



TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Existing Conditions

DRAFT
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1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

As described in MnDOT's *Guidance for Coordination, Cooperation and Consolidation: Collaborative Strategies for Redesigning Transit Systems*, organizations throughout Minnesota clearly recognize the benefits of inter-governmental collaboration in order to address challenges such as constrained funding, statewide economic changes, and increasing populations in need of services. In particular, MnDOT's Office of Transit has provided active support and useful tools for local transit providers to encourage and enable them to work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their services.

Often the aim of coordination or consolidation is increased efficiency and a lower cost per passenger trip for participating agencies. In some cases, coordination has been shown to result in significant reductions in cost per vehicle hour or passenger trip, which may lead to lower transportation expenditures. For many participants, however, the result of increased coordination may lead to benefits other than cost savings. For human service agencies or transit providers that may be serving only a portion of the demand for their transportation services, or whose unit costs are already relatively low, coordination/consolidation is more likely to enable them to serve more customers, or offer a higher level or quality of service, for the same amount of expenditure.

Understanding that no one solution will fit all circumstances, MnDOT's guidance offers a range of strategies—the Three C strategies of coordination, cooperation, and consolidation— as well as a systematic approach to identifying the strategies that will work best in a given area.

The purpose of this study is to apply MnDOT's recommended approach in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties to identify and evaluate several appropriate coordination strategies that could be implemented in the region to improve mobility options for residents, and to help stakeholders choose their preferred option.

PLANNING PROCESS AND PROJECT GOALS

The desired outcome of the project is the achievement of the following goals:

- Identify and analyze opportunities to create regional services, to inform future transit funding decisions
- Analyze the advantages and challenges associated with alternative approaches to collaboration
- Develop three collaboration options, from coordination up to and possibly including system consolidation
- Prepare an implementation plan for the preferred option
- Generate greater understanding of transit collaboration issues to improve future planning efforts

In order to develop suitable coordination/consolidation options for the three-county region, the consultant team, composed of Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates and Pepin Hugunin & Associates, will document and assess existing transit and human service transportation services, evaluate opportunities for regional services, analyze different organizational structures for delivering those services, and develop a plan to guide implementation of the selected services. Important areas of focus in this study area will include:

- Identifying opportunities for developing connections between services to facilitate more inter-and intra-county travel
- Developing strategies to reduce or eliminate duplicative services and administrative efforts among existing transportation providers
- Exploring the potential for initiating some basic level of service to address the mobility needs of residents in the rural portions of Blue Earth, Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties

Throughout the process, the consultant team will be guided by a Project Management Team (PMT), which includes representatives of MnDOT's Office of Transit, Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Faith in Action and a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) composed of a broad group of stakeholders.

This technical memorandum is the first in a series of four reports that will be prepared throughout the course of the project.

RECENT PLANNING STUDIES

As one of our first steps in understanding existing conditions, the Nelson\Nygaard team reviewed other studies, plans and documents about public transportation services in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties.

South Central Minnesota Rural Transit Needs Assessment

*Prepared by the Urban Regional Studies Institute at Minnesota State University, Mankato:
December 2009*

This study examines alternative strategies for implementing and improving transit service in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Nicollet, and Waseca Counties, and explores potential transit demand and costs. The needs assessment looks at existing transit systems in the Region Nine area, relevant demographic data, perceptions of existing service, service gaps, transit alternatives, ridership projections and costs, and implementation strategies. The study determined that the largest work flows are between Nicollet and Blue Earth Counties, with some 9,000 employees commuting between the two counties.

The study includes a detailed analysis of travel demand by looking at demographic and travel data and the Mankato Area Transportation Multi-Modal Planning Study survey.

In addition to analyzing potential demand for transit using survey analysis, the study provides a portrait of existing area transit systems and an analysis of comparable transit systems in Minnesota, including the Arrowhead Transit System, the Austin-Mower County Area Transit, Brainerd and Crow Wing Public Transit, and Kandiyohi Area Transit System.

The study compares three transit alternatives:

- A system comprised of route deviation and dial-a-ride

- A fixed route system
- A fixed route system with feeders

The study concludes that of the three potential alternatives, the fixed route system with feeders would provide the best outcomes due to cost efficiency and optimal service for riders. Further, the authors mention that a public dial-a-ride option could be included if demand and funding merit the expansion. Lastly, the authors argue for weekday service only, providing for some 240,000 annual riders, and that the selected system should be run for minimum trial period of five years.

2010 Transit Survey for Saint Peter Transit

Saint Peter Transit sponsored a transit survey in March 2010. The average rider who completed the survey is between the ages of 18 and 64, white, understands English, does not have a disability, and has a household income of less than \$20,000 per year.

The survey focused on understanding transit rider preferences. Highlights of the findings include:

- Riders largely use transit because they do not own a car or they cannot drive.
- Many riders do not have a driver's license, especially those with special needs.
- Most riders use transit frequently (between two and four days per week) and many also use transit to get to and from shopping and work.
- Most riders are established riders; they have been using the service for more than a year, with many riding for over five years.
- Riders are overwhelmingly very satisfied with the service.
- The main ideas for service improvements include increasing service hours and reducing wait times.
- Most riders learned about the system through direct mailings and the website.

Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan

Prepared for Minnesota Department of Transportation by SRF Consulting Group: February 2011

The Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan is intended as the link between the goals and strategies established in the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan and the funding allocations to each public transit system in Greater Minnesota. The plan includes a market and technical analysis, as well as a summary of public involvement in the process, a summary of needs, and a list of transit investment priorities. This plan projects future need for transit services in Greater Minnesota and estimated costs, and is designed to assist decision-makers as they address growing transit demand.

The plan notes that while rural transit systems make up a majority of service hours and miles in Minnesota, urban areas make up nearly three times as many trips in the state though operating costs for urban and rural transit systems are nearly equal. The plan estimates that a large urban area passenger trip can be provided for roughly half the cost of a small urban trip, or a third of the cost of a rural passenger trip. The plan notes that MnDOT's priority is to preserve existing service throughout the state, followed by system expansion, and finally, as a last option, funding contraction for underperforming segments or systems. Guidelines and methods are provided for evaluating current service and future needs.

Mankato Area Transportation and Planning Study: 2035 Multi-Modal Transportation Plan

Prepared for MnDOT District 7, Region Nine Development Commission, Cities of Mankato and North Mankato, Counties of Blue Earth, Nicollet, and Le Sueur, and Minnesota State University—Mankato by URS: March 2011

The Mankato Area Transportation and Planning Study (MATAPS) sets the vision for the three-county area for the following 25 years.

The study analyzes the existing conditions of the area with a look at population statistics and patterns, and industry figures on employment including corporate and labor statistics. The study further examines the existing road network's volumes and capacity, and safety record, as well as the transit networks, non-motorized facilities (pedestrian, bicycling, etc.), and finally the rail and aviation situation of the area. Using the above information the study projects the impacts from population and economic growth on the existing transportation network, breaking down the analysis by existing mode.

The study concludes with recommendations for each mode type. For transit MATAPS addresses future needs with the following general guidance:

- Serve an aging population
- Emphasize creating sustainable communities
- Improve fixed-route services
- Coordinate fixed-route services with developing area
- Implement county and regional transit connections

The following strategies summarize the specific recommendations for the area:

- Bus rapid transit
 - Secure funding for a BRT system operations study and plan
 - Improve Mankato Transit to better serve the area
- Branding of Mankato Transit
 - Create marketing materials to better reflect a vision for transit's role in the region
- Integration with non-motorized transportation
 - Integrate pedestrian and bicycle connections with transit
- County-wide transit service
 - Explore emerging and evolving rural transit needs, and identify a framework for service provided budget constraints
- Regional transit connections
 - Promote alternative mode ridership to the Twin Cities, and consider integration of transit services to connect local transit and county-wide connections
- Transit education and coalitions
 - Work with major employers and institutions to identify opportunities to market and/or provide incentives to use transit

Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study

*Prepared the City of Mankato, MnDOT, and Minnesota State University—Mankato by
Nelson\Nygaard: December 2011*

Market Analysis

The Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study provides a market assessment of the greater Mankato region, including Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Nicollet, and Waseca Counties. The aim of the report is to assess potential current and future transit service in the area. The market analysis includes a profile of each of the five areas mentioned above, with a look at the major employers, worker flows, and demographics. A profile of each town or city in the respective counties was developed. These profiles include population change, unemployment figures, minority proportions, and vehicle ownership.

Regional Transportation Strategies

This section of the Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study focuses on possible transit connections throughout the four-county study area. A total of eight conceptual transit routes are considered with all but one having its terminal stop in Mankato, with origins in St. Peter, Waseca, Eagle Lake and Madison Lake, Mapleton, Lake Crystal, New Ulm, and Amboy. The eighth route considered would run from St. Peter to Le Sueur, and operate one round trip during peak hours and another at midday. This latter route would likely be an extension of the Mankato to St. Peter route and would operate only on weekdays. The study further examines possible service to the City of Waseca.

Following analysis of those conceptual routes, a discussion of other methods of meeting regional transportation needs looks at how better coordinated efforts could impact local mobility. The plan lays out a pilot coordination strategy for the Mankato Region, including administration, service delivery, and funding concerns. The study further lays out a pilot program.

Lastly, the redesign study recommends the creation of a Regional Transit Advisory Group (RTAG) through which existing and future transportation providers can address needs in a regional context. The study provides six key activities for the RTAG, which are listed below:

- Develop vision, goals and objectives for regional transit service
- Improve regional coordination of existing services
- Improve sharing of expertise among providers
- Better publicize and market existing services
- Explore funding opportunities
- Explore the possibility of instituting a regional mobility management position

Guidance for Coordination, Cooperation and Consolidation: Collaborative Strategies for Redesigning Transit Systems

Prepared by the Minnesota Department of Transportation: Revised August 2013

The MnDOT Office of Transit developed this guidance to assist transit service areas faced with anticipated lower funding levels. MnDOT recommends improving customer access and service by establishing policies that balance accessibility with efficiency, and promote enhanced working

relationships between the various Greater Minnesota transit systems. The guidelines for future budget shrinkages are focused on the following three principles (called the “three C’s”:

- Coordination—two or more agencies work together in a formal relationship with a focus on information sharing. Agencies remain independent.
- Cooperation—two or more agencies use joint decision making power to provide management of limited resources within a distinct system. Agencies remain independent.
- Consolidation—two or more agencies are combined to provide operational authority from one system, which then provides transit services according to service agreements or other contractual relationships.

The guidance report is written for transit providers, and outlines specific benefits of the “three C’s including:

- More opportunities for creativity in service delivery
- Better balance between efficiency as measured by operating cost per revenue hour and effectiveness as measured by passengers per revenue hour
- More flexibility in vehicle management
- More attentiveness to all aspects of federal requirements
- More time for managers to develop expertise in specialty areas

The document describes the benefits of restructuring, as well as various methods and examples of the “three C’s.” The appendices offer directions on how service areas can begin the process of working together and possibly consolidating, as well as a study design and list of resources.

Technical Assistance Brief: Performance Measures for New or Merged Services

Prepared for Greater Minnesota Rural Public Transit Systems by Sarah Brodt Lenz, Greater MN Public Transit Coordinator: January 2013

The Technical Assistance Brief details how Greater Minnesota Rural Public Transit Systems that are adjusting their delivered service to either meet unmet needs or are consolidating with other agencies will prepare report on and measure the success of each new route or merged service. Transit systems are asked to provide data that will be used to calculate performance measures for each service segment. Performance measures include:

- Passengers per hour
- Cost per hour
- Cost per passenger trip
- Revenue per trip
- Revenue miles
- Measuring progress

MnDOT established statewide standards only for Passengers per Hour based on type of service, several of which are detailed in Figure 1-1. Guidance for tracking and evaluating other measures is provided in the brief.

Figure 1-1 MnDOT Performance Measures

Type of Service	Passenger per Hour Threshold	Rating	Action
Community or Municipal Dial-A-Ride	≤ 2.0 PPH	Poor	Consider Discontinuance
	2.0 to 3.0 PPH	Minimally Adequate	Must improve to Good or Better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours.
	≥ 5.0 PPH	Excellent	
Deviate Rural Route	≤ 3.0 PPH	Poor	Discontinue or consider alternate method of service delivery.
	3.0-5.0 PPH	Minimally Adequate	Must improve to Good or better in the next year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	5.0 – 8.0 PPH	Good	Include in the following years base service hours.
	≥ 8.0 PPH	Excellent	

Source: MnDOT

Region Nine: 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan

Prepared for and by Region Nine Development Commission: Amended July 2012

This coordination plan was developed by the Region Nine Development Commission which comprises the counties of Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca, and Watonwan. The plan mentions the need to better serve the needs of vulnerable and/or transit dependent populations as motivation for improved coordination. The plan cites the following four strategies as ranking high throughout the planning process:

- Central information directory (called the Regional Transportation Linkage Line)
- Centralized Mobility Manager
- Diversification of vehicle fleet
- Extension of evening and weekend service hours

In addition to the above there is a brief summary of existing conditions and needs, the adoption and approval of the plan, and supporting appendices.

Within the nine-county region there are over 200 municipalities spread over more than 5,000 square miles, and containing a population of some 230,000 residents. There is recognition that the countries closer to the Twin Cities saw greater population increases from 2000 to 2010 than less proximate areas. The plan describes various demographic statistics in the region related to age, race, industry, and poverty.

As a part of the plan, over 200 regional transportation providers were asked to supply information about the services they offer. From the 50 responses that were returned it was clear that most public transit providers operate a dial-a-ride system. The study further determined that the following changes are needed to improve transportation coordination:

- Relax some of the regulations.
- Build awareness of the program.
- Attain additional funding.

- Encourage better communication with providers and with MnDOT.
- Eliminate political boundaries need to be eliminated.
- Establish positive working relationships.
- “Good coordination of rides can only be achieved at the expense of quality of service.”

The plan concludes with a list of over 20 strategies organized according to level of effort and ease or difficulty of implementation. These strategies include funding identification, shared transportation fleet facilities, fixed route development, and expanded services for older adults and people with disabilities among others. All strategies are described by a synopsis, clients and communities served, responsible agencies, and the type of strategy addressed.

Other Transit Survey Data

The Community and Transportation Development online survey was developed by a City of Le Sueur/Le Sueur School District employee and distributed by the transit directors at Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Transit in April 2014. The three transit systems had been meeting in previous months regarding discussions with MnDOT about coordination. The goal of the survey was to target the general public to understand overall transportation usage and needs and perceptions about the available services. In Le Sueur, the survey link was posted on the City website and information was distributed on the buses and City bills sent to residents. In Saint Peter, the survey information was distributed on buses and the transit director traveled to elementary schools and Gustavus Adolphus College to distribute information. The VINE transit director attended community events to distribute information about the survey and also passed out information on the People to Jobs program buses and in VINE adult learning courses.

The overall findings from the survey as related to this report are as follows:

- The majority of survey respondents were between the ages of 20 and 40. Only 26% were over the age of 60.
- Many respondents were from Le Sueur, Mankato, or Saint Peter.
- 55% are satisfied with transportation options currently available.
- 26% often use public transit to accesses services.
- 58% need transportation to shopping and 44% need transportation for social trips.
- Many respondents need transportation between the hours of 3:00 pm and 8:00 pm or later.
- Many respondents need transportation on Fridays and Saturdays.
- If a transit bus traveled regularly along Highway 169, respondents would like to travel to Mankato and Saint Peter.

2 STUDY AREA PROFILE

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties

This transit restructuring study focuses on three rural counties located in south central Minnesota: Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties. The area is sparsely populated with a total population of about 130,000 people over 1,700 square miles. Generally speaking, the counties are primarily rural with a series of small communities interspersed throughout. Mankato in Blue Earth County, Le Sueur in Le Sueur County, and North Mankato and St. Peter in Nicollet County are the four main urban areas that offer most of the regional services.

Blue Earth County has the largest population with 64,504 residents; 60% of the county's population resides in Mankato alone (40,740 people). Comparatively, both Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties have about half the population of Blue Earth (at 27,758 and 32,849 respectively). Their major cities also have significantly fewer residents compared to Mankato; the City of Le Sueur has an approximate population of 4,065, while North Mankato and St. Peter have populations of 13,515 and 11,445 respectively. About 75% of Nicollet County's total population lives in one of those two cities.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the counties are very similar, as shown in Figure 2-1. They have similar proportions of unemployed residents, residents with disabilities, older adults, Spanish-speaking residents, commuters, and zero-vehicle households. Additionally, all three counties have comparable employment sectors, with the Trade, Transportation, and Utilities sector as the top employer for each.

Le Sueur County has a slightly higher youth population at 25%, compared to Blue Earth at 20% and Nicollet at 22%. A more noticeable difference between counties is the number of very low income households among the three. Twenty-five percent of households in Blue Earth County have an annual income less than \$25,000, compared to only 17% of all households in both Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties (see Figure 2-1).

Figure 2-1 Demographic Summary

Agency	Blue Earth County		Le Sueur County		Nicollet County	
	Total	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total
County Population	64,504	100%	27,758	100%	32,849	100%
Unemployed In Labor Force*	2,561	7%	973	6%	970	5%
Residents with a Disability	3,328	5%	1,247	4%	1,508	5%
Youth (0-17)	12,586	20%	6,966	25%	7,289	22%
Senior (65+)	7,697	12%	4,150	15%	4,160	13%
Spanish-Speaking Residents**	2,123	3%	1,657	6%	1,592	5%
Commuters***	33,865	53%	13,628	49%	16,693	51%
Transit Passengers	397	1% of Commuters	89	Less than 1% of Commuters	156	Less than 1% of Commuters
Riders per Capita	0.006		0.003		0.005	
Households	24,476		10,997		12,192	
Zero-Vehicle Households	1,665	7%	406	4%	542	4%
Very Low-Income Households****	6,164	25%	1,806	16%	2,033	17%
Low-Income Households****	6,088	25%	2,868	26%	2,991	25%
Area Employers (2014, 2 nd Quarter)	1,947		704		672	
Top Employment Sectors						
1	Trade, Transportation and Utilities		Trade, Transportation and Utilities		Trade, Transportation and Utilities	
2	Education and Health Services		Construction		Education and Health Services	
3	Construction		Other Services		Construction	

Sources: US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates, Minnesota Dept. of Employment & Economic Development

* Does not include residents not in labor force

** Speaking English very well and less than very well

*** Labor force that does not Work at Home

**** Very Low-income Households earning less than \$25,000 per year

Low-income households earning less than \$50,000 per year, which is 80% of the median household income in Blue Earth County, classified low income according to US Department Housing and Urban Development (<http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il.html>)

POPULATION GROWTH AND DENSITY

The Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet County study area is experiencing growth across the three counties and most of their large cities (see Figure 2-2). All three counties have grown about 10% in population since 2000. Population forecasts prepared by the Minnesota State Demographic Center suggest that this trend of growth will continue for the next several decades, albeit significantly slower in coming years. The City of Mankato is growing fastest among the four larger cities, with a 25% population change over the last decade. Both large cities in Nicollet County grew at about 15%, while the City of Le Sueur's population has increased the least, at only 4%.

Figure 2-2 Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet County Population Trends

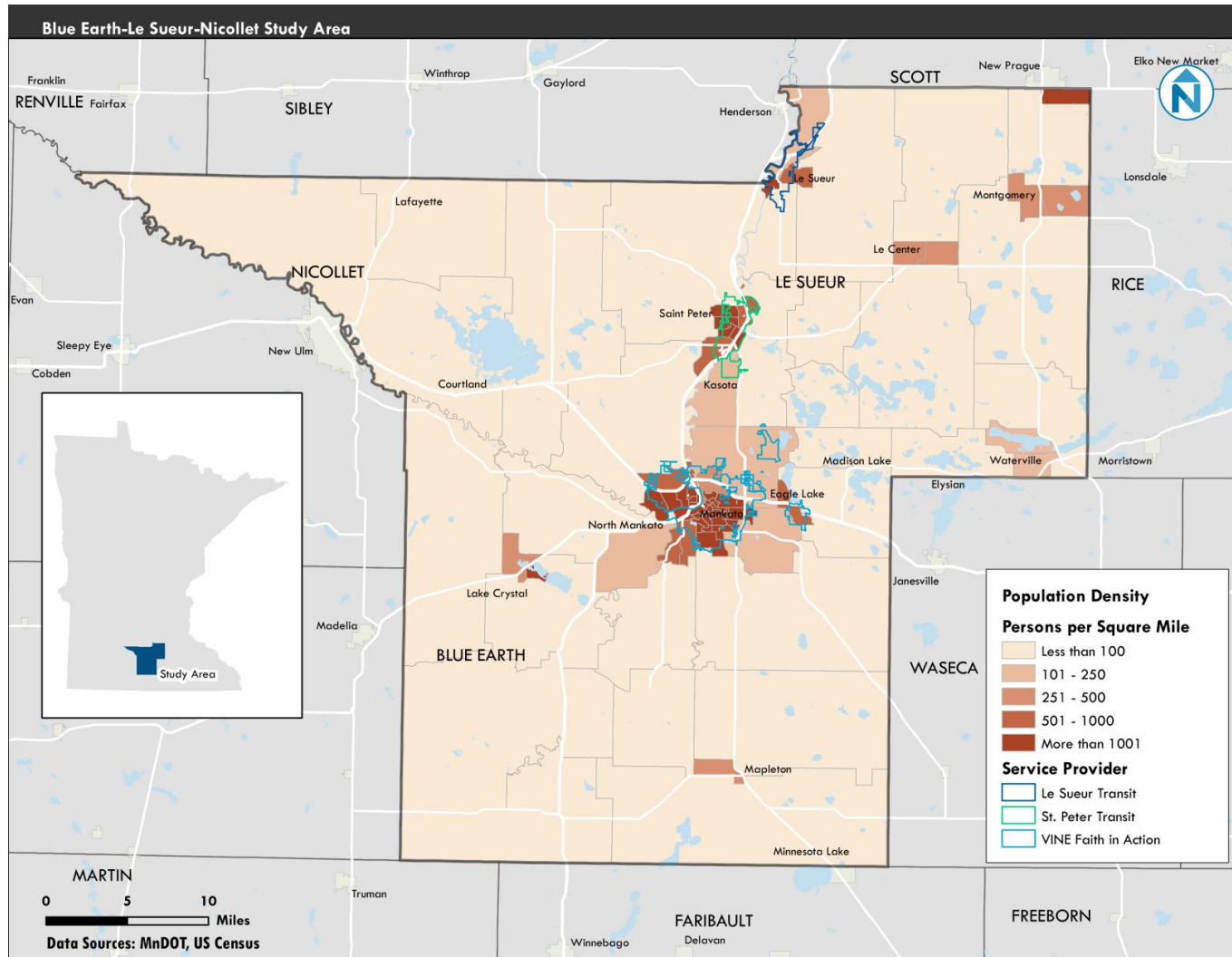
Location	2000	2010	2013	Change 2000 - 2013	2020 (Forecasted)
Blue Earth County	55,941	64,013	64,218	14.8%	64,455
City of Mankato	32,427	39,305	40,740	25.6%	
Le Sueur County	25,426	27,703	27,834	9.5%	31,161
City of Le Sueur	3,919	4,048	4,065	3.7%	
Nicollet County	29,771	32,727	33,002	10.8%	33,722
City of North Mankato	11,798	13,394	13,515	14.6%	
City of St. Peter	9,761	11,196	11,445	17.2%	

Sources: Minnesota State Demographic Center; City and Town population estimates.

Population Density

The Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet County study area is sparsely populated, with a total population in the three-county area of about 130,000 people spread over roughly 1,700 square miles. The overall population density for the area is approximately 70 people per square mile. As shown in Figure 2-3, the highest levels of population density are in the one or two larger cities in each county. Of note, the central region of the study area has the highest concentration of people compared to the rest of the study area. This roughly 50 square mile area contains three of the major communities: Mankato, North Mankato, and St. Peter, totaling about 65,000 people.

Figure 2-3 Population Density



Source: MnDOT, US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Demographic characteristics have a direct impact on the demand for public transportation. In particular, we look to the location and concentration of individuals who are more likely than the general public to use public transportation. These individuals tend to be people with disabilities, youths under the age of 18, older adults aged 65 or older, households that do not have access to an automobile, and persons with low incomes. Data for this analysis is drawn from the 2010 U.S. Census.

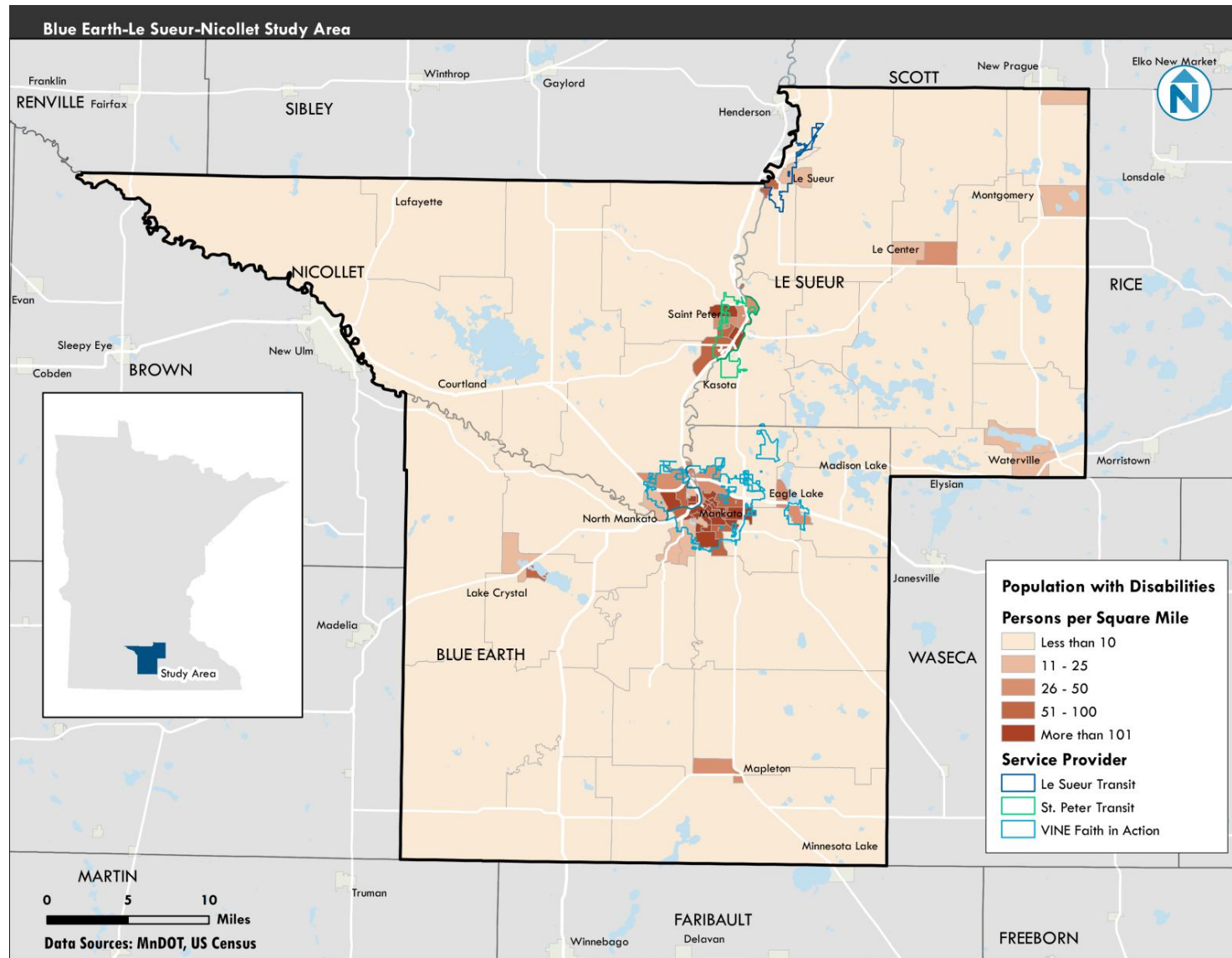
The following series of maps shows the spatial distribution of each population and identifies areas that have a higher concentration of these individuals. These maps highlight each target population compared to the population overall, on a square mile basis.

This data shows that youths and older adults, while concentrated primarily in the larger communities, are more widely distributed than people with disabilities or lower incomes, or households without access to a car. In each case, however, Mankato, North Mankato, and St. Peter consistently have the highest concentration of people with characteristics typically associated with a need for transit service. Findings associated with each group are highlighted in the below and in the following series of maps.

- **People with Disabilities:** The highest concentrations of persons with disabilities can be found in the Mankato, North Mankato, and St. Peter areas. Furthermore, in general, the towns in each of the three counties possess higher levels of residents with disabilities, while the more rural areas have comparatively low densities of residents with disabilities (see Figure 2-4).
- **Youth:** All three counties have a relatively larger population of youth under the age of 18, compared to those with disabilities. Again, the central region of the study area in and around Mankato, North Mankato, and St. Peter is the most densely populated (see Figure 2-5). Additionally, as demonstrated in the map, more towns in Le Sueur County show higher proportions of youth, supporting earlier statistics of Le Sueur with the highest percentage (25% of county population) of youth in the study area Figure 2-1).
- **Older Adults:** As demonstrated by Figure 2-6, the highest concentrations of seniors age 65 and older follow a similar pattern to youth concentrations. The major cities consistently have the largest senior populations, with smaller towns overall possessing higher levels than rural areas comparatively.
- **Zero-Vehicle Households:** There are relatively few areas in the study area that have elevated rates of zero-vehicle households. Only Mankato and North Mankato show any significant concentration of more than 25 households per square mile without a vehicle (see Figure 2-7).
- **People with Low Incomes:** Figure 2-8 shows the concentration of households that have an annual income less than \$25,000. The major communities of Mankato, Le Sueur, North Mankato, and St. Peter have the highest concentrations of these households. Several smaller towns throughout the study area have some noticeable lower income populations, but the vast majority of lower income areas are located within these four larger cities.
- **People with Limited English Proficiency (LEP):** As shown in Figure 2-9, there are clusters of people who have limited English proficiency in all three counties. In total there are 311 people with LEP in Blue Earth County, 263 in Le Sueur County, and 271 in

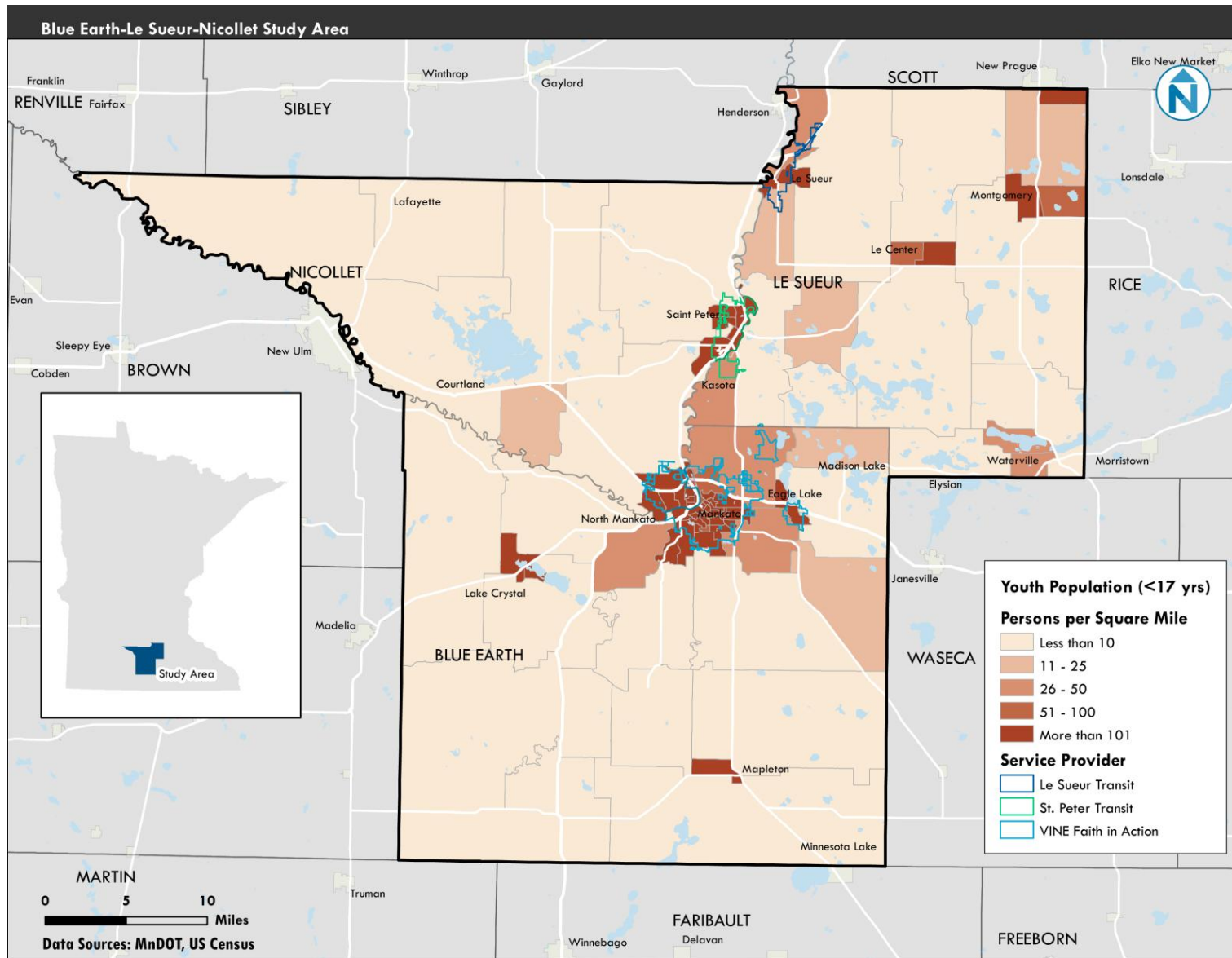
Nicollet County. For the most part, these populations are within the transit service areas of VINE, Saint Peter Transit, and Le Sueur Transit, with a few exceptions. A small number of people with LEP live outside of the VINE service area in western Mankato and a small number live on the eastern side of Le Sueur outside of Le Sueur Transit service area. Additionally, there is an LEP population located in the City of Le Center in Le Sueur County that is not served by public transit.

Figure 2-4 Density of Residents with Disabilities



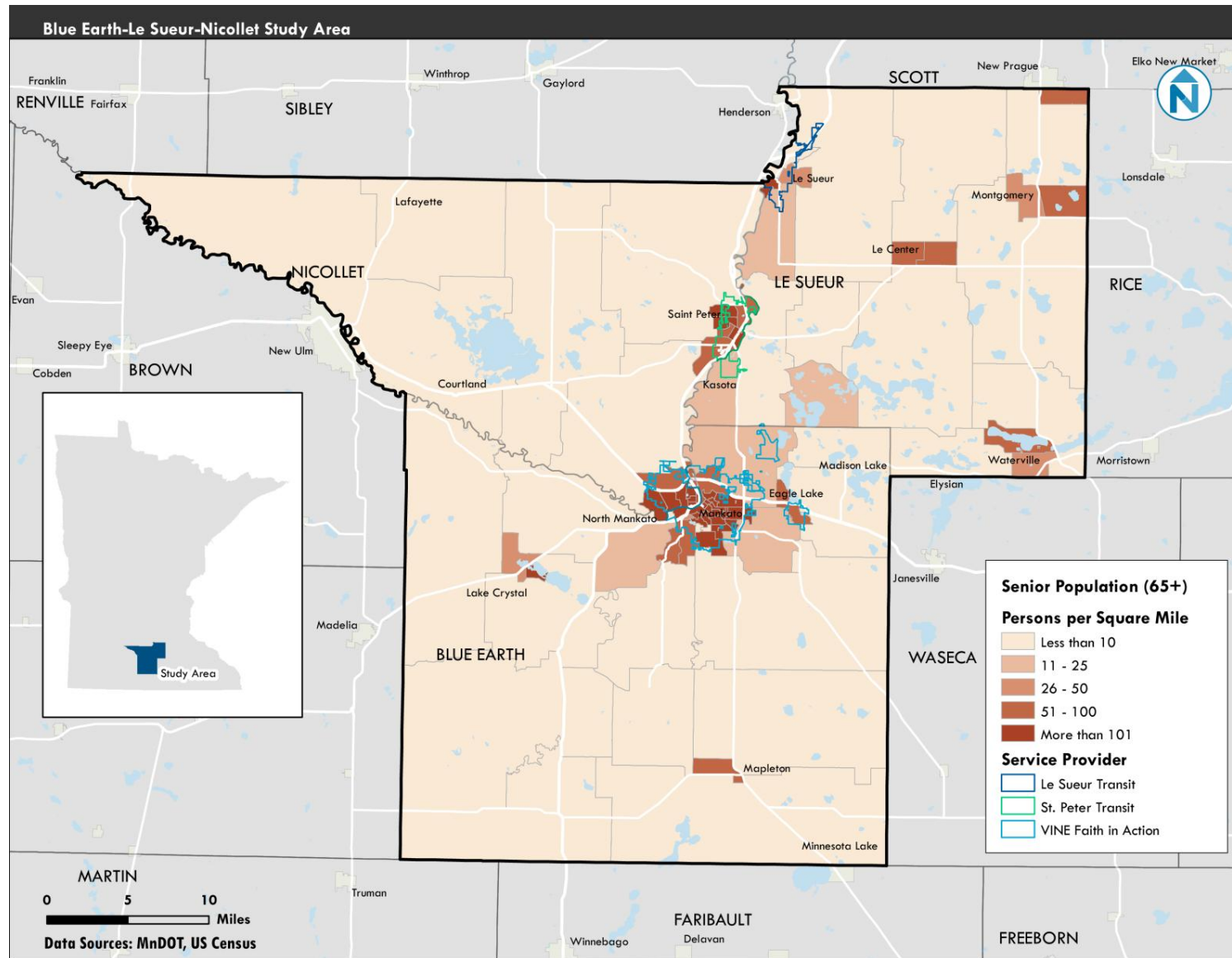
Source: MnDOT, US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

Figure 2-5 Density of Youth Population



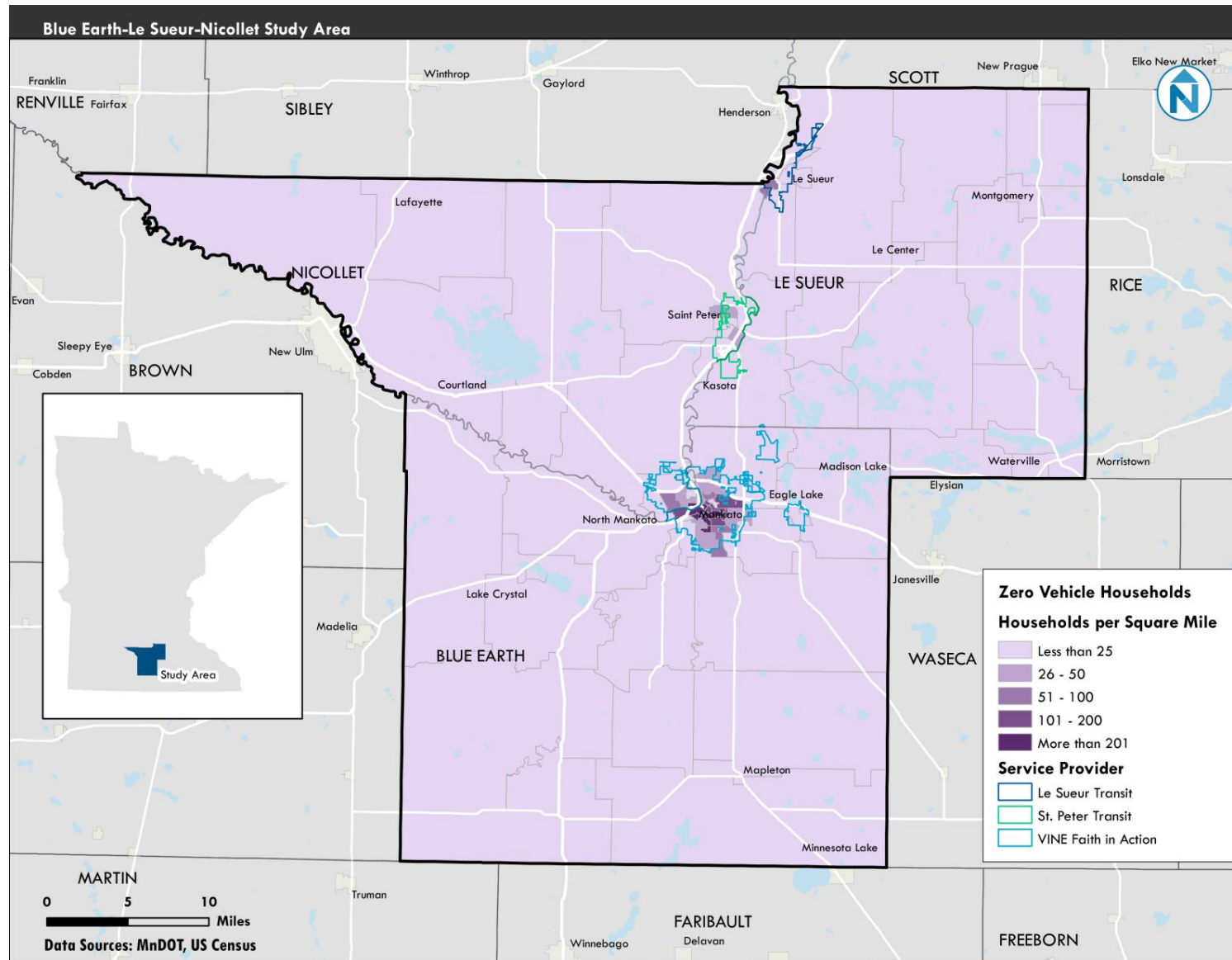
Source: MnDOT, US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

Figure 2-6 Senior Population Density



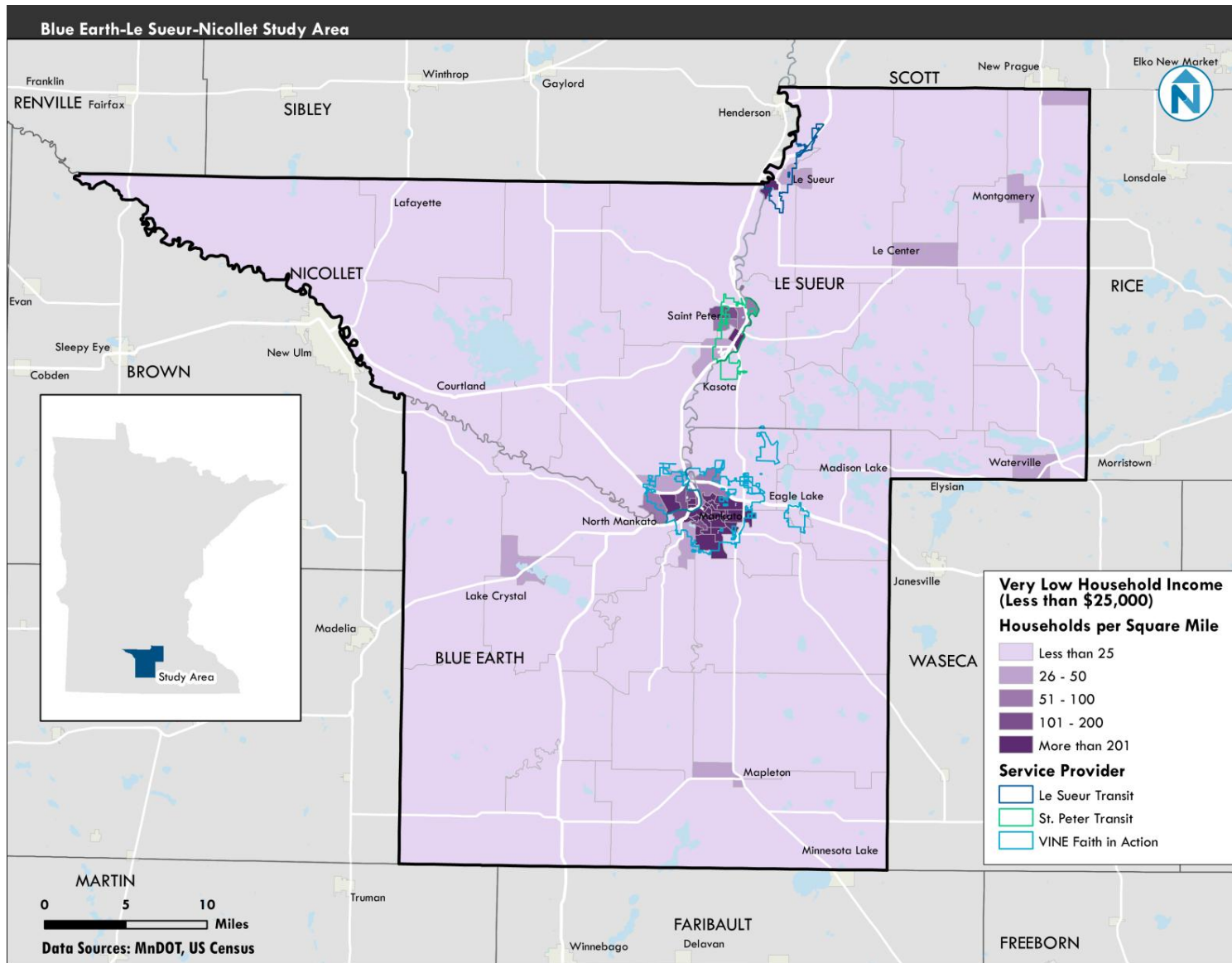
Source: MnDOT, US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

Figure 2-7 Density of Zero-Vehicle Households



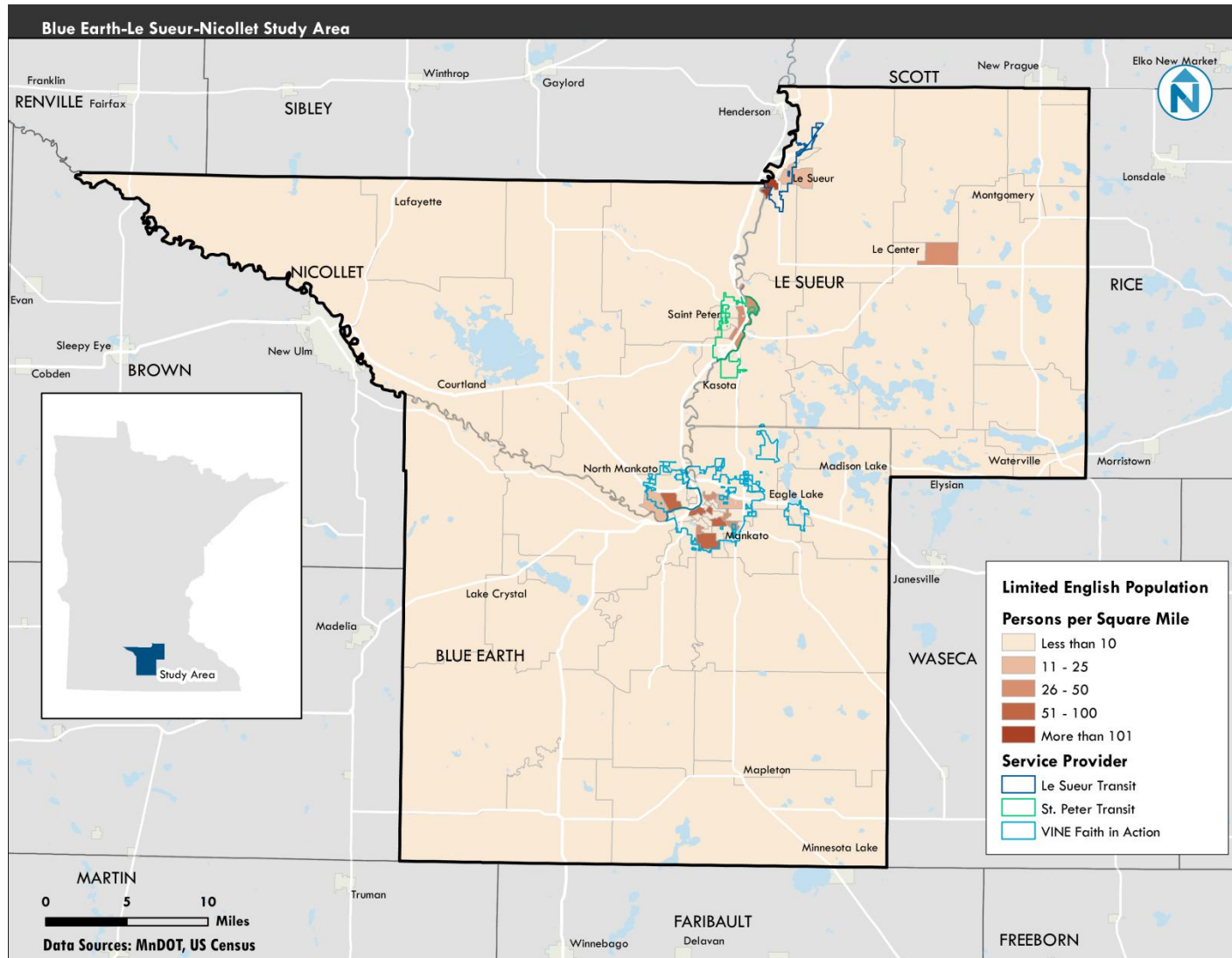
Source: MnDOT, US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

Figure 2-8 Density of Very Low Income Households



Source: MnDOT, US Census 2008-2013 American Community Survey, 5 year estimates

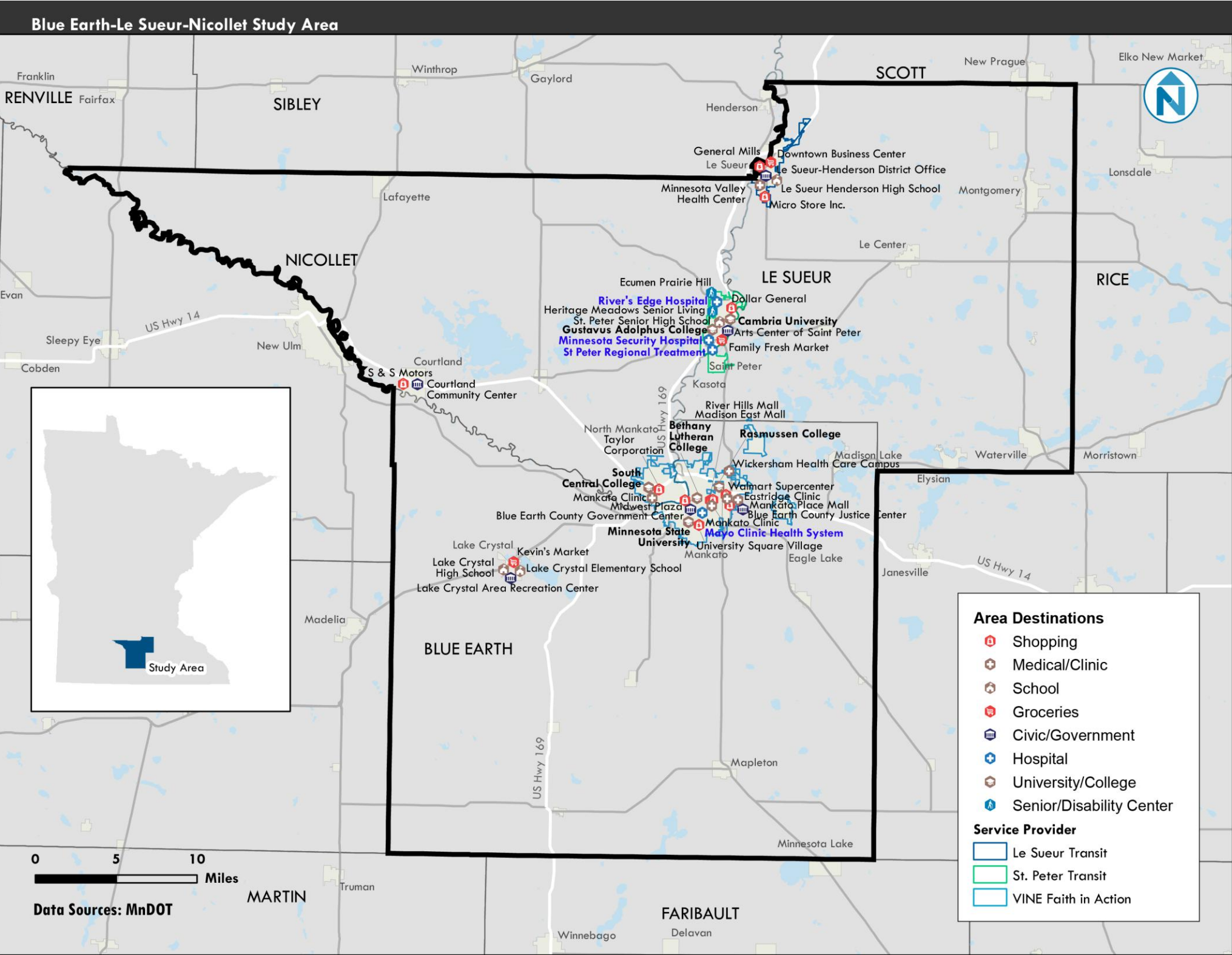
Figure 2-9 Limited English Proficiency Populations



MAJOR DESTINATIONS

As shown in Figure 2-10, major destinations in the Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet County study area are primarily located within the major urban areas of Mankato/North Mankato, Le Sueur, and St. Peter. All of these destinations are located within each city's respective transit service area. Several other destinations (schools, a shopping center, and a civic center) are located in smaller, more rural communities in the study area, such as Courtland and Lake Crystal. Major destinations in area include: colleges and universities, hospitals and health clinics, shopping malls, grocery stores, and community and civic centers.

Figure 2-10 Transit Services and Major Destinations in Study Area



Source: MnDOT, internet research

3 EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

In Blue Earth County (outside the City of Mankato), VINE Faith in Action, a volunteer care giving organization that serves the south central Minnesota area, is the major provider of transportation services. Transit service for the general public in Nicollet County is provided by Saint Peter Transit, which serves the City of Saint Peter and the City of Kasota (located in Le Sueur County). In Le Sueur County, general public transit service is provided in the City of Le Sueur by Le Sueur Transit.

Each of these providers offers demand-response transportation using small fleets of 2-3 vehicles; VINE also administers a volunteer driver program. Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit also operate route deviation service. VINE offers transportation to individuals age 60 and over, as well as limited service to individuals under age 60 who have a disability, throughout its service area. VINE's People to Jobs program provides service to work, training, and child care for workers with limited incomes.

The services operated by each of these providers are described in more detail in the following sections.

SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS AND DELIVERY

Service Characteristics

Figure 3-1 summarizes the characteristics of the transportation services offered by each of the three providers. Similarities and differences are highlighted below.

Service Area, Service Type, and Eligibility

Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit provide Dial-A-Ride (DAR) and deviated fixed-route service within the City of Le Sueur and the City of Saint Peter, respectively; Saint Peter Transit also operates DAR service within the neighboring City of Kasota, located in Le Sueur County, and between Saint Peter and Kasota. DAR and fixed route services are available to all city residents.

Kasota has received service since the inception of Saint Peter Transit. No formal agreement exists between the two cities. Kasota residents are able to travel within Kasota and to Saint Peter. Approximately three round trips are provided to Kasota residents each weekday.

Figure 3-1 Service Characteristics Summary

Agency	City of Le Sueur Transit	City of Saint Peter Transit	VINE Faith in Action
System Name	Le Sueur Transit	Saint Peter Transit	VINE Transit
Service Area	City of Le Sueur	City of Saint Peter and City of Kasota	People to Jobs: City of Mankato and North Mankato (and 8 miles outside both cities) Volunteer drivers: Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties
Hours of Operation	June-August: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (Monday-Friday) September-May: 7:00 am to 4:30 pm (Monday-Friday)	Dial-A-Ride 7:00 am to 8:00 pm (Monday-Friday) 10:00 am to 5:00 pm (Saturday) Deviated Route 10:00 am to 6:00 pm (Monday-Friday)	People to Jobs: 24 hours (vans run 5:30am to 9:00pm) Volunteer drivers: 5:30am to 9:00pm
Type of Service	Dial-A-Ride (DAR), Deviated Route, Subscription (Preschool)	Dial-A-Ride (DAR), Deviated Route, Subscription (Preschool)	Volunteer driver rides Dial-A-Ride (People to Jobs)
Eligibility	Resident of Le Sueur	Resident of St. Peter or Kasota	Volunteer rides: age 60+, < 60 with verified disability People to Jobs: referral from Blue Earth County Employment Services or other partners
Fares	<p>General Public/Senior (62)/Disabled Cash Fare \$2.00 one way</p> <p>Ticket Books •Senior/Disabled (Ages 62+)\$25.00/25 Route Rides or 12 Dial-A-Rides •General Public (Ages 6-61)\$30.00/25 Route Rides</p> <p>Pre-school Fares \$11.25-\$54.74/month, depending on number of trips per week</p>	<p>General Public Cash Fare \$1.75 (one way city route within Saint Peter) \$3.50 (one way DAR within Saint Peter) \$4.50 (one way DAR within Kasota or to Saint Peter)</p> <p>Senior (55) Cash Fare \$1.00 (one way city route within Saint Peter) \$2.00 (one way DAR within Saint Peter) \$3.50 (one way DAR within Kasota or to Saint Peter)</p> <p>Ticket Books - 1 ticket for route / 2 tickets for DAR General Public Ticket Books \$40 / \$27 / \$14 (32 / 20 / 10 ticket book within Saint Peter) \$48 / \$32 / \$17 (32 / 20 / 10 ticket book within Kasota or to Saint Peter) Senior Ticket Books \$28 / \$18 (32 / 20 ticket book within Saint Peter) \$32 / \$20 (32 / 20 ticket book within Kasota or to Saint Peter)</p> <p>Pre-school Fares \$16.00-\$65.00/month, depending on number of trips per week</p>	<p>People to Jobs program \$3 per ride Volunteer Rides Requested donations</p>

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Agency	City of Le Sueur Transit	City of Saint Peter Transit	VINE Faith in Action
Last Fare Increase	(2010) General public cash fare reduced from \$2.25, Senior/disabled cash fare raised from \$1.50	2013	n/a
Reservation Policy	Scheduled up to seven (7) days in advance. Same day accepted. Calls taken up to an hour before requested pick up time.	30 to 45 minutes before any appointments.	Two (2) business day up to one month in advance. Next day service is also allowed if available. Request changes by noon the day before the ride.
Pick Up Window	Ten (10) minute window for pick-up, five (5) minutes on either side of the scheduled time.	No official pick-up window.	No official pick-up window.
Cancellation/No Show Policy	After three (3) no shows transit service may be suspended for up to one (1) month.	No cancellation or "no show" policy.	After two (2) no shows, ability to ride is in jeopardy

Le Sueur Transit's deviated fixed-route service makes stops at four destinations in Le Sueur between 9:30 am and 4:00 pm on weekdays: Sunrise Plaza affordable housing for seniors, Hillside Court Affordable Housing, Radermacher's grocery store, and Valleygreen Square Mall. Saint Peter Transit's deviated route operates in Saint Peter from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday, making 10 stops at apartment buildings, shopping and medical destinations, and the Saint Peter Community Center on a 60-minute loop.

Both Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit also provide subscription service for preschool students during the school year. Services operate in a very similar way. Parents arrange in advance for their children to be transported between home, school, and/or daycare and pay for a certain number of trips per week. Le Sueur also operates a subscription route to Le Sueur High School, which is open to the general public as well as students.

As one of the many forms of assistance they offer, VINE volunteers provide rides to individuals age 60 and over, and to individuals under age 60 who have a verified disability. VINE volunteers will pick up residents of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties and will transport these individuals anywhere throughout the state within reason. Unlimited medical rides are available but rides for other purposes are limited to one per individual per week. Volunteers use their own vehicles to provide rides.

VINE also operates the demand-response People to Jobs service for low-income workers and their children in the greater Mankato area in partnership with Blue Earth County Employment Services, Greater Mankato Area United Way, and Adult Basic Education. People to Jobs trips are provided by part-time paid staff using VINE vehicles. The program is a six-month transitional program designed to assist people who cannot utilize Mankato's public transit system to get to and from work and daycare. The program is aimed primarily at people with lower incomes. The People to Jobs program transports people within Mankato and North Mankato and eight miles outside of the two cities.

Days and Hours of Service

Transit service hours in the cities of Le Sueur and Saint Peter/Kasota are fairly similar – service is available on weekdays roughly during business hours, although service in Saint Peter ends a little later than service in Le Sueur. DAR service in Saint Peter also operates on Saturdays. No weekend service is available in Le Sueur. VINE's People to Jobs is a 24-hour service. VINE staff will transport individuals between 5:30 am and 9:00 pm, but VINE will call a cab outside of these hours. In some cases, when a person has a new job VINE will call a cab for them outside of service hours until they are able to find a coworker to share a ride with going forward. VINE volunteers are available to provide rides between 5:30 am and 9:00 pm.

Rider Policies

As described below, policies regarding trip reservations, passenger assistance, and other aspects of demand-response service operation vary among the three systems.

Advance notice

The three systems have fairly different policies regarding advance notice for trip reservations. Le Sueur transit accepts trip requests from seven days to one hour in advance; 24 hours is encouraged for trips to appointments. Many requests are received on the day of service. Saint Peter Transit service is nearly all on-demand; trip requests, even for service to appointments, are

taken 30-45 minutes (often less) in advance. VINE schedules trips from one month up to two days in advance; same-day service is provided if space is available.

Pick-up window

Le Sueur Transit passengers are asked to be ready to leave five minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. Vehicles may arrive between five minutes before and five minutes after the scheduled pick-up time.

Due to the immediate response nature of most of Saint Peter Transit's service, there is no official pick-up window policy.

For People to Jobs trips, VINE asks passengers to be ready at the pick-up time; drivers will wait only five minutes after the scheduled pick-up. There is no official pick-up window for VINE volunteer rides. VINE will call riders the day before to confirm and will tell them a general time to expect the driver. They do not track if drivers are frequently on-time or late.

Assistance

The three systems represent the spectrum of assistance that is typically provided to users of DAR service: Le Sueur Transit provides door-to-door assistance, Saint Peter Transit assists passengers from curb to curb, and VINE offers assistance through the door of the home or destination, if needed.

Both Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter transit operate vehicles that are accessible to passengers who use wheelchairs. None of VINE's current volunteer drivers have accessible vehicles. If a passenger uses a wheelchair and can transfer to a vehicle seat, the volunteer returns the passenger's own wheelchair to the house, and obtains a wheelchair at the destination for the passenger to use while at that location.

Route deviations

Le Sueur Transit will deviate within three to four blocks away from the route (about a half a mile) for a pick-up or drop-off. This is an informal policy.

Any Saint Peter Transit passenger may request a deviation of up to two blocks (or more, if needed) for a pick-up or drop-off. No additional fare is charged for a deviation.

No-shows

Le Sueur Transit passengers who "no-show" for rides three times may be subject to a suspension for up to one month. Due to the immediate-response nature of the Saint Peter Transit service, no-shows are not a problem and the system does not have an official policy for dealing with passengers who no-show frequently. VINE People to Jobs passengers are asked to cancel at least two hours in advance, and those who no-show twice are in jeopardy of losing their ability to get a ride.

Fares

The fare structures in place at both Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit are fairly complex, as shown in Figure 11. Fares for DAR and route service in Le Sueur and Saint Peter can be paid either by cash or ticket. Ticket books offer a discount over cash fares. Discounts are given to

seniors and persons with disabilities in both systems; the definition of “senior” is 62 and over in Le Sueur and 55 and over in Saint Peter. Preschool fares in both systems are based on the number of trips taken per week. DAR fares appear to be higher in Saint Peter than in Le Sueur.

VINE sends monthly statements to customers who have ridden with a volunteer driver and suggest that the rider make a donation to cover the cost of reimbursement to the driver. VINE’s suggested donation is \$0.66/mile to cover the driving costs and VINE administrative costs. VINE reimbursed drivers at \$0.46/mile. About 65% of riders make a donation, and some drivers donate their reimbursement back to the program.

Operations

The policies and procedures used by each provider to deliver trips are described below.

Reservations, Scheduling and Dispatching

VINE is the only provider to use paratransit scheduling/dispatching software. Easy Rides from Mobilitat is used to keep information about passengers and destinations, record trip requests, generate daily driver manifests, track statistics about trips that were provided, and prepare reports for all of VINE’s transportation programs. VINE also uses Easy Rides to prepare and track billing.

Trip requests are matched with volunteer drivers on the basis of geography, day of week and trip is needed, and vehicle needs. Volunteers often transport the same customers on a regular basis. Drivers and customers communicate directly on the day of the trip.

People to Jobs trips are requested by the Friday before the trips are needed, and assigned to a People to Jobs route by the VINE scheduler. Two of VINE’s small buses and one minivan are used to provide this service. VINE dispatchers will contact driver’s cell phones if there is a change to the schedule or additional pick-ups along the route. The vehicles are not equipped with radios. VINE volunteers are also contacted via cell phones or land lines to reserve rides. Drivers will record times and beginning and ending mileages for each pick-up/drop-off on the driver manifest. VINE Transit staff enters the information from manifests back into the Easy Rides system for a record of service provided each day.

Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit both use manual reservations/scheduling and dispatching procedures that seem complicated to an outsider but are thoroughly understood and followed without difficulty by transit system staff.

The Le Sueur Transit Director and preschool coordinator/driver prepare a daily manifest for each driver that lists route stops/times and scheduled DAR pick-ups, and dispatch same-day trip requests and provide other assistance to drivers throughout each weekday. If there is a time when one or the other is not available, calls transfer directly to the driver who has the main cell phone. That driver is able to take same-day calls and either add them to his/her list or dispatch to the other driver using a two-way radio. The cell phone is equipped with Bluetooth for hands-free operation.

Le Sueur Transit drivers complete manifests with shift starting and ending times and mileages, number and type of passengers at each route stop or pick-up, and number and type of fares collected at each pick-up. Pick-up times for DAR trips are also recorded.

Telephone calls to Saint Peter Transit for DAR service are routed directly to the driver onboard the vehicle via a telephone to vehicle-mounted radio patch. The drivers receiving the calls write

the calls on a log sheet and then try to make the pick-ups and drop-offs in as efficient a manner as possible given the calls that are waiting. Service is provided very promptly—often within minutes, but within 30-45 minutes maximum for most trips. As in Le Sueur, drivers in Saint Peter are all very familiar with addresses within the city and travel time needed to get from one place to another.

Customers request deviated pick-ups using the same phone number, and are patched through to the drivers of both the DAR and fixed route bus over the radio.

Log sheets completed by the Saint Peter Transit drivers note shift start and end times and mileages, time of each call and pick-up, number and type of passengers at each pick-up, and number and type of fare paid at each pick-up.

Le Sueur Transit enters the ridership information collected on the daily manifests into a spreadsheet which breaks down ridership into the following categories by month: child, youth, adult, senior, disability, wheelchair, DAR trip, DAR pass, miles, and hours. Saint Peter Transit also enters all the information from the daily manifests into a spreadsheet, which is tallied up by month.

Vehicle Run Structure and Schedules

Le Sueur Transit operates two vehicles in service daily and divides route and DAR service between the two throughout the day. Route service includes both the deviated fixed-route serving key destinations in town and the preschool and high school subscription routes. The first driver on duty starts at 7:00 am and works until 4:30 pm, with a 30-minute unpaid lunch break. The second driver begins at 7:30 am and finishes at 4:00 pm, also with a 30-minute lunch break.

Saint Peter Transit also has two vehicles in service each day, with each vehicle providing both fixed-route and DAR service at different times during the day, but four drivers are on duty. The first driver works a full-time 6.5 hour shift from 7:00 am until 1:30 pm, all in DAR service. The second full-time driver is on duty from 10:00 am until 1:00 pm providing route service, and from 1:30 pm until 4:30 pm operating DAR service. Two part-time drivers cover 1:00 pm until 8:00 pm. The first provides route service from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm and switches to DAR service from 4:30 pm until 6:00 pm. The second part-time driver operates route service from 4:00 to 6:00 pm, and finishes with DAR service until 8:00 pm.

One vehicle is used for route service and another for DAR service. When drivers switch between services, they do so after a break, the length of which depends on the number of hours the driver works that day. Saint Peter Transit's Crown Victoria is used to shuttle drivers to and from the DAR and route vehicles during the driver swap.

VINE has seven routes through the People to Jobs program. Routes are created based on the times that riders need to be at work and geographically based on where riders live and work. When a new person is added to the program, VINE will see which route is best suited for that pick-up. VINE People to Jobs routes are described in Figure 3-2.

Figure 3-2 VINE People to Jobs Routes

Vehicle Route	Start Time	End Time	Communities Served	Days of week
AM 1	5:00 AM	10:00 PM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Monday - Friday
AM 2	7:00 AM	10:00 AM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Monday - Friday
AM 3	7:00 AM	9:00 AM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Monday – Friday
Midday 1	10:00 AM	2:00 PM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Sunday – Saturday
PM 1	2:00 PM	11:00 PM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Monday – Friday
PM 2	3:00 PM	6:00 PM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Monday - Friday
PM 3	4:00 PM	11:00 PM	Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, LeHillier	Monday - Friday

Source: VINE Transportation Manager

Service Contracts

All three transit providers operate service for other organizations, under formal contracts or longstanding agreements.

Le Sueur Transit provides service under contract to Minnesota Valley Health Center (an Adult Day Care center), located in Le Sueur. This service picks up seniors at their homes and transports them to the Adult Day Care Center and also provides field trips for groups of seniors at the center. Le Sueur Transit charges \$3 per person per one-way trip for this service.

The transit system also operates a “Sober Bus” service in the evening on specified holidays and dates of town events and celebrations; usually about seven times per year. Service, which is sponsored by several bars in town with pull-tab game revenues, runs from 8:00 pm – 1:30 am between downtown and patrons’ homes, within city limits. Le Sueur Transit is paid \$400 for the first bus in service and \$50 per hour for the second bus. Under another contract, Le Sueur Transit provides service on two Sundays per month to enable residents to attend services at two local churches. Each church pays \$150 per month for the service.

Other Le Sueur Transit contracts include Medical Assistance trips provided for UCare members, occasional service for Le Sueur Park Elementary School speech program students and participants in the adult day care program offered by Gardenview nursing home.

Le Sueur County Public Health and Minnesota Valley Action Council both purchase ticket books for seniors and other clients from Le Sueur Transit. The transit system charges agencies a \$2.50 administrative fee per ticket book in addition to the \$30 ticket book price.

Saint Peter Transit provides DAR service to students at Gustavus Adolphus College between designated spots on campus and in Saint Peter on weekend nights when school is in session. The “GusBus” runs between the hours of 9:00 pm and 2:00 am. The two buses used in the service have reached capacity, so a trial third bus is being used this year between the hours of 10:00 pm and 2:00 am. Saint Peter Transit management expects the third vehicle to be part of the next two-year contract. Saint Peter Transit receives \$37.50 per vehicle hour of service. The service is funded through student fees, and the student senate at the college is involved in approving the service and the contract every two years. In addition to providing a beneficial service for students, as evidenced by ongoing support and growing ridership, the GusBus contributes to the

safety and wellbeing of students, residents, and property, which the community of Saint Peter values.

VINE Transit is under contract to Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties and to the managed care programs in the study area, UCare and Blue Plus, to provide trips for Medical Assistance recipients (i.e., Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation). VINE also provides Medical Assistance transportation for people in Faribault County. Blue Plus reimburses VINE for transportation services at \$.85 per mile and UCare reimburses at \$0.75 per loaded mile with a \$5 pick-up fee.

VINE provides service for individuals with mental health issues under contract to Blue Earth County Department of Human Services for \$0.72 per mile. VINE also provides contracted transportation for children attending after-school activities under contract to the Mankato Area school district for \$0.72 per mile.

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Transit Mission and Goals

VINE Faith in Action's overall mission is to "promote quality of life and a culture of caring, sustained by volunteerism, community engagement and support for neighbors in need." VINE's goals as stated in their bylaws are as follows:

- Provide volunteer assistance to older adults, people with disabilities, families, and others in need
- Facilitate appropriate care arrangements for those in need by working cooperatively with them, their families, their community, and their faith congregation (if any)
- Support the traditional commitment of faith congregations to the welfare of people in need by providing a strong basis for their collaboration
- Provide education, support, and recognition to volunteer caregivers
- Assist individuals in need and caregivers by connecting them to existing formal and informal support networks and develop or assist new support networks
- Engage older adults in activities and services to improve the quality of life for themselves and the community

Le Sueur Transit's mission is "to be aware of the present and future transportation needs of our citizens and to meet those needs with reliable, prompt and courteous service."

Saint Peter Transit does not have a formal mission statement.

Organization and Staffing

Figure 3-3 summarizes the governance structure and organization of functions for each of the three transit providers. As municipal transit systems, Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit are organized and governed similarly. VINE Transit, as part of a private non-profit organization, has a different organizational and reporting structure.

Le Sueur Transit is a department of the City of Le Sueur, overseen by the City Administrator and City Council. The Transit Director reports to the City Administrator. The City's finance director is responsible for financial, accounting, budgeting, and payroll tasks.

Saint Peter Transit is located organizationally within the City of Saint Peter's Finance Department, which is headed by the Finance Director, who is supervised by the City Administrator. The Transit Coordinator reports to the Finance Director. The Finance Director is responsible for accounting and accounts payable, and cash collection. The City mechanic is responsible for most of the maintenance work on the transit system's vehicles.

The Transit Forum, consisting of transit stakeholders, was formed to provide guidance as Saint Peter Transit's deviated route was being developed. This forum has met twice in the last 18 months. There is no set membership structure or policies guiding the Transit Forum.

VINE's organizational chart is shown in Figure 3-4 on the next page. The organization is governed by a Board of Directors who decide issues on policy, programs, and grant applications, among other things. The board's executive team is in charge of personnel and financial decisions. There are 15 board members who each have a three-year term with the option to renew for another three years. Board members are professionals from the community, most of whom are also VINE volunteers. The Transportation Manager reports to the VINE Executive Director.

Figure 3-3 Organizational Structure

Provider	Le Sueur Transit	Saint Peter Transit	VINE
Policy Board	City Council	City Council	VINE Board of Directors
Management Staff	Transit Director	Transit Coordinator	Transportation Manager
Transit Director Reports to:	City Administrator	Finance Director	Executive Director
Service Operations	In-house	In-house	In-house
Maintenance	Contract (Wolf Motors)	City	Contract (Larson Repair)
Union Status	Non-union	Non-union	Non-union

Source: MnDOT, Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, VINE Transit

Employees

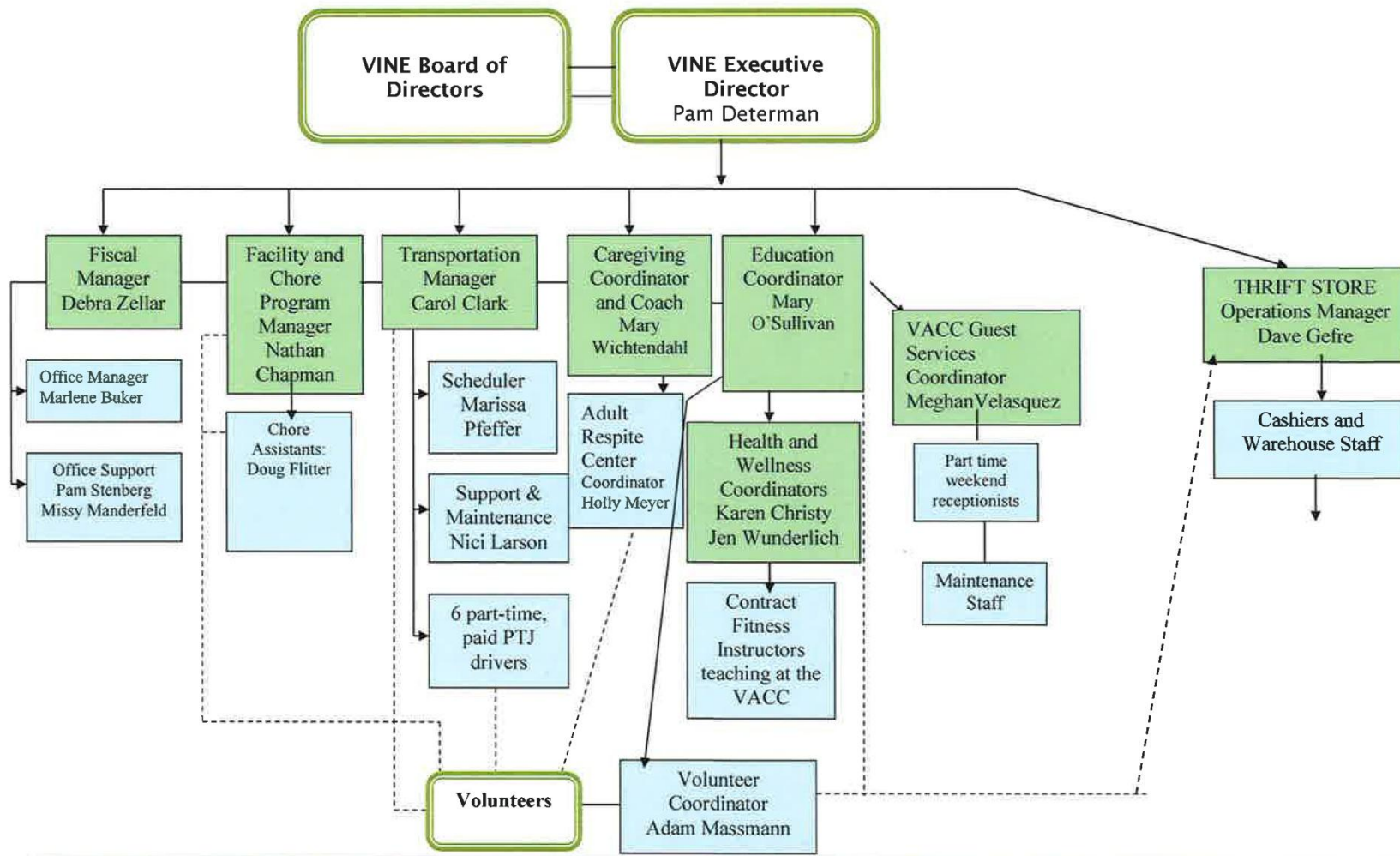
The staffing of each transit provider in full-time equivalents (FTEs) is shown in Figure 3-5.

Le Sueur Transit employs two full-time employees: the Transit Director and a driver/preschool coordinator, who splits her time between office work (10 hours per week), scheduling/dispatching, and driving. The Transit Director is responsible for all operations, including hiring, scheduling, budgeting, financial and reporting tasks, and day-to-day operations. Additionally, there are three part-time drivers.

All drivers are required to have a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). Le Sueur gives new drivers 30 days after their hire date to get their license, which they can obtain through a program in Mankato. Drivers are also required to undergo a background check, a physical, and drug/alcohol testing.

There are two driver shifts: 7:00 am to 4:30 pm and 7:30 am to 4:00 pm. Both drivers are responsible for dial-a-ride and deviated route trips throughout the day. The transit director is responsible for all operations, including hiring, scheduling, budgeting, financial and reporting tasks, and day-to-day operations. The preschool coordinator helps with the preschool schedules, monthly billing, and clerical work during the 10 hours per week that she is in the office.

Figure 3-4 VINE Organizational Chart



Saint Peter Transit employs a full-time Transit Coordinator and a pre-school aide. The Transit Coordinator manages the day to day operations of the transit system, including overseeing drivers, scheduling, reporting, procurement, grant writing, and all administrative functions. There are two full-time drivers and nine part-time drivers. Full-time equivalency is 35 hours per week. Drivers act as dispatchers by taking calls for rides via radio while they are on the road. Drivers are on the road for 6.5 hour shifts during which they are responsible for taking the calls for rides, maintaining the handwritten passenger logs, and collecting fares. The 6.5 hour shifts do not include pre-trip inspections, which drivers are required to do before each shift.

Saint Peter drivers are required to have a background check, drug and alcohol testing, a criminal check and driving record check, and a Class D license (due to the capacity of the Saint Peter Transit vehicles, CDL licenses are not required).

VINE employs a Transportation Manager who oversees a full-time scheduler, a full-time support and maintenance support staff member and six part-time drivers, who provide rides as part of VINE's People to Jobs program. Full-time employees work between 35 and 40 hours per week and part-time employees work at least 20 hours, but less than 35 hours per week. A percentage of the time of VINE's Office Manager, Chore Program Manager (for vehicle maintenance), Data Entry Clerk, Data Entry and Billing Clerk, and Fiscal Manager is allocated to the transportation program.

Figure 3-5 Full-Time Employee Equivalents (FTE)

Le Sueur Transit		Saint Peter Transit		VINE	
Employees	FTE	Employees	FTE	Employees	FTE
Transit Director	1	Transit Coordinator	1	Transportation Manager	1
Driver/Clerical Worker	1	Pre-School Aid	.5	Scheduler	1
Drivers (3)	1	Drivers (11)	6.5	Drivers (6)	3
				Transportation Assistant	.85
				Data Entry and Billing Clerk	.3
				Office Manager	.25
				Chore Program Manager	.15
				Executive Director	.125
				Data Entry Clerk	.1125
				Fiscal Manager	.1
Total	3	Total	8	Total	8.71

Source: Calculations based on data provided by Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, VINE Transit

Of the three providers, VINE is the only one who utilizes volunteer drivers. VINE has about 1,000 volunteers for a variety of services within the organization; 180 of these volunteers provide transportation for clients. Rides with volunteer drivers are available seven days per week from 5:30 am to 10:00 pm. Volunteers are reimbursed at \$.46 per mile. They are also reimbursed for meals and parking.

VINE recruits volunteers through flyers that are posted around the community. Although VINE does not have the budget for extensive marketing and recruiting, attracting volunteers is not difficult due to the organization's longstanding role and reputation in the community. Once a year there is a celebration to honor and recognize volunteers and VINE also sends out cards to

volunteers for many occasions. The Rake the Town event is a city-wide leaf-raking event once per year that can be a vehicle for recruiting new volunteers.

Volunteers must have a background check, liability insurance of \$250,000 minimum, and reference checks. In order to drive the VINE taxi vehicles, volunteers must obtain a health card from the City of Mankato and the City of North Mankato.

Wages

Wage rates currently paid to drivers and other operational staff members by each provider are shown in Figure 3-6. As shown, Le Sueur Transit and VINE's pay similar wages; Saint Peter pays the highest wages of the three providers.

The senior driver/clerical worker at Le Sueur Transit started at \$10.50 for a probation period of six months and received \$11.75 after six months. Part-time drivers start at \$11.75 during the first six months and receive \$12.50 after the first six months. All employees receive annual cost of living wage increases.

VINE Transit pays drivers \$12.00 per hour, with no increases in the recent past or planned for the future. Schedulers are paid \$14.77 per hour and receive a small cost of living increase of 2-3%.

Saint Peter Transit pays new drivers at \$14.48 per hour. After 1,040 hours or 12 months, whichever comes first, they receive \$14.83. After two years of service, drivers are paid \$15.01 and at three years they are paid \$15.16. The preschool bus aide receives \$9.93 per hour.

Figure 3-6 Driver Wage Summary

	Le Sueur Transit	Saint Peter Transit	VINE Transit
2015 Driver Wages	\$10.50-\$11.75 for first 6 months / \$11.75-12.50 after 6 months	\$14.48 first 1040 hours / \$14.83 after 1041 hours. After 2 years = \$15.01.. After 3 years = \$15.16	\$12.00 (no increases)

Source: Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, VINE Transit

Drug and Alcohol Testing

Le Sueur Transit drug and alcohol testing is conducted through the City of Le Sueur. A staff member at City Hall will notify Le Sueur transit employees if they have been selected for a random test, which is completed at the Le Sueur Valley Health Center. The third-party administrator is Minnesota Municipal Utilities Association (MMUA) Drug & Alcohol Testing Consortium.

Drug and alcohol testing for Saint Peter Transit employees is also administered by the MMUA. The City Administrator will notify Saint Peter Transit employees if they have been selected for a random test, which is completed at River's Edge Hospital and Clinic. The random selection is done by a computer program.

VINE Transit's drug and alcohol testing is administered by Occupational Medicine Consultants located in the Twin Cities. Randomly selected employees are sent to the Mankato Clinic Urgent Care unit to complete the testing.

Training

The Le Sueur Transit Director is in charge of training new drivers and employees. There is a new hire orientation during which the transit director will explain each transit procedure. Once a driver has obtained a CDL license, the Transit Director trains him/her to operate the vehicles safely and to fill out the driver paperwork. The City also provides a monthly training session for City employees on a variety of topics, such as CPR training.

New Saint Peter Transit drivers are required to complete training in the following: pre-trip vehicle inspection, daily logs and other transit documents, use of wheelchair lift and securement, vehicle operation, and use of the radio dispatch system. New drivers ride along with a more senior driver until they are ready to drive on their own.

In addition to initial orientation training, VINE volunteers receive training in working with vulnerable adults. VINE uses Minnesota RTAP training resources for its paid drivers.

Procurement

The Le Sueur and Saint Peter Transit directors are responsible for making purchases of goods and services for their systems, following MnDOT's required procurement procedures and checking with their respective city management as needed. Transit system staff is included in the City of Le Sueur's cell phone plan. The Le Sueur Transit Director purchases office and cleaning supplies for all three organizations that are housed at the Joint Services Building; each pays its own share. The VINE transportation director and office manager researches the best price for any office supplies and vehicle supplies before making a purchase and usually sources these supplies locally.

Insurance

Le Sueur vehicles are insured through the City's insurance program, which is the same as other city vehicles. There is one rate for all city vehicles. Saint Peter Transit insures its vehicles through the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, which is a cooperative, member-owned organization that provides property, liability, workers compensation and employee benefits to Minnesota Cities. Members contribute premiums to a jointly owned fund rather than paying premiums. The funds are used to pay for members' claims, losses and expenses. VINE has a \$1-\$3 million liability insurance for each vehicle through Philadelphia Insurance, which had the best price. They used a service called the McClure Agency to find the most affordable insurance provider.

Marketing and Public Information

To market and advertise Le Sueur Transit's services, the Transit Director meets with the following:

- Local industry human resources employees to explain the benefits of employee use of public transit
- Le Sueur Chamber of Commerce and local realtors to reach new residents and local businesses
- Area medical clinics and senior housing staff to capture persons who no longer have a driver's license or have mobility issues

The Saint Peter Transit Coordinator is in charge of marketing available services, which includes meeting with interested resident groups to describe the benefits of public transit and also promotional giveaways targeted at older adults living in assisted living centers. The system also makes use of public access TV, brochures at bus stops and on vehicles to provide information about service to the public. The Transit Coordinator also attends pre-school kickoff events, senior expos, Gustavus Adolphus College orientation, and other community events to inform the public and market the service.

VINE has a quarterly newsletter sent out to thousands of residents in Blue Earth County that describes available services, service changes, and needs for volunteers. They also send volunteer brochures to area churches periodically and place advertisements in the local paper if they have a dire need for volunteers. The Transportation Manager also hands out brochures at community events.

CAPITAL RESOURCES

Facilities

Le Sueur Transit vehicles are stored on-site at 601 South 5th Street, Le Sueur, in a three-stall, heated garage leased from the City of Le Sueur for \$16,000 per year. The building includes office space, a meeting/lunch room, and the garage. The police reserve and emergency services are also headquartered in the same building.

Saint Peter Transit vehicles are stored in a heated, three-stall garage attached to City Hall at 227 South Front Street in Saint Peter, although the two older vehicles (used for Saturday night service) do not fit within the garage and are stored outside. An office for the Saint Peter Transit Coordinator is located in the same building, as is the Saint Peter Police Department. The transit system leases the space from the City at a cost of \$3,700 per year for the garage and \$1,800 per year for the office space.

VINE's transportation program is based at the VINE Adult Community Center (VACC), formerly the Nichols Office Center in Mankato. In 2011, VINE purchased the 56-year old, 60,000 square foot building and its lot from Blue Earth County for \$1 and transformed it into a modern community center housing not only VINE's many programs and services, but also offices of a number of public and non-profit human service agencies. Phase I of the \$7 million building renovation was completed in 2014; Phase II and continued fundraising are underway. The VINE Transit office is located in the VACC. Vehicles are stored outside on the premises.

Fleets, Vehicle Maintenance, and Fueling

Detailed information about each system's vehicle fleet is shown in Figure 3-7.

Le Sueur Transit utilizes three buses; each can carry 18 people and between one and three wheelchairs. The vehicles are fueled with city-purchased fuel at the Parks Department on the north side of the city. Drivers keep track of mileage, the date, and how many units of fuel are used to refill each vehicle. This city-purchased fuel is slightly cheaper than at privately owned gas stations.

Saint Peter Transit uses five buses: four El Dorados and one Champion. The two 2015 buses are driven six days per week and one bus is driven five days per week. The older two buses are used for Saturday night service. There is also one Crown Victoria car that is used to switch out the

drivers during shift changes. Saint Peter is transitioning from gasoline to diesel vehicles, but both types of fuel are currently used. Fuel is purchased at a \$.08 discount from two separate stations: diesel fuel is purchased at Quick Trip and gasoline is purchased from Freedom gas station. To pay for the fuel, drivers use an account card that is kept at each gas station. There is also emergency diesel stored on City property.

VINE has two buses and one minivan that are used for the People to Jobs JARC program and three minivans that are licensed taxis. The taxi minivans are used primarily for Medical Assistance trips. VINE fuels their vehicles at Kwik Trip gas stations. They have a Kwik Trips credit card for each vehicle. While fueling, drivers input the odometer reading. VINE is able to download odometer reports from Kwik Trips online. This information is not tracked per driver, but per vehicle.

Figure 3-7 Vehicle Fleets

Make	Year	Fuel	Capacity	W/C	Last Reported Mileage
Le Sueur Transit					
El Dorado	2002	Diesel/Biodiesel	18	1	92,536
Elkhart Coach	2008	Unleaded Gasoline	18	2	95,203
Elkhart Coach	2009	Unleaded Gasoline	18	3	72,484
Elkhart Coach	2015	Unleaded Gasoline	17	2	Not in service yet
Saint Peter Transit					
Champion Bus	1998	Diesel/Biodiesel	20	4	71,194
El Dorado	2008	Unleaded Gasoline	15	1	184,334
El Dorado	2009	Unleaded Gasoline	15	1	160,204
El Dorado	2015	Unleaded Gasoline	13	1	10,175
El Dorado	2015	Unleaded Gasoline	13	1	12,975
VINE Transit					
Ford El Dorado	1997	Unleaded Gasoline	20	0	122,351
Dodge Caravan	2003	Unleaded Gasoline	6	0	175,316
Chevy Turtle Top	2009	Diesel/Biodiesel	12	2	17,545
Chrysler Town and Country	2007	Unleaded Gasoline	6	0	101,114
Chrysler Town and Country	2007	Unleaded Gasoline	6	0	108,483
Dodge Caravan	2007	Unleaded Gasoline	6	0	79,955

Source: MnDOT, Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, VINE Transit

Although not included in Figure 3-7, VINE has recently obtained a Section 5310 vehicle to provide rides for individuals to and from their houses to the VINE community center and respite center. Additionally, community non-profits will be able to use this vehicle for transporting their members to and from facilities. The vehicle is scheduled to be delivered to VINE by the end of March. The vehicle is a Goshen Coach that fits 16-18 people and two wheelchairs.

Maintenance

Le Sueur Transit uses Wolf Motors for all their maintenance needs, which is located about 24 miles away from the Le Sueur Transit office. Le Sueur Transit reports that they are very satisfied with Wolf Motor's service quality and timeliness. Preventative maintenance is conducted in accord with a vehicle maintenance log book, which is kept for each vehicle. Drivers perform pre-trip and post-trip inspections, which is documented in the daily inspection forms and signed by the drivers. If a repair need is identified, the driver will notify the manager immediately and note the defect in the daily inspection form. If the repair need is a safety issue, the vehicle is taken out of service until it is repaired and safe to operate.

Saint Peter Transit uses the City of Saint Peter Public Works mechanic for 95% of their maintenance needs and contracts out to a Ford or El Dorado dealership for the more difficult jobs. Collision damage is repaired at a local body shop. The preventive maintenance schedule for each vehicle is based on the manufacturer's recommendations, which include: the use of synthetic oil, 10,000 service interval, tires replaced between 15,000 and 17,000 miles, and brakes replaced between 17,000 and 20,000 miles. Drivers perform a 34-point maintenance pre-trip check for each vehicle and documented in the daily check list. If a repair is needed, the transit coordinator is notified and works to get the vehicle repaired at the appropriate contractor.

VINE Faith in Action Transit drivers complete a daily maintenance check form and reports any maintenance request to the contracted repair center. All vehicles are maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. VINE preventative maintenance, such as oil changes, is completed by a VINE staff member. Vehicles needing additional repairs or maintenance are taken to Larson Repair located in Mankato.

Capital Planning

The agencies prepared 10-year Transit Capital Plans to prioritize vehicle replacement. As shown in Figure 3-8, both Le Sueur and Saint Peter Transit have capital plans that include replacing many of their vehicles by the year 2022. Le Sueur plans to replace four vehicles by 2022 and Saint Peter plans to replace five vehicles by 2021.

VINE's strategic planning report is currently in the final development stage, but will not be ready as this tech memo goes to print.

Figure 3-8 10-Year Capital Plan for Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit

Cost (Number of Vehicles) by Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Le Sueur Transit	\$70,000	\$0	\$74,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$82,000	\$0	\$87,000	\$0
Saint Peter Transit	\$140,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$80,000	\$82,000	\$84,000	\$0	\$0

Source: MnDOT.

SERVICE ASSESSMENT

Rider Demographics

Rider demographics for the three providers are categorized by service type and rider type and shown in Figure 3-9, Figure 3-10, and Figure 3-11.

As shown in Figure 3-9, ridership for the Le Sueur Transit demand response service is about 30% higher than for the deviated route service. Demand response service ridership was highest in 2011 and the lowest in 2012, and recovered to almost 2011 levels by 2013. Deviated route ridership has remained constant with a slight decrease from 2011 to 2013. Overall ridership has decreased by 2% during this period.

The largest rider type for Le Sueur Transit is students and children in the youth category. Students decreased by 7% from 2011 to 2013 and children increased by 11%. The smallest categories of riders are senior and adult users. The number of senior riders decreased by 36% from 2011 to 2013, while adult riders increased by 11%.

Figure 3-9 Le Sueur Transit Rider Demographics

Year	Service Type		Rider Type					Total
	Demand Response	Deviated Route	Person with a disability	Senior	Adult	Youth		
						Student	Child	
2011	15,566	10,719	5,237	3,472	3,330	7,817	6,429	26,285
2012	13,612	10,604	5,457	3,046	3,242	6,600	5,871	24,216
2013	15,297	10,388	5,306	2,219	3,713	7,277	7,170	25,685

Source: MnDOT

Rider data is available only for Saint Peter Transit's demand response service (Figure 3-10); ridership for this service has declined by 3% from 2011 to 2013. Adult riders are the largest group using the service, but users have fallen by 3% during this period. Youth is the smallest category of users; student use has increased by 57% from 2011 to 2013 and child use has decreased by 38%. Use of the service by people with disabilities has remained constant, while ridership by seniors has decreased by 17%.

Figure 3-10 Saint Peter Transit Rider Demographics

Year	Service Type		Rider Type					Total
	Demand Response	Deviated Route	Person with a disability	Senior	Adult	Youth		
						Student	Child	
2011	73,119	-	6,545	11,476	45,224	3,197	6,677	73,119
2012	74,056	-	7,889	12,221	44,999	3,188	5,759	74,056
2013	70,632	-	8,131	11,282	43,794	5,048	4,122	70,632

Source: MnDOT

Ridership of VINE's demand response and flex route service has decreased by 5% from 2011 to 2013, as shown in Figure 3-11. Adult users are the largest rider category and student riders are the smallest category. Ridership has fallen across almost all rider categories during this period: people with disabilities ridership fell by 28%, senior ridership fell by 14%, adult ridership fell by

14%, and child ridership fell by 5%. Student riders are the only category that saw an increase (13%) during this period.

Figure 3-11 VINE Rider Demographics

Year	Service Type		Rider Type					Total
	Demand Response	Flex Route	Person with a disability	Senior	Adult	Youth		
						Student	Child	
2011	2,560	13,059	2,254	2,965	7,947	10	3,430	15,619
2012	4,534	11,278	1,923	2,611	6,628	88	3,562	15,812
2013	3,704	11,094	1,612	2,437	6,803	139	3,255	14,798

Source: MnDOT

Ridership Patterns

The three transit providers have very distinct service areas: Le Sueur Transit operates within the City of Le Sueur only, and Saint Peter Transit provides trips exclusively in the cities of Saint Peter and Kasota. VINE's transportation service area covers a number of communities in Blue Earth County, including Mankato, North Mankato, Lake Crystal, Eagle Lake, and Mapleton. Some trips are provided by VINE's volunteer drivers to residents of Saint Peter as well, but only to bring Saint Peter residents to Mankato and not for trips within the City of Saint Peter.

Figure 3-12 shows the one-way passenger trips provided by Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit during the week of January 25, 2015, estimated from transit system driver logs and manifests.¹

Daily trips in each system totaled 100-150 per weekday. Saint Peter Transit provided almost 50 trips on the Saturday during this particular week.

Figure 3-12 Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit One-way Passenger Trips, January 26-31, 2015

	26-Jan	27-Jan	28-Jan	29-Jan	30-Jan	31-Jan	Week Total
Saint Peter Transit							
Total	165	107	119	98	104	41	634
Le Sueur Transit							
Bus #42	missing	8	9	9	7		
Bus #46	70	68	81	67	74		
Bus #47	43	71	70	53	50		
Total	113	147	160	129	131		680

Source: Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit

Figure 3-13 summarizes the VINE Transit trips provided during the week of January 25, 2015, by program. Information was generated by Easy Rides, VINE's scheduling/dispatching software.

¹ Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit drivers use shorthand references when completing manifests/logs, and often do not note full addresses or passenger names because they are so familiar with their service areas and the riding habits of their passengers. Same-day changes may not be noted on the logs/manifests. Consequently, the numbers presented in Figure 3-12 are close to the actual numbers of trips provided each day, but may not be 100% accurate.

Of the total 380 one-way trips, 198, or 52%, were provided by volunteers driving their own vehicles. Part-time VINE staff using VINE vehicles provided 134 People to Jobs trips, or 35% of the total. Volunteer drivers using VINE vehicles provided 48 Medical Assistance trips, or 13% of the total number of trips for the week.

Figure 3-13 VINE Transit One-way Passenger Trips Provided January 25-31, 2015

	Number	Percent of Total
Driven by volunteers in their vehicles	198	52%
Driven by part-time staff in VINE vehicles - People to Jobs	134	35%
Driven by volunteers in VINE vehicles - Medical Assistance	48	13%
Total Trips	380	100%

Source: VINE Transit scheduling/dispatching system data

Figure 3-14 shows the most frequent origins and destinations of VINE trips during the week. The origin/destination pair of most trips in each program was Mankato/Mankato. North Mankato and Mankato was another frequent origin/destination pair, but many fewer trips were provided between those communities than within Mankato. Six trips within Saint Peter during this particular week were provided by VINE volunteers driving their own vehicles. Other origin/destination pairs were served, including some outside of the study area;

Figure 3-14 shows only the top combinations.

Figure 3-14 Most Frequent Origins and Destinations, VINE Transit Trips January 25-31, 2015

Top Trip Origins and Destinations	Number	Percent of Total
Volunteer Rides		
Mankato-Mankato	98	49%
Mankato-North Mankato	23	12%
North Mankato-Mankato	23	12%
North Mankato-North Mankato	6	3%
Lake Crystal-Lake Crystal	6	3%
Saint Peter-Saint Peter	6	3%
People to Jobs		
Mankato-Mankato	112	84%
Mankato-North Mankato	11	8%
Eagle Lake-Mankato	5	4%
Medical Assistance		
Mankato-Mankato	41	85%
North Mankato-Mankato	4	8%
Mankato-North Mankato	3	6%

Source: VINE Transit scheduling/dispatching system data

Unmet Needs

The three transit managers each identified transportation needs for their customers above and beyond what their systems currently provide. Unmet needs, based on requests for service, are listed below.

City of Le Sueur

- Le Sueur to Mankato trips, especially for shopping (there are very limited retail destinations in the City of Le Sueur, even with the presence of the Valleygreen Square Mall)
- Trips to Le Center, where the Le Sueur County Courthouse is located
- Service beyond 4:30 pm, especially to accommodate work trips
- Saturday service
- Service to the new country school in Henderson
- Parents who live outside of the city would like transportation for their children to the Le Sueur Nursery School
- Employers in Le Sueur, including Cambria countertops and Le Sueur Cheese, are potential destinations for city/county residents as well as people from outside the city or Le Sueur County

City of Saint Peter

- Service on Sundays
- Earlier and later service on Saturdays
- Saint Peter to Mankato trips
- Service to more churches in Saint Peter
- Metro St. Paul/Minneapolis to Saint Peter Regional Treatment Center
- Saint Peter to metro St. Paul/Minneapolis
- Additional capacity during morning and afternoon commute for work and school

VINE Customers

- Weekend shopping trips
- Next-day service (VINE sometimes has the capacity to accommodate next-day service requests, but not always)
- Last-minute return medical trips

Current and Potential Coordination with Other Transportation Providers

All three transit providers are currently involved in coordinating service and/or exchanging information about their transportation services with other providers. Cooperative efforts in which the systems are currently involved are listed below.

Importantly, all three transit directors and their governing departments/boards/councils have stated a strong interest in and support for more significant coordination among the three systems in the future. The three organizations began meeting on their own to discuss possible coordination or consolidation prior to the initiation of this study.

Opportunities for coordination in the future that were identified by the transit directors are summarized below.

Le Sueur Transit

Current coordination activities include service to preschools, transportation for elder care field trips, and transportation for students participating in special Park Elementary and St. Anne's School programs.

Opportunities for future coordination include the following:

- Land to Air service along the Route 169 corridor includes a stop at the Le Sueur Motel
- UCare sponsors dialysis trips from Le Sueur to Mankato
- Trailblazer Transit in Sibley County travels into Le Sueur County
- Contracted service with Aging Services in Montgomery in Le Sueur County
- Route from the City of Le Sueur to Shakopee in Scott County

Saint Peter Transit

Saint Peter Transit currently provides feeder service to Land to Air and Jefferson Lines intercity services, trips between home or daycare and preschools, and participates on the Minnesota Ride Link program for veterans, funded with a federal Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) grant, and the Saint Peter Schools Read and Feed summer program.

VINE Transit

VINE provides Mobility Management services to organizations in the Region Nine planning district, funded by a grant from MnDOT. Clients who are in need of transportation are referred to the Mobility Manager (who is VINE's Transportation Manager), and she provides appropriate information and referrals concerning transportation options.

Funds for VINE's Mobility Management services previously came from FTA's Section 5317 New Freedom program. That program was repealed by MAP-21. The current authorizing legislation for the federal transit programs, and New Freedom programs and services were made eligible activities under the Section 5310 program, Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities. VINE is receiving other funds from MnDOT to continue its Mobility Management program at least through the end of this calendar year, and plans to apply for 5310 funds to support the program in the future.

Other Transportation Services in the Region

Transportation services that operate in the three counties other than those of the three primary providers involved in the study are listed below. Several providers, who may have a role in future coordination efforts within the study area, were interviewed as part of the stakeholder outreach process. Their services are described briefly below.

Public Transportation Providers

Watonwan Take Me There (TMT)

Watonwan TMT was interviewed during the stakeholder outreach process. As part of its service to Watonwan County residents, TMT provides service to dialysis clinics in Mankato on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Very few pick-ups (less than five per year) are also made in Lake Crystal, in Blue Earth County, on these trips. The one-way fare from Lake Crystal to Mankato is \$7.25. TMT trips from Watonwan County to Mankato typically have available capacity and would be able to accommodate Blue Earth County riders, but TMT staff feels that there is no demand for such service, and riders would need another alternative for travel within Mankato once they arrived.

Faribault County Prairie Express

Fairbault County's public transit system provides service for county residents to the southern Blue Earth County cities of Mapleton and Amboy along MN Highway 30.

Volunteer Driver Programs

There are several volunteer driver programs available in the region including:

- Aging Services for Communities
- Blue Earth Veterans Services
- Le Sueur County Veterans Services
- Mankato Area Living at Home
- Nicollet County Veterans Services
- Nicollet County Volunteer Transportation

The Nelson\Nygaard team surveyed the regional volunteer driver programs to gain information about how each operates; the results of the survey to date are shown in Figure 3-15. Of the three volunteer driver programs that have responded to the online survey to date, the Aging Services for Communities program that serves Le Sueur County and others outside the study area is the largest program with 50 volunteer drivers and a budget of \$400,000. The Nicollet County Department of Public Health serves Nicollet County, Rochester, and the Twin Cities with 12 volunteers and a budget of \$25,000. The Blue Earth County Veterans office is the smallest program serving veterans in Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties with only three volunteers.

The programs provide medical transportation for eligible individuals, which include older adults and people with disabilities in the Aging Services and Nicollet County programs, and veterans in the Blue Earth County program.

Figure 3-15 Volunteer Driver Program Details

Volunteer Program	Service Area	Participant Eligibility	Trip Eligibility	# of Active Drivers	Vehicles Used	Reimbursement	Volunteer Wait Policy	Reservation Policy	Annual Funding / Staff Hours	Funding Source
Nicollet County Public Health	Nicollet, Twin Cities, Mankato, Rochester	Disability and/or 65+, Nicollet Resident	Medical	12	Volunteer vehicles	Federal IRS Rate	Volunteers wait for appointments to end and pick up riders later	24 hours	\$25,000 / 20 hours	United Way, Nicollet Fund, Rider Donations
Aging Services for Communities	LeSueur, Rice, Scott, Waseca, Faribault, Dakota Counties	Disability	Medical	50	Volunteer vehicles	Federal IRS Rate	Volunteers wait for appointments to end	24 hours	\$400,000 / 110 hours	Rider Donations
Blue Earth County Veterans Office	Blue Earth & Nicollet Counties	Veteran, Blue Earth/Nicollet Resident	Medical	3	Agency vehicles	None	Volunteers wait for appointments to end	3-5 days	Unknown	Rider Donations, VA Beneficiary Reimbursement program

Private and Non-profit Providers

Figure 3-16 shows the private and non-profit providers that operate in the three counties:

Figure 3-16 Private and Non-Profit Transportation Providers in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet County

County	Provider
Blue Earth County	Americare Mobility Van (AMV) Blue Earth Taxi Elder Care Services, Inc. (for agency's clients only) Kato Cab Jefferson Lines Bus Service Land to Air Express MRCI (for agency's clients only) Taxi Pros
Le Sueur County	Le Sueur County Development Center
Nicollet County	Jefferson Lines Bus Service

Source: Region 9 2011 Human Service Transportation Plan

Land to Air

Land to Air was interviewed as part of the stakeholder outreach process. Service is provided from home base in Mankato to Minneapolis and Rochester. Trips from Mankato to Minneapolis travel the MN Highway 169 corridor, with stops at the Food Co-op and Gustavus Adolphus College in Saint Peter, and in Le Sueur by reservation. Six trips are provided in each direction on weekdays, and three on weekends and holidays. Some vehicles in the Land to Air fleet are wheelchair-accessible.

Land to Air recently received a 5311 (f) grant from MnDOT to transport passengers to medical destinations in Rochester; public providers bring passengers to Land to Air bus stops, where they transfer for the trip to Rochester.

Buses do not always have available capacity, but the company is open to working with public transit providers to facilitate regional trips.

AMV

AMV was also interviewed because of its role in Medical Assistance transportation (Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation) in the study area. Based in Mankato, AMV is the Medical Assistance provider for Blue Earth, Nicollet, Le Sueur, and 11 other counties, providing both Access Transportation Services (ATS) and Specialized Transportation Services (STS).

The company operates a fleet of 50 vehicles, mostly Chrysler minivans that are wheelchair-accessible. About 80% of trips provided originate in the Mankato area. About 95% of trips are individual rides; the other 5% are routes between schools and autism centers that operate daily.

Based on the company's experience with Medical Assistance recipients, medical transportation appears to be in very high demand, especially for dialysis treatment, which is a growing need.

Brown County Heartland Express

Brown County Heartland Express primarily serves destinations within Brown County and also connects with Land to Air service in Mankato for trips to Rochester traveling along Highway 15 through Nicollet County and Blue Earth County. Additionally, volunteer drivers take riders to Mankato from Brown County, but no accessible service is available.

OPERATING AND FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

This section presents operating and financial statistics for each of the three study area transit providers for the past several years and evaluates performance of each in comparison to MnDOT's standards for different types of service.

Understanding the performance of each system today and over the past few years—the level of service provided, the associated costs, the utilization of services by customers, and the sources and amounts of funding that support each provider's services—is an important foundation for the assessment of possible coordination/consolidation alternatives in the next phases of this project.

Operating and Financial Statistics

Operating statistics presented in this section—ridership, vehicle hours, vehicle miles, and operating costs—were obtained primarily from MnDOT annual budget reports containing data submitted by the providers for the period 2011 through 2014; other information was provided directly by the providers as noted. Funding information for the same years was obtained from MnDOT annual fiscal obligations reports.

Because demand-response, or dial-a-ride, and fixed-route or deviated fixed-route services operate differently and cannot be fairly compared to each other in terms of performance, information in the following tables is presented by type of service. Separate operating cost and farebox revenue figures were not available for the two city providers' DAR and deviated route services, however. Therefore, operating costs were allocated between the types of service on the basis of vehicle hours, following the assumption that DAR trips travel a more circuitous route, in general, than deviated route trips, which involve deviations only some of the time. Farebox revenues were allocated between the two types of service based on estimates of the proportion of passengers who pay for fares with tickets rather than cash (and thereby pay a lower fare per trip) and the proportion of general public riders and those qualifying for a reduced-fare discount. Estimated fare revenues by type of service should be taken as rough estimates, however, because both systems have pre-school riders whose fares are billed to parents monthly, and those revenues are not counted as farebox revenue.

Data for each provider is presented and discussed separately; a comparison of performance measures between providers follows.

Le Sueur Transit

Operating and financial data for Le Sueur Transit is shown in Figure 3-17.

Le Sueur Transit ridership has stayed relatively constant or grown a bit over the four-year period, with 26,000-28,000 passengers being served each year. DAR ridership has decreased slightly, however, by 3%, while deviated route ridership rose by 13% over the period. Deviated route ridership jumped by 15% between 2013 and 2014 alone.

Figure 3-17 Le Sueur Transit Operating and Financial Statistics, 2011-2014

Le Sueur Transit	Service	2011	2012	2013	2014 (1)	Change over period
Operating Data						
Ridership (one-way passenger trips)	<i>Demand response</i>	10,719	10,604	10,388	10,378	-3.2%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	15,556	13,612	15,297	17,585	13.0%
Total Vehicle Hours	<i>Demand response</i>	2,052	2,488	2,293	2,576	25.5%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	1,799	1,440	1,550	1,320	-20.6%
Total Vehicle Miles	<i>Demand response</i>	21,558	20,809	23,645	25,195	16.9%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	6,300	7,833	6,300	6,300	0.0%
Financial Data						
Operating Cost (2)	<i>Demand response</i>	\$115,771	\$126,831	\$124,746	\$150,385	29.9%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	\$101,497	\$73,407	\$84,324	\$77,061	-24.1%
	<i>Total</i>	\$217,268	\$200,238	\$209,070	\$227,446	4.7%
Farebox Revenue (3)	<i>Demand response</i>	\$18,508	\$18,373	\$19,565	\$16,614	-10.2%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	\$22,805	\$19,955	\$23,268	\$26,748	17.3%
	<i>Total</i>	\$41,313	\$38,328	\$42,833	\$43,362	5.0%
Performance Measures						
Passenger Trips/ Vehicle Hour	<i>Demand response</i>	5.2	4.3	4.5	4.0	-22.9%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	8.6	9.5	9.9	13.3	54.1%
Operating Cost/Passenger Trip	<i>Demand response</i>	\$10.80	\$11.96	\$12.01	\$14.49	34.2%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	\$6.52	\$5.39	\$5.51	\$4.38	-32.8%
Operating Cost/Vehicle Hour	<i>Demand response</i>	\$56.42	\$50.98	\$54.40	\$58.38	3.5%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	\$56.42	\$50.98	\$54.40	\$58.38	3.5%
Farebox Recovery Ratio	<i>Demand response</i>	16.0%	14.5%	15.7%	11.0%	-30.9%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	22.5%	27.2%	27.6%	34.7%	54.5%
	<i>Total</i>	19%	19%	20%	19%	.03%
Subsidy per Passenger Trip	<i>Demand response</i>	\$9.07	\$10.23	\$10.13	\$12.89	42.1%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	\$6.25	\$7.97	\$6.88	\$7.61	21.7%
	<i>Total</i>	\$6.70	\$6.69	\$6.47	\$6.58	-1.7%

Source: MnDOT

(1) 2014 information from MnDOT Line Item Detail Report and Fiscal Obligations Report

(2) Operating cost allocated between demand response and deviated route on the basis of vehicle hours

(3) Fare revenue allocated between demand response and deviated route on the basis of estimated proportion of tickets vs. cash fares by type of rider

Vehicle hours and miles for both DAR and deviated route service have remained relatively constant over the period. Between 2,000 and 2,500 vehicle hours and 22,000 and 25,000 vehicle miles of DAR service were provided each year. Vehicle hours and miles of deviated route service totaled 1,300-1,800 and 6,300-7,800 each year, respectively. Total operating costs fell slightly for 2012 and 2013, to just over \$200,000 each year, and then rose by about 9% to \$227,446 in 2014. The estimated DAR share of operating costs, based on vehicle hours of service, has fluctuated from year to year, but increased in 2014 by about 21% to \$150,385. The estimated deviated route share of operating costs has fallen over the four-year period, by about 24%, to \$77,061 in 2014.

Fare revenues have also remained relatively stable, totaling \$40,000 or so per year. Fare revenues were allocated between services on the basis of ridership, so the deviated route service's much higher ridership results in a higher amount of fare revenues each year, even though the cost of route trip (including one that involves a deviation) is much lower than the one-way DAR fare.

Figure 3-17 includes measures of service performance for Le Sueur Transit over the four-year period:

- Passenger trips per vehicle hour, an important measure of productivity or service effectiveness for a demand-response service
- Operating cost per passenger trip, a measure of cost effectiveness
- Operating cost per vehicle hour, a measure of cost efficiency
- Farebox recovery ratio (the percentage of operating costs recovered through payment of fares by passengers), a measure of cost effectiveness
- Subsidy per passenger, the amount of funding, excluding fare revenues, used to offset operating costs, another measure of cost effectiveness

Between 2011 and 2014, Le Sueur Transit's DAR service transported between four and five passengers per vehicle hour. Productivity on the deviated route service was nine to ten passengers per vehicle hour between 2011 and 2013, and rose to 13 passengers per hour in 2014. With a more defined route and many trips that do not involve a deviation to a passenger's home or destination, deviated route service can be expected to carry a higher number of passengers per vehicle hour than DAR service.

Operating cost per passenger trip for DAR service ranged from about \$11.00-14.00 over the four years. Cost per trip on the more heavily utilized deviated route service ranged from about \$5.00 to \$7.00. Since vehicle hours were used to allocate total operating expenses between DAR and deviated route service, costs per vehicle hour are identical, and ranged from about \$51.00 to \$58.00 from year to year. Over the four-year period, hourly operating costs rose by only 3.5 percent.

Total farebox revenues represented 19%-20% of total operating costs each year. Subsidy per passenger trip on the DAR service was \$9.00-\$10.00 between 2011 and 2013, and rose to \$13.00 in 2014. Subsidy per passenger on the deviated route service was in the range \$7.00 to \$8.00 between 2011 and 2014.

Saint Peter Transit

Operating and financial statistics for Saint Peter Transit between 2011 and 2014 are shown in Figure 3-18.

Figure 3-18 Saint Peter Transit Operating and Financial Statistics, 2011-2014

Saint Peter Transit	Service	2011	2012	2013	2014 (1)	Change over period
Operating Data						
Ridership (one-way passenger trips)	<i>Demand response</i> (2)	73,119	74,056	70,632	53,229	-27.2%
	<i>Deviated route</i> (3)	NA	NA	1,745	6,243	257.8%
Total Vehicle Hours	<i>Demand response</i>	5,519	5,700	6,087	4,951	-10.3%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	846	2,046	141.8%
Total Vehicle Miles	<i>Demand response</i>	73,882	83,803	77,950	60,221	-18.5%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	11,162	26,558	137.9%
Financial Data						
Operating Cost (4)	<i>Demand response</i>	\$297,694	\$320,917	\$293,013	\$225,303	-23.2%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	\$40,274	\$93,107	145.7%
	<i>Total</i>	\$297,694	\$320,917	\$333,737	\$318,410	44.0%
Farebox Revenue (5)	<i>Demand response</i>	\$33,340	\$37,226	\$41,994	\$48,288	-18.9%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	\$2,244	\$8,029	286.3%
	<i>Total</i>	\$33,340	\$37,226	\$44,238	\$56,257	70.9%
Performance Measures						
Passenger Trips/Vehicle Hour	<i>Demand response</i>	13.2	13.0	11.6	10.8	-18.9%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	2.1	3.1	47.9%
Operating Cost/Passenger Trip	<i>Demand response</i>	\$4.07	\$4.33	\$4.15	\$4.23	4.0%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	\$23.34	\$14.91	-36.1%
Operating Cost/Vehicle Hour	<i>Demand response</i>	\$53.94	\$56.30	\$48.14	\$45.51	-15.6%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	\$48.14	\$45.51	-5.5%
Farebox Recovery Ratio	<i>Demand response</i>	11.2%	11.6%	19.3%	21.4%	91.1%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	5.5%	8.6%	56.5%
	<i>Total</i>	11.2%	11.6%	20.0%	17.7%	57.8%
Subsidy per Passenger Trip	<i>Demand response</i>	\$3.62	\$3.83	\$3.24	\$3.33	-8.0%
	<i>Deviated route</i>	NA	NA	\$22.05	\$13.63	-38.2%
	<i>Total</i>	\$3.62	\$3.83	\$3.69	\$4.41	21.9%

Source: MnDOT

(1) 2014 figures from MnDOT Line Item Detail Report and Fiscal Obligations Report

(2) Ridership, hours, and cost figures for 2011-2014 include GusBus

(3) Includes 498 fixed route ridership in 2014

(4) Operating cost allocated between demand response and deviated route on the basis of vehicle hours

(5) Fare revenue allocated between demand response and deviated route based on rider type and fare type information provided by Saint Peter Transit

Several notes about Saint Peter Transit's service that should be considered when reading Figure 3-18:

- Deviated route service began operation in August 2013, so the 2014 figures represent the first full year of that service. That accounts for the large increases in service output and utilization in that year as compared to 2013.
- About 30% of Saint Peter Transit's deviated route trips involve a deviation, which makes it function more like DAR service than fixed-route service.
- Passenger trips, costs, estimated hours, and contract revenue for the transit system's contract with Gustavus Adolphus College for the "GusBus" service are included in figures for each year. That service, with its very high ridership and short trip distances, favorably affects the performance measures presented in Figure 3-18.

Saint Peter Transit carried approximately 73,000-74,000 riders on its DAR service in 2011 and 2012. Service on the deviated route began in August 2013, with about 1,700 riders. DAR ridership in that year fell slightly to nearly 71,000 passengers. In 2014, the first full year of deviated route service, DAR ridership declined further to roughly 53,000 passengers, while deviated route ridership rose to 6,700. It would be reasonable to expect a shift in ridership as DAR riders and new customers found that the new deviated route met their needs; however, DAR ridership decreased by over 17,000, more than the number of new deviated route riders. Total ridership in 2014 was about 17% less than in 2013.

Consistent with the initiation of new service and ridership patterns, vehicle hours of service increased overall between 2011 and 2014. DAR vehicle hours ranged from 5,400 to 5,700 between 2011 and 2013, then decreased to just under 5,000 in 2014. Deviated vehicle hours were nearly 850 in the first partial year of service, and increased to just over 2,000 in 2014.

Vehicle miles of service followed the same pattern. DAR miles fluctuated year to year, but showed a decrease of 19% between 2011 and 2014. Deviated route miles more than doubled between 2013, when service was in operation for only several months, and the first full year of operation in 2014.

DAR operating costs, estimated on the basis of vehicle hours of service, ranged from approximately \$290,000 to \$321,000 between 2011 and 2013, then decreased by 23% in 2014 to \$225,000. Deviated route operating costs more than doubled between 2013 and 2014, to just over \$93,000.

Total farebox revenues in 2011 and 2012 were approximately \$33,000-\$37,000 in 2011 and 2012. After implementation of the deviated route service in 2013, fare revenues increased to over \$66,000, most of which are attributable to the DAR service. In 2014, reported fare revenues were somewhat lower—just over \$56,000—reflecting lower DAR ridership in that year, but still significantly higher than in the beginning of the four-year period.

Performance measures for Saint Peter Transit are also presented in Figure 3-18.

Passenger trips per vehicle hour on the DAR service were very high, particularly in 2011 and 2012; the service carried 13 passengers per hour in those years, and 11 or 12 per hour in 2013 and 2014. As mentioned previously, the inclusion of GusBus ridership in reported passenger trips greatly raises this average productivity. The GusBus service transports Gustavus Adolphus College students between campus and destinations in downtown Saint Peter on weekend nights. Travel times and distances are short (the college is also located in downtown Saint Peter), service hours are limited (9:00 pm to 2:00 am) and the service is heavily utilized, with a typical productivity of over 40 passengers per vehicle hour.

Productivity of the deviated route began at 2.1 passenger trips per vehicle hour in its first few months of operation, and rose to 3.1 trips per hour in the first full year of service.

Cost per vehicle hour for DAR service was \$54.00-\$56.00 in 2011 and 2012, and decreased to roughly \$48.00 and \$46.00 in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Farebox revenues covered over 11% of DAR operating expenses in 2011 and 2012. With the increase in farebox revenues reported in 2013 and 2014, that ratio increased to 19-21%.

Subsidy per DAR passenger is low—less than \$4.00 per year over the four-year period. Subsidy per deviated route passenger is higher—\$22.00 and \$14.00 in 2013 and 2014, respectively—but increases the overall subsidy per passenger only slightly, to approximately \$4.00 each year.

VINE

VINE's operating and financial statistics for 2011-2014 are shown in Figure 3-19.

Figure 3-19 VINE Operating and Financial Statistics, 2011-2014

VINE Transit	Service	2011	2012	2013	2014	Change over period
Operating Data						
Ridership (one-way passenger trips)	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	3,922	4,534	4,049	4,455	13.6%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	12,721	11,278	10,749	7,741	-15.5%
Total Vehicle Hours	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	2,867	3,472	3,707	3,631	26.6%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	3,467	2,448	2,461	2,235	-35.6%
Total Vehicle Miles	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	35,107	43,863	42,769	42,821	22.0%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	46,055	34,996	31,742	26,134	-43.3%
Financial Data						
Operating Cost	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	\$83,262	\$88,371	\$90,023	\$98,713	18.6%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	\$113,409	\$105,897	\$102,082	\$96,828	-14.6%
Farebox Revenue	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	\$16,828	\$15,044	\$17,887	\$19,229	14.3%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	\$20,095	\$15,732	\$14,162	\$13,869	-31.0%
Performance Measures						
Passenger Trips/Vehicle Hour	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	1.4	1.3	1.1	1.2	-10.3%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	3.7	4.6	4.4	2.1	-41.9%
Operating Cost/Passenger Trip	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	\$21.23	\$19.49	\$22.23	\$22.16	4.4%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	\$8.92	\$9.39	\$9.50	\$12.51	40.3%
Operating Cost/Vehicle Hour	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	\$29.04	\$25.45	\$24.28	\$27.19	-6.4%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	\$32.71	\$43.26	\$41.48	\$43.32	32.4%
Farebox Recovery Ratio	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	20.2%	17.0%	19.9%	19.5%	-3.6%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	17.7%	14.9%	13.9%	14.%	-19.2%
Subsidy per Passenger Trip	<i>Volunteer rides (New Freedom)</i>	\$16.94	\$16.17	\$17.82	\$17.84	5.3%
	<i>People to Jobs (JARC)</i>	\$7.34	\$7.99	\$8.18	\$10.72	46.1%

Source: MnDOT

Several important considerations about VINE's transportation data include the following:

- Figure 3-19 includes only the transportation services VINE operates with the JARC and New Freedom grants it received from MnDOT over the four-year period. MnDOT-supported services are only a part of VINE's overall transportation program, which also includes non-emergency medical trips for Medical Assistance recipients in several counties (provided by volunteer drivers utilizing the VINE vehicles that are licensed as taxis) and other organizations that contract with VINE for client transportation. VINE provided 6,562 Medical Assistance and other contract trips in 2014, just over half the number of trips provided with MnDOT support.
- Transportation services are an integral part of the organization—transportation, management and support staff spend a portion of their time on grant-supported and other transportation services, and drivers may provide other volunteer services to support VINE programs.

Data for VINE's New Freedom and JARC (People to Jobs) services are presented separately in Figure 3-19 and discussed separately below because the two services have very different operating characteristics. New Freedom trips are provided by volunteer drivers using their own vehicles. JARC trips are provided by part-time paid drivers using VINE vehicles, and while there are regularly scheduled trips between the same origins and destinations for customers during the six months that they are eligible to use the service, it is a typical DAR operation.

New Freedom Service

New Freedom ridership showed some variation over the four-year period, but increased overall to 4,455 trips in 2014. Vehicle hours of service also fluctuated from year to year, and increased by more than 25% over the period to 3,631 hours in 2014. Vehicle miles increased by nearly the same amount, reaching 42,821 in 2014.

Operating cost of the New Freedom service increased steadily, but not dramatically, from year to year, ending at nearly \$99,000 in 2014, a four-year increase of almost 20%. Farebox revenues, which in this service come from donations from riders to offset the cost of mileage reimbursements to drivers and VINE's administrative costs, increased in most years, ending at just over \$19,000 in 2014, an increase of 14% over 2011.

Productivity for the New Freedom service is in line with what would be expected of a volunteer rides program in which most trips are provided for one rider at a time. Passenger trips per vehicle hour ranged from 1.1 to 1.4 over the four-year period. Actual productivity is likely to be somewhat higher, because vehicle hours of service represents total hours spent by volunteer drivers, including wait time until passengers are finished with their appointments and ready to return home, and not just driving hours.

Cost per trip remained stable over the four-year period, at roughly \$19.00-\$22.00 each year. Cost per vehicle hour ranged from \$24.00-\$29.00 per year; actual hourly costs are likely to be higher, due to the inclusion of wait time in the vehicle hours of service figures.

Donations from riders covered about 20% of the cost of providing service each year, resulting in a subsidy per passenger of \$17.00-\$18.00.

JARC Service—People to Jobs

Ridership on the People to Jobs service declined each year, resulting in an overall decrease of 16% between 2011 and 2014. Vehicle hours and miles of service declined as well, by 36% and 43%, respectively.

The cost of providing the service also decreased over this period, beginning at about \$113,000 in 2011 and ending at \$97,000 in 2014, a decrease of 15 percent. Farebox revenues declined as well, falling from about \$20,000 in 2011 to \$14,000 in 2014, a decrease of 31 percent.

Passenger trips per vehicle hour of People to Jobs service varied from year to year, ranging from a low of 2.1 in 2014, when ridership was lowest, to 4.6 in 2012, the year of highest ridership.

Cost per passenger trip increased annually over the four-year period, ranging from nearly \$9.00 in 2011 to almost \$13.00 in 2014. Hourly operating costs increased as well, beginning at almost \$33.00 in 2011 and ending at \$43.00 in 2014.

Consistent with the decrease in ridership over the four-year period, the farebox recovery ratio declined from 18% in 2011 to 14% in 2014, while subsidy per passenger increased from \$7.34 in 2011 to \$10.72 in 2014.

Performance Measures

MnDOT has established performance standards for new or merged services provided by Greater Minnesota's rural public transit systems.² The standards provide guidance to transit operators regarding the level of service performance needed to ensure continued funding from MnDOT.

While the services of the study area's three transit providers are not new or merged services, and VINE Transit is not a public transit operator, the standards still offer a useful way to compare the performance of the providers' service to each other and to measures of successful services.

MnDOT's performance measures include:

- Passengers per hour
- Cost per passenger trip
- Cost per revenue service hour
- Revenue per passenger trip
- Revenue miles

MnDOT has set standards for passengers per hour for different types of services, including community or municipal Dial-A-Ride and deviated rural routes. For the other measures, MnDOT's technical brief provides guidance regarding calculation of the measures and outlines expectations for monitoring and performance rather than service standards. Standards and guidance are shown below in Figure 3-20.

² Technical Assistance Brief, *Performance Measures for New or Merged Services*; January 1, 2013 MnDOT Office of Transit

Figure 3-20 MnDOT Performance Measures: Standards and Guidance

Performance Measure	Rating or Guidance
Passenger per Vehicle Hour: Community or Municipal Dial-A-Ride	
Less than or equal to 2.0	Poor
2.0 to 3.0	Minimally adequate
3.0 to 5.0	Good
Greater than or equal to 5.0	Excellent
Passengers per Vehicle Hour: Deviated Rural Route	
Less than or equal to 3.0	Poor
3.0 to 5.0	Minimally adequate
5.0 to 8.0	Good
Greater than or equal to 8.0	Excellent
Cost per Passenger Trip	Should be monitored for significant variations
Cost per Vehicle Hour	Should be constant throughout service year
Revenue per Passenger Trip	Should achieve local share requirement at a minimum

Source: MnDOT

Figure 3-21 shows the performance measures previously discussed for Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Transit as compared to MnDOT's standards and guidance. Performance measures for each provider in Figure 3-21 represent an average for the four-year period.

Figure 3-21 Performance Measures, 2011-2014

Transit Provider	Average, 2011-2014				
	Passenger Trips/Vehicle Hour	Cost /Passenger Trip	Cost /Vehicle Hour	Farebox Recovery Ratio	Subsidy/Passenger Trip
Le Sueur Transit					
Dial-A-Ride	4.2	\$12.32	\$55.04	14.3%	\$10.58
Deviated Route	10.3	\$5.45	\$55.04	28.0%	\$7.18
Saint Peter Transit					
Dial-A-Ride	12.1	\$4.20	\$51.30	15.9%	\$3.50
Deviated Route	2.6	\$19.13	\$47.49	7.1%	\$17.84
VINE Transit					
People to Jobs	3.7	\$10.08	\$40.19	15.2%	\$8.56
New Freedom volunteer rides	1.2	\$21.28	\$27.19	19.5%	\$17.19

Source: MnDOT

Dial-A-Ride Services

The productivity of all three providers' DAR services, measured by passengers per vehicle hour, falls into the "Good" range of 3.0 to 5.0 set by the MnDOT standards. Saint Peter Transit's 12.1 passengers per hour is well above the 4.2 and 3.7 passengers per hour carried on Le Sueur Transit's DAR and VINE's People to Jobs service, but that is due to the inclusion of the highly productive GusBus service in Saint Peter Transit's DAR data.

Cost per passenger trip is similar for Le Sueur Transit and VINE, at \$12.32 and \$10.08, respectively; Saint Peter Transit's cost per trip of \$4.20 is lower due to the GusBus service. VINE's cost per hour of \$40.19 is lower than the other two providers' costs—\$55.04 for Le Sueur Transit and \$51.30 for Saint Peter Transit.

Fare revenues recover a slightly greater share of operating costs Saint Peter Transit's DAR services than of Le Sueur Transit or VINE's People to Jobs service—almost 16% as compared to 14% and 15%, respectively. This is likely due to the slightly higher fares for DAR service in Saint Peter. The higher fares compared to \$10.58 for Le Sueur Transit and \$8.56 for VINE's People to Jobs.

Deviated Route Services

With a productivity of 10.3 passengers per vehicle hour, Le Sueur Transit's deviated route service falls into the "Excellent" category set by MnDOT's standards. At an average of 2.6 passengers per hour between 2013 and 2014, Saint Peter Transit's deviated service is less productive, and fell into the "Poor" range during that time period. However, it is not unusual for a new service to develop its maximum ridership over time, and the Saint Peter service is likely to continue to grow. MnDOT's standards set a goal of 3.0 to 5.0 passengers per vehicle hour for services in the poor category to strive for, and with an increase in passengers per hour of 48% in 2014, the service reached the lower end of that level. It is also important to note that approximately one third of the trips on the Saint Peter deviated route involve a deviation, while deviations on the Le Sueur service are less frequent. Deviations have a negative impact on the productivity of service.

Cost per passenger trip varied greatly between the two systems. An established service with healthy ridership, Le Sueur Transit's deviated route cost per passenger trip over the four-year period averaged \$5.45, while the new Saint Peter Transit service averaged \$19.13 between 2013 and 2014. At \$14.91, Saint Peter Transit's cost per passenger trip got closer to that of Le Sueur Transit in 2014.

Cost per vehicle hour was similar between the two systems, but lower for Saint Peter Transit: \$46.82 as compared to \$55.04 for Le Sueur Transit.

Le Sueur Transit's higher deviated route ridership resulted in a higher farebox recovery ratio and lower subsidy per passenger as compared to Saint Peter Transit.

New Freedom Volunteer Driver Services

Performance measures associated the volunteer driver service VINE provides with its New Freedom were discussed earlier. They are shown in Figure 3-20 for reference, but since the nature of such service is very different from DAR or deviated route service, the performance of VINE's New Freedom service is not compared with the performance of the services offered by the other providers.

Funding

Funding utilized by each of the three transit agencies between 2011 and 2014 is presented in the following tables.

Public transit services in Minnesota are funded jointly by federal, state, and local governments. Federal transit assistance programs and state funds from Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) and General Fund (GF) revenues typically provide 80-85% of total transit operating expenses. Transit agencies must provide the remaining 15-20% from farebox revenues, contract revenues, and other local sources of funding. Agencies may provide more than the required 15-20%, although such “overmatch” does not increase the federal or state funds that they are eligible to receive.

Providers like VINE that receive grants from federal transit assistance programs through MnDOT for specific transportation projects are responsible for providing the required non-federal share, typically 50% for an operating project and 20% for a capital project.

Le Sueur Transit

Le Sueur Transit funding over the four-year period is summarized in Figure 3-22Figure 3-21.

Figure 3-22 Le Sueur Transit Funding, 2011-2014

Le Sueur Transit	2011	2012	2013	2014*
Operating Costs				
DAR	\$115,771	\$126,831	\$124,746	\$135,697
Deviated route	\$101,497	\$73,407	\$84,324	\$91,749
Total Operating Costs	\$217,268	\$200,238	\$209,070	\$227,446
Operating Revenues				
DAR fare revenue	\$16,854	\$16,784	\$17,323	\$10,509
Deviated route fare revenue	\$24,459	\$21,544	\$25,510	\$32,853
Subtotal Fare Revenues	\$41,313	\$38,328	\$42,833	\$43,362
Federal funds	\$60,414	\$55,598	\$49,325	\$73,299
State funds	\$110,350	\$104,593	\$117,931	\$108,657
Subtotal Grant Funds	\$170,764	\$160,191	\$167,256	\$181,956
Additional Local Share (1)	\$5,192	\$1,720	-\$2,839	\$2,127
Total Operating Revenues	\$217,269	\$200,239	\$209,070	\$227,445

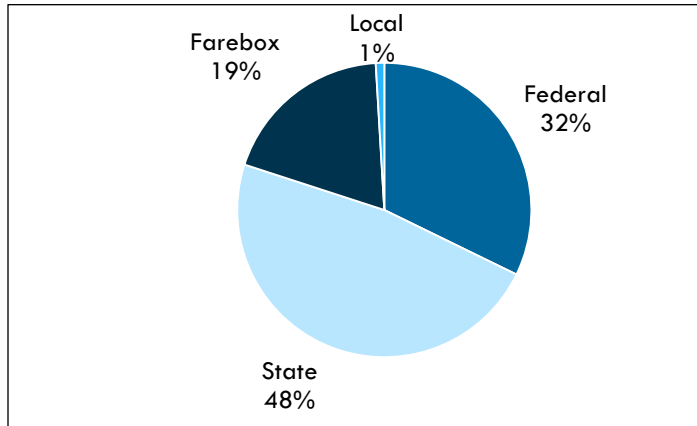
Source: MnDOT

- (1) Contract revenues (\$3,345) and needed additional local share (\$1,847) 2011
 \$1,720 of total contract revenues (\$3,059) 2012
 Fare revenue (\$42,833) plus contract revenue (\$1,820) exceeded needed local share 2013
 Contract revenues (\$836) and needed local share (\$1,291) 2014

* From 2014 Line Item Detail Report and 2014 Fiscal Obligations Report

State funds provided the largest share of Le Sueur Transit's funding in each year, followed by federal funds from the Section 5311 operating assistance program for rural areas, and fare revenues. In 2011, 2012, and 2014, Le Sueur Transit provided a small additional sum beyond farebox revenues to make up its required local share. In 2013, fare and contract revenues exceeded the necessary local share. The breakdown of revenues for the transit system in 2014 is shown in Figure 3-23.

Figure 3-23 Sources of Le Sueur Transit Revenue, 2014



Saint Peter Transit

Saint Peter Transit's expenses and revenues between 2011 and 2014 are shown in Figure 3-24.

Figure 3-24 Saint Peter Transit Funding, 2011-2014

Saint Peter Transit	2011	2012	2013	2014*
Operating Costs				
DAR	\$297,694	\$320,917	\$293,013	\$225,303
Deviated route			\$40,724	\$93,107
Total Operating Costs	\$297,694	\$320,917	\$333,737	\$318,410
Operating Revenues				
DAR fare revenue	\$33,340	\$37,226	\$64,983	\$50,401
Deviated route fare revenue	\$0	\$0	\$1,605	\$5,856
Subtotal Fare Revenues	\$33,340	\$37,226	\$66,588	\$56,257
Federal funds	\$69,300	\$66,500	\$65,700	\$92,179
State funds	\$142,700	\$145,500	\$174,300	\$162,549
Subtotal Grant Funds	\$212,000	\$212,000	\$240,000	\$254,728
Additional Local Share (1)	\$52,353	\$71,691	\$27,149	\$7,425
Total Operating Revenues	\$297,693	\$320,917	\$333,737	\$318,410

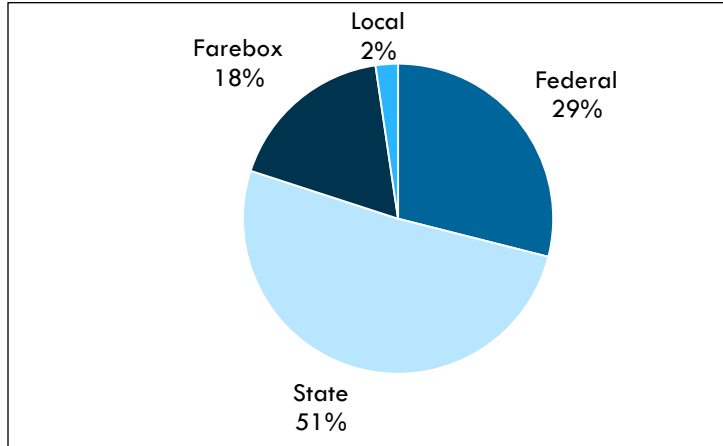
Source: MnDOT

- (1) \$47,595 contract revenues plus needed additional \$4,758 local share 2011
 \$39,165 contract revenues plus needed additional \$32,526 local share 2012
 \$22,350 contract revenues plus needed additional \$4,798 local share 2013
 Portion of contract revenues (\$31,706 total) revenues 2014

* From 2014 Fiscal Operations Report and 2014 Line Item Detail Report

State funding also makes up the largest source of revenue for Saint Peter Transit, followed by federal funds and farebox revenues. In each year between 2011 and 2013, the agency contributed contract revenues plus and additional local share, beyond farebox revenues, to make up its required local share. In 2014, revenues exceeded the required local share. Sources of revenue for Saint Peter Transit in 2014 are shown in Figure 3-25.

Figure 3-25 Sources of Revenue for Saint Peter Transit, 2014



VINE Transit

VINE's funding for the services it provides with federal JARC and New Freedom funding received through MnDOT is shown in Figure 3-26 and Figure 3-27.

JARC funding is used to support the People to Jobs service. The required non-federal match for this operating project is 50% of net operating cost (operating cost minus fare revenues). In addition to fares paid by riders, VINE receives funds from Blue Earth County Employment Services and United Way to make up this required match.

Figure 3-26 VINE Transit Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Funding, 2011-2014

VINE Transit	2011	2012	2013	2014
Operating Costs				
JARC	\$113,409	\$105,897	\$102,082	\$96,828
Operating Revenues				
JARC fares	\$20,095	\$15,732	\$14,162	\$13,869
Federal funds	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$43,960	\$41,480
State funds	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Subtotal Grant Funds	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$43,960	\$41,480
Additional Local Share	\$48,314	\$45,165	\$43,960	\$41,480
Total Operating Revenues	\$113,409	\$105,897	\$102,082	\$96,829

Source: MnDOT

VINE utilizes federal New Freedom funding that it receives through MnDOT to support volunteer rides for customers who do not have a funding source for transportation, to cover other administrative expenses associated with its volunteer driver program, and to provide door-through-door assistance for riders who need it. The required non-federal match for this program is also 50% of net operating cost. VINE receives funding from a Blue Earth County block grant for this purpose. Donations from riders also make up part of the non-federal match.

Figure 3-27 VINE Transit New Freedom Funding, 2011-2014

VINE Transit	2011	2012	2013	2014
Operating Costs				
New Freedom	\$83,262	\$88,371	\$90,023	\$98,713
Operating Revenues				
New Freedom fares	\$16,828	\$15,044	\$17,887	\$19,229
Federal funds	\$33,000	\$33,000	\$33,000	\$39,742
State funds	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Subtotal Grant Funds	\$33,000	\$33,000	\$33,000	\$39,742
Additional Local Share	\$33,434	\$40,327	\$39,136	\$39,742
Total Operating Revenues	\$83,262	\$88,371	\$90,023	\$98,713

From MnDOT

The breakdown of revenues used by VINE to provide its People to Jobs (JARC) and volunteer ride (New Freedom) services by source in 2014 is shown in Figures 3-28 and 3-29, respectively.

Figure 3-28 VINE's People to Jobs Revenues, 2014

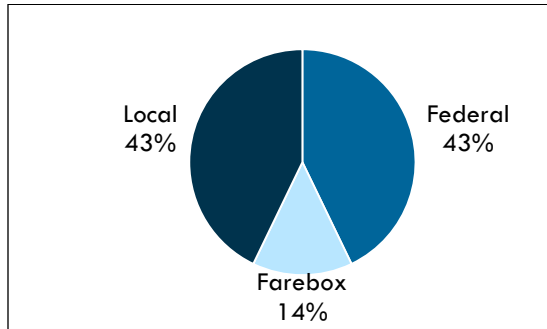
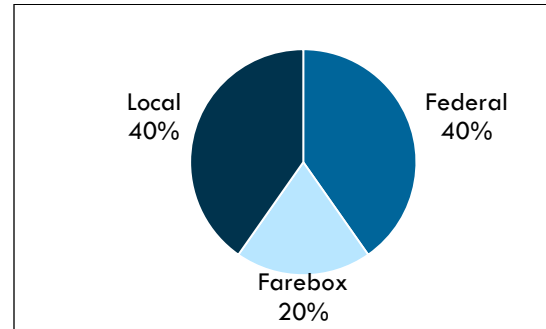


Figure 3-29 VINE's New Freedom (volunteer rides) Revenues, 2014



VINE receives another New Freedom grant through MnDOT to support the mobility management services it provides in the region. To encourage the implementation of mobility management programs and services, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has defined mobility management as a capital expense, making it eligible for federal funding up to 80%. VINE's Mobility Management grant was \$46,000 to \$49,000 per year between 2011 and 2014.

As of federal fiscal year 2013, the federal JARC and New Freedom programs were repealed and their eligible activities incorporated into other federal transit assistance programs. MnDOT has committed to providing the amount of the federal funding VINE previously received for the People to Jobs, New Freedom and Mobility Management services through calendar year 2014, but the organization will no longer be receiving grants under those programs from MnDOT. For VINE's transportation and mobility management services to continue, funding sources to replace JARC and New Freedom grants need to be identified.

4 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

METHODOLOGY

As part of understanding existing conditions in the study area, the Nelson\Nygaard team conducted a series of interviews with various regional stakeholders. These interviews were designed to collect information about stakeholder priorities, perceptions of existing operations, transportation challenges and opportunities, and perceptions about potential coordination among existing providers.

In total, the Nelson\Nygaard team completed 13 interviews with stakeholders from the region, two group meetings with public and non-profit human service agencies, and nine interviews with riders of Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Transit. The team also distributed online surveys to regional volunteer driver programs and health care organizations. The interviews, meetings, and surveys were conducted in February and March 2015. The interviews were conducted over the phone, and the group meetings were conducted in person at the VINE offices.

The stakeholders interviewed, and the topics discussed with each group, are identified below. Comments on themes that emerged from the outreach are presented in the rest of this section.

Stakeholders

Group Meetings

Six people attended the Public Human Services Group on Tuesday, March 10, including:

- Phil Claussen, Director of Human Services, Blue Earth County
- DeAnn Boney, Financial Assistance Supervisor, Blue Earth County
- Kim Boerger, Supervisor/Counselor, Blue Earth County Employment Services
- Kari Arndt, Case Manager, Waiver, Nicollet County Public Health
- Terri McMillen, Office Support Specialist/Transportation, Nicollet County
- Kari Jo Sowieja, Fiscal Supervisor, Le Sueur County

Three people attended the Non-profit Human Services Group on Wednesday, March 11, including:

- Jessica O'Brien, Associate Director, MN Council of Churches Refugee Services, Mankato
- Kamil Jamac, MVAC Program Specialist, Minnesota Valley Action Council, St. Peter
- Wilber Neushwander-Frink, Community Organizer, Arc of Southwestern Minnesota

The human service groups were asked questions about their clients' transportation needs, their perceptions of the available services in the region, and whether they thought various mobility management strategies would improve transportation for their clients.

Stakeholder Interviews

The Nelson\Nygaard team interviewed 13 regional stakeholders including city and county administrators, county commissioners, human service and education representatives, and representatives from other regional service providers. The stakeholders interviewed include:

- Ashley King, Program Coordinator, Shiloh's Hope
- Bob Meyer, County Administrator, Blue Earth County
- Brad Potter, City Administrator, City of Eagle Lake
- Cassandra Nelson, Events Services Coordinator, Gustavus Adolphus College
- Darrell Pettis, County Administrator, Le Sueur County
- Elizabeth Harstad, Director of Community Impact, Greater Mankato Area United Way
- Jason Mekalson, General Manager, Land to Air
- Julie Bluhm, Team Lead, Habilitative Services, Inc.
- Kathleen Svalland, Watonwan County Commissioner
- Marjorie Smith, Transit Director, Watonwan Take Me There
- Melissa Overton, Behavior Analyst with Valley Enterprises, Inc.
- Mike Pinske, President/CEO, AMV
- Mark Anderson, Superintendent of Transit, City of Mankato Department of Public Works (Mankato Transit System)
- Bob Apitz, Transit Director, Brown County Family Services (Brown County Heartland Express)
- Pat LeCourse, Transit Operations Coordinator, Brown County Family Services (Brown County Heartland Express)
- Tom Henderson, Director, Brown County Family Services

The regional stakeholders were each asked different but similar questions with the aim of understanding specific transportation services available both inside and outside the study area, unmet regional transportation needs, and the potential for future collaboration.

Rider Interviews

Nine riders were interviewed via telephone during the first week of March:

- Four Le Sueur Transit riders
- Two Saint Peter Transit riders
- Three VINE riders

During phone interviews, riders were asked how often they use the services, their frequent destinations, and their perceptions of the services.

Le Sueur riders interviewed all live within the city limits. One Saint Peter rider lives in Kasota and takes the dial-a-ride bus home from work in the afternoon; the other rider lives within the City of Saint Peter. The three VINE riders live right outside Mankato. VINE riders are very dependent on

the volunteer driver program to get them to where they need to go, particularly for groceries and medical appointments.

Surveys

Health Care Organizations

Online surveys were sent via email to seven health care organizations in the region. Four organizations responded:

- Pam Williams, CEO, Minnesota Valley Health Center
- Marcia Bahr, Director of Marketing and Communications, Mankato Clinic
- Nancy Thompson, Director, Cancer Center, Mayo Clinic Health System - Mankato
- Sara Madigan, Regional Director of Social Services, Mayo Clinic Health System – Southwest Region

The online surveys collected information about health care organization's clients and staff in order to understand their transportation needs and challenges. It also asked organizations if certain mobility management strategies would be of value to clients and staff.

Volunteer Driver Programs

Online surveys were sent via email to six volunteer driver programs in the region. Three programs responded:

- Mary Hildebrant, Director, Nicollet County Public Health
- Tanya Hauer, Transportation Supervisor, Aging Services for Communities
- Gary Evenson, Veterans Service Officer, Blue Earth County Veterans Office

The online survey for volunteer driver programs collected information about program operations, vehicles and drivers, ride scheduling, and administration and funding. It also asked programs to describe administration/operation challenges and whether they are interested in coordination or consolidation with similar programs.

Other Stakeholder Input

In addition to the meetings, interviews, and surveys described above, the consulting team also reviewed the Mankato Listening Session Minutes from January 21, 2015 to learn more about homelessness in Mankato.

PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING SERVICES

Le Sueur, Saint Peter, and VINE Transit Systems

Overall, stakeholders gave Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Transit very high marks for the quality of service each provides, saying that clients who live within the service areas of each system receive high-quality service that fills a vital need. The most frequent complaint from stakeholders is that there is a need for expanded service times –especially evenings and weekends – and additional routes to serve a wider area.

Strengths

Specific strengths of the three transit services include:

- Riders uniformly praised the three providers and were especially complimentary about the service quality provided by drivers.
- Le Sueur Transit riders especially appreciate the special bus trips arranged in Le Sueur for senior dinners, trips to see the Christmas lights in Mankato, and trips to see the seasonal color changes.
- Gustavus Adolphus College is very pleased with the Gus Bus service provided by Saint Peter Transit. Ridership has been increasing and service is well-liked by the students. Additionally, foster care staff members are generally pleased with Saint Peter service, especially with the drivers who are very helpful and provide additional assistance when needed.
- VINE's People to Job (PTJ) program also received positive reviews from the human service groups because the service is vital to single mothers who need transportation to get to work and to their children's daycare program.

Weaknesses

Specific weaknesses of the three transit services include:

- Le Sueur Transit riders requested more access points on the route and Saturday service.
- Saint Peter Transit riders had several requests and comments. Riders would like to take the bus in the morning, but service isn't available early enough for some to get to work on time and would like a bus to run after 8 p.m. on Saturday. One Saint Peter rider uses the bus frequently as she has a split-shift job. If her last shift goes into the evening, she takes a taxi home, which is very costly. Riders prefer dial-a-ride to the route buses, because route deviations cause the trips to take much longer than the dial-a-ride trips. Riders also indicated that the morning bus is crowded due to a run it takes to Kasota for workers going to MRCI, which used to be located in Saint Peter. One assisted living program employee noted that the buses are sometimes late to pick up clients, but overall the service is adequate.
- VINE riders seem very accustomed to giving the two-to three-day advance request for a ride and do not object to it. However, one older adult rider said the advance notice is an issue if there's an emergency. Riders also remarked that the People to Jobs program buses can be crowded during the morning and afternoon rush.

Volunteer Drivers

Riders were generally satisfied with their experiences with the VINE volunteer driver program, but also agreed that expanding the programs with additional volunteers would make it easier to obtain rides. One rider commented that if a volunteer driver from her area is not available she had to pay the mileage reimbursement of a driver coming from and returning to Mankato.

The human service groups also expressed a high regard for the VINE volunteer driver program and thought the program should be expanded and enhanced in order to provide expanded hours and service on holidays and weekends. One participant mentioned that driver recruitment and retention can be challenging for VINE, a problem which may increase as many of the drivers are seniors themselves.

Mankato Transit System (MTS)

Only one stakeholder provided perspectives on MTS service commenting that overall MTS fails to fill transportation needs for human service clients. The human service group noted that MTS service for North Mankato is less robust in terms of service hours and routes as it is for the City of Mankato.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Although stakeholders agreed that Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Transit provide valuable transportation services for people within their respective service areas, there are still many unmet needs in the tri-county area. Many riders rely on public transportation, so providing clients with reliable, timely and accessible transportation is an essential human service issue. Generally, people who participate in human service programs are more likely to need public transit services than the general public.

Mankato is the primary destination for the region

Human service groups agreed that the majority of their clients want to travel to and from Mankato for work, shopping, social events, and medical services. Although currently there isn't a transit route connecting the three main urban areas, human service groups remarked that the Highway 169 corridor travels north-south connecting Le Sueur to Saint Peter to Mankato and is the logical connector route; however, they noted that residents of rural Nicollet and Le Sueur counties that are not near Highway 169 also need to get to Mankato.

According to human service groups, there are two primary reasons that people who live outside of Mankato need to travel into the city:

- **Shopping:** Le Sueur residents travel to Mankato to shop for clothing because they no longer have a local clothing store. Additionally, the Walmart and Aldi's in Mankato offer low-cost grocery store options that are not available in the rural areas.
- **Employment:** There are a number of large employers in the Mankato area, including MRCI and Walmart. Human service providers were interested in developing partnerships with employers to set up transportation options for their workers. Saint Peter residents in particular need to go Mankato for temporary employment opportunities. They often rely on friends and co-workers to provide a ride to work, which is not always reliable. Additionally, working people with children need to find transportation to get themselves to work and their children to daycare, which can be especially difficult. Transportation for second-shift employment is an issue as well.

Additionally, a stakeholder from a human service organization commented that VINE's People to Jobs program provides a temporary bridge for employees to use for up to three months after securing a new job. The PTJ program actually provides this service for six months, which highlights that people are not fully aware of existing services offered. After six months, PTJ participants are encouraged to find other means of transportation, such as carpooling with their colleagues.

Le Sueur and Saint Peter residents need to travel outside city limits

Public transit for residents of Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties is, for the most part, restricted to city boundaries. Saint Peter Transit serves the City of Saint Peter and the City of Kasota (located in Le Sueur County). In Le Sueur County, general public transit service is provided in the City of Le Sueur by Le Sueur Transit. Residents who live in the rural sections of both counties do not have access to public transit, but still need to get to human services and medical appointments.

For example, in Le Sueur County, there is a new drug court. Today only about three people are traveling to the City of Le Center multiple times per week for drug court related appointments, but the program is expected to expand in the near future.

Additional service times and service areas are needed

As described above, riders commented that they would benefit from additional service hours in the evenings and on the weekends, and human service groups concurred that their clients would also benefit from extended hours. Additionally, riders and human service groups requested additional service outside of existing routes in order to serve people who live in the more rural areas of the counties and to connect the three counties.

Healthcare organization administrators also agreed that their clients would benefit from additional service hours and areas. Healthcare administrators commented that their patients are frequently unable to make appointments because they do not have transportation to get to the healthcare facility. This causes a decline in the patient's health and makes it even more vital for them to find transportation for future appointments. Healthcare administrators noted that travel between counties is important for patients to access health facilities throughout the region.

For the most part, healthcare organization administrators agreed that certain mobility management strategies could help address mobility needs. Specifically, administrators were interested in hearing more about volunteer driver programs, travel vouchers, and a centralized source of transportation information. Administrators were also intrigued by the Missouri mobility management pilot program that matched patient appointments to available transit services to help overcome transportation barriers and decrease missed appointments. Most of the administrators saw potential in such a program working in the region.

Existing wheelchair-accessible vehicles are not meeting the demand

Stakeholders noted that the region lacks enough accessible vehicles to serve the demand from people who use wheelchairs. Health Care Organizations in particular commented that the demand for accessible vehicles is not being met, which is detrimental to their patients finding transportation to appointments. Although there are volunteer driver services that could provide these medical trips, none of the volunteer driver vehicles are able to accommodate wheelchairs. Accessibility for people who use wheelchairs is also a priority for several county administrators.

Specific populations need additional services

Older Adults

Human service groups remarked that the growing aging population is putting a strain on existing transportation systems, especially individuals who need to travel long distances to Mankato, Rochester, and the Twin Cities for medical appointments. Volunteer drivers are especially helpful in serving older adults in the study area, but many volunteers are getting older themselves and a significant portion of volunteers leave the area for warmer climates in the winter, leaving a dearth of available drivers.

People with Disabilities

According to human service groups, many of the individuals with developmental disabilities within the study area live in Mankato. If a person with disabilities lives in a group home, they are able to access transportation through a work provider, if they have one, or a group home provider. But if a person with a disability lives in an apartment, and they cannot afford Mankato public transit, they frequently walk, sometimes long distances, at night and in bad weather. There are some informal “moms’ network” volunteer driver programs that serve people with disabilities in Mankato, Fairmont and New Ulm that allow certain people with disabilities to travel longer distances for non-medical trips.

Adults Residing in Foster Care and Assisted Living Facilities

There are a number of adult foster care facilities in the region that provide specialized assistance and residential services to older adults and people with disabilities. Public transportation provides a benefit to foster care residents in that it allows them to become more independent and self-sufficient. Habilitative Services Inc. in Saint Peter, for example, has one vehicle that is used to transport clients for shopping trips and other appointments, but clients still rely on public transportation for the majority of their transportation needs.

Saint Peter Transit transports as many as 23 residents of Shiloh’s Hope Adult Foster Homes to Valley Enterprise in Saint Peter and Quality Products in Kasoto for employment. To get to their jobs on time, residents of these homes need to travel during peak periods in the morning and afternoon when the buses are nearly at capacity. There are six Shiloh’s Hope homes in the Saint Peter area, so the buses need to make several stops adding additional time to these morning routes. Even with these issues, foster home staff members reported that Saint Peter service is highly regarded by both foster home employees and clients. The Saint Peter drivers in particular were noted as being very helpful. One foster home staff member mentioned that occasionally the buses can be late, which frustrates the clients; however, the staff member added that it’s useful for clients to know that delays are unavoidable in daily life so they can learn to adapt.

Many of the assisted living facilities in the region provide their own transportation for clients; however, these resources are stretched very thin and many times they are not able to provide enough transportation to meet their clients’ needs. One stakeholder mentioned that some assisted living facilities provide transportation for shopping and non-medical excursions only, when the largest transportation needs for their clients are for medical and employment trips.

People who are Homeless

Human service groups and homelessness advocates noted that transportation is a major problem for Mankato's significant homeless population. People who are homeless need transportation to obtain and keep employment in order to pay for housing. There are several interconnected issues:

- **Location of affordable housing and services:** Much of the affordable housing is located outside of Mankato, but the jobs, healthcare and services are located in the city. Transportation services between Mankato and outlying communities (e.g., Lake Crystal, St. Peter, and New Ulm) where affordable housing is located are nonexistent. Routes to and within North Mankato are also insufficient for those trying to use public transit for jobs. Affordable housing located within Mankato is often not located near public transportation lines. Additionally, half-way houses and treatment facilities are frequently located far from bus stops.
- **Access to information:** Transportation schedules and information can be hard to decipher for people with limited or no English skills, new immigrants or migrant workers, and those with mental health issues. These individuals require a travel trainer or bus buddy to provide instruction and guidance on how to ride the bus. Additionally, transit marketing and information should be targeted at people who are homeless or have low incomes, as well as the limited English proficiency population. Ideally, information about transit would be housed on a single website that provides all types of information available in the region.
- **Transportation service hours:** Many people with low incomes and individuals who are homeless are employed in third-shift positions need transportation early in the morning before the buses are running.
- **Bus stop locations:** People dealing with low income and homelessness have trouble walking the long distances between the bus stops and their destinations, especially if they are disabled and/or in winter if they are not dressed warmly.

Potential solutions to these issues were suggested by homelessness stakeholders, including:

- **Finding bus fare money** can be an issue for people dealing with low income or homelessness. There could be a program that provides vouchers to eligible individuals to pay for bus fare and other transportation options. Engaging the business community, especially those employers who are most likely to employ low-wage earners and individuals who are homeless, could help to fund voucher programs and provide other support.
- **Alternative transportation programs** (e.g., bike, vehicle donation programs, ride share incentives) for people who are homeless should be considered to fill in the gaps where transit is not offered.
- **The VINE volunteer driver program** should be continued and expanded.

New Americans

Recently immigrated Americans have special transportation needs, according to human service groups. In addition to transportation to work, shopping, and childcare, new Americans need to get to Mankato for English classes and many times need to travel in large family groups to the same place. VINE in particular is a good resource for transporting entire families to English classes, although there is frequently a waiting list for VINE's services. New Americans also need to

travel to North Mankato for social and religious events and to the Twin Cities for shopping and religious events.

Many New Americans work the second shift (evening shift) because they attend English classes during the day. The human service groups estimated about 500-700 new American families live in Mankato or North Mankato. Additionally, there are about 100 newly immigrated Somalis who live in Saint Peter and need to travel to temporary work opportunities in Mankato.

New Americans also need to travel to Minneapolis to renew their immigration status once per year and currently rely on friends and family members for transportation.

Youth

Young people age 18-25 need transportation services to get to after-school programming. There is also a small population of homeless youth who depend on the Mankato Transit System to get to services.

Volunteer driver programs and medical assistance transportation have administrative challenges

Human service groups remarked that the rules for volunteer drivers and medical assistance transportation vary by municipality or county, which can cause confusion among administrators and users. For example, different volunteer driver programs have different reimbursement rates; Nicollet County pays volunteers the IRS mileage rate, while medical assistance volunteer drivers are reimbursed less than half the IRS rate. Additionally, some public human service programs do not reimburse volunteers for “unloaded” miles (empty vehicle) or wait times; other volunteer programs receive an hourly rate for wait times, and still others are paid a stipend.

Additionally, the volunteer driver programs commented that recruiting, recognizing, and retaining qualified drivers is the main challenge with operating a volunteer driver program. Without sufficient drivers, programs struggle to keep up with the demand for service. It is also challenging to find drivers to meet special needs, such as driving long distances for special medical care.

PERSPECTIVES ON FUTURE COLLABORATION OR CONSOLIDATION

Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit and VINE Transit

When discussing potential coordination and collaboration of existing public transit in the study area, human service groups emphasized that it’s important to enhance current services and not recreate or duplicate services. Additionally, the system should incentivize medical and transportation providers to work together to create ways to get people to medical appointments.

A county administrator remarked that shared services (other than transportation) among the three counties was discussed in the past, but hasn’t been discussed recently. If the transit restructuring study goes forward with collaboration, the commissioner strongly recommends implementing a Joint Powers Agreement to formally agree upon changes. In the past, unofficial collaborative agreements resulted in questions and misunderstandings over which agency was responsible for what task. The same commissioner also had concerns that collaboration might

result in a lower quality transit system than what already exists today. Quality of service, cost-effectiveness, and expanded user groups (e.g. to young people) are priorities for all stakeholders.

According to one county administrator, VINE addresses many of Blue Earth's transportation needs and the county is already offering the maximum financial assistance. Funding that the county already provides to VINE can be included as local match to a future coordinated system, but it would be questionable for the county to spend additional funds.

Another county administrator commented that in the rural areas the only feasible type of transportation service is dial-a-ride, which is expensive and difficult to take away once implemented if it becomes hard to support financially. Public transit is not currently available in the rural areas of his county, so it would take a sizable amount of funding to expand services into these areas. Moreover, the administrator added that the general public doesn't see rural transit as a priority. Nonetheless, the same administrator noted that the county board is always open to discussing potential ways of expanding services to areas where there are documented needs for transportation.

Mankato Transit System

As discussed above, people who live in St. Peter, Le Sueur, and the rural areas of all three counties need to access destinations in Mankato. The consulting team discussed the idea of collaboration between Mankato Transit System (MTS) and the other providers in the area. In addition to the Mankato City Council being interested in joining a regional transit system, MTS agreed that if regional transit services were coordinated and/or expanded so more people can travel to Mankato, MTS would be willing to collaborate in the following ways:

- MTS would be willing to work out arrangements for transfers to fixed route or demand response service. However, MTS Mobility Bus capacity is very limited at present; there are only two vehicles operating on weekdays and one on Saturdays. MTS is discussing expansion of the Mobility Bus service in the future to accommodate the demand for this service.
- MTS would be willing to wash, fuel, and repair other providers' vehicles at its facility in Mankato.
- MTS would be willing to make its tokens and passes available to Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit so that riders traveling to Mankato could pay for all fares at one time. A regional pass might also be an integrated fare payment solution.
- MTS noted that a Guaranteed Ride Home program should be part of the regional service, so that regional travelers to Mankato are assured of being able to return home. For example, dialysis patients are not always ready to return home when scheduled, and may miss their return trip.

Volunteer Driver Programs

Volunteer driver programs were generally receptive to discussing potential coordination of certain administrative or operating functions, especially driver training. They were also open to further discussion of consolidating programs that have similar missions and clients. One volunteer program administrator commented that challenges with coordination and consolidation arise when it comes to ensuring that both organizations are fairly compensated. It can also be challenging not to make the system too complicated for clients who are dealing with health issues and may have difficulties understanding new rules. Additionally, some clients do not want to ride

with unfamiliar drivers and also do not want to travel for longer than they have to, especially after a medical procedure.

Other regional systems

Brown County

Brown County representatives reported that they are willing to talk with the other three counties and would like to be a part of any plan for regional service. Brown County Heartland Express, which only serves Brown County, uses RouteMatch, the license for which cannot be shared, but if other transportation providers were to purchase their own licenses, the scheduling/dispatching systems could talk to each other so that trips could be booked on both the providers' vehicles. Additionally, a new license purchaser might be able to participate in the existing pricing consortium. Brown County representatives recently visited with Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit to give them a RouteMatch demo.

In the past, inter-county service was attempted along the heavily travelled Highway 14 corridor from New Ulm in Brown County through Nicollet County to Mankato, with state and/or federal funding. Service was not successful, and was only in operation for about eight months. Only two round trips per day were offered (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), which was not enough service to satisfy the needs; at least three round trips per day would have been necessary for a successful service. Another service was tried from Brown County to Nicollet County along Highway 15. It was also unsuccessful because not enough service was scheduled.

Watonwan County

Watonwan representatives are open to the discussion of collaboration with Le Sueur, Saint Peter, and VINE. Watonwan residents need to get to Mankato for medical appointments (mainly dialysis) and shopping. There is not a significant need for Watonwan residents to travel to Le Sueur or Saint Peter. There is currently a Watonwan Take Me There (TMT) trip that travels from Watonwan County into Mankato through Lake Crystal. Occasionally they will pick up Lake Crystal residents on their way to Mankato, but generally there is not a demand for this service. They are willing to pick up people in Blue Earth on the way to Mankato, as long the pick-up location is on the route.

Land to Air

Land to Air transportation has several routes that go into the study area. They pick up riders in Saint Peter, Mankato, and Le Sueur and transport them to the airport in the Twin Cities. They also received a Section 5311 (f) grant to provide intercity travel from existing Land to Air pick up locations to Rochester for medical care. When asked about potential for coordination, Land to Air responded that they are very open to the discussion and would welcome public partnership. They travel along high-use corridors Route 169, Highway 90 and Highway 35 and could pick up people along this route. Land to Air has four wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

Americare Mobility Van (AMV)

The demand for medical transportation is growing in the study area, and AMV is the primary provider for this type of service. AMV acknowledged that there is a problem with existing public transportation service not crossing county borders and noted that AMV would be willing to work with public providers to draw up solutions, which may include coordinated service.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This section summarizes key findings from the review and analysis of data collected in this phase of the Transit Restructuring Study and offers preliminary thoughts on opportunities for coordinating/consolidating/enhancing transportation services in the study area that should be among those investigated in upcoming study tasks.

EXISTING SERVICES

The review of the transit providers in Blue Earth, Nicollet and Saint Peter Counties shows three organizations that are dedicated to providing transportation options that meet the needs of their customers. All three providers offer a very high level of service: Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit both provide same-day service; Saint Peter Transit's response time is more like a taxi than a public transit service, while Le Sueur Transit and VINE Transit provide assistance beyond the curb for passengers who require it. All three services are very highly regarded by users, funding agencies, and community stakeholders.

Service Overlaps

There is little to no overlap or duplication in the transportation services provided by these organizations. Their service areas are separate, distinct, and not contiguous. Where there is some duplication is in the time spent by the three transit directors to manage their services and comply with the requirements of their funding sources, in areas such as driver training, procurement, drug and alcohol testing, vehicle maintenance, and development of printed and online public information and marketing materials. These areas may offer the potential for joint efforts among the providers.

Service Policies

Most of the service policies of Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit are different, but similar. Key areas of difference include:

- Dial-A-Ride response time—while Le Sueur Transit accepts trip requests up to an hour before a requested pick-up time, most trips are scheduled on the day of the trip or up to seven days in advance. Many of Saint Peter Transit's trips are provided with little or no advance notice.
- Service days and hours—Saint Peter Transit begins service earlier and ends service later than Le Sueur Transit, and provides service on Saturdays.
- Fares—both public transit providers have somewhat complex fare structures, with many different fare categories and ticket book options. However, Saint Peter Transit cash fares are higher. In addition, the systems have a different eligibility age for “senior” fares—62 in Le Sueur and 55 in Saint Peter.

- VINE Transit’s policies, given the specialized nature of its volunteer driver services and specific client and trip eligibility for its People to Jobs service, are less similar to the public transit providers’ than they are to each other.

Operational Practices

Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit have developed mostly manual procedures for reserving and scheduling trips, preparing daily driver manifests, recording the disposition of trips, preparing billing to contract entities, and preparing service reports. VINE Transit uses a scheduling/dispatching software system that assists with all of those tasks. That type of system would streamline those administrative duties and provide other benefits for the public transit providers.

Contract Services

All three providers have longstanding contracts or less formal arrangements to provide service to other groups that are important to those groups and generate revenue for the providers. Examples of such agreements or contracts include Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit transportation for preschoolers, Saint Peter Transit’s GusBus contract, Le Sueur Transit’s “Sober Bus,” Medical Assistance transportation provided by VINE and Le Sueur Transit, and service provided by VINE to Blue Earth County Department of Human Services and the Mankato Area school district.

UNMET NEEDS

Comments from PMT and PAC members, conversations with stakeholders, and review of previous plans and studies identified the following unmet transportation needs in the region, among others:

- Service between cities in all counties and to Mankato from other cities, for all types of riders
- Service to cities from rural areas
- Evening and weekend service
- Wheelchair-accessible service

NEXT STEPS

Upcoming tasks will focus on identifying and evaluating alternatives for 1) improved transit services and 2) organizational alternatives for delivering those potential services, including coordination and/or consolidation among the three counties and/or existing transit providers.

Areas to be explored based on the findings of the data collection and analysis to date, include:

- Regional fixed route services recommended as part of the Mankato Transit Redesign Study
- Coordination with Land to Air regional bus services
- Centralized/expanded volunteer driver programs or functions such as driver recruiting, training, recognition and reimbursement

- Planned demand service from outlying areas (regularly scheduled trips once or twice a week from rural areas to Mankato or other urban destinations)
- Flexible voucher program, which would enable participants to purchase trips from public providers, private providers, family members, or friends
- Centralized transportation information and trip planning services
- Coordinated management/administrative functions among Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit and VINE
- Technology tools, such as DAR scheduling/dispatching software for Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit, and tablets onboard vehicles for all three providers
- Regional Mobility Management services

APPENDICES

Appendix A Stakeholder Interview Notes

STAKEHOLDER REPORT

Human Services Discussion Groups

VINE hosted both human services discussion groups.

Six people attended the **Public Human Services Group** on Tuesday, March 10. Attending were:

- Phil Claussen, Director of Human Services, Blue Earth County
- DeAnn Boney, Financial Assistance Supervisor, Blue Earth County
- Kim Boerger, Supervisor/Counselor, Blue Earth County Employment Services
- Kari Arndt, Case Mgr, Waiver, Nicollet County Public Health
- Terri McMillen, Office Support Specialist/Transportation, Nicollet County
- Kari Jo Sowiejka, Fiscal Supervisor, Le Sueur County

Three attended the **Non-profit Human Services Group** on Wednesday, March 11. Attending were:

- Jessica O'Brien, Associate Director, MN Council of Churches Refugee Services, Mankato
- Kamil Jamac, MVAC Program Specialist, Minnesota Valley Action Council, St. Peter
- Wilber Neushwander-Frink, Community Organizer, Arc of Southwestern Minnesota

Summary Report

Reliable, timely and easily accessible transportation is an issue for all of the clientele of the human services organizations, public and non-profit, serving Blue Earth, Nicollet and Le Sueur counties. Most do not have personal vehicles and rely on some form of public or private transportation.

Transportation does not appear to be an issue for individuals who live within the city limits of St. Peter, Le Sueur or North Mankato who are mobile and wish to travel during service hours along the designated routes. In the case of St. Peter, travelers can also get to their destinations via dial-a-ride. The groups did not discuss bus service within Mankato, but several noted that service within and from North Mankato is not as good in terms of hours and routes as it is in Mankato.

Mankato is a Hub

Getting to and from Mankato for work, shopping and medical services is a key issue and desire for anyone with limited transportation options located outside of Mankato. Those within Mankato and North Mankato must travel where and when the bus is available. Mankato is also home to social and religious opportunities for refugees who live in Nicollet County.

The Highway 169 corridor is a natural route to transport people from certain areas within the three counties, such as from St. Peter and Le Sueur. However, residents of rural Nicollet and Le Sueur that are not on the highway and don't have personal transportation have to rely on other people, such as friends, family or a case worker.

Human Services Complexities

The transportation services that public and non-profit organizations are able to arrange and provide are impacted by the array of program and reimbursement rules. What works for one county or population group may not work for another. Transit is an issue in almost all human services units within Blue Earth County government, but they are most able to provide transportation for medical needs. "There are lots of gaps in the system," a representative said.

The state has rules concerning reimbursement for drivers, but they depend on who they are transporting and where. Le Sueur County contracts with the Minnesota Valley Action Council in Montgomery for volunteer drivers and that service is working well for them. The employment services providers are able to provide rides for work if the client is under the right case program. MVAC/Nicollet County is able to pay the IRS mileage rate for that type of ride. However, Medical Assistance pays 20 cents per mile to volunteer drivers. Government programs do not pay for "unloaded" miles (empty vehicle) or wait times. Drivers used to get an hourly rate for wait times; some get paid a stipend.

Special transportation services can result in a huge bill, e.g., a trip to/from Le Sueur can cost \$200 through American Medical Van and the state has to approve the expenditure.

One participant described the difficulty clients face in understanding what's available to them. "If I go on MA and need a ride, my financial worker will tell me to call so and so and then if they switch to Blue Plus, they no longer call so and so, and if they move to Blue Earth County..." it's another number. If the person can't speak English that adds to the complexity of trying to find transportation services. "You can be enrolled in a health plan one month and move to another the next month. No wonder they're so confused and so they just say I'm not going to my medical appointment."

Mankato is Destination for Jobs

Reliable transportation is key to getting and keeping a job for anyone, including refugees and low-income people. Those refugees (approximately 100 Somalis) who live in St. Peter rely on friends and co-workers to take them to what is frequently temporary work in Mankato. If the driver is sick and people can't get to work, the person can lose their job.

An additional and important issue concerning travel for work is the fact that many refugees work the second shift because they attend English classes during the day. One non-profit representative said that there are 500-700 refugee families in North Mankato and the Nicollet county region.

Working people with children have the added complexity of child care and this impacts their ability to keep a job. “They have to get up two hours early to get their kids to child care and by the time they pick up their kids, the daycare is closed.”

A number of large employers are located in the area, but bus service is either non-existent or limited due to their locations. Examples include Cambria in Le Sueur. Diane’s in Le Center, Angie’s Popcorn, Masterson’s, Capstone, Taylor Corporation, MRCI (in Mankato) and Imperial Plastics. Wal-mart recently opened a distribution center in the Mankato area off the bus route. Employers do not have transportation programs, and several group participants thought it would be helpful to work with them on setting these up. Public agencies invest considerable time figuring out carpooling for their clients. VINE’s People to Jobs program can be used on a limited basis for up to three months as it is a temporary bridge.

Refugees (the entire family) must upgrade their immigration status after one year and they must travel to the Minneapolis Immigration Office for this purpose. Again, they rely on people within their community for transportation.

Mankato is Destination for Shopping

Mankato is an important destination for shopping, whether for groceries or clothing. People who live in Le Sueur no longer have a clothing store. Refugees and low-income people seek out Mankato for lower-priced grocery shopping at Wal-mart and Aldi’s. Residents of towns, such as La Fayette, in rural Nicollet County and people living in St. Peter and Le Sueur, have to rely on friends or family to get them to Mankato or to do their grocery shopping for them. In some cases, a case worker might pick up the person and take them shopping.

As one public human services representative said, “People can either afford the bus to go shopping, or they can afford to buy something, but they can’t do both.”

Somali populations like to travel to the Twin Cities to shop at their stores, as well as attend the mosque.

Aging Population Impacts Transportation Needs

The fact that our population is aging impacts transportation in a number of ways. More elderly people need to travel to medical appointments within their communities as well as to Mankato, Rochester (Mayo) and the Twin Cities. Public and non-profit programs work to arrange for transportation and considerable paperwork is involved in the administration of rides. Some require assistance getting in and out of their homes and vehicles and not all transportation services will provide that. Volunteer drivers tend to be older and as that group ages, fewer drivers will be available. Also, this is the “snow bird” population that is often gone in the winter months.

Mankato and Special Populations

Mankato is also a hub for people with persons who have development disabilities and who are intellectually challenged. If a person who is challenged intellectually lives in a group home, they are able to get transportation through a work provider, if they have one, or the group home provider. And they can get “one-on-one” travel, meaning that they can arrange transportation in advance for personal trips. However, if a person with a disability at poverty level lives in an apartment, they cannot afford bus transportation and frequently walk, sometimes long distances and at night and in bad weather. “It’s like the bus stops (at night) and you have no life after 6 p.m. It’s not safe for people walking around after dark,” said a non-profit participant.

People with disabilities often get around through an informal volunteer “moms’ network.” This informal network is in use in Mankato, Fairmont and New Ulm as well as other areas of Minnesota, according to a non-profit participant. It is the only way for this group of people to go to activities out of town.

Mankato also has a significant homeless population, and when and if they are able to move into an apartment, transportation is a big issue.

Feedback on Existing Transportation Services

The VINE volunteer driver program is uniformly highly regarded and needed, and participants expressed a desire that the service continue and be enhanced. Blue Earth has subcontracts with VINE for elderly and social service transportation.

Some participants expressed the need for expanded hours and service on holidays and weekends.

VINE’s People to Jobs program, which transports single moms as well as children to daycare, is important to users and those who provide services to them. One person said that if a worker travels during school hours the bus can be very crowded.

One participant said of volunteer driver programs. “We’re lacking drivers, so we’re always hearing that we can’t do that ride, or if you could change your appointment we could. So it’s not very person-centered. The drivers are great, but they’re getting older.”

MVAC is doing outreach for drivers on a continuous basis.

One non-profit participant said, “VINE is a great resource because they provide transportation to refugees within Mankato, to take them to English classes and to take the kids to onsite child care in same building. That they can transport families is huge, and there’s always a waiting list.” She noted that there’s a need for family transportation in North Mankato, too.

Dial-a-ride is popular with riders and providers alike and serves an important role.

Route buses in St. Peter, Le Sueur, North Mankato and Mankato are a vital service provided that they go when and where the rider needs to go. Participants expressed a need for expanded hours, especially to accommodate second shift riders, and more routes.

Opinions about Study

Group participants want more transportation services available to more client groups, particularly into Mankato, and are hopeful that the study results in this. Underserved populations include those who fall outside of those mentioned in this report, such as low-income individuals not in a particular program or served by a non-profit.

One person said it’s important to enhance what we have and not recreate. Another suggested that the process and solution to transportation issues needs to be creative and that we should look at natural incentives vs. perverse incentives. An example is, if a person has a case manager and then is able to get transportation, the person may not have an incentive to get well if they are going to lose their transportation.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

Transportation Services Rider Interviews for Le Sueur, St. Peter & VINE

Nine riders who use the transportation services of Le Sueur (4), St. Peter (2) and VINE (3) were interviewed by telephone on March 3, 4, 6 and 7. Interviews averaged about 10 minutes in length. Riders were asked about how often they use the services, their destinations, their perceptions of the services, and their opinions of potential centralized transportation information and planning.

Le Sueur riders all live within the city limits as the bus service doesn't go outside the city. One St. Peter rider lives in Kasota and takes the dial-a-ride bus home from work in the afternoon only as service doesn't begin early enough in the morning for her. The three users of the VINE volunteer driver program who were interviewed are all located outside of Mankato.

USE OF EXISTING SERVICES

Of the nine riders, only the two St. Peter travelers use the transportation services for work. The remaining riders use the services mainly for grocery shopping and medical appointments. These are the top three destinations. Other trips are for church, hair appointments, post office, bank, library, veterinarian, visiting friends and other shopping.

Frequency of use varied. VINE riders use the volunteer driver service less frequently than those who use the transit services of St. Peter and Le Sueur, but they are very dependent on the program to get them to where they need to go, particularly for groceries and medical appointments. One VINE rider from Madison Lake uses the volunteer rider program once a month to go to the VA medical clinic in Mankato. Persons who use the volunteer driver program frequently piggyback two uses into one ride, e. g., a hair appointment followed by a quick run into a grocery store.

Of the nine interviewed, a St. Peter rider uses the bus most frequently as she has a split-shift job. If her last shift goes beyond 8 p.m., she then takes a taxi home, which costs additional.

One disabled Le Sueur rider is a frequent user of the services and rides the bus four to six times each week, even taking her cat to the vet in a carrier. "They (dispatch) know that I go to PT and they expect me to call. Half the time I take the route buses, otherwise I do dial-a-ride."

PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING SERVICES

Likes

Riders uniformly praised the transportation services and drivers, whether dial-a-ride, route or the volunteer driver program. No one had a negative comment about any of the drivers. "I would be up a creek if I didn't have it. I've ridden for a long time. It's wonderful and the drivers are wonderful," said a Le Sueur rider.

One St. Peter rider said, "It's very good. We have real polite drivers and it works out really well."

"I love it. I couldn't be living out here in the country without VINE. I live in Lake Crystal and all my appointments are in Mankato. There's nothing about the service I don't like," said an 87-year-old VINE rider. (Lake Crystal is about 15 miles southwest of Mankato)

There is appreciation for the special bus trips arranged in Le Sueur for such things as the senior dinner. According to a rider, the federally-funded Hillside Court for low-income people contracts with the city for trips to see Christmas lights in Mankato and the seasonal color changes; this rider noted it would be nice to have the trips available to the general public.

Dislikes or Would like to See Changes

Le Sueur (population approximately 4,000) residents have special shopping needs due to a lack of department store shopping in town and they would benefit from shopping trips to St. Peter or Mankato for that reason.

“We don’t have shopping. There are no stores. We lost Alco so there is no place to get clothes, shoes, underwear and things you might get at Home Depot. It would be nice to go to St. Peter for shopping,” a Le Sueur rider said.

If residents in Le Sueur or St. Peter want to go to Mankato, they must take a taxi and pay at least \$20/one way.

One rider indicated that the morning bus in St. Peter is now very crowded due to a run it takes to Kasota for workers going to MRCI, which used to be located in St. Peter. She feels that another bus is needed in the morning.

VINE riders seem very accustomed to giving the two-to three-day advance request for a ride and are okay with it. However, one elderly rider from Good Thunder said the notice is an issue if there’s an emergency.

“If there’s an emergency, you can’t get into the doctor right away,” she said.

While the Lake Crystal rider is very pleased with the service, she indicated that if a driver is not available from her area, a driver has to come out from Mankato. “... then I have to pay to get a driver from Mankato. And pay to have them come out, take me to Mankato and come back. I pay mileage (for the full trip).”

In St. Peter, one of the riders prefers dial-a-ride because she said the route buses can take longer since they do a deviated route and riders can end up going out of their way.

One St. Peter rider would like a bus to run after 8 p.m. on Saturday. “A lot of people would like that, that want to go places. Eight p.m. during week is pretty good, but they could touch it up a bit.”

Other Le Sueur suggestions were for more access points on the route and Saturday service.

EXPANDED VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROGRAM

When asked about the possibility of an expanded volunteer driver program several felt it would be a good idea although others were happy with the way things were working for them now. One woman uses a car service from aging services in Le Centre to get to Mankato and pays \$50. This is a volunteer driver program and drivers are paid for gas.

One rider in St. Peter said she isn’t old enough to use the volunteer driver program.

Another rider had an interesting perspective on the ability to expand the volunteer driver service. She said that sometimes drivers are busy in spring and fall when farm work is at peak. However, she has always been able to get a driver and pays what she can of the volunteer payment.

POTENTIAL CENTRALIZED TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION & PLANNING

It’s clear from the rider interviews that Mankato is a destination point for residents and that riders from St. Peter and Le Sueur and other small towns near Mankato would like to be able to more regularly go there. (Riders in Le Sueur would at least like to get to St. Peter for department

store shopping.) The purpose of a Mankato trip is both necessity for medical appointments as well as for socialization and shopping. One rider said she doesn't need to get anywhere else in the three-county area other than Mankato.

When asked if they thought it would be helpful to have a centralized system for getting transportation information, most were not sure how it would work or how it would be a benefit to them. If a centralized system resulted in expanded service, such as to Mankato on a regular basis, riders would likely be in favor. One expressed concern that she would not be able to access any information online as she doesn't have a computer. While riders would like regular travel opportunities to Mankato, they are using the existing services for their day-to-day needs and are happy with the transportation services they are using.

Blue Earth Interview notes

Name	Title	Organization
Brad Potter	City Administrator	City of Eagle Lake
Cassandra Nelson	Events Services Coordinator	Gustavus Adolphus College
Elizabeth Harstad	Director of Community Impact	Greater Mankato Area United Way
Jason Mekalson	General Manager	Land to Air
Kathleen Svalland	County Commissioner	Watsonwan County Commissioner
Marjorie Smith	Transit Director	Watsonwan Take Me There
Mike Pinske	President/CEO	AMV

Greater Mankato Area United Way

- Tell me about the Greater Mankato Area United Way?
 - Focus on:
 - Emergency services
 - Supporting individuals and family
 - Youth
 - Older adults
 - Disabilities
 - Health and wellness
 - Work with a variety of non-profits
 - Work with 34 agencies in the communities
 - Fund those agencies
 - They are in touch with the community about what the needs are.
- Transportation needs
 - People with disabilities, youth, people who do not have cars, mental health appointments
 - One of the biggest issues that the agencies report: programming is there but there isn't the transportation to get people to the programming.
 - Mankato is very spread out. There are a lot of problems with Mankato transit and they have not been filling the transportation needs and gaps.
- How many people do you serve in the area?
 - Service area is Blue Earth, Nicollet and Le Sueur
 - About one in three people are being impacted by United Way funded services

- What is United Way's current involvement in transportation services?
 - VINE is one of the agencies that they fund
 - People to Jobs – transportation
 - Volunteer care giving
 - Community center
 - JARC funded People to Jobs
 - VINE is losing that JARC funding
 - United Way has given the stamp of approval for consolidation because otherwise the People to Jobs program will go away.
 - United Way gives \$38,000 to the People to Jobs program
 - Fund general support for the program
 - Who program budget \$110,000 in 2014
- What transportation programs does United Way fund?
 - Indirectly funding MRCI Worksource– to and from job sites. But United Way has cut funding, because they have become more self sustaining. The program works with people with disabilities bringing them to job opportunities.
 - Nicollet County Senior transit – volunteer driver program
 - Connecting Kids program – fund general support – help get youth rides to programs and use VINE for that.
- Elizabeth mentioned at the PAC kickoff meeting that even in greater Mankato, human service agency clients have transportation needs. We'd like to learn more about specific populations and their mobility gaps. Need to get from outer communities to Mankato? Service during different days/hours?
 - Youth – right after school – need get to programming. There are homeless youth who are 18-25 and need to get to places.
 - Older adults – have problems with the limited hours of the transit system
 - Dialysis – VINE is helping to fill this gap
 - There are also some job opportunities in Le Sueur where they need to go.
 - New American population needs to see civil servant for citizenship – Need to go to St. Paul and Minneapolis

Gustavus Adolphus College

- How is GusBus contract with St. Peter Transit going?
 - Working with the City has been great. They've been helpful and cooperative. Things are going well this year. Gustavus is trying not to crowd the buses, which was an issue in the past.
 - To purchase tickets and passes for the weekday service, students go to the Campus Activities Center.

- Gus Bus is Friday and Saturday night sponsored by the Student Senate. This is a set route. Students wait at a designated sponsor.
 - Gus Bus is utilized quite a bit and is going well.
 - The college pays for this service and it's free for students. The college pays a flat fee although she doesn't know how much that is.
- Confirm that college wants to continue service.
 - The college definitely wants to continue service. Ridership has been increasing and the students really like the service.
- Any plans for expanding or changing service—additional vehicle being tried now; hope to extend that? Additional nights, daytime shuttle?
 - She has not heard anything about expanding or changing service.
 - Ridership for the Gus Bus is up, so they have added additional vehicles. Not sure if that will continue into the spring, the Student Senate deals with Gus Bus administration.
 - Ridership is also up this year for the daytime routes; this ebbs and flows based on student needs.
 - Matt Timmons is the Senate Co-President (student). He's supposed to call me at some point.

Land to Air

- Current services
 - Pick up from St. Peter Coop/ Gustavus and go to Minneapolis Transportation Center, U of MN Huron Blvd, Minneapolis-St. Paul airport
 - Mankato is home base – 9 shuttles leaving per day connecting to Minneapolis and other bus connections, others traveling east to Rochester and the medical community
 - Do not pick up anywhere else in Blue Earth
 - There is a pick-up in Le Sueur by reservation.
 - Mankato – transport a few thousand people per month, St. Peter and Le Sueur are much less.
- Is there typically excess capacity when they're traveling along Rte. 169 between Mankato and Le Sueur? Would Land to Air be willing to consider picking up study area residents to fill any available capacity and taking them to the stops they serve along Rte. 169, for a fare? What would their concerns be?
 - Depending on the time of the year, right now buses are more than full over capacity. But generally, there is space on the buses. They average about 6 passengers, for a 12 passenger bus.
 - Coordination – applied for and received a 5310 grant (Intercity grant) to provide service Rochester are and the medical community. Public providers bring people to the bus stops and Land to Air takes them to the hospitals in Rochester

- Open to working with public transit and picking up people along 169. Would be a good place to pick up additional people.
- Routes that travel down Highway 90 and Highway 35 on the way to Rochester, could pick up people there.
- 5310 Grant
 - Not heavily used now, but are working on marketing it better. Because people don't know about it. Hiring an operations person to help with marketing the program.
- Do they have the ability to serve people who use wheelchairs?
 - Buses are accessible for people in Wheelchairs. The 5310 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. The whole fleet is not, but the grant run to Rochester is accessible. 10 vehicles and 4 WC accessible.

AMV

- Americare Mobility Van (AMV) is the Medicaid NEMT provider for the 14 county area that includes Blue Earth County, Nicollet County, and Le Sueur County.
- Mike has been working at AMV for 25 years. He's the president.
- AMV is based in Mankato.
- AMV does both Access Transportation Services (ATS) and Specialized Transportation Services (STS), so all their vans are MnDOT certified to provide STS.
- They have 50 vehicles, mostly Chrysler minivans that are WC accessible with side or rear lifts. Also have vehicles to accommodate stretchers.
- Although they can't track how many trips are provided within the study area, more than 50% of trips they provide originate in the Mankato area. Blue Earth county is the most populated county that they serve, Nicollet County is second biggest. They had 6,000 trips total in February and 7,000 in January. All the vehicles are owned by AMV, who does all the medical trips in the region.
- About 80% of the trips are paid for through Medicaid, and 20% is private paid (paid by the client).
- AMV does not coordinate with any other transportation program in the area, but they are open to doing so.
- AMV has a trip cost of \$7 per passenger mile. They charge a base fee of \$16.24 and then \$1.29 per mile after that.
- AMV does not purchase passes on any of the transit providers in the area.
- AMV is about 95% at capacity on a daily basis. They reach capacity about three days in advance.
- 95% of the transportation they provide is one rider to one destination. This is due mainly to the way that medical appointments are set up, making it hard to pick up multiple people at senior centers. There could be more coordination from the medical appointment side. The other 5% are routed trips. These are for school districts and autism centers and go from autism centers to school. And do that every school day.

- AMV uses a sophisticated reservations software called Amsoft PMT software – paratransit management system. Set up recurring trips, and routes, does everything in a HIPPA compliant format.
- Thoughts on need for public transit service, given travel needs of medical assistance members?
 - There are problems with existing transportation services not being able to cross county lines and not providing weekend or evening service.
 - Current transportation operators are very protective of their funding, and not willing to coordinate.
 - AMV wants to work with the providers to come up with a coordination service. If there is a need to get people to other locations, AMV is ready and able to provide these services.
 - There is very high demand for medical transportation. AMV could easily add more vehicles to their fleet and fill them with the demand.
 - Dialysis especially is a growing need.

Watonwan Take Me There

- TMT goes to Mankato two days a week Tuesday and Thursday, Dialysis – Mornings only. Only for Watonwan. They also pick up in Lake Chrystal – which is part of Blue Earth County – on the way to Mankato. They have to pay at a different rate. St. James to Lake Chrystal. Watawon to Blue Earth.
 - Within the city limits of St. James - \$1.50 each way per person
 - Within Watonwan county - \$3.00 each way per person
 - Go to Mankato - \$11.00 cash per person
 - LC to Mankato - \$7.25 cash per person
 - Sell in packages of tokens.
 - Pick up very, very few in Lake Crystal. Less than 5 per year. Going from Lake Chrystal. Leave Mankato at 10:30. The return is the problem for them to get home. Get to Mankato at 6am. Dialysis patients are done at 10:30am and ready to go back to Watonwan.
 - St. James to Mankato – 40 miles
- Make sure we understand the services they provide to the study area—type of service, schedule, destinations served, before the call
 - Most of the service is within Watawon. They also go to Fairmont. The majority of the service is back and forth between St. James and Madelia.
 - Dial a ride service. Routes. Go to all the surrounding urban areas.
- Is there excess capacity on those trips to Mankato or elsewhere in the study area? Would TMT be willing to consider picking up study area residents to fill any available capacity and taking them to Mankato (maybe at a designated pick-up point)?
 - Capacity. Can't stay in Mankato to do runs.

- Have a really hard time finding drivers. Had only two applicants per open position.
- Finically there's a problem as well. They would need additional funding.
- Board of Commissioners has not been in favor of consolidation or coordination with other providers. Have always been willing to go out of their county, and the state should look at TMT and see how expensive that is to do.
- They used to go to Mankato Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. But only one person wanted to go on Friday. They decided not to do that.
- If you're already going into Mankato – TMT is happy to pick up anyone on the way there just isn't the demand for it.
- It's difficult to let people know that the services are available. Can pick up people on the outskirts of Mankato. Has to be on the way.

Watonwan County Commissioner (or Administrator?)

- Travel patterns of Watonwan County residents—need to get to Mankato, St. Peter?
 - Watonwan TMT transports into Martin and Faribault and has a route that goes into Mankato – do not pick up anyone else on the way.
 - Watonwan residents need to go to Blue Earth (Mankato) mainly for dialysis appointments. Medical needs are 98% of the trips and shopping is the other 2% into Mankato.
 - There is no need for Watonwan residents to go to Le Sueur or St. Peter.
- Interest in coordinating with BE/LS/N Counties in the future?
 - The coordinator of Watonwan TMT is not interested in consolidation, but they know they are losing money by not consolidating so they are open to the discussion. There would be additional funding from the state, if they consolidated.
 - She has noticed that in the last few years, there have been more people needing to get medical care. People love the TMT. Use of the TMT continues to grow.

City of Eagle Lake City Commissioner

Thinking about life cycle housing aimed at seniors, who may have transportation needs

- Doesn't know a lot about transportation, doesn't know if VINE serves Eagle Lake (they do).
- Trying to get some life cycle housing – trying to tackle this from a housing perspective. Also thinking about transporting these people.
- Mankato private taxi companies have taken off. Large enough to support several taxi companies and filling the transportation need.
- There is no taxi service in Eagle Lake. There is no Uber in Eagle Lake or Mankato. There are no volunteer driver programs in Eagle Lake. He's sitting down with some local churches as a potential. Going to see if there is a need in the community. Interested in Uber/Lyft and how we can work with them to provide transportation for individuals.

Blue Earth Interview Notes

Name	Title	Organization
Bob Meyer	County Administrator	Blue Earth County
Mark Anderson	Superintendent of Transit	City of Mankato Department of Public Works (Mankato Transit System)
Tom Henderson	Director	Brown County Family Services
Bob Apitz	Transit Director	Brown County Family Services (Brown County Heartland Express)
Pat LeCourse	Transit Operations Coordinator	Brown County Family Services (Brown County Heartland Express)
Darrell Pettis	County Administrator	Le Sueur County

Blue Earth County

- Benefits/challenges of coordination/consolidation among the three counties; any discussions about regionalizing other services?
 - No new or recent discussions, but shared services have been discussed in the past
 - Strong preference for Joint Powers Agreement—collaborative agreements have been tried in the past, and have resulted in questions and misunderstandings; elected bodies more comfortable with a more formal commitment
 - Concerns – ending up with public transit system that doesn't provide as good a service as VINE does now; discussing transit services in region without including Mankato Transit System
- Strengths and weaknesses of VINE transit service
 - VINE addresses a long of Blue Earth County transportation needs
 - County already provides funding to VINE
- Priorities for improving transit service in county?
 - Cost-effective system
 - More accessibility (meaning open to more people, not wheelchair accessibility)—younger people, for example
- Possibility of providing local match from county funds for a coordinated/consolidated transit system?
 - Blue Earth County already provides funding to VINE; if that would be included in the local match to the coordinated system, fine. Additional funding from Blue

Earth County is more questionable. The County Board is currently split regarding support for transit service.

Mankato Transit System

- People from other communities (St. Peter, Le Sueur, rural areas of all three counties) need access to destinations in Mankato. If transit services are coordinated and/or expanded so that people can get to Mankato, would MTS be willing to work out arrangements for transfers to fixed route or demand response service? Integrated fare payment options? (e.g., riders in St. Peter buy SPT tickets and pay for Mankato fare at same time)
 - Yes, new fixed-route riders would be welcome, and MTS is willing to discuss facilitating transfers to the Mankato Mobility Bus
 - Mobility Bus capacity is very limited at present (two vehicles are in operation on weekdays, and one on Saturday). Expansion is being discussed.
 - MTS is currently located in the Department of Public Works, but is moving to Community Development
 - The Mankato City Council is interested in being part of a regional transit system
 - MTS would be willing to wash/fuel/repair other providers' vehicles at its facility in Mankato
 - MTS would be willing to make its tokens and passes available to Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit so that riders traveling to Mankato could pay for all fares at one time
 - A regional pass might also be an integrated fare payment solution
 - A Guaranteed Ride Home program should be part of the regional service, so that regional travelers to Mankato are assured of being able to return home—for example, dialysis patients are not always ready to return home when scheduled, and may miss their ride

Brown County

Spoke with all three Brown County Family Services representatives on a conference call

- Travel patterns of Brown County residents—need to get to Mankato, St. Peter? Trips from study area to New Ulm?
 - Brown County Heartland Express addresses in-county travel needs quite well, but can't take people out of the county
 - There is a need for Brown County residents to get to Mankato—college students, seniors, people with disabilities, all types of riders. Medical services are located in Mankato, college students from New Ulm need to get to and from MSU Mankato, college students at Martin Luther College in New Ulm need to get to and from Mankato.

- Brown County Heartland Express is currently connecting to Land to Air service in Mankato for trips to Rochester. Route travels from Brown County through Nicollet to Blue Earth on Highway 15.
- Volunteer drivers take riders to Mankato from Brown County, but no accessible service is available.
- Inter-county service was attempted along the heavily travelled Highway 14 corridor from New Ulm in Brown County through Nicollet County to Mankato, with state and/or federal funding. Service was not successful, and was only in operation about eight months. Only two round trips per day were offered (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), which was not enough service to satisfy the needs; at least three round trips per day would have been necessary for a successful service.
- Another service was tried from Brown County to Nicollet County along Highway 15. It was also unsuccessful because not enough service was scheduled.
- Potential for use of Brown County Route Match license by other providers
 - This question came up in relation to another county. Brown County's RouteMatch license can't be shared, but if another transit provider were to purchase its own license, the two scheduling/dispatching systems could talk to each other so that trips could be booked on both the providers' vehicles. A new license purchaser might be able to participate in the existing pricing consortium.
 - Have visited with Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit to give them a RouteMatch demo.
- Interest in coordinating with BE/LS/N Counties in the future?
 - Brown County is very willing to talk with the other three counties and would like to be a part of any plan for regional service.

Le Sueur County

- Views on need for service in Le Sueur County outside of City of Le Sueur
 - Transit is a tough issue in Le Sueur County
 - Rural, non-centralized county; about 90% of 30,000 population lives outside of Le Center
 - Small cities, lots of rural areas within townships
 - Only services are Le Sueur Transit and Senior Rides, run out of Montgomery (nonprofit organization similar to VINE; County contributes \$25-50,000 annually)
 - People participating in human service programs are more likely to have transportation needs, rather than the general public
 - Medical appointments—County Human Services Department pays for taxi rides in some cases
 - New drug court in Le Center (more about this below)

- People need to travel outside of the county—to Mankato, St. Peter, Shakopee (Scott County)
- County Board hasn't discussed transit service much
 - Only feasible type of service seems to be dial-a-ride, which would be expensive and difficult to take away once implemented if it became too hard to support financially
 - County has never had transit service before, so would take a sizable amount of funding to get it started
 - General public isn't asking for it
- Drug court
 - Only 2-3 people participating now; will be more in future; Le Sueur County one of last counties to start such a program
 - Have to travel to Le Center 2-3 times/week for court appearances, testing, appointments with attorneys, and other reasons
 - Participants may live anywhere in county
- If study looks at ways to provide services to Le Center and to meet other Le Sueur County human service transportation needs, County Administrator and County Board would be interested in discussing those
- Speak to Director of Human Service, Sue Rynda, for more information on human service transportation needs (srynda@co-le-sueur.mn.us, (507) 357-8288)



TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Service Design Alternatives

Executive Summary

October 2015



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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Office of Transit has provided active support and useful tools for local governments and transit providers to encourage and enable them to work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public transportation services. The overall goal of increased cooperation, coordination, and consolidation among transit providers and other transportation stakeholders, particularly on a regional level, is improved mobility: greater opportunities for travel beyond jurisdictional boundaries; reduction or elimination of service overlaps, which can free resources to address service gaps; and the introduction of new transportation options that become feasible when stakeholders work together.

MnDOT and its local partners in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties are currently engaged in an effort to identify and evaluate service and organizational alternatives for improving mobility options for residents of the three-county area. A consultant team led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates is assisting with that effort.

While the initial objective of this project was to identify opportunities for restructuring existing transit services in Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties, as the project progressed, the focus shifted to determining the best way to help develop a new Regional Transit System. As identified through the 2011 Transit Investment Plan, a goal of the MnDOT Office of Transit is to provide a minimum level of public transportation access or coverage to the entire Minnesota population. There is a special emphasis on providing access to transportation to populations dependent on transit, including individuals with disabilities, new Americans, groups with low incomes including the homeless population, and people with limited vehicle availability.

The study area includes three of the few counties in Minnesota without county-wide transit service. Each county has a city-wide transit system: Greater Mankato Transit System (Blue Earth), Saint Peter Transit (Nicollet), and Le Sueur Transit (Le Sueur). In addition, VINE Faith in Action has been providing some service to residents of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. It is hoped that the Regional Transit System can be built on the foundations of these systems.

Technical Memorandum #2: Service Design Alternatives presents service options for a new three-county transit system. Service alternatives for a new regional transit system are presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. Included in the description of each scenario are estimates of ridership and cost, and suggested funding sources.

The report is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of each of the three existing transit providers and the environment for future cooperation/coordination among the three counties. Service design options are described in Chapter 3 and an evaluation framework is presented in Chapter 4.

2 STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES

SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties are three of only a few counties in Minnesota that do not have county-wide transit service. Each of the three counties has a city-wide transit system: Greater Mankato Transit System (Blue Earth County), Saint Peter Transit (Nicollet County), and Le Sueur Transit (Le Sueur County). In addition, VINE Faith in Action provides some service to residents of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties.

Saint Peter Transit provides route deviation and dial-a-ride service for the general public within the City of Saint Peter and the City of Kasota (located in Le Sueur County). Le Sueur Transit provides route deviation and dial-a-ride for the general public within the City of Le Sueur. VINE offers transportation to individuals age 60 and over, as well as limited service to individuals under age 60 who have a disability, throughout its service area. VINE's People to Jobs program provides service to work, training, and child care for workers with limited incomes. VINE also administers a volunteer driver program. Each of these three providers utilizes a small fleet of 2-3 vehicles. Moreover, they each operate with a small administrative/management staff; Saint Peter has two FTEs, Le Sueur has 1.5 FTEs, and VINE has 5.5 FTEs.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The work documented in Technical Memo #2 includes a detailed SWOT analysis of each of the three existing transit providers that were included in the project—Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE—as well as a higher level analysis that considers the environment for future cooperation, coordination, and consolidation among entities in the three counties as a means of improving mobility for residents.

In the regional SWOT analysis, strengths and weaknesses were assessed using information about the demographic and development characteristics of the region, existing transportation services, stakeholder involvement, and previous coordination work. Opportunities and threats were identified for the creation of a network of public transit services for Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties that could begin to address the mobility needs of the region's residents.

Figure 2-1 summarizes the regional SWOT analysis and includes the major findings from the SWOT analysis of individual transportation providers. The information in the table highlights the resources available to transportation stakeholders in the study area as they consider creation of a new regional system and some of the challenges they face as they move forward.

Figure 2-1 SWOT Analysis: Regional Transportation Network in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of transit service where provided—response time, assistance, personal touch • Transportation resources in three-county region include public, private for profit, private nonprofit, and volunteer providers • Community appreciation and financial support for existing transit providers and services expressed through contract services and other funding • VINE’s experience with mobility management services and administration of volunteer driving program • Viable regional intercity bus routes were identified as part of Mankato Transit System redesign project • Saint Peter/Kasota relationship sets precedent for inter-county service • Support for coordination and new transit services, where appropriate, from MnDOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited transit service areas: Le Sueur, Saint Peter, Mankato area • Service areas are not contiguous • Limited eligibility for transit services—city residents, job access clients, Mankato area residents with a disability or over age 60 • Somewhat limited operating hours—little evening and weekend public service • Two municipal systems utilize unique manual reservations/scheduling/dispatching procedures • Municipal systems operate with very small staffs • New Freedom and Job Access and Reverse Commute Funding from MnDOT for VINE will end in 2016 • Existing providers are different types of organizations: two municipal systems and one private nonprofit organization
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populations typically among transit users are concentrated in cities in the three counties: older adults, persons with disabilities, residents of zero-vehicle households, residents of low-income households • Destinations are concentrated in Mankato, North Mankato, and Saint Peter • Volunteer driver programs face administrative challenges and are willing to coordinate • Neighboring counties willing to coordinate regionally—Brown, Watonwan • Public and private providers willing to coordinate—MTS, Land to Air, AMV • Regional provision of services (other than transportation) has been discussed in the study area before • Human service agencies consistently report that clients have unmet transportation needs • Inform residents and elected officials about transportation needs and the value of small urban/rural public transit services • Current process to create Regional Transportation Coordination Councils—provides infrastructure, financial support, technical assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low population density overall • 1% or less of commuters in each county use transit • Residents with transportation needs live in rural areas as well as cities • Public transit not seen as a high priority need in all three counties • Previous inter-county service along Highway 14, Highway 15 was not successful • Desire to preserve quality of existing transit services • Need for sustainable funding sources • Success of a new regional transportation network requires a regional champion

3 SERVICE DESIGN ALTERNATIVES

OVERVIEW

This section describes service design alternatives for a new three-county transit system. An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the three counties and information about unmet transportation needs, collected from transportation providers and a wide range of stakeholders in earlier tasks, formed the basis for the alternatives identified for each county. Examples of the types and levels of service that might be appropriate for the Blue Earth/Le Sueur/Nicollet County region were also collected from several similar multi-county regions in Minnesota that have successfully implemented transit services. The peer regions are also good indicators of the growth in transit ridership and costs that the three counties might expect over time.

Service alternatives for a new regional transit system are presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. The Low LOS Scenario features the introduction of new demand-response services to unserved areas within each county. Volunteer driver services in the more rural areas are also proposed. The High LOS Scenario adds intercounty deviated route services to expand connections and opportunities to travel throughout the region. No changes to existing transit services are proposed in either scenario. Included in the description of each scenario are estimates of ridership and operating cost, and suggested funding sources.

PEER REGIONS

The five regional transit systems selected for comparison to the Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet county region include:

- Prairie Five Rides: Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine counties
- Tri-CAP Transit Connection: Benton, Morrison, Sherburne, and Stearns counties and the cities of Albany, Sauk Center, Melrose, Paynesville, Little Falls, Big Lake, and Elk River
- Tri-Valley Transportation: Polk, Red Lake, Norman, Marshall, Kittson, Pennington, Mahnomen, and Clearwater counties
- Western Community Action's Community Transit: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lyon, and Redwood Counties
- Central Community Transit: Kandiyohi and Renville counties (Meeker County is considering joining this consolidated system)

Key service, ridership, and financial information for four of those systems is presented in Figure 3-1 as guidance for Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet County stakeholders as they consider the proposed service alternatives for their area. This information was also used in the development of service alternatives for the study area and estimates of expected ridership and cost.

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Figure 3-1 Summary Information, Peer Regions

System	2013 Pop	% Urban Pop	% Rural Pop	Type of Service	Year Started	2013 Total Hours of Service	2013 Rural Hours of Service	% Rural Service Hours	2013 Ridership	2013 Operating Expenses
Prairie Five Rides	43,964	25%	75%	Weekday Dial-A-Ride in specific communities; weekday rural Dial-A-Ride throughout 5 counties; out-of-region service on certain days; volunteer rides in rural areas	1995	15,700	5,720	36%	138,345	\$1,317,839
Tri CAP Transit Connection	314,429	57%	43%	Dial-A-Ride service on weekdays; deviated routes connecting cities daily or on weekdays; out-of-county/region service on certain days; volunteer rides in rural areas	1975	27,895	21,695	78%	78,079	\$1,041,792
Tri-Valley Transportation	84,731	30%	70%	Dial-A-Ride in specific communities on weekdays and Saturdays; Dial-A-Ride in and between other communities on certain days; Dial-A-Ride in rural communities on certain days; volunteer rides in rural areas	1996	11,570	1,690	15%	99,221	\$1,070,567
Western Community Action/Community Transit	63,316	41%	59%	2 deviated routes in City of Marshall weekdays and daily; rural Dial-A-Ride in each county on weekdays; Dial-A-Ride between major communities; volunteer rides available	1995	37,642	15,059	40%	146,288	\$1,612,924
Blue Earth/Le Sueur/Nicollet Counties	125,697	65%	35%							

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit and peer system interviews

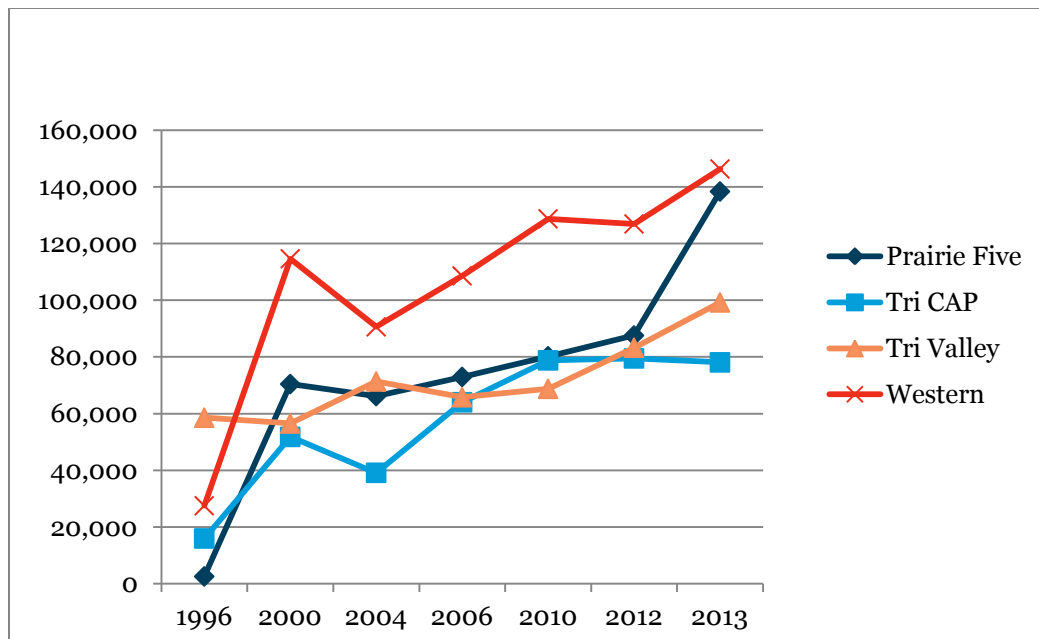
Population in 2013 in each of the four regions ranges from just over 44,000 to nearly 312,000, as compared to the study area's population in that year of nearly 126,000. The split between urban and rural populations varies among the regions. The Prairie Five Rides and Tri-Valley regions are primarily rural; in the other two regions, urban and rural populations are more evenly balanced. In the study area, 65% of population is located in urban communities and 35% is located in rural areas. Note that the percentage of service hours provided in each region's rural areas is not always in proportion to the percentage of the region's rural population.

The transit services in all four of these regions are mature: three began operation in 1995 or 1996, while Tri-CAP Transit Connection has been in service since 1975. Services in all four regions are predominantly demand-response; a few deviated routes operate in the Tri-CAP and Western Community Transit systems. Services are provided within larger communities; throughout rural areas, sometimes in specific communities on certain days; between communities; and to out-of-county or region destinations, again usually on certain days. Most services operate on weekdays only. All four systems offer rides with volunteer drivers in the rural parts of their service areas. Annual ridership in 2013 ranged from 78,000 for Tri-CAP Transit Connection to 146,000 for Western Community Action/Community Transit.

Figure 3-2 and Figure 3-3 illustrate the transit ridership and operating cost trends experienced by the peer regions between 1996 and 2013.

Although there have been some decreases in ridership from year to year in each system, Figure 3-2 shows that ridership increased significantly from 1996 to 2013.

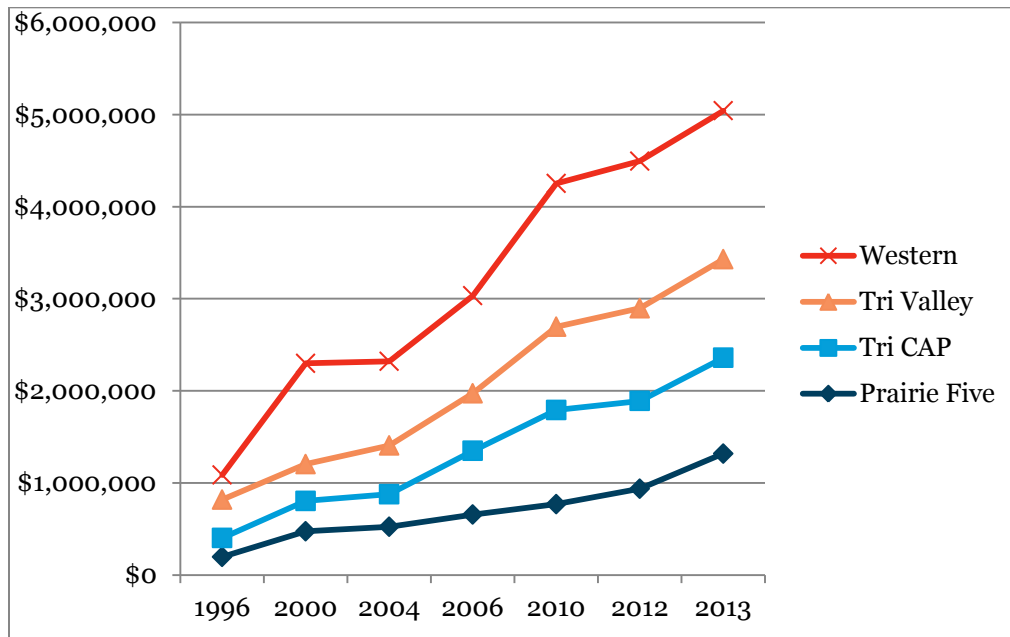
Figure 3-2 Ridership of Peer Systems, 1996-2013



Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

Total operating costs increased more steadily over the period, as shown in Figure 3-3.

Figure 3-3 Total Operating Cost of Peer Systems, 1996-2013



Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

SERVICE DEFINITIONS

The types of service included in the proposed service design alternatives and the role that each will play in the region's public transportation network are summarized below.

- **Structured Dial-A-Ride Service**—designed to offer a basic level of mobility for residents of small communities or rural areas, structured Dial-A-Ride service (also known as zoned Dial-A-Ride, pre-scheduled group trips, or planned demand service) provides advance reservation, door-to-door or curb-to-curb service within a community and/or connections to larger communities or regional destinations on specified days of the week. In the study area service scenarios, structured Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for communities with populations of at least 250, with service operating for six hours per day, three days a week.
- **Community Dial-A-Ride Service**—offering a higher level of service than structured Dial-A-Ride, community Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for larger communities with populations of at least 2,500. Services would operate for 50 hours per week, either 10 hours per day on weekdays or some combination of 8-9 hours per day on weekdays and 7-8 hours on Saturdays. Connections to urban centers within the county could be provided on specified days each week. Community Dial-A-Ride service could also be offered as a county-wide option.
- **Flexible or Deviated Routes**—these routes operate on a fixed route and schedule, but depart from the route to pick up or drop off passengers within a certain distance upon request (typically made in advance). Deviated routes could provide internal service for larger communities (Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit currently operate both Dial-A-Ride and deviated routes in their cities) or regional connections between communities. The frequency of proposal regional deviated routes varies by route, from a

minimum of two round trips per day, three days a week up to five round trips per day, Monday through Friday.

COMPONENTS OF THE LOS SCENARIOS

As mentioned above, service alternatives for a new regional transit system are presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios.

Low LOS Scenario

The Low LOS Scenario features the introduction of new demand-response services to unserved areas within each county.

Structured Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for the smaller communities in each county. These communities include: Amboy, Madison Lake, Mapleton, and Vernon Center in Blue Earth County; Waterville in Le Sueur County; and Courtland, Lafayette, and Nicollet in Nicollet County. Structured Dial-A-Ride will operate three days per week, six hours per day, to provide trips within these small towns or to larger communities in the county.

A higher level of **Community Dial-A-Ride service** is recommended for the larger, but still small, communities in each county, including Eagle Lake and Lake Crystal in Blue Earth County and Le Center and Montgomery in Le Sueur County. Community Dial-A-Ride will operate five or six days per week, eight-nine hours per day, offering trips within the community and potentially to larger destinations on specified days of the week.

The Low LOS scenario also includes the operation of a **volunteer driver program** throughout the rural areas of the three-county region, administered by a regional Mobility Manager.

In both the High and Low LOS scenarios, all transit services currently provided in the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur are assumed to continue.

The Low LOS scenario components are listed in more detail in Figure 3-4 and shown on the map in Figure 3-5.

High LOS Scenario

The High LOS scenario includes all services proposed as part of the Low LOS scenario, with the addition of **deviated route service** to connect smaller communities with larger urban areas in each county and the region. These routes represent those that are most likely to succeed based on travel patterns, population centers, and location of major employers or other activity centers.

Potential deviated routes include:

Blue Earth

- Eagle Lake and Madison Lake to Mankato: one round trip per weekday
- Mapleton to Mankato: two round trips, one day per week
- Lake Crystal to Mankato: one round trip per weekday
- Amboy to Mankato: one round trip, one day per week

Le Sueur

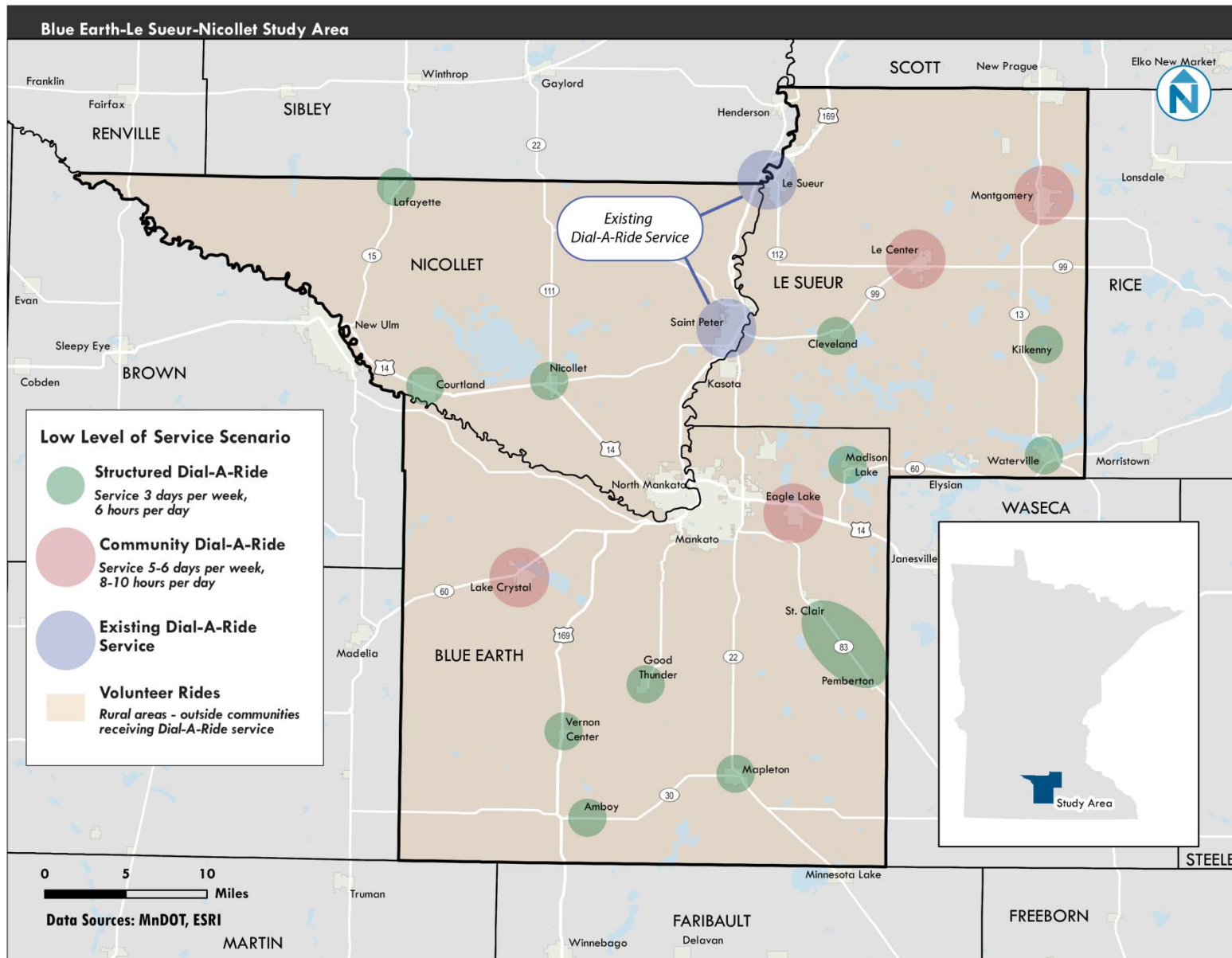
- Saint Peter to Le Sueur (shared with Nicollet County): three round trips per weekday

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Figure 3-4 Low Level of Service (LOS) Scenario Overview

Service Type/County	Community Served	2013 Pop	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Structured Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Amboy	534	Basic access to local and county transportation services; access for transit-dependent population groups	3 days/week	6 hours/day	Service hours can be used to provide trips within each community and/or to county's urban centers on specific days.
	Good Thunder	572				
	Madison Lake	1,056				
	Mapleton	1,752				
	Pemberton/St. Clair	1,109				
	Vernon Center	332				
Le Sueur	Cleveland	614				
	Kilkenny	351				
	Waterville	1,864				
Nicollet	Courtland	635				
	Lafayette	504				
	Nicollet	1,126				
Community Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	2,534	Enhanced level of access to local transportation service for transit-dependent groups and general public; opportunity for connections to larger urban centers in county	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	Connections can be provided to each county's urban centers on specific days; service could also be provided on a county-wide basis.
	Lake Crystal	2,537		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Le Sueur	Le Center	2,489		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
	Montgomery	2,944		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Volunteer Driver Services						
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns		Lifeline service for residents of rural communities or those needing transportation that community services cannot provide	As needed		Volunteer driver programs should be administered by a regional Mobility Manager.
Le Sueur						
Nicollet						

Figure 3-5 Study Area Map Depicting Low LOS Scenario



- Saint Peter to Mankato (shared with Nicollet County): five round trips per weekday, three round trips on Saturday

Nicollet

- Saint Peter to Le Sueur (shared with Le Sueur County): three round trips per weekday
- Saint Peter to Mankato (shared with Le Sueur County): five round trips per weekday, three round trips on Saturday
- New Ulm to Mankato (via Nicollet; shared with Brown County): three round trips per weekday

The High LOS scenario components are listed in more detail in Figure 3-6 and shown on the map in **Error! Reference source not found.**

RIDERSHIP, COST, AND FUNDING ESTIMATES

Estimates of ridership for the components of the Low and High LOS scenarios were developed using the experience of the four peer systems and the current transportation providers in the study area as a guide, as described below. Estimates of operating and capital costs, and amounts and sources of funding, were also prepared, and checked against the experiences of the peer systems for reasonableness.

Ridership

Ridership trends among the peer systems between 1996, when three of the four systems were in their first year or two of operation, and 2013 were scaled to the study area by the calculation of trips per capita rates for each. The trips per capita rates were applied to estimates of the population of the study area at various points to calculate estimated trips by county and region. Underlying these calculations was the assumption that the service components of the Low LOS scenario would be implemented in 2016 and the additional High LOS scenario services would be implemented by 2020.

Three methods were used to apply the peers' trip per capita rates to the study area population:

- Method #1: Use of the lowest and highest rates among the peer systems for the relevant year to develop low and high estimates of study area ridership, which resulted in a two substantially different levels of potential ridership
- Method #2: Use of average peer trips per capita rates for each year to smooth out differences among the peers, and the addition of the current ridership of Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit
- Method #3: Adjusting the trips per capita rates used in Method #2 by county to reflect both the average growth of the peer systems' ridership over time and the riders presently using the existing transit services in the region

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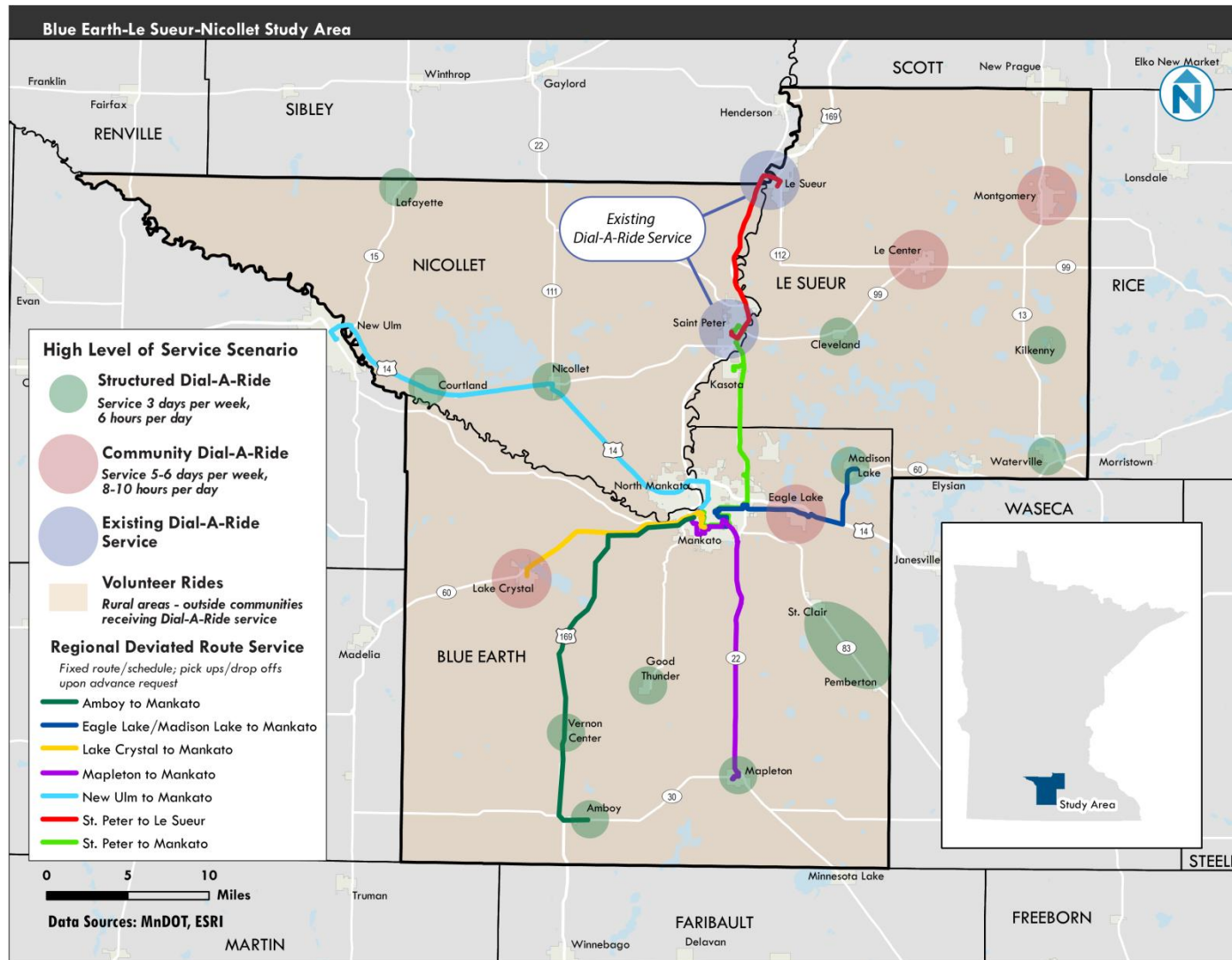
Figure 3-6 High LOS Scenario Overview

Service Type/County	Community Served	2013 Pop	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Structured Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Amboy	534	Basic access to local and county transportation services; access for transit-dependent population groups	3 days/week	6 hours/day	Service hours can be used to provide trips within community and/or to county's urban centers on specific days.
	Good Thunder	572				
	Madison Lake	1,056				
	Mapleton	1,752				
	Pemberton/St. Clair	1,109				
	Vernon Center	332				
Le Sueur	Cleveland	614				
	Kilkenny	351				
	Waterville	1,864				
Nicollet	Courtland	635				
	Lafayette	504				
	Nicollet	1,126				
Community Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	2,534	Enhanced level of access to local transportation service for transit-dependent groups and general public; opportunity for connections to larger urban centers in county	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	Connections can be provided to county's urban centers on specific days; service could also be provided on a county-wide basis.
	Lake Crystal	2,537		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Le Sueur	Le Center	2,489		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
	Montgomery	2,944		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Volunteer Driver Services						
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns		Lifeline service for residents of rural communities or those needing transportation that community services are not able to provide	As needed		Volunteer driver programs could be administered by a regional Mobility Manager.
Le Sueur						
Nicollet						

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Service Type/County	Community Served	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Deviated Fixed Routes					
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	Access to important regional destinations--Mankato, Saint Peter, and New Ulm (Brown County)--for shopping, health care, and employment	M-F	1 round trip per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	
	Mapleton to Mankato		One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	
	Lake Crystal to Mankato		M-F	1 round trip per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	
	Amboy to Mankato		One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter		M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Mankato		M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato		M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Mankato		M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur		M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips

Figure 3-7 Study Area Map Depicting High LOS Scenario



The results of Method #3 are shown in Figure 3-8. Estimated ridership for the study area's proposed new regional transit system begins at approximately 125,000 for the first year of service. After the implementation of the regional deviated fixed-route services in 2020, ridership is projected to increase significantly to over 166,000, mirroring the increase in the peer systems' ridership, which is assumed to be at least partly due to similar expansions of service. Ridership growth continues over time, but at a slower pace, with estimates of over 192,000 and nearly 205,000 trips in 2025 and 2030, respectively.

Figure 3-8 Application of Peer System Ridership Rates: Method #3

Year	Service in Operation	County	Population	Average Trips/Capita - Adjusted Peer Rates	Estimated Ridership	Current Ridership (2014)	Current + Estimated New Ridership
2016	Low LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	63,664	0.4	25,466		25,466
		Le Sueur	29,905	0.5	14,953	27,963	42,916
		Nicollet	32,964	0.3	9,889	59,472	69,361
		Total Service Area	126,533	0.4	37,960	87,435	137,742
2020	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	64,455	0.6	38,673		38,673
		Le Sueur	31,161	1.8	56,090		56,090
		Nicollet	33,722	2.5	84,305		84,305
		Total Service Area	129,338	1.6	179,068	0	179,068
2025	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	65,535	0.8	52,428		52,428
		Le Sueur	32,078	2.1	67,364		67,364
		Nicollet	34,148	2.5	85,370		85,370
		Total Service Area	131,761	1.8	192,193	0	192,193
2030	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	66,021	0.8	64,040		64,040
		Le Sueur	32,922	2	77,367		77,367
		Nicollet	34,494	2.5	98,308		98,308
		Total Service Area	133,437	2.1	239,715	0	239,715

Costs and Funding

Service costs for each LOS scenario by community and county were estimated based on the proposed service hours and average cost per hour data among Minnesota's rural transit providers in 2014.

Low LOS Scenario

Estimated annual operating costs and capital costs for the Low LOS scenario are shown in Figure 3-9.

The total annual operating cost of this set of services is estimated to be \$1,129,852. The share estimated for each county, based on number of service hours, is:

- Blue Earth: \$551,616
- Le Sueur: \$408,408
- Nicollet: \$169,828

As a point of reference, annual operating costs for Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit's Dial-A-Ride and deviated route service in their communities in 2014 were \$318,410 and \$227,446, respectively.

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Figure 3-9 Estimated Operating and Capital Costs, Low LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Lafayette	936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000		
	Nicollet	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000		
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed	NA	NA	\$62,920	NA	
Le Sueur					\$31,460		
Nicollet					\$26,620		
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				10,816	5,616	\$551,616	\$480,000
Le Sueur				8,008	2,808	\$408,408	\$320,000
Nicollet				2,808	2,808	\$169,828	\$160,000
Grand Total				21,632	11,232	\$1,129,852	\$960,000

Total capital costs for this scenario are estimated to be \$960,000. Each county's share of that expense is:

- Blue Earth: \$480,000
- Le Sueur: \$320,000
- Nicollet: \$160,000

High LOS Scenario

Estimated annual operating costs and capital costs for the High LOS scenario services are shown in Figure 3-10. As noted above, this scenario includes all of the components of the Low LOS Scenario plus seven deviated fixed routes to offer connections to urban centers within and between counties. Cost estimates shown in Figure 3-10 for structured Dial-A-Ride, community Dial-A-Ride, and volunteer driver services are identical to the table above that shows Low LOS scenario cost estimates.

The total annual operating cost of this set of services is estimated to be \$1,356,152. The share estimated for each county, based on number of service hours, is:

- Blue Earth: \$592,416
- Le Sueur: \$430,708
- Nicollet: \$333,028

Total capital costs for this scenario are estimated to be \$1,520,000. Each county's share of that expense is:

- Blue Earth: \$800,000
- Le Sueur: \$408,000
- Nicollet: \$312,000

Note that when a final set of services is selected for implementation, capital costs associated with the High LOS scenario may be reduced, as there are likely to be opportunities for using vehicles to provide more than one service. For example, the vehicles used to provide community Dial-A-Ride service in Eagle Lake or Lake Crystal could also be used to operate the deviated fixed-route service from those communities to Mankato.

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Figure 3-10 Estimated Operating and Capital Costs, High LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000		
	Lafayette	936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000		
	Nicollet	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000		
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed	NA	NA	\$62,920	NA	
Le Sueur					\$31,460		
Nicollet					\$26,620		

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Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Mapleton to Mankato	One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Amboy to Mankato	One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$56,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$32,000
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	1,700	0	\$86,700	\$80,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$48,000
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$24,000
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				11,616	5,616	\$592,416	\$800,000
Le Sueur				9,308	2,808	\$430,708	\$408,000
Nicollet				6,008	2,808	\$333,028	\$312,000
Grand Total				26,932	11,232	\$1,356,152	\$1,520,000

Comparison to Peer System Operating Expenses

As a check on the reasonableness of the cost estimates for both LOS scenarios, operating expense data for the peer transit systems is discussed below.

Total annual operating expenses for each of the four peer systems between 1996 and 2013 are shown in Figure 3-11.

Figure 3-11 Peer Systems Annual Operating Expenses, 1996-2013

System	1996	2000	2004	2006	2010	2012	2013	% Change 1996-2000	% Change 2000-2013
Prairie Five Rides	\$196,362	\$474,309	\$523,734	\$656,598	\$769,156	\$936,543	\$1,317,839	141.5%	177.8%
Tri CAP Transit Connection	\$205,538	\$329,686	\$353,307	\$692,338	\$1,022,366	\$954,645	\$1,041,792	60.4%	216.0%
Tri-Valley Transportation	\$416,989	\$400,250	\$529,845	\$624,399	\$905,132	\$1,005,777	\$1,070,567	-4.0%	167.5%
Western Community Action/ Community Transit	\$267,375	\$1,094,048	\$913,560	\$1,060,598	\$1,556,356	\$1,597,769	\$1,612,924	309.2%	47.4%

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

Changes in operating expenses reflect the increases in ridership that each system experienced in most years. From a low of several hundred thousand dollars in 1996, when all the systems except Tri-CAP Transit Connection were newly implemented, operating expenses per system grew to over one million dollars in 2013, very similar to the \$1 million and \$1.3 million estimates of operating cost for the Low and High LOS scenarios.

Funding Options

Public transit services in Minnesota are funded jointly by federal, state, and local governments. Federal transit assistance programs—for rural and small urban areas, these are primarily the Rural Area Formula program, known as Section 5311, and the Bus and Bus Facilities program, or Section 5339—and state funds from Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) and General Fund (GF) revenues typically provide 80-85% of total transit operating expenses or 80% of capital expenditures. Transit agencies must provide the remaining 15-20% from farebox revenues, contract revenues, and other local sources of funding. Agencies may provide more than the required 15-20%; although such “overmatch” provides extra support for local transit services, it does not increase the federal or state funds that they are eligible to receive.

Providers like VINE that receive grants from federal transit assistance programs through MnDOT for specific transportation projects are responsible for providing the required non-federal share, typically 50% for an operating project and 20% for a capital project.

Figure 3-12 and Figure 3-13 present the estimated operating costs for the components of the Low and High LOS scenario by type of service and county and the breakdown of those costs between federal/state and local sources of funding. MnDOT’s required local share for services in rural areas, defined as those with populations fewer than 2,500, or services for seniors and people with disabilities, is 15%. The local share for services in small urban areas with populations of 2,500-

50,000, is 20%. Those percentages were applied to the various services shown in Figure 3-12 and Figure 3-13.

Sources of funding used by the peer systems and Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit for the 15-20% local share include:

- Fare revenues
- Contract revenues from operating service for public agencies, schools, or businesses
- Contributions from counties and municipalities
- Advertising revenues
- Grants from private foundations

Farebox revenues typically provide all or most of the required local match. To develop estimates of the level of fare revenue that each county might expect to help defray their financial obligations for the new regional transit system's services, total estimated ridership by county was allocated among types of service on the basis of service hours. **Average one-way fares of \$2, \$1.50, and \$3 were assumed for structured Dial-A-Ride service, community Dial-A-Ride service, and regional deviated route service, respectively.**

Resulting estimated fare revenues are shown in Figure 3-12 and Figure 3-13. Note that these estimates are rough—a more reliable analysis would require more detailed ridership estimates and a more detailed fare structure for each service, including a calculation of the effects of discounted ticket/pass fares or reduced fares offered to older adults and people with disabilities. Note also that local funding responsibilities are shown by county, but contributions could come from individual communities rather than county government. Nevertheless, Figure 3-12 is useful as a general guide to funding shares, and shows that in many cases, farebox revenues could provide most, all, or even more than the required local funds.

Figure 3-12 Estimated Operating and Capital Costs, Low LOS Scenario 2016, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Annual Operating Cost	Federal/State Share 80-85%	Local Share 15-20%	Service Hours	Estimated Ridership	Estimated Fare Revenue	Balance Local Share
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	\$286,416	\$243,454	\$42,962	5,616	13,223	\$26,445	\$16,517
Le Sueur	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	10,123	\$20,247	\$1,235
Nicollet	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	19,864	\$39,728	-\$18,247
Community Dial-A-Ride*							
Blue Earth	\$265,200	\$212,160	\$53,040	5,200	12,243	\$18,365	\$34,675
Le Sueur	\$492,646	\$394,117	\$98,529	9,096	32,793	\$49,189	\$49,340
Nicollet	\$318,410	\$254,728	\$63,682	6,997	49,497	\$74,246	-\$10,564
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$1,649,088	\$1,347,912	\$301,176	32,525	137,743	\$228,219	\$72,957
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	\$62,920	\$53,482	\$9,438	NA	2,860	NA	\$9,438
Le Sueur	\$31,460	\$26,741	\$4,719	NA	1,210	NA	\$4,719
Nicollet	\$26,620	\$22,627	\$3,993	NA	1,430	NA	\$3,993
Total Volunteer Rides	\$121,000	\$102,850	\$18,150		5,500	NA	\$18,150
Total Low LOS Scenario	\$1,770,088	\$1,450,762	\$319,326	32,525	143,243	\$228,219	\$91,107

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Figure 3-13 Estimated Annual Operating Costs, High LOS Scenario 2020, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Annual Operating Cost	Federal/State Share 80-85%	Local Share 15-20%	Service Hours	Estimated Ridership*	Estimated Fare Revenue	Balance Local Share
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	\$286,416	\$243,454	\$42,962	5,616	17,315	\$34,629	\$8,333
Le Sueur	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	11,671	\$23,342	-\$1,861
Nicollet	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	17,894	\$35,788	-\$14,307
Community Dial-A-Ride**							
Blue Earth	\$265,200	\$212,160	\$53,040	5,200	16,032	\$24,048	\$28,992
Le Sueur	\$492,646	\$394,117	\$98,529	9,096	37,806	\$56,709	\$41,821
Nicollet	\$318,410	\$254,728	\$63,682	6,997	44,589	\$66,883	-\$3,201
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$1,649,088	\$1,347,912	\$301,176	32,525	145,306	\$241,399	\$59,777
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	\$62,920	\$53,482	\$9,438	NA	2,860	NA	\$9,438
Le Sueur	\$31,460	\$26,741	\$4,719	NA	1,210	NA	\$4,719
Nicollet	\$26,620	\$22,627	\$3,993	NA	1,430	NA	\$3,993
Total Volunteer Rides	\$121,000	\$102,850	\$18,150		5,500	NA	\$18,150
Subtotal	\$1,770,088	\$1,450,762	\$319,326	28,781	150,806	\$241,399	\$77,927
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	\$40,800	\$34,680	\$6,120	800	2,466	\$7,399	-\$1,279
Le Sueur	\$66,300	\$53,040	\$13,260	1,300	5,403	\$16,210	-\$2,950
Nicollet	\$163,200	\$130,560	\$32,640	3,200	20,392	\$61,176	-\$28,536
Total Deviated Routes	\$270,300	\$218,280	\$52,020	5,300	28,262	\$84,785	-\$32,765
Total by County							
Blue Earth	\$655,336	\$543,776	\$111,560	9,744	38,673	\$66,076	\$45,484
Le Sueur	\$733,614	\$595,625	\$137,989	11,332	56,090	\$96,260	\$41,729
Nicollet	\$651,438	\$529,642	\$121,796	13,005	84,305	\$163,848	-\$42,052
Total High LOS Scenario	\$2,040,388	\$1,669,042	\$371,346	34,081	179,068	\$326,184	\$45,162

*Ridership on Structured Dial-A-Ride and Community Dial-A-Ride services are higher than in the Low LOS Scenario as shown in Figure 3-23 due to the inclusion of ridership increases between 2016 and 2020.

**Community Dial-A-Ride in Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties includes Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit

Estimated capital costs for the Low and High LOS scenarios, broken down by service type, county, and funding source, are shown in Figure 3-14. As noted above, capital costs associated with the High LOS scenario may be lower than these estimates when a final set of services is selected for implementation, due to opportunities for using vehicles to provide more than one service.

Figure 3-14 Estimated Capital Costs, Low and High LOS Scenarios, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Estimated Capital Cost	Federal/State Share 80%	Local Share 20%
Low LOS Scenario			
Structured Dial-A-Ride			
Blue Earth	\$320,000	\$272,000	\$48,000
Le Sueur	\$160,000	\$136,000	\$24,000
Nicollet	\$160,000	\$136,000	\$24,000
Community Dial-A-Ride*			
Blue Earth	\$160,000	\$128,000	\$32,000
Le Sueur	\$160,000	\$128,000	\$32,000
Nicollet	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$960,000	\$800,000	\$160,000
Volunteer Driver Services			
Blue Earth	\$0	\$0	\$0
Le Sueur	\$0	\$0	\$0
Nicollet	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Volunteer Rides	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Low LOS Scenario by County			
Blue Earth	\$480,000	\$400,000	\$80,000
Le Sueur	\$320,000	\$264,000	\$56,000
Nicollet	\$160,000	\$136,000	\$24,000
Total Low LOS Scenario	\$960,000	\$800,000	\$160,000
High LOS Scenario: All of the services listed above plus Deviated Fixed Routes			
Deviated Fixed Routes			
Blue Earth	\$320,000	\$272,000	\$48,000
Le Sueur	\$88,000	\$70,400	\$17,600
Nicollet	\$152,000	\$121,600	\$30,400
Total Deviated Routes	\$560,000	\$464,000	\$96,000
Total High LOS Scenario by County			
Blue Earth	\$800,000	\$672,000	\$128,000
Le Sueur	\$408,000	\$334,400	\$73,600
Nicollet	\$312,000	\$257,600	\$54,400
Total High LOS Scenario	\$1,520,000	\$1,264,000	\$256,000

4 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Constrained resources and/or local priorities may preclude the implementation of all of the proposed services, or require a phased implementation plan, so some evaluation effort is likely to be necessary. To be effective, criteria for assessing the relative merits of the service alternatives should be tied to the goals and objectives of the project and its stakeholders and be suitable for use and understood not only by project advisory committee members, but also other stakeholders, potential rider groups, and the general public in the study area. Since objectives, preferences, and priorities among those groups may conflict, the framework in which the evaluation criteria are used should offer a way to identify tradeoffs and resolve differences.

Evaluation criteria to assist in assessing the service alternatives' potential to help address these goals and a suggested framework for applying them are described below.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As outlined in a recent summary of this project prepared by MnDOT Office of Transit staff, objectives of the study include the following:

- Exploring the potential for initiating some basic level of service to address the mobility needs of residents in the rural portions of Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties
- Identifying opportunities for developing connections between services to facilitate more inter- and intra-county travel
- Developing strategies to reduce or eliminate duplicative services and administrative efforts among existing transportation providers
- Ensuring that policy makers are fully informed about the options for developing service

Other objectives, expressed by stakeholders during interviews and project meetings, include:

- Providing new or improved transportation options for certain population groups, such as older adults, workers in low-wage jobs, new American families, and individuals needing to shop at food banks or travel outside their communities to shop for groceries
- Making the most efficient use of transportation funding and other resources
- Planning for sustainable transportation services that meet documented needs

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Suggested criteria that could be used to evaluate the desirability of the components of the proposed Low and High LOW scenarios are listed below. Others could be added following discussions with project stakeholders as planning for new regional transit services move forward.

Feasibility

- Existing provider and/or vehicles are available
- Local community supports implementation
- Local funding sources support implementation
- Lead time required for start-up

Impact

- Serves a target population of concern
- Meets a specific transportation need
- Provides new service in a rural area (population less than 2,500)
- Responds to a need identified by project stakeholders
- Provides lifeline service—access to health care, shopping
- Contributes to economic development—access to jobs, training, education
- Offers opportunity for quality of life trips—social, recreational, faith-based, and community activities
- Improves the level and/or availability of general public transit service—days, hours, geographic service area
- Improves the quality of service available

Coordination

- Potential for operation by an existing provider
- Provides connections to other communities within county
- Provides connections to regional destinations
- Enhances impact of another service (e.g., structured Dial-A-Ride or community Dial-A-Ride services transport residents of small communities to regional deviated route bus stops)

Funding Requirements

- Start-up cost
- Annual operating cost
- Vehicle requirements
- Availability of funding for local match
- Sustainability of funding sources

Performance

- Expected to meet MnDOT performance standards for applicable type of service: passengers per hour, cost per hour, cost per passenger trip, revenue per passenger trip, revenue miles. (The specific standards established for community of municipal dial-a-ride service and deviated rural routes are discussed in Technical Memo #1. After

- implementation of new services, performance measures should be calculated and reviewed periodically to assess performance and identify any necessary adjustments.)
- Moves community toward MnDOT's suggested Regional Trade Center level of service guidelines

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The following steps are offered as a scheme for applying these evaluation criteria to the proposed service alternatives.

- Brainstorm additional evaluation criteria with project stakeholders
- Prepare an evaluation matrix that lists all service alternatives on one axis and all evaluation criteria on the other
- Assign a low, medium or high score on for each service alternative on each criterion (up to the Performance category) in one of the following ways. Performance measures, the only qualitative ratings that will be assigned, should be calculated and entered into the appropriate box.
 - A group of stakeholders could meet to complete the matrix together, using sticky dots could be used to indicate low (red dot), medium (yellow dot), or high (green dot) ratings on a flip chart version of the matrix. Stakeholders should discuss and resolve differences among preferences and priorities once initial dot voting is complete to arrive at a final score for each category for each alternative.
 - Stakeholders could complete an Excel version of the matrix individually, using text to indicate low, medium and high ratings. Results could be compared and discussed at an online or in-person meeting and a summary matrix prepared.
 - Results of the initial evaluation by stakeholders could be presented at public workshops or in other forums to get input from county residents on their service priorities.

NEXT STEPS

As stakeholders in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties consider the regional transit system service alternatives described in this report, the consultant team will identify and evaluate organizational alternatives for implementing priority transit services.



TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Service Design Alternatives

FINAL
October 2015



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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Office of Transit has provided active support and useful tools for local governments and transit providers to encourage and enable them to work together to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public transportation services. The overall goal of increased cooperation, coordination, and consolidation among transit providers and other transportation stakeholders, particularly on a regional level, is improved mobility: greater opportunities for travel beyond jurisdictional boundaries; reduction or elimination of service overlaps, which can free resources to address service gaps; and the introduction of new transportation options that become feasible when stakeholders work together.

MnDOT and its local partners in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties are currently engaged in an effort to identify and evaluate service and organizational alternatives for improving mobility options for residents of the three-county area. A consultant team led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates is assisting with that effort.

This technical memorandum is the second in a series of three reports that will document the development and analysis of transit service and organizational alternatives for the three counties. Technical Memorandum #1, Existing Conditions, summarized previous relevant planning efforts, described the demographic characteristics of the three counties, discussed in detail the administration and services of LeSueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE Faith in Action, and summarized comments offered by a wide range of stakeholders. This memo presents an analysis of that information, describes several service design alternatives for meeting transportation needs in the three-county area, and evaluates those alternatives.

The report is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of each of the three existing transit providers and the environment for future cooperation/coordination among the three counties. Service design options are described in Chapter 3 and an evaluation framework is presented in Chapter 4.

2 ANALYSIS OF STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS

This chapter presents the results of two strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses.

The first analysis considers Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit, the two public transit providers in the study area, and VINE Faith in Action. Strengths and weaknesses in a number of focus areas were assessed on the basis of data collected about the organizations and the transportation services they provide for the preparation of Technical Memorandum #1, comments from the Project Management Team (PMT) and Project Advisory Committee (PAC), and input from stakeholders.

Focus areas include:

- Administration/Oversight
- Operations/Service Performance
- Equipment/Facilities/Technology
- Fares/Funding
- Image of Transit/Community Relations
- Public Information

Opportunities and threats were identified not only for capitalizing on strengths and making improvements to each system individually, but also for increased cooperation/coordination/consolidation among the three providers.

The second analysis considers the environment for future cooperation, coordination, and consolidation among entities in the three counties as a means of improving mobility for residents. Strengths and weaknesses were assessed using information about the demographic and development characteristics of the region, existing transportation services, stakeholder involvement, and previous coordination work. Opportunities and threats were identified for the creation of a network of public transit services for Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties that could begin to address the mobility needs of the region's residents.

EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

Le Sueur Transit

The SWOT analysis for Le Sueur Transit is presented in Figure 2-1 and the subsequent discussion.

Figure 2-1 Le Sueur Transit SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Operations / Service Performance			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service reservations are flexible allowing riders to schedule same-day travel For the most part, Le Sueur Transit already serves the most densely populated area in the county and the highest concentrations of transit-dependent individuals Staff is willing to provide new services to respond to community needs; for example, the “Sober Bus” on holidays and Sunday church service Coordinating service to preschools, elder care field trips, and after school programs Meeting MnDOT’s standards: Demand-response service received a “good” rating and deviated route service received an “excellent” rating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service is limited to the City of Le Sueur, weekdays only, and stops at 4:30 p.m. Informal deviation policy A small LEP population lives on the eastern side of Le Sueur outside of the transit service area Overall ridership declined slightly from 2011 to 2013 Fails to meet MnDOT’s standards for level and type of service to Regional Trade Centers by not providing service 12 hours per day, 7 days per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service that connects Le Sueur to locations both inside and outside the county are needed, including trips to Mankato and Le Center Extended service in the evenings and the weekends is needed Additional opportunities for future coordination with other local providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Riders may not know about the deviation policy Limited service days and hours could limit ridership potential Service may not be meeting the needs of some of the most vulnerable New American populations Ridership may continue to decline if service does not adapt to meet current challenges Service is more temporally limited than other similar cities in the state
Administration / Oversight			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff are highly-regarded and are efficient and effective Administrative procedures are thoroughly understood and followed without difficulty by transit system staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A single staff member is responsible for most critical agency functions Driver wages are the lowest of the three agencies Manual reservations, scheduling, and dispatching system with handwritten notes; lacking a formal manifest form and procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a system of automating procedures and overlapping responsibilities Embrace technology to develop automated data capturing and tracking procedures and prepare manifests Increase driver wages to be consistent with regional standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agency is vulnerable to staff turnover and even use of vacation time May not be collecting correct and/or complete data, which could make reporting more difficult Low wages can result in difficulty attracting and retaining quality workers

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Equipment/Facilities/Technology			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transit facilities are top-notch, providing ample room to accommodate staff; also provide a heated garage for vehicles Recently acquired a new vehicle; other vehicles have relatively low mileage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-vehicle technology is limited or non-existent Maintenance is provided by a private contractor 24 miles away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase scheduling/dispatching software to automate data collection and tracking Purchase on-vehicle technologies to improve data capturing, such as tablets or smart phones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency is relying on manual systems that need to be updated in order to coordinated services
Fares and Funding			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Riders and stakeholders agree that fares are equitable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairly complex fare system of passes and ticket books Funding information is not easily accessible by transit staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplify fare structure Improve data collection procedures through more advanced data collection methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination with other services could be hindered by complicated fares
Image of Transit / Community Relations			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service is highly personal, reflects local needs, and is highly valued by existing riders Transit Director promotes the service directly with local leaders and potential riders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
Public Information			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transit Director meets with local leaders and potential riders to promote services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about services is limited; schedules and route maps are not posted online. Other than in-person marketing efforts, there are no additional resources employed to distribute information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ridership may be increased through additional public information and marketing, especially with a more complete online presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ridership among younger riders could stagnate if online presence is not improved

Strengths

Le Sueur Transit operates an efficient and successful transit service that is highly-regarded by the community. Service is personalized, prompt, and allows same-day requests. Demographic analysis of Le Sueur County shows that most of the county's vulnerable population groups live within the transit system's service area. In addition to meeting the community's needs, Le Sueur Transit meets state performance standards as well. When compared to MnDOT's standards for transit service productivity, Le Sueur Transit's demand-response service falls into the "good" category and deviated route service falls into the "excellent" category.

Le Sueur Transit's employees are the root of the agency's success. Through long-standing employee efforts, the agency's administrative processes run smoothly. The agency's success is due primarily to the transit director who manages most of the agency's functions and keeps the ties to the community by meeting with local leaders and riders.

Additionally, Le Sueur Transit employees effectively manage several contract services that each fill a different gap in the community, for example, the "Sober Bus" service sponsored by local bars and offered on holidays and Sunday church service sponsored by area churches. Le Sueur Transit also contracts with local entities, providing specialized trips to area pre-schools, elder care services, and after school programs.

Le Sueur Transit's facilities and equipment are also excellent. The Le Sueur Transit office provides ample space for employees and the heated garage stores three vehicles to ensure that they are safe from the elements. One of Le Sueur Transit's vehicles is brand new and the other vehicles have less than 100,000 miles and plenty of road time ahead.

Weaknesses

The SWOT analysis also identified several areas for potential improvement within Le Sueur Transit. The agency's most evident weakness is the same as one of its greatest strengths. A single staff member is responsible for most of the agency's critical functions, leaving the agency vulnerable to staff turnover and even use of vacation and sick time. Moreover, many of the processes that work well today are based primarily on long-term employees who developed manual processes that have worked for years, but are in danger of falling apart if said employees no longer work there. The primary example of this is the handwritten forms that drivers use to record their daily trips, which are missing important data about the trips such as pickup and drop off addresses, the riders' names, and odometer readings. In most cases Le Sueur Transit employees have transported the same individuals for years, and as a result, drivers and the transit director know many of these trip details without having to write them down. However, when data is not properly collected and organized, it is difficult for Le Sueur Transit to generate useful statistics easily and that can make the transit director's job more difficult. Basic demand-response service reservations/scheduling/dispatching software would make data collection easier and more accurate.

Related to this, Le Sueur Transit does not employ on-vehicle technology for recording data, such as tablets or smart phones, which are now considered industry-standard and are being used by many other small agencies in the state.

Another weakness is that the service is spatially and temporally limited. According to MnDOT's standards for level and type of service to Regional Trade Centers, in cities of Le Sueur's size and economic activity, both deviated route and demand-response service should be offered seven days

a week, 12 hours per day. Le Sueur Transit only operates on weekdays, for up to 10.5 hours, ending at 4:30 p.m. To meet MnDOT's requirements, service should be extended to 6:00 p.m. and offered on Saturdays and Sundays. Furthermore, Le Sueur Transit only offers service within City of Le Sueur boundaries. For the most part, the service area covers the majority of the vulnerable populations; however, there are concentrations of older adults and people with disabilities, and a small cluster of Limited English Proficiency individuals, outside of the service area, as well as destinations in other communities, such as Le Center, that county residents need to reach. These individuals are likely in need of additional transportation options.

In addition, Le Sueur Transit's fare system of passes and ticket books is fairly complicated, which could be an impediment for future coordination with other services in the region.

Lastly, the agency's public information and marketing strategy could have a broader reach. Information about available services, including schedules and maps, is not posted online, which may provide a barrier to young adults learning about the system because they gain most of their information through technology. Having an online presence and making information available online is essential to ensuring that the younger user group and others are able to find out about available services.

Opportunities

Based on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis, there are many opportunities for Le Sueur Transit to improve available services. One such opportunity, which should be implemented in the near future, is creating a system of automatic processes to streamline reservations, scheduling, dispatching, and other administrative functions and document these procedures in writing. Manual and handwritten systems should be traded for automatic and online systems, primarily through reservations/scheduling software and/or on-vehicle technology, to ensure accurate and thorough data capturing and tracking. In the same vein, Le Sueur Transit should reinforce employee skill sets and overlapping responsibilities between the transit director and the other office employee, so that the agency will not be affected by planned or unplanned events that take the transit director away from work.

There is also the opportunity to coordinate with local providers or partners, such as Land to Air, Trailblazer Transit, and Ucare in order to connect the City of Le Sueur with major employment and economic hubs. In addition to connecting service to other cities, Le Sueur Transit should also consider extending service into the evenings and on the weekends to meet both MnDOT's standards and requests from riders and stakeholders.

Finally, Le Sueur Transit has an opportunity to boost ridership and encourage coordination through two measures: simplifying the fare structure and expanding public information and marketing. Also, the success of any new programs brought about by coordinated with other providers would depend on an effective marketing effort to encourage ridership.

Threats

There are also several threats to Le Sueur Transit that should be viewed as challenges to consider when forming service alternatives and recommendations for changes. First, if the agency continues to collect data manually through the processes currently in place, there is a risk that data will not be tracked properly, which creates more work for the transit director who needs to be able to generate and report on useful statistics easily. Also, in order to coordinate with other providers to provide connecting service to other cities, Le Sueur Transit would need to

standardize and automate many of their procedures to ensure accurate and complete data collection. Moreover, if unexpected staffing changes did take place, replacement employees may not be able to navigate the current procedures which could cause severe administrative back up and could impact service.

Another threat is present in the fact that Le Sueur Transit does not have a formal deviation policy. Even though unofficially Le Sueur Transit will deviate a few blocks, the estimated number of deviations actually occurring is very low, especially when compared to the number of Saint Peter Transit deviations, roughly 30% of all Saint Peter Transit's trips. A lower number of deviations creates a more efficient system; however, if riders do not know that Le Sueur Transit will deviate slightly off the route to pick them up, these people may choose to use the demand-response service instead. Le Sueur Transit should ensure that this policy is formally advertised.

The final threat is service limitations, both spatially and temporally, that could be hindering Le Sueur Transit's potential for a stable ridership. As identified through stakeholder input, connections to other cities, especially Mankato and Le Center, would create a more interconnected region and allow Le Sueur residents greater access to employment and services. Moreover, because Le Sueur Transit is limited to weekdays and stops at 4:30 p.m., the City of Le Sueur is receiving less service than other similarly sized cities.

Saint Peter Transit

The SWOT analysis for Saint Peter Transit is presented in Figure 2-2 and discussed below.

Figure 2-2 Saint Peter Transit SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Operations / Service Performance			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Almost all service is on-demand (within 30-45 minutes for most trips) ▪ Gus Bus service has plans for expansion ▪ Peter Transit serves the majority of vulnerable populations in Nicollet County ▪ Population of Saint Peter grew 17% between 2000 and 2013 ▪ Coordinates service with Land to Air and Jefferson Lines intercity, area daycare and preschools, other school programs, and the Minnesota Ride Link program for veterans. ▪ Demand-response ridership among people with disabilities and students increased between 2011 and 2013 ▪ Demand-response service received an “excellent” rating from MnDOT’s performance standard ratings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service is limited to the City of Saint Peter, with a reduced schedule for DAR and no deviated route service on Saturday and no service on Sunday ▪ Small populations of seniors, people with disabilities, youth, and very low income households are not served by Saint Peter Transit ▪ Demand-response ridership among seniors, adults, and children decreased between 2011 and 2013 ▪ Fails to meet MnDOT’s standards for level and type of service to Regional Trade Centers by not providing service 12 hours, seven days a week ▪ Morning and afternoon rush hour buses are at capacity ▪ Deviated route service received a “poor” rating from MnDOT’s performance standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional service that connects Saint Peter to Mankato and Minneapolis/St. Paul ▪ Additional service early and later on Saturdays and service on Sunday (including service to area churches) ▪ Additional opportunities for future coordination with other local providers ▪ Opportunity to improve passengers per hour on the deviated route service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service may not be meeting the needs of some transit dependent individuals outside of the service area ▪ Limited service days and hours could limit ridership potential; service is more temporally limited than other similar cities in the state ▪ Deviated fixed route service is at risk for discontinuance if it continues to not meet required performance rating
Administration / Oversight			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff are highly-regarded and are efficient and effective ▪ Administrative procedures are thoroughly understood and followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A single staff member is responsible for most critical agency functions ▪ Manual reservations, scheduling, and dispatching system with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a system of automating procedures and overlapping responsibilities ▪ Embrace technology to develop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The agency is vulnerable to staff turnover and even vacation time ▪ May not be collecting correct and/or complete data, which could make reporting

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<p>without difficulty by transit system staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Driver wages are the highest of the three systems 	<p>handwritten notes; lacking a formal manifest form and procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No mission statement 	<p>automated data capturing and tracking procedures and prepare manifests</p>	<p>more difficult</p>
Equipment/Facilities/Technology			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transit vehicles are stored in a heated garage; older Saturday night service vehicles stored outside ▪ Recently acquired two new vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-vehicle technology is limited or non-existent ▪ Scheduling and dispatching is done while the driver is already on the road 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase scheduling/dispatching software to automate data collection and tracking ▪ Purchase on-vehicle technologies to improve data capturing, such as tablets or smart phones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agency is relying on manual systems that need to be updated in order to coordinated services
Fares and Funding			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Riders and stakeholders agree that fares are equitable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very complex fare system of passes and ticket books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Simplify fare structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordination with other services could be hindered by complicated fares
Image of Transit / Community Relations			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service is highly personal, reflects local needs, and is highly valued by existing riders ▪ Gus Bus service is strongly supported and well used by students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪
Public Information			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transit Director meets with local leaders and potential riders to promote services ▪ Informational brochures and public access TV are also used to advertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information about services is limited online through the city website and Gus Bus links are broken on the college website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ridership may be increased through additional public information and marketing, especially with a more complete online presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ridership among younger riders could stagnate if online presence is not improved

Strengths

Saint Peter Transit provides personalized and flexible transportation services to the City of Saint Peter. Saint Peter is a growing and thriving community at the center of which is Gustavus Adolphus College. Saint Peter Transit's Gus Bus service for students is one of its most popular services, so much so that the agency plans on expanding in the next year. The service area also contains the majority of the county's vulnerable populations; many of these individuals ride Saint Peter Transit's demand-response service which received an "excellent" performance standard rating from MnDOT.

Similar to Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit's employees are its greatest asset. Knowledgeable and efficient employees allow the agency's long-standing administrative processes to run smoothly. The transit director is primarily responsible for the agency's success by managing most of the agency's essential functions and keeping the community, the college, and local officials invested in making the service work.

In addition to the major contract with Gustavus Adolphus College, Saint Peter Transit contracts with several other local entities providing transportation for local daycares and preschools and other after-school programs, as well as the Minnesota Ride Link program for veterans. The agency is also coordinating service to link to the Twin Cities and Rochester through partnerships with Land to Air and Jefferson Lines.

Saint Peter Transit is housed in the City Hall building, which provides an indoor heated garage for several SPT vehicles. The agency recently acquired two new vehicles that are used to provide service six days per week. Other Saint Peter Transit vehicles are quite a bit older, but these are used solely for the short trips from the college to downtown Saint Peter during Saturday night service.

Weaknesses

Although Saint Peter Transit has many strengths, the agency does have a few weaknesses that should be addressed. Similar to Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit's most evident weakness pertains to the outdated methods by which the agency collects and tracks data. Although the processes used today have worked well for the agency in the past, the service would benefit from automating data collection and streamlining reservations, scheduling, and dispatching. Most importantly, the agency is lacking a thorough system of gathering ridership data, which makes it difficult for the transit director to generate statistics easily. Saint Peter Transit should consider developing a formal process by which to collect daily ridership information by using scheduling and dispatching software and having the drivers complete detailed manifest forms. Also similar to Le Sueur Transit, all the responsibilities and critical functions of the service fall solely on the transit director's shoulders, leaving the agency vulnerable to major administrative disturbances, if staffing changes were to occur.

Another weakness is that Saint Peter Transit fails to meet MnDOT's standards for level and type of service to Regional Trade Centers, because service is not offered for 12 hours every day of the week. To meet MnDOT's requirements, service should be extended on Saturdays and offered on Sundays. Additionally, there are small clusters of transit dependent individuals who live outside of the Saint Peter Transit service area; many of these individuals are likely in need of public transportation.

Although the agency is providing an enormous benefit to the community by transporting individuals to and from employment, it is failing to supply enough transportation to meet the rush hour demands. Stakeholders and riders complain that the demand-response service is very full in the morning and afternoon and the system would benefit from adding another vehicle at these times. While the demand-response service has high productivity and reaches capacity during certain times of the day, productivity of the deviated route service is very low. In fact, the deviate route service received a “poor” performance standard rating from MnDOT for having a productivity rate of 2.6 passengers per hour, which is just below the “good” rating threshold. However, it is important to note that one-third of the trips on the Saint Peter deviated route involve a deviation, which can negatively impact the productivity of service. Unlike Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit riders are well aware of the deviation policy and take advantage of it frequently.

Saint Peter Transit’s fare system of passes and ticket books is even more complicated than Le Sueur Transit’s fare system. Prices vary by destination, type of rider, and number of tickets, which can be very confusing to new and existing riders, and could be an impediment for future coordination with other services in the region.

Similar to Le Sueur Transit, the agency’s public information and marketing strategy could use an update. Only very basic information is available online through the City of Saint Peter website. There is even less information available on the Gustavus College website, and at the time that this report was written, the college’s webpage for the Gus Bus was not functioning.

Opportunities

Saint Peter Transit has many opportunities to learn from the advantages and disadvantages listed in this SWOT analysis. First and foremost, the agency should consider creating a system of automatic processes to streamline reservations, scheduling, dispatching, and other administrative functions and document these procedures in writing. Purchasing a simple reservations / scheduling software program and/or on-vehicle technology would ensure accurate and thorough data capturing and tracking. These tools are now considered industry-standard and are in use at many other small transit agencies in the state.

Similar to Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit should develop a plan of action to reinforce employee skill sets and overlapping responsibilities between the transit director and other employees in the event that a planned or unplanned event takes the transit director away from work for an extended period.

Saint Peter Transit also has the opportunity to improve the productivity of the deviated route service by ensuring that the public knows about the service and how it works. The agency should consider creating a marketing campaign focused on increasing public awareness about the deviated route. Marketing efforts should emphasize where the route travels and the flexibility and convenience of traveling quickly without a deviation. Marketing should be targeted at the bus stop locations and major destinations near the bus stops. Moreover, many of the individuals who call in advance for the demand-response service might be willing to take the deviated route service if they knew more about it.

There is also the opportunity to extend service hours to meet the minimum standards set by MnDOT for cities of Saint Peter’s size and level of economic activity. Riders and stakeholders noted that service to area churches on Sunday would be utilized by many residents. Saint Peter Transit also has the opportunity to embrace additional coordination efforts to increase

connections to regional hubs, including the Twin Cities and Mankato. The agency would need to simplify and streamline its fare system in order to coordinate or partner with area providers. By both simplifying the fare system and boosting their online presence, Saint Peter Transit could increase ridership, especially among the younger riders.

Threats

Saint Peter Transit has many opportunities for improvements, but there are also a few threats to the agency that should be considered when developing service alternatives. To start, the agency must update its data collection methods and employ technology to streamline its systems. This is imperative if Saint Peter Transit is to coordinate with other regional providers to provide additional connections to regional hubs. These new administrative processes must be written down, so unexpected staffing changes will not disrupt service.

Another threat to Saint Peter Transit is the low productivity numbers for the deviated route service. The low number of passengers per hour on the deviated route service is mostly likely due to the high number of deviations that passengers take on the route. Because the City of Saint Peter is such a small and compact service area, it is likely that many of the deviations of one or two blocks off the route are unnecessary. Moreover, as described above, many of the individuals who call in advance for the demand-response service might be willing to take the deviated route service if they knew more about it. Unfortunately, if the service continues to operate with low productivity for several years, MnDOT recommends that the service be discontinued.

VINE Transit

The SWOT analysis for VINE is presented in Figure 2-3 and the subsequent discussion.

VINE

Figure 2-3 VINE SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Operations / Service Performance			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People to Jobs transportation is provided 24 hours per day (van transportation and taxicab service) Far-reaching volunteer driver service serves Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties Acts as the Mobility Manager for Region 9 Commission organizations Serves the majority of vulnerable populations in the Mankato and North Mankato areas Coordinates service with Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties, UCare and Blue Plus, and for after-school activities. Only one of the three transit providers that serves multiple cities and counties Demand-response service (People to Jobs program) received an “good” rating from MnDOT’s performance standard ratings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small clusters of very low income households are not served by VINE People to Jobs service People to Jobs ridership decreased by 15% from 2011 to 2014 decreases (although this is due to a stronger economy and more strategic Mankato bus routes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional service early and later on Saturdays and service on Sunday (including service to area churches) Additional opportunities for future coordination with other local providers There is a need for VINE to provide service for weekend shopping Share experience with management of volunteer driver program with other providers Help with development of similar organizations in Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties Perform mobility manager duties as part of Regional Transportation Coordination Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a nonprofit organization, VINE may not be able to take on a lead management/administrative role in a coordinated regional network of services for the three counties VINE’s focus is not the general public; provides services for older adults primarily, and people with disabilities Service may not be meeting the needs of some transit dependent individuals outside of the service area
Administration / Oversight			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff are very dedicated, effective, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driver wages are low and not eligible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase driver wages to attract and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation is only one of many

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<p>and efficient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Experienced management of volunteer driver program and demand-response service ▪ Program is well-staffed; Transit Coordinator and Executive Director are both very knowledgeable about transportation ▪ Transit Coordinator acts as the mobility manager for Region 9 Commission organizations 	<p>for increases</p>	<p>retain quality workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide assistance to LST and SPT with selection and implementation of software, such as EasyRides, if applicable ▪ Purchase on-board vehicle technology to take advantage of data from EasyRides 	<p>programs/services that VINE offers; many competing uses for agency resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower wages can result in difficulty attracting and retaining quality workers
Equipment/Facilities/Technology			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of EasyRides for scheduling / reservations / dispatch, managing customers, bill payment, etc. ▪ New state-of-the-art facility and office space; dynamic, innovative community center ▪ Recently acquired a new vehicle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On-vehicle technology is limited or non-existent ▪ Vehicles not equipped with radios; drivers are contacted via cell phones with schedule changes ▪ No wheelchair accessible vehicles ▪ No indoor garage space for vehicles ▪ Many of the vehicles are old and have high mileage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase on-vehicle technologies that work with EasyRides software ▪ Pursue grant funding for wheelchair accessible vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Without wheelchair accessible vehicles, VINE is not serving a significant subset of the older adult and disabled populations ▪ Several vehicles will need to be replaced in the near-term ▪ Drivers are susceptible to accidents if they are on their cell phones while driving
Fares and Funding			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost-effective services due to use of volunteer drivers ▪ Fare system is simple and straightforward ▪ 65% of volunteer driver customers contribute to the cost of their trip provided by a volunteer driver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ New Freedom grants fund only part of the transportation services VINE offers; difficult to get funding information about the other services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JARC and New Freedom funding used to support People to Jobs, mobility management, and volunteer driver program is no longer available. Alternate funding source(s) will need to be identified if those services are to continue.

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			▪
Image of Transit / Community Relations			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community provides funding for facility, volunteers, contracts for service, and funding to match federal grants ▪ Longstanding and well-regarded reputation ▪ Do not seem to have difficulty finding/retaining volunteers as other agencies do 	▪	▪	▪
Public Information			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informational brochures and a quarterly newsletter are used to advertise the system ▪ Some information about the People to Jobs and volunteer driver programs is available online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The information available online is limited and may be confusing to someone who is not familiar with the offerings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ridership may be increased through additional public information and marketing, especially with a more complete online presence 	▪

Strengths

VINE has a longstanding reputation as a vital community resource providing transportation services to older adults, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes in Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. VINE offers two types of transportation services. The VINE volunteer driver program provides rides to Blue Earth and Nicollet County residents 60 and over and individuals under the age of 60 who have a verified disability. Volunteers will transport these individuals anywhere in the state. The People to Jobs demand-response program transports low-income workers and their children in the greater Mankato area. It should be noted that VINE is the only organization of the three profiled in this study to transport customers across city and county lines. In addition to these two services, the VINE Transportation Coordinator also acts as the mobility manager for Region 9 Commission organizations providing travel assistance to individuals throughout the region with MnDOT New Freedom grant funding.

VINE's broad community vision is epitomized by the organization's new office space. The organization recently transformed a dilapidated building into a brand-new community center with state-of-the-art facilities. VINE's plans to build the new community center were supported both financially and politically by the community. Blue Earth County and the United Way organization provide local match funds for the JARC and New Freedom grants. Additionally, members of the community serve as volunteers for the volunteer driver program and other programs. Unlike other volunteer driver programs around the country, VINE does not have a problem recruiting volunteers.

Not unlike Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit, VINE's dedicated employees are the key to its success; however, VINE's management differs from the other two providers because there are two key employees (instead of one), the Transit Coordinator and the Executive Director, who are both very knowledgeable about transportation, as well as other office staff who can step in to complete tasks as needed.

VINE's employees efficiently manage the volunteer driver and demand-response programs by using EasyRides software to schedule trips, generate driver manifests, prepare invoices, track statistics, prepare reports, and keep customer information.

Additionally, VINE runs a very cost-efficient transportation program, primarily due to the low costs of the volunteer driver program, although the People to Jobs program is also very cost-effective. VINE asks that customers contribute to volunteer driver reimbursement costs and 65% of customers contribute. Many of volunteer drivers will donate the reimbursement back into the program.

Weaknesses

There are a few weaknesses that should be mentioned for VINE transportation services, which are useful in determining the opportunities for improvements. First, although VINE's People to Jobs service covers most of the Mankato area, demographic data shows that there are clusters of very low income households adjacent to the service area that are not served. These individuals could benefit from an extension of service.

Second, VINE could benefit from a few improvements to its vehicles, technologies, and driver wages. Although VINE recently acquired a new vehicle, many of its other vehicles are at least eight years old and have high mileage. VINE's capital plan should include funding for additional vehicles in the near future. Furthermore, none of VINE's vehicles are wheelchair accessible, which

means that VINE fails to serve a significant subset of the older adult and disabled populations. Vehicles are also not equipped with radios and drivers respond to calls about schedule changes on their cell phones. And, VINE's driver wages are low compared to Saint Peter Transit's driver wages and drivers are not eligible for wage increases.

Opportunities

VINE is in a unique position to share information about its successes with other regional providers. There is an opportunity for VINE to share its experience with creating and promoting a successful volunteer program with other volunteer driver programs in the region and with organizations that want to develop a new volunteer driver program. VINE could share best practices and technical assistance, and also possibly perform centralized functions, such as driver recruitment, training, reimbursement for all regional programs.

Moreover, VINE could help to develop similar non-profit organizations in Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties; so that the types of human service needs (including transportation) that VINE addresses in the Mankato area can be addressed in the other counties. VINE also has the opportunity to assist Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit with the selection and implementation of software for reservations, scheduling, and dispatching. The software the VINE uses – EasyRides - is suitable for small transit operations, is affordable, is offered in a web-based version, and would facilitate regional consistencies and potential coordination. To improve its own transportation services, VINE also has the opportunity to purchase onboard vehicle technology to take advantage of the data collected through EasyRides.

VINE is also an appropriate candidate to perform mobility manager duties as part of a Regional Transportation Coordination Council. The Minnesota Departments of Transportation and Human Services would like to create a statewide framework of eight to ten Regional Transportation Coordination Councils throughout Minnesota in order to break down barriers and offer a seamless system of human service transportation. VINE is the ideal organization to take on this role for the region. As the regional mobility manager, VINE would lead activities to advance coordination, provide technical assistance, and establish provider performance standards, among other things.

Threats

Although there are many opportunities for VINE to improve their transportation services, there are also a few threats that should be considered when developing service alternatives. First, VINE has a different mission, organizational/governance structure, and funding sources as a non-profit organization than the two municipal systems in Le Sueur and Saint Peter. Moreover, VINE's customers are older adults primarily, but also people with disabilities and eligible individuals with lower incomes, and not the general public. Because of this, VINE may not be able to take on a lead management or administrative role in a coordinated regional network of general public transit services for the three counties. Instead, it is likely that VINE could be a service provider, mobility manager, or a centralized manager of volunteer driver programs.

Further, transportation is only one of the many services that VINE provides. While transportation is necessary to support or complement VINE's other programs, it must compete for resources with those other programs, and may not always be a priority for the organization in the future.

Two of the federal funding sources that VINE has depended on in the past – the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom programs– are no longer available. Alternate funding source(s) will need to be identified if those services are to continue. VINE will need funding in the near future to purchase new vehicles since many of VINE’s vehicles are old and have high mileage. VINE should also consider purchasing wheelchair accessible vehicles in order to better serve the older adult and disabled populations.

Finally, VINE could also experience difficulties hiring and retaining quality drivers, especially in an improving economic climate, if the organization does not consider raising driver wages and offering scheduled increases over time.

FUTURE COORDINATION IN BLUE EARTH, LE SUEUR, AND NICOLLET COUNTIES

SWOT Summary

Figure 2-4 presents the results of the SWOT analysis of cooperation, coordination, and consolidation efforts among transportation stakeholders in the three counties to create a regional public transportation network.

The implications of the SWOT findings for the creation of a regional public transit network are discussed below. The focus of this part of the transit restructuring project is to identify alternative transit service designs for the region; however, service alternatives depend in part on the resources available in the area for managing and operating service, so some of the SWOT findings touch on organizational alternatives as well.

Figure 2-4 SWOT Analysis: Regional Transportation Network in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of transit service where provided—response time, assistance, personal touch • Transportation resources in three-county region include public, private for profit, private nonprofit, and volunteer providers • Community appreciation and financial support for existing transit providers and services expressed through contract services and other funding • VINE's experience with mobility management services and administration of volunteer driving program • Viable regional intercity bus routes were identified as part of Mankato Transit System redesign project • Saint Peter/Kasota relationship sets precedent for inter-county service • Support for coordination and new transit services, where appropriate, from MnDOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited transit service areas: Le Sueur, Saint Peter, Mankato area • Service areas are not contiguous • Limited eligibility for transit services—city residents, job access clients, Mankato area residents with a disability or over age 60 • Somewhat limited operating hours—little evening and weekend public service • Two municipal systems utilize unique manual reservations/scheduling/dispatching procedures • Municipal systems operate with very small staffs • New Freedom and Job Access and Reverse Commute Funding from MnDOT for VINE will end in 2016 • Existing providers are different types of organizations: two municipal systems and one private nonprofit organization
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populations typically among transit users are concentrated in cities in the three counties: older adults, persons with disabilities, residents of zero-vehicle households, residents of low-income households • Destinations are concentrated in Mankato, North Mankato, and Saint Peter • Volunteer driver programs face administrative challenges and are willing to coordinate • Neighboring counties willing to coordinate regionally—Brown, Watonwan • Public and private providers willing to coordinate—MTS, Land to Air, AMV • Regional provision of services (other than transportation) has been discussed in the study area before • Human service agencies consistently report that clients have unmet transportation needs • Inform residents and elected officials about transportation needs and the value of small urban/rural public transit services • Current process to create Regional Transportation Coordination Councils—provides infrastructure, financial support, technical assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low population density overall • 1% or less of commuters in each county use transit • Residents with transportation needs live in rural areas as well as cities • Public transit not seen as a high priority need in all three counties • Previous inter-county service along Highway 14, Highway 15 was not successful • Desire to preserve quality of existing transit services • Need for sustainable funding sources • Success of a new regional transportation network requires a regional champion

Strengths

Figure 2-4 documents a number of strengths in the three-county study area that could provide a foundation for the creation of a regional public transportation network.

The services provided by Le Sueur Transit, Saint Peter Transit, and VINE all offer a high level of personalized transportation to customers—rides with little or very little advance notice, whatever type of assistance they need, and transit staff who know them, their travel patterns, and their communities. Financial support from city and county governments and community agencies and businesses, sometimes through service contracts, demonstrates the value that the communities place on the services offered by the three providers.

In addition to those three providers, other public transit and private for profit providers (MTS, Land to Air, AMV), and agencies administering volunteer driver programs (Aging Services for Communities, Nicollet County Public Health, and each county's Veterans Office) are available to help address mobility needs in the region. The demographic, travel, and development patterns of the three-county area have the potential to support regional intercity bus service, as shown in the Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study.

Finally, resources for future coordination and collaborative efforts to create a regional transit network include the experience VINE has gained from the administration of its volunteer driver program and as the Mobility Manager for organizations in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties and others in the Region 9 planning district, and the support and technical assistance for coordination and new transit services provided by MnDOT.

Weaknesses

The entries in the Weaknesses quadrant of Figure 2-4 relate to the development of a regional public transit network in the three counties, and are not necessarily failings of the existing providers or services.

Although a high level of transit service is provided, it is only available in specific, non-contiguous areas: the cities of Le Sueur and Saint Peter, and the Mankato/North Mankato area.¹

Access to service is restricted in terms of eligibility as well. Only residents of Le Sueur and Saint Peter are eligible to use the services provided in those cities. Only job access clients in Mankato and North Mankato (and up to eight miles beyond each city) are eligible to use VINE's People to Jobs service, and only individuals who are age 60 and older or who have a disability are eligible for rides through VINE's volunteer driver program in Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. Those restrictions leave out many people with transportation needs in the three-county region.

Existing services are also limited in terms of their days/hours of operation. Public transit service hours in Le Sueur and Saint Peter vary, but in general, service is not available before 7:00 a.m. or after 8:00 p.m. on weekdays (service in Le Sueur ends at 4:30 p.m.), and the only weekend service is Saint Peter's Dial-A-Ride from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, and service to specific churches in Le Sueur on Sunday mornings. VINE's days and hours of service are broader, but restricted to eligible individuals.

The two municipal providers have developed manual reservations/scheduling/dispatching procedures that work for them, but are unique to their operations and would be difficult to adopt

¹ VINE's volunteer driver program operates throughout Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties, most trips occur in Mankato/North Mankato; a much smaller number serve Lake Crystal and Saint Peter.

for an expanded service or regional system. Moreover, both systems operate with very small staffs. Transit managers have many responsibilities—including driving, when necessary—and are stretched to the limit.

Another weakness of the regional transit network at present is that two of the federal funding sources that VINE has depended on in the past – the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom programs– are no longer available. Alternate funding source(s) will need to be identified if those services are to continue.

Lastly, the two municipal transit systems and VINE are obviously different types of organizations and transportation is only one of the services that VINE provides. Since VINE is a nonprofit organization with a different mission, organizational/governance structure, funding sources, etc. than the two municipal systems and other transportation providers, and focuses on serving specific client populations rather than the general public, it may not be able to take on a lead management/administrative role in a coordinated regional network of general public transit services for the three counties.

All of the factors mentioned above would make it difficult to form a regional structure and network of services by simply combining or expanding existing services.

Opportunities

A number of very encouraging opportunities for improving mobility options throughout the study area were identified through the SWOT analysis.

The population groups that typically have limited access to a private vehicle and utilize transit services—older adults, people with disabilities, youth, and residents of low income and zero-vehicle households—are concentrated in the urbanized parts of the three counties. Similarly, popular destinations for work, school, shopping, health care, and other services activities are concentrated in the cities of Mankato, North Mankato, and Saint Peter. Although there are transportation needs outside of the urbanized areas, as discussed below in the Threats section, it will be much easier to address the majority of needs by providing connections between a limited number of origins and destinations than it would be if potential riders and major destinations were widely dispersed throughout the region.

Specific opportunities for collaboration within the study area to improve public transit services include both 1) initiation of basic levels of service throughout the three counties' communities to offer better connections to residents and 2) coordination with neighboring counties and private transportation providers, who have indicated a willingness to be involved in the development of regional and inter-regional transportation strategies.

Based on previous work to classify Minnesota communities into “Regional Trade Center” categories according to population size and amount of economic activity, and information from transit users gathered in the development of the 2011 Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan, MnDOT has developed service planning guidance for communities that are considering new or modified transit services. The RTC standards suggest a minimum level of service in all communities that ranges from daily fixed route and complementary paratransit service for a relatively long service day in the largest communities to flexible route or demand-response service for more limited service days and hours in smaller communities. It is also suggested that services be phased in over a period of five to seven years as resources and local priorities allow. This current study presents an opportunity for Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties and

communities to identify the appropriate level of service for each area and begin to provide a basic level of mobility for all residents.

The process of creating Regional Transportation Coordination Councils (RTCCs) across Minnesota, which is currently underway under the leadership of MnDOT and the Minnesota Department of Human Services, represents another huge opportunity for improving mobility for many of the target population groups in the three counties, particularly those who may need services that are more specialized than public transit. As noted in Figure 2-4, human service agency stakeholders have indicated that insufficient transportation is a barrier to receiving services that is faced by their client groups, even in the most urbanized parts of the three-county region. An RTCC serving the area would offer infrastructure, financial support, and technical assistance that human service agencies and transportation providers could use to create or expand services—such as vanpools or ridesharing, volunteer driver programs, travel training, vehicle sharing, joint service contracting, voucher programs, and others—to fill service gaps. For example, agencies operating volunteer driver programs in Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties have indicated that they share similar administrative and operational challenges and would be open to working together to find solutions. VINE has extensive experience from managing its own volunteer driver program as well as providing mobility management services for other organizations. Coordination and/or expansion of volunteer driver programs in the three counties, with VINE’s assistance, might be a perfect project for a new Regional Transportation Coordination Council to undertake.

Finally, the fact that improving or expanding public transit services is not seen as a priority in all three counties (see Threats quadrant) presents an opportunity to inform both residents and elected officials of the extent of the need for transit services and the positive impacts that such services have on access to health care (and lower public health care costs in the long run), employment (both access to existing jobs and creation of new ones, plus the resulting indirect economic activity), attraction and retention of employees, and other factors that contribute to a healthy economy.

Threats

The items listed in the Threats section of Figure 2-4 should be viewed as challenges to the development of expanded public transit services in the three counties, or issues to consider as services and organizational alternatives are developed, rather than barriers.

The population density of the three counties is low overall, which makes fixed route transit infeasible outside of the urbanized areas. Most people in each county drive, especially to work. However, there are residents in the rural sections of the counties who have transportation needs. While the numbers of individuals may not be high, transportation options are critical if they are to obtain the services they need and take part in active community life. Residents and elected officials may need to be convinced of the importance of addressing the needs of those individuals.

The high level of personalized service that is offered by the three existing transit providers may not be possible or compatible with a more standardized, equitable, regional approach to service.

Previous attempts to provide inter-county service along several major highways were not successful, which may decrease the acceptance of proposed new regional services among some stakeholders.

As with all programs and services in today's economic environment, the sustainability of funding sources for new public transit services is critical. It is politically difficult to discontinue services for budgetary reasons once they are in place and being used by residents.

Research and experience in the transit industry has shown that coordination and collaboration efforts are most successful when there is a local champion to provide leadership, encouragement, energy, and an ongoing commitment to a coordination effort, especially one that may take time to come to fruition. Finding such a champion in Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties will be a key to the success of future regional transportation services.

3 SERVICE DESIGN ALTERNATIVES

OVERVIEW

The initial objective of this project was to identify opportunities for restructuring the operation and management of the existing transit services in Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties to gain efficiencies and meet more mobility needs. As the project progressed, the focus shifted to determining the best way to help develop a new Regional Transit System to provide service to residents of those counties. As identified through the 2011 Transit Investment Plan, a goal of the MnDOT Office of Transit is to provide a minimum level of public transportation access or coverage to the entire Minnesota population. There is a special emphasis on providing access to transportation to populations dependent on transit, including individuals with disabilities, new Americans, groups with low incomes including the homeless population, and people with limited vehicle availability.

The study area includes three of the few counties in Minnesota without county-wide transit service. Each county has a city-wide transit system: Greater Mankato Transit System (Blue Earth), Saint Peter Transit (Nicollet), and Le Sueur Transit (Le Sueur). In addition, VINE Faith in Action has been providing some service to residents of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties. It is hoped that the Regional Transit System can be built on the foundations of these systems.

This section describes service design alternatives for a new three-county transit system. An analysis of the demographic characteristics of the three counties and information about unmet transportation needs, collected from transportation providers and a wide range of stakeholders in earlier tasks, formed the basis for the alternatives identified for each county. Examples of the types and levels of service that might be appropriate for the Blue Earth/Le Sueur/Nicollet County region were also collected from several similar multi-county regions in Minnesota that have successfully implemented transit services. The peer regions are also good indicators of the growth in transit ridership and costs that the three counties might expect over time.

Service alternatives for a new regional transit system are presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. The Low LOS Scenario features the introduction of new demand-response services to unserved areas within each county. Volunteer driver services in the more rural areas are also proposed. The High LOS Scenario adds intercounty deviated route services to expand connections and opportunities to travel throughout the region. No changes to existing transit services are proposed in either scenario. Included in the description of each scenario are estimates of ridership and cost, and suggested funding sources.

PEER REGIONS

Detailed descriptions of five peer regions can be found in Appendix A. Key service, ridership, and financial information for four of those systems is presented below as guidance for Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet County stakeholders as they consider the proposed service alternatives for

their area. This information was also used in the development of service alternatives for the study area and estimates of expected ridership and cost.

Figure 3-1 shows summary statistics for four of the five peer regions.

Population in 2013 in each of the four regions ranges from just over 44,000 to nearly 312,000, as compared to the study area's population in that year of nearly 126,000. The split between urban and rural populations varies among the regions. The Prairie Five Rides and Tri-Valley regions are primarily rural; in the other two regions, urban and rural populations are more evenly balanced. In the study area, 65% of population is located in urban communities and 35% is located in rural areas. Note that the percentage of service hours provided in each region's rural areas is not always in proportion to the percentage of the region's rural population.

The transit services in all four of these regions are mature: three began operation in 1995 or 1996, while Tri-CAP Transit Connection has been in service since 1975. Services in all four regions are predominantly demand-response; a few deviated routes operate in the Tri-CAP and Western Community Transit systems. Services are provided within larger communities; throughout rural areas, sometimes in specific communities on certain days; between communities; and to out-of-county or region destinations, again usually on certain days. Most services operate on weekdays only. All four systems offer rides with volunteer drivers in the rural parts of their service areas. Annual ridership in 2013 ranged from 78,000 for Tri-CAP Transit Connection to 146,000 for Western Community Action/Community Transit.

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Figure 3-1 Summary Information, Peer Regions

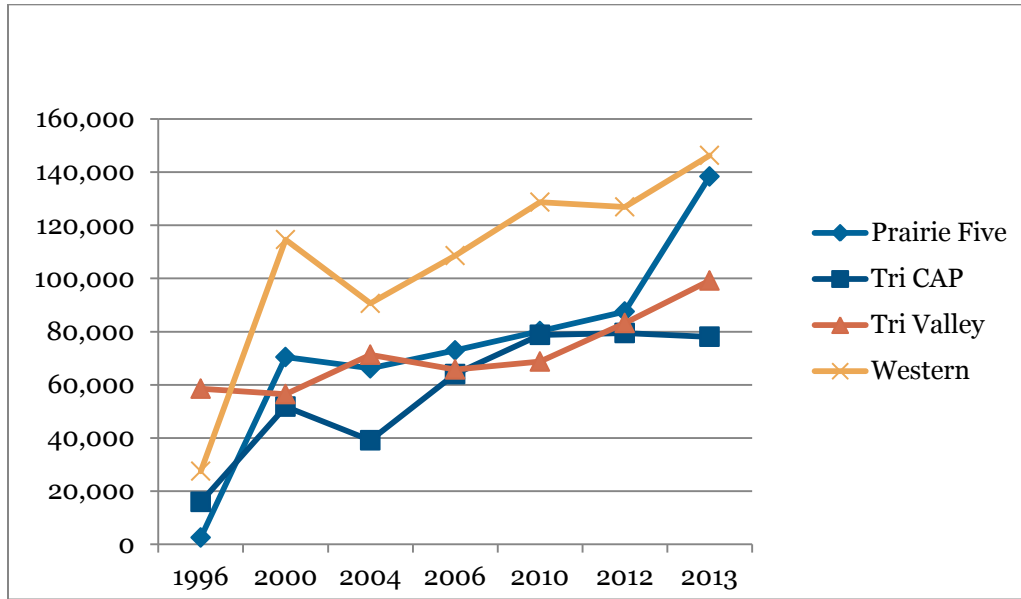
System	2013 Pop	% Urban Pop	% Rural Pop	Type of Service	Year Started	2013 Total Hours of Service	2013 Rural Hours of Service	% Rural Service Hours	2013 Ridership	2013 Operating Expenses
Prairie Five Rides	43,964	25%	75%	Weekday Dial-A-Ride in specific communities; weekday rural Dial-A-Ride throughout 5 counties; out-of-region service on certain days; volunteer rides in rural areas	1995	15,700	5,720	36%	138,345	\$1,317,839
Tri CAP Transit Connection	314,429	57%	43%	Dial-A-Ride service on weekdays; deviated routes connecting cities daily or on weekdays; out-of-county/region service on certain days; volunteer rides in rural areas	1975	27,895	21,695	78%	78,079	\$1,041,792
Tri-Valley Transportation	84,731	30%	70%	Dial-A-Ride in specific communities on weekdays and Saturdays; Dial-A-Ride in and between other communities on certain days; Dial-A-Ride in rural communities on certain days; volunteer rides in rural areas	1996	11,570	1,690	15%	99,221	\$1,070,567
Western Community Action/Community Transit	63,316	41%	59%	2 deviated routes in City of Marshall weekdays and daily; rural Dial-A-Ride in each county on weekdays; Dial-A-Ride between major communities; volunteer rides available	1995	37,642	15,059	40%	146,288	\$1,612,924
Blue Earth/Le Sueur/Nicollet Counties	125,697	65%	35%							

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit and peer system interviews

Figure 3-2 and Figure 3-3 illustrate the transit ridership and operating cost trends experienced by the peer regions between 1996 and 2013.

Although there have been some decreases in ridership from year to year in each system, Figure 3-2 shows that ridership increased significantly from 1996 to 2013.

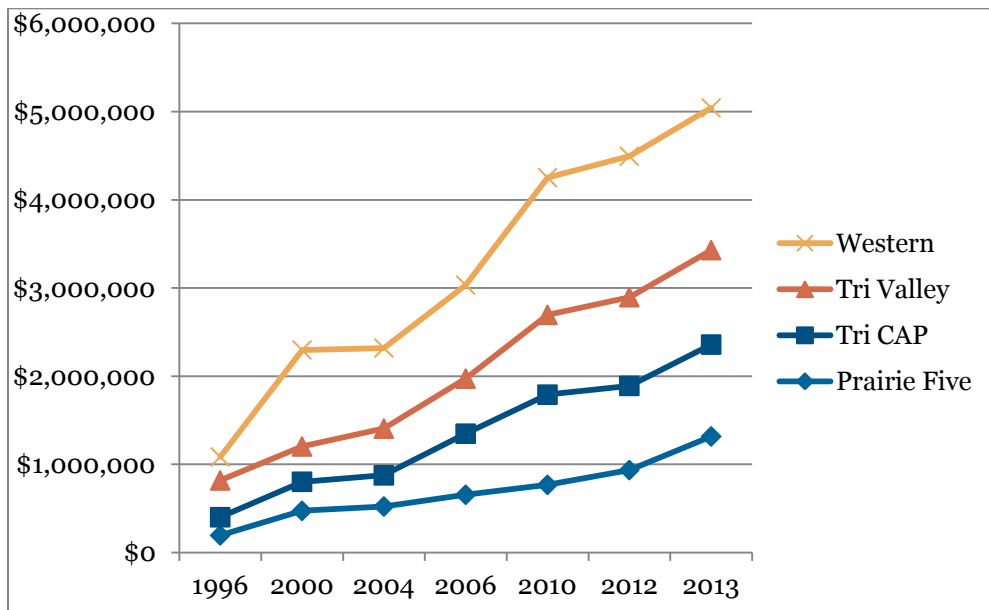
Figure 3-2 Ridership of Peer Systems, 1996-2013



Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

Total operating costs increased more steadily over the period, as shown in Figure 3-3.

Figure 3-3 Total Operating Cost of Peer Systems, 1996-2013



Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

SERVICE DEFINITIONS

There are many types of public transportation services. Each service type has its own characteristics and ideal operating environment. For general fixed-route service, density is the key to determining where, when, and even if a route should operate. The more people that live or work within a particular geographic area, the higher the level of transit service that the area can support. For example, a community with three to six households per acre can generally produce enough ridership activity to justify hourly bus service, while a community with higher population density or with a substantial mix of residential and non-residential uses may be able to support higher service frequency. In less developed areas where population levels are low and residences and/or popular destinations are dispersed, demand-response or flexible service is likely to be the most appropriate way to provide mobility.

Appendix B contains more detailed descriptions of a range of transit and paratransit services. The types of services included in the service scenarios for the study area, and the role that each will play in the region's public transportation network, are summarized below.

- **Structured Dial-A-Ride Service**—designed to offer a basic level of mobility for residents of small communities or rural areas, structured Dial-A-Ride service (also known as zoned Dial-A-Ride, pre-scheduled group trips, or planned demand service) provides advance reservation, door-to-door or curb-to-curb service within a community and/or connections to larger communities or regional destinations on specified days of the week. In the study area service scenarios, structured Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for communities with populations of at least 250, with service operating for six hours per day, three days a week.
- **Community Dial-A-Ride Service**—offering a higher level of service than structured Dial-A-Ride, community Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for larger communities with populations of at least 2,500. Services would operate for 50 hours per week, either 10 hours per day on weekdays or some combination of 8-9 hours per day on weekdays and 7-8 hours on Saturdays. Connections to urban centers within the county could be provided on specified days each week. Community Dial-A-Ride service could also be offered as a county-wide option.
- **Flexible or Deviated Routes**—these routes operate on a fixed route and schedule, but depart from the route to pick up or drop off passengers within a certain distance upon request (typically made in advance). Deviated routes could provide internal service for larger communities (Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit currently operate both Dial-A-Ride and deviated routes in their cities) or regional connections between communities. The frequency of proposal regional deviated routes varies by route, from a minimum of two round trips per day, three days a week up to five round trips per day, Monday through Friday.

LOW LOS SCENARIO

Figure 3-4 summarizes the components of the Low LOS Service Scenario recommended for the Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet county region. As mentioned earlier, this scenario includes the introduction of new structured or community Dial-A-Ride services in unserved communities in each county. Volunteer driver services in the more rural areas are also proposed. No changes to the transit services currently provided in the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur are proposed; it is assumed that the current level of service will continue to operate in those communities.

Following a brief description of each of the service components, estimates of overall ridership, operating and capital cost, and funding sources and amounts are provided for this scenario as a whole.

Figure 3-4 Low Level of Service (LOS) Scenario Overview

Service Type/County	Community Served	2013 Pop	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Structured Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Amboy	534	Basic access to local and county transportation services; access for transit-dependent population groups	3 days/week	6 hours/day	Service hours can be used to provide trips within each community and/or to county's urban centers on specific days.
	Good Thunder	572				
	Madison Lake	1,056				
	Mapleton	1,752				
	Pemberton/St. Clair	1,109				
	Vernon Center	332				
Le Sueur	Cleveland	614				
	Kilkenny	351				
	Waterville	1,864				
Nicollet	Courtland	635				
	Lafayette	504				
	Nicollet	1,126				
Community Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	2,534	Enhanced level of access to local transportation service for transit-dependent groups and general public; opportunity for connections to larger urban centers in county	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	Connections can be provided to each county's urban centers on specific days; service could also be provided on a county-wide basis.
	Lake Crystal	2,537		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Le Sueur	Le Center	2,489		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
	Montgomery	2,944		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Volunteer Driver Services						
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns		Lifeline service for residents of rural communities or those needing transportation that community services cannot provide	As needed		Volunteer driver programs should be administered by a regional Mobility Manager.
Le Sueur						
Nicollet						

Proposed Services

Structured Dial-A-Ride Services

Structured Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for the smaller communities in each county, including:

Blue Earth

- Amboy
- Good Thunder
- Madison Lake
- Mapleton
- Pemberton/St. Clair
- Vernon Center

Le Sueur

- Cleveland
- Kilkenny
- Waterville

Nicollet

- Courtland
- Lafayette
- Nicollet

Service Days and Hours

As noted above, structured Dial-A-Ride should operate three days a week for six hours per day to provide basic transportation service for residents of these small communities. This level of service is similar to that provided in the smaller communities in the peer regions, and is consistent with MnDOT's Regional Trade Center service standards for communities of this size.

Service hours could be used to provide circulation within each community and/or to transport residents to key destinations within each county, such as Mankato/North Mankato, Le Sueur, Le Center, Nicollet, and Saint Peter, which offer more opportunities for shopping, medical care, others types of trips, and access to the regional deviated routes proposed as part of the High LOS scenario. The decision about the exact nature of the services to be offered should be made by local stakeholders.

This type of service is likely to be used primarily by older adults, people with disabilities, individuals with low incomes, and other groups that are dependent on transit services for their mobility.

Community Dial-A-Ride Services

A higher level of Dial-A-Ride service is recommended for the larger (but still small) communities in each county, including:

Blue Earth

- Eagle Lake
- Lake Crystal

Le Sueur

- Le Center
- Montgomery

No new community Dial-A-Ride services are proposed for Nicollet County (although Saint Peter Transit service is assumed to continue) because no communities fall into the population range for this type of service.

Service Days and Hours

More extensive days and hours of service are proposed for community Dial-A-Ride services than for structured Dial-A-Ride services. In the peer regions, Dial-A-Ride service in specific communities or throughout counties generally operates on weekdays for 10-12 hours per day; in two of the systems, Dial-A-Ride service is available for eight or nine hours per day. Tri-Valley Transportation also offers six hours of Dial-A-Ride service on Saturdays.

Presently, Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit operate eight and 9.5 hours of Dial-A-Ride service, respectively, on weekdays. Saint Peter Transit also offers service for seven hours on Saturday. To remain consistent with the level of service already provided in some communities as well as to follow the examples of the peer regions, the Low LOS scenario for the study area includes 50 hours per week of Dial-A-Ride service per community. At the discretion of local stakeholders, service could be provided on weekdays only for 10 hours per day, or for a shorter span of service on both weekdays and Saturdays—8.5 hours on weekdays and 7.5 hours on Saturdays, for example.

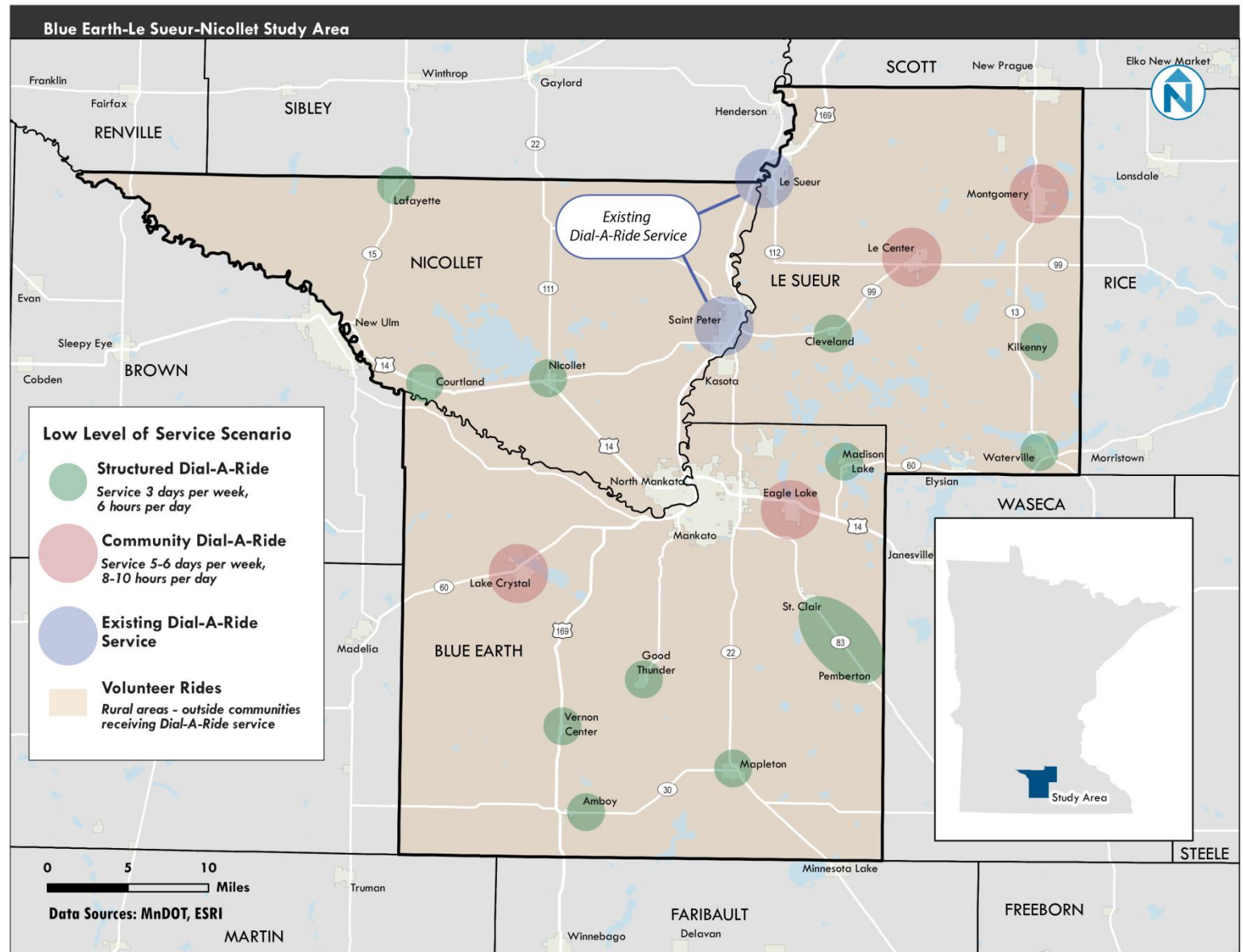
Community Dial-A-Ride service would provide access to more local transportation service for not only transit-dependent groups, but also the general public. This type of service would also allow residents of these smaller communities to travel to larger urban centers in their counties, such as Mankato/North Mankato and Le Sueur, most likely on specific days of the week.

Volunteer Driver Services

VINE Faith in Action currently manages a volunteer driver network that provides rides to older adults and people with disabilities in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties with New Freedom funding from MnDOT. This service (together with the People to Jobs demand-response service operated by VINE with Job Access and Reverse Commute funding from MnDOT, which does not utilize volunteer drivers) is a key component of the existing transit network in the three counties and has a role in a new regional transit system as well, to make transportation available to rural area residents and/or transit-dependent riders for essential trips. All of the peer systems reviewed offer rides with volunteer drivers to residents of rural areas or those who need to travel outside of the available days/hours of Dial-A-Ride or deviated route service. Consequently, the Low LOS scenario includes the operation of a volunteer driver program throughout the three-county region, administered by a regional Mobility Manager.

Figure 3-5 is a map depicting the services proposed by community in the Low LOS Scenario.

Figure 3-5 Study Area Map Depicting Low LOS Scenario



HIGH LOS SCENARIO

Figure 3-6 summarizes the services proposed for the High LOS scenario. This scenario includes all services proposed as part of the Low LOS scenario, with the addition of seven deviated routes to connect smaller communities with larger urban areas in each county and the region. As in the Low LOS scenario, all transit services currently provided in the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur are assumed to continue.

Proposed Services

Regional Deviated Routes

During meetings with transportation providers and stakeholders in the study area earlier in this project, the need for access to regional destinations—particularly Mankato—from other communities in the three-county area was mentioned repeatedly. The larger communities in the region offer opportunities for employment, shopping for essentials such as groceries and medications, health care, and other types of services and activities that are not available in the smaller towns and rural areas.

The set of potential intercounty routes presented here were first identified as part of the Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study, which was completed in June 2012 by the Nelson\Nygaard consulting team. These regional transportation strategies were confirmed during discussions with regional stakeholders and the findings of the Existing Conditions report as part of the current Transit Restructuring Plan.

These routes represent those that are most likely to succeed based on travel patterns, population centers, and location of major employers or other activity centers. Potential routes include:

Blue Earth

- Eagle Lake and Madison Lake to Mankato
- Mapleton to Mankato
- Lake Crystal to Mankato
- Amboy to Mankato

Le Sueur

- Saint Peter to Le Sueur (shared with Nicollet County)
- Saint Peter to Mankato (shared with Nicollet County)
-

Nicollet

- Saint Peter to Le Sueur (shared with Le Sueur County)
- Saint Peter to Mankato (shared with Le Sueur County)
- New Ulm to Mankato (via Nicollet; shared with Brown County)

Although these services were envisioned as fixed routes in the Mankato transit redesign study, operation as deviated routes is proposed as part of the High LOS scenario to accommodate both the general public and people with disabilities with one service rather than with separate fixed-route and ADA paratransit services.

Transit Restructuring Plan | Service Design Alternatives
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Figure 3-6 High Level of Service (LOS) Scenario Overview

Service Type/County	Community Served	2013 Pop	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Structured Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Amboy	534	Basic access to local and county transportation services; access for transit-dependent population groups	3 days/week	6 hours/day	Service hours can be used to provide trips within community and/or to county's urban centers on specific days.
	Good Thunder	572				
	Madison Lake	1,056				
	Mapleton	1,752				
	Pemberton/St. Clair	1,109				
	Vernon Center	332				
Le Sueur	Cleveland	614				
	Kilkenny	351				
	Waterville	1,864				
Nicollet	Courtland	635				
	Lafayette	504				
	Nicollet	1,126				
Community Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	2,534	Enhanced level of access to local transportation service for transit-dependent groups and general public; opportunity for connections to larger urban centers in county	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	Connections can be provided to county's urban centers on specific days; service could also be provided on a county-wide basis.
	Lake Crystal	2,537		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Le Sueur	Le Center	2,489		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
	Montgomery	2,944		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Volunteer Driver Services						
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns		Lifeline service for residents of rural communities or those needing transportation that community services are not able to provide	As needed		Volunteer driver programs could be administered by a regional Mobility Manager.
Le Sueur						
Nicollet						

Transit Restructuring Plan | Service Design Alternatives
MnDOT

Service Type/County	Community Served	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Deviated Fixed Routes					
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	Access to important regional destinations--Mankato, Saint Peter, and New Ulm (Brown County)--for shopping, health care, and employment	M-F	1 round trip per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	
	Mapleton to Mankato		One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	
	Lake Crystal to Mankato		M-F	1 round trip per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	
	Amboy to Mankato		One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter		M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Mankato		M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato		M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Mankato		M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur		M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips

Coordination of service planning and implementation between a new regional transit system and the Greater Mankato Transit System to ensure that new and existing services complement each other and are not duplicative will obviously be very important. To date, MTS has not been a focus of the project, but will be included in discussions about moving forward with the development of a regional system in the future. Figure 3-8 shows the regional routes that are proposed for the study area together with the other components of the High LOS scenario. Each route is described in more detail below.

Eagle Lake and Madison Lake to Mankato

While Eagle Lake and Madison Lake are small communities, many services and jobs for residents in these communities are located in the Mankato area. The 2012 Greater Mankato Transit Study found that approximately 750 Mankato area workers live in either Eagle Lake or Madison Lake. In addition to employment opportunities, residents of Eagle Lake and Madison Lake need to travel to Mankato to access shopping, medical appointments, and educational opportunities.

VINE currently provides volunteer drivers and People to Jobs transportation services to Eagle Lake and volunteer drivers to Madison Lake; however, these services are restricted to older adults and people with disabilities and are not intended to serve the general public. According to ridership data, approximately 4% of the volunteer trips travel from Eagle Lake into Mankato.

Description

This route would operate from Mankato via the same alignment as the Mankato to Saint Peter Route:

- 2nd/Cherry (Downtown Transit Center)
- MSU Campus (Nelson Hall)
- New Mankato Transit System and Land to Air Bus Facility (Victory Drive/Hoffman Road)
- Mayo Clinic (Marsh and Oak Lawn)
- River Hills Mall

Outside of Mankato, two stops are proposed:

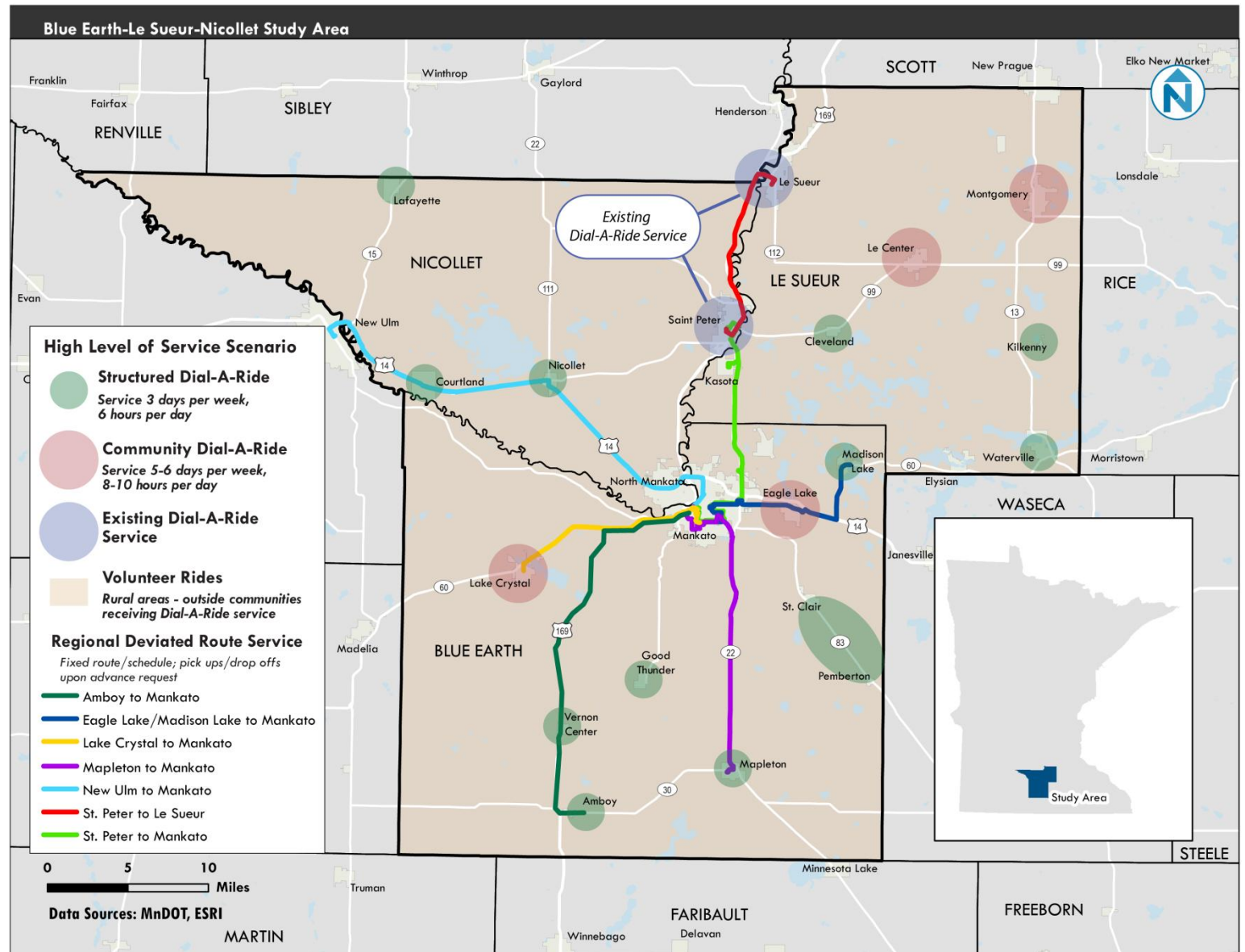
- Eagle Lake (Parkway Avenue and 2nd Street)
- Madison Lake (along Walnut Avenue between Main and 1st)

Based on the one-way route distance, which is about 17 miles, local stops in Mankato and in Eagle Lake and Madison Lake, it is estimated that a single one-way trip can be made in about 30 minutes (see Figure 3-7). Initially, two weekday one-way trips are proposed for each weekday, one inbound trip in the morning and one outbound trip in the evening. No weekend service is proposed on this route.

Figure 3-7 Eagle Lake and Madison Lake to Mankato Conceptual Schedule

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Trips	Frequency
Weekday			
AM Peak	7:00 a.m. – 7:45 a.m.	One inbound	Single trip
Midday	-	-	-
PM Peak	5:15 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	One outbound	Single trip
Weekend	-	-	-

Figure 3-8 Study Area Map Depicting High LOS Scenario



Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that a 12-passenger vehicle with capacity for 2-3 wheelchairs would be sufficient.

Mapleton to Mankato

Located about 20 miles south of Mankato, Mapleton is one of the larger rural communities in Blue Earth County with about 1,700 residents. According to the findings of the 2012 Greater Mankato Transit Plan, the Mapleton Community Home, which has approximately 120 employees, is one of the larger Blue Earth County employers located outside of Mankato.

Additionally, regional stakeholders noted that subsidized housing was recently built in Mapleton, but these new residences are not connected to jobs in Mankato by public transportation. There is also a need to connect Mapleton residents with shopping and medical destinations within Mankato.

Description

In Mankato, several stops would be served:

- 2nd/Cherry (Downtown Transit Center)
- MSU Campus (Nelson Hall)
- New Mankato Transit System and Land to Air Bus Facility (Victory Drive/Hoffman Road)
- Mayo Clinic (Marsh and Oak Lawn)

In Mapleton, it is proposed that the route provide deviated service to pick up individuals at their homes. It is likely that two destinations would be requested frequently:

- Mapleton Community Home (Troendle Street)
- Main Street (between 1st and 4th Street)

Based on the one-way route distance, which is about 21 miles, and relatively non-stop service between Mankato and Mapleton, it is estimated that a round trip can be made in 75 minutes (see Figure 3-9). Initially, two round trips are proposed one day a week (such as Tuesday or Thursday). No weekend service is proposed on this route.

Figure 3-9 Mapleton to Mankato Conceptual Schedule

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Round Trips	Frequency
Weekday (One day only)			
AM Peak	7:00 a.m.– 8:15 a.m.	1	Single trip
Midday	-	-	-
PM Peak	3:00 p.m.– 4:15 p.m.	1	Single trip
Weekend	-	-	-

Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that a 12-passenger vehicle with capacity for 2-3 wheelchairs would be sufficient.

Lake Crystal to Mankato

As with Eagle Lake and Madison Lake, many services and jobs for Lake Crystal residents are located in the Mankato area. According to the 2012 Greater Mankato Transit Plan, approximately 500 Mankato area workers live in Lake Crystal. Additionally, Lake Crystal has several major destinations including a specialty grocery store and a recreational center. Lake Crystal also has recently built low-income housing that lacks public transportation connections to Mankato where many residents are employed. It is also likely that many other types of trips (such as those made by students at MSU), would be generated by Lake Crystal.

Description

In Mankato, two stops would be served:

- 2nd/Cherry (Downtown Transit Center)
- MSU Campus (Nelson Hall)

Outside of Mankato, two stops in Lake Crystal are proposed:

- Main Street between Blue Earth Street and Humphrey Street
- Main Street and Highway 60

Based on the one-way route distance, which is about 12 miles, and relatively non-stop service along Highway 60, it is estimated that a single one-way trip can be made in 20-30 minutes (see Figure 3-10). Initially, two weekday one-way trips are proposed five days a week, one inbound trip in the morning and one outbound trip in the evening. No weekend service is proposed on this route.

Figure 3-10 Lake Crystal to Mankato Conceptual Schedule

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Trips	Frequency
Weekday			
AM Peak	7:00 a.m.– 7:30 a.m.	One inbound	Single trip
Midday	-	-	-
PM Peak	5:00 p.m.– 5:30 p.m.	One outbound	Single trip
Weekend	-	-	-

Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that a 12-passenger vehicle with capacity for 2-3 wheelchairs would be sufficient.

Amboy to Mankato

Amboy is a small community of about 500 residents located 25 miles south of Mankato on Highway 30 (just east of Highway 169). Two smaller communities are also located along the Highway 169 corridor: Vernon Center with about 330 residents and Garden City with about 250 residents. While there are no large employers located in Amboy, Vernon Center or Garden City, the area is isolated and in need of some type of transit service to Mankato. Residents in these areas also need to travel to Mankato for medical appointments and periodic shopping trips.

Description

Several specific stop locations along the route include:

- Downtown Amboy (likely along Main Street)
- Vernon Center (near Main and West Streets)
- Garden City (near Main and Washington Streets)

Based on the one-way route distance, which is about 25 miles, and only two other stops between Amboy and Mankato, it is estimated that a round trip can be made in about 75 minutes (see Figure 3-11). Initially, one round trip is proposed one day a week. It is recommended that this service operate on Wednesday to offer connections for family members visiting Welcome Manor Family Services in Garden City. No weekend service is proposed on this route.

Figure 3-11 Amboy to Mankato Conceptual Service

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Round Trips	Frequency
Weekday (One day only)			
AM Peak	7:00 a.m.– 8:15 a.m.	1	Single trip
Midday	-	-	-
PM Peak	-	-	-
Weekend	-	-	-

Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that a small van that can accommodate one wheelchair would be sufficient for this service.

Saint Peter to Le Sueur

As a potential extension of the Mankato to Saint Peter service, the route could be extended to Le Sueur. Currently, Le Sueur Transit does not travel outside of city borders. The City of Le Sueur has several large employers and medical facilities and is one of the largest communities in Le Sueur County. In addition, the 2012 Greater Mankato Transit Study established that about 11% of workers in Le Sueur County travel south to Mankato or North Mankato for their jobs and 7% travel south to Saint Peter. Le Sueur residents need to travel to Saint Peter or Mankato to access medical appointments and shopping; many low-income residents have difficulty accessing locations outside of Le Sueur because public transit is not available.

This route would also be useful for Saint Peter residents who wish to travel to Le Sueur, but the majority of the riders would most likely be Le Sueur residents traveling to Saint Peter or to Mankato via the Saint Peter to Mankato regional route described below. The cost of operating this route could be shared between Nicollet and Le Sueur Counties (or between the two cities) on the basis of ridership from each area.

Description

From Saint Peter, the regional route to Le Sueur would continue north on Highway 169 and have two stops in Le Sueur:

- Downtown (Bridge Street and 2nd)
- Minnesota Valley Health Center/Mayo Health (S. 4th Street and Davis)

Based on the one-way distance, which is about 13 miles, and the assumed non-stop service between Saint Peter and Le Sueur along Highway 169, a single round trip can be made in about 45 minutes (see Figure 3-12). No weekend service is proposed on this route.

Figure 3-12 Saint Peter to Le Sueur Conceptual Schedule

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Round Trips	Frequency
Weekday			
AM Peak	7:15 a.m.– 8:00 a.m.	1	Single trip
Midday	12:15 p.m.– 1:00 p.m.	1	Single trip
PM Peak	5:30 p.m.– 6:15 p.m.	1	Single trip
Weekend	-	-	-

Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that a 12-passenger vehicle with capacity for 2-3 wheelchairs would be sufficient.

Saint Peter to Mankato

While the Mankato/North Mankato area is by far the largest population and employment destination in the three-county area, the next largest community in the study area is Saint Peter. Saint Peter is not only close to the Mankato area along the heavily traveled Highway 169 corridor, but is home to several large activity centers, including a main street with shopping, several regional employers, and Gustavus Adolphus College. Regional stakeholders noted that many Saint Peter residents, especially low-income workers with temporary jobs, commute to Mankato for work or need to travel there for medical appointments and other errands.

Saint Peter Transit provides deviated route and demand-response service within the cities of Saint Peter and Kasoto, but the service does not currently connect to Mankato or the nearby City of Le Sueur.

This route is likely to be used by the following groups of riders for access to Mankato:

- Residents of Saint Peter
- Residents of other Nicollet County communities who could use structured or community Dial-A-Ride service to Saint Peter to access the regional route
- Residents of Le Sueur
- Residents of other Le Sueur County communities who could use structured or community Dial-A-Ride service to Le Sueur to access the regional Le Sueur/Saint Peter route and this route to Mankato

The cost of operating this route would be shared by Nicollet and Le Sueur counties on the basis of ridership from each area.

Description

The regional route is proposed to start from Mankato's Downtown Transit Center at 2nd and Cherry. From here, the route would serve several key regional destinations in Mankato:

- MSU campus
- Mankato Transit System Bus Facility on Victory Drive/Hoffman Drive

- Mayo Clinic
- River Hills Mall

From Mankato, the route would continue north on Highway 22 and serve the Wickersham Clinic, which was identified by the 2012 Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study as an important destination that is currently not served by public transportation. The route would then continue north on Highway 22 and serve downtown Kasota before merging onto Highway 169 in Saint Peter. Several stop locations are proposed for Saint Peter, including two stops on Highway 169 and a stop at Gustavus Adolphus College.

Findings from stakeholder outreach established that there is a demand for commuting between Mankato and Saint Peter, as well as other travel needs between the two communities for shopping, medical appointments, and social engagements. For these reasons, several weekday AM peak and PM peak round trips, a single weekday midday trip, and three Saturday round trips are proposed.

Based on the one-way distance for this route, which is about 22 miles, it is assumed that a single round trip can be made in about 90 minutes (see Figure 3-13). To utilize only one vehicle for this service, therefore, 90 minute frequencies are proposed on this route.

Figure 3-13 Saint Peter to Mankato Conceptual Schedule

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Round Trips	Frequency
Weekday			
AM Peak	6:30 a.m.– 9:00 a.m.	2	90 minutes
Midday	11:30 a.m.– 1:00 p.m.	1	Single trip
PM Peak	3:30 p.m.– 6:00 p.m.	2	90 minutes
Weekend	10:00 a.m.– 2:30 p.m.	3	90 minutes

Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that initially a 12-passenger vehicle with capacity for 2-3 wheelchairs would be sufficient, but a larger vehicle could be considered if ridership increases.

New Ulm to Mankato

New Ulm one of the larger communities within close proximity to the Mankato area and the two areas are connected by a major regional corridor (Highway 14). Due to New Ulm's location on the border between Brown and Nicollet counties, stakeholders providing input to this project noted that it is more convenient for residents of western Nicollet County communities such as Lafayette and Courtland to travel to New Ulm for services and activities than to locations within the study area. Findings from the 2012 Greater Mankato Transit Study show that about 6% of Nicollet County residents work in New Ulm. It is also likely that a significant portion of New Ulm residents work in Mankato. Affordable housing is also located in New Ulm and lacks public transportation connections to employment, medical, and shopping destinations.

The cost of operating this route would be shared between Nicollet and Brown counties on the basis of ridership.

It should be noted that in the past, inter-county service was attempted by Brown County Heartland Express along the heavily travelled Highway 14 corridor from New Ulm in Brown County through Nicollet County to Mankato, with state and/or federal funding. Service was not successful, and was only in operation for about eight months. Only two round trips per day were offered (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), which was not enough service to satisfy the needs; at least three round trips per day would have been necessary for a successful service. Currently, Brown County Heartland Express connects with Land to Air service in Mankato for trips to Rochester traveling along Highway 15 through Nicollet County and Blue Earth County, but does not serve New Ulm.

Description

This route would operate from downtown New Ulm to downtown Mankato, largely via Highway 14. One or two stops would be made in New Ulm. Between New Ulm and Mankato, the route would stop in Nicollet and then continue non-stop to 3rd Avenue and Riverfront Drive in Mankato before terminating at the downtown transit center (2nd and Cherry).

Based on the one-way distance, which is about 31 miles, and the relatively non-stop service along Highway 14, it is estimated that a single round trip can be made in about 120 minutes. Initially, three weekday round trips are proposed for each weekday, in the morning peak, mid-day, and evening peak. No weekend service is proposed on this route.

Residents of Nicollet County could access the route in Nicollet as it returns from Mankato on the morning or mid-day trip for service to New Ulm, and return to Nicollet on the afternoon trip toward Mankato (see Figure 3-14). Individuals living in Courtland or Lafayette could use the structured Dial-A-Ride service for transportation to Nicollet; Nicollet residents could use their Dial-A-Ride service to reach the regional bus stop in the city. Residents of the rural areas of the county could utilize the volunteer driver program for access to this route.

Figure 3-14 New Ulm to Mankato Conceptual Schedule

Days of Service	Hours of Service	Round Trips	Frequency
Weekday			
AM Peak	6:30 a.m.– 8:30 a.m.	1	Single trip
Midday	12:00 – 2:30 p.m.	1	Single trip
PM Peak	4:30 p.m.– 6:30 p.m.	1	Single trip
Weekend	-	-	-

Capital Needs

One vehicle would be required to operate this route. It is anticipated that a 12-passenger vehicle with capacity for 2-3 wheelchairs would be sufficient.

RIDERSHIP, COST, AND FUNDING ESTIMATES

Estimates of ridership for the components of the Low and High LOS scenarios were developed using the experience of the four peer systems and the current transportation providers in the study area as a guide, as described below. Estimates of operating and capital costs, and amounts and sources of funding, were also prepared, and checked against the experiences of the peer systems for reasonableness.

Ridership

Total annual ridership served by each of the four peer systems for selected years between 1996 and 2013 is shown in Figure 3-15.

Figure 3-15 Annual Ridership of Peer Systems, 1996-2013

System	1996	2000	2004	2006	2010	2012	2013	% Change 1996-2000	% Change 2000-2013
Prairie Five Rides	2,572	70,430	66,177	72,940	80,207	87,556	138,345	2638.3%	96.4%
Tri CAP Transit Connection	15,962	51,801	39,126	64,014	78,781	79,474	78,079	224.5%	50.7%
Tri-Valley Transportation	58,559	56,515	71,335	65,779	68,754	83,248	99,221	-3.5%	75.6%
Western Community Action/ Community Transit	27,525	114,620	90,599	108,586	128,708	126,907	146,288	316.4%	27.6%

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

Prairie Five Rides, Tri-CAP, and Western Community Transit all experienced significant increases in ridership between 1996 and 2000, which were the first few years of operation for Prairie Five Rides and Western Community Transit (Tri-CAP's service began in 1975). Tri-Valley Transportation was the only system for which ridership decreased slightly over that period. Over time, ridership grew for all four systems. Between 2000 and 2013, each system served significantly more riders. Increases ranged from 28% for Western Community Transit to 96% for Prairie Five Rides.

To scale the ridership growth experiences of the four peer systems to the Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet County area, Figure 3-16 shows trips per capita by year for each of the regions.

All four systems provided less than one trip per capita in 1996. Tri-CAP Transit Connection maintained a similar rate of trips per capita over the period, as both population and ridership increased. Tri-Valley Transportation also provided a fairly consistent number of transit trips per capita over the period, increasing from .7 in 1996 to 1.2 in 2013. The other two systems experienced a reasonably large growth in trips per capita. Prairie Five Rides' trips per capita increased from .1 to 3.1, largely due to increases in ridership, as population levels decreased slightly over the period. Western Community Action's Community Transit also provided significantly more trips per capita in 2013—2.3 as compared to .4 in 1996, while population declined over the period.

These experiences set the level of expected ridership for Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties at less than one trip per capita when service is first implemented. Over time, ridership may either remain fairly constant, or increase to two or three trips per capita.

Figure 3-16 Population and Ridership of Peer Regions, 1996-2013

System	1996 Pop	1996 Ridership	Rides/ Capita	2000 Pop	2000 Ridership	Rides/ Capita	2010 Pop	2010 Ridership	Rides/ Capita	2013 Pop	2013 Ridership	Rides/ Capita
Prairie Five Rides	50,571	2,572	0.1	50,011	70,430	1.4	45,190	80,207	1.8	43,964	138,345	3.1
Tri CAP Transit Connection	247,042	15,962	0.1	263,521	51,801	0.2	310,790	78,781	0.3	314,429	78,079	0.2
Tri-Valley Transportation	88,776	58,559	0.7	85,747	56,515	0.7	84,570	68,754	0.8	84,731	99,221	1.2
Western Community Action/Community Transit	67,159	27,525	0.4	65,675	114,620	1.7	63,869	128,708	2.0	63,316	146,288	2.3
Average		26,155	.3		73,342	1.0		89,113	1.2		115,483	1.7

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

Figure 3-17 and Figure 3-18 show the application of the peer systems' ridership rates to the study area in two different ways. Both tables assume that Low LOS scenario—structured and community Dial-A-Ride and volunteer driver services—would be implemented in the short term, and the regional deviated route services that are part of the High LOS scenario would be implemented by 2020.

In Figure 3-17, the low and high trips per capita rates from the peer systems during 1996, their initial year (except for Tri-CAP Transit Connection, which was a mature service at that point) are applied to the current population of each of the study area counties to calculate low and high estimates of ridership at the start of the new regional transit system's service. Low and high trips/capita rates from the peer systems in 2000, about four years after their implementation, are applied to estimates of the study area counties' population projections for 2020. Peer systems' low and high trip rates from 2010 are applied to county population projections for 2025, and rates from 2013 are applied to population projections for 2030 to estimate ridership ranges as the new regional system matures.

Low estimates of ridership calculated in this way range from 12,653 in 2016 to 26,687 in 2030. High estimates begin at 88,573 in 2016 and increase to 413,655 in 2030. There is obviously a great difference between the low and high estimates.

Figure 3-17 Application of Peer System Ridership Rates: Method 1

Year	Service in Operation	County	Population	Trips/Capita Low	Trips/Capita High	Estimated Ridership - Low	Estimated Ridership - High
2016	Low LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	63,664			6,366	44,565
		Le Sueur	29,905			2,991	20,934
		Nicollet	32,964			3,296	23,075
		Total Service Area	126,533	0.1	0.7	12,653	88,573
2020	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	64,455			12,891	109,574
		Le Sueur	31,161			6,232	52,974
		Nicollet	33,722			6,744	57,327
		Total Service Area	129,338	0.2	1.7	25,868	219,875
2025	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	65,535			19,661	131,070
		Le Sueur	32,078			9,623	64,156
		Nicollet	34,148			10,244	68,296
		Total Service Area	131,761	0.3	2	39,528	263,522
2030	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	66,021			13,204	204,665
		Le Sueur	32,922			6,584	102,058
		Nicollet	34,494			6,899	106,931
		Total Service Area	133,437	0.2	3.1	26,687	413,655

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit and Minnesota State Demographic Center

Figure 3-18 shows the application of average trip rates to the study area's population projections at the same time points. This method results in one ridership estimate per year rather than a range, and smoothes out variation among the peer systems' ridership growth. Adding the current ridership of Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit to the estimates of ridership for the new services to be implemented by the regional transit system results in ridership estimates that appear more realistic than the range of estimates generated by the first method.

Figure 3-18 Application of Peer System Ridership Rates: Method 2

Year	Service in Operation	County	Population	Average Trips/Capita - Peers	Estimated Ridership	Current Ridership (2014)	Current + Estimated New Ridership
2016	Low LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	63,664		19,099		19,099
		Le Sueur	29,905		8,972	27,963	36,935
		Nicollet	32,964		9,889	59,472	69,361
		Total Service Area	126,533	0.3	37,960	87,435	125,395
2020	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	64,455		64,455		64,455
		Le Sueur	31,161		31,161	27,963	59,124
		Nicollet	33,722		33,722	59,472	93,194
		Total Service Area	129,338	1.0	129,338	87,435	216,773
2025	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	65,535		78,642		78,642
		Le Sueur	32,078		38,494	27,963	66,457
		Nicollet	34,148		40,978	59,472	100,450
		Total Service Area	131,761	1.2	158,113	87,435	245,548
2030	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	66,021		112,236		112,236
		Le Sueur	32,922		55,967	27,963	83,930
		Nicollet	34,494		58,640	59,472	118,112
		Total Service Area	133,437	1.7	226,843	87,435	314,278

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit and Minnesota State Demographic Center

However, application of the same average trips per capita rate to each of the three counties' populations does not result in high enough trip estimates for Le Sueur and Nicollet counties to account for not only ridership on the new High LOS scenario but also the high levels of ridership that are currently achieved by Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit's Dial-A-Ride and deviated route services. Therefore, trips/capita rates were adjusted by county to reflect both the average growth of the peer systems' ridership over time and the riders presently using the existing transit services in the region. The results of these adjustments are shown in Figure 3-19.

Figure 3-19 Application of Peer System Ridership Rates: Method 3

Year	Service in Operation	County	Population	Average Trips/Capita - Adjusted Peer Rates	Estimated Ridership	Current Ridership (2014)	Current + Estimated New Ridership
2016	Low LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	63,664	0.4	25,466		25,466
		Le Sueur	29,905	0.5	14,953	27,963	42,916
		Nicollet	32,964	0.3	9,889	59,472	69,361
		Total Service Area	126,533	0.4	37,960	87,435	137,742
2020	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	64,455	0.6	38,673		38,673
		Le Sueur	31,161	1.8	56,090		56,090
		Nicollet	33,722	2.5	84,305		84,305
		Total Service Area	129,338	1.6	179,068	0	179,068
2025	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	65,535	0.8	52,428		52,428
		Le Sueur	32,078	2.1	67,364		67,364
		Nicollet	34,148	2.5	85,370		85,370
		Total Service Area	131,761	1.8	192,193	0	192,193
2030	High LOS Scenario	Blue Earth	66,021	0.8	64,040		64,040
		Le Sueur	32,922	2	77,367		77,367
		Nicollet	34,494	2.5	98,308		98,308
		Total Service Area	133,437	2.1	239,715	0	239,715

Estimated ridership for the study area's proposed new regional transit system using peer system method #3 begins at approximately 138,000 for the first year of service. After the implementation of the regional deviated fixed-route services in 2020, ridership is projected to increase significantly to over 179,000, mirroring the increase in the peer systems' ridership, which is assumed to be at least partly due to similar expansions of service. Ridership growth continues over time, with estimates of over 205,000 and nearly 240,000 trips in 2025 and 2030, respectively.

Operating and Capital Expenses

Low LOS Scenario

Estimated operating and capital costs for the components of the Low LOS scenario are presented in Figure 3-20.

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Figure 3-20 Estimated Operating and Capital Costs, Low LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Lafayette			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Nicollet			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed	NA	NA	\$62,920	NA	
Le Sueur					\$31,460		
Nicollet					\$26,620		
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				10,816	5,616	\$551,616	\$480,000
Le Sueur				8,008	2,808	\$408,408	\$320,000
Nicollet				2,808	2,808	\$169,828	\$160,000
Grand Total				21,632	11,232	\$1,129,852	\$960,000

The total annual operating cost of this set of services is estimated to be \$1,129,852. The share estimated for each county, based on number of service hours, is:

- Blue Earth: \$551,616
- Le Sueur: \$408,408
- Nicollet: \$169,828

As a point of reference, annual operating costs for Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit's Dial-A-Ride and deviated route service in their communities in 2014 were \$318,410 and \$227,446, respectively.

Total capital costs for this scenario are estimated to be \$960,000. Each county's share of that expense is:

- Blue Earth: \$480,000
- Le Sueur: \$320,000
- Nicollet: \$160,000

Cost Assumptions

The following assumptions were used to develop these cost estimates:

Structured Dial-A-Ride Service

- Cost per vehicle service hour is \$51, the average cost/hour of all rural systems in Minnesota in 2014, as reported in MnDOT's *2014 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota's Public Transit Systems, February 2015*
- All service hours in these communities are considered rural service hours. Rural service hours make up nearly 52% of the service hours in this scenario.
- Service in each community can be provided using a lift-equipped cutaway vehicle similar to those used by Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit, at an approximate cost of \$80,000 each. Since service is proposed to operate only three days a week, vehicles could be shared between communities in close proximity to each other.

Community Dial-A-Ride Service

- Cost per vehicle service hour is \$51
- Service can be provided by lift-equipped cutaway vehicles at an approximate cost of \$80,000 each. Because service is proposed for 5-6 days per week, each community will require its own vehicle.
- None of the service hours provided in these communities are considered to be rural service hours.
- Operating and capital costs associated with the services currently provided by Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit are not included in these estimates.

Volunteer Driver Services

- Service will be available to residents of rural communities outside of cities and towns in each county, in place of the volunteer rides provided through VINE to eligible residents of Blue Earth and Nicollet counties. Funding for this component of the new regional transit system would replace the New Freedom funding provided to VINE through MnDOT. Volunteer rides provided by VINE under contract to Blue Earth and Nicollet County departments and agencies would continue to operate as they do at present.

- Volunteer drivers will use their own vehicles and will be reimbursed for mileage and incidental expenses as is currently the policy of VINE's volunteer driver program.
- Average cost per volunteer ride is \$22, based on VINE's cost per trip for rides provided in 2014 with New Freedom funding
- To calculate total volunteer driver cost per county, VINE's 2014 ridership in 2014 for older adults and people with disabilities in Blue Earth and Nicollet counties was increased by approximately 25% to account for the addition of Le Sueur County, based on the proportion of the region's population that resides in Le Sueur County. Trips were allocated to each county in proportion to its share of the region's population.

High LOS Scenario

Operating and capital cost estimates for the services proposed for the High LOS Scenario are presented in Figure 3-21. As noted above, this scenario includes all of the components of the Low LOS Scenario plus seven deviated fixed routes to offer connections to urban centers within and between counties. Cost estimates shown in Figure 3-20 for structured Dial-A-Ride, community Dial-A-Ride, and volunteer driver services are identical to the table above that shows Low LOS scenario cost estimates.

Figure 3-21 Operating and Capital Cost Estimates, High LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Lafayette			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Nicollet			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000

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Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed		NA	NA	\$62,920	NA
Le Sueur						\$31,460	
Nicollet						\$26,620	
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Mapleton to Mankato	One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Amboy to Mankato	One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$56,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$32,000
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	1,700	0	\$86,700	\$80,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m.Saturday3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$48,000
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$24,000
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				11,616	5,616	\$592,416	\$800,000
Le Sueur				9,308	2,808	\$430,708	\$408,000
Nicollet				6,008	2,808	\$333,028	\$312,000
Grand Total				26,932	11,232	\$1,356,152	\$1,520,000

The total annual operating cost of this set of services is estimated to be \$1,356,152. The share estimated for each county, based on number of service hours, is:

- Blue Earth: \$592,416
- Le Sueur: \$430,708
- Nicollet: \$333,028

Total capital costs for this scenario are estimated to be \$1,520,000. Each county's share of that expense is:

- Blue Earth: \$800,000
- Le Sueur: \$408,000
- Nicollet: \$312,000

Note that when a final set of services is selected for implementation, capital costs associated with the High LOS scenario may be reduced, as there are likely to be opportunities for using vehicles to provide more than one service. For example, the vehicles used to provide community Dial-A-Ride service in Eagle Lake or Lake Crystal could also be used to operate the deviated fixed-route service from those communities to Mankato.

Cost Assumptions

Assumptions underlying the development of cost estimates for regional deviated fixed-route services are as follows:

- Operating cost per hour is assumed to be \$51. The communities to be served by the deviated routes are either rural or small urban. The average cost per hour for small urban systems in Minnesota in 2014, as reported in MnDOT's *2014 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota's Public Transit Systems, February 2015*, was \$40; \$51 is used here for conservative estimates of operating cost.
- With the exception of the New Ulm to Mankato route, route running times and proposed service frequencies were developed as part of the Greater Mankato Transit Redesign Study. A higher level of service is proposed here for the New Ulm route to reflect input from stakeholders regarding the need for service between Nicollet County and New Ulm and previous experience with service between those points.
- Service hour estimates were increased by approximately 10% to accommodate deviations.
- None of these service hours are assumed to be rural service hours. Rural service hours account for 30% of the total in this scenario.
- Lift-equipped cutaway vehicles will be sufficient to accommodate demand on these routes. The unit cost of a vehicle is assumed to be approximately \$80,000.
- The operating and capital costs of routes that would be utilized by residents of more than one county would be allocated between counties on the basis of ridership. This analysis allocates 70% of the cost of the Saint Peter to Le Sueur route to Le Sueur County and 30% to Nicollet County because more ridership from Le Sueur to Saint Peter can reasonably be expected. Sixty percent of the costs of the Saint Peter to Mankato route are allocated to Nicollet County because of the size of Saint Peter's population relative to that of the City of Le Sueur; 40% is allocated to Le Sueur County.

Comparison to Peer System Operating Expenses

As a check on the reasonableness of the cost estimates for both LOS scenarios, operating expense data for the peer transit systems is discussed below.

Total annual operating expenses for each of the four peer systems between 1996 and 2013 are shown in Figure 3-22.

Figure 3-22 Peer Systems Annual Operating Expenses, 1996-2013

System	1996	2000	2004	2006	2010	2012	2013	% Change 1996-2000	% Change 2000-2013
Prairie Five Rides	\$196,362	\$474,309	\$523,734	\$656,598	\$769,156	\$936,543	\$1,317,839	141.5%	177.8%
Tri CAP Transit Connection	\$205,538	\$329,686	\$353,307	\$692,338	\$1,022,366	\$954,645	\$1,041,792	60.4%	216.0%
Tri-Valley Transportation	\$416,989	\$400,250	\$529,845	\$624,399	\$905,132	\$1,005,777	\$1,070,567	-4.0%	167.5%
Western Community Action/ Community Transit	\$267,375	\$1,094,048	\$913,560	\$1,060,598	\$1,556,356	\$1,597,769	\$1,612,924	309.2%	47.4%

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit

Changes in operating expenses reflect the increases in ridership that each system experienced in most years. From a low of several hundred thousand dollars in 1996, when all the systems except Tri-CAP Transit Connection were newly implemented, operating expenses per system grew to over one million dollars in 2013, very similar to the \$1.1 million and \$1.4 million estimates of operating cost for the Low and High LOS scenarios.

Funding Options

Public transit services in Minnesota are funded jointly by federal, state, and local governments. Federal transit assistance programs—for rural and small urban areas, these are primarily the Rural Area Formula program, known as Section 5311, and the Bus and Bus Facilities program, or Section 5339—and state funds from Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) and General Fund (GF) revenues typically provide 80-85% of total transit operating expenses or 80% of capital expenditures. Transit agencies must provide the remaining 15-20% from farebox revenues, contract revenues, and other local sources of funding. Agencies may provide more than the required 15-20%; although such “overmatch” provides extra support for local transit services, it does not increase the federal or state funds that they are eligible to receive.

Providers like VINE that receive grants from federal transit assistance programs through MnDOT for specific transportation projects are responsible for providing the required non-federal share, typically 50% for an operating project and 20% for a capital project.

Figure 3-23 and Figure 3-24 present the estimated operating costs for the components of the Low and High LOS scenario by type of service and county and the breakdown of those costs between federal/state and local sources of funding. MnDOT’s required local share for services in rural areas, defined as those with populations fewer than 2,500, or services for seniors and people with disabilities, is 15%. The local share for services in small urban areas with populations of 2,500-50,000, is 20%. Those percentages were applied to the various services shown in Figure 3-23 and Figure 3-24.

Sources of funding used by the peer systems and Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit for the 15-20% local share include:

- Fare revenues
- Contract revenues from operating service for public agencies, schools, or businesses
- Contributions from counties and municipalities
- Advertising revenues
- Grants from private foundations

Farebox revenues typically provide all or most of the required local match. To develop estimates of the level of fare revenue that each county might expect to help defray their financial obligations for the new regional transit system's services, total estimated ridership by county was allocated among types of service on the basis of service hours. **Average one-way fares of \$2, \$1.50, and \$3 were assumed for structured Dial-A-Ride service, community Dial-A-Ride service, and regional deviated route service, respectively.**

Resulting estimates of fare revenues are shown in Figure 3-23 and Figure 3-24 for the two scenarios. Note that these estimates are rough—a more reliable analysis would require detailed ridership estimates and a more detailed fare structure for each service, including a calculation of the effects of discounted ticket/pass fares or reduced fares offered to older adults and people with disabilities. Note also that local funding responsibilities are shown by county, but contributions could come from individual communities rather than county government. Nevertheless, Figure 3-23 and Figure 3-24 are useful as a general guide to funding shares, and show that in many cases, farebox revenues could provide most, all, or even more than the required local funds.

Figure 3-23 Estimated Annual Operating Costs, Low LOS Scenario 2016, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Annual Operating Cost	Federal/State Share 80-85%	Local Share 15-20%	Service Hours	Estimated Ridership	Estimated Fare Revenue	Balance Local Share
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	\$286,416	\$243,454	\$42,962	5,616	13,223	\$26,445	\$16,517
Le Sueur	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	10,123	\$20,247	\$1,235
Nicollet	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	19,864	\$39,728	-\$18,247
Community Dial-A-Ride*							
Blue Earth	\$265,200	\$212,160	\$53,040	5,200	12,243	\$18,365	\$34,675
Le Sueur	\$492,646	\$394,117	\$98,529	9,096	32,793	\$49,189	\$49,340
Nicollet	\$318,410	\$254,728	\$63,682	6,997	49,497	\$74,246	-\$10,564
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$1,649,088	\$1,347,912	\$301,176	32,525	137,743	\$228,219	\$72,957
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	\$62,920	\$53,482	\$9,438	NA	2,860	NA	\$9,438
Le Sueur	\$31,460	\$26,741	\$4,719	NA	1,210	NA	\$4,719
Nicollet	\$26,620	\$22,627	\$3,993	NA	1,430	NA	\$3,993
Total Volunteer Rides	\$121,000	\$102,850	\$18,150		5,500	NA	\$18,150
Total Low LOS Scenario	\$1,770,088	\$1,450,762	\$319,326	32,525	143,243	\$228,219	\$91,107

*Community Dial-A-Ride in Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties includes Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit

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Figure 3-24 Estimated Annual Operating Costs, High LOS Scenario 2020, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Annual Operating Cost	Federal/State Share 80-85%	Local Share 15-20%	Service Hours	Estimated Ridership*	Estimated Fare Revenue	Balance Local Share
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	\$286,416	\$243,454	\$42,962	5,616	17,315	\$34,629	\$8,333
Le Sueur	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	11,671	\$23,342	-\$1,861
Nicollet	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	17,894	\$35,788	-\$14,307
Community Dial-A-Ride**							
Blue Earth	\$265,200	\$212,160	\$53,040	5,200	16,032	\$24,048	\$28,992
Le Sueur	\$492,646	\$394,117	\$98,529	9,096	37,806	\$56,709	\$41,821
Nicollet	\$318,410	\$254,728	\$63,682	6,997	44,589	\$66,883	-\$3,201
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$1,649,088	\$1,347,912	\$301,176	32,525	145,306	\$241,399	\$59,777
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	\$62,920	\$53,482	\$9,438	NA	2,860	NA	\$9,438
Le Sueur	\$31,460	\$26,741	\$4,719	NA	1,210	NA	\$4,719
Nicollet	\$26,620	\$22,627	\$3,993	NA	1,430	NA	\$3,993
Total Volunteer Rides	\$121,000	\$102,850	\$18,150		5,500	NA	\$18,150
Subtotal	\$1,770,088	\$1,450,762	\$319,326	28,781	150,806	\$241,399	\$77,927
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	\$40,800	\$34,680	\$6,120	800	2,466	\$7,399	-\$1,279
Le Sueur	\$66,300	\$53,040	\$13,260	1,300	5,403	\$16,210	-\$2,950
Nicollet	\$163,200	\$130,560	\$32,640	3,200	20,392	\$61,176	-\$28,536
Total Deviated Routes	\$270,300	\$218,280	\$52,020	5,300	28,262	\$84,785	-\$32,765
Total by County							
Blue Earth	\$655,336	\$543,776	\$111,560	9,744	38,673	\$66,076	\$45,484
Le Sueur	\$733,614	\$595,625	\$137,989	11,332	56,090	\$96,260	\$41,729
Nicollet	\$651,438	\$529,642	\$121,796	13,005	84,305	\$163,848	-\$42,052
Total High LOS Scenario	\$2,040,388	\$1,669,042	\$371,346	34,081	179,068	\$326,184	\$45,162

*Ridership on Structured Dial-A-Ride and Community Dial-A-Ride services are higher than in the Low LOS Scenario as shown in Figure 3-23 due to the inclusion of ridership increases between 2016 and 2020.

**Community Dial-A-Ride in Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties includes Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit

Estimated capital costs for the Low and High LOS scenarios, broken down by service type, county, and funding source, are shown in Figure 3-25. As noted above, capital costs associated with the High LOS scenario may be lower than these estimates when a final set of services is selected for implementation, due to opportunities for using vehicles to provide more than one service.

Figure 3-25 Estimated Capital Costs, Low and High LOS Scenarios, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Estimated Capital Cost	Federal/State Share 80%	Local Share 20%
Low LOS Scenario			
Structured Dial-A-Ride			
Blue Earth	\$320,000	\$272,000	\$48,000
Le Sueur	\$160,000	\$136,000	\$24,000
Nicollet	\$160,000	\$136,000	\$24,000
Community Dial-A-Ride*			
Blue Earth	\$160,000	\$128,000	\$32,000
Le Sueur	\$160,000	\$128,000	\$32,000
Nicollet	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$960,000	\$800,000	\$160,000
Volunteer Driver Services			
Blue Earth	\$0	\$0	\$0
Le Sueur	\$0	\$0	\$0
Nicollet	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Volunteer Rides	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Low LOS Scenario by County			
Blue Earth	\$480,000	\$400,000	\$80,000
Le Sueur	\$320,000	\$264,000	\$56,000
Nicollet	\$160,000	\$136,000	\$24,000
Total Low LOS Scenario	\$960,000	\$800,000	\$160,000
High LOS Scenario: All of the services listed above plus Deviated Fixed Routes			
Deviated Fixed Routes			
Blue Earth	\$320,000	\$272,000	\$48,000
Le Sueur	\$88,000	\$70,400	\$17,600
Nicollet	\$152,000	\$121,600	\$30,400
Total Deviated Routes	\$560,000	\$464,000	\$96,000
Total High LOS Scenario by County			
Blue Earth	\$800,000	\$672,000	\$128,000
Le Sueur	\$408,000	\$334,400	\$73,600
Nicollet	\$312,000	\$257,600	\$54,400
Total High LOS Scenario	\$1,520,000	\$1,264,000	\$256,000

4 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR SERVICE ALTERNATIVES

This section presents issues for transportation stakeholders to consider as decisions are made about the services that should be implemented in the short term and in the future in the Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet county region.

Constrained resources and/or local priorities may preclude the implementation of all of the proposed services, or require a phased implementation plan, so some evaluation effort is likely to be necessary. To be effective, criteria for assessing the relative merits of the service alternatives should be tied to the goals and objectives of the project and its stakeholders and be suitable for use and understood not only by project advisory committee members, but also other stakeholders, potential rider groups, and the general public in the study area. Since objectives, preferences, and priorities among those groups may conflict, the framework in which the evaluation criteria are used should offer a way to identify tradeoffs and resolve differences.

Evaluation criteria to assist in assessing the service alternatives' potential to help address these goals and a suggested framework for applying them are described below.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As outlined in a recent summary of this project prepared by MnDOT Office of Transit staff, objectives of the study include the following:

- Exploring the potential for initiating some basic level of service to address the mobility needs of residents in the rural portions of Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties
- Identifying opportunities for developing connections between services to facilitate more inter- and intra-county travel
- Developing strategies to reduce or eliminate duplicative services and administrative efforts among existing transportation providers
- Ensuring that policy makers are fully informed about the options for developing service

Other objectives, expressed by stakeholders during interviews and project meetings, include:

- Providing new or improved transportation options for certain population groups, such as older adults, workers in low-wage jobs, new American families, and individuals needing to shop at food banks or travel outside their communities to shop for groceries
- Making the most efficient use of transportation funding and other resources
- Planning for sustainable transportation services that meet documented needs

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Suggested criteria that could be used to evaluate the desirability of the components of the proposed Low and High LOW scenarios are listed below. Others could be added following discussions with project stakeholders as planning for new regional transit services move forward.

Feasibility

- Existing provider and/or vehicles are available
- Local community supports implementation
- Local funding sources support implementation
- Lead time required for start-up

Impact

- Serves a target population of concern
- Meets a specific transportation need
- Provides new service in a rural area (population less than 2,500)
- Responds to a need identified by project stakeholders
- Provides lifeline service—access to health care, shopping
- Contributes to economic development—access to jobs, training, education
- Offers opportunity for quality of life trips—social, recreational, faith-based, and community activities
- Improves the level and/or availability of general public transit service—days, hours, geographic service area
- Improves the quality of service available

Coordination

- Potential for operation by an existing provider
- Provides connections to other communities within county
- Provides connections to regional destinations
- Enhances impact of another service (e.g., structured Dial-A-Ride or community Dial-A-Ride services transport residents of small communities to regional deviated route bus stops)

Funding Requirements

- Start-up cost
- Annual operating cost
- Vehicle requirements
- Availability of funding for local match
- Sustainability of funding sources

Performance

- Expected to meet MnDOT performance standards for applicable type of service: passengers per hour, cost per hour, cost per passenger trip, revenue per passenger trip, revenue miles. (The specific standards established for community of municipal dial-a-ride service and deviated rural routes are discussed in Technical Memo #1. After

- implementation of new services, performance measures should be calculated and reviewed periodically to assess performance and identify any necessary adjustments.)
- Moves community toward MnDOT's suggested Regional Trade Center level of service guidelines

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The following steps are offered as a scheme for applying these evaluation criteria to the proposed service alternatives.

- Brainstorm additional evaluation criteria with project stakeholders
- Prepare an evaluation matrix such as the Blue Earth County sample shown in Figure 4-1 that lists all service alternatives on one axis and all evaluation criteria on the other
- Assign a low, medium or high score on for each service alternative on each criterion (up to the Performance category) in one of the following ways. Performance measures, the only qualitative ratings that will be assigned, should be calculated and entered into the appropriate box.
 - A group of stakeholders could meet to complete the matrix together, using sticky dots could be used to indicate low (red dot), medium (yellow dot), or high (green dot) ratings on a flip chart version of the matrix. Stakeholders should discuss and resolve differences among preferences and priorities once initial dot voting is complete to arrive at a final score for each category for each alternative.
 - Stakeholders could complete an Excel version of the matrix individually, using text to indicate low, medium and high ratings. Results could be compared and discussed at an online or in-person meeting and a summary matrix prepared.
 - Results of the initial evaluation by stakeholders could be presented at public workshops or in other forums to get input from county residents on their service priorities.

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Figure 4-1 Sample Evaluation Matrix, Blue Earth County

Blue Earth County	Low LOS Scenario								High LOS Scenario (includes Low LOS Scenario elements as well)			
	Service	Structured Dial-A-Ride				Community Dial-A-Ride		Volunteer Driver Services	Regional Deviated Routes			
Criterion		Amboy	Madison Lake	Mapleton	Vernon Center	Eagle Lake	Lake Crystal	Rural Blue Earth County	Eagle Lake to Mankato	Mapleton to Mankato	Lake Crystal to Mankato	Amboy to Mankato
Feasibility												
Existing provider and/or vehicles available												
Local community supports implementation												
Local funding sources support implementation												
Lead time required for start-up												
Impact												
Serves a target population of concern												
Meets a specific transportation need												
Provides new service in a rural area												
Responds to a need identified by stakeholders												
Provides lifeline service												
Contributes to economic development												
Offers opportunity for quality of life trips												
Improves level and/or availability of general public transit service												
Improves quality of service												
Coordination												
Potential for operation by an existing provider												

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Provides connections to other communities within county												
Provides connections to regional destinations												
Enhances impact of another service												
Funding Requirements												
Start-up cost												
Annual operating cost												
Vehicle requirements												
Availability of funding for local match												
Sustainability of funding sources												
Performance												
Passengers per hour												
Cost per hour												
Cost per passenger trip												
Revenue per passenger trip												
Revenue miles												

NEXT STEPS

As stakeholders in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties consider the regional transit system service alternatives described in this report, the consultant team will identify and evaluate organizational alternatives for implementing priority transit services.

APPENDIX A

Peer Review

Prairie Five Rides

About

Started in 1995, the Prairie Five Rides Transit System provides demand-response transportation to residents of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine Counties. Eligibility is not restricted; the general public of any age is able to ride. Most rides are provided through the demand-response service within Appleton, Canby, Dawson, Madison, Montevideo, and Ortonville. Long-range transportation outside of the region is also provided on certain days of the week to the Twin Cities, Marshall, Willmar, and St. Cloud. Volunteer drivers provide service in the more rural areas of the region and will also transport users throughout the state and to some locations in North and South Dakota.

Prairie Five Rides is a service of Prairie Five Community Action, Inc., which is a private, 501(c) 3 non-profit headquartered in Montevideo in Chippewa County. Transportation is one of many services offered by Prairie Five Community Action, including Head Start, housing loans and assistance, senior assistance, and youth programs.

City demand-response service within Appleton, Canby, Dawson, Madison, and Ortonville is provided between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. The City of Montevideo starts service at 5:30 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m. Rural demand –response service provided throughout the five-county region operates between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. A single trip to the Twin Cities is provided every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. For all services, advance notification is not required, but Prairie Five Rides requests that reservations be placed 24-hours in advance, if possible.

Demographics and Operating Statistics

The five-county region served by Prairie Five Rides has a total population of 44,262, of which 11,163 live in urban areas (25%) and 33,099 live in rural areas (75%). The service provided 138,345 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 15,700 total service hours; rural service makes up approximately 36% of the service hours. Ridership increased steadily since the start of service; from 2,500 trips in 1996 to 70,430 in 2000 to 80,207 in 2010. From 2012 to 2013 ridership jumped from 87,556 to 138,345, a 58% increase. For the rural DAR service, Prairie Five Rides served approximately 3,650 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 1,480 revenue hours, approximately 2.45 passengers per hour.

Fares

A one-way trip costs \$1.50 for rides within the six cities, with passes available for unlimited ride and discounts for youth, seniors, and the general public. The regional fares are \$0.25 per mile for seniors (60+), \$0.35 for children, and \$0.40 per mile for adults (18-59), with a minimum fare of \$5.00 per one way trip for every user. If a user only requires a one-way trip they will be charged 1.5 times the regular rate to cover the return cost of the bus, van or volunteer driver. Personal escorts can ride for free.

Funding

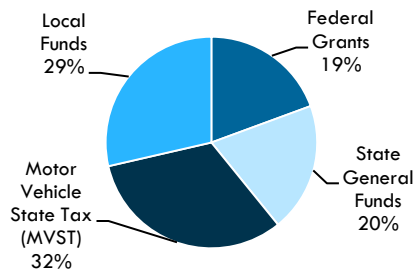
In 2013, Prairie Five Rides had \$1,317,839 in total operating funds, which increased by 71% from \$769,156 in 2010. 2013 funding sources are shown in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 2, federal grants make up only 19% of the program funding, while MVST funds make up 32%, local funds

provide 29%, and state general funds provide 20%. In years where the local funds provide more than the 20% match, such as in 2013, these additional funds are put into reserve accounts or used to provide additional service. Local funding is primarily sourced from the five counties and six cities in which Prairie Five Rides provides transportation services. For capital purchases, the 20% local share is split evenly among these eleven local governments. For operating costs, the eleven local governments each set aside \$7,000 to make up for any shortfalls throughout the year. Contract fees, fare revenues, and donations are also used as local share dollars for operating costs. Each of the counties and cities are members on the Transportation Advisory Committee and have buy-in on every financial decision.

Figure 1 Prairie Five Rides Funding Sources

Funding Source	Amount
Federal Grants	\$255,600
State General Funds	\$260,433
Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST)	\$424,917
Local Funds	\$376,889
Total	\$1,317,839

Figure 2 Prairie Five Rides Funding Percentages



Program Manager

Ted Nelson
(320) 269-6578

Tri-CAP Transit Connection

About

Started in 1975, Tri-CAP Transit Connection serves Benton, Morrison, Sherburne, and Stearns counties and the cities of Albany, Sauk Center, Melrose, Paynesville, Little Falls, Big Lake, and Elk River. Tri-CAP provides dial-a-ride (DAR) service in rural Benton, Morrison, Sherburne and Stearns counties five days a week, which is available to the general public with no age or income requirements. All buses are wheelchair accessible.

Tri-CAP Transit Connection is one of many services provided by the Tri-County Action Program (Tri-CAP), which is a federally designated Community Action Program headquartered in Waite Park in Stearns County. Tri-CAP also provides housing assistance, self-sufficiency and counseling services, and energy assistance programs.

DAR service hours vary by service area. In Benton and Stearns County, DAR operates Monday through Friday between 7 a.m. and 4 p.m. Service is provided within a 15 mile radius of the Tri-CAP facilities in St. Cloud. Passengers are advised to make a reservation in advance to ensure availability. In Morris County, DAR is provided Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. within a 10 mile radius of the Morrison County Government Center. The Sherburne County DAR operates weekdays between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. within the City of Elk River and the City of Big Lake. There are also multiple deviated fixed route services that provide either daily or weekday service between and within the cities of Albany, Sauk Center, Melrose, Paynesville, Little Falls, Big Lake, and Elk River. On certain days of the week Tri-CAP will connect these cities to St. Cloud and the Twin Cities.

Volunteer drivers provide rides using their own private vehicles to residents living in the rural areas of Benton, Stearns and Morrison counties. Passengers are assigned to volunteers by the Tri-CAP dispatch center for medical appointments and other trip types. Volunteer drivers are reimbursed at the Federal IRS rate and may also be eligible for some meal reimbursements.

Demographics and Operating Statistics

The four-county region served by Tri-CAP has a total population of 312,978, of which 177,849 live in urban areas (57%) and 135,128 live in rural areas (43%). The service provided 78,079 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 27,895 total service hours; rural service makes up approximately 78% of the service hours. Ridership increased since start of service; from 15,962 trips in 1996 to 51,801 in 2000 to 78,781 in 2010, but dropped slightly from 2012 to 2013 from 79,474 to 78,079. For the rural DAR service, Tri-CAP served approximately 6,000 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 1,768 revenue hours, approximately 3.4 passengers per hour.

Fares

Within the cities of Albany, Sauk Center, Melrose, Paynesville, Little Falls, Big Lake, and Elk River, bus fares are \$1.25 per one-way trip. Rural trip fares are \$3.00 per one-way trip.

Funding

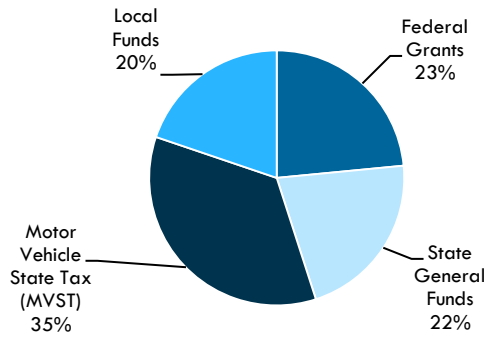
In 2013, Tri-CAP received \$1,041,792 in total operating funds, which increased by 2% from \$1,022,366 in 2010. 2013 funding sources are shown in Figure 3. As shown in Figure 4, federal grants make up only 23% of the program funding, while MVST funds make up 35%, local funds

provide 20%, and state general funds provide 22%. The local match is provided by the cities of Albany and Melrose, as well as Sherburne and Morrison County. Fare revenue and service contract revenues are also included in local funds.

Figure 3 Tri-CAP Funding Sources

Funding Source	Amount
Federal Grants	\$244,500
State General Funds	\$224,599
Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST)	\$366,451
Local Funds	\$206,242
Total	\$1,041,792

Figure 4 Tri-CAP Funding Percentages



Transportation Director

Laurie Schultz

320-257-4445

Tri-Valley Transportation

Since 1995, Tri-Valley Transportation (a.k.a. T.H.E. Bus or Tri-Valley Heartland Express) has served the general public in eight Minnesota counties: Polk, Red Lake, Norman, Marshall, Kittson, Pennington, Mahnomen, and Clearwater. There are no age limits or income restrictions, and the service is not limited to trip type; medical, social, recreational, shopping and other personal trips are allowed. Curb-to-curb demand-response transportation is provided between and within these counties on certain days of the week. Buses are wheelchair accessible and can seat up to 40 passengers.

Tri-Valley Transportation is run by the Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc (TVOC), a local Community Action Agency focused on service impoverished communities. In addition to transportation, TVOC operates dozens of programs that help children, older adults, individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals and families, and people with addiction.

Demand-response service is provided within Thief River Falls, Crookston, Bagley, and Mahnomen Monday through Saturday starting at 6 a.m. and ending at 6 p.m. during the week and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Demand-response service in and between Ada, Fertile/Twin Valley, Warren, and Hallock/Kalstad is provided on certain days of the week. Tri-Valley also provides a daily commuter service (August through May) that runs between Thief River Falls and East Grand Forks, Crookston and Thief River Falls, and Bagley and Thief River Falls. Rural service is provided throughout the eight counties to different communities on specific days of the week. Volunteer drivers, operating through Tri-Valley's Rural Transportation Collaborative (RTC) program, provide rides for individuals living within the most rural parts of Polk, Red Lake, Pennington, Norman, Marshall, and Kittson Counties who have no other transportation options. Volunteers are reimbursed the IRS rate per mile. Additionally, Tri-Valley has a "Summer Fun" bus that transports children within city limits of Crookston, Thief River Falls, Bagley, and Mahnomen to and from summer camps, community events, and other destinations.

In addition to the services described above, Tri-Valley provides travel training to educate individuals on the transportation options located in the region through one-on-one or group training. This service is free for residents of the eight-county region.

Demographics and Operating Statistics

The eight-county region served by Tri-Valley has a total population of 84,442, of which 25,343 live in urban areas (30%) and 59,098 live in rural areas (70%). The service provided 99,221 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 11,570 total service hours; rural service makes up approximately 15% of the service hours. Ridership increased steadily since start of service; from 58,559 trips in 1996 to 68,754 in 2010 to 99,211 in 2013.

Fares

Within the cities of Crookston and Thief River Falls, same day rides cost \$3.00 to destinations and \$2.00 for return trips. Users can save \$1 on the outgoing trip by reserving a day in advance. Within the cities of Bagley, Mahnomen, Warren, Hallock, Karlstad, Ada, Twin-Valley, and Fertile the one-way fare is \$1.00 each way. Passes are available for the general public in \$10 and \$20 denominations and "Summer Fun" passes are available for \$55 per child or \$125 per family for families with three or more children. Rural transportation is priced based on the mileage for each trip. Tri-Valley provides a matrix showing the round trip rates for each possible community origin and destination.

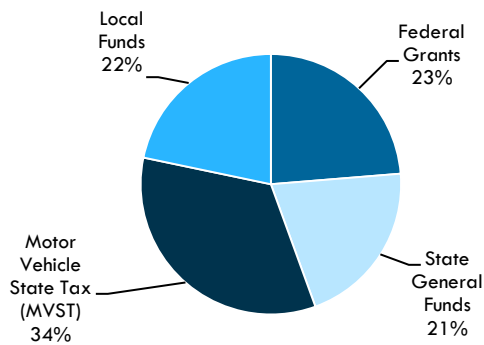
Funding

In 2013, Tri-Valley utilized \$1,070,567 in total operating funds, which increased by 18% from \$905,132 in 2010. 2013 funding sources are shown in Figure 5. As shown in Figure 6, federal grants make up only 23% of the program funding, while MVST funds make up 34%, state general funds provide 21%, and local funds provide 22%. In years in which the local funds provide more than the 20% match required by MnDOT, such as in 2013, these additional funds are put into reserve accounts or used to provide additional service. Local funding is gained from a variety of sources including, funding from each of the eight counties and the cities of Thief River Falls, Crookston, and Bagley, revenue contracts with various human service agencies, commuter routes for a large local employer (Digikey), and small contracts with healthcare agencies and firms who pay for their clients to come in for appointments.

Figure 5 Tri-Valley Funding Sources

Funding Source	Amount
Federal Grants	\$253,800
State General Funds	\$222,034
Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST)	\$362,266
Local Funds	\$232,467
Total	\$1,070,567

Figure 6 Tri-Valley Funding Percentages



Transportation Program Coordinator

Jennifer Booth
218-681-6760
jennifer.booth@tvoc.org

Community Transit (Western Community Action)

Started in 1996, Community Transit provides demand-response transportation primarily in and between Cottonwood, Jackson, Lyon and Redwood Counties, but also throughout Southwest Minnesota. Wheelchair accessible buses provide demand-transportation between the major communities, while volunteer drivers provide rides to destinations outside of the service area or when buses are not available. Community Transit utilizes a fleet of more than 20 lift-equipped buses and provide both curb-to-curb and door-to-door service.

Western Community Action was founded in 1965 as a Community Action Agency and provides more than a dozen programs to the community including Head Start, emergency shelter, food assistance, tax prep, housing assistance, and other programs for seniors and people with low income.

Within the City of Marshall, Community Transit provides two deviated fixed route to designated stops within city limits. The “Red Route” is offered seven days a week, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. during the week and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. The “Blue Route” is offered Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Rural demand-response service is available in each of the counties, Monday through Friday, generally between the hours of 6 a.m. and 4 p.m. Volunteer drivers are available during the days and hours that work for the volunteers.

Demographics and Operating Statistics

The four-county region served by Community Transit has a total population of 63,268, of which 25,788 live in urban areas (41%) and 37,479 live in rural areas (59%). The service provided 146,288 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 37,642 total service hours; rural service makes up approximately 40% of the service hours. Ridership increased steadily since start of service; from 114,620 trips in 1996 to 128,708 in 2010 to 146,288 in 2013.

Fares

Rural transportation costs vary and are based on distance; trips of 7 miles or less cost \$2.00, 7-15 miles cost \$3.00, 15-30 miles cost \$4.00, 30-40 miles cost \$5.00. For trips that are 41 miles or more, the cost is \$50 per hour. Deviated fixed route service within the City of Marshall costs \$1.00 and trips within the other cities in the region cost \$2.00. There are discounts for children and group rates for six or more passengers.

The user is charged a fee based on mileage for volunteer driver trips. For trips that are shared between two or more individuals, trip cost to the user is \$0.35 per mile with a minimum of \$2.50. For trips that are not shared, the cost to the user is \$0.60 per mile with a minimum of \$4.00. Escorts ride free within the four-county area but are charged \$10 per trip outside of the region.

Funding

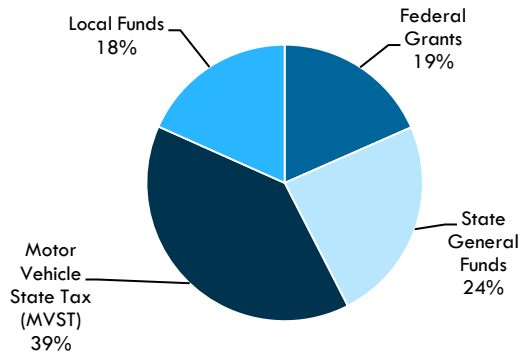
In 2013, Community Transit received \$1,612,923 in total operating funds, which increased by 4% (\$1,556,356) since 2010. 2013 funding sources are broken out in Figure 7. As shown in Figure 8, federal grants make up only 19% of the program funding, while MVST funds make up 39%, state general funds provide 24%, and local funds provide 18%. The City of Marshall and each of the four counties contribute to the service in different amounts based on a formula. Generally, the counties contribute up to the 20% local match; however, in some years, like 2013, the local

governments will not need to provide the full 20% because Community Transit is able to raise enough through passenger fares or private foundations.

Figure 7 Community Transit Funding Sources

Funding Source	Amount
Federal Grants	\$297,000
State General Funds	\$387,790
Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST)	\$632,710
Local Funds	\$295,424
Total	\$1,612,923

Figure 8 Community Transit Funding Percentages



Transportation Program Coordinator

Shelly Pflaum
Community Transit Access Coordinator
507-537-1416 ext. #2115
shelly.pflaum@wcainc.org

Central Community Transit

Central Community Transit, an independent not-for-profit agency, was launched in 2015 by consolidating two rural transit providers in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. CCT operates three different types of service: route deviation, dial-a-ride/demand-response, and volunteer drivers. All of these services are available to members of the general public. CCT operates between 5:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Route deviated transit service offers scheduled transit services that deviate or travel off route for up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile (10 blocks) of the published route as requested by passengers. CCT operates deviated service within the limits of the City of Willmar, Monday through Saturday. Additional route deviated service is available between Olivia and Willmar as well as between Willmar and Litchfield (in Meeker County). General public dial-a-ride service is provided door-to-door throughout Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. This service is available for passengers who request a trip up to 24 hours in advance and are looking to travel within their respective counties. Same day service is also provided as available for an additional fee.

Volunteer drivers are reimbursed for mileage according to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) published business rate, currently set at \$0.575 per mile². The majority of the trips provided by volunteer drivers are to transport people traveling to/from medical services with funding provided by health care providers (Blue Cross Blue Shield and UCare). CCT also provides volunteer drivers through their Senior Transportation Program for Kandiyohi and Renville County residents.

Demographics and Operating Statistics

The two-county region served by CCT has a total population of 57,764. Prior to merging, the two agencies that provided transportation in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties provided a total of 161,896 one-way passenger trips in 2013 and 29,578 total service hours. Transportation is provided primarily in rural parts of Renville County; rural service made up 28% of the service hours provided in 2013. In Kandiyohi County, ridership rose slightly from 118,404 in 2011 to 119,309 in 2014, while ridership in Renville County dropped slightly from 47,316 to 36,972 in those same years.

Fares

CCT has a fairly complicated fare structure that sets fares based on service type (published route and dial a ride); distance traveled and includes a surcharge for scheduling the service on the same day of travel. Fares within the main city in Kandiyohi County (City of Willmar) are \$1.50 per one way trip. Dial-a-ride service in Kandiyohi County costs between \$2.00 and \$6.00 depending on the mileage. Dial-a-Ride service in Renville County costs between \$2.00 and \$4.00 depending on the mileage. Riders are encouraged to request a trip at least 48 hours in advance of when they want to travel. Same day requests for service are accommodated if possible and riders are charged a surcharge of \$1.00.

² Note that CCT reimburses volunteer drivers according to the published business rate, which is different from the IRS published charitable rate, which is \$0.14 per mile. See <http://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates>

Funding

As shown in Figure 9, Kandiyohi County spent between \$1 and \$1.3 million annually to operate service between 2012 and 2014. The majority of the operating costs were provided by MnDOT grants and farebox revenues, but the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County also contributed funds. System revenues include contract revenue, advertising revenue, and interest.

Figure 9 Kandiyohi County Funding by Source

	2012	2013	2014
Kandiyohi Area Transit			
MnDOT Funds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	\$935,000	\$1,008,100	\$1,265,650
Revenues (Farebox + System Revenue + Local Contributions)	\$264,242	\$275,898	\$308,650
<i>Total Operating Funds</i>	\$1,074,565	\$1,130,024	\$1,295,175
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	\$204,030	\$215,960	\$240,924
System Revenue	\$42,160	\$33,683	\$37,726
Local Government	\$18,052	\$26,255	\$30,000

Renville County increased operating revenues from \$480,938 to \$577,698 between 2012 and 2014 (see Figure 10). The majority of the operating funds were raised through MnDOT grants and farebox revenues. Local government contributions are provided by annual donations from the ten cities in Renville County. Out of service revenue is collected when Renville Heartland Express bills the County for a medical assistance volunteer driver trip, which is paid for through the Department of Human Services. These funds are reported as revenues, not fares.

Figure 10 Renville County Funding by Source

	2012	2013	2014
Renville County Heartland Express			
MnDOT Funds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	\$280,500	\$340,000	\$382,500
Revenues (Farebox + Local Contributions)	\$200,437	\$206,814	\$195,198
<i>Total Operating Funds</i>	\$480,937	\$546,814	\$577,698
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	\$111,630	\$118,791	\$119,430
Local Government Contributions	\$26,642	\$27,236	\$25,492
Out of Service Revenue	\$62,165	\$60,787	\$50,276

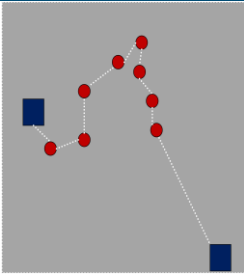
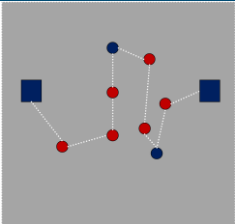
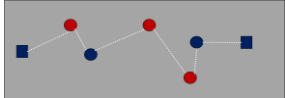
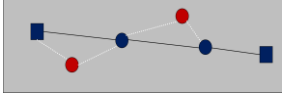
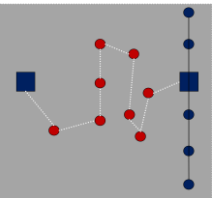
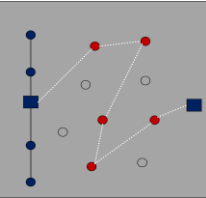
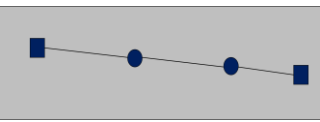
Transportation Program Coordinator

Tiffany Collins
Transit Director
320-222-7974 Ext 2TCollins@katbus.org

APPENDIX B

Small Urban and Rural Transit Fact Sheet

Transit Restructuring Plan | Service Design Alternatives
MnDOT

	Pre-scheduled Group Trips (Structured or Zoned Dial-A-Ride)	Demand-Response (Dial-A-Ride or Paratransit)	Anchored Flexible Route (Point Deviation)	Flexible Route (Deviated Fixed Route)	Demand-Response Feeder Service		Fixed Route
							
Description	Service is scheduled to operate between specific areas or communities and important destinations on certain days of the week or month. Passengers are picked up at home or at a central location, such as a senior center, and taken in a group directly to the destination.	Residents within a certain geographic area call in advance to schedule a curb-to-curb or door-to-door trip. Service may be open to the general public, older adults and people with disabilities, or clients of human service programs. Service may be restricted to particular zones on specified days or during specified time periods.	Anchored Flexible routes have several fixed timepoints (usually at major activity centers or connection points to other transit services). Passengers who live between the time points may call to request a curbside pick-up. The deviation zone may be a fixed distance or flexible. The driver takes the most direct route between time points to pick up each passenger.	Service runs along a published alignment. Passengers living a certain distance from this route may call to request a curbside pick-up. The deviation zone may be a fixed distance or flexible. Since the route is specified, the bus must return to the point where it left the route after a deviation.	Primary function is feeder service to fixed route stops/stations. Arrivals at and departures from fixed-route transfer points are scheduled. Pick-ups and drop-offs may be completely by request (graphic on the left), or at specified locations only (graphic on the right).		A set route and schedule are published and open to the general public.
Passengers per Revenue Hour	6-12	2-5	3-5	3-8	3-5		8-10
Benefits	Provides lifeline service to those without transportation options for necessary trips (medical appointments, grocery shopping). Productivity (passengers per revenue hour) is higher than on demand-response service.	In rural areas with dispersed origins and destinations, demand-response service provides the ability to serve a large geographic area. Door-to-door or curb-to-curb service is easy for older adults and people with disabilities to use.	Anchored Flexible service combines the accessibility features of demand-response with the scheduled reliability of fixed-route service.	In lower-demand areas where deviations can be accommodated, both fixed-route and ADA paratransit service can be provided with one vehicle.	Applicable where distance, development patterns, or street layout make connections to regional fixed route services difficult for customers. Suited to areas or times of low demand.		This type of service typically provides the fastest travel times between points, which makes service attractive to choice riders. Since trips are not reserved in advance, fixed-route service offers riders the most independence. When well utilized, fixed-route services are the most cost-effective.
Challenges	The relatively low level of service will leave some needs unmet.	Demand-response service has a high cost per passenger trip as the number of passengers that can be served in one vehicle hour is limited.	To accommodate flex pick-ups, the travel time between time points must be a factor longer than direct travel.	In rural areas with sparse road networks, accommodating out-and-back deviations may add significant travel time.	Coordination with fixed-route schedules is critical		Fixed-route service means the transit agency must also provide ADA paratransit service.



TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Organizational Examples

Executive Summary

October 2015

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1 INTRODUCTION

The initial objective of this project was to identify opportunities for restructuring existing transit services in Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties. As the project progressed, however, the focus shifted to determining the best way to help develop a new Regional Transit System. The goal is to provide access to transportation to residents of the three counties, especially populations dependent on transit, including individuals with disabilities, new Americans, groups with low incomes including the homeless population, and people with limited vehicle availability.

Using the existing city-wide transit systems as the foundation, the previous Technical Memorandum (Technical Memo #2) presented service design alternatives for a new three-county transit system. Service alternatives for a new regional transit system were presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. The Low LOS Scenario featured the introduction of new demand-response services to unserved areas within each county and volunteer driver services for the most rural areas. The High LOS Scenario added inter-county deviated route services to expand connections and opportunities to travel throughout the region. No changes to existing transit services are proposed in either scenario.

This Technical Memorandum presents three different organizational examples for creating a new three-county transit system. The description of each option provides information on member agencies, governance, service delivery, staffing, and member responsibility for various functions. Additionally, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis provides a comparison of the three structural examples.

2 ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES

This chapter presents examples of three organizational structures for managing and operating a new regional transit network in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties, based on arrangements that have been used by other regions in Greater Minnesota to organize transit services. They include:

- Intergovernmental Service Agreement for Transit Cooperative
- Joint Powers Agreement—Service Contract
- Joint Powers Agreement—Consolidated Services

The different organizational arrangements represent progressive degrees of structural change for the region's transit services, ranging from the centralization of certain functions for transit operations that would remain separate for each county to the formation of a new regional transit system that would incorporate existing providers into its structure.

Each option is summarized below. A comparison of the three options is presented in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis that follow the individual descriptions.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL SERVICE AGREEMENT—TRANSIT COOPERATIVE

Intergovernmental service agreements are widely used among local governments in Minnesota to shape cooperative efforts. Agreements are usually, although not always, written. Less formal than Joint Powers Agreements, these arrangements nevertheless effectively facilitate intergovernmental cooperation. In the study area, an intergovernmental service agreement could be used to establish a transit cooperative among interested counties and municipalities.

This option would formalize relationships and transit service responsibilities among the participating partners and consolidate some functions, but would maintain separate transit operations throughout the three-county region. The cooperative would provide a framework for maintaining existing transit services and implementing new services in small communities and new regional services, standardizing service policies and operational procedures among providers, centralizing functions such as grant management and reservations/scheduling/dispatch, and branding service regionally without creating a new transit system structure. This option could be the initial step in the creation of a new regional transit system at some point in the future.

Likely parties to an intergovernmental service agreement include Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties, the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur, and any smaller communities that are interested in initiating the structured Dial-A-Ride or community Dial-A-Ride services proposed for them in the two service alternative scenarios. Decision-making authority would be vested in an Advisory Board composed of representatives of each member agency.

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MnDOT

Responsibility for the various functions involved in a transit cooperative effort is summarized in Figure 2-1. A lead agency would be designated to contract with MnDOT for grant funds for the three-county area and to handle administrative duties such as data compilation and reporting, facilitating shared purchases among providers, obtaining vehicle insurance, and employing a shared compliance manager (to be funded with a Transit for Our Future grant from MnDOT). A single entity, either the lead agency or some other organization, would oversee the provision of volunteer driver services for residents of the region's rural areas.

Figure 2-1 Responsibilities and Functions within each Organizational Example

Organizational Example			
Function	Intergovernmental Service Agreement Transit Cooperative	Joint Powers Agreement Service Contract	Joint Powers Agreement Consolidated Service
Governance			
Members	Counties Cities of St. Peter and Le Sueur Smaller communities desiring service	Counties Cities of St. Peter and Le Sueur Smaller communities desiring service	Counties Cities of St. Peter and Le Sueur Smaller communities desiring service
Legal Relationship	Written Intergovernmental Service Agreement	Joint Powers Agreement and service contracts	Joint Powers Agreement
Management Structure	Advisory Board composed of representatives of member communities Lead agency designated to handle some administrative functions	Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of member communities Lead agency to oversee operation and contracts	Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of member communities New executive director to manage daily operations
Service Planning and Delivery			
Service Planning	Jointly by member communities	Lead agency in consultation with member communities	Centralized for region
Reservations	Centralized by county	Centralized by county	Centralized for region
Dispatch	Centralized by county	Centralized by county	Centralized for region
Operations	Existing provider and/or contractor(s) as appropriate in each county	Overseen by lead agency; existing and/or new providers under contract to operate service	Goal: centralized, either in-house or contract operations Shorter term: service in each county could be contracted
Vehicle Maintenance	Could be done centrally in each county by existing provider or for three-county region by MTS	Done by contractors	Centralized or responsibility of service contractors
Service Policies	Standardized by county	Standardized by county	Consistent throughout region

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Marketing	Regional branding; consistent approach to service information	Individual branding possible, but regional branding and service information is preferable	Single identity of regional system
Volunteer Program	Program covers multiple communities, overseen by one entity	Program covers multiple communities, overseen by one entity	Program covers consolidated region, overseen by one entity
Staffing			
Employee Status	Most staff employed by current agency, but new compliance manager shared by all member communities	Most staff employed by current agency, but new compliance manager shared by all member communities	Goal: all staff employed by consolidated system Phase I: if service is contracted, staff remains employed by current agency
New Staff Needs	Joint compliance manager (funded by Transit for Our Future grant) Designation of transit coordinator in each county and smaller community	Joint compliance manager (funded by Transit for Our Future grant) Designation of transit coordinator in each county and smaller community	Executive Director, Management/administrative staff Reservations, scheduling, dispatching staff, drivers (if service is provided in-house)
Administration			
MnDOT Grant Management	Lead agency designated to contract with state	Lead agency	Consolidated system
Data Collection and Reporting	Data collected by providers and compiled by lead agency	Data collected by providers and compiled by lead agency	Data collected centrally or by service contractors and compiled centrally
Billing	Shared practices/procedures	Centralized system	Centralized system
Procurement	Shared purchases where appropriate (fuel, equipment, software)	Single purchasing system	Single purchasing system
Vehicle Ownership	Vehicle titles held by member agencies	Vehicle titles held by service contractors	Goal: current vehicle ownership transferred to JPB; new vehicles owned by JPB Phase I: vehicles owned by service contractors
Vehicle Insurance	Insurance consortium	Obtained by lead agency or part of service contractor requirements	Obtained by consolidated system or part of service contractor requirements
Federal/State Compliance	Overseen by joint compliance manager	Overseen by joint compliance manager	Included in management/administrative staff duties

Service could be delivered in each county by any one of the existing major providers and/or contractors, as appropriate. If service is contracted, federal and state competitive procurement procedures would be followed, and any entity that is interested in being considered for selection would be eligible to submit a bid or proposal. However, to show that there are viable providers within the study area that may wish to compete for operation of new services, Figure 2-2 lists

potential operators for the service components proposed for each county in the Low and High LOS scenarios.

Figure 2-2 Potential Providers of Proposed Services, Intergovernmental Service Agreement

Service Component	Potential Providers
Low LOS Scenario	
Blue Earth County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (4 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor
Volunteer Rides (rural communities)	VINE
Le Sueur County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (Waterville)	Le Sueur Transit or new contractor
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities plus City of Le Sueur)	Le Sueur Transit (city and other towns) or Le Sueur Transit for city and new contractor for towns
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
Nicollet County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (3 communities)	Saint Peter Transit or new contractor
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities plus City of Saint Peter)	Saint Peter Transit (city and other towns) or Saint Peter Transit for city and new contractor for towns
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
High LOS Scenario – Additional Services	
Deviated Fixed Routes—Blue Earth County	
Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Mapleton to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Lake Crystal to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Amboy to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Deviated Fixed Routes—Le Sueur County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor
Deviated Fixed Routes—Nicollet County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor

JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT—SERVICE CONTRACT

There are variations on Joint Powers Agreements (JPAs) between local governments in Minnesota. Two of those appear applicable to the creation of a new regional transit system in the study area. The first is the service contract model.

Under this organizational option, interested governments would enter into a formal written Joint Powers Agreement for centralized provision of transit services in the region by a designated lead agency. The other members of the Joint Powers Board formed by the agreement would purchase transit services for their communities from the lead agency. That agency could either operate all transit services desired by the other parties to the agreement directly or, more likely in this case, contract with other service providers in some or all areas.

As in the intergovernmental service agreement option, the likely participants in a JPA for a service contract would be the three counties, the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur, and interested smaller towns. Designation of the lead agency would be up to the members based on the willingness of one entity to assume responsibility for providing and/or contracting for transit service in the region on behalf of the other members.

The division of responsibilities for various functions among the parties to a JPA is presented in Figure 2-1 above. Governance would be provided by a Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of each participating government. The lead agency would be responsible for administrative functions, including contracting for the provision of service it does not operate directly, coordinating service planning among member communities, contracting with MnDOT for grant funds, employing a joint compliance manager (to be funded with a Transit for Our Future grant), compiling data and reporting, obtaining vehicle insurance, and coordinating regional branding of services. As in the Intergovernmental Service Agreement option, volunteer driver services for the region would be managed centrally.

Service delivery options are shown in Figure 2-3. For Dial-A-Ride services, it is envisioned that one contractor would provide all of the services to small communities in each county, with centralized reservations, scheduling, and dispatching. Service policies would be standardized within each county; standardization across counties would also be desirable.

As in the intergovernmental service agreement option, contracted services would be subject to a competitive procurement process. The list in Figure 2-3 is intended to show that there are providers in the study area that might be interested in competing for the new service contracts that would be available as part of the expanded regional transit network.

Figure 2-3 Potential Providers of Proposed Services, Joint Powers Agreement for Service Contract

Service Component	Potential Providers
Low LOS Scenario	
Blue Earth County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (4 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor; one contract for all towns
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor; one contract for both towns
Volunteer Rides (rural communities)	VINE
Le Sueur County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (Waterville)	Le Sueur Transit
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities plus City of Le Sueur)	Le Sueur Transit
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
Nicollet County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (3 communities)	Saint Peter Transit
Community Dial-A-Ride - City of Saint Peter	Saint Peter Transit
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
High LOS Scenario – Additional Services	
Deviated Fixed Routes—Blue Earth County	
Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Mapleton to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Lake Crystal to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Amboy to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Deviated Fixed Routes—Le Sueur County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, other new contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	
Deviated Fixed Routes—Nicollet County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, other new contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	

JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT—CONSOLIDATED SERVICE

Joint Powers Agreements that facilitate shared powers or consolidated services are more commonly used among local governments in Minnesota than agreements for service contracts. This option represents the highest degree of structural change for transportation stakeholders in the study area of the three organizational alternatives discussed here because it would create a

new regional transit entity to deliver all transit services in the region. The new regional system would incorporate and replace the existing providers over time.

This organizational alternative would be most suitable if the High LOS scenario is selected by study area stakeholders for implementation because of the regional services that are included in it and the interconnectedness of its service components.

As in option #2, participating governmental units would enter into a written JPA and form a Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of all participating members to oversee and guide the new regional transit system. A new executive director or general manager, together with other key management and administrative staff, would be hired to manage day-to-day operations, with direction from the Board of Directors.

As shown in Figure 2-1 above, all service planning and delivery functions, such as reservations/scheduling/dispatching, service policies, vehicle maintenance, volunteer driver service management, and marketing would be centralized for the three-county region rather than by county. All administrative responsibilities would be handled centrally as well.

The long-term goal for a regional transit system would be consolidated service delivery, provided either in-house or by a contractor. Ownership of vehicles and other assets would be assumed by the new system and operations staff (drivers, reservationists, schedulers, dispatchers, supervisory personnel) would become employees of the new system. As an interim step, however, some or all services could be provided under contract to the new entity, utilizing existing providers where possible and desirable. This would allow for a transition over time from city-based services to the new regional structure.

Examples of areas that have established Joint Powers Agreements for consolidated transit services include:

- Kandiyohi and Renville counties and City of Wilmar: Central Community Transit (Meeker County is considering joining the agreement)
- Faribault and Martin counties
- City of Bemidji and Beltrami County: Paul Bunyan Transit
- Lake of the Woods and Roseau counties—Far North Transit (merging with Paul Bunyan Transit in 2015)
- Douglas, Pope, Stevens, Traverse and Todd counties—Rainbow Rider Transit
- Sherburne and Wright counties—RiverRider Public Transit (merged with Tri-CAP Transit Connection and Trailblazer Transit in 2014)
- McLeod and Sibley counties—Trailblazer Transit

SWOT ANALYSIS

Figure 2-4 compares and contrasts the characteristics of the three organizational alternatives by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with each.

All three alternatives would provide the structure needed to implement the components of the Low or High LOS scenarios. As shown in Figure 2-4, a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats pertain to more than one—sometimes to all three—of the alternatives. The key differences among the options are the degree of change that they would mean for existing transit providers in the region, the complexity of their implementation, and the potential they

Figure 2-4 Organizational Alternative SWOT Analysis

Organizational Structure	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Intergovernmental Service Agreement - Transit Cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal disruption to established transit providers Formalizes roles and responsibilities for transit in the region Local control over service decisions Easiest alternative to implement Lowest cost to member agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not reduce the number of transit entities in the region May increase the number of transit providers (new services) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key functions could be centralized for increased efficiency and customer – friendliness Potential to realize cost savings for existing services Joint compliance manager would improve ease and degree of compliance Sets stage for more comprehensive transit restructuring in future New contracting opportunities for service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty identifying entity willing to act as lead agency for centralized administrative functions Funding constraints for new services
Joint Powers Agreement - Service Contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalizes roles and responsibilities for transit in the region Offers a role for existing transit providers Key functions would be centralized for increased efficiency and customer friendliness Local control over service decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not reduce the number of transit entities in the region May increase the number of transit providers (new services) Demanding role for lead agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint compliance manager would improve ease and degree of compliance Sets stage for more comprehensive transit restructuring in future New contracting opportunities for service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance of communities to contracting for transit service Difficulty identifying entity willing to act as lead agency for centralized administrative functions and contract oversight Lack of political and community support Funding constraints for new services
Joint Powers Agreement - Consolidated Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces number of transit entities in the region All functions would be centralized in long term for maximum efficiency and customer friendliness More consistent and understandable service across communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most dramatic structural change Eliminates local transit system autonomy Most difficult alternative to implement Highest cost to member agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to realize cost savings for existing services Option to contract with existing providers in the short term Offers infrastructure and resources for meeting future transit needs of region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance of communities to structural changes in transit service delivery Lack of political and community support Selection of Low LOS scenario for implementation Funding constraints for new services

offer to streamline, enhance, and improve transit services to meet the needs of residents throughout the region.

NEXT STEPS

This memo described organizational options for delivering the service design alternatives preferred by study area stakeholders in a regional context. Next steps include discussions at the local level regarding alternatives for both service and organizational structures to determine priorities and preferences.



TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Organizational Alternatives

FINAL

October 2015

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1 INTRODUCTION

While the initial objective of this project was to identify opportunities for restructuring existing transit services in Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties, as the project progressed, the focus shifted to determining the best way to help develop a new Regional Transit System. The goal is to provide access to transportation to residents of the three counties, especially populations dependent on transit, including individuals with disabilities, new Americans, groups with low incomes including the homeless population, and people with limited vehicle availability.

Using the existing city-wide transit systems as the foundation, the previous Technical Memorandum (Technical Memo #2) presented service design alternatives for a new three-county transit system. Service alternatives for a new regional transit system were presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. The Low LOS Scenario featured the introduction of new demand-response services to unserved areas within each county and volunteer driver services for the most rural areas. The High LOS Scenario added inter-county deviated route services to expand connections and opportunities to travel throughout the region. No changes to existing transit services are proposed in either scenario.

This Technical Memorandum presents three different organizational alternatives for creating a new three-county transit system. The description of each alternative provides information on member agencies, governance, service delivery, staffing, and member responsibility for various functions. Additionally, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis provides a comparison of the three alternatives.

SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties are three of only a few counties in Minnesota that do not have county-wide transit service. Each of the three counties has a city-wide transit system: Greater Mankato Transit System (Blue Earth County), Saint Peter Transit (Nicollet County), and Le Sueur Transit (Le Sueur County). In addition, VINE Faith in Action provides some service to residents of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties.

Saint Peter Transit provides route deviation and dial-a-ride service for the general public within the City of Saint Peter and the City of Kasota (located in Le Sueur County). Le Sueur Transit provides route deviation and dial-a-ride for the general public within the City of Le Sueur. VINE offers volunteer driver transportation to individuals age 60 and over, as well as limited service to individuals under age 60 who have a disability, throughout its service area. VINE's People to Jobs program provides service to work, training, and child care for workers with limited incomes. Each of these three providers utilizes a small fleet of 2-3 vehicles. Moreover, they each operate with a small administrative/management staff; Saint Peter has two FTEs, Le Sueur has 1.5 FTEs, and VINE has 5.5 FTEs.

Figure 1-1 provides a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis for regional transportation in the three-county study area. The information in the table highlights

the resources available to transportation stakeholders in the study area as they consider creation of a new regional system and some of the challenges they face as they move forward.

Figure 1-1 SWOT Analysis: Regional Transportation Network in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet Counties

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of transit service where provided—response time, assistance, personal touch • Transportation resources in three-county region include public, private for profit, private nonprofit, and volunteer providers • Community appreciation and financial support for existing transit providers and services expressed through contract services and other funding • VINE's experience with mobility management services and administration of volunteer driving program • Viable regional intercity bus routes were identified as part of Mankato Transit System redesign project • Saint Peter/Kasota relationship sets precedent for inter-county service • Support for coordination and new transit services, where appropriate, from MnDOT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited transit service areas: Le Sueur, Saint Peter, Mankato area • Service areas are not contiguous • Limited eligibility for transit services—city residents, job access clients, Mankato area residents with a disability or over age 60 • Somewhat limited operating hours—little evening and weekend public service • Two municipal systems utilize unique manual reservations/scheduling/dispatching procedures • Municipal systems operate with very small staffs • New Freedom and Job Access and Reverse Commute Funding from MnDOT for VINE will end in 2017 • Existing providers are different types of organizations: two municipal systems and one private nonprofit organization
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populations typically among transit users are concentrated in cities in the three counties: older adults, persons with disabilities, residents of zero-vehicle and low-income households • Destinations are concentrated in Mankato, North Mankato, and Saint Peter • Volunteer driver programs face administrative challenges and are willing to coordinate • Neighboring counties willing to coordinate regionally—Brown, Watonwan • Public and private providers willing to coordinate—MTS, Land to Air, AMV • Regional provision of other services has been discussed in the study area before • Human service agencies consistently report that clients have unmet transportation needs • Inform residents and elected officials about transportation needs and the value of small urban/rural public transit services • Current process to create Regional Transportation Coordination Councils provides infrastructure, financial support, technical assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low population density overall • 1% or less of commuters in each county use transit • Residents with transportation needs live in rural areas as well as cities • Public transit not seen as a high priority need in all three counties • Previous inter-county service along Highway 14, Highway 15 was not successful • Desire to preserve quality of existing transit services • Need for sustainable funding sources • Success of a new regional transportation network requires a regional champion

OVERVIEW OF SERVICE DESIGN ALTERNATIVES

Service design alternatives for a new three-county transit system were developed as part of Technical Memo #2 and are presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. The alternatives were developed using stakeholder input about unmet transportation needs during earlier project tasks and the MnDOT Regional Trade Center service standards. Examples of the types and levels of service collected from several peer multi-county regions in Minnesota also informed the alternatives.

The types of service included in the proposed service design alternatives and the role that each will play in the region's public transportation network are summarized below.

- **Structured Dial-A-Ride Service**—designed to offer a basic level of mobility for residents of small communities or rural areas, structured Dial-A-Ride service (also known as zoned Dial-A-Ride, pre-scheduled group trips, or planned demand service) provides advance reservation, door-to-door or curb-to-curb service within a community and/or connections to larger communities or regional destinations on specified days of the week. In the study area service scenarios, structured Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for communities with populations of at least 250, with service operating for six hours per day, three days a week.
- **Community Dial-A-Ride Service**—offering a higher level of service than structured Dial-A-Ride, community Dial-A-Ride service is proposed for larger communities with populations of at least 2,500. Services would operate for 50 hours per week, either 10 hours per day on weekdays or some combination of 8-9 hours per day on weekdays and 7-8 hours on Saturdays. Connections to urban centers within the county could be provided on specified days each week. Community Dial-A-Ride service could also be offered as a county-wide option.
- **Flexible or Deviated Routes**—these routes operate on a fixed route and schedule, but depart from the route to pick up or drop off passengers within a certain distance upon request (typically made in advance). Deviated routes could provide internal service for larger communities (Saint Peter Transit and Le Sueur Transit currently operate both Dial-A-Ride and deviated routes in their cities) or regional connections between communities. The frequency of proposal regional deviated routes varies by route, from a minimum of two round trips per day, three days a week up to five round trips per day, Monday through Friday.

Components of the LOS Scenarios

As mentioned above, service alternatives for a new regional transit system are presented in Low and High Level of Service (LOS) Scenarios. The Low LOS Scenario features the introduction of new demand-response services to unserved areas within each county. Structured dial-a-ride service is proposed for the smaller communities in each county. These communities include: Amboy, Madison Lake, Mapleton, and Vernon Center in Blue Earth County, Waterville in Le Sueur County, and Courtland, Lafayette, and Nicollet in Nicollet County. A higher level of dial-a-ride service is recommended for the larger, but still small, communities in each county, including Eagle Lake and Lake Crystal in Blue Earth County and Le Center and Montgomery in Le Sueur County. The Low LOS scenario also includes the operation of a volunteer driver program throughout the three-county region, administered by a regional Mobility Manager.

The High LOS scenario includes all services proposed as part of the Low LOS scenario, with the addition of deviated routes to connect smaller communities with larger urban areas in each county and the region. These routes represent those that are most likely to succeed based on travel patterns, population centers, and location of major employers or other activity centers.

Potential routes include:

Blue Earth

- Eagle Lake and Madison Lake to Mankato
- Mapleton to Mankato
- Lake Crystal to Mankato
- Amboy to Mankato

Le Sueur

- Saint Peter to Le Sueur (shared with Nicollet County)
- Saint Peter to Mankato (shared with Nicollet County)

Nicollet

- Saint Peter to Le Sueur (shared with Le Sueur County)
- Saint Peter to Mankato (shared with Le Sueur County)
- New Ulm to Mankato (via Nicollet; shared with Brown County)

In both the High and Low LOS scenarios, all transit services currently provided in the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur are assumed to continue.

Additional details regarding the service days and hours and estimated costs for the LOS scenarios are provided in Figure 1-2 and Figure 1-3. Estimates of ridership for the Low and High LOS scenarios were developed using the findings from four peer rural transit systems in Minnesota, Prairie Five Rides, Tri-CAP, Tri-Valley, and Western Community Transit. Current ridership data from Saint Peter Transit, Le Sueur Transit, and VINE was also used as a guide. Service costs were estimated based on proposed service hours and the average cost per hour among Minnesota's rural transit providers in 2014.

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Figure 1-2 Operating and Capital Cost Estimates, Low LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Lafayette	936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000		
	Nicollet	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000		
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed	NA	NA	\$62,920	NA	
Le Sueur					\$31,460		
Nicollet					\$26,620		
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				10,816	5,616	\$551,616	\$480,000
Le Sueur				8,008	2,808	\$408,408	\$320,000
Nicollet				2,808	2,808	\$169,828	\$160,000
Grand Total				21,632	11,232	\$1,129,852	\$960,000

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Figure 1-3 Operating and Capital Cost Estimates, High LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Nicollet			Courtland	936	936	\$47,736
Lafayette				936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
Nicollet				936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000

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Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Mapleton to Mankato	One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Amboy to Mankato	One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$80,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$80,000
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	1,700	0	\$86,700	\$80,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$80,000
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$80,000
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				9,744	3,744	\$559,864	\$640,000
Le Sueur				7,436	936	\$410,696	\$328,000
Nicollet				6,008	2,808	\$333,028	\$272,000
Grand Total				23,188	7,488	\$1,303,588	\$1,240,000

2 ORGANIZATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

This chapter presents three organizational alternatives for managing and operating a new regional transit network in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, and Nicollet counties. They include:

- Intergovernmental Service Agreement for Transit Cooperative
- Joint Powers Agreement—Service Contract
- Joint Powers Agreement—Consolidated Services

The alternatives represent progressive degrees of structural change for the region's transit services, ranging from the centralization of certain functions for transit operations that would remain separate for each county to the formation of a new regional transit system that would incorporate existing providers into its structure.

Each option is summarized below. A comparison of the three alternatives is presented in the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis that follow the individual descriptions.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL SERVICE AGREEMENT—TRANSIT COOPERATIVE

Intergovernmental service agreements are widely used among local governments in Minnesota to shape cooperative efforts. Agreements are usually, although not always, written. Less formal than Joint Powers Agreements, these arrangements nevertheless effectively facilitate intergovernmental cooperation. In the study area, an intergovernmental service agreement could be used to establish a transit cooperative among interested counties and municipalities.

This option would formalize relationships and transit service responsibilities among the participating partners and consolidate some functions, but would maintain separate transit operations throughout the three-county region. The cooperative would provide a framework for maintaining existing transit services and implementing new services in small communities and new regional services, standardizing service policies and operational procedures among providers, centralizing functions such as grant management and reservations/scheduling/dispatch, and branding service regionally without creating a new transit system structure. This option could be the initial step in the creation of a new regional transit system at some point in the future.

Likely parties to an intergovernmental service agreement include Blue Earth, Le Sueur and Nicollet counties, the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur, and any smaller communities that are interested in initiating the structured Dial-A-Ride or community Dial-A-Ride services proposed for them in the two service alternative scenarios. Decision-making authority would be vested in an Advisory Board composed of representatives of each member agency.

Responsibility for the various functions involved in a transit cooperative effort is summarized in Figure 2-1. A lead agency would be designated to contract with MnDOT for grant funds for the three-county area and to handle administrative duties such as data compilation and reporting,

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facilitating shared purchases among providers, obtaining vehicle insurance, and employing a shared compliance manager (to be funded with a Transit for Our Future grant from MnDOT). A single entity, either the lead agency or some other organization, would oversee the provision of volunteer driver services for residents of the region's rural areas.

Figure 2-1 Responsibilities and Functions within each Organizational Alternative

Organizational Alternative			
Function	Intergovernmental Service Agreement Transit Cooperative	Joint Powers Agreement Service Contract	Joint Powers Agreement Consolidated Service
Governance			
Members	Counties Cities of St. Peter and Le Sueur Smaller communities desiring service	Counties Cities of St. Peter and Le Sueur Smaller communities desiring service	Counties Cities of St. Peter and Le Sueur Smaller communities desiring service
Legal Relationship	Written Intergovernmental Service Agreement	Joint Powers Agreement and service contracts	Joint Powers Agreement
Management Structure	Advisory Board composed of representatives of member communities Lead agency designated to handle some administrative functions	Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of member communities Lead agency to oversee operation and contracts	Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of member communities New executive director to manage daily operations
Service Planning and Delivery			
Service Planning	Jointly by member communities	Lead agency in consultation with member communities	Centralized for region
Reservations	Centralized by county	Centralized by county	Centralized for region
Dispatch	Centralized by county	Centralized by county	Centralized for region
Operations	Existing provider and/or contractor(s) as appropriate in each county	Overseen by lead agency; existing and/or new providers under contract to operate service	Goal: centralized, either in-house or contract operations Shorter term: service in each county could be contracted
Vehicle Maintenance	Could be done centrally in each county by existing provider or for three-county region by MTS	Done by contractors	Centralized or responsibility of service contractors
Service Policies	Standardized by county	Standardized by county	Consistent throughout region
Marketing	Regional branding; consistent approach to service information	Individual branding possible, but regional branding and service information is preferable	Single identity of regional system
Volunteer Program	Program covers multiple communities, overseen by one entity	Program covers multiple communities, overseen by one entity	Program covers consolidated region, overseen by one entity

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Staffing			
Employee Status	Most staff employed by current agency, but new compliance manager shared by all member communities	Most staff employed by current agency, but new compliance manager shared by all member communities	Goal: all staff employed by consolidated system Phase I: if service is contracted, staff remains employed by current agency
New Staff Needs	Joint compliance manager (funded by Transit for Our Future grant) Designation of transit coordinator in each county and smaller community	Joint compliance manager (funded by Transit for Our Future grant) Designation of transit coordinator in each county and smaller community	Executive Director, Management/administrative staff Reservations, scheduling, dispatching staff, drivers (if service is provided in-house)
Administration			
MnDOT Grant Management	Lead agency designated to contract with state	Lead agency	Consolidated system
Data Collection and Reporting	Data collected by providers and compiled by lead agency	Data collected by providers and compiled by lead agency	Data collected centrally or by service contractors and compiled centrally
Billing	Shared practices/procedures	Centralized system	Centralized system
Procurement	Shared purchases where appropriate (fuel, equipment, software)	Single purchasing system	Single purchasing system
Vehicle Ownership	Vehicle titles held by member agencies	Vehicle titles held by service contractors	Goal: current vehicle ownership transferred to JPB; new vehicles owned by JPB Phase I: vehicles owned by service contractors
Vehicle Insurance	Insurance consortium	Obtained by lead agency or part of service contractor requirements	Obtained by consolidated system or part of service contractor requirements
Federal/State Compliance	Overseen by joint compliance manager	Overseen by joint compliance manager	Included in management/administrative staff duties

Service could be delivered in each county by any one of the existing major providers and/or contractors, as appropriate. If service is contracted, federal and state competitive procurement procedures would be followed, and any entity that is interested in being considered for selection would be eligible to submit a bid or proposal. However, to show that there are viable providers within the study area that may wish to compete for operation of new services, Figure 2-2 lists potential operators for the service components proposed for each county in the Low and High LOS scenarios.

Figure 2-2 Potential Providers of Proposed Services, Intergovernmental Service Agreement

Service Component	Potential Providers
Low LOS Scenario	
Blue Earth County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (4 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor
Volunteer Rides (rural communities)	VINE
Le Sueur County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (Waterville)	Le Sueur Transit or new contractor
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities plus City of Le Sueur)	Le Sueur Transit (city and other towns) or Le Sueur Transit for city and new contractor for towns
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
Nicollet County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (3 communities)	Saint Peter Transit or new contractor
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities plus City of Saint Peter)	Saint Peter Transit (city and other towns) or Saint Peter Transit for city and new contractor for towns
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
High LOS Scenario – Additional Services	
Deviated Fixed Routes—Blue Earth County	
Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Mapleton to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Lake Crystal to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Amboy to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or other contractor
Deviated Fixed Routes—Le Sueur County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor
Deviated Fixed Routes—Nicollet County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, or other contractor

JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT—SERVICE CONTRACT

There are variations on Joint Powers Agreements (JPAs) between local governments in Minnesota. Two of those appear applicable to the creation of a new regional transit system in the study area. The first is the service contract model.

Under this organizational option, interested governments would enter into a formal written Joint Powers Agreement for centralized provision of transit services in the region by a designated lead agency. The other members of the Joint Powers Board formed by the agreement would purchase transit services for their communities from the lead agency. That agency could either operate all transit services desired by the other parties to the agreement directly or, more likely in this case, contract with other service providers in some or all areas.

As in the intergovernmental service agreement option, the likely participants in a JPA for a service contract would be the three counties, the cities of Saint Peter and Le Sueur, and interested smaller towns. Designation of the lead agency would be up to the members based on the willingness of one entity to assume responsibility for providing and/or contracting for transit service in the region on behalf of the other members.

The division of responsibilities for various functions among the parties to a JPA is presented in Figure 2-1 above. Governance would be provided by a Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of each participating government. The lead agency would be responsible for administrative functions, including contracting for the provision of service it does not operate directly, coordinating service planning among member communities, contracting with MnDOT for grant funds, employing a joint compliance manager (to be funded with a Transit for Our Future grant), compiling data and reporting, obtaining vehicle insurance, and coordinating regional branding of services. As in the Intergovernmental Service Agreement option, volunteer driver services for the region would be managed centrally.

Service delivery options are shown in Figure 2-3. For Dial-A-Ride services, it is envisioned that one contractor would provide all of the services to small communities in each county, with centralized reservations, scheduling, and dispatching. Service policies would be standardized within each county; standardization across counties would also be desirable.

As in the intergovernmental service agreement option, contracted services would be subject to a competitive procurement process. The list in Figure 2-3 is intended to show that there are providers in the study area that might be interested in competing for the new service contracts that would be available as part of the expanded regional transit network.

Figure 2-3 Potential Providers of Proposed Services, Joint Powers Agreement for Service Contract

Service Component	Potential Providers
Low LOS Scenario	
Blue Earth County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (4 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor; one contract for all towns
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities)	Existing service provider or new contractor; one contract for both towns
Volunteer Rides (rural communities)	VINE
Le Sueur County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (Waterville)	Le Sueur Transit
Community Dial-A-Ride (2 communities plus City of Le Sueur)	Le Sueur Transit
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
Nicollet County	
Structured Dial-A-Ride (3 communities)	Saint Peter Transit
Community Dial-A-Ride - City of Saint Peter	Saint Peter Transit
Volunteer Rides (rural areas)	VINE
High LOS Scenario – Additional Services	
Deviated Fixed Routes—Blue Earth County	
Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Mapleton to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Lake Crystal to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Amboy to Mankato	Existing service provider, Land to Air, or structured/community Dial-A-Ride contractor
Deviated Fixed Routes—Le Sueur County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, other new contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	
Deviated Fixed Routes—Nicollet County	
Saint Peter to Mankato	Saint Peter Transit, Land to Air, other new contractor
Saint Peter to Le Sueur	

JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT—CONSOLIDATED SERVICE

Joint Powers Agreements that facilitate shared powers or consolidated services are more commonly used among local governments in Minnesota than agreements for service contracts. This option represents the highest degree of structural change for transportation stakeholders in the study area of the three organizational alternatives discussed here because it would create a new regional transit entity to deliver all transit services in the region. The new regional system would incorporate and replace the existing providers over time.

This organizational alternative would be most suitable if the High LOS scenario is selected by study area stakeholders for implementation because of the regional services that are included in it and the interconnectedness of its service components.

As in option #2, participating governmental units would enter into a written JPA and form a Joint Powers Board of Directors composed of representatives of all participating members to oversee and guide the new regional transit system. A new executive director or general manager, together with other key management and administrative staff, would be hired to manage day-to-day operations, with direction from the Board of Directors.

As shown in Figure 2-1 above, all service planning and delivery functions, such as reservations/scheduling/dispatching, service policies, vehicle maintenance, volunteer driver service management, and marketing would be centralized for the three-county region rather than by county. All administrative responsibilities would be handled centrally as well.

The long-term goal for a regional transit system would be consolidated service delivery, provided either in-house or by a contractor. Ownership of vehicles and other assets would be assumed by the new system and operations staff (drivers, reservationists, schedulers, dispatchers, supervisory personnel) would become employees of the new system. As an interim step, however, some or all services could be provided under contract to the new entity, utilizing existing providers where possible and desirable. This would allow for a transition over time from city-based services to the new regional structure.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Figure 2-4 compares and contrasts the characteristics of the three organizational alternatives by identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with each.

All three alternatives would provide the structure needed to implement the components of the Low or High LOS scenarios. As shown in Figure 2-4, a number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats pertain to more than one—sometimes to all three—of the alternatives. The key differences among the options are the degree of change that they would mean for existing transit providers in the region, the complexity of their implementation, and the potential they offer to streamline, enhance, and improve transit services to meet the needs of residents throughout the region.

NEXT STEPS

This memo described organizational options for delivering the service design alternatives preferred by study area stakeholders in a regional context. Next steps include discussions at the local level regarding alternatives for both service and organizational structures to determine priorities and preferences.

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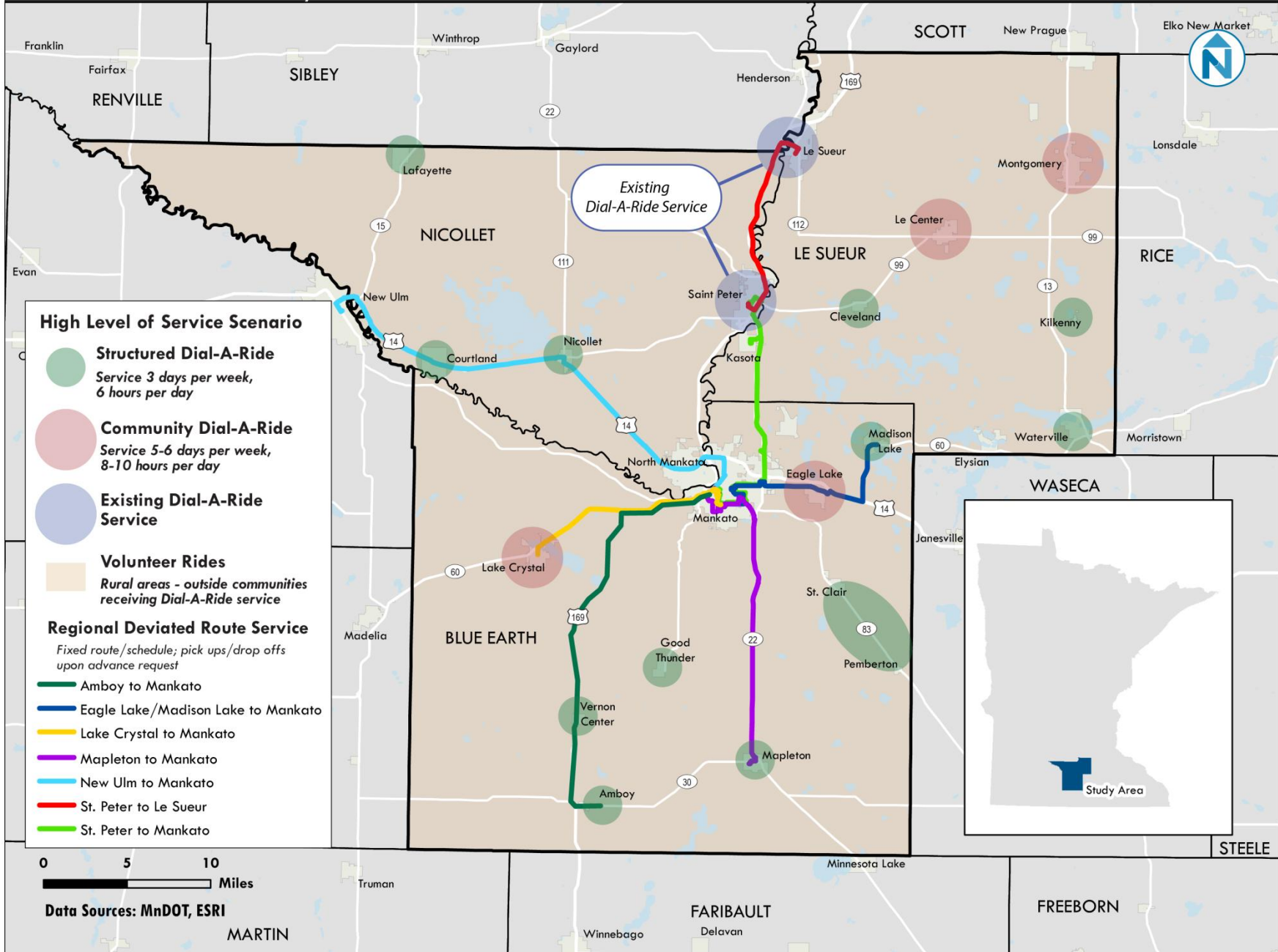
Figure 2-4 Organizational Alternative SWOT Analysis

Organizational Structure	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Intergovernmental Service Agreement - Transit Cooperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal disruption to established transit providers Formalizes roles and responsibilities for transit in the region Easiest alternative to implement Lowest cost to member agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not reduce the number of transit entities in the region May increase the number of transit providers (new services) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key functions could be centralized for increased efficiency and customer - friendliness Joint compliance manager would improve ease and degree of compliance Sets stage for more comprehensive transit restructuring in future New contracting opportunities for service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty identifying entity willing to act as lead agency for centralized administrative functions Funding constraints for new services
Joint Powers Agreement - Service Contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalizes roles and responsibilities for transit in the region Offers a role for existing transit providers Key functions would be centralized for increased efficiency and customer friendliness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not reduce the number of transit entities in the region May increase the number of transit providers (new services) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to realize cost savings for existing services Joint compliance manager would improve ease and degree of compliance Sets stage for more comprehensive transit restructuring in future New contracting opportunities for service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance of communities to contracting for transit service Difficulty identifying entity willing to act as lead agency for centralized administrative functions and contract oversight Lack of political and community support Funding constraints for new services
Joint Powers Agreement - Consolidated Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces number of transit entities in the region All functions would be centralized in long term for maximum efficiency and customer friendliness More consistent and understandable service across communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most dramatic structural change Eliminates local transit system autonomy Most difficult alternative to implement Highest cost to member agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to realize cost savings for existing services Option to contract with existing providers in the short term Offers infrastructure and resources for meeting future transit needs of region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resistance of communities to structural changes in transit service delivery Lack of political and community support Selection of Low LOS scenario for implementation Funding constraints for new services

High Level of Service (LOS) Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	2013 Pop	Market Served/Need Addressed	Service Days	Service Hours	Comments
Structured Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Amboy	534	Basic access to local and county transportation services; access for transit-dependent population groups	3 days/week	6 hours/day	Service hours can be used to provide trips within community and/or to county's urban centers on specific days.
	Good Thunder	572				
	Madison Lake	1,056				
	Mapleton	1,752				
	Pemberton/St. Clair	1,109				
	Vernon Center	332				
Le Sueur	Cleveland	614				
	Kilkenny	351				
	Waterville	1,864				
Nicollet	Courtland	635				
	Lafayette	570				
	Nicollet	1,126				
Community Dial-A-Ride						
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	2,534	Enhanced level of access to local transportation service for transit-dependent groups and general public; opportunity for connections to larger urban centers in county	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	Connections can be provided to county's urban centers on specific days; service could also be provided on a county-wide basis.
	Lake Crystal	2,537		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Le Sueur	Le Center	2,489		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
	Montgomery	2,944		M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	
Volunteer Driver Services						
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns		Lifeline service for residents of rural communities or those needing transportation that community services are not able to provide	As needed		Volunteer driver programs could be administered by a regional Mobility Manager.
Le Sueur						
Nicollet						
Deviated Fixed Routes						
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato		Access to important regional destinations--Mankato, Saint Peter, and New Ulm (Brown County)--for shopping, health care, and employment	M-F	1 round trip per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	
	Mapleton to Mankato			One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	
	Lake Crystal to Mankato			M-F	1 round trip per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	
	Amboy to Mankato			One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter			M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Mankato			M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato			M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Mankato			M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur			M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	Annual costs would be allocated among communities on the basis of passenger trips

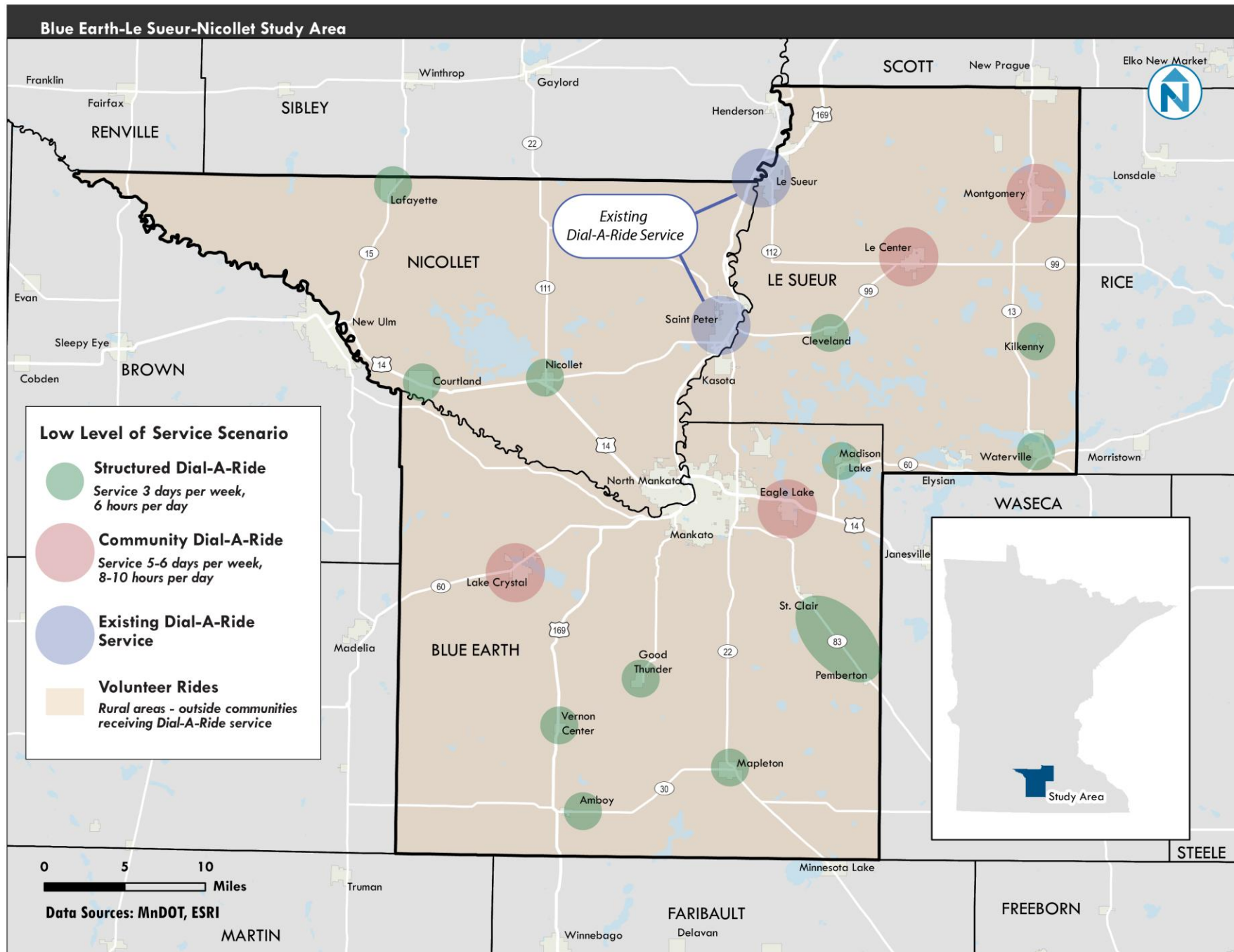
Blue Earth-Le Sueur-Nicollet Study Area



Low Level of Service (LOS) Scenario

[illegible]

Blue Earth-Le Sueur-Nicollet Study Area



Estimated Operating and Capital Costs, Low LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Lafayette			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Nicollet			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed	NA	NA	NA	\$62,920	NA
Le Sueur						\$31,460	
Nicollet						\$26,620	
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				10,816	5,616	\$551,616	\$480,000
Le Sueur				8,008	2,808	\$408,408	\$320,000
Nicollet				2,808	2,808	\$169,828	\$160,000
Grand Total				21,632	11,232	\$1,129,852	\$960,000

Estimated Operating and Capital Costs, High LOS Scenario

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Amboy	3 days/week	6 hours/day	936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Good Thunder			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Madison Lake			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Mapleton			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Pemberton/St. Clair			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Vernon Center			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Le Sueur	Cleveland			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Kilkenny			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Waterville			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Nicollet	Courtland			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
	Lafayette			936	936	\$47,736	\$80,000
	Nicollet			936	936	\$47,736	\$40,000
Community Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Le Sueur	Le Center	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
	Montgomery	M-F or M-Sat	50/week; M-F, 10 hours/day or M-Sat, 8.5/7.5 hours/day	2,600	0	\$132,600	\$80,000
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	Rural areas outside of cities and towns	As needed	NA	NA	NA	\$62,920	NA
Le Sueur						\$31,460	
Nicollet						\$26,620	
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	Eagle Lake/Madison Lake to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Mapleton to Mankato	One weekday	2 round trips, a.m. peak and evening peak	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000
	Lake Crystal to Mankato	M-F	2 one-way trips per day: a.m. peak (inbound), p.m. peak (outbound)	300	0	\$15,300	\$80,000
	Amboy to Mankato	One weekday	1 a.m. peak round trip	100	0	\$5,100	\$80,000

Service Type/County	Community Served	Service Days	Service Hours	Estimated Annual Service Hours	Rural Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Cost	Estimated Vehicle Cost
Le Sueur	Le Sueur to Saint Peter	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$56,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F 5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday 3 round trips mid-day	M-F 1,900 Saturday 300	0	M-F \$96,900 Saturday \$15,300	\$32,000
Nicollet	New Ulm to Mankato	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	1,700	0	\$86,700	\$80,000
	Saint Peter to Mankato	M-Sat	M-F5 round trips per day: 2 a.m., 1 mid-day, 2 p.m. Saturday3 round trips mid-day	M-F1,900 Saturday300	0	M-F\$96,900 Saturday\$15,300	\$48,000
	Saint Peter to Le Sueur	M-F	3 round trips per day: a.m. peak, mid-day, p.m. peak	600	0	\$30,600	\$24,000
Total Annual Service Hours and Cost by County							
Blue Earth				11,616	5,616	\$592,416	\$800,000
Le Sueur				9,308	2,808	\$430,708	\$408,000
Nicollet				6,008	2,808	\$333,028	\$312,000
Grand Total				26,932	11,232	\$1,356,152	\$1,520,000

Estimated Annual Operating Costs, Low LOS Scenario 2016, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Annual Operating Cost	Federal/State Share 80-85%	Local Share 15-20%	Service Hours	Estimated Ridership	Estimated Fare Revenue	Balance Local Share
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	\$286,416	\$243,454	\$42,962	5,616	13,223	\$26,445	\$16,517
Le Sueur	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	10,123	\$20,247	\$1,235
Nicollet	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	19,864	\$39,728	-\$18,247
Community Dial-A-Ride*							
Blue Earth	\$265,200	\$212,160	\$53,040	5,200	12,243	\$18,365	\$34,675
Le Sueur	\$492,646	\$394,117	\$98,529	9,096	32,793	\$49,189	\$49,340
Nicollet	\$318,410	\$254,728	\$63,682	6,997	49,497	\$74,246	-\$10,564
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$1,649,088	\$1,347,912	\$301,176	32,525	137,743	\$228,219	\$72,957
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	\$62,920	\$53,482	\$9,438	NA	2,860	NA	\$9,438
Le Sueur	\$31,460	\$26,741	\$4,719	NA	1,210	NA	\$4,719
Nicollet	\$26,620	\$22,627	\$3,993	NA	1,430	NA	\$3,993
Total Volunteer Rides	\$121,000	\$102,850	\$18,150		5,500	NA	\$18,150
Total Low LOS Scenario	\$1,770,088	\$1,450,762	\$319,326	32,525	143,243	\$228,219	\$91,107

*Community Dial-A-Ride in Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties includes Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit

Estimated Annual Operating Costs, High LOS Scenario 2020, and Funding Shares

Service Type/County	Total Annual Operating Cost	Federal/State Share 80-85%	Local Share 15-20%	Service Hours	Estimated Ridership*	Estimated Fare Revenue	Balance Local Share
Structured Dial-A-Ride							
Blue Earth	\$286,416	\$243,454	\$42,962	5,616	17,315	\$34,629	\$8,333
Le Sueur	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	11,671	\$23,342	-\$1,861
Nicollet	\$143,208	\$121,727	\$21,481	2,808	17,894	\$35,788	-\$14,307
Community Dial-A-Ride**							
Blue Earth	\$265,200	\$212,160	\$53,040	5,200	16,032	\$24,048	\$28,992
Le Sueur	\$492,646	\$394,117	\$98,529	9,096	37,806	\$56,709	\$41,821
Nicollet	\$318,410	\$254,728	\$63,682	6,997	44,589	\$66,883	-\$3,201
Total Dial-A-Ride	\$1,649,088	\$1,347,912	\$301,176	32,525	145,306	\$241,399	\$59,777
Volunteer Driver Services							
Blue Earth	\$62,920	\$53,482	\$9,438	NA	2,860	NA	\$9,438
Le Sueur	\$31,460	\$26,741	\$4,719	NA	1,210	NA	\$4,719
Nicollet	\$26,620	\$22,627	\$3,993	NA	1,430	NA	\$3,993
Total Volunteer Rides	\$121,000	\$102,850	\$18,150		5,500	NA	\$18,150
Subtotal	\$1,770,088	\$1,450,762	\$319,326	32,525	150,806	\$241,399	\$77,927
Deviated Fixed Routes							
Blue Earth	\$40,800	\$34,680	\$6,120	800	2,466	\$7,399	-\$1,279
Le Sueur	\$66,300	\$53,040	\$13,260	1,300	5,403	\$16,210	-\$2,950
Nicollet	\$163,200	\$130,560	\$32,640	3,200	20,392	\$61,176	-\$28,536
Total Deviated Routes	\$270,300	\$218,280	\$52,020	5,300	28,262	\$84,785	-\$32,765
Total by County							
Blue Earth	\$655,336	\$543,776	\$111,560	11,616	38,673	\$66,076	\$45,484
Le Sueur	\$733,614	\$595,625	\$137,989	13,204	56,090	\$96,260	\$41,729
Nicollet	\$651,438	\$529,642	\$121,796	13,005	84,305	\$163,848	-\$42,052
Total High LOS Scenario	\$2,040,388	\$1,669,042	\$371,346	37,825	179,068	\$326,184	\$45,162

*Ridership on Structured Dial-A-Ride and Community Dial-A-Ride services are higher than in the Low LOS Scenario as shown in Low LOS Scenario table due to the inclusion of ridership increases between 2016 and 2020.

**Community Dial-A-Ride in Le Sueur and Nicollet Counties includes Le Sueur Transit and Saint Peter Transit