

# Transportation

A publication of the Association of Minnesota Counties

Counties, along with other local units of government, need an adequate transportation system that can efficiently move people and goods and provide businesses with the goods and products that they need to allow them to capitalize on their economic development potential.

Counties play a significant role in managing Minnesota's road system. Counties have responsibility for over 45,000 miles of roads. In addition, counties are responsible for and maintain over 7,635 bridges on the county system. 24 percent of all road travel in Minnesota occurs on county roads and County State Aid Highways (CSAH).

## County Roads and County State Aid Highways

Counties are responsible for two separate road systems, the County State Aid Highway system and the local county road system. The main difference between the two systems is the manner in which they are funded. The County State Aid Highway System is largely funded by the distribution of fuel tax revenue from the Highway User Tax Distribution Fund, while county road system is funded through property tax revenue.

Under state law, the County Board determines overall policies, designation of routes and the road construction program in each county. The board makes these determinations after close consultation with the county highway engineer who must be a registered civil engineer.

## County State Aid Highway System

The county state aid highway system (CSAH) includes 30,376 miles of roadway that counties are required to construct and maintain under current constitutional and statutory provisions.

In 1957, a constitutional amendment passed that created a Highway Users Tax Distribution Fund (HUTDF). Revenue from the motor fuels tax and motor vehicle licensing fees are deposited into the HUTDF and can only be spent on roads. 62 percent of these funds are distributed to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's trunk highway system, 29 percent of these funds are distributed to counties, and 9 percent of these funds are distributed to municipalities that have over 5,000 in population. Out of the counties 29 percent share, counties are required to provide funding and maintenance not only for the county state-aid highway system (CSAH) but also for county state-aid highways (CSAH) that run through cities with a population of less than 5000. In 2002, counties received approximately \$356 million in CSAH funds.

A County State Aid Screening Board has general oversight responsibilities for the CSAH System. The Screening Board is composed of one county engineer from each of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's seven non-metropolitan districts, two from the metropolitan district, and one from each county with a population of more than 175,000. This currently includes the counties of Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, St. Louis, and Washington.

The current amount of funding each county receives depends on application of the following formula:

- 10% is allocated on an equal basis to all counties;
- 10% is apportioned on the basis of motor vehicles registered in each county;
- 30% is apportioned on the basis of approved CSAH lane miles in each county; and
- 50% is apportioned on the basis of need. Need is defined as the cost of the construction required to reconstruct all CSAH miles to meet state aid design standards.

Once the apportionments are approved by the Commissioner of Transportation, 40 percent of CSAH funds are distributed to counties for administration, maintenance and preservation. The remaining funds are to be used for construction and reconstruction.

## County Roads

There are 15,008 miles of county roads in Minnesota. The county road mileage varies from county to county, with St. Louis having the largest system at 1,605 miles and Meeker County having no county road mileage. This variation is due to the size of the county, the size of the CSAH system, and other historical factors.

## Bridges

Counties in Minnesota are responsible for approximately 40 percent of the 19,775 bridges in this state. Of that number, 5,595 bridges are on the CSAH system and 2,217 are on the County Road system.

One of the ongoing concerns regarding bridges is the inadequate funding for local bridge replacement and rehabilitation. Approximately 20 percent of all bridges in the state are either structurally or functionally deficient. A local bridge program is in place that is funded through federal, state, and local sources. To date, this funding has not provided the necessary revenue to maintain the established local bridge program.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

## Transit

In the past, county involvement in public transportation was primarily a human services activity. More recently, counties have begun to provide funding to local transit systems. The purpose of county involvement is to assist in the creation of a transit system that would be available to all residents and the general public, not just to the elderly, handicapped, and poor.

Transit operations and programs differ between the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and Greater Minnesota.

## Metro Transit

In the TWIN CITIES METROPOLITAN AREA, the Metropolitan Council is responsible for most aspects of transit planning and operations. There are several different types of bus transit programs in the metropolitan area. These include regular bus route services, community-based small urban and opt-out programs, rural or county special transportation services, and Metro Mobility which is a regional transportation service for seniors and others with disabilities. Bus transit in the Metropolitan Area is funded through the property tax, fare revenue, and state and federal funds. The largest share is derived through local resources - property tax and fare revenue.

## Light Rail Transit

Minnesota's first light rail transit system was developed in the Metropolitan area, along Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis. It is an 11 mile transit corridor that has been in operation since 2003. This system is managed by the Metropolitan Council.

## Greater Minnesota Transit

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's Office of Transit is responsible for transit planning and assistance in GREATER MINNESOTA. Program operations remain the responsibility of the local units of government. Transit programs are available in 74 of the 80 non-metropolitan counties and are similar to those in the metropolitan area, but on a smaller scale. Several of the larger cities have regular route systems. Most other transit programs are dial-a-rides, volunteer, or fixed schedule going to a specific location. One of the major issues with transit is the lack of statewide coverage. Currently, there are no transit services in 6 counties. In 15 counties there is only limited service in some of their cities. The division of funding for most Greater Minnesota transit programs is generally one-third federal, one-third state, and one-third local.

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