

Chapter 3: Challenges

Throughout Greater Minnesota, public transportation service provides residents with enhanced personal mobility and improved access to destinations. There are significant challenges facing transit users and providers. The stakeholder involvement process resulted in the identification of major themes that shaped the development of this plan and are summarized in five challenges. These challenges relate primarily to maintaining and expanding public transit services, meeting mobility needs of individuals and the workforce, exploring new transit service options and strategies, and addressing coordination of services among the many providers.

Challenge 1: Maintaining and Expanding Public Transit

Minnesota's public transit systems provide transportation alternatives to driving alone and allow people to live independently and participate in the state's communities and economy. Over the past decade, Minnesota has also expanded transit service to previously unserved areas, while maintaining an emphasis on keeping the existing service and infrastructure safe and in efficient operating condition. These transit services are funded through a financial partnership that includes local, state, and federal participation.

One of the biggest challenges facing public transportation agencies is finding sufficient and reliable sources of funds to not only operate and maintain existing systems, but also to expand service. Funding levels are subject to fluctuations as the State's general fund is appropriated every two years and local funds must be available to provide a percentage of matching funding. Funding is dedicated to transit through the State's Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST), but revenues fluctuate substantially with the economy. There is still a need for a stable source in order to maintain transit service within Greater Minnesota. In addition, in order to expand transit services, additional funding would need to be identified.

Themes Related to the Challenge

Various outreach efforts including facilitated workshops, structured interviews, and an electronic survey have been used to gather public input for this planning effort. These responses are described in detail in Chapter 2, Plan Purpose and Development Process. Other public involvement activities have been conducted outside the scope of this plan but have been used for additional support to key themes. The following themes within the Regional Coordination Plans and MPO Transit Development Plans have been found to relate to the challenge.

Regional Coordination Plans

As part of Congress's reauthorization of the surface transportation act (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, grantees under the New Freedom Initiative, Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program, and Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (5310) must be part of a "locally developed coordinated public transit/human service transportation plan" in order to receive funding for fiscal year 2007 and beyond. These plans are intended to help state and community leaders, agencies, and stakeholders develop programs and action plans for coordinated services.

Themes that emerged from Minnesota’s regional coordination plans included funding, increased span of service, and service to outlying areas.

- **Funding**

Most regions identified insufficient funding as a primary barrier to successful coordination and provision of transit services. In many cases, most of the subsequent needs identified by regions would be satisfied in part by a substantial increase in funding. However, several plans recognized that rider needs far exceed the amount of available funding.

- **Increased Span of Service**

For many communities with public transit systems in place, operations are limited to daytime hours during weekdays only. Several regional plans express a need for expanded service hours on evenings and weekends to meet the diverse needs of transit customers.

- **Service to Outlying Areas**

Many regional plans expressed difficulty in providing services to outlying rural areas. Plans identified a need to improve services to county areas outside of small cities and to non-urbanized rural areas.

MPO Transit Development Plans

Each of Greater Minnesota’s Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) has a Transit Development Plan (TDP). A TDP is a seven-year planning document that guides operations/capital budgeting processes and future planning. Each TDP is updated annually, with a public hearing for community comment prior to adoption by the MPO. Each TDP does the following:

- Outlines the goals, objectives, standards, capital improvement program, and operating and financial programs.
- Provides a general direction for future delivery of public transportation.
- Assigns a general timeline for future improvements to the public transportation service.
- Assigns general cost and revenue requirements for future improvements to the public transportation system.

TDPs also identify issues relating to maintaining and expanding infrastructure in their respective geographic areas. In Minnesota, TDPs are available from Duluth, Rochester, St. Cloud, Fargo/Moorhead, and Grand Forks/East Grand Forks.

Duluth

The Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) has identified a need for additional resources to meet current demand. The agency’s plan states that instances in which buses cannot pick up waiting passengers because of capacity constraints are becoming common. Additional service hours should be targeted at specific existing routes.

Rochester

Rochester Public Transit offers fixed-route and demand responsive/ADA paratransit service throughout the Rochester area. A recent service analysis identified unmet needs in the area, including additional service to the southwest portion of the city and north and south crosstown routings.

St. Cloud

St. Cloud Metro Bus operates fixed-route service as well as demand responsive general public and ADA paratransit service within the St. Cloud metropolitan area. Metro Bus has identified a number of specific unmet service needs, including a connection to Northstar Commuter Rail at Big Lake, expansion of service hours on holidays, and service to a number of key destinations in the St. Cloud area.

Fargo/Moorhead

Fargo/Moorhead Metro Area Transit has identified a need for expanded fixed-route service to the growing areas throughout the cities. Specific unmet needs include service to neighboring communities, increased service frequency for college transit customers, and funding for city-wide demand responsive service.

Grand Forks/East Grand Forks

Grand Forks/East Grand Forks Transit has identified a need for service to employers. Specific unmet needs include service to the East Grand Forks Industrial Park and American Crystal Sugar Plant.

Challenge 2: Changing Mobility Needs of Individuals

People who cannot or do not drive face difficulties getting to work, school, and medical care. Personal mobility means having transportation services available that can take an individual where the individual needs to travel, when the individual wants to travel, being informed about the services, knowing how to use them, being able to use them, and having the means to pay for them. Public transit is the means by which these trips are made by those who choose not to or cannot drive.

This section provides background information on demographic conditions and trends that influence Greater Minnesota, both in terms of historic trends as well as future projections. These trends reflect the growing mobility needs of Greater Minnesota's population. Specific emphasis in this discussion will be placed on consumer groups that have traditionally had mobility limitations: seniors, minorities, low-income persons, and persons with disabilities. As these populations change and grow, the challenge is how to implement transit services to meet their mobility needs.

Growing Population

As illustrated in Figure 3.1, Minnesota has grown more rapidly since 2000 than its neighboring states in the Upper Midwest, but has not grown as fast as the nation as a whole. Between 1990 and 2007, Minnesota's population increased by almost 19 percent from 4.4 million residents to nearly 5.2 million residents.

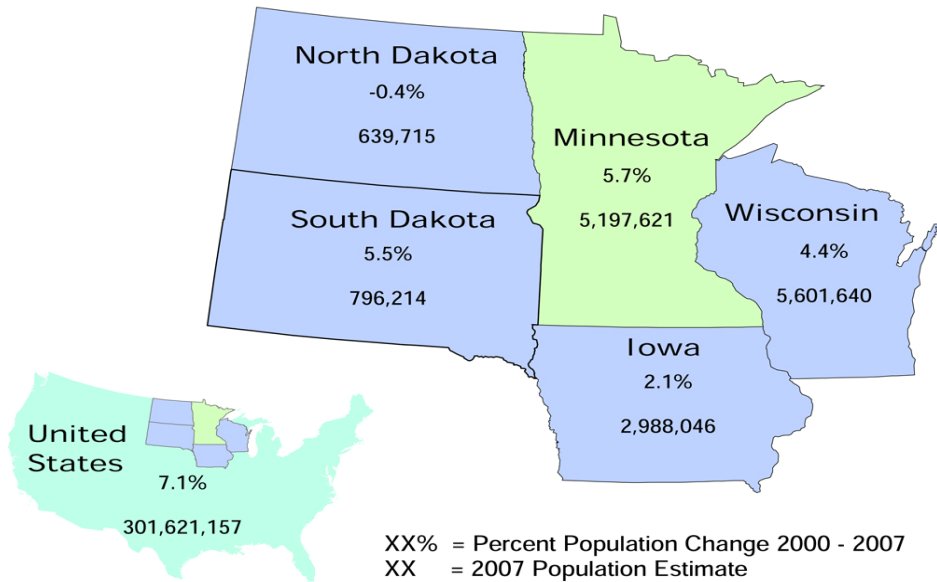


Figure 3.1 Minnesota Statewide Population Growth, 2000 to 2007

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The majority of the state's population growth has historically been focused on urban areas of the state, including regional centers such as Rochester and St. Cloud. The recent trend of population growth in urban areas is expected to continue in the future for Greater Minnesota as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

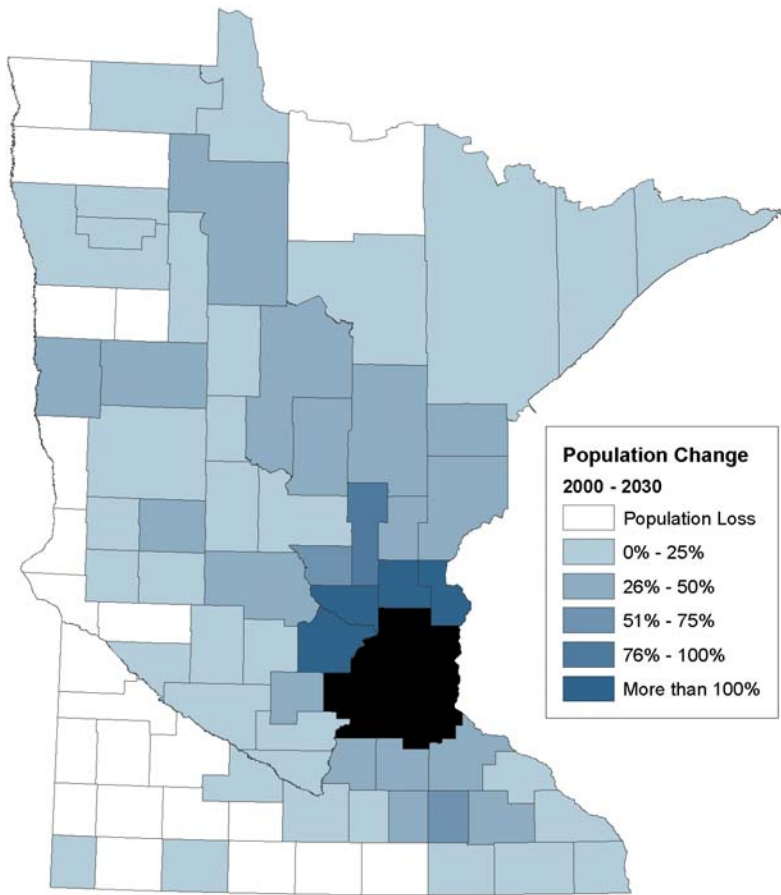
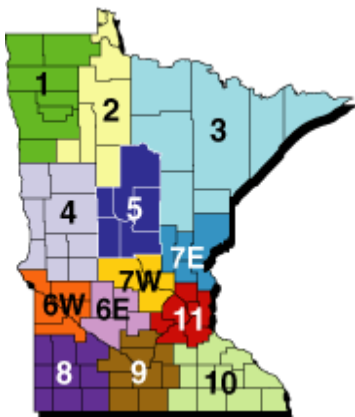


Figure 3.2 Population Change by County, 2000–2030

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and Minnesota State Demographic Center

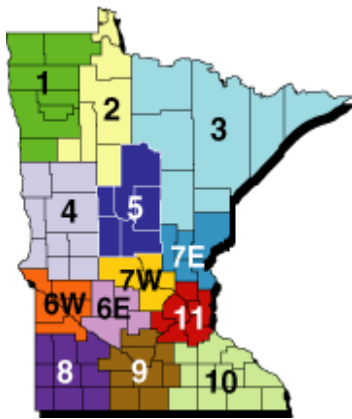
To better interpret the trends across the state, the socioeconomic data was analyzed within the state’s Economic Development Regions. The regions and their corresponding counties are shown in



- 1: Kittson, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau
- 2: Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen
- 3: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, St. Louis
- 4: Becker, Clay, Douglas, Grant, Otter Tail, Pope, Stevens, Traverse, Wilkin
- 5: Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, Wadena
- 6W: Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, Yellow Medicine
- 6E: Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, Renville
- 7W: Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, Wright
- 7E: Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Pine
- 8: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock
- 9: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, Watonwan
- 10: Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Rice, Steele, Wabasha, Winona
- 11: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, Washington

Figure 3.3.

- 1: Kittson, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau



- 2: Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen
- 3: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, St. Louis
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Figure 3.3 Minnesota DEED Economic Development Regions

Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

From 2000 to 2030, the population of Greater Minnesota is expected to increase by 32 percent—adding nearly three-quarters of a million people. However, population growth will not occur uniformly throughout the state. As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the largest population gains in the state will occur immediately north and northwest of the Twin Cities. The majority of growth will occur in Regions 7E and 7W, with 42 percent of the state’s total growth occurring in 7W. Wright County alone will gain over 130,000 residents, moving it from the fourth largest county in Greater Minnesota to the largest. Region 10 is also expected to see large gains, accounting for 18 percent of the state’s total gains.

Some parts of the state are not expected to experience growth in population. While most of the northern third of the state will likely experience modest gains in population, some populations in that portion of the state are expected to decrease slightly. Between now and 2030, 17 counties are expected to lose population, with the majority of those losses occurring in Regions 6W and 8 where virtually all counties are expected to decrease in population.

Aging Population

As people age, isolation becomes a growing problem, and access and mobility become increasingly critical needs. For older Americans, affordable, reliable transportation options are essential. In 2005, approximately 12 percent of Minnesotans were 65 years of age or older. By 2020, Minnesota is expected to have more seniors than kindergartners. By 2035, the proportion of seniors is expected to nearly double, with 21 percent of Minnesotans aged 65 or older. Figure 3.4 shows the population for age cohorts for 2005 and 2035, and illustrates the significant increase in the size for cohorts over 60.

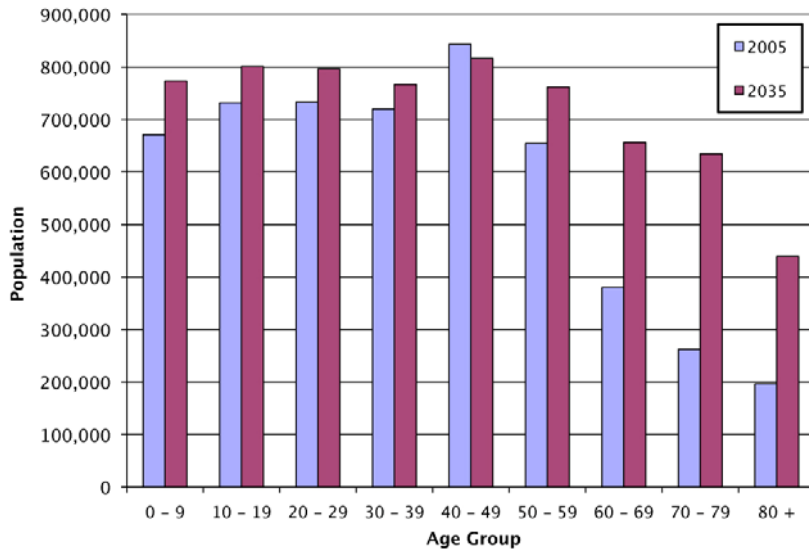


Figure 3.4 Minnesota's Population by Age, 2005–2035

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Minnesota State Demographic Center

The Transit Market Research Study from 2000 surveyed transit riders across Minnesota. It showed that between 50 and 60 percent of users in rural counties were 65 years of age or older. This aging demographic trend will impact the need for transit services in the future.

Figure 3.5 shows the change in elderly population between 2000 and 2030 by county.

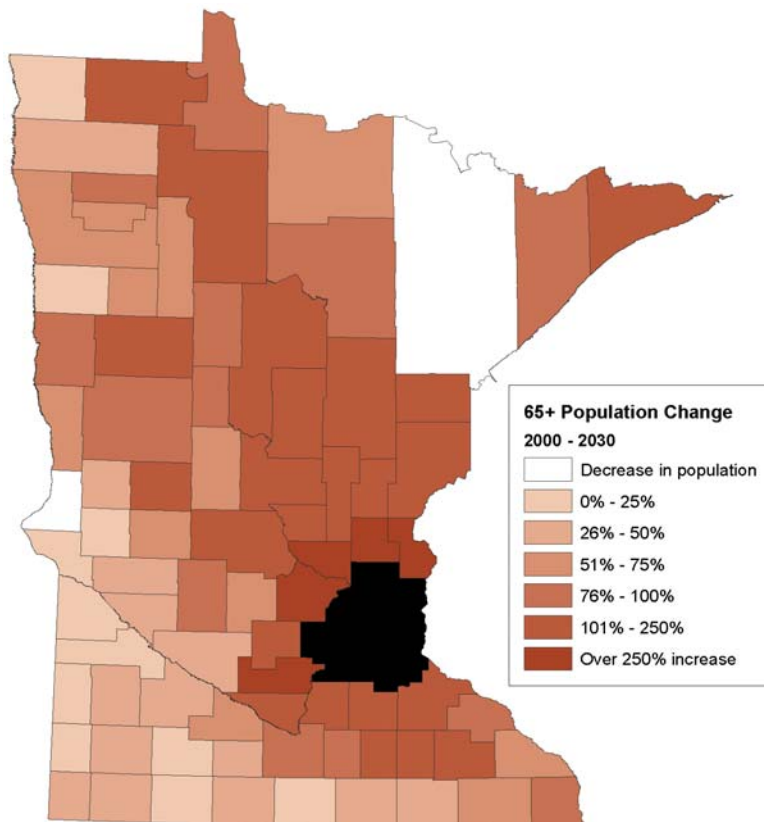


Figure 3.5 Age 65+ Population Change, 2000–2030

Changing Population

The makeup of the population in Greater Minnesota is changing as the overall size of the population grows. Significant changes have occurred in recent years among some of the key user markets of public transit services. These shifts present ongoing challenges to service providers.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities comprise 15 to 20 percent of the total population in most of Greater Minnesota's Economic Development Regions, as shown in Figure 3.6. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability as an individual with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. It is anticipated that this population will grow at a faster rate than the general population in future years due to the significant number of seniors with disabilities.

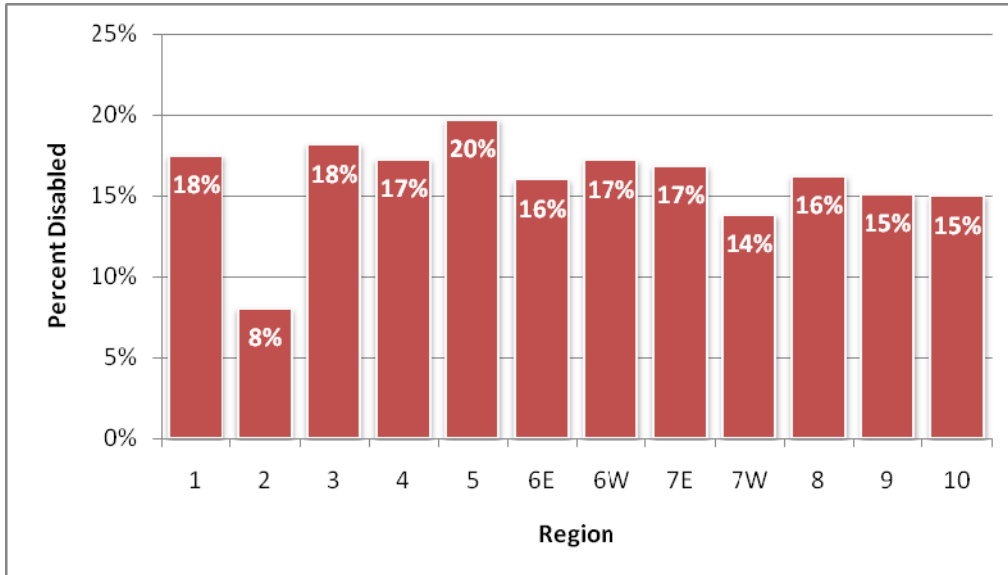


Figure 3.6 Percent of Population with a Disability by Region, 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The percentage of persons with disabilities relative to the entire population is similar across regions and ranges from 13.8 percent (Region 7W) to 19.7 percent (Region 5). The exception is Region 2, whose population has approximately half the percentage of persons with disabilities as other regions across the state.

For many people with disabilities, life is severely limited by the lack of transportation. Some people with disabilities who are willing and able to work cannot do so because of inadequate transportation. Others cannot shop, socialize, enjoy recreational or spiritual activities, or even leave their homes for the same reason. Limited funding for public transit service restricts the ability to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.

Low-Income Persons and Access to Transportation

The percentage of Minnesotans living at or below the poverty line is just under 10 percent statewide. Since the 2000 Census, the number of households living in poverty has increased slightly. However, Minnesota's poverty rate remains lower than the national average. Within the state, poverty fell between 1990 and 2000 but has increased by a few percentage points since then. The percent of Minnesotans below the poverty line was estimated to be 9.2 percent in 2005, compared to 7.9 percent in the 2000 Census. Figure 3.7 illustrates the relative presence of poverty across the state by county, and Figure 3.8 shows the estimate of households in poverty by region within the state. The Greater Minnesota Transit Market Research Study surveyed transit riders in 2000 on basic demographic characteristics. Between 58 and 69 percent of the respondents to the onboard survey had annual incomes below \$15,000. The low-income population across the state is expected to grow at a faster rate than the general population due to the number of elderly poor.

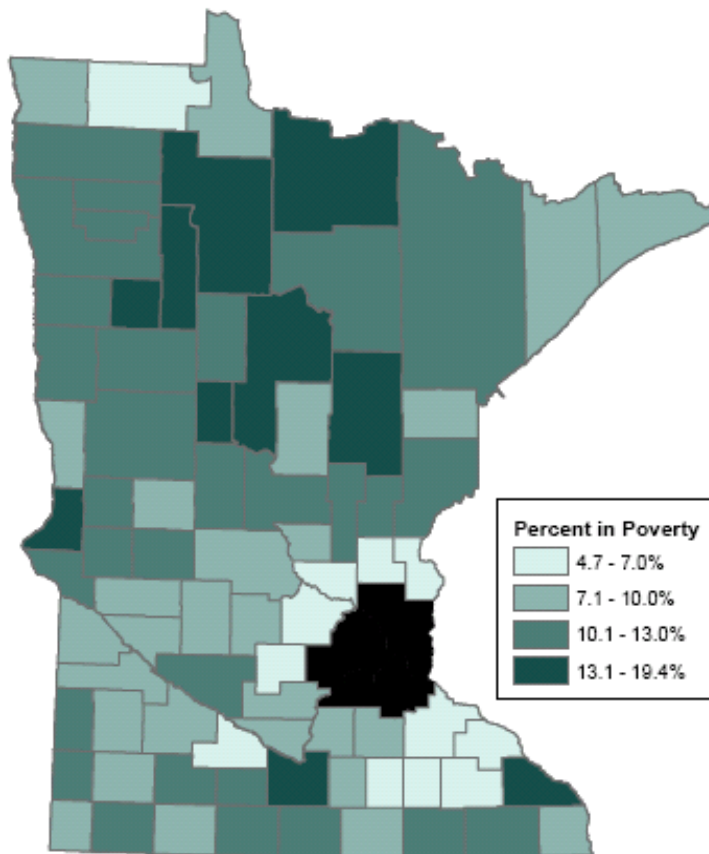


Figure 3.7 Percent in Poverty by County, 2005

Source: *Minnesota State Demographic Center*

Another indicator of transportation need is lack of access to a vehicle for all persons in a household. Approximately 6.5 percent of Minnesota households have no access to a vehicle. Another 29.5 percent of households have access to only one vehicle. In these households people look to public transit to meet their mobility needs.

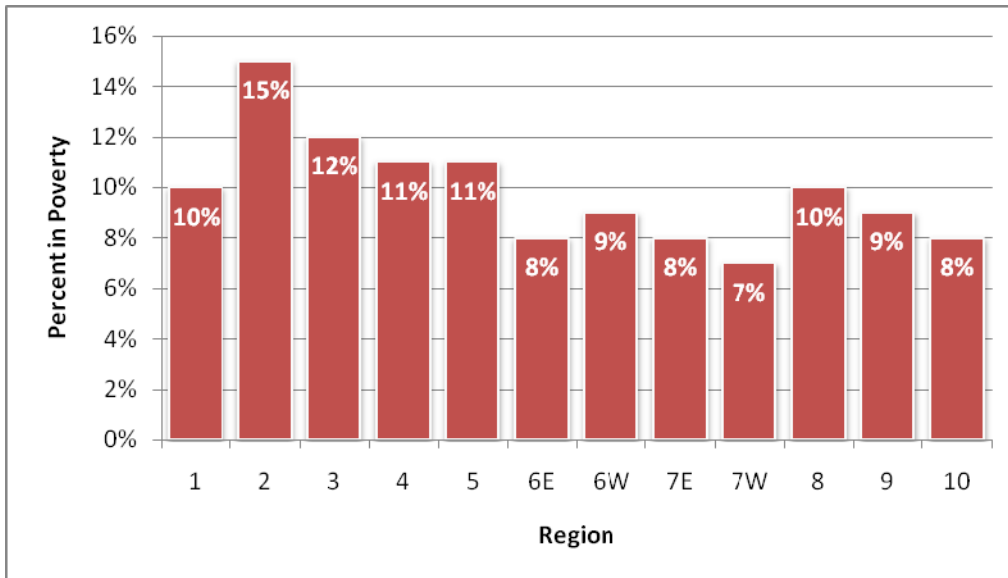


Figure 3.8 Poverty Estimates by Region, 2005

Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center

Those in poverty or with limited access to personal transportation are often described as transit dependent and are one of the principal transit consumer groups.

Minorities

The ethnic and racial composition of Minnesota’s population is changing, but it is still less diverse than the nation. Minnesota’s nonwhite and Latino (minority) population increased from six percent to 14 percent between 1990 and 2005. In coming decades, Minnesota’s population is anticipated to continue becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Between 2005 and 2015, the nonwhite population is projected to grow by 35 percent, compared to a growth rate of seven percent for the white population. During the same time period, the Hispanic population is expected to increase by 47 percent. Much of the rapid growth in the nonwhite and Latino population stems from migration from other states and from outside of the United States.

The largest proportions of minority populations are found in northern Minnesota counties with large concentrations of American Indians. As illustrated in Figure 3.9, minority levels for individual counties range from under five percent in much of the central portion of the state to almost 22 percent in Beltrami County in Region 2.

Documenting nondiscrimination in transportation as it pertains to minorities is required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Mn/DOT is working to ensure that all Minnesotans have meaningful access to transit services, including minorities.

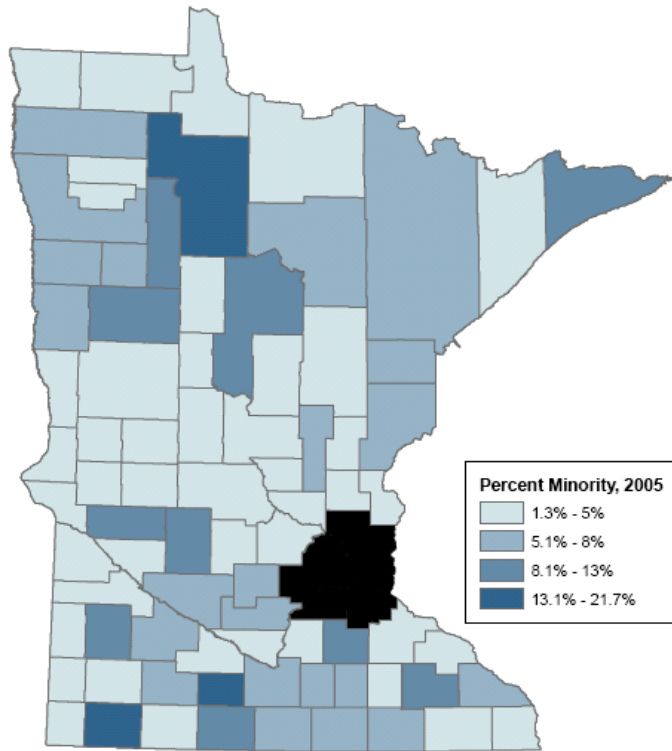


Figure 3.9 Percent Minority by County, 2005

Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center

At the regional level, slight variations in minority population levels exist throughout Greater Minnesota. As displayed in Table 3.1, most regions range from approximately four percent minority (Region 7W) to seven percent minority (Region 8). At 16.3 percent, Region 2's proportion of minorities is far greater than that of any other region.

Table 3.1 Minority Population by Region, 2005

Region	Minority Population	Total Population	Portion of Total (Percent)
1	4,728	88,226	5.4
2	13,161	80,572	16.3
3	18,504	325,356	5.7
4	10,944	218,479	5.0
5	7,106	161,547	4.4
6E	7,587	119,255	6.4
6W	2,480	48,135	5.2
7E	6,269	159,296	3.9
7W	12,839	378,151	3.4
8	8,727	119,059	7.3
9	12,703	227,538	5.6
10	32,858	485,909	6.8

Source: Minnesota Demographic Center

Themes Related to the Challenge

Various outreach efforts including facilitated workshops, structured interviews, and an electronic survey have been used to gather public input for this planning effort. These responses are described in detail in Chapter 2, Plan Purpose and Development Process. Other public involvement activities have been conducted outside the scope of this plan but have been used for additional support to key themes. The following themes within the Regional Coordination Plans have been found to relate to the challenge.

Regional Coordination Plans

As part of Congress's reauthorization of the surface transportation act (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, grantees under the New Freedom Initiative, Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program, and Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (5310) must be part of a "locally developed coordinated public transit/human service transportation plan" in order to receive funding for fiscal year 2007 and beyond. These plans are intended to help state and community leaders, agencies, and stakeholders develop programs and action plans for coordinated services.

Themes that emerged from Minnesota's regional coordination plans included affordable cost to riders and rider education and awareness.

- **Affordable Cost to Riders**

Regional plans identified a need to keep the cost of public transportation services affordable for users. This need is directly linked to the availability of funding to service providers.

- **Rider Education and Awareness**

Many plans identified a demonstrated need to better educate riders and potential riders about the availability of services and how to access those services. A related issue for many regions was the need to coordinate marketing of available services through a common directory.

Challenge 3: Changing Mobility Needs of the Workforce

Historical trends in employment, as well as the commuting patterns that connect rural Minnesota residents to jobs, play a large role in determining the shape of this plan. During the public involvement process, stakeholders consistently identified an increasing need for employment-related transit services to provide residents in Greater Minnesota with increased access to employment opportunities. As commuter travel needs continue to spread beyond traditional transit service areas, meeting the mobility needs of the workforce is a significant challenge.

This section will examine trends in Greater Minnesota employment growth and commuting patterns to help determine demand for transit services. Three trends will be examined in this section: long-term growth in employment in Greater Minnesota, more Minnesotans live and work in different counties, and increased commuting into urban areas.

Long-Term Growth in Employment in Greater Minnesota

Greater Minnesota's employment is projected to continue to grow through 2030 with the largest gains expected in regions to the north and northwest of the Twin Cities. In addition, employment growth is also expected to concentrate in regional centers, corresponding with population growth projected in

these areas. The statewide increase in employment is projected to be almost 30 percent from 2000 to 2030, equating to an increase of approximately 350,000 workers.

The highest growth in employment will occur in Regions 7E, 7W, and 10, as shown in Table 3.2. Employment growth is expected to remain virtually flat in the northern portions of the state in Regions 1 and 3, and losses are expected in the southwest in Regions 6W and 8. Most of the rest of the state will likely see modest gains.

Table 3.2 Greater Minnesota Employment Change by Region, 2000–2030

Region	2000	2030	Change	Change (Percent)
1	44,390	45,460	1,070	2
2	36,788	44,690	7,902	21
3	159,133	159,030	-103	--
4	106,760	124,820	18,060	17
5	73,973	92,790	18,817	25
6E	61,512	68,630	7,118	12
6W	24,292	20,640	-3,652	-15
7E	70,655	135,030	64,375	91
7W	179,878	346,100	166,222	92
8	63,203	59,310	-3,893	-6
9	122,543	135,370	12,827	10
10	250,694	310,890	60,196	24
Total	1,193,821	1,542,760	348,939	29

Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center

Figure 3.10 presents the percentage change in employment between 2000 and 2030 by county.

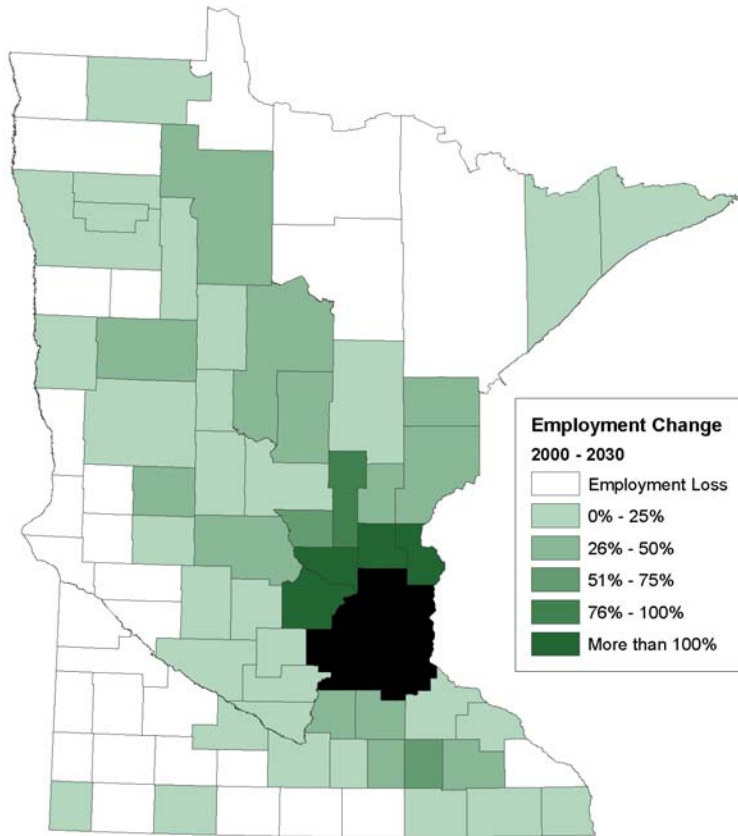


Figure 3.10 Projected Change in Employment by County, 2000–2030

Source: *Minnesota State Demographic Center*

Minnesotans Increasingly Live and Work in Different Counties

The number of Minnesota workers employed in their county of residence has fallen steadily since 1970. In that year, over 80 percent of Minnesota workers were employed in the same county where they lived. By 2000, this figure had fallen to 66.3 percent.

Rates of working outside the county of residence range from three percent in outlying counties to nearly 70 percent in the Twin Cities collar counties, as shown in Figure 3.11. Generally, these rates decline as distance from the Twin Cities increases. Because of their proximity to the strong job market of the Twin Cities, exurban counties surrounding Minneapolis and Saint Paul have the lowest percentages of residents who live and work in the same county. The Twin Cities area is a magnet for workers from other regions. In addition, counties containing regional centers, such as Rochester and Duluth, have lower rates than their neighboring counties.

It is important to acknowledge that a work trip across county boundaries is not necessarily longer than a work trip within a county. For some people, a trip from one county to another may mean a journey of a just a few blocks. However, on average, the declining proportion of workers employed in their county of residence indicates that Minnesotans are commuting longer distances.

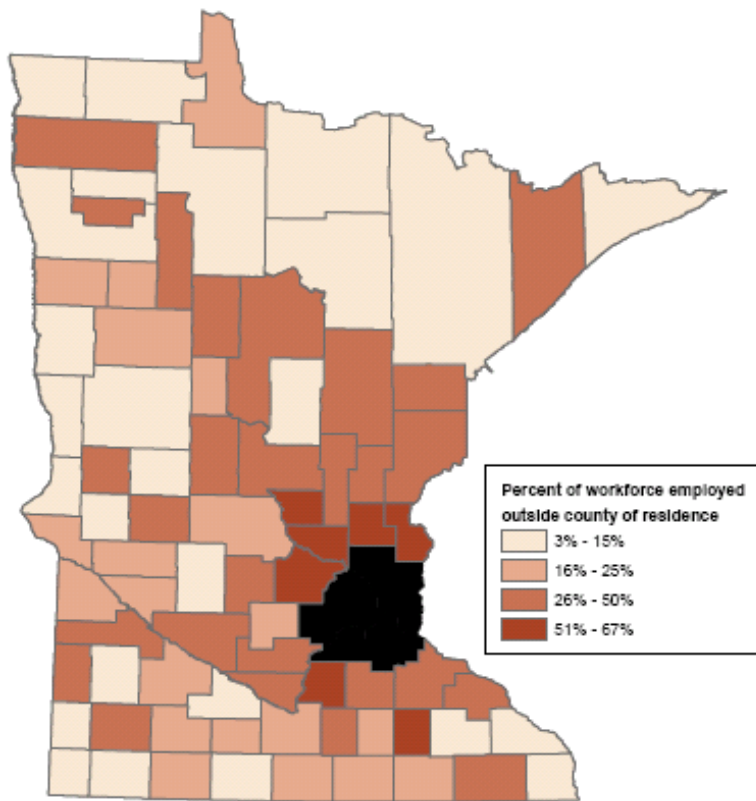


Figure 3.11 Employment Outside County of Residence, 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

As employment growth continues in areas adjacent to the Twin Cities and in regional centers across Greater Minnesota, the trend of Minnesotans working outside the county they live in is expected to continue as workers are drawn to these employment concentrations. This will present greater challenges for transit, as commute distances will likely increase with even more diverse origins and destinations.

Increased Commuting into Urban Areas

Twin Cities

While the regions of Greater Minnesota play a vital role in the state's economic success, the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area serves as the state's economic and employment hub. Commuter transit corridors focused on the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area connect residents of Greater Minnesota counties with important employment centers in the Twin Cities. The Metropolitan Council 2030 Transportation Policy Plan identifies several promising corridors for further study as potential transitway/commuter corridors and long-distance express routes to serve both the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and other areas throughout Greater Minnesota.

Four corridors were identified for initial screening and possible alternatives analysis studies. These corridors are as follows:

- I-35W north of downtown Minneapolis
- Trunk Highway 36
- Trunk Highway 65/Central Avenue

- I-94 east of downtown Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Further, long-distance express bus routes may be introduced outside of the seven-county area where appropriate, to provide transit service between exurban areas and downtown Minneapolis or Saint Paul. Possible corridors include the following:

- I-35 from North Branch
- I-35 from Faribault
- TH 55 from Buffalo
- St. Cloud to Big Lake (connecting to the Northstar Commuter Rail service)

Greater Minnesota

Worker flows to employment centers in Greater Minnesota can be examined through commute shed analysis. This type of analysis uses Longitudinal Employment and Household Dynamics (LEHD) data, a type of information from the U.S. Census Bureau that links worker home origins with their employment destinations.

Figure 3.12, Figure 3.13, and Figure 3.14 illustrate commute sheds for Rochester, Duluth, and St. Cloud, which are the three largest regional centers in Greater Minnesota. These figures illustrate the difference between commute sheds for these regional centers. Duluth has the most tightly constrained commute shed with the majority of workers commuting within a 10- to 15-mile radius. Rochester and St. Cloud have a broader area from which workers travel. Both of these cities show a large number of workers commuting 15 to 20 miles.

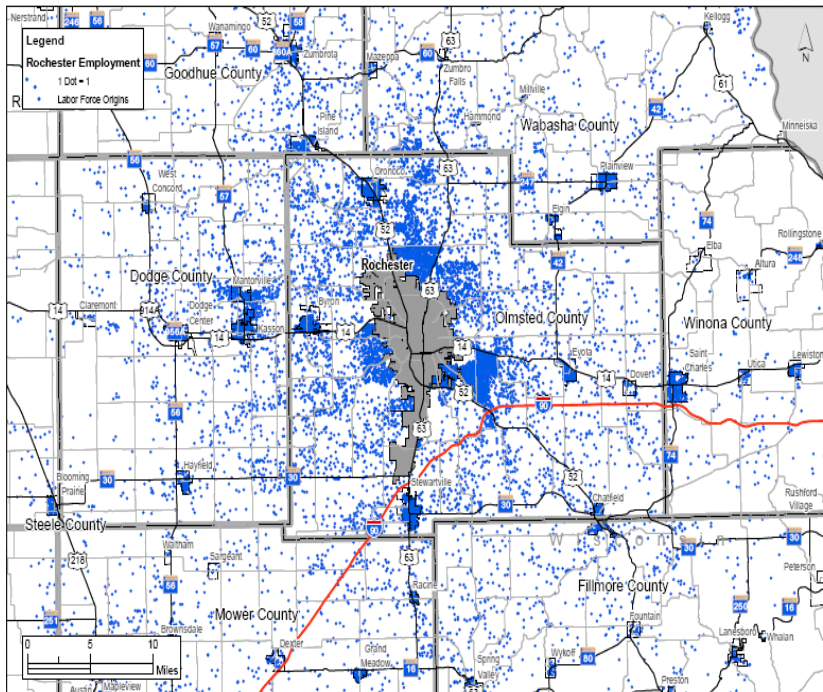


Figure 3.12 City of Rochester Commute Shed

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, LEHD.

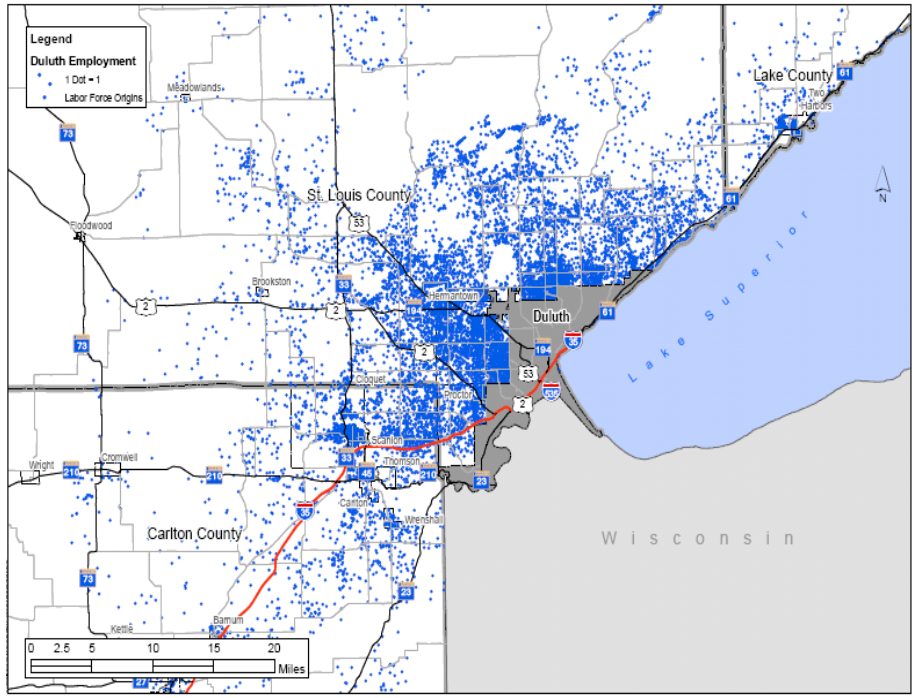


Figure 3.13 City of Duluth Commute Shed

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, LEHD

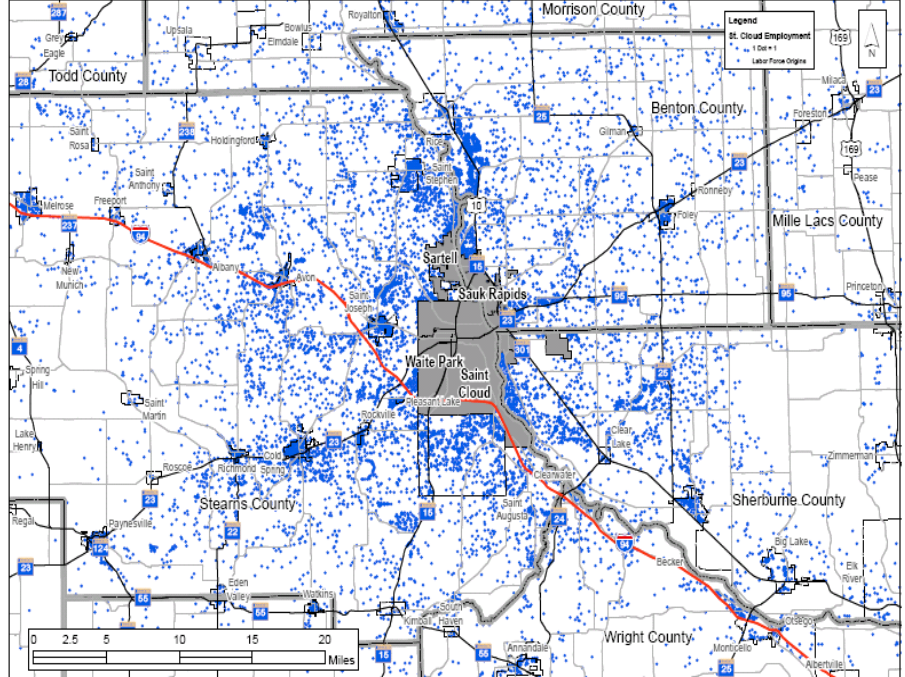


Figure 3.14 City of St. Cloud Commute Shed

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, LEHD

Themes Related to the Challenge

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Challenge 4: Changing Transit Options in Greater Minnesota

In Minnesota, residents have many choices about how to travel to work, school, and other destinations. Each day a decision has to be made at a personal level about how to travel. As a state, we also have to make decisions regarding the multiplicity of transit options. We live in an increasingly multimodal society; therefore, it is important to discuss the various transit options that are available and may have potential in Greater Minnesota. Knowing when to take advantage of each transit option and determining its applicability presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Greater Minnesota. This section describes several transit options for Greater Minnesota, including intercity bus, commuter bus, rail, and rideshare.

Possible Transit Options

Intercity Bus

Intercity Bus Service is regularly scheduled bus service for the general public that operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or more urban areas not in close proximity, has the capacity for transporting baggage carried by passengers, and makes meaningful connections with scheduled intercity bus service to more distant points, if such service is available. Commuter bus service is not included in this definition. The intercity bus system is operated by three main carriers: Jefferson Lines, Greyhound Lines, and Megabus. Jefferson Lines provides the majority of service in Greater Minnesota and at this time is the only recipient in Minnesota of federal assistance for rural intercity transit service through the Section 5311(f) program. Both Greyhound and Megabus focus on providing express services, such as from the Twin Cities to Chicago. Intercity bus services as of June 2009 are shown in Figure 3.15.

While ridership on routes in rural Minnesota increased in 2008, national intercity bus ridership levels have decreased significantly since the 1960s. The advent of the freeway system led bus companies to shift services away from small towns and rural areas. Intercity bus deregulation in 1982 also allowed the firms to drop unprofitable rural services. Despite a smaller network in 2009 than in 1999, 85 percent of Minnesotans in rural areas live within 25 miles of an intercity bus stop.

Several population groups are known to need and use intercity bus based on demographic characteristics such as age, income, or automobile availability. These segments of the population are defined using Census categories and include young adults (ages 18 to 24), auto-less households, older adults (age 60 and above), persons living below the poverty level, and persons with a mobility limitation.



Figure 3.15 2009 Intercity Bus Services

Source: Mn/DOT

Volunteer Driver

The volunteer driver system is a program where transportation is provided by a volunteer who drives their own vehicle. The use of volunteer drivers may be used to supplement public transportation buses but is usually used to access destinations beyond the public transit system area served. Volunteer driver programs administered by public transit agencies are presently available in 48 counties in Greater Minnesota, as shown in Figure 3.16.

Expanding transit service by engaging volunteer drivers is a strategy that enables communities to address limited public transportation and the high cost of private transportation. However, volunteer driver programs are often subject to a shortage of volunteers, issues regarding insurance coverage, and

general program administration. Still, volunteer drivers greatly increase mobility for the primary consumer groups in Greater Minnesota including the transit dependent senior populations, persons with disabilities, and the economically disadvantaged.

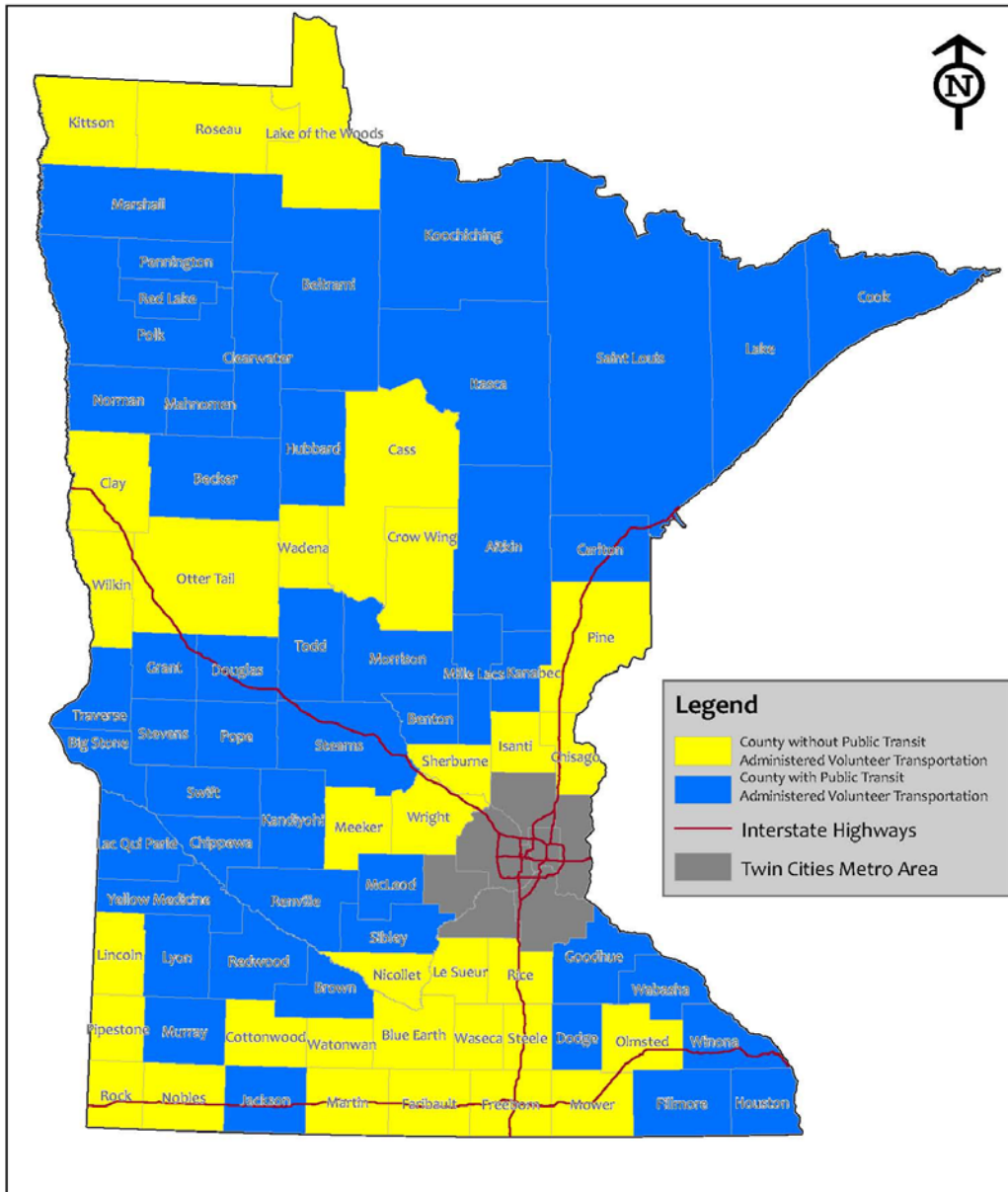


Figure 3.16 Public Transit-Administered Volunteer Transportation

Source: Mn/DOT

Rideshare

Ridesharing, either through carpooling or vanpooling, serve commuters who travel long distances to get to work, such as from Greater Minnesota to job sites in the Twin Cities. Unlike carpooling, vanpooling is usually administered by a transit provider. For Greater Minnesota residents, vanpools are currently available through the Metropolitan Council to residents who travel to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The program, known as Van-Go!, had 92 vanpools in operation as of February 2009. Many of

these vanpools that travel into the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area originate in Greater Minnesota as shown in Figure 3.17.

Both carpooling and vanpooling reduce the costs involved in repetitive or long-distance driving by sharing the costs of the trip. By ridesharing, commuters may use high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, which provide an incentive to rideshare and also help to reduce traffic congestion for people who drive alone. Both carpooling and vanpooling provide similar environmental benefits by reducing the number of cars on the road, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the need for additional parking spaces at the destination.

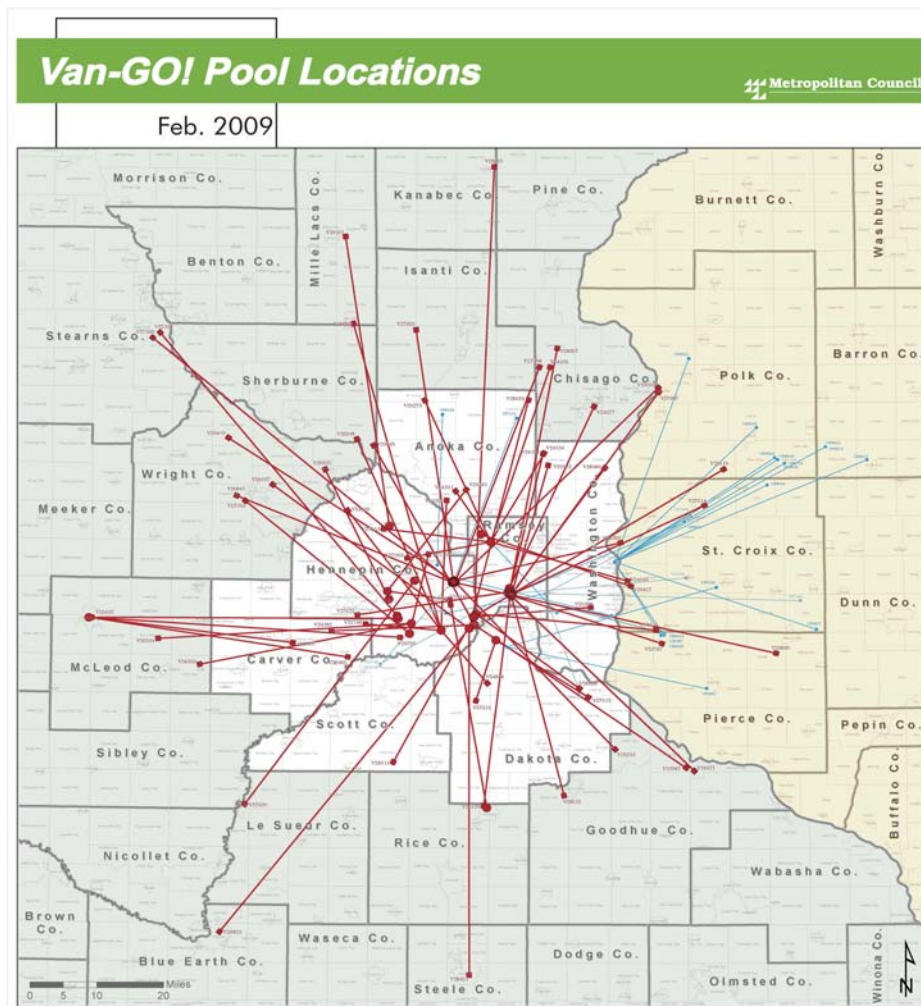


Figure 3.17 Minnesota Vanpool Origins and Destinations, 2009

Source: Metropolitan Council

Despite these benefits, implementing formal rideshare programs is a challenge. While this transit option does address the mobility needs that are spreading beyond traditional service areas, the cost to administer and support a formal program can be an issue. In addition, given the diversity of transit providers and various levels of government, deciding what agency or entity should take responsibility for the program is a challenge. While rideshare programs into other urban areas may be a possibility for Greater Minnesota since they provide regular transit services in a low-density rural area where other

transit services may not be economically feasible, a recent pilot vanpool project in Fargo/Moorhead was discontinued after it was deemed to be too expensive. Nonetheless, a study from North Dakota State University on rural and small urban vanpooling (*Vanpooling in North Dakota: Feasibility and Operating Scenarios*) indicated that vanpooling is viewed positively by the majority of owners and participants.

College/University Fare Integration

Many transit operations now have enhanced systems of fare integration with local universities. Commonly known in Minnesota as “U-Pass,” this student-oriented transit program allows students at local participating universities to take public transit at reduced or no cost. This partnership between the local public transit agency and local universities or colleges occurs at several locations across Greater Minnesota, including:

- **Duluth Transit Authority:** University of Minnesota, Duluth; College of St. Scholastica; and Lake Superior College
- **Metro Area Transit:** Minnesota State University, Moorhead
- **Metro Bus:** St. Cloud State University
- **Paul Bunyan Transit:** Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College
- **Western Community Action:** Southwest Minnesota State University

Although U-Pass is a strategy to cope with increasing congestion and, in the case of smaller communities, the increased demand for parking due to university growth, administration of the program and adequate funding are challenges that both the universities and transit providers face. Despite these challenges, the U-Pass program has greatly impacted ridership and travel patterns and illustrates the effect that the U-Pass system has as an effective travel demand management (TDM) strategy. Universities in both large urban and small "college town" communities around the country have embraced U-Pass as a strategy to encourage the use of public transit and improve their community. The U-Pass programs represent an increasingly important part of the vision for transportation in Greater Minnesota.

Commuter Bus

Commuter bus (or commuter coach) is an express bus service that targets commuters who make trips during weekday peak hours. Service is provided over fixed routes with a regular schedule, connecting a transit center or park and ride lot located outside a major metropolitan area to the central city. In general, commuter coach operates inbound service in the morning and outbound service in the afternoon. This service tends to provide greater amenities for travelers including bathrooms, reclining seats, and, more recently, wireless internet access. This transit mode addresses mobility needs spreading beyond traditional transit service areas.

Sometimes, commuter bus systems operate as precursors to future rail lines in order to better quantify demand and provide service in the interim before the establishment of the commuter rail service. An example of this is the Northstar Commuter Coach, which operated between Big Lake and downtown Minneapolis. In late 2009, this commuter bus service was superseded by the Northstar Commuter Rail, Minnesota’s first commuter rail line.

While the majority of commuter bus routes provide service into the Twin Cities, commuter bus service also exists in Greater Minnesota. Rochester City Lines connects passengers from more than 40

surrounding cities and towns with downtown Rochester. For passengers, the accessibility to transit in the downtowns, the higher cost and availability of parking, and the quick and often more comfortable bus trip often makes commuter coach service an attractive alternative to driving. Finding sufficient funding for these services, however, is a significant challenge for implementing commuter bus services.

Rail

Greater Minnesota currently has intercity passenger rail service that operates daily along the Empire Builder corridor from Chicago to Portland/Seattle. The Minnesota locations served by passenger rail include Winona, Red Wing, Saint Paul, St. Cloud, Staples, Detroit Lakes, and Moorhead (Fargo). There is increased interest across the state in passenger rail projects for Greater Minnesota. However, creating a new passenger rail network will be a challenge as each line will need to find sufficient capital and operating funding from both the state and federal levels. Mn/DOT is currently developing a Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan which will identify and prioritize corridors for future intercity passenger rail lines.

Other passenger rail projects that will serve Greater Minnesota include the state's first commuter rail line which opened for service between Big Lake and Minneapolis in late 2009. The Northstar Commuter Rail serves Greater Minnesota residents northwest of the Twin Cities, connecting them with Minneapolis. This project and other future commuter rail corridors will provide residents of Greater Minnesota increased transportation options for connections with the Twin Cities Metro Area.

Facilities

This section describes facilities that utilize innovative ideas and technology to expand the transit network or to provide transit advantages. These techniques are primarily found and used in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The funding, administration, and maintenance of these facilities pose a challenge to providing this supportive infrastructure in Greater Minnesota.

Park-and-Pool Facilities

Park-and-pool facilities are places where people can leave their private vehicles and meet a carpool or vanpool. Park-and-pool lots lack the access to transit services that park-and-ride lots offer. While Metro Transit manages and operates park-and-ride facilities in the Twin Cities, Mn/DOT owns park-and-pool facilities located in Greater Minnesota on the Trunk Highway System. The majority of these Greater Minnesota park-and-pool lots are located in Mn/DOT District 1 (Duluth) and District 3 (St. Cloud).

Park-and-Ride Facilities

Park-and-ride facilities are parking lots for private vehicles that offer connections to transit services. Park-and-ride lots provide an essential service—a place to leave the car. Park-and-ride lots are also a place to meet up with a carpool or vanpool. The vehicle is stored in the car park during the day and retrieved when the commuter returns. Park-and-rides are generally located in the suburbs of metropolitan areas or on the outer edges of large cities.

During facilitated workshops in the fall of 2008, members of the public, regional agency representatives, and transit providers mentioned park-and-ride infrastructure as a need in Greater Minnesota. Park-and-ride lots are another form of transportation innovation that make transit more accessible to people who live outside the transit system boundaries and also serve as a travel demand management (TDM) strategy to reduce traffic congestion on the road and offer greater transportation options for commuters. Park-and-ride lots may be a possible action to better integrate transit and highways in Greater Minnesota.

Bus-Only Shoulders

Bus-only shoulders (BOS) refer to the utilization of highway shoulders by transit buses during peak travel periods with heavy congestion. Bus-only shoulders allow transit operators to have more predictable route travel times, thus decreasing their operating costs. In addition, BOS provide an incentive for riding the bus by both the actual and perceived time savings. BOS also affect the travel times for non-transit users on the same road by getting more people out of their cars and onto the bus, thereby decreasing congestion.

The Twin Cities Metropolitan Area is home to 290 miles of bus-only shoulders, more than five times the number of BOS miles in the rest of the nation combined. Mn/DOT's Team Transit manages the BOS in collaboration with the region's transit operators. Team Transit has developed various criteria for the design, development, and implementation of BOS, and plans for accommodations for BOS on both existing and future roadway projects. Existing and planned bus-only shoulders are shown in Figure 3.18.

Although currently a Twin Cities Metropolitan Area program, BOS has the potential to expand into Greater Minnesota, particularly in the urban areas that experience traffic congestion during peak travel periods. BOS could also be implemented as a temporary measure during construction activities on highways which reduce the carrying capacity of a roadway. In general, BOS is an innovative concept that offers increased possibilities for transit in Greater Minnesota.

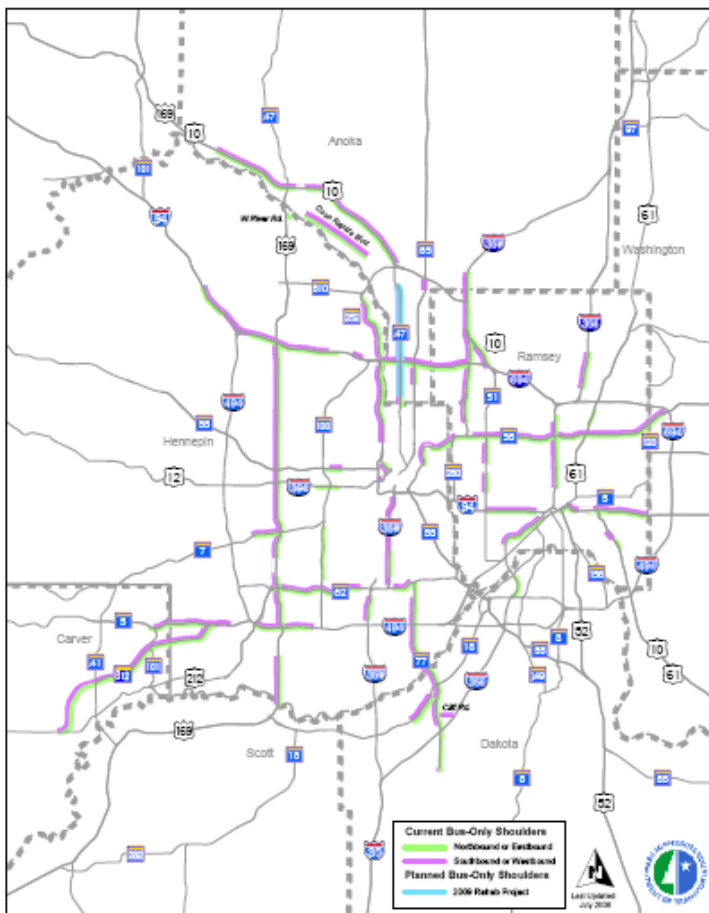


Figure 3.18 Current and Planned Bus-Only Shoulders

Source: Mn/DOT

Bicycling and Walking Facilities

State agencies and many local and regional jurisdictions provide bicycle and pedestrian facilities, such as paved shoulders, on-road bike lanes, and off-road shared use paths and sidewalks with curb ramps. These facilities offer mobility to those who are unable to or choose not to drive. When these facilities are linked to transit routes, more people can take advantage of transit through the improved intermodal connections; this expands the transportation network, supports development around transit, increases mobility for Minnesota residents, and can also lead to increased numbers of transit riders.

Features that complement walking/bicycling-and-transit include but are not limited to safe intersection crossings, bus routes with sidewalks, park-and-ride lots approached by sidewalks, bicycle racks on buses, park-and-ride lots with bicycle parking, and guaranteed ride home programs. These and other features exist in the Twin Cities, but are limited in Greater Minnesota.

Providing this supportive infrastructure in Greater Minnesota presents a challenge. There is a need for coordinated planning between state agencies and local and regional jurisdictions. Inherent in this challenge is putting in place policies that create or enhance development around transit and supporting funding strategies that favor intermodal connections.

Themes Related to the Challenge

Various outreach efforts including facilitated workshops, structured interviews, and an electronic survey have been used to gather public input for this planning effort. These responses are described in detail in Chapter 2, Plan Purpose and Development Process. Other public involvement activities have been conducted outside the scope of this plan but have been used for additional support to key themes.

Challenge 5: Coordination of Services

Federal, state, and local governments and community-based organizations have created specialized programs to meet particular transportation needs. At the federal level alone, in 2005 there are at least 62 separate programs, administered by eight federal departments that provide special transportation services to people with disabilities, low-income individuals, and/or older adults. In spite of the significant investment in public transportation services, gaps in service still exist in many communities. These gaps in service, in both rural and urban areas, are particularly burdensome for transportation-disadvantaged individuals, who may not have access to cars or alternative transportation.

The variety of human service programs and public transit providers presents a challenge to coordinate services in the most cost-efficient and effective manner. Inherent in this challenge is the variety of requirements – both federal and state – in the provision of transportation services. Each program may require different data to be reported and may operate under a different funding cycle. As such, coordinating across local agencies is complicated by the fact that the organizations are likely to use different billing systems—some may reimburse consumers directly, others may reimburse providers, and others may operate their own vehicles with no direct billing required. Insurance requirements also interfere with the ability of agencies to coordinate transportation services. In many cases, the insurance requirements prohibit agencies from sharing vehicles or clients.

Coordinating with Human Service Transportation

Human service transportation systems usually provide transportation to specific consumer groups with a specific purpose, such as attending a class, visiting the doctor, or participating in an event. Human

service transportation may be categorized into three broad categories – transportation provided by Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Program, Non-Emergency Medical Transportation, and Head Start. Coordination of human service transportation will continue to be a priority for the state of Minnesota in the future.

Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Capital Program

The human service agencies assisted by Mn/DOT are private non-profit organizations that receive capital funding through the Federal Transit Administration’s Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310). This program provides capital assistance to private non-profit service providers when public transit is deemed inadequate or unavailable, with the purpose of increasing mobility for older adults and people with disabilities. There are approximately 120 Section 5310 providers across Minnesota. The program requires that the agencies coordinate services with other agencies to receive capital funding; however, the extent of this coordination is hampered by the larger issues of insurance requirements and Special Transportation Service regulations.

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation

One of the largest human service transportation programs is non-emergency medical transportation which involves transporting a patient to and from the source of medical care when the medical condition is not life threatening.

Enrollees in Minnesota’s publicly funded health care programs may be eligible to receive transportation services to obtain covered medical services from both local providers and from tertiary care centers at some distance from their homes. In Greater Minnesota, non-emergency medical transportation services are administered on a countywide basis with each county subcontracting the actual transportation services to a third party HMO provider. Although run by the same individual organizations, the counties act independently and there is frequent duplication of administrative costs in addition to lack of transportation coordination between county boundaries.

Head Start

Founded in 1965, Head Start is a national program that provides family and child development services to America’s low-income, pre-school age children and their families. Part of Head Start’s operation includes the safe and secure transport of children back and forth to school. In Minnesota, 27 Head Start grantees provided 6,366 children with rides in 2008.

Over the past eight years, Head Start has been challenged by a flat operating budget that has not kept pace with the cost of inflation. In addition, the organization is further constrained by a lack of capital funding for equipment, such as vans or buses. Federal regulations also mandate a variety of safety features that are not required of other transportation services, including human services transportation and public transit systems.

Mn/DOT is working with Head Start to address some of these issues and increase coordination and collaboration efforts with other transit systems. Another program with potential to complement Head Start is Safe Routes to School, a federal program administered by Mn/DOT. Locations of Head Start programs and services are shown in Figure 3.19.

Head Start Programs and Service Areas

December, 2008

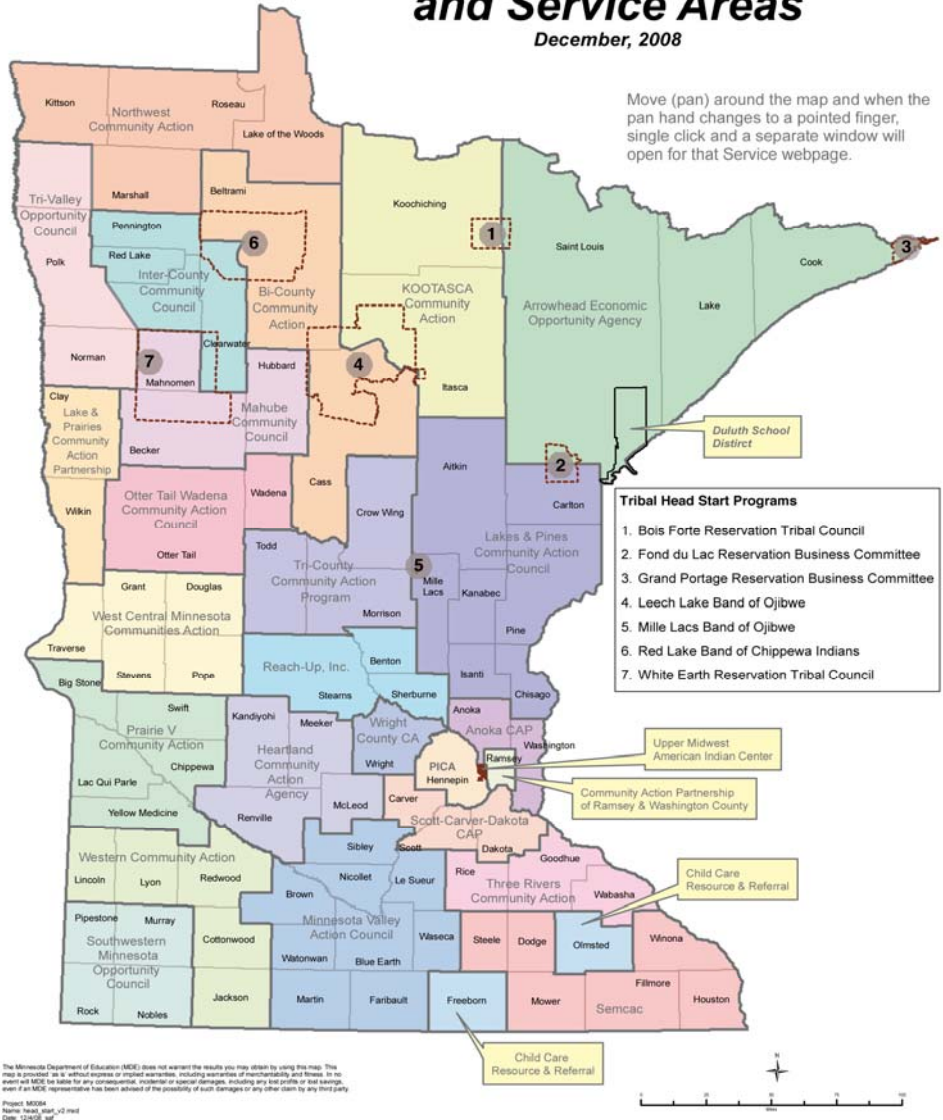


Figure 3.19 Head Start Programs and Service Areas

Source: Mn/DOT

Themes Related to the Challenge

Various outreach efforts including facilitated workshops, structured interviews, and an electronic survey have been used to gather public input for this planning effort. These responses are described in detail in Chapter 2, Plan Purpose and Development Process. Other public involvement activities have been conducted outside the scope of this plan but have been used for additional support to key themes. The following themes within the Regional Coordination Plans have been found to relate to the challenge.

Regional Coordination Plans

As part of Congress's reauthorization of the surface transportation act (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, grantees under the New Freedom Initiative, Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) program, and Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (5310) must be part of a "locally developed coordinated public transit/human service transportation plan" in order to receive funding for fiscal year 2007 and beyond. These plans are intended to help state and community leaders, agencies, and stakeholders develop programs and action plans for coordinated services.

Themes that emerged from Minnesota's regional coordination plans included coordination of county services, overcoming regulatory barriers, and the need for mobility management. These are additional areas of concern for program development for the public transit systems in greater Minnesota.

- **Coordination of County Services**

A commonly identified need was the coordination of county services. Although transit customers often wish to complete trips between counties, county lines often act as barriers. Several plans stated that counties were unwilling to allow their vehicles and drivers to cross into other counties.

- **Overcoming Regulatory Barriers**

Regions expressed a desire to share vehicles between 5310 programs and public transit operations. The method by which each program is administered currently limits this potential coordination strategy.

- **Mobility Management**

Mobility management is an approach to transportation that maximizes resources through collaboration between transit providers and other agencies and organizations, with an emphasis on meeting user needs and providing alternatives to the single occupant automobile. It uses all of the community resources and types of transit systems to meet the demand for service, including public transit systems. Mobility management is influenced by a variety of factors, including increased mobility on the part of individuals with disabilities, rapid growth in the senior population, reduced federal and state transportation funds, and demand for accountability.

The concept of mobility management has been advanced by a federal initiative called United We Ride. This initiative provides a framework for states and communities to use in assessing their degree of coordination in human service transportation and developing action plans to improve mobility. A person or agency may act as a Mobility Manager, providing a "one-stop shop" for all community mobility needs, including trip scheduling/sharing, marketing and outreach, planning and policy development, and facilitation of regionalization of transportation programs. In addition to advocating for transit and transportation services, the Mobility Manager can develop contacts and relationships with key stakeholders and providers. Active management may include contract, grant, and assistance programs, and handling of the administration and support of volunteer drivers and county van/bus services.

In the mobility management model, transportation agencies serve as mobility managers for the region. In the past, most transportation planning has been conducted at the macro level. Mobility managers take a different approach by examining the micro environment and focusing on the needs of the individual transportation users. By taking a micro view, mobility management focuses on individual needs by using all available resources and matching need with resources, infusing an individualized customer focus into transportation planning and services.

The use of technology, in conjunction with policy and procedural changes, can enhance mobility management. Available technologies include:

- Automatic vehicle locators
- Trip planning software
- Electronic fare collection

In communities where both the public and private sectors are already providing some level of transportation, these services can offer a strong base from which to build a coordinated transportation network. One of the most common forms for this coordination is a transportation brokerage. The brokerage concept is not new, but has gained new interest in the last few years because of its use with Medicaid transportation. A transportation brokerage is simply a mechanism to match ride requests with available transportation resources. Someone, an individual or agency, must manage or “broker” the ride requests to the transportation providers. Typically, this broker should be an independent and objective party that performs the matches based on the best transportation (mode and timing) for the lowest cost. A variety of transportation options can be used (for example, taxis, volunteers, fixed-route bus service, and demand responsive dial-a-ride type services).