



Bus Stops as Community Assets



HUMPHREY SCHOOL
OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Capstone Paper

In Partial Fulfillment of the Master Degree Requirements
The Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs
The University of Minnesota

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May 4, 2018

May 1, 2018

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Bus Stops as Community Assets

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	7
Section One: Project Overview	11
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Definitions and Research Questions	
Section Two: Research Summary	19
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing Assets and Positive Conditions to be Leveraged• Negative Conditions to be Mitigated	
Section Three: Vision	57
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bus Stops as Community Assets	
Section Four: Objectives & Recommendations	65
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster Collaboration with Outside Groups• Establish a Model of Community Ownership• Balance Maintenance Costs with the Benefits of Community Ownership• Continue To Improve Communications• Build From What Has Worked	
Section Five: Conclusion	85
Appendix	87



Acknowledgments

We express sincere thanks to all those who contributed to the research process for this report and for their contributions to the vision of Bus Stops as Community Assets.

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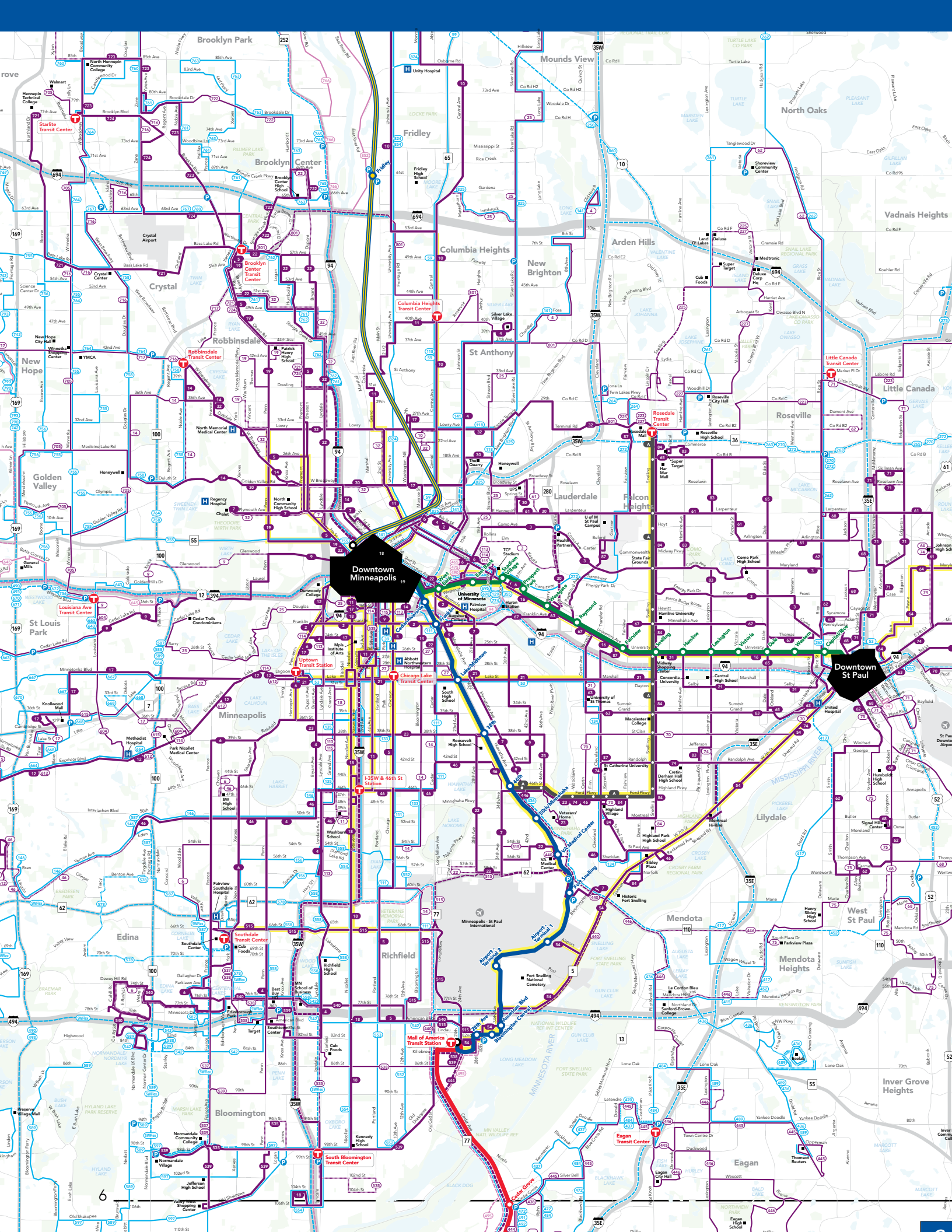
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Downtown Minneapolis

Downtown St Paul

1-35W & 46th St Station

Mall of America Transit Station

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Executive Summary

Metro Transit operates more than 12,000 bus stops over 907 square miles of the Twin Cities region of Minnesota, providing an important service that connects people to the places where they live, work, and play.‡

While bus stops are fairly ubiquitous, their design and placement have come from an utilitarian approach rather than a community asset based approach. Although there is a need for efficiency given the magnitude of the system, the role that bus stops play in people's daily lives and the impact they have on surrounding properties warrant a greater appreciation. There are opportunities to build bus stops into more community-oriented spaces - ones that both contribute to and are cared for by the community itself.

The bottom line is that bus stops are - and have the potential to be further recognized as - valuable community assets.

Determining neighboring stakeholder perceptions of bus stops is a key feature of this report. While there are many studies that show the relationship between riders and transit infrastructure, far fewer detail the feelings of the nearby community (in particular, neighboring businesses and residents). In order to find those missing perspectives, available literature on the perceptions and integration of bus stops as part of the built environment was reviewed, subject matter experts in transit and community

Bus stops are - and have the potential to be further recognized as - valuable community assets.

‡ Metro Transit 2017 Facts. Retrieved from <https://www.metrotransit.org/metro-transit-facts>

development were interviewed, and a field study of over 60 neighboring stakeholders was performed. Each of these research methods have elucidated the positive aspects of bus stops, showing how they contribute to the communities they serve, but have also revealed some of the barriers that prevent bus stops from being held in high regard, which presents opportunities for Metro Transit to improve.

Some of the positive aspects that were shared or discovered included the value that transit accessibility brings for neighborhood residents and businesses and the bus stop's role in contributing to a walkable environment. The primary negative complaints that arose were related to maintenance needs and the attraction of unwanted activity.

To leverage the positive aspects of bus stops, while mitigating some of the negative influences, a list of recommended actions was developed for Metro Transit. These actions generally fall under one or more of five main objectives, which seek to help expand Metro Transit's long-term capability in transforming bus stops into community assets.

Research sources:

- 1. Literature on bus stops as part of the built environment**
- 2. Subject matter experts in transit and community development**
- 3. Field study with over 60 neighborhood stakeholders**

Objectives:

- A. Foster Collaboration with Outside Groups**
- B. Establish a Model of Community Ownership**
- C. Balance Maintenance Costs with the Benefits of Community Ownership**
- D. Continue To Improve Communications**
- E. Build From What Has Worked**

Key to pursuing these objectives will be how Metro Transit determines to dedicate staff time and resources to complete the recommended actions. As the successes of the Adopt-A-Shelter program, Better Bus Stops, and the Public Art program show, the investment made by staff to work alongside the community leads to better transit and contributes to creating a sense of place and community ownership. In addition, building from what Metro Transit already has done offers a chance to transform the agency from a service provider to a community partner, and bus stops from an underutilized transit tool to a valued community asset.



Flickr / Metro Transit

 S Bryant Av

STOP

ALL WAY


30 FEET

BUS






Section One: Project Overview

*This section introduces the primary issues presented by the client Metro Transit, creates definitions for key terms **neighboring stakeholder** and **community asset**, and outlines the research questions that will be explored in this report.*

Introduction

In early 2018, Metro Transit Engineering and Facilities Department partnered with the Transportation's Impact on Community and Economic Development Capstone Course at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs to explore neighboring stakeholder perceptions of bus stops and to generate solutions that maximize the role of the bus stop as a community asset.

Project Context

There is a growing body of work that addresses the transit user's experience of bus stops, including Metro Transit's recent efforts to gather more input from bus riders through initiatives like the Better Bus Stops campaign. By expanding the understanding of the rider's perspective of buses and transit, a space has also emerged to learn more about the experience of bus stops from the perspective of neighboring stakeholders as well. In this report, **neighboring stakeholders** is defined as nearby property owners, business managers and staff, residents, and other users of the space. It is the aim of this project to fill that gap in knowledge and learn more about the perspective of neighboring stakeholders, and to generate solutions that could ultimately enhance the value of bus stops as a community asset.

Who are 'Neighboring Stakeholders'?

nearby property owners, business managers and staff, residents, and other users of the space





Bus Stops as Community Assets

What is a Community Asset?

As the concept of a community asset is fundamental to this project, it should first be defined. A **community asset** is anything that can be used to improve the quality of life within a community. This includes organizations, people, partnerships, facilities and infrastructure, among other things. Any positive or potentially positive resource in the community is an asset that can be leveraged to develop effective solutions to emerging issues.‡ This definition is informed by the Asset Based Community Development approach to community development and capacity building.

Asset Based Community Development

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) identifies and builds upon underutilized assets that are already present to some degree within the community. It mobilizes individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to build upon those assets, rather than simply inventory and address the varied needs of the community.§ There are multiple advantages to an ABCD approach, some of which include:

- It changes the narrative - ABCD focuses on the assets and resources that can be lifted up rather than just the problems and weaknesses present in a community, which can foster pride in community over disillusionment
- The process itself is actually an asset - The process of partnering with community organizations and individuals to identify assets and collaborate toward common goals creates a web of relationships that

What is a 'Community Asset?'

anything that can be used to improve the quality of life within a community

(organizations, people, partnerships, facilities & infrastructure, etc.)

‡ Center for Community Health and Development. (2018). Chapter 3, Section 8: Identifying Community Assets and Resources. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas. Retrieved April 12, 2018, from the Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/conduct-concerns-surveys/main>.

§ Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute. (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2018, from <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx>

strengthens community processes and institutions, and builds agency and capacity to act

- It can maximize the return on investment - Public institutions are already stretched thin with regard to the services they can provide on their own, and increasing the capacity of community members and organizations to participate can multiply the efficacy of current and proposed assets and services.

In Asset Based Community Development, a community's assets are inventoried and leveraged toward building a stronger community. However, rather than focusing on a particular community, this report focuses on a particular asset - the bus stop - and how it can be leveraged to improve quality of life in the areas around them. Bus stops exist in practically every community in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area; and while they already widely function as community assets, there is potential to both amplify the conditions of the bus stop that enhance quality of life, as well as to mitigate some of the conditions where there is opportunity for improvements.

Furthermore, bus stops are often surrounded by other community assets, but are not meaningfully connected with them. These assets can be aspects of existing physical infrastructure or natural resources, but in many cases may be less tangible cultural resources rooted in neighborhood ties such as the civic energy of individuals and community organizations. As is the case with many public agencies, Metro Transit is in a position in which it has to do more with less. If Metro Transit can tap into adjacent or overlapping community assets exterior to itself, not only can those

ABCD Advantages

- *Changes the narrative*
- *Process itself an asset*
 - *Maximizes Return*

assets contribute to a more positive perception and experience of bus stops, but in helping build the capacity of community partners and highlighting underutilized community assets those positive effects can spillover beyond the boundary of the bus stops and into the community around them.

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Research Questions

Primary Research Question

This understanding of community assets informed the primary research question:

- How can Metro Transit contribute to a more positive perception and experience of local bus stops and enhance their role as community assets for both transit riders and neighbors?

Supporting Questions

The primary research question, in turn, informed three secondary research questions:

- What are the actual perceptions of neighboring stakeholders?
- What factors in a bus stop's environment influence neighboring stakeholder perceptions?
- How can Metro Transit leverage partnerships and community ownership to improve bus stops?

ELL WITH
RESULTS

RESULTS.NET

RE/MAX
RESULTS

BRAD

1768

74A

GRAB
WIN FREE GAS
FOR A YEAR

T
74
Stop 11755





Section Two: Research Summary

This section outlines the methods of research conducted through the process of this project, highlights positive conditions that can be leveraged in fostering bus stops as community assets, and notes negative conditions that need to be mitigated with the same goal in mind.

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Research Summary

To answer the primary research question of how Metro Transit can contribute to a more positive perception and experience of local bus stops and enhance their role as a community assets, it is important to gain an understanding of what is currently valued about bus stops and what problems exist that may prevent them from being viewed positively. To do so, three research methods were adopted, including a review of relevant literature, interviews with subject matter experts, and in-person surveys of residents and businesses near selected bus stops.

The literature review consisted of articles focusing on the function and perceptions of safety at bus stops, measures of crime at bus stops, the economic impact of bus stops, and the potential for bus stops to become focal points of placemaking efforts. The limited number of available articles on the microeconomic impact of bus stops in particular reflects a disparity in scholarly interest when compared with higher-investment transit infrastructure, such as rail or bus rapid transit systems.

Augmenting the literature review were 15 interviews with subject matter experts. These interviews helped identify common issues associated with Metro Transit bus stops, how staff currently engage in community outreach efforts, and what examples exist for programs that enhance local community ownership efforts.

The third research method was an in-person survey to businesses and residents located near bus stops that yielded 67 responses from nine study areas. The formation of the

Research sources:

- **Review of relevant literature**
- **Interviews with subject matter experts**
- **In-person surveys of residents and businesses near selected bus stops**

survey questionnaire and study areas was significantly informed by the main findings from the academic literature and interviews with subject matter experts. The main findings of these three resources are summarized in the following sub-section, while an in-depth account of the survey methodology and a statistical report of the results are presented in a later section designated to the stakeholder perceptions survey.

Findings from the academic literature and interviews with subject matter experts show that many people recognize bus stops as assets that are supported by a number of positive conditions, yet the existence of some negative issues associated with bus stops provide room for improvement as well. Metro Transit can examine ways to leverage the positive characteristics that support or are imbued by bus stops while finding means to lessen or mitigate the negative aspects that exist. The information gathered through these methods are examined in the following two subsections according to their contribution as positive or negative characteristics that can either help or hinder bus stops from being community assets.

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Existing Assets to be Leveraged

Economic Potential

The economic impacts of proximity to transit are highly relevant to the potential for bus stops to be viewed as a community asset. Studies exploring the macroeconomic impact of transit in the Twin Cities have identified a number of notable findings. A 2010 study by the Center for Transportation Studies revealed an increase in approved building permits after the Blue Line LRT project in Minneapolis received a commitment for funding from the Federal government in the form of a Full Funding Grant Agreement. A companion piece to that study revealed the Blue Line LRT project generated a positive price premium for commercial and industrial properties along the transitway, indicating increased demand for certain types of land located in close proximity to transit service. ‡

A 2015 study of the relationship between building permits and the Green Line LRT project revealed that upon receiving a funding commitment from the Federal Transportation Administration, the number of building permits in close proximity increased by 30%, while the value of those permits increased by an average of 80%.§ A 2017 study exploring the impact of the Green Line LRT on housing prices compared prices of single-family homes in close proximity to the Green Line at different phases of the project.◇ After the project received its funding commitment, housing values increased by an average of \$9.20 per square foot and \$13.70 per square foot at different stages of the project. Though they are fairly new in the literature, studies investigating the impact of bus rapid transit in the Twin Cities seem to be suggesting similar

‡ Ko, K., & Cao, X. J. (2010). Impacts of the Hiawatha Light Rail Line on Commercial and Industrial Property Values in Minneapolis.

§ Cao, X. J., & Porter-Nelson, D. (2016). Real estate development in anticipation of the Green Line light rail transit in St. Paul. *Transport Policy*, 51, 24-32.

◇ Cao, X., Lou, S. (2017). When and how much did the Green Line LRT increase single family housing values in St. Paul, Minnesota?. *Journal of Planning, Education and Research*, pp. 1-25.

results. Though the overall impact of these findings is obscured by such complicating factors as gentrification and displacement, the capacity of transit to generate economic value on the macro-scale is supported by these studies. However, the literature contains comparatively less information on the ability for transit to generate value on the microeconomic scale of businesses and residences that neighbor bus stops.

To better inform the question of the microeconomic impact that a given business might experience due to their proximity to a bus stop, it is helpful to consider studies that focus on the impact of walkability and accessibility on a local area's economic vitality. Both walkability and accessibility are key elements of successful transit-oriented places. Broadening the review of literature to examine the impact of these elements on economic vitality in surrounding areas can potentially fill the existing gap in the literature as it relates to the micro-scale economic impacts for which bus stops may be responsible. For instance, a 2013 study investigating the competition between walkable and car-oriented retail suggests that existing price advantages for car-oriented retailers may be offset by other externalized costs, and that a competitive advantage can emerge for local retailers when their surroundings are sufficiently walkable.‡ Similarly, applicable findings may be gleaned from existing studies that investigate the economic impact of factors similar to, but distinct from, transit. For example, a 2012 study investigating the relationship between Nice Ride bikeshare stations and economic vitality found that "as the number of bike-sharing stations in the Twin Cities has grown,



Pedestrian- and transit-oriented development, Silver Lake

‡ Guy, F. (2013). Small, Local and Cheap? Walkable and Car-oriented Retail in Competition. *Spatial Economic Analysis*, 1-18.

so has the economic activity in the areas surrounding them.”‡

Through the survey data, more qualitative information was heard about how bus stops are contributors to their communities by providing an essential service in getting people to work. Many workers and customers arrive to establishments by bus, creating a needed ingredient in a functioning economy, and even some survey respondents who did not see many customers arrive by bus still understood its value to neighborhood residents.

Placemaking

One characteristic of bus stops that makes them unique among other types of transit infrastructure is their broad distribution throughout the area that a transit operator serves. However, their value is often overlooked in favor of larger, more expensive rail transit investments. Despite this fact, the ubiquity of bus stops in most transit services holds great potential to leverage placemaking activities that can both advertise the availability of transit and enhance the role of bus stops as assets in their communities.

An emerging body of literature is forming with findings on the connection between transit stops and placemaking potential.

‡ Wang, X., Lindsey, G., Schoner, J., & Harrison, A. (2016). Modeling Bike Share Station Activity: Effects of Nearby Businesses and Jobs on Trips to and from Stations. *Journal of Urban Planning and Development*, 01 March 2016, Vol.142(1).

Through placemaking, stations and stops become focal points in a community, especially if there is an associated plaza or public space. Even the station building or the bus shelter itself can be thought of as a place. That is, the use of it can be expanded, in partnership with the local community, to serve other public purposes. The potential uses are boundless, from a café to an art gallery to a venue for performances and markets. In this way, a great station or stop adds value to the surrounding neighborhoods and increases the viability of commercial districts by connecting businesses to commuters and new customers.

- David Nelson in the Project for Public Spaces'
Thinking Beyond the Station:



Skateboard ramp on the side of a transit stop, David Nelson, *Thinking Beyond the Station* Project for Public Spaces, 2014

In particular, the provision of wayfinding, events calendars, and suggestions of things to do in the area surrounding a given transit stop can help connect transit riders with the unique character and offerings of their bus stops. In one study, the example of partnering with a local library to host a summer mobile library at stops in close proximity to parks is given to showcase ideas for improving bus stops by increasing interactions between riders and nearby amenities and activities.‡

In addition to this body of literature that explicitly investigates the connection between placemaking and transit, relevant findings can be discovered in literature that seek to understand the significance of transit in historic patterns of development. In particular, the role that transit stops played in historic streetcar suburbs may have relevant implications for the role of bus stops as a community asset in contemporary society. Early suburban streetcar lines were commonly used as land speculation tools, and would often be built in greenfields with a wave of land development following in their wake. As such, transit stops effectively served as the center of development for new suburban communities and were consequently imbued with a distinct sense of community identity, ownership, and place.

By comparison, regular bus stops have seldom been used for placemaking. Instead, the role of local bus service is typically limited to merely connecting existing destinations rather than leveraging the creation of places that are altogether new. Many of the existing destinations that are connected by regular bus service are oriented towards the use of private

‡ Nelson, D. M. (2014, May 08). Thinking Beyond the Station. Retrieved from <https://www.pps.org/article/thinking-beyond-the-station>

automobiles, and attempts to use bus stops to create place rely on a process of retrofitting these destinations to be conducive to the walkability and accessibility upon which quality transit-oriented places depend.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) literature has taken note of the potential of historic land development practices to inform the sustainable development of attractive, walkable places today. The land use patterns and patterns of connectivity that defined historic streetcar suburbs in the period of time between the late 19th Century and the 1920s seem particularly relevant. When applying these lessons learned to a modern context, it is important to be mindful of the differences between rail transit and regular bus transit. In general, the potential for rail transit to leverage desirable transit-supportive development practices is far greater than that of bus transit. However, some of the findings on stop design from literature focusing on rail transit may be generalizable to bus transit.

Finally, the role of the community in creating places is also quite important. Successful placemaking strategies tend to produce products that support and enhance the existing character of the surrounding area. In order to achieve this reflection, co-production with community members is key. Neighborhood events where community members are able to consider and express their preferences for what constitutes a quality place can serve as rich opportunities for co-production. Ownership and identity are also key factors to success in creating a distinct and welcoming sense of place.

An example of this type of co-production was demonstrated in 2016, when a member of the Lyndale Neighborhood Organization approached Metro Transit with an idea for beautifying an otherwise blank wall at the Nicollet Garage. A member of the neighborhood had recently constructed a sculpture of a dragon that needed a place to be displayed after it had been removed from its previously unpermitted placement alongside a protected bike lane. A representative of the Lyndale Neighborhood Organization approached Metro Transit with the idea of installing it at the Nicollet Garage, and was directed to apply to the public art program. The applicant reported being highly satisfied with the process of securing the necessary approvals, citing the simplicity of the application and the benefit of having a set contact person walk them through each requirement. In this way, Metro Transit helped the neighborhood organization establish a landmark and enhance the neighborhood's sense of identity by finding an approved location for a piece of public art that had previously been located in an unpermitted location in the public right.

Civic Engagement

In seeking to enhance the degree to which bus stops function as community assets, the highly engaged nature of Minnesota's citizens suggests a great deal of potential for partnership and collaboration. Minnesota consistently has some of the leading electoral participation rates in the United States. This was demonstrated in the November 2016 presidential election where Minnesota led the nation with more than 81% of Minnesota registered voters casting a ballot, which was just under 75% of the eligible voting population of the state.‡ Likewise, Minnesota is notable for a culture of public service and engagement that translates into a high rate of volunteerism that has potential to foster a willingness to take on aspects of ownership of community assets including bus stops. A 2015 study by the Corporation for National and Community Service ranked the State of Minnesota second in the nation, only behind Utah, for volunteer activities donating \$3.3 billion worth of services in one year.§ When metro areas were compared in the same study, the Twin Cities had the highest per capita rate of volunteering in the United States.

In addition to the exceptional civic engagement of individual actors in the Twin Cities metropolitan region, there is a rich network of cultural infrastructure to draw upon with existing neighborhood and non-profit institutions to partner with and extend Metro Transit's resources. To begin with, there are 70 neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis, 17 district councils in Saint Paul, and numerous analogous organizations in the suburbs served by Metro Transit that could be potential



Better Bus Stops, Metro Transit
(photo cred West Broadway
Business and Area Coalition, and
JUXTApotion Arts)

- ‡ Hargarten, J. (2017, March 17). Minnesota had the nation's highest voter turnout - again. Here's one reason why. Retrieved from: <http://www.startribune.com/minnesota-had-the-nation-s-highest-voter-turnout-again-here-s-one-reason-why/416247753/>
- § Corporation for National & Community Service. (n.d). City Rankings by Volunteer Rate. Retrieved from: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/vcla/city-rankings-volunteer-rate>.

partners to foster positive relations between bus stops and adjacent stakeholders. Finally, the Twin Cities is home to many hundreds of nonprofit organizations that have been notably active in the community.

Existing Programs

Over the course of the research various existing programs were discovered that either relate directly to bus stops or provide insight into how bus stops can be leveraged to have a more positive impact on their surrounding environments. Some of these programs are currently run by Metro Transit and demonstrate the agency's interest in having a greater influence on improving community space and building relationships.

Adopt-A-Shelter Program

Metro Transit's Adopt-A-Shelter program helps businesses, individuals, community organizations, and schools make a difference in their neighborhoods by "adopting" local bus shelters. The program seeks to complement the regular visits made to shelters by Metro Transit staff with assistance from the community in performing basic clean-up of shelters, alerting Metro Transit to special maintenance needs, and reporting vandalism or suspicious activity. In exchange, adopters receive recognition in the form of dedicated signage with the adopter's name displayed on the shelter, as well as a media release to local newspapers.

For the last seven years, Metro Transit's Adopt-A-Shelter program has been successfully

managed with the investment of a relatively small amount of Metro Transit staff time. Despite this relatively light investment of staff time on the part of Metro Transit, 80 of Metro Transit's 1,000 shelters and bus stop facilities are currently adopted. Of these, approximately 50 adopters are considered active. From the perspective of Metro Transit staff, it is more important to have a larger pool of adopters maintaining a smaller amount of involvement than to have prohibitively high standards for participation that might reduce the pool of adopters. Among the duties of shelter adopters, the most valuable is maintaining a channel of communication between Metro Transit and the community so that Metro Transit's facilities personnel hear about issues directly rather than having issues routed through customer relations. As such, the requirements of Adopt-A-Shelter contracts tend to be fairly open to encourage a broad base of participants.

The Adopt-A-Shelter program has leveraged partnership with a diverse array of participants for a variety of reasons. For many participants, involvement in the program simply formalizes and recognizes the stewardship of adjacent shelters which adopters had already been performing. Examples of this type of adopter include grocery stores and corner stores where business operators recognized the value that the shelter provided for their customers, and naturally took ownership of the space. For other adopters, the opportunity for advertising is a strong motivator. In one specific case, a landscaping company that lacked a brick-and-mortar location to post their own signage donated some landscaping services at a Metro Transit Park and Ride in exchange for the



Adopted shelter, Chicago and Franklin



signage that Adopt-A-Shelter provides.

Where academic literature at times falls short in presenting stories of the positive role that bus stops can play in the surrounding community, the stories that originate in the Adopt-A-Shelter program help fill the gap. One example is a shelter located near 66th Street and I-35W which has been adopted by a family of four. The father of the family takes the bus every day from that location, and the family visits the shelter once a week to ensure that it is generally in a state of good repair. The family has gone so far as to plant flowers at the shelter. Another resident who recently moved to the Longfellow neighborhood of south Minneapolis described his decision to adopt the shelter as being a natural extension of the fact that he catches the bus there every day.

In Brooklyn Center, all 18 of Metro Transit's shelters have been adopted. This high rate of adoption is due, in large part, to the work of one community leader who has championed the program and achieved great success in recruiting local businesses to adopt adjacent shelters. In the case of the shelter adjacent to Cub Foods in Brooklyn Center, the manager explained their interest in adopting that shelter, saying that half of their customers use that stop, and that collaborating with Metro Transit to ensure that it stays maintained is simply good for business.

The success story of Brooklyn Center highlights an important lesson that has been learned from the administration of the program thus far. Adjacent property owners tend to be much more open to the

Opposite: The West Broadway Improvement District has adopted more than a half-dozen shelters, Flickr / Metro Transit

idea of adopting a shelter if the recruitment effort comes from someone within the community, rather than Metro Transit itself. The community leader who has had so much success in recruiting adopters has lived in Brooklyn Center her entire life, and is highly in tune with the changes that Brooklyn Center has faced over the years. As such, the pitch she makes to adjacent property owners is informed by a more intimate understanding of the community than is possible from a more centralized recruitment effort originating from Metro Transit staff.

The Adopt-A-Shelter Program helps businesses, individuals, community organizations, and schools make a difference in their neighborhoods and exemplifies the type of agency-individual partnership that lets community members take some level of ownership over a space, accessing the relatively untapped reserves of time and human resources of transit neighbors and friends that can be prohibitively costly for Metro Transit, but empowering, beneficial, and even fun for the adopters.

Metro Transit Public Art Program

Metro Transit offers the opportunity for arts nonprofits, artists, and community groups to install temporary public art pieces on agency property. To do so, an application must be filed with Metro Transit that includes project description, location, timeline, maintenance needs, details of efforts to build community support, and proof of liability insurance for the installation.



Green Line Public Art. Photos by Eric Wheeler, Metro Transit. (Above and Opposite)



Metro Transit’s efforts to engage local artists to enliven transit stops and infrastructure is a demonstrable step toward placemaking and community building. It also provides a baseline for the type of process and contract necessary to make such partnerships possible.

Better Bus Stops Initiative

The Better Bus Stop campaign, which ran from March 2016 to March 2017, was an initiative focused on improving Metro Transit bus stops and shelters across the region, connecting with users of transit to understand their perspective of bus stops, and engaging transit reliant communities with high levels of concentrated poverty and people of color. With equity as the goal, respondents helped prioritize transit enhancements and identify significant places in the community, as well as commented on bus stop shelter design. It is estimated that 7,000 people participated in Better Bus Stops community engagement process.

During the course of the Better Bus Stops community engagement process, Metro Transit partnered with community organizations that already had trusted relationships with the communities they were seeking to engage. In doing so, a partnership was created that was more authentically based, more effective at reaching the voices of the targeted population, and that helped build the capacity to act of the engaged communities and the partnering organizations. This is a good example of how existing social infrastructure and community organizations can be leveraged in the future, and how more

“Our front porch to our customers is the bus stop. That’s where we present ourselves to our customers really for the first time.”

– Brian Lamb, Metro Transit General Manager

authentic and productive relationships can be forged in the neighborhoods of the Twin Cities.

Bus stops are the “front porch” to transit. As Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb says, “it’s where we present ourselves to our customer for the first time.” During the Better Bus Stops campaign, Metro Transit focused on the bus stop as the bus rider’s gateway to transit. Perhaps another way of thinking about bus stops, a way that might better connect with neighboring stakeholders, is as a gateway from transit to the neighborhood.

Utility Box Art Program

The City of Minneapolis Utility Box Art Program allows for the wrapping of city-owned utility boxes with either pre-approved designs or new artist-created designs.‡ The Departments of Community Planning and Economic Development and Public Works created a guidebook for each design type, containing information on project objectives, eligible applicants, responsibilities that come with the program, and instructions on how to apply.

The program is an example of how a public agency has created a way to transform utilitarian structures into objects that amplify community identity and grow both interest and capacity for different groups to participate in enhancing the built environment. Metro Transit could look to this program as a way to expand the Public Art program to allow for the customization of bus stops through a set of predefined guidelines, using stops as cultural



City of Minneapolis (Spring 2016). Minneapolis Art Wraps Pre-Approved Utility Box Designs. Retrieved from www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-121720.pdf

‡ City of Minneapolis (Spring 2016). Minneapolis Art Wraps Pre-Approved Utility Box Designs. Retrieved from www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-121720.pdf

markers, furthering the notion that bus stops can be gateways to neighborhoods.

The City's Parklet Program

The City of Minneapolis Public Works Department oversees and facilitates a Parklet Program. A parklet is a modular structure that is placed in an on-street parking space as a means to extend the pedestrian realm. Some parklets feature outdoor seating in front of restaurants, for example. The City has three parklets that it loans to businesses, organizations, or property owners each summer through an application process. The City also has a manual for those who wish to construct their own parklet.

The CARAG (Calhoun Area Residents Action Group) neighborhood association is an example of an organization that has created their own parklet. The organization used a charrette process with the neighborhood to design the parklet, inviting community participation, and works with a business each year to host the parklet. The process includes filling out an encroachment permit and naming the City of Minneapolis under their liability insurance.

A relevant aspect of this program, that could lead to a better understanding of how to increase the community ownership of bus stops, is how an agency can take initiative to start a program and that community groups such as neighborhood associations can turn this initiative into momentum. This relationship could lay the foundation for fruitful neighborhood-wide pilot programs between Metro Transit and community groups.

(Opposite) Parklet in public right-of-way. Photo from City of Minneapolis



Adopt-a-Litter Container Program

Another program run by the City of Minneapolis is the Adopt-a-Litter Container program, operated by the Public Works Department. In this program, the City installs a waste bin in a place where the adopter will maintain it for a minimum of two years. The maintenance involves either throwing away trash in their own bin or paying to have it collected separately and keeping the area free of snow, ice, and refuse. Because this program shares a similarity with Metro Transit's Adopt-A-Shelter program, there might be an opportunity to learn how the City has marketed the program and also if there are adopters near bus stops who might be willing to adopt the bus stop as well.



Adopt-A-Litter Container. (2017, March 1). Retrieved from <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/solid-waste/cleancity/adopt-a-litter-container>

Negative Conditions to be Mitigated

Perception of Safety

One of the greatest drivers of negative perceptions of bus stops is the bus stop's contribution to or proximity to nuisances. Among these nuisances, the literature has a particular focus on crime which may be disproportionate with the actual impact of crime on the provision of transit service. A 1999 study examined the relationship between the built environment and crime rates near bus stops. The study found that "crime rates were higher at intersections with alleys, mid-block passages, multifamily housing, undesirable establishments such as liquor stores and check-cashing establishments, vacant buildings, and graffiti and litter." Higher crime rates were also noted where on-street parking was present at intersections. "Positive environmental factors included good visibility and existence of bus shelters [...] and higher rates of vehicle traffic were associated with lower crime rates." The findings of this study may be relevant to informing how the relationship between transit stops and the built environments that they typically inhabit may shape perceived associations between crime and bus stops. More specifically, these findings may suggest that the occurrence of crime is more strongly correlated with features of the built environment that are associated with bus stops, and that correlations between crime and the presence of bus stops may be of a spurious nature.

Correlations between crime and the presence of bus stops may be of a spurious nature.

Loukaitou-Sideris, A., Liggett, R., Iseki, H., & Thurlow, W. (2001). Measuring the Effects of Built Environment on Bus Stop Crime. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 28(2), 255-280.

In addition to elements of the built environment, the literature suggests that perceptions of crime may also be dependent on other factors such as time of day and gender. A 2016 study investigated what aspects of transit stops have the greatest impact on the rider's perception of wait time. The study found that time of day and gender had an impact on perceived wait time, such that wait times felt longest for women waiting during the night time and early morning hours.‡ These findings corroborate with a 1993 study investigating factors that affect perceptions of outdoor public environments. Of particular relevance was the finding that women more commonly rate landscapes as unsafe than men do, but that both men and women prefer landscapes with two or more people.§ The lowest rated landscape for women was the uninhabited bus shelter at dusk. This finding highlights the nuanced relationship between perceptions of safety and transit shelters. The authors explain that a bus shelter can feel treacherous because their confined designs often offer limited means of escape.

Following the literary findings, some survey respondents similarly expressed concerns that bus stops are places that can enable crime. These comments were centralized in certain areas, sometimes even to one particular bus stop within a neighborhood, and usually detailed anxiety over drug use, dealing, alcohol use, loitering, and littering. These problems persist in some regard because offenders can claim to be waiting for the bus to avoid accusations of loitering, when they have no real intention to ride the bus.

A bus shelter can feel treacherous because their confined designs often offer limited means of escape.

‡ Fan, Guthrie, & Levinson. (2016). Waiting time perceptions at transit stops and stations: Effects of basic amenities, gender, and security. *Transportation Research Part A*, 88, 251-264.

§ Nelson, T., & Loewen, L. (1993). Factors Affecting Perception of Outdoor Public Environments. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 76(1), 139-146

“Those People”

In interviews with neighboring stakeholders and Metro Transit’s outreach and street operations staff, a theme of a commonly held sense that transit riders “don’t belong” in the environments where bus stops are located was identified. There are a number of potential factors that contribute to this sentiment held among Metro Transit’s neighbors, some including the perception and reality of crime occurring near bus stops, but also through a culturalized expectation that people do not linger in public spaces.

Compared to cities in other countries, many American cities have a lack of vibrant public spaces where people are encouraged to congregate and spend time. Historical trends, such as urban renewal, white flight, and the privatization of public spaces during the 20th Century contributed, in many ways, to a hostile type of architecture where private buildings are intentionally designed to dissuade outsiders from spending time in spaces that surround them.

The Twin Cities’ status as a mid-sized metropolitan area in a cold climate where the built environment is predominantly oriented around the use of personal automobiles seem particularly conducive to cultivating the sense that people do not belong in the public realm. One striking example of the ways

these factors can contribute to a sense of not belonging is the system of skyways in downtown Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Ostensibly, these skyways are a harmless way to offer refuge from the oftentimes harsh conditions of Minnesota's long, cold winters. However, the skyways may also be contributing to a privatization of what would normally be public space that alienates the people who find themselves outside in the public realm. Additionally, conversations with placemaking experts indicated that people tend to think others do not belong when they are not engaged in any type of activity, whereas people engaging in activity tend to be perceived as "belonging" *moreso*.

Closely related to these factors is the Twin Cities metro's condition of having among the greatest areas of concentrated poverty where 50% or more of the population consists of persons of color (ACP50). According to the Metropolitan Council's 2010 Travel Behavior Inventory, only three percent of trips in the Twin Cities are made via transit. Of those trips, 52% were made by individuals earning less than the area median income, with fully one-third earning less than half the area median income. Given the Twin Cities' pattern of geographic segregation along lines of race and income, it is possible that the commonly held sense that transit riders waiting at bus stops "don't belong" in the places they occupy could be a reflection of underlying socioeconomic biases against people of color and low-income earners.

Maintenance Challenges

In some ways, a natural conflict exists between Metro Transit's goals of keeping its transit stops maintained while unlocking their placemaking potential to be unique, interesting, and reflective of the communities in which they are located. According to the American Public Transportation Association, investing in art and architecture at transit stations has potential to give transit stops a sense of identity and vibrancy that can improve the experience of commuters.‡

The sheer scale of Metro Transit's operations requires that its facilities be standardized so that repairs and replacement can be performed in the easiest and most cost effective manner possible. This standardized approach limits the creative freedom of Metro Transit when it invests in art at its stations, and also limits the degree to which Metro Transit can be flexible when community members and groups propose ideas for enhancing the aesthetics or sense of place at bus stops.

While helping to ensure that stops remain clean and in a good state of repair, this limited flexibility also reduces the degree to which changes to transit stops can be made by the communities that they serve, which could be a helpful factor in unlocking a sense of community ownership that would enhance the role of bus stops as community assets.

‡ Moore, J. (2018, April 10). For transit stations, public art brings both beauty and budgetary concerns. Retrieved from: <http://www.startribune.com/for-transit-stations-public-art-brings-both-beauty-and-budgetary-concerns/479060693/>

Jurisdictional Issues

Much of the potential for bus stops to serve as community assets lies in the relationship they have to the spaces that surround them. However, Metro Transit's capacity to shape those spaces is limited. As a result, the municipalities and agencies that control the areas surrounding bus stops can sometimes make changes that are at cross purposes with those of Metro Transit. For instance, while managing its right-of-way near a bus stop, municipalities may make changes that inhibit the mobility of transit riders by reducing necessary sidewalk widths or placing street furniture in the way of boarding and alighting areas. The inability for Metro Transit to control the provision and location of trash receptacles is another significant jurisdictional issue. Litter is commonly cited as a reason why bus stops can sometimes be viewed as an unwelcome nuisance in their community. However, Metro Transit lacks both the capacity to provide and maintain trash receptacles around all of their stops.

The issue of litter can go beyond the simple presence or absence of trash receptacles near transit stops. In some cases, a city's policies on charging fees for trash collection can produce negative externalities that affect the public realm. While surveying stakeholders that neighbor Metro Transit's facilities, one respondent described their unsuccessful attempt to provide a trash receptacle outside of their office for public use. Over time, this respondent noticed that the receptacle was being abused by people who would use the receptacle for purposes above and beyond

throwing away a simple coffee cup or candy bar wrapper. Instead, it was clear that people had targeted that receptacle as a means to illegally dump large volumes of trash in a manner that abused the respondent's kind attempt to take ownership of the public realm. The respondent cited their location in a low-income neighborhood, as well as the city's policy of charging residents for trash collection by volume as a potential reason for this to have happened. Without a clear understanding or means of communicating the ways that jurisdictional issues affect the role of bus stops as community assets, a lack of coordination between Metro Transit and its partners will continue to limit the perception of bus stops as a community asset.



The placement of this bike rack is bad for everyone. Not only does the bike rack block the bus stop's boarding and alighting area. The close proximity to transit riders waiting for the bus dissuades the cyclist from using the bike rack at all.

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Survey Design

The preliminary analysis and early expert interviews made it clear there was a variety of existing and ongoing transit perception research that focused on the rider perspective. As such, it seemed critical to begin a process to ascertain perceptions of neighboring stakeholders that may or may not personally use transit, but are impacted by proximity to a bus stop location by which they may reside, own, and/or be employed.

Metro Transit clients were consulted to select the study areas. The clients recommended three bus lines that were effective transects of varying urban and suburban portions of the Twin Cities, the 4, the 9, and the 74 bus lines.

There were two basic objectives behind the survey:

1. Determine neighboring stakeholder perceptions of nearby bus stops to explore current conditions.
2. Determine if there was potential for future community stewardship of local transit stops if regarded as genuine community assets.

There was a small sample pilot study conducted in an area impacted by transit, that was explicitly ruled out as one of the primary study areas. This initial modest survey was utilized to get some basic idea of stakeholder perceptions, but more importantly to inform and refine future survey methods by field testing the proposed survey questions before the final field data was collected from the study areas.

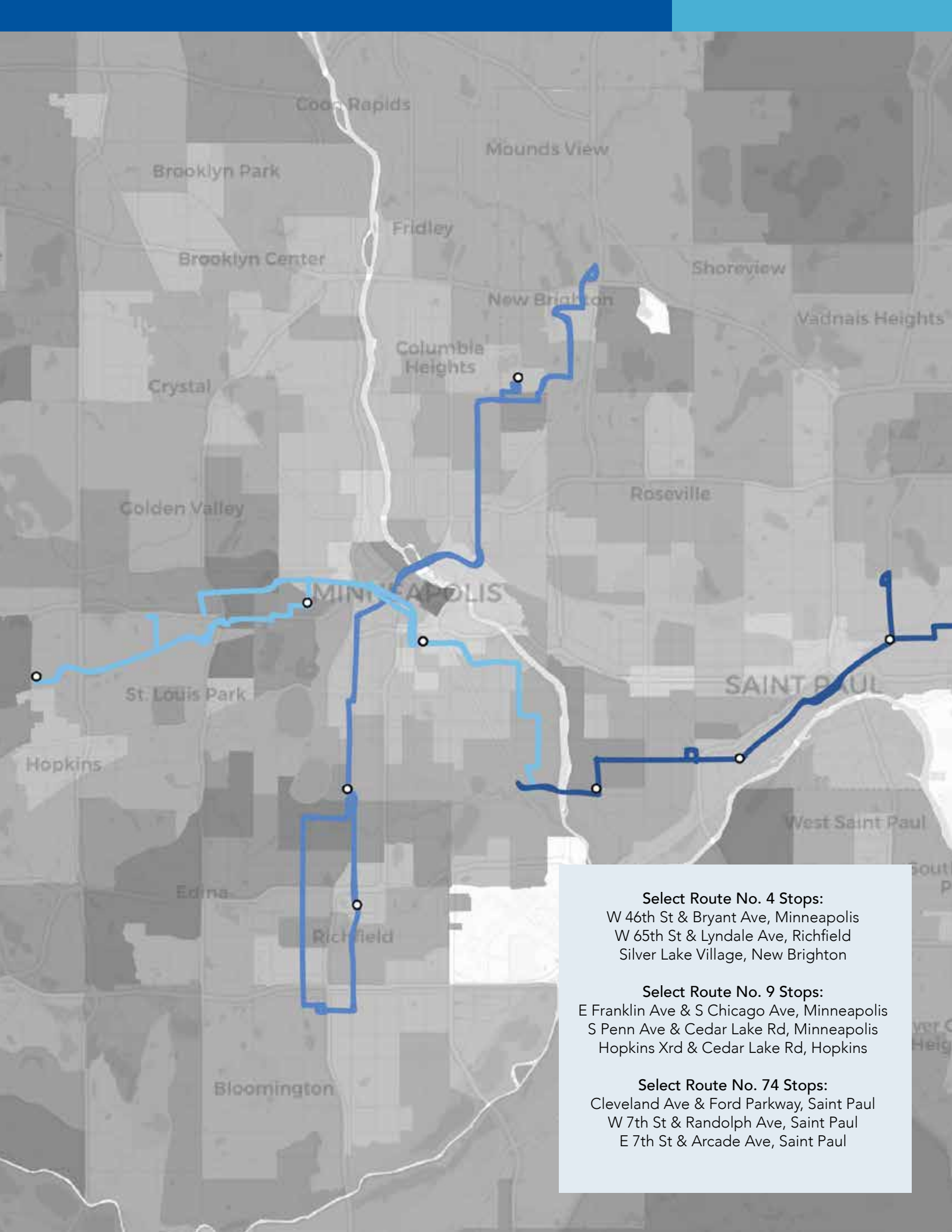
Neighbor Questionnaire
Bus Stop Location

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 being the most, how satisfied are you with your block?
1 2 3 4 5
2. Do you or your neighbors/customers use the bus? For what purposes?
1 2 3 4 5
3. Does the bus stop have a positive or negative effect on your block. If being very negative and 5 being very positive? Why?
1 2 3 4 5
4. How might the bus stops have a more positive effect on the block?
1 2 3 4 5
5. Do you ever find yourself taking care of, or cleaning-up, or keeping an eye on your local bus stop?
1 2 3 4 5
6. If you or your neighbors had the chance to make changes or take care of the bus stop, would you? Why or why not?
1 2 3 4 5
7. What level of involvement or communication would you want from Metro Transit if you were to care for the bus stop?
1 2 3 4 5

Click One: Business owner or Manager Employee Resident Other

(Right) Median household income and bus stops selected for survey.

- Under \$25k
- \$25k - \$49,999
- \$50k - \$74,999
- \$75k - \$99,999
- \$100k and Up



Select Route No. 4 Stops:

W 46th St & Bryant Ave, Minneapolis
W 65th St & Lyndale Ave, Richfield
Silver Lake Village, New Brighton

Select Route No. 9 Stops:

E Franklin Ave & S Chicago Ave, Minneapolis
S Penn Ave & Cedar Lake Rd, Minneapolis
Hopkins Xrd & Cedar Lake Rd, Hopkins

Select Route No. 74 Stops:

Cleveland Ave & Ford Parkway, Saint Paul
W 7th St & Randolph Ave, Saint Paul
E 7th St & Arcade Ave, Saint Paul

From lessons learned in the small pilot study, the survey questions were refined in consult with Metro Transit. The research group selected three study areas each from the three recommended bus lines for a total of nine areas meant to represent a diverse transect of Twin Cities urban environments served by bus transit. From those nine study areas, the research team conducted a total of 67 surveys. For further details see the survey methodology section in the appendix

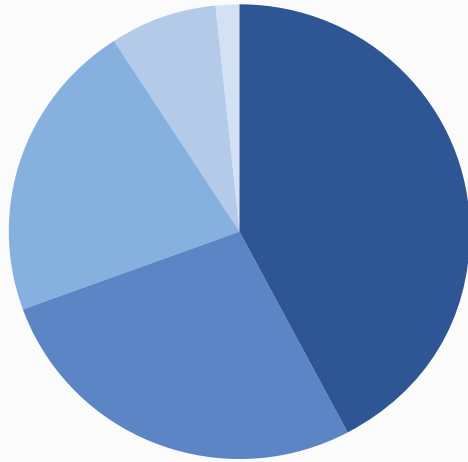
Study Area Selection

Metro Transit staff was consulted in the process of identifying study areas. Bus routes that passed-through a diverse set of neighborhoods with respect to socioeconomic and racial makeup, and built-form attributes were identified. The lines finally identified were routes 4, 9, and 74.

A set of variables were crafted to identify a diverse range of bus stops for the survey. First, the study areas in total should include both commercial and residential uses. Second, surveyed bus stops should be diverse in demographics, specifically with race and income. Third, the survey should include areas that are both dense and urban, as well as dispersed and suburban. Finally, stops that serve as transfer-points between routes should be surveyed in addition to stops that do not serve as transfer-points.

Considering the variables listed above, commercial nodes around the region were identified and analyzed. A median household income map and a simplified neighborhood racial makeup map were compared with commercial property throughout the Twin Cities region. Small business nodes were identifiable in the central cities and inner-ring suburbs, but were not as easily identifiable farther from the core.

Bus Stops as Community Assets Stakeholder Survey Results



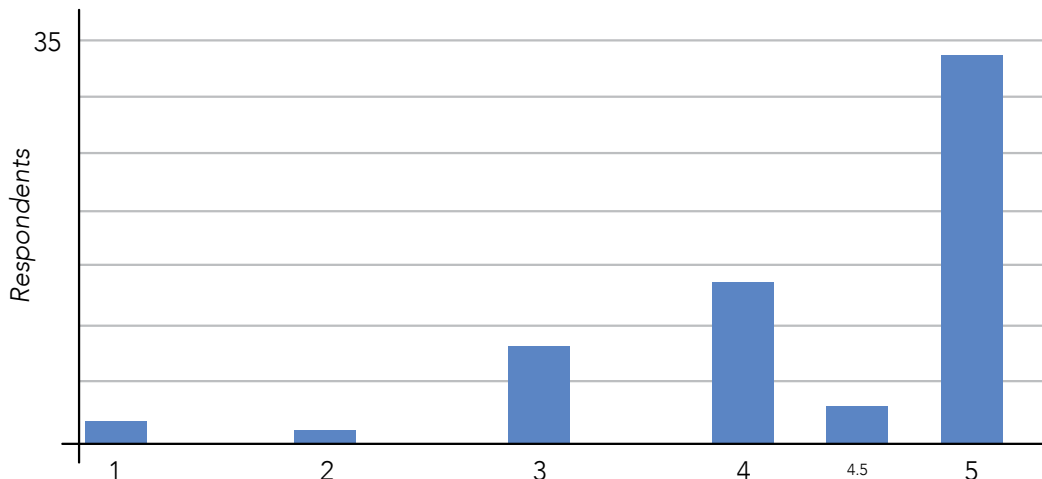
Survey respondents role in bus stop neighbor establishment:

Employees - 28
Managers - 18
Owners - 14
Residents - 5
Patron - 1

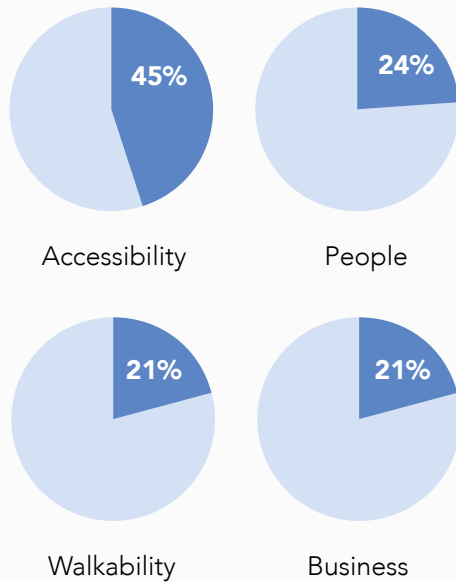
The aggregated statistics from the stakeholder survey reveal genuine capacity and potential to facilitate bus stops as community assets. The five point scale to ascertain how stakeholders perceive their neighborhoods shows a large majority of the responses were overwhelmingly positive with a median value of 5.0 out 5.0.

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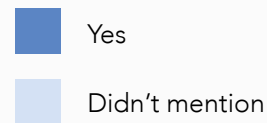
Neighborhood Satisfaction
(on a scale from one to five... five being the best')



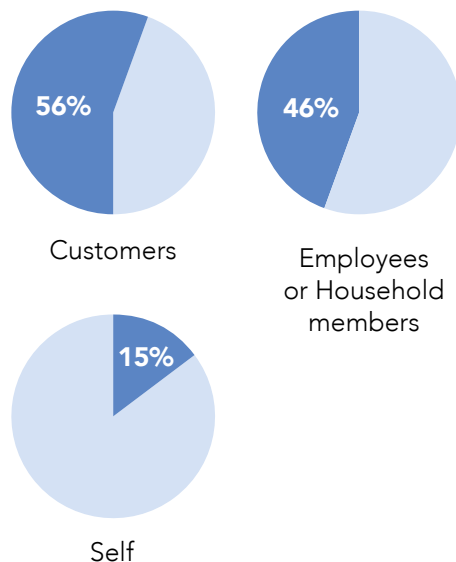
When thinking about *Neighborhood*... respondents mentioned importance of...



The chief factors that created positive perceptions included access, community cohesion, shopping and business factors, and walkability.

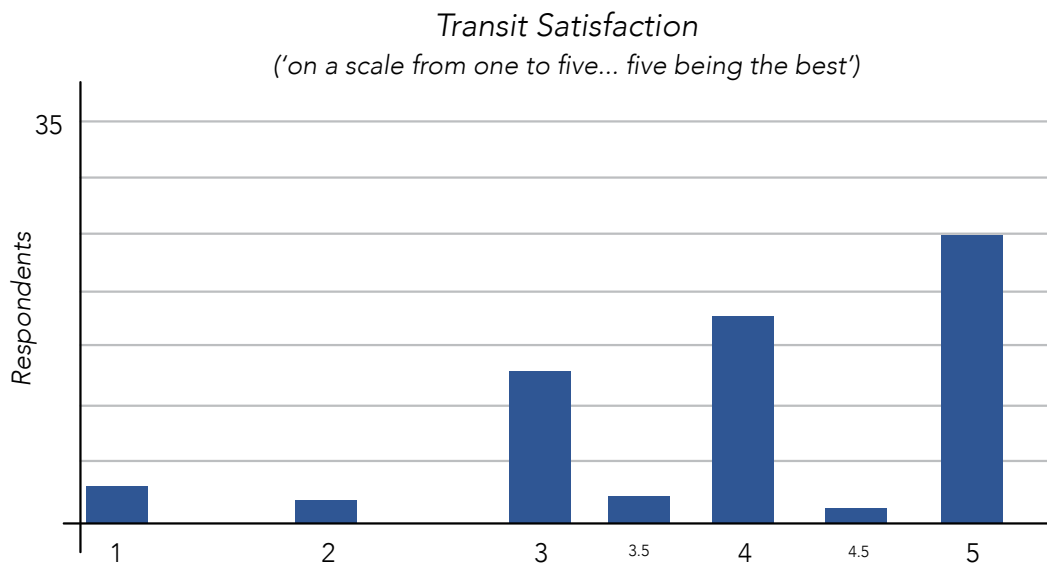


Percentage of respondents' who said customers, employees or household members, or themselves used transit.

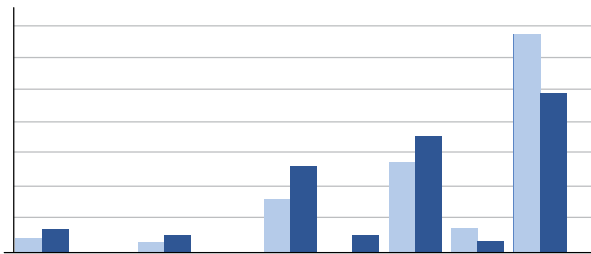


The interview subjects recognized transit's value in most cases despite the fact less than 15% reported being regular transit users themselves. Greater numbers recognized transit usage by others in their area with 46% reporting their co-workers or fellow household members used the Metro Transit system. An even larger share, 56%, knew or perceived at least some of their neighbors and customers relied on public transit to some degree.

However, as far as overall perceptions of transit are viewed, there is room for improvement. The five point scale about transit impact on their block revealed a median value of 4.0 on the five point scale.



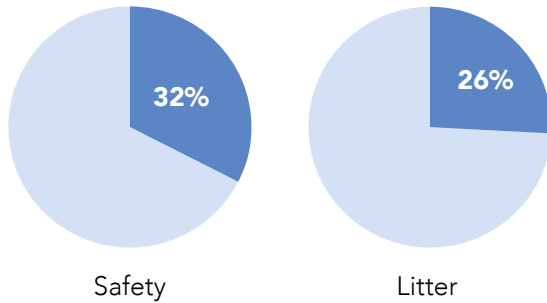
Comparison of Neighborhood to Transit



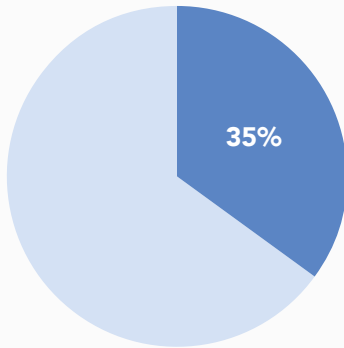
Neighborhood perceptions dominated transit perceptions for the values of 4.5 and 5.0 on the Likert scale. Likewise unlike neighborhood perceptions, the primary influences people cited as the basis of their transit perceptions were fundamentally negative.

Transit Satisfaction
 Neighborhood Satisfaction

Concerned about...

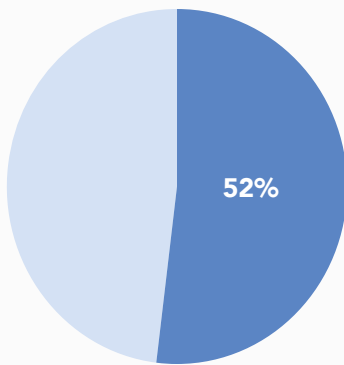


The most common sentiments revolved around crime and safety issues by 32% of stakeholders and concerns public transit adding to problems of litter by 26%. Whether these safety and trash concerns are misattributed, reality based, or most likely in between, it is clear Metro Transit could improve its messaging to refocus on its positive impacts in the Twin Cities.



Already taking care in some form

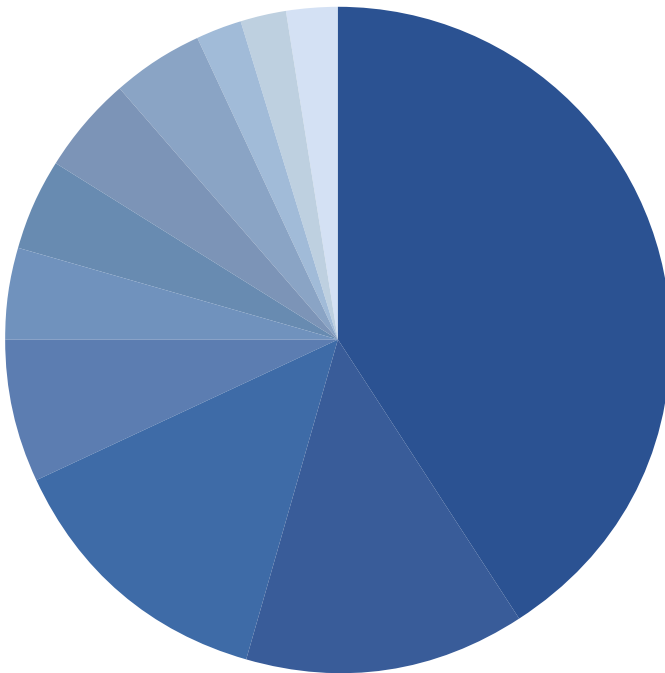
Related to the perceptions of litter, when stakeholders were asked if they ever performed any form of bus stop maintenance, 35% responded affirmatively. That indicates that in some cases volunteer labor to maintain or improve the value of bus stops is already occurring.



Expressed some interest

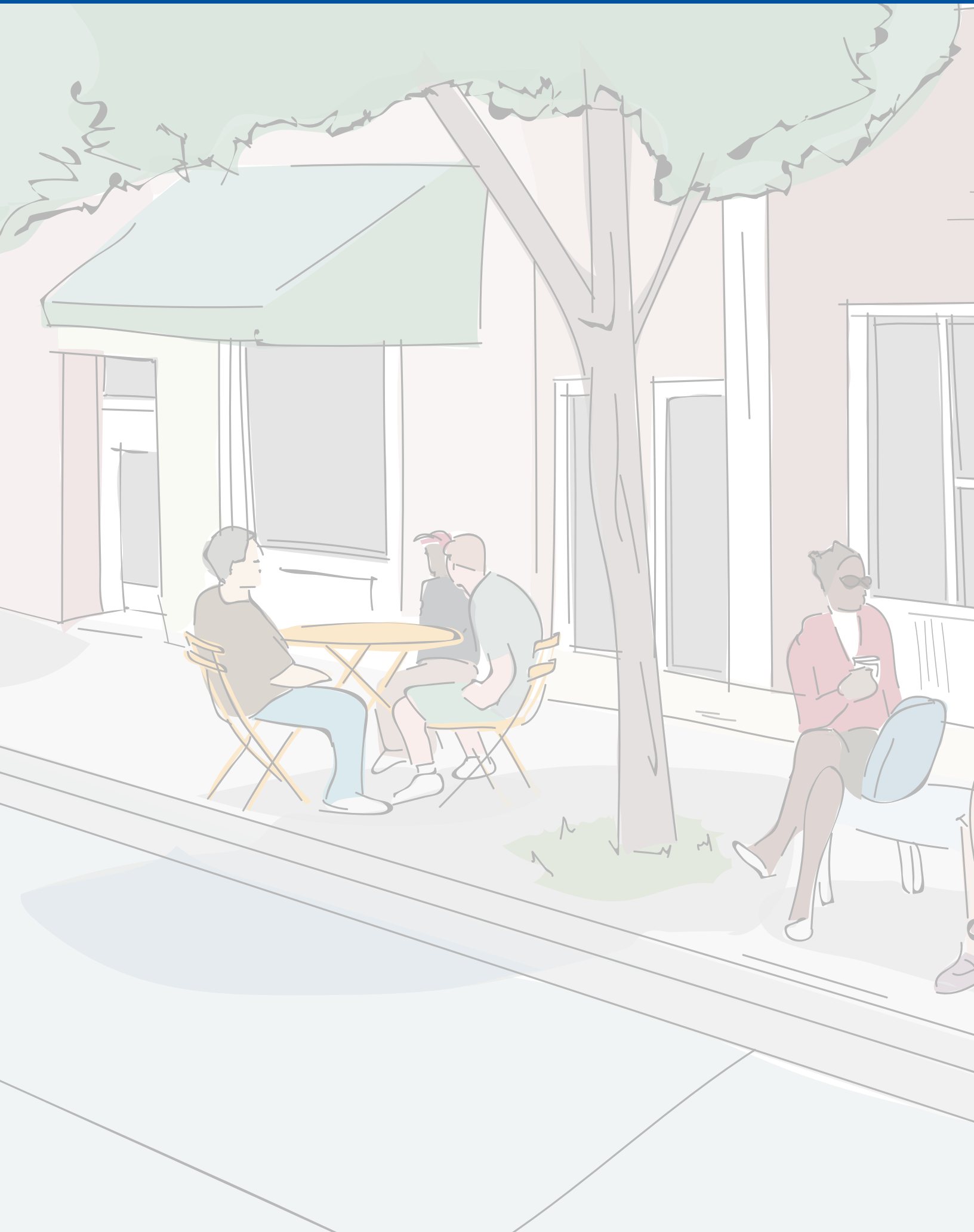
The follow up question if stakeholders would be interested in regular maintenance for some form of public recognition showed even more potential capacity for local collaboration, with 52% of stakeholders stating interest in such a hypothetical civic engagement program.

The final question asked what communications channel stakeholders would prefer if they need to connect with Metro Transit about neighborhood problems directly related to transit stops. Despite the rapid change in communications technology in recent decades, the number one desired channel was phone contact by a wide margin, 40%.



Preferred channels of communication:

- Phone - 18*
- Website - 6*
- No Need - 6*
- Face-to-face - 3*
- #311 - 2*
- USPS - 2*
- Not sure - 2*
- Talk to boss - 2*
- Email - 1*
- Police - 1*
- Transit police - 1*



An illustration of a bus stop. A person is sitting on a bench on the left, holding a cup. In the center, a person wearing a green apron and a purple bag is standing and looking down at a green bag on the ground. The bus stop has a blue roof and a red circular sign on top. The background shows a building with windows and a door.

Section Three: Vision for 2030

A 2030 Snapshot of Bus Stops as Community Assets



19B OLSON HWY

Vision: 2030

The year is 2030. Metro Transit and its observers have reported a notable increase in measures of rider satisfaction, the number of riders that choose transit, and the amount of positive feedback from members of the community that neighbor transit stops. In addition to large-scale investments in LRT and BRT, much of this success has been attributed to a bottom-up initiative to better understand the direct experiences of riders, residents, businesses, and organizations that neighbor Metro Transit's most common type of infrastructure - the local route bus stop. The insights gained from studying these basic community assets have produced three outcomes in particular.

#1 Metro Transit Knows and Works Closely with Its Allies

In order to produce the most positive impact on the community possible, Metro Transit works closely with a network of allies from across the region to collaboratively address the diverse array of issues that Metro Transit encounters as it works with its neighbors to keep bus stops maintained. Originally, much of this network was developed through simple, low-cost programs like the Adopt-A-Shelter program, which uncovered stories of everyday acts of stewardship that were being carried out by residents and businesses alike to strengthen the community fabric around bus stops. In time, similar relationships were formed with larger organizations, such as neighborhood and business associations, community groups and nonprofits. By keeping a caring eye on nearby bus stops, communicating when issues arise, and performing light maintenance when appropriate, the social infrastructure that has

developed around bus stops has established itself as one of Metro Transit's most valuable resources as it works to provide the safest and most dignified service for the community that it can.

#2 Metro Transit Encourages and Cultivates Community Ownership

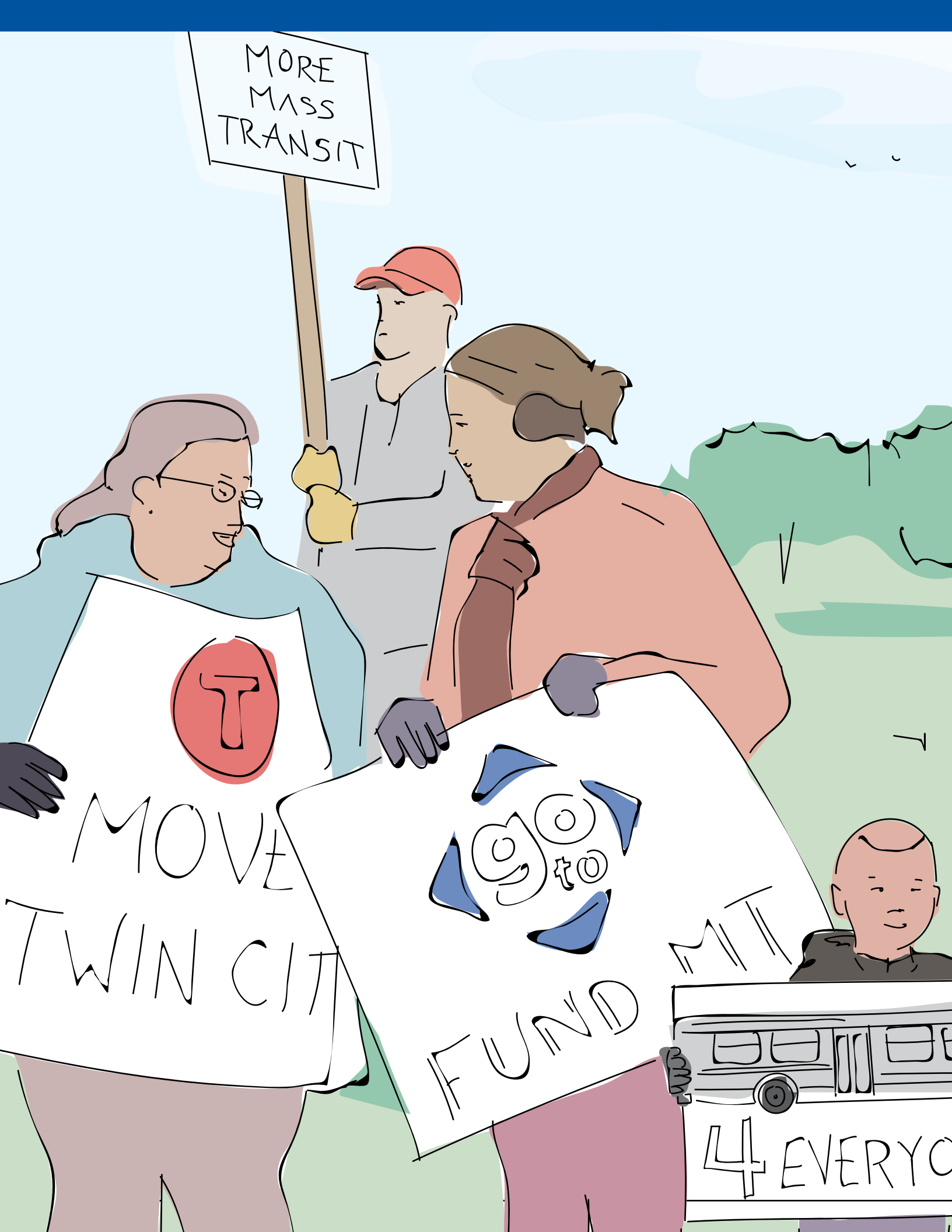
As the social infrastructure of collaboration strengthened within the communities that Metro Transit serves, a greater interest in opportunities to take ownership of the physical realm within and surrounding bus stops has taken root. These opportunities range from simple changes like planting flowers to larger changes like building pergolas and parklets next to bus stops where neighbors can wait for the bus in comfort and style. More and more bus stops are starting to reflect the unique identities of the neighborhoods that they serve, such that bus stops now serve as the bedrock for many of the Twin Cities' most interesting public places.

#3 Grassroots Support Enables Long-Term Planning

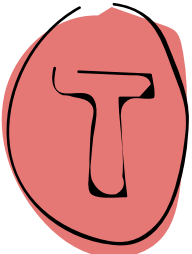
With the value of transit acutely recognized by a broad base of transit supporters, the semi-annual debate around transit funding at the state capitol is vastly different than it had been in the past. Elected officials know that any step taken to reduce the stability of investments in the transit system will be swiftly met with careful scrutiny from a broad and deep base of actively engaged transit advocates. The

greater certainty around funding produced by this clearly articulated and effectively organized body of political support enables the type of quality, long-range planning on which an efficient and effective transit network relies. In this way, what started as a bottom-up effort to better understand the way that riders and neighbors experience transit's presence in the community has helped Metro Transit ascend to the ranks of the world's most effective transit operators.

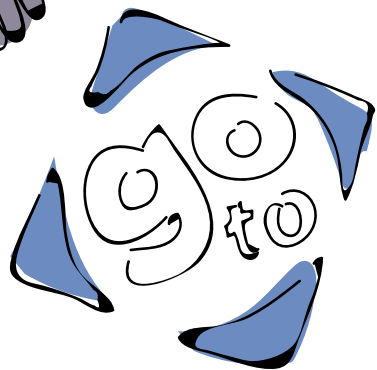




MORE
MASS
TRANSIT

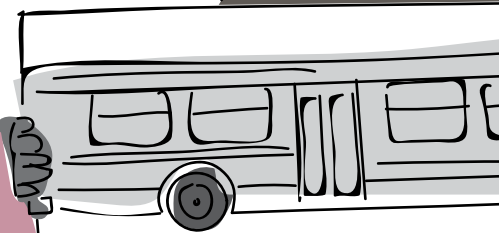


MOVE
TWIN CITY

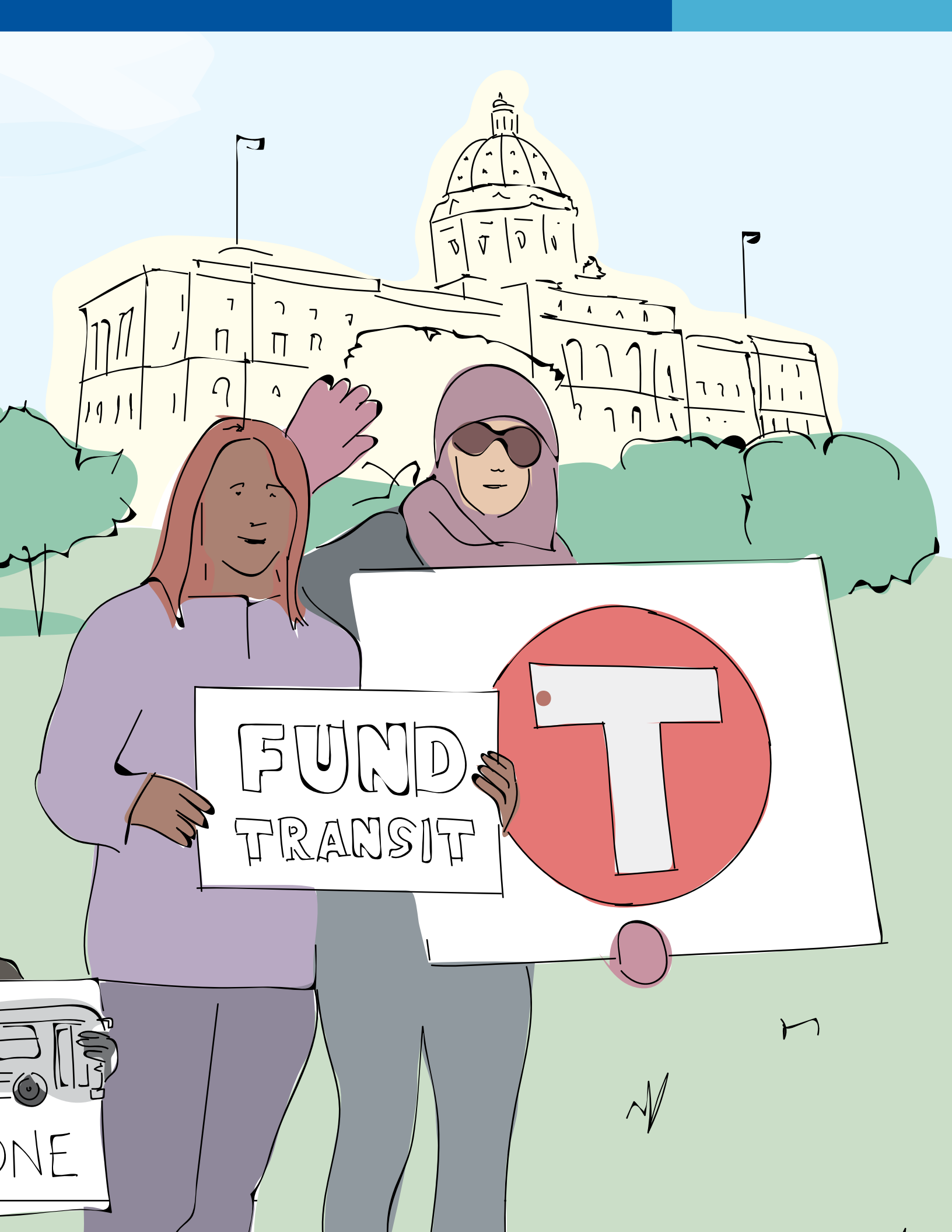


FUND

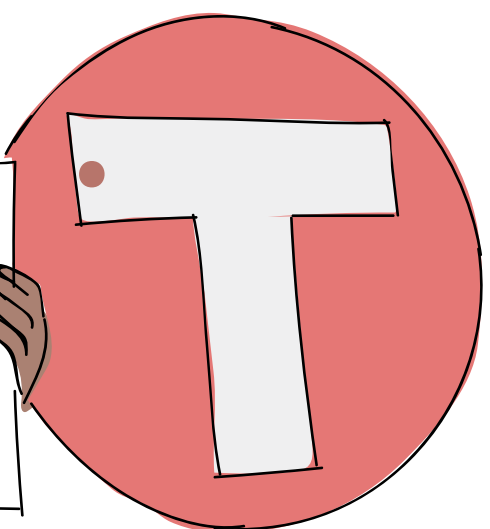
MTA



4 EVERYONE



FUND
TRANSIT



I

2



? TRANSIT INFORMATION

Fares and Information

Transit System Map

Route Schedules

3321

A yellow Metro Transit bus is shown from a front-three-quarter view. The destination sign above the windshield displays '768 DOWNTOWN'. A sign on the front bumper reads 'RAGSTOCK'. The Metro Transit logo is visible on the front of the bus. The background is a blurred street scene with utility poles and streetlights.

Section Four: Objectives and Recommendations

Building upon the diverse body of research that included a stakeholder survey, expert interviews, and thorough review of relevant academic literature, five broad key objectives have been identified to guide paths forward to bus stops as community assets. To move towards these objectives there are 11 specific recommendations to be thoughtfully considered for implementation or expansion by Metro Transit.

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Objectives

In order to achieve this vision for the future, Metro Transit will need to make strategic investments towards five key objectives:

A Foster Collaboration with Outside Groups

B Establish a Model of Community Ownership

C Balance Maintenance Costs with the Benefits of Community Ownership

D Continue To Improve Communications

E Build From What Has Worked

The pursuit of these objectives through a set of recommended actions can leverage the strengths of existing organizations and programs, improve lines of communication between Metro Transit and stakeholders, and build a sense of community ownership over bus stops. Metro Transit will need to consider how it will invest staff time and resources to take these steps, whether it be through the hiring of a full-time position dedicated to building up and maintaining a community of bus stop advocates or whether the tasks can be divided and managed within existing staff responsibilities.

A

Foster Collaboration with Outside Groups

In order to create the conditions for bus stops to be more widely seen as community assets, Metro Transit should draw upon existing cultural, organizational, and civic resources. Minnesota is known for a high rate of civic participation and volunteerism and Metro Transit has an opportunity to leverage this energy through both direct partnership with individuals and through existing community-based organizations. Creating such partnerships will allow Metro Transit more outlets to share information and hear feedback and will help Metro Transit address some of the larger social issues that it can't handle by itself, such as discrimination and crime. Partnerships also make placemaking activities more likely as local knowledge and advocacy is needed to understand how the built environment around bus stops can best serve the community.

B

Establish a Model of Community Ownership

In order for Metro Transit to invite the community to take ownership over bus stops, a model and set of standards should first be implemented to guide participation in a way that works best for the agency. Be it through a program like Adopt-A-Shelter, the addition of public art, or other investments, having defined requirements and communicating them in a simple way will lower barriers for engagement. This effort can also be a place to address some of the jurisdictional conflicts

that might arise between Metro Transit's needs and those of the municipalities, creating a streamlined process for both an applicant who would like to customize their bus stop and for the agencies involved. Furthermore, each new partnership for bus stop projects will serve as a model for future participation, while increasing awareness about how bus stops serve as neighborhood assets.

By giving the community the tools to take action and the ability to turn a bus stop into a community place, it invites a sense of belonging- the bus stop becomes our bus stop. This sense of inclusion can hopefully translate to those who use the space as well. For instance, there might be a feeling of pride to see someone using a bench that you made. And over time people who use the community-oriented bus stop are no longer seen as strangers, but as neighbors.

Finally, creating a model of ownership and allowing residents and organizations to turn bus stops into community places can potentially lessen maintenance needs for Metro Transit staff. When a feeling of ownership exists for a place, people are more motivated to become caretakers for it. In other words, the neighborhood residents and workers unofficially adopt a stop.

By giving the community the tools to take action and the ability to turn a bus stop into a community place, it invites a sense of belonging- *the* bus stop becomes *our* bus stop.



Balance Maintenance Costs with the Benefits of Community Ownership

The reframing and making of bus stops into community assets should be discussed in conversation with maintenance staff and related departments as there may be some upfront challenges that will need to be solved in order to achieve more long-term benefits. This will at the very least involve broadening the cost-benefits analysis to weigh potential staff time and maintenance costs with the potential positive community outcomes that opportunities such as expanding outreach and allowing for community placemaking at bus stops can bring. Although community enhancement may not bring direct financial returns to Metro Transit, the positive impact of these programs to engage a wider community can generate more support for the transit system as a whole- support which might be key for securing future operations and maintenance funding.



Continue To Improve Communications

An important part of establishing partnerships and building community ownership will require an emphasis on improving and expanding communication streams, access to information, and having important conversations about issues surrounding transit. Targeted outreach to bus stop stakeholders will create positive relationships, allow for useful feedback, and grow faith in

Metro Transit as a community service provider. Similarly, producing easy-to-reach information access points reduces obstacles and leverages the potential for stakeholders to participate in helping bus stops operate as community assets.

In expanding its outreach, Metro Transit should specifically reach out to local neighborhood organizations, business groups, and municipal agencies to share the benefits and positive stories of transit- how it's necessary for a strong and fair economy by providing accessibility to the places people live and work. Additionally, Metro Transit should be willing to discuss the negative issues surrounding transit, including perceptions and realities of crime, a sense of exclusion that exists at some bus stops, and jurisdictional issues that result in less-than-efficient bus stop areas. As mentioned before, Metro Transit cannot solve all the problems that arrive at its doorstep by itself and being able to brave ways to communicate about these issues, fostering strong relationships with local stakeholders, and working on them together will be a step forward in providing inclusive solutions. These conversations have the potential to change perceptions about the use of public space and transit (it's okay to hang out in a public space), facilitate operations across jurisdictional boundaries (policies and structures enhance the area around bus stops), and increase the potential for community ownership of bus stops (easy-to-understand, streamlined application process).

E

Build From What Has Worked

The image of Metro Transit presented in the vision statement is not one that is radically different than today, but one that has been able to build on current efforts by finding ways to expand capacity. Metro Transit has already initiated programs that have led to improved partnerships and increased community input, such as Better Bus Stops, the Adopt-A-Shelter, and public art programs and the recommendations outlined below emphasize streamlining, expansion, and replication of such efforts. In addition to leveraging partnership and collaborative efforts, Metro Transit should also consider how staff management of these tasks are handled.



Bus Stops as Community Assets

Action Items

1. Expand Ownership Models

Expand the role of community ownership models like Adopt-A-Shelter within the agency.

Description: The Adopt-A-Shelter program exemplifies the type of agency-individual partnership that lets community members take some level of ownership and agency over a space, accessing the relatively untapped reserves of time and human resources of transit neighbors and friends that can be prohibitively costly for Metro Transit, but empowering, beneficial, and even fun for the adopters. This is a model for low-stakes community buy-in that can be expanded, replicated, and leveraged. For example, Metro Transit could expand Adopt-A-Shelter to include all bus stops and call it Adopt-A-Stop.

Responsibility: Metro Transit
Time/Resource Intensity: Low
Cost Associated: Staff time; Contractors (on-going)
Priority: High

Key Words: #perception_crime #placemaking #civic_engagement #belonging #maintenance_challenges

Objectives Satisfied:



2. Outreach Strategy

Create an outreach strategy for transit-adjacent businesses and residents that includes effective messaging about importance of transit and bus stops, as well as information on how to adopt stops and get in contact with Metro Transit.

Description: Metro Transit has put a lot of resources into communicating with users of transit, but less so for developing communications for transit adjacent businesses and residents. Metro Transit should develop an outreach strategy for these stakeholders that includes effective messaging about the general benefits of transit and accurate ridership and crime information to address negative perceptions. Additionally, many residents and business owners indicated an interest in participating in programs like Adopt-A-Shelter. Communications would include information about Adopt-A-Stop or other placemaking programs.

Responsibility: Metro Transit

Time/Resource Intensity:

Medium

Cost Associated: Staff time (on-going); Materials; Design work (up front)

Priority: High

Key Words: #perception_crime #belonging #economic_potential #existing_programs

Objectives Satisfied:



3. Harness Civic Energy

Harness the civic energy of the Twin Cities by partnering with individuals and community organizations to fully leverage unique cultural assets and resources.

Description: The Twin Cities is characterized by high levels of volunteerism and civic engagement, both on an individual level and in active neighborhood and community organizations. This is an asset in itself; and Metro Transit should tap into this existing social infrastructure wherever possible. Business associations have a rational self-interest in increasing access to bus stops and ensuring a safe and pleasant neighborhood experience. Identify and partner with these business associations to act as leaders and facilitators in taking ownership of bus stops. The Twin Cities features a robust art community, including art institutes and programming at universities and high schools, as well as numerous art-related organizations and studios. Metro Transit should coordinate this talent and energy into creating a sense of place and ownership, and to improve aesthetics at selected bus stops. In addition there are 70 neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis, 17 district councils in Saint Paul, and numerous analogous organizations in the suburbs served by Metro Transit that could be potential partners to foster positive relations between bus stops and adjacent stakeholders.

Responsibility: Metro Transit; Community Organizations

Time/Resource Intensity: Medium

Cost Associated: Staff time

Priority: High

Key Words: #civic_engagement #placemaking

Objectives Satisfied:





712

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Photo Cred: Minneapolis Star Tribune

4. Share Positive Stories

Proactively share positive stories regarding bus stops and successes of placemaking, public art, and Adopt-A-Shelter programs.

Description: There is an over-representation of negative externalities of bus stops in prevailing narratives about transit. Metro Transit should make a concerted effort to circulate positive stories regarding the benefits of bus stops to communities, as well as successful stories of community members taking ownership over bus stops and participating in placemaking, public art, and Adopt-A-Shelter programs.

Responsibility: Metro Transit
Time/Resource Intensity: Low
Cost Associated: Staff Time
Ongoing
Priority: Medium

Key Words: #perceptions_safety #existing_programs #civic_engagement #those_people

Objectives Satisfied:



5. Centralized Information Hub

Create a centralized informational hub where interested parties can learn how to customize their bus stop, including a step-by-step guide that walks through the process, and links to other pertinent information about placemaking programs and resources.

Description: To streamline and encourage placemaking efforts, Metro Transit should consider creating an easily accessed online hub of information that contains information on the differing programs and opportunities, and offers instruction on what restrictions, materials, expectations, and processes are required for enhancements to the bus stop environment. Such a hub of information would also be helpful for agency staff and partnering municipalities to be clear on necessary steps and potential jurisdictional issues.

Time/Resource Intensity: low
Cost Associated: Staff time
(short term, with ongoing updates)
Priority: Medium

Key Words: #jurisdictional_issues #placemaking #civic_engagement #maintenance_challenges

Objectives Satisfied:



6. Collaborate on Municipal Improvements

Continue to collaborate with municipalities on improvements to active transportation networks and pathways that connect to bus stops to improve access and perception of bus stops as assets.

Description: The immediate physical surroundings of bus stops have a lot of influence over whether or not they are perceived as assets. Furthermore, many associate the walk to the bus stop, and the perceived safety of the connections, with the bus stop itself. To improve the image of bus stops, and the experience of neighboring stakeholders and users, Metro Transit should continue to collaborate where possible with municipalities to improve the physical connections and pathways that bring people to bus stops.

Responsibility: Metro Transit; Municipalities

Time/Resource Intensity: Medium

Cost Associated: Staff time (on-going)

Priority: Medium

Key Words: #jurisdiction_issues #economic_potential #placemaking #those_people #perception_safety

Objectives Satisfied:



7. Contract with Neighborhood Groups

Continue to contract with neighborhood groups and organizations for community outreach and engagement efforts.

Description: During the course of the Better Bus Stops community engagement process, Metro Transit partnered with community organizations that already had trusted relationships with the communities they were seeking to engage. In doing so, a partnership was created that was more authentically based, more effective at reaching the voices of the targeted population, and that helped

Responsibility: Metro Transit

Time/Resource Intensity: Low

Cost Associated: Staff time (periodic); Contractors

Priority: Medium

Key Words: #civic_engagement #existing_programs

Objectives Satisfied:



build the capacity to act of the engaged communities and the partnering organizations. This is a good example of how existing social infrastructure and community organizations can be leveraged in the future, and how more authentic and productive relationships can be forged in the neighborhoods of the Twin Cities.

8. Replicate Study, Focus Groups

Consider replicating the pilot surveys completed in this report on a wider scale, with focus groups in specific study areas or communities of interest.

Description: The conversations that emerged during the surveys conducted with neighboring stakeholders provided useful insight into the perceptions of those neighboring bus stops. However, there still isn't a dataset of neighboring stakeholders' perceptions that reflects that of bus riders, or that is large enough to be statistically significant. Metro Transit should consider replicating the survey on a larger scale for more statistical significance. Methods for collecting data might include more in-person interviews, remote survey collection such as phone interviews and online surveys, or collections of stakeholder focus groups.

Responsibility: Metro Transit

Time/Resource Intensity:

High

Cost Associated: Staff time (short-term); Consultants

Priority: Medium

Key Words: #civic_ engagement #existing_ programs

Objectives Satisfied:



9. Leverage Existing Events

Further leverage community events (i.e. National Night Out, Open Streets, State Fair, etc.), by bringing attention to transit facilities and encouraging the community to engage with those spaces.

Description: Bus stops are ubiquitous to much of the Twin Cities. Metro Transit can tap into existing community events like Open Streets and National Night Out and bring attention to specific bus stops within neighborhood to promote Metro Transit and advertise ownership, public art, and placemaking programs.

Responsibility: Metro Transit
Time/Resource Intensity: Low

Cost Associated: Staff time (periodic), Engagement Materials

Priority: Low
Icons (Objtv): 1, 2, 4, 5

Key Words: #civic_engagement #those_people #placemaking

Objectives Satisfied:



10. Pilot Customization Program

Run a pilot program of neighborhood-led bus stop customization and measure the response from riders and neighbors.

Description: Metro Transit can collaborate with a neighborhood or business association to allow the group to make temporary additions or enhancements to a select number of bus stops. Metro Transit should survey the response from stakeholders on how it impacted their experience of the stop.

Responsibility: Metro Transit; neighborhood associations; business associations; community groups

Time/Resource Intensity: High

Cost Associated: Staff time (temporary)

Priority: Low

Key Words: #civic_engagement #those_people #placemaking #perceptions_safety #existing_programs

Objectives Satisfied:



11. Full-Time Employee

Consider creating a position or division that acts as a full time liaison between Metro Transit agencies (Street Operations, Community Outreach, Urban Design, etc.) and community members and organizations to promote placemaking, public art, and Adopt-A-Stop programs.

Description: Description: Existing placemaking, public art, and Adopt-A-Shelter programs are located across varying departments with varying levels of priority, creating disparate efforts and levels of inter/intra-agency communication. Having a staff member or division dedicated to the cause could allow Metro Transit to make a consolidated effort at proactively communicating with neighboring stakeholders and interested community members/organizations and cultivate relationships that expand existing placemaking, public art, and Adopt-A-Shelter programs.

Responsibility: Metro Transit

Time/Resource Intensity:

High

Cost Associated: Salary

Priority: Low

Key Words: #jurisdictional_issues #existing_programs #civic_engagement

Objectives Satisfied:







Bus Stops as Community Assets

Section Five: Conclusion

The Twin Cities region is projected to usher in unprecedented levels of growth in the coming decades. As a growing diversity of transportation mode choices continues to be adopted and embraced by residents of the Twin Cities, transit is well-positioned to help the region grow according to principles of efficiency, sustainability, and equity. Large-scale transit projects such as LRT and BRT figure to be an important part of accommodating that growth. However, as the work of Metro Transit begins to incorporate more of these larger infrastructure projects, it is important not to lose sight of the vast potential that exists within the transit system's most prolific asset - the local route bus stop. It is through these bus stops that the majority of Metro Transit's customers start and finish their transit trips.

By strengthening the role of bus stops as assets in their community, Metro Transit can create value that is recognized and promoted by transit riders, neighbors, and policymakers.

Alternatively, losing sight of the potential that bus stops hold to serve as assets could produce challenges in the process of cultivating community support for the enhancements to the transit system that are needed to strategically accommodate regional growth. By following the recommendations presented in this report, Metro Transit can leverage the opportunity that exists within its most basic and widely distributed assets to make meaningful progress in the work of guiding the future of transit in the Twin Cities.



Appendix

- *Expert Interview*
- *Report References*
- *Literature Review*
- *Survey Information*
- *Memorandum of Agreement*

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Expert Interviews

- Anna Flintoft, Manager of Planning & Urban Design, Engineering and Facilities | Metro Transit
- Bill Hultberg, Adopt-A-Shelter Program Manager | Metro Transit
- Bill Lindeke, Contributor | Streets.mn
- Diane Sannes, Brooklyn Center Adopt-A-Shelter Advocate
- Jason Cao, Professor of Urban & Regional Planning | University of Minnesota
- Karyssa Jackson, Everyday Equity and Sr. Community Outreach Coordinator | Metro Transit
- Katie Roth, Manager, Arterial Bus Rapid Transit | Metro Transit
- Kelsey Fogt, Associate Transportation Planner | City of Minneapolis - Public Works
- Kristen Murray, Tactical Urbanism & Community Engagement | Juxtaposition
- Kyle Burrows, Planner, Service Development | Metro Transit
- Mark Granlund, Public Art Administrator | Metro Transit
- Max Musicant, Director | The Musicant Group
- Pam Steffen, Manager of Customer Relations | Metro Transit
- Philip Schwartz, Boardmember | Lyndale Neighborhood Association
- Yesenia Soto-Mayboca, Police Officer | Metro Transit
- Yingling Fan, Professor of Urban & Regional Planning | University of Minnesota

Bus Stops as Community Assets

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Bus Stops as Community Assets

Literature Review

Topic 1: Drivers of Perceptions

Measuring the effects of the built environment on bus stop crime
Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Robin Liggett, Hiroyuki Iseki, William Thurlow
1999

One of the greatest drivers of perceptions of bus stops is the bus stop's proximity to nuisances. Among these nuisances, the literature has a particular focus on crime which seems disproportionate with the actual impact of crime on the provision of transit service. This study examined the relationship between the built environment and crime rates near bus stops. The study found that "crime rates were higher at intersections with alleys, mid-block passages, multifamily housing, undesirable establishments such as liquor stores and check-cashing establishments, vacant buildings, and graffiti and litter." Higher crime rates were also noted where on-street parking was present at intersections. "Positive environmental factors included good visibility and existence of bus shelters [...] and higher rates of vehicle traffic were associated with lower crime rates." The findings presented in the study may be relevant to inform how the built environment surrounding a given Metro Transit stop may be linked to actual rates of crime, and to examine any potential relation between these elements of the built environment and the perception of crime.

Waiting time perceptions at transit stops and stations: Effects of basic amenities, gender, and security
Yingling Fan, Andrew Guthrie, David Levinson
2016

The experience of transit users constitutes another significant driver of perceptions of bus stops. The literature mainly focuses on the perceptions of transit users as they relate to the quality of the service, rather than the transit stop itself. However, understanding the key variables that impact a user's perception of the transit service itself offers suggestions as to which aspects of the transit stop are most salient in the way they are perceived by the community as a whole.

Acknowledging that transit riders' perceptions of wait times tend to be longer than actual wait times, the study seeks to determine if there are aspects of the transit stop itself that affect these perceived wait times. In particular, the study seeks to understand the impact that different transit stop amenities have

on the perceived wait time of transit users. The study found that a greater number of amenities provided at transit stops tended to reduce the transit rider's perceptions of wait time. Additionally, time of day and gender also had an important impact on a transit rider's perceived wait time. This finding is particularly relevant, as there may be important differences in the perception of bus stops as a community asset that should be integrated into Metro Transit's approach to promoting their stops within the community.

Factors Affecting Perceptions of Outdoor Public Environments

T.M. Nelson and L. J. Loewen

1993

This study holds potential to inform the role that gender plays in determining perceptions in general. The study sought to understand differences of perception among men and women for different landscapes at different times of day. It was found that women more commonly rate landscapes as unsafe than men do, but that both men and women prefer landscapes with two or more people. The lowest rated landscape for women was the uninhabited bus shelter at dusk. This finding highlights the nuanced relationship between perceptions of safety and transit shelters. The authors (leaning on prospect-refuge theory) explain that a bus shelter, despite its name, can be treacherous because there is limited means of escape.

Hedonic Value of Transit Accessibility: An Empirical Analysis in a Small Urban Area

Jason Cao and Jill Hough

2008

One area of study that holds potential to bring out the positive impact that the presence of transit stops may have on its surrounding community is the relationship between transit and economic vitality. This study analyzed rental market and transportation access factors in Fargo, ND. The study found that the auto-accessibility of a property was associated with an increase in its rental value. As travel time from the central business district increased, rental value decreased. Accessibility to transit, on the other hand, was negatively correlated with rental value, particularly within an eighth-mile radius. The study suggests some potential reasons for these trends. First, the study speculates that there

may be nuisances associated with the presence, particularly in a smaller urban area such as Fargo. Other potential explanations for the trend take into account the aspects of an area that may make it suitable for transit in the first place. For instance, the fact that rental values were lower near transit might be reflective of the fact that lower income populations tend to rely on transit, and therefore locate in areas with greater transit accessibility. Secondly, Fargo's central business district is the part of town with the highest level of transit service, and it had long been in decline in the years before the study was conducted. Finally, transit stops tend to be located on busy streets with more commercial uses which may be less attractive for residential uses. Though there are limitations in the degree to which these findings can be generalized to the Twin Cities, the study stands as an example of how different interpretations of data representing the relationship between transit and property values are possible.

Topic 2: Potential Improvements/Comparisons with Peer Transit Agencies

The literature contains a number of studies that provide ideas and best practices for improving bus stops and their perceptions within the community.

Thinking Beyond the Station

David Nelson, Project for Public Spaces
2014

This article from the Project for Public Spaces contains insight on the value of multi-agency cooperation in strategies that seek to activate space. Ideas presented in the article include partnering with advertising agencies or cultural institutions to create fun, distinct displays at stops. Other ideas include the provision of wayfinding, events calendars, and suggestions of things to do in the area surrounding a given transit stop. The example of partnering with a local library to host a summer mobile library at stops in close proximity to parks is given to showcase ideas for improving bus stops by increasing interactions between riders and nearby amenities and activities.

Bus Stops as Urban Places

Doug Suisman
1997

This short document briefly examines and critiques 13 bus stops for their

design and rider utility. The article places bus stops in a greater context of transit services, arguing that their value is often overlooked in favor of larger, more expensive rail transit investments. However, the ubiquity of bus stops in most transit services holds great potential to advertise the availability of transit. As such, the difference between a bus stop that appears dirty or neglected compared to a bus stop that appears clean, comfortable and safe can have far-reaching implications for the ability of the transit service to attract riders. Within this framework, the document provides useful ideas for design and amenities as bus stops that can effectively promote ridership for the transit agency as a whole.

Understanding the Space for Co-design in Riders' Interactions with a Transit Service

Daisy Yoo, John Zimmerman, Aaron Steinfeld, Anthony Tomasic
2010

This study provides useful background on the concepts of co-production and co-design, and how those processes of engaging the community can interact with the practical concerns of public works departments. The potential of co-production and co-design holds a great deal of promise to promote bus stops as community assets. However, there are many technical, logistical and practical considerations with which co-designed solutions must be compatible. When considering the potential for Metro Transit to establish practices of co-production and co-design, this article offers useful findings as they relate to integrating the insights gained from co-production processes with the technical considerations for successful implementation. For instance, involving transit customers in the process of designing the service holds potential to generate a sense of ownership that can complement the maintenance responsibilities held by members of the transit agency that might otherwise solely view the suggested outcomes of co-design as an increased burden.

Bus Stop Urban Design

Kevin Jingyi Zhang
2012

This study looks at improving bus stops in Vancouver, BC. The focus of the study is exclusive to making improvements to transit stops for riders and does not include the perspective of adjacent property owners. However, it provides a useful breakdown of the factors that provide the greatest utility for transit riders

as well as nine variables to consider when changing bus stops. When considering urban design solutions, the content of this article is invaluable. It details four contributing factors to and five components of increased transit ridership, seven bus stop goals, and nine urban design parameters to consider with bus stop design.

Bus Stops as Community Assets

Survey Information

Survey Methodology, Questionnaire, and Results

The preliminary research and early expert interviews made it clear there was a variety of existing and ongoing transit perception research that focused on the rider perspective. As such it seemed critical to begin a process to ascertain perceptions of adjacent stakeholders that may or may not personally use transit, but are impacted by proximity to a stop location they may reside, own, and/or are employed at. The basic workflow was to consult with the client contacts at Metro Transit to select the study areas. Then there was a small sample pilot study conducted in an area impacted by transit that was explicitly ruled out as one of the primary study areas. This initial small survey was utilized to get some basic idea of stakeholder perceptions, but more importantly to inform and refine future survey methods by field testing the proposed approaches before the final field data was collected from the study areas. After refining the survey methods in consult with Metro Transit, the nine study areas were surveyed and this larger sample was used to inform the recommendations and action items presented in Section Five of this report.

Root Questions

At the root of the project's research questions were two lines of inquiry. The first and primary, is to gain a critical understanding of stakeholder perceptions.

The second question is informed by the first, and seeks to understand how bus stops can be perceived of and function as a community asset. How can Metro Transit better mitigate and communicate relationships between its bus stops and

adjacent stakeholders without burdening already limited resources.

Based upon these goals, four primary routes of questioning and their order of inquiry were formulated:

1. What property do you own, reside, and/or work at near bus stop(s) and briefly describe your primary activities?-Provides basic background of the research subject and could be used for categorical analysis of data, e.g. homeowners vs. renters or residences vs. commercial property.
2. Do you ever use transit? If yes, for what/when?-Whether one uses transit can impact their views and is potentially important to data classification and analysis.
3. How do you feel about the bus stops in your area and their impact on the property you own or work at as well as your activities?-The root question that addresses the research gap.
4. How would you like or envision a channel with Metro Transit for making adjacent bus stops an asset to your community?-A way to solicit positive solutions to empower stakeholders and other community members to make bus stops a community asset and explore turning transportation nodes into destinations.

Midway Pilot Study

As a way to inform the methods of the future survey plans in designated study areas, the research team collected some pilot data in an area that was impacted by transit, but would not be utilized later in the project as a study area. For this initial collection, the neighborhood of Midway in Saint Paul was chosen focusing on areas to the west, north, and east of the busy road intersection of Snelling Avenue North and University Avenue West.

The Midway Neighborhood is a central urban region of the Twin Cities named for its roughly equidistant position from the initial centers of growth in the Twin Cities metro area, downtown Saint Paul to the east



Map of pilot survey, University and Snelling, Saint Paul

and downtown Minneapolis to the northwest both roughly 4 miles away. It is a significant transportation crossroads for both mass transit and car/ truck traffic.

The primary source of the high traffic volume is Interstate 94 and the exit for Snelling Avenue a quarter mile south of the University Avenue intersection. From that origin point there is significant freight traffic to the industrial and rail cluster northwest of the Snelling and University intersection, large chain shopping outlets on the southside of University Avenue, and several miles north in Roseville. There is also significant automobile traffic due to nearby shopping, services, and employment centers.

Due to its central location in the Twin Cities, Midway is also a crossroads for transit. Until fairly recently, the area's transit needs consisted entirely of several bus lines traveling north-south on Snelling Avenue and east-west on University Avenue. That changed in June 2014 with the 11-mile Green Line LRT that connected the downtowns of Minneapolis and Saint Paul after a four year period of construction. The transit line runs in the center of University Avenue through Midway and cost some parking and lane space for automotive traffic. Two years later in June 2016, the "A Line" Bus Rapid Transit was created which travels north-south on Snelling Avenue with frequent service in addition to a variety of existing standard bus routes. Those two larger transit lines and associated infrastructure ultimately preclude Midway from the final study area, which focuses on standard bus stops alone, but will inform further study garnering stakeholder data.

Midway Survey Methodology

To gather some preliminary stakeholder qualitative data, eleven brief interviews were conducted in Midway over a three day period on February 16 to 18, 2018. All the research subjects were working in the neighborhood at local small businesses or institutions. Four interviews were conducted at restaurants, five at retail establishments, one at a tavern, and one at the neighborhood public library. All the interviews were conducted on a walk-in basis with no previous contact between the subjects and interviewer. All of the eleven interview subjects were employees and not owners.

Of the eleven subjects, five of them were regular transit users and six never, or rarely used transit. Of the five interview subjects who used Metro Transit on a regular basis, four of the five thought the neighborhood transit stops functioned

as assets to the neighborhood. Of the six subjects who were not using Metro Transit consistently, two considered them assets, three had largely negative attitudes, and one was neutral with no opinions expressed.

The most common positive comments from stakeholders were regarding transit's ability to increase access to their workplace. Five of the eleven subjects saw this access as having a positive economic impact on their workplace. Two of the eleven subjects stated that the access to transit offset negative factors of limited or no parking. One of those opinions was from a manager of a popular restaurant that had very limited parking and the other by an employee of a pawn shop on University Avenue with no parking lot or street parking available in front of its business. Two of the interview subjects made note of more abstract principles about how a large metro needs transportation access for all, alluding to equity issues.

The negative comments from interview subjects were more diverse and more difficult to discern. Two of the subjects mentioned their perception that transit creates crime and safety issues, although the two subjects framed related severity rather differently. The subject who had the stronger view on crime issues specifically cited marijuana smoking and public urination in proximity of their businesses as primary examples of antisocial behavior. A third interview subject stated that transit was a major source of crime at their previous job, but saw transit as less of a problem in Midway.

In addition, two subjects spoke negatively of "free riders" on the Green Line LRT and A Line BRT - one used transit and the other did not. Two of the interview subjects were critical of long term impacts by construction or infrastructure changes due to the Green Line LRT. The first of which was highly critical of the years of disruptive construction before the line opened in 2014. His assertion was disruption to neighborhood business during construction and project cost have not been offset by positive externalities of the LRT four years into operations. The second subject's complaint was specifically about losing parallel parking spots on University Avenue to make room in the right-of-way for the LRT. While there is a free parking lot on the opposite side of the block, it primarily serves a liquor store and is frequented by loitering, tying back to crime and safety issues. Concerns regarding restroom use were also noted.

When asked about effectiveness of communicating concerns to Metro Transit, only one respondent expressed any opinion at all. This pawn shop employee, who once submitted a concern to Metro Transit, thought the issues were dealt with in an effective and timely manner.

Midway Survey Findings

From the the modest sample of qualitative data some loose conclusions were drawn about stakeholder perceptions. At least in the urban and transit-heavy Midway neighborhood, a good share of the business community recognize transit's value for providing transportation access to support economic development. Likewise a significant proportion of the Midway workforce in the sample (5 of 11 interviewees) utilized transit as a primary mode of transportation. 2 of 11 interviews mentioned transit as an asset for businesses with limited or no parking.

However there were also less common, but repeated negative themes that deserved scrutiny in future data collection. Most notably that there was the common perception linking transit stops with crime and danger. As noted in the research review, it is not an unknown phenomenon for bus stops being misattributed as a source of crime. This may have been even more true in Midway which is mostly low and middle income residents with a crime rate higher than average compared Saint Paul and areas outside the Metropolitan Area.

Contextually there needed be caution about extrapolating too much from the half of respondents who expressed positive attitudes, beyond matters of small sample size. As stakeholders in Midway have more use for transit both to get to work and provide access to a large customer base which could be different in lower density study areas. Further studies examined bus stops specifically entirely avoiding the confounding transit variable of a light rail line and mostly avoiding areas also served by bus rapid transit.

The initial approach to questioning will be refined based on further interviews with subject matter experts and further review of literature to optimize data collection. It was clear from the very small pilot study that there are needs to develop better ways to to measure the types, and degree of impacts, expressed by interview subjects to make the most use of analysis after the study. The open ended question about how stakeholders feel about bus stops and their impacts needed further refinement. Further input may be more productive and insightful by providing a few crucial variables about bus stop qualities and having subjects rate on a scale.

This need for refinement of the investigative approach was much more apparent on the final question about a desire for neighboring stakeholders to have a

channel of collaboration with Metro Transit. With the exception of the one interview subject who had positive interactions with Metro Transit, the other ten subjects had little to say on the issue. In future questioning it may work better to present subjects with several options and have them rate their preference to guide the inquiry to make it more productive.

Another issue that was considered for future data collection is how the interviewers will introduce and present themselves. In the Midway Pilot Study, the interviewer was open about their role as a student working on a project to make recommendations to Metro Transit. One survey writing expert suggested revealing less about the purpose of the questions, suggesting that the information may bias given responses.

Survey Redesign

For the field survey conducted in nine selected study areas there was acknowledgment at the outset that due to the limited resources of student researchers, it would be impossible to collect data from a large enough sample to be statistically significant. With over 12,000 bus stops as part of Metro Transit's infrastructure, there are hundreds of thousands of people who could be considered adjacent stakeholders who live, own property, and/or are employed near bus stops. Being certain due to constraints it would be impossible to survey over 100 participants, it was clear the sample would not even be approaching 0.1% making it far too small to make area wide population predictions about such a large and diverse pool of neighboring stakeholders.‡

While acknowledging the limits of the empirical utility of the survey, there was ambition to collect some combination of quantitative and qualitative data. To collect data with higher utility for analysis it was clear there were needs to structure the questions and resulting data gathered more than the preliminarily pilot round for some topics of inquiry. Structured questions explicitly limit the range of answers users were able to provide to assist in cross comparison analysis among survey subjects. In combination with questions to provide constrained answers with empirical analysis potential, there was an acknowledged need to pose open ended queries as well. The answers from those sort of questions

‡ King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton university press.

had use to illustrate and personalize as anecdotes as well as grouping related comments together and ascertain dominant attitudes through sentiment analysis.

‡ § ◇ †

To gather some rudimentary quantitative data it was decided to utilize a basic five point Likert scale to explore stakeholder perceptions. Basic Likert scales assesses perception on an ordinal range of numbers associated with negative or positive perceptions with the lowest being negative sentiments. Five point designated Likert scales are the most common classification system and was deemed appropriate for the level of perceptual information that was being sought from the survey subjects. The basic scale set up was an answer of 1 was for very negative sentiments, 3 for neutral sentiments, 5 for the most positive, and answers of 2 or 4 filling in the gap in-between for perceptions between wholly negative, neutral, or positive.

The Likert scale queries were used on two of the revised survey questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 being the most, how satisfied are you with your block? Upon receiving an answer regarding stakeholder perceptions, the interviewers would follow up to ask what factors were most important in their feelings of satisfaction and answers were recorded as qualitative data.
2. Does the bus stop have a positive or negative effect on your block, 1 being very negative and 5 being very positive? Why? Likewise after recording the perception of adjacent transit on the Likert scale interviewers would follow up to record what factors were critical in influencing their perceptions as valuable qualitative data.

‡ Pang, B., & Lee, L. (2008). Opinion mining and sentiment analysis. *Foundations and Trends® in Information Retrieval*, 2(1–2), 1-135.

§ Lu, Z., Du, R., Dunham-Jones, E., Park, H., & Crittenden, J. (2017). Data-enabled public preferences inform integration of autonomous vehicles with transit-oriented development in Atlanta. *Cities*, 63, 118-127.

◇ Ravi, K., & Ravi, V. (2015). A survey on opinion mining and sentiment analysis: tasks, approaches and applications. *Knowledge-Based Systems*, 89, 14-46.

† Clifton, K. J., & Handy, S. L. (2003). Qualitative methods in travel behaviour research. In *Transport survey quality and innovation* (pp. 283-302). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

How interviewers introduced themselves to subjects and the order of the two questions and were considered crucial to produce the best results. Unlike the initial Midway Pilot Study, during the second round of field data collection interviewers introduced themselves as simply University of Minnesota students that were conducting a brief survey. It was decided not to mention Metro Transit as the client as it provided no real advantage and had less potential to bias answers. Then the first question about overall satisfaction of their local area expressed in term of their immediate block to get them in a mindset to analyze place and its associated infrastructure, both physical and social. Once the subjects were thinking about their surrounding urban environment, they were asked to consider how the area bus stops had a positive or negative impact on the adjacent urban landscape.

One issue not anticipated by researchers was the fact that a five point Likert scale was considered too small and restrictive an ordinal scale by some interview subjects. This was demonstrated by some answers where respondents insisted on expressing half values in between the integers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. There was a total of 126 Likert scale responses collected on both questions and 6 of those answers were expressed in values that ended with "0.5" falling in between the five structured choices in the ordinal scale. That being said those 6 data points do have value as they are still essentially discrete as the only decimal values given were 0.5. On future surveys it is recommended to use a larger ordinal range to account for these subtleties, with a 1-10 scale coming to mind for future studies as a scale people possess a cognitive familiarity with.

This quantitative field data provided a bit of the "what," which considered the degree to which perceptions are positive or negative among stakeholders of their adjacent urban landscapes and transit impact within that framework. To get at the "why," answers derived from qualitative inquiries had to be examined.‡

Besides recording the key factors offered from stakeholders that shaped the perception of their block and nearby bus stops, there were several more open ended questions to explore stakeholder current and future potential relationships with bus stops. After asking stakeholders what shaped their perceptions of area

‡ Lu, Z., Du, R., Dunham-Jones, E., Park, H., & Crittenden, J. (2017). Data-enabled public preferences inform integration of autonomous vehicles with transit-oriented development in Atlanta. *Cities*, 63, 118-127.

bus stops, interviewers asked them “How might the bus stops have a more positive effect on the block?” The qualitative data then gathered about what factors shaped perceptions of a stakeholder’s block and nearby bus stops along with feedback about how to improve bus stops in the area was analyzed for reoccurring themes and sentiments from the spreadsheet data populated by the researchers.

Lastly there was some data that was categorical in nature collected in the nine study areas. After asking stakeholders to provide previously discussed quantitative and then qualitative data about their block, they were asked “Do you or your neighbors/customers use the bus? For what purposes?” The affirmative answers from respondents were tallied into those three categories to provide some insight into transit usage in the area and is considered to be a potential controlling factor with perceptions of the adjacent bus stops.

Stakeholders were also asked “Do you ever find yourself taking care of, or cleaning-up, or keeping an eye on your local bus stop?” With the mission to engage neighboring stakeholders to take a degree of ownership of their bus stops to transform to assets, it was crucial to determine if any maintenance or other issues was already being addressed by interview subjects. For initial analysis that data was categorized into a binary framework of simple yes or no.

Following up on that question, “If you or your neighbors had the chance to make changes or take care of the bus stop, would you? Why or why not?” This question was somewhat problematic in the field when the interviewed stakeholder had a short tenure as an employee and/or low rank in the chain of command. In those cases the interview subject often produced no opinion or what appeared to be simply guesses. There could be some further fine tuning of this general line of inquiry in any future studies. For initial analysis this was also tallied into a simple binary classification of yes or no regarding ownership potential.

Following upon that the interviewer would ask: “What kind of involvement or communication would you want from Metro Transit if you were to care for the bus stop?” Many interview subjects were initially unsure how to answer. When this confusion was expressed to interviewers options were offered such as phone, email, going to a website, onsite visit, etc. In any case those answers were categorically classified by preferred communication channel of interview subjects.

The final question asked was simply what the interview subjects role was in relation to the interview location. This was categorically recorded as owner/

manager, employee, resident, or other. The primary stakeholders interviewed were at businesses and fit the owner/manager, or employee categories. There was a desire to focus primarily on bus stops in relation to local businesses and it was more comfortable for researchers to approach subjects for interviews in public businesses than at private residences.

When interviews were conducted in many cases entry level employees would ask if it was preferable to talk to an owner or manager. Largely because they had more perspective from higher operations at the business and quite often had longer tenure at the locations for more informed opinions. This may have skewed the sample a bit toward upper level employees, but likely provided more valuable information.

From the nine study areas on three Metro Transit bus lines, 4, 9, and 74, there were 67 interviews conducted from March 30 to April 6, 2018. The number of interviews in each study area varied from a low of 4 to a high of 12 subjects. The bus routes were selected by Metro Transit as effective transects to be well representative of a range of neighborhoods served by transit from low to higher density and some in the main urban centers of Saint Paul and Minneapolis as well as suburban locations. The research group selected the specific study area locations to try to accentuate this cross sectional nature of the areas selected.

With the fairly low number of responses at the 9 study areas, it is not suggested using the data collection for area comparisons as sample sizes are far too small. However there is much knowledge that can be built upon with further study if Metro Transit wishes to further explore stakeholder perceptions to build positive community relationships to accentuate bus stops as community assets.

What follows is a copy of the questionnaire used in the field. In addition Metro Transit will be provided the master spreadsheet that anonymizes the data in regard to specific business, but will have the study area specified as well as the status of the respondent regarding owner/manager, employee, or resident.

Neighbor Questionnaire

Bus Stop Location:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least satisfied and 5 being the most, how satisfied are you with your block?

1 2 3 4 5

2. Do you or your neighbors/customers use the bus? For what purposes?

3. Does the bus stop have a positive or negative effect on your block, 1 being very negative and 5 being very positive? Why?

1 2 3 4 5

4. How might the bus stops have a more positive effect on the block?

5. Do you ever find yourself taking care of, or cleaning-up, or keeping an eye on your local bus stop?

6. If you or your neighbors had the chance to make changes or take care of the bus stop, would you? Why or why not?

7. What kind of involvement or communication would you want from Metro Transit if you were to care for the bus stop?

Circle One: Business owner or Manager Employee Resident Other:

**Memorandum of Agreement
Capstone Workshop
University of Minnesota
Humphrey School of Public Affairs**

Date 01/20/2018

Project Title or Focus:

Bus Stops as a Community Asset

Client Organization:

Metro Transit

Primary Client Contact (name, telephone, email):

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Planning and Urban Design, Engineering and Facilities Department, Metro Transit

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651-430-4314

THIS MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT (this Agreement) is made by and among the Client referred to above and the Student Consultants. The Regents of the University of Minnesota (the University) is not a party to this Agreement and shall have no obligation to perform the services called for under the Project.

Problem/Opportunity Statement Driving this Study:

Despite their potential to generate a variety of community benefits, bus stops can be considered to be inadequate by riders and a nuisance by adjacent stakeholders. There is a lack of understanding of the most important factors that influence rider and stakeholder perceptions of bus stops, which constrains the potential for bus stops to be viewed as an asset to the community.

Project Purpose:

This project will augment Metro Transit's understanding of what drives negative perceptions of bus stops within the Twin Cities and, subsequently, help derive strategies to address them to the purpose of an improved experience for transit riders and neighbors, as well as increased efficacy of Metro Transit to provide high quality transit service.

Research Questions Pursued in this Study:

1. What are the actual perceptions of adjacent property owners/users? What are they focused on? (What makes a bus stop good? What do you like/dislike about your bus stop?)
2. What are the effects of existing perceptions of bus stops on the Agency's ability to provide service?
3. What factors in a bus stops' external environment have the greatest influence on stakeholder perceptions? (land use, geography, socio-economics)
4. What factors in a bus stops' internal environment have the greatest influence on stakeholder perceptions? (shelter design)

Deliverable(s) Presented at Conclusion of the Study:

1. Written and visual report
2. Oral Presentation

Scope of Work (Summarize key actions (and dates if you know them) to complete the study and prepare/present deliverables). Here are some milestones to consider:

- Finalize Memorandum of Agreement between client and student-consultant team

- Mid-Term (or periodic) meeting with client and students to share progress/findings
- Provide “draft” presentation to client
- Provide “draft” report to client for review
- Provide oral presentation to client
- Provide final report to client
- Client provides final evaluation of student consultant team to instructor

Potential Costs:

- Mailing surveys
- Report printing if multiple copies needed
- Poster printing if needed

Project Start Date: 1/16/18

Project End Date: 5/4/18

Client Responsibilities (NOTE: THIS IS ONLY SUGGESTED LANGUAGE AND SUBJECT TO NEGOTIATION BETWEEN THE STUDENT-CONSULTANT TEAM AND CLIENT)

By participating in the program, the Client agrees to:

- Designate Carol Hejl and Berry Farrington as the primary client contact
- Provide clear instructions for and expectations of the students.
- Provide students with any needed information on an agreed upon schedule.
- Provide students with constructive feedback regarding project and deliverables.
- Attend meetings with students and/or instructor(s) as needed.
- Be as flexible as possible with your schedule to accommodate the students’ scheduling needs.
- Willingly share organizational information with the students that will help them to achieve desired results;
- Attend final presentation on May 1 at Humphrey, being sure to invite key organizational leaders and other external stakeholders that would benefit from this information.
- Complete an Evaluation Form, including the Client’s evaluation of processes, deliverables and project presentation and submit to Lyssa Leitner. A copy of the evaluation form is attached and marked as Exhibit A

Student-Consultant Team Responsibilities:

The Student Consultant Team collectively agrees to:

- Designate Joseph Ayers-Johnson as the primary student contact;

- Provide client with deliverables as described above;
- Present findings to client in the form of both an oral presentation and a written format that addresses the needs of the client;
- Provide the client with a project update at least every (x number) days/weeks;
- Ask specific questions of the client to make sure you are on track with expectations.

Joint Responsibilities

- Return all e-mail messages or phone calls from the client within 1 business day;
- Be on time for all Project meetings;
- Be professional – treating each other as professionals who are engaged in a contractual agreement;
- Use the final product without prior approval.

Use of Project Materials

The Instructor has the right to review and approve the delivery to the Client of all written reports and other deliverables under this Agreement.

Unless the Student Consultants and the Client otherwise agree in writing:

- (i) the Client has permission to use the materials prepared under the Project in its business activities and to reproduce or publicly display (e.g., post on the internet) the materials in connection with such activities;
- (ii) the Student Consultants shall jointly own the intellectual property rights, including copyright, in the materials and any other intellectual property developed as part of the Project, subject to the policies of the University.
- (iii) the final written product shall be stored in the University of Minnesota digital conservancy, making it publicly available for review and use by educators, policy-makers, and practitioners.

General Terms

The Client acknowledges its understanding that the services and materials to be provided under this Agreement are provided by post-secondary students in connection with their fulfilling a course requirement. The student consultants and the University expressly disclaim all express and implied warranties concerning those services and materials, including the implied warranties or merchantability, fitness for particular purpose and non-infringement. The client accepts such services and materials As Is, With All Defects.

The client releases the student consultants and the University from all suits, claims, liabilities, or causes of action, of whatever nature, in contract or tort, arising out of the performance of such services and the preparation and use of such materials. Exceptions to this policy may be negotiated between the students and the client, subject to the approval

of the instructor and the associate dean. Or In rare circumstances, with the concurrence of the instructor and the associate dean, the students and the client may agree that rights to publish may be established.

Acceptance

By signing below, the following individuals agree to the terms of this Agreement:

Students:

_____	_____
	Date
_____	_____
	Date
_____	_____
	Date
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	Date
_____	_____
	Date

Client(s)

_____	_____
	Date
_____	_____
	Date
_____	_____
	Date

