

# **East Metro** **STRONG** VISION + VISION REPORT

March 2016

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# A Vision of Growth for the East Metro

## Our Vision

We envision a future East Metro that is:

### PROSPEROUS

Development along transit corridors supports vibrant downtowns and station area destinations. Surrounding neighborhoods are ethnically, culturally and economically diverse. People are walking, biking, playing, and enjoying streets, which have storefronts to see in, generous sidewalks for strolling, and planted boulevards for shade.

### MULTI-MODAL

High quality, multi-modal transportation systems connects housing, employment, education, and recreation. Access for a mix of generations, abilities, and economic levels is provided. Downtowns, transit station areas, neighborhoods, and parks are served by a complement of walking, biking, transit, and auto facilities.

### HOME GROWN

High-paying work, close to home, thrives on a mix of commercial activity, clean industries, ample housing, and recreation assets. Technology and education hotspots emerge, anchored by large employers that draw complimentary businesses and build the workforce. Local businesses, drawn to the area's artisans and walkable neighborhoods, provide new products and services.

### PEOPLE FIRST

Communities have vibrant and connected downtowns, parks, and riverfronts. Walking and biking are easy choices in a 'people first' environment.

### HEALTHY AND GREEN

Quiet neighborhoods punctuate green space. Parks and open space are protected, with equitable access by biking or walking. Community-supported agriculture and fresh food access is widespread. Access, recreation, and education support the next generation of stewards.

Substantial growth will occur in transit corridors, and that growth will occur faster in those corridors than in other parts of the East Metro.



### Where our Vision came from, and how we will pursue it

Our Vision of growth was developed with bottom-up input from community stakeholders, and was informed by a variety of technical analyses. Community leaders from cities and counties in the East Metro participated in a visioning exercise in which they sketched the types of growth that the East Metro aspires to over the coming decades. While the level of desired growth varied among communities, most anticipate responding to transit with higher growth in proposed transit corridors than the Metropolitan Council currently projects.

Our Vision will only happen with stronger East Metro transit service. That is:

- Projected East Metro growth will bring with it the need for expanded transit.
- Substantial amounts of projected growth will happen only with more and better transit.

The 2040 Transportation Policy Plan includes only one new transit corridor in the East Metro, the Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) through the Gateway Corridor. (The Increased Revenue Scenario includes all desired new East Metro lines.) East Metro communities will help advocate for increased service and quality in all of the Vision corridors.

Cities are now developing their 2040 Comprehensive Plan updates, which are due in December of 2018. East Metro Strong anticipates that:

- Local planning will illustrate in more detail how communities can achieve our Vision, including how transit-oriented land use planning supports the Vision; and
- For the next Transportation Policy Plan update, local planning will demonstrate the land-use readiness and need for transportation choices underpinning all transit corridors in our Vision.

Our Vision is aspirational but achievable, especially if East Metro communities work together to support transit investments in addition to the Gold Line. It will be critical in the coming decade for East Metro and regional stakeholders to achieve all components of our Vision. That includes both the transit lines in the Vision, and the many other decisions necessary to maximize the return on those investments.

### Next steps

East Metro Strong Board members present this Vision as part of an ongoing conversation about the future of a prosperous East Metro. We will be presenting it to and discussing it with East Metro jurisdictions, and seeking their formal endorsements.

By endorsing our Vision, local governments are affirming the value of transit-focused growth that will continue to make the East Metro vital and prosperous.



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## Introduction

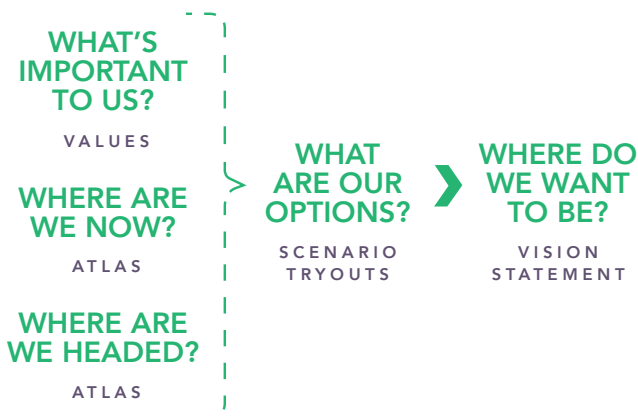
In 2014, East Metro Strong convened public and private stakeholders in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington Counties to create a unified vision of growth in the East Metro.

The Vision describes a future that conserves and celebrates our heritage, and innovates and prospers using our economic and transportation assets.

Envisioned outcomes include accelerated transit investments in transit corridors, growth accommodated in those corridors, and more travel using transit.

The visioning process, shown in Figure 1, produced a Vision statement, supplemented by graphic and quantitative illustrations of what the Vision could look like and how it can perform.

**Figure 1: The Visioning process**



### About East Metro Strong

East Metro Strong is a public/private partnership of stakeholders in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington Counties that are working together to implement a unified vision of transit-supported growth in the East Metro.

The partnership advocates for transit plans and investments that support connected, prosperous places; and assists communities in capturing the economic and social benefits of those investments.

Members include: the counties of Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington; the cities of Cottage Grove, Oakdale, Saint Paul, West Saint Paul, White Bear Lake, and Woodbury; 3M, HealthEast, the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Saint Paul Foundation.

We thank the many persons and organizations who made the Vision possible, through participation, information sharing, and supporting the work of the East Metro Strong partnership.



## Our Values and Vision

### Our Values

East Metro stakeholders agree on these qualities and aspirations that we value highly:

#### PEOPLE

- » Health, safety and well-being.
- » Ethnic, cultural, and generational diversity.
- » Educational attainment.
- » Civic engagement.

#### PLACES

- » Unique and vibrant local identities.
- » Accessible, affordable, and adaptable housing for people of all ages, incomes, and abilities.
- » Historic preservation and celebration.
- » Environmental stewardship.

#### PROSPERITY

- » Living wage jobs.
- » Entrepreneurship and innovation.
- » Local business support.
- » Community fiscal prudence.

#### CONNECTIVITY

- » Affordable, efficient, and safe travel choices for people of all ages, income, and abilities.
- » Inter-connected local and regional travel networks.
- » Digital connectivity for all people and places.

Drawing on these values, East Metro stakeholders developed the following Vision.



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Overall, participants described an East Metro that they care deeply about, and were in remarkable agreement on their values and goals for the future of the East Metro. The visioning process and participants are described in Appendix I.

Achieving all parts of the Vision will require the collaborative work of many stakeholders across jurisdictions and organizations. To support the process, East Metro Strong has prepared a Vision Atlas that describes the area's existing conditions and current plans, including strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and challenges. The next two sections of this report draw on the Atlas to describe where the East Metro is now (Section III), and where it is headed under current plans (Section IV). The Atlas is available as a stand-alone document at [EastMetroStrong.com](http://EastMetroStrong.com).



## The East Metro today: Neighborhoods and centers with room to grow

Our Vision is for the entire East Metro; we envision communities that exemplify our values throughout all of the three-county area. Since stakeholders prioritized “Development along transit corridors that supports vibrant downtowns and station area destinations”, the Vision has a special interest in transit corridors. Stakeholders also envision widespread agriculture, for example, but our work to illustrate how the Vision could work focused first on transit corridors.

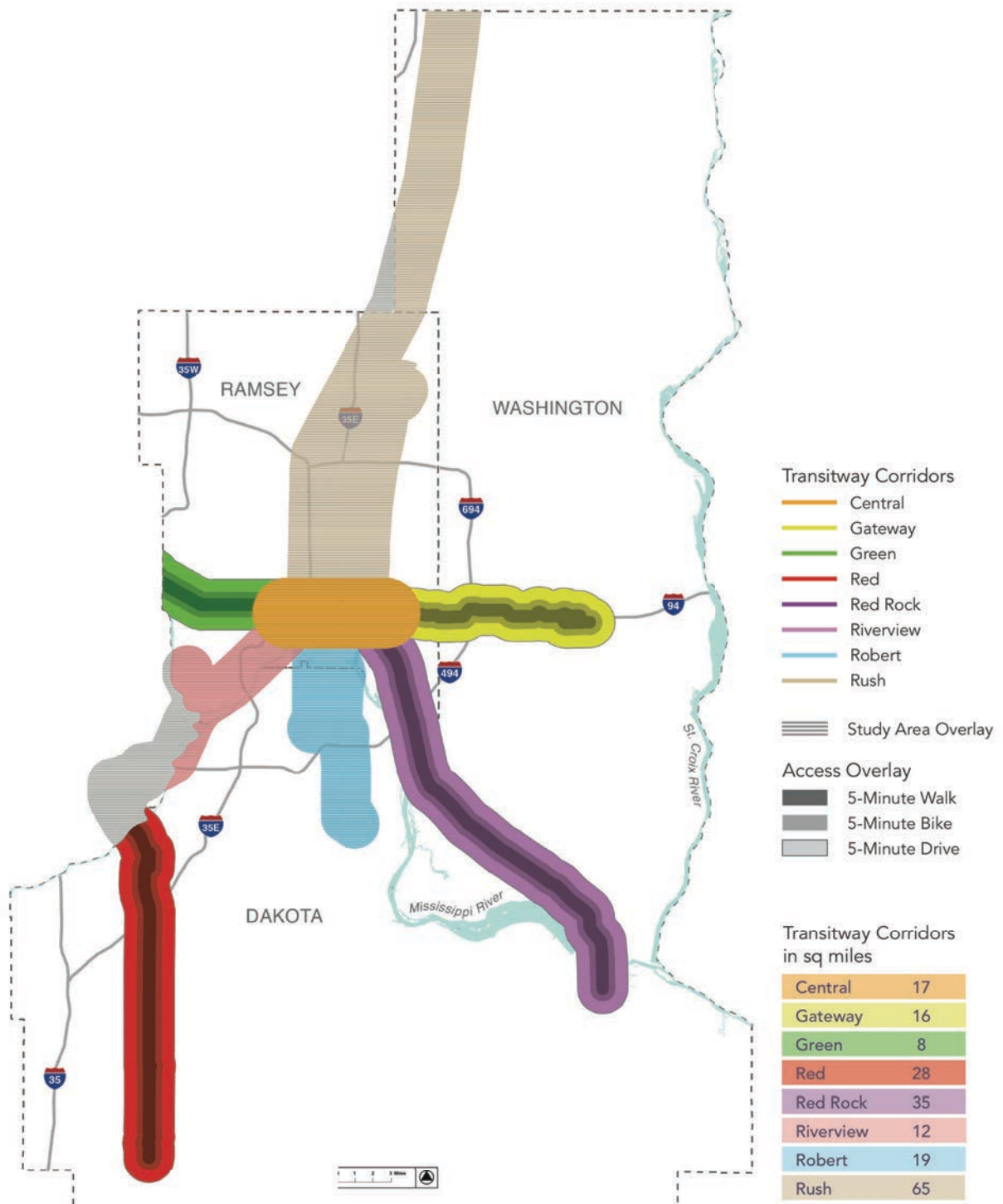
Communities in the East Metro are planning for five transit corridors, as shown in Figure 2, and East Metro Strong worked with the Commissions planning each corridor to define them for purposes of the visioning process.<sup>1</sup> Where a corridor has a transitway in operation or the line is otherwise well-defined, likely multi-modal access-sheds have been identified as illustrated in Figure 3 (Green, Gold, Red, and Red Rock). Together, the area around the five lines is the Vision Area.

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<sup>1</sup> As each Commission’s work has advanced, each corridor has become more defined, changing the shapes shown here. We believe that the basic conclusions reached using this mapping remain valid.

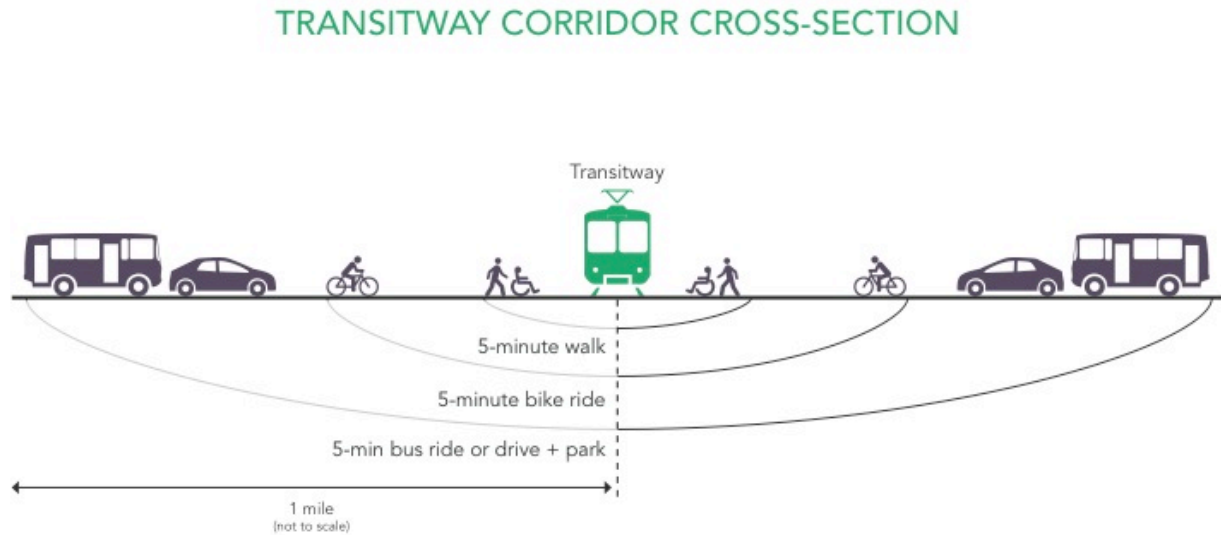


Figure 2: The Vision Area: East Metro transit corridors





**Figure 3: Illustrative transitway corridor cross-section**



Together, the transit corridors comprising the Vision Area cover approximately 200 square miles. Detailed examination of the corridors revealed a deep and extensive foundation of assets and strengths capable of catalyzing the Vision.

### **An abundance of healthy neighborhoods**

Within the Vision Area, East Metro currently has:

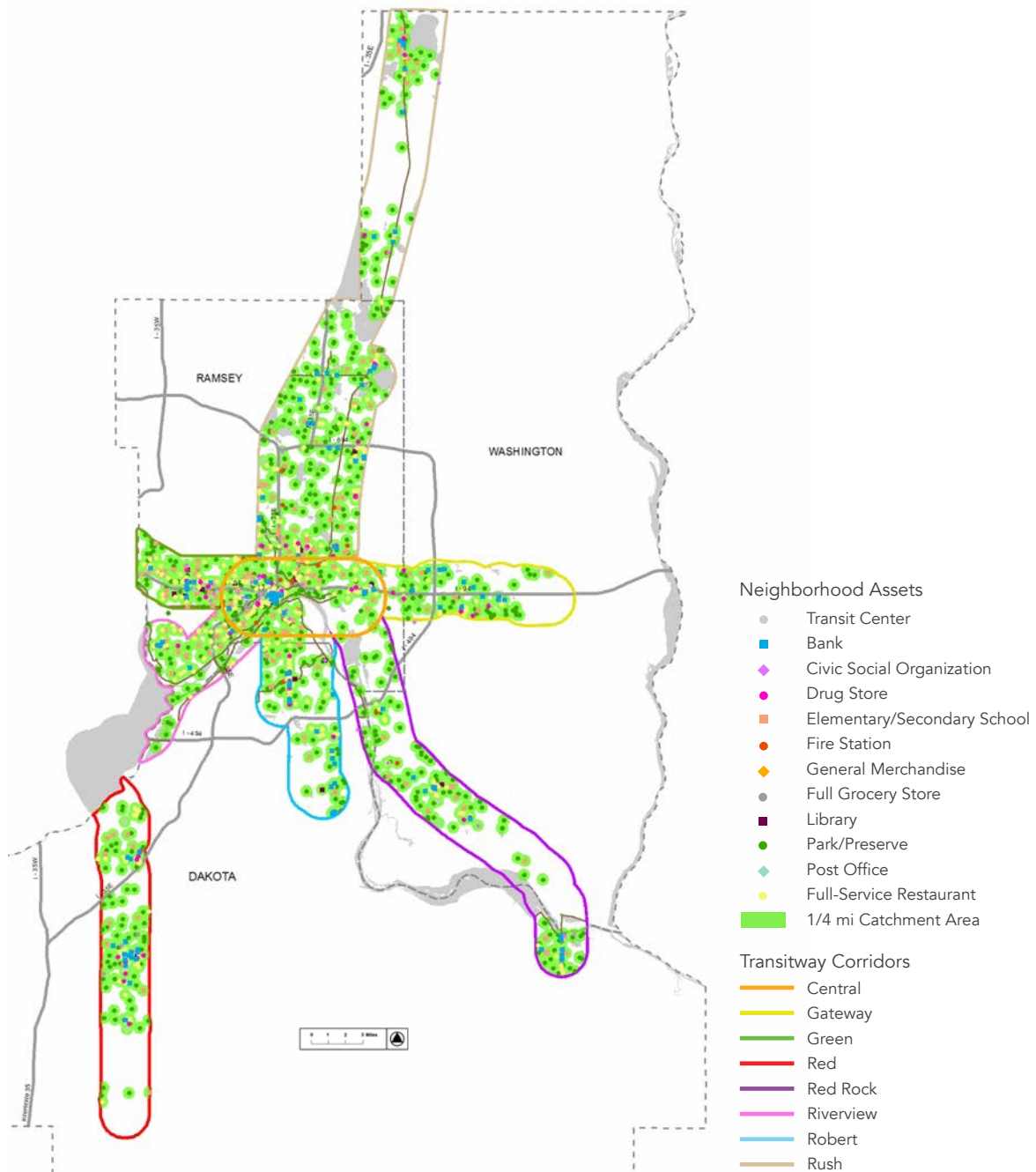
- **598,000** residents
- **11,000** employers
- **350,000** jobs
- **125,000** students

The area covers just 20% of the East Metro’s three-county total land area, but that 20% contains over half of the counties’ current households and jobs, indicating the planners of East Metro transit corridors are doing an excellent job of focusing on locations where transit can serve the most residents and jobs.

At a finer grain, the detailed examination of the Vision Area found 1,400 facilities and establishments that contribute to neighborhood “completeness” by providing daily essentials. These “neighborhood assets” are important ingredients in realizing the Vision, and as shown in Figure 4, 55% of the vision area is within a ¼-mile walkable distance of one or more assets.



Figure 4: Neighborhood assets



Many of the assets are clustered in neighborhood centers containing three or more facilities or establishments. There are a total of 80 such centers in the Vision Area, and 42% of the area is within a 1/2-mile of such a center, the common distance for high-capacity transit station passenger-sheds.



In sum, the Vision Area today contains a substantial foundation of transit-friendly neighborhoods that the Vision and local plans can build upon.

### **Room to grow at strategic locations**

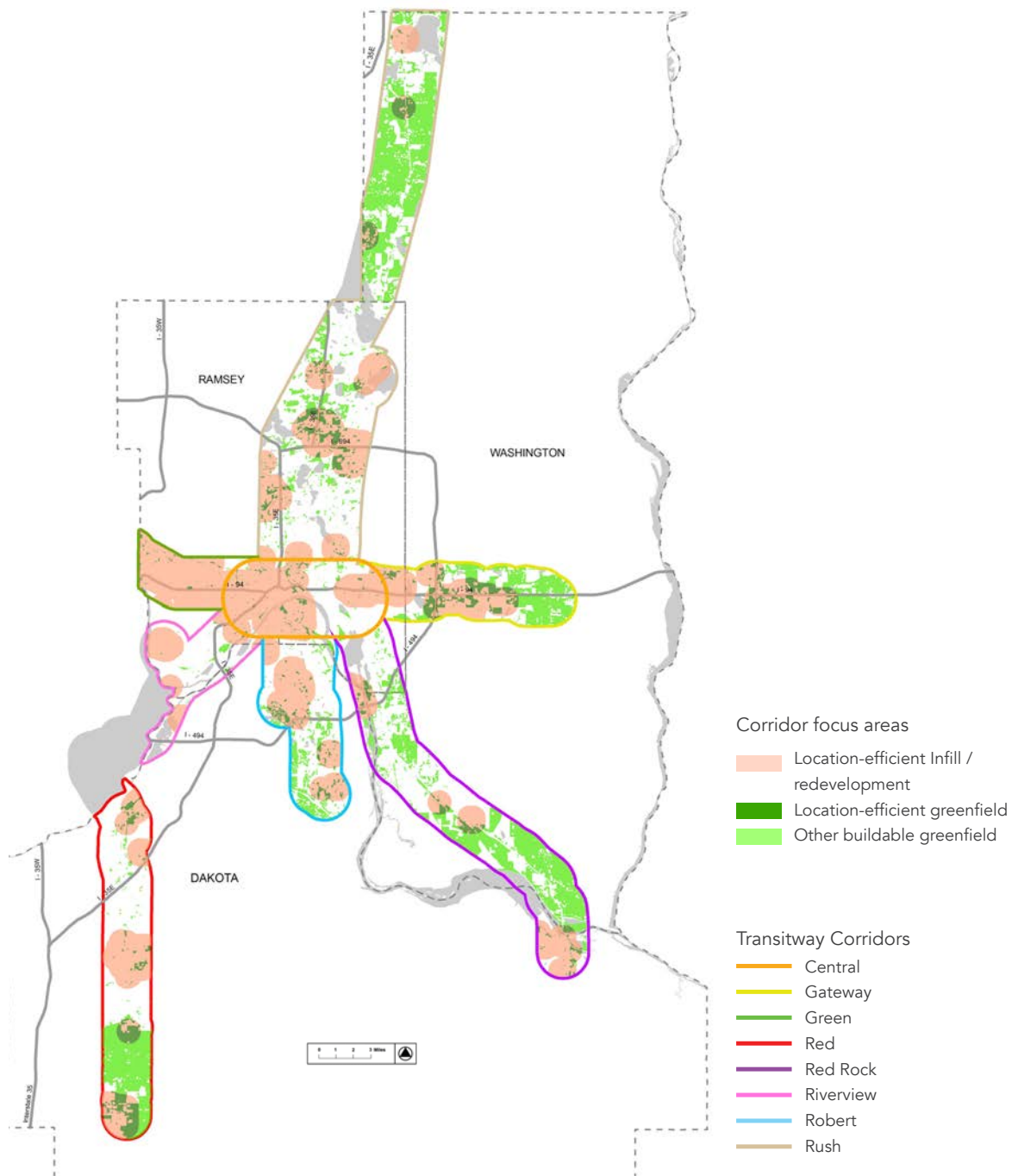
The Vision Area also contains substantial room for growth and economic development at strategic or location-efficient points in the corridors. To find such opportunity sites, the detailed examination of corridors first divided them into greenfield areas of undeveloped and agricultural land, versus already-developed areas with infill and redevelopment potential. Next the process identified 120 “major assets” and 60 clusters of multiple major assets, as defined and shown in Figure 5. Land within a half-mile passenger-shed around these centers is considered the most strategic or location-efficient areas for growth because of the opportunity to leverage past public and private investments in the major assets and supporting infrastructure. Thirty-six percent of the Vision Area falls into this location-efficient category, including:

- 16 square miles of infill and redevelopment areas, and
- 12 square miles of greenfields.

Within each corridor, these are called major asset focus areas.



Figure 5: Major asset focus areas





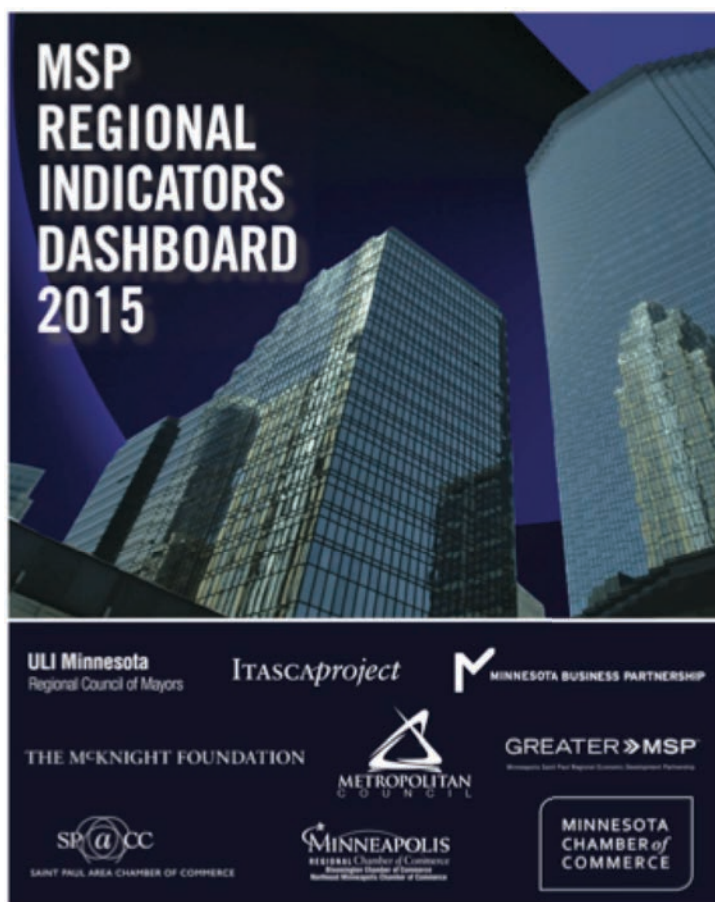
## Weak transit leading to economic disadvantage

The Vision Area’s current economic activities and opportunities for development are not currently supported with sufficient multi-modal transportation choices:

- Only **26%** of the area is within a ¼-mile of daily transit; and only 33% of the area is within a 1/4 mile of any routes (excluding Express routes); and
- Only **40%** of the area is walkable as measured by street network density.

As a result, despite having a healthy concentration of jobs, residents of the East Metro cannot, on average, reach many of those jobs via walking or transit.

**Figure 6: State and regional leadership choose transit accessibility as a measure of competitiveness**



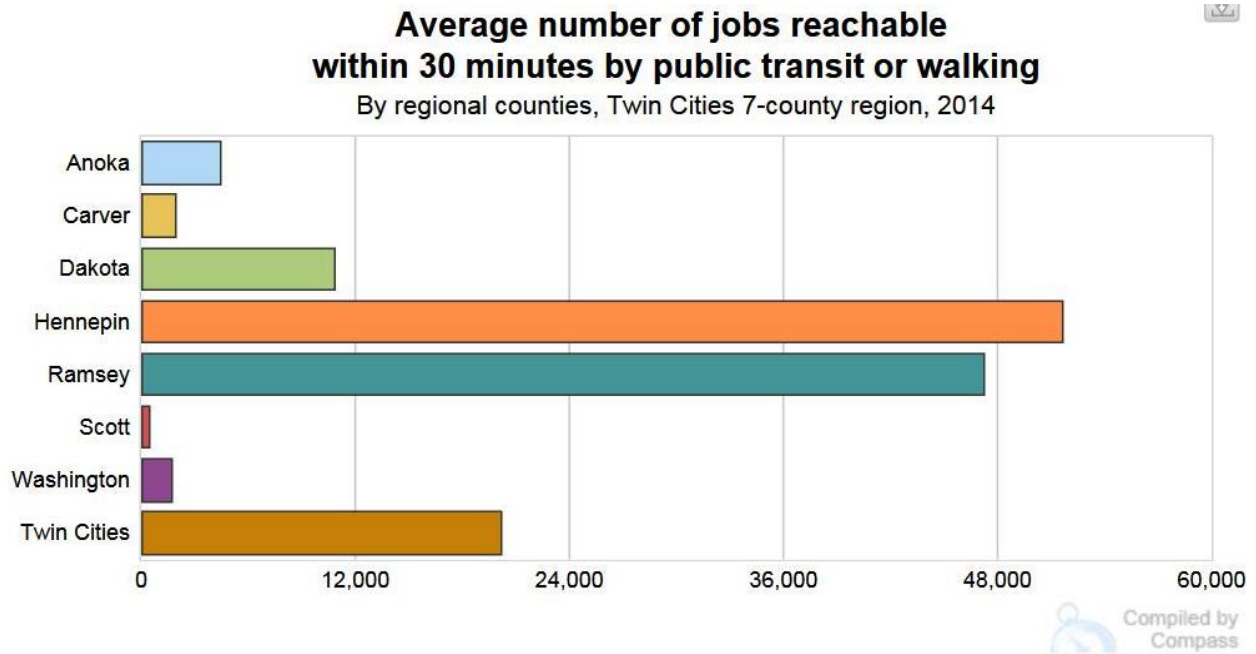
The region’s leaders agree that transit access matters to competitiveness. The MSP Regional Indicators Dashboard (Figure 6) was developed by Greater MSP, the economic development agency for the region, to track the region’s performance on metrics that a broad cross-section of state and regional leaders agree are critical to regional economic competitiveness.<sup>2</sup> This group chose “Average number of jobs reachable within 30 minutes via walking or transit” as an important measure of competitiveness.

On an overall basis, the Minneapolis – Saint Paul region ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of 12 regions chosen by state and regional leaders as MSP peers. And within a region that lags its peers, two of the three East Metro counties have far less transit access than even the MSP regional average, as shown in Figure 7.

<sup>2</sup> At: <http://www.greatermsp.org/index.php?src=gendocs&ref=regionalindicatordashboard>



Figure 7: MSP regional breakdown of job accessibility<sup>3</sup>



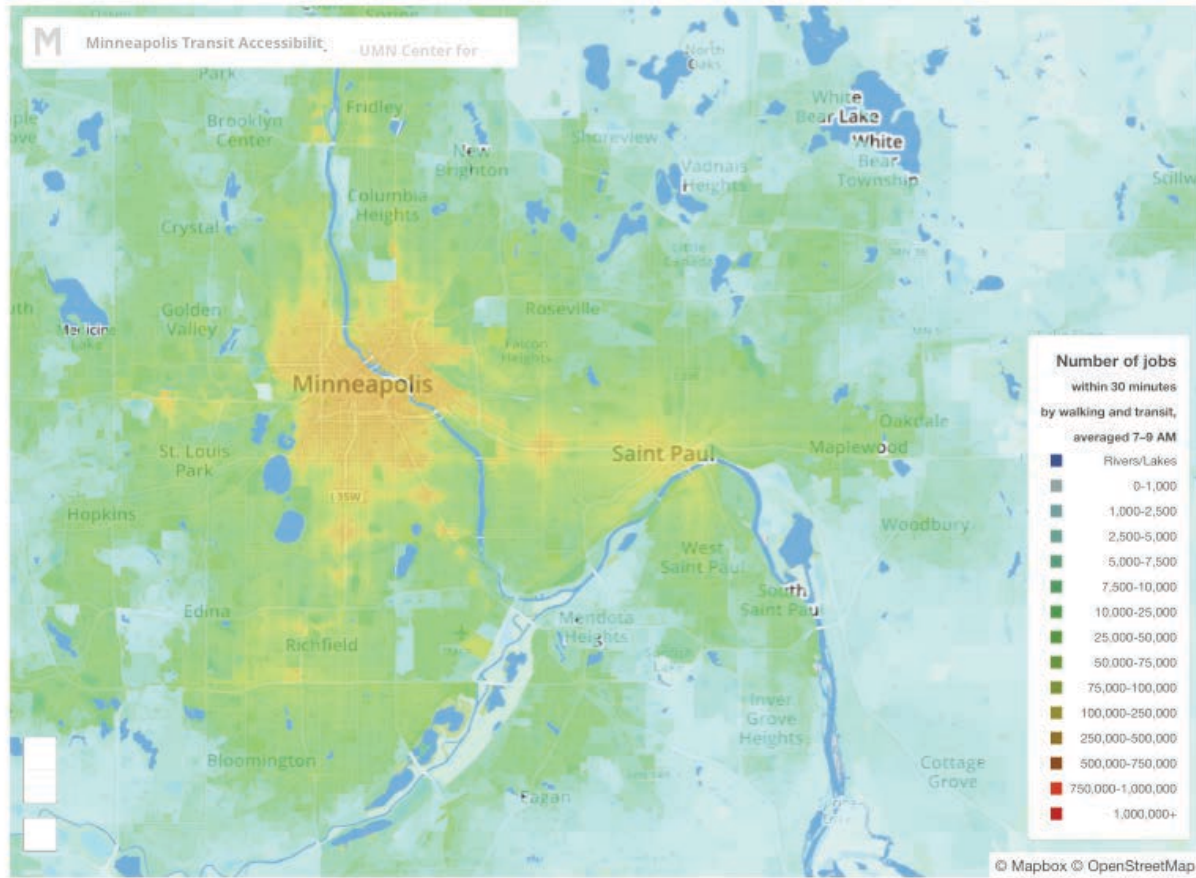
Another way to portray the East Metro’s disadvantage is by *mapping* the same metric for the region, as shown in Figure 8.

<sup>3</sup> Greater MSP and Minnesota Compass



**Figure 8: Job accessibility by walking or transit during the morning commute<sup>4</sup>**

This map shows, for every location within the shown region, the number of jobs accessible from that location in 30 minutes or less using transit and/or walking.



At first glance, the figure may look like a map of job concentrations, but the fact that, for example, the 3M campus in Maplewood is not orange (i.e. not accessible by transit), shows that the East Metro has substantial job concentrations that are not transit-accessible. This was economically sustainable in the past, but is no longer competitively viable.

<sup>4</sup> <http://access.umn.edu/research/america/transit/2014/index.html>.



## Where we're headed:

### We'll grow if we respond to changing demographics

#### The East Metro is growing quickly

The East Metro as a whole is growing faster than Hennepin County, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: East Metro & Hennepin County population growth**

	Population growth now to 2040	Employment growth now to 2040
East Metro	28.0%	35.5%
Hennepin County	23.9%	33.2%

*Source: Metropolitan Council*

Between now and 2040, East Metro counties are forecasted to gain:

- Up to **393,000** new residents; and
- Up to **159,000** new jobs.

Just as the Vision Area captures a high percentage of current jobs and residents in the East Metro, it is also projected to see most of the growth between 2010 and 2040:

- **172,000** new residents (59% of all new East Metro residents in the 3 counties);
- **105,000** new jobs (66% of all new East Metro jobs in the 3 counties); and
- **35,000** new students.

#### The East Metro needs better transit and transit-oriented planning to ensure and manage growth

A growth forecast is not a guarantee. If more walkable neighborhoods with transit connections to jobs are not made available in the East Metro, people seeking those essentials may instead choose locations in the west metro, or they may choose to move to other regions of the country.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For example: “Access to Public Transportation a Top Criterion for Millennials When Deciding Where to Live, New Survey Shows”, [www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/news-media/access-public-transportation-top/](http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/news-media/access-public-transportation-top/).



As Greater MSP and the Regional Indicators Dashboard recognize, the same is true of employers: they increasingly seek to locate in walkable, transit-served locations. If the East Metro does not become more walkable and transit-served, it will likely not see the forecast level of growth and development, either in the Vision Area, or in the balance of the East Metro.<sup>6</sup>

The values-driven Vision prepared by stakeholders recognizes walkable, transit-served areas as the basis for both economic growth and residents' current high quality of life.

To this end, cities in the region will be updating their comprehensive plans by December 2018, in keeping with regional planning requirements. These updates are an important opportunity to:

- Express the East Metro values and locally detail the Vision; and
- Respond to changing demographics and anticipated new transit lines.

(In addition to supporting the Vision, data in the accompanying Atlas is available to East Metro cities as they update their comprehensive plans.)

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<sup>6</sup> See Smart Growth America and Cushman & Wakefield Center for Real Estate and Urban Analysis, *Core Values*, which identifies nearly 500 companies that have moved to more transit-served and walkable places in the past five years, and analyzes why.



## How the Vision could look and perform

The Vision in Section II describes what we want to be. Current growth patterns are not on a trajectory to fulfill that Vision. Can these patterns change to fulfill the Vision, and what could that look like?

To answer those questions, East Metro jurisdictions participated in a set of workshops in which they explored what kinds of development might be located in transit corridors to respond to, and benefit from, changing demographics and anticipated transit. The desired outcome of the workshops was a preferred scenario that describes how much growth East Metro cities would like to see in the Vision Area.

### Quantifying the Vision

To support the growth scenario workshops, East Metro Strong utilized INDEX scenario planning software. This GIS-based tool enables users to define a palette of desired place types, delineate growth areas, and apply preferred place types to the areas. The tool, in turn, “scores” the user-created scenarios with a set of quantitative indicators showing performance in categories aligned with Vision goals. In this way, participants obtain feedback on scenario performance, and are able to compare alternative scenarios to identify a preferred option that delivers the greatest progress toward goals.

To initiate the process, webinars were held for local government staff and other participating organizations to familiarize them with the INDEX tool and workshop objectives. And East Metro Strong consulted with stakeholders to formulate palettes of desired place types that participants would apply to corridors using the previously delineated corridor focus areas as a canvas for “painting” scenarios (Figure 5). The palettes did not match any single community’s land use designations, but developed broad land use categories representative of possible suburban land uses.

Two workshops were held for suburban jurisdictions and their portions of the Vision Area corridors, and a third workshop was conducted with the City of Saint Paul because portions of all suburban corridors are in the City, as well as the core where these corridors converge in central Saint Paul.

To facilitate the workshops, all jurisdictions in the Vision area received “Community Scans” that described characteristics of the portion of the jurisdiction inside a transit corridor in terms of Vision focus area land quantities, existing and planned land-uses, and locations of current employers and future transit stations.

At the three workshops, each participating community ‘painted’ potential 2040 place types on those portions of a transit corridor in its boundaries. Each community representative brought a different philosophy to the table. Generally speaking, consistent with the Vision and local goals, participants painted place types they felt were both aspirational and attainable in a scenario that includes high-quality transit.



The results of the three the jurisdiction and corridor-level workshops were combined into 2040 scenarios for the Vision Area.

Nearly all of the individual growth scenarios painted by the communities exceeded the current 2040 forecast, especially in major asset focus areas. Some exceeded the 2040 forecast substantially. In terms of population and jobs, the exceedance was greatest for jobs. Therefore, a simple summing of individual communities’ aspirational growth gave results that far exceed forecast growth in the transit corridors.

But with outliers excluded, the group’s forecast exceedance fell into a clear range of between 8 and 36% exceedance, with a subgroup clustered nearly midway or at approximately 12% exceedance. Using these parameters, three synthesis scenarios were organized to represent a range of possible forecast exceedance, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Alternative synthesis growth scenarios for East Metro transit corridors**

Vision Growth Scenario	2040 Forecast +	
	Major Asset Focus Areas	Balance of Vision Area
A	12%	8%
B	36%	8%
C	36%	12%

For example, in Scenario A:

For the part of the East Metro located in transit corridors:

- locations within ½-mile of a major asset, would, on average, grow 12% faster than currently projected, and
- all other parts of the transit corridors would grow 8% faster than projected.

The performance of the three synthesis scenarios is shown in Table 3 using INDEX indicators to gauge a scenario’s alignment with Vision goals.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The travel indicators included measures of multi-modal orientation expressed as intersections/sq mile for street network connectivity, especially for pedestrians; bicycle lane miles/sq mile for bicyclists; and transit stops/sq mile for transit passenger access. These characteristics were part of the “place type palette” used in workshops, and their indicator scores reflect the outcomes ‘painted’ by participants.

Travel impacts were also measured by the change in auto driving, expressed as vehicle miles traveled (VMT)/day/capita, which occur as travelers choose to switch from autos to the walking, biking, and transit facilities described in the first set of indicators.



**Table 3: Comparison of 2040 forecast & alternative Vision Area scenarios:  
description and performance**

	2040 Forecast	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
% Growth in Vision asset areas:		+12%	+36%	+36%
% Growth in rest of Vision area:	Base	+8%	+8%	+12%
<b>Descriptive indicators:</b>				
Population	771,395	848,074	937,870	953,759
Population per square mile	2,766	3,041	3,363	3,420
Total dwelling units	322,695	354,872	393,038	399,585
Single family dwelling units	220,315	241,975	266,184	270,962
Multi-family dwelling units	102,380	112,897	126,854	128,623
Percent single-family dwelling unit	68.27%	68.19%	67.72%	67.81%
Percent multi-family dwelling units	31.73%	31.81%	32.28%	32.19%
Jobs	410,787	454,117	516,920	522,884
Jobs per square mile	1,473	1,628	1,854	1,875
Development intensity (total persons (population + jobs)/square mile)	4,239	4,670	5,217	5,295
Development mix (jobs/population)	0.533	0.535	0.551	0.548

Because transit station locations are not yet known for most East Metro corridors, VMT change was conservatively estimated at the traffic analysis zone (TAZ) level based on broad changes in land-use density, diversity, and design. The VMT reduction estimate does not include the effect of a dense, diverse corridor appreciably shortening auto trips that continue to occur in the vicinity. Taking this effect into account generally triples the VMT reduction: “Transit reduces VMT by three vehicle miles in total for every vehicle mile reduced due to transit ridership.” Reid Ewing & Shima Hamidi, “Longitudinal Analysis of Transit’s Land Use Multiplier in Portland (OR)”, *Journal of the American Planning Association*, August 25, 2014.



<b>Performance indicators:</b>	<i>Best performance in <b>green</b>.</i>			
Residential water use - gallons/dwelling unit/day	98.94	98.86	<b>98.41</b>	98.50
Residential energy use - million British thermal units/dwelling unit/year	95.60	95.52	<b>95.13</b>	95.21
Residential greenhouse gas emissions - carbon dioxide equivalent tons/dwelling unit/year	21.51	21.49	<b>21.41</b>	21.42
Home-based vehicle miles traveled/day/capita	14.14	14.01	<b>13.69</b>	13.77

A final workshop was then held to review three synthesized 2040 scenarios, and to solicit a preference for the scenario most likely to achieve the Vision. The three synthesis scenarios were presented to participants as a starting point for discussion. (Unlike in this Report, the superior performance of Scenario B was not highlighted in the participants' materials.)

After extensive discussion of the scenarios' performance and likelihood of being realized, most participants in the fourth workshop expressed a preference for Scenario B, because it:

- Illustrates:
  - A robust implementation of the Vision and its values; and
  - The directional performance that the Vision is meant to produce.

In particular, participants noted that Scenario B tends to outperform Scenario C, even though Scenario C added more growth.

- Is aspirationally possible.

## Conclusion

Scenario B is a quantitative illustration, preferred by most participating communities, of how the Vision could look and perform. It is distinguished by:

- Adding households and jobs to transit corridors in ways that meaningfully improve the performance of the East Metro, according to measures that matter to East Metro communities.
- The eagerness of East Metro communities to add households and jobs to transit corridors, in most cases faster than the regional forecast.



The preferred Scenario B also highlights what might fairly be called challenges to achieving the Vision:

- Simply increasing growth in transit corridors does not necessarily improve performance; proximity to other activities also matters, and especially proximity to existing assets. In this case, Scenario C added more jobs and residents to the transit corridor than Scenario B, but Scenario C did not perform as well, largely because those jobs and residents were farther from assets.

This fact is, on balance, positive for parts of the Vision Area that may not see new transit service immediately. Many of the benefits of compact and complete neighborhoods can be produced and enjoyed in advance of transit, by investing near existing assets. Arrival of transit can then leverage walkable, diverse areas to further increase the benefits. This highlights the need for care in managing future growth locations, independent of the location of future transit lines and stations.

- The fact that many communities would like to grow jobs faster than housing may also present a challenge. One value of the visioning was to begin conversations on achieving the right balance of housing and employment in the corridors, and in relation to the balance of the three East Metro counties.

Aside from the preference expressed by a majority of participating jurisdictions, Scenario B is neither technically nor politically a promise by any community to grow at a certain rate or in a certain way.

As East Metro Strong, its members, and other stakeholders advocate for transit investment and plan for growth, they can use the scenarios assessment as an illustration of benefits available to the East Metro, and thus the region and the state, from investing in new transit and growing in the Vision corridors.



## Appendix I: The Vision process

Our Vision was formulated by representatives of 23 public and private organizations. These stakeholders participated in workshops from December 2014 to September 2015 that solicited input on important likes and dislikes, how they inform a preferred Vision aligned with local values, and how much growth is desirable for realizing Vision benefits.

For the values conversation, discussions were organized around four qualities: connectivity, prosperity, community, and nature. Participants discussed these qualities in relation to places in East Metro, and aspects they like and dislike about the places.

For the visioning conversation, participants imagined what they wanted East Metro to look like in the year 2040 if seen from a hot-air balloon, both the sweep of what they saw, and some of the details. Participants expressed likes and dislikes using a variety of terms, and common likes and dislikes were identified and tallied. Similarly, participants described aspects of their preferred vision using a variety of phrases, and those were consolidated into primary themes and tallied.

### LIKES

- » Prosperity through diverse, accessible jobs
- » Home improvement/home stability – pride in place
- » Recreational opportunities - traditional park improvements
- » Entertainment opportunities
- » Prosperity and diversity
- » Connectivity to parks and open spaces

### DISLIKES

- » People-unfriendly places
- » Underused parks and public spaces
- » Poor accessibility to community amenities
- » Limited multi-model transportation connections
- » Isolated business campuses
- » Unsafe walking and biking routes to schools



## VISION THEMES

- » Economic prosperity through job growth and retention
- » Housing choices

## Participating organizations - Vision workshops

City of Centerville  
City of Forest Lake  
City of Inver Grove Heights  
City of Oakdale  
City of Saint Paul  
City of South St. Paul  
City of West St. Paul  
City of White Bear Lake  
City of Woodbury  
Dakota County  
Davis Communications  
Hennepin County  
Metro Transit  
Metropolitan Council  
Metropolitan Transportation Services  
Minnesota Philanthropy Partners  
Mississippi National River and Recreation Area  
Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Office of Saint Paul Mayor Christopher B. Coleman  
Ramsey County  
Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority  
Saint Paul Planning and Economic Development  
Washington County  
West Lakeland Township

## Consultants

Criterion Planners  
Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation