

# inTransit

## Hiawathaland Transit

By HEATH HICKOK, Program Coordinator,  
Minnesota Public Transit Association

The Three Rivers Hiawathaland Transit System received the Transit System of the Year Award from MPTA at the Minnesota and Wisconsin Public Transit Conference last November. They are looking towards the future and have been taking measures since 1995 to create a rural transit system that provides exceptional service at an affordable price.

In fact, the Hiawathaland Transit System has been growing exponentially through mergers with smaller systems in the region. They have a business model that creates efficiencies by offering rides to a broader service area and consolidation has led the way for growth in ridership.

According to Amy Repinski, Director of Public Transit, some areas that were only serving 25 to 35 riders a day are now serving 300 to 400 per day. “We are seeing significant growth,” said Repinski.

The growth is accompanied by more user-friendliness for riders. Rather than contacting a bus driver, people can call a main dispatch number to schedule rides or get information on routes. Technological advances have also streamlined the business operations at Hiawathaland Transit resulting in cost savings which can then go towards new equipment and better maintenance.

Even though the system is growing leaps and bounds there are still unmet needs in some of the very rural areas. The focus moving forward will be to

address those needs by expanding into areas such as Rice County where there is demand, but no service.

Consolidation is a great way to make public transit systems more cost-effective to operate and more profitable. Through technological advances and consistent management, the Three Rivers Hiawathaland Transit System is providing a better service to regional customers. Their expansion will continue with more buses serving more people in the years to come.



In each issue of the InTransit newsletter, Heath Hickok, MPTA Program Coordinator, will profile a different transit system.



**Tony Kellen**  
**President**

Minnesota Public Transit Association  
Director of Operations & Technology  
St. Cloud Metro Bus  
[tkellen@stcloudmtc.com](mailto:tkellen@stcloudmtc.com)  
320.529.4481

## President's Column

With the start of a new Legislative Session, we have a great opportunity to raise the awareness of transit in Minnesota and the need for expanding the service we provide.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA) will be working for you in St. Paul, meeting with legislators and members of the administration to advocate for increased transit funding. Thanks to our member organizations, MPTA has the resources to stay on top of action at the Capitol and respond to issues that impact your transit system. Working with other transportation advocates and associations, we build the relationships needed to be successful. That's why your continued membership in MPTA is so important.

The new Chairs of the House and Senate Transportation Committees are long-time champions for transit in Minnesota. In the Senate, Senator Scott Dibble (DFL-Minneapolis) will Chair the Senate Transportation and Public

Safety Division of the Finance Committee. In the House, Representative Frank Hornstein (DFL-Minneapolis) Chairs the Transportation Finance Committee while Representative Ron Erhardt (DFL-Edina) Chairs the Transportation Policy Committee. These are legislators with whom MPTA has a great working relationship and we anticipate making progress for transit in Minnesota this session.

While we have a great team of support staff, we need YOU to play a role in educating legislators and local community leaders about the importance of transit in your community. MPTA is here to make advocacy for transit simple for you. We will work with you to participate in Transportation Day at the Capitol on February 8th so that legislators clearly understand the importance of transit for their constituents and you can make the most out of the one day out of the year you spend at the Capitol.

MPTA will also be working to have a stronger presence in local communities as well as

in St. Paul. Our new Program Coordinator, Heath Hickok will be organizing local transit showcases to focus the attention of local legislators and news media on transit systems in their communities. This is a great opportunity to not only educate local leaders but to market your transit system and let people know more about the quality transit service you provide. The Duluth Transit Showcase is Saturday, February 9th with the St. Cloud Area Transit Showcase the following week on February 16th.

With new leadership at the Capitol, we have new opportunities for transit but with a serious deficit in the general fund budget we also face serious challenges. Your continued commitment to providing great transit service for people who rely on that service will make a difference. Please do your part to advocate for your riders, your system and the transit community in Minnesota.

Happy New Year!

**Margaret Donahoe**  
**Advocacy Director**

Minnesota Public Transit Association



## Legislative Report

The 2013 Legislative Session has begun and it promises to provide greater opportunities for the legislature to focus on transit in Minnesota.

In the wake of the November elections, the leadership of the Minnesota legislature is now in the hands of the DFL who will join with DFL Governor Mark Dayton to lead state government for the next two years.

There are a significant number of freshmen legislators — more than usual thanks to the new legislative districts that were created based on the 2010 census. Working to educate new legislators about the many transit systems in the state will be a top priority for the Minnesota Public Transit Association this session.

The new committee lists are now available. For transportation, there is one committee in the Senate, the Transportation and Public Safety Division chaired by Senator Scott Dibble. The [full committee list](#) provides contact information for the 17 members of this committee.

In the House, there are two transportation committees: [Transportation Finance](#) and [Transportation Policy](#). The Transportation Finance Committee is chaired by Representative Frank Hornstein and the Transportation Policy Committee is chaired by Representative Ron Erhardt.

Another important new face is Charlie Zelle, CEO of Jefferson Bus Lines, who has been

appointed by Governor Dayton to serve as the new Commissioner for the Department of Transportation. Zelle began his work at MnDOT on January 15, 2013, succeeding Commissioner Tom Sorel, who resigned December 1st, 2012, to become the CEO of AAA Minneapolis.

“It is a great honor to join the Dayton Administration in an area that is critically important to all Minnesotans,” said Zelle as his appointment was announced. “MnDOT has a strong reputation for innovation and I look forward to helping lead the agency as it plays an increasingly important role in advancing the state’s future prosperity through key investments in infrastructure.”

In addition to his work at Jefferson Lines, Zelle has been involved in transportation advocacy through the Itasca Project, a group of CEOs of major companies and other community leaders and most recently by serving as a member of the Minnesota Transportation Finance Committee (TFAC).

### **The Minnesota Transportation Finance Committee issued its final report at the end of December.**

The 19 member panel of local government officials and business and labor leaders issued a number of recommendations for developing an economically competitive or world class transportation system in Minnesota.

TFAC found that the gap between what is needed

*Legislative Report, continued...*

## Legislative Report Continued...

to have an economically competitive transportation system and the amount of revenue projected to come in over the next 20 years is \$50-\$55 billion. The group determined that the transportation funding gap predicted during the next 20 years must be addressed with a comprehensive funding and investment framework that is sustainable and equitable. Additionally, Minnesota needs a formula that blends a return-on-investment approach with a fair, predictable and sustainable method for supporting a variety of transportation options throughout the state.

The funding recommendations include:

- An increase of ½ cent to the current ¼ cent local option sales tax levied in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area for transit.
- An increase of \$32 million per year for Greater Minnesota Transit.
- The dedication of the sales tax on leased vehicles to transportation (estimated at \$32 million per year).
- A 10 percent increase in the revenue from the license tab fees
- An increase in the state motor

fuel tax of either 10 cents per gallon immediately or 3.5 cents per gallon over the next five years with additional yearly increases of 1.5 cents per gallon after those increases are imposed.

- Authorization for all counties to levy a wheelage tax with the elimination of the \$5 per vehicle cap.
- Allow the 80 counties outside of the metropolitan area to impose local option sales tax for transportation without a referendum.
- Authorization for cities to create Transportation Improvement Districts
- Expansion of MnPASS lanes in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

### **Legislative leaders have said that the top priority for the 2013 Session will be balancing the state's general fund budget.**

The latest budget forecast shows a funding shortfall of just over \$1 billion for the coming biennium (FY2014-15). Legislative leaders and the governor will need to balance the budget and have called for a mix of spending cuts and revenue increases to bring the budget

back in balance.

At this point, we don't know what kind spending cuts will be proposed, but the general fund appropriation for transit could be vulnerable once again. On the revenue side, the focus will be on the sales tax and efforts to broaden the list of products and services that are taxed. Many services in Minnesota are exempted from paying the state sales tax as well as some purchases. Exemptions to the payment of state sales tax include light rail and commuter rail vehicles and parts and petroleum products used by transit systems. There are also a number of exemptions from payment of the motor vehicle sales tax that reduce the amount of revenue available for transportation.

The Governor's budget will be released on January 22nd and that will provide a starting point for the debate at the legislature over balancing the budget.

In addition to the forecast for the general fund, we also have new numbers for the motor vehicle sales tax (MVST) and the revenue from the sales tax on leased vehicles (MVLST). Compared to the forecast developed at the end of the 2012 session, there is good news for transit funding.



Hear from key Legislators regarding transit funding – Chairs for Transportation Committee: Senator Dibble and Rep. Hornstein and Rep. Erhardt

We'll make appointments for you to meet with your legislators!

## Transportation Day at the Capitol - 2013

Thursday, February 7, 2013

Best Western Kelly Inn, St. Paul  
Across Rice St. from MnDOT

11:30 am- 1:30 pm Lunch  
Kelly Inn, St. Paul

**Sign up today!**

For MPTA Members RSVP to  
[Margaret@transportationalliance.com](mailto:Margaret@transportationalliance.com)

### Legislative Report Continued...

There is an 82 percent increase, or \$22 M more, in estimated revenue from the sales tax on motor vehicle leases. After subtracting for revenue that is deposited in the general fund, this one-half of this revenue is credited to the County State Aid Highway Fund and one-half is credited to the Greater Minnesota Transit Assistance Fund.

The Transit Assistance Fund is forecast to receive more revenue than projected by the end of session forecast. The forecast for this fund is affected by two factors. First, the decrease in the forecast for revenue from MVST means a decrease of about \$5 million for the four year forecast period (FY2012-15). Of this reduction, \$4.7M impacts Metropolitan Area Transit and

\$0.5M impacts Greater MN Transit. The forecast for the motor vehicle lease sales tax increased by \$22 million over four years. The overall effect of these two factors is an increase of \$16.6 million for the entire Transit Assistance Fund for the four year period.

## SouthWest Transit honors Veterans

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

SouthWest Transit paid tribute to veterans in several ways on Monday, November 12, 2012.

All veterans rode free on SouthWest Transit that day. SouthWest Transit staff members and First Transit drivers were acknowledged by their fellow employees for the service they provided.

Working with Trans Media Group, a bus has been wrapped to honor all veterans and will be put into service beginning November 12th.

“We want to recognize the sacrifice so many have made,” said Len Simich, CEO of the transit agency. “We are proud to be able to honor those who have played such an important role in our country’s history.”



# System Profile

After 33 years of serving the St. Cloud community, Metro Bus Executive Director Dave Tripp will retire in April. Search for a new Executive Director begins.



## St. Cloud Metro Bus Executive Director to retire, board opens search for replacement

By Tom Cruikshank, St. Cloud Metro Bus

The Metro Bus Board of Commissioners has opened the search process for replacing long-time Executive Director, David W. Tripp. Tripp announced to the Board on December 18, that he will be retiring effective April 26, 2013, after a 33-year career with the agency.

The Board has chosen an 11 member committee of community, citizen and business leaders to assist in the selection process. Chairing the Committee is Wanda Overland, Vice President for Student Life and Development at St. Cloud State University.

Under Tripp's leadership, Metro Bus has experienced tremendous growth from a small three-city

transit system to a multiple award winning urban system now serving the four cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park, seven days a week with Fixed Route, Dial-a-Ride, University, and Northstar Link commuter bus services. Metro Bus has consistently ranked at or near the top in peer transit system performance comparisons, with ridership now reaching over 2.4 million rides per year.

Recently Metro Bus received a Federal Clean Fuels grant from the US DOT for a Compressed Natural Gas fueling facility and building renovation project that Tripp envisioned several years ago. Announcement of this grant

award was personally delivered to Metro Bus by US Transportation Sec. Ray LaHood.

"Dave has directed a dedicated and skilled workforce committed to innovation, quality and customer service that is well respected throughout our communities," said Paul Ringsmuth, Commission Chairman. "Metro Bus wishes to express its sincere appreciation to Dave for his 33 years of outstanding service."

Information about the position and selection process is available on [ridemetrobust.com](http://ridemetrobust.com).

## Increased ridership with special Election Day service

By VALERIE KUSCHEL, Pine River Ride With Us Bus

We had a wonderful day for the bus with the Election. We transported 89 passengers, ran 7.2 hours and 81 miles. Our driver Curt was very tired by the end of the day. He said it was "good tired." I was pleased that the bus did great and that so many people came out to vote.





State Senator Roger Reinert (center) poses with Friend of Transit Award with MPTA Lobbyist Sherry Munyon and DTA General Manager Dennis Jensen.

## State Sen. Reinert receives Friend of Transit Award

By TOM ELWELL, DTA

Senator Roger Reinert was recently presented with the Friend of Transit Award from the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA).

The Friend of Transit Award is presented to individuals or organizations distinguishing themselves through exceptional leadership and service toward the development and improvement of public transit in Minnesota by policy or legislative initiatives.

Reinert was commended for his support of state-wide public transit initiatives, including Duluth's Multimodal Transit Center.

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## MVTA Receives Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting

By ROBIN SELVIG, MVTA

The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting has been awarded to the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada (GFOA). The award was presented for the MVTA's comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR).

"This is significant recognition of the work we do at MVTA," said MVTA Treasurer and Savage Councilmember Jane Victorey. "We are proud to receive this award as it is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting," she said.

An Award of Financial Reporting Achievement has also been awarded to MVTA Finance Officer, Lois Spear, for the role she played in preparing the award-winning CAFR. "Lois provides significant leadership in the area of financial reporting and keeps the Finance Committee well informed," said Victorey.

The CAFR has been judged by an impartial panel to meet the high standards of the program including demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and to motivate potential reading of the CAFR. GFOA is a nonprofit professional association serving approximately 17,500 government finance professionals.

***Next issue: March 2013***

***We want to hear from your transit agency.***

We want to hear from you. It can be as simple as a photo and a paragraph.

Submit news items & photos to: [bertahartigcommunications@gmail.com](mailto:bertahartigcommunications@gmail.com).



## MSU students jump on the free bus bandwagon

By DAN LINEHAN, *Free Press* Staff Writer

When city buses began accepting Minnesota State University riders free this fall, Transit Foreman Mark Anderson expected more riders — perhaps 25 percent or 30 percent more.

The response has been even greater.

In September, ridership increased citywide by 75 percent compared to the same month last year. In October, it rose by 61 percent.

Anderson said the change has been very successful, though sustaining such a large increase so fast has caused a few growing pains.

“Right now, we’re handling it pretty well. Anytime you try to do something that’s a little innovative, there’s going to be a learning curve adapting to the new system,” Anderson said.

As it always has, the city will be billing the university for bus services, so city taxpayers won’t be paying for the students’ new privilege.

In a typical year, the university pays about \$180,000, and the bill for this new service is estimated at \$350,000, said David Cowan, facilities services director for MSU.

The students’ rides are not actually free — about two-thirds of the service is paid for by a new, 75 cents per credit “green fee” paid by Minnesota State University students. The rest comes from residential life and parking funds.

Students are happy to pay for the bus through fees and merely show their university ID cards to ride, said Soyal Shrestha, Minnesota State Student Association president. It has been especially popular with international and first-year students, who often lack vehicles.

The extra payments to the city also have expanded service, including a nighttime route to James Avenue.

The intense demand has led the Student Senate and the city to work together on making minor changes to service, too.

For example, a bus happened to drop off students only a few minutes before class, so the buses made minor changes so that students arrived about three minutes earlier, Shrestha said.

The city also revamped its routes in late August, so the increase in ridership may be partly caused by more convenient routes.

Anderson hopes the new routes and the change for MSU will get more people riding the bus for years to come.

“Changing habits is always hard and getting people out of their cars is one of the most difficult things to do,” he said. But that can change “if you put good, reliable service on the road and market it well.”



Representatives from Rosemount, Eagan and Apple Valley City Councils, Metropolitan Council, Dakota County, Rosemount Mayor, MVTA Board members gathered to celebrate the grand opening of the Rosemount Transit Station.



## MVTA, City of Rosemount celebrated Rosemount Transit Station grand opening

By ROBIN SELVIG, MVTA



Rosemount Mayor William Droste provides prospective on the importance of transit in Rosemount.

The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) and the City of Rosemount celebrated the grand opening of the Rosemount Transit Station on Tuesday, Dec. 18. The facility began operations on Monday, December 10.

Speakers for the event included:

Rosemount Mayor William Droste, Dakota County Commissioner and Chair of the Community Development Agency (CDA) Tom Egan and Metropolitan Council Representative Wendy Wulff. MVTA Chair Gary Hansen served as the Master of Ceremonies.

Construction of the station began in September. The site includes parking for 102 vehicles. To complete this project, the MVTA partnered with a variety of organizations, including the State of Minnesota/MnDOT, the City of Rosemount, the Dakota County CDA and the Metropolitan Council.

Service from the new Transit Station will mirror what has been operating from the Rosemount Community Center with three peak-period morning trips to downtown Minneapolis and four peak-period afternoon trips from downtown Minneapolis. There is also all-day service on Flex Route 420 that operates between Rosemount and Apple Valley. Additional express service to Minneapolis is slated for 2013 based on federal grant funding; the MVTA has also procured some federal grant funds to expand service to St. Paul and Rosemount will also be considered for this service.

**The Rosemount Transit Station is located at 14550 Burnley Ave. W., Rosemount.**



Submit your *InTransit* submissions to Berta Hartig at [bertahartigcommunications@gmail.com](mailto:bertahartigcommunications@gmail.com). Please attach photos separately as TIFF, JPG or PDF files. Deadline for March 2013 issue is February 22.

## Metro Transit 2012 ridership tops 81 million, Hiawatha Light-Rail ridership highest ever

By JOHN SIQVELAND, Metro Transit

Customers boarded Metro Transit buses and trains more than 81 million times in 2012 – an increase of 165,044 rides (0.2 percent) over 2011. Ridership on the Hiawatha light-rail line was the highest in the line's history at 10.5 million.

“For only the second time in a generation, Metro Transit ridership has exceeded 81 million,” said General Manager Brian Lamb. “This represents the third straight year of ridership growth.”

This also marks the sixth consecutive year in which ridership has topped 76 million – a mark not previously achieved since 1983. Customers boarded Metro Transit buses and trains 81,053,506 times in 2012, which helped to push the agency's 40-year lifetime ridership past the 3 billion mark in November.

### Bus Service

Bus ridership was up 0.1 percent to 69,854,994. Urban local routes – the heart of Metro Transit's all-day service – remained essentially flat at 59 million rides. Ridership on freeway-oriented express routes was up 0.9 percent, or 88,000 rides, to 9.5 million while rides

on suburban crosstown routes grew 6.4 percent, or nearly 100,000 rides, to 1.7 million.

“In 2011, Metro Transit bus ridership grew more than four percent – significantly outpacing transit systems around the county,” said Lamb. “Those new customers continued to choose Metro Transit throughout 2012.”

### Hiawatha Light Rail

At 10,498,236, ridership on the Hiawatha Light-Rail line is the highest recorded since the line's 2004 opening.

“We're particularly grateful to our customers and proud to achieve this benchmark in a year that included the longest service disruption in Hiawatha's eight-year history,” said Lamb.

In February, rail operations on a portion of the line were interrupted for a work week as crews stabilized a compromised pedestrian bridge that passes over Highway 55 and the Hiawatha Line near Lake Street / Midtown Station.

Average weekday ridership on the Hiawatha Line exceeds projections for the year 2020 by nearly 30 percent.

### Northstar Commuter Rail

Overall annual ridership on Northstar declined 0.45 percent due to a 13 percent reduction in the number of riders travelling to special events downtown. These reductions were offset partially by increases in the core market of weekday commuters. For the year, weekday commuter ridership was up four percent. A fare reduction implemented in August yielded progressively larger monthly increases in weekday riders over mid-year figures – from a six percent increase in September to nearly a 20 percent increase in December. Weekday ridership was also boosted by higher-than-projected rides from Ramsey Station which opened in November.

“We surveyed potential customers early in the year and they told us they'd use Northstar more often if fares were modestly reduced,” said Lamb. “The price adjustment has drawn new customers who continue to choose Northstar day after day.” The line proved its reliability again in 2012 with near-perfect on-time performance of 97 percent.

[metro council.org](http://metro council.org)



## Visitors throng to restored Union Depot

The Union Depot in downtown St. Paul held a throng on Dec. 8 – more than 20,000 people – for a day of tours and activities celebrating the grand reopening of the restored historic transportation hub in Lowertown. [Read more.](#)

## Project partners celebrate final phase of construction on region's next METRO system line

Dakota County Commissioner Will Branning envisioned a transitway on Cedar Avenue in 1982 as an Apple Valley city council member. And in a few short months, that vision will become a reality when the METRO Red Line began operating in the corridor. [Read more.](#)

## 300 miles of bus-only shoulder lanes help reduce highway congestion

The Twin Cities boasts three times more bus-only lanes than rest of the U.S. combined!

This fall, the Twin Cities metro area surpassed 300 miles of bus-only shoulders after a new stretch of shoulder was approved for use along Highway 65 near National Sports Center in Blaine. [Read more.](#)

# intransit

*InTransit* newsletter is a bimonthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA). Opinions and views expressed in this publication may not necessarily be those of the Minnesota Public Transit Association or its members.

### **InTransit Contributors**

Tom Cruikshank, St. Cloud Metro Bus  
Margaret Donahoe, Transportation Alliance  
Tom Elwell, Duluth Transit Authority  
Heath Hickok, MPTA  
Tony Kellen, St. Cloud Metro Bus  
Valerie Kuschel, Pine River Ride With Us Bus  
Robin Selvig, MVTA  
Linda Spevacek, SouthWest Transit  
Metropolitan Council Newsletter

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