



 **Metropolitan Council**



annual report **2003**

## Message from the Chair:



I've often said that 90 percent of the residents of the Twin Cities metropolitan area don't know what the Metropolitan Council does, while the other 10 percent go to bed at night worrying about our every move.

Our dual challenge is to help inform and educate the former group about the value of regional solutions to regional problems, while reassuring the latter group that the Council can be trusted to focus on our core mission, work collaboratively with our regional partners and be accountable to the public.

In 2003, the new members of the Council made important strides in both areas, as this annual report explains.

Most significant, the Council undertook the job of writing a new *2030 Regional Development Framework* that reflects our commitment to work cooperatively with local communities to accommodate the region's growth in a sensible, efficient manner. For the first time, it includes a set of benchmarks that will allow us to measure the region's progress toward achieving our goals.

Adoption of the *Framework* came only after extended meetings with key stakeholder groups, a series of four public information meetings held around the region and a formal public hearing – as well as countless meetings of the Council itself.

The Council also demonstrated our commitment to fiscal responsibility. We reduced our 2003 budget as part of the effort to erase the state's budget shortfall, kept the Council's property tax levy in check for 2004 and maintained the agency's AAA bond rating.

Finally, we made significant progress in the construction of the region's first light-rail transit line in the Hiawatha Avenue corridor. This line – which is scheduled for completion in 2004 – will allow us to test a new form of transit in the Twin Cities area and help us in making future transit investment decisions.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Bell".

Peter Bell  
Chair



## ← New Council focuses on core mission

Cooperation, efficiency, accountability – these have been the bywords of the Metropolitan Council since its 17 members were appointed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty in early 2003.

The Metropolitan Council was created by the Legislature more than three decades ago to plan and coordinate the orderly development of the seven-county metropolitan area. The Council's core mission also includes the efficient operation of our regional systems for transportation, aviation, wastewater collection and treatment, and regional parks and open space.

After their appointment, the members of the current Council made a firm commitment to:

- Focus on these core missions
- Perform them in a cost-effective manner
- Work cooperatively with our regional partners
- Be accountable to the public for results

The Council's resolve was demonstrated throughout the year in many ways, both large and small.

**Regional Framework:** Most dramatic, the Council undertook a major rewrite of the *2030 Regional Blueprint* adopted by the last Council to guide the region's growth in the coming years. The new *2030 Regional Development Framework* is more clear and concise. It reflects the Council's commitment to work with communities in a collaborative and flexible manner. And it contains specific benchmarks to measure progress toward achieving regional goals.

**Fiscal Responsibility:** The Council did its part to help erase the state's budget shortfall, trimming our 2003 budget by 4 percent (nearly \$17 million) and eliminating more than 200 positions. The Council also adopted a 2004 budget that kept the lid on property taxes paid by the average homeowner for regional services and functions. In addition, the Council developed a set of performance indicators to regularly measure the efficiency and effectiveness of regional systems.

Cooperation

efficiency



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**Narrowing Its Focus:**

The Council eliminated a program that used revenue from one-time wastewater service availability charges (SAC) to help encourage "inclusionary housing." While the Council remains committed to affordable housing, the SAC waiver program was draining reserves needed to help expand the region's wastewater collection and treatment system. The Council also drafted legislation for consideration by the 2004 Legislature that would eliminate statutory authority that is obsolete or unnecessary.

**Building Closer Relationships:**

The Council worked to build closer relationships with local communities in the seven-county area and the adjacent counties. During the course of the year, Chair Peter Bell and Regional Administrator Tom Weaver met individually with each of the county boards in the metro area. In December, the Council hosted a meeting of representatives from the seven metro counties and six adjacent counties to discuss the *Regional Framework* and other matters of mutual concern. Chair Bell also created the Chair's Forum – an advisory panel of 14 local elected officials – that will meet quarterly to provide local perspectives and feedback on issues of regional concern.

**Exploring Outsourcing Opportunities:**

At the direction of the 2003 Legislature, the Council requested proposals from private vendors to operate the new Hiawatha light-rail transit line, along with an internal competitive proposal from Metro Transit. The process resulted in the selection of Metro Transit as the most qualified and least costly operator for the line. The Council will continue to explore possible cost savings by having private vendors perform some functions, such as track maintenance and engineering services. The Council also began a systematic effort to identify other opportunities for savings through using competitive processes to ensure the most cost-effective delivery of services.

*accountability*

## Other important milestones

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➤ In cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and Hennepin County, the Council worked toward completion of the region's first light-rail transit line. By year's end, the \$715-million, 12-mile Hiawatha LRT line was 86% complete. Service between downtown Minneapolis and Fort Snelling will open in April 2004, with full service to the Mall of America by December 2004.

➤ The Council and Hennepin County continued design work on a proposed \$135 million busway along County Road 81 between downtown Minneapolis and Rogers. The Council also provided \$400,000 to help study alternatives for the construction of a busway in the Cedar Avenue corridor in Dakota County.

➤ The Council awarded \$13 million in Livable Communities grants to clean up polluted sites for redevelopment and jobs, support innovative development and redevelopment, and provide gap financing for local housing projects. In November, the program won recognition for "overall excellence" in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2003 Smart Growth Achievement competition.

➤ All of the region's wastewater treatment plants won national recognition for outstanding compliance with state and national water discharge permits. The Council also continued its record of maintaining competitive wastewater treatment rates. In 2003, the rates were lower than 83% of other U.S. cities with similarly sized systems.

➤ The Council provided a \$135,000 grant to help finance the addition of 600 acres to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve in Anoka County. This park – containing some of the most significant wildlife habitat in the metropolitan area – is part of the 47,000-acre regional park system, which attracts more than 30 million visits annually.

## Regional Development Framework

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### Plan gives communities more flexibility

Slowing the growth of traffic congestion and protecting water resources as top priorities. Placing more emphasis on market solutions to producing affordable housing. Setting specific benchmarks to measure progress toward regional goals.

These are among the new directions in the Council's *2030 Regional Development Framework*. The *Framework*, adopted in January 2004, is the overall growth and development plan for the region.

### The Council's strategies are organized around four policies:

- ▶ Working with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner.
- ▶ Planning and investing in multi-modal transportation choices, based on a full range of costs and benefits, to slow the growth of congestion and serve the region's economic needs.
- ▶ Encouraging expanded choices in housing locations and types, and improved access to jobs and opportunities.
- ▶ Working with local and regional partners to conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources.

Under the growth policy, local communities will have greater discretion in staging growth, recognizing that development opportunities do not always occur in a contiguous manner. The strategies encourage land-use patterns that connect a variety of uses, take advantage of existing sewer infrastructure, and provide convenient access to transportation corridors.

The transportation policy gives priority to maintaining the existing metro highway system, reducing bottlenecks that impede travel, and exploring new pricing strategies, such as FAST lanes, to improve the system's efficiency and add capacity where possible. It also supports expansion of the transit system and developing a network of transitways, with mode choices based on a thorough cost-benefit analysis.

The housing policy emphasizes market solutions to affordable housing production. As communities work to broaden the range of housing choices, they can draw on tools already at hand – for example, comprehensive plans and local ordinances. The Council will use its programs and resources – including negotiated housing goals, planning and technical assistance, regional investments and incentive programs – to encourage communities to provide for a diversity of housing types and costs.

The policy on natural-resource protection encourages the integration of natural-resource conservation strategies to regional and local land-use decisions. Its emphasis on protection and management of the region's water resources is consistent with Governor Pawlenty's initiative to protect water resources statewide. And it makes clear that preserving prime agricultural land is a local decision, not a regional priority.

The *Framework* is the centerpiece of the Council's regional policy plans. State law requires the Council to prepare and adopt a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area. The Council adopts long-range comprehensive policy plans for transportation, airports, wastewater treatment and regional recreation open space as part of the guide. These policy plans will be updated in 2004-05 to reflect the growth forecasts and policies in the new *Framework*.

State law also requires communities to review and update their local comprehensive plans at least once every 10 years. Communities then submit their plans to the Council, which determines if the local plans are consistent with its metropolitan plans. The next updates must be submitted to the Council by 2008.

## Accommodating growth

**The Twin Cities metropolitan area experienced unprecedented growth in the 1990s – a population gain of 353,000 people. New jobs, rising incomes, added tax revenue and rising property values accompanied the growth.**

**So, too, did increased traffic congestion and commuting times.**

**Home prices rose faster than incomes. New development created demand for costly urban services and put increased pressure on vital natural resources.**

The Council forecasts the region will add another 966,000 people by 2030. Accommodating this new growth in a way that retains the region's quality of life will require carefully integrating investments in transportation, housing, wastewater services and natural resource preservation with decisions about land use. The Council, using the new *Regional Development Framework* as a guide, is committed to working with local communities to support land-use patterns that efficiently connect housing, jobs, retail centers, civic uses and open space to make the best use of valuable regional and local investments.

### **Council partners with local governments**

State law requires local governments in the seven-county Twin Cities area to develop local comprehensive land-use plans. The law requires the Council to review the plans as they are updated or amended. The Council also reviews items in the plans related to environmental protection that are required by state and federal regulations.

In 2003 the Council reviewed a total of 129 comprehensive plan amendments, and another 273 environmental assessments, national pollution discharge elimination permits, watershed plans and other plans and permits as required by state and federal law.



### **Blaine – a ‘model for land-use planning’**

Blaine’s amendments to its comprehensive plan clear the way for more than 11,000 new homes by 2020, increasing the city’s housing supply 70%. The changes will also expand the area served by regional sewers by nearly 2,500 acres, and change 4,600 acres in the city from a rural to an urban designation. In part, the amended comprehensive plan calls for:

- ▶ Single-family homes as well as attached and unattached townhouses
- ▶ Medium- and higher-density housing
- ▶ Protection of open space and natural resources based on the city’s natural resource inventory
- ▶ Two activity centers containing a mix of housing, shops and offices located on transportation corridors

The overall plan, endorsed by the I-35W Corridor Coalition, illustrates how thoughtful planning and growth can occur when communities and the Council work together to achieve local and regional goals. (See sidebar on right.)

### **Investments create community vitality**

New job centers are thriving where polluted land once drained community tax bases. New town centers are springing up in older and developing communities, combining housing, shops, walkways, easy access to transit and open space, and providing community gathering places. Housing affordable to essential workers like teachers, health aides and police officers, as well as families with lower incomes, is being built by cities across the region.

These positive changes are spurred by communities working with funds from the Metropolitan Council’s Livable Communities Program. Participation in the voluntary program has never been higher, now at 106 communities.

In 2003, the Council gave grants totaling:

- ▶ \$5.1 million to 10 communities to clean up a total of 172 acres at 18 sites for redevelopment and job creation. The funds are expected to leverage nearly \$293 million in private investment. The projects will create an estimated 2,405 new jobs with an average hourly wage of \$12.22. The region’s net tax capacity is expected to increase by \$4.5 million.
- ▶ \$6.2 million to seven communities for nine mixed-use, transit- and pedestrian-friendly developments that demonstrate efficient growth and incorporate livability features that residents want.
- ▶ \$300,000 to seven communities to support projects in the planning stage that show promise as demonstration projects.
- ▶ \$1.4 million to 10 communities to support development, redevelopment and rehabilitation of rental and ownership housing for households with low and moderate incomes.

Between 1996 and July 2003, the Livable Communities program invested almost \$102 million in state and regional funding to clean up polluted land for jobs and redevelopment, produce affordable housing and create walkable, transit-oriented development. The effort has leveraged an estimated \$3.3 billion in private and other public investment, or 32 times the Council’s contribution. The federal Environmental Protection Agency recognized the program with its "Overall Excellence Award" in the 2003 Smart Growth Achievement competition.

**Sitting on the northern edge of the urban Twin Cities, the once-quiet city of Blaine is expected to grow quickly – and significantly – in the next few years. The city and its residents worked closely with the Council for more than two years to amend the city’s comprehensive land-use plan. The result, approved in 2003 by the Council, is what Council Chair Peter Bell called "a model for future development" across the region.**

**Among its many attributes, Bell noted the plan’s inclusion of housing goals, effective environmental planning, and support by neighboring communities. The plan also includes transportation improvements to support the additional growth.**

## Improving mobility

**Highway congestion ranks as the region's top concern for a growing number of metropolitan area residents. Daily commutes take longer than ever. More highway miles are congested during peak travel times. Traffic tie-ups cost commuters and businesses hundreds of millions of dollars in wasted fuel, lost time and slower distribution of goods.**

**The Council is committed to working with the state and local communities to make strategic investments to improve mobility and slow the growth of congestion as the region adds nearly one million people by 2030. The first priority for highway improvements will be to maintain the existing 657-mile metro highway system, reducing bottlenecks that impede travel and adding capacity where feasible.**

**But the region must make more efficient use of the highway system by encouraging flexible work hours, telecommuting, ridesharing and other traffic-management efforts. Expanding the bus system and developing a network of transitways will also play a critical role in maintaining the region's mobility.**

### Governor's plan speeds up transit investments

Gov. Tim Pawlenty in July announced an innovative plan to accelerate road projects to improve safety and mobility for residents across the state. The \$900 million package included a transit component that will allow the Metropolitan Council to accelerate construction of much-needed transit facilities to help ease congestion in the Twin Cities area.

The package includes \$16.5 million for nine park-and-ride facilities in the metropolitan area, including in the Northwest Corridor, where a high-speed busway is being designed. Another \$12 million will be spent to enhance transit along major highway construction projects, including Hwys. 212 and 169, and Interstates 394, 494, 694 and 35E. Facilities will include bus-only shoulders, high-occupancy vehicle ramp bypasses and additional park-and-ride lots. Another \$6 million was allocated for transit improvements yet to be determined.

### Light-rail line nears completion

Construction of the 12-mile Hiawatha LRT line was 86% complete at year's end. The region's first LRT route will connect downtown Minneapolis with Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America. The route has 17 stops.

Progress in 2003 included:

- Construction of all 12 stations in Minneapolis – each with its own neighborhood-inspired design – was completed, including installation of signals and gate arms at crossings.
- LRT cars were tested at up to 55 miles per hour between downtown Minneapolis and Fort Snelling.
- The Council and its partners approved realignment of the route near the Mall of America. The new alignment provides a much better connection to the mall for riders and triples the park-and-ride capacity near the station.

The line will open for service from downtown Minneapolis to Fort Snelling in April 2004, with full service to the Mall scheduled for December 2004.

### **Transit tackles funding challenge**

Regional transit operations focused on becoming even more efficient in response to a nearly \$18.7 million cut in its base funding from the state for the 2004-05 biennium. Service cuts, fare increases and administrative overhead reductions were required to address the funding reduction. Implementing improved technology and continuing the multi-year, region-wide service restructuring effort will both improve current efficiency and position the service to grow more quickly as the economy and funding situation improve in the future.

### **New technology improves efficiency**

The Council in 2003 began to install and test new "smart card" fare technology on a portion of the bus fleet. Users of the "Go To" cards simply touch the card to a small device to pay their fares, resulting in quicker boarding and reduced travel time. The durable plastic cards are rechargeable, and will be used both on buses and on the Hiawatha light-rail line. Cash will continue to be accepted on buses and at light-rail ticket machines. The new system will be installed on all buses and implemented throughout the region in 2004.

### **Transit updates fleet**

Fifty new articulated buses will be on Twin Cities area roadways in the first quarter of 2004. The 68-seat buses will replace 25 aging articulated buses as well as 27 43-seat buses in the Metro Transit fleet. These replacements add capacity to the system without increasing the total number of buses.

Metro Transit is installing bike racks on buses. The entire fleet is expected to be outfitted by mid-2004.

### **Restructuring goal is improved service**

Metro Transit is engaged in a comprehensive, multi-year, sector-by-sector restructuring of bus service throughout the region. The goal is to revamp service to optimize effectiveness, efficiency and productivity through faster service, enhanced reliability and higher ridership.

In 2003, the Council – after extensive public comment – approved final plans for the Central-South area, which includes Highland Park in St. Paul, south Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington and Edina. One goal is to seamlessly integrate bus and light-rail transit (LRT) service. Another is to implement daylong, high-speed, north-south service in the I-35W corridor, with plentiful cross connections to other freeways and local buses. The new plan will be implemented in three phases starting in April 2004.

The Council in 2003 also laid the groundwork for restructuring bus service in the northwestern suburbs. Metro Transit conducted research and held an initial stakeholder workshop in October 2003. A draft plan will be drawn up in 2004 for public comment.



### **Agencies cooperate to allocate federal funds**

The Council and its Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) in 2003 solicited applications for federally funded transportation projects in the seven-county area. About \$90 million is available for projects in the 2007-08 funding cycle. The TAB is evaluating and ranking the applications. Funding awards will be made in 2004 to projects that increase regional mobility, improve safety for motorists and bicyclists/pedestrians, reduce congestion and automobile emissions, and enhance public transit service.

Many major highway projects in the region are funded through a related process coordinated by the Minnesota Department of Transportation. All roadway and transit projects that receive federal funding, regardless of where the projects originate, are incorporated into a regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TAB and the Council in 2003 approved the 2004-2007 TIP.

### **Other transit advances include:**

- ▶ Metro Transit and Hennepin County continued design work on the reconstruction and redevelopment of County Road 81 in northwestern Hennepin County. The corridor serves seven diverse communities, from North Minneapolis to Rogers. The \$135 million project will integrate bus rapid transit (BRT) in the corridor.
- ▶ More riders – nearly 937,000 – took Metro Transit buses to the State Fair than ever in history. The ridership was up 3.6% from 2002. Almost one in three fair-goers boarded a bus to get to the fair.
- ▶ While ridership on the bus system overall declined in 2003 due to service cuts, fare increases and a continued soft economy, U-Pass ridership was up more than 30% in 2003. Metro Transit partners with the University of Minnesota to provide students with semester passes at a discounted rate on the bus system. The program vastly reduces congestion and parking shortages in and around the University.
- ▶ Ridership on contracted regional-route bus service topped 1.9 million, up about 1.5% from 2002.
- ▶ A record 80 employers offered discounted annual bus passes to their employees through the Council's MetroPass program. The passes are tax-deductible for employers and cut demand for on-site parking.
- ▶ Metro Mobility, the region's paratransit service for people with disabilities, continued a very low rate of trip denials in 2003 while facing increasing demand for the service. Ridership topped 1.2 million while denials averaged less than one percent. Service was restructured in August to respond to state budget constraints and to more closely mirror regular-route service. The result was less service on weekends in the outlying communities of the region.



### **Aviation fuels regional economy**

Sustainable air transportation services to major domestic and international markets are essential to the region's ability to compete in the global marketplace. The Council works closely with the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) and other airport owners to ensure that the region's system of airports provides state-of-the-art, secure, and affordable services for business and leisure travelers, freight transport and general aviation activities.

Council aviation planning during 2003 included:

- ▶ Continued coordination with the MAC on preparation and implementation of an updated zoning ordinance for Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) and updated noise contours for MSP's sound insulation program.
- ▶ Completion of the MSP 2010 Plan, which details upcoming airport capital improvements.
- ▶ Completion of predevelopment activities at Anoka County-Blaine, Flying Cloud and St. Paul Downtown airports.
- ▶ Continued coordination with Mn/DOT on air-service and air-cargo initiatives.
- ▶ Completion of technical work on the Council's special general-aviation light-aircraft study.
- ▶ Ongoing reviews of comprehensive plan amendments and environmental referrals.

The uncertainty created by the September 2001 terrorist attacks and the economic slowdown continued to have a major impact on industry and airport revenues. A significant development is an airline challenge to the MAC regarding funding of the region's reliever airports. In late 2003 the MAC was reviewing its fee ordinance for the reliever airports and evaluating financial alternatives for their operation. Recommendations are expected in 2004.

The Council also initiated interagency discussions as it prepares to update the aviation system plan in 2004. The plan will address, among other issues, classification and roles of the reliever airports.



## Encouraging housing choices

**The Council works closely with communities to ensure an adequate supply of serviced, developable land to meet regional housing needs and respond to demographic trends. Coalitions of interested organizations, public agencies, businesses and foundations continue to strive to expand housing choices in the region.**

**The Council uses its programs and resources – including negotiated housing goals, planning and technical assistance, regional investments, and incentive programs – to encourage communities to provide for a diversity of housing types and costs. In addition, the Council gives funding priority to communities and projects that increase the variety of housing types and costs, appropriately mix land uses, increase transportation choices and leverage private investment.**

### **Expanding affordable housing opportunities**

Affordable housing is fundamental to a strong economy and strong communities. Without affordable housing for people of all ages and incomes – including essential workers like teachers, police, and nursing aides – jobs go unfilled and community vitality suffers. Workers who can't afford to live in or near the communities where they work are forced to commute longer distances, adding to traffic congestion. Children without stable housing are at great risk for poor school performance.

For the second straight year, the Council's housing authority, Metro HRA, achieved full use of its available federal Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers by families and individuals with low incomes. Rising rental vacancy rates gave voucher holders more choice in housing location and amenities and lowered overall rental prices as property owners sought out tenants.

The HRA assisted an average of 6,800 households monthly through the Housing Choice voucher program and other tenant-based rental assistance programs targeted to special populations. Rental assistance payments were made to more than 1,400 property owners, injecting \$46.2 million annually of federal, state and local funds into the regional economy.

Metro HRA serves low-income seniors, families and people with disabilities throughout Anoka, Carver, and most of suburban Hennepin and Ramsey Counties. The vouchers allow people to locate decent housing while paying one-third of their income for rent. All housing units in the program are inspected annually by HRA staff. Participating property owners are guaranteed a stable source of rental income. In 2003 the program had a waiting list of approximately 7,400 eligible households.



### **Affordable housing for families in suburbs**

The Council operates a small, scattered-site public housing program of 150 units in 11 cities in suburban Anoka, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties. The Family Affordable Housing Program gives families with low incomes the opportunity to live in neighborhoods outside areas with high levels of poverty. Most of the homes are within one-quarter mile of a bus stop.

As of November 2003, the Council had bought or executed purchase agreements for 144 of an eventual 150 homes. The cities where the homes are located each identified the need for more affordable rental housing in their comprehensive plans, and signed an agreement with the Council to participate in the program. More than 115 units are now occupied.

The units are leased to families on the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority and Metro HRA waiting lists. A professional property management firm manages all the program's properties.

### **Supporting housing production**

The Family Housing Fund and Minneapolis Foundation provided the Council with \$300,000 to assist reinvestment activities that support housing production in the seven-county area. The Council used the funds to create a one-time predevelopment grant program for projects that had been planned but lacked resources for implementation.

The Council awarded grants to seven projects in six communities. If all the proposed housing units are built, an estimated 4,270 units will be added, including many units affordable to people with low to moderate incomes. The seven projects represent 1,075 acres of infill development, redevelopment or adaptively reused land.

## Protecting natural resources

**The Twin Cities metropolitan area is endowed with rich natural assets. Rivers, lakes, woodlands, wetlands, prairies, aggregate resources and prime agricultural land enhance our population's quality of life and provide significant economic benefits.**

**The Council has long been a capable steward of natural resources. Its regional wastewater collection and treatment system helps ensure the health of the region's rivers and the public. The Council works with communities and watershed management organizations to put into place practices that protect ground and surface water. Council investments in the region's renowned system of parks and trails help preserve beautiful natural habitats and provide recreation for millions of people each year.**

### **Wastewater facilities support regional growth**

Every day, the Council collects and treats up to 300 million gallons of wastewater from homes, businesses and industries in 103 communities in the region, ensuring the protection of public health and the region's water resources. With a goal of becoming one of the top five wastewater utilities in the nation, the Council has reduced its wastewater budget in recent years and maintained its competitiveness nationally for wastewater rates.

In 2003, according to industry figures, the Council's wastewater rates were lower than 83% of other U.S. cities with similar-sized systems. In 2004 the charge to municipalities for collecting and treating wastewater will rise just 3.1% to \$134 per 100,000 gallons, still less than the \$135 charged in 1998.

The Council plans rehabilitation and expansion of wastewater facilities carefully to support regional goals of accommodating growth, protecting natural resources, and maximizing the effectiveness and value of regional infrastructure investments. Capital budget expenses for work completed in 2003 amount to approximately \$158 million. Of this, 39% was earmarked for expansion, 48% for rehabilitation and 13% for quality improvement.

### **Treatment plants earn national recognition**

While keeping costs down and maintaining competitive rates, the Council consistently achieves outstanding compliance with state and national clean water discharge permits. In 2003 the national Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies honored all of the treatment plants in the region. The St. Croix Valley, Hastings and Eagles Point plants received Platinum Awards for five consecutive years of perfect compliance; the Seneca, Empire, Rosemount and Blue Lake plants earned Gold Awards for full compliance during 2002; and the Metro Plant earned a Silver Award for having five or fewer permit exceedances during 2002 (two exceedances).



### **Construction milestones reached:**

- Construction of facilities for solids processing, operations and maintenance was completed at the Eagles Point Wastewater Treatment Plant in Cottage Grove.
- Construction began on the Council's new South Washington County Interceptor, a nearly 10-mile-long sewer pipe that will serve developing areas of South Washington County. When completed in 2004, the pipe will convey wastewater to Eagles Point.
- A \$130 million expansion of the Empire Wastewater Treatment Plant in fast-growing Dakota County is under way. The plant's treatment capacity will be doubled from 12 to 24 million gallons of wastewater per day. To avoid harm to the environmentally sensitive Vermillion River, the treated wastewater will be conveyed 13 miles through a new outfall pipe for discharge into the Mississippi River in Rosemount.
- Construction began on the four-mile Medina leg of the Elm Creek Interceptor to provide wastewater service to growing portions of northwestern Hennepin County.
- Construction was completed to rehabilitate the Metro Plant liquid-treatment facilities and retrofit them for phosphorus removal.

### **Task force to identify infiltration/inflow solutions**

The Council in 2003 appointed a 16-member Infiltration and Inflow (I/I) Task Force to identify solutions to the region's ongoing challenge of excessive stormwater leakage into the region's sanitary sewers. The task force includes representatives from cities across the region as well as the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities, and is chaired by Metropolitan Council Member Russ Susag.

The task force is looking at four major issues:

- What is the regional-versus-local liability for sanitary-sewer overflows that can result from too much I/I?
- What are the appropriate levels of service and support from regional government to reduce I/I?
- What should be the schedule to implement solutions?
- Who pays and for what?

Not correcting the problem would necessitate an estimated \$300 to \$400 million in additional relief sewers and pumping stations. The task force is expected to issue recommendations in 2004.

### **Grants improve region's water quality**

The Council awarded nearly \$1 million in competitive grants in 2003 aimed at improving the region's water quality by reducing pollution from surface water runoff. The 13 grants represent the last round of competitive grants in the five-year, \$7.5 million MetroEnvironment program initiated in 1998. The 2003 grants will fund construction of rain gardens, erosion control measures, stormwater management ponds and other projects to reduce nonpoint-source pollution in the region's lakes, streams and rivers.

The Council also approved five grants totaling \$403,000 to support its research on protection of both water quality and supply in the region. The grants will use the last of the funds set aside 10 years ago in the Twin Cities Water Quality Initiative (TCQI), some of which were returned when projects were completed under budget. Three of the new grants address water supply, and two address impacts on water quality related to urban growth.

### **Mercury reduction effort makes progress**

The Minnesota Dental Association (MDA) and the Metropolitan Council made progress in 2003 on a joint program to drastically reduce the amount of mercury-containing dental amalgam that is getting into the regional wastewater collection and treatment system.

As of October 1, 65% of metro area dental clinics that place or remove amalgam fillings had committed to participate in the program. The clinics will voluntarily install equipment that will remove at least 99% of amalgam particles from dental wastewater.

Mercury in dental amalgam can be released into the environment if amalgam particles escape through dental-waste vacuum systems and are incinerated as part of the wastewater treatment process. Mercury in the environment can accumulate in fish and be harmful to people who eat the fish.

The partnership hopes to achieve 100% commitment to the program by June 2004.

### **Cities reach agreement on planning for future water supply**

Participants in the Southwest Groundwater Work Group – including several communities, Scott and Dakota Counties, the Metropolitan Council and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – signed an agreement in 2003 to continue working together to address water supply issues in the fast-growing Minnesota River Valley. The goal is to sustain water supplies and protect valuable natural areas in the communities.

The work group, convened by the Council, has met since 1997 to study and resolve water supply issues in the southwest metro area. The Council will use the group as a model in assisting the northwest area of the region, which also faces water supply issues as its population grows.

### **Park expansion preserves valuable habitat**

The Twin Cities area's nationally renowned system of regional parks grew in 2003 with the addition of 600 acres to the Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve in Anoka County. A \$135,000 Council grant helped make the purchase possible. The Rice Creek Watershed District also provided a \$50,000 grant.

The 600-acre parcel is part of a 1,000-acre park expansion approved in an amended regional park master plan in 2003. The park contains some of the most significant wildlife habitat in the metropolitan area and is home to such species as sandhill cranes, wild turkeys, bald eagles and the endangered Blanding's turtles. Habitats are rich and varied and include tamarack swamps, maple and basswood forests, sedge meadows, prairies and lakes.

In 2003 the Council made 16 grants for capital improvements to existing regional parks. The grants were financed with nearly \$2.37 million in Council park bonds and interest earnings, matching a \$3.34 million state appropriation and \$2.63 million in federal funds. The grants will help acquire 63 acres of park land, rehabilitate recreation facilities in seven parks, and develop new parks facilities.

The Council distributed \$3.3 million in state funding to regional park implementing agencies to help finance a portion of the cost of operating and maintaining the regional park system. The Council will also distribute up to \$4.12 million in lottery proceeds in monthly installments to the agencies. These funds are targeted for one-time operations and maintenance activities such as park, road and trail repairs, and maintenance equipment purchases.

The regional parks system includes 46 parks and park reserves and five special recreation features totaling about 47,000 acres open for public use. In addition, the system has 22 regional trails totaling 170 miles. Parks are operated by 10 partner cities, counties and special park districts. They work with the Council, and its Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, to acquire and develop parks and trails. The goal is to protect natural resources and provide outdoor recreation for public enjoyment. The regional parks system receives more than 30 million visits annually.

## 2003 Budget Overview

The Metropolitan Council serves the public in five principal areas:

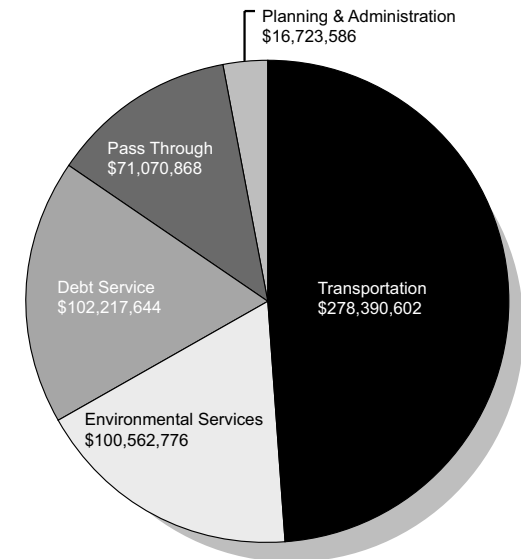
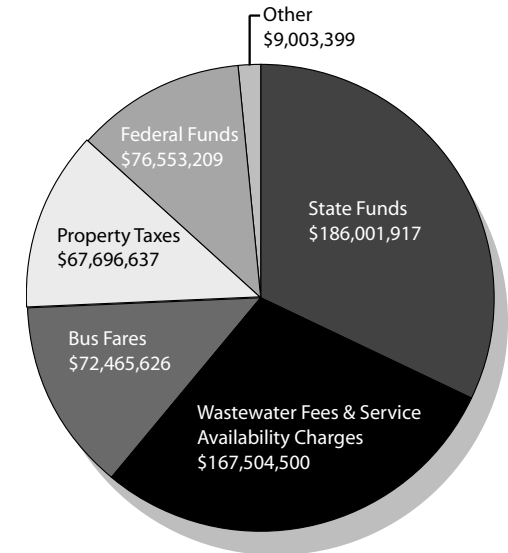
- 1) Providing and coordinating regional transit services and travel-demand management through Metro Transit, regional-route service and Metro Commuter Services; working with transit providers, transportation agencies and businesses to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality; and providing transportation service to people with disabilities through Metro Mobility.
- 2) Conserving and protecting vital natural resources, principally water, by collecting and treating wastewater, and by working with communities and coordinating watershed management to improve water quality and supply; and open space, helping to plan, acquire and develop a system of regional parks.
- 3) Providing affordable housing choices by working with communities and employers to increase the supply of affordable housing, and providing affordable housing opportunities to low- and moderate-income families through the Metro Housing and Redevelopment Authority.
- 4) Working with local communities to accommodate growth in a flexible, connected and efficient manner, encouraging the creation of neighborhoods that are walkable, convenient to transit, jobs, shops and services, incorporate green space, include affordable housing, and save on infrastructure costs.
- 5) Increasing efficiency of regional services and investments by maintaining a AAA credit rating, making efficient and effective capital improvements, and providing cost-competitive services.

### 2003 Budget Revenue (Amended)

Total =	\$579,225,288
Wastewater Fees and Service Availability Charges	\$167,504,500
Bus Fares	\$ 72,465,626
Property Taxes	\$ 67,696,637
Federal Funds	\$ 76,553,209
Other	\$ 9,003,399
State Funds	\$186,001,917

### 2003 Budget Expenditures (Amended)

Total =	\$568,965,476
Transportation	\$278,390,602
Environmental Services	\$100,562,776
Debt Service	\$102,217,644
Pass Through	\$ 71,070,868
Planning and Administration	\$ 16,723,586



## The Metropolitan Council

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TTY 651-291-0904

**Chair and Regional Administrator's Offices**

651-602-1554  
Fax 651-602-1358

**Environmental Services**

651-602-1005

**Metro Transit**

612-349-7400

**Metro Mobility Service Center**

651-602-1111  
TTY 651-221-9886  
Customer information for transit services for certified riders with disabilities

**Transit Information Center**

612-373-3333

**Metro Commuter Services**

651-602-1602  
Commuting options, employer trip-planning and travel-demand management

**Metro HRA**

651-602-1428  
Housing Choice vouchers for low-income families and individuals

**Regional Data Center**

651-602-1140  
Maps, CD-ROMs, reports and publications  
Email: data.center@metc.state.mn.us

**Public Comment Line**

651-602-1500  
24-hour voice mail for comments, ideas, suggestions

**Council Mission**

**The mission of the Metropolitan Council is to develop, in cooperation with local communities, a comprehensive regional planning framework, focusing on transportation, wastewater, parks and aviation systems, that guides the efficient growth of the metropolitan area. The Council operates transit and wastewater services and administers housing and other grant programs.**

[www.metrocouncil.org](http://www.metrocouncil.org) for regional information  
[www.metrotransit.org](http://www.metrotransit.org) for direct link to transit information  
[www.metrocommuterservices.org](http://www.metrocommuterservices.org) for direct link to employer travel-demand information

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