

7 REGIONAL COMMUTER GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Chapters 2 through 6 provide background information used for the development of goals, performance standards and service alternatives. This chapter briefly identifies goals and objectives. These goals allow for defining recommendations for specific commuter services, allowing elected officials to establish policy direction to address the various challenges in MnDOT District 3. The objectives serve as general recommendations for commuter transportation in District 3 and the following chapters detail some of the programs and services that can support these recommendations.

DEFINING REGIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR COMMUTER TRANSPORTATION

In most regions, bus and rail transit is a publicly provided service, just like police, fire, water and sanitation. A significant difference exists, however, between transit and other public services: transit is the only service where the use of it is discretionary. As an example, St. Cloud residents have few options if they choose not to use the public water system or police/fire services, but they have options when it comes to using public transit service: they can drive their own car, get a ride from somebody else, walk, or ride a bicycle.

If funding and resources were not a concern, commuter transit services could easily be designed and implemented to meet everyone's needs. They could operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days each year. They could operate very frequently, hundreds of routes, with service operating up and down almost every highway in Central Minnesota.

Unfortunately the amount of funding available to build and maintain a system is always a major issue for transit, and thus it becomes a critical factor in determining the design and operation of regional commuter services. Because commuter transportation use is a discretionary activity for most people, it becomes critical for planners to fine tune their ability to make educated guesses about when and where people will actually use commuter services.

The value of establishing goals is that they provide strategic direction for defining service alternatives and recommendations. The following goals, in support of the overall commuter transportation study, were developed based on stated priorities of stakeholders, and the markets for commuter transportation services.

Goal 1: Develop effective services for commuter transportation markets. A set of effective transportation options require thoughtful commuter transit services, and supportive programs to encourage people to consider alternatives to driving alone for their commute. Objectives include:

- Ensure commuter services are easy to understand.

- Park-and-ride facilities should have adequate capacity, offer convenience and provide appropriate amenities.
- Manage an effective set of rideshare options to meet the needs of individuals for whom regional transit service is not available.
- Maximize effectiveness of commuter bus services.
 - Design commuter bus services to be as direct and time-sensitive as possible.
 - Implement tools and strategies to speed transit service, particularly along congested corridors, through HOV lanes, traffic signal prioritization (TSP), queue jump lanes, and other capital investments.
 - Ensure adequate vehicle capacity to maintain passenger loads within adopted load standards for transit.
 - Transfers should be convenient and fast between feeder services and regional commuter routes.

Goal 2: Expand transit services into areas where transit has a likelihood of success.

Not all parts of District 3 are appropriate for fixed route transit service, but demographic data suggests some form of transit service or alternative mode (carpool, vanpool, flexible route service, etc.) may be appropriate in many of the District 3 counties. Some objectives include:

- Negotiate potential pilot programs and partnerships to introduce transit services into communities where service is not currently available.
- Ensure that each new service is financially feasible, meets performance standards and does not negatively impact existing services.
- Ensure there is community and political support for new transportation options before their introduction.

Goal 3: Coordinate commuter services with transit providers in the greater region.

Metro Transit, Northstar, River Rider and some of the other existing transit operators are seen by some stakeholders as organizations that would benefit from additional collaboration with regional partners. Objectives to support this goal include:

- Meet regularly with transit staff and other stakeholders from adjacent properties to review service options and coordination opportunities, continuing the discussions from the various Human Service-Public Transportation Coordination Plans.
- Co-author grant applications with regional agencies and planning entities.
- Consider joint operations/shared funding of transit services that cross county boundaries.
- Ensure promotion of vanpools and other ridesharing opportunities at major employers throughout District 3.

Goal 4: Tie the provision of transit and investments in transit to land use and the resulting demand levels.

Because land use patterns are the single largest determinant of transit patronage, transit services should be designed to complement land use patterns. Proposed developments must be evaluated in a consistent manner. This will allow the development community, citizens, and elected officials to anticipate the extent that future transit services will provide service to new developments. Some objectives that provide direction for this District 3 study are as follows:

- Commuter transit services should provide links to high-density employment cores.

- Transit services that fail to achieve established performance standards should be considered for remedial action.
- Transit services that significantly exceed standards should be augmented.
- Transit services are not appropriate for some communities that do not meet service implementation thresholds.

Goal 5: Encourage sustainable development practices that support ridesharing and transit. Objectives, which are in-line with most of the regional transportation planning efforts, include the following, for which project stakeholders have an advocacy and advisory role to the counties and cities within District 3:

- Support pedestrian- and transit-friendly building practices, working with planning staff and developers to ensure planned and future development meets service access criteria.
- Work with jurisdictions to enact zoning regulations that facilitate dense transit-oriented development to be focused near future Northstar (or other rail) or regional bus facilities.
- Support the establishment of building orientation and pedestrian accessibility recommendations for new development, so that the development that occurs is convenient to pedestrians and transit users.
- Identify parking designs (and associated payment and allocation policies) that support and incentivize ridesharing.
- Encourage the establishment of local policies requiring that new transit-dependent land uses, such as social service offices and community colleges, should be located on existing or proposed transit routes.
- Support infrastructure projects, especially along transit corridors, that complement and/or enhance the commuter transportation operational needs (pedestrian access to bus stops, adequate location for passengers to wait for the bus (or train), sufficient curb space for buses, passenger amenities and transit priority treatments).

Goal 6: Increase the visibility and elevate the image of ridesharing and public transportation programs in District 3. Access to transportation information is not always easy. Some basic objectives to increase visibility include:

- Encourage regional collaboration for more effective communications and marketing tools to promote transit use and ridesharing.
- Improve the passengers' experience through enhanced bus stops and passenger amenities.
- Provide easy-to-understand signage and passenger information that promotes the ease of use of existing and future regional transit services.
- Partner with local organizations, businesses, municipalities and other agencies to enhance access to and the quality of transportation information available in District 3.

CONCLUSION

These goals will require support from stakeholders in order to advance commuter transportation in District 3. To determine how successful District 3 is in achieving the goals, it is important to define service measures and standards. These are discussed in Chapter 8.