

2020 METROPOLITAN COUNCIL PERFORMANCE EVALUATION REPORT

REPORT TO THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE



The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region

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The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization for the seven-county Twin Cities area. The Council operates the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans and helps fund regional parks, and administers federal funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate- income individuals and families. The 17-member Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the governor.

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About This Report

The Metropolitan Council recognizes performance evaluation as a key tool to ensure that its functions meet their objectives in a timely and cost-effective manner. The Council has implemented a number of methods to strengthen its performance evaluation process.

This report is required by Minnesota Statutes, Section 473.13, Subdivision 1a, which calls for the Council to submit annually to the Legislature a "...substantive assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of each significant program of the Council, with, to the extent possible, quantitative information on the status, progress, costs, benefits and effects of each program."

The report provides a record of the services provided and service levels achieved by the Council in the context of historical trends, performance measures and budget compliance.

The report includes multi-year performance measures for major Council operations and summarizes significant accomplishments by division.

The introduction describes the Council's authority, organization, and major functions. The overview summarizes the Council's major accomplishments in 2020. The next three sections discuss division results and the accomplishments of the individual units within each division.

The last section is the appendix, which includes various maps and a 2020 Council budget summary.

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Introduction

The Twin Cities Region and the Metropolitan Council

The seven-county metropolitan area is a growing and economically vibrant region with a population of more than 3 million. The regional economy is supported by diverse industries, and its unemployment rate is lower than the national average. The region’s population is projected to grow to nearly 3.7 million people by 2040.

The Metropolitan Council was created by the Minnesota Legislature in 1967 to plan and coordinate the orderly growth and development of the seven-county area. It has authority to plan for regional systems that include transportation, aviation, water resources, and regional parks and open space. The Council’s core mission includes the efficient operation of transit services, wastewater collection and treatment, and housing programs to assist households with low incomes.

The governor appoints a chair who serves at large and 16 Council members representing districts, who together govern the organization. Within the organization are divisions for transportation, environment, and community development. The Council has approximately 4,200 employees and annual operating expenditures of over \$800 million, mostly for regional transit service and wastewater treatment.

Table 1. Number of Employees and Percent of Expenditures by Division, 2020

Division	Employees	Expenditures
Community Development	89	2%
Environmental Services	637	15%
Metro Transit	3,099	74%
Metropolitan Transportation Services	49	1%
Regional Administration	342	8%
Total	4,216	100%

Divisions and Their Functions

Community Development carries out regional functions for the metropolitan parks and open space system, develops policy for the region’s orderly growth and development, conducts research, provides local planning assistance, operates a housing and redevelopment authority, and administers the Livable Communities programs.

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) provides wastewater collection and treatment services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to municipal and industrial customers. MCES operates and maintains 634 miles of regional sanitary sewers and treats an average of 250 million gallons of wastewater daily at nine regional treatment plants. The division conducts integrated planning to ensure sustainable water quality and water supply for the region.

Metro Transit is the largest transit agency in Minnesota, providing an integrated network of buses, light rail, and commuter trains, as well as resources for those who carpool, vanpool, walk or bike.

Metropolitan Transportation Services develops regional policy for all means of transportation, allocates federal funds to transportation projects, coordinates regional aviation planning, and provides transit service for people with disabilities.

Overview of the Council's Performance

Council updates regional policy plans for transportation and parks

The Council approved an update to the region's 2040 Transportation Policy Plan in 2020. The update to the plan addresses trends that have emerged since the plan was last updated in 2018. This update sets the stage with studies and analyses that will inform the region's next big planning effort, the 2050 regional development guide.

Regional planning hinges on the interconnectedness of transportation with land use, water supply, parks, and housing. The update will inform conversations with local governments, community partners and the people of the region with valuable transportation data and analysis.

The update marks the end of a year-long process, involving stakeholder meetings with technical staff, policymakers, and people across the region.

The updated Regional Parks Policy Plan includes modest policy changes and an updated system plan to guide the Regional Parks System. The plan builds upon the existing work of 10 implementing agencies to advance equity by committing to several strategies designed to strengthen equitable use of the Regional Park System.

The updated policy plan identifies estimated costs for acquisition and development and includes a five-year capital improvement program. The plan update focuses on stewardship through maintaining and enhancing the Regional Parks System.

Council protects public health and environment

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) collects and treats an average of 250 million gallons of wastewater from businesses, industry, and 2.9 million residents daily at its nine regional wastewater treatment plants. This cleaned water is discharged to the Mississippi, Minnesota and St. Croix rivers.

Our 22,248 effluent water quality data points tracked compliance with federal and state clean water discharge standards throughout the year. Six treatment plants had five or more consecutive years of perfect compliance with their discharge permits through 2020. Overall, our compliance record is the third best in the nation.

Essential wastewater services uninterrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic

In this unprecedented year, the Council responded quickly to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace, reduce the risk of disruption to our essential services, and support employee well-being. MCES sustained uninterrupted wastewater collection and treatment service to the region and maintained construction, maintenance and planning functions — which are all essential to supporting the health of the region.

COVID-19 spread monitored using wastewater-based epidemiology

In 2020, MCES partnered with three different research partners to monitor viral fragments in wastewater to predict COVID-19 outbreaks. Data from our nine treatment plants contributed to a body of research that shows how wastewater epidemiology could become one more tool to help public health officials make informed policy decisions to mitigate or prevent future spread.

Council ensures quality, reliable sources of clean water for the future

In the metro area, MCES monitored the water quality of 20 tributary streams; 17 sites on the Minnesota, Mississippi and St. Croix for the large-river program; and 168 lakes in our role in ensuring reliable sources of clean water for the future.

MCES examined trends in chloride in streams tributary to the Mississippi, Minnesota, and St. Croix rivers. Chloride is a contaminant of concern because of its impact on aquatic organisms in the environment, corrosive effect on infrastructure, and taste in drinking water. Our analyses showed that chloride is trending upward in 12 of 17 streams investigated.

Regional parks continue to be a top metro attraction

Twin Cities metro area residents love their parks. The Regional Parks System includes 56 regional parks and reserves, comprising nearly 55,000 acres, 415 miles of interconnected trails, and 8 special recreation features, such as the Como Zoo and Conservatory. The number of annual visits to regional parks and trails was 63.3 million in 2019 (the latest figure available). For perspective, the Mall of America receives about 40 million annual visits.

Community Development

Overview

The mission of Community Development is to:

- Understand current and future development patterns to inform development of local and regional policy.
- Provide high-quality, coordinated planning, policy and program development to support regional growth and reinvestment.
- Identify and analyze regional issues.
- Facilitate community collaboration.
- Provide Livable Communities Act grants from three funding accounts to eligible communities to assist them with cleaning up polluted sites, expanding housing choices, and undertaking developments that use land and infrastructure more efficiently and connect housing, jobs and services.
- Deliver state and federally funded rent assistance to create and provide affordable housing for low-income households in the region.
- Partner with the 10 regional park implementing agencies (cities, counties, and park districts) and the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission to manage the many regional parks, trails, and open spaces that make up the Twin Cities nationally renowned regional parks system.

Table 2. Units and Core Activities of the Community Development Division

Units	Core Activities
Regional Parks	Develop and implement the <i>Regional Parks Policy Plan</i> through planning, administration of the regional parks system grant programs, and outreach assistance to the 10 regional park implementing agencies. Support the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, which advises the Metropolitan Council on regional parks policy, master plan reviews and grant program coordination. Help coordinate the regional parks legislative requests. Ensure protection of the region’s investment in the regional parks system through the review of local comprehensive plans and environmental studies.
Local Planning Assistance	Implement the Metropolitan Land Planning Act through <i>Thrive MSP 2040</i> and its policy plans. Provide planning and technical assistance and foster cooperative relationships with local governments and other organizations to achieve local and regional goals. Accomplish this responsibility through the Sector Representative Program; technical assistance; review of local comprehensive plans, plan amendments, and environmental reviews; and coordination of policy outreach efforts through the Land Use Advisory Committee.
Research	Collect and disseminate data and analysis about demographics, development patterns, regional parks visitation, and greenhouse gas emissions in the Twin Cities region.
Livable Communities	Implement the <i>Housing Policy Plan</i> and the Livable Communities Act and its three funding accounts which provide grants to participating communities. Support the planning and development of affordable and lifecycle housing in the region. Help to advance transit-oriented development in the region.
Metropolitan Council Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA)	Administer rent assistance programs for low-income seniors, families, individuals, and households with disabilities. Serve specialized populations, such as people experiencing homelessness or families working towards self-sufficiency. Own and operate 150 scattered-site housing units, known as the Family Affordable Housing Program.

Regional Parks

The Regional Parks unit is responsible for developing and implementing the Regional Parks Policy Plan, with the advice of the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission. The Commission provides recommendations to the Metropolitan Council regarding its reviews of park and trail master plans, the capital improvement program for the Regional Parks System, and the distribution of park grants, including the Park Acquisition Opportunity Fund Program that helps support regional park and trail acquisitions.

The Regional Parks unit also protects the Regional Parks System through the review of local comprehensive plans and environmental studies for consistency with the Regional Parks Policy Plan.

In 2020, the Regional Parks unit:

- Updated the *2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, fulfilling a statutory expectation for a full review at least once every four years.
- Reviewed and evaluated local comprehensive plans for conformance to the Regional Parks Policy Plan and worked with local communities to ensure that their local planning efforts protect the integrity of the existing and planned Regional Parks System.
- Reviewed and approved master plans or master plan amendments for the following regional parks and trails:
 - Victory Memorial Regional Trail (Wirth Parkway segment) Master Plan Amendment (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
 - Rum River Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment (Anoka County)
 - Vermillion River Greenway Regional Trail (Hastings) Master Plan (Dakota County)
 - Pine Point Regional Park Master Plan (Washington County)
 - Crow-Hassan Park Reserve Master Plan Amendment (Three Rivers Park District)
 - Coon Creek Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment (Anoka County)
 - Grand Round North Regional Trail Master Plan (City of Saint Paul)
 - Shingle Creek Regional Trail Master Plan (Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board)
 - Sam Morgan Regional Trail Master Plan Amendment (Saint Paul)

The Council also assists the 10 regional parks implementing agencies with funding for capital investment, operations and maintenance, land acquisition and programming throughout the metropolitan Regional Parks System.

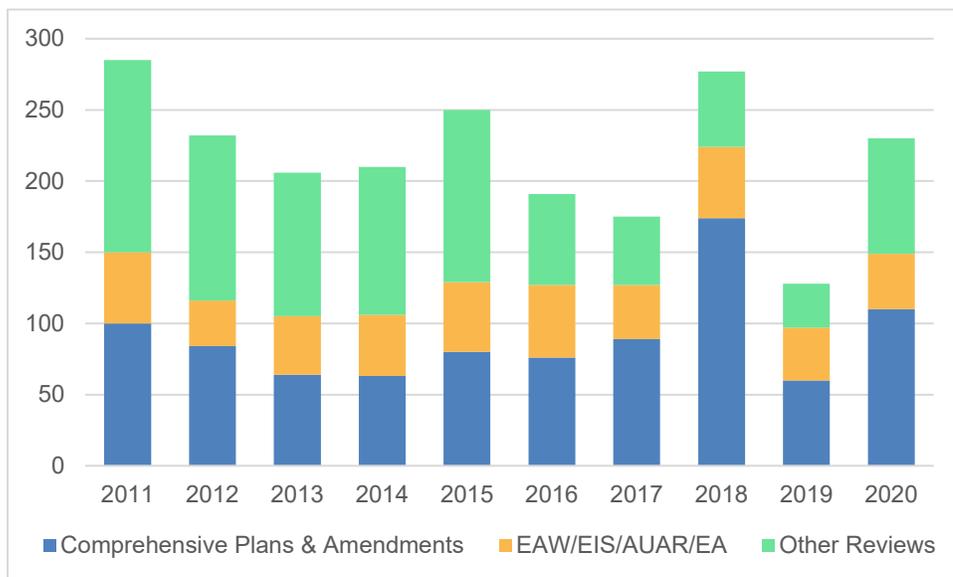
Local Planning Assistance

In 2020, the Local Planning Assistance unit:

- Continued implementation of the Planning Assistance Grant program, which provides \$1.9 million in grants to 70 eligible communities to support updates to their 2040 comprehensive plans.
- Maintained resources in the *Local Planning Handbook*, which guides local governments regarding local comprehensive planning requirements and connects them to additional technical resources. The handbook is an online platform and includes a tool for submitting plans online, community-specific data and information needed for planning, an individualized online mapping tool, and an extensive resource library to assist local governments in updating their comprehensive plans.
- Delivered the fourth year of the PlanIt comprehensive plan program by continuing to develop planning podcasts and distributing news blasts to the region's planning community to assist with the 2040 comprehensive planning process. This effort is a continuation of the PlanIt program, which in prior years included in-person workshops, self-guided learning through tutorials, podcasts, and articles, and remote learning opportunities through a webinar series.

- As shown in the chart below, conducted 230 reviews to determine their conformance to the regional systems, consistency with Council policy, and compatibility with the plans of adjacent communities, including:
 - 110 reviews of comprehensive plans including amendments and 39 environmental reviews, such as environmental assessment worksheets (EAWs), environmental impact statements (EIS), environmental assessments (EAs), and alternative urban area-wide reviews (AUARs).
 - 81 reviews of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers #404 permits, wastewater and surface water discharge permits, and other types of reviews.

Chart 1. Type and Number of Reviews, 2011-2020



- Continued to collaborate with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to align review of comprehensive plans for communities that fall within the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA).
- Provided technical planning assistance and resources to local elected and appointed officials and local planning staff through the Council’s Sector Representative Program, particularly as communities submitted local comprehensive plans and completed the plan review process. The Council has authorized 138 of 168 expected comprehensive plans through December 2020. There are 24 plans either currently determined incomplete for review or are awaiting Council committee review. Only six plans have not been received for review. Council staff are actively working with local governments to assist in completing their plans.
- Developed the Regional Economic Framework in partnership with the Center for Economic Inclusion and Greater MSP in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide a coordinated response to the severe economic impacts of the pandemic. The framework was developed to serve as an alternative Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) as defined by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. The framework was adopted by the Council in August 2020 and implementation is supported by all three partner agencies.

- Maintained resources in the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Guide, which provides resources to local governments in planning and implementing TOD. The guide is an online platform and includes case studies and best practices for local planners to help build and share knowledge of TOD planning and implementation.
- Maintained a solar energy planning and implementation resource online to support communities in their local efforts to plan for the protection and development of access to direct sunlight for solar energy systems in their local comprehensive plans.
- Developed an online tool, called Surface with Purpose, to help quantify potential climate change mitigation effects from green roof and BioSolar development on large rooftops and surface parking lots across the region. This tool is intended to help inform resilience investments, as well as planning and development decisions to promote greater climate resilience across the region.
- Developed the Solar for Vouchers Program which provides technical assistance to help multifamily rental property owners install solar panels and reduce energy costs. Property owners can take advantage of the savings resulting from this technical assistance in exchange for a commitment to rent some of their units at market rates to Metro HRA's Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program participants.
- Developed an online resource to help communities better understand the smaller scale changes taking place within their communities in terms of demographics, housing markets, and the built environment. This project – Suburban Neighborhood Change – identifies census tracts within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area with similar characteristics, identifying seven distinct types of change. The tool includes a comprehensive resource library that provides resources for communities to respond to the needs and opportunities they may face.
- Provided analysis on fiscal disparities, including tax-base values and impacts of the tax- base sharing program, for the public and policymakers.
- Planned and coordinated bimonthly meetings of the Land Use Advisory Committee, which assisted in the development of Livable Communities Act programs eligibility review and updates to scoring criteria as well as implemented an equity approach to meetings and presentations.
- Continued to collaborate with Environmental Services staff to establish an ongoing partnership between the Land Use Advisory Committee and the Metropolitan Area Water Supply Advisory Committee to discuss the integration of land use and water in their respective work and identify shared issues for further collaboration.
- Prepared an annual Plat Monitoring Report for 45 developing communities.
- Prepared a report on the Metropolitan Agricultural Preserves program monitoring enrollments in the region.

Research

In 2020, the Research team:

- Published/updated several web-based interactive data visualizations including Recent Residential Development in the Twin Cities region, trends of rent prices, a regional parks demographic analysis application, Covid economic impacts, suburban neighborhood change.
- Completed a number of major research initiatives including a report on youth and parks, rethinking areas of concentrated poverty and place-based equity, and redrawing census tract boundaries.
- Began planning for the development of the 2050 metropolitan development guide by both laying the groundwork for interdivisional collaboration and improving the Council's forecasting toolkit.
- Implemented the region's first comprehensive city-level greenhouse gas emissions inventory, which quantifies emissions from energy use, transportation, solid waste, water use, wastewater treatment, and agriculture/livestock. Began developing a scenario planning tool that will empower communities to see how actions they take influence greenhouse gas emissions.
- Produced annual city and township estimates of population and households pursuant to Minnesota Statutes 473.24, and developed estimates of populations, households, and affordable housing for both transportation analysis zones and census tracts.
- Began planning for several major initiatives including the 2021 parks visitor study, the economic values atlas, and residential preferences of section 8 voucher holders.
- Conducted analysis and developed interactive visualization of regional parks visitation using origin-destination data from cell-phone location data.
- Disseminated data from two American Community Survey releases, including consistently posting data on the Council's website within 12 hours of new data availability and providing a number of public presentations.
- Provided analysis of or assistance with U.S. Census Bureau data to local government, nonprofit partners, the media, and the public and began planning how the Council can support the 2020 Census.
- Conducted annual surveys on building permits, affordable housing production, group quarters, and manufactured home parks.
- Provided technical assistance to local governments on long-term forecasts and housing elements in the 2020 round of comprehensive plan updates.
- Maintained up-to-date data in the Council's Data+Maps website, including tabular geospatial data.

Livable Communities

In 2020, 97 metropolitan area communities participated in the Livable Communities program (Minnesota Statutes 473.25) to help expand and preserve affordable housing opportunities, recycle polluted sites, revitalize older cities and suburbs, and create new neighborhoods in growing communities.

Communities voluntarily participate in the program and negotiate housing goals with the Council. They are then eligible to compete for funding from the three accounts in the Livable Communities Fund, as well as pollution cleanup funds available from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

The Livable Communities Fund provides grants from the following accounts:

- Livable Communities Demonstration Account (LCDA) supports development and redevelopment projects that achieve connected development patterns linking housing, jobs and services, and maximize the development potential of existing or planned infrastructure and regional facilities.
- Local Housing Incentives Account (LHIA) preserves and expands housing opportunities through grants to eligible communities to meet negotiated goals for affordable and lifecycle housing.
- Tax-Base Revitalization Account (TBRA) helps cities to pay for cleanup of polluted land and buildings, facilitating redevelopment activities and thus restoring tax base, jobs and housing in urban areas.

In 2020, the Livable Communities Program unit:

- Awarded 26 TBRA grants totaling \$6 million to help clean up polluted land in nine communities: Bloomington, Falcon Heights, Hopkins, Minneapolis, Minnetonka, New Brighton, St. Louis Park, Saint Paul, and Shakopee.
- Awarded 13 LCDA grants totaling nearly \$9 million to help projects in seven communities: Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Hopkins, Minneapolis, Richfield, St. Louis Park, and Saint Paul. The funded projects will help acquire and prepare sites for redevelopment that include a mix of housing, commercial, and other uses that support daily needs and community activities. Projects will also assist with the construction of energy conservation and storm water management solutions.
- Awarded 11 LHIA grants totaling \$5.5 million to help preserve or build affordable housing in at least eight cities: Chaska, Cottage Grove, Forest Lake, Maple Grove, Minneapolis, Oakdale, Saint Paul, Woodbury and cities in suburban Hennepin County, through Homes within Reach and the City of Minnetonka.
- Awarded 8 LCDA Transit Oriented Development grants totaling over \$4.9 million in three communities through the LCDA program: Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, and Saint Paul. The funded projects will help promote higher-density projects within easy walking distance of a major transit stop that will typically include a mix of uses oriented to the transit stop.

Collectively, the 2020 Livable Communities grants are expected to:

- Create or retain over 900 jobs.
- Leverage almost \$800 million in private funds and over \$270 million in other public funds.
- Add or preserve nearly 3,500 housing units, over 2,600 of which will be affordable at or below 80% of Area Median Income.
- Clean up over 48 acres of polluted property to prepare it for redevelopment.

Metropolitan Council Housing and Redevelopment Authority

In 2020, about 7,200 low-income households in the metropolitan area benefited from rent assistance through one of 10 programs administered by the Metro HRA unit. The rental assistance programs, funded through federal and state funds, include the Housing Choice Voucher, Project Based Voucher, Mainstream Voucher, Non-Elderly Disabled, Family Unification, Veteran's Affairs Supportive Housing, Bridges, Temporary Assistance Program, Housing Trust Fund, and Family Affordable Housing programs. In 2020, the HRA unit:

- Provided Housing Choice Vouchers to 6,800 very low-income seniors, families with children, individuals, households with disabilities and veterans, enabling families to afford the rent in private rental units.
- Provided rent assistance to approximately 300 additional households through programs serving specialized populations such as disabled, homeless, or families working toward self-sufficiency.
- Issued over \$70 million in direct rent payments to approximately 1,800 private landlords.
- Maximized use of Housing Choice Voucher funds by ensuring 100% of the available funding was utilized.
- Maintained the HUD ranking of High Performer in the Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP).
- Awarded 114 new federal housing vouchers through the Mainstream program to serve homeless persons using the transit system as temporary shelter.
- Owned and managed 150 scattered-site Project Based Voucher units (Family Affordable Housing Program), comprising single-family houses, duplexes and town homes located in 11 suburban communities.
- Operated Community Choice, a mobility counseling program to assist families with Housing Choice Vouchers find housing in areas of opportunity. The program encourages self-sufficiency and success in new neighborhoods.
- Increased rental assistance opportunities available to homeless veterans through the Veteran's Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program.
- Implemented Small Area Fair Market Rents, zip code based rent limits to ensure voucher holders have access to high rent areas of the region.

Metropolitan Transportation Services

Metropolitan Transportation Services has two major functions:

- It conducts transportation planning for the metropolitan area as the region's federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Metropolitan Council adopts regional transportation policies and plans and coordinates all transportation planning in the Twin Cities area. This includes highways, transit, airports, waterways and rail, as well as travel-demand forecasting and air quality planning.
- The division provides direct transit service contracts or partners with counties for four main programs: Metro Mobility/ADA, Transit Link dial-a-ride, contracted regular-route, and Metro Vanpool.

Transportation Policy Plan

The philosophy and focus of the Council's Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) is to provide transportation goals, strategies and investment direction for the Council and its regional transportation partners to help implement the regional development guide, *Thrive MSP 2040*. During 2020, the plan went through an update process and an updated *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* was adopted by the Council on November 18, 2020. Specifically, the plan calls for the region to:

- Plan and invest in multi-modal transportation choices.
- Focus highway investments on preserving, operating and managing the existing system, improving transportation safety, and on slowing the growth of congestion.
- Encourage growth and density along transitway corridors.
- Encourage travel-demand management strategies.
- Encourage local communities in the urbanized area to implement a system of fully interconnected arterial and local streets, pedestrian pathways, and bikeways. Promote the development and preservation of various freight modes.
- Support investments in airport facilities.
- Serve the region's economic prosperity through investments that attract and retain successful businesses and a talented workforce.
- Connect residents of all races, ethnicities, income, and abilities to opportunities. To carry out these overall policies, the Metropolitan Council:
 - Develops and maintains transportation policy for the metropolitan area, which is documented in the long-range Transportation Policy Plan.
 - Develops and updates the metropolitan area federal Transportation Improvement Program, the short-range capital improvement program for all projects using federal transportation funds.
 - Carries out the region's annual transportation planning activities, as specified in the Unified Planning Work Program.
 - Implements transportation policy through the allocation of federal funds through its own programs and through coordination with the federal, state, and local governments.
 - Acts as the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization.
 - Provides or coordinates with transit programs throughout the region.
 - Operates Metro Transit, the region's largest provider of large-bus, regular-route transit service, light-rail transit service, and commuter-rail transit service.
 - Operates Metro Mobility, the region's ADA transit service, which provides group-transit services (demand-response and arranged) as a legally mandated complement to the regular-route system for persons with disabilities who are unable to use regular-route transit service.
 - Operates contracted regular-route transit services, a network of routes operated by private contractors. These routes comprise about 10% of regular-route transit in the Twin Cities.
 - Operates Transit Link dial-a-ride, a shared-ride, curb-to-curb small bus service for the general public operating in the seven counties for trips not available using regular-route bus and rail transit. Transit Link connects riders to the regular-route system and to Metro Mobility.

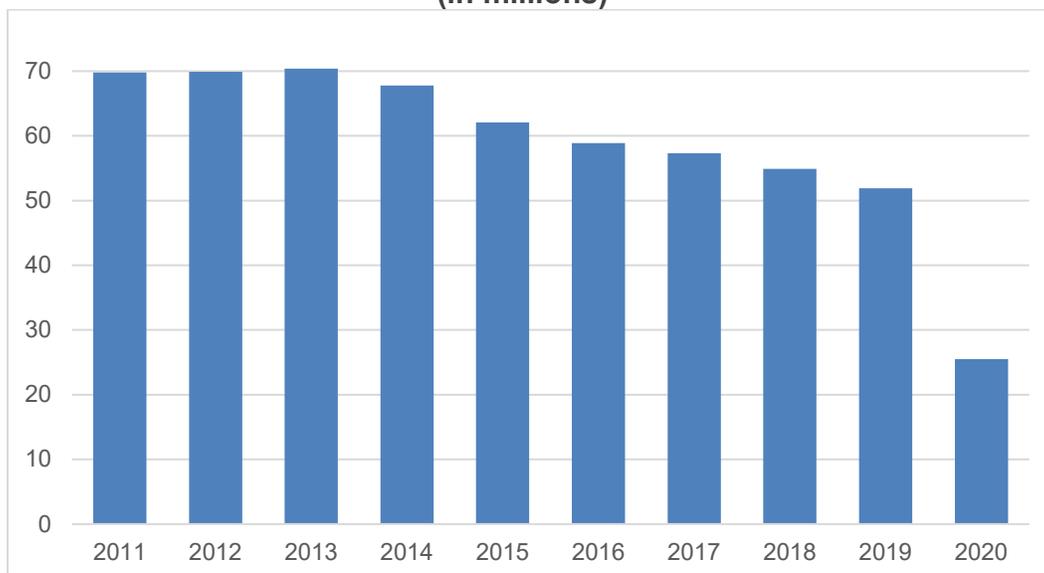
- Operates Transit Link dial-a-ride, a shared-ride, curb-to-curb small bus service for the general public operating in the seven counties for trips not available using regular-route bus and rail transit. Transit Link connects riders to the regular-route system and to Metro Mobility.
- Partners with Suburban Transit Providers. Twelve communities, also known as “opt outs,” have chosen to provide their own transit service. They provide service through contracts primarily with private companies, although they also contract with nonprofit and other governmental entities. Operating funding flows from the state to the Suburban Transit Providers through the Council. The Council coordinates regional support for fares, capital programs and other activities with opt-out authorities.
- Provides vanpools through Metro Vanpool. Started in 2001, Metro Vanpool subsidizes commuter vanpools that serve work locations and times not effectively served by the regular-route bus and rail network.
- The region also has transit programs not affiliated with the Metropolitan Council. The University of Minnesota operates all-day intercampus transit service for students, faculty, employees, and the general public. The system is integrated with the regional regular-route network and interchanges passengers with other transit programs.

Overview of Regional Transit Ridership

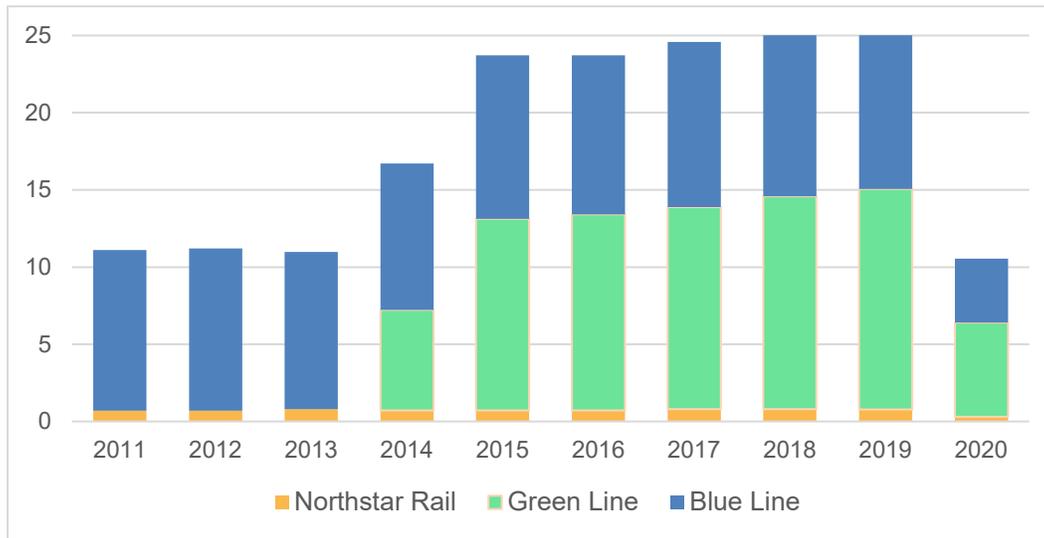
Total 2020 transit ridership in the region was 40.9 million rides. Ridership was down significantly for the year due to the COVID-19 outbreak, with express services feeling the greatest impact. Ridership decreased approximately 55% for the year as a whole and 68% during the pandemic. The impact fell unequally across the types of service, express ridership decreasing more than 90%; local bus and rail, approximately 60%; and BRT services, about 50%. Demand-responsive services were affected as well, losing more than half their ridership during the pandemic.

A variety of factors will affect future ridership growth, including funding levels, fuel prices, the economy, employment levels, development patterns, income levels, service improvements, highway congestion levels, and growth of ride-hailing companies.

Chart 2. Regional Bus Ridership, 2011-2020
(in millions)



**Chart 3. Regional Rail Ridership, 2011-2020
(in millions)**



Transportation Planning Activities

As the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the Council is federally required to provide a continuing, coordinated, comprehensive (3C) transportation planning process that includes state agencies and local units of government. In return, the metropolitan region is eligible for federal transportation funds.

Transportation Policy Plan

Federal regulations require the Council to prepare a long-range transportation plan for the region, which must be updated every four years. During 2020, the Council coordinated a review and public participation effort to update the plan adopted in 2018.

The 2020 update was considered a minor update to align the schedule for the next major update of the plan with the update of the Regional Development Guide (*Thrive MSP 2040*), which will both be adopted in 2024. This minor update included recognizing the significant changes to regional travel caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and committing to work in the Planning Work Program to analyze the potential long-term impacts over the next few years.

The plan also incorporated results of recently completed planning work, including an update to travel behavior data and information based on recently completed regional household survey work. The Council utilized the area's Transportation Advisory Board and its technical committees to assist in reviewing proposed changes to the plan.

The Council coordinated a primarily on-line public participation process that collected over 400 comments from 215 individuals and agency commenters. The responses to comments received and changes made to the plan responding to the comments can be found in the [Public Comment Report](#).

A summary of the plan's policies and investment direction is contained in the plan overview and the 14 chapters contain detailed information on modes and other required elements for practitioners and those who require detailed information. The final updated plan can be found on the [Council's website](#).

Transportation Improvement Program

The Council is responsible for preparing a short-range Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and approving projects for federal funding. This work is conducted through the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) and its Technical Advisory Committee and includes broad public outreach.

In 2020, the 2021-2024 TIP was prepared and adopted by TAB and the Council. As required by federal law, the TIP includes all federally funded surface transportation projects.

Highway Planning

The Council participates with MnDOT, cities, and counties in highway planning activities to ensure implementation of the policy direction established by the Council in its *Thrive MSP 2040* and the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*.

In 2020, the Council coordinated with MnDOT's Metro District on several highway planning studies, especially several ongoing interagency corridor studies, including the Rethinking I-94 Project, the Freeway System Interchange Study, and the Twin Cities Highway Mobility Needs Study.

The Council administers the Right-of-Way Acquisition Loan Fund (RALF), which gives communities no-interest loans to purchase right-of-way for principal arterials and other trunk highways in advance of the time that MnDOT would be in a position to make the purchase.

Transit Planning

The Council performs long-range transit planning activities to implement the policy direction established in its *Thrive MSP 2040* and the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*.

The Council significantly advanced or finalized a number of work program items in 2020, including an evaluation of the transit network to determine what role routes serve in the system from a perspective of being productive versus providing geographic coverage, which included three policy maker workshops to help identify the region's values when making bus investment decisions and finalizing an update to the Public Transit and Human Services Coordination Action Plan, a federally required document for directing certain federal transit funds. The Council also provided transit planning support for local communities in transit planning efforts and continued reviewing transit plans for consistency with regional systems.

The Council continued to participate with MnDOT, transit providers, cities, counties, and county regional railroad authorities to conduct feasibility, alternatives analysis, environmental, and engineering studies and implementation plans for several transitway corridors. Implementation and construction work continued on the Green Line Extension (Southwest) light rail transit (LRT), and Orange Line (I-35W South) bus rapid transit. The Gold Line dedicated bus rapid transit line moved into engineering and environmental work. The Blue Line extension began additional alternatives analysis work is done to identify a potential alignment that would be outside of the previously identified segment on the BNSF freight rail corridor.

Feasibility, alternatives analysis, or environmental work continued on the Rush Line dedicated bus rapid transit, Riverview modern streetcar, and Highway 169 bus rapid transit corridors. Additional ongoing work included implementation efforts for the arterial bus rapid transit system, including the opening of the C line (Penn Avenue) and the receipt of state bond funding to fully fund the B line and D lines (Chicago-Emerson-Fremont, Lake Street/Marshall Avenue), along with currently available partial funding for the E line (Hennepin Avenue). The Council also

entered a major planning effort known as Network Next to identify the location and timing of the F, G and H arterial BRT lines. The Council also participated in intercity passenger rail studies, including Zip Rail, the Minneapolis/Saint Paul-Milwaukee High-Speed Rail, and the Northern Lights Express (NLX) – Duluth to Twin Cities.

Air Quality Planning

The Council conducts long-term planning required by federal law to ensure that planning for congestion management, transportation, land use and air quality conforms to the requirements of the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendment.

In 2020, conformity analysis for the update of the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* and the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) (along with several amendments) was completed to ensure the construction of TPP and TIP projects would not violate federal air quality standards.

The Council participated in the *Thrive* work group on climate change and continued work to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation planning into transportation planning. In its role as the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the region, the Council concurs with the biennial selection of projects selected by its Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) for federal transportation funding through adoption of the TIP. This includes funding provided through two federal funding programs – the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program and the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program.

The Regional Solicitation awards funds to highway, transit, bicycle/ pedestrian, Safe Routes to School, and travel demand management (TDM) projects through a rigorous scoring system that involves over 60 participants from the Council and its partners. In 2020 as part of the Regional Solicitation process, the TAC Funding & Programming Committee evaluated project applications for qualification, 11 scoring committees met and evaluated projects, and TAB, with input from its technical committees, selected a program of 57 projects for funding in 2024-2024. The program of projects, which was confirmed by the Council in January 2021, will receive approximately \$200 million in federal funds.

Travel Forecasting

As the regional planning agency, the Council is charged with maintaining and applying travel forecast models to support planning for the orderly development and operation of transportation facilities. The Council maintains socioeconomic data and obtains traffic data from MnDOT to monitor, revise, and update travel forecasts. Federal regulations require the Council to provide projections of traffic demand and related air quality emissions. These projections are used to evaluate regional transportation investments proposed in the short- range TIP and the long-range Transportation Policy Plan. In 2020:

- Work continued responding to requests for forecast travel-demand data and providing assistance and model review to consultants, agencies, and local governments. Council staff also worked with consultants on several regional-scale highway and transit projects that required forecasts.
- A next-generation activity-based travel demand model, released in late 2015 continued to be refined. Work will continue refining the model, providing technical assistance in its application. Planning began for the next generation of travel forecasting models, by joining the national ActivitySim consortium and beginning work on a local implementation of the region's next forecast model.

- Work continued on the Travel Behavior Inventory. A 10-year 2019-2027 TBI program has been developed that will involve more frequent and regular data collection and model improvements. Data collection for the 2019 TBI Household Travel Survey began in October 2019 and continued through September 2019. Data release occurred in early 2020. Work continued in 2020 on planning the 2021 household travel survey to improve on it, including improving representativeness of respondents. In 2020, a panel survey was also conducted to monitor the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on regional travel.

Aviation Planning Activities

The Council prepares and maintains a plan for the regional aviation system. The Council works closely with MnDOT Aeronautics, the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), and other airport owners to ensure that the region's airports provide state-of-the-art, secure and affordable services for business and leisure travelers, freight transport and general aviation activities. The Council coordinates aviation planning and community development with local, state and federal governmental units, airport users and citizens.

2020 highlights include the following activities:

- Reviewed, analyzed, and provided comments on the Lake Elmo Joint Airport Zoning Board.
- Participated in the scoring and first phase of the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport Long Term Comprehensive Plan. Attended multiple meetings with internal and external stakeholders.
- Participated in various aviation related task forces and studies including MnDOT State Aviation System Plan, Joint Airport Zoning Board and the Noise Oversight Committee.

Reviewed and approved the 2020-2026 Capital Improvement Program for Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport and MAC's reliever airports.

Suburban Transit Providers

Twelve suburban communities manage their own transit services. Two of these – Plymouth and Maple Grove – operate their own municipal programs. Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, Prior Lake, Savage, Shakopee, and Rosemount created an intergovernmental entity called Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) to provide transit in their communities.

Chaska, Chanhassen, and Eden Prairie created another intergovernmental entity, Southwest Metro Transit. These communities contract with a variety of providers to deliver service. They also select their own routes and levels of services. A significant share of the service provided by suburban providers meets the needs of commuters traveling to and from downtown Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

Contracted Regular Routes

Contracting regular-route service is most beneficial in situations where a smaller bus is appropriate due to ridership, operational constraints, and neighborhood perception; where performance does not meet regional standards when directly operated; and in certain specially funded service arrangements. Metropolitan Transportation Services manages contracts for approximately 10% of the region's regular-route bus service.

Transit Link Service

Transit Link is dial-a-ride service available to the public in areas and at hours of the day when the regular-route transit network is not available. The Metropolitan Council contracts with local governments and private companies to provide Transit Link service.

Although Transit Link is available to the general public, typical users are the elderly, people who do not own a car, people too young to drive, and persons with disabilities traveling outside the Metro Mobility service area.

Growth or reduction in these services will be addressed as a consideration of the overall transit system and as demand warrants. The expansion of the regular-route bus system may result in reduced demand for Transit Link as more people have access to regular-route service.

Metro Vanpool

Commuter vanpools are made up of five or more people, including a participant driver, commuting to and from work at destinations throughout the region on a regular basis.

The Metro Vanpool program provides financial assistance for vans serving locations or times not well served by the regular-route transit network.

Metro Mobility Program Evaluation

This section responds to Minn. Stat. 473.13, which requires the Council's program evaluation report to include "an assessment of progress towards meeting transit goals for people with disabilities... with required elements including, but not limited to: (1) a description of proposed program enhancements; (2) an assessment of progress; (3) identification of the estimated total number of potential and actual riders who are disabled; (4) an assessment of the level and type of service required to meet unmet ridership needs; and (5) an analysis of costs and revenue options, including a calculation of the amounts of surplus or insufficient funds available for achieving paratransit needs."

Metro Mobility Service

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), every public entity operating a regular-route system that includes local service must provide complementary paratransit service to individuals with disabilities who are unable to use the regular-route system. Federal law requires this paratransit service be delivered at levels comparable to the regular-route system.

This service must be provided within three-quarters of a mile of any all-day, local regular route in the Twin Cities. In addition, Minnesota Statutes 473.386 requires the Metropolitan Council to provide "greater access" and "door-through-door transportation" for the elderly, people with disabilities, and others with special transportation needs" within the Transit Taxing District as it existed on March 1, 2006. Legislation was signed in 2019 expanding the Metro Mobility service area to include the city of Lakeville.

Under the ADA there are several key provisions governing service delivery in the federally mandated service area. Some of these provisions include:

- No trip limits, restrictions, or capacity constraints.
- There can be no denials of service.
- Service must be guaranteed at the time of the call.
- Service must be provided during all hours when regular-route service is available.
- Trips must be scheduled within one hour of the requested time.
- There may not be a pattern or practice of limiting availability. This includes long telephone hold times, a substantial number of late pickups, missed trips, or excessively long trips.

- The fare cannot exceed twice the non-discounted fare for a trip of similar length, at a similar time on the regular-route system.
- Eligibility determinations must be made within 21 days of receiving a complete application for service.

The Metro Mobility Service Center certifies riders, establishes policy in conformance with state and federal regulations, investigates customer concerns and manages the service contracts with private providers.

Program Enhancements

Technology

In 2020, Metro Mobility implemented a project with Trapeze Group, Inc., introducing a fully accessible on-line booking option for customers through web or smartphone application to a small group of customers. Previously all rides were booked by telephone through contracted reservationists. The product also provides vehicle arrival information to customers who choose to use the service. Announcement of the new service, with links to the Metro Mobility webpage, is planned Q1 2021.

Service Expansion to Lakeville

Legislation was signed in 2019 expanding the Metro Mobility service area to include the city of Lakeville. Beginning January 2020, the Metro Mobility South Zone contractor began providing trips within the city of Lakeville. Council staff conducted outreach sessions with city staff, local senior centers, and other interested stakeholders to best support residents using the service for the first time. By years end, 2,658 passengers were served in Lakeville with this expansion.

Covid-19 Related Special Services

Ridership losses due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in under-utilized driver and fleet resources across all its contracts. In response, Metro Mobility repurposed its capacity to provide transportation services in new ways. Each of these services has continued into 2021 and will remain in place as long as system capacity allows and the need persists.

- In March 2020, Metro Mobility began offering a free grocery delivery service. With this program, certified Metro Mobility customers can order groceries and household essentials online from a store that has online shopping and local pickup, and have the order delivered to their residence. A total of 1,738 grocery deliveries were made in 2020 under this program.
- In March 2020, Metro Mobility began offering a curbside destination service, allowing customers to book a single trip to both arrive and depart from a curbside pick-up. By years end, Metro Mobility provided 10,791 curbside trips.
- Beginning in April 2020, Metro Mobility offered food-shelf delivery services to locations throughout the region, allowing recipients to stay safe and stay home. By year's end, Metro Mobility services partnered with 31 different food shelves and made 20,770 deliveries.
- In April 2020, Metro Mobility began offering free door-to-door rides to essential employers working at health care facilities. The service provided a safe, reliable and accessible trip to work for those working on the front lines of the Covid-19 pandemic. Service is provided throughout the regional transit-taxing district. In 2020, 176,982 rides were provided for essential health care workers. The service continued into 2021.

- In May 2020, the Council began offering Covid-19-positive or symptomatic customers a subsidized ride to medical appointments through a new Aware Taxi service. Aware drivers were equipped with additional personal protective equipment and received Covid-19 safety training. In addition, Aware vehicles had protective barriers between driver and passenger compartments. In 2020, 69 Covid-19-positive or symptomatic riders received transportation under this program.

Driver Hiring and Retention

The Metropolitan Council increased Metro Mobility contractor driver hourly rates beginning in August 2020 with the start of the new South Zone contract. The increase of \$1.50 per hour above the previous minimum, last increased October 2017, is expected to continue to improve the number and quality of drivers, resulting in improved service quality. The West and East zone contracts initiating in 2021 include the same increase in minimum hourly rate. Staff will continue to assess the influence of the driver labor market relative to an increasing demand for Metro Mobility service to maintain improvements.

Assessment of Progress

Premium On-Demand Taxi Service

In 2020, Metro Mobility initiated a newly scoped service contract with its taxi provider to pilot a subsidized on-demand alternative for certified customers who select the option. Trips are requested directly from the provider via a customized smartphone-based app with updated features designed to improve the existing booking process, or by phone with the assistance of a reservationist. The service offers ambulatory and wheelchair-accessible rides, available to all certified customers within the entire Metro Mobility service area and associated service hours.

The Premium On-Demand service is not a substitute for the federally required ADA service, but provides customers with an additional option that is flexible and accommodates spontaneous requests. The program allows customers more flexibility and the convenience of a single-seat ride. The program was modified in February 2019 to expand the reservation window to four days in advance, consistent with Metro Mobility On-Demand service.

One of the advantages to the Council of the Premium On-Demand service is the relatively low cost per ride because the Council's share of the cost is capped at \$15.00 and riders tend to take shorter trips to limit their cost to \$5.00. The average Council contribution for each Premium Same Day service remains at approximately \$9.00 per ride.

Background on Premium Same Day Service

In 2004, Metro Mobility began offering Premium Same Day (PSD) service to customers who want a same-day ride but are not able or chose not to place a ride with Metro Mobility. (ADA regulations do not require same-day service availability.) In 2013 Metro Mobility expanded the Premium Same Day program to include all same-day trip requests. The program name was changed to Premium On-Demand in February of 2019.

Metro Mobility Ridership

The demand for Metro Mobility service has increased dramatically over the past decade, with ridership increasing more than 80% between 2006 and 2019. In 2019, ridership exceeded 2.38 million rides. However, in 2020, regular Metro Mobility ridership was significantly impacted by COVID-19.

**Table 4. Metro Mobility Operations
(in millions by fiscal year)**

Category	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
Fare Revenues	\$7.13	\$8.61	\$8.87	\$9.14
Expenses	\$96.00	\$101.66	\$107.69	114.05
Operating Reserves	\$18.19	\$(0.58)	0	0
Federal Revenue	\$3.34	0	0	0
Base Appropriation	\$56.42	\$55.98	\$55.98	\$55.98
Shortfall	(\$10.92)	(\$37.65)	(\$42.84)	(\$48.93)
Funding Requested	\$10.92	\$37.65	\$42.84	\$48.93

Key assumptions entail an estimate as of late October 2020, current law and current program structure, as well as current fare structure. The program allows customers more flexibility and the convenience of a single-seat ride. The program was modified in February 2019 to expand the reservation window to four days in advance: consistent with Metro Mobility On-Demand service. One of the advantages to the Council of the Premium On-Demand service is the relatively low cost per ride because the Council's share of the cost is capped at \$15.00 and riders tend to take shorter trips to limit their cost to \$5.00. The average Council contribution for each Premium Same Day service remains at approximately \$9.00 for each ride.

Metro Mobility Ridership

The demand for Metro Mobility service has increased dramatically over the past decade, with ridership increasing over 80% between 2006 and 2019. However, regular Metro Mobility ridership was significantly impacted by Covid-19 in 2020. In 2020, overall system ridership dropped 13.5% from the previous year. Beginning in March 2020, Metro Mobility ridership initially fell 80%, with a slow return to approximately 40% of the regular service by year's end.

Total system ridership in 2020 was 1.46 million rides. Rides delivered were mostly non-shared beginning in March to protect customers against covid-19 exposure as much as possible. The following charts illustrate Metro Mobility ridership in 2020 relative to the previous year.

Both 2019 and 2020 saw a drop in new applications for certifications received compared to previous years, but the decline is not expected to continue, given historical rates. An increasing number of applications are new certifications, rather than submitted by people who are recertifying. Metro Mobility received 5,509 new certifications in 2020. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Metro Mobility had an increasing number of active riders in our system, defined as customers who used Metro Mobility within the past year.

Options for Managing Costs and Increasing Revenue

As ridership and service demand increases so do operational and capital costs. Over the past several years, the Council has improved operating cost-effectiveness by increasing investments in workforce and technology to improve service delivery and service quality, restructuring to achieve economy of scale, purchasing fuel in bulk below pump rates, and identifying innovative ways to reduce the cost of the service being provided without changing the operating parameters of the service. Metro Mobility has a known, long-standing structural deficit due to increasing costs and a base general fund appropriation that does not fully fund federal and state mandated levels of service.

Metro Transit – A Service of the Metropolitan Council

Metro Transit, an operating division of the Metropolitan Council, administers and operates transit services in the Twin Cities through directly provided services and contracted transit providers.

Mission

To implement the *Transportation Policy Plan*, Metro Transit is committed to fulfilling its mission of delivering environmentally sustainable transportation choices that link people, jobs and community conveniently, consistently and safely. In pursuit of its mission, Metro Transit embraces these guiding principles:

Service Excellence. We go beyond the expectations of our customers to deliver convenient, comfortable and reliable service; we don't accept today's best as tomorrow's limitations.

Environmental Responsibility. We promote public transportation as an environmentally friendly service and conduct our business in an environmentally responsible manner.

Innovation. We regularly question the status quo; we encourage creativity and innovation in all things.

Safety. We provide a safe and secure environment for our customers, community, and employees through consistent training, enforcement and allocation of resources.

Teamwork. As employees, we seek shared success, treat one another with respect, and consider each other as customers.

Financial Responsibility. We continuously improve the cost-efficiency of our services; we approach our financial relationships with integrity and transparency.

Community Orientation. We are an important part of the Twin Cities region. We engage the community in our decision-making, provide well-crafted communication, and offer opportunities for public involvement.

Based on ridership, Metro Transit is the largest transit agency in Minnesota and provides about 90% of regular-route service in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul area. In 2020, 72% of rides were taken on the agency's buses and 28% of trips were on light rail trains.

Its more than 3,000 employees transported customers more than 111,700 times each weekday with service on 125 lines including local, express and contract bus routes; METRO A Line, METRO C Line, METRO Red Line bus rapid transit; METRO Blue Line, METRO Green Line light rail; and the Northstar Commuter Rail Line.

Metro Transit's fleet includes 889 buses (including 8 battery electric buses), 91 light-rail rail cars, 18 commuter rail cars and six locomotives. Metro Transit expects to achieve the goals set in the Council's *2040 Transportation Policy Plan* by tailoring cost-effective service to diverse markets with an integrated system of core routes focusing on transit centers, an array of express bus services using park-and-ride facilities, and transit advantages on freeways and highways. Metro Transit has aligned its business plans to coincide with the growth objectives of the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*.

Ridership

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on Metro Transit’s ridership In 2020. Total system ridership was 38.4 million rides, about 53% of 2019’s figure of 82.5 million. Ridership In 2020 experienced an initial two months of normal, strong ridership, followed by disruption by the pandemic in mid-March 2020, sharply reducing ridership for the year.

Total Ridership

Total ridership included 26.4 million bus rides, more than 10.2 million light-rail rides; and more than 150,000 commuter rail rides. Metro Transit provided 111,723 rides on an average weekday in 2020. Table 5 shows 2019 and 2020 ridership for all Metro Transit modes.

Table 5. Metro Transit Ridership, 2020

Mode	2019 Total	2020 Total	Number Change	Percent Change
Bus	53,656,103	26,357,294	- 27,298,809	- 51%
Light Rail	25,299,442	10,255,520	-15,043,922	- 59%
Northstar	767,768	152,455	- 615,313	- 80%
Total	79,723,313	36,765,269	- 42,958,044	- 63%

Metro Transit Numbers Over Past Decade

The following charts provide a profile of Metro Transit over the previous 10 years. They show bus and rail fleet size; total miles operated; bus and rail ridership; fare history for bus, light rail, and commuter rail; average daily number of missed trips; number of information calls handled; number of miles between mechanical failure; and of accidents per 100,000 miles driven.

Chart 5. Metro Transit Fleet Peak Size – Bus and Rail, 2011-2020

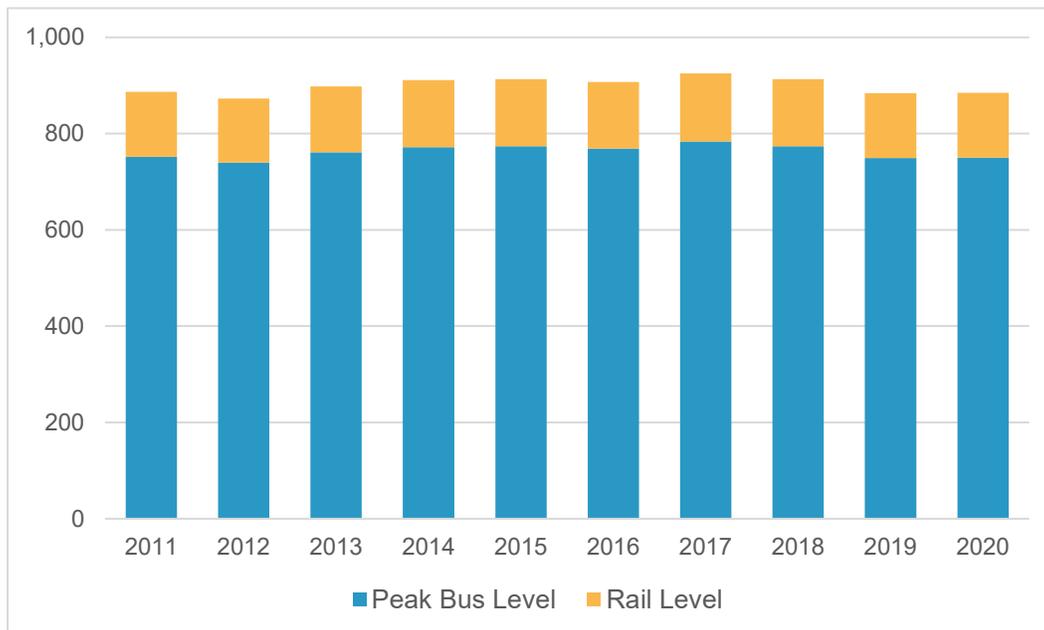


Chart 6. Metro Transit Total Miles Operated, 2021-2020
(in millions)

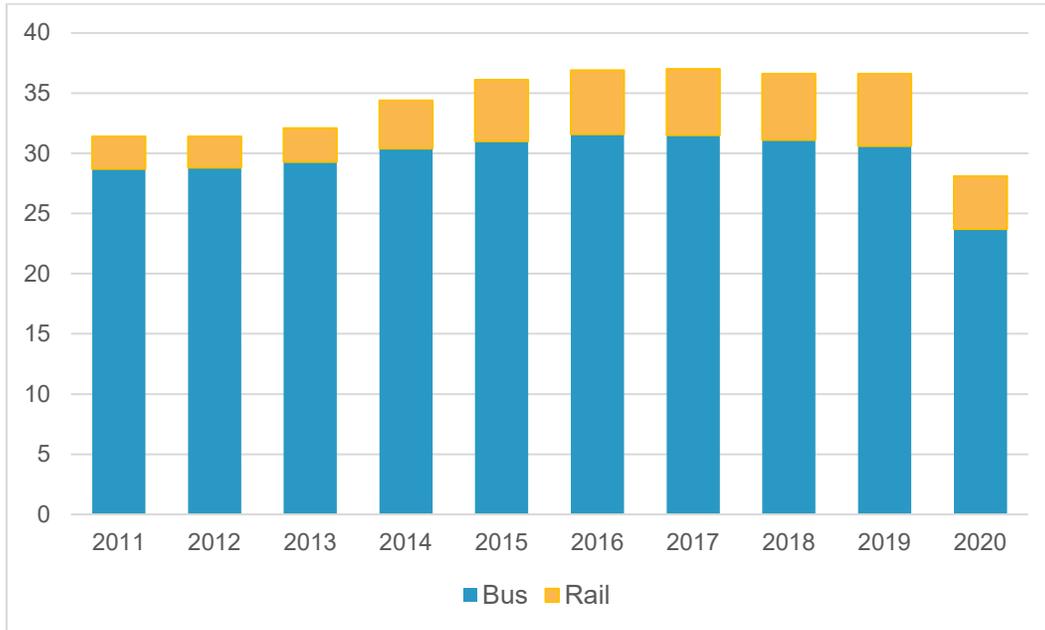


Chart 7. Metro Transit Rail Ridership, 2011-2020
(in millions)

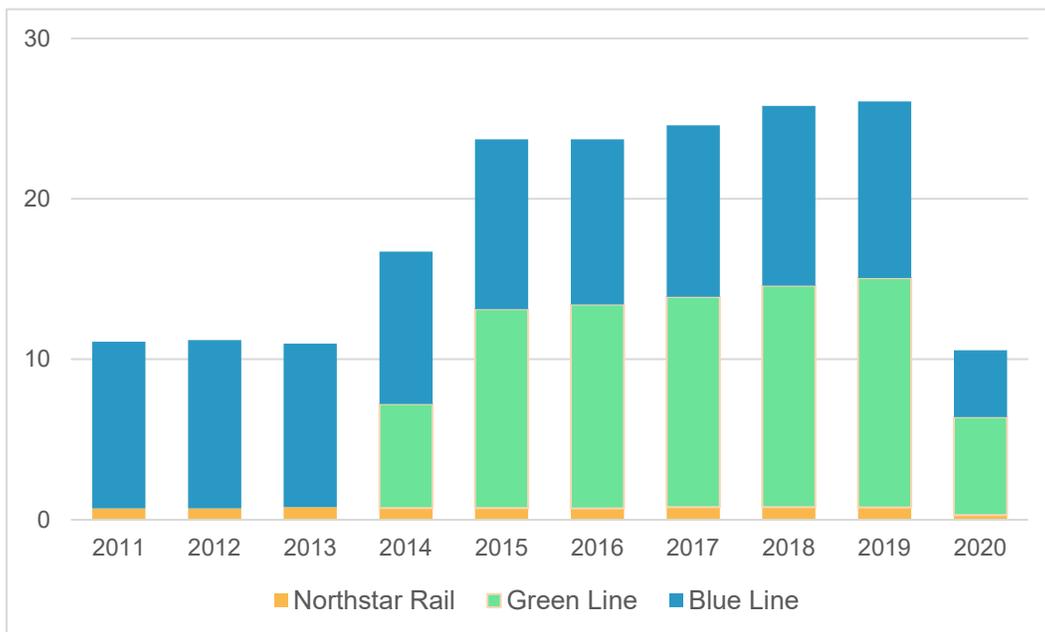


Chart 8. Metro Transit Fare History – Bus and Light Rail, 2011-2020



Chart 9. Commuter Rail Fares, 2016-2020

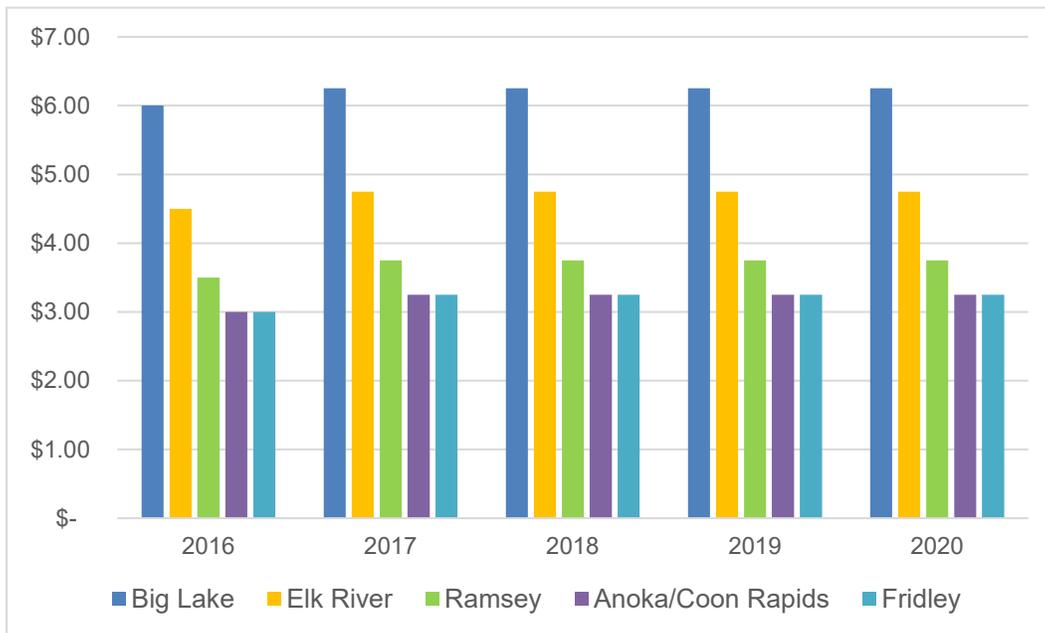
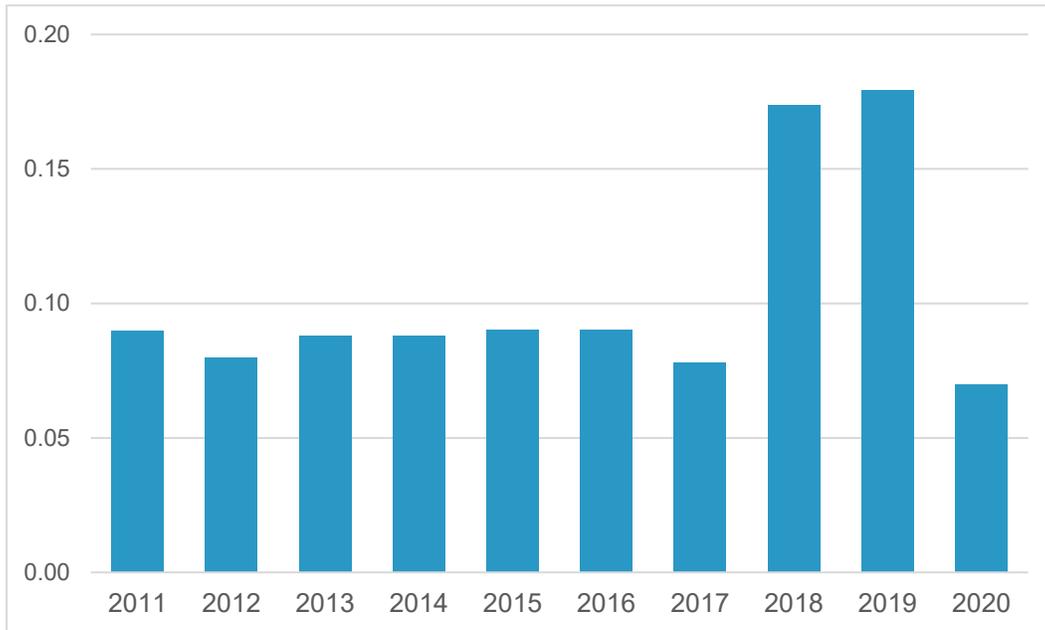


Chart 10. Average Daily Number of Missed Trips, 2011-2020



**Chart 11. Information Calls Handled, 2011-2020
(in millions)**

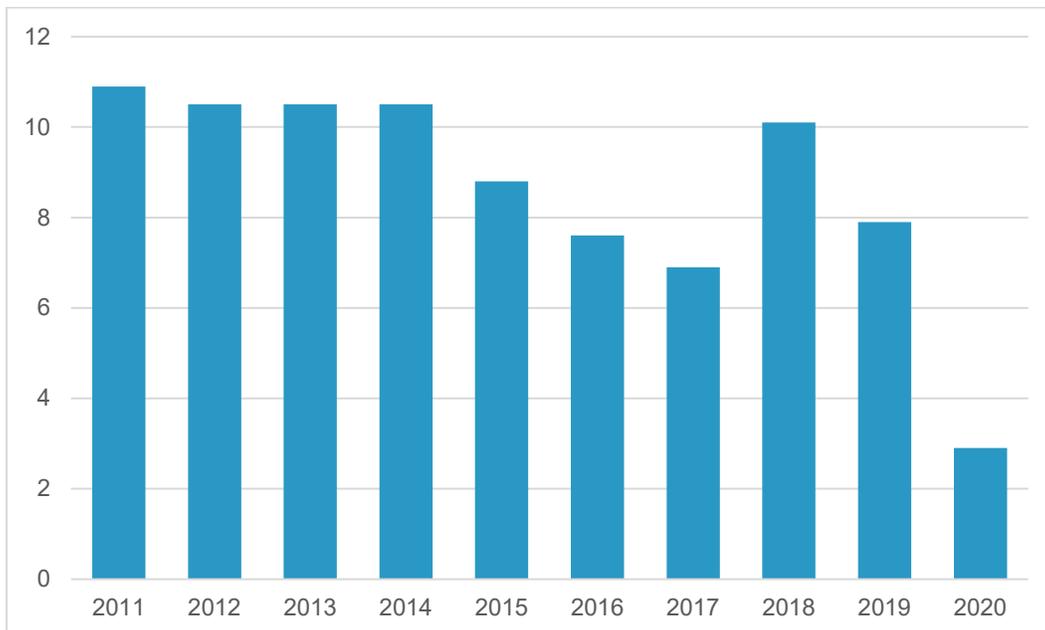
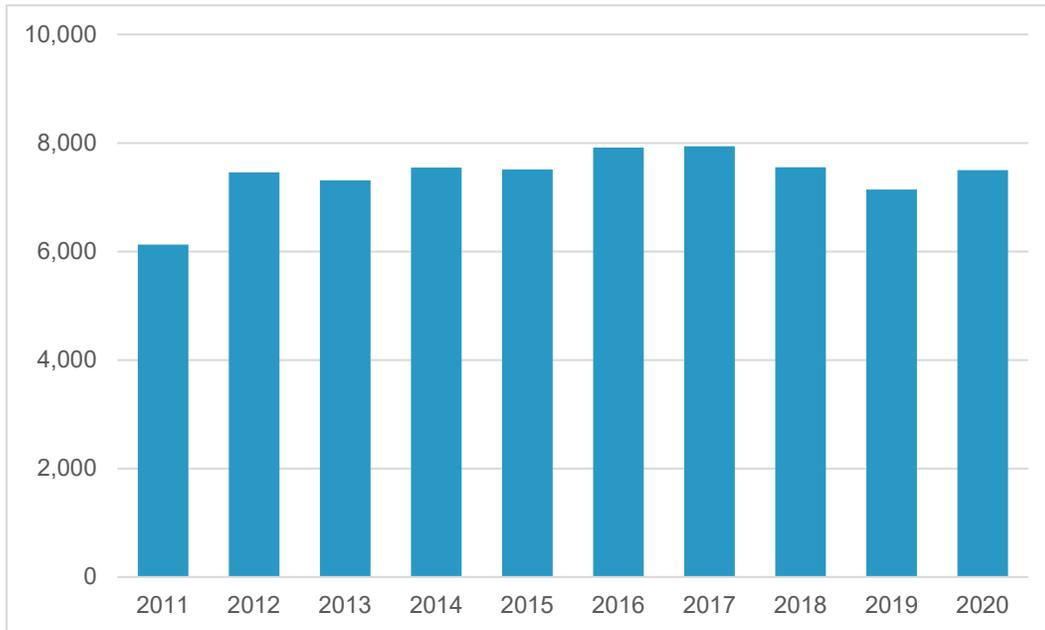
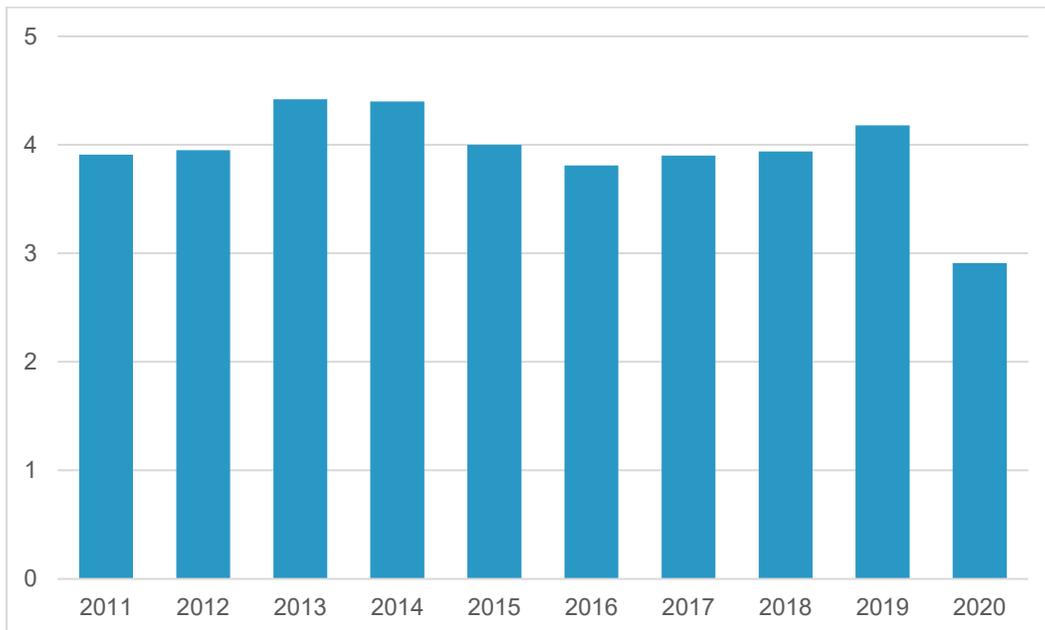


Chart 12. Number of Miles Between Mechanical Failures, 2011-2020



Note: Mileage is the distance traveled in service between mechanical failures. Higher is better.

Chart 13. Metro Transit Bus Passenger and Traffic Accidents Per 100,000 Miles Driven, 2011-2020



Environmental Services

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES), an operating division of the Metropolitan Council, provides wastewater collection and treatment services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to municipal and industrial customers. It provides integrated planning and technical assistance for surface waters and water supply, to ensure sustainable water quality and water supply for the region. Its 637 employees protect public health and the environment, and support economic growth for the metropolitan area.

The division aims to be a valued leader and partner in water sustainability. We impacting water resources to ensure the region has the high quality water resources and supplies to thrive.

MCES operates and maintains approximately 634 miles of regional sanitary sewers and treats an average of 250 million gallons of wastewater daily at nine regional treatment plants. The division provides cost-effective wastewater collection and treatment service to 110 communities and 2.9 million people, which is one-half of the state's population. The division also coordinates regional planning for the regional wastewater system, surface water quantity and quality, and water supplies to protect public health and the environment, promote water quality, manage risk of flooding, and ensure abundant, safe and affordable drinking water sources for the region.

In addition, MCES:

- Collaborates with state and federal agencies, local and county governments, watershed management organizations, interest groups, and the public to protect the region's water resources as the region's population grows.
- Ensures sufficient wastewater collection and treatment capacity to support planned growth.
- Makes capital investments that preserve assets, improve system performance, and provide capacity to support growth.

Mission

MCES is committed to fulfilling its mission of providing wastewater services and integrated planning to ensure sustainable water quality and water supply for the region. MCES aligns its business plans with the strategies of the *2040 Water Resources Policy Plan* and the Council's long-range regional plan, *Thrive MSP 2040*, to support economic growth and development in ways that protect our valued water and land resources.

The division focuses on three outcomes:

- **Sustainable Communities.** Work with partners to conserve and utilize the region's groundwater and surface water to protect public health, support economic growth and development, maintain habitat and ecosystem health, and provide recreational opportunities essential to the region's quality of life.
- **Sustainable Services.** Maintain a high-performing organization with an engaged and innovative workforce that is competent, motivated and diverse.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure.** Ensure reliable, affordable wastewater infrastructure that provides best long-term regional value.

Essential services continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

While responding to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis throughout 2020, MCES sustained uninterrupted wastewater collection and treatment service to the region and maintained construction, maintenance and planning functions — which are all essential to supporting the health of the region. To reduce the risk of disruption to our essential services, the division quickly developed and implemented plans to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace and support employee well-being. The division updated continuity of operations plans to address the unique circumstances of a pandemic.

Our essential on-site workers and all of our on-site contractors -- at wastewater treatment plants, across the wastewater collection system and at construction sites -- modified work practices and schedules to maintain social distancing, wear proper personal protective equipment and adhere to all other public health protocols. Employees who could perform their jobs remotely were required to adapt their homes into workspaces to continue their essential off-site work.

Adjusting customer rates in response to financial burden of the pandemic

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, MCES leadership anticipated that municipal customers could potentially face budget challenges in 2021. MCES had planned for a 3.2% increase in revenue from the Municipal Wastewater Charge (MWC) but adjusted to cover annual debt service and operation cost increases. However, due to financial effects of the pandemic, MCES held the increase to just 2% by relying more on reserve funds.

Wastewater-based epidemiology: Monitoring SARS-CoV-2

In 2020, MCES researched wastewater-based epidemiology as a tool for pandemic response. Using data from virus fragments found in wastewater to predict COVID-19 outbreaks, before community testing identifies positive cases, could become one more tool to help public health officials make informed policy decisions to mitigate or prevent future spread.

MCES collaborated with three different research partners: University of Minnesota Genomics Center, University of Minnesota Duluth Medical School, and the National Wastewater Surveillance System project led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. MCES developed capabilities to monitor viral material concentration in the wastewater coming into the Metro Plant in Saint Paul, developed methods to monitor for the presence of new virus strains in wastewater, and provided wastewater samples twice a week from the Metro Plant and from all nine treatment plants depending on the study.

Wastewater Services

Provide high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective regional wastewater service for the metro region.

Water cleaned at the wastewater treatment plants is discharged to the Mississippi, Minnesota and St. Croix rivers. The water we return to the environment is cleaner than the rivers following past our treatment plants.

Wastewater collection and treatment highlights from 2020 include:

- Operated and maintained approximately 634 miles of regional sanitary sewers and 61 lift stations that collect wastewater from more than 5,000 miles of sewers owned by 110 communities in the seven-county region, and convey the wastewater to one of nine MCES wastewater treatment plants.
- Collected and treated about 250 million gallons of wastewater a day.
- Operated and maintained nine regional wastewater treatment plants: Blue Lake in Shakopee, Eagles Point in Cottage Grove, East Bethel in East Bethel, Empire in Empire Township, Hastings in Hastings, Metropolitan in Saint Paul, Rogers in Rogers, Seneca in Eagan and St. Croix Valley in Oak Park Heights.
- Tracked 22,248 effluent water quality data points proving our environmental compliance throughout the year.
- Achieved full compliance with federal and state clean water discharge standards at eight of our nine wastewater treatment plants. Six plants had five or more consecutive years of perfect compliance with their discharge permits through 2020: Hastings (30 years), St. Croix Valley (29 years), Blue Lake (15 years), Eagles Point (15 years), Empire (13 years), and Metro (9 years). They will receive Platinum Peak Performance Awards in 2021 from the National Association of Clean Water Agencies.

These compliance records are among the highest in the nation. Collectively, the plants achieved 118 consecutive years of compliance. The Hastings and St. Croix Valley plants are among the six top performers in the U.S. Overall, our compliance record is the third best in the nation.

- Set user fees that pay 100% of wastewater operations and debt service costs. When combined with local collection fees, users in the Twin Cities pay rates that are 40% lower than the national average of other large metropolitan areas, which are below national averages.
- Continued to partner with approximately 900 industrial permittees to monitor their wastewater discharges, preventing pollutants such as mercury from entering the wastewater collection system.

Sustainability efforts include energy conservation, solar development

- MCES uses energy management to reduce operating costs and to extend our environmental protection to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We focus on energy conservation and efficiency, recovering energy from wastewater solids processing, supporting renewable energy, and optimizing energy rate options with our utilities. Most recently, improvements and upgrades at the Seneca Plant resulted in annual savings of more than 2 million kilowatt hours – reducing operating costs by more than \$150,000 a year.
- Through MCES's participation in Xcel Energy's Community Solar Garden program and power purchase agreements, we have more than 17 megawatts of solar capacity under contract. These agreements support renewable energy development in the region and save more than \$200,000 a year on our utility bills.

U of M partnership studies possible use of incinerator ash in agriculture

MCES continued its partnership with the University of Minnesota to determine if the ash from incinerating solids removed from wastewater can be used as an agricultural soil amendment. Incineration at the Metro Plant results in about 40 tons of ash per day, which is landfilled. The ash content is about 13% phosphorus, which can be beneficial for life-forms, including plants. In 2020, the University provided a significant deliverable of the project, the “Land Application of Sewage Sludge Incinerator Ash for Phosphorus Recovery: A Review.” The project is scheduled for completion with production of all deliverables by September 2021.

Responding to public health risks of PFAS

In October 2020, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) announced it was applying new perfluorooctane sulfonic acid (PFOS) criteria to several metro-area waterbodies. PFOS is one of a group of related chemicals known as perfluorinated alkylated substances (PFAS), which are found in industrial processes, fire-fighting foam, and many consumer products. This new regulatory action affects waters into which MCES wastewater treatment plants directly or indirectly discharge.

MCES facilities do not create or generate PFOS. The pollutant comes from industries, used residential water, and landfill leachate, among other sources. The most effective and affordable way to manage PFOS pollution is to reduce or eliminate the sources of PFOS. Removing PFOS at wastewater treatment facilities is much more expensive than source control. It could require costly investments and may not be as effective. MCES in the preliminary stages of responding to the new MPCA criteria.

Water Research Foundation partnership studies PFAS through incineration

MCES and at least seven other utilities will contribute to a national Water Research Foundation study, selected in December 2020, to understand the fate of PFAS through wastewater solids incinerators. The research will attempt to establish a mass balance of PFAS around incinerator systems including solids handling, ash production, air scrubber drain water, and air emissions. MCES’s role includes providing some project funding and project review. The project will launch in 2021.

Industrial Pretreatment Incentive Program

MCES initiated the Industrial Pretreatment Incentive Program (IPIP) to encourage industries with high-strength wastewater discharges to install pretreatment equipment at their facilities.

High-strength discharge is wastewater with high chemical oxygen demand or high levels of total suspended solids, which increase the treatment needed to clean the water.

MCES enrolled local industry partners Kemps LLC in the program. Kemps, a dairy manufacturer in Farmington, discharges wastewater to the Empire Plant. Kemps installed industrial pretreatment equipment in 2018. By 2020, the treatment plant performance had improved. Levels of organics, solids, and phosphorus in the wastewater have decreased. Reduction in solids make them easier to process. Kemps’ cottage cheese production, which is about one third of its local business, is the only portion of the business targeted by the IPIP. Its wastewater strength reduced an average of 96.4% in 2019 and 95.8% in 2020.

Wastewater Infrastructure

Ensure reliable, affordable wastewater infrastructure that provides best long-term regional value.

Infrastructure investment is critical to sustaining MCES' successful history of protecting public health and the environment. MCES uses a best practice asset management approach to preserve the existing \$7 billion system and invest in new wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure to meet the needs of the growing Twin Cities region. In 2020, the \$104M capital budget supported asset preservation (76% of capital spending), service improvement (16%), and capacity expansion (8%).

Continued reinvestment program strengthens wastewater assets

The 2020-2025 capital improvement program is preserving and rehabilitating existing wastewater infrastructure, meeting more stringent water- and air-quality regulations, reducing energy consumption, and expanding system capacity to meet regional growth needs.

2020 capital investments include:

Regional sanitary sewers and related facilities

- Completed rehabilitation or replacement of regional sanitary sewers based on condition assessment, to address capacity, or to coordinate with partnering transportation agencies. Project locations: Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Chanhassen, Maplewood, Medina, Minneapolis, Minnetrista, Mound, Oak Park Heights, Saint Paul, St. Bonifacius, Victoria, Waconia, and Woodbury.
- Continued rehabilitation, reconstruction, consolidation, or removal of wastewater lift stations based on condition assessment or to address capacity needs. Project locations: Bloomington, Coon Rapids, and Hopkins.
- Continued rehabilitation, replacement, or improvement of the wastewater flow-metering system. Project locations: Hopkins, Independence, Loretto, Maple Plain, and Oak Park Heights.

Wastewater Treatment Plants

- Made improvements to address capacity, performance asset renewal or improve process to meet new regulatory standards, energy, or safety. Project were completed at the Blue Lake, Eagles Point, Empire, Metropolitan, Rogers, Seneca, and St. Croix Valley Plant.

Initiative to reduce excess water from entering wastewater system

MCES and the communities that it serves have been working to reduce the stormwater and groundwater entering wastewater sewers via defective pipes and improperly connected sump pumps, downspouts, and foundation drains. Inflow and infiltration (I/I) is a concern because it can cause the release of wastewater into the environment or into basements during wet weather events and takes up capacity in the wastewater system that is reserved for growth.

Since the I/I program began in 2007, total volume of wastewater collected and treated by the regional system has decreased, while precipitation has increased and regional growth has continued.

Water Resources Management

Ensure quality, reliable sources of clean water for the future.

MCES's water resources functions include surface water management to help improve and maintain the quality of our lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands, and coordinating water supply planning to ensure reliable sources of clean water for the future.

The Metropolitan Council is charged with creating a comprehensive regional development guide that minimizes the adverse impacts of growth, including adverse impacts on the environment. Monitoring data collected by MCES, its partners, and citizen volunteers is used to identify pollution problems, support regional planning efforts, and meet federal and state regulations.

Water resources 2020 highlights include:

- Launched work with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, watershed organizations and metro communities to review local surface water planning in the region and determine whether changes are needed. Staff began this investigation by issuing surveys and conducting virtual meetings. They will continue working with partners in 2021 on recommended changes.
- Facilitated the Twin Cities Water Monitoring Data Group, a partnership of public sector water resources practitioners collaborating to establish and promote standard practices for water monitoring, analysis, and data stewardship in the Twin Cities metro area. Held an in-person workshop highlighting common issues and how organizations share water data with data users. Training and events included safe monitoring protocols during the pandemic, statewide analytical laboratory result study, implications of the statewide tiered aquatic use framework on monitoring and assessment, and how people value water (locally and nationally).
- Monitored the water quality of 20 metro-area tributary streams, with plans to monitor 19 streams in 2021. Staff no longer test water quality at the Upper Bevens site or the Beltline site, but added a site on the Crow River in 2020 to gather more information for MCES's future Crow River Wastewater Treatment Plant in Rogers.
- Monitored 17 sites on the Minnesota, Mississippi and St. Croix for the large-river program.
- Monitored the water quality of 168 lakes in the metro area. In 2020, 42% of the lake sites received a grade of "A" or "B", meaning that they had relatively good water quality. Another 35% of lake sites received a water quality grade of "C". The remaining 23% of lake sites received a water quality grade of "D" or "F", meaning that they had relatively poor water quality. Similar to that of past years, there was no distinct pattern within the Twin Cities metropolitan area as to where lakes with specific water quality are located.

Water quality study shows chloride in metro-area streams generally increasing

MCES examined trends in chloride in streams tributary to the Mississippi, Minnesota, and St. Croix rivers. Chloride is a contaminant of concern because of its impact on aquatic organisms in the environment, corrosive effect on infrastructure, and taste in drinking water. Our analyses showed that chloride is trending upward in 12 of 17 streams investigated. We are investigating drivers of chloride trends in these streams, which are mostly likely to be road salt, fertilizer, water softening, livestock waste, and industrial and commercial processes.

Council grants help growing communities use water more efficiently

MCES secured Minnesota Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment funding and re-authorized a successful past grant program for municipalities to increase water efficiency. There are 38 communities participating in the 2019-2022 program. MCES also continued its financial support for the Minnesota Technical Assistance Program at the University of Minnesota, which places university interns in Minnesota businesses to help them conserve water use.

MCES's Water Efficiency Grant Program provides grants to communities that manage municipal water systems to provide rebates to homeowners and commercial property owners. The rebates are an incentive to replace older, less-efficient clothes washing machines, toilets, irrigation controllers, and spray sprinkler bodies with Energy Star and U.S. EPA WaterSense-labeled devices. The program also funds irrigation system audits, of which 18 were done in 2020.

The grants funded replacement of more than 1,600 devices in 2020: 660 toilets, 895 irrigation controllers, and 73 spray sprinkler bodies. This will save an estimated 42 million gallons of water per year. The four-year program will provide \$787,000 in state funds and \$262,500 in local matches from the participating communities. A total of \$323,700 in rebates were awarded in 2020.

Delivering Value to the Region

Customer Service

Improving customer service for communities, industries, and watershed management districts and organizations is a primary goal for MCES. Our Customer Portal is one such customer service improvement. It gives our municipal wastewater customers easy, on-demand access to data about system flow and inflow/infiltration programs. The portal includes a customizable data dashboard so customers can get a quick view of wastewater flow data that can inform local sanitary sewer system decisions. The dashboard also allows flow data to be plotted with rainfall information to show how wet-weather events are influencing flow through the wastewater collection system. We are expanding portal functions to replace other manual and timely processes between MCES and our municipal customers, and continue to improve transparency for them.

Competitive wastewater rates

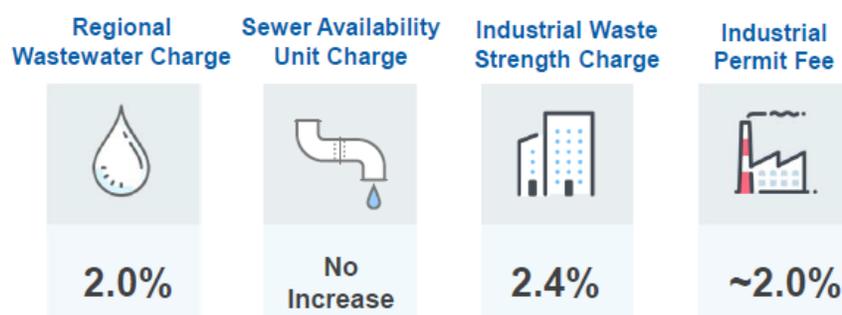
MCES is committed to keeping its wastewater rates competitive. We set municipal wastewater and industrial rates based on what it costs us to provide regional wastewater service. Each spring we meet with our customers – municipalities, industries, and liquid waste haulers – to discuss proposed budgets for the coming year. In 2020, we focused on aggressive cost containment in 2021 to meet revenue concerns of our customers.

Highlights in 2020 include:

- Recognizing the economic impact of COVID-19 to our customer communities, we kept all rates – for regional wastewater, SAC, industrial waste strength charge and industrial permit fee – for 2021 to increases lower than 2.5%, while total use of funds needed to increase 3.9%.
- Households pay less for wastewater services than comparable-sized regions across the U.S.
- Received AAA bond rating, the highest credit rating, from Standard & Poor's and Moody's, qualifying MCES for low-interest-rate loans to finance infrastructure improvement projects.

MCES charges have remained low, as shown in Chart 14.

Chart 14. Annual Percent Change in MCES Charges for 2021



Charges for growth or property changes hold steady

The sewer availability charge is a one-time fee that MCES requires when a property first connects to the regional wastewater system. It's also charged when a property's use changes and increases its potential demand on the system.

This program has been in place since 1973 and with ongoing modifications and improvements, continues to be efficient and well accepted. The one-time connection charge for a single-family residence is \$2,485 and has not increased since 2014.

Household rates are significantly below national average

Households in the seven-county Twin Cities area pay about \$347 per year, on average, to their municipalities for wastewater collection and treatment service (MCES 2020 survey). According to data comparing peer regional systems, that amount is 40% less than households pay in comparable regions across the country – those that treat more than 100 million gallons of wastewater daily (National Association of Clean Water Agencies 2017 survey).

Wastewater service charges in the Twin Cities metro area (about \$29 a month per household in 2020) are lower than most household utility charges, such as gas, electricity and wi-fi.

Environmental Services is committed to improving its budgeting and forecasting accuracy and transparency based on recommendations and feedback from customers and auditing its processes.

Sustainable Water Workforce

Like utilities across the nation, Environmental Services is addressing projected staffing shortages in the water workforce due to the unprecedented high percentage of employees reaching retirement age. MCES is among the leading water sector utilities in the nation in promoting diversity in the workplace and has been advising staff at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency who work on building the water utility workforce of the future.

Skilled and Diverse

A number of efforts have been put in place to cultivate a skilled and diverse workforce that is able to address emerging-contaminants, aging infrastructure, water shortages, cybersecurity and rapidly changing treatment technologies and processes.

Workforce highlights from 2020 include:

- **Diversity.** Increased workforce diversity to 14% in 2020 from 7.5% in 2009. In 2020, 29.8% of the workforce was female. MCES is working to establish a more diverse workforce at the local level through good-paying jobs. New initiatives to recruit persons of color and women into skilled trades include apprenticeship programs for electricians and construction-related jobs, and intern program supports.
- **Outreach.** Hosted 36 outreach engagements, including career-focused information sessions, career fairs, and partnership and collaboration meetings.
- **Recognition.** Awarded 512 Keystone exceptional-performance awards and 195 peer-to-peer WATER awards to employees. This is an increase of 138% from the number of awards in 2019, in part recognizing how staff have adapted during the pandemic to perform with excellence.
- **Job applicant diversity.** In 2020, MCES had 1,930 applicants for 53 job vacancies that were filled. Women comprised 30.4% of applicants and 25% of those hired. People of color comprised 26.3% of the applicants and 17% of those hired.
- **Construction Inspector Program.** The Council's Workforce Development Unit assisted MCES Construction Services in designing and launching this new three-year program.

Up to three individuals will be hired to learn the foundational and industry specifics of the construction inspector positions. The program included a preparatory session in which people of color and females could participate. The result was a pool of 11 eligible applicants, consisting of five women and six men of color.

Environmental Services by the Numbers

The following charts provide a profile of MCES over the past previous decade.

Chart 15. Total Expenditure Per Million Gallons (in 2020 dollars)

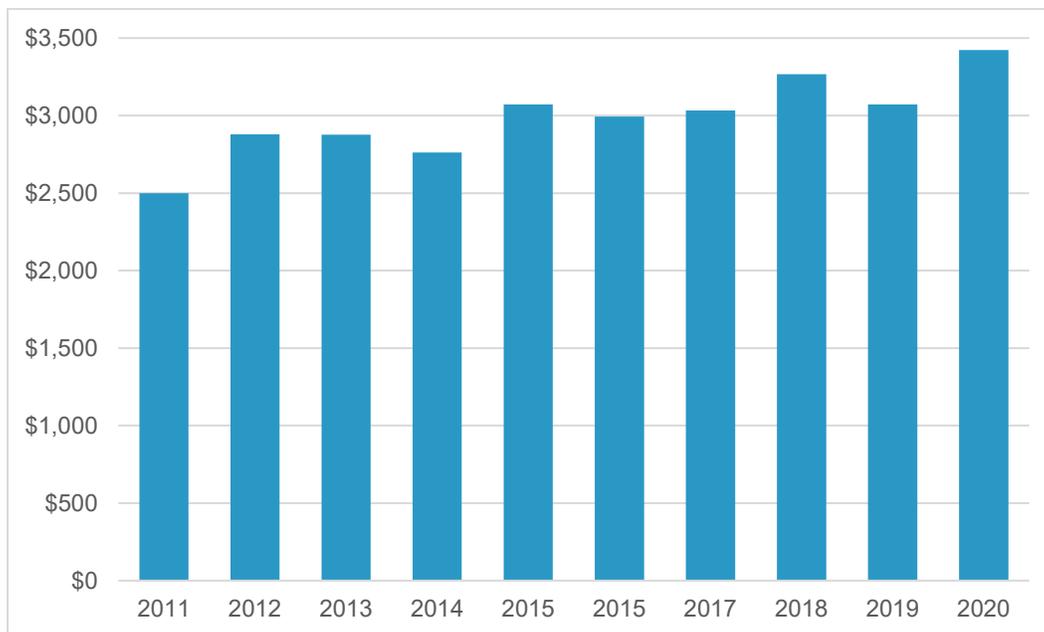


Chart 16. Total Expenditures Per Capita (in 2020 dollars)

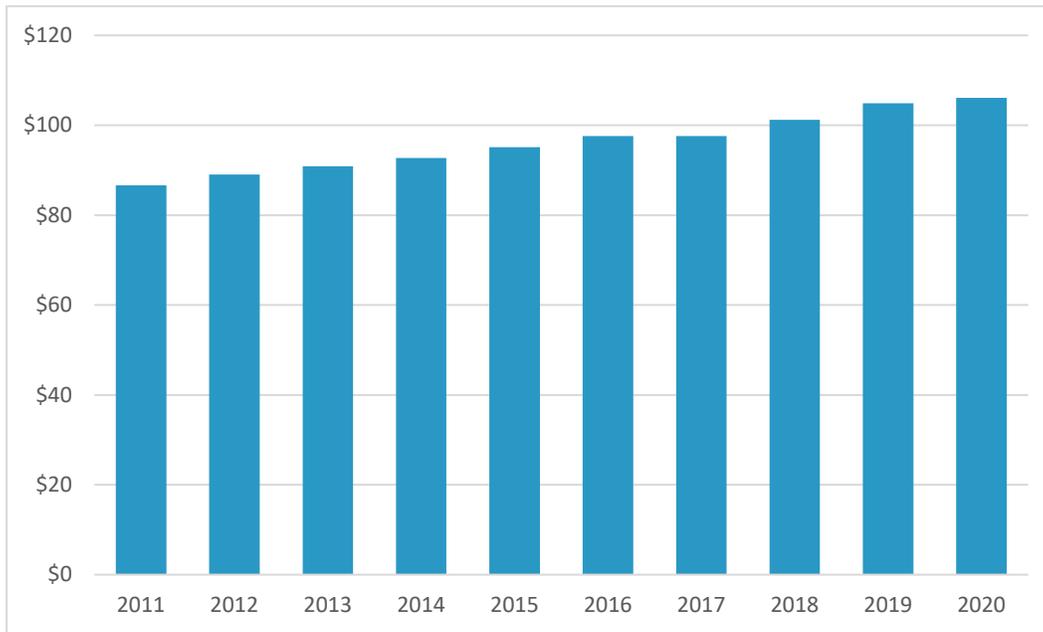
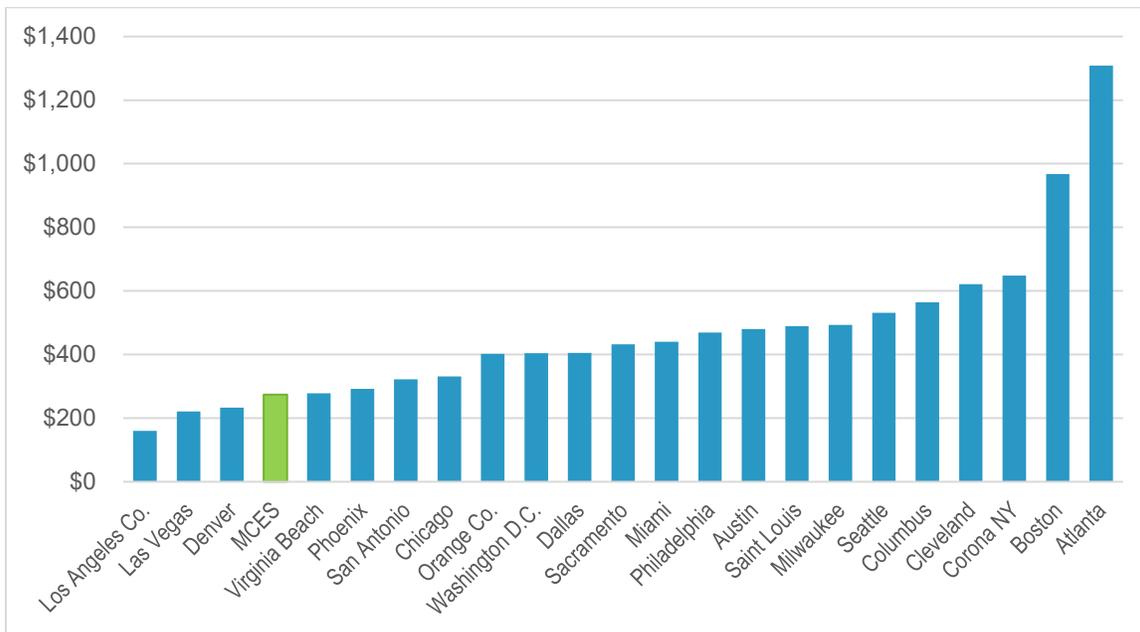


Chart 17. Retail Sewer Charges Per Household Compared to Peer Agencies (2016 national data)



2017 NACWA survey (2016 rates). MCES portion is typically 55% to 65% of communities' retail rates.

Chart 18. Monthly Household Utility Comparison (2016 national data)

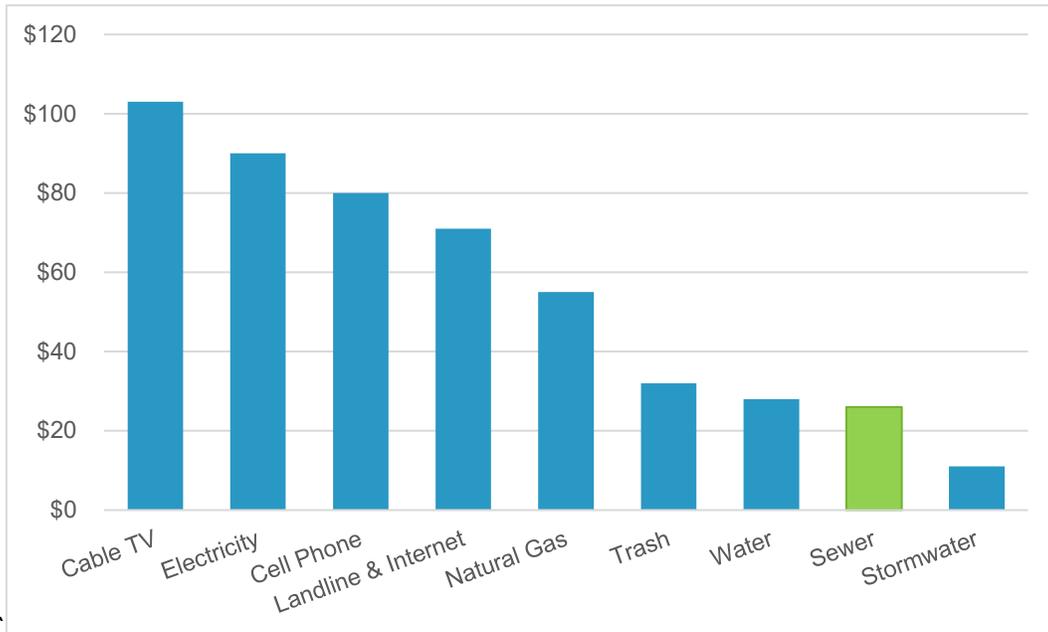
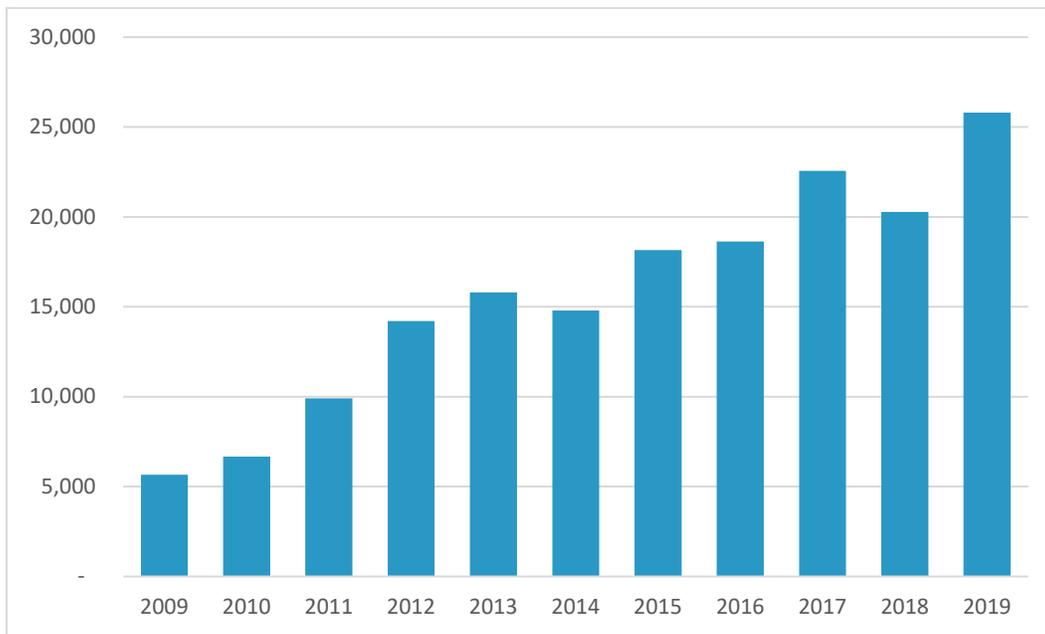
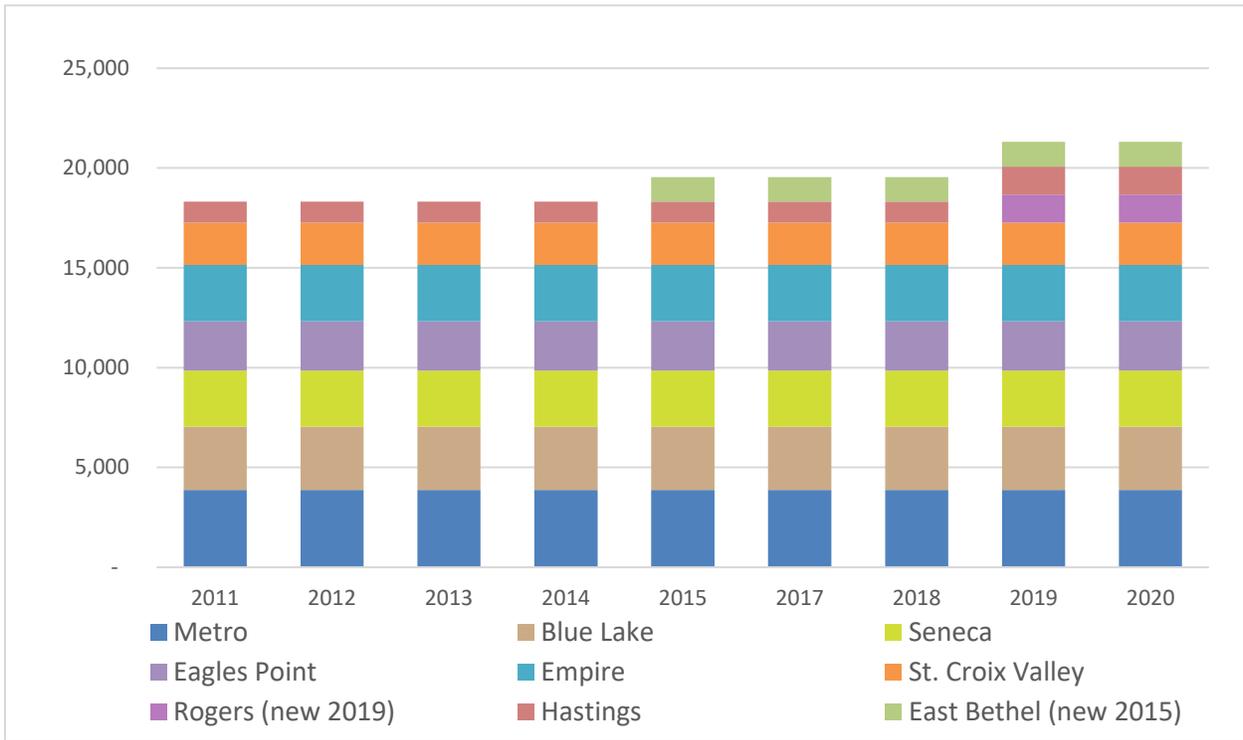


Chart 19. Number of Sewer Availability Charges, 2009-2019



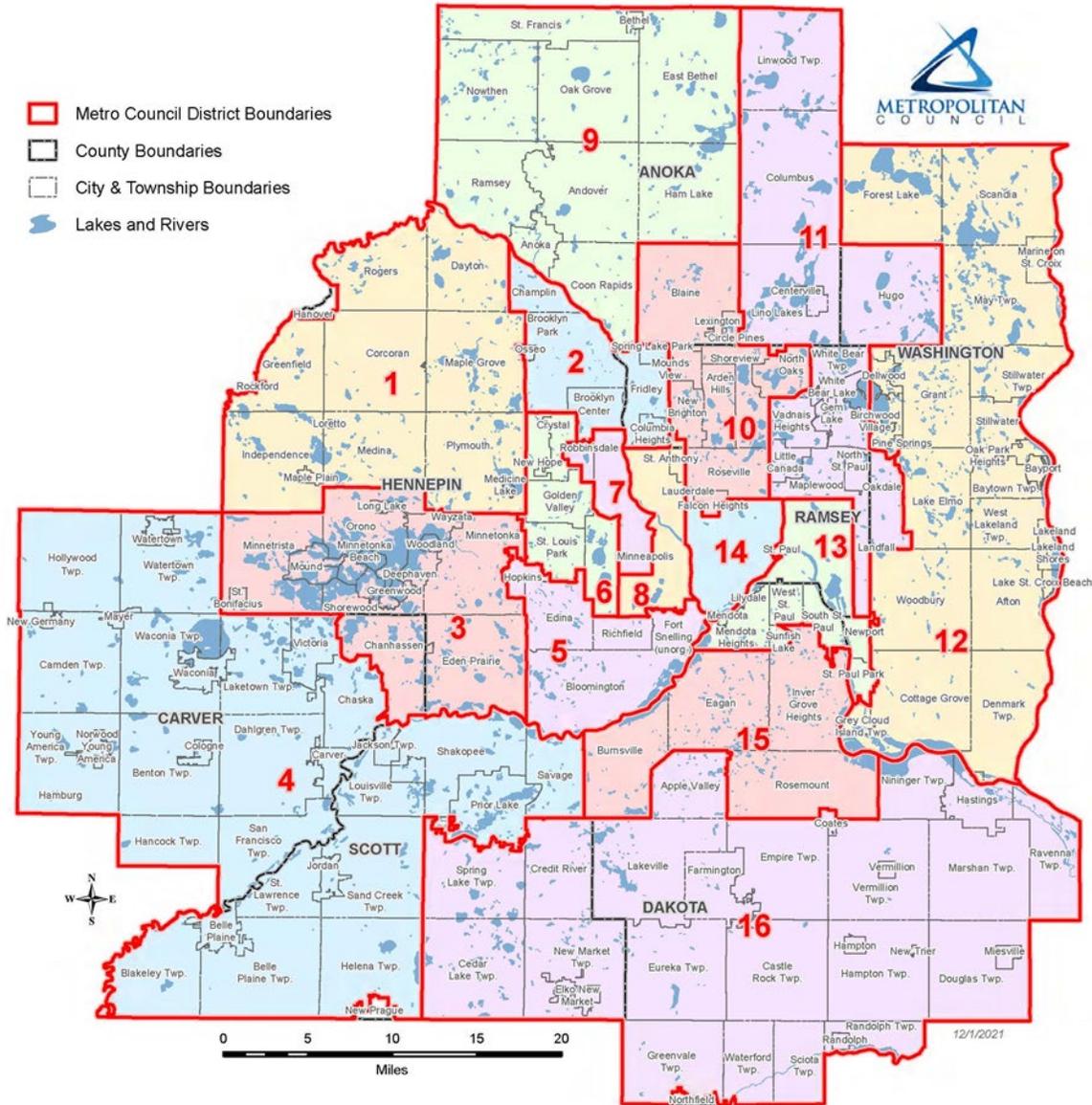
SAC is a one-time fee for new connections or increased capacity required from the wastewater system.

Chart 20. National and State Pollutant Discharge Limits to Meet Annually



Appendix: Maps and Budget Summary

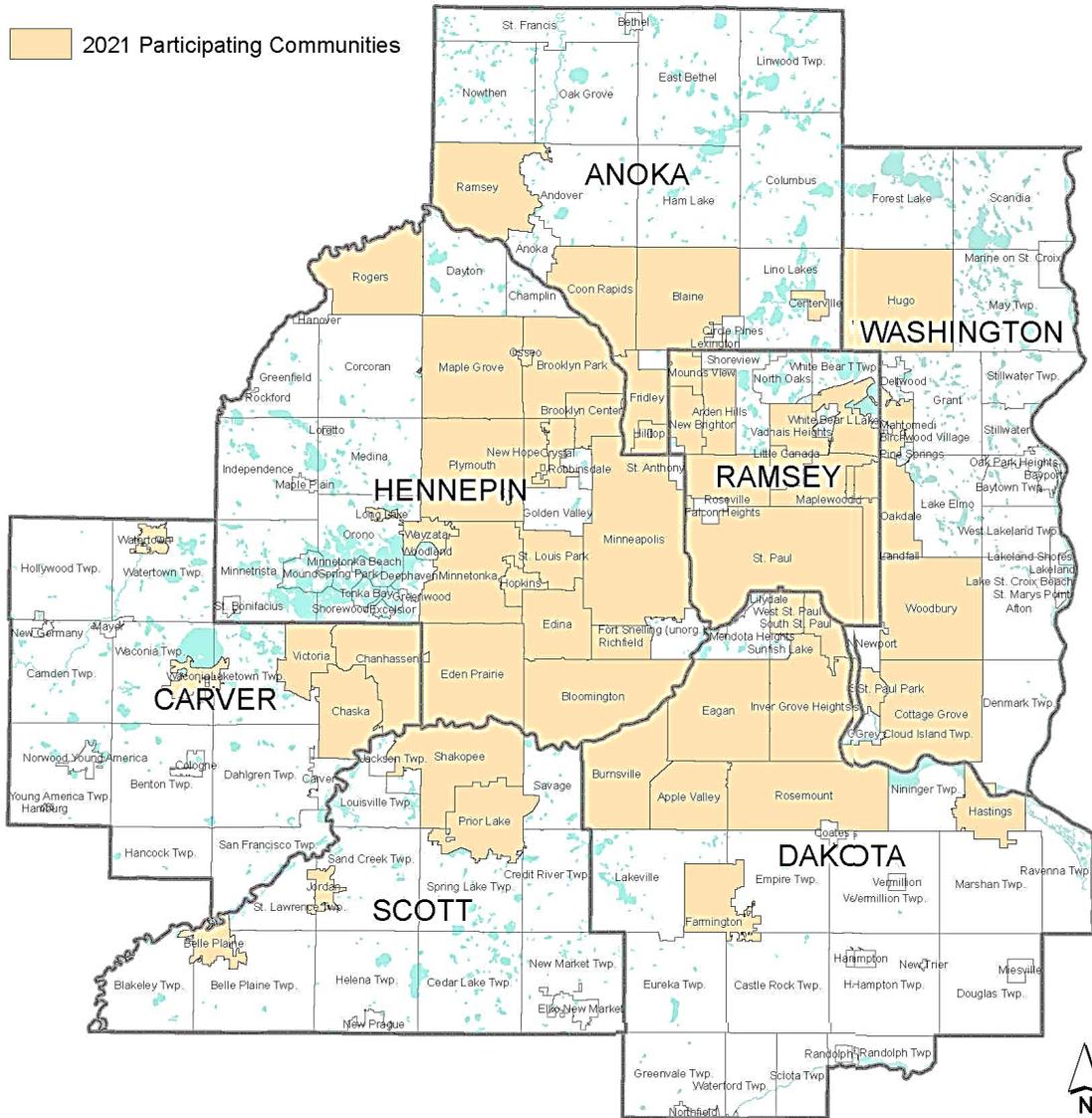
Map 1. Metropolitan Council Districts and Members



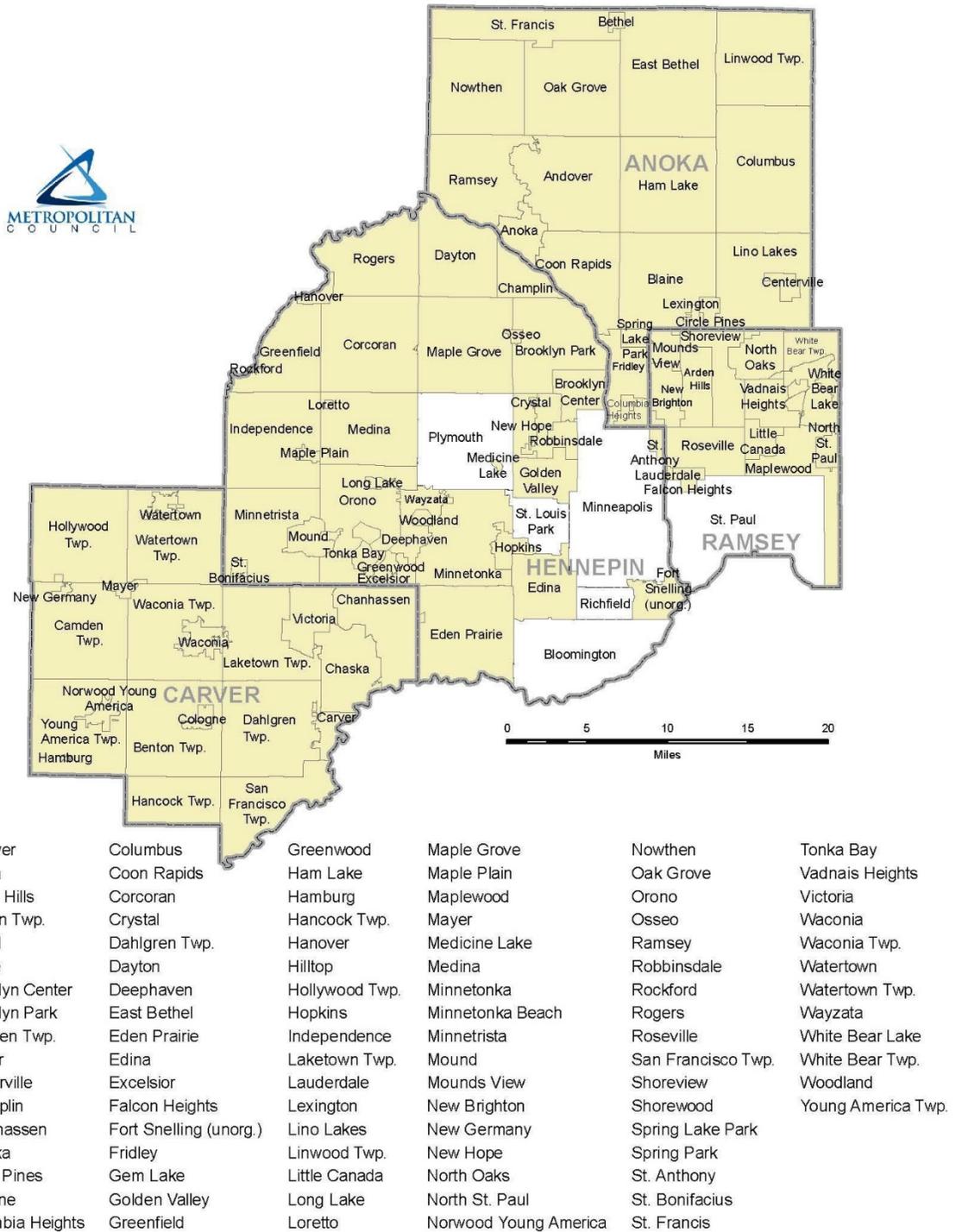
Chair Charlie Zelle

District	Member	District	Member
1	Judy Johnson	9	Raymond Zeran
2	Reva Chamblis	10	Peter Lindstrom
3	Christopher Ferguson	11	Susan Vento
4	Deb Barber	12	Francisco Gonzalez
5	Molly Cummings	13	Chai Lee
6	Vacant	14	Kris Fredson
7	Robert Lilligren	15	Phillip Sterner
8	Abdirahman Muse	16	Wendy Wulff

Map 2. Cities Participating in Livable Communities Grant Program

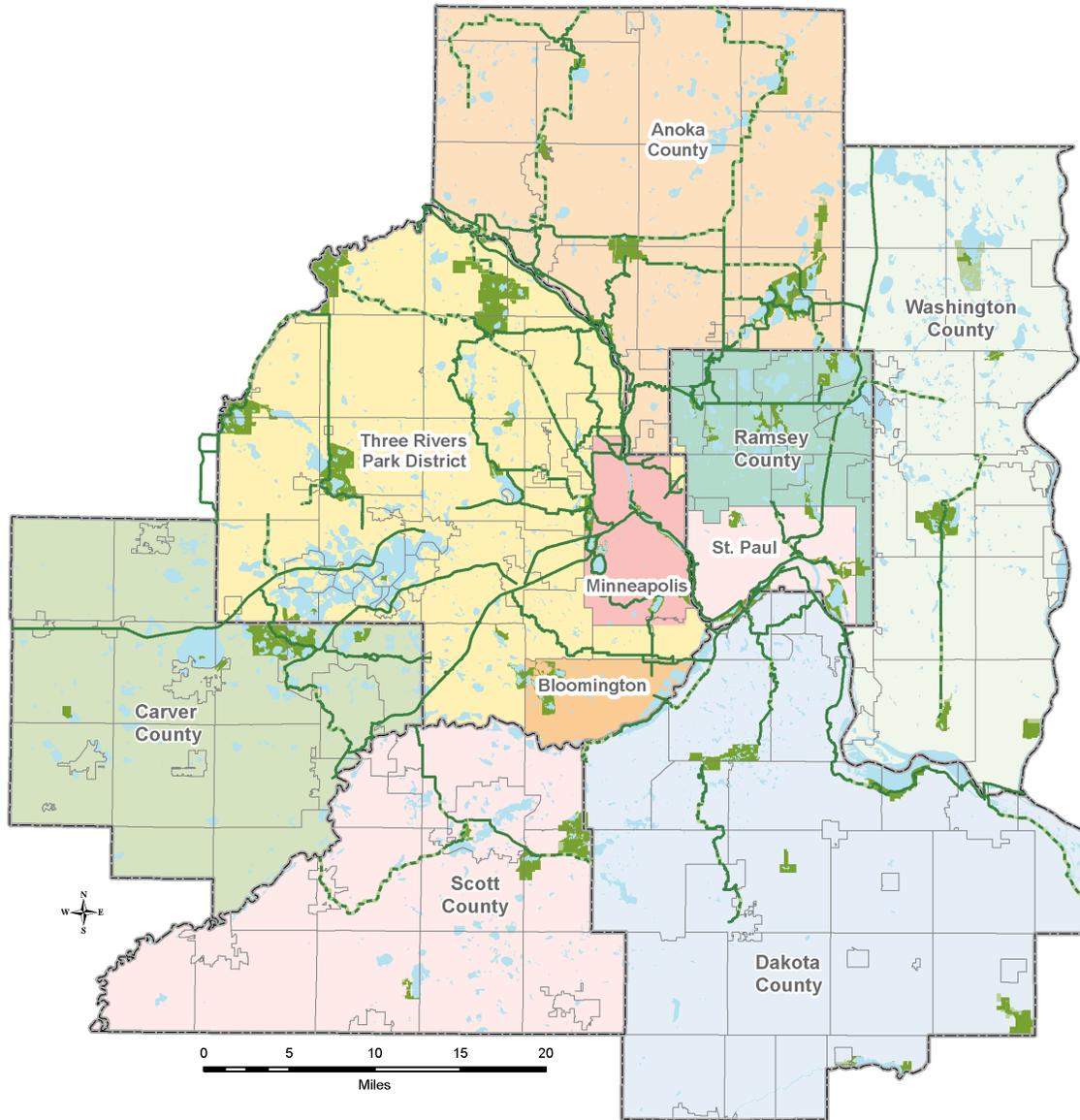


Map 3. Communities Participating in Metro HRA Programs*

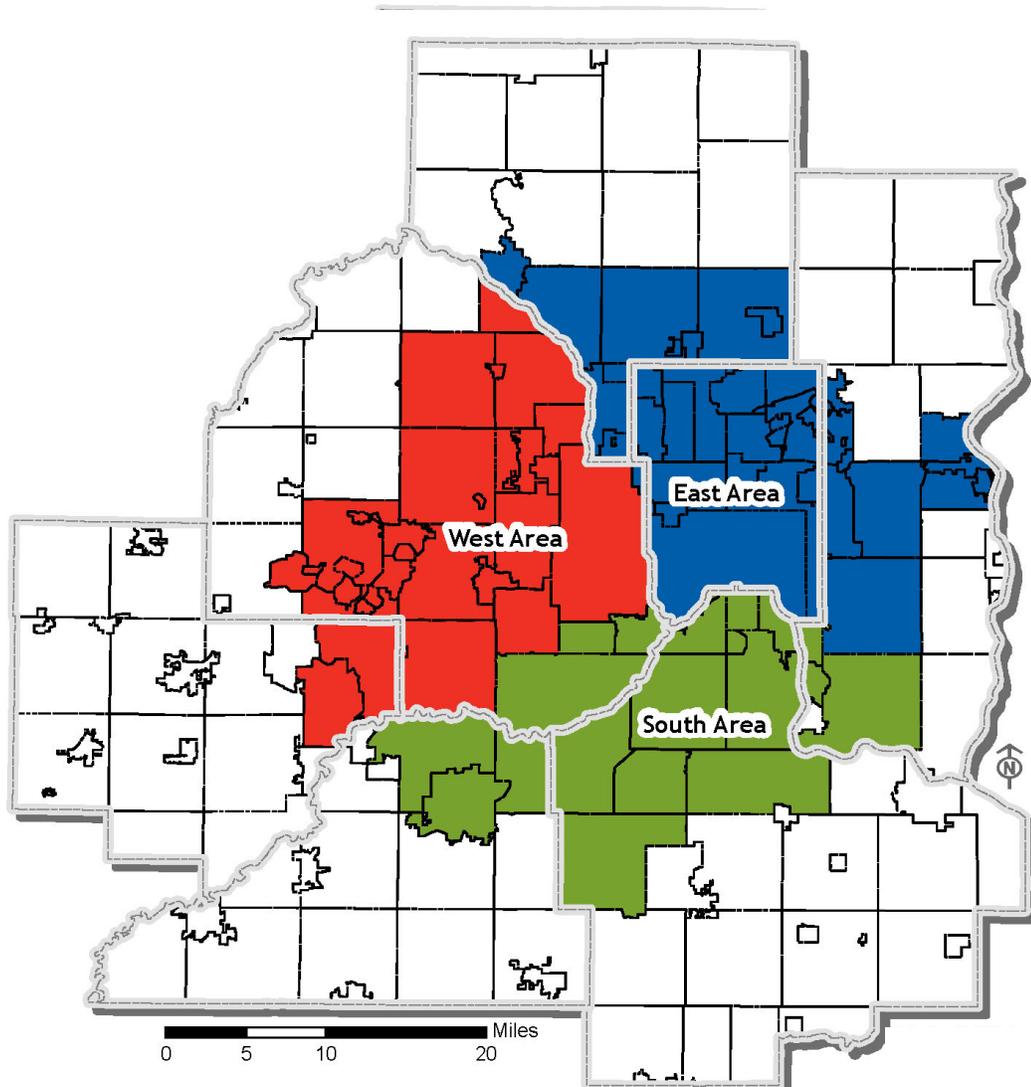


* For some programs, the Metro HRA service area is expanded

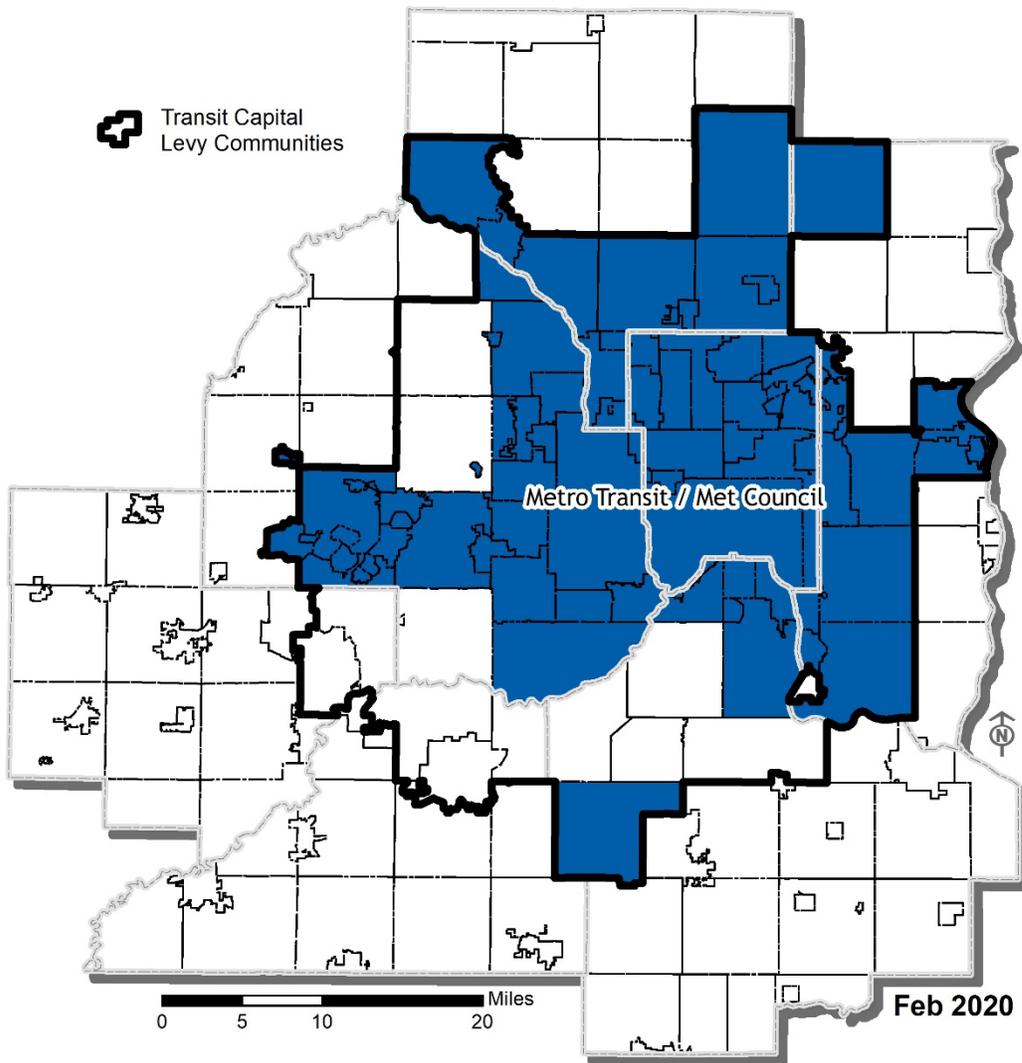
Map 4. Regional Parks and Trails



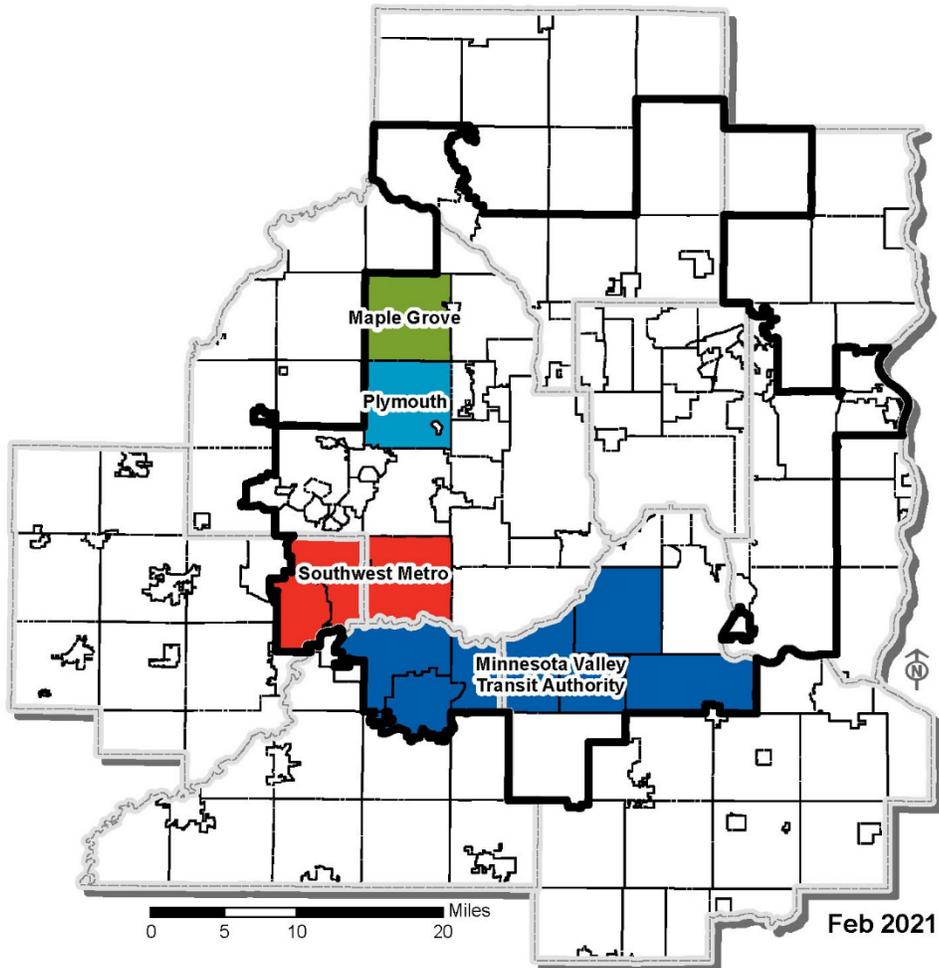
Map 5. Metro Mobility ADA Service Areas



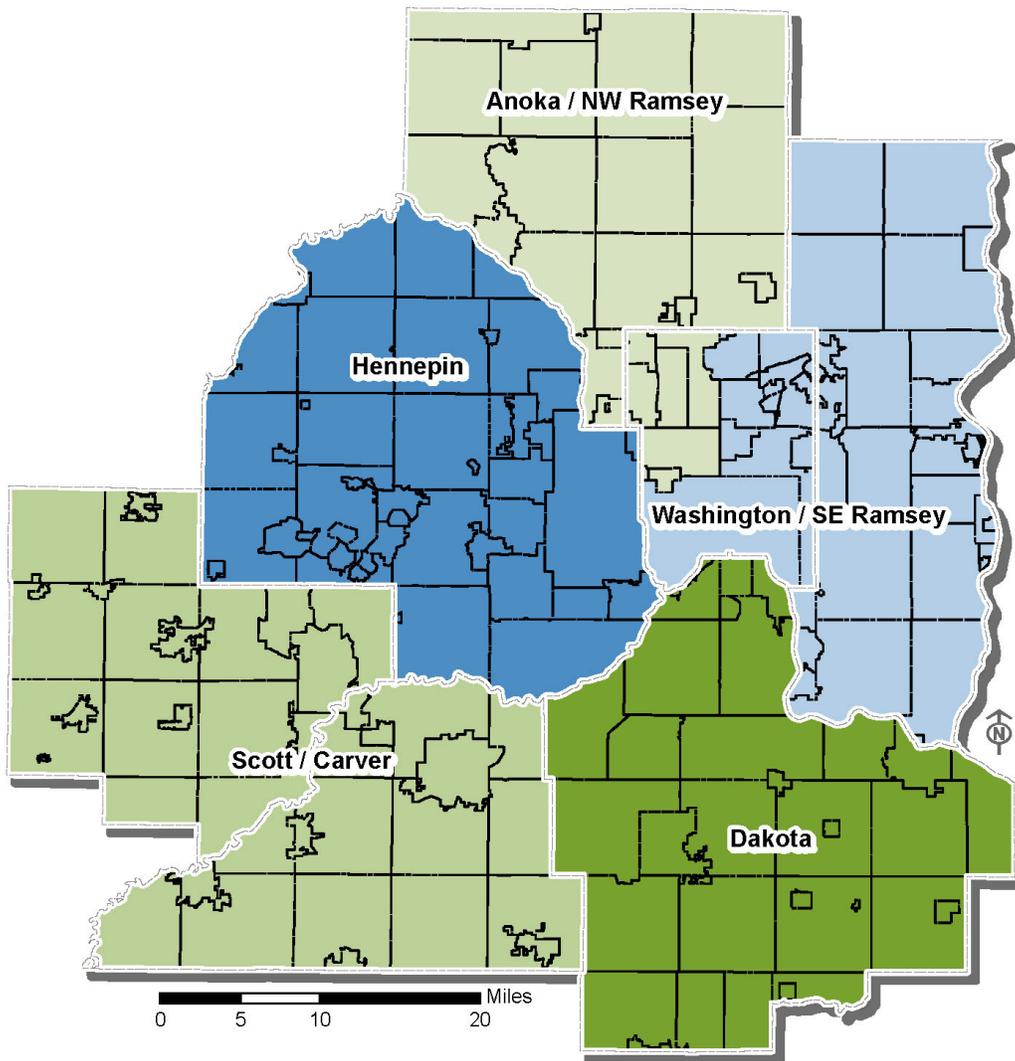
Map 6. Metro Transit / Metro Council Service Area



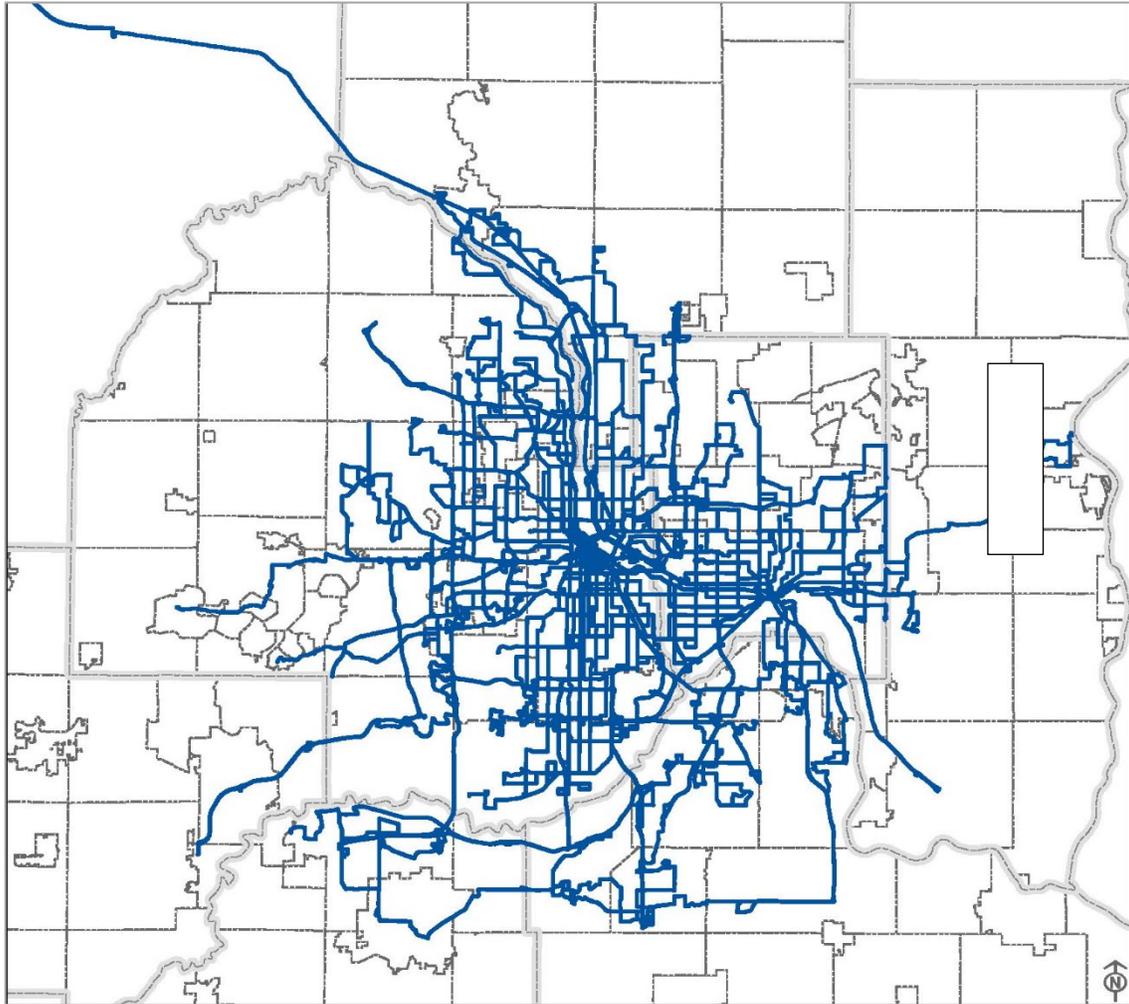
Map 7. Suburban Transit Providers



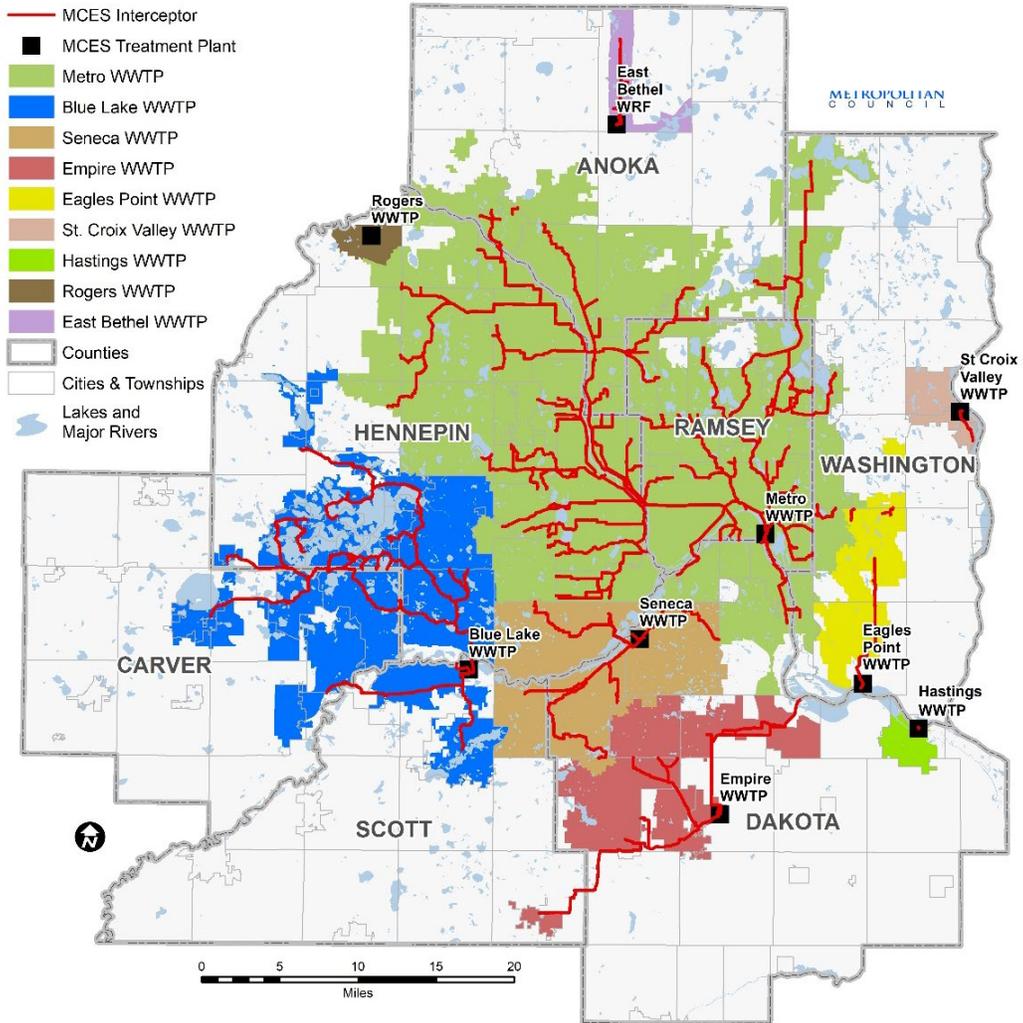
Map 8. Transit Link Dial-a-Ride Service Area



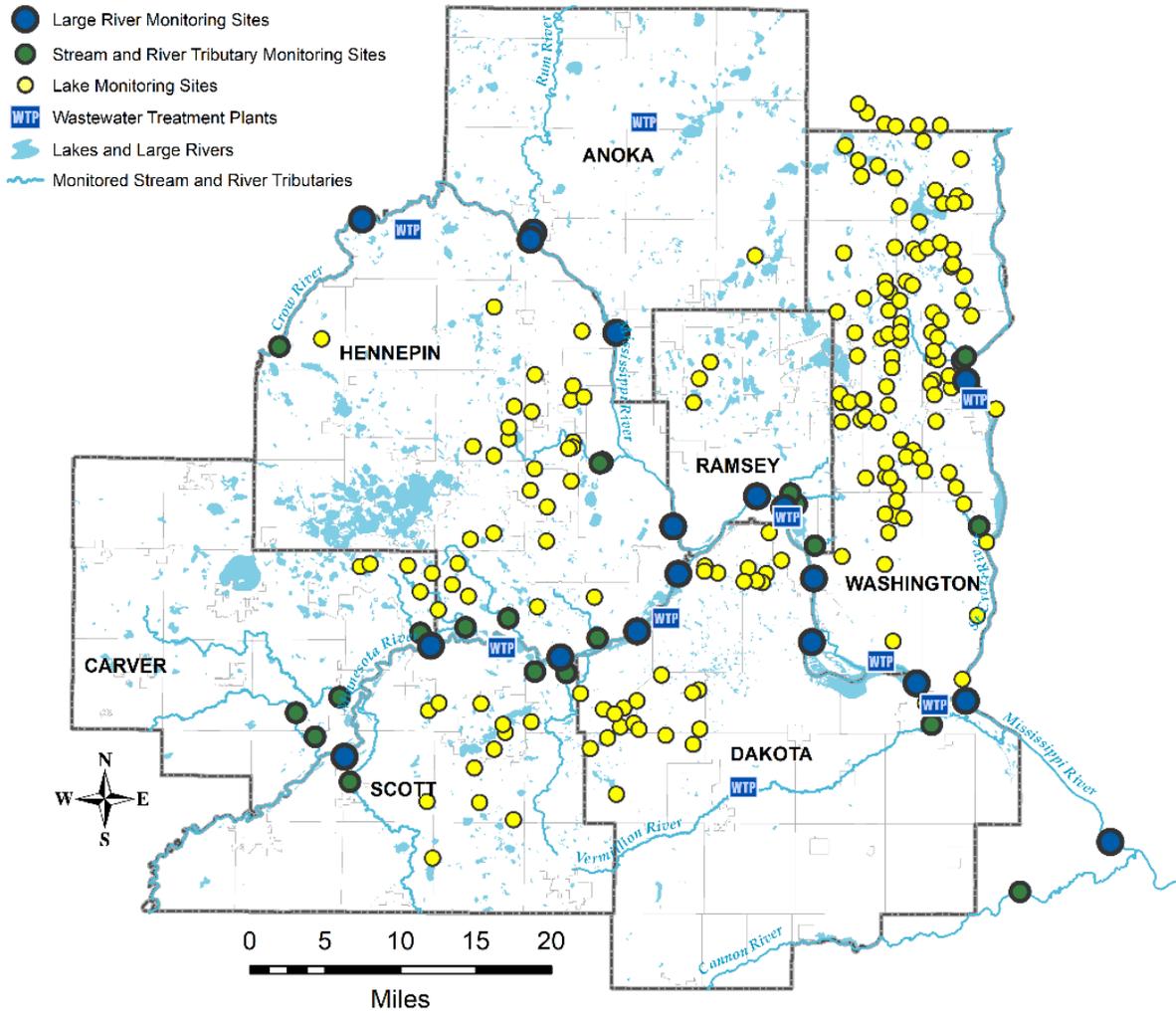
Map 9. Metropolitan Area Regular-Route Transit Service



Map 10. Wastewater Treatment Plants and Interceptors



Map 11. Surface Water Monitoring Sites



Metropolitan Council 2020 Adopted Budget

Revenues	Dollars (000s)
Net Property Tax	88,739
Federal Revenues	106,767
State Revenues	417,026
Local Revenues	38,182
Municipal Wastewater Charges	235,629
Industrial Wastewater Charges	14,406
Passenger Fares, Contract & Special Events	112,938
Investment Earnings	2,198
Other Post-Employment Benefit Investment Earnings	17,698
Other Revenues	10,965
Total Revenues	1,044,548
Other Sources	
MVEST Transfers In	25,301
SAC Transfers In	48,247
Total Other Sources	73,548
Total Revenues and Other Sources	1,118,096

Expenses	Dollars (000s)
Salaries & Benefits	478,438
OPEB Benefit Payments	13,582
Consulting & Contractual Services	70,267
Materials & Supplies	38,104
Fuel	29,640
Chemicals	8,578
Rent & Utilities	35,971
Printing	544
Travel	2,103
Insurance	8,415
Transit Programs	105,457
Operating Capital	2,522
Government Grants	3,105
Other Expenses	13,419
Passthrough Grants & Loans	133,043
Debt Service Obligations	199,974
Total Expenses	1,143,162
Other Sources and (Uses)	
Transfers Out/Other Uses	(11,000)
Total Other Sources and (Uses)	(11,000)
Total Expenses and Other Sources and (Uses)	1,154,162
Change in Fund Balance	(36,066)

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