

CHAPTER TWO: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN SERVICE PLAN DEVELOPMENT

A commitment to community engagement is a guiding principle at Metro Transit and public involvement is at the core of the Central Corridor Transit Service Study. Metro Transit spent significant effort identifying key stakeholders and connecting with the communities of the Central Corridor transit study area to inform development of the concept plan.

PRE-CONCEPT PLAN OUTREACH

In order to ensure board public engagement, Metro Transit used several different outreach strategies to reach different stakeholders before drafting a concept plan. The four primary ways used to gather public input were:

1. A series of meetings with neighborhoods and community groups, residents and businesses
2. Three public open houses
3. A public input form on the Metro Transit website
4. Trusted advocates contracted by the District Councils Collaborative of the Saint Paul and Minneapolis (DCC)

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH MEETINGS

Key stakeholders in the Central Corridor Transit Service Study Area include the Minneapolis neighborhood associations and St. Paul District Councils. The study area includes nine Minneapolis neighborhoods (Marcy Holmes, Downtown East, Downtown West, Loring Park, Elliot Park, Cedar-Riverside, Seward, University, Prospect Park) and 12 St. Paul District Councils (St. Anthony Park, Como, North End, Hamline-Midway, Thomas-Dale (Frogtown), Union Park, Summit-University, Capital River, Macalester-Groveland, Summit Hill, West Seventh and Highland Park). All of these key stakeholder groups were offered an opportunity to be involved in the Central Corridor Transit Service Study.

In all, nearly 40 community/neighborhood groups were engaged and 700 individuals were involved in meetings to review previous transit service restructuring efforts, share the study objectives and gather feedback on how transit is currently performing. This effort brought stakeholders into the planning process at the earliest possible time. In addition, an important piece of the pre-concept plan work included gathering data regarding existing travel behaviors in the study area. A complete list of the specific community stakeholder groups, as well as attendance at each meeting, is available in a separate public involvement report available online.

This concept plan reflects travel behavior information and comments about current bus service received from customers and other stakeholders, sought by Metro Transit staff to inform this plan.

OPEN HOUSES

At three open houses, staff presented information on the important aspects of existing demographic data and current transit service within the Central Corridor Transit Study Area. A dot map exercise in which open house attendees placed dots on over sized maps indicating their home, work, and two other commonly-traveled destinations, helped to start conversations and engage the public in the planning process. Metro Transit staff came away with a few key themes repeated by many open house attendees. First, that there was general satisfaction with existing transit service for major destinations such as the University of Minnesota, the two downtowns and the Midway shopping area. Also mentioned by open house attendees was the need to improve evening and weekend service span and frequency in more peripheral corridors in the study area, as well existing gaps in north-south transit service in St. Paul. The geographic focus of open house attendees varied by open house location, but these themes were common at each open house.

Open House Location	Open House Date	# of Attendees
Coffman Memorial Union (University of Minnesota)	March 3, 2012	28
Rondo Community Outreach Library (461 N. Dale)	March 8, 2012	28
J.J. Hill Magnet School (998 Selby Ave.)	March 20, 2012	23

PUBLIC INPUT FORM

Paper and online versions of the Central Corridor Transit Service Input Form were created to collect data regarding where people travel within the study area. The input form asked questions regarding transit utilization, transfers, origin and destination, start and end times, trip purpose and suggested locations for new transit service. More than 3,300 online and paper public input forms were received through early May 2012.

Over half of the respondents or about 67 percent rode transit to destinations in the study area at least five days a week while 11 percent used transit six days a week and 14 percent used transit seven days a week. Only 3 percent of respondents indicated that they did not use transit. Around 90 percent of respondents indicated that their trip in the study area occurs on a weekday, while only 16 percent indicated trips on Saturdays and 10 percent indicated trips on Sundays. The seemingly contradictory responses to these two questions indicate a degree of non-traditional working schedules by some respondents. The most commonly referenced bus routes by respondents were the Routes 3, 16/50, 2, 144, 87 and 21. About 44 percent of respondents indicated that they transfer at least once and 16 percent transfer at least twice on their transit trip. The top trip purposes for trips in the study area were school (49 percent), work (39 percent), appointments and shopping (5 percent), and other (7 percent).

The results from the two open-ended questions are discussed below. A sample of the public input form and more specific detail on the survey responses is available in a separate public involvement report available on the study website.

Question: Is there a location in the area currently not served by buses where service should be added?

Responses varied from general ideas to specific corridor and bus stop suggestions for improving transit access. Many respondents called for better north-south transit service in St. Paul in general, without naming specific corridors, while some listed many corridors or singled out specific corridors or areas.

The most common location-specific response was to add transit service on Lexington Parkway to connect destinations south of University Avenue or near Como Park with the Green Line. The second most common location-specific comment was for a new bus stop on the U of M's East Bank along Pleasant Street SE between Pillsbury Street SE and the Washington Avenue Bridge.

Other major north-south streets were also noted, ranging from requests to improve existing transit service on Snelling, Dale Street, and Raymond/ Cleveland avenues to requests for new service on streets such as Fairview Avenue, Hamline Avenue, Western Avenue, and Victoria Street. Some respondents specified locations on the U of M campus for new bus stops, including Appleby Hall, the Science Teaching and Student Services building, Smith Hall, Walter Library and the Scholar's Walk. A smaller number of respondents commented on general areas to improve transit service connectivity, with the most common being the Macalester-Groveland neighborhood in St. Paul.

Question: Please provide any suggestions you have that would help improve bus service in the Central Corridor. For example, is your service frequent enough, go where you wish, go early enough, late enough? Are transfers easy to make?

The most common service improvements were related to frequency of service, more hours of service (including weekends), faster service, better transfer connections, new service, safety, and improved waiting facilities.

Frequency: Frequency was the most common comment type in the online public input form. Many respondents specifically mentioned improving the frequency of weekend and evening services. Ninety respondents requested more frequency on routes 2, 3, 6 and 87.

Hours of Service / Weekend Service: Respondents called for increased hours of service and new or improved weekend frequency levels for almost every route in the study area, as well as future light rail service. Common requests include improving weekend service frequency on Route 3, adding evening and weekend service on routes 87 and 144, and better weekend and late night service on Route 63.

On-Time Performance: Another common comment was buses running late, particularly on routes 2, 3 and 16. Many respondents noted the frustration of overcrowded or late buses followed by empty buses or “bus bunching.”

Transfers: Respondents commenting on transfers either noted a difficult existing transfer or emphasized the need for good connections with the Green Line. A significant number of respondents stated that transfers between Route 87 and most east-west routes in the study area were badly timed, and several respondents said they would not use transit if forced to transfer between Route 84 and the Green Line rather than use the Route 144.

New Service: Better service at Huron Station was a common request, as was the desire for a direct, one-seat service between Highland Park, Fort Snelling and the airport. Corridor-specific comments are included in the results for question nine.

Facilities / Safety: Many of the safety comments related to conditions on buses, but some noted feeling unsafe at bus stops at Snelling and near Sky Line Towers in St. Paul. Other facilities comments related to winter conditions at bus stops without heated shelters.

A large number of respondents noted satisfaction with existing transit service and coverage, some noting a reluctance to change service, particularly with Route 16. Many respondents in this category were eager for the end of light-rail construction and the start of Green Line service.

TRUSTED ADVOCATES OUTREACH

The District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis (DCC) adapted the Trusted Advocate community engagement model used in Seattle, WA to support the Central Corridor Transit Service Study and increase the capacity to gather community input and create opportunities for long-term, sustainable engagement and interaction between Metro Transit and the diverse community in the study area. Trusted Advocates are “members of a specific ethnic, racial, cultural and/or other underrepresented group who are recognized by other members as trustworthy, approachable and effective, particularly navigating distance between the group and the majority community.” -- *Innovative Public Tools in Transportation Planning: Application and Outcomes*

Trusted Advocates have strong connections to their communities, a background in community engagement, and the ability to advocate and educate within their communities. Nine individuals were contracted by the DCC to connect with individuals who lived, worked, attended school or participated in other activities within the study area. During engagement sessions to document travel behavior, some advocates chose to use the same tools as Metro Transit (public input forms, interactive activity) while others tailored their work to their own individual style of outreach and the individuals of their community.

Methods of engagement include one-on-one interviews, door knocking, tabling (staffing a table at a heavily trafficked location or event), kitchen table meetings/home visits, small-group meetings and community gatherings. The total number of individuals reached by each advocate ranged from 60 to 200. The trusted advocates held engagement sessions throughout the study area but were concentrated along the corridor. Engagement sessions were held in over 40 locations throughout the corridor including Cedar-Riverside, Prospect Park, Summit-University, Frogtown, Union Park, Como area and Macalester-Groveland.

In addition to gathering travel behavior data, trusted advocates documented other feedback during each engagement session. Some of these comments or concerns that were frequently shared by participants were related to overcrowded buses, operator behavior, safety concerns, travel time, the lack of availability of transit information due to language barriers or lack of internet access, waiting conditions, and a desire for more frequent service all days of the week.

A more detailed report of the Trusted Advocate Project is available in a separate public involvement report available on the study website.

CONCEPT PLAN OUTREACH

Staff used the feedback received during the pre-Concept Plan outreach to develop a concept service plan, which became the topic of a formal public review period. As in the previous phase, Metro Transit used several different outreach strategies to reach different stakeholders to ensure broad public engagement. The five primary ways used to communicate the concept plan and gather public input were:

1. Contact neighborhoods and community groups, residents and businesses
2. Notices to current customers and general public
3. Five public meetings
4. A variety of public input methods, such as comment cards and email
5. Trusted Advocates contracted by the DCC

CONCEPT PLAN STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH MEETINGS

When the concept plan was available, staff contacted key stakeholders in the Central Corridor Transit Service Study Area. In some cases, staff was invited to revisit appropriate neighborhood or District Council meetings to explain how the pre-concept plan data was used, and introduce residents to the Concept Plan. In other instances, this was an opportunity for those who might have passed on the opportunity to influence the study to connect with the project for the first time. In all cases, stakeholders were encouraged to study the Concept Plan and provide comment.

Before the conclusion of the public comment period, staff reconnected with all 40 of the initial community/neighborhood groups and a few others were added, including Como Park Community Council and the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. This part of the

process not only continued the ongoing dialog with community members but also uncovered community concerns with some of the elements of the plan. It provided staff an opportunity to further investigate options for future consideration as the Concept Plan was revised.

NOTICES TO CURRENT CUSTOMERS AND GENERAL PUBLIC

Information about the study and the Concept Plan was provided to current customers and the general public through these outlets:

- All project reports, process and project information were provided at metrotransit.org and at the Metropolitan Council Data Center.
- Key information from the project website and the Concept Plan was translated into Spanish, Somali and Hmong. The entire Concept Plan was available in Braille.
- Print versions of the Concept Plan report were available at all libraries in the Study Area and by request.
- 12,000 concept plan brochures –which included a comment card – were distributed on buses and at schedule distribution outlets in the Study Area.
- Nearly 100 posters advertising the five public meetings were displayed in bus shelters along University Avenue and throughout the Study Area.
- A special card was attached to bus fareboxes in the Study Area to highlight the concept plan and public meetings.
- A letter was mailed to residents and business along new Route 83 informing them of proposed changes and ways to provide feedback.
- A press release was sent to local media. Articles appeared in the *Pioneer Press* and *Highland Villager* newspapers and online at mn2020.org, [Transit for Livable Communities \(tlcminnesota.org\)](http://Transit for Livable Communities (tlcminnesota.org)) and tcdailyplanet.net
- The June 2012 *Connect* customer newsletter, which is available on all buses and trains system wide, outlined the Concept Plan and provided ways to learn more and comment, including public meeting information.
- Operators and staff made onboard announcements, especially on routes 16, 50 and 94.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Five public meetings provided opportunities for attendees to learn about the Concept Plan, ask questions, and provide feedback. Two meetings were designated as official public hearings, although all meetings had the same format. Each meeting began with an open house format in which attendees could view maps of the proposed routes, ask questions and address concerns. A presentation of the Concept Plan was then given, including proposed routes and the rationale used in planning them. Attendees were given the opportunity to testify and provide comments. Brochures with postage-paid comment cards were available for attendees who preferred to provide written comments. The meetings were as follows:

Date	Location	Attendees
June 19	Brian Coyle Center	10
June 21	Central Corridor Resource Center	16
June 23	Goodwill/Easter Seals	16
June 26	Hennepin County Central Library (public hearing)	21
June 28	Rondo Community Library (public hearing)	28

METHODS OF PUBLIC INPUT

People could use several methods to provide feedback on the Concept Plan. These included email, a brochure with postage-paid comment card that was available on buses and at schedule distribution outlets in the study area, calls to Customer Relations, fax, letter, petition, Twitter and Facebook. The comment card attached to the brochure asked which bus routes the respondents ride most often, the intersection closest to their home or work, and their thoughts on the plan. Respondents could provide further comments regarding frequency, hours of service, transfers, travel time, eliminated service and general comments. Paper and electronic version of the comment card were available to the public.

Metro Transit received more than 800 comments from 650 contacts. Comments received after 5 p.m. on July 23, 2012, were considered late but still included for consideration.

This chart provides the distribution of public comments received:

Type	Count
Email	239
Comment Card	473
Customer Feedback	44
Letter	3
Fax	1
Petition	1 (45 signatures)
Public Hearing Testimony	47
Twitter	3
Facebook	1
Total	820

Public comment notes:

- A repeat responder is responsible for 21 percent of the comments
- There was 1 petition (45 signatures) opposing the proposed bus service on south Lexington Parkway (Route 83)
- There were 18 government officials, cities, or organizations responding about the restructuring
 1. City of St. Paul
 2. District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis
 3. District 10 Como Park Community Council
 4. Macalester Groveland Community Council
 5. Canabury Condominium Association
 6. Ramsey County
 7. Como Park Regional Advisory Council
 8. Como Town
 9. District 6 Planning Council
 10. District 12 Community Council
 11. St. Anthony Park Community Council
 12. Tri Area Block Club
 13. Transit for Livable Communities
 14. Como Zoo Conservatory
 15. Smart Trips
 16. Summit Hill Association
 17. Steve Elkins (Metropolitan Council Transportation Committee Chair)
 17. ISAI AH

TRUSTED ADVOCATE OUTREACH

In a parallel process, the trusted advocates contracted by the District Councils Collaborative of Saint Paul and Minneapolis (DCC) used their strong community connections to discuss the Concept Plan in meetings with individuals and small groups similar to those used to gather data in the pre-concept plan phase. In preparation for this work, trusted advocates received specialized training on the concept plan and were able to ask detailed questions to specifically address the anticipated questions and concerns of the communities they most associate with.

The trusted advocates reconvened meeting with the communities they made contact with in the first phase of work, making themselves available to gather feedback, identify concerns and assist with the submission of community formal public comment. As common themes and concerns emerged, trusted advocates helped connect Metro Transit with communities who could help understand problems with the Concept Plan and options for the revised and recommended plan. The methods for engagement for the trusted advocates continued to include one-on-one interviews, door knocking, tabling (staffing tables at events or gathering spaces), home visits, small-group meetings and community gatherings.

RECOMMENDED PLAN OUTREACH

A public open house was held on Oct. 10, 2012 at Rondo Community Library. This event provided the opportunity for stakeholders to hear about the changes and clarifications to the Concept Plan and ask questions. To promote the open house, posters were hung in bus shelters throughout the Study Area, information was available online and was emailed to stakeholders, and articles appeared in *Connect* and the *Pioneer Press*.

Date	Location	Attendees
October 10	Rondo Community Library	58

PUBLIC OUTREACH CONCLUSIONS

Feedback from stakeholders and public comments identified areas in the plan that warranted modification. Metro Transit received the greatest number of comments about proposed Route 83. There were 176 comments regarding this route after the Concept Plan and 17 comments following the Recommended Plan. These comments included a mix of both positive and negative feedback. Most of the negative feedback following the Concept Plan came from residents on Lexington Parkway south of Jefferson Avenue, and following the Recommended Plan, from residents on Edgumbe Road and Hamline Avenue. One of the common suggestions following the Concept Plan was to extend Route 83 north to Como Park. Other comments suggested that the route be extended farther to serve those living north of the park.

Route 94 received the second highest number of comments (85). The primary concerns with this route were the loss of midday service, a longer commute time and loss of the Route 94 stops at Marion Street near Ravoux Hi-Rise and at Snelling Avenue. Other concerns included the elimination of Route 144, the potential loss of Huron Station connections to the U of M, clarification regarding the future of the Route 62 deviation along Demont Avenue and safety on light rail and University Avenue.

The Concept Plan was modified to address many of the concerns highlighted by public comments, while staying within the project operating budget. Specifically, five routes were altered in response to public comment. No changes were made to the Recommended Plan following its availability to the public.