

Chapter 1 Introduction

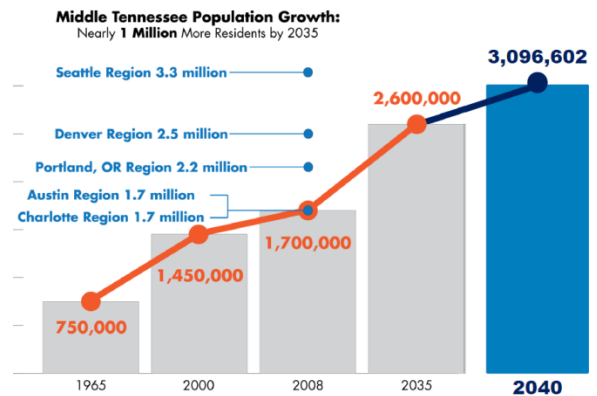
Nashville and Middle Tennessee make up a dynamic region that has become one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the nation. With more than 1 million people expected to relocate to Middle Tennessee between now and 2040, transportation concerns have also grown and are becoming increasingly challenging to address.

FIGURE 1-1 | MIDDLE TENNESSEE COUNTIES



As with every metropolitan area, mobility in Middle Tennessee is currently defined by three key factors: patterns of development and growth, the natural limitations of the topography, and the manmade limitations imposed by the built environment. As the growth of this region adds pressure to our natural and built environments, Middle Tennessee must develop a strategy that will address the issues of congestion by providing a range of alternative mobility solutions. In particular, Middle Tennessee needs a comprehensive Transit Plan.

FIGURE 1-2 | MIDDLE TENNESSEE POPULATION GROWTH



The Need for a Transit Plan

The Nashville Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee (MTA) have engaged in a regionwide public discussion of the best strategies to improve regional mobility under a Regional Transit Plan. This study has been undertaken with the clear understanding that transit alone will not solve all of the region’s mobility issues, but an improved transit system must be a key and integral part of any solution. Roadway improvements, including roadway expansion, will need to be a part of future travel solutions. However, the region is reaching a point in size and density where mass transit and other “shared-use” mobility options will have to become a much larger part of the travel mix to assure continued economic prosperity for the region.

Purpose of this Plan

The recommendations resulting from the nMotion planning process aim to:

- **Improve access to opportunity** for those with limited auto availability
- **Expand the range of competitive travel options** for all Middle Tennesseans
- **Simplify and integrate** various means of transportation to develop a seamless, connected system to provide Middle Tennesseans with the maximum travel flexibility
- **Prioritize major transit investments** in transit-supportive areas
- **Significantly increase ridership**, especially in target markets

What nMotion Is and What It Is Not

In undertaking this process, MTA/RTA set out to create a long-term plan for a transit system for Middle Tennessee. We did so with the understanding that this plan would not, in and of itself, answer all of the transit questions that must be answered. Here's what this plan is:

- A framework for the types and magnitude of changes that could be advanced;
- A concept of how individual projects/services can come together into a comprehensive system;
- A mechanism for promoting more in-depth conversations about what we want for future mobility in our region
- A springboard toward short-term implementation and planning for long-term improvement; and
- A determination of order-of-magnitude costs based on recent experience in benchmark regions.

However, nMotion is not:

- The in-depth planning required for a high-impact capital/corridor project.
- A detailed projection of future costs – instead, the costs presented herein are order of magnitude costs.
- A detailed funding plan, which still needs to be developed.
- A detailed implementation plan, which will be developed following development of the funding plan.

Partnerships and Collaboration

For a regional mass transit system to be effective, MTA and RTA will need to expand and enhance partnerships with public and private entities to make such a system a reality. These will range from other regional public transit agencies such as Murfreesboro Rover, Franklin Transit and Clarksville Transit to private transportation providers such as taxi operators, rideshare providers such as Lyft and Uber, car-share providers like Car2Go, and bike-share operators such as B-cycle. MTA and RTA will need to work more closely with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) to incorporate improved mass transit facilities into key travel corridors, as well as local cities and towns to both improve transit facilities and allow for/encourage the types of development that will support a robust mass transit system. Partnerships with university communities and high-tech sector will be needed to advance technological enhancements such as open payment systems and advanced, intermodal itinerary planning applications. For large-scale projects, MTA and RTA will also explore the opportunities presented in recently adopted state legislation allowing for public-private partnerships in the development of advanced mass transit facilities.

Growth with Intention

The nMotion plan suggests a path forward to achieve these goals. However, bold solutions, such as high-capacity transit investments like rail, require higher-density development than currently exists in most of Middle Tennessee. This can change if the region “grows with intention,” as envisioned in NashvilleNext, the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Regional Transit Vision, and other plans.

What does that mean? It means growing in a way that intentionally provides greater density that will support mass transit along certain corridors. Although public engagement efforts demonstrated widespread support for high-capacity mass transit facilities such as light rail, current development patterns, population and job density, and pedestrian access from neighboring areas to target corridors would not support these investments in a way that provides an adequate return on investment.

The rate and nature of regional growth suggest that such investments could be very effective over the long term if undertaken in concert with coordinated changes in land use, development, and complementary public policy and investments over the long term. Implementing these changes as our region grows will allow for the broadest range of living options and better position us to preserve the open spaces we cherish so dearly.

The Critical Importance of Downtown Nashville

In order to accomplish the goals of nMotion, future plans will need to address mobility in – and through – downtown Nashville. Downtown Nashville is the region’s most concentrated trip destination, and more people travel to

downtown Nashville than any other location in the region.

Because of that, downtown will remain the dominant focal point of high-capacity transit investments. Downtown Nashville is also a major point of cross-regional access – i.e., people moving from one part of town or the region to another would logically pass through downtown. Because of its importance to the region, downtown Nashville will require special consideration for transit priority.



nMotion Transit Plan

The nMotion transit plan is the result of more than a year of public engagement and technical analysis, and has been designed to meet future needs in a manner that reflects regional planning efforts and desires expressed through extensive civic engagement. This report includes an overview of public engagement, strategic recommendations and key actions for improving transit in Middle Tennessee, benefits and costs associated with the recommended plan, and a discussion of immediate and long-term next steps. This report is also accompanied by several appendices that document the extensive technical work and public engagement that inform the nMotion plan.