

PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

2022 Draft Budget and Levies



METROPOLITAN
C O U N C I L

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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Comment Overview

This report serves to summarize public comments received for the draft 2022 budget and levies for the Metropolitan Council. The budget was released for public comment on Oct. 27, 2021. Between that time and Dec. 8, 2021, one comment was received from MN350, on behalf of its transit justice team. The comments are included in this report. During that time, the draft budget and plain language summaries were available on the Metropolitan Council's website and through printed copies as requested.

The Met Council proactively promoted availability of the comment draft, including advertising it and the public hearing through social media, through Council members to each of the 16 districts, and other means. An opportunity for in-person comment from members of the public was provided at the regularly scheduled meeting of the Metropolitan Council on Dec. 8, 2021. No member of the public made comment during this time.

The table below summarizes the comments received; the contents of each comment are on the following pages.

Date	Format	Resident last name	Resident first name	Organization represented
12/8/2021	email	Jereb	Adrianna	MN350

Comments in full:

Dear Metropolitan Council members,
MN350 is a climate justice organization dedicated to ending the pollution damaging our climate, speeding the transition to clean energy, and creating a just and healthy future for all. Our Transit Justice team works with transit riders and advocates for reliable and accessible public transit.

We ask that you adapt the 2022 Metropolitan Council draft budget to address the following concerns, and postpone its approval until these changes are made.

Transit Fares

MN350 and MoveMN have done ten transit canvasses from August to December on Metro Transit routes, talked to several hundred riders, and collected 166 rider stories. During September and October, we repeatedly heard how \$1 fares positively impacted riders, especially daily riders who depend on Metro Transit as their primary mode of transportation. For some, a \$2.50 fare may not be a burden, but for many low-income people, it is a barrier to getting to work, school, and family.

In the 2022 draft budget, transit fares are expected to fund only 8% of Metro Transit operating costs. Public transportation is a public service, not a business. It should be free for everyone to use, and fares create unnecessary barriers. In addition, collecting fares is expensive. Having fare machines, enforcing fares, and making buses wait at stops for riders to pay wastes time and funding. It's not a simple question, but the rewards would be significant: how could the budget be altered so that fares are not necessary? Where else could that 8% come from?

Service Cuts

Another theme of our transit canvasses has been the importance of frequent, reliable transit service. Metro Transit route cuts in the month of December are and will be detrimental to people who rely on transit. Especially during winter months, it is dangerous and inhumane to keep people waiting at stops because transit is not frequent or reliable.

We're aware that service cuts are in part due to the operator shortage: to that end, the Council and Metro Transit need to fund better paid positions with reasonable schedules that make operator positions more appealing and sustainable as careers. Transit cannot function without operators, and operators must be compensated well for their essential work.

Other transit systems around the country have used federal funds to improve service by putting in bus lanes and giving buses signal priority. Metro Transit should follow suit. The Metropolitan Council must not allow federal money to remain as a surplus and go unused.

Transit Planning

Only 1% of the 2022 Transportation Operating Budget is dedicated to transit planning, and that's unacceptable. We know that a robust public transit system is essential for the health of our climate and communities, and expanding that system must be a high priority.

The draft budget does not include any plans for using federal infrastructure funding that the Council will likely receive of the \$818 million awarded to Minnesota for public transportation projects. We understand that the exact amount of funding has not been determined or distributed, but it is still the Council's responsibility to plan for the future and have projects lined up and ready to go once that funding is available. It is essential that the Council fully fund the F, G, and H BRT lines and invest in planning new lines.

Transit Police

The draft budget does not provide any exact amount for how much the Metro Transit Police department will cost to staff. There's an item for 217 FTE Metro Transit Police staff, but no number on the cost of salaries, benefits, insurance, and other costs for those staff. The budget needs to be rewritten to include an exact amount for staffing Metro Transit Police. MN350 requested an itemized police budget on November 11th but still have not received any information, despite following up multiple times and getting confirmation that our requests were received. Whether because of inefficiency, understaffing, or willful neglect, the result is the same: information is being withheld. We did not receive information about the police budget in advance of this hearing, and therefore cannot comment on it at all. The lack of oversight and transparency from the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit Police is unacceptable. **We ask that the budget approval be postponed until we receive this information.**

Budget Process Accessibility

The Metropolitan Council budget process is not transparent or accessible. It has not been widely promoted, and there are no accessibility measures in place. The Council should advertise the budget process to transit riders through Metro Transit bus and train ads, provide translators for Spanish, Hmong, and Somali speakers, and research additional accessibility measures.

Additionally, this budget hearing is scheduled for the same date and time as the City of Minneapolis budget meeting, so residents of Minneapolis do not have the option of attending both meetings. There should be more than one time available for people to attend this meeting.

These comments written and submitted by Adrianna Jereb, MN350 Transit Justice Organizer, on December 8, 2021.

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