

CITIZENS LEAGUE
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STATEMENT

TO: Members, Legislative Study Committee on Metropolitan Transit,
Senator Steve Novak and Representative Kathleen Vellenga, co-chairs

FROM: Citizens League, Community Information Committee

SUBJECT: Organizational structure for metropolitan transit

1. There appears to be agreement among all parties involved that the MTC, with its 50-passenger buses operating on fixed routes is doing a credible job of serving trips to and between the major centers of downtown Saint Paul and downtown Minneapolis, plus some non-downtown destinations, mainly in the central cities, during peak hours.
2. There appears to be agreement, too, that 50-passenger bus, fixed-route transit is not able to serve suburban and some central city, non-downtown, destinations very well, and that there is a real need to provide better, more cost-effective transit service (broadly defined to include all forms of providing rides for individuals) to suburban and some central city, non-downtown, destinations.
3. There is agreement that escalation of public subsidy for transit can't continue. Other ways of providing service more cost-effectively must be utilized if large numbers of suburban residents are to be served.

There also is implicit agreement that solutions to serving these non-downtown destinations lie in methods other than light rail transit (LRT). Whatever the assets of LRT may be in serving major centers, its ability to serve non-downtown destinations is even more limited than is the bus.

4. There appears to be agreement that new non-downtown service should not be provided by a single monopoly supplier. Instead, there seems to be agreement that such service needs to be provided by contract with a vendor, public or private. That is, a responsible body should "buy" transit services, so to speak, on behalf of its residents.
5. There appears to be implicit agreement that suburban service is likely to vary from place to place and be composed of several separate networks, not just one, which means that the service can be handled through several different contracts, not just one.
6. But public and private leadership in the Twin Cities metropolitan area have failed to act on this agreement. Moreover, where it can't be the direct operator itself, the MTC has not promoted other forms of transit or encouraged other vendors. Yet the MTC continues to argue that it should be designated as being responsible for providing all forms of transit serving all destinations in the metropolitan area. There is no evidence that the MTC will be any more able to, or interested in, serving these other destinations in coming years than it has been in the past. It is even possible that were the MTC to take on additional responsibilities, it could not do an adequate job with these responsibilities added to its traditional large-bus, fixed-route system.

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7. The Metropolitan Council, as the overall governing body for the Twin Cities metropolitan area, now must provide the leadership to see that the job of serving these suburban and some central city, non-downtown, destinations gets done, without taking operational responsibility. The Council should:

- * Identify specific major types of non-downtown trips in which there is a regional interest, such as those which provide access to major employment locations or are vital to the poor, elderly, or other transit-dependent populations.
- * Submit to the Legislature biennial proposals for transit financing in the region, covering (a) the level and type of regional financing, including the question of the future of the property tax as a source for transit, (b) level of fares, and (c) level of state funding.
- * Encourage cities to organize themselves into clusters covering natural transit sub-regions, much as the suburbs have organized for cable TV service, for example, and then to be responsible for seeking and awarding bids from vendors to provide service in their own areas, consistent with needs identified by the Council. The Council would decide the level of subsidy that would be provided for each service.

Any vendor, including the MTC, would be free to submit bids.

If cities declined to call for and award bids, then the Council could decide whether the degree of regional interest in serving certain transit needs is of such importance that some other way for calling for and awarding bids would be necessary, including the possibility that the Council itself would step in as a last resort.

- * Apportion transit funding in the Twin Cities area, including an apportionment to the MTC for its operations.
 - * Report regularly to the Legislature on how well the system is working, accompanied by recommendations for change, if any.
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