



CITY of CRYSTAL

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March 8, 2023

Christine Beckwith
Project Director
METRO Blue Line Extension
6465 Wayzata Blvd #500
St Louis Park MN 55426

Subject: City of Crystal design comments on the METRO Blue Line Extension

Dear Ms. Beckwith:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the preliminary design concepts for the proposed METRO Blue Line Extension light rail transit project. The city appreciates the work of project staff to prepare these concepts and traffic simulations for review and comment by the city, its residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the community.

The six scenarios are as follows:

1. Existing (no-build) - 6 lanes at grade, no LRT
#1 is the baseline scenario required for the environmental review.
2. LRT with 4 lanes at grade
#2 was the initial concept. Blue Line Extension project staff and city staff would not recommend this scenario due to its impact on vehicular travel.
3. LRT with 4 lanes, interchange at Bass Lake Road and a third southbound lane south of Corvallis
#3 is the concept currently preferred by the Blue Line Extension project staff.
4. LRT with 4 lanes, at-grade with additional lanes at Bass Lake Road and a third southbound lane south of Corvallis
#4 is intended to address the Bass Lake Road intersection capacity issues without constructing an interchange.

5. LRT with 6 lanes, at grade

#5 would create space for LRT and maintain the same road capacity that exists today.

6. LRT with 6 lanes and an interchange at Bass Lake Road

Blue Line Extension project staff and city staff agree that #6 would be an overdesign and would not recommend this scenario.

Because scenarios #3, 4 and 5 are the most realistic alternatives for construction of LRT in the corridor, the Crystal City Council has directed city staff to provide the following comments on those scenarios. The purpose of these comments is to assist Blue Line Extension project staff with refinements to these scenarios as work continues on the environmental review and municipal consent processes.

A. ALL SCENARIOS

1. Replacement of median landscaping being removed by the project

Replace, in new locations, the recently-installed median treatments and landscaping which will be removed to make way for LRT (Exhibit A-1).

- The county recently installed new landscaping with irrigation in the median of Bottineau Blvd. due to the failure of much of the landscaping installed in the 2011-2012 roadway reconstruction project.
- These recent improvements were essential to achieving the “parkway” vision for the roadway when the reconstruction plans were approved in the late 2000s.
- Because the LRT project will replace this landscaping with ballast rock, track, LRT equipment and hardscape, landscaping of equivalent quality and quantity should be included in the project in areas alongside the roadway.
- Specific locations and designs would be determined later in the project. For example, it may be more beneficial to concentrate the enhanced landscaping near major intersections or adjacent to residential uses rather than in a strictly linear fashion.

2. Wilshire Blvd. intersection

Include two left turn lanes from eastbound Wilshire Blvd. to northbound Bottineau Blvd. (Exhibit A-2).

- Due to traffic generated by vehicles leaving the park and ride facility and limited stacking space between Lakeland Ave. and Bottineau Blvd., two left turn lanes are needed from eastbound Wilshire Blvd. to northbound Bottineau Blvd.
- This was in the 90% plans for the previous alignment

3. 47th Ave. intersection

Optimize intersection performance with minor adjustments to signal and approach lanes (Exhibit A-3).

- For eastbound 47th Ave. turning right to go south on Bottineau Blvd., install a right-turn green arrow to overlap with the left-turn green arrow from northbound Bottineau Blvd. to

westbound 47th Ave. This will increase the green time for the dominant movement on that approach with no penalty to the other approaches, except that U-turns from northbound Bottineau Boulevard to southbound Bottineau Blvd. / TH100 may need to be prohibited.

- For westbound 47th on the east side of Bottineau Blvd., due to limited stacking space, straighten the north side curb to create two lanes for the full distance between Lakeland Ave. and Bottineau Blvd., designate the right lane for straight movement or right turns, and designate the left lane only for left turns because that is the dominant movement on this approach.

4. Bus shelters and crosswalk at Elmhurst/Bass Lake Road

Add bus shelters on Bass Lake Road at Elmhurst, modify the south curb of Bass Lake Road, and construct an enhanced crosswalk including a median extension with a pedestrian refuge (Exhibit A-4).

- Shelters for east-west buses on Bass Lake Road are needed to improve the rider experience and facilitate transfers to and from LRT.
- Elmhurst is an existing, but unmarked, crosswalk that should become more prominent to discourage mid-block crossing. This should include an activatable beacon to warn drivers of pedestrians crossing so they have time to yield as required by law.
- These elements were in the 90% plans for the previous alignment.
- The city reserved space and aligned its trails/sidewalks to accommodate the planned bus shelters and crosswalk in its 2018 Bass Lake Road Streetscape and 2019-2020 Becker Park projects.

5. West Broadway jurisdictional transfer - 42nd Ave. to Douglas Dr. segment

Complete a jurisdictional transfer agreement with the cities of Robbinsdale and Crystal for the segment of West Broadway (CSAH 8) from 42nd Ave. (CSAH 9) to Douglas Dr. (CSAH 102).

- The county has identified this segment for jurisdictional transfer to the respective cities (Exhibit A-5a).
- The segment from Fairview Ave. south into Robbinsdale has never been constructed to urban standards and is essentially the same rural highway it was 80 years ago (Exhibit A-5b).
- The 2040 “no build” traffic forecast shows an estimated 1,000 vehicle per day diversion from Bottineau Blvd. to this segment of West Broadway (Exhibit A-5c).
- Additional diversion will likely occur due to the project and the lane reduction on Bottineau Blvd. West Broadway is the primary alternate route for vehicles avoiding congestion and delay on Bottineau Blvd.
- Due to the presence of city utilities, the most practical approach would be for the agreement to provide for a jurisdictional transfer payment to the cities in lieu of county reconstruction. The utility reconstruction costs would be the responsibility of the respective cities, and the actual construction work would be completed by the respective cities after jurisdictional transfer.
- Acceptance of this jurisdictional transfer would be consistent with the adopted policy of the city, which states: “The city would accept responsibility for this roadway only after it is

reconstructed to the city's urban standards with municipal consent or the county provides the city with funds to accomplish same." (Crystal 2040 Comprehensive Plan, p. 31)

6. Maintain and improve bicycle and pedestrian connections and safety in the vicinity of the Bass Lake Road intersection

- Preserve the existing access route for pedestrians and cell tower maintenance vehicles from the southwesterly quadrant of the Bass Lake Road intersection to the proposed park and ride. (Exhibit A-6a.)
- Include at-grade pedestrian enhancements similar to those previously planned by Hennepin County in its 2016 Blue Line Extension Bicycle Study and construction project #1615 which did not proceed. (Exhibit A-6b.)
- Extend the off-street trail on the south side of Bass Lake Road from Bottineau Blvd. east to the vicinity of Xenia Ave. and transition to the existing on-street bike lanes in that area.

7. Replacement of city facilities

To whatever extent the project removes existing city facilities and infrastructure, replacement must be part of the project and not at city expense. Examples include but are not limited to the Welcome to Crystal sign, city-owned roadway lighting, and landscaping installed during reconstruction of Bottineau Blvd. in 2011-2012.

8. Preventing access to the track zones

The track zones north and south of Bass Lake Road may invite unauthorized pedestrian travel or other dangerous activity. This is especially concerning in the interchange scenario due to the confined spaces between the raised roadway embankments north and south of the Bass Lake Road station. The project needs to include fencing and other design elements to make it intuitively clear that these areas are dangerous and access is prohibited. These design elements need to go beyond "keep out" and "danger" signs and need to include physical barriers and design cues wherever practical.

9. Public Safety

The current and ongoing safety issues for patrons and employees on the Metro Transit system have been widely reported and documented. Residents and business owners in Crystal continue to express their concerns. Presuming that these safety issues are successfully addressed by Metro Transit before the Blue Line Extension begins operating, the design of the Bass Lake Road station, park and ride facility and adjacent infrastructure must minimize the opportunity for future public safety problems to develop. For the project to be successful, Metro Transit must include design elements in the area of the station and park and ride that are consistent with the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The city's particular concern is that, despite Metro Transit having its own police department, as a practical matter it is the Crystal Police Department that will be the first responder to most calls in and around the Bass Lake Road station.

10. Bus Service Enhancements

Crystal acknowledges that Metro Transit is already planning to evaluate its bus routes and operations as part of the Blue Line Extension project development. The city requests that this evaluation strengthen suburban bus service, particularly by improving east-west connections to the light rail stations and also complementary north-south routes where applicable.

11. Continue traffic counting through 2023

Conduct traffic counts in spring and fall 2023 using the same locations and methods as in 2022.

- The proposed lane reduction on Bottineau Blvd. is contrary to the traffic forecasts used in the mid-2000s when the county determined that a 6-lane facility was needed.
- While some data show that traffic changes have occurred in recent years, it is unclear whether these are temporary pandemic effects or permanent changes.
- A new set of traffic counts in spring and fall 2023 would help determine whether a 4-lane roadway would be adequate.

B. SCENARIO #3 (4 LANES WITH INTERCHANGE)

1. Southbound on-ramp merge lane

Include a third southbound lane from the terminus of the southbound on-ramp to approximately the same location where the third lane terminated south of Wilshire Blvd. prior to the restriping in summer 2015. (Exhibit B-1.)

2. Northbound auxiliary lane to off-ramp

Include a third northbound lane from approximately the same location where the third lane started south of Wilshire Blvd. prior to the restriping in summer 2015 to the beginning of the northbound off-ramp. (Exhibit B-2.)

3. Double left turn lanes on the northbound off-ramp

Add a second left turn lane from the northbound off-ramp to westbound Bass Lake Road while preserving the right turn lane to eastbound Bass Lake Road. This would improve throughput from the northbound off-ramp and allow less red time or more green time on the other approaches. This is especially important for westbound Bass Lake Road which would experience substantially greater delays with the interchange option as currently proposed.

4. Shoulders in the 4-lane segment

In the segment between Wilshire Blvd. and 47th Ave., include shoulders on the roadway wherever it will be reduced to 2 lanes in one direction. This is necessary to ensure emergency vehicles can pass through the area during periods of heavy traffic. It is especially critical for the segment from Wilshire Blvd. to Corvallis Ave. because Bottineau Blvd. provides the city's only grade-separated crossing of the Canadian Pacific Railway main line which sees 20-25 trains per day, some two miles in length.

5. 3-to-4 lane “gore” at the ramp to southbound Trunk Highway 100

The project currently proposes to start a third southbound lane just south of Corvallis Ave. to provide space for vehicles queuing in a single lane to go south on TH100. Instead of creating a 2,000-foot-long third lane for this purpose, the project should improve the throughput to TH100 by starting the third southbound lane much closer to 47th Ave. and allowing the middle lane to choose either southbound Bottineau Blvd. or TH100. This change would reflect the fact that approximately half of the southbound traffic during the peak hour exits to southbound TH100 rather than staying on Bottineau Blvd.

C. SCENARIO #4 (4 LANES WITH ADDITIONAL LANES AT BASS LAKE ROAD)

1. Southbound lane drop

Extend the third southbound lane through the Wilshire Blvd. intersection to approximately the same location where the third lane terminated prior to the restriping in summer 2015. (Exhibit C-1.)

2. Shoulders in the 4-lane segment

In the segment between Wilshire Blvd. and 47th Ave., include shoulders on the roadway wherever it will be reduced to 2 lanes in one direction. This is necessary to ensure emergency vehicles can pass through the area during periods of heavy traffic. It is especially critical for the segment from Wilshire Blvd. to Corvallis Ave. because Bottineau Blvd. provides the city’s only grade-separated crossing of the Canadian Pacific Railway main line which sees 20-25 trains per day, some two miles in length.

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CI. SCENARIO #5 (6 LANES)

1. 3-to-4 lane “gore” at southbound Trunk Highway 100

Rather than force all traffic exiting to southbound TH100 into a single lane, improve the throughput to TH100 by allowing the middle lane to choose either southbound Bottineau Blvd. or TH100. This change would reflect the fact that approximately half of the southbound traffic during the peak hour exits to southbound TH100 rather than staying on Bottineau Blvd.

The city looks forward to continuing to work with the project staff on this important project. Please feel free to contact me at 763.531.1140 or adam.bell@crystalmn.gov with any questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bell', written in a cursive style.

Adam R. Bell
City Manager

EXHIBIT A-1

Existing median landscaping



Wilshire Blvd. intersection

Excerpt from 90% plans (previous alignment)

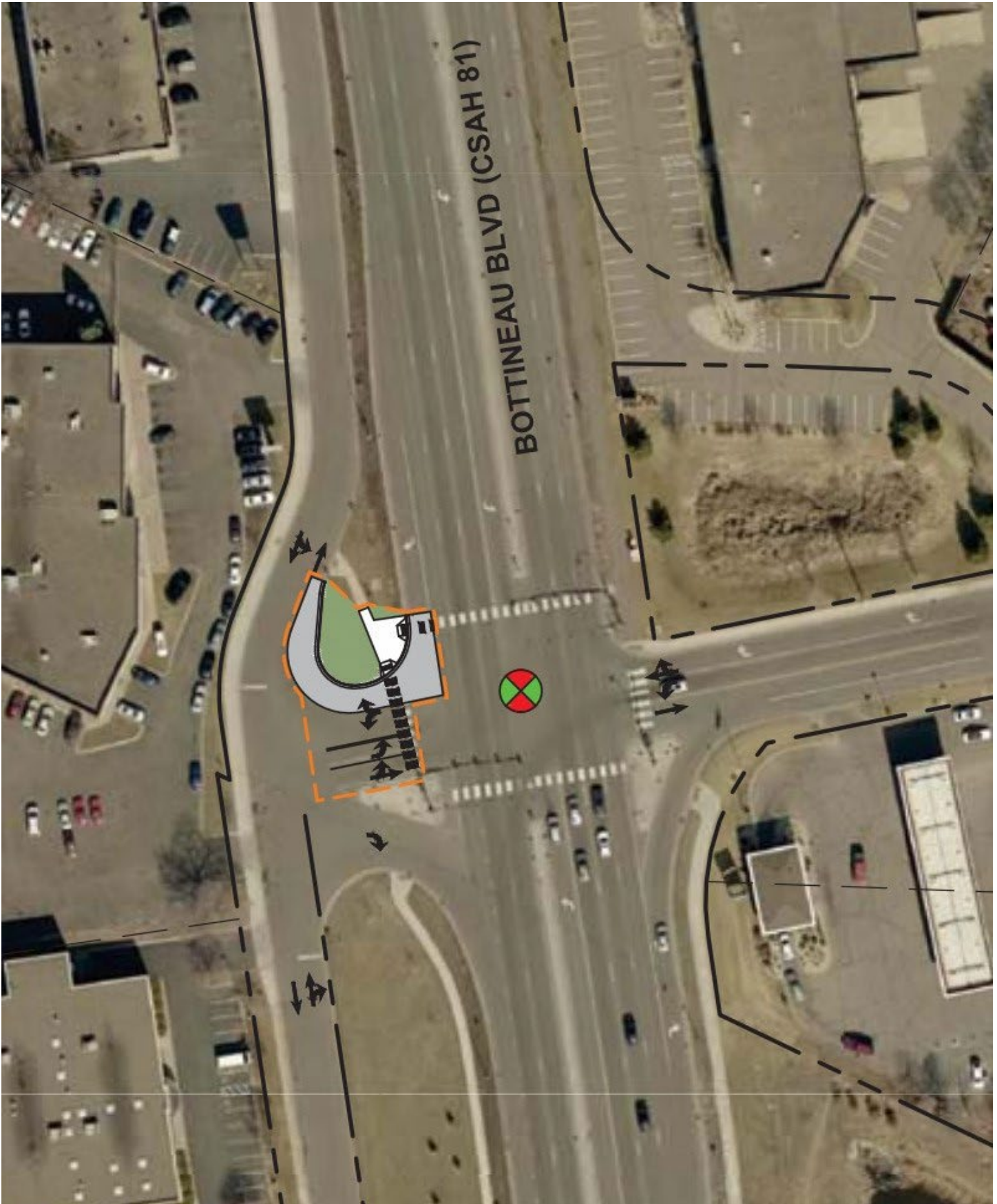


EXHIBIT A-3

Eastbound 47th Ave. at Bottineau Blvd.

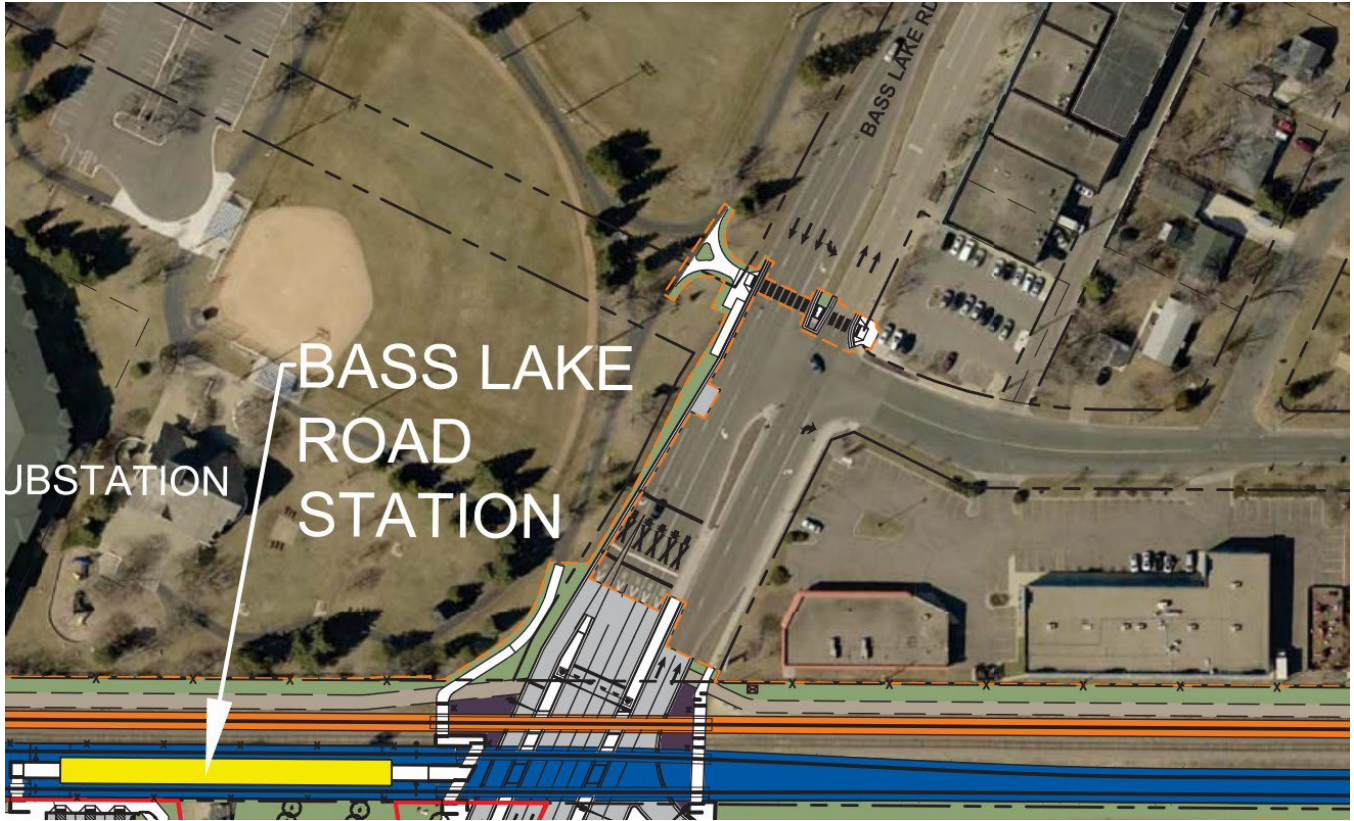


Westbound 47th Ave. at Bottineau Blvd.



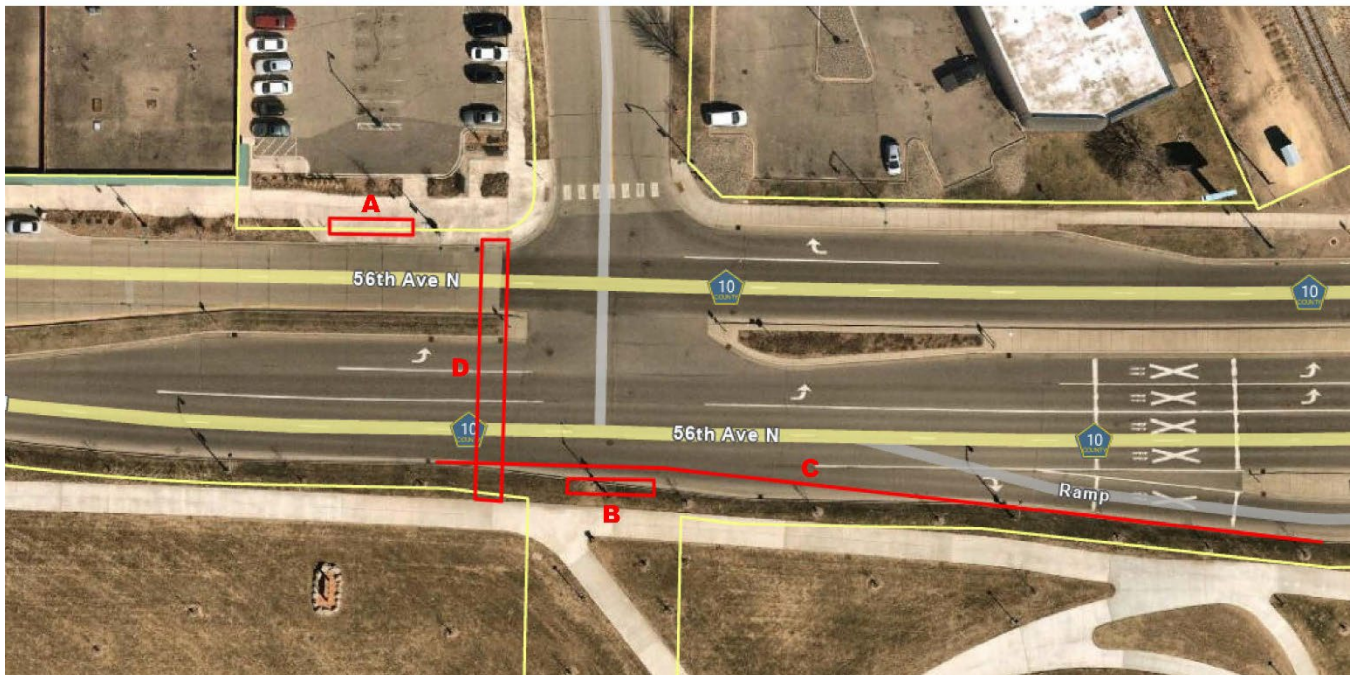
Bus shelters and crosswalk at Elmhurst and Bass Lake Road

Excerpt from 90% plans (previous alignment):



2021 aerial photo with approximate location of previous Blue Line alignment project elements in red:

- A. Westbound bus shelter
- B. Eastbound bus shelter
- C. New curb line
- D. Crosswalk

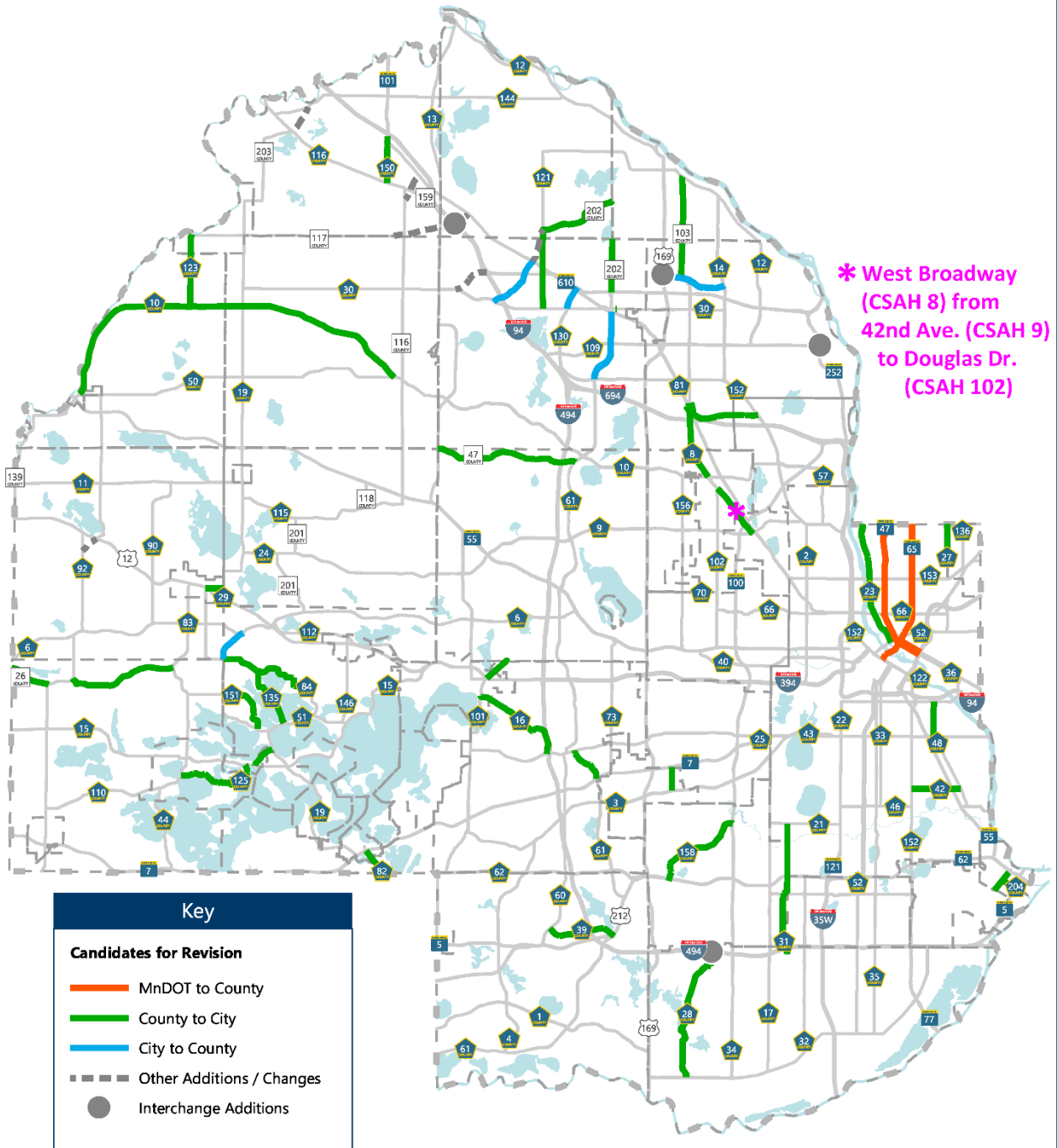


Jurisdiction Transfer Candidates

HENNEPIN COUNTY
MINNESOTA

Figure 4-17 | Public Works

(City note in magenta)



Disclaimer: This map (i) is furnished "AS IS" with no representation as to completeness or accuracy; (ii) is furnished with no warranty of any kind; and (iii) is not suitable for legal, engineering or surveying purposes. Hennepin County shall not be liable for any damage, injury or loss resulting from this map.



Publication date: 5/30/2018

EXHIBIT A-5b

West Broadway looking northwest from 47th



West Broadway looking southeast from Welcome



2040 forecast model - shift from Bottineau Blvd. to West Broadway

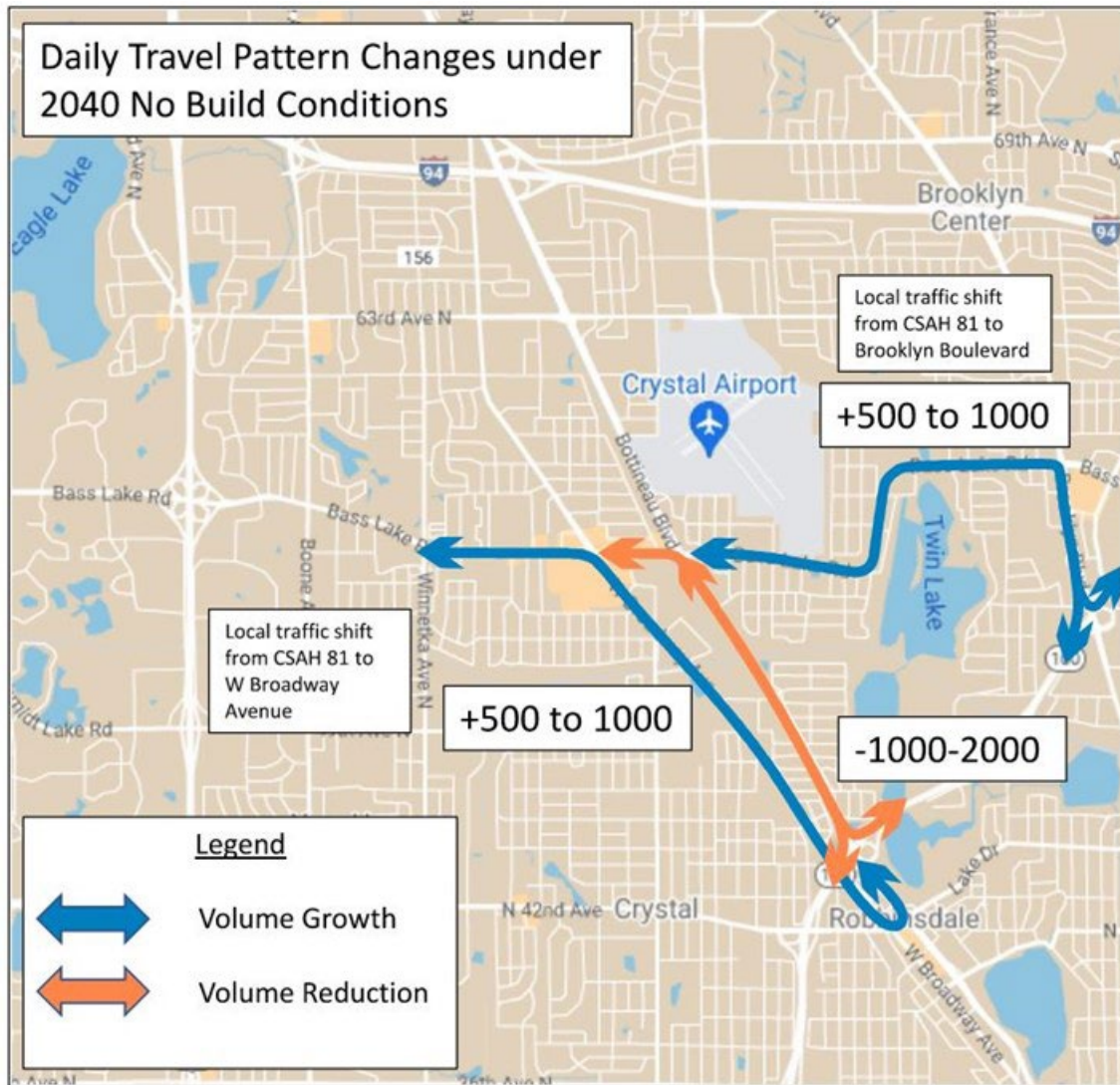
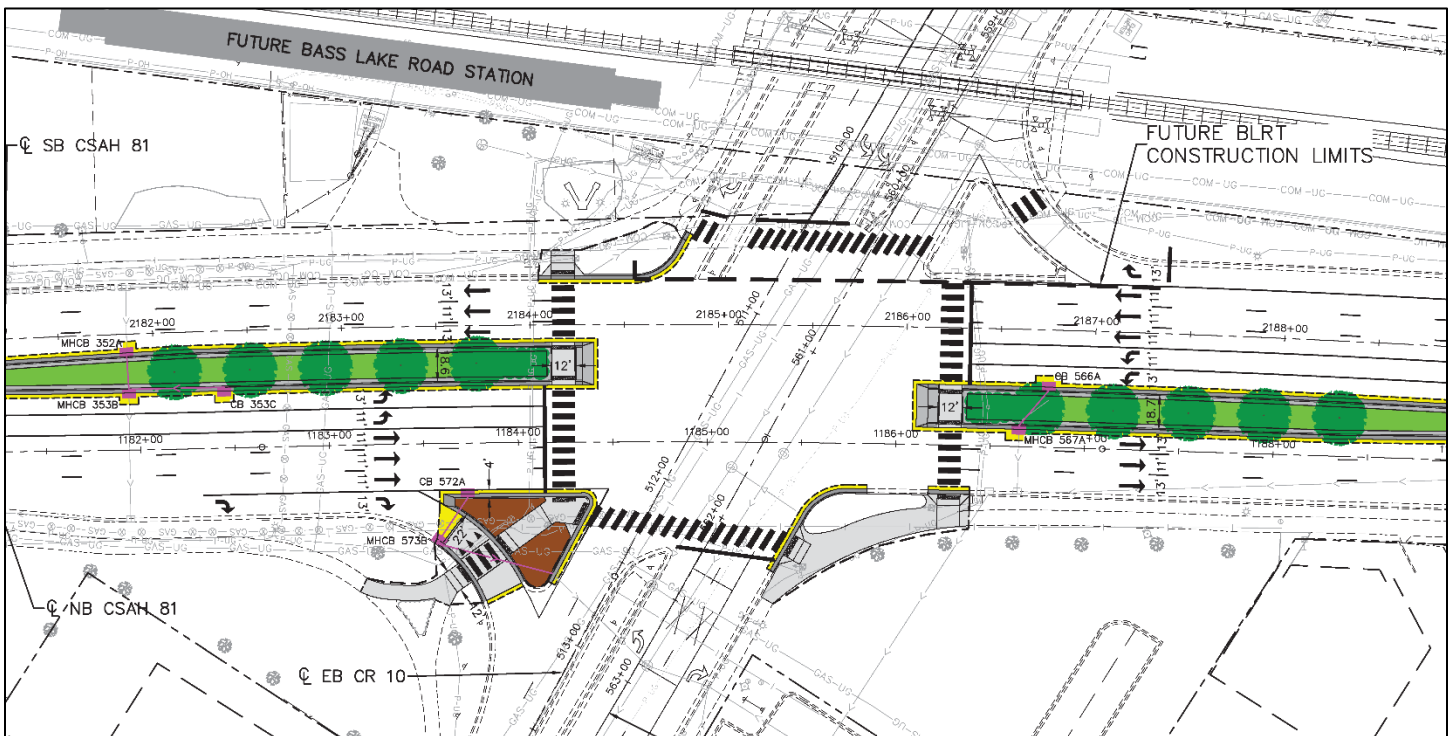
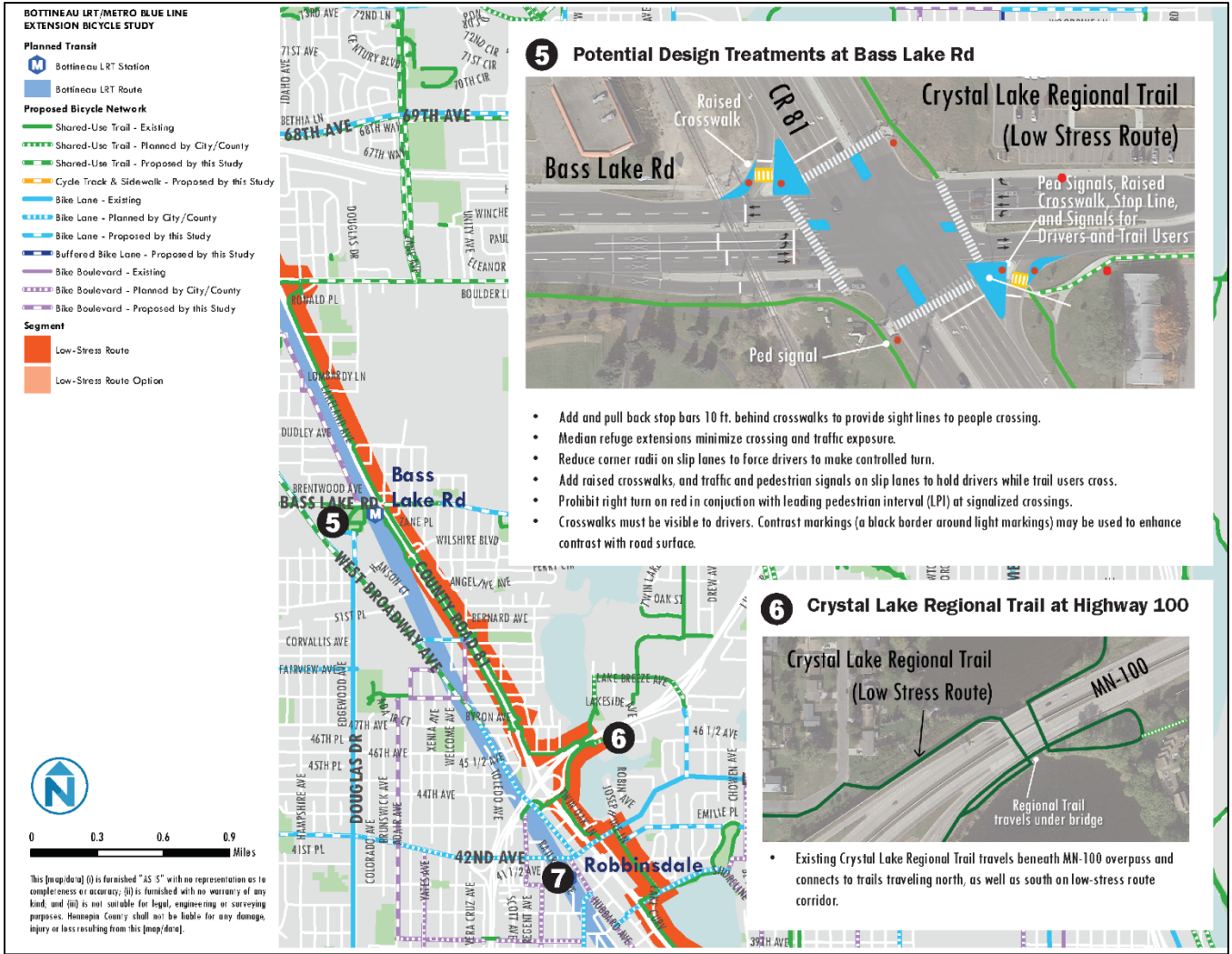


EXHIBIT A-6a

Existing bike/ped trail and cell tower maintenance access route



Previously planned at-grade pedestrian enhancements



April 2015 aerial photo showing southbound third lane drop



Lane drop taper (before summer 2015 restriping)

April 2015 aerial photo showing northbound third lane add



EXHIBIT C-1

April 2015 aerial photo showing southbound third lane drop

