

RTCC Project Memorandum #5 Geographic Service Area

To: Brian Gibson, St. Cloud APO Executive Director

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Re: WSB Project No. 012670-000

1. Introduction

The Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) and WSB have been working to identify a geographic service area for the Regional Transportation Coordination Council (RTCC) to facilitate transportation coordination in the region. Geographic boundaries are defined at the county level by examining the results of the previous RTCC project memo analyses as well as input from existing transit providers. This memo summarizes key findings from previous memos, provides a proposed geographic boundary for the RTCC, and outlines recommendations for coordination outside the proposed boundary.

2. Purpose and Need

In the development of an Operational Implementation Plan (OIP) for an RTCC, the State of Minnesota requires each RTCC to define the geographic area it will serve. The goal of the State is that, eventually, all areas of Greater Minnesota be served by at least one (1) RTCC. The State requires that each RTCC serve at least four (4) contiguous counties. Additionally, each OIP must identify how the RTCC will coordinate with RTCCs in neighboring regions.

The goal of an RTCC is to facilitate and streamline coordination between transportation providers, county human service agencies, private sector providers, and other interested stakeholders in order to identify and fill transportation gaps, streamline access to transportation services – especially for those individuals who are “transportation disadvantaged” – and to provide more options of where and when to travel. RTCCs will be able to receive funds from both the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) for the purpose of facilitating the transportation of individuals. Defining a geographic area served by each RTCC helps ensure that all areas of the state are included in at least one (1) RTCC, and helps ensure the participation of County human service agencies within the appropriate RTCC(s). Depending upon how the financial support of an RTCC is structured, defining the geographic area may also help identify which counties and municipalities could provide financial support to the RTCC. However, it is not necessary that an RTCC’s defined service area include the entirety of a county. It is possible to include only portions of counties if doing so is appropriate, as long as the four (4) county minimum service area is achieved.

3. Summary of Previous Memo Findings

Two (2) previous memos have been used to guide the recommended geographic service area (See Memo #2 Stakeholder Survey Questionnaire and Memo #3 Rider Survey). Memo #2 showcases where RTCC stakeholders currently provide service. Memo #3 outlines that most transit users are relying on transit for work and school, and details users’ reliability on the service. Both Memo #2 and Memo #3 highlight existing conditions. Memo #2 highlights specific areas of service provided by stakeholders participating in the Saint Cloud area RTCC planning process. Memo #3 analyzes rider survey responses such as trip purpose and rider satisfaction from public

transit providers in the region. Both memos were used to shape decisions in establishing the proposed geographic service area.

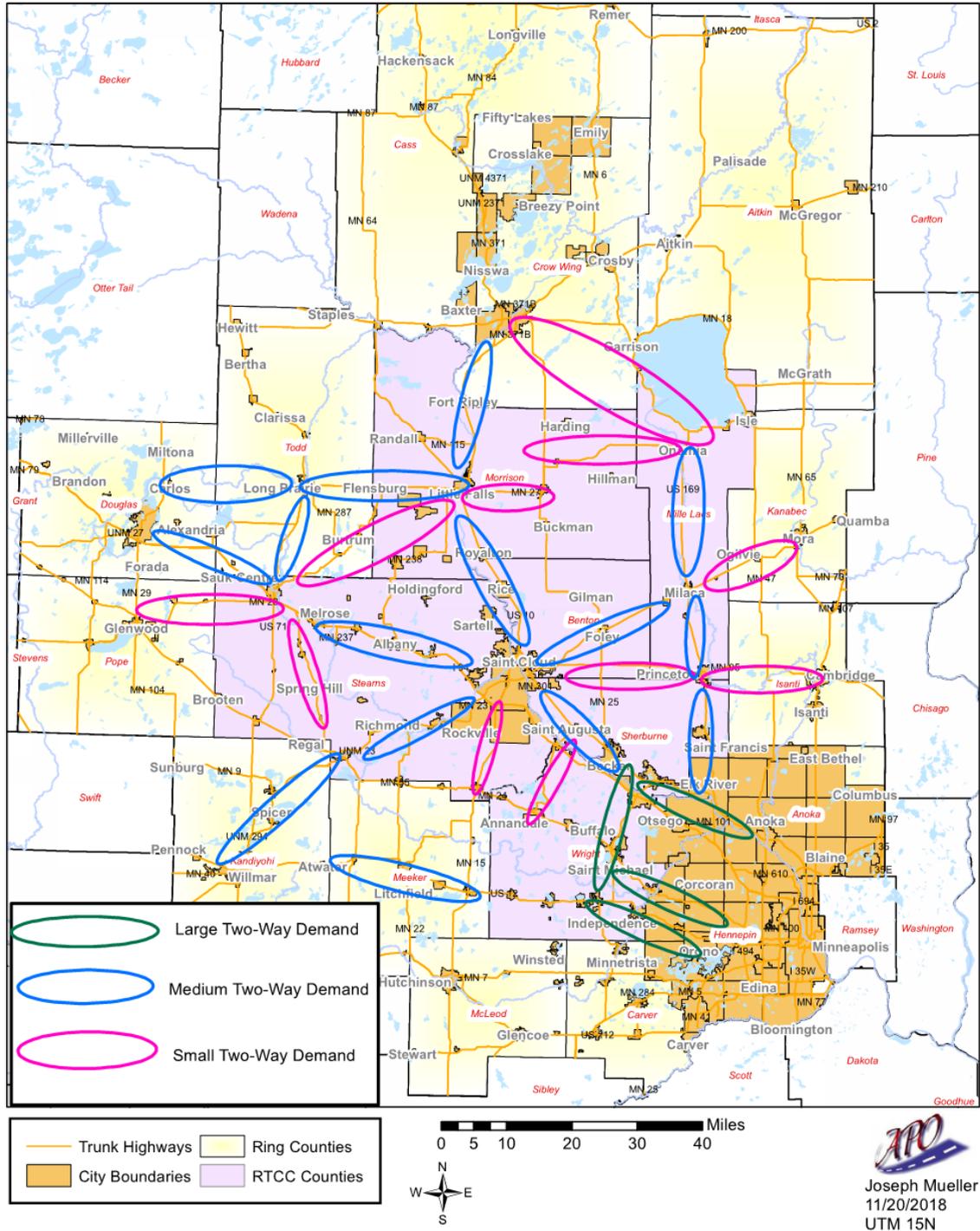
4. Proposed RTCC Service Area

Information from the previous RTCC memos, current travel patterns indicated by transit providers, and discussions with transit providers have been used to create the proposed geographic service area. The RTCC geographic service area is based on MnDOT RTCC standards which are used to form RTCCs in greater Minnesota. In the Saint Cloud region, six (6) counties have been identified as core counties to participate in the RTCC (see **Figure 1**). The following are the identified counties:

- Benton
- Mille Lacs
- Morrison
- Sherburne
- Stearns
- Wright

These counties are identified based on current travel patterns established by the region's urban and rural transit providers. Existing levels of demand can influence the need to coordinate among multiple transportation providers. **Figure 2** illustrates the various levels of comparative demand: small, medium, and large demand. Demand comparisons are based on discussions and feedback from the region's transit providers.

Figure 2: Proposed RTCC Geographic Region Service Area



Areas defined with the greatest demand are located in Sherburne and Wright counties. Three (3) of the four (4) identified largest demand routes are from Sherburne and Wright to Anoka and Hennepin counties respectively. However, Hennepin and Anoka counties are both located within the seven (7)-county metropolitan area. MnDOT RTCC standards state that the forming RTCCs cannot include counties within the seven (7)-county metropolitan area. The other largest demand area is along corridors connecting Sherburne and Wright counties.

Areas defined with mid-range travel demand vary throughout the proposed region. The greatest concentration of mid-range demand includes and surrounds the Saint Cloud area. Saint Cloud as the primary transportation hub within the proposed RTCC region generates the most transit trips as the operating hub for Metro Bus and Tri-CAP Transit systems. Other transportation hubs include Elk River, Little Falls, Milaca, Onamia, Buffalo, Monticello, and Sauk Centre where Tri-CAP and Trail Blazer Transit systems operate. The RTCC can coordinate with partnering public transit agencies and other transportation providers in the region to ensure that travel demand need is met.

Some of the proposed counties within the proposed RTCC service area may likely participate in other forming RTCCs such as Region 5 to the north, Region 7E to the east and Mid-Minnesota to the southeast. The Saint Cloud area RTCC will need to coordinate with potentially impacted counties to ensure those counties are willing to participate in multiple RTCC efforts.

5. Surrounding Ring Counties

Figure 1 also portrays twelve (12) “ring counties” that surround the proposed Saint. Cloud region RTCC. These counties produce less demand for transportation connections with the six (6) Saint Cloud area RTCC counties. The counties within the proposed RTCC service area have multiple identified hubs of travel demand, whereas the ring counties may only have one travel demand hub within the counties. The counties in the outer ring are as follows:

- Aitkin
- Cass
- Carver
- Crow Wing
- Douglas
- Isanti
- Kanabec
- Kandiyohi
- McLeod
- Meeker
- Pope
- Todd

Carver County also lies within the seven (7) county metropolitan area with Hennepin and Anoka counties as described in the previous section. Although Carver County has been identified as a ring county, Carver is already participating in a RTCC-type partnership with Scott County through the SmartLink program. **Figure 1** does not identify any specific travel patterns to or from Carver County.

6. Recommendations for Trips Outside the Service Area

Although the ring counties highlighted in the previous section have less demand connecting with the counties within the proposed service area, the Saint Cloud area RTCC shall need to consider

coordination options for these trips. Moreover, the RTCC needs to consider how to address travel coordination between the RTCC counties and the ring counties. Trips outside the ring counties need further consideration in order to complete trips for travelers within and between the Saint Cloud area RTCC and outside ring counties.

Based on this, WSB recommends the following considerations for the RTCC to meet the travel needs of all users. The recommendations provided are either categorized as short- or long-term. Short-term recommendations are strategies that can be implemented immediately or utilized as needed. Long-term recommendations capture re-evaluating and working with MnDOT to ensure that the RTCC maintains its effectiveness and can continue to progress.

Short-Term:

1. Establish a customer tracking program to record and analyze trip requests facilitated by the RTCC as well as record requests that were unable to be completed by the RTCC.
2. Work with public transit providers', volunteer programs, and private transportation providers to meet existing demand outside the service area.
3. Seek partnerships with private for-profit and non-profit transportation providers to create subsidized transportation options for trips the RTCC cannot meet.

Long-Term:

1. Evaluate the RTCC annually to determine the effectiveness the RTCC's activities including, but not limited to, the RTCC service area, existing partnerships, etc.
2. Work with MnDOT to create effective coordination efforts among surrounding RTCCs and to develop standards to determine how counties can be added to the RTCC.

7. Next Steps

The proposed service area will need to be reviewed and commented on by the RTCC Project Management Team (PMT). Following the RTCC PMT review, the service area will be submitted to MnDOT Office of Transit and Active Transportation by Dec.31, 2018. The APO and WSB will also be developing project memos with staffing recommendations and funding scenarios. The RTCC PMT will provide essential feedback to help finalize the proposed service area, the staffing recommendations, and the funding scenarios.

It is important to note that while this memo makes a technical recommendation on a proposed service area based on the analysis of available information, each of the proposed counties will need to approve or reject the use of human service agency support (be it financial or in-kind services) to support the RTCC. Thus, it is not really up to the RTCC to define its geographic service area as much as it is up to each county to decide if it wants to be part of the RTCC's service area. In order for each county to make that decision, the anticipated costs and benefits of the RTCC must be defined. It would be premature to approach any county or municipality regarding their potential participation in an RTCC until near the end of the OIP development process. Therefore, the proposed service area identified in this memo can be considered an initial, logical starting point for having conversations with the identified counties and municipalities within the preliminary service area. The final service area will be determined as one of the last steps in the OIP development process.