

10 Other Transportation Services

This chapter presents other regional transportation operations and how Saint Cloud Metro Bus will coordinate and interact with these services. The other key public transportation provider in the region is the Northstar Commuter Rail. Major operators that Metro Bus needs to coordinate with include the local county rural transit systems and inter-city operators. This chapter also presents Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) initiatives in the Saint Cloud area and how they pertain to Metro Bus.

10.1 Northstar Coordination and Integration

The Northstar Corridor is a 40 mile commuter rail line operating between Big Lake in Sherburne County and Minneapolis. The commuter rail line opened for service on November 16th, 2009. There is an extension proposed for the Northstar Commuter Rail that will bring it to Saint Cloud. In the meantime a commuter connection bus, called the Northstar Link, is operating between the Downtown Transit Center, SCSU, East Saint Cloud and the Big Lake terminal of the commuter.

The Northstar Link bus is operated by Saint Cloud Metro Bus under contract to the Northstar Corridor Development Authority (NCDA). The primary service is between a park and ride lot at U.S Route 10 and Lincoln Avenue SE in East Saint Cloud. Northstar Link trips also provide access to Saint Cloud State University and Downtown Saint Cloud. Reverse commute service is available on all bus trips from Big Lake, however there is only one reverse commute train from Minneapolis.

The long term plans have the Northstar Commuter Rail serving Saint Cloud, potentially at the East Saint Cloud park-and-ride location. When train service is at this location it is desirable that Metro Bus buses will meet all arriving and departing trains.

Meanwhile, Metro Bus will continue to operate Northstar Link buses as long as the NCDA provides funding for the service. If Northstar Commuter Rail service is provided to Saint Cloud, services could be discontinued or re-oriented to connect to other areas of Central Minnesota.

10.2 Modal Coordination

There are a number of other public transportation operations in the area that are not included in the study that interact with Metro Bus. This section provides a general overview of those services and how they will continue to serve the Saint Cloud region and connect with Metro Bus services. These services include the rural demand response services as well as inter-city services that operate into Saint Cloud. Local taxi providers are not included in this section. Coordination with the Dial-A-Ride service operated by the Saint Cloud Metro Bus is also discussed.

- Dial-A-Ride – Dial-A-Ride services are provided through the Saint Cloud Metro Bus. These dial-a-ride services include Americans with Disability Act (ADA) mandated services throughout the Saint Cloud service area, as well as general public dial-a-ride in areas that are not within a close proximity of a fixed route. Saint Cloud Metro Bus has been encouraging dial-a-ride passengers to use fixed route transit whenever possible in order to reduce this service. The use

of fixed route services as an alternative to dial-a-ride should be encouraged by providing convenient transfers at key locations as well as fare incentives.

- Tri-Cap Transit Connection – Tri-Cap Transit Connection provides rural public transit within Benton, Stearns, Sherburne, and Morrison Counties. There are a number of services operated by Tri-Cap including volunteer driver programs, dial-a-ride services, and deviated fixed routes. Deviated fixed route services do provide connections into Saint Cloud. To maximize resources needed to provide rural area services, Tri-Cap can connect to Metro Bus services in outlying locations, such as at Crossroads Center or the VA Hospital for ambulatory passengers, instead of traveling into downtown and other Saint Cloud locations.
- Jefferson Lines – Jefferson Lines provides intercity bus service throughout the Upper Midwest and connects with Greyhound to provide bus service throughout the country. In Saint Cloud Jefferson Lines uses the Downtown Transit Center as its bus station. This allows Metro Bus to feed passengers to Jefferson Lines buses, as well as provide a comfortable waiting area and ticket sales for Jefferson Lines. This arrangement should continue with the planned service changes and planning for Jefferson Lines should be included in any changes at the Transit Center.
- Amtrak – Amtrak provides intercity train service throughout the country. In Saint Cloud, Amtrak has a train station located at 555 East Saint Germain Street. Saint Cloud is on Amtrak's Empire Builder line that operates between Chicago and Seattle or Portland. One eastbound and one westbound train per day serve Saint Cloud. The eastbound train is scheduled to stop in Saint Cloud at 5:14AM while the westbound train is scheduled to stop in Saint Cloud at 12:24AM.

10.3 Intelligent Transportation Systems

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) represents a range of technology approaches to improve the delivery of transportation services. As recommended during the last planning process, there are a number of initiatives that the Saint Cloud Metro Bus should pursue in conjunction with the various cities in the service area as well Stearns, Benton, and Sherburne Counties, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation. Some of the key ITS deployments that Saint Cloud should pursue include:

- Bus Stop Annunciator Systems – A bus stop annunciator system allows for automatic announcement of bus stops for passengers aboard buses. This frees operators to concentrate on the safe operation of buses instead of making bus stop announcements for passengers. Besides assisting with the ADA requirement of announcing major bus stops, this annunciator system would be an amenity for passengers who may not be as familiar with bus stop locations.
- Real-Time Passenger Information – Real-time passenger information will allow passengers to know exactly when a bus will arrive at a bus stop. This deployment is based on a well-run AVL system that tracks buses in real-time, reporting arrival time at a bus stop to the passenger via a

smartphone application, a phone number, the Internet, and/or real-time bus arrival screens at major bus stops.

- Traffic Signal Priority – Traffic signal priority will allow for traffic signals to identify buses and either hold the green signal for a few seconds to allow the bus to get through the intersection or turn the light green a few seconds sooner to speed the bus up. Traffic signal priority is already in use in Minnesota and through local cooperation priority can be given to transit vehicles.