



# in transit

Minnesota Public Transit Association



## Minnesota's future wins when logjam breaks

Minneapolis Star Tribune

MINNESOTA—With One of this state's most persistent and damaging political logjams finally gave way on February 25. As a result, some of this state's most persistent traffic jams will ease before this decade ends, and most damaged bridges will be replaced.

The House's 91-41 vote, overriding Gov. Tim Pawlenty's veto of a \$6.6 billion, 10-year transportation funding bill with one vote to spare, was the product of highly skillful lawmaking. (The Senate's 47-20 vote was never in doubt.)

Many of the legislators and lobbyists who contributed to this result deserve credit for making the state's infrastructure a priority in 2008. Our list is incomplete, but starts with these:

- DFL House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher. Yesterday's vote likely would have had a different outcome were it not for Kelliher's personal role in shaping the bill. She took the lead in securing business backing. Her respectful, persistent courtship of House Republicans won six minority votes that stayed solid under heavy intra-caucus pressure.
- House Transportation Finance chair Bernie Leider, DFL-Crookston, the bill's House sponsor. The only World War II veteran still serving in the Legislature, Leider brought the conscience and values of the Greatest Generation to the transportation argument. A retired county roads engineer, he understood how critical the shortage of funds for highways and, particularly, bridges has become.

He wasn't about to let the boomers and Gen X-ers simply pass the problem to their children. "The Legislature caused this problem, because for the last 20 years we haven't been doing the job we should," Leider said yesterday.

- Rep. Ron Erhardt, R-Edina. The template for the transportation bill was the one Erhardt assembled almost single-handedly in 2005, when, as the chair of the House Transportation Policy Committee, he resolved to do something about the growing shortage of transportation funds.

His bill was vetoed, but his courage inspired others. Kudos to the five other House Republicans who voted yes yesterday: Neil Peterson, Bloomington; Kathy Tinglestad, Andover; Jim Abeler, Anoka; Bud Heidgerken, Freeport, and Rod Hamilton, Mountain Lake.

- Minnesota Chamber of Commerce President David Olson. By raising their gas tax ante at the start of the session, Olson and the chamber positioned themselves to help shape the outcome. Olson withstood nasty barbs from some of his own members to secure for his organization a seat at the negotiating table and a role in whittling down the bill's metro sales tax to 0.25 cents on the dollar.
- Wells Fargo-Minnesota President Jon Campbell. Campbell took the transportation issue personally, lobbyists said, and worked effectively with legislators behind the scenes. He's also credited with nudging the Chamber of Commerce into a stronger role. Along with Supervalu CEO Jeff Noddle, Campbell went public on these pages last week, saying that more roads-and-transit investment could not wait another year.

The revenue this bill will provide for roads, bridges, transit and even repair of the MnDOT building is badly needed. Now it's up to the Legislature's DFL majorities to find ways to soften the tax blow that goes with it. A 20-year transportation funding battle ended yesterday, but the general fund battle is about to begin.

# From the President



Tony Kellen, President  
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It's been an historic Legislative Session and it's not over yet. On February 25, over two-thirds of the Minnesota legislature voted to override Governor Pawlenty's veto of the 2008 transportation funding bill, making the legislation law. This is a great victory for transit systems all across Minnesota. With authority for counties in the Twin Cities Metro-

politan Area to levy a ¼ percent sales tax specifically to fund transitways, Minnesota has joined many major metropolitan areas in dedicating revenue for transit projects. This funding will allow the state to compete much more effectively for federal transit dollars.

For Greater Minnesota Transit, the new law dedicates 50 percent of the revenue from the sales tax charged on leased vehicles to transit outside the metropolitan area after deducting for the gas tax credit that will be provided to low-income residents. This additional source of dedicated revenue will provide an average increase of about \$5.8 million over the next 10 years. The legislation also contains an increase in the general fund appropriation for Greater Minnesota transit of \$1.7 million for the current biennium.

THANK YOU! to everyone who sent e-mails, made phone calls and came to the Capitol to talk to legislators. It really does work. This bill is not a one-time shot in the arm. It provides dedicated, ongoing revenue that will grow into the future.

Overriding the veto of a Republican or Democratic Governor hasn't happened since Harold Levander was Governor. The six Republican House members and two Republican Senators who voted in favor of the overridden deserve a lot of credit. Despite pressure from their political parties, they voted to provide the

resources necessary to improve our transportation system. Please send a thank-you e-mail and better yet, send a public thank you via a letter to the editor to your local newspaper if your legislators voted for the bill – Republican or Democrat.

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All legislators who supported this bill need a public "thank you" from us. Take a few minutes to send an e-mail and send a quick letter to your local newspaper just letting people know that this legislation will make a difference in your community.

Transit systems will benefit from the enactment of this law for many years to come. We have a real responsibility to stand up for all the legislators who voted for this legislation. They have shown their support for us, and we need to thank them for their commitment to transit in Minnesota.



# Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe  
Legislative Director  
Minnesota Transportation Alliance

The 2008 Transportation Funding bill, now Chapter 152, contains a number of important provisions for transit systems. Here is the breakdown:

+ **Authorization for counties to impose a .25 percent increase in metropolitan area sales tax dedicated 100 percent to transit.** Revenue estimate is a total of \$1,152,027 over the next ten years. The revenue starts at \$68,350 in FY09 increasing to \$135,490 in FY2018. Revenue will continue to increase into the future, growing with inflation.

- Eligible counties include: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington. One or all of these counties can now join a joint powers board and then impose the tax increase.

- Counties whose proportional annual sales tax revenue is less than or equal to 3 percent are guaranteed to receive at least as much back as the revenue they generated.

- Before imposing the tax, an eligible county must declare by resolution of its board to be part of the metropolitan transportation area and enter into a joint powers agreement.

- Funding can be used for: capital improvements to transitways, capital costs for park-and-ride facilities, feasibility studies, property acquisition and construction of transitways, and operating assistance for transitways.

- A Grant Evaluation and Ranking System (GEARS) Committee shall be formed to provide grants for eligible expenditures.

+ **General fund appropriation for Greater Minnesota Transit - \$1.7 million for FY2009**

+ **Dedicating sales tax on leased vehicles to Greater MN transit and local roads starting in FY2010 and fully phased-in by FY2012**

50 percent to Greater MN transit  
50 percent to CSAH fund

**Revenue estimate is \$58,216,000 in additional revenue over the next 10 years.** Increase starts in FY2011 at \$3,630,000, gradually increasing to \$7,978 in FY2018.

+ **Northstar Commuter Rail extension study - \$250,000 from general fund**

+ **Authorization for counties in Greater Minnesota to levy a sales tax of up to ½ percent** for a specific transportation project or improvement. The transportation project or improvement must be designated by the board of the county or more than one county acting under a joint powers agreement. The taxes must terminate after the project or improvement has been completed. The taxes imposed are subject to approval by a majority of voters at a general election.

+ A county regional rail authority may not contribute more than 10 percent of the capital costs of a light rail transit or commuter rail project and may not contribute any funds to pay the operating and maintenance costs of an LRT or commuter rail project. If a county is contributing to a project on the date of enactment, it may continue to contribute funds.

+ A Transportation Strategic Management and Operations Advisory Task Force is created to advise the governor and legislature on management and operations strategies that will improve efficiency in transportation. The task force shall submit a report by December 15, 2008 to the governor and chairs of the committees with jurisdiction over transportation.

The legislature continues to work on the 2008 Capital Bonding bill. A number of transitway studies are likely to be funded as well as the state match for Central Corridor Light Rail line running between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul. Some funding may be provided for Greater Minnesota transit facilities.

Between the new funding law and the capital bonding bill, it's a great session for transit!





## Transit in the News

### Metro Transit ridership reaches 25-year high

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL – Metro Transit closed 2007 with 77 million rides, the highest annual ridership total since 1982.

That means that every minute of every day last year, 146 people hopped on a Metro Transit bus or train.

The 2007 ridership tally was 3.4 million rides, or 4.7 percent higher than 2006.

"Ridership growth in 2007 is not a one-year phenomenon. It continues a positive trend," said General Manager Brian Lamb. "Ridership is up 10.4 percent over the past two years."

The agency recorded increases in all major service categories in 2007: express rides up 4.8 percent; urban local rides, up 4.6 percent; and rail rides, up 1.5 percent.

Metro Transit saw a 12.2 percent increase in rides taken with a Metropass, a transit pass that employers provide, often picking up all or part of the cost for their employees. "Business leaders understand the importance of transit in battling congestion, and they see the benefits when employees have a relaxed, reliable commute," Lamb said. There were 7.2 million Metropass rides last year.

U-Pass rides by students at the University of Minnesota also were up 9.1 percent to 4.3 million.

Lamb reported that riders have responded favorably to the agency's new Go-To Card fare payment system with 26 percent of all rides in December taken by holders of these "smartcards."

Lamb also cited reliability improvements that made transit service more attractive to new customers. On-time performance for buses was 89 percent, up 1 percent over 2006. Trains ran on schedule 97 percent of the time.

Metro Transit also received positive feedback from customers on its Go Greener Initiative that included the purchase late last year of 19 hybrid electric buses - with 150 more on the way - and the use of 10 percent soy biodiesel, increasing to 20 percent in March.

"Clearly external conditions contributed, such as higher gas prices, growing freeway congestion and - in the last five months of the year - the loss of the I-35W bridge," Lamb said. "Nonetheless, while ridership surged upward when gas prices increased, those new customers stayed with us when prices dropped. They appreciated the reliability and received a positive commuting experience."



### DTA ridership was up 6 percent in 2007

#### *U-PASS ridership up nearly 15 percent*

DULUTH – Duluth Transit Authority regular route ridership increased by 6 percent in 2007 - the biggest growth in years with 2,854,227 rides.

U-PASS ridership continues to grow at UMD, Lake Superior College, College of St. Scholastica and University of Wisconsin, Superior, which joined the program in the fall of 2007. U-PASS ridership in 2007 increased by nearly 15 percent with 506,079 boardings. The U-PASS program, which started in 2000 at UMD has generated increased ridership every year ever since.

In addition, DTA ridership on the Port Town Trolley, which operates as summer circulator between downtown Duluth, Canal Park and Bayfront, also increased in 2007.

Bike& Bus ridership was up nearly 16 percent with nearly 16,000 boardings in 2007.

Wheelchair rides were up by nearly 6 percent in 2007 with 4,373 boardings.

The DTA also experience increased use of 31-Day Adult and Teen Passes in 2007, which was up more than 3 percent.



## Donna Allan retires as Mn/DOT's Director of the Office of Transit

Donna Allan  
Retired Director of the Office of Transit  
Minnesota Department of Transportation

### CARRY ON!

Almost 30 years ago, I joined Mn/DOT to help implement small accessible paratransit projects in Greater Minnesota. Few would have predicted that by 2008, we would have a network of rural public transit service equal to or better than any in the nation, but that's what happened. In 2007, we exceeded the ten million trip mark in Greater Minnesota!

It took strong partnerships and the dedication of a lot of people to reach that milestone. Largely a grass roots effort, individuals and organizations across the State have worked to plan, secure resources, and implement services that ensure mobility for the citizens of their communities. Often it started out with a single individual who saw the benefits of public transit. Those dedicated people, some of whom were compensated only by seeing people get the transportation they need, are to be commended.

Behind every successful transit system, there are always engaged local elected officials and agency board members. The interest and resourcefulness of committed city council members, county board members, and non-profit board members has been essential to the successful implementation and operation of our rural transit systems.

We're fortunate, in Minnesota, to have Congressional representatives and State legislators who understand rural transit needs. We owe special thanks to those who have worked to appropriate funds for operations, vehicles, and in the last few years, maintenance and storage facilities. In 2006, for the first time, the State identified a dedicated fund for transit—a significant accomplishment.

Finally, it takes special people to operate transit services on a daily basis. I have deep respect for the providers who figure out what works for their communities, comply with a multitude of regulations—both State and Federal—and provide the rides through good times and lean. Where once it was the exception to find an experienced transit manager in Greater Minnesota, we now have a strong core of trained professionals who efficiently operate systems with a focus on customer service.

While much has been done, challenges remain for Greater Minnesota transit. There are still counties without service and gaps that need to be addressed. We need more and better coordination of existing services to help ensure that boundary issues are addressed, the best use is made of limited dollars, and people really get where they need to go. I'm confident

that these issues are in good hands and that the creativity of people in the industry will again take us in directions we might not anticipate today.

It has been a fascinating journey. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with so many talented people—within Mn/DOT and in the field—who really care about making a transportation difference in peoples' lives. I'll remember with pleasure the opening of each new transit service, the ribbon-cuttings, the new vehicles, the bus rodeos, the conferences, the new facilities, and most of all, the people. This is good work! Carry on!



St. Cloud Metro Bus General Manager Dave Tripp (left) and Duluth Transit Authority General Manager Dennis Jensen present Donna Allan with a commendation plaque at her February 5th retirement party.



Donna Allan poses with co-workers at her retirement party: (from left) Harlan Tardy (AEOA), Mike Frisch (Tri-Valley Heartland Express), Donna Allan, Greg Negard (Paul Bunyan Transit), and Jack Larson (Arrowhead Transit).



## Transit in the News

### Eastview students produce bus posters for MVTA

BURNSVILLE – Students enrolled in the Advanced MultiMedia Class at Eastview High School have once again produced interior panels for display in local and express Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) buses. The panels focus on themes involving school activities and transit.

The students' artwork was reviewed by the MVTA and winning entries were selected in the two categories. Winners were: School Activities – senior Justin Tao; Transit – junior Donyea Cooley-White. The students received a certificate of award and a \$25 gift certificate to Best Buy for their efforts. Additionally, a number of students received honorable mentions. This is the sixth year the Eastview students have created interior bus panels for the MVTA.

As part of their class, students were to complete a project using software such as Photoshop, along with a variety of graphics and images. As in previous years, the MVTA had the panels printed and dry mounted by Cornerstone Copy Center, for display on the interior of MVTA buses. Students were also given a copy of their final product.

"Each year the students become more sophisticated in their final project, and it's exciting to see them progress," said program coordinator Robin Selvig, MVTA Customer Service Manager. "Their technical skills improve, and their creativity makes everyone who views their work appreci-

ate it," she said. Selvig added, "We appreciate the opportunity to partner with Eastview, and we hope that it's fun for the students to receive life-size copies of their bus panels and see how the work is actually put to use on the buses." This project is part of a strategic partnership between the MVTA and area schools. The MVTA has also worked with Burnsville High School students. Other area high schools interested in participating in this program are invited to contact the MVTA. Cornerstone Copy Center also participates by producing the panels for a reduced price.



Junior Donyea Cooley-White (left) and Senior Justin Tao (right) with the bus panels they produced for the MVTA.

### MVTA reports 5.6 percent ridership growth

BURNSVILLE –The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority experienced record ridership in 2007, with milestones including providing our 25 millionth ride in February, and ending the year up 5.6 percent above 2006 ridership levels at just under 2.5 million boardings.

MVTA express ridership grew by 4.6 percent, according to MVTA Chair and Burnsville Mayor Elizabeth Kautz. "Our express ridership increase was particularly significant," Kautz said, "because we had no increase in capacity on our buses, and many of our park & ride facilities are over capacity." Minneapolis express ridership grew by 4.9 percent, while St. Paul ridership grew a modest 1.9 percent.

The largest ridership increases were on local routes, and Kautz said that local ridership grew 8.5 percent, despite the elimination of Route 466 and the consolidation of two routes serving Apple Valley on Saturdays. Burnsville and Eagan residents

saw the largest growth, with Sunday service up 21 percent. "These changes are consistent with the pattern of the last few years," said Beverley Miller, MVTA Executive Director. "We believe that local ridership is heavily dependent on the cost of driving, while express ridership is also dependent on the cost of downtown parking," Miller said. "Our significant increase in ridership clearly shows that our continued commitment to providing high quality local bus service is being met with strong acceptance by our communities."



# MVTA awards bus service contract to Schmitt & Sons Transit

BURNSVILLE –The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) recently completed a "request for proposal" process for one or more transit service providers. The winning proposal was submitted by Schmitt & Sons Transit Service (SST) of Lakeville, MN. Schmitt & Sons began operating from the MVTA's Burnsville Bus Garage on Saturday, Dec. 29. The company had been one of two providers, already operating from the MVTA's Eagan Bus Garage.

The five-year agreement is valued at \$10.3 million annually, which is less than the \$10.7 million paid by the MVTA for service in 2007. The RFP process was "very thorough" according to Jon Ulrich, MVTA Chair and Scott County Commissioner. He said that the MVTA received three proposals, one of which was determined to be non-responsive. "The MVTA's Finance Committee met at least four times," Ulrich said, "including multiple meetings with the proposers, and careful review of the qualifications and financial impact of this decision. We believe we made the best decision for the MVTA." The contract was actually awarded at the MVTA Board's September 26th meeting, and MVTA and SST staffs have been working diligently for the past three months to ensure a smooth transition.

"We are excited to take on this expanded role with the MVTA," said Schmitt & Sons owner Paul Leidner. "We have had a good working relationship with the Transit Authority, and we look forward to providing solid service to their riders." Schmitt & Sons also operates school buses for the Lakeville Area Public Schools.

"Schmitt & Sons has provided stellar service to us in the past few years - we receive lots of driver compliments and few complaints about the service they have provided for us," said Beverley Miller, MVTA Executive Director. "We believe that MVTA riders will have a great experience riding our buses, with Schmitt & Sons operating all of our service," she said. "We also look forward to having SST operate our Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service in the I-35W and Cedar Avenue corridors in late 2009."



Dan Schmitt of Lakeville, one of the owners of Schmitt & Sons Transit, helps with the move into the new garage. Schmitt & Sons also operates transit service from the MVTA's Eagan Bus Garage.

# MVTA honors State Senators Carlson and Doll



Sen. Jim Carlson of Eagan (left) and Sen. John Doll of Burnsville (right), were honored at the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority January 2008 Board meeting for their leadership, guidance and service on behalf of transit and transportation issues in the Minnesota Legislature. They are pictured with MVTA chair Jon Ulrich, who is also a Scott County Commissioner.



## Transit in the News

### Judy Ellison named acting director for the Office of Transit

ST. PAUL –Former planning director, Judy Ellison, was appointed as the acting director of the Office of Transit.

Her appointment began February 11 and she will serve in that capacity until a permanent director is selected. She succeeds Donna Allan who retired February 8.

Ellison joined Mn/DOT in 1989.

Previously, Ellison served as the director of the Moorhead Area Transit System and on the staff of the Regional Transit Board.

Ellison has held several positions in the Office of Transit. She was promoted to planning director in 1997.

A Moorhead native, Ellison holds a bachelor’s degree in business management from Moorhead State University.



Judy Ellison (center) chats with Tom Gottfried and Donna Allan at Mn/DOT's Office of Transit.

### Metro Transit enhances online trip planner

METRO –Bus riders can now map their transit trips using an enhanced version of Metro Transit’s popular web-based trip planner. The self-service, online trip planner has been enhanced with mapping capability. The trip maps are interactive and intuitive, so customers can zoom in and out and more easily see the locations of the bus and train stops that they will use. The trip planner also provides maps with complete walking directions to and from bus and train stops.

Among other improvements, the trip planner now highlights a “personal bus schedule” feature, which displays all the trips up to one hour before and three hours after the exact trip that is displayed. Another upgrade gives users a fast way to find the five park-and-ride lots nearest their starting point, simply by typing in their starting address. It’s available at <http://metrotransit.org/tripPlanner/Default.aspx>



### DTA introduces WebWatch

DULUTH –The Duluth Transit Authority has introduced WebWatch - a new interactive feature that allows riders to obtain real-time schedule information and track buses on the DTA's web-site - [www.duluthtransit.com](http://www.duluthtransit.com).

Through the use of satellite tracking and GPS-based technology, WebWatch allows riders to access real-time bus schedule information for their stop and monitor their bus on a map as it makes its way along the route. WebWatch calculates when a bus will arrive at a selected stop based on the actual time the bus passes GPS points along its route.

WebWatch users select the bus route they need, indicate the direction of travel and choose their stop; and WebWatch provides a real-time estimate for the next three arrival times at that stop.

WebWatch real-time schedule and live bus tracking maps are updated every minute.

WebWatch allows riders to see exactly when their bus will arrive at their stop while still at home, work-site, school and other web-friendly environments, and plan their schedule accordingly. Wait-time at bus stops can be reduced and trip planning improved.

WebWatch can be accessed from desktop and laptop computers along with web-enabled mobile communication devices.

When initializing WebWatch, riders are prompted to download free SVG Adobe software to get started. Please note that WebWatch requires Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5 and above or Netscape 7.0 and above. WebWatch’s “real-time” schedule feature, however, will work with any Internet browser; but its live bus tracking map feature will only work on Internet Explorer and Netscape browsers.

The Duluth Transit Authority is the first transit system in Minnesota and third in the nation to provide WebWatch real-time schedule / live bus tracking feature on its web-site. Long Beach Transit of Long Beach, California and Chicago’s Suburban PACE transit have also implemented WebWatch bus tracking services.

The DTA has also introduced an email subscription service to keep riders informed on service-related issues that could affect their trips. Email notifications are sent to subscribers for detours and other service updates as soon as the information becomes available.

DTA riders can sign up for e-mail notifications at [www.duluthtransit.com](http://www.duluthtransit.com).





## Rochester ridership up 8 percent for 2007

*Rochester Post-Bulletin*

- Gas prices reach an all-time high.
- Rochester's population tops 100,000.
- Experts: Worldwide oil production may have peaked.
- Mayo Clinic continues to grow, hiring hundreds of new employees each year.
- A new parking ramp is proposed in downtown Rochester. Headlines to this effect have appeared in the city's Post-Bulletin within the past few months, so it should come as no surprise that a recent front page headline announced an 8 percent increase in ridership on Rochester's City Bus Lines.

Expensive gasoline, a growing population and a shortage of downtown parking are combining to make public transit increasingly attractive for thousands of people in and around Rochester.

If you're not on board, it's high time you at least investigated the possibility of letting someone else do the driving for you.

Think it's too complicated or inconvenient? Think again. Rochester's system is a model for efficiency and ease of use statewide, which is why ridership has increased every year since 1995, even when gas prices were under \$1. Performance and growth like that is why Rochester in 2003 received the Minnesota Public Transit Association's Transit System of the Year award.

But public services are a "What have you done for me lately?" endeavor, so there's little time or opportunity to rest on laurels. Fortunately, officials with the public transit system seem to understand that.

Tony Knauer, Rochester's transit and parking manager, is looking toward a significant expansion of bus routes and services within the next two or three years. State funds should cover much of the increased cost, and Knauer has great expectations.

"We've not expanded service significantly for a number of years, and yet our ridership has continued to grow," he said. "I just know that once we expand our routes, we'll have double-digit increases in ridership."

Dan Holter, co-owner of Rochester City Bus Lines, said he expects an increased focus on northwest Rochester when the new routes are implemented.

"A lot of people in that area are currently using the Park and Ride option," he said. "We'd prefer to get into the neighborhoods so they don't have to start their cars at all."

We concur with that sentiment. Each weekday, at least 29 diesel-powered City Lines buses criss-cross Rochester, and if that number had to double to accommodate demand, we'd all be better off. The air downtown would be cleaner, and with more room in our parking lots, perhaps there'd be less interest in paving areas that could be left as green space.

If that isn't incentive enough to get you on the bus, consider this: You're already paying for the city's public transportation system. Fares paid by riders cover less than half of the system's total costs, and in 2008 about \$3 million in state, federal and local tax dollars will cover the rest of the tab in Rochester.

## SouthWest Transit reaches 1 million rider milestone

EDEN PRAIRIE – For the first time in its 20 plus years of existence, SouthWest Transit will reach the one million rides milestone in 2007.

"Just two months ago we didn't think this would be the year the system would reach one million rides, we thought it wouldn't happen until 2008," said Len Simich, Chief Executive Officer of SouthWest Transit.

"However, with the continuing high cost of gas, early snowstorms and more University of Minnesota students using our service, ridership in both October and November have been two of the highest ridership months SouthWest Transit has ever experienced."

Ten years ago SouthWest Metro Transit, as it was known then, provided slightly less than 400,000 rides. Since then the public transit agency that serves Eden Prairie, Chanhassen and Chaska has made numerous significant changes to improve customer satisfaction, convenience and ridership.

The agency created its headquarters and main Park & Ride facility at SouthWest Station in Eden Prairie; created additional Park & Rides; up-graded and introduced coach buses to its service line; increased service frequency; achieved national recognition for its on-time service, maintenance, safety, and customer service programs; and ensured that all riders could "Expect the Best" from SouthWest Transit.

SouthWest Transit Commission Chairman, Craig Peterson said, "Public transit plays such a vital role in the quality of life for everyone. SouthWest Transit employees work hard everyday to meet and exceed our riders' expectations.

This milestone is indicative of the fact that we are doing a lot of things right and that the public recognizes the excellence of the service SouthWest Transit provides."

SouthWest Transit looks forward to 2008 and plans to introduce new service, bring on new/additional vehicles, and open new Park & Rides along Highway 312 in Chanhassen and Chaska in 2008.





# Transit in the News

## Survey says: Transportation is Number 1 issue facing Metro region

ST. PAUL—Transportation issues ranked as the No. 1 concern of metro-area residents in 2007, according to survey results released today by the Metropolitan Council at its State of the Region event in downtown Minneapolis. Transportation issues have been consistently cited as a major public concern since 2000.

According to the Council's survey, conducted annually, 37 percent of Twin Cities residents identified traffic congestion, road conditions, limited transit options and other transportation challenges as the region's "single most important problem." Transportation was more dominant as an issue in the suburbs and rural areas than in the central cities, where crime was of greatest concern.

Crime is also a major concern, with 32 percent of residents citing crime as the region's top issue. Together, transportation and crime issues overshadow all others, including growth, social issues, education and the economy as areas of major concern.

"Transportation is front and center, not only among the general public and business community, but within the administration and at the legislature as well," said Council Chair Peter Bell. "With continued growth in transit ridership and public focus on transportation infrastructure, the Council joins the administration in advocating for investments that meet our long-term needs in a way that is prudent and realistic."

The survey also confirms a growing interest in commuting alternatives that would help reduce transportation costs. Among them are more fuel-efficient vehicles, as well as congestion-reducing solutions such as taking the bus or train, telecommuting, car- and van-pooling, working closer to home and biking or walking.

### Other survey findings:

+ 94 percent of residents said the region is a better place to live than other metropolitan areas. However, 34 percent said the quality of life has declined over the past year. Two-thirds of those who said the region's quality of life has "gotten worse" in the past year cited concern about transportation and crime as the No. 1 issue facing the region.

+ 35 percent of residents said parks, trails and the natural environment are the area's most attractive features. Eight percent cited the variety of things to do, and seven percent cited arts and culture.

+ 95 percent of residents said the Council's role in monitoring water supply and water quality is important to the region's quality of life. Also important to large majorities are the Council's role in wastewater treatment, growth planning,

preserving natural resources, grants to local units of government and regional parks and trails.

+ 74 percent of residents say light-rail transit is a very important or moderately important Council program. In addition, the number of Twin Cities commuters who say they are "very interested in trying carpooling" is twice as large as the number of residents who currently carpool, and the number of commuters who are "very interested" in taking transit is three times as large as the number who currently take buses and LRT to work.

The Council also gets respectable ratings for the job that it does. Some 80 percent of those surveyed gave the Council fair-to-high marks for performance.

Results are based on the responses of more than 1,300 survey participants, collected October through December 2007. They reflect the demographic and geographic distribution of the region's adult population. Survey results have a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

### St. Paul, Ramsey County drop request that terminus be at Union Depot concourse

Project partners are making progress toward agreement on the scope of the Central Corridor LRT line. St. Paul and Ramsey County leaders have agreed to a compromise that calls for an eastern terminus in front of Union Depot rather than the depot's rear concourse. The compromise also calls for extending tracks to a vehicle maintenance facility on county-owned land near the concourse, making it easier for a concourse connection in the future. In addition, their plan asks that the infrastructure be provided for three future additional stations on University Avenue. Meanwhile, Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak has endorsed a transit-pedestrian mall for the University of Minnesota's East Bank where trains would run at street level instead of in a more costly tunnel. Rybak's announcement coincided with the Central Corridor LRT Project's release of draft scenarios, showing only one plan at \$909 million that would meet federal constraints and be operable. To meet University of Minnesota officials' concerns, this scenario includes \$20 million in additional mitigation costs for rerouting traffic.





## Minnesota Public Transit Newsletter

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### MN Public Transit Association

#### Executive Officers:

President — Tony Kellen, St. Cloud Metro Bus  
Vice-Pres. — Jack Larson, Arrowhead Transit  
Treasurer — Jacqueline Forner, Chisago/Isanti  
Secretary — Deb Little, Northfield Transit  
Past President — Linda Elfstrand, Tri-Cap

#### Board of Directors:

Roxanne Emerson, Washington County (08-10); Michael Frisch, Tri-Valley (06-08); Chad Gessell, RiverRider Transit (08-10); John Groothuis, Kandiyohi Transit (06-08); Alan Herrmann, CART (08-10); Dave Jacobson, Southwest Transit (07-09); Tim Kirchoff, Anoka County (08-10); Mike Klauda, North Central Bus (08-09); Anthony Knauer, Rochester (07-09); Gregory Negard, Paul Bunyan Transit (07-09); Mike Opatz, Maple Grove (06-08)

## Contributors

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Metropolitan Council Directions

## SEND NEWS

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## DTA employees raised \$1,863 for Toyland Express

DULUTH –DTA drivers and staff volunteers raised \$1,863 for the local 2007 Toyland Express drive. These funds were raised in a raffle that was held at the Driver's Annual Holiday Party.

Drivers and staff volunteers solicited prizes for the raffle from local businesses and presented the Salvation Army with a check on December 10th. Toys were purchased by the Salvation Army and distributed to children of needy families in the Twin Ports.



Major Lavonne Fones of the Duluth Salvation Army receives check from DTA Drivers Ruth Christie and Bob Moerke.

## in transit Bulletin Board

### Transit Events

Sept. 29 — Oct. 1, 2008 Minnesota Public Transit Conference — River Center — St. Paul, MN  
July 19, 2008 — Minnesota Statewide Bus Rodeo — Bemidji

### RTAP Training Classes

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) offers training in passenger assistance, defensive driving, abuse prevention along with 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](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/Form/index.html). **See RTAP training calendar at [www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/rtaptrng.html](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/rtaptrng.html).** For more information, contact RTAP Coordinator Lynn Frank at 651/296-1610 or [lynn.frank@dot.state.mn.us](mailto:lynn.frank@dot.state.mn.us).



Bridge the gap with  
**RTAP**

