

CHAPTER 2 – PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN WEST SUBURBAN SERVICE CHANGES PROJECT

A commitment to community engagement is a guiding principle at Metro Transit. Public involvement is at the core of the West Suburban Service Changes project.

PRE-CONCEPT PLAN OUTREACH

In early 2013 a concept plan was developed with stakeholder involvement through a May 2012 open house, municipal input, surveys distributed on routes in the study area, feedback solicited through Council's website, and surveys distributed at senior and low-income residential complexes.

SURVEYS

More than 1,100 rider surveys were distributed on routes serving the study area. Twenty-nine percent of the surveys, or 322 responses, were returned. More than 600 surveys were also distributed at seven senior and low-income residential complexes in the study area. A list of nearly 100 stakeholders was developed to provide project updates to those expressing an interest in the project.

OUTREACH MEETINGS

The concept plan's recommended service improvements identified during the initial stakeholder outreach process included: adding evening service on the Route 9N branch, adding later evening service on Route 615 and adding a new local circulator in Minnetonka (Route 614).

CONCEPT PLAN OUTREACH

Staff used the feedback received during the pre-Concept Plan outreach and by reviewing the performance and productivity of existing express service in the area to develop a concept service plan, which became the topic of a formal review period. Metro Transit used several different outreach strategies to ensure broad public engagement:

1. Rider alerts to current customers
2. Two public hearings
3. A variety of public input methods, such as e-mail and comment cards
4. Article in local newspapers and city newsletters

NOTICES TO CURRENT CUSTOMERS AND GENERAL PUBLIC

Information about the project and the Concept Plan was provided to current riders and the general public in several ways. Notification of the public hearings was provided in the State Register, the *Star Tribune*, the City of Minnetonka's newsletter, local area newspapers, and in *Connect*, Metro Transit's onboard customer newsletter that is available on buses and trains. All project reports were available at metrotransit.org and print copies of the concept plan were available at local libraries within the study area. Passenger notices were distributed on all routes included in the project, and staff made on-board

announcements, particularly on express routes. Stakeholders were notified via email when the Concept Plan was available online.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Two public hearings provided opportunities for attendees to learn about the concept plan, ask questions, and provide feedback. A presentation of the concept plan was given at each hearing, including proposed route changes and the rationale for making them. Attendees were then given the opportunity to testify and provide public comments. Comment cards were also available for attendees who preferred to provide written comments. The public hearings were as follows:

Date	Location	Attendees
April 1, 2013	Hennepin County Hopkins Library	45
April 3, 2013	Hennepin County Ridgedale Library	23

In addition to the public hearings and comment cards, people could also provide comments over the phone and through letters, faxes, emails, Twitter and Facebook.

Metro Transit received 147 comments from 108 individuals. The following chart provides the distribution of comments received:

TOPIC	EMAIL	COMMENT CARD	CUSTOMER FEEDBACK	VOICE MAIL	TWITTER	PUBLIC HEARING	TOTAL
Route 9				1		4	5
Route 615				5		1	6
Route 664	16	2	2	1	1	7	29
Route 665	5	2		1		7	15
Route 667	18	1	2	3		5	29
Route 670	25	3				10	38
Route 671	15	1				1	17
Other*		1				5	6
LRT						1	1
Midday						1	1
Total	79	10	4	11	1	42	147

*Comments included topics including Routes 12, 17, 604, bus route on 494, and Target North Campus.

OUTREACH CONCLUSIONS

Feedback from stakeholders identified the areas that warranted modification within the plan. Routes 664, 667 and 670 were the routes that received the most feedback. The topics of greatest concern were as follows:

Elimination of service on Highway 7, west of County Road 73

One of the largest concerns expressed regarding the concept plan was the loss on service on Highway 7, west of County Road 73. Some individuals stated that they did not have access to a vehicle or did not want to drive to a park and ride.

Potential overloading

Many stakeholders were concerned about overloading on the buses and having to stand during their commute. This was specifically a concern to those currently riding routes 664, 665, and 667.

Fringe of peak service

Stakeholders provided comments about specific trips in the fringe of the peak that are vital to their commute. Comments were received about this topic on all express routes in the study area.

Travel time

Many stakeholders were also concerned about potential increases in travel time. While comments were received about travel time on all express routes, current route 670 and 671 riders were the most concerned about this issue.

Park-and-Ride facilities

Due to concern regarding loss of service or not enough service to support a route, several stakeholders suggested the addition of new park-and-ride facilities.

The concept plan was altered to address many of the concerns expressed by stakeholders. The routing on Route 667 was adjusted to include Highway 7 and County Road 101. The schedules and span of service on routes 614, 664, 667, 670 and 671 were modified in response to public comments.