

RESULTS OF THE NORTHSTAR COMMUTER COACH SURVEY

JUNE 2004

Introduction

The Northstar Commuter Coach Survey was conducted on June 29, 2004. A total of 240 persons rode from Elk River that day and 212 surveys were completed. The results of the survey are detailed below.

Findings

➤ ***The Northstar Commuter Coach provides a valued transportation option to area commuters.***

- All of respondents said they are either very satisfied or satisfied with the coach bus service.
- There was unanimous support for continuing the bus service as a needed alternative to driving to jobs downtown.
- The majority of respondents said they are willing to pay slightly higher fares to be able to continue using bus service. The median fare that riders said they would be willing to pay from Elk River to Minneapolis is \$4.00, compared to the current fare of \$3.50.

➤ ***Without a transit alternative, a significant percentage of commuters will resort to driving on area roads.***

- When asked what travel option they would choose if bus service were unavailable, 51 percent said they would use a car to travel to work – 43 percent using a single-person car and the remainder saying they would carpool.
- Anecdotally, some respondents who said they would use another transit option still said they would need to drive some distance to link up to a different service.

➤ ***Riders strongly support and will use the Northstar Commuter Rail service.***

- More than 90 percent of respondents said they favor the proposed Northstar Commuter Rail service.
- When given a choice between bus service and Northstar Commuter Rail, 63 percent said they would be more likely to use Northstar Commuter Rail.
- Even when given the alternative of Northstar Commuter Rail at an estimated \$5.00 one-way fare, which is higher than both the existing bus service fare (\$3.50) and the fare respondents were willing to pay (\$4.00), riders still preferred Northstar Commuter Rail.

Survey Results

1. Overall, please rate your level of satisfaction with the Northstar Commuter Coach Bus service:

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Very Satisfied	186	87.7%
Satisfied	26	12.3%
Dissatisfied	0	0.0%
Very Dissatisfied	0	0.0%
No opinion	0	0.0%

2. Would you like to see the Northstar Commuter Coach Bus service continue?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Yes/Strongly	205	97.2%
Yes	6	2.8%
No	0	0.0%
No/Strongly	0	0.0%
No opinion	0	0.0%

3. What is the maximum one-way fare you would be willing to pay to keep the Commuter Coach Bus service operating from Elk River to Downtown Minneapolis?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Less than \$5.00	102	64.2%
\$5.00 - \$7.00	39	24.5%
\$8.00 and over	12	7.5%
No Opinion	6	3.8%

Mean: 4.61
Mode: 4.0
Median: 4.0

4. If the Commuter Coach Bus service were terminated or the fares were increased higher than what you are willing to pay, what option would you pursue instead of using the bus service?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Travel to Minneapolis by single-person car	89	42.6%
Travel to Minneapolis by carpool	18	8.6%
Travel to Minneapolis by another transit option	83	39.7%
Negotiate a reduced work schedule and/or telecommute from home	3	1.4%
Find employment closer to home	9	4.3%
Quit working	1	0.5%
Other (please specify): _____	6	2.9%

5. Do you favor or oppose the proposed Northstar Commuter rail service that would run on existing railroad tracks with six station stops from Big Lake to Downtown Minneapolis?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Favor/Strongly	153	73.6%
Favor	37	17.8%
Oppose	2	1.0%
Oppose Strongly	6	2.9%
No opinion	10	4.8%

6. If the Northstar Rail service is approved and implemented, the ride on the train from Elk River to Downtown Minneapolis would be 35 minutes with an estimated one-way fare of \$5.00. The Northstar Commuter Rail service would also connect to the Hiawatha Light Rail Line, allowing Northstar passengers to ride to other stops in Downtown Minneapolis and out to the airport and the Mall of America. If you had the choice of using the Northstar Commuter Coach Bus service or the Northstar Commuter Rail service, which would you be more likely to use – the bus or the train?

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u># of Responses</u>	<u>% of Responses</u>
Northstar Commuter Coach Bus	48	23.2%
Northstar Commuter Rail/Train	130	62.8%
No Opinion	29	14.0%

Attachment 1: Commuter Coach Bus Ridership & Funding

Ridership

- There are approximately 145,000 Commuter Coach Bus riders annually.
- Approximately 106,000 people ride to and from Elk River, with an additional 39,000 people traveling to and from Riverdale in Coon Rapids.
- These riders pay a total of \$381,000 towards the operation of the buses.

Funding and Revenue

Total Cost per Year

<u>Item</u>	<u>Dollars</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Bus leases	\$475,956	40.1%
Trip Operating Cost	\$579,523	48.8%
Administration	\$132,895	11.2%
TOTAL COST	\$1,188,374	

Revenues

<u>Source</u>	<u>Dollars</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Federal Funding	\$380,772	32.0%
Farebox Recovery	\$381,000	32.1%
Local Funding Share	\$426,602	35.9%
TOTAL REVENUE	\$1,188,374	

Current Local Funding Share

<u>Source</u>	<u>Current Operating Year: Ends 09/30/04</u>
State of Minnesota	\$343,000
Anoka County	\$53,358
Sherburne County	\$47,775
Hennepin County	\$1,668
Benton County	\$805
TOTAL	\$446,606

Future Funding Alternatives

The Northstar Corridor Development Authority is meeting with state legislators to identify funding options to continue the service after September 30, 2004. Currently, neither the NCDCA nor the state has committed the funds needed to operate the commuter coach bus service from October 1, 2004 through September 30, 2005.

A decision by the NCDCA Board on next steps for the commuter coach service is expected in the coming months.

Attachment 2: Comments from Respondents

Comments were welcomed as part of the Northstar Commuter Coach Survey. Below is a sampling of some of the comments offered by riders.

Comments on Question 3 - Fare amount

- *It should be the same as SW Transit's fare from downtown to Chanhassen.*
- *I think it is priced appropriately at the current time. Any increase may change my mind in regard to riding the bus.*
- *I am willing to pay anything to keep the bus going.*
- *\$3.50 - \$7.00 whatever it takes—this bus is great.*
- *On the bus it takes an hour to get to DT from Elk River. If the train takes its place at \$5.00 each way and it is only a 35-minute ride the train is a better deal logically speaking.*

Comments on Question 4 - Alternative travel without bus

- *Drive to Coon Rapids Park & Ride and take the bus from there.*
- *Drive to where I could catch MTC bus.*
- *Get to work @ 5:00 am by carpooling when I don't need to be there until 7:30.*
- *Travel to St Paul by carpool.*
- *I will drive to Maple Grove Transit.*
- *Drive to Anoka.*
- *Drive down Hwy 10 to CR P&R.*

Comments on Question 6 - Choice between commuter rail or bus

- *(Chose train) only because it's cheaper.*
- *Depends on schedules I may use both -- prefer train over bus if maintained and run as well as existing bus service.*
- *Whichever one is more effective for my ride to work!*
- *I would take whatever would be more cost effective.*
- *I would choose bus or train based on the schedule, frequency of buses/train vs. my work schedule. All equal, I'd choose train-quicker.*
- *I'd probably stick with the bus as I like the direct routes with no stops. Although I'd surely give the train a try and continue to support it!*
- *RE: Train - Coming home would be great.*

Comments on Question 7 - Other comments

- *Please try very hard not to stop this bus service. It would create a severe hardship for many people myself included. Thank you.*
- *I'd very much like to see the service continue until the train becomes an option.*
- *If the train were faster, I would take that.*
- *I strongly favor a Northstar Commuter train. It is long overdue. I currently use the Northstar bus then connect with light rail. A Northstar train with a connection to the light rail would better enable me to get to work. Also mass transit is the way to go because it will reduce congestion on the roads & air pollution from a reduced amount of cars on the road.*
- *We need Northstar--- whether it be the bus or train. Traffic congestion is already unbearable on Hwy 10 & 242. Many days the buses are filled to capacity with passengers standing! We need Northstar!!*
- *I will take the bus or rail. I do not wish to drive...I will pay any amount other than driving.*
- *Put more cars on the road? Not very smart in my opinion.*
- *I have ridden since Day 3 of this service and love it. I hate driving "traffic" wasted time when I have to drive.*
- *I've been riding the bus since it started on October 1, 2001. It is an excellent & much appreciated service. I am a strong supporter of commuter bus/train & would be terribly disappointed to see it end.*
- *The last thing the Twin Cities should be considering is discontinuing any transit systems of any kind.*
- *This bus service was an integral factor in my decision to move from Champlain to Zimmerman. We must find a way to keep this service running until Commuter rail is a reality!*
- *Bring the train - less traffic congestion & less pollution.*
- *As more people move to the outer metro area I think it's imperative that a rail system be implemented.*
- *I'm glad that my tax dollars are finally going towards something that I can honestly say benefits me directly.*
- *I don't care if I take the bus or the train, I just don't want to have to drive downtown!*
- *I moved to Elk River on May 29 and was excited by the opportunity of the NCC Bus. What a nice alternative to get to work. I am very much in favor of the NC Rail/Train to work as well and would love to see the CC Bus stay at least until the Rail/Train gets on track.*