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AARP IN ST. LOUIS &

CITIZENS FOR MODERN TRANSIT

# PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES FOR ST. LOUIS TRANSIT



**AARP** Real Possibilities in

**St. Louis**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The MetroLink light rail system is a well-used and efficient transit system for the St. Louis region, linking numerous communities in Missouri and Illinois. MetroLink serves as a transportation alternative, to the automobile, for approximately 60,000 daily passengers. Together with MetroBus, the MetroLink system provides mobility for a diverse range of citizens allowing access to employment centers, commercial districts, educational institutions, parks and other destinations. The light rail system is a critical component to the economic development and cultural vitality of the greater St. Louis region. The MetroLink system truly enhances the quality of life for its passengers and their respective communities, making a safe and vibrant light rail system a major civic goal for the St. Louis region.

Recently, the MetroLink light rail system has experienced challenges including a decrease in ridership, negative perceptions of safety, and a lack of investment around the stations. These issues have resulted in a loss of confidence in the system by some in the greater St. Louis community. Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT) and AARP in St. Louis have commissioned this study to focus on improving placemaking around the MetroLink stations, with the knowledge that improved public spaces add people, surveillance and investment to a community. The study is to focus on livability and improvements to the physical environment in and around the stations. The study was not to focus on policy change of the light rail system. The study was to provide a brief yet thorough analysis of three stations on the system, which have unique characteristics and commonalities as well. The stations selected for study include: North Hanley; Forest Park/DeBaliviere and Delmar. The goal of the study is to ensure that immediate and long term action items regarding placemaking can be implemented to ensure the vitality and security of the system and restore public confidence in MetroLink, in the present and the future.

The term placemaking has a broad interpretation, however it is both an urban planning philosophy and process, to improve the public realm of a community. Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a nonprofit organization which advocates for creating public spaces which enhance the public realm and the quality of life in communities, both nationally and internationally. PPS has defined placemaking as follows:

*"Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention*

*to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."*

## Inventory and Assessment

The basis of all urban planning efforts starts with an analysis of the existing conditions, specifically in and around the three stations. Analysis of the MetroLink system from a placemaking perspective, will help to identify both opportunities and constraints, regarding public space and user experience.

**1: North Hanley Station** – This station is suburban, commuter oriented with a large surface parking lot and parking garage. The station is bounded by Interstate 70 on the north, University of Missouri – St. Louis on the east and residential land uses on the south and west and is located in unincorporated St. Louis County.

The station has some opportunities including plenty of parking for commuters, bus transfer shelters, access to a regional bike trail and adjacencies to a corporate campus and university.

The major constraints for the Hanley Station include no public restrooms for passengers, limited shade and seating for passengers, single access point to the platform, lack of wayfinding and identification signage and numerous signs of neglect.

**2: Forest Park/DeBaliviere Station** – The busy station is in an urban, mixed use neighborhood in the City of St. Louis. The station is near Forest Park, one of the busiest destinations in the entire St. Louis region. The station also is a transfer point for commuters, located on the convergence of the Red Line and Blue Line of MetroLink. This transfer point, along with MetroBus, the Loop Trolley, and the St. Vincent Greenway will provide a multi-modal transit experience for passengers.

The station has many opportunities including the adjacency to Forest Park and it's many institutions and events, within a stable neighborhood, access to bus routes and The Loop Trolley, parking for commuters and visitors.

The major constraints for the Forest Park/DeBaliviere Station include no public restrooms for passengers, lack of wayfinding especially to Forest Park, confusing directional signage to the platform, numerous hidden corners and poorly delineated entrance portals to the platform.

**3: Delmar Station** – This station is located in the City of St. Louis, just a couple of blocks east of Skinker Boulevard, near the vibrant Loop District, a thriving mixed use area along

Delmar Boulevard full of shops, entertainment and hospitality uses. The Loop Trolley is being constructed on Delmar Boulevard, with a trolley stop just to the south of the existing MetroLink station. The Delmar Station is in an urban context, with new public and private investment, occurring nearby but also some economically depressed areas not too distant from the station.

The station has many opportunities including the adjacency to The Loop, access to bus routes and The Loop Trolley, parking for commuters and visitors, and significant investments in both private mixed use developments and public infrastructure.

The major constraints for the Delmar Station include no public restrooms for passengers, lack of wayfinding especially to/from the station area to The Loop, lack of visibility of the station platform from the street, numerous hidden corners, poorly defined perimeter, and a former railroad building which reflects disinvestment in the area.

### Placemaking Walk Audits

In addition to analysis of existing conditions, engaging the public and various user groups is one of the most critical components of good urban planning. The users of the MetroLink system, civic leaders, public agency representatives and law enforcement personnel were engaged, as part of the study, to help identify issues and propose solutions regarding improved placemaking at the three stations. This engagement was conducted through placemaking walk audits at the three stations. The placemaking walk audits allowed interested individuals to evaluate the respective station through a site evaluation walk and a survey. The survey focused on four main categories:

- Uses and Activities
- Access and Linkages
- Comfort and Image
- Sociability

### Survey Results

Audit attendees rated the station areas on these categories and were able to give individual comments as well. The detail rankings and comments for each station's audit are presented in section 2, Placemaking Walk Audits of this report. In addition to the surveys used in the walk audits, a text polling exercise was utilized at the debriefing session, after each respective audit, which allowed further engagement with the attendees. Survey rankings, polling and comments, from attendees, which

were consistent for all three stations are summarized as follows:

#### Uses and Activities:

- Agree that many passengers use the station.
- Agree that people are at the station for transit purposes.
- Disagree that the boarding process is easy to understand.
- Strongly disagree that signage directs passengers to nearby amenities.
- Disagree that directional and identification signs are easy to understand.
- Disagree that surrounding businesses support the station.
- Disagree that adjacent structures /buildings look occupied and well maintained.

#### Access and Linkages:

- Disagree that accessible routes are clearly visible and navigable.
- Disagree that you feel safe walking from the street/parking lot to the station.
- Disagree that there are emergency (blue phones) along your route.
- Disagree that there is a sense of place once you enter the platform area.

#### Comfort and Image:

- Disagree that station facilities look clean and well maintained.
- Strongly disagree that there are restrooms and drinking fountains.
- Disagree that there is graffiti and signs of vandalism at the station.
- Disagree that you feel safe waiting for a bus at a nearby bus shelter.
- Disagree there are emergency phones (blue phones) at the station.
- Agree that there are hidden areas/blind corners in the area.

#### Sociability:

- Disagree that the station feels connected to the adjacent community/neighborhood.
- Disagree that the station design reflects a quality transit system in the community.
- Disagree that the public art at the station areas reflect a quality transit system.

### Recommendations

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

The accumulation of the site inventory and assessment, placemaking walk audits, surveys and discussion resulted in recommendations for improvements to the three stations. Many of the recommendations can be applied to the other stations in the MetroLink System, which face similar issues. The recommendations are based on the collective research, experience and discussion of the placemaking walk audits. The recommendations, reflect the discussion of the audits participants in categorizing the improvements into short term action items and long term action items for each station. The following is a summary of the recommendations for each station.

### **North Hanley Station (short term action items 1-2 years)**

- Install a variety of seating at the station.
- Install landscape planters.
- Remove obsolete pay phone stands.
- Remove overgrown landscape along North Hanley Road near top of stairs.
- Address signs of neglect including peeling paint on structures, collapsed fencing, failed landscape, etc...
- Install solar powered charging stations.
- Install emergency phones near station and bus shelters.
- Add Metro branding graphics to adjacent retaining wall.

### **North Hanley Station (long term action items 2-5 years)**

- Install bollard lighting on perimeter of station.
- Install a prefabricated restroom building for passenger use.
- Install higher, transparent fencing along tracks.
- Construct permanent shade structures near bus shelter waiting areas.
- Propose development of mixed use (retail, hospitality, residential) buildings near or at the station.

### **Forest Park/DeBaliviere Station (short term action items 1-2 years)**

- Install wayfinding signage to direct passengers to Forest Park.
- Utilize tactical urbanism methods such as wayfinding stencils painted on sidewalk for wayfinding/branding.
- Improve signage and graphics of towers for better defined entry to platforms.
- Relocate smoking/ash urns away from stairs.
- Install a variety of seating types on the platform and station.
- Install landscaping and stormwater improvements along DeBaliviere Ave.
- Install elevator identification signage on platform.
- Fence off numerous hidden spaces on platform under street.
- Install emergency phones near station platform and bus shelters.

- Accommodate food trucks on Metro property and adjacent streets.
- Collaborate with institutions and events in Forest Park to activate the public space along DeBaliviere Ave.
- Collaborate with local and regional parks/public works entities to install a bike share program.

### **Forest Park/DeBaliviere Station (long term action items 2-5 years)**

- Install a prefabricated restroom building for passenger use.
- Propose development of a public parking garage/mixed use (retail, residential, security) building on existing Metro parking lot, on west side of DeBaliviere Ave.

### **Delmar Station (short term action items 1-2 years)**

- Install wayfinding signage to direct passengers to The Loop.
- Install wayfinding signage from Metro parking lot to station platform.
- Utilize tactical urbanism methods such as wayfinding stencils painted on sidewalk for wayfinding/branding.
- Improve station identification signage to be more visible from Delmar Boulevard.
- Replace existing sidewalks along Hodiament Ave. near station.
- Install a variety of seating types around the station and on Des Peres Ave.
- Install chess tables and café tables/chairs on west side of Des Peres Ave. near existing sculpture.
- Remove overgrown vegetation near former Wabash railroad station building to improve visibility of station.
- Fence off numerous hidden spaces at lower level of existing railroad station building.
- Improve lighting of former Wabash railroad station building both interior/exterior by turning on lights at night.
- Install emergency phones near station and bus shelters.
- Relocate ticket validating machines closer to ticket vending machines.
- Accommodate food trucks on Metro parking lot or on adjacent street.
- Collaborate with local neighborhood associations and The Loop entertainment venues to activate public space along Des Peres Ave. and Delmar Boulevard.

### **Delmar Station (long term action items 2-5 years)**

- Install a prefabricated restroom building for passenger use.
- Install an accessible ramp from platform to Hodiament Ave.
- Improve lighting on Des Peres Ave., near former Wabash railroad station building.
- Propose re-development of the former Wabash railroad station building into a mixed use (retail, residential, security) building.
- Propose development of existing Metro parking lot into a parking garage and mixed-use (commercial, residential) building.