

6.0 TRANSIT ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the Transit Analysis is to establish a framework for future transit projects and investments that are consistent with the overall goals of the City of Blaine and that of the Transportation Master Plan. Two goals of this Transportation Plan address transit:

Goal 1 – Mobility

The transportation system should offer convenient travel opportunities that will allow people to travel according to their own needs.

Goal 6 – Environmental and Natural Resource Protection

The transportation system should recognize the environmental resources of the region and minimize negative encroachments and disruptions on such areas.

6.2 Existing System

The term *transit* applies to all forms of sharing rides, regardless of whether the service is provided by a public or private operator, organization, or individual vehicle owner, or whether the ridesharing arrangements are formal or informal. Most transit rides, however, are provided by formal transit systems, at least during the morning and afternoon peak travel periods.

Figure 1 shows the existing transit routes and facilities. Metro Transit, Anoka County Traveler, and North Suburban Lines provide transit services in the City of Blaine.

Metro Transit, the transit operating division of the Metropolitan Council, is the dominant transit system in the area. Metro Transit operates regular bus route service in Blaine. The entire City of Blaine is within the Metropolitan Taxing District boundaries and classified as service area IV (outer suburban transit area). Based on this classification, the City of Blaine is primarily served by peak-period express bus service, ridesharing and local circulation provided by smaller vehicles or dial-a-ride type service. Under this concept, buses, park-and-ride vehicles, community circulators and dial-a-ride connect with express operation and service to the Inner Urban/Suburban and Core Transit Areas.

The primary Metro Transit bus stop serving the City of Blaine is the Northtown Mall - a regional shopping center – located in the City’s southwest quadrant between County Road 10 and University Avenue. The Northtown transit center functions as a hub for Metro Transit and Anoka County Traveler bus routes with destinations to downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul.

Route 10 (Central) – This bus route serves the Northtown shopping center/transit hub, Spring Lake Park, Fridley (University Ave.), Hilltop, Columbia Heights, Central Avenue, NE

Minneapolis, and downtown Minneapolis. Buses run approximately every 10 minutes during morning/evening peak (rush hour) periods and 10 to thirty minutes daily.

Route 25 (Silver Lake) – Serves the Northtown Shopping Center, Mounds View, Fridley, New Brighton, Minneapolis (Quarry Shopping Center, Loring Park, Kenwood) and downtown Minneapolis. Bus run approximately every 15 minutes during morning/ evening peak (rush hour) periods and thirty minutes during the midday. There is no evening service and Saturday service is every eighty minutes.

Route 250 (95th Avenue/I-35W) – Express bus service to Lino Lakes, the I-35W/95th Avenue Park and Ride, Mounds View, the County Road H Park and Ride, and downtown Minneapolis (Marquette/11th Street South). Nine buses run approximately every 5 to 30 minutes during the weekday morning/evening peak (rush hour periods); and one midday service. There is no evening or weekend service.

Route 262 – Serves Lino Lake’s St. Joseph’s Church, Blaine’s Centennial Schools and Sun Light Church, Circle Pines, Lexington, Shoreview, Hodgson Road, Rice Street, and downtown St. Paul.

Routes 824/829 (University/Central) – Express bus service to the Northdale Shopping Center, Northtown Shopping Center, Spring Lake Park, Fridley, Columbia Heights, NE Minneapolis, and downtown Minneapolis. Buses run approximately every thirty minutes during the weekday morning/evening peak (rush hour) periods. There is no midday, evening or weekend service.

Routes 827/852 (Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road) – Local/Express bus service to the Anoka Metro Center, Anoka-Hennepin Technical College, Foley Park and Ride, Northtown Shopping Center, Fridley, NE Minneapolis, and downtown Minneapolis. Buses run approximately every thirty minutes during the weekday morning/evening peak (rush hour) periods. Buses run hourly during midday and evening periods. Buses run every 80 minutes on Saturdays.

Route 854 (University/Lyndale) – Express bus service to Northdale Shopping Center, Oak Park Plaza, Northtown Shopping Center, Fridley City Hall, and downtown Minneapolis. Buses run approximately every 7-20 minutes during the weekday morning/evening peak (rush hour) periods. There is no midday, evening, or weekend service.

Route 860 (Hwy 10, I-35E) – Express bus service to Riverdale Park & Ride, Village Ten Shopping Center, Northtown Shopping Center, Mermaid Park & Ride, and downtown St. Paul. Buses run every twenty minutes during the morning/evening peak (rush hour) periods. There is no midday, evening, or weekend service.

Metro Mobility, also a Metropolitan Council operating unit, provides special demand-response service for people with disabilities through contracts with two main private contractors, three county systems and several smaller private providers.

Anoka County Transit Services

Transit services in Anoka County give residents a variety of transportation options, from buses that travel on a scheduled route to dial-a-ride service that offer on-demand service anywhere within Anoka County.

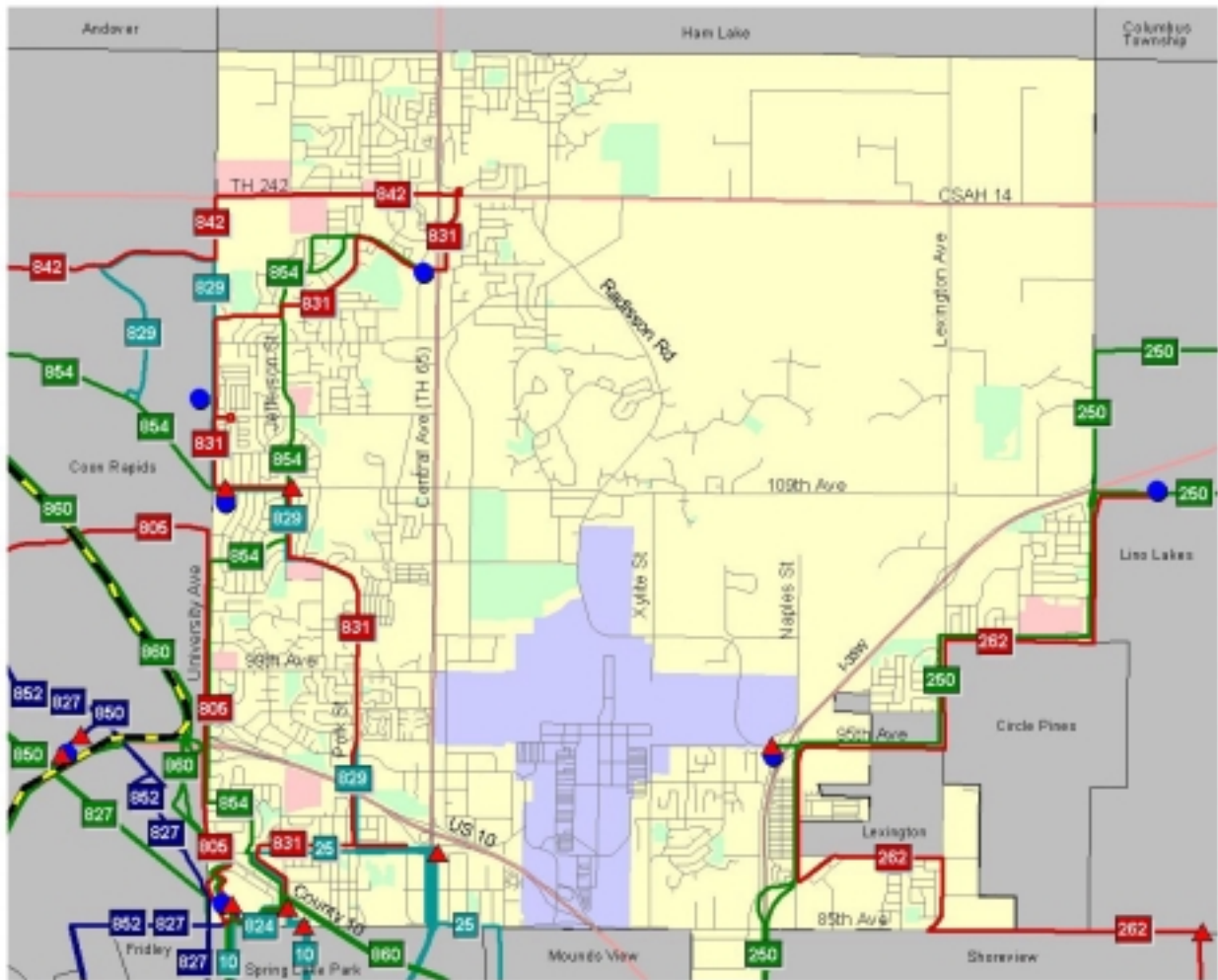
The **Anoka County Traveler** operates four fixed routes throughout portions of Anoka, Blaine and Coon Rapids. Connections can be made to all areas of Anoka County and to the metro area.

Route 805 – Local bus service to Anoka County Government Center, Northtown Mall/Transit Hub, downtown Anoka, Village Ten, Woodland and Winchester Apartments, Health Partners Clinic, Coon Rapids High Schools, Colonial Estates Apartments, University Avenue, Northdale Boulevard, and Riverdale park-and-ride via the Northstar Commuter Coach service. Bus service operates on the hour in the weekday morning (7:30 A.M.) to evening (6:23 P.M.) period. No weekend service.

Route 831 – Local bus service to the Pioneer Village/Cub Foods, Four Seasons, Oak Park Plaza, Anoka County Human Service Center, Rainbow Foods, and the Northtown Mall/Transit Hub. Bus service operates every hour in the weekday morning (6:30 A.M.) to evening (6:40 P.M.) period. Weekend service is on Saturday from 7:00 A.M. to 5:53 P.M..

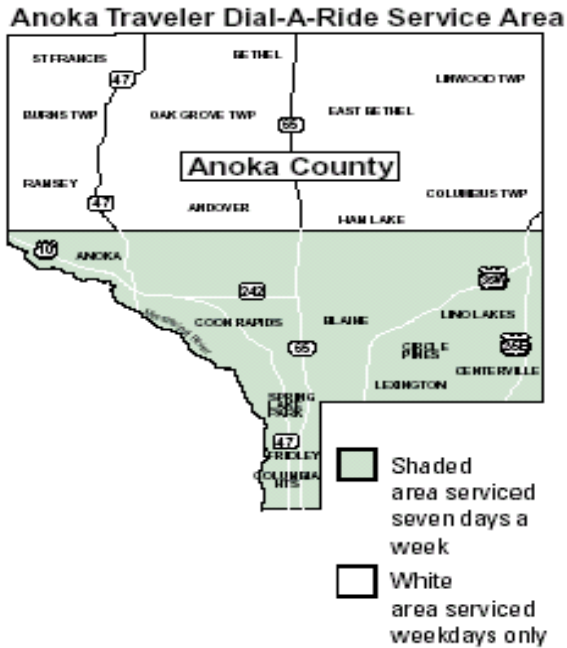
Route 842 – Local bus service to Government Center, Anoka Metro Treatment Center, Blaine High School, and Cub Foods/Pioneer Village. Bus service operates every hour in the weekday morning (6:50 A.M.) to evening (7:15 P.M.) period. No weekend service.

**Figure 6.1
Existing Transit
Routes and Facilities**



Traveler Dial-a-Ride

The Anoka County Traveler dial-a-ride service provides curb-to-curb transportation service anywhere in Anoka County. Anyone can use the service as long as they are able to travel independently. The Traveler dial-a-ride coordinates with the fixed route regular bus service and Metro Mobility to ensure passengers the most efficient and affordable way to travel to other cities and destinations in the Twin City metro region.



Anoka County Volunteer Transportation Program

The Anoka County Volunteer Transportation Program provides rides to and from medical, dental and social services appointments for seniors (60+) and clients receiving financial assistance from Anoka County. Medical and dental trips may be made throughout the metro area, while social services appointments must remain within Anoka County.

Reservations are made Monday through Friday from 9:00 A.M. until Noon. Three to four day advance notice is needed on all requests. Rides are provided Monday through Friday from 8:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.

There is no charge for this service, however, donations to the Volunteer Transportation Program are accepted. A donation is not required to receive a ride.

North Suburban Lines

This operator provides local and express service between northern suburbs (including Blaine, Lino Lakes, Lexington, Circle Pines, Arden Hills, Shoreview, Little Canada, and Roseville) to downtown Saint Paul, Monday through Friday.

Route 213 – Bus service to Lino Lakes, Sunset/North Road (Blaine), Circle Pines, Son Light Church, Circle Pines, North Oaks/Hodgson Road, Shoreview/Rice Street, and downtown St. Paul. Bus service is every forty minutes in the weekday morning (5:30 A.M. to 8:00 A.M.) and evening (4:10 P.M. to 6:15 P.M.) period. There is no midday, evening, or weekend service.

Table 6.1 Existing Park-and-Ride Facilities

Name	Address	Bus Routes	Parking Space Capacity / Utilization
Northtown Shopping Center Transit Hub	85 th Ave. & Jefferson 150 Northtown Drive NE	10, 25, 824, 827, 852, 854, 860, Anoka Traveler 805, 831	340 / 300
Oak Park Plaza	109th & University	829, 854, Anoka Traveler 805, 831	10 / 10
Park of Four Seasons	11300 Block of University Ave. N.E.	829, Anoka Traveller 831	25 / 4
Blainebrook Bowl	Paul Pkwy. & Hwy. 65 12000 Central Avenue NE	854, Anoka Traveller 831	30 / 15
95th Ave. & I-35W	9495 West I-35W Service Road NE	250	56 / 100

Source: Metro Transit, September 2001

Northstar Commuter Rail Coach

The new Northstar Commuter Rail Coach is in vicinity of the City of Blaine and provides nearby transit service at the Riverdale Shopping Center in Coon Rapids. In October 2001, commuters between Elk River and downtown Minneapolis are able to travel to work along the 30-mile corridor via coach-styled buses. Eight trips are made in the morning/evening peak periods. Each bus accommodates about 60-seated passengers, and stop at park-and-ride lots in Elk River and at the Riverdale Shopping Center. The service is a two-years demonstration project that is administered by Mn/DOT.

Park-and-Ride Facilities

There were a total of 140 active park-and-ride lots in the Twin Cities metro area as of the spring of 2001, providing 10,000 spaces. In the City of Blaine there are five park-and-ride lots providing 461 spaces. Table 6.1 lists existing park-and-ride facilities. The utilization of park-and-ride facilities within Blaine is at 93 percent of capacity and the 95th Avenue/I-35W facility strains the existing facility capacity.

Other Existing Transit Services

Transit Incentives Program

There are a number of incentive programs that support the bus transit system, offered through metro area employers that are designed to make taking the bus or joining a car or vanpool more attractive to both the companies and their employees.

The **Metropass** program, which began in the fall of 1998, provides a deeply discounted annual bus pass purchased by employers for employees. Metropass has made a significant impact in ridership at participating companies without adversely affecting system revenue.

Under the **TransitWorks!** program, existing transit passes are sold to an employer at a discount. Employees can then purchase them on-site at the discounted rate, often on a pre-tax basis.

A new program, called **Commuter Check**, provides vouchers that employers can give their employees to purchase transit passes or pay for vanpool costs. A recent federal tax law change allows an employee to use Commuter Checks to purchase transit passes with a pre-tax salary deduction.

Rideshare Services

- **Metro Commuter Services** is the regional provider of travel-demand management services. Working closely with transportation management organizations (TMOs), transit agencies and cities in the region, Metro Commuter Services develops and delivers marketing and educational programs for commuters and employers in the metropolitan area.

6.3 Issues and Opportunities

An examination of the existing transit routes shown in Figure 6.1 shows that large segments of the City are not served by general fixed route service. As the City continues to grow and density of development increases, provision of additional transit service will provide travel options for Blaine residents. In addition to expanded bus service, Commuter Rail and Light Rail Transit may offer long-term transit opportunities.

6.3.1 Bus Service

A new park-and-ride facility is being constructed to replace the over-capacity site at the junction of I-35W and 95th Avenue. The new location will provide 800 parking spaces and is part of the project to rebuild the I-35W and 95th Avenue interchange. A High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) bypass lane will be included on the southbound entrance ramp. In addition, Metro Transit is planning to establish a small feeder bus network from the surrounding area to bring riders into the express bus transit service at 95th Avenue.

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is way to develop a complementary mix of land uses around transit-stations in a way that takes advantage of, and helps to promote transit service, while sustaining neighborhoods and quality of life objectives. The introduction of transit can provide a boost to land development opportunities near stations if there is a strong investment climate and if public plans, regulations and, possibly, incentives are in place. With the right combination of private and public factors, transit station area development can increase ridership, help create interesting, sustainable neighborhoods, and help guide regional growth.

Potential opportunities for enhanced bus service were identified in the following areas:

- TH 65 Corridor
- Radisson Road Corridor/Northeast Area
- Express Service to Downtown St. Paul
- U.S. 10 Corridor

TH 65 Corridor

The provision of bus service on TH 65 has been identified as a need by the Metropolitan Council. A TH 65 bus route would serve the communities of Blaine, Ham Lake, and East Bethel. At this time, funding has not been identified to add the service, however, planning discussions are underway.

Providing bus service to the TH 65 Corridor would likely require development of park-and-ride facilities at strategic locations.

Radisson Road Corridor/Northeast Area

The land use plan developed for the Northeast Area by the Design Center (see Section 3) included higher density residential and mixed-use development adjacent to Radisson Road at approximately the 119th Avenue alignment. This land use plan supports the implementation of transit service along Radisson Road, most likely connecting to the 95th Avenue park-and-ride lot and the I-35W corridor express service.

Express Service to Downtown St. Paul

Only a small segment of Blaine presently has convenient access to express bus service to downtown St Paul. The downtown St Paul area is a significant employment center with a large number of government, business, and service employees. Providing express bus service to the citizens of Blaine who commute to downtown St Paul would provide an alternative to driving.

U.S. 10 Corridor

The U.S. 10 Corridor is currently the subject of an Interregional Corridor Study (IRC) by the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Proposed improvement along the U.S. 10 Corridor include the possibility of express bus transit service on High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes as part of the overall corridor improvements.

6.3.2 Commuter Rail

Commuter Rail service makes use of existing freight railroad tracks to operate passenger service. Commuter Rail service generally operates only in the peak morning and evening hours, although midday service is also provided in some markets. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) is responsible for the development and implementation of Commuter Rail passenger service in Minnesota.

A Commuter Rail feasibility study identified six corridors as having the potential to support passenger service. These six corridors have been prioritized into two groups: Tier I and Tier II corridors. The first priority are the three Tier I corridors: Northstar, Red Rock and Dan Patch. The Northstar Corridor extends from Minneapolis to Rice and is Mn/DOT's top priority. The

second priority is the Red Rock Corridor extending from Minneapolis to Hastings. Dan Patch extends from Minneapolis to Lakeville.

The three Tier II corridors are expected to be implemented sometime after 2020. The three Tier II corridors are the Rush Line (St. Paul to Hinkley), Norwood-Young America (Minneapolis to Norwood-Young America), and the Bethel Corridor (Minneapolis to Bethel).

The Northstar Commuter Rail line extends 82 miles from Minneapolis to Rice. Passenger trains would use the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) tracks. There are eleven stations proposed along the line. The two nearest train stations to the City of Blaine are located in Coon Rapids. The Foley Park and Ride Station is located north of Foley Boulevard and the Riverdale Station is south of Riverdale Commons along Northdale Boulevard. Bus transit service from the Northtown Transit Center to the Coon Rapids commuter rail station is also planned.

Preliminary engineering was completed in June 2001, however, further project development and implementation are currently on hold pending resolution of funding issues. Passenger service was expected to begin in late 2005 but will likely be delayed.

The Bethel Corridor extends from Minneapolis to Bethel. It would be contiguous with the Northstar Corridor from Minneapolis to Coon Rapids where the Bethel Corridor alignment continues to the north, roughly parallel to TH 65. As a Tier II corridor, implementation is expected sometime after 2020. There are presently no studies ongoing or planned for the Bethel Corridor.

The implementation of Commuter Rail service may have a positive impact on Blaine's transportation system. Specifically, the Bethel Corridor has the potential to attract riders who would otherwise drive to their commuting destination. The Bethel Corridor is generally parallel with TH 65 and could provide a transportation option to commuters from the northern communities of Ham Lake, Andover, East Bethel, and Oak Grove. The BNSF rail line continues north of Bethel to Isanti and Cambridge and expansion of the potential Commuter Rail service should be considered.

6.3.3 Light Rail Transit

The first Light Rail Transit (LRT) line in the Twin Cities is currently being constructed. The Hiawatha LRT line extends from downtown Minneapolis to the Mall of America in Bloomington. The Hiawatha LRT line is scheduled to be open in 2004. A feasibility study is presently being conducted for an LRT line from downtown Minneapolis to downtown St Paul.

Potential additional LRT lines are currently being studied along the Central Corridor and the Southwest Corridor. The Central Corridor connects downtown Minneapolis, through the University of Minnesota, to downtown St. Paul. The Southwest Corridor extends from Minneapolis through St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka and Eden Prairie. Previous planning studies had identified the TH 65 corridor as a potential LRT route. These plans are now outdated and there are presently no plans or initiatives for a TH 65 LRT line. It may be appropriate at some point in the future, however, to consider LRT as one element of a long-term multi-modal solution for the TH 65 corridor.

6.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations support the goals of providing travel options for the citizens of Blaine. Figure 6.2 illustrates components of the future transit system.

Bus Service

The City of Blaine should support the implementation of expanded bus transit service in the following areas:

- TH 65 Corridor
- Radisson Road/Northeast Area
- Express Transit Service to Downtown St Paul
- U.S. 10 Corridor

Commuter Rail

The City of Blaine should support the implementation commuter rail service, including the Northstar Corridor as the first element of Minnesota's Commuter Rail System Plan. The City of Blaine should also encourage Mn/DOT to consider acceleration of the timetable for development of the Bethel Corridor. Commuter Rail service on the Bethel Corridor may offer a multi-modal solution to traffic congestion issues along TH 65.

**Figure 6.2
Future Transit System**



RABSONS

Blaine Transportation Plan