

T Transportation Committee

Meeting date: February 9, 2009

Council meeting February 25, 2009

ADVISORY INFORMATION

Date: February 2, 2009

Subject: Approval of Regional Dial-a-Ride Service Delivery Plan

District(s), Member(s): All

Policy/Legal Reference: Mn Statute 473.384

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Division/Department: Metropolitan Transportation Services (MTS)

Proposed Action

That the Metropolitan Council approve the attached Regional Dial-a-Ride Service Delivery Plan.

Background

The Metropolitan Council has funded a number of locally controlled dial-a-ride programs around the metropolitan area since the merger with the Regional Transit Board (RTB) in 1994. Prior to that time these contracts were administered by the RTB, who inherited some, but not all of them from MnDOT in 1984. They are often referred to as Community Based Dial-a-Ride programs.

In 2009 the Council will contribute \$3.1 million in operating assistance and approximately \$800,000 in capital to support fourteen community based dial-a-ride programs. These dial-a-ride services are administered and controlled by counties, cities and non-profit agencies.

MTS staff have studied the history and transformation of these programs over the years as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the current structure in meeting the Council's legislatively defined goal "to provide, to the greatest feasible extent, a basic level of mobility for all people in the metropolitan area" (Mn Stat. 473.3, Subd. 2a). There are a number of deficiencies in the existing approach and process by which these grants are awarded and the service delivered.

In addition to community based dial-a-ride programs, the Council fully funds dial-a-ride programs in Woodbury, Cottage Grove, Newport, St. Paul Park, Stillwater and Minnetonka. These dial-a-ride services were established to replace mid-day fixed route services that were eliminated due to low productivity. The operating budget for these dial-a-ride services in 2009 is \$1.6 million. The Council currently spends a total of \$4.7 million annually to provide general public dial-a-ride services.

Rationale

Staff is recommending implementation of a restructured regional dial-a-ride transit program in January 2010 to be developed and delivered collaboratively between the Council and each of the seven metro area counties. Under the new model, all existing dial-a-ride contracts would be discontinued in 2010 and the funds reallocated across the seven counties based on a formula that considers the total population, size of the service area, the transit dependent population and disabled population in the portion of the county not served by fixed route mid-day services. Each county would elect to either:

1. Administer and directly operate or competitively procure the dial-a-ride transit service within their respective county; or
2. Defer to the Council to competitively procure a service contractor and provide administrative oversight of dial-a-ride transit service within their respective county.

The proposed service restructure would address these current issues:

- a) Eliminate the arbitrary distribution of funds to a small subset of transit providers in the region.
- b) Streamline administrative efforts. Council training, administrative oversight and auditing for drug and alcohol oversight, ridership and customer service reporting, financial management, fleet maintenance audits, legal support, and Title VI compliance, would be reduced by approximately 50%.
- c) Assure program eligibility for federal funds and compliance with federal regulations.
- d) Provide equitable coverage throughout the metropolitan area. Some areas today have no transit service.
- e) Eliminate duplicative services. Recent data analysis shows that 25% to 44% of the dial-a-ride trips provided by three programs duplicate fixed route service available within a ¼ mile walk on both ends of the trip provided.
- f) Require coordination with fixed route services and other regional dial-a-ride programs.
- g) Assure that services are equally available to the general public.
- h) Standardize operating policies and procedures and integrate dial-a-ride into the “family” of transit services: rail, fixed route bus, Metro Mobility and Regional Dial-a-Ride.
- i) Eliminate sole source contracts.
- j) Allow future flexibility in service delivery area as fixed route services evolve.

A coordination advisory committee with representatives from all seven counties and the Council will be established to aid in the implementation of the restructured program as well as provide ongoing oversight to the dial-a-ride services.

The Council will seek modifications to Minnesota Statute 473.384 during the current legislative session to eliminate language that is contradictory, ambiguous and unclear relative to the current program structure.

Funding

Staff is recommending that the current funds budgeted for dial-a-ride, both Community Based programs and fixed route replacement services, be reinvested in Regional Dial-a-Ride service as described above. Counties that elect to directly administer regional dial-a-ride service will self-fund their local administrative costs as some already do today.

This summer, Council staff will seek approval to hold public hearings and adopt a distance-based fare policy for Regional Dial-a-Ride service. In 2008, the Council adopted a minimum \$2.25 fare for dial-a-ride services that are at least partially funded with state general fund or MVST dollars. In addition to a surcharge based on distance, incentives for customer-coordinated group trips will be proposed.

To most effectively coordinate service, Council staff proposes expanding the current Metro Mobility Trapeze software system to all MTS-managed contracts. Trapeze technology will allow reservationists to screen every trip requested for a reasonable fixed route solution or a solution with a transfer between dial-a-ride and fixed route at a major transit station so as to minimize costs and maximize capacity on dial-a-ride. This expansion will require a one time investment for additional licensing, computer equipment and start up at an estimated additional cost of up to \$200,000. Staff anticipates that this project would be eligible for unallocated federal New Freedoms funding or Regional Transit Capital funding; both currently available.

Known Support / Opposition

MTS staff has met with staff from all seven counties to discuss the plan and solicit feedback. Reaction to the proposal has been largely positive. There is widespread appreciation for the changes that the Council is proposing but some concern about how current grantees will respond.

This restructuring concept was presented to the Transportation Committee in June 2008 as an information item. Most currently funded programs have been aware of the Council’s proposal either through the Transportation Committee presentation or a similar presentation at the Transportation Providers Advisory Committee (TPAC) last spring.

Some existing providers are opposed to this plan as it will reduce funds that partially support agency specific objectives. A meeting with current Community Based dial-a-ride providers is scheduled for February 17. Staff from the seven counties are also invited to attend. Details of the restructured program and implementation may be refined with input from county staff and current providers.

Proposed Regional Dial-a-Ride Service Delivery Plan

- 1) Delivery of dial-a-ride services via county-wide programs that are either:
 - a) Directly administered and operated/competitively contracted by the county, or;
 - b) That are administered and competitively procured by the Council on behalf of the county.
- 2) The Council and each county form a coordinating advisory committee to develop and implement dial-a-ride service in each respective county and to establish inter-agency service coordination.
- 3) All service contracts are either competitively procured or directly operated by the county at competitive rates. Service contracts are designed to achieve operating consistency between programs and provide:
 - a) Service that is equally available to the general public – no qualifying criteria or prioritization of trips
 - b) Standard maximum percentage of standing orders during each hour of the day
 - c) Curb-to-curb service with limited assistance
 - d) Regional dial-a-ride fare policy
 - e) Standard service policies (wait times, no-shows, service window, cancellations and suspensions)
- 4) Redirect current Council funding from dial-a-ride programs (non-ADA) to regional dial-a-ride program.
- 5) Required coordination with fixed route services.
- 6) Multiple year operating agreements.
- 7) Regional dial-a-ride service is adjusted and coordinated with the implementation of new transit services such as Cedar Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT).