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Newsletter for Minnesota Public Transit

January/February 2007

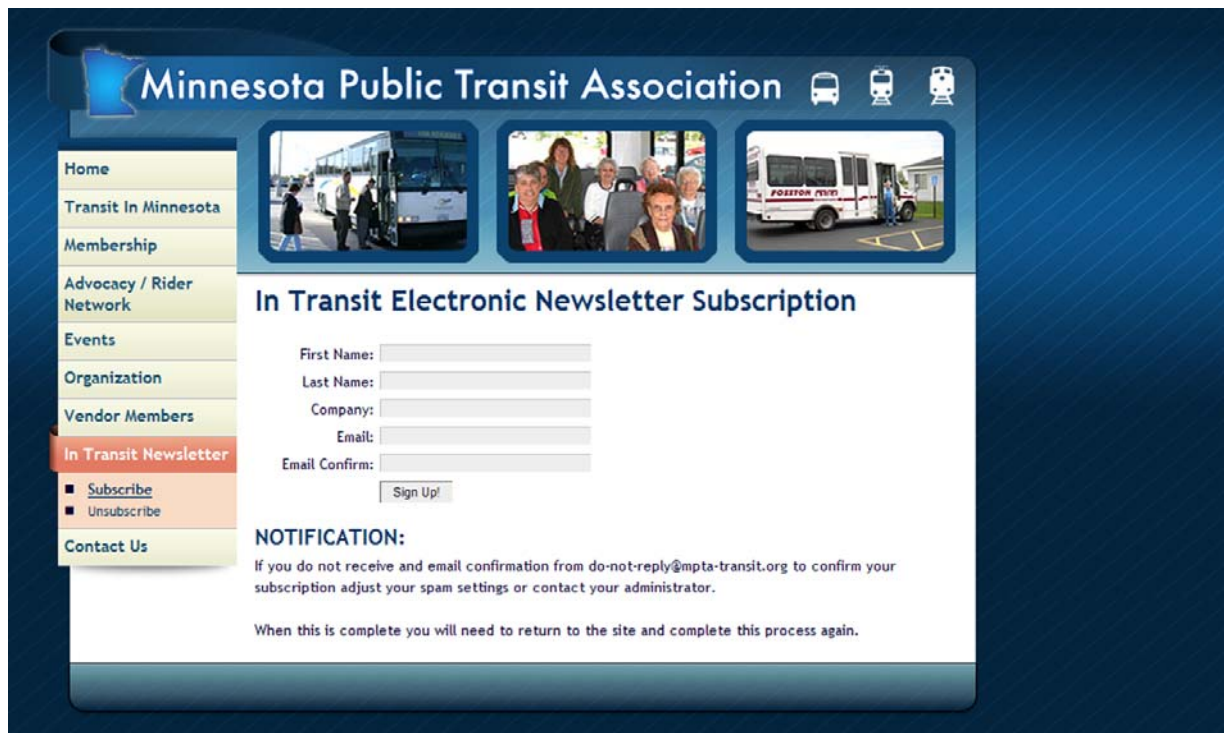
MPTA upgrades web-site — InTransit newsletter goes online




Welcome to the electronic age! This is the first online issue of the InTransit newsletter. Sign up here online on the MPTA web-site and you will receive your next issue via e-mail. Subscribe to future InTransit newsletters by providing your e-mail address and you will continue to receive this newsletter.

Going paperless with the InTransit newsletter allows

MPTA to save money while continuing to provide the latest news on public transportation in Minnesota. As a non-profit organization, it's important for us to save costs where possible and make the best use of your membership dollars.

Stay connected to transportation issues in Minnesota. Sign up for future InTransit newsletters today!



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From the President



Tony Kellen, President
Minnesota Public Transit Association
Director of Operations, St. Cloud Metro Bus
320/529-4481 - tkellen@stcloudmtc.com

New year for transit

It's a new year and MPTA is moving ahead with new initiatives while building on past successes.

Here's an update on what's new as MPTA works to improve communications with our members, educate legislators about the need for increased transit funding, provide high-quality events and training opportunities, expand our base of supporters and advocates and develop working relationships with other organizations that care about trans-

it service in Minnesota.

Visit our new web-site! The MPTA web site has a new look and updated information. This web site should serve as an important resource for members and others looking for information on transit in Minnesota. Take a look around the new web site at www.mpta-transit.org and let me know if you have comments or suggestions. This is your web-site, so be sure to provide feedback regarding the design and content.

Of course the web-site is also where you will sign up to receive InTransit in the future. With an electronic version of this newsletter, we'll be able to provide information on transit issues and activities to more people in a much more cost-effective manner.

Mark your calendars for upcoming events. It seems like a long way off, but plans are already being made for this year's Bus Roadeo and public transit conference. The Minnesota

Public Transit Conference will be held October 29-31 at the St. Cloud Civic Center. More details on this year's event will be coming shortly. Once again, you'll be able to register for the conference online.

This year we partnered with a number of other transit advocacy groups to host the Transit Legislative Breakfast on February 8th. We had a very good turnout at the breakfast this year. Thanks to everyone who participated in this important event - particularly folks who traveled a long distance.

Help organize transit advocates! Once again, MPTA will be asking for your assistance in generating grassroots support for transit funding. Legislators need to hear from their constituents about transit service. Fortunately, transit riders are an audience we can reach and we can encourage people to contact their legislators in support of expanded service and increased funding. MPTA will be asking transit systems to distribute bus rider sign-up forms that allow transit riders to become part of our transit network. Through this system, riders will be sent occasional e-mails or direct mail pieces letting them know how they can make a difference in supporting transit funding. Please do your part to help generate letters, e-mails and phone calls to legislators this session.

All of these services - events, information, web sites, legislative activity etc. are possible thanks to membership revenue.

It's critical for all transit systems in Minnesota to belong to our Minnesota Public Transit Association. This association is the only statewide, independent voice speaking out for transit. MPTA has developed a comprehensive legislative agenda and has a strong presence at the Capitol. We keep transit advocates up to date on the latest activity and provide the information necessary for you to make an



impact on transit funding levels. You should have received an invoice for 2007 MPTA dues. If you haven't already done so, please send your membership dues in today. More information on membership can be found on the MPTA web site as well.

Membership is what makes MPTA a strong voice for transit in Minnesota. Join your colleagues and fellow transit advocates in supporting this organization and supporting quality transit service for people throughout the state.

DTA'S U-PASS ridership at UMD tops 2 million

DULUTH—The Duluth Transit Authority's (DTA) U-PASS Program at UMD surpassed the 2 million rider milestone on February 1, when freshman Sarah Kryjeski of St. Paul boarded the route #11 bus at the Kirby Transit Hub. Sarah lives on campus and doesn't have a car. She uses the DTA for everything - work, shopping and entertainment.

U-PASS ridership at UMD has increased every year since 2000, when the program was established, and has accounted for 11 percent of the DTA's over-all ridership during the same time period. Prior to the U-PASS Program, UMD ridership averaged just 4,000 a month. UMD ridership today tops the 4,000 rider mark in only 2 days. Ridership at UMD today averages more than 42,000 per month.

The U-PASS Program was introduced in Fall Semester of 2000 as an innovative partnership between UMD and the DTA to encourage greater use of public transportation on campus by providing unlimited rides for students, faculty and staff and building an on-campus transit hub.

Since 2000, when the U-PASS Program was instituted, UMD has experienced a phenomenal 23 percent increase in enrollment. UMD enrollment is now at an all time high with 11,190 students. The U-PASS Program has been very instrumental in accommodating the transportation needs of this increased enrollment.



DTA driver Sadie Green poses with Sarah Kryjeski - the 2 millionth U-PASS rider at UMD.

Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe
Legislative Director
Minnesota Transportation Alliance



Legislature to set transit funding levels

The 2007 Legislative Session is in full swing. If you haven't yet contacted your legislators, now is the time to do so.

This is a critical budget year. The legislature will determine the funding levels for transit systems for the current year and the next two years and with revenue from the motor vehicle sales tax coming in at less than projected levels, transit systems will face funding shortfalls unless action is taken now to increase funding.

The Metropolitan Council is projecting a transit shortfall of \$8 million for the current biennium and \$31 million for the '08-'09 biennium. Greater Minnesota transit faces a shortfall of \$.52 million for 2007 and an additional \$3.7 million for the coming FY 08-09 biennium.

The Governor released his budget in the middle of January and now the legislature will need to put together an omnibus transportation funding bill for both Mn/DOT and the Metropolitan Council. While the Governor's budget is usually the starting point, legislatures can and regularly do decide on different budget numbers and different funding mechanisms. That's why it's so important to stay in touch with your legislators.

For Greater Minnesota transit, the administration is recommending a FY07 deficiency appropriation of \$522,000 to make up for the decline in MVST revenues currently dedicated to transit. For the '08-'09 biennium, the recommendation includes the additional MVST provided through the constitutional amendment on a 60/40 highway/transit split with the 40 percent for transit split 38/2 between Metropolitan Area Transit and Greater Minnesota Transit. The budget also includes an increase from dedicating the sales tax revenue from leased motor vehicles with the same distribution. The total increase in state revenues is \$3,533,000 for the three years. The total in state funding for the coming biennium is \$75,009,000.

For Metropolitan Area Transit, the Governor is recommending a FY07 deficiency appropriation of \$7,847,000 to make up for the decline in MVST revenues currently dedicated to transit. For the '08-'09 biennium, the recommendation includes the additional MVST provided through the constitutional amendment on a 60/40 highway/transit split with the 40 percent for transit split 38/2 between Metropolitan Area Transit and Greater Minnesota Transit. The budget also includes the in-

crease from dedicating revenue from leased vehicles. The total increase in state revenues is \$75,378,000 for the three years. Total state revenues for Metropolitan Area Transit for the coming biennium: \$449,606,000.

MPTA's legislative agenda includes:

- Support \$4.23 million general fund appropriation for MN/DOT's current operating contracts in Greater Minnesota (preservation).
- Support \$7.0 million additional general fund appropriation for unfunded 2007 state share (MN/DOT share per statute) of operating contract requests for Greater Minnesota transit systems.
- Support \$6.0 million additional general fund appropriation to meet state share (MN/DOT share per statute) of 2007 un-met service needs identified in Greater Minnesota transit systems.
- Support general obligation bonds for Greater Minnesota Transit - \$4 million
- Support general fund appropriation for Northstar Commuter Rail start-up costs – up to \$5 million.
- Support regional bonding for metropolitan area transit - \$65 million.
- Support general obligation bonds for Central Corridor - \$40 million.
- Support general obligation bonds for Saint Paul Union Depot - \$9 million.
- Supports fully funding the FY 08-09 shortfall to maintain the metropolitan area's current transit operations.
- Support general fund appropriation for expansion of metropolitan area transit services.
- Support \$6.2 million general fund appropriation to cover the Metro Mobility shortfall.
- Seek adequate dedicated funding to accelerate implementation of the Metropolitan Council 2030 Transportation Policy Plan by 2020 (about \$315 million/yr.), with 50 percent of the new money used to double the bus system.
- Seek adequate dedicated funding to implement the 2001 Greater Minnesota Public Transportation Plan (about \$38 million/year).
- Support statutory dedication of revenues from sales tax on leased vehicles for transit.

This promises to be a crucial legislative session for transit. We need you to help advocate and support efforts to expand and improve transit service throughout Minnesota. For more information, please visit the MPTA web site: www.mpta-transit.org.





LRT Loop proposal has serious drawbacks

MPLS/ST. PAUL—A proposed change in the alignment of the Central Corridor LRT line to create a one-way loop in downtown St. Paul would increase capital and operating costs, increase travel times, reduce ridership and create “serious operational and reliability issues.”

These are among the conclusions of a \$40,000 study conducted for Ramsey County by the DMJM Harris consulting firm and a separate analysis by the Metropolitan Council’s transportation planning staff. Such a dramatic change in the alignment also could require re-opening the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), which could delay the project by six months and add to its cost.

The LRT alignment proposed in the Alternatives Analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) calls for parallel tracks entering downtown on Cedar Street and turning on Fourth Street, terminating at Union Depot.



The loop idea was advanced by Ramsey County Commissioner Tony Bennett, and the county has hired an advertising firm to promote it. Met Council Chair Peter Bell, St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, the Pioneer Press and the business-led Central Corridor Partnership all have expressed serious reservations. Copies of the DMJM study and the Met Council memo are posted at www.metrocouncil.org.

Metro Transit takes wraps off buses & trains

METRO AREA—In the interests of greater transparency, Metro Transit is peeling back some of the full-wrap advertising on buses and trains. Full wrap is a popular form of outdoor advertising that envelops trains and buses in jumbo graphics printed on adhesive vinyl film. But passengers, bus drivers and transit police didn’t like the way the ads made it hard to see out of the train and bus windows.

So the transit agency now allows wrap advertising to cover only half of the window surface on a bus or train. In addition, at the request of drivers, bus windows beside the boarding doors will be left unwrapped.

“We do hear from customers who, particularly at night, find it a little more difficult to see out to identify their stops,” said Robert Gibbons of Metro Transit.



The agency has hired a new advertising broker to sell bus and train ads. From that contract, Metro Transit will receive \$3.3 million this year, up from \$3 million in 2006.

Across the country, about 20 percent of transit agencies don’t allow wrapping. About 47 percent allow partial wrapping, and the rest allow full wrap.

Radar, Metro Transit’s first K-9, retires

METRO AREA—Partners for six years, Metro Transit Police Captain Bob Elmers and his dog Radar present a confident team. With a sweep of his hand, the officer signals the German shepherd to come to attention. The dog quickly assumes a poised position.

When Elmers demonstrates a crouching stance he might use to track a suspect without getting noticed, Radar — a Metro Transit Police K-9 — follows suit.

Elmers, who became a police officer in 1973 and a K-9 handler in 1988, became Radar’s partner while working for the Minneapolis Police Department’s K-9 unit. In 2002, both were hired by Transit Police, making Radar the department’s first K-9.

Radar can smell explosives, track suspects and search buildings. He has maintained a high public profile with Elmers, riding along side him buses and trains.

The two were introduced when Radar was just four months old. “Here was this little dog with floppy ears,” Elmers said. “His paws were the same size they are now. The moment I opened the kennel door, we bonded.”

Because of recent changes in his job, Elmers won’t have time to maintain Radar as a K-9. In January, Radar gives up his badge and retires from duty. Radar will stay as Elmers’ personal dog.



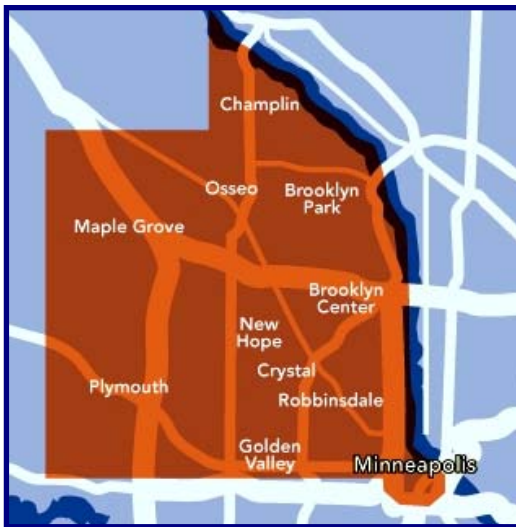
Captain Bob Elmers and his partner Radar on Hiawatha light rail.

Metro Transit prepares for sector restructuring

METRO AREA—Residents of the northwest corner of the Twin Cities metropolitan area will soon see changes in transit service coming their way.

Starting in June, Metro Transit will implement the first phase of its Northwest Metro Transit Restructuring Plan, which will improve service in an area that represents 13 percent of the metropolitan region's population and 20 percent of the region's jobs. The area generates 10.3 million rides annually, roughly 14 percent of Metro Transit's ridership. A second phase of changes is planned for early 2008.

Cities in the project area include Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Crystal, Golden Valley, Maple Grove, New Hope, North Minneapolis, Osseo, Plymouth and Robbinsdale.



This spring, marketing efforts will help Metro Transit customers learn more about the changes. Elements of customer marketing include a brochure, advertising on buses and in newspapers and a feature on the agency's website, metrotransit.org. Stakeholders involved throughout the process will also be enlisted to help reach customers affected by the changes. Metro Transit has communicated with a group of about 500 elected officials and business and community leaders who represent the study area.

As they have done in previous studies to improve service, Metro Transit planners - after consulting with residents, business owners and other stakeholders - took a fresh look at where and how often buses operate, then proposed a plan to update service to better match where people live and work today. The project area is served by 45 bus routes.

"The goal of this project is to make transit service more effective and meaningful for this area, while using existing resources to meet that goal," said Cyndi Harper, transit planner and project manager at Metro Transit.

An earlier concept plan was revised after the agency received feedback from public meetings and comments from printed cards, e-mails, faxes and letters. The Metropolitan Council approved the final plan in December.

This project marks the fifth time Metro Transit has evaluated existing service and recommended improvements to routes and facilities in a given area. In 1998, the agency divided the Twin Cities region into nine geographic sectors, and has been restructuring service one sector at a time.

Passenger capacity to grow on Hiawatha line - three new rail cars will join LRT fleet

METRO AREA—When the Hiawatha Line made its debut in 2004, ridership hit nearly 3 million. A fleet of 24 light-rail cars handled demand when a portion of the line opened in June of that year and were used more extensively when the entire line was completed in December.

Since then, ridership has more than tripled, yet the number of rail cars has remained static. Ridership surged to 7.9 million in 2005 and grew another 20 percent last year, to 9.4 million.

To help keep up with customer demand, three new light-rail cars will be added to the fleet this winter. This is the first fleet expansion since light-rail service began with 24 cars.

"One can clearly see the need for the additional capacity to our rail system," said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb. "The public's appetite for rail service continues to grow."

Starting in March, Metro Transit will operate 12 two-car trains during rush hours, which will increase the rail system's capacity to carry customers at times when demand is highest. That's not the only benefit customers will see.

The expanded fleet also enhances capacity for train service during special events, such as home games for the Twins and Vikings at the Metrodome. "In 2006, we provided service at more than 100 special events in downtown Minneapolis," Lamb said. "With the extra capacity, we'll be able to move more people faster than we ever have before."

Finally, the expanded fleet means less pressure on the system's maintenance schedule because there will be more spare trains. Increased ridership had forced Metro Transit to put extra miles on its current fleet, cutting into the amount of time rail cars are out of service and available for cleaning and regular maintenance. With the additional vehicles, customers will be assured of more reliable and cleaner trains.

The cars, manufactured by Bombardier, cost \$3.15 million each. One car was purchased with \$3.15 million left in the Hiawatha light-rail project budget and the other two from \$6.3 million from Hennepin County through a local funding match for the proposed Northstar commuter rail line. The new cars will be identical to the first 24 in the fleet.



Three more light-rail vehicles will provide additional trips during peak periods and special events.

St. Cloud Metro Bus is lighting up new shelters for bus riders

Solar lights boost security at bus stops

ST. CLOUD—Metro Bus has recently installed 15 new bus shelters — seven with solar-powered lighting.

The new shelters replace older wooden structures, some built in the 1980s, said Metro Bus Director of Planning and Marketing, Tom Cruikshank.

“Many of the older shelters have no security lighting and Metro Bus would like to change that using environmentally friendly solar energy” noted Executive Director David Tripp.

Getting electricity to a shelter can be expensive and almost impossible in many areas. In some cases, Metro Bus has been able to make agreements with the nearby property owners, but the agency often finds that difficult.

Metro Bus has worked with Tafco Corp. and Solar Outdoor Lighting Inc. to produce the shelters. “Tafco and Solar Outdoor have never worked together; so this was a new experience for everyone involved,” said Cruikshank. A local contractor has been installing the units.

Three of the solar-powered shelters have large panels that supply lighting to the advertising panels as well as security lighting. The other four simply supply security lighting. Cruikshank would like to replace all of the old shelters as money allows. One challenge the bus service

has run across while replacing the shelters is keeping up with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Many of the older shelters were built before the act came into place in 1990.

Some of the areas where the old shelters were located preclude retrofitting to make them accessible. Others just have to be modified. Metro Bus maintains 56 shelters in the St. Cloud area and has worked with the cities it serves to make the stops more accessible.



METRO BUS

Regional Transit Leaders Meet in Mankato

MANKATO—On October 20, members of a Regional Transit Leadership Team met in Mankato to discuss transit as it exists today as well as look at the future of transit in the region. Sixteen individuals, under the leadership of Reggie Edwards, Region Nine Executive Director, attended the meeting. Representatives from 5311 and 5310 programs, city and county governments, Minnesota State University-Mankato, private entities, former legislators and Mn/DOT staff were present.

The first order of business was to determine how the participants perceive current transit options. They examined rural, intra-regional and inter-regional transit. Transit needs were given to the group in a scenario challenge to find a way to meet the need. It is hoped that this information will stimulate ideas for ways to improve transit in Region Nine.

The second meeting was held on January 26. During this meeting, participants were able to experience using transit within the region. Watonwan County “Take Me There Transit” picked up the group in Mankato and transported them to New Ulm in a Class 400 vehicle. In New Ulm, a panel of four different types of providers from the area showcased their programs.

Following the New Ulm meeting, the group boarded a Brown County Heartland Express bus and traveled back to Mankato. After a working lunch, the group rode Mankato Transit’s fixed routes back to the initial meeting point. Many ideas were shared and great conversation led to a new understanding. Meeting participants were able to look at intra-regional transit in depth.

Another meeting is planned to discover the benefits of inter-regional transit. The group expects to travel to the Metro Area and use the Hiawatha Light Rail.

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Minnesota Public Transit Newsletter

In Transit newsletter is a bi-monthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA). Opinions expressed in this publication may not necessarily be those of the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

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Bridge the gap with RTAP

RTAP Training Classes

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) offers training in passenger assistance, defensive driving and abuse prevention. In 2007, RTAP is offering refresher courses and training for newly hired employees. New hires should take the full eight hours of Passenger Assistance, four hours of Defensive Driving and four hours of Abuse Prevention. Refresher training should be taken once every three years after the initial new hire courses have been completed. **Register for classes by completing the form posted on the Office of Transit's web site at: www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/Form/index.html. RTAP calendar is subject to change. For the most up-to-date listing, see the 2007 RTAP training calendar at www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/rtaptrng.html. For more information, contact RTAP Coordinator Lynn Frank at lynn.frank@dot.state.mn.us or 651/296-1610.**

March

- 10 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Brainerd Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Gordon Thompson)
- 24 Driver Refresher Training — Mankato Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Steve Rasmussen)
- 31 Passenger Assistance Training — St. Cloud Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Jamey Rosenau)

April

- 14 Passenger Assistance Training — Metro Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Terry Higgs)
- 21 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Willmar Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Verona Klimek)
- 28 Passenger Assistance Training — Mankato Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Myrna Flint)

May

- 05 Passenger Assistance Training — Fergus Falls Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Verona Klimek)
- 05 Driver Refresher Training — Willmar Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Steve Rasmussen)
- 19 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Bemidji Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Myrna Flint)
- 19 Passenger Assistance Training — Rochester Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Kris Barrett)

June

- 09 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Fergus Falls Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Myrna Flint)
- 16 Passenger Assistance Training — Brainerd Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Helen Pieper)
- 23 Driver Refresher Training — Bemidji Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Gordon Thompson)
- 30 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Rochester Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. (Terry Higgs)

Transit Events

- July 21 Minnesota Statewide Bus Rodeo — Willmar, MN
- Oct 29-31 Minnesota Public Transit Conference — St. Cloud, MN

SEND NEWS

In Transit News
% Tom Elwell
Duluth Transit Authority
2402 West Michigan Street
Duluth, MN 55806
telwell@duluthtransit.com

Contributors

Margaret Donahoe — Transportation Alliance
Tom Elwell — Duluth Transit Authority
Bob Gibbons — Metro Transit
Elizabeth Hochstedler — St. Cloud Times
Tony Kellen — St. Cloud Metro Bus
Janice Klassen — Mn/DOT
Peter Raeker — Metro Transit
Metropolitan Council Directions