

# Executive Summary for the Draft 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 more frequently, bus rapid transit in mixed traffic that stops less frequently (arterial BRT), and commuter express routes that operate primarily during traditional morning and evening rush hours, making fewer stops.

The Draft *Metro Transit Service Improvement Plan* (Draft 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 out to the year 2030. The plan combines *Thrive MSP 2040* outcomes and principles, *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* goals and objectives, transit planning fundamentals and significant public input to guide service improvement priorities that require additional operating funds. Goals include transportation system stewardship, safety and security, access to destinations, competitive economy, healthy environment and leveraging transportation investment to guide land use. Improved bus services would be operated by Metro Transit or by private providers under contract to the Metropolitan Council.

The Draft SIP proposes new or improved local and express bus services within the Metro Transit service area and summarizes planned but unfunded arterial BRT services. Arterial BRT services are included in the plan since sources for the additional operating funds have not been identified. Commuter rail, light rail and highway BRT improvements are not included in the Draft SIP because the region's long-range plan for expanding the region's network of transitways is described in the Transportation Policy Plan (TPP). However, connecting local bus service improvements supporting these projects are included. The Draft SIP is not intended to be a complete transit improvement or investment plan. It does not include 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.

## Early Stakeholder and Public Engagement

Metro Transit gathered early stakeholder and public input in developing service improvements that meet community transit needs. Workshops in late 2013 brought community leaders 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 is available. Stakeholders and the public submitted nearly 4,000 survey responses. When seeking survey responses, Metro Transit staff

gave special attention to gathering thoughts from traditionally under-represented populations. Key feedback from the survey includes:

- Nearly unanimous support for bus service expansion providing service for people who rely on transit. In general, there was a desire for a strengthening of service within existing coverage areas over expansion of service to areas of the region currently not served with 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.

## **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 equitably

## **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. Professional staff ideas, including input from Transit Information Center representatives, and feedback from other regional planning projects (Thrive MSP 2040, TPP, sector studies) 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.

## **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 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 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 improve connections and service throughout the Metro Transit service area. Criteria 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.

Table 1 identifies the evaluation criteria, and defines how each criterion is calculated, the scoring thresholds and weight of each measure.

## Initial Screening Results

The Draft SIP presents the results from screening 165 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 initial screening results identify 41 High projects and 81 Medium projects, which will have priority for implementation based on available resources.

Forty-three (43) 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.

Figure 1 shows all of the proposed improvements by rank. Table 2 is a project description summary, including a brief description of each project and its overall rank. Table 3 shows the resources and ridership details of each project, its implementation phase and service improvement category. Table 4 shows how each project scored on each of the individual evaluation measures.

## Summary of Draft SIP

Of the 122 projects that scored High or Medium and are the priority for implementation, 77 projects expand geographic coverage and improve network connectivity, 71 improve frequency on existing routes, and 62 include service that starts earlier in the morning and/or operates later into the night. There are also 14 reverse commute projects.

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

- 50 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.
- 33 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.
- 27 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.
- 14 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.

Eleven arterial BRT projects are also in the Draft SIP but are not counted in the 122 evaluated projects (the A line already has secured operating funds). Figure 2 shows the projects in the Draft SIP by improvement purpose and Figure 3 illustrates projects according to route classification.

## Draft SIP Resources

Table 5 shows the “high and medium” projects in the Draft SIP account for an additional \$75.5 million annually by 2030, which is an increase of 33 percent over the 2015 Metro Transit bus operating budget, and a 27 percent increase by 2025. These projects will generate approximately 16 million new rides, which is an increase of 23 percent from 70 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 is \$3.48, which is favorable compared to the existing Metro Transit average subsidy per passenger of \$3.35-\$5.94, depending on route classification.

**Table 5 Draft SIP Resources**

	Draft SIP	Arterial BRT	Total
<b>Total Service Hours</b>	<b>665,000</b>	<b>269,500</b>	<b>935,000</b>
<b>Additional Buses</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>New Passengers</b>	<b>16.2 Million</b>	<b>12.7 Million</b>	<b>28.9 Million</b>
<b>Total Cost (2014\$)</b>	<b>\$75.5 Million</b>	<b>\$30.5 Million</b>	<b>\$106 Million</b>

<b>Total Subsidy</b>	<b>\$56.4 Million</b>	<b>\$18.8 Million</b>	<b>\$75.1 Million</b>
<b>Subsidy Per Passenger</b>	<b>\$3.48</b>	<b>\$1.48</b>	<b>\$2.60</b>

The operating costs in Table above include fuel, 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 yield for complementary services such as Transit Link or Metro Mobility. Projects that propose all-day service in a community currently served only during peak periods, or not at all, as well as projects broadening the span of service, may have impacts on these dial-a-ride services.

### Next Steps

Metro Transit is hosting a public comment period on the Draft SIP Nov. 1-30, 2014. There are 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 will host five community meetings and one public hearing between Nov. 5 and 18. Times, dates and locations are attached.
- Information about the plan will be available at select libraries, on YouTube and social media, in *Connect* (Metro Transit customer newsletter), press releases to local media and promotional materials on buses
- Metro Transit’s Community Outreach Coordinator is contacting community-based organizations

There are several ways to comment about the Draft SIP: attend a meeting, leave a voicemail at 651-602-1500, send an email to [sip@metrotransit.org](mailto:sip@metrotransit.org), or fill out a postage-paid comment card. Comments can also be sent via mail to Metro Transit Service Development, 560 6th Avenue North, Minneapolis, MN 55411. The deadline for comments is Nov. 30, 2014.

Staff also will perform a Service Equity Analysis as outlined in Title VI. Proposed improvements will be reviewed to make sure that low-income populations and people of color are sharing equitably in the benefits of service improvements.

The Draft SIP will be modified based on feedback received during the comment period. The Met Council will be asked to approve the Final SIP in early 2015. The SIP will be updated every 4-5 years to reflect changing demographics, new development patterns and travel demand patterns.