



HENNEPIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

A-2400 GOVERNMENT CENTER
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55487-0240

March 1, 2022

Representative Frank Hornstein
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hornstein and Members of the House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee:

We write on behalf of Hennepin County and the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority to express our strong support for Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan's recommended \$200 million dollars for the METRO Blue Line Light Rail Transit Extension project as part of their Move Minnesota Forward 2022 supplemental budget recommendations. This funding will serve as a portion of the non-federal match required to leverage expanded federal funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

The Blue Line Extension will provide transformational benefits to residents along the corridor, connecting Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Robbinsdale, and North Minneapolis to downtown Minneapolis, and the greater regional transit system. It will provide a more efficient and affordable connection for tens of thousands of residents, including connecting workers to jobs, patients to health care, students to education, and families to resources throughout the region.

The Blue Line Extension will serve some of the most racially and economically diverse communities in Minnesota. Communities along this corridor have some of the highest rates in the state of households without regular access to a personal vehicle, and who rely on transit to meet their daily needs. These communities also have a higher number of people experiencing poverty, have a greater percentage of people of color, have high concentrations of cost-burdened households, *and* have felt the lasting impacts of historical redlining and disinvestment. This project will improve accessibility for residents with shorter travel times to work, school, healthcare, and resources, while also spurring long overdue economic development and building wealth for working families.

Across the country and in our region, light rail projects have spurred valuable economic development and helped build thriving, prosperous communities positioned for growth and ready for the opportunities and challenges of the future. More than 35% of development in the Twin Cities region has occurred in high frequency transit corridors like the Blue Line Extension since

2005, including \$9.2 billion near existing and planned light rail stations, with another \$5.6 billion of projects in the pipeline.

Through strategic planning, community engagement, and intentional anti-displacement actions, these types of infrastructure investments can meaningfully advance inclusive prosperity and maximize benefits for current residents, small businesses, and cultural institutions. For the Blue Line Extension project, we have established an Anti-Displacement Workgroup comprised of community leaders, business owners, residents, and experts. This workgroup will center community voices and convene diverse partners and stakeholders to develop robust anti-displacement measures and policies that counter potential unintended harm that can come from large scale infrastructure projects. We are working deliberately every day to ensure the project benefits corridor residents and minimizes physical, economic, and cultural displacement.

In the next few months, the project will identify a community supported route. Thousands of community members have been engaged and provided input on the route options over the last year. Following that recommendation, design and technical evaluation of the recommended route will advance and the project will move forward to qualify for federal funding through the fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program. Further robust community engagement will continue through these and future phases.

The IIJA is a once-in-a-lifetime federal investment in our nation's infrastructure and creates an opportunity to address Minnesota's aging infrastructure and better connect communities across the state. Minnesota has a unique opportunity to ensure matching funds are available to maximize new federal funding and put Minnesota communities in the best position to compete nationally for these funds. That is why we strongly support Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan's recommended \$200 million dollars for the Blue Line Light Rail Extension. The state's investment will ensure we can compete for hundreds of millions in federal funding from the IIJA and leverage hundreds of millions in non-federal match county funding for the project.

This investment recognizes the many benefits this project will bring to communities along the line, our region, and state, and acknowledges the clear calls from communities of color and working-class families along the corridor for enhanced transit service that meets their needs. The Blue Line Extension is the next critical leg of a world class regional transit network that will connect our region, reduce disparities, address climate change, and position our state for inclusive prosperity and growth for generations to come.

Thank you again for your leadership and your commitment to the people of Minnesota.



Marion Greene, Chair
Hennepin County Board of Commissioners



Irene Fernando, Chair
Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority