

annual report 04





For the Metropolitan Council and the Twin Cities region, 2004 was a year of great progress ... progress made possible through strong partnerships with local governments, state agencies, nonprofit organizations and other groups.

The most dramatic example was the opening of the region's first light rail transit line. The 12-mile, \$715 million Hiawatha line was completed after years of hard work by the Council, Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan Airports Commission and other partners.

It promises to generate not only new transit riders, but also a new commitment to building a true multi-modal transportation system for our growing seven-county area.

The construction of the Hiawatha line is but one product of the vital partnerships highlighted in this annual report.

During 2004, the Council worked closely with local governments as we completed our *2030 Regional Development Framework* and began updating our system plans for transportation, water resources and regional parks. These plans will help our region accommodate the nearly 1 million new residents projected by 2030 and ensure the most efficient use of our highways, sewers and other costly infrastructure.

Through our Livable Communities program, we awarded \$15.5 million in grants to more than 20 cities to help them clean up polluted lands, revitalize communities and expand the supply of affordable housing.

Working with 10 city and county park agencies, the Council continued to improve and expand a regional park system that serves more than 30 million visitors annually. Last year saw the designation of a new 882-acre regional park in Scott County, made possible by a partnership with that county and the Doyle family.

During the year, we met with each of the seven metro county boards, convened three meetings of our 14-member mayors' forum and brought together representatives of the adjacent counties to discuss issues of common concern. We also joined with the McKnight Foundation and the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute to sponsor a daylong conference on regional policy issues.

In addition to working collaboratively with our partners, this Council is committed to maximizing the efficiency of our regional systems and being accountable for results.

chair's letter



Toward these ends, the Council held our property taxes flat for 2004 and again for 2005. Taking advantage of low interest rates, we refinanced more than \$120 million in bonds in the last two years and saved \$7 million in interest. In tough bargaining with our transit union, we achieved significant savings in Metro Transit health care costs. And we continued to operate a wastewater collection and treatment system that regularly wins national environmental awards, while maintaining rates 23 percent below those of peer agencies.

The Council developed two sets of benchmarks – one to measure the progress of our region in achieving the goals of the *Framework* and another to measure the operational performance of our agency. We plan to share the results with the public on an annual basis.

In the coming years, members of our Council remain committed to working collaboratively with our partners, ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of our regional systems, and building greater accountability.

Peter Bell
Chair



Partnerships were critical to the successful planning and construction of Hiawatha light rail transit. Cutting the ribbon during opening day ceremonies in June 2004 were, from left: Metropolitan Council Chair Peter Bell; Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak (hidden); U.S. Representative Martin Sabo; Governor Tim Pawlenty; U.S. Senator Norm Coleman; Hennepin County Commissioner Peter McLaughlin; and Federal Transit Administrator Jenna Dorn.



©Bob Perzel

Ridership almost doubles forecasts

Customers rode light rail more than 2.2 million times during the first five months of operation (July through November), 91 percent greater than the forecasted ridership for the first phase. In November, ridership averaged 2,734 during the weekday morning rush period, the best indicator of the line's positive impact on traffic congestion. That figure was up 34 percent from July, the first full month of operation.

The line proved especially popular for large events at the Metrodome, including Twins and Vikings games.

Light rail makes long-awaited debut

The sleek yellow, black and silver cars speed alongside Hiawatha Avenue between downtown Minneapolis and the Mall of America, packed with commuters, shoppers and airport travelers. After years of hard work by the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, the City of Minneapolis, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and other regional partners, Hiawatha light rail transit began operating in 2004. By just about any measure, the line is a resounding success.

About 95,000 people turned out for opening weekend festivities in late June, when the line opened from downtown Minneapolis to Fort Snelling. Another 87,500 rode during the first weekend in December when the remainder of the 12-mile line to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America opened, nearly four weeks ahead of schedule. The Council's Metro Transit division operates the rail service.



Revenue high from fares

Rail service – like Metro Transit's bus operations – is producing enough revenue to cover about one third of its expenses. This is higher than almost all peer transit operations in the country, according to the National Transit Database. Fare compliance is also high – transit police report that more than 99 percent of passengers inspected produced proof of payment in November. Those who don't are subject to a \$180 fine.



Expanding options for commuters

In addition to Hiawatha light rail, several other major transit projects made significant progress in 2004. They include:

Northstar Commuter Rail. The Metropolitan Council approved \$2.5 million in regional funding for the Northstar commuter rail project between Minneapolis and Big Lake. The monies will help buy right-of-way within the metro area to connect the commuter rail line to Hiawatha light rail.

Council funds leveraged an additional \$10 million in federal matching funds that would have been lost had the state not used the money by Sept. 30. The Northstar Corridor Development Authority, with funds from Anoka, Hennepin and Sherburne Counties, contributed \$10 million toward the \$265 million, 40-mile project. Combined, the funds kept the project on track, avoiding a costly one-year delay and saving up to \$11 million in construction inflation costs.

Northwest Busway. The 22-mile bus rapid transit service will connect downtown Minneapolis with Rogers in northwest Hennepin County. Despite lack of passage of a bonding bill by the 2004 Legislature, work on the busway moved ahead, albeit slowly. Reconstruction of West Broadway Avenue in north Minneapolis continued, and reconstruction of County Road 81 in Robbinsdale will begin in 2005.

Cedar Avenue Busway. The Dakota County Regional Rail Authority, with funding from the Council, completed an alternatives analysis for the Cedar Avenue corridor in Spring 2004.

A proposed bus rapid transit line would connect Lakeville in the south to light rail in Bloomington.

Integrating bus and rail service. Metro Transit implemented updated bus routes and schedules in Sector 5 – the bus system's largest service area – which includes south Minneapolis, Richfield, Edina and Bloomington. Results included integrating bus and light rail service, and implementing daylong, high-speed, north-south service in the I-35W corridor. Restructuring is also being planned in Sector 8, the northwest portion of Metro Transit's service area.





Slowing the growth of congestion

Population growth poses big challenges for the Twin Cities region's transportation system. In 1990, according to a 2002 Texas Transportation Institute study, 30 percent of the area's freeway lanes were congested. By 2000, that figure was more than 50 percent. In the Council's 2004 survey of metro area residents, traffic congestion ranked as the No. 1 concern.

In 2004, the Council approved a new *Transportation Policy Plan* that contains policies and strategies designed to slow the growth in congestion and improve mobility. Among the plan's strategies:

- Invest in multi-modal transportation choices.
- Encourage mixed-use development along transportation corridors to better link housing, jobs and amenities.
- Encourage flexible work hours, telecommuting, ridesharing and transit ridership.
- Focus highway investments on maintaining and managing the 657-mile system, removing bottlenecks and adding capacity where possible.
- Build transit ridership by 50 percent, or 36 million riders per year, by 2020, and double ridership by 2030.

Assuming highway revenue estimates based on historic levels of state and federal funding, the plan proposes investments of \$6.2 billion – or \$283.5 million annually – through 2030 for maintaining and improving the highway system. It also advocates up to \$2 billion in additional investments in the transit system to achieve ridership goals.

Transportation Milestones

- The Council weathered a 44-day transit strike in February and March 2004. A settlement was reached that helped the Council slow the skyrocketing costs of health care benefits. As of October 2004, bus ridership lagged 6.6 percent behind October 2003, but was slowly rebuilding from the strike and from fare increases and service reductions implemented in 2003 as a result of cuts in transit funding from the state.
- In 2004 Hennepin County joined the list of 100 Twin Cities area companies and agencies offering the Council's MetroPass as an employee benefit. The passes provide unlimited rides on bus and rail.
- The Council approved a \$2.7 billion Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) for the seven-county region from 2005 to 2008. The TIP is a comprehensive program of local, regional and state highway and transit investments, bikeway and pedestrian enhancements and air quality improvement projects in the region proposed for federal funding.
- Metro Mobility provided 1.34 million rides to people with disabilities and maintained a trip denial rate of less than 1%.
- Council staff supported MnDOT in developing the region's first test of High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes to relieve congestion in the I-394 corridor. The lanes are projected to open in May 2005.

Regional plan gives communities flexibility

The Twin Cities metropolitan area is growing at a fast pace – and is expected to keep growing. The Metropolitan Council forecasts that by 2030 the region will grow to 3.6 million people, nearly 1.5 million households and 2.1 million jobs.

The Council works collaboratively with local governments and other regional partners to ensure that growth occurs in a manner that makes the best use of public investments in transportation, wastewater treatment, airports and parks. The Council's *2030 Regional Development Framework*, adopted in 2004, recognizes that different communities have different opportunities, aspirations and needs. But it also is grounded in the belief that all communities have a shared responsibility to help accommodate the region's growth, use market forces to help expand housing choices, and ensure connected, efficient land-use patterns.

The *Framework* establishes strategies around four major policies:

- Accommodate growth in a flexible, connected manner

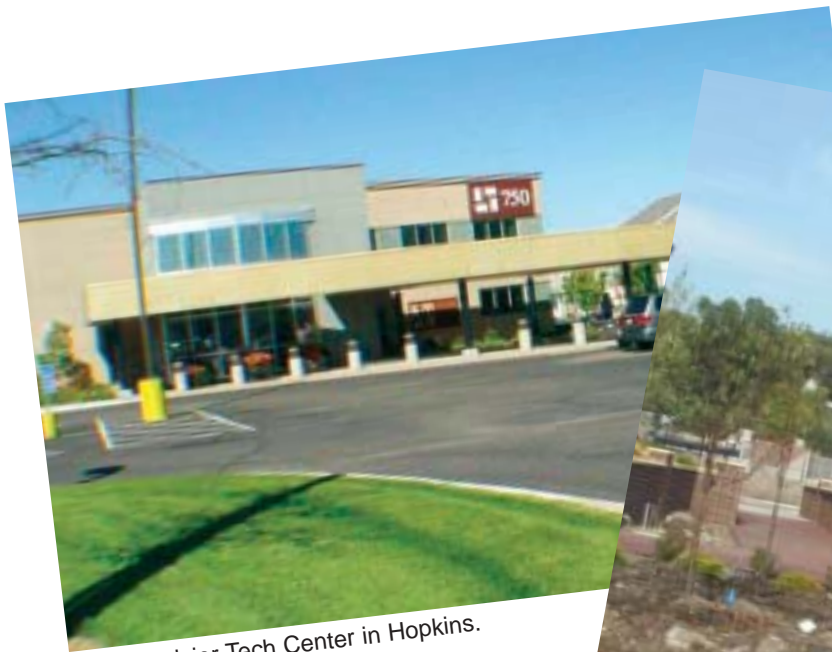
- Slow the growth in traffic congestion and improve mobility
- Encourage housing choices
- Conserve, protect and enhance the region's vital natural resources

As required by Minnesota law, the Council in 2004 began updating its regional system plans to reflect the new directions in the *Framework*. In 2004 the Council adopted an updated *Transportation Policy Plan* (see page 6). An updated draft *Water Resources Management Policy Plan* was adopted for public hearing, scheduled for February 2005. In April, the Council will hold a public hearing on an updated draft *Recreation Open Space Policy Plan* (see page 14). Each plan was developed through a proactive process to solicit input from key stakeholders and the public.

Local governments are required by state law to review and update, as needed, their local comprehensive plans at least once every 10 years. The plans must be consistent with regional policies set forth in the *Framework* and system plans. The next updates must be submitted to the Council by 2008.



Developers Bill Beard, center, and Paul Gamst, right, of The Beard Group, Inc., with Hopkins Mayor Gene Maxwell outside the Excelsior Tech Center. The Beard Group designed and developed the project.



The Excelsior Tech Center in Hopkins.



East River Mews, in Minneapolis.

Growth Milestones

- The Metropolitan Council received an "Outstanding Planning Award" from the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association (MnAPA) for the *2030 Regional Development Framework*. According to the MnAPA, the *Framework* was selected because it is a well-developed and organized plan, with an excellent opportunity for effective implementation given the strong involvement with planners at various levels of government and inclusion of strong regional benchmarks.
- The Minnesota Supreme Court upheld the authority of the Council to require changes in local comprehensive plans that are inconsistent with metropolitan system plans. The Council and the City of Lake Elmo continued discussions in late 2004 to achieve changes in Lake Elmo's comprehensive plan to best balance local needs and regional interests.
- The Council approved \$2.7 million in Livable Communities grants for eight projects to clean up polluted land for redevelopment in five metropolitan area communities. The grants will help to clean up nearly 100 acres, with resulting redevelopment creating more than 4,000 new jobs and increasing the net tax capacity by nearly \$5.7 million. Additional grant awards using 2004 funds in the Tax Base Revitalization Account as well as the Livable Communities Demonstration Account are expected to be made in January 2005.
- The Council joined with the Humphrey Institute and the McKnight Foundation to hold a regional policy conference attended by about 150 people – many of them local officials – to seek consensus on the challenges facing the growing region.

Plant upgrades produce cleaner air and water

Years of planning and investments to upgrade metro-area wastewater treatment plants are producing big payoffs in environmental benefits for the region.

In late 2004, a new set of incinerators came on line at the Metro Plant in St. Paul, the region's largest wastewater treatment facility and one of the largest in the nation. The incinerators and related solids dewatering equipment are significantly reducing odors, air pollutants, and fuel costs – the latter expected to drop from \$2.4 million in 2004 to less than \$400,000 in 2005. In addition, steam generated by heat recovered from the incineration process produces enough electricity to meet 25 percent of the plant's energy needs.

Cleaner air is not the only benefit of the Metropolitan Council's investments. The Mississippi River is cleaner and healthier as a result of Metro Plant improvements to reduce the amount of phosphorus in wastewater effluent discharged into the river.

Since 1993, the Council has spent nearly \$50 million to reduce the plant's discharge of phosphorus, which in excessive amounts promotes algae growth and degrades water quality. In 2004 phosphorus discharge was reduced by 75 percent as new equipment and operating techniques were brought on line. That translates into an additional 1,000 tons per year of phosphorus removal.



The Council's other regional treatment plants also have significantly reduced their phosphorus discharges. The second- and third-largest plants in the system – Blue Lake and Seneca, both on the Minnesota River – cut their phosphorus discharge by 60 percent since 1996. Smaller plants are already meeting target discharges or are installing equipment to achieve them by 2010.

While successful point-source pollution control is important, it is only one part of the equation. Reducing phosphorus and other pollutants from diffuse urban and agricultural sources – known as "nonpoint-source pollution" – will continue to be a big challenge in coming decades.

The Council recently completed a five-year, \$7.5 million grant program to fund dozens of smaller projects to reduce phosphorus and other pollutants from surface runoff into area waters, but precise impacts won't be known for years.

The Council partners with numerous local governments, watershed organizations and state and federal agencies to monitor the quality of the region's lakes, streams and rivers. The Council also provides local governments with technical assistance to institute best management practices to reduce nonpoint-source pollution.



Rain gardens on Hugo city property help to filter parking lot and road runoff.

Council receives national kudos

The Metropolitan Council's Environmental Services Division (MCES) in 2004 received "Excellence in Management Recognition" from the national Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies. MCES was selected for the honor for its successful implementation of progressive management initiatives over a period of several years.

Key among the efforts was an \$80 million reduction in costs to MCES customer communities from 2000 to 2002, achieved through operational changes and workforce efficiencies. Further savings since then in labor, chemical, utility and debt-service costs have helped MCES keep wastewater rates 23 percent below the national average for similar-sized wastewater utilities.


The Council's Seneca Wastewater Treatment Plant also earned an award for Excellence in Operation and Maintenance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, after being judged the second best large advanced plant in EPA's Great Lakes region.

Mercury reduction

The Council in 2004 continued its partnership with the Minnesota Dental Association to implement a voluntary program in which dental offices can more effectively filter mercury discharges from their wastewater before it enters the wastewater collection system. Seventy-eight percent of eligible offices had committed to the program by September 2004. The partnership hopes to achieve full participation in 2005.

protecting the environment



A scenic view of a riverbank. A large, mature tree with a thick trunk stands prominently on the left side of the bank. The ground is covered in lush green grass and other vegetation. The river flows from the right side of the frame towards the center, with some fallen branches in the water. The background shows more trees and a clear sky, suggesting a bright, sunny day.

Environment Milestones

- The Council approved new policies and criteria for the Council's involvement in acquiring, operating or improving wastewater treatment plants in small towns in rural areas in the region that want Council participation, as well as growth. The Council also voted to extend regional sewer service farther into the southern metro area, starting with Elko-New Market.
- The Council accepted recommendations from its Infiltration and Inflow Task Force to reduce the amount of clear water that makes its way into the wastewater treatment system, especially during heavy rainfalls. The extra water consumes capacity in the wastewater system reserved for future growth. The Council incorporated the recommendations into the draft of its updated Water Resources Management Policy Plan, which will be the subject of public hearings in early 2005.
- The Council began using ultra-low-sulfur diesel fuel in nearly half of Metro Transit's bus fleet in order to improve air quality and further the Governor's clean-air strategy. All buses will use the fuel by 2006.
- Metro Transit put into service three hybrid-electric buses, and the Governor directed the Council to add another 20 by 2008.
- The Council appointed a Natural Resources Task Force to develop a coordinated strategy to protect regionally important natural areas and wildlife corridors.

Regional park system adds jewel

Looking far into the future, the Metropolitan Council in 2004 designated a new 882-acre regional park deep in Scott County. Oak forest, prairie and wetland habitats and a 115-acre lake comprise Doyle-Kennefick Regional Park, the newest addition to the highly valued regional park system.

For generations the land had been in the Doyle and Kennefick families. Landowner Frances Doyle, who died in 2003, wanted his 400-acre farm set aside for public use. Scott County partnered with the Council to acquire the land. Funds from the county, the Council and the state made the acquisition possible.

Over time, as 367 acres of adjacent land become available for purchase, more land will be added to the Doyle parcel.

The park won't be open to the public for at least 10 years, because of the additional land acquisitions and funding needed to finance park development. By 2030, the park is expected to serve 50,000 households across the county, as well as the entire region.

"Previous generations succeeded in establishing what has become a world-renowned park system," said Council Chair Peter Bell. "Now it's our turn to identify and preserve the last best places in our region for future generations."

The regional park system features 74 parks, trails and special recreation features. It received an estimated 30.5 million visits in 2003.



The spray pool at Bunker Hills Regional Park in Anoka County.

Parks Milestones

- The Council approved six grants totaling \$1.1 million to help park agencies acquire 217 acres for regional parks.
- The Council, working with the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, began drafting an update of its regional parks policy plan. The Council sought input from park visitors and citizens through internet and written surveys, and also held special outreach meetings with teens and racial/ethnic minority groups. An updated policy plan will be presented for public hearing in April 2005.
- The Council distributed \$3.2 million in state funds to regional park implementing agencies for operating and maintaining the park system. The Council also distributed lottery proceeds on a monthly basis to park agencies for park maintenance; \$4.15 million was allotted for fiscal year 2005. Park operations and maintenance are funded primarily through local property taxes and user fees.



Affordable housing promotes a healthy region

Affordable housing is fundamental to a strong economy and a healthy region. A 2003 study commissioned by the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the Family Housing Fund, in partnership with the Metropolitan Council, documented the growing need for housing affordable to families earning

less than the area median income. Without affordable housing, jobs go unfilled and essential workers – like teachers, police and nursing aides – can't afford to live near their workplaces. Longer commutes add to traffic congestion.

Council maintains full use of housing vouchers

The Metropolitan Council's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA) weathered changes in the federal funding formula for the Section 8 Housing Choice voucher program in 2004 without cutting any recipients.

Responding to shrinking federal funding, the Council lowered the maximum subsidy it pays to rental property owners who participate in the Section 8 program. It also told property owners that Metro HRA cannot approve any rent increases at least until September 2005.

The HRA achieved full use of its available Section 8 vouchers, assisting an average of 6,600 households monthly. Rental assistance payments were made to more than 1,400 property owners, injecting \$51.1 million annually of federal, state and local funds into the regional economy. In 2004 the program's waiting list equaled the number of people served by the program – about 6,600 eligible households.

Housing Milestones

- The Council completed rehabilitation of 150 affordable rental homes it purchased for the Family Affordable Housing Program. The Council partners with 11 suburban communities to provide affordable rental housing opportunities to families on the Council's and the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority's waiting lists. A private management firm manages the properties for the Council.
- The Council awarded a total of almost \$1.9 million to Minneapolis, St. Paul and 11 suburban communities to support affordable housing initiatives. The funds will assist in the development of 180 new rental units affordable to lower income households and 123 affordable ownership units. The grants, made from the Local Housing Incentives Account of the Livable Communities program, will leverage an additional \$53 million in total development investments.
- The Council awarded almost \$400,000 in two grants to Minneapolis and St. Paul to assist in the development of 22 new affordable townhomes and condominiums and 103 new rental units, including 82 affordable to households with lower than median income. The units are part of developments that feature largely market-rate units. The grants, from the Inclusionary Housing Account of the Livable Communities program, will leverage an additional \$19 million in total development investments. The Council partners with the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the Family Housing Fund to award the funds from the accounts.

The Council recognizes that durable and well-maintained housing is important to community tax base, livability, businesses and the region as a whole, and supports affordable housing in the region through various programs and initiatives.



Lakeville Mayor Robert D. Johnson, left, and Dakota County Community Development Agency Director Mark Ulfers stand at the site of the Prairie Crossing Townhomes in Lakeville.

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For more information about the Metropolitan Council, its members and their districts, see the Council's Web site at www.metrocouncil.org.

*Resigned effective Dec. 31, 2004

Metropolitan Council Core Services

The Metropolitan Council serves the public in five principal areas:

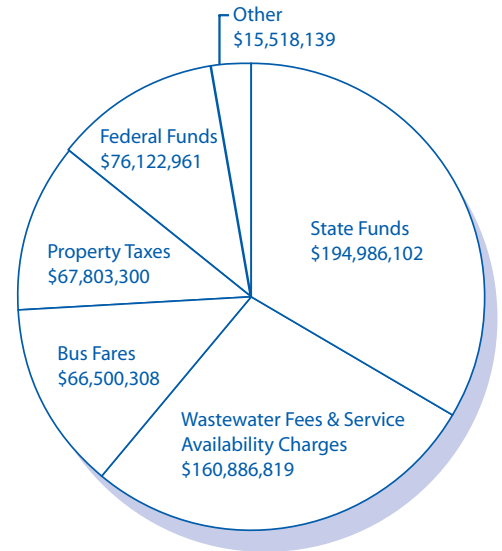
- 1) Providing and coordinating regional transit services and travel-demand management through Metro Transit, regional-route service and Metro Commuter Services; working with transit providers, transportation agencies and businesses to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality; and providing 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.

2004 Budget Overview

2004 Budget Revenue (Amended)

Total = \$581,817,629*

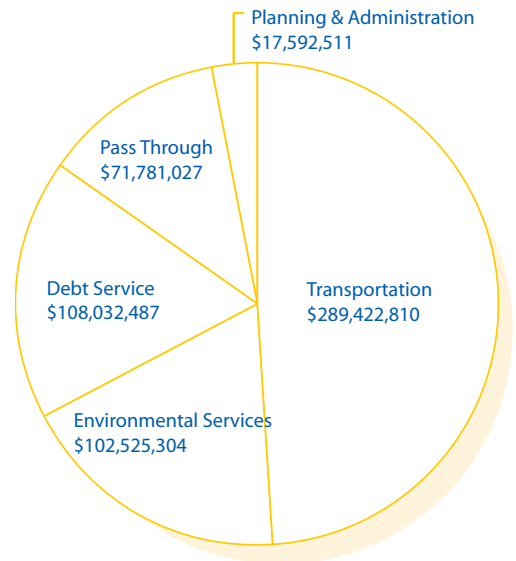
Wastewater Fees and Service Availability Charges	\$160,886,819
Bus Fares	\$ 66,500,308
Property Taxes	\$ 67,803,300
Federal Funds	\$ 76,122,961
Other	\$ 15,518,139
State Funds	\$194,986,102



2004 Budget Expenditures (Amended)

Total = \$589,354,139

Transportation	\$289,422,810
Environmental Services	\$102,525,304
Debt Service	\$108,032,487
Pass Through	\$ 71,781,027
Planning and Administration	\$ 17,592,511



*Revenues and expenditures for pass-through and debt-service funds rarely match on an annual basis. In 2004, the Council used reserves to make up the difference in revenues and expenditures.

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.

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Metro Commuter Services

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Metro HRA

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www.metrotransit.org for direct link to transit information

www.metrocommuterservices.org for direct link to employer travel-demand information



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