

CITIZENS LEAGUE
530 Syndicate Building
Minneapolis, MN 55402

January 23, 1985

STATEMENT

TO: Members, Metropolitan Council and Regional Transit Board

SUBJECT: Citizens League comments on transit alternatives analysis and draft environmental impact statement

This statement was prepared by the Citizens League for presentation at a joint public meeting of the Metropolitan Council and Regional Transit Board on Wednesday, Jan. 23, 1985, to receive comment on a draft environmental impact statement on transit alternatives in the University Ave. and Southwest corridors. We have divided this statement in two parts. The first part concerns specific comments on the draft environmental impact statement. The second part concerns the League's overall positions on LRT.

COMMENTS ON DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

In general, the draft environmental impact statement includes the essential information for the Council and RTB to make a decision. If there is a problem, it is that the implications of the data are not spelled out as thoroughly as they might. Our comments here are designed to help make those implications clearer.

1. What are the implications of the population and employment data on page 3-3?—These data are extremely important and bear special emphasis. For ease of understanding we have rearranged the data on that page:

	<u>1980</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>% change</u>
POPULATION INCREASE				
Total population, seven-county area	1,985,900	2,426,300	440,400	22.2%
Population in corridors under study	335,800	350,400	14,600	4.3%
Population in balance of seven-county area	1,650,100	2,075,900	425,800	25.8%
EMPLOYMENT INCREASE				
Total employment, seven-county area	1,037,800	1,357,600	319,800	30.8%
Employment in corridors under study	381,200	441,800	60,600	15.9%
Employment in balance of seven-county area	656,600	915,800	259,200	39.5%

These data show that an additional 14,600 residents are forecast in the area of the University and Southwest corridors out of a total of 440,400 new residents in the entire metropolitan area in the year 2000, which means that 96.7 percent of the growth in population is forecast to occur in parts of the metropolitan area outside the corridors under study. The data show an additional 60,600 jobs in the corridor area out of a total of 319,800 new jobs in the metropolitan area between 1980 and the year 2000, which means that 81.1 percent of the growth in jobs is forecast to occur in the parts of the metropolitan area outside the corridors under study.

This information raises a question about the relative need for new service in these corridors in comparison to the needs in the rest of the region, particularly since the corridors under study already have a significant amount of transit service.

2. What is the split in ridership between transit and driving under the various options?—This question is answered partially in the tables on page 4-11 and 4-13, which indicate a maximum diversion of trips to transit of 6,600 in the University corridor and 5,800 in the Southwest corridor. However, the tables do not list the overall distribution of trips, which is known among transportation planners as the "modal split". This data is available and should be included. In response to our request, the transportation planning staff of the Metropolitan Council provided us with the following information:

YEAR 2000 WORK TRIPS WITHOUT CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS(THE "NULL" ALTERNATIVE)

<u>Location</u>	<u>Auto driver</u>	<u>Auto pssngr</u>	<u>Transit</u>	<u>% Transit</u>
To and from downtown Minneapolis	59,364	22,782	55,972	40.5%
To and from downtown Saint Paul	40,466	15,589	17,740	24.0%
Rest of region	1,041,091	211,938	51,089	3.9%
Total region work trips	1,140,921	250,309	124,801	8.2%

YEAR 2000 WORK TRIPS WITH LRT IN UNIVERSITY AVE. CORRIDOR

<u>Location</u>	<u>Auto driver</u>	<u>Auto pssngr</u>	<u>Transit</u>	<u>% Transit</u>
To and from downtown Minneapolis	58,155	22,331	57,632	41.7%
To and from downtown Saint Paul	40,106	15,444	18,244	24.7%
Rest of region	1,039,128	211,553	53,438	4.1%
Total region work trips	1,137,389	249,329	129,314	8.5%

YEAR 2000 WORK TRIPS WITH LRT IN SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR

<u>Location</u>	<u>Auto driver</u>	<u>Auto pssngr</u>	<u>Transit</u>	<u>% Transit</u>
To and from downtown Minneapolis	58,235	22,357	57,526	41.7%
To and from downtown Saint Paul	40,592	15,648	17,554	23.8%
Rest of region	1,039,723	211,536	52,859	4.1%
Total region work trips	1,138,550	249,541	127,939	8.4%

A comparison of the transit ridership to and from downtown Minneapolis under the three alternatives indicates that fewer than 2,000 work trips to and from downtown Minneapolis would be diverted to transit (including LRT) if either the University or Southwest LRT legs was built. It must be emphasized that these figures represent trips to and from work. Thus one person going to and from work would be counted twice.

What happens when all transit trips to and from downtown Minneapolis, not just work trips, are considered? The results are similar. For example, Council data reveal total transit trips during a 24-hour period to and from downtown Minneapolis would be 91,212 under the Null alternative, and 93,113 with LRT in the University corridor, an increase of 1,900 person-trips on transit. Approximately 40 percent of those trips can expect to be taken in the two rush hours, combined, or 20 percent per rush hour, according to Council transportation planners. Thus fewer than 500 trips bound for downtown Minneapolis would be diverted to transit per rush hour in the year 2000, if the University Ave. leg were built. That figure is so small that, considering the potential margin of error in forecasts, it is hard to say whether the study demonstrates any increase, at all, in peak hour transit ridership as a result of LRT construction.

3. What does the report have to say about the trip needs of the persons who live in the corridors under study?--We found no substantial discussion of the kinds of trips made by the people who live in these corridors, where the trips begin and end, and what their purposes are. It is puzzling how an effective study of transportation to serve the people in the corridors can be conducted without paying close attention to that data.

The study seems more concerned with the placement of transportation alternatives within pre-existing "corridors" than with an analysis of the transit needs of the affected population. Perhaps that is the inevitable result of the way the study was conducted. Certainly, it helps explain why such a very small increase in transit ridership is possible under all of the transit options discussed. The only way the corridor improvements can help the persons who live in the corridor areas is if the residents' trip destinations coincide with the location of the corridors. It is well-known, of course, that the destinations of individuals in the Twin Cities area are widely distributed. Few census tracts, for example, are likely to have more than one-fifth of their residents with jobs in either downtown Minneapolis or Saint Paul.

The 1980 census revealed that only 15.2 percent of all workers in the entire city of Minneapolis worked in downtown Minneapolis, with 13.7 percent of all workers in Saint Paul working in downtown Saint Paul. Suburban percentages are even lower. For example, 10.6 percent of Saint Louis Park workers were employed in downtown Minneapolis in 1980.

The fundamental question which this raises, therefore, is whether a corridor approach to transportation planning satisfactorily meets the travel needs of a significant portion of residents.

A corridor-based approach probably must be undertaken if the problem being addressed is congestion, rather than better transit service for residents. Here, too, the results are very small, with the study indicating that perhaps a reduction of 2 percent in congestion on I-94 between the downtowns is possible in the year 2000. In the Southwest corridor a reduction in congestion of 5.7 percent is forecast at France Ave.

4. Is the disruption which light rail transit would create worth the results which would be achieved?--The study indicates that several modifications in traffic movement would be needed for LRT, such as banning parking on Nicollet Ave. south of downtown Minneapolis to 29th St., a prohibition on street crossings or left turns on University Ave. in St. Paul except where stations are located, possibly some esthetic problems in the vicinity of the state capitol, some uncertainty about the impact of vibrations caused by the system, the need for wider rights-of-way in some cases, a need to rebuild the Washington Ave. bridge, and a need to give LRT drivers the ability to override traffic signals to gain a speed advantage.

It is not our purpose here to challenge any of these changes. However, we believe that the reasons for making such changes should be more compelling. The report indicates slight increases in ridership, slight easing of congestion, and slight impact on development. Are these relatively meager results worth other costs which would be incurred?

5. Is the report sufficiently balanced?--We question certain statements that make the reader wonder whether there is a foregone conclusion in the document. For example, a curious sentence appears on page 2-1: "At that time (in the 1970s) heavy rail was rejected to prevent the overdevelopment of the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, to the detriment of the rest of the region." It would be interesting if the Metropolitan Council would simply look back at its own reasons for rejecting heavy rail. Anyone familiar with that debate remembers the reason: too few riders for the amount of investment required.

6. What should one conclude from the air pollution data?--Perhaps the most surprising--though not most significant--data in the entire document are on page 5-22. The Null, or "do-nothing" alternative, produces better air quality than the busway or LRT alternative. We consulted informally with Council staff and were informed that the general drop in air pollution is brought about by improvements in pollution controls on cars and other vehicles. The reason the figures are higher for the busway and LRT alternatives is that they would take up street space, therefore requiring more cars to idle for longer times at traffic signals, which increases the air pollution.

The only site which violates federal carbon monoxide standards is University and Snelling Ave., where the eight-hour standard is 9 parts per million, while the level in 1983 was 19.5 parts per million. Under all alternatives, the one-hour standard at University and Snelling still would be slightly above the eight-hour standard (9.1 to 9.6). In any event, the data indicate that the carbon monoxide problem will hardly be affected one way or another by the Council's decision. What really is interesting, however, is that if there is any impact at all, the Null alternative produces higher quality than the LRT alternative.

5. Is the report sufficiently documented?--The Council might want to examine two statements particularly. Page 3-2 says that MTC ridership decline finally was reversed in 1984. The statement isn't clear whether this is system-wide or in the corridors under study. We have no reason to question the statement. It simply would be good for the study to indicate the bus ridership in the corridors under study, and system-wide, for the last few years.

Page 5-5 says that communities in the study area are experiencing little or no growth in their tax bases. That seems inaccurate. For example, according to the League of Minnesota Cities, the assessed valuation of Minneapolis grew from \$1.7 billion in 1980 to \$2.8 billion in 1984; in Saint Paul, \$1.0 billion to \$1.7 billion; in Hopkins, \$90 million to \$130 million, and in Saint Louis Park, \$277 million to \$400 million.

If the report is really to be effective in discussion of potential transit ridership, it should make clear some additional assumptions. Those include: (a) the likely change in parking rates in the downtowns, in real dollars, between now and the year 2000; (b) the likely change, if any, in the number of cars owned per household in the corridors under study and in the entire region; (c) the likely change, in current dollars, in the capital and operating cost of private cars, including likely change in the price of fuel; (d) the likely change in average vehicle occupancy in the region during rush hours and during the rest of the day.

We think the report could be clearer in its discussion of travel times on the 94B/D express buses between the downtowns. The times listed on page 1-9 exceed the times on the printed schedules. Moreover, they exceed the times mentioned on the table on page 4-5. This may seem to be a relatively minor point, but regular riders of those express buses know that they are quite fast, and that their speed advantage should not be understated.

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Having discussed specifics of the report in front of you, we would now like to outline our thoughts in more detail on whether the region should proceed with LRT.

1. What is the problem? So much of the discussion flows from this central question. Another way of expressing the question is as follows: If LRT is the answer, what is the question?

When the problem is addressed in transportation terms, two central components emerge:

Congestion--This problem is best expressed as too many vehicles on the road during peak hours. Since cars outnumber other vehicles by such a large factor, anything that serves to reduce the number of cars on the road will help reduce congestion.

Some persons express a slightly different form of congestion: too many buses on certain downtown streets during peak hours.

Access--This is a frequently overlooked problem. It has to do with people whose transportation options are limited. They may be too poor, too old, or too physically handicapped to have the same mobility which the rest of us have. Today's transit system makes it reasonably possible for the transit-dependent to have access to downtown destinations. But their options are extremely limited for non-downtown destinations.

Several other non-transportation components also make up the statement of the problem:

Pollution--Usually this problem is expressed in terms of excessive reliance on petroleum fuel, and that we'd be much better off environmentally if we shifted to electricity. Analysis of this problem requires that two types of pollution be balanced against each other. Use of petroleum fuel in transportation vehicles produces nitrous oxide fumes. Electrically-powered vehicles do not pollute the air in that fashion. However, electricity is produced by burning coal, which can result in the discharge of sulphur dioxide into the air, increasing the problem of acid rain.

Cost--There are concerns that the MTC is too labor-intensive, thereby adding to the cost of the region's transit system unnecessarily. Every bus needs one driver, and a bus--say, the articulated variety--can't carry more than about 80-90 persons. Thus if more persons could be moved with fewer paid drivers, money would be saved. Others say that a more serious cost problem in transit personnel is too many full-time drivers for what is essentially part-time work.

Another cost dimension seems to be the concern that buses wear out too soon.

Development--Under this issue as a statement of the problem is an assumption that residential, commercial and industrial development is occurring in the wrong places in the region. The region would be better off, so the argument goes, if the transit system could be used to guide development where the Metropolitan Council wants it to go.

The bus is an undesirable transit vehicle. Something better is needed.--There is a belief that more persons would ride transit if there were a more desirable vehicle than a bus.

The Twin Cities metropolitan area needs a better transit system if it is to be regarded as a world class city.--Some persons believe the economic

competitiveness of the Twin Cities area, nationally and internationally, would be enhanced if it had a transit system like recognized great cities of the world.

How does LRT meet these problems?

How LRT would help solve the congestion problem--According to the Metropolitan Council, if the proposed three-leg LRT system were built, approximately 83 percent of the LRT person-trips to downtown Minneapolis in the year 2000 are projected to be person-trips diverted from buses. Such a diversion does not ease congestion, because it does not remove cars from the road. The other 17 percent translates into about 3,650 cars which formerly went into downtown Minneapolis being taken off the road, which is approximately three percent of all vehicles going downtown.

In the absence of LRT, the Metropolitan Council is projecting, for the year 2000, that 3.5 percent of all person trips will be by transit. With LRT, the percent by transit increases by .3 percent to 3.8 percent, according to the Metropolitan Council.

If instead of all trips, only trips to downtown Minneapolis are considered, the Metropolitan Council is projecting that without LRT, about 27.5 percent of all trips to downtown Minneapolis will be on transit. With LRT, that percentage increases to 28.4 percent.

LRT would do very little, considering the size of the investment, to ease congestion. This should not be surprising. Better than three-fourths of all trips in the metropolitan area begin or end at home. This means that a transit system which is competitive with the car must pick up and discharge persons close to home. A vehicle fixed to its own guideway--and with only 35 miles of guideway contemplated for the three-leg system--cannot possibly be located near the residences of the vast majority of persons who live in the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

Whatever other advantages LRT might have, it must deliver riders or it can't be justified.

How LRT would help solve the access problem--LRT is oriented to the same destinations as is the bus system. It will not be able to deliver anyone to a destination that the bus system already hasn't been able to provide. It just isn't possible for LRT to deliver a person who lives at 33rd and Bloomington in south Minneapolis, for example, to a job in Eagan, New Hope, Eden Prairie, or a host of other locations, including northeast Minneapolis, where job opportunities for lower-income persons are expanding. Or consider the plight of elderly persons who may need help in getting to doctors' offices. They can't call LRT for that service.

In some respects LRT reduces access. As noted earlier, 83 percent of its riders to and from downtown Minneapolis are projected to be former bus riders. Those people would have no choice but to ride LRT because

their bus lines would have been removed. LRT, of course, has fewer stops, which means that people will have to walk further to get to the LRT line. Or they may be required to take a feeder bus, which means another transfer, which inevitably means a longer trip. Finally, bus riders who would be required to transfer to LRT would be well-advised to question transit planners and policy makers very closely on the fare question. Will the LRT fares be lower than bus fares (to reflect the claimed lower cost of LRT), the same as bus fares, or higher than bus fares?

How LRT would solve the pollution problem--As discussed earlier, LRT helps solve a pollution problem to the extent it is better to use electricity than it is to burn diesel fuel.

On the assumption that it is better to burn "clean" electricity, the amount of pollution reduced through the construction of 35 miles of LRT in an area which already has 1,000 miles of bus routes is obviously infinitesimal. If policy makers really wanted to stop burning diesel fuel for Twin Cities transit, a better solution would be to electrify the entire bus system. Buses could be transformed into trolley buses, with electrical wires added over the roads on which they run.

How LRT would solve the cost problem--The draft environmental impact statement prepared by the Metropolitan Council for the University Ave.-Southwest corridors indicates operating expenses for LRT would be less than that for buses because LRT vehicles would travel faster. One chart indicates that the same number of persons would be carried on LRT with one-third fewer vehicles, which means, in effect, one-third fewer personnel, assuming only one employee is needed on each vehicle.

We are in no position to question the validity of consultants' studies on this point, but we think the claim of a cost savings with rail transit needs to be subject to the closest possible scrutiny.

Assuming the operating savings were valid, would they offset the higher capital expense of a rail system? Would only one paid employee be required on board if riders' security were threatened? Will LRT personnel be paid the same as bus drivers or will they be able to negotiate higher wages on the theory they are operating more sophisticated equipment?

How LRT will help guide development--On the assumption that the Metropolitan Council decided to encourage high-density residential or commercial-industrial development around the various LRT stations between Minneapolis and Saint Paul, between downtown Minneapolis and the airport, and between downtown Minneapolis and Hopkins, it would be necessary for the various city governments to approve rezoning to permit such development. Where would a city council be able to accomplish such rezoning? Where, for example, in the residential neighborhoods of these cities through which the LRT lines would run, would citizens approve of the construction of major amounts of high-rise condos or office or retail buildings?

But even if the rezoning were accomplished, would developers choose those locations as being marketable? If, in fact, they were built, and

occupied, how likely is it that a substantial portion of the occupants would have jobs located along the LRT line?

If jobs are located along the line, how likely is it that the occupants would use LRT instead of some other mode, such as their personal cars? If an LRT line extended to the Bloomington stadium site, and if high-rises were built there, would a resident of such a high-rise take the LRT east to the airport, then down Hiawatha, then through the University and finally to downtown? If the person can afford to live in a high-rise, that person would also be able to afford a personal car, probably with stereo and tape deck. Why will such a person take LRT rather than the direct, non-stop route downtown?

The Council's own environmental impact statement is most helpful on this question, pointing out, for example, that the chief commercial-industrial development impact between the two downtowns might be one office building the size of the Griggs-Midway building. In total the report claims about 11,000 jobs could be relocated in the Twin Cities area, about 3 percent of the total increase in jobs, along with a relocation of about 4,000 persons, which is about 1 percent of the increase in population.

How LRT would be a more desirable transit vehicle?—On the surface this is a tough question to analyze. Clearly, if the alternative is an old bus that doesn't heat well in the winter and doesn't provide air conditioning in the summer, a new LRT vehicle with good heating and air conditioning clearly would be more attractive. Such amenities are not unique to LRT. Buses can be built the same way. If anything, a risk exists that LRT could siphon urgently needed capital funds for bus replacement, thereby damaging the overall quality of the transit system.

But this issue really is much larger. This is whether people who don't ride buses today will somehow find the LRT vehicle worth riding, even though they will have to ride buses to get to the LRT line. That might hold true for the first few days, but people are going to be regular riders for more basic reasons than that. Transit of whatever kind must be competitive with other modes. It must do a good job of picking up persons near their home and providing quick service to their destinations.

The Metropolitan Council, the Regional Transit Board and the Legislature should evaluate very closely the degree to which the impetus for LRT is coming from persons who don't like buses. The "backbone" of an LRT system still will be buses.

How LRT would help this area become a world class city?—A metropolitan area becomes a world class city for a wide variety of educational, cultural, environmental, and economic reasons. Clearly, more might be done to help the Twin Cities area be a world class city. If so, should not an effort be made to ask first what is necessary rather than try to justify an LRT system on that basis?

If the costs of LRT were to be fall on the owners of the land near the stations and on others who would benefit directly, then it might be possible to discern

just how much support exists for this proposal. But instead it is assumed that costs would be widely shared.

Another exercise also helps to put the LRT investment in perspective. Suppose the Metropolitan Council were given \$363 million to spend on transit. What options would vie for those funds? Renewal of the bus fleet? (That amount of money might buy 1 1/2 new bus fleets.) Direct purchase of rides to work for lower-income persons whose job destinations aren't located on bus routes? It would be interesting to see the priority LRT would receive when compared directly with other transit options.

If LRT is not the answer, what is? That depends, of course, on how the problem is defined. The problems of congestion and access are central. This metropolitan area needs to do something other than just build more freeway lanes when traffic increases. Access, too, is key. The quality of life of this region is dependent upon the ability of all persons, rich and poor, handicapped or not, to get to their destinations.

While no single strategy will do the job, following are a couple of illustrations.

All new freeways and expansion of freeways should have preference for high occupancy vehicles (HOVs), buses, taxis and carpools, built into them. Thus, for example, the HOV lane concept already adopted for I-394 should be extended to other freeways. Of a total of 10,500 person-trips on I-394 in the peak hour in the year 2000, the Minnesota Department of Transportation is projecting that 6,150 of those person-trips will be on the HOV lane. Taking all 24 hours, the Department of Transportation is projecting some 42,000 trips on I-394 going downtown, with 24,000 of them on the HOV lane.

To help lower-income persons and others who can't drive to destinations, much more creative use of flexible vehicles, such as taxis, should be found. For example, imagine five lower-income persons who need to travel six miles to their jobs, and that they can't get there by bus. Could not it be possible to contract with a taxi driver, for example, for regular pickup of these persons to work and then home again? Would not only a modest subsidy be required?

Rail transit may have a role in helping guide development.

Rail transit's potential, assuming zoning ordinances could be compatible, may lie in its impact on development. However, persons who advocate use of LRT usually think in terms of longer-distance trips, such as home-to-work. The real potential of rail transit in guiding development may lie in short distance trips, not long distance.

For example, think about designing rail systems that help people get around within and near major centers, such as Southdale-494, Brookdale, Ridgedale, downtown Minneapolis, and downtown Saint Paul. In each case, the total miles of rail would not likely exceed three miles, and would probably be less. Such systems would enable people to get around within and near the centers without having to rely on cars. This would be a powerful incentive for high-rise development, without the likely opposition that would surely occur elsewhere. Rail transit would be used to reward people who take short trips, while stimulating development in those locations where it should occur. This is where the car, too, is most vulnerable to competition. Persons are much more likely to use a transit system than a car for a convenient one-mile trip in and near a major center.

Here is a summary of the proposed IRT lines:

- 1). University Avenue corridor, from the St. Paul CBD to the Metrodome and then to 2nd Avenue North, for a total of 10.5 miles, 43 stations, and 21 vehicles;
- 2). Southwest corridor, from Minneapolis CBD to trunk highway 101, for a total of 14 miles, 15 stations and 15 vehicles;
- 3). Hiawatha Avenue corridor, from the Metrodome to the airport and out to the old Met Stadium site, for a total of 10.5 miles, 17 stations and 22 vehicles.

COSTS. Total capital costs for the three-leg IRT system are estimated at \$363,865,910 in 1984 dollars, assuming no underground construction. Some business interests are urging a subway for downtown Minneapolis, which would add more than \$100 million to these estimates.

Capital Costs per Corridor

<u>University Ave.</u>	<u>Southwest</u>	<u>Hiawatha</u>
\$124.16 million	\$91 million	\$148.6 million

Operating costs would be paid from fares and public funds that would otherwise have been used to support a comparable bus service.

REVENUES. After discussing several funding sources, an implementation plan lists a preferred funding scenario. This preferred funding includes four components:

- 1). Motor Vehicle Excise Tax-- Present law provides for a gradual transfer from general fund to a transportation fund. So far one-fourth of the receipts have been transferred to this fund. If the existing schedule were followed in coming years, another quarter would be transferred in each of the next three bienniums, to complete the transfer.

Present law provides that 25 percent of the motor vehicle excise tax receipts which flow in the transportation fund shall be for transit. The balance is for highways. The 25 percent for transit is distributed, in turn, 80 percent to the metropolitan area and 20 percent outstate.

The implementation plan is recommending that 33% of the metropolitan transit share of the excise tax between 1985 and 2010 be made available for IRT.

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount of Metro Transit Fund Going to LRT</u>
85	\$ 3.33 million
86-87 biennium	\$ 7.445 million
88-89 biennium	\$18.14 million
90-91 biennium	\$32.76 million
92-93 biennium	\$52.562 million

2). Urban Mass Transportation Administration-- A hoped-for \$50 million capital grant from the UMTA at the federal level.

3). Federal Highway Administration-- \$20 million from a special FHWA fund for transit-related improvements in Hiawatha corridor.

4). A 'feathered' 0.2 mill levy across the metropolitan transit taxing district for 1985-2010 to retire the bonds (no discussion of type of bonds or issuing agency). If the federal capital grants fail to come through, the levy would be increased to .35 mills.

The implementation plan recommends local funding such as tax increment districts or benefit assessment districts around the stations to provide 'system enhancements' above the baseline design.