REGIONAL TRANSITWAY GUIDELINES

LOCAL PLANNING HANDBOOK

The purpose of the Regional Transitway Guidelines is to provide technical guidance, based in best practices, that supports the development and operation of transitways in a way that is consistent, equitable, and efficient, and delivers an effective, integrated, and user-friendly transit system throughout the Twin Cities region.

Transit partners across the region use these guidelines including counties, cities, consultants, and transit providers to ensure that the transitway system that this region develops appears seamlessly designed to the transit user. This is particularly important because this region has a growing transitway system, multiple agencies involved in its implementation, new modes like dedicated bus rapid transit being introduced, and a need to align transit and land use planning to ensure sustainable communities and development patterns. The guidelines currently address light rail, commuter rail, highway bus rapid transit, and arterial bus rapid transit, but other modes could be added as the region explores their implementation.

THE GUIDELINES AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANS

Communities can use the Regional Transitway Guidelines to support their efforts to update or amend their comprehensive plans. The guidelines provide information on transitways and how they integrate into a community's transportation system to serve the needs of their residents. Each section of the Guidelines addresses a different topic that may impact a community's Comprehensive Plan or the implementation of that plan. The following is a description of how the different Guidelines sections may relate to Comprehensive Plans:

Service Levels and Station Area Density and Activity

Transitways typically provide higher levels of service and need existing or planned density to make that high service level cost-effective and provide the region with a good return on investment. The 2050 Regional Development Guide, Imagine 2050, outlines the densities required to support the levels of service on corridors by transitway type (light rail, bus rapid transit, etc.). In addition to residential density, station areas should also have a high concentration of destinations such as density of jobs, major education facilities, and walkable entertainment and service districts to support greater overall activity levels. (provide link to typical service levels info).

Station Site Selection

Communities should be aware of the factors transit agencies consider when selecting transitway station sites. Two are particularly relevant to community comprehensive plans: 1) balancing travel time and access to transit and 2) access to and from stations for transit vehicles and riders. Communities should work with their transit provider when considering distances between planned areas of more intensive uses and centers of activity and multimodal access in station areas.

More stations along a line will lead to slower travel times but greater access (and vice versa). However, slower travel times are less competitive with driving and can lead to fewer people choosing to use a transitway over driving. Conversely, fewer stations limits the number of people that can potentially access the service.

For all transitway modes, access to the station for transit vehicles and customers is a primary factor in siting an individual station. It is critical to ensure that customers and transit vehicles, including those specific to the mode and those for connecting transfers, have safe and convenient access to the station.

Station and Support Facility Design

All transitway stations must serve people arriving or leaving by foot, in wheelchairs, on bicycles, and being dropped-off or picked-up by a car. All transitway stations must be ADA compliant. Some stations may also provide access for transit transfers, transit layover, and/or park-and-ride locations but the provision of additional facilities depends on the considerations listed above. Supporting multi-modal access to transitway stations is especially important for communities to keep in mind when developing local plans, the access for connecting modes is typically a local responsibility that will not be built through a transitway project's scope and limited budget.

Runningway Guidelines

Transitway runningways may include and will at least intersect the local road system and require traffic coordination. Wherever a runningway is dedicated to transit, it can have a transformative effect on the local transportation network and also present opportunities to change such things as pedestrian and bicycle access, streetscape design, and intensity of uses that surround the transit facilities. If a transitway runs in mixed-traffic, there are transit advantages that communities can support, such as curb bump-outs and optimized traffic light timing.

Vehicle Guidelines

Communities with transitways should be aware of the considerations that go into vehicle decision-making. Vehicle design significantly impacts the design of stations, including the amount of space needed to accommodate the vehicles and access and egress for vehicles.

Technology and Customer Information Guidelines

Communities may need to plan for integration for traffic control systems and should be aware of the other technology considerations in transitways. This also includes the relationship between access and movement within and around stations that relates to where and how customer information is provided.

Identity and Branding Guidelines

Identity and branding of the transitways system takes into account the "brand promise" of transitways that many of the other guidelines discuss. The guidelines establish the parameters for how the features of transitways relate to the branding of the system and the transitway lines. Branding is key to communicate the expected type and level of transitway service to the public. These considerations can help communities understand how transit customers might view transitways and stations in their community as significant and requiring important coordination in adjacent areas. Communities may also be interested in the station naming criteria that outline the importance of recognizable, distinct, and succinct station names.

Project Development, Leadership, and Oversight Guidelines

It is important for communities to understand the process, relationships, and responsibilities of transitway project partners because they will be integrally involved in the development of a transitway project. This is especially important since projects may change lead agencies throughout the process.

UPDATING GUIDELINES

The Guidelines were developed in collaboration with regional partners that included counties, cities, transit providers, and consultants. While there are no large systematic updates of the guidelines identified as a future work program item, given their basis in best practices, the Council is always open to interim suggestions for improving the Guidelines if best practices or other new information become available. It is also important to consider that these are Guidelines to aid in decision making and not requirements or rules.

ACCESSING THE GUIDELINES

The Regional Transitway Guidelines are summarized in the TPP's Transit Investment Plan and detailed in depth in the Regional Transitway Guidelines document. Both are available on the Council's website:

2050 Transportation Policy Plan – Transit Investment Plan Chapter

Regional Transitway Guidelines - Metropolitan Council

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