1   Introduction

The Saint Cloud metropolitan area, situated along the Mississippi River in central Minnesota, is one of the fastest growing regions in the state, if not the nation[1]. It is located 65 miles northwest of the Twin Cities, and it is included in the U.S. Census Bureau's Combined Statistical Area (CSA) of Minneapolis-Saint Paul-Saint Cloud—Minnesota's largest metropolitan area. Saint Cloud is also home to Saint Cloud State University (SCSU), which is the second-largest public university in the state and the largest member of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System.

Metro Bus, operated by the Saint Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission, provides transit service to the area, including the cities of Saint Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park. Service includes a fixed route system and a Dial-a-Ride program for persons with disabilities. Metro Bus also provides seasonal transit service to the Saint Cloud State University campus. Figure 2-1 is a map of the fixed route system. The study area for this update to the long range plan consists of the Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) region, which includes Saint Cloud and its surroundings in Stearns, Benton, and Sherburne Counties. Particular emphasis is given to the municipalities currently served by Metro Bus as well as Saint Joseph and Saint Augusta, where future transit expansion has been considered.

The subsequent chapter covers the following eight topics to understand social and economic trends in the communities served by Metro Bus: demographics, socioeconomics, the combination of the two into a potential for transit success scoring system, employment, commuting patterns, land use, future growth and development, and a separate section profiling the Saint Cloud State University (SCSU). Past, present and future population statistics are discussed in the demographics section, as are the concentrations of youth and senior populations in the region. In the socioeconomics section, income statistics, poverty, and households without vehicles are discussed. In a subsequent section, demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are generally considered to be correlated to higher rates of transit usage are evaluated for the region in order to produce a map of areas of potential transit success. Jobs, major employers, and unemployment are discussed in the employment section and means of transportation to work and place of employment are discussed in the commuting section. In the land use section, both land use and the location of major trip generators are described. Future growth is described based on projected land use changes through 2035. The final section on SCSU describes both the student and employee populations.

Generally the most recent data available from multiple sources were used in this evaluation. The sources, noted in each figure and table, include the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the US Census Bureau's Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program (LEHD), AASHTO's Census Transportation Planning Products (CTPP), Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO), Saint Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), Saint Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce, Saint Cloud Area Convention and Visitors Bureau and State of Minnesota. Unless otherwise noted, maps present data at the Census block group unit of analysis.

The following chapters provide a holistic view of both the existing transit system as well as of the proposed system modifications that – when taken together in their entirety – make up the Long Range Transit Plan Update. These include the proposed route realignments, operating and capital cost estimates, as well as various other planning elements.

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[1] http://www.minnesotabusiness.com/st-cloud-among-america%E2%80%99s-fastest-growing-cities