



Governance of Transit in the Twin Cities Region

Project Description

May 2010

BACKGROUND

The governance structure for transit in the Twin Cities region is complex. The Metropolitan Council is responsible for planning and operating bus, light rail, and commuter rail services for the region, but several other entities are also involved. They include the Counties Transit Improvement Board, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Transportation Advisory Board, regional rail authorities for each of the seven counties in the Twin Cities region, suburban transit providers who have “opted out” of Metro Transit (a division within the Metropolitan Council) bus services, private contracted transit operators, and numerous project-specific commissions and committees.

Funding for transit in the Twin Cities region is also complex, with revenues coming from multiple sources, including the state legislature, federal grants, the state motor vehicle sales tax, local sales taxes, property taxes, and fares. Different communities within the region and different modes of transit rely on these sources to varying degrees.

In the past six years, the Twin Cities region has seen the development of two major transit corridors: the Hiawatha Light Rail line and the Northstar Commuter Rail line. Plans for bus rapid transit corridors along I-35W and Cedar Avenue and light rail lines along the Central and Southwest corridors will further expand the transit system in the region.

EVALUATION ISSUES

1. How is authority for governance, planning, management, operations, and funding of transit systems in the Twin Cities region distributed among state and local governments?
2. To what extent do the responsibilities of these transit agencies overlap, and is their work adequately coordinated?

3. How is transit funded, and does it adequately balance capital and operating funding needs?
4. How do other regions structure and fund their transit authorities? To what extent can Minnesota learn from their experiences?

DISCUSSION

Some legislators have suggested that the Twin Cities’ multilayered transit governance structure is inefficient and poorly equipped to handle current and future transit challenges. Further, concerns have been raised that overlapping governance structures for funding and operating transit systems create inequalities and gaps in transit service.

We will evaluate planning and governance of transit in the Twin Cities region largely using interviews, site visits, and surveys. To evaluate the funding of transit, we will review Minnesota statutes and federal regulations and analyze funding data. To identify how other metropolitan regions plan and govern their transit systems, we will conduct an extensive literature review. We will attempt to evaluate the performance of the transit system by using a variety of measures. However, these analyses may be limited due to data availability or comparability.

This evaluation will focus on certain transit systems within the Twin Cities region, including bus service provided by Metro Transit and suburban transit providers, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, and commuter rail transit. We will not evaluate the viability of prospective transit lines, nor will we evaluate specialized transit services, such as Metro Mobility or transit provided by the University of Minnesota.

We plan to issue a report in early January 2011. Comments or questions regarding this evaluation should be directed to Judy Randall, evaluation manager, at 651-296-1227 or judy.randall@state.mn.us.