



# STOPS FOR US!

Organizing for Equity Along the Central Corridor

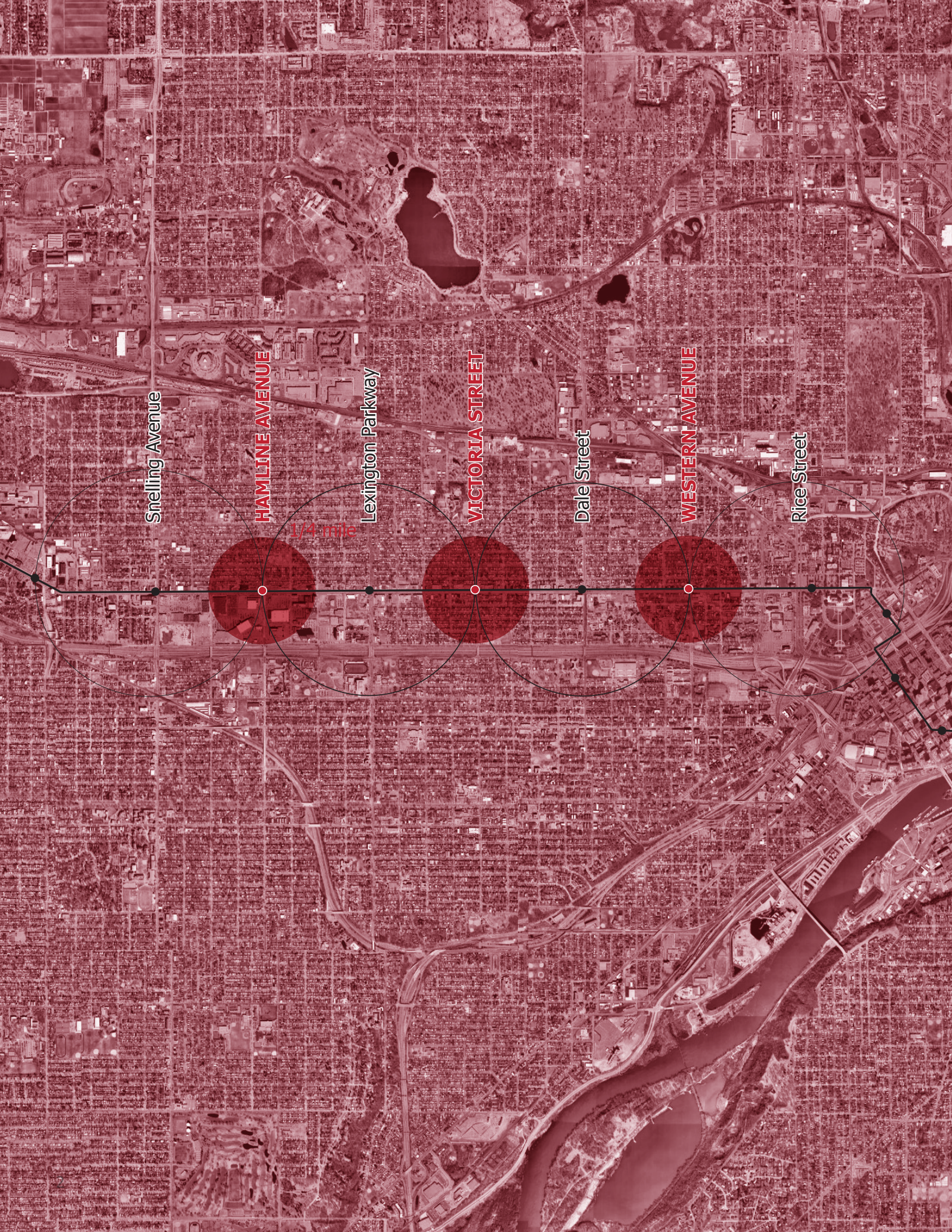
Concerns

- housing - trying to get the neighborhood - for assistance
- problems with housing - compliance issues, meeting or how enforcement - ads to vacant

Importance of parks, etc. to go to accommodate Adequate green

predatory lending problem vulnerable





Snelling Avenue

HAMLIN AVENUE

1/4 mile

Lexington Parkway

VICTORIA STREET

Dale Street

WESTERN AVENUE

Rice Street



## **STOPS FOR US!**

Organizing for Equity Along the Central Corridor

### **STOPS FOR US PARTNERS**

Alliance for Metropolitan Stability  
Asian Economic Development Association  
Aurora/ St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation  
Community Stabilization Project  
District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis:

North End Planning Council  
Frogtown Neighborhood Association  
Summit-University Planning Council  
Hamline Midway Coalition  
St. Anthony Park Community Council  
Union Park District Council  
Macalester-Groveland Community Council  
Summit Hill Association  
CapitolRiver Council  
Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association  
Prospect Park East River Road Improvement Association  
Southeast Como Improvement Association  
University of Minnesota District Improvement Association  
West Bank Community Coalition

Got Voice, Got Power!  
Hmong Organizing Program, TakeActionMN  
Housing Preservation Project  
ISAIAH  
Jewish Community Action  
JUST Equity  
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy  
Model Cities, Inc.  
MICA  
Preserve and Benefit Historic Rondo Committee  
Saint Paul NAACP  
Saint Paul Urban League  
Transit for Livable Communities  
UFCW Local 789  
University UNITED  
University Avenue Business Association

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## WHO BENEFITS FROM PUBLIC INVESTMENT?

When the Central Corridor light rail begins its service connecting St. Paul and Minneapolis in 2014, it will carry more than the thousands of riders who will use it daily. The line will also carry with it a powerful story about how engaged residents and community-based organizations can, and must play a central role in the planning and development of major infrastructure investments.

Public decisions often get made in ways that marginalize local interests, and exclude residents of low-income communities and people of color from the benefits of multi-million-dollar investments of public funds. Officials are making choices right now about the development of the Central Corridor. These public decisions will affect people's lives and shape the future of their neighborhoods along the line -- decisions about opportunities for local businesses, job creation, creation and preservation of homes people can afford, and access to a full range of transportation choices to get to and from jobs, schooling and community life. The community's continuing active involvement is critical to ensure that the full benefits of the Central Corridor are shared by all.

The people who live and work along the Central Corridor are counting on it. With all of the challenges facing the low-income communities, communities of color and small businesses along the line, it's vital that the \$1 billion LRT investment involves and benefits the people it will affect the most. In the words of Hmong community leader

Va-Megn Thoj, "Winning will mean that we have justice in the community for people who are dependent on transit. It will mean that we can count on the project benefitting riders from the community. Then we can celebrate."





NO RAIL

VICTORIA  
STOPS  
FOR  
US!  
WESTERN  
HAMLINE  
COMMUNITY  
[www.stopsforus.com](http://www.stopsforus.com)

**T Metro Transit**  
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## LIGHT RAIL STOPS FOR US

There has already been one major celebration of victory. On January 25, 2010, a large group of community members, funders and government officials gathered for a hastily planned press conference about the Central Corridor light rail transit line. Excitement overwhelmed the crowd when U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood took the podium and made a long-awaited announcement.

"I'm here today to say that the trains are going to stop here. They are going to serve this community. And [the Department of Transportation is] going to pay half the cost," he said.<sup>1</sup>

This announcement meant that funding had been secured for three previously unplanned stations to serve neighborhoods on the eastern end of the Central Corridor LRT.

As a series of senators, legislators, commissioners and city council members followed Sec. LaHood at the microphone, each one expressed genuine joy about the announcement.

"Today's announcement is a victory for the countless people who've stood up for these stops for over five years. As one, we worked, we prayed, we shouted...and now we won!" said St. Paul City Councilmember Melvin Carter III.

Why all the enthusiasm? The three missing stations had been part of an ongoing debate over who would – and should – benefit from a \$1 billion public investment in Central Corridor LRT.

The funding cleared the way to provide rail access, as well as the many benefits that come along with transitway development, to several distinct and historic communities of color along University Avenue, communities that otherwise would have been passed by as the train whisked from downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis.

There was one thing that nobody said at that press conference: Key decision-makers had initially opposed community demands for the three stops being included on the line. It was only after years of work, led by a coalition of community groups that kept the issue alive, that officials at the local, regional and federal levels came to realize that the three stops at Western Avenue, Victoria Street and Hamline Avenue were essential to making the Central Corridor a success for the Twin Cities as a whole.

1

"Mayor Coleman, Transportation Secretary Announce Central Corridor to Have Neighborhood Stops," City of Saint Paul Press release, January 25, 2010, on City of St. Paul web site, <http://www.stpaul.gov/CivivAlerts.aspx?AID=766&ARC=1517&PREVIEW=YES>, accessed October 2011



## WHAT IS THE CENTRAL CORRIDOR?

Slated to open in 2014, the Central Corridor will be the Twin Cities' second line in a planned regional light rail transit system. It will begin at the historic Union Depot in downtown St. Paul, travel along University Avenue, run through the campus of the University of Minnesota, and end at the connection to the existing and hugely successful Hiawatha line in downtown Minneapolis.

Although planning for the Central Corridor LRT has been in the works since the 1980s, broad community interest in the Central Corridor began ramping up when the line's alignment and planned stations were announced in mid-2006. Stops were planned all along University Avenue, but there were gaps in areas where the largest populations of low-income people and people of color lived. In those neighborhoods, where there was the heaviest use of existing bus lines, planned stations were few and far between.

In the eastern University Avenue section, home to significant populations of color, the planned stops were one mile apart. That would require residents to walk up to a half-mile walk in a climate with an average temperature of less than 25° F during the five coldest winter months. Many of the people who would have to make that walk rely on public transit to get to work, buy their groceries, transport their children to and from school and daycare, and use the many community services located along the avenue. Many more are elderly or people with disabilities. Compounding the problem, bus service would be cut back significantly to accommodate the new train.

Yet the Metropolitan Council, the agency responsible for transit planning in the Twin Cities, opposed additional stops. The agency claimed that including the missing stops would disqualify the project from a 50 percent funding match from the federal government. The Met Council also stated in official federal documents that "minority or low-income populations within the study area are not subject to any disproportionate impacts associated with the development of the Central Corridor LRT."<sup>2</sup> Then-Met Council Chair Peter Bell went so far as to say that there were no civil rights issues associated with the Central Corridor.

"I don't know if I buy the civil-rights argument," said Bell in interview with Minnesota Public Radio. "There are many disparities that exist in this country based on race and income. You have health care disparities, you have disparities in the criminal justice system, you have educational disparities. Let me tell you one place you don't have disparities: That's transit. Low-income minority people across the country have more transit than upper-income non-minority individuals. That's a fact."<sup>3</sup>

But that analysis didn't match with what the community knew about the Central Corridor and other rail projects throughout the country. Residents and community organizers began analyzing the plans, and asking whether the new train would really serve everyone, or merely serve as a commuter route to move people quickly between the two downtowns.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Transit Administration, Central Corridor LRT Transit Supplement Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Washington, DC, 2008, vol.1, p. 3-153.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Yuen, "Central Corridor: In the Shadow of Rondo," Minneapolis Public Radio, April 29, 2010, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/04/20/centcorridor3-rondo/>, accessed October 2011.



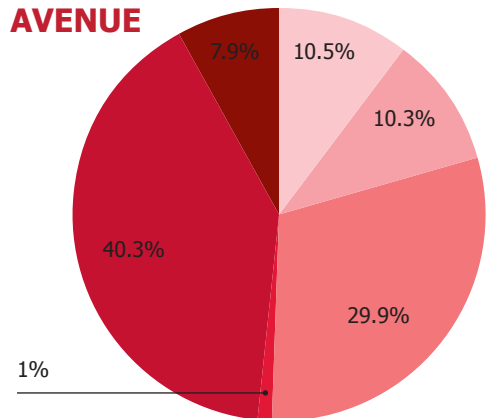
## WHO LIVES THERE?

Community members from neighborhoods on and adjacent to east University Avenue were concerned about the plans. These are some of the most ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods in the Twin Cities, with large populations of African Americans, Hmong, and whites, and smaller pockets of Latinos and African immigrants. While only 24 percent of the Twin Cities regional population is comprised of people of color,<sup>4</sup> the neighborhoods along east University Avenue in St. Paul average more than 50 percent people of color.<sup>5</sup>

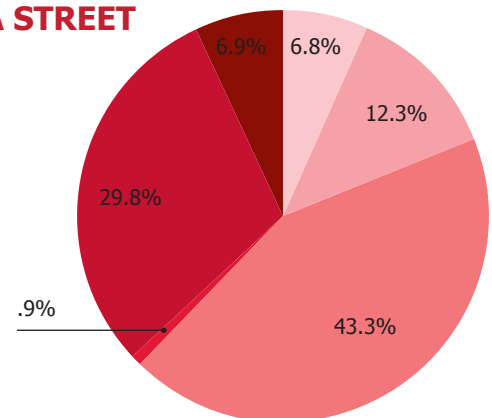
The Central Corridor LRT will run through the heart of what used to be called Rondo, a vibrant African American neighborhood that was thriving for generations before and after World War II. In the 1950s, seeking a highway corridor linking St. Paul and Minneapolis, transportation planners constructed Interstate 94 right through the heart of Rondo, without fair consultation with or compensation to residents. Hundreds of homes and small businesses were displaced, and families were forced to relocate to unfamiliar and unwelcoming areas of the region. The African American residents who remain in the neighborhood 60 years later have not forgotten that mistreatment.

"I-94 was done to the community, not with it," says Nieeta Presley of the Aurora St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation. "Promises were made, but they were false promises. Now, as this new major investment is coming that promises benefits to the community, an al-

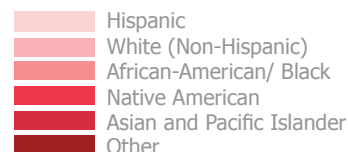
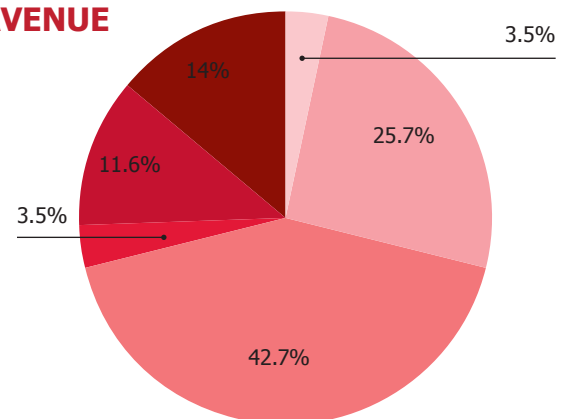
### WESTERN AVENUE



### VICTORIA STREET



### HAMILE AVENUE



4

Metropolitan Council, Metro Stats, Saint Paul, MN, March 2011, <http://stats.metc.state.mn.us/stats/pdf/Census2010.pdf>, accessed September 2010.



## **WESTERN AVENUE**

Population within 1/4 mile: 1,970  
Percent minority: 69.4%  
Median household income: \$33,722.75

## **VICTORIA STREET**

Population within 1/4 mile: 2,944  
Percent minority: 84.3%  
Median household income: \$33,359.20

## **HAMILE AVENUE**

Population within 1/4 mile: 3,417  
Percent minority: 85.9%  
Median household income: \$28,279.25

ready injured community, we needed to be on top of it. Our leadership came out and said, 'We don't want another Rondo.'"

This part of St. Paul is also an important resettlement area for large populations of Hmong people. They began arriving in the 1970s, refugees from their native Laos after fighting alongside the United States in the Vietnam War. Now, thousands of Hmong live along the Central Corridor.

"Very vulnerable populations live along the corridor: low-income people, immigrants, people with low English proficiency," says Thoj, of the Asian Economic Development Association. "That's where all the passion and commitment is rooted. People in this corridor are directly impacted and they should stand to gain the most from a transit project like this."

University Avenue resident Metric Giles, an organizer with the Community Stabilization Project, says the Central Corridor is an opportunity for transportation planners to rebuild some of the trust with communities of color along the avenue. "There is an opportunity to heal that wound, an open wound," he says. "This is about how the Metropolitan Council could come to the community and say, not just with words but with actions, 'The things we did with I-94 are unresolved and we want to take the time with the Central Corridor to recognize the disparities that were felt by the community.'"



## THE BATTLE FOR THREE MISSING STOPS

Networks of community organizers who were already working to secure community benefits such as housing, transit and economic development along University Avenue began talking to each other and to their neighbors. They attended community gatherings and hosted public meetings to find out what community residents wanted to gain from the light rail.

At the annual Rondo Days celebration in 2007, a coalition of grassroots organizations showed residents a map of the Central Corridor and asked them to place push pins in the areas where they would like the train to stop. At the end of the day, the areas around Western Avenue, Victoria Street and Hamline Avenue were by far the most populated. Yet there were no stops planned for those intersections.

Andrea Lubov, a St. Paul resident and Jewish Community Action leader, was among those who realized that the way the line was being planned would have adverse impacts to these communities. "When you look at the census data you realize those areas are lower income and highly transit dependent. Why should people from those areas have to walk further, unless the point is to say we don't want poor people to get on our train?"

As more and more residents began voicing concerns, a coalition of more than 20 grassroots organizations came together as the Stops for Us coalition, with a primary focus on securing the three missing stations.

Coalition members organized marches and kept resident leaders involved throughout the process. They joined every committee they could, attended countless public meetings and talked to the myriad public officials who had a stake in the Central Corridor. They studied the policies, the processes and the jargon that surrounds such a major public undertaking. They also organized community members to submit comments on important federal documents. In the end, 173 public comments were submitted in favor of the missing stops.

Standing in the way of all this community effort was that Met Council staff had been given a directive to deliver the project on time and on budget above all else. At the time, the ultimate factor for the Central Corridor to be considered for the critical federal funding match was the Federal Transit Administration's cost-effectiveness criteria. The FTA used a formula called the Cost Effectiveness Index as a pass-fail measure to determine which projects around the nation would be eligible for federal funding. The federal requirements favored shorter travel times and longer distances between stops, without regard to the consequences for local residents. The model also tended to favor higher income and mostly white commuter lines over intra-regional rail lines that would also serve lower-income, transit-dependent people who traveled within a community. Fearing a loss of \$477 million in federal funds, the Met Council told the Stops for Us coalition that the missing stops were not an option.



"We were told, 'If you want these stops, you're going to destroy the project. You're going to stop the whole thing,'" remembers Joan Vanhala of the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability. "Elected officials were afraid to raise the issue because everyone was feeling tenuous about the project's eligibility for federal funding."

Nancy Homans, Mayor Coleman's policy director at the city of St. Paul, says that causing too much controversy was a very real consideration for local officials. "The community activism was really important, because we were walking a middle ground. We couldn't jeopardize the project or create so much conflict that the money would go to a transit project somewhere else."

The cost-effectiveness calculations were determined by dozens of decisions made along the line, including controversial and costly proposals for mitigations to the University of Minnesota and Minnesota Public Radio. Community members saw that their ideas weren't being taken seriously while those larger institutions were getting the majority of the attention. As it became clear that deep-rooted community knowledge and expertise weren't going to convince the Met Council, Stops for Us members decided they needed hard data to back them up.

The District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, a coalition member, hired a consultant to analyze transitway development in similar regions around the country. That independent analysis directly contradicted the Met Council's assertion that the missing stations

would place stops too close together.

"You could not miss the fact that all of the supporting documents submitted to the federal government talked about transit-dependent low-income populations, but the plans weren't supporting those populations," says researcher Mary Kay Bailey. "Looking at some of the other places with similar demographic characteristics, people weren't spacing (stations) this far apart."

In fact, stations in other regions were typically  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile apart. The research also showed that the intersections in question had the appropriate population densities and transit ridership to support stations.

Carrie Jo Short, who helped fund the research through Minnesota Philanthropy Partners, says that her foundations saw the research as a critical piece to establishing credibility for the community. "For me, it reinforced the value of truly investing in capacity for organizations and encouraging them to be research- and data-driven so it doesn't just appear to be a knee-jerk response, it's what the data tell us," she says. "The question was, where do we want to be in the history books? And I think we want to be on the side of the people."

The research made an impact with many Central Corridor decision-makers. In response, Mayor Coleman asked Peter Bell, as chair of the Met Council, to have Met Council staff analyze the report. Soon after, the Met Council released





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THOMAS

its own report stating that “assertions made regarding the potential for increased ridership... are not derived from FTA-derived...forecasting methodology. While it is possible to negotiate with the FTA to use alternative methodologies... the process of negotiations would be time-consuming and cause delay to the current project schedule.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the Met Council still would not acknowledge disparate impacts, it made a critical concession in February 2008 by agreeing to include the underground infrastructure for the three stations, known as “stubs,” in the plans. Since the stubs would not increase travel time, they would not affect the project’s cost effectiveness assessment with the FTA.

“When they included the stubs, that was a critical point because it acknowledged that the stations should be in,” says Anne White, a resident leader of the DCC. “We had been calling them ‘additional’ stations, but at that point we re-framed our message and started calling them ‘missing’ stations.”

Although it offered an opening for further concessions down the road, many in the coalition found the addition of the stubs to be more of an insult than a victory. “This is a quality of life issue for our community,” says Giles. “This promise was an illusion of providing the community with influence. However, it resulted in no stations being built in the plan. I believe that this decision was a continuation of the use of mass transit as a tool of racism that is perpetrated on economi-

cally marginalized communities of color.”

Not satisfied with the addition of the stubs, officials at the city of St. Paul began brainstorming ways to add one of the missing stops to the line.

“We had to make a calculated decision,” says Homans. “We decided we were going to get the stops, but not threaten the whole project. That wasn’t going to do anyone any good. But somehow, somehow, we knew we could get the stops.”

City staff realized that if a local agency committed 100 percent of the funds to build the station, that change would not have to be submitted to the FTA for a funding match. In August 2009, Mayor Coleman announced that the city would commit \$5.2 million to fund the full construction of one of the three stations.

“We’re committed to making sure that at least one of the additional stations that the community has been demanding gets built out from the beginning of the line, and also have set a path forward that a couple of other stations will be built as well,” Coleman said in his announcement.<sup>7</sup>

Stops for Us leaders didn’t view winning one stop as a victory, but rather as a step in the right direction. After years of being told that no stations could be added, St. Paul’s move gave the coalition hope that all three stations were in the Central Corridor’s near future.

7

Dan Olson, Laura Yuen and Rupa Shenoy, “Saint Paul to Fund Additional Light Rail Station,” Minnesota Public Radio, August 26, 2009, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2009/08/26/central-corridor-new-station/>, accessed October 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Metropolitan Council, “A Response to the District Councils Collaborative Research Report,” Saint Paul, MN, February 2008.



## FROM GRASSROOTS TO FEDERAL POLICY

After the 2008 presidential election, the coalition had some indication that the Obama administration would revisit its transportation funding policies. At that time, the coalition moved to a strategy of building relationships with key decision-makers within the Obama administration to discuss the detrimental effects of the cost-effectiveness criteria.

"Our leaders did a ton of work at the federal level building relationships with members of Congress and advocating for the missing stations," said David Greene, a leader with the faith-based group ISAIAH. "We also convened meetings with FTA officials in Washington and talked about the issue."

Coalition members didn't yet have an established relationship with Federal Transit Administration head Peter Rogoff. But they knew he was going to be at a national rail conference that Stops for Us members were scheduled to attend in Boston in late 2009. Coalition members approached Rogoff after his plenary speech, and took advantage of the opportunity to talk to him about the stops. Although none of them had ever spoken personally with Rogoff, their organizing work with other FTA officials had already paid off: Rogoff said he knew all about the issue of the missing stops. He declared the Central Corridor "the poster child" for the need to change federal rules for transit funding. By the end of the conference, Rogoff had agreed to come to St. Paul to hear directly from the community why the missing stops were critical

to the Central Corridor's success.

Two weeks later, Rogoff was in the DCC's offices with a bagful of hamburgers and one hour dedicated to listening to the community organizers.

"One of the lessons we learned is that if you want to change federal policy, you need to lay the groundwork with sliders from White Castle," jokes Jim Erkel, of the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. MCEA created demographic maps of the Central Corridor that had made believers out of many skeptics of the missing stops idea. The maps showed large populations of residents of color along the line, and clearly illustrated how the planned stops were not aligned with where those populations lived. The Stops for Us coalition had hung the maps around the room for Rogoff to study, as they explained the many ways federal rules stood in the way of building an equitable LRT line.

Rogoff told coalition members that the needs of the community were just as important as the budget and other issues that had occupied the Met Council's attention. He told them to keep on pressing and not give up. As he walked out the door, Rogoff asked if he could take the maps with him.





## AN OPENING FOR EQUITY

With the maps in his possession, Stops for Us leaders knew that Rogoff was gathering information to fuel an argument for policy changes. And by January 2010, the FTA made it official: cost effectiveness would no longer be the sole, pass-fail driver for decision-making around federal transit funding. Instead, a variety of “livability factors” would be balanced with an economic analysis. These changes would continue to hold local communities accountable, while placing them more in control of how transitways were planned.

In his national remarks announcing the change, Rogoff specifically cited the Central Corridor as a reason for the change.

“That project is specifically not building stations in a fashion that troubles us from a civil rights perspective because it is not going [to] adequately serve the African American community and the Asian community,” Rogoff said in his announcement.<sup>8</sup>

Just two weeks later, Stops for Us organizers got a call saying that they should be available for a press conference the following day. Members of the coalition gathered at the press conference, where it was finally announced that local government agencies and private foundations had committed enough money to secure the federal match to build the three missing stations at Western, Victoria and Hamline.

“It’s fair to say that by January 2010 the three stops were high on everyone’s agenda locally,”

says Jonathan Sage-Martinson of the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative, a unique partnership of local private foundations addressing a range of corridor-related issues. “When the policy was going to be changed, there was a lot of work among local agencies to come up with that match. When we were approached, one of our funders said, ‘This is exactly the kind of opportunity our fund was created to take advantage of.’”

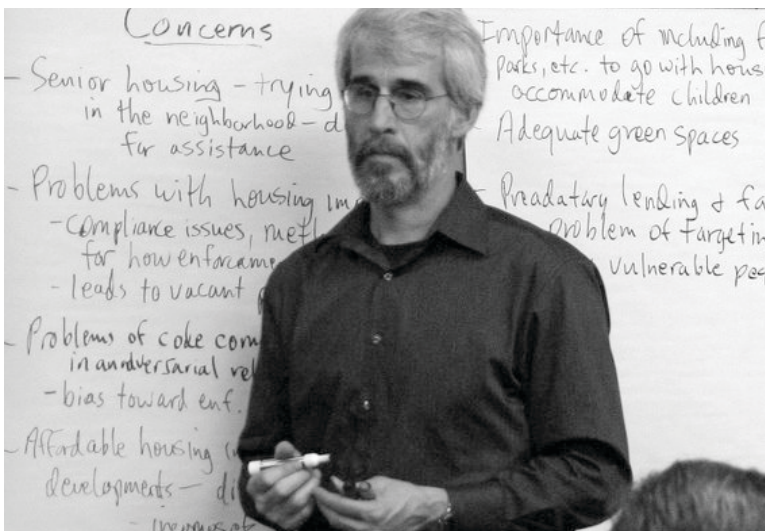
The Funders Collaborative, along with the city of St. Paul, Ramsey County and the Counties Transit Improvement Board were able to quickly piece together enough funding to build the stops. Although the longer story of what the coalition and its allies had to do to secure the missing stops was not told at the press conference, Sec. LaHood acknowledged the community’s role in his remarks. “You’ve made a difference and we will use you as an example across the country,” he said. “That if you have great projects that are for the people, and work with your delegation, you can make things happen.”

Stops for Us members cheered on from the audience, taking in one of the most significant victories for racial and economic equity that many of them had ever experienced. It’s not every day that a local coalition moves federal policy to ensure a \$1 billion public investment in their community benefits the people who live there. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recognized the accomplishment, giving the coalition a 2010 National Achievement in Environmental Justice award. Now, they recall that moment as

<sup>8</sup>  
<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/01/13/new-fta-rules/>

an affirmation that community members have an important and powerful role in public decision-making.

"This victory points the way toward future victories for equity. It shows the community can pull together, gain some power and influence the outcome of a major infrastructure project," says Vic Rosenthal of Jewish Community Action. "It demonstrates how important coalition-building is. Without getting the right people in the room, you're never going to have enough power to win. We learned never to give up on something. It is possible to win."







## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Who should benefit from major public investments in our nation's infrastructure? Most everyone would say "all Americans," but the reality is that the way our public decisions are made often marginalizes the very communities that need it the most. In the case of the Central Corridor, the historic African American and Southeast Asian communities that were used to justify the need for the project were the ones who stood to gain the least from it as originally planned. Through years of strategic thinking, positioning and community organizing, the Stops for Us coalition was able to change that picture, and leveraged a \$16.5 million investment into the communities





along east University Avenue. The project will not only benefit those communities, but it will also make the Central Corridor a better project and provide an example of community organizing leading to equitable benefits that will serve as a model for future transitways throughout the entire Twin Cities region and the nation.

"I hear from my colleagues how they are looking forward to the connections throughout the geography," says Ramsey County Commissioner Toni Carter, a key decision-maker along the Central Corridor. "It will create a better environment for people in the suburbs, for people who come in for business, for whatever it will be. There is an understanding that this transportation investment is for all of us. It will be a more vibrant community if it's a more connected community. That's not just about the local thing, that's about the greater region and state overall."

But Stops for Us members say it's too soon to say whether the community's organizing will result in that ultimate vision. The stops are crucial, and the community organizing that made them possible is the foundation of ongoing work to ensure the Central Corridor is an equitable rail line. Residents and coalition members, working with the same decision-makers who helped them achieve the stops victory, say they need to remain committed to ensuring future decisions benefit, and do not harm, the neighborhoods along the corridor.

Many community concerns remain unresolved. Business owners are worried about how they will survive years of construction, and residents are

threatened by potential property tax increases that could displace them from their homes. A federal lawsuit and two complaints alleging civil rights violations have not been resolved to the community's satisfaction.

Giles says that positioning the Stops for Us victory as the ultimate victory would be a mistake. "The stops were one of the many environmental justice issues we needed to deal with. If those other issues become overshadowed by the stops, then we have done an injustice to the community."

The Stops for Us coalition provides a model for leaders, organizers and advocates in the Twin Cities and around the country who are facing what seem like insurmountable odds as they seek equitable outcomes for their communities. Lessons learned – about strategy, consistent dialogue with decision-makers, maintaining unity, and dealing directly with issues of racism – will be important for organizers along the Central Corridor and elsewhere as they face future challenges.

But for the people who currently live around University Avenue, what happens next is urgent. They want to make sure they can continue to live, do business, build wealth and thrive in their neighborhoods. Now, the members of the coalition agree, is the time to ensure that everyone, including low-income communities and people of color, can reap the benefits of this major public investment. Members of the coalition and the greater community are committed to continuing their advocacy, to ensure that this major public investment works for everyone, to the benefit of the local communities and the entire region.



