



in transit

Minnesota Public Transit Association



Falling Motor Vehicle Sales Tax revenues mean big shortfall for transit

The December revenue forecast contained bad news not only for state government, but also for regional transit. Once again, state officials reduced their projection of the revenues that transit can expect from the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST). The new forecast indicates that MVST revenues will fall \$11 million short of earlier projections for the current fiscal year and another \$23 million for the next two-year budget period, which begins July 1, 2009.

The projected decline means that we face a total budget shortfall of \$72 million through the next biennium just to maintain existing transit service and fund committed service expansions, such as the startup of the Northstar commuter rail line. To put this number into perspective consider this: the 25-cent transit fare increase we implemented Oct. 1 is expected to raise about \$7.2 million a year.

This shortfall affects not only Metro Transit, but also Metro Mobility, suburban providers and the region's community-based transit programs.

Frankly, we are confronted with a structural imbalance between the revenues available to grow our transit system, and those available to operate it.

Under the 2008 transportation funding bill passed by the Legislature, five metro counties imposed a new quarter-cent sales tax to help fund the planning, construction and operation of "transitways" – such as light rail, commuter rail and bus rapid transit.

However, under the law, the money may not be used to help operate regular route bus service. (The bill did include a one-time appropriation of \$31 million for transit operations in the current biennium.)

Many people thought our transit funding problems were solved in 2006, when the voters approved a constitutional amendment dedicating 100 percent of MVST revenues to transportation. When fully implemented in 2012, 60 percent of the revenues will go to highways and 40 percent to transit (36 percent for the metro area and 4 percent for Greater Minnesota).

Thus far, however, the amendment is turning out to be simply a bigger slice of a rapidly shrinking pie. Understandably, in the current economic climate, many people are deferring major purchases such as new cars.

In the current fiscal year, regional transit is now projected to receive \$112.5 million in MVST revenues, nearly \$12 million less than it did in 2003. MVST has proven to be a much less reliable funding source than the property tax it replaced. The Council is not eager to raise bus fares or reduce service. First, we recognize that about a third of our riders do not own or cannot operate a car – and depend on transit to get to vital destinations. Second, if we are forced to cut existing transit service, the federal government is unlikely to help fund major new transit improvements such as the proposed Central Corridor LRT line.

The Metropolitan Council is strongly committed to growing our transit system and maintaining regional balance. We look forward to working with the governor and Legislature to resolve our budget challenges.

Peter Bell

Metropolitan Council

December 2008



From the President



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With all of the bad news regarding the economy and the state's budget situation, it's hard to remain optimistic about the coming year. We know that 2009 will present serious challenges for transit systems all across the state. At the same time, we also know that people can make a difference in setting the state's budget priorities.

The State of Minnesota is currently projected to be facing a budget deficit of over \$4 billion for the coming FY2010-2011 biennium on top of the budget deficit for the current biennium. In 2003, the state faced a similar situation with what was seen as an historic budget deficit. However, there are some important differences between 2003 and 2009. In 2003, the overall economy was in much better shape and the state had some reserves as well as a huge tobacco settlement fund to rely on in finding ways to balance the budget. This time, the state has used up all of its reserves and has no special funding to turn to while the state's unemploy-

ment rate increases and the general economy continues to weaken. The February forecast – the one that the legislature uses to develop a balanced budget – is expected to show an even bigger budget deficit.

The legislature will not be conducting business as usual and every budget will be scrutinized closely. That's why it's more important than ever for transit advocates to speak up and actively participate in the decision making process. We've heard some talk about K-12 Education being spared from cuts or not facing drastic cuts. Why? Because education advocates are always speaking out and making the case for the importance of quality education to the state. Just recently, local government officials came to the Capitol to plead for smaller cuts in Local Government Aid and they were successful in their efforts to reduce the cut made through the "unallotment" process. Even in bleak times, advocates can make a difference in the decisions made by lawmakers if they speak up and get involved.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association will be working with legislators to stress the need to keep buses rolling. MPTA will be hosting the Annual Transit Breakfast on February 4, 2009 at the Kelly Inn in St. Paul to bring advocates together with legislators at this critical time. **Legislators will need to hear from their constituents about the importance of local transit service.**

Remember, the people who rely on transit service are relying on us to stand up for their ability to get to work and live independent lives. We all need to be speaking out for the importance of transit service to the state.



Bob McFarlin, formerly of MnDOT, named to Met Council

Bob McFarlin, the public voice of the Minnesota Department of Transportation after last year's Interstate 35W bridge collapse, will serve on the Metropolitan Council.

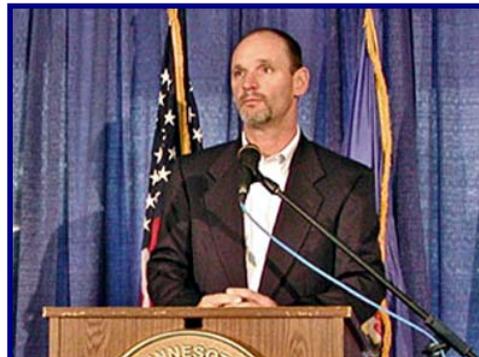
ST. PAUL — Governor Tim Pawlenty recently named Robert F. McFarlin to an unscheduled vacancy on the Metropolitan Council in District 3. The vacancy will occur with the resignation of Mary Hill Smith effective December 31st. McFarlin's effective date will be on January 2nd.

McFarlin left the state transportation department six months ago after serving as acting commissioner when the Minnesota Senate removed Lt. Gov. Carol Molnau as commissioner. He had been a key aide to Molnau.

McFarlin is now a vice president at Weber Shandwick, a public relations company in Bloomington.

He will represent a western Hennepin County district.

The Metropolitan Council operates the Metro Transit bus system and oversees regional planning for airports, transportation, parks and water in the Twin Cities area.



Former MnDOT spokesman Bob McFarlin will now serve on the Metropolitan Council.

Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe
Legislative Director
Minnesota Transportation Alliance

The forecasted budget deficit is extremely serious and will probably get worse. According to Minnesota Management and Budget (formerly Department of Finance), the state faces a budget deficit of \$426 million for the current biennium ending June 30, 2008 and that number may rise. For the coming biennium, FY2010-2011, the expected budget shortfall has grown from the end-of-session estimate of \$946 million to \$4.8 billion and that number is also expected to increase when the February, 2009 forecast is released.

To deal with the deficit for the current biennium, the Governor recently announced that he was authorizing the spending of the \$155 million remaining in the budget reserve and cutting or "unallotting" previously made appropriations. His list includes a \$110 million cut in local aid to cities and counties, and \$73 million to human services programs. The LGA is sent to 66 cities and 44 counties in the state.

Other cuts outlined by the Governor include: \$20 million for the University of Minnesota, \$20 million for MnSCU, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System, \$40 million, or 10 percent, of state agencies' budgets and \$4 million for the state's Housing Finance agency. MnDOT's Office of Transit will be looking at potential general fund reductions as well as Metropolitan Area Transit budgets. With sales tax revenue from the motor vehicle sales tax down, the general fund deficit is even more problematic. The Metropolitan

Council has projected that the operating deficit for Metropolitan Area Transit is about \$70 million for the FY2010-FY2011 biennium.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association will be finalizing its 2009 Legislative Agenda in January. The agenda will focus on obtaining adequate transit funding and maintaining the gains achieved last session including the metropolitan area sales tax for transitways and the current allocation of the motor vehicle sales tax. The constitutional amendment passed in 2006 states that no less than 40 percent of the revenue must be spent on transit and the legislature has set the transit distribution at 36 percent for metropolitan area transit and 4 percent for Greater Minnesota transit. The MVST funds are critical for the operation of the bus system.

MPTA will also be seeking funds through the capital bonding bill for transitways and transit facilities. In addition, policies issues may include support for Transit Improvement Areas, monitoring land use planning, and transit governance legislation.

On the more positive side, the likelihood of a major economic stimulus plan being enacted into law in January or February is high. All indications are that this legislation will include funding for transportation infrastructure including transit funding. No word on how much Minnesota might receive for transit, but this could be a very timely addition to the state's federal transit funds.

If you have any questions or comments about the coming legislative session or MPTA's legislative agenda, please contact Sherry Munyon or Tony Kellen, MPTA President.



As part of winning the 2008 Gold Safety Award from the American Public Transportation Association, First Transit received \$5,000 to award to charities.

First Transit donated a check for \$2,500 to the Jane Brattain Breast Center. All three of the women in photo are breast cancer survivors. The other \$2,500 will be donated to the Alzheimer's Foundation.

Photo: (from left) John Matthews – First Transit, Dave Simoneau – First Transit Director of Driver Services & Emergency Management, Jane Norstrom – Park Nicollet Foundation, Jane Brattain – Breast Center, Len Simich – CEO, SouthWest Transit, Barb Clark – First Transit, Pat Quale – SouthWest Transit Administrative Services Director, and Alvin Halaas – First Transit Driver Development and Safety Manager.



Met Council swats down MPR's objections about Central Corridor route

METRO – Minnesota Public Radio may stay or go, but the Central Corridor light-rail line will not be moved off Cedar Street in St. Paul, Metropolitan Council President Peter Bell said Monday, December 22.

In a strongly worded statement, Bell criticized MPR for “using its airwaves and its web-site to rally its supporters” to push for moving the line off Cedar and away from its studios. “Extensive testing following Federal Transit Administration guidelines shows vibration and noise impacts ... can be mitigated at MPR,” Bell said, noting that Cedar has been the preferred route for many years.

“Cedar Street was properly chosen for the alignment,” he concluded. “Cedar Street remains the route.” In a December 10 letter from its attorneys to the Central Corridor office, MPR said that the noise and vibrations from light-rail trains “could well shut down the highly sensitive MPR Broadcast Center, leaving MPR with no practical alternative but to sue” to recover the value of its \$100 million building and the costs of relocating.

MPR acknowledged that it and its neighbors “have been generally aware of the potential for LRT on Cedar Street for some time,” but said that only in the last six months has MPR been given access to data disclosing the extent of the “significant negative impact” on its facilities.

The letter calls the noise and vibration testing “truly deficient” and accuses researchers of throwing out vibration data that did not conform to their assumptions. Central Corridor trains are expected to pass within 8 to 14 feet of MPR’s complex, which includes recording and broadcast studios and concert halls.

Bell said Monday that “our experienced project engineers, who have worked on other LRT projects around the country,” have spelled out numerous ways that the line’s impact could be mitigated, from soundproofing the studios to putting a rubber material underneath the tracks.

“Reopening the decision about the alignment would cost tens of millions of dollars and delay the project at a minimum of one year,” he said, a sentiment he expressed repeatedly this spring when the University of Minnesota pushed for further study of an alternative route through its Minneapolis campus. After months of often contentious discussions, the “northern alignment” was dropped and the Washington Avenue route restored amid assurances that the university’s concerns about traffic and vibrations would be addressed.

“In defense of the U, their cheese got moved,” said St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, who sits on a Central Corridor planning committee. He

was referring to a tunnel under Washington Avenue that was eliminated because of cost concerns.

Coleman has become more vocal in his frustrations with MPR’s recent actions, pointing to compromises other stakeholders have made in the name of progress. “What MPR is proposing kills Central Corridor,” he said.

MPR needs to understand that local dissent gives the FTA ample reason to refuse the funding request, Coleman said. He noted that the city lent MPR \$3.3 million for the expansion.

“We could study this thing for another 10 years, and we’ll still say Cedar is the best option,” he said.

Jennifer Haugh, a spokeswoman for MPR and American Public Media, said Monday that “the initial environmental impact study of the current alignment did not factor in noise- and vibration-sensitive facilities that are concentrated along Cedar Street” and that federal guidelines require alternative routes to be studied. She also underscored MPR’s support for the Central Corridor project.

Too close for comfort?

MPR says it hasn’t found a light-rail line running so close to a recording and broadcast facility anywhere in the United States, but it’s been in contact with the lead engineer of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in Salt Lake City, where light-rail trains serve Temple Square.

In an e-mail, the engineer, Trent Walker, says that an underground recording studio is located 120 feet from a rail station and that “since the rail has gone in, the studio is not usable for recording of most programs and has been only usable for rehearsals.”

Walker also said trains do not use their bells or horns when passing the tabernacle. “This is the only reason we are able to record and do not have major problems with the train in the hall,” he wrote.

The Central Corridor Project Office has said that the use of horns and bells could be limited near MPR and two historic churches just up Cedar Street.



The MPR station and studios is the third building after the two churches on St. Paul’s Cedar Street. MPR has said the planned LRT line will add so much noise and vibrations as to render some facilities unusable.



SouthWest Transit tests double-decker bus service

METRO – A double-decker bus like the ones commonly seen in London will be rolling from the southwest suburbs into downtown Minneapolis this week in a test by SouthWest Transit.

To keep up with growing ridership, SouthWest is considering buying double-decker buses over the next few years. It is trying out the bus to gauge the reaction of drivers and riders, said Len Simich, chief executive officer for SouthWest.

Riders who want to take the bus downtown can catch it at 6:40 a.m. today at the Market Park and Ride in Chanhassen, and at 7:15 a.m. Wednesday and 8 a.m. Thursday at the SouthWest Station in Eden Prairie.

Serving Eden Prairie, Chaska and Chanhassen, SouthWest has seen ridership jump 15 percent this year, spurred in part by high gas prices.

As a result, SouthWest buses have been crowded, and a recent ridership survey found that riders dislike having to stand during commuting trips.

A double-deck bus would seat about 80 people compared with 55 on the coach buses that SouthWest uses for its commuter runs. With aisle space for about 20 standing passengers, the double-deckers could carry up to 100 passengers.

Double-deckers are expected to match or beat fuel use in regular buses and are easier to maneuver than extra-long articulated buses. But they cost about \$750,000 -- \$200,000 more than a regular coach bus, Simich said.

Double-decker buses are used for transit in England and China, but they have not been widely used for transit in the United States until recently because they did not meet the federal funding requirement that they be made in America.

Now, British manufacturer Alexander Dennis Limited has buses made in Riverside, CA, making the double-deckers eligible for federal funding.

Alexander Dennis went into partnership this year with ElDorado National, a U.S. bus manufacturer that assembles the double-decker buses. Forty-eight percent of the bus is made of U.S. parts and the assembly here meets the requirements for made-in-America status, said Alexander Dennis Vice President Steve Walsh.

Walsh said the buses also are engineered to perform well on ice and snow. The company just delivered 12 of the double-deckers to Toronto.



SouthWest Transit will be purchasing new buses over the next couple of years and the double decker buses will be considered to help better serve our riders.



SouthWest Transit riders were treated to a ride on a Alexander Dennis double-decker bus being tested this week to see if it will help meet the huge demand for bus service. The bus picked up riders at the corner of 3rd Avenue and 4th Street in downtown Minneapolis and continued on its regular route.



DTA employees raise \$1,608.80 for local Toyland Express

DULUTH – DTA drivers and staff volunteers raised \$1,608.80 for the local 2008 Toyland Express Drive. These funds were raised in a raffle that was held at the Driver’s Annual Holiday Party.

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



Alan Carlson of the Duluth Salvation Army receives donation check from DTA employees Clint Johnson, Bob Moerke and Janine Taylor.

Commuter Choice Awards recognize innovation and advocacy

MINNEAPOLIS –Ten Twin Cities organizations and individuals received Commuter Choice awards today for their role in helping to reduce congestion. Metro Transit and transportation management organizations (TMOs) in the region each year recognize people and companies that come up with creative ways to promote alternatives to driving alone to work, including transit, biking, carpooling, vanpooling and telecommuting.

Advertising agency Carmichael Lynch was among those honored at a ceremony today in St. Paul, winning an award for Exceptional Company Involvement. In addition to offering reduced-price transit passes and a bicycle sharing program, the agency reimburses employees who walk to work for the cost of shoes, and gives rebates to employees who take light rail to and from the airport. The company also developed a “green blog” and hosted a seminar on transportation options.

The award for Outstanding Promotion by a small organization went to St. Paul Neighborhood Network, a non-profit community television network that produced several programs promoting alternatives to driving alone during the Republican National Convention. It has a bike-sharing program and subsidizes transit passes at a higher rate than parking.

SRF Consulting Group, Inc. won Outstanding Promotion by a Medium Organization for using friendly rivalry to reduce the number of drive-alone trips. The engineering and design firm held an “Alternative Commute Challenge” that pitted SRF employees against those at a competitor business for the greatest mileage reduction.

The Public Agency Leadership award was presented to Hennepin County, which in addition to hosting commuter fairs and providing a generous subsidy on transit passes and free bicycle amenities, developed a “Trade Time for Fitness” program that helps employees save on bicycle commuting expenses.

Ameriprise Financial, Inc., the nation’s largest financial planning company, won the Corporate Leadership award for its sponsorship of Bike Walk Week. The company organized six bicycle convoys and offered multiple incentive gifts for employee participation. Ameriprise has offered Metropass to its employees for more than 10 years, since the program’s inception.

The Best Technology Solution award was given to Boston Scientific. The medical device manufacturer used a Google map interface to create a customized carpool matching system for its workplace. It also advocated for increased transit service in Maple Grove, where it is located.

The Rookie of the Year award, presented for outstanding effort by an organization that is promoting commuter alternatives for the first time, went to the 934th Airlift Wing of the U.S. Air Force. Through commuter fairs and an online bulletin that assists employees in finding others to share the ride, 50 of its 350 employees now belong to vanpools.

The Friend of Commuter Alternatives Award was presented to Alice Tibbetts, who developed a Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) plan for the City of Minneapolis. She is a longtime supporter of SRTS and has served on the Bicycle Advisory Board in St. Paul.

In addition to the presentation of Commuter Choice awards, GE Capital Solutions Fleet Services was commended for being designated as a Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) worksite. BWC is a national accreditation program that recognizes employers that offer excellent commuter benefits.





Central Corridor LRT Update



Not the last spike, but the last weld on LRT extension

METRO – When the final weld was made on the Hiawatha light-rail transit (LRT) extension to a shared station with the Northstar commuter-rail line in downtown Minneapolis on November 5, the moment was akin on a local level to the driving of the last spike on the trans-continental railroad.

“This connection will create a 52-mile passenger rail network for the Twin Cities, 12 miles for Hiawatha and 40 miles for Northstar. The network will increase to 62 miles when Central Corridor begins service,” said Mark Fuhrmann, director of the Northstar and Central Corridor projects. Fuhrmann also was chief financial officer of the Hiawatha project.

See a series of photos illustrating the track welding process. The milestone marked the beginning of a light-rail connection between St. Paul and Minneapolis and between the Twin Cities and communities on the Northstar commuter rail line. Central Corridor LRT trains from St. Paul will operate their last mile in downtown Minneapolis from a point near the Metrodome to the Hiawatha extension when Central Corridor service begins in 2014.

New station will operate on two levels

Commuters on Hiawatha and Central Corridor LRT trains will board and disembark at the Minneapolis Multimodal Station being built on the Fifth Street North bridge next to the new Minnesota Twins stadium. The same station also will serve Northstar commuter trains traveling to and from Big Lake on BNSF Railway tracks, terminating below the bridge. Stairs, elevators and escalators will take commuters

from Northstar trains on the lower level to Hiawatha and Central Corridor trains on the upper level. Hiawatha LRT trains will begin operating over the extension from the Warehouse Station to the new station at the same time Northstar begins service late next year.

No dignitaries were on hand to make speeches and there was no fanfare as welders Britton Carpenter and Brian Downey of Chesapeake Thermite Welding, a subcontractor, finished the final welds in the intersection of Fifth Street and First Avenue by the Warehouse Station.

The welders worked behind barricades as motorists and pedestrians passed through the busy intersection and Hiawatha trains picked up and dropped off commuters at the nearby station, but the public gave no heed to the significance of what was occurring. The men placed a clamp where the rail was to be joined, heated the spot with an acetylene torch, placed a metal bucket with chemicals over the spot and set off a chemical reaction with a fuse. Stepping back, they watched as sparks shot several feet into the air for about 30 seconds, turning the cold steel to molten metal so the two could pound and grind it. And that was it.

The next day, crews were working in the rain to install rebar in preparation for the pouring of concrete to create embedded track so autos on First Avenue can drive smoothly across the spot.



Welders Britton Carpenter and Brian Downey of Chesapeake Thermite Welding finished the final welds in the Hiawatha LRT extension on November 5.

First Urban Partnership Agreement project in Minneapolis nears completion

Will improve safety, reduce congestion

ROSEVILLE – The first of more than 20 Urban Partnership Agreement projects were recently completed when a transit advantage bus-only turn lane opened on Highway 77 (Cedar Avenue) in Minneapolis.

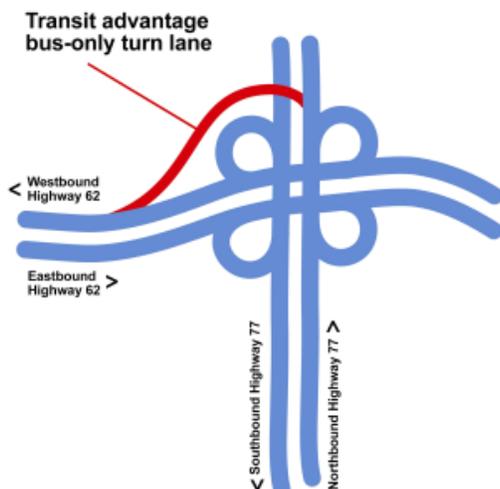
The bus-only turn lane allows buses traveling north on Highway 77 to cross southbound Highway 77 and use the ramp from southbound Highway 77 to westbound Highway 62 (see diagram). This bus-only turn lane allows buses to avoid using the often congested Highway 77 northbound loop to westbound Highway 62. The bus-only turn lane will be used exclusively by buses. Signs will be posted to ensure motorists understand that it is for buses-only.

Mn/DOT expects transit riders to save between five and 10 minutes during peak times through this improved link to the bus-only shoulder and MnPASS network on Highway 77, Highway 62 and Interstate 35W.

As part of this project, a traffic signal has been installed at southbound Highway 77 to stop southbound traffic and allow buses to safely cross over the highway. The signal system includes technology imbedded in the roadway that detects when a bus arrives at the signal. When a bus is detected, the signal will stop southbound traffic and allow the bus to enter the bus-only on-ramp to westbound Highway 62. The technology will activate the signal for buses only. During non-congested times buses will use the Highway 77 northbound loop to enter westbound Highway 62 and the traffic signal will remain green on southbound Highway 77.

Coming soon—more time saving and safety benefits for transit riders

By late 2008 Minnesota Valley Transit buses using this bus-only ramp will incorporate an innovative use of differential global positioning technology to help bus drivers keep buses centered on the bus-only shoulders and assist in precision docking at bus stops.

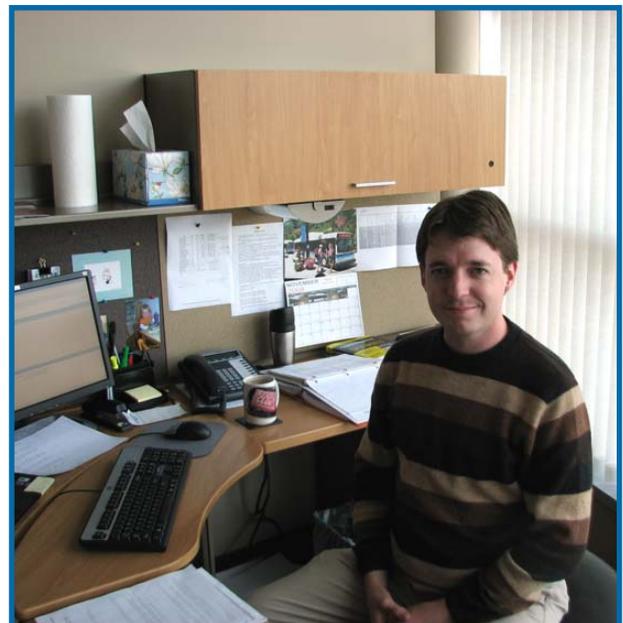


This project, also funded through UPA, will enable bus drivers using this advanced technology to know precisely where the bus is relative to adjacent lanes. It allows buses to travel safely at higher speeds on the bus-only shoulders in conditions that typically prevent use due to reduced visibility caused by weather or darkness. Transit riders will benefit from this technology with faster, more consistent trips. The differential global positioning technology is being developed by researchers at the University of Minnesota's Intelligent Transportation Systems Institute.

Minnesota was awarded \$133.3 million through the U.S. Department of Transportation's UPA program for strategies to reduce traffic congestion in the Twin Cities. Money from the UPA will be used to reduce congestion on Interstate 35W and Highway 77 and in downtown Minneapolis. The program includes projects between downtown Minneapolis and southern suburbs along with additional transit service and park-and-ride lots on I-35W in the northern suburbs and on Highway 77.

For more information on UPA, visit the project Web site at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/upa/>.

MVTA hires a new planner



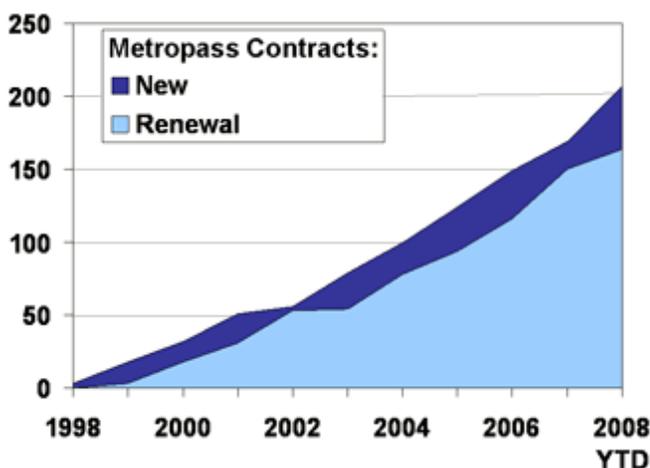
MVTA recently added Shaun Morrell to its professional staff as a planner. Morrell brings a planning background at a regional government in Montana to the position, along with a Master's Degree in Urban Transit.



Metro Transit's Metropass marks 10-year anniversary

Program now available at 200 employers

METRO – Ten years ago, Metro Transit began a project with local employers who were interested in providing their workers a new incentive to leave their cars at home more often. At the time, Metro Transit was selling transit passes to employers who provided them to workers as a commuter benefit. But with a new program called Metropass, participating employers could provide an annual transit pass to employees at deeply discounted prices.



In the 10 years since the Metropass program was initiated, enrollment has grown steadily. As of October 1, 2008, 200 companies were enrolled with a total of 156,000

The first company to enroll in Metropass – patterned after a similar program in Denver – was American Express Financial Advisors (now Ameriprise Financial, Inc.). The largest employer in downtown Minneapolis at the time, the company cited transportation as a key issue for recruiting and retaining workers and began offering the program on October 1, 1998.

Employers look for solutions

Fast forward a decade. Regional employers still want transportation solutions and consider Metropass as an important tool to help workers save on gas and parking costs, get employees to work on time under less stress and show environmental commitment. The program offers cardholders unlimited rides on light-rail trains and on regular-route buses operated by Metro Transit and suburban transit providers, 24/7, weekdays and weekends. Since 2005, Metropass cards have used Go-To Card technology, allowing commuters to touch their cards to a reader and record their rides instantly.

“The Metropass program has wildly exceeded expectations,” said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb. “Thanks to the success of Metropass, Metro Transit has built important relationships with local employers, who in turn spread the message that Metro Transit provides a valuable service that helps drive the economic engine of the region.” Ameriprise is among eight companies celebrating 10 years with Metropass in 2008. Other employers marking 10-year anniversaries include: Bemis Company, Inc.; Comcast; Dorsey & Whitney, Ecolab; Minnesota Pollution Control Agency; TCF National Bank; and Toltz, King, Duvall, Anderson & Associates.

Company enrollment soars

Word continues to spread about the region’s premier transit pass program, and local companies are getting on the Metropass bandwagon in increasing numbers. To date, the program is available at 200 businesses, government agencies and nonprofit organizations for a total of 156,000 commuters.

This past January, 172 employers were enrolled in Metropass. The number of companies enrolled the first nine months of 2008 is 22 percent higher, or 36 more companies, over the same time last year. The largest employer in terms of potential riders is Allina Health Systems, which has 16,240 employees eligible for Metropass.

St. Cloud Metro Bus sets all-time record ridership

ST. CLOUD – Public transit annual ridership in the St. Cloud area reached 2.32 million this year - surpassing the record high of 2.25 million set 61 years ago.

System-wide ridership was 2,323,434 for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2008.

Ridership was 2,250,000 in 1947.

Fixed route ridership experienced a 16 percent increase over last year.

“We attribute a large share of this growth in ridership to the increased gas prices during the summer months, extending back to 2007,” said David Tripp, Metro Bus Executive Director. “Despite the drop in gas prices, it appears that many new riders continue to use Metro Bus because substantial travel savings can be obtained without sacrificing convenience.”



Use of bike racks on Metro Transit trains, buses grows

METRO – Use of bicycle racks on Metro Transit buses and trains has risen dramatically in just 18 months, a recent Metro Transit survey shows.

The increase in rack use is a sign that along with growing transit ridership, bicycling to work is on the rise in the Twin Cities. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, bicycle commuting grew by 49 percent in Minneapolis between 2006 and 2007. The city has the second highest bike commuting rate in the nation, just behind Portland, Oregon.



Every light-rail car has rack space for four bicycles.

Results from Metro Transit's survey, conducted in early fall, show that the number of bicycles loaded per trip on buses doubled since a similar survey was conducted in May 2007. On light rail, there was a 41% increase in bicycles loaded per trip over the same period.

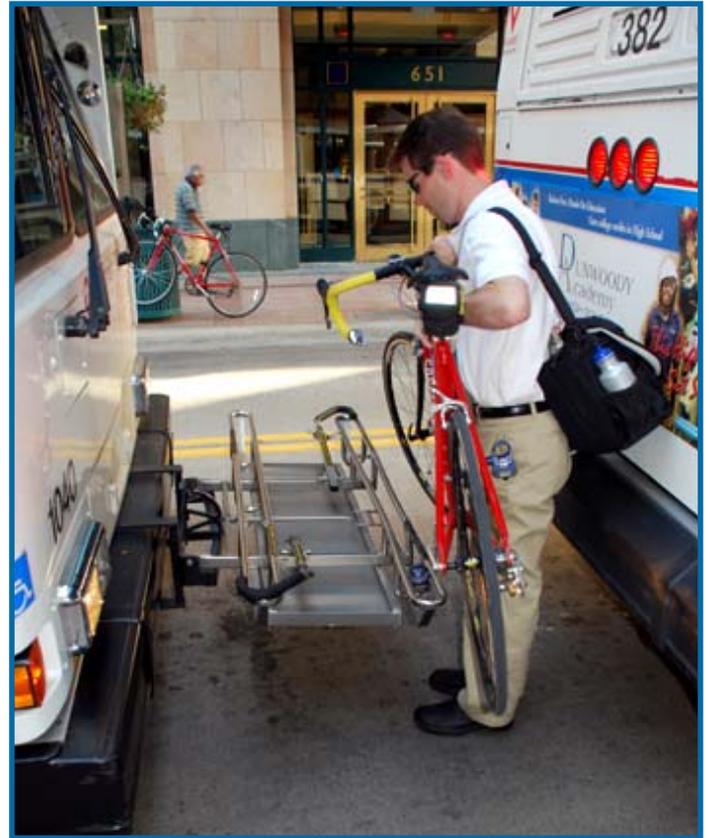
Bus drivers tallied each time a customer used a bicycle rack between Sept. 22 and Oct. 5. Results indicate that customers loaded 870 bicycles on buses on an average weekday, 586 on Saturdays and 378 on Sundays.

Surveyors counted bicycles being loaded and unloaded on Hiawatha light-rail trains during a similar study period (weekends were not included). On average, about 2.5 bicycles were loaded on each trip.

Commuters combine use of bicycles with transit

More commuters are combining their use of bicycles with trips on a Metro Transit bus or train to make the most of their options, said Metro Transit Market Development Specialist John Siqveland.

"By not relying strictly on bicycling or transit, commuters can increase the number of transit facilities accessible to them and can eliminate transfers," Siqveland said. "Combining modes can also give commuters more flexibility about their route and total trip time."



A commuter loads his bike onto a bus on Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis.

Nearly 82% of bus customers walk to their stop, he said. About 70% of these customers walk a half mile or less between their stop and final destination. "One can easily travel two miles or more by bicycle in the same time it takes to walk a half mile. Intermodal options provide for a much larger transit service area," he said.

For the first time, Metro Transit also recorded the number of intermodal travelers who were "bumped" because the bike rack on the bus was full. During the survey, customers encountered full racks on buses 485 times. When a bike rack is full, customers are asked to wait for the next bus.

"One use of this data is to identify choke points on bus routes that could indicate where Metro Transit, cities or other stakeholders might place additional bike lockers or racks to give intermodal commuters more options," Siqveland said. "The data also can help us target outreach to teach safe and proper use of racks."



Minnesota Public Transit Newsletter

In Transit newsletter is a bi-monthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA). Opinions expressed in this publication may not necessarily be those of the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

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Metropolitan Council Directions

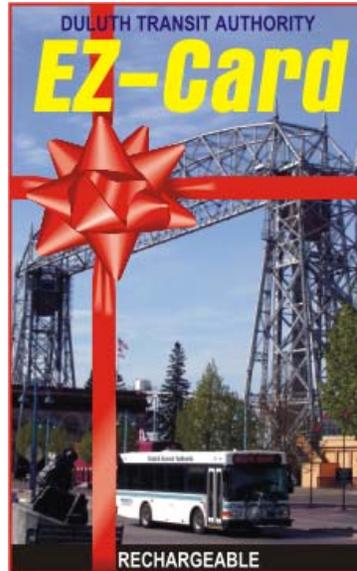
SEND NEWS

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DTA gives away free EZ-Cards in December to speed up boarding

DULUTH—In an effort to speed up the paying of fares and boarding of buses, the Duluth Transit Authority is giving away proximity-sensitive EZ-Cards for riders purchasing 31-Day Passes or Stored Value Cards at the Downtown Transit Center or the DTA Operations Center during the month of December.

Paying a fare with an EZ-Card is simple. Riders just need to “tap” the target on the fare-box with their EZ-Card to validate a ride. EZ-Cards kept in wallets or plastic holders will also validate rides when “tapped” or held within two inches of the farebox target.



EZ-Cards are rechargeable for continued use and can be recharged with any pass or stored value fare option.

Normally, the DTA charges \$2 for an EZ-Card; but is waving the fee during the month of December to promote the fare card medium and speed up passenger boardings.

EZ-Cards are made of durable plastic and have a three year life. EZ-Cards also provide improved security! Whenever an EZ-Card is lost or stolen, it can be replaced with the value remaining on the card at the time it was reported - providing the serial number was recorded.

The DTA is now transporting record numbers of riders and faster boarding of passengers will surely help buses maintain their schedules. The DTA marketed EZ-Cards as great Holiday gifts as well.



Bulletin Board

RTAP Training Classes

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) offers training in passenger assistance, defensive driving, abuse prevention along with refresher courses and training for newly hired employees. New hires should take the full eight hours of Passenger Assistance, four hours of Defensive Driving and four hours of Abuse Prevention. Refresher training should be taken once every three years after the initial new hire courses have been completed. Register for classes by completing the form posted on the Office of Transit’s web-site at: www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/Form/index.html. See RTAP training calendar at www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/rtaptrng.html.

For more information, contact RTAP Coordinator Lynn Frank at 651/366-4710 or lynn.frank@dot.state.mn.us.



Bridge the gap with
RTAP