

2030

TRANSPORTATION

Policy Plan Summary



Our Strategy: Realistic, Innovative and Focused



The Twin Cities metropolitan area is a growing and prosperous region with many natural assets. However, the region's mobility – so fundamental to its economic vitality and quality of life – is challenged by mounting congestion, rising costs and tight fiscal constraints.

Traffic congestion already is regarded by metro area residents as one of the region's most serious problems. It is likely to worsen as population and job growth outpace our ability to meet the growing demands for peak-hour travel. Instead of providing reserve capacity for decades, new highway lanes can fill up in a matter of months.



The 2008 Minnesota Legislature approved an historic increase in transportation funding. Even with these new resources, however, there will not be enough money to “fix” congestion throughout the region's highway system. Adding enough highway capacity to meet expected demand over the next 25 years would cost more than \$40 billion – an amount that, if funded by the state gasoline tax alone, would add more than \$2 per gallon to the cost of fuel.

The 2008 law directed the Minnesota Department of Transportation to first commit the highway funds to system preservation, especially to bridges, but left it to Mn/DOT to clarify funding availability for possible capacity expansions.

The law also authorized the seven metro counties to impose a new quarter-cent sales tax for the development and operation of bus and rail transitways. Five of the seven counties did so in 2008. Counties imposing the tax were allowed to form a new joint-powers board to allocate the funds, consistent with the Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan. While the law provides a needed infusion of funds for transitway development, it does not permit the use of these funds to maintain or expand the regular-route bus system.

The region faces hard choices in addressing preservation, safety and mobility needs. To respond effectively, the region needs a transportation strategy that is realistic, innovative and focused on leveraging available dollars for the most benefit.



The Highway Vision



A good highway system is vital to the region's economy, providing access to jobs, goods, markets and services.

Consistent with the 2008 law, the region's first investment priority will be to preserve the 657-mile metropolitan highway system. As a result of this measure, four major metro area bridges will be replaced and another 26 bridges will be repaired, replaced or prioritized for rehabilitation by 2018. This effort will utilize a significant percentage of the new resources that will be available under the 2008 law.



In the near term, the region will invest in low-cost/high-benefit highway projects that help alleviate congestion “choke points.” Twenty of these projects that would improve safety and mobility – similar to those made at Highway 100 in St. Louis Park and at I-94 in Maplewood – are identified in the plan. In order to provide maximum flexibility to take advantage of proposed federal economic stimulus money, the plan also includes a list of 12 expansion projects from the previous plan. One of these could be funded, contingent upon the necessary additional federal money becoming available. However, the cost to construct these expansion projects is beyond the resources normally expected to be available by 2030.

With limited resources available to expand the current system, a key component of the regional strategy will be providing alternatives to congested travel. These alternatives include:

- High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes
- High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes
- Bus-only shoulders
- Priced dynamic shoulder lanes, which would be available to single occupant vehicles at peak times of day for a variable fee
- Other transit advantages

In 2009, Mn/DOT and the Council will develop a long-term vision for future investments in the metropolitan highway system. The vision will focus on maximizing the use of existing highway capacity, pavement and right-of-way. It also will identify the types of highway expansion projects that are needed if new funding becomes available. At the same time, the major expansion projects included in the Council's and Mn/DOT's previous plans will need to be revisited and their scope probably narrowed. This effort will identify project elements that are critical to preserve and manage the highway system, reduce congestion, improve safety and optimize system performance. Additional low-cost/high-benefit projects also will be identified and assessed in a study to be conducted in 2009.

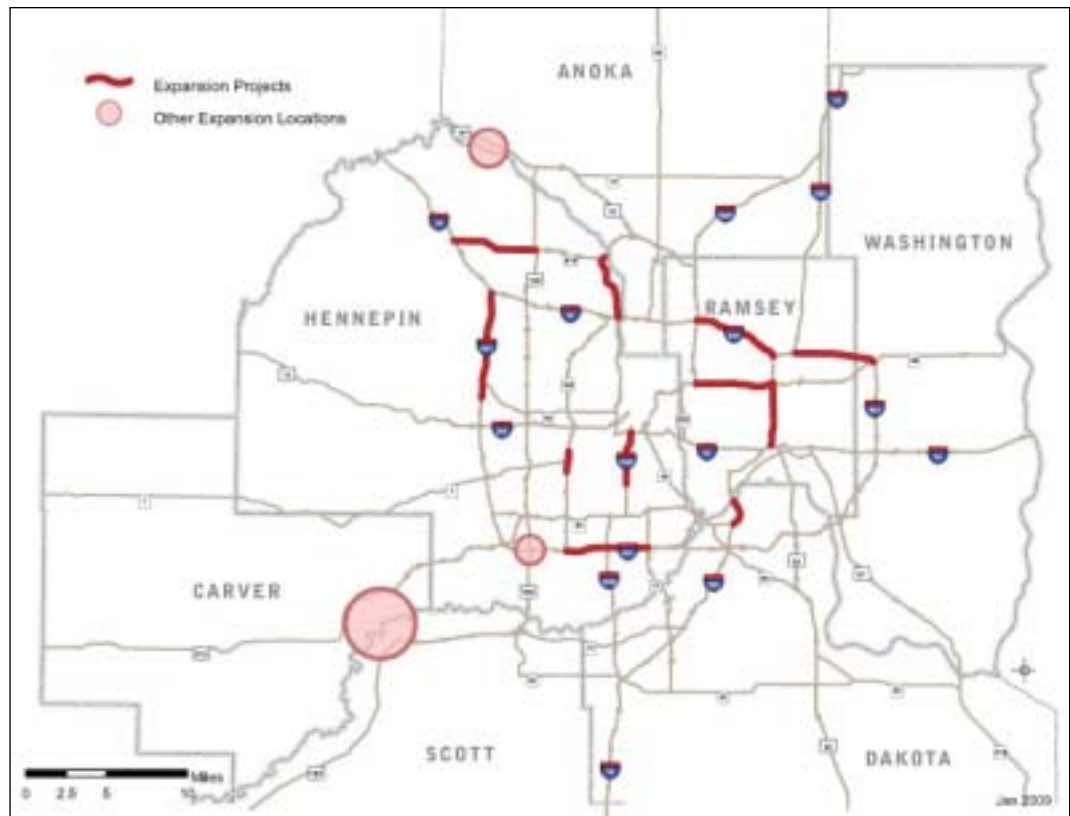
The regional highway system has the ability to provide safe travel for millions of trips each day. By implementing congestion alternatives and by fully utilizing existing through-lanes and existing right-of-way, the mobility needs of the region can in large part be met. Travel will not be congestion-free, but the system will perform better.



Bridge Investments Map



Expansion Projects Map



The Transit Vision



Transit plays an important role in the regional economy. It connects people to economic and educational opportunities, provides an alternative to driving on congested highways, improves air quality, reduces energy consumption and enhances mobility for everyone.

This plan renews the Council's goal of doubling transit ridership – from a 2003 base of 73 million annual rides – to 145-150 million rides by 2030. Strategies for achieving this goal include:



- Expanding the bus system by improving coverage and frequency; adding express routes, transit centers and park-and-ride facilities; and making technological improvements such as web-based trip planning tools and real-time service information.
- Utilizing highway improvements – such as HOT and HOV lanes, bus-only shoulder lanes, ramp meter bypasses and other improvements – that give transit a travel-time advantage over the single-occupant car.
- Developing a network of bus and rail “transitways,” including light-rail transit (LRT), bus rapid transit (BRT), commuter rail and express buses with transit advantages.

Providing transit advantages and developing a network of transitways will allow travel that avoids congested highways, connects regional employment centers, improves the reliability of riders' trips and boosts the potential for transit-oriented development.



A Network of Transitways



The region now has two transitways – Hiawatha LRT and the I-394 HOT lane. Four more are in construction, final design or preliminary engineering – the Northstar commuter rail line, the I-35W and Cedar Avenue BRT projects, and the Central Corridor LRT line.



Eight additional corridors are recommended as potential transitways by 2030. Planning and development studies, conducted and funded in cooperation with county regional railroad authorities and Mn/DOT, will determine the specific alignment, mode and schedule for each corridor. The status of these corridor studies are:

- Southwest: Alternatives Analysis completed and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for three LRT options underway.
- Bottineau Boulevard: Alternatives Analysis underway.
- Rush Line: Alternatives Analysis underway.
- I-35W North, Highway 65/BNSF, Highway 36 and I-94 East: Preferred mode and alignment to be determined through alternatives analyses over the next three years.
- Red Rock: Alternatives Analysis completed recommending a phased approach. Studies for improved bus service are now underway, and commuter rail could be implemented if high speed rail is developed in the corridor.



The cost estimates in this plan assume the transitways will be implemented as follows:

- Three corridors will be built as LRT or dedicated busways – one to be completed by 2020, one begun before 2020 and completed soon after, and a third completed by 2030.
- Four BRT corridors will be built on highway alignments – two will be built by 2020 and two additional BRT corridors on highway alignment will be built by 2030.
- One additional commuter rail corridor will be built by 2030.

Nine arterial streets are recommended for a form of BRT featuring limited-stop service and technology improvements to provide a faster trip. This plan assumes six of these corridors could be implemented by 2020, and three more by 2030:

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| • Central Avenue | • Nicollet Avenue | • Robert Street |
| • Snelling Avenue | • Chicago Avenue | • West Seventh Street |
| • West Broadway | • East Seventh Street | • American Boulevard |

Express bus routes with transit advantages provide another alternative to congestion. Transit advantages include bus-only shoulder lanes, HOT or HOV lanes, and ramp meter bypasses. Express routes typically operate non-stop between a park-and-ride facility and their destination. The region will need to double express bus service to remain on track to increase transit ridership 50% by 2020 and double it by 2030.

Council members

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Tony Pistilli – District 2
Mary Hill Smith – District 3 (resigned 12-08)
Robert McFarlin – District 3 (appointed 1-09)
Craig Peterson – District 4
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Sherry Broecker – District 12
Richard Aguilar – District 13
Kirstin Sersland Beach – District 14
Daniel Wolter - District 15
Brian McDaniel – District 16

To see the full plan:

Plan adopted Jan. 14, 2009

A copy of the full plan is available online at www.metrocouncil.org .

A CD or black-and-white copy is available by contacting the Council's Data Center.

E-mail: data.center@metc.state.mn.us

Phone: 651-602-1140

TTY: 651-291-0904

About the Metropolitan Council

The Metropolitan Council is a 17-member body appointed by the governor. It was created by the Legislature in 1967 to plan for “the coordinated, orderly and economical development” of the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area – consisting of Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington Counties.

In addition to its planning functions, the Council operates a regional transit system that provides about 270,000 rides per weekday, provides wastewater collection and treatment services for more than 100 communities, and oversees a regional parks and trails system that attracts more than 33 million visitors per year.