

METRO Green Line opening day

Written by Lydia Schwartz

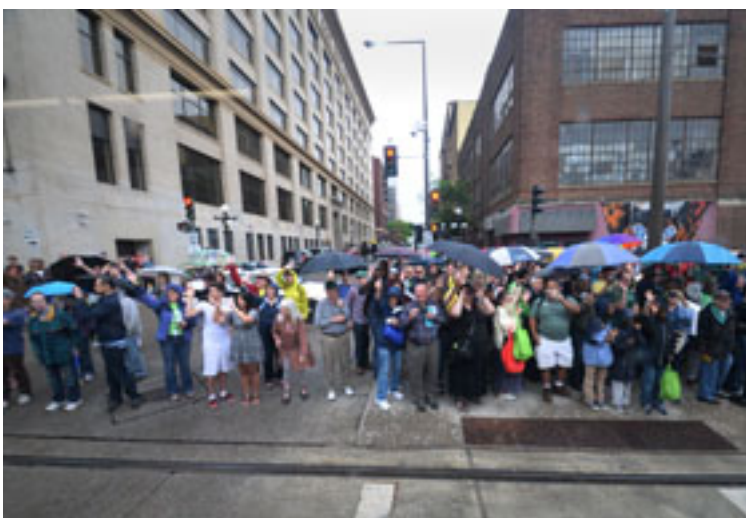
Thursday, 19 June 2014 16:17



On June 14, after almost two decades of anticipation, the METRO Green Line (formerly called the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit project) officially opened for service during a celebration at Union Depot Station in downtown St. Paul.

The 11-mile route has 23 stops and provides a much-needed link between downtown St. Paul, the Minnesota State Capitol, the University of Minnesota and downtown Minneapolis. The entire trip takes about 40 minutes, traveling on University Avenue most of the way. It begins at Union Depot Station, connecting riders to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak). At the Minneapolis Downtown East Station, the METRO Green Line connects with the Blue Line, which runs along Hiawatha Avenue down to the Mall of America in Bloomington. The Green Line ends at Target Field where it connects with the Northstar Commuter Rail Line, which travels up through the northern suburbs ending in Big Lake.

According to Metropolitan Council, initial planning activities for the Green Line began as far back as 1981. In June 2001, the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority started holding meetings with Central Corridor stakeholders to develop an impact statement. The report was released in April 2006 and provided information about the design, benefits, and costs as well as any social, economic, transportation, and environmental impacts.



Susan Haigh was appointed chairwoman of the Metropolitan Council by Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton in 2011. She has been a strong advocate for the Green Line ever since the project's

METRO Green Line opening day

Written by Lydia Schwartz

Thursday, 19 June 2014 16:17

early conception stages and especially during her time serving as Ramsey County Commissioner between 1995 and 2005.

"This is a new beginning for our region as this Green Line forever links our two great cities, better connects thousands of workers to their jobs and attracts thousands of new residents who want to live along this line," said Haigh. "Implementing a comprehensive transit vision makes us a stronger, healthier, and more connected region."

In June 2006, after a few months of public comment on the proposal, the project officially transitioned to the Metropolitan Council, which then applied to the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program for permission to begin preliminary engineering. New Starts is the federal government's primary financial resource for supporting major transit capital investments and evaluates the project throughout the entire development process.

The preliminary plans were approved in December 2006 and the Metropolitan Council almost immediately created the Community and Business Advisory Committees to provide input. Early plans for the METRO Green Line had limited stops in the lower economic neighborhoods that it travels through – the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul and Cedar-Riverside in Minneapolis. Public outrage over these attempts at disenfranchisement caused developers to quickly add three more stops in Rondo and one in Cedar-Riverside.

Seitu Jones, a resident of the Rondo neighborhood, is one of seven artists from across the country commissioned to integrate artwork along the Green Line. Jones said he was just old enough to remember the disproportionate effects on his community caused by poor planning in the construction of I-94.

"Interstate 94 devastated St. Paul's African American community," Jones said. "Many of my elders vowed not to let that happen again without some resistance and questions. Without that same resistance, there would not be the additional stations along the Green Line."

The Metropolitan Council says that it has been tracking almost 160 new construction and redevelopment projects within one mile of the METRO Green Line that together are worth over \$2.5 billion. They expect figures to continue to climb in the coming months as more developers release their final investment numbers.

"The Green Line is an exciting and critically important new investment in our economic future that will go a long way toward creating jobs and development across our region," said Sen. Al Franken. "It provides a much-needed boost to our transportation infrastructure that will enhance Minnesota's competitiveness and bring new opportunities to our state."

Even though the total budget of the entire project may seem daunting – \$957 million according to the Metropolitan Council – political and community leaders understand that it was well worth the investment.

"The Central Corridor is a transformative project for the Twin Cities," said Rep. Keith Ellison (5th Dist.). "I am looking forward to riding the train between Minneapolis and St. Paul. It will be much

METRO Green Line opening day

Written by Lydia Schwartz

Thursday, 19 June 2014 16:17

better than sitting in traffic on (Interstate) 94. Folks throughout the Twin Cities will now have a faster and more wallet-friendly way to get to work, visit their friends, and go to school."

The Federal Transit Administration approved the project's final design in May 2010 and construction began soon after. It took almost three years to complete and underwent extensive testing over the last several months.