



Hennepin for People



To: Mayor Frey, Council President Payne and Members of the City Council  
Chair Charlie Zelle and Members of the Metropolitan Council

CC: Members of the Minneapolis Legislative Delegation

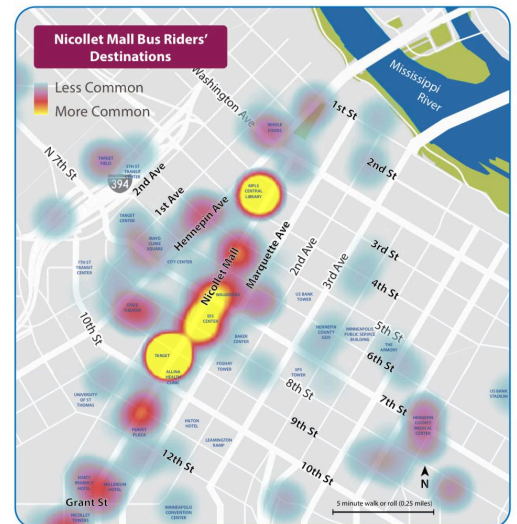
Re: **Proposals to Remove Buses from Nicollet Mall**

Date: October 14, 2024

Any proposal to remove buses from Nicollet Mall and relocate those buses to other streets **must improve, and not harm, service for transit riders**. If that cannot be done, the buses should not be removed. Since the Legislature voted in 2023 to pass historic funding for expansion of bus service, any changes to downtown bus transit must also accommodate future expansions. The proposed alternatives do not yet meet these essential criteria. In particular, we ask you to eliminate Option #2 from further consideration.

For decades prior to 2010, both express and local buses used Nicollet Mall. Since 2010, when express buses were consolidated on to Marquette and 2nd (MARQ2), five regular bus routes (10, 11, 17, 18, 25) have continued to use dedicated lanes on Nicollet Mall. While bus speeds for those five routes are slower than they should be *on this segment* of a bus rider’s trip, this downside is balanced with other benefits:

- **Total Travel Time** - The proper measurement of a person’s transit trip is “door to door” including walking or rolling on both ends of the trip. As your own data shows, transit on Nicollet Mall brings the most people closest to their final destinations.



Source: 2022 Travel Behavior Inventory Onboard Transit Survey; Routes 10, 11, 17, 18, and 25

- **Dedicated Lanes** - While average speed is important, the value of dedicated lanes in providing *reliability* must not be dismissed. Buses traveling in mixed traffic with automobiles might have an acceptable *average* speed, but riders on those buses can still get jammed up in congestion. If an employee is late to work, their boss doesn't typically care about "average speeds."
- **Direct Routing** - The most direct route for buses traveling on Nicollet Avenue south of Nicollet Mall is to continue traveling on Nicollet Mall.

We do not dismiss the potential benefits of moving buses on Nicollet Mall to other streets, but multiple factors must be considered including those listed above. So it is problematic that project staff have said that the choice to move buses off Nicollet Mall is predetermined, and that it's just a question of which alternative is chosen. It is not typical for a study to presume results in advance. Doing so is what produces flawed alternatives.

### **Hennepin Avenue: If not now, when?**

An example of this flawed process is that for riders of Routes 11 and 25, no choices are provided. For those riders, Options 1, 2 and 3 are all the same. They will be moved from dedicated lanes on Nicollet to mixed traffic lanes on Hennepin. But the City's Transportation Action Plan (TAP) ([page 12 PDF](#)) says Hennepin Ave should be evaluated for dedicated lanes:

#### **Transit 2.3** **DO**

Evaluate the potential for a bus-only lane, and/or other transit advantages, on the following corridors, considering partnerships with other jurisdictions.

- Hennepin Avenue between Washington Ave South and 12<sup>th</sup> Street South.
- Hennepin Avenue between Franklin Ave and 12<sup>th</sup> Street South.

The TAP was approved *before* the legislature passed transit funding, *before* the E Line Project on Hennepin was funded, and *before* moving bus routes 11 and 25 were being considered. Previous studies have recognized

that downtown streets must be treated as a system, because changes on one street impact how other streets function. For all these reasons, the time to study dedicated lanes on these segments of Hennepin is now, as part of any decision related to Nicollet Mall.

### **Impacts on Routes 10, 17 and 18 and future BRT**

Both Options 1 and 2 will require greater walking distances and, for those bus routes that travel on Nicollet Avenue, require less direct routing. For Option 1, these downsides may be mitigated by more reliable transit speeds on Marquette and 2nd. For all these reasons, Option 1 should continue to be evaluated if paired with a full evaluation of what improvements are needed on Hennepin Ave as described above.

Option 2 not only includes the same downsides as Option 1, but also would eliminate the bus-only passing lanes on Marquette and 2nd. Those lanes are the essential feature which has successfully provided speed, safety, reliability and capacity for expansion since MARQ2 was completed in 2009. As recently as April of this year, Rice University Senior Lecturer [Christof](#)

[Spieler](#), author of “Trains, Buses, People: An Opinionated Atlas of Transit” led a tour of Marquette and 2nd during the American Planning Association conference in Minneapolis. He extolled the very qualities of the street design that Option 2 would eliminate, at greater cost than Option 1. We should not spend more money to make transit service worse. For all these reasons, Option 2 should be removed from further consideration.

Option 3, which would move buses to Third Ave is notably the only option which would relocate, rather than simply remove, the dedicated bus only lanes which currently exist on Nicollet Mall. It would provide convenient transfers to Blue and Green Line LRT at the Government Center Station. It would also provide the opportunity to upgrade the bicycle lanes on Third Avenue to a fully protected facility. Because Third Avenue would benefit from a new design, Option 3 should continue to be evaluated, but those upsides must be measured against the serious downside of Option 3 being furthest from the core and requiring the greatest additional walking distances. Like with Option 1, it must be paired with a full evaluation of Hennepin Ave.

### **Keeping Buses on Nicollet Mall**

The City must be committed to making pedestrian areas meaningfully welcoming and accessible to everyone, including transit riders, with permanent seating, public art, drinking fountains, shade and other amenities. Having more space dedicated to people walking, bicycling, rolling, and taking transit is crucial to building a sustainable and welcoming city. These modes shouldn't be forced to compete.

This letter does not take a position on whether or not to remove buses from Nicollet Mall. But we expect a thorough answer to the question posed by city staff on page 7 of their [December 4 Presentation](#) to the City Council: “How to ensure service remains as good or better for transit riders?” Since we don't know if that question can be sufficiently answered, one of the options must be to keep buses on Nicollet Mall and what is needed to improve that service. This was the clear input of many participants at the September 24 open house.

Building out a modern transit system is absolutely essential to providing equitable access to jobs, improving air quality and public health (especially for children), addressing multiple forms of racial disparities, increasing our regional economic competitiveness, ensuring mobility for an aging population, and combating the climate crisis. Minneapolis must lead on all these challenges. When the State delivers precious transit dollars to our region, Minneapolis must take all actions needed to maximize the benefits of these state investments.

Consistent with Minneapolis's leadership role, we ask you to a) eliminate Option 2 from further consideration, b) study Options 1 and Option 3, with the addition of evaluating dedicated lanes on Hennepin Avenue as described in the City's adopted Transportation Action Plan and c) not assume buses can be removed from Nicollet Mall but instead study and consider improvements that do not include removal.

Bicycle Alliance of MN  
Hennepin for People

ISAIAH  
Move Minnesota

MN 350  
Neighbors for More Neighbors  
Sierra Club