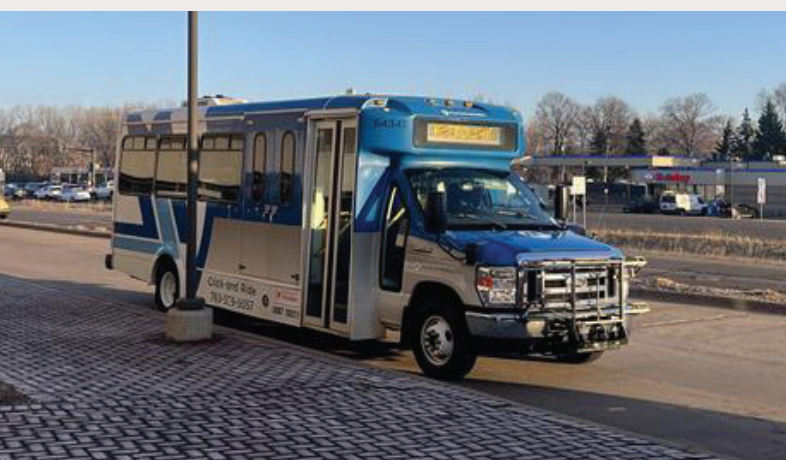




Twin Cities Regional Microtransit Policy Framework Final Report



Executive Summary

The Minneapolis-Saint Paul region is experiencing growth in microtransit, a recently emerging transit service model. The Metropolitan Council produced the Regional Microtransit Policy Framework Study to collaboratively develop a strategy with the region's five transit providers and microtransit operators to improve microtransit coordination, service quality, and passenger experience.

What is Microtransit?

Microtransit is an on-demand, shared-ride transit service provided within a defined service zone. The size of the zone is entirely customizable depending on agency preferences, but service planners usually keep them small enough to keep wait times for a pickup at a reasonable number of minutes. Microtransit riders typically reserve their trips using the provider's application, with alternative booking methods such as telephone or website options also available. Most microtransit trips are booked for the same day, though many providers allow riders to schedule up to 14 days ahead.

Figure 1. Microtransit Trip with One Rider vs Two Riders

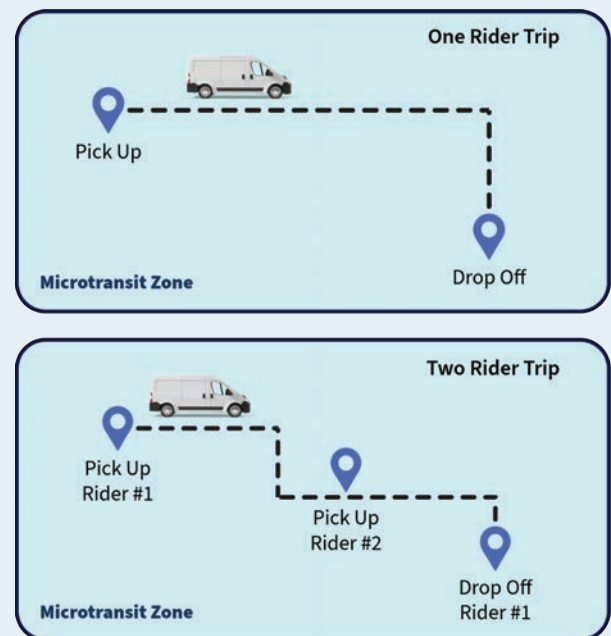


Figure 2. Microtransit Rider Journey



Search Your Destination



Book a Trip & Pay Fare



Meet the Driver at Pick Up Location



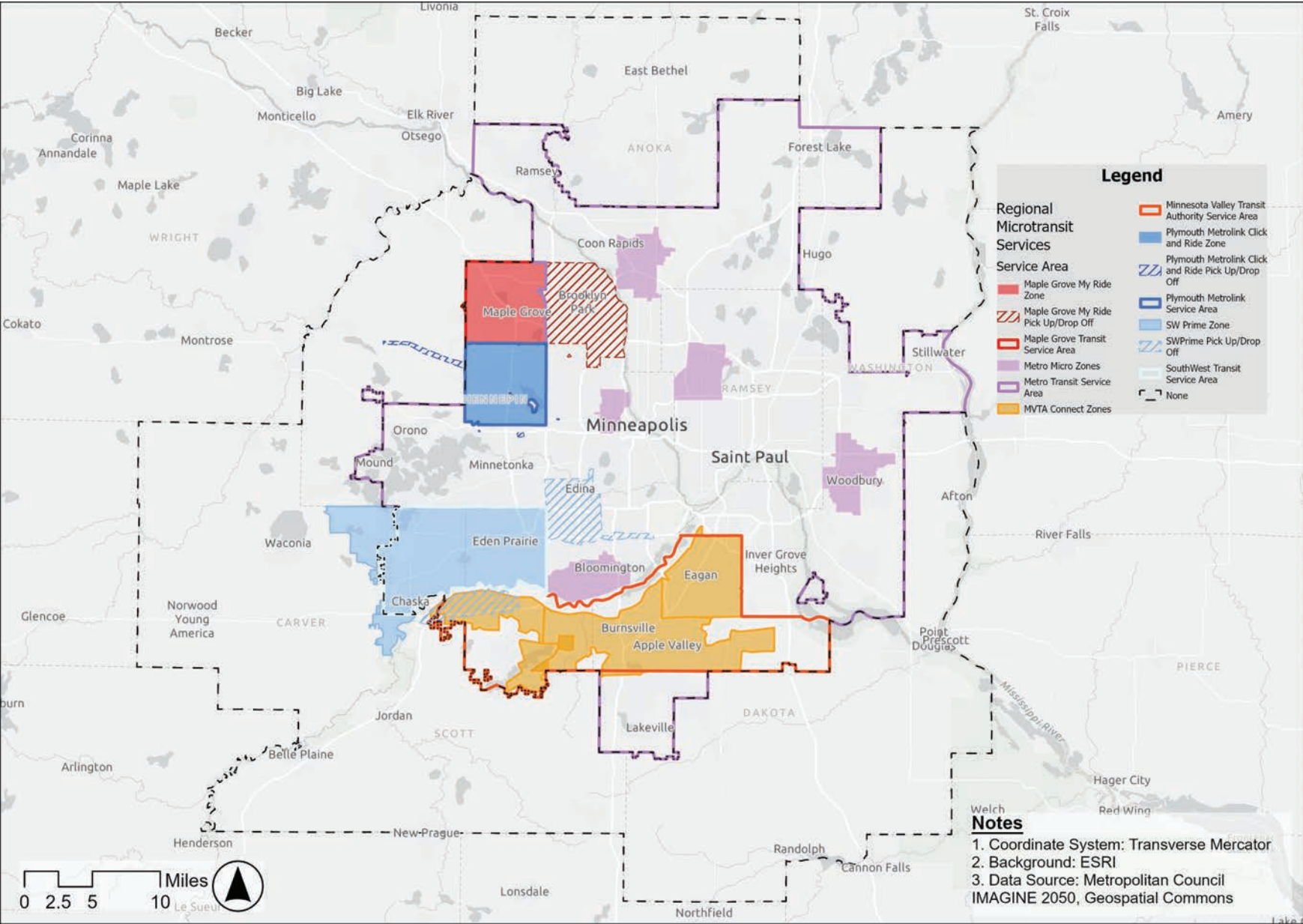
Ride



Drop Off at Destination

In the Twin Cities, there are five transit providers that operate microtransit services. Those services are MVTA Connect, Maple Grove My Ride, Metro Transit Metro Micro, Plymouth Click-and-Ride, and SW Prime, as outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Twin Cities Regional Transit Providers & Microtransit Zones



Study Recommendations

The following study recommendations help establish a common understanding of microtransit's role in the regional transit network, outline how the region will assess and compare different microtransit service types, and set priorities for future enhancements to regional microtransit operations.

#1 Adopt Purposes of Microtransit in Twin Cities Regional Transit Network

The 2050 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) is the region's long-range transportation plan. It is recommended that the Metropolitan Council include language addressing the purpose microtransit serves in the broader transit network.

Microtransit plays multiple roles within the Twin Cities regional transit network and has potential future applications observed in other regions that are not yet operating in the Twin Cities. Each microtransit service may serve multiple purposes. However, successful microtransit services should clearly identify, and design service for, the purpose(s) it seeks to fulfill.

#2 Adopt a Microtransit Framework

The 2050 TPP is recommended to be updated to include text that establishes the framework for categorizing microtransit service zones, which will support more context-driven planning and performance evaluation.

The framework establishes a systematic approach for differentiating service types and implementing relevant policies and guidelines appropriate to each category. For instance, the standard for passengers per service hour varies depending on whether the service predominantly falls within Urban, Suburban, Rural Center, or Rural Microtransit framework categories.



Figure 4. Purposes of Microtransit



Supporting fixed route transit as feeder or first/last mile connection



Providing geographic and timespan coverage in the transit network



Improving quality of access to destinations

Figure 5. Microtransit Framework



Urban Microtransit
Transit Market Area 1 and 2



Suburban Microtransit
Emerging Transit Market Area 2, Transit Market Area 3 and 4



Rural Center & Freestanding Town Center Microtransit
Emerging Transit Market Area 3, Freestanding Town Center



Rural Microtransit
Transit Market Area 5

#3 Update the Transportation Policy Plan

The 2050 TPP is recommended to be updated to include language addressing microtransit in the Transit Investment Plan, Policies & Actions, and Transit Design & Performance Guidelines. These updates include incorporations of references to the microtransit framework categories, the Regional Agenda for Microtransit, guidance from this study and updates to the methodology for the Regional Route Analysis.

#4 Implement the Regional Agenda for Microtransit

The Metropolitan Council and the region's five microtransit providers have collaborated on a set of statements that reflect a shared direction for aligning microtransit service strategies over the next five years. The transit providers' long-term objective in pursuing this agenda is to improve the microtransit customer experience across the region by moving toward consistency and lowering barriers to integration of microtransit into the regional transit network.

Each action from the Regional Agenda for Microtransit outlined in the table below is part of delivering this vision. The Metropolitan Council set the implementation timeline for each action based on the providers' input on priority level, impact on regional goals and the level of complexity to deliver them.

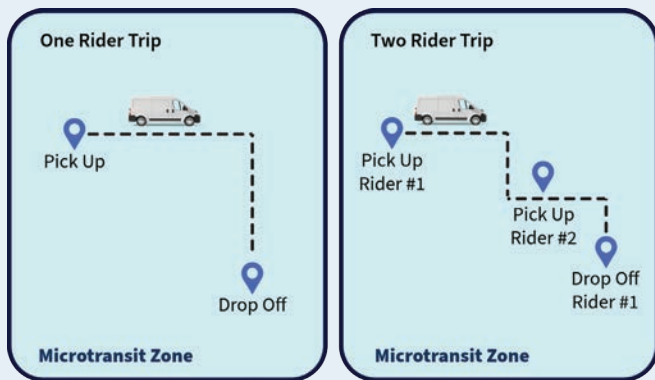
Regional Agenda for Microtransit Action	Priority Level	Impact Level	Level of Complexity	Anticipated Timeline
TA1: Microtransit will be incorporated into analysis on access to destination metrics used in regional planning.	Low	Low	Medium	Long-term
F1: Microtransit service fares will be maintained at an affordable rate, not exceeding twice the cost of a peak-period express route service fare.	High	High	Low	Short-term
F2: All microtransit providers will align their reduced fare categories and accept Transit Assistance Program (TAP), even if fare rates vary by service.	High	High	Medium	Short-term
F3: Fare payment methods strive toward consistency across the region, with Go-To-Card and cash options universally accepted.	High	High	Low	Short-term
SC1: Regional providers will convene a working group to develop a regional transfer policy for microtransit, addressing transfers between microtransit and fixed-route services.	Medium	Medium	Low	Short-term
SC2: Regional agencies will strive to provide and maintain General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data for their microtransit services.	High	High	Medium	Medium-term
SC3: All providers will work toward integration on a regionally shared booking platform or provide data from their system that could be integrated into an interoperable ride reservation platform.	High	High	High	Long-term
SC4: Where possible, regional providers will strive to design microtransit to complement and integrate well with fixed route schedules.	Medium	Medium	High	Medium-term
SC5: Microtransit providers will allow other providers to make pick-ups and drop-offs at park and ride sites and transfer hubs to enable regional transit connections.	Medium	Medium	Low	Short-term
SC6: Each provider should make the regional shared map of microtransit zones available on their microtransit information platforms to better communicate to riders the available options to best suit their trip.	Medium	Low	Low	Short-term
SC7: All providers will set designated cross-zone hubs, or transfer points and popular destinations in adjacent service areas where pick-ups or drop-offs may be made to connect to destinations in an adjacent microtransit zone.	Medium	High	Medium	Medium-term

KEY: **TA:** Transit Access | **F:** Fares | **SC:** Service Coordination

1 Microtransit Overview

Microtransit is on-demand, shared-ride transit service provided within a defined service zone. The zone is fully customizable in size but is usually set small enough to keep wait times for a pick-up within a reasonable number of minutes and vary by service type. Riders book individual trips on-demand and are picked up and dropped off at a curbside stop, with other riders able to share that trip, as shown in Figure 6. People use the service to access local destinations, such as groceries, medical appointments, education, and retail destinations, as well as to connect to fixed routes.

Figure 6. Microtransit Trip with One Rider vs Two Riders



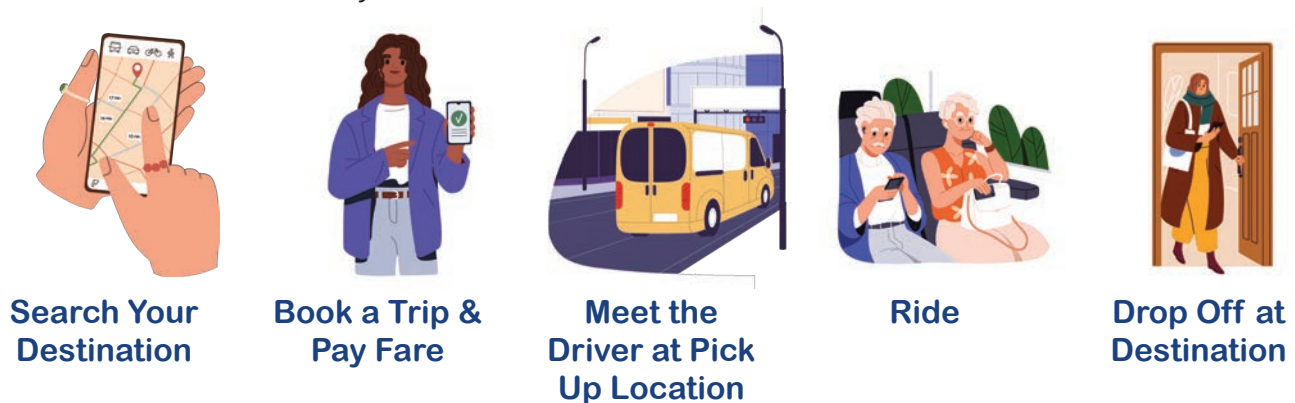
1.1 How does Microtransit work?

Microtransit riders generally reserve their trips using the provider's mobile application, with alternative booking methods such as telephone or website options also available. Most riders book trips for the same day, though some providers allow for rides scheduled up to 14 days in advance.

Following a reservation, each trip is assigned to a vehicle and driver, and the rider is informed of an estimated wait time and pick up window. At the scheduled time, the rider meets the driver at the designated pick up location and proceeds to their destination, often sharing the ride with additional passengers collected along the route.

There is typically a pick up window that the passenger must be within to allow the microtransit service to be early or late if the trip schedule requires it. The pick up window can be specified by each provider but typically there is a 10- or 15-minute allowance on either side of the pick up time. The journey concludes with the rider's drop off at their intended location within the defined service area. For an illustrative summary of these steps, see Figure 7.

Figure 7. Microtransit Rider Journey

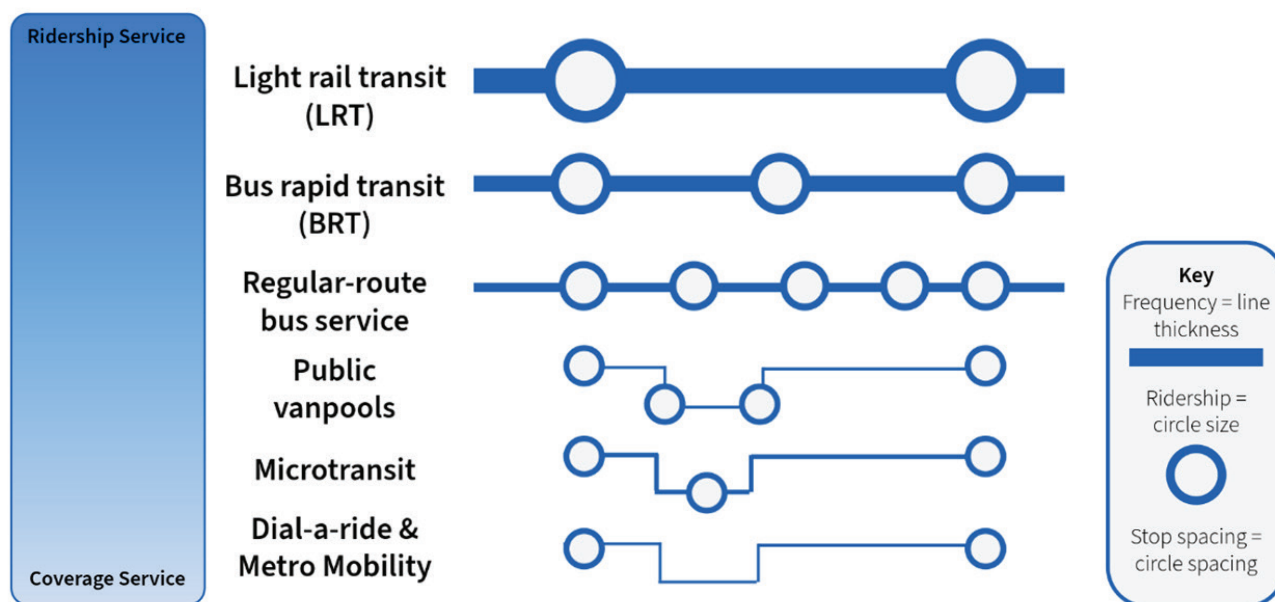


1.2 How does Microtransit relate to other fixed route transit services?

Microtransit is a coverage service, meaning it connects riders to important destinations, but it does not move as many passengers as fixed route transit. This means microtransit relies on the fixed route system to provide efficient connections to major destinations. On the other hand, microtransit operates well in areas of the region with lower demand or specialized needs where fixed routes would not operate efficiently.

There are currently six types of transit service in the region, each with a role to play in the network. The relationships between services and key features are graphically represented in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Transit System Service Style Illustration



1.3 How does Microtransit relate to other non-fixed route transit services?

Microtransit shares some operational characteristics with paratransit and dial-a-ride transit options but represents a different service purpose and a higher level of service with same-day trips available. Table 2 outlines some of the key features of each non-fixed route transit service type.

Table 2. Non-Fixed Route Transit Service Type Comparison

	Microtransit (Metro micro, SW Prime, etc.)	Paratransit (Metro Mobility/ Metro Move)	Dial-a-Ride (Transit Link)
Eligibility	General public	ADA-certified riders	General public
Service Area	Zone-based (set by provider)	Within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of fixed routes	Where fixed routes are infrequent or unavailable
Vehicle Fleet	Includes ADA accessible vehicles	All ADA accessible vehicles	All ADA accessible vehicles
Scheduled/ On-Demand	Mostly on-demand (some scheduling available with some providers)	Reservations scheduled ahead of time	Reservations scheduled ahead of time

1.4 How does Microtransit operate in the Twin Cities?

In the Twin Cities, there are five transit providers, all five of which operate microtransit services, as shown in Figure 9. Each provider has developed the service to meet specific needs in their service area and has set the service zones, service hours, fares, and other policies to meet those needs.

2 Microtransit Provider Profiles

All data outlined is based on data from 2024 or the most recent available and may not fully reflect ongoing service changes.

Figure 9. Microtransit Operations in the Twin Cities

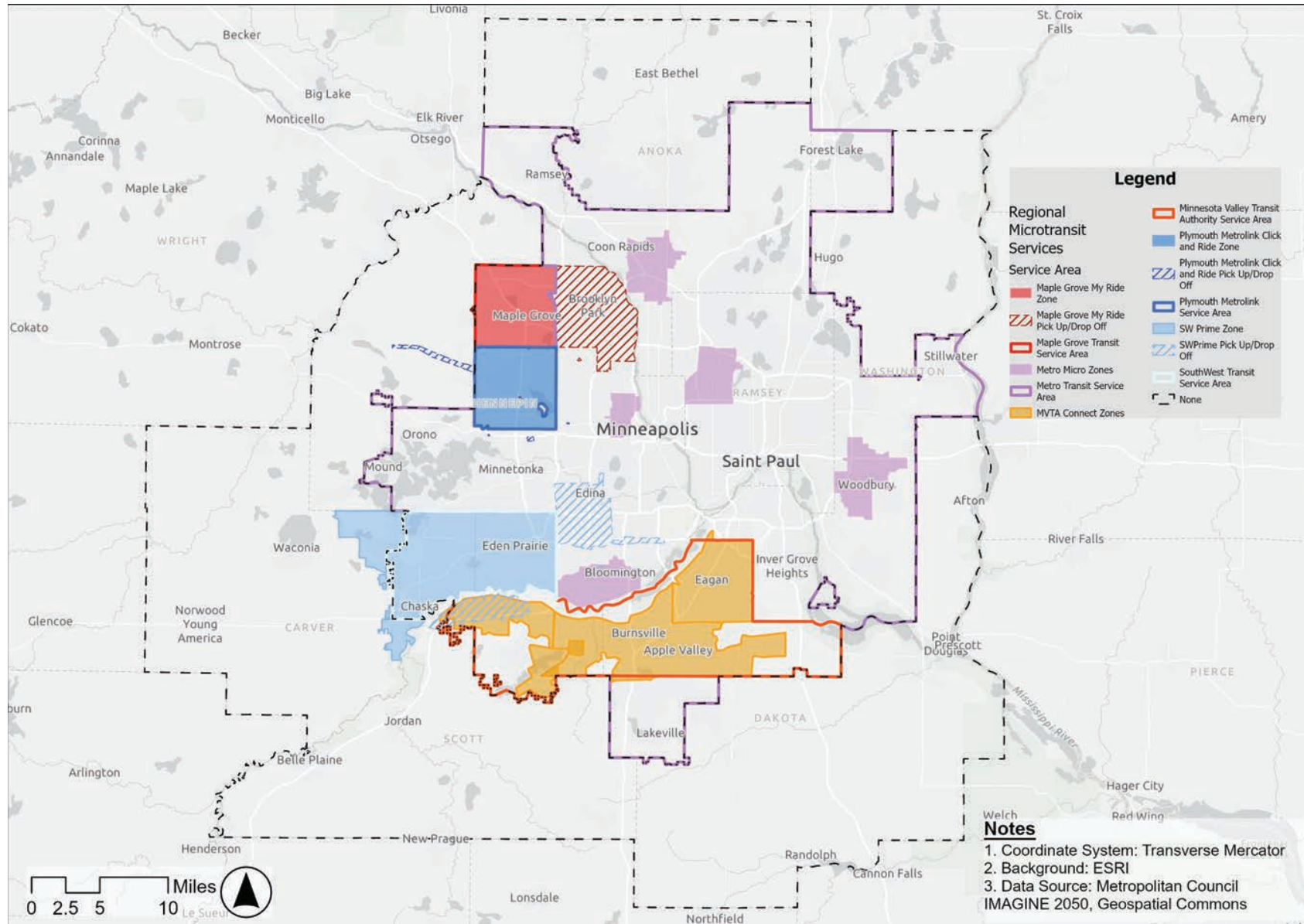




Figure 10. Maple Grove My Ride Bus

My Ride, A Service of Maple Grove Transit

Service Zone:

Trip origin and/or destination must be within City of Maple Grove. Pick up or drop off available in:

- Cities of Osseo
- Brooklyn Park
- Brooklyn Center
- Robbinsdale Transit Center
- Crystal Shopping Center
- Station 73 (Plymouth)
- West Health Campus (Plymouth)
- CROSS Food Shelf (Rogers)

Fare:

\$3 cash for single ride or \$20 for the 10 ride-ticket or mobile fare

Annual Ridership:

38,514

Average Trip Length:

7.17 miles

Service Hours Per Capita:

0.24



Figure 11. Metro Micro Bus

Metro Micro, A Service of Metro Transit

Service Zone:

- North Minneapolis: a zone bounded by 34th Ave. N., I-94 and Mississippi River, Dunwoody Blvd. and I-394, and Xerxes Ave N
- Roseville: zone roughly bound by County Road B, Old Highway 8, County Road F, and Victoria Street
- Woodbury: parts of Woodbury, Oakdale, and Lake Elmo and serves many schools, Park & Rides, clinics, and retail areas
- Bloomington: zone roughly bounded by 94th Street, Highway 169, the Minnesota River, and 3rd Avenue
- Blaine: zone roughly bounded by Central Avenue to the east, 81st Avenue NE in the south, the BNSF Rail Line, and Erlandson and Sand Creek parks to the west, and 117th Avenue to the north

Fare:

\$2.50, \$3.25 during rush hours (Monday to Friday: 6 to 9 am and 3 to 6.30 pm); \$1 each for Transit Assistance Program (TAP), Mobility Fare, Youth (6-12 years of age), Seniors (ages 65+), and Medicare card holders

Annual Ridership:

63,738 (prior to launch of Bloomington & Blaine zones)

Average Trip Length:

2 miles

Service Hours Per Capita:

0.28



Figure 12. Click-and-Ride Bus

Click-and-Ride, A Service of Plymouth Metrolink

Service Zone:

Anywhere in Plymouth, in addition to select locations outside the city of Plymouth, such as:

- Ridgedale Center in Minnetonka
- Colonial Square in Wayzata
- Golden Valley Center
- Businesses located around Highway 55 and County Road 101 in Medina and Hamel
- Maple Grove Transit Station

All rides to select locations outside of Plymouth must begin or end at a location in Plymouth.

Fare:

\$3 flat rate, single ride

Annual Ridership:

45,123

Average Trip Length:

5.75 miles

Service Hours Per Capita:

0.20



Figure 13. SW Prime Van

SW Prime, A Service of SouthWest Transit

Service Zone:

- Primary service area includes Eden Prairie, Chanhassen, Chaska, Carver, and Victoria
- Autonomous Vehicle (AV) Zone: stop-to-stop service at SWT Mobility Hub in Eden Prairie
- Secondary locations (pick-up/drop-off only): Normandale Community College, select locations in Edina and Shakopee, and select clinic locations in neighboring cities

Fare:

\$5 standard rate, \$3 for Seniors (ages 65+), \$2.50 for Transit Assistance Program (TAP participant), free for disabled veterans and children of 5 years and under, and free in AV service Zone

Annual Ridership:

146,104

Average Trip Length:

9.42 miles

Service Hours Per Capita:

0.44



Figure 14. MVTA Connect Bus

MVTA Connect, A Service of Minnesota Valley Transit

Service Zone:

- Connect Main Zone includes the cities of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Rosemount, and Savage
- Connect Eagan: Eagan Zone, Eagan city boundaries
- Connect Prior Lake/Shakopee Zone: Prior Lake and Shakopee

Fare:

\$3 flat rate, single ride

Annual Ridership:

109,925

Average Trip Length:

4.51 miles

Service Hours Per Capita:

0.28

3 Study Process Overview

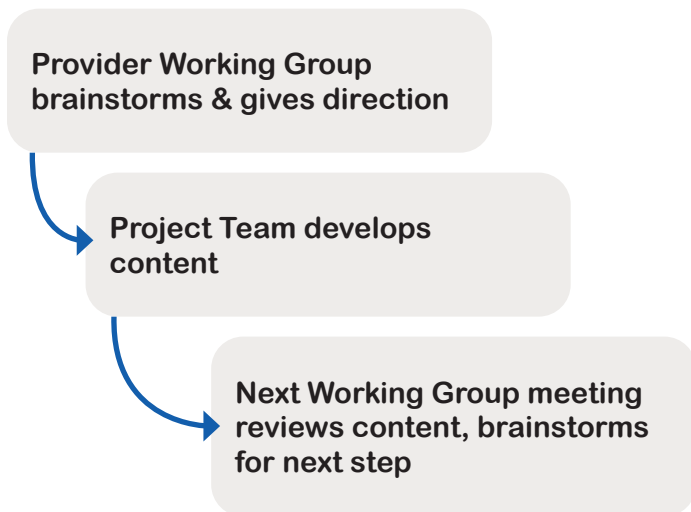
3.1 Study Objectives

The Regional Microtransit Policy Framework Study was a work item identified during the production of the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, recognizing the sustained role of microtransit as part of the regional transit network. The study includes a comprehensive set of policy recommendations tailored to the unique needs of the region related to microtransit service. The recommendations address critical aspects of regional microtransit policies to improve coordination, service quality, and passenger experience.

3.2 Approach & Schedule

The approach to this study was built around engaging with the transit providers in the region to inform a collaborative vision for microtransit policy and guidance, as represented in Figure 15. Starting in April, the study convened a Regional Transit Providers Working Group meeting every other month where the project team provided updates on technical progress and engaged providers in dialogue about upcoming content direction.

Figure 15. Approach to Content Development



Providers also received draft content for the policies, recommendations, and guidance coming out of the study to solicit input and feedback throughout the process. For the full schedule summary, see Figure 16.



Figure 16. Schedule Overview

3.3 Study Goals

The Metropolitan Council and its regional transit partners framed this study to be a collaborative process where providers help the Metropolitan Council generate ideas, form recommendations, and come to a decision on the region's preferred direction. The ideal outcome of any collaborative process is consensus, and when consensus was not available, the study committed to reflect any outstanding issues within the final documentation for future evaluation and review.

3.3.1 Outcome Goals

- Develop policy that aligns growth of microtransit with regional goals
- To set microtransit up for successful evolution that improves the rider experience
- Balance policy and guidance to support best outcomes in service

3.3.2 Process Goals

- To build relationships & capacity for collaborative problem-solving across agencies
- To ensure participants got value out of participating and demonstrating their interests are reflected and supported
- To make fair decisions such that all participants understand how and why we arrived at a decision

3.4 Guiding Principles

The following principles served as goalposts for developing the Regional Microtransit Policy Framework and the deliverables of this study. They provided a shared “North Star” as the Metropolitan Council and the transit providers made decisions about microtransit policy and guidance.

- **Improve the Customer Experience** This study advances policies and guidance that improves the customer experience of present and future microtransit riders by removing and reducing barriers for users within each service, improving connections to other transit services, and improving service across transit providers.
- **Context-Sensitive Policy & Guidance** This study advances policies and guidance that apply varied objectives for different applications of microtransit service, which vary by geography or trip purpose.
- **Balancing Flexibility & Achieving Regional Shared Goals** This study aims to preserve microtransit's core strength – its adaptability to meeting the needs of individual providers – while fostering regional collaboration to enhance the customer experience and advancing shared objectives. This study leans toward producing guidance that equips providers with the flexibility to implement at their discretion, except when there are clear shared goals for which policy is the best tool to achieve.





4 Peer Region Review

The study team reviewed and developed summaries of microtransit service development and regional policy in several peer regions to inform local policy & guidance development. The following contains highlights from the review, which can be found in Appendix D in full.

4.1 Denver

Microtransit Service Overview

- 4 providers
- 28 zones

Evolution of Current Service: FlexRide

- In 2000, the circulator service was discontinued due to poor performance.
- Call-n-Ride, first on-demand service was established in 2008 with a median zone size of 7.5 square miles.
- Service was rebranded as FlexRide in 2019 and first launched in Broomfield.
- Initially there were 21 FlexRide service areas, which has now expanded to 24. Those completing a trip outside the local zone pay to upgrade their fare.
- FlexRide has evolved to include scheduled trips that do not require advanced reservation within the microtransit service zone.
- **Takeaway:** Today FlexRide represents both a microtransit innovator and pioneer, and a successful operator in the post-COVID era - 47.1% increase in ridership in 2024 compared to 2021.

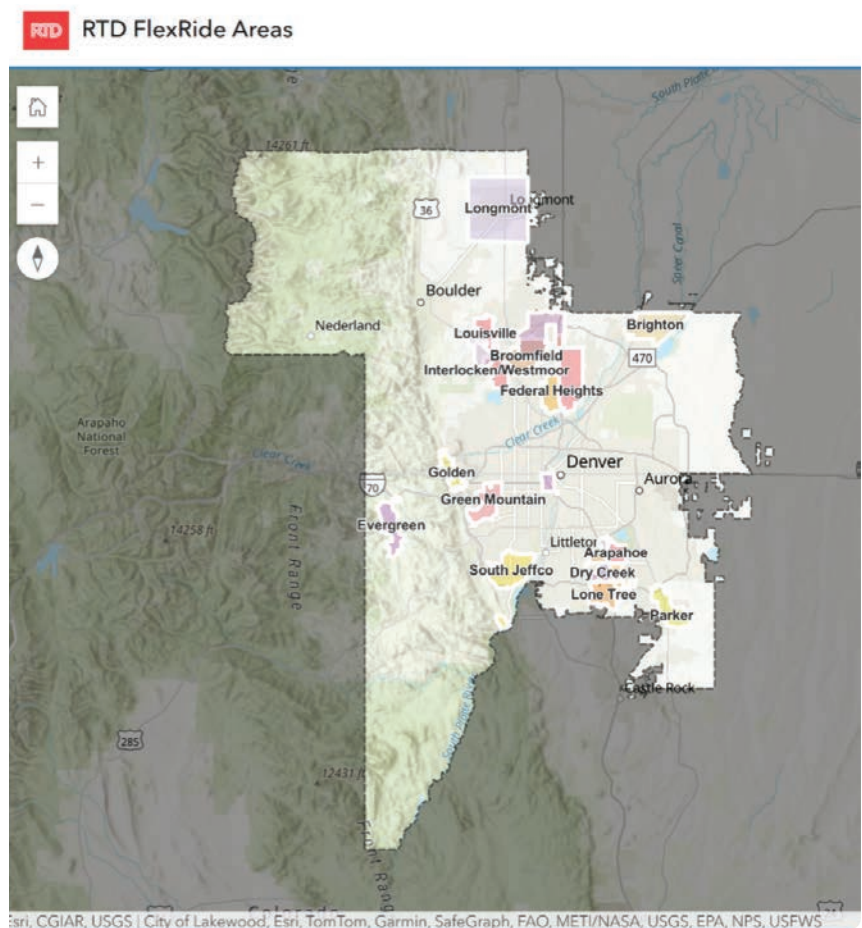


Figure 17. RTD Microtransit Zone Map – Courtesy of Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD)

Regional Integration

There have been minimal service integrations to date due to “distinct and complimentary” service goals of FlexRide and the Denver Connector. The two models have been compared in Table 3.

Policy & Governance

Planning: The Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and leads regional transportation planning efforts.

Governance: Key equity policy considerations for Microtransit from DRCOG include:

- Ensure microtransit service areas include equity priority areas
- Ensure it is accessible for shift workers who may need transport at off-peak hours
- Ensure fares are comparable to fixed routes
- Ensure accessible vehicles
- Ensure zones are established with community input

Table 3. Regional Microtransit in Denver

	Denver Connector	FlexRide
Governance	Operated by Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, contracted to Downtowner	RTD manages FlexRide, contracted to Via Mobility
Funding	Funded by City budget, with some RTD contribution	RTD budget (based on sales taxes, fares, grants)
Service Model	Free for user	Fare based
Objectives	Enhance local mobility as well as connect residents to local destinations including RTD stations	First and last mile to RTD transit; paratransit
Areas	Specific neighborhoods	Region wide (within zones and between adjacent zones)



4.2 Seattle

Microtransit Service Overview

- 4 microtransit services
- 15 zones

Evolution of Current Service: King County Metro Flex

- The Routing Company launched microtransit in the region, initially called Ride Pingo, to substitute for lower productivity fixed routes. It served King County and Kitsap County zones.
- Separately, Via to Transit was established in 2019 as a pilot to Link Light Rail Stations.
- MetroFlex launched in 2023 to replace Ride Pingo, Via to Transit and Community Ride, operated by Via.
- The evolution was driven by the ability to create a unified service area to cover more destinations, rather than separate zones with only hubs and transfer points in between.
- **Takeaway:** Simplification of ride booking and consistency throughout the region supports improved rider experience.

Regional Integration

- **Fare Payment:** The region has universal acceptance of the ORCA card across providers.
- **Trip Planning:** There is a One-Call/One-Click system for the region covering fixed route and demand-response services in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties.
 - This work was led by King County Mobility Coalition and recently received FTA funding for Phase 2 through Innovative Coordinated Access & Mobility (ICAM) Pilot Program.
- **Funding:** Microtransit is primarily locally funded, with some FTA grants to spur development (Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility [ICAM] & Mobility on Demand Sandbox).

Policy & Governance

Planning: Puget Sound Regional Council is the regional planning authority.

Microtransit Service Areas (By Agency)

- Community Transit (Zip Alderwood)
- King County Metro (Metro Flex)
- Kitsap Transit (On-Demand Service)
- Pierce Transit (Runner)

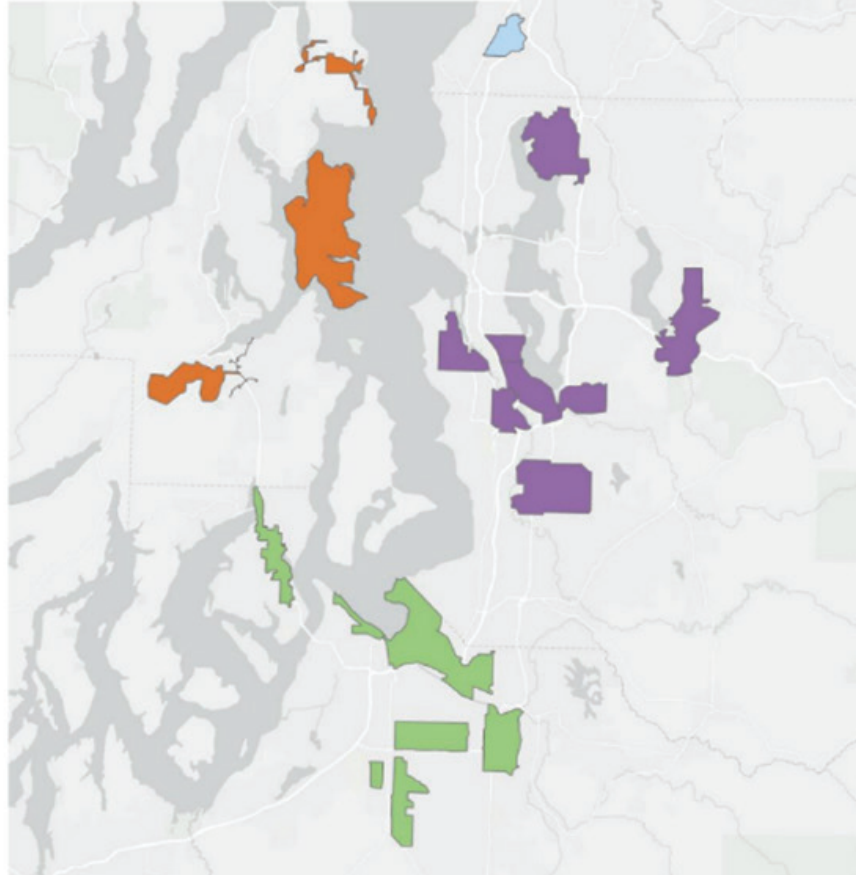


Figure 18. Seattle Microtransit Service Areas - Courtesy of Puget Sound Regional Council

- The Regional Transportation Plan – Coordinated Mobility Plan identifies need to advance cost sharing and coordination among providers.
- The Mobility-On-Demand Work Program advances microtransit coordinated policies and metrics.
- The Transit Operators Committee meets regularly and provides input on microtransit policy and governance topics. It provides the annual Transit Integration Report.

Governance: King County Metro has adopted microtransit into the Service Guidelines.

- The guidelines include service design, pilot processes, and evaluation criteria for microtransit expansion, reduction, or transition to fixed route services.
- Key principles from the guidelines include creation of “a prioritization methodology and a framework for evaluating pilots based on productivity, efficiency, and equity.”
- King County Metro operates microtransit in “low-density areas where demand is widely dispersed” and microtransit can achieve more “effective” and “sustainable” service than fixed routes.

4.3 Toronto

Microtransit Service Overview

- 4 microtransit services
- 10 zones

Evolution of Current Service: Milton Microtransit

- Pilot projects for Metrolinx started in 2015-2016 and were supported in multiple planning efforts and policies through 2020.
- The initial pilot was very well received both by riders – with a 90% satisfaction rating – and by Metrolinx – with 39% cost recovery ratio, which was a 15% improvement over the fixed route service in the area.
- In 2019-2021, the New Mobility Pilot Program was established as a partnership of Metrolinx, Durham Region Transit and Grand River Transit.
- Funding challenges have made Metrolinx revert service to 30ft buses, limiting ability to service curb-to-curb trips.

Regional Integration

- **Fare payment:** The region universally accepts the PRESTO card.
- **Partnerships:** There is active participation with University of Toronto on planning and study toward a Mobility as a Service (MaaS) model.

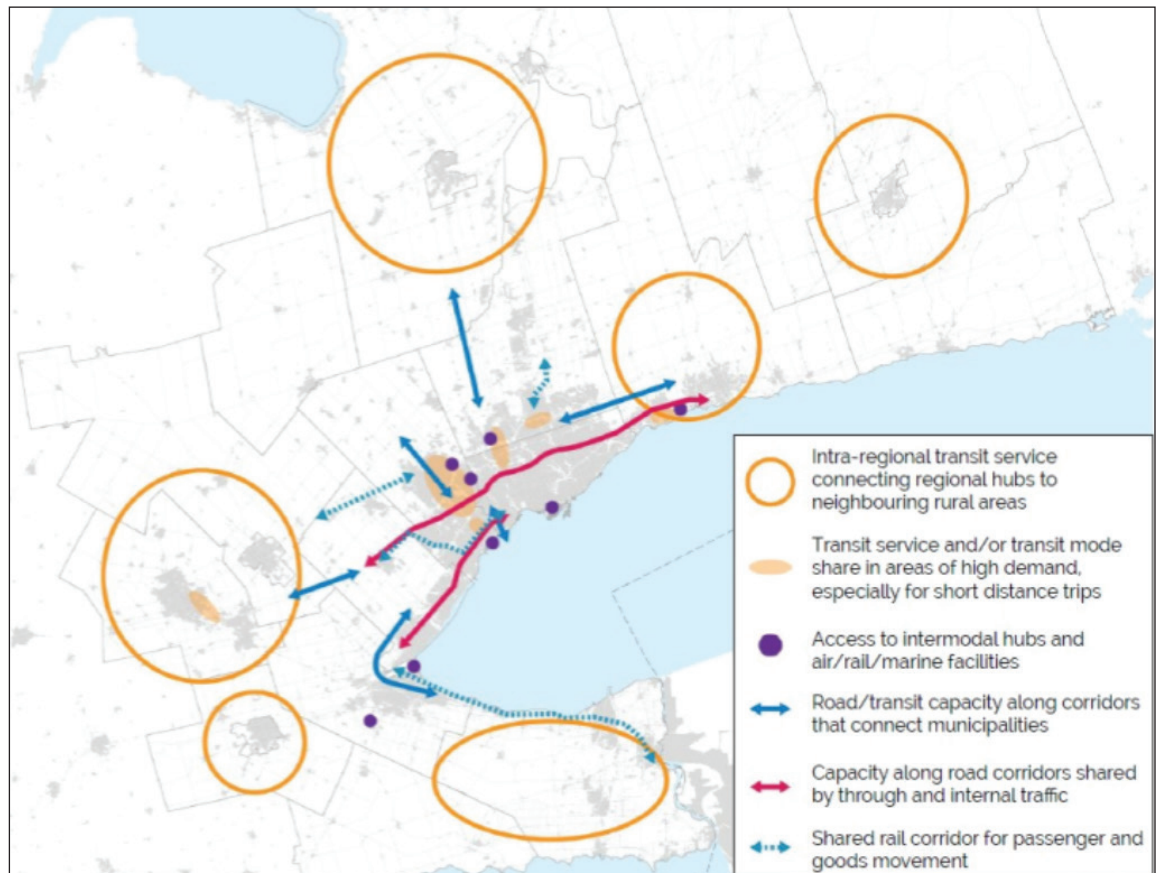
Policy & Governance

Planning: The province's transportation plan "Connecting the GGH" (Greater Golden Horseshoe) outlines several microtransit related objectives – centered around providing mode choices and increasing access.

- "Support the use of on-demand microtransit to better serve low-performing conventional routes or new routes, and to improve first-mile/last-mile connections to higher order public transit."

Governance: There is contrast in policy and funding environment given the Canadian governance context.

Figure 20. Toronto Region Map from Connecting the GGH Report, Courtesy: Province of Ontario



4.4 Atlanta

Microtransit Service Overview

- 8 microtransit services
- 10 zones

Evolution of Current Service: Henry County Transit

- Henry County is 30 minutes outside downtown Atlanta, operating in a suburban context.
- Express routes and dial-a-ride service evolved to include a Via-based microtransit service in 2024.
- Henry County has added a local fixed route within the microtransit zone as part of implementation of a Transit Master Plan.
- **Takeaway:** Microtransit can build demand and technical foundations of a future local fixed route service.

Regional Integration

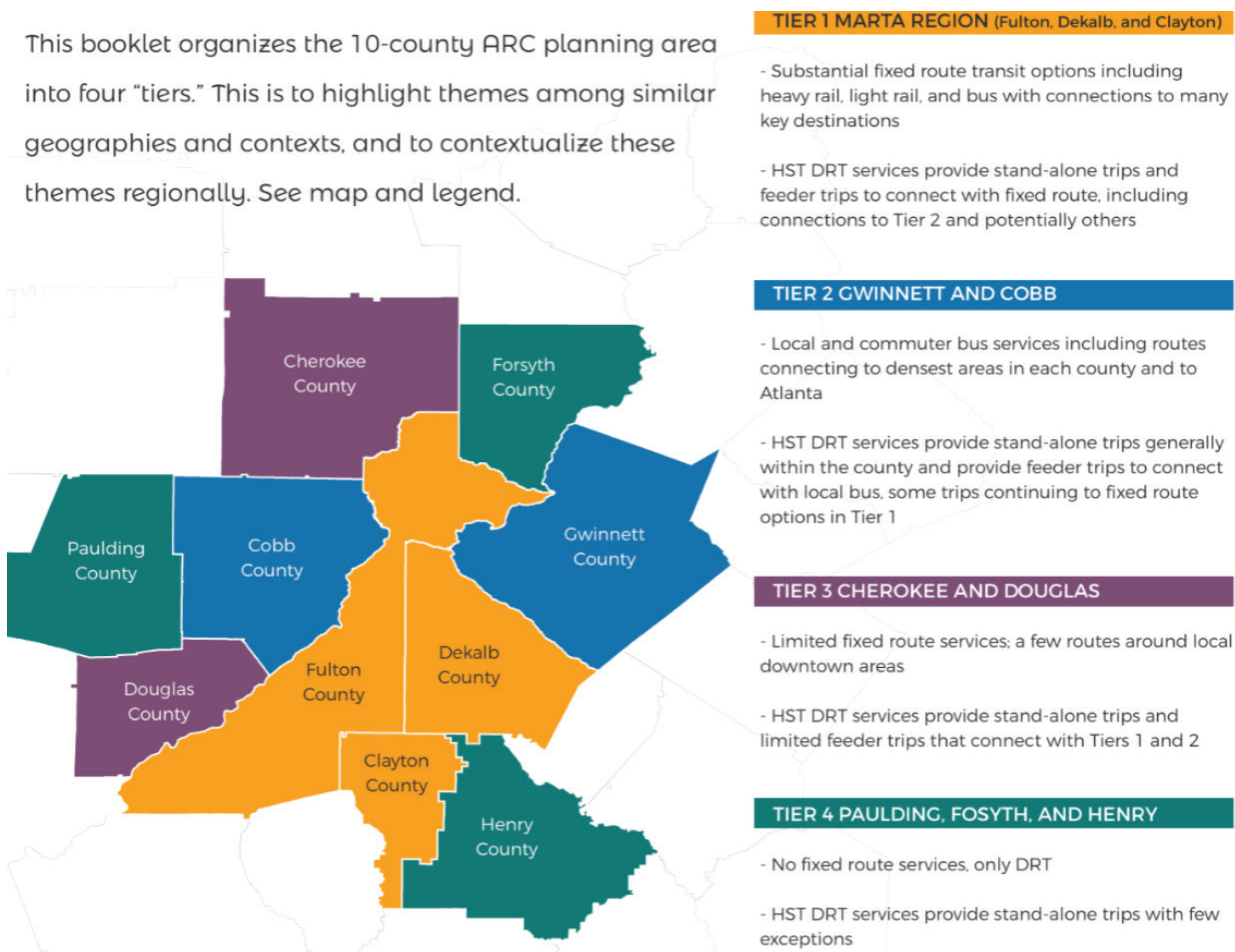
- **Planning:** The Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority coordinates transit planning among the providers and coordinates the state/federal funds.
- **Funding:** The Atlanta-region Transit Link Authority (ATL) funded CobbLinc and Ride Gwinnett microtransit projects, as well as the airport shuttle with FY 2023 Transit Trust Funds.
- **Exploring coordination:** Some regional planning meetings have acknowledged desire for greater platform integration, trip planning ability (GTFS-Flex support), and fare integration.

Policy & Governance

Planning: The Atlanta Regional Commission is the regional planning agency. The region strengthened its coordination approach through the Demand Response Implementation Plan (11/2020).

- It includes four Tiers based on context of county transit services.
- The plan develops recommendations based on themes from existing and desired services within each Tier.
- It did not include service standards.

Figure 21. Demand Response Implementation Plan Tiers, Courtesy of Atlanta Regional Commission



4.5 Peer Region Review Summary

The outcomes of this analysis point to some useful reference points as the Twin Cities region develops microtransit policies and guidance. Highlights from each region analyzed include:

Denver

- Included independent service providers in urban and suburban settings
- United by innovative regional partnerships for holistic mobility planning and operations

Seattle

- Multi-provider region with connector, coverage, and feeder microtransit models
- Adjacent service zones have consolidated to one platform
- Produces annual transit integration report to advance shared priorities
- Strong unified fare payment system and strong service design standards

Toronto

- Suburban providers leading the way on microtransit service implementation
- Provincial government prioritizing full suite of Mobility as a Service (MaaS) strategies, which may help overcome existing funding limitations

Atlanta

- Multi-provider region covering suburban and rural zones, with urban areas planned
- While individual services are well established, collaboration structures are still evolving to support better rider experience





5 Study Outcomes

Through an iterative content development process with the Regional Providers Working Group, this study produced three memos which are included in this report as Appendices.

- Appendix A – Microtransit Framework Memo
- Appendix B – Twin Cities Microtransit Policy and Performance Measures Memo
- Appendix C – Twin Cities Regional Microtransit Service and Network Design Memo

In addition to the recommendations proposed in Section 6 of this report, Appendix C includes guidance for providers as the region continues to plan for the growth of microtransit as a part of the regional transit service network.

5.1 Network Design Guidance

Designing a microtransit network begins with a clear understanding of the role each zone will play within the broader transit network. Service development and network design principles for microtransit integrate it into the broader transit network so that microtransit is not planned in isolation, but as a complementary piece of the transportation ecosystem. At the foundation of the service design process is the need to define the purpose of each microtransit service zone among the region's three purposes of microtransit:

- **Service Purpose** – the “why” behind the approach
 - Supporting fixed route transit as feeder or first-last mile connection
 - Providing geographic and timespan coverage of transit network
 - Improving quality of access to destinations
- **Objectives** – the specific, actionable outcome that puts in the purpose into practice, defines the “what”

Demand & Market Assessment

Just as fixed-route transit planning is shaped by land use patterns, microtransit demand is closely linked to how people live, work, and travel within a community. The Twin Cities region uses a Microtransit Framework to reflect the land use, population, and transportation characteristics of an area in the planning of new microtransit services and evaluation of existing ones. The Microtransit Framework is built upon the existing Transit Market Areas used throughout regional planning.

Figure 5. Microtransit Framework



Urban Microtransit
Transit Market Area 1 and 2



Suburban Microtransit
Emerging Transit Market Area 2, Transit Market Area 3 and 4



Rural Center & Freestanding Town Center Microtransit
Emerging Transit Market Area 3, Freestanding Town Center



Rural Microtransit
Transit Market Area 5

Table 4: Service Design Parameters by Zone Type

Microtransit Framework Zone Type				
	Urban Microtransit	Suburban Microtransit	Rural Center & Freestanding Town Center Microtransit	Rural Microtransit
Service Area Size	2-5 sq. mi.	15-40 sq. mi.	5-20 sq. mi.	20-100+ sq. mi.
Daily Trip Demand (est.)	50-100	40-80	60-120	20-80
Average Wait Time Target	5-10 min	10-20 min	10-20 min	15-30 min
Average Trip Duration	5-15 min	10-15 min	12-20 min	20-30 min
Productivity Target (PPH)	4.1	2.5	2.3	2
Estimated Vehicles Needed	2-3	2-3	3-5	1-3
Typical Vehicle Size	Minivans/Cutaways (4-8 riders)	Minivans/Cutaways (4-8 riders)	Minivans/Cutaways (4-8 riders)	Sedans, Minivans, and Cutaways (2-8 riders)
Service Design Features	Dense areas, short trips, high demand potential, high rates of pooling	Medium density, longer trip lengths, connections to other transit services	Broader trip purposes within a single zone	Long distances, coverage and equity-based service
Example Communities (sq mi)	Downtown Minneapolis (2.5), Downtown Saint Paul (2.3), Northeast Minneapolis (5)	Maple Grove (35), Plymouth (35), Roseville (15)	Waconia, Hastings (10), Stillwater (7)	Empire (34), Scandia (39)

Accessibility

All riders, regardless of age, ability, language, income, or technological access, should be able to use microtransit services in the region. Transit providers should develop and document accessibility standards to maintain a system that is equitable, inclusive, and compliant with regulations.

Physical accessibility

Transit providers maintain ADA-complaint fleet vehicles to ensure all riders can utilize microtransit. Fully ADA-compliant vehicles are equipped with ramps or lifts, and securement systems for wheelchairs and other mobility devices. Vehicle seating arrangements are designed to accommodate standard specifications for wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, and strollers. Drivers also play an important role and receive training in passenger assistance, including boarding, securement, and communication with riders who have disabilities. In addition, pick-up and drop-off points should be evaluated for safe and accessible boarding during the service design stages and continuously after service launch, analyzing if features like curb cuts, sidewalks, accessible grades and adequate lighting are consistently available.

Booking and technology accessibility

Riders should be able to request trips through multiple channels, including by mobile application (compatible with a wide range of devices), by phone, and a web booking portal to enable use by individuals without smartphones or data plans. Digital booking platforms should comply with WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standards, which guarantee compatibility with screen readers, large-text displays, and color contrast. Providers should strive to offer app-based payments, GoTo card acceptance, and cash options.

Language and communication accessibility

Riders should receive information in formats they can understand. Service information, whether through the app, website, or call center, should be available in the primary languages spoken in the service area. Written materials and instructions should use plain language, generally at a grade 6–8 reading level, to maximize comprehension. Riders who need alternative formats should have access to large print, braille, or audio versions of service information upon request.

Performance standards and monitoring

Transit providers can strive to ensure that all ADA-eligible trips are fulfilled without denial. Accessibility-related complaints should be tracked and resolved within a strict timeframe to demonstrate responsiveness. Finally, annual accessibility audits of vehicles, software, and policies reaffirm accessibility as a sustained priority.

Operational Efficiency

Operational efficiency ensures that resources like vehicles, drivers, and funding, are used effectively while still meeting reliability and customer service goals. Minimizing deadhead miles and maximizing the number of shared rides while still meeting customer experience expectations are two key efficiency metrics that providers actively monitor. Advanced dispatch software capable of real-time route optimization can help meet these goals, as well as strategic vehicle scheduling that accounts for geographic demand patterns, driver shifts, and the locations of vehicles to reduce response times. Productivity is measured as passengers per in-service hour and subsidy per passenger trip, which is regularly reviewed internally by providers and annually analyzed in the Regional Route Analysis. These practices enable transit providers to balance the dual objectives of providing service coverage and maintaining cost-effective, efficient operations.

Network Integration with Fixed-Route & Multimodal Transit

A key factor in successfully integrating microtransit with the broader transit network comes down to the use of General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data. GTFS is the common data standard that allows fixed-route transit schedules, stops, and service information to be shared with trip planners, maps, and other mobility tools. GTFS information from the fixed-route system is typically ingested into the microtransit software platform in real time so that schedules, arrivals, and transfers are accurately reflected for a seamless customer experience.

GTFS-Flex is an extension of the GTFS standard that supports flexible, on-demand services such as microtransit. With GTFS-Flex, microtransit services can be discovered and displayed in the same tools that riders already use to plan fixed-route trips, making microtransit feel like an integrated part of the transit network rather than a standalone option.

Service Coordination

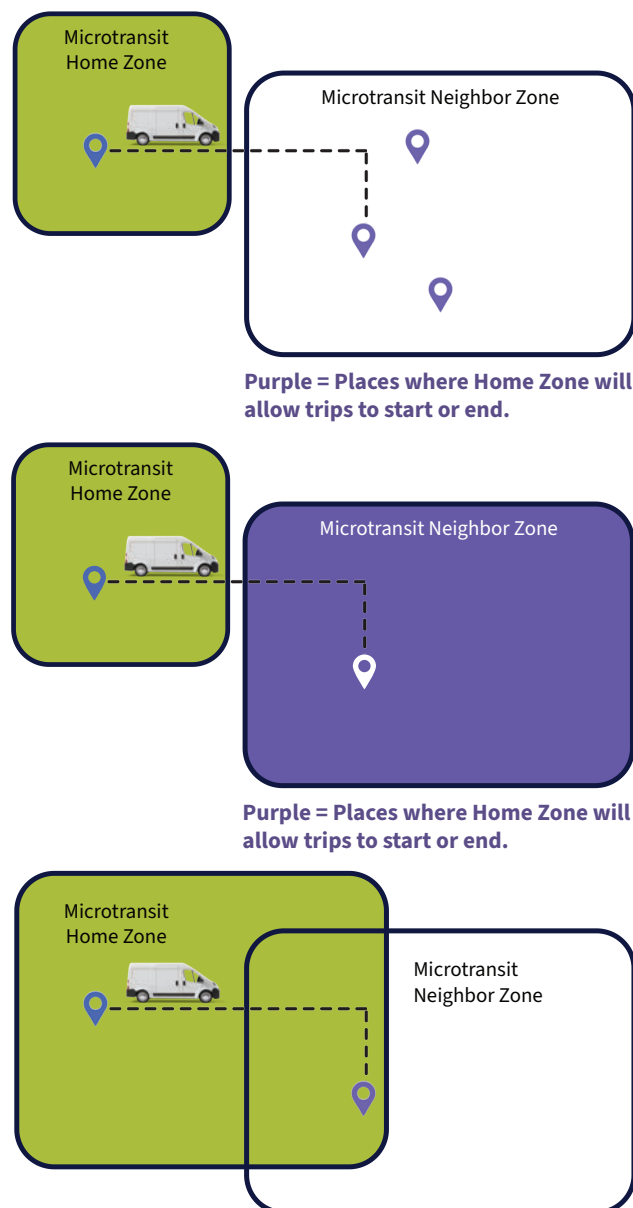
Riders benefit by creating a more regionally integrated network for travel between communities, especially with a hub-and-spoke fixed route transit network. Microtransit services can provide essential connections to adjacent communities by establishing planned service coordination, giving riders ways transfer to other services to reach destinations outside the microtransit zone. Transit providers each determine how to support connections from their microtransit zone(s) into other transit and travel options. Service coordination can take one of three forms:

- **Default Coordination Style – Cross-Zone Hubs:**
Trips to or from designated transfer points or popular destinations in adjacent service areas (transit stations, park and rides, commercial hubs, hospitals, stadiums, universities etc.) are allowed.
 - Cross-zone hubs may be located at other transit provider's stations if they have coordinated with the other provider and received approval to operate at the facility.
- **Alternative A – Limited, Direct Out of Zone Travel:**
Trips between adjacent microtransit services are permitted to start or end in a defined neighboring area. This approach enables flexible, rider-focused service across jurisdiction boundaries.
 - Pick-up or drop-off only zones may be located outside a provider's service area with staff coordination on service design from the transit provider who operates service in that area.
- **Alternative B – Coordinated Service:** Two transit providers collaborate to provide service in a microtransit zone which may span service areas or overlap with another service, based on available fleet resources and capacity to meet service requests.
 - A provider may only extend a zone for full pickup and drop off beyond their service area at the request of the agency who operates service there.
 - Local governments may request microtransit service from their local transit provider with a funding source to support the service. If the transit provider declines to establish a requested service, the local transit provider may engage other adjacent providers to determine if a coordinated service arrangement could be established between the providers.

While service coordination is up to each transit provider as part of their network design, it is important to consider how to produce a more regionally connected network by enabling access to adjacent communities and transit services. When new zones are planned, selecting a service coordination style is an important step in the process.

Trips that begin and end in another transit provider's service area, even if routed via the home zone, are discouraged. Riders using microtransit to complete such unintended trips should receive communication regarding this policy.

Figure 22. Cross-Zone Hubs Model, Alternative A Model, And Alternative B Model



Phasing, Pilots and Scalability

Piloting a microtransit service before applying formal performance standards can be a low-risk way to test, refine, and validate the service concept. A pilot period creates space to adjust the design in response to real-world conditions, while also phasing in operations gradually. It supports smoother rollout by aligning with funding cycles, staged hiring, and community engagement, and it gives transit providers flexibility to refine or even change technology platforms if needed. By gathering performance data and rider feedback early, transit providers can ensure the service is optimized before scaling to full operations. Key benefits of piloting include:

- Testing and refinement – Validates service design, zone boundaries, operating hours, and in-vehicle trip settings in real-world conditions.
- Gradual phasing – Scales service over time, aligning with staged driver hiring and incremental fleet deployment.
- Technology validation – Tests the platform's reliability, trip-matching algorithms, and reporting dashboards.
- Flexibility to adapt – Allows providers to switch technology vendors or adjust the service model if not effective.
- Funding alignment – Connects pilot milestones with phased funding approvals and budgetary oversight.
- Community engagement – Gathers rider and stakeholder feedback early to refine service and build public trust.
- Proof of concept – Demonstrates service viability, generate performance data, and build a case for long-term investment.

Reporting & Accountability

Robust, standardized reporting, enhances the processes that guide service performance, ensuring that operations are transparent, accountable, measurable, and continuously improving. Vendors must provide transit providers with detailed data reports or tools to produce such reports which contain a wealth of key indicators such as ridership, wait times, trip completion, cost per trip, and on-time performance, in real time or day of service.

Finally, reporting feeds into a continuous improvement cycle: performance reviews, rider feedback, and operational data are analyzed regularly, and findings are used to refine policies, adjust service designs, or revise vendor contracts. This ensures that microtransit remains adaptive and responsive to the community's needs over time.

Designing microtransit is not a one-time act; it is a process of continuous adjustment and improvement.



6 Recommendations

The Metropolitan Council and its regional transit partners identified several opportunities for adopting new policy and shared priorities through study's inquiry into regional transit systems and providers' structures for planning and operating microtransit. These recommendations provide the basis of a collective understanding of how microtransit fits within the regional transit network, how this region will evaluate and compare service types, and set priorities for future improvements to regional microtransit operations.



6.1 Adopt Purposes of Microtransit in Twin Cities Regional Transit Network

The 2050 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) is the region's long range transportation plan. It is recommended that it be amended to include language addressing the purpose microtransit serves in the broader transit network.

Microtransit plays multiple roles within the Twin Cities regional transit network and has potential future applications observed in other regions that are not yet operating in the Twin Cities. Each microtransit service may serve multiple purposes, however successful microtransit services should clearly identify, and design service for, what purpose(s) it seeks to fulfill.

Figure 23. Purposes of Microtransit



Supporting fixed route transit
as feeder or first/last mile connection



Providing geographic and timespan coverage
in the transit network



Improving quality of access
to destinations



Supporting fixed route transit as feeder or first/last mile connection

- Connects riders to existing fixed route transit services from their homes, from destinations within the service zone, or from key specified destinations.
- Supports regional connections between transit providers with complementary services.
- Supplements low-frequency transit routes or tests new markets for transit service.



Providing geographic and timespan coverage in the transit network

- Offers greater geographic coverage where demand is too low, street networks would be inefficient to operate in, or low-density land use patterns make it not cost-effective to run fixed route transit service.
- Serves days of the week or times of day at which fixed route service does not have enough demand to run.



Improving quality of access to destinations

- Enhances mobility options for underserved populations, such as low-income communities, seniors, suburban/rural residents, and people with disabilities. This is especially true for areas with limited or no fixed route transit options, where riders must schedule other services days in advance, rather than on-demand.
- Supports quality of mobility improvements for paratransit riders when microtransit can accommodate and supplement service for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) qualified riders with mobility devices.
- Improves access to key destinations like medical care, educational opportunities, grocery stores, and job opportunities particularly for primary caregivers and trip types that are difficult to accommodate on regular route transit.



6.2 Adopt the Microtransit Framework

The 2050 TPP is recommended to be amended to include language to establish a regional framework for categorizing microtransit service zones, which will support more context-driven planning and performance evaluation.

The microtransit framework, as outlined in Figure 24, provides a structure to distinguish service types and apply varied policies and guidelines for distinct types of service. For instance, the standard for passengers per service hour varies depending on whether the service predominantly falls within Urban, Suburban, Rural Center, or Rural Microtransit framework categories.

The microtransit framework uses the Transit Market Areas (TMAs) as a basis to categorize microtransit service zones. In this way, microtransit is integrated into the broader transit planning framework in the region. The TMA framework, while built around fixed route transit potential, captures several key features of microtransit operations potential, including:

- Population density
- Employment density
- Renter population
- Walkability
- Household vehicle ownership

The map displayed in Figure 25 illustrates how the various microtransit services in operation relate to the microtransit framework categories.

Figure 24. Microtransit Framework Categories



Urban Microtransit
Transit Market Area 1 and 2



Suburban Microtransit
Emerging Transit Market Area 2,
Transit Market Area 3 and 4



**Rural Center & Freestanding
Town Center Microtransit**
Emerging Transit Market Area 3,
Freestanding Town Center



Rural Microtransit
Transit Market Area 5

Table 5. Microtransit Framework Typical Characteristics

Zone Framework Population & Destination Density	Typical Fixed- Route Transit Service(s)	Typical Fixed Route Service Frequency	Types of Demand- Responsive Service(s)
 Urban Microtransit (TMA 1 & 2) High density, high population, mixed land use, high concentration of employment centers	• Light rail • BRT • Local and express bus network • Commuter rail (where applicable)	High-frequency and moderate frequency service (Ranging from under 15 minute to 60 minute headways)	• First- / last-mile • Expanded service coverage • Underserved neighborhood service • Late night service • Comingling of ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride services • Event based microtransit • Car-free zone shuttles • Workforce focused services • Hospital/medical access shuttles • University safe ride
 Suburban Microtransit (Emerging TMA 2, TMA 3, TMA 4) Low to moderate density, dispersed land use, commuter-oriented	• Express bus • Local fixed-route • Park-and-ride facilities • Commuter rail (where applicable)	Moderate to infrequent service (Ranging from 30-120 minutes headways)	• First- / last-mile • Expanded service coverage • Comingling of ADA paratransit and dial-a-ride services • Single zone service (within zone) • Multiple zones service (within and between zones) • Home-to-hub • Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) • University safe ride • Off-peak or weekend coverage (no fixed route services)
 Rural Center & Freestanding Town Center Microtransit (Emerging TMA 3 & Freestanding Town Centre) Moderate –high local density within a small zone, walkable cores, tourism or campus areas	• Local fixed-route bus • Circulators • Regional/intercity Coaches	Moderate to limited service (Ranging from 60-120 minute headways)	• Citywide or single zone service • Deviated microtransit service • Feeder services to intercity services • Dial-a-ride • NEMT • Commingled ADA paratransit, Dial-a-ride and microtransit • Evening and/or late-night service • Weekend or tourism service
 Rural Microtransit (TMA 5) Very low density, large geographic areas, low transit demand	• Intercity coach • Regional demand-response • Volunteer driver networks	Very limited or scheduled only service (once daily to a few times/week)	• Zone based service • Dial-a-ride • NEMT • Driver programs (carpool, vanpool, open network rideshare) • Commuter shuttles • Flexible route and deviated microtransit service



6.3 Other Updates to the Transportation Policy Plan

The 2050 TPP is recommended to be amended to include language addressing the following topics. For full recommended text, see Appendix B.

- The Metropolitan Council would update the Transit Investment Plan Chapter to formally incorporate the microtransit service types categorized in the microtransit framework, outline how regional planners and leaders make decisions for microtransit services, and outline future investments in microtransit options.
- In the Policies & Actions Chapter, the Metropolitan Council would update Action 18E to the following: “Work across transit providers to implement the Regional Agenda for Microtransit to improve the microtransit customer experience.”
- In the Transit Design & Performance Guidelines, the Metropolitan Council would reflect updates to the Regional Transit Performance Guidelines that include updates to productivity analysis methodology. Productivity analysis will compare passengers per in-service hour (PPSH) metrics from each microtransit zone to benchmark metrics set for each Microtransit Framework category, comparing services operating in similar geographic contexts. Table 6 reflects the updated productivity benchmark for each category of microtransit service. For additional methodology notes, see Appendix B. No changes are proposed to cost effectiveness analysis methods. However, it is recommended that the Metropolitan Council evaluate the regional cost allocation methodology to ensure consistency among providers.

Table 6. Productivity Benchmarks by Microtransit Framework Category

Zone Framework		Zone Average	Minimum Per Trip
 Urban Microtransit		4.1	n/a
 Suburban Microtransit		2.5	n/a
 Rural Center & Freestanding Town Center Microtransit		2.3	n/a
 Rural Microtransit		2.0	n/a



6.4 Regional Agenda for Microtransit

The Metropolitan Council and the region's five microtransit providers have collaborated on a set of statements that reflect a shared direction for aligning microtransit service strategies in the next five years. This agenda captures both existing shared practices across providers and improvements all providers have agreed to work toward. The current shared practices can be found in Appendix A. The transit providers' long-term objective in pursuing this agenda is to improve the microtransit customer experience across the region by moving toward consistency and lowering barriers to integration of microtransit into the regional transit network.

As technology in the microtransit industry evolves, this agenda will require updates to stay current with the state of practice. However, the intent is for this agenda to span across specific vendors and software updates to orient the evolution of microtransit service toward the region's policy outcomes.

6.4.1 Transit Access Analysis (TA)

Agenda Item TA1:
Microtransit will be incorporated into analysis on access to destination metrics used in regional planning.

Purpose: To appropriately reflect the expanded coverage offered by microtransit service zones.

Impact on Customer Experience: Long-term this may impact service planning decisions or policy development.

Impact on Regional Goals: Our region's transportation equity evaluation criteria are based on access to destination metrics, so accurately reflecting those outcomes will add transparency and accountability in progressing on transit service equity throughout the region, regardless of the transit mode in use within the area.

Description: Access to destination measures look at how many opportunities and resources (jobs, shopping, etc.) people can reach within a certain travel time. Currently, access by transit includes only fixed route service options. The Metropolitan Council will begin to incorporate typical microtransit service wait times and travel times for microtransit zones into transit travel time accessibility measures.

Microtransit service fares will be maintained at an affordable rate, not to exceed twice the cost of a peak-period express route service fare. Exceptions will be made if a particular service(s) is positioned as either a distance-based service or premium services such as airport service.

Purpose: To limit the potential for future fare changes that would make microtransit unaffordable to riders who rely on it for access to destinations.

Impact on Customer Experience: Provides riders long-term confidence that the cost of their ride will not significantly shift over time.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports livability of the region by maintaining affordability of services that provide access to local destinations and regionally connected transit solutions.

Description: Transit providers set the rates for microtransit fares within their service area within this affordability benchmark that will be consistent throughout the region.

Agenda Item F2: All microtransit providers will align their reduced fare categories and accept Transit Assistance Program (TAP), even if fare rates vary by service.

Purpose: To improve clarity and simplicity in microtransit fares.

Impact on Customer Experience: Reduces communication and knowledge barriers to utilizing multiple microtransit services throughout the region.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports equitable access to transportation and opportunity in our region.

Description: Providers currently accept reduced fares for a variety of rider categories beyond the Transit Assistance Program. This can create confusion for customers who use multiple systems. While the most simplified fare system would provide a single fare structure for rates and rider categories throughout the region, providers differ in microtransit service visions and desire flexibility to set fare rates for their customers locally. Therefore, the recommendation is to align, at a minimum, the categories of reduced fares accepted throughout the region on microtransit, in addition to accepting TAP reduced fares.

Agenda Item F3: Fare payment methods will strive toward consistency across the region, with Go-To-Card and cash options universally accepted.

Purpose: Reduce payment friction and inconvenience for microtransit customers. Align around the Go-To card as the region's interoperable physical fare media option.

Impact on Customer Experience: Reduce barriers to using multiple microtransit services regionally.

Impact on Regional Goals: Providing both credit card-based and cash-based fare payment options supports equitable access to transportation and opportunity in our region.

Description: In the region today, there are multiple ways to pay microtransit fares, including within providers' microtransit apps, on secondary apps, with Go-To cards, and cash. The region can work toward reducing the number of apps needed to pay for transit trips while maintaining access to the service for both credit card-based payments and cash payments.

Agenda Item SC1: Regional providers will convene a working group to develop a regional transfer policy for microtransit, addressing transfers between microtransit and fixed-route services.

Purpose: To align fare pricing incentives with the purpose of microtransit in different contexts.

Impact on Customer Experience: Simplifies transfers and creates connections to local destinations.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports integration of microtransit into the regional transit network.

Description: Transfers, or providing riders who have paid one fare the ability to move between transit routes without paying a second fare, are an essential part of connectivity in the transit network. Usually fare policies require riders to pay the higher fare of two services when using services with different fare rates in one trip. Some transit providers have set microtransit fares equal to their local route bus fare to reflect service operation as a local coverage service, and others have set it to a higher rate to encourage use of fixed route options when practical. This transfer policy will encourage connectivity between fixed routes and microtransit networks, especially as microtransit is used as a first- and last-mile tool. The exception for Urban Microtransit zones reflects the likelihood of more walkable, transit-rich settings where trip chains between microtransit and fixed routes are less necessary and providers may use transfer surcharges to incentivize riders to stay on fixed route options where possible.

Agenda Item SC2: Regional agencies will strive to provide and maintain General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data for their microtransit services.

Purpose: To adopt common data standards for ease of discovery, planning and booking microtransit.

Impact on Customer Experience: Lowers barriers to finding microtransit options with fewer apps.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports integration of microtransit into the regional transit network.

Description: GTFS is the common data standard that allows fixed-route transit schedules, stops, and service information to be shared with trip planners, maps, and other mobility tools. GTFS was initially built around fixed route service, so to integrate on-demand options like microtransit, a new standard called GTFS-Flex is being increasingly adopted. As providers adopt and enable this feature in their microtransit services over time, it is important to ensure that providers bring their microtransit service information into the common data standard so that future trip planning (and eventually booking) can happen in standard navigation apps in addition to being available in an individual agency app.

Agenda Item SC3: All providers will work toward integration on a regionally shared booking platform or provide data from their system that could be integrated into an interoperable ride reservation platform.

Purpose: To align technology approaches across transit providers to improve customer experience.

Impact on Customer Experience: Lowers barriers to booking microtransit options and makes them easy to use with fewer apps.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports efficient regional transit connections.

Description: Booking a seat on a microtransit service is an important part of the customer experience, which currently takes place on independent apps for each provider. There are several possible ways that booking could be enabled on a common app or a third-party external app. Integration requires the ability to share information about availability of vehicles across providers, prioritization of trips and detailed software/technical coordination. However, the result is a system much more like the experience riders have today in fixed route options, where they can research their trip and receive results that match their need, regardless of who runs the service.

Agenda Item SC4: Where possible, regional providers will strive to design microtransit to complement and integrate well with fixed route schedules.

Purpose: To support efficient operations and transit network integration.

Impact on Customer Experience: Lowers barriers to using microtransit to complete a fixed route trip.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports integration of microtransit into the regional transit network and aligns with a transit strategy that positions fixed routes as the “spine” of regional transit service.

Description: Within the resources available, providers can use microtransit service design to ensure that riders can easily connect to fixed route services from microtransit. This includes aligning the span of service (or hours of operation), creating time transfers (vehicles on different routes being scheduled to arrive at a common time to allow passengers to switch between them), and providing clear communication and wayfinding to microtransit stop locations at major transit stations.

Agenda Item SC5: All providers will allow other providers to make pick-ups and drop-offs at major park and rides and transfer hubs to enable regional transit connections.

Purpose: To improve operational efficiency at regional transit hubs.

Impact on Customer Experience: Increases speed of microtransit pick-up and drop-offs and access to all regional transit services.

Impact on Regional Goals: Supports efficient regional transit connections.

Description: Facilities built for transit operations often provide excellent infrastructure for microtransit stops and riders benefit from easy access between transit providers’ transit networks. Efficient operations require some coordination between providers to ensure that microtransit pick-ups and drop-offs locations are set and facilitated in a way that integrates well with other operation needs on site.

Agenda Item SC6: Each provider will make the regional shared map of microtransit zones available on their microtransit information platforms to better communicate to riders the available options to best suit their trip.

Purpose: To lower barriers to access nearby destinations outside a providers' microtransit zone.

Impact on Customer Experience: Improves visibility of service options to fill trip needs and access to destinations.

Impact on Regional Goals: Improves regional coordination & collaboration toward shared goals.

Description: Discovery of nearby microtransit zones operated by another transit provider can be difficult to find if not communicated by each provider to their customers. As microtransit evolves as a mode and works toward more technologically sophisticated methods of coordination, displaying other providers' zones within a service map and app interface with a link to the other service is a simple way to facilitate trips that may not be possible without access to the other service.

Agenda Item SC7: All providers will set designated cross-zone hubs, or transfer points and popular destinations in adjacent service areas where pick ups or drop offs may be made to connect to destinations in an adjacent microtransit zone.

Purpose: To lower barriers to access nearby destinations outside a providers' microtransit zone.

Impact on Customer Experience: Improves access to regional destinations and freedom to travel across jurisdictional boundaries.

Impact on Regional Goals: Improves regional accessibility and convenience for transit riders.

Description: Cross-zone hubs could be established at transit stations, park and rides, commercial hubs, hospitals, stadiums, and universities, in alignment with the microtransit zone's service purpose. Providers can work together on a case-by-case basis if needed to establish cross-zone hubs that allow for more efficient operations should established hubs be too far away from another provider to allow for efficient operations. This service strategy allows customers to travel between communities even if they're in different transit providers' service areas by designating transfer points between services and enabling travel to key regional destinations. This is an important benefit especially in a hub-and-spoke style fixed route transit network, where the alternative may be a long trip out-of-direction from the customer's destination to transfer to another provider at a common fixed route hub.

7 Implementation Plan

Table 7 outlines an implementation strategy relating to the proposed actions for the Twin Cities region. For each action, the Metropolitan Council and its regional transit partners considered the priority level, impact rating, and level of complexity to determine the anticipated timeline for implementation. Items that they rated as high priorities and high impact improvements may be prioritized for shorter term implementation, while higher complexity may lead to a longer timeline for implementation.

Table 7. Regional Agenda for Microtransit Action

Regional Agenda for Microtransit Action Roles to Implement	Priority Level	Impact Level	Level of Complexity	Anticipated Timeline
TA1: Microtransit will be incorporated into analysis on access to destination metrics used in regional planning. Metropolitan Council: Lead Transit Providers: Support	Low Planning metrics while important do not impact rider experience	Low Limited effect on daily operations or rider convenience	Medium New methodology to be considered for analysis	Long-term This requires integration into long-term planning documents, and the current comprehensive plan cycle is already underway.
F1: Microtransit service fares will be maintained at an affordable rate, not exceeding twice the cost of a peak-period express route service fare. Transit Providers: Lead and Implement Metropolitan Council: Support	High Fare equity is critical for accessibility	High Directly impacts ridership and affordability of services	Low No providers are anticipated to need to change their fares	Short-term With high priority and low complexity, policy can be implemented quickly with regional strategy alignment.
F2: All microtransit providers will align their reduced fare categories and accept Transit Assistance Program (TAP), even if fare rates vary by service. Transit Providers: Lead Metropolitan Council: Oversight	High Important for regional equity and accessibility	High Improves access for low-income riders	Medium Reduced fare categories are set at the provider level through administrative action	Short-term It's a high priority and generally easier to implement, as it requires mostly administrative actions and minimal technology changes.
F3: Fare payment methods strive toward consistency across the region, with Go-To-Card and cash options universally accepted. Transit Providers: Lead Metropolitan Council: Support Technical Vendors: Implement	High Consistency of payment is crucial for a good rider experience across services	High Reduces friction for riders and can lead to greater ridership	Low No providers are anticipated to need to change their fares	Short-term With high priority and low complexity, policy can be implemented quickly with regional strategy alignment.
SC1: Regional providers will convene a working group to develop a regional transfer policy for microtransit, addressing transfers between microtransit and fixed-route services. Transit Providers: Lead Metropolitan Council: Support	Medium Helps to enhance connectivity but is less critical than fare equity	Medium Improves convenience for those riders that do multi-segment trips	Low Primarily an administrative and driver training action	Short-term This strategy supports the regional vision for microtransit with modest strategic investment.
SC2: Regional agencies will strive to provide and maintain General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data for their microtransit services. Metropolitan Council: Lead Transit Providers: Implement Technical Vendors: Support	High Critical for inter-regional trip planning and interoperability	High Enables integration with any trip planning app and allows riders to see all connections and options	Medium Most providers already producing GTFS for fixed route and most vendors are capable.	Medium-term With some elements of software development out of providers' control, the action is encouraged to be taken as soon as it is supported by each provider's vendor, given the long-term value.

**Regional Agenda for
Microtransit Action**

Roles to Implement	Priority Level	Impact Level	Level of Complexity	Anticipated Timeline
SC3: All providers will work toward integration on a regionally shared booking platform or provide data from their system that could be integrated into an interoperable ride reservation platform. Metropolitan Council: Lead Transit Providers: Support Technical Vendors: Implement	High One platform would enable seamless microtransit experience across the region	High Major improvement for users and overall system efficiency if one system	High Complex technical integration across multiple vendors and provider buy-in required	Long-term See Section 3.1 for more detail.
SC4: Where possible, regional providers will strive to design microtransit to complement and integrate well with fixed route schedules. Transit Providers: Lead Metropolitan Council: Support	Medium Improves efficiency for intermodal trips and access	Medium Maximizes coverage	High Changes to service hours may require funding or contract changes	Medium-term Service planning updates may be considered for phased implementation to improve access.
SC5: All providers will allow other providers to make pick-ups and drop-offs at major park and rides and transfer hubs to enable regional transit connections. Transit Providers: Lead Technical Vendors: Support	Medium Important for regional connectivity	Medium Improves transfer convenience at key hub locations	Low Adding stop locations is simple for software vendors once location is agreed upon	Short-term Ease of implementation drives placement in short-term implementation.
SC6: Each provider should make the regional shared map of microtransit zones available on their microtransit information platforms to better communicate to riders the available options to best suit their trip. Metropolitan Council: Lead Transit Providers: Implement	Medium Improves rider awareness and understanding of connections	Low Enhances transparency but no direct relation to ridership or improved system operations	Low Requires relatively simple data sharing and minor continual monitoring	Short-term Ease of implementation drives placement in short-term implementation.
SC7: All providers will set designated cross-zone hubs, or transfer points and popular destinations in adjacent service areas where pick-ups or drop-offs may be made to connect to destinations in an adjacent microtransit zone. Metropolitan Council: Lead Transit Providers: Implement Technical Vendors: Support	Medium Expanding this strategy to all providers	High Connectivity benefits generate strong customer experience impact	Medium Some coordination required with operators of adjacent service areas	Medium-term While some providers already have cross-zone hubs, this may benefit from further study to implement a thoughtful regional strategy.

The Twin Cities' transition toward a more integrated microtransit network hinges on alignment across fares, data systems, and service design. While some short-term actions (fare consistency, data publication) are straightforward, the long-term success of regional microtransit will depend on institutional collaboration and technical interoperability across platforms and transit providers.

7.1 Pathways to Interoperability & Regional Microtransit Platform Alignment

Item SC3 within the Regional Agenda points toward the region's intent to improve customer experience by making each microtransit service less isolated and more seamless with other nearby service options. Within the context of microtransit, the region's transit providers see interoperability, or the ability to interact with multiple service providers in one software environment, as a valuable step toward improved customer experience. Currently, most microtransit software providers use proprietary data formats that resemble—but do not fully align with—those of other vendors. As a result, applications must be custom programmed, often at additional cost, to communicate across platforms. This lack of interoperability limits the ability of mobility services to function effectively as part of a regional transportation network.

The following pathways outline the technical, organizational, and governance steps required to close this gap and enable true interoperability.

The cost of limited regional coordination is clear: riders cannot seamlessly plan, book, and pay for trips across geographic boundaries without encountering barriers.

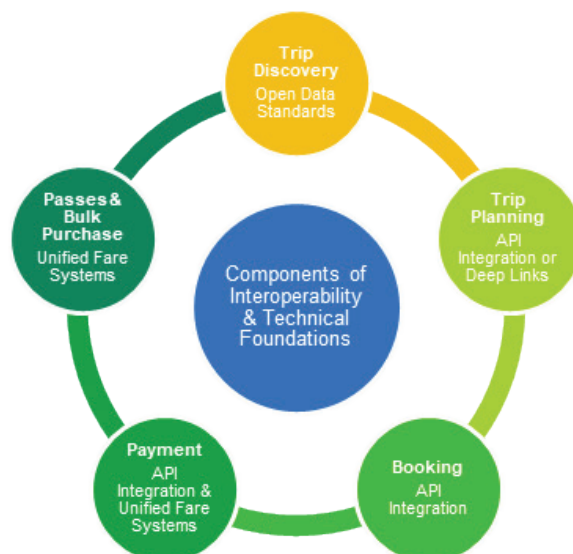


Figure 26. Components of Interoperability & Technical Foundations

Technical Foundations

To enable interoperability, providers should adopt common standards and share technological solutions, such as:

- **Open Data Standards:** The General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) Realtime, or at a minimum GTFS Static, should be available to ensure consistent schedule and real-time data changes.
- **Application Programming Interface (API) Integration:** Secure API availability between booking platforms for cross-provider trip planning and booking.
- **Unified Fare Systems:** Platforms should support interoperable fare payment systems (e.g., Go-To-Cards).
- **Real-Time Discovery/Coordination:** Share vehicle location and trip status data (e.g., estimated wait times) across providers for trip planning (e.g., connections, transfers) between jurisdictions. Integration with third-party apps like Transit App and Google maps will aid in reducing barriers.

Organizational Strategies

Interoperability will also require coordinated governance and shared practices.

- **A regional working group**, like the regional providers working group, should be utilized to oversee standards, implementation timelines, and vendor alignment.
- **A formalized Memorandum of Agreement (MOA)** will be required for cost sharing, data exchange, and service coordination.
- **Customer-facing policies:** the working group must align on customer-facing policies to deliver a consistent rider experience across jurisdictions, ensuring key elements – such as transfer rules, booking windows, cancellation policies – remain uniform.



Data Governance & Privacy

As outlined in the 'Data Management, Privacy & Security Considerations' section of Appendix C, data sharing related to interoperability must also be secure and compliant with regional standards:

- **Define data-sharing standards:** Implementation of agreements specifying what operation and rider data can be exchanged and under what conditions.
- **Privacy and security standards:** Require all software vendors to comply with regional privacy and security standards, including encryption and access controls.
- **Audit mechanisms:** Implement mechanisms to monitor compliance and address risks proactively.

In the absence of a single platform used by all providers across the region, interoperability between the separate platforms will be a continuous and evolving process that will require regular review and adaptation from the regional providers.

Regional Platform Pathway

With the complexity of delivering a microtransit network operated by multiple providers – each with distinct software’s, service zones, vehicle fleets, and operational policies - an alternative path is to seek out a regional shared microtransit platform.

A shared platform can reduce interoperability challenges and create a more seamless customer experience by consolidating trip discovery, planning, booking, and payment into a unified environment.

The Metropolitan Council and its regional transit partners could pursue a regional microtransit platform through two pathways:



Selecting a Single Regional Software Vendor

Under this model all participating service providers operate on the same backend system and customer-facing app. This approach minimizes technical integration work and provides the smoothest “out-of-the-box” rider experience. Possible procurement structures include:

- **Joint Procurement Process:** All transit providers participate in a unified RFP with shared requirements, governance, and evaluation criteria. This would require alignment to get on the same contract schedule.
- **Master Contract Managed by a Regional Authority:** The Metropolitan Council (or other regional body) procures a master contract with a single platform vendor. Individual providers then “opt in” by issuing service orders under the umbrella contract.
- **Independent Provider Procurement of the Same Vendor:** Each provider conducts its own RFP but selects the same vendor. This approach is the fastest pathway (no schedule alignment required) and still results in unified customer experience. The selected vendor must support multi-tenancy (separated but connected production environments).

Each of these possibilities would result in a single software provider and regional, white-labeled app where customers can view and access all regional microtransit and fixed-route options, book within each service zone, transfer between services, access integrated payment options, and receive consistent notifications and support.

Developing a Regional Application That Integrates Different Provider APIs

In this model, the region builds (software development) and maintains a regional mobile application that aggregates data and APIs from each service providers independently chosen microtransit software. The regional app acts as an ‘umbrella’ front end which would allow for most things from trip discovery to fare information, booking links but with limited booking functionality. Providers would still maintain their own standalone apps and software backends.

While this approach is technically feasible, it is less desirable because it results in redundant apps, places ongoing technical burdens on the region, requires redevelopment whenever vendors upgrade or change, and still leads to a fragmented customer experience across providers. However, this model may be appropriate when agencies cannot reach consensus on a single platform, when procurement timelines are misaligned, when a unified long-term vendor strategy is not feasible, or when providers wish to maintain full operational independence.

8 Further Study Needs

This Regional Microtransit Policy Framework provides a platform for regional alignment on core policy and actionable steps for future system improvements. There remain some areas identified in this collaborative process that this study could not fully explore or resolve which would be good candidates for future study.

Service Coordination and Regional Connectivity

- **Cross-Zone Hubs:** Explore the establishment of a network of hubs to improve connectivity between service zones.
- **Southwest Light Rail Integration:** Assess opportunities for coordinating transit facilities and microtransit in First/Last Mile (FLM) connections, as expressed by SWT and Metro Transit.
- **Regional Travel Across Modes:** Investigate strategies to enable longer trips and seamless connections between microtransit and fixed-route services.

Provider Feedback and Emerging Themes

- **Marketing and Outreach:** Develop region-wide education and marketing campaigns to promote services, especially for trips crossing zones or service boundaries. This could be coordinated with updates to the region's 5310 Coordinated Plan to effectively message dial-a-ride service options as a distinct service from microtransit.
- **System Integration:** Coordinated software vendor roadmap planning to achieve integration of platforms and systems to enhance operational efficiency.
- **Policy Development:** Recognizing that microtransit is still evolving, current guidelines can serve as a foundation for future policy development updates.
- **Rural Microtransit & Funding Structures:** Evaluate how microtransit may be able to provide complementary service in Transit Link service areas and consider implications of expansions to the Transit Capital Levy District to fund microtransit expansion.

Technical and Operational Research Areas

- **Underperforming Fixed Routes:** Examine how microtransit performance guidelines could relate with underperforming fixed-route services, including zone-based performance analysis and evaluation of conversion potential.
- **Zone Design and Monitoring:** Study optimal zone sizing at the provider level for accurate performance tracking, operational efficiency, and improved customer experience.
- **Regional Cost Allocation in Route Analysis:** Align on a shared methodology for cost allocation for the annual regional route analysis.
- **Regional Booking Platform:** Define key features and governance policies for a unified microtransit booking system, including trip planning, integrated payment, accessibility, real-time data, and provider controls. Emphasize collaboration, phased rollout, and continuous refinement.

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