infrastructure project.

Our teams work deliberately every day to ensure the Blue Line Extension benefits corridor residents; and minimizes physical, economic, and cultural displacement.

Our anti-displacement goals closely align with the Biden-Harris administration's Justice40 Initiative, which commits 40 percent of Federal climate investment to benefit disadvantaged communities. Transit is a climate investment, and in order to benefit disadvantaged communities, intentional focus on anti-displacement is required.

Partnership and Thank You

We hope the Committee's goals align and look forward to the possibility of partnering. We can achieve transformational benefits for our communities with Federal support, and I am confident that this work has the opportunity to be scaled to other jurisdictions due to Hennepin's size, experiences, assets, and shortcomings.

We are a mix of urban, suburban, and exurban communities, and we are adjacent to rural communities—all of whom need comprehensive transit options to access vital resources such as level 1 trauma centers, social services, veterans affairs, educational institutions, job training, and airports. Innovations that work in Hennepin can apply to counties larger and smaller, which makes this region a productive space to consider new ideas.

In partnership, we could ask questions and create replicable frameworks to center residents who have been historically marginalized, to meaningfully incorporate climate change, and to address quantifiable patterns of disinvestment through affordable housing, growing local businesses, and access to jobs.

Thank you again for the time today, and I look forward to hearing your questions or reactions. And thank you, Chair Smith.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ALISON ZELMS

CITY ADMINISTRATOR, CITY OF ROCHESTER, MINNESOTA

AUGUST 24, 2021

Madam Chair, My name is Alison Zelms (Z-E-L-M-S), City Administrator for the City of Rochester. We are located a little over an hour south of the twin cities metro area and our community has approximately 119,000 residents and over 3 million visitors each year for our world renowned medical care from the Mayo Clinic.

I'd like to begin by expressing our gratitude for several recent Congressional actions.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) have been critically important sources of emergency transit funding. Ridership on Rochester Public Transit regular routes fell 90 percent in the early days of the pandemic; today we are still 65 percent below 2019 levels.

The emergency operations funding allowed us keep our current bus routes throughout the city running and to implement extensive cleaning and other safety measures to keep operators and passengers safe. CARES capital funding (with no local match required) allowed us to purchase 10 replacement buses without tapping depleted reserves to come up with the local dollars. Without CARES and ARPA we would not have been able to safely operate our essential service for the many essential workers we have in Rochester.

We appreciate the consideration by Congress for President Biden's and U.S. Department of Transportation 2022 budget. Investment in infrastructure supports resiliency when it is needed most in our communities. This investment allows for transit programs that create and increase equitable access to opportunity. It includes \$56.1 million for Rochester's Bus Rapid Transit project which was included in the U.S. Department of Transportation FY22 Budget.

Rochester's bus rapid transit project, known as The Link, is a transformational public transit project currently in the design phase, and has applied for funding from the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant's Small Starts program.

This high-amenity, high-frequency downtown transit service is part of a comprehensive mobility strategy. Local funding through our Destination Medical Center, the largest public-private economic initiative in Minnesota and the catalyst for growth in Rochester, will further the goal of creating a global destination for health and wellness.

This once-in-a-generation project will have a broad impact in our community, advancing important foundational principles and strategic priorities, which include the following areas:

Environmental Sustainability. The Link will move people more efficiently and reduce vehicle miles traveled in our community; Reduce future environmental and livability problems associated with traffic congestion; and the electric powered fleet will reduce our city's environmental footprint and help the city transition away from fossil fuels.

Economic Health. The Link will help reduce downtown parking demand, allowing for higher and better land-use in the downtown core; will encourage investment in high-density, affordable, mixed-use development along transit corridors; and will be a signature amenity in Rochester for residents and visitor by providing a superior customer transit experience.

Social Equity. The Link provides access to employment and other opportunities for populations who need it most—we know that economic and social mobility is strongly correlated with physical mobility; and will have a long-term halo effect, strengthening the overall Rochester Public Transit system providing the opportunity to improve service to transit-dependent populations.

In addition to this major effort, the City of Rochester sees additional challenges and opportunities perhaps more unique to a transit system outside of the metro area that we wanted to share:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant adverse effect on transit ridership. While the principles that shape our mobility strategy remain in place, a high degree of uncertainty exists, such as the following questions:

When will the public health crisis subside and the associated operational restrictions and guidance from Federal, State, and local authorities be eased?

When will people feel comfortable returning to public transit, from a personal risk perspective? How will the recent proliferation of remote work affect the rate of growth in transit demand?

We are confident that demand will return and grow. However, we anticipate the rate of growth may need to be reevaluated.

The COVID-19 pandemic has sped the rate of change and encouraged innovation, leading to an opportunity to reconsider and improve many aspects of transit service delivery. For example, the need to disinfect the onboard environment means new cleaning protocols and filtration technologies that will lead to improved customer comfort.

Touchless mobile fare payment technology is being implemented in Rochester—long-planned, but of increased importance now. Vehicle technology continues to advance, such as improvements in range and performance of battery electric vehicles and on-street pilot testing of autonomous transit vehicles. In fact, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and First Transit, Rochester Public Transit's contracted operator, have a year-long autonomous shuttle pilot operating on the streets in Rochester—expected to carry passengers starting this fall.

I ask the Members of this Committee to support continued Federal resources for local transit agencies that will help us emerge healthy and build our infrastructure for the future. With no clear end to the impacts of COVID-19 in sight, operation support will continue to be needed to guarantee we are able to provide essential services to the most vulnerable populations.

Federal capital programs like those in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) as well as ongoing transportation-specific programs such as the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program are essential to implement sustainable equitable mobility available to everyone that encompasses congestion management, social equity, affordable housing, economic development, and climate action.

Thank you again for this opportunity and your time.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GRACE WALTZ

VICE PRESIDENT OF PUBLIC POLICY, MINNEAPOLIS REGIONAL CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE

AUGUST 24, 2021

Chair Smith and Administrator Fernandez, thank you for the opportunity to address the importance of investing in a strong transit network. My name is Grace Waltz, and I am the Vice President of Public Policy at the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce. The Minneapolis Regional Chamber is the largest local chamber in Minnesota with nearly 2,300 members in the 11-county metro region. Over the past 10 years, the Minneapolis Regional Chamber and our partners have commissioned two studies from national experts to assess the expected return on investment from building out our region's transit system. These reports have confirmed that in addition to providing more and better ways to get around, investments in transit pay off, both for those who use transit, and those who use our roads and highways. Building a comprehensive transit system in our metro area will provide a major return on investment—more than \$9 billion in positive direct impacts. Improved public transit is a key component to eliminating access barriers to equitable employment and economic disparities. Employers and employees have been seeking better transit, and this report shows that it is the smart thing to do from a monetary perspective. It is also important to note that our most recent study found that 81 percent of the benefits of a better transit system would be enjoyed by people and businesses using the region's street and highway system due to reduced traffic, thus avoiding inconveniences like shipping delays and long daily commutes.

Beyond the clear economic benefits, public support for improved transit access is incredibly high. A 2018 poll commissioned by the Minneapolis Regional Chamber showed that 74 percent of all respondents said they would support the State of Minnesota making additional investments in transit, including buses, trains and light rail. There is also strong support for making transit easier to use. 58 percent said that they would like to use public transit such as rail or buses more often, but it is not convenient to or available from their home or work. Nearly two-thirds believe that transit is necessary to compete with other metro areas for jobs. 64 percent said that Minneapolis-Saint Paul needs a better regional transit system in order to compete for jobs with peer cities such as Denver, Salt Lake City, Dallas, and Portland that have more complete transit systems. These results make it clear that Minnesotans recognize that transit is good for our economy and their day to day lives, making our State stronger and more competitive.

It also must be noted that the way we think about our transit systems looks different than it did just 17 months ago. The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to remote work decimated demand for public transit in the Twin Cities and across the country. While some companies have begun the process of bringing their workers back to the office, continued uncertainty has delayed the return to office for many companies, and there continue to be some who may never bring their workers back to prepandemic levels.

As we think about the transit system of the future, we need to think about building systems that are more than about getting people to and from work—we need systems that allow people to use transit to go to a doctor's appointment, the grocery store, out to dinner, or to a sporting event. To put it plainly, it's no longer enough to build a system that only gets people from Point A to Point B. We need a system that gets people from Point A, to C, to D, E, and F, back to A again.

Federal, State, and local leaders recognize that we are at a unique moment in time when it comes to making innovative investments. There is momentum for transit investments here in Minnesota that strengthen our economy and make our State an even better place for businesses and employees. Investment in transit is a true win-win that helps more people live their lives, get to their jobs, providing benefits to everyone in the region. We know that businesses prefer to locate near transit where employees and customers will have more travel options. Investing in transit now will generate positive impacts for our economy for decades, including additional State and local tax revenues of nearly the same magnitude as the investment costs—\$143 million a year or \$2.86 billion over 20 years.

Economic benefits aside, the recent United Nations climate report painted a terrifying picture of what is to come if we do not change the way we treat the planet, and transit plays a major role in a cleaner future. Over this past summer Minnesotans have witnessed the devastating impacts of climate change in our own backyards, which is to say nothing of the impacts in other parts of the country and around the world.

The Minneapolis Regional Chamber has been advocating strongly for transit investments—and this ROI information only strengthens our resolve and desire to make this happen. We are hopeful that policymakers will recognize the significant benefits that comes with transit and will make smart choices in support of investments that benefit our economy, employees, and everyone in the region. Thank you for focusing on this very important issue.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CASSANDRA BELYEU JOHNSON

TRANSIT RIDER, BROOKLYN PARK, MINNESOTA

AUGUST 24, 2021

Hello and thank you for your time today as I talk about what public transportation means to me and the community of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center. My name is Cassandra Belyeu and I am a resident of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota on the borderline of Brooklyn Center, where I have resided for the past 4 years. I am a passionate advocate for transportation access. I am here today to share my perspectives with Senator Tina Smith and the panel.

Transportation is lacking in my area, an issue I feel needs to be addressed. My research on the Metro website has revealed only four buses that I am aware of that service the cities of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park. Anyone who misses one of these buses will be forced to wait an hour for the next arrival or walk long distances of potentially over a mile. During the Minnesota winters, such a long wait or walk can be an extremely difficult challenge.

Without access to reliable transportation, simple tasks like shopping and receiving a haircut can occupy significant portions of someone's day. While I have personal access to a car today, I didn't always. I can still recall spending half my day planning a haircut due to lack of access to timely transportation, arriving a full hour early just to secure my spot with my barber. I would also rely on family to pick me up and take me home afterwards, if my haircut appointment ended in the evening when buses were less available. During the weekends, I always had to get a ride, because buses were even more unavailable than during the week.

My story is far from the only one, and the time it occupied in my day shows the necessity of reliable transportation in the Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area, where currently it is lacking. My story raises the question of what would happen to other Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center residents like me who either temporarily or permanently rely on public transportation.

I have also spoken with friends in order to hear their perspective on what public transportation means to them. I have a friend who would love to move to the northwest suburbs, particularly Brooklyn Park, but finds such a move difficult due to lack of public transportation. My friend's story shows that public transportation is not only a means of offering access to numerous locations for current residents, but also a means of bringing people into our communities.

In addition to knowing people who are unsure about moving to the area, I also know people who live in the Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area who have been stranded and needed me for a ride home because they couldn't get home using Brooklyn Center transit. Instead, I had to pick them up where they were. No bus ran close to their home, meaning they would've had to have walked miles if I hadn't picked them up, and in very bad weather.

Access to public transportation is also extremely important for children and during holidays. During Halloween and other public activities, children often have trouble arriving because the events can be so far spread out.

I am here to say that the transportation situation right now is not working for many people in the Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area. I would like to demand that the buses in Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park run longer hours, including hours that go beyond rush hour into the evening and weekend times, specifically Sundays where they often do not run at all, and that the buses offer more stops, particularly in underprivileged communities.

Even though I have a car, I would still like to use public transportation from time to time. During trips to the Mall of America, I still use public transportation. My example shows that even people with access to personal transportation can still benefit from stronger public transportation.

My story and the stories of countless Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center residents raises the question of what access to public transportation means for residents, and shows the tremendous effect it can have on the community.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NURIA FERNANDEZ

ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

AUGUST 24, 2021

Good morning. Chair Smith and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today here in the Twin Cities.

This is a truly pivotal time for our Nation's public transportation systems. Thanks to your diligence and hard work, the Senate recently passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The legislation includes \$550 billion in new Federal investment in America's roads and bridges, water infrastructure, resilience, internet, and more. The transit industry will receive almost \$90 billion in guaranteed funding—the most significant Federal support for transit in our Nation's history.

That proposed funding is not just an abstract number. It will improve people's lives throughout the Nation. Here in Minnesota, 11 percent of trains and buses in the State are past their useful life. It's clear the State of Minnesota would benefit greatly from the more than \$818 million designated under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to improve public transportation.

I can confidently say that this State has been a great partner in advancing public transportation. The Biden-Harris administration is laser-focused on supporting good work in transit, like what we are seeing in Minnesota.

I want to take a moment to thank Chairman Brown and Members of this Subcommittee for all you did to shepherd this vital infrastructure bill through the Senate these last few months. I know it was not easy!

With the passage of the infrastructure bill through the Senate, I am more optimistic than I have ever been. This level of Federal funding will touch lives in every corner of the country, including here in Minnesota. At long last, transit systems will have the resources to expand, modernize and offer 21st-century technology solutions and services that Americans deserve, and should expect, to help get them to jobs, school, and vital services.

From right here in the Twin Cities region to smaller urban and rural communities throughout Minnesota. We will ensure safe and efficient transportation for everyone.

The legislation also includes funding dedicated to zero-emission vehicles—and funding to train transit workers who maintain and operate those vehicles—advancing the Administration's climate and job creation goals. As we continue to switch from fossil fuels to electric or hydrogen, we will reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that play such a big role in our planet's rising temperatures. We will also build the manufacturing, power production, and maintenance jobs of the future, like the ones here in Minnesota where they're producing the transit fleet of the future right now. In doing all this, the Biden-Harris administration will commit to the men and women who build transit and keep it running—we will not leave working Americans behind while transit moves forward.

This work is more important than ever, given the recent alarming report from the U.N. Panel on Climate Change, which declared our last decade the hottest in history and confirmed carbon dioxide is the leading contributor to climate change. In fact, according to the report, unless we sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions—and soon—global warming will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius, after which climate consequences will be even more severe.

The folks here in Minnesota know all about this. This summer has been drier than any since the 1980s. You have all walked outside to the haze of a sun blotted

out by the smoke of wildfires. From coast to coast, while the skies might be smoky, the evidence is crystal clear—we have no more time to waste.

The Federal Transit Administration's Region 5 Administrator Kelley Brookins, who leads our work in Minnesota, is here with me today. Kelley and her team partner with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and 51 transit agencies throughout the State to fund public transportation serving all 87 Minnesota counties. As part of her work, she administers approximately \$394 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan, which was signed by President Biden earlier this year. These funds are helping transit agencies across Minnesota continue to operate, despite significant losses in ridership and revenue due to COVID. Among the ARP funds apportioned to the State:

- \$23 million is going to Minnesota's smaller cities,
- \$15.3 million is designated for rural transit, including tribal transit, and
- More than \$700,000 dollars will support service for seniors and people with disabilities.

We are supporting the travel needs of workers in Saint Cloud, helping college students at Mankato get to class, enabling members of the White Earth Band of Chippewa Indians to get to doctor's appointments, and much more.

Here in the Twin Cities, the Metropolitan Council has made a commitment to expand transit—with six new high-capacity lines on the way—which will truly transform communities in the region by closing gaps in service and offering mobility options to more people in the community. Through our Capital Investment Grants Program, FTA has helped support the amazing successes seen by the Bus Rapid Transit program here in the Twin Cities. The Met Council is creating a BRT system that can be held up as a standard for other cities. As we move forward, FTA also looks forward to supporting the expansion of that program and the light rail. Currently in our pipeline, we are working with Met Council to develop:

- Two bus rapid transit lines: the Orange Line and the Gold Line, and
- Two light rail projects: the Green Line Southwest Extension and the Blue Line Bottineau Extension.

When built, these projects will add 55 miles to the transit network and extend through a dozen communities, creating better connections to opportunities. Those opportunities will truly be open to everyone who calls the Twin Cities, and the suburbs, home. Equity is a critical issue to FTA, and to the Biden-Harris administration, and it is why I am so proud to be working in transit. I've often said it is the great equalizer. Once those doors open and you step on board, everyone has the same opportunity to go where they need to go, to be who they want to be. These Bus Rapid Transit and light rail routes will serve otherwise underserved communities, where not everyone can afford a car. They will make sure that, regardless of how you travel, everyone has an equal shot at getting where they're going.

This truly bold transit expansion will support a region so important to the successful economic recovery of Minnesota. It will also give us a unique opportunity. Transit can be a tool that is so often lacking. It gives us the chance to address the inequities of our past. Sometimes, these mistakes, these inequities, were caused by blind neglect. Other times, it was a conscious choice to leave some people in the shadows. One of my goals at FTA is to ensure that transit brings a light of opportunity for those who have been denied it by our system for far too long.

Transit won't just be changing lives here in the Twin Cities either. To the southeast, we look forward to seeing the City of Rochester launch its first bus rapid transit line, connecting downtown residents and visitors with the Mayo Clinic, the University of Minnesota-Rochester campus, and other important destinations. There is also a major transit-oriented development site planned along the route.

FTA is proud to be a partner supporting critical transit projects in Minnesota. Thank you, Met Council CEO David Greenfield, Chair Charlie Zelle, and Metro Transit General Manager Wes Kooistra for your vision and leadership. We look forward to getting a first-hand look at the Orange Line, which is set to open later this year.

With that, I would again like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I welcome your questions.

**RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS OF CHAIR SMITH
FROM NURIA FERNANDEZ**

Q.1. In response to a question on efforts to prevent displacement, you noted that displacement is a problem that has occurred nationwide, and that there are some best practices to combat displacement as a result of new transit projects. What steps has FTA taken, and what additional steps will FTA be taking, to compile best practices to prevent displacement? Will you be holding a roundtable for grantees or publishing guidance for transit agencies or others with that information?

A.1. FTA is committed to ensuring that persons displaced as a direct result of Federal or federally assisted projects are treated fairly, consistently, and equitably in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act so that displaced persons do not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of projects designed for the benefit of the public as a whole. The President's Justice40 Initiative is an important part of that commitment, with the goal of delivering 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant Federal investments to disadvantaged communities. Transit development often spurs other types of development in an area, which can lead to displacement of existing residents contributing to patterns of residential segregation and disparities in access to opportunity, and therefore FTA is committed to ensuring its Justice40 Initiative does not lead to displacement. FTA is also committed to civil rights statutes related to transportation, such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq. (Title VI), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives Federal funds or other Federal financial assistance. The FTA Equity Analysis completed by a grantee during the planning stage with regard to where a project is located or sited is one Title VI compliance tool that utilizes demographic data in order to better understand how DOT programs impact various groups, including communities that are minority, low-income, and limited English proficient. FTA is committed to working with our stakeholders and Federal partners to identify solutions to remove infrastructure that has displaced or separated communities. We are examining how we can advance equity and further embed fairness in our policies and programs, and I look forward to continuing to work with you on this issue.

Q.2. In evaluating grant proposals, how does FTA consider anti-displacement efforts? Do you think FTA's current evaluation process puts enough weight on anti-displacement provisions in awarding grants? How might FTA plan to update grant evaluation criteria to address anti-displacement?

A.2. The Secretary has made clear that he is dedicated to proactively addressing the needs of communities that have been historically overburdened and underserved by our Nation's transportation systems, and I am too. In FTA's Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO), we provide priority consideration for projects that advance and support the goal of the President's Justice40 Initiative, which is to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant Federal investments to disadvantaged communities. How-

ever, many of FTA's discretionary programs do not cause displacement since they fund projects such as bus procurements. The FTA Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program, which funds new transit projects and expansions to existing systems, specifically takes into consideration in the evaluation and rating process the plans and policies in place at the local level to maintain and increase affordable housing to avoid displacements and gentrification effects that can sometimes occur. FTA's Pilot Program for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Planning grants fund comprehensive or site-specific planning studies for projects seeking funding through the CIG program. We are currently developing the FY22 TOD Planning grant NOFO and looking at ways to further incorporate Justice40 and homelessness considerations.

Q.3. Displacement is an issue with ramifications across many Federal agency jurisdictions. How is the FTA working with other agencies to address the impacts of displacement and work to mitigate displacement as a result of federally supported projects? More specifically, is DOT/FTA working with HUD, EPA, or any other Federal agencies to prevent physical, cultural, or economic displacement?

A.3. FTA works with our Federal partners, including EPA and HUD, to provide important protections and assistance for individuals and communities affected by federally funded projects. FTA is currently meeting on a regular basis with HUD to discuss how the agencies can work together to administer grant programs with other agencies' programs in mind. The focus thus far has been on FTA's Areas of Persistent Poverty and Transit Oriented Development Planning discretionary grant programs.

Q.4. Several witnesses discussed procurement strategies to allow more small contractors and contractors of color to win contracts. How do these efforts vary from transit agency to transit agency? How is FTA communicating best practices to transit agencies with respect to contracting opportunities, and is that communication sufficient? Does FTA's current system of contracting goals adequately incentivize transit agencies to meaningfully improve access to procurement opportunities for contractors of color?

A.4. FTA plays a key role in connecting small businesses, minority-owned businesses, and women-owned businesses with economic opportunities as we build transportation systems. Our primary tool for ensuring women- and minority-owned businesses have access to DOT-funded contracts is the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program, applicable to most FTA recipients with federally funded capital, operating, and planning contracts. Since 2012, the DOT program has required FTA recipients with a DBE program to reach out to DBEs and potential DBEs, and to have a Small Business Element (SBE) to foster small business participation, which expands the impact of the program beyond certified DBEs to include small businesses.

Procurement efforts at the local level naturally vary. Each transit agency develops its own plan to foster small business participation that includes strategies tailored for the size of the agency, the types of contracts they let, and other local conditions. FTA ap-

proved these programs in 2012 and continues to review them as submitted.

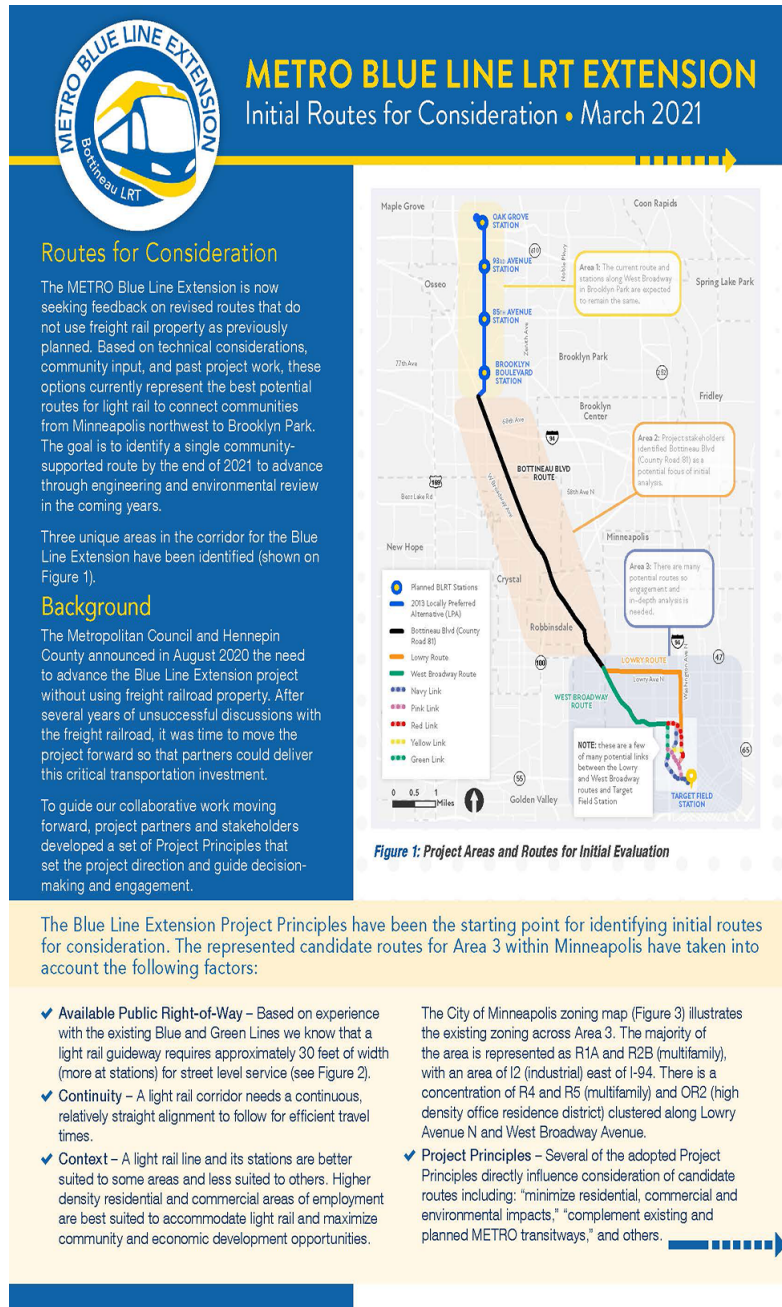
The DBE program is a DOT program. The contract goals and incentives in the program are determined by the regulations. That said, flexibility is a hallmark of the DBE program and FTA coordinates extensively with the Secretary's Office, the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, FHWA, and FAA to identify challenges and opportunities in the program for recipients, certifiers, and small businesses. FTA offers an extensive library of training materials on our DBE webpage, including best practices in the SBE program. We also partner with the National Transit Institute to offer regular training in the DBE program, one of NTI's most in-demand courses. FTA's efforts to improve access to procurement opportunities for contractors of color have been successful: nationwide, FTA recipients regularly meet their local goals, which are based on DBE availability.

Q.5. Have you identified any weakness or loopholes in FTA's Buy America statutes, regulations, or practices? If so, what steps are you taking to address them?

A.5. It is vitally important for FTA to ensure that taxpayer dollars support American jobs and manufacturing. FTA's Buy America statutes, regulations, and practices protect American jobs by requiring that all steel, iron, and manufactured goods used in transit projects must be produced in the United States. They also require audits of revenue rolling stock purchases to ensure that these procurements are compliant with Buy America. To further strengthen FTA's Buy America program, FTA is working to implement President Biden's Executive Order 14005, "Ensuring the Future Is Made in All of America by All of America's Workers", as well as the Build America, Buy America title of the bipartisan infrastructure law. Accordingly, FTA is committed to working closely with the Office of Management and Budget's Made in America Office to evaluate Buy America policies and practices, including the waiver review process. In addition, FTA is working to update the Buy America regulations at 49 CFR Part 661 to incorporate statutory changes and to make other amendments.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUPPLIED FOR THE RECORD

METRO BLUE LINE EXTENSION



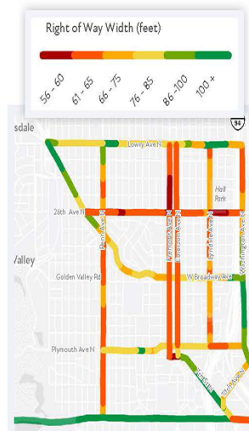


Figure 2: Rights-of-Way Width in Area 3

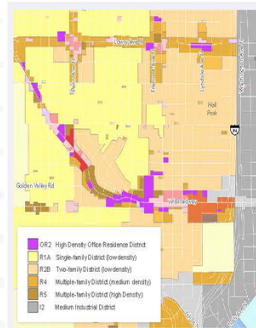


Figure 3: Existing Zoning in Area 3 (Source: City of Minneapolis)

Using these factors, the project team reviewed potential options.

What remained after the initial review includes two primary routes (Lowry Avenue and West Broadway) and a series of linking segments in downtown Minneapolis that could connect the two in varying ways.

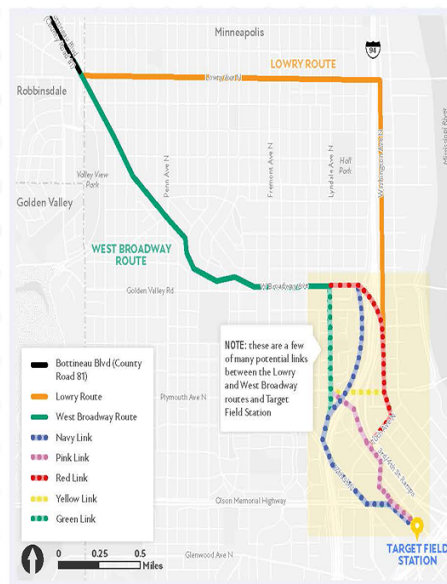


Figure 4: Potential Routes for Evaluation in Area 3

Next Steps

We want to hear from you! Visit BlueLineExt.org to view our interactive map, provide comments, take a survey, or connect with project staff.



What routes do you want to see advanced?



What opportunities do you see?



What challenges do you see?

Stay Connected!

Project website: BlueLineExt.org
Follow us on Twitter: [@BlueLineExt](https://twitter.com/BlueLineExt)

For project questions or to invite us to an event, contact Sophia Ginis, Manager of Public Involvement:
Sophia.Ginis@Metrotransit.org



ADVANCING EQUITY ALONG THE BLUE LINE EXTENSION





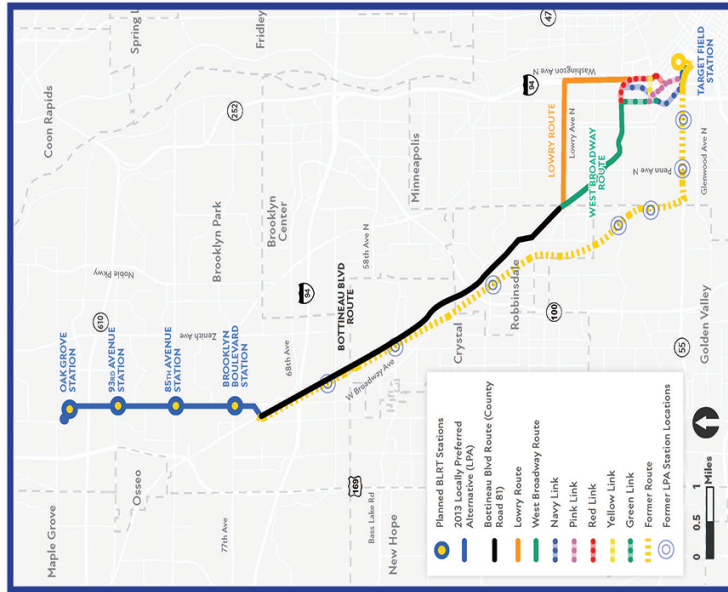
Blue Line Light Rail Extension project

The Blue Line Extension will run from downtown Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park, connecting some of our region's most diverse communities and transit reliant residents to jobs, education, and opportunities.

After over a century of disinvestment, racial covenants, and redlining, we have a duty to ensure that existing residents, small businesses, and cultural institutions are both engaged in and able to benefit from the increased public and private development occurring in their neighborhoods.

By advancing robust anti-displacement and community wealth building strategies alongside the light rail project, we aim to set a national standard for how projects of this scale can leverage existing community assets to maximize community and economic benefits to existing residents, businesses and communities.

This guide shares some of the challenges these communities face and opportunities for the Blue Line Extension to reduce disparities and improve people's lives.



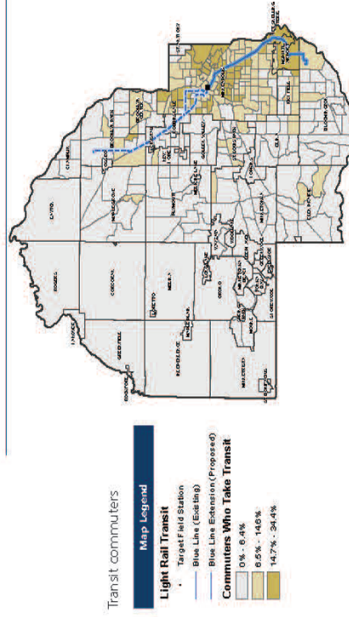
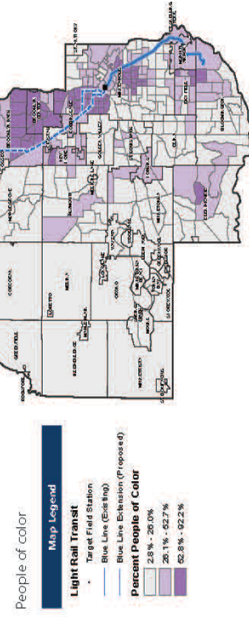


Serve communities of color and people who rely on transit

Light rail will connect people to new opportunities and destinations in areas with:

- majority people of color
- high rates of people who use transit to meet everyday needs

Strategy: Partnering with cultural and community organizations to engage diverse stakeholders in planning and decision-making



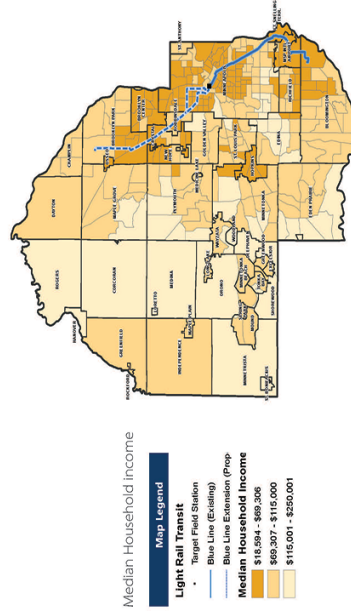
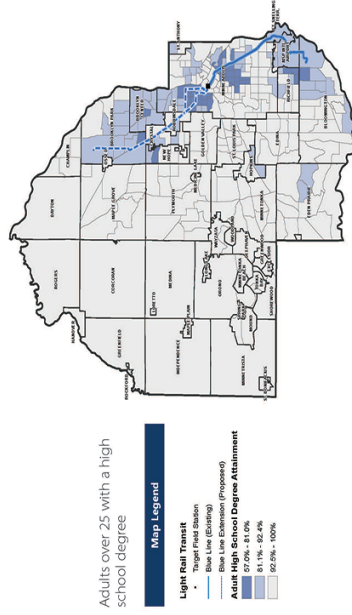


Connect people to jobs and education

Linking people more efficiently to educational and employment opportunities will reduce commute times, increase access to goods and services, and unlock potential in a corridor with:

- high rates of people over 25 without high school degrees
- some of the lowest household incomes in the region

Strategy: Work closely with educational institutions and employers along the line to ensure students and workers are served and connected



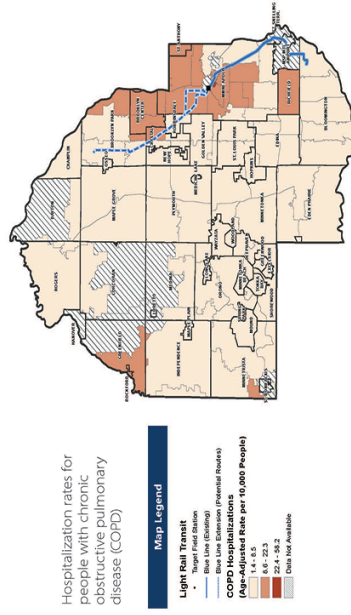
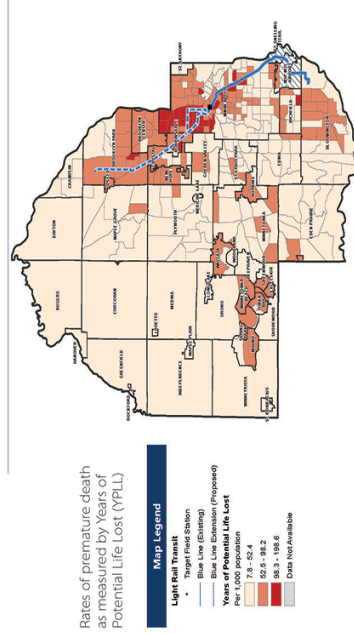


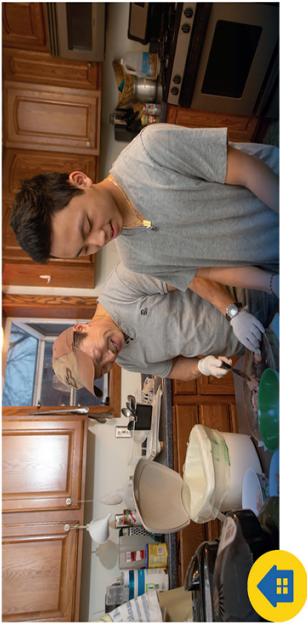
Improve public health and reduce pollution

Connecting people to quality health care and providing clean active transportation choices will serve as a lifeline for well being in a corridor where residents:

- are more likely to experience premature death
- are more likely to be hospitalized for COPD

Strategies: Direct connection with North Memorial hospital. Incorporate active transportation investments in station area planning, work with health institutions to best serve and connect patients and workers, advance clean transportation options that support climate action goals



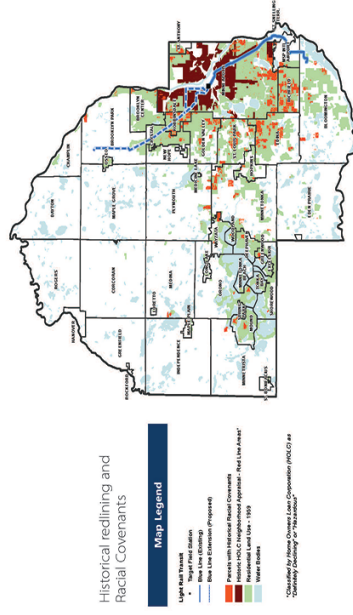
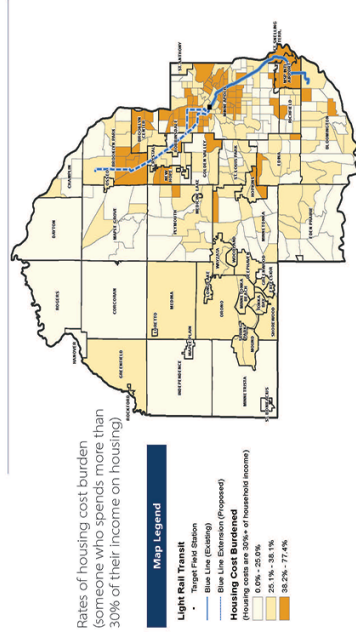


Increase access to affordable housing

Ensuring access to affordable housing will create strong foundations on which residents can build stable lives in areas with:

- high rates of housing cost burden
- a history of systemic redlining and racist covenants

Strategies: Inclusive zoning ordinances in station areas, guide affordable housing development and preservation, expand homeownership and home rehab programs, advance robust anti-displacement and renter protection strategies



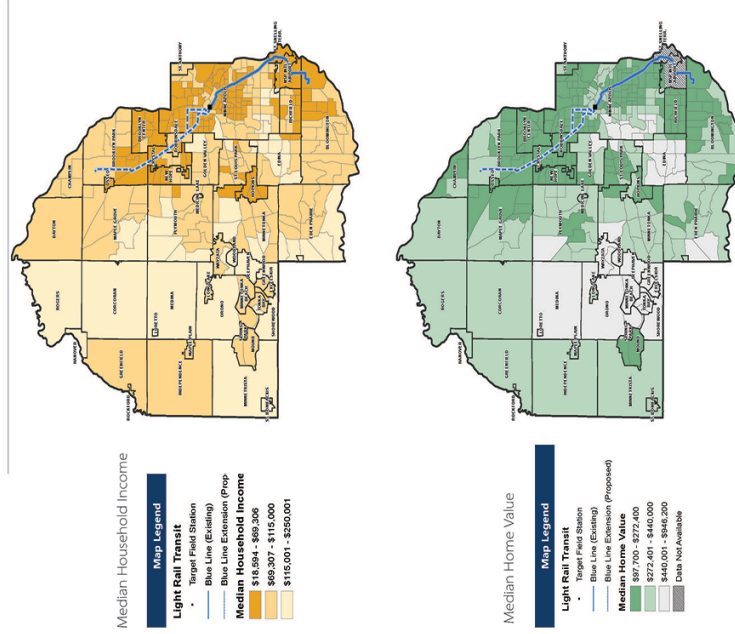




Help residents and communities build wealth in place

Investing in community-driven visions for economic development in the corridor will grow prosperity in areas with:

- low household incomes
- low home values


Strategies: Small business support and technical assistance, actionable anti-displacement strategies, community and economic development planning, strong project local workforce and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) benchmarks






Setting a new standard for community wealth building and anti-displacement strategies along light rail

Explore the corridor's many assets and destinations: <https://arcg.is/19T5z40>



METROPOLITAN
COUNCIL



Hennepin

BlueLineExt.org

STATEMENT OF NEW FLYER OF AMERICA



Testimony Submitted for the Record on behalf of New Flyer of America

*Before the United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development Field Hearing:
"Exploring Minnesota's Transit Priorities"*

August 22, 2021

New Flyer of America ("New Flyer") is grateful for the opportunity to provide this testimony for the Subcommittee's field hearing, "Exploring Minnesota's Transit Priorities."

We thank Subcommittee Chair Smith for her attentive leadership on this issue at a crucial time in our country's debate over how to expand and improve upon our Nation's infrastructure. We have been proud to partner with the Subcommittee Chairman on transit policy throughout her tenure in the Senate and on the Banking Committee. We celebrate her willingness to champion our industry and her appreciation for the multitude of benefits that public transportation offers to the citizens of the United States, and Minnesota. Transit investments contribute to climate change improvements, mobility for underserved populations, and the creation and sustainment of good-paying, highly skilled jobs.

New Flyer is headquartered in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and is the largest OEM employer in the transit bus industry, with over 5,700 employees in the U.S. and Canada. Over 3,300 of those employees are based in the U.S., spanning 30 states. We are proud of the fact that we have the largest employee footprint in Minnesota in terms of New Flyer jobs per state: St. Cloud's employee base is 725, while Crookston boasts 325 employees. Since establishing a presence in Minnesota, New Flyer has invested more than \$50 million in the state, upgrading and expanding its facilities and augmenting workforce development to better enable the new mobility era, and the advancement of zero-emission adoption.

Our manufacturing facilities now have the capability of producing zero-emission, heavy-duty transit buses, in addition to the more traditional vehicles using diesel propulsion systems. New Flyer has over 50 years of experience manufacturing zero-emission buses and has delivered over 6,400 electric vehicles in North America. Our battery-electric bus saves up to \$400,000 in energy costs and \$125,000 in maintenance over a 12-year life span.

New Flyer is encouraged by the Biden Administration's focus on clean, green technology; both for what it will do for our communities, as well as what it will do to advance our business, and the employees whose careers depend on manufacturing these high-quality, increasingly sought-after vehicles. New Flyer enthusiastically supports the recently passed provisions in the United States Senate's bipartisan infrastructure bill which provides nearly \$1 trillion in total infrastructure spending over five years.

Increases to the Bus and Bus Facilities Formula Program, the Bus and Bus Facilities Discretionary program, the Low or No Emission Vehicle Grant Program, the Capital Investment Grant Program, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program are highly encouraging. As well, the creation of the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Grant Program will make meaningful strides to make innovative technology available to communities across our country. This investment will support future innovations, such as the deployment of the zero-emission Hydrogen Fuel-Cell Electric Xcelsior Charge H2™, which can save 85-135 tons of greenhouse gas per year from tailpipe emissions compared to diesel buses. We are eager to bring more New Flyer buses that feature innovative zero-emission technologies manufactured in Minnesota, to communities across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to supplement today's hearing. We are grateful to the Committee for exploring the critical mobility and climate issues facing our great Nation and are honored to be a part of the discussion.

Built to Rely On®

**STATEMENT OF RAFAEL ORTEGA, CHAIR OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY
REGIONAL RAIL AUTHORITY AND RAMSEY COUNTY COMMIS-
SIONER—DISTRICT 5**

Rafael Ortega
Chair of the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority and Ramsey County Commissioner District 5
August 24, 2021
U.S. Senate Field Hearing – Examining Minnesota’s Transit Priorities
Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs
Subcommittee - Housing, Transportation and Community Development
Senator Smith, Chair

Chair Smith, Committee Members, and Administrator Fernandez.

As Chair of the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority, I am honored to welcome you to Minnesota and thank you for holding this hearing and providing Ramsey County the opportunity to offer our perspective on the importance of a strong transit system in Minnesota’s Twin Cities region.

Ramsey County sees transit as a strategy that advances economic competitiveness and inclusiveness by creating greater prosperity and opportunity for all—whether you are a young mom on West Seventh who needs a reliable way to get to her job at the airport every day, a suburban commuter or a downtown resident taking the Green Line to a soccer game at Allianz Field. Transit is a crucial element in our transportation network built for those of all abilities.

Some background, more than 550,000 Minnesotans call Ramsey County home. We are in the heart of the 7-county St. Paul and Minneapolis metro area, the 2nd most populous county in Minnesota with roughly 10 percent of the state’s residents. Predominantly urban, Ramsey is the smallest and most densely populated county in the state. Our communities are nationally known as attractive places rich in diversity, history and opportunity and I am proud that people want to live here. For those reasons and more, a strong transit system is vital to our residents and the federal partnership to fund our existing transit system and support oncoming projects cannot be underestimated.

Working with the Metropolitan Council Ramsey County is developing critical transit investments specifically targeted to areas that depend on transit to connect to important services, healthcare, and jobs. Specifically, let me call out three projects that should be priorities for FTA:

- The Riverview Corridor between downtown Saint Paul’s Union Depot and the Mall of America
- The METRO Gold Line Corridor between Union Depot and the City of Woodbury
- The Rush Line Corridor between Union Depot and the City of White Bear Lake

Additionally, during the last Minnesota state legislative session Ramsey County successfully lobbied for the state’s contribution to the 2nd train to Chicago passenger rail improvements and we are pleased the federal government has dollars set aside for the project.

Let me also share some important policy items for both the Committee and FTA to consider:

- The federal government should once again take a larger share of the funding for local transit projects. In our region, and I believe in many others, local governments must fund the building of new transit projects.
- Cutting the approval process time for projects would aid local governments by helping with the budgeting process and keeping the public engaged. It should not take years and a more efficient process would accelerate implementation of more transit at a time when transit dependent riders need more options.

The Senate’s recent vote on President Biden’s infrastructure bill sent a strong message and reminds the public these investments are critical to our nation’s future. Ensuring this legislation becomes law will open the door for local governments to expand transit systems and I encourage you all to work for passage in 2021.

Finally, our country and the region benefit from our strong federal partners including Senator Tina Smith, Senator Amy Klobuchar, and Representative Betty McCollum. Senator Smith, Committee Members and Administrator Fernandez, thank you for your continued partnership, it is appreciated.

METRO DIAGRAM

