



## Smart INVESTMENTS<sup>SM</sup> IN TRANSPORTATION FOR MINNESOTA

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### Connecting Communities in Greater Minnesota: *Roads, Intercity Bus and Rail for Personal Travel*

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In Greater Minnesota – especially the more rural areas – trip destinations are far less concentrated than in the Twin Cities metro region, meaning that residents of Greater Minnesota are more likely to make frequent trips in between urbanized areas and between smaller cities. This Growth & Justice policy brief highlights some of the ways that the government in Minnesota should both preserve and enhance the ease of intercity personal travel in Greater Minnesota. The brief looks at investments, policies and approaches for the interregional corridor highway system, intercity bus service and passenger rail service.

#### Interregional Corridors

Minnesota's priority interregional corridors (IRCs) – totaling about 3,000 centerline miles – link together the various cities that serve as major trade centers in Minnesota outside of the Twin Cities metro region. IRCs make up 25 percent of the state highway system and 2 percent of Minnesota roads overall, but they carry more than one quarter of all vehicle miles traveled in the state and most of Minnesota's freight traffic. When MnDOT makes investments in the highway system, including the interregional corridors, those investments are split among the categories of infrastructure preservation, safety, mobility, and improvements to aid local economic development, known as regional and community improvement priorities (RCIP).

#### Potential Policies and Approaches

- Address critical pavement preservation needs for Minnesota's system of interregional corridors.
- For safety-related improvements to the IRC system, emphasize lower-cost roadway enhancements whenever feasible as an alternative to projects that would improve safety through increased road capacity.

- Fund the maintenance of IRC bridges – as well as repair and replacement as needed – to keep the bridges strong, including those bridges not covered by transportation funding under Chapter 152 of Minnesota's 2008 laws.
- Keep investments in IRC mobility improvements modest, unless the mobility needs on the IRC system become far worse than what's anticipated.
- For local economic development, give priority to RCIP investments that also advance objectives important to the overall IRC system.
- Use intelligent transportation systems, when cost-effective, to improve travel on IRCs throughout Minnesota, employing, for example, traffic sensors and computerized signals at intersections, real-time traffic monitoring, and signs and other communication modes to alert drivers to adverse conditions.
- Update IRC investment plans regularly, based on new data and trends.
- Identify which of the IRC system's unmet needs should be funded first if unanticipated transportation dollars become available.

#### Intercity Bus Service

Intercity bus service – as distinct from rural transit service – carries passengers along a fixed route between two or more urban areas not in close proximity, with a limited number of stops along the route, a regular schedule for the bus service, and connections offered between different routes and services. All intercity bus service in Minnesota is provided by private companies, and nearly all of it is offered by either Jefferson Lines or Greyhound Lines. Under federal law, no state government is allowed



to regulate the routes, schedules or fares of any private intercity bus company. Consequently the primary way Minnesota's state government involves itself in intercity bus service is through the distribution of subsidies, most especially the federal funds available specifically for intercity bus transportation in rural areas under the 5311(f) program. Jefferson Lines accepts 5311(f) funding and pays the local match on many of its lines. Greyhound does not accept 5311(f) subsidies.

## Potential Policies and Approaches

- Favor options that will enhance connections between intercity buses and other modes of transportation when selecting routes for operating subsidies and when using government funds for station improvements and other capital investments.
- When deciding which intercity bus routes to subsidize, give precedence to routes that serve areas with demographic characteristics suggesting a high potential demand for intercity bus service and containing major destinations for intercity bus customers.
- Target subsidies for intercity bus service to routes that connect rural areas and small towns with larger urban areas and the national intercity bus network.

- Coordinate intercity bus service and subsidies with other states.
- Consider at some point in the future establishing a state subsidy program for intercity bus lines that is separate from federal subsidy programs, provided that doing so does not take away from the state funding available for high-priority transportation needs.

## Intercity Passenger Rail Service

In recent years, there has been increased interest in expanding the intercity passenger rail system in Minnesota. Significantly expanding intercity passenger rail service would be a very expensive proposition, and demand for more train travel is uncertain. For these reasons, it is not clear that such an expansion in general is the best transportation choice right now. That said, the following state investments, policies and choices are recommended when the State of Minnesota does take steps to expand its intercity passenger rail system.

## Potential Policies and Approaches

- Undertake upgrades to existing rail infrastructure – for expanded intercity passenger rail service – in ways that also benefit the movement of freight by rail.
- Establish the Twin Cities as the hub for any new passenger rail service in Minnesota, giving first priority to routes that connect the Twin Cities with St. Cloud, Rochester, Duluth, and the regional transportation hub of Chicago.
- Build up the new passenger rail services on an incremental basis over time but with the objective that each new service corridor will eventually be part of a larger regional system.
- For intercity passenger rail service, carry out construction projects in a manner that doesn't preclude conversion to faster train service at some later date.
- Coordinate any major expansion of intercity passenger rail service with the Metropolitan Council.



Source: Jeffersonlines.com

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