



COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Blue Line Extension Update

FROM: John Sutter, Community Development Director

TO: Anne Norris, City Manager (for December 21 work session)

DATE: December 16, 2021

SUBJECT: Blue Line Extension update

At the Sep. 23 City Council work session, Metro Transit and Hennepin County staff (“the project”) presented different design concepts for the Crystal segment of the proposed Blue Line Extension. Most prominent among these options was a grade separation of Bottineau Blvd. over Bass Lake Road, with the station at grade in between the northbound and southbound embankments of Bottineau Blvd. The primary purpose of the grade separation would be to improve the traffic flow through the Bass Lake Road intersection and reduce the number of lanes pedestrians would need to cross.

Since then:

- Due to concerns expressed by city staff about the interchange option, especially related to public safety, the project prepared an alternative concept that would maintain 6 lanes at grade through the Bass Lake Road intersection, similar to the configuration in place from 2011-2015 before the segment from Wilshire south to Hwy 100 was restriped to 6 lanes. This option would include a pedestrian bridge over Bottineau Blvd with an elevator and staircase accessing the south end of the station platform. This is called the “4-6-4 Option”.
- The project has also modified the Interchange Option in response to city staff concerns. The most significant change is lengthening the bridges so the station platform is no longer between two embankments. This means the pedestrian crossing and access to the south end of the station platform would be from a path under bridges instead of a tunnel through embankments as shown on Sep. 23.
- The project also took current traffic counts for comparison with historic and forecast counts on Bottineau Blvd. This included two segments (Wilshire-Corvallis and Corvallis-47th) that had not previously been counted. An updated traffic simulation comparing the 4-6-4 and Interchange options is being prepared but will not be ready for the Dec. 21 work session.

The purpose of the Dec. 21 work session is to share these materials with the City Council and receive feedback before they are presented at a community open house from 5-7 p.m. on Jan. 6 in the Community Room in the basement of City Hall, 4141 Douglas Dr. N.

Based on staff, Council and community feedback, the project will refine these concepts and present them in person at a Council work session on Feb. 10.

In the meantime, on Dec. 13 the project released a Draft Route Modification Report for public and agency comment. This report finds that the Bottineau Boulevard alignment appears to be workable in a very general sense but it does not address the specific issues and challenges with this alignment, and most significantly does not address concerns about the mobility impacts of eliminating a lane in each direction north of Highway 100. At the Jan. 13 work session, staff will present proposed comments on the Route Modification Report for Council discussion, followed by Council consideration of a formal comment resolution on Jan. 18. The project's deadline for comment is Jan. 25.

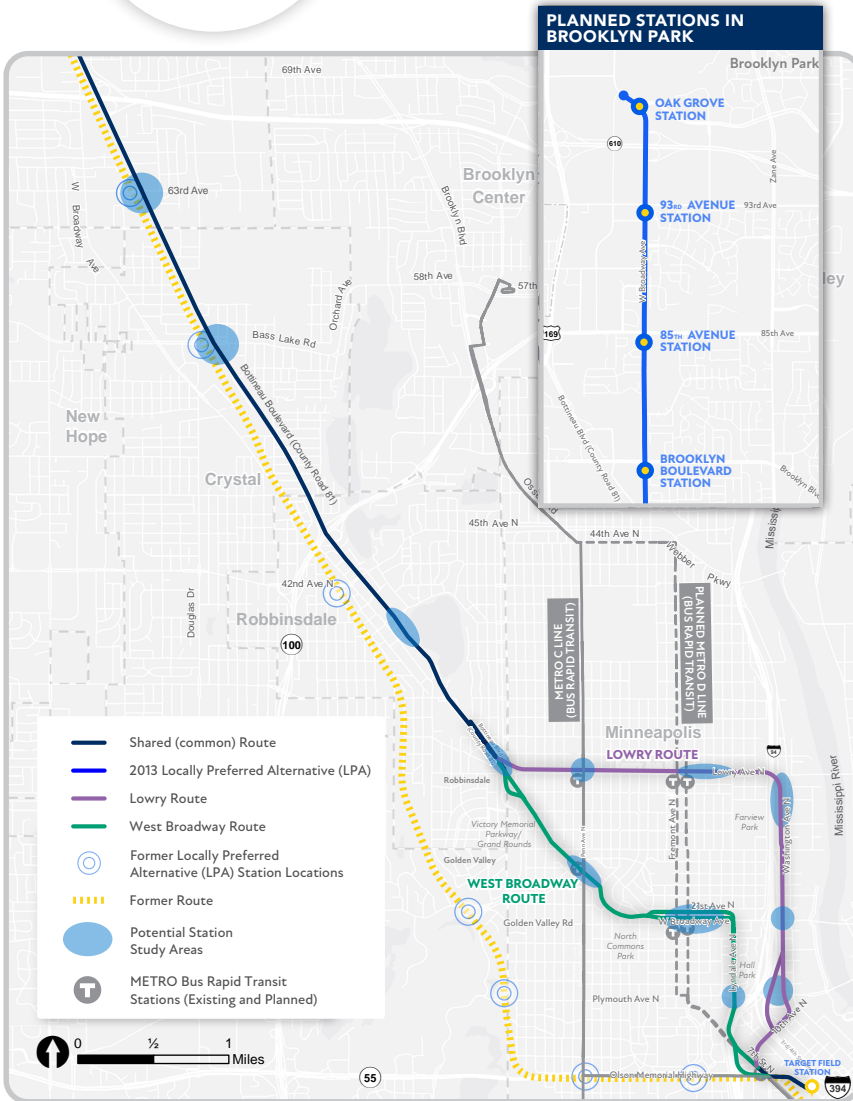
Attachments:

1. Draft Route Modification Report (summary)
2. Slideshow for Dec. 21 work session
3. Traffic Counts and Forecasts
4. Right of way comparison (11x17) - 4-6-4 Option vs Interchange Option
5. Aerial and ground view comparisons (11x17) - 4-6-4 Option vs Interchange Option



METRO BLUE LINE EXTENSION

Draft Route Modification Report Summary • December 2021



Background

Since August 2020, the Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County have partnered to evaluate revised route options that do not use freight rail property as previously planned for the METRO Blue Line Extension.

Brooklyn Park:

The former route and stations along West Broadway in Brooklyn Park remain the same.

Crystal and Robbinsdale:

The proposed route along Bottineau Boulevard (County Road 81) closely parallels the original route for most of this area.

Minneapolis:

Two route options are being evaluated—one along Lowry and Washington Avenues (shown in purple) and one along West Broadway Avenue (shown in green).

Purpose of the Report

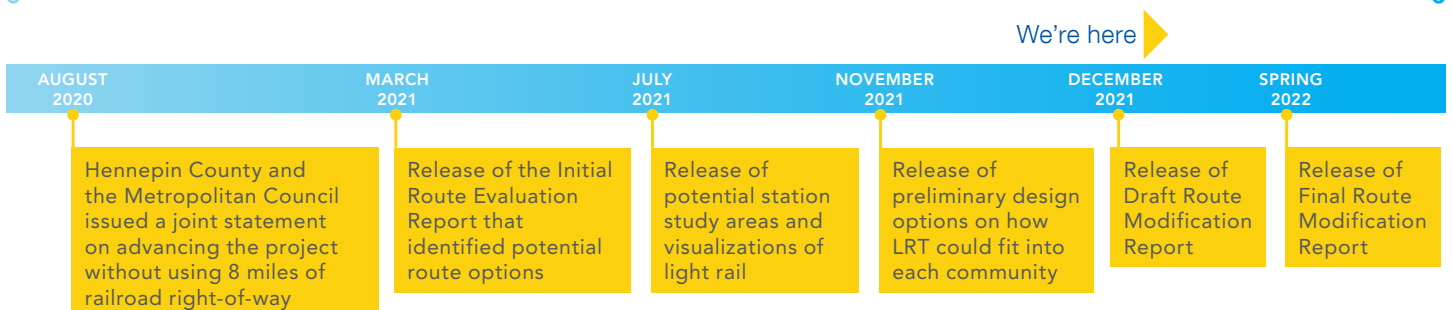
The Initial Route Evaluation Report released in March 2021 laid out a process and general timeline to identify a community-supported route for the project. Now, this Draft Route Modification Report describes the overall process, public input, and technical evaluation that will inform the recommendation of a modified route. The Final Route Modification Report will recommend a community supported route for further evaluation in spring 2022 that responds to the Project Principles and project goals.

Help us select a route!

Now is the time to give comments as your feedback will shape the final recommendation. To submit your comments on the Draft Route Modification Report and for a list of upcoming community meetings, visit BlueLineExt.org.

Schedule

ONGOING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT





METRO BLUE LINE EXTENSION

Draft Route Modification Report Summary • December 2021

Community Engagement

The METRO Blue Line Extension Project relies on community voices to inform project decision-making. Since August 2020, the project has engaged with communities through a variety of activities, including in-person and virtual community meetings, door knocking, attending community events, online and paper surveys, and interactive maps. See below for the timing and project updates shared since August 2020.

- **Round 1 (August 2020 through January 2021):**
Input on project goals, concerns, opportunities, and thoughts on potential new routes
- **Round 2 (March 2021):**
Input on new route options released as part of the Initial Route Modification Report
- **Round 3 (July to August 2021):**
Input on the connections that light rail would make within communities and station locations within those areas
- **Round 4 (Late September to December 2021):**
Input on updated design concepts and potential opportunities and impacts of light rail options

Since March 2021, project staff have contracted directly with 12 community and cultural organizations to support a robust engagement process. These organizations are seeking feedback on the project by hosting activities prioritizing low-income communities, communities of color, and specific areas of the corridor. The community and cultural organizations include:

- Asian Media Access Inc
- CAPI USA
- Encouraging Leaders
- Harrison Neighborhood Association
- Juxtaposition Arts
- Lao Assistance Center of MN
- Liberian Business Association
- Northside Economic Opportunity Network
- Northside Residents Redevelopment Council
- West Broadway Business Coalition
- Jordan Area Community Council
- Hawthorne Neighborhood Council

Major themes heard from the community:

- Avoid impacts/disruption to communities and the environment
- Safety on transit and in communities served
- Easy pedestrian access to/from stations
- Anti-displacement efforts are a priority
- Support for businesses during construction
- Access to regional destinations
- Support economic development
- Improve the transit experience
- Improve access/serve transit dependent populations



October 9th Bike, Walk, Bus tour of Minneapolis route options and station study areas.

Anti-Displacement Initiative

The Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County are committed to delivering a light rail transit (LRT) investment that benefits current corridor residents and businesses. In response to feedback received during engagement activities, project partners are advancing efforts to address community concerns about housing affordability, business support, and displacement.

The project team is convening a diverse Anti-Displacement Workgroup with seats for agency and community partners to research and recommend programs and policies that will support this initiative. The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) will lead and facilitate the Anti-Displacement Workgroup and provide recommendations in the next 18 months.

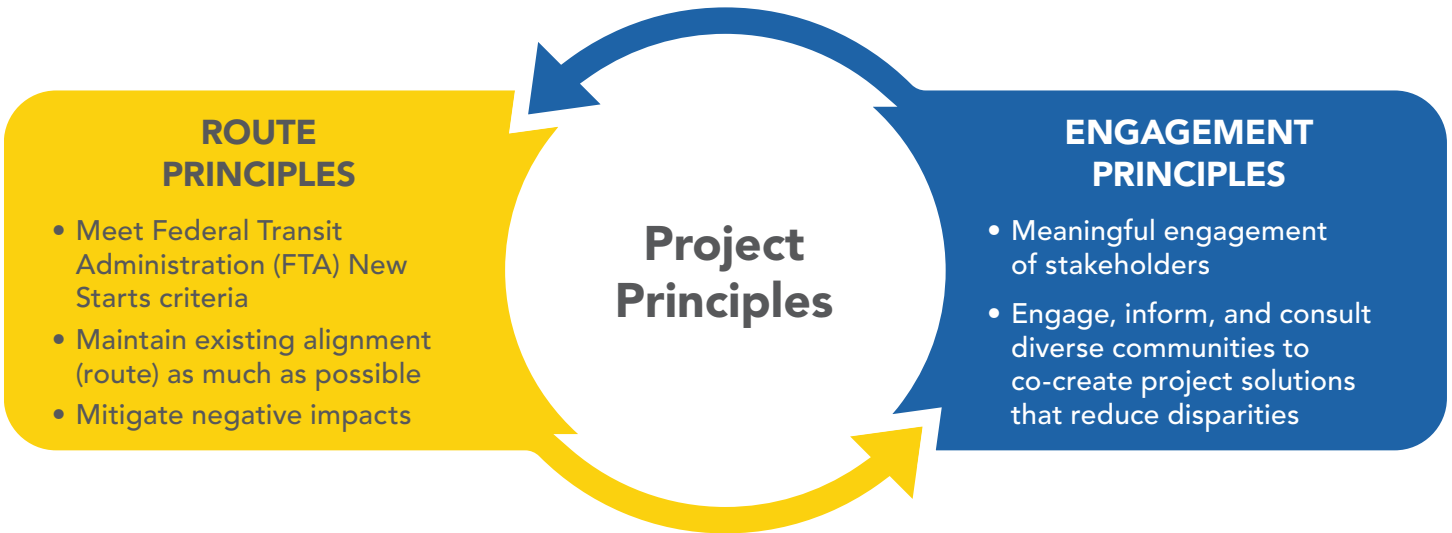


METRO BLUE LINE EXTENSION

Draft Route Modification Report Summary • December 2021

Evaluation Process

To determine a community-supported route, the project team is considering Project Principles and goals, community and business feedback, and engineering requirements. Each route is evaluated against the project goals to see how it serves community needs.



Each route has been evaluated based on its ability to meet project goals. All the routes have received an overall assessment of “good” in their ability to serve the community. In some cases these routes achieve an excellent rating based on unique features and the potential to deliver exemplary positive benefits. None of the routes have been assessed as “poor,” which would mean they did not meet the project goals. The Evaluation Findings section of this report provides more detail on how each route was evaluated against the project goals.

ASSESSMENT OF ROUTE OPTIONS TO DEFINED GOALS

PROJECT GOAL	BOTTINEAU BOULEVARD (COUNTY ROAD 81) IN BROOKLYN PARK, CRYSTAL, AND ROBBINSDALE	LOWRY ROUTE	WEST BROADWAY ROUTE
Improve transit access and connections to jobs and regional destinations	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT	EXCELLENT
Improve frequency and reliability of transit service to communities in the corridor	EXCELLENT	GOOD	GOOD
Provide transit improvements that maximize transit benefits, while being cost competitive and economically viable	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
Support communities’ development goals	EXCELLENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Promote healthy communities and sound environmental practices including efforts to address climate change	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
Advance local and regional equity and work towards reducing regional economic disparities	GOOD	GOOD	EXCELLENT



METRO BLUE LINE EXTENSION

Draft Route Modification Report Summary • December 2021

Next Steps

The Draft Route Modification Report is available for public review, and comments will be accepted through **January 25, 2022**. The Metropolitan Council and Hennepin County will carefully review the community input received along with the findings from the technical analysis completed to date to recommend a community-supported route for further evaluation in spring 2022 as part of the Final Route Modification Report. Following that recommendation, design and technical evaluation of the recommended route will advance and will be documented in federal and state environmental review documents. Further robust community engagement will continue through these and future phases.

To submit your comments on the draft report and for a list of upcoming community meetings in January, visit BlueLineExt.org.

We're here ▶

1 YEAR

1.5 – 2 YEARS

1.5 – 2 YEARS

3 – 4 YEARS

- Identify community-supported route
- Environmental review
Document benefits and impacts of the project
Municipal Consent
Seek city support of the LRT design
- Engineering
Develop construction ready design plans
● Station area planning
- Construction and Full Funding Grant Agreement
Federal funding
- Goal — Line opens in 2028

LRT projects are complex and unforeseen challenges arise. Schedules and timelines are subject to change.

Blue Line Extension Community-Supported Route:

- Best meets the Project Principles and goals
- Grounded in community feedback through collaboration with stakeholders
- Supported by project corridor communities and decision-makers

Stay Connected!

For project questions or to invite us to an event, contact:

Brooklyn Park/Minneapolis/Robbinsdale/

Overall Project Questions:

Sophia Ginis – Sophia.Ginis@metrotransit.org

Crystal:

David Davies – David.Davies@metrotransit.org



Visit BlueLineExt.org for more information, to sign-up for the project newsletter, and share your comments, questions and concerns on our interactive feedback map.

@BlueLineExt @Blue_Line_Extension

@METROBlueLineExtension









CR81 Options Comparison at Bass Lake Road



Brooklyn Park | Crystal | Robbinsdale | Golden Valley | Minneapolis



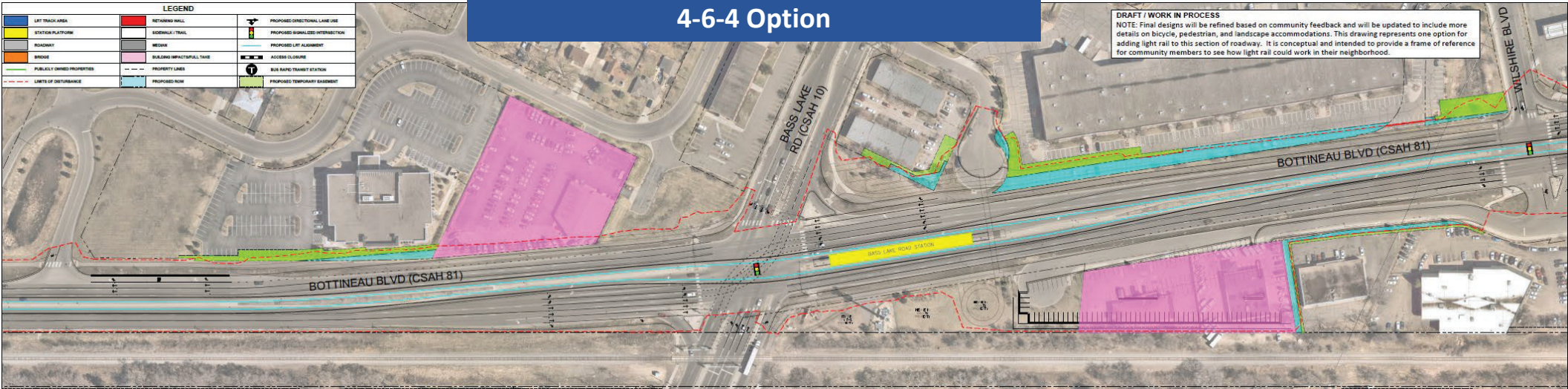
Comparison of BLRT CR81 Options at Bass Lake Road

CATEGORIES	4-6-4	INTERCHANGE	KEY TAKEAWAY
 <p>Design</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expands CR 81 Between Crystal Airport Rd and Wilshire Blvd, keeping six lanes of thru traffic for just over half of a mile (3,000 feet) Light rail is at-grade in the center of the roadway Park and ride access via Lakeland Ave N. from the Wilshire intersection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CR 81 has four thru lanes are on a grade-separated overpass at Bass Lake Road with ramps for access from Bass Lake Road; the intersection maintains full access for Bass Lake Road Light rail is at-grade centered between overpass bridges Park and ride access via Lakeland Ave N. from the Wilshire intersection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 4-6-4 option includes an additional through lane in each direction, while the interchange elevates CR81 over Bass Lake Road
 <p>Right of Way</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adding LRT to a 6-lane CR 81 requires additional right of way on the east side of the roadway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interchange ramps and bridges requires additional right of way on the east side of the roadway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are similar right of way impacts between the road expansion for the 4-6-4 option and the Interchange option
 <p>Form & Function</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Station platform is in the middle of a six-lane road (with additional turning lanes at the intersection) The pedestrian bridge provides a crossing of CR 81 and concept provides grade-separated access to the south end of the station to the platform from the park and ride and trails (note: must accommodate the truck moving route so the overpass is higher than typical pedestrian bridge) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Station platform is at-grade framed by adjacent interchange bridges The south at-grade crossing provides grade-separation from CR 81 and provides access to trails on either side of CR 81 and access from park and ride to station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Interchange creates more space for the station with the additional area under the bridges available as complementary community space
 <p>Station Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging due to traffic on both sides of the platform Access to the north end of the station requires crossing between three and five lanes of traffic on CR 81 Pedestrian bridge access to park and ride and regional trail Road noise will sound louder to riders at the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separated from vehicle traffic with opportunities for placemaking Access to the north end of the station requires crossing only the access ramps for CR 81 South end at-grade access to platform without crossing roadway Less road noise at the platform due to the separation from CR 81 Offers more protection from weather elements for riders at platform and at-grade crossing users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Interchange offers more opportunity for placemaking, easier passenger access to the station, and less road noise on the platform
 <p>Traffic Performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers slight improvement over four-lane CR81 with LRT Traffic operations slightly degraded from existing conditions for peak-hour travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thru traffic on CR 81 is separated from the intersection (no stopping) Improves Bass Lake Road operations from existing Best performing traffic option compared to four or six lanes, reduces travel time for vehicles on CR 81 by ~20-25% Traffic operations are better than existing conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 4-6-4 accommodates traffic almost as well as the existing intersection. The Interchange accommodates traffic better than the existing intersection.
 <p>Pedestrian Crossing Experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At grade crossing: similar to what pedestrians experience today Track design would provide pedestrian refuge in the center of the road with pedestrian crossing buttons Pedestrian bridge: added height for truck moving route increases pedestrian effort and travel time compared to the at-grade crossing, most pedestrians and bikes will likely cross at-grade to save time Intersection has many more opportunities where pedestrians and vehicles could conflict, making it less safe (due to the number of lanes that pedestrians cross and the directions of traffic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bass Lake Road at-grade crossing: separate from the CR 81 thru lanes South end at-grade crossing: requires no roadway crossing Direct connection between trails on east and west sides of CR 81 Direct connection from park and ride to station Pedestrian and bike safety features will be included at rail crossing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 4-6-4 would continue to include a long crosswalk but includes an elevated pedestrian bridge crossing option; while the Interchange option allows pedestrians and bikes to cross CR81 at-grade without crossing the through traffic.

Right of Way

4-6-4 Option

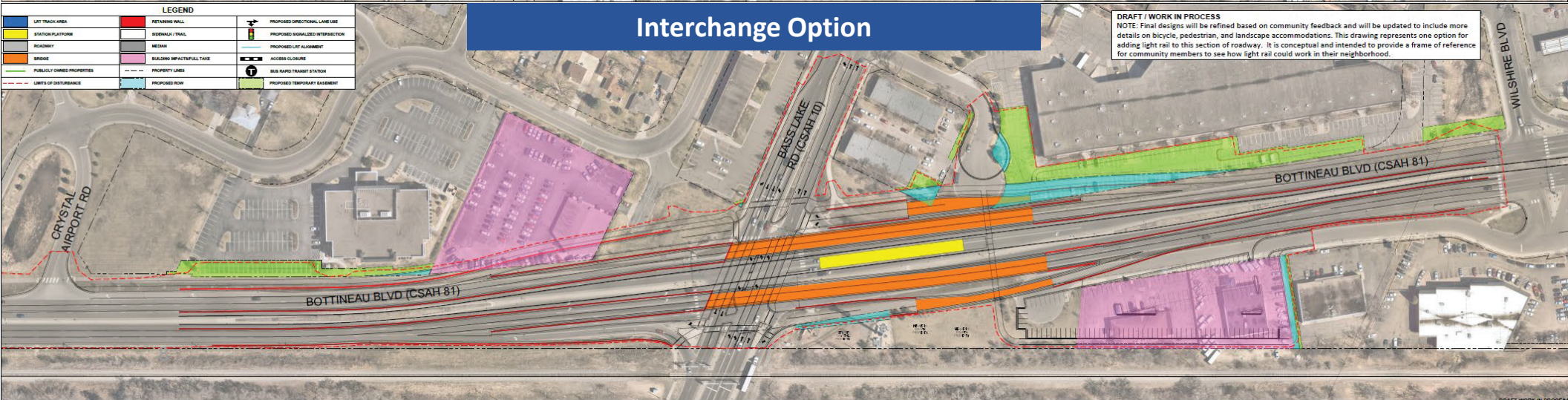
LEGEND		
LIGHT TRACK AREA	RETAINING WALL	PROPOSED DIRECTIONAL LANE USE
STATION PLATFORM	SIDEWALK/TRAIL	PROPOSED SIGNALIZED INTERSECTION
ROADWAY	MEDIAN	PROPOSED LIGHT ALIGNMENT
BRIDGE	BUILDING IMPACT/FULL TIME	ACCESS CLOSURE
PUBLICLY OWNED PROPERTIES	PROPERTY LINES	BUS RAPID TRANSIT STATION
LIMITS OF DISTURBANCE	PROPOSED ROW	PROPOSED TEMPORARY BASEMENT



DRAFT / WORK IN PROCESS
 NOTE: Final designs will be refined based on community feedback and will be updated to include more details on bicycle, pedestrian, and landscape accommodations. This drawing represents one option for adding light rail to this section of roadway. It is conceptual and intended to provide a frame of reference for community members to see how light rail could work in their neighborhood.

Interchange Option

LEGEND		
LIGHT TRACK AREA	RETAINING WALL	PROPOSED DIRECTIONAL LANE USE
STATION PLATFORM	SIDEWALK/TRAIL	PROPOSED SIGNALIZED INTERSECTION
ROADWAY	MEDIAN	PROPOSED LIGHT ALIGNMENT
BRIDGE	BUILDING IMPACT/FULL TIME	ACCESS CLOSURE
PUBLICLY OWNED PROPERTIES	PROPERTY LINES	BUS RAPID TRANSIT STATION
LIMITS OF DISTURBANCE	PROPOSED ROW	PROPOSED TEMPORARY BASEMENT

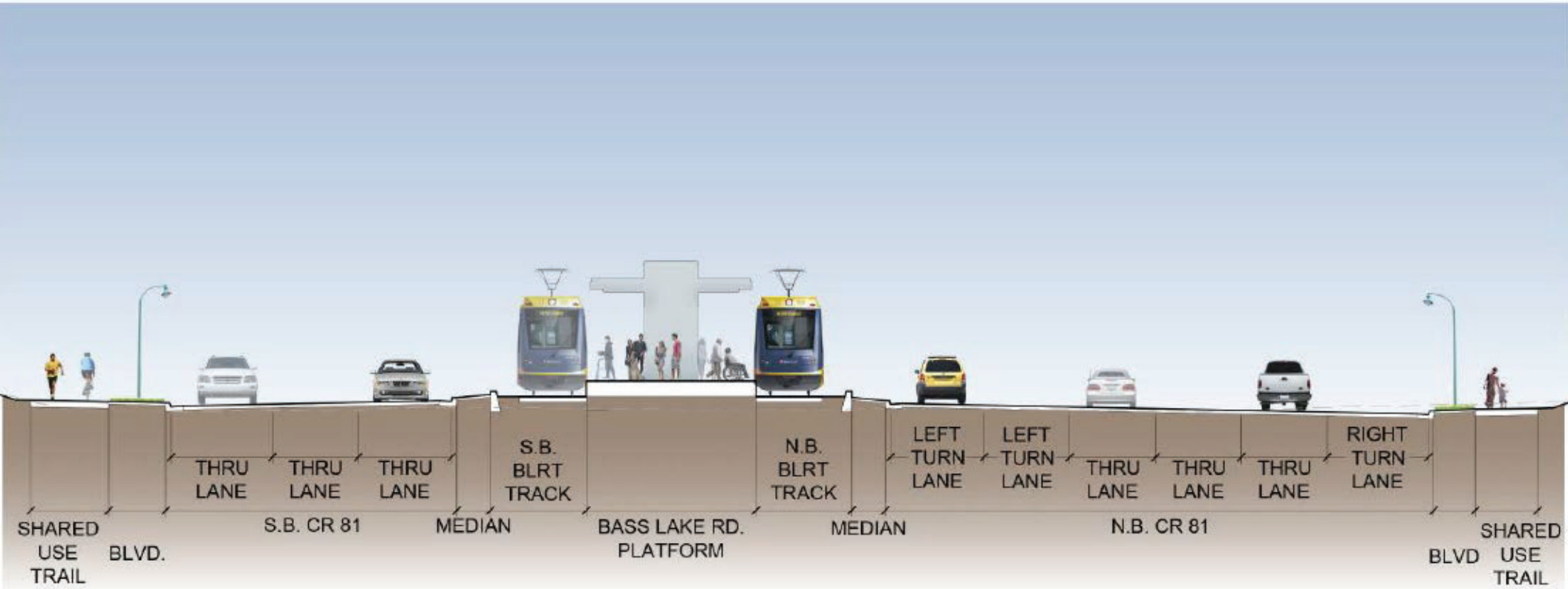


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4-6-4 Design



4-6-4 Design





DRAFT: CONCEPT IN DEVELOPMENT

Note: This image represents a planning concept based on cursory engineering work. If this concept advances, significant additional design would be required.



Bass Lake Road: 4-6-4 Option Aerial View of Station Area Looking North





DRAFT: CONCEPT IN DEVELOPMENT

Note: This image represents a planning concept based on cursory engineering work. If this concept advances, significant additional design would be required.



Bass Lake Road: 4-6-4 Option Aerial View of Station Area Looking East





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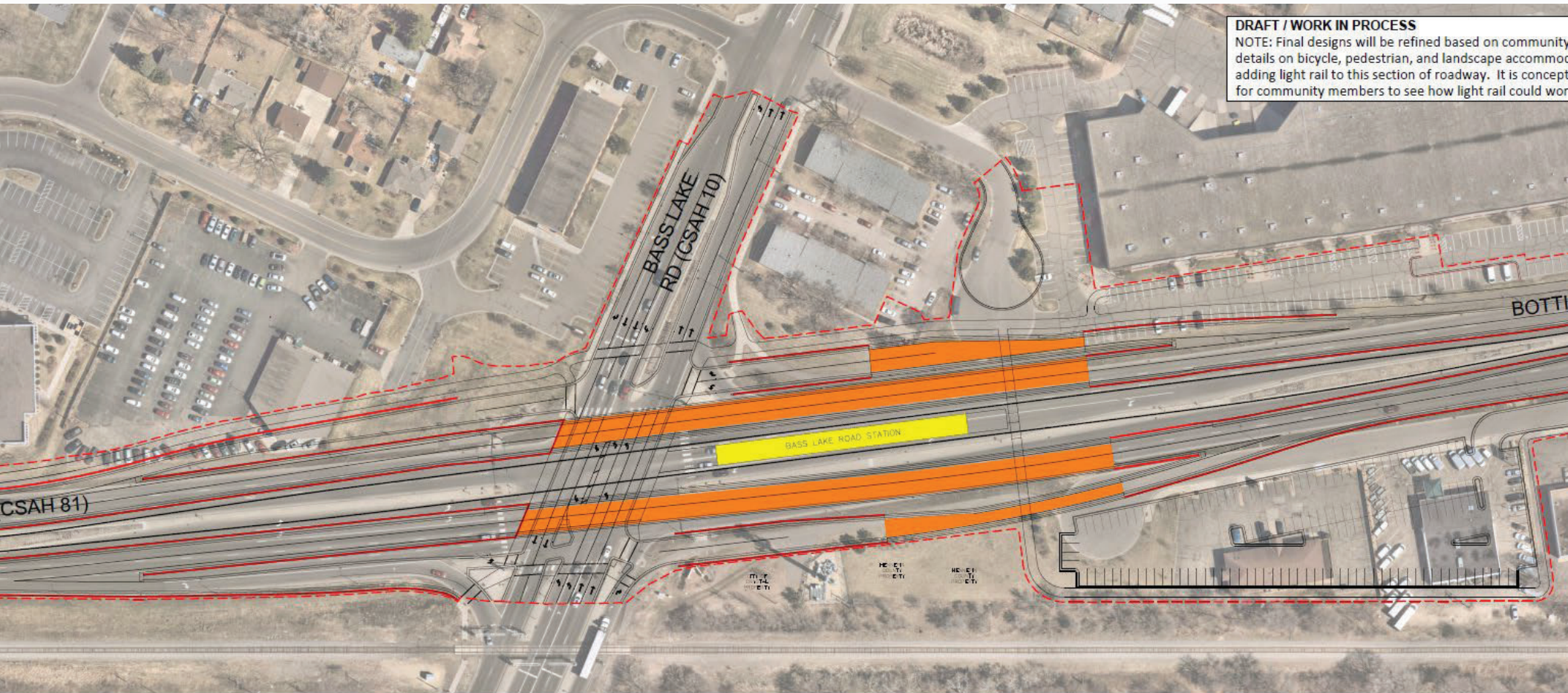
This rendering is a preliminary planning concept based on cursory engineering work. It is not intended to represent a final design. Additional design would be required.



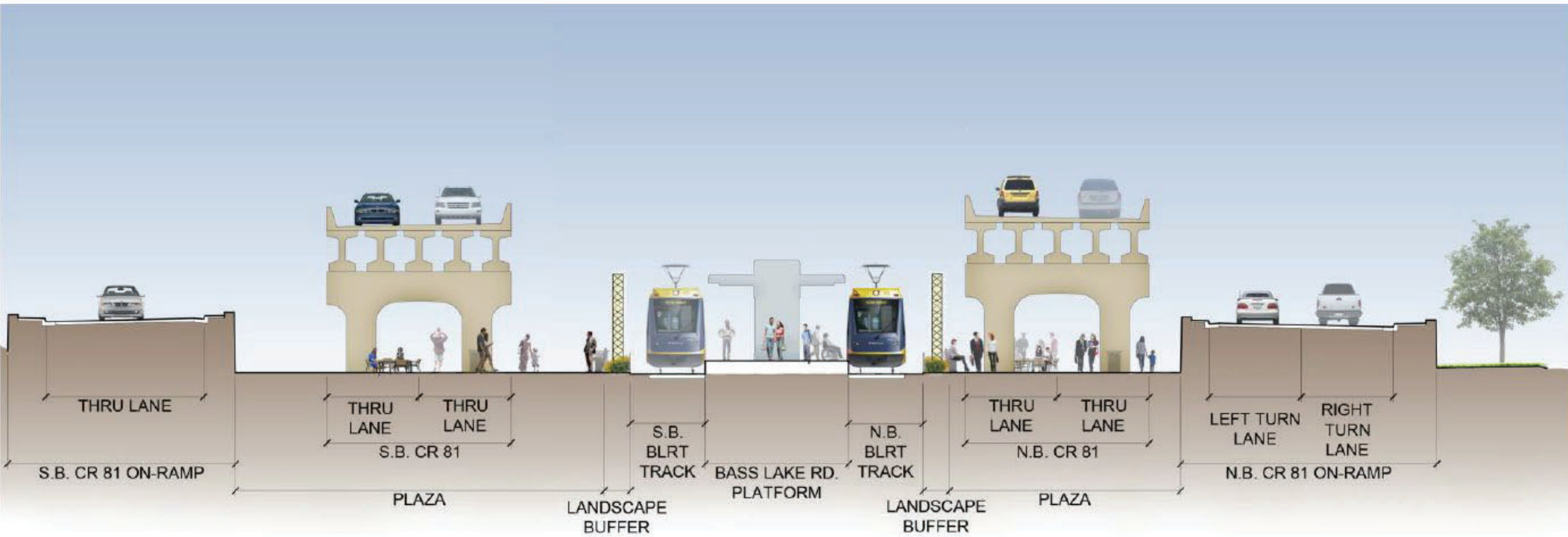
Bass Lake Road: 4-6-4 Option Ground View of Station Area – Pedestrian Crossing



Interchange Design



Interchange Design





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Bass Lake Road: Interchange Option Ground View of Station Area Looking South





DRAFT: CONCEPT IN DEVELOPMENT

Note: This image represents a planning concept based on cursory engineering work. If this concept advances, significant additional design would be required.



Bass Lake Road: Interchange Option

Ground View of Station Area Looking East





DRAFT: CONCEPT IN DEVELOPMENT

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Bass Lake Road: Interchange Option

Ground View of Station Area Looking East from Park & Ride





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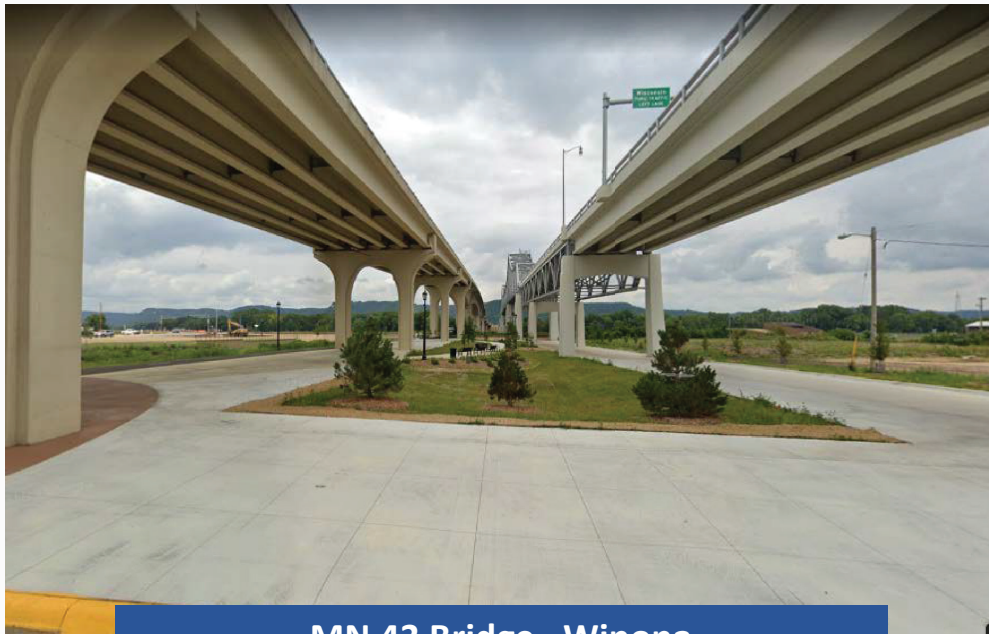
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Bass Lake Road: Interchange Option Aerial View of Station Area Looking North



MnDOT Examples



MN 43 Bridge– Winona



MN 61– Hastings

CR 81 Traffic Volumes

Annual average daily traffic (AADT) is the estimated average daily traffic volume experienced in both directions of a roadway segment considering the seasonal variation in traffic in a one-year period.

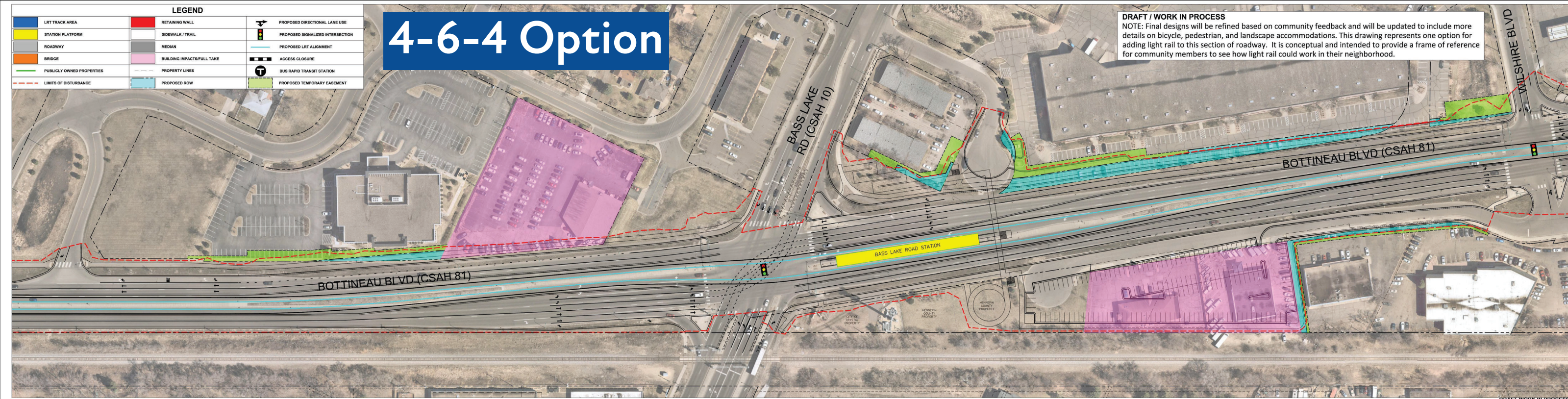
	Segment	2005 AADT ¹ (vehicles/day)	2015 AADT ² (vehicles/day)	2019 AADT ³ (vehicles/day)	2021 AADT ⁴ (vehicles/day)	2030 Forecast ⁵ (vehicles/day)	2040 Forecast ⁶ (vehicles/day)
A	CR 81, 63 rd Ave to Bass Lake Rd	23,900	26,500	28,500	26,500	35,000	34,000
B	CR 81, Bass Lake Rd to Wilshire Blvd	23,900	27,000	31,000	26,700	36,000	32,000
C	CR 81, Wilshire Blvd to Corvallis Ave				28,100		
D	CR 81, Corvallis Ave to 47 th Ave				29,900		
E	CR 81, 47 th Ave to TH 100 ramps	28,500	32,500	38,000	33,100		39,000



- Existing volumes during the design phase for the CR 81 reconstruction.
- Volumes after the CR 81 reconstruction but before the restriping to 6 lanes between 47th Ave and Wilshire Blvd.
- Volumes after the CR 81 restriping to 6 lanes between 47th Ave and Wilshire Blvd.
- Volumes collected in October 2021.
- Forecasts used in the design phase for the CR 81 reconstruction.
- Forecasts in the current Hennepin County Transportation Plan.

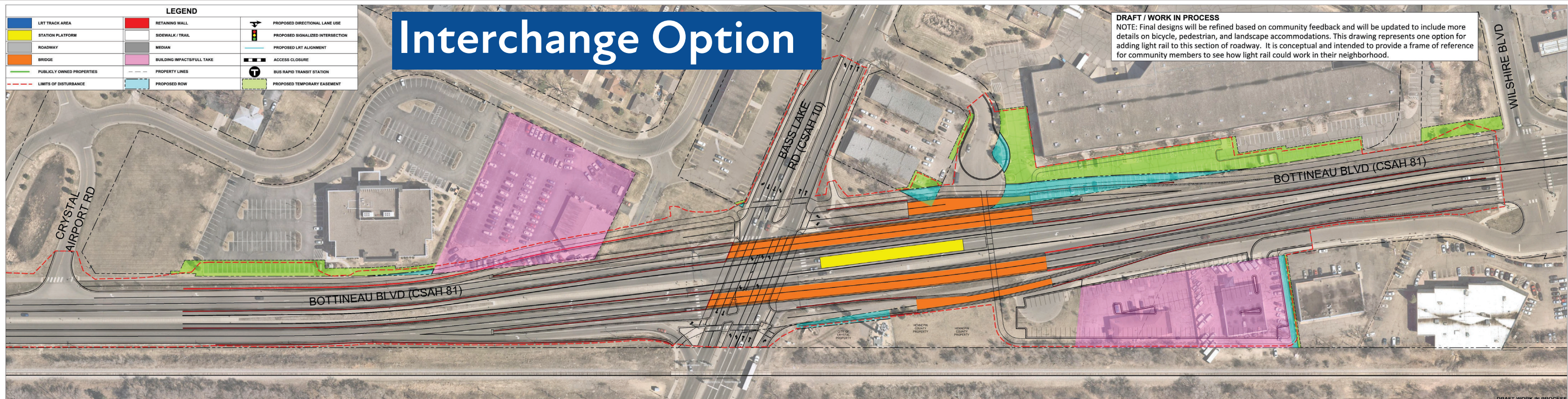


Right of Way



4-6-4 Option

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Interchange Option

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Bass Lake Road: 4-6-4 Option
Aerial View of Station Area Looking North



Bass Lake Road: Interchange Option
Aerial View of Station Area Looking North



Bass Lake Road: 4-6-4 Option
Ground View of Station Area – Pedestrian Crossing



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Bass Lake Road: Interchange Option
Ground View of Station Area Looking East



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