



8. NEXT STEPS

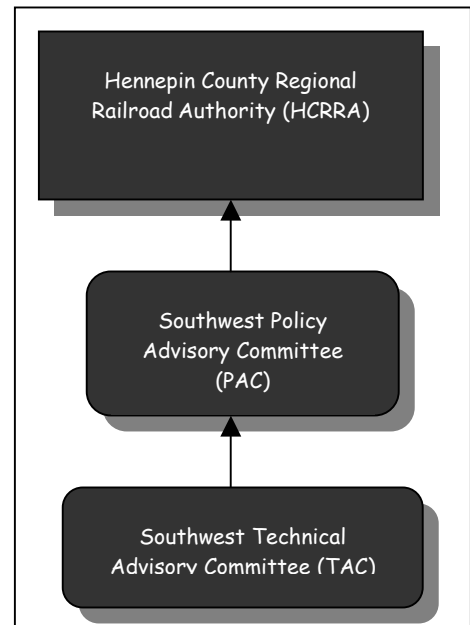
Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the potential next steps in the development of a Southwest Transitway. Those next steps include presentation of the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) recommendation to the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA), an alternatives analysis (AA)/draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) study, preliminary engineering (PE), and final design.

Southwest Rail Transit Study Process

Two committees, a Southwest Technical and Southwest Policy Advisory Committee, guided this Study. The role of the Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was to review technical information and develop a technical recommendation regarding which rail transit alternatives to include in future studies. The Southwest TAC recommendation was forwarded to the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) for their consideration in developing their recommendation for the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA).

The role of the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) was to provide policy guidance and develop a recommendation regarding future study of rail transit. The Southwest PAC recommendation will be presented to the HCRRA for action in late 2003.



The Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) is composed of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and is charged with rail transit planning for Hennepin County. The HCRRA provided funding for the current Study in order to investigate the potential for rail transit development in the Southwest Metro Area. The Southwest PAC recommendations will be presented to the HCRRA in late 2003. At that the HCRRA will decide whether to partner with the study area cities to continue study of a Southwest Rail Transitway.

Rail Transitway Development Process

Assuming that the HCRRA acts to continue study for a Southwest Rail Transitway the following are the likely next steps in the transitway planning process.

There are three key phases in the planning process for projects seeking Federal funding from the New Starts program:

- Alternatives Analysis (AA) / Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).
- Preliminary Engineering (PE).
- Final Design.

Alternatives Analysis (AA)/ Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)

The next logical study phase for a Southwest Rail Transitway is an alternatives analysis(AA)/draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). The AA/DEIS study phase is required in order to be eligible for Federal Funding from the Federal Transit Administration's Section 5309 New Starts Program. Typically an AA/DEIS evaluates appropriate modal and alignment options for addressing mobility needs in a given area. The AA/DEIS study is intended to provide information to local officials on the benefits, costs and impacts of various transportation alternatives in a given area. Potential local funding sources for implementing and operating the proposed rail transitway are also identified.

The AA/DEIS study phase is considered complete when a locally preferred alternative (LPA) is selected by local and regional decision-makers, adopted by the Metropolitan Council, and included in the financially constrained Transportation Policy Plan (TPP). Once this is completed, the local project sponsor may request the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) approval to enter into the preliminary engineering phase of project development.

Preliminary Engineering (PE)

During the preliminary engineering (PE) phase of project development, the design of the proposal is refined, taking into consideration all reasonable design alternatives. PE results in estimates of project costs, benefits and impacts at a level of detail necessary to complete the Federally-mandated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and local funding sources are committed to the project.

Typically, preliminary engineering (PE) is considered complete when FTA issues either a Record of Decision (ROD) or a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Once this occurs, the local project sponsor requests FTA approval to enter final design.

Final Design

Final design includes right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and the preparation of final construction plans (including construction management plans), detailed specifications, construction cost estimates, and bid documents. The project's financial plan is finalized, and a plan for the collection and analysis of data needed to undertake a "Before and After Study" is developed. Once this is completed, the local project sponsor requests that FTA enter into a full funding grant agreement (FFGA). After the FFGA is signed, construction of the project may commence.

Figure 8.1 Planning and Project Development Process

FTA Planning and Project Development Process

