

NORTHSTAR CORRIDOR RAIL PROJECT

Environmental Assessment/Draft 4(f) Evaluation
December 22, 2005



Minnesota Department of Transportation
in cooperation with the
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the Metropolitan Council
and the
Federal Transit Administration

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S.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This federal environmental assessment (EA) document has been prepared under 23 CFR 771.129 and 23 CFR 771.130 by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA), and the Metropolitan Council of Twin Cities on behalf of the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration to update information found in the *Northstar Corridor Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS and FEIS)*, dated October 2000 and March 2002, respectively, and the *Record of Decision (ROD)*, dated December 2002. This reevaluation document addresses whether there have been significant changes to the proposed action, the affected environment, and the anticipated impacts or the proposed mitigation measures required. If there have been no significant changes in any of these areas, the FEIS document may still be considered valid. However, if there have been significant changes, in any of these areas, then a supplement to the FEIS must be issued, or a new FEIS document shall be prepared.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has the primary responsibility for the Northstar Corridor project. Mn/DOT is the project sponsor and federal grant applicant for the Northstar Corridor Rail project and works in partnership with NCDA and the Metropolitan Council for the construction and operation of the service.

S.1 Purpose and Need

As presented in the DEIS and FEIS, the purpose and need for the Northstar Corridor Rail project is as follows:

Three factors affect the demand for transportation services in the Northstar Corridor:

- Population and employment growth in the corridor counties
- Driver behavior
- Changes in the origin and destination of trips made

The purpose of the Northstar Corridor Rail project is to meet the future transportation needs of the corridor.

- Address the imbalance between travel demand and travel supply
- Address the lack of multimodal transportation choices
- Improve the coordination between transportation investments and land use development
- Address the lack of corridor wide transit services
- Address the lack of non-motorized facilities

Reasons for Proposed Changes to Preferred Alternative

In response to the FTA's guidance on measuring cost-effectiveness, Mn/DOT and the NCDA have worked to redefine the project to enhance the travel time savings for commuters, and to reduce the capital and operating costs by shortening the length of the line (from an 81.8 mile system to a 40.1 mile system) and reducing the number of stations. The result is an efficient and cost-effective project.

In addition, the inclusion of a third mainline from milepost (MP) 15.1 to MP 21.1 (located in the cities of Fridley and Coon Rapids) was specifically defined and required as part of the Capital Improvements Engineering Agreement between the BNSF and the NCDA. Since the DEIS/FEIS, the design and limits of the proposed third mainline have changed to reflect specific capacity

requirements, rail operations, and avoidance/minimization of sensitive resources in proximity to the rail corridor.

S.2 Alternatives

Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS

The preferred alternative described and evaluated in the FEIS and defined in the ROD includes the following system elements (See preferred alternative figure in Appendix A.2):

- Commuter rail service on the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line, from downtown Minneapolis to a northern terminus at Rice, Minnesota, for a length of 81.8 miles.
- Eleven commuter rail stations at the following locations (from south to north): Downtown Minneapolis, Northeast Minneapolis (7th Street location), Fridley, Coon Rapids-Foley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Anoka, Elk River, Big Lake, Becker, St. Cloud, and Rice.
- A vehicle maintenance facility at the Elk River South location.
- A layover facility at Rice.
- A Light Rail Transit (LRT) connection from 3rd Avenue North to 6th Avenue North (including tail tracks) on 5th Street (north side of street), and an LRT station immediately west of 3rd Avenue North. One alternative alignment would end at the platform (with no tail tracks); however, tail tracks were evaluated in the FEIS to disclose impacts of the total length.
Note: The impact and mitigation measures associated with LRT from 1st Avenue North to 3rd Avenue North were documented in the Hiawatha LRT Reevaluation and ROD.
- All of the proposed track improvements evaluated in the DEIS (retained for the purpose of environmental evaluation); except for the potential triple track from Coon Creek to I-694 (mileposts 20.7 to 15.6) and the potential siding from milepost 20.7 to 18.8. Proposed track improvements potentially could change from those evaluated in the EIS, depending on the outcome of the BNSF negotiations.
- A bus operation plan that will reduce bus service frequencies on existing express service routes that duplicate commuter rail service. Existing bus routes will also be modified to connect to commuter rail stations and service frequencies will be modified to provide strong connections to commuter rail.

An MOS of the preferred alternative for the Northstar Corridor was defined and evaluated in the FEIS. Specifically, the MOS for the corridor was defined as commuter rail service from downtown Minneapolis to the proposed Big Lake station (40.1 mile system). Station locations were proposed at Downtown Minneapolis, Northeast Minneapolis, Fridley, Coon Rapids-Foley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Anoka, Elk River, and Big Lake. Under the MOS, a layover facility was proposed at Big Lake, along with a maintenance facility at the Elk River South site. The LRT connection defined for the preferred alternative was the same under the MOS.

Proposed Changes to the Preferred Alternative

Since the issuance of the ROD for the Northstar Corridor (December 2002), Mn/DOT, the NCDA, and the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities have been studying and refining system components of the originally identified preferred alternative. Based on this analysis and designing a system that is cost effective, several changes to the preferred alternative, specifically the MOS, have been identified. A summary of the proposed changes and reasons for the proposed changes is presented herein:

- MOS defined as Downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake (40.1 mile system) with stations at Downtown Minneapolis, Fridley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Anoka, Elk River and Big Lake

- Maintenance and layover facility at Big Lake
- Shift location of Big Lake station to the south side of BSNF mainline and to the east of CR 43
- Include third mainline track (from MP's 15.1 to 21.1) on the west (railroad south) side from MP's 15.1 to MP 16.6, then transitioning to the east (railroad north) side to MP 21.1.
- Light Rail Transit alignment on the south side of 5th Street from 3rd Avenue North to the Intermodal Station
- Minneapolis Intermodal Station located under and north of 5th Street North (shifted approximately 400 feet to the north from location studied in the FEIS).

S.3 Environmental Consequences

The revised preferred alternative has the potential to affect residents, the economy, and the environment of the Northstar Corridor. The potential impacts of the revised preferred alternative, compared to the preferred alternative defined and evaluated in the FEIS and ROD, have been assessed and documented in this EA.

A general summary of each of the areas evaluated, as compared to the preferred alternative defined and evaluated in the FEIS, are presented Section 4.0 of the EA. Table S.1 summarizes the impacts of the revised preferred alternative.

Table S.1 — Summary of Impacts — Revised Preferred Alternative

Attributes	Degree of Impact		
	Not Significant	Possibly Significant	Significant
Social Impacts			
Land Use and Economic Development	X		
Community Facilities and Services	X		
Displacements and Relocations	X		
Archaeological and Historic Resources	X		
Visual and Aesthetic Conditions	X		
Environmental Justice	X		
Safety and Security	X		
Environmental Impacts			
Farmlands	X		
Wetlands		X	
Floodplains	X		
Wild and Scenic Rivers and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area/MNRRRA	X		
Vegetation and Wildlife	X		
Rare, Threatened and Endangered Species	X		
Water Quality and Utilities	X		
Hazardous Waste and Contaminated Materials	X		
Air Quality	X		
Noise and Vibration	X		
Transportation	X		



S.4 Public and Agency Involvement

The ROD for the Northstar Corridor Rail project documents the public involvement activities that took place during the EIS process (see Appendix A-1). The summary of these activities, in compliance with the NEPA process, are herein incorporated by reference.

Representatives of the Northstar Project Office (NPO) has routinely met with counties, cities, and townships in the MOS corridor (downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake) regarding station design specifics. These meetings cover issues that are unique to the station site; including access, land use, and public safety. Mn/DOT and its partners have coordinated with the City of Big Lake regarding the new station location and the maintenance facility. Additionally, they have also worked with the City of Elk River about moving the originally proposed maintenance facility out of Elk River. Both Big Lake and Elk River are supportive of the proposed maintenance facility in Big Lake. As noted in Section 6.0 (4f) Evaluation), representatives of the NPO have met with the City of Fridley and Anoka County Parks regarding avoiding and /or minimizing impacts to the Rice Creek Regional Trail/Mississippi River Regional Trail and the Springbrook Nature Center.

In compliance with the design review called for in the Northstar Corridor Programmatic Agreement, representatives of the NPO have met with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) regarding design considerations associated with the LRT alignment on 5th Street, the LRT station and the Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station.

EA Public Review and Comment Period/Public Informational Meetings

The Northstar Corridor Rail Project EA/Draft 4(f) Evaluation will be available for public review and comment on January 2, 2006. The comment period for the EA will run from January 2 to February 16, 2006. During the 45-day review and comment period, Mn/DOT and its partnering agencies will host three open house/public hearings.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Report

This federal environmental assessment (EA) document has been prepared under 23 CFR 771.129 and 23 CFR 771.130 by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA), and the Metropolitan Council of Twin Cities on behalf of the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration to update information found in the *Northstar Corridor Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS and FEIS)*, dated December 2000 and March 2002, respectively, and the *Record of Decision (ROD)*, dated December 2002. This reevaluation document addresses whether there have been significant changes to the proposed action, the affected environment, and the anticipated impacts or the proposed mitigation measures required. If there have been no significant changes in any of these areas, the FEIS document may still be considered valid. However, if there have been significant changes, in any of these areas, then a supplement to the FEIS must be issued, or a new FEIS document shall be prepared.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has the primary responsibility for the Northstar Corridor project. Mn/DOT is the project sponsor and federal grant applicant for the Northstar Corridor Rail project and works in partnership with NCDA and the Metropolitan Council for the construction and operation of the service. Cooperating agencies identified during the EIS process for the project include: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR), and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MnPCA).

The scope of this reevaluation effort is to report changes compared to the project described in the Northstar FEIS and ROD. The reevaluation contains the following elements:

- Project History
- Purpose and Need
- Alternatives
- Affected Environment
- Environmental Consequences
- Mitigation
- Public and Agency Involvement
- Permits and Approvals

1.2 Proposed Action

As previously stated, should there be no significant changes to the proposed action, affected environment, anticipated impacts or proposed mitigation measures, the FEIS will be considered valid, and the requested FTA action will include the approval of the Revised Northstar Corridor ROD to reflect the changes of the preferred alternative (revised preferred alternative) identified and evaluated in the Northstar Corridor FEIS (March 2002). At the state level, Mn/DOT, as the responsible governmental unit (RGU), will reevaluate the adequacy of the Northstar Corridor FEIS. The Northstar Corridor Revised ROD would reflect the redefined Minimum Operable Segment (MOS) as the preferred alternative for Phase I of the overall 81.8-mile Northstar Corridor Rail project.

1.3 Project History

General Overview of Planning Process

Examination of commuter rail in the Twin Cities began in 1997, with the initiation of the *Twin Cities Commuter Rail Feasibility Study*. The feasibility study was conducted in two phases, with study documents published in January 1998 and January 1999, respectively. The Northstar Corridor was included in this study.

In May 1998, the NCDA undertook a Major Investment Study (MIS) to identify transportation solutions to meet future transportation needs in the Northstar Corridor. This study concluded that commuter rail service in the corridor is feasible, and identified commuter rail as part of the Locally Preferred Transportation Investment Strategy (LPTIS), along with expanded feeder bus services, roadway improvements, river crossings, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) initiatives, and bicycle/pedestrian improvements.

The Northstar Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which evaluated potential transportation alternatives for the Northstar Corridor, was published in October 2000. As a result of actions taken through the Advanced Corridor Planning Process and comments received on the DEIS, a supplemental environmental information document to the DEIS was distributed in January 2001 that evaluated the impacts of a proposed Northeast Minneapolis Station at 7th Street Northeast. Based on the analysis documented in the DEIS, supportive technical reports, and issues raised throughout the study's public involvement process, a preferred alternative was selected and fully described in the FEIS, which was published in March 2002. The commuter rail alternative, with modifications, emerged as the preferred alternative and was carried forward to be evaluated in the FEIS. The FEIS defined and evaluated an MOS of the preferred alternative. The MOS of the preferred alternative reflected a 40.1 mile system from Downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake. A ROD was issued by the FTA in December 2002 for the full system from Downtown Minneapolis to Rice (approximately 81.8 mile system), along with a state environmental adequacy determination issued by Mn/DOT.

Table 1.1 provides a summary of the major Northstar Corridor milestones from 1998 through May 2005.

Table 1.1 — Northstar Project Milestones

Northstar Project Milestone	Date
Alternatives Analysis/MIS Initiated	May 1998
Alternatives Analysis/MIS Completed	March 2000
Draft EIS Completed	October 2000
Supplement to Draft EIS Completed	January 2001
Categorical Exclusion Documents Completed for Big Lake, Elk River and Coon Rapids-Riverdale Commuter Coach Facilities (3 separate documents)	February 2001
Preliminary Engineering Completed	June 2001
Final EIS Completed	March 2002
Record of Decision/Adequacy Determination	December 2002
Preliminary Engineering Validation Report Completed	May 2005

Commuter Bus Service

Following the release of the DEIS, Mn/DOT and the NCDA initiated commuter bus service that demonstrates the viability of the transit service in the Northstar Corridor. Northstar commuter coach is operated by the NCDA. The service is similar to the proposed Northstar commuter rail service. The Northstar commuter bus currently stops at existing park-and-ride lots at the Elk River and Coon Rapids-Riverdale stations and travels to/from the 5th Street transit station in downtown Minneapolis during peak hours. The Northstar commuter bus stations at Big Lake (currently serving as a park and pool lot), Elk River, and Coon Rapids were each evaluated through federal categorical exclusion documents, as they were projects with independent utility. As the projects were under construction or programmed for construction, they were considered part of the no-build alternative in the FEIS.

Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS

The preferred alternative described and evaluated in the FEIS included the following system elements (See preferred alternative figure in Appendix A.2):

- Commuter rail service on the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line, from downtown Minneapolis to a northern terminus at Rice, Minnesota, for a length of 81.8 miles.
- Eleven commuter rail stations at the following locations (from south to north): Downtown Minneapolis, Northeast Minneapolis (7th Street location), Fridley, Coon Rapids-Foley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Anoka, Elk River, Big Lake, Becker, St. Cloud, and Rice.
- A vehicle maintenance facility at the Elk River South location.
- A layover facility at Rice.
- A Light Rail Transit (LRT) connection from 3rd Avenue North to 6th Avenue North (including tail tracks) on 5th Street (north side of street), and an LRT station immediately west of 3rd Avenue North. One alternative alignment would end at the platform (with no tail tracks); however, tail tracks were evaluated in the FEIS to disclose impacts of the total length.

Note: The impact and mitigation measures associated with LRT from 1st Avenue North to 3rd Avenue North were documented in the Hiawatha LRT Reevaluation and ROD.

- All of the proposed track improvements evaluated in the DEIS (retained for the purpose of environmental evaluation); except for the potential triple track from Coon Creek to I-694 (mileposts 20.7 to 15.6) and the potential siding from milepost 20.7 to 18.8. Proposed track improvements potentially could change from those evaluated in the EIS, depending on the outcome of the BNSF negotiations.
- A bus operation plan that will reduce bus service frequencies on existing express service routes that duplicate commuter rail service. Existing bus routes will also be modified to connect to commuter rail stations and service frequencies will be modified to provide strong connections to commuter rail.

An MOS of the preferred alternative for the Northstar Corridor was defined and evaluated in the FEIS. Specifically, the MOS for the corridor was defined as commuter rail service from downtown Minneapolis to the proposed Big Lake station (40.1 mile system). Station locations were proposed at Downtown Minneapolis, Northeast Minneapolis, Fridley, Coon Rapids-Foley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Anoka, Elk River, and Big Lake. Under the MOS, a layover facility was proposed at Big Lake, along with a maintenance facility at the Elk River South site. The LRT connection defined for the preferred alternative was the same under the MOS.

Proposed Changes to the Preferred Alternative

Since the issuance of the ROD for the Northstar Corridor (December 2002), Mn/DOT, the NCDA, and the Metropolitan Council have been studying and refining system components of the originally identified preferred alternative. Based on this analysis and designing a system that is cost effective, several changes to the preferred alternative, specifically the MOS, have been identified. A summary of the proposed changes and reasons for the proposed changes are presented in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 — Summary of Proposed Northstar Corridor Changes Since the FEIS

Proposed Change	Primary Reason for Change	Impact Evaluation	Comments*
<p>Minimum Operable Segment (MOS), Downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake (40.1 miles)</p> <p>Stations at: Downtown Minneapolis, Fridley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Anoka, Elk River, and Big Lake</p>	<p>Funding availability, transportation system user benefits, ridership, and improved cost effectiveness</p>	<p>FEIS evaluated MOS of the preferred alternative from downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake (layover facility at Big Lake).</p> <p>Stations at: Downtown Minneapolis, Northeast Minneapolis, Fridley, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Coon Rapids-Foley, Anoka, Elk River, and Big Lake</p> <p>Maintenance facility at Elk River south site</p>	<p>Northeast Minneapolis and Coon Rapids-Foley stations have been removed from MOS.</p> <p>As noted below, maintenance facility is now proposed at Big Lake.</p>
<p>Defer construction of Northeast Minneapolis and Coon Rapids-Foley stations (not included in revised MOS)</p>	<p>Funding availability, improved cost effectiveness</p>	<p>DEIS and FEIS evaluated both stations.</p>	
<p>Maintenance Facility at Big Lake</p>	<p>Avoids deadheading trains from Elk River South to the end of the line at Big Lake</p> <p>Increases service to the end of the line</p> <p>Provides greater transportation system user benefits to the system</p> <p>Improved cost effectiveness</p> <p>Avoids cost of separate layover facility at the end of the line</p>	<p>DEIS evaluated a maintenance facility at Big Lake (approximately 18 acres in size).</p>	
<p>Shift location of Big Lake Station to the south side of BNSF mainline and the east of CR 43</p>	<p>Eliminates grade crossing with the BNSF mainline (safety improvement)</p> <p>Allows for shorter station track lead that would not cross CR 43</p> <p>Accommodates expansion of parking</p>	<p>DEIS evaluated an 18-acre maintenance facility in Big Lake (within the proposed footprint for the station/maintenance facility).</p> <p>DEIS/FEIS evaluated a Big Lake station on the north side of the BNSF mainline and west of CR 43.</p>	<p>With the combination of the maintenance/layover facility (including access road) and station on the south side of the BNSF mainline/east of CR 43, the proposed overall site is approximately 37.5 acres.</p>

Continued

Proposed Change	Primary Reason for Change	Impact Evaluation	Comments*
Third Mainline Track (MP's 15.1 to 21.1) on the west (railroad south) side from MP 15.1 to the MP 16.6 then transitioning to the east (railroad north) side to MP 21.1.	<p>Rail Passenger Capital Improvements Engineering Agreement approved by BNSF.</p> <p>Agreement requires the inclusion of a third mainline from MP 15.1 to 21.1</p> <p>Shift in alignment of Third Main to the east (railroad north) side to reduce potential noise impacts, and avoid/minimize right-of-way, floodplain, wetland and 4(f)/6(f) impacts.</p>	<p>DEIS evaluated the impact of a Third Mainline from MP 15.6 to 20.7, plus a proposed siding from MP 18.8 to 20.7.</p> <p>Third Mainline proposed on the west (railroad south side) of the existing BNSF mainline tracks, with the siding on the east (railroad north side).</p> <p>Third mainline and siding were not included in the Preferred Alternative defined and evaluated in the FEIS/ROD.</p>	ROD states that: "Proposed track improvements potentially could change from those evaluated in the EIS, depending on the outcome of the negotiations with BNSF."
Light Rail Transit Alignment on the south side of 5 th Street	<p>Avoids dead-ending 5th Avenue North</p> <p>Maintains roadway connectivity to nearby residential development</p> <p>Improves vehicle circulation</p> <p>Minimizes effects on historic structures on north side of 5th Street</p>	ROD states that the vehicle circulation and possibility of locating LRT tracks on south side of 5 th Street North will be studied to improve vehicle circulation and mobility.	
Minneapolis Intermodal Station located under and north of 5 th Street North	<p>Proposed land redevelopment in vicinity</p> <p>Reduced need for two points of vertical circulation</p>	FEIS evaluated station between 5 th Street North and 7 th Street North, with vertical circulation at both streets.	

* Northstar Corridor FEIS/Final 4(f) Evaluation incorporated by reference the findings of the Northstar Corridor DEIS/Draft (f) Evaluation.

As the design has progressed on the other components of the proposed Northstar Corridor Rail project, modifications to the stations and the track alignment have taken place to minimize potential impacts, provide the most efficient transportation system, and meet the needs of the local communities as well as local, regional, state, and federal requirements. Design modifications include such elements as shifting the Fridley station platform approximately 200 feet to the north (from the location defined in the FEIS), shifting the pedestrian overpass at the Coon Rapids station, realigning access points into stations to improve vehicular circulation, and reconfiguring the proposed stormwater detention pond at the Anoka station to minimize impacts to the Rum River scenic easement. Design modifications and their associated impacts will be evaluated in this EA, as appropriate

The FEIS evaluated a proposed park-and-ride facility at the Anoka Station to accommodate approximately 260 parking spaces. As reflected in Figure 3.5, the Northstar Project has identified and evaluated a station platform and required stormwater detention pond at the project site. The City of Anoka is currently taking the lead in the development of a park-and-ride facility at this location. The Northstar Project would be a funding partner for the proposed parking structure near the station site. Figure 3.5 outlines the approximate boundary of the parking facility proposed by the City of Anoka. In an effort to disclose potential impacts, the EA reflects updated information on the project area, where appropriate. If the project definition changes substantially

from what was proposed and evaluated in the FEIS and in this EA, the City of Anoka will work with the appropriate agencies in the preparation of required environmental documentation. Appendix A-1 includes a City of Anoka resolution regarding the project. The proposed parking structure is part of an overall City lead commuter rail transit village (CRTV).

As noted in Table 1.2, the DEIS evaluated an 18-acre maintenance facility site in Big Lake. The Elk River South site was identified as the preferred maintenance facility location in the FEIS. Based on the efficiency factors reflected in the “primary reason for change” column of the table, the revised preferred location for the maintenance facility is at Big Lake. As presented in the farmland, threatened and endangered species and water quality/utilities sections of this EA, no significant impacts to these resources would result from locating the facility in Big Lake. More specifically, the Loggerhead Shrike nesting areas (Becker area and between Clear Lake and St. Cloud), referenced in the DEIS are not within the Big Lake facility boundaries and were not identified in either the state or federal database review conducted for the EA. The farmland analysis also indicated that the proposed revised preferred alternative would not impact prime, unique or locally important soils. Both the Elk River South and Big Lake maintenance facility locations would be located on currently undeveloped land. The Elk River South site would have impacted research plots on Cargill property. In terms of existing utilities, both the Elk River and Big Lake sites would be served by utilities from adjacent roadways (approximately same distance to extend). The Elk River South site also required a lift station. The water quality/utility section of the EA summarizes the current and future utility services required for the Big Lake Maintenance facility.

2.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

2.1 Purpose and Need

As presented in the DEIS and FEIS, the purpose and need for the Northstar Corridor Rail project is as follows:

Need for Transportation Improvements

Three factors affect the demand for transportation services in the Northstar Corridor:

- Population and employment growth in the corridor counties
- Driver behavior
- Changes in the origin and destination of trips made

The purpose of the Northstar Corridor Rail project is to meet the future transportation needs of the corridor. The following section summarizes the specific components of the project purpose in response to identified transportation needs:

- Address the imbalance between travel demand and travel supply
- Address the lack of multimodal transportation choices
- Improve the coordination between transportation investments and land use development
- Address the lack of corridor wide transit services
- Address the lack of non-motorized facilities

Goals of the Northstar Corridor Rail Project

The following goals have been established for the project:

- Improve mobility and safety within the corridor
- Minimize adverse environmental impacts and foster positive environmental excellence
- Encourage transportation-supportive land use development patterns
- Provide a cost-effective and efficient transportation system

The Northstar Corridor Rail project objective is to transport commuters to work in downtown Minneapolis, in a safe, fast, and reliable manner.

Benefits of Northstar Corridor Project

This project provides a cost-effective way of adding capacity to the transportation system, while successfully avoiding the highway chokepoints that include and surround downtown Minneapolis. The proposed commuter rail line serves downtown Minneapolis, terminating at the proposed Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station, with a convenient connection to the Hiawatha Light Rail Transit (LRT). The cost of improving TH 10 between Big Lake and Blaine/I-35W is estimated at \$570 million (2007 dollars). In addition, those improvements do not address the congested entry points to downtown Minneapolis.

The connection of Northstar Commuter Rail to the Hiawatha LRT will provide a seamless connection from the Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station through the core of the downtown to the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and continue to the Mall of America. These represent some of the largest trip generators in the Twin Cities area.

Two other characteristics of the Northstar Corridor that will contribute to the success of the commuter rail project include:

1. The transit-oriented development (TOD) already occurring in the corridor in the anticipation of Northstar Corridor project, and
2. The strong business, government, and citizen support for the project.

Reasons for Proposed Changes to Preferred Alternative

In response to the FTA's guidance on measuring cost-effectiveness, Mn/DOT and the NCDA have worked to redefine the project to enhance the travel time savings for commuters, and to reduce the capital and operating costs by shortening the length of the line (from an 81.8 mile system to a 40.1 mile system) and reducing the number of stations. The result is an efficient and cost-effective project. This redefined project is supported by the Governor, Mn/DOT, the Metropolitan Council, and the NCDA.

In addition, as noted in Table 1.2, the inclusion of a third mainline from MP 15.1 to MP 21.1 was specifically defined and required as part of the Capital Improvements Engineering Agreement between the BNSF and the NCDA. Since the DEIS/FEIS, the design and limits of the proposed third mainline have changed to reflect specific capacity requirements, rail operations, and avoidance/minimization of sensitive resources in proximity to the rail corridor.