

# **Reconnecting the Urban Landscape**

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# Reconnecting the Urban Landscape

a rails-to-trails feasibility study for the Midway Area of Saint Paul, Minnesota

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University UNITED

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*with support from:*  
The Center for Urban & Regional Affairs





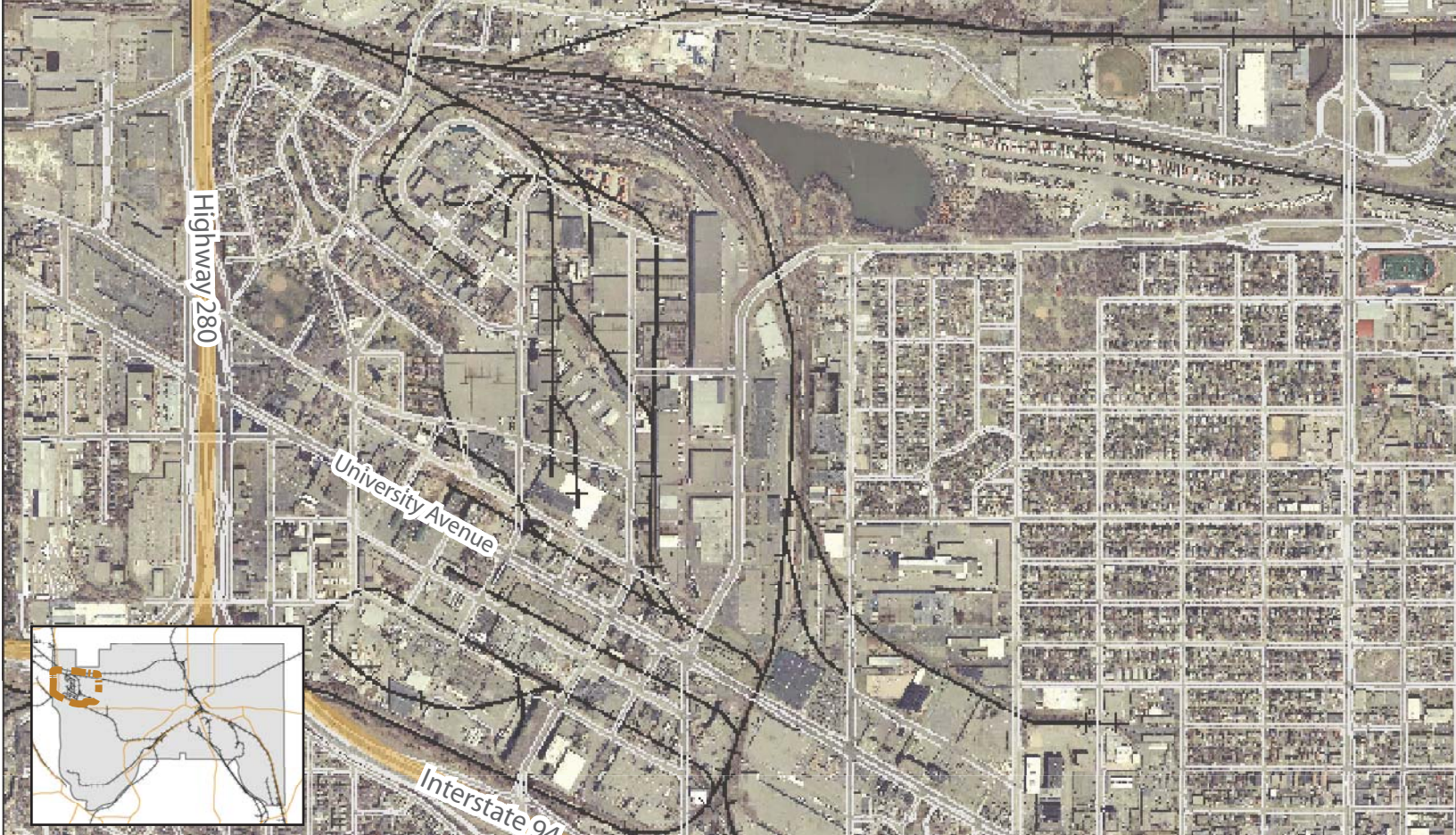
University Avenue, looking west towards the main north-south rail arterial between the Minnesota Transfer and tracks along I-94.

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University Avenue, a historic stretch of road linking the Minnesota Capitol in Saint Paul with Northeast Minneapolis, is arguably the most historically important and diverse stretch of road in the state. The Avenue spans residential neighborhoods, miles of storefronts, parallels the Mississippi River and, between roughly Fairview Avenue and Highway 280, divides a dense industrial district. For years, University Avenue has been home to a sprawling heavy manufacturing and industrial area, known as the Midway Industrial District. Naturally, heavy rail infrastructure was built to serve industrial properties, eventually forming a dense network of arteries and spurs. Moreover, for over 50 years, University Avenue was an auto-oriented corridor.

This will soon change. By 2014, University Avenue will feature a light rail line, bringing with it an unprecedented change in the built environment. A predominantly retail and industrial avenue will be home to housing and amenities such as parks and trails. According to the Central Corridor Development Strategy, Saint Paul's development



## STUDY AREA

framework for the light rail line, over 14,000 new housing units are projected for University Avenue as a result of light rail. As of 2008, the city and its citizens are planning for higher densities around light rail stations, new pedestrian amenities, mixed use buildings, etc. However, in so doing, it is vital that the existing and new residents of these 14,000 housing units will have access to a network of trails, recreation and natural areas.

The Central Corridor light rail line is projected to cost \$1 billion. With such a large public investment, it is important to fully capitalize on the benefits and amenities possible with light rail. As with any light rail project, the line must connect to a multi-modal network that will be used by passengers of all means of transportation. Successful light rail lines service not only passengers within walking distance, but those who arrive by bus connections, other rail lines or through a trail system. However, without the necessary infrastructure to encourage multi-modal transit, the ridership and development potential of the Central Corridor light rail line will be diminished.

This feasibility study examines the potential for rails to trails conversion in the Midway industrial area. Important factors include the amount of right of way available, ownership, connectivity, land values and proximity to other modes of transit, among others. These and other factors are mapped and diagrammed. Moreover, using dimensions from the Beltline, a successful rail conversion project in the city of Atlanta, it is possible to graphically demonstrate the feasibility of a similar project within the Midway.

Ultimately, these analyses are used to recommend potential development areas. The recommendations also offer an implementation plan for development that includes a timeline and list of development partners.



Typical scene along the Minnesota Transfer

## executive summary

This study proposes a general concept for a rails-to-trails conversion project in the Midway Industrial area, stretching from the northwest at Highway 280 and extending south and east into Fairview station and the proposed extension of the Midtown Greenway. The project is referred to as the “Midway Link”. The bicycle trail and pedestrian paths are structured into five urban districts, including:

- Western link
- St. Anthony Park
- Industrial Corridor
- Fairview Extension, and
- University Crossing

The concept and districts are outlined in detail in the “Proposals” section.

A typical cross section of the Midway Link includes a 15'-wide, two lane bicycle path, pedestrian lanes and trees and vegetation where necessary. At some points, the trail widens and includes “jewels,” or opportunities to create or enhance parkland.

The right-of-way for all sections of the project (not including jewels) does not exceed a width of 30’.

In addition to making general design proposals, this report offers recommendations for planning and implementation. The recommendations include:

**1. Launch a task force dedicated to implementing pedestrian and trail projects along the University Avenue corridor**

**2. Commission detailed studies of at least two pedestrian and/or trail projects**

**3. Begin discussions with railroad companies and property owners, but only after task force has established its work plan**

**4. Once all properties have been acquired in accordance with the detailed plan, create a non-profit corporation dedicated to building the project**

While the report offers a general design and organizational framework, more studies are needed to explore issues and opportunities in detail.



Saint Anthony Park Community garden, located along the Midway Link

## methodology

As a feasibility study, the report examines the economic, physical and social constraints of building such a project in the Midway area. The first section, titled *Precedent*, presents an overview of local and national rail conversion plans that are applied to the Midway conversion project. The Atlanta Beltline, a 23-mile rail conversion project that reconnects large sections of that city, has been studied extensively and thus has a considerable paper trail. One report, “The Beltline Emerald Necklace”, contains detailed dimensions of the rights-of-way along the trail corridor. These dimensions are applied to the Midway area to see if the potential rights-of-way are physically suitable for a similarly-sized project.

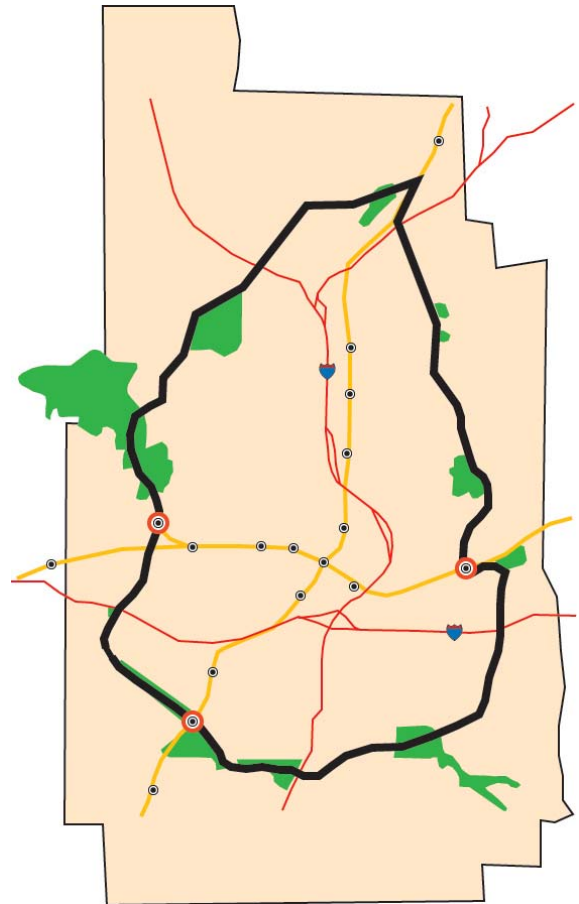
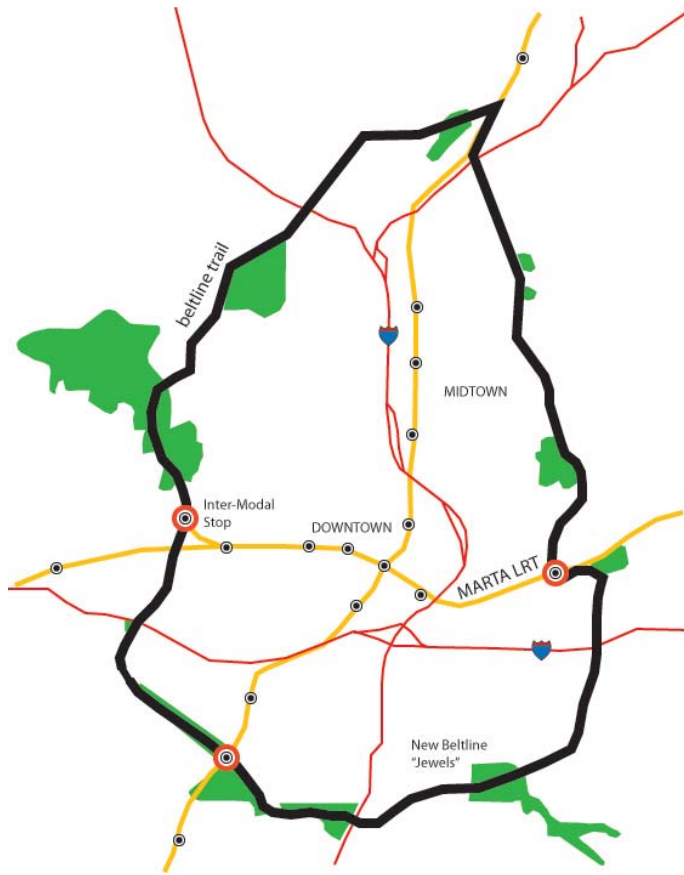
No planning project should operate in a vacuum. For this reason, the partnerships, funding mechanisms and public process from the Beltline project are also presented. At the local level, the report highlights the St. Paul extension of the Midtown Greenway (a potential trail conversion project) and the Minneapolis Grand Rounds Missing Link project (currently in the planning stage). These two projects are adjacent to the Midway Trails Initiative, with the Missing Link connecting to the

project’s northwest and western areas and the Midtown Greenway extension potentially linking to the southern edge of the Midway area.

*Site Analysis* examines important project-specific data such as land use, surrounding parks, land values, ownership, neighborhoods, topography, zoning, existing transportation infrastructure, etc. Using GIS mapping, it is possible to layer many of these data to identify the areas most suitable for trail conversion.

The third analysis section, *Application*, analyzes the dimensions from the Atlanta Beltline project within the Midway Trails project area. GIS overlays of the dimensions are mapped on top of Saint Paul parcels to see if it is physically possible to build a trail

The *Recommendations* section synthesizes the Analyses into two types of recommendations: Design (combining Site Analysis and Application) and Organizational (the partnerships, funding and scheduling possibilities for a potential rails to trails conversion project.) Ultimately, the goal of this report is to provide a general framework for project advocacy and implementation.



LEFT: The Atlanta Beltline as built, showing connections to MARTA and new parks  
 RIGHT: Scale comparison between the Beltline and the City of Minneapolis

# precedent

## THE ATLANTA BELTLINE PROJECT Atlanta, GA

Atlanta's largest infrastructure project in decades originally began as a thesis project by Georgia Tech graduate student Ryan Gravel. Gravel's project called for turning the 23-mile heavy rail line encircling the city into a continuous trail and transit corridor. Eventually, with encouragement from colleagues and local citizens, the Beltline evolved into a multi-million dollar transformation of the city that now connects 15 neighborhood planning units along 23 miles.

For its time, the Atlanta Beltline was an ambitious proposal. However, the concept of stimulating development and creating urban connections through a continuous greenway is not new. In a report by Yale University professor Alexander Garvin for the Trust for Public Land, Garvin cites the Minneapolis park system as the "best-located, best-financed, best designed and best-maintained public open space in America".<sup>1</sup> In addition to its parks,

Minneapolis is well-known for its Grand Rounds Scenic Byway, a public greenway constructed in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps.<sup>2</sup> Although built in the 1930s, the idea for the beltway was envisioned by landscape architect and professor Horace W.S. Cleveland in 1883. Cleveland also prepared the plan for the Saint Anthony Park neighborhood of Saint Paul. Incidentally, his namesake can be found on Cleveland Avenue, which bisects a major section of the Midway Trails Study Area.

While not a novel idea, it was much more of an uphill struggle to convert 23 miles of already developed industrial land into parks than it was for Minneapolis to build its system on barren land. Before major development reached the outskirts of early Minneapolis, the city wisely followed Cleveland's plan and purchased land adjacent to the proposed Grand Rounds corridor very inexpensively. Today, however, modern Atlanta is a post-industrial city that is fully developed. Prior to the Beltline project, the corridor was a patchwork of vacant warehouses,

large industrial complexes, parks, residential neighborhoods, scenic areas and brownfield sites, among other land uses.

Coincidentally, as shown by the diagram on page 6, the Atlanta Beltline project covers roughly the same area and follows a similar alignment to Minneapolis' Grand Rounds. To implement a greenway plan as far-reaching as the Grand Rounds, the Beltline project had to garner enough political support to warrant a heavy up-front public investment.

Political support for the Beltline eventually grew strong enough to establish a foundation, development corporation, a partnership with the Trust for Public Land and full cooperation by the City of Atlanta. However, this support came because of a well-crafted argument for a 21st-century greenway that would yield enormous political, social and quality of life benefits. Shown at right is a short list of the numbers associated with the Beltline project.

As of 2008, the Beltline is still in the planning stages. As illustrated by the initial economic development numbers, the Beltline is already acting as a magnet for new housing, development clusters and serves an immediate population of over 65,000 people.

## THE ATLANTA BELTLINE: BY THE NUMBERS

### CONNECTIVITY

2,544 acres of parks and trails, collectively known as the Emerald Necklace

2,014 acres of Beltline parks

23-mile Beltline Trail

Population within 1/2 mile of Beltline: 65,591

Will connect 45 neighborhoods and 11/12 city council wards

#### *Within 1/2 mile:*

- 14 schools (8,537 students, 925 teachers)
- 32 playgrounds
- 22 basketball courts
- 9 recreational centers

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

530 acres of public/private development

35 development projects proposed or under construction

6,600 additional housing units

1.1 million square feet of additional retail

\$20 billion of new economic development over 30 years

30,000 additional permanent jobs

### FINANCE

\$2.5 billion cost, \$1.7 billion of which will be funded through a tax allocation district (TAD)



An active freight line along the Beltline corridor  
*Source: The Beltline Emerald Necklace*

Figure 8-1

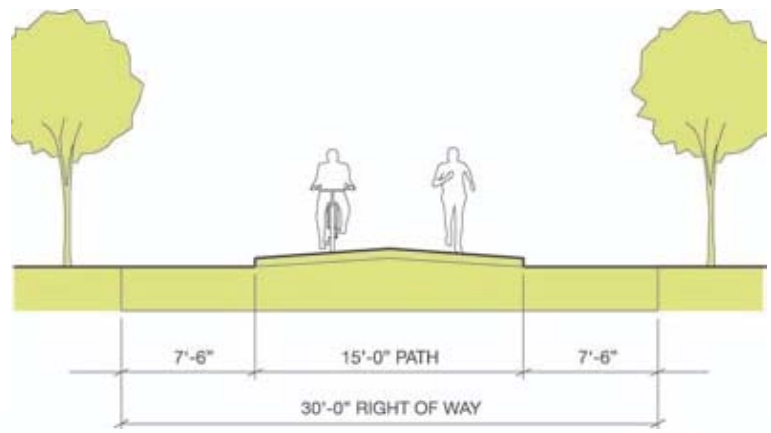


Figure 8-2

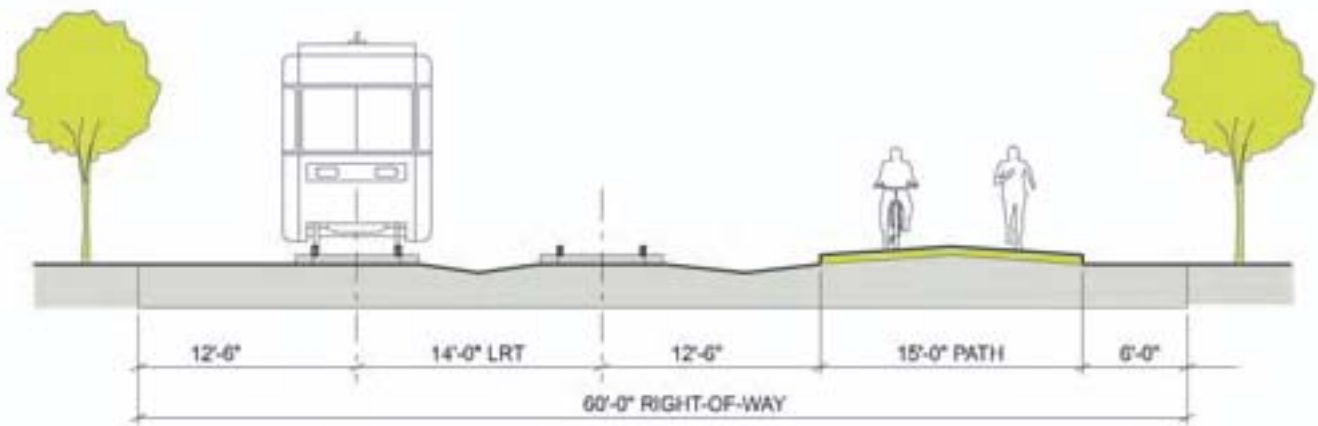


Figure 8-1: Typical Beltline cross section for simple trail and drainage swales  
Figure 8-2: Typical Beltline cross section with trail, drainage swales and two-track transit

The Beltline is projected to take 20-25 years to fully develop and consists of two phases. The first phase will involve acquiring the necessary rights-of-way to build a trail and, in phase two, a two-track light rail transit line. A substantial portion of the projected cost of \$2.5 billion will go towards constructing the transit line, while only a fraction of that amount is necessary for land acquisition and trail construction.

In reality, eight potential cross sections are proposed in the Garvin report. Some cross sections are as wide as 175', including streets, buildings, pocket parks, transit and a trail. These additional cross sections can be found in the appendix. Moreover, in locations with ample right-of-way, these additional cross sections are presented as potential design configurations for a Midway Link project.

This study assumes that the maximum right-of-way needed for any stretch of the Midway Link (not including park land) is 30' (similar to figure 8-1 above).



RIGHT: Birdseye view of SEMI heavy rail tracks, roughly where route G2 is proposed. One rail car is approximately 50' long

LEFT: Proposed routes for the Missing Link

## GRAND ROUNDS MISSING LINK Minneapolis, MN

At the local level, the city of Minneapolis is currently planning to complete H.W.S. Cleveland's original vision for a continuous greenway loop. Known as the Grand Rounds Missing Link, the project aims to connect Northeast Minneapolis to Southeast Minneapolis. This is not the first time that the city has tried to build the missing link. Shortly after constructing the rest of the Grand Rounds in the late 1920s, the city attempted projects in 1931, 1939 and throughout the 1970s. The latest and most concerted planning effort began in 2007, with the city holding a series of public meetings on several potential routes.<sup>1</sup>

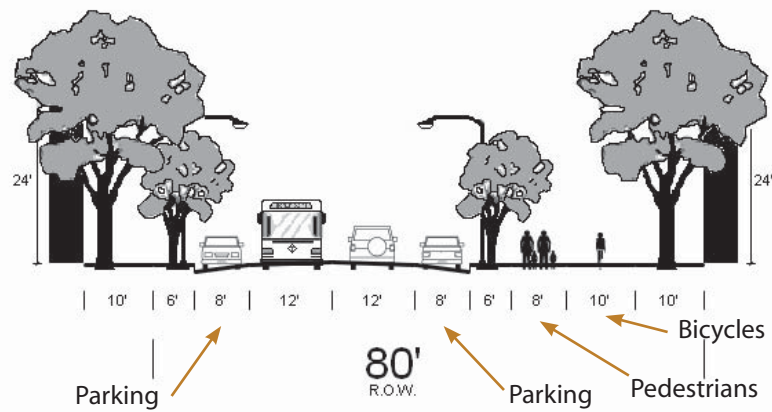
Most of the potential routes for the 2007 planning process are shown in the map above<sup>1</sup>. The blue routes use Stinson Boulevard to connect Northeast across the Transfer tracks, with routes terminating along SE 14th Avenue and Oak Street. The advantage of these routes is the relatively short

bridges required to traverse the tracks. This route would also more directly connect Northeast to the Gophers stadium (under construction), the University of Minnesota campus and, ultimately, East River Road. However, as many as 30 homes would be demolished under some of the proposed routes. Many residents in the Como neighborhood have voiced strong opposition to this prospect.<sup>2</sup>

Red routes have the advantage of cutting through industrial properties, rather than having to demolish houses as is the case with blue routes. The trade off with most blue routes are the extensive bridges required to span the wide tracks of the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial area. Bridges add considerable cost to the project. For these reasons, some have expressed the desire to consider routing the Missing Link through the Saint Anthony Park neighborhood and Midway Industrial area, precisely within the boundaries of this report's study area.

There are potentially substantial advantages to exploring a Saint Paul route for the Missing Link.

<sup>1</sup>Keeping the Promise: Completing the Grand Rounds <sup>2</sup>Taking Como homes for 'missing link' is not acceptable, The Bridge



TOP: Grand Rounds typical section  
 ABOVE: Conceptual alignment for the Saint Paul extension of the Midtown Greenway<sup>1</sup>

The abundance of abandoned and little-used rail lines in the Midway Industrial area provides a convenient and potentially cost-effective way of completing the link. In addition, with light rail arriving in 2014, there is the potential to create more regional links by establishing multi-modal hubs at light rail stops. Other possibilities exist for connecting to notoriously underserved neighborhoods in Saint Paul, connecting to the U of M Transitway (which would serve students at the Saint Paul and Minneapolis campuses) and stimulating mixed-use redevelopment in the Midway Industrial area. With dozens of rail spurs throughout the Midway, a Saint Paul Grand Rounds link could act as a spine that would connect to a network of local trails.

#### SAINT PAUL EXTENSION OF THE MIDTOWN GREENWAY Minneapolis and Saint Paul, MN

The Saint Paul TMO, an advocacy group for transit and bicycling, has pushed for an extension of the Minneapolis Midtown Greenway into Saint Paul<sup>2</sup>. The idea has been well received by the city, which

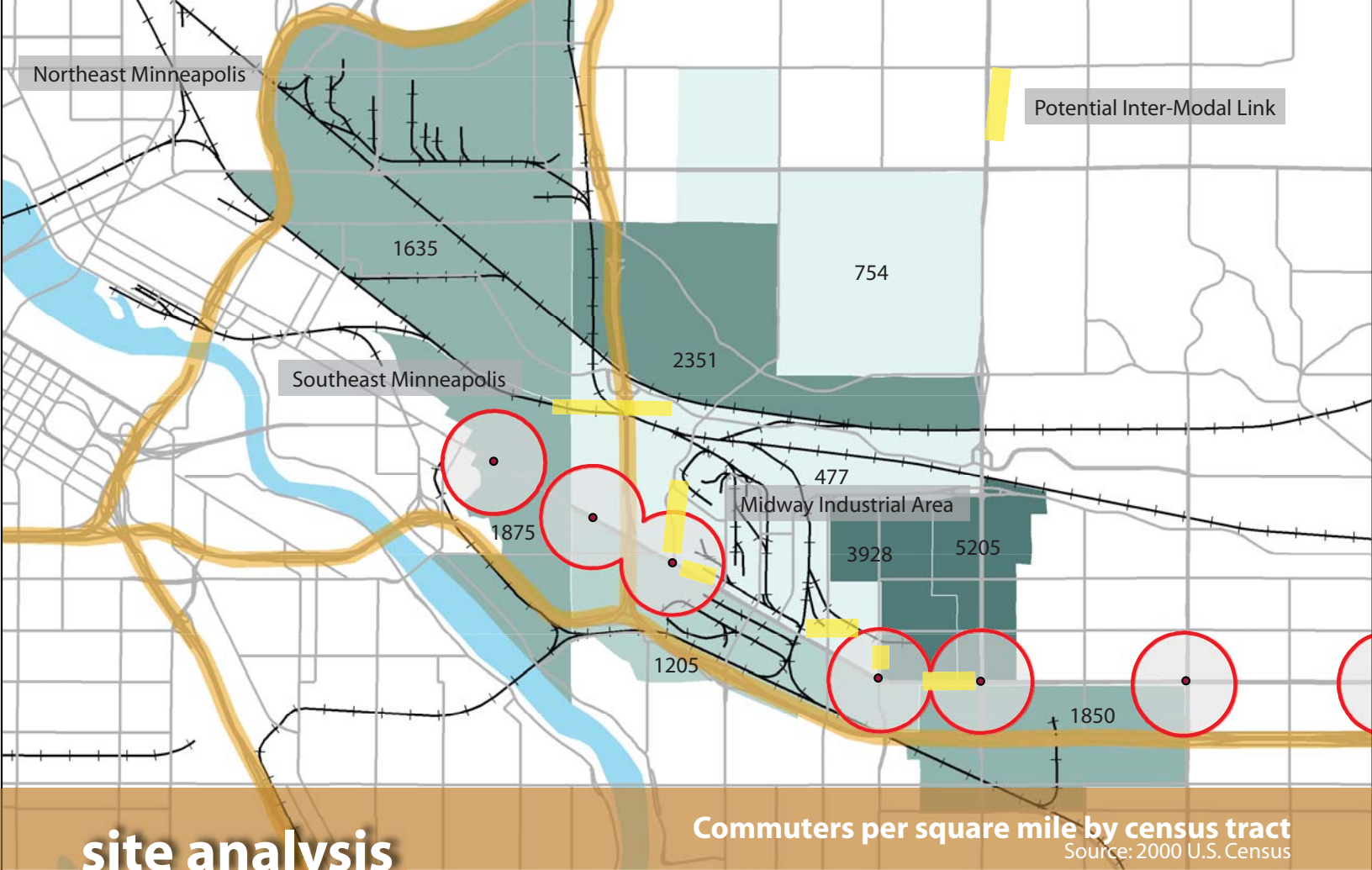
<sup>1</sup>[www.streetsections.com](http://www.streetsections.com)

<sup>2</sup>[www.midwaytmo.org/greenway.htm](http://www.midwaytmo.org/greenway.htm)

has pledged money for the first of four phases. The first phase extends from the intersection of 35E and Ayd Mill Road to around Marshall Street, phase two connects the existing greenway at the river to the Midway area and phase three connects phases one and two.

Land use concepts and design guidelines for the corridor were developed by a landscape architecture graduate student in "A Vision for the Future Saint Paul Greenway" (Vision). While this feasibility study does not make site-specific design recommendations, the design concepts for areas significant to the Midway Trails project are highlighted. These areas include the roundhouse (shown above) and at-grade connections to stretches of University Avenue within phase 3.

These two projects are highly significant, since there is a golden opportunity to make an enduring connection through the Midway Industrial Area. Doing so makes the argument for all three projects much stronger and could potentially create a highly integrated bicycle network. These potential connections are explored in the "Proposals" section.

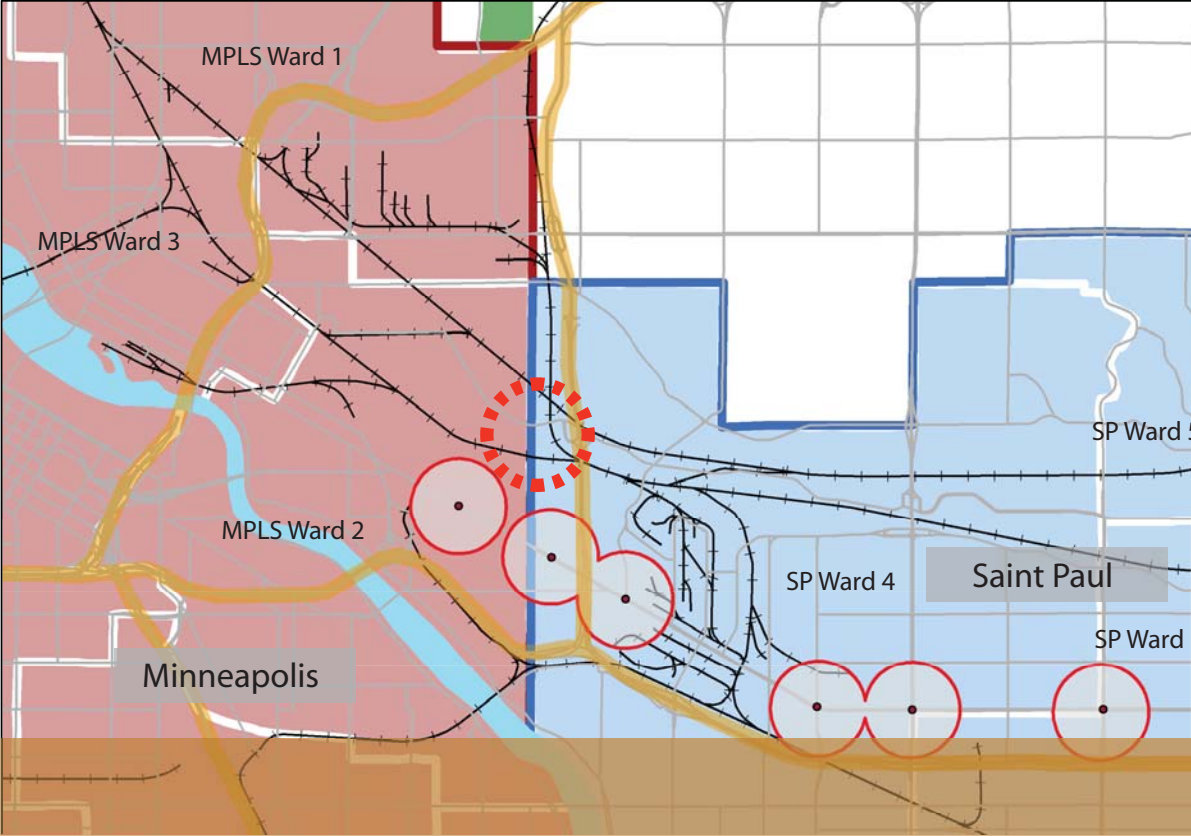


Historically, the Midway area of Saint Paul and Minneapolis' Northeast and Southeast neighborhoods have been isolated from one another. As discussed earlier in the report, the Grand Rounds Missing Link project aims to connect Southeast and Northeast Minneapolis through a greenway. In Saint Paul, Highway 280, heavy rail lines and a lack of east-west pedestrian connections severs the city from its neighbor to the west. However, an extensive network of rail lines and spurs directly links all three neighborhoods. Thus, there is great potential to capture a much larger share of users in the Midway Link project than under existing infrastructure conditions.

This potential is illustrated in the map above. The map shows the number of commuters per square mile in adjacent census tracts. Since it is a largely industrial area, the census tract for the Midway Industrial area has a relatively low share of commuters. By contrast, surrounding residential neighborhoods in Minneapolis and Saint Paul have a high proportion of commuters that could potentially use the Midway Link. Yellow lines show connections between rail spurs and proposed light rail transit

stations and illustrate the potential for inter-modal transit. By establishing additional bus, bicycle and pedestrian connections to the light rail stations, it is possible to increase ridership and expand the reach of the Twin Cities' alternative transportation network.


This section provides an analysis of the existing physical, demographic and economic conditions within the Midway Industrial area. Factors to be analyzed include topography, existing infrastructure, existing parks and destinations, and land use and zoning, among others. Much of this information is conveyed using annotated and diagrammed maps with minimal text. Other important factors include the major land owners and the current estimated market value (EMV) of corridor and adjacent land. However, it is important to understand that while EMV is a good estimate of the cost to acquire land for the Midway Link, these figures are not reflect the cost of a whole project. Additional funds will be needed for consultants, materials and labor. These and other limitations are addressed in the "Limitations" section.



**Political Boundaries**  
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

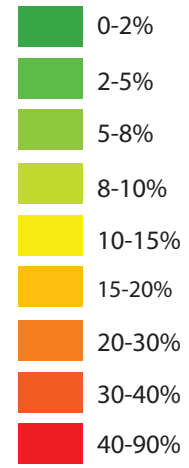
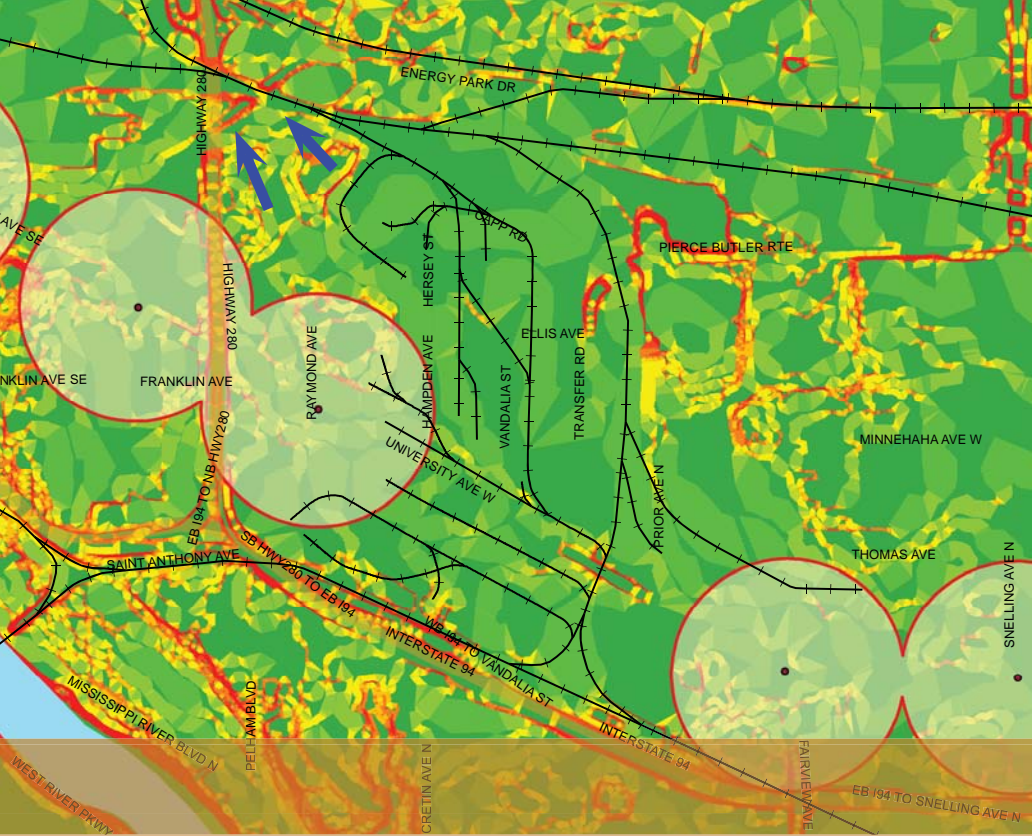
The majority of the project area is located within ward 4 of Saint Paul. However, an important connection to the Grand Rounds and University of Minnesota Transitway must be made across the municipal border in Minneapolis. It will be important to include the city of Minneapolis and its Park Board in planning for this connection.



 Redevelopment opportunities around private greenways

**Existing Road Infrastructure**  
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

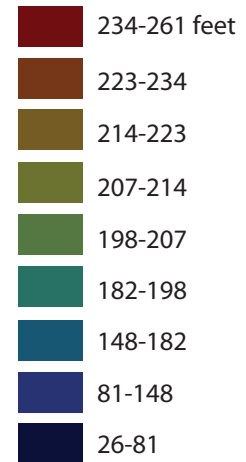
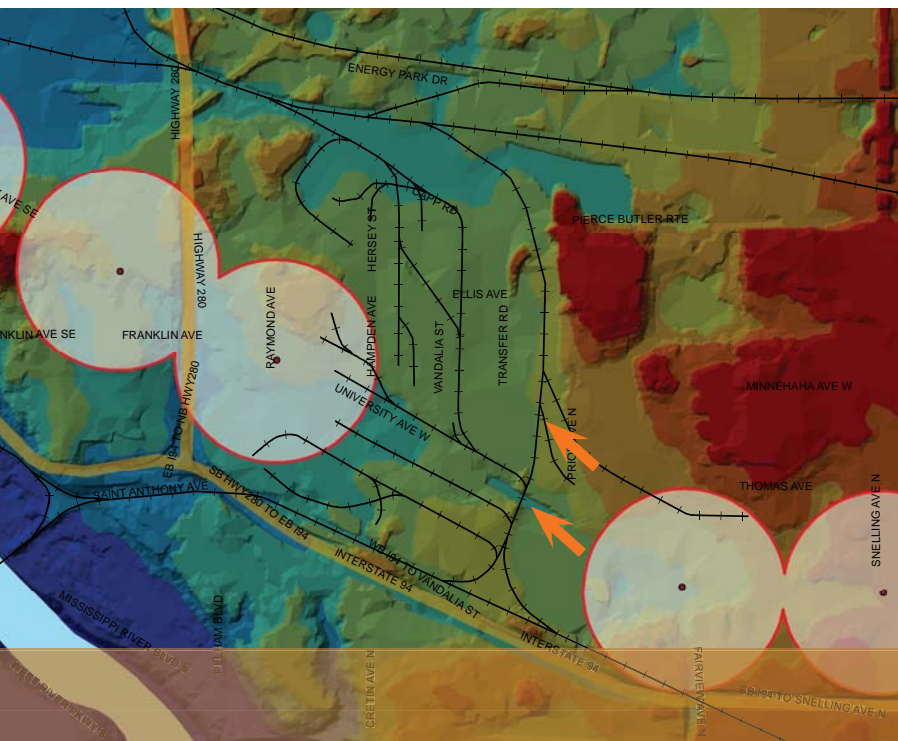
Fortunately, the study area is connected through a dense network of roads. These will serve to provide on-street routes if it is not possible to make a link through rail corridors. The local road system also promotes mixed-use redevelopment, which would work well in tandem with a converted rail spur. Excellent opportunities for redevelopment along a rail spur are shown above.



← Slopes in excess of 10%

**Slope**  
Source: Ramsey County

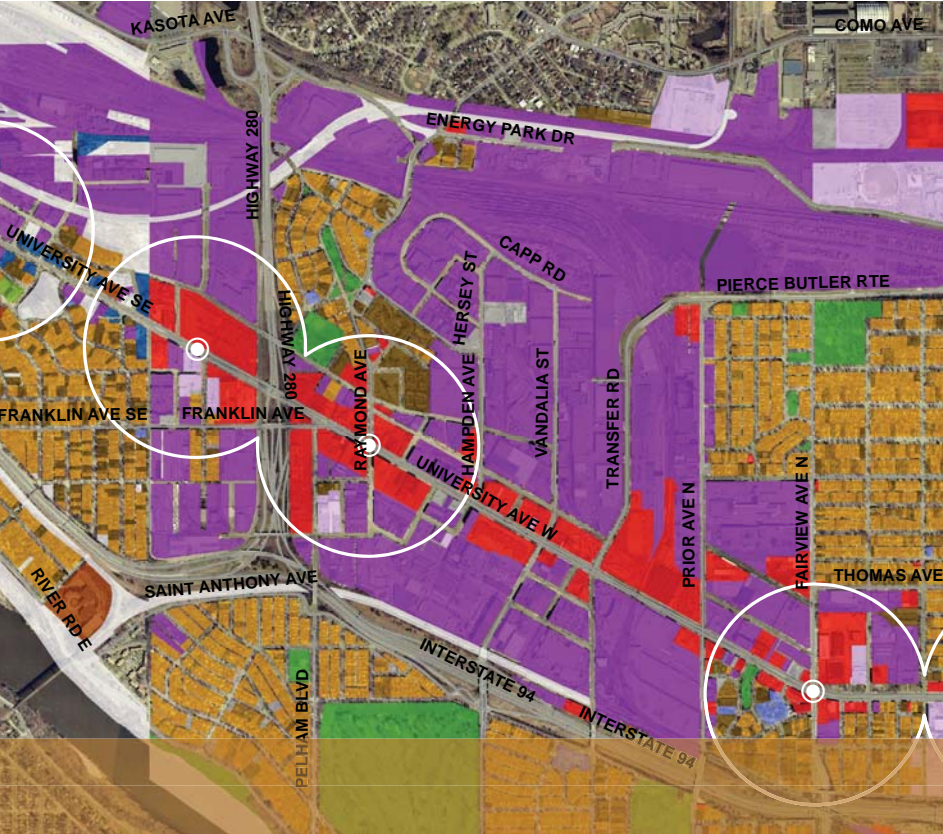
One of the advantages of rail to trail conversion is the fact that heavy rail lines were intentionally built on gradual slopes. In general, most slopes within the study area are no steeper than 10%, which is generally accepted as the maximum slope for bicycle trails. There may be some difficulty when transferring from the Midway Link to the Grand Rounds, as indicated by the arrow above. This can be addressed by a grading plan.



↗ Bridge needed

**Elevation**  
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

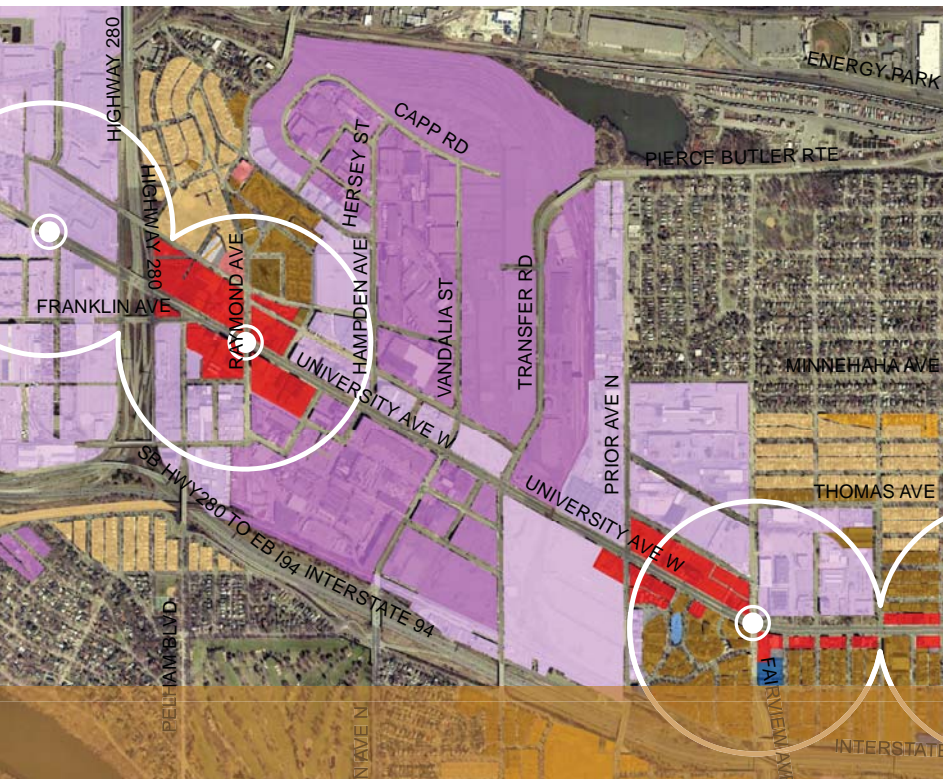
Since slope is a product of elevation, there are very few major elevation differences throughout the study area. One major topographic change is University Avenue between Transfer and Prior. Like the existing heavy rail line, the Midway Link will require a bridge at this location in order to connect with the Saint Paul Greenway to the south.



- Commercial
- Industrial
- Single Unit Residential
- Duplex Residential
- Multi-Unit Residential
- Institutional
- Parks
- Religious

**Existing Land Use**  
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

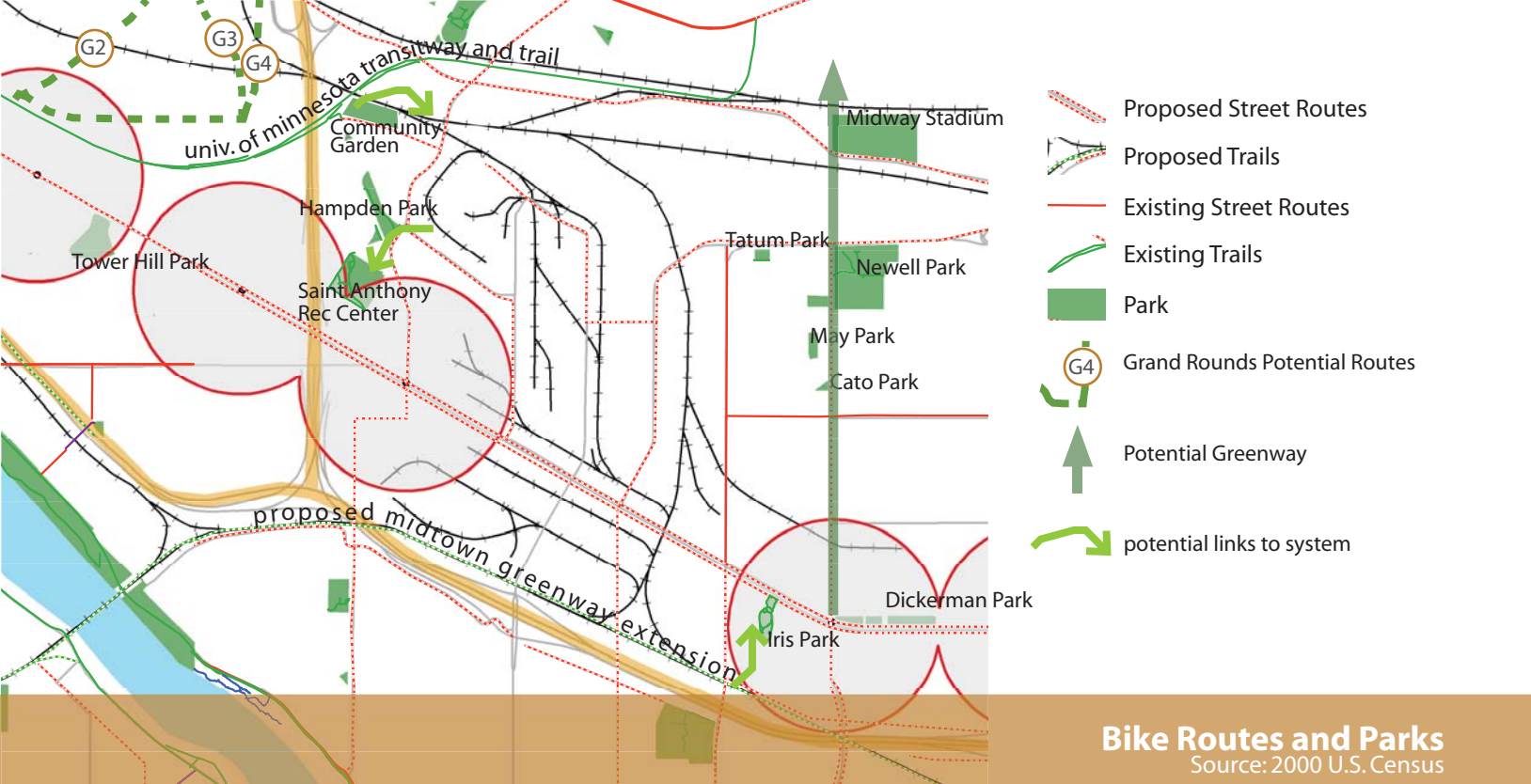
Two distinct retail hubs exist around Raymond and Fairview avenues. Medium and high density residential buildings are located just north of the proposed Raymond station, which comprise an important high-density, mixed-use community that should be served by the Midway Link. More high-density residential should be developed at Fairview into the future in order to justify an eastern extension of the Link.



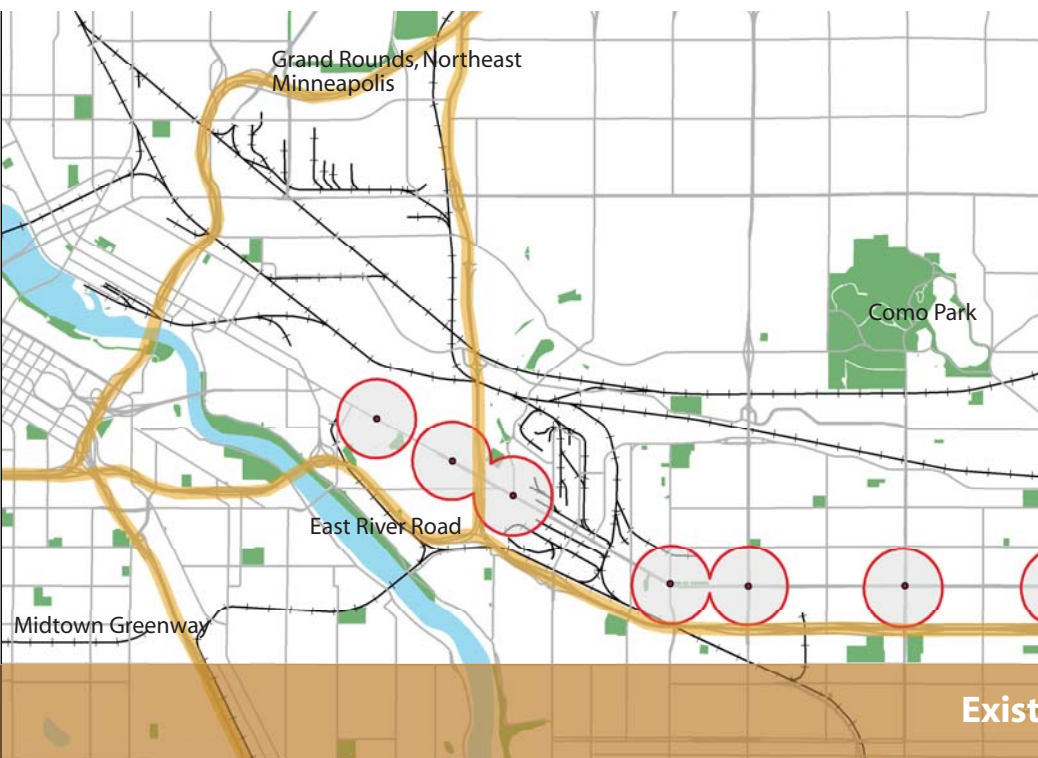
- One Family Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Multi Family
- Community Business
- General Business
- Light Industrial
- General Industrial
- Vehicular Parking
- Office Service

**Zoning**  
Source: 2000 U.S. Census

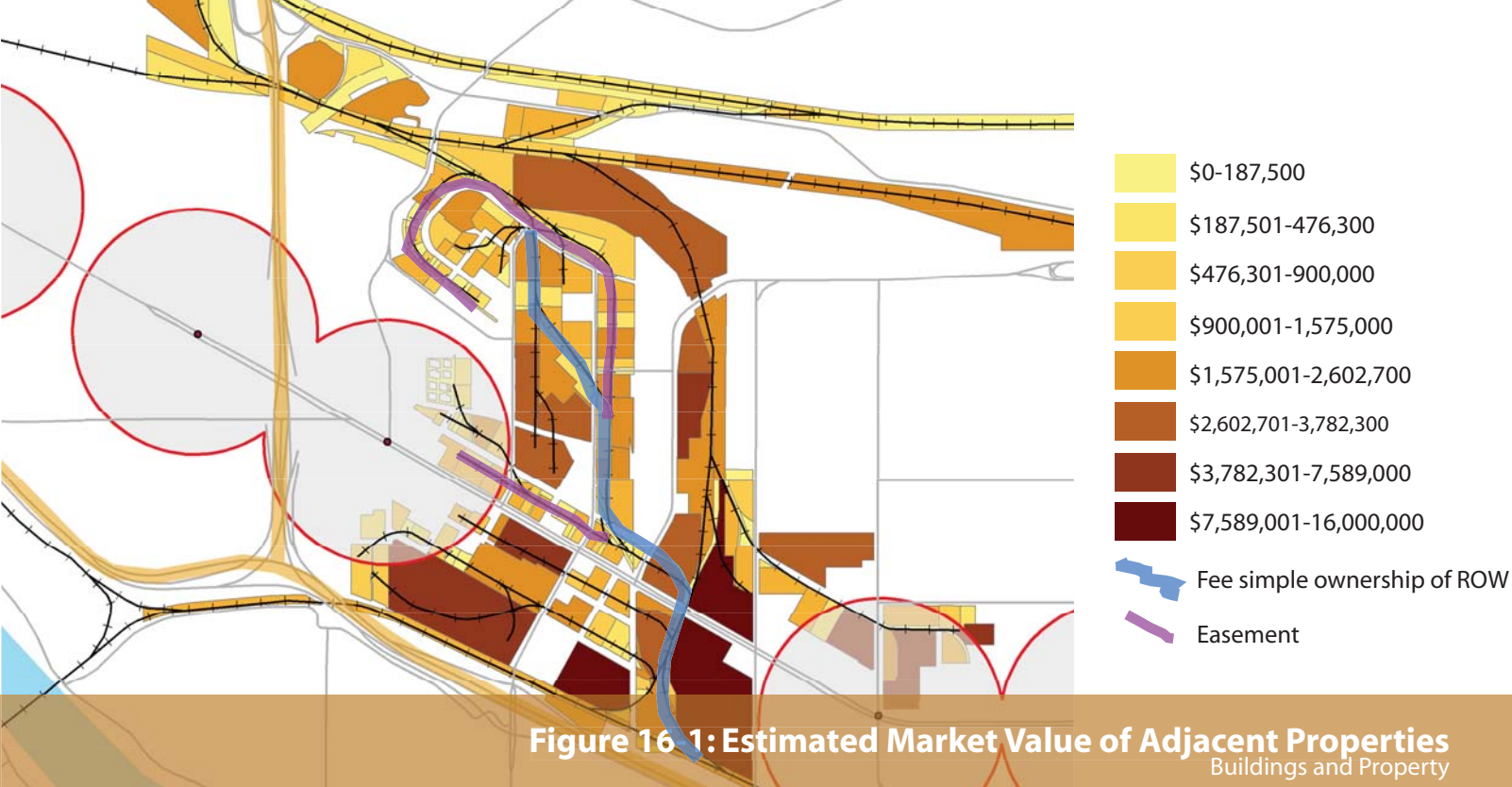
The proposed zoning seeks to confine retail uses to Raymond and Fairview. In addition, no new residential or mixed use districts are proposed under this plan. With the Midway Link, more opportunities for higher density residential and mixed-use structures are possible by providing a recreational amenity and commuting mode in otherwise auto-dominated industrial areas. Zoning changes are necessary to reflect the new infrastructure of the Link.



Parks in the study area are plentiful but isolated. Hampden Park and the Saint Anthony Rec Center near Raymond are close enough to a rail spur to warrant a connection, while Dickerman Park is directly connected to the system near Fairview. In the future, smaller pocket parks along Fairview may be connected to the system via a proposed Fairview greenway, with the potential to connect the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus.



At a larger scale, the heavy rail system connects to important regional and local parks. These include Como Park to the east, East River Road/Mississippi River boulevard to the southwest (via the Midtown Greenway extension) and potentially Northeast Minneapolis. The Midway Link can provide the essential connection between major recreational destinations in both cities.



While many properties adjacent to rails in the study area are worth over \$1 million, it is not necessary to buy or create an easement for the entire parcel. In some areas, the Minnesota Transfer owns the track (if it exists) and right of way, while in others, the rail is operated though an easement. In areas with Minnesota Transfer ownership, long sections of property are no more than \$480,000.



**Figure 16-2: Major Railroad Companies that Own Property and Public Property**

The rail spurs in the Midway Link study area are owned by one of three companies: Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Canadian Pacific Railway or Minnesota Commerical Railway. While most spurs are owned by Minnesota Commercial or Burlington Northern, there is a short section of land along the University Transitway that will need to be acquired.



## Rail Status

At the design phase of the Midway Link, careful attention should be given to trail reaches that parallel live rail lines. Additional land will need to be acquired in order to construct a barricade between the trail and a live track. A significant obstacle exists south of University Avenue, where the trail would cross three active rail lines. However, the frequency of rail crossings has substantially dropped off in recent years.

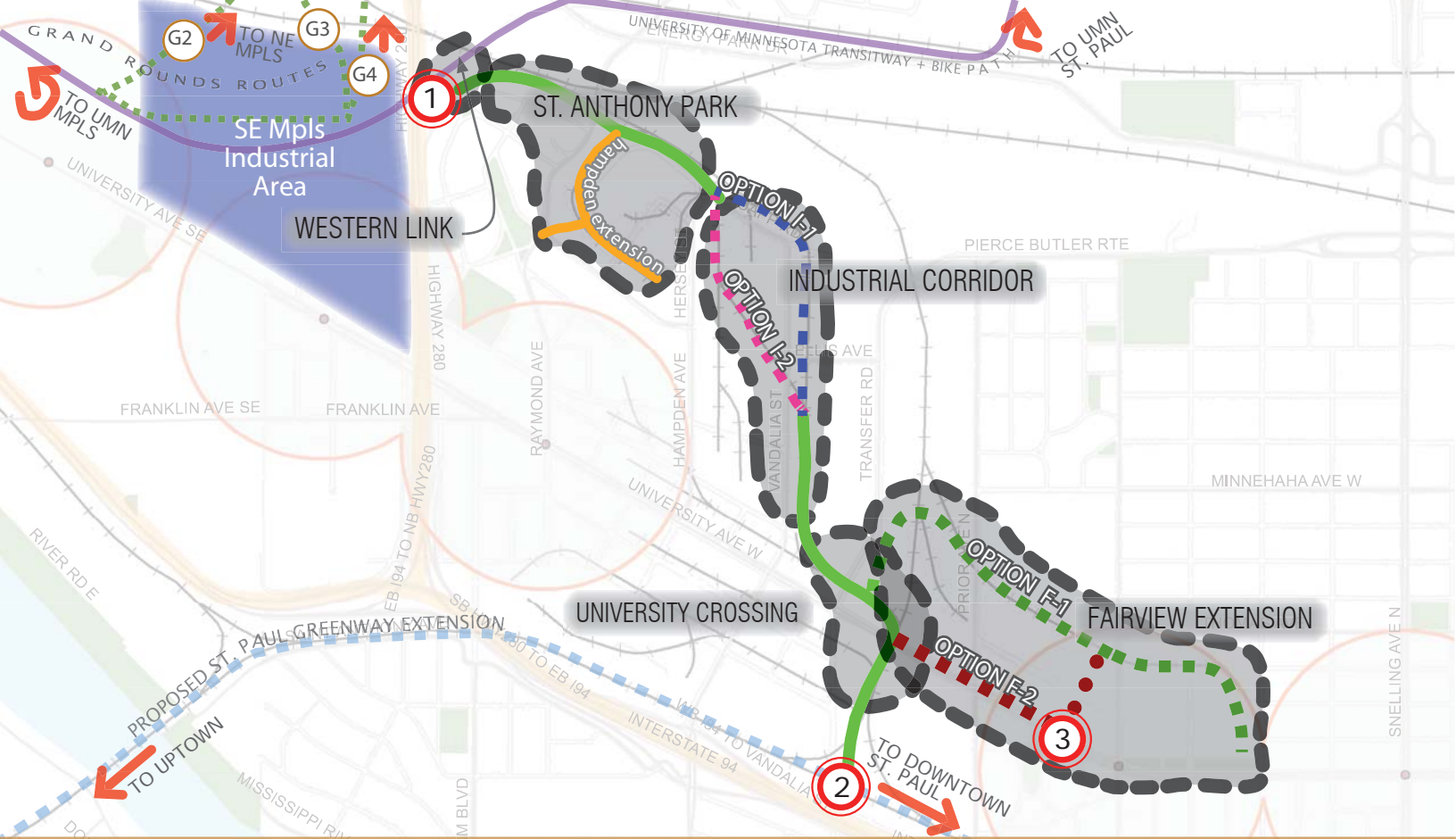


Figure 18-1: CONCEPT PLAN | The Midway Link is proposed as a set of five distinct urban districts

## proposal

A successful Midway Link will make seamless connections to the following three major points of interest, shown above:

- ① University of Minnesota Transitway (and possibly the Grand Rounds missing link)
- ② Proposed St. Paul extension of the Midtown Greenway
- ③ Fairview light rail station (2014)

These connections are essential to the project, as each links up with other transit/bikeway projects that would be the source of thousands of potential users. Without these links, the project merely functions as an “arm” of other transit projects, rather than the nexus of major regional transportation systems.

Within the Midway Link system, there are five proposed urban districts. Each district contains a different set of programmatic circumstances and design challenges that contribute to the unique and varied character of the Link. The following section outlines proposals and opportunities for each of these urban districts, beginning with the Western Link and moving east geographically to

Fairview Extension. These proposals examine potential routes, redevelopment opportunities, connections to major infrastructure and institutions and identify areas for further study.

The proposals outlined herein should be interpreted as the first step towards a more thorough examination of a Midway Link project. Proposals do not include construction documents, engineering specifications or detailed proformas that would be a part of a more rigorous and time-consuming implementation project. For example, the exact contours and spatial determinants will be established by a professional survey and an accurate cost estimate should be prepared by contractors. These two factors alone could significantly alter the project as proposed here.

Ultimately, this study finds that a Midway Link project is generally feasible from a spatial perspective and justified by surrounding land uses, infrastructure connections and redevelopment potential. Suggestions for future studies and advocacy are outlined in the “Recommendations” section.



## western link

The Western Link connects to the existing University of Minnesota Transitway and bike trail north of Robbins Street. Highway 280 passes over this connection, providing an excellent opportunity for a grand gateway into the Midway Link (see figure 19-1 at right). West of 280, the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial area (SEMI), a large business and light industrial park, occupies the area between the tracks and future Westgate station to the south (see figure on page 18). A proposal for a complementary “green” industrial district has been prepared by University UNITED in the Midway Industrial Area. If implemented, the SEMI and green business parks would be directly linked via this gateway. In addition, the Midway Industrial area would also be linked to both the Saint Paul and Minneapolis campuses of the University of Minnesota.

Three routes of the Grand Rounds Missing Link project are proposed to terminate near the Western Link, connected by the UMN Transitway (Figure 18-1). If one of these routes is selected, the Midway Link would be connected to Northeast Minneapolis and the entire Grand Rounds Scenic Byway.





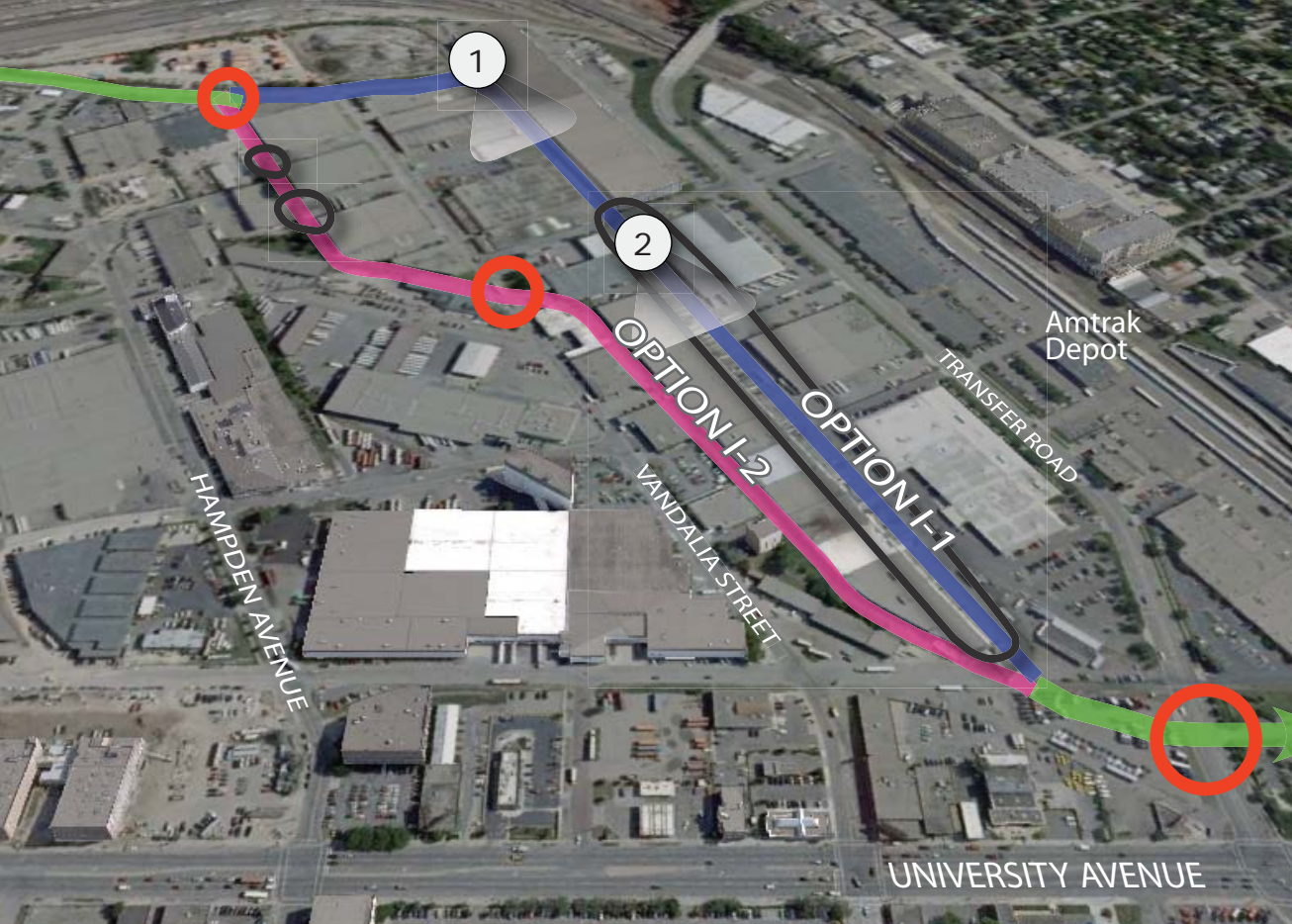
## st. anthony park





St. Anthony Park is a largely residential neighborhood in the northeast corner of St. Paul. Framed by Highway 280 to the west, the Midway Industrial area to the east and Minnesota Transfer to the north, the southern half of the neighborhood is largely isolated. A St. Anthony Park reach of the Midway Link would reconnect the area with the city of Minneapolis and provide additional redevelopment opportunities with a spur leading to Hampden Park.

Much of the Midway Link through this neighborhood lies adjacent to the St. Anthony Park community garden (Figure 20-2). The garden is an actively used social space that is frequented by local residents. This direct connection is perfectly complementary to the trail, since it promotes “eyes on the trail” and encourages use of the trail by residents. The garden is one of the Link’s “jewels” and should be enhanced to accommodate a rest stop and places for observation.

The link could potentially extend even deeper into the neighborhood through another rail spur (indicated above in orange). Currently acting as a spine for industrial buildings, a Hampden Extension would terminate at an additional “jewel” in Hampden Park, with a highly-visible street-crossing at Raymond. Adjacent to such an attractive amenity, industrial and warehouse buildings along the spur could be converted into artist housing or apartments.





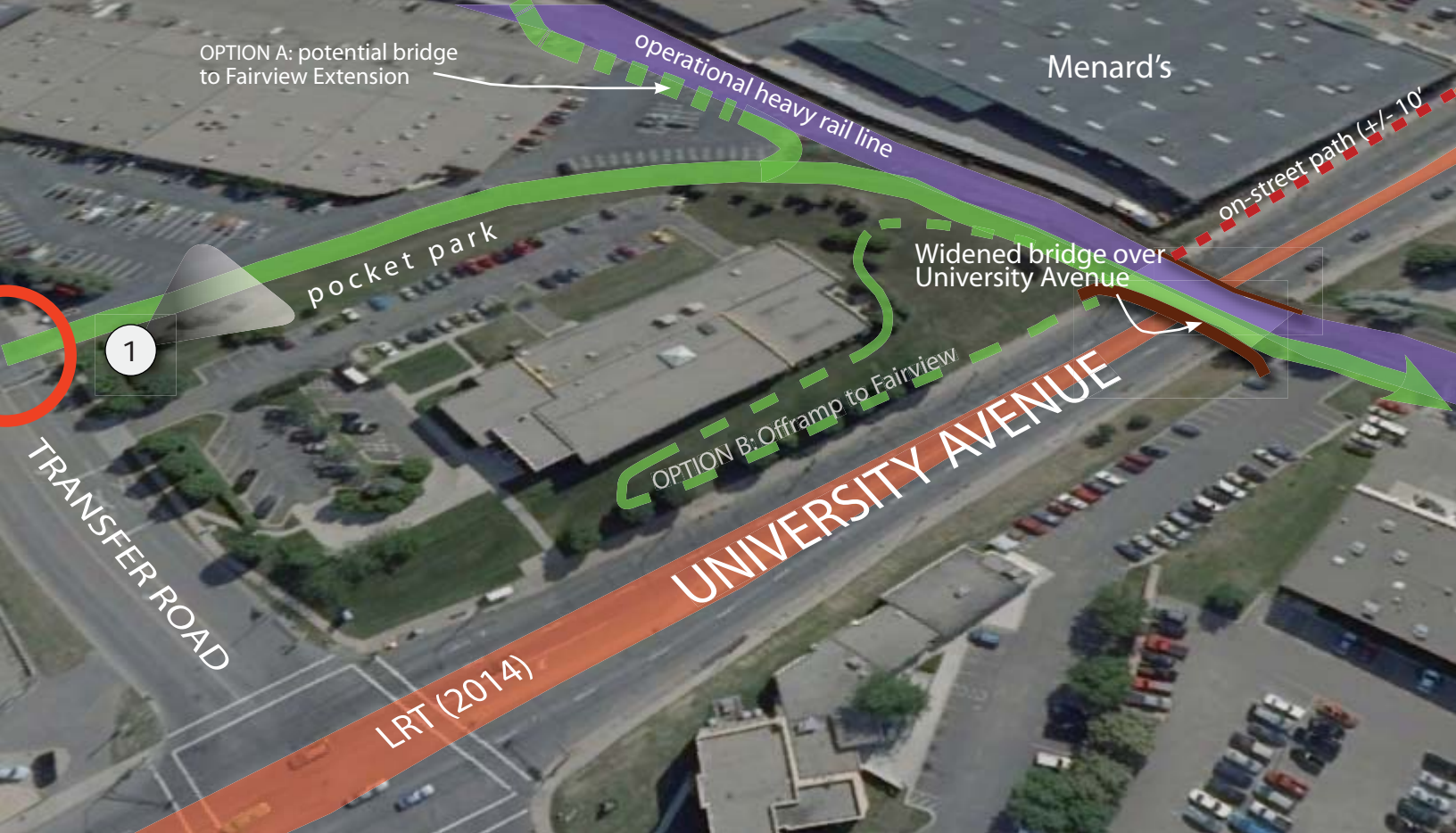
-  alternative route 1
-  alternative route 2
-  sections used as truck parking/circulation
-  street crossing

## industrial corridor

This expansive reach is the heart of the Midway Link. All spurs in this district are controlled entirely by Minnesota Commercial Railway, a consolidated railroad company that evolved out of the former Minnesota Transfer in the 1980s (See figure 16-2, page 16). This is highly significant, since property negotiations for most of the project would be with a single owner.

Spatially, the Midway Industrial area is ideally suited to bicycle corridors. Two formerly active rail spurs divide the properties between Vandalia and Transfer along a north-south axis, resulting in 30-foot wide corridors (see figures 21-1). However, while no buildings occupy the corridors, semi-truck parking lots can be found primarily in Option 1 (see figure 21-2). These lots would have to be removed if Option 1 is selected. While Option 2 might appear to be the natural choice for a link, a trail would have to cross streets in two locations (indicated by red circles above). Both options begin and end in the same location.





## university crossing

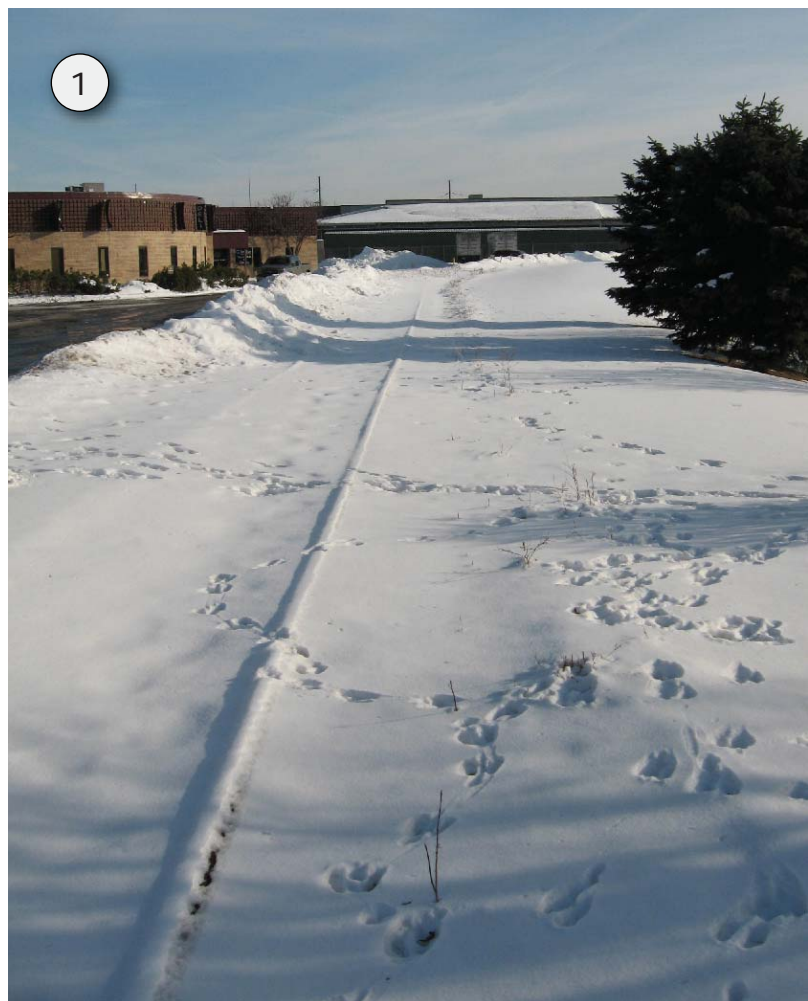
At University Crossing, the Link makes an important connection across University Avenue and south to the greenway extension. The spur in this district has a wide right of way (see figure 22-1 at right), which affords a great opportunity for a pocket park.

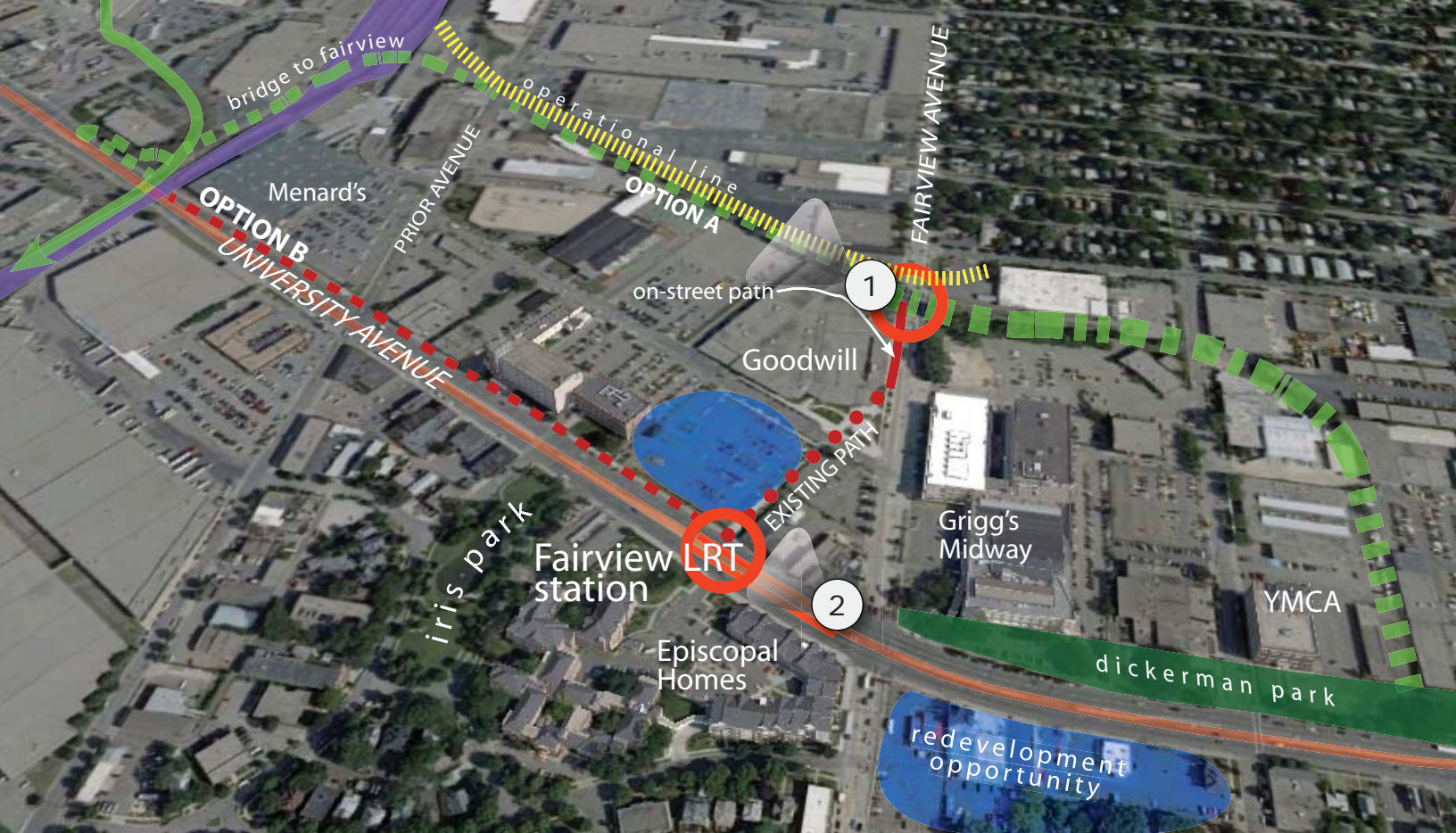
This district could also provide a link to the forthcoming Fairview light rail station, located roughly 1/4-mile east of Transfer Road. The following two options exist:

**OPTION A:** Construct a pedestrian bridge that runs north and east over the heavy rail line, eventually linking up with an east-west rail spur and terminating at Fairview station and Dickerman Park.

**OPTION B:** Construct an off-ramp that carries riders down to University Avenue and to Fairview station along street-level bike lanes.

These options are evaluated in the next section, "Fairview Extension".





## fairview extension

Even without light rail, the intersection of University and Fairview is vibrant. The intersection is framed by over 100,000 square feet of office space (Grigg's Midway), a senior housing project (Episcopal Homes, Iris Park, Dickerman Park, Goodwill) and two potential redevelopment areas. Daily, thousands of commuters and customers descend upon the intersection, which means that making a connection to the Midway Link is vital.

Option A uses a spur two blocks north of University, with a generous (and wooded) right-of-way (see figure 23-1). This spur crosses Fairview and loops southeast to Dickerman Park. At Fairview, a short on-street route connects to an existing plaza and pedestrian path at the Goodwill building, ultimately ending at Fairview station.

Option B is an on-street route that connects three long blocks along University Avenue. While likely less expensive than the northern route (which requires a bridge), Option B would require at least 12' of right-of-way along University Avenue. Further studies are needed to determine if the proposed light rail cross section can accommodate both light rail and bicycle lanes. Figure 23-2 shows the terminus of the Goodwill pedestrian path at right.





## recommendations

### **1. Launch a task force dedicated to implementing pedestrian and trail projects along the University Avenue corridor**

This task force should include members from affected district councils and neighborhood organizations, city council members, city staff, advocacy groups and dedicated residents. In the case of the Atlanta Belt Line, the Trust For Public Land (TPL) initially provided all support for the project. TPL met with property owners and, over a several-year period, acquired the necessary financing to purchase (either fee simple or through easements) land for the Belt Line. After the land was purchased, TPL partnered with AtlantaBeltLine, Inc., a non-profit group dedicated to planning and implementing the project. It is strongly recommended that the University Avenue task force partner with the Minnesota Chapter of TPL.

### **2. Commission detailed studies of at least two pedestrian and/or trail projects**

For example, while this report identifies the general concept of a Midway Link and its overall feasibility, it

does not provide specifics on project cost, phasing, amount of engineering work necessary, soil surveys, detailed plans, perspectives and cross sections of trail and jewels, land surveys, etc. All projects should have a comprehensive and thorough investigation into these and other issues before proceeding to the next phase.

### **3. Begin discussions with railroad companies and property owners, but only after task force has established its work plan**

The task force should develop extensive work plans for each project that include a timeline, a contact list of important stakeholders, available and desired resources, and assigned roles for all members (outreach, grant writing, planning, etc.).

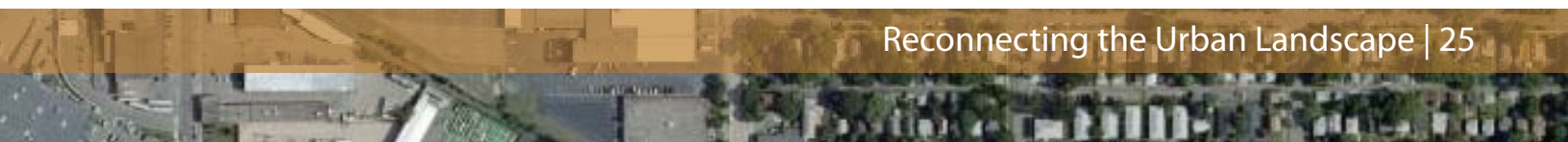
Once the work plans have been prepared and the task force has amassed significant political impetus from the community, the task force can begin to enter into conversations with affected property owners and railroad companies. The overall goal of the discussions should be to maximize the gains of all parties involved. To this end, the exact

configuration and alignment of the Midway Link as proposed in the detailed studies may have to be altered as a result of these negotiations. The task force should retain the original consultants throughout this process to make changes as necessary.

Ideally, the negotiations and funding acquisition will be handled by a third-party organization such as TPL.

**4. Once all properties have been acquired in accordance with the detailed plan, create a non-profit corporation dedicated to building the project**

This corporation could potentially evolve into a city-wide entity dedicated to building rail-to-trail projects on a much larger scale. The corporation would coordinate fund-raising, management, partnerships, negotiations and planning, with the overall goal of building a city-wide network of trails and boulevards, similar to the AtlantaBeltLine, Inc.





## conclusions

*"The pedestrian is the design imperative."*

Throughout the implementation process, the Midway Link project should remain committed to the following goals and operating principles:

- Implement a trail system that links the key locations set forth in the concept plan (figure 18-1)
- Provide redevelopment opportunities
- Create jewels and places for people to recreate
- Involve residents through a task force and community meetings
- Be amenable to change

However, the most important goal should be to reconnect isolated urban neighborhoods, while providing pedestrian amenities that improve health and livability. For, according to urban designer Dom Nozzi, *"The pedestrian is the design imperative."*