

SouthWest Transit sees growth as it enters 40th year

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An SW Prime vehicle is

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(Sun file photo by Jay Morgan)

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Erik Hansen, the CEO for the Eden Prairie-based public transportation agency, provided a year in review during the council's Feb. 10 meeting.

Hansen was quick to celebrate the current period of growth for the transit service, which was created in 1986 and operates under an agreement between Eden Prairie, Chanhassen and Chaska. The agency provides bus, on-demand rideshare and shuttle services.

"This is actually at least the second year in a row where we're the fastest growing transit agency in the state," he said, noting that there was 14% growth in 2025 ridership compared to 2024 with nearly 614,000 passengers transported last year.

Hansen also spoke proudly of recent rider survey results that showed 96%-98% customer satisfaction. A phone survey this past fall showed community approval at 61% positive with 14% negative.

Efficiency is another important component, Hansen said, with SouthWest Transit operating 22% more efficiently than what is provided by Metro Transit, based on a subsidy per trip that is \$12.07 compared to \$15.42.

Riders were also asked what destinations they want to use SouthWest Transit to get to and from? Popular responses included the State Fair, Renaissance Festival as well as sporting events, concerts and other destinations in downtown Minneapolis.

"Those are the kinds of things that people really are interested in," Hansen said. "And in fact, over the last two years our ridership for these kinds of events is up 90% because we've been spending a lot of time focusing on expanding that particular service."

For SW Prime, the agency's on-demand rideshare service, Eden Prairie made up most of the ridership last year with nearly 26,000 rides from the city and 22,000 rides into the city. There were also 44,000 rides within the city, and around half of those were in the autonomous vehicle zone.

Hansen noted that ridership in the autonomous vehicle zone, which launched in April of last year, has seen 144% growth over previous regular SW Prime service.

"We're still offering it for free, but I do think that a lot of it has to do with the service itself as well," Hansen said of the autonomous vehicle service.

This past year also saw the launch of SouthWest Transit's 686 bus route, which connects riders to the MSP Airport and Mall of America and has stops along the I-494 corridor.

SW Prime used to offer rides to the airport, but that service proved too costly, Hansen said.

"We're saving about half a million dollars a year in operating costs by running that [bus] service versus what we were doing before, so it's actually kind of a huge benefit," he added. "More people use it and it costs less."

Transportation to and from work also continues to be a needed service in the community. According to SouthWest Transit, survey data shows that 71.6% of commuter bus trips are taken for work while 46% of SW Prime trips support employment.

Hansen also noted that the upcoming legislative session could prove impactful for SouthWest Transit. He said the agency is pushing for legislation that will provide an equitable fair share of sales tax to suburban transit agencies while opposing any legislation that would eliminate or regulate SouthWest Transit or other similar agencies.

Hansen encouraged community members to visit swtransit.org/action to learn more about the ongoing efforts and policy discussions at the State Capitol.

To learn more about SouthWest Transit and its services, visit swtransit.org.

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