

APPENDIX I

SUMMARIES FROM PUBLIC FOCUS GROUPS AND EMPLOYER MEETINGS

MN/DOT DISTRICT 3 COMMUTER STUDY: FOCUS GROUPS

Cambridge Focus Group

January 31, 2012

The project team hosted a focus group for members of the public to share their thoughts and experiences about commuting. Eight residents of the Cambridge area attended the meeting, which was held at the Cambridge City Hall Complex from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM.

Hometowns of attendees:

- Isanti
- Cambridge
- Princeton

Attendees reported traveling to the following destinations for both work and other trip purposes:

- Cambridge
- Blaine
- Mora
- St. Cloud
- Ramsey
- Minneapolis
- St. Paul
- Anoka
- Otsego
- Hinckley
- Pine City
- Maple Grove
- Coon Rapids
- Edina
- Bloomington

Attendees traveled to other destinations for purposes other than work. These included shopping in Bloomington, Maple Grove, Coon Rapids, and Riverdale; visiting museums in St. Paul; and attending other entertainment events in Downtown Minneapolis, such as plays or sporting events.

They described their commutes as frustrating, boring, relaxing, tolerable, and monotonous. Several individuals indicated they moved to the area because it is affordable, and the commute is the longest they could allow.

Things people would change about their commute:

- More predictable weather
- No more fast food advertising
- Better road maintenance
- Fewer stop lights
- A shorter trip
- Use of transit
- Cheaper gas
- Commuter buddy
- Not having a commute

Nature of Commutes

Several attendees said they would not commute to the Twin Cities during certain times. One does not travel downtown for early morning meetings because of traffic. Another will not schedule medical appointments for his children anytime near rush hour.

One attendee who commutes to St. Paul has established a work schedule that allows her to arrive before the AM rush hour and leave before the PM rush.

Stop-and-go traffic exists in the rush hours on Hwy 169. Another corridor that attendees complained about was Highway 65, because of all the stoplights that added a lot of time to their commute.

An employee of the Cambridge Wal-Mart reported that employees do carpool sometimes (maybe 5-10%) and walk if they live in Cambridge.

Some people never travel to St. Cloud because the roads are rural, and deer are a real danger. By contrast, the Twin Cities are an easy 20-30 minutes on a freeway.

Current Commuting Options

All attendees had used buses within the Twin Cities. Five had used transit in other cities. If transit were available in their area, only one attendee said that he would give up his car.

Using transit to get to the Twin Cities is difficult. Several attendees said that if they take the commuter rail, they then have to make multiple bus transfers. The attendee who works in St. Paul said she would have to transfer four times.

Transit is very crowded during sporting events.

An attendee who works in St. Paul has a co-worker that relies on a vanpool, and she is pleased with the experience. Another had ridden in a vanpool once many years ago and did not like the experience (she described it as claustrophobic). Several expressed reluctance to trust another driver to get them to work on time.

One attendee mentioned the gas station in Cambridge that is used as a park and ride for traveling to the Twin Cities.

Taxis are largely available, but are very expensive.

Heartland Express

The group agreed that Heartland Express should be marketed more. They all perceive the service as a service only for seniors or people with disabilities, but acknowledged they were aware that it is available to the general public. One attendee had used the service over a decade ago to travel to and from school in a nearby town. Another's wife had considered using Heartland Express to get to work because they share one car, but the schedule makes it difficult to use for job access.

Hypothetical Commuting Options

Direct transit link from home to work

Three attendees ranked transit from home to work highly; four gave this option a low ranking. Several liked the idea of the option, but did not believe there would be timesavings. Another did not think transit would ever travel to his work site (Mora). Those who ranked it highly said they would use transit if it were convenient and reliable, but would not have rated it highly if they would have to transfer.

All gave the value of transit for others in the community a very high ranking, even if it was not of value to them personally.

Carpooling

Two ranked carpooling highly; three very low. Several mentioned they would not be comfortable with a stranger and would be concerned about driver reliability. Unless the cost savings would be huge, carpooling was not an option.

Those that ranked it highly cited the price of gas and parking.

Park and Rides

Two attendees ranked the use of park and rides with a score of 1.

Guaranteed Ride Home

Only one attendee ranked a guaranteed ride home program highly. She said she would use it if she could go home anytime her kids needed her. Right now, she cannot use transit because of the necessity of being flexible to pick up her children.

Incentive Programs

They group agreed that cash incentives would be the best encouragement for carpooling or other transit options. Several said they would carpool, with incentives, and would be willing to ride a bus or train if it was reliable and convenient (and if they received incentives).

Brainerd Focus Group

February 1, 2012

The project team hosted a meeting with nine residents of the Brainerd-Baxter area to discuss commuting patterns needs. The meeting was held at the Brainerd Public Library from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM.

Hometowns of attendees:

- Brainerd
- Baxter
- Nisswa

Attendees reported traveling to the following destinations for both work and other trip purposes:

- St. Cloud for shopping, medical appointments, restaurants, in addition to work/school
- Nisswa
- Waite Park
- MSP airport
- Brainerd
- Baxter
- Little Falls
- Twin Cities - ball games
- Duluth - recreation, shopping
- Bemidji

One person works in Little Falls, but the rest of the group stated that there are no destinations in Little Falls to encourage people to go there; no one else travels there. Some Brainerd residents commute to Garrison. One attendee remembered a bus to the casino maybe one or two years ago, leaving Brainerd from a residential development called the Towers.

They described their commutes as long, expensive, high maintenance costs, short, boring and they also described poorly lit roads.

Things people would change about their commute:

- Carpooling for shared cost and responsibility
- Better scenery
- Better snow maintenance
- Cheaper
- Less boring
- If there were mass transit
- Less traffic in the summertime

Current Commuting Patterns

Nature of Commutes

Several attendees commute between Nisswa and Brainerd and reported that the drive is very easy. Drivers traveling to St. Cloud said that the drive is also typically easy, but boring. One attendee who commutes to St. Cloud several times per week mentioned that it would be nice to carpool for safety and boredom reasons.

Traffic Congestion

On holiday weekends in the Twin Cities, many businesses release their employees early, typically at noon on Friday. Traffic in the Twin Cities on those days is particularly bad.

Current Commuting Options

Seven of the nine attendees travel to the Twin Cities at least once per month. All of them drive because of the lack of good options to get there. One mentioned that MegaBus service would be great to have for that trip. Another stated that she used to take Jefferson Lines from the Twin Cities to Duluth when she was in school at the University of Minnesota.

Lake Express is a service available to the airport, but it is expensive. One attendee only knew about it because she works for a rental car agency that rents cars to people who have decided against using Lake Express. A one-way rental car is less expensive.

If your car broke, how would you get to St. Cloud?

Most at the meeting agreed that they would call a friend for a ride. One or two said they would try to borrow a car.

Information Sharing and Communication

The group thought that the internet is the best place to advertise, and they use Google to search, primarily. Smartphone apps would also be useful. Two suggested printed information at places like the Department of Social Services and at the rest stop.

They also observed that in the Twin Cities, a large amount of information about transit is available in many places.

Hypothetical Commuting Options

Direct Transit from Home to Work

Five gave this option a high ranking of 4-5. Most cited cost savings as the primary reason. Others said that safety is a big factor because it would keep them from having to drive late at night, in bad weather, in an unreliable car, and/or on roads with high deer populations. One attendee would like to study during her commute.

One ranked this option neutrally, and three gave it a low ranking. This group said that their commute (to Nisswa from Brainerd) is short and not hard. Others like making their own schedule while driving.

Three attendees ranked the value of transit for others in their community highly, but not necessarily for themselves.

Carpooling

Four attendees gave carpooling a high ranking (4-5). Six would ride with a friend, but all stated that they preferred not to ride with a “random stranger.” Even if it costs less, they prefer to know the person beforehand.

Park and Rides

Four attendees gave a park and ride a 4 or 5 ranking. Amenities they would like at a park and ride are emergency phones, cameras, and good lighting. Some preferred a person in a booth, and others thought this was not necessary.

The group discussed places to catch the bus, and most who liked the park and ride option agreed that a 10-minute drive to catch a bus is a perfectly feasible option. One suggested the rest area on Highway 10 as a site for a park and ride, though it is somewhat far from town. Another suggested West Gate Mall.

Vanpools

Three gave vanpools a high ranking. One was willing to pay up to \$300 per month, but another would not be willing to pay that much. Others commented that using a vanpool seemed too hard and too uncomfortable.

The idea was more attractive to one attendee whose schedule varies daily, but only if she could opt in each day that she has regular hours.

Many were concerned about the time constraints of ridesharing and liked the flexibility of their cars.

Incentives

All attendees ranked at least one of the monetary incentives highly. One stated that she would use a walking incentive, but not one for other commuting options.

St. Cloud Focus Group

February 2, 2012

The project team hosted a meeting with St. Cloud residents to discuss their commuting patterns. The meeting was held at the Great Rivers Regional Library in downtown St. Cloud from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM. Eleven area residents were in attendance.

Hometowns of attendees:

- Waite Park
- St. Cloud
- New London
- Melrose
- Rice
- Buffalo
- Clearwater

Attendees reported traveling to the following destinations for both work and other trip purposes:

- Waite Park
- Green Isle
- Minneapolis
- St. Paul
- Melrose
- Sauk Rapids
- St. Cloud
- Clearwater
- Hamel
- Maple Grove
- Brooklyn Park
- Albertville (outlet mall)
- MSP Airport
- Brainerd
- Crookston
- North Dakota
- Nebraska
- Bloomington – Mall of America

Most reported going to Minneapolis for other-than-work reasons between 1 and 4 times per month.

Current Commuting Patterns

Nature of Commutes

Most attendees described their commutes as long and expensive. In contrast to other focus groups, in which at least a few participants cherished their alone time or enjoyed their commute, all but one attendee used primarily negative words to describe their commutes. The most common descriptions were:

- Long
- Expensive
- Boring
- Challenging weather

The attendee who used Northstar Link and rail to the Twin Cities each day described her commute as relaxing, easy, and efficient. The person who used local transit in St. Cloud or rode his bicycle also had positive descriptions (short, entertaining).

Two attendees also reported picking up or dropping off children during their morning or evening commute.

Commute times for the eleven attendees were:

- 1 hour
- 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes
- 20-40 minutes
- 1 ½ hours
- 1 hour
- 15 minutes
- 20-45 minutes
- 1-1 ½ hours
- 1 hour
- 2-2 hours, 15 minutes
- 1 ½ hours

Costs of Commuting

Four attendees listed cheaper gas as one of the items they wished were different about their commute. Others listed “affordable.” Cost savings was a major topic of discussion.

The cost of commutes range from \$42 per month for the individual using local bus service to \$500 per month for the commuter driving from St. Cloud to Green Isle. Others reported costs of \$300-\$400 per month.

Only three attendees pay for parking at their work sites, all in Downtown Minneapolis. One reported paying \$1 per hour, one \$3 per hour, and one finds free parking or pays \$3-\$5 per day.

One attendee reported putting 30,000 miles on her vehicle in the last year commuting from St. Cloud to Minneapolis for work.

Reasons for Commuting

Most moved to their home for family, school, or work reasons and found a job as nearby as they could. The Northstar Link commuter moved recently because housing outside of the city was more reasonable; she stated that she would NOT have moved if Northstar had not been available to use.

Congested Corridors

- I-494 between Hwy 169 and the airport
- Rogers exit on I-94
- Albertville
- Metrodome events

Current Commuting Options

One person would use transit if it were efficient, faster, and more enjoyable. They worry about the punctuality of service.

One commented that she would feel “greener” if she used transit.

The Northstar rider commented that the Link and train are never late, are extremely comfortable, and that her commute is extremely easy. She buys a monthly pass through employer, and then pays \$4 of \$7 for each trip. She also commented that the drivers are extremely considerate and nice. Several commented that they wished the train came all the way to St. Cloud and that the transfer is a hassle and a big deterrent for using the service.

A few expressed discomfort with riding so closely next to a stranger, especially on a coach bus instead of on a train.

One attendee sees vanpools during his commute but is not aware of what they are or where they go.

No one had carpooled for commuting, and one person expressed that she did not know where to look for anyone going in her direction.

Metro Bus

Six of the 11 people in attendance had used Metro Bus at some point. A few were former students who were pleased with the service because it is free for students. Others reported that it is efficient and easy. Some buses make too many stops, and some drivers are great, while others less so.

Hypothetical Commuting Options

Direct transit link from home to work

Six attendees rated this option highly – between 4 and 5. Their reasons were to lessen stress of the commute, ensure no car breakdowns, and use a reliable form of transportation. One emphasized that he would use light rail but not a bus if it were available.

Four attendees gave this option the lowest rating. One said she likes to be alone for her commute. Another said that the transit hours would have to expand to accommodate her.

Several attendees who ranked transit low for themselves ranked it highly for their community. One man said that although he could not use such a service because he uses his car throughout the day for work, others in his community might use it. His community also used to have bus and train service several decades ago, which his parents and grandparents remember using.

Carpooling

Two attendees gave carpooling a high rating, citing the potential to save money. One emphasized that even if he could pick someone up for half of his 1 ½ hour commute, he would do it. Others said that it would be more convenient than driving alone.

Nine attendees gave this option a low rating, saying they need the flexibility of a car, want control of their schedule, or would worry about their safety with a stranger.

Park and Rides

Two attendees ranked the use of park and rides highly. These two stated that the convenience and avoidance of congestion are incentives for use. Only two attendees gave this item a score of 1.

Guaranteed Ride Home

Six attendees gave the guaranteed ride home program a high ranking. One knew about the Met Council's program already, but stated that it covers only \$25 of a fare home (another attendee mentioned that a taxi from the Twin Cities cost \$200). Many said that this program would encourage ridesharing.

The Northstar rider stated that she would not take Northstar if she had children at home, because of the issue of flexibility in an emergency.

Incentive Programs

Individuals at the focus group were nearly all supportive of each of the incentive programs. Anything that could save them money on their commute they support.

One attendee stated that her employer does not even offer health insurance and expressed doubt that they could offer any type of transportation incentives. Another stated that if a program would help pay for gas, he would support it.

Other “What Ifs?”

- If parking tripled, would you take the Northstar Link? - An attendee who drives to Minneapolis and pays for parking would consider transit if parking was much more expensive. Now, she says, she is indifferent to the cost.
- A feeder bus service to the Northstar Link would be great for the days the Northstar Link commuter cannot drive to the park and ride. She has to take a cab on those days, which is expensive
- Other services into St. Cloud from surrounding communities – Buffalo and Rice, specifically – received support.

Information Distribution

The group generally agreed that the internet and Facebook are the best ways to communicate with the public about transportation options. One person suggested free trials of the transit service, such as a 7-day free bus pass; one agreed that she had tried the Northstar Link for the first time because of a free pass.

MN/DOT DISTRICT 3 COMMUTER STUDY: EMPLOYER MEETINGS

Baxter-Brainerd Employer Meeting

February 1, 2012

The project team hosted a meeting to discuss commuting patterns and employee transportation needs with businesses in Baxter and Brainerd. The meeting was held at the MnDOT Training Facility in Baxter from 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM.

Introductions

Six employers from the Brainerd-Baxter area were in attendance:

- The Grand View Lodge, which employs 80-85 full-time, year-round, and an additional 500 employees in the summer. At their Nisswa camp, about 18 individuals are employed full-time.
- The Brainerd Chamber of Commerce employs 11 people full-time.
- The Brainerd Hotel employs 20 full- and part-time individuals, with an additional 10 in the peak season. Another 20-30 people are employed at the restaurant on-site. The Brainerd Hotel representative also represented Visit Brainerd, the area lodging association.
- Comfort Suites employs 10 full-time individuals and an additional 25-35 part-time at the waterpark.
- TCBX, a trucking company, employs 36 full-time, currently.
- WSN has approximately 160 employees in 7 offices from Minot to Red Wing. Their Baxter location has 60 full-time employees.

Study Overview and Discussion

Ellen Oettinger from Nelson\Nygaard presented the study activities to date and reviewed the results of the general public survey as well as the employer survey. Joey Goldman led the discussion.

Finding Employees

The Grand View Lodge looks to the surrounding community for employees for the most part. They have limited on-site housing – approximately 60 units – and typically reserve this for international workers. They employ about 40 individuals on J-1 visas each season. Many do not have a license and need assistance with transportation. The Lodge sees the affordable housing issue as a major challenge in finding employees.

One of the hoteliers stated that he has difficulty finding employees, and the trucking company also has difficulty finding drivers in the area. He has three available tractor-trailer trucks with no drivers.

The Chamber discussed several local issues with the study team. The unemployment rate in Brainerd is one of the highest in the state. Of the 14,000 residents, 1,000 are unemployed. Many households in the city may only have one car, at much higher percentages than represented in the study overview. The city needs changes to its economic structure in order to shift these numbers.

The city is also 50% rental housing, with some neighborhoods as high as 70%, but one attendee stated that he believes this is beginning to change, with more residents purchasing homes.

Transportation Options

The Chamber conducted a transportation survey about 10 years ago and learned that many employees have about 20-mile commutes.

Another employer said that at his business in Brainerd, the farthest commuting in is Nisswa. This employer also uses graduates of the Teen Challenge program as employees. Teen Challenge is a program to help treat chemical dependency. Participants do not have driver's licenses, and working with them on commutes to work can be a challenge.

Many part-time housekeepers at several of the hotels represented do not have cars. Most carpool, but some also use Dial-A-Ride. Dial-A-Ride has limitations because it is not designed to accommodate commuters; it is primarily for seniors and people with disabilities. The buses are "all over town," but it is difficult to get to work using them. Dial-A-Ride stops at 5:00 PM and does not operate on the weekends; most employees do not work 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

One attendee suggested that the Dial-A-Ride operate to specific locations for commutes; employers would try to make arrangements to accommodate that. The Grand View Lodge, for instance, would pick up workers in Nisswa if the Dial-A-Ride dropped them there.

About 1/3 of employees at the Brainerd Hotel use transit or carpool. Some cannot drive because of their driving records. The Dial-A-Ride riders spend a lot of time waiting, and they cannot be as flexible about their commutes.

There are one or two taxi companies in Brainerd, though they change ownership frequently. One is called the Brainerd Area Taxi. Many people do not want to use these taxis because of service quality.

The Grand View Lodge employs about 40 individuals on J-1 visas each season. Many do not have a license and need assistance with transportation. One international worker obtained a license and bought an inexpensive used car one summer, selling it back to the dealer when he left the country. The Lodge prefers not to endorse this practice, as they have recently bought a car from a departing employee who was unable to sell it at the end of his stay.

Regional Travel

One attendee would like to see the rail extended to Brainerd; it was once planned to extend to Camp Ripley, but no further.

If there were a bus to Minneapolis, people would use it. Another pointed out that Jefferson Lines does have this type of trip. Several members of the group stated that there is not enough information distributed about available services.

Parking

In Downtown Brainerd, workers may have to purchase a parking stall for \$15-\$20 per month. There are also public parking lots Downtown.

Information

Two employers keep information about transit options for employee reference, one particularly for international workers. The Chamber keeps a lot of information on hand at the visitor information centers.

The group believed that any advertising of ridesharing services or other programs should be employer-based. Employers could use the break rooms to advertise in order to have a paper component. Since most employers are under 10 employees, coordinating a program across employers would be the best way to get something implemented, using the individual employers to advertise. The employers should have some type of incentive for participating.

Ridesharing

Most of the employers agreed that ridesharing would be beneficial for their workers. One employer commutes 45 minutes and agrees that gas prices are very high. As it is, primarily relatives or coworkers carpool with each other; residents are likely to not trust strangers as carpoolers.

One employer who stated some interest in ridesharing also said that she might not take it because she likes the independence of driving and the flexibility of control over her schedule.

Another issue is that the shifts are very scattered, more so than in the past. Workers who do carpool often have to wait on each other at the end of shifts.

What if gas goes up?

If gas goes up, the area would be devastated economically because of its dependence on tourism. If tourism dropped, the number of jobs would decline.

Incentives

One employer stated that he would only be interested in incentives when he can no longer recruit employees.

Another said that ridesharing and other programs are easier in urban areas where there is another option in case the ride falls through. In rural areas, there is not the same safety net. Another employer said that he believed a guaranteed ride home program would be abused if instituted.

Would a shuttle between hotels work?

Most attendees did not think a shuttle would work. One cited a current issue with Reichert Bus Service, which is planning the operation of a shuttle between hotels and a one-day ice fishing tournament. Reichert's suggestion has been to pick up at each hotel separately and drive to the tournament instead of circulating in a loop between all points.

St. Cloud Employer Meeting

February 2, 2012

The project team hosted a meeting to discuss commuting patterns and employee transportation needs with businesses in St. Cloud at the Great Rivers Regional Library in St. Cloud, from 8:00 AM to 9:30 AM.

Introductions

Thirteen representatives of the employer community in St. Cloud and many other communities in the lower portion of District 3 participated in the meeting. Among them were:

- The Buffalo Chamber of Commerce, representing 260 members and 500 businesses in Buffalo. The Chamber employs one full-time and one-part time individual.
- The St. Cloud Chamber, representing 1,000 members and 4,000 businesses. The Chamber employs 15 people and is a member of Central Minnesota Transportation Alliance.
- Rum River Health Services with 40 full-time employees.
- A representative of the City of Royalton
- Child Care Choices, a nonprofit in St. Cloud
- A Sherburne County Commissioner who has been involved in Northstar.
- A Big Lake City Council member
- Catholic Charities, which employs 600 people in St. Cloud
- The St. Cloud Veterans Hospital, which employs 1,500 individual and operates transportation to support its vocational rehabilitation program and access to care at the hospital
- The Disabled American Veterans, which employs 16 volunteer drivers to transport veterans to medical appointments.
- Golden Plump poultry, a large employer in the St. Cloud region.

Study Overview and Discussion

Ellen Oettinger from Nelson\Nygaard presented the study activities to date and reviewed the results of the general public survey as well as the employer survey. Joey Goldman led the discussion.

One attendee commented that the Northstar rail needs more trains operating. The service works well, but not for the average commuter. Another attendee commented that the original request was for far more service than is currently available. The rail owner DNSF controls the number of trips on the line.

One attendee pointed out that her clients use transit far more than the 1% reported in the telephone survey of the general public. Her clients are low income and depend on the bus service.

Another mentioned that transit is critical to students in the community, as noted in the study findings. In a survey conducted before Northstar was in operation, $\frac{3}{4}$ of St. Cloud State University students reported to be coming from Anoka and Sherburne.

Commuting Challenges

With unemployment rates where they are, no employers reported difficult finding employees to fill jobs. However, three said that commuting is a challenge for their company or worksite.

One large employer attracts workers willing to work non-traditional shifts and typically earn lower wages; many workers are low income, immigrants, or both, and have less access to private vehicles than other residents might. Many of these workers carpool, and the employer reported that many would love to take a bus. Some use Tri-CAP for one leg of their commute – to work for first shift workers or to home for second shift workers – because the service hours do not accommodate both legs of the commute. Many carpool to St. Cloud from Long Prairie and Sauk Center

Another employer stated that some people have vehicles but still cannot travel because the vehicles are old and have such bad gas mileage.

Catholic Charities' clients use the transit system to access services at their offices, but many have financial trouble. Since the system is hub and spoke, transfers are typically necessary; a ride is \$1, and the transfer fee is 25 cents. Catholic Charities helps 325 people each month, using a \$5,000 total budget. Half of this is spent on transportation - typically for assistance purchasing gas and maintenance.

Employer Incentives

The only employer in attendance that provides commuter incentive services is the VA hospital, which helps match rideshare travelers and offers some incentives. Incentives include a better parking spot for carpoolers and a pre-tax stipend for public transit, among others. The VA began offering incentives in the mid 1990s in order to maximize energy savings. The federal government changed its policy and that of its agencies such as the VA.

Several employers in downtown St. Cloud pay for employee parking; at least one pays for transit (though only one employee takes advantage of this incentive currently). Parking is an issue for employers downtown, and many, including ING, have parking incentives.

The potential for employers to incentivize different types of travel options was perceived by the group to be somewhat slim. The Chamber reported that there is a lot of uncertainty about state taxes and healthcare reform and the requisite effects on business. Capital investment has picked up, but hiring has not yet. If incentives mean an employer has to pay more money, there may be a low response, but maybe some of the larger employers may still be interested.

Transit System

Several employers reported that their employees or clients use transit to access work and services. One large employer in St. Cloud reported that at least 8-10 on the AM shift use transit daily to get to work, but cannot use it to get home at the end of the shift because service is no longer operating. Many also use taxis.

Another issue is accessing childcare while using transit to commute. Dropping a child at day care can add an hour to a commute, including waiting at the bus stop.

The employers generally felt that the transit systems and Dial-A-Rides in rural areas are primarily set up for older adults and persons with disabilities. One in particular supports the idea of regionalizing rural transit and making cross-county line transfers easier, particularly for accessing healthcare and accommodating commuters.

The representative from Big Lake commented that transportation options for accessing the Northstar train and park and ride in Big Lake are essential for the success of the service.

Another initiative that had been discussed in the past is operating a bus along Highway 169 into Elk River. Other attendees were supportive of reviving this idea.

Others advocated for coordinating existing services, pointing out that many buses purchased using Section 5310 funding are not being used after 4:30 PM.

Other

Camp Ripley brings nearly 300,000 people to the camp throughout the year, including 250,000 civilians. There was an effort several years ago to take the Northstar line up to Camp Ripley to accommodate these trips.

The issue of land use and housing patterns was also briefly discussed. The City of Royalton has hundreds of individuals who move there but work in St. Cloud or other cities, forcing them to commute on congested highways.