



Citizens League Statement

The Metropolitan Council's Draft Regional Transit Facilities Plan

Prepared for the Metropolitan Council Public Meeting
Council Chambers, 230 E. Fifth St., St. Paul, Jan. 21, 1992

Chair deVries and members of the Metropolitan Systems committee: The Citizens League's basic position here today is in firm support of the Transit Facilities Plan. We urge the Council to adopt it next month, translate it into a strong bill and work aggressively to pass that bill in the Legislature.

We will offer several suggestions that would, in our opinion, improve this document. Nevertheless, we want to say clearly at the outset that our basic thrust is to strongly support the Plan. Madame chair, you folks and your staff have done a remarkable job on this proposal in a relatively short period of time. You have used a common-sense approach, taking parts of everyone's favorite solution and weaving them into a well-reasoned, politically acceptable, technically-sound and integrated series of proposals. This can provide a conceptual and political breakthrough that should earn the Council considerable credit. We should also acknowledge the significant contributions of the Regional Transit Board (RTB), the Metropolitan Transit Commission and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to this plan.

The governor a year ago challenged the Council to demonstrate its value to this area and the state . . . to rise above the bureaucratic trap of preoccupation with daily details and myriad minor decisions and to provide leadership in solving complex, important, region-wide problems. Over the last decade or so, the Citizens League has expressed similar concerns; as a decidedly friendly critic, we have urged the Council to focus on the big picture, to provide leadership on major policy issues. The Transit Facilities Plan is an excellent example of just such leadership.

The plan is built on a handful of central, sensible ideas. The League wholeheartedly supports these ideas; we think they are directly in accord with concepts we have advanced for some time; indeed, we believe they are vital to any successful transit plan in this metropolitan area. Those ideas are:

- Transit means riding, without regard to a particular kind of hardware -- it means turning solo drivers into riders.
- Proposals that do not cost-effectively turn drivers into riders are not useful.
- One essential key to improved service is to give transit exclusive rights-of-way -- whatever the technology -- so that it can compete with the private auto.
- Successful transit in this metropolitan area will require a variety of technologies and strategies in many parts of the region.
- Transit must reflect the region's true travel patterns, which for decades have not been concentrated along dense diagonals leading to one or two job centers, but rather decentralized and increasingly diffuse. Demographics, too, have contributed to our phenomenal auto use as the baby-boom generation matured and its large bulge moved through the employment cycle. The Council's own research and analysis make this travel pattern unmistakably clear. But applying it to transit planning and operations in the real world has been difficult. In a word, as the Transit Facilities Plan states, transit must go where people want to go.

As many of you know, the Citizens League is a long-time skeptic about rail transit in this area, because it is highly expensive and because other vehicle systems, not tied exclusively to a fixed guideway, promise to do more for less . . . put another way, to more economically go where more of the people want to go more of the time.