

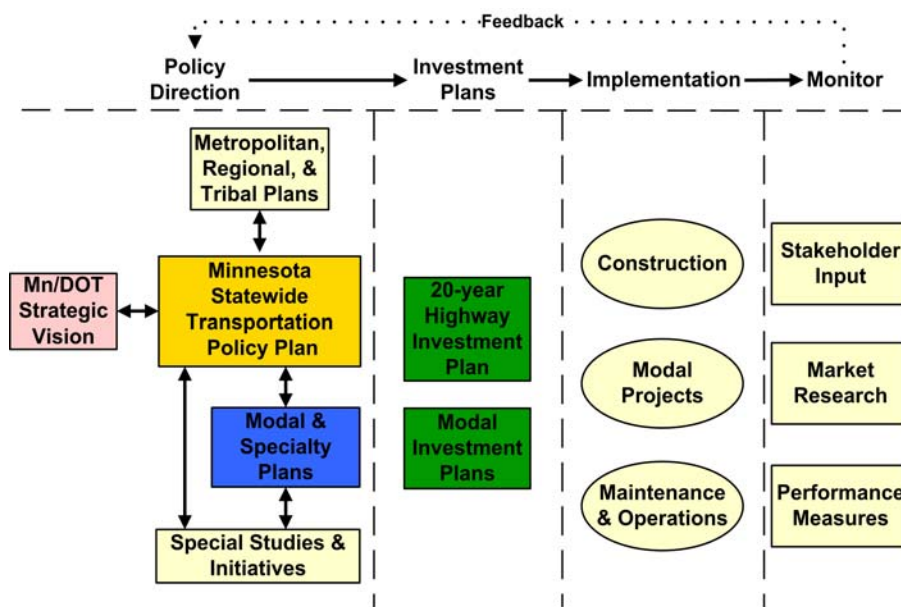
# Chapter 2: Plan Purpose and Development Process

Public transportation empowers individuals to be independent, seek and retain employment, access medical care, and gain access to new opportunities. The Greater Minnesota Transit Plan is a 20-year strategic plan that sets forth strategic directions for the future of public transportation in Greater Minnesota. The plan describes current challenges that the state is facing, examines future transit service needs and analyzes future levels of funding to meet that need.

Mn/DOT’s Office of Transit administers the provision of transit services in Greater Minnesota in partnership with the federal government and local communities. This role is maintained through the development of policies and programs that provide technical and financial assistance to local transit programs; evaluate and improve performance of local transit systems; ensure effective utilization of state and federal investment in public transportation; and ensure compliance with all pertinent state and federal laws, rules, and regulations.

## Relationship to Statewide Transportation Plan

Figure 2.1 highlights Mn/DOT’s responsibility to plan and program many modes of transportation, including highways, freight, rail, bicycles and pedestrians, transit, and aeronautics. These plans may also develop investment policies and performance measures that serve as an important input for the statewide planning process. As one of Mn/DOT’s Modal and Specialty Plans, the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan will be incorporated into the Minnesota Statewide Transportation Plan.



**Figure 2.1 Planning and Programming Process**

Source: Mn/DOT Office of Investment Management

## Public Involvement

“Hear Every Voice” is Mn/DOT’s policy on public and stakeholder participation. In Mn/DOT’s decision-making processes, stakeholder consultation and public involvement play an integral role. In order to fulfill the department’s mission, Mn/DOT is committed to involving members of the public throughout the state in the development of its plans. To “hear every voice,” Mn/DOT’s stakeholder consultation and public involvement processes for the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan included:

- Early and continuing public involvement opportunities
- Timely information about public transportation issues
- Reasonable public access to technical and policy information
- Adequate public notice of public involvement activities and time for public review and comment at key decision points
- Consideration and response to public input during the planning process

## Project Management and Decision-Making Structure

The project management and decision-making structure for the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan 2010-2030 is presented below. The structure served as a guide for both internal and external communications.

### Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee was responsible for providing advice at key project milestones on a broader level than that of the Technical Team. The public involvement responsibilities of the Advisory Committee included providing advisory services for the development of the vision and providing assistance with stakeholder communications, including engaging stakeholders in the public involvement process.

Advisory Committee members included:

- Association of Minnesota Counties
- Chisago/Isanti County Heartland Express
- Duluth Transit Authority
- East Central Regional Development Commission
- Fargo/Moorhead Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Metropolitan Council
- Minnesota Board on Aging
- Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
- Minnesota Department of Health
- Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Minnesota Department of Transportation – District 4
- Minnesota Department of Transportation – Office of Transit
- Minnesota Department of Transportation – Office of Investment Management
- Minnesota Public Transit Association
- Minnesota State Council on Disability
- Udac

- University of Minnesota, Center for Transportation Studies

### **Technical Team**

The Technical Team provided overall project management and guided the work of the consultant team. For public involvement activities, Technical Team responsibilities included reviewing and approving surveys and other materials for release to stakeholders, facilitating stakeholder communication, and obtaining, organizing, and integrating stakeholder and public input into the plan update process.

Technical Team members included staff from the Mn/DOT Office of Transit, Office of Investment Management, and Modal Planning and Program Management Division.

## **Stakeholder Input**

The stakeholder assessment process was an integral part of identifying current issues in public transportation and developing a vision for transit in Greater Minnesota. Government agencies, transit providers, human services organizations, healthcare organizations, business organizations, elected officials, and the general public were all included in the stakeholder assessment.

Three main stakeholder assessment strategies were used in the development of the plan: facilitated workshops, structured interviews, and an electronic survey. This section contains a summary of these strategies and their outcomes.

### **Facilitated Workshops**

A series of seven facilitated workshops were held in Detroit Lakes, St. Cloud, Marshall, Duluth, Bemidji, Rochester, and Mankato during September 2008. The purpose of the workshops was to gather input from key stakeholder groups and provide an opportunity for the general public to learn about the project and provide feedback.

The workshops were structured into three main parts. The first portion of the workshop included background information on the project and the development process for the plan. The second portion of the workshop was an open discussion for participants to identify and discuss transit issues in Greater Minnesota. Discussions were facilitated regarding issues in service, marketing, coordination, regulation, and insurance. In the final portion of the workshop, project staff led workshop participants through a prioritization exercise in which they were asked to identify the top issues they wanted to see addressed in the plan. The list of issues included key issues identified in the 2006 locally developed transit coordination plans as well as additional issues identified during the discussion portion of the workshop.

While the discussions and prioritizations varied slightly by region, there were several issues that emerged as main themes at all seven workshops:

- Evening and weekend service
- Technology for trip scheduling
- Education for prospective users
- Appropriate size vehicles
- Expanded services in rural areas
- Expanded employee (commuter) services
- Coordination of trips with nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and healthcare providers
- Expanded transportation services across county lines

- Park-and-rides/infrastructure
- Establishment of mobility management organizations

### Structured Interviews

Mn/DOT conducted 35 structured interviews with leaders from state and regional agencies in September 2008. Agencies represented at the interviews included state agencies, regional development commissions, area agencies on aging, and chambers of commerce.

The interviews served to gather an assessment from agency leaders on how well current transit service in Greater Minnesota was meeting local needs at the time of the interview. Questions focused on service gaps, groups benefiting from additional transit, priorities for expanding service, and emerging transit issues.

**Table 2.1 Summary of Results from Structured Interviews**

Topic	Top Responses
Greatest needs for additional transit	Expanded service area and hours Access to service in rural areas Education on available transit
Groups benefitting most from additional transit service	Seniors (83%) Persons with disabilities (69%)
Greatest challenges facing transit in the next five years	Availability of funding Aging population Coordination/crossing borders Increase in fuel costs*

*\*The cost of fuel at the time of the structured interviews was at a record high.*

### Electronic Survey

Thirty-five electronic surveys were also completed by transit providers throughout Greater Minnesota in October 2008 as a complementary data collection method to the structured interviews.

Survey questions focused on the same topics as the structured interviews; however, the electronic survey also included several questions on the coordination of services.

**Table 2.2 Summary of Results from Electronic Survey**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Top Responses</b>
Groups benefitting most from additional transit service	Seniors (37%) Commuters (23%)
Service gaps in current transit system	Time of service (74%) Service area coverage (51%)
Current barriers to expanding/improving service	Funding for operations (97%) Funding for equipment (43%) (prior to ARRA)
Top priorities for new funding	Expanded service hours (43%) Expanded service area (34%)
Greatest challenges to providing service	Funding (94%) Fuel prices (29%) Labor costs (29%)
Experiencing benefit from coordinating transit services with other organizations	Yes (89%) No (3%) Does not apply (8%)

### **Stakeholder Process Findings**

The findings of the stakeholder assessment presented several key themes that were identified by stakeholders as issues throughout the assessment activities:

- **Expansion of service hours and area:** The need for expanded service hours and area was noted throughout the stakeholder process. Key issues were evening and weekend service as well as expanded options for service in rural areas.
- **Expansion of core services:** In contrast to the need for expanded service hours and area, a need for expanding core services was also identified. This expansion would increase service frequency and additional on-demand capacity during core service hours.
- **Technology:** Stakeholders identified a need for the expanded use of technology in trip planning and the coordination of services.
- **Commuter services:** Communities of all sizes expressed a need for increased commuter services to keep their transit systems and their communities viable.
- **Rideshare:** Expanding or promoting rideshare resources was identified as a strategy for expanding service, particularly under budgetary constraints.
- **Volunteer driver programs:** The expansion of resources for volunteer driver programs was also noted as a cost-effective strategy for expanding service.
- **Infrastructure:** Infrastructure, such as park-and-ride facilities, transfer stations, and service hubs, was identified as a need for expanding services.
- **Appropriate size vehicles and vehicle accessibility:** The need for size-appropriate vehicles was noted as an issue for increasing service availability and efficiency. A need for additional vehicles was also expressed as a key need, particularly in rural areas.
- **Coordination:** Coordination of services between transit providers and agencies was identified as a high priority for increasing system efficiencies.

- **Mobility management:** The use of mobility management organizations, either statewide or regionally, was identified as a strategy for expanding and improving coordination efforts.
- **Regulation and insurance issues:** Stakeholders also expressed a need for clarification or easing of transit regulations. It was also noted that insurance issues need to be addressed.
- **Information and education:** Stakeholders noted a lack of public awareness on current transit options in Greater Minnesota and expressed a need for additional information and education on available services.
- **Medical service and rider aides:** Stakeholders identified a growing need for rider aides for transit users who have specialized medical needs. A greater need for the coordination of medical trips by nursing homes and assisted living facilities was also identified.
- **Funding and costs:** The availability of funding was noted by stakeholders throughout the public involvement process as a challenge to providing service. Rising fuel prices were also noted as a challenge.

## Stakeholder Feedback

Before finalizing the plan, the draft findings, conclusions, and directions for the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan were presented for stakeholder review and input. Opportunities for public input were provided through a series of open house outreach meetings, a videoconference conducted with participants from earlier workshops, development of project website content, and a public hearing. All comments received were catalogued to provide a record for the process.

### Outreach Meetings

Seven outreach meetings were held across the state during April and May 2009 in conjunction with open house meetings being conducted during the development of the State Rail Plan. Summary information highlighting the study process and results was displayed at the open house meetings and staff members were available to address questions and record comments. The meetings were held in St. Cloud, Rochester, Duluth, Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Red Wing, Mankato, and Moorhead.

### Videoconference

A videoconference session was conducted in April 2009 to communicate the key plan findings to participants from the facilitated workshops conducted earlier in the process. Each Mn/DOT District hosted a video link to allow participants the opportunity to review the plan highlights and provide feedback on the proposed outcomes.

### Project Website

A link to the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan was provided on the Mn/DOT website. Information was provided on the overall study process and timeline as well as links to the draft plan and technical analysis documentation prepared for the plan. Viewers were offered the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed plan.

### Public Hearing

A public hearing was conducted prior to finalization of the plan. This afforded an additional opportunity for stakeholder feedback on the proposed plan before final adoption. All comments were catalogued and became part of the formal record of the process.