

OUR LIVES ARE ON THE LINE



Blue Line Coalition Community Report | January 2022

Big changes are coming to our neighborhoods in North Minneapolis, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park – and our lives are on the line.

The construction of the Blue Line Extension project will bring a light rail route from Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park in coming years. Having safe, affordable and efficient transportation choices are the avenues to our freedom, dignity and connection to community, especially for those of us who have been denied these options for far too long.

Together, we see a vibrant future where fast, reliable transit options make it possible for a mother to go to her daughter's soccer game instead of waiting on multiple bus transfers.

Together, we see train stops that serve and grow immigrant and BIPOC business districts that create wealth and stability in our cultural communities.

Together, we see safe street crossings that make it possible for elders to walk to their community-owned grocery store.

Getting from one place to another cannot be a given for some and a daily challenge or impossible barrier for others. That's why this project is so important. And why it **MUST** be different from past transit projects in the region and nationwide.

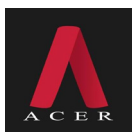
Many light rail lines in St. Paul and Minneapolis – and across the country – have pushed out low-wealth renters, current homeowners, immigrants and communities of color from their homes and businesses. We must create a different outcome by demanding reasonable rules and proven policies that stop rent spikes, require affordable housing over luxury development and increase community ownership all along the line.

Decisions being made right now will impact our communities – and our friends and families for generations to come. After nearly a decade of planning, and more than \$100 million spent, the Met Council and Hennepin County announced in August 2020 that they were abandoning the previous route. In March 2021, the project team began engaging community members along the new proposed routes with the goal of identifying a "community supported route" by April 2022.

The final route for the train is being chosen and construction will begin soon. Before this process goes any further, we need clear commitments that those of us who call these neighborhoods home, who work and worship and gather in our communities are not priced out or pushed out.

Together, we have the power to ensure these big changes bring big benefits for our communities.

Since 2013, the **BLUE LINE COALITION** has been building community-based power to ensure immigrant/refugee, low-wealth and Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities along the Blue Line Extension Corridor are able to stay in their homes and businesses, create wealth and economic development, and enhance their wellbeing and access to opportunity throughout the region.



BLC'S WORK

The Blue Line Coalition is rooted in the BIPOC and immigrant communities that will be most impacted by the Blue Line Extension project. Since 2013, we have been working together to ensure government leaders recognize this project is a racial justice and regional equity issue and that community inclusion and leadership must be central to ALL planning and outcomes. Our communities have a right to quality transit projects and safety improvements – and **strong protections to make sure we are NOT pushed out** of our neighborhoods and that our residents and businesses directly benefit from these new investments.

BLC'S IMPACT

Because of our decades of deep relational organizing and years of engagement on this project, the BLC has the expertise and solutions to advance equitable outcomes. Together, BLC partners have successfully advocated for community-centered approaches, including:

- **ANTI-DISPLACEMENT WORK GROUP:** The BLC has long advocated for anti-displacement approaches that focused on the creation, preservation and protection of affordable housing and building tenant power through organizing. After receiving a report from the BLC in 2021 urging the

adoption of anti-displacement policies before construction, Hennepin County moved forward in convening a working group to provide policy recommendations to address anti-displacement across the corridor.

- **ROUTE SELECTION PROCESS:** With the project realignment announced in 2020, BLC expressed public concerns that the speed of the new route selection process was moving faster than the adoption of policies to protect communities of color and authentic engagement from directly impacted residents. Within months, the route selection process was extended.

- **FUNDING FOR ORGANIZING:** Our communities need the right tools to make informed decisions about the future of their neighborhoods and the opportunities for their neighborhoods. We continue to advocate for adequate funding to resource community organizations in building trusting relationships with people who have vital expertise but have been blocked from participation due to cultural, language, financial or other barriers.

OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR VOICES

“ We brought together Hmong elders to talk about this project and a woman shared that she's very worried. She's worried because her family used to live in St Paul, but then the Green Line light rail project came through and it changed the community. They had to move to Minneapolis and now they've heard the Blue Line is coming, and they don't want it to change their community again. They don't want to be evicted. They want to feel safe. We're refugees who already lost our homes, being forced from Laos to Thailand and then the United States. Why is it that us Hmong people can't have a place to call home? Our seniors had to go through something as traumatizing as the Secret War, and now they can't even keep their house. I can relate to those roots, as well, because my parent sand grandparents experienced that, too.

- **Amanda Xiong**
CAPI USA



“ Four years ago, I bought my first home and it's six houses off the Lowry proposed route. I'm concerned about what that means for me -- if they decide on the Lowry route will they buy out buildings next to me? What will happen to the Hmong store and restaurant down the street during construction? And it's not just me. I'm one of two or three homeowners on my block; the rest are all rental housing. I'm worried, if they choose the Lowry route, that new owners will buy out those buildings, raise the rents and displace people. Displace my neighbors. Despite all this uncertainty -- all the planning and resources that have gone into this project -- I didn't receive a postcard about this until early January 2022. Before that I'd heard nothing. On the postcard there were a couple of meetings, but, if I were my dad, who works two jobs, I couldn't attend one of those meetings. Why don't they come to us? To our churches and where folks are at to include our voices?

- **Karla Arredondo**
Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza



“ This line is going to cost \$1.5 billion to build and bring an estimated \$7.8 billion in investment. This corridor has the most ownership of BIPOC businesses and a majority of BIPOC residents along the route, but when you look at investment and the opportunity around redevelopment they still continue to not be favorable to the BIPOC community. Right now, we're still trying to gain back some of the businesses that have already been lost due to land acquisition along the corridor. We don't want a route that focuses on the usual suspects, like the Caribous and the Starbucks. Our BIPOC small businesses are the economic engines for a lot of these cities – the biggest employers of local residents, and the businesses community is used to and feels comfortable in. We welcome redevelopment but gentrification continues to happen. We need an economic ecosystem that centers the development and creation of wealth for BIPOC communities.

- **Denise Butler**
African Career Education and Resource Inc (ACER)

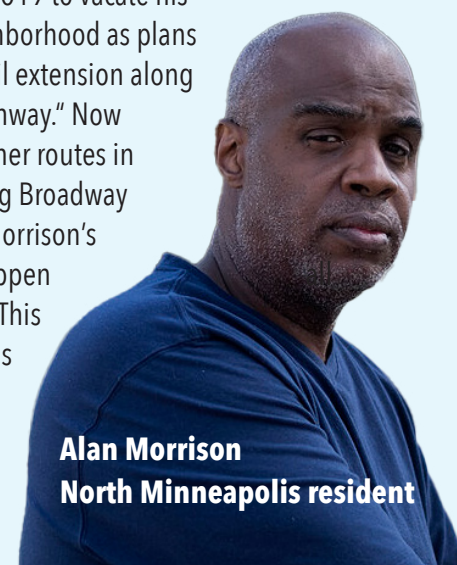


“ As a transit rider, especially in North Minneapolis, the buses are packed all the time. Even though they're frequent, they don't always show up and a bus being one minute late could ruin my whole day. So, as a bus rider myself for 10 years, it's exciting to have the possibility of light rail here. But we also have to take into account the possible displacement and destruction that could come from the light rail, which is something transit riders might not think about. North Minneapolis is very central. It's not a far distance from anything but it feels so far from everything because of the lack of resources we're given. Light rail could help us finally feel connected and part of the city. But the project can't come at the expense of our own lives.

- **Blaishia Lee, Northside Residents Redevelopment Council**

As the *North News* reported last year, Alan Morrison may lose “two homes to one train... Morrison was ordered by new property owners in 2019 to vacate his duplex in the Harrison neighborhood as plans were underway for a light rail extension along nearby Olson Memorial Highway.” Now officials have eyes on two other routes in North Minneapolis, including Broadway Avenue, a few blocks from Morrison's new apartment. “It could happen over again,” said Morrison. “This isn't just gentrification. This is gentrification in your face.”

Photo by North News



Alan Morrison
North Minneapolis resident

WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE:

Harrison Neighborhood Residents Were Asked to Design Their Own Displacement

For members of the near-North Harrison Neighborhood in Minneapolis, the Blue Line extension was first described as a restorative justice project. Decades before, the construction of the Olson Memorial Highway had destroyed Black businesses and created a dangerous arterial that threatens the safety of residents every day. Residents were assured that bringing light rail to the neighborhood would not only provide additional transportation options but include safety improvements, a grocery store and affordable housing.

So, for nearly a decade, Harrison Neighborhood Association (HNA) organized community members to engage in the development process. But, because of a lack of intentional framework *before construction began* to ensure the current community members would benefit, residents were asked to "design their own displacement."

"The result has been devastating," says Nichole Buehler, HNA Executive Director. "While project leaders assured us that the project would bring affordable housing resources, the expectation of transit has only resulted in zoning changes for new developments that openly seek to capitalize on the light rail expansion. Of the 479 new housing units proposed or in development, only 28 are affordable to the median-income Harrison household. We've also seen a 60% increase in property values around the previously proposed Near North stations, demolition of affordable units to make way for market-rate development, and apartment buildings being purchased and upscaled, pushing out renters who have called Harrison home for decades."

"The question that must be answered before any progress on the route is: how will the city, county and Metropolitan Council follow through on the promises made to our community and address the harm that has already occurred?"

In partnership with Our Streets Minneapolis, HNA is leading the [Bring Back 6th campaign](#), a community-centered planning process committed to a racial justice framework and restorative approach that intentionally directs economic, social and environmental benefits of highway removal to immigrant/refugee, low-wealth and BIPOC communities along the project corridor.

WE NEED A DIFFERENT APPROACH:

Protections Must Be in Place Before a Route is Selected and Construction Begins

A different outcome requires a different planning approach – one that doesn't *aspire* to equitable outcomes but takes the *intentional steps* at the *appropriate time* to achieve a different result. As the project leaders move toward the selection of a new route, we need more than commitments. We need action.

Government and transit planners have a duty to address the disinvestment and lack of transit options our neighborhoods with great urgency. But the project will not have an authentic "community-supported route" until:

- The representation on the **project engagement** efforts truly represents the demographics of the corridor, and doesn't just acknowledge the concerns of those communities but commits to solve for those problems before the process moves forward.
- There are strategies in place to bring **investment to the corridor** – affordable housing, business incubators and more – that begin an explicitly restorative process to reverse decades of disinvestment and racist policies that have kept our communities from building wealth, power and influence.
- The **Anti-Displacement Workgroup** conducts its proposed work to develop deep awareness and buy-in from decision makers who will implement and enforce policy solutions that create protections for our communities.
- Government leaders in corridor cities begin to move immediately on **essential policies** like:

Strong Inclusionary Zoning policies that require developing affordable housing at 30% of area median income (AMI) along the corridor so current residents can afford to stay.

Residential and Commercial Rent Control like the one passed in St. Paul which caps annual rent increases for tenants at 3% – and a similar approach to protect BIPOC small businesses from predatory buy-outs or dramatic rent increases, as well.

Tenant Opportunity to Purchase to ensure renters and preservation buyers have the chance to buy buildings changing ownership, instead of predatory buyers looking to upscale and price out current residents to maximize profit.

This is a moment we can choose to make bold decisions that make this project an example of justice and equity for cities across the nation. Our communities have the solutions and together we can create lasting change.



Learn more about our work at
blcoalition.wordpress.com