



Minnesota Regional Transit
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REGIONAL TRANSIT BOARD

Mears Park Centre
230 East 5th Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101
612/292-8789

MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Tuesday, January 22, 1991
Mears Park Centre Chambers
Immediately Following the
5:00 p.m. Board Meeting

AGENDA

1. Call to Order and Roll Call
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Briefing on Regional Transit Board Legislative Program
4. Other Business

Michael J. Ehrlichmann
Chair

REGIONAL TRANSIT BOARD

Mears Park Centre
230 East Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101
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DRAFT

DATE: January 17, 1991

TO: Gregory Andrews, Executive Director
Sherry Munyon, Deputy Chair

FROM: Judith Hollander
Director of Planning & Programs

SUBJECT: Possible Legislative Initiatives for 1991

A number of possible legislative initiatives have been identified by the Planning and Programs staff for consideration during the upcoming session in addition to the LRT initiatives adopted by the board. A brief summary, objective and rationale for each initiative follows.

I. METRO MOBILITY

A. Expand the authority of the Department of Public Safety to license Metro Mobility drivers.

Objective: To ensure that the best drivers are hired for Metro Mobility service provided by private companies.

Rationale: As a regulatory agency that has information-gathering and monitoring capabilities, the Department of Public Safety can establish standards of hiring and retaining Metro Mobility drivers as well as take action to grant, suspend and/or revoke licenses. This tighter regulatory authority will increase the safety of Metro Mobility passengers, especially those who are considered vulnerable adults.

B. Authorize an increased appropriation for Metro Mobility.

Objective: To fully meet the travel needs of persons with disabilities who must rely on Metro Mobility.

Rationale: A \$23 million biennial appropriation for FY 1991-93 (the same level as for FY 1989-91) is simply not enough to meet the growth in demand for Metro Mobility service. Even with measures advanced by the RTB to contain costs and increase revenue from other sources, an increased state appropriation of \$ 7 million is needed to fulfill the RTB's special transportation service obligations under existing law. There are no excess property tax funds available for use in the Metro Mobility program; the property tax source of funding, in fact, no longer provides enough funding to maintain the regular route transit services.

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C. Modify the RTB special transportation service statute to define appropriate service methods and types matched to the various eligible groups of persons with disabilities, the elderly, and others with special transportation service needs.

Objective: To ensure that special transportation services provided in the future are appropriately matched to respond to the needs of persons who have no other alternative form of transportation.

Rationale: Metro Mobility ridership has tripled since 1986, while the subsidy per passenger has remained relatively constant. The perception that Metro Mobility is "out of control" is not accurate. While it does require more state funding than ever, the Metro Mobility program is meeting the needs of so many more people now. With the tremendous growth in service, the program has been managed effectively and continually improved to respond to problems that have emerged. For example, in 1990, the RTB instituted a trip assurance program, which virtually guarantees that all ride requests are met. The trip assurance program solved the problem of recent years that some rides were being denied, but it has created other problems: complaints about service timeliness and reliability are up considerably.

It is time to ask whether Metro Mobility, as a door-through-door transportation service, can continue to be everything to everyone. Other methods or types of special transportation service should be explored and may be better suited for different segments of the population served. The RTB would like to secure legislative authority, if it is needed, to accomplish changes in the design of Metro Mobility. For example, RTB and MTC staff have been discussing splitting the program into at least three component; for example: (1) door-through-door, subscription bus/van service for developmentally disabled persons who travel regularly to human service or jobs and training facilities (*vulnerable adults transported by this method require more special assistance than other Metro Mobility riders*); (2) lift-equipped vans, regionally owned, made available to providers who competitively bid to operate service within defined geographic areas, providing door-to-door service; and (3) curb-to-curb taxi service for ambulatory riders who qualify as seniors or transit disadvantaged to receive scrip, or coupons, for travel by this means. Analysis is underway to define these options in more detail and present them to advisory committee members for input. The RTB's efforts in this regard may need to be endorsed by the legislature, before such changes are enacted.

D. Support legislative initiatives of other agencies that will result in improvements to Metro Mobility

Initiative: Revise Mn. Stat. 252.478 (Metro Transportation Support Grants) to allow reimbursement for clients using more cost effective alternatives to Metro Mobility for trips to and from day training and habilitation centers. This initiative is expected to be supported by the Department of Human Services.

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Initiative: Revise Mn. Stat. 299A.12 (Wheelchair Securement Devices) to permit large transit vehicles to be equipped with wheelchair securement devices that may be engaged and released by the riders or the rider's assistant, while unassisted by the driver of the vehicles. This legislative initiative will be carried by the Department of Public Safety and will include a requirement for the Commissioner of Public Safety to adopt rules necessary to set standards for the operation, strength and use of such devices. The recommendation for this change was advanced by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), which last year established an ad hoc committee, including transit operators and members of the disability community, to propose changes in the existing wheelchair securement standards.

II. BUSINESS INCENTIVES

A. Provide transit tax credit to employers who provide ridesharing incentives to their employees.

Objective: To provide employers with a financial incentive to pass on to their employees encouraging them to share a ride to work during peak periods thus reducing congestion, harmful emissions, energy usage and noise.

Rationale: Currently, little incentive is provided to the employers to get its work force to the job site. With this type of incentive in place, a positive educational process will occur and congestion will be reduced.

B. Require that a transit subsidy be offered if free parking at employment sites with over 50 employees is offered within the transit taxing district.

Objective: To ensure that the single occupant vehicle is not given an unfair financial advantage by providing incentives to transit users.

Rationale: Currently, many employers provide free parking to their employees. Typically, this is not recognized as an employee benefit and is not taxed as one. However, if an employer provides a transit subsidy over \$15.00 per month, which is the IRS tax exempt maximum, the employee is taxed on the surplus subsidy.

C. Require employers of 250 employees or more to offer a payroll deduction alternative to employees that wish to use mass transit within the transit taxing district.

Objective: To reduce barriers for obtaining access to mass transportation within the transit taxing district of the Twin Cities.

Rationale: Currently, there are over 300 employers that provide payroll deduction for transit fares to their employees. However, increasing the number of employers providing this service to their employees eliminates another barrier toward transit use.

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D. Require employers, with over 250 employees at a work site, to prepare a TDM plan addressing trip reductions during peak periods.

Objective: To reduce traffic impacts, vehicle emissions, energy usage, and ambient noise levels by reducing the number of commute vehicle trips and miles. The goal is to reduce peak-hour traffic at the work site by 25%.

Rationale: Currently, large employers within the transit taxing district are not required to address any congestion, environmental and/or energy consumption problems that are created by the employee work site.

III. LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT

A. Advocate for a one-cent regional sales tax for transportation with one-half cent for LRT and one-half cent to counties and municipalities to use for transportation purposes.

Objective: Provide an adequate source of funds for light rail transit.

Rationale: At this funding level, construction could begin on an LRT corridor every 12 months. The Central Corridor would be built first and completed in 1997/98.

B. Establish a joint-powers board, comprised of voting members from each of the seven metro counties, the RTB, Mn/DOT, MTC and the Metropolitan Council, to act as the lead agency for LRT final design and construction.

Objective: Establish the organizational structure to design and construct LRT.

Rationale: Create an organization that is representative of the various interests in LRT that can effectively lead the design and construction of light rail transit in the region.

IV. ENERGY CONTINGENCY

A. Require that providers of transit services funded through the RTB be given priority status in receiving fuel through the state emergency fuel set-aside program. Also require that companies and institutions establish ridesharing programs for their employees and adopt other strategies that will conserve fuel during a crisis.

Objective: To have adequate fuel supplies available for essential transit services in order to maintain base levels of service.

Rationale: The RTB is mandated to develop an energy contingency plan, and this initiative is in line with recommendations adopted by the board during 1990 for this plan.

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V. OTHER

A. Modify current legislation (Mn. Statutes 609.855--Crimes Against Transit Providers and Operators) to include publicly funded paratransit providers and operators.

Objective: To expand the scope of current legislation that defines crimes against interference with transit operators and prohibited activities while riding on paratransit services operated with public funds.

Rationale: Current state law does not encompass paratransit providers and operators against "intentionally committed acts that unreasonably interfere with or obstruct the operators of a transit vehicle."

B. Modify legislation to allow Regional Transit Board staff members the opportunity to utilize State Motor Pool Vehicles for official business.

Objective: Provide RTB staff members with the opportunity to use State Motor Pool Vehicles for official business.

Rationale: Some RTB staff members do not have personal cars available to them when they need to travel to meetings; others would prefer not to use their personal automobiles. At this time, only one vehicle is available for staff use.