

Region 2 2016 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan

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Adopted by:

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION: The 2016 Region 2 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan is an update of the 2011 Region 2 Local Human Service Coordination Plan. Numerous stakeholders were involved in the update of this plan including a steering committee which was comprised of public, private, and human service agencies as well as public workshop attendees representing various groups and agencies throughout Region 2. Together, these agencies helped to develop a comprehensive project list for this plan, which can be found in Appendix A of this document.

After analyzing the 2011 plan, goals and objectives, 2016 survey results and listening to providers and users of transportation services in region 2, several primary needs and gaps in services were identified. With Region 2 being incredibly rural in nature outside of the population centers, strategies were addressed that pertain to better coordination of resources. It was also identified that a transportation inventory was necessary to provide a current overview of transportation options and services available in each county. The responsibility would be placed on individual counties to distribute this information at different county specific events such as: county fairs, Non-Profit Day outreach events for senior citizen and disabled individuals and other local events.

PLAN PROCESS: The 2017 Regional Transit Coordination Plan for northcentral Minnesota was led by a Steering Committee which included guidance from local human service providers, public and private transportation, and older adult services in the region. Public engagement was conducted through multiple avenues that included: 1) a standardized survey, which was distributed to evaluate the unmet transportation needs of human service agency clients 2) a Transportation Resource Questionnaire, which was distributed to human service providers that identified the transportation resources and capacity of the community 3) two focus groups that helped provide an opportunity for greater input from a variety of representatives including transportation agencies, human service providers and passengers 4) a transportation planning workshop which was organized for stakeholders identified by the Steering Committee to discuss the barriers in meeting the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low-income and 5) four Steering Committee meetings which guided the entire transportation planning process. The Steering Committee met to discuss each of the unmet transportation needs and to address and prioritize preferred project solutions from the feedback given.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT: Region 2 is in need of creating a culture of collaboration and coordination across all public and private organizations, services and agencies. In order to make successful local solutions sustainable, it is essential to provide leadership that has vision, takes action, and garners local support. Establishing effective multi-sector collaboration and engaging multiple generations will help build upon the success of these efforts. A common thread throughout the data collected involved increased hours of service during weekends and evenings.

One major barrier to coordinating services throughout different organizations is the unawareness of available services. Region 2 is large and rural, with one of the challenges

being the services provided to outlying areas, which often times are vulnerable populations. This can often compound issues, as most of these individuals are also in need of other services, and lack of transportation access does not help their situation.

PUBLIC OUTREACH: This committee conducted two focus groups (one for providers and one for consumers) that offered greater input from a number of representatives, including transportation agencies, human service providers and passengers. In addition to the Organization Focus Group conducted on January 26th, 2017, I was able to attend a lunch at the Bagley Senior Citizen Center in Clearwater County and ask about transportation for riders who attend this lunch. A transportation workshop was also held to discuss project ideas and gather more insight on how to coordinate resources better throughout our region.

Steering Committee Members

Steering Committee Membership	Organization	Representing
Lezlie Grubich	Paul Bunyan Transit Executive Director	Section 5310 and 5311 Transit System
Becky Secore	Beltrami County Health and Human Services	Family Child Care (FCC) Licensure
Don Mohawk (retired in June 2017)	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator	Statewide Transit Coordinator
Darla Waldner	Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging Director	Area Agency on Aging
Linda Hanson	Hubbard County Developmental Achievement Center	Community Development Groups
Cindy Pic	Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Transportation Programs	Section 5310 and 5311 Transit System
Linda Bair(retired in June 2017)	Heartland Express Transit Supervisor	Section 5311
LuAnn Bleiler	Paul Bunyan Transit Operations Manager	Section 5310, 5311 Transit System
Kent Ehrenstrom	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator	Statewide Transit Coordinator

Collette Maxwell	Red Lake Transit	Section 5311 Transit System
April Collman	Adult Day Services, Inc. Bemidji	Health and Human Services Organization
Jessica Horn	Clearwater DAC	Health and Human Service Organization

Introduction

The goal of transit coordination is to enhance transportation access by minimizing duplication of services and facilitating the most appropriate and cost-effective transportation possible with available resources. The purpose of coordination between human services and public transit coordination is to improve transportation services for all, but with special focus on persons with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with low incomes. Through coordination, communities can maximize use of transportation resources funded through public and private sources.

This document is an update of the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan and will assist stakeholders, such as Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils, as they determine ways to coordinate human service transportation and transit services in Region 2. The 2016 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan documents technical analysis that evaluates existing transportation services in Region 2 and assesses needs and gaps of transportation service provision among public transit agencies, social service agencies, and other providers. The plan also records public participation efforts and stakeholders' preferred strategies and projects to improve transportation coordination in Region 2.

A Local Human Services Transit Coordination plan is a federal requirement under the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act). Federal regulations state that projects eligible for funding under the Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310) program must advance strategies identified in a Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan. This planning process fulfills federal requirements by engaging transportation providers, social services agencies, and members of the public in identifying strategies for regional transportation coordination.

Beyond fulfilling federal requirements, this planning process encouraged representatives of diverse organizations to join together in articulating specific projects that could advance transportation services in Region 2. Through public participation activities, stakeholders brainstormed project ideas and refined these ideas in a collaborative setting. The final project list reflects input from a broad range of regional stakeholders and provides a 5-year blueprint for future coordination efforts in Region 2.

PLAN GOALS

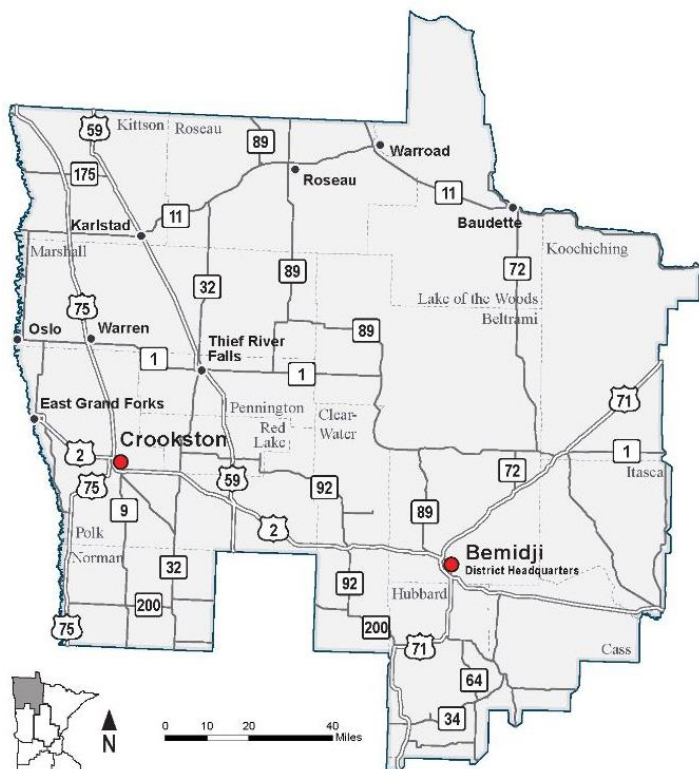
The goals for this plan are to:

- Provide an update of the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Plan
- Provide an overview of current transportation coordination within Region 2
- Establish strategies and identify and prioritize projects
- Improve the coordination between public and private partners that show low-cost creative partnerships
- Suggest a systems change approach to transportation for rural communities in order to address the unmet needs of the most vulnerable populations
- Raise awareness on how critical relationship-building among and between agencies and organizations across disciplines and fields is essential for improving population health.
- Incorporate transportation access to needed essential services i.e. day-cares, weekend trips, recreational/social outings, places of worship, jobs, etc.

Plan Process:

Study Area

The study areas includes 5 counties in Northcentral Minnesota Region 2. These counties include Beltrami, Hubbard, Clearwater, Lake of the Woods, and Mahanomen.



Existing Conditions Geography

Region 2 is located in Northcentral Minnesota and serves 5 of the least-healthy counties within the state of Minnesota: Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Lake of the Woods and Mahanomen (See Figure 1.1: MnDOT District Boundaries). Region 2 is home to 164,925 people (3% of Minnesota’s population).¹ Greater Minnesota residents seek to maintain rural values, their heritage and the assets that support them.

Figure 1-1: MnDOT District Boundaries



Figure 1.1 MnDOT District Boundaries

Individual Counties Characteristics

Beltrami County:

Bemidji is a regional center serving over 100,000 individuals in eight contiguous counties including small cities and Minnesota’s three largest American Indian Reservations, Red Lake, Leach Lake, and White Earth. Beltrami County is known to have the greatest percentage of Native Americans of any county in the state. The majority of counties in Northwest Minnesota are recognized as “frontier” communities due to the significant distances between populations and market service areas for healthcare,

¹ 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Population Total Estimates (excludes Cass, Itasca and Koochiching counties)

employment, education and shopping. Some other major towns and destinations within each of the counties include:

Blackduck: located in Beltrami County and is nationally known for a Customer's Own Material (COM) workroom known as Anderson Fabrics Outlet Store. Anderson Fabrics is recognized as the custom workroom of choice for many design competition wines. There are over 300 employees, which is the largest workroom of its kind in the United States.

Hubbard County:

Park Rapids: the location of Itasca State Park which is Minnesota's oldest state park with a total of 32,000 acres and includes more than 100 lakes. Park Rapids has a thriving downtown and has hundreds of volunteers who regularly get involved in every level of keeping the community active and inviting.

Clearwater County:

Bagley: The center of several natural attractions. Lake Lomond and Itasca State Park along with the headwaters of the Mississippi River. This community has a strong rich heritage and encourages new opportunity.

Other counties, cities and towns that have been identified within the distributed surveys include: Mahnomen and Lake of the Woods Counties, Cass Lake, Turtle River, Solway, Northhome, Laporte, Redby, Red Lake, Shevlin, Kelliher, Osage, Menahga, Akeley/Nevis, Lake George, Two Inlets. Frequent destinations that are outside the region include: Minneapolis, Fargo, ND, and Brainerd.

These cities provide unique opportunities for shoppers, sport fans, cultural shows, medical services, specialty appointments and many more additional services.

The geographic barriers in providing transportation is vastly related to the remote and rural communities throughout our region. Our region is known to be the poorest region in the entire state. The North Central Community Map shows the driving distances to Bemidji from all major towns/cities throughout our region. Bemidji is the regional hub for eight surrounding counties to access all different services from medical, education and shopping. The distance of communities to Bemidji range from 100 miles from Baudette to Bemidji to 54 miles from Park Rapids to Bemidji to 70 miles from Mahnommen to Bemidji (See North Central Community Map: Driving Distance to Bemidji). Access to transportation options is a significant barrier that limits other access to needed human services, living in a spread-out rural geographic areas. Although there's fewer traffic congestions, trip destinations for work, healthcare, and other services tend to be much longer distances and therefor places an added barrier to access services. Transportation is a critical resource that determines access to all other basic human needs and often time plays a major role of the health of the individual.

Another geographic barrier is the service area that is offered. There are organizations and agencies within our region that are not in the transit service area. Our Steering Committee, focus groups and workshop attendees identified the need to ***expand transit service areas in unreached pockets of our region to reach the under-served and the unserved residents***. The Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan (GMTIP) has committed to investing in regional connections and cross-county service where there is a high level of travel between population and employment rich centers. (Goal#1: Expanding transit services to under-served or unserved communities.)

Individual reports by geographic area were conducted for the 2013-2014 Gaps Analysis study. These reports gathered input from counties, tribes, and managed care organizations (MCO's) about the capacity of Minnesota publicly funded services delivery systems to support all Minnesotans. The Lead Agency Survey was the primary data collection procedure used by the Gaps Analysis Study. The Lead Agency Survey was completed by staff with knowledge about one or more of the four populations 1) older adults 2) persons with disability 3) adults with mental health conditions and 4) children and youth with mental health conditions.²

Some of the common identified barriers to accessing services from our five counties included:

- Geographic location of providers/distance to services,
- Lack of awareness of available services
- Lack of service availability on short notice or during crisis and
- Access to transportation

Through this Gap analysis report, the top 3 priorities for improving or adding to transportation needs were broken into counties and identified. Beltrami, Mahnommen, Clearwater and Lake of the Woods all identified availability at specific times/days as a major priority to address. Beltrami, Hubbard and Clearwater identified the importance of

² Gaps Analysis Report 2013- 2015 Study

availability of last minute unplanned transportation trips. Beltrami, Hubbard and Mahnommen also identified improving the dependability of transportation as a significant improvement in meeting the needs of transportation riders. The image below provides an overview of the common themes of improving or adding to the transportation options currently available in Region 2.

Options for improving or adding to the transportation options	Beltrami	Hubbard	Mahnomen	Clearwater	Lake of the woods
Safety					
Dependability	X	X	X		
Assisted/escorted service			X		X
Availability at specific times/days	X		X (evening)	X	X (Late on weekdays and weekend services)
Availability of last minute or unplanned transportation	X	X		X	
Lower costs		X		X	
Access to information about transportation options					
Tailored, customized transportation option to meet medical and or social need not listed above					X (Medi-van)

Figure 3.3 Options for Improving or Adding to the Transportation Options in Region 2

Demographics

To better understand the relationship between regional demographics, transportation options, and key destinations a series of maps was created depicting these elements in this region. Other valuable tools utilized within this section included a Health Equity Data Analysis (HEDA) report conducted through a collaboration with Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), Minnesota Department of Transportation Traffic Volumes/ATR studies, and County Health Rankings from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. These are included in Appendix A.

Characterization of Population

Health Equity Data Analysis (HEDA)

Residents within these 5 counties have shown to have some of the shortest lives, highest poverty and zero-vehicle household rates and a greater percentage of persons with disabilities in comparison from the statewide average and other counties within Greater Minnesota. HEDA was conducted as part of the MDH's health equity pilot project in order to better understand the causes and conditions of health inequity throughout Minnesota. Almost forty percent (39.3%) of residents living in the North Counties have an income below the 200% of the poverty level (Beltrami 41.3%, Clearwater 40.5%, Hubbard 35.1%, Lake of the Woods 30.4%).

In this report individuals in our region who had incomes less than \$35,000, showed higher rates of smoking, blood pressure, stroke or stroke-related, heart trouble, cholesterol and diabetes compared to the overall state of Minnesota's rates. There is a significant increase in health for people who make more than \$35,000 per year due to increase of access to healthier foods, living conditions, transportation options, physical activity, increased education options, health access, increased social support and hope than those who are making less than \$35,000.

County Health Rankings

Greater Minnesota has a higher percentage of senior populations, youth (ages 18 and younger), low-income residents, as well as higher rate of disabled individuals. County Health Rankings are provided to establish a rank for a particular county in any state. This number helps raise awareness of the many interconnected parts that influence health. Counties are ranked relative to the health of other counties in the same state. These County Health Rankings are based on more than 30 factors that influence health, including smoking, alcohol and drug use, access to health care, education, income, air and water quality, disconnected youth and years of life lost.

According to the recently released 2017 Community Health Rankings, Beltrami County has an overall health ranking of 84th out of 87th counties with a total of 8,900 years of potential life lost (YPLL) vs. the statewide total of 5,111 YPLL. Mahnomen and Clearwater have both been ranked for last place for overall health ranking at 87th with Mahnomen with 12,200 YPLL.³ Higher premature deaths negatively impacts a community and across the state, Native Americans, Alaskan Native and African Americans tend to have the highest rates of premature deaths. Rural communities also tend to have higher rates of premature death rates. Cynthia Borgan, Beltrami Public Health director, stated in the local Bemidji Pioneer newspaper:

“When we lose people prematurely, we're really missing out on their most productive years. Families who lose their parents or grandparents early also miss out on the value of learning from the wisdom of their elders and having that sense of place, of continuity of belonging when they miss having that connection to older family members.”

³ County Health Rankings 2017

It has also been identified that the state of Minnesota has shown to have a north –south health divide meaning that its healthiest counties from the 2017 Community County Health Rankings tend to be in the southern part of the state and its least healthy ones in the northern part. Research shows that people with higher incomes are healthier and live longer than people who live in poverty. Health disparities are more common among the low –income communities for various factors that create barriers to healthier opportunities such as nutrition, education, inadequate housing and decreased physical activity. The high poverty rates within our region, along with the high number of households in Greater Minnesota who do not have access to a vehicle (6.1%) with Mahnomen County at 10.7% feed into our low health rankings and overall health of our communities.

Transportation seems to be a part of the “next step” change needed to create a healthier and thriving community. These low health rankings create a tremendous opportunity to look at how transportation can address some of these rural community health needs through providing additional access, knowledge of services and increasing services necessary to improve the health of the vulnerable populations.

Region 2 has counties that are slightly over the statewide average of persons with disabilities at 11.4%. Clearwater being 17.1%. Those who live with a disability are often likely to be unemployed as well. According to the National Council of Disabilities, people with disabilities who were not working reported that *lack of transportation is one of the biggest barriers to employment*. Where public transit is not available, due to the large geographic distances, other accessible transportation options are often in short supply. Of course, a person’s disability is not the only determining factors in whether transportation is a problem to access employment; an individual’s income level, behavioral choices, social support play key roles as well.

Unemployment

The five-county region suffers from some of the highest unemployment rates in the State of Minnesota. The figure below describe the unemployment rates in the Headwaters Region. The current unemployment rate is 6.3% compared to the states at 4.0%. The Region’s unemployment rate has declined since the peaks of 10% in the 80's. Recently, Region 2 holds high percentages of vulnerable populations who need transportation that determines access to all other services (work, shopping, child care, employment, recreational, medical etc.). Data has also shown a disproportionate rate of the five counties with economically stressed communities, high unemployment, poor health outcomes, and a greater incidence of at-risk behaviors. The population of the five-county region grew by 11 percent from 2000- 2015, from 76,161 to 84,510. Growth is expected

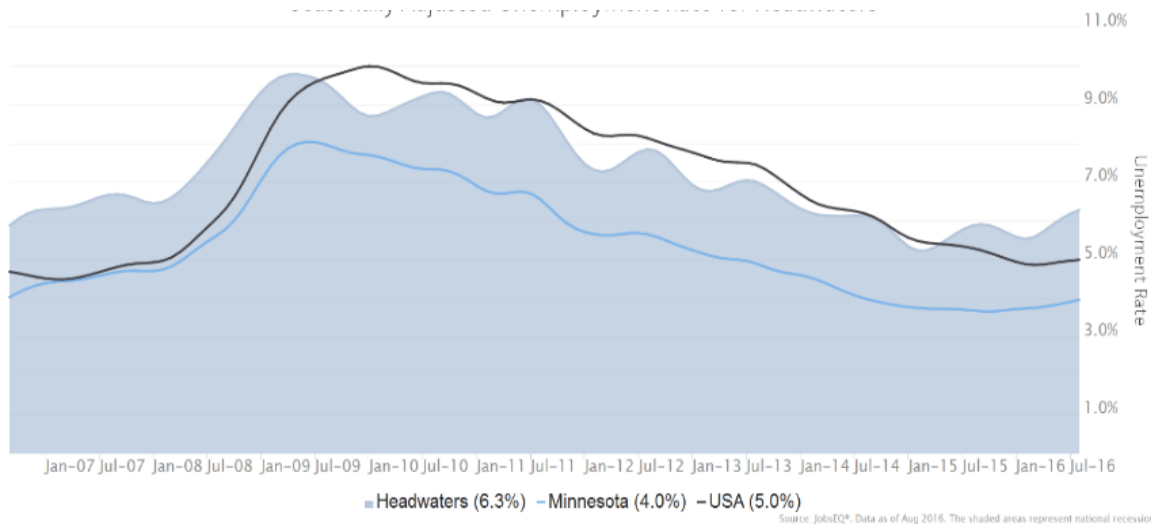


Figure 4.4 Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rate for Headwaters

to continue, reaching 90,129 by 2030 (See Headwaters Region Population Graph) due to layoffs and business closings the rate increased greatly at the end of the last decade.

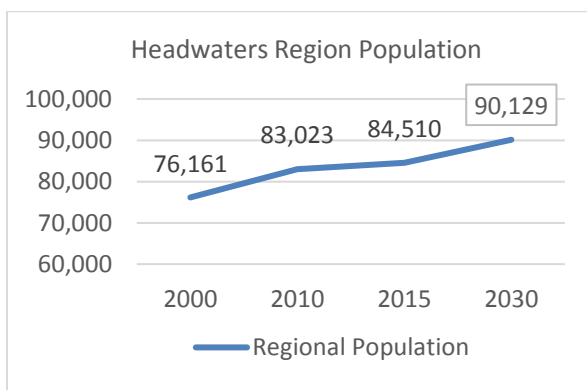


Figure 6.5 Headwaters Region Population 2000-2030

County	2000	2015	% Change
Beltrami	39,650	45,672	15.1
Clearwater	8,423	8,803	4.5
Hubbard	18,326	20,655	12.7
Lake of the Woods	4,605	3,923	-14.8
Mahnomen	5,190	5,457	5.1

Figure 5.6 Population Percent Change from 2000 to 2015 for each County

Region 2's unemployment rate continues to exceed both the state and National levels.

Over half the population (54%) lives in the Greater Bemidji area in Beltrami County. Beltrami County has experienced 15% growth since the turn of the century. Hubbard County has also experienced steady growth during this period. The remaining three counties have seen little, or in the case of Lake of the Woods, negative population growth. Given the large land area and small population, the Headwaters Region is one of the most sparsely populated Regions in the State of Minnesota. It is also known that there is a demand on recruiting drivers within our Region, however, often individuals cannot pass the substance and alcohol tests. This places an added barrier to jump through in providing access to vulnerable populations.

Improving Transportation System and Travel Patterns: An online mapping tool was developed to better understand travel patterns of current transit users and non-transit users. Information collected through this tool helped quantify the need for public

transportation within and across communities within Minnesota. Summary of the findings included:



- Transit users are more likely to have lower incomes, have larger households, fewer cars per household, and are more likely to be employed part time than non-transit users.
- The majority of respondents to the Wikimap and online destination survey were non-transit users
- Both non-transit and transit users identified a need for trips to cross county lines and connections to cities in other MnDOT districts
- Many non-transit users identified local destinations that could be served by transit. Non-transit users who had access to transit may be more likely to use transit if transit also served additional nearby destinations

MNDOT Travel Pattern Studies

Manufactures Perspective Minnesota Transportation System: District 2

An identified study put out by MnDOT in June of 2016 suggested that it is essential to develop opportunities to collaborate with communities and continue to cultivate relationships with businesses, city and county engineers, economic development professionals and other key stakeholders. Some of these suggestions included: coordinating shift/school start times and public transit schedules and develop other traffic- related solutions.⁴

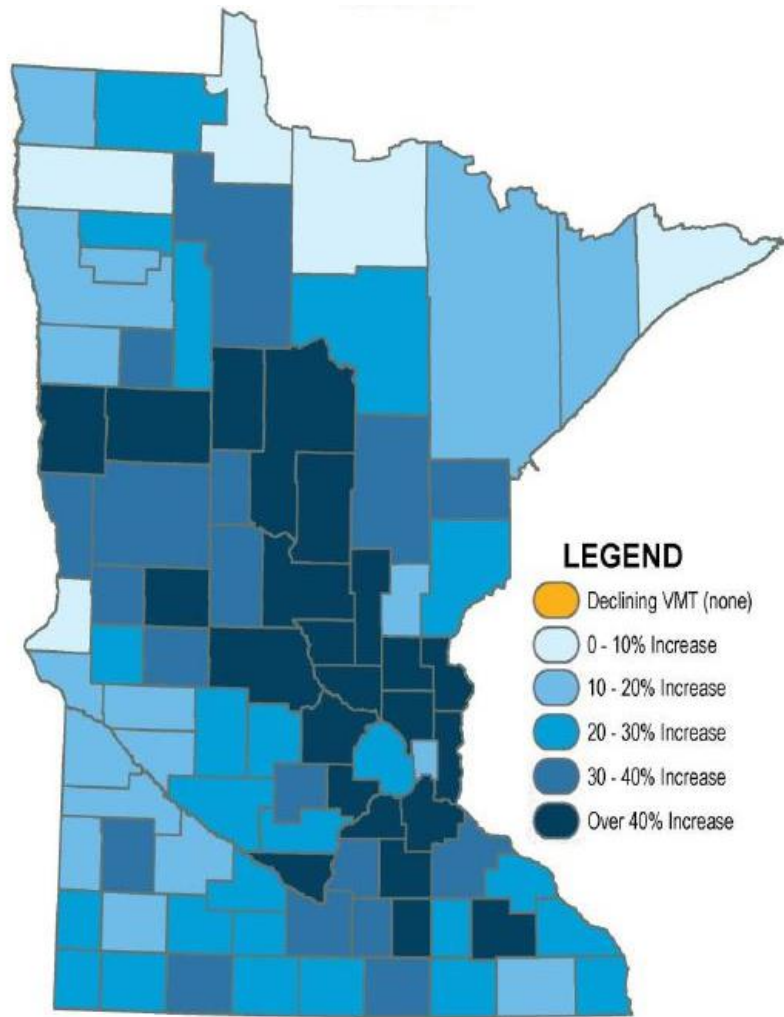
Improving the transportation system through the collection and feedback from District 2 businesses can be utilized effectively by MnDOT statewide to improve the system and support future statewide planning efforts and development of best practices. The combined findings/recommendations from the Manufactures' Perspective Studies in District 2, 4, and 8 were able to guide and help understand business's need to improve the state's transportation system.

Vehicle Miles of Travel Trends in Minnesota from 1992-2014: MnDOT Office of Transportation System Management

MnDOT District 2 put out another study in November of 2015 that identified the Statewide Annual Growth Trends from 1992-2014. Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is a common way to measure the demand of transportation network. This is defined as the total number of miles traveled by all vehicles during a certain time period. Figure 8 illustrates changes in VMT, population and employment in Minnesota between 1992 and 2014.⁵ Within the 23-year period of tracking these particular trends, VMT has outpaced population and employment. VMT increased by a total of 37%, population increased 22% and employment increased 27.7%.

⁴ Minnesota Department of Transportation Manufactures Perspective Minnesota Transportation System: District 2

⁵ Vehicle Miles of Travel Trends in Minnesota from 1992-2014: MnDOT Office of Transportation System Management



Source: Mn/DOT, Office of Transportation System Management

Figure 7.7 Total Percent VMT Growth on all Roads in Minnesota 1992-2014

As shown in figure 7.7, the highest percent growth in VMT in Minnesota has been in counties surrounding the Twin Cities. However, the slowest growth in VMT occurred in more of the rural counties in the state with Lake of the Woods being less than 10% increase. According to the Statewide VMT Growth Trends in Minnesota by Jurisdiction 1992-2014- the state trunk highway system made up 57.7% of total VMT, but only 8.2% of total centerline miles.

Zero-Vehicle Households

Zero Vehicle Households are one of the most influential and common indicators of transit needs. Whether a household has access to a car or not provides them access to all other basic needs. In Greater Minnesota, 6.1% of households do not have a vehicle available. Mahnomon County (10.7%) is one of the three highest percentages of zero vehicle households in all of the other Greater Minnesota counties.

Transit-Dependent Populations

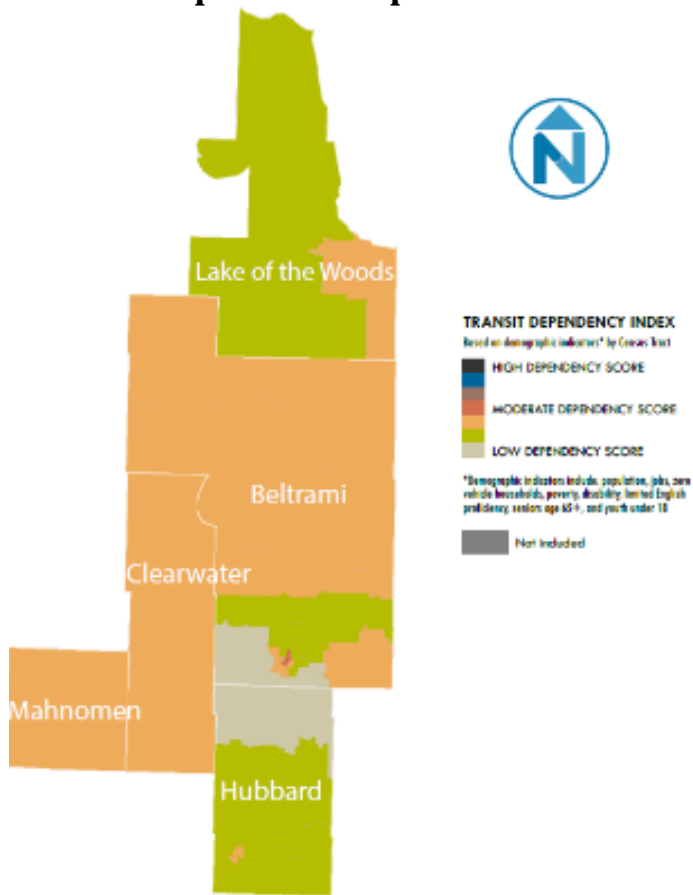


Figure 8.8 Transit Dependency Index for Region 2

Limited transportation in the greater Bemidji area directly impacts health equity for vulnerable populations. As shown in the Transit Dependency Index-based off of the demographic Census tract – Region 2 has a low transit-dependent level. According to this data, the only transit-dependent populations within our region is within Bemidji city limits. Bemidji has a moderate to high dependency on transit.

According to the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), Bemidji has a very large young adult population. From 2000-2014; 18-34 year olds made up 37% of the population. There is also a large elder population (14.4% 65 and older) within this community that should not go unnoticed (Minnesota State and County US Census 2014). In addition, 34% of adults in Bemidji 65 and older have one or more disabilities which may include: deficits in hearing, vision, and cognitive abilities; and difficulty performing self-care, ambulation, and living independently (ACS, 2015).

Not providing transportation options restricts access to medical, dental, and mental health visits as well as basic human service options. It places a barrier to have healthy nutritious food options, education, employment, civic, community and spiritual participation.

Some specific identified transit- dependent populations within our region include:

- **Red Lake Reservation** – services to the Bemidji Community Food Shelf once a week.
- **Bagley’s Senior Center**- Senior Center wants to provide transportation service for elderly residents who are out of the geographic transit service who need a ride to receive their nutritious meal during lunch.
- **Bemidji’s after school activities** need more transportation options for low-income children
- **Boys and Girls Club in Bemidji** is in need of an affordable transportation options starting in September 2017.
- **Northwest Women’s Battered Women’s Shelter**-
- **Loon Lake Lodge**- is located outside the geographic service area and would like to have transportation access.
- **Anderson Fabrics**- the need for workforce transportation for 2nd and 3rd shift workers

The current public transit system is critical for serving the needs of persons with low-income, persons with disabilities and the elderly, however, the need to look at other opportunities to work collectively with private transportation providers and local human services in our region is necessary in meeting the demand of the growing elder population and those who have low to no access to a vehicle.

When comparing the age of the region’s population with State and National figures, a number of interesting trends emerge. While a similar proportion of the population is under 18, the region has a smaller percentage of its population in the prime working ages of 25-54. Additionally, as identified on the Population by Age graph below, a higher percentage of the region’s population is older than 55. Given that many retirees already make the region their home due to the attractive natural resources and quality of life amenities, meeting the needs of the growing senior population will be important for the community's planning efforts.

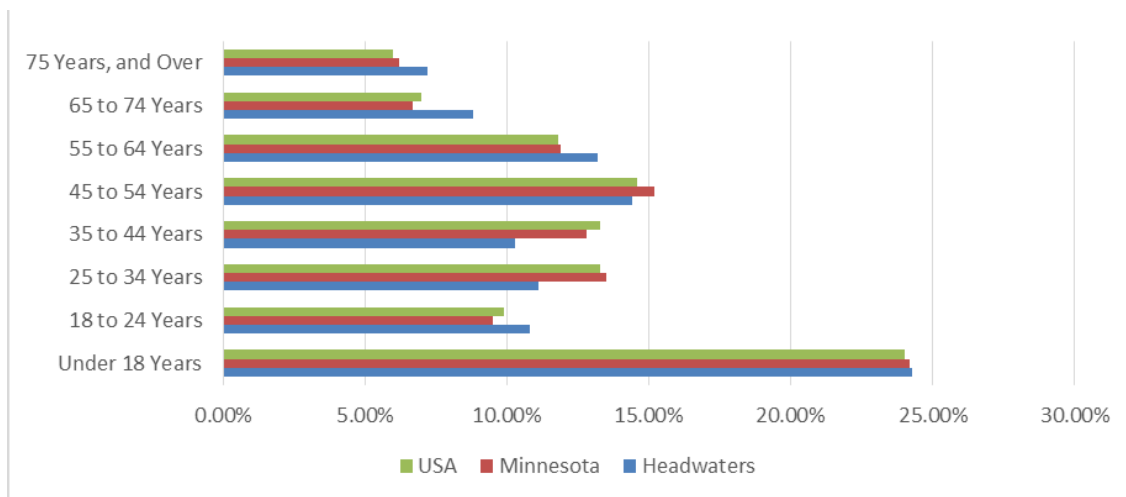


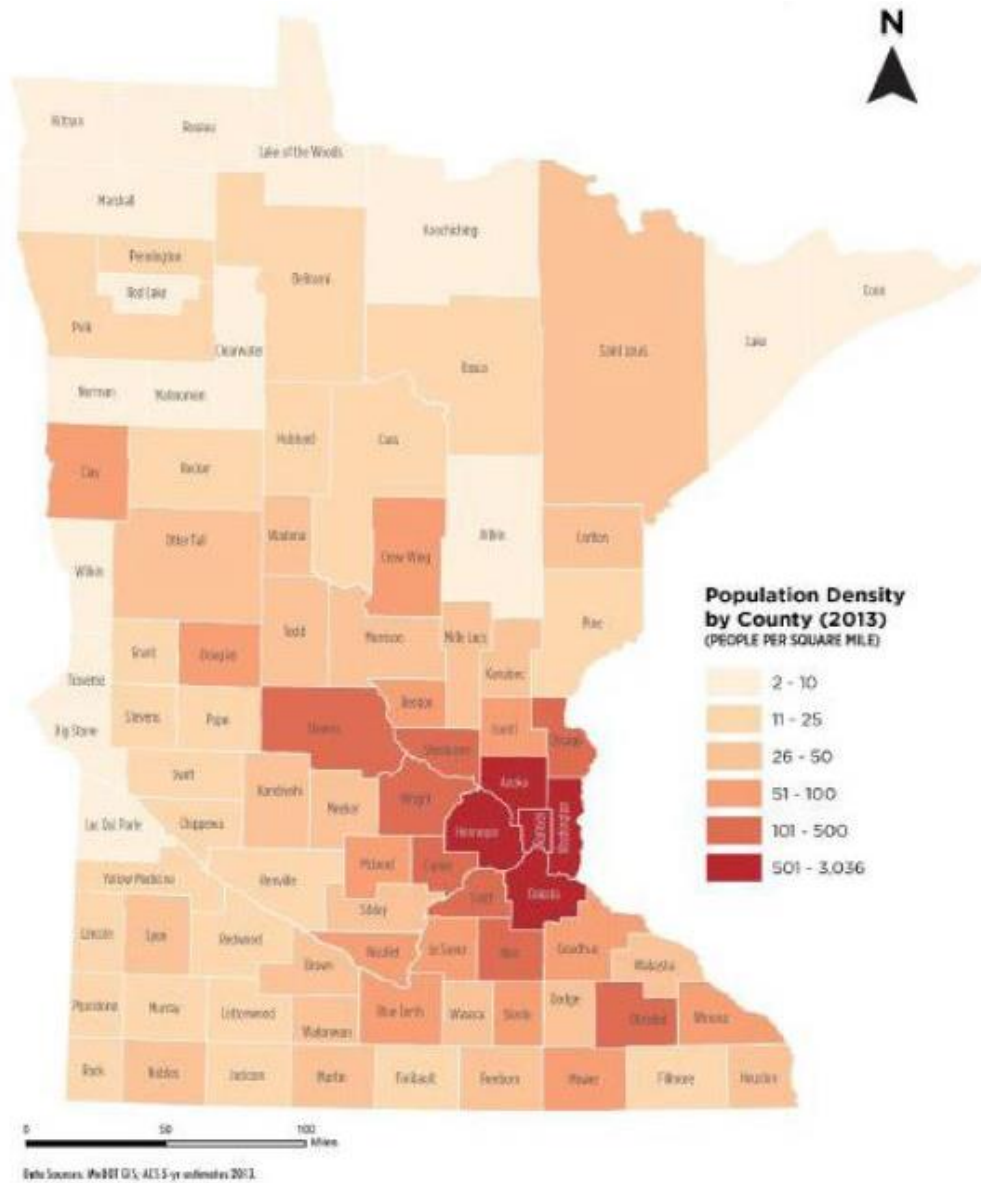
Figure 9.9 Population by Age: Comparison from the USA, Minnesota, and Headwaters

Moreover, as these individuals hit retirement age, it is clear that there will need to be a system in place that provides better access for transportation services so that the elderly can stay healthy and can continue to live independently. Transit services that support residents to live independently increase business activity and support individuals to live active lifestyles and be engaged in the community. Transportation options that provide medical and nutritional trips which have shown to have the highest return on investment. According to the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), Minnesota has a very large elder population along with a high range of adults with one or more disabilities including: hearing deficits, vision and cognitive abilities, difficulty performing self-care, ambulation, and living independently. Transit dependent populations within our region include: older adults, low-income, elementary, middle, high school, and college students. Our region's aging population has increased from 2000-2014 to 16% in Greater Minnesota. Between 2014 and 2045, the older adult population is anticipated to increase by 88%.

Population and demographic transportation needs for region 2 include:

- extended hours of service for third and fourth shift
- weekend trips (religious/recreational)
- volunteer drivers that can pass the pre-employment drug screening test
- system to improve coordination across agencies and organizations

It is known that those households without access to a vehicle or people with low-incomes often rely on public transportation for all or a large portion of their travel. Although there is a lower population density in Region 2 (Figure 10.10), the need to access human goods, services and employment, education, religious services and appointments is still there. As noted in the GMTIP, population, and employment densities are important factors because the clustering of people and jobs helps determine where the transit routes need to run.



It is

Figure 10.10 Statewide Population Density by County

As shown in the Population Density by County map, most of our Region is between 2-25 people per square mile. The Employment Density Map also provides a visual of the low density of jobs throughout much of the region, excluding Bemidji city in Beltrami County. The below job density map shows the number of jobs per square mile. The lack of reliable transportation is a significant obstacle to finding work, getting to health appointments, and accessing healthy food options. It is difficult for people within our region who rely on transportation services to balance work, job training, child care and appointments. Funding transportation efforts that help connect people to access jobs will provide an improvement in quality of life for the most vulnerable populations.

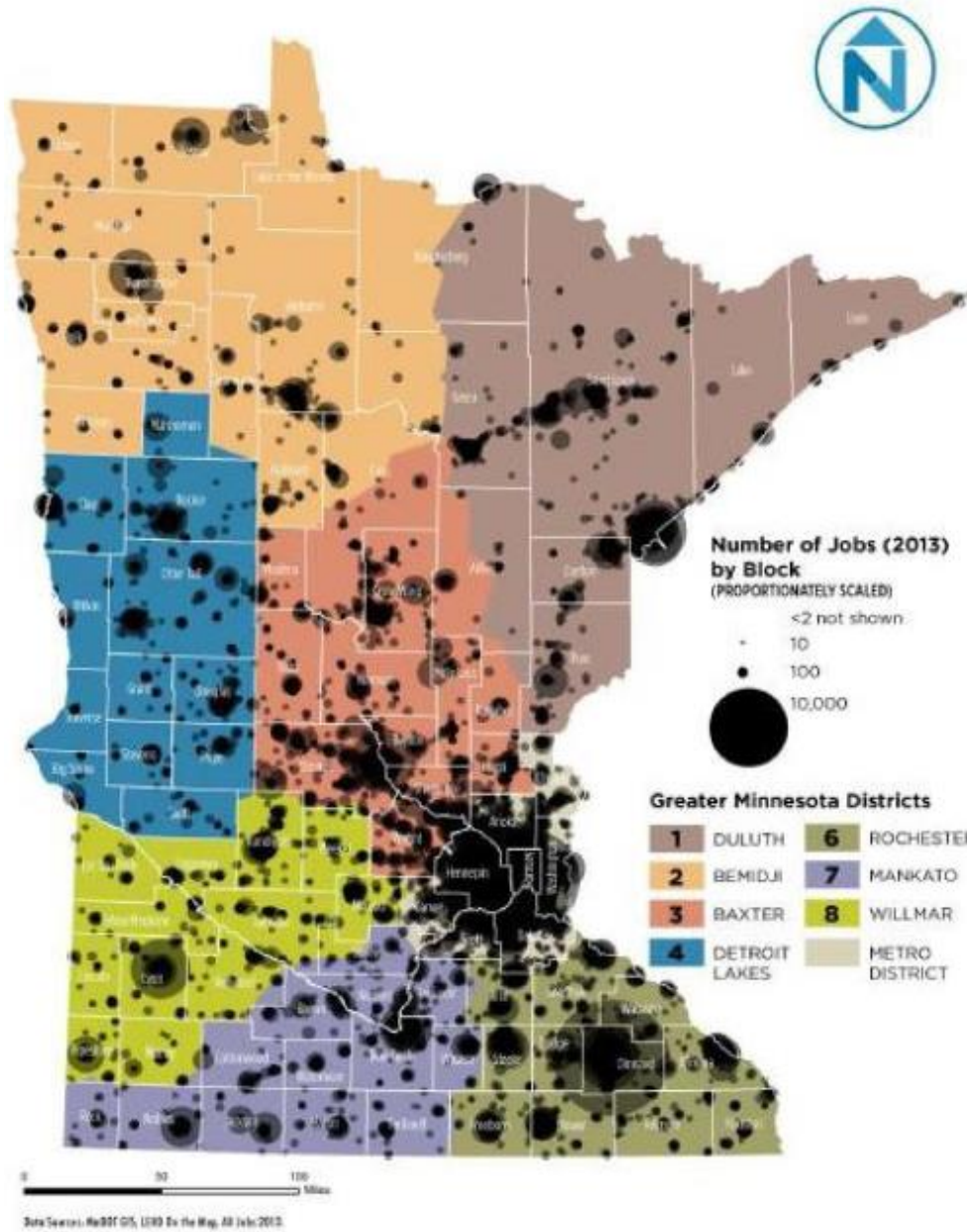


Figure 11.11 Statewide Employment Density by Census Block

Transportation Resources

Throughout Region 2, Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC) started to develop an inventory meant to capture service information for all public, private, school district, human service, and non-profit transportation providers in the region. The inventory provides a source of comparison across agencies and a means to identify service gaps. With this we hoped to focus on the existing routes and services to work to build their capacity, operationally and through indirect support. To complete the inventory, Region 2 HRDC sent an online questionnaire to 60 of the region's

transportation providers in Region 2. 43 responses were returned. A summary of the transportation resources is available in Appendix B. Our rural region depends on state, county, and local transportation networks to improve our quality of life for all residents.

Region 2 transit providers serve this region in various ways by supplying transportation in the following categories:

- Rural system
- Small urban system
- Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities (5310)
- Private Non-profit
- Private For-Profit
- Tribal
- Faith Community
- Government (State, County)
- Nursing Home/Assisted Living

Information collected utilizing the transportation data collection tools (questionnaires, focus groups, surveys, and workshop). As shown through the MnDOT traffic studies, the travel pattern in the region shows that the majority of the trips are to and from the Bemidji area.

As shown on the directory map for Region 2 (appendix) you can identify the transportation providers within Region 2. Region 2 has 6, 5310 providers: Paul Bunyan Transit (PBT), Tri- Valley Opportunity Council, Hubbard County, Heartland Express, FAR North Public Transportation, and Mahnomen County Heartland Express. Region 2 also has numerous 5310 providers and private providers who own their own vehicles and provide transportation for their clients. These providers also coordinate to address the needs of clients. It was discussed within the focus groups and workshops that a vehicle sharing program would be beneficial within our region.

Clearwater Day Activity Center, Inc. has a demand response and a fixed route service system. This services provides transportation to Bagley, Bemidji, Crookston, Fargo, Fosston, Grand Forks, and Park Rapids. Coordination activities for this service include:

- DAC Pine Ridge Residence ICF/DD and Clearwater County Human Services
- Section 5310 Elderly and Handicapped Program North Woods Cottage

Tri Valley Opportunity Council, Inc. is a non-profit community action agency that seeks to identify needs, seek resources and provide opportunities for people to thrive. Tri-Valley Transportation programs include a Rural route Ride Schedule that provides services to Grand Forks on Monday, Mahnomen every 2nd Tuesday, Thief River Falls every 4th Tuesday, Fargo/Moorhead every 1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesday and Bemidji every 2nd and 4th Friday.

Tri- Valley will be contracting with the Bagley Senior Center Starting July 2017 to provide trips to and from the Senior Citizen Center.

Adult Day Services has a route deviation service type that serves within the city of Bemidji. Coordination activities for this service include:

- Veteran's transportation for regular schedules
- Adult Day Services runs a Volunteer Driver Program with a formal contract agreement arranged daily, monthly or yearly
- Non-Emergency Medical transportation assistance with appointment
- Informal weekly arranged public transit to transport their clients
- Elder Day Care Adult Day Services, Inc
- Walker Adult Day Services has a formal agreement for scheduled transports

ADS has the ability to offer vehicle sharing opportunities if the individual has a health card.

Paul Bunyan Transit has a demand response and route deviation service type that serves within Beltrami, Lake of the Woods and Roseau. The specific cities it serves includes: Badger, Baudette, Bemidji, Blackduck, Greenbush, Kelliher, Roseau, Tenstrike, and Warroad. Coordination activities for this service include:

- Volunteer Driver Program Beltrami County Human Services contracts with PBT to provide transportation to MA &SS enrolled clients, along with Private individuals needing service other than where the bus travels
- Hubbard County to provide dispatching service for the cite of Park Rapids
- Member of Northern Tier Transit Groups which meet quarterly to discuss issues, sponsor regional rodeo events, and hold trainings. This group can also purchase tokens or punch pass for other rides within service area
- Taxi Services if PBT can't provide service to customer, after hours or request is out of service area, referral to 1st City Taxi and Bemidji Cab
- Occupational Training Centers (OTC) provides approximately 95% if transportation needs of clients in the Bemidji area. Clients purchase a monthly work pass for discount, they can also purchase tokens or punch pass for other rides within service area.
- Social Service Beltrami County Human Services purchases tokens and passes for clients as well as call to reserve ride for them
- Boys and Girl Club of Bemidji uses PBT to transport their students to special events with the community or service area.
- DT & H (DAC) of Bemidji contracts with PBT to provide rides for their clients from their homes to the DAC in the AM & PM. Further transportation is provided if clients need other service also
- Section 5310 (Elderly and Handicapped Program Neilson Center and Elder Care Centers coordinate to contract with PBT for episodic excursions ex: Fishing, mall shopping, Christmas tour, fall leaf tour, Sr. Day at the Park,
- PBT, works with Jefferson lines as a ticket agent and Intercity Carrier, providing customers transportation throughout Minnesota and the US;
- Rural MN CEP, contracts and purchases tokens from PBT to transport their clients for work training and employment opportunities within the service area

- Coordinate with local Charter Bus Company, Bemidji Bus Lines, assisting and referring each other's service, when needed
- Focus (Sheltered workshop) in Roseau contracts with PBT to provide rides for their clients from their homes to the facility located in Roseau in the AM & PM. Further transportation is provided if clients need other services.

Hubbard County has a demand response and route deviation service types that serves Beltrami, Blue Earth and Hubbard County. The specific cities within these counties include: Afton, Akeley, Laporte, Nevis, and Park Rapids. Coordination activities for this service include:

- Volunteer Driver Program Volunteer drivers are shared with PBT as needed and/or coordinate trips if able.
- K-12 transportation with in town transportation for school
- Provide rides to and from day care to community Ed. summer rec programs
- Referrals to charter services
- Joint efforts with school buses on major events requiring shuttle services
- DT & H (DAC) Section 5310 providers joint effort with DAC
- Intercity Carrier- Meets Jefferson Lines to and from Minneapolis (Tuesday and Saturday unless a holiday).
- Preschool provide rides from day care to preschool
- Provide rides to other social service trips to medical assistance clients and sell them bus passes to use for clients
- Work jointly with Living at Home program to provide high intensity needs such as dialysis
- Contract with PBT for our demand response dispatching
- Contract with Veterans Services to provide transportation for veterans
- Tuesday AM there is a retail shopping & Service & grocery ride in Park Rapids

As of June 2017, Linda Bair, the Heartland Express Supervisor, has retired and Deb Visecka has taken on her role. It is unknown at this time what will be happening with this service.

Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians has a demand response and route deviation service type that serves Beltrami County. The specific cities within this county that this transit provider serves includes: Bemidji, Little Rock Community, Ponemah, Red Lake, Redby. Coordination activities for this service include:

- Coordinates with Red Lake Transit Tribally owned buses to better utilize all resources
- Provide feeder serve to those busses carrying students to schools off the reservation
- Coordinate with PBT as passengers need ride to the Bemidji area
- Occupational Training Centers includes New Beginnings in Redby purchasing 700 passes/year
- Transportation for the local Boys and Girls Club

- Provide Senior Citizen Services as needed, serving local nursing home and senior citizen centers
- Vocational Rehab Services purchase passes for their clients use
- Women's Shelter purchase passes for their clients
- Red Lake Homeless Shelter purchases passes for their clients

Red Lake Transit is in the process of collaborating with Bemidji Community Food Shelf on some opportunity to provide transportation from Red Lake to Bemidji Food Shelf every Friday.

Through the surveys received throughout our region the local destination priorities that riders responded with include:

#1 Work,

#2 Medical,

#3 Shopping/Social event and

#4 School

In comparison to the GMTIP, the only change was medical was much higher of a need in our region than throughout Greater Minnesota. The following are some specific examples of places to provide transportation to serve unserved or underserved populations:

- Grocery Stores (Market Place Foods, Walmart, Luekens)
- Bemidji Community Food Shelf⁶
- Bi Cap
- Sanford (non-emergency visits)
- Post Office
- Senior Centers (Bagley, Bemidji, Mahnomen)
- Boys and Girls Club
- Bemidji Farmers Market
- Day Cares
- Bank
- Schools
- Non-emergency appointments

⁶ Through the 2016 HEDA interviews, many clients felt they did not have adequate service to and from the food shelf. Individuals would spend so much time waiting for public transit that their food would start thawing. It was also shared that seniors lacked gas money to get to the food shelf for their nutrition assistance program for senior boxes. Region 2 has social service providers, public transportation, dial a ride, demand response and a deviated route system.

Coordination Success:

- Paul Bunyan Transit provides free transportation to the Boys and Girls Club during the summer months in Bemidji.
- Tri-Valley Heartland Express has developed a partnership contracting with Digi-Key to provide job employment throughout the region. This bus operates from Crookston to Thief River Falls carrying 32 employees and Bagley to Thief River Falls carrying 27 employees. The contract is negotiated every year, with Digi Key paying a large portion and giving Tri-Valley authority when the employees are on the bus. There have been many incentives and tax breaks which have made this partnership feasible and desirable, helping both sides financially. This partnership places many incentives to encourage ridership.
- Community Resource Connection (CRC) serves as navigators for people searching for resources to address home, family, employment and other self-sufficiency issues. This service exist to help people better understand how to use services more effectively. CRC serves Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater and Hubbard Counties. This link provides information on transportation option services throughout Northwestern Minnesota <http://www.crcinform.org/directory/categories/transportation>. Another helpful directory for adults with mental health includes the Mental Health Resources Provided in Bemidji.

Transportation Opportunities:

FOOD SHELF PARTNERING WITH OTHER KEY SERVICES

An article written by John Reinan, March 18, 2017 suggest that when individuals are in need of food, they are also in need of other services as well. It was suggested to use Food Shelf locations as a way to provide that extra help. The Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN), a Minneapolis-based organization, recently launched a pilot program to bring together the organizations that assist Minnesotans in need and improving collaboration, using the food shelf as a hub. Region 2 has a few Food Shelves that could take after this FFEN model.

MOBILE FOOD SHELF

Bemidji Community Food Shelf is a faith-based organization that serves those within Beltrami County experiencing food insecurity. The food shelf is committed to implementing a pilot project to deliver fresh food to vulnerable populations in at least one underserved community outside of the greater Bemidji area, as well as an apartment complex serving low-income seniors who lack transportation. This service in rural Minnesota would be a model for expanded food access for low-income and other vulnerable populations via mobile food delivery.

BSU partnership with the community food shelf is another possibility. Since many college students qualify for the services that the food shelf provides, there is an

opportunity to meet the needs of these college students through providing them nutritious food. There has been discussion over a site food shelf at BSU.

SYSTEMS CHANGE APPROACH TO TRANSPORTATION

More Local Human Service Coordination efforts have started to develop which have come out of this current 2017 MnDOT Region 2 Local Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan update. Evergreen Youth and Family Services was the applicant for a Blue Cross Blue Shield Minnesota a Healthy Community Health Equity in Action grant. This application looked at some collaborative projects to advance health equity by improving transportation options and access for rural, low-income individuals in Northwest Minnesota. This grant highlighted a systems change approach to transportation. Project strategies to create transportation system change emphasize resource-mapping and sharing, stakeholder engagement to promote provider collaboration and effective state and local advocacy. The project activities proposed in this BC/BS grant proposal capitalize on existing stakeholder momentum that was created through the transit coordination plan.

This has been an effort to collaborate on transportation changes and opportunities within our region that would advance health equity for all individuals. The partners for this grant included: Bemidji Link to Transportation Committee (BLT), Community Resource Connections (CRC), Headwaters Regional Development Commission (HRDC), Paul Bunyan Transit (PBT), and the Bemidji Community Food Shelf. Although funding was not granted to this specific proposal, moving forward, the partners have committed to working together towards a systems change approach in reaching more vulnerable populations through transportation access within our region.

CARERIDE GONVICK PROJECT

Another possibility is to utilize technology and travel patterns through Lyft or Uber. Clearwater Gonvick Project would like to partner and combine caregiving plus technology and empowering health and human service organizations & providers to revolutionize both common carrier and non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT).

Their vision is to use an already proven technology much like UBER and LYFT that utilizes GPS tracking and Google Networking and match it to our caregivers. This has the potential to radically improve consumer control over transportation resources. The focus population is the elderly and the low income who through this service would be able to remain independent in their homes, regardless if they have the ability to own and operate a vehicle. This project is called CareRide that will capitalize on already proven software designed with adjustable templates. This service will coordinate riders, drivers and consumers. You will know in real-time where a consumer is and how long they have been waiting.

BEMIDJI LINK TO TRANSPORTATION (BLT)

Conversations have taken place around the importance of improving the transportation system and services and eliminating deficiencies within the system. Efforts within the

Greater Bemidji area explored transportation expansion options and in the process create a Bemidji Link to Transportation Committee in 2016. This committee consists of 20+ human service providers, schools, mental health agencies, housing agencies, PBT and Headwaters Regional Development Commission. This group is passionate about the importance of transit issues, however lack sustainability due to intermittent staff leadership.

A leader from BLT has proposed an idea serving Bemidji/Beltrami County through a system that meets in the center and sends four buses out each morning to collect people and bring them into the community center. From the center, have busses scheduled to go to places such as Sanford, Walmart, Food Shelf etc.

BEMIDJI LEEDS!

A local stewardship group in Bemidji recently identified access to transit as a key community issue and has indicated an interest in providing leadership to help identify solutions. Transportation has risen to the top of the list as a main priority to start working towards. HRDC is interested in providing staff leadership in order to create collective understanding and capitalize on the opportunity to more fully utilizing existing community resources.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE COUNCIL (RTCC)

This RTCC has been identified as a solution to help direct and lead the strategies within the 2017 Local Human Service Transportation Coordination plan. The RTCC would play an instrumental role in providing information, insight and direction in preparation of the regions coordination efforts and projects. Supporting a staff person to organize and coordinate community level action across all partners working towards a common goal would improve the transit services across Region 2.

“Someone has to pay somebody to harness all this passion”

SMALL- SCALE PARTNERSHIPS

This plan has offered an extensive broad understanding of the coordination that is going on throughout Region 2 regarding transportation. However, it is clear that in order to make positive impact within the vulnerable residents that our within our five counties, individual communities will need to take ownership and identify what it is that will fully utilize the assets each individual community has.

Public Participation Steering Committee

The plan Steering Committee closely guided plan decision-making. Steering Committee duties included:

- Evaluating strategies and assessing outcomes of projects identified in the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan
- Developing project ideas and identifying priority strategies as part of the public workshop
- Prioritizing project ideas identified at the public workshop for inclusion in the final plan

The Steering Committee was made up of representatives from county human service agencies, area agency on aging representatives, centers for independent living representatives, passengers and others.

Members included:

Steering Committee Membership	Organization	Representing
Lezlie Grubich	Paul Bunyan Transit Executive Director	Section 5310 and 5311 Transit System
Becky Secore	Beltrami County Health and Human Services	Family Child Care (FCC) Licensure
Don Mohawk (retired in June 2017)	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator	Statewide Transit Coordinator
Darla Waldner	Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging Director	Area Agency on Aging
Linda Hanson	Hubbard County Developmental Achievement Center	Community Development Groups
Cindy Pic	Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Transportation Programs	Section 5310 and 5311 Transit System
Linda Bair(retired in June 2017)	Heartland Express Transit Supervisor	Section 5311

LuAnn Bleiler	Paul Bunyan Transit Operations Manager	Section 5307, 5311 Transit System
Kent Ehrenstrom	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator	Statewide Transit Coordinator
Collette Maxwell	Red Lake Transit	Section 5311 Transit System
April Collman	Adult Day Services, Inc. Bemidji	Health and Human Services Organization
Jessica Horn	Clearwater DAC	Health and Human Service Organization

2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan Outcomes

Another component to this Transit Coordination Plan includes an analysis of the 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan's List of strategies and projects for improving transit coordination. The 2017 Steering Committee reviewed these strategies and projects to provide an update on regional progress on the 2011 transit coordination since 2011. The strategies and projects in the 2011 have been given a status of started, in progress, ongoing, not started. The complete list of the 2011 strategies and projects and an assessment of their outcome is presented below.

Action/Project	Discussion/Analysis	Status
Create a set of Regional Coordination Tools: Create a web-based directory of service providers with locations served, days, and hours of operations, and other necessary information for effective coordination	Community Resource Connection (CRC) website has this information, however, needs to be updated and additional information needs to be added since some of the information is incomplete. This website needs to be monitored and updated regularly. Would it be possible to have it be monitored and updated through convening quarterly transportation coordination meetings	In progress
Create a web-based tool that would allow providers to upload anticipate routes or post information about trips they are making with seats available	Challenge is keeping information up to date, however, working on a vehicle sharing network is being discussed	Ongoing
Explore the creation of a mobility manager position	This has not gone anywhere and no one person is designated for this role. This could be a role that is placed in a Regional Transit Coordinator Council (RTCC)	Not started

Action/Project	Discussion/Analysis	Status
Strategy 2: Minimize Insurance Issues		
Action/Project	Discussion/Analysis	Status
Standardize policies	MnDOT has no control over the insurance issue. There needs to be creative, thinking outside the box for this particular issue, especially for dealing with whose client is whose.	In progress
Strategy 3: Increase Funding		
Look for additional funding	What additional funds are not currently being utilized?	Ongoing
Work with lawmakers to adjust laws and regulations to allow for additional funding		Started and stopped
Strategy 4: Reduce Operating Expenses		
Utilize vans when appropriate rather than buses	This concept is more appropriate for human service providers and other agencies instead of public transit services. There is difficulty coordinating the vans with varying numbers of riders	Ongoing
Strategy 5: Use Volunteer Drivers More Effectively		
Action/Project	Discussion/Analysis	Status
Increase the amount of drivers	Create a volunteer driver network. There is a difficulty to recruit drivers because of the economy	Ongoing
Increase the number of passengers per trip	Some action to show that monthly coordination for doctors and dental visits have been successful. This is creative partnerships at work.	In Progress
Strategy 6: Increase Public Awareness of Transit Services		
Action/Project	Discussion/Analysis	Status
Advertise Services better	Organizations have shared the importance of social media, flyers, and websites. There was discussion of a strategic marketing approach may be needed	In Progress

Rider Survey

Rider surveys were conducted as part of the 2017 GMTIP and have been placed into this plan. 30 rider surveys were collected throughout our region. Overall longer service

hours, reliability and lower cost were the top three most wanted improvements for transportation riders. The majority of our riders were satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of services. However, most of the respondents identified having difficulty walking and required assistance. Most of the rider responses conveyed needing help to get in and out of a vehicle or needed assistance walking to their door, or caring groceries.

Additionally, it was identified that weekend service hours were needed for religious purposes as well as shopping and recreational trips. Riders also identified wanting holiday service hours. Rider responses were all older than 55 with the majority of the responders 65 or older.

Focus Groups

A focus group was held on January 26th, 2017 which incorporated input from all interested stakeholders. 20 Local Human Service providers and agencies were represented at our Organization focus group, which is listed in Appendix. This focus group allowed input from multiple agencies that looked at how to improve transportation services for vulnerable populations (persons with disabilities, older adults and individuals with low-incomes). Discussions took place on how to maximizing the communities' transportation resources and coordination. During this focus group perceptions of the current transportation services were identified, opportunities were voiced, short and longer-term needs were addressed as well as trends and future challenges within our region. Some of the discussion points have been identified and crafted as potential projects which will be identified later on in this plan.

Some of the discussion points identified by the Focus Group participants included:

- Providing access for individuals with mental health concerns who lack coping skills to ride public transportation

“Last minute rides is a reality for many people who use transit due to a particular crisis. Many do not have the time or energy to plan or schedule a ride service.”
- Agencies spend a significant amount of their resources (time, money) to address transportation limitations in the community. The resources for agencies could better be utilized if transportation was not such a barrier/gap
- Providing transportation to seniors who would benefit from a nutritious meal
- Limited affordable transportation options at times that most entry level jobs are requiring availability (weekend, after 5pm before 8 am). With this limitation, it enables individuals to maintain employment due to availability of transportation
- As brought up in the 2011 Plan, federal and state rules, regulations and insurance, continue to be an essential barrier limiting coordination within our services. This continues to be a challenge that needs to be explored and approached at a new angle.

Some key benefits of the transportation system within Region 2 involves the public transportation system coverage of a large area. Another important assist is agencies who

offer assistance with bus passes to make it affordable for those vulnerable populations. Local human services also provide bus tokens and passes to those who are eligible.

As part of the focus group, attendees were asked to split into 4 groups, identify a note taker and a reporter within each group. Some of the main themes identified from the breakout sessions included:

- Volunteer driver network would be a helpful tool in coordinating transportation efforts.
- Encourage providers to develop new programs and services that include the most remote areas
- Increase awareness of transportation services throughout the region
- Establish a route that would take people to necessary stops (Bank, Food Shelf, Day Care)
- Every six months create a two-page report that would highlight a specific population and services in the region.
- Education of existing services and resources available to specific populations
- Sanford health has identified that it may be useful to put together a human service network

Riders Focus Group

Riders were also reached through meeting with staff from Hope House in Beltrami County. Hope House is a community-based supportive program for persons with serious and persistent mental illness. The director, Daniel Brouse, provided some time to share during their staff meeting and provide information regarding the transit plan. During this meeting rider surveys, organizational surveys were passed out. There was also a discussion of major challenges and gaps for their services regarding transportation. The highest identified barrier shared during this focus group was spending a significant amount of time in the car driving their clients around to different services

In addition to the Organization Focus Group conducted on January 26th, 2017, I was able to attend a lunch at the Bagley Senior Citizen Center in Clearwater County and ask about transportation for riders who attend this lunch. The seniors who rode the transportation system around the table provided input on transportation challenges, gaps and opportunities:

Challenges

- If you are not someone who uses the service regularly, you are usually left to learn the “hard way”. One rider suggest that when you call to be picked up, you call for your return trips as well. When you call you also establish location to be picked up before you get off transit. However, this limits their services. “You don’t always know what you need in advance.”

- You do not always know how long shopping takes and yet your expected to have an answer
- The transit system picks up headstart kids 3 times a week which limits availability
- Costs over1\$ every time you go onto the bus which adds up
- Paul Bunyan Transit (PBT) restricts use by riders that have three missed rides, however, the population that is being served often are in high crisis and have mental health/chemical dependencies. Loosing ability to ride the public transit creates a barrier and yet, having a scheduled bus show up for someone that no longer needs a ride is a burdensome to the transportation system.
- Some older adults park their car in the winter and drive public transportation during the winter months
- Scheduling conflicts
- Time for human services and agencies is significantly spent trying to address transportation limitations in the community just to serve survivors of domestic violence, after school activities, and other mental health issues.
- Limited service hour availability
- Last minute rides are reality for many people who use transit (crisis, planning for the week is a luxury and often not possible for families who may lack the resources, coping skills, time energy)

Primary Gaps

- More availability for transportation services
- Businesses need to have places for older adults and people with disabilities to sit while waiting for their transportation
- Improve the system of information given to create a useful directory for transportation resources (pull entire management team together)
- Access to basic needs for populations within rural areas
- Days and times of transportation available (nights, weekends)

I asked the seniors if there were people that were missing from around the table due to transportation, and they all confirmed that there were many underserved individuals who would benefit if in fact they had transportation.

Opportunities

- Local church in Bagley has a van and potential partner to help provide this meal every day to these seniors' apartments (Park View and Otterville). Have a service that would pick up at 10:30 and drop off at 12:30 Monday through Friday.
 - "I would love to see a bus available for the lunch hour at the Senior Citizen Center. That would be great for not only a meal but also socialization."
- Could we do this for Sunday church services?
- Mobile food shelf for rural communities resident

- Explore <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/transportation> for funding opportunities for transportation in rural communities
- Paul Bunyan Transit (PBT) - The question was brought up at Bemidji Leads! Meeting if PBT could provide dispatching services to human service agencies who provide transportation services.

Planning Workshop

The Transportation Planning Workshop was on April 13, 2017 from 10 am to 2pm at the Northwest Minnesota Foundation which incorporated input from all interested stakeholders, breaking out into small table discussions. The table discussion topics were facilitated by a group leader that was identified and confirmed before the start of the workshop. These four identified group leaders were given a list of discussion questions to help guide the conversation. The discussion topics included:

- A. Creating a regional coordination resource guide: identifying existing transportation (public and private) resources including eligibility, hours of services, contact information, access points
- B. Extending service hour availability and expand geographic area coverage (weekend and evening services)
- C. Creating a volunteer network/human service network
- D. Establishing a fixed route system for specific populations

A total of 21 people attended, listed in Appendix C. At the workshop, stakeholders identified strengths and weaknesses of transit coordination in the region. Building from these, stakeholders then identified priority strategies for transit coordination and brainstormed project ideas that could address these strategies. Using input gathered at this workshop, the Steering Committee prioritized the strategies and projects included in the final plan at the final meeting. A complete list of project ideas considered during the planning process is presented in Appendix D.

Strengths and Weaknesses

At the public workshop, participants identified strengths and weaknesses of existing coordination efforts in Region 2. Combined with the plan’s technical findings, these strengths and weaknesses form the basis for identifying strategies to address transportation coordination in this region.

Table 1 Identification of Region 2’s Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
Increase demand of transportation for vulnerable populations and workforce	Limited funding available and infrastructure
Desire to work collectively together across agencies and organizations	Leadership is lacking (lack of resources and inadequate coordination)/

Strengths	Weaknesses
	communication is lacking/ duplication of services
Affordable transportation	Limited geographic service area and access to human services; unknown transportation options; long waiting time and limited comfortable waiting places; Taxis are not affordable and can take a huge portion of an individual's overall paycheck
Growing population	Restricted with the number of drivers available and limited coverage of rural areas, limited availability to have multiple stops, and limited days and times of transportation options (evening hours)
Coordination between services	Legal limitations placed on specific agencies and organizations makes it difficult to overcome the transportation barrier

Many of the organizations questionnaires and surveys received throughout this process had similar findings to the GMTIP. As an overview, rider's expressed a sincere desire for longer service hours, improved reliability and to start introducing weekend services. There has shown to have a large population of people with disabilities in Greater Minnesota, that it becomes essential that state human services and agencies work collectively to meet the demand and need of this growing population. A lack of resources can have the potential to fuel creativity and innovation.

Coordination Strategies and Projects

The following includes a list of coordination strategies that were attached to project ideas identified throughout the Planning Process. The list is broken down into three categories: 1) Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources; 2) Mobility; and 3) Communication, Training, and Organizational Support.

Category 1-Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources

Strategy 1- Create a regional coordination resource guide identifying existing transportation (public and private) resources including eligibility, hours of services, contact information, access points, specific areas and the needs of underserved and unserved populations

Strategy 2- Share information of existing transportation options and funding statues to clarify existing barriers and create potential strategies for improvement and providing stakeholder engagement collaboration

- A. Better coordination for efficiencies with the Regional Transit Coordination Council (RTCC) Pushing to get the top priorities and strategies implemented that are laid out in the 5 year Transit Coordination plan
 - a. Meet quarterly with Advisory Group for accountability that the identified strategies are moving forward; create a report that will highlight the success stories within communities

Strategy 3- Establish and lead Small Scale- Low-Cost Creative Partnerships throughout the region

- A. Health Equity in Action- Evergreen Youth and Family Services- Partnerships between Paul Bunyan Transit -HRDC-Community Resource Connection -Bemidji Food Shelf (Mobile Food Shelf)
- B. Red Lake Transit-Bemidji Food Shelf- HRDC: Red Lake Transit would like to provide 1 more service that runs to and from Red Lake to the food shelf every Friday
- C. Clearwater- Gonvick Project- CareRide- Home at Heart Care Inc. Reinventing the wheel
- D. Bagley Senior Center lunch transportation – Tri-Valley
- E. Church support

Strategy 4- Create a Transportation District

Category 2- Mobility

Strategy 4 - Extend service hour availability and expand geographic area coverage (weekend and evening services)

Strategy 5- Establish a fixed route system for specific populations

Strategy 6- Create a volunteer network/human service network

Strategy 7- Establish a vehicle share program that would offer organizations to meet their mobility needs at a reduced cost

Strategy 8- Car pooling list that is accessible for early and late shifts

Category 3- Communication, Training, and Organizational Support

Strategy 8- Advocate for transportation needs at the local and state level

Strategy 9- Coordinate transportation system within organization as well as cross sector collaboration

Project Overview

To categorize project ideas, Steering Committee members created an “Effort vs. Impact” chart to compare these project ideas. This created a relative sense of how much effort (low to high) each project idea would take as well as how much impact (minor to major) each project could have in its region. This chart can be found in Appendix E. The strategies and projects listed below represent those ideas the Steering Committee prioritized as having the most potential to improve transit coordination in Region 2. The column on the left has numbers one to seven which represents the highest project priority (#1) to the lowest project priority #7 identified by the final steering committee meeting.

#1	#1 Project-Transportation Inventory: Create a transportation inventory of the current transportation options public, private, school district, human services, and non-profit transportation providers in the region.	
	Population Served	Residents residing in Region 2
	Communities Served	Entire Region 2
	Responsible Entities	Community Resource Connection (CRC) /Headwaters Regional Development Commission
	Strategies Addressed	<p>Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources: Create a regional coordination resource guide; Small- Scale Creative partnerships.</p> <p>Make this guide accessible by internet and paper copies. It is also important to distribute this information through different events throughout the community (Boomers and Beyond in Bemidji, County Fairs, Senior Providers meetings, senior citizen services etc.).</p> <p>This resource guide will be one book that is split into the five different counties and 1 tribal transit section</p>
#7	#2 Project -Private/Public Partnerships: Utilize large-scale employers throughout Region 2 such as Anderson Fabrics in Blackduck and Team Industry in Bagley	
	Population Served	Low-income workers and persons with disabilities
	Communities Served	Entire Region
	Responsible Entities	Private Employer contracting with public transit (e.g. PBT, Tri- Valley, Red Lake Transit)

	Strategies Addressed	Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources: Establish a fixed route system for specific populations. It is important to provide transportation for the 3 rd and 4 th shift workers
#5	#3 Project-Vehicle Share Network: Create and maintain a vehicle share program through the non-profit organizations which offers vehicles when not already in use.	
	Population Served	Residents with disabilities and low income
	Communities Served	Entire region
	Responsible Entities	Local human service agencies
	Strategies Addressed	Mobility: Creating a volunteer network It was identified that ADS can allow for those individuals who carry a health card can transport clients to medical visits.
#2	#4 Project -Regional Transportation Coordinator Council Planner: Coordinate regional transit efforts	
	Population Served	MnDOT District 2
	Communities Served	Entire Region 2
	Responsible Entities	MnDOT, public transit agencies and local human service agencies, Local units of governments and human service agencies
	Strategies Addressed	Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources and Mobility: Share information & Advocacy; Creating a transportation resource guide Contact and connect with Sue Semmers is the coordinator for this transportation coordination
#3	#5 Project -Volunteer Driver Pool: Recruit diverse group of drivers that can satisfy the needs of riders. (Long and short routes and drivers that can drive different times of days; non-emergency health)	
	Population Served	Disable and elderly persons
	Communities Served	Entire Region 2's
	Responsible Entities	Human Service agencies and Sanford Health
	Strategies Addressed	Mobility: Creating a volunteer network Look at how Upper Mississippi runs their volunteer network program

#4	#6 Project -Transportation for Senior Citizen Center Lunches	
	Population Served	Elderly and disabled individuals
	Communities Served	Bagley
	Responsible Entities	Senior Citizen Center
	Strategies Addressed	<p>Mobility: Creating a volunteer network; Small Scale Creative Partnerships</p> <p>Tri-Valley has secured funding for this project through MnDOT to provide meals every day to two senior apartments, Park View and Otterville Transportation service could pick up seniors at 10:30 and drop off at 12:30 Monday through Friday</p>
#6	#7 Project-Mobile Food Shelf: Work with Community Bemidji Food Shelf to extend healthy food options via. Mobile Food Shelf efforts	
	Population Served	Low-income and elderly individuals
	Communities Served	Beltrami County
	Responsible Entities	Bemidji Food Shelf and local units of governments
	Strategies Addressed	<p>Mobility: Small scale- low cost partnerships & Extending service hours and geographic coverage</p> <p>Look into funding sources</p>

Needs Assessment

Region 2 is in need of creating a culture of collaboration and coordination across all public and private organizations, services and agencies. In order to make successful local solutions sustainable it is essential to provide leadership with the vision, take action as well as have community buy-in. Establish effective multi sector collaboration, engaging multi-generations which will help build upon the success of these efforts.

Service Limitations, Gaps & Unmet Needs

- “Transportation is a barrier that is keeping people impoverished”- Bemidji Superintendent, Jim Hess
- There are 300 Homeless students within the Bemidji School District alone and very few of them have transportation. There is a school walk zone for those kids who live close to the school to walk, however, in the winter this is not an option.
- RSVP program in Bemidji, which provided rides for home-bound and low-income seniors, just closed this year, which has made transportation more of a need within this area.
- Transportation is often the barrier that affects access to services. Over the past year, the Food Shelf and the local community action agency, (housing, Headstart, energy assistance, weatherization, and youth Build) relocated outside the city limits. These relocations, while essential for the space needs of the agencies, have significantly increased transportation barriers to access services. There are also challenges to inter-community transportation options as the surrounding communities need access to the services located in the regional center of Bemidji.
- Bagley Senior Center identified that it is inconvenient to pay every time you get on the bus. (ex: home to grocery store, grocery store to senior center, senior center to home). Wait time can be long. For example, if an elder would like to go grocery shopping after she ate at the senior center, she would either have 20 min to shop quickly, or she would have to wait 2 hours to shop before the bus would be back. Another situation is the bus is not always on time. In small communities, services may not be open as late as in bigger cities. After a senior meal, some riders called for a ride home, and the bus was unable to reach them until 2:45pm and the Senior Center closes at 2 pm. A volunteer was able to drive these individuals home, however, as they were driving, they saw the bus parked up the block with the driver inside. When an individual calls for a ride, the call is to the central Crookston office, which doesn't always have the updated information available.
- Partnerships that pool resources and combine efforts beginning with the planning process in order to develop mutual goals and shared understanding. Partners to consider include:
 - Clinics
 - Larger hospital systems
 - Academic centers/universities
 - Public transportation
 - Health departments
 - RDC

- Health plans
- Community organizations
- Organizations that could bring in specific trainings

Centralized Information

- Active members of services understand that existing transit operations are bound by established rules that govern public funding and these rules limit flexibility. Stakeholders realize that other options need to be explored on a more systematic and formal basis.
- The Bemidji community is ready to be more actively and assertively partnered with MnDOT to ensure that the community’s essential transportation needs are creatively addressed and significantly improved. This is a critical time for community involvement in this plan.
- Bemidji is known to be the regional hub that offers a variety of services for smaller and more rural communities within Greater Minnesota. Changing transportation accessibility will create a systems change model which will provide access to the most vulnerable populations outside the city limits and therefore increase their overall health and access.
- Key stakeholders within our region have started asking themselves, “how does our organization, agency connect with the other services we need?”

Temporal Limitations

- Buses often cover a large area so there are times and days you either cannot rely on a ride or accept the long wait. This senior center lunch needs a system that can pick seniors up promptly. An example on how this system does not work great for this service is provided below. “Just today, an elderly lady called the bus for a ride to the Sr. Center for the 11:30 am meal. The central Crookston office informed her she would be picked up and brought to the meal at 9:45 and get picked up at 2 pm.”
- In the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan (GMTIP), MnDOT placed a high priority on connecting input from underserved or unserved populations in rural Minnesota. These people included: seniors, low-income, persons with housing instability, individuals with disabilities, veterans and new Americans. This was conducted through a paper survey. Some of the feedback was pulled from organizations within our region including: Bi-CAP, Leech Lake Band of Objibwe. This survey was aimed at collecting input from hart to reach populations in rural Minnesota. Some key findings that were received are summarized below.
 - The majority of responders did not sue transit in the past year. Of these non-transit users, 41% indicated that they would use transit if it served where they lived.
 - Transit needs to reach outlying cities and communities and provide service beyond city or county boundaries with better information on how to use transit.

- Participants are more likely to choose transit if it is convenient, low cost and allows for flexibility in travel plans.

Service Quality and Miscellaneous Issues

Active Transportation was brought up as a way to meet the needs of transportation within some rural communities creating a system of pedestrian pathways and automated signage to direct and guide people.

The Feedback that was provided through organizations and public transportation services identified several challenges in attempting to coordinate services. Top priorities of coordination efforts were all across the board with identifying how to best coordinate services. It has been established that in rural communities one size does not fit all. These included:

1. Difficulties providing affordable cost options
2. There is a higher demand for services for boundaries to be expanded
3. Limited amount of available drivers
4. Insurance coverage

Some of these barriers in coordination could be improved through providing more transportation options in our rural communities. It would also help to increase the flexibility amongst providers. Creating a pool of drivers that could be used to transport a specific population. It would also help to promote the improved services and system through a useful directory for transportation resources.

According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), $\frac{1}{4}$ of America's population live in rural areas. Compared to urban locations, rural residents have an increased rate of poverty, a larger percentage of elderly and poor health, have limited doctors, hospitals and other health resource and often face many barriers limiting to health services due to limited transportation availability.

In a local SHIP meeting I attended in April, it was brought to my attention that there is a need to provide transportation from Pine Point to Park Rapids for grocery shopping. There is a Tribal Service bus that serves residents in Pine Point, however, they do not pick people up to drive them to Park Rapids. They only drive people to Mahnomen from Pine Point for medical appointments.

HEDA's report found through surveys and interviews that riders would like to see a mobile food shelf being offered for unreached vulnerable populations. It has been specified that Kelliher or Blackduck would be the initial starting/pilot communities. Community Resource Connections has been willing to work to help identify what the needs are and prioritize strategies that will increase the number of riders being served. Lack of transportation could be a key barrier to receiving important human services.

Expand services to best serve clients within our area. This involves collaboration between multiple transportation organizations and other human service providers. For example, having a service that would be able to provide mothers the flexibility to drop their child

off at day care. Another example is to provide transportation to the senior citizen lunch. There is a need to provide clarity about the services that are offered. Utilizing the services that Community Resource Connect (CRC) as a key provider to offer a transportation resource guide has been discussed. It was brought up that there is a need for a market to recruit and train drivers to increase the job market. It was also suggested to look at transportation access to and from the Food Shelf and Bi Cap. Due to the wide variety of needs, it would also be helpful to have a dual system which would include both scheduled bussing at certain stops and locations and times as well as the dial a ride system. Having weekly rides that would provide transportation to various destinations i.e. Food Shelf, Walmart, religious ceremonies.

Appendix A – Transportation Resources

The following includes contact information of all regional transportation providers and local human services and agencies that were a part of this process and who received information and provided input. **Please note that this is not a complete list of providers in the region.**

2017 Local Human Service transit Providers/Public Transit Contact Information: Region2					
#	Name	Organization	County	Phone	Email
1	Sabrina Anderson	Northwoods Caregivers Living at home in Park Rapids	Hubbard	218-333-8262 218-760-4000	
2	Connie Carmichael	Northwoods Caregivers Living at home in Park Rapids	Hubbard	218-732-3137	director@parkrapidslivingat home.org
3	Linda Hanson	Hubbard County Developmental Achievement Center	Hubbard	(218) 732-3358	lhanson@unitelc.com
4	Linda Bair	Heartland Express Transit Supervisor	Hubbard	(218) 732-9328	lbair@co.hubbard.mn.us
2017 Local Human Service transit Providers/Public Transit Contact Information: Region2					
#	Name	Organization	County	Phone	Email
1	Bruce Emmel	Homeat Heart Care	Clearwater	218-776-3508	BEmmel@homeatheartcare.c om
2	Jamie Halverson	Clearwater County Department of Human Services	Clearwater	(218) 694-6164	jamie.halverson@co.clearwa ter.mn.us
3	Rosa Lossing,	Cornerstone residents	Clearwater	218-647-8258	rosacrk@paulbunyan.net
4	Kay Peterson	Senior Center in Bagley	Clearwater	2186946873	
5	Jessica Horn	Clearwater DAC	Clearwater	(218) 694-6541	jE11:H54ocdac@gvtel.com
2017 Local Human Service transit Providers/Public Transit Contact Information: Region2					
#	Name	Organization	County	Phone	Email
1	Jo Aery	Social Services Lake of the Woods County	Lake of the Woods	218-634-2642	jo_a@co.lake-of-the-woods.mn.us
2017 Local Human Service transit Providers/Public Transit Contact Information: Region2					
#	Name	Organization	County	Phone	Email
1	Janelle Vance	Beltrami County Health and Human Services	Beltrami	218-333-4197	janelle.heinonen@co.beltram i.mn.us
2	Amy Dehap	Long Lake Loon Lodge	Beltrami		loonlodg@gmail.com
3	Andrea Kingbird	Northwoods Battered Women's Shelter	Beltrami	(218) 444-1395	andrea.k@mnselter.org
4	Pam Mallery	Northwoods Battered Women's Shelter	Beltrami	(218) 444-1395	
5	Hyacinth Stiffler	Bi-County Community Action Programs, Inc.	Beltrami	218-547-3438 X 104	hyacinth.stiffler@bicap.org
6	Darla Jores	Bi-CAP	Beltrami		
7	Kirk Karstens	Bi-CAP	Beltrami	218-222-9866	kirk.karstens@bicap.org
8	Brian Ophus	Bi-CAP Workfouce Impact Supervisor	Beltrami	218.441.2242	Brian.Ophus@co.beltrami.m n.us

9	Andrea Ohnstad	Boys and Girls Club	Beltrami	218-444-4171	aohnstad@paulbunyan.net
10	Sarah Winkle	Upper Mississippi Mental Health Center	Beltrami		
11	Becca Shindelar	Lutheran Social Services	Beltrami	218-760-5716	becca.shindelar@lssmn.org
12	Bayley Erin	Bemidji State University (BSU)	Beltrami	BSU Intern	
13	Venessa Wananu	Upper Mississippi Mental Health Center	Beltrami	(218) 751-3280	vanessa_wananu@ummhcmn.org
14	Cindy Berget	Upper Mississippi Mental Health Center	Beltrami	(218) 751-3280	cindy_berget@ummhcmn.org
16	Robin Wold	Hope House	Beltrami	218-444-6748	rwold@paulbunyan.net
17	Camerson Young	Evergreen Youth Services	Beltrami	BSU intern	-
18	Rebecca Schueller	Executive Director: Evergreen Youth Services	Beltrami	218-441-4561	Rebecca.Schueller@evergreenyfs.org
19	Jennifer Kovach	Evergreen Youth Services	Beltrami	(218)441-4555	Jen.Kovach@evergreenyfs.org
20	Michele Crowson	Evergreen Youth Services	Beltrami	218-441-4552	Michele.Crowson@evergreenyfs.org
21	Mary Mitchel	Bemidji Community Food Shelf	Beltrami	218-556-3249 ©	www.bemidjifoodshelf.org
22	Connie Norman	Sanford Health of Northern MN	Beltrami	(218)766-7192 (Cell)	Connie.Norman@SanfordHealth.org
23	John Marcum	Market Place Foods	Beltrami	218-444-1400	johnmarcum@shopmpf.com
24	Dan Brouse	LAC Meeting Transportation	Beltrami	218-330-8119	daniel.brouse@co.beltrami.mn.us
25	Karla Meade	Family Assessment Worker for Beltrami County Child Protection	Beltrami		Karla.Meade@co.beltrami.mn.us
26	Seth Tramm	Sanford Health	Beltrami	218-333-2990	Seth.Tramm@SanfordHealth.org
27	Angie Lauderbaugh	Bemidji Link to Transit - (BLT)	Beltrami	218-368-1059	alauderbaugh@bemidji.k12.mn.us
28	Steve Cochems	Anderson Fabrics	Beltrami	218-835-6377	SCochems@andersonfabrics.com
29	Hannah Klemm	Food Shelf Bemidji	Beltrami	612-309-5598	hklemm87@gmail.com
30	Darlene Benson	Adult Day Services (driver)	Beltrami	218-751-1324	adultday@gmail.com
31	John Baker	Adult Day Services (driver)	Beltrami	218-751-1324	adultday@gmail.com
32	Senior Center Bemidji		Beltrami	218-751-8836	
33	Lezlie Grubich	Paul Bunyan Transit Executive Director	Beltrami	(218) 751-8765	l.grubich@paulbunyantransit.com
34	Becky Secore	Beltrami County Health and Human Services	Beltrami	(218)333-4195	becky.secore@co.beltrami.mn.us
35	Don Mohawk	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator	Beltrami	(218) 263-2979	don.mohawk@state.mn.us
36	LuAnn Bleiler	Paul Bunyan Transit Operations Manager	Beltrami	(218) 751-8765	l.bleiler@paulbunyantransit.com
37	Collette Maxwell	Red Lake Transit	Beltrami	(218) 679-2910	collette.maxwell@redlakenation.org

38	April Collman	Adult Day Services, Inc. Bemidji	Beltrami	(218) 751-1324	acollman@paulbunyan.net
39	Mary Lund	Transportation Coordinator for Beltrami County	Beltrami	218-333-8023	mary.lund@co.beltrami.mn.us
40	Ruth Sherman	Community Resource Connect	Beltrami	218-333-6838	rsherman@rcinform.org
41	Carolyn Hegland	Bemidji Community Food Shelf	Beltrami		
42	Jan Carlson	Red Lake Child Development and parent educator	Beltrami		jcarlson@redlake.k12.mn.us

Appendix B – Public Workshop Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organization</i>
LuAnn Bleiler	Paul Bunyan Transit Operations Manager
Kent Ehrenstrom	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator
Don Mohawk	MNDOT Department of Transit Program Coordinator
Linda Hanson	Hubbard County Developmental Achievement Center
Cindy Pic	Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Transportation Programs
Collette Maxwell	Red Lake Transit
Andrea Ohnstad	Boys and Girls Club
Angie Lauderbaugh	Bemidji Link to Transit - (BLT)
Connie Norman	Sanford Health of Northern MN
Rebecca Schueller	Executive Director: Evergreen Youth Services
Andrea Kingbird	Northwoods Battered Women's Shelter
Bruce Emmel	Home at Heart Care
Ruth Sherman	Community Resource Connect
Jan Carlson	Red Lake Child Development and parent educator
Steve Cochems	Anderson Fabrics
Connie Troksa	Land of the Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging
Carolyn Hegland	Bemidji Community Food Shelf
Nicole George	MnDOT Central Office
Matt McFarland	HRDC Support Specialist
Naomi Carlson	HRDC Transportation Planner

Appendix C – Project Idea Summary

Idea #1- Improving Transit Services for Vulnerable People

Issue:

Many people, especially low income, elderly and disabled individuals, do not have access to adequate, reliable transportation that would provide equitable access to employment opportunities, child care options, medical appointments, government services, grocery shopping and other essential trips.

Collective Understanding:

Some initial discussions have taken place around transit system deficiencies. A Bemidji are group formed under the name “Bemidji Link to Transit” (BLT). The group drew a good following due to the importance of the transit issue, but lacked sustainability due to intermittent staff leadership. Bemidji Leads!, a local stewardship group recently identified access to transit as a key community issue and has indicated an interest in providing leadership to help identify solutions. HRDC is interested in providing staff leadership in order to create collective understanding and capitalize on the opportunity to more fully utilize existing community resources. Mapping community resources is an important first step in this effort.

Community Brainstorming:

After creating a collective understanding of the gap in local transit services and an inventory of currently existing transit services HRDC intends to lead community discussion designed to brainstorm ideas for new collaborative opportunities. The brainstorming sessions will include BLT and Bemidji Leads! members, area non-profit organization staff, local church representatives, local transportation providers, tribal representatives, government officials and users/ potential users in need of transit options. Based on the brainstorming ideas staff will generate a range of strategies worth consideration by participating entities.

Do it! Fix it! Try it!:

In the book “In Search of Excellence”, Peters and Waterman suggested several keys to organizational effectiveness. Among the book’s themes are the following, which seem to be particularly useful in the proposed transit improvement initiative:

1. A bias for action. Active decision making avoids “paralysis by analysis”. Facilitated quick decision making and problem solving tends to avoid bureaucratic control. Do something then evaluate its effectiveness? If it works do more. If it fails, try something else.
2. Get close to your customer. Learn from the people being served.
3. Autonomy and entrepreneurship. Foster innovation and nurture 'champions'.

Multiple Year Work Plan:

The first year would focus on the Bemidji area transit system, and would advance the work that was started with a disciplined planning process designed with implementation activities in mind. The second year would focus on the remainder of the Headwaters Region with implementation activities identified in at least two additional communities. The communities chosen will be those where champions emerge that are willing to engage in innovative activities designed to provide greater access to the underserved vulnerable populations.

Improving the Coordination within rural Community Transit System

Many people in Beltrami County, especially low income, elderly and disabled individuals, do not have adequate, reliable transportation that would provide equitable access to employment opportunities, child care options, medical appointments, government services, grocery shopping and other essential destinations. Our public transit system is great but is not able to adequately address all of the identified needs. Many other entities provide transportation for users for some purposes, but the system is fragmented. By working together we can create a more coordinated system that better addresses the transit needs of the community. A well-coordinated transit system that meets the needs of the most vulnerable population will begin to meet the needs of all users.

Idea # 2 -Transportation District – This was identified at the Bemidji Leads! Meeting in June that this could help provide better service coverage to rural areas as well as longer days and times available. Develop a service similar to Upper Mississippi Mental health does through providing last minute rides.

Idea #3- Open Your Heart Grants- contract with PBT to offer a 100% contracted service that would support an underserved or unserved population. Identify afterschool activities and transportation options. PBT could possible provide dispatching services if it is 100% paid for through another funding source.

Idea #4- Utilize taxi services and enhance and have them a part of the solution- Create job development for driving positions for people in the community

Appendix E – Project Analysis: Effort vs. Impact Assessment

Difficult to do/Minor impact projects	Difficult to do/Major impact projects: Project #2 Project #3 Project #4 Project #7
Easy to do/Minor impact projects	Easy to do/Major impact projects: Project #1 Project #5 Project #6