

Smart INVESTMENTSSM

IN TRANSPORTATION FOR MINNESOTA

Connecting Communities in Greater Minnesota *Roads, Intercity Bus and Rail for Personal Travel*

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GROWTH & JUSTICE

Growth & Justice is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that researches and recommends public policies to make Minnesota's economy simultaneously more prosperous and fair. We support fair taxation and smart public sector investment — fiscally responsible, accountable investment that advances prosperity for all Minnesotans. Growth & Justice is a leading progressive voice on state issues.

Executive Summary

In Greater Minnesota – especially the more rural areas – trip destinations are far less concentrated than in the Twin Cities metro region, meaning that residents of Greater Minnesota are more likely to make frequent trips in between urbanized areas and between smaller cities. This Growth & Justice policy report highlights some of the ways that the government in Minnesota should both preserve and enhance the ease of intercity personal travel in Greater Minnesota. This report looks at investments, policies and approaches for the interregional corridor highway system, intercity bus service and passenger rail service. ([More](#))

Interregional Corridors

Minnesota’s priority interregional corridors (IRCs) – totaling about 3,000 centerline miles – link together the various cities that serve as major trade centers in Minnesota outside of the Twin Cities metro region. IRCs make up 25 percent of the state highway system and 2 percent of Minnesota roads overall, but they carry more than one quarter of all vehicle miles traveled in the state and most of Minnesota’s freight traffic. When MnDOT makes investments in the highway system, including the interregional corridors, those investments are split among the categories of infrastructure preservation, safety, mobility, and improvements to aid local economic development, known as regional and community improvement priorities (RCIP). ([More](#))

Potential Policies and Approaches

- Address critical pavement preservation needs for Minnesota’s system of interregional corridors. ([More](#))
- For safety-related improvements to the IRC system, emphasize lower-cost roadway enhancements whenever feasible as an alternative to projects that would improve safety through increased road capacity. ([More](#))
- Fund the maintenance of IRC bridges – as well as repair and replacement as needed – to keep the bridges strong, including those bridges not covered by transportation funding under Chapter 152 of Minnesota’s 2008 laws. ([More](#))
- Keep investments in IRC mobility improvements modest, unless the mobility needs on the IRC system become far worse than what’s anticipated. ([More](#))
- For local economic development, give priority to RCIP investments that also advance objectives important to the overall IRC system. ([More](#))
- Use intelligent transportation systems, when cost-effective, to improve travel on IRCs throughout Minnesota, employing, for example, traffic sensors and computerized signals at intersections, real-time traffic monitoring, and signs and other communication modes to alert drivers to adverse conditions. ([More](#))
- Update IRC investment plans regularly, based on new data and trends. ([More](#))
- Identify which of the IRC system’s unmet needs should be funded first if unanticipated transportation dollars become available. ([More](#))

Intercity Bus Service

Intercity bus service – as distinct from rural transit service – carries passengers along a fixed route between two or more urban areas not in close proximity, with a limited number of stops along the route, a regular schedule for the bus service, and connections offered between different routes and services. All intercity bus service in Minnesota is provided by private companies, and nearly all of it is offered by either Jefferson Lines or Greyhound Lines. Under federal law, no state government is allowed to regulate the routes, schedules or fares of any private intercity bus company. Consequently the primary way Minnesota’s state government involves itself in intercity bus service is through the distribution of subsidies, most especially the federal funds available specifically for intercity bus transportation in rural areas under the 5311(f) program. Jefferson Lines accepts 5311(f) funding and pays the local match on many of its lines. Greyhound does not accept 5311(f) subsidies. ([More](#))

Potential Policies and Approaches

- Favor options that will enhance connections between intercity buses and other modes of transportation when selecting routes for operating subsidies and when using government funds for station improvements and other capital investments. ([More](#))
- When deciding which intercity bus routes to subsidize, give precedence to routes that serve areas with demographic characteristics suggesting a high potential demand for intercity bus service and containing major destinations for intercity bus customers. ([More](#))
- Target subsidies for intercity bus service to routes that connect rural areas and small towns with larger urban areas and the national intercity bus network. ([More](#))
- Coordinate intercity bus service and subsidies with other states. ([More](#))
- Consider at some point in the future establishing a state subsidy program for intercity bus lines that is separate from federal subsidy programs, provided that doing so does not take away from the state funding available for high-priority transportation needs. ([More](#))

Intercity Passenger Rail Service

In recent years, there has been increased interest in expanding the intercity passenger rail system in Minnesota. Significantly expanding intercity passenger rail service would be a very expensive proposition, and demand for more train travel is uncertain. For these reasons, it is not clear that such an expansion in general is the best transportation choice right now. That said, the following state investments, policies and choices are recommended when the State of Minnesota does take steps to expand its intercity passenger rail system. ([More](#))

Potential Policies and Approaches

- Undertake upgrades to existing rail infrastructure – for expanded intercity passenger rail service – in ways that also benefit the movement of freight by rail. ([More](#))
- Establish the Twin Cities as the hub for any new passenger rail service in Minnesota, giving first priority to routes that connect the Twin Cities with St. Cloud, Rochester, Duluth, and the regional transportation hub of Chicago. ([More](#))
- Build up the new passenger rail services on an incremental basis over time but with the objective that each new service corridor will eventually be part of a larger regional system. ([More](#))
- For intercity passenger rail service, carry out construction projects in a manner that doesn’t preclude conversion to faster train service at some later date. ([More](#))
- Coordinate any major expansion of intercity passenger rail service with the Metropolitan Council. ([More](#))

Intercity Personal Travel in Greater Minnesota

Most personal travel consists of trips that begin and end within the same urbanized area. But intercity personal travel is also a vital concern, particularly for residents of Greater Minnesota. In Greater Minnesota – and especially the more rural areas – trip destinations are far less concentrated than in the Twin Cities metro region, meaning that residents of Greater Minnesota are more likely than Twin Cities residents to make frequent trips in between urbanized areas and between smaller cities. This Growth & Justice report on *Connecting Communities in Greater Minnesota* highlights some of the ways that government should both preserve and enhance the ease of intercity personal travel. Featured here are investments, policies and approaches related to the interregional corridor highway system, intercity bus service and passenger rail service.

Interregional Corridors

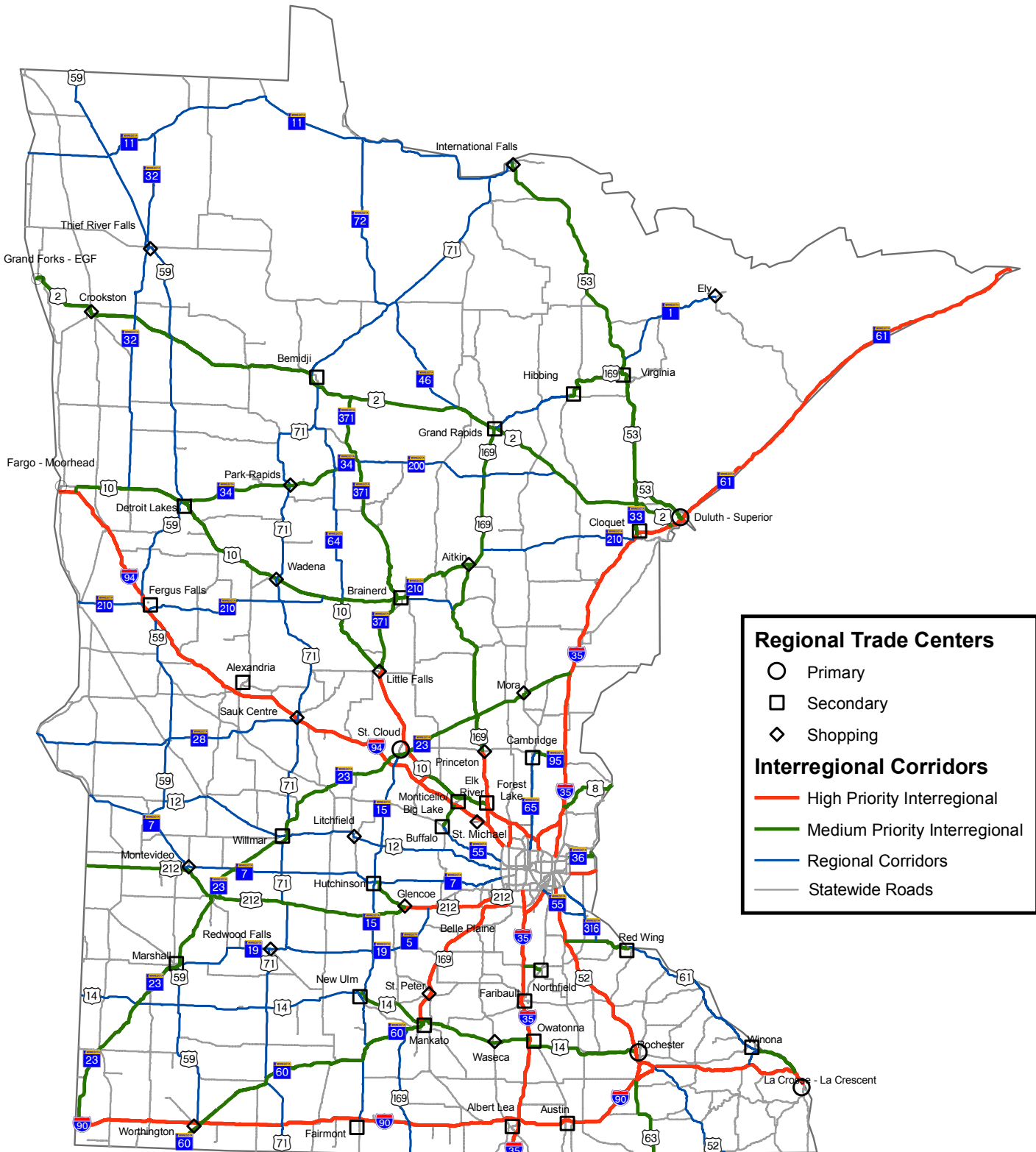
The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has identified an important subset of the highways under its jurisdiction as high- and medium-priority interregional corridors (IRCs). Minnesota's IRCs total about 3,000 centerline miles, linking together the various cities that serve as major trade centers in Minnesota outside of the Twin Cities metro region. IRCs make up 25 percent of the state highway system and 2 percent of Minnesota roads overall, but they carry more than one quarter of all vehicle miles traveled in the state and most of Minnesota's freight traffic. (MnDOT, p. 19.) (For information about freight issues, policies and approaches, see the Growth & Justice freight transportation [report](#) and [policy brief](#).)

When MnDOT makes investments in the highway system, including the interregional corridors, those investments are split among the categories of infrastructure preservation, safety, mobility (measured in terms of average traffic speed), and improvements to aid local economic development, known as regional and community improvement priorities (RCIP). (MnDOT, p. 2.) In 2004, MnDOT anticipated having enough funding over the next 20 years to address all infrastructure preservation needs, with dollars left to fund investments in safety, mobility and RCIP. However a drop in projected revenues between 2004 and 2009 prompted MnDOT to switch to a Minnesota highway plan that incorporates all four of these investment areas but with investments in infrastructure preservation still given the highest priority. (MnDOT, pp. 3 & 33.) Going forward, construction costs and both state and federal sources of revenue will be subject to unanticipated changes – some, perhaps, dramatic in size or scope – meaning that the state's IRC investment plans are also likely to undergo changes over the coming years. (MnDOT, p. 31.) It is within this context that any policy recommendations regarding the interregional corridor system must be considered.

Potential Policies and Approaches

- **Address critical pavement preservation needs for Minnesota's system of interregional corridors.** The state's highest priority regarding the IRCs should continue to be the preservation and maintenance of concrete and asphalt. The need for preservation is driven home by the fact that MnDOT anticipates that the number of Minnesota highway miles with poor pavement conditions will triple between the years 2009 and 2018. (MnDOT, p. 48.) As one way to address other investment needs, MnDOT and its local partners should carry out IRC preservation projects in ways that also improve highway safety, enhance mobility and advance local economic development objectives. Clearly, the state will need to analyze proposed investments in the IRC system based on a combination of the key factors – preservation, safety, mobility and economic development. Preservation stands out as a crucial element of the equation.

Interregional Corridors and Regional Trade Centers



Source: Minnesota Department of Transportation

- **For safety-related improvements to the IRC system, emphasize lower-cost roadway enhancements whenever feasible as an alternative to expensive projects that would improve safety through increased road capacity.** Some 70 percent of all Minnesota traffic fatalities occur on rural highways in Greater Minnesota – often on two-lane roads. Rural highways in Greater Minnesota generally have relatively low traffic volumes, making expansion difficult to justify based on capacity considerations. For this reason, efforts to increase safety on much of the interregional corridor system should focus on such improvements as centerline rumble strips, cable median barriers, turning and passing lanes, and the provision of full shoulders for use by drivers who need to pull out of traffic because of vehicle trouble. Efforts to improve driver behavior are important, too. The sorts of roadway enhancements noted here should be put in place in conjunction with planned construction projects that also achieve non-safety objectives, as this is an effective way to capture multiple benefits and save money. (MnDOT, p. 8.)
- **Fund the maintenance of IRC bridges – as well as repair and replacement as needed – to keep the bridges strong, including those bridges not covered by transportation funding under Chapter 152 of Minnesota’s 2008 laws.** Chapter 152 funding and financing is available to improve those bridges that are deemed to be either “structurally deficient” or “fracture critical.” But the dollars available under Chapter 152 fall short of what’s needed for the required work on those types of bridges, so MnDOT will need to commit other funds to carry out the Chapter 152 mandate for bridge repairs. In addition, many bridges and culverts within the system do not qualify as either “structurally deficient” or “fracture critical” but still need attention. (MnDOT, pp. 16-17 & 48.) More funding is needed to tackle this challenge. Often timely action on maintenance and repair can forestall more expensive replacement needs. Bridges with lower sufficiency ratings should be targeted for repair sooner than others.
- **Keep investments in IRC mobility improvements modest, unless the mobility needs on the IRC system become far worse than what’s anticipated.** It is tempting to invest heavily in mobility improvements because they constitute an important share of the state’s identified transportation investment needs. (MnDOT, p. 28.) But the interregional corridors mainly serve Greater Minnesota, and the greatest needs for mobility improvements stem from traffic congestion in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. (MnDOT, p. 40.) Not surprisingly, then, mobility is not a problem at all for most of the IRC system. In fact, 98 percent of IRC highway miles in 2008 were within two miles per hour of their target for average traffic speeds. (MnDOT, p. 20.) And it’s worth noting that too great a focus on meeting mobility needs for IRC road miles near the Twin Cities area could have the unintended consequence of spurring even greater urban sprawl outward from the state’s largest metro region. Still, the proportion of IRC highway miles within two miles per hour of their target average traffic speeds is forecast to drop to 94 percent by 2018 and to 91 percent by 2028. (MnDOT, p. 20.) If this downward trend in mobility turns out to be worse than the forecast, it may be necessary to increase the amount invested in mobility improvements for select segments of the IRC system.
- **For local economic development, give attention to those regional and community improvement priorities that also advance objectives important to the overall IRC system.** RCIP investments, aimed at spurring local economic development, take many different forms, and pursuing all of them would be cost-prohibitive. (MnDOT, p. 50.) Furthermore state-funded improvements undertaken to meet local economic-development objectives alone are not as easy to justify politically as those improvements that help spur local economic development but also help meet performance targets for the state’s entire transportation system. Therefore, to improve cost-efficiency, the state should place its funding priority on those RCIPs that also advance system-wide objectives regarding infrastructure preservation, safety and mobility.
- **Use intelligent transportation systems (ITS), when cost-effective, to improve travel on IRCs throughout Minnesota.** Effective ITS initiatives reduce congestion, accidents and stops through the use of technology as an alternative to costly roadway expansion or measures aimed at reducing traffic. Strategies include traffic sensors and computerized signals at intersections, real-time traffic monitoring, and signs and other communication modes to alert drivers to adverse conditions.

- **Update investment plans regularly.** MnDOT should continue its practice of making annual updates to its plans for improving the IRC system, taking into consideration new data and trends. (MnDOT, p. 51.) Both the cost of planned transportation infrastructure improvements and the amount of money available to undertake them are likely to change over time, as are transportation patterns and road conditions. Similarly the overall performance of the transportation system is likely to deviate from current predictions, and the timing for individual projects will likely require changes.
- **Identify which of the IRC system’s unmet needs should be funded first if unanticipated transportation dollars become available.** Because of finite resources for state transportation needs, it’s true that some transportation improvements are identified as important but not ranked high enough to warrant action. However, at times, new and unanticipated sources of either federal or state transportation funding become available, making action possible on a portion or portions of the IRC system’s unmet needs. To prepare for such circumstances, MnDOT should identify a list of higher-priority IRC improvements not currently planned but worthy of attention in the event that new funding becomes available. When preparing this list of higher-priority unmet needs, officials should keep in mind that state and federal transportation funds are often disbursed for very specific types of projects. Therefore, higher-priority improvements for the IRC system ought to be identified in several different categories, including infrastructure preservation, safety, mobility enhancement, and improvements for local economic development purposes. (MnDOT, p. 42.)

Intercity Bus Service

Both in Minnesota and in the nation as a whole, the majority of intercity bus riders are either young adults or senior citizens, and intercity bus riders are more likely than not to have low incomes and also lack transportation alternatives to the bus. (KFH & SRF, p. 3-2.) In addition, intercity bus riders are more likely to be female and to be traveling for personal reasons, rather than for business. (KFH & SRF, p. 3-1.) Intercity bus service, as examined in this report, is defined as carrying passengers along a fixed route between two or more urban areas not in close proximity, with a limited number of stops along the route, a regular schedule for the bus service, and connections offered between different routes and services. (KFH & SRF, p. 1-2.) (Not covered here is rural transit service in Greater Minnesota among nearby communities.)

Intercity bus customers tend to be solo riders and travel between a wide variety of origins and destinations within Minnesota, as opposed to only making trips from small towns to large cities and back again. (KFH & SRF, p. 3-34.) Major trip destinations for intercity bus travel include college campuses, military bases, prisons, medical facilities, and airports and train stations. (KFH & SRF, p. 3-18.) The trips for which people use intercity bus services tend to be longer than the average trip by car or train, but shorter than the average commercial airline trip. (KFH & SRF, p. 3-1.)

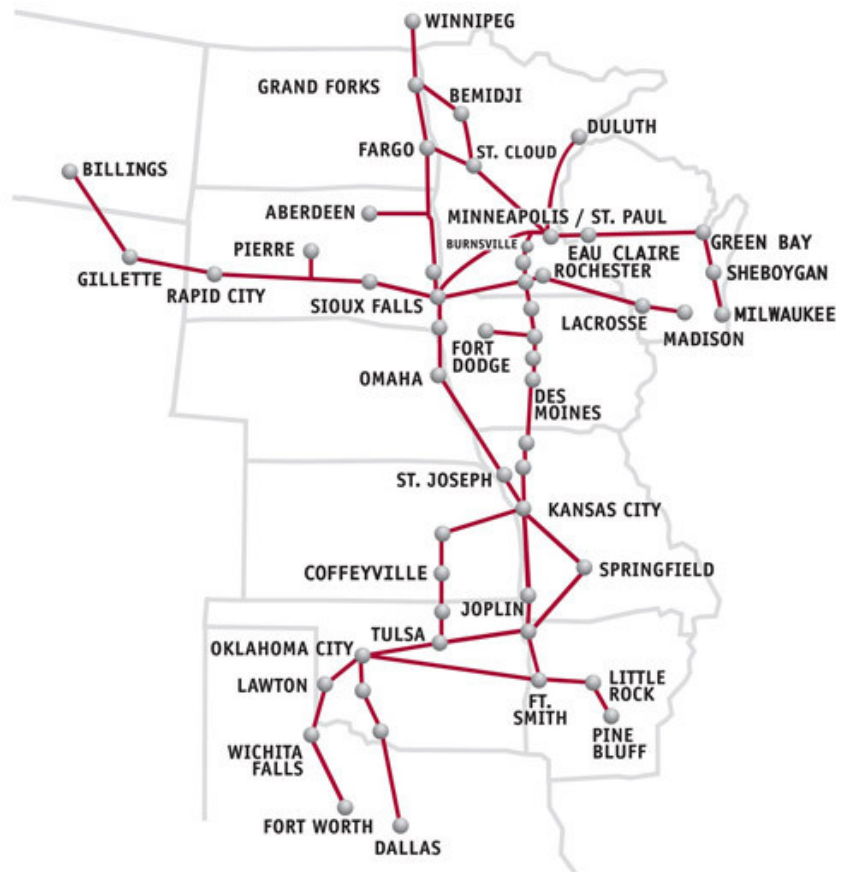
All intercity bus service in Minnesota is provided by private companies, and nearly all of it is offered by either Jefferson Lines or Greyhound Lines. (KFH & SRF, p. 2-1.) Greyhound is the only company in the United States that provides a national network of intercity bus routes, and it therefore links together regional intercity bus providers such as Jefferson. (KFH & SRF, p. 1-15.)

Under federal law, states are not allowed to regulate the routes, schedules or fares of any private intercity bus company. (KFH & SRF, pp. 1-2 & 1-19.) Consequently the primary way Minnesota’s state government involves itself in intercity bus service is through the distribution of subsidies, most especially the federal funds available specifically for rural, intercity bus transportation under 5311(f) – part of the Federal Transit Administration’s broader 5311 program supporting public transportation in rural areas. Under 5311(f), Minnesota and other states must use 15 percent of their annual apportionment from the overall 5311 program to support intercity bus service and in this way help fill service gaps in rural areas. (KFH & SRF, pp.1-18 & 1-19.) Whenever 5311(f) funding from the federal government is provided to either establish or maintain an unprofitable bus route, a 20 percent local match is required for assistance on capital projects, and all operating assistance requires a 50 percent local match on the net operating deficit. (KFH & SRF, pp. 1-23 & 1-29.) The state of Minnesota does not pay this local match and does not require local governments to pay it, either, so it is paid by the bus company. Consequently all Minnesota routes funded through 5311(f) still represent a net loss for the intercity bus company that runs them.

Jefferson Lines accepts 5311(f) funding and pays the local match on many of its lines, on the grounds that these unprofitable rural and small-town routes feed into the company's more profitable, unsubsidized routes. (KFH & SRF, pp. 1-14 to 1-15 & 2-14.) Greyhound, however, stopped accepting 5311(f) funding in 2004 and now mostly operates high-frequency express service between major population centers and along major highways, creating service gaps in Greater Minnesota that are only partially filled by Jefferson Lines. (KFH & SRF, pp. 2-12 to 2-14, 3-3 & 3-16.) Even though there are service gaps in Minnesota's intercity bus network, the rate at which ticket revenue covers operating expenses does indicate that the state's remaining intercity bus routes are efficiently located. (KFH & SRF, pp. 1-29 & 3-46.)

Potential Policies and Approaches

- Favor options that will enhance connections between intercity buses and other modes of transportation when selecting routes for operating subsidies and when using government funds for station improvements and other capital investments.** This includes connections with transit systems, bicycle and pedestrian access to bus stations, and bus routes that make stops at train stations and airports. (KFH & SRF, pp. 4-2, 4-5, 5-9 & 5-10.) The state also should coordinate rural transit service with the intercity bus network so that rural transit functions as a feeder service for intercity bus routes. Transit vehicles should stop at intercity bus stations on a schedule that matches with intercity bus departures and arrivals. (KFH & SRF, p. 5-7.)
- When deciding which intercity bus routes to subsidize, give precedence to routes that serve areas with demographic characteristics suggesting a high potential demand for intercity bus service and containing major destinations for intercity bus customers.** In addition to areas with higher population densities, demand for intercity bus service is likely to be greater in locations with a large percentage of either senior citizens or young adults and where a higher-than-average share of the households do not own cars. Furthermore demand for a given intercity bus route is likely to be greater if it serves locations near a college campus, a military base, a prison, or a major medical facility. (KFH & SRF, pp. 4-2 & 4-6.)
- Target subsidies for intercity bus service to routes that connect rural areas and small towns with larger urban areas and the national intercity bus network.** The utility that bus riders derive from a given route increases with the number of places that they are able to reach using that route. So routes that connect with statewide and nationwide intercity bus networks are particularly useful. It's worth considering, too, those small cities skipped over by intercity express bus routes that travel between major population centers – such as the heavily used and frequent bus runs between Minneapolis and Chicago, with passenger stops limited to only Madison and Milwaukee in Wisconsin. There is a need in many of the smaller towns along these express routes for access to the major population centers at either end of the line.



Source: Jeffersonlines.com

- **Coordinate intercity bus service and subsidies with other states.** A lack of coordination among neighboring states can lead to inadequate connections between each state’s intercity bus services. Often enough, bus travelers need to reach destinations beyond their state’s borders. Therefore it makes sense to identify either existing or potential bus routes that pass through both Minnesota and one or more of the neighboring states and to make arrangements with those other states to jointly provide 5311(f) funding for interstate routes. (KFH & SRF, p. 4-4.)
- **Consider at some point in the future establishing a state subsidy program for intercity bus lines that is separate from federal subsidy programs, provided that doing so does not take away from state funding available for high-priority transportation needs.** Assuming that at some point the state has sufficient revenues to undertake such a program, a state subsidy would allow for action on intercity bus service without the constraints that the federal government now places on how its subsidy money is used. For example, the federal 5311(f) program must focus on rural transportation. But a state-funded subsidy could be used to spur new or expanded trunk bus routes in Greater Minnesota between major population centers, hence strengthening the overall system rather than just patching service in areas with low population densities and relatively weak demand for service. (KFH & SRF, p. 5-23.) If the state were to offer its own subsidy program, any funding for new intercity bus routes should be provided on a probationary basis and then discontinued if the demand for service along the route is too low to justify ongoing state subsidies. (KFH & SRF, p. 4-11.) And such a move by the state should not come at the expense of funding for rural transit systems and other transportation system priorities.

Intercity Passenger Rail Service

Minnesota has only two intercity passenger rail lines – the Northstar commuter line running from Big Lake to downtown Minneapolis, and Amtrak’s Empire Builder that runs once a day in each direction through Minnesota on its route between Chicago and either Seattle or Portland . The Empire Builder makes stops in the Minnesota cities of Winona, Red Wing, St. Paul, St. Cloud, and Staples and Detroit Lakes, as well as in Fargo, ND, just across the Minnesota border. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 2-18.) Just like most intercity passenger rail service in the United States, these lines run on tracks owned by freight train companies and also carry freight trains. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., pp. ES-1, ES-2 & 2-1.) This arrangement for shared tracks is a difficult one because many major rail lines in Minnesota are already carrying traffic loads above their intended capacity. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 1-9.)

In recent years, there has been increased interest in expanding the intercity passenger rail system in Minnesota. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. ES-1.) The interest stems in part from the fact that more people get on and off Amtrak trains in St. Paul than at any other Amtrak train station with only one train per day arriving from each direction. Plus, passenger traffic at all of Minnesota’s other Amtrak stations is also greater than the national average.



Photo by jpmueller99

(Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 2-18.) Arguments in favor of increased passenger rail service include that regions tend to reap economic advantages from greater variety in transportation options, that train travel is safer than travel by car, and that diverting intercity travelers to rail reduces wear on the highway system. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. ES-10.) In addition, some argue that demand for intercity passenger rail service is likely to increase in Minnesota because the population is both growing and aging, and because the trend is upward for gas prices paid by automobile travelers. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., pp. 1-5 & 3-3.) However, the demand for an expanded intercity passenger rail system is very uncertain, given that there is not yet a standard, proven and reliable methodology for forecasting intercity passenger rail ridership. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 3-24.)

In the last several years, significant federal grant money has become available for intercity passenger rail projects. However, the competition for this grant money is stiff. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 1-19.) In 2008, the federal Passenger Rail Improvement and Investment Act (PRIIA) authorized about \$750 million a year for intercity passenger rail grants. In 2009, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act added another \$8 billion to the PRIIA grant programs. This new federal money is in addition to several other federal transportation funding programs for which intercity passenger rail is an acceptable use. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 1-19.) Nevertheless, the \$8 billion is but a small fraction of the dollars required to significantly upgrade rail transportation nationwide. By way of example, MnDOT's 2010 combined plan for freight and passenger rail estimates that the capital costs for the suggested rail improvements just in the state over a 20-year period to be \$6.2 billion to \$9.5 billion, including costs that have traditionally been the responsibility of private freight railroads. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. ES-5.)

Potential Policies and Approaches

Significantly expanding intercity passenger rail service in Minnesota would be a very expensive proposition, and demand for more train travel is uncertain. For these reasons, it is not clear that such an expansion in general is the best transportation choice right now. The government budget challenges, both at the state and the federal level, also may make large investments in expanded intercity rail service in Minnesota – as distinct from transit rail service – politically difficult. That said, the following state investments, policies and choices are recommended when the State of Minnesota does take steps to expand its intercity passenger rail system.

- **Undertake upgrades to existing rail infrastructure – for expanded intercity passenger rail service – in ways that also benefit the movement of freight by rail.** Most new intercity passenger rail service would almost certainly take place on existing railroad tracks or in existing rights of way, so passenger service would share this infrastructure with freight trains. If the capacity of the railroad infrastructure in a given corridor needs to be expanded to accommodate new intercity passenger trains, that expansion should also benefit the freight rail service, which would otherwise be hindered by the addition of new passenger trains. Investments in rail infrastructure, if pursued, will be easier to justify if they also benefit the existing freight rail system. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 6-20.) Of course, in cases where state-funded improvements to the railroad network benefit both freight and passenger service, the state government will need to negotiate with private rail companies on matters of cost-sharing and implementation time frames. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 1-17.)
- **Establish the Twin Cities as the hub for any new passenger rail service in Minnesota, giving first priority to routes that connect the Twin Cities with St. Cloud, Rochester, Duluth, and the regional transportation hub of Chicago.** (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 4-42.) Studies indicate that these potential intercity passenger rail routes stand the greatest chance of generating high ridership because they would serve the state's larger population centers. In addition, creating or expanding service to these cities would maximize the number of people with easy access to the intercity passenger rail system. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., pp. 5-5 & 5-6.) Given the high capital costs of expanding intercity passenger rail routes, new or expanded service between the Twin Cities and these destinations offers the best chance to have ticket revenues cover a large percentage of operating costs – an important criteria for route selection. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., pp. 1-17, 5-11 & 5-12.) Particular attention should be given to expanding rail service between the Twin Cities and St. Cloud, not only because this route has high ridership potential but also because it would require lower capital expenditures than the other recommended routes. That's because rail already connects St. Paul to St. Cloud, and Amtrak serves that route once a day in each direction, albeit at inconvenient times. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 5-6.) In addition, the Northstar commuter rail line runs part way up from the Twin Cities to St. Cloud. Extension of passenger rail service to other, smaller cities in the state should only be considered once routes out of the Twin Cities to St. Cloud, Rochester and Duluth have been established and are successful. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., pp. ES-3 & ES-4.)
- **Build up the new passenger rail services on an incremental basis over time but with the objective that each new service corridor will eventually be part of a larger regional system.** Financial, logistical and political reasons all likely support an incremental approach to the implementation of expanded passenger rail service in Minnesota. But when taken, the incremental steps should be carried out in such

a way that they will eventually add up to a larger, integrated network. An intercity passenger rail line that is well-connected with other similar lines is likely to attract a larger and more reliable customer base than a stand-alone line that does not provide passengers with the opportunity to make connections to other routes throughout the state, region and country. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. ES-6.)

- **For intercity passenger rail service, carry out construction projects in a manner that doesn't preclude conversion to faster train service at some later date.** In all likelihood, financial constraints will mean that new passenger rail lines will operate at speeds below what today's technology allows. Nonetheless it is possible that higher-speed service will become feasible at some point in the future, meaning that new passenger rail lines should be built in such a way as to allow for relatively easy incorporation of design elements that are needed for faster trains. Higher-speed passenger rail service requires that tracks make more gradual curves, make fewer at-grade crossings with roadways, and are built according to stricter construction standards. Very fast passenger rail service may require dedicated tracks that are separate from the tracks used by freight trains but still located on the same rights of way. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 4-36.)
- **Coordinate any major expansion of intercity passenger rail service with the Metropolitan Council.** The Twin Cities metropolitan area is home to a great number of railroad bottlenecks, substantially affecting both the freight rail system and any passenger rail system that uses the Twin Cities as its hub. The Met Council is the primary regional authority for Twin Cities area transportation. So any efforts to sort out the logistical problems and infrastructure limitations related to rail traffic and bottlenecks must be coordinated with that governing body. (Cambridge Systematics, et al., p. 6-7.)



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Sources

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