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## County study taking a look at transit along Robert Street corridor

**BY MEGAN ANDERSON - SUN NEWSPAPERS**

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A half-million dollars will buy Dakota County an in-depth feasibility study looking at transportation issues in the Robert Street corridor.

The proposed corridor could reach as far north as Union Depot in downtown St. Paul and as far south as southeast Rosemount. Planners are considering developing a transit system along Robert Street and Highway 52.

Sam O'Connell, a project manager with Dakota County, made a presentation April 17 to the Mendota Heights City Council about the study. She said last year the state Legislature gave the county \$500,000 to conduct the feasibility study. The county has hired URS Inc., a national company with offices in Minneapolis, to conduct the study.

"We were asked to take a look at the corridor and really define what are the transportation issues," O'Connell said.

The last transportation study in this area was conducted in 1990. This updated feasibility study would define the scope of the project and recognize the changes in development over the last 16 years.

Assisting with the study is the Robert Street Corridor Technical Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from Mendota Heights, Eagan, West St. Paul, Inver Grove Heights, South St. Paul, Lilydale, Sunfish Lake and Rosemount.

Celeste Riley of Mendota Heights is on the committee. "I really admire the way the study is being planned and executed," Riley said.

Riley said fixing existing problems isn't why she is motivated to be involved in the transit study. "It is looking at the future and looking at what is good for this region," she said. "I'm looking at my kids and grandkids and what will work for them, as well as for me."

The committee will consider the impact an additional transit system could have on the environment and the community. Members will look at a monorail, light rail, commuter train and an expanded bus system.

The committee hopes to find out what transit issues exist, including possible problems with the bus system and traffic congestion. The group will also determine if the lack of transportation has had a negative impact on new development.

The analysis will include a market study to see who could benefit from a new transit system. Some markets include commuters, residents looking for another option, or those who are dependent on transit systems to get around. "We'll really look at the transit market and see who these folks are and where they're going," O'Connell said.

O'Connell said that this is just the preliminary stage of the study, noting that a transit project like this takes time. "It's not something that just kind of happens over night," she said. "Especially when you are seeking federal dollars." She said one option for federal funding is New Starts, a program that provides financial assistance to local transit systems, and is highly competitive.

"One of the things that we want to know is can this corridor support one or maybe two transit investments and what that would be," O'Connell said.

The study is expected to take 14 months with a completion date of April 2008.

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