

Regional Transit Overview

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Moving people, easing congestion

Transit – which includes buses, light rail, vanpools and other modes – plays an important role in the regional economy. Transit connects workers with their jobs, eases traffic congestion, improves air quality, saves commuters money, reduces energy use, and conveys other benefits to the regional economy and quality of life.

Transit ridership is growing rapidly in the seven-county Twin Cities area. Ridership on all types of service – express and local buses, light rail, dial-a-ride service and service for people with disabilities – totaled 95 million in 2008, a 6.5% increase over 2007. Nearly every regional transit service gained riders in 2008.

Region has many transit options

The Metropolitan Council operates the largest transit system in the state - **Metro Transit**. The agency provided more than 81 million bus and rail rides in 2008 – the highest annual ridership since 1981. Its service area includes

Minneapolis, St. Paul and dozens of suburban communities.

The region has several other transit services. About a dozen cities within the Council's transit taxing district operate their own regular-route and dial-a-ride bus services. These **Suburban Transit Providers** carried 5.2 million riders in 2008, an increase of more than 1 million riders from 2007.

Contracted regular-route service consists primarily of commuter routes from the suburbs into the central cities, provided by private companies under contract with the Council. In 2008, these routes carried 2.5 million passengers.

The **University of Minnesota** operates bus service between the St. Paul and Minneapolis campuses. In 2008 that service provided more than 3.6 million rides.

The **Northstar Commuter Coach** and **Ramsey Star Express** serve commuters in the future Northstar Commuter Rail corridor. The services had a combined 2008 ridership of 225,000. The Northstar Commuter Coach will end operations when Northstar rail begins service in late 2009.

Community dial-a-ride programs are outside the urbanized area of the region. The Council supports these services financially through contracts with nonprofit and governmental agencies. These programs provide a base level of transit service in rural areas that are not served with regular-route service, and delivered 420,000 rides in 2008.

Metro Mobility is a special dial-a-ride service for people with disabilities. In 2008, Metro Mobility provided nearly 1.2 million rides. The service, administered by the Council, is provided through contracts with private companies. Four counties or nonprofit agencies also provide special transit for people with disabilities outside the core of the region; these services carried more than 209,000 passengers in 2008.

Van Go! is the Council-sponsored vanpool program. It carried 210,000 rides in 2008.

Region is leader in revenues from fares

The Twin Cities region relies less on government subsidies to operate transit than most peer U.S. metro areas. A survey of

13 peer metro areas showed that in 2007 the transit system in the Twin Cities ranked third in reliance on fare revenue to fund the system. The percent of operating costs covered by fares in this region is 28%; the peer average is 21.9%.

Overall, transit funding in the Twin Cities area is lower than in peer regions, though it has increased in recent years. The Twin Cities spends \$136 per capita, compared with a peer average of \$139.

Expanding the transitway network

The Metropolitan Council, in partnership with the county regional rail authorities, other transit providers and the County Transit Improvement Board, is planning a network of bus and rail “transitways” in heavily traveled corridors. Already in operation are Hiawatha light rail and the high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane in the I-394 corridor.

Northstar Commuter Rail, connecting Big Lake with downtown Minneapolis, will begin service in late 2009.

Construction of **light rail in the Central Corridor** between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul could begin as soon as 2010.

Analysis and environmental assessments are underway for light-rail transit in the **Southwest Corridor** between

downtown Minneapolis and communities in the southwest metropolitan area.

An alternatives analysis is under way in the **Bottineau Boulevard** corridor along County Road 81 in Minneapolis northwest to Rogers, as well as on the **Rush Line** in the northeastern metro communities. The *2030 Transportation Policy Plan* identifies **I-35W north, Highway 65, Highway 36, and I-94 east** as areas for additional corridor study. Alternatives are also being analyzed for the **Red Rock Corridor** in the southeastern metro area.

Regional debut for bus rapid transit

The Council is partnering with a number of other agencies through the Urban Partnership Agreement to reduce congestion in the **I-35W and Cedar Avenue corridors** south of Minneapolis. Bus rapid transit is being planned on Cedar Avenue and on I-35W south of Minneapolis. A HOT lane is also being constructed on I-35W south of downtown.

A growing network of facilities like transit centers, park-and-ride lots, bus-only shoulders and exclusive high-occupancy vehicle lanes support and improve the efficiency of the transit system. In addition, many people rideshare to work in cars or vans, reducing the number of vehicles on the

region’s roadways and reducing pollution.

Transit helps ease roadway congestion

Without transit, congestion on the region’s roadways would be much worse. According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, there are 263 congested highway lane-miles in the seven-county metro area. Though congestion decreased from 2007 to 2008, a MnDOT study showed there are 51 severely congested lane-miles.

Traffic congestion increases stress, decreases productivity, and robs people of family time. The regional economy is also negatively affected. Congestion results in an increased cost of goods and services, a shrinking customer base, a shrinking employee base, and tardy and stressed employees.

For more information

- [Links to transportation options.](#)
- Visit the [Metro Transit website](#) or call Metro Transit information at 612-373-3333.
- Related fact sheets:
 - [Metro Transit](#)
 - [Metro Mobility](#)
 - [Metro Transit Rideshare](#)
 - [Hiawatha LRT](#)
 - [Transportation Planning](#)

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