



# ***Citizen Advocates for Regional Transit***

***Universal Transit Mobility through Unified Transit Governance***

**[www.C-A-R-T.org](http://www.C-A-R-T.org)**

**Testimony for the Metropolitan Council Governance Task Force hearing October 25, 2023**

**To: Co-Chairs Rep. Hornstein, Sen. Pratt, and Members of the Task Force:**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Governance of the Metropolitan Council. We recognize that the Metropolitan Council controls and coordinates many functions across the Metro area. Our comments will be directed to improvement of the planning and control of the Metro transit system. We urge the Task Force to consider and adopt needed changes to the transit planning and implementation process and accountability structure, as part of your overall Governance recommendation.

Our organization advocates for the concept of Universal Transit Mobility (UTM):

- Defined as the ability of an individual to travel from any location in the Metro Transit Tax District to any other location in a reasonable length of time, using public transportation.
- Provided via a coordinated SYSTEM of public transit throughout the Metropolitan Transit service area, comprising LRT, BRT, Local Bus, Ride-Sharing and other transit modes.
- Developed through a process of Unified Transit Governance (UTG) by a government agency having responsibility and accountability for all aspects of planning, implementing, and operating the public transit SYSTEM, in coordination with counties and municipalities within the transit service area.

We believe that the Metropolitan Council is the best positioned entity to accept and carry out this role.

The following addendum is a brief discussion of

- The need for UTM
- Problems with the current system of Transit development
- The recommended organization, responsibility and accountability for UTG.

*We respectfully request the Metropolitan Council Governance Task Force to recommend restructuring Metro Transit functions and responsibilities as part of their overall Governance recommendation.*

Respectfully Submitted,

Jay Severance and James Schoettler

For the Associates of Citizen Advocates for Regional Transit, <https://c-a-r-t.org/team>

## **Achieving Universal Transit Mobility (UTM) through Unified Transit Governance (UTG)**

The public and their legislators are familiar with the troubles afflicting major Transitway projects in the Twin Cities Metro. Recently the long-planned Rush Line /Purple Line aBRT project ran into local opposition, and problems with the SWLRT and Bottineau projects have been widely publicized. The public may not be familiar with the root cause of these troubles, which results from past measures splitting off the responsibility for planning and delineation of Transitway projects to the counties, while assigning responsibility for implementation and operation of the projects to the Metropolitan Council.

With this complication, the Met Council inherits whatever deals or agreements were previously made – or failed to be made or were incompetently made - by the counties to obtain agreement on the route. Problems usually surface in the implementation phase handled by the Met Council, although caused by the county.

In the 2022 session of the Minnesota Legislature HF 3718 was introduced by retiring Representative Alice Hausman, to establish a framework for Regional Transit objectives and development responsibilities. That framework includes the following legislative mandates:

1. **To establish Universal Transit Mobility (UTM)** as the new and clear goal for investments in and the operation of regional public transit: to enable anyone within the Transit Taxing District (TTD) to reach any other location within the TTD in a reasonable amount of time using public transit.
2. **To establish Unified Transit Governance (UTG)** to provide over-all responsibility and accountability for Transit development and encourage more local government participation in the assessment of need, planning for intra and inter-municipal transit and improving transit accessibility.

### **Why UTM? “You can’t get there from here.”**

Universal Transit Mobility can be defined as the ability of an individual to travel from any location in the Metro Transit Tax District (TTD) to any other location in the TTD in a reasonable length of time, using public transportation.

The dominant transportation system of the region comprises thousands of miles of roads, highways and parking, costs billions of dollars per year and consumes 30% of our landscape. This system can be said to provide “Universal Automotive Mobility” (UAM), primarily for people with access to automobiles. However, a substantial number of people throughout the region do

not qualify, cannot afford, are unable to drive or are unwilling to fight traffic. And there is a much larger group who would prefer to ride transit, if UTM was available.

The capacity of this auto-centric system is being challenged by growth of population and utilization for commercial delivery vehicles, resulting in more congestion and less mobility. The solutions are to either build more roads or utilize the existing system more efficiently through an expanded and coordinated transit system of Transitways, Busways, and ride sharing, with the target of achieving UTM.

What we need is good public transit. What is it? It is not more routes downtown. It is, instead, a replication of the structural objective of our vehicular road system: the ability to get from any location within the urban service area to any destination within the urban service area in a reasonable amount of time. This is the objective of UTM.

Our current public transit system, and major investments, are predominantly focused on the two downtowns. But most people don't go downtown. Today, there are dozens of "downtowns" around the Metro. Jobs, services, and shopping will always be widely distributed across the urban region. The public transit system needs to reflect this reality. It needs to support freedom of movement and enable any transit rider in the TTD to reach any other location within the TTD in a reasonable amount of time.

UTM is different from the legacy downtown transit systems, although it certainly will use most of the existing downtown route facilities. It is a system of bus, BRT and LRT transit networks (and related components like ride-share and autonomous vehicles) throughout the urban service area, operated together as one system, that brings transit accessibility to every part of the urban service area.

UTM is built up from the local to the regional area. It begins with individual local governments creating a knowledge base of the transit needs of those who don't drive and those who prefer not to drive. What destinations are most desirable, when and where, both within the local governmental area and across its boundaries? This knowledge needs to become a part of the transportation section of the local comprehensive plan. It needs to become a consideration in all zoning, land use and public service planning; and it must be a consideration in public and private development in the community.

Regional transit planning must consider the local and cross-border transit needs identified in the local plans and create a regional transit system that meets these needs in aggregate. As connectivity increases, these routes and stations will enhance the value of all the properties connected by the system and will reduce the number of vehicles on the region's roads and highways, making them more accessible to those vehicles which do need to be on the road and highway system.

One of the most important, yet most neglected, aspects of public transit is the local role in making public transit accessible. A bus stop or station has little benefit if riders cannot reach it. Yet local governments are responsible for local planning, zoning, regulation, traffic management, sidewalk design and management, crosswalk design and management, traffic control, sidewalk design and maintenance, snow and ice removal, etc.

The local comprehensive plan should identify areas of transit accessibility around all bus stops and stations, should have policies for how this accessibility should be provided, locations and

needs for improvement and a schedule of projects to upgrade the appropriate aspects of accessibility.

## **Why Unified Transit Governance (UTG)? System integrity and Accountability**

UTG assigns responsibility for planning, developing, constructing, operating, and maintaining transit service and transit facilities to the Metropolitan Council and it incorporates a Stakeholder process that includes public hearings, seeking input from all levels of government and pursuing consensus-oriented dispute resolution with and among these units of government.

Restructuring of the Metropolitan Council will be needed to implement these responsibilities. However, it only makes sense to assign full responsibility, from design to implementation of the regional transit system to the agency with over fifty years of experience doing regional system planning and operation, provided the cities and counties have input.

UTG will bring all TTD municipalities into transit planning and participation in UTM through their comprehensive plans and invite municipal recommendations regarding mobility and transportation improvements. Traditional transit planning has exaggerated the importance of dense urban centers, minimized that of suburban areas and ignored the travel interactions among suburban communities. Local governments in general need to do more analysis and generate better understanding of the intra and inter municipal transit needs of their residents. And with this information, they need to participate in the development of measures to serve those transit needs.

### **The UTM-UTG Goal**

***The Legislature should charge the Met Council with implementing Universal Transit Governance by charging the Met Council with undertaking a regional transit system re-design that responds to the needs of all stakeholders, and places full accountability on the Council for defining the parameters, establishing metrics, funding, building, operating and coordinating all activities to achieve UTM by 2050.***

***The Legislature should also charge local governments with responsibility for identifying and reporting on the needs of their residents for transit access and steps needed to provide their residents with reasonable access to transit stations and stops.***

***We urge the Metropolitan Council Governance Task Force to consider restructuring Metro Transit functions and responsibilities as recommended here, as part of their overall Governance recommendations.***