

Committee Report

Transportation Committee



Committee meeting date: October 13, 2025

For the Metropolitan Council: October 22, 2025

Business Item: 2025-256

Northstar Replacement Service - Big Lake and Elk River, Contract 251100

Proposed action

That the Metropolitan Council authorizes the Regional Administrator to negotiate and execute contract number 251100 a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) for the Council to operate commuter express bus service between Big Lake, Elk River, and downtown Minneapolis at no net cost to the Council.

Summary of Transportation Committee discussion/questions

Metro Transit Service Development Director Adam Harrington presented this item.

Carter, Tyronne asked if this is the first time the Council has partnered with MNDOT on a service like this. Harrington responded that Council has had an example of previous service funding agreement related to access closure into downtown Minneapolis during I-35W south construction, as well more similar contract operating as a contractor to Maple Grove Transit and Anoka County for a previous project (US Hwy 65 express bus to Ham Lake).

Johnson reiterated that this is only three weekday rush hour trips – not Vikings/special events or weekends.

Vice Chair Chamblis asked about the definition of rush hour times as described in this presentation as 6:30-8:30am, 4:30-5:30pm, are these different than previous Route 888 presentation (Business Item 2025-178 from Aug 11). Harrington responded that the times indicated today for Route 882 are approximate trip times range for most popular work shifts in downtown Minneapolis, versus the "Fare Rush Hour times of 6:00-9:00am and 3:00-6:30pm". Route 888 will span that time period.

Osman asked if this is the first time Metro Transit has operated outside of the seven-county metro area. Harrington responded that this would be the first time that Metro Transit operate a contract outside the seven-county metro area.

Motion by Osman, seconded by Johnson. **Motion carried.**

Johnson added that Harrington stated that even during with contract, Metro Transit will have enough buses and operators to advance all Metro Transit initiatives as planned. Quite different from years of bus operator shortage.

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District(s), member(s):	District 2, Councilmember Reva Chamblis; District 7, Councilmember Yassin Osman District 9, Councilmember Diego Morales
Policy/legal reference:	Minnesota Statutes §§ 471.59; 473.121; 174.90; 174.02; FM 14-1 Procurement Policy, FM 15-1 Income Grants Policy
Staff prepared/presented:	Lesley Kandaras, Metro Transit General Manager Adam Harrington, Director, Service Development Jonathan Ahn, Assistant Director, Service Development Ryan Heath, Manager, Service Development
Division/department:	Metro Transit/Service Development

Proposed action

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Background

MnDOT has requested express bus service to Big Lake and Elk River as a two-year joint powers agreement. Sherburne County has supported the request. The Council-approved Northstar replacement service plan did not include Big Lake and Elk River, which are outside of the Council's statutory transit service area. Big Lake and Elk River rides are mostly accessed by park and ride and are approximately 50% of Northstar ridership.

Many requests for service north of Ramsey were received during the Northstar transition engagement process. While the Council does not have statutory authority to serve Big Lake and Elk River with bus service, MnDOT does have that authority, and the Council may serve as a contracted operator to MnDOT.

The proposed agreement with MNDOT will authorize the Council to provide commuter express bus service outside of the Metropolitan Area to Big Lake and Elk River park and ride lots on a demonstration basis.

Approval of this request would authorize the Council to negotiate and execute an agreement with MnDOT for the Council to provide commuter express bus service between Big Lake, Elk River, and downtown Minneapolis. There is no net fiscal impact to the Council.

would be provided, timed to major downtown work starts and ends. All trips will serve the Marq/2 corridor in downtown Minneapolis. No weekend service would be provided. No other services will be included in the contract. Existing regional coach buses will be utilized. Council express bus fares will be used, and riders can use existing pass and discount products.

Service Development will periodically evaluate the route's performance and coordinate with MnDOT, Sherburne County, and other stakeholders to adjust the service as needed.

By mutual agreement and with notification, MnDOT and the Council will be able to terminate the service early if needed. Service beyond the two-year demonstration would be part of a future contract.

Rationale

Minnesota Statute § 471.59 and Council Procurement Policy FM 14-1 requires that all Joint Powers Agreements be authorized by the Council. Income Grants Policy FM 15-1 requires agreements exceeding \$500,000 be approved by the Council.

Thrive lens analysis

On Feb. 12, 2025, the Council adopted Imagine 2050, which builds on policy direction in Thrive MSP 2040. Under the Thrive lens, the proposed action supports Prosperity by providing Northstar replacement service to Big Lake and Elk River.

Funding

Council bus operating will be used to operate the service; costs will be reimbursed to the Council by MnDOT.

Small business inclusion

There are no impacts to small businesses with the proposed action.

