

Cassandra Belyeu Testimony

Hello and thank you for your time today as I talk about what public transportation means to me and the community of Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center. My name is Cassandra Belyeu and I am a resident of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota on the borderline of Brooklyn Center, where I have resided for the past four years. I am a passionate advocate for transportation access. I am here today to share my perspectives with Senator Tina Smith and the panel.

Transportation is lacking in my area, an issue I feel needs to be addressed. My research on the Metro website has revealed only four buses that I am aware of that service the cities of Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park. Anyone who misses one of these buses will be forced to wait an hour for the next arrival or walk long distances of potentially over a mile. During the Minnesota winters, such a long wait or walk can be an extremely difficult challenge.

Without access to reliable transportation, simple tasks like shopping and receiving a haircut can occupy significant portions of someone's day. While I have personal access to a car today, I didn't always. I can still recall spending half my day planning a haircut due to lack of access to timely transportation, arriving a full hour early just to secure my spot with my barber. I would also rely on family to pick me up and take me home afterwards, if my haircut appointment ended in the evening when buses were less available. During the weekends, I always had to get a ride, because buses were even more unavailable than during the week.

My story is far from the only one, and the time it occupied in my day shows the necessity of reliable transportation in the Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area, where currently it is lacking. My story raises the question of what would happen to other Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center residents like me who either temporarily or permanently rely on public transportation.

I have also spoken with friends in order to hear their perspective on what public transportation means to them. I have a friend who would love to move to the northwest suburbs, particularly Brooklyn Park, but finds such a move difficult due to lack of public transportation. My friend's story shows that public transportation is not only a means of offering access to numerous locations for current residents, but also a means of bringing people into our communities.

In addition to knowing people who are unsure about moving to the area, I also know people who live in the Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area who have been stranded and needed me for a ride home because they couldn't get home using Brooklyn Center transit. Instead, I had to pick them up where they were. No bus ran close to their home, meaning they would've had to have walked miles if I hadn't picked them up, and in very bad weather.

Access to public transportation is also extremely important for children and during holidays. During Halloween and other public activities, children often have trouble arriving because the events can be so far spread out.

I am here to say that the transportation situation right now is not working for many people in the Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center area. I would like to demand that the buses in Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park run longer hours, including hours that go beyond rush hour into the evening and weekend times, specifically Sundays where they often do not run at all, and that the buses offer more stops, particularly in underprivileged communities.

Even though I have a car, I would still like to use public transportation from time to time. During trips to the Mall of America, I still use public transportation. My example shows that even people with access to personal transportation can still benefit from stronger public transportation.

My story and the stories of countless Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center residents raises the question of what access to public transportation means for residents, and shows the tremendous effect it can have on the community.