

TRANSIT PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Regional transit providers must weigh the potential benefits of transit investments against the costs, to best manage the system to be cost-effective, efficient, and achieve the region's policy goals. A well-designed transit network is a vital ingredient to the success of our region and has many benefits for our communities:

- It supports the regional economy by providing convenient access to jobs, education, shopping and other activities.
- It provides access to the regional economy and civic life for those who do not have the option to drive due to disability, affordability, or other circumstances.
- It can reduce overall costs of living for residents by providing an affordable and viable alternative to automobiles and supports active, car-free lifestyles for those who chose it.
- It supports efficient land use and transportation by encouraging denser residential and commercial development along transit corridors. This results in meeting people's daily needs with less land for development and our transportation system.
- It reduces pollution and greenhouse gas emissions compared to private automobiles and promotes other forms of active living and health, and foster better overall quality of life.

Transit planners generally consider a similar set of principles while designing transit routes and services. City staff and policymakers interested in improving transit service in their community can use these principles as a guide for how to plan for transit-supportive land use and urban design in their comprehensive plans. In general, it is recommended that communities work with their transit providers when considering how to incorporate transit into their comprehensive plans and how to make their communities more transit-oriented.

- known planned transit service expansion, working with transit provider(s), and
- desired transit expansion corridors or areas based on community land use plan, if

IDENTIFYING AREAS OF PLANNED TRANSIT SERVICE EXPANSION

Each transit provider is responsible for developing a service improvement plan and updating it regularly. Communities should work directly with the transit agency that provides services in their area to identify if there is any planned expansion for their comprehensive plans. Often multiple transit agencies provide fixed-route services within the same community. For example, most agencies operate routes connecting their communities to the University of Minnesota campus. Transit service can be expanded in three main ways:

- Geographic – When transit routes are changed/extended or new routes can be made to serve new geographic areas.
- Frequency – When transit vehicles arrive/depart more often (i.e. every 15 minutes instead of every 30 minutes).
- Span – When a transit route's schedule is extended to operate during additional hours or days of the week (i.e. adding Saturday service to a route that only operates on weekdays right now).

Communities should also consider special transit services in their community including Metro Mobility (ADA paratransit), Metro Move, and Transit Link (dial-a-ride). Transit providers in the region are listed below along with the communities within their service area.

Transit Agency	Service Types	Webpage
Maple Grove Transit	Fixed-Route Bus; Microtransit	Transit Maple Grove, MN
Metro Transit (Met Council)	Fixed-Route Bus, Light Rail, Commuter Rail; Micro Transit	Metro Transit - Network Now
Minnesota Valley Transit Authority	Fixed-Route Bus, Light Rail, Commuter Rail; Microtransit	MVRTA - Routes
Plymouth MetroLink	Fixed-Route Bus; Microtransit	Transit City of Plymouth, MN
Southwest Transit	Fixed-Route Bus; Microtransit	SouthWest Transit's Reports, Reviews & Plans
Metropolitan Transportation Services (Met Council)	Metro Mobility (ADA paratransit); Metro Move; Transit Link (Dial-a-Ride)	Transportation Services - Metropolitan Council
University of Minnesota	Campus Connector Bus; Student ADA paratransit; Student Safe Ride Home	UMN Parking and Transportation Services

Communities within the seven-county metropolitan area not included in any regular-route transit provider's service area should contact their Metropolitan Council Sector Representative if interested in access to regular route transit. These areas should currently have access to dial-a-ride transit services and other ride-sharing options.

IDENTIFYING TRANSIT EXPANSION OPPORTUNITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Transit fundamentally depends on local land use and transportation systems to be successful. The best way for communities to influence the potential for transit service improvements is by planning for and implementing transit-friendly land use and urban design policies. These should be reflected in comprehensive plans and supporting policies. Doing so in long-range land use plans makes a stronger case for potential transit improvements being included in short-range service improvement plans. Within a comprehensive plan, there are two main strategies to influence transit service decisions:

- Making land uses and transportation networks near existing transit service more transit supportive.
- Working with your transit agencies to identify corridors that are good candidates for extending existing service or starting new service and making land uses and transportation networks along them more transit supportive.

For both strategies, the two things local agencies influence are 1) transit market demand through land use policy and improving walkability around transit, and 2) creating transit supportive corridors through their transportation network and urban design that allow for efficient route design and operations. While doing these things does not guarantee transit agencies will prioritize service in your area, as service becomes more well used agencies will look to improve a route with even better service to meet/grow demand. Communities should work directly with transit agencies to incorporate transit into their comprehensive plan.

Increasing Transit Market Demand: Demand for transit service varies across the region based mostly on differences in population and job density, walkability, and demographics. The Met Council analyzes these factors and maintains a map of Transit Market Areas (TMAs). TMAs reflect the expected demand for fixed-route transit service (bus routes, light rail, etc.) in communities even if they do not currently have fixed-route transit service. This dataset also has Transit Market Index score by census block group, which is used to categorize areas into the TMA designations, and can give communities a more detailed understanding of different potential transit demand levels. The higher the score, the more expected demand.

Given that we know the main transit demand drivers in the region are 1) population and job density and 2) walkability, communities that want their transit service to increase should plan to improve both these factors within a 10-minute walk (half mile, via the pedestrian network) of existing transit stops, stations, and/or park-and-rides or along planned transit corridors. In addition to these main factors, the Council also found other factors positively affected transit use such as the number of renters in an area and the number of jobs that are also everyday destinations (retail, restaurants, entertainment, schools, medical care, etc.). Increasing these types of development within walking distance of existing or planned transit service should also help increase transit demand. See the [Local Land Use, Urban Design, and Transportation Networks](#) section of Transit Design and Performance Guidelines Appendix in the Transportation Policy Plan (TPP).

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT WALKABILITY

All transit riders are pedestrians on at least one end of their trip (more often both). For transit to be successful and useful, not only does there need to be a density of people, jobs, and other destinations within an easy walk, but that walk needs to be safe and comfortable for all pedestrians. Planners should pay particular attention to designing for people with disabilities, other mobility restrictions, or who may be using strollers. Safer street crossings are just as critical as the environment along streets for walking. Increasing density without providing easy, safe, and comfortable walking access to destinations will only result in more automobile traffic, especially if there is lots of free parking. Walkable environments will attract even more people (transit riders and others) if they are engaging and fun places to be!



An image of a walkable urban street with transit supportive features.

Source: NACTO Urban Street Design Guide

Developing Transit Supportive Corridors:

There are several ways communities can make it easier for transit agencies to create and operate simple, easy to understand transit routes that are faster, more convenient, and (most importantly) more useful for riders. Incorporating these practices into your transportation system and urban design practices has the added benefit of making transit service more efficient and productive. Further, when transit routes are efficient, it is cheaper for agencies to add more service than on circuitous routes.

Plan for transit supportive densities and walkability within a half mile of nodes along linear corridors. A linear corridor is easier to serve with transit. Transit routes that are linear and consistent are the most efficient to provide and easier for customers to understand. This often requires planning coordination across community boundaries.

Provide strong demand anchors at the ends of a transit corridor. Examples of this are large job centers, hospitals, colleges, libraries or other large public service institutions. Transit is more efficient with balanced passenger loads in each direction. Major destinations at each end help to distribute demand evenly and limit overcrowding of vehicles and oversupply of service.

Allow and encourage a mix of different uses along transit corridors. Transit is most effective when it serves a variety of trip purposes and destinations. Mixed-use development patterns encourage travel patterns with many origins and destinations throughout the day, making transit more effective and easier to provide for a variety of purposes.

Plan for transit advantages and customer and support facilities on streets with transit. Identify streets with existing, planned, or potential transit service in your community and incorporate transit facilities and pedestrian supportive elements into their design. Transit advantages along a corridor means a faster trip for riders and potentially more frequent transit service at less cost to the transit agency. Space should also be left for customer facilities such as bus stops, shelters, or even transit centers in busier locations with multiple routes. Lastly, support facilities are vital to transit operations and must also be considered when thinking of expanding or new transit service. Agencies that build and maintain roadways should coordinate with transit agencies on where they need break facilities for drivers or utilities to support customer facility features like heating and signage.

Additional Resources

For a more detailed discussion of transit planning and route design principles, please see the [TPP Transit Design and Performance Guidelines Appendix](#).

For more information about specific planning tools that can help support transit please see the Council's [Transit-Oriented Development Guide webpage](#).