Hiawatha Light Rail
by Victor Helin, Vivek Deshpande, and Cole Hiniker
What is Light Rail?

• Light Rail is urban rail transit powered by overhead electric wires
• Streetcars were a form of the modern light rail, they were mainly one car in length while modern light rail consists of a few interconnected cars
• In most cases light rail has exclusive right of way, but does interact with auto traffic at controlled intersections
• Heavy rail differs because it almost never (in urban environments) interacts with local traffic
Hiawatha line runs parallel with Hiawatha Ave. from the warehouse district downtown to just beyond the Mall of America in Bloomington.
Twin Cities Light Rail

- Completed June 26, 2004 (Airport and MOA, December 2004)
- 12 miles of track
- 17 Stations
- 66 seated passengers (120 standing)
- Powered by 16-ft overhead wires
- Top speed 55 mph (40 mph city)
- 19,300 per day in year 2005: 24,800 per day by year 2020
- Total Cost $715.3 million
Cities with Light Rail

• Portland, Oregon

• Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas

• St. Louis, Missouri

Others include – Buffalo, NY; Salt Lake City, UT; San Jose, CA and Denver, CO and 13 others
• DART light rail line has two main light rail lines and the TRE commuter rail line
• As of 2003 between the TRE, Red and Blue lines the DART system had over 50,000 riders daily in 2003

• Portland light rail system consists of two major parts: a light rail system with three lines and a new downtown streetcar system
• The total ridership of the Tri-MAX system in FY 2003 were 26.1 million or 80,000 daily
Development Benefits of Light Rail

- In Portland, some $3 billion worth of investment has occurred along the MAX line since the decision to build in 1978
- Dallas has had $1.3 billion in private funds invested along the 44 miles of track making up the DART lines
- In St. Louis, there has been significant revitalization along all of the MetroLink lines including at the University of Missouri-St. Louis and the Washington University Medical Center
Relevant Issues for Development of LRT Stations

- Station Area Plans
- Neighborhood Planning
- Precedents from other Cities
- Station and Design
- Real Estate Development Strategies
- Environmental Analysis
Stations along Hiawatha LRT

- Downtown Stations
- Cedar Riverside
- Franklin Avenue
- Lake Street / Midtown
- 38th Street
- 46th Street
- 50th Street / Minnehaha Park

- VA Medical Center
- Fort Snelling
- Airport - Lindbergh Terminal
- Airport – Humphrey Terminal
- Bloomington Central
- 28th Avenue
- Mall of America
Land Use Characteristics

- Major corporate and government employers
- One of the largest downtown residential populations in the U.S., with 25,000 residents
- Mixed land uses consisting of arts, entertainment, shopping, restaurants
- Major center for sports with Metrodome and Target Center providing 82,000 seats
- 19 hotels with more than 5,000 rooms
Lake Street / Midtown Station

- High concentrations of housing – single, moderate and multi-family housing
- Main neighborhoods - Phillips, Seward, Longfellow and Corcoran
- Industrial uses & shopping centers east and west of the station - Minnehaha Mall and Hi-Lake
- Street-fronting mixed-use commercial businesses along Lake St.
- Under-utilized parcels suitable for higher intensity development
46th Street Station

- Location: Adjacent to Minnehaha Creek with close proximity to large parks and the Mississippi
- Current Land Use Pattern: Large big box retail, strip commercial, moderate density single and multi-family housing
- Traffic Condition: High volume 45000 ADT with car speeds often approaching 50 MPH
- In the absence of park-n-ride facilities, access to the station is projected to be by foot
- Unsafe for Pedestrians
Mall of America – Existing Land Use

- Largest retail/entertainment complex in the U.S. spread over an area of 4.26 Mi square
- Nine hotels catering to both Mall patrons and air travelers
- Office Space - 664,000 square feet
- Manufacturing/Industrial & Commercial Uses - 245,000 square feet
- Residential Units – 252 high-density and six low-density units
- Three large vacant parcels with potential development interest
Mall of America Transit Station

Original design: The station and a 200-space park-and-ride lot across 24th Avenue on the east side of the Mall of America.

A new station and park-and-ride lot with nearly 600 spaces to be built at East 82nd Street and 28th Avenue.
Benefits

• The plan nearly triples park-and-ride capacity and adds about a half mile of dual track
• Convenient for intermodal transfer and for air travelers
• Free prime land to be generated for development east of the Mall by moving a planned 200-space park-and-ride lot at East 82nd Street and 24th Avenue
• No new State funding needed – Cost $39.9 Million
Airport – Lindbergh & Humphrey Terminal

- Trains run a through 1.8-mile tunnel that is 70 feet below two airport runways
- Lindbergh Terminal – major international hub generating about 10,165 jobs
- A four gate charter flight terminal with approximately 1 million passengers annually
- Houses Northwest Airlines Buildings C and F (administrative offices, flight operations and aircraft maintenance)
Redevelopment along Hiawatha

- It was estimated that the LRT could bring in 70,515 new jobs, 14,815 new residents, and 19 million+ square feet of new commercial development by 2020.
- There is significant space and interest for redevelopment at nearly all the stations except the Airport, VA hospital, and Fort Snelling.
Downtown Stations

- The new Guthrie Theater area
- New office tower at Metrodome station
- Connections to the new library
- Multiple connections to other rail lines
Lake Street Station

• 20% of the land has redevelopment potential
• Property owner at Hi-Lake will invest $2 million to “spruce up” mall
• Farmer’s market opened in 2004
• Potential Midtown Greenway connection
• Millions of dollars in public money has been spent to lure development
38th, 46th, and 50th Street Stations

- Mixed-use development potential
- Redevelopment of underutilized industrial land
- Infill of small open spaces around stations
- 61-unit apartment building near 46th Street being built, “specifically because of the light-rail”
- Much of the land use near these stations is single-family housing
Bloomington

- $600 million project around 80th St. Station
- Multi-faceted with residential, commercial, and recreational
- 700-room hotel and 60,000 square-foot water park
- Developer is asking Bloomington for $35 million in infrastructure improvements
- Same developer has similar project at other station in Bloomington
Public Investment

- Millions of dollars has been spent studying and building infrastructure improvements to lure development.
- So far, most development has occurred without much public money.
- Trend in other cities has set a standard that public money should assist Transit-Oriented Development.
- Creative funding techniques such as Tax-Increment Financing can mask the public investment costs.
Questions

• Could there have been a better corridor for setting up the LRT line?
• Is there a better alternative way of using the existing corridor?
• Does light-rail really attract new development?
• Does the development of LRT through the city increase congestion?
• Does the development of a light rail transit system increase sprawl?
• Does transit-oriented development work/ Will it work here?