



Network**NOW**

Draft plan engagement summary

MARCH 2025



Engagement and customer feedback

Summary

Metro Transit released the Network Now Draft Concept Framework on September 12, 2024, for over sixty days of public comment, closing the comment forms on Monday, November 18, 2024.

This section summarizes engagement activities, efforts to reach diverse populations, and feedback received for the final round of community comments on the Network Now Framework. The feedback received helped Metro Transit confirm priorities and make changes to the final network framework.

Overview

Metro Transit received nearly 1,600 comments during the Network Now Draft Concept Framework. Comments were received via electronic or paper comment form, email, phone calls, in-person verbal comments or statements at Metro Transit hosted events as well as community events, and onboard intercept conversations on bus/train and at Transit Centers. Overall Metro Transit accepted comments in whichever form was easiest for people and has treated all forms of comments equally no matter the venue that they were submitted.

Strategies to reach customers and community

Opportunities to connect

Hosted community meetings

Metro Transit held an official Public Hearing on Tuesday, October 29, from 5 – 7 p.m. at the Heywood Chambers in Minneapolis. Five additional in-person community meetings were held around the metro area for people to connect with Metro Transit staff, ask questions and submit comments. All locations were accessible by transit. Two virtual meetings were also held to help ensure accessibility. Three of these events also included attendance from Metro Transit's executive team, including the general manager. All meetings had the same format, which included a presentation and then time for discussion and questions.

Pop-ups & briefings

In addition to Metro Transit hosted community meetings, staff also attended community events, presented at standing meetings and connected with partner municipalities and counties, often presenting at public council meetings or work sessions.

- 25 community events
- 35 municipal and county public briefings
- 15 committee and other presentations

In addition to the external events Network Now was also shared extensively within Metro Transit. Effort was taken to hear from front-line staff that have firsthand experience with service needs, with particular attention paid to hearing for bus and train operators. Information about how to comment on Network Now was shared in internal newsletters, at multiple employee townhalls / service review meetings, and outreach staff tabled at garages in addition to having leave behind information on tables and on monitors.

Onboard intercept survey

Over 150 hours were spent onboard buses, trains and at transit centers directly engaging with customers. Staff talked to or handed material to over 2,000 customers. Verbal comments were captured as much as possible. Staff spent time at all of Metro Transit's Transit Centers and rode approximately 50 routes spread over the service region.

As part of the monthly Great Day in Transit, Network Now was featured as part of the September outreach efforts. 65 ambassadors working 270 hours shared Network Now information. Data on the number of people reached was not tracked as closely as the intercept work, but on average one person is able to reach 20-50 people per shift.

Furthering our reach

Rider alerts, interior cards and newsletter: Physical posters were installed in bus shelters with the highest number of boardings. Electronic rider alerts were posted online and sent to subscribers signed up to receive rider alerts. Announcements were made on rail platforms. Overall, Metro Transit used our advertising space and other primary tools to reach riders to ensure information about Network Now was getting out as far as possible.

This also included all our electronic newsletter channels, such as Connect & Rider's Club, as well as social media.

Partner outreach: Metro Transit also asked others to further spread information about Network Now to get more feedback. We reach out to partner organizations, neighborhood groups and other government entities. Over 400 direct points of contact were made.

Translated materials: The comment form and the project factsheet were translated into Spanish, Somali, Hmong, Karen, Lao and Vietnamese, which are the common languages within Metro Transit's service areas. All fact sheets were made available on the website.

Key findings

Highlights

Between comments received and direct conversation with riders, local partners and through our engagement process, we have heard that people overall like the direction of the plan. In particular, the following have been notable themes:

Support for:

- Investments in the METRO network, speed and reliability initiatives, and in demonstrated markets where ridership can grow
- Emphasis on all-day service meeting a variety of needs, route simplification
- Desire for express service that operates for more of the day, giving people better options

Of the items requested the following main themes emerged:

- More frequency, late night service, and suburban to suburban connections
- Requests for additional microtransit services

On-board and transit center intercept overview

Almost all the riders we talked to did not know about Network Now or had very little knowledge of the efforts or what was in the plan. That is why on-board intercept conversation are so important as they allow us to speak with riders who are likely not to otherwise engage but provide critical insight to items of importance for our customers. Most customers did not want to write down comments but were happy to chat with staff about their thoughts. Themes from intercept work include:

- Overall support for the plan
- Excitement to see increased frequency
- Concerns about safety, especially when missing transfers – with an acknowledgement that improvements have been seen.
- Desire for cheaper and easier to use fare products

Sample comments, (transcribed by staff as closely as possible to what was said and verified with the customer by reading the statement back):

"I have fallen on some hard times, and I am trying to fix my life, I really need the bus and cheaper fares would be helpful, and cheaper all day passes so I can get a lot of trips done in one day to save money."

"I really like all the examples of increased frequency on the routes I ride that you just talked about. I support increased frequency. The bus gets me where I need to be."

"If you add anything else it would be more afternoon and evening service"

"All your buses should be at least every 30 minutes."

"The issues on the train have really improved, please keep it up because I had been avoiding the train."

Public community conversations

While each community conversation/official public hearing followed the same format, each had its own flavor. Overall, the public meeting conversation provided for some of the richest and fullest discussion with our community. In the virtual meetings participants responded to each other via chat as well as asked questions. Some of our smaller gatherings turned into more informal conversations with participants asking questions and providing input during the presentation as well as engaging in conversation with each other. In our larger in-person gatherings community members came prepared with impactful prepared statements and after people asked their questions, members engaged in rich discussion about transit trade-offs and priorities.

Sample comments, (transcribed by staff as closely as possible or copied verbatim from a virtual meeting chat)

General Metro Transit comments

"I know that Network Now is about frequencies and the system, but is any department of Metro Transit looking at the accessibility of stations and stops, particularly in relation to land use/traffic safety? For example, accessing the 46th St. station from East of Hwy 55 is difficult, uncomfortable, inconvenient, and feels unsafe."

"I think the plan is wonderful."

"I agree with the direction of your plan. While access is important you need to start by growing ridership. You can't build a system without ridership."

Sample of specific requests:

"I was disappointed to see that there's still no route between south Minneapolis and western suburbs without a transfer in uptown or downtown included in the plan."

"Please create a route that is simply on Old Shakopee Rd that will allow for timely transfers on the BRT and LRT Lines in Bloomington."

"Bloomington doesn't have frequent East-to-West transit right now and could benefit from Micro Transit to help fill in that gap. When is Bloomington going to get Micro Transit to fill in those gaps?"

"Late night transit needs to come back." / "I like the improvements in the frequency for core routes and the pruning of extraneous routes. I do not like the lack of additional late night service."

Submitted comments

The main method that was advertised to provide feedback on the website and via other linked material, like advertisements, was to respond through a comment form. The comment form asked four questions related to how well the proposed framework met travel needs. There was four open space to comment on what was liked about the plan or additional items that were desired.

Overall, the content of the comments submitted focused most on specific requests related to a particular route or travel need.

Responses to the four question prompts:

The overall service proposed in Network Now meets my travel needs.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
20%	24%	38%	18%

Metro Transit is proposing service in Network Now that meets when I need to travel.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18%	23%	41%	18%

Metro Transit is proposing service in Network Now that meets where I need to travel.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
18%	22%	41%	19%

Compared to today, do these service improvements make you:

More likely to use transit	The same as today (no change)	Less likely to use transit
44%	42%	14%

Themes and sample comments

The most common theme from the comments received was about span of service and frequency. Frequency was the most noted theme, both for why people liked the plan the most and what they hoped to see more of.

What I like about the plan:

"The all-day express service and the Metro Transit Micro zones are the best additions to the regular route buses. The gold line is also a fantastic project; please continue to expand BRT with guideways."

"I like that on some key routes frequency is increased. Frequency is the only thing that keeps me from using transit more."

"I specifically appreciate the formal consolidation of the Route 23 and the Route 612 into a single route"

"I love the frequency upgrades basically everywhere they occur and support the discontinued routes and branches basically everywhere they occur."

Changes I would like to see:

Comments in this section were often very detailed and specific, with requests coming from all areas of the region. To analyze this section of comments, planners received information about the routes specific to their area.

Example of general comments:

"I was very glad to see the draft Network Now plan released to the public today. I think it's a great direction for the agency overall and I am excited to put together some comments. Reading through the plan, I didn't see any information at all about late night or overnight service."

"If possible, it would be great to see service improvements on the weekends. I know most local routes don't justify 15-minute service all day, but recently hourly bus service on the weekend has made it a lot harder to get around. Even if there were some segments of Sundays where local routes (specifically thinking routes with service patterns like the 7) could run every half hour, it would be a massive improvement."

Example of a specific request:

"I would like a direct route to Target Northern Campus from downtown Minneapolis in the morning and then a route from Target Northern Campus to downtown Minneapolis in the afternoon."

"I need to go from South Minneapolis to the University of MN--none of the updates in Network Now increase my access to useable transit NOR do they reduce my transit time."

"I live in Forest Lake and now have to travel 20 minutes to get the nearest bus to go to downtown Minneapolis. Others from north of Forest Lake have to do the same. Please bring back Route 288."

Demographics of respondents

This section only includes demographics of those who responded via the comment card. Much of the intercept and community event attendance was done to ensure we were reaching diverse demographics as we consistently hear less from youth and people of color via electronic methods alone.

Transit use:

- 72% ride transit almost every day or multiple times per week. Another 15% ride at least a few times a month.

Age:

- 42% of individuals were between the ages of 25-44.
- 41% were 45 and above.
- 12% were under 24 with only 2% below the age of 18. Getting feedback from youth, especially those that ride with us to school continues to be a priority.

Race:

Multiple options can be selected.

- 3% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 7% Black, African, or African American
- 7% Asian or Asian American
- 8% Hispanic, Latine, or Latino
- 2% Middle Eastern or North African
- .4% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- 75% White
- 7% Other

Gender

- 54% of responses were from women, transgender or non-binary individuals.

Disability

- 29% of responses were from people that have or may have a disability.

Income & vehicle status

- We received fairly equal responses from people within each income demographic, with slightly more responses coming from people making more money.
- 30% of responses came from people with no vehicle.