

# Executive Summary for the Metro Transit Bus Service Improvement Plan

## Introduction

Effective bus service is a critical part of a successful transit system in the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Bus services include local routes that stop every 1/8<sup>th</sup> to ¼ mile, bus rapid transit (BRT) that travels in mixed traffic and serves stops spaced farther apart and commuter express routes that operate primarily during traditional morning and evening rush hours, serving fewer stops.

The *Metro Transit Service Improvement Plan* (SIP) builds on the existing bus network and identifies opportunities to add new routes and increase the frequency and span of service on existing routes through the year 2030. The SIP goals, projects and priorities were developed using four primary resources – *Thrive MSP 2040* outcomes and principles, *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* (TPP) goals and objectives, transit planning fundamentals and significant public input. Goals include transportation system stewardship, safety and security, access to destinations, a competitive economy, healthy environment and leveraging transportation investment to guide land use.

The SIP proposes new or improved local and express bus services within the Metro Transit service area and includes planned but unfunded arterial BRT services. Commuter rail, light rail and highway BRT improvements are not included in the SIP because the region's long-range plan for expanding the region's network of transitways is described in the TPP. However, connecting local bus service improvements that support these projects are included. The SIP is not intended to be a complete transit improvement or investment plan, but is a frames improvements and priorities as they stand today. It does not affect cities outside of Metro Transit's service area and does not include associated capital investments (vehicles, customer and support facilities, technology enhancements, etc.).

Metro Transit is the largest of five public transit providers in the Twin Cities region. The TPP requires each transit provider to develop its own SIP, then work together to combine projects in the initial years of each SIP into the Regional Service Improvement Plan (RSIP). The RSIP is a four- to five-year plan that guides bus service improvements for all transit providers in the region, and will be updated in 2015.

## Stakeholder and Public Engagement

### Early Outreach

In addition to numerous customer route improvement ideas received every day through Metro Transit Customer Relations, bus operators and transit planners, Metro Transit gathered early stakeholder and public input in developing service improvements that meet community transit needs. Workshops in late 2013 brought stakeholders together to identify and prioritize community travel desires. In addition, a survey asked respondents to identify bus service characteristics that encourage them to ride transit more often, point out their priorities for bus service and how they would invest in transit enhancements if additional funding were available. Stakeholders and the public submitted nearly 4,000 survey

responses. In seeking survey responses, Metro Transit staff gave special attention to gathering thoughts from traditionally under-represented populations. Key survey feedback includes:

- Nearly unanimous support for bus service expansion to provide service for people who rely on transit. In general, there was a preference for strengthening service within existing coverage areas over expansion of service to areas of the region currently not served by transit.
- A significant majority of respondents prefer to use transit as much as possible and would ride more often if the transit network were improved.
- When driving is an option for the customer, the biggest mode choice factor is the difference in travel time between driving and transit. Categories related to auto use, such as the cost and availability of parking and the price of fuel also were important factors.

### Public Comment Period

In November 2014 Metro Transit hosted a public comment period on the Draft SIP. There were several ways for customers, community-based organizations, elected officials and other stakeholders to learn about the specific improvements in the Plan:

- Project website: [metrotransit.org/sip](http://metrotransit.org/sip)
- Community meetings and public hearing: Metro Transit hosted host five community meetings and one public hearing. 78 people attended the meetings.
- Information at select libraries, on buses, in *Connect* (Metro Transit customer newsletter), on YouTube and social media, in press releases
- Metro Transit’s Community Outreach Coordinator contacted community-based organizations

Metro Transit received 176 unique contacts from individuals and organizations with nearly 600 suggestions on bus service improvements. The comments received by agency staff covered a wide range of Draft Plan elements from route-specific to general remarks about the transit network as a whole. There were many comments supporting the overall service improvement project and reiterating the importance of expanding transit as the region continues to grow and change.

COMMENT TYPE	# COMMENTS
New Service Improvement Idea	216
Supporting Service Improvement Idea in Draft	161
Modified Service Improvement Idea in Draft	69
General – Not Specific to Service Improvement Planning	104

- The most popular category of feedback, with 225 comments, related to the frequency and hours of service on existing bus routes.
- Approximately 125 comments focused on routing and bus service structure.
- About 100 comments were related to improving service coverage to areas without service or with limited service and reverse commute routes (routes bringing urban residents to suburban jobs).

- Nearly 70 comments related to the SIP planning process and 50 comments were submitted about the importance of improving travel time.

The Draft SIP was modified based on feedback received during the comment period.

## Guiding Principles

Metro Transit combined the policy direction with the goals and transit values identified through the workshops and survey, and identified seven principles to guide the SIP development process:

- Maximize ridership growth
- Emphasize high productivity and/or low-subsidy projects
- Provide faster travel time
- Enhance the connectivity of the transit system
- Support transit-friendly land use and design
- Expand service for off-peak and non-work trip purposes
- Improve transit equity

## Project Identification Methodology

Metro Transit used several sources of ideas for potential bus service improvements. Sources included survey responses, travel demand patterns from the survey's origin-destination data, ideas from TPP, Thrive MSP 2040 and transitway project outreach, customer requests submitted to Metro Transit Customer Relations and the existing RSIP. Staff ideas, including input from Transit Information Center representatives, and feedback from other regional planning projects (Thrive MSP 2040, TPP, sector studies, etc.) were also considered.

Metro Transit staff distilled these ideas into specific bus route improvements, projected the resources needed to implement each improvement (e.g., service hours, peak buses), and estimated the new ridership each improvement could be expected to generate.

The process for selecting corridors for review as potential Arterial BRT projects is outlined in Metro Transit's Arterial Transitway Corridors Study (ATCS), which was done in 2011-2012. More information about ATCS, including project reports and updates, is available at [www.metrotransit.org/previous-arterial-BRT-studies](http://www.metrotransit.org/previous-arterial-BRT-studies)

## Types of Service Improvements

Projects are identified in three phases of implementation based on managing or preserving loading standards, existing or anticipated land use patterns and coordination with transitway project implementation: 2015-2017, 2018-2020 or 2021-2030. Five types of bus service improvements were identified: new coverage, wider span of service, better frequency of service, faster travel time and reverse commute service. Reverse commute projects connect residents in Minneapolis or St. Paul with jobs in suburban communities. Many of the proposed improvements satisfy multiple improvement categories.

## Evaluation Criteria

Regional policy identifies three main categories of evaluation criteria for prioritizing bus service improvements. Together, these evaluation criteria emphasize bus service productivity, ensure social equity and provide geographic value in a balanced manner.

Productivity criteria demonstrate the ridership potential of service improvements using land use and density factors. The criteria considered were existing population and jobs, Job Concentrations served as identified in Thrive MSP 2040, riders per in-service hour, subsidy per passenger and intersection density. Productivity criteria represent 50 percent of the total points available in the evaluation process.

Social equity criteria evaluate how well improvements serve people who rely on transit. The criteria considered were number of jobs served that pay less than \$40,000 annually, the number of vehicles available compared to the population 16 and older, and routes serving low-income populations, people of color and people with disabilities. Equity criteria account for 25 percent of the evaluation points.

System connectivity criteria establish how well projects would improve connections and service throughout the Metro Transit service area. Criteria considered were the number of intersecting transit routes, people served by a new route or route extension, key destinations, Educational Institutions served as identified in Thrive MSP 2040 and off-peak, span of service and/or reverse commute improvements. System connectivity criteria represent 25 percent of the evaluation points.

The evaluation criteria, which defines how each criterion is calculated, along with the scoring thresholds and weight of each measure are included in the appendix.

The eleven ABRT projects included in the SIP were not reviewed using these criteria, because they were previously evaluated as part of the ATCS project.

## Screening Results

The SIP presents the results from screening 185 proposed bus service improvements in the Metro Transit service area. Based on the evaluation results, each proposed improvement has been ranked High, Medium or Low. Proposals earning at least 75 percent of the points are ranked High; those earning at least 55 percent of the points rank Medium. The screening results identify 50 High projects and 87 Medium projects, which will have priority for implementation based on available resources.

Forty-eight (48) projects scored Low. While not recommended for implementation at this time, these projects may be evaluated in the future when 2040 forecasts for population, households and jobs have been adopted by local communities through updated local comprehensive plans, or new land use developments are proposed.

These figures do not include the eleven ABRT projects, which were not ranked High, Medium or Low as part of this project. They were previously ranked as part of the ATCS project.

## Summary of SIP

Of the 137 projects that scored High or Medium and are the priority for implementation, 57 projects expand geographic coverage and improve network connectivity, 70 improve frequency on existing routes and 52 include service that starts earlier in the morning and/or operates later into the night. There are also 7 reverse commute projects.

Improvements are planned across all transit route classifications, as defined in the 2040 TPP:

- 56 projects on urban core routes, which are the basic framework of the all-day bus network, providing people with essential connections to major activity centers and transitways.
- 35 projects on commuter express routes. Commuter and express routes are designed primarily to bring people from urban and suburban residential areas to jobs in the region's major employment areas, focusing on the most common work start and end times.
- 28 projects on suburban local routes. These routes provide access to the transit network across large portions of the lower-density portions of the transit service area.
- 18 projects on urban supporting routes, which serve urban areas on crosstown corridors that typically do not connect to a major regional center, such as one of the downtowns. They are designed to complete the grid of urban bus routes and facilitate connections.

## SIP Resources

Table 1 shows the projects prioritized for implementation (projects scoring a High or Medium and the Arterial BRT projects) would require an additional \$98.3 million annually by 2030, which is an increase of 30 percent over the 2015 Metro Transit bus operating budget. These projects will generate approximately 29 million new rides, an increase of 43 percent from 68 million bus rides in 2014. This planned growth would occur mostly during the first six years of the SIP timeframe, since most of the projects are in Phase I or II. The average subsidy per passenger for these projects would be \$2.35, which is favorable and will contribute to favorable overall route subsidies.

<b>Additional Annual Service Hours</b>	<b>870,000</b>
<b>Additional Peak Buses</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>New Annual Passengers</b>	<b>29 Million</b>
<b>Additional Annual Operating Cost (\$2015)</b>	<b>\$98.3 Million</b>
<b>Additional Annual Subsidy (\$2015)</b>	<b>\$67.3 Million</b>
<b>Subsidy per Passenger for Improvements (\$2015)</b>	<b>\$2.35</b>

The operating costs in the table above include fuel and operators and other support staff but does not include capital costs such as purchasing vehicles or expanding bus support facilities to accommodate this additional service. It also does not account for a standard spare ratio of 18 percent or the service changes these projects may predicate for complementary services such as Transit Link or Metro Mobility. Projects that propose all-day service in a community currently served only during rush hours, or not at all, as well as projects broadening the span of service, may have impacts on these dial-a-ride services.

### **Next Steps**

The SIP will be updated every four to five years to reflect changing demographics, new development patterns and travel demand patterns. The next step towards implementation of the service improvements outlined in the SIP is to secure the additional operating funds needed.