



Stronger, Better

Strategic Plan, 2021-22





To get where we want to go, we must work together

From General Manager Wes Kooistra

The COVID-19 pandemic brought us many challenges and uncertainties. But it also presented an opportunity to think critically about what we want our transit system and our workplace to look like in the future.

Together, we are committed to becoming a stronger, better service provider, and an organization where all employees have what they need to succeed.

This Strategic Plan is our vision for where we want to go. This plan captures the important work that is underway and provides a clear vision for how we will build on and support the foundational work our operators, technicians, police officers and other frontline staff do each day. Importantly, this plan also describes the common features of our work and provides a way to measure the progress we're making toward our goals.

As this plan shows, everyone's contributions matter, and we must all work together to get where we want to go. Thank you for being a part of this critically important work.

Our Mission

We at Metro Transit deliver environmentally sustainable transportation choices that link people, jobs, and community conveniently, consistently, and safely.

Introduction

What is the Strategic Plan?

The Strategic Plan defines Metro Transit's goals and core elements that characterize our work. It describes the initiatives we'll take to make meaningful progress – both in the work we do and how we do it. The plan creates a shared vision for us to work toward and will provide our customers, partners, and other stakeholders a better understanding of where we are focusing our efforts.

The Strategic Plan supports and supplements the Metropolitan Council's long-range plan, Thrive MSP 2040, and Transportation Policy Plan.

How is the Strategic Plan organized?

The Strategic Plan establishes **five goals** that are supported by activities summarized in this document and explained in greater detail in a workplan. Our goals are:

1. We will transition from the pandemic to a stronger, better transit system
2. We provide service that is safe, welcoming, and comfortable
3. We provide service that is reliable and easy to use
4. We make our region more environmentally sustainable
5. We are a great place to work and build a career

Our goals describe the outcomes we are working to achieve. But how we accomplish these goals is as important as the goals themselves. In all our work, we must demonstrate these **core elements**:

1. We meaningfully advance equity inside our organization and in the region
2. We effectively communicate and engage with customers, stakeholders, and employees
3. We evaluate our performance and foster innovation for continuous improvement
4. We are responsible stewards of a transformative and financially sustainable transit system

How was the Strategic Plan created?

In 2020, agency leaders were asked to describe how we will recover from the pandemic and better serve our customers, staff, and community. Staff helped add greater detail to this vision, set milestones, and identified the resources required to move forward.

How will the Strategic Plan be used?

This Strategic Plan represents our agency's priorities. It will be supported by the strategic workplan and department goals and can be used by all employees who are asked to create individual work goals. The Strategic Plan will also influence Metro Transit's operating and capital budgets.

The workplan will be used to track progress for initiatives supporting each goal and core element. Updates will be regularly provided to staff, and a full progress report will be published a year from the plan's introduction.

We will transition from the pandemic to a stronger, better transit system

The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly changed travel behavior, and its lasting impacts remain to be seen. But the pandemic also revealed how many people rely on transit to meet their needs, at all times of the day. A year after the pandemic began, around 100,000 rides were being provided each weekday. To build and maintain confidence in transit, we must make immediate and meaningful improvements to provide safe, welcoming, reliable and equitable service.



To become a stronger, better service provider, we will:

Implement a comprehensive approach to rebuilding ridership

Here and across the country, transit ridership has significantly declined as a result of the pandemic. As our region begins to emerge from the pandemic, we must have a cohesive strategy for keeping existing customers and attracting new riders. This strategy must include meaningful investments in service, security, vehicle and facility maintenance, and a sustained effort to describe transit's value to the community and the work we are doing to improve.

Example action: Offer discounted fares and fare passes to reintroduce our services in fall 2021

Complete a service and market performance analysis

We have always been called to offer transit access across a wide geographic area while respecting our limited resources. Changes in travel behavior – especially outside the core cities – require us to reassess how we can continue to accomplish these dual goals. As we update our definition of what successful service looks like, we must also place a greater emphasis on how our services are supporting regional efforts to address economic disparities.

Example action: Assess and revise transit performance measures to more effectively evaluate success

Create a performance dashboard

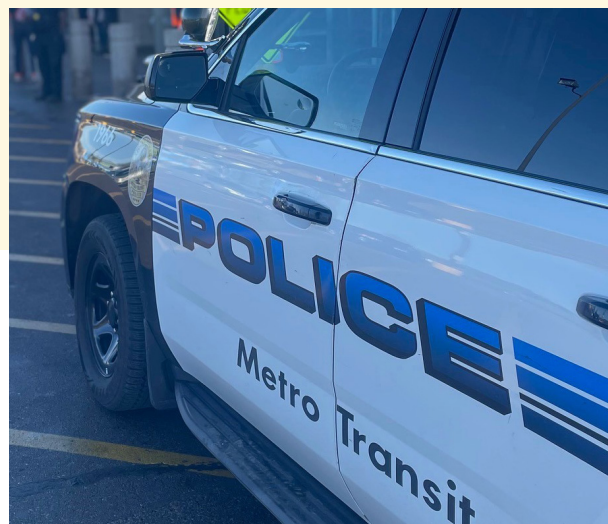
Advances in data collection and analysis have given us a clearer understanding of our performance. In addition to guiding our priorities and decisions, data can help employees, customers, and stakeholders get a better picture of our activities and the progress we are making. To expand access to the information we use and reflect the feedback we are receiving from the communities we serve, we will regularly share data on ridership, service reliability, customer feedback and other key metrics through a public performance dashboard.

Example action: Publish transit performance data online at metrotransit.org



We will provide service that is safe, welcoming, and comfortable

We have developed a strong safety culture, and our professionally trained operators take pride in getting customers safely to their destinations. At the same time, public safety concerns that exist in the communities we serve are affecting our customers and our employees and demand more attention. To provide the safest environment possible, we are expanding the capabilities of the Metro Transit Police Department and engaging employees, customers, and community members in an ongoing conversation about transit safety. We will also continue to respond to public health guidance and put the health of employees and customers before all else.



To make service safer and more welcoming, we will:

Expand the official presence on vehicles and at stations

The Metro Transit Police Department is one of the largest and most diverse police agencies in Minnesota. To better meet our current and future needs, though, the department must continue to evolve. In practice, that means hiring more patrol officers, building a team of civilian staff whose responsibilities include fare education, and supporting the work of our Homeless Action Team, which connects vulnerable people who seek shelter on transit to the resources they need.

Example action: Recruit 50 non-sworn staff to be present on transit and hire additional police officers to support these positions

Leverage technology to guide and support police response

Real-time cameras allow transit police and other supervisory staff to proactively monitor light-rail vehicles, stations, and other busy boarding areas in real time. To make the most of these resources, we must have a dedicated team of sworn officers and civilians available to monitor activities and effectively guide responses.

Example action: Fully staff the real-time information center with a team of 11 sworn officers and civilians and explore the use of live cameras on buses

Support and respond to a review of the Metro Transit Police Department

The killing of George Floyd inspired a community conversation about policing and racial equity – a conversation that will continue to shape the role police play on transit. Building on community and employee feedback, we will support and respond to the Metropolitan Council’s review of the Metro Transit Police Department’s policies, practices, and relationships, and respond to recommendations that come from the Council in spring 2022.

Example action: Support the work of the Council’s Transit Police Work Group and respond to Council-adopted recommendations in 2022

Continue to pursue administrative citations authority for fare evasion

Since 2019, we have sought legislative authority to handle fare evasion citations in-house instead of through the judicial system. This approach would mean people who aren’t police officers could issue citations, and the penalty could be lowered from the current state law that makes fare evasion a misdemeanor charge punishable by up to a \$180 fine.

Example action: Work with Gov. Tim Walz’s administration to continue advocating for the administrative citation bill in the 2022 legislative session

Center the employee experience in conversations about transit safety

Like our customers, safety is a top concern for our employees, especially those who interact regularly with the public. We must continue to center these employees’ experiences and provide meaningful opportunities to engage in conversations about transit safety. In practice, this includes elevating and supporting the work of the Transit Safety & Security Committee, measuring employees’ perception of safety and supporting staff who are harmed on the job.

Example actions: Survey employees about personal safety, provide relief instructors and transit supervisors additional training to support peers who are subject or witness to violence.



We provide service that is reliable and easy to use

Buses and trains must arrive on time and get customers to their destinations as scheduled. To improve speed and reliability, we are working with local partners to expand the use of transit advantages like bus lanes and signal priority and consolidating bus stops in select corridors. We are also expanding the METRO network of Bus Rapid Transit and light rail lines, bringing faster and more frequent service to key corridors across the region. Customers must also be able to easily plan their trips, pay their fares and respond to planned and unplanned service changes.



To make our services more reliable and easier to use, we will:

Expand and maintain the METRO network

By 2030, we plan to operate a METRO network that includes 12 Bus Rapid Transit lines and an expanded light rail network. By 2040, we expect to open another seven arterial Bus Rapid Transit lines. Collectively, this expanded network will provide access to hundreds of thousands of jobs, as well as schools, parks, and other destinations throughout the region. In Minneapolis and St. Paul, three out of every four residents would be within a 10-minute walk or roll of a BRT or light rail station.

Example action: Open the METRO Orange Line and METRO D Line, and complete design work for the METRO B Line

Review fare products and structure

Fares should never be a barrier to transit. To make transit affordable for all, we will expand and adapt bulk pass programs like the Transit Assistance Program, Student Pass, Metropass and Residential Pass, and recommend policy changes that make fares simpler and more equitable. To make fares easier to buy and use, we will modernize our fare collection technology to accept new types of fare payment.

Example action: Adjust fare products to align with changes in travel pattern so fares are simpler and more equitable

Improve the customer experience at bus stops

A key part of a customer's journey on transit, bus stops need to be accessible, inviting, and offer access to the information customers need to prepare for their trip. To improve the customer experience at bus stops, we will continue to add and replace shelters at priority boarding locations and work with local partners to improve accessibility at and near all bus stops. To keep our growing shelter network in better repair, we will also expand our facilities team and continue efforts to deter and respond to damage.

Example actions: Make progress toward our goal of installing 270 new and replacement shelters through 2026 and develop clear standards for the upkeep of transit facilities

Expand the use of transit advantages like bus lanes and signal priority

Service reliability and travel times are impacted by many variables that are outside our control, including traffic conditions and the weather. But transit advantages like bus lanes and signal priority can help ensure service stays on time and that customers arrive at their destinations in a reasonable amount of time. To improve service reliability, we will continue to work with local partners to expand the use of transit advantages and make coordinated improvements in key corridors through the Better Bus Routes program.

Example actions: Improve Route 22 through the Better Bus Routes program and develop regional priorities for transit advantages



We make our region more environmentally sustainable

Cars, trucks, and other vehicles are the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Minnesota. Transit plays a key role in reducing those emissions and supporting the region's efforts to respond to the climate crisis. Our commitment to environmental sustainability doesn't end with providing alternatives to driving alone, however. We are also committed to transitioning to low- or no-emissions vehicles, using less energy and water at our support facilities and producing less waste that goes to area landfills.



To contribute to the environmental sustainability of our region, we will:

Continue transitioning the fleet to low- and no-emission vehicles

We have always been a leader when it comes to adopting new bus technologies. To build on that record of innovation, we will learn from our existing electric bus fleet and continue seeking opportunities to purchase low- and no-emission vehicles that can reliably meet service needs. Low- and no-emission vehicles will primarily be used on routes serving neighborhoods where air quality is poorer.

Example action: Create a zero emission transition plan and aggressively implement it

Design, build, and maintain energy-efficient support and public facilities

The Minneapolis Bus Garage, scheduled to open in late-2022, will not only provide space for another 200 buses but mark another step forward in our effort to build and maintain facilities that are as environmentally friendly as possible. The new garage will feature electric bus charging equipment, a stormwater retention system, and solar panels, among other sustainability features. Efforts to make existing public and support facilities more energy efficient are also ongoing.

Example actions: Establish revised baseline energy consumption figures and reduction targets for all support facilities, complete and open the Minneapolis Bus Garage

Coordinate efforts to further embed sustainability in all work

The Climate Action Plan will unify efforts across the Metropolitan Council to reduce our climate impacts and prepare for a changing climate. To support this work, we have documented all the existing work we are doing related to climate change and will help the Metropolitan Council set new goals and targets the organization will work toward beginning in 2022. To champion and coordinate these efforts, we will create a new leadership position focused on sustainability.

Example action: Establish and hire a leadership position that will work across departments and with external partners to build a sustainability strategy and support the Climate Action Plan



We are a great place to work and build a career

To provide great service, we must be a great place to work and build a career. This means hiring a talented and diverse workforce and creating an environment where employees thrive and want to stay. This also means making sure all employees feel safe, valued, and included, and providing the tools and training they need to do their job well and to grow.



To ensure we are a great place to work and build a career, we will:

Create a workplace that is free from racism, harassment, and retaliation

Through the Councilwide Racial Equity Training Program, staff are receiving more resources on intercultural competency, bias, and racial equity. New awareness and skills will support work to establish and communicate clear expectations for how people behave in a positive and inclusive workplace and ongoing efforts to acknowledge and celebrate our organization's diversity.

Example actions: Support efforts to update Metropolitan Council policies and procedures, including those related to maintaining a respectful workplace and harassment, and educate staff about these updates

Hire and retain a talented and diverse workforce

Our organization includes people from many different cultures and backgrounds. But we must become even more intentional to ensure our recruitment and hiring efforts are equitable and free from bias. Recognizing our current employees are our greatest resource, we must also do more to encourage skill-building among all staff and build support for programs like the Operator Apprenticeship Program, Red Kite, Leadership Academy, and Mentoring Works.

Example actions: Support Human Resources in the implementation of a Recruitment and Selection Score Card; offer frontline staff a chance to act in supervisory roles through the Leadership Academy

Create a workgroup to address training barriers for frontline staff

The Metropolitan Council regularly offers opportunities for staff to build professional skills. However, these training opportunities aren't always accessible to all staff, especially frontline employees who work non-traditional hours or do not have access to technology. More resources and education are required to ensure all employees can access resources offered by the Metropolitan Council.

Example action: Create a work group and work with Human Resources, Equity & Inclusion and Communications to address training barriers

Create a facility plan to address current and future workspace needs

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, employees who could work from home were asked to do so to help reduce the risk of transmission while those who continued to work on site adopted new safety protocols. Nationwide, this changed how people work and interact as well as their expectations. We must embrace the benefits of hybrid work, including the opportunity to make our workplace more accessible, while maintaining safe and healthy workplaces for all employees.

Example actions: Complete redesign plans for the Heywood Office, complete an expansion of the Hiawatha Operations & Maintenance Facility



How we reach our goals is as important as the goals themselves

Our goals describe the outcomes we are collectively working to achieve. But we are also being called to approach our work with a stronger focus on equity, engagement, innovation, and stewardship – the core elements that will guide all our work. The following examples illustrate how our core elements will help us achieve our goals.

We meaningfully advance equity inside our organization and in the region

The Twin Cities has some of the starkest disparities in the nation. Across the region, Black people are less likely to own a home and experience unemployment and poverty at higher rates than their white counterparts. Too often, people in our region also face challenges because of their genders, identities, or disabilities. Together, we must actively support shared regional efforts to address the effects of discrimination and provide a workplace where everyone has what they need to be successful.

To advance equity inside our organization and in the region, we will:

- Clearly define “transit equity” and goals and provide tools and resources to staff that support equity analysis and decision making
- Execute the Equity Metrics Program, conduct an annual Service Equity Evaluation, and apply an equity lens to budget development
- Place a stronger emphasis on making transit investments that improve mobility options in neighborhoods where there are more people of color, renters, people with lower incomes and less access to vehicles
- Increase contracting and purchasing with disadvantaged and underutilized businesses
- Continue investing in staff and organizational racial equity competency through training, professional development, and supporting the Equity and Inclusion Team
- Align Metro Transit work with Councilwide efforts focused on embedding and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion

We effectively communicate and engage with customers, stakeholders, and employees

Employees, customers, and stakeholders should not only be informed about what we’re doing but be invited to participate in meaningful conversations about our work. To do that, we must become more intentional about providing opportunities to provide feedback and demonstrate how that feedback is informing our actions.

To communicate and engage with customers, stakeholders and employees, we will:

- Review and consolidate survey efforts to ensure we are gathering feedback efficiently and inclusively
- Provide summaries of engagement activities and explain how public input influenced our decisions
- Regularly engage with the Office of Equal Opportunity to ensure our engagement and communication efforts are accessible and continue to translate materials as appropriate
- Host monthly manager’s meetings to provide important information about the Strategic Plan, budget, and other agency priorities
- Identify strategic partnerships and build stronger relationships with these partners

We evaluate our performance and foster innovation for continuous improvement

Advances in our data collection and analysis efforts have given us a much better understanding of ridership patterns that can be used to guide our service. Data is also being used to improve speed and reliability, vehicle maintenance, and investigate locations where crashes are most-likely to occur. As we look further into the future, we will need to do even more to collect, share and use data to improve our performance.

To evaluate our performance and foster innovation for continuous improvement, we will:

- Establish performance teams to ensure our actions and decisions help us achieve goals most connected to our customers' satisfaction (e.g., safety and reliability) and our ability to serve our region (environmental sustainability)
- Set performance targets and monitor our progress toward them on both internal and public dashboards
- Implement a microtransit pilot in North Minneapolis to provide new mobility options and connections to the regional transit network and to build capacity for more similar services in the future

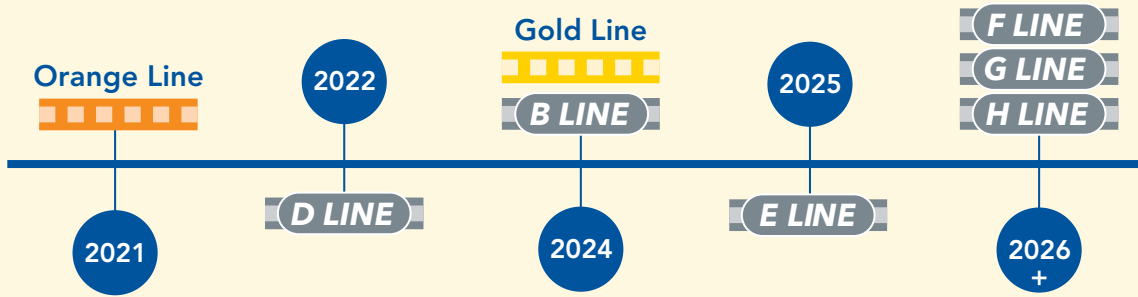
We are responsible stewards of a transformative and financially sustainable transit system

Federal aid and reserve funds helped offset pandemic-driven losses in fare and motor vehicle sales tax revenue. But a structural deficit existed even before the pandemic and without a predictable, sustainable funding stream we will face a fiscal cliff in mid-2025. While we must be mindful of our financial uncertainty, we must continue to invest in improvements that help us grow ridership and keep existing assets in a state of good repair.

To be responsible stewards of a transformative and financially sustainable transit system, we will:

- Explore new sources of revenue, including joint development and new or expanded funding partnerships
- Reduce expenses by continually searching for one-time savings and ongoing efficiencies
- Develop lifecycle costs for all new transit investments to plan for long-term capital and operating expenses, and communicate those costs to stakeholder groups
- Create a Business Technology Unit to better plan and manage the significant investments we are making in new technology

We are improving our region's mobility every year



Green Line Extension schedule under review.



Future Rapid Transit Network

