



**To:** Cole Hiniker, AICP  
Metropolitan Council

**From:** Joseph Kapper, AICP  
SRF Consulting Group

**Date:** May 20, 2020

**Subject:** Metropolitan Council Service Allocation Study  
Initial Transit Agency Outreach Summary

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

One of the first tasks associated with the Service Allocation Study involved a report on existing conditions for transit service within the Minneapolis – St. Paul region. In addition to documenting the scope of transit service and socioeconomic data, the consultant team conducted outreach to each transit provider to understand the scope of their services and gain general input on the study. In March and April of 2020 several video and tele-conferences were held with individuals responsible for service monitoring, planning, and allocation at each agency. The content of each meeting included the following topics:

- Offering an overview of the Service Allocation Study and gathering initial feedback on work to date and potential successful outcomes.
- Transit agencies provide a summary of their current services.
- How are transit operating resources allocated today?
  - How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
- Agency planning and service development priorities.

As of this memo's completion, interviews have been conducted with Metro Transit, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority, SouthWest Transit, the City of Plymouth, Maple Grove Transit, and Metropolitan Transportation Services. Prior to each stakeholder interview, the consultant team reviewed the transit services currently offered by each agency, as well as relevant survey results, internal procedures, and long-range planning documents provided for the purposes of this study. These documents were used to inform the in-meeting discussions, as well as this report.

### **Key Themes: Service Allocation and Monitoring**

With variations on specifics, all transit agencies use similar industry standard performance measures on service efficiency, revenue effectiveness, and cost effectiveness to aid in making service planning decisions. They also differentiate standards by transit mode (e.g. commuter express service vs. local service). Common measures include:

- Passengers per in-service hour
- Passengers per trip (express service)
- Operating ratio (farebox return)
- Operating cost per revenue hour

As the largest transit agency in the region, Metro Transit has the largest internal infrastructure (in terms of technology, data collection, and staffing) to monitor its service and implement planning decisions, typically performed on a quarterly basis coinciding with operator picks for work assignments involving multiple agency departments. Other agencies make service planning decisions on a rolling basis, and smaller agencies make the decisions with local transit agency boards or city management.

A common objective of several agencies was the desire to maintain minimum standards of service quality where there is the greatest potential for ridership. Examples of this include maintaining the highest levels of span and frequency on Metro Transit's High Frequency Network and maintaining express trip frequency and span at key transit centers and suburban park-and-rides.

Conversely, both small and large agencies have noted challenges in providing coverage-based service in areas of low ridership demand, especially given recent trends toward the suburbanization of low-income households and low-wage employment centers. These demographic shifts can make transit service essential to the livelihood of vulnerable populations, but the types of transit that are often most beneficial to these populations (including suburban local routes, reverse-commute routes, and demand-response services) may not perform well based on traditional transit performance metrics.

Though not all providers in the region have a consistent formal, written policy for service allocation or a documented process for evaluating and implementing service changes, every agency engages in service monitoring activities, in many cases using regional performance standards as specified in the Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) and Appendix G. However, multiple agencies expressed a need to incorporate measures of success beyond ridership and productivity, including access to jobs, housing, and other opportunities, as well as measures of equity. Some stakeholders also expressed interest in developing a more formalized process to coordinate, plan, and implement transit services across agency boundaries, with the goal of delivering a seamless experience to riders.

Detailed examples of service allocation methods are described in Appendix A: Meeting Records. Additionally, transit agencies provided the consultant team with relevant survey results, internal procedures, and long-range planning documents. These materials are included in Appendix B: Supporting Materials.

### **Service Planning Priorities**

An inclusive account of agencies' service planning priorities is included in Appendix A: Meeting Records. Briefly, the following projects and items were cited among the region's service planning priorities as they relate to the Service Allocation Study:

- Serving the I-494 Corridor as a market for both express service and "microtransit" demand response service.
- Addressing service planning questions that go unanswered in the current TPP (new modes of transportation, updating transit market area definitions and recommendations)
- How to serve emerging concentrations of low-income individuals and new affordable housing developments in areas that are difficult to efficiently serve with transit
- Expanding more efficient types of demand-response transit
- Understanding how nonprofit operators (DARTS, Newtrax) can be a part of coverage-based services
- Efficiently connecting people to suburban job centers
- Continued development of service around planned transitways
- Acknowledging the realities of scarce and/or volatile funding sources and issues with bus operator shortages, etc. and how agencies can plan to be more resilient.

Overall, the Service Allocation Study is an opportunity to build a regional framework for transit service planning that better reflects the needs of transit providers and their customers. Throughout the initial outreach process, transit agency staff exhibited consistent approaches to transit service planning, including the need to balance ridership and productivity with a renewed focus on access and equity. Future phases of the study will explore specific measures for evaluating existing and proposed transit service, as well as future service scenarios that illustrate how the region's transit agencies can translate these shared values into action.



### Appendix A: Meeting Records

Meeting records are listed in the order in which interviews were completed. Supporting documents included in Appendix B were used to inform the meeting discussion and the meeting records. These documents are cited in bold where appropriate (i.e., **B1**), and a full list is available on the final page of this report.

**Stakeholder Meeting: Matt Fyten & Charlie Cochrane, SouthWest Transit;  
Remote Conference – Thursday, March 19**

**1. Introduction/Purpose of Study (SRF)**

**2. Summary of Current Services**

Commuter/Express Routes:

- 600, 602, 690, 695, 697, 698, 699; Shuttles serving Normandale Community College and Best Buy headquarters in Bloomington. Limited reverse commute service; 1 trip per day through Southdale Transit Center.
- According to SouthWest Transit, “99% of [their] express service is oriented toward downtown Minneapolis and U of M.” Remaining express service offers links to Best Buy HQ and Normandale College along I-494.
- Service to Carver Station (Routes 697 and 698) is supported via a CMAQ grant. Will evaluate the continuation of service based on performance.
- Other growth areas include expanded special event services (100k rides to Minnesota State Fair; numerous professional sporting events and other activities).

Park-and-Ride Facilities (**B4**):

- SouthWest Station (Eden Prairie) – 970+ spaces; at capacity (400 spaces being added w/SWLRT)
- Chanhassen Transit Station – 400+ spaces
- SouthWest Village (Chanhassen) – 500+ spaces
- East Creek Transit Station (Chaska) – 700+ spaces
- Carver Station – 400 spaces (owned by the City of Carver)
- Park-and-rides are at 50 percent capacity overall, with the exception of SouthWest Station.

Suburban Local Routes:

- None currently offered; this may change as SWT reallocates service in response to Southwest LRT (Green Line Extension) implementation. Also expecting SWLRT to replace SWT’s midday and reverse commute trips.

Demand-Response Services:

- SouthWest Prime: general-public demand-response service operating weekdays and Saturday. Saturday service allows connections with Metro Transit at Southdale Transit Center, as SWT weekday routes are not in operation.
- Since beginning in 2015, SW Prime has expanded from 40-50 rides per day to approximately 400 rides per day. Demand is still growing as SWT continues to market the service and add

capacity, but the agency expects this to level off soon. Also offers NEMT trips branded as SW Prime MD.

- SW Prime began with software from Ridecell but switched to Spare Labs (<https://www.sparelabs.com/en/>) in 2019. Spare has been effective for service monitoring and data analytics, allowing SWT to match capacity to demand.

### 3. Current Policies and Procedures

- How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - Balance of political requests, funding availability, and performance metrics
  - Service changes are made 3-4 times per year, including a seasonal reduction in May when U of M ends classes, a seasonal service addition in September when U of M begins, and another change in winter if needed.
- What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - For commuter/express routes, SWT monitors demand by looking at ridership per trip. When ridership is lower than 20 passengers per trip, SWT may reduce the number of trips or modify timings to better balance demand.
  - If adding a park-and-ride, SWT aims to meet minimum peak headways of 15 minutes (except for SouthWest Station, which has multiple routes providing service every 5-10 minutes).
  - Midday service is scheduled to deliver appropriate headways rather than specific ridership metrics (intended to be available for occasional use).
  - If ridership exceeds 35-40 passengers per trip, SWT will consider adding service.
- Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
  - Yes. SWT looks at a variety of metrics for both commuter/express service and demand-response (SW Prime).
  - For commuter/express routes, the primary service planning metric is trip-level ridership as described above, but SWT also monitors systemwide performance on other metrics, including passengers per in-service hour (PPISH) and subsidy per rider.
  - For SW Prime, goals are to achieve an average of 3 passengers per hour and a maximum wait time of 30 minutes. Typically, the service has been able to achieve average wait times of 15-20 minutes. Average trip duration is also monitored, with a goal of under 20 minutes.

### 4. Planning Priorities

- SWT Long-Range Action Plan (**B16**) calls for the following: Increased commuter express service; Increased reverse commute service; Increased express service along the Highway 5 corridor; SW Prime and Express Service expansion to I-494 corridor/Mall of America.
- The next service expansion will be the SW Prime extension to the I-494 corridor. The agency is in the process of purchasing 10 cutaway-style demand-response vehicles with grant

funding. By late 2021 or early 2022, the goal is to introduce service every 30 minutes, Monday through Saturday.

- In 2023, SWT will implement service changes in response to the completion of SWLRT (the Green Line extension to Eden Prairie). This will allow SWT to reduce or eliminate midday service between SouthWest Station and downtown Minneapolis/University of Minnesota, as LRT will provide service between these destinations. In SWT's view, the new rail connection will allow SWT to reallocate operating funds to SW Prime, first- and last-mile services, and fixed route service along Highway 212.
- SWT is in very preliminary conversations with the City of Victoria regarding a potential park-and-ride facility on Highway 5. Victoria is not currently part of the metro region's transit taxing district, so the funding question would need to be resolved for SWT to provide service to Victoria. It is also undetermined as to whether there is sufficient demand for this service.
- Carver County is interested in expanding SW Prime service throughout the county (beyond the existing communities served). These discussions are (again) very preliminary.
- SWT is currently working on a grant for a new bus storage facility. The current garage is already at capacity, and 15 vehicles are already on order. SWT notes that capital funding for vehicle storage is one need that is currently not well addressed by regional and state funding structures.
- SWT notes that there is a need for regional conversation regarding the coordination of various demand-response services, including SW Prime and Smart Link/Transit Link. In the agency's view, the Met Council pulled Smart Link/Transit Link from the SWT operating area without full consultation with SWT. One particular gap noted with this transition is the ability to offer scheduled rides. This is a feature offered by Smart Link/Transit Link, but not SW Prime. SWT has the software capability to introduce scheduled rides, but it would need additional vehicles and operations funding in order to do so without impacting the quality of service for on-demand riders.
- SWT offered the following feedback on regional priorities (paraphrased here):
  - The region's transit ridership is not necessarily going in the right direction. Do we need different metrics for different market areas?
  - One suggestion could be to take a look at the current TPP Appendix G and incorporate new service models that are now in use (such as SW Prime).
  - Staff noted that SWT has 11 of the 15 longest express routes in terms of trip length, which impacts its performance on some metrics.
  - It could make sense to establish separate metrics for ridership-based service (urban local and commuter/express) and coverage-based service (Prime). These metrics could then be used to allocate both capital and operations funding.
- Regarding customer feedback, SWT notes that Prime currently averages 4.8 out of 5 stars as rated by riders. This has varied as the service has grown. One point of feedback received from customers is that some would like the ability to schedule trips in advance (as discussed above).

## **5. Next Steps**

- SWT to review and comment on SRF notes (complete).

## **6. Supporting Materials Provided/Obtained**

**B15.** SouthWest Transit 2018 Rider Survey.

**B16.** SouthWest Transit Long-Range Action Plan.



**Stakeholder Meeting: Mike Opatz, Maple Grove Transit;  
Remote Conference – Thursday, March 19**

**1. Introduction/Purpose of Study (SRF)**

**2. Summary of Current Services**

Commuter/Express Routes:

(MGT prefers the term “Express”, since “Commuter” is a separate NTD reporting category.)

- Routes 780, 781, 782, 783, 785 provide service to downtown Minneapolis. 781 and 785 are core routes serving Maple Grove Transit’s main transit centers. Route 789 provides service to the University of Minnesota. Most routes make local stops within Maple Grove, with the exception of Routes 785 and 789 (express from transit centers).
- Ridership on many current routes is often at or near capacity. MGT notes that according to their license plate survey, many of the customers parking at MGT park-and-ride facilities come from communities further to the north and west that currently lack transit service.
- Current routes provide approximately 830k-850k rides per year on a \$6 million operating budget.

Park-and-Ride Facilities (**B4**):

- Maple Grove Transit Station – 924 spaces, restroom, bike parking (serving Routes 781 and 789)
- Parkway Station – 800 spaces, restroom, bike parking (serving Route 785)
- Zachary Lane – 322 spaces, heated shelter, bike rack (serving Route 782)
- Cross Winds Church – 125 spaces, shelter, bike rack (serving Route 783)
- Shepherd of the Grove Church – 50 spaces, shelter only (serving Route 780)
- In 2018, Maple Grove Transit Station was at 98 percent capacity; Parkway Station was at 67%.

Suburban Local Routes:

- Route 788 provides shuttle service within Maple Grove, connecting passengers with Route 783. If and when funding permits, MGT would like to introduce a new east-west suburban local route (Route 784).

Demand-Response Services:

- MY RIDE (formerly Dial-a-Ride) is a general-public demand-response service operating weekdays from 6 AM to 6 PM and Saturday 7 AM to 4 PM. Service is provided within the City of Maple Grove, as well as to/from the City of Osseo and select destinations in Brooklyn Park.

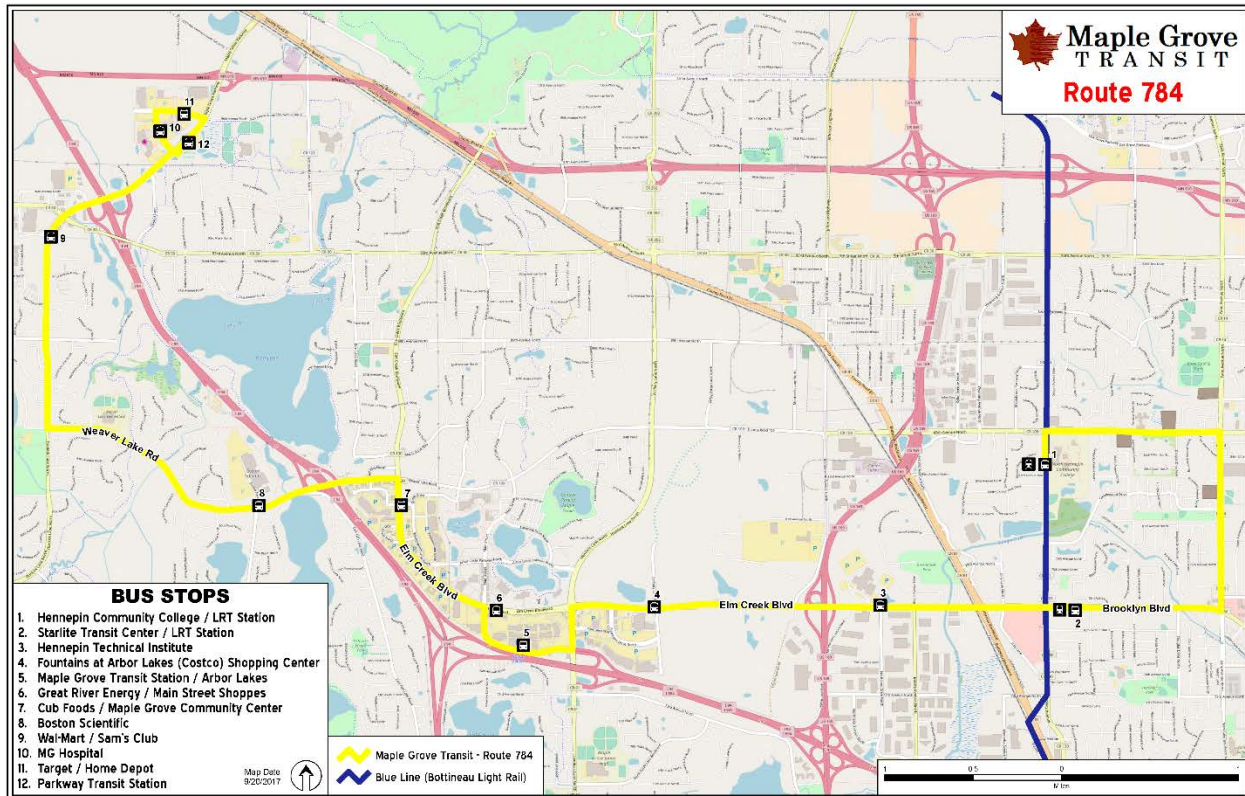
- With the transition to the MY RIDE branding, MGT introduced on-demand rides made possible by new dispatch software from Ecolane (<https://www.ecolane.com/>). Both on-demand and scheduled rides can be booked via the Ecolane mobile app.
- Demand for MY RIDE has been growing since the transition. Effective January 2, 2020, MGT raised the MY RIDE fare from \$1.75 to \$3.00, with discounted 10-ride tickets available for \$20.

### 3. Current Policies and Procedures

- How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - Like other agencies, MGT monitors performance metrics by route and trip and makes changes when feasible based on the availability of staff, vehicles, and operating funds.
  - MGT's Transit Manager collaborates with the city manager and city council on service allocation decisions.
- What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - For commuter/express routes, MGT monitors trends in ridership by trip. When warranted by sustained demand patterns (as evidenced by sample data or complaints), MGT will attempt to shift trip times, switch to a higher-capacity vehicle, or add a trip if resources are available.
- Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
  - MGT reviews performance metrics regularly but does not use specific targets to determine when service changes are needed.

### 4. Planning Priorities

- MGT customers have expressed a desire for earlier AM trips, later PM trips, and more mid-day service to and from Minneapolis. Increasing midday and reverse commute service is a major goal of the agency but is limited by funding constraints.
- Beginning March 16, 2020, MGT launched 3 reverse-commute trips on Route 781, providing service between downtown Minneapolis and Maple Grove Transit Station. The intent of this service is to allow customers to connect with the MY RIDE service to reach their employment destinations in Maple Grove.
- The Transit Manager offered the following feedback on current planning priorities:
  - In the late '90s, MGT only operated local demand response/dial-a-ride and express service; Maple Grove did not have the density to support local bus service. Now, this is changing as the City of Maple Grove implements more compact design in the core of the community, and as more employers move to the area.
  - MGT sees an increasing need for suburban local service that would connect with Brooklyn Park and the proposed Blue Line Extension (Bottineau LRT). The agency has developed a concept for Route 794 to address these needs (shown in the map on the following page, also included as **B3**).



- MGT is aware of MnDOT’s current plans to explore Highway BRT on I-94/Hwy 252. Given the delays and issues with the Blue Line Extension, it could be that BRT is a better solution for both this and the Bottineau corridor.
- MGT is observing increasing demand in communities to the northwest, including Rogers, Albertville, Monticello, and Osseo, where many residents drive to MGT park-and-rides to catch buses to downtown Minneapolis. With MGT’s facilities at or near capacity, Maple Grove thinks there is a need for additional transit service further northwest (whether provided by the Met Council, Metro Transit, or MGT). Additional communities would likely need to become part of the transit taxing district for this to be possible.
- MGT would like to focus more resources on local and reverse commute service to better meet the needs of its residents and businesses. A number of local constituencies are actively advocating for improved transit service, including Age-Friendly Maple Grove, which recently completed an action plan detailing steps to improve the city’s livability for seniors. This plan can be found here: <http://agefriendlymaplegrove.org/cms-files/23141-maplegrovetransit-recreation-agefriendlymg-brochure.pdf>.
- MGT offered the following feedback on regional funding priorities (paraphrased here):
  - Funding at the regional level is apportioned between the providers by the Met Council, but funding levels do not seem to be “dialed in” to actual service needs.

There is likely a need for more funding in general, but allocation could also be more transparent and better prioritized.

- MGT notes that the current formula is loosely based on each community's tax base from 2002. A more equitable system could include a variety of population-based and performance-based metrics, including measures that would take into account the broader transit shed served by systems like MGT. Any formula should be simple to explain to the public and closely related to factors that impact transit service delivery.
- Agencies may be reluctant to change the current funding allocation if overall funding levels do not change. If there is an increase in funding, there may be more openness to reassessing the methods of allocation.

## 5. Next Steps

- MGT to review and comment on SRF notes (complete)

## 6. Supporting Materials Provided/Obtained

**B1.** Maple Grove Transit: 2016 "Express Bus Service" Customer Survey - Report of Results (December 2016).

**B2.** Maple Grove Transit: Rider Guide (March 2020).

**Stakeholder Meeting: John Harper, MTS / Transit Link;  
Remote Conference – Friday, March 20**

**1. Introduction/Purpose of Study (SRF)**

**2. Summary of Current Services**

- The Met Council’s service (including MTS and Metro Transit) is envisioned as a single set of fixed routes. All routes are planned by Metro Transit’s Service Development group.
- When determining which routes will be contracted, Metro Transit considers the following factors:
  - Productivity (lower-productivity routes are ideal to shift to a lower cost structure)
  - Community/street network characteristics (simple vs. complex – more complex operations are often kept in-house at Metro Transit)
  - Passenger load characteristics (routes with minimal passenger loads can be operated by contractors using 30-foot buses; Metro Transit generally operates 40’ and larger buses)
- Overall, the primary metric for determining Metro Transit vs. MTS contracted operation is productivity. If changes in ridership, route structure, or productivity do occur, routes can switch between Metro Transit and MTS contracted operation.
  - Examples: Route 84 (A Line local service) and Route 16 (Green Line local service) moved to contractor operation when METRO services were implemented on each corridor.
  - Conversely, Route 32 (Lowry Ave.) was moved to Metro Transit operation when productivity increased.
- In the past, Metro Transit had used geographic factors and/or route classification to make contracting decisions. Contracted routes were primarily suburban locals, with few routes in Minneapolis or Saint Paul. MTS now operates several supporting routes in the core of the region, including many of the crosstown routes in Saint Paul.
- In recent years, Metro Transit experienced a driver shortage and looked to contracted service to offload routes and/or operate new service. Because of this, MTS now operates several commuter/express routes, including Routes 670, 671, 664, and 452.
- MTS’ current contract operators include First Transit and Schmitt & Sons, as well as MTM (until June). Staff note that there has been difficulty attracting qualified bidders in recent years (MV had previously held contracts but is no longer participating).

**Demand-Response Services:**

- Metro Mobility: ADA complementary paratransit offered within  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of all fixed routes in the region (2.5m trips per year). 3 service areas; dispatched based on passenger residence location.

- Transit Link: General public demand-response service for trips where fixed-route service is not available (based on geography and time of day). Provides approximately 260,000 rides per year.
  - 5 service areas, including 3 directly contracted by MTS and 2 operated through county participation.
    - Smart Link (Scott/Carver counties)
    - Anoka County Traveler
  - Uses connections at fixed-route hubs when possible. For example, for a passenger living in Stillwater, the following trips might be offered:
    - Rush-hour trips from Stillwater to Saint Paul: Route 294 is available, so no Transit Link service would be offered.
    - Midday trips from Stillwater to Saint Paul: Transit Link to a hub (such as Maplewood Mall), then fixed-route service to downtown (Route 54 or 64).
    - Rides with origin and destination in Stillwater (where no local service is available): Transit Link would offer curb-to-curb trips.
  - Currently, between 80 and 90 percent of Transit Link trips are curb-to-curb, with an average trip distance of over 10 miles. Service operates Monday through Friday, and customers can reserve a ride up to 7 days in advance. Same-day rides are provided as capacity permits. Standing order (subscription) trips are accepted and account for about 75 percent of total trips.
  - One rule: If a suburban provider decides to offer an independent dial-a-ride service, Transit Link will not serve trips that lie fully within the provider's service area. Transit Link will maintain service for trips into or out of the suburban provider's territory but aims to avoid duplication for trips served by other means.
    - Prior to Transit Link (2010), there were a patchwork of demand-response systems that left some communities unserved. Now, there is a single reservation process across the region, with the exception of trips fully within suburban dial-a-ride areas.
    - When Transit Link was established, Maple Grove Transit and Plymouth Metrolink already operated their own dial-a-ride services. SouthWest Transit previously had Transit Link service, but Transit Link was discontinued when SouthWest Prime became a full-fledged demand-response service.
    - For MTS, this is a question of equity: the system's goal is to give one transit solution to each customer to avoid leaving some areas with no service at all.

#### Vanpool:

- MTS manages the Metro Vanpool program, which supports vanpools of 5 or more people commuting throughout the metro area.
- Previously, the vanpool program was subject to geography criteria to avoid duplicating fixed-route service (during peak hours, no vanpooling was allowed to downtown Minneapolis or downtown Saint Paul).

- Starting in 2020, Metro Vanpool allows vanpools anywhere in the metro area at any time of day. MTS notes that geography and coordination efforts can be barriers to creating and maintaining any vanpool, so the goal is to lower the barrier to entry.
- Metro Vanpool currently supports 55 active vans, including approximately 10 vans to Best Buy's headquarters and multiple vans to the military base at Fort Snelling.
  - Employer participation is noted to increase vanpooling: Best Buy and some other employers subsidize the rider's monthly cost.
  - Federal employees (including military) can spend their \$125 monthly transit allowance on vanpool expenses.

### **3. Current Policies and Procedures**

- How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - Service planning decisions for MTS routes are made by Metro Transit.
- What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - The TPP currently specifies that "at least 20 percent" of the region's transit service should be operated by contractors. This has always been exceeded.
  - MTS and Metro Transit have jointly developed a document to guide contracting decisions. [Metro Transit provided this document (**B8**) to the consultant team].
- Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
  - For Transit Link, MTS monitors service requests and aims to keep denials at or near 3 percent of service requests. (There may be some "invisible demand," as some customers may not call after being denied once). MTS views Transit Link as "true lifeline service"; due to the length of trips provided, it can be difficult for vehicles to serve more than 2 rides per hour.

### **4. Planning Priorities/Other Comments**

- MTS is not in the planning area, so generally planning decisions are made by Metro Transit.
- Vanpool is currently collaborating with Metro Transit's Strategic Initiatives group (Meredith Klekotka) to explore opportunities for TNC and vanpool collaboration.
- Transit Link currently uses the same Trapeze system as Metro Mobility but operates using a fully separate fleet. Transit Link and Metro Mobility are both working to implement online trip reservations through Trapeze, but Transit Link is also piloting Ecolane software in the Hennepin service area. Automated trip batching could offer improved efficiency.

### **5. Next Steps**

- MTS to review and comment on SRF notes (complete)

### **6. Supporting Materials Provided/Obtained**

**B8.** Metro Transit/MTS: Route Contracting Guidance (2012).

**B9.** MTS: Transit Link Service Areas (2020).

**Stakeholder Meeting: Aaron Bartling, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority;  
Remote Conference – Monday, March 20**

**1. Introduction/Purpose of Study (SRF)**

**2. Summary of Current Services**

Commuter/Express Routes:

- MVTA operates the following commuter/express services:
  - 12 express routes to downtown Minneapolis
  - 2 express routes to downtown Saint Paul
  - 4 reverse commute routes (3 from Minneapolis, 1 from Saint Paul)
    - Route 436 – 46<sup>th</sup> Street Station to Thomson Reuters
    - Route 445 – Cedar Grove Transit Station to Thomson Reuters
    - Route 489 – Saint Paul to Thomson Reuters
    - Route 492 – Downtown Minneapolis to Scott County
  - 2 suburb-to-suburb routes
    - Route 495 – Mall of America to Shakopee: Started with state funding, continued with private partnership. Funding agreements are in place with Amazon and Mystic Lake Casino for select direct trips. Mystic Lake Casino also operates a first-and-last-mile shuttle serving the Marschall Road Transit Station.
    - Route 498 – Shakopee to Golden Triangle: Started Fall 2019, funded by a grant obtained by Scott County prior to its merger with MVTA service. Ridership was slowly improving in early 2020.

Suburban Local Routes:

- MVTA operates the following suburban local service:
  - 8 suburban local routes
  - 2 flex routes (Routes 420 and 421)
  - 1 shuttle (Route 426)

Demand-Response Services:

- MVTA Connect is a general-public demand-response service operating weekdays from 6 AM to 7 PM weekdays. Service is provided within parts of Savage and Burnsville, partially overlapping with the service area of Route 421. Service began in June 2019 and has been extended through the end of 2020.

**3. Current Policies and Procedures**

- How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - MVTA has a flexible process for service planning decisions that depends on where the agency is seeing and hearing a need for improvements.



- County transit studies can also play a role in determining where service proposals are developed and implemented.
- MVTA also maintains a Future Growth Concept Map that shows the agency's future priorities, as well as study recommendations and customer comments.
- What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - MVTA has a formal schedule for service review and implementation that includes 4 service changes per year. 1 minor service change in November focuses on cleanup and holiday schedules, with additional service changes in February, May, and August.
  - Service changes are reviewed 6 months in advance to determine the details of the proposal, solicit partnerships and/or funding agreements as needed, and identify schedule and cost impacts.
  - The planning team is responsible for both planning and scheduling; it uses the cleanup service change to adjust schedules based on driver and rider feedback.
- Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
  - MVTA currently has no set targets for performance measures, but staff analyze performance data on a regular basis to assess the need for service changes. Primary performance measures include productivity (passengers per in-service hour), farebox recovery, and subsidy per passenger.
  - In 2020, MVTA aims to develop a set of performance targets to guide service expansion and reduction decisions.

#### 4. Planning Priorities

- MVTA Strategic Plan (2018-2022): Focus on improving technology, CAD/AVL, and real-time information. Recommended that MVTA develop a special event service plan by 2020, as well as introduce one public-private partnership each year.
- MVTA has made major progress on technology. The agency has installed a completely new AVL system from Avail Technologies (<https://availtec.com/>) that promises much-improved data and analysis capabilities. All MVTA buses are now equipped with the technology, and the agency has launched a new real-time information app for customers. Service Planning staff are in the process of determining how to use the on-time performance and ridership data that is now available.
- MVTA is gradually expanding special event service from major annual events (State Fair, etc.) to serve recurring and one-time events (Vikings games, Super Bowl, concerts, etc.). The goal is to use special event service as a marketing tool to attract new riders and help them become familiar with the transit options that are available.
- MVTA is also expanding partnerships with businesses to support and market transit services, and incorporate transit benefit programs under the brand MVTA Co Go. The Viking Lakes area is seen as an opportunity for expanding this.

#### 5. Next Steps

- MVTA to review and comment on SRF notes (complete).

**6. Supporting Materials Provided/Obtained**

**B10.** MVTA Strategic Plan (2018-2022).

**B11.** MVTA System Map (March 2020).

**Stakeholder Meeting: Nur Kasin, Plymouth MetroLink;  
Remote Conference – Tuesday, March 24**

**1. Introduction/Purpose of Study (SRF)**

**2. Summary of Current Services**

- Traditional express service (to downtown Minneapolis in the AM) accounts for 70 percent of Plymouth Metrolink’s service. Approximately 20 percent of service is devoted to reverse commute services, while the remaining local service is primarily local dial-a-ride. According to staff, “Success depends on meeting the needs of all three markets.”
- Current fixed routes provide approximately 520k rides per year on a \$3.6 million operating budget (2018 NTD data).

Express Routes:

- Routes 772, 774, 776, 777, 790, 793, and 795 provide service to downtown Minneapolis, with Routes 774 and 795 also serving Downtown East and the University of Minnesota. Most routes make local stops within the City of Plymouth prior to expressing via Highway 169 and I-394.
- Routes 771 and 791 serve as shuttle routes to and from Station 73 Park & Ride and Four Seasons Mall. [Note: these are classified by the Council as suburban local routes.]

Reverse Commute Routes:

- Routes 742 and 747 provide weekday morning express service from downtown Minneapolis to Plymouth and afternoon and evening service from Plymouth to downtown Minneapolis.
- These routes prioritize service to major employment centers, including corporations like TCF, Abbott, Prudential, US Foods, and Smith Medical.
- Routes 740 and 741 serve as shuttle routes from Station 73 Park & Ride to other destinations in Plymouth. [Note: these are classified by the Council as suburban local routes.]

Park-and-Ride Facilities (B4):

- Station 73 Park & Ride – 288 spaces (86% utilization in 2018)
- St. Philip Park & Ride – 100 spaces (91% utilization in 2018)
- Dunkirk Lane Park & Ride – 50 spaces (162% utilization in 2018 – over capacity)
- Nathan Lane Park & Ride – 120 spaces (88% utilization in 2018)

Demand-Response Services:

- Plymouth Metrolink Dial-A-Ride is a general-public demand-response service operating weekdays from 6 AM to 8:30 PM. Service is provided within the City of Plymouth and to or from select outside destinations, including Ridgedale Center, Colonial Square (Wayzata), and Golden Valley Center.

- Plymouth recently introduced on-demand rides through a new software contract with TransLoc (<https://transloc.com/>). Both on-demand and scheduled rides can be booked via the TransLoc mobile app.

### 3. Current Policies and Procedures

- How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - Plymouth Metrolink uses surveys and customer comment emails to monitor demand for new service. In addition, the agency analyzes performance metrics by route and trip every 3 months at minimum, using a custom Excel spreadsheet format that generates the metrics of greatest interest, including the percentage of low or 0-ridership trips and the percent of trips that exceed loading standards. [This spreadsheet has been provided to the consultant team.]
  - Staff note that some routes perform well overall, but not on all trips; reverse commute routes tend to be less productive. Looking only at ridership can raise equity issues, since almost everyone commuting to downtown Minneapolis has another option (car). Reverse commute routes are more likely to be people's only commute option, and there is value in the availability of this kind of service.
  - When making service changes, Plymouth Metrolink conducts public outreach to get feedback before plans are implemented.
- What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - Plymouth Metrolink uses the Metropolitan Council's service analysis report and evaluates its route-level performance against Appendix G.
- Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
  - Plymouth Metrolink relies on Appendix G for performance guidelines but notes that reverse commute should not be measured by the same standards as express service, as the purpose and ridership demographics are different.
  - Goal for demand-response service is 4 passengers per hour (higher than many peers).

### 4. Planning Priorities

- Highway 55 BRT (**B14**):
  - From a narrow perspective on administrative boundaries, Metro Transit service on Highway 55 could have been a no-go, but from a regional transportation perspective, additional transit service to Plymouth is welcome.
  - Transit in Plymouth used to be a political talking point, but the state, county, and city are now all supportive of transit, and it could be the right time for Highway 55 BRT.
  - If Highway 55 BRT comes to Plymouth, Plymouth Metrolink can re-focus its service on local routes, feeders, and/or increased on-demand service to support the BRT service. Plymouth will start this planning process as the BRT project advances.
- New Park & Ride facilities:
  - Rockford Road/Lancaster Lane – 4 Seasons Mall development

- Dunkirk Lane & Highway 55 – Preliminary conversations with Dundee’s Nursery (would move existing P&R from church parking lot)
- Planning for a Park & Ride on the northwest side of Plymouth, where demand is increasing (in part due to riders driving from other cities, including Medina). Potential location could be at a community recreation center near Lawndale & CR 47.
- Plymouth Metrolink offered the following feedback on regional funding priorities (paraphrased here):
  - The region needs a coherent, cooperative planning committee. Each agency needs to think regionally to be successful. Different branding shouldn’t mean less efficient service for riders.
  - Agency structure can influence the service provided. MVTA and SWT have multiple stakeholders and a larger scale that can more efficiently allocate overhead resources (mechanics, etc.) across more routes. Maple Grove contracts with Metro Transit, which likely lowers its operating costs; Plymouth faces potentially higher costs due to its small scale. Perhaps regional measures account for differences in agency structure.
  - There should be a process for regional coordination in route planning (plan according to service needs first; figure out costs later).

## 5. Next Steps

- Plymouth to review and comment on SRF notes (complete).

## 6. Supporting Materials Provided/Obtained

**B12.** Plymouth Metrolink Express Schedule (2020).

**B13.** Plymouth Metrolink Reverse Commute Schedule (2020).

**B14.** Plymouth Metrolink Resolution of Support for Highway 55 BRT (Adopted 2019).

**Stakeholder Meeting: Cyndi Harper and Kristin Thompson, Metro Transit;  
Remote Conference – Thursday, March 26**

**1. Introduction/Status of Outreach (SRF)**

**2. Summary of Current Services**

- Current route classifications:
  - Core Local – primarily routes serving the downtowns
  - Supporting Local – primarily crosstown routes or other routes in Market Areas 1/2
  - Suburban Local – less frequent; Metro and MVTA are primary operators
  - Arterial BRT
  - Highway BRT
  - Transitways
- Network Next route classifications – moving toward frequency-based designations at the route segment level as follows:
  - Core – every 15 minutes or better
  - Connecting – demand-driven headways; every 20-30 minutes
  - Coverage – policy-based minimum headways
- Network Next will be adopted by the Council, but is not Council policy. If designations used for the Service Allocation Study route categories do not match Network Next exactly, they should use different names.
- Certain routes may be trickier to analyze or categorize, including reverse commute services (which often involve little incremental cost, as they would otherwise be deadhead hours), as well as local routes that use freeways (e.g. Route 134) or express routes with long local tails (Route 857, Route 645).

**3. Current Policies and Procedures**

- How does the agency currently approach service allocation decisions?
  - Metro Transit reviews the network annual to identify opportunities to reduce or reallocate service to address operational constraints (operator shortages; vehicle availability).
  - Routes are screened using regional subsidy and productivity measures; they are then assigned to service planners for analysis.
    - “Keep it or cut it” list: many routes operating at policy minimum headways must either be maintained at current headways or eliminated from the network.
    - For routes with some excess frequency or span compared to regional standards, frequency or span may be reduced to achieve necessary goals (peak vehicle availability, operator reduction, etc.).
    - To the extent possible, Metro Transit tries to keep the high-frequency network whole, avoiding cuts that would cause routes to fall below 15-minute frequency.

- High-frequency express routes can be a very flexible way to save peak buses (changing relatively few trips could easily save multiple buses).
- Weekend service cuts are analyzed as weekday-equivalent hours (cutting 1 hour on a Saturday is equal to 0.2 of a weekday hour). As such, weekend cuts are rarely as effective as changes to weekday service.
- What policies currently exist to guide service expansion or reduction?
  - Metro Transit makes 4 service changes per year, scheduled concurrently with operator picks every March, June, August, and December. June and August are school-on/school-off picks scheduled to coincide with the Minneapolis Public Schools.
  - If modifying a route alignment or making a major frequency change, the service planning process starts 6 months in advance. 2-3 months are needed for the actual process of implementing changes (planning, scheduling, signs, etc.). Prior to this process, a Change of Service form must be completed, which is due 3 months before service implementation.
  - Example: Proposed service changes to Route 63 (frequency improvements to operate every 15 minutes between Westgate and Sun Ray Transit Center; eastern segment extended into Woodbury as a new suburban local route, Route 323).
    - Planning for this project began some time ago, and Metro Transit applied for Regional Solicitation grants to cover the necessary operating funds.
    - Public outreach was completed to engage each of the cities affected, as well as for customers along the corridor.
  - The Service Improvement Plan (SIP) was completed in 2015 to give Metro Transit and its partners a roadmap for growth. Previously, there was a roadmap for transitways (the TPP), but not for local or express service improvements. The SIP (which will be replaced by Network Next) is now used as a starting point to identify future improvements that could be made with additional funding.
    - Projects in the SIP are ranked by priority (High/Medium/Low), rather than a specific implementation year.
    - Benefit of SIP is that it is based on data, not politics (can better evaluate service improvements in comparison to one another, and justify selecting the projects that best match regional priorities).
- Are there separate performance guidelines or goals for different types of service?
  - See Appendix G. of TPP

#### 4. Planning Priorities

- Metro Transit has provided summaries of customer feedback and existing policy guidance that have been completed for Network Next. These have been made available to the consultant team.
- Often Metro Transit is in a mode of planning for service reduction, given resource constraints and other external issues like operator or fleet shortages.

- Metro Transit offered the following feedback on existing policy in the TPP/Appendix G:
  - What isn't covered well? Microtransit and other first- and last-mile services. There is likely a need to explore what role these should play in the regional system.
  - Challenges can arise when Thrive MSP and other Council policies pull Metro Transit in multiple directions.
    - Example: Equity is a huge focus, and greatly important to both the Council and Metro Transit. However, due to the suburbanization of poverty and the suburbanization of low-wage jobs, providing transit to low-income populations is becoming increasingly difficult, and routes extended to serve new job centers or isolated “islands of poverty” may not meet the region's ridership or productivity standards.
    - The Council is understandably pushing for housing affordability in the region's higher-cost areas, but doing so sometimes results in affordable housing developments that are difficult to connect to the regional transit network.
    - A question for the Service Allocation Study and Network Next could be how equity should interact with other regional goals.
- Feedback from public outreach:
  - Metro Transit used to hear frequently regarding the need for community shopping routes for seniors.
  - Nonprofits have largely stepped in to fill this role, with DARTS and NEWTRAX (Washington County) providing circulator or deviated-route service in multiple communities.
  - Senior housing centers are often viewed by policymakers as ridership generators, but Metro Transit sees greater ridership from employees that work at these facilities than by the residents themselves.
- Feedback on contracted services:
  - TPP specifies that at least 20 percent of all transit service (excluding Metro Mobility) should be contracted. Metro Transit contracts routes via MTS based on geographic factors, route complexity, and above all, ridership and productivity. MTS has the flexibility to operate routes using cutaways or small buses if ridership permits.
  - Metro Transit provided a policy document describing this process in greater detail (developed jointly with MTS).

## 5. Next Steps

- Metro Transit to review and comment on SRF notes (complete).

## 6. Supporting Materials Provided/Obtained

**B6.** Metro Transit: Network Next Existing Feedback Summary (2020).

**B7.** Metro Transit: Network Next Existing Policy Summary (2020).



**B17. Technical Memo Summarizing Network Next Outreach Activities**

## **Appendix B – Supporting Materials**

Supporting materials are included as individual PDF files within a zipped folder. These documents include the following:

- B1. Maple Grove Transit: 2016 “Express Bus Service” Customer Survey - Report of Results (December 2016).**
- B2. Maple Grove Transit: Rider Guide (March 2020).**
- B3. Maple Grove Transit: Proposed Local Route 784.**
- B4. Metropolitan Council: 2018 Annual Regional Park-and-Ride System Report.**
- B5. Metropolitan Council: 2018 Regional Route Performance Analysis.**
- B6. Metro Transit: Network Next Existing Feedback Summary (2020).**
- B7. Metro Transit: Network Next Existing Policy Summary (2020).**
- B8. Metro Transit/MTS: Route Contracting Guidance (2012).**
- B9. MTS: Transit Link Service Areas (2020).**
- B10. MVTA Strategic Plan (2018-2022).**
- B11. MVTA System Map (March 2020).**
- B12. Plymouth Metrolink Express Schedule (2020).**
- B13. Plymouth Metrolink Reverse Commute Schedule (2020).**
- B14. Plymouth Metrolink Resolution of Support for Highway 55 BRT (Adopted 2019).**
- B15. SouthWest Transit 2018 Rider Survey.**
- B16. SouthWest Transit Long-Range Action Plan.**
- B17. Technical Memo Summarizing Network Next Outreach Activities (2020)**