

2015 Record of Accomplishment

Council-wide or Regional Administration

Council adopts the Public Engagement Plan

In 2015, the Metropolitan Council finalized its Public Engagement Plan. Engagement is the act of intentionally organizing individuals, communities, constituencies and organizations to help the Council generate ideas, better understand issues, identify concerns and considerations, and help with problem-solving. The Public Engagement Plan establishes principles and processes for public engagement to ground Council decisions in the needs of community stakeholders and to engage people in the decision-making process. The plan was created collaboratively with members of the Community Engagement Steering Committee, a group of organizations initially formed to support the Corridors of Opportunity/Partnership for Regional Opportunity efforts. The plan is founded on eight principles:

- Equity: residents and communities are partners in decision-making.
- Respect: residents and communities should feel heard and their interests included in decisions.
- Transparency: residents and communities should be engaged in planning and decisions should be open and widely communicated.
- Relevance: engagement occurs early and often throughout a process to assure the work is relevant to residents and communities.
- Accountability: residents and communities can see how their participation affects the outcome; specific outcomes are measured and communicated.
- Collaboration: engagement involves developing relationships and understanding the value residents and communities bring to the process. Decisions should be made with people, not for people.
- Inclusion: Engagement should remove barriers to participation that have historically disengaged residents and communities.
- Cultural Competence: Engagement should reflect and respond effectively to racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic experiences of residents and communities.

As part of efforts to strengthen connections with customers and the community, Metro Transit created an Outreach and Engagement team, assigned transit officers to new beats in North Minneapolis and Saint Paul's East Side, and provided Spanish language courses to bus operators and police. The Council is also actively engaged in efforts to improve public involvement policies and activities in state agencies.

Council creates Equity Advisory Committee

In October 2015, the Metropolitan Council created the Equity Advisory Committee. The Equity Advisory Committee will advise the Council in its efforts to advance equity throughout the region and specifically how the Council implements the equity commitments in the region's long-range plan, *Thrive MSP 2040*. Members will influence Council decisions related to regional policies on transportation and transit, local planning, housing, environmental issues, and more.

This committee is also intended to bring new and more diverse voices to Council decision-making. The committee will have 21 members, representing geographic districts to assure region-wide representation, as well as people from different races, incomes, abilities and backgrounds. Specifically, members will be selected by the Chair of the Metropolitan Council to reflect the full range of diversity in the region, including low-wealth communities, and communities of color. It will include four current Metropolitan Council members. The Equity Advisory Committee is expected to hold its first meetings by spring 2016.

[Chair Duininck tours all seven counties, strengthens bonds with local governments](#)

Following his appointment in January 2015, Chair Adam Duininck completed a seven-week, seven-county tour of the Twin Cities region. The tour aimed to strengthen relationships between the Council and local governments, and to highlight issues key in local communities related to regional systems and policies. Duininck toured transit and transportation projects, regional parks, existing and future housing developments, and wastewater treatment facilities, and met directly with local officials, legislators, business leaders, and community leaders throughout the region.

[Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the ADA](#)

2015 marked the 25th anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Council celebrated the significant impact this law has on the services it provides to residents of the region. Among the direct impacts to Council services are the following:

- Guaranteeing that people can access public buildings independently (including access doors and wide hallways)
- Guaranteeing transit service for people with disabilities
- Assuring regular route transit is accessible to customers with mobility devices
- Improving housing to assure accessibility for people using mobility devices or providing notification for impaired residents to detect smoke alarms, doorbells, and related safety features
- Providing accessible facilities, parking, and special features in the regional park system

[Partnership results in rainwater reuse at new ballpark](#)

When the City of Saint Paul and Saint Paul Saints opened a new ballpark in May, the facility hosted a sustainability feature that captures rainwater from the rooftop of the adjacent Metro Transit operations and maintenance facility for the METRO Green Line. That rainwater is used to irrigate the ball field and grounds, and as water for some of the ballpark's toilets. Environmental Services division staff helped with the planning and implementation of the project, the first in Minnesota to recycle rainwater for human use indoors.

[Sustainability efforts include energy conservation, solar development](#)

- A new solar facility at the Blue Lake Wastewater Treatment Plant will provide 10% of the plant's annual energy needs and reduce energy costs. The Council will pass on the savings to residents

and businesses who pay the cost of wastewater treatment throughout the metro area. The project is a public/private initiative. The Council is leasing land at the site to Oak Leaf Energy Partners, which is the developer on the project with SunEdison, a global renewable energy development company. Mortenson is a subcontractor and did most of the actual construction. Xcel Energy contributed a \$2 million renewable development fund grant. In 2015, efforts to reduce purchased energy used at the wastewater treatment plant yielded the equivalent of enough electricity to power more than 11,000 homes and enough natural gas to heat nearly 1,900 homes.

- The Council's Environmental Services (MCES) division expects to save \$3.5 million in 2015 on fossil-fuel energy purchases for wastewater treatment. (Energy savings are measured relative to 2006 energy costs as a baseline.) The savings result in lower wastewater rates for city and industrial customers, as well as significant environmental benefits.
- In the spring, three manufacturers demonstrated electric bus technology for Metro Transit customers and staff; feedback from these demonstrations will inform future fleet planning efforts.
- The Council approved a power purchase agreement to bring rooftop solar panels to six Metro Transit facilities in 2016. The panels will provide the equivalent of half the energy used at their respective locations and are expected to save about \$4 million in energy costs over the next 25 years.

Council ramps up workforce development

The Council continues to support programs that prepare the future workforce and help employees obtain the skills they need to support a changing customer base.

- The Council again sponsored the 12-week Urban Scholars summer internship program, providing critical, real-world experience for college students from diverse backgrounds. In 2015, 11 students participated in the program, working in departments throughout the Council.
- Metro Transit launched a new training program that will put job-seekers on a path toward full-time employment as a mechanic-technician through a combination of career and college readiness programming, support toward earning a technical degree and a paid internship. A group of 40 participants began the program in fall 2015. Job opportunities were promoted through a series of Employment Open Houses and an operator testing event.
- The Metro Transit Police Department also continued its growth, reaching 108 full-time officers. Many of the department's newest members speak a second language, and among the new hires is the state's first full-time female Somali police officer. Today the department is roughly 35% diverse, up from just 5% in 2012.

Community Development

Regional parks continue to be a top metro attraction

Twin Cities metro area residents love their parks. The number of annual visits to regional parks grew 3.3% from 2013 to 2014 (the latest figure available), reaching 48.7 million. For context, the Mall of America receives about 40 million annual visits.

Investing in parks protects the environment, raises quality of life, and creates jobs

The Council's investment in our regional parks helps protect sensitive environmental areas, expands the acres of regional parkland and miles of trails, expands outdoor and environmental learning, enhances park facilities, and creates jobs.

In 2015, the Council approved approximately \$24.1 million in grants to the regional park implementing agencies:

- \$16.9 million in grants to build, expand or improve planned park facilities including trails, nature centers, parking areas, swimming areas, fishing areas and other programmed enhancements.
- \$6.7 million in grants to acquire properties and trail easements within planned park and trail boundaries to expand the regional parks system.
- \$490,000 in grants to conduct outdoor recreation and environmental education, recruit volunteer coordinators to organize outdoor activities, or provide trail user wayfinding systems.

Planning sets framework to strengthen the regional park system

The Council adopted the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* in February 2015. This is one of our most significant planning outcomes this year. In addition, the Council reviewed and approved master plans for:

- Baker-Carver Regional Trail (Three Rivers Park District)
- Nokomis-Hiawatha Regional Park (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- Theodore Wirth Regional Park (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- Coon Creek Regional Trail (Anoka County)
- Lebanon Hills Regional Park (Dakota County)

The Council also reviewed and approved amendments to the master plans for:

- Blakeley Bluffs Park Reserve (Scott County)
- Highway 96 Regional Trail (Ramsey County)
- Above the Falls Regional Park (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
- East Anoka County Regional Trail (Anoka County)
- Lake Elmo Park Reserve (Washington County)

Livable Communities Act grants encourage development

In the 2015 funding cycle, the Council will award up to \$22.5 million in Livable Communities grants. The grants support revitalization of brownfields for job creation; transit-oriented development; and affordable housing.

Since 1995, the Council has awarded nearly 1,000 grants totaling over \$311 million to build or rehabilitate nearly 20,000 affordable housing units; clean 2,100 acres of polluted land, creating or retaining 41,000 jobs; and support development of transit-oriented, connected land uses. The grants have helped leveraged billions of dollars in other public and private investments.

Metro HRA earns highest possible ranking

In 2015, the Council's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA) earned the highest ranking possible for program operation from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This 2015 ranking is for the calendar year 2014.

HUD and Congress use 14 indicators to measure and grade the performance of housing agencies that administer the Housing Choice Voucher program. Working with landlords and program participants, Metro HRA ensured effective and efficient provision of rent assistance and maximized the number of households served and funds expended.

Housing wait list opened for first time in 8 years

In 2015, the Metro HRA opened the region's wait list for federal rent assistance for the first time since 2007. About 36,000 people applied for the 2,000 wait list spots. The Metro HRA provides housing assistance to more than 6,500 households. Under the Housing Choice Voucher program, tenants pay approximately 30% of their income towards rent and the Metro HRA pays the remainder directly to the landlord, within established rent guidelines.

HRA supports homeless veterans

The Metro HRA has 120 special-purpose housing vouchers to provide rental assistance for homeless, low-income, disabled veterans and their families. The program provides stable and safe housing which combines HRA rental assistance with Veteran's Affairs (VA) case management and clinical services to ensure success in independent living.

Council creates mobility counseling program

In 2015, the Metro HRA established Community Choice, a mobility counseling program designed to assist families in finding housing in areas of opportunity. The program is based on a commitment to equity, providing residents with access to opportunity and choice to live in communities that provide possibilities for success, prosperity, quality of life and success in new neighborhoods. Program design was complete in 2015. Work with voucher holders will begin in late 2015.

System Statements issued to local governments

State law requires the Council to issue System Statements to local governments after updating the regional plan and accompanying system and policy plans once every 10 years. System Statements explain the implications of the metropolitan system plans for each individual community in the metropolitan area, and they include additional information specific to the community such as the community designation(s), forecasted population, household, and employment through the year 2040; guidance on appropriate densities; affordable housing need allocation; and specific information related to transportation, water resources, and regional parks and trails. Receipt of the system statement triggers a community's obligation to review and, as necessary, amend its comprehensive plan by the end

of 2018. System Statements were issued to all 188 cities, townships, and counties in the metropolitan region on Sept. 17, 2015.

Local Planning Handbook updated

To aid local governments in updating their local comprehensive plans, the Council has prepared a fully updated Local Planning Handbook. The handbook provides clear direction on the required elements for local comprehensive plans by topical area; contains an array of suggestions and resources to move beyond minimum requirements; individualizes community information as much as possible; connects communities with resources, grants, and technical assistance; and highlights local planning efforts across the region. In addition, the handbook includes a whole new section of individual community pages full of checklists, maps, and resources specific to each community, while also allowing for online submittal of plans and plan amendments. The handbook, formerly in paper format, is now web-based, easing the distribution of materials, allowing for expanded resource libraries and tools including interactive mapping, and allowing for better responsiveness to changes in legislation and incorporating community feedback.

Finalizing the new Housing Policy Plan

In 2014, the Council adopted a new *regional 2040 Housing Policy Plan*, its first in nearly 30 years. In 2015, the Council truly finalized the work of the Housing Policy Plan by amending the plan to include an updated Allocation of Affordable Housing Need to inform local comprehensive plans. Additionally, the Council adopted a new set of Guidelines for Housing Policy Performance which included a complete reworking of the Council's approach to developing local Housing Performance Scores. The plan establishes the Council's broad housing policy direction for the coming decades. It will assist local communities throughout the region to plan for and create housing options that give all people of all life stages and of all economic means viable choices for safe, stable, and affordable homes.

Transportation

Adopting the Transportation Policy Plan

In January, the Council adopted the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*, which provides policy direction and investment priorities for the region's transportation system over the next 25 years. The plan provides the transportation-related specifics related to the regional policy direction in *Thrive MSP 2040*. The transportation plan details existing conditions and future needs for the region's system as a whole, as well as expected investments in the regional highway and transit systems.

For the first time the plan identifies a Regional Bicycle Transportation Network. It also provides a stronger emphasis on the relationship between local development decisions and transportation investment – particularly in terms of effective transit investment.

[Regional Solicitation effectively allocates federal transportation dollars](#)

Local officials had high praise for the process that allocated \$176 million in federal dollars to transportation projects slated for construction throughout the region in 2017-2019. In May, the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) selected local projects for federal funding following an evaluation of the process and criteria over the course of the previous 18 months. The Council concurred with TAB's selection and recommendation.

Projects selected in this Regional Solicitation include local highway, bridge, transit, and bikeway and pedestrian enhancements in the metro area that local units of government submitted for funding consideration. The \$176 million of federal funds will leverage an additional \$131 million in local matching funds. The total cost of the all the projects comes to \$307 million. Carver County Commissioner Randy Maluchnik, a member of TAB, said the selected projects addressed meaningful transportation infrastructure needs and were regionally balanced.

[Metro Mobility restructuring improves customer service and reduces costs](#)

Metro Mobility is a shared public transportation service for certified riders who are unable to use regular route buses due to a disability or health condition. The 20-year-old Metro Mobility service model that was adopted in 1994 did not keep pace with the changing demographics and travel patterns, contributed to regional inequity in service delivery, and compounded challenges in federal compliance. To address these problems, Metro Mobility restructured its contractor service model, shifting from a five-contractor model to a three-contractor model. This change improves customer service by providing all customers with one-seat rides through eliminating transfers and by ensuring safety net programs, such as Premium Same Day Taxi Service and Assured Ride Home, are available to all customers. Restructuring Metro Mobility also saves the Metropolitan Council money—an estimated \$630,000 annually.

[Light rail ridership climbs, sets records](#)

The METRO Green Line enjoyed tremendous success during its first full-year of operation. Passengers boarded Green Line trains nearly 1.3 million times in October, the highest monthly total since the line opened in 2014.

Average weekday ridership in October 2015 exceeded 44,000, well ahead of the 41,000 average weekday rides forecast for 2030. With fans traveling to the new Saint Paul Saints ballpark, TCF Bank Stadium and Target Field, single-day light rail ridership topped 100,000 for the first time ever on Thursday, Sept. 3. The Blue Line also had a strong year, with ridership up 12.5% through the end of October.

The state's first light-rail line also celebrated an important milestone: in January, the Blue Line surpassed 100 million total rides since its 2004 opening.

Elsewhere, Northstar ridership increased slightly as on-time performance improved to 95%. Bus ridership declined, in part due to customers shifting to the Green Line. Several efforts were launched to support bus ridership, including the introduction of free WiFi on several express and local routes.

Metro Transit also provided more than 575,000 rides to and from the 2015 Minnesota State Fair, the highest express and regular route ridership in event history. Through the end of November, total ridership exceeded 79 million, a nearly 2% increase over last year.

[Metro Transit initiates major bus stop improvements](#)

Efforts to improve the waiting experience at bus stops began taking shape across the region through the Better Bus Stops program. Metro Transit installed shelters at 51 locations where none had previously existed. Many of these sites will include solar-powered lighting. Metro Transit replaced another 60 shelters in Minneapolis, where the agency assumed responsibility for shelters that had previously been under private management. In addition, Metro Transit installed 2,300 new bus stop signs with route numbers, maps and instructions that help customers access real-time departure information using a mobile device, the first phase in a systemwide roll-out. Digital displays with real-time departure information were also added at 15 busy bus boarding locations. Beyond the bus stop, customers benefited from the introduction of automatic on-board bus stop announcements on all routes and a new feature that provides real-time information through text message.

[A Line construction gets under way](#)

Station construction began on the state's first arterial bus rapid transit line, the A Line. Opening in 2016, the A Line will provide an improved bus experience with faster and more frequent service, specialized vehicles and train-like features including off-board fare payment and enhanced stations with more amenities and security features. The line will operate between the Rosedale Transit Center in Roseville and the METRO Blue Line's 46th Street Station in Minneapolis, serving several employment, retail and residential destinations along Snelling Avenue, Ford Parkway and 46th Street. The line will also provide a connection to the METRO Green Line's Snelling Avenue Station. Metro Transit is partnering with the City of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Port Authority to explore the possibility of building a new Major League Soccer stadium on Council-owned property near Snelling Avenue that would also be served by the A Line.

[Metro Transit improves fare payment processes](#)

More than half of transit customers pay their fares with a pre-paid Go-To Card or unlimited-ride pass, making boarding more efficient and providing customers greater convenience. Building on this trend, Metro Transit partnered with HOURCAR to give customers of the car-sharing service the ability to use their transit pass for vehicle entry. Additionally, Go-To Card readers were added to Northstar Link buses that provide connecting express bus service between the Northstar Commuter Rail line's Big Lake Station and St. Cloud. In December, Metro Transit launched a low-income fare pilot program that provides households participating in the Council's rental assistance program fare passes that automatically provide discounted, \$1 fares. A Student Pass pilot was launched in St. Paul, providing around 1,000 students with unlimited-ride transit passes. Several large employers, including Regions

Hospital, Be the Match, Delta and the Mall of America, also joined the Metropass program to provide employees a low-cost, unlimited-ride transit passes.

Environmental Services

Keeping sewer rates competitive

MCES provides wastewater treatment services to 108 municipalities in the seven-county area at wholesale rates. In turn, those municipalities bill the households and businesses within their boundaries for the wastewater treatment services received, at an average annual rate of \$242. This \$242 retail sewer rate is 40% lower than the average rate of \$404 reported by 25 similarly sized wastewater treatment “peer” agencies in the U.S., according to the most recent survey (2013) by the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA).

Council protects public health and environment

MCES treats approximately 250 million gallons of wastewater from more than two million residents daily. This cleaned water is discharged to our rivers. Six wastewater treatment plants received national awards in 2015 for five years or more of perfect discharge permit compliance through 2014: Hastings (24 years); St. Croix Valley (23 years); Seneca (14 years); Blue Lake (9 years); Eagles Point (9 years); and Empire (7 years). These compliance records are among the highest in the nation.

Seeking solutions to water supply, water resources management issues

In collaboration with partner agencies and the region’s communities, the Council updated and adopted key water-related plans in 2015. The *2040 Water Resources Policy Plan* now has two overarching themes: taking an integrated approach to water supply, water and quality and wastewater collection and treatment, rather than addressing those issues separately; and also doing so in collaboration with local government and other partners. The plan includes policies and strategies to:

- Treat wastewater from homes, businesses, and industries to high water quality standards to protect public health and the environment.
- Protect and improve the quality of surface waters.

Helping ensure the metro area has adequate water supplies now and in the future

In 2015 the Metropolitan Area Water Supply Advisory Committee and the Council approved an updated Metropolitan Area Master Water Supply Plan. The plan charts a path toward a future of affordable, safe and abundant water needed for a prosperous and equitable region. The plan stresses collaboration among communities and agencies, utilization of data that helps map out water supply trends, and options for action – including water conservation – as keys to a successful “water future” for the metro area. The Council’s role will include providing information and planning tools to help communities secure safe and plentiful drinking water, while protecting the region’s water resources.