

Planning for Transit Advantages

Mn/DOT provides a number of advantages for transit on its system of state highways. These advantages include bus shoulders, HOV lanes, park-and-ride lots, and HOV bypasses. Planning and coordination of these amenities is the responsibility of Mn/DOT's Transit Advantages Coordinator, currently Carl Jensen.

Team Transit is a partnership between Metro Transit, Mn/DOT, Metropolitan Council, the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Transit providers, metro-area counties and municipalities.

Needs for transit advantages are identified by the transit providers during regular meetings. Opportunities to incorporate transit advantages into regular Mn/DOT construction projects are identified during a review of Mn/DOT's program. Mn/DOT's Team Transit project manager then coordinates the needs of the providers, integrating them into Mn/DOT projects when feasible and appropriate to the construction schedule. The scale of these projects ranges from surface overlays to major reconstruction.

Funding for Team Transit needs is provided through an annual target varying from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000, augmented with additional CMAQ funds for qualifying projects. Where practicable, transit needs such as bus shoulder construction, are incorporated into existing Mn/DOT projects. When the scope of this accommodation is minor, the added costs are typically absorbed by the larger project without impacting the Team Transit budget. More complex and expensive transit accommodations and stand-alone projects draw funding from the Team Transit budget.

Bus shoulder needs comprise the greatest portion of Team Transit projects, and are prioritized by Team Transit based on roadway congestion and anticipated bus use. At times, these needs can be met with the simple placement of roadway signs authorizing bus shoulder use. More often, though, the shoulders will require strengthening and/or widening to appropriately and safely accommodate bus use. Team Transit has developed a preliminary list that identifies potential expansion to the bus shoulder system. Some of these segments include portions of the IRC system outside the 494/694 beltway.

To accommodate future bus use and roadway preservation activities, the Metro Division has adopted a new typical cross section for new construction or reconstruction of freeways and expressways.

Guidelines for bus shoulder use were first formally documented in 1996 by representatives from Mn/DOT (Joe Gladke), Metro Transit (Aaron Isaacs) and the State Patrol. These guidelines are presently undergoing a review and update process, which should be completed by the end of 2001 (completed). The guidelines address the roadway, traffic and weather conditions that control appropriate shoulder use by buses. Examples of these criteria follow:

- Minimum mainline speed to allow bus shoulder use: 35 mph
- Maximum speed of buses on shoulders: 15 mph greater than mainline, not to exceed 35 mph
- Minimum shoulder width: 10 feet, 11.5 feet on bridges

Team Transit is a working group comprised of representatives from MnDOT Metro Division Design and Freeway Operations, Metro Transit, and the suburban opt-out transit providers, Maple Grove, Plymouth Metro Link, Southwest Metro Transit, and Minnesota Valley Transit Authority. Team Transit meets every three months to discuss transit needs and to review Mn/DOT's planned program.

MnDOT's Transit Advantages Coordinator, Carl Jensen, coordinates activities and priority ranking of the transit advantages. Carl's responsibilities require close coordination with the Area Engineers and the Program Delivery project managers. He also provides important technical assistance to this program and coordinates the operations side of the team transit operations and implementing the operating guidelines for bus shoulder use. Carl also prepares the agenda for quarterly Team Transit meetings and maintains meeting records.

Data for the Metro Division's transit advantages is maintained by Carl Jensen. The database includes bus shoulders, HOV lanes, and ramp meter bypasses. Metro Transit maintains the data for the Metro area's approximately 119 park and ride lots and 45 park and pool lots, most of which are locally owned.