

CHAPTER TWO: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN CONCEPT 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.

In order to ensure board public engagement, Metro Transit used several different outreach strategies to reach different stakeholders. 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 hired 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 twelve St. Paul District Councils (St. Anthony Park, Como, North End, Hamline-Midway, Thomas-Dale, 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 get involved in the Central Corridor Transit Service Study.

In all, Metro Transit met with nearly 40 community/neighborhood groups and 700 individuals 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 on-line.

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

The three open houses 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 on-line 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 on-line 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 on-line 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 the 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 the 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 the 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 the 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 commented on looking forward to the end of Light Rail construction and the start of Green Line Service.

TRUSTED ADVOCATES

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.