

Transit Systems in Minnesota

Public transit systems in Minnesota are marked by variation in their size, geographic coverage area, and service offerings. While the state assists transit operators with funding and planning, the systems are operated at a local or regional level primarily by public entities, such as counties and cities.

Forms of service

The public transportation systems vary with respect to forms of service provided to its riders. The basic forms are:

- **Regular route bus** service, operating primarily in urban settings on fixed routes and standard schedules and typically with a high frequency of stops;
- **Express bus** service (including bus rapid transit), which generally follows longer fixed routes and has fewer stops compared to regular route buses;
- **Demand response or “dial-a-ride,”** in which riders (usually in areas not served by regular route transit) can arrange for specific trips upon request;
- **Route deviation**, bus service on typically regular schedules that generally follows fixed routes but with small deviations upon rider request;
- **Paratransit**, which provides door-to-door transport for people who are unable to use regular bus service (required under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to complement any fixed route bus service area); and
- **Rail transit**, which operates on railroad track and includes street cars, light rail transit (LRT), commuter rail, and intercity passenger rail.

Systems in greater Minnesota

There are over 60 transit systems throughout greater Minnesota. Each one is classified under state law into one of four categories based on its location and system characteristics, as summarized in the table below. [Minn. Stat. § 174.24](#).

Class	Count	Forms of Service	Service Areas	Examples
Urbanized	6	Mainly regular route	One or a few cities	Duluth, Moorhead, St. Cloud
Small urban	13	Dial-a-ride, deviation	One or a few cities	Hibbing, Northfield, Winona
Rural	41	Dial-a-ride, deviation	Various	Arrowhead, Becker, Steele
Elderly/disabled	5	Paratransit	Matches regular route	E. Grand Forks, Rochester

Although there are commonalities (particularly within each classification), the transit systems vary in some of their key characteristics. Service is most often operated by cities and counties but some systems are run by joint powers boards, tribal governments, other forms of local government, and nonprofits. Fixed route service and paratransit are only found in more densely populated urban areas. Route deviation or dial-a-ride service, or both, are offered in small urban and rural settings. While transit systems in an urban area typically cover one or a couple of cities, rural systems can cover part of a county, be countywide, or be regional (extending across multiple counties). Service in a few counties only exists within a city, and seven counties lack any transit offerings. Hours of bus service usually

cover the working day, but in rural areas it often does not run later into the evening and is not always offered over the weekend. Bus frequency also varies and might not be daily. Some privately operated (but federally subsidized) intercity bus routes cross transit provider coverage areas and connect more distant cities.

Systems in the metropolitan area

The metropolitan area is served by a number of transit options, consisting of:

- **Metro Transit**, encompassing an extensive bus system as well as the state’s only light rail transit line and only commuter rail line;
- **Metro Mobility** paratransit for those with disabilities or health conditions;
- **Transit Link dial-a-ride** minibus or van service for the general public in those parts of the metropolitan area not served by regular route transit;
- **“Opt-out”** systems consisting of seven suburban transit providers that replace Metro Transit service in several metropolitan cities; and
- **Independent operators**, as in Ramsey Star and the University of Minnesota.

The Metropolitan Council

The Metropolitan Council’s transportation division consists of Metro Transit and Metropolitan Transportation Services (MTS). MTS manages contracts with public and private entities to operate (1) Metro Mobility, (2) Transit Link dial-a-ride service, and (3) additional regular bus routes (mainly for commuters into the central cities). The council’s rail and regular route bus service constitutes the largest transit system in Minnesota, accounting for over 87 percent of calendar year 2009 ridership. The council maintains most metropolitan park-and-ride lots, which link motorists to bus and rail service. In addition to being a transit operator, the Metropolitan Council performs regional transportation planning and management.

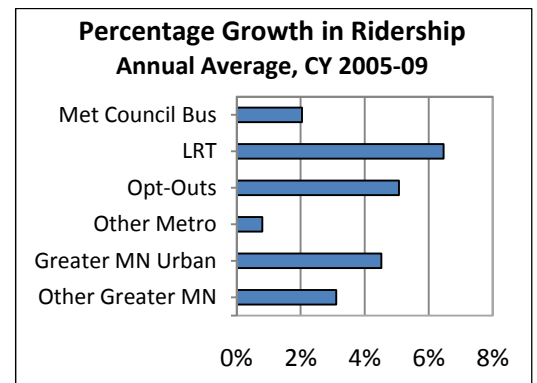
Opt-outs

The opt-outs are operated by a range of agencies including counties and cities (independently or through a joint powers agreement) as well as nonprofits. Service offerings vary, covering regular route circulator service within specific communities, dial-a-ride, and express bus service. Bus service provided by the opt-outs replaces that offered by the Metropolitan Council (although there is some overlap in coverage areas due to commuter service to the central cities).

Ridership

The charts below show ridership and its growth from calendar years 2005 to 2009.

Category	CY 2009 Ridership	CY 2005-09 Growth
Met Council Bus	68.1 M	5.1 M
LRT	9.9	2.0
Opt-Outs	4	0.8
Other Metro	6.1	0.2
Greater MN Urban	7.2	1.1
Other Greater MN	3.8	1.9
Total	99.9	9.7
Notes		
Amounts are in millions.		
CY is calendar year.		



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