

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Improvement and expansion of the public transit system is the backbone of the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan to accommodate the population and employment growth forecast for the region. Current growth estimates predict 1,000,000 new residents by 2030. A primary goal in the Transportation Policy Plan is doubling transit system ridership by 2030, and achieving 50 percent of this ridership increase by 2020. The regional Transportation Plan calls for development of transitways in all major corridors, including bus-only shoulders, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, exclusive busways, light rail and commuter rail service. Bus services, in a variety of forms, will be the foundation of the public transit expansion program. Bus services will include local bus service, and express service, as well as special services for the disabled.

Metro Transit provides most of the bus service in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, supplemented by routes contracted by the Met Council to private providers and "opt-out" systems operated by some suburban municipalities. Metro Transit regularly reviews and updates individual bus routes to reflect the changing nature of development and travel in the Twin Cities area. In addition, starting in 1998 Metro Transit embarked on a program to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of transit service. The metro area was divided into nine geographic sectors for the purpose of comprehensively evaluating transit service and needs, determining market opportunities and restructuring service and facilities to better address those needs and opportunities. To date, transit service restructuring studies have been completed and implemented with successful results in northeast and south Minneapolis, St. Paul, Bloomington, Richfield, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, St. Louis Park and the northeast suburbs. The next area of restructuring is north Minneapolis and the northwest suburbs.

THE STUDY AREA

The Northwest Metro Transit Study area comprises the northwest portion of the region. It is bounded by Highway 55 on the south, the Mississippi River on the north and east and the western city limits of Maple Grove and Plymouth on the west. Communities in the study area include Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Osseo, Crystal, New Hope, Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Champlin and north Minneapolis. As the region's primary employment center and transit generator, downtown Minneapolis is included in all of Metro Transit's sector studies, including the Northwest Metro Transit Study. However, future changes to downtown routings are being considered in the *Access Minneapolis* study, the city's ten-year transportation action plan.

The cities of Plymouth and Maple Grove provide their own transit service, including express services between Plymouth and Maple Grove and downtown Minneapolis, dial-a-ride service and other special transit services operating exclusively within these communities. These services are subject to planning directed by those communities. Maple Grove and Plymouth are involved in the Northwest Metro Transit Study to coordinate and maximize plan opportunities and address potential local route connections between these communities and the rest of the study area. Through this planning process, no recommendations have been made for immediate

implementation due to funding constraints. However, this plan includes route concepts for future consideration.

Northwest Metro Transit Study area statistics as of September 2005, unless otherwise specified:

- 45 bus routes
- 12% of 2004 annual Metro Transit and Met Council system rides
- 119 peak buses/ 65 midday buses (excludes Plymouth & Maple Grove)
- 15% (395,695) of region's population-2000 Census
- 20% (314,291) of region's employment-2000 Census

A comprehensive analysis of existing transit ridership and route performance is provided in the Existing Conditions Report. Baseline service is characterized by:

- Level of transit service throughout the day is well-matched with the distribution of current demand
- Ridership in north Minneapolis is quite good at all times
- Ridership during peak periods is generally good, especially on commuter routes
- Ridership on suburban routes during the off-peak varies considerably
- Complexity of some routes
- Bus stop spacing too close on many routes, slowing bus operations

STAKEHOLDER PROCESS: Coverage and Productivity

Transit faces a difficult trade-off between pursuing the most frequent service to the largest group of existing and potential riders, which would minimize the subsidy per passenger (the Productivity goal) versus distributing service on as many streets as possible to offer minimal walk distance to people wherever they are, regardless of the cost (the Coverage goal). Another way to think of the Productivity versus Coverage goals is in terms of “bringing people to transit” versus “bringing transit to people.” When we bring people to transit, through park-and-ride facilities, focused boarding points, or, ultimately, through higher density land use, productivity increases and the cost per passenger drops. When we bring transit to people by covering a larger area in a more door-to-door fashion, productivity declines as more time is spent serving passengers in dispersed locations. Transit services usually try to strike a reasonable balance between these two goals.

As part of evaluating existing service and gathering community input, Metro Transit convened stakeholders (transit riders, community groups, elected officials and city staff) at several meetings to review how transit performs and get feedback on planning objectives for transit. In addition online surveys were used to solicit feedback from stakeholders. The purpose of the community outreach was to ask stakeholders to prioritize the value of competing transit service objectives. Feedback suggested that the productivity and efficiency of transit service in the Northwest Metro Transit Study area were highly valued and should guide the development of the restructuring plan.

Major service improvement themes voiced by stakeholders included:

- Faster service to major destinations such as downtown Minneapolis, Arbor Lakes and North Memorial Medical Center
- Address gaps in the current network such as Penn Avenue in north Minneapolis
- Easier suburb-to-suburb travel without having to transfer in downtown Minneapolis
- Better connections between transit centers
- Local connections between Plymouth, Maple Grove and the rest of the northwest suburbs

KEY OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of this plan were developed in concert with those identified by stakeholders:

- Provide faster and more direct service to major destinations and along major corridors
- Improve reliability, travel speed and convenience of transit services
- Relocate transit services to better fit local development and transit markets
- Improve connections between neighborhoods, routes and transit centers
- Integrate plans for new services and facilities, such as the Bottineau Bus Rapid Transit project
- Optimize effectiveness and efficiency to improve productivity

PLAN STRATEGIES

Strategies employed in the plan to meet the key objectives are:

- Improve operating speed. The attractiveness and efficiency of transit service will increase with improved operating speeds. An aggressive implementation of Metro Transit's bus stop spacing policy (eight stops per mile) will help achieve this goal.
- Additional transit advantages such as bus-only shoulders, transit signal priority and HOV and bus lanes on highways.
- Improve service frequency and span of service. Given a choice, most people prefer more frequent service within reasonable access distances.
- Simplify the route structure, which will make transit more attractive to current and new riders.
- Add new service in strong corridors and to major destinations. Examples include continuous service on Penn Avenue between Highway 55 and 44th Avenue, connecting several suburban local routes at the Starlite Transit Center and new connections between Golden Valley and New Hope and the Ridgedale Shopping Center area in Minnetonka.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

This final plan reflects feedback from customers and other stakeholders. More than 1,100 comments were received through five open houses and one public hearing held in late May and early June 2006.

PLAN MODIFICATIONS

The following modifications were made to the Concept Plan proposed in April 2006:

- Route 5-- Use 26th/Broadway layover between 4:30 a.m and approx. 7:00 p.m. After 7:00 p.m. Route 5 buses on 26th Avenue will travel to North Memorial.
- Route 7-- Retain Plymouth Avenue service between Washington Avenue and Wirth Chalet. Maintain a direct ride to the Warehouse District, downtown, U of M, and Hiawatha/Lake Street. Service every 30 minutes on weekdays and Saturday, 30-60 minutes on Sundays.
- Route 14-- Split route at Broadway/Knox, with a new branch via Golden Valley Road. Improve weekend frequency, maintain current off-peak frequency on Broadway east of Knox Avenue. Reduce frequency on Golden Valley Road.
- Route 19-- Retain service on 42nd Avenue west of Thomas Avenue and no service on 42nd Avenue east of Thomas. Recommended extension to Robbinsdale Transit Center.
- Route 22-- Shift current Route 5R branch to Route 22. Extend trunk to 45th Avenue/Bryant Avenue. No service on Webber Parkway or Humboldt Avenue south of Shingle Creek Drive. Route 22 will no longer end in downtown Minneapolis but instead will serve the area south of downtown currently covered by Route 19 (Cedar Avenue, 28th Avenue, V.A. Medical Center).
- Route 26-- Eliminated. Plymouth service replaced by Route 7 and Golden Valley Road service replace by Route 14.
- Route 32—30-minute service during rush hours and 30/60-minute frequency at all other times.
- Route 705-- Alternating trips serve deviations east and west of Winnetka Avenue No service on Xenia Avenue or Laurel Avenue (more direct routing to Louisiana Transit Center). New weekday service between Starlite and Wal-Mart on Lakeland Avenue
- Route 716-- Retain current routing.
- Route 722-- Expand weekend span of service. Select trips extended north to serve Brookdale Dr and 83rd/Noble Avenue.
- Route 724—Service between Target Northern Campus and Starlite will continue to be part of the route.
- Route 758-- New branch serving Robbinsdale Transit Center, Noble Avenue and Golden Valley Road.
- Route 760-- Retain Setzler/Nedderson “A” branch.
- Route 761-- Retain Woodbine Avenue, Halifax Avenue, 71st Avenue, and France Avenue routing.
- Route 762-- Operate two long-line trips in each direction.
- Route 766-- Retain “F” branch in Champlin.

PLAN IMPACTS

One principal objective of the plan is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of transit service in delivering mobility to residents, employees and visitors to the Northwest Metro Transit Study area.

The Metro Transit team worked extensively to refine the proposal to minimize negative impacts on current customers. While retaining good coverage, this final plan simplifies the route structure and reinvests resources into areas or at times of the day where additional service is warranted.

Less than 0.3 percent of current riders will be beyond a ¼-mile walk from the final route network.

Metro Mobility service within the study area is also impacted by the plan. This door-to-door service for the disabled is mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act and is provided by the Metropolitan Council. Since Metro Mobility's service hours and areas are determined by the fixed route transit network, changes to the fixed route service hours or routings impact Metro Mobility's complementary paratransit services as well.

TITLE VI ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL DISPARATE IMPACT

This transit service plan (as modified to address public comments) has been evaluated using Federal Transit Administration Title VI and Metropolitan Council guidelines to understand its impacts on low-income and minority populations. This evaluation finds that the recommended changes are non-discriminatory and do not have a disparate impact on minority or low-income populations in the study area.

TIMELINE

This report outlines a comprehensive near-term service plan for north Minneapolis and the northwest suburbs and is the fourth report of this study. An Existing Conditions report was completed in 2003, and the Concept Plan was published in April 2006. The Recommended Plan, which was presented to the public and the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Committee in November 2006, incorporated feedback from stakeholder and public workshops held in late May and early June 2006. The Final Plan was approved by the Metropolitan Council in December 2006. Implementation of urban local and most express route changes is planned for June 2007, and most of the suburban local route changes will occur in 2008 or when the Starlite Transit Center expansion is complete.

BOTTINEAU BOULEVARD CORRIDOR BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT)

The Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan calls for a busway along County Road 81 (Bottineau Boulevard) between downtown Minneapolis, Maple Grove and points north, with branches during the peak period to serve major trip generators in the northwest suburbs. The Northwest Metro Transit Study service plan will meet not only the near-term needs in the study area, but also is flexible enough to lay a foundation for longer-term BRT service. Elements from Phase I of the Bottineau BRT service plan are included in the growth scenario of the Northwest Metro Transit Study. However, this service plan does not include services related specifically to the BRT project, as such longer-term changes would need to be developed separately in coordination with BRT implementation and will require additional transit resources.

RESOURCES

Due to budget constraints, the service proposed in the Northwest Metro Transit Study must have total service hours and peak vehicle requirements generally equivalent to existing levels in the study area. The current resource levels are detailed in Chapter Five and compared with the resource requirements for the final plan. Some additional service improvement priorities are included in the "growth scenario" of the Northwest Metro Transit Study when budgets are sufficient to allow a net increase of transit service resources in the study area.