

Societal Benefits of Community Transit

Full Report: [Measuring the Economic Benefits of Rural and Small Urban Transit Services in Greater Minnesota](#)

This study developed a method for estimating benefits of transit in Greater Minnesota. Transit agencies in Greater Minnesota were categorized into six peer groups. These included urbanized systems, community transit systems, large and very rural systems, multi-county systems near the metro area, regional transit systems, and small systems. One case study was selected for each peer group. The case studies included a survey of transit riders and an estimation of the different types of benefits provided by each transit agency. Results from the case studies were used to estimate benefits for the peer group.

St. Peter Transit was chosen as the case study for the community transit systems. The community transit systems serve individual communities in non-metropolitan areas. Therefore, they serve smaller areas with more concentrated demand. These systems, on average, are the smallest in the state in terms of population served, vehicle miles and hours of service, and fleet size. Average fleet size is just four vehicles, ranging from one to nine. Other community transit systems are located in Fosston, Granite Falls, Morris, Winona, Hibbing, and Brainerd.

Use of Transit

An onboard rider survey conducted by St. Peter Transit yielded 27 responses, providing information about who uses transit and how they use it. About half of the riders use the service at least 5 days a week, indicating a reliance on the service. Riders use transit for a wide variety of purposes. Shopping trips, health care trips, personal business trips, and work trips are the most common.

Riders were shown to have limited transportation options. Among the St. Peter riders surveyed, 73% did not have a driver's license, 70% did not have a vehicle in their household, 63% considered themselves as having a disability, and 72% had household incomes below \$25,000. If transit was not available, 35% would not have made their current trip, while most of the remainder would have either had a family member or friend give them a ride, taken a more expensive taxi or ride hailing service, or walked.

Estimated Monetary Benefits

Total annual benefits of community transit in Greater Minnesota was estimated at \$19 million (Table 1). Benefits were categorized as either mobility benefits or efficiency benefits. Mobility benefits are those resulting from providing trips to people who otherwise would not be able to make the trip. Efficiency benefits are those from individuals taking transit instead of driving, getting a ride from someone, walking or biking, or making the trip some other way.

Table 1. Summary of Estimated Monetary Benefits of Community Transit Systems in Greater Minnesota

<i>Benefit Category</i>	Estimated Benefit (\$)
<i>Mobility Benefits</i>	
Low-cost mobility benefit	296,395
Access to health care benefit	17,590,652
Public assistance cost savings	464,642
<i>Efficiency Benefits</i>	
Vehicle operating cost savings	0
Chauffeuring cost savings	786,616
Travel time benefits	-27,659
Safety benefits	8,433
Environmental benefits	-122,040
Total	18,997,038

Access to health care benefits comprises a large share of these benefits. These benefits result from providing trips to health care service for individuals who otherwise would not be able to make those trips. It results in reduced health care costs and improved quality of life. Twenty-seven percent of St. Peter riders said they would miss many health care trips if transit was not available, and 14% more reported they would miss at least some trips.

Public assistance cost savings, chauffeuring cost savings, and low-cost mobility benefits comprise most of the remainder of the benefits. Public assistance cost savings result when transit provides access to work to individuals who otherwise would not be able to travel to work. Transit allows more people to go to work and maintain a job, which reduces the need for government spending on assistance programs. Among riders who use transit to get to work, about half said the service is very important to them and they would not be able to keep their job without it.

Chauffeuring cost savings are benefits to family members and friends who would need to provide transportation to transit riders if transit was not available. These savings include the cost of operating the vehicle as well as the value of their time for providing the trip. These are significant because many riders would need to rely on others for a ride if transit was not available. Low-cost mobility benefits are benefits to transit riders who would not be able to afford to make the trip any other way if transit was not available.

These benefits equal \$36.16 per trip provided. The cost of providing a trip averaged \$7.04 for community transit systems in 2017. This results in a benefit-cost ratio of 5.1, meaning that each dollar invested in transit provides \$5.10 in benefits.

Non-Monetary Benefits

Transit provides other benefits that were not quantified in dollar terms. These include relocation avoidance, intangible user benefits, increased productivity, and equity. A quarter of St. Peter riders indicated they would relocate if transit was not available, including 17% who would move to a different city. Transit provides several

intangible user benefits. Most riders agreed or strongly agreed that transit improves social connectedness, reduces stress, allows for independent living, and improves overall quality of life. Increased productivity is a result of the improved access to work and education, which is demonstrated by the high percentage of riders that rely on transit for those purposes. Transit promotes equity by serving a disproportionately higher percentage of low-income households, the carless, people with a disability, minorities, and older adults.