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Metropolitan Council - Environment

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AT A GLANCE

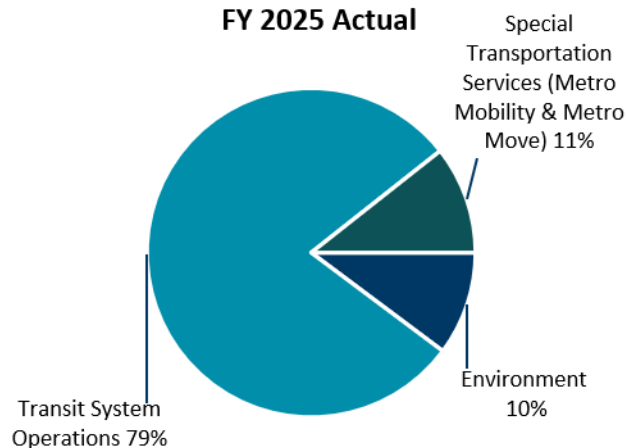
- 3,285,554 residents in the seven-county area in 2025 (Met Council April 2025 estimate based on 2020 Census)
- 51.0 million transit rides provided by the Council in 2025
- 1.95 million rides on Special Transportation Services (Metro Mobility and Metro Move) in 2025
- 250 million gallons of wastewater treated daily
- Over 100 communities provided with wastewater treatment service in 2025
- Over 69.1 million regional park visits in 2025
- 119 regional parks/trails, park reserves, and special recreation features; totaling over 65,300 acres, plus 450 miles of interconnected trails
- 7,200 low-income households provided affordable housing by the Council's Metro Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) in 2025
- From 2020 to 2050 the Council forecasts the region will grow by:
 - 657,000 more people
 - 324,000 more households
 - 493,000 more jobs

PURPOSE

The Metropolitan Council is the regional policy-making body, planning agency, and provider of essential services for the Twin Cities metropolitan region. The Council's mission is to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous region in partnership with more than 180 communities and seven counties. We provide cost-effective transit and wastewater services, assist households with low and moderate incomes to find affordable housing, and support communities as they plan for anticipated growth.

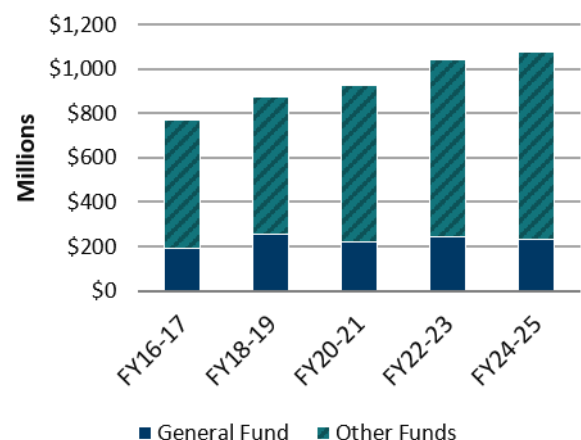
BUDGET

**Spending by Program
FY 2025 Actual**



Source: Budget Planning & Analysis System (BPAS)
Reflects only funds flowing through the state accounting system

Historical Spending



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement
Reflects only funds flowing through the state accounting system

The charts on the previous page show appropriations to the Metropolitan Council recorded in the state's financial system, which represents a subset of the Council's total budget. The Council's Unified Operating Budget for 2026 is \$1.79 billion. State appropriations for transit, parks operations, and water supply planning provided approximately 32% of agency funding in CY26. Most of the Council's operating funding comes from charges for services (wastewater fees and passenger fares), a regional transportation sales tax, federal funds, property taxes, and local funds.

Funding reflected above is for both the "Metropolitan Council – Transportation" and "Metropolitan Council – Environment" state budgetary entities. Funding from the state general fund is provided for Special Transportation Services (Metro Mobility and Metro Move), transit system operations, parks, and occasional varying amounts for specific transportation and park projects. Other funds flowing through the state's financial system to the Council that are a result of either ongoing statutory appropriations or occasional legislative appropriations include Transit Assistance Funds (derived from a portion of Motor Vehicle Sales Tax proceeds), parks and trails legacy funds, lottery in-lieu-of-sales tax funding for parks, clean water funds, and environment funds.

STRATEGIES

Our governing body – the 17-member Metropolitan Council – plays a key convening role, bringing together communities to develop policies and a shared vision for the region. To achieve our mission, we carry out planning initiatives and provide essential services to the region, primarily through the Imagine 2050 process.

The Metropolitan Council is required by M.S. 473.145 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/473.145>) to prepare and adopt, after appropriate study and necessary policy hearings, a comprehensive development guide for the metropolitan area.

It consists of policy statements, goals, standards, programs, and maps prescribing guides for the orderly and economical development of the metropolitan area and future developments which will have an impact on the entire area. It includes but is not limited to such matters as land use, parks and open space land needs, the necessity for and location of airports, highways, transit facilities, public hospitals, libraries, schools, and other public buildings.

Imagine 2050, the regional development guide approved in February 2025, builds on the principle that together we can tackle challenges that individual communities may not be able to take on alone.

As the seven-county metro region's long-range plan, Imagine 2050 includes a vision and goals, and sets the policy foundation for land use, housing, transportation, water resources, and regional parks. It addresses critical issues that cross policy areas: climate, equity, natural systems, and public health, safety, and well-being. The guide shapes how this region will grow in the next 30 years.

The vision statement for Imagine 2050 is: "A prosperous, equitable, and resilient region with abundant opportunities for all to live, work, play, and thrive." The statement builds off the regional values and goals set by the Council to guide our policy work.

Regional goals

The Metropolitan Council has endorsed these goals for our region to achieve through our policies, practices, programs, and partnerships.

Our region is equitable and inclusive

Racial inequities and injustices experienced by historically marginalized communities have been eliminated; and all people feel welcome, included, and empowered.

Our communities are healthy and safe

All our region's residents live healthy and rewarding lives with a sense of dignity and wellbeing.

Our region is dynamic and resilient

Our region meets the opportunities and challenges faced by our communities and economy including issues of choice, access, and affordability.

We lead on addressing climate change

We have mitigated greenhouse gas emissions and have adapted to ensure our communities and systems are resilient to climate impacts.

We protect and restore natural systems

We protect, integrate, and restore natural systems to protect habitat and ensure a high quality of life for the people of our region.

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 473 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/473>) provides the legal authority for the Metropolitan Council.

Program: Environment

Activity: Water Sustainability

<https://metrocouncil.org/Wastewater-Water/Services/Water-Quality-Management.aspx>

AT A GLANCE

- The Metropolitan Council partners with 181 cities and townships, 7 counties, other governmental entities, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and others
- 250 million gallons of wastewater treated daily
- Municipal water use:
 - Current average (2015-2024): 260 million gallons per day
 - 195 million from groundwater
 - 66 million from Mississippi River
 - Current average (2015-2024) water use per person per day
 - Residential groundwater: 67 gallons
 - Total groundwater: 95 gallons
 - Residential surface water: 46 gallons
 - Total surface water: 83 gallons

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

Although the seven-county region is relatively water-rich, the region's steady population growth, increased groundwater pumping, changing land use, and variable weather and climate are challenging some communities' ability to meet current and future demand.

The purpose of the Metropolitan Council's Water Supply Planning Sustainability and Water Supply Program is to support communities addressing water-supply challenges by developing regional and multi-community solutions; expanding planning and technical assistance; providing data, modeling, and other tools to inform decisions; and improving coordination among communities, utilities, counties, watersheds, and state agencies. The Met Council identifies and supports targeted funding opportunities for water efficiency, reuse, and other projects that advance water sustainability. The Met Council also helps communities incorporate source water protection into land-use decisions and address connections between groundwater and surface water. These activities provide communities with:

- **Regional and multi-community options** for addressing water-supply and water resources protection challenges, better integrating land-use and water planning.
- **Planning and technical assistance** to identify opportunities to use water more efficiently and make balanced use of surface water, stormwater, and wastewater and groundwater resources.
- **Regional data, modeling, and planning tools** to understand water-supply conditions, future demand, climate impacts, and connections between groundwater and surface water.
- **Information to guide infrastructure planning and investment**, including the water-system improvements needed to maintain reliable supplies and adapt to changing conditions.
- **Regional investment priorities and planning-level information on costs and benefits** to help communities and decision-makers prioritize actions.
- **Targeted funding opportunities**, where appropriate, for regionally beneficial projects such as water efficiency and water reuse.

- **Support for incorporating source-water protection, including wellhead protection, into land-use decisions** and reducing impacts on groundwater and surface water resources.

In advisory committees, work groups, and other venues, the Metropolitan Council partners with local units of government, state agencies, and other stakeholder groups to collaboratively address local and regional water sustainability issues in the metro area. The program supports Metropolitan Council efforts to bolster the livability of the region, foster economic growth and prosperity, and to alleviate competition and conflict over water supply.

SERVICES PROVIDED

The data and tools generated, and the projects implemented by the Council's Water Sustainability and Water Supply Planning Program benefit communities by enhancing communities' planning processes and ensuring a more coordinated and regionally sustainable approach to water supply. Cities in the region are the suppliers of water to residents, and the Council provides collaborative support through coordinating discussions around water supply issues, and by its technical and financial assistance role.

Council Role in Water Supply

Council Role	Outcome/Goal
Develop and update the Metro Area Water Supply Plan with advice and direction from the Metro Area Water Supply Advisory Committee	To address regional water supply needs and provide guidance for local water supply systems and regional investments
Develop and maintain technical tools and provide technical assistance	Better understanding of water supply issues and trends
Aid in plan development and review services to local and state entities	Consistency of local water supply plans with the regional master plan now referred to as Metro Area Water Supply Plan (M.S. 103G.291, Subd. 3(b))
Analyze regional and local water supply emerging issues and provide financial assistance and support for local solutions	Local government units make informed and effective water supply decisions
Facilitate cooperation between communities and support local effort through subregional water supply engagements	Regional, cost effective, long-term, reliable, and sustainable solutions to current and potential problems

There is no budgetary base of state funding for this activity. However, the Council receives occasional appropriations from the general fund and the clean water legacy fund for various water projects.

RESULTS

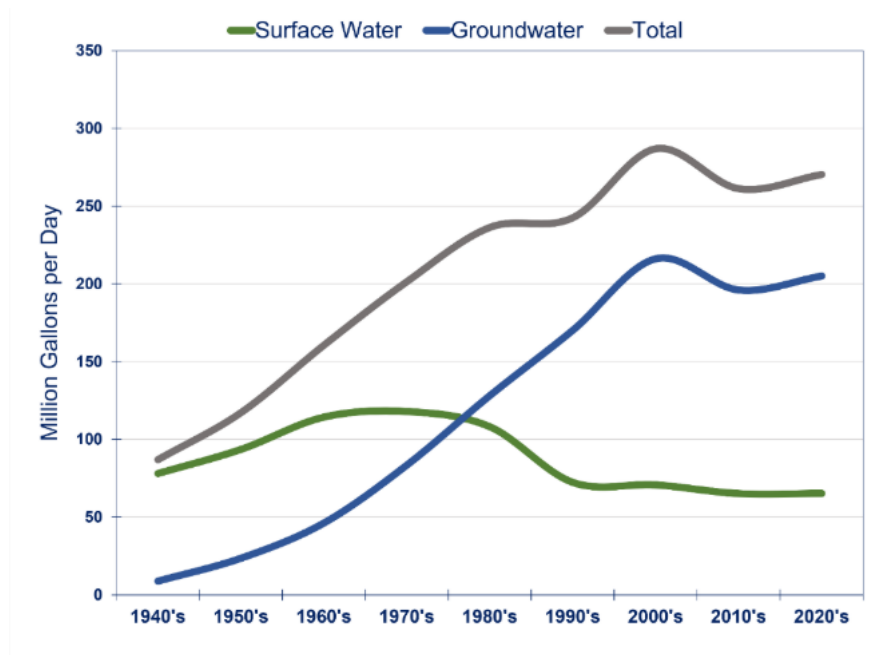
Part A: Performance Data

The Council's current statutory responsibility for water supply planning began in 2005. At that time, no additional funding was provided to the Council to carry out the new responsibilities. The Clean Water Land and Legacy funding was first made available in 2010 and has made a significant impact on water supply planning and implementation in the metro area. The Council's Clean Water funded sustainability work has equitably funded water sustainability projects of municipal water suppliers through competitive contracts and grants. From 2005 to 2019, as more money was made available for this work, the number of communities that received technical and financial support from the Council grew substantially. The number of communities receiving technical and financial support was fairly stable between 2019 and 2022 with a few noticeable dips. One in 2020 was a result of the pandemic. In 2021, the first of several drought years, many communities requested more technical assistance to support their efforts to mitigate the impact of drought. From the end of 2023 to present, communities received technical support from the Met Council through facilitated sub-regional workgroups. We continue to hold subregional meetings to discuss priorities and needs for the region. These meetings bring our partners together to help develop studies, projects, and solutions needed on a regional and subregional level to ensure sustainable

water resources for the region. We also hold meetings with our Metro Area Water Supply Advisory Committee and the Metro Area Water Supply Advisory Committee Technical Advisory Committee to gather input.

Sustainable groundwater use in the region is another measure of success for this program. One of the intended long-term outcomes is sustainable use of groundwater in the metro area.

Figure 1. Municipal groundwater, surface water, and total water use in the Twin Cities metropolitan area by decade from the 1940's to the 2020's.



Part B: Evidence of Effectiveness

This program has not yet been evaluated using randomized control or quasi-experimental design methods.

Minnesota Statutes 473.1565 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/473.1565>) directs the Council to carry out water supply planning activities, including development of a metropolitan area master water supply plan.

Minnesota Statutes 103G.291 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/103G.291>) requires that all local water supply plans in the metropolitan area be included as part of the local comprehensive plan that is submitted to the Metropolitan Council for review.

Program: Environment**Activity: Parks and Trails**
<https://metro council.org/Parks.aspx>
AT A GLANCE

- Over 69.1 million regional park and trail visits in 2025
- Regional parks, special recreation features, and park reserves totaling over 65,300 acres
- Regional trails totaling nearly 490 miles
- Ten regional park implementing agencies that own and manage regional parks and trails

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

The purpose of the Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails System is to meet the outdoor recreation needs of residents and visitors and to preserve natural systems, including green space and wildlife habitat. The Regional Parks and Trails System acts as the state parks and trails of the metropolitan area. Parks and trails are critical to the metropolitan area's current and future livability, sustainability, stewardship, and prosperity. The Regional Parks and Trails System draws more than 69.1 million visits every year, which is more than the Mall of America and adds untold value to the livability of our region.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Under state law, Metropolitan Council is charged with overseeing the acquisition and development of regional parks and trails. The agency partners that own and operate the parks are called regional park implementing agencies. Together, Metropolitan Council and the ten regional park implementing agencies plan for and finance the Metropolitan Regional Parks System. The ten regional park implementing agencies are:

Anoka County	Washington County
Carver County	Three Rivers Park District
Dakota County	Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
Ramsey County	City of Bloomington
Scott County	City of Saint Paul

Metropolitan Council's responsibilities include:

- In coordination with the regional park implementing agencies, locate new regional parks and trails to serve the region's growing population and protect our region's natural systems.
- Review and approve park and trail long-range plans and long-range plan amendments that set the vision for the regional park or trail's future, including identifying the development concept and estimated development costs for recreation facilities and needed acquisitions.
- Survey park and trail visitors to measure what activities they prefer, how far they travel, and how often they visit a park or trail.
- Disburse state and regional funds to park agencies to finance operations and maintenance, recreation facility construction, and equity and recreation programming and staffing, in accordance with state law and Council distribution plans and policies.

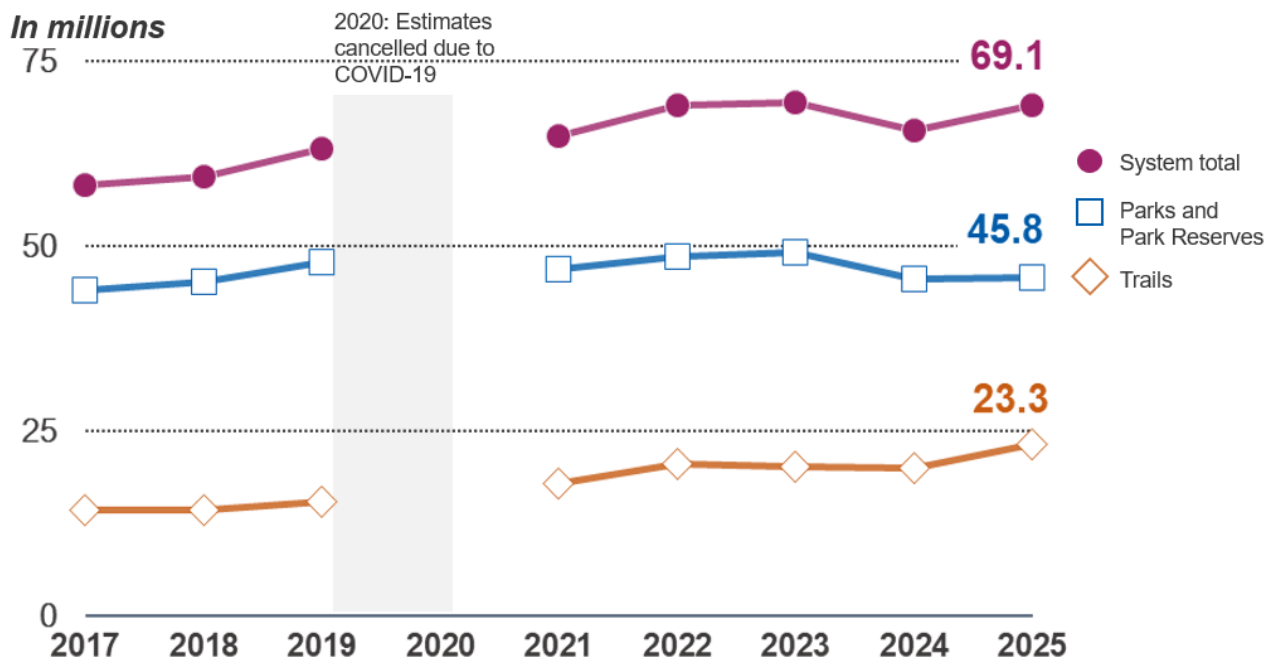
The fiscal pages of this activity display base general funds and lottery in-lieu-of-sales tax funding for metropolitan area parks and trails operations and maintenance, as well as occasional funding for miscellaneous projects from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund and the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund.

RESULTS

Part A: Performance Data

The 2025 annual use estimate was over 69.1 million visits across the regional park system. There was no use estimate completed in 2020 due to the pandemic. The most recent visitor study was completed in 2021. This study is conducted once every five years and is slated to be updated in 2026. From 2014 to 2025, annual visits to regional parks and trails increased by over 42%. A new, more accurate attendance estimate methodology was implemented in 2017, which, among other things, showed that more system visits are happening in off-peak times of the year, like winter, than was previously thought.

Figure 1. Annual Visits to the Regional Parks and Trails System



Source: Metropolitan Council's annual parks and trails use estimates (July 2025).

The Regional Parks and Trails System is one of the most iconic park systems in the nation and is frequently cited by residents as one of the most attractive features of the region.

Beyond park visits, the system is an amenity that contributes to the region's quality of life and can help retain and attract businesses and residents. Parks and green space boost human health and well-being, provide an opportunity for increased physical activity, and provide many social benefits. Parks and open space also have many environmental benefits, including biodiversity conservation, air and water purification, erosion control, and climate regulation.

Part B: Evidence of Effectiveness

This program has not yet been evaluated using randomized control or quasi-experimental design methods.

M.S. 473.351 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/473.351>) and M.S. 297A.94(h)(3) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/297A.94>) authorize funds for operating and maintaining regional parks and trails.

M.S. 85.53, Subd. 3 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/85.53>) authorizes allocations of Parks and Trails Legacy Fund appropriations among 10 regional park agencies.