

5.0 SUMMARY OF DEFICIENCIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section summarizes notable deficiencies in terms of service quality and performance for the routes in Sector 8, along with potential opportunities for improvements. These assessments are based on the analyses presented earlier in this report and are evaluated against the Metro Council Transit Service Design Standards.

It should be noted that the identification of specific deficiencies does not necessarily suggest that there are feasible remedial actions. Some may have had better service in the past and have not had the ridership to support the service. All, however, may have potential for improvement, perhaps through route restructuring or other strategy, or as a result of recent growth or other changes. This will be the subject of the later phases of this study.

5.1 NORTH MINNEAPOLIS URBAN SERVICES

As the true “urban” portion of Sector 8, North Minneapolis is comprised of denser, more mature neighborhoods with a relatively high percentage of low-income neighborhoods. As is typical in these types of neighborhoods in other cities, this area has a relatively good level of transit service. It also has a correspondingly good level of transit ridership based on a well-established, traditional transit riding habit consistent with its long-standing history of good transit service.

As described earlier, the services in North Minneapolis generally meet the Service Design Standards. The only notable deficiencies and opportunities for improvement in North Minneapolis identified in this analysis are as follows:

Route Structure

The route layout in North Minneapolis is essentially a grid pattern, but the grid is not complete and has some significant gaps. In particular, there are two services on Penn (Route 5 north of 26th Avenue and Route 19 south of Golden Valley Road), which do not connect and do not allow access to some important east-west services (including Broadway). Similarly, service on Golden Valley Road operates only as far as Penn and does not connect to other north-south services or the important commercial district along Broadway.

The prime benefit of a true grid pattern is the ability to get from an origin to a destination with no more than one transfer. For this to happen, the grid needs to be complete so that all north-south routes intersect all east-west routes and vice versa. Consideration should thus be given to restructuring Routes 5 and 19 to provide complete routings along the full length of both Penn and Golden Valley Road.

Route Coverage and Service Frequencies

Even though service levels are quite good overall in North Minneapolis, some branches have poor or no service during low-demand times. Diverting some service from other branches, even if only a few trips, could provide better balanced coverage. The most notable example is the 49th Avenue and 51st Avenue branch of Route 5, where virtually all service is concentrated on

the Osseo Road routing during evenings. This results in a 20-minute service on this portion (more than the 30-minute standard in the 1996 Service Design Standards), whereas retaining evening service on the 49th-51st branch could still keep a 30-minute service on Osseo Road.

Also, the Lowry route and corridor has no service evenings and weekends. This is a corridor where significant new developments are planned.

5.2 SUBURBAN LOCAL SERVICES

As detailed in the earlier analysis, the transit service in the suburban areas is generally characterized as having significantly less coverage and lower service levels than in the urban areas. Even though this reflects the overall lower population and employment densities and the lower traditional ridership levels in the suburbs, many of these services fall well short of the Service Design Standards in terms of frequencies, span of service and route spacing.

The primary exception to this pattern is during the peak periods, where express commuter services provide much of the suburban area with generally better coverage and service frequencies. These are discussed in the next section.

The more significant deficiencies and potential opportunities for improvement are detailed below.

Route Coverage

As noted earlier, service coverage varies considerably by time of day and day of the week. During weekdays, most areas have coverage, although some services are quite infrequent. A few newly-developed areas do not have service or have minimal service, such as the northern parts of Brooklyn Park (Brookdale Drive, 85th Avenue, Edinburgh Drive) and Champlin Boulevard.

The coverage during low-demand times, especially evenings and weekends, is generally quite poor, with many routes not operating at certain times of the day or days of the week. Some of the more noteworthy examples include:

- Routes 721, 755, 756 and 766 – no evening or weekend service to large areas within the Sector;
- Route 717, the Noble branch of Route 19 and the Humboldt-85th Avenue extension of Route 22 – no weekend service;
- Routes 715 and 716 – no Saturday evening or Sunday service, resulting in no Sunday service in the suburban area west of County Road 81, other than the Route 19 branch on St. Croix, Douglas and 36th Avenue;
- No Saturday or Sunday evening service in any suburban areas, except Route 724.

Even though ridership during these times has generally been unable to support better service, a restructuring of the suburban routings, even with low frequencies, may be able to provide a basic service on the major corridors and to key destinations.

Service to Key Destinations

Suburban local services tend to focus on the main suburban shopping areas, especially Brookdale, Robbinsdale and the Starlite Center. Commercial centers not well served include Four Seasons Mall (focal point for Plymouth services on the edge of the Metro Transit Sector 8 service area) and Champlin Boulevard. Both the Broadway and Brooklyn Boulevard commercial areas are served but the service on Brooklyn Boulevard is fragmented and the service on Broadway has recently been reduced on weekends (no Saturday evening or Sunday service).

The Brooklyn Center (Shingle Creek) civic center and employment area also has regular service, mostly connecting to Brookdale Shopping Center. Other nearby services, however, (Route 766 and the Humboldt-Brookdale branch of Route 22) bypass this important commercial area and could be rerouted.

Two of the most important destinations in the suburban area, and those with good transit ridership potential, are the two colleges, which have limited service during off-peak times. North Hennepin Community College has service along 85th Avenue and Zane to Brookdale Shopping Center (Route 723, hourly service, except weekend evenings, and somewhat circuitous), but lacks a north-south connection to Starlite Center and the Broadway corridor. Hennepin Technical College has an hourly service along Boone and Bass Lake Road (Route 721) but no service to nearby Starlite Center and connecting routes. A route restructuring could potentially upgrade both of these destinations into secondary transit route focal points.

Route Structure

The overall suburban route structure is built around the two focal points at Robbinsdale and Brookdale, which also serve as terminus points for local routes in North Minneapolis. Brookdale Center has an hourly express link to Downtown Minneapolis, but Robbinsdale has to rely on local services (Routes 14 and 19) for connections to downtown. Connections at the two focal points are discussed in the next section.

Most suburban local routes are on main arterial streets and are generally quite direct. A few are somewhat circuitous, such as Route 723, which results in a lack of a continuous transit service on Brooklyn Boulevard (a busy commercial arterial). Service on Douglas is also non-continuous, especially south of 42nd Avenue.

Connections to adjacent, non-downtown focal points are limited. Route 32 connects the Lowry corridor to Rosedale and other destinations east of the Mississippi River, but does not operate evenings or weekends. The service on Winnetka used to provide a Saturday-only link to the Louisiana Avenue Transit Center, but now only a couple of early morning and late night trips exist. There are also no links to the Plymouth services at Four Seasons Mall, nor to the new Maple Grove commercial center.

Connections and Transferability

At both Robbinsdale and Brookdale, local services that terminate are generally intended to connect with each other and with downtown connectors. The connections are fairly good at Brookdale, with full meets every hour. The meets at Robbinsdale are not as good, with some hourly local routes leaving 30 minutes apart and the downtown connector (Route 14) leaving every 20 minutes.

Times at other transit centers, such as Starlite Center, tend to be more random, since times are set by meets at the two main focal points. Thus, transfers are inconvenient.

Off-peak Service Frequencies

With a few exceptions, most suburban local services have only a 60-minute frequency, which is at the low end of the Service Design Standard. Where routes meet consistently at a timed-transfer focal point, the service works reasonably well but, as noted above, this is not the case at all places.

In some areas, service is much less frequent and falls well short of the Service Design Standard, as detailed in an earlier section. The north Brooklyn Park area (Humboldt-Brookdale Drive), for example, has only three trips during the mid-day, and these are extensions of Route 22, which do not connect to Brookdale Center. Mid-day frequencies on Routes 755, 756 and 766 are only every two hours, as are Routes 715 and 716 on Saturdays.

Service frequencies generally are no worse during evenings and weekends. Where demand is low, service tends to not be provided at all, rather than being reduced to a lower frequency.

5.3 PEAK-PERIOD EXPRESS SERVICES

A series of downtown express services provide commuter services between the suburban areas and Downtown Minneapolis during peak periods. They typically overlay suburban local services and extend to and from downtown via the freeways. In some cases, they duplicate local services and in other cases they replace the local services. Most also serve park-and-ride facilities, which they rely on for much of their ridership.

The peak-period commuter expresses generally perform well and are well used. There are some deficiencies and opportunities for improvement and these are described below.

Route Coverage

The peak-period express services cover much of the built-up areas in the Sector 8 suburbs but not all. In particular, relatively new areas, especially in north Brooklyn Park (Brookdale Drive, 85th Avenue, Edinburgh Drive) and Champlin (Champlin Boulevard) have little or no service, although there is a fair amount of medium-density residential developments in these areas that should be able to support transit.

Route Structure

The route structure of most peak express services (residential local, park-and-ride, freeway express) works fairly well, although the local portion on some routes can be quite long and circuitous. Examples include the outer portions of Routes 94 G and K, which have long local sections before reaching the freeway. The outer portion of Route 763 is also circuitous in that the first part operates in the opposite direction to the commute direction.

Off-peak Service Frequencies

The service frequency on most of the peak express routes is about every 30 minutes, with schedules timed to meet the downtown office start and finish times. Some routes, however, only offer one or two trips in each peak hour. Notable examples include Routes 94 E and G, which serve similar areas and could be restructured to offer a broader span of service with, perhaps two routes covering the area now served by three (94 E, G and K).