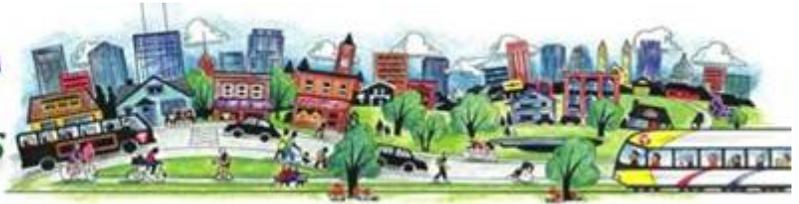


# TRANSIT for Livable Communities



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June 18, 2007

Councilmember Sandy Colvin Roy  
Chair, Transportation and Public Works Committee  
Minneapolis City Council

Dear Councilmember Colvin Roy:

Transit for Livable Communities (TLC) is a community based not-for-profit organization working to improve the quality of life in the region by expanding transportation choices, including more transit, bicycling, walking, and transit-oriented development. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input for your committee's review of the Downtown Action Plan portion of the Access Minneapolis 10-Year Action Plan.

The region will gain almost a million new people in the next two decades, and the impact of this growth provides tremendous opportunities – and challenges – to the region's largest city. Minneapolis must align its plans to capture as much of this growth as possible in a way that preserves livability, increases sustainable economic development and jobs, and protects the health of Minneapolis residents and the environment we live in. The policies, investment priorities, and attitudes of the City must begin to shift now to ensure that Minneapolis in 2017, or 2027, is as vibrant and dynamic as possible. We are mindful of the need at this juncture for constructive compromise. The Downtown Action Plan that you are reviewing strikes a reasonable balance, although we look forward to advocating for more progressive policies and investments throughout the remainder of the Access Minneapolis planning process and beyond.

The Downtown Action Plan first and foremost identifies important changes in downtown transit service and routing that will spur growth in transit ridership. Without these changes the increase in bus traffic alone will hinder access to the downtown, reducing the downtown's appeal as a place to work, shop, or live. While some downtown businesses, employees and residents may need to alter current travel patterns, these impacts are minor compared to the drastic deleterious consequences of maintaining the status quo. The Downtown Action Plan's proposed changes on Hennepin Avenue,

Marquette and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenues, Nicollet Mall, and 8<sup>th</sup> Street work together to increase transit viability and attractiveness, leading to higher mode share for transit.

In addition to its support of the Downtown Action Plan overall, TLC offers the following comments about specific issues raised by the Plan:

**1) Maintain transit east-west service in the core of the downtown, preferably on a transit spine on 8<sup>th</sup> Street**

In addition to the light rail corridor running east-west through the downtown, it will be important to increase east-west bus traffic mobility and ridership. The Downtown Action Plan's earlier proposal to create a transit spine with two-way transit service on 8<sup>th</sup> Street would be an excellent opportunity to attract more transit riders through improved service and accessibility. By focusing two-way bus service on one corridor, the City and agencies can also focus transit amenities and design improvements to increase pedestrian access, attractiveness and comfort. Two-way service would also help transit riders better identify transit access points. By expanding service on a spine several blocks south of the light rail corridor, downtown locations are all within several blocks of both east-west and north-south service.

One proposal raised by some stakeholders is to move east-west transit service to 4<sup>th</sup> Street. TLC strongly opposes this idea, as it would actually discourage transit ridership – moving in exactly the wrong direction. Transit users working, living, or visiting locations south of 7<sup>th</sup> Street would actually be made to walk further than they do today, to a location with fewer transit amenities and less pedestrian traffic. Routing changes by Metro Transit would slow service, further reducing the attraction of transit and likely reducing ridership.

Some business owners have raised concerns about the impact of increased transit and pedestrian traffic on an 8<sup>th</sup> Street spine. There are important challenges that must be addressed – better design, more transit amenities, and increased resources for safety concerns throughout the downtown area. The proposal to focus transit service on a two-way spine however, would allow for concentrated resources at these very locations. In addition, by increasing pedestrian and transit traffic, safety concerns should be mitigated by the impact of “more eyes on the street” – a well-known urban design principle.

**2) The proposed circulator-like service on Nicollet is a good compromise of transit needs**

The competing interests for travel on Nicollet Mall are significant, even without auto traffic. TLC is interested in a long term plan that allows for much greater bicycle and pedestrian traffic, in addition to no-emission transit service where possible. The compromise Nicollet service plan developed by Metro Transit and described in the Downtown Access Plan balances the need for local transit service accessibility with

important circulator-like amenities for visitors and shoppers. The use of low-emission, hybrid vehicles is essential to this plan.

**3) Develop more comprehensive and specific planning for infrastructure and policies that improve safety and access for bicyclists**

TLC has provided comments previously to the Access Minneapolis Steering and Technical Committees and to the City Council. (See TLC comments from 3/22/07 and 4/10/07, included in the Summary of Public Workshops – Series 3: Downtown Transportation Action Plan). Many of the concerns about access and safety for bicyclists have been addressed in revised Downtown Action Plan. In particular, specific implementation steps to improve bicycle/pedestrian safety on Hennepin Avenue were identified.

While we support the adoption of the Downtown Action Plan in its current form as a way to move forward, we also understand that neither the Downtown Action Plan nor the comprehensive Access Minneapolis city-wide study will be complete until Pedestrian Master Plan and Bicycle Master Plans are completed and amended to the study. The Pedestrian Master Plan has been funded through TLC's Bike Walk Twin Cities Program and will begin later this year. The City must also seek funding this year for a comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan that will address all of the concerns cited in TLC's previous comments, as well as the comments of the City's Bicycle Advisory Committee.

**4) Clearly identify specific mode share change goals in the transportation plan and its component parts**

The Downtown Action Plan cites the City's Sustainability Plan in identifying a goal of alternative transportation mode share of 67% by 2013. While this is an important medium term goal, we believe it is important to identify short term modal targets within the Downtown Transportation Action Plan in order to assure predictable accountability. The Access Minneapolis implementation framework is an appropriate place to include short term mode-specific targets.

In conclusion, we strongly support adoption of the Downtown Action Plan, and hope you will adopt our specific recommendations. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions, or would like more information on TLC positions or recommendations.

Sincerely yours,

Carol Flynn  
Program Committee Chair  
TLC Board of Directors

Lea Schuster  
Executive Director

cc: Transportation & Public Works Committee  
Office of the Mayor  
Charleen Zimmer, Public Works

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