



Frequently Asked Questions

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Is the Southwest Light Rail (SWLRT) plan dead?

No, far from it. Gov. Mark Dayton is reported to be “Shocked and Appalled” about the recent “budget blowup” – the projected cost is now up to about \$2 billion. However, Metro Council Chair Adam Duininck, and the entire Metropolitan Council, made it clear at their 5/6/2015 Committee of the Whole meeting that they are determined to implement a plan to cut costs, but to build the proposed line from Minneapolis to Eden Prairie. As far as the Metropolitan Council is concerned, while the route could be shortened by cutting at the Eden Prairie end, the alignment cannot be changed, and “no build” is not – repeat not – on the table as a real option.



Photo by Dorothy Childers

Won't the Republicans in the State House refuse to provide funding?

The Republican controlled House will almost certainly not appropriate any more money for Southwest Light Rail. However, the current financing plan includes only 10% from the State – the other 40% comes from Counties. It appears SWLRT supporters are planning to go ahead with an approach that will simply not rely on the State for any more money than has already been appropriated. It appears their real plan -- or their hope -- is to win back both Houses of the legislature in 2016, and appropriate more State money. But they might be able to implement enough budget cuts to produce a budget and a plan that pays for the project without more State money – or at least get it built to the point that there is no choice but to provide “bailout money”.

What about the Lakes and Parks Alliance (LPA) lawsuit?

Let me first state clearly that while I applaud what LPA is doing, **I am not a member, and I do not speak for LPA.**

There is currently a Summary Judgment motion from LPA before U.S. District Judge Tunheim. If this motion is granted, it appears certain that, at a minimum, the Metro Council would have to restart the Municipal Consent process. Due to scheduling issues, the practical effect could be to delay the project

long enough so that it could not be included in President Obama's final budget. If SWLRT is not in Obama's final budget, the prospect of SWLRT ever being built is difficult to predict.

After the hearing on the LPA motion was held on March 9th, Judge Tunheim said he would rule on the LPA motion "as soon as possible." However, there is no set deadline for a Federal District Judge to rule on a motion.

How much has been spent -- and is available to spend -- for SWLRT?

The Star Tribune reports **\$59 million** has been spent so far, citing Metro Transit as a source. I am skeptical about this number – I think it could be higher.

However, the real issue is: **how much more might be spent during the rest of 2015?** That number is **\$121.8 million** – almost double the report on current spending to date. Here's where this total comes from:

The State has appropriated an additional **\$37 million** in General Fund money for SWLRT, but that is for Fiscal Year 2016 budget, which starts July 1st of this year.

The Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) has granted **\$63.6 million**, to be disbursed in 2015.

The Hennepin County Railroad Authority (HCRRA) has **\$21.2 million** budgeted for 2015.

If all this money is spent in 2015 – and that appears to be the Met Council's plan – then almost \$200 million will have been spent on SWLRT by the end of the year. Of course, the argument for SWLRT supporters is: "We've done so much already we can't stop now."

Can the Legislature put a freeze on more spending, to study alternatives?

Almost certainly yes. The Omnibus Transportation Bill could be amended to freeze State and CTIB spending, and could almost certainly also freeze HCRRA spending.

I am doing all I can to encourage the Legislature to implement such a freeze.