Introduction

On January 6, 2016 the first of two stakeholder outreach meetings was held at the Senior Center in St. Peter, MN. A group of community leaders was assembled representing various entities along the Highway 169 Corridor that have interest and/or expertise in providing intercity bus service. The overall objective of this session was to complement the technical analysis of each community on the corridor and define the intercity travel markets. The meeting also helped provide an understanding of how well current services meet local needs, what the most important new travel markets are, and how can non-users would find expanded intercity service to be an attractive option.

The consultant team worked with the PMT to establish the stakeholder working group members. Invitees included local public officials, transit and transportation providers, people that work in human services, business and economic development representatives, and representatives of educational institutions.

The first meeting was approximately two hours in length, including a large group presentation with smaller breakout discussion session. The consultant team provided an overview of project activities, and other relevant background information, and then facilitated small group discussions in the following topic areas:

Defining the Market for Transit Service

*Who would be a user of intercity bus service on Highway 169?*
*How well are these users served now?*
*Can you prioritize among these user groups?*
*What are the key destinations for intercity bus service?*

Barriers and Gaps

*Why is there presently no rural-to-urban (subsidized) intercity bus service on the Highway 169 Corridor?*
*What are some of the challenges related to serving potential users (see earlier discussion)?*
*What is an acceptable fare for intercity bus service?*

Strategies and Opportunities

*How can we effectively meet needs related to intercity transportation?*
*Who is interested and willing to be at the table to start this service?*

On the following page is a list of the meeting attendees.
### Meeting Attendees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Albers</td>
<td>St. Peter Transit</td>
<td>507-934-0668</td>
<td><a href="mailto:waynea@stpetermn.gov">waynea@stpetermn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Prafke</td>
<td>St. Peter</td>
<td>507-934-0663</td>
<td><a href="mailto:toddp@saintpetermn.gov">toddp@saintpetermn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Bigham</td>
<td>MnDOT District 7</td>
<td>507-304-6195</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lisa.bigham@state.mn.us">lisa.bigham@state.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrell Pettis</td>
<td>Le Sueur County</td>
<td>507-357-2251</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dpettis@co.le-sueur.mn.us">dpettis@co.le-sueur.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Genelin</td>
<td>District 7 ATP</td>
<td>612-756-0537</td>
<td><a href="mailto:terrygenelinagency@msn.com">terrygenelinagency@msn.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdi Sabrie</td>
<td>African Family and Educ. Center</td>
<td>507-351-8142</td>
<td><a href="mailto:amsabrie@gmail.com">amsabrie@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vance Stuehrenberg</td>
<td>Blue Earth County</td>
<td>507-388-8129</td>
<td><a href="mailto:vances@blueearthcountymn.gov">vances@blueearthcountymn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Cowan</td>
<td>MNSU - Mankato</td>
<td>507-389-6931</td>
<td><a href="mailto:david.cowan@mnsu.edu">david.cowan@mnsu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb Dahl</td>
<td>Scott County Workforce</td>
<td>952-496-8151</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bdahl@scott.mn.us">bdahl@scott.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Baker</td>
<td>Greater Mankato Growth</td>
<td>507-385-6657</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pbaker@greatermankato.com">pbaker@greatermankato.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Len Simich</td>
<td>SouthWest Transit</td>
<td>952-949-2287</td>
<td><a href="mailto:lsimich@swtransit.org">lsimich@swtransit.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Clarksen</td>
<td>MnDOT Office of Transit</td>
<td>651-366-4182</td>
<td><a href="mailto:robert.clarksen@state.mn.us">robert.clarksen@state.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh Johnson</td>
<td>Mystic Lake / SMSC</td>
<td>952-496-7392</td>
<td><a href="mailto:josh.johnson@mysticalake.com">josh.johnson@mysticalake.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie Buchanan</td>
<td>Jefferson Lines</td>
<td>800-451-5333</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bonnieb@jeffersonlines.com">bonnieb@jeffersonlines.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Posivio</td>
<td>Trailblazer Transit</td>
<td>320-864-1000</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cposivio@trailblazertransit.com">cposivio@trailblazertransit.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Klassen</td>
<td>MnDOT Office of Transit</td>
<td>507-831-8011</td>
<td><a href="mailto:janice.klassen@state.mn.us">janice.klassen@state.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Clark</td>
<td>Vine</td>
<td>507-387-1666</td>
<td><a href="mailto:carolclark@vinevolunteers.com">carolclark@vinevolunteers.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Long</td>
<td>DEED</td>
<td>507-344-2610</td>
<td><a href="mailto:randy.long@state.mn.us">randy.long@state.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan Tesdahl</td>
<td>Nicollet County Human Services Director</td>
<td>507-934-8576</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jtesdahl@co.nicollet.mn.us">jtesdahl@co.nicollet.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Parker</td>
<td>Region 9 Development Commission</td>
<td>507-389-8886</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sam@rndc.org">sam@rndc.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly Kreft</td>
<td>City of Belle Plaine</td>
<td>952-873-5553</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hkreft@ci.belleplaine.mn.us">hkreft@ci.belleplaine.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jake Huebsch</td>
<td>MAPO (Mankato Area Planning Org)</td>
<td>507-387-8630</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jhuebshc@mankatomn.gov">jhuebshc@mankatomn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Vogel</td>
<td>MAPO (Mankato Area Planning Org)</td>
<td>507-387-8613</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pvogel@mankatomn.gov">pvogel@mankatomn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Hingevedl</td>
<td>Scott County</td>
<td>952-496-8839</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ahingevedl@co.scott.mn.us">ahingevedl@co.scott.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janelle Teppen</td>
<td>City of LeSueur</td>
<td>507-593-8311</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jteppen@cityoflesueur.com">jteppen@cityoflesueur.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandi Owen</td>
<td>City of Le Sueur</td>
<td>507-665-6211</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sowen@cityoflesueur.com">sowen@cityoflesueur.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoNes VanHecke</td>
<td>Gustavus College</td>
<td>507-933-7526</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jvanheck@gustavus.edu">jvanheck@gustavus.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Anderson</td>
<td>Mankato Transit</td>
<td>507.387.8655</td>
<td><a href="mailto:manderson@mankatomn.gov">manderson@mankatomn.gov</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Freese</td>
<td>Scott County</td>
<td>952-496-8346</td>
<td><a href="mailto:LFreese@co.scott.mn.us">LFreese@co.scott.mn.us</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following is a summary of input provided by stakeholders throughout the meeting, with responses for each topic area. Included are key points from notes taken during the session, large format flip-charts, and follow-up emails from stakeholders.

**Intercity Bus Market**

Defining the market for transit service required meeting participants to discuss who would be the key users of the service, and significant origins and destinations. General themes from the discussion include the following:

**Students**

- Students at Gustavus Adolphus would use the service. In addition to the planned trip home for the holidays, students would travel to the Twin Cities for recreation, cultural events, and shopping at places like Mall of America.

- Mankato State University (MSU) Students would use the service for recreation in the Twin Cities. There are also international students at MSU that have friends and connections in the Twin Cities and rely on bus service to get to and from MSP Airport. Immigrant/international populations have a network in the Twin Cities.

- Currently 25 percent of Jefferson Lines/Land to Air ridership is students on Friday and Sunday.

- South Central College has many immigrant students without cars that have community connections in Twin Cities

- Many students do not own cars and therefore cannot make intercity trips.

**Immigrant Population**

- Immigrant populations: International and specialty retail in the Twin Cities, family connection in Twin Cities

- Unlicensed drivers – particularly new immigrants – cannot make the trip by automobile.

- New Prague is also a medical destination

- People need to get to immigration court and other federal services in the Twin Cities

**Social Services and Community Oriented Activities**

- The elderly and disabled would take the service for social trips (visiting family and friends).

- Specialty medical trips to Minneapolis/St. Paul; majority of medical trips go to Mankato; clinic services in New Prague.
• Mental health services are becoming more regionalized, people need to travel from rural areas.

• Seniors can connect to urban transit in the Metro area, but will need training and marketing effort.

• St. Peter Regional Treatment Center – employees, visitors, etc. There are also release patients seeking to visit others and/or work throughout corridor that would benefit from the service.

• VA Services in Minneapolis

**Job Connections**

• Southwest Twin Cities has underserved employment base, seeking workers to fill new jobs.

• Reverse commuters to Le Sueur. There is currently a housing shortage in Le Sueur, so people commute in from long distances. Cambria is also a major employment destination for Le Sueur residents.

• Many people seeking jobs do not have cars; people without access to automobiles are a key user group.

• Mystic Lake service currently provides eight trips per day for employees, free rides for casino patrons on over 10 daily routes. Approximately 7 percent of shift employee residences to south of the Minnesota River over the past 5-7 years; Approximately 250 of 3,300 employees live in Mankato, St. Peter, Le Sueur, etc.

**Other**

• Single or zero vehicle households would benefit from enhanced services.

**Barriers and Gaps**

Reviewing the markets that are underserved by intercity bus at present, meeting participants were prompted to discuss some of the reasons. Topics included why there was presently no rural-to-urban scheduled service on the corridor eligible for MnDOT program funds, challenges related to serving the target markets for service, and the financial outlook for providing intercity service.

**Funding**

• Very few/no local agencies have the resources to subsidize an intercity route in a pilot stage, where the operating deficit is presumed to be high.
• Program funding is “silied” by eligible recipients and geographic areas – rural vs. urban, intercity providers, public transit, etc.

• Commuter service is not eligible for intercity program funds.

Barriers

• Lack of local scheduled feeder service makes it difficult to reach the Highway 169 Corridor from rural areas.

• People are not familiar with how to use intercity service or public transit service; region is oriented to car travel.

• Limited English proficiency makes learning how to use transit/intercity bus challenging.

• For local officials, it is difficult to prioritize and champion intercity service where none has existed before.

• Multiple transfers and indirect service can have long travel times that make it unattractive to new users.
  
  o Rural-to-urban trips

  o Transfers in Twin Cities metro area to public transit.

• Low population density in rural areas.

• Dispersed origins and destinations.

Affordability

• $60 Roundtrip is too much for social or entertainment trip, but reasonable for special occasions and holidays.

• Example fare would be $6 each way from Mankato to Shakopee, and $10 each way from Mankato to Twin Cities.

Strategies and Opportunities

Governance and Funding

• The intercity bus service should have independent oversight and not be managed by a single entity or decision making body. This could be accomplished with a joint powers authority, MnDOT oversight, etc.

• Jefferson Lines has been profitable in operating Land to Air service, to-date; has not applied for funding from Mankato to Twin Cities.
• Local funding options:
  o Blue Earth County has passed a .5 cent sales tax to support rural connections to regional center (Mankato)
  o Nicollet County recently passed a $10 wheelage tax.

Marketing and Outreach
• The project managers will need to continuously conduct market research to understand the target customer (workforce, immigrants, students, etc.), and evaluate how well needs are being met.
• Need to have an online presence to connect with students.
• Ability to find transportation services using a smartphone.
• Develop marketing partnerships with universities, social service organizations, Twin Cities communities, etc.
• The project and funders will need advocacy and buy-in from business community.

Implementation
• There must be adequate funding to support the pilot phase of the project.
• Participants agreed that the use of existing structures (Land to Air Express) is an excellent starting point, but also recognized that major coordination efforts will be required to expand and finance the service to meet needs.
• New multi-county service could provide rural feeder service to intercity operator.
  o 3 County joint transit board may form and is currently in very preliminary stages; Feeder service may be in operation in 2017.
  o The three counties are important stakeholders in the project.
• Need to have seamless transfers and cooperative agreements between transit agencies to streamline fare collection.
• 5311 (f) MnDOT intercity requirements
  o Passenger boarding stops within community or accessible by public transit
  o 3 weekly roundtrips
  o Shelter facility with schedule
• Take advantage of the expertise of incumbent transit/intercity providers. Land-to-Air is successful on the corridor and can operate a modified service.

• Local agencies are willing to partner in a variety of functional areas (outreach, marketing, connecting transit service, shared facilities, etc.)

**Next Steps**

Continuing the outreach process, the project team will distribute a web survey targeted at college and university students, faculty, and staff. Since higher education institutions provide a significant boost to intercity ridership, understanding their needs will be essential to successful implementation.

The PMT will also define the problem statement over the course of the next two months, and the project team will complete a market analysis, estimates of demand, and a draft service plan. The larger stakeholder group will reconvene in late March to review draft recommendations.