

Thrive MSP 2040 Policy Discussion Outline

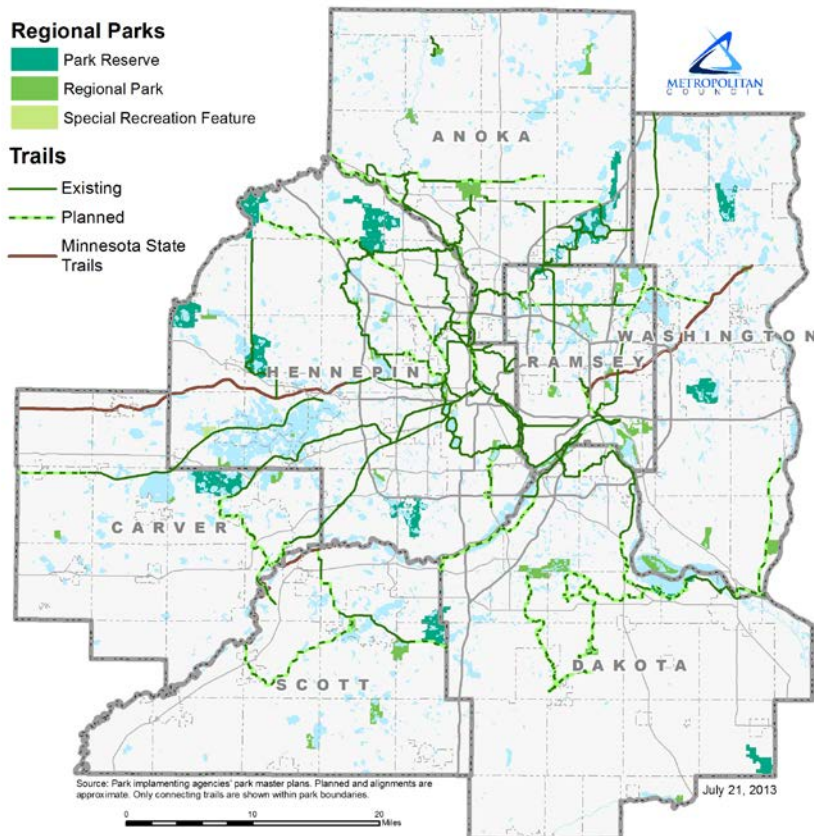
Regional Parks and Trails Issues

Scope, geography and authority of the discussion

The [1974 Metropolitan Parks Act](#) created the Regional Parks System and authorized the Metropolitan Council to:

- Identify land, which together with State parks and trails, will meet the outdoor recreational needs of the people of the metropolitan area, and
- Grant capital funds to regional park agencies to implement the [Regional Parks Policy Plan](#).

Regional parks and open space is one of the Council's statutory systems



named in the Metropolitan Land Planning Act.

Over the past 40 years, the Council has invested \$591.6 million in regional and state funds to help its ten partner implementing agencies acquire and develop regional parks and trails. Today, the system includes nearly 55,000 acres of regional parkland and more than 300 miles of regional trails. In 2012, there were nearly 46 million visits to the regional parks system.

Today's issues are strongly connected to past and previous Thrive discussions on:

- Natural resources;
- Transportation policy: Bicycle and pedestrian issues;
- Water resources;
- Economic competitiveness.

Existing policy direction

[Regional recreation open space](#) includes land and water of regional importance including park reserves, major linear parks, large recreation parks and special use facilities (such as conservatories and zoos). Regional importance and the regional parks system are understood to:

- transcend local boundaries;
- provide recreation and resource restoration that local communities may not be able to do on their own;
- attract visitors from across the metropolitan area and beyond.

In addition to the regional parks system, local communities provide active recreation opportunities that range from tot lots to athletic fields and community centers – facilities used almost exclusively by local residents.

Within the [Regional Development Framework](#), Council roles related to the regional park system are:

- Conserve natural resources—particularly water resources—and protect vital natural areas when planning and constructing regional infrastructure (including regional parks and open space).

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- Expand the regional park system, as appropriate, to conserve, maintain and connect natural resources identified as high quality or of regional importance. Invest in acquisition and development of land for the regional park system.

The [2030 Regional Parks Policy Plan](#) defines specific policies for the regional parks system, including siting, acquisition, finance, planning, and activities.

Emerging tensions

A 2008 Council survey found that usage of the regional parks system was not representative of the demographics of the region, specifically as it relates to communities of color. Later this year, the Council will conduct targeted qualitative research with communities of color to inform the development of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan.

The 2008 Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment increased the general sales tax by 0.375 percent until 2034 to support the Parks and Trails Fund (14.25 percent) that funds parks and trails of State or regional significance and the Outdoor Heritage Fund (33 percent), used to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for game, fish, and wildlife. The dedicated stream of funding for parks acquisition and development may attract requests for the Council to incorporate existing or planned parks and trails into the regional parks system. While some parks have been added to the regional parks system – such as Tony Schmidt Park in Arden Hills and Kingswood Special Recreation Feature – many local parks and trails hoping for regional funding do not meet the criteria for [regional recreation open space](#), defined in Council policy as minimum acreage, share of non-local visitors and tied to natural resources.

Questions for discussion

- A. **Equitable access to regional parks and trails.** Based on the findings of the Council’s research with communities of color, what types of roles is

the Council prepared to play to ensure equitable access to regional parks and trails?

- Encourage local and regional partners to offer communications, programming and facilities to address the findings;
- Collaborate with local partners to link regional parks and trails with concentrations of residents of color;
- Convene regional parks agencies with communities of color;
- Continue research on parks usage to meet changing needs.

- B. **Integrate regional parks and trails investment with transit.** What roles should the Council play to support access to parks and open space along densifying transitway corridors?

- Encourage local governments to plan for open space along transitway corridors;
- Collaborate with partners to develop standards for parks and open space in station-area planning;
- Highlight and enhance regional trail connections and access to regional parks where they intersect with transitways;
- Promote intermodal access to regional parks, trails and transit network;
- Encourage local governments to apply for Livable Communities Act grants to fund elements of open spaces along transitways.

- C. **Integrate regional parks and trails with bicycle transportation.** Many regional trails serve both a recreation and a transportation purpose. What will the Council do to integrate bicycle transportation with the regional trail system?

- Collaborate with partners to increase awareness of the regional bicycle network;
- Strengthen alignment of planning and resources between the regional trail system and the transportation system.