

Regional Transit Facts

Moving people, easing congestion

Transit – which includes buses, light rail, vanpools and other modes – plays an important role in the regional economy. Transit gets workers to their jobs, eases traffic congestion, improves air quality, saves commuters money and reduces carbon emissions.

Despite major economic fluctuations, transit ridership in the seven-county Twin Cities area has grown significantly since 2000. Ridership on all types of service – express and local buses, light rail, dial-a-ride service and transportation for people with disabilities – totaled 90.9 million in 2010, an 18.7% increase during the decade.

Region has many transit options

The Metropolitan Council operates the largest transit system in the state—Metro Transit. The agency provided nearly 78 million bus and rail rides in 2010. Its service area includes Minneapolis, St. Paul and dozens of suburban communities.

In addition to scores of bus routes, Metro Transit operates two rail lines. Hiawatha Light Rail has been in operation since 2004, carrying passengers between downtown Minneapolis, Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America. Northstar Commuter Rail, a 40-mile line carrying passengers from Big Lake in Sherburne County to downtown Minneapolis, opened in late 2009. Combined, the rail services provided 11.2 million rides in 2010.

The region has several other transit services. About a dozen cities within the Council's transit taxing district operate their own regular-route bus services. These Suburban Transit Providers carried more than four million riders in 2010.

Contracted regular-route service consists primarily of commuter routes from the suburbs into the central cities, provided by private companies under contract with the Council. In 2010, these routes carried 2.8 million passengers.

The University of Minnesota operates bus service between its two campuses in St. Paul and Minneapolis. In 2010 that service provided nearly four million rides.

Transit Link is a region-wide dial-a-ride program that serves people outside areas served by fixed-route transit. The new program was rolled out in the first half of 2010, replacing a variety of community dial-a-ride programs. Ridership totaled 306,000 in 2010. Transit Link was put into place to ensure more equitable, consistent service throughout the region and to better coordinate with fixed-route transit.

Metro Mobility is a special dial-a-ride service for people certified under the American with Disabilities Act. The Council-administered service is provided through contracts with private companies. Four counties or nonprofit agencies also provide transit for people with disabilities outside the transit taxing district. In 2010, Metro Mobility and the other agencies provided 1.5 million rides.

Van Go! is the Council-sponsored vanpool program. It carried 182,000 rides in 2010.



The Metropolitan Council operates the largest transit system in the state: Metro Transit. The agency provided nearly 78 million bus and rail rides in 2010.

Transit Link is a region-wide dial-a-ride service that provides consistent equitable service to people throughout the region who are not served by regular-route transit.

Region is leader in revenues from fares

The Twin Cities region relies less on government subsidies to operate transit than most peer U.S. metro areas. A survey of 11 peer metro areas showed that in 2009, the transit system in the Twin Cities area ranked third in reliance on fare revenue to fund operations. The percent of operating costs covered by fares in this region is 28.6%; the peer average is 23.1%.

Overall, transit funding in the Twin Cities area is significantly lower than in peer regions, though it has increased in recent years. The Twin Cities spends \$145 per capita, compared with a peer average of \$168.

Expanding the transitway network

The Metropolitan Council, in partnership with the county regional rail authorities, other transit providers and the Counties Transit Improvement Board, is planning a network of bus and rail “transitways” in heavily traveled corridors. Already in operation are Hiawatha Light Rail, Northstar Commuter Rail, and the high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes in the I-394 and I-35W corridors.

Construction of light rail in the Central Corridor between downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis, running largely along University Avenue, began in 2010. Opening of the line is anticipated in late 2014. Preliminary engineering on a light-rail line in the Southwest Corridor between downtown Minneapolis and Eden Prairie is likely to begin in 2011.

Implementation of bus rapid transit (BRT) is under way on two corridors – Cedar Avenue in Dakota County and I-35W south of Minneapolis. Service is expected to open in late 2012.

Analyses of alternative routes and modes are under way on several other corridors, including Bottineau Boulevard, the Rush Line, Red Rock and the Gateway Corridor.

Transit helps ease roadway congestion

Without transit, congestion on the region’s roadways would be much worse. For example, 40% of all downtown Minneapolis workers use transit. According to the Minnesota Department of Transportation, there are more than 250 congested lane-miles in the seven-county metro area.

Traffic congestion increases stress, decreases productivity, robs people of family time and hurts the regional economy. Congestion results in higher cost of goods and services, a shrinking customer and employee base, and tardy and stressed employees.

For more information

- Information about transportation options is available at www.metrocouncil.org
- [Related fact sheets](#): Metro Transit, Metro Mobility, Metro Transit Rideshare, Hiawatha LRT, Transportation Planning.



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