REGIONAL SERVICE AND FINANCE STUDY ON TRANSIT

Summary Report to the Legislative Study Commission on Metropolitan Transit

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January 1984

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INTRODUCTION

The regional service and finance study by the Council was precipitated in early 1982 by a serious deficit in operating funds projected by the Metropolitan Transit Commission for the 1983-85 biennium. The Council formed a task force in June 1982 to consider revenue alternatives to the property tax for regional services (including transit). The task force, chaired by Council Chairman Charles Weaver, had 26 members, including elected local officials, Commission members, legislators, labor representative, league of women voters, Humphrey Institute, Citizens League and Council members. The task force held eight meetings and adopted recommendations to the Council on November 10, 1982. The task force recommendations included the Council review of existing service delivery and service options; consistency of service with regional plans and policies; the need for the service; reasonableness of cost and efficiency of operation; equity of amount and structure of service delivery and fares; study of sources of regional revenue; and report of findings to the 1984 legislature.

In December, 1982, the Council directed staff to perform a regional service and finance study of all metropolitan commissions in 1983. This report addresses the transit portion of the overall study, which was accelerated to provide input to the Legislative Study Commission on Metropolitan Transit. This report was adopted at a special meeting of the Metropolitan Council on January 19, 1984.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At its January 19, 1984 meeting, the Metropolitan Council adopted the following findings and recommendations of the Regional Service and Finance Study - Transit Report:

INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Institutional Accountability section of the Regional Service and Finance Study concludes that better management of the region's fiscal resources can be achieved by fully employing all the statutory authority already available to the Council. Three major areas could be improved immediately without changing the present institutional structures: (1) improvements to the development program-capital funding process, (2) expanded reporting to the Legislature on areas where the Legislature has final authority, and (3) better relations between the Council and metropolitan commissions. These types of changes would provide greater accountability in the regional service delivery system and greater consistency, comprehensiveness, and coordination among regional services. Although the recommendations below are stated in terms of how they would apply to the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), the changes recommended in the Institutional Accountability section of the study would apply to the other Metropolitan Commissions, as well.

Recommendations

That the Council institute the following changes to the metropolitan agency review process pertaining to transit as provided by existing legislative authority, or until such time there are changes to that authority:

1) The MTC should be required to submit a Transportation Development Program (TDP) to the Council on January 1 of even numbered years. Guidelines for the content, scheduling, and time frame of development programs should be prepared by the Council in revising the Metropolitan Investment Framework, including extending the time frame of the TDP to the year 2000 so that it will be consistent with the Council's Development Framework and Transportation Policy Plan and submitting sufficient information about operations so that the Council can act on capital investment proposals with knowledge of their operating implications.

The term TDP is used in this report as defined by the Metropolitan Reorganization Act (See Attachment A). The purpose of preparing the above guidelines is to help the Council and the MTC interpret the broad statutory language. The intent of reviewing information about operations is to provide the Council with a complete picture of the implications of proposed capital improvements which the Council approves. The type of information intended may include annual operating and maintenance costs, socio-economic effects, and similar matters which would help the Council understand the relationship of the capital improvements to its plans and policies. "Information about operations" should not be construed to mean the MTC's operating budget.

2) The transit capital improvement program (CIP) should be expanded to include 10-year projections of revenues and expenditures, and the operating budget should be expanded to include four-year revenue and expenditure

projections. Transit CIP's should also address the short- and long-range effects of proposed capital projects on the operations of the MTC and on future capital needs.

- 3) No projects contained in the transit capital budget should be approved by the Council unless they are also included in an updated, approved TDP and CIP.
- 4) The Council should develop guidelines in the Metropolitan Investment Framework and Transportation Policy Plan that would ensure that both capital and operating budgets for transit would address the relationship between the service proposed and regional objectives, the target population or area to be served, how the delivery of the service will be evaluated, and the service alternatives that were considered and why they were rejected. The purpose of these guidelines would be to give the MTC clear direction about the content of a program budget format and to enable the Council to more easily evaluate how well MTC plans and programs support the Council's long-range plans and policies.
- 5) The Council should provide comments to the Legislature, as part of the annual report of the Council, on the equity, efficiency and regional and local impact of any proposed changes to MTC revenue sources. The Council should also provide comments on the relationship of the MTC operating budget to regional objectives.
- 6) The MTC Chairman should be requested to participate as a member of the proposed Regional Executive Council to discuss regional issues of common interest and to share information on agency debt plans. The proposed Regional Executive Council would be headed by the Council Chair and have as members the Chairs of each of the Metropolitan Commissions.

TRANSIT

The transit portion of the Regional Service and Finance Study addresses six major points:

- 1. MTC services are more cost-effective in the two central cities and the first ring of suburbs than in the second and third ring suburbs.
- 2. The MTC should continue to assess the applicability of new service options in the outer suburbs.
- 3. Transit fares should not be increased more often than every two years and the increase should be related to inflation and other economic indicators.
- 4. The MTC system relies too heavily on property taxes; property tax payments made by some outlying communities are disproportionate to the service provided to them.
- 5. The property tax structure should be adjusted to better reflect the service provided; potential revenue losses for the MTC should be compensated with motor vehicle excise tax funds.
- 6. Changes to the existing institutional structure are necessary to address transit needs throughout the area.

The four issues discussed in the report can be summarized as follows:

ISSUE #1

"What is the cost-effectiveness of the transit services provided in the Metropolitan Area?"

Findings

The Role of Transit

- 1. Transit is an essential regional service.
 - As a social tool to provide mobility to those that cannot drive or as an alternative for those that choose not to drive;
 - As an economic tool to make jobs accessible to a larger work force and to help maintain two viable downtowns;
 - As a transportation tool to relieve congestion and to reduce the need for additional roadway capacity in specific corridors;
- 2. Conventional transit riders and individuals traveling as passengers in automobile account for more than 25 percent of all trips in the Metro Area.
- 3. The demand for transit services should be met in a flexible manner by a combination of service delivery techniques, service providers and pricing policies.
- 4. The transit service area has become more difficult to serve from 1970 to 1983 because of the decentralization of jobs and residences, as well as higher car ownership and income levels.
- 5. The MTC provides the bulk of the regular route service, implements the regional ride sharing services and provides some of the special services for disabled people.
- 6. Non-MTC providers play a limited but efficient role in the provision of regular route services. They play a very important role in the provision of special services for seniors and disabled individuals, as well as community centered services.
- 7. The cost of MTC transit operations has escalated at a much faster pace than inflation because of fuel and labor costs and the implementation of more expensive services.
- 8. The MTC services provided in the Fully Developed Area are cost-effective because they fulfill most of the travel needs of the transit dependent at a reasonable cost.
- 9. The MTC services provided in the outlying suburbs offer limited opportunities to the potential users and are more expensive to provide. They are less cost-effective services than those provided in the inner area.

- 10. Cost-effectiveness on a system wide basis can be improved by:
 - Pursuing additional cost containment measures;
 - o Using high capacity vehicle on heavily traveled routes (articulated buses, LRT, etc...)
 - o Strongly promoting ride sharing services
 - Increasing the attractiveness and quality of the service provided;
- 11. Cost-effectiveness can be improved by considering alternative service delivery methods, particularly for peak-hour only service to the second and third ring suburbs.

ISSUE #2

"What alternative service delivery methods should be considered?"

Findings

1. Several service options, such as contracting out, making special labor arrangements, using ride sharing services and reorienting existing routes around special transfer facilities could enhance the cost-effectiveness of transit service.

Recommendations

That the MTC include an analysis of the applicability of the service options identified above as well as any other promising options in the preparation of the Transportation Development Program.

ISSUE #3

"Is the financing of transit services equitable and adequate?"

Findings

Fares

- 1. The ability of fare revenues to support the transit system is limited by the sensitivity of the riders to increases and the risk of significant ridership losses.
- 2A. A distance-based fare structure is more equitable than a flat-fare scheme.
- B. A premium fare for express service is justified not only on the basis of a high level of service (i.e., high speed) but also on the basis of the cost differential of the service.
- C. A fare differential between peak and off-peak periods is justified on the basis of the difference in costs.
- Too frequent fare increases or fare increases that do not keep in line with overall inflation rate and the cost of competing transportation modes negatively impact ridership levels.

Subsidies

- 4. A regional tax is justified on basis of the regional benefits generated by the transit system.
- 5. The property tax contribution to the total operating cost of the transit system has raised disproportionately in the past three years.
- 6. Property tax payments made by residents of some outlying suburbs have become disproportionate to the service provided.
- 7. Even though other regional taxes (i.e. sales tax, payroll tax,...) present some advantages over the property tax,, they appear difficult to implement.
- 8. The regional tax for transit should be stable in terms of fluctuations in the economy of the region.
- 9. The motor vehicle excise tax has some of the advantages of the sales tax and the gas tax and has been already identified for transit purposes.

Recommendations

Fares

- 1. That fare revenues should account, at least, for 35-40 percent of the MTC total operating cost.
- 2. That future fare increases be considered every two years as part of the preparation of the TDP and if needed, included in the budget for the following biennium.
- 3. That future fare increases be related to inflation, the cost of providing the service, and the cost of competitive modes of transportation.
- 4. That a distance-based fare structure, including express service and peak-hour surcharges be maintained.

Subsidies

5. That the following allocation of MTC operating costs by sources of revenue be recommended:

Fares	35-40%
Property Tax	30-35%
State*	20%
Federal	10%

- *State participation would be a combination of motor vehicle excise tax and/or general fund revenues (to be determined) and social fares reimbursement.
- 6. That the property tax structure be adjusted to reflect the levels of services provided, according to the following ranges:

Limited peak-hour service up to 1.25 mills
Peak-hour and limited off-peak service up to 1.50 mills
Full range of service 2.00 mills

- 7. That new service options that reduce operating costs be implemented.
- 8. That potential MTC revenue losses from the property tax adjustment be compensated with motor vehicle excise tax funds.
- 9. That existing and new non-MTC statewide transit programs that are cost-effective and cost-efficient be strengthened and promoted with motor vehicle excise tax funds.

ISSUE #4 (INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE)

The roles and responsibilities of the MTC, Council and Mn/DOT in the planning, programming and delivery of transit service in the Metropolitan Area.

Findings

- 1. There is no comprehensive short-range transit service plan and program that addresses the overall transit (including paratransit) needs of the metropolitan area.
- 2. There has not been a review of the MTC operating budget to ensure consistency with metropolitan policies and plans, either before or after legislative action.
- 3. Since 1981, Minnesota statutes (Sec. 174.23, Subd. 2 and 174.24, Subd. 3a) provide for Council review and approval of the MTC contract with Mn/DOT for financial assistance. This review has not taken place.
- 4. It is difficult for the MTC to objectively plan for service needs in areas unsuited for MTC service or for providers that would compete with MTC service.
- 5. MTC is most proficient at providing regular-route service in built-up areas with relatively high population density.
- 6. Legislative appropriations to the MTC are not based upon overall transit needs in the metropolitan area, and a service plan and program to address those needs.

Recommendations

That the Metropolitan Council:

1. Request the Commission to prepare, as part of its Transportation Development Program (TDP) a comprehensive service plan and program that addresses the transit (including paratransit) needs of the entire metropolitan area in cooperation with the service providers and Mn/DOT; hold a formal public hearing; and submit the TDP to the Council by January of even-numbered years.

- 2. Notify the Commission as to what additional information should be in its submission of proposed contracts (and amendments) for state financial assistance to Mn/DOT. (This information will be the basis for Council review and approval of the proposed contract).
- 3. Submit to the Minnesota Legislative Study Commission on Metropolitan Transit, the Regional Service and Finance Study Transit Report, and the revised January 17 memorandum on "Response to Legislative Staff Working Paper on Alternative Institutional Models" (Attachment B).
- 4. Actively support the acceleration of the scheduled transfer of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax from the general fund to the Highway user Tax Distribution Fund and the Transit Assistance Fund, in the 1984 legislative session.
- 5. Establish transit as a high priority item for the 1984 Council Work Program with special emphasis upon improving relationships with the Legislature and the Metropolitan Transit Commission.

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473.161 Development programs of metropolitan commissions

Subdivision 1. Preparation of development programs. Each metropolitan commission shall prepare a development program covering the detailed technical planning, engineering, financing, scheduling and other information necessary to the development of the program elements to be performed by the commission in implementing the policy plan adopted by the council pursuant to section 473.146. The program may include such other technical information as the metropolitan commission deems necessary. The program shall prescribe and delineate the functions to be performed and activities to be undertaken by the metropolitan commission and shall cover at least the five year period commencing with the first calendar year beginning after its approval or such longer period as the council may prescribe. The program shall describe all capital improvements to be undertaken in such period and with respect to each improvement shall include the following:

- (a) A description of the improvement, its location, function and estimated cost:
- (b) The proposed manner of financing the capital costs of the improvement, and the sources of revenue available for payment of such costs;
- (c) A schedule showing on a yearly basis the timing of land acquisition, construction and capital expenditures for the improvements;
- (d) A review and description of the public need for the improvement, alternatives to the improvement, (including alternatives not involving capital expenditures), the environmental and social effects of the improvement and all actions and steps theretofore taken by the commission with respect to the improvement;
- (e) An estimate of the probable impact of the improvement on the responsibilities of the other metropolitan commissions;
- (f) An estimate of the annual operating costs of the improvement and the sources of revenue available for payment of such costs:
- (g) An evaluation of the relative priority of the improvement taking into consideration other capital improvements described in the program;
- (h) Each program shall include such additional information as the council or commission may deem appropriate.

Upon a request from any local governmental unit, the commission shall hold a public hearing for the purpose of receiving testimony from local governmental units and the public prior to submission to the council as provided in subdivision 2.

Subd. 2. Submission to and approval by council. The development program prepared by the metropolitan commission shall be submitted to the council for review and approval or disapproval. The council shall complete its review within 90 days after receipt of the proposed development program. If the council determines that the program is consistent with the policy plan it shall approve the program as submitted. If it determines that the program is inconsistent with the policy plan, it shall disapprove it and return it to the submitting commission with comments and the commission shall make appropriate revi-

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sions in the program and resubmit it to the council for review and approval or disapproval. Before approving a program or returning it to the submitting commission, the council shall hold a public hearing for the purpose of considering the program and the council's comments thereon, if requested to do so by the affected commission. The council may approve or disapprove a development program in whole or in part. Within two years of the approval of its first development program by the council and at least biennially thereafter each commission shall review the program, make such revisions as are necessary, including an updating of the five year capital improvement program, and submit the program to the council for its review and approval or disapproval as herein provided.

Subd. 3. Effect of development program. After approval by the council of a development program the commission shall implement the program. No capital improvements shall be undertaken by the metropolitan commission unless authorized by the program or specifically approved by the council. The council shall not approve any improvement not in substantial conformance with the appropriate policy plan.

473.411. Transportation development program

Subdivision 1. Development program. The commission shall prepare and submit in the manner provided in and satisfying the requirements of section 473.161, a development program, providing for the implementation of the policy plan adopted by the council. In preparing the program, the commission shall consult with counties and municipalities in the metropolitan area, the state transportation department and the commissioner of energy, planning and development, and for that purpose may create such advisory committees as may be necessary.

The program shall provide for coordination of routes and operations of all publicly and privately owned transit and paratransit facilities within the transit area to the end that combined efficient and rapid transit and paratransit may be provided for the use of the public in the entire area. The commission may designate a segment of the system planned as a pilot or demonstration transit or paratransit project using, without limitation, new technology including airborne systems, or traditional systems of evolved or modern form. The development program shall include the general alignment and profile, approximate points of access, facility classification, approximate cost, relation to other existing and planned transit and paratransit routes and facilities, and a statement of the expected general effect on present and future use of the property within the corridor. The program shall be accompanied with a statement of need for the proposed construction or improvement, a description of alternate routes which were considered, and an explanation of the advantages and disadvantages in the selection of any route considered. The development program shall also contain a description of the type of right-of-way or routes required; the type of transit service to be provided in each portion of the system; designation of transit mode; and appropriate general operating criteria. The program shall also contain an operational improvement program which shall at least describe performance objectives and standards which the commission proposes to achieve in satisfying policies, purposes, and goals established by the legislature and the council; identify performance indicators by which to monitor and assess progress in achieving the objectives and standards; and establish a route deficit limit as provided in section 174.28, subdivision 5. The program may include such other information as the council or the commission deems necessary.

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL Suite 300 Metro Square Building, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

MEMORANDUM

DATE:

January 17, 1984 - REVISED January 19, 1984

TO:

Committee on Metropolitan Commissions

FROM:

Transportation Staff (Lawrence Dallam)

SUBJECT:

Response to Legislative Staff Working Paper on

Alternative Institutional Models

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this memo is to develop a Council response for the Legislative Study Commission on Metropolitan Transit on their staff's working paper on "The Assignment of Governmental Function and Responsibilities," January 11, 1984. The response is predicated on the findings and recommendations of the "regional Service and Finance Study - Transit Report," prepared by staff in December, 1983.

The major institutional-related problems identified in the Council staff report, in the terms of the legislative staff working paper (pp. 8,9) are as follows:

- 1. Mid-Range Implementation Planning -- the absence of a comprehensive short-range transit service plan and program for the metro area. The service provided by the MTC in the low-density suburbs is neither cost-effective nor responsive to suburban transit needs.
- 2. Establishing Annual Funding Level -- the absence of a public policy on the annual funding level and mix of revenue sources on fares, taxes and state assistance for all transit services in the metropolitan area.
- 3. Annual Distribution of Funds -- the absence of agency and public review of the annual allocation of public funds for the provision of transit services in the metropolitan area.

DISCUSSION

Model I - Emphasizing Decision-Making at the State Level

This model is responsive to the problems identified in the Regional Service and Finance (RSF) Transit Report. A major concern is concentrating ultimate decision-making on metropolitan goals, policies, plans, programs and delivery of service at the state level -- without a forum for local public input and without representatives of the metropolitan area participating in the final decision. Current state law provides Mn/DOT with the authority to require consistency of metropolitan planning with matters of statewide significance as specified in the Mn/DOT Statewide Plan. This law appropriately identifies the role and responsibility of Mn/DOT. Statewide matters should reside in a state agency -- metropolitan matters in a metropolitan agency(s) -- and local matters in local bodies.

Model II - Emphasizing Decision-Making at the Metropolitan Council

The model is also responsive to the RSF Transit Report in that the Council would be responsible for the mid-range plan, the distribution of funds and the arranging of services. The Council would share this responsibility, in part, with a newly constituted advisory board on transit. If this were done, the new board should be staffed by the Council (as per the Health Board, the Parks and Open Space Commission and the Metropolitan Rideshare Board), which would ensure commitment to, and implementation of, the long-range policy plan. Additional staff resources are estimated at two-to-three full-time planners. The responsibility for allocating funds and arranging services would reside primarily with the new board and would provide an open forum for input and involvement by local units of government and the several providers of transit services.

Model III - Emphasizing Decision-Making in a Regional Transit Agency

This model is also generally responsive to the Council staff findings and recommendations in the RSF Transit Report because it would clearly separate planning/coordinating from operations. A major concern is the shifting of long-range transit planning responsibility to the regional transit agency from the Council. This would have the Council do long-range transportation planning for all modes except transit and have the new agency's transit plan "jig-sawed" into the Council's plan. Since transit is one of the metro systems, it would also confuse and complicate the administration and implmentation of the Land Planning Act.

Model IV - Emphasizing Sharing of Decision-Making Between Regional Agencies and Local Units

This model is also responsive to the RSF Transit Report for the same reasons as Model II. A semi-independent transit advisory board would be established and the mid-range planning responsibility would be shared between MTC and local units of government. The MTC would plan and operate service within the fully developed area — and could bid on services planned by local units outside the fully developed area. The prime advantage of this model is that services would be tailored to the needs of the area served — and those needs and services would be determined by those subregional areas.

CONCLUSIONS

- 1. The selection of a new institutional-structure model should be guided by the following principles:
 - a. clear separation of metropolitan-wide responsibilities for midrange planning from operations (service delivery)
 - b. the type of service (regular-route, paratransit, ...) should be the most cost-effective for the area to be served.
 - c. local units of government should have a strong voice in the planning and implementation of service for their area.
 - d. providers of service should be involved in the planning and funding of transit service.

- e. clear definition of roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved in the process of planning, financing and providing for transit service in the metropolitan area.
- f. state agencies should be responsible for matters of statewide significance -- metropolitan for metropolitan -- and local for local.
- 2. Each of the models are consistent with some of the principles stated in Conclusion I and no model is consistent with all of them. The following model would be more responsive to the principles:

A. Institutional

Mn/DOT and the Council would be unchanged as far as composition and overall role.

The MTC would be changed such that the planning, programming and policy roles for the Metro Area would be <u>unmistakeably</u> separated from the ownership, management and operation of services. This could be accomplished by establishing a new agency (with a new name) and having the MTC become the board of the bus company. The bus company (MTC) would be responsible for service delivery in the fully developed area.

An advisory body to the new transit agency would be established with membership including service providers, consumers and local elected officials.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

long-range policy planning--responsibility of the Council; the plan must be consistent with the Mn/DOT plan.

mid-range planning and programming--responsibility of new transit agency with advice of new advisory body. The service plan and implementation program would be approved by the Council.

establishing annual funding level--responsibility of the Council with review by the new transit agency and its advisory body.

annual distribution of funds--joint responsibility of new transit agency and advisory body, similar to arrangement of the Council and Transportation Advisory Board on the distribution of Federal Aid Urban (FAU) funds.

arranging services -- responsibility of new transit agency.

The above model is shown circled on the attached chart.

PART G. AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

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