

intransit

MVTA fleet Passes DOT inspection with flying colors

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) buses are among the safest vehicles operating on the streets and highways of the Twin Cities. How do we know? MVTA fleet of 118 buses all passed their annual inspections by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) with zero deficiencies. "This is the second straight year the MVTA fleet has had zero deficiencies," said Fleet Maintenance Manager Glenn Boden. "It is a remarkable accomplishment."

In order to pass inspection, all systems have to be operating as manufactured, Boden said, and we don't know from year-to-year what they will inspect. He added, "It is possible to pass inspection with a minor deficiency (such as a

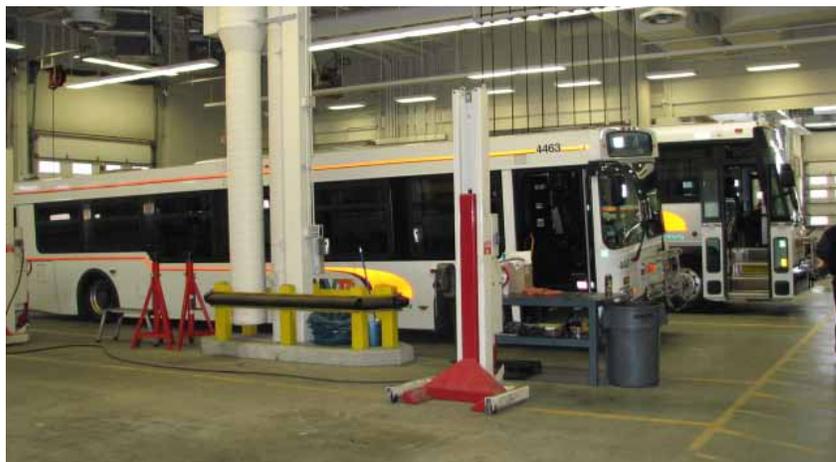
burned-out light), but to pass with no deficiencies for two years in a row reflects really well on the quality of work done by our maintenance staff at Schmitt and Sons, MVTA's service provider."

This milestone can be measured in other ways. In 2010, the MVTA received the APTA Gold Award for Safety, and in the past three years, the MVTA has operated with no missed trips due to fleet issues, while operating some 3.75 million miles annually.

Connie Massengale, MVTA Project Manager for Schmitt and Sons said, "MVTA buses are inspected by Minnesota State Patrol, commercial

"We are very proud of our safety record," said MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller. "The MVTA has set high standards for operations and we continually exceed them. Our riders should know that they are riding the safest buses we can operate."

vehicle department, once a year for ADA Compliance, bus registration and insurance compliance." She said, "The inspection includes a visual walk through checking for defects and vehicles are either approved for service if everything is in compliance, or the bus is "downed" if there is something wrong. The inspection is either a pass or fail." Vehicles can be spot checked by inspectors at any time, so vehicles are kept to inspection standards at all times, she noted.



From the President



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President's Column

Happy New Year! As we head into 2011, it's important for all of us to remain strong advocates for transit in Minnesota.

The state continues to face tough economic challenges and with a change in the make up of the government, we all have a duty to educate new policy makers about the value of transit service and the need to keep this service strong.

The results of the 2010 election were surprising to many and include the election of many new legislators at the state level. Both the Minnesota House and Senate will be led by Republican leaders rather than DFL leadership. The Minnesota House will have 72 Republican members compared to 62 DFL members and the Minnesota Senate will have 37 Republican members and 30 DFL members. Of the 201 legislators who will take office in January, 36 House members are newly elected, while 23 Senate members will be freshmen, for a total of 59 legislators who have never served in the legislature and probably are not real familiar with transit budgets.

The Republican led legislature will need to work with Governor Dayton — a DFLer — to balance the state's budget and pass legislation on a host of issues. This may prove to be a huge challenge given the sharp differences between the parties. Republicans campaigned on a theme of "living within our means" while Governor Dayton campaigned on a platform of raising income taxes on the top earners in the state. Now these policymakers face a \$6.2 billion funding gap in the general fund and will have to develop a balanced budget.

If you have not yet reached out to your local legislators, please do so. A quick e-mail to congratulate them on

their election or re-election and to let them know you are a resource takes only a few minutes of your time. Remember, many legislators are newly elected and will appreciate the information you can provide about transit service in their districts. You can find more information on who represents your area in this 2010 election directory: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/leginfo/electdir10.pdf>

Don't forget to invite your local legislators to visit your system or meet over a cup of coffee to discuss the value of the service you provide. Many transit riders are depending on your voice to speak up for them.

You can also hear from the new legislative leadership and meet with your local legislators one-on-one at Transportation Day at the Capitol. This year's event is scheduled for February 16th at the Kelly Inn in St. Paul. Mark your calendars and plan to join your colleagues in St. Paul as we work to retain funding for transit service in a very tough budget year.

As always, the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA) is busy working for you at the legislature. Our lobbyist has already been meeting with legislators to prepare for the coming session. MPTA has also developed a Transit Report with background information on transit in Minnesota to help legislators who may be new to this issue. You can access the report on MPTA's web site: www.mpta-transit.org. Feel free to download the report and use it with local officials and local legislators.

A new year, new leadership, new governor and new challenges face us in 2011. We need you to stay engaged and actively advocate for the transit services that Minnesota needs.

Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe
Advocacy Director
Minnesota Public Transit Association

Legislative Report

The 2011 Legislative Session began on January 4th with the state facing a projected \$6.2 billion general fund deficit for the coming biennium.

What does this mean for transit in Minnesota? It means that general fund dollars are at risk and services may need to be cut and/or fares increased.

A deficit of this size is huge. In addition, the Republican leadership in the House and Senate has indicated that it does not support increasing taxes to raise additional revenue to help bridge the gap between anticipated revenue and expenses. Republicans campaigned on a platform of having the state live within its means and not raising taxes. Governor Dayton campaigned on a platform of increasing income taxes but he can only sign or veto legislation sent to him by the legislature.

The November 2010 budget forecast projects that general fund revenues for FY2012-13 will be about \$32 billion, a \$1.5 billion increase from the current biennium. Projected current law spending is expected to reach \$38.5 billion, an increase of \$8.3 billion over the spending forecast for the current biennium.

Last session, general fund cuts to transit budgets were largely offset by increases in anticipated revenue from the motor vehicle sales tax, which is constitutionally dedicated to transit and highways. The November 2010 forecast projects less revenue from the motor vehicle

sales tax than was shown in the previous forecast — the February 2010 forecast. The previous forecast projected total motor vehicle sales tax revenue at \$511.8 million in FY2011. The latest forecast predicts \$478.7 million or \$33.1 million less than previously anticipated. For FY2012 and FY2013, the projection for total MVST revenues is down \$88.9 million for the biennium.

With a change in the majority in the legislature comes a change in the leadership of the transportation committees. In the Senate, Senator Joe Gimse from Willmar has been named Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee. In the House, Rep. Mike Beard from Shakopee will Chair the committee. Both the House and Senate have cut back on the total number of committees so both transportation policy and budget issues will be dealt with in one committee in each body.

There has been some discussion of the legislature taking up a capital bonding bill during the 2011 session. Although this year is a budget year and not a bonding year, the fact that Governor Pawlenty vetoed over \$300 million worth of projects in last year's bill — including all funding for transit projects — and the promises of many legislators to create jobs, may lead to pressure to pass some level of capital bonding. Governor Dayton campaigned on the goal of passing a \$1 billion bonding bill during the 2011 session. With all of the bonding requests line-item vetoed last session, there are many transit projects waiting for funding.

TRANSIT BONDING REQUESTS

Metro Transitways

Cedar Avenue BRT - \$8.4M
Northstar Ramsey Station - \$3.08M
Red Rock - \$.5M
Southwest LRT - \$5M
Gateway Corridor - \$1M
Robert Street - \$200,000

Greater Minnesota Transit

Duluth Multi-modal Transit Terminal - \$6M
Mankato Bus Garage - \$5.2M
Northfield Transit Station - \$520,000
Rochester Transit Garage - \$13.6M
Stewartville Park and Ride - \$220,000
St. Cloud Operations Center - \$1.2M

Northern Lights Express - \$5M

Minneapolis Interchange LRT improvements - \$10M

Union Depot - \$8.5M

Metro Transit launches Ride to Rewards loyalty program

By BOB GIBBONS, Metro Transit

Points can be converted to ride value, gift cards

Loyalty programs aren't just for airlines, retailers or banks anymore.

Metro Transit has launched a loyalty program called Ride to Rewards for customers who pay their bus or train fares with any transit pass that uses Go-To Card technology. Those who enroll in the program earn points on Metro Transit and suburban transit providers.

Points can be converted to ride value on Go-To Cards or redeemed for gift cards. Every time a Ride to Rewards member pays his or her fare with a Go-To Card or pass, the member's account is automatically credited with one half of a point.



"Our customers have told us the best incentive for them to take the bus or train more often is receiving credit toward future rides," said General Manager Brian Lamb. "Just like airline loyalty programs, Ride to Rewards gives customers a way to earn free future travel or to redeem points for gift cards."

Another component of Ride to Rewards allows customers to earn points faster by linking a credit or debit card to their Ride to Rewards account and earn points for purchases made at merchant partners, including restaurants, salons and retailers. This part of the program requires that a Ride to Rewards member be 18 years of age or older.

Customers also can earn points by shopping at an online mall, which features discounts and special offers at merchants such as Macy's, Foot Locker and LEGO.

The program, the first of its kind in the transit industry, is free and open to anyone with a Go-To Card, Metropass, U-Pass, College Pass or Students Pass. More than 7,600 customers have enrolled in Ride to Rewards so far.

Metro Transit is working with Transit Treasure on the program. Transit Treasure operates merchant-funded loyalty rewards programs designed specifically for public transit systems and their customers.

New transit station in Minneapolis



A Metro Transit bus served the new I-35W & 46th Street Station in Minneapolis, the first transit station to be directly on the interstate as part of planned bus rapid transit service on the I-35W corridor. Customers can transfer to local buses on the 46th Street bridge or board express buses on the freeway level below. The new station, which opened in December, is between the northbound and southbound lanes, which will allow buses to pick up and drop off customers without leaving the freeway.

Wadena's Friendly Rider reaches ridership milestones

By GEORGE BEHL, Wadena County Friendly Rider



Wadena County Friendly Rider ended 2010 by accomplishing two ridership milestones.

On December 9, the seven-year-old service reached its accumulative 250,000 ridership mark. This year, the system also reached its highest annual ridership: 40,000.

Wadena County Friendly Rider is a dial-a-ride service. It operates four bus (three in Wadena and one in Staples) Monday - Friday. Weekend service is provided in Wadena only from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Saturdays and 8 a.m. - 12 p.m. on Sundays.

Minnesota Valley Transit Authority's Driver Assist System begins passenger service

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

In November, the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) launched its Driver Assist System in regular passenger service along Cedar Avenue. This system, deployed initially on 10 buses, allows bus drivers to make better use of existing bus-only shoulders between Apple Valley and Minneapolis along Trunk Highway 77.

“We are excited to be able to provide this enhancement to transit service that will help bus drivers maintain scheduled service, particularly in adverse weather conditions like those we have this week,” said Michael Abegg, MVTA’s Project Manager for the Driver Assist System. The system provides a high-accuracy GPS-based position of the bus within the authorized shoulders and gives feedback to drivers through physical and visual enhancements.

According to MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller, this project is a result of extensive partnership efforts. “The technical elements were developed by the University of Minnesota’s Intelligent Vehicles and

HumanFIRST Laboratories, while the funding was provided by the Federal, State, and local governments under the Urban Partnership Agreement (UPA). And, of course, MVTA’s closest partner is its private operating contractor, Schmitt & Sons Transit, which hires and trains the drivers.”

The implementation of the Driver Assist technology was accompanied by an extensive training program. Schmitt & Sons drivers were required to show proficiency in using the system in a training simulator and then transfer that proficiency to on-road training.

MVTA’s Driver Assist System also marks the nation’s first deployment in the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Vehicle Assist and Automation (VAA) for Transit program. The VAA program is intended to advance the start of the art in areas such as guiding bus movement through narrow lanes, precision docking at stations, and collision avoidance.

The DTA's "Park FREE-Ride FREE" service, which has ended for the season, will most likely return in some fashion during next year's I-35 construction season.



DTA's Park FREE-Ride FREE service eases congestion during I-35 construction

By TOM ELWELL, Duluth Transit Authority

DULUTH – The Duluth Transit Authority's (DTA) "Park FREE-Ride FREE" service was instrumental in curbing rush-hour traffic congestion this past construction season in western Duluth neighborhoods where the bulk of the I-35 construction was occurring by placing more west Duluth residents on buses and keeping cars off I-35 and Grand Avenue, which was busy with detour traffic all summer.

Planning for Mn/DOT's massive I-35 reconstruction project between Proctor and Duluth began a year in advance. Mn/DOT and DTA officials developed a public transit option to help ease neighborhood anxieties and expected traffic congestion on I-35 and Grand Avenue in Duluth's western neighborhoods

during the construction season. The DTA developed a "Park FREE-Ride FREE" program that provided free round-trip express service for weekday commuters boarding buses at temporary Park & Ride lots on Grand Avenue and bus stops west of 46 Avenue West and Grand Avenue during the morning rush hour. Those boarding received a free transfer which was good anytime that day for a return trip. Express lanes on Grand Avenue were utilized by DTA express and regular service buses throughout the construction season.

Ridership from the Park & Ride lots on Grand Avenue was less than initially predicted; but new ridership originating from west of 46th and Grand Avenue was significant — peaking at 690 new

rides per day. The daily average from May through September was 594 additional rides per day. More than 36,000 additional rides were generated during the "Park FREE-Ride FREE" promotion.

Mn/DOT's two-year Mega I-35 Reconstruction Project is the largest highway construction project in northern Minnesota since I-35 was completed in the 1970s. I-35 traffic was restricted to one lane only in both directions on an 8-mile stretch of I-35 between Proctor and Duluth and many on and off ramps closed during the construction. Mn/DOT estimated that the massive construction project would have a significant impact on commuters traveling into Duluth from the south, as well as residents in the western part of the city; and it did.

Submit your *InTransit* submissions to Berta Hartig at bertahartigcommunications@gmail.com. Please attach photos separately as TIFF, JPG or PDF files. Next issue is November 2010.



Read the full article: <http://www.crookstontimes.com/archive/x1682973746/Tri-Valley-Transportation-gets-the-word-out>

Tri-Valley Transportation gets the word out

By NATALIE J. OSTGAARD, City Editor, Crookston Daily Times, Posted Nov 15, 2010 @ 02:41 PM

Transportation has been a hot topic around Crookston of late, especially when it involves kids and buses. Mark Hoiland, travel trainer for Tri-Valley Opportunity Council Public Transportation, aims to get the word out about public transportation options available to everyone within its six-county service area.

“Tri-Valley Transportation has been serving the public for more than 25 years,” he explained. “To better meet the needs of our clients, Tri-Valley introduced the Travel Training Program in May 2009, funded by a federal grant.”

Hoiland said his job involves teaching transportation options to the general public. His primary trainees are children, senior citizens and physically or mentally challenged individuals. The goal is to grow rider awareness, independence, ridership and confidence of new and current riders. A general assessment is done in an individual or group setting to determine what the riders’ needs are. The program is offered free of charge.

“Without Travel Training, some will never feel comfortable enough to ride or have the opportunity to ride public transportation,” he said.

He cited a recent success story involving three residents of Northwood Cottage in Bagley, who he worked with to teach the steps of using the Tri-Valley Heartland Express (T.H.E. Bus). As a result, they gained greater independence, being able to schedule rides for themselves as well as ride it alone to get where they’re going.

Hoiland created a Travel Training Course booklet that details three basic steps involved in riding T.H.E. Bus that is available for those he speaks to and anyone who wants one.



“I try to answer all questions regarding our services and the options of riding public transportation and if I can’t right at the moment, I will find the answer,” he said.

All of the busses are handicap accessible and provide curb to curb service. T.H.E. Bus offers services in the cities of Crookston, Thief River Falls and Bagley, rural routes and commuter routes in the counties of Polk, Red Lake, Norman, Marshall, Pennington and Clearwater. Buses run through these counties on various days and destinations, with regular hours 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. There is also Rural Transportation Collaborative (volunteer rider/driver program). Transportation service is used for a variety of reasons, including school, medical, social, recreational and shopping.

People who need transportation on a regular basis at the same time subscription service customers. Others are dial-a-ride, meaning they call ahead to make transportation arrangements, preferably with 24-hour notice to guarantee your ride.

“The cost, \$1.50 per trip, is very reasonable, and you can purchase a card to make paying easier,” said Hoiland.

DTA increases fares, expands evening schedules, introduces new Holiday services and implements a new Stroller Policy

By TOM ELWELL, Duluth Transit Authority

The DTA has raised fares, expanded evening service, introduced new holiday services and implemented a new Stroller Policy beginning January 1, 2011. The fare increase was designed to fund the expansion of evening services, the introduction of Holiday services, and off-set potential government funding reductions.

Fare Increase

DTA increased its base peak-hour fare to \$1.50 and off-peak/weekend fare to 75 cents. The DTA also eliminated the peak-hour youth fare; but retained a discounted 31-Day Youth Pass for riders 18 and under.

The DTA has not raised fares in the last few years, like many transit agencies to keep pace with higher fuel prices. The DTA last raised fares in 2005 and 1992.

Expand Evening Schedules — 7 days a week

The DTA has expanded late night service on selected routes in Duluth, seven days a week. Third shift workers and the general riding public have requested later bus service for many years.

Holiday Services

The DTA is implementing limited service on all major holidays beginning with New Year's Day and

the following holidays throughout the year: Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas. The DTA has not provided holiday services since the early 1970s.

New Stroller Policy

After a two-year trial period, the DTA is returning to its original "Folder Stroller Policy."

The "trial policy" allowed children to be left in the stroller while being transported with strollers parked in the areas reserved for disabled passengers. The DTA will no longer allow this practice and requires all children to be removed from the stroller and the stroller folded and stored out of the aisle. Strollers will no longer be allowed to be stored in the area reserved for disabled passengers using wheelchairs. Large strollers that cannot be folded and stored under or between the seats will no longer be allowed on DTA buses.

In 2008, the DTA changed its stroller policy on a trial basis to make buses more convenient for customers who transported children with strollers. However, during the past two years, the new policy prompted numerous and persistent complaints from elderly, disabled and other customers as strollers often blocked aisles causing congestion and trip hazards



The Duluth Transit Authority's Stroller policy:

- Children must be removed from strollers and seated on guardian's lap or on the adjacent seat, if available.
- Strollers must be of a size that can be folded and stored on the bus.
- Strollers must be stored out of the aisle for the duration of the trip.
- Strollers may not be stored in the seating area reserved for disabled riders or stored on the front storage rack.
- Strollers that cannot be folded and stored out of the aisle will not be allowed on the bus.

within the bus. Several accidents were reported when passengers tripped on strollers or a stroller tipped over. The increased size and use of the strollers frequently resulted in a conflict for the spaces reserved for passengers using wheelchairs, causing service delays. After careful consideration of these issues the DTA has elected to return to the stroller policy that was in effect prior to 2008.

metro council.org

Central Corridor: 2010 Highlights

<http://www.metrocouncil.org/newsletter/transit2010/CCLRTDec10.htm>

The Central Corridor light-rail transit project is well poised for 2011, when federal approval of a Full Funding Grant Agreement is anticipated in March and construction can proceed at full throttle. In December, the Council awarded the last of five major construction and procurement contracts for the line. The five major contracts came in at \$34 million below budget.



Freeway bus station opens on I-35W

<http://www.metrocouncil.org/newsletter/transit2010/46thStation.htm>

The first sign of bus-rapid transit (BRT) service in the I-35W corridor has sprouted at 46th Street South in Minneapolis. Metro Transit opened the new two-level transit station at I-35W and 46th St. in December, the first station to be directly on the interstate as part of future BRT service. The station features geothermal heating and air conditioning, LED lighting and real-time information signs.



Council approves identity framework for developing transitways

<http://www.metrocouncil.org/newsletter/transit2010/TransitIDFrameworkDec10.htm>

The Metropolitan Council approved a framework that will guide how the region's developing transitway system is identified and branded. Light-rail transit and bus-rapid transit lines will be named using a color-coded scheme. One goal is to communicate a clear expectation of service to users and to separate transitway service from local or express bus service in the region.



Central Corridor Making Tracks News

Central Corridor LRT Update

**Making
Tracks**



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InTransit Bulletin Board

Jan 8	Driver Refresher Tri-CAP Transit Connect	Waite Park
	Passenger Assistance Western Community Transit	Marshall
Jan 29	Driver Refresher City of Northfield	Northfield
Feb 5	Defensive Driving & Maltreatment Awareness Western Community Transit	Marshall
Feb 12	Passenger Assistance Rainbow Rider Transit	Lowry
	Defensive Driving & Maltreatment Awareness Far North Transit	Roseau
Feb 19	Driver Refresher Smartlink Transit	Jordan
	Driver Refresher Rainbow Rider Transit	Lowry
	Driver Refresher Prairie Five Rides	Montevideo
Feb 26	Defensive Driving & Maltreatment Awareness DARTS	West St. Paul
Mar 5	Passenger Assistance DARTS	West St. Paul
Mar 19	Defensive Driving & Maltreatment Awareness East Side Neighborhood Service	Minneapolis

Register drivers through the Mn/DOT Office of Transit website at:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/rtap/index.html>

You can apply to be a Host Agency for classes through the website at:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/rtap/rtapclassrequest.html>

Trainers available

We have 13 qualified trainers throughout Greater Minnesota who are eager to come to your facility to train your drivers!

Grantee organizations (Section 5310, 5311, 5316, 5317) having the appropriate facilities and equipment are encouraged to host classes in Passenger Assistance, Defensive Driving and Maltreatment Awareness. Go to the [Request A Class At Your Location](#) to view the brochure describing the program.

Deadline for applying to host 2nd quarter classes (April-May-June) is Tuesday, March 1st.



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