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Where the biggies leave off . . .

Light rail transit through neighborhood is temporarily derailed

by Will Craig

Things are happening in the CNW rail corridor, that's obvious to everyone. Except for the through-lines, all the rails and ties have been torn out. Soon all buildings will be gone too. What isn't clear is what is going to be there in the future.

The land is now owned by the Hennepin County Railroad Authority. It was purchased from the Chicago Northwestern Railroad last year for \$6 million. The justification for the purchase was that the land might be useful as a transit corridor. Transit could include LRT (light rail transit) or, possibly, a busway. Whether or not land is eventually dedicated to this use, much other land is freed up now. The county currently has no plan for developing this excess land.

What about the future of railroading on existing tracks? CNW has an easement to continue using their tracks for as long as they wish. They have incentive to pull out earlier however. When the sale was made, Hennepin County withheld \$1.5 million. If the railroad pulls out before April 1987, they get this money in full. If they miss that deadline, but are out by April 1991, they still get \$.5 million. CNW is now negotiating to acquire the Milwaukee Road; if successful they have stated that they will be out of the corridor within 6 months. The CNW may decide to stay. If they do and LRT is built, their easement restricts them to two train movements per day, these must be between midnight and 6 a.m.

It is not clear that any transit will ever occur in the corridor. Much of the current activity has resulted from a federal UMTA (Urban Mass Transit Authority) grant of \$500,000 to study alternatives in the Twin Cities. UMTA believes we might be able to build a University Avenue transitway or a southwest transitway, but not both. Even if the southwest corridor is chosen, an alternative route in from Hopkins is across the 29th Street rail corridor and up Nicollet Avenue into downtown.

The UMTA grant funds a study by a consultant on the feasibility of each alternative. It also calls for a rather elaborate review process by citizens and public officials. At the center is a Steering Committee comprised of elected officials, including 7th ward alderman, Barbara Carlson. This committee collects reports and opinions from both the consultant and from citizens groups; these should be complete by the end of the year. Then the review process starts. The steering committee reports to the Regional Transit Board. From there the decision goes to the Metropolitan Council. These reviews should be complete by April 1985. Requests for funding preliminary engineering studies and eventually construction might then go forward to UMTA and/or state legislature.

Citizen input to this process has come from the South-



Present view of CNW rail corridor from Burnham Bridge.

Photo by Gretchen Vander Weide

west Corridor Citizens Advisory Committee made up of representatives of the various neighborhoods and communities along the route, running all the way out to Excelsior. Representing Kenwood-Isles have been John Rebane and Will Craig. Representing CICO (the Calhoun-Isles Community Organization) has been Pat Scott. Other affected neighborhoods have also been authorized to send representatives to the monthly meetings.

If LRT were to come, the greater HLP (Hill & Lake Press) neighborhood could benefit from increased access to downtown. If the route comes through the CNW corridor, there will be a stop at 21st Street. From there, travellers would be whisked downtown at 50mph. Two possible approaches to downtown exist. On the first, the trains would follow the CNW tracks along 3rd Avenue North to 6th Street, then swing into downtown with a first stop on Hennepin. On the second, the train would leave the CNW right-of-way at Highway 12, come in Wayzata Boulevard, make its first stop on Hennepin and Lyndale, then proceed down Hennepin with stops every other block.

Two other stops might serve CIDNA. Between Cedar Lake Road (Dean Parkway), Lake Street, and France, two more stops must be designated. The location is yet to be determined.

Your neighborhood representatives have viewed LRT as a reasonable land use, but argued strongly against the busway. LRT is certainly superior to a southwest diagonal freeway and its installation would preempt the freeway as a possibility. With the great quantity of parks in the area, the chance of this land being given over to recreation use is remote. LRT looks like a good choice. Busways are an anathema. Once the pavement is down, its too easy to allow van-pools, then car-pools and high occupancy

vehicles. Physical barriers will be removed to allow these smaller vehicles, and soon individual cars will be running at all hours. Enforcement will be sporadic, and nuisance will be high. Busways are held to be an undesirable alternative by your representatives.

Until recently we have been able to keep busways off the agenda. Now UMTA is saying that they are a viable alternative and are requiring the consultant and steering committee to give them a hearing. Representatives from the MTC, the Metropolitan Council, and the Hennepin County Railroad Authority say that analysis will be performed on busways, but only to satisfy Washington. No one is seriously considering busways in the CNW corridor. Be prepared.

Use of non-transit land in the corridor is another important issue for the neighborhood. No plan exists for that land at this time. The consultant is required to propose some strategy for using profits from this excess land to cover transit construction costs in part. The strategy might call for sale or lease of the land. Whatever, the Hennepin County Rail Authority will not be the developer. They will sell that right to a developer who will then have to work a proposal through normal city of Minneapolis procedures. These procedures certainly include much citizen input, especially since all of the land is now zoned R-1. The densest development that can take place on such land is townhouse. Any change to this zoning classification requires much public involvement. But all of this is much down the road.

The major issue for now is transit. LRT or busway or nothing. If you feel strongly about this issue, contact your neighborhood representative—or your council member. This article has presented the track we are taking. If we think things are going wrong, we will sound the alarm. Until then, watch this space and hold your breath.



LOWRY HILL GATHERED NO MOSS on Sunday, Sept. 23, as the mighty green machine steamrolled to victory at Palio III. But as the story and pictures on pages 8 and 9 show, foxes, egrets, and racoons shared in the fun too.

Photo by Holly Lewis

Come to the Kenwood Park Neighborhood Recreation Center (KEPNARC) Dedication

Sunday, October 14

1:30 Dedication

2:00-4:00 Square dance and party

See You There!