



Citizen Advocates for Regional Transit

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Testimony on Universal Transit Mobility (UTM) and the need for Unified Transit Governance (UTG) As Proposed in HF 3718 – May 12 2022

This testimony is submitted in support of **HF3718**– “Universal transit mobility implementation provided, various governing transit requirements in the metropolitan area amended, comprehensive planning requirements amended, property tax levies authorized, bonds issued, and allocation requirements for county transportation sales and use tax amended.”

HF3718 is intended to make two fundamental changes in the delivery of public transit in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area:

1. To establish Universal Transit Mobility (UTM) as the new and clear goal for investments in and the operation of regional public transit: to enable anyone within the Transit Taxing District (TTD) to reach any other location within the TTD in a reasonable amount of time using public transit.
2. To establish Unified Transit Governance (UTG) to encourage more local government participation in the assessment of need and planning for intra and inter municipal transit, while assigning overall regional responsibility for transit system design, investment and operation to the Metropolitan Council (MC).

Why UTM? “You can’t get there from here.”

The dominant transportation system of the region comprises thousands of miles of roads and highways, costs billions of dollars per year and consumes 30% of our landscape. This system can be said to provide “Universal Automotive Mobility” (UAM), primarily for people with access to automobiles. However, a substantial number of people throughout the region do not qualify, cannot afford, are unable to drive or are unwilling to fight traffic. And, there is a much larger group who would prefer to ride transit, if UTM was available.

The capacity of this auto-centric system is being challenged by growth of population and utilization for commercial delivery vehicles, resulting in more congestion and less mobility. The solutions are to either build more roads, or utilize the existing system more efficiently through an expanded and coordinated transit system of Transitways, Busways, and ride sharing, with the target of UTM.

Our current public transit system, and major investments, are predominantly focused on the two downtowns. But most people don’t go downtown. Today, there are dozens of “downtowns” around the Metro. Jobs, services and shopping will always be widely distributed across the urban region. The public transit system needs to reflect this reality. It needs to support freedom of movement, and enable any transit rider in the TTD to reach any other location within the TTD in a reasonable amount of time.

Why UTG? System integrity and Accountability

HF3718 defines UTM and charges the Metropolitan Council with implementing a transit system that includes a goal of UTM by 2050

H.F.3718 assigns responsibility for planning, developing, constructing, operating, and maintaining transit service and transit facilities to the MC. And it incorporates a Stakeholder process that includes public hearings, seeking input from all levels of government and pursuing consensus-oriented dispute resolution with and among these units of government.

The Legislature and public are familiar with the troubles afflicting the SWLRT and Bottineau projects. They may not be familiar with the root cause of these troubles which resides in legislation splitting off the planning and design of Transitway projects to the counties while implementation and operation go to the Metropolitan Council to fulfill. With this complication, the MC inherits whatever deals or agreements were previously made by the counties to obtain agreement on the route, whether or not they are good agreements.

In contrast, it will be most effective to assign full responsibility and accountability, from designing to implementing the regional transit system, to the agency with over fifty years of experience doing regional system planning and operation, provided the cities and counties have input.

HF3718 will bring all TTD municipalities into transit planning and participation in UTM through their comprehensive plans and invite municipal recommendations regarding mobility and transportation improvements.

Traditional transit planning has exaggerated the importance of dense urban centers, minimized that of suburban areas and ignored the travel interaction among suburban communities. Local governments in general need to do more analysis and generate better understanding of the intra and inter municipal transit needs of their residents. And with this information, they need to participate in the development of measures to serve those transit needs within the overall UTM system.

HF3718 charges the MC with undertaking a general transit system redesign that reflects the needs of all stakeholders, and is accountable for funding and coordinating all operations to achieve UTM,

This is not limited to a hub-and-spoke transit service model primarily focused on the central business districts in Minneapolis and St Paul. The two central downtowns will always be an important part of UTM, but no longer dominate transit service. The MC is provided with funding sources and directed to do a better job of balancing investment across the TTD.

Your support for this legislation - to establish unified governance and ongoing funding for the achievement of Universal Transit Mobility in the Transit Taxing District is very important.

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