

All aboard: Green Line LRT starts June 14

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There's still some work left to be done, but the \$957 million Green Line will open to riders on June 14 after about four years of construction, becoming the second active light rail transit line in the Twin Cities metro.

Metropolitan Council Chair Susan Haigh celebrated the announcement Wednesday morning near the Union Depot Station in downtown St. Paul, which will be the line's eastern terminus.

The route, long called the Central Corridor, runs 11 miles to the west, making its way through St. Paul's Midway area along University Avenue before cutting through the University of Minnesota campus on its way to the Target Field Station in downtown Minneapolis.

"We've had 5,400 workers out working hard to bring us to Saturday, June 14," Haigh said. "What I'm excited about it is, when we open this, it'll be almost 60 years to the month that streetcars left the Twin Cities."

With about six months until the line's opening, some "small projects" remain, Haigh said. The Green Line project is currently about 98 percent complete, according to the project website. Haigh added that the project has been on budget.

Two of the remaining tasks are fixing cracked concrete in intersections along University Avenue and adjusting the elevations of several manhole covers.

An enclosed stairway and elevator connecting downtown St. Paul's Central Station platform to a skyway should be complete by spring. Workers are also finishing up track switches in the rail yard of the line's operations and maintenance facility in Lowertown.

Aside from construction, 20 of the Green Line's 59 trains are yet to be delivered. Beginning in late February, trains will start running on the line every 10 minutes to test signaling and communications systems on the route. Sixty-one new train operators will also be trained during this time.

"It's really about testing and safety and training right now," Haigh said.

Eighteen new stations have been built along the route. Most of the new stations are spread along University Avenue between the campus and the State Capitol, and there are four stations in downtown St. Paul beginning with the Union Depot. The Green Line will also share five stations in downtown Minneapolis with the existing Blue Line (or Hiawatha).

The University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis will be serviced by three new stations—one on the West Bank between 19th and Cedar avenues, one on the East Bank in front of Moos Tower, and one in Stadium Village near TCF Bank Stadium.



An enclosed stairway and elevator connecting the Green Line's Central Station platform to a skyway should be complete by spring. The station is bounded by Fourth, Fifth, Cedar and Minnesota streets in downtown St. Paul. (Staff photo: Bill Klotz)

“It’s going to revitalize the entire corridor and re-twin the Twin Cities,” said Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, who also chairs the Counties Transit Improvement Board.

The opening of the Green Line will come nearly 10 years after the opening of the Blue Line. The 12-mile line, which connects downtown Minneapolis to the airport and Mall of America, began full service on Dec. 4, 2004.

The Green Line will also open in time to serve baseball fans attending Major League Baseball’s All-Star Game at Target Field on July 15.

“We want people to take the train to get to this event,” Haigh said, “and we want to showcase the development in this area during the All-Star Game.”

The Green Line has spurred \$1.7 billion in development so far along the route, according to the Met Council. Examples include the 104-unit C&E Lofts at 2410 W. University Ave., near the Raymond Avenue station, which celebrated a **grand opening** last summer. In downtown St. Paul, the 254-unit Penfield Apartments, about a block from the 10th Street Station, began welcoming tenants last fall. And the new St. Paul Saints ballpark in Lowertown — set to open in spring of 2015 — will be just a few blocks from Union Depot.

“It’s a transformative investment that is being made here,” McLaughlin said.

Community celebrations are being planned for the Green Line’s opening, said Polly Talen, co-chair of the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative. Speeches and a ribbon cutting are planned for 9 a.m. at Union Depot, and other events will start at 10 a.m. at a number of stations along the line. Free rides on the Green Line and all other Metro Transit routes will also be offered June 14 and June 15.