

Regional transit system ranks high in efficiency

Written by Peter Bell
Friday, 30 April 2010 22:38

Over the last seven years, the Metropolitan Council has had considerable success in expanding our regional transit system and growing ridership.

We've opened our first light rail line in the Hiawatha corridor and begun work on our second in the Central corridor. We've started service on our first commuter rail line in the Northstar corridor. And we've completed the first phase of bus rapid transit improvements in the I-35W and Cedar Avenue corridors.

However, we've also worked very hard to ensure that our system is as efficient and cost-effective as possible.

Our transit system compares very well with peer systems around the country, as shown by a new report compiled by our transportation staff. The performance evaluation report, required by state law, compares our transit system with 11 others – including Baltimore, Dallas, Denver, Milwaukee, Portland, Seattle and St. Louis.

Here are a few key findings:

The ridership of our system grew by 17 percent during the period 2005 to 2008, compared with 8.5 percent for our 11 peers.

Our system's operating costs – adjusted for inflation – increased by 7.4 percent during this period, compared with 12.1 percent for our peers.

Our farebox recovery rate – the percentage of operating costs covered by fares – ranked third highest in 2008 among the 12 systems examined.

Our subsidy per passenger in 2008 averaged \$2.61, compared with \$3.24 for our peers.

In other words, our ridership is growing faster, our service is more efficient and it requires a lower subsidy per passenger than most of our peers.

One place where we lag a little is in the amount of transit service we offer. Our system provides 19.9 miles of transit service per capita, putting us in sixth place among the 12 regions studied and just below the peer average (20.7).

However, we hope to improve in this area as we continue to expand our bus system, and develop our network of rail and bus transitways.

On May 26, the Council will be acting on a recommendation from Hennepin County that we move forward with our third light rail line in the Southwest Corridor between downtown Minneapolis and Eden Prairie. The 14-mile line would connect with our other rail lines at the inter-modal station near Target Field.

When this rail line is completed, we will have nearly 130 miles of transitways providing fast, hassle-free service in some of our most heavily traveled corridors.

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Overall, the new report is a tribute to the outstanding performance of our staff at Metro Transit, Metro Mobility and our entire transportation services division.

(Peter Bell is chair of the Metropolitan Council, a 17-member body that oversees regional planning, transit, wastewater services, and regional parks and trails.)