



July 23, 2020

Dear Governor Tim Walz, Federal, State, and County Elected Leaders,

The united communities along the METRO Blue Line Light Rail Transit (BLRT) Extension corridor affirm our unwavering commitment to the alignment and mode of BLRT. After more than a dozen years collaborating with multiple agencies and exploring alternative alignments, there was agreement that the BNSF Railway connection between Highway 55 and West Broadway is the best location for BLRT. We call on all of our elected leaders to push forward a deal with BNSF to advance BLRT like the State did with Southwest LRT and has done with other major projects. Put meaningful action behind your words of support and find a way forward on the design that has been underway with BNSF participation for more than 20 years.

The recent suggestions to convert this long-awaited light rail line to a different alignment and mode without community conversation is an affront to our residents. Our diverse communities along this line have a higher number of people living in poverty and experiencing transportation barriers than other areas that will be served by light rail. This is an example of traditional power structures ignoring communities of color and is systemic racism in action.

Since 1988, the Northwest cities of Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park have been working on designs for the Northwest Corridor LRT Line with the full knowledge and cooperation of BNSF engineers and officials. Our communities have spent thousands of hours working toward the 90 percent construction plans which are nearly shovel ready. We have responded to issues raised by BNSF leaders, accommodating their requirements, and meeting state and federal requirements to mitigate impacts through the historic corridor. Even in 2014 when BNSF proposed to increase the rail traffic by connecting to Canadian Pacific Railway in Crystal, BNSF representatives affirmed that the addition of oil trains in the corridor would not pre-empt the use of the corridor for the planned LRT line.

The assertion that BNSF has reimagined their long-term plans for increased rail traffic on this section of track is a distraction. The line is a spur line with minimal potential for future customers. In fact, it appears that this summer they have started using the north end of this line for storage of excess cars, miles from where those cars are needed, and moving the cars overnight, which is disruptive as they pass across seven at-grade crossings. Their concern that LRT will lead to higher density development along the line is curious. The homes in Robbinsdale and Crystal have been built up to the BNSF spur line since the 1970s; one could not build closer to the corridor than the homes already there.

Why use the BNSF connection instead of an alternative route or roadway? One word – Rondo. Whether it is a major freeway or an LRT line taking the right-of-way needed from a fully developed residential area, the community bordering the improvement suffers more harm than benefit. Other BLRT routes explored in the 1980s and 90s would have resulted in the loss of on-street parking for blocks of homes, disrupted neighborhood connections on side streets, and created longer walking distances to the stations from homes. The planned location is the right corridor for our quadrant. The BNSF alignment provides convenient station locations separated by areas that already have limited crossing points due to the freight traffic.

We have been patiently waiting for other projects to move forward and our patience is gone. We need your leadership to stand up for our communities. We continue to fully engage the diverse and lower income communities along the corridor in a campaign of equity to demand access to modern public transportation. BLRT will connect our area to jobs, affordable housing, education and other opportunities. As the Met Council's new Regional Economic Framework summary points out, and as several of you have said many times publicly, the region must eliminate barriers to transportation equity. As evidenced by the attached maps, there is no better way to improve regional racial and economic equity than to advance the BLRT project.

We request to meet with the Governor immediately to discuss how to advance this critical project and also expect that a Corridor Management Committee (CMC) meeting will be scheduled in August.

Sincerely,



Ricardo Perez, Coalition Organizer
Blue Line Coalition
<https://blcoalition.wordpress.com/>



Mayor Lunde, City of Brooklyn Park
Connect Blue Line Now! Coalition
www.connectbluelinenow.com



Mayor Harris, City of Crystal Golden Valley
Connect Blue Line Now! Coalition



Mayor Murphy, City of Robbinsdale
Connect Blue Line Now! Coalition



Council Member Deshler, City of Crystal
Connect Blue Line Now! Coalition



Mayor Hemken, City of New Hope
Connect Blue Line Now! Coalition