

intransit

Metro Bus Hosts Another Successful Food Drive

By BERTA HARTIG, Metro Bus



The food drive was promoted on Townsquare Media radio stations. A large yellow banner was secured to the side of the collection bus by Velcro to announce the drive. Food drive staff also handed slips to shoppers as they entered the stores. Coborns, Cash Wise, Walmart and Byerly's all participated in this year's drive.

Metro Bus teamed up with Townsquare Media and New Flyer to host its third annual "Fill the Flyer" Food Drive in December.

More than \$1,700 and nearly 3,700 pounds of food and paper products were collected and split between local food shelves. Because of matching grants and buying power from Second Harvest, the cash donations will purchase about \$17,000 worth of groceries.

Employees from Metro Bus and Townsquare Media staffed the drive outside local grocery stores a few hours each day, each day visiting a different store — during one of the coldest weeks in December. New Flyer hosted an employee food and cash drive at their St. Cloud plant.

Over the past three years, the "Fill the Flyer" Food Drive (summer and winter campaigns) have collected over 14,000 pounds and more than \$5,000 in donations for local food shelves.





Marc Hall, President

Minnesota Public Transit Association

President's Column

Happy New Year! As I begin my term as president of the Minnesota Public Transit Association, I want to thank you for your membership and support of MPTA. Without the participation and membership of transit systems all across Minnesota, transit funding would not be at the levels we have today. Your involvement in MPTA has a direct impact on your budget and the ability of all systems to provide quality service in an era of growing demand and increasing costs. Having a strong voice at the legislature and in our local communities makes a big difference in the amount of attention and funding that is given to transit in Minnesota.

I'm honored to have been elected MPTA president and I feel very optimistic about the future of our association. We have more staff and more resources than we have had in the past and we have a real opportunity to make more progress during the 2014 Legislative Session. MPTA will continue to be a resource for you as we host important events and training sessions, keep you informed of the latest action in both St. Paul and Washington, D.C. and advocate with lawmakers for additional funding.

We are already looking toward the coming events: Transportation Day at the Capitol, March 13th in St. Paul; the Bus Roadeo, July 11-12 in Duluth and the Minnesota Public Transit Conference, September 9-11, 2014 in St. Paul. In addition, our MPTA staff will be asking to visit you in your part of the state as we work to expand our outreach.

My goal as president is to improve the quality and effectiveness of our association. I have some ideas of my own, but am also looking for your ideas. What would you like to see MPTA accomplish in the coming years? Are there services or information you are looking for that we can provide? How would you improve the events we host each year? Please shoot me an email and let me know your thoughts: marc.hall@co.pipestone.mn.us

Again, thanks for your support and for the work you do every day to bring quality transit service to people in your area. Here's to a great year for transit in 2014!

2014 MPTA EVENTS

March 13: Transportation Day at the Capitol, St. Paul

July 11-12: Minnesota Bus Roadeo, Duluth

Sept. 9-11: MPTA Conference, St. Paul



Margaret Donahoe
Advocacy Director

Minnesota Public Transit Association

Legislative Report

Positive State Budget Forecast

The state received good news with the November 2013 forecast for general fund revenues. The estimate for revenues is up — especially for income tax revenue and the overall forecast calls for a budget surplus of about \$825 million after schools are paid back from the shift in aid that occurred during the last previous budget crisis.

The positive outlook is important for transit systems throughout the state. The budget surplus will mean no cuts in general fund revenue for the foreseeable future and will also help in making the case for dedicating all of the sales tax revenue from leased motor vehicles to transportation. Currently, the first \$32 million in revenue from leased vehicle sales tax is deposited in the general fund and used for other purposes. MPTA has been advocating for a shift of those funds with the majority of the revenue dedicated to Greater Minnesota transit systems. When the state was facing a budget deficit, there was no ability to make that shift, now we have a good chance to convince lawmakers that those funds should be dedicated to transportation just like the sales tax on purchased motor vehicles.

According to numbers released by MnDOT, the latest forecast includes a 42.8 percent increase in estimated revenue from the sales tax on motor vehicle leases for the FY2014-15 forecast period. One-half of the revenue that remains after the first \$32 million is deposited in the general fund — up to \$9 million — is credited to the County State Aid Highway Fund and the remaining revenue — about \$28.7 million in FY2014 and \$35.5 million in FY2015 — is deposited in the Transit

Assistance Fund. This compares to \$14.4 million in FY2013 for Greater Minnesota transit.

The November forecast is a preliminary look at the general fund. The legislature and governor will use the February, 2014 forecast in making decisions during the coming Legislative Session. The need to use the February forecast is the reason the coming session will not begin until February 25, 2014. With any luck, the forecast for a budget surplus will hold and even look better by February with continued growth in the overall economy.

MPTA Adopts Legislative Agenda for 2014

The Board of the Minnesota Public Transit Association adopted its Legislative Agenda for 2014. The agenda includes a significant increase for transit funding, both in terms of revenue and funding for projects that would be included in the capital bonding bill.

Here are some highlights:

Support transit funding that is adequate, stable and predictable.

- Support a level of funding for both Greater Minnesota Transit and Metropolitan Area Transit that builds out the systems over the next 15 years. In Greater Minnesota \$45 million is needed and in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area \$300 million is needed.

Legislative Report Continued...

100 percent leased vehicle revenue appropriated to transportation with the following distribution: 70 percent to Greater Minnesota Transit and 30 percent to the five metro ring counties; beginning in 2016. The percentage split allows shared future growth.

The 70 percent allocation provides an increase of nearly \$30 million to Greater Minnesota from today's allocation of revenue.

The 30 percent allocation provides an increase of \$11 million to the five ring counties from today's allocation of revenue.

Support sales tax increase in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area to secure \$300 million; with revenues split between bus expansion \$125 million; LRT/BRT/RAIL \$125 million; Local needs \$50 million. This is expected to provide a 4 percent growth for the bus service. Suburban Transit providers, as a part of the regional system, shall also benefit from the increased revenues that will be recognized.

- Support continuation of the general fund appropriation to reimburse greater Minnesota transit operators for the free rides for Veterans adopted for the 2013-2014 biennium.
- Oppose reductions in general fund appropriations to transit unless the funds are backfilled with a new source of revenue.
- Support statewide sales tax for transit

Capital Bonding Request

- \$196 million for Metropolitan Area Transit
- Up to \$8 million for Greater MN Transit Facilities
- \$3.2 million for Safe Routes to School
- Up to \$40 million in Regional Bonding Authority in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area

The complete Legislative Agenda is available on MPTA's web site: www.mpta-transit.org

MPTA Joins Move MN

MPTA has joined the Move MN campaign — a new public relations campaign focused on building support for a comprehensive transportation funding bill to be passed during the 2014 Legislative Session.

Move MN represents a diverse coalition of organizations that are concerned about highway, transit and bike and pedestrian funding all across the state. The campaign has been working to build a strong coalition and put together communications

and grassroots infrastructure as we approach the start of the 2014 Session. You will see and hear much more about the campaign in the coming weeks.

Move MN held regional meetings in Willmar, Moorhead, Mankato, Rochester, Duluth and will host

a meeting St. Cloud in mid-January. We really appreciate the participation of representatives from the transit systems in those areas at the meetings.

You can help make a difference by having your system join Move MN and by helping MPTA with outreach to legislators, the governor and local media regarding the need to increase funding for transit statewide. More information is available at: www.movemn.org.



DTA's Emergency Mainline Service Keeps Duluth Moving

By HEATH HICKOK, DTA

December 4 was a cold and blustery morning in Duluth. It had been snowing for most of the night and would continue to snow for the next two days. The calls to the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) offices from the local media and the public started early — each wanting to know if the DTA was reducing or suspending service.

At the DTA, the decision to suspend service is evaluated on an hour-by-hour basis. In the early morning hours we announced services were running. By midday, the snow was coming down at an alarming rate and DTA had to decide about the afternoon peak service, as we have a policy of giving the public a minimum of a two hour notice for service disruptions.

At 2:30 pm, we informed the media that the DTA would suspend regular service and move to the Emergency Mainline Service at 5 pm.

The Emergency Mainline Service was established in December 2008, as the result of an unusual winter-weather event, in which the upper elevations in Duluth experienced white-out blizzard conditions, while the downtown area next to Lake Superior was relatively normal without the high winds and blowing snow. The main line transit routes run in a general east to west direction from the far west area through the downtown to the eastern section of the city following snow emergency routes, a distance of approximately 25 miles. These routes do not traverse the steep hills and are unaffected

by ice and snow packed streets. They also serve the highest transit-dependent service area.

When service is reduced or suspended due to a winter-weather event, prompt communication to the public is critical. Employers look to the DTA before letting employees go home early and the universities depend on the DTA to transport students to and from campus. It is imperative that everyone in the community be given ample notice of a pending shutdown of transit services.

Although the weather event, and the DTA's responses were given significant attention by local television stations and this coverage was great for sharing the DTA's reasoning with the public, these sound bites wouldn't air until after 5 pm. Therefore, the primary focus for informing the public became radio and social media.

The DTA's radio partners informed the public much quicker than television. These real-time announcements provided time for transit customers and employers to prepare for the service changes.

Social media also was important in effectively communicating our message to the public. We posted service updates throughout the day on Facebook and Twitter. When we decided to initiate the Emergency



Social media and radio both played vital roles in communicating the implementation of the DTA's Emergency Mainline Service during a December snowstorm.

Mainline Service, more than 950 people viewed the announcement on Facebook. Passengers with access to smart phones and computers were instantly notified of the change in service plans and able to evaluate the effect of the switch to the Emergency Mainline Service on their travel needs.

As Minnesota public transit systems, we all need to be prepared for winter-weather events and have protocols in place for service changes. However, each of these events is unique and need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Not every snowfall requires a service change; however, when it happens, being prepared with a good communications process for the public will ensure a smooth transition from regular service to a shutdown, with all your passengers safely transported.

SouthWest Transit Supports the Communities it Serves

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

SouthWest Transit prides itself on the quality service we provide to our founding cities of Chaska, Chanhassen and Eden Prairie. Well over 90 percent of this service takes riders to downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota to work and school Monday through Friday. Another important component of SouthWest Transit's vision and mission is how we serve our communities on a more local basis.

Saturdays during December 2013 we saw riders from Chaska, Chanhassen and Eden Prairie hopping the bus for a ride to the Mall of America or Eden Prairie Center for some holiday shopping. Our SouthWest Polar Express took riders to downtown Minneapolis to take in the sights and sounds of the season, including the final Holidazzle parade of 2013.

SWT also participated in local events throughout the year including local job fairs, Chanhassen's 4th of July parade and business expo; Chaska's River City Days parade and Touch a Truck event; and Carver's Steamboat Days parade. Our 1947 Silversides was on display at the Carver County Fair with staff on site to answer questions about our service. These

events are an effective way to get the word out about the services SouthWest Transit has to offer.

Twins Express service continued in 2013 providing rides to Target Field from our three Cities. Our "Summer Adventures" route expanded this year from trips to the Como Zoo to include the MN Children's Museum, MN History Center and others. Young families and seniors took full advantage of this opportunity.

On Tuesdays, the Eden Prairie Feeder Bus continued to transport residents from several senior housing sites to nearby shopping areas and medical facilities.

State Fair service was as popular as ever, providing over 71,000 rides. Just as the Fair ended, our Vikings Express service started up bringing Vikings fans to see their team play their last home games in the Metrodome.

And in December as they've done for many years, riders and staff generously donated toys and food for the annual Toys for Tots drive and local food shelves. SWT once again hosted an event, lunch and a movie, for local seniors at the Chaska Lodge, with an Eden Prairie high school choir performing songs of the season.



SouthWest Transit focuses on the community throughout the year with special services and events.

MVTA Operates Safe Fleet: Five Consecutive Years of DOT Inspections with Zero Deficiencies

By ROBIN SELVIG, MVTA

Minnesota Valley Transit Authority's (MVTA's) fleet of 128 buses again passed their annual inspection by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) with zero deficiencies. This is the fifth consecutive year of inspections with zero deficiencies.

"MVTA passengers can have confidence that the buses they are riding on a daily basis are safe and well-maintained," said Dan Schmitt, President of Schmitt and Sons, the operator of service for the MVTA. "We are very proud of our mechanics and staff," he said.

The MVTA buses are annually inspected by Minnesota State Patrol, commercial vehicle department to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), bus registration and insurance compliance. The inspection includes a visual walk-through of each vehicle, checking for defects; vehicles are either approved for in-service operation if everything is in compliance, or the bus is "downed" if there is something wrong. The inspection is either a pass or fail.

"We don't know what DOT will inspect from year-to-year,"

said MVTA Fleet Maintenance Manager Glenn Boden. "In order to pass inspection, all systems have to be operating as manufactured."

Vehicle inspection, repair, and maintenance standards are critical to the safe operation of commercial motor vehicles, according to a factsheet prepared by MnDOT.

"They are designed to reduce accidents, injuries, and fatalities resulting from unsafe vehicles operating on the highways," according to the factsheet focusing on Annual Inspection Requirements.

MVTA Launches Wi-Fi Demonstration Project on Five Buses, at Two Transit Stations

By ROBIN SELVIG, MVTA



The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) officially launch its Wi-Fi demonstration project today. Five buses and two transit stations (Burnsville and Eagan) have been equipped with a public Wi-Fi system. The demonstration period is 90 days and if there is demand for Wi-Fi and the service operates well, it will be extended to additional buses and transit stations.

Buses with free Wi-Fi are identified with a Wi-Fi symbol near the passenger boarding door. Drivers have cards with the network name and password. Use of

the system is subject to MVTA's terms and conditions, which are posted on the MVTA's website.

Members of the MVTA Board's Strategic Planning Committee identified several technology projects, including Wi-Fi on buses, as priorities for the next year.

"In the past six months, more and more riders have asked for this service," said MVTA Board Chair Gary Hansen, who is also an Eagan Councilmember. "We look forward to rider feedback and to rolling this service out at additional stations and on additional buses."

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 2012 comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR).

"We proudly accept this award," said MVTA Treasurer and Savage Councilmember Jane Victory. "It is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting," she said. "MVTA takes its fiduciary responsibilities very seriously and we have worked hard to earn this recognition, which is a significant accomplishment by a government and its management."

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.

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.



Metro Transit's holiday spirit is easy to see

Metro Transit showed its holiday spirit with its Twinkle Bus. Adorned with more than 23,120 LED lights the 40-foot hybrid bus participated in the Target Holidazzle Parade in December. Metro Transit also participated in Toys for Tots, and several other holiday promotions.

For TIC Rep, Job Changes but Motivation Stays the Same

By DREW KERR, Metro Transit

When Transit Information Center representative Carol Hansen applied to work for Metro Transit in 1976, she was asked two simple questions: Could she read a map, and did she know north, south, east and west?

Things have advanced quite a bit since then.

Hansen spoke recently with the Star Tribune about how her TIC job has changed as technology has evolved and Metro Transit's service territory has expanded. Today, instead of paper maps and a Hudson Street guide, TIC representatives use computers to quickly help customers locate bus stops and plan their routes.

While the job is different than it used to be, Hansen said her motivation remains the same.

"I have always liked helping people," she told the Star Tribune. "You can actually tell when you've actually helped them by the tone of their voice. One mom was packing up little kids, taking them to day care, going to work, then going to school. I ended up saving her two hours a day of travel time. When I got done, she was almost in tears."



Metro Transit Seeks Input to Shape Service Improvement Plan

By JOHN SIQVELAND, Metro Transit

Metro Transit is asking for customer and community feedback to help develop a 10- to 15-year plan for expansion of its bus system.

When complete, the Service Improvement Plan will guide improvements to Metro Transit's network of local and express bus service in the years ahead as additional funding becomes available.

Through February 2014, Metro Transit is soliciting feedback through a survey posted at www.metrotransit.org/sip. The brief survey is designed to collect data on travel patterns and priorities of travelers, as well as to solicit suggestions for changes to bus service. Metro Transit is also partnering with community groups and promoting the Service Improvement Plan throughout the transit system in an effort to maximize input.

This feedback will help to inform a draft plan that will be presented to the public next year for additional comment before being finalized.

Printed materials about the Service Improvement Plan for group distribution are also available upon request at sip@metrotransit.org.

Metro Transit is a service of the Metropolitan Council. Customers boarded Metro Transit buses and trains 81 million times last year.

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) Driver Training Classes

Defensive Driving & Maltreatment Awareness

From 8 am to 4:30 pm

Sat., Jan. 25	Paul Bunyan Transit, Bemidji
Sat., Feb. 15	Rainbow Rider, Lowry
Sat., March 1	Rainbow Rider, Lowry
Sat., March 15	Albert Lea Transit, Albert Lea

Passenger Assistance Training

From 8 am to 4:30 pm

Sat., Jan. 25	Chisago/Isanti County Heartland Express, Cambridge
Sat., Feb. 1	Rainbow Rider, Lowry
Sat., Feb. 1	River Rider, Big Lake
Sat., Feb. 8	Albert Lea Transit, Albert Lea

Driver Refresher

From 8 a.m. to noon.

Sat., Feb. 1	DARTS, West St. Paul
Sat., March 8	Albert Lea Transit, Albert Lea

Registration and complete schedule:

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

NEW EDITOR FOR 2014:

The next *InTransit* Newsletter may have a different look and feel as MPTA Program Coordinator Laura Eash takes over the publication.

Please submit news items to Laura Eash at Laura_Eash@mpta-transit.org

Berta will free up her nights and weekends to focus on being “mom,” as well as continue her “day job” responsibilities as Marketing Coordinator for St. Cloud Metro Bus.



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.

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