



**Minneapolis
Park & Recreation Board**

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July 21, 2015

Nani Jacobson
Assistant Director, Environmental and Agreements
Metro Transit – Southwest LRT Project Office
6465 Wayzata Blvd., Suite 500
St. Louis Park, MN 55426

Dear Ms. Jacobson:

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the Southwest Light Rail Transit project. The MPRB's comment letter reflects statements and outcomes noted in comments of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and focuses on the changes to the project as noted in the SDEIS. To best recognize the MPRB's earlier comments, members of a Community Advisory Committee formed to guide comments on the DEIS were assembled and offered insights related to the SDEIS.

In 1883, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board was created by an act of the Minnesota State Legislature and a vote of Minneapolis residents. It serves as an independently elected, semi-autonomous body responsible for governing, maintaining, and developing the Minneapolis park system. The MPRB's mission is as follows:

The MPRB shall permanently preserve, protect, maintain, improve, and enhance its natural resources, park land, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations.

The MPRB exists to provide places and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate, and engage in activities that promote health, well-being, community, and the environment.

The MPRB is also one of 10 regional park implementing agencies. It works with the Metropolitan Council to acquire and develop regional parks and trails to protect natural resources and provide outdoor recreation for public enjoyment in the Metropolitan Area. In 2011, based on Metropolitan Council annual use estimates, the regional parks and trails that are impacted by this alignment received over 6 million visits.

The MPRB is obligated to ensure that parks and trails and the interests of current and future park and trail users are not substantially impaired by the project. It is within this context that the MPRB makes the comments contained in this letter. As stated in the MPRB's comments on the DEIS, there are several overarching messages the MPRB wishes to express regarding the SWLRT project:

- MPRB remains supportive of light-rail transit.
- Current development and public use of the corridor within Minneapolis has an open and natural character that includes portions of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park, Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway, Kenilworth Regional Trail, and Cedar Lake Regional Trail. Park design in this area focuses on serenity, habitat restoration, minimal development, and passive recreation. To retain the area's character the water table levels and quality, cultural landscapes, habitat, and open space must be protected and preserved.
- Other parks in or near the corridor include Alcott Triangle, Park Siding Park, and Bryn Mawr Meadows. These parks serve more neighborhood use, but maintaining existing parks settings, access, and use are clear priorities of the MPRB.
- Visual quality and noise are key areas of concern for the MPRB. The introduction of LRT in combination with freight rail poses the potential for significant disturbance to a corridor that, once disturbed, may realize a restored look for decades.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the SDEIS for the SWLRT project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Michael Schroeder, Assistant Superintendent for Planning, at mschroeder@minneapolisparcs.org.

Sincerely,

Liz Wielinski
President, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

Comments Submitted by the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board in Response to the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Southwest Light Rail Transit Project

July 21, 2015

SDEIS Section 3.4.1.3 (Cultural Resources)

REVIEW

The Kenilworth Corridor is a resource enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors each year. While it serves as a bicycle commuting route between Minneapolis and southwest suburbs, users are attracted to the corridor as a recreation resource based on its location relative to features of the Minneapolis' Grand Rounds and its unique setting. Cultural resources are prominent as an attraction and the SDEIS identifies features important to the MPRB and, significantly, notes adverse effects of the SWLRT project on those features and resources.

The MPRB offers the following comments relative to Section 3.3.1.3 (Cultural Resources) provided in the SDEIS:

- 1 Table 3.4-4 (Cultural Resources in St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment that would be adversely affected under the LPA), Historic Districts, XX-PRK-001, notes impacts to the Grand Rounds from the introduction of LRT. The MPRB is keenly interested in preserving the qualities and integrity of the Grand Rounds, a resource under its jurisdiction. The MPRB agrees that the project poses the potential for adverse impacts, but also notes those impacts cannot be fully understood from information presented in the SDEIS. The MPRB anticipates the Metropolitan Council will provide information sufficient and comprehensive in nature to understand and evaluate impacts on the Grand Rounds, particularly as it relates the visual quality and encroachments of LRT and LRT-supporting infrastructure on the setting and viewsheds of the Grand Rounds.
- 2 Table 3.4-4 (Cultural Resources in St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment that would be adversely affected under the LPA), Individual Resources, HE-MPC-1822 cites the impacts on the Kenilworth Lagoon. The MPRB agrees that passage under the proposed bridges is a significant issue and that the introduction of additional bridge deck area poses an impact on the experience of users of the Kenilworth Channel (referred to as the Kenilworth Lagoon in the SDEIS). The MPRB, through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) created between the MPRB and the Metropolitan Council, have agreed to cooperate on the design of the bridge crossings of the channel. That process has not concluded so comment on the impacts cannot be offered. In the MOU, a process for designing the bridges and concepts for their design were framed. The MPRB anticipates the design will be aligned with the terms of the MOU. Significantly, the MPRB seeks a solution that encourages passage for channel users by reducing or eliminating encroachment of bridge components into the channel as the primary method of respecting the historic qualities of the channel.
- 3 Table 3.4-4 (Cultural Resources in St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment that would not be adversely affected under the LPA), Individual Resources, HE-MPC-1833 cites Cedar Lake Parkway as unaffected by the project. It notes effects considered include "LRT tunnel portal outside of the parkway" but views from the parkway to this portal are part of the experience of the parkway. In fact, views demonstrated for the tunnel portal and the necessary fencing (Appendix J, Exhibit J-13) suggest that infrastructure is significant to the viewshed from the parkway. In addition, Section 3.4.1.5 (Visual Quality and

Aesthetics) notes the positive effects of the “dense regular massing of trees bordering the corridor creates a highly memorable moment.” That visual feature is, in the view of the MPRB, part of the experience of the parkway. As a result, the MPRB disagrees that Cedar Lake Parkway is unaffected by the project and recommends it be included with other adversely impacted resources.

OUTCOMES

- A. Encroachments of LRT and LRT-supporting infrastructure are demonstrated for their visual impacts on cultural resources present on MPRB parklands and recreation areas and that methods of reducing those visual impacts on the experience of parks and trails users is minimized to the greatest degree practicable.

SDEIS Section 3.4.1.4 (Source: MnDOT CRU, 2014.Impacts on Parklands, Recreation Areas, and Open Spaces)

REVIEW

The Kenilworth Corridor and the North Cedar Lake Trail area maintained or owned and maintained by the MPRB as a significant regional recreation resources. The introduction of LRT in a co-location scenario is a concern for the MRPB particularly from the perspective on impacts on these resources and safety concerns resulting from co-location. For the MPRB, the Kenilworth Corridor serves 550,000 users annually and the North Cedar Lake Trail serves 414,000 users annually (estimates provided by the Metropolitan Council), making these parklands, recreation areas, and open spaces areas of primary concern for the MPRB. Because this section deals, in part, on access to those facilities, the MPRB believes safety in crossing of LRT and freight rail infrastructure should be addressed.

The MPRB offers the following comments relative to Section 3.4.1.4 (Source: MnDOT CRU, 2014, Impacts on Parklands, Recreation Areas, and Open Spaces) provided in the SDEIS:

- 1 Section 3.4.1.4 (Source: MnDOT CRU 2014.Parklands, Recreation Areas, and Open Spaces) notes “there would be no long-term direct impacts from the LPA on parklands, recreation areas, and open spaces in the segment.” Co-location poses the potential for safety impacts, which the MPRB considers to be a long-term and direct impact on resource users. The presence of freight rail and its impacts on the users of the Kenilworth Corridor has not been fully addressed in the SDEIS from the perspective of any failure of the freight rail infrastructure and the ability to respond to an emergency condition.
- 2 Table 3.4-6 (Parks, Recreation Areas, and Open Spaces in the St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment) notes resources and impacts in this segment of the project. The MPRB agrees this list is complete and accurate based on its understanding of the project as demonstrated through the SDEIS, but notes that safety concerns noted in the introduction to this section are not included in the “Types of Impacts.” From the perspective of the MPRB, any crossing of LRT or LRT and freight rail that is not grade-separated poses an impact on users of the parkland, recreation area, or open space resource. In particular, the MPRB is concerned that the combination of LRT and freight rail compromises safety for pedestrian and bicycle crossings when those crossing occur at-grade and recommends the Metropolitan Council address those crossings in greater detail and for any changes where grade separation is eliminated, that the Metropolitan

Council demonstrate the ways in which an at-grade crossing can be made equally safe as the grade-separated crossing. While the SDEIS references Appendix G for information related to crossings, the diagrams are too general to understand the specific measure to be implemented to maintain a safe crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists of LRT or LRT and freight rail.

- 3 Under Long-Term Direct and Indirect Parklands, Recreation Areas, and Open Spaces Impacts, it is noted the “The indirect impacts of the LPA would be in the form of visual, noise, and/or access impacts, addressed in greater detail in Sections 3.4.1.5, 3.4.2.3, and 3.4.4.4 of this Supplemental Draft EIS.” This section of the SDEIS references the North Cedar Lake Regional Trail and correctly notes it is owned and operated by the MPRB. However, Section 3.4.1.5 (Visual Quality and Aesthetics) does not fairly or fully address the visual impacts of a bridge crossing of LRT and freight rail. The MPRB believes this structure poses the potential for a significant visual impact on the setting of Cedar Lake Park due to its length and height. While the MPRB supports inclusion of the bridge to provide safe crossing of LRT and freight rail, its design poses the potential for a significant impact on the parkland resource of Cedar Lake Park and on users of the North Cedar Lake Regional Trail.

OUTCOMES

- B. The corridor fully addresses potential safety impacts posed by freight rail in the corridor, including accommodation of emergency response.
- C. At-grade trail crossings at LRT and freight rail infrastructure, where the trail must cross both facilities in the same location, are made equally as safe as a grade separated crossing.
- D. The visual quality of all structures within or visible from parklands are addressed in ways that minimize their intrusion upon the natural settings or activity areas
- E. The North Cedar Lake Trail bridge crossing LRT and rail infrastructure is designed to minimize its visual impact and any adverse impacts to its setting in Cedar Lake Park to the greatest degree practicable.

SDEIS Section 3.4.1.5 (Visual Quality and Aesthetics)

REVIEW

The Kenilworth Corridor presents a visual quality that is recognized in the SDEIS as “dominated by the existing trails themselves and adjacent active freight rail track. The trails and freight rail alignment are generally surrounded by overstory and understory deciduous vegetation.” The SDEIS further describes the visual quality of the corridor by stating “Dense regular massing of trees bordering the corridor creates a highly memorable element.” The MRPB confirms these points as the key visual elements of the corridor, both of which are central to the experience of the corridor.

The MPRB offers the following comments relative to Section 3.4.1.5 (Visual Quality and Aesthetics) provided in the SDEIS:

- 1 While the process of documenting existing visual character is clear and follows processes to which the MPRB agrees, the nature of views as static are contrary to the experience of corridor users. The nature of an assessed view should be translated to the experience of a traveler in the corridor; that is, instead of a limited number of viewpoints attempting to characterize the visual experience, the constantly changing viewpoints of a bicyclists

- or a pedestrian should be considered. It is from that perspective that the “dense regular massing of trees bordering the corridor” becomes important.
- 2 Section 3.4.1.5 (Visual Quality and Aesthetics) indicates that Traction Power Substations (TPSS) will be sited in “fully developed areas, including surface parking lots, existing roadway right-of-way, and vacant parcels where feasible.” The Kenilworth Corridor, a primary concern of the MPRB, has none of these siting opportunities. Because these features should be considered a visual intrusion similar to the “addition of the station infrastructure and the overhead equipment required by the LRT Table 3.4-8 (Anticipated Direct Change and Impact in Visual Quality and Aesthetics from St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment Viewpoints, Viewpoint 6, Intactness), they should be considered a significant factor for the change in visual quality in the corridor.
 - 3 Table 3.4-7 (Existing Visual Quality and Aesthetics by Viewpoint in the St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment) reinforces the roles of the dense massing of trees in forming the vividness and unity of the corridor from the perspective of visual quality. It further suggests the viewpoints are generally free of visual encroachments. To these points, the MPRB offers its concurrence.
 - 4 Table 3.4-8 (Anticipated Direct Change and Impact in Visual Quality and Aesthetics from St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment Viewpoints) indicates the primary thresholds for visual character are decreased or diminished by the removal of trees to accommodate the transit and freight rail improvements and by the introduction of LRT-supporting infrastructure. In essence, the MPRB would interpret this to mean the existing visual character—and therefore, the visual experience—is denigrated by the proposed changes. From that perspective, and regardless of the formula applied to achieve the visual impact ratings, each viewpoint should be considered substantially impacted. In addition, this table seems to underestimate the impacts of LRT-supporting infrastructure. In demonstrations included in Appendix J, every preliminary rendering with LRT running at grade includes LRT-supporting infrastructure that becomes an intrusion upon the visual experience for users of the Kenilworth Corridor.
 - 5 Table 3.4-8 (Anticipated Direct Change and Impact in Visual Quality and Aesthetics from St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment Viewpoints) for Viewpoint 3 describes the view from Cedar Lake Parkway toward the tunnel the channel crossing. The description notes the tunnel portal as a part of the view, but the lack of notation regarding the portal suggests that it has no visual impact. In fact, the preliminary rendering shown in Exhibit J-13 would suggest the portal has a substantial visual impact. Replacing the existing split rail fence with a taller and more expansive fence at the portal does not respect the intactness described for this viewpoint in Table 3.407. While the SDEIS notes this as a substantial visual impact, the MPRB remains very concerned that mitigation will not restore the visual experience currently enjoyed by trail users.
 - 6 Table 3.4-8 (Anticipated Direct Change and Impact in Visual Quality and Aesthetics from St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment Viewpoints) for Viewpoint 5 indicates the “increased clearance and openness under the bridge would create a visual connection between the segments of the lagoon north/south of the new bridges.” The MPRB agrees this is a positive change. However, the narrative description for Viewpoint 5 suggests “the bridge, as currently conceived, will have an attractive design that will become a positive focal point in the view.” From the perspective of the MPRB, this set of bridges has the potential of substantially improving the visual experience of the lagoon by removing as many piers as possible from the water, thereby reinforcing the lagoon itself as the focal point—not the bridge. As the design of the bridges proceeds, the MPRB encourages enhancement of the openness of the view, removal of bridge encroachments into the lagoon, and minimizing to the degree practicable the visual focus of the new bridges.

- The narrative description of this viewpoint indicates the impact as “Not Substantial,” but it is largely dependent on the design of the introduced bridges.
- 7 Table 3.4-8 (Anticipated Direct Change and Impact in Visual Quality and Aesthetics from St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment Viewpoints) for Viewpoint 6 indicates the same response for Intactness and Unity. But more important, the description of the change suggests “the addition of the station structures will make a positive contribution to the level of vividness that counterbalances the loss of vividness due to vegetation removal.” While a formulaic application of a visual quality assessment might allow for the substitution of one factor of visual quality for another, the MPRB suggests the introduction of a station cannot be considered a reasonable replacement for the loss of trees, especially when the assessment of views for the corridor suggest the dense massing of trees is a central feature of the corridor and that two of the three factors evaluating the view indicate the loss of trees decreases or reduces the factor (and the third factor cannot be determined from the SDEIS because of an apparent typographical error).
 - 8 Section C (Mitigation Measures) indicates mitigation measures will “include landscaping, visual treatment and continuity with the elevated light rail structure design, lighting, and signage.” A footnote references Section 3.4.1.3, but is suggesting measures of mitigation will be achieved through “sensitive design and the incorporation of protective measures” (Table 3.4 (Cultural Resources in St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment that would be adversely effected under the LPA), Individual Resources, HE-MPC-1822), the MPRB suggests that further definition is required to understand how sensitive design and protective measures will replace the “dense regular massing of trees bordering the corridor” that is indicated in the SDEIS as creating a “highly memorable element.”
 - 9 While this section of the SDEIS addresses key viewpoints of concern to the MPRB, it fails to address other significant points of visual quality related to MPRB resources. In particular, this section does not address the impacts on visual quality of the proposed grade-separated crossing of LRT and freight rail of the North Cedar Lake Regional Trail (and MPRB-owned and operated facility) and Cedar Lake Park. In addition, there is no mention of the landing for a bridge extending from Van White Memorial Boulevard and its impacts on Bryn Mawr Meadows, parkland under the jurisdiction of the MPRB. Finally, Table 3.4-6 (Parks, Recreation Areas, and Open Spaces in the St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment) notes visual changes as an impact at Park Siding Park, but no mention of the visual quality impacts are noted in this Section 3.4.1.5.

OUTCOMES

- A. The “dense regular massing of trees bordering the corridor” remains a defining element of the corridor.
- B. LRT-supporting infrastructure, including features not addressed or not fully addressed in the Visual Quality and Aesthetics section such as traction power substations and the LRT tunnel portal, is designed in ways that minimizes visual impacts upon trail users.
- C. The experience of Kenilworth Channel users is orchestrated to maintain focus on the channel as the primary feature, with bridges that to the greatest degree practicable remain background elements for channel users.
- D. Stations, while significant structures in the setting of the Kenilworth Corridor, are not substitutes for the quality of the existing natural setting.
- E. Visual impacts to all parklands are addressed through a process that emphasizes the quality of the visual experience with the natural setting as the dominant feature.

SDEIS Section 3.4.2 (Environmental Effects)

REVIEW

The physical location of the Kenilworth Corridor is important to the MPRB not only as a recreation resource, but because of its geographic context among several lakes of the Chain of Lakes Regional Park. Instances of environmental degradation related to the introduction of LRT are of primary concern because of the proximity of the natural features along the corridor. Still, the corridor is an important recreation feature, offering a route for pedestrians and bicyclists totaling more than 550,000 visits per year. The introduction of LRT alongside freight rail poses changes related to safety and connectivity that are a concern for the MPRB.

The MPRB offers the following comments relative to Section 3.4.2 (Environmental Effects) provided in the SDEIS:

- 1 Section 3.4.2.1 (Geology and Groundwater) notes “there is the potential for long-term pumping of surface water from the tunnel portals (predominantly stormwater) that collects inside and at the lowest point of the tunnel portals and is routed to underground infiltration chambers.” This section notes further “AS described in the Draft EIS, in areas of high groundwater elevations and granular soils, there is an increased potential for groundwater contamination as a result of previous hazardous and contaminated materials spills.” In a description of the effects of the tunnel on lake levels, the SDEIS indicates “Groundwater and lake levels in the area surrounding Cedar Lake, Lake of the Isles, and Lake Calhoun are very similar, with little change in elevation across the system” and “there is little or no groundwater gradient among the lakes; groundwater does not ‘flow’ from one water body to another.” During the MPRB’s study of alternative crossing of the Kenilworth Channel, consultant reports suggest there is a directional movement of groundwater in this area, with a general direction along the alignment of the LRT corridor. The MPRB notes these statements as inconclusive relative to the potential for contamination and adverse impacts on the lakes. That construction activities could increase the potential for groundwater contamination, that groundwater (now potentially contaminated) would be collected upon entering portion of the tunnel and then infiltrated using underground chambers, and that there is evidence the groundwater system in this area is connected (regardless of flow), suggests a risk for groundwater contamination from the presence of the tunnel that needs to be addressed.

The SDEIS focuses on the potential impacts of groundwater contamination resulting from LRT operations and suggests “The potential to contaminate groundwater from operation of the light rail system would be low, because the trains would be electric and, generally, no activities that generate pollutants would occur in this area.”

Notwithstanding the MPRB’s comments above related to groundwater, the SDEIS does not address the potential for contamination of groundwater from the operations of freight rail in the Kenilworth Corridor. Because co-location is the basis of the SDEIS, it would seem the potential for groundwater contamination from freight rail operations should be addressed

- 2 Section 3.4.2.1 (Geology and Groundwater), part C (Mitigation) addresses a groundwater management plan to be prepared as part of the project and that it would address “collection, storage, and disposal of surface water runoff from the light rail track

- systems, stations, and other infrastructure developed as part of the project.” Because the LPA is based on co-location, freight rail is part of the “other infrastructure developed as part of the project” and should be addressed in the groundwater management plan.
- 3 Section 3.4.2.2 (Water Resources: Wetlands, Floodplains, Public Waters, and Stormwater Management, Part B. Potential Water Resource Impact, Public Waters and Stormwater Management indicates that “runoff from newly poured concrete surfaces can have high alkalinity, often above pH 9, which can result in degraded water quality and can affect fish.” This section further states “The concrete used for this project would take several months to cur enough so that the pH of exposed surfaces decreased to acceptable levels. Stormwater runoff would be tested, and if excessive levels of pH or turbidity are found, the runoff would be treated before it is released to storm sewers or receiving water bodies.” From the perspective of the MPRB, “acceptable levels” would be at least the same as those levels found prior to the construction of the improvements. In addition, when the receiving water bodies include those under the jurisdiction of the MPRB or are related to its park resources, the MPRB would urge the Metropolitan Council to treat any runoff from those surfaces that might degrade water quality or affect fish, and to not rely upon finding excessive levels of pH or turbidity (at which point, the MPRB assumes, some stormwater runoff would have already entered receiving water bodies.
 - 4 Section 3.4.2.3 (Noise), A. Existing Conditions indicates that east of West Lake Station and the Kenilworth Lagoon “Currently, the dominant noise source in the segment is existing freight rail traffic.” The nature of the park setting suggests that this noise level not be exceeded by the combination of LRT and freight rail in the corridor.
 - 5 Section 3.4.2.3 (Noise), B. Potential Noise Impacts, Long-Term Direct and Indirect Noise Impacts indicates that “The presence of the proposed tunnel in the Kenilworth Corridor eliminates almost all noise impacts relative to an at-grade LRT system within the same segment of the corridor,” yet it fails to identify what noise impacts remain. The MPRB desires clarity on those impacts that remain after “almost all” have been eliminated so that it can better understand the mitigation that might be proposed. Table 3.4-12 (Summary of Noise Impacts for Category 1 and Category 3 Land Use – St. Louis Park/Minneapolis Segment) summarizes impacts of noise on the Kenilworth Channel and Kenilworth Lagoon Bank. A MOU between the MPRB and the Metropolitan Council addresses concerns related to noise at the Kenilworth Channel crossing and suggests that a design for the bridges would “incorporate strategies or features in the design of a bridge that respond to findings of MPRB’s study of channel crossing concepts.” The MOU indicates “The MPRB undertook a study of the channel crossing and determined visual quality and noise as the MPRB’s highest priorities for consideration in the design of the bridge.” Notwithstanding the statements of this section, the MPRB expects the Metropolitan Council will maintain adherence to the MOU and determine methods of reducing noise impacts in the area of the Kenilworth Channel and Kenilworth Lagoon Bank regardless of the type and number of impacts indicated in the SDEIS because, as is noted in this section of the SDEIS, “quietude is essential feature of the park.”
 - 6 Section 3.4.2.4 (Vibration), C. Mitigation Measures indicates mitigation for vibration impacts will be incorporated in a vibration mitigation plan. For the MPRB, vibration impacts at the Kenilworth Channel bridges remain a concern. Preliminary design directions for the bridges suggest the potential for a trail bridge separated from an LRT bridge. The MPRB believes this is significant in reducing vibration impacts for trail users, even as we understand that vibration for outdoor receptors are not a consideration.
 - 7 Section 3.4.2.5 (Hazardous and Contaminated Materials) indicates the design of the tunnel would include measures that would, “In the unlikely event of a spill of hazardous or contaminated materials in the tunnel... prevent infiltration of groundwater through the

- tunnel bottom and allow contaminated materials to be collected... and not released into the groundwater.” While these measures for unlikely events are appreciated, the MPRB remains concerned about the potential for construction activities to change conditions and allow contaminated materials to move toward lakes or other water bodies.
- 8 Section 3.4.4.5 (Bicycle and Pedestrian) describes the impacts of the LPA on bicycle and pedestrian facilities, many of which are under the jurisdiction of the MPRB in this segment of the corridor. The MPRB desires further information on the safe crossing of LRT and freight proposed in the area of the 21st Street Station due to its proximity to East Cedar Beach. The combination of rail crossings at this location poses concerns for pedestrian and bicycle access, in particular resulting from those users becoming suddenly and temporarily “trapped” between rail crossings. Recent discussions of the Metropolitan Council related to cost reductions suggest elimination of the North Cedar Lake Trail Bridge which would present the same concerns to the MPRB. This section notes Appendix G offers a conceptual design of improvements but the diagrams are too general to understand the ways in which pedestrian and bicycle safety will be provided.
 - 9 Section 3.4.4.5 (Bicycle and Pedestrian) describes impacts related to LRT for pedestrians and bicyclists, but the significant change presented in the SDEIS is the presence of freight rail in the Kenilworth Corridor. The MPRB believes freight rail can be a safety concern for trail users and it should be addressed in a FEIS. Further, other portions of the SDEIS describe the potential for blockage of local roadways by freight trains, but the SDEIS does not describe the potential for blockage of trail intersections. In particular, if the proposed North Cedar Lake Trail bridge is eliminated as a cost saving measure, the FEIS must address the blockage of the intersection of the North Cedar Lake Trail and address any safety concerns for trail users resulting from such a blockage.

OUTCOMES

- A. Any permanent dewatering methodologies applied to the corridor protect water table levels and quality, and habitat within the parklands that is dependent on those water levels. (Outcome previously identified in MPRB DEIS comment letter)
- B. The ground management plan addresses impacts of all rail infrastructure, not just new LRT infrastructure.
- C. When dealing with construction impacts to water bodies within or near parklands, best practices are implemented as a baseline for project activities, not as a response to excessive pH or turbidity levels.
- D. Noise and vibration impacts are minimized for park and trail users and maintained at levels not greater than the extant condition.
- E. Bridge crossings of the Kenilworth Channel are achieved with a separated trail structure to ensure vibrations from rail are not reflected through the structures to pedestrians or bicyclists.
- F. Technologies are incorporated that reduce track noise and vibration.
- G. Possible contamination from freight rail operations are addressed to a greater degree as the potential for contamination from light rail operations because of the nature of the operation and the freight conveyed through the corridor.
- H. The potential for construction activities to change conditions and allow contaminated materials to move toward lakes or other water bodies is addressed as a core component of the implementation plan.
- I. Bicycle and pedestrian intersections with rail infrastructure if required to be at-grade are developed in ways that are equal in safety to grade separated crossings.

- J. Trail crossings of rail infrastructure does not create blockage except when trains are passing the crossing.

SDEIS Section 3.5 (Draft Section 4(f) Impacts)

REVIEW

The MPRB provided information to the Metropolitan Council related to its park properties along and near the SWLRT corridor. The MPRB agrees that the list of properties included in the SDEIS is complete and correct.

The MPRB offers the following comments relative to Section 3.5 (Draft Section 4(f) Impacts) provided in the SDEIS:

- 1 Table 3.5-2 (Summary of FTA’s Preliminary Section 4(f) Property Use Determinations) lists and describes the impacts of SWLRT on MPRB park properties. The MPRB agrees with the determinations provided the comments of this section are recognized and addressed by the project.
- 2 Section 3.5.1.4 (Section 4(f) Use Definitions and Requirements), A. Individual Section 4(f) Evaluation indicates “de minimis use is described below in Section 3.5.1.6. The SDEIS published by the Metropolitan Council does not include this section.
- 3 Section 3.5.4.1 (Publicly Owned Parks and Recreation Areas), I. Park Siding Park – Preliminary No Section 4(f) Use Determination, Preliminary Determination of Temporary Section 4(f) Use indicates that 0.016 acre of the park would be used to construct and remove a temporary trail detour as a result of the SWLRT project. It has been discussed that changes made necessary by the SWLRT tunnel will result in the need to reconstruct a portion of sanitary sewer in the area of Cedar Lake Parkway, a part of which will impact Park Siding Park. The FEIS should identify this need, if in fact the park is required for this construction activity, in the FEIS.
- 4 Section 3.5.4.1 (Publicly Owned Parks and Recreation Areas), J. Kenilworth Channel/Lagoon (as an element of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park – Preliminary *De Minimis* Determination, Preliminary Determination of Permanent Section 4(f) Use: Section 4(f) de minimis Use indicates the channel “would not be adversely impacted under the LPA and the horizontal clearances between the banks and the new piers [of bridges supporting the trail, LRT, and freight rail] would be of sufficient width to accommodate recreational activities that occur within the channel/lagoon.” The MPRB has been active in the design of bridges and understands it is possible to span the channel for the purposes of the trail crossing with no piers extending into the water and that it may be possible to span the channel for the purposes of the LRT crossing with no piers extending into the water. The MPRB considers this possibility to be a positive feature of a proposed bridge as it maximizes the open water available in the channel for recreation use. However, the bridge decks are more expansive than in the extant trail/freight rail bridge causing concerns for the amount of snow that might be collected on the channel under the bridge. Winter activities, including cross-country skiing are important features of this part of the park and must be considered as a part of the crossing.
- 5 Section 3.5.4.1 (Publicly Owned Parks and Recreation Areas), J. Kenilworth Channel/Lagoon (as an element of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park – Preliminary *De Minimis* Determination, Preliminary Determination of Permanent Section 4(f) Use: Section 4(f) de minimis Use indicates the new bridge crossings of the Kenilworth

- Channel “would have an attractive design that would become a positive focal point in the view. In the visual quality assessment, this view changes is indicated to be Not Substantial, but in fact views of the bridges should be of secondary importance when compared to the channel—the historic resource.
- 6 Section 3.5.4.1 (Publicly Owned Parks and Recreation Areas), J. Kenilworth Channel/Lagoon (as an element of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes Regional Park – Preliminary *De Minimis* Determination, Preliminary Determination of Permanent Section 4(f) Use: Section 4(f) *de minimis* Use indicates the areas of the Kenilworth Channel would be moderately impacted by noise. The MPRB, through an MOU with the Metropolitan Council, has identified noise generated by LRT to be a primary concern and one that will be addressed as a part of the bridge design process.
 - 7 Section 3.5.4.1 (Publicly Owned Parks and Recreation Areas), K. Cedar Lake Park – Preliminary *De Minimis* Determination, Preliminary Determination of Permanent Section 4(f) Use: Section 4(f) *de minimis* Use, Cedar Lake Junction indicates the realignment of an existing trail to create a grade separated crossing of LRT and freight rail. Because of the intensity of trail use, managing crossings for pedestrian and bicyclist safety remains a primary concern for the MPRB. In addition, the MPRB recognizes this crossing, due to its height and length, would permanently alter the setting in the north portion of Cedar Lake Park. The design of the bridge should, in the opinion of the MPRB, find ways to minimize its visual impact on trail and park users. In the SDEIS, this bridge was not addressed in the section related to Visual Quality and Aesthetics.
 - 8 Section 3.5.4.1 (Publicly Owned Parks and Recreation Areas), L. Bryn Mawr Meadows Park – Preliminary *De Minimis* Determination, Preliminary Determination of Permanent Section 4(f) Use indicates a bridge and a new elevated section of the Luce Line Trail would be constructed in a portion of the park and trails connecting to this bridge would be reconstructed in a portion of the park. While the MPRB is supportive of the demonstrated alignment, the presence of the bridge in the park setting is significant. In the SDEIS, this bridge was not addressed in the section related to Visual Quality and Aesthetics.

OUTCOMES

- A. Bike and pedestrian trails remain with the same or better design quality and width as current trails; these include those that run along and across the corridor, as well as access trails.
- B. The trail design meets the needs of current and projected users.
- C. All trail connections are maintained or improved.
- D. At all points along the corridor, and especially at the narrowest locations, sufficient space remains for trails, trail users, and year-round maintenance vehicles and crews.
- E. Trail crossings of LRT and freight rail are safe and logical, and do not present unnecessary delays for trail users.
- F. Structures introduced to parklands to support LRT or accommodate its presence are designed to allow the park setting to remain the prominent feature of the park or recreation use.
- G. Recreation activities currently available in the Kenilworth Corridor and MPRB parks are equal to or better upon completion of the SWLRT project as those that exist.
- H. Park or recreation features are restored upon completion of temporary construction activities to match as closely as possible the extant conditions.