Overview

Total Governmental Revenues

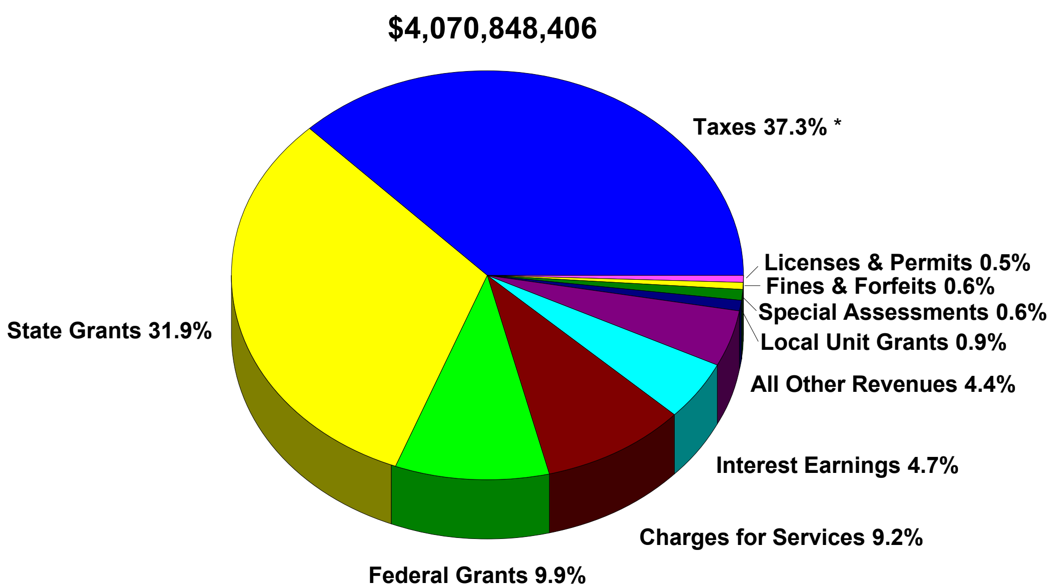
In 2000, Minnesota counties raised total governmental revenues of $4.07 billion to finance county services. This represents an increase of 9.7 percent over the amount raised in 1999.

The composition of funding sources for counties generally varies only slightly from year to year. Over time, there have been some shifts in the constitution of revenues. The two largest sources of revenues for counties continue to be taxes and state intergovernmental revenues, which account for 37.3 and 31.9 percent of total revenues, respectively.

Between 1999 and 2000, all but two categories of county revenue increased. Those categories of revenues showing the greatest growth were interest earnings and federal highway grants, which increased 196.4 and 107.0 percent, respectively. Interest earnings were significantly down in 1999 due to poor returns on the types of investments in which counties invest their reserves. A turnaround in the investment environment in 2000 resulted in strong interest earnings that brought this category up to historical levels. Federal highway grants increased due to a number of large road projects in several counties. The two sources that decreased were federal disaster grants and disparity reduction aid. Federal disaster grants were down due to a decrease in the damage from flooding and storms. Disparity reduction aid decreased as a result of statutory changes. To further examine trends in revenues, refer to Table 1.

Figure 1 shows the relative shares of total governmental revenues by source. The underlying data for this pie chart is detailed in Table 1.

Figure 1: Total Governmental Revenues



* This category includes property, sales, gravel taxes as well as tax increments.

Total Governmental Expenditures

Counties provide a variety of services to their citizens. Most services are accounted for in Governmental Funds. In 2000, Minnesota counties expended $4.15 billion from Governmental Funds to provide county services. This represents an increase of 5.0 percent over 1999 total governmental expenditures.

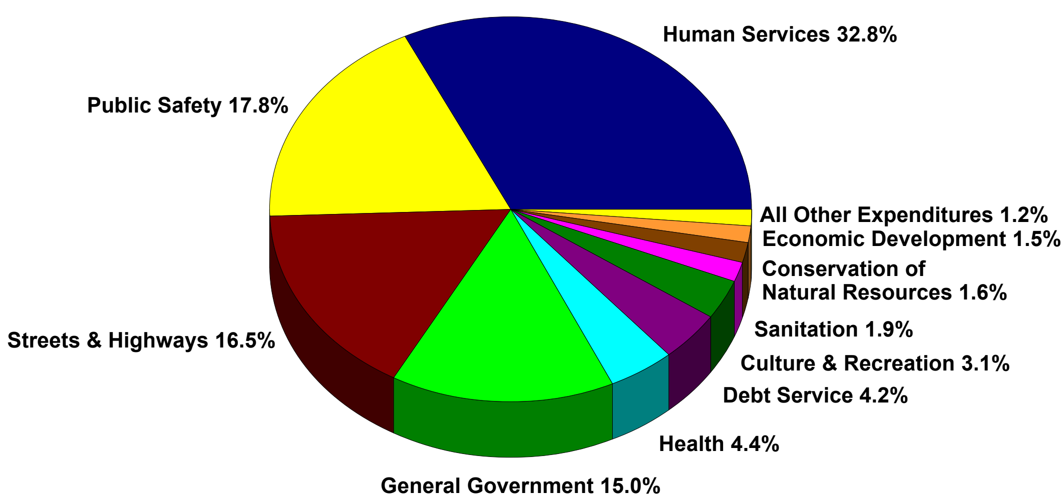
The relative shares of total governmental expenditures change very little from year to year. However, as the priorities of counties change over time, the relative shares of total spending shift to reflect these new priorities. Human services remain by far the largest expenditure for counties, but the category has decreased from 34.4 percent of total expenditures in 1996 to 32.8 percent in 2000. Conversely, public safety expenditures have risen from 15.4 percent of total expenditures in 1996 to 17.8 percent in 2000.

Between 1999 and 2000, all expenditure categories increased except debt service and conservation of natural resources. Debt service expenditures decreased because there was a high level of refinancing in 1999 that was not repeated in 2000. Conservation of natural resources expenditures decreased because several counties completed capital projects in 1999 that did not have on-going expenses into 2000. To examine these and other trends, refer to Table 1.

Figure 2 shows the relative shares of total governmental expenditures by function. The underlying data for this pie chart is detailed in Table 1.

Figure 2: Total Governmental Expenditures *

$4,151,672,830



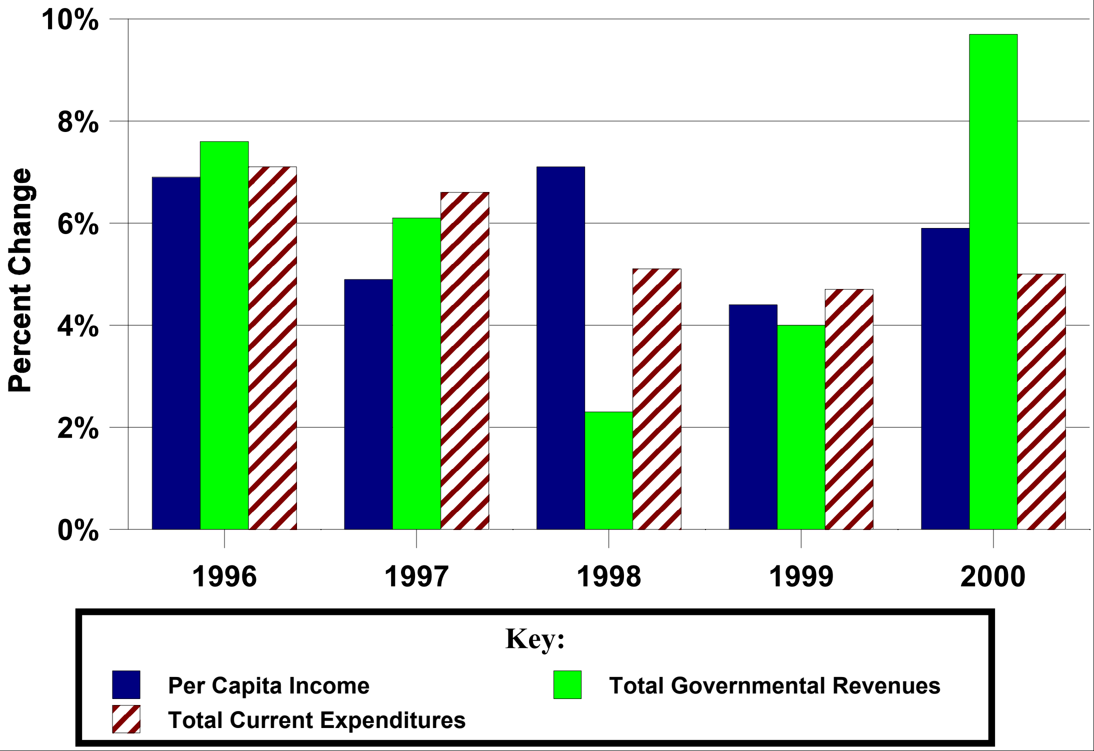
* Includes current expenditures, capital outlays, and debt service.

Growth in Government

During the five-year period of 1996 to 2000, total governmental revenues and total current expenditures increased every year.[1] The rate at which they increased varied from 2.3 percent to 9.7 percent. To place this growth in perspective, Figure 3 below includes a bar showing the growth in per capita personal income for Minnesotans.[2] Per capita income is an indicator of the ability of citizens to pay for increased governmental spending. Generally, when expenditures grow faster than per capita personal income, citizens must spend a greater proportion of their income on governmental services. However, if non-tax sources of revenue keep pace or grow faster than expenditures, the increased spending may not result in a greater tax burden for citizens.

Figure 3 compares the change in total current expenditures and total governmental revenues to the change in Minnesota per capita personal income. Total current expenditures grew faster than per capita income for three of the five years. Total revenues also grew faster than per capita income for three of the five years.

Figure 3: Percentage Change - Total Governmental Revenues, Total Current Expenditures, and Per Capita Income - 1996 to 2000



---

[1] The chart excludes capital outlays as this category is more prone to yearly fluctuations. The chart also excludes revenues derived from borrowing because counties are prohibited from borrowing for current expenditures. Most capital projects are funded through the issuance of bonds or other types of borrowing such as certificates of participation.

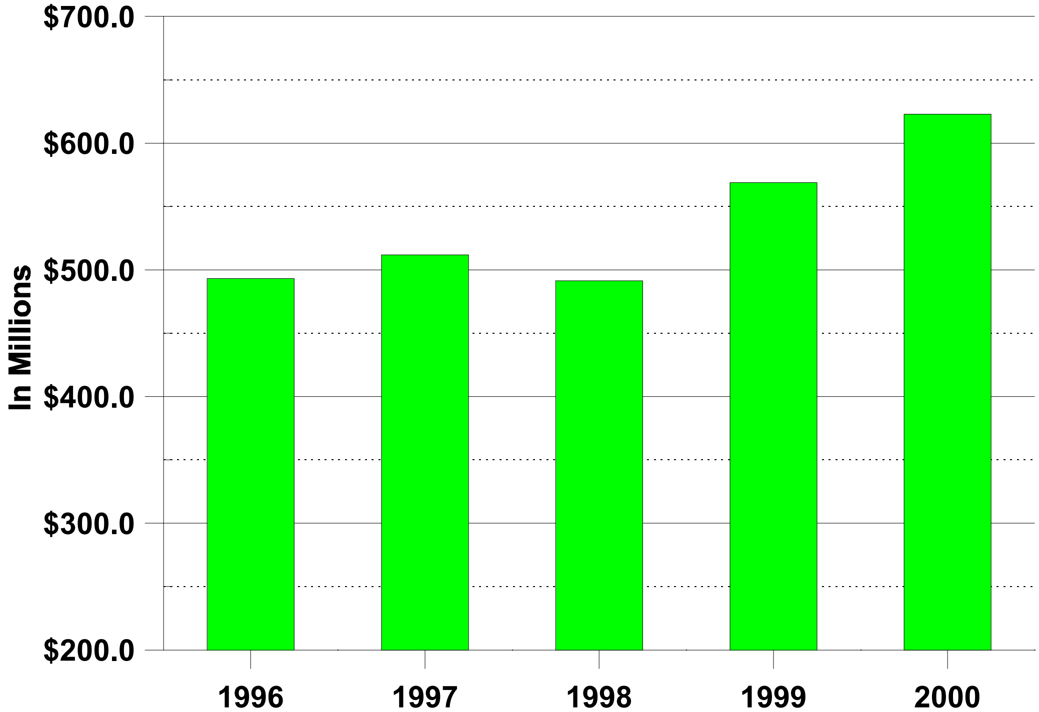
[2] Per capita income is calculated by dividing Minnesota total personal income by its total midyear population. The figure is calculated by the Bureau of Economic Analysis which is a part of the U. S. Census Bureau.

Capital Outlay Expenditures

Counties expended $622.9 million on capital investments in 2000. This represents an increase of 9.5 percent over the level expended in 1999. Capital outlays are more likely than current expenditures to vary significantly from one year to the next. The reason for this is that capital projects tend to be large in size but infrequent in nature. Some of the factors that influence the level of capital investments include: the need for infrastructure improvements; public safety concerns; demands for public meeting places and facilities; the need to replace aging infrastructure; and damage to public facilities caused by fire, floods, and storms.

Figure 4 illustrates the trend in capital spending for the years 1996 through 2000.

Figure 4: Total Capital Outlay Expenditures, 1996 to 2000



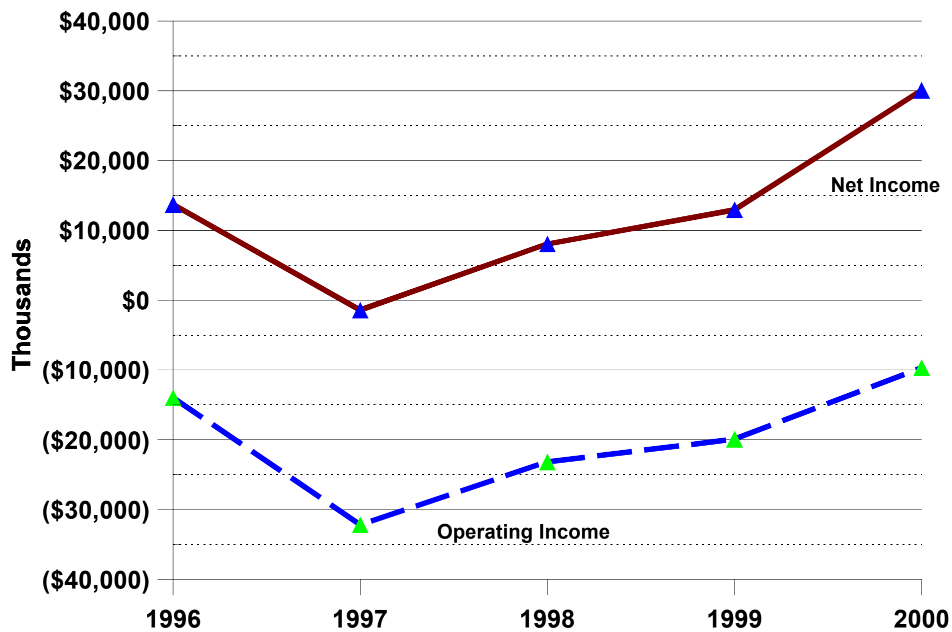
Public Service Enterprises

In addition to Governmental Funds, many counties establish Enterprise Funds to account for services that are financed and operated in a manner similar to private business enterprises. These enterprises are intended to be self-sustaining through fees and user charges. Although some enterprises generate net income, most have the objective of breaking even. Enterprise Fund accounting is also used to provide more detailed financial information on operations where there are public policy, accountability, management control, and other concerns. The most common enterprises created by counties include hospitals, nursing homes, nursing services, and solid waste. Other enterprises include recreation facilities, housing, and economic development.

Public service enterprises provide a good or service for a charge. Most enterprises are designed to recoup the costs of providing the service through charges to the user. Many county enterprises, however, do not recoup all the costs of the service and need to supplement the operating revenues with transfers from other funds and non-operating revenues such as taxes and intergovernmental revenues. In 2000, the operating losses of county enterprises totaled $9.7 million. Counties provided transfers and non-operating revenues of $50.7 million to cover operating losses in county enterprises. After the inclusion of non-operating revenues, county enterprises posted a net income of $30.1 million in 2000. Tables 4 through 8 provide detailed financial information on Enterprise Fund operations.

Figure 5 examines the five-year trend in the operating income and net income or loss of municipal enterprises. The gap between the operating income line and the net income line shows the amount that counties contributed in the form of non-operating revenues to county enterprises.

Figure 5: Net Income and Operating Income of Municipal Enterprises, 1996 to 2000



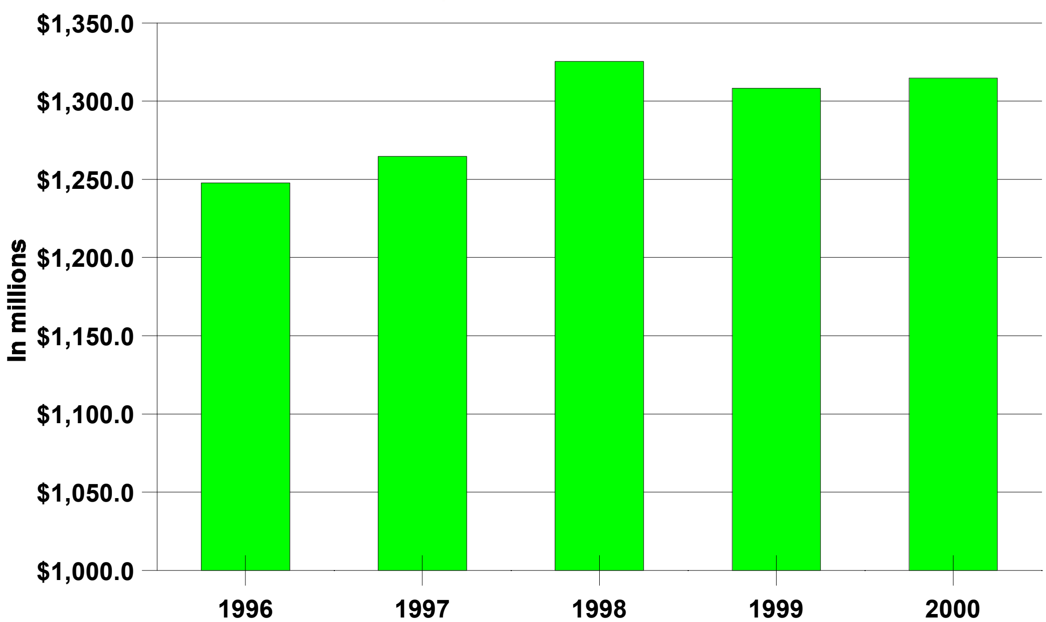
Outstanding Long-Term Indebtedness

Counties incur long-term debt through the issuance of bonds and notes, certificates of indebtedness, and tax anticipation certificates. Long-term lease agreements are also classified as long-term debt. Counties may only borrow to finance capital projects and purchases. They are restricted by law from borrowing for current expenditures. The amount of outstanding debt affects a county's expenditures because counties must make principal and interest payments to service the debt.

Counties reported a total of $1.31 billion in outstanding long-term debt at the end of 2000. This represented an increase in long-term debt of 0.5 percent over 1999. At the close of the 2000 fiscal year, counties had $1.06 billion in outstanding bonds and $250.9 million in other long-term debt. Table 9 details outstanding debt by individual county.

Figure 6 shows the five-year trend of outstanding long-term debt for Minnesota counties.

Figure 6: Outstanding Long-Term Indebtedness as of December 31, 2000 *



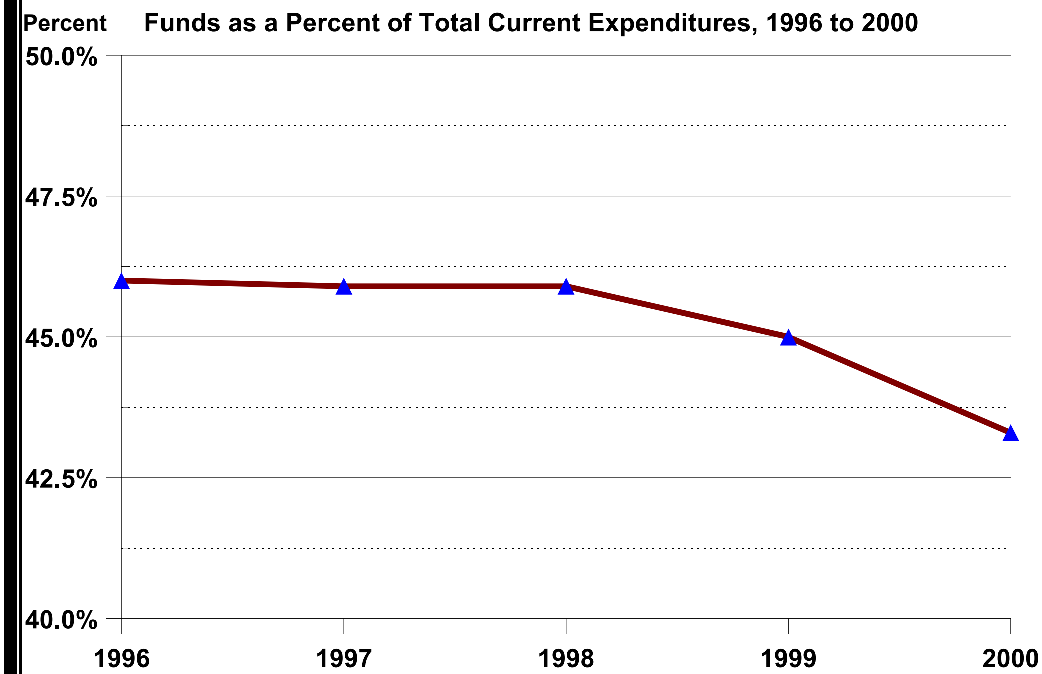
*** Includes bonds and other types of debt such as certificates of participation, long-term leases, and notes.**

Unreserved Fund Balances of the General Fund and Special Revenue Funds

Counties maintain cash reserves for several reasons. Counties should have relatively large fund balances at the end of the year because they must rely on them to meet expenditures during the first five months of the next fiscal year until they receive the first property tax and state aid payments. Additional reasons include contingency funds for unforseen needs and setting aside resources for future capital investments. The unreserved fund balances of counties' General and Special Revenue Funds totaled $1.45 billion in 2000.[3] This represents an increase of 2.5 percent over the level in 1999.

Comparing counties' unreserved fund balances to their total current expenditures helps put the fund balances in perspective and provides insight on the relative financial health of Minnesota's counties. County unreserved fund balances as a percent of total current expenditures averaged 43.3 percent in 2000. Among individual counties, unreserved fund balances as a percent of total current expenditures ranged from 17.4 percent to 154.7 percent. Figure 7 shows the five-year trend of unreserved fund balances as a percent of total current expenditures.

Figure 7: Unreserved Fund Balances of the General and Special Revenue Funds as a Percent of Total Current Expenditures, 1996 to 2000



[3] Although this section discusses only two types of fund balances, Minnesota counties actually report three different classifications of fund balances in the General and Special Revenue Funds. The ***unreserved, undesignated fund balances*** include all funds remaining at the close of the fiscal year for which no legally-binding commitment has been made, nor has the governing body passed a resolution designating those funds for a specific purpose. The ***unreserved, designated fund balances*** include all funds remaining at the close of the fiscal year for which no legally-binding commitment has been made; however, these funds have been designated by the governing body for a specific future use. The ***reserved fund balances*** include all funds remaining at the close of the fiscal year for which there is a legally-binding external commitment of those funds, such as a signed contract for services or equipment.