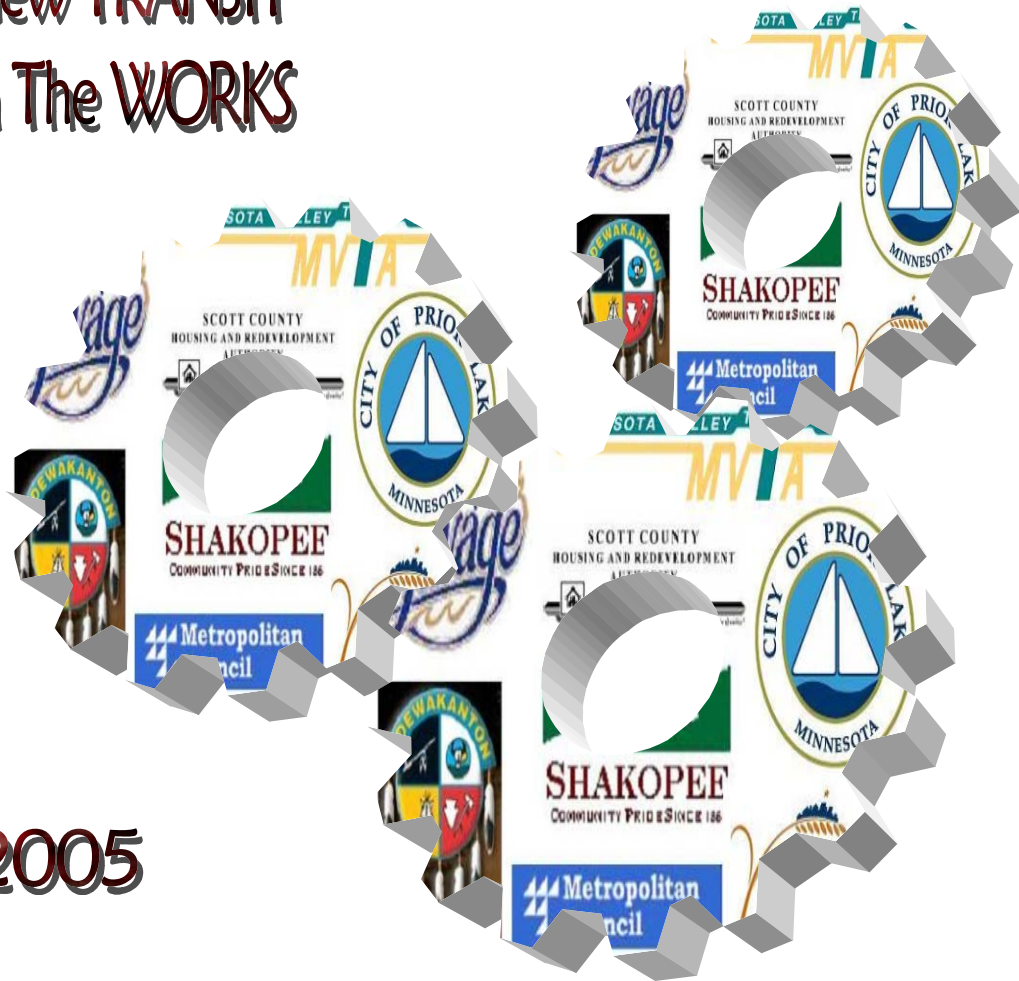


Unified Transit Management Plan

For the Communities of Scott County,
Minnesota

New TRANSIT
In The WORKS



May 2005

Prepared for Scott County by:



Perteeet

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Executive Summary

Identified Issues

A number of transit-related issues have been identified in the course of this study, including the following:

River Crossings

There are three major roadway crossings of the Minnesota River: The Cedar Street Bridge, Interstate 35W and US Trunk Highway (TH) 169. Of these, two have been the focus of separate public transportation studies in recent years, the I-35W Bus Rapid Transit Study and the Cedar Street Transitway Study, that have recommended significant transit improvements in each of these respective corridors.

The TH 169 corridor is significantly under-utilized as a transit corridor, with no regular transit crossings of the Bloomington Ferry Bridge, the most direct corridor connecting northwestern Scott County with the Minneapolis metro area to the north.

Existing Services

Scott County is served by four separate transit operators: Scott County Transit, predominantly a dial-a-ride operator, Laker Lines, Shakopee Transit and the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA). The latter three entities are service providers that “opted out” from Metro Transit’s service area, electing to provide their own services funded, in part, by state Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) funds. Of the six Metro area opt-out regions, Prior Lake and Shakopee exhibit the lowest ridership and highest relative costs for transit services and provide the lowest level of transit service per capita to their citizenry.

While MVTA does provide significant local and express service out of the Burnsville Station, that service is remote from much of the western portions of Scott County and utilized to a much lesser degree by residents of Prior Lake and Shakopee as compared to residents of Savage, (an MVTA member) located further to the east. While more than 300 regular park-and-ride users, identified as residing in Scott County, predominantly at Burnsville Station, a significant majority reside in the eastern third of the County; in part because present transit services are oriented to the I-35W corridor rather than to the TH 169 corridor.

The more rural portions of Scott County, including the communities of Jordan and Belle Plaine in the southwestern portion of Scott County and the communities of Elko, New Market and New Prague in southern Scott County, are served

exclusive via dial-a-ride services provided by Scott County Transit. Lower developmental and residential densities in these regions make fixed route transit service impractical at the present time, but steady rapid growth in this region suggests that close monitoring of densities, population and travel patterns of residents of these communities should be conducted.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) currently provides its own fixed route services to multiple origins and destinations throughout the Metropolitan Area for the purpose of employee transportation. Fourteen buses are operated by a subcontractor for these purposes.

Study Recommendations

The significant park-and-ride demand identified from Scott County shows the need for improved transit services, in particular, commuter express services into downtown Minneapolis and into suburban areas such as Edina, Bloomington, Richfield and Eden Prairie. It is recommended that new services focus first on the Minneapolis commuter market and later expand into other northern and eastern adjacent commuter markets, downtown St. Paul, the Universality of Minnesota, Normandale Community College, and Hennepin Technical College.

There are a number of small park-and-ride facilities throughout Scott County that have inadequate levels of transit service and do not generate any appreciable transit demand. Scott County needs to develop a large (500-1,000 parking stall) park-and-ride/transit center that will consolidate commuter transit demand and focus service on the TH 169 corridor. In order to accomplish these, and other, objectives, the following recommendations have been made.

Dial-a-Ride

Dial-a-ride services in Scott County ultimately need to be consolidated into one provider: Scott County Transit. Existing opt-outs in the Cities of Shakopee and Prior Lake need to focus their efforts and funding instead on big bus fixed route services. With the impending transfer of Metro Mobility ADA-paratransit services throughout Scott County to Scott County Transit, that organization will be the sole provider of demand response services throughout Scott County. Scott County Transit is encouraged to adopt that role as its mission. The City of Shakopee should then correspondingly ramp down its provision of additional dial-a-ride services over the next 1-2 years.

Scott County's 2005 budget for dial-a-ride is \$994,000, including \$543,000 in Metropolitan Council funding covering approximately 60 percent of the cost of providing service. As all county dial-a-ride services come under Scott County Transit's control, the 25,000 rides currently funded by the City of Shakopee will be included in Scott County Transit's total, making it eligible for additional funding under the Council's performance-based funding program. This could generate approximately \$160,000 in additional funding, with the remainder of the cost of

these services paid for from the fare box, the increased subsidy from ADA passengers, and other County funds.

Scott County Transit needs to continually monitor both ridership and travel patterns of dial-a-ride users. As ridership on these services increases, Scott County Transit needs to develop a series of service benchmarks to identify high ridership and high productivity dial-a-ride corridors as candidates for transitioning from dial-a-ride to route deviation or fixed route services.

Fixed Route

The existing Shakopee and Prior Lake opt-out areas should begin to pool their transit resources over the near-term (3-4 years) and focus their attention on fixed route services to their constituents. Services to be provided should include: 1) commuter express trips to downtown Minneapolis via TH 169 and I-394, incorporating the existing Laker Lines trips and adding at least three more (for a minimum of 5) morning and afternoon trips to provide an attractive level of service to induce expanded ridership, 2) local services connecting the major communities of Shakopee, Prior Lake and Savage to the Burnsville Station, permitting the transferring of riders to MVTA services to expand access for Scott County residents to additional destinations in the Metro area, and 3) connections between the Burnsville Station and the Mystic Lake Casino complex, Savage, Shakopee, and Prior Lake to provide improved commuter connections from the Metro region to employment opportunities in Scott County. The initial year's cost of local service, assuming continued operation by Scott County Transit at current contracting rates of about \$37 per hour, are estimated to be about \$325,000, leaving approximately \$1.4 million for fixed route services.

Initially, at least five morning and five afternoon commuter express transit trips from Scott County will be needed to help balance commuter growth and generate additional commuter express transit demand. Within 1-2 years as many as 8 morning and 8 afternoon trips may be needed to satisfy short-term demand until a permanent park-and-ride facility (see below) is completed. Future service additions, including commuter express, local and midday express, should respond to increased demand as it develops.

While combining the two Cities resources should result in enhanced transit services for users, the two entities need not relinquish the identities of the services of their individual systems. What is needed is to create the appearance of a single system, enhanced levels of service, coordinated schedules, marketing and planning.

Currently the Cities of Prior Lake and Shakopee are programmed to receive about \$1.39 million in MVST funds in 2005. With a 20 percent fare box recovery, an additional \$345,000 in fare revenues would bring the transit budget for the two cities to approximately \$1.74 million.

In the longer term, as the transit market matures and the permanent TH 169 park-and-ride/transit center is in operation, the additional concentration of transit

demand will permit the expansion of commute travel destinations to additional areas within the Metro region, including the area adjacent to the I-494 corridor, to downtown St. Paul, and improved east-west connections to Dakota County. These improvements will require close cooperation between Scott County transit operators and Southwest Metro Transit, MVTA, and Metro Transit.

Additionally, developments in southern Scott County should be continually monitored. While existing developmental and residential densities do not warrant dedicated fixed route services, a continuation of current growth trends will generate increasing transit demand from this region, which will be best served via the I-35W corridor.

Facilities

Scott County needs to immediately begin the process of site selection and acquisition, design and construction of a new transit center in the area south of the Bloomington Ferry Bridge near the confluence of CSAH 18, TH 169, TH 13, and the future CSAH 21 extension. This transit center needs an initial capacity of approximately 500 parking stalls and should be ultimately expandable to provide between 1,000 and 1,100 parking stalls within 6-8 years. This facility should take advantage of commercial and residential joint development opportunities in the Southbridge area to develop an expanded market for transit services in Scott County.

The transit center can also serve as office space for transit operators in the Scott County area, particularly with respect to marketing and promotional activities. While the transit center is probably not compatible with maintenance and storage operations, Scott County Transit could also take advantage of this site for administrative staff as well.

If Scott County Transit chooses to continue providing dial-a-ride services directly, a separate maintenance and storage facility will need to be developed for dial-a-ride and local circulator service vehicles. This facility should be located in close proximity to the transit center in order to minimize deadhead (non-revenue) service hours and costs.

A temporary facility with parking capacity between 100 and 200 stalls needs to be developed in the neighborhood of the permanent facility in preparation for implementation of additional commuter express transit services.

Municipal Participation

In the short term, the primary beneficiaries of improved transit use of the TH 169 corridor will likely be the Cities of Shakopee and Prior Lake, although many residents of western portions of the City of Savage may well decide to take advantage of improved services in this corridor. The City of Savage should remain part of MVTA for the short-term, but should be an active participant in the planning and marketing of all transit services in Scott County. The Cities of Shakopee and Prior Lake need to open discussions with the MVTA and

Southwest Metro Transit concerning the future potential of joining either regional provider as a long-term strategy.

In the future, as service levels improve and additional transit facilities are developed, the Cities of Shakopee, Prior Lake and Savage need to assess joining together formally to provide transit services throughout the northern portion of Scott County. Discussions concerning this long term strategy need to begin immediately so that a long term strategy is in place when the need for formal action occurs. At that time, the three jurisdictions can re-evaluate the desirability of joining together in a new opt-out area, or formally joining an existing opt-out such as Southwest Metro Transit or the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority.

At that time, a dedicated source of local transit funding will also need to be secured to fund the local portion of enhanced transit services and facilities. It is estimated that between \$2.5 million and \$3.5 million will need to be generated locally to subsidize transit operations and facilities in Scott County by 2020.

There is also a longer-term need to begin identifying a mechanism for expanding the Transit Taxing District in the future and for annexing areas such as Belle Plaine, Jordan, New Market, Elko and New Prague. Consider that the residents of these cities will likely make-up a percent of the transit ridership on the newly implemented commuter express route system. Currently there is no formal policy for expanding the District and for assessing tax support for transit improvements in areas outside the District.

Service Delivery

The Cities of Shakopee and Prior Lake should provide transit services to their constituents by means of contracting with third parties rather than entering into direct operations themselves. This will result in lower initial capital outlays for equipment and facilities and take advantage of existing operating expertise and maintenance and storage capacity in the region. Currently, for local fixed route small vehicles 35 ft or smaller, Scott County Transit could continue providing this service through contract, as they have proven to be cost-beneficial.

Additionally, these cities should take advantage of the expertise of the Metropolitan Council's Regional Transportation Services to identify, negotiate and manage contracted services. This policy is expected to yield lower contracting prices and better contractor oversight than either or both jurisdictions electing to "go it alone" in contracting for services. This will also reduce the administrative overhead while the two jurisdictions work out the sharing of resources, both financial and human, enhancing transit services in Scott County.

Finally, Shakopee should transfer operations and administration of its vanpools over to the Metro Commuter Services and reinvest those finances into fixed route services. Allowing these passengers to convert to using the new commuter express route or continue as a vanpool passenger under this agency.

Immediate Needs

Work needs to commence immediately to get the permanent park-and-ride/transit center project into the capital grant pipeline. A site needs to be identified and funding applied for within the next three months.

Additionally, a temporary park-and-ride site needs to be secured in the neighborhood of the permanent transit center site. A short-term capacity of 100-250 parking stalls should be provided at a site having excellent visibility from the major commuter corridors, and possessing easy access for private vehicles and for buses.

The Cities of Shakopee and Prior Lake need to agree to pool their existing opt-out transit funding to make improvements to the region's transit services and programs. Additionally, they need to agree to focus on fixed route services, particularly commuter express service via TH 169 park-n-ride/transit center to downtown Minneapolis and leave dial-a-ride exclusively to the purview of Scott County Transit. Both cities need to formally include Scott County Transit in their agreements as the designated dial-a-ride operator in Scott County and to include both SMSC and Scott County Housing and Redevelopment Authority in planning and marketing activities to take advantage of potential expanded funding eligibility by both of these entities. Additionally, the City of Savage is encouraged to continue to be an active participant in the marketing, planning and development of improved transit services.

Planning Needs

A number of supporting policies need to be developed and adopted by Scott County and the municipalities in existing and future opt-out areas. These policy initiatives include the following:

- ❖ **Signage** – current signage of transit facilities and services is inadequate. Scott County, MnDoT and the opt-out communities need to work together to develop standards and warrants for transit signage, including the signing of every bus stop in the urban areas of the county and adequate signage at park-and-rides and other transit facilities
- ❖ **Shoulder access** – while the need for shoulder bus lanes on county and state roads in the Scott County region will be increasing over time, there is an existing need to provide these lanes along SH 13 between CSAH 18 and the Burnsville Station, particularly in the eastbound direction. Studies need to begin to develop warrants for the future expansion of this program based on transit and auto volumes, congestion characteristics and potential for travel time savings
- ❖ **Transit Oriented Design** - Scott County needs to pursue the development of transit-oriented design standards to guide the development of land uses adjacent to, and nearby transit facilities. Particular attention should be given to the location of public housing developments and essential human services in close proximity to major transit developments (such as the TH 169 Transit Center)
- ❖ **Comprehensive Planning** - The County and the individual cities need to include transit considerations in their comprehensive planning efforts, including the designation of major and minor transit corridors in their roadway network and the development of land uses along these corridors that are compatible with, and supportive of, pedestrian, bicycle and transit uses, including lower vehicle speeds, extensive pedestrian and bicycle paths and traffic control devices

- ❖ **Planning** – The County and its constituent municipalities need to maintain a more regional perspective in planning transit services and improvements. These considerations include working with transit agencies in other areas (such as MVTA and Southwest Metro Transit) in the joint planning and development of services between service areas and the potential for joint funding of services and facilities benefiting a more regional audience
- ❖ **Marketing** – The County and its cities need to keep the promotion and marketing of transit services and facilities at a high priority. This effort includes development and distribution of promotional and informational materials, encouraging communities to consider transit impacts in all of the zoning and land use decisions and working with the Metropolitan Council to integrate transit information with the region-wide information network

Expected Results

The expanded funding and emphasis on transit services in Scott County can be expected to have widespread results on the economic, mobility and quality of life throughout the County. A planning model developed by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) was used to monetize the anticipated benefits of improved mobility.

Anticipated benefits include:

- ❖ **Economic and Mobility** – Based on the TRB model, it is estimated that every dollar spent on transit improvements in Scott County will return approximately \$1.20 on mobility and economic benefits to Scott County, its municipalities and citizens; benefits from reduced use of energy and other natural resources accrue to society as a whole.
- ❖ **Improved Transit Ridership** – Approximately 2,400 additional daily transit trips will be taken by transit within Scott County and into Hennepin County.
- ❖ **Mode Split Improvements** – The transit mode split of trips between Scott County and Hennepin County would improve from less than one percent to over five percent.
- ❖ **Reduced Congestion** – A reduction of approximately 2,400 daily automobile trips from Scott County to Hennepin County is estimated; reduced costs of accidents due to the relative safety of bus travel to that of automobile travel accrue to all road users and society as a whole.
- ❖ **Improved Air Quality** - The estimated annualized air quality benefits of improved transit in Scott County due to reduced vehicular emissions are approximately \$86,000 per year, including improved hydrocarbon, carbon monoxide, and NOx emissions; improved mobility for pedestrians and bicyclists due to reduced vehicle use.