

\$33.3 million aimed at Twin Cities transit projects

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Published: October 3rd, 2011

Fund is part of effort to embrace regional planning

Some \$33.3 million should soon be available to support transit-oriented development primarily in 11 metro cities.

Most of that — \$32.3 million — comes from money that the Metropolitan Council had committed to projects that just didn't happen over the last few years because of the poor economy, as well as dollars socked away in a contingency fund in case the council's transit operations needed money.

The other \$1 million comes from a \$5 million grant awarded last October to the Met Council from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development has designated 53 metro "transit improvement areas" where the money will be spent. (For a list, go to: <http://tinyurl.com/5vas57h>)

A regional transit planning effort known as the Corridors of Opportunity is coordinating the money. Recipients are expected to include local cities, counties, rail authorities, local development authorities, private or not-for-profit developers and not-for-profit organizations supporting TOD, entrepreneurs and small business development, according to Corridors documents.

Met Council Chairwoman Sue Haigh and Lee Sheehy, director of the region and communities program for the McKnight Foundation, are co-chairs of Corridors group.

On Friday, Sheehy said that "engaging the communities and the marketplace with resources focused on implementation creates leverage for the larger public and private investments in the corridor."

In an e-mailed statement, Haigh said TOD helps cities "focus on development that is efficient and attracts private capital along light rail and bus rapid transit corridors. Ultimately, TOD will help stimulate economic growth and generate jobs."

The Met Council has \$19.8 million available in its Livable Communities Demonstration Account (LCDA) and \$12.5 million in its Tax Base Revitalization Account (TBRA) funds — money that is over and above the "regular" \$8 million levied annually to support the LCDA program and the \$5 million annual levy amount for the TBRA program, said Guy Peterson, the Met Council's community development division director.

The council will make the \$32.3 million in LCDA and TBRA money available on a competitive basis to pay for development work and site cleanup activities in the 11 metro cities.

"It's competitive," Sheehy said on Friday, "and that's why it was created, so it could engage the community-based and private and other sectors to leverage up the money."



A Central Corridor LRT station was taking shape in August on University Avenue two blocks east of Raymond Avenue in St. Paul. The station is one of 53 sites designated as "transit improvement areas" and eligible for grant money to support development. (File photo: Bill Klotz)

Peterson told the council's community development committee at a recent meeting that the \$32.3 million is "largely the result of the poor economy of the last few years."

He then outlined for the committee "potential program parameters" that would see allocation of \$6 million annually in LCDA money and \$4 million a year in TBRA dollars — with maximum grant amounts of \$1 million for the former and \$500,000 for the latter.

"We wouldn't want to put it all out at once," Peterson told the committee. "We want to see if the program is going to work — is there an appetite out there" for such a program.

Met Council spokeswoman Bonnie Kollodge said on Friday that council staff members "are still getting stakeholder input" about exactly how the council should disperse the money. An update is expected Nov. 7; a revised program could be voted on two weeks later.

The three-year Corridors initiative is financed with \$21 million, including the \$5 million from HUD and \$16 million in grants and loans from the New York-based Living Cities collaborative.

The Corridors program will help finance and support projects in seven transitway corridors in the region: Southwest LRT, Bottineau Transitway, Gateway Corridor, Cedar Avenue BRT, Central Corridor, Hiawatha LRT and Northstar Commuter Rail.

The Met Council administers three grant programs under the 1995 [Livable Communities Act](#) supporting projects advancing efficient, compact, and connected land-use patterns. From 1996 through 2010, the council awarded 565 LCA grants totaling \$188.4 million.

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