

Chapter 9. Progress toward Doubling Ridership

In 1998, the Metropolitan Council in its *Transit 2020 Master Plan* set a goal of doubling the transit system by 2020. This chapter looks at the progress towards meeting this goal.

Ridership grew from 1997 to 2001, putting the Twin Cities area ahead of this goal. But recent ridership declines have put the Twin Cities area behind.

Ridership increased 16.1% from 1997 to 2001 because of increases in service hours, improvements in transit service, and growth in employment in the Twin Cities.

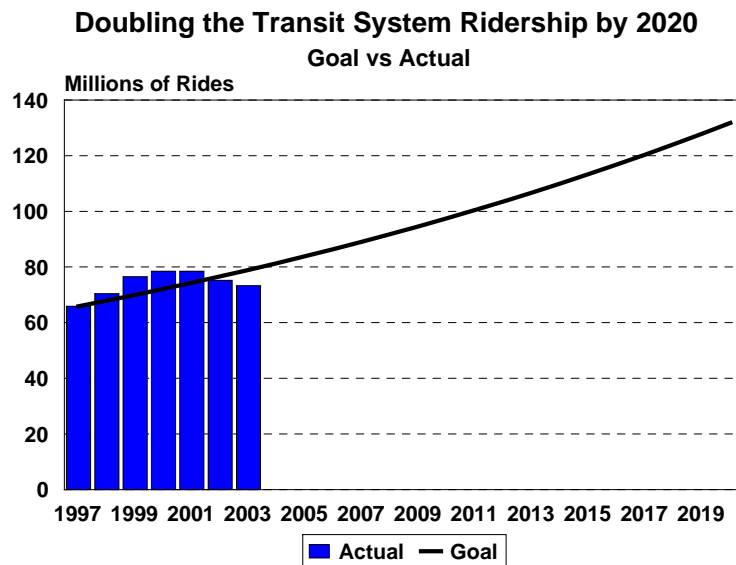
By 2001, this put ridership about 6.4 million rides ahead of the goal established in 1998.

Since 2001, however, ridership has decreased to the point where it is now 5.7 million rides behind the goal.

This change occurred due to several factors:

- The reduction in travel immediately after September 11, 2001 and then the following short-term economic downturn.
- The recession from 2001 - 2003 which reduced employment and thus travel to and from work. This is especially critical as approximately 80% of transit riders are going to or from work. The number of people employed in the Twin Cities declined each year from 2001 to 2003, for a total decline over the three years of 2.6%. The decline in employment hit the Twin Cities' largest transit market, downtown Minneapolis, especially hard. Downtown Minneapolis experienced an 8.4% job decline between 2001 and 2003. During the same time period, transit ridership declined 6.6% region-wide¹.
- State budget cuts triggered fare increases, which are an economic disincentive to ridership.

Future ridership growth will depend on funding levels, the economy, employment levels, development patterns, service improvements, and highway congestion levels.



¹ Minnesota Workforce Center