

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRANSIT SYSTEM GOVERNANCE POLICY AND PLANNING IN THE TWIN CITIES REGION

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES PROJECT

About the Partner

SouthWest Transit is the public transit agency for the cities of Chaska, Chanhassen, Eden Prairie, and Carver. The agency was formed in 1986, when the southwest Minneapolis suburbs of Chaska, Chanhassen, and Eden Prairie chose to opt out of the Metropolitan Transit Commission transit system, in accordance with Minnesota State Statutes. SouthWest Transit offers fixed-route services to and from downtown Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota, Normandale Community College, Best Buy headquarters, and various special events, as well as demand-responsive microtransit service via its SW Prime service.



Project Description

Analyzing the effectiveness of transit governance in the Twin Cities region has proven difficult. A report by the State Auditor in 2011 found that the transit governance structure in the region is far from ideal, lacks agreed-upon vision and priorities, and is strained due to overlapping responsibilities and distrust between the Metropolitan Council and suburban transit providers. That situation has only worsened over the past decade, partly due to a shortage in regional transit funds available to all providers.

With the effectiveness of the current transit governance setup becoming more of an open question at the State Capitol—as evidenced by the creation of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission to study the effectiveness and setup of the Metropolitan Council and suburban transit—SouthWest Transit seeks to examine the effectiveness of transit governance and policy in the Twin Cities region since the enabling Suburban Transit legislation was introduced in the early 1980s.

This project is particularly timely, as many of the key stakeholders and staff who were involved in the setup of the suburban transit governance model have either recently retired or will be retiring soon, which will leave a significant knowledge gap.

This project is one of two projects this year with SouthWest Transit. The first project focuses on the history and evolution of regional transit system governance. This second project focuses on assessing the effectiveness of transit system governance and planning in the Twin Cities region.

Key Issues, Questions, and Ideas to Explore

1. Have the original goals or aims of the enabling Suburban Transit legislation been achieved? If not, what changes to transit policy or governance would better meet the intent of the original Suburban Transit legislation?
2. How is the effectiveness of suburban transit providers currently measured? Are there other effectiveness metrics that could better assess the overall value of suburban transit providers?
3. How does transit policy, governance, and planning for the Twin Cities region differ from peer regions across the country? What are the appropriate roles for the Metropolitan Council and suburban transit providers in regional transit planning? What changes to transit policy, governance, or planning might improve the relationships between the Metropolitan Council and suburban transit providers in the Twin Cities region?

How Student Work Will Be Used to Build Community Resilience

- To inform future legislation related to transit governance in the Twin Cities region. In doing so, the project would increase sustainability and advance equity related to transit and transit users, not only in SouthWest Transit's service area, but throughout the entire seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan region.

Potential Community Partners or Stakeholders

- Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA)
- Cities of Eden Prairie, Chanhassen, Chaska, Shakopee, Prior Lake, Savage, Burnsville, Apple Valley, Eagan, Rosemount, Lakeville, Minnetonka, Plymouth, and Maple Grove
- State legislators
- Metro Transit
- Metropolitan Council staff
- Metro-area counties: Hennepin, Carver, Scott, Anoka, Dakota, Washington, Ramsey
- Chambers of Commerce
- Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) members & staff
- Regional Transit Board (RTB) members & staff

Existing Plans & Reports

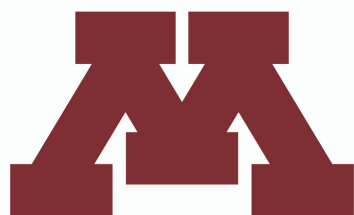
- Legislative Auditor's report (2001)
- Blue Ribbon Commission report
- MnDOT Transit Report (statewide)

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