



# Metro Mobility

In an effort to meet demand for rides in the federally mandated service area, the Metropolitan Council established lower standards for services in the state-mandated service area. In addition, rider complaints may not always be addressed appropriately.

## Report Summary

### Quality of Metro Mobility Services

The Metropolitan Council applies different standards when scheduling rides in the state-mandated service area compared to the federally mandated service area. Metro Mobility also struggled to meet performance goals related to the timeliness of ride services in Fiscal Year 2023.

- Unlike rides in the federally mandated service area, ride requests in the state-mandated service area are not guaranteed at the time of the request and may be scheduled to occur more than one hour beyond the rider’s requested pick-up time. (pp. 17-18)
- While the Metropolitan Council largely met the demand for Metro Mobility services in Fiscal Year 2023, it permitted providers to deny ride requests in the state-mandated service area. (pp. 19-20)

**Recommendation** ► The Legislature should consider amending statutes to explicitly identify service requirements in the state-mandated service area. (pp. 25-26)

- Metro Mobility services failed to meet the performance goals for on-time pick-ups and drop-offs in Fiscal Year 2023. (pp. 20-22)
- The Metropolitan Council has taken actions to address service quality issues, including the use of penalties; however, trip providers have still struggled to meet performance goals. (pp. 23-24)
- The Metropolitan Council has paid trip providers a bonus related to meeting all ride requests when they have not earned it. (p. 24)

**Recommendations** ► The Metropolitan Council should take additional steps to address service quality issues and ensure that the bonus related to fulfilling all ride requests is only given in instances when the trip provider has earned it. (p. 24)

### Background

Metro Mobility provides transportation services for thousands of eligible individuals with disabilities and other health conditions in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The Metropolitan Council oversees Metro Mobility and contracts with private companies to provide ride services.

State statutes and federal regulations require the Metropolitan Council to adhere to specific service requirements and to establish a process for addressing rider complaints. Federal regulations require the Metropolitan Council to provide services within three-quarters of a mile of the fixed-route transit system. Statutes require the Metropolitan Council to provide services in a larger geographic area than the area required by federal regulations.

State appropriations have comprised the largest portion of Metro Mobility funding in recent years. The Metropolitan Council also generates funding through fares collected for services, and in recent years also received federal relief funding for Metro Mobility services.

## Metro Mobility Complaints Process

Several issues related to the Metro Mobility complaints process undermine its effectiveness, resulting in a process that does not ensure that the Council receives all riders' complaints or that appropriate action is taken to address rider complaints.

- Riders' concerns must meet certain conditions for the Metropolitan Council to track them as complaints that require action. (p. 38)

**Recommendation** ► The Metropolitan Council should systematically track data related to all rider concerns and use the information to improve riders' experiences. (p. 47)

- Contracts disincentivize trip providers from forwarding complaints to the Metropolitan Council, despite the Metropolitan Council requiring trip providers to do so. (p. 37)

**Recommendation** ► The Metropolitan Council should change the incentive structure in contracts with trip providers to encourage providers to forward complaints to the Metropolitan Council. (p. 46)

- The role that trip providers play in processing Metro Mobility riders' complaints undermines the integrity of the complaints process. (pp. 38-39)

**Recommendation** ► Metropolitan Council should limit the role of trip providers in the complaints process. (pp. 44-45)

- The Metropolitan Council has not established clear guidance for how staff should resolve complaints, which could result in inconsistent approaches. (p. 42)

**Recommendation** ► The Metropolitan Council should update its written procedures to provide more complete guidance to staff. (p. 45)

- The Metropolitan Council has sometimes paid trip providers a complaints-based bonus when they have not earned it. (p. 44)

**Recommendation** ► The Metropolitan Council should ensure that it only pays bonuses to providers when those bonuses are earned. (p. 47)

### Summary of Agency Response

In a letter dated April 30, 2024, Metropolitan Council Chair Charles Zelle wrote that the Council agrees with the recommendations in the report and “generally find[s] they align well with current and upcoming efforts to adjust and improve Metro Mobility service.” He said, “Increased demand and ongoing workforce constraints have created program capacity challenges,” including a shortage of drivers, but that contractors have had success attracting drivers in recent months. He reported that this, combined with new replacement buses and “ongoing technology improvements,” among other factors, has resulted in zero ride request denials since the start of 2024.

Chair Zelle said that the Council “will take steps to ensure [rider] concerns are fully documented” and that contractors forward all complaints to the Council. He added that the Council has “taken initial steps to revise work instructions to increase staff guidance on the handling of complaints.” Finally, Chair Zelle wrote that the Council has “corrected existing reporting to ensure any contractual performance bonuses are appropriately verified.”