

Chapter 8: Future Plans and Studies

Many issues and proposed strategies identified in this plan will require further in-depth analysis and consultation among partners, stakeholders, and policymakers. Several key studies and investment plans are currently underway or will be initiated soon to study and expand upon the policies and strategies of this plan. These studies are summarized below.

Greater Minnesota Transit Plan

The update of the 2001 Greater Minnesota Transit Plan is scheduled for completion in 2009. The plan will define the future vision for public transportation across Greater Minnesota and focus on the needs of four target market groups: the elderly, low income, disabled, and commuters. It will identify strategies to guide investments to both maintain and expand current transit services across the state.

Greater Minnesota Transit Implementation/Investment Plan

In 2008, the Minnesota Legislature directed Mn/DOT to develop a transit implementation plan that includes an analysis of ridership and transit service needs throughout greater Minnesota; a calculation of unmet needs; an assessment of the level and type of service required to meet unmet needs; an analysis of costs and revenue options; and a plan to reduce unmet transit service needs. The plan is to specifically address special transportation service, ridership, and needs. The objective of the plan is determine the level of funding that will be required to meet at least 80 percent of unmet transit service needs in greater Minnesota by July 1, 2015 and at least 90 percent of unmet transit service needs in greater Minnesota by July 1, 2025. This plan will be completed in 2009.

Intercity Bus Study

In 2009, Mn/DOT will update its Intercity Bus Study, which was last updated in 1997. Intercity bus service in Minnesota is defined as “regularly scheduled bus service for the general public, which operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or more urban areas not in close proximity, which has the capacity for transporting baggage carried by passengers, and which makes meaningful connections with scheduled intercity bus service to more distant points.” The primary objectives of the study include enhanced coordination and connectivity between public and private sector services, the identification of service gaps, strategies to meet service needs, and improved interface between transportation modes. The results of this study, scheduled for completion in mid-2009, will be incorporated in the Statewide Transportation Policy Plan through an amendment likely in 2010.

Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan

The Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, mandated by the 2008 Minnesota Legislature, is scheduled for completion in late 2009. The plan will create a vision for both passenger and freight rail services in Minnesota, establish investment needs, identify a potential passenger system network, determine the role of private and public sector entities, set parameters for corridor priorities, and identify potential funding sources. The plan will comply with expected federal state rail plan guidelines and requirements in order to expedite development and funding for proposed and future projects.

While the passenger rail component of the plan will establish criteria to prioritize potential passenger rail corridors, the freight component of the plan will look at cost, access, and capacity issues that offer opportunities to improve Minnesota's competitiveness and market presence both locally and around the world. A key component of the study will be to integrate the private rail network into the state transportation system, and to effectively complement truck, water, and air freight modes. This plan should allow for short-line railroad vitality, and account for increasing demands on main line capacity by growing "overhead" or long-haul freight rail traffic and new passenger rail development. The results of this plan will be incorporated as a future amendment to this Statewide Transportation Policy Plan.

Metro Highway System Investment Study

Over the next 12 months, Mn/DOT and the Metropolitan Council will work with other transportation partners to evaluate the metropolitan highway system. The study's goal is to define the long-term (40-50 year) vision for the metropolitan area's transportation system. The Metro Highway System Investment Study (MHSIS) will guide overall mobility decisions by giving direction to fully utilize all highway and modal investments in a coordinated manner. The strategies will not be fiscally constrained but the total cost will be considered in "right-sizing" the future transportation system.

This study will address how and where to optimize the use of the system taking into consideration current space and right-of-way constraints. The study will also consider innovative strategies such as dynamic shoulders, managed lanes, and greater integration of transit advantages to improve person throughput on key corridors. This may include the re-examination of previously planned projects as potential areas for strategic capacity investment.

Regional Freight Studies

The Northern Minnesota\Northwest Wisconsin Freight Study and the Western Minnesota Freight Study will be multimodal including highway (commercial vehicle operations), rail, waterway, air cargo, and intermodal transportation. Building on prior planning activities conducted by area partners, the studies will provide a better understanding of the demands freight places on regional transportation infrastructure. Both studies will examine regional and local issues not captured in previous freight transportation studies and plans, document the existing freight transportation systems, identify industry and region-specific issues and trends as

they relate to freight transportation, and plan for improvements for freight movement specific to the regions.

Long-Range Transportation Funding Options

The 2008 Minnesota Legislature directed that Mn/DOT, in consultation with other state agencies and key stakeholders, evaluate and study:

- (1) How current and long-range needs for preservation and improvement of the state's highways, bridges and transit might be affected by changes in travel behavior and revenue generation due to improved vehicular fuel economy, increased availability of non-driving travel alternatives, and/or sharply increased fuel prices.
- (2) Whether road-use pricing and other alternative transportation system funding mechanisms used in other states and countries show promise for use in Minnesota and for public acceptance and alleviation of congestion; with consideration given also to the effects of such options for air and water quality, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and costs of implementation and potential for revenue generation.

Mn/DOT also sponsored a symposium in June of 2009 to address these questions. This symposium was designed to:

- Bring together potential stakeholders.
- Inform stakeholders of current state transportation system performance needs and revenue implications.
- Educate participants about, and build awareness of, various transportation funding options.
- Explore and discuss the potential direct and indirect effects new funding choices could have on Minnesota's environment and the condition of its transportation system.

The study, due in November 2009, will also look into the potential of road pricing and other alternative funding mechanisms with particular consideration of their environmental impacts and implementation feasibility.

Innovative Finance Initiative

Mn/DOT is working with its transportation partners and stakeholders to explore new innovative finance concepts and options for maximizing limited transportation dollars, better aligning user benefits with costs, and delivering more transportation projects sooner.

Mn/DOT is currently developing goals and a plan for this new innovative finance initiative. The plan will guide the department's exploration and assessment of innovative finance options and best practices, as well as its collaboration and outreach in this area. The plan will also guide the implementation and evaluation of

innovative finance solutions and the integration of successful innovative approaches into the department's planning and project development processes.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan will identify physical obstacles in Mn/DOT facilities, describe the methods that will be used to make the facilities accessible, specify the schedule for the taking action, and identify the responsible official. This transition plan will also identify a procedure to address complaints/grievances. Ultimately, the ADA transition plan is intended to identify system needs to be addressed through the transportation planning and programming process. Upon completion, the plan will assist Mn/DOT in meeting ADA requirements.

Complete Streets Feasibility Study

Complete Streets are defined as roadways designed and operated to enable safe, attractive, and comfortable access and travel for all users; pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and public transport users of all ages and abilities. Mn/DOT and its partners are assessing the benefits, costs, and feasibility of establishing a Complete Streets policy in Minnesota. Mn/DOT is hiring a consultant to gather information and feedback about what a Complete Streets policy would mean for Minnesota. The consultant will also research Complete Streets initiatives nationwide. A Complete Streets Study Committee and Technical Advisory Panel have been assembled. The Commissioner will present the final report to the Legislature in December of 2009.