

intransit

An electrifying ride: Rainbow Rider gets grant for electric hybrid buses

By JO COLVIN, *Echo Press*, Alexandria

What do you get when you cross a hefty ARRA TIGGER with eight VTMs?

An excellent way to reduce hydrocarbons, save money on fuel consumption and provide residents of Douglas and five other rural Minnesota counties with a safe and reliable mode of transportation.

Not to mention a rural public transit system that is the first in Minnesota, and one of few in the nation, to have hybrid buses in its fleet.

Rainbow Rider, the public transit system that serves Douglas, Pope, Stevens, Todd, Traverse and Grant counties, recently received a grant that enabled it to purchase eight electric hybrid buses.

The grant was provided with funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), part of the federal stimulus program. Under the umbrella of that act is the Transit Investment for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction Program (TIGGER).

“The program is designed to encourage jobs in production through the use of alternative energy, like the buses, wind generation, insulation, that



type of thing,” said Kevin Anderson, transit project manager for District 4.

Harold Jennissen, director of Rainbow Rider, said that the benefit of the grant is twofold – it helps save money and helps the environment.

“The purpose of the grant was to reduce the greenhouse gases with more efficient buses and to reduce their miles per gallon of fuel used,” he said.

Rainbow Rider originally wrote the grant with three other rural transit systems. But with stringent criteria

– including age and condition of the buses, whether buses needed replacing, how many buses are currently in the fleet, and a proven track record of performance, ridership and safety – it was the only entity to qualify.

“Rainbow is excelling in what they do day to day, and that’s why they received this honor,” Anderson said.

Jennissen got word on September 10 that they received the substantial request – \$845,000 to cover the cost of eight hybrid buses.

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From the President



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President's Column

The 2011 Legislative Session is in full swing and we need everyone involved in advocating for transit and educating lawmakers. The folks who ride the bus need you to speak up or their transit options may well be cut.

At the state level, legislators and the administration now face a \$5 billion general fund deficit — down from the \$6.2 billion projected in November but still a huge hole in the budget. All areas of funding are at risk including transit budgets. Governor Dayton released his budget proposal with increases in income taxes on the highest earners in the state that goes a long way toward bridging that gap, but the Republican majority in the legislature has made it clear that they will not support increases in the income tax.

While the governor's budget included some cuts to the general fund appropriations for transit, with the latest budget forecast he had indicated that he be submitting a supplemental budget proposal that does not include cuts in the general fund dollars for transit. We do anticipate that the budget put forward by legislative leaders will include significant cuts in general fund dollars across state government."

At the federal level, the President has proposed dramatic increases in transit funding and continues to push hard for high-speed rail development across

the country. Unfortunately, his plan contains no specifics in terms of how to pay for the increased spending without increasing the deficit.

Republican majorities at both the state and federal levels have attacked funding for passenger and transit rail projects as too costly for the benefit they provide. The governors of Wisconsin and Florida have even rejected federal rail funds, expressing concern about the state costs and responsibilities that go along with new rail lines. Bus service may be the one area both sides can come to agreement on if advocates can demonstrate the cost-effectiveness and importance of bus service for constituents.

Contact MPTA if you would like assistance in getting a meeting organized in your community with area transit providers and local legislators. When legislators meet with you and put a face on local transit service, it makes a difference!

I'd also like to thank everyone who attended Transportation Day at the Capitol on February 16th in St. Paul. A number of transit systems were represented, ensuring that legislators notice the importance of transit service. When people take the time and effort to come to St. Paul and meet with legislators or join in the discussion of transportation funding, it demonstrates

With all the new faces at the capitol and a dire budget situation, this is a critical year to get to know your local legislators.

MPTA would like to say "Thank You" to several transit systems who hosted local meetings with legislators: Linda Bair, Hubbard County Transit; Greg Negard, Paul Bunyan Transit; Rusty Haskins, Becker County Transit hosted legislators in Park Rapids. Daryn Toso, Transit Alternatives and Harold Jennissen, Rainbow Rider hosted a meeting in Fergus Falls with local legislators. The Rochester Chamber of Commerce hosted a meeting with local legislators to discuss transportation issues in particular.

the commitment of local communities to maintaining this valuable service.

MPTA is here to assist you in being a strong advocate for transit in Minnesota. Visit our web site to access the 2011 MPTA Legislative Agenda and our Transit Report which provides background information on transit service and funding as well as information on why transit service is so important. Send a copy of the report to your legislators and even local elected officials including county commissioners and city council members. In addition, we're happy to provide talking points, assistance with letters to the editor and with letters to legislators. Make sure you take advantage of your membership in MPTA to get to tools you need speak up for transit service.

It will be a long, tough legislative session. We will need all transit systems contacting legislators and the governor to advocate against cuts in transit service.

Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe
 Advocacy Director
 Minnesota Public Transit Association



Legislative Report

Governor's Budget Proposal

The major issue of the 2011 Legislative Session is, of course, the need to balance the state's general fund budget in the face of a projected \$5 billion deficit.

The first step in that process happened on February 15th when Governor Mark Dayton presented his 2012-13 budget, focusing on a balanced approach of spending cuts and revenue increases to bridge the \$5 billion deficit projected for the general fund in the '12-13 biennium. Another goal of the governor's budget is to have a longer-lasting impact given that the budget has ongoing structural issues that will lead to budget deficits in future years. His original proposal included \$4.1 billion in new revenue through a new tax rate for those with the top incomes and almost \$2 billion in spending cuts.

Given the heavy reliance on tax increases in the governor's proposed budget and the Republican majority opposition to tax increases, the governor's proposal is really a first step in a long process of coming to a compromise on how to bridge

the gap in the general fund budget. It is expected that the budget presented by the Republican majority will include much larger cuts in general fund appropriations.

Legislative Auditor Reports

The Office of the Legislative Auditor was asked by the legislature to examine two areas impacting transit service: the governance of transit service in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and the procedures for delivering nonemergency medical transportation.

The OLA has found that the governance structure for transit in the region is far from ideal with more than 25 organizations involved in transit planning, development or operations and some having overlapping responsibilities and not always a strong level of trust. In addition, the lack of agreed-upon vision and priorities for transit has contributed to challenges. Despite these challenges, the OLA found that the region's transit system has performed well on most measures of efficiency, effectiveness and impact compared with peer regions.

Continued...

In the governor's budget, general fund cuts are proposed for Greater Minnesota transit and Metropolitan Area transit.

(Original proposal prior to March forecast, which reduced deficit to \$5 billion)

(in thousands) **Expenditures**

Metropolitan Council

	FY2010	FY2011	Total	FY2012	FY2013	Total
General Fund	\$65,436	43,971	109,407	59,715	59,715	119,430
Governor's Rec.				(\$5,418)	(\$5,418)	(10,836)
Transit Assistance (MVST)	\$141,920	168,311	310,231	195,840	209,376	405,216
TOTAL	\$207,356	212,201	419,557	250,137	263,673	513,810

Greater Minnesota Transit Expenditures

General Fund	\$17,252	11,617	28,869	16,292	16,292	32,584
Governor's Rec.				(\$1,343)	(\$1,343)	(2,686)
Transit Assistance (MVST)	14,216	26,437	40,653	21,760	23,264	45,024
Miscellaneous Special Revenue	31,892	51,725	83,617	43,137	43,178	86,315
Federal	60,938	66,233	127,171	58,875	58,875	117,750
Federal Stimulus	7,092	8,754	15,846	8,435	7,590	16,025
Trunk Highway	835	844	1,679	775	775	1,550
Miscellaneous Agency	2,435	570	3,005	475	475	950
TOTAL	134,655	166,266	300,921	148,487	149,187	297,674

Legislative Update, continued...

OLA key recommendations:

- The legislature should restructure the Metropolitan Council to have a mix of appointed and elected Council members that serve staggered terms rather than terms that are co-terminus with the tenure of the Governor.
- The Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) and the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) should be retained.
- Suburban transit providers should continue to operate, although there are some opportunities for consolidation.
- The Legislature should not commit capital funds to transitway development projects without ensuring that operating revenues for the first 5 to 10 years have been identified.
- The Legislature should explicitly give the Metropolitan Council authority to allocate the “supplemental” revenue for transit in the region that is generated by the motor vehicle sales tax (MVST).
- The Legislature should extend the transit taxing district to cover the entire seven-county region.

In the area of nonemergency medical transportation, the Auditor states that Minnesota should simplify its complex and confusing administrative structure for the medical nonemergency transportation program.

Key Recommendations:

- The Legislature should require the Department of Human Services, with input from interested parties, to present a proposal to the 2012 Legislature that creates a single administrative structure for medical nonemergency transportation.
- The Department of Human Services should propose statutory changes to address the length of time recipients are eligible for “special” transportation and the frequency of assessments.
- The Legislature should clarify state law on eligibility for “special” transportation when appropriate “access” transportation is not available.
- The Department of Human Services should publish “special” transportation eligibility policies and seek comments from interested parties when changing them.
- The Department of Human Services should identify, collect, and report key measures related to program performance statewide and periodically verify data submitted by the broker and counties.

Federal Transportation Proposal

At the federal level, the Obama Administration unveiled its proposal for a successor to SAFETEA-LU—a proposal that bears a strong resemblance to the legislation developed by former House Transportation and Infrastructure Chair Jim Oberstar. For the six-year transportation authorization act, the President requests \$556 billion over six years to be spent for highway, transit, and rail programs and a new National Infrastructure Bank.

The proposal seeks \$119 billion for public transportation programs—a 128 percent increase over SAFETEA-LU levels and just \$4 billion below the American Public Transportation Association’s (APTA) recommended level. It also includes \$53 billion over six years for its new High-Speed Rail program.

Unfortunately, the budget did not address the key question—how the proposed six-year program would be funded. Tax revenues generated by the gas tax are estimated to total \$36.8 billion in FY2012, leaving a shortfall of \$70 billion between revenues and the President’s proposal. For the next six years, revenues are estimated at \$230 billion, leaving a \$326 billion shortfall between the six-year proposal and available revenues.

The plan does provide an opening to begin a legislative debate with the Congress on the future direction of federal investments in transportation and adds additional pressure to finally get a six-year authorization bill passed by September. The Obama surface transportation program reauthorization plan would include:

- **New Trust Fund**
Create a new “Transportation Trust Fund,” replacing the Highway Trust Fund, and establish four accounts—one for highways, one for transit, one for high-speed rail, and one for the National Infrastructure Bank.
- **Consolidation of Programs**
For transit, the New Starts program would be collapsed into a broader Transit Expansion and Livable Communities Program.
- **Off-Budget**
The transportation programs would be moved “off-budget” and become “mandatory spending” with spending strictly aligned with revenues into the trust fund.

DTA ridership tops 3 million for third consecutive year

By TOM ELWELL, Duluth Transit Authority

DULUTH - Duluth Transit Authority ridership for 2010 surpassed the 3 million rider mark for the third consecutive year. DTA ridership for 2010, which was down 0.07 percent from 2009, totaled 3,171,085. DTA ridership has steadily improved over the past few years and is up 21.6 percent since 2005.

While transit use is up by all segments of the general population, U-Pass ridership has shown the most consistent gains. U-Pass ridership for 2010 at UMD, College of St. Scholastica, Lake Superior College and UWS increased by 4.57 percent over 2009

Ridership is up 21.6 percent since 2005

with 747,737 rides. U-Pass ridership at UMD for 2010 was 515,638 down slightly from 2009 less than 0.2 percent.

DTA Bike & Bus ridership for 2010 also surpassed the previous year's total. In its 16th year of operation, the Bike & Bus service transported 22,751 bicycles up 2.5 percent over last year. In 2009, the DTA began providing the Bike & Bus service on a year-round basis.

STRIDE (Special Transit RIDE) ridership for 2010 also increased by 1.9 percent with 25,637 passengers.

DTA ridership gains parallels the national trend. More Americans today



are using public transportation due to volatile gas prices and inflation. When fuel prices dropped, DTA ridership remained steady. The recent rise in fuel prices should result in continued passenger growth.

"We're very pleased with these numbers" says General Manager Dennis Jensen. "We picked up a lot of new riders during the I-35 construction project last summer and they are continuing to ride. We are especially pleased with the success of the U-Pass program and all the benefits that this has brought to the colleges and to the community."

Rainbow Rider, continued...

The 2010 buses are all handicapped-accessible, 12-passenger vehicles with three spots for wheelchairs and a hydraulic wheelchair lift.

Jennissen explained that the buses use an electric hybrid system called a variable torque motor (VTM), which works in conjunction with a standard gas engine. The VTM does not require any battery or charging.

"We are the first [rural] system in Minnesota to have the VTM system on our buses," Jennissen said. "These are the first of this kind."

With a VTM, the electric system is in gear from zero to 28 miles per hour. When the bus reaches speeds higher than that, it shifts out and runs on gas.

Because of this design, the buses will be used in city limits.

Currently, four of the buses are up and running, with the other four to follow within the next few weeks. Plans so far are to have one in Glenwood, one in Wheaton, and at least five in Alexandria.

Anderson and Jennissen estimate that using the eight hybrid buses could save about 20 to 30 percent in gas costs. It could also save money in maintenance. Both will be carefully tracked and submitted to the Federal Transit Administration.

Regarding the buses' safety, Jennissen says that each driver on staff who uses a hybrid bus has had training, and that each bus has the exact same safety

requirements as a standard bus.

"They are as reliable as a normal gas-powered vehicle," Jennissen said, adding that the VTM has a switch that automatically disconnects in case of an accident.

A safe way to travel, reduced fuel costs and a way to help keep the environment just a little cleaner – Anderson and Jennissen agree that the TIGGER grant was a win-win-win for those in the areas Rainbow Rider serves.

And it begs the question – How did the Douglas County resident inexpensively cross the road without being detected?

He took a Rainbow Rider hybrid bus and didn't leave a carbon footprint.



White Earth Public Transit shifts into high gear for third year of service

By RAY JOHNSTON, White Earth Public Transit Coordinator

I recently completed my second year working as the Transit Coordinator for White Earth Public Transit (WEPT). During this period the challenges have been many, and the rewards have been tremendous.

The staff

White Earth Public Transit (WEPT) employees are a unique bunch. Shifts begin at 5 a.m. for some and end at 7:30 p.m. for others. Transit is open 14 ½ hours each weekday. Not everyone is suited for these hours. It requires a team effort where drivers often help one another. Only those able to accept the teamwork concept at Transit succeed. The other two main ingredients are: getting riders to work on time and operating safely.

This team includes the coordinator, a Transit dispatcher, 10 drivers, and one substitute. They also are our “transit ambassadors.

You will see them at the casino, convenience stores, shopping centers, clinics, the RTC, the Sports Complex, schools, the Depot, etc., always trying to help get more riders and promoting the program. It’s called dedication. We are both proud and pleased to be part of this team.

The numbers

Rider numbers continue to increase, but it’s more than just numbers! It’s not just getting people to work. We are purpose-driven. Working with kids groups is the most satisfying

(and challenging). We feel that we are a small part of each school child’s life when we are able to do a trip for bowling or skating, or the longer trips to the Black Hills and the North Shore. The children are the future!

Other rewarding trips have been made for Pathways Out of Poverty, Elder Nutrition (ENP), Boys and Girls Clubs, Cops and Bobbers (WEPD), Charter School, Learning Center, Honor Guard, American Legion, tours for Senator’s Byron Dorgan and Al Franken, Congressman Collin Peterson, and many others.

Two new buses

One of our new buses is equipped with reclining seats, DVD player, extended

Continued: *White Earth Public Transit*

White Earth Public Transit hits the ‘million’ mark

White Earth Public Transit (WEPT) recently hit a milestone. It’s one that you would never believe since WEPT operates an urban style route system in a very rural area. One million miles! One million miles without an accident! There was one fender-bender during Transit’s infancy, but since that time a perfect record.

WEPT has an in-depth education and training program that stresses safety regulations—a major contributing factor to the stellar safety record. All drivers participate as instructors and students in the program, helping one another. It’s a teamwork effort!



White Earth Transit Station “The Depot”:

The historic and newly renovated Burlington Northern Sante Fe railroad depot in Detroit Lakes is now known as the White Earth Transit Station. The home-base station is at White Earth. Public route service is provided four times per day operating along US Highway #59 from Lakes country to the Shooting Star Casino in Mahanomen. Connecting transportation is available at The Depot by Becker County Transit, Clay County Rural Transit, Jefferson Lines, as well as Amtrak. Four additional routes operate exclusively on the White Earth Reservation serving all of its communities.

White Earth Public Transit, continued

foot room, plus carpeting on the walls, floor, and ceiling. This bus operates weekdays on the CDL Route (Casino-Detroit Lakes). In addition to the regular route, the other purpose is to use it for Casino trips from The Depot.

The second new bus is equipped with child-restraint seats. It operates weekdays on the NTW 200 Route (Naytahwaush, including Rice Lake, to the Casino). The safety seating enables us to provide travel for the youngsters.

Three new vans

These units provide rides for up to 11 passengers (seven when wheelchairs are used). The smaller size vehicle is more efficient for rural roads and where ridership is smaller. These vans use E-85 fuel.

The fleet

Nine total vehicles provide nearly 300,000 transportation miles each year throughout the reservation, plus to the Depot in Detroit Lakes. This past fall, two buses were donated to

the Boys and Girls Clubs of the White Earth Reservation. Prior to that time WEPT provided transportation for the Clubs at Naytahwaush, Pine Point, and White Earth.

New route

The new DLX (Detroit Lakes Express) Route started in January, leaving the Depot at 7:15 a.m. It is direct to White Earth. This route will alleviate the pressure on the CDL (Casino-Detroit Lakes) route, which has experienced increased rider demand since the Depot opened this fall. The return route will leave White Earth at 4:30 p.m.

Kids, elders and disabled

During the past two years WEPT transported nearly 5,000 kids for the Boys and Girls Clubs. The two buses donated to the Club give Transit time for a new venture. A new bus will arrive in the Spring 2011. We call it the “Transformer bus” in toy-terms, since it takes on so many forms. It

quickly converts from 12 passenger seats and three wheelchair places - to 16 passenger seats and two wheelchair places - or to 18 passenger seats and one wheelchair place.

The bus was awarded by Minnesota Grant 5310. It was a collaborative effort by ENP, Health, Food Distribution, Substance Abuse, and Transit. Its primary use will be for elders and disabled. More information will be available this coming Spring. The “designers” of this program are Pat Anderson, Bonnie Butler, Gloria Goodwin, Carol Fabre, SuAnne Frasier, Ray Johnston, Jean LaRoque, and Pat Moran, along with participation and guidance from Ben Bement, Monte Fox, Dean Johnson, and Burny Tibbetts.

Submit your *InTransit* submissions to Berta Hartig
at bertahartigcommunications@gmail.com.

Please attach photos separately as TIFF, JPG or PDF files.

Deadline for May 2011 issue is April 18.



Apple Valley Councilmember Clint Hooppaw was administered the Oath of Office as the new representative from Apple Valley, replacing Sharon LaComb. Joseph Zammiller of Rosemount was administered the Oath of Office as the new at-large alternate commissioner, representing a rider.

The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority Board of Directors elects officers for 2011

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

Will Branning, Dakota County Commissioner for District 7, was re-elected Chair of the MVTA Board. Gary Hansen, Eagan City Councilmember, was re-elected Vice Chair. Jane Victorey, Savage City Councilmember, was re-elected Treasurer; and Wally Lyslo, At-large representative, was re-elected Secretary.

Other members of the Board include: Burnsville Councilmember Dan Kealey; William Droste, Mayor of Rosemount; Jon Ulrich, Scott County Commissioner; Clint Hooppaw, Apple Valley Councilmember; and Joseph Zammiller, Rosemount resident, an at-large alternate commissioner, representing riders.

MVTA 2010 ridership on the rise; U of M ridership shines through economic downturn

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) ridership to the University of Minnesota grew more than 10 percent between 2009 and 2010, continuing a long-term trend. MVTA has grown this sector of its ridership by more than 60 percent during the past five years. Additionally, the 2010 numbers show signs that MVTA's express ridership is recovering from the economic downturn: Saint Paul express ridership grew steadily (about 4 percent over the previous year), while Minneapolis express ridership leveled off from a 2009 drop. Overall, total ridership was 2,437,933, up slightly from 2009 (0.3 percent).

"We are excited about serving the U of M market," said MVTA Board Chair and Dakota County Commissioner Will Branning. "We introduced service from Cedar Grove

Transit Station, adding to the family of service to the U from Apple Valley and Burnsville. New Route 475 is one example of the ways MVTA is harnessing a ridership market that, by its nature, defies the downward tug that plagues commuter-oriented express services during a period of flagging employment."

At the end of the third quarter, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) reported bus ridership decreased nationally by 2.2 percent. "Because nearly 60 percent of public transit trips are work-related commuter trips, public transit ridership continues to be impacted by the ups and downs of the economy and persistent high unemployment," said APTA President William Millar.

"We are really setting the stage for the future," said MVTA Executive

Director Beverley Miller. "We opened two transit stations (the new Apple Valley and Cedar Grove Transit Stations) in 2010 laying more groundwork for the Bus Rapid Transit station-to-station service beginning in 2012.

"We continued to serve our core riders to downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, and continued to grow our local ridership, providing more connections between our cities by the service configuration at the Cedar Grove Transit Station. Now it's easier for a rider from Savage to get to work in Eagan, or for a rider from Rosemount to get to a job in Burnsville."

And, at the end of 2010, gas prices inched upward — a trend that is continuing into 2011, Miller said.



Read the full article online:

http://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/state-and-regional/article_d3a298fc-2e89-11e0-a681-001cc4c002e0.html

Volunteers fill critical role for SEMCAC as number of area seniors increases

By PATRICK B. ANDERSON, *Winona Daily News*

Posted: Wednesday, February 2, 2011 12:00 am

ROLLINGSTONE — Snow-covered bluffs slid past the driver's side window as Mitch Halbakken drove into town.

He parked in the driveway of a gray, single-story home, glanced at the review mirror and unbuckled, rushing out to help his two passengers, Bill and Leona Multhaupt.

Halbakken takes the Multhaups to Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center in La Crosse, Wis., about every two weeks to meet with doctors. The 57-year-old retiree does a lot of volunteer driving — it gives him that good feeling of helping others, he said. He's on the road five days a week as a driver for the South Eastern Minnesota Citizens Action Council, taking people 60 and older back and forth from medical appointments.

"I started as needed," said Halbakken, who joined the program more than a year ago. "I wouldn't have signed up for it if I knew I wasn't going to enjoy it."

The need for volunteers in Lewiston, St. Charles and Rollingstone, Minn., is critical, according to a recent news release from the agency. Halbakken is one of 20 active drivers in Winona County, but SEMCAC is still short on what it needs to provide adequate service, said Erlene Welshons,

transportation director for the agency. She likes to keep 30 to 35 drivers on call for the program's busiest county.

The shortage could be seasonal — some volunteers head south for the winter and return in the warmer months — but Welshons and her team still face higher demand despite unchanged public funding.

The number of people 65 and older is expected to double statewide, and rise 81 percent in parts of southeast Minnesota by 2030, according to estimates from the Department of Transportation. SEMCAC relies on \$65,000 a year from the federal government — with help from private donations — to maintain its service. The allocation is up for reauthorization in 2011, and public funding could be cut off unless U.S. lawmakers vote it through, Welshons said.

"We know that there's no money," she said. "It's always in jeopardy."

SEMCAC volunteers performed 14,046 total rides last year in the program's five-county coverage area, which also includes Houston, Fillmore, Dodge and Steele counties. The number is a slight dip from 2009, but only after three years of steady increases, and only because of changes in Medicaid, Welshons said.



Overall, the total miles traveled increased 50 percent in four years, from 267,509 in 2006 to 400,986 in 2010. Counties cover the cost of miles for some Medical Assistance passengers and are reimbursed by Medicaid. Winona County's Human Services Department was reimbursed for more than \$93,000 in 2010 to cover ride-related fuel costs, Director Julie Thompson said.

Volunteer drivers are one option for the area's growing population of seniors, whose transit needs are changing as the demographic shifts to more independently minded baby boomers, said Jean Meyer, MnDOT's transit coordinator for southeastern Minnesota.

"Older Americans are saying they want to be able to live in their homes, but have access," she said.

Serving rural parts of the state is difficult because the distance between homes and services can be so much greater, Meyer said. To help, SEMCAC also coordinates public bus transit in five counties, including Winona, and applies for state grants every year to help pay for operating costs. The group will receive \$231,000 for 2011 costs, Meyer said.

Pi Kappa Alpha member Luis Guitart, gathering signatures at TCF Bank Stadium before a Gopher's game.

SouthWest Transit promotes safety

Partners with University of Minnesota fraternity to stop students from texting while driving

By PAT BRINK, SouthWest Transit

It was back to school time and also time to remind students that texting while driving is simply not a good idea. SouthWest Transit partnered with The Pi Kappa Alpha (PKA) fraternity at the University of Minnesota (U of M) to remind people to stop texting while driving.

To begin the effort, the fraternity placed a SouthWest Transit sign in its front yard on University Avenue that read "u txt. we drive." The fraternity kept the sign up for nearly two weeks. During those two weeks members of the fraternity wearing the "u txt. we drive" T-shirts gathered signatures from students and others who pledged not to drive and text.

In all, the fraternity gathered hundreds of signatures and the fraternity was recognized by the U of M Police Department, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Department and its own national fraternity office for its efforts.

In addition to working with the fraternity, AJ Indoor Advertising provided advertising support to the effort through November of last year. Four different signs, with various "don't text and drive" messages were placed in bars, restaurants, theaters and other public spots throughout the U of M area and the cities that SouthWest Transit serves.

"We're very pleased to partner with Pi Kappa Alpha in this effort," said Len Simich, SouthWest Transit CEO. "It's an important campaign that we will continue to use. Right now about half of our buses carry the 'u txt. we drive' message on the back of the bus. SouthWest Transit offers direct service to the University of Minnesota and is committed to serving the transit needs of the students and faculty."



The SouthWest Transit sign in front of the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity house reminded students not to text and drive.

SouthWest Transit begins demonstration project on suburb-to-suburb Transit

By PAT BRINK, SouthWest Transit

It's just one route, but it is a route that could herald the way for similar ventures throughout the Twin Cities.

Each weekday morning at the Heart of the City parking ramp in Burnsville, riders board one of SouthWest Transit's mini-buses for a ride to their work site in Eden Prairie. The service works similar to a demand response group trip. Currently, there are 12-15 riders using the service daily.

Because there is no parking shortage or parking costs at the various employment sites, SouthWest needed to design a route that could be promoted as a way to get the rider to work faster and with less stress — especially during the winter driving months.

"Let's face it, in the suburbs the parking is free and it's often more difficult to provide a significant time advantage to riding the bus," said Len Simich, SouthWest Transit's CEO. "With the bus lane advantages that are available to us along I-35W and I-494, and by designing a limited stop trip between Burnsville and Eden Prairie, the trip we provide is faster and more relaxing for the commuter."

To assist in the planning and marketing of this new service, SouthWest enlisted help from the 494 Commuter Services staff who have close relationships with businesses along the I-494 corridor.

"One of the ways that we are working to get more riders is by 'door-knocking' at companies throughout the Golden Triangle area. We need the 494 Commuter Services' assistance in spreading the word to employers that this service is available," said Dave Jacobson, COO at SouthWest Transit. "Eventually, our goal is to tie the major employment sites together and build ridership so that we can fill a large vehicle."

To date, the feedback has been very positive.

"I really like the timing and convenience of this route. It's nice to arrive at work and get back home without being stressed out from all the traffic," said one of the riders.

Currently, there is only one route to and from Eden Prairie and Burnsville. However, if this model proves successful, SouthWest Transit anticipates rolling out similar routes in suburban areas that have a high concentration of employees who travel into the SouthWest Transit service area on a daily basis.

FAR North Transit receives donation

By STEVE BUTLER, FAR North Transit Manager



A very generous memorial gift for the family of the late Carl Edwin Hansen was recently received by FAR North Public Transit of Lake of the Wood and Roseau Counties. The riders and staff of FAR North Transit wish to thank the Hansen family for the gift of \$1,000. The donation will be used for the operations of the buses in Lake of the Woods counties.

FAR North



Public Transit

In learning of Ed's history, it is no surprise he would want to help support such a needed service in the Baudette area. Being a dedicated member of the Brink Center for so many years he obviously knew the need for active bus service and donations such as this makes it possible for service to continue. For many of these passengers, the bus is their only means of transportation. FAR North Transit operates three buses daily in the two counties, providing over 26,000 rides in the past year.



Walmart influences Metro Bus ridership and traffic

By TOM CRUIKSHANK and BERTA HARTIG, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Say what you want about Walmart, but people shop there. It is also reflected in our ridership.

When Walmart moved its St. Cloud Sam's Club and Walmart stores to the Epic Center development in Sartell this past fall, it resulted in a change in bus routing. At their former locations, these stores were served by routes 3 West Side and 33 Southwest. Traffic congestion and heavy ridership activity contributed to those routes being frequently late. While no one enjoys a late bus, the high ridership was a nice problem to have.

Now that the stores are in Sartell, the on-time performance of 3 West Side and 33 Southwest has improved — and 31 Sartell route has inherited the heavy ridership and traffic congestion issue.

Increased service for 31 Sartell

When Walmart and Sam's moved to Sartell in September 2010, Metro Bus adjusted the 31 Sartell route to serve this new development seven days a week, with increased evening and weekend hours. Despite the added service, the 90-minute headways caused long waits between buses and long ride times for those who required transfers to complete their trips.

Starting February 27, the 31 Sartell route began operations with 30- and 60-minute departures on weekdays. The weekend service continues at its current 90-minute schedule. The route also changed its hub from Crossroads Shopping Center, located in west St. Cloud, to the more frequently used downtown St. Cloud Transit Center. Because most Metro Bus routes hub from the Transit Center, this change offers more convenience to riders.

Walmart isn't the only factor affecting how Metro Bus routes function — Metro Bus must also adjust its routes as traffic patterns change.

Increased traffic, new interchange

As a result of the increased traffic volumes exacerbated by the Epic Center development, Mn/DOT will be constructing an interchange at the intersection of Highway 15 and Stearns County Road 120 in 2012. Metro Bus anticipates needing to tweak the route as a result of the new interchange.

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Susan Haigh selected as new Council chair

Gov. Mark Dayton has announced the appointment of Susan Haigh, president and CEO of Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity, as the new chair of the Metropolitan Council.



Council Chair
Susan Haigh

CCLRT positioned for federal commitment, creating 3,400 jobs

The Central Corridor Light Rail Transit Project is poised to create at least 3,400 jobs now that the federal government has forwarded the Full Funding Grant Agreement to Congress.

A 60-day courtesy review will occur prior to execution, when an FFGA will commit the federal government to half of the \$957 million project cost. The project already has spent \$145 million for design, property and construction.

Video: Update on I-35W BRT improvements

At a recent Council meeting, John Levin of Metro Transit provided an update on bus rapid transit (BRT) improvements being made in the I-35W corridor. View Levin's presentation.

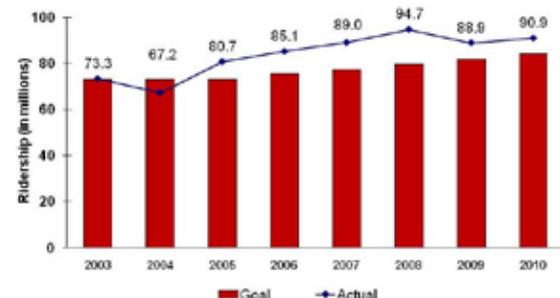
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Transit ridership rebounds in 2010

Transit ridership across the seven-county Twin Cities area grew 2.2% in 2010, a partial rebound from the 2009 ridership slump caused by the economic recession. Passengers boarded buses, rail and other transit a total of 90.9 million times in 2010.

Annual Ridership Goal
2003 through 2010



Central Corridor Making Tracks News

Central Corridor LRT Update

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Mar 19 **Defensive Driving** Minneapolis
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East Side Neighborhood Service

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:
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Trainers available

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

Metro Transit 2010 Ridership up 2.3% to 78 million

Customers boarded Metro Transit buses and trains more than 78 million times last year, a 2.3 percent increase over 2009.

The year 2010 marks only the fourth time in past 30 years that Metro Transit's annual ridership has exceeded 78 million.

"With signs that the economy is slowly improving, we have a positive outlook for ridership to continue to grow in 2011," said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb.

Lamb said ridership on express buses — typically people headed to and from work — increased 2.5 percent last year to 9.2 million.

Customers used Hiawatha light-rail trains 10.5 million times in 2010, a 6 percent increase and the highest annual ridership in the line's six-year history.

Ridership on core urban routes — the heart of the Metro Transit system — increased .7 percent to 65.6 million.

Ridership on the new Northstar commuter rail line closed its first year at 710,400 rides, nearly 21 percent below expectations. The rush-hour only service intended for workers was hampered by the weak economy and a 7 percent unemployment rate with fewer people headed to jobs in downtown Minneapolis.

Lamb said average weekday rides last month on Northstar were 2.5 percent higher than December 2009, a trend that continues in early January with average weekday rides up more than 14 percent.

"While Northstar ridership last year did not match expectations, service quality was high with a 95.6 percent on-time performance," he said. "Best of all, 2010 Northstar operations finished within budget despite low ridership."



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