

Long ago, Rondo Avenue had a streetcar line.

People who lived in Rondo would see their neighbors walking along the street, visiting shops, waiting for the streetcar.

Today, our society suffers from isolation and atomization. People wall themselves off from each other, from their neighborhoods, from their communities. Can we afford to let ourselves be divided by giant walls of concrete?

If the massive social tragedy of I-94 wasn't sad enough for you, consider its failure as an efficient method of transportation. Freeways have extremely limited capacity, take up enormous amounts of space, and suffer from traffic jams. Adding more capacity to freeways convinces more people to drive, meaning that congestion becomes inevitable regardless of size. The only real consequences of highway "improvement" are increased emissions, reduced transit ridership, and costlier maintenance liabilities.

I support Our Streets' plan to restore I-94 back into a normal street. In addition, I desperately hope that we can get the only truly congestion-proof solution for quick travel between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St Paul - regional rail. Nobody will want to wait in traffic on a clogged highway anyways once a convenient, 15 minute train trip exists.

This is a chance to heal our communities and revitalize our cities. Let's prioritize the people who live in our communities, not the ones who drive on top of them.

-Jeremy Winter

Hello,

My name is Karen Allen. First, let me state that I am a Saint Paul resident and I love my city. Since graduating from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, I have lived in Saint Paul and worked in downtown Minneapolis. I live the bulk of my life within a couple mile radius of the I-94 corridor in question.

So why am I here? I live two blocks away from I-94 in Saint Paul so the future of this corridor is of utmost importance to me. I am here to speak for my two-year-old daughter, lives with respiratory challenges. My wish is for her, and all the other children in this community, to grow up with clean air. My husband commutes via bike, so my wish is for him, and all other cyclists or pedestrians, to have safe passage on their routes. I live, work, shop, eat, and socialize throughout these neighborhoods and I would like to see them united rather than divided by the highway.

At a recent Policy Advisory Committee meeting, a staff member referred to this I-94 corridor as the "heart" of the twin cities. While I appreciate his sentiment was meant to reflect the importance of the Rethinking I-94 project, I would posit that it is people who are the heart of our cities. People, like the children who attend Maxfield Elementary on Victoria, overlooking the highway, or the small business owners on Selby or University who are striving to grow their businesses, or community members like my neighbors who have fought to maintain a community in the Rondo neighborhood despite the destruction wrought by the construction of I-94 in the 1960s.

I-94 is not a heart but a gaping wound, poisoning the land and air around it. A wound cannot be fixed by a bandage like a land bridge, or a repair like some new pavement, the area must be sewn back together.

This body must think ahead 20, 30, 50 years and make a choice to protect our people, build wealth in our community, steward our environment and balance our fiscal obligations. I ask you to thoroughly consider the TC Boulevard concept for its ability to reknit the community, provide safer, lower-pollution transportation and dissipate the traffic that floods our neighborhoods. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change our communities for the better, seize it.

Thank you,

Karen Allen  
Board Member – Sustain Saint Paul

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Hello,

I am writing in support of the Twin Cities boulevard. I understand that the job of MNDOT is to build highways. That's what they know how to do. They build highways all over the state. Some necessary and others not. I-94 between St. Paul and Minneapolis is not needed. It divides communities, worsens health outcomes for those living in the dense corridor, and does nothing to move our cities and state away from carbon and fine particle emissions as we are entering a climate crisis.

At grade options will reconnect communities, improve health outcomes, promote transit, disincentivize car use, as well as free up acres and acres of valuable land to improve the tax base of both Minneapolis and St. Paul. Thanks for your consideration.

-Eli Harvey

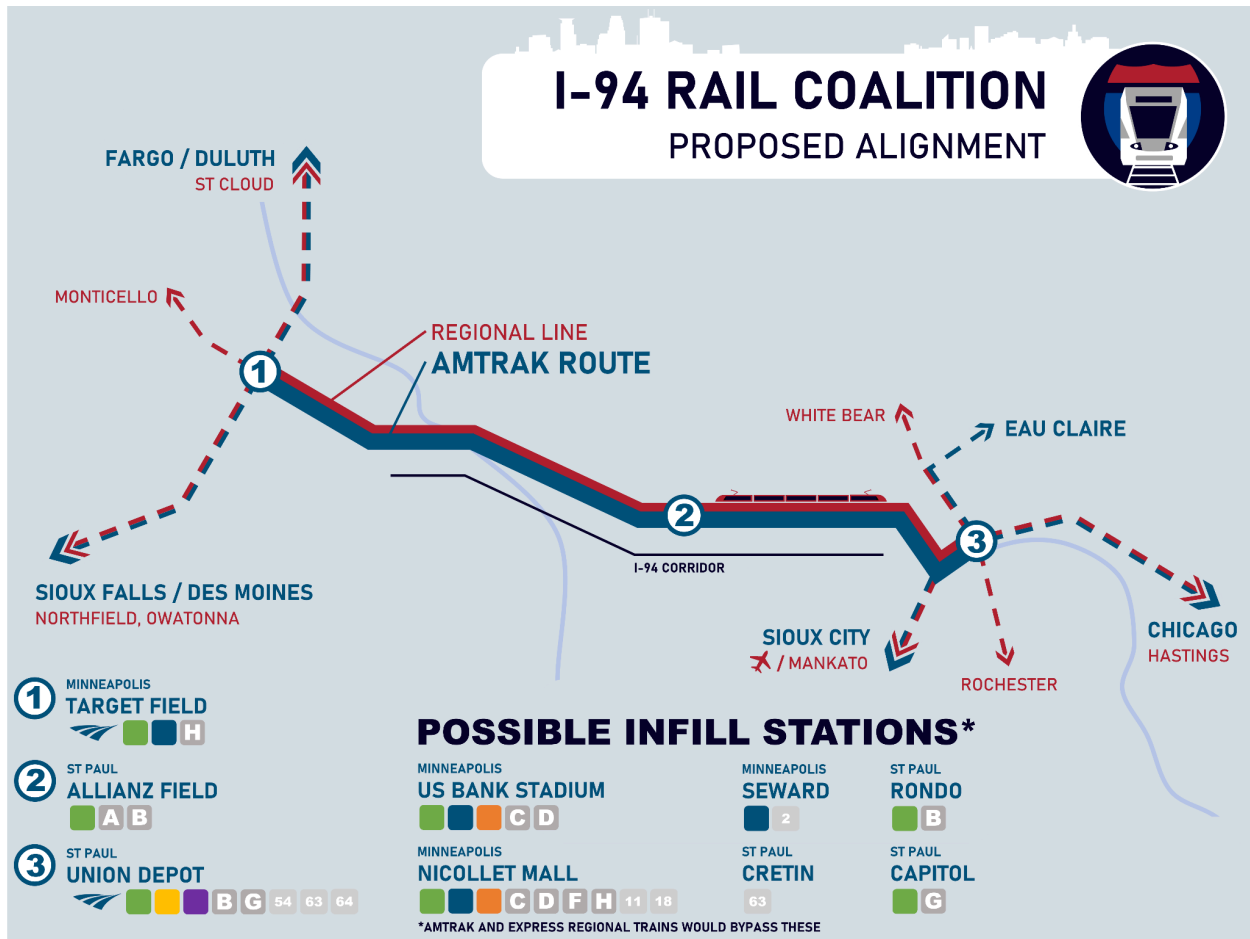
# I-94 RAIL COALITION

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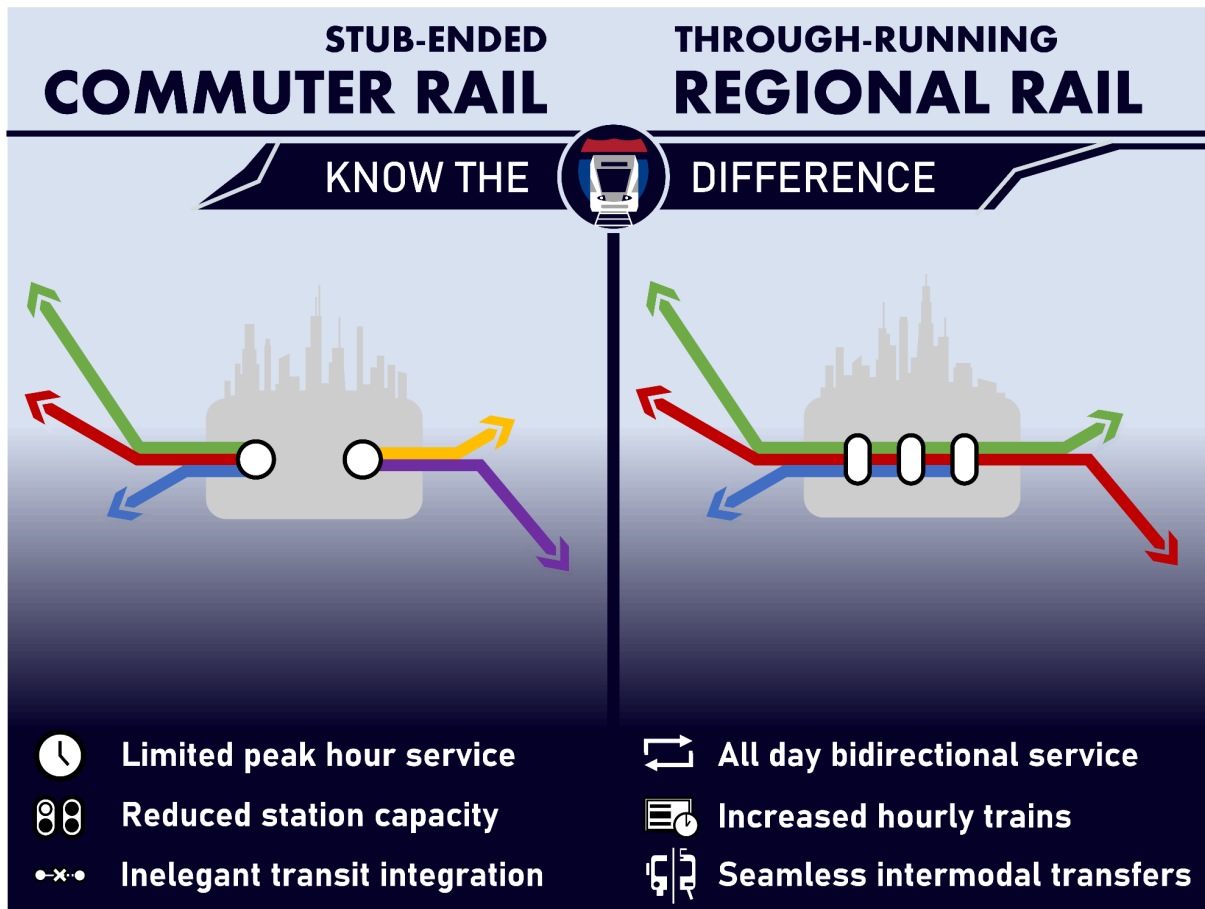
Members of the House Transportation Committee,

Following a transformative 2023 legislative session, Minnesota is ushering in a new era of rail transportation. As our network looks to grow, centered around our two downtown stations, there remains a gaping hole in our ambitions. Minneapolis Target Field and St. Paul Union Depot, both establishing themselves as the transportation hubs of their respective cities, have no direct heavy rail connection, and travel therebetween can take as much as an hour by light rail. Rethinking I-94 offers a rare opportunity to bridge the gap, link the two downtowns, and unify the expanding Twin Cities passenger rail network.



Though the Green Line already connects the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, it is only light rail; it runs at-grade, often slowly, and with very little signal priority such that the full trip can take up to an hour. The Green Line is not adequate on its own; consistent demand for the 94 express bus demonstrates this. LRT is a low-speed, low-capacity transit mode by design, meaning it works best for shorter trips, either to nearby destinations or feeding into other, faster forms of rapid transit. That's where heavy rail comes in.

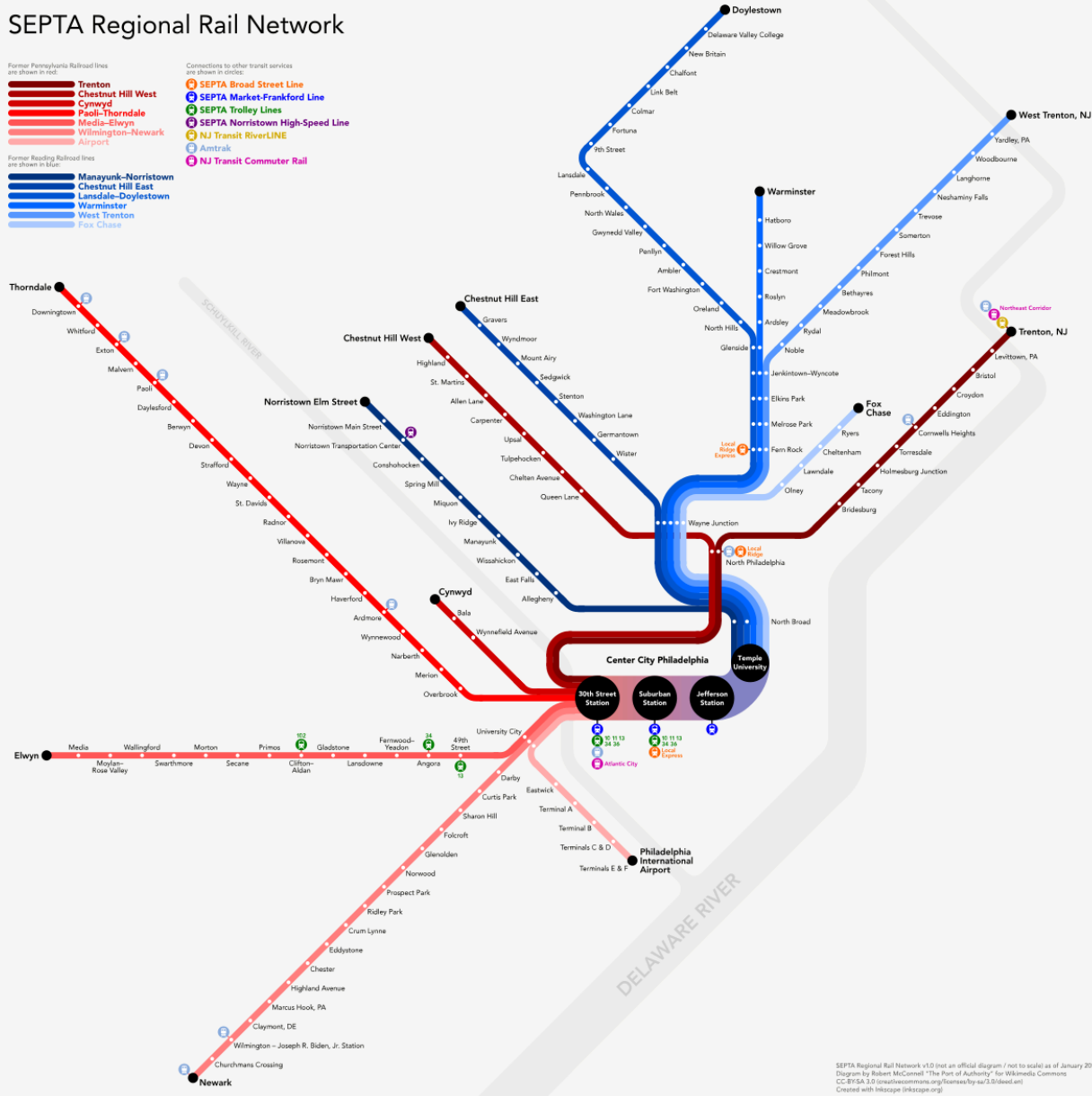
Aside from reducing the downtown-to-downtown trip time, a corridor such as this would properly connect the platforms of Target Field and Union Depot, allowing regional and intercity trains to through-run along I-94 and serve both downtowns.



Contrary to typical commuter rail lines, like the Northstar here in Minnesota, it is not uncommon for regional networks to contain several stations in close proximity, usually in an urban area. This allows suburban trains to cleanly pass through one or more downtown nodes, thereby serving multiple parts of an urban area, rather than terminate at a central station and be forced to turn around in a passenger-congested area.

# SEPTA Regional Rail Network

- Former Pennsylvania Railroad lines are shown in red:
- Trenton
  - Chestnut Hill West
  - Cynwyd
  - Paoli-Thorndale
  - Media-Elwyn
  - Wilmington-Newark Airport
- Former Reading Railroad lines are shown in blue:
- Manayunk-Norristown
  - Chestnut Hill East
  - Lansdale-Doylestown
  - Warminster
  - West Trenton
  - Fox Chase
- Connections to other transit services are shown in circles:
- SEPTA Broad Street Line
  - SEPTA Market-Frankford Line
  - SEPTA Trolley Lines
  - SEPTA Norristown High-Speed Line
  - NJ Transit RiverLINE
  - Amtrak
  - NJ Transit Commuter Rail



SEPTA Regional Rail Network v1.0 (not an official diagram / not to scale as of January 2013)  
 Diagram by Robert McConnell "The Port of Authority" for Wikimedia Commons  
 CC-BY-SA 3.0 (creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en)  
 Created with Inkscape (inkscape.org)

Source: Port of Authority

The benefits of through-running rail are often undervalued, but similar projects have massively benefitted their respective cities. When Melbourne rebuilt Flinders Street Station to allow through-running service, the central hub was able to accommodate twice as many trains per hour. After Philadelphia built its Center City Commuter Connection, a tunnel linking the downtown terminals, SEPTA recorded a 20% jump in its regional rail ridership, and the average commute time was reduced by 15 minutes per trip. Crosstown travel was more practical, with the dense neighborhoods surrounding the downtown core being accessible by continuous lines without forcing awkward, cumbersome transfers in the city center. This spurred a plethora of development around the central stations, allowing the city to reap an incredible economic benefit from the project.

*“More impressively still, Philadelphia’s run-through service generates far fewer non-revenue trips, thereby reducing costs while preserving capacity for further service improvements. By contrast, almost 30% of the trips in and out of [Boston] South Station are non-revenue (i.e., unproductive) trips necessitated by the inherent inefficiency of stub end terminal operations, which the MBTA itself concedes in the SSX DEIR.”*

- North-South Rail Link

As the committee is aware, MnDOT has released a list of project alternatives for Rethinking I-94. This includes a complete removal of the freeway, a lane reconfiguration, and two at-grade roadway options above the freeway trench. While a rail corridor does not depend on a complete removal of the freeway, it is contingent upon a lane reduction to create space in the median. Outside of this, any number of proposals, from the Rondo land bridge to the Twin Cities Boulevard, could exist in tandem with a sunken rail corridor. Our vision is compatible with all community-oriented alternatives - which is to say, any alternative that does not keep the destructive and harmful freeway in its current form.



Our hope is that the committee can appreciate the gravity of this generational undertaking. A heavy rail link between our downtowns will become an inevitable necessity; it is not a question of if, but when. Now is the best time to build this critical piece of infrastructure. It is not often that a project of this scope is conceived and followed through. Whatever we build, whatever we commit to in this timeline is something that will exist for decades - and something that will need to adapt to the continued growth of our region. Now is not the time to shy away from a transformational investment - especially one that will drastically reduce costs in the long term while spurring a wealth of economic growth throughout the Twin Cities.

Thank you for considering our proposal.

Sincerely,

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**I-94 Rail Coalition**

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<https://i94railcoalition.neocities.org/>

*"Your city is the infrastructure it chooses to build and maintain. Big investments, both good and bad, become a sunk cost that reverberates through everything your city decides to do decades; even centuries into the future. They become your civic identity, for better or worse, and you hope that a region like the Twin Cities leans into the things that actually make it great."*

- Ray Delahanty

I'm Dan Waddell and I live in the Mac-Groveland neighborhood of Saint Paul. I'd like to submit a written comment for the upcoming committee meeting on 2/20.

I would like to submit a comment asking the committee to prioritize an I94 proposal that implements heavy rail between Saint Paul and Minneapolis. This is for several important factors:

- Heavy rail will provide the best alternative for car transport. The green line is hobbled by frequent stops resulting in an end 2 end trip that is 45 minutes long. Most car trip outside of rush hour take less than 25 minutes between both downtowns. Heavy rail between both downtowns (with a stop in Midway) will provide a much more competitive trip time that gets car off the road
- Heavy rail is high capacity, can be electrified, and is generally more environmentally friendly than car transportation. If the state's goal is to fight climate change, we need to invest in rail which is proven to be one of the most green transportation options.
- The I94 trench provides a great platform to install heavy rail. Because the trench already exists, it will be logistically much simpler to install heavy rail. The state should take advantage. This also provides the benefit of shifting costly, ongoing highway maintenance to lower fixed costs of rail transportation.
- Heavy rail in the I94 trench enables the state to build services into planned regional rail expansions. Due to the network effect, planned projects such as the Northern Lights Express or twice daily train from Saint Paul to Chicago can amplify ridership by providing a heavy rail connection between both downtowns. This will make overall efforts to expand rail much more successful.

Therefore I ask the committee to commit to enacting a transformative alternative and include heavy rail as part of an I94 redesign.