

To: Minneapolis City Council
Minneapolis Public Works

From: Minneapolis Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Date: February 3, 2016

Subject: Olson Memorial Highway Design Requirements as Part of the Blue Line Extension Project

Olson Memorial Highway Design Requirements as Part of the Blue Line Extension Project

Background:

The Blue Line Extension project has entered the Municipal Consent phase, with design, scope and costs approved by the Metropolitan Council. A full reconstruction of Olson Memorial Highway (Minnesota TH-55) from I-94 to Theodore Wirth Park is included in the Blue Line Extension project's scope. This stretch includes two of the line's four stations within Minneapolis, with the proposed Royalston Station of the Green Line Extension within a quarter mile as well. MnDOT has required that this stretch of highway remain a 6- to 7-lane design as part of the full reconstruction. More information on the project's scope and design can be found on the project's website.

Recommendation of the PAC:

The Pedestrian Advisory Committee strongly recommends the City Council vote to deny municipal consent for the Blue Line Extension as proposed due to the 6/7-lane Olson Memorial Highway required by MnDOT. A 6-lane roadway, regardless of pedestrian enhancements, is incapable of meeting the city's transportation and equity goals for the immediate and surrounding areas. If built as currently required by MnDOT, it will be a dangerous place for pedestrians, a barrier between neighborhoods, and a powerful disincentive to use of the intended centerpiece of this project: the train.

A project of this scope represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to truly reconnect the neighborhoods of North Minneapolis, enhance the safety and comfort of non-motorized users, and provide a street design that informs the type of development that maximizes the two Blue Line stations (as well as the planned Royalston Station). The City of Minneapolis, the Metropolitan Council, and Hennepin County have active plans to improve regional and city-wide transportation options within North Minneapolis with walking, biking, and transit projects beyond the Blue Line Extension. In total, these improvements should enable Olson Memorial Highway to become a premier urban street that does not simply allow for pedestrians, but prioritizes them above regional motor traffic.

The PAC is prepared to engage with the City, Metropolitan Council, and MnDOT on paths to allow a reduced lane roadway configuration.