Summary Report

Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Transit Restructuring Plan

FINAL REPORT

October 2015

NELSON
NYGAARD

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1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Office of Transit is leading a statewide effort to encourage coordination, cooperation, and consolidation (the "three Cs") between Greater Minnesota's transit providers. The interest in cooperation and coordination among transit providers, especially small operators, reflects a variety of interests and concerns, including a desire to accommodate rider's needs to travel regionally as well as a desire to increase service efficiency and effectiveness.

As part of the overall transit restructuring effort, MnDOT hired a team of consultants led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates to develop a restructuring plan for Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties, located in south central Minnesota approximately two hours west of the Twin Cities. This tri-county area has already made strides in propagating the "three Cs." As of January 1, 2015, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville County Heartland Express consolidated services and formed a new transit provider for both counties, called Central Community Transit (CCT). The goal of the restructuring plan was to discuss the feasibility of and develop a plan for merging Meeker County Public Transit into the CCT network.

The Nelson\Nygaard Team's role was to support this process by collecting and analyzing existing conditions, including service needs and potential improvement opportunities. The study team considered and evaluated consolidation models that offered potential to better serve identified needs and challenges. The Nelson\Nygaard team also worked with stakeholders to create a preferred strategy and develop an implementation plan to guide the region towards this preferred strategy.

STUDY PROCESS

The Kandiyohi Renville Meeker Transit Study began in January 2015 with a kick-off meeting with the Project Management Team (PMT). The PMT is comprised of MnDOT staff and the transit directors from each transit provider. The study team also worked with a second group, the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) throughout the study. The PAC is made up of regional stakeholders including county and city staff, staff from area non-profits and human service organizations, and elected officials from the three counties. The members of the PMT and PAC are listed in Appendix A.

The study team met with the PAC on four different occasions between January and August 2015 to discuss and review the following topics.

- February 2015 –Introduce team, review work scope and schedule and confirm project goals and objectives.
- March 2015 – Review and confirm existing transit services including performance, organizational structure and coordination as well as an overview of the communities served.
- May 2015 – Review and confirm the Service Evaluation Report which is intended to guide the region through the restructuring process.
- June 2015 – Review and confirm the Consolidated Service Improvement Plan which lays out the plan for consolidating and restructuring service to better serve the three-county region.

- August 2015 – Review and confirm the Implementation Plan which provides detailed steps for implementing the Consolidated Service Plan.

STUDY GOALS

MnDOT set five primary goals for this effort:

- Improve customer service and seamlessness in terms of fares, service coverage and informational tools.
- Increase the availability of transit services, with potential new destinations and expanded service hours that come from eliminating any duplicative services
- Improved cost effectiveness for the agencies operating services through cost savings, shared expenses, more flexible use of available resources and equipment, economies of scale and freeing up resources
- Economic and facilities development opportunities due to improved buying power and the potential for larger scale developments
- Improved relationships between organizations by way of shared governance and multijurisdictional political support

2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

KANDIYOHI, RENVILLE AND MEEKER COUNTIES

The focus of this transit restructuring study is three rural counties located in south central Minnesota: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker. Combined the counties span an area geographically of nearly 1,000 square miles with a combined population of just over 80,000 people. Each county has a regional service and population center: Olivia, Willmar and Litchfield in Renville, Kandiyohi and Meeker counties respectively. As shown in Figure 2-2 , the three counties have similar rates of youths, older adults, commuters and unemployment.

In terms of demographic data, the counties are very similar. They have similar rates of youths, older adults, commuters and unemployment. One key demographic difference between the three counties, however, is the proportion of Spanish speaking residents. While only 2% of the people living in Renville and Meeker County identified themselves as Spanish speaking, 8% of the Kandiyohi residents did. The census data also tells us that the study area overall enjoys relatively robust employment, with less than 5% unemployment overall; an unemployment rate lower than the state or nation overall. However, despite high employment rates, nearly half of all households in the region are classified as low income according to standards set by the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

POPULATION DENSITY

The Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker study area has a stable population with slow growth experienced by most of the counties and their largest cities. Exceptions to this overall trend are the City of Willmar, which grew by just over 7% between 2000 and 2013 and Renville County, which lost population over the last 13 years (see Figure 2-1). Population forecasts prepared by the Minnesota State Demographic Center suggest that this trend of slow, but steady growth will continue for the next several decades.

Figure 2-1 Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Population Trends

Location	2000	2010	2013	Change 2000 - 2013	2020 (Forecasted)
Kandiyohi County	41,203	42,239	42,351	2.79%	44,495
City of Willmar	18,351	19,610	19,717	7.44%	
Meeker County	22,644	23,300	23,109	2.05%	25,706
City of Litchfield	6,562	6,726	6,723	2.45%	
Renville County	17,154	15,730	15,214	-11.31%	16,240
City of Olivia	2,570	2,484	2,450	-4.67%	

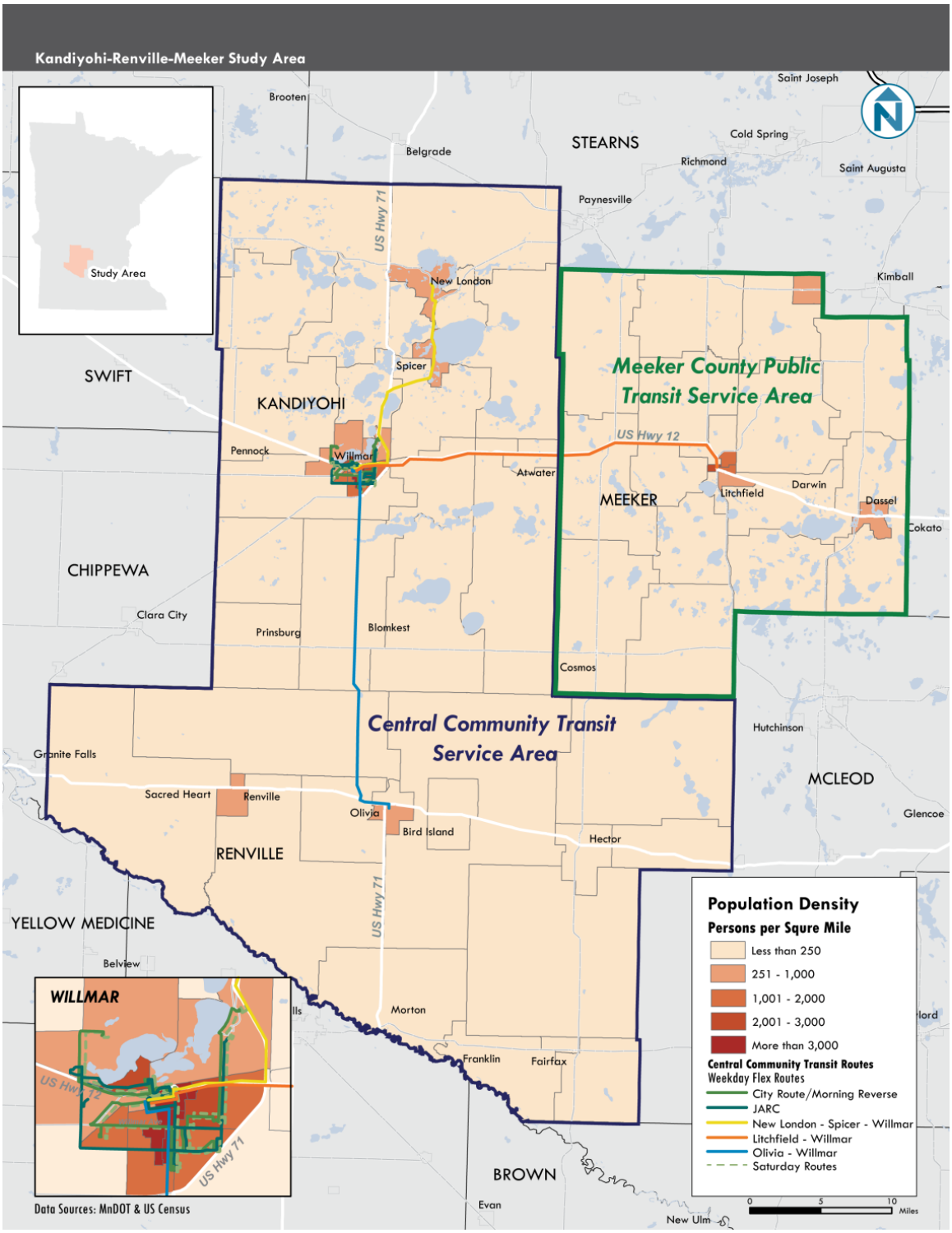
Sources: Minnesota State Demographic Center; City and Town population estimates.

Figure 2-2 Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker County Demographic Profile[1]

County	Kandiyohi County		Renville County		Meeker County	
	Total	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total
County Population	42,265	100%	15,499	100%	23,197	100%
Unemployed Population	1,611	4.8%	538	4.3%	867	4.8%
Non-Labor Force Population	10,110	24%	4,183	27%	5,908	25%
Disabled	2,463	6%	852	5%	1,202	5%
Youth (0-17)	10,093	24%	3,528	23%	5,803	25%
Senior (65+)	7,020	17%	3,013	19%	3,927	17%
Spanish-Speaking Residents**	3,256	8%	797	2%	639	2%
Limited English ***	832	2%	89	1%	239	Less than 1%
Households	17,120		6,400		9,288	
Zero-Vehicle Households	1,260	7%	331	5%	345	4%
Low- and Very Low-Income Households *****	8,533	50%	3,140	49%	4,202	45%

[1] Data Sources: 2008-2013 American Community Survey and the Minnesota Dept. of Employment & Economic Development
* Does not include residents not in labor force
** Speaking English very well and less than very well
*** Speak English less then well
**** Labor force that does not Work at Home
***** Very Low-income Households earning less than $25,000 per year
Low-income households earning less than $50,000 per year or 80% of the median household income in Kandiyohi County, classified low income according to US Department Housing and Urban Development (http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il.html)

Figure 2-3 Population Density: Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties



DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Demographic characteristics have a direct impact on the demand for public transportation. In particular, we look to the location and concentration of individuals who are more likely than the general public to use public transportation. These individuals tend to be youths under the age of 18, older adults aged 65 or older, people with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and households that do not have access to an automobile. Data for this analysis is primarily drawn from the 2010 U.S. Census and in cases where data was not available; the 2000 Census data was used.

The data shows that youths and older adults, while concentrated in the larger communities, are more widely distributed than the people with disabilities or lower incomes. In each case, however, Willmar, Litchfield and Olivia have the highest concentration of people with characteristics typically associated with a need for transit service. Findings associated with each group are highlighted below. Maps for each demographic population can be found in Technical Memorandum #1: Existing Conditions.

- **People with Disabilities:** The highest concentrations of disabled persons are in Willmar and Litchfield. In general, the towns in each of the three counties possess higher levels of disabled residents, while the more rural areas have comparatively low densities of disabled residents.
- **Youths:** Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville counties have a relatively large percentage of the population under the age of 19. Consistent with this, nearly all of the towns throughout the three-county region have at least marginally higher densities of children. This is particularly true when looking at the Willmar-Spicer-New London area, but also Litchfield and Dassel in Meeker County.
- **Older Adults**: Older adults in the three counties have a similar distribution as youths, with older adults living in the town centers rather than in the rural areas. Litchfield in particular has a higher proportion of older adults than other areas in the region, while the Willmar-Spicer-New London area has comparatively lower levels of senior adults.
- **Limited English Speakers (LEP):** Only a handful of the people (approximately 1%) living in the study area identified themselves as limited English speakers. Of the people who identified themselves as limited English speakers, the majority are concentrated in parts of Willmar and Litchfield.
- Z**ero Vehicle Households:** There are relatively few areas in the study area that have elevated rates of zero vehicle households. The only census blocks in the area that contain more than 10 zero vehicle households per square mile are in Renville, Olivia, Litchfield, and Willmar
- **People with Low Incomes:** The distribution of the study area's lowest income individuals represents a higher, but still low, income threshold. In addition, it is worth noting that there is likely overlap between the concentrations of low income households and other transit dependent groups described above.

3 EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

This chapter profiles each of the existing transit agencies and provides an overview of the available services in the three counties. As part of this discussion, it is important to note that, as mentioned, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and the Heartland Express in Renville County merged operations to create Central Community Transit (CCT) on January 1st 2015. Although the merger represents several months of analysis and discussion, experience with the new CCT service is quite short. As part of describing the existing services, therefore, this analysis includes an overview of CCT services as well as the services and resources available at the pre-merger institutions provided by KAT and the Heartland Express.

CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT (CCT)

Central Community Transit's (CCT) is an independent not-for-profit agency that operates transit service for residents of Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. CCT initiated service on January 1, 2015 and operates with a staff of 43 employees, an estimated budget of $1.8 million and a fleet of 24 vehicles. CCT offers deviated fixed route, demand response and volunteer driver services in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. All of CCT's services are available to the general public, although the volunteer service is primarily for people traveling for medical assistance and for out-of-county travel. CCT was established as the merger between two transportation agencies as described below.

Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT)

Prior to merging with Renville County Transit to form CCT in early 2015, transit service in Kandiyohi County was provided by Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT). KAT began operations in 1999 as an independent transit agency with funding raised through federal and state grants, contributions from local governments, passenger fares and service contracts. In its last year operating as KAT, the agency had an annual budget of nearly $1.2 million provided 119,309 trips, and operated with 20 buses, 28 drivers, and 35 volunteer drivers.

Renville Heartland Express

The Renville County Heartland Express service began operations in 1996. The Heartland Express operated as part of the Renville County government as a division in the Department of Human Services. Operating as a county department meant that Heartland Express drivers and staff were Renville County employees. Prior to merging with CCT, Heartland Express had an annual budget of $577,698, provided 36,972 trips and operated with six drivers, 22 volunteer drivers and four buses.

Service Overview

CCT provides the following transportation services in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties:

- **City of Willmar Deviated Fixed Route Service:** Route deviated transit service offers scheduled transit services that are allowed to deviate or travel off route for up to ¾ of a mile (10 blocks) of the published route as requested by passengers.
- **Regional Deviated Fixed Route Service:** CCT offers scheduled deviated services between communities in Kandiyohi County and between Kandiyohi County and neighboring counties. These routes are also allowed to deviate off route for longer distances (up to five miles) as compared with the city routes. CCT requests that passengers request a deviation (pick-up off the main route) at least 24 hours in advance. Service is provided for the following routes.
  - Willmar to New London to Spicer
  - Willmar to Litchfield
  - Willmar to Olivia
- **Demand Response Service:** CCT operates three types of demand response service (general public demand response, contracted service and volunteer driver). In each case, riders are requested to call and schedule their trips at least 24 hours in advance but for a small fee (addition of $1.00 per one-way trip); same day trips may be accommodated.
  - General public demand response service is provided door-to-door throughout Kandiyohi and Renville Counties.
  - Contracted service is designed to support specific health and human service programming, such as helping parents get their children to preschool programs and transporting individuals with disabilities to supported employment activities. Contracted services are paid for by the sponsoring agency, and are organized around that agency's specific needs.
  - Volunteer driver service is provided by drivers, working as volunteers and using their own vehicles. The majority of the trips provided by volunteer drivers are to transport people traveling to/from medical services with funding provided by health care providers (Blue Cross Blue Shield and UCare).

Ridership

Ridership on CCT is estimated at roughly 162,000 annual trips, with about 1% scheduled as deviated fixed route, 85% scheduled as demand response, and 14% provided by volunteer drivers.

Figure 3-1 CCT (KAT and Heartland Express) Ridership by Service Type (2014)

	Deviated Fixed Route (all routes)	Demand Response	Volunteer Drivers	Total
Kandiyohi Area Transit Service	18,330	100,979	2,664*	121,973
Heartland Express Service	n/a	36,972	3,050**	40,022
Total – All Routes	18,330	137,951	5,714	161,995

Source: MnDOT and CCT

*Estimated based on March 2015 monthly total, 222 for 12 months

**Estimated based on April 7 -11, 2014 weekly total of 61 trips for 50 weeks of the year (service does not run on holidays/weekends).

Fares and other service attributes can be found in Figure 3-3.

MEEKER COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT (MPT)

Public transportation in Meeker County is provided by Meeker County Public Transit (MPT). The service began operations in 1995 with one bus, largely as a senior bus program. Today, MPT operates seven MPT buses and provides transportation throughout Meeker County.

MPT is part of a private, non-profit agency, Ecumen, whose primary mission is oriented around providing residential and day programs for older adults. Under this structure, MPT is a department within Ecumen and is responsible for transit service management and operations. Ecumen supports MPT with administrative functions such as payroll, human resource functions and overall financial oversight.

Unlike CCT, MPT does not directly operate service. Instead service is operated by a third party contractor, Ripley Transport. MPT staff manages the overall system, including developing budgets, dispatching service (taking and scheduling trip requests), managing the volunteer driver program, and interfacing with members of the public. MPT also owns the vehicles. Ripley Transport, on the other hand, is contracted to provide the transportation and maintain MPT vehicles. As the service contractor, Ripley Transport employees the drivers, provides training and drug and alcohol testing as well as maintains all MPT vehicles. In addition to contracting with MPT, Ripley Transport also contracts with the school district for school bus transportation.

Service Overview

Consistent with CCT, MPT operates a combination of deviated fixed route, demand response and volunteer driver services and all of these services are open and available to members of the public. Some services are designed specifically for members of the public and other services operate in response to contracted services.

- Deviated Fixed Route Service: MPT operates three deviated fixed routes. Most of these routes are associated with contracted service, but are also available to the general public. MPT does not publish schedules, time tables or maps for these routes, so riders must contract MPT for information. Service is provided for the following routes.
  - Litchfield to Dassel
  - Litchfield to Dassel to Hutchinson
  - Willmar to Litchfield
- Demand Response Service: MPT operates three types of demand response service (general public demand response, contracted service, and volunteer service). In each case, riders are requested to call and schedule their trips at least 24 hours in advance, but for a small fee (addition of $1.00 per one-way trip); same day trips may be accommodated.
  - General public demand response service is provided door-to-door throughout Meeker County with outlying communities on certain scheduled days and times. This service is available for passengers who request a trip up to 24 hours in advance and are looking to travel within their respective counties.
  - Contracted service is designed to support specific health and human service programming, such as helping parents get their children to preschool programs and transporting individuals with disabilities to support employment activities. Contracted services are paid for by the sponsoring agency.

- Volunteer driver service is provided by the Meeker County Council on Aging, which is housed in the MPT facility. The majority of the trips provided by volunteer drivers are to transport people traveling to/from medical services with funding provided by health care providers (Blue Cross Blue Shield and UCare).

Ridership

In 2014, MPT provided 74,317 trips, with about 45% scheduled as deviated fixed route, 51% scheduled as demand response (including contract service), and 4% as volunteer driver trips (see Figure 3-2).

Figure 3-2 Meeker Public Transit Ridership by Service Type (2014)

	Deviated Fixed Route (all routes)	Demand Response (including contracted service)	Volunteer Drivers	Total
Meeker Public Transit	33,573	37,744	3,000	74,317

Source: MPT adapted by Nelson\Nygaard

Fares and other service attributes can be found in Figure 3-3

Figure 3-3 Service Attributes Profile

Provider	KANDIYOHI AREA TRANSIT (KAT)	RENVILLE COUNTY	CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT (CCT)	MEEKER COUNTY
System Name	KAT Bus	Heartland Express	Central Community Transit (CCT)	Meeker County Public Transit
Service Area	Kandiyohi County	Renville County	Kandiyohi and Renville Counties	Meeker County
Hours of Operation	5:30 am to 5:30 pm (Monday-Friday) 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (Saturday)	6:30 am to 5:00 pm (Monday-Friday)	5:30 am to 5:30 pm (Monday-Friday) 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (Saturday)	6:15 am to 6:00 pm (Monday-Friday) 8:00 am to 1:00 pm (Saturday) 8:00 am to 1:00 pm (Sunday)
Fares	City Route $1.50 one-way $1.00 extra if same day service Dial-A-Ride $2.00 one-way (0-10 miles) $3.00 one-way (11-20 miles) $4.00 one-way (21-30 miles)	City Route $2.00 one way $3.00 one way to Danube $20 for 10 one-way rides $25 for 26 on way rides County Service $4.00 town to town (excluding Danube & Bird Island)	City of Willmar $1.50 one-way (published route) $2.00 one way (door-to-door) $1 same day service Dial-A-Ride (Kandiyohi) $2.00 one-way (0-10 miles) $3.00 one-way (11-20 miles) $4.00 one-way (21-30 miles) $6 Willmar to Litchfield $1 same day service Dial-A-Ride (Renville) $2.00 one way (Olivia) $3.00 one way (to Danube) $4.00 one way town to town (excluding Danube & Bird Island) $5.00 one way (to Willmar) $4.00 one way rural to town (within 5 miles)	City Route $2.00 adult (16-55) one-way $1.50 children (0-15) one-way $1.50 seniors (56+) one-way $13.50 city pass (10 rides) County Service $3.00 one-way $1.00 extra for same day charge $25.00 county pass (10 rides) $6 Litchfield to Willmar
Last Fare Increase	2012	2011	n/a	2011
Reservation Policy	24 hours preferred, same day accepted ($1.00 extra)	24 hours preferred, same day accepted	48 hour preferred (not including weekends), 24 hours requested, same day limited ($1.00 extra)	24 hours preferred, same day accepted ($1 extra)
Pick Up Window	Between 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait three minutes.	No official pick-up window.	Between 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait three minutes.	Between 10 minutes before and 5 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait one minute.
Cancellation Policy	Cancel as soon as possible. Two "no-shows" within a 30-day period will receive a warning letter. If a rider receives a third "no-show" within the 30-day period that rider will be suspended.	Cancel as soon as possible. Collect payment on "no-shows." Do not have a policy to penalize "no-shows."	Cancel as soon as possible. Two "no-shows" within a 30-day period will receive a warning letter. If a rider receives a third "no-show" within the 30-day period that rider will be suspended.	At least one hour prior to scheduled ride or considered a "no-show" and will have to pay for the missed ride. Three times a "no-show" will result in service denial for a period of time.

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

While there are similarities and differences between all the services, one the primary differences is agency structure. CCT is an independent agency, while MPT operates as a department within a larger, non-profit organization (Ecumen). This is a fundamental difference that has implications for agency management, rather than transit service operations. CCT, for example, provides (or contracts for) all business services associated with operating the transit agency, such as payroll, accounting, human resources, and marketing. This contrasts with MPT, which relies on Ecumen to provide many of these services.

In terms of the organizational structure, each agency is managed by a Transit Director who functions as a general manager for the transit services (see Figure 3-4). CCT's Transit Director reports to a Joint Powers Board that is comprised of county and city representatives. MPT also reports to a combination of both an Advisory Board (comprised of county and city officials and Ecumen staff) as well as the Director of Ecumen's Litchfield campus.

Figure 3-4 Organizational Structure Summary

County	Kandiyohi Area Transit	Renville County Heartland Express	Central Community Transportation	Meeker Public Transit
Policy Board	Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners	Renville County Board of Commissioners	Joint Powers Board (both counties represented equally)	MPT Advisory Board (made up of city, county, Ecumen reps)
Management Staff	Transit Director	Transit Director	Transit Director	Transit Director
Transit Director Reports to:	Joint Powers Board	County Administrator.	Joint Powers Board	Ecumen Litchfield Campus Director (who reports Ecumen Regional Director)
Service *Operations*	In house	In house	In house (a respective locations)	Contracted
Dispatch	In house	In house	In house (at respective locations)	In house
Maintenance	In house (daily maintenance), contracted out for more difficult repairs	County maintenance facility	Kandiyohi – in house and contracted; Renville – County services	Contract Operator
Union Status	Non Union	Union	Union	Non Union

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Central Community Transit, and Meeker Public Transit

Staffing

Employee staffing for the three transit systems is shown in Figure 3-5.

Figure 3-5 Number of Transit Employees by Agency

Central Community Transportation				Meeker County Public Transit	
Former Kandiyohi County		Former Renville County			
Employees	Employees	Employees	Employees	Employees	Employees
Transit Director	1	Transit Director	1	Transit Director	1
Assistant Director	1	Scheduler/Dispatcher	2.5	Volunteer Coordinator	1
Office Staff	2	Drivers	4.5	Scheduler/Dispatcher	2 part-time
Volunteer Coordinator	1			Drivers	9*
Scheduler/Dispatcher	3				
Maintenance Coordinator	1				
Drivers	17.5				
Total FTE	26.5	Total FTE	8	Total FTE	12

Source: Calculations based on data provided by Central Community Transit, and Meeker County Public Transit.

* Drivers are not employees of Meeker County Public Transit

FINANCIAL ASSESSMENT

Figure 3-6 provides a financial and performance assessment for the year 2014. A full assessment of the transit services in the three counties for the years 2011 to 2014 is presented in Chapter 5 of the Technical Memorandum #1: Existing Conditions Report.

Figure 3-6 Financial and Performance Assessment for 2014

	Kandiyohi Area Transit	Renville Heartland Express	Meeker Public Transit
Costs			
Deviated Fixed Route	$212,695	0	$218,004
Demand Response	$968,946	$577,698	$589,418
Total Costs	$1,181,641	$577,698	$807,422
Operating Statistics			
Service Miles	360,009	155,966	185,980
Service Hours	24,865	9,007	13,631
Ridership	119,309	36,972	71,317
Performance Measures			
Cost per Hour	$47.52	$64.18	$59.91
Cost per Mile	$3.28	$3.70	$3.32
Cost per Passenger	$9.90	$15.63	$10.49
Passengers per Hour	4.8	4.1	5.7
Farebox Recovery Ratio	20%	20.70%	26%
Subsidy/Passenger	$7.94	$12.39	$7.77

Revenues and Funding

Kandiyohi County

KAT increased operating expenses from $1 to $1.3 million annually to operate service between 2012 and 2014. The majority of the operating funds were provided by MnDOT grants. System revenues include contract revenue, advertising revenue, and interest. The City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County also contribute funds (see Figure 3-7).

Figure 3-7 Kandiyohi Area Transit Funding by Source 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014
Kandiyohi Area Transit			
MnDOT Funds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	$935,000	$1,008,100	$1,265,650
Revenues (Farebox + System Revenue + Local Contributions)	$264,242	$275,898	$308,650
Total Operating Funds	$1,074,565	$1,130,024	$1,295,175
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	$204,030	$215,960	$240,924
System Revenue	$42,160	$33,683	$37,726
Local Government	$18,052	$26,255	$30,000

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

Renville County

Renville County Heartland Express increased operating revenues from $480,938 to $577,698 between 2012 and 2014 (see Figure 8). Similar to the KAT, the majority of the operating costs were raised through MnDOT grants and farebox revenues.

Figure 3-8 Renville Heartland Express Funding by Source 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014
Renville County Heartland Express			
MnDOTFunds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	$280,500	$340,000	$382,500
Revenues (Farebox + Local Contributions)	$200,437	$206,814	$195,198
Total Operating Funds	$480,937	$546,814	$577,698
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	$111,630	$118,791	$119,430
Local Government Contributions	$26,642	$27,236	$25,492
Out of Service Revenue	$62,165	$60,787	$50,276

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

Meeker County

Meeker Public Transit increased operating revenues from $709,778 to $819,257 between 2012 and 2014 (see Figure 3-9). Similar to the CCT, the vast majority of operating funds are provided by MnDOT grants and supplemented by farebox revenues and local government contributions. Small urban and rural transit services in Minnesota are primarily funded by federal and state grants that are managed and awarded by MnDOT.

Figure 3-9 Meeker Public Transit Funding by Source 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014
Meeker County Public Transit			
MnDOT Funds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	$408,000	$510,000	$568,650
Revenues (Farebox + City and County Contributions)	$301,778	$251,115	$250,607
Total Operating Funds	$709,778	$761,115	$819,257
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	$221,022	$198,917	$208,932
City of Litchfield Contributions	$40,816	$24,734	$18,964
Meeker County Contributions	$39,940	$27,464	$22,711

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

4 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing services, a series of interviews with stakeholders in Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville Counties were conducted early on in the study process. These interviews were designed to understand existing operations as well as gain insights into stakeholder priorities and aspirations for service development.

Perceptions of Existing Service

Overall, stakeholders felt strongly that the existing public transportation services are an important, valued service in their home counties. Most also felt that agencies are well run and professional and offered praise for administrative staff, dispatchers, and drivers.

> *"The transit service is good. Many [people] wouldn't be able to come here without transit. So they appreciate it, and I appreciate it."*
>
> *"When a change needs to be made, they're not afraid to try it and see if it works and that's important. It's ever-changing, schedules change, locations change. Staff are very professional and don't ask for more than they need."*
>
> *"The level of service is so high."*
>
> *"I'm very happy with it."*

Anticipated Benefits and Challenges of Further Consolidation

The intended benefits of creating CCT were to save money and enhance service and indeed these benefits are important to several of the stakeholders. The majority of the stakeholders expressed support for these goals but remained skeptical about the ability of the new system to deliver on these benefits, especially regarding to saving money and in the short run.

According to many stakeholders, the anticipated benefits of moving forward with Meeker County joining CCT are less service duplication and more efficient delivery of services. Potential drawbacks are that there may not be any cost savings at least in the short-term, although consolidation can provide "more bang for the buck." Another concern about a merger between CCT and MPT relates to local control over the service. This is expressed as a fear that the current personalized services and local decision making could be lost and service quality could suffer.

Comments included:

> *"If the merger isn't going to save money for the taxpayers, then I'm a little shaky on that. I don't know if I would do it. But at the same time, I recognize that there are people who need that service."*
>
> *"Saving money is important," another added, "but if we're going to get more bang for the buck then that's another way to look at it."*

> "*This will cost more--three groups together will cost more. No staff cut, no buildings closed down. We'll add one or two layers to run things in centralized manner. It will cost more.*"

Others felt that benefits would be realized but not in the short run. "I'm *anticipating* more efficiency, less duplication. Paths won't be crossing as much." "I think there *will be* some efficiencies and flexibility because, if a bus goes to Willmar and they need another run...it just makes sense that there would be some economies and better service, but I can't say that yet."

When asked about the potential benefits of Meeker County joining the CCT network, stakeholders expressed a combination of both optimism and skepticism. Stakeholders expressed different perspectives on the likelihood of the merger, with some saying Meeker County was not interested and others saying the merger are a done deal. In both cases, however, stakeholders expressed a desire to be sure that any merger is well thought out and carefully evaluated.

Concerns about the merger primarily relate to costs and control over the service. Many stakeholders expressed a lot of concern over the financial arrangements, citing that each county has made different levels of financial commitment to public transit and the potential for one county to subsidize another remains high. This type of concern also extended to a concern that Meeker County is already very efficient and the opportunities to be more efficient are limited.

Others expressed concern over how the service could impact local business by making it easier for people to get to other communities and using their services. Other stakeholders were more concerned that over time the local knowledge and 'closeness' of the staff and the passengers would be eroded as the agency got bigger.

Essential Elements to Support the Plan

Stakeholders expressed a variety of opinions about what was essential to their supporting a plan for merging Meeker County into the CCT network.

One stakeholder identified three key elements prerequisite to supporting the merger of Meeker County and CCT:

1. MPT should follow the lead of CCT on most of the administrative and service functions. MPT should accept the name, logo, colors, and uniform of CCT. In addition, MPT should also accept the policies and rules of CCT. The rules and policies have been discussed over and over again as part of merging KAT and Heartland Express and some stakeholders do not want to re-do this work.
2. Services will continue to be provided locally within all three counties. Nearly all stakeholders identified local control over the service and local dispatch of the services as essential to their agreeing to their accepting the merger. Many stakeholders felt strongly that the local connection is what makes the service successful and "safe" for riders. As a result, they are reluctant to give that up.
3. The role of the private sector will be a critical issue in any potential merger between CCT and MPT. Many stakeholders in Meeker County feel strongly that the private sector provides a level of efficiency to the service that can't be replicated and they don't want to lose this efficiency.

5 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The purpose of creating an evaluation framework is to help guide decision making. An effective evaluation framework should also clearly communicate how decisions will be made, so people not directly participating in the process can understand the rationale behind certain choices.

EXISTING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

MnDOT established performance measures and set standards for rural public transit systems expecting to add or change service in order to meet unmet needs or merge with other transit systems. The following performance measures were recommended to review new or merged services:

- Passengers per revenue hour
- Cost per passenger trip
- Revenue per passenger trip
- Cost per revenue service hour
- Revenue miles and average trip length

For deviated rural services or community dial-a-rides, MnDOT established standards for passengers per revenue hour, as detailed in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1 MnDOT Performance Standards for Passengers per Hour

Type of Service	Passengers Per Hour	Rating	Comment
Community or Municipal Dial-A-Ride	≤ 2.0 PPH	Poor	Discontinue
	2.0 to 3.0 PPH	Minimally adequate	Must improve to Good or better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours
	≥ 5.0 PPH	Excellent	
Deviated Rural Route contracted routes should not be started at any level below "good"	≤ 3.0 PPH	Poor	Discontinue or consider alternate method of service delivery
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Minimally adequate	Must improve to Good or better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	5.0 to 8.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours
	≥ 8.0 PPH	Excellent	
	≥ 10.00 PPH	Excellent	

Source: MnDOT

Although none of the services provided by CCT or MPT falls below a "Good" performance standard, as shown in Figure 5-2, there are opportunities to improve service and increase the passengers per hour to an "Excellent" rating.

Figure 5-2 2013 Passengers per Hour Compared with MnDOT Rating

County	Passengers Per hour (2013)	MnDOT Rating	Comments
Kandiyohi			
Flex Route	6.3	Good	Opportunities for improvement
Demand Response	5.8	Excellent	Maintain current service levels
Renville			
Demand Response	5.4	Excellent	Maintain current service levels
Meeker			
Flex Route	3.5	Good	Opportunities for improvement
Demand Response	5.5	Excellent	Opportunities for improvement

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The evaluation framework can be consolidated and organized around a handful of fundamental objectives, which are broadly defined as: 1) Service Quality; 2) Service Availability; 3) Costs; 4) Operational Efficiency; and 5) Regional Coordination. A preliminary evaluation framework is presented as Figure 5-3.

Figure 5-3 Evaluation Framework

Goal	Evaluation Criteria
Service Quality	Established guidelines for service performance (on-time performance) Vehicles – availability, reliability and cleanliness Drivers – friendliness, knowledge of service area, willingness to be helpful Accessibility of service – simplicity and ease of using the service
Service Availability	Availability of information about service and ability to request travel (methods to request trip, hours trip requests are accepted) Hours and days service operates Trip denials
Cost	Capital Costs, Operating Costs, Administrative Costs
Operational Efficiency	Hourly cost of service Passengers per hour Cost per passenger Subsidy per passenger
Regional Coordination	Availability of connections between regional centers

6 ORGANIZATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

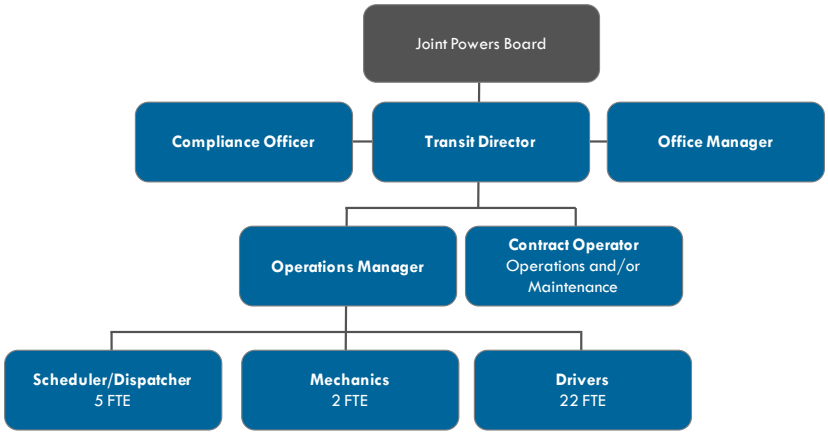
ORGANIZATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

A key consideration is the organizational structure and identifying practical alternatives for merging Meeker Public Transit (MPT) into the CCT network. Four different alternatives were considered for consolidating transit services and are defined below. The variations in each option address the administrative staffing and delivery of services.

Alternative 1: Mix of In-House and Third Party Contract for Operations and Maintenance

As shown in Figure 6-1, under this alternative, all transit services including regional services, local circulation and intercommunity routes, and structured dial-a-ride in the tri-county area would be consolidated under CCT. Day–to-day operations would be a mix of in-house operations and a third party contract. Service currently operated in-house by CCT would remain unchanged. The Ripley Transport contract that provides drivers for Meeker County Transit service as well as maintains and houses the vehicles could be extended. The current contract between Ripley Transport and Ecumen (dba/Meeker Public Transit) runs through December 31, 2015 with an option to extend the contract for one year.

Figure 6-1 Mix of In-House and Third Party Contract



Alternative 2: Mix of In-House and third Party Contract with Option to Split Operations and Maintenance

This alternative is a variation of Alternative 1. Rather than the newly established JPA (as the contracting agency) entering into a contract agreement with a third party to provide both day-to-day operations and vehicle maintenance, this alternative provides an option to separate these two functions. That is, proposers (or contractors) would be requested to submit separate cost estimates and proposals for service operations and vehicle maintenance. This would enable the contracting agency to evaluate each service separately and elect to enter into a third party contractual arrangement for one or both services. Day-to-day service in Renville and Kandiyohi counties would continue as an in-house operation.

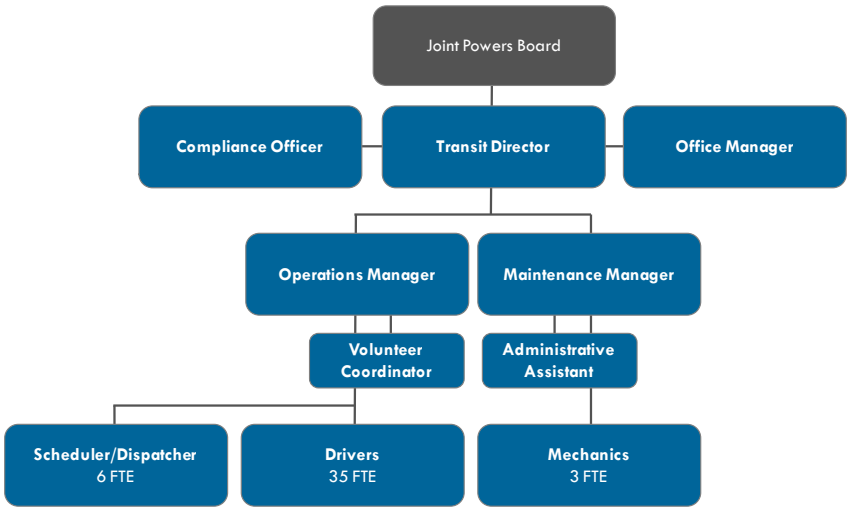
Under this alternative, all administrative personnel would be part of the CCT system. The organizational structure in this alternative would essentially be the same as Alternative 1.

Alternative 3: In-House Operation and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

Consistent with Alternatives 1 and 2, all transit services in Alternative 3 in the tri-county area would be consolidated under CCT (shown in Figure 6-2). The major difference between this alternative and Alternatives 1 and 2 is that services would be operated by in-house personnel in each county. Vehicle maintenance would also be provided with in-house personnel. There would be no third party contract. As with many transit agencies, the newly established tri-county JPA would have to consider the advantages and disadvantages of providing a full in-house operation versus contracting with a private provider.

A full in-house operation means hiring new personnel and employing all necessary staff to operate service and maintain vehicles in all three counties. Since CCT currently functions as an in-house operation, the agency could handle the additional responsibilities with some additional staff. If all vehicles were maintained in-house, it would require staffing up with a Maintenance Manager and more mechanics.

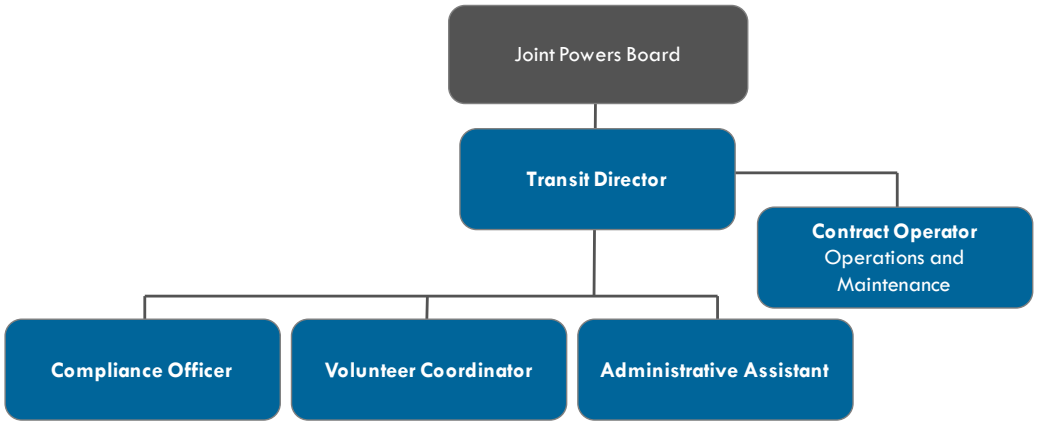
Figure 6-2 Consolidated Service Plan: In-House Operations and Revised Administrative Structure



Alternative 4: Consolidated Service Plan: Third Party Contract Operation and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

Under this alternative, service operations and vehicle maintenance would be managed by a third party contract. This would require the newly established JPA (as the contracting agency) to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for operating service in all three counties and for maintaining the entire fleet of 25 vehicles. For the JPA to have appropriate oversight and a means to monitor contractor performance and ensure service quality, it is recommended that the RFP include numeric service and safety standards (Sample performance measures are listed under Alternative 1). It may also be desirable to include monetary incentives for meeting or exceeding key performance measures as well as penalties for non-performance. The provisions should allow the JPA to observe contractor performance by any means necessary to ensure fulfillment of service-quality standards. All reporting requirements should be specified and the JPA should be allowed to survey all aspects of the operations both routinely and at random. Experience at other transit agencies suggests that an important provision in contract agreements is to ensure that public officials and the public at large have ample opportunity to make suggestions to improve service delivery when necessary.

Figure 6-3 Consolidated Service Plan: Third Party Contract and Revised Administrative Staff Structure



SUMMARY

While there was no general consensus on the alternatives the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) acknowledged that the merger of the two transit systems in Renville and Kandiyohi counties is going well and they are interested in CCT consolidating with MPT. The PAC acknowledged that even though there are some different perspectives, policies and procedures, they can be worked out and the lessons learned from Renville and Kandiyohi counties should be considered when planning and implementing the merger with MPT.

Some members expressed interest in maintaining a 3rd party contractual arrangement under a consolidated system and others thought it would be desirable to break out the services separately for service operations and vehicle maintenance. This would enable the contracting agency to consider one or both services as a 3rd party contractual arrangement. The final determination on how to structure the service will be an important first decision of the Joint Powers Board for the proposed consolidated system.

7 CONSOLIDATED PLAN

CONSOLIDATED SERVICE PLAN

The proposed service improvement plan creates a service hierarchy to reflect demand and match community size and needs with the appropriate service types. The hierarchy is designed to balance the appropriate level and type of services with local needs to create a consolidated network that facilitates travel between small communities and larger towns and cities.

Deviated Fixed Route Service

The three types of proposed deviated fixed route service are summarized below.

- **Regional Service –** connects the largest population and employment centers (Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield) in the tri-county region with scheduled deviated fixed routes. Regional services between Willmar and Olivia and Willmar and Litchfield will operate daily. Each service will operate at least three round trips every day they operate. Each service will operate at least three round trips every day they operate.
- **Local Circulation Routes** – provides local circulation for passengers traveling within the region's largest communities, Willmar and Litchfield. Services are operated as deviated fixed routes.
- **Inter-Community Routes** – links the smaller communities within each county (with at least 500 residents) to the local hubs of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. In many cases, inter-community routes may be operated in conjunction with contracted services. The goal is to link the most populated cities in each county with either Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. Service may be deviated fixed route or structured dial-a-ride service depending on need and demand.

The Consolidated Service Plan recommends a number of changes to the current service, summarized in Figure 7-1. The regional services, local circulation routes, and inter-community routes are depicted in Figure 7-2. Please refer to **Chapter 3** in **Technical Memorandum #3** for more details about the deviated fixed route service within the Consolidated Service Improvement Plan.

Demand Response Service

Structured Dial-A-Ride Service

Structured Dial-A-Ride Service provides lifeline service for smaller communities (of at least 250 people). Structured dial-a-ride will provide demand response services to communities with sufficient population that are not being served by deviated fixed-route service. These communities include Raymond, Prinsburg, and Lake Lillian in Kandiyohi County, and Morton, Franklin, Fairfax, and Buffalo Lake in Renville County. There are no communities with at least 250 people in Meeker County that are not already being served by the deviated fixed-route service. Organizing and structuring service on certain days of the week will provide efficiencies because communities in the same area will be served on the same day. Riders will be encouraged to plan appointments on the days that the dial-a-ride is scheduled to be in their community. Advanced notice of 24 hours will be required.

Additionally, structured dial-a-ride will be provided to the more urban communities that are more than five (5) miles outside of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield that are also receiving deviated fixed-route service. The structured dial-a-ride to these communities will provide some additional door-to-door service for individuals who need more specialized transportation services. In some communities, service will occur on days when deviated fixed-route service is not available (e.g. if deviated fixed route is provided Mondays and Wednesday, structured dial-a-ride will be provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays). These communities include New London and Spicer in Kandiyohi County; Bird Island, Renville, Sacred Heart, and Hector in Renville County; and Cosmos, Darwin, and Dassel in Meeker County.

General Dial-A-Ride Service

General Dial-A-Ride Service provides lifeline service for individuals living in the main urban areas of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield who are not able to use deviated fixed-route service. The deviated fixed-route service will serve the majority of riders in these three communities, because there will be scheduled time points, a shorter range of arrival and departure times, and no reservations required. However, there will still be some riders who are not able to get to the scheduled stops and will need door-to-door service. These individuals will likely continue to use the general dial-a-ride services that are already available in these three cities.

General dial-a-ride service will be provided to individuals living within Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield and up to five miles outside of the city limits. Locations that are further away from these three hubs are served by the deviated fixed route and the structured dial-a-ride services. The service hours for general dial-a-ride service will remain the same as today and a24-48 hour reservation policy will be encouraged in order to incentivize riders to use the deviated fixed-route service if they are able to do so.

The Consolidated Service Plan recommends a number of changes to the current service, summarized in Figure 7-1. The structured and general dial-a-ride services are depicted in Figure 7-3. Please refer to **Chapter 3** in **Technical Memorandum #3** for more details about the demand response service within the Consolidated Service Improvement Plan.

Figure 7-1 Proposed Consolidated Transit Service Network

Service	Current Level of Service	Service Recommendation	Proposed Changes
Regional Routes			
Willmar-Olivia	Monday–Friday: 3 round trips	Add Saturday service	Add Saturday service – 321 additional service hours Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Willmar-Litchfield	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday Friday, 1,264 annual service hours	Add Saturday service 1,685 annual service hours	Add Saturday service - 421 additional service hours
Local Circulation Routes			
Willmar	Monday–Friday: 26 round trips Saturday: 5 round trips 4,171 annual service hours	Maintain current service level	No service changes
Litchfield	No current deviated fixed route service	Add deviated fixed route service – Monday–Friday, Saturday 1,182 annual service hours	Add deviated fixed-route service Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Inter-Community Deviated Fixed Routes			
Willmar-Spicer-New London	Monday–Friday: 5 round trips Scheduled in conjunction with contracted service (ProWorks)	Maintain current service level	No change
Sacred Heart – Renville – Olivia – Bird Island	Dial-a-ride service only	Add deviated fixed route service on Monday and Wednesday: 3 round trips 530 annual service hours	Currently operated as demand response service; recommend scheduling as deviated fixed-route service Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Olivia - Hector	Dial-a-ride service only	Add deviated fixed route on Tuesday and Thursday: 3 round trips 530 annual service hours	Currently operated as demand response service; recommend scheduling as deviated fixed-route service Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Litchfield -Darwin-Dassel	Monday–Friday: 4 round trips Scheduled in conjunction with contracted service (ProWorks)	Add a fifth trip 513 annual service hours	Add a fifth weekday trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times

Service	Current Level of Service	Service Recommendation	Proposed Changes
Litchfield - Hutchinson	Monday–Friday: 2 round trips Scheduled in conjunction with contracted service (ProWorks)	Add a third round trip 1,238 annual service hours	Add third round trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Structured Demand Response Service			
Litchfield – Eden Valley Watkins	Monday and Wednesday: 2 round trips 478 annual service hours	Add a third round trip 686 annual service hours	Add third round trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Litchfield – Cosmos	Tuesday and Thursday: 2 round trips 426 annual service hours	Add a third round trip 608 annual service hours	Add third round trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Structured dial-a-ride	No structured dial-a-ride	Add routes to communities with sufficient population: 2 days per week = 500+ people	Add structured dial-a-ride clustered to different parts of the region and publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
General Dial-A-Ride Service			
General Dial-A-Ride Service	Ad hoc throughout the three counties	Within five miles of the three main urban areas: Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield	Streamline General DAR to a five-mile radius around Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield allowing the structured DAR to cover the areas outside of these cities

Figure 7-2 Proposed Deviated Fixed Routes

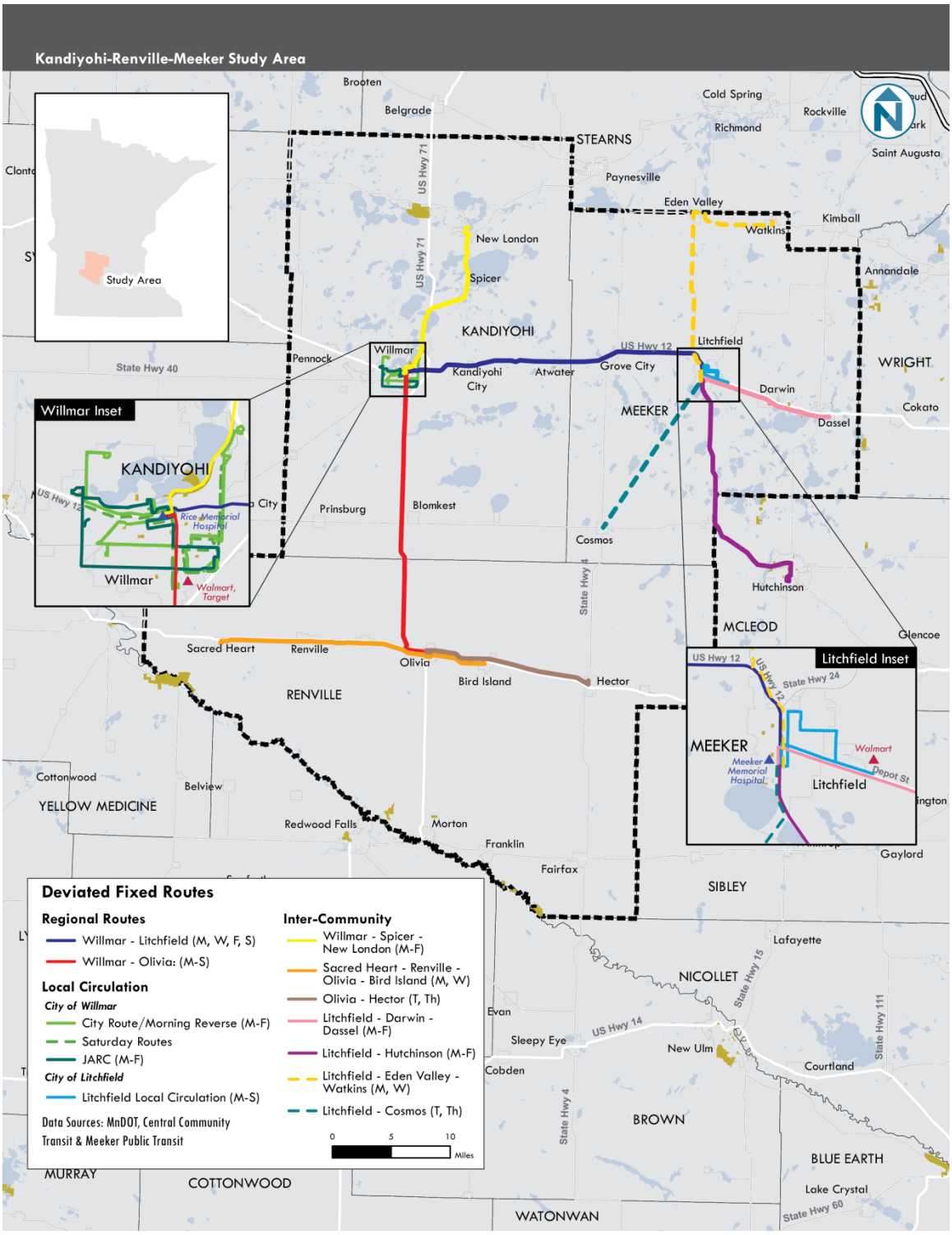
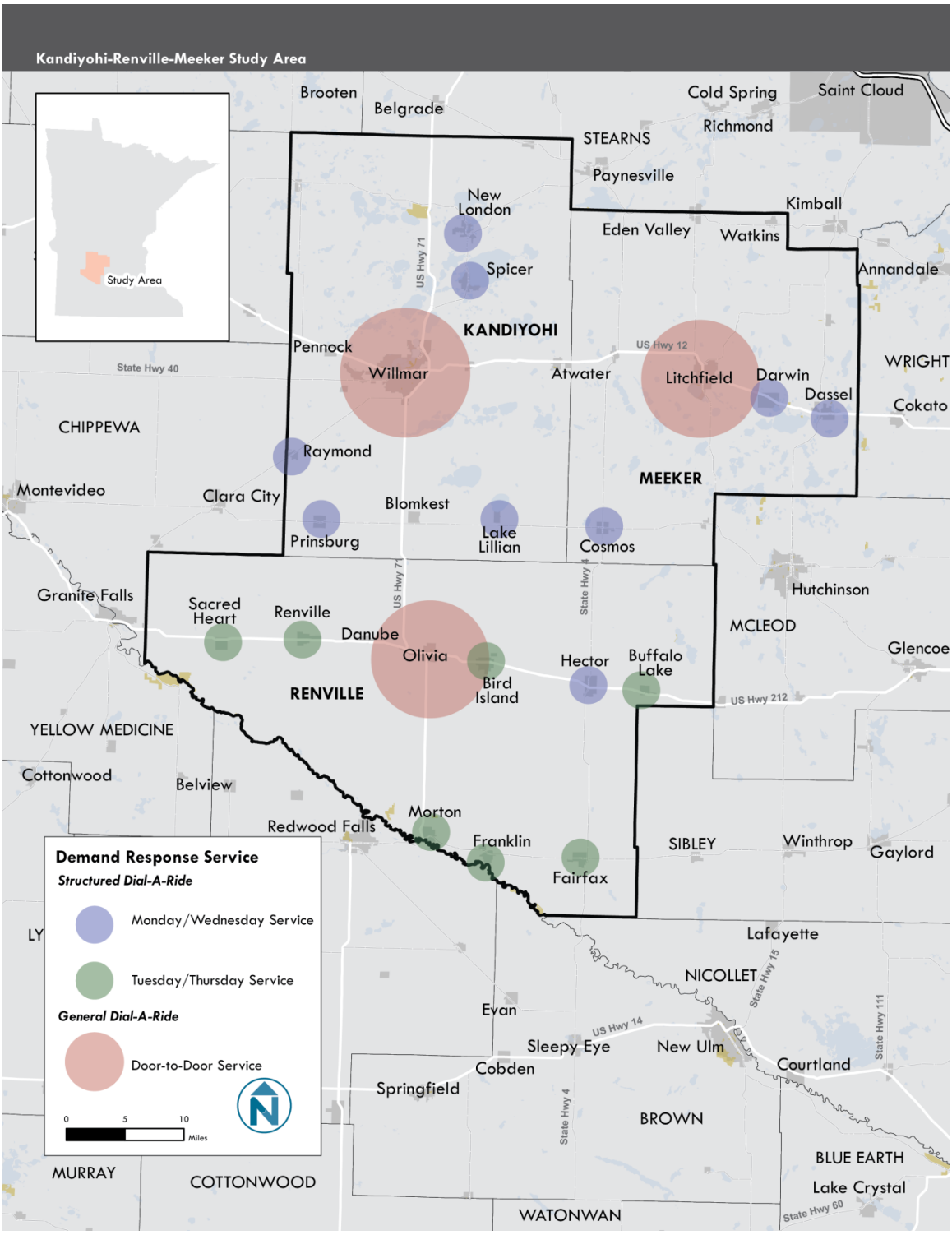


Figure 7-3 Demand Response Service



UNIFORM FARE STRUCTURE

In January 2015, when Renville County Heartland Express and Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) consolidated services and formed CCT, the Joint Powers Board decided to delay revisions to passenger fares until the merger was fully implemented. Therefore, CCT did not change KAT and Heartland Express fares with the understanding that a fare analysis would be conducted later in the year. With a proposed consolidation between CCT and Meeker County Public Transit currently being explored, a uniform fare structure and corresponding fare policies are needed.

Existing Fare Structure

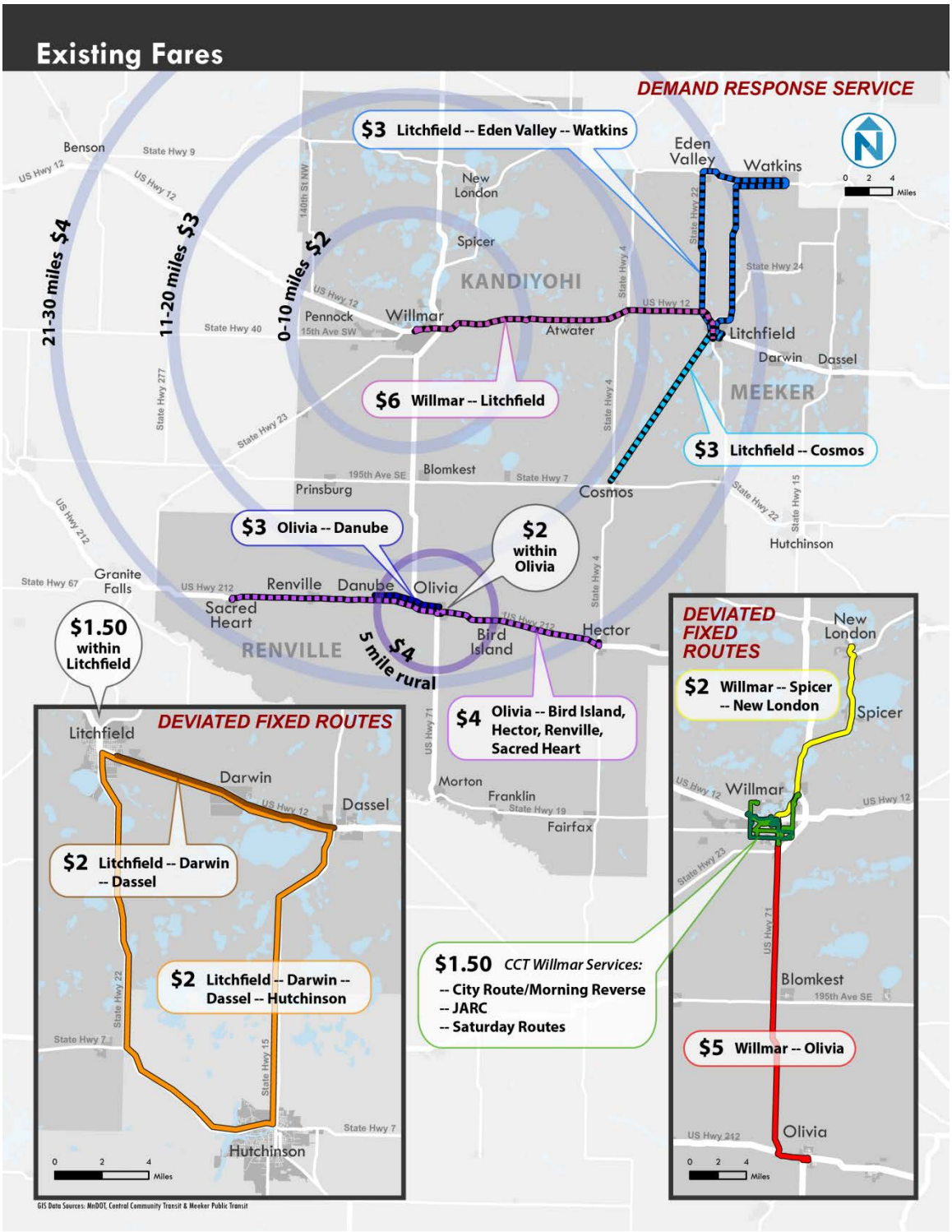
The existing fares for CCT and MPT are summarized in Figure 7-4 and shown visually in Figure 7-5.

Figure 7-4 Existing Fare Structure

FARES	Central Community Transit (CCT)	Meeker County Public Transit
Deviated Fixed Route		
Cash Fare	$1.50 one-way (published route)	$2.00 adult (16-55) one-way
	$2.00 one way (door-to-door)	$1.50 children (0-15) one-way
		$1.50 seniors (56+) one-way
Surcharge	$1.00 Same day fee	$1.00 Same day fee
Demand Response		
Cash Fare	Kandiyohi County	
	$2.00 one-way (0-10 miles)	$3.00 one-way
	$3.00 one-way (11-20 miles)	$6.00 Willmar to Litchfield
	$4.00 one-way (21-30 miles)	
	$6.00 Willmar to Litchfield	
	Renville County	
	$2.00 one way (to Olivia)	
	$3.00 one way (to Danube)	
	$4.00 one way town to town (excluding Danube & Bird Island)	
	$5.00 one way (to Willmar)	
	$4.00 one way rural to town (within 5 miles)	
Passes		$13.50 city pass (10 one-way rides)
	$37 punch pass	$25.00 county pass (10 one-way rides)
Fees	$1.00 Same day fee (Kandiyohi only)	$1.00 Same day fee

Source: CCT and MPT

Figure 7-5 Existing Fares



PROPOSED FARE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

Consistent with the fare policy goals and building on the existing distance-based fare structure, a uniform fare structure and consistent policies are proposed for the three-county consolidated system. Other factors to consider when establishing and setting transit fares are social equity and environmental justice. To ensure equitable fares, transit agencies should recognize the ability of passengers to pay for the service to meet their basic mobility needs. Within Renville, Kandiyohi, and Meeker counties, there are large concentrations of very low income residents in Willmar, Litchfield, Dassel, and Olivia.

Distance-Based Fares

As described above, CCT has a distance-based fare structure meaning that higher fares are charged for rides that cover greater distances. For example, passenger fares are $3.00 for travel between Olivia and Blue Island (a distance of five miles) and incrementally increases with distance travelled, with fares at $5.00 when traveling between Fairfield and Olivia (a distance of 22 miles).

Maintaining distance based fares is recommended for a uniform fare structure for a consolidated tri-county system. Under a tri-county system with a large service area and passengers traveling both short and long distances, it is appropriate to charge fares commensurate with distance travelled. Since door-to-door service requires a higher level of service compared to picking up passengers at a fixed bus stop, a higher fare is justified. Consistent with the current CCT fare structure, the $.50 surcharge when traveling door-to-door should be maintained. Two options are presented for a distance based fare structure. Figure 7-6 presents two options for a proposed fare structure. Fares increase by distance travel and range from a low of $3.00 to $6.00 for travel over 30 miles. Two price categories for ticket books are recommended with a 15% discount compared to cash fares.

Figure 7-6 Proposed Fare Structure

Three-County Consolidated Service			
Option 1		Option 2	
Cash Fares	Cost ($)	Cash Fares	Cost ($)
Local Circulator Routes	$1.50	Local Circulator Routes	$2.00
6-10 miles (one-way)	$2.00	0-11 miles (one-way)	$3.00
11-20 miles (one-way)	$3.00	12-16 miles (one-way)	$4.00
21-30 miles (one-way)	$4.00	17-30 miles (one-way)	$5.00
Over 30 miles (one-way)	$6.00	Over 30 miles (one-way)	$6.00
Pre-Paid Tickets	Cost ($)	Pre-Paid Tickets	Cost ($)
$10 worth of rides (10 $1.00 tickets)	$8.50	$10 worth of rides (10 $1.00 tickets)	$8.50
$20 worth of rides (10 $2.00 tickets)	$17.00	$20 worth of rides (10 $2.00 tickets)	$17.00

Notes:
Includes regional travel, inter-community routes, and demand responsive service.
$1.00 fee is charged for same day service.

A visual representation of sample trips and the corresponding fares for the two options are displayed in Figure 7-7 and Figure 7-8.

Figure 7-7 Proposed Distance-Based Fares with Sample Trips (Option 1)

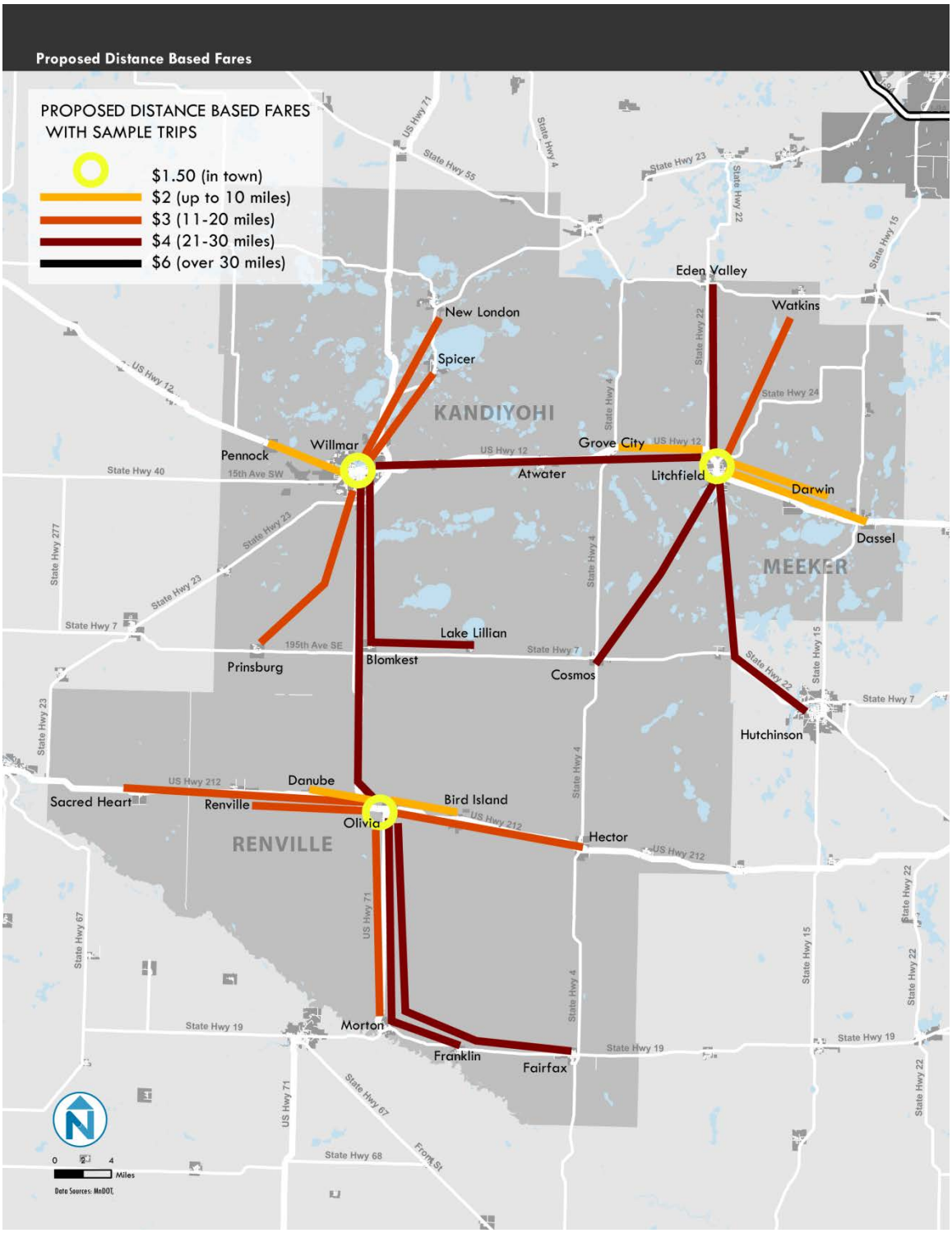
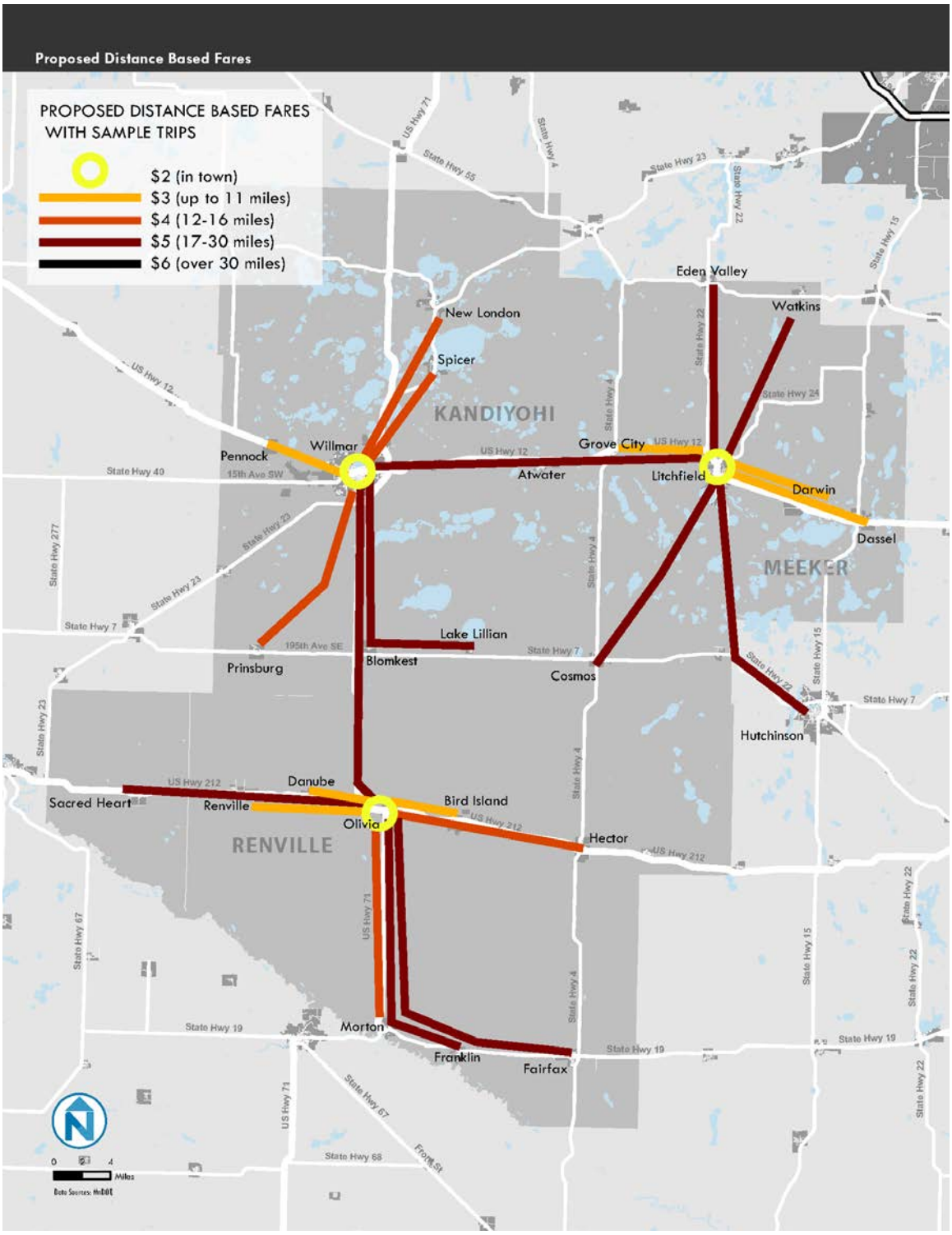


Figure 7-8 Proposed Distance-Based Fares with Sample Trips (Option 2)



Discounts

MPT currently offers a 25% discounted fare for seniors 56 years and older and for students 15 years and younger. Discounted fares are not offered on CCT although children ages four and younger ride free in Kandiyohi County.

It is common among transit agencies to have discounted fares to address social equity concerns. Reduced and discounted fares are frequently offered to seniors, passengers with disabilities and students. Many transit agencies also offer free fares for children under five years of age, provided they are traveling with a fare-paying adult. Appropriate identification is typically required for discounted fares.

The FTA requires that fixed-route services that receive Section 5307 operating assistance charge elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and individuals with a Medicare card a 50% discount from the full fare during off-peak hours. Most transit agencies go beyond the legal requirements and offer a 50% discount throughout the day for cash fares as well as a discounted monthly pass or tickets. Since transit services in Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville counties are not recipients of FTA Section 5307 funds, they are not obligated to offer discounted fares.

Offering discounted fares consistently across all three counties is a difficult policy decision that would have to be made by the new JPA board of directors. Factors to consider include the percentage of existing and potential senior and youth passengers and the impact a discounted fare would have on the farebox recovery ratio. If a discount is desired, the amount of the discount must be determined. Other considerations include age requirements for seniors and students and whether discounts should be provided for cash and pre-paid tickets.

Contract Service

MnDOT's administrative rules define all categories of local operating revenues. In addition to passenger fares, there are five other revenue categories - contract, school, and charter, auxiliary and other financial assistance. Of particular relevance for CCT and MPT is contract revenue because of the many contracted services provided for organizations such as ProWorks and West Central Industries (WCI). These services provide a special route guarantee at an agreed upon hourly contract rate and are paid for by the organizations for the benefit of the rider. When services are consolidated a consistent rate should be used for all regularly scheduled contracted services.

8 IMPLEMENTATION

There are several steps that need to be taken in order to implement the consolidated service plan. Figure 8-1 lists the major implementation activities and a timeline organized into the following categories.

- Administration and staffing
- Capital and financial planning
- Marketing and public information
- Service/ operations
- Vehicle, facilities and maintenance
- Monitoring and evaluation

REVISING THE JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY

A first step in implementing the consolidated service plan is revising the 2014 Kandiyohi Renville Joint Powers Authority to include Meeker County. As a first step, in July 2015 representatives from the City of Litchfield and Meeker County discussed and supported moving forward with consolidating MPT transit services with CCT. The next step is to obtain formal approval from Meeker County commissioners and then convene a meeting with the Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Board and Meeker County commissioners to determine the composition for an expanded Joint Powers Board (JPB).

The existing JPB consists of two members each from the Kandiyohi County Board, City of Willmar Council, and Renville County Board, as well as two elected officials, one from each county, totaling eight board members. To include representatives from Meeker County, the Joint Powers Board (JPB) could be expanded to an 11-member board by adding two representatives from the Meeker County Board plus one other elected official from Meeker County communities. Alternatively, the JPB could choose to reduce the total number of Board members to one representative from each County plus one other elected member for a seven-member Joint Powers Board. Once the size and make-up of the Board is agreed upon, the JPA agreement needs to be formally approved by each of the three commissions.

In addition to the Joint Powers Board, the Transit System Operations Board needs to be expanded to include Meeker County representatives.

Figure 8-1 Implementation Tasks and Conceptual Timeline

													Launch Service					
		Primary Responsibility (if applicable, key support role is shown after semicolon)	Estimated Resources		2015				2016				2017					Ongoing
			County, JPA, or Consulting Staff Hours	Fixed Costs (Low-High)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan/Feb/ March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	Jan	Feb/March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	
ADMINISTRATION/STAFFING																		
1	Obtain Meeker County's endorsment of transit service consolidation	Staff from Meeker county; county commissioners	4															
2	Convene meeting of Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Board & Meeker County commissioners to determine new JPB composition	CCT Staff and county commissioners	4															
3	Revise Joint Powers Authority (JPA) agreement to include Meeker County for a three county consolidated transit system	CCT Staff and/or consultant	16															
4	Revise make-up of Transit System Operations Board to include Meeker County representatives	CCT Staff and county commissioners	4															
5	Take JPA agreement to each of the three commissions for formal action	CCT Staff and county commissioners	8															
6	Extend Ripley Contract for MPT service for one year	Ecumen Staff (dba MPT)	4															
7	Develop job descriptions and Hire staff for new positions	CCT Staff; Ecumen staff																
8	Determine administrative staffing and operations plan	CCT Staff; Ecumen staff	8															
9	Develop administraive staff transition plan	CCT Staff; Ecumen staff	16															
10	Facilitate moving administrative staff to one location	CCT Staff																
11	If decision is to continue 3rd party contract in Meeker County, develop RFP for 1) operations and 2) vehicle maintenance	CCT Staff	40															
12	If applicable, select contractor(s) for 1) operations and 2) vehicle maintenance	CCT Staff and contractor as appropriate	8															
13	Develop set of administrative procedures	CCT Staff	24															
14	Plan for transition of assets to JPA	CCT Staff	8															
15	Develop operating and capital budget	CCT Staff	24															
16	Convene ongoing meetings with JPB	CCT Staff; JPB	4 (per month)															
CAPITAL AND FINANCIAL PLANNING																		
1	Gain consensus and buy-in from MnDOT and Meeker County for funding transition from Meeker County to JPA	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	8															
2	Negotiate with Meeker County on transfer of existing fleets to JPA based on vehicle age, condition, mileage and suitability for the service area	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff ; MnDOT staff	16															
3	Estimate transition-related costs for MnDOT for transition funding	CCT Staff	8															
4	Develop unified capital replacement plan	CCT Staff; MnDOT Staff	8															
5	Explore local revenue enhancement opportunities/partnerships to support local share of transit funding	CCT Staff	24															
6	Finalize uniform fare structure for consolidated system	CCT Staff	16															
7	Hold public hearing on fare structure	JPB	4															
8	Plan, procure, purchase, and install bus stop signs for the circulator routes and inter-community routes	CCT Staff	40															
9	Develop long-term financial plan	CCT Staff	16															

		Primary Responsibility (if applicable, key support role is shown after semicolon)	Estimated Resources		2015				2016				2017					Ongoing
			County, JPA, or Consulting Staff Hours	Fixed Costs (Low-High)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan/Feb/ March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	Jan	Feb/March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	
MARKETING / PUBLIC INFORMATION																		
1	Create public information about the planning process and planned outcomes of the consolidated planning effort	CCT Staff; JPA Board and stakeholder group (and consultant)	16															
2	Develop Information and Public Marketing Plan	CCT Staff; JPA Board and stakeholder group	32															
3	Repaint buses with CCT logo and color schme	CCT Staff; MnDOT Staff	32	$10,000-$15,000														
4	Plan, purchase, and install bus signs on deviated fixed routes	CCT Staff and county DPW Staff	40	$5,000-$7,000														
5	Develop route schedules/maps; print and distribute	CCT Staff; consultant	32	$500														
7	Develop consolidated transit brochure/service area map; print and distribute	CCT Staff; consultant	24	$2,000-$4000														
9	Secure URL for new consolidated system website	CCT Staff	4	$100-$200														
10	Develop website for consolidated system	CCT Staff; consultant	40	$500-$1,000														
11	Create social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) and assign a staff member to update	CCT Staff	16															
14	Design (if appropriate) and print tickets and passes	CCT Staff	24	$500														
15	Develop distribution plan for tickets and passes at sales locations in each county	CCT Staff	16															
16	Conduct public meetings about planned changes to transit	CCT Staff	24															
17	Conduct kick-off event to launch consolidated transit service	CCT Staff; county commissioners	8															
SERVICE / OPERATIONS																		
1	Develop a plan for transitioning to the Consolidated Service Plan	JPA Board	12															
2	Begin discussions with drivers about proposed plan for transition	CCT Staff; drivers	4															
3	Refine the service plan	CCT Staff	12															
4	Finalize the bus stop locations and confirm with local municipalities	CCT Staff; cities and counties DPW	20															
5	Develop an operating plan to support the service plan	CCT Staff; Transit System Operations & JPB Boards	12															
6	Test new deviated fixed routes for operability, make adjustments as needed	CCT Staff; drivers	8															
7	Make final revisions to services before implementation	CCT Staff	12															
8	Establish local bus stop maintenance and amenities plan	JPA Board; Transit Systems Operations Board	16															
9	Prepare training plan for drivers	CCT Staff	12															
10	Finalize schedules	CCT Staff	8															
11	Train drivers and administrative staff about new services and procedures	CCT Staff; drivers	8															
12	Implement consolidated service plan	CCT Staff	40															
13	Refine service schedules as needed	CCT Staff; Transit System Operations Board	16															
14	Develop plans for refinement and future expansion of service	CCT Staff	12															

Launch Service

		Primary Responsibility (if applicable, key support role is shown after semicolon)	Estimated Resources		2015				2016				2017					Ongoing
			County, JPA, or Consulting Staff Hours	Fixed Costs (Low-High)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan/Feb/ March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	Jan	Feb/March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	
VEHICLES, FACILITIES, AND MAINTENANCE																		
1	Develop a consolidated vehicle plan	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	8															
2	Confirm storage locations for vehicles	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	4															
3	Develop vehicle, parts, and equipment inventory	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	8															
4	If applicable, transfer spare parts for vehicles	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	4															
5	Develop a consolidated maintenance plan	CCT Staff	12															
6	Hire additional CCT maintenance staff, if needed	CCT Staff	24															
7	Transition MPT vehicles to CCT maintenance, as appropriate	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	8															
8	Negotiate lowered rates at auto mechanics for major repairs	CCT Staff	8															
9	Replace decals on vehicles with unified system brand; repaint vehicles as needed	CCT Staff	See above															
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEMS ADMIN																		
1	Research and purchase new phone system	CCT Staff; JPB Board	20	$3,000-$5,000														
2	Purchase new 1-800 number	CCT Staff	4															
3	Purchase and Install Route Match Coordination Software	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	16	$5,000-$7,000														
4	Develop vehicle communications plan between dispatch and operators and train both parties	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	16															
5	Train schedulers and dispatchers on the new Route Match technology	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	40															
MONITORING AND EVALUTION																		
1	Determine if consolidated services are meeting performance standards	CCT Staff	8															
2	Monitor service on monthly basis and report to Transit Systems Operations and JPA Boards	CCT Staff	4/month															
3	Adjust service and make other revisions as necessary	CCT Staff and/or contract operator	4/month as needed															
4	Solicit rider feedback via surveys (after one year of service)	CCT Staff	40/year															

Appendices

Appendix A PMT and PAC Members

Below is a list of the Project Management Team (PMT) and the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) members.

PMT Members

Name	Title	Agency / Organization
Sara Dunlap	Sr. Transportation Planner	MnDOT
Bev Herfindahl	Transit Project Manager	MnDOT
Tiffany Collins	Transit Director	KAT / CCT
Donna Anderson	Transit Director	Ecumen
Noel Shugahart	Planning Coordinator	MnDOT

PAC Members

Name	Organization / Agency
Paul Setzepfandt	Renville County Commissioner
Ron Dingmann	City of Litchfield
Jim Butterfield	Kandiyohi County
Al Houdek	City of Olivia
Kevin Halliday	City Clerk of Willmar
Rollie Nisson	Kandiyohi County
Paul Virnig	Meeker County
LoAnn Shepard	Financial / Clinical Supervisor Meeker County Social Services
Dale Miller	ProWorks

Existing Conditions Report

Transit Restructuring Plan

Final Draft

April 2015

NELSON
NYGAARD

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Office of Transit is leading a statewide effort to encourage coordination, cooperation, and consolidation (the "three Cs") between Greater Minnesota's transit providers. The interest in cooperation and coordination among transit providers, especially small operators, reflects a variety of interests and concerns, including a desire to accommodate rider's needs to travel regionally as well as a desire to increase service efficiency and effectiveness. MnDOT has set five primary goals for this effort:

- Improve customer service and seamlessness in terms of fares, service coverage and informational tools.
- Increase the availability of transit services, with potential new destinations and expanded service hours that come from eliminating any duplicative services
- Improved cost effectiveness for the agencies operating services through cost savings, shared expenses, more flexible use of available resources and equipment, economies of scale and freeing up resources
- Economic and facilities development opportunities due to improved buying power and the potential for larger scale developments
- Improved relationships between organizations by way of shared governance and multijurisdictional political support

As part of the overall transit restructuring effort, MnDOT hired a team of consultants led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates to develop a restructuring plan for Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties, located in south central Minnesota approximately two hours west of the Twin Cities. This tri-county area has already made strides in propagating the "three Cs." As of January 1, 2015, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville County Heartland Express consolidated services and formed a new transit provider for both counties, called Central Community Transit (CCT). Regional leaders are currently discussing a merger of Meeker County Public Transit into the CCT network.

The Nelson\Nygaard Team's role is to support this process by collecting and analyzing existing conditions, including service needs and potential improvement opportunities. The study team will consider and evaluate consolidation models that offer potential to better serve identified needs and challenges. The Nelson\Nygaard team will also work with stakeholders to create a preferred strategy and develop an implementation plan to guide the region towards this preferred strategy.

This Existing Conditions Report is the first in a series of working papers that will be prepared over the course of this study. Its purpose is to analyze current transit operations in Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker counties and to ensure stakeholders have a comprehensive understanding of existing services and agency operations. This first report serves as a baseline reference and a first step in working towards service and organizational alternatives. This report is a working paper that will be updated as new information arises.

PLANNING PROCESS

The Kandiyohi Renville Meeker Transit Study began in January 2015 with a kick-off meeting with the Project Management Team (PMT). The PMT is comprised of MnDOT staff and the transit directors from each transit provider. This group will oversee the study team's day-to-day work on the project, facilitates information sharing among project stakeholders, and provides technical leadership. A list of the individuals and organizations participating in the PMT is included in Appendix A.

The study team will also work with a second group, the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) throughout the study. The PAC is made up of regional stakeholders including county and city staff, staff from area non-profits and human service organizations, and elected officials from the three counties. This team will meet approximately every six weeks to discuss the findings of the technical reports and provide direction for ongoing technical analysis. A list of the individuals and organizations participating in the PAC is included in Appendix A.

The planning process is comprised of several deliverables, the first of which is this technical report, which assesses existing services, functions, positions, and personnel of the two transit systems. The next deliverables will consist of technical reports that will:

- Identify design opportunities for regionalization of services, which will propose service design alternatives, develop evaluation framework, and will analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Identify and evaluate joint agency structure alternatives, which will evaluate alternative organizational and governance structures, determine the impacts on capital assets and the implications for costs and funding, and will develop recommendations and a timeline.
- Serve as an implementation plan for the priority service alternatives determined by the PAC.

Each deliverable will be reviewed by both the PMT and the PAC before they are released to the general public. The Consulting Team will present each deliverable and the final presentation in-person at a predetermined location within the study area.

RECENT PLANNING STUDIES

As one of our first steps in understanding existing conditions, the Nelson\Nygaard Team reviewed other studies, plans and documents about public transportation services in Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker counties. While none of these plans are strictly transit service plans, they do provide guidance and context for our effort and are summarized briefly below.

2010 Transit Survey (Kandiyohi and Renville Counties)

Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville Heartland Express sponsored a transit survey in March 2010. The average rider who completed the survey is between the ages of 18 and 64, white, understands English, is not disabled, and has a household income of less than $20,000 per year.

The survey focused on understanding transit rider preferences. Highlights of the findings include:

- Riders largely use transit because they do not own a car or they do not like to drive.
- Many riders do not have a driver's license, especially those with special needs.

- Most riders use transit frequently (between five and seven days per week) and many also use transit to get to and from work and school.
- Most riders are established riders; they have been using the service for more than a year, with many riding for over five years.
- Riders are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the service.
- The main ideas for service improvements include increasing service hours and reducing wait times.
- Most riders learned about the system through direct mailings and on the radio.

Region 6E 2011 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan

The MnDOT Office of Transit worked with the Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (region 6E – Kandiyohi, Meeker, Renville, and McLeod) to prepare a plan to improve the coordination and cooperation of transportation providers in the Region and to overcome identified barriers that cause gaps in access to services. This study was completed in 2011.

According to the plan, although the transportation agencies available in the region had made strides in addressing transportation needs, there were still underserved populations and geographic areas, due in part to different political cycles and cultures. The dial-a-ride programs in particular were cited as having greatly improved service to the elderly and people with disabilities and contracts with specific user groups have improved transportation service for nursing homes and other specialized groups. But the region lacked Special Transportation Services (STS) and needed to better coordinate with Veteran Services. In addition, the system suffered from a lack of funding, which prevents the replacement of vehicles, development of new technologies or marketing efforts. Although consumers continued to enjoy affordable services, costs have outpaced revenues and provider rates were not equitable.

The plan highlighted the dramatic improvement in public-private cooperation and congratulated the region's communication between providers and stakeholders, but also stated that the region needed to improve communication with its users and expand inter-agency coordination. Finally, the plan recognized the benefits of the car donation program but criticized the "no-load mile" rule that tends to reduce the number of volunteer drivers.

The plan prioritized sixteen strategies that had the most potential to improve transit coordination in Region 6E:

- Better advertisement and promotion the region's transportation options.
- The centralization of the information with at least unique call number and if possible web coordination.
- The maintenance of the existing vehicle fleet.
- The establishment of "bus buddies' or transit ambassadors program.
- The merge of various Day Training and Habilitation transportation with existing transit.
- The organization of a bi-annual regional transit forum for all regional stakeholders.

The plan also recommended more difficult strategies including:

- The development of new program like SMART RIDE program, which includes bus, minivan, and volunteer driver service.

- The creation of a smart card technology to facilitate communication between transit authorities and users.
- The improvement of vehicle dispatch across the region and the expansion of service both within and beyond the boundaries of Region 6E.
- The improvement of convenience, safety and comfort at bus stops.
- The examination of rules and regulations in order to promote public transportation.
- The expansion of the Volunteer Driver program and the modification of the no-load mile rule.

Guidance for Coordination, Cooperation and Consolidation: Collaborative Strategies for Redesigning Transit Systems - MnDOT (2013)

MnDOT's 2013 *Guidance for Coordination, Cooperation and Consolidation: Collaborative Strategies for Redesigning Transit Systems* serves as impetus for this Transit Restructuring Plan. The report provides a range of strategies to encourage organizational working relationships among public transit systems to improve the administration and delivery of services in Greater Minnesota.

The guidance report is written for transit providers, and outlines specific benefits of the "three C's including:

- More opportunities for creativity in service delivery
- Better balance between efficiency as measured by operating cost per revenue hour and effectiveness as measured by passengers per revenue hour
- More flexibility in vehicle management
- More attentiveness to all aspects of federal requirements
- More time for managers to develop expertise in specialty areas

The report outlines a set of coordination, cooperation and consolidation strategies and tools that are appropriate for many transit systems in Minnesota, including an example of a Joint Powers Agreement, specific mobility management responsibilities and tools, and an array of examples from across Minnesota, highlighting transit agencies that are already engaged in coordinated, cooperative and consolidated efforts and activities. The appendices provide a toolkit of resources for transit agencies to reference.

State Performance Measures – MnDOT (2013)

In early 2013, MnDOT Office of Transit prepared guidance for rural public transit systems expecting to add service to meet unmet needs or merge with other transit services. This guidance is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes by using a series of service performance measures. The following performance measures are required to be reviewed for new or merged services:

- Passengers per Hour
- Cost per Passenger Trip
- Revenue per Passenger Trip
- Cost per Revenue Service Hour

- Revenue Miles and Average Trip Length

MnDOT established statewide standards only for Passengers per Hour, which are detailed in Figure 1 below, while the other measures are based on individual system-wide averages.

Figure 1 MnDOT Performance Measures

Type of Service	Passenger per Hour Threshold	Rating	Action
Community or Municipal Dial-A-Ride	≤ 2.0 PPH	Poor	Consider Discontinuance
	2.0 to 3.0 PPH	Minimally Adequate	Must improve to Good or Better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours
	≥ 5.0 PPH	Excellent	

Source: MnDOT

New or merged services are expected to achieve a "good" rating during a demonstration or pilot year in order to be included the following year in the base revenue hours. Otherwise, a provider must follow the appropriate action described above.

MnDOT Transit Reports

MnDOT Transit Reports are published annually to provide residents and elected officials an overview of public transit services in Minnesota. The report also contains a summary of the federal and state transportation funding for Minnesota Transit, which amounts to $221.4 million and $594.5 million, respectively, for FY 2013. Of the $594.5 million state transit funding, $100 million is allocated to areas outside of the Twin Cities metro area. State funding is projected to increase in 2014-2015 by $174 million, $23 million additional funds for areas outside of the Twin Cities.

Highlights from the Transit Report for the study area include:

- Kandiyohi Area Transit's Saturday ridership increased by 10%, as well as improved efficiency and accessibility through a JARC-funded program, which provided additional service to adult-day service and community-based workplaces. Other than the Saturday service, Kandiyohi transit system has maintained steady operating expenses, but lost overall ridership by 3% between 2011 and 2012.
- In 2012, Renville County Heartland Express and Kandiyohi Area Transit partnered and applied for funds to purchase RouteMatch software. Renville County also purchased a new bus. Renville County has seen both expenditures and ridership decreasing since 2011.
- Meeker County Public Transit benefited from a 4% ridership increase since 2011 and upgraded a third of its fleet with two new Class 400 buses. While ridership is recovering from a low record in 2010, operating expenses have increased every year since 2008.

2014 Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Agreement

The Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Agreement allowed Kandiyohi and Renville County to form a Joint Powers Board to succeed Kandiyohi Area Transit and Renville Heartland Express's current public transit operations. The goal is to provide a coordinated service delivery and funding source for public transportation throughout the bi-county service area.

The Joint Powers Board consists of two members each from Kandiyohi County Board, City of Willmar Council, and Renville County Board, as well as two elected officials from both counties. The Board meets quarterly and has the power to expend funds for establishing, funding, coordinating, administering, and operating a Public Transportation Service.

The Joint Powers Board established a 14-member Transit System Operations Board consisting of one member from various community groups, consumers, businesses, and city and county staff. Responsibilities of the operations board include overseeing the development of an annual transit services plan, monitoring the effectiveness of service, and hiring an Executive Director to oversee the new service, among other things. The Executive Director is charged with designing an affordable, accessible, and cost-effective transportation plan.

2 KANDIYOHI, RENVILLE AND MEEKER COUNTIES – COMMUNITY PROFILE

OVERVIEW

As part of understanding the opportunities for transit service development in Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties, the study team considered the size, spatial distribution and characteristics of the local population. In particular, we looked at growth trends, population density and community demographics. Population growth and density lead us to the largest concentrations of potential riders and markets for public transportation. Demographics are also important because experience tells us that individuals with certain demographic characteristics are more likely to need and use public transportation. These individuals tend to have economic or physical constraints and/or have limited access to private automobiles and are more likely to rely on public transportation services to meet their transportation needs.

Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties

As mentioned, the focus of this study transit restructuring study is on three rural counties located in south central Minnesota: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker. Combined the counties span a area geographically of nearly 1,000 square miles. The region, however, is sparsely populated with a combined population of just over 80,000 people. Generally speaking, the counties are characterized by rural landscape and a series of small communities. Each county also has a regional service and population center. These cities are Olivia, Willmar and Litchfield in Renville, Kandiyohi and Meeker counties respectively. Of the three, Kandiyohi County and the City of Willmar have the largest populations by far; there are over 42,000 people living in Kandiyohi and 20,000 in Willmar. This compares with Meeker County, which has a population of just over 23,000, of which roughly 6,700 live in Litchfield. Another 15,500 people live in Renville County with 2,400 people in Olivia (see also Figure 2).

In terms of demographic data, the counties are very similar. They have similar rates of youths, older adults, commuters and unemployment. One key demographic difference between the three counties, however, is the proportion of Spanish speaking residents. While only 2% of the people living in Renville and Meeker County identified themselves as Spanish speaking, 8% of the Kandiyohi residents did. The census data also tells us that the study area overall enjoys relatively robust employment, with less than 5% unemployment overall; an unemployment rate lower than the state or nation overall. However, despite high employment rates, nearly half of all households in the region are classified as low income according to standards set by the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (see also Figure 2).

Figure 2 Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker County Demographic Profile

Provider	Kandiyohi County		Renville County		Meeker County	
	Total	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total	Total	Percent of Total
County Population	42,265	100%	15,499	100%	23,197	100%
Unemployed Population	1,611	4.8%	538	4.3%	867	4.8%
Non-Labor Force Population	10,110	24%	4,183	27%	5,908	25%
Disabled	2,463	6%	852	5%	1,202	5%
Youth (0-17)	10,093	24%	3,528	23%	5,803	25%
Senior (65+)	7,020	17%	3,013	19%	3,927	17%
Spanish-Speaking Residents**	3,256	8%	797	2%	639	2%
Limited English ***	832	2%	89	1%	239	Less than 1%
Commuters****	20,414	48%	6,974	45%	10,472	45%
Transit Commuters	218	1% of Commuters	40	Less than 1% of Commuters	45	Less than 1% of Commuters
Riders per Capita	0.005		0.003		0.002	
Households	17,120		6,400		9,288	
Zero-Vehicle Households	1,260	7%	331	5%	345	4%
Low- and Very Low-Income Households *****	8,533	50%	3,140	49%	4,202	45%
Area Employers (2014, 2nd Quarter)	1,340		573		586	
Top Employment Sectors						
1	Education and Health Services		Education and Health Services		Education and Health Services	
2	Trade, Transportation and Utilities		Trade, Transportation and Utilities		Trade, Transportation and Utilities	
3	Manufacturing		Manufacturing		Manufacturing	

Data Sources: 2008-2013 American Community Survey and the Minnesota Dept. of Employment & Economic Development
* Does not include residents not in labor force
** Speaking English very well and less than very well
*** Speak English less then well
**** Labor force that does not Work at Home
***** Very Low-income Households earning less than $25,000 per year
Low-income households earning less than $50,000 per year or 80% of the median household income in Kandiyohi County, classified low income according to US Department Housing and Urban Development (http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il.html)

POPULATION GROWTH AND DENSITY

The Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker study area has a stable population with slow growth experienced by most of the counties and their largest cities. Exceptions to this overall trend are the City of Willmar, which grew by just over 7% between 2000 and 2013 and Renville County, which lost population over the last 13 years (see Figure 3). Population forecasts prepared by the Minnesota State Demographic Center suggest that this trend of slow, but steady growth will continue for the next several decades.

Figure 3 Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Population Trends

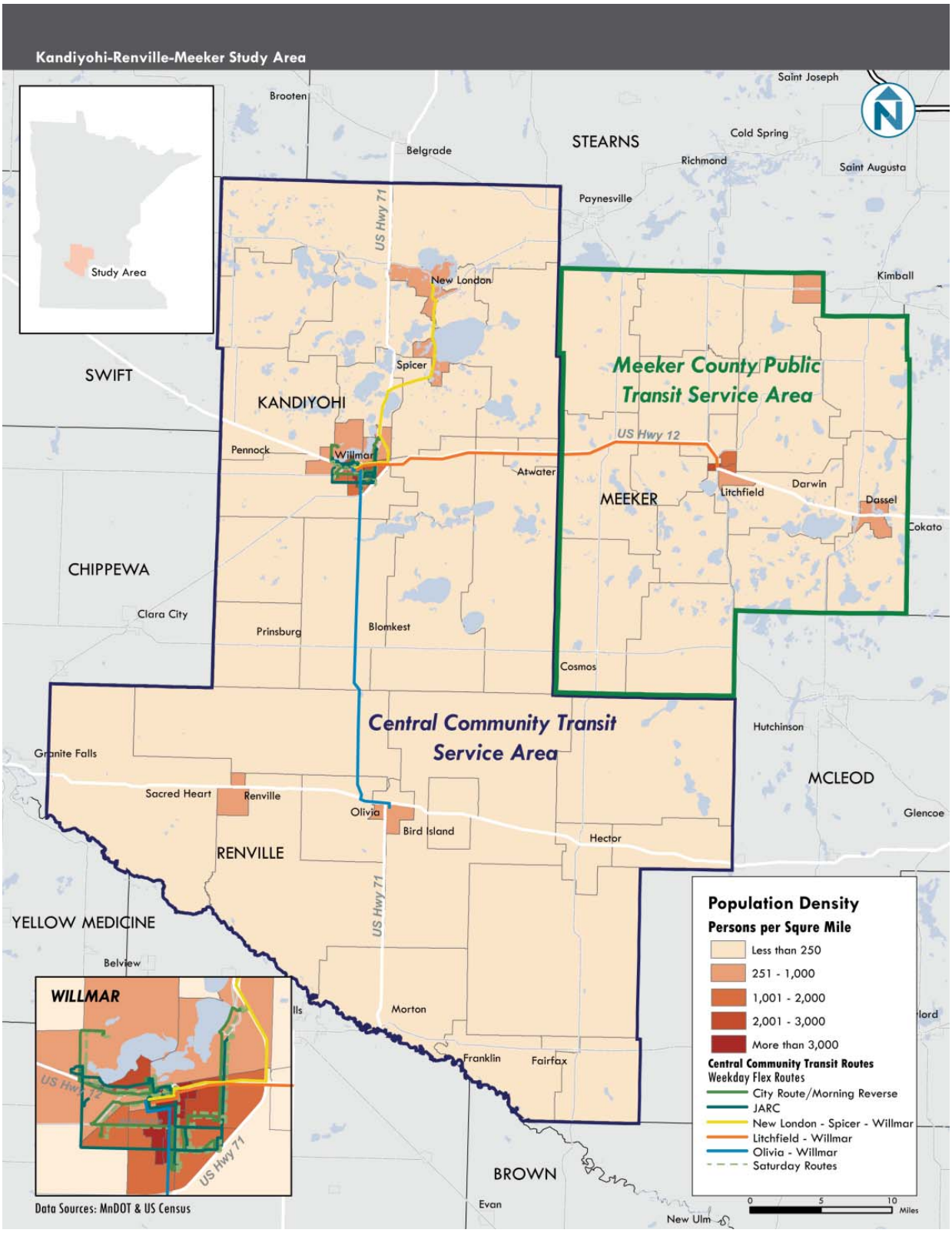
Location	2000	2010	2013	Change 2000 - 2013	2020 (Forecasted)
Kandiyohi County	41,203	42,239	42,351	2.79%	44,495
City of Willmar	18,351	19,610	19,717	7.44%	
Meeker County	22,644	23,300	23,109	2.05%	25,706
City of Litchfield	6,562	6,726	6,723	2.45%	
Renville County	17,154	15,730	15,214	-11.31%	16,240
City of Olivia	2,570	2,484	2,450	-4.67%	

Sources: Minnesota State Demographic Center; City and Town population estimates.

Population Density

The Kandiyohi, Meeker, Renville study area is sparsely populated with a total population in the three county area of just over 80,000 individuals spread over rough 1,000 square miles. The overall population density is just 32 persons per square miles. As shown in Figure 4, the highest levels of population density are in the towns of Willmar in Kandiyohi County, Litchfield in Meeker County, and Renville and Olivia in Renville County.

Figure 4 Population Density: Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties



DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

As mentioned, demographic characteristics have a direct impact on the demand for public transportation. In particular, we look to the location and concentration of individuals who are more likely than the general public to use public transportation. These individuals tend to be youths under the age of 18, older adults aged 65 or older, people with disabilities, persons with low incomes, and households that do not have access to an automobile. Data for this analysis is primarily drawn from the 2010 U.S. Census and in cases where data was not available; the 2000 Census data was used.

The following series of maps shows the spatial distribution of each population independently and identifies areas that have a higher concentration of these individuals. When looking at the maps, it is important to note that the maps highlight relatively population, or, the percentage of the targeted population as compared to the population overall. This means that some areas will be marked as having a relatively high concentration of a particular population, even if the absolute number of these individuals is small.

The data shows that youths and older adults, while concentrated in the larger communities, are more widely distributed than the people with disabilities or lower incomes. In each case, however, Willmar, Litchfield and Olivia have the highest concentration of people with characteristics typically associated with a need for transit service. Findings associated with each group are highlighted in the following section followed by a series of maps.

- **People with Disabilities:** The highest concentrations of disabled persons are in Willmar and Litchfield (see Figure 5). In general, the towns in each of the three counties possess higher levels of disabled residents, while the more rural areas have comparatively low densities of disabled residents.
- **Youths:** Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville counties have a relatively large percentage of the population under the age of 19. Consistent with this, nearly all of the towns throughout the three-county region have at least marginally higher densities of children. This is particularly true when looking at the Willmar-Spicer-New London area, but also Litchfield and Dassel in Meeker County. Meanwhile children in Renville County are clearly concentrated in Renville and Olivia (see Figure 6).
- **Older Adults**: Older adults in the three counties have a similar distribution as youths, with older adults living in the town centers rather than in the rural areas. Litchfield in particular has a higher proportion of older adults than other areas in the region, while the Willmar-Spicer-New London area has comparatively lower levels of senior adults. Seniors in Renville County also are similarly distributed as children; suggesting consistent residential patterns throughout the three-county region (see Figure 7).
- **Limited English Speakers (LEP):** Only a handful of the people (approximately 1%) living in the study area identified themselves as limited English speakers. Of the people who identified themselves as limited English speakers, the majority are concentrated in parts of Willmar and Litchfield (see Figure 8).
- **Zero Vehicle Households:** There are relatively few areas in the study area that have elevated rates of zero vehicle households. The only census blocks in the area that contain more than 10 zero vehicle households per square mile are in Renville, Olivia, Litchfield, and Willmar (see Figure 9).
- **People with Low Incomes:** Figure 10 and Figure 11 both show the distribution of low-income households per square mile throughout the tri-county region. Figure 10 shows the

distribution of the study area's lowest income individuals; while Figure 11 represents a higher, but still low, income threshold (Figure 10's population is not included in Figure 11). In addition, it is worth noting that there is likely overlap between the concentrations of low income households and other transit dependent groups described above.

Figure 5 Limited Mobility (Disabled) Population Density: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

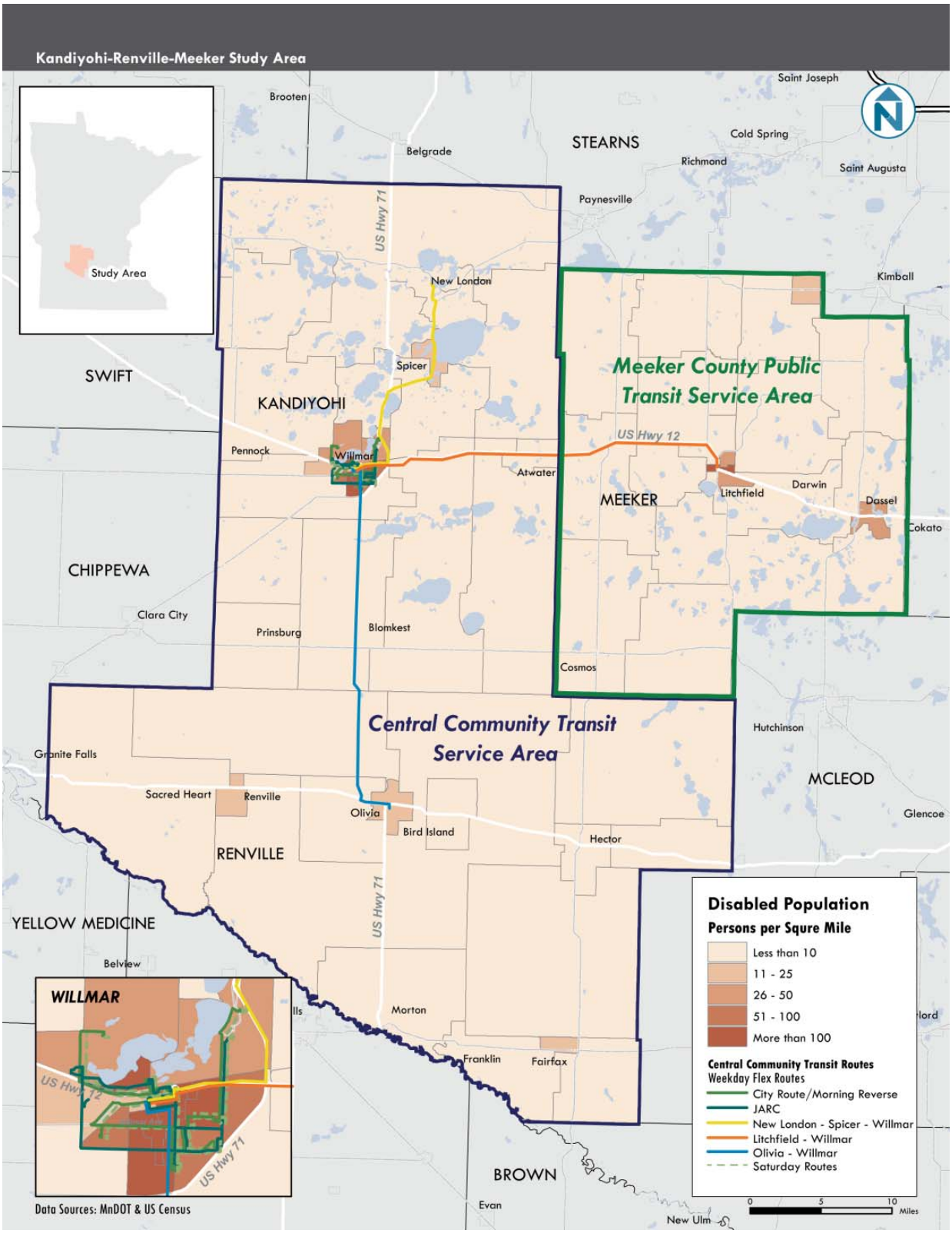


Figure 6 Youth Population (17 years old and Younger) Density: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

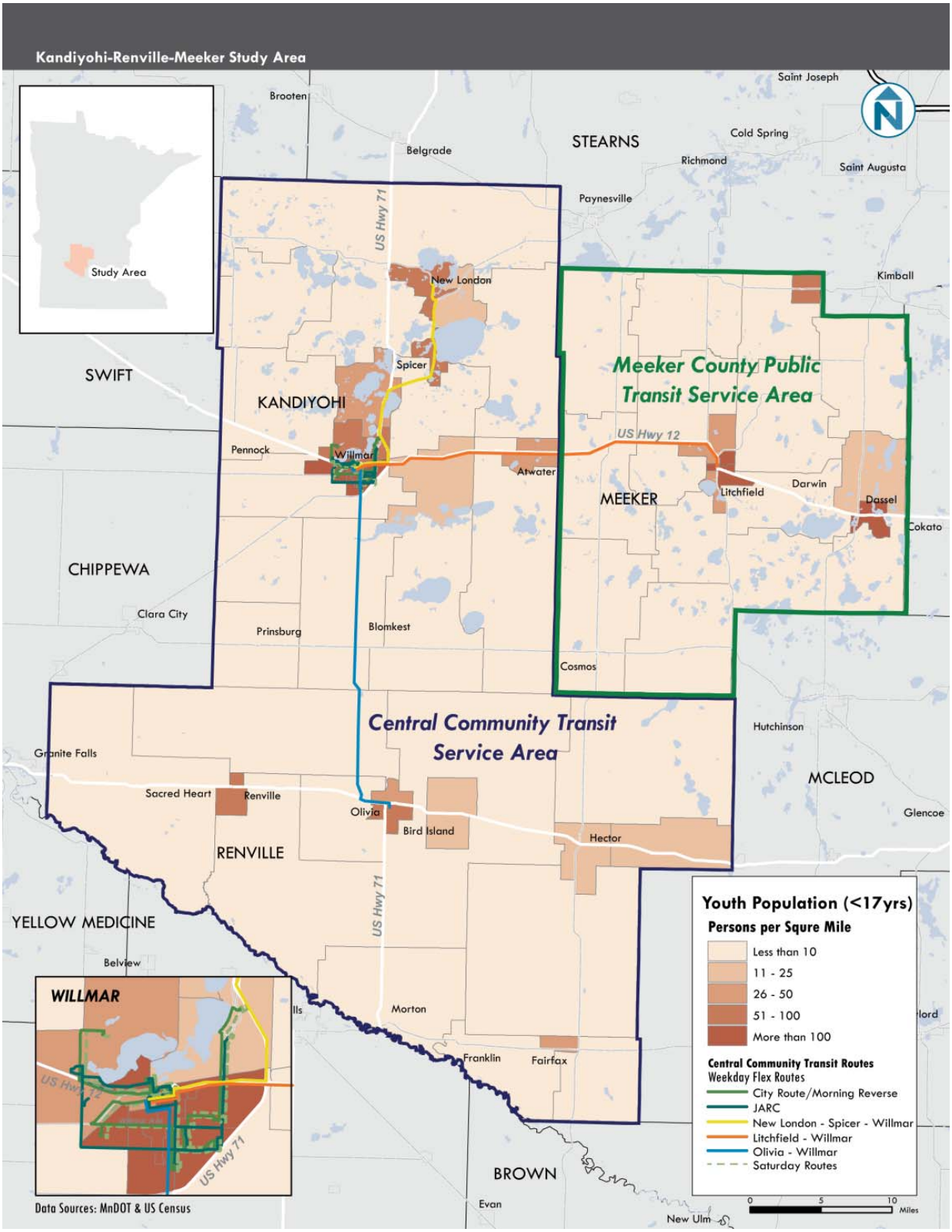


Figure 7 Senior Population (Over 65 years old) Density: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

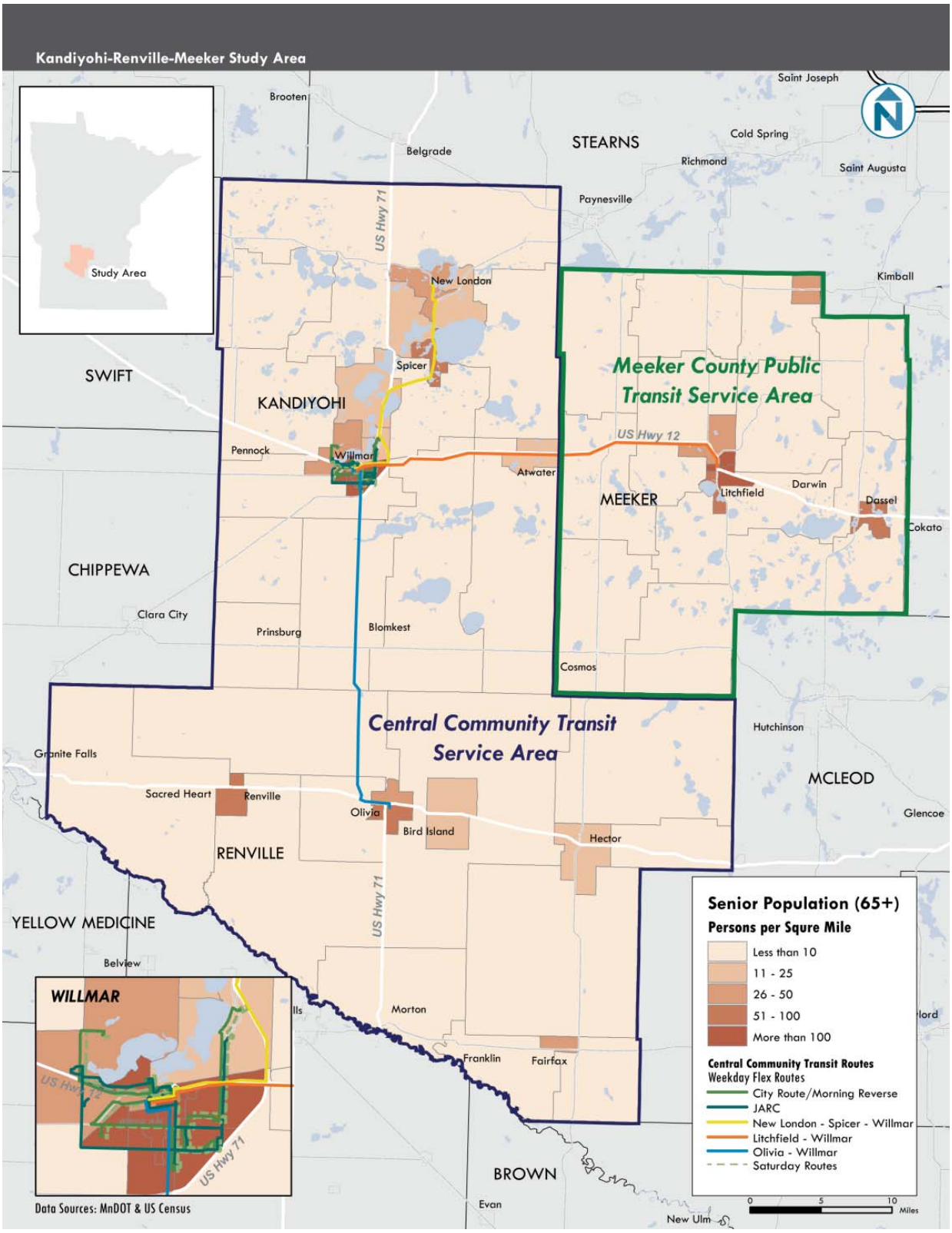


Figure 8 Limited English Speaking Population: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

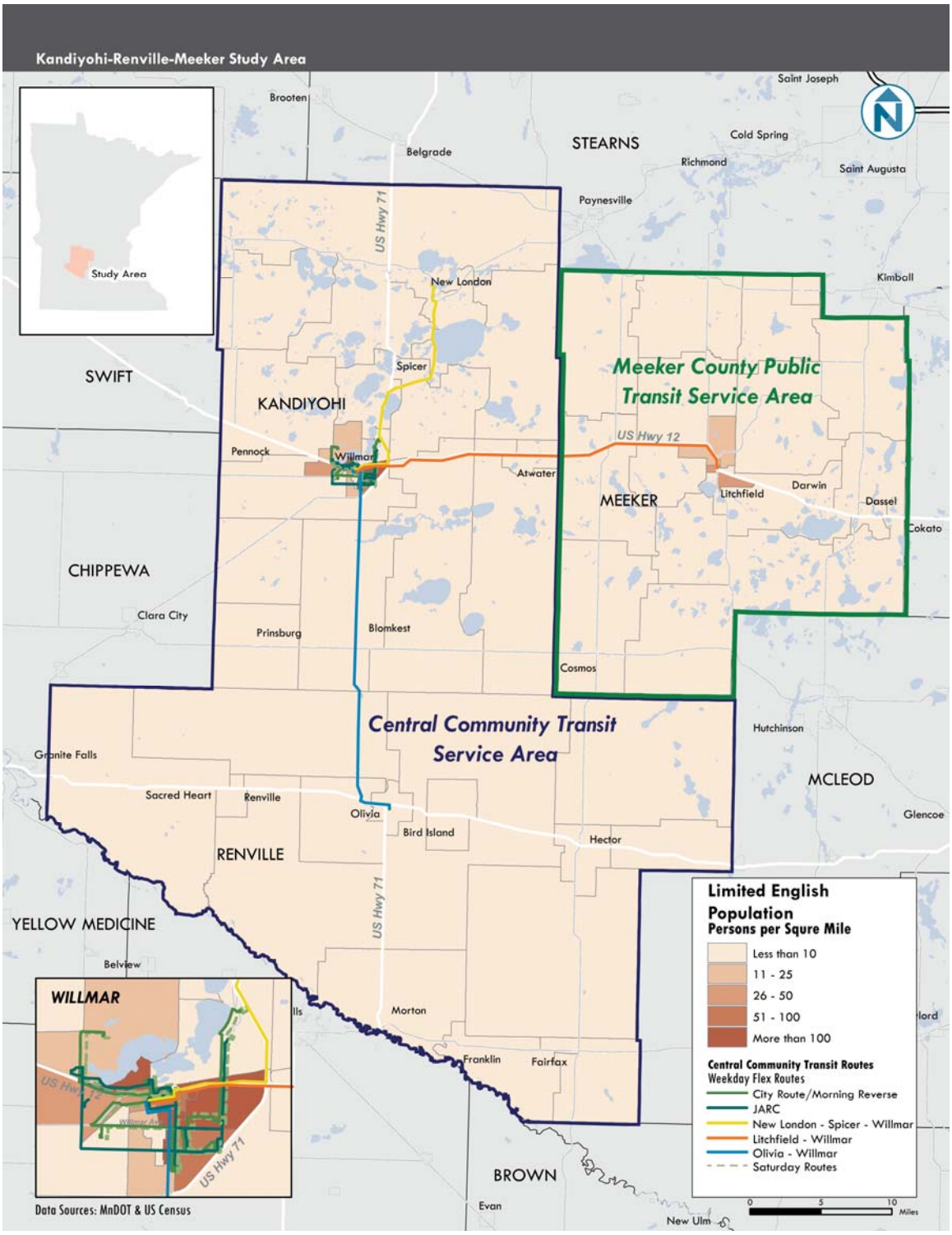


Figure 9 Vehicle Access – Zero Vehicle Households: Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

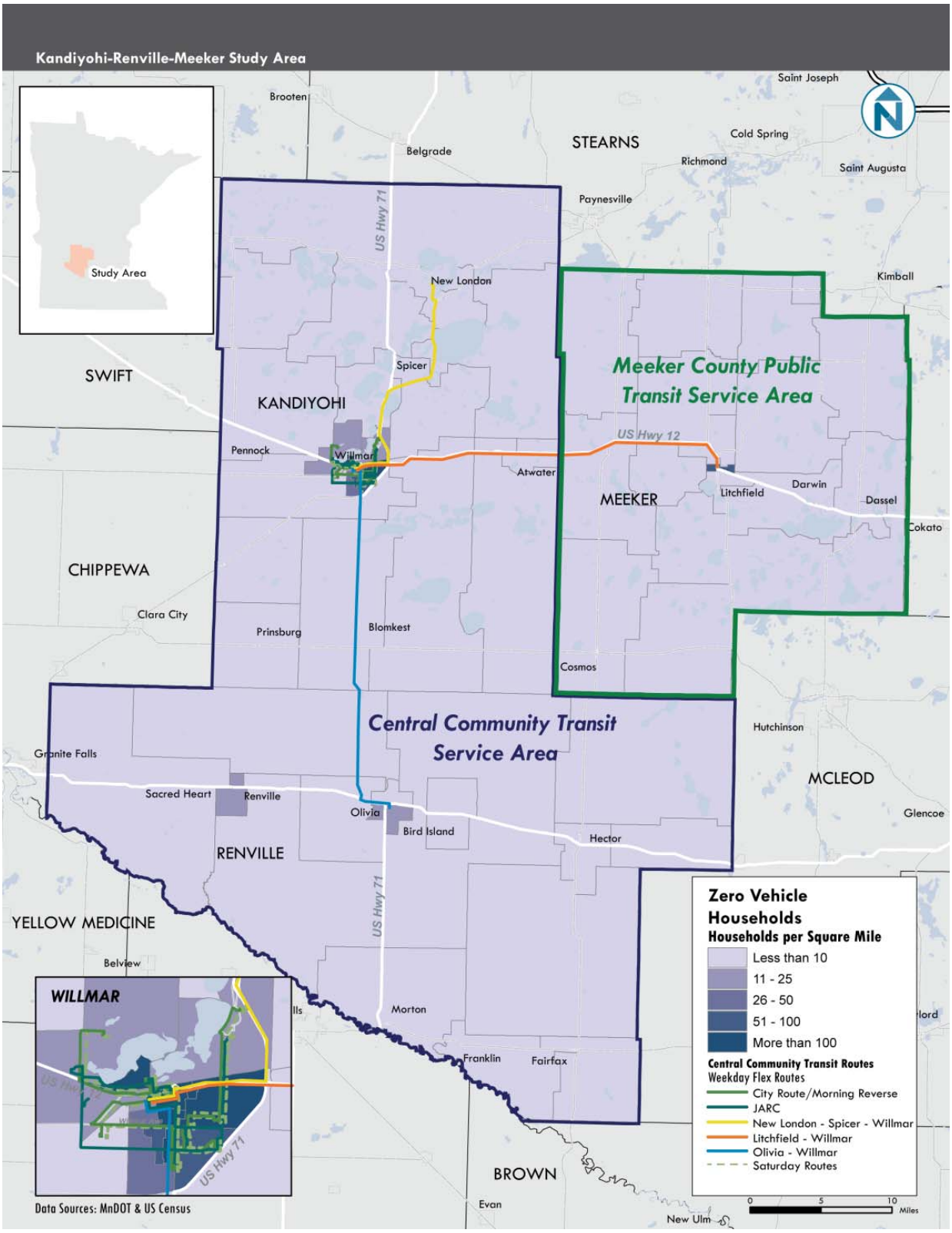


Figure 10 Very Low Income Household Density (less than $25,000 annual household income): Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

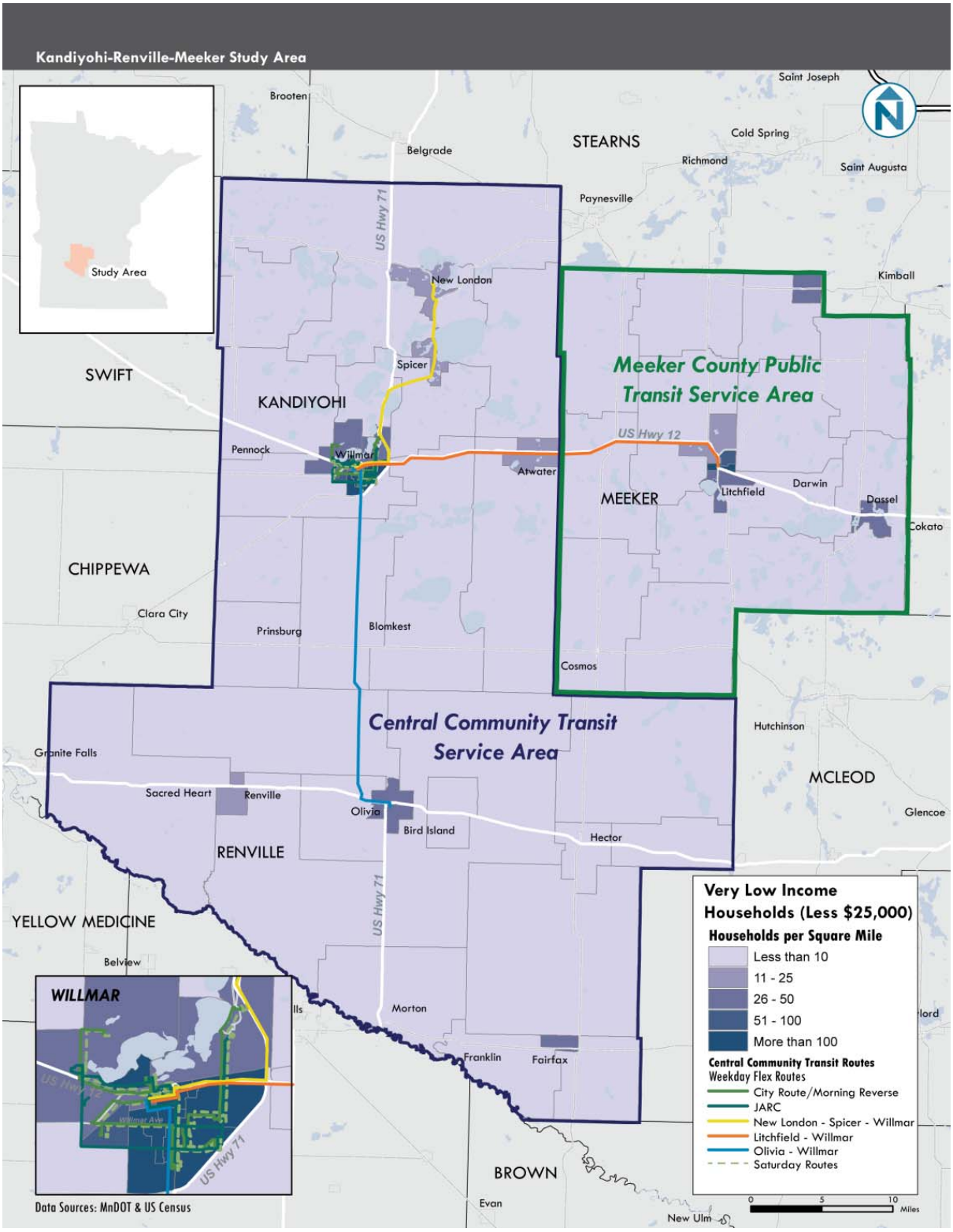
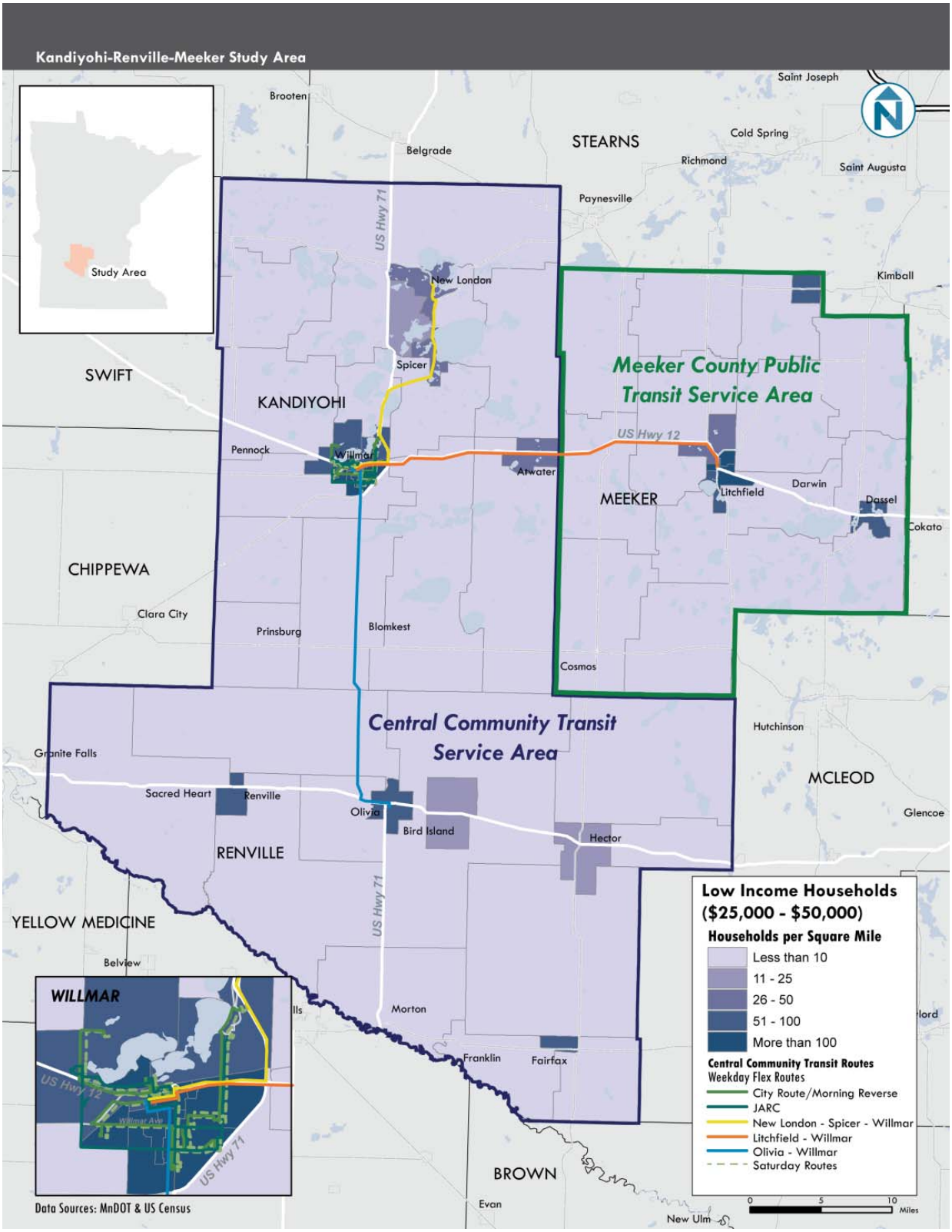


Figure 11 Low Income Household Density (between $25,000 and $50,000 annual household income): Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties



3 EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

OVERVIEW

This chapter profiles each of the existing transit agencies and provides an overview of the available services and existing travel patterns. An overview of the organizational and administrative structures of each agency is presented in Chapter 4, while financial information is provided in Chapter 5.

As part of this discussion, it is important to note that, as mentioned, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and the Heartland Express in Renville County merged operations to create Central Community Transit (CCT) on January 1st 2015. Although the merger represents several months of analysis and discussion, experience with the new CCT service is quite short. As part of describing the existing services, therefore, this analysis includes an overview of CCT services as well as the services and resources available at the pre-merger institutions provided by KAT and the Heartland Express.

TRANSIT AGENCY AND SERVICE OVERVIEW

Central Community Transit (CCT)

Central Community Transit's (CCT) is an independent not-for-profit agency that operates transit service for residents of Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. CCT initiated service on January 1, 2015 and will operate with a staff of 43 employees, an estimated budget of $1.8 million and a fleet of 24 vehicles. CCT's funding will be raised through a combination of federal and state grants, plus contributions from local governments, passenger fares and revenue earned through contract service. CCT's mission is to "cost effectively meet the many transportation needs of the residents of Kandiyohi and Renville Counties by providing safe, reliable, cost-effective transportation through the many bus and volunteer driver services it provides."

Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT)

Prior to merging with Renville County Transit to form CCT in early 2015, transit service in Kandiyohi County was provided by Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT). KAT began operations in 1999 as an independent transit agency with funding raised through federal and state grants, contributions from local governments, passenger fares and service contracts. KAT initiated service as a rural transit service, primarily providing service to support older adults, persons with disabilities and people needing access to transportation. The service evolved in the 15 years between its early operations and when it consolidated services to create CCT, expanding considerably. In its last year operating as KAT, the agency had an annual budget of $1,181,641, provided 119,309 trips, and operated with 20 buses, 28 drivers, and 35 volunteer drivers.

Renville Heartland Express

The Renville County Heartland Express service began operations in 1996. The Heartland Express operated as part of the Renville County government as a division in the Department of Human Services. Funding for the service, consistent with CCT and Kandiyohi Area Transit, came from federal and state grants, local sources, fares and contracts.

Operating as a county department meant that Heartland Express drivers and staff were Renville County employees. In addition, Renville County supported Heartland Express operations with administrative and back off services (payroll, grant management services). Heartland Express vehicles were also maintained by the Renville County as part of the county's fleet management services. Prior to merging with CCT, Heartland Express had an annual budget of $577,698, provided 36,972 trips and operated with six drivers, 22 volunteer drivers and four buses.

Service Overview

CCT operates three different types of service: route deviation, dial-a-ride/demand-response, and volunteer drivers. All of these services are available to members of the general public, but the volunteer driver service is primarily used to transport people traveling for medical assistance purposes and for out-of-county travel.

- **Route deviated transit service** offers scheduled transit services that are allowed to deviate or travel off route for up to ¾ of a mile (10 blocks) of the published route as requested by passengers. CCT operates deviated service within the limits of the City of Willmar, Monday through Friday. Saturday service is also available throughout the year. Additional route deviated service is available between Olivia and Willmar as well as between Willmar and Litchfield (Meeker County)
- **General public dial-a-ride service** is provided door-to-door throughout Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. This service is available for passengers who request a trip up to 24 hours in advance and are looking to travel within their respective counties. Same day service is also provided as available for an additional fee. (24-48 hours preferred).
- **Volunteer driver service** is provided by drivers, working as volunteers and using their own vehicles. Drivers are reimbursed for mileage according to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) published business rate, currently set at $0.575 per mile[1]. The majority of the trips provided by volunteer drivers are to transport people traveling to/from medical services with funding provided by health care providers (Blue Cross Blue Shield and UCare). CCT also provides volunteer drivers through their Senior Transportation Program for Kandiyohi and Renville County residents. Prior to consolidation Renville Heartland Express Renville resident also used volunteer drivers to transport people traveling outside of Renville County for any purpose as long as they were willing to pay the mileage charge. Kandiyohi Area Transit, however, only assigned medical trips to volunteer drivers.

[1] Note that CCT reimburses volunteer drivers according to the published business rate, which is different from the IRS published charitable rate, which is $0.14 per mile. See http://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates

Contracted Service

Contracted service is an important part of CCT's service. These services are designed to support specific health and human service programming, such as helping parents get their children to preschool programs and transporting individuals with disabilities to supported employment activities. Contracted services are paid for by the sponsoring agency, but are also open to members of the general public. CCT's largest contracts include:

- Pre-school transportation. CCT provides demand responsive service for children from their homes to Head Start, Public Preschool, Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), and Play Island Preschool.
- Human service transportation. CCT has contracts to provide demand responsive transportation for various groups and organizations. Service is scheduled around specific routes that pick up passengers from their homes and take them to their destinations during pre-arraigned times of the day and days of the week.
- Group transportation. The Carriage service, for groups of older adults and persons with disabilities who need to travel outside of normal public transportation operating hours. Participating agencies can purchase use of CCT vehicles and drivers for $55 per hour.
- "Joy Ride" service. In the summer months, CCT provides Friday and Saturday night service for local residents to travel to and from the restaurants and bars in Willmar through a program called "Joy Rides." The county safety coalition organizes this service and raises money through local bars and alcohol distributers to pay $10 per ride. There is high demand for this service and many residents see it as a public service and would like it to be expanded to additional days per week.

Fares and Rider Policies

CCT has a fairly complicated fare structure (Figure 12) that sets fares based on service type (published route and dial a ride); distance traveled and includes a surcharge for scheduling the service on the same day of travel. The complicated fare structure reflects, in part, the relative newness of the CCT service and the desire to keep fares equitable across both counties.

In terms of rider policies, riders are encourage to request a trip at least 48 hours in advance of when they want to travel. Same day requests for service are accommodating if possible and riders are charged a surcharge of $1.00 for same day scheduling. CCT's requests riders to cancel service as soon as possible, although they don't have a published cancellation policy. Riders are penalized for no-shows (where a ride is scheduled but the rider doesn't use the ride) after they fail to show up for a ride twice in a 30-day period with a warning letter. If a rider receives a third non-show within the 30-day period, they are suspended from the service.

Meeker County Public Transit (MPT)

Public transportation in Meeker County is provided by Meeker County Public Transit (MPT). The service began operations in 1995 with one bus, largely as a senior bus program. Today, MPT operates seven MPT buses and provides transportation throughout Meeker County.

MPT is part of a private, non-profit agency, Ecumen, whose primary mission is oriented around providing residential and day programs for older adults. Under this structure, MPT is a department within Ecumen and is responsible for transit service management and operations.

Ecumen supports MPT with administrative functions such as payroll, human resource functions and overall financial oversight.

Unlike CCT, MPT does not directly operate service. Instead service is operated by a third party contractor, Ripley Transport. MPT staff manages the overall system, including developing budgets, dispatching service (taking and scheduling trip requests), managing the volunteer driver program, and interfacing with members of the public. MPT also owns the vehicles. Ripley Transport, on the other hand, is contracted to provide the transportation and maintain MPT vehicles. As the service contractor, Ripley Transport employees the drivers, provides training and drug and alcohol testing as well as maintains all MPT vehicles. In addition to contracting with MPT, Ripley Transport also contracts with the school district for school bus transportation.

Service overview

Meeker County Public Transit (MPT) provides route deviation, dial-a-ride/demand response and volunteer driver service. All of these services are available to members of the general public, except the volunteer driver program, which is used exclusively for medical assistance transportation.

- **Route deviated transit service** offers scheduled service that is allowed to deviate or travel off route for up to ¾ of a mile (10 blocks) of a scheduled route as requested by passengers. This service includes a route deviated service that operates between Willmar and Litchfield and travels along Route 12.
- **General public dial-a-ride service** is provided door-to-door throughout Meeker County. This service is available for passengers who request a trip up to 24 hours in advance; same day service is also provided as available for an additional fee (24-48 hours preferred).
- **Volunteer driver service** is used to provide rides for medical assistance trips only. Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles and are reimbursed for mileage. Consistent with CCT, volunteer drivers making trips for MPT are reimbursed for mileage according to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS) published business rate, currently set at $0.575 per mile[2].

Contracted Services

MPT contracts with several community services to provide transportation for various populations, especially for children, people with disabilities and older adults. These contracts include:

- Pre-school transportation. MPT organizes transportation for children traveling to/from Head Start, a local preschool, and for certain children K-12 who need special transportation. These services are Monday through Friday from September to May and scheduled by families who pay a fee depending on how often the children travel per week.
- Transportation for people with disabilities. MPT has a contract to transport people from their homes to/from occupational training centers and supported employment. Contracts include services sponsored by West Central Industries (WCI) in Hutchinson as well as ProWorks Inc in Litchfield.

[2] Note that CCT reimburses volunteer drivers according to the published business rate, which is different from the IRS published charitable rate, which is $0.14 per mile. See http://www.irs.gov/Tax-Professionals/Standard-Mileage-Rates

- Sunday transportation. MPT contracts with a group of faith based organizations to provide transportation for church congregants. Sponsors currently include St. Phillips Church, Zion Church, 1st Lutheran Church, and United Methodist Church.
- Veterans Transportation. MPT provides veterans transportation through the Department of Veterans Affairs from their homes to Emmaus Place, an adult day center in Litchfield.

Fares and Rider Policies

MPT has one fare for trips within the City of Litchfield and a slightly higher fare for people traveling anywhere in Meeker County. MPT also charges lower fares to youths (aged 15 or under) and older adults (aged 56 or more). They also offer 10-ride ticket coupons. A $1.00 surcharge is also added to individuals who schedule a ride on the same day of travel (see Figure 15).

Riders are encouraged to schedule their travel at least 24 hours in advance. Same day requests for service are accommodating if possible and riders are charged a surcharge of $1.00 for same day scheduling. MPT requests that riders cancel their trips at least one hour prior to their scheduled pick-up time, or the trip will be considered a 'no show' and the rider will need to pay for the missed rides. Riders are penalized for no-shows; three no-shows result in a suspension from the service for a period of time.

Coordination with Other Transportation Systems

CCT coordinates with Greyhound Jefferson Bus Lines, Meeker County Public Transit, Western Community Transit, and Prairie Five Rides, among others, by referring passengers seeking transportation outside Kandiyohi County and providing transportation to and from transfer points. CCT also coordinates with the Veterans Administration through the Minnesota Ride Link project funded by the Veterans Transportation and Community Living Initiative (VTCLI). CCT utilizes the Revation Mobile Communicator tool to assist Veterans with transportation options.

MPT coordinates trips between CCT through a weekday dial-a-ride connector service between Willmar and Litchfield. MPT also coordinates with Trailblazer, which serves Sibley, McLeod & Wright counties.

Figure 12 Service Attributes Profile

Provider	KANDIYOHI AREA TRANSIT (KAT)	RENVILLE COUNTY	CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT (CCT)	MEEKER COUNTY
System Name	KAT Bus	Heartland Express	Central Community Transit (CCT)	Meeker County Public Transit
Service Area	Kandiyohi County	Renville County	Kandiyohi and Renville Counties	Meeker County
Hours of Operation	5:30 am to 5:30 pm (Monday-Friday) 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (Saturday)	6:30 am to 5:00 pm (Monday-Friday)	5:30 am to 5:30 pm (Monday-Friday) 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (Saturday)	6:15 am to 6:00 pm (Monday-Friday) 8:00 am to 1:00 pm (Saturday) 8:00 am to 1:00 pm (Sunday)
Fares	City Route $1.50 one-way $1.00 extra if same day service Dial-A-Ride $2.00 one-way (0-10 miles) $3.00 one-way (11-20 miles) $4.00 one-way (21-30 miles)	City Route $2.00 one way $3.00 one way to Danube $20 for 10 one-way rides $25 for 26 on way rides County Service $4.00 town to town (excluding Danube & Bird Island)	City of Willmar $1.50 one-way (published route) $2.00 one way (door-to-door) $1 same day service Dial-A-Ride (Kandiyohi) $2.00 one-way (0-10 miles) $3.00 one-way (11-20 miles) $4.00 one-way (21-30 miles) $6 Willmar to Litchfield $1 same day service Dial-A-Ride (Renville) $2.00 one way (Olivia) $3.00 one way (to Danube) $4.00 one way town to town (excluding Danube & Bird Island) $5.00 one way (to Willmar) $4.00 one way rural to town (within 5 miles)	City Route $2.00 adult (16-55) one-way $1.50 children (0-15) one-way $1.50 seniors (56+) one-way $13.50 city pass (10 rides) County Service $3.00 one-way $1.00 extra for same day charge $25.00 county pass (10 rides) $6 Litchfield to Willmar
Last Fare Increase	2012	2011	n/a	2011
Reservation Policy	24 hours preferred, same day accepted ($1.00 extra)	24 hours preferred, same day accepted	48 hour preferred (not including weekends), 24 hours requested, same day limited ($1.00 extra)	24 hours preferred, same day accepted ($1 extra)
Pick Up Window	Between 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait three minutes.	No official pick-up window.	Between 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait three minutes.	Between 10 minutes before and 5 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait one minute.
Cancellation Policy	Cancel as soon as possible. Two "no-shows" within a 30-day period will receive a warning letter. If a rider receives a third "no-show" within the 30-day period that rider will be suspended.	Cancel as soon as possible. Collect payment on "no-shows." Do not have a policy to penalize "no-shows."	Cancel as soon as possible. Two "no-shows" within a 30-day period will receive a warning letter. If a rider receives a third "no-show" within the 30-day period that rider will be suspended.	At least one hour prior to scheduled ride or considered a "no-show" and will have to pay for the missed ride. Three times a "no-show" will result in service denial for a period of time.

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Central Community Transit, and Meeker Public Transit

Preliminary Assessment of Transportation Needs

Major Destinations

As described in Chapter 2, Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker counties are largely rural areas with several small communities; each county also has a regional service center where employment and services are concentrated. As part of understanding transportation needs, the study team mapped key destinations as a way to understand transportation destinations, or places where people want to go. Key destinations were mapped together with existing transportation routes to understand how well the routes are matched with the destinations. Mapped destinations include shopping centers, hospitals, schools, medical services, community centers and senior centers (see Figure 13). Not surprising, the major destinations within the study area are clustered around the three main urban areas: Olivia, Willmar, and Litchfield. They are also well aligned with existing published routes.

Existing Travel Patterns

Kandiyohi County

Also as part of understanding needs, the study team mapped existing travel patterns based on existing trip patterns. Data was provided for travel during Kandiyohi County only (see Figure 14) and includes 2,602 passenger trips made between February 9th and 14th 2015. The data shows, the vast majority of all trips (86%) starts and end within the City of Willmar; this is also the area where CCT operates the majority of its deviated fixed route service. Roughly 11% of passenger trips start and end outside of the City of Willmar, but still within deviated fixed route service area. Within Willmar the top destinations are Kandi Mall, Land O'Lakes, Highland Apartments, and the Woodland Center.

A small percentage (3%) start and end outside of the City of Willmar and outside of the fixed route service area. Additionally there were about 10 passengers traveled between Willmar and New London and 16 trips between Willmar and Spicer. Another 10 passenger traveled between Willmar and Litchfield during this time period.

Meeker County

MPT did not have easily accessible trip origin and destination information, but was able to provide the top five destinations for passengers during January 2015, as shown in Figure 15. The top destinations for this time period are as follows:

- Walmart (388 passenger trips)
- Meeker Memorial Hospital (207 passenger trips)
- Ecumen Home Care & Hospice (139 passenger trips)
- Affiliated Community Medical Center East (98 passenger trips)
- Affiliated Community Medical Center West (88 passenger trips)

Figure 13 Major Destinations in Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

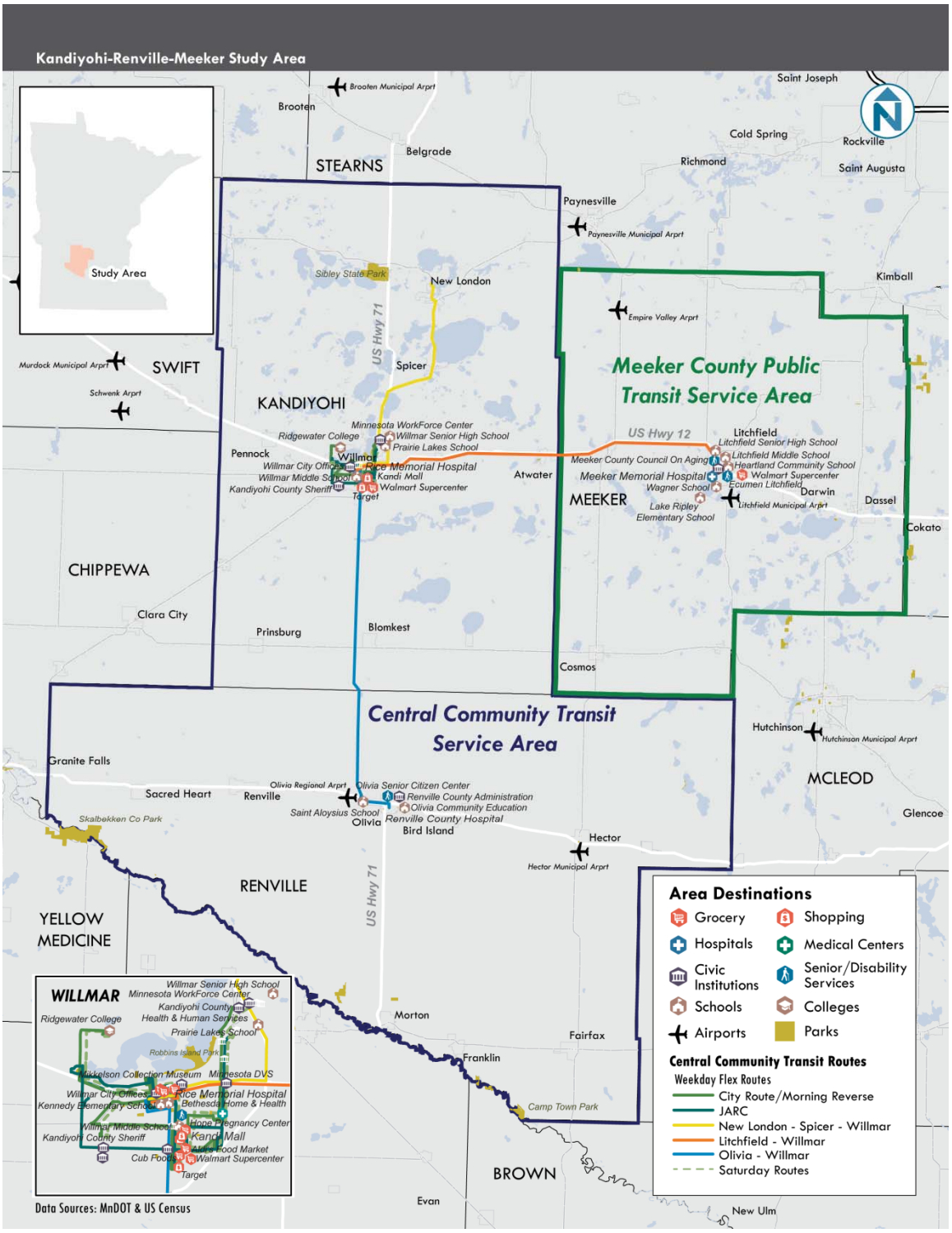


Figure 14 CCT Origin and Destination Data for February 9th – February 14th 2015

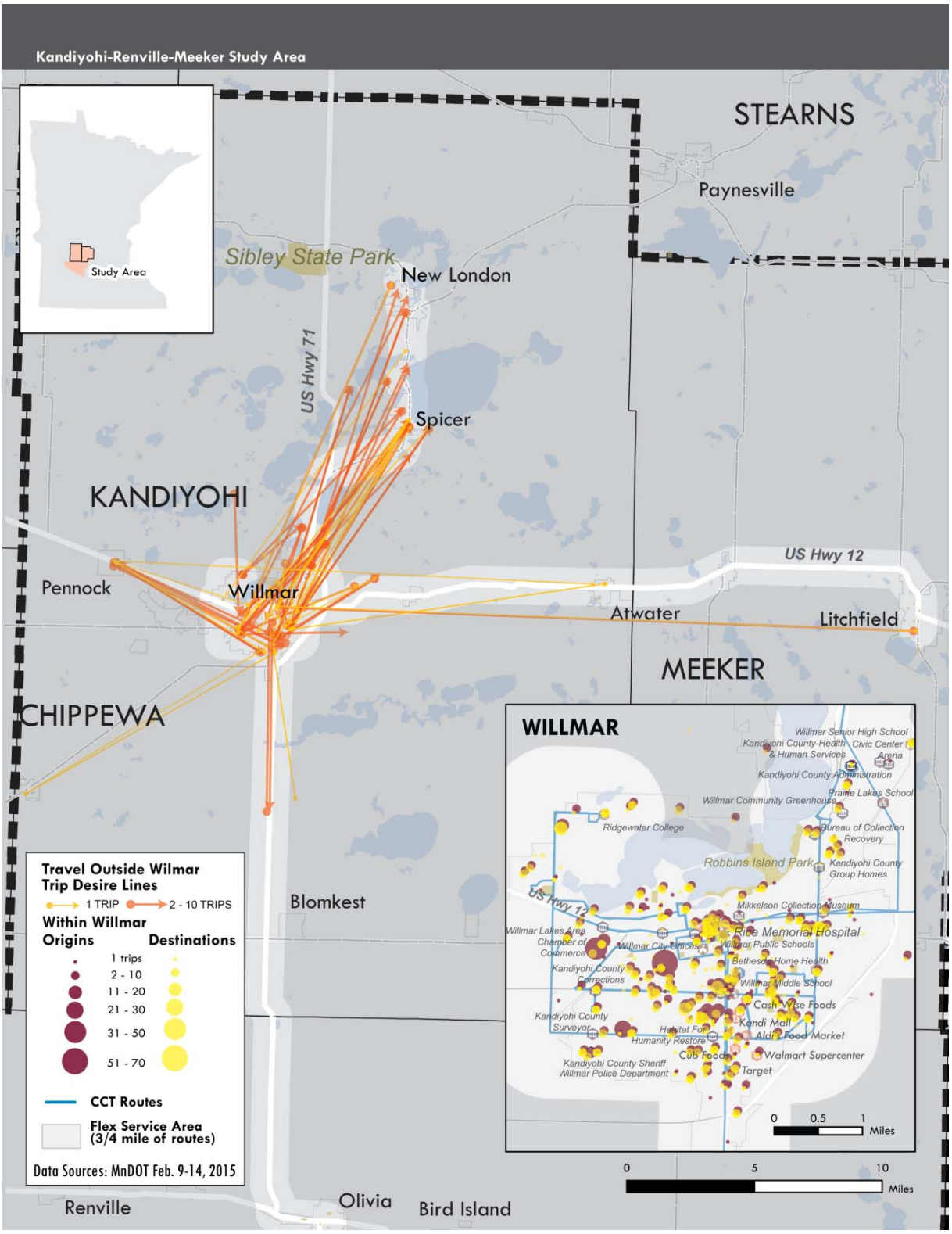
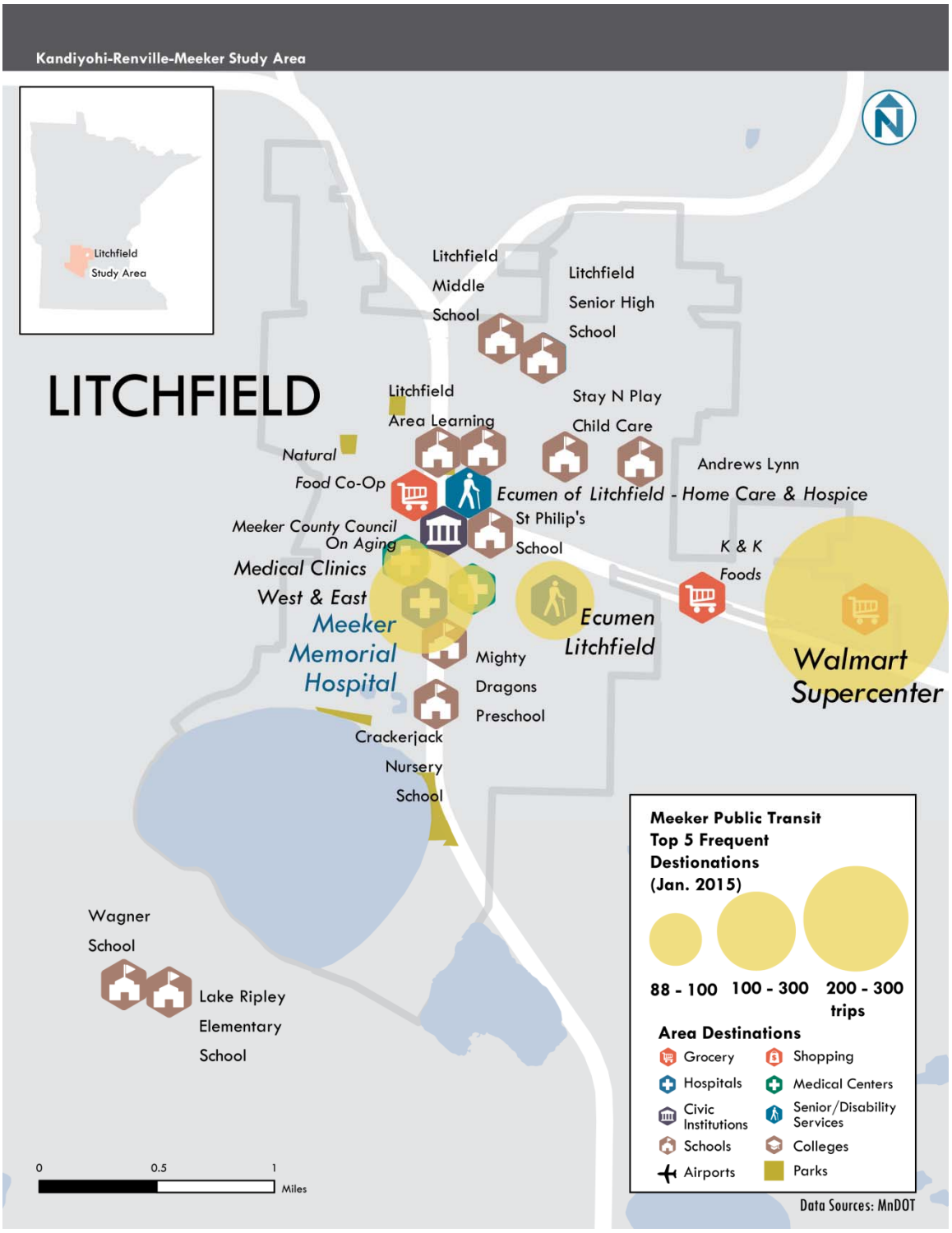


Figure 15 Meeker Public Transit Top Destinations (January 2015)



Preliminary Needs

Discussions with Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker stakeholders led identified a number of potential needs for transportation in the tri-county study area (see also Chapter 6). These described needs include the following services:

- New populations moving into urban areas, especially the Somali population.
- Data from the Kandiyohi Public Health Department suggests that the number of families that speak a language other than English at home increased from 90 to 282 families.
- People living on the outer edges of the county, where towns may be closer to the regional center in the next county over.
- Medical transportation, especially to the growing outpatient care facilities. Specialists and doctors travel to local clinics so people need to travel to Willmar and Hutchinson instead of Rochester and the Twin Cities. Additionally, Renville County is building a new hospital, which will add a new major destination to the study area.
- Educational facilities, especially the Minnesota West Technical Campus that is being developed in Willmar. This is a new facility that is growing and attracting young people. There may be opportunities to connect people to this facility, especially considering young people's interest in using transit.

Service needs will be assessed further in the next phase of this planning process to better understand how existing or new services can help to address these needs.

4 ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

OVERVIEW

Understanding the organizational and administrative systems used to manage and operate public transportation systems Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker counties is critical to developing recommendations for enhanced coordination, cooperation and consolidation. These functions create opportunities and challenges to working together. As a first step, therefore, the study team inventoried existing systems.

While there are similarities and differences between all three agencies, one the primary differences is agency structure. CCT is an independent agency, while MPT operates as a department within a larger, non-profit organization (Ecumen). This is a fundamental difference that has implications for agency management, rather than transit service operations. CCT, for example, provides (or contracts for) all business services associated with operating the transit agency, such as payroll, accounting, human resources, and marketing. This contrasts with MPT, which relies on Ecumen to provide many of these services. In terms of the organizational structure of the agencies, CCT and MPT are both managed by a Transit Director who functions as a general manager for the transit services (see Figure 16). CCT's Transit Director reports to a Joint Powers Board that is comprised of county and city representatives. MPT also reports to a combination of both an Advisory Board (comprised of county and city officials and Ecumen staff) as well as the Director of Ecumen's Litchfield campus.

Figure 16 Organizational Structure Summary

Provider	Kandiyohi Area Transit	Renville County Heartland Express	Central Community Transportation	Meeker Public Transit
Policy Board	Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners	Renville County Board of Commissioners	Joint Powers Board (both counties represented equally)	MPT Advisory Board (made up of city, county, Ecumen reps)
Management Staff	Transit Director	Transit Director	Transit Director	Transit Director
Transit Director Reports to:	Joint Powers Board	County Administrator.	Joint Powers Board	Ecumen Litchfield Campus Director (who reports Ecumen Regional Director)
Service *Operations*	In house	In house	In house (a respective locations)	Contracted
Dispatch	In house	In house	In house (at respective locations)	In house
Maintenance	In house (daily maintenance), contracted out for more difficult repairs	County maintenance facility	Kandiyohi – in house and contracted; Renville – County services	Contract Operator
Union Status	Non Union	Union	Union	Non Union

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Central Community Transit, and Meeker Public Transit

Human Resources

Central Community Transit (CCT)

Central Community Transit (CCT) is lead by an Executive Director (the former KAT Transit Director), who supervises the transit director of the former Renville County Heartland Express. Although the two systems have been consolidated as of January 1, 2015, there have been few human resource changes to date. Both KAT and Renville County staff worked hard during the merger to ensure there were no changes that would reduce the number of employees or negatively impact the financial and health benefits provided to CCT employees. As a result, creating a consistent and equitable human resource system has been challenging.

One major change is that prior to the merger, Heartland Express employees, as part of Renville County, were part of a union, while KAT employees did not belong to a union. The merger extended union representation, such that all CCT employees who work at least 15 hours and are not in a supervisory role are members of the AFSME union.

According to CCT's Personnel Policy manual, all new hires will serve a training period of six months after hire date. New employees are required to go through an orientation program designed to familiarize them with department operations, objectives, and personnel policies. CCT requires pre-employment (post job offer) testing and ongoing random testing.

Kandiyohi County

CCT employs 28 drivers in Kandiyohi County, seven of which are full-time and 21 that work part-time. Many of the part-time drivers also work on "on-call" arrangements, working as needed. Many part-time drivers are retired, have second jobs, or are only available in the summer months. Driver schedules vary between 8 to 10 hours per day, with overtime paid after 8 hours. CCT provides health insurance for full-time employees.

In addition to drivers, CCT employs nine full-time staff members (former KAT employees): executive director, assistant director, fiscal clerk, office coordinator, scheduler, two dispatchers, volunteer coordinator, and a maintenance coordinator. The role of assistant director is currently empty and CCT is looking to hire this position.

Renville County

CCT employs six drivers in Renville County: three full-time, two part-time, and one substitute. Drivers work a variety of shifts: 4 hours, 8 hours, 10 hours, and 11 hours. CCT will honor these shifts until the Operations Board determines an equitable system for the former Renville County drivers. Drivers are paid on a 40 hour week and overtime is paid after 40 hours. Health insurance is offered for full-time and part-time employees.

For Renville County, CCT also employs two full-time dispatchers, who also serve as schedulers, and are licensed to drive the vehicles if needed. There are two other staff members: the transit director, and a part-time dispatcher.

Meeker County Public Transit (MPT)

Meeker County Public Transit staff members are employed by Ecumen. Ecumen employees include two full-time office staff, the transit director and the volunteer coordinator. The volunteer coordinator also completes the quarterly and annual reporting requirements and is in charge of marketing. Ecumen also employs two part-time dispatchers also help to fill in for the volunteer driver program and help with billing and accounts receivable. The human resources department is located at the Ecumen office in Litchfield; all hiring and payroll for Meeker Public Transit employees (other than the drivers) is done by Ecumen. MPT employees follow the Ecumen employee handbook. Dispatching training occurs in the office one-on-one with the more senior dispatcher.

Figure 17 Number of Transit Employees by Agency

Central Community Transportation				Meeker County Public Transit	
Former Kandiyohi County		Former Renville County			
Employees	Employees	Employees	Employees	Employees	Employees
Transit Director	1	Transit Director	1	Transit Director	1
Assistant Director	1	Scheduler/Dispatcher	2.5	Volunteer Coordinator	1
Office Staff	2	Drivers	4.5	Scheduler/Dispatcher	2 part-time
Volunteer Coordinator	1			Drivers	9*
Scheduler/Dispatcher	3				
Maintenance Coordinator	1				
Drivers	17.5				
Total FTE	26.5	Total FTE	8	Total FTE	12

Source: Calculations based on data provided by Central Community Transit, and Meeker County Public Transit.

* Drivers are not employees of Meeker County Public Transit

Driver Wages

As shown in Figure 18, prior to consolidation, KAT drivers were paid between $11.00 and $16.62, while Renville Heartland Express drivers were paid between $11.95 and $14.38. The pay rates do not include other benefits, including health care packages, which also have impacts on employee take home pay rates.

Before creating CCT, Renville County studied employee compensation rates, and based on this study adjusted Heartland Express employee wages higher, to raise all drivers wages to $13.86 (except one driver who continued to receive $14.38). When CCT was created wages increased by between 10 and 26 percent. CCT drivers are paid between $13.86 and $17.75 per hour depending on length of service with the former KAT and Heartland Express agencies.

MPT does not pay drivers directly; therefore, wages are not included in this analysis.

Figure 18 Driver Wage Summary for Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville Heartland Express, and Central Community Transit

Driver Hourly Wages	Kandiyohi Area Transit	Renville Heartland Express	Central Community Transit
2014	$11.00-$16.62	$11.95-$14.38	n/a
2014 Adjustment	n/a	$13.86-$14.38	n/a
Transition Rate	$13.86-$17.72	$14.28-$16.35	n/a
2015	n/a	n/a	$13.86-$18.81 per hour

Source: Central Community Transit

Volunteer Drivers

As described above, volunteer drivers fill an essential role in both CCT and MPT's transportation operations. For CCT, volunteer drivers transport Medicaid-eligible individuals for non-emergency transportation and also individual's traveling to medical appointments outside the service area. CCT volunteers also transport seniors through the Senior Transportation Program. MPT only allows volunteers to transport medical access (Medicaid) trips. Renville is the only county that allows the general public to use volunteer drivers if the rider pays the full reimbursement rate. Both CCT and MPT reported that attracting and retaining volunteer drivers is an essential element of operating a successful volunteer driver program. Many of their current drivers are retired adults who have been volunteering for many years.

For both providers, volunteers provide door-to-door transportation assistance in their own vehicles. They are allowed to assist riders with their coats, shutting off lights, and locking doors, if asked. They can also help carry up to four bags of groceries to the rider's door without crossing the threshold.

CCT volunteer drivers are paid a minimum of $3.00 in pick-up fee plus $.56 (or current IRS Mileage Reimbursement Rate) per mile. Passengers participating in the CCT Senior Transportation program are asked to pay this fare to the volunteer driver at the end of the trip as a donation. MPT volunteer drivers are just paid the standard IRS mileage reimbursement rate.

Marketing

The former KAT transit director oversees several marketing efforts, including informational brochures, advertisements in the local newspaper, radio advertising, information on the website, and promotional items, such as pens and clips. There is also a Willmar Downtown bus stop that has a reader board that streams announcements, upcoming events, and route changes. Information is posted on the sides and backs of the KAT (now CCT) buses.

The former Renville Heartland Express transit director markets available transit services in several ways, including advertisements on the back of buses, brochures distributed in government buildings and medical facilities, advertisements posted on three Heartland Express benches, newspaper articles and advertisements, and radio advertising. The transit director will also attend local events such as the county and city parades to hand out brochures and discuss services with inquiring attendees.

To market MPT services, the MPT transit director attends pre-school open houses, the Chamber of Commerce Business Expo, senior day at the Meeker County Fair, the Litchfield Watercade parade and other parades in outlying communities in Meeker County to pass out information and talk about MPT services. MPT brochures are translated into Spanish to enhance awareness of available services in the Hispanic communities.

CAPITAL ASSETS

Vehicle Fleet

CCT has 13 vehicles for transporting riders in the Kandiyohi service area. The fleet is made up of one El Dorados, eight Elkhart Coaches, three Goshen's, and one Supreme. Most vehicles have capacity for between 19 and 22 passengers and between 2-3 wheelchairs. Vehicle age ranges from 14 years to less than a year. The majority of the vehicles are between six and nine years old. The fleet has a total mileage of 2.7 million and an average mileage of 140,000[3]. Former KAT vehicles are stored in a garage at the KAT offices in Willmar.

CCT has seven full-time vehicles and one part time vehicle serving Renville County; two of these vehicles are El Dorados, four are Glavals, and one is a Turtle Top; all are wheelchair lift equipped. Vehicles are between two and 13 years old. The fleet has total mileage of 1.08 million miles and an average mileage of 154,000 miles. Vehicles are stored at the Renville County Heartland Express offices in Olivia.

Meeker County Public Transit has nine vehicles, with six Diamond and three Turtle Tops. Vehicle age ranges from 14 years to less than a year. Most vehicles have the capacity for between 17 and 18 passengers and 2-3 wheelchairs. The fleet has a total mileage of 1.3 million and an average mileage of 163,563. Vehicles are stored at the MPT offices in Litchfield.

[3] The mileage for one vehicle is shown as 1,698,515 miles. This is assumed to be incorrect. The vehicle was not included in the calculation of average mileage.

Figure 19 Central Community Transit and Meeker Public Transit - Existing Fleet

Make	Year	Fuel	Capacity	W/C	Last Reported Mileage
Central Community Transit (CCT)					
Vehicles serving Kandiyohi County					
El Dorado	2001	Diesel/Biodiesel	20	2	298,441
Goshen	2003	Diesel/Biodiesel	30	2	n/a
Elkhart Coach	2007	Diesel/Biodiesel	20	2	243,813
Supreme	2008	Diesel/Biodiesel	18	6	57,929
Elkhart Coach	2008	Diesel/Biodiesel	19	2	184,725
Goshen	2008	Diesel/Biodiesel	24	3	123,196
Elkhart Coach	2009	Diesel/Biodiesel	22	3	150,634
Elkhart Coach	2009	Diesel/Biodiesel	19	3	150,971
Elkhart Coach	2009	Diesel/Biodiesel	18	6	160,547
Elkhart Coach	2011	Unleaded Gasoline	19	3	105,890
Elkhart Coach	2011	Unleaded Gasoline	18	3	106,621
Elkhart Coach	2011	Unleaded Gasoline	20	3	70,982
Goshen	2014	Diesel/Biodiesel	33	3	8,478
Vehicle serving Renville County					
Glaval	2002	Unleaded Gasoline	22	2	303,917
Glaval	2006	Unleaded Gasoline	22	2	300,994
Turtle Top	2007	Unleaded Gasoline	12	3	67,058
Glaval	2008	Unleaded Gasoline	22	2	203,679
El Dorado	2011	Unleaded Gasoline	22	2	106,527
Eldorado	2012	Unleaded Gasoline	22	2	59,004
Glaval	2013	Unleaded Gasoline	22	2	40,563
Meeker County Public Transit					
Diamond	2001	Diesel/Biodiesel	18	2	304,722
Diamond	2006	Diesel/Biodiesel	17	2	247,151
Diamond	2007	Diesel/Biodiesel	17	3	210,961
Diamond	2007	Diesel/Biodiesel	17	3	195,357
Diamond	2008	Diesel/Biodiesel	17	2	171,259
Diamond	2009	Diesel/Biodiesel	18	3	142,702
Turtle Top	2012	Unleaded Gasoline	19	3	32,231
Turtle Top	2014	Unleaded Gasoline	19	3	4,119
Turtle Top	*Data unavailable*				

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Meeker Public Transit

Vehicle Maintenance

Vehicle maintenance for former KAT vehicles is provided in-house at the CCT/KAT headquarters in Willmar. CCT employs one full-time maintenance employee to provide the majority of the daily maintenance needs and contracts out to a local mechanic for more difficult repairs. Drivers are responsible for checking and cleaning their vehicles prior to starting their route. If driver's note any defects or mechanical issues, they report them to the maintenance coordinator and documented on the daily inspection sheet. The maintenance coordinator refers to the Maintenance Policies and Procedure document for the preventative maintenance schedule for each vehicle.

Former Heartland Express vehicles are maintained and repaired within the Renville County Highway Department. Maintenance issues are recorded in the daily inspection sheet by drivers before starting their route and reported to the County's lead mechanic. For major repairs and repairs under warranty, the vehicles are serviced at Mills Ford in either Willmar or Redwood. At this moment, it is unclear if Renville County Highway Department will continue to service and maintain the CCT vehicles based in Renville County.

MPT vehicles are maintained and repaired by the contract operator (Ripley Transportation) within the Ripley maintenance facility. Bus drivers do a pre-trip inspection before their daily route and fill out a vehicle inspection report. Defects are recorded on the form and turned into the Ripley maintenance shop foreman, with a copy sent to the MPT director's office.

As shown in Figure 20, maintenance costs for 2014 vary widely between the three providers. MPT has the highest maintenance costs regardless of having less than half as many vehicles as KAT. Heartland Express's maintenance expenses amount to only 7% of the total maintenance costs for both Kandiyohi and Renville.

Figure 20 2014 Maintenance Expenses by Transit Agency (DRAFT)

System	Maintenance Wages	Maintenance Expenses	Contract Maintenance Expenses	Number of Vehicles	Total Costs	Cost per Vehicle
Kandiyohi Area Transit	$45,773	$35,380	$30,183	13	$11,336	$8,564
Renville County Heartland Express	$0	$2,300	$3,100	7	$5,400	$1,350
Meeker County Public Transit	$0	$68,500	$18,000	9	$86,500	$9,611

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Meeker Public Transit

Dispatch Software

All three transit agencies use RouteMatch, which has the following capabilities:

- Trip dispatching by date and vehicle
- Trip request data and scheduling management, including origin/destination storage and schedule optimization functions
- Customer data collection, storage, and search module

- Vehicle and driver data management, including an Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) function

Meeker County uses a combination of RouteMatch and Microsoft Access to assign trips to individual vehicles. RouteMatch is not being utilized for billing and accounting at this time for any of the agencies.

Capital Planning

The agencies prepared 10-year Transit Capital Plans to prioritize facility upgrades and vehicle replacement and expansion.

CCT's Plan includes $100,000 for additional bus storage, $40,000 for upgrades to the MDT/Tablets every two years, and $30,000 for upgrading their current RouteMatch dispatching software for Kandiyohi County. For Renville County, CCT allocates $1,000 to update their website with Title VI information, $36,000 for bus cameras, $15,000 for radios, and $12,000 for updated MDT/Tablets every two years. MPT's capital plan includes $5,000 for a phone system update.

In addition, all three agencies plan to replace nearly all of their current fleet within the next 10 years. CCT is planning to replace all but one Kandiyohi vehicle within the next seven years. CCT is planning to replace all Renville vehicles within the next six years. MPT plans to replace all but two vehicles within the next five years. Figure 21 below shows total capital plan costs per year for each system, and the number of vehicles being replaced (in parenthesis).

Figure 21 10-Year Capital Plan for Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties

Cost (Number of Vehicles) by Year		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Central Community Transit	Kandiyohi	$70,000 (1)	$80,000 (1)	$246,000 (1)	$114,000 (1)	$78,000 (1)	$88,000 (1)	$82,000 (1)	$92,000 (1)	$0	$8,000
	Renville	$122,000 (1)	$4,000	$0	$84,000 (1)	$82,000 (1)	$88,000 (1)	$86,000 (1)	$0	$0	$0
Meeker Public Transit		$70,000 (1)	$5,000	$80,000 (1)	$82,000 (1)	$0	$87,000 (1)	$0	$0	$0	$0

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Meeker Public Transit

5 FINANCIAL AND PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW

Agency finances, including costs and funding but also performance metrics are fundamental to encouraging and advancing transit agency collaboration. To support this analysis, the Nelson\Nygaard team collected and evaluated financial data for each of the three agencies being studied by this effort: Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) in Kandiyohi County; the Heartland Express (Renville County), and Meeker Public Transit (Meeker County). The primary data source for the analysis is data provided by MnDOT for four year period between 2011 and 2014. Additional data was also provided by the individual transit agencies, but this data was used to supplement MnDOT information.

The financial and performance analysis provides an overview of agency operating costs and funding resources. Statewide policy allows MnDOT to support rural transit services with grant funds provided through a combination of federal and state resources. Grant amounts are negotiated between MnDOT and individual transit agencies; for rural transit agencies MnDOT grant funds will pay up to 85% of the contract amount. Transit agencies must raise local funds to support the remaining 15% through a variety of sources, including farebox and contract revenues as well as contributions from local governments. If local agencies are able to raise revenues in excess of 15% of the contracted amount, those funds can be used to support local service but do not draw down additional MnDOT revenues.

Transit productivity measures compare and contrast service inputs, outputs and consumption. *Service inputs* are summarized as total annual operating costs, while *service outputs* include revenue service hours and revenue service miles. *Service consumption* includes ridership and farebox revenues. The performance data is then expressed in terms of three performance indicators commonly used in the transit industry, which can be categorized as follows:

- **Cost efficiency.** These indicators are the ratios of *service inputs* to *service outputs*, and measure the efficiency of resource allocation within the agency.
- **Cost effectiveness.** These indicators are the ratio of *service inputs* to *service consumption* and measure how well the service is utilized by the community.
- **Service effectiveness.** These indicators are the ratio of *service consumption* to *service outputs* and measure how well the capacity of service is being utilized by the consumer.

An assessment of how well the individual transit services performed with regard to the three categories of performance indicators (cost efficiency, cost effectiveness, and service efficiency), as well as average subsidy per passenger is discussed below and shown in Figure 23. It is worth noting, however, different service types will perform differently and are not comparable. Fixed-route bus service, including deviated fixed route service, is a scheduled service that is designed to carry larger numbers of passengers per trip. Demand responsive service, on the other hand, provides services to individuals with higher needs and is designed as more flexible service catering to individual transportation needs. As a result, the mix of services provided by an agency can have a significant impact on their relative performance.

KANDIYOHI AREA TRANSIT (KAT)

Between 2011 and 2014, KAT's annual operating costs remained stable with costs increasing between 3% and 5% per year over the four year time frame. In 2011, annually operating costs were at roughly $1.1 million and increased to nearly $1.2 million by 2014 (see Figure 22). The vast majority of KAT's operating costs are associated with the demand response services.

In terms of revenue, KAT's largest funding source is federal and state grants, which are provided by MnDOT and account for 85% of the operating revenue. The remaining revenues are raised locally and account for 15% of the system costs. Most of the local revenue is raised through passenger fares ($233,903[4]), with the remainder ($56,657[5]) provided by contributions from the City of Willmar, Kandiyohi County plus other funds raised local governments.

Ridership over the same period also remained relatively stable, increasing from 118,404 trips in 2011 to 119,209 in 2014. However, while ridership remained constant, KAT increased its hours of service by 23% and increased service miles by 22%. This means that each trip required more resources to provide.

The increase in service hours and miles is balanced by KAT's ability to decrease the hourly cost of service over the same four years. In 2011, the hourly cost of service was $53.10, which dropped to $47.52 by 2014. Consequently, while the cost per passenger did increase slightly from $9.13 to $9.90, the rate of increase is significantly less than the increased resources (hours and miles) required to provide KAT's service.

[4] Data is from 2014.

[5] Ibid.

Figure 22 Kandiyohi Area Transit Financial and Performance Assessment

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Operating Costs (1)				
Deviated Fixed Route	$118,921	$96,711	$135,603	$212,695
Demand Response	$962,182	$977,854	$994,421	$968,946
Total Costs	$1,081,103	$1,074,565	$1,130,024	$1,181,641
Operating Revenues				
State/Federal Revenues (2)	$908,263	$895,931	$960,520	$1,004,395
Total Farebox	*$217,494*	*$246,190*	*$249,643*	*$233,903*
Local Operating Revenue	$44,654	$67,557	$80,139	$56,657
Operating Statistics				
Service Miles	293,689	270,360	272,500	360,009
Service Hours	20,358	20,904	21,265	24,865
Ridership	118,404	121,974	118,826	119,309
Performance Measures				
Cost per Hour	$53.10	$51.40	$53.14	$47.52
Cost per Mile	$3.68	$3.97	$4.15	$3.28
Cost per Passenger	$9.13	$8.81	$9.51	$9.90
Passengers per Hour	5.8	5.8	5.6	4.8
Farebox Recovery Ratio	20%	23%	22%	20%
Subsidy/Passenger	$7.29	$6.79	$7.41	$7.94

NOTES:

(1) Operating costs were allocated between flex route and demand response service based on the proportional share of costs provided by KAT.

(2) Federal and state share of operating revenues total 85% of operating costs.

(3) Farebox revenues were allocated between flex route and demand response service based on the proportional share of revenues provided by KAT including excess shares as shown above.

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

HEARTLAND EXPRESS (RENVILLE COUNTY)

Operating costs for the Heartland Express ranged between $480,000 and nearly $578,000 over the last four years (see Figure 23), resulting in a 10% increase in costs over the four year period. Revenues for Heartland Express were provided through state and federal grants administered by MnDOT. These revenues accounted for roughly 66% in 2014. Local funds accounted for the remaining 34% and were raised through farebox revenues (32%) and contributions from Renville County and other local governments.

Heartland Express' ridership declined between 2011 and 2014. The system carried 22% fewer riders; ridership decreased from about 47,300 riders in 2011 to nearly 37,000 riders in 2014. Service hours and miles also declined over the same time period, but not as dramatically. The cost per hour of service increased marginally over the same time period, but overall, the cost per trip increased considerably, from $11.12 in 2011 to $15.63 in 2014.

Figure 23 Renville Heartland Express Financial and Performance Assessment

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Operating Costs	$526,291	$480,838	$549,578	$577,698
Operating Revenues				
State/Federal Revenues	$280,500	$280,500	$340,000	$382,500
Farebox Revenue	$171,960	$146,838	$161,628	$183,576
Subtotal Revenues	*$452,460*	*$427,338*	*$501,628*	*$566,076*
Local Operating Revenue	*$73,831*	*$53,500*	*$47,950*	*$11,622*
Operating Statistics				
Service Miles	162,346	165,121	165,815	155,966
Service Hours	9,282	8,871	8,313	9,007
Ridership	47,316	43,027	43,070	36,972
Performance Measures				
Cost/Hour	$56.51	$54.20	$66.11	$64.18
Cost/Mile	$3.23	$2.91	$3.31	$3.70
Cost/Passenger	$11.09	$11.18	$12.76	$15.63
Passengers/Hour	5.1	4.9	5.2	4.1
Farebox Recovery Ratio	21.8%	23.2%	21.6%	20.7%
Subsidy/Passenger	$8.66	$8.58	$10.00	$12.39

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

MEEKER PUBLIC TRANSIT (MEEKER COUNTY)

In 2014, MPT's annual operating cost was just over $800,000. This represents an 18% increase in total costs from 2011 (Figure 24). Like KAT, the majority (73%) of MPT's costs is associated with demand response service; this trend is consistent over the four year time period. MPT funds are raised through a combination of federal and state grants administered by MnDOT. In 2014, these grants accounted for slightly more than 70% of the system's total revenues. Remaining revenues were raised through the farebox (26%) and contributions from the City of Litchfield and Meeker County government (5%).

Ridership on MPT's services grew significantly between 2011 and 2014; system wide MPT increased ridership by 29%. At the same time, the number of hours and miles operated by MPT decreased, suggesting that on average MPT is trending towards shorter trips and fewer longer trips. The number of passengers carried per hour also increased during this time period.

MPT's cost per hour of service increased by 24%, but the cost per passenger decreased by nearly 9%. However, the farebox recovery ratio decreased over the same period of time, so the subsidy per rider remained relatively flat.

Figure 24 Meeker Public Transit Financial and Performance Assessment

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Operating Costs				
Flex Route	$198,780	$228,026	$261,617	$218,004
Demand Response	$486,667	$484,555	$507,844	$589,418
Total Costs	$685,447	$712,581	$769,461	$807,422
Operating Revenues				
State/Federal Revenues	$408,000	$408,000	$510,000	$568,650
Farebox Revenue				
Flex Route	$126,692	$97,250	$95,480	$91,930
Demand Response	$103,657	$123,772	$103,437	$117,002
Total Farebox	*$230,348*	*$221,022*	*$198,917*	*$208,932*
Local Operating Revenue	$47,099	$83,559	$60,544	$29,841
Operating Statistics				
Total System				
Service Miles	182,400	185,280	195,480	185,980
Service Hours	13,091	13,504	14,339	13,631
Ridership	62,350	68,721	71,695	71,317
Performance Measures				
Cost per Hour	$48.20	$46.92	$50.86	$59.91
Cost per Mile	$2.63	$3.02	$2.90	$3.32
Cost per Passenger	$11.49	$10.01	$9.72	$10.49
Passengers per Hour	4.2	4.7	5.2	5.7
Farebox Recovery Ratio	34%	31%	26%	26%
Subsidy/Passenger	$7.63	$6.90	$7.21	$7.77

NOTES:

(1) Operating costs were allocated between flex route and demand response service based on the proportional share of costs provided by Ecumen.

(2) Farebox revenues were allocated between flex route and demand response service based on the proportional share of revenues provided by Ecumen including excess shares as shown above.

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The previous section describes each of the individual system's operating statistics and performance metrics. This section compares the same data across all three agencies, using 2014 as the designated year. As discussed, the transit industry generally compares and contrasts transit service productivity and performance in terms of cost efficiency, cost effectiveness and service effectiveness. Also, as mentioned, the type of service operated has a significant impact on an agency's performance metrics. To account for this, the analysis also shows the percentage of the transit service that is classified as demand response (as shown in Figure 25).

Cost Efficiency

Cost efficiency is typically measured as **operating cost per revenue hour.** The cost to provide an hour of service is relatively consistent across all three agencies. KAT's costs are the lowest at $47.52 per hour, Renville County is the highest at $64.18 and MPT is in the middle ($59.91). Lower costs achieved by KAT likely reflect the fact that it is a larger agency and is able to achieve some efficiency through size. Likewise, Renville is higher but is also the smallest of the three agencies. It is also worth noting, that the MPT's costs are within the range of the other agencies, suggesting their management approach of operating service through a third party contract is within the range of the other two agencies.

Cost Effectiveness

One of the standard metrics for transit services is **operating cost per trip** (or cost per passenger), which measures cost effectiveness by assessing total operating costs over consumption of service (total ridership). The cost per passenger trip among these three agencies is $9.90, $15.63, and $10.49 for Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker counties, respectively. Renville has a higher cost per passenger, which as discussed, is likely due to the fact that they operate a higher proportion of demand response services as compared with the other agencies.

A transit agency's **farebox recovery ratio** is the ratio of fare revenue to total operating costs. A general rule of thumb for small urban transit systems is that a recovery rate of approximately 15-25% (e.g., fares account for 15-25% of operating costs) is within reason. In the case of Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker counties, the farebox ratios are much higher than this rule of thumb with ratios of 20%, 21% and 26% respectively. These higher farebox recovery rates likely reflect the fact that a large number of the services are operated under contract with agencies contributing fairly to agency revenues.

Farebox recovery rates and operating costs per passenger are combined in the metric, **subsidy per trip** (or passenger), that shows the amount of public resources used to subsidize each passenger trip. This indicator is often better understood by policy makers who want to know how much each passenger is being subsidized. The data shows that Renville County's higher farebox recovery rate means the subsidy per trip ($10.66) is much closer to the subsidy per trip achieved by Kandiyohi ($7.94) and Meeker County ($7.77).

Service Effectiveness

Passengers per revenue hour measure service effectiveness, or how well is the service being consumed in relation to the amount of service available. This metric is heavily influenced by the type of service provided as well as other factors such as the size of the service area and efficiency of the scheduling. Deviated fixed route services are expected to carry more passengers per hour

and mile as compared with demand response services. The data shows that in terms of passengers per hour, Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker County have a range of 4.8, 4.1 and 5.7 respectively. The passengers per revenue hour statistics indicate that Kandiyohi and Meeker County likely benefit from operating the majority of their service within their respective cities (Willmar and Litchfield), while Renville County vehicles travel slightly longer distances.

Figure 25 Comparative Performance Metrics (Based on 2013 Data)

	Kandiyohi Area Transit	Heartland Express	Meeker Public Transit	Statewide Average
Percent Demand Response of Total Ridership	84%	100%	56%	n/a
Cost per Hour	$47.52	$64.18	$59.91	$51.03
Passengers per Hour	4.8	4.1	5.7	4.5
Cost per Passenger	$9.90	$15.63	$10.49	$11.90
Farebox Recovery Ratio	20%	31.8%	26%	n/a
Subsidy per Passenger	$7.94	$10.66	$7.77	n/a

Source: Nelson\Nygaard adapted from 2013 data provided by MnDOT and individual transit agencies.

*Note: CCT does not have service statistics data yet because it was formed in January 2015, so all data is shown for KAT and Renville as separate entities.

6 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

As part of understanding the existing services, the Nelson\Nygaard team conducted a series of interviews with stakeholders in Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville Counties. These interviews were designed to understand existing operations as well as collect insights into stakeholder priorities and aspirations for service development.

In total, the Nelson\Nygaard team completed approximately 20 interviews with stakeholders from each county. The interviews were conducted in February 2015. Most of the interviews were conducted via the telephone, although a handful was conducted in person as part of the site visit activities held in early February. A list of the stakeholders interviewed and the interviewer guidelines is included as Appendix B.

PERCEPTIONS OF EXISTING SERVICE

Overall, stakeholders felt strongly that the existing public transportation services are an important, valued service in their home counties. Most also felt that agencies are well run and professional and offered praise for administrative staff, dispatchers, and drivers.

> *"The transit service is good. Many [people] wouldn't be able to come here without transit. So they appreciate it, and I appreciate it."*
>
> *"When a change needs to be made, they're not afraid to try it and see if it works and that's important. It's ever-changing, schedules change, locations change. Staff are very professional and don't ask for more than they need."*
>
> *"The level of service is so high."*
>
> *"I'm very happy with it."*

Central Community Transit serving Kandiyohi County

Stakeholders in Kandiyohi give Central Community Transit (CCT) and its predecessor Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) very high marks for the quality of service that it provides, as well as for the quality of work that is done by its management team. Most of the stakeholders said the service is needed in the community and is an important community asset.

Specific strengths of the transit service include:

- Being easy to work with and accommodating when people call with a problem or concern.
- Customer service overall, with high marks given to the drivers and information systems.
- Flexibility, especially CCT's ability to be flexible in accommodating riders' and employers' schedules and needs.

- Getting riders to their destinations on-time. This is especially important when the destination is their place of work. One stakeholder has more than 200 employees who use the transit service and reported that they rarely have issues with CCT.
- Cost of the service overall and in particular, to the riders.

Weaknesses of the services include:

- Difficulties in communicating with riders for whom English is not their native language.
- Inability to respond to trip requests on short notice.
- A short term challenge was also cited regarding getting people to work on time in the Spicer-New London area.

Renville County

Strengths of the transit service include flexibility in scheduling. "They used to require 24 hours notice," but are now more responsive to more immediate needs. Still, "there are times when we can't schedule appointments because transit isn't available. The transit system can get them there, but not at the time when they need to be there."

"Interaction with staff" and communications generally are regarded as being very good. The drivers are generally regarded as being "fantastic."

One respondent questioned the economics of transit. "You've got some routes," he said, "and those probably pay. But once you start running around like a taxi cab, that's not going to be economical."

Specific strengths of the transit service include:

- Flexibility and willingness to accommodate needs, even in short notice.
- Staff - staff were consistently described as "fantastic".

Weaknesses of the services include:

- Serving the periphery of the county.

Meeker County Transit

Consistent with stakeholders in Kandiyohi and Renville counties, stakeholders in Meeker County gave MPT high marks. Only one stakeholder was somewhat less enthusiastic about the service, saying that the service "*works pretty well, but it doesn't work <u>really</u> well*."

Specific strengths of the transit service include:

- Getting people to their appointments on-time.
- Being easy to use – including scheduling the service but also the way the drivers treat the riders.
- Staff – dispatchers and drivers were cited for their professionalism and making drivers feel safe and cared for.

Weaknesses of the services include:

- Trying to accommodate last minute service requests, which have the effect of stretching drivers and compromising schedule and making other riders late for their appointments.

- Need for service later in the evening.

THE CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT CONSOLIDATION

Experiences to Date/Lessons Learned

Generally speaking, the majority of the stakeholders involved in the merger of KAT and Heartland Express services into CCT reported that the process was professional and relatively easy. This sentiment was shared by nearly all stakeholders, including some who felt the consolidation process was not as successful as they had hoped. These individuals said they had entered the merger process intent on maintaining the existing level of service, ensuring no one lost their job or lost pay, and that the overall cost of service didn't increase. At the end of the day, however, they ended up compromising on nearly all of those goals.

Stakeholders were also nearly universal in their agreement that the merger of the Kandiyohi and Renville County transit operations was relatively easy until they came to the personnel side of things. The challenges largely related to ensuring the pay and benefits of the two groups of employees remained equitable throughout the merger, but at the same time neither group of employees compromised on pay or benefits. The fact that Heartland Express employees were part of the union helped them negotiate future contracts. While the personnel issues are largely resolved, this has led to an increase in the overall cost of providing service.

Stakeholders said that one of the successes of the merger is that the service operations continued unchanged and the process and issues remained invisible to the riding public. One stakeholder noted, "The merger has had some 'bugs,' but they don't affect the clients."

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES MOVING FORWARD

Kandiyohi and Renville

The intended benefits of creating CCT were to save money and enhance service and indeed these benefits are important to several of the stakeholders. The majority of the stakeholders expressed support for these goals but remained skeptical about the ability of the new system to deliver on these benefits, especially regarding to saving money and in the short run. Comments included:

> *"If the merger isn't going to save money for the taxpayers, then I'm a little shaky on that. I don't know if I would do it. But at the same time, I recognize that there are people who need that service."*
>
> *"Saving money is important," another added, "but if we're going to get more bang for the buck then that's another way to look at it."*
>
> *"This will cost more--three groups together will cost more. No staff cut, no buildings closed down. We'll add one or two layers to run things in centralized manner. It will cost more."*

Others felt that benefits would be realized but not in the short run. "I'm *anticipating* more efficiency, less duplication. Paths won't be crossing as much." "I think there *will be* some efficiencies and flexibility because, if a bus goes to Willmar and they need another run...it just makes sense that there would be some economies and better service, but I can't say that yet."

Meeker County Joining CCT

When asked about the potential benefits of Meeker County joining the CCT network, stakeholders expressed a combination of both optimism and skepticism. Stakeholders expressed different perspectives on the likelihood of the merger, with some saying Meeker County was not interested and others saying the merger are a done deal. In both cases, however, stakeholders expressed a desire to be sure that any merger is well thought out and carefully evaluated.

Concerns about the merger primarily relate to costs and control over the service. Many stakeholders expressed a lot of concern over the financial arrangements, citing that each county has made different levels of financial commitment to public transit and the potential for one county to subsidize another remains high. This type of concern also extended to a concern that Meeker County is already very efficient and the opportunities to be more efficient are limited.

Others expressed concern over how the service could impact local business by making it easier for people to get to other communities and using their services. Other stakeholders were more concerned that over time the local knowledge and 'closeness' of the staff and the passengers would be eroded as the agency got bigger.

Short Term and Long Term Priorities

Stakeholders did not have strong opinions or ideas about unmet needs for transit services in Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville. In each county, at least one stakeholder said there are service needs and challenges at the outlying communities. These communities may easily be as close or even closer to the regional center in the adjacent community, so bringing them into their 'home' regional center may not make sense. Stakeholder also noted that it is also expensive for buses to travel to the edge of the county to pick up passengers, so some of these communities may not get their fair share of the service.

In general, stakeholders seemed to think that the existing level of service is about right. There may be some needs for critical patient transportation. Others talked about the fact that the population in each county is aging and this should lead to an increased need for transportation, but acknowledged that the need has not materialized yet.

Essential Elements to Support the Plan

Stakeholders expressed a variety of opinions about what was essential to their supporting a plan for merging Meeker County into the CCT network.

One stakeholder identified three key elements prerequisite to supporting the merger of Meeker County and CCT:

1. MPT should follow the lead of CCT on most of the administrative and service functions. MPT should accept the name, logo, colors, and uniform of CCT. In addition, MPT should also accept the policies and rules of CCT. The rules and policies have been discussed over and over again as part of merging KAT and Heartland Express and some stakeholders do not want to re-do this work.
2. Services will continue to be provided locally within all three counties. Nearly all stakeholders identified local control over the service and local dispatch of the services as essential to their agreeing to their accepting the merger. Many stakeholders felt strongly

that the local connection is what makes the service successful and "safe" for riders. As a result, they are reluctant to give that up.

3. The role of the private sector will be a critical issue in any potential merger between CCT and MPT. Many stakeholders in Meeker County feel strongly that the private sector provides a level of efficiency to the service that can't be replicated and they don't want to lose this.

APPENDICES

Appendix A PMT and PAC Members

Below is a list of the Project Management Team (PMT) and the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) members.

PMT Members

Name	Title	Agency / Organization
Sara Dunlap	Sr. Transportation Planner	MnDOT
Bev Herfindahl	Transit Project Manager	MnDOT
Tiffany Collins	Transit Director	KAT / CCT
Donna Anderson	Transit Director	Ecumen
Noel Shugahart	Planning Coordinator	MnDOT

PAC Members

Name	Organization / Agency
Paul Setzepfandt	Renville County Commissioner
Ron Dingmann	City of Litchfield
Jim Butterfield	Kandiyohi County
Al Houdek	City of Olivia
Kevin Halliday	City Clerk of Willmar
Rollie Nisson	Kandiyohi County
Paul Virnig	Meeker County
LoAnn Shepard	Financial / Clinical Supervisor Meeker County Social Services
Dale Miller	ProWorks

Appendix B Organizations included in the Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders included transportation professionals, community agency representatives, community leaders, County Commissioners and more, and represented the following organizations. In some cases, there was more than one respondent from the organization listed.

- ACTS, Renville
- Central Community Transit (board)
- Golden Living Center, Olivia
- Jennie-O Turkey Store
- Kandiyohi County Board of Commissioners
- Kandiyohi County Family Services
- Kandiyohi-Renville County Community Health
- Meeker County Transit (board)
- Meeker County Transit (driver)
- Meeker County Transit (staff)
- Meeker County Transit (rider)
- ProWorks, Litchfield
- Renville County Board of Commissioners
- Ripley Transportation, Litchfield
- West Central Industries, Willmar
- Willmar Adult Basic Education, Jefferson

Appendix C Stakeholder Interview Guide

(KRM) STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW GUIDE

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) hired Nelson\Nygaard to develop a Transit Restructuring Plan for Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties. The focus of the effort is to encourage/facilitate inter-governmental collaboration with the hope of creating cost efficient regional transit services. Project goals include:

- *Identify and evaluate public transportation needs*
- *Identify ways to increase efficiency in existing services*
- *Create collaboration models and assist with ongoing consolidation challenges*
- *Develop implementation plans*

Please tell interviewee that the conversation is confidential.

Interview Topics

- What does your organization/agency do? What is your role in the organization?
  - Where (what county) are you/your organization located?
  - Where (what county/counties) do your constituents live?
- Do you personally work on transportation issues?
  - If yes, what is your role?
  - How long have you been working on transportation issues?
- Does your organization or your organization's clients/constituents use public transportation?
  - If yes, how and for what purpose?
  - How well is the service meeting your needs?
  - Do your clients use public transportation to travel across county lines?
- Does your organization pay (directly) (through contracts or other purchase agreement) for the transportation service?
  - Do your clients/constituents pay? (I.e. do they pay a fare?)
  - Do you believe the cost/fare is appropriate?
- From your perspective, what are the strengths of the existing system/service?
  - What works well/what parts of the service do you like
- From your perspective, what are the weaknesses of the existing system/service?
  - What doesn't work well/what parts of the system would you like to change?
- Do you have ideas or solutions for how the service can be improved?
- Questions related to consolidation:

- Are you aware that Kandiyohi County and Renville County transit systems have consolidated into one system: Central Community Transit?
- Do you have any experience with CCT?
  - If yes, what is your experience? (Good/bad/indifferent – and why?)
- Do you know there is a proposal for Meeker County to join CCT?
  - What is your initial reaction to this proposal? Why?
- Do you have any concerns about the possible consolidation of Meeker County with CCT?
  - Do you expect your client/constituents would be affected by a consolidation? How so?
- Do you have any other thoughts or comments about public transportations service in Kandiyohi, Renville or Meeker County?

DRAFT Service Evaluation

Technical Memo #2

May 2015

NELSON
NYGAARD

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Office of Transit is leading a statewide effort to encourage coordination, cooperation, and consolidation (the "three Cs") between Greater Minnesota's transit providers. The interest in cooperation and coordination among transit providers, especially small operators, reflects a variety of interests and concerns, including a desire to accommodate rider's needs to travel regionally as well as a desire to increase service efficiency and effectiveness. MnDOT has set five primary goals for this effort:

- Improve customer service and seamlessness in terms of fares, service coverage and informational tools.
- Increase the availability of transit services, with potential new destinations and expanded service hours that come from eliminating any duplicative services
- Improved cost effectiveness for the agencies operating services through cost savings, shared expenses, more flexible use of available resources and equipment, economies of scale and freeing up resources
- Economic and facilities development opportunities due to improved buying power and the potential for larger scale developments
- Improved relationships between organizations by way of shared governance and multijurisdictional political support

As part of the overall transit restructuring effort, MnDOT hired a team of consultants led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates to develop a restructuring plan for Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties, located in south central Minnesota approximately two hours west of the Twin Cities. This tri-county area has already made strides in propagating the "three Cs." As of January 1, 2015, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville County Heartland Express consolidated services and formed a new transit provider for both counties, called Central Community Transit (CCT). Regional leaders are currently discussing a merger of Meeker County Public Transit into the CCT network.

The Nelson\Nygaard Team's role is to support this process by collecting and analyzing existing conditions, including service needs and potential improvement opportunities. The study team will consider and evaluate consolidation models that offer potential to better serve identified needs and challenges. The Nelson\Nygaard team will also work with stakeholders to create a preferred strategy and develop an implementation plan to guide the region towards this preferred strategy.

This technical memo is the second in a series of working papers that is intended to guide the Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker region through the restructuring process. In particular, this memo focuses on the first three goals identified by MnDOT: 1) improving customer service; 2) increasing the availability of transit service; and 3) improving the cost effectiveness of the transit service operations.

The memo is organized around five chapters immediately following this introductory section:

Chapter 2: Existing Transit Service and Ridership – provides an overview of the exiting transit services available in each of the three counties and provides maps of ridership activity.

Chapter 3: Level of Service Comparison – compares existing services with the level of service standards recommended by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

Chapter 4: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis – discuses the strengths and weaknesses of the existing transit service delivery methods, namely Central Community Transit (CCT) serving Kandiyohi and Renville County and Meeker Public Transit, serving Meeker County. This chapter draws upon information presented in Chapter 2 as well as information gather and analyzed in the existing conditions technical memo (TM1) issued in March, 2015.

Chapter 5: Evaluation Framework – presents an evaluation framework. The evaluation framework reflects the findings identified in the SWOT analysis and is intended to guide future decision making.

Chapter 6: Service Improvement Opportunities – identifies opportunities to strengthen and improve transit services in Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker counties. Service improvements include options to strengthen the service, but also customer service and service operations.

2 EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICE, RIDERSHIP AND FUNDING

OVERVIEW

Public transportation services in Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker County are provided by Central Community Transit (CCT) and Meeker Public Transit (MPT). The discussion of CCT includes an overview of CCT services, as well as the services, ridership and resources available at the pre-merger institutions provided by KAT and the Heartland Express; the individual services are referred to as Kandiyohi County or Renville County.

This chapter provides a detailed inventory of existing transit services, including information on how the services are operated and structured and ridership by service type. The chapter also provides an overview of how the services are funded

KANDIYOHI, RENVILLE AND MEEKER SERVICE AREA

The study area includes Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties. Public transportation service available in these three counties includes deviated fixed route, demand response and volunteer driver services. Deviated fixed route service is a scheduled service that travels along a route that is published with time points so passenger can know where and when they can get on and off the bus. Deviated fixed route services are allowed to travel off-route according to passenger requests. Demand response and volunteer driver service is scheduled in response to passenger requests.

Deviated fixed route service in the study area is mapped in Figure 2-1. This map shows connections between the major urban areas of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield as well as intra-county routes that connect smaller cities, New London and Spicer in Kandiyohi County, and Darwin, Dassel, Cosmos, Eden Valley, and Watkins in Meeker County.

An overview of regional transit ridership for all services is shown in Figure 2-2. Ridership is focused primarily in the main urban and suburban areas of Willmar, Litchfield, and Olivia and to a lesser extent in Dassel. Deviated fixed route service also connects Litchfield to Dassel, which has moderate ridership levels. The City of Renville has moderate ridership and is connected by demand response and volunteer driver service. Volunteer driver ridership is also mapped showing demand scattered both inside and outside the study area. Frequent volunteer driver destinations inside the study area include Willmar, New London, and Spicer in Kandiyohi County, Hector, Fairfax, and Renville in Renville County, and Litchfield, Eden Valley, and Watkins in Meeker County.

Figure 2-1 CCT and MPT Deviated Fixed Transit Routes

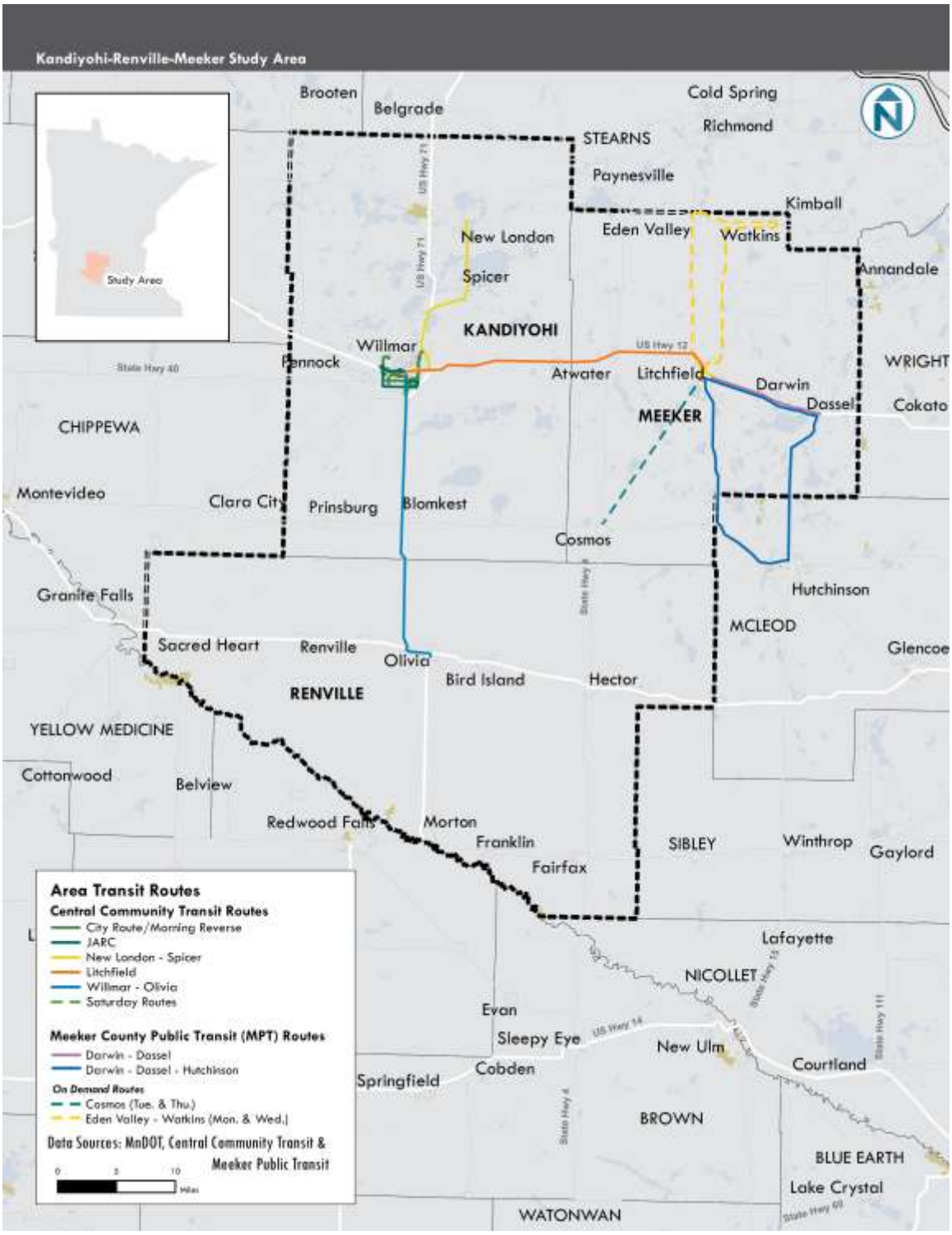
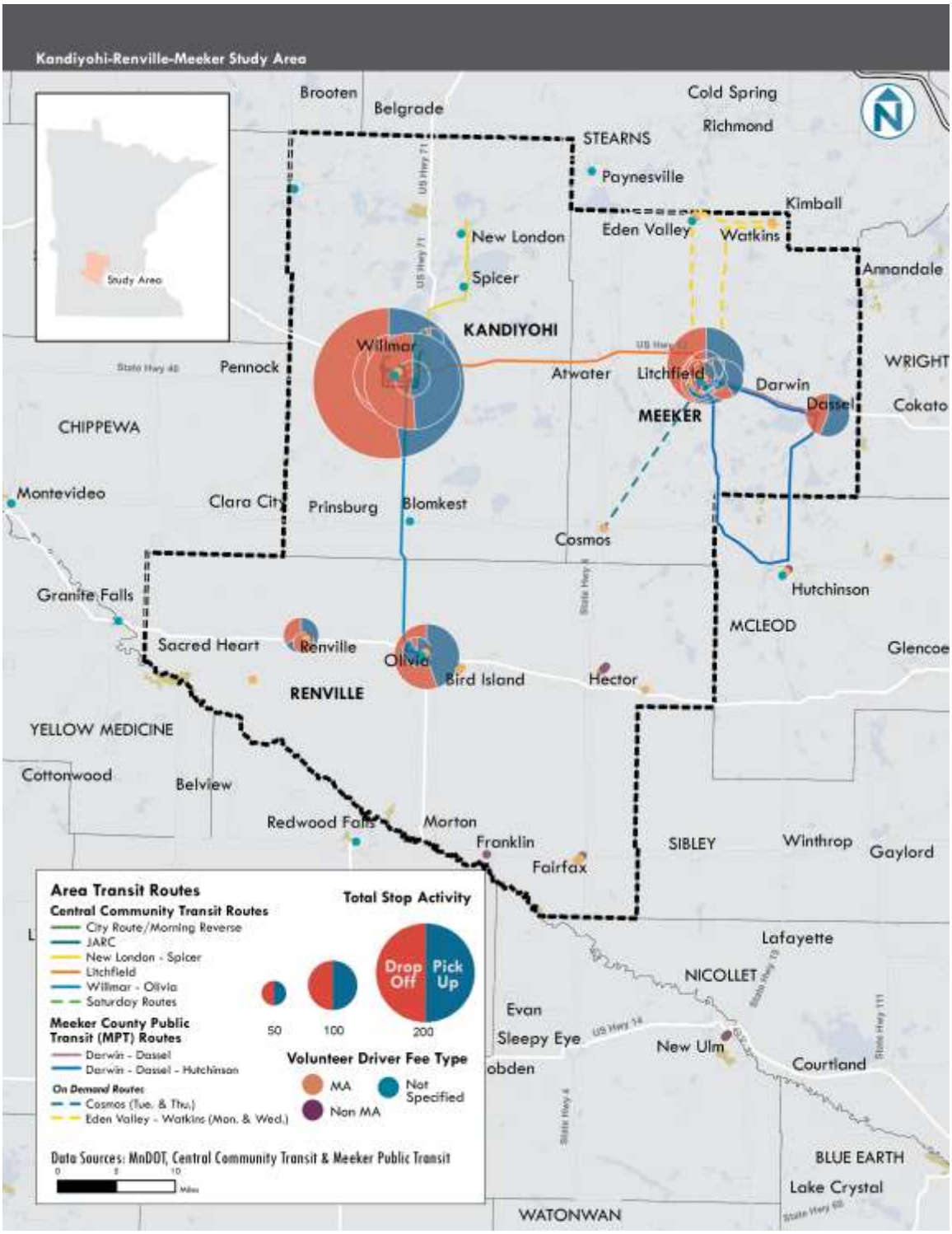


Figure 2-2 Study Area Transit Ridership All Services



CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT (CCT)

CCT operates deviated fixed route, demand response and volunteer driver services in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. All of CCT's services are available to members of the general public, but the volunteer driver service is primarily used to transport people traveling for medical assistance purposes and for out-of-county travel.

Service Overview

As discussed, CCT is a new agency that formed by merging the services operating in Kandiyohi County (KAT) and Renville County (Heartland Express). Currently, for the most part, transit service is coordinated across the two agencies but with some exceptions, services operations are not yet fully integrated. This structure reflects the fact that the consolidated operations are still transitioning from independent agencies into a single organization.

City of Willmar Deviated Fixed Route Service

Route deviated transit service offers scheduled transit services that are allowed to deviate or travel off route for up to ¾ of a mile (10 blocks) of the published route as requested by passengers. CCT's rider guidelines suggest that passengers call and request a deviation at least 24 hours in advance. There are four deviated fixed routes operating in the City of Willmar. For the most part, CCT's deviated fixed route services have a timetable that is available on the Kandiyohi Area Transit website. The timetable can also be downloaded from the KAT website, but maps are not available. These deviated fixed routes include the following (see also Figure 2-3):

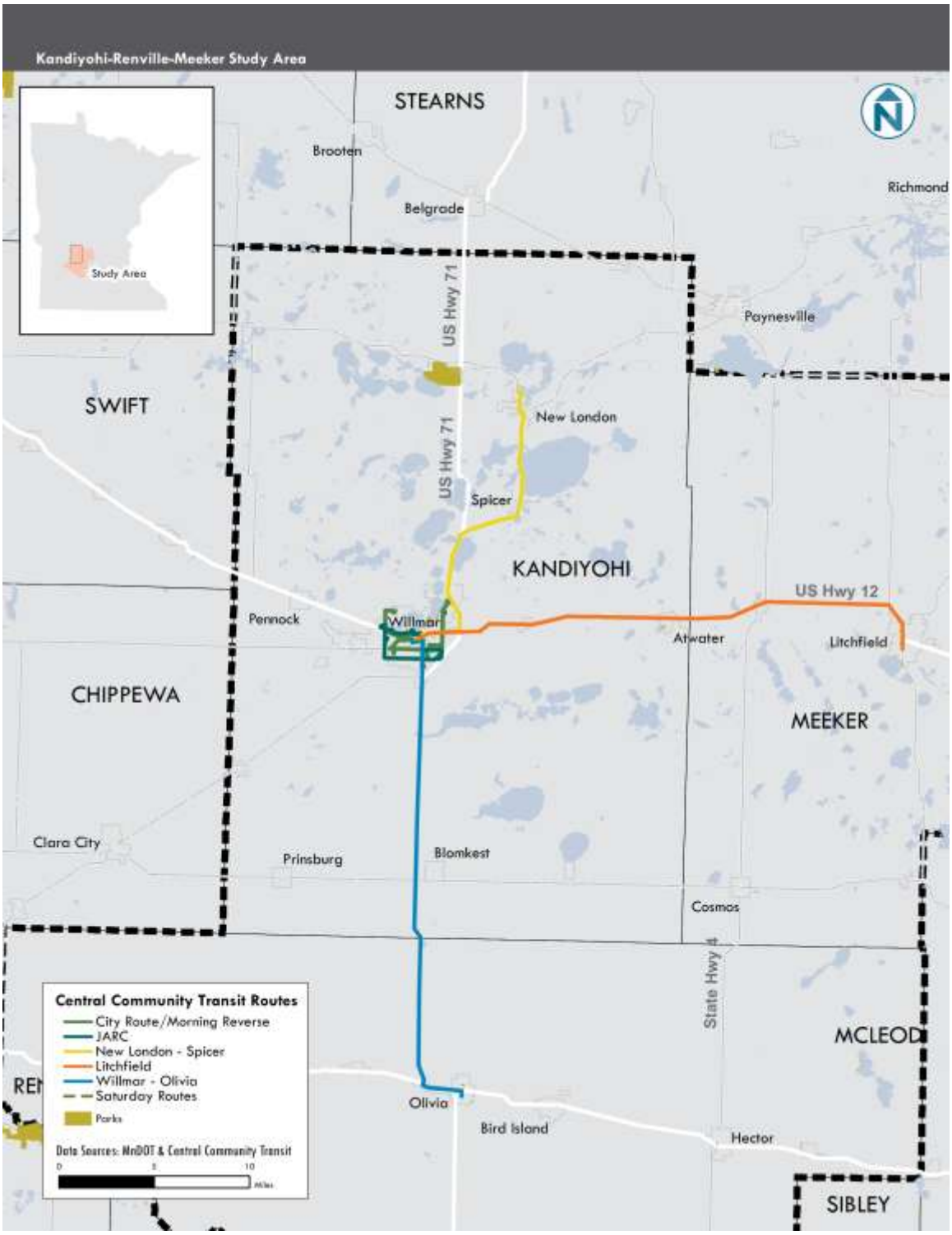
- City of Willmar Monday – Friday Route – This route operates within the City of Willmar and makes hourly stops at most of the communities' major shopping and service centers. Buses arrive at the stops on a roughly hourly schedule between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. As the name suggests, the route operates on weekdays.
- Saturday Route #1 and Route #2 – Saturday service in the City of Willmar serves similar destinations as the Monday – Friday route, but the service is organized as one-way loops that begin and end at the Lakeview and Cardinal Apartments. Passengers may also request deviations off of either Route #1 or #2. CCT requests that passengers schedule their deviations at least 24 hours in advance of their scheduled pick-up. Route #1 operates in counter-clockwise direction while Route #2 operates in clockwise direction.
- JARC Route - On weekdays, CCT operates a Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) route that provides three morning and three afternoon trips between neighborhoods and major apartment complexes in the City of Willmar and the Jennie-O Plants 4 and 5, and the WPC Hatchery. The service is designed to support major employment in the area around the City of Willmar.
- Morning Reverse Route – CCT provides two morning trips in downtown Willmar, beginning at either the Cardinal Apartments or the Human and Health Services Building and ending in Ridgewater College. The Morning Reverse Route provides two morning trips on weekdays, one beginning at the Cardinal Apartments and leaving at 9:00 am and the second beginning at the Human and Health Services Building and departing at 10:20 am.

Regional Deviated Fixed Route Service

CCT offers scheduled deviated services between communities in Kandiyohi County and between Kandiyohi County and neighboring counties (see Figure 2-1). These routes are also allowed to travel off route for longer distances (up to five miles) as compared with the city routes. CCT requests that passengers request a deviation (pick up off the main route) at least 24 hours in advance. There is a published timetable for the New London Spicer route on the Kandiyohi Area Transit website, but not the Willmar – Olivia or the Willmar – Litchfield routes:

- New London Spicer Route – CCT operates one deviated fixed route that provides connections between the City of Willmar and the communities of New London and Spicer. This bus operates on weekdays and makes one short trip at 7:00 am (Willmar to Spicer and back), plus four daily round trips that serve Willmar, Spicer and New London. These trips depart from Willmar at 8:00 am, 9:40 am, 11:45 am and 2:00 pm. Each trip takes roughly 2 hours and 40 minutes to complete; this schedule allows for roughly 20 minutes in each community (Willmar, New London, and Spicer).
- Willmar – Litchfield (Route 12) Route – CCT and MPT jointly operate a route between the City of Willmar and the City of Litchfield. This service provides three daily round trips on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays with the first trip leaves Litchfield at 7:30 am and the last trip leaves Willmar at 3:00 pm. The Route 12 route has scheduled stops in Grove City, Atwater and Kandiyohi and will also deviate up to two miles from the route to pick up or drop off passengers. The service is new, beginning operations in April 2014. The route is operated by a MPT driver using a CCT vehicle. While there are advertisements about the route, there is currently no published timetable on either the KAT or MPT website.
- Willmar – Olivia Route – CCT also operates daily service between the cities of Willmar and Olivia. Service is coordinated between the Kandiyohi and Renville operations, but most of the service is operated and scheduled in Renville. The service is a hybrid between demand response and deviated fixed route service. None of the trips operate according to a published schedule, but many are oriented around consistent times with passengers encouraged to schedule their trips around these times. As a result, the route is listed as a deviated fixed route. There are an estimated three to four daily trips between Willmar and Olivia in each direction.

Figure 2-3 CCT Bus Routes in Kandiyohi County



Demand Response Service

CCT operates three types of demand response service (general public demand response, contracted service and volunteer driver). In each case, riders are requested to call and schedule their trips at least 24 hours in advance but for a small fee (addition of $1.00 per one-way trip); same day trips may be accommodated.

- **General public demand response service** is provided door-to-door throughout Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. This service is available for passengers who request a trip up to 24 hours in advance and are looking to travel within their respective counties. Same day service is also provided as available for an additional fee, although 24-48 hours advanced notice is preferred.
- **Contracted service** is designed to support specific health and human service programming, such as helping parents get their children to preschool programs and transporting individuals with disabilities to supported employment activities. Contracted services are paid for by the sponsoring agency, and are organized around that agency's specific needs. However, members of the public are allowed to use the routes and CCT routinely schedules members of the public to these routes.
- **Volunteer driver service** is provided by drivers, working as volunteers and using their own vehicles. The majority of the trips provided by volunteer drivers are to transport people traveling to/from medical services with funding provided by health care providers (Blue Cross Blue Shield and UCare). CCT also provides volunteer drivers through their Senior Transportation Program for Kandiyohi and Renville County residents. Prior to consolidation Renville Heartland Express Renville residents also used volunteer drivers to transport people traveling outside of Renville County for any purpose as long as they were willing to pay the mileage charge. Kandiyohi Area Transit, however, only assigned medical trips to volunteer drivers.

Ridership

Ridership on CCT is estimated at roughly 162,000 annual trips, with about 1% scheduled as deviated fixed route, 85% scheduled as demand response, and 14% provided by volunteer drivers (see Figure 2-4). Ridership on KAT and Heartland Express in 2014 was 156,281, not including volunteer driver trips, which added another 5,714 trips for a combined total of 161,995. The vast majority of these trips were provided as demand response trips, although as described previously trips provided as contract service are recorded as demand response trips. More detailed information on transit ridership by county is included in the following section.

Figure 2-4 CCT (KAT and Heartland Express) Ridership by Service Type (2014)

	Deviated Fixed Route (all routes)	Demand Response	Volunteer Drivers	Total
Kandiyohi Area Transit Service	18,330	100,979	2,664*	121,973
Heartland Express Service	n/a	36,972	3,050**	40,022
Total – All Routes	18,330	137,951	5,714	161,995

Source: MnDOT and CCT

*Estimated based on March 2015 monthly total, 222 for 12 months

**Estimated based on April 7 -11, 2014 weekly total of 61 trips for 50 weeks of the year (service does not run on holidays/weekends).

Kandiyohi County

Deviated Fixed Route and Demand Response Ridership

KAT ridership is mapped in Figure 2-5, showing destinations with at least 25 pickups or drop offs during the week of March 2-7, 2015. Due to data limitations, the map shows combined ridership for both deviated fixed route and demand response services; it also does not distinguish riders on contracted service.

A total of 4,282 pickup and drop off locations were collected during this period in March. Although most of the locations only had one or two trips, there are a handful of destinations within Willmar that had significant ridership: West Central Industries, Bethesda Pleasantview, and Crossroads. There are also several smaller stops that nonetheless show large amounts of riders; these include the Kandiyohi County Recycling, Ridgewater College, and Highland Apartments.

Figure 2-5 Kandiyohi County Top Ten Destinations

Location	Trip Type	Address	Pick Up	Drop Off	Percentage of total trips that begin or end at a location
West Central Industries	Workforce Training Services	1300 22nd St SW, Willmar, MN	323	369	16%
Bethesda Pleasantview	Housing / Health Care	901 Willmar Ave SE, Willmar, MN	121	130	6%
Crossroads	Health Care Services	2000 Trott Ave SW, Willmar, MN	61	97	4%
Kandiyohi County Recycling	Work / Errands	1400 22nd St SW, Willmar, MN	68	79	3%
Ridgewater College	School / Education	2101 15th Ave NW, Willmar, MN	35	71	2%
Highland Apartments	Housing	115 S.E. Becker Ave, Willmar, MN	55	47	2%
Cashwise	Shopping / Groceries	1300 5th St SE, Willmar, MN	34	35	2%
Jefferson School	School / Education	1234 Kandiyohi Ave S.W., Willmar, MN	10	50	1%
Woodland Center Group	Health Care Services	1125 6th St Se, Meeker, MN	23	35	1%
Walmart-Willmar	Shopping / Groceries	700 19th Ave SE, Meeker, MN	20	21	1%

Source: CCT

Nearly all of the significant destinations within Kandiyohi County are within the city of Willmar or in the immediate surrounding area (Figure 2-8). Generally speaking, most of CCT's largest stops (in terms of ridership) are along the scheduled deviated fixed route. Most are also served by contracted service. The overlap of service provides increased flexibility for people traveling

to/from the high demand locations. Contract service is typically organized around specific programmatic activities, while the deviated fixed route gives riders the flexibility to travel outside of the organized times. Data for the county wide services also shows a concentration of activity around New London and Spicer. The higher ridership likely reflects the availability of deviated fixed route service that operates between communities on scheduled and daily basis.

Figure 2-9 maps ridership activity within the city of Willmar and shows the top destinations, which as described above, are largely along the published transit routes or within the deviation area of those routes. There are a few destinations which are not directly on the published routes, including Jefferson School. Jefferson School has more drop offs than pickups, suggesting students are able to find alternate ways for one of their trips to or from school.

Volunteer Driver Ridership

Ridership provided by volunteer driver services was also mapped and analyzed for the same time period as the deviated fixed route and demand response service (see Figure 2-6). This data includes 61 trips; 52% of the trips were for travel within Kandiyohi County and 48% were for travel outside of Kandiyohi County. Roughly a quarter of the volunteer driver trips begins and ends in the City of Willmar. Roughly another quarter includes travel between the City of Willmar and Marshall, Sunburg or New London (see Figure 2-7). Volunteer driver trips are mapped in Figure 2-10.

Figure 2-6 CCT Ridership: Overview of Kandiyohi County Volunteer Driver Ridership[1]

Kandiyohi Area Transit	Total Trips	Travel Within Kandiyohi County	Percentage of Total	Travel Out of Kandiyohi County	Percentage of Total
Trips	**61**	32	52%	29	48%

Source: CCT ridership data adapted by Nelson\Nygaard

Figure 2-7 Kandiyohi County - Top Volunteer Driver Trips

Kandiyohi Area Transit	Trips	Percent of Total	One Way Mileage
Willmar to Willmar	14	23%	n/a
Willmar to Marshall	6	10%	68
Sunburg to Willmar	5	8%	23
New London to Willmar	5	8%	14

Source: CCT ridership data adapted by Nelson\Nygaard

Kandiyohi volunteer driver service also includes a handful of longer, but infrequently trips:

- Martin County (126 miles from Willmar)
- Mora in Kanabec County (112 miles from Willmar)
- City of Ramsey in Anoka County (105 miles from Willmar)
- Wadena County (99 miles from Willmar)

[1] Data for the number of vehicle miles and the number of passengers was not available for Kandiyohi County.

Figure 2-8 CCT Ridership: Kandiyohi County (Deviated Fixed Route and Demand Response Service)

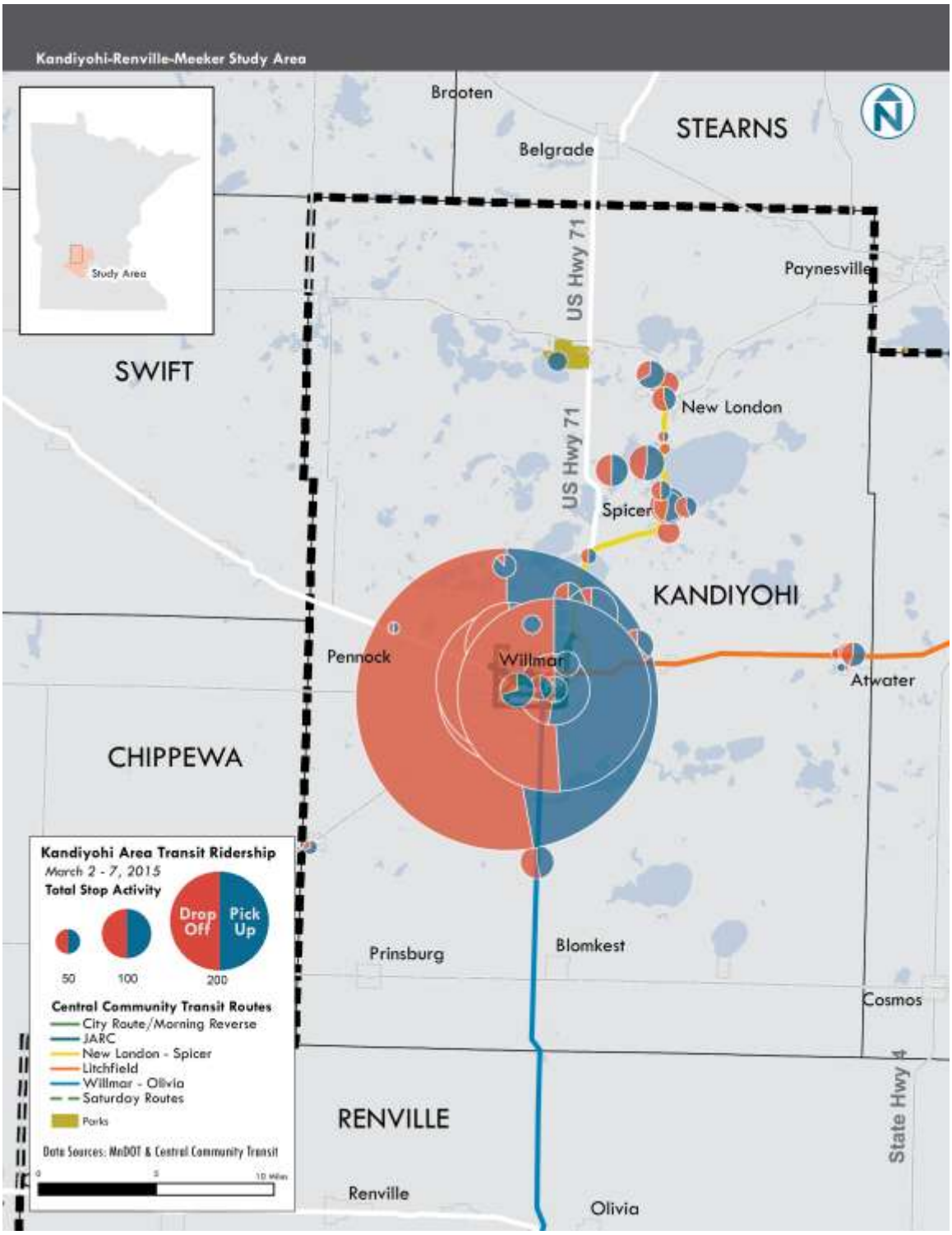


Figure 2-9 CCT Ridership: City of Willmar

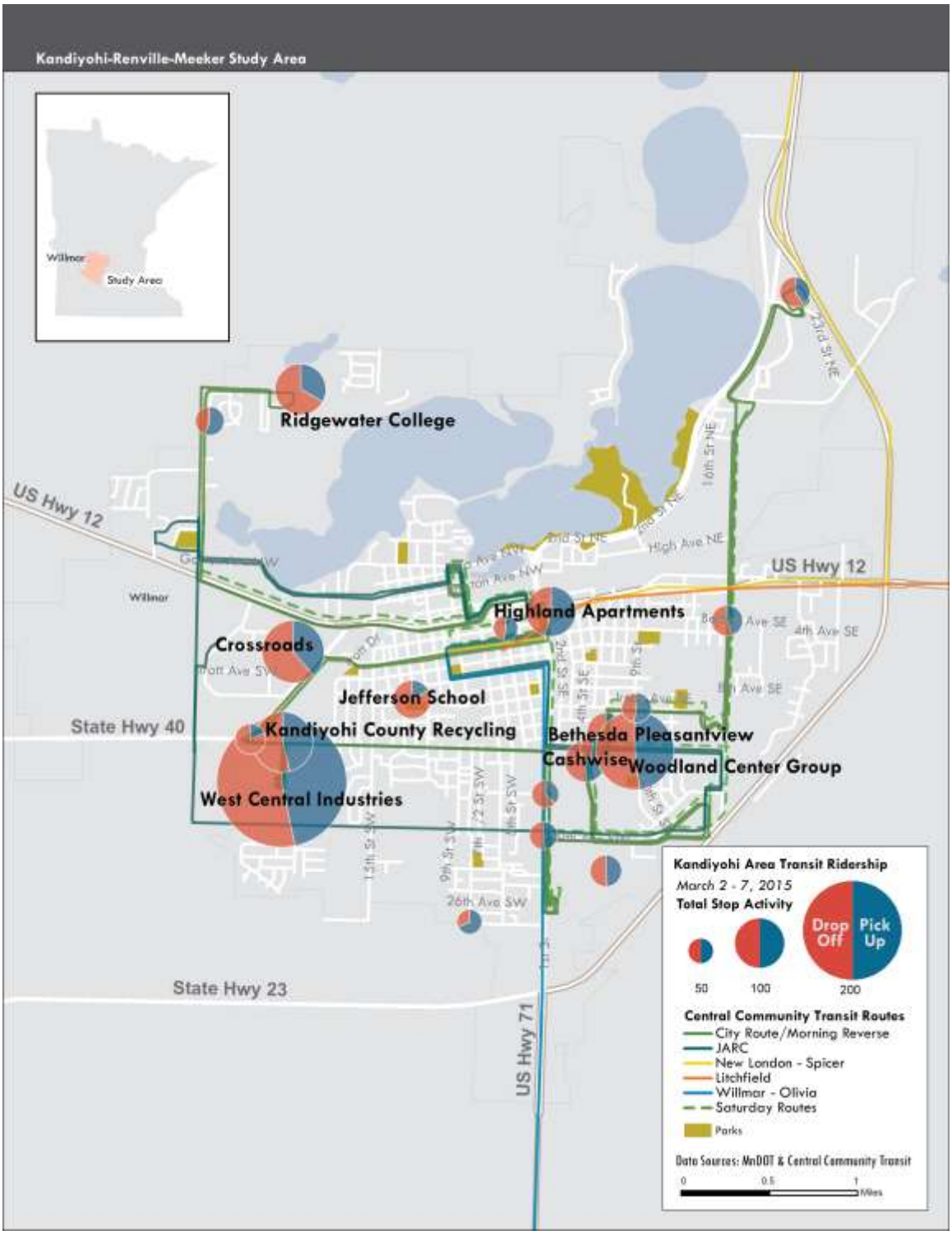
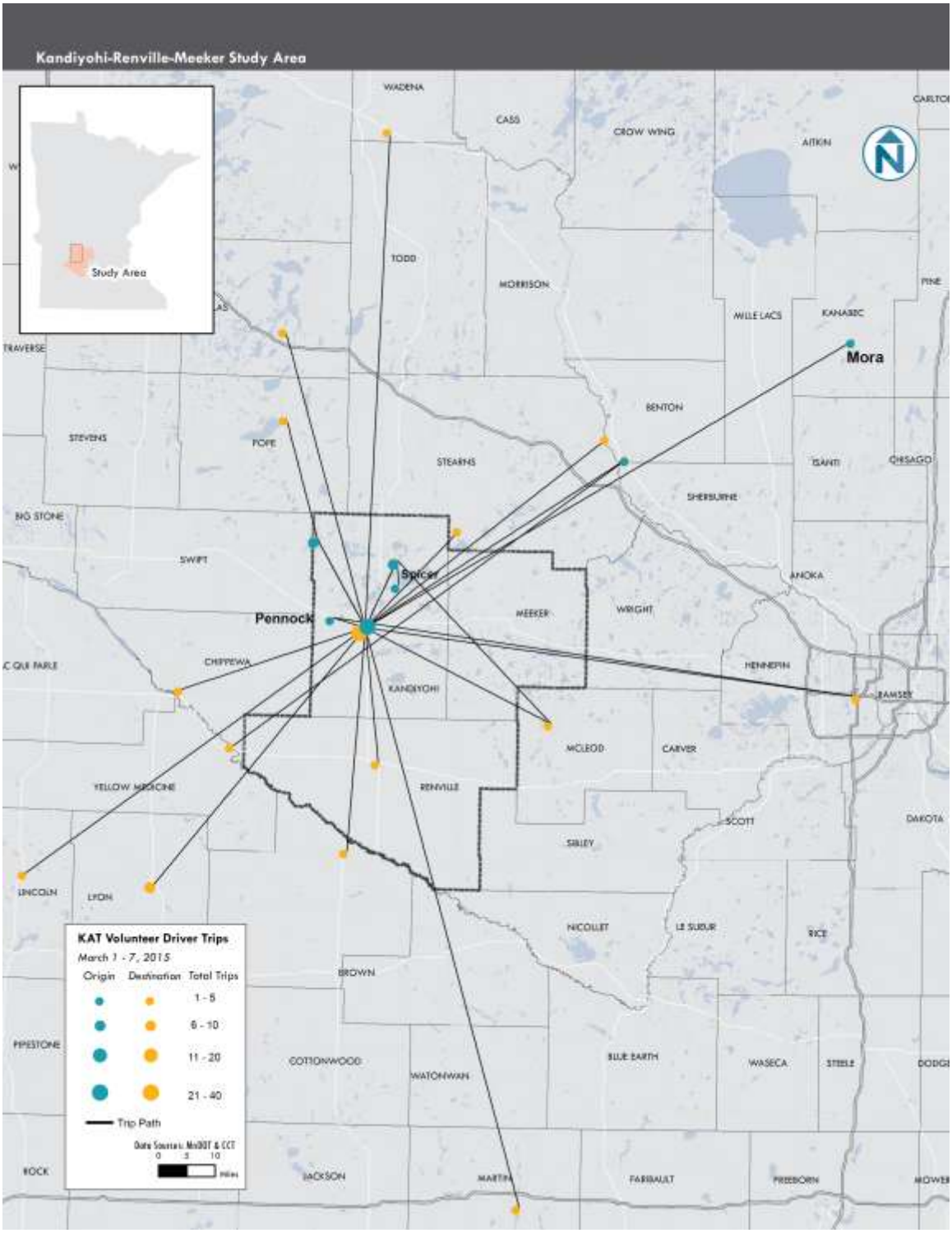


Figure 2-10 CCT Ridership: Volunteer Drivers scheduled in Kandiyohi County



Renville County

Demand Response Ridership

As discussed, Renville County does not operated deviated fixed route service. As a result, ridership data reflects demand response service, but includes ridership scheduled as part of contracted service. This data includes pickups and drop offs during the period of March 2-6; 1,202 pickups and drop off locations were collected. Ridership on the service that travels between Olivia and Willmar is included in the Top Destinations analysis (Figure 2-11) but is not mapped in Figure 2-14.

The majority of the trips served are within the City of Olivia and surrounding area. Other destinations include Sacred Heart, Renville, Bird Island, and Hector. The most frequent destination within the City of Olivia is the Adult Client Training Service (ACTS). Other frequent destinations include Play Island in Bird Island, four locations of Crossroads (an assisted living facility) in Willmar and Olivia, and the West Central Industries in Willmar and Olivia. A closer look at the City of Olivia in Figure 2-15 confirms that ACTS is the primary destination. Other destinations are mostly contained within the city boundaries.

Figure 2-11 Renville County Top Destinations

Location	Trip Type	Address	Pick Up	Drop Off	Percentage of total trips that begin or end at a location
ACTS	Employment	800 E Fairview Ave, Olivia, MN	114	141	21%
Play Island	School / Education	104 S 10th St , Bird Island, MN	50	25	8%
Crossroads	Health Care Services	2000 Trott Ave Sw, Willmar, MN	46	4	6%
Crossroads	Health Care Services	609 E Hickory Ave, Olivia, MN	16	17	4%
Crossroads	Health Care Services	831 Grove Ave, Bird Island, MN	6	20	3%
Crossroads	Health Care Services	608 E Hickory Ave, Olivia, MN	5	21	3%
West Central Industries	Employment	1300 22nd St SW, Willmar, MN	16	8	3%
West Central Industries	Employment	500 S 13th St, Olivia, MN	12	12	3%
Learning Fun House	School / Education	199 Main St , Bird Island, MN	11	13	3%
Learning Fun House	School / Education	1400 SW 22nd St, Willmar, MN	8	12	21%

Source: CCT

Volunteer Driver Ridership

Volunteer Driver data for Renville County was evaluated for the week of April 7th to April 11th, 2014. The majority of the volunteer driver trips venture outside of Renville County (see Figure

2-12). As compared with the volunteer service provided in Kandiyohi County, volunteer driver trips are scheduled for destinations further outside of the county boundaries.

The top five top origin and destination pairs (see Figure 2-13 and Figure 2-16) show high demand for Renville County residents to travel outside of the county, mainly to access health care services in Willmar and Minneapolis/St. Paul. Many of these trips originate and end in Olivia, Bird Island, and surrounding areas. There are high mileage but infrequent trips to St. Cloud and the Twin Cities, which are between 90 and 113 miles away from Olivia.

Renville County uses volunteer driver services to support medical assistance (MA) trips as well as other programs. Data collected from the week analyzed, suggests that the majority of the out of county trips (73%) are associated with MA demand. Volunteer drivers scheduled within Renville County, however, are nearly evenly split between MA (51%) and non-MA trips (48%).

Figure 2-12 CCT Ridership: Overview of Renville County Volunteer Driver Ridership

Renville Heartland Express	Total	Travel Within Renville County	Percentage of Total	Travel Out of Renville County	Percentage of Total
Riders	**61**	31	51%	30	49%
Trips	**79**	33	42%	46	58%
Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)	**3090**	420	14%	2670	86%

Source: Data provided by CCT and adapted by Nelson\Nygaard

Figure 2-13 Top Five Pairs for Renville Volunteer Driver Trips

Origin	Destination	Total Trips	Total VMT	Percentage of Trips
Renville	Willmar (Primarily Cancer Center & Eye Center)	10	324	13%
Sacred Heart	Willmar (Primarily Cancer Center & Eye Center)	8	206	10%
Fairfax	Bird Island	6	160	8%
Olivia	Minneapolis	4	444	5%
Olivia	Willmar	4	61	5%

Source: Data provided by CCT and adapted by Nelson\Nygaard

Figure 2-14 CCT Ridership: Renville Heartland Express Demand Response Service

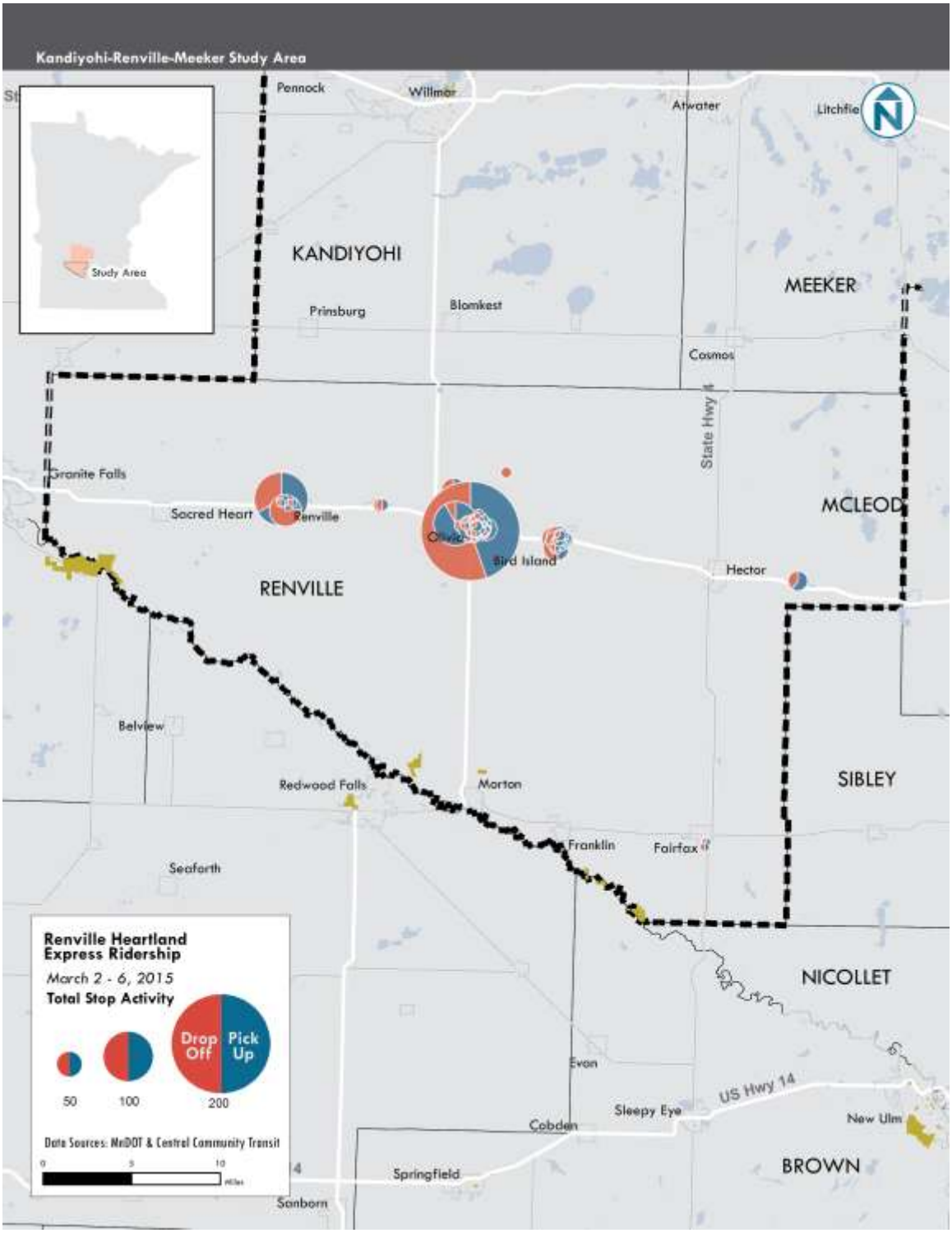


Figure 2-15 CCT Ridership: City of Olivia

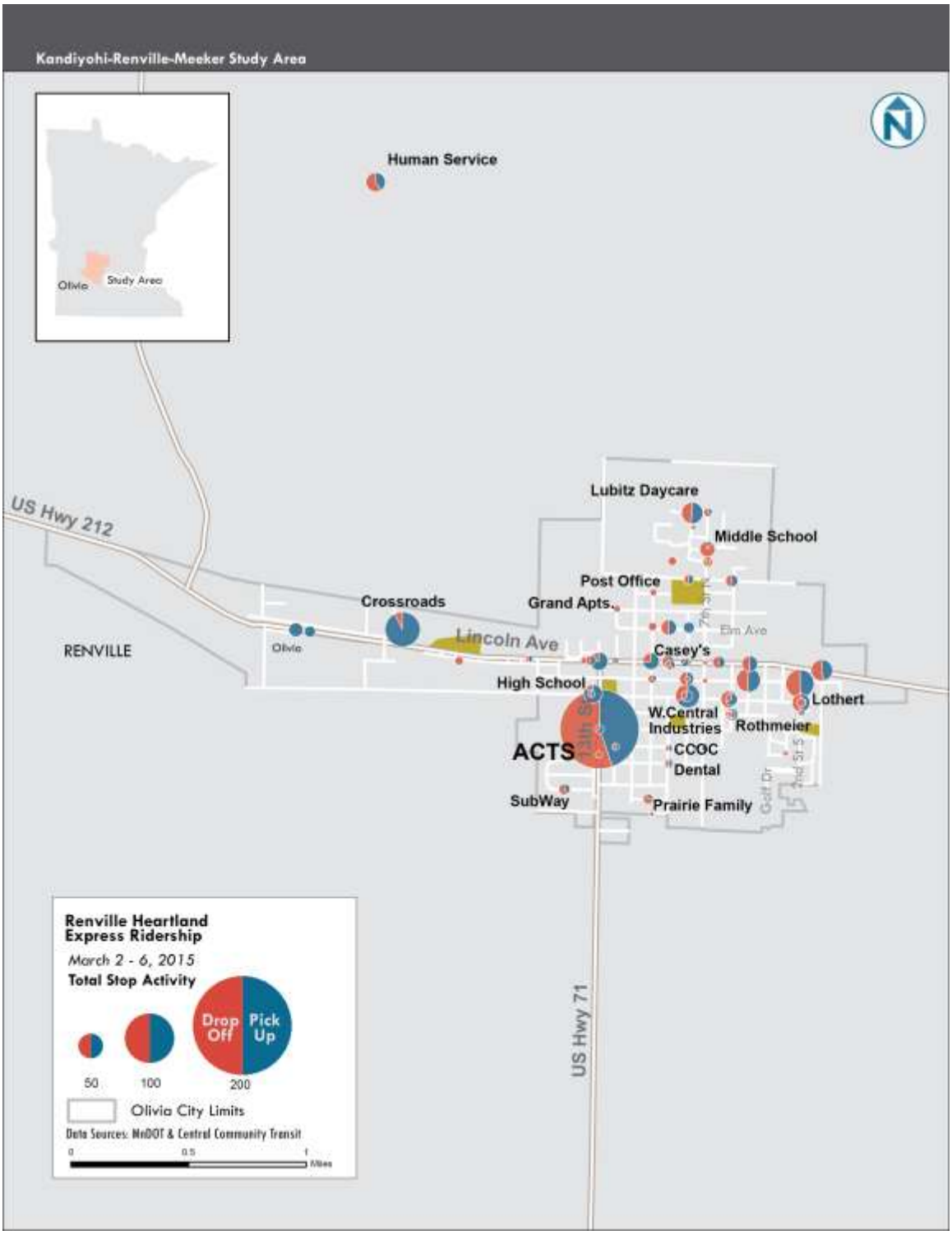
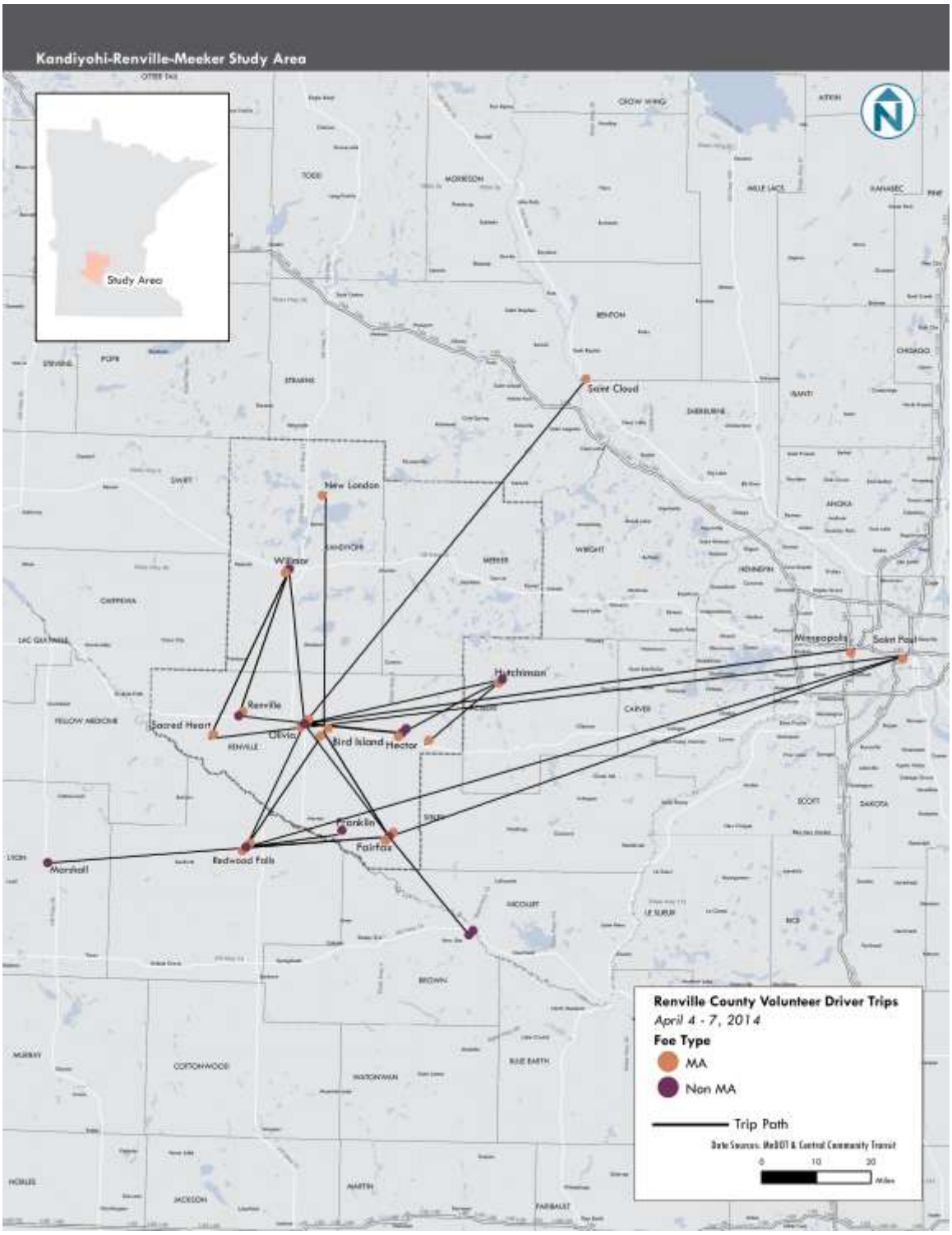


Figure 2-16 CCT Ridership: Renville County Volunteer Drivers



Service Funding

CCT is funded through a combination of federal and state grants, passenger fares, contract revenue and contributions provided by local governments. Small urban and rural transit agencies in Minnesota are primarily funded by federal and state grants that are managed and awarded by MnDOT. MnDOT negotiates contracts with individual service providers that determine the amount of service to be provided and the cost of providing that service. Once finalized, MnDOT will provide funding for 85% of the contracted amount.

Local funds are raised through a combination of passenger fares, service contracts and contributions from local governments. Per the contract with MnDOT, transit providers must match MnDOT's funds with at least 15% of the service costs. Transit providers have some flexibility with regards to how they raise the funds, but the funds must come from local sources. In some cases, local transit operators are able to raise more than the 15% contracted and use these funds to expand service. Because CCT is a brand new agency, local funding for Kandiyohi Area Transit and Renville County Heartland Express are presented separately in the following text.

Kandiyohi County

As discussed, MnDOT funds local transit operations by first developing a contract with the local transit provider and then funding this contract up to 85% of the costs. Although local transit operators have flexibility with regards to how they raise local funds, they must raise at least 15% of the contracted amount. In addition, any funds raised over the 15% local match are not matched with state resources.

KAT spent between $1 and $1.3 million annually to operate service between 2012 and 2014. The majority of the operating costs were provided by MnDOT grants and the farebox, but the City of Willmar and Kandiyohi County also contributed funds (see Figure 2-17). System revenues include contract revenue, advertising revenue, and interest.

Figure 2-17 Kandiyohi Area Transit Funding by Source 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014
Kandiyohi Area Transit			
MnDOT Funds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	$935,000	$1,008,100	$1,265,650
Revenues (Farebox + System Revenue + Local Contributions)	$264,242	$275,898	$308,650
Total Operating Funds	$1,074,565	$1,130,024	$1,295,175
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	$204,030	$215,960	$240,924
System Revenue	$42,160	$33,683	$37,726
Local Government	$18,052	$26,255	$30,000

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

Renville County

Renville County Heartland Express increased operating revenues from $480,938 to $577,698 between 2012 and 2014 (see Figure 2-18). Similar to the KAT, the majority of the operating costs were raised through MnDOT grants and farebox revenues. Local government contributions are provided by annual donations from the ten cities in Renville County. Out of service revenue is collected when Renville Heartland Express bills the County for a medical assistance volunteer driver trip, which is paid for through the Department of Human Services. These funds are reported as revenues, not fares.

Figure 2-18 Renville Heartland Express Funding by Source 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014
Renville County Heartland Express			
MnDOTFunds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	$280,500	$340,000	$382,500
Revenues (Farebox + Local Contributions)	$200,437	$206,814	$195,198
Total Operating Funds	$480,937	$546,814	$577,698
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	$111,630	$118,791	$119,430
Local Government Contributions	$26,642	$27,236	$25,492
Out of Service Revenue	$62,165	$60,787	$50,276

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

MEEKER COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT (MPT)

Service Overview

Consistent with CCT, MPT operates a combination of deviated fixed route, demand response and volunteer driver services and all of these services are open and available to members of the public. Some services are designed specifically for members of the public and other services operate in response to contracted services. In 2014, MPT provided roughly 74,217 trips, with about 45% scheduled as deviated fixed route, 51% scheduled as demand response (including contract service), and 4% as volunteer driver trips (see Figure 2-19).

Figure 2-19 CCT (KAT and Heartland Express) Ridership by Service Type (2014)

	Deviated Fixed Route (all routes)	Demand Response (including contracted service)	Volunteer Drivers	Total
Meeker Public Transit	33,573	37,744	3,000	74,317

Source: MPT adapted by Nelson\Nygaard

Deviated Fixed Route Service

MPT operates three deviated fixed routes. Most of these routes are associated with contracted service, but are also available to members of the public. MPT does not publish schedules, time tables or maps for these routes, so riders must contract MPT for information. Route descriptions and maps (see Figure 2-20) reflect conversations with MPT staff:

- Litchfield to Dassel - this route is scheduled in conjunction with contracted service scheduled with ProWorks. In this way, the service functions similarly to school bus service. MPT operates four trips per day Monday through Friday between Litchfield and Dassel, two in the morning (7:30 am to 9:00 am and 8:00 am to 9:30 am) and two in the afternoon (2:00 pm to 3:30 pm and 2:30 to 4:00 pm). The service will deviated a couple of miles to accommodate passenger pick up s and drop offs.
- Litchfield – Dassel – Hutchinson – MPT operates two trips per day Monday through Friday, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, between Litchfield and Hutchinson. The morning trips travels south on Route 22 to Hutchinson and returns via Dassel and Darwin to Litchfield. The afternoon trip makes the same trip but travels in a reverse direction. The morning trip leaves Litchfield at 7:00 am and arrives in Hutchinson at around 8:30 am. It departs Hutchinson and heads back to Litchfield at 9:00 am. The afternoon trip leaves Litchfield at 2:30 pm, arrives in Hutchinson around 3:30 pm and heads back to Litchfield at 4:00 pm. There are designated time points associated with many passengers, most of whom use the service on a regular basis. MPT will also allow passengers to request a pick up for up to three or five miles from the route.
- Willmar – Litchfield (Route 12) Route – CCT and MPT jointly operate a route between the City of Willmar and the City of Litchfield. This service provides three daily round trips on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays with the first trip leaves Litchfield at 7:30 am and the last trip leaves Willmar at 3:00 pm. The Route 12 route has scheduled stops in Grove City, Atwater and Kandiyohi and will also deviate up to two miles from the route to pick up or drop off passengers. The service is new, beginning operations in April

2014. The route is operated by a CCT driver using a CCT vehicle. While there are advertisements about the route, there is currently no published timetable on either the KAT or MPT website.

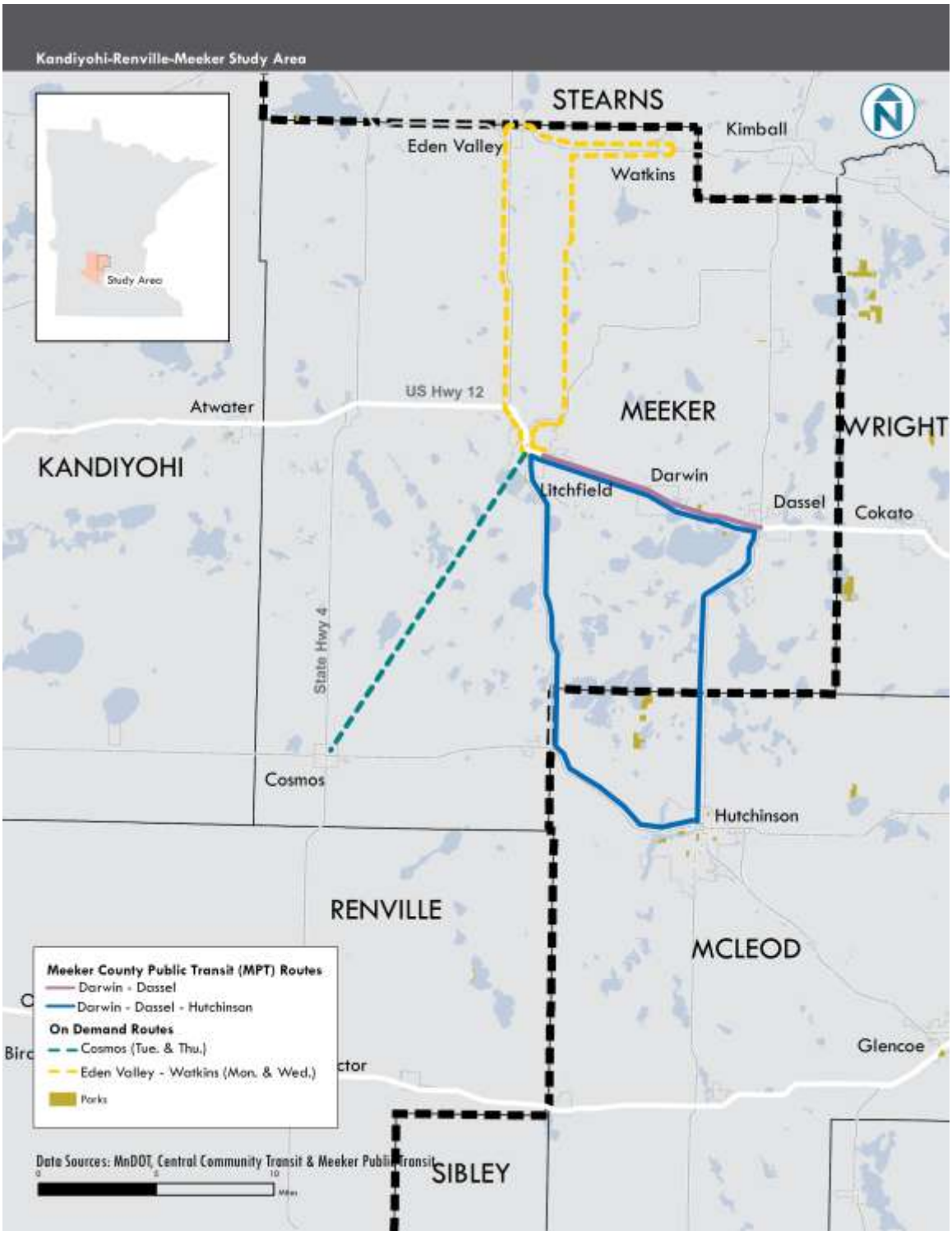
Demand Response Service

MPT operates two types of demand response service (general public demand response and contracted service). In each case, riders are requested to call and schedule their trips at least 24 hours in advance, but for a small fee (addition of $1.00 per one-way trip), same day trips may be accommodated.

- **General public demand response service** is provided door-to-door throughout Meeker County with outlying communities on certain scheduled days and times. This service is available for passengers who request a trip up to 24 hours in advance and are looking to travel within their respective counties. Same day service is also provided as available for an additional fee, although 24-48 hours advanced notice is preferred. MPT's demand response service is only to certain designated places on certain days of the week. These two services include (see also Figure 2-20):
    - Litchfield – Cosmos – MPT sends a bus to Cosmos in the southwestern portion of Meeker County and brings riders to Litchfield on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The service includes one trip in the morning and one in the afternoon. Vehicles do not have scheduled time points and there are no restrictions on deviations, other than passengers need to request and schedule pick-ups and drop-offs in advance.
    - Litchfield – Eden Valley and Watkins – Consistent with the Cosmos service, MPT sends buses to Eden Valley and Watkins in northern Meeker County on Mondays and Wednesdays and brings riders to Litchfield. The service includes one trip in the morning and one in the afternoon. Vehicles do not have scheduled time points and there are no restrictions on deviations, other than passengers need to request and schedule pick-ups and drop-offs in advance.
- **Contracted service** is designed to support specific health and human service programming, such as helping parents get their children to preschool programs and transporting individuals with disabilities to supported employment activities. Contracted services are paid for by the sponsoring agency, and are organized around that agency's specific needs.

Volunteer driver service is provided by the Meeker County Council on Aging, which is housed in the MPT facility. The majority of the trips provided by volunteer drivers are to transport people traveling to/from medical services with funding provided by health care providers (Blue Cross Blue Shield and UCare).

Figure 2-20 Meeker Public Transit Routes



Ridership

Deviated Fixed Route Service

Ridership data for MPT's deviated fixed service was collected for the period between February 2 and 7, 2015, during which data for 2,402 pickup and drop off locations were collected. The top destinations on the deviated fixed route service are primarily contract destinations, including Proworks, a workforce training service. This location has the highest ridership of any location. Other high ridership destinations include Head Start in Litchfield, Red Rooster (a Proworks satellite location) in Dassel, and Mighty Dragon in Litchfield (see Figure 2-21 and Figure 2-25). There is also moderate ridership in Darwin, Dassel, and Hutchinson.

Figure 2-21 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: Top Flex Route Service Destinations

Location	Trip Type	Address	Pick Up	Drop Off	Percentage of total trips that begin or end at a location
Proworks	Workforce Training Services	427 E 10th St, Litchfield, MN, 55355	176	180	15%
Head Start	School / Education	250 E. 1st, Litchfield, MN, 55355	69	56	5%
Red Rooster – Proworks	Workforce Training Services	135 3rd St, Dassel, MN, 55325	63	49	5%
Mighty Dragon	School / Education	703 S Sibley Ave, Litchfield, MN, 55355	61	48	5%
Emmaus Place	Home	200 N Holcombe Ave, Litchfield, MN, 55355	50	47	4%
Wal-Mart	Shopping	2301 E Frontage Rd, Litchfield, MN, 55355	37	52	4%
Litchfield High School	School / Education	340 E 10th St, Litchfield, MN	24	32	2%
Meeker Memorial Hospital	Health Care	612 S Sibley Ave, Litchfield, MN, 55355	23	23	2%
Emmanuel North	Home	600 S Davis Ave, Litchfield, MN, 55355	23	23	2%

Source: Meeker Public Transit

Demand Response Service

Data for demand response service was collected during the same time period as deviated fixed route. There were approximately 86 pickups and drop off locations collected. The top destinations for MPT demand response service are primarily shopping and daycare destinations concentrated in the City of Litchfield, as shown in

Figure 2-22 and Figure 2-26. Many of the destinations scheduled as demand response trips are within or near the deviated fixed routes, but others including Renner's Daycare and Cornerstone Church are further away.

Figure 2-22 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: Top Demand Response Service Destinations

Location	Trip Type	Address	Pick Up	Drop Off	Percentage of total trips that begin or end at a location
Modern Quilters	Shopping	62038 State Hwy 24, Litchfield, MN 55355	9	15	28%
Heartthrob Exhaust	Shopping	60819 Us Hwy 12, Litchfield, MN 55355	5	5	11%
Sommerfeld Steph Daycare	School / Education	25451 608th Ave, Litchfield, MN 55355	5	3	9%
Birch's DayCare	School / Education	62960 250th St, Litchfield, MN 55355	3	4	8%
Barka Dairy	Shopping	19497 County Hwy 1, Litchfield, MN 55355	4	0	5%
Renner's Daycare	School / Education	28451 655th Ave, Litchfield, MN 55355	3	0	4%
St Anthony Manor	Religious	131 Church St, Litchfield, MN 55355	2	0	2%

Source: Meeker Public Transit

Volunteer Drivers

Meeker Public Transit provided volunteer driver data from March 10--14, 2015. Volunteer driver provided by MPT primarily travels out of county (77% of all trips), as shown in Figure 2-23. However, the average distance traveled by volunteer drivers for out of county is only marginally higher than in-county trips.

Two of the top five volunteer driver trip destinations are in the City of Willmar (see Figure 2-24). The trip that travels from Litchfield to Willmar Regional Cancer Center is both the most frequent destination and also one of the lengthiest trips. The MPT volunteer driver data is mapped in Figure 2-28, which shows that many of the volunteer routes originate or end in Litchfield and travel as far as Crystal Lake. Long distance travel is primarily for medical assistance (MA) trips, although volunteer drivers also travel to Saint Cloud and Willmar for non-MA trips.

Figure 2-23 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: Volunteer Driver Data

Meeker Public Transit	Total	Travel Within Meeker County	Percentage of Total	Travel Out of Meeker County	% of Total
Trips	60	14	23%	46	77%
Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)	1383.5	439	32%	944.5	68%
Average Miles Traveled Per Trip		31		21	

Source: Meeker Public Transit

Figure 2-24 MPT Top Trips with Volunteer Drivers

Origin	Destination	Total Trips	Total VMT	Percentage of total trips that begin or end at a location	Average Vehicle Miles per Trip
Litchfield	Willmar Regional Cancer Center	12	368	20%	31
Litchfield	Woodland Center in Willmar	8	205	13%	25
Watkins	Meeker Hospital, Litchfield	5	96	10%	19
Cosmos	Emmaus Place, Litchfield	5	104	7%	20
Eden Valley	St. Cloud Hospital/Medical Centers	4	146	6%	36

Source: Meeker Public Transit

Figure 2-25 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: Flex Route Service

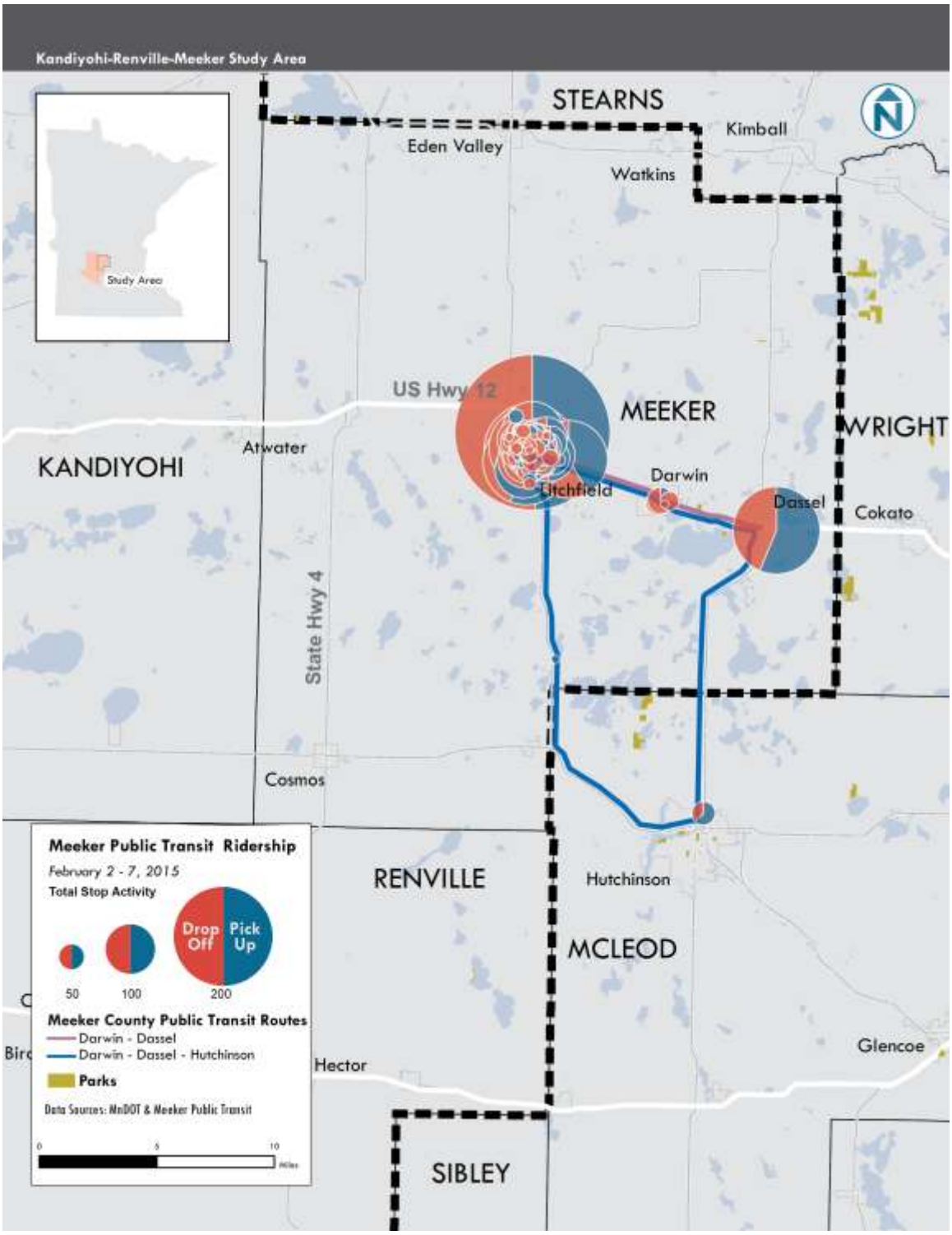


Figure 2-26 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: Demand Response Service

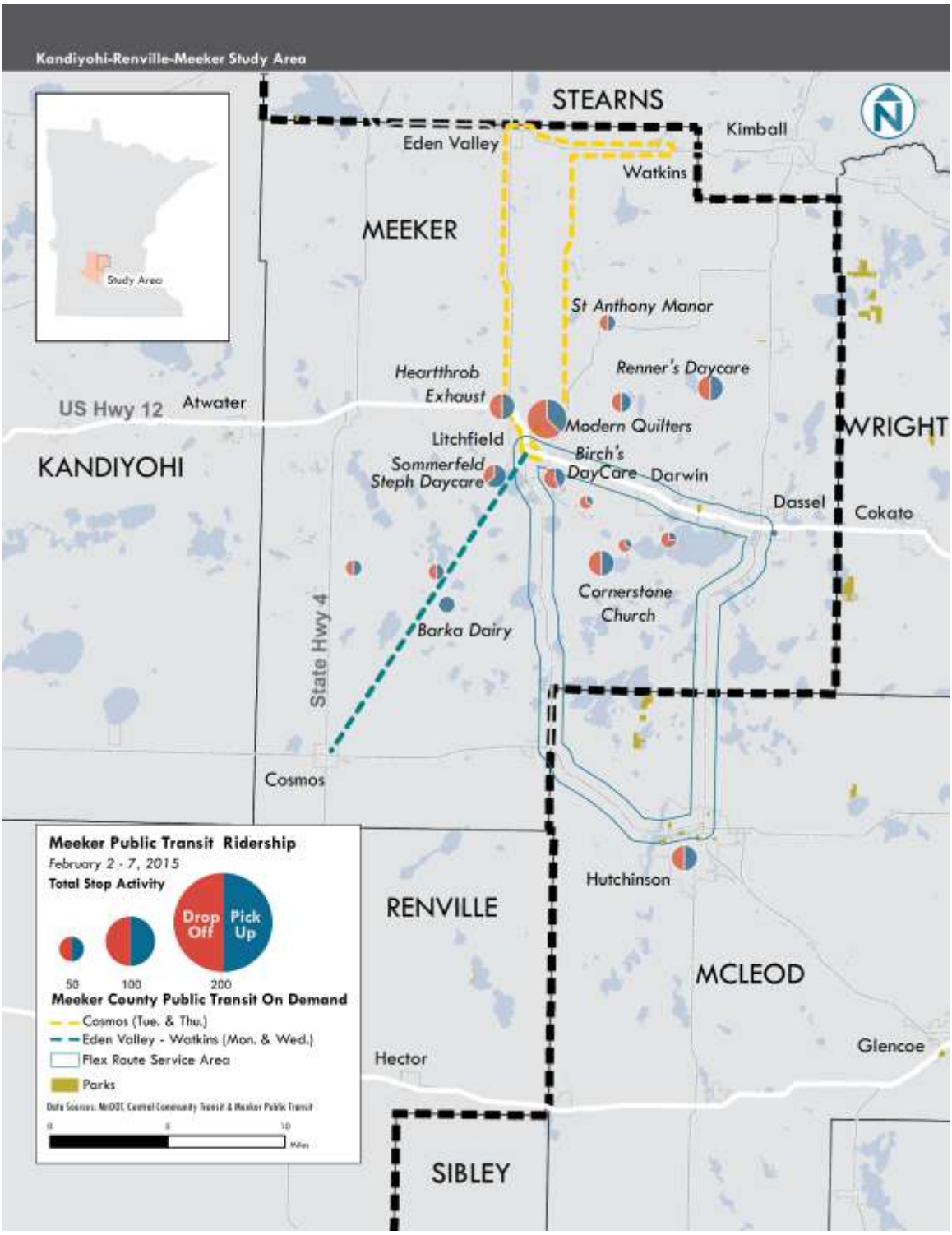


Figure 2-27 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: City of Litchfield

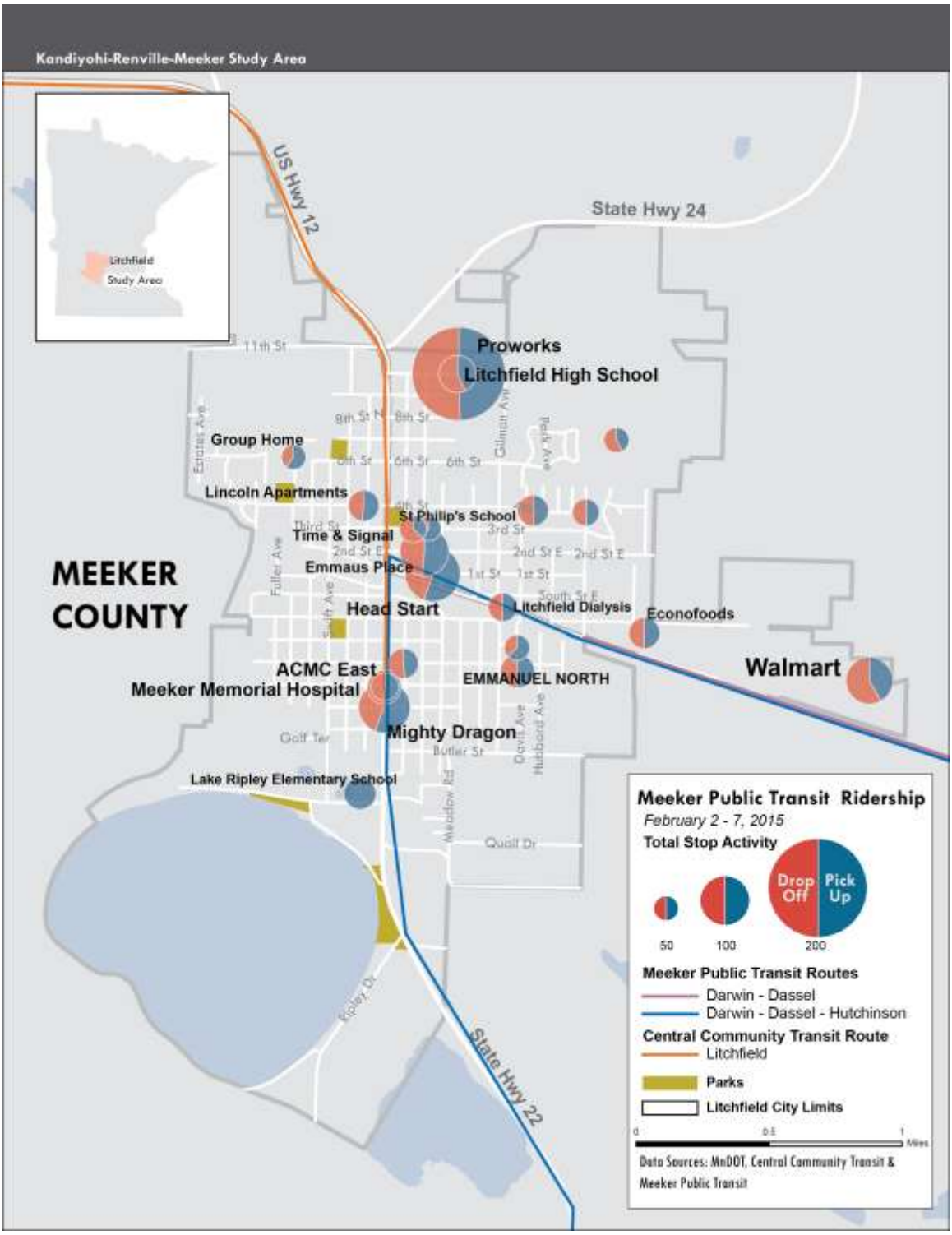
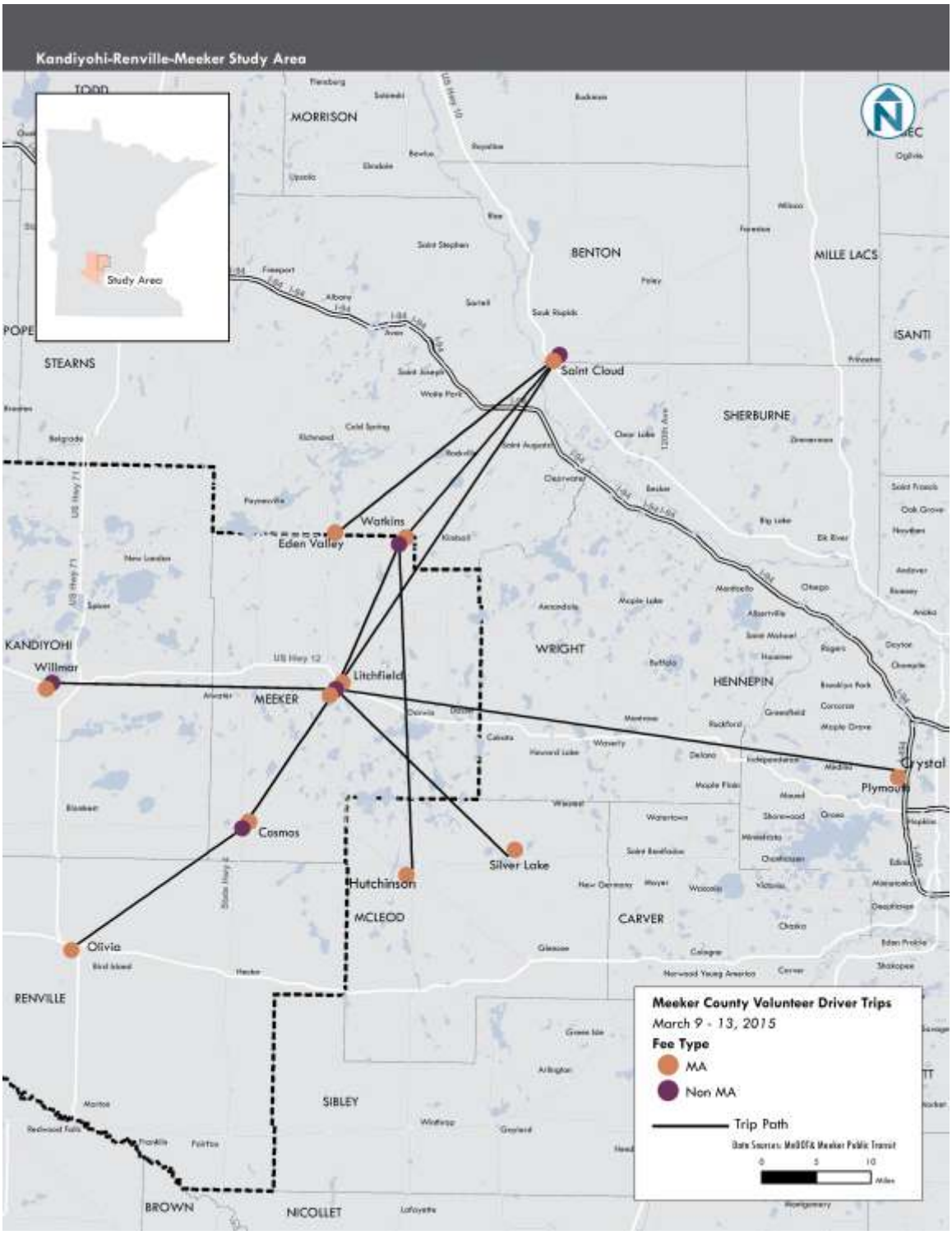


Figure 2-28 Meeker Public Transit Ridership: Volunteer Drivers



Service Funding

Meeker Public Transit increased operating revenues from $09,778 to $819,257 between 2012 and 2014. Similar to the CCT, the majority of the operating costs were raised through MnDOT grants and farebox revenues. As discussed, small urban and rural transit services in Minnesota are primarily funded by federal and state grants that are managed and awarded by MnDOT. MnDOT negotiates contracts with individual service providers that determine the amount of service to be provided and the cost of providing that service. Once finalized, MnDOT will provide funding for 85% of the contracted amount.

Local jurisdictions must raise the remaining 15% locally to meet the service obligations of the contract. MPT raises local funds through farebox revenues, including both individual passenger fares as well as contracted revenues. Local governments, including the City of Litchfield and Meeker County government also support MPT with annual contributions.

Figure 2-29 Meeker Public Transit Funding by Source 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014
Meeker County Public Transit			
MnDOT Funds Grants (Federal and State Grants)	$408,000	$510,000	$568,650
Revenues (Farebox + City and County Contributions)	$301,778	$251,115	$250,607
Total Operating Funds	$709,778	$761,115	$819,257
Revenues by Source			
Farebox	$221,022	$198,917	$208,932
City of Litchfield Contributions	$40,816	$24,734	$18,964
Meeker County Contributions	$39,940	$27,464	$22,711

Sources: Kat-Meeker-Renville Study Information, Service Reports (2011-2014) and Fiscal Obligation Reports

3 LEVEL OF SERVICE COMPARISON

In 2012, the Office of Transit established standards for level and type of transit service that should be offered in Regional Trade Centers (RTC). These guidelines determined the amount of rural transit access that should be dedicated to each of the seven types of Regional Trade Center's that were established by MnDOT in 2003. The seven categories are based on the community population, type of economic markets, and market drivers, which include retail, manufacturing, education, health care and other service establishments. When determining how much service each RTC category should have, MnDOT considered several conditions, including the location of major trip generators, human service contracts, and travel along major corridors. Figure 3-2 shows MnDOT's suggestions for the service type, frequency of service, and span of service for each type of Regional Trade Center.

The Consulting Team assessed the current level of service available in towns with populations over 2,500 within Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties to determine if they meet the MnDOT's standards for Regional Transit Centers. As shown in Figure 3-1, towns within the three counties fall into RTC levels two, three, four and five. Generally, both CCT and MPT deviated fixed route and demand response services have a lower service frequency and span of service than MnDOT recommends:

- **Dassel (Meeker County)** is categorized as a Full Convenience Center. MnDOT recommends both flexible route and demand response service to serve Full Convenience Centers seven days a week, 12 hours per day. MPT currently provides service to Dassel with deviated fixed route service available every day as part of other regional services. Combined, this equates to about four hours of deviated fixed route service on weekdays. MPT does not provide demand response transportation to Dassel at this time.
- **Litchfield (Meeker County)** is categorized as a Complete Shopping Center, which means that MnDOT recommends that a minimum of both deviated fixed route and demand response be available seven days a week, 12 hours per day. MPT currently serves Litchfield with deviated fixed route service on weekdays, with service available for 8.5 hours per day and demand response service 12 hours per day on weekdays. On weekend days, service is available for 5 hours per day.
- **Olivia (Renville County)** is categorized as a Partial Shopping Center. Under MnDOT's recommendations, Partial Shopping Centers should receive a minimum of both deviated fixed route and demand response service seven days a week, 12 hours per day. CCT provides limited deviated fixed route service in Renville County as part of the Olivia to Willmar Route. This service provides between three and four trips per day on weekdays. CCT in Renville County also operates demand response service for 12 hours on weekdays only.
- **Spicer (Kandiyohi County)** is also categorized as a Partial Shopping Center. CCT provides deviated fixed route service for 6 hours on weekdays and demand response service for 12 hours on weekdays. There is currently no weekend service to Spicer.

- **Willmar (Kandiyohi County)** is categorized as a Secondary Wholesale/Retail Center. MnDOT standards recommend a minimum of deviated fixed route and demand response service every day for 15 hours a day. CCT provides deviated fixed route service 9 hours per day on weekdays and Saturdays. Demand response service is available for 12 hours per day on weekdays and 8.5 hours on Saturdays.

Figure 3-1 RTC Categorization of Cities/Towns in Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

City/Town	Provider	2003 RTC Category (number)	MnDOT Service Standards for RCT Categories			Actual Service Level Currently Provided			Does the actual service level meet MnDOT's Standards?
			Suggested Service Types	Frequency	Span of Service	Service Types	Frequency	Span of Service	
Dassel	MPT	Full Convenience Center (5)	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	12 Hours/ Day	Flexible Route	Weekdays	Weekdays: 4 hours	No, needs weekend service and additional weekday hours
						Demand Response	None	None	Needs service
Litchfield	MPT	Complete Shopping Center (3)	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	12 Hours/ Day	Flexible Route	Weekdays	Weekdays: 8.5 hours	No, needs weekend service and additional weekday hours
						Demand Response	Daily	Weekdays: 12 hours Weekend: 5 hours	No, needs additional weekend hours
Olivia	CCT	Partial Shopping Center (4)	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	12 Hours/ Day	Flexible Route	Weekdays	Weekdays: 8.5 hours	No, needs weekend service and additional weekday hours
						Demand Response	Weekdays	Weekdays: 12 hours	No, needs weekend service.
Spicer	CCT	Partial Shopping Center (4)	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand	Daily	12 Hours/ Day	Flexible Route	Weekdays	Weekdays: 6 hours	No, needs weekend service and additional weekday hours
						Demand Response	Weekdays	Weekdays: 12 hours	No, needs additional weekend hours

			Response						
Willmar	CCT	Secondary Wholesale/ Retail Center (2)	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	15 Hours/ Day	Flexible Route	Daily	Weekdays: 9 hours Weekend: 9 hours	No, needs additional weekday and weekend hours
						Demand Response	Daily	Weekdays: 12 hours Weekend: 8.5 hours	No, needs additional weekday and weekend hours

Figure 3-2 MnDOT's Standards for Level and Type of Service to Regional Trade Centers

RTC Size	Category	RTC Population	Examples	Density	Principle Riders	Suggested Service Types	Frequency	Span of Service
1	Primary Wholesale Retail Center	45,000-higher	Rochester Duluth St. Cloud	High	Seniors Individuals with disabilities Youth Commuters	Fixed Route	Daily	16 Hours/Day
						OR		
						Complementary Paratransit	Daily	16 Hours/Day
2	Secondary Wholesale/ Retail Center	16,000-45,000	*Willmar Detroit Lakes New Ulm	High	Seniors Individuals with disabilities Youth Commuters	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	15 Hours/Day
3	Complete Shopping Center	11,000-16,000	*Litchfield Thief River Falls Montevideo	Medium	Seniors Individuals with disabilities Youth	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	12 Hours/Day
4	Partial Shopping Center	7,000-10,000	*Dassel *Olivia *Spicer	Medium	Seniors Individuals with disabilities Youth	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	12 Hours/Day
5	Full Convenience Center	4,000-7,000	Granite Falls Albany Pine Island	Medium	Seniors Individuals with disabilities Youth	Flexible Route **and** Community Zoned Demand Response	Daily	12 Hours/Day (Ex: AM internal, PM contract routes)

RTC Size	Category	RTC Population	Examples	Density	Principle Riders	Suggested Service Types	Frequency	Span of Service
6	Minimum Convenience Center	2,500-4,000	Parkers Prairie Hoyt Lakes Sebeka	Low	Seniors Individuals with disabilities	Flexible Route	Weekly (could also be daily)	4 Hours/Day (Ex: 2 trips in, 2 trips out of the RTC)
						OR		
						Rural Zoned Demand Response	3 Days/Week	6 Hours/Day (Ex: 2 trips in, 2 trips out of the RTC)
7	Hamlet	2,500 and Under	Mizpah Lengby Kensington	Low	Seniors Individuals with disabilities	Flexible Route	Weekly	4 Hours/Day (Ex: 2 trips in, 2 trips out of the RTC)
						OR		
						Rural Zoned Demand Response	3 Days/Week	6 Hours/Day (Could also be daily service with limited internal service)

Source: MnDOT Office of Transit 2013 Regional Trade Center Study and MnDOT 2012 Update

4 STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

INTRODUCTION

As part of assessing transit services in Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties, the study team prepared a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis (SWOT). The purpose of this analysis is to distill and communicate a variety of data and information collected throughout the project to date, specifically the existing information compiled in Technical Memo 1 and the service analysis presented as part of this analysis. The SWOT analysis is also intended to help identify opportunities for improvement – both internal within each agency as the currently existing and potentially for a new agency structure that increases collaboration across CCT and MPT and/or potential consolidation of the two agencies.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis is presented around a description of the largest strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as summary tables that highlight key themes. The descriptive text references each of the agencies individually, but is oriented around the overall service areas. The summary tables, on the other hand, are oriented around the individual agencies and speak to their specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. As a result, the SWOT summary tables consist of two figures:

- **Figure 4-1 CCT Transit Service Design and Service Delivery** (including public information, equipment, facilities and technology)
- **Figure 4-2 MPT Transit Service Design and Service Delivery** (including public information, equipment, facilities and technology)

Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

As shown in the SWOT analysis, CCT and MPT transit services operate efficiently and successfully. Strengths that are evident across both agencies include service that is responsive and highly individualized. The service also offers a local understanding and sensitivity that is appreciated by riders and valued by stakeholders and members of the community who don't use the service.

The individual service providers, including CCT (Kandiyohi and Renville Counties) and Meeker Public Transit, have internal systems that allow the agencies to operate responsibly and effectively. Staff has access to technology, such as RouteMatch and Automatic Vehicle Location

(AVL) systems that make trips scheduling more efficient. Technology can also help agencies better understand how riders are using their services and strengthen service design and efficiency. Other effective systems include fleet management and vehicle maintenance systems (especially in CCT).

CCT and MPT also benefit from operating a combination of contracted and general public service. The contracted service allows the agencies to cluster and organize trips, which makes their overall systems more efficient and productive. These organized services also provide some consistency and predictability to the demand and provide opportunities to direct general public trips to these scheduled services. Contracted service also provides additional income to the system.

Another strength that applies to both CCT and MPT is the road network. Although the distances between destinations may be fairly long, the population centers, major destinations, and transit need in each individual county as well as the overall region is concentrated around a handful of corridors. Highway 12, for example, connects Willmar and Litchfield and also travels through some of the region's more populated communities (Atwater, Dassel and Darwin). Highway 71, runs north-south through Kandiyohi and Renville Counties connecting Willmar and Olivia. The Third primary corridor, Highway 212, runs parallel and south of Highway 12; this roadway connects the major communities in Renville County, including the cities of Renville and Olivia and the towns of Bird Island and Hector. This roadway design helps create a series of primary corridors around which transit service can operate.

Weaknesses

The SWOT analysis also identified a series of weaknesses within the systems. Among the most significant weakness that applies to both agencies is the lack of information available to clearly and easily explain how the service works. CCT does provide some information about its Willmar services, but the information is very basic and does not make the routes easy to understand or communicate the services efficiently. The naming convention of CCT's routes (i.e., Morning Reverse Route), for example, do not tell provide much information about how the route works or where it goes. It is also likely that mapping and writing down the scheduled services will help staff at CCT and MPT better understand and communicate their services to other people.

Another weakness in the regional transit network is implementation of the technology systems. Although having the systems is a clear strength, neither CCT nor MPT are able to use the scheduling software systems to their full capacity. In addition, the systems are not set up consistently across each of the agencies, or in the case of CCT, Kandiyohi and Renville Counties use and program their software systems differently. Other relatively basic systems, such as telephone service and email systems are also not coordinated. This limits the opportunity for service coordination as well as collaboration between staff.

Consistent with technology, CCT and MPT's service design represents both a strength and a weakness. While some services are well coordinated, other routes and services are not. Medical assistance service, for example, is provided almost exclusively by volunteer drivers. Indeed, volunteer drivers are efficient for trips that take a long time because the most expensive part of the service (the driver's wage) is provided free of charge. However, the data shows that a significant portion of the volunteer driver trips (up to 25%) have origins and destinations within the same county. Another portion of the trips are for travel to the adjacent county, which in the case of CCT, maybe within the same service area. These trips may be better integrated with the rest of the service network as a way to increase service efficiency.

Other strengths and weaknesses include:

- **Staff availability, staff development and staff skills.** Both CCT and MPT are run with very small staffs that consist of a handful of drivers, plus a small staff of schedulers, dispatchers and managers. These staff members are held in high regard by managers, stakeholders and contracting agencies and are largely responsible for each agency being well run. CCT and MPT are relatively small agencies, so it is to be expected that staff levels will also be small. However, it is not clear if CCT and MPT have systems that reinforce staff skill sets so any one agency does not rely on a single individual for a critical agency function (i.e. only one person understands the volunteer driver data). As a result, staff competency is a strength, but the lack of overlapping systems is a weakness.

  In the longer term, not reinforcing skills sets makes the agency vulnerable to staff turn-over. In the short-term, operations can be affected by unplanned events that take staff away from work, even for a short period of time, such as illness, vacations or other life events.
- **Volunteer Driver Networks.** CCT and MPT rely on volunteer drivers to provide their medical assistance service. Volunteer drivers are a cost efficient way to provide service and also typically operate a high level of service. The challenge with volunteers is that they are volunteers and therefore may or may not be available when needed. In addition, both CCT (including Kandiyohi and Renville County) and MPT reported challenges maintaining the size and flexibility of their volunteer driver network.
- **Vehicle Replacement Plans.** Both CCT and MPT have relatively older fleets and will likely need to replace vehicles in the next few years. The need to replace vehicles on an ongoing basis (as opposed to buying several vehicles at once) reflects a well-managed system. It also creates an opportunity to streamline fleets so they are more consistent both within CCT and potentially also with MPT fleet. A more homogenous fleet will make it easier for vehicle mechanics and drivers who may need to work across services.
- **Vehicle Maintenance Systems.** Vehicle maintenance systems vary by provider. Renville County historically – and currently – uses county fleet services to maintain transit vehicles. Kandiyohi has always maintained its own vehicles. MPT maintains its vehicles as part of a service contract. CCT's vehicle maintenance system is effective and, while not coordinated across the two counties, is efficient on a local level. MPT's vehicle maintenance system is adequate. The strength of these systems is that the work – vehicles are maintained and operate safely. The weakness (and opportunity) is that the systems are not well coordinated and there are likely efficiencies through shared maintenance, especially for heavy maintenance.

Additionally, CCT and MPT services do not meet MnDOT's standards for level of service and type of service to Regional Trade Centers (RTC). The gap between the standards and availability of service is largely based on differences between service frequency and span of service, including weekend service. CCT and MPT may consider increasing service within Dassel, Litchfield, Olivia, Spicer and Willmar to meet MnDOT's minimum standards. In each of these cities, MnDOT's standards call for daily service offered 12 hours per day.

Opportunities and Threats

Within the strengths and weaknesses of each of the individual systems, there are opportunities and threats. The opportunities represent ways to take advantage of the existing circumstances to

strengthen service, operations, and management. Threats, on the other hand, pose challenges that could become significant if they are not addressed.

Among the most apparent opportunity and threat is the creation of CCT. The merger is significant because it provides an opportunity to demonstrate the ability of a larger agency to be effective and efficient and still provide a high level of service to the public. As a new agency, CCT is receiving a lot of attention and support both locally from stakeholders and from staff at MnDOT. These stakeholders want CCT to be successful and understand that the new agency will face challenges as it evolves and are willing to assist. However, the merger is also a threat because merging agencies is challenging and takes time. Employees are busy managing existing operations, which makes addressing merger issues easy to postpone or overlook as more immediate concerns require attention. In addition, just as other agencies are looking to support CCT, there is also external pressure on CCT to be successful and demonstrate this success quickly.

Another opportunity and threat reflects the strengths and weaknesses of CCT's and MPT's service design. As discussed, one of the most valued aspects of the service is the highly personal and highly local aspect of the service. To many this reflects a personal (if only via the telephone) relationship with dispatch staff and drivers. Many of the opportunities associated with improved service operations – including increased use of RouteMatch, streamlining systems (email, telephone service, scheduling practices) across agencies could mean that Renville County residents may schedule trips through a dispatcher based in Kandiyohi. Likewise a volunteer driver based in Renville County may provide a trip for a Kandiyohi resident. It is possible to retain a local feel and flavor to the service operations even while systems are being streamlined, but care must be taken to get this done right.

Figure 4-1 CCT Service Design and Delivery SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
▪ Service is highly personal, reflects local understanding and is highly valued by existing riders ▪ Riders are able to schedule same day travel ▪ Regional service includes jointly operated Route 12 (Willmar – Litchfield) service with MPT ▪ Longer distance service is provided cost effectively – either through scheduled fixed route service, or by using volunteer drivers ▪ Staff is willing to try new services as ideas are suggested by riders and stakeholders (example is provided by summer weekend evening service) ▪ Service is well coordinated with other local service providers, including school bus operators ▪ Kandiyohi has experimented with new fuel technologies (biodiesel) ▪ Kandiyohi and Renville both use Route Match and AVL scheduling technologies	▪ Information about available service is limited. CCT provides timetables but no maps. Service is not easy to use for casual or new users. ▪ Routes that offer deviations make travel times unpredictable ▪ Data is not available on a route by route basis, so it is difficult to determine route level ridership ▪ Demand outside of main communities is not well organized and thus is likely less productive or higher cost ▪ Medical assistance trips are segregated and provided by volunteer drivers, even when deviated fixed or demand response service may be available ▪ Some vehicles are older and/or have high mileage and will need replacing. Only four vehicles (out of 20) less than 100,000 miles. ▪ Staff set up scheduling software differently. Phone systems and other technologies are also different. ▪ CCT services do not meet MnDOT's standards for level of service and type of service to Regional Trade Centers

Opportunities	Threats
▪ According to demographic data, the region's largest cities will have the greatest population growth, which is more easily served by transit ▪ As CCT grows, it will be important to retain system strengths, including offering highly personal, local and friendly service ▪ Potential to create "true" deviated fixed route service in Renville County ▪ Potential to collaborate on volunteer driver programs and trips; some destinations are the same ▪ Ridership may be increased through increased public information ▪ Use of RouteMatch will need to be streamlined across agencies to allow more collaborative and coordinated scheduling	▪ Demographic data including age and income characteristics suggests the need for service may increase over time ▪ Creating cost efficiencies associated with a larger system may impact riders' sense of personalized and local service ▪ Fleet is very diverse, which may create some challenges with shared use and maintenance ▪ Use of RouteMatch will need to be streamlined across agencies to allow more collaborative and coordinated scheduling

Figure 4-2 Meeker County Service Design and Delivery

Strengths	Weaknesses
▪ Service is highly personal, reflects local understanding and is valued by riders ▪ Regional service includes jointly operated Route 12 (Willmar – Litchfield) service with MPT ▪ Longer distance service is provided cost effectively – either through scheduled fixed route service, or by using volunteer drivers ▪ Staff is willing to try new services (example is provided by summer weekend evening service) ▪ System buses are well maintained and operated ▪ Meeker County uses Route Match and AVL scheduling technologies	▪ Information about available service is limited. MPT does not provide timetables or maps. Service is not easy to use for casual or new users. ▪ MPT does not operate scheduled services within the City of Litchfield; as a result some trips are not well coordinated. ▪ Trips scheduled outside of Meeker County's main communities are not well organized and are less productive ▪ Medical assistance trips are segregated and provided by volunteer drivers, even when deviated fixed or demand response service may be available ▪ MPT's fleet on average is fairly old; only two vehicles (out of 9) less than 100,000 miles. ▪ MPT services do not meet MnDOT's standards for level of service and type of service to Regional Trade Centers
Opportunities	**Threats**
▪ Demographic data the region's largest cities will have the greatest population growth, which is more easily served by transit ▪ As the system grows, it will be important to retain system strengths, including offering highly personal, local and friendly service	▪ Demographic data including age and income characteristics suggests the need for service may increase over time ▪ Creating cost efficiencies associated with a larger system may impact riders' sense of personalized and local service

▪ Potential to create "true" deviated fixed route service in Renville County ▪ Potential to collaborate on volunteer driver programs and trips; some destinations are the same ▪ Ridership may be increased through increased public information ▪ Use of RouteMatch will need to be streamlined across agencies to allow more collaborative and coordinated scheduling	▪ Fleet is very diverse, which may create some challenges with shared use and maintenance ▪ Use of RouteMatch will need to be streamlined across agencies to allow more collaborative and coordinated scheduling

5 EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW

The purpose of creating an evaluation framework is to help direct and guide decision making. An effective evaluation framework should also clearly and simply communicate how decisions will be made, so people not directly participating in the process can understand the rationale behind certain choices.

The Transit Restructuring Study will consider a variety of improvement opportunities, some that speak to transit services and others that relate to agency organization, management and administration. The study will also consider the benefits and costs of increased collaboration, and potentially consolidation of individual agency services and functions. Developing an effective evaluation framework, therefore, is critical both to guide decision makers (which in this case includes the Project Advisory Committee (PAC)); and to communicate the decisions to parties that will be affected by the decisions.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A well-designed evaluation framework should reflect the goals and objectives of the process (i.e., what are we trying to accomplish). In this case, the effort is largely driven by MnDOT, which as set five primary goals for this effort:

- Improve customer service and seamlessness in terms of fares, service coverage and informational tools.
- Increase the availability of transit services, with potential new destinations and expanded service hours that come from eliminating any duplicative services
- Improved cost effectiveness for the agencies operating services through cost savings, shared expenses, more flexible use of available resources and equipment, economies of scale and freeing up resources
- Economic and facilities development opportunities due to improved buying power and the potential for larger scale developments
- Improved relationships between organizations by way of shared governance and multijurisdictional political support

These goals are also consistent with local goals. Local goals were not formally articulated as part of this process, but have been discussed throughout the process, including with stakeholders, the Project Management Committee (PMC), and the PAC. The local goals are understood to be:

- At a minimum, retain the quality and availability of transit service to local residents. Ideally, services will be strengthened both in terms of the availability of service but also the quality.

- Retain and improve local responsiveness of the services and agency to the surrounding community.
- Increase both the overall capacity of the network and staff and at the same time, improve the cost efficiency of the individual services and overall network.
- Avoid negatively impacting existing staff financially either through staff reductions or reductions in compensation.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

In addition to the goals and objectives associated with this particular effort, the State of Minnesota (MnDOT) also sets standards and measures for transit service productivity. These performance measures and standards are intended to be tools to assess progress towards achieving established goals and objectives, particularly how to allocate scarce resources.

By providing a consistent set of performance standards, transit staff, the CCT Joint Board, and MPT Advisory Board will have consistent direction on how to allocate, prioritize and deploy current and future services. Their use in the service planning and allocation process will avoid potentially inequitable, and possibly inefficient, allocations of service. It is important to define measures and standards as follows:

- A ***measure*** is a basis for comparison; a reference point against which other factors can be evaluated.
- A ***standard*** is a recommendation that leads or directs a course of action to achieve a certain goal. Typically, a standard is a target and oftentimes represented as a numerical value.

This section compares and contrasts the existing MnDOT statewide performance measures with 2013 performance data from CCT and MPT.

Existing MnDOT Statewide Performance Measures

MnDOT established performance measures and set standards for rural public transit systems expecting to add or change service in order to meet unmet needs or merge with other transit systems. The following performance measures were recommended to review new or merged services:

- Passengers per revenue hour
- Cost per passenger trip
- Revenue per passenger trip
- Cost per revenue service hour
- Revenue miles and average trip length

For deviated rural services or community dial-a-rides, MnDOT established standards for passengers per revenue hour, as detailed in Figure 5-1.

Figure 5-1 MnDOT Performance Standards for Passengers Per Hour

Type of Service	Passengers Per Hour	Rating	Comment
Community or Municipal Dial-A-Ride	≤ 2.0 PPH	Poor	Discontinue
	2.0 to 3.0 PPH	Minimally adequate	Must improve to Good or better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours
	≥ 5.0 PPH	Excellent	
Deviated Rural Route contracted routes should not be started at any level below "good"	≤ 3.0 PPH	Poor	Discontinue or consider alternate method of service delivery
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Minimally adequate	Must improve to Good or better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	5.0 to 8.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours
	≥ 8.0 PPH	Excellent	
	≥ 10.00 PPH	Excellent	

Source: MnDOT

Although none of the services provided by the three agencies falls below a "Good" performance standard, as shown in Figure 5-2, there are some opportunities to improve service and increase the passengers per hour to an "Excellent" rating.

Figure 5-2 2013 Passengers per Hour Compared with MnDOT Rating

Service	Passengers Per hour (2013)	MnDOT Rating	Comments
CCT (KAT Bus)			
Flex Route	6.27	Good	Opportunities for improvement
Demand Response	5.77	Excellent	Maintain current service levels
CCT (Renville Heartland Express)			
Demand Response	5.4	Excellent	Maintain current service levels
Meeker Public Transit			
Flex Route	3.5	Good	Opportunities for improvement
Demand Response	5.5	Good	Opportunities for improvement

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Given the MnDOT and local goals, and in consideration of existing performance measures, the evaluation framework can be consolidated and organized around a handful of fundamental objectives, which are broadly defined as: 1) Service Quality; 2) Service Availability; 3) Costs; 4) Operational Efficiency; and 5) Regional Coordination. Goals can be further defined and articulated by evaluation criteria to create a framework to compare and contrast opportunities.

A preliminary evaluation framework is presented as Figure 4-3; this framework is intended as early draft and will be discussed in greater detail with the PMT and PAC. As the framework is refined, additional information will be needed to translate the evaluation criteria into clear and measurable information that can be used to evaluate service improvement options.

Figure 5-3 Draft Evaluation Framework

Goal	Evaluation Criteria
Service Quality	Established guidelines for service performance (on-time performance) Vehicles – availability, reliability and cleanliness Drivers – friendliness, knowledge of service area, willingness to be helpful Accessibility of service – simplicity and ease of using the service
Service Availability	Availability of information about service and ability to request travel (methods to request trip, hours trip requests are accepted) Hours and days service operates Trip denials
Cost	Capital Costs Operating Costs Administrative Costs
Operational Efficiency	Hourly cost of service Passengers per hour Cost per passenger Subsidy per passenger
Regional Coordination	Availability of connections between regional centers

6 SERVICE IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS

Based on the analysis of the individual systems and in consideration of the SWOT analysis, the study team identified three primary areas for service improvements:

- Service design and coordination
- Technology, facilities and capital resources
- Public information and marketing.

Each of these improvement opportunities are described in the following text. Administrative and organizational improvement opportunities will be discussed in subsequent working papers.

TRANSIT SERVICE DESIGN

Transit service design refers to how transit services are operated and provided. Transit service is fundamental to the agency purpose and mission, but is not always as simple and straight-forward. This section identifies a series of service improvement opportunities for the three-county region. It includes an overview of service design principles or guidelines and also identifies a series of specific improvements relevant to CCT and MPT.

Service Design Principles

CCT and MPT strive to serve as many residents, workers, and visitors in Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker County as possible within available resources. At the same time, each provider needs to serve a wide variety of riders; trip types, and demands, many of which conflict with each other. For example, most riders prefer door-to-door service, but they also want service to be fast and direct and travel times to be predictable. As the bus stops to pick up additional riders at their doors, the bus will quickly become slower, less direct, and less predictable. Public transit, however, is a shared service, which means it must balance the needs of some passengers against the needs of other riders. Overall, public transit is intended to meet the basic needs of residents in developed areas who cannot drive; and in some cases, to provide reasonable options to those who can drive. For both types of riders—and those in between—there are certain service design principles that will improve service for nearly all riders.

Service Should be Simple

First and foremost, for people to use transit, they must be able to understand it. Accordingly, service should be designed so that it is easy to understand. This makes it easier for potential riders to learn about the options that are available, and help ensure that riders get where they want to go when they want to without experiencing frustration and problems. Most of the guidelines in this section are aimed at making service intuitive, logical, and easy to understand.

Routes Should Operate Along a Direct Path

The fewer directional changes a route makes, the easier it is to understand. Conversely, circuitous alignments are disorienting and difficult to remember. Transit routes, including deviated fixed routes, should be organized around the most direct alignment unless there is a compelling reason not to.

Routes Should be Symmetrical

Routes should operate along the same alignment in both directions to make it easy for riders to know how to get back to where they came from. All routes should operate along the same alignment in both directions except in cases where such operation is not possible due to one-way streets or turn restrictions. In those cases, routes should be designed so that the opposite directions parallel each other as closely as possible.

This design principle is often difficult to follow for rural and small town operators because as compared with looping services, symmetrical routes will reduce the service area (or geographic coverage). Routes that operate with a looping alignment, however, will nearly always erode travel time in at least one direction of travel.

Transit Routes Should Operate Along Arterials

Potential transit users have at least a basic knowledge of an area's arterial road system and use that knowledge as points of reference. In rural Minnesota, major arterials pass through the center of most towns and villages. The operation of bus service along arterials therefore makes transit service more visible as well as easier to figure out and to use. It also makes service faster.

Service Should be Consistent and Operate at Regular Intervals

People can easily remember repeating patterns but have difficulty remembering irregular sequences. For this reason, routes should operate along consistent alignments and at regular intervals (headways). This is true even if the route operates limited departures during certain times of the day, such as commute hours. Thus, even if there are only two trips per day, the departures ideally will be scheduled at 6:15 and then again at 7:15, or potentially 8:15, depending on travel needs.

Services Should be Well Coordinated

In many areas, multiple routes operate through the same corridors or segments of time but to different final destinations. Both CCT and MPT have service – including both deviated fixed routes but also demand response services - that travel along the same corridor. In many cases, these routes are coordinated and reinforce each other. For example, in the City of Willmar, many destinations along the deviated fixed route service are also served by demand response contracted service. This creates multiple opportunities for people to travel between high-demand locations. However, the routes should be coordinated so that the deviated fixed routes are not overlapping with the contracted service and so that riders have access to more trips and the opportunity to use either service.

Service Levels Should be Based on Service Standards

One of the challenges facing CCT and MPT is determining when service should be operated as demand response and when it should be operated as deviated fixed route (recognizing that in

some cases, the difference is very minor). One way to help standardize this decision is to set service guidelines to suggest when service scheduled deviated fixed route service may be more efficiently operated as demand response service. MnDOT performance guidelines provide some suggestions to this; by setting standards for minimally adequate service (see Figure 4-1). Routes that are not meeting set standards may need restructuring.

Service Levels Should Reflect MnDOT Standards

Transit service levels should meet MnDOT's standards for level and type of service to Regional Trade Centers (RTC). As described in Chapter 3, these guidelines determine the amount of rural transit access that should be dedicated to each of the seven types of Regional Trade Center's that were established by MnDOT in 2003. The seven categories are based on the community population, type of economic markets, and market drivers, which include retail, manufacturing, education, health care and other service establishments. When determining how much service each RTC category should have, MnDOT considered several conditions including the location of major trip generators, human service contracts, and travel along major corridors. Any service level changes need to take into account MnDOT's suggestions for the service type, frequency of service, and span of service for each type of Regional Trade Center. The standards are designed to ensure a minimum level of service coverage statewide rather than meet service operating standards.

Service Improvement Opportunities

Transit services operated by CCT, including service available in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties, and MPT are similar. These services include deviated fixed route, demand response and volunteer driver service. There is also some distinction between service that is designed to serve members of the general public as compared with service designed to serve human and health service contractors. The analysis of existing systems suggests a handful of opportunities for service improvements opportunities. Note the service improvement opportunities are intended to represent a list of potential opportunities for discussion purposes. As a result, in an attempt to present the largest universe of potential improvements possible, some options may conflict with each other (i.e. it would be impossible to do both improvements). The goal is for the PAC to discuss these options to determine which ones warrant

1. Increase Service to meet MnDOT's Level of Service Standards for Regional Trade Centers

As discussed in Chapter 3, MnDOT's standards for level of service and type of service to the Regional Trade Centers (RTC) recommend guidelines for service levels. The guidelines are based on a categorization of Minnesota's cities and towns with over 2,500 people into seven types of regional trade centers. Each category has a baseline type, frequency, and span of service that MnDOT recommends. CCT and MPT services are currently oriented around productivity standards, rather than coverage standards. As a result, neither agency is meeting the RTC standards recommended by MnDOT.

In order to meet MnDOT's standards, CCT and MPT would need to increase service levels as shown below. The estimated cost of increasing service to meet MnDOT's requirements was calculated based on the number of hours service would need to increase multiplied by the service cost per hour (Meeker: $60/hour, Renville: $64/hour, Kandiyohi: $48/hour).

As shown in Figure 6-1, meeting the standards set by MnDOT would result in a significant increase in the amount of transit service available in the communities. To meet MnDOT's standards, CCT would need to provide additional deviated fixed route service in Renville County (see recommendations below) and increase weekend day service. It is worth noting that in communities as small as Olivia (2,300 residents, 2010 US Census) the main value of deviated fixed route service is to connect Olivia to other nearby destinations, such as the Renville/Sacred Heart – Olivia - Bird Island route recommended below and/or increasing service to Willmar. This is also the case for Spicer (1,200 residents, 2010 US Census); the value of deviated fixed route service is for connections to and from Spicer and Willmar. Meeting the MnDOT's service standards for Regional Trade Centers is not a low cost endeavor; additional costs would add roughly $577,952 annually to CCT's budget per year. This represents a roughly 24% increase of the budget from approximately $1.8 million to $2.4 million.

Meeting the MnDOT standards would also greatly increase the amount of transit service provided in Meeker County. Similar to CCT, most of the additional service would involve increasing deviated fixed route service in Dassel and Litchfield and most of the value in the increased service would be to create connections between Dassel and Litchfield. Some of this could be accomplished by reversing the existing service between Litchfield and Hutchinson so that the route operates out and back along the same corridor. Other service additions include expanding service hours and span of service. A rough estimate of the increased resources put the additional cost at $620,380 per year; this would increase the agency budget from roughly $820,000 to $1.4 million, a roughly 43% increase.

Figure 6-1 Service Level Increases to Meet MnDOT's RTC Standards

City/Town	Current Service Levels	MnDOT Recommended Increase (per year)	Cost of Service Increase (per year)
Dassel	Flexible route, weekdays only, 4 hours	Additional 3,248 hours	$194,880
	No demand response service	Additional 4,248 hours	$254,880
Litchfield	Flexible route, weekdays only, 8.5 hours	Additional 2,123 hours	$127,380
	Demand response, daily, 12 hours on weekdays, 5 hours on weekend days	Additional 728 hours	$43,680
Olivia	Flexible route, weekdays only, 8.5 hours	Additional 2,123 hours	$135,872
	Demand response, daily, 12 hours on weekdays, no weekend service	Additional 1,248 hours	$79,872
Spicer	Flexible route, weekdays only, 6 hours	Additional 2,748 hours	$131,904

	Demand response, daily, 12 hours on weekdays, no weekend service	Additional 1,248 hours	$59,904
Willmar	Flexible route, daily, 9 hours on the weekday and weekend days	Additional 2,124 hours	$101,952
	Demand response, daily, 12 hours on weekdays, 8.5 hours on weekend days	Additional 1,426 hours	$68,448

2. Create Structured Demand Response Service to Outlying Communities

MPT has had success structuring service to the outlying communities on set days of the weeks and organizing travel needs around specific trip times. The routes are scheduled as demand response services, but are designed to service the outlying communities of Cosmos, Eden Valley and Watkins on specific days of the week and at specific times. CCT has a similar route that serves New London and Spicer. These routes create efficiencies for MPT in terms of allocating resources and ensuring the outlying portions of the county have regular access to transit service.

CCT does not currently have structured demand response service in Renville County, but there may be opportunities to create these types of routes to Hector, and/or potentially Franklin and Fairfax. There are also opportunities to operate along major thorough fares, such as southbound on Highway 71 to make sure connections are as fast and direct as possible. This routing may also open up and provide service to other parts of the county. In all cases, structured service should be well publicized and clearly communicated with existing and potential riders (see also Public Information and Marketing).

Implementation Concerns (Costs and Benefits)

Creating more structured service, which requires riders to schedule their travel around certain days of the week or times of the day, even if it continues to operate as demand response (i.e. door to door) service, will likely be met by some resistance from riders accustomed to traveling when they desire. The cost to individual riders needs to be balanced against potential benefits to the system overall; by organizing and structuring service there should be more service available to more riders. In addition, experience suggests that over time riders will get used to the system and organize their travel around it.

3. Expand Deviated Fixed Route Service

CCT in Kandiyohi County operates a handful of "true" deviated fixed routes that consist of published routes with clear timetables and scheduled arrival and departure times. These routes consist of local and regional services and help organize the service, especially for members of the public. CCT in Renville County does not operate any deviated fixed routes, although the Olivia – Willmar is a scheduled service. It primarily lacks published information about how the service works. Likewise, MPT has a handful of services that are loosely scheduled as deviated fixed routes; these routes are scheduled around contracted service and lack published information.

Renville County

In the case of CCT, Renville County, the service between Olivia and Willmar could be strengthened by formalizing its operation as a scheduled service. While there are already a handful of scheduled services, understanding these routes is difficult for riders not calling to request a trip (these individuals are scheduled onto an existing trip). Existing demand suggests there is potential for between four and five daily round trips; trips may be scheduled so that two trips are available in the morning and afternoon, plus one trip around the lunch hour.

There is also potential for deviated fixed route service along Highway 212 between Sacred Heart, Renville, Olivia and Bird Island. Current demand suggests there is considerable demand between these locations, so service could be organized around a handful of departure times. The route could be scheduled so passengers could transfer to the Olivia – Willmar route. This way of scheduling service would also make it easier for passengers to travel between Renville/Sacred Heart and Hector as opposed to Olivia.

Meeker County

MPT, as discussed, has several routes that operate as deviated fixed route but are not publicized as such. Furthermore, all of these routes are regional; there is no deviated fixed route service in the City of Litchfield. One opportunity, therefore, would be to create a scheduled service within the City of Litchfield that provides connections between major housing areas and Wal-Mart and/or the Meeker Memorial Hospital. This route may include travel from the Group Home and Lincoln Apartments west of Highway 12, potentially crossing Highway 12 to serve Emmaus Place and housing on the west side of town, continuing to Econofoods and the Wal-Mart Supercenter. The route would be relatively short and could be scheduled as hourly service on weekdays; so that the first trips are organized around Econofood and Wal-Mart opening hours (say 9:00 am or 10:00 am).

Implementation Concerns (Costs and Benefits)

Barriers to implementing more deviated fixed route are not onerous, especially in the case of the Olivia-Willmar service and loosely structured routes operated by MPT. These routes are already largely functioning as deviated fixed routes and only need additional structure and more information to be formalized. The cost of this step is relatively small and should be considered regardless.

In cases where true demand response service would be structured as deviated fixed routes, the barriers are more substantial but still manageable. In most cases, riders would still receive door-to-door service. Minor adjustments around departure times, however, may need to be accommodated. Riders may also need to share their trip with additional riders. As discussed, costs to individual riders must be balanced against benefits to the overall system; organizing and structuring service will help CCT and MPT reduce costs, increase productivity and potentially expand service.

4. Use Demand Response Service and Deviated Fixed Route Service to Provide Medical Assistance Trips

Currently all medical assistance operated by both CCT and MPT are provided by volunteer drivers. As discussed, this has potential to make the system some efficient because volunteer trips are billed based on mileage rather than hourly, so longer distance,

time consuming trips are less expensive. The data suggests, however, that many of the medical assistance trips are shorter distance and many are within county or within the service area. As CCT and MPT strengthen their regional service network with scheduled service between major destinations (i.e. Olivia – Willmar and Litchfield – Willmar), there are likely more opportunities to assign medical trips to these routes or on other within county demand response service. Assigning trips to existing services and routes rather than volunteer drivers may expand service availability and by carrying more riders, reduce overall costs.

Implementation Concerns (Costs and Benefits)

In general, administrative rules regarding non-emergency medical transportation funded by Medicaid can be challenging. As a result, there are likely administrative and billing barriers to using more traditional transit services to provide MA trips, although those are not widely understood at this time. Other barriers reflect those cited previously – increased service coordination will mean some trips may be shared and riders may need to accommodate this change, either by traveling with others, adjusting their departure times and/or traveling in a different type of vehicle.

Potential benefits, however, include efficiencies through increased service productivity. Diversifying how trips are provided will also reduce the strain on the existing volunteer driver network, which is already challenged (see SWOT analysis).

5. Coordinate Volunteer Driver Trips

As discussed, medical assistance transportation in Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties is provided by volunteer drivers. These trips are almost exclusively single rider trips, such that one volunteer driver transports one individual. In some cases, this level of service is necessary, for a variety of reasons, including the sensitivity associated with the medical trip, or the need to arrive or depart at specific times.

At the same time, however, the data shows that there are clusters of destinations common across many medical assistance trips. These destinations include local facilities such as the Willmar Regional Cancer Center, Meeker Hospital in Litchfield; regional destinations such as St. Cloud Hospital/Medical Center and Silver Lake clinics and longer distance destinations in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Given many destinations are common across all counties, there may be opportunities for trips to be coordinated, so that for example the vehicle traveling to Saint Cloud that originates in Renville County picks up riders in Meeker County en route. Coordinated trips may be provided by volunteer drivers of agency vehicles.

Implementation Concerns (Costs and Benefits)

Barriers to implementation are likely to be ways to share costs (i.e. if a Renville County volunteer or agency vehicle picks up a Meeker travelers, how is that driver rewarded) and the ability to share information easily so that as riders in Meeker County (for example) request a trip, the dispatcher can see relevant trips already scheduled in by other transit agencies. Benefits to implementation are lower trip costs, increased productivity and less reliance on the volunteer driver network.

TECHNOLOGY, FACILITIES AND CAPITAL RESOURCES

The service assessment and SWOT analysis also lead to a handful of improvement opportunities related to technology, facilities and capital resources. These improvement opportunities primarily relate to ways that individual agencies can collaborate more closely. They are relevant to CCT as the merger takes shape and advance. They are also relevant to MPT as potential opportunities to collaborate with CCT.

1. Create Consistent Scheduling Systems

CCT (Renville and Kandiyohi) and MPT use the same software (RouteMatch) to support trip scheduling. However, each agency has the software programmed differently and the programs are not linked electronically so they can see each others' schedules. Although unlikely to be as simple as it sounds the agencies may work together to create a uniform approach to programming and using RouteMatch. The uniform approach may be negotiated by CCT internally and/or with MPT but should reflect best practices, such as scheduling service by type rather than vehicle.

This administrative step creates several benefits by 1) developing a support network for new or inexperienced users of RouteMatch; 2) sharing staff across agencies, if/as needed; and 3) organizing systems so trip data can be shared and coordinated. Consistent with streamlining the scheduling systems, CCT and/or MPT should create similar scheduling procedures so dispatchers follow similar steps when they schedule trips.

2. Streamline Trip Booking Systems

CCT (Renville and Kandiyohi) and MPT do not currently use the same telephone or email systems to schedule trips. As part of the merger, it is likely that CCT will develop a shared telephone and email system that can be used by both parts of the agency. This will help ensure trips can be scheduled out of either office and allows staff to work collaboratively. It should also create efficiencies if CCT wants to improve customer systems, by potentially (for example) expanding reservation hours or create support networks. Uniform systems should allow staff in either office answer phones, respond to email and schedule trips for either Renville or Kandiyohi residents.

3. Coordinate Vehicle Replacement and Maintenance Plans

Both CCT and MPT have well managed fleets. There are opportunities to coordinate both vehicle replacement and vehicle maintenance systems.

CCT and MPT will be replacing vehicles in the short term; vehicles are likely purchased from a state contract. There may be administrative benefits from coordinating vehicle purchases. Larger potential benefits accrue, however, when the fleet replacement plans are coordinated, to ensure the individual agencies always have access to reliable vehicles, when vehicles need repair or are otherwise out of commission. There are also opportunities to diversify the fleet so agencies can employ smaller or larger vehicles based on need.

Coordinating vehicle maintenance may also produce benefits, especially for heavier duty, more occasional maintenance work. Sharing resources, so that vehicles based in Renville may be maintained in Kandiyohi (for example) may also make maintenance easier.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MARKETING

For people to be able to use transit, they must first understand where and when it's offered and how to use it. Offering clear, easy to understand and readily available transit information is critical to attracting people to the system, encouraging them to ride more, and having greater satisfaction in services offered. Moreover, advertising the service offerings in ways that highlight the benefits to the individual can attract new riders and encourage existing riders to use transit more often.

Public transit typically serves a very broad cross-section of an area's residents, workers, and visitors. Because different people access, use, and process information in different ways, transit systems must deliver information in a number of different ways. For example, many older adults are not computer-literate, and thus the provision of information via the web will not reach many older residents; information must instead be distributed via printed information, telephone, and radio. Similarly, people with low income may be able to use the internet, but do not have regular access to a computer. On the other hand, younger riders rely primarily on the internet and mobile applications to receive information. For transit systems to reach the people that they are there to serve, it is essential that they provide effective information in ways that will reach all potential riders.

A review of national case studies in public information and marketing helps provide an understanding of the minimum standards and best practices in public information. Adopting minimum standards or identifying desirable best practices could help Central Community Transit (CCT) and Meeker Public Transit (MPT) to:

- Upgrade the quality of public information products (website, schedule handouts, rider guides, etc.)
- Improve the user-friendliness
- Make information about the two agencies serving the region more consistent
- Widen the appeal of transit to new market demographic segments
- Provide better customer service

Current Public Information and Marketing Systems

The need for improved transit information systems in the study area was identified in the SWOT analysis and is also discussed in the previous sections. The need for more, different and better information and marketing systems was also identified through discussions with stakeholder and the individual transit systems.

Central Community Transit (CCT)

There is no CCT website describing the services offered in Kandiyohi and Renville Counties. KAT and Renville Heartland Express have separate websites for the former services. The Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) website (www.katbus.org) provides some basic information including route schedules, rider policies, an overview on the types of services offered, eligibility for the senior transportation program, and contact information. But the KAT website is also missing some basic information, including fares and route maps. The information on the paper is outdated and doesn't match the information on the website. There is no mention on the KAT website about consolidation with Renville County.

Figure 6-2 KAT Bus Website

Route schedules and rider policies are also available as paper handouts at the KAT offices, although the information is not branded in a consistent and coherent way and would be difficult for first-time riders to understand how to ride.

The Renville Heartland Express website (www.co.renville.mn.us/services/transportation/index) has fare information, hours of operation, contact information, and a route schedule. The Renville Heartland Express website is missing some basic information such as rider policies and route maps.

CCT's marketing efforts are also still separated between the two former transit agencies. KAT marketing efforts include:

- Advertisements in the local newspaper
- Radio advertising
- Promotional items, such as pens and clips
- Willmar downtown bus stop reader board
- Information on the sides and backs of the KAT (now CCT) buses

Renville marketing efforts are similar:

- Advertisements on Heartland Express (now CCT) buses and benches
- Radio and newspaper advertising
- Attending local events, such as county and city parades

Meeker Public Transit (MPT)

Information about Meeker Public Transit is hidden within the "senior living" tab of the Ecumen Litchfield website (http://www.ecumenoflitchfield.org/housing-services/#wellness-center). The Meeker Public Transit website contains the operating hours, contact information, and some basic guidance for making a reservation for a ride, but is missing more detailed route information, rider guides and a map of the Willmar-Litchfield Route.

MPT provides a rider guide, information about the volunteer driver program and preschool transportation, and the cancelation policy in paper handouts.

The MPT transit director markets MPT services by attending local events, such as pre-school open houses, the Chamber of Commerce Business Expo, senior day at the Meeker County Fair, the Litchfield Watercade parade and other parades in outlying communities. MPT brochures are translated into Spanish to enhance awareness of available services in the Hispanic communities.

Figure 6-3 MPT Website within the Ecumen Litchfield Website

Recommendations

As described above, CCT and MPT are both lacking sufficient online and offline public information that allow current and perspective riders to find what they need to know in order to ride available services. It is recommended that the systems implement the following public information and marketing elements:

Figure 6-4 Recommendations for Improvements

Type	Central Community Transit	Meeker Public Transit
Website	▪ Combined CCT website that connects the old URLS of KAT Bus and Renville ▪ New CCT branding and design scheme ▪ Rider-friendly schedules and maps, including creating route names that reflect trip destinations ▪ System map ▪ Overview of services ▪ Fares ▪ Service updates on the home page ▪ Rider policies ▪ Employment information ▪ Bus Advertisements	▪ Separate website or separate page on Ecumen site ▪ System map and Willmar-Litchfield route map and schedule ▪ Overview of services ▪ Rider policies ▪ Fares ▪ Service updates

Handouts	▪ System Map ▪ Route Schedules and Maps including creating route names that reflect trip destinations ▪ Rider Policies	▪ Route Schedule and Map including creating route names that reflect trip destinations ▪ Rider Policies
Optional Features	▪ Google Transit Integration ▪ Online reservations system for reservations, modifications, and cancellations	▪ Online reservations system for reservations, modifications, and cancellations
Social Media Marketing	▪ Facebook Page, Twitter for service updates	▪ Facebook Page, Twitter for service updates
Other marketing efforts	▪ Continue current efforts with rebranded CCT colors and logos ▪ Add Spanish translation of brochures and website	▪ Continue current efforts ▪ Add radio and newspaper advertisements

Best Practices for Rural Transit Public Information

There are two types of basic service information that transit systems typically provide:

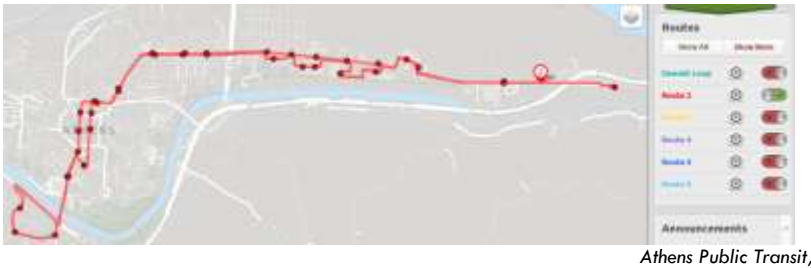
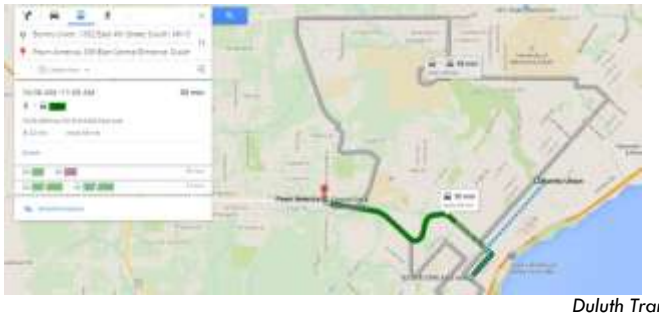
1. Route and schedule information (maps, schedules, and information on connections)
2. Basic information on how to ride (fare policy, stop locations, accommodation of riders with disabilities, accommodation of bicycles, etc.)

This information is delivered in a variety of ways (see Figure 2):

- **Printed Maps, Schedules and Ride Guides.** The traditional ways to provide this information is through printed maps and schedules and "rider guides." These are usually made available onboard buses, at important community destinations such as libraries, schools and senior centers, at transit stops and transfer locations, and at the transit agency offices and service outlets.
- **Customer Service Representatives.** In addition to printed materials, most transit agencies also have "live" customer information systems, where customer service representatives are available by telephone for questions about service availability, schedules, and fares. Customer service representatives are extremely important to deviated fixed route and demand response systems because these services require that people reserve trips in advance.
- **Web-based Materials.** More recently, the importance of providing information on the internet has become increasingly important. Most transit systems nationally provide service information on their websites where users can either view it electronically or print it remotely.
- **Real-time service information.** This information can be provided via signage at stations and stops, via traditional websites, and via smart phone mobile websites and apps and provides information about service delays and arrival times.
- **Online Trip Planners (Google Transit).** As part of providing information online, most large and many small transit systems now offer route and schedule information

through Google Transit. Many larger transit systems provide their Google Transit data publicly for use in the development of third party smart phone apps.

Figure 6-5 Public Information Examples

System Map	*LaCross Municipal Transit Authority, Wisconsin*
Printed Schedules and Route Maps	*Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA)*
Website	*Athens Public Transit, Ohio*
Real-Time Information	 *Athens Public Transit, Ohio*
Google Transit	 *Duluth Transit Authority, Minnesota*

Best Practice Example

Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR)

Even small rural transit systems can benefit from well-thought-out and designed public information systems. ACTR is small transit system that serves Addison County, Vermont, with most services focused on Middlebury. ACTR also provides a wide variety of information outside the standard maps, schedules, and fare information, including:

- A printed Rider's Guide that presents information on all ACTR services, including route maps and schedules, and "how to ride" information
- An attractive, easily navigated website (www.actr-vt.org) that provides service alerts, Google Trip Planner, and rider guides (see Figure 6-6)
- Information on regional connections
- Updates via Twitter
- A Facebook page

ACTR also uses its website to recruit volunteer drivers and solicit sponsorships and donations.

Figure 6-6 ACTR Website

Website

A successful transit website will accomplish multiple goals: allow users to get information about services, increase the profile of the transit system and provide a one-stop shop for information about services and service updates. The following section describes key characteristics of an effective transit website, including some examples of successful sites from other cities.

A number of minimum standards have emerged from TCRP studies *TCRP Synthesis 43: Effective Use of Transit Websites* and *TCRP Report 92: Strategies for Improved Traveler Information* (referenced at the end of this report) and industry experience. In addition to the minimum standards, the best websites go above-and-beyond to provide additional features.

Figure 6-7 Minimum Website Standards and Added Features

Minimum Standards	Added Features
Agency information, including background and history, and basic operating statistics (to increase public familiarity with the system)	Real-time information on vehicle locations and "next bus in …" content
System map and route-by-route schedule information and maps	Trip planning service, either through a function on the website or through integration with Google Transit.
Information about specialized transportation services, such as ADA, Medicaid and Elderly and Disabled services, including: ▪ Policies on eligibility ▪ Usage guidelines ▪ Application forms.	Integration with social media such as Twitter and Facebook to provide service alerts and updates on transit initiatives.
Fare information	Customized website for mobile devices
Service alerts	Ability to purchase tickets and passes and reserve a ride on demand response service
A printable rider guide to present basic information on how to use the services	Customizable e-mail or SMS text alerts for service disruptions, agency news, etc.

Source: TCRP studies TCRP Synthesis 43: Effective Use of Transit Websites and TCRP Report 92: Strategies for Improved Traveler Information

In addition to the criteria identified above, the best websites will have:

Figure 6-8 Website Best Practices

Element	Best Practices
Accessibility	Large font/uncluttered for people with visual impairments. Designed to be readable by mobile web-enabled devices.
Style / Design	Clean, spacious visual appearance. High-contrast color scheme - Black on white or white on dark color suggested. Sans serif font recommended. Pages are consistent in use of font, font point size, and graphics.
Navigation	Quick links to system map, routes, fares, rider guides, service alerts, contact info Drop down lists often used to aid navigation. All major content pages are reachable from any other page. Minor content pages or sub-category are no more than one nested level deep (two if necessary in limited cases). Consistent site navigation scheme among pages (e.g. same dropdown list or navigation link set on each page). Pages labeled and identified consistently throughout website.
Maps and Schedules	Available in a readily printable format - for example, letter-sized pages in PDF format -- as well as in a JPG format that loads within the website itself. If maps are in color, they should be easily understood even if printed in black and white.
Location	Transit website should have its own domain name, separate from any other services, to enhance branding and navigation or have a discrete page within another website
Announcements and Maintenance	Announcements (e.g. service interruptions, events) kept up to date and old announcements deleted. New information posted in a format consistent with the rest of the website. Site periodically reviewed for dead links and missing information.

Below are some examples of rural transit agencies that follow these criteria.

Figure 6-9 Rural Transit Website Best Practices

CARTS Transit District, San Marcos City, Texas (http://www.ridecarts.com/)

Marin Transit, California (http://www.marintransit.org/)

Shore Transit, Eastern Shore, Maryland (http://www.shoretransit.org/)

Cascades East Transit, Central Oregon (http://www.cascadeseasttransit.com/)

Maps, Schedules, and Rider Guides

System Maps

System maps illustrate a transit system's entire network of services. Riders reference system maps to help them plan and travel within the transit system. System maps should be available as an actual printed map (usually onboard transit vehicles or at transit customer service centers) and also as a digital map suitable for viewing and printing on a home computer or mobile device. They may also note where connections are available with other transit systems.

CCT and MPT serve a large three-county area and collaborate on one route that travels between Willmar and Litchfield, which makes development of system map trickier than other more condensed transit systems. Similarly, in Vermont, Burlington's CCTA and Montpelier's GMTA each serve large geographical areas and they also collaborate on regional service between the two

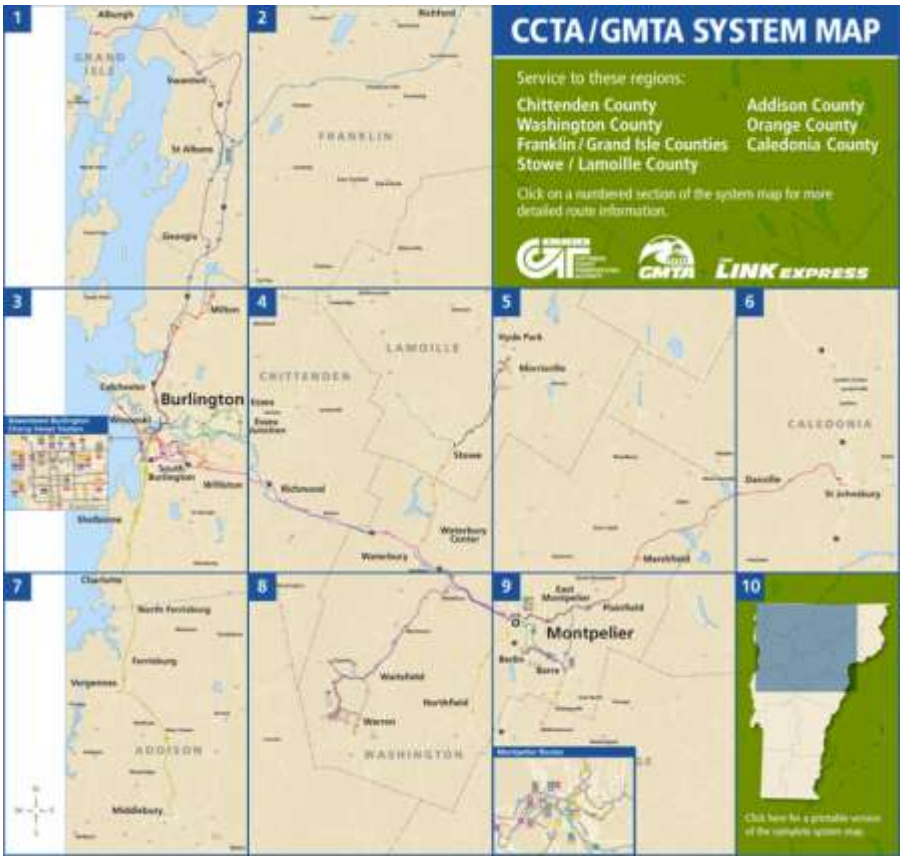
cities. In total, service extends approximately 80 miles from east to west and 80 miles from north to south. To display all of this information on a single map, the two agencies publish on their websites (www.cctaride.org and www.gmtaride.org) a large overview map that users can then drill down into for more detailed maps.[2] As shown in Figure 6-10, the first page is a large system wide map designed to provide orientation and an overview of available services. From there, users click on "tiles" that link to detailed area maps.

Route-by-Route Maps and Schedules

Route-by-route schedules with accompanying route maps are a second basic type of information that transit systems provide. Some transit systems, especially larger ones, produce individual "schedule cards" for each route; other transit systems, most often smaller ones, include these on their system maps. Schedules are usually available in printed form onboard transit vehicles and at key locations. They also appear on agency websites in a printable format.

Although the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority is a much larger system, CCT and MPT could learn from their straightforward and easy-to-read "pocket schedules" which contain fare information, a guide to using the flex route system, and side-by-side route map and schedule (see Figure 6-11)

Figure 6-10 Combined CCTA / GMTA Overview System Map



[2] This is the same approach used by the MBTA on its web system map, but encompasses a larger area and the services provided by multiple agencies.

Figure 6-11 MVTA "Pocket Schedules"

Rider Guides

Rider Guides typically provide information for first-time riders who may or may not be familiar with using transit services. CCT and MPT should have comprehensive rider guides available on their websites and a more compact and abridged version in print. The print guides should be well-designed to contain a lot of information in a relatively small space. The rider guides should contain the following:

- How to use the schedule
- Fares and passes and where /how to purchase them
- How to make a reservation
- Eligibility
- Route deviations
- Rider policies: pick up window, wait time, no-show policy, seat belt policy, ride rules

Optional Features

Google Transit Implementation

Google Transit integrates transit routes, stops, and schedules within Google Maps, and it allows users to plan transit trips from within Google Maps. Use of Google Transit has become increasingly common, and it is often the first place that younger riders will go to find transit information. Google Transit can also be a source of information for trips that require use of services provided by different transit systems, since it is not tied to any individual system. Google Transit can also be accessed via smart phones.

While participation in the Google Transit program is "free," it does require an agency to provide Google with service data in a specialized Google Transit Feed format on an ongoing basis. Therefore it does require staff time to participate in the program and offer this service. It is recommended that CCT utilize Google Transit for their public routes.

Online Reservations

Figure 6-12 Intercity Dial-A-Lift Online Reservations Log in Screen

Reserving a ride online is a new functionality that is just starting to catch on for small to medium sized transit systems. As the Baby Boomer generation ages, use of technology will become more and more widespread because this age group is comfortable using computers and mobile applications in daily life. Online ride reservations systems allow customers to access their customer profile information, reserve a trip, view and edit trip reservations, and download and print their trip information through a restricted-access, web-based program that is linked through the transit system's website. Users receive updates via email.

RouteMatch, which is the reservations software both CCT and MPT use, has an online reservations portal that can be added to their basic reservations software. InterCity Transit in Eastern Washington State offers online-reservations for their Dial-A-Lift program through the RouteMatch portal (see Figure 6-12). Customers register for the program and log in with their private password. They can search for their origin and destination addresses, choose a time for pick-up, and answer questions regarding their trip.

Marketing

Social Media Marketing

Figure 6-13 Duluth Transit Authority Facebook Page

It is well-established that Facebook and Twitter are one of the primary ways that the younger generations communicate with the world. Companies, agencies, and non-profits use these media platforms to market their products, establish a brand, receive public comments and feedback, and keep the public abreast of any changes and announcements. Most large and medium transit agencies have had a presence on Facebook and/or Twitter for several years. Smaller transit agencies who want to appeal to the younger generation are starting to also jump onto this trend.

The 2012 TCRP report 99Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation explores the use of social media among transit agencies and documents successful practices. The key lessons learned from the agencies interviewed for this report are as follows:

- Keep social media in perspective: Social media will reach a small percentage of users so it should be well-integrated with other types of public information.

- Find the right voice: The language of social media tends to be informal and conversational; agencies should avoid jargon and embrace humor.
- Listen, listen, listen: Social media can provide agencies with unfiltered customer feedback and agencies should listen to their riders to learn what they are doing right and wrong.
- Respect the strengths of different types of social media: For example, Facebook will contain more detailed information about the service and Twitter should be used only for immediate communications, such as service updates.
- Just get started: All the agencies who implemented social media reported that social media is worth trying.

Duluth Transit Authority utilizes Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to communicate with their users as shown in Figure 6-13.

Public Information Resources

For more information on industry standards and best practices in the field of public information, see:

- TCRP Synthesis 99: Uses of Social Media in Public Transportation; a Synthesis of Transit Practice, Transit Cooperative Research Program, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. (2012) http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_syn_99.pdf
- *TCRP Synthesis 43: Effective Use of Transit Websites,* Transit Cooperative Research Program, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. (2002): http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tsyn43.pdf
- *TCRP Report 92: Strategies for Improved Traveler Information*, Transit Cooperative Research Program, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. (2003): http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_92.pdf
- *Passenger Information Services: A Guidebook for Transit Systems*, Transit Cooperative Research Program, *TCRP Report 45:* National Academy Press, Washington, D.C. (1999): http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_45.pdf
- *Designing Printed Transit Information Materials: A Guidebook for Transit Service Providers*, Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (2008): www.nctr.usf.edu/pdf/77710guidebook.pdf
- *A Multidisciplinary Approach Toward Improving Bus Schedule Readability*. Journal of Public Transportation, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2006. http://www.nctr.usf.edu/jpt/pdf/JPT%209-4%20Sollohub.pdf

KANDIYOHI, RENVILLE, MEEKER TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING STUDY

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM #3

July 2015

NELSON NYGAARD

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) Office of Transit is leading a statewide effort to encourage coordination, cooperation, and consolidation (the "three Cs") among Greater Minnesota's transit providers. The interest in cooperation and coordination among transit providers, especially small operators, reflects a variety of interests and concerns, including a desire to accommodate riders' needs to travel regionally as well as a desire to increase service efficiency and effectiveness. MnDOT has set five primary goals for this effort:

- Improve customer service and seamlessness in terms of fares, service coverage, and informational tools
- Increase the availability of transit services, with potential new destinations and expanded service hours that come from eliminating any duplicative services
- Improve cost effectiveness for the agencies operating services through cost savings, shared expenses, more flexible use of available resources and equipment, economies of scale, and freeing up resources
- Find economic and facilities development opportunities due to improved buying power and the potential for larger scale developments
- Improve relationships between organizations by way of shared governance and multijurisdictional political support

As part of the overall transit restructuring effort, MnDOT hired a team of consultants led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates to develop a restructuring plan for Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker counties, located in south central Minnesota, approximately two hours west of the Twin Cities. This tri-county area has already made strides in propagating the "three Cs." As of January 1, 2015, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville County Heartland Express consolidated services and formed a new transit provider for both counties, called Central Community Transit (CCT). Regional leaders are currently discussing a merger of Meeker County Public Transit into the CCT network.

The Nelson\Nygaard team's role is to support this process by collecting and analyzing existing conditions, including service needs and potential improvement opportunities. The team will consider and evaluate consolidation models that offer potential to better serve identified needs and challenges. The team will also work with stakeholders to create a preferred strategy and develop an implementation plan to guide the region towards this preferred strategy.

This technical memo is the third in a series of working papers that is intended to guide the Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker region through the restructuring process. In particular, this memo focuses on the first three important elements for advancing consolidation between the three counties including 1) organizational alternatives; 2) a consolidation service plan; and 3) a uniform fare structure.

The memo is organized around three chapters immediately following this introductory section:

Chapter 2: Organizational and Governance Structures – identifies four alternatives for organizing the administrative structure and service delivery options, including the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Chapter 3: Consolidated Service Improvement Plan – presents a consolidated service network for the tri-county area consisting of several types of services. It also includes marketing and public information recommendations and technology enhancements.

Chapter 4: Uniform Fare Structure and Policies – outlines fare policy goals for a consolidated system and proposes two options for a uniform fare structure based on distance travelled. Existing fares for a series of sample trips are compared to proposed fares to make it easy for the reader to understand the alternative fare structures.

2 ORGANIZATIONAL AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

An important element of the Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Transit Restructuring Study is to review the current organizational structure of existing transit services in the tri-county area and support further coordination, cooperation, and consolidation (the "three Cs") with the goal of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of transit services. The tri-county area has already made strides in propagating the "three Cs." As of January 1, 2015, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville County Heartland Express consolidated services and formed a new transit provider for both counties, called Central Community Transit (CCT).

Since the merger of Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville County Heartland Express occurred less than six months ago, it is important to consider lessons learned and benefits from these recent experiences. According to Technical Memorandum #1, the majority of stakeholders that were involved in the merger of KAT and Heartland Express services into CCT reported that the process was professional and relatively easy. Key objectives of the merger that were met include maintaining existing levels of service, preventing loss of jobs or reduction in pay, and keeping service costs relatively stable. The biggest challenges with the merger related to employee pay and benefits although the outcome was positive. Most importantly, the merger did not impact the riding public and, from their perspective, the level and quality of service remained the same.

According to many stakeholders, the anticipated benefits of moving forward with Meeker County joining CCT are less service duplication and more efficient delivery of services. Potential drawbacks are that there may not be any cost savings at least in the short-term, although consolidation can provide "more bang for the buck." Another concern about a merger between CCT and MPT relates to local control over the service. This is expressed as a fear that the current personalized services and local decision making could be lost and service quality could suffer. These "lessons learned" and concerns about the future service will be given careful consideration when moving ahead with plans to consolidate transit services in the tri-county area.

At the May 11, 2015 meeting, the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) acknowledged that that the merger of the two transit systems in Renville and Kandiyohi counties is going well. They are interested in CCT consolidating with MPT and are seeking guidance for the next step in the consolidation process. A key consideration is the organizational structure and identifying practical alternatives for merging Meeker Public Transit (MPT) into the CCT network.

ORGANIZATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

Four different alternatives are presented for consolidating transit services. Each alternative calls for full consolidation of all service types inclusive of deviated fixed route, demand response, and contracted service. One system consolidating CCT with MPT would require a single administrative structure and policy board that combines all transit services in a way that allows it to operate as one system.

The variations in each option address the administrative staffing and delivery of services. A description of each option is discussed below including the major advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Joint Powers Agreement

The existing Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) established in August of 2014 between Kandiyohi and Renville Counties and the City of Willmar would need to be modified to include Meeker County. An amended JPA that includes Meeker County would succeed Meeker County Public Transit's existing operation and allow for one transit system to serve the tri-county region.

Under the 2014 JPA, a policy board was established consisting of two members each from the Kandiyohi County Board, City of Willmar Council, and Renville County Board, as well as two elected officials, one from each county, totaling eight board members. With one consolidated tri-county system, an expanded policy board would have to be established — one that provides equitable representation from each county.

To include representatives from Meeker County, the Joint Powers Board (JPB) could be expanded to an 11-member board by adding two representatives from the Meeker County Board plus one other elected official from Meeker County communities. Alternatively, the JPB could choose to reduce the total number of Board members to one representative from each County Board plus one other elected member for a seven-member Joint Powers Board. Regardless of its size and make-up, the Board would have the authority to expend funds for a tri-county public transit system.

In addition to the Joint Powers Board, a 14-member Transit System Operations Board was established to oversee the development of an annual transit services plan, monitor service effectiveness, and conduct other related tasks. Representatives from community and business groups and consumers in Meeker County should be added to this board to ensure their county needs and perspectives are represented.

Alternative 1: Consolidated Service Plan: Mix of In-House and Third Party Contract for Operations and Maintenance

Under this alternative, all transit services including regional services, local circulation and intercommunity routes, and structured dial-a-ride in the tri-county area would be consolidated under CCT. Day–to-day operations would be a mix of in-house operations and a third party contract. Service currently operated in-house by CCT would remain unchanged. The Ripley Transport contract that provides drivers for Meeker County Transit service as well as maintains and houses the vehicles could be extended. The current contract between Ripley Transport and Ecumen (dba/Meeker Public Transit) runs through December 31, 2015 with an option to extend the contract for one year. To exercise this option, Ecumen would need to notify Ripley 90 days in advance of the termination date.

To continue operating under a third party contract in Meeker County, the newly consolidated system would need to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) after the one-year extension. Under this option, the RFP would solicit proposals to operate service and maintain vehicles in Meeker County.

With any contract for transit service, it is important that quality standards and expected performance be spelled out. Some contracts provide monetary incentives for meeting and/or exceeding key performance measures as well as penalties for non-performance. Key performance measures could include:

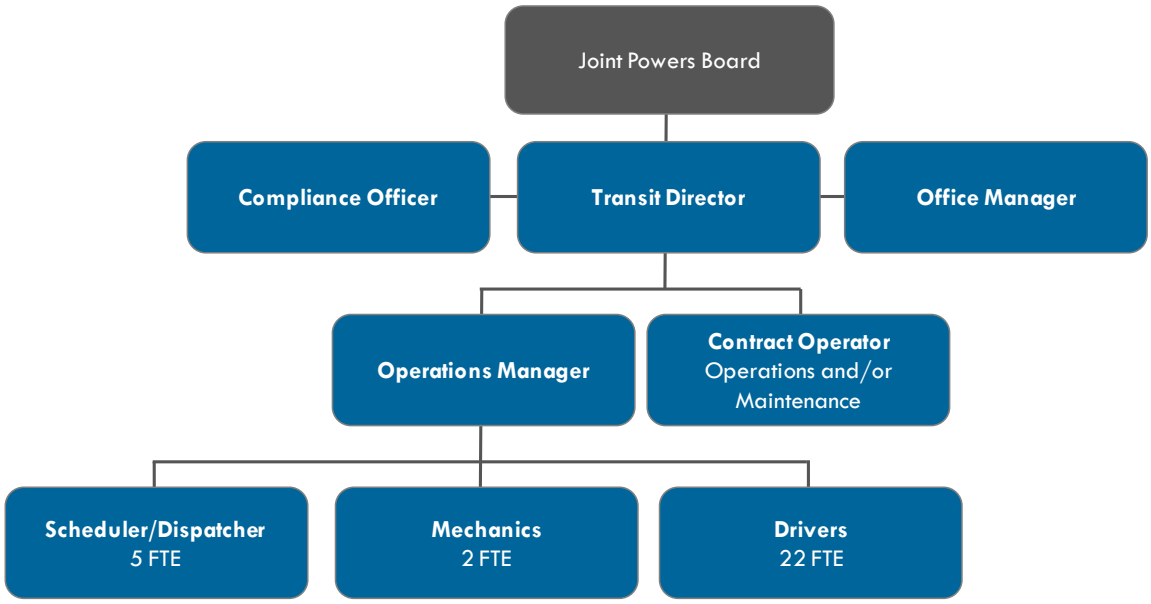
- On-time performance
- Allowable number of road calls
- Safety standards
- Vehicle maintenance
- Vehicle appearance and cleanliness

A contract agreement should also specify reporting requirements to ensure appropriate oversight and to allow for monitoring performance trends. The current Ripley contract calls for monthly reports documenting passenger data, miles and hours of operation, customer complaints, and equipment maintenance records. The contract does not include performance targets or standards.

Under this alternative, the administrative staff of Ecumen would join the CCT administrative staff. In the short-term, staff could continue to be housed in separate locations as they are today. In the longer term, it would be desirable for all administrative staff to be physically housed in the same building to enable regular face-to-face communication and ease of information sharing.

An organizational chart showing the proposed relationship between the parties is presented in Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 Consolidated Service Plan with Mix of In-House and Third Party Contract



A summary of the advantages and disadvantages of this option are presented in Figure 2-2 below.

Figure 2-2 Major Advantages and Disadvantages: Consolidated Service Plan with Mix of In-House and Third Party Contract

Advantages	Disadvantages
▪ Improves and simplifies transit information and makes it easier from the passenger's perspective ▪ Unifies services in tri-county region under a single brand (CCT) ▪ Provides a well-coordinated public image for public transit ▪ Reduces or eliminates reporting requirements for Ecumen (dba Meeker Public Transit) ▪ Enables one uniform fare structure and simplifies fare payment from the passenger's perspective – Supports Meeker County Commissioner's preference to maintain third party contract – Provides opportunity for "back up" of administrative functions	▪ Requires modification of organizational structure and some personnel assignments ▪ Requires a fair and equitable human resource system for all administrative employees ▪ Requires changes to procedures and personnel policies to ensure consistency ▪ May lose some economies of scale with mix of in-house and third party contract

Alternative 2: Consolidated Service Plan: Mix of In-House and third Party Contract with Option to Split Operations and Maintenance

This alternative is a variation of Alternative 1. Rather than the newly established JPA (as the contracting agency) entering into a contract agreement with a third party to provide both day-to-day operations and vehicle maintenance, this alternative provides an option to separate these two functions. That is, proposers (or contractors) would be requested to submit separate cost estimates and proposals for service operations and vehicle maintenance. This would enable the contracting agency to evaluate each service separately and elect to enter into a third party contractual arrangement for one or both services. Day-to-day service in Renville and Kandiyohi counties would continue as an in-house operation.

Under this alternative, all administrative personnel would be part of the CCT system. The organizational structure in this alternative would essentially be the same as Alternative 1.

Figure 2-3 below summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of this option.

Figure 2-3 Major Advantages and Disadvantages: Mix of In-House and Third Party Contract to Split Vehicle Operations and Maintenance

Advantages	Disadvantages
▪ Improves and simplifies transit information and makes it easier from the passenger's perspective ▪ Unifies services in tri-county region under a single brand (CCT) ▪ Provides a well-coordinated public image for public transit ▪ Reduces or eliminates reporting requirements for Ecumen (dba Meeker Public Transit) ▪ Enables one uniform fare structure and simplifies fare payment from the passenger's perspective ▪ Supports Meeker County Commissioner's preference to maintain third party contract ▪ Obtains better handle on maintenance costs	▪ Requires modification of organizational structure and some personnel assignments ▪ Requires a fair and equitable human resource system for all administrative employees ▪ Requires changes to procedures and personnel policies to ensure or consistency ▪ May lose some economies of scale with mix of in-house and third party contract ▪ May need to modify procedures and personnel policies to ensure consistency ▪ Creates potential for "finger pointing" between drivers and mechanics ▪ Potential to cost more by splitting third party contract

Alternative 3: Consolidated Service Plan: In-House Operation and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

Consistent with Alternatives 1 and 2, all transit services in Alternative 3 in the tri-county area would be consolidated under CCT. The major difference between this alternative and Alternatives 1 and 2 is that services would be operated by in-house personnel in each county. Vehicle maintenance would also be provided with in-house personnel. There would be no third party contract. As with many transit agencies, the newly established tri-county JPA would have to consider the advantages and disadvantages of providing a full in-house operation versus contracting with a private provider. Cost, service quality, and efficiency are all issues that must be considered in deciding whether to contract for service or operate service and maintain vehicles with in-house personnel.

A full in-house operation means hiring new personnel and employing all necessary staff to operate service and maintain vehicles in all three counties. Since CCT currently functions as an in-house operation, the agency could handle the additional responsibilities with some additional staff. If all vehicles were maintained in-house, it would require staffing up with a Maintenance Manager and more mechanics. In-house maintenance functions would include:

- Comprehensive vehicle maintenance plan including scheduled and routine maintenance
- Regular and daily vehicle inspections including oil changes and tune-ups
- Wheelchair lift servicing and repairs
- Annual safety inspections performed by a certified mechanic
- Vehicle “re-builds,” such as full engine or transmission/drive train replacements
- Vehicle management information system

A sample staff organizational chart to support this structure is presented in Figure 2-4. It shows the administrative positions and the number and type of personnel needed to support day-to-day operations.

Figure 2-4 Consolidated Service Plan: In-House Operations and Revised Administrative Structure

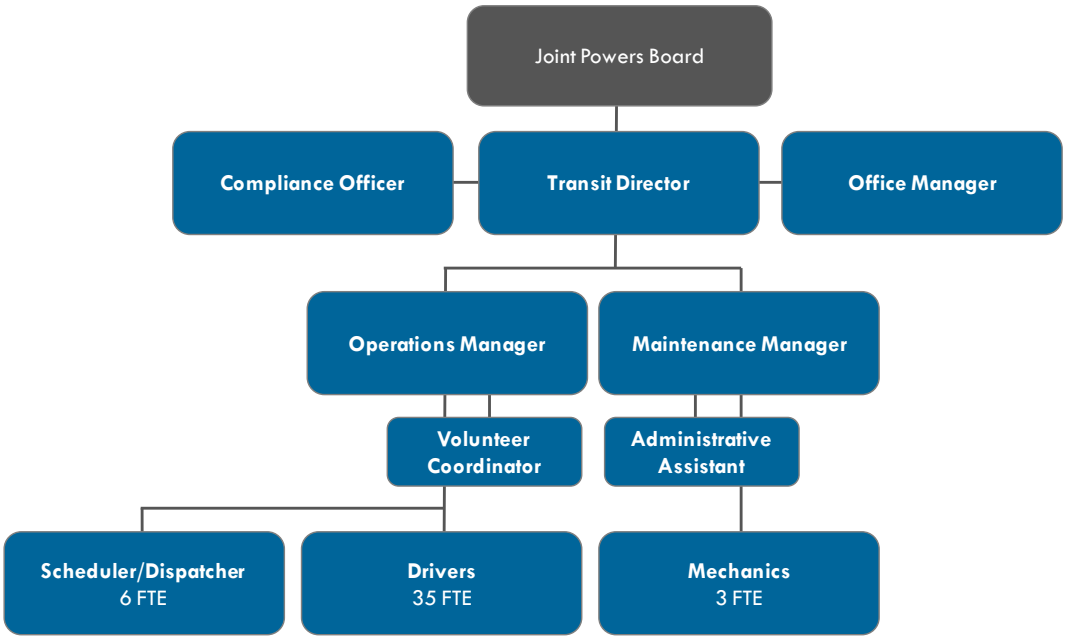


Figure 2-5 below summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of this option.

Figure 2-5 Major Advantages and Disadvantages: In-House Operations and Maintenance and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

Advantages	Disadvantages
▪ Improves and simplifies transit information and makes it easier from the passenger's perspective ▪ Reduces or eliminates reporting requirements for Ecumen (dba Meeker Public Transit) ▪ Enables one uniform fare structure and simplifies fare payment from the passenger's perspective ▪ Unifies services in tri-county region under a single brand (CCT) ▪ Provides a well-coordinated public image for public transit ▪ May reduce the need for "on call" or stand-by drivers ▪ Ensures all drivers receive consistent pay and benefits ▪ Provides higher level of control and accountability ▪ May be able to better utilize vehicles if all operated in-house ▪ Provides for more seamless service with single operator ▪ Provides direct control over recruiting and hiring drivers, schedulers, and maintenance staff ▪ Increases monitoring and control of maintenance record keeping	▪ Will need to modify organizational structure and modify some job descriptions and personnel assignments ▪ Will need to structure fair and equitable human resource system for all administrative employees ▪ May need to modify procedures and personnel policies to ensure or consistency ▪ Recruiting and hiring can be challenging and time consuming for administrative staff ▪ Reduces the overall risk to the administrative agency

Alternative 4: Consolidated Service Plan: Third Party Contract Operation and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

Under this alternative, service operations and vehicle maintenance would be managed by a third party contract. This would require the newly established JPA (as the contracting agency) to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for operating service in all three counties and for maintaining the entire fleet of 25 vehicles. For the JPA to have appropriate oversight and a means to monitor contractor performance and ensure service quality, it is recommended that the RFP include numeric service and safety standards (Sample performance measures are listed under Alternative 1). It may also be desirable to include monetary incentives for meeting or exceeding key performance measures as well as penalties for non-performance. The provisions should allow the JPA to observe contractor performance by any means necessary to ensure fulfillment of service-quality standards. All reporting requirements should be specified and the JPA should be allowed to survey all aspects of the operations both routinely and at random. Experience at other transit agencies suggests that an important provision in contract agreements is to ensure that public officials and the public at large have ample opportunity to make suggestions to improve service delivery when necessary.

Figure 2-6 Consolidated Service Plan: Third Party Contract and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

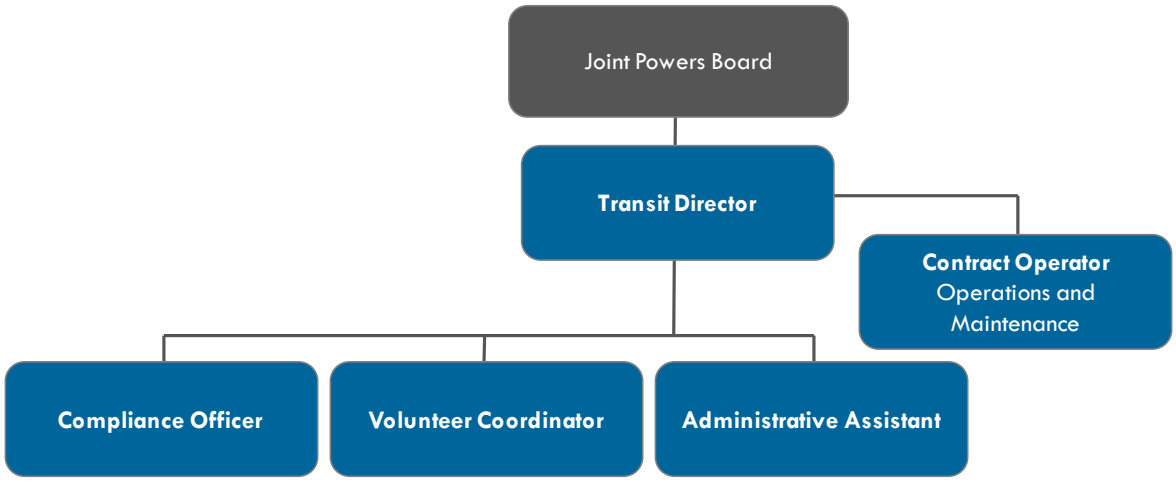


Figure 2-7 below summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of this option.

Figure 2-7 Major Advantages and Disadvantages: Third Party Contract for Service Operations and Maintenance and Revised Administrative Staff Structure

Advantages	Disadvantages
▪ Improves and simplifies transit information and makes it easier from the passenger's perspective ▪ Reduces or eliminates reporting requirements for Ecumen (dba Meeker Public Transit) ▪ Enables one uniform fare structure and simplifies fare payment from the passenger's perspective ▪ Unifies services in tri-county region under a single brand (CCT) ▪ Ensures all drivers receive consistent pay and benefits ▪ Private contract may be more cost efficient than in-house operations; however, dependent upon labor agreement ▪ Provides for more seamless service with single operator ▪ May be able to better utilize vehicles if all operated by one contractor	▪ Will need to modify organizational structure and modify some job descriptions and personnel assignments ▪ Will need to structure fair and equitable human resource system for all administrative employees ▪ May need to modify procedures and personnel policies to ensure or consistency ▪ May not want to lose control over provision of service ▪ CCT in-house operations currently provided by union staff ▪ May be more responsive and timely if all vehicles maintained by local vendor

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

This chapter presented alternatives for CCT and MPT to consolidate transit services from both an administrative and operations perspective. It identified the major advantages and disadvantages and showed how staff could be structured in each alternative. It is important to emphasize that there is no one "right way" to organize a transit agency and that staff and the policy board need to consider a number of variables including their own values, perspectives and priorities when deciding how to structure the agency. A summary of the alternatives are presented in Figure 2-8 below.

Figure 2-8 Summary of Organizational Alternatives

	Current Structure	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4
Service Operations					
CCT	In-House	In-House	In-House	In-House	Contractor
Meeker County	Contractor	Contractor	Option for In-House or Contractor	In-House	Contractor
Vehicle Maintenance					
CCT	In-house (Kandiyohi) Contractor (Renville)	In-house (Kandiyohi) Contractor (Renville)	Option for In-House or Contractor	In-House	Contractor
Meeker County	Contractor	Contractor	Option for In-House or Contractor	In-House	Contractor

The next steps in the process are to review the alternatives and reach consensus on a preferred option (or set of options). The following step will be to further develop and refine the preferred option and develop an implementation plan.

3 CONSOLIDATED SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

A key part of the transit restructuring plan involved inventorying existing transit services and considering how well the services are matched with demand and need. An overview of existing transit services was documented in Technical Memo 1 and an evaluation and assessment of the existing services was provided in Technical Memo 2. The objectives of the service improvement plan are to develop a series of service improvement options, including opportunities to strengthen the existing service network and to transition CCT and MPT into a consolidated and regionally oriented network. This chapter lays out a series of recommendations for consideration and review by the Project Advisory Committee (PAC).

Guiding Principles

The main goals of service improvement options are to 1) streamline service by reducing redundancies between routes and create a more efficient service structure; 2) promote publicizing and marketing existing services so the services are easier to understand and use; and 3) develop a network that creates parity and equality across the tri-county region and individual communities. The study team developed four guiding principles that, combined, create a framework for the proposed recommendations.

1. Make Existing Transit Services Easy to Understand and Use

For people to benefit from public transportation, they need to know what services are available and how to use them. One of the most cost effective ways of improving the existing services is making sure people understand what is available and how to navigate the system.

2. Provide Comparable Service Levels in Comparable Areas

One of the key goals of the service improvement plan is to ensure residents living in similar types of communities have access to similar types of service and service levels regardless of where they live in the regional service area.

3. Work Towards Statewide Regional Trade Center Standards

MnDOT set statewide standards for public transportation service levels based on a series of criteria that reflects population, employment, and land uses. Many of the communities in Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker counties do not meet these standards. The service improvement plan therefore lays out a strategy to first create equity across similarly sized and positioned communities and secondarily begin to make progress towards the state service standards.

4. Create a Structured Network of Demand Response Service

Creating a structured network of demand response services will help simplify services, improve their operational efficiency, and work towards parity across communities.

CONSOLIDATED SERVICE PLAN

The proposed service improvement plan creates a service hierarchy to reflect demand and match community size and needs with the appropriate service types. The hierarchy is designed to balance the appropriate level and type of services with local needs to create a consolidated network that facilitates travel between small communities and larger towns and cities. The four types of service are summarized below.

- **Regional Service –** connects the largest population and employment centers (Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield) in the tri-county region with scheduled deviated fixed routes. Regional services between Willmar and Olivia and Willmar and Litchfield will operate daily. Each service will operate at least three round trips every day they operate. Each service will operate at least three round trips every day they operate.
- **Local Circulation Routes** – provides local circulation for passengers traveling within the region's largest communities, Willmar and Litchfield. Services are operated as deviated fixed routes.
- **Inter-Community Routes** – links the smaller communities within each county (with at least 500 residents) to the local hubs of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. In many cases, inter-community routes may be operated in conjunction with contracted services. The goal is to link the most populated cities in each county with either Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. Service may be deviated fixed route or structured dial-a-ride service depending on need and demand.
- **Structured Dial-A-Ride Service** – provides lifeline service for smaller communities (of at least 250 people). The structured demand response service will serve these communities twice per week. People can use the service to travel between communities or to travel to/from the regional center.
- **General Dial-A-Ride Service** – provides lifeline service for individuals living in the main urban areas of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield who are not able to use deviated fixed-route service.

The Consolidated Service Plan recommends a number of changes to the current service, summarized in Figure 3-1 and further described below. The regional services, local circulation routes, and inter-community routes are depicted in Figure 3-24. The structured and general dial-a-ride services are depicted in Figure 3-26.

Figure 3-1 Proposed Consolidated Transit Service Network

Service	Current Level of Service	Service Recommendation	Proposed Changes
Regional Routes			
Willmar-Olivia	Monday–Friday: 3 round trips	Add Saturday service	Add Saturday service – 321 additional service hours Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Willmar-Litchfield	Monday, Wednesday, Thursday Friday, 1,264 annual service hours	Add Saturday service 1,685 annual service hours	Add Saturday service - 421 additional service hours
Local Circulation Routes			
Willmar	Monday–Friday: 26 round trips Saturday: 5 round trips 4,171 annual service hours	Maintain current service level	No service changes
Litchfield	No current deviated fixed route service	Add deviated fixed route service – Monday–Friday, Saturday 1,182 annual service hours	Add deviated fixed-route service Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Inter-Community Deviated Fixed Routes			
Willmar-Spicer-New London	Monday–Friday: 5 round trips Scheduled in conjunction with contracted service (ProWorks)	Maintain current service level	No change
Sacred Heart – Renville – Olivia – Bird Island	Dial-a-ride service only	Add deviated fixed route service on Monday and Wednesday: 3 round trips 530 annual service hours	Currently operated as demand response service; recommend scheduling as deviated fixed-route service Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Olivia - Hector	Dial-a-ride service only	Add deviated fixed route on Tuesday and Thursday: 3 round trips 530 annual service hours	Currently operated as demand response service; recommend scheduling as deviated fixed-route service Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Litchfield -Darwin-Dassel	Monday–Friday: 4 round trips Scheduled in conjunction with contracted service (ProWorks)	Add a fifth trip 513 annual service hours	Add a fifth weekday trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times

Service	Current Level of Service	Service Recommendation	Proposed Changes
Litchfield - Hutchinson	Monday–Friday: 2 round trips Scheduled in conjunction with contracted service (ProWorks)	Add a third round trip 1,238 annual service hours	Add third round trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Structured Demand Response Service			
Litchfield – Eden Valley Watkins	Monday and Wednesday: 2 round trips 478 annual service hours	Add a third round trip 686 annual service hours	Add third round trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Litchfield – Cosmos	Tuesday and Thursday: 2 round trips 426 annual service hours	Add a third round trip 608 annual service hours	Add third round trip Publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
Structured dial-a-ride	No structured dial-a-ride	Add routes to communities with sufficient population: 2 days per week = 500+ people	Add structured dial-a-ride clustered to different parts of the region and publish service schedule with departure and arrival times
General Dial-A-Ride Service			
General Dial-A-Ride Service	Ad hoc throughout the three counties	Within five miles of the three main urban areas: Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield	Streamline General DAR to a five-mile radius around Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield allowing the structured DAR to cover the areas outside of these cities

PROPOSED SERVICE NETWORK

Regional Routes

Willmar – Olivia Route

Current Service:

- Daily service between Willmar and Olivia
- Operates Monday – Friday
- Three to four round trips daily
- Approximate annual service hours: 1,993

Proposed Changes:

Saturday service should be added to allow residents to travel between Willmar and Olivia on the weekend.

Additionally, the lack of established time points and public awareness of the service limit ridership potential. Arrival and departure points should be scheduled at central locations throughout the day and this information should be published on the website and printed materials. Scheduled stops and a conceptual schedule are shown below.

- Downtown Willmar Bus Stop at 4th and Becker Streets
- Adult Client Training Services (ACTS), 802 E. Fairview Ave, Olivia

Service Hours and Cost:

Adding Saturday service will increase the annual service hours to approximately 1,993 annually (including an additional 20% per run to account for driver breaks). These services cost approximately $119,592 (based on a cost/hour of $60, the average of KAT Bus and Renville's current fully allocated cost/hour).

Figure 3-2 Route Map

Figure 3-3 Conceptual Schedule, Willmar – Olivia

Southbound: Monday – Saturday		
	4th & Becker, Willmar	ACTS, Olivia
AM	7:00	7:50
	11:00	11:50
PM	3:00	3:50
Northbound: Monday – Saturday		
	ACTS, Olivia	4th & Becker, Willmar
AM	8:00	8:50
PM	12:00	12:50
	4:00	4:50

Willmar – Litchfield Service

Current Service:

- Service between Willmar and Litchfield
- Stops in Grove City, Atwater, and the City of Kandiyohi
- Operates Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
- Three round trips daily
- No designated time points
- Approximate annual service hours: 1,685

Figure 3-4 Route Map

Proposed Changes:

The existing weekday service level is appropriate to demand; however, Saturday service should be added to offer weekend service between Willmar and Litchfield. Another recommendation is to create and publish a service schedule that lets riders know when and how they can connect to the route. Scheduled stops may include:

- Downtown Willmar Bus Stop at 4th and Becker Streets
- Kandiyohi City Post Office
- Atwater Public Library
- Grove City Library
- Meeker Memorial Hospital in Litchfield

Figure 3-5 Conceptual Service – Willmar-Litchfield

Westbound: Monday – Saturday					
	4th & Becker, Willmar	Kandiyohi City Post Office	Atwater Public Library	Grove City Library	Meeker Hospital
AM	7:00	7:15	7:30	7:45	8:00
	11:00	11:15	11:30	11:45	12:00
PM	3:00	3:15	3:30	3:45	4:00
Eastbound: Monday – Saturday					
	Meeker Hospital	Grove City Library	Atwater Public Library	Kandiyohi City Post Office	4th & Becker, Willmar
AM	8:20	8:35	8:50	9:05	9:20
PM	12:20	12:35	12:50	1:05	1:20
	4:20	4:35	4:50	5:05	5:20

Service Hours and Costs:

The annual cost of service (including added service on Saturday) is approximately $122,148. Service costs are estimated on 2,106 annual service hours (includes operating time plus 20% layover/recovery time) and an average cost per hour of service of $58 (average of KAT and MPT fully allocated cost per hour).

Local Circulation

Willmar Local Circulation

CCT currently operates five deviated fixed routes that serve the City of Willmar, as shown in Figure 3-7. These routes will remain unchanged.

Figure 3-6 Route Map

Figure 3-7 Current Service – Willmar Local Circulation

Route	Morning	Afternoon	Evening	Service Days	Saturday	Daily Hours	Annual Hours
Monday – Friday Route	3	3	1	M-F	n/a	8	2000
Saturday Route #1	3	3	1	Saturday	7	7	364
Saturday Route #2	3	1	n/a	Saturday	4	3.5	182
JARC	3	1	2	M-F	n/a	4	1000
Morning Reverse Route	2	n/a	n/a	M-F	n/a	2.5	625
TOTAL CURRENT Hours	14	8	4		11		4171

Litchfield Local Circulation

Current Services:

- Dial-a-ride service within Litchfield, but no established time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: unknown

Proposed Changes:

Deviated fixed-route service in Litchfield would establish several time points at the destinations with high ridership (as identified in Technical Memo #2). The proposed route would start and end at Wal-Mart, where the bus and driver would wait for a short period of time.

Scheduled stops include:

- Wal-Mart
- Meeker Memorial Hospital
- Emmaus Place
- Pro Works

Figure 3-8 Route Map

It is recommended that three (3) round trips be provided Monday through Friday and three (3) round trip on Saturday. Riders would also be able to request route deviation anywhere in the City of Litchfield. The service should be advertised on the website and in all printed materials.

Service Hours and Costs:

The service would run approximately 1,181 hours per year (including the additional 20% per run to account for driver breaks) and would cost approximately $70,902 per year (based on MPT's cost/hour of $60). This service is currently being provided by MPT; the proposed scheduled stops would make it easier for riders to plan their trips around the schedule. Additionally, the City of Litchfield route would require one (1) additional vehicle to provide the service at an estimated $80,000 in one-time capital costs.

Figure 3-9 Conceptual Service, City of Litchfield Route

Westbound: Monday – Saturday					
	Wal-Mart	Meeker Hospital	Emmaus Place	Pro Works	Wal-Mart
AM	7:15	7:25	7:35	7:45	7:55
	11:30	11:40	11:50	12:00	12:10
PM	3:30	3:40	3:50	4:00	4:10
Eastbound: Monday – Saturday					
	Wal-Mart	Pro Works	Emmaus Place	Meeker Hospital	Wal-Mart
AM	8:10	8:20	8:30	8:40	8:50
PM	12:25	12:35	12:45	12:55	1:05
	4:25	4:35	4:45	4:55	5:05

Inter-Community Routes (Short-Term)

Willmar – Spicer – New London Route

Current Service:

- Weekday service between Willmar, Spicer, and New London
- Operates Monday through Friday
- One short round trip from Willmar to Spicer in the morning
- Four round trips between Willmar, Spicer, and New London
- Service schedule is posted on the CCT website
- No designated time points
- Approximate annual service hours: 2,000

Figure 3-10 Route Map

Proposed Changes:

Although annual service hours would remain the same, the Willmar – Spicer – New London route should have scheduled stops and stop locations so riders know that they can be picked up from a certain location at a certain time, which will encourage additional ridership.

Scheduled stops include:

- Downtown Willmar
- Spicer Fire Department
- Middle Fork Café in New London

Figure 3-11 Conceptual Schedule, Willmar – Spicer – New London Route

Monday - Friday (Loop)					
	Downtown Willmar Bus Stop	Spicer Fire Department	New London – Middle Fork Café	Spicer Fire Department	Downtown Willmar Bus Stop
AM	7:00	7:20	-	-	8:00
	8:00	8:20	8:30	-	9:15
	9:40	10:10	10:20	10:35	11:00
	11:45	12:15	12:25	-	1:00
PM	2:00	2:45	3:00	-	3:45

Service Hours and Costs:

Because there is no additional service added to the route, service hours remain unchanged at approximately 2,000 hours per year (including the additional 20% per run to account for driver breaks) and cost approximately $112,000 per year (based on KAT's cost/hour of $48).

Sacred Heart – Renville – Olivia – Bird Island Route

Current Service:

- Dial-a-ride service to Sacred Heart, Renville, and Bird Island, but no established time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: unknown

Figure 3-12 Route Map

Proposed Changes:

Based on ridership data collected in Technical Memorandum #2, it is recommended that deviated fixed-route service be provided to serve Sacred Heart, the City of Renville, and Bird Island on Mondays and Wednesdays each week. The route will have scheduled stop locations so riders know that they can be picked up from a certain location at a certain time, which will encourage additional ridership. CCT will need to publicize the route on their website and in all printed materials.

Scheduled stops include:

- ACTS in Olivia
- Memorial Park in Renville
- Sacred Heart Post Office
- Bird Island Post Office

It is recommended that three (3) round trips be provided Monday and Wednesday. In addition to making scheduled stops, the buses would deviate to pick up riders along the route.

Figure 3-13 Conceptual Schedule, Olivia – Sacred Heart – Renville – Bird Island

Westbound: Monday and Wednesday			
	Olivia - ACTS	Renville - Memorial Park	Sacred Heart Post Office
AM	7:00 11:00	7:20 11:20	7:35 11:35
PM	1:00	1:20	1:35
Eastbound: Monday and Wednesday			
	Sacred Heart Post Office	Renville - Memorial Park	Olivia - ACTS
AM	7:50 11:50	8:10 12:10	8:20 12:20
PM	1:50	2:10	2:20

Eastbound: Monday and Wednesday		
	Olivia - ACTS	Bird Island
AM	8:10	8:20
PM	12:10 2:10	12:20 2:20

Eastbound: Monday and Wednesday		
	Bird Island	Olivia - ACTC
AM	8:25	8:30
PM	12:25 2:25	12:30 2:30

Service Hours and Costs:

The service would run approximately annually 530 hours (including the additional 20% per run) and would cost approximately $33,946 per year (based on Renville's cost/hour of $64). Additionally, the Olivia – Sacred Heart – Renville – Bird Island route would require that CCT purchase one (1) additional vehicle and split the vehicle's time with the Olivia – Hector route, which runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The one-time capital expense of this vehicle is approximately $40,000 (half of $80,000 vehicle, which is split between CCT and MPT).

Olivia – Hector Route

Current Service:

- Dial-a-ride service to Hector, but no established time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: unknown

Proposed Changes:

Based on ridership data collected in Technical Memorandum #2, it is recommended that a deviated fixed route be provided to serve Hector on Tuesdays and Thursdays each week. The route will have scheduled stops and stop locations so riders know that they can be picked up from a certain location at a certain time, which will encourage additional ridership. The route should be publicized on the CCT website and in all printed materials.

Scheduled stops include:

- ACTS in Olivia
- Hector Post Office

It is recommended that three (3) round trips be provided Tuesday and Thursday. In addition to making these scheduled stops, the buses would deviate to pick up riders along the route.

Figure 3-14 Route Map

Figure 3-15 Conceptual Service, Olivia – Hector

Eastbound: Tuesday and Thursday		
	ACTS (Olivia)	Hector Post Office
AM	7:00	7:30
PM	11:00	11:30
	1:00	1:30
Westbound: Tuesday and Thursday		
	Hector Post Office	ACTS (Olivia)
AM	7:40	8:10
	11:40	12:10
PM	1:40	2:10

Service Hours and Costs:

The service would run approximately 530 hours per year (including the additional 20% per run) at an approximate annual cost of $33,946 (based on Renville's cost/hour of $64). Additionally, the Olivia-Hector route would require that CCT purchase one (1) additional vehicle and split the vehicle's time with the Olivia – Sacred Heart – Renville – Bird Island route, which runs on Mondays and Wednesdays. The one-time capital expense for this vehicle is approximately $40,000 (half of $80,000 vehicle, which is split between CCT and MPT).

Litchfield – Darwin – Dassel Route

Current Service:

- Contracted service with ProWorks
- Open to the public
- Operates Monday through Friday
- Four round trips each day between Litchfield, Darwin, and Dassel
- No designated time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: 1,700

Figure 3-16 Route Map

Figure 3-17 Conceptual Service, Litchfield – Darwin – Dassel

Eastbound: Monday – Friday			
	Meeker Hospital	Darwin Post Office	Dassel Post Office
AM	7:30	7:45	8:00
	8:00	8:15	8:30
	11:00	11:15	11:30
PM	2:00	2:15	2:30
	2:30	2:45	3:00
Westbound: Monday – Friday			
	Dassel Post Office	Darwin Post Office	Meeker Hospital
AM	8:05	8:25	8:50
	8:35	9:00	9:20
	11:35	12:00	12:20
PM	2:35	3:00	3:20
	3:05	3:25	3:50

Proposed Changes:

In addition to providing this service for ProWorks employees, this route should be opened to the public and advertised on the website and in printed materials. Additionally, CCT should add an additional daily route (Monday–Friday) to accommodate the reduced service to Darwin and Dassel in the Litchfield – Hutchinson route (detailed below). The route will have scheduled time points.

Scheduled stops include:

- Meeker Hospital
- Darwin Post Office
- Dassel Post Office

It is recommended that five (5) round trips be provided Monday through Friday. In addition to making these scheduled stops, the buses would deviate to pick up riders along the route.

Service Hours and Costs:

The service would operate approximately 2,125 hours per year (including the additional 20% per run) and would cost approximately $127,500 per year (based on MPT's cost/hour of $60).

Litchfield – Hutchinson Route

Current Services:

- Operates Monday through Friday
- Two round trips each day between Litchfield and Hutchinson
- Darwin and Dassel are served on the return trip
- No designated time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: 875

Proposed Changes:

The service should be reduced to express service between Litchfield and Hutchinson. From Litchfield, riders who need to go to Darwin and Dassel have five round trip options per day. Additionally, there should be a third run added to bring the service up to the same standards as other similar routes in the region. The route will have scheduled stops that should be publicized on the website and in printed materials.

Scheduled stops include:

- Meeker Hospital
- Hutchinson Health Hospital

It is recommended that three (3) round trips be provided Monday through Friday, instead of two round trips. In addition to making these scheduled stops, the buses would deviate to pick up riders along the route.

Figure 3-18 Route Map

Figure 3-19 Conceptual Service, Litchfield – Hutchinson

Southbound: Monday – Friday		
	Meeker Hospital	Hutchinson Hospital
AM	7:00	7:45
	11:00	11:45
PM	1:00	1:45
Northbound: Monday – Friday		
	Hutchinson Hospital	Meeker Hospital
AM	7:50	8:35
	11:50	12:35
PM	1:50	2:35

Service Hours and Costs:

With the addition of the third round trip per day, the service would run approximately 1,237 hours per year (including the additional 20% per run) with an approximate annual cost of $74,250(based on MPT's cost/hour of $60).

Litchfield – Eden Valley – Watkins Route

Current Service:

- Operates Mondays and Wednesdays
- Two round trips each day between Litchfield, Eden Valley, and Watkins
- No designated time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: 478

Proposed Service:

In order to bring this route up to the same level of service as similar routes in the region, it is recommended that an additional afternoon round trip be added. The route will have scheduled stops that should be publicized on the website and in printed materials. Scheduled stops include:

- Meeker Hospital
- Eden Valley Post Office
- Watkins Post Office

It is recommended that three (3) round trips be provided Monday and Wednesday, instead of two round trips. In addition to making these scheduled stops, the buses would deviate to pick up riders along the route.

Figure 3-20 Route Map

Figure 3-21 Conceptual Service, Litchfield – Eden Valley – Watkins Route

Northbound: Monday and Wednesday			
	Meeker Hospital	Eden Valley Post Office	Watkins Post Office
AM	7:00	7:25	7:45
	11:00	11:25	11:45
PM	1:00	1:25	1:45
Southbound: Monday and Wednesday			
	Watkins Post Office	Eden Valley Post Office	Meeker Hospital
AM	7:50	8:10	8:35
	11:50	12:10	12:35
PM	1:50	2:10	2:35

Service Hours and Costs:

With the addition of the third round trip per day, the service would run approximately 686 hours per year (including the additional 20% per run), with estimated annual costs of $41,184 (based on MPT's cost/hour of $60).

Litchfield – Cosmos Route

Current Service:

- Operates Tuesdays and Thursdays
- Two round trips each day between Litchfield and Cosmos
- No designated time points
- Service is not advertised
- Approximate annual service hours: 426

Proposed Service:

The addition of a third round trip is recommended for this route to provide the same level of service across the region. The route will have scheduled stops that should be publicized on the website and in printed materials. Scheduled stops include:

- Meeker Hospital
- Cosmos Post Office

It is recommended that three (3) round trips be provided Tuesday and Thursday, instead of two round trips. In addition to making these scheduled stops, the buses would deviate to pick up riders along the route.

Service Hours and Costs:

With the addition of the third round trip per day, the service would operate approximately 608 annual hours (including the additional 20% per run) at an estimated annual cost of approximately $36,504 (based on MPT's cost/hour of $60).

Figure 3-22 Route Map

Figure 3-23 Conceptual Service, Litchfield – Cosmos

Southbound: Tuesday and Thursday		
	Meeker Hospital	Cosmos Post Office
AM	7:00	7:45
	11:00	11:45
PM	1:00	1:45
Northbound: Tuesday and Thursday		
	Cosmos Post Office	Meeker Hospital
AM	7:50	8:35
	11:50	12:35
PM	1:50	2:35

Figure 3-24 Proposed Deviated Fixed Routes

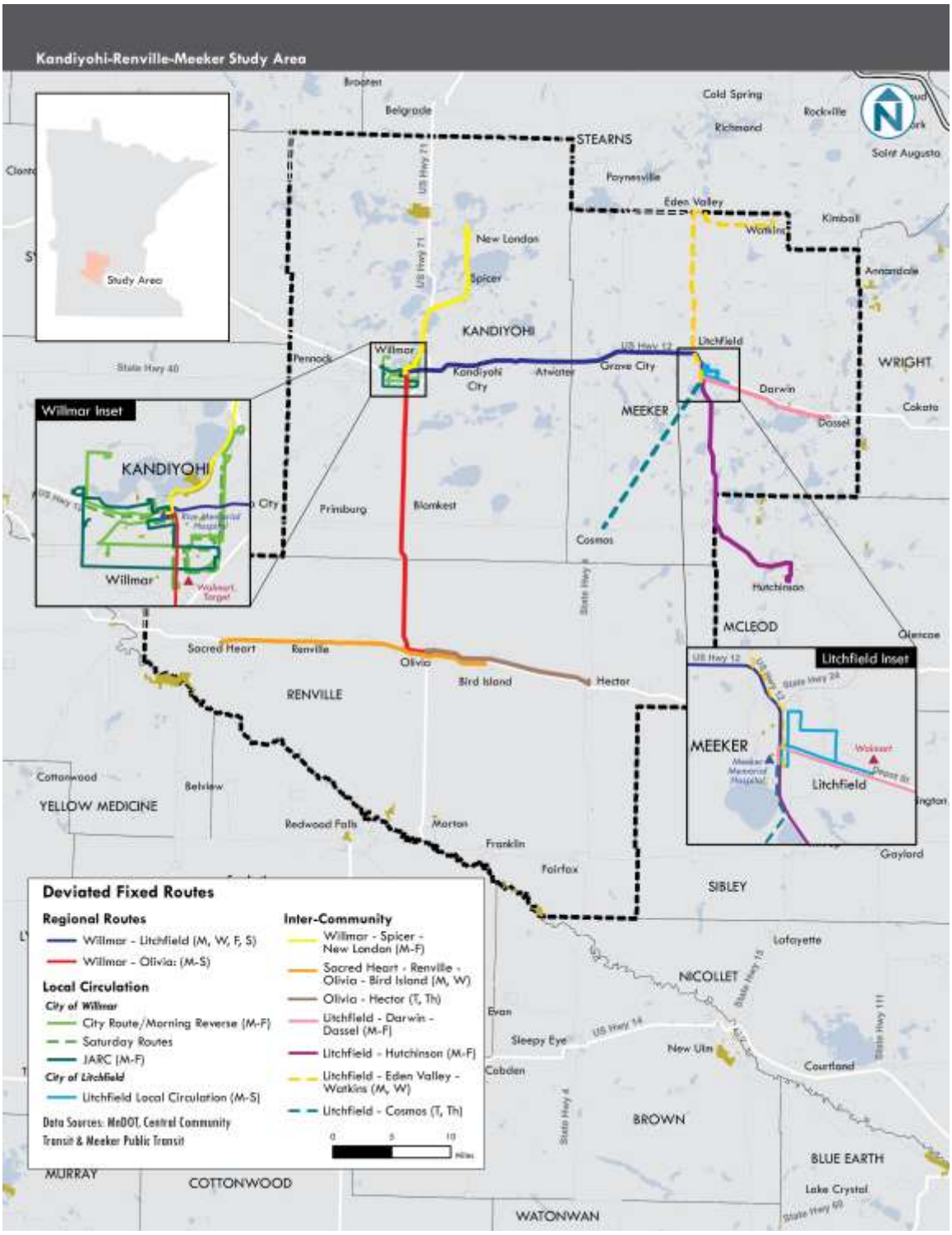


Figure 3-25 Conceptual Routes Summary

Service Type*	Weekday # of Round Trips			Service Days	Saturday Round Trips	Estimated Annual Revenue Hours	Additional Service Hours	Estimated Annual Operating Costs	Estimated Vehicle Costs	Comments on Changes
	Morning	Midday	Evening							
Regional Routes										
Willmar – Olivia	1	1	1	M-S	3	1,993	312	$119,592		No changes to service. Same approximate annual service hours as current service.
Willmar – Litchfield	1	1	1	M,W,F, S	3	2,106	421	$122,148		Added Saturday service
Local Circulation										
Willmar	14	8	4	M-S	5	4,171	0	$233,576		No changes to service. Same approximate annual service hours as current service.
Litchfield	1	1	1	M-S	3	1,182	1,182	$70,902	$80,000	Added DFR service M–F and Saturday
Inter-Community Routes										
Willmar – Spicer – New London	3	2		M-F		2,000	0	$112,000		No changes to service. Same approximate annual service hours as current service.
Sacred Heart – Renville – Olivia – Bird Island	1	2		M,W		530	530	$33,946	$40,000 (shared vehicle)	Added DFR service M,W
Olivia – Hector	1	2		T, Th		530	530	$33,946	$40,000 (shared vehicle)	Added DFR service T, Th
Litchfield –Darwin – Dassel	2	2		M-F		2,125	0	$102,000		Added fifth daily route
Litchfield – Hutchinson	1	2		M-F		1,238	513	$74,250		Added second afternoon route
Litchfield – Eden Valley Watkins	1	2		M, W		686	270	$41,184		Added second afternoon route
Litchfield – Cosmos	1	2		T, Th		608	244	$36,504		Added second afternoon route
Totals						17,945	5,332	$1,079,179	$160,000	

DEMAND RESPONSE SERVICE

As previously described, it is recommended that the Consolidated Service Plan include structured dial-a-ride service that is provided twice per week to communities with a population of at least 250 people. To create system efficiencies, communities located in the same general area will be served on the same days of the week. Additionally, general dial-a-ride service should be provided to supplement the deviated fixed-route service in the main urban areas by providing door-to-door service during regular service hours.

Structured Dial-A-Ride Service

Structured dial-a-ride will provide demand response services to communities with sufficient population that are not being served by deviated fixed-route service. These communities include Raymond, Prinsburg, and Lake Lillian in Kandiyohi County, and Morton, Franklin, Fairfax, and Buffalo Lake in Renville County. There are no communities with at least 250 people in Meeker County that are not already being served by the deviated fixed-route service. Organizing and structuring service on certain days of the week will provide efficiencies because communities in the same area will be served on the same day. Riders will be encouraged to plan appointments on the days that the dial-a-ride is scheduled to be in their community. Advanced notice of 24 hours will be required.

Figure 3-26 Proposed Structured Dial-A-Ride Service Schedule

Community	Approx. Population	Days per Week	Annual Service Hours
Kandiyohi County			
Lake Lillian	250	M, W	464
New London	1,200	M, W	464
Prinsburg	500	M, W	464
Raymond	800	M, W	464
Spicer	1,100	M,W	464
Renville County			
Bird Island	1,000	T, Th	464
Buffalo Lake	700	T, Th	464
Fairfax	1000	T, Th	464
Franklin	500	T, Th	464
Hector	1,100	M, W	464
Morton	500	T, Th	464
Renville	1,300	T, Th	464
Sacred Heart	500	T, Th	464
Meeker County			
Cosmos	500	M, W	464
Darwin	300	M, W	464
Dassel	1,500	M, W	464
Total Service Hours			**12,750**[1]

Additionally, structured dial-a-ride will be provided to the more urban communities that are more than five (5) miles outside of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield that are also receiving deviated fixed-route service. The structured dial-a-ride to these communities will provide some additional door-to-door service for individuals who need more specialized transportation services. In some communities, service will occur on days when deviated fixed-route service is not available (e.g. if deviated fixed route is provided Mondays and Wednesday, structured dial-a-ride will be provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays). These

[1] Service hours calculated by assuming four hours per trip and multiplying by 104 days per year.

communities include New London and Spicer in Kandiyohi County; Bird Island, Renville, Sacred Heart, and Hector in Renville County; and Cosmos, Darwin, and Dassel in Meeker County. A proposed schedule for this type of service is shown in Figure 3-26.

Service Hours and Costs:

Structured dial-a-ride services will provide approximately 12,750 annual service hours throughout the three-county region. Using an average hourly cost of $60, it is estimated that this service will cost approximately $765,000 per year.

General Dial-A-Ride Service

In addition to the structured dial-a-ride service designed for the smaller communities outside of the main urban hubs, there should also be general dial-a-ride to fill the needs of Willmar, Litchfield, and Olivia residents who are not able to use the deviated fixed-route service. The deviated fixed-route service will serve the majority of riders in these three communities, because there will be scheduled time points, a shorter range of arrival and departure times, and no reservations required. However, there will still be some riders who are not able to get to the scheduled stops and will need door-to-door service. These individuals will likely continue to use the general dial-a-ride services that are already available in these three cities.

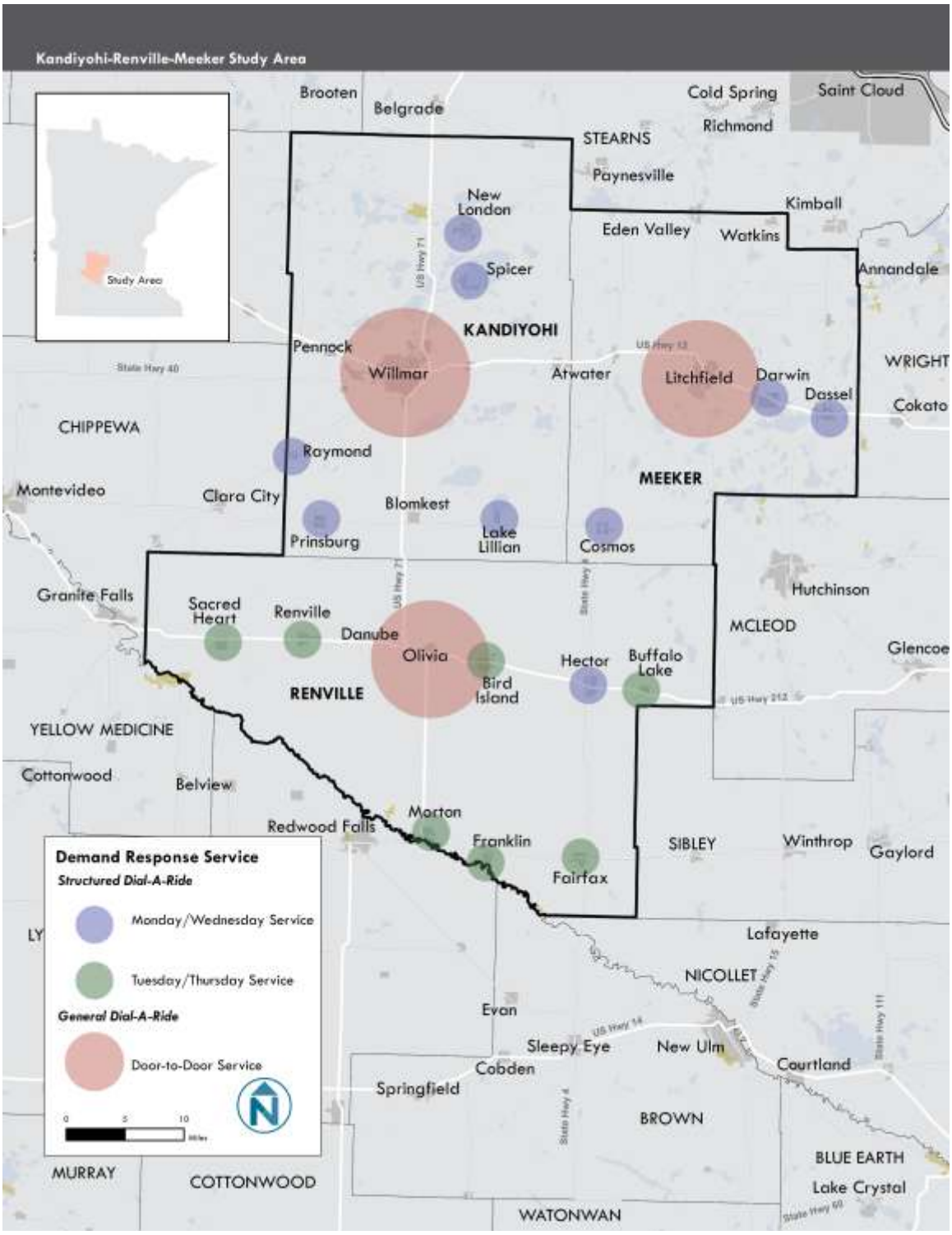
General dial-a-ride service will be provided to individuals living within Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield and up to five miles outside of the city limits. Locations that are further away from these three hubs are served by the deviated fixed route and the structured dial-a-ride services. The service hours for general dial-a-ride service will remain the same as today and a24-48 hour reservation policy will be encouraged in order to incentivize riders to use the deviated fixed-route service if they are able to do so.

Service Hours and Costs:

General dial-a-ride service will provide more focused demand response service only in the three main urban areas, which will lower the cost of demand response service overall. It is estimated that this service will provide approximately 13,187 annual hours to the three-county region and will cost approximately $791,244 annually (using an average hourly rate of $60).

Both the structured dial-a-ride and general dial-a-ride services are depicted in Figure 3-27.

Figure 3-27 Demand Response Service



PHASED SERVICE TO THE REGIONAL TRADE CENTERS

As described in Technical Memorandum #2, the Office of Transit established standards for level and type of transit service that should be offered in Regional Trade Centers (RTC). Five of the communities in the three-county region meet the population threshold for a Regional Trade Center. Service level recommendations for each of these five communities are noted in Figure 3-28 .

Figure 3-28 MnDOT Service Standards for RTCs

Community	MnDOT Service Standards	Current Service Level Provided
Dassel	Deviated fixed route and demand response service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day	Deviated fixed route: weekdays, 4 hours per day Demand response: none
Litchfield	Deviated fixed route and demand response service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day	Deviated fixed route: weekdays, 8.5 hours per day Demand response: Monday–Sunday, 12 hours on the weekday, 5 hours on the weekend
Olivia	Deviated fixed route and demand response service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day	Deviated fixed route: weekdays, 8.5 hours per day Demand response: Weekdays, 12 hours
Spicer	Deviated fixed route and demand response service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day	Deviated fixed route: weekdays, 6 hours per day Demand response: weekdays, 12 hours per day
Willmar	Deviated fixed route and demand response service, seven days a week, 15 hours per day	Deviated fixed route: weekdays, 9 hours per day; Saturday, 9 hours per day Demand response: weekdays, 12 hours per day; Saturday, 8.5 hours

Future Service Enhancements

The Consolidated Service Plan provides additional deviated fixed-route service in some of these communities, but for the most part, the service levels remain relatively constant and fall short of meeting MnDOT's RTC guidelines. As the recommendations from this report are put into place, certain triggers or thresholds will provide the impetus for adding service. When one or more of the following triggers are met, additional service may be warranted:

Meet or exceeds MnDOT's performance measures for passenger productivity (see

- Figure 3-29)
- A pattern of trip denials for demand response service
- A failure to adhere to the service schedule because there are too many deviations
- Buses are at capacity

Figure 3-29 MnDOT Performance Measures

Type of Service	Passenger per Hour Threshold	Rating	Action
Community or Municipal Dial-A-Ride	≤ 2.0 PPH	Poor	Consider Discontinuance
	2.0 to 3.0 PPH	Minimally Adequate	Must improve to Good or Better in the next grant year or discontinue. Report and monitor service segment for upcoming year.
	3.0 to 5.0 PPH	Good	Include in following year's base service hours
	≥ 5.0 PPH	Excellent	

Source: MnDOT

In the first phase (or short-term), the Consolidated Service Plan proposes increasing the level of service in some communities (see Figure 3-30 below). In the next phase (within three to five years), service can be increased further to meet the RTC guidelines. Increasing the level of service from Phase 1 to Phase 2 will require significant investment of approximately 28,202 annual service hours and $1.69 million annual service costs, reflecting a 64% increase over current costs.

Figure 3-30 Recommendations for Phase 1 and Phase 2

Community	Phase 1 (recommendations in the Consolidated Service Plan)	Phase 2 (within three to five years)	Approximate additional service hours / costs
Dassel	Deviated fixed route: connector service to Litchfield and Darwin, but no circulator service Demand response: structured dial-a-ride, 4 hours, two days per week	Deviated fixed route: add circulator service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day Demand response: increase dial-a-ride services to seven days a week, 12 hours per day	8,288 annual service hours $497,280 annually
Litchfield	Deviated fixed route: 6 hours per day, 4 days per week Demand response: Monday–Sunday, 12 hours on the weekday, 5 hours on the weekend	Deviated fixed route: increase to seven days a week, 12 hours per day Demand response: increase to seven days per week, 12 hours per day	3,794 annual service hours $227,654 annually
Olivia	Deviated fixed route: connector service, but no circulator service Demand response: Weekdays, 12 hours	Deviated fixed route: add circulator service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day Demand response: increase dial-a-ride services to seven days a week, 12 hours per day	5,496 annual service hours $329,760 annually
Spicer	Deviated fixed route: connector service, but no circulator service Demand response: structured dial-a-ride, 4 hours, two days per week	Deviated fixed route: add circulator service, seven days a week, 12 hours per day Demand response: increase dial-a-ride services to seven days a week, 12 hours per day	8288 annual service hours $497,280 annually
Willmar	Deviated fixed route: weekdays, 9 hours per day; Saturday, 9 hours per day Demand response: weekdays, 12 hours per day; Saturday, 8.5 hours	Deviated fixed route: increase to seven days a week, 12 hours per day Demand response: increase to seven days per week, 12 hours per day	2,336 annual service hours $140,160 annually

TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS

Coordinating Trips

Sharing trips across the two transportation providers, CCT and MPT, is part of the consolidated service. Trip sharing allows CCT and MPT to share their scheduling and dispatching information so that each system can book rides on each other's vehicles, which increases vehicle utilization, reduces driver down time, and creates greater efficiencies in the system. Trip sharing is also supported by the regional fare network because the simplified fare structure is the same across the region, making reimbursement between the two agencies easier.

The first requirement of shared trips is shared scheduling software; fortunately, Kandiyohi, Renville, and MPT already utilize the same software, Route Match. Another requirement is that trips must have the same eligibility criteria and the same confirmation protocol. Additionally, trips must have the same service standards, such as on-time windows, missed trips policies, etc. Using this system, CCT and MPT will be able to book rides on existing trips by looking at each other's daily schedules. For example: if CCT has a rider that needs to travel from Willmar to Cosmos and MPT is already doing that trip, then CCT can place that rider on the MPT vehicle. MPT will then send an invoice to CCT to pay for that trip.

Using Route Match

Currently, CCT and MPT use Route Match similarly:

- MPT schedules trips by vehicle, but also uses Microsoft Access to schedule the deviated fixed routes. MPT has the Route Match Coordination Module, which they use to coordinate service with CCT for the Willmar-Litchfield route; however, only one staff member knows how to use this module. For volunteer drivers, the customers' name and addresses are in the Route Match system, but the scheduling is done manually and stored in a handwritten notebook.
- CCT also schedules trip by vehicle using Route Match. CCT uses the Route Match Coordination Module to coordinate service with MPT on the Willmar-Litchfield route; employees are comfortable using this feature. Volunteer driver trips are not entered into Route Match and are scheduled by entering information manually into Excel.

Recommendation

Assigning trips by vehicle is the most efficient way to use Route Match, which both agencies already do. Starting with subscription trips, Route Match assigns the day's trips to a vehicle, which provides anchors for the rest of the trips to be assigned to specific time points around these scheduled trips. After a day's trips are assigned to a vehicle, a driver is assigned to that vehicle. Many times the driver is assigned the same vehicle, but this is not always the case. Before the schedule is finalized a staff member reviews the schedule to ensure accuracy. Route Match can create a schedule based on certain parameters; however, it cannot account for special circumstances, such as weather, construction, or the special needs of a passenger. The schedule will need to be reviewed by a staff member who is very familiar with the area, the trips, and the customers.

It is recommended that CCT and MPT both operate Route Match in the same way, which would also allow them to share schedules and pick up each other's trips as appropriate. The Route Match Coordination Module provides a software system that allows agencies to assign costs to certain

passenger trips, which creates easy reimbursement methods. The two agencies will need to set up the same Route Match parameters, which will include the pickup window, average vehicle speed, etc.

Case Study: Via Mobility Services in Boulder, Colorado

Nonprofit operator Via Mobility Services in Boulder, Colorado provides approximately 140,000 demand-response trips. Via provides accessible, driver-assisted, door-through-door transportation and mobility options for older adults and people with disabilities of any age, as well as for lower wage earners. Via's primary service area includes Boulder County, with limited service provided in the nearby counties of Adams, Arapahoe, Larimer, and Weld. Via embarked on a pilot program in 2010 to determine how their dispatch center could access scheduling software systems and share trips between two systems: Via and the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD).

After bridging two different software systems, data was able to flow between the two systems. On the operations side, the mobility coordinator is able to view both screens simultaneously, identify existing gaps and excess capacity, and fill empty seats where appropriate. Because the coordinator is able to simultaneously view both screens and trip data can be automatically transferred between the systems, the need to rekey information from one system to another has been eliminated. Updated scheduling information is then relayed to drivers' in-vehicle tablets and via cell phone using voice-over Internet protocol. Call-n-Ride and paratransit riders were informed about the project, and some standing rides were transferred between the two services based on the most efficient option.

Implementation of the program effectively doubled Via's fleet, making Via vehicles available to Call-n-Ride passengers and Call-n-Ride's vehicles available to Via passengers. By combining service populations, Via freed paratransit seats for those riders with a higher level of need. Since the pilot was launched, the number of trip denials has decreased, and there has been a 36 percent increase in ridership, accomplished without an increase in cost. Riders in Longmont now account for 35 percent of Via's ridership.[2]

Mobile Tablets

Tablets with electronic manifests allow for improved scheduling flexibility, optimal use of vehicles, and the ability to track boarding and alighting times. They also allow the agency to track schedule adherence and have a better understanding of trip pick-up and drop-off timeliness. Tablets that have 4G technology installed can also serve as GPS devises and can provide real-time information about the buses whereabouts. Tablets have already been implemented for CCT and MPT, and drivers report that tablets make dispatching and data collecting easier and more efficient. CCT's Capital Plan includes $40,000 for upgrades every two years. MPT also has $12,000 in their Capital Plan to update tablets every two years.

Telephone Systems

An effective phone system routes telephone calls, stores messages (voice mail), notifies recipients of new messages, and provides integrated voice response capabilities to give information to callers on system schedules, fares, and current service status. More sophisticated telephone systems will

have Interactive Voice Response and Automated Call Distribution, which increases capacity to handle telephone inquiries by automatically providing route and service information to riders and routing calls.

- An Automated Call Distributor (ACD) is a recommended feature of a new phone system, for routing calls and tracking hold times, call volumes and length, and other statistics.
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR) is an option that enables customers to book and cancel trips over the phone without the assistance of a person, and can be used to place automated trip confirmation calls and trip reminders to customers.

Ideally, a coordinated telephone system for the region would include the following elements:

- Allow callers to speak with a live person to provide the human "touch"
- Interactive voice recognition (24/7 access) for pre-arrival notification, cancellations, and delays
- Universal and easy access/use
- Simple (800) telephone number
- English and Spanish language options
- Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP)

Recommendation

It is recommended that CCT and MPT employ a seamless reservations system that allows customers to have several options for calling to make a reservation. The phone system would be set up as follows: CCT and MPT would establish an easy-to-remember 1-800 number for the new consolidated service (or use the existing CCT 1-800 number). This number will be set up to recognize when a caller originates from Kandiyohi, Renville, or Meeker County and will route the caller to the transit office in the caller's home county. If someone at their home office does not pick up after the third ring, the caller will be routed to both of the other two offices. The current Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker phone numbers would remain the same, connecting callers to these county offices so customers can talk to someone they may know.

MPT's Capital Plan includes $5,000 for a phone system update, but CCT has not allocated funding to update their phone systems. Because the phone systems will need to be compatible across the three county offices, CCT and MPT will need to obtain additional funding to upgrade their phone systems as well as install additional features, such as automated call distributor and interactive voice response.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND MARKETING

Seamless Information and Marketing

An Information and Marketing Plan that creates a seamless user experience is an essential component to this Consolidated Service Plan. Before the consolidation effort is finalized, it is important for all players to understand how it will be presented to the public and key stakeholders. It is common for agencies to feel a loss of identity as a regional brand is developed although this sentiment can be overcome by bringing everyone to the table and building consensus around a look and feel that has the "buy in" of all stakeholders.

It is recommended that key stakeholders from each county work together to develop a plan for information and marketing that will ensure a seamless user experience. Working together can also instill a sense of pride for participants seeking to showcase a new cooperative effort. It is recommended that a Marketing Committee be established consisting of staff and policy board members to oversee the brand integration.

Recommended Strategies

Unified Branding

Unified branding involves the adoption of a shared brand identity that ensures that passengers experience a streamline transit service for the region and are unaware that the bus they are boarding might be operated by another transit service. The unified passenger information system also means passengers refer to the same webpage and consult the same passenger schedules to get information about transit services. This makes the system easy to understand and use, and thus makes it more attractive to riders. The joint branding and unified passenger information system also simplifies some functions allowing a small staff to focus on more community specific programs and services.

Unified branding should be applied to:

- Logo and color scheme
- Website
- Fare structure (as described in Chapter 4)
- Schedules and maps
- Bus branding and color scheme

Valley Metro in Phoenix, a case study taken from TCRP 173: *Improving Transit Integration among Multiple Providers,* provides an example of how multiple transit operators consolidated into one entity and developed a successful unified branding campaign.

Case Study: Valley Metro

The Maricopa County Regional Transportation Planning Authority, branded as Valley Metro, is the regional transit authority for the majority of the Phoenix metro area. Nearly all of the region's most populated cities operate local transit services. The regional services that connect communities are funded and operated separately by Valley Metro. In 2004 voters reauthorized funding for bus and light rail transit improvements, which was a major step forward in creating a regional transit network by restructuring bus service into a grid and by planning for regional light rail. Valley Metro's early successes include a unified regional brand to remove visual distinctions

between the services for riders, create a joint passenger information system, and set unified fares that are regionally based on mode rather than on who is operating or funding the service. Valley Metro has a Regional Marketing Committee that manages branding and marketing and a Regional Fare Committee that oversees the fare structure. Valley Metro is also updating the Transit Standards and Performance Measures to create more consistencies among operators across the service area.

Website

If decided, once the merger has taken place (or several weeks in advance), it is recommended that CCT set up one website that contains all the regional transportation options, regardless of who is the operator, which will also be linked to social media accounts. From the rider's perspective, all services will have the same unified brand; therefore, information about each route and service should be contained in a single website. The quality of a transit operation's web site affects riders' or potential riders' perceptions of the level of service they can expect from the agency. The website should contain the following:

- Agency information about CCT, including the background and history, consolidation with Renville County and Meeker County, and the basic operating statistics, which will increase public familiarity with the system
- System map and route-by-route schedule information and maps, which should be in printable format for easy distribution
- Information about specialized transportation services, such as ADA, Medicaid and elderly and disabled services, including: policies on eligibility, usage guidelines, and application forms, if applicable
- Fare information about all transit options in the three-county region
- Service alerts
- A printable rider guide to present basic information on how to use the services
- A mobile-friendly design for the site

The web site should be maintained regularly and information should be updated as service changes are implemented. For best practices when developing websites, please refer to Figure 6-8 in Technical Memorandum #2.

Printed Material

Both transit operators provide limited printed information. It is not widely available except from the transit offices, and few locations in either community have transit information brochures available to the public.

At a minimum, printed materials should include:

- The system map
- Route schedules and maps
- Rider guide
- Fare information

Printed materials should also be reviewed and updated annually. A distribution plan should be developed to ensure a supply of up-to-date brochures is widely available at community centers, supermarkets, libraries, and public buildings.

Schedules and Maps

The most important component of the website will be the system map and route schedules. These will provide the public with both an overview of all the transit options available in the three-county region and detailed information about each route. It is essential that the public have a resource to find information about the deviated fixed routes and their scheduled time points. The schedules and maps should be formatted as printable documents that riders can print and distribute to organizations and for their own use.

Advertising the New Consolidated Service

If MPT undergoes a rebranding into CCT and the region's transportation systems are consolidated, there should be a strategic advertising component within the Information and Marketing Plan. This advertising component will dictate how CCT announces the consolidated service to the community and provide sufficient information to the public about the service changes, the new website, and the new transit information. The Marketing Committee will be responsible for developing this component and will also be tasked with bringing in additional stakeholders from local human service organizations and nonprofits to provide input on the best way to reach both current and potential passengers.

4 UNIFORM FARE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

INTRODUCTION

In January 2015, when Renville County Heartland Express and Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) consolidated services and formed CCT, the board decided to delay revisions to passenger fares until the merger was fully implemented. Therefore, CCT did not change KAT and Heartland Express fares with the understanding that a fare analysis would be conducted later in the year. With a proposed consolidation between CCT and Meeker County Public Transit currently being explored, a uniform fare structure and corresponding fare policies are needed. This chapter reviews the existing fare structure and policies of CCT and MPT, discusses fare policy goals including farebox recovery ratios, and proposes two options for a distance based uniform fare structure. A series of sample trips (origins and destinations) are presented at the end of this chapter to compare current fares with the proposed fares.

EXISTING FARE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

The existing fares for CCT and MPT are summarized in Figure 4-1 and further described below. A map visually displaying the cash fares are shown in Figure 4-2 on the following page.

Central Community Transit (CCT) Fares

CCT has a fairly complicated fare structure that sets fares based on distance traveled with a surcharge for service type (published routes versus dial-a-ride). One-way cash fares on deviated fixed-route service are $1.50 on a published route (traveling from bus stop to bus stop) and $2.00 for a one-way door-to-door service. One-way distance-based fares on demand response service ranges from $2.00 for one-way travel (0-10 miles) up to $6.00 for travel between Willmar and Litchfield. Contracted service is $6.00 for one-way travel and the agencies are billed directly rather than passengers paying fares when boarding. In Kandiyohi County there is a $1.00 surcharge for service requests for same day of travel.

In addition to cash fares, a punch pass can be purchased for $37 and provides $39 worth of trips (one $2 ride is free). For convenience, a bag of ten tokens are sold for $20.

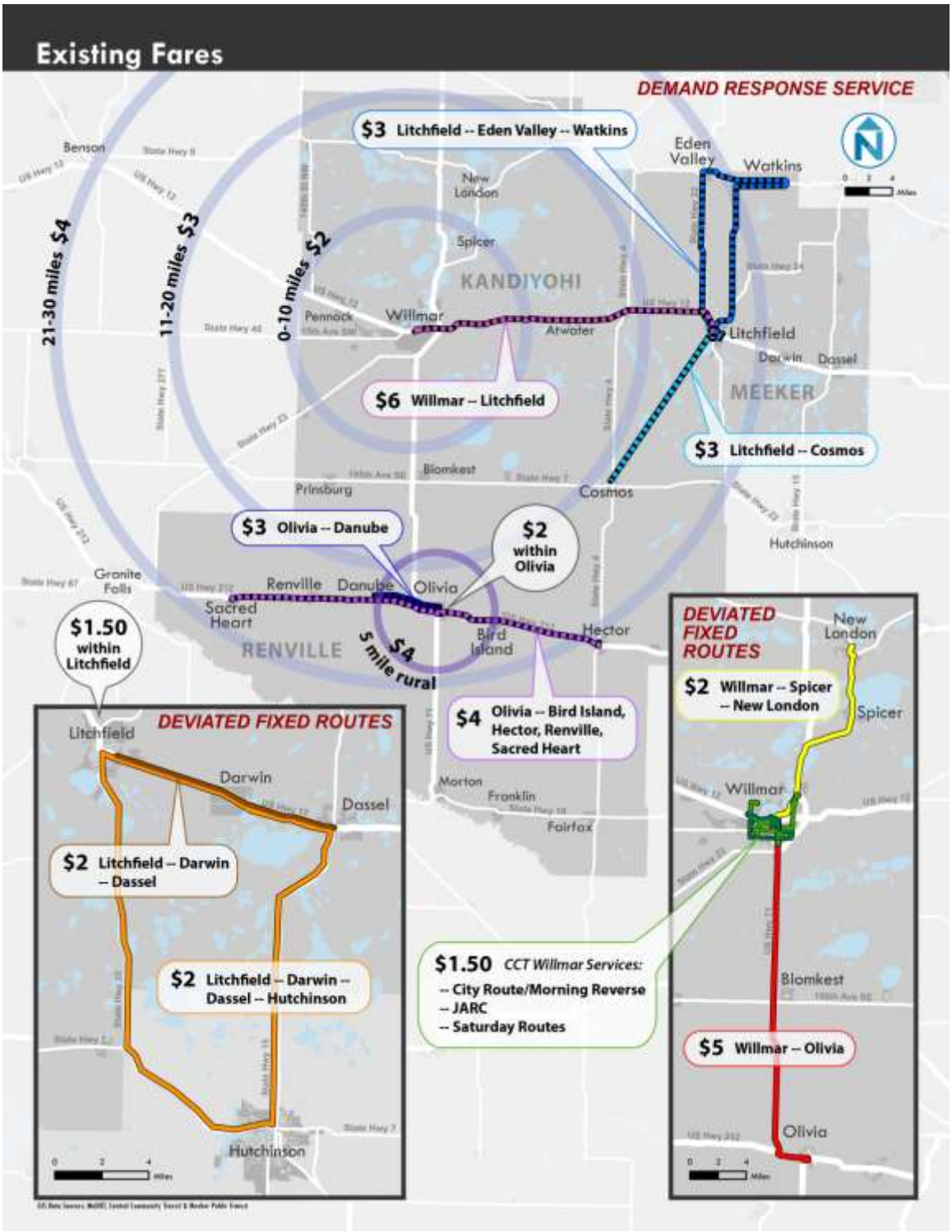
Volunteer driver service has a separate fare structure. Fares are based on the IRS mileage reimbursement rate which is currently $0.575 per mile plus a $3.00 pick up fee.

Figure 4-1 Existing Fare Structure

FARES	Central Community Transit (CCT)	Meeker County Public Transit
Deviated Fixed Route		
Cash Fare	$1.50 one-way (published route)	$2.00 adult (16-55) one-way
	$2.00 one way (door-to-door)	$1.50 children (0-15) one-way
		$1.50 seniors (56+) one-way
Surcharge	$1.00 Same day fee	$1.00 Same day fee
Demand Response		
Cash Fare	Kandiyohi County	
	$2.00 one-way (0-10 miles)	$3.00 one-way
	$3.00 one-way (11-20 miles)	$6.00 Willmar to Litchfield
	$4.00 one-way (21-30 miles)	
	$6.00 Willmar to Litchfield	
	Renville County	
	$2.00 one way (to Olivia)	
	$3.00 one way (to Danube)	
	$4.00 one way town to town (excluding Danube & Bird Island)	
	$5.00 one way (to Willmar)	
	$4.00 one way rural to town (within 5 miles)	
Passes		$13.50 city pass (10 one-way rides)
	$37 punch pass	$25.00 county pass (10 one-way rides)
Fees	$1.00 Same day fee (Kandiyohi only)	$1.00 Same day fee

Source: CCT and MPT

Figure 4-2 Existing Fares



Meeker County Public Transit (MPT) Fares

MPT has a $2.00 one-way adult fare for local (in-town) trips. Discounted fares for local service is $1.50 for children (aged 15 or under) and older adults (aged 56 or more). Similar to CCT, MPT has a $1.00 surcharge for trips scheduled on the same day of travel. One-way fares on demand response service traveling between towns are $3.00. Travel between counties, such as from Willmar to Litchfield, cost $6.00 for one-way service.

MPT sells a $13.50 punch pass for local or in-town travel (referred to as a city pass) that consists of ten one-way ticket coupons. Adults who purchase the punch pass get a savings of over 30% compared to paying $2.00 cash for each ride. A $25 pass for travel within the county allows 10-one-way rides. Compared to paying $3.00 cash per ride, this pass provides a $5.00 discount.

Fare Policies

MPT and CCT have similar fare policies. Riders are encouraged to schedule their travel at least 24–48 hours in advance. Same-day requests for service are accommodated if possible and riders must pay a surcharge of $1.00 for same-day scheduling. The pick-up window is similar but not exactly the same for each service. CCT is considered "on-time" if service arrives between 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after the scheduled pick-up time whereas MPT's pick-up window is between 10 minutes before and 5 minutes after the scheduled pick-up time. CCT's drivers will wait three minutes for passengers after the vehicle arrives and MPT drivers will wait one minute.

Cancellation policies vary. CCT's requests riders to cancel service as soon as possible, although there is no published cancellation policy. Riders are penalized for no-shows after they fail to show up for a ride twice in a 30-day period. Warning letters are sent to passengers to remind them of the policy and their infractions. If a rider receives a third no-show within the 30-day period, they are suspended from the service. MPT riders are required to cancel their trips at least one hour prior to their scheduled pick-up time, or the trip will be considered a "no-show" and they must pay for the missed trip. If a rider gets three no-shows, it could result in a short-term service suspension.

FARE POLICY GOALS

Consistent with transit industry practice and Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) goals to encourage coordination, cooperation, and consolidation (the "three Cs") among small and mid-size transit providers, five fare policy goals are proposed. They guide the development of a uniform fare structure in the tri-county area and are listed below:

1. Fares should be consistent, fair, and equitable across all three counties
2. Fares should be fair and equitable for all types of services including local and regional travel
3. Fares should be easy to understand and flexible for passenger convenience
4. Fare recovery measures and standards should meet MnDOT's requirements
5. Fares should be revisited on a regular basis to keep pace with the Consumer Price Index

Although MnDOT does not have a strict farebox recovery standard, the formula for supporting transit operations is a 15% local share with 85% state and federal financial participation. A 15% farebox ratio is consistent with industry practice for small urban transit services. It means that if

county transit services recover 15% of their operating costs from the farebox, then no additional local matching funds are required.

Prior to the merger of CCT, Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville Heartland Express were experiencing farebox recovery ratios that were much higher than 15% in the previous four years. As shown in Figure 4-3 below, the farebox ratio was approximately 20% for KAT and about 30% for Renville. The farebox recovery ratio for Meeker County Public Transit also exceeded the 15% local share although it has been on a general downward trend. The higher farebox recovery ratios may be in part because a large number of the services are operated under contract with agencies making direct financial contributions for services that are more than if passengers paid the standard fare.

Figure 4-3 Farebox Recovery Ratio Comparison

	2011	2012	2013	2014
Kandiyohi Area Transit	20%	23%	22%	20%
Meeker Public Transit	34%	31%	26%	26%
Renville Heartland Express	33%	31%	29%	32%

Source: CCT and MPT

In early 2013, MnDOT Office of Transit prepared guidance for rural public transit systems expecting to add service to meet unmet needs or merge with other transit services. This guidance provided a series of performance measures to assess service and cost effectiveness. One of the measures—revenue per passenger trip—is relevant and will need to be monitored and measured when services are consolidated and implemented.

PROPOSED FARE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES

Consistent with the fare policy goals and building on the existing distance-based fare structure, a uniform fare structure and consistent policies are proposed for the three-county consolidated system. Other factors to consider when establishing and setting transit fares are social equity and environmental justice. To ensure equitable fares, transit agencies should recognize the ability of passengers to pay for the service to meet their basic mobility needs. Within Renville, Kandiyohi, and Meeker counties, there are large concentrations of very low income residents in Willmar, Litchfield, Dassel, and Olivia.

Distance-Based Fares

As described above, CCT has a distance-based fare structure meaning that higher fares are charged for rides that cover greater distances. For example, passenger fares are $3.00 for travel between Olivia and Blue Island (a distance of five miles) and incrementally increases with distance travelled, with fares at $5.00 when traveling between Fairfield and Olivia (a distance of 22 miles).

Maintaining distance based fares is recommended for a uniform fare structure for a consolidated tri-county system. Under a tri-county system with a large service area and passengers traveling both short and long distances, it is appropriate to charge fares commensurate with distance travelled. Since door-to-door service requires a higher level of service compared to picking up passengers at a fixed bus stop, a higher fare is justified. Consistent with the current CCT fare structure, the $.50 surcharge when traveling door-to-door should be maintained.

The main advantage of distance-based fares is that they seem fair to the riders who are used to paying more for longer trips. With a distance-based fare structure, the cost of longer distance service can recover a higher percentage of the operating costs. The main disadvantage of distance-based fares is that they are more complex for passengers to understand; however, this can be minimized by providing clear public information. Posting a map on the agency's website and in printed information that shows the service area, sample trips and the corresponding fares is recommended. The map would enable passengers to understand the fare structure and know their fares in advance of their scheduled trips. Also when reserving a trip, the dispatcher should inform the passenger of the fare for their ride.

Two options are presented for a distance based fare structure. While they are similar, the actual distances and amounts vary slightly. Figure 4-4 presents two options for a proposed fare structure. Fares increase by distance travel and range from a low of $3.00 to $6.00 for travel over 30 miles. Two price categories for ticket books are recommended with a 15% discount compared to cash fares.

Figure 4-4 Proposed Fare Structure

Three-County Consolidated Service			
Option 1		**Option 2**	
Cash Fares	Cost ($)	Cash Fares	Cost ($)
Local Circulator Routes	$1.50	Local Circulator Routes	$2.00
6-10 miles (one-way)	$2.00	0-11 miles (one-way)	$3.00
11-20 miles (one-way)	$3.00	12-16 miles (one-way)	$4.00
21-30 miles (one-way)	$4.00	17-30 miles (one-way)	$5.00
Over 30 miles (one-way)	$6.00	Over 30 miles (one-way)	$6.00
Pre-Paid Tickets	Cost ($)	Pre-Paid Tickets	Cost ($)
$10 worth of rides (10 $1.00 tickets)	$8.50	$10 worth of rides (10 $1.00 tickets)	$8.50
$20 worth of rides (10 $2.00 tickets)	$17.00	$20 worth of rides (10 $2.00 tickets)	$17.00

Notes:
Includes regional travel, inter-community routes, and demand responsive service.
$1.00 fee is charged for same day service.

A comparison of existing and proposed cash fares for a series of sample trips (with varying trip lengths) is presented in Figure 4-5. The figure shows the fare for each sample trip, and if the change from the current fare and by how much.

Figure 4-5 Comparison of Existing and Proposed Cash Fares for Sample Trips

Trip Type	Origin	Destination	Approximate Mileage	Current Fare Structure (one-way cash)	Option 1: Proposed Fare (one-way cash)	Option 2: Proposed Fare (one-way cash)	*Option 1: Fare Change over existing fare*	*Option 2: Fare Change over existing fare*
Demand Response								
Door to Door	300 8th Street, Bird Island	611 E Fairview, Olivia	5	$2.00	$1.50	$3.00	*($0.50)*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	231 4th Ave., Franklin	611 E Fairview, Olivia	22	$4.00	$5.00	$5.00	*$1.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	Renville	611 E Fairview, Olivia	11	$3.00	$3.00	$3.00	*$0.00*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	611 E Fairview, Olivia	399 Maple Street, Danube	6	$3.00	$2.00	$3.00	*($1.00)*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	100 Central Ave, New London	300 7th Street, Willmar	16	$3.00	$3.00	$4.00	*$0.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	145 3rd Ave, Spicer	300 7th Street, Willmar	12	$3.00	$3.00	$4.00	*$0.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	700 19th Ave, Willmar	301 Becker Ave, Willmar	2	$2.00	$1.50	$2.00	*($0.50)*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	176 1st Street, Lake Lillian	301 Becker Ave, Willmar	21	$4.00	$4.00	$5.00	*$0.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	168 3rd Street, Pennock	301 Becker Ave, Willmar	8	$2.00	$2.00	$3.00	*$0.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	201 Walnut Street, Sacred Heart	1309 W Lincoln, Olivia	18	$3.00	$3.00	$5.00	*$0.00*	*$2.00*
Door to Door	300 Cedar Ave, Hector	1309 W Lincoln, Olivia	15	$3.00	$3.00	$4.00	*$0.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	101 E Monument Drive, Morton	1309 W Lincoln, Olivia	16	$3.00	$3.00	$4.00	*$0.00*	*$1.00*
Door to Door	200 Park Street, Fairfax	1309 W Lincoln, Olivia	30	$4.00	$6.00	$5.00	*$2.00*	*$1.00*
Deviated Fixed Route								
Door to Door	500 13th Street, Willmar	410 5th St, Willmar	2	$2.00	$1.50	$2.00	*($0.50)*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	500 13th Street, Willmar	Wal-Mart, Litchfield	30	$6.00	$6.00	$5.00	*$0.00*	*($1.00)*
Door to Door	300 Pacific Ave, Dassel	2301 E Frontage Road, Litchfield	10	$3.00	$2.00	$3.00	*($1.00)*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	100 Meeker Ave, Watkins	612 S. Sibley Street, Litchfield	18	$3.00	$3.00	$5.00	*$0.00*	*$2.00*

Trip Type	Origin	Destination	Approximate Mileage	Current Fare Structure (one-way cash)	Option 1: Proposed Fare (one-way cash)	Option 2: Proposed Fare (one-way cash)	*Option 1: Fare Change over existing fare*	*Option 2: Fare Change over existing fare*
Door to Door	213 Oak Lane, Darwin	2301 E Frontage Road, Litchfield	5	$3.00	$1.50	$3.00	*($1.50)*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	101 Saturn Street, Cosmos	2301 E Frontage Road, Litchfield	28	$3.00	$4.00	$5.00	*$1.00*	*$2.00*
Door to Door	190 Rose Ave, Eden Valley	612 S. Sibley Street, Litchfield	26	$3.00	$4.00	$5.00	*$1.00*	*$2.00*
Door to Door	100 Stearns Ave, Watkins	612 S. Sibley Street, Litchfield	17	$3.00	$3.00	$5.00	*$0.00*	*$2.00*
Door to Door	301 2nd Street, Grove City	2301 E Frontage Road, Litchfield	9	$3.00	$2.00	$3.00	*($1.00)*	*$0.00*
Door to Door	Wal-Mart, Litchfield	50 E. 6th Street, Litchfield	3	$2.00	$1.50	$2.00	*($0.50)*	*$0.00*
New Local Circulator								
Bus stop	Wal-Mart, Willmar	Kandi Mall, Willmar	3	$1.50	$1.50	$2.00	*$0.00*	*$0.50*
Bus stop	Meeker Hospital, Litchfield	Walmart, Litchfield	3	$1.50	$1.50	$2.00	*$0.00*	*$0.50*

A visual representation of sample trips and the corresponding fares for the two options are displayed in Figure 4-6 and Figure 4-7.

Figure 4-6 Proposed Distance-Based Fares with Sample Trips (Option 1)

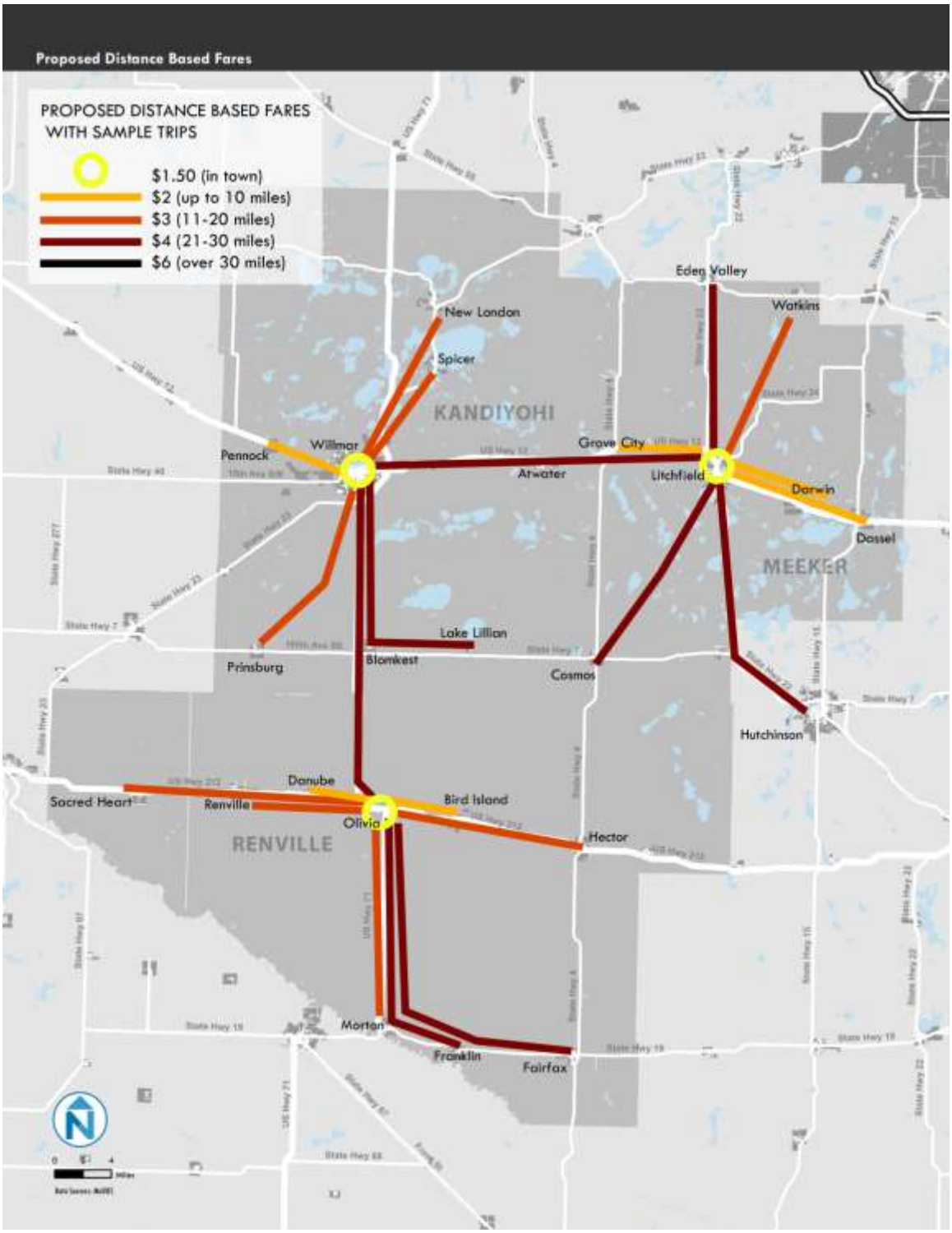
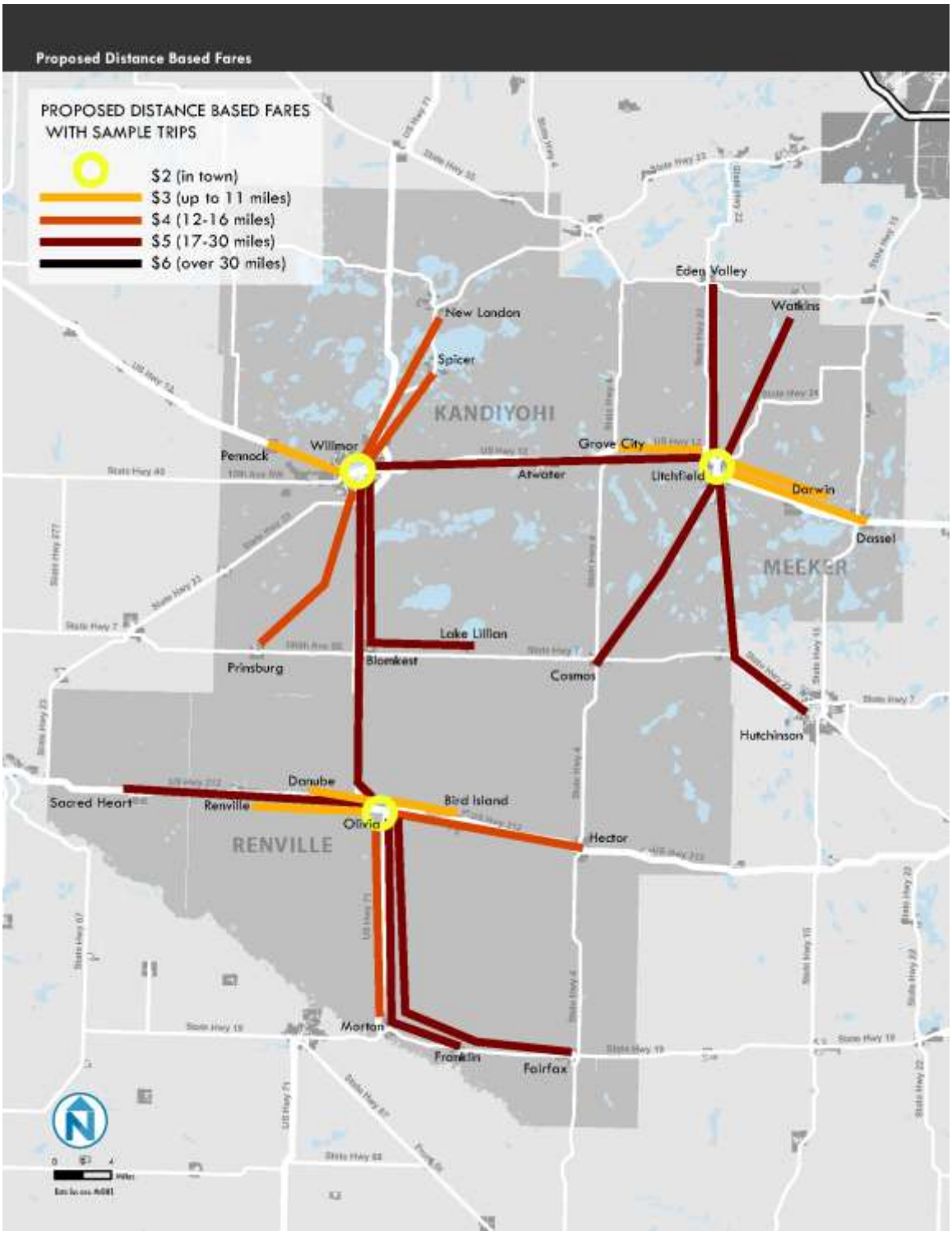


Figure 4-7 Proposed Distance-Based Fares with Sample Trips (Option 2)



Discounts

MPT currently offers a 25% discounted fare for seniors 56 years and older and for students 15 years and younger. Discounted fares are not offered on CCT although children ages four and younger ride free in Kandiyohi County.

It is common among transit agencies to have discounted fares to address social equity concerns. Reduced and discounted fares are frequently offered to seniors, passengers with disabilities and students. Many transit agencies also offer free fares for children under five years of age, provided they are traveling with a fare-paying adult. Appropriate identification is typically required for discounted fares.

The FTA requires that fixed-route services that receive Section 5307 operating assistance charge elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and individuals with a Medicare card a 50% discount from the full fare during off-peak hours. Most transit agencies go beyond the legal requirements and offer a 50% discount throughout the day for cash fares as well as a discounted monthly pass or tickets. Since transit services in Kandiyohi, Meeker and Renville counties are not recipients of FTA Section 5307 funds, they are not obligated to offer discounted fares.

Offering discounted fares consistently across all three counties is a difficult policy decision that would have to be made by the new JPA board of directors. Factors to consider include the percentage of existing and potential senior and youth passengers and the impact a discounted fare would have on the farebox recovery ratio. If a discount is desired, the amount of the discount must be determined. Other considerations include age requirements for seniors and students and whether discounts should be provided for cash and pre-paid tickets.

Contracted Service

CCT and MPT provide contracted service to several employers such as ProWorks and West Central Industries. These are door-to-door services that charge $6.00 for one-way trips regardless of distance travelled. These subscription services pick up passengers at the same time and go to the same place on a regular basis. Special arrangements have been made between the transit services and employers to bill directly for transportation services. Trips are often provided at a higher level of service, and are billed directly to the employers, rather than charging a fare to individual passengers.

Contracted services are usually beneficial to both parties; transit services and employers and social service agencies. They can provide clear roles and responsibilities for each and specify the basis for which payments are to be made. Effective agreements can be based on a number of factors and there is no one methodology that is necessarily “best” for the transit agency or employer. However, transit agencies do not necessarily receive payments from the employers or social service agencies to fully cover the cost of providing service, although it typically covers a greater share than the standard per passenger fare. Agreements should be in writing rather than relying on an oral understanding. It is recommended that cost and passenger data for individual contracted services be monitored and that the agreements be reviewed periodically to update the cost basis, payment methods, and other elements to ensure they still optimize benefits for both parties.

Fare Policies

CCT and MPT each have fare-related policies. While these policies address some important areas, they are not necessarily consistent nor are they comprehensive. Figure 4-8 compares the existing policies of CCT and MPT and then recommends a series of additional uniform service fare policies for a consolidated system.

Figure 4-8 Existing and Recommended Fare Policies

Category	Existing Policies		Recommended Policies
	Existing CCT	Existing MPT	Consolidated System
Scheduling a Ride (Reservation Policy)	48 hour preferred (not including weekends), 24 hours requested, same day limited.	24 hours preferred, same day accepted ($1 extra),	All rides should be scheduled at least 24 hours prior to the time that you need the ride (and can be scheduled up to 2 weeks in advance). Same day trips can be provided if space and time is available.
Cancelling a Ride	Cancel as soon as possible.	At least one hour prior to scheduled ride or considered a "no-show" and will have to pay for the missed ride.	Cancellations should be made as far in advance as possible and must be made two hours before the scheduled ride time. After 3 “late cancels” in a rolling three-month period, service may be suspended for 30 days.
Pick-Up Window (Dial-A-Ride)	Between 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait three minutes.	Between 10 minutes before and 5 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Driver will wait one minute.	Between 5 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time. Pick-up times depend on availability. Remember dial-a-ride service is a “shared ride.” This means that other riders with different destinations may be picked up and dropped off along the way. Your trip on public transit may take longer than if you took a taxi or drove yourself.
"No-Show" Policy	Two "no-shows" within a 30-day period will receive a warning letter. If a rider receives a third "no-show" within the 30-day period that rider will be suspended.	Three times a "no-show" will result in service denial for a period of time.	If you schedule a ride, and then 1) cancel the ride with less than two hours advance notice, 2) fail to meet the bus at the designated pick-up location, or 3) are not ready to go within five minutes of your scheduled pick-up time, that is considered a “no show.” Three no-shows within a three-month rolling period may result in a 30-day suspension of service. If you schedule a trip, and then do not show up for that trip, any other trips you may have scheduled on that day are automatically cancelled.

Source: CCT and MPT

NEXT STEPS

This chapter summarized the existing CCT and MPT fare structure, proposed fare policy goals and recommended a distance-based uniform fare structure for a tri-county consolidated system. The next steps in the process are to review and obtain consensus from the Policy Advisory Committee on the Fare Structure and Policies, refine them as needed, and develop an implementation plan.

KANDIYOHI, RENVILLE, MEEKER TRANSIT RESTRUCTURING STUDY

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM #4

July 2015

NELSON
NYGAARD

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1 INTRODUCTION

Formation of a Joint Powers Board and approval of the Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) in 2014 established Central Community Transit (CCT), an independent not-for-profit agency that operates transit service in Kandiyohi and Renville counties. CCT succeeded the two services known as Kandiyohi Area Transit (KAT) and Renville Heartland Express when they merged to form CCT and began operating service on January 1, 2015.

During the first quarter of 2015, MnDOT and local leaders initiated a study to consider a merger of Meeker County Public Transit into the CCT network. The study was conducted by Nelson\Nygaard and guided by MnDOT and a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) that assessed transit service performance, gathered stakeholder input, evaluated organizational alternatives and options for a uniform fare structure and recommended a consolidated service improvement plan. MnDOT and the PAC directed the consultant to develop an implementation plan and timeline for merging Meeker Public Transit into Central Community Transit.

This technical memorandum discusses the steps that need to be taken to implement the consolidated service plan. Figure 1-1lists the major activities and a timeline organized into the following categories and discussed in the next chapter.

- Administration and staffing
- Capital and financial planning
- Marketing and public information
- Service/ operations
- Vehicle, facilities and maintenance
- Monitoring and evaluation

Figure 1-1: Implementation Tasks and Conceptual Timeline

		Primary Responsibility (if applicable, key support role is shown after semicolon)	Estimated Resources		2015				2016				2017					Ongoing
			County, JPA, or Consulting Staff Hours	Fixed Costs (Low-High)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan/Feb/ March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	Jan	Feb/March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	
ADMINISTRATION/STAFFING																		
1	Obtain Meeker County's endorsment of transit service consolidation	Staff from Meeker county; county commissioners	4															
2	Convene meeting of Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Board & Meeker County commissioners to determine new JPB composition	CCT Staff and county commissioners	4															
3	Revise Joint Powers Authority (JPA) agreement to include Meeker County for a three county consolidated transit system	CCT Staff and/or consultant	16															
4	Revise make-up of Transit System Operations Board to include Meeker County representatives	CCT Staff and county commissioners	4															
5	Take JPA agreement to each of the three commissions for formal action	CCT Staff and county commissioners	8															
6	Extend Ripley Contract for MPT service for one year	Ecumen Staff (dba MPT)	4															
7	Develop job descriptions and Hire staff for new positions	CCT Staff; Ecumen staff																
8	Determine administrative staffing and operations plan	CCT Staff; Ecumen staff	8															
9	Develop administraive staff transition plan	CCT Staff; Ecumen staff	16															
10	Facilitate moving administrative staff to one location	CCT Staff																
11	If decision is to continue 3rd party contract in Meeker County, develop RFP for 1) operations and 2) vehicle maintenance	CCT Staff	40															
12	If applicable, select contractor(s) for 1) operations and 2) vehicle maintenance	CCT Staff and contractor as appropriate	8															
13	Develop set of administrative procedures	CCT Staff	24															
14	Plan for transition of assets to JPA	CCT Staff	8															
15	Develop operating and capital budget	CCT Staff	24															
16	Convene ongoing meetings with JPB	CCT Staff; JPB	4 (per month)															
CAPITAL AND FINANCIAL PLANNING																		
1	Gain consensus and buy-in from MnDOT and Meeker County for funding transition from Meeker County to JPA	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	8															
2	Negotiate with Meeker County on transfer of existing fleets to JPA based on vehicle age, condition, mileage and suitability for the service area	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff ; MnDOT staff	16															
3	Estimate transition-related costs for MnDOT for transition funding	CCT Staff	8															
4	Develop unified capital replacement plan	CCT Staff; MnDOT Staff	8															
5	Explore local revenue enhancement opportunities/partnerships to support local share of transit funding	CCT Staff	24															
6	Finalize uniform fare structure for consolidated system	CCT Staff	16															
7	Hold public hearing on fare structure	JPB	4															
8	Plan, procure, purchase, and install bus stop signs for the circulator routes and inter-community routes	CCT Staff	40															
9	Develop long-term financial plan	CCT Staff	16															

		Primary Responsibility (if applicable, key support role is shown after semicolon)	Estimated Resources		2015				2016				2017					Ongoing
			County, JPA, or Consulting Staff Hours	Fixed Costs (Low-High)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan/Feb/ March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	Jan	Feb/March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	
MARKETING / PUBLIC INFORMATION																		
1	Create public information about the planning process and planned outcomes of the consolidated planning effort	CCT Staff; JPA Board and stakeholder group (and consultant)	16															
2	Develop Information and Public Marketing Plan	CCT Staff; JPA Board and stakeholder group	32															
3	Repaint buses with CCT logo and color schme	CCT Staff; MnDOT Staff	32	$10,000-$15,000														
4	Plan, purchase, and install bus signs on deviated fixed routes	CCT Staff and county DPW Staff	40	$5,000-$7,000														
5	Develop route schedules/maps; print and distribute	CCT Staff; consultant	32	$500														
7	Develop consolidated transit brochure/service area map; print and distribute	CCT Staff; consultant	24	$2,000-$4000														
9	Secure URL for new consolidated system website	CCT Staff	4	$100-$200														
10	Develop website for consolidated system	CCT Staff; consultant	40	$500-$1,000														
11	Create social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) and assign a staff member to update	CCT Staff	16															
14	Design (if appropriate) and print tickets and passes	CCT Staff	24	$500														
15	Develop distribution plan for tickets and passes at sales locations in each county	CCT Staff	16															
16	Conduct public meetings about planned changes to transit	CCT Staff	24															
17	Conduct kick-off event to launch consolidated transit service	CCT Staff; county commissioners	8															
SERVICE / OPERATIONS																		
1	Develop a plan for transitioning to the Consolidated Service Plan	JPA Board	12															
2	Begin discussions with drivers about proposed plan for transition	CCT Staff; drivers	4															
3	Refine the service plan	CCT Staff	12															
4	Finalize the bus stop locations and confirm with local municipalities	CCT Staff; cities and counties DPW	20															
5	Develop an operating plan to support the service plan	CCT Staff; Transit System Operations & JPB Boards	12															
6	Test new deviated fixed routes for operability, make adjustments as needed	CCT Staff; drivers	8															
7	Make final revisions to services before implementation	CCT Staff	12															
8	Establish local bus stop maintenance and amenities plan	JPA Board; Transit Systems Operations Board	16															
9	Prepare training plan for drivers	CCT Staff	12															
10	Finalize schedules	CCT Staff	8															
11	Train drivers and administrative staff about new services and procedures	CCT Staff; drivers	8															
12	Implement consolidated service plan	CCT Staff	40															
13	Refine service schedules as needed	CCT Staff; Transit System Operations Board	16															
14	Develop plans for refinement and future expansion of service	CCT Staff	12															

		Primary Responsibility (if applicable, key support role is shown after semicolon)	Estimated Resources		2015				2016				2017					Ongoing
			County, JPA, or Consulting Staff Hours	Fixed Costs (Low-High)	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan/Feb/ March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	Jan	Feb/March	April/ May/ June	July/ Aug/ Sept	Oct/Nov/ Dec	
VEHICLES, FACILITIES, AND MAINTENANCE																		
1	Develop a consolidated vehicle plan	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	8															
2	Confirm storage locations for vehicles	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	4															
3	Develop vehicle, parts, and equipment inventory	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	8															
4	If applicable, transfer spare parts for vehicles	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	4															
5	Develop a consolidated maintenance plan	CCT Staff	12															
6	Hire additional CCT maintenance staff, if needed	CCT Staff	24															
7	Transition MPT vehicles to CCT maintenance, as appropriate	CCT Staff and Ecumen Staff	8															
8	Negotiate lowered rates at auto mechanics for major repairs	CCT Staff	8															
9	Replace decals on vehicles with unified system brand; repaint vehicles as needed	CCT Staff	See above															
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEMS ADMIN																		
1	Research and purchase new phone system	CCT Staff; JPB Board	20	$3,000-$5,000														
2	Purchase new 1-800 number	CCT Staff	4															
3	Purchase and Install Route Match Coordination Software	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	16	$5,000-$7,000														
4	Develop vehicle communications plan between dispatch and operators and train both parties	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	16															
5	Train schedulers and dispatchers on the new Route Match technology	CCT Staff; Ecumen Staff	40															
MONITORING AND EVALUTION																		
1	Determine if consolidated services are meeting performance standards	CCT Staff	8															
2	Monitor service on monthly basis and report to Transit Systems Operations and JPA Boards	CCT Staff	4/month															
3	Adjust service and make other revisions as necessary	CCT Staff and/or contract operator	4/month as needed															
4	Solicit rider feedback via surveys (after one year of service)	CCT Staff	40/year															

2 CONSOLIDATION IMPLEMENTATION BLUEPRINT

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFFING

This section reviews the major tasks and responsibilities for administering and staffing the proposed three-county consolidated transit service. Revising the JPA is the initial required task to be followed by developing and implementing an administrative staff structure and detailed plans for service operations. The specific steps are discussed below.

Revising the Joint Powers Authority

The 2014 Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Agreement needs to be revised to include Meeker County. As a first step, in July 2015 representatives from the City of Litchfield and Meeker County discussed and supported moving forward with consolidating MPT transit services with CCT. The next step is to obtain formal approval from Meeker County commissioners and then convene a meeting with the Kandiyohi Renville Transit Joint Powers Board and Meeker County commissioners to determine the composition for an expanded Joint Powers Board (JPB).

The existing JPB consists of two members each from the Kandiyohi County Board, City of Willmar Council, and Renville County Board, as well as two elected officials, one from each county, totaling eight board members. To include representatives from Meeker County, the Joint Powers Board (JPB) could be expanded to an 11-member board by adding two representatives from the Meeker County Board plus one other elected official from Meeker County communities. Alternatively, the JPB could choose to reduce the total number of Board members to one representative from each County plus one other elected member for a seven-member Joint Powers Board. Once the size and make-up of the Board is agreed upon, the JPA agreement needs to be formally approved by each of the three commissions.

In addition to the Joint Powers Board, the Transit System Operations Board needs to be expanded to include Meeker County representatives.

Staffing

Service Operations

An important first decision of the JPB is about how service should be operated in all three counties. Key questions to address include:

- Should CCT service in Renville and Kandiyohi counties continue operating using in-house personnel?
- Who should operate service in Meeker County? Should service continue to be operated under a 3rd party contract or should it be brought in-house following the current CCT model?
- Should a 3rd party provide operations and/or maintenance for all three counties or just Meeker County?

Regardless of the decision, the Ripley contract needs to be extended to operate Meeker Public Transit for one year, from January 2016 to January 2017. This action must be made by Ecumen *(not the JPB)* which will allow the new JPB to decide on a longer-term course of action. If the JPB decides that some or all of CCT transit service (including Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker counties) should be operated under a 3rd party contract, then staff would prepare a Request for Proposal (RFP). The RFP should be structured to enable vendors to submit proposals for operations and/or maintenance allowing for maximum flexibility. It should also include a sample contract so potential vendors are informed about performance expectations and other contract requirements. For example, transit service contracts should spell out performance standards and expected performance and whether monetary incentives for meeting and/or exceeding performance measures will be provided as well as penalties for non-performance. A formal selection process including a selection committee, specific evaluation criteria and timeline should also be clearly explained to ensure a fair and objective method for evaluating proposals and selecting the best option for the three county system.

The size and make-up of administrative staff is dependent on whether service is operated in-house or under a 3rd party contract. While there is no one "right" service delivery option, the decision on who operates the consolidated service in the three-county service area will influence the size and structure of administrative staff.

Administration

On the administrative side, CCT currently has six (6) employees plus 5.5 schedulers/dispatchers, a maintenance coordinator plus 22 drivers. MPT (Ecumen employees) has two administrative employees and two part-time schedulers/dispatchers and nine drivers. The question regarding the role and number of administrative employees is critically important and is influenced by how service operated; whether it is a total in-house operation, some or all of service is operated by a 3rd party contract and how vehicle maintenance is structured.

Following the decision on service operations, CCT staff in cooperation with Ecumen staff should develop an administrative staffing plan including job descriptions and performance expectations. One key position that would remain unchanged is the Transit Director who would continue to assume overall responsibility for all aspects of the service to ensure that the three-county consolidated transit system is running smoothly. In addition to the existing Transit Director, other key positions that are recommended regardless of the service delivery option are Office Manager /Administrative Assistant and Compliance Officer. The Compliance Officer would be a new position that would assume responsibility for preparing and submitting federal and state documentation, ensuring that all provisions of the existing labor contract are honored as well as overseeing other routine reporting requirements. The Office Manager would support the Transit Director on a variety of administrative tasks.

CAPITAL AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

An initial task of the JPA will be to seek funding to cover costs for Meeker County to transition from a single county operation to a three-county consolidated service.

Kandiyohi and Renville counties have transferred their capital assets to the new JPA. Once the merger with Meeker County occurs, their capital assets will need to be transferred in accordance with MnDOT and FTA requirements. MnDOT retains an interest in all capital assets funded with any FTA grant funds or Minnesota State transit assistance funds and has established a set of procedures for transferring a vehicle to a consolidated system without incurring any obligation to purchase the vehicle outright before transferring it. Under MnDOT's Disposition Policy guidance, a vehicle may be transferred to another eligible organization if the transit agency follows a set of specific procedural guidelines and works with MnDOT Office of Transit staff to facilitate the transfer. It is expected that capital assets from Meeker County would be transferred to the JPA.

Under MAP-21, the U.S. Department of Transportation is establishing performance measures and MnDOT will develop complementary performance targets for transit assets. Transit agencies receiving federal assistance are required to develop performance targets for state of good repair and will also be required to develop asset management plans, which include capital asset inventories, condition assessments, decision support tools, and investment prioritization. These requirements will impact the three-county consolidated transit operation, which will be required to develop a Transit Asset Management Plan that defines specific actions such as how the JPA will procure, operate, maintain, rehabilitate, and replace transit assets, as well as how the organization will manage asset performance, risks, and costs over their lifecycle.

The JPA will need to develop a unified capital plan including vehicle replacement schedule and plans for vehicle storage and maintenance (see section below, page 2-12). A long-term financial plan should be developed projecting operating and capital costs over a minimum timeframe of five years to ensure financial sustainability for the system.

Other important financial decisions relate to the fare structure. Two options are proposed for a consolidated distance base fare structure. The JPB will need to formally adopt a preferred option and hold public hearings to solicit feedback from the public. For more information, please refer to page 2-13.

MARKETING AND PUBLIC INFORMATION

Coordinated marketing and public information systems are important because they provide a single place for riders to obtain information about all services and a unified, consistent message for providing information to the public. The need for improved transit information systems in the study area was identified in the SWOT analysis and the need for more, different, and better information and marketing systems was also identified through discussions with stakeholder and the individual transit systems.

Information and Public Marketing Plan

It is recommended that key stakeholders from each county work together to develop a plan for information and marketing that will ensure a seamless user experience. Working together can also instill a sense of pride for participants seeking to showcase a new cooperative effort. It is recommended that a Marketing Committee be established consisting of staff and policy board members to oversee the brand integration.

Branding

Branding creates a public image for a product or service. Branding for transportation services is important because it makes the available services easy to recognize and understand.

Figure 2-1: CCT Logo

When Central Community Transit (CCT) was formed by combining KAT Bus and Renville Heartland Express, a new brand was created. The brand included a new logo (shown in Figure 2-1), which is painted on the sides of new buses, displayed at the CCT offices, and printed on new printed materials. Other buses, the website, and older printed materials have the old KAT and Renville lettering and color scheme.

CCT's long-term goal is to expand the brand to cover all vehicles and public information. Once MPT is also part of the CCT brand according to the general public, it will be important to carry the branding into anything that is visible to riders.

Signs/Logos on the Buses

Signs and logos on buses are especially important because they allow the services to advertise themselves. As described above, the CCT brand has been painted on the sides of a few of the newer buses, but there are still a large number of KAT and Renville busses that are painted with the former lettering and color scheme. CCT will need to repaint these buses and develop a timeline for repainting the MPT buses with the CCT logo and color scheme.

In addition, including a telephone information number or website address on the outside of the bus enables it to function as a moving billboard so interested persons will know where to go for information about the system. It also lets residents of the three counties know that the buses they see are available to the public, and are not *only* for seniors or people with disabilities. CCT will need to develop a consistent information sign for each vehicle that contains the region-wide phone number, website, route information.

Bus Stops

With deviated fixed route service in all three counties, the installation of signage indicating key bus stops is recommended for CCT. Informative bus stops provide an invaluable ongoing marketing function. Comprehensive bus stop signs show people who are not familiar with the transit service that it exists and might be available to them. They also reassure riders that they are at the correct location — something of great concern on a deviated route or commuter when buses

run with limited frequency. All bus stops should be clearly marked with signs that provide as much information as possible: the consolidated system name and logo, stop and frequency information, and a contact telephone number and website. Adding shelters, benches and news racks/bulletin boards is recommended for high-volume stops.

CCT will need to purchase and install close to 40 bus signs, which will require some planning and funding.

Printed Materials

Post-consolidation and once the service plan has been implemented CCT should revise all of the printed materials for the region to have the same logo, color scheme, and format. CCT should create a system map to show the entire region and routes as well as route schedules and maps for each route. Additionally, a rider guide with the universal rider policies should be updated and published. Information about fares should also be updated and published.

Printed materials should also be reviewed and updated annually. A distribution plan should be developed to ensure a supply of up-to-date brochures is widely available at community centers, supermarkets, libraries, and public buildings.

Technology

Website

It is recommended that CCT set up one website that contains all the local and regional transportation options, regardless of who is the operator, which will also be linked to social media accounts. From the rider's perspective, all services will have the same unified brand; therefore, information about each route and service should be contained in a single website.

The web site should be maintained regularly and information should be updated as service changes are implemented. For best practices when developing websites, please refer to Figure 6-8 in Technical Memorandum #2.

Social Media

CCT should also set up Facebook and Twitter accounts which can be managed by savvy administrative staff or customer service staff, and can be used to inform regular users of service changes, detours, or other updates. Social media have been especially successful at closing the information gap for transit providers that do not provide real-time arrivals and departures, and even more useful when they can be integrated into a comprehensive information system. A Twitter follower, for example, can find out that there is a vehicle breakdown or a weather-related service issue just by checking his or her Twitter feed. Both Facebook and Twitter posts can be consolidated using any number of free (or inexpensive) software packages.

Fare Passes and Tickets

Once the fare structure has been approved by the JPA Board, staff would need to consider if a design for passes and tickets is warranted or may elect for them to remain the same. Regardless, a distribution network to make them widely available needs to be developed. Tickets and passes should be at the transit offices and at other locations throughout the region, such as grocery stores, senior centers, colleges, and government buildings.

It is encouraged that CCT explore special discounts associated with retail outlets. For example, Wal-Mart in Litchfield would benefit from the pre-arranged group trips and may consider subsidizing a passenger's return trip or paying a customer's fare if he or she were to spend $10 or more at the store. These types of arrangements have been offered in other areas and may have appeal with at select stores in Kandiyohi or Meeker Counties.

Ongoing Public Relations

Although the transit directors currently provide some public relations and marketing activities, there is opportunity for an increased role in community outreach and involvement post consolidation. The Information and Marketing Plan should include a strategic public relations and advertising component that will dictate how CCT announces the consolidated service to the community. It will be very important, once the new service is implemented, to provide sufficient information to the public about the service changes, the new website, and the new transit information. Staff should be responsible for developing this component and will also be tasked with bringing in additional stakeholders from local human service organizations and nonprofits to provide input on the best way to reach both current and potential passengers.

Additionally, CCT should convene several public meetings in advance of the launch of the new consolidated service plan to explain the changes to the public. At least three public meetings should be planned at a convenient time and location in Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield at least a few weeks prior to service launch. Finally, CCT should plan a kick-off event to launch the consolidated transit service and invite the public and media to attend.

SERVICE AND OPERATIONS

Consolidated service for the three-county region will increase the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of transit in the region and should also help to meet performance standards. The Consolidated Service Plan creates a service hierarchy to reflect demand and match community size and needs with the appropriate service types. The hierarchy is designed to balance the appropriate level and type of services with local needs to create a consolidated network that facilitates travel between small communities and larger towns and cities.

Service Standards

The JPA Board will first need to approve a set of proposed policies and standards that will apply to transit throughout the service area.

Below is a set of industry-standard service standards for consolidated transit operation (shown in Figure 2-2). The most critical performance measure is farebox recovery, because the consolidated system will be required to cover 15% of the total operating costs, with 85% of funding funneled through MnDOT from state and federal sources. Different types of services are anticipated to achieve different levels of cost recovery, with local circulation routes covering 20% of operating costs with fares.

Ultimately, it will be up to the JPA Board to adopt a set of performance standards, that can be updated as operating conditions and services change.

Figure 2-2: Proposed Service Standards for Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties

Quality/ Reliability/Design Measures	Proposed Service Standards by Service Type
Passengers per Revenue Hour	1. Local Circulation Routes: 8 passengers per hour 2. Regional Routes: 6 passengers per hour 3. Inter-Community Routes: 6 passengers per hour 4. Structured Dial-a-Ride: 5 passengers per hour 5. General Purpose Dial-a-Ride: 3 passengers per hour
Farebox Recovery	1. Local Circulation Routes: 20% 2. Regional Routes: 20% 3. Inter-Community Routes: 20% 4. Structured Dial-a-Ride: 15% 5. General Dial-a-Ride: 15%
On Time Performance	1. Deviated Fixed Service: No bus should depart a time point before the time published in the schedule. 90% on-time performance for all services. 2. Dial-A-Ride: Between 5 minutes before and 15 minutes after scheduled pick up time Pick up times depend on availability. Remember dial-a-ride service is a "shared ride". This means that other riders with different destinations may be picked up and dropped off along the way. Your trip on public transit may take longer than if you took a taxi or drove yourself.
Passenger Complaints/ Boardings	The number of complaints shall not exceed 0.01% of the total boardings. The benchmark is 7.5 complaints/100,000 boardings.
Trips Cancelled	No bus or trips should be cancelled.

System Implementation

There are several steps that must be taken to get the consolidated system up and running. First, the JPA Board must approve the proposed policies and standards, as noted above, and integrate these standards into a transition plan for implementing the Consolidated Service Plan. Additionally, the Consolidated Service Plan developed by the consultant during this project will need to be refined and approved by each municipality. The JPA Board will need to develop an operating plan which will finalize the operation of each type of service.

Drivers and administrative staff need to be brought up to speed on the proposed Consolidated Service Plan in order to ensure a smooth transition. With service launch scheduled for January 2017, drivers will need to be fully trained on the new policies, procedures and routes prior to this date.

Additionally, MPT should extend the Ripley Transport service contract for one year to continue operations in Meeker County to give ample time for the transition to a three-county consolidated system.

Deviated Fixed Routes

Deviated fixed route service streamlines the transportation service in the region by reducing redundancies between routes and creates a more efficient service structure. The network of routes also creates parity and equality across the tri-county region and individual communities. There are three types of deviated fixed route service:

- **Regional Service –** connects the largest population and employment centers (Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield) in the tri-county region with scheduled deviated fixed routes. Regional services between Willmar and Olivia and Willmar and Litchfield will operate daily. Each service will operate at least three round trips every day they operate.
- **Local Circulation Routes** – provides local circulation for passengers traveling within the region's largest communities, Willmar and Litchfield. Services are operated as deviated fixed routes.
- **Inter-Community Routes** – links the smaller communities within each county (with at least 500 residents) to the local hubs of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. In many cases, inter-community routes may be operated in conjunction with contracted services. The goal is to link the most populated cities in each county with Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. Service may be deviated fixed route or structured dial-a-ride service depending on need and demand.

Implementation Steps

There are several steps that need to be accomplished prior to launch in January 2017:

- Test the new deviated fixed routes for operability and make adjustments
- Train drivers on the new routes and policies
- Establish a local bus stop maintenance and amenities plan
- Purchase, plan, and install new bus stop signs at stop locations
- Refine service schedules as needed

Dial-a-Ride Services

Structured Dial-a-Ride

CCT and MPT currently schedule and dispatch trips based on whenever service requests are made. For example, if MPT receives a dial-a-ride request from Cosmos to Litchfield, staff will schedule that ride if a vehicle is available. If another request comes for a trip from Cosmos to Litchfield on the same day, if there is availability, staff will schedule that ride. As a result, a number of trips are operated as single-passenger trips. While this provides ongoing use of the vehicles and keeps them moving, many transit agencies schedule trips that operate within service zones of communities as a way to concentrate the scheduling of trips in specific corridors at certain times of the day.

In order to implement structured dial-a-ride in the region, staff will first need to refine and approve the communities and days of the week for the service. A vehicle will need to be assigned to these trips for at least part of the day, depending on the number of trip requests.

Most importantly, CCT will need to devise a marketing campaign to educate communities and individuals who live within these communities about the new service. This will entail calling current customers in the communities, hosting community meetings, posting information at community hubs, and emailing information, if applicable. The structured dial-a-ride service will also be discussed at the public meetings and announced during the kick-off event.

General Dial-a-Ride

General dial-a-ride service provides lifeline service for individuals living in the main urban areas of Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield who are not able to use deviated fixed-route service.

For the most part, general dial-a-ride is remaining the same, although with a slightly smaller geographic area. General dial-a-ride pickup and drop off is now restricted to a five mile radius around Willmar, Olivia, and Litchfield. Same day trips will also still be accepted, but will be discouraged through a $1 surcharge. The more limited geographic service area and the same day service fee will encourage riders to take the deviated fixed routes for most of their trips, because it will go further distances and will also allow people more flexibility and spontaneity.

Implementation of the general dial-a-ride will require CCT and MPT agreeing on the formal service boundaries and service hours. Vehicles will need to be assigned to this service. Again, marketing and educating the public about the service change is a high priority and will be discussed at the public meetings and announced during the kick-off meetings.

Vehicles

A consolidated service allows for the combining of transit fleets to create a shared three-county transit fleet. The current combined fleet of all three services is 29 vehicles. A consolidated transit fleet also means there will be more interchangeable vehicles and an overall improved spare vehicle ratio. Currently, there are eight different types of vehicles (makes and models) in the region. For future vehicle purchases, the JPA Board may opt to purchase one make of vehicle to assist with uniformity of maintenance and supply needs.

In addition, there are plans to replace at least two-thirds of the current fleet within the next 10 years. Figure 2-3 below shows total capital plan costs per year for each system, and the number of vehicles being replaced (in parenthesis).

Figure 2-3: 10-Year Capital Plan for Kandiyohi, Renville and Meeker Counties

Cost (Number of Vehicles) by Year		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Central Community Transit	Kandiyohi	$70,000 (1)	$80,000 (1)	$246,000 (2)	$114,000 (2)	$78,000 (1)	$88,000 (1)	$82,000 (1)	$92,000 (1)	$0	$8,000
	Renville	$122,000 (1)	$4,000	$0	$84,000 (1)	$82,000 (1)	$88,000 (1)	$86,000 (1)	$0	$0	$0
Meeker Public Transit		$70,000 (1)	$5,000	$80,000 (1)	$82,000 (1)	$0	$87,000 (1)	$0	$0	$0	$0

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Meeker Public Transit

The current fleet replacement plans can be combined for a single consolidated fleet replacement plan for the new system. A key factor to be determined will be the level of service that will be made available in the three-county service area (see Technical Report #3). If the JPA Board authorizes a service expansion to increase service hours to reach the MnDOT Regional Trade Center standards, then additional vehicles will be required.

Vehicle Storage

Consolidation of agencies does not always signify physical consolidation. After service consolidation in January 2017, CCT may prefer to keep two vehicle storage facilities, one in Kandiyohi County and one in Renville County. This is a cost saving measure because the counties do not currently have the local match funds required to construct a new facility. Additionally, having two separate vehicle storage locations works well for Kandiyohi and Renville counties because vehicles in each location are closer to local routes. In the short-term, to save on deadhead costs and to have vehicles readily available in all three counties, it is recommended MPT retain its storage facility located at the MPT offices in Litchfield.

Post consolidation, a comprehensive inventory of vehicles, vehicle parts, and vehicle-related equipment should be developed. This will allow spare parts to be redistributed where needed across the three agencies and ensure that accurate information about each vehicle is collected and retained.

Maintenance

The three agencies each have a different process for vehicle maintenance. To maintain former KAT bus vehicles, CCT employs a full-time maintenance employee to provide the majority of the daily maintenance needs and contracts out to a local mechanic for more difficult repairs. Renville County vehicles are maintained by the Renville County Highway Department; however, CCT is developing a plan for maintaining Renville County vehicles in house. MPT vehicles are maintained and repaired by the contract operator (Ripley Transportation).

The first step is developing a consolidated maintenance plan which will identify the best strategy for providing quality, low-cost maintenance and repair for the systems 29 vehicles. As shown in Figure 2-4, maintenance costs for 2014 vary widely between the three providers. MPT has the

highest maintenance costs, paying more than $1,000 additional per vehicle than CCT; therefore it is recommended that maintenance and repair of MPT vehicles be transitioned to the CCT in-house maintenance method, which may require hiring another part-time or full-time maintenance staff member. Because maintenance of MPT vehicles is provided on-site at the Ripley Transportation facility, vehicles will need to be serviced at the CCT facility.

Figure 2-4: 2014 Maintenance Expenses by Transit Agency

System	Maintenance Wages	Maintenance Expenses	Contract Maintenance Expenses	Number of Vehicles	Total Costs	Cost per Vehicle
Kandiyohi Area Transit	$45,773	$35,380	$30,183	13	$11,336	$8,564
Renville County Heartland Express	$0	$2,300	$3,100	7	$5,400	$1,350
Meeker County Public Transit	$0	$68,500	$18,000	9	$86,500	$9,611

Source: MnDOT, Kandiyohi Area Transit, Renville County Transit, Meeker Public Transit

For both CCT and MPT, more extensive repairs are outsourced to specialist auto mechanics in the region. To cut costs, CCT should take all CCT and MPT vehicles to the same auto mechanics and negotiate a special deal for providing additional business.

Fares

Before service is consolidated, a new uniform fare structure will need to be adopted and implemented for the suite of transit services. Two options for a distance based fare were outlined in Technical Memorandum #3. Depending on the preferred option, fares for some trips would represent an increase or decrease over current fare levels (see Figure 4-5 of Technical Memorandum #3 for fares for sample trips).

The JPA Board is required to conduct a public meeting to solicit comments and feedback before approving a new fare structure. The meeting should be held at a convenient public location and should be advertized in a locally distributed newspaper announcing the public meeting at least five (5) days prior to the date of the meeting. Also, the notices should be posted on all buses and at major activity centers such as senior centers, libraries and medical offices. Comments should be accepted at the public meeting as well as via telephone, email, U.S. mail, or fax. A summary of the comments and feedback received should be presented to the JPA Board before a formal vote is taken on the new fare structure.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATION

Reservations, Scheduling and Dispatching

Telephone Systems

It is recommended that CCT employ a seamless reservations system that allows customers to have several options for calling to make a reservation. The phone system would be set up as follows: CCT would establish an easy-to-remember 1-800 number for the new consolidated service (or use the existing CCT 1-800 number). This number will be set up to recognize when a

caller originates from Kandiyohi, Renville, or Meeker County and will route the caller to the transit office in the caller's home county. If someone at their home office does not pick up after the third ring, the caller will be routed to both of the other two offices. The current Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker phone numbers would remain the same, connecting callers to these county offices so customers can talk to someone they may know.

CCT should ensure that the new phone system has interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) technology which can be programmed to provide automated calls to customer regarding pre-arrival notifications, cancellations, and delays. Other recommended features include a Spanish language option and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP).

Use of Route Match

The continued use and expansion of existing software capabilities is encouraged as part of a consolidated transit system, especially since RouteMatch is the standard software platform for transit agencies in Greater Minnesota. Assigning trips by vehicle is the most efficient way to use Route Match, which both CCT and MPT already do. It is recommended that Route Match be continued to operate in the same way, which would also allow shared schedules and pick up trips in each county as appropriate.

Reservations will be received through the 1-800 number that will direct a caller to the transit agency office located within the caller's county. If that office is busy, the caller will be redirected to both of the other offices. The scheduler will then take the callers information and schedule the ride in the coordinated Route Match system. Each vehicle will be assigned trips depending on the trips origin and destination.

Integrating the Kandiyohi, Renville, and Meeker Counties into a regional consolidated system requires enhanced technologies. For coordinating multiple services and brokering trips, technology revolves around software that provides assistance for making trip reservations, scheduling and dispatch of services, billing agencies for the trips or services provided, cost sharing (pulling funds from multiple accounts and funding sources, as appropriate, to cover the cost of a trip), and reporting. RouteMatch software can be used by providers to record and track clients and trip eligibility for various programs, to book and schedule trips, to optimize vehicle schedules, and to generate required reports and invoices. The Route Match Coordination Module provides a software system that allows agencies to assign costs to certain passenger trips, which creates easy reimbursement methods. The two agencies will need to set up the same Route Match parameters, which will include the pickup window, average vehicle speed, etc.

Prior to service launch, CCT should develop a Vehicles Communications Plan that sets a communication policy for dispatch to talk to drivers and vice versa. This plan will include a policy for same day pick-ups, no shows, and late arrival notification.

Employee Training

Employees will need to be trained to use any new technologies implemented as part of the consolidation. Training is usually offered as part of any new Route Match technologies and can be purchased for a new telephone system. Ideally, two or more staff members will be trained for each new technology and can then train other employees.