

Chapter 7:

Strategic Directions

The Mn/DOT Office of Transit employs four major mechanisms for issuing strategic guidance to locally operated transit systems. The Office of Transit provides planning and operational guidance to public transit systems through technical memos on specific issues as they arise. The Transit Providers' Guidebook is a guide for operators of public transit service in rural and small urban areas and is a resource for effectively managing and operating a successful transit service. Mn/DOT provides overarching policy guidance for the future of transit in Greater Minnesota through this Greater Minnesota Transit Plan. This plan sets forth the vision, policies, and strategies for transit through 2030 in Greater Minnesota.

Overview

The vision, policies, and strategies presented below are the result of a concerted planning effort that included stakeholders, community leaders, advisory committee members, and Mn/DOT transit professionals. In addition to providing technical research and demand modeling, consultant staff coordinated stakeholder involvement to support the development of the vision, policies, and strategies.

The Greater Minnesota Transit Plan Advisory Committee was instrumental in evaluating the technical work and advising on key elements of the vision, policies, and strategies. The Advisory Committee provided direction on important themes, including mobility needs, service delivery, and community impacts. As the product of these discussions, the vision represents the long-term outcome desired for transit in Greater Minnesota. The five policies broadly state the guiding principles upon which Mn/DOT will make decisions leading to the achievement of the vision. Each policy has corresponding strategies that provide specific implementation activities.

Performance measures and indicators are also included in this chapter under the appropriate policies. Mn/DOT's Statewide Transportation Plan has 10 major policy areas with corresponding measures. The Office of Transit identified four performance measures relating to public transit that are included in the Statewide Transportation Plan. These performance measures are monitored and reported on an annual basis. In addition, the office of Transit regularly collects information on other indicators for reporting purposes and providing guidance for improving transit services.

Vision

A high-quality coordinated transit network that is integrated into the overall state transportation system and that meets the mobility needs of the people of Minnesota.

Policies

The current plan takes a comprehensive approach to planning for transit services in Greater Minnesota. The identification of the five challenges in Chapter 3 has led this plan to expand from one goal based on transit services from the 2001 plan to five policies that encompass a wider range of themes. These five policies seek to achieve Mn/DOT's vision for Greater Minnesota transit by establishing a set of overarching policies with accompanying strategies. These policies and their accompanying strategies will shape how Mn/DOT will manage its transit programs in the future.

Mn/DOT will seek to meet its estimated future performance targets through the five following policies:

1. Maintain and expand the statewide public transit network.
2. Increase mobility for individuals and the workforce.
3. Provide a safe and reliable transit environment.
4. Invest in infrastructure to increase access to services.
5. Enhance coordination and communication to reach the broadest possible audience in a cost-effective manner.

Greater Minnesota Transit Policy 1: Maintain and expand the statewide public transit network.

Background

Mn/DOT has worked for many years with local jurisdictions to develop a statewide network of transit services. While full coverage is not yet available, 76 out of 80 counties in Greater Minnesota operate some level of public transit service. The current investment in transit services, equipment, and infrastructure is significant, and this investment should be maintained as long as the local services are efficiently and effectively operated. Existing services must continue to meet annual performance expectations or be subject to adjustment or potential removal from the funding program.

If additional state or federal funds become available beyond that necessary to maintain current service levels of the 66 public transit systems serving 76 Greater Minnesota counties, Mn/DOT will first look to extend service into currently unserved areas that are seeking transit service. This strategy ensures that those geographic areas currently without public transit service have an opportunity to more fully address local transportation needs if they so choose. Mn/DOT will work with the local jurisdiction to identify reasonable service levels and performance targets. Funding will be available for services and equipment. Start-up service must meet annual performance expectations or be subject to adjustment or potential removal from the funding program.

When all geographic areas of Greater Minnesota seeking public transit service provide some level of public transit service, any excess program funding for service or equipment will be available for increasing the investment in existing service areas. These investments should be directed to expand core services where the greatest return on investment can be expected. That will include increasing service frequencies for fixed routes, adding service hours and capacity for on-demand and route services to address capacity limitations and new markets, and expanding weekday and weekend service hours.

Strategies

- Strategy 1:** Mn/DOT will maintain the viability of existing transit systems through the allocation of operating and financial assistance first to existing public transit service that meets performance targets.
- Strategy 2:** Mn/DOT will provide resources to start new transit services in areas without public transit when new financial resources are available to fund service.
- Strategy 3:** Mn/DOT will provide resources to expand core service frequencies and weekday or weekend service hours of existing providers when all geographic areas seeking public transit services have services and new financial resources are available.

Measures

Measure 1: Greater Minnesota Public Transit Bus Service Hours

This measure evaluates how well Minnesota is meeting rural transit needs in Greater Minnesota. This is based on the total number of bus service hours provided compared to the total number of hours needed to meet transit needs. Demographic trends mean that additional service is needed to adequately meet transit demands in Greater Minnesota.

Measure 2: Access to Intercity Bus Services

Intercity bus service has historically been declining around the nation and also within the State of Minnesota. However, Mn/DOT is working to retain a statewide network and improve service where possible and when funds become available. This measure evaluates scheduled intercity bus service to Level 1 and 2 regional trade centers.

Indicators

Indicator 1: Cost efficiency (cost/mile and miles/vehicle)

Indicator 2: Service effectiveness (passengers/service hour and passengers/mile)

Indicator 3: Cost effectiveness (cost/service hour, cost/passenger trip, and revenue recovery percentage)

Indicator 4: Availability (hours (span) of service and frequency)

Ties to Statewide Transportation Plan Policy 7, Greater Minnesota Metropolitan and Regional Mobility.

Greater Minnesota Transit Policy 2: Increase mobility for individuals and the workforce.

Background

Minnesota's population is growing, aging, and changing. For people with mobility constraints, transit provides access to important destinations, such as school, work, nutrition sites, shopping, places of worship, and medical facilities. Transit providers must continue to provide transportation services for the general public while placing emphasis on primary consumer groups including seniors, persons with disabilities, and low-income persons, and minorities. Regional, multi-modal systems that incorporate pedestrians and bicyclists as important components of the public transit systems will continue to be an emphasis in planning and programming transit services in Greater Minnesota.

The local jurisdictions, through Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Regional Development Commissions (RDCs), and Mn/DOT district offices, should regularly evaluate travel needs and markets to identify changing conditions. Transit services directed at special markets, such as commuter needs, must be carefully evaluated to identify reasonable opportunities for success. Responding to a wide range of commuter needs can be very challenging. Therefore, local areas are encouraged to identify the most pressing needs by market group, such as the low-income populations, or by geographic area, such as a key travel corridor. From that work, the appropriate response can be identified (for example, direct commuter service, investment in park-and-ride or park-and-pool lots, or provision of rideshare promotion services).

The commuter needs of Twin Cities metropolitan area collar counties present a significant challenge. Mn/DOT, along with the collar counties and the Metropolitan Council, must work together to evaluate the most pressing commuter needs by travel corridor and identify infrastructure and service ideas. Investments in park-and-ride and park-and-pool lots will be focused on Trunk Highway corridors where the greatest commuter concentrations are found. Local jurisdictions will need to identify candidate locations and acknowledge an on-going commitment to maintain such facilities.

Another very challenging travel market is travel between communities. This represents travel from smaller communities to regional centers for a variety of services along with longer distance intercity travel connecting regional centers with points beyond Minnesota. Mn/DOT must work with local communities to identify the level of travel needs between communities and evaluate reasonable strategies to address those needs.

Strategies

- Strategy 1:** Mn/DOT will work with MPOs, Regional Development Commissions (RDCs), tribal and local governments, and transit providers to plan for and provide options to address mobility needs of individuals and the workforce such as new routes, expanded carpool and vanpool assistance, and park-and-pool and park-and-ride lots.
- Strategy 2:** Mn/DOT, through plans and policies, will work to ensure that long-range public transit decisions in Greater Minnesota address future demographic shifts.

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Indicators

- Indicator 1:** Availability (hours (span) of service and frequency)
- Indicator 2:** Ridership productivity (number of trips per year)

Ties to Statewide Transportation Plan Policies 5, Statewide Connections and 7, Greater Minnesota Metropolitan and Regional Mobility.

Greater Minnesota Transit Policy 3: Provide a safe and reliable transit environment.

Background

The highest priority at Mn/DOT is traveler safety. Safety and security are inherent in all of the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan policies and are primary considerations in all public transit systems planning, operations, and maintenance activities. Public transportation should be operated and maintained to ensure the safety and security of riders, employees, and facilities. Transit safety incidents are tracked and reported to the National Transportation Database (NTD) for national analysis.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has placed a high priority on system safety programs. The FTA monitors and/or audits safety commitment and system safety program standards in the United States through the regulated State Safety Oversight Program. Mn/DOT expects that transit systems will implement safety standards and policies throughout their planning and operations through the written confirmation of responsibilities, expectations, and objectives.

Strategies

- Strategy 1:** Mn/DOT will work with transit providers to develop vehicle and facility safety and security plans.
- Strategy 2:** Mn/DOT will provide continuing training for transit operators through the Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP).

Measure

- Measure 1:** Greater Minnesota Public Transit Safety

This measure evaluates the number of FTA-defined reportable incidents for Greater Minnesota transit systems.

Indicators

- Indicator 1:** Maintenance program effectiveness (maintenance expense/revenue mile)
- Indicator 2:** Accident rate (accidents/100,000 miles)
- Indicator 3:** Fleet composition (class size and spare ratio)

Ties to Statewide Transportation Plan Policy 1, Safety, and 2, Infrastructure Preservation.

Greater Minnesota Transit Policy 4: Invest in infrastructure to increase access to services.

Background

The investments in equipment and infrastructure to support transit services should be focused on areas that yield proven results. Transit fleets need to be maintained and replaced at levels that are consistent

with industry standards. Mn/DOT will work with the local transit providers to establish a schedule for vehicle replacement or overhaul to ensure fleets of existing services are kept current. Mn/DOT will also work with local jurisdictions to identify the most appropriate mix of vehicle sizes for each system to best meet local needs. Investments in vehicle storage, maintenance, and administrative space will need to meet program guidelines and accountability standards as specified by Mn/DOT.

Investments in advanced technology applications for transit should be carefully evaluated by the local jurisdictions to identify the best potential for success. The greatest return on investment will be found in the areas of trip reservations and scheduling, customer information services, and fare payment/revenue handling systems.

Strategies

- Strategy 1:** Mn/DOT will continue to invest in size-appropriate ADA-accessible equipment to maximize operating efficiencies.
- Strategy 2:** Mn/DOT will invest in transit maintenance and storage facilities and passenger facilities that meet program guidelines and are consistent with local plans as funds are available.
- Strategy 3:** Mn/DOT will work with transit providers to replace or rehabilitate transit fleets following industry standards for vehicle replacement cycles.
- Strategy 4:** Mn/DOT will invest in advanced technology applications.

Measure

- Measure 1:** Remaining Service Life for Transit Fleets in Greater Minnesota

Transit fleet vehicles are an important component of the infrastructure necessary to deliver transit passenger services. When vehicles get older, there are increased issues with maintenance and availability that need to be monitored closely to ensure that regular services can be provided to customers. This measure evaluates the remaining useful lifespan of the transit fleet available to customers in Greater Minnesota.

Indicator

- Indicator 1: Fleet composition (class size and spare ratio)

Ties to Statewide Transportation Plan Policy 2, Infrastructure Preservation.

Greater Minnesota Transit Policy 5: Enhance coordination and communication to reach the broadest possible audience in a cost-effective manner.

Background

To meet the widest level of transportation needs in Greater Minnesota, local public transit services must coordinate operations and administration with local human service agencies and providers. As so many

transit customers come from the elderly, disabled, and low-income populations, it is essential for these transit services to work with human service agencies to plan for and implement effective and cost-efficient services. Mn/DOT will continue to expand its working relationship with state agencies through the Interagency Committee on Transit Coordination (ICTC) to identify improved coordination activities and address the trip needs of all transit users including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and low-income populations.

One of the ways coordination can be expanded locally is to invest in mobility management activities. In many areas across the country, mobility management organizations are taking shape to serve as a centralized system of information and expand coordination of transportation services and resources. The intent is to improve transportation options for customers by improving access to information and reducing confusion among customers and advocates and to coordinate, where possible, the many local service providers. Mobility management activities must derive from and be consistent with local coordination plans. Such systems should be established at least at the regional or district level across the state to ensure reasonable coverage.

Local transit providers should routinely fund efforts to provide information about available services to potential customers. Effective transportation decision-making requires understanding and addressing the unique needs of many different socioeconomic groups. Early, inclusive, and meaningful public involvement in transportation decision-making is a proven means for designing transportation facilities that fit more harmoniously into communities. The transit providers should also pro-actively work with local jurisdictions to incorporate transit into land use decisions.

While bicycle and pedestrian travel is generally local in nature, there is growing interest in linking systems to allow uninterrupted travel throughout a larger area. Enhanced coordination between transit and bicycle/pedestrian systems increases the non-motorized transportation network. For example, the system of scenic bikeways supports non-motorized travel in Greater Minnesota through a combination of low-volume highways and paved trails. Coordination at the regional level is necessary to successfully develop these multimodal systems.

Strategies

- Strategy 1:** Mn/DOT will work in partnership with local human service agencies and state agencies to coordinate service planning and operations for target populations including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and low-income populations.
- Strategy 2:** Mn/DOT will work with local providers to expand marketing and information services to better inform target populations of available services.
- Strategy 3:** Mn/DOT will work with local transit and planning officials to generate land use and transportation interaction decisions.
- Strategy 4:** Mn/DOT will evaluate options for enhancing communication and coordination at the local level, including establishing mobility management organizations at the regional level.
- Strategy 5:** Mn/DOT, in cooperation with agencies and stakeholders such as MPOs, RDCs, tribal governments, local jurisdictions, and advocacy and recreation groups should coordinate efforts to enhance regional bicycle and pedestrian system interconnectivity to transit.

Indicators

- Indicator 1:** Cost efficiency (cost/mile and miles/vehicle)
- Indicator 2:** Service effectiveness (passengers/service hour and passengers/mile)
- Indicator 3:** Cost effectiveness (cost/service hour, cost/passenger trip, and revenue recovery percentage)
- Indicator 4:** Availability (hours (span) of service and frequency)
- Indicator 5:** Ridership productivity (number of trips per year)

Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan

Following the completion of the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan, Mn/DOT will undertake the development of a Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan as directed by the Minnesota State Legislature as described in Minnesota Statute 174.24, Subd. 1a. Transit service needs implementation plan. The Transit Investment Plan will include:

- 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
- A plan to reduce unmet transit service needs