



Previous Plans and Studies

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews previous plans and studies that have been undertaken in the Leech Lake area. Previous planning efforts give insight into how a community is to develop in the future as well as provide excellent background information on an area. There are several planning documents that are relevant for review. These include the following:



- Leech Lake Reservation Community Survey: Transportation Report
- Leech Lake Reservation/Cass County Area Transit Service Needs Assessment
- Public Transportation - Human Services Coordination Plan

Leech Lake Reservation Community Survey: Transportation Report

This report was published in 1993 by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and the Minnesota Center for Survey Research. This was a survey conducted throughout the Leech Lake Reservation, with 424 completed surveys from tribal members. There were three questions that dealt specifically with general transportation. Results that may be pertinent to this technical assistance project were as follows:

- Fifty-four (54) percent indicated they thought that the availability of transportation has stayed the same over a period of time; 25 percent indicated transportation had gotten better; and the remaining 25 percent indicated it had gotten worse.
- Over 90 percent indicated that improved transportation would at least improve the quality of life a little.
- Of the 424 households, 75 percent did not own a vehicle.
- Forty-four (44) percent indicated that vehicles owned and in working order were more than 10 years old.
- Seventy-eight (78) percent indicated a willingness to car or vanpool.
- Seventy-five (75) percent indicated they travel to Cass Lake for health care.

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- Respondents indicated their place of employment as Bemidji (42 percent), Grand Rapids (32 percent), and Cass Lake (22 percent).
- Respondents indicated that their place for child care or school was Cass Lake (38 percent), other places (33 percent), Deer River (10 percent), and Bemidji (5 percent).
- Of those who attended high school or college, 47 percent go to Cass Lake and 18 percent go to Bemidji.
- Of those who responded, most travelled to Walker (48 percent) for social services, 30 percent went to Grand Rapids, and 9 percent to Bemidji. Of these, 11 percent indicated they hitchhiked or got a ride from someone.
- Finally, information about income, which plays a major role in transportation access, was provided. Nearly 55 percent indicated a household income of less than \$15,000. Of this, income for 9 percent of households was below \$5,000.

Leech Lake Reservation/Cass County Area Transit Service Needs Assessment

This was a well-documented report prepared by the Leech Lake Reservation/Cass County Area Task Force in 1994. This report documented the following:

- Demographics
- Service Generators
- Service Area
- Existing Services
- Identification of Need

In reviewing this document, much of the information remains pertinent, although some of the data may be out of date. What remains important is that there is documentation on service generators, (then) existing services, and identification of needs based upon quantitative and qualitative information.

This report identified the following transportation issues, which closely mirror those discussed at the “kick-off” meeting for this current study.

- Most residents rely on a household vehicle for transportation.
- There is a lack of affordable transportation.
- A lack of transportation to education, employment, social service, shopping, and community facilities.
- A lack of access to reliable transportation.

- There are great distances to travel for the above-mentioned services/facilities;
- Existing services concentrate on population pockets, i.e., elderly, disabled, and social service programs.
- Nine percent of the service area population that is 55 years and older are neither drivers nor the spouse of drivers.
- Eight percent of older persons are in need of additional transportation services.

This report reiterated the survey responses from the 1993 Transportation Survey, as documented previously.

This report documented alternatives to improve services ranging from improvements to existing services, new public services, coordination opportunities, and barriers to coordination. The following briefly reiterates those alternatives, other than improvements to existing services since those services have vastly changed in the last decade.

New Public Transit Services, Coordination, and Barriers

- A demand-responsive service within the area.
- A fixed-route service within the area.
- A public transit serviced based out of Walker to provide transit service to northern service area residents.
- A centralized dispatch and motor pool system to handle transit requests and vehicle service.
- Coordination between six providers/agencies/tribe.
- Barriers include funding concerns, management, cultural differences, relative isolation of residents, affordability, access to services, availability of services.

Public Transportation - Human Services Coordination Plan

On August 10, 2005 President Bush signed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), providing \$286.4 billion in guaranteed funding for federal surface transportation programs over six years through FY 2009, including \$52.6 billion for federal transit

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programs, a 46 percent increase over transit funding guaranteed in the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

SAFETEA-LU builds on many of the strengths of rural transit's favorable treatment in TEA-21 and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) (the two preceding highway and transit authorizations). Some of the desirable aspects of the rural transit program are brought into other elements of federal transit investment, and an increased share of the total federal transit program will be invested in rural areas under this new legislation.

SAFETEA-LU requires that projects selected for funding under Section 5310, JARC, and New Freedom programs be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” and that the plan be “developed through a process that includes representation of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers.”

In response to these requirements, the Region Five Development Commission completed a Human Services Coordination Plan for Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena Counties. The details of this report can be found at www.regionfive.org.

The Leech Lake Tribe did not participate greatly during this planning study. However, this study still makes valid points regarding service gaps in the Leech Lake area. Additionally, this plan documented five strategic goals, with supporting objectives, as well as possible future projects. The following were the adopted goals determined by the Technical Advisory Committee for the Region Five area:

- Goal 1:** Making things happen by working together;
- Goal 2:** Taking stock of community needs and moving forward;
- Goal 3:** Putting Customers first;
- Goal 4:** Adapting funding for greater mobility; and
- Goal 5:** Moving people efficiently.

Possible Project Summary

The following presents a summary of possible projects that were deemed useful within the region:

- Medical Feeder Transportation (hospital shuttles)
- Early Morning Work Transportation
- Veterans Hospital Transportation (increased opportunity for Veterans to St. Cloud and Minneapolis)
- Weekend Services for Disabled
- Volunteer Driver Assistance
- Year-round (seasonal emphasis) Resort Transportation
- Brochure/Web Site Development
- TAC remaining together
- Car Loan and Car Repair Program
- Volunteer Driver Program

SUMMARY

A review of previous planning is always a prudent approach to starting any new planning project. Many of the points made in these studies and reports, some of which were stated over a decade ago, are still valid today. Much of the recent coordination planning represents useful ideas and resources upon which the Leech Lake Tribe can build.