

Transit Services and Multimodal Transportation Infrastructure

Within Stearns County, transportation services and facilities exist for both transit and multimodal trails.

Existing Public Transit Service

Existing transit services and infrastructure in Stearns County support public transportation, ridesharing, and intercity transportation. Public transit services in Stearns County are provided by two entities, the urbanized area is served by the St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission (Metro Bus). Metro Bus provides fixed-route bus service, dial-a-ride service, and commuter bus service between St. Cloud and the Northstar Commuter rail in Big Lake. In the rural portion of the county, outside of the St. Cloud urbanized area, public transit services are provided by Tri-County Action Program (Tri-CAP), a community action partnership that offers dial-a-ride transit service. In addition to Metro Bus and Tri-CAP, there are other specialized transit providers that offer private transportation or transit services targeted to a specific client base.

Beyond transit services, there are also several infrastructure elements, such as transit centers and park-and-ride lots, which support transit users.

St. Cloud Metro Bus Service

St. Cloud Metro Bus was created by the Minnesota Legislature in 1969 to operate as a Transit Authority. St. Cloud Metro Bus service area consists of the cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park. These communities are served by two divisions: fixed-route and dial-ride. Furthermore, St. Cloud Metro Bus provides transit services for St. Cloud State University (SCSU).

St. Cloud Metro Bus is governed by a board of commissioners made up of five members. Two members represent the City of St. Cloud, and there is one member each from the Cities of Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park. Board members have traditionally included elected Mayors or City Council members. St. Cloud Metro Bus receives funding via local tax dollars, the FTA, and MnDOT. The current composition of operating funding sources for Metro Bus is shown in Table 2-13.

TABLE 2-13: ST. CLOUD METRO BUS OPERATING FUNDS

Funding Source	Amount	Percent of Budget
FTA Section 5307	\$ 859,000	14%
MnDOT (Greater Minnesota Transit)	\$ 1,485,400	24%
MVST	\$ 1,815,600	29%
Local Share (includes fares)	\$ 2,135,883	33%
Total Operating Budget	\$ 6,295,883	100%

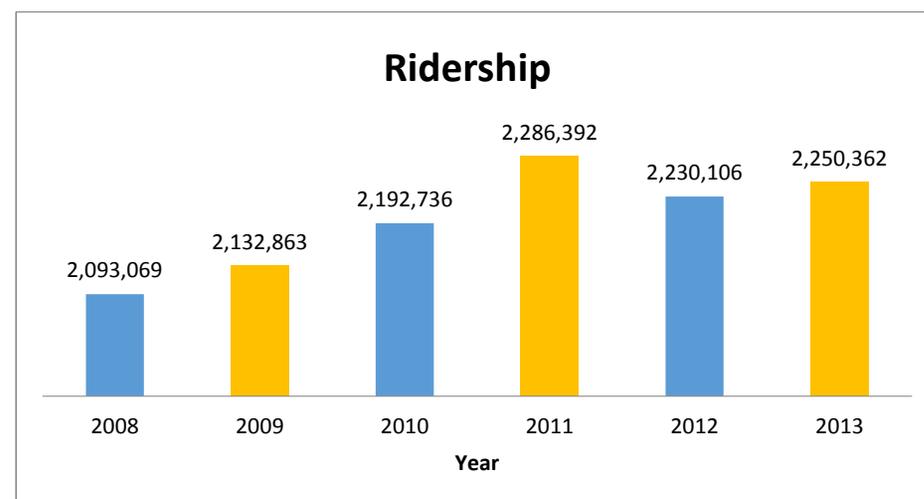
Source: 2013 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota's Transit Systems, MnDOT

Fixed Route Service

St. Cloud Metro Bus operates 21 fixed route services during weekdays from 5:25 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., Saturdays from 7:45 a.m. to 6:45 p.m., and Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Fares are paid on a cash basis, or through the purchase of multi-ride passes. About 43 percent of riders use monthly passes.

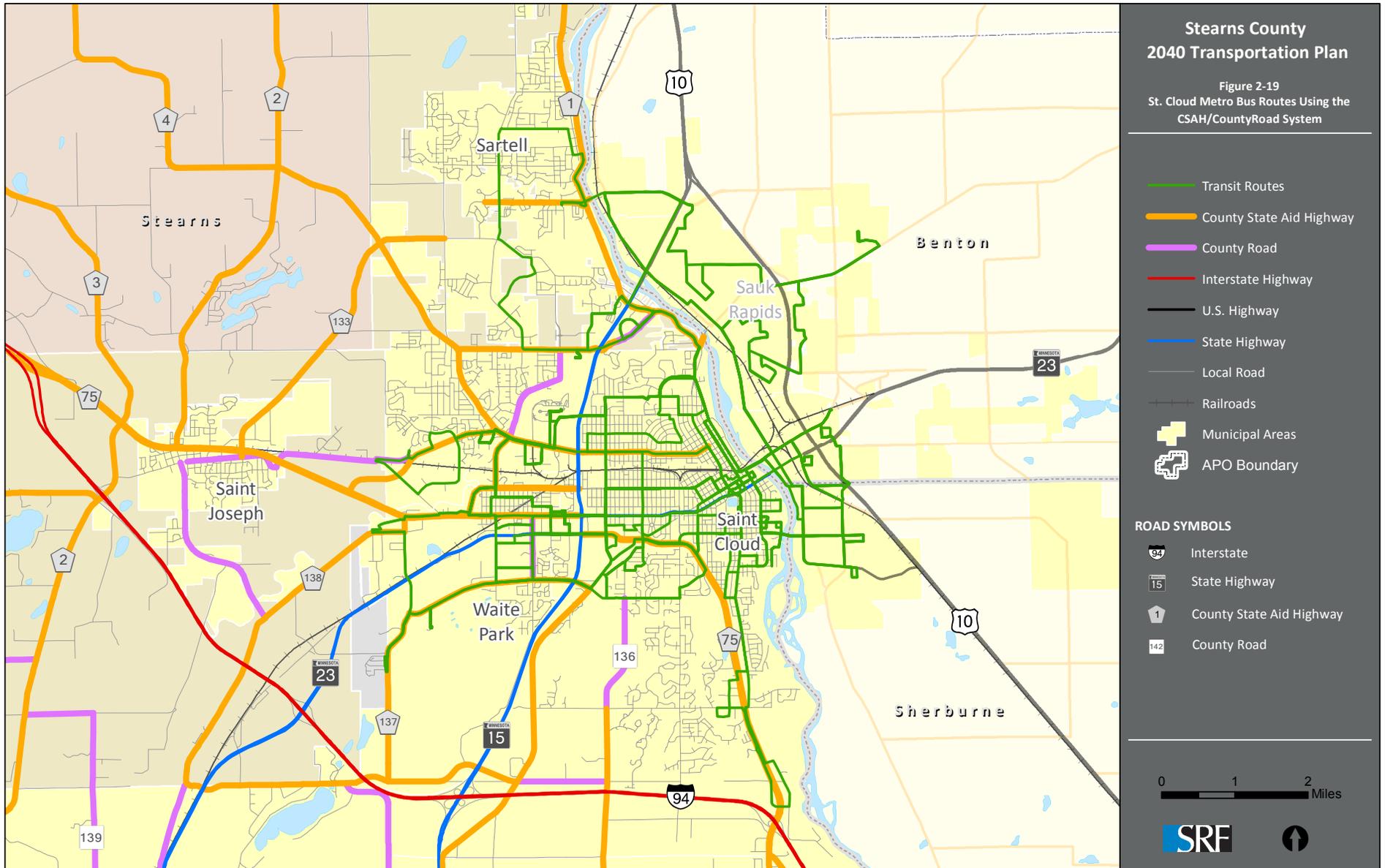
In 2013, there were 2,250,362 fixed-route passenger trips made on St. Cloud Metro Bus (see Figure 2-18). The interaction between St. Cloud Metro Bus and the Stearns County roadway network is also displayed on the following page (see Figure 2-19).

FIGURE 2-18: ST. CLOUD METRO BUS FIXED ROUTE RIDERSHIP



Source: 2013 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota's Transit Systems, MnDOT

FIGURE 2-19: ST. CLOUD METRO BUS ROUTES USING THE CSAH/COUNTY ROAD SYSTEM



Dial-a-Ride Service

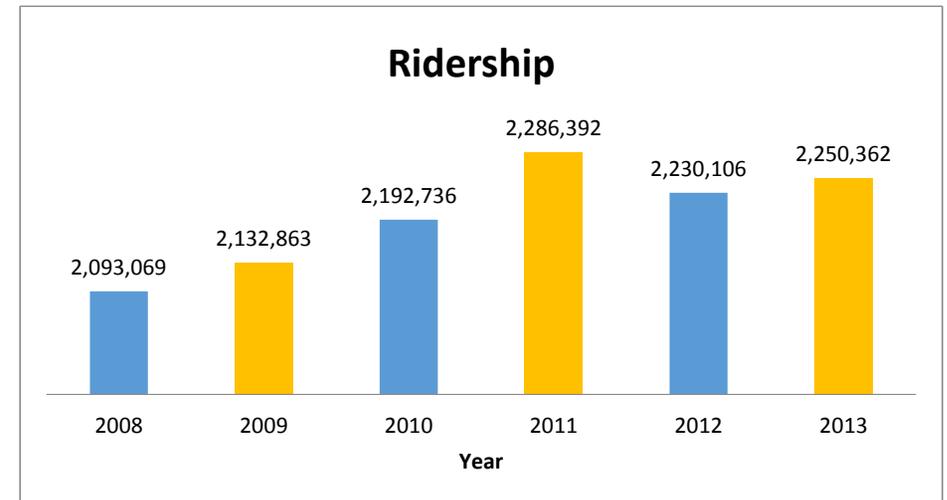
St. Cloud Metro Bus Dial-a-Ride service is a driver assisted, door-through-door, shared bus service for people with disabilities. This service complements the fixed-route bus as per the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As of 2014, the fleet consists of 22 vehicles.

Those that are eligible to use the service are unable to board, ride, or alight a bus in the fixed route system due to a disability or physical barrier. People who use personal oxygen supplies or ventilators may also be eligible for dial-a-ride service. It is subject to the requirements of the ADA, and operates comparable hours to the fixed-route service. Dial-a-ride operates on a shared-ride basis, meaning that trips are coordinated and scheduled pick-up and drop-off times are set to accommodate the most efficient amount of passengers. The dial-a-ride service area is shown in Figure 2-21.

People can request trips by making a reservation with St. Cloud Metro Bus. Reservations can be made up to seven days in advance. Subscription services are also offered for those that wish to reserve set trip times over a longer term. Furthermore, St. Cloud Metro Bus conducts community outreach and travel training to assist those with disabilities in learning how to use dial-a-ride services and fixed-route services.

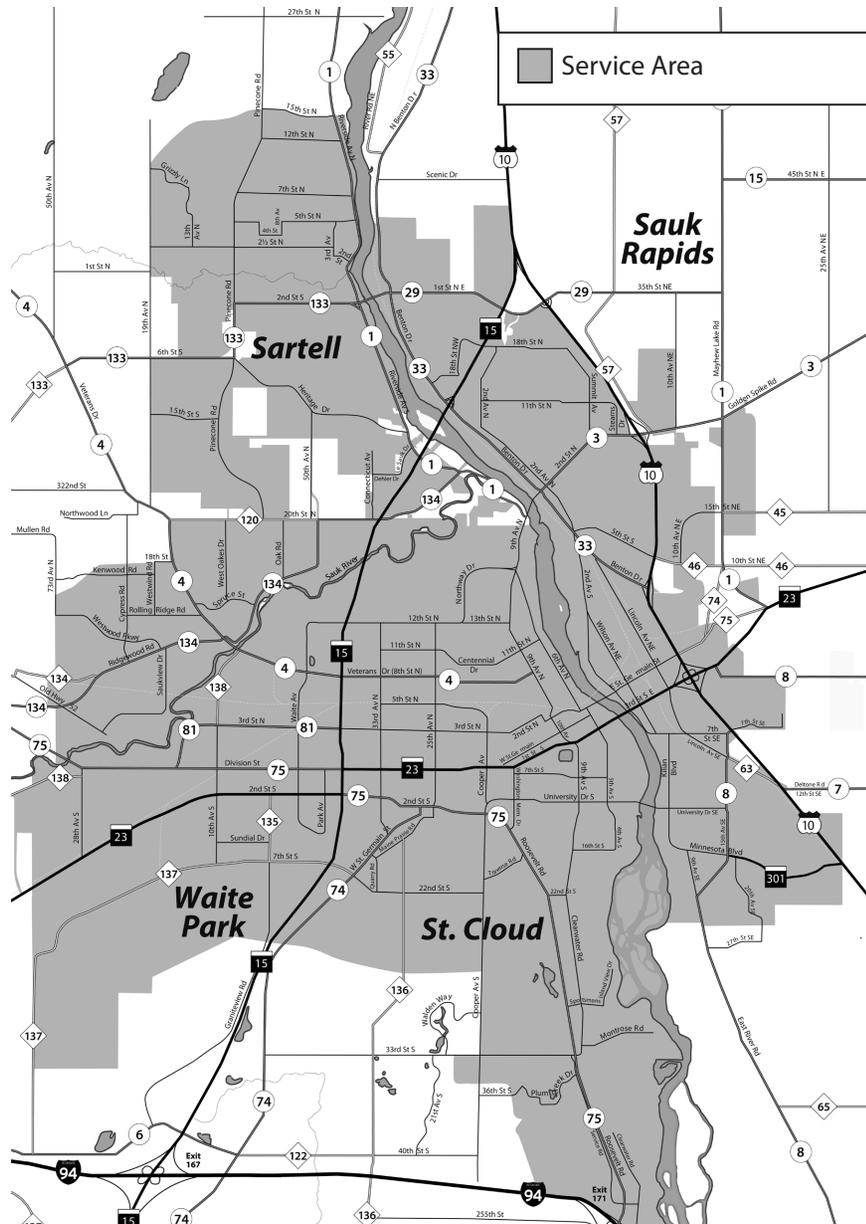
In recent years, there has been a decline in dial-a-ride ridership (see Figure 2-20) This decline reduces the availability of dial-a-ride services to the general public, reducing extended service hours, and training passengers to use fixed-route services where they are able to use both.

FIGURE 2-20: DIAL-A-RIDE RIDERSHIP



Source: 2013 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota's Transit Systems, MnDOT

FIGURE 2-21: DIAL-A-RIDE SERVICE AREA



Northstar Link Commuter Bus

Northstar Link, operated by St. Cloud Metro Bus provides bus service from east St. Cloud direct to the Northstar Commuter Rail Line station in Big Lake. From there, commuters can ride the rail from Big Lake to downtown Minneapolis. The Northstar Link is governed by the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA), a joint powers authority consisting of 30 governmental entities along the Northstar Corridor from St. Cloud to Minneapolis. Stearns County is a funding partner for the operation of this service through its contributions to NCDA. It is currently the only transit service for which Stearns County supports local share of operating costs.

In 2013, the Northstar Link provided an estimated 55,200 passenger trips. Passengers may access the Northstar Link at the following locations:

- St. Cloud Metro Bus Transfer Center (downtown St. Cloud)
- SCSU Miller Center
- East St. Cloud Park-and-Ride (TH 10 at CSAH 63 – Sherburne County)
- Becker Park-and-Ride
- Big Lake Park-and-Ride

On weekdays the Northstar Link makes ten inbound trips (five morning and five afternoon) and ten outbound trips that connect to commuter rail trips in Big Lake. Additionally, there are two daily inbound and outbound trips on Saturdays and Sundays. Furthermore, the Northstar Link operates three special services to supplement its commuter operations:

- Route 887F consists of one inbound and one outbound midday trip that does not connect with the commuter rail line in Big Lake. Instead this service operates the entire commuter corridor into downtown Minneapolis, stopping at all Northstar Park-and-Rides with the exception of Fridley.
- Route 887T and Route 887V are trips that link with Northstar Commuter Rail for Minnesota Twins and Minnesota Vikings games when supplemental rail service is provided. Fares here are the same as conventional weekday service.

Tri-CAP Service

Tri-CAP is the federally designated Community Action Program for Benton, Sherburne, and Stearns Counties. Programs administered by the agency may serve one or more counties, and in several cases, go beyond the boundaries of these three counties. Tri-CAP’s programs include weatherization, financial counseling, housing assistance, vocational training, and transportation services. In 2014, Tri-CAP became the operator of River Rider service based in Sherburne County, which also makes trips into St. Cloud, and has connections to St. Cloud Metro Bus.

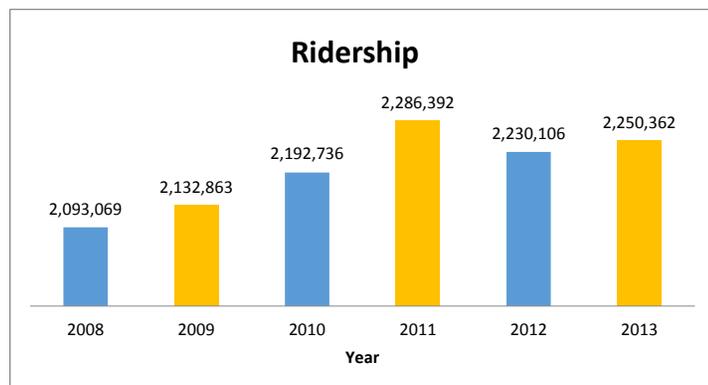
Including its entire set of multi-county transit services, the total operating budget of Tri-CAP is approximately \$954,645 (2012). Funding sources are outlined in Table 2-14, and ridership trends in the Tri-CAP system are shown in Figure 2-22.

TABLE 2-14: TRI-CAP TRANSIT OPERATING FUNDS (2012)

Funding Source	Amount	Percent of Budget
FTA Section 5311	\$ 271,530	28%
MnDOT (Greater Minnesota Transit)	\$ 235,700	25%
MVST	\$ 288,200	30%
Local Share (includes fares)	\$ 159,215	17%
Total Operating Budget	\$ 954,645	100%

Source: 2013 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota’s Transit Systems, MnDOT

FIGURE 2-22: TRI-CAP ANNUAL RIDERSHIP



Source: 2013 Transit Report: A Guide to Minnesota’s Transit Systems, MnDOT

Transit Connection (Rural Public Transit)

The Transit Connection has buses operating in Rural Benton, Morrison and Stearns Counties five days per week, and is operated by Tri-CAP. This bus service is available to the general public with no age or income requirements. All buses are handicapped accessible.

Bus reservations can be made up to two weeks in advance, and it is recommended that passengers make reservations at least one business day in advance of their trips. Transit Connection operates on a dial-a-ride, curb-to-curb basis throughout rural Stearns County outside of the St. Cloud Metro Bus service area.

The Transit Connection operates a fleet of 14 medium-duty buses. The hours of operation are Monday – Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Existing Specialized Transit Services

In Stearns County there are two transportation providers that offer MnDOT funded programs for a dedicated client base, or population other than the general public. This services is known as specialized transit. They are an important part of a coordinated transit network, and provide opportunities for people to connect to jobs, medical appointments, and key services.

Tri-CAP

In addition to its public transit services, Tri-CAP offers mobility management services and a volunteer driver program.

Transportation Resource Center (TRC)

TRC’s mission is to use existing transportation resources to match riders with the most suitable and cost-effective transportation options. The TRC providers could include mass transit, dial-a-ride services, taxi, private driver, volunteer driver, and wheelchair accessible vehicles. TRC services are open to anyone that needs to arrange for transportation in Benton, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright Counties. TRC is supported by MnDOT grants using FTA Section 5310 funding.

Volunteer Driver Program

Tri-CAP coordinates a volunteer driver program where individuals provide rides using their own private vehicles to the residents of Benton, Stearns, and

Morrison Counties. Passengers are assigned to volunteers by the Tri-CAP dispatch center and may be traveling to medical appointments or a variety of other destinations for critical services. Volunteer drivers are reimbursed for mileage and may also be eligible for some meal reimbursements. Passengers contribute to this service on a donation basis. Volunteer rides typically cover long distances to regional medical centers or clinics and are outside of the scope of typical public transit services.

WACOSA

WACOSA is a non-profit organization based in Waite Park that serves more than 575 adults with disabilities in central Minnesota. Most of their services involve vocational training and employment services; however, they also provide classes, physical fitness programs, and senior services. WACOSA receives FTA Section 5310 funding to purchase medium-duty buses and vans to transport clients to job sites and programs. They also coordinate transportation for clients with St. Cloud Metro Bus and Tri-CAP.

Other Transportation Services

In addition to the aforementioned transit providers, there are several other transportation companies in Stearns County that provide private and specialized transportation services. These include:

Intercity Bus

Jefferson Lines is a private intercity bus carrier that makes stops in St. Cloud and connects to a national intercity route network. It offers through connections with Greyhound Lines and Amtrak in Minneapolis–St. Paul. Services are open to the general public and are accessible; fares vary based on distance traveled. Scheduled services in St. Cloud are operated daily.

Medical Transportation

Medical transportation companies provide trips for the specific purpose of medical appointments or other health care services. Fares are most commonly paid through insurance reimbursement, Minnesota Medicare or Medicaid Services, or through private pay. In many cases these providers are part of a coordinated public transit and human service transportation network.

Care Cab is a medical transportation provider that operates throughout

Minnesota. Services are on-demand and Care Cab accepts insurance, Medicare, and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) reimbursements. The service is also open to the public.

Another example of a medical transportation provider includes Medi-Van. Their service area varies based on trip purpose and fleet availability. It is a provider of stretcher service in Stearns County, and can provide specialized care while in medical transport.

Private Taxi and Van Providers

Yellow Cab of Central Minnesota provides metered taxi service in all of Stearns County. It will travel at metered rates throughout central Minnesota and make trips to MSP airport. Yellow Cab operates 24 hours a day and 7 days per week.

Another example of a private provider includes Country Care-a-Van. Country Care-a-Van is a demand response accessible transportation provider that is based in Sartell, and will travel throughout central Minnesota. Priority is given to people with disabilities in need of transportation. Country Care-a-Van accepts cash, insurance, Medicare, and NEMT reimbursements.

Existing Public Transit Facilities

St. Cloud Metro Bus

St. Cloud Metro Bus owns and operates several facilities. For example, the St. Cloud Metro Bus headquarters and operations center was built in 1985. Over time, the facility has expanded to 77,425 sq. ft. and houses the administrative offices, dispatching, maintenance, and vehicle storage. Another major facility includes the Multimodal Transfer Facility located in downtown St. Cloud. This facility operates as a major transfer center for St. Cloud Metro Bus, Jefferson Lines, rural transit providers, and taxi services.

Another major St. Cloud Metro Bus facility is the Crossroads Center Bus Stop, which was constructed in 2005. This facility offers partially enclosed and heated passenger waiting shelters, and dedicated bus parking and traffic circulation facilities.

The major St. Cloud Metro Bus facilities and services are further supported by more than 50 bus shelters and 700 signed bus stops.

Additionally, in 2014 St. Cloud Metro Bus opened its state-of-the-art Mobility

Training Center where people can learn to use the bus in the comfort of a controlled environment with transit agency staff. It is especially useful for older adults, new transit riders, people with disabilities, and people with limited English proficiency. This also serves as an eligibility assessment facility for ADA paratransit service.

MnDOT Park-and-Ride and Park-and-Pool Facilities

MnDOT uses two different terms to describe these parking facilities, referring to a park-and-ride facility as a site that has transit service, and a park-and-pool facility is a site without transit service. Table 2-15 highlights the existing multimodal parking facilities in Stearns County. An additional park-and-ride facility opened in 2013 at I-94 and CSAH 2. This well utilized paved facility offers 134 striped parking stalls and a LED lighting system.

TABLE 2-15: STEARNS COUNTY PARK-AND-RIDE & PARK-AND-POOL FACILITIES (2010)

Facility	Location	Capacity	Utilization
St. Cloud Northstar Park-and-Ride – Highway 10 and Lincoln Avenue	St. Cloud, MN	146	24 (16%)
Cold Spring Park-and-Pool – Highway 23	Cold Spring, MN	60	8 (13%)
St. Joseph Park-and-Pool– I-94 and CSAH 2	St. Joseph, MN	36	35 (97%)
Albany Park-and-Pool – I-94 and CSAH 10	Albany, MN	28	23 (82%)

Park-and-ride and park-and-pool facilities should also have accessibility features such as paved pads, pedestrian curb cuts, and ramps. The only facility in Stearns County that has these features is the St. Cloud Northstar lot. Other key features of parking facilities include safety items like crosswalks, bicycle facilities, pedestrian scale lighting, sidewalks, lighting, controlled signal pedestrian crossings, and emergency call boxes. In Stearns County the only facility with some of these features is the St. Cloud Northstar lot, with sidewalks, lighting, and an emergency call box. The St. Cloud facility also has a bench, bike racks, shelters, bus route information, and signage. The other Stearns County facilities have clear signage. Albany and Cold Spring also have shade trees. These are all features that make the facilities more customer-friendly and attractive.

It is important to note, the park-and-ride and park-and-pool facilities located in St. Joseph and Albany are currently maintained by Stearns County. Any future improvements will require further coordination and discussions with MnDOT on cost sharing feasibility.

Existing Multi-Purpose/Trail System

Trails can serve both transportation and recreation purposes. Some trail users choose to ride their bicycle or walk to and from work, shopping, or recreational locations as part of a lifestyle choice. People that use a bicycle for transportation purposes rather than recreational purposes are generally more comfortable riding on shoulders of roadways with traffic than typical recreation bicyclists who prefer their separated paths.

Existing Trail System

The existing trail system in Stearns County is primarily composed of three regional trails managed by Stearns County Parks, a state trail managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and local trails managed by municipalities.

Stearns County Parks owns and operates the Lake Wobegon Trail that extends from St. Joseph to the Todd County line and a spur segment that extends from Albany to the Morrison County line. In total, the Lake Wobegon Trail consists of 54 miles of paved trail on abandoned rail corridors. Stearns County also operates the Dairyland Trail, on an abandoned rail corridor between Greenwald and Elrosa for a total of seven miles. The Dairyland Trail is a limestone surface trail suitable for horseback riding, hiking, and bicycling. Additionally the Rocori Trail Board operates the Rocori Regional Trail within Stearns County between Richmond and Cold Spring. This trail is a paved bicycle trail that extends a total of five miles on an abandoned rail corridor.

The one state trail in Stearns County is the Glacial Lakes State Trail, which extends from Kandiyohi County to the City of Richmond. The Cities of St. Cloud and Clearwater each operate local trails. St. Cloud operates the Scenic River Trail and the Beaver Island Trail as paved, bicycle trails. These local trails serve recreational purposes, or as connections to local civic locations such as parks and schools. The City of Clearwater operates a local trail that extends 1.6 miles along the east side of County Road 75 from 27th Avenue East to Manor Drive. The trail connects the sport fields on 27th Avenue East and Riverside Park to downtown.

These trails (county, state, and local) currently provide important regional recreational connections and a safe transportation alternative for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Issues and Opportunities

In addition to the technical analysis completed for the Plan, the County actively sought public input regarding transportation-related issues early in the planning process. The Project Review Panel and Technical Advisory Committee believe that without this input, later plan recommendations and improvements would have had little relevance to residents, business owners, public safety officers, elected officials, and agency staff, and may not have fully addressed the needs of those using the County transportation system. This input also added context to the issues, needs, and opportunities affecting the County's transportation system.

Early in the planning process, a preliminary list of transportation needs and opportunities was prepared by the Project Review Panel for review by key stakeholders. At the early public meeting and at the subsequent four focus group meetings held around the County, citizens were encouraged to add their comments, views, and ideas to this list.

Figure 2-23 geographically highlights the major issues and opportunities identified from the early public engagement process. Overall safety and system conditions were major concerns regarding the County's transportation system.

FIGURE 2-23: STEARNS COUNTY FOCUS GROUP AND PUBLIC OUTREACH COMMENTS

