



in transit

Minnesota Public Transit Association



St. Cloud Metro Bus dominates 2008 Statewide Bus Rodeo

BEMIDJI – The 2008 Minnesota Statewide Bus Rodeo, which was held in Bemidji on Saturday, July 19, had the most participants in the Rodeo's 21-year history with a record 63 contestants - 13 in the large bus division and 50 in the small bus division.

This annual event provides training, skill-enhancement and recognition for Minnesota's public bus operators. Drivers competed in one of two divisions, Small or Large Bus, where they navigate an obstacle course set up to simulate real-life driving challenges.

Rodeo participants also attended a special driver training course entitled "Commercial Driver's License: Want to Keep It?", which was delivered by STS Certified Transit Trainer, Kate Boelter of St. Cloud Metro Bus. The course covered state laws that apply to professional drivers with commercial driver's licences and educated drivers on how to maintain this licensing status.

The winner of the Large Bus Division was Duane Dufner of St. Cloud Metro Bus, with Darrell Hanson of Metro Transit placing second and Chuck Olmschenk of St. Cloud Metro Bus placing third.

The winner of the Small Bus Division was David Peacock of St. Cloud Metro Bus with Todd DeZurik of St. Cloud Metro Bus placing second and Alan Altepeter of Tri-Valley Heartland Express, Crookston, placing third. David Peacock, the first-place driver in the Small Bus Division, will represent Minnesota in the Community Transporta-

tion Association of America's National Bus Rodeo, which will be held in Rhode Island next spring.

Receiving the 2008 Driver's Choice Awards was Bob Arnold of Paul Bunyan Transit, Bemidji. The Driver's Choice Award is given each year to the Rodeo contestant who best demonstrates the spirit of the profession through their concern for their customers and community as well as a sense of sportsmanship and camaraderie they display during the competition. This award is determined entirely by contestant vote and is awarded to a driver only once in their career.

The Minnesota Statewide Bus Rodeo is organized by Mn/DOT's Office of Transit, Minnesota's Rural Transit Assistance Program and hosted by local transit agencies from across the state. The event is also supported by the Minnesota Public Transit Association.



2008 Rodeo winners (from left) Alan Altepeter, David Peacock, Todd DeZurik, Duane Dufner, Darrell Hanson, Chuck Olmschenk and Bob Arnold.



Driver's Choice Award recipient Bob Arnold (right) and Paul Bunyan Transit Manager Greg Negard.

2008 Minnesota Public Transit Conference



September 29 - October 1
St. Paul RiverCenter

“The Changing Environment -TRANSIT - Changing The Environment”.

Don't miss this year's information-packed, fun-filled event! Join your colleagues and learn more about the changing environment with public policy and transit financing. Sessions will focus on trends in public policy and transit financing and the ways in which transit service positively impacts our personal and natural environment. With a variety of topics to choose from and informative general sessions with colleagues, you will be inspired, informed and ready to make a difference.

Keynote Speakers

Welcome & Opening Remarks

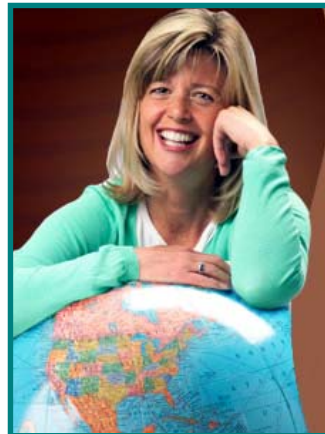
Sue Thomas

Staying In the Race



Captivating her audiences and leaving them speechless is the trademark of Sue Thomas. Profoundly deaf since the age of 18 months, Sue spent years with therapists to develop her voice and in the process became an expert lip-reader in order to communicate with the hearing world around her. Inspired by Sue's unique job at the FBI headquarters in Washington DC, doing undercover surveillance by lip-reading, in 2002 her speaking platform went international with the release of the TV series, SUE THOMAS: FBEYE.

Today her dynamic spirit cannot be contained in her silent world and reaches out to break the Sound Barrier with widely diversified audiences worldwide. Her humor is contagious and her stories are compelling. When she is not traveling and speaking, Sue Thomas lives in the quiet hills of Vermont with her Special Skills/Hearing Dog, Katie. Besides her best-selling autobiography, "Silent Night", she is working on several other writing projects, and is in the development stages of EPEC, a service dog training facility, as well as a silent retreat, 'A Place of Streams. Today, besides her deafness, she also walks with Multiple Sclerosis. When asked what her greatest accomplishment has been, she answers, "Simply staying in the race."



Closing Remarks

Kim Carlson

Final Session Luncheon

Kim Carlson's passion for the planet has led her to become an eco-savvy entrepreneur, green business author and an eco-chic life-style expert. She practices what she preaches - Except she doesn't really preach. She enthuses!

Kim's real world expertise in all things green has made her a popular keynote speaker and green business consultant to corporations, universities, governments and consumer groups. Kim uses her media appearances as the EarthSmart Expert on NBC television to convey the myriad pleasures of a planet-friendly life-style, touching upon topics ranging from stylish organic entertaining to nontoxic gardening and eco-golf. Kim can be seen and heard as a frequent eco-expert on national talk radio and television reaching an audience of over 17 million in 2007. She has been the host of the weekly national radio program, Living The Green Life and Public Television specials on earth-friendly topics. Kim currently is a regular guest writer for The Minneapolis Star Tribune Newspaper's Saturday Home Section and contributes green content to national magazines such as Self, Health, Shape, Natural Health, Cooking Light, Bride & Groom, Experience Life, and Midwest Home. For more about Kim Carlson visit www.earthsmartconsumer.com.

From the President



Tony Kellen, President
Minnesota Public Transit Association
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The Minnesota Public Transit Association is busy working for you as we gear up for the Annual Public Transit Conference and start looking toward the 2009 Legislative Session.

This year's Minnesota Public Transit Conference promises to be a huge event with inspiring speakers, great networking opportunities and an impressive vendor exhibition that will showcase products

and services of value to transit systems statewide. It's an important time to "think green" and our conference agenda will focus on the important role that transit plays in improving not only the physical environment but the community environment as well. Transit service is an important tool in reducing emissions and our reliance on foreign oil. Sessions at the conference will explore strategies for publicizing the many benefits of transit service.

MPTA will also be playing a role in advocating for adequate federal transit funding. We're at a critical moment with the Highway Account of the Federal Highway Trust Fund facing a deficit and the current transportation authorization bill (SAFETEA-LU) set to expire next year. It will take a strong advocacy effort to keep transit a high priority during the Congressional debate. With gas tax revenues declining, funding will be a challenge for the next six-year authorization bill and we will need to be vocal if we are to continue to receive the federal transit funding we all rely upon.

Thanks to a grant from the American Public Transportation Association, members of MPTA will be helping to highlight the need for federal and state transit funding. We received funding for the Association to raise the awareness of transit service availability and funding issues through local media. It's an important time to make local transit service more visible.

As we head into the fall, we also need to remember that there is a big election coming up in November. Decisions about transit funding will be made by the people who are elected to office this fall. They need to know where transit service operates in Minnesota and the critical role it plays in allowing people to get around and live their lives. Take some time to educate folks in your communities about transit service and let them know it's an important issue for candidates to address to all levels of government.

Minnesota Public Transit Association



2008 Transportation Forums - Meet the Candidates

Meetings run from 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. with lunch. Costs vary depending on location. Register at:
www.transportationalliance.com

Rochester – Monday, September 8

Ramada – 1517 16th Street S.W. – Cost: \$20.00

Alexandria – Tuesday, September 16

Holiday Inn – 5637 Highway 29 South – Cost: \$15.00

St. Cloud – Monday, September 22

Best Western Kelly Inn – 100 Fourth Avenue South – Cost: \$20.00

Mankato – Tuesday, September 23

Holiday Inn – 101 E. Main Street – Cost: \$15.00

Worthington – Thursday, September 25

Travelodge – 2015 Humiston Avenue – Cost: \$15.00

Cambridge – Monday, September 29

Minnco Center – 236 Second Ave. SW – Cost: \$15.00

Blaine – Tuesday, October 7

National Sports Center – 1700 – 105th Avenue NE – Cost: \$20.00

Bloomington – Thursday, October 9

Comfort Inn Airport – 1321 E. 78th Street – Cost: \$20.00

Woodbury – Tuesday, October 14

Country Inn by Carlson – 6003 Hudson Road – Cost: \$20.00

Special Evening Meeting:

Eagan – Thursday, September 18 – 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Eagan Community Center – 1501 Central Parkway



Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe
Legislative Director
Minnesota Transportation Alliance

While rising gas prices have attracted more people to transit service in an effort to save money, high fuel prices have also meant that transit systems need to pay much more to keep the buses rolling. When you add in the fact that revenue from the sales tax on motor vehicles (MVST) has not been generated at the levels anticipated, budget problems are the result.

For Metropolitan Area Transit, an operating shortfall has led to the decision to increase fares. After holding a series of public hearings on its proposal, the Metropolitan Council approved a plan to increase regular-route fares by 25 cents starting October 1. At the same time, an increase of 50 cents for Metro Mobility service will also take effect. New cash fares will be \$1.75, \$2.25, or \$3 depending upon the type of service and the time of day. Metro Mobility fares will be \$4 during weekday rush hours and \$3 at other times. One part of the original plan was not adopted: extending the morning rush hour by one-half hour so that the rush hour fares would have kicked in at 5:30 a.m.

The Council also approved a second fare increase, if needed, to take effect sometime in 2009, that would allow for an increase of up to another 50 cents depending on the cost of fuel and other economic factors. Even with fare increases, officials say additional state funding will be needed to close the gap on projected shortfalls in the future. The fare increase addresses about one-half of the expected regional transit shortfall for 2009 of \$15 million. This shortfall would have been higher without a \$31 million appropriation from the new metro county

sales tax that was contained in the 2008 Transportation Funding bill. The fare increase will also help with a future anticipated shortfall in 2010 and 2011 which has been estimated at closer to \$50 million for the two-year period. The fare increase will be implemented by all service providers including Metro Transit, Metro Mobility, suburban transit providers and dial-a-ride and other contracted services.

Some transit systems in Greater Minnesota are also contemplating fare increases or have recently enacted fare increases in order to address increased operating costs. Unfortunately, higher fares often hurt ridership and there is a real limit as to how much of the burden can be borne by farebox recovery. It's a sad irony that as more and more people are interested in trying transit service due to high gas prices, transit systems are being forced to raise fares to deal with budget shortfalls.

Legislative support for transit will be critical during the 2009 Legislative Session. Additional funding is clearly needed to keep Metropolitan Area Transit service at current levels. However, a projected deficit in the state's general fund will make it difficult for the legislature to find additional operating dollars. Agency staff are already busy looking in every nook and cranny for any funds that can be tapped to close the budget deficit in the general fund. That means all transit systems could be at risk for losing funds. Greater Minnesota transit received additional funding in the 2008 Transportation Funding bill through a statutory dedication of the sales tax on leased vehicles, and a statutory dedication can always be changed by future legislatures.

As always, it's extremely important for transit advocates to keep communicating with elected officials and advocating for the transit service that thousands of Minnesotans rely on every day to live their lives.



Minnesota Public Transit Association





Met Council approves transit fare increase

METRO – The Metropolitan Council has approved an increase in transit fares that will go into effect beginning this fall.

An increase of 25 cents on regular-route service goes into effect October 1. At the same time, an increase of 50 cents on Metro Mobility service for people with disabilities will also take effect.

New cash fares will be \$1.75, \$2.25 or \$3 depending on the type of service and time of day. Metro Mobility fares will be \$4 during weekday rush hours and \$3 at other times.

The Council, however, did not support extending the morning rush-hour by one-half hour, so that rush hour fares would have begun at 5:30 a.m.

“The longer morning rush-hour was a sticking point among people who are transit dependent, and who felt it would impose particular hardship upon lower-income customers,” said Council Chair Peter Bell. “We felt this was an area where we were able to exercise some flexibility.”

The Council also approved a second fare increase, if needed, to take effect sometime in 2009, adding up to another 50 cents

to the cost of a bus, train or Metro Mobility ride, depending on the cost of fuel and other economic factors. Council officials have indicated there will be opportunity for additional public input in advance of a second increase, if another increase is deemed necessary.

The need for a fare increase was announced in June, followed by public hearings and meetings in July. More than 400 public comments were received from people who attended the public sessions or submitted comments by other means, including email, fax, phone messages and mail.

“No one particularly relishes the idea of higher fares, least of all the Council—given growing transit ridership,” said Bell. “But it’s safe to say people understand what it means when we experience rising fuel costs and lower than expected revenues from the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax.

Even with the fare increase, agency officials say Legislative support will be needed to close the gap on projected shortfalls in the future. The fare increase addresses about half the expected regional transit shortfall for 2009 of \$15 million, a deficit that would have been higher without a \$31 million infusion from the county sales tax the Legislature approved this year. The fare increase will also help to lower an anticipated shortfall in 2010 and 2011, which combined, was projected to be closer to \$70 million.

The fare increase will be implemented by all service providers, including Metro Transit, the region’s largest provider of transit service, Metro Mobility, suburban transit providers, and dial-a-ride and other contacted service.

Tri-CAP opens new building with ribbon-cutting ceremony

ST. CLOUD – Tri-County Action Program, Inc. (Tri-CAP) officially cut the ribbon on their new building at 1200 23rd Avenue South in Waite Park on June 19th. This building houses the Tri-CAP Transit Connection & Volunteer Driver Program and the Transportation Resource Center.

Tri-CAP began providing bus services in 1975 with a grant through the Older Americans Act and evolved to public transit in 1980. In the 30 plus years since starting bus service there have been a lot of changes. Under the current plan, Tri-CAP operates public bus transit in rural Benton, Morrison & Stearns Counties for people of all ages.



Pictured at the ribbon cutting celebrating the building acquisition and 800 square foot addition are from left to right, Paula Erdmann, Tri-CAP Executive Director; Mike Schadauer, MN Dot; Nancy Betts, Transportation Advisory Committee Vice Chair; Todd Malcolm, Tri-CAP Board Chair; Linda Elfstrand, Transportation Director.



DTA ridership up 12 percent for first 6 months of 2008

DULUTH – Duluth Transit Authority system-wide ridership increased by 6 percent in 2007 and for the first six months of 2008, ridership continues an upward swing in both Duluth and Superior. Ridership during the first six months of 2008 showed a 12 percent increase of 165,966 rides over the first six months of 2007.

DTA ridership for the first six months of 2008 totaled 1,544,619 and is on pace to top the 3 million rider mark this year.

DTA ridership for 2007 was 2,843,240 and this upward trend in ridership is expected to continue due to high gas prices and inflation.

The additional passenger revenue generated from increased ridership has been offset by the increase in the price of diesel fuel. For the first six months of 2008, the DTA paid an average of \$1.06 more per gallon compared to fuel purchased in the first six months of 2007. The DTA purchases an average of 35,000 gallons of bio-diesel fuel per month.

New station ramp expands capacity along Hiawath Line

BLOOMINGTON– August 11th marked the grand opening for a new five-level parking ramp in Bloomington – helping to increase parking capacity along the Hiawatha light-rail line and making it easier and more convenient for customers to park and ride. The \$16.5 million facility at the 28th Avenue Station has approximately 1,450 parking spaces and is Metro Transit’s largest parking facility.

Construction on the new ramp was completed last month and took just over a year. The new parking structure replaces a 350-space surface parking lot on the south side of the station, which was filled to capacity on weekdays and during special events in downtown Minneapolis.

“The surface parking lot was over capacity for about three years,” said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb. “We’re already seeing the popularity of this new ramp. In fact, well over 500 customers used the new facility when it first opened for business on July 22.”

With the addition of the ramp, there are approximately 2,800 free parking spaces along the Hiawatha Line. The new structure also includes 2,000 square feet of retail space that

will be leased at a later date. There also is a plaza area between the parking ramp and light rail station.

The project is a collaboration of the Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit and the City of Bloomington. The contractor was Knutson Construction Services, Inc. of Rochester.

It was financed through an arrangement with Bloomington Port Authority, which issued bonds for construction. The Metropolitan Council will make lease payments to the Port Authority to pay for the bonds. Once the bonds are paid off in 2009, the Met Council will own the parking ramp.

MVTA reports ridership milestone

BURNSVILLE – The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) experienced a ridership milestone in June 2008, by providing an average of more than 10,000 rides each weekday during the month. This brings the year-to-date ridership to 1,282,672, which is more than the total numbers of riders transported in all of 1996.

"This is a very significant milestone," said MVTA Board Chair Elizabeth Kautz, who is also the Mayor of Burnsville. "This means the MVTA has doubled our ridership in less than 12 years, while the region is focusing on doubling ridership every 20-25 years."

"Ridership continues on a record pace," MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller reported. "We are up about five percent over the same period last year, and are only restricted by the capacity of our vehicles and our park & ride facilities." She reported many standing loads on buses, as riders turn to alternatives to the high gas prices. While it is an excellent time for transit, she said, "It also presents challenges as we don't have funding to add vehicles at this time. We continue to seek alternatives to help with the load levels."

Additionally, the MVTA is looking ahead to 2009 and beyond when Bus Rapid Transit begins in the I-35 and Cedar Avenue corridors. This will provide additional opportunities for area residents to use transit.

Finally, the MVTA is looking ahead to the 2008 Minnesota State Fair, and expects record ridership on the weekday and weekend buses. Weekdays, buses will operate from the Burnsville High School (600 E. Highway 13) and the Burnsville Transit Station (Highway 13 & Nicollet Avenue) every hour. Weekends, buses will operate every 30 minutes from the Burnsville Transit Station and the Eagan Transit Station (Pilot Knob & Yankee Doodle Roads). "We expect our State Fair Ridership to reflect the same pattern our regular ridership has," said MVTA Customer Relations Manager Robin Selvig. "We expect to see many people taking the bus as a way to combat the cost of driving. We hope that's the case."





Metro Bus to change ADA Specialized Service eligibility process

ST. CLOUD – A public hearing to present and discuss proposed changes to the St. Cloud Metro Bus Dial-a-Ride ADA Specialized Service eligibility process was held on August 7th. The changes are designed to alleviate capacity constraints and trip denials to improve access for users in compliance with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations. St. Cloud Metro Bus commissioners heard praise for the current service and listened to the concerns of riders at the hearing before voting for its approval on August 19th.

"Our goal is to have a fair and compliant Specialized Services ADA Eligibility process in place to ensure that rides are available for those who truly need the service," said Terry Markfort, Dial-a-Ride Services Manager. "The new process also will help reduce ride denials because of capacity issues and control the growth of the service."

The changes include:

- Revised application, which no longer requires doctor's approval
- New in-person interview, which may include cognitive and/or functional assessments
- Two certification categories: conditional and unconditional
- Optional free travel training to learn how to use the fixed route system and a community outreach program (via a New Freedom grant from Mn/DOT)
- Current users will need to go through re-certification process under new rules



The Sauk Rapids City Hall Community Room was filled with residents sharing concerns and praise about St. Cloud Metro Bus Dial-a-Ride. The public hearing was held to present proposed changes to the Specialized Service eligibility process.

Cambridge Fire Hall becomes new Heartland Express transit center

Jackie Forner
Transportation Director
Chisago Heartland Express

CAMBRIDGE – Finally after 6 months of remodeling, the old Cambridge Fire Hall was transformed into the new Heartland Express Transit Center. This project received funding through FTA and was an earmark from Congressman James Oberstar. Although the process felt cumbersome at times, the final outcome was well worth it. A huge thank you goes out the Isanti County Board of Commissioners who supported this project from the very beginning and Chisago County Commissioners for their contribution to this project.

Moving day was on July 8 and everything went smoothly. Within the week all the boxes had been unpacked (well maybe we have one or two left over). We are proud that there was never an interruption of service. This Transit Center also has 6 garage bays for both storage of our vehicles and maintenance. To that end, we hired our first ever Mechanic and started servicing our own vehicle in mid-July. Already we can start to see a cost savings.

In August, under an agreement with the City of Cambridge, three of five bus shelters purchased through the JARC grant and with the help and support of St. Cloud Metro Bus, were installed in the City of Cambridge. One of those is located right outside our front door. Passengers are pleased with the new shelters; they now know where to wait for the bus.

We have scheduled an Open House and Official Ribbon Cutting ceremony for Wednesday, October 15 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend. We are located at 245 2nd Avenue SE, Cambridge, MN 55008. We are one block south of Hwy. 95 (west side of Railroad tracks) on corner of Buchanan Street and 2nd Avenue SE.



Newly remodeled Chisago County Heartland Express Transit Center



Metro Transit workers approve 2-year deal with pay raise

METRO –Metro Transit bus drivers, light-rail operators, mechanics and office workers accepted a new two-year contract by the Metropolitan Council on August 5.

About 83 percent of the Amalgamated Transit Union 1005, which represents about 2,200 workers, approved the new deal.

The agreement gives the workers a pay raise of about 2.25 percent next month and another 2 percent raise next year, as well as wage-class improvements for mechanics and dispatchers.

In addition, bus drivers who work between 8 p.m. and 3 a.m. will get a 50-cent pay shift differential.

"We think it's a deal the membership can live with," said union President Michelle Sommers of the pact, which expires in 2010.

Metro Transit workers last went on strike in 2004, when they were off the job for six weeks.

The new deal arrives as Metro Transit is experiencing a spike in ridership.

Metro Transit ridership up 7.9 percent through June

METRO –If the positive trend for ridership continues, Metro Transit could be looking at another record-breaking year. For the first half of the year, customers boarded Metro Transit buses and trains 39.7 million times. That's 7.9 percent, or 2.9 million rides, higher than the same period last year.

Metro Transit finished 2007 with 77 million rides, the highest annual ridership total since 1982. Metro Transit has a ridership goal of 78 million rides this year.

"When we set our ridership goal for 2008 in mid-2007, we felt confident that we would reach 78 million rides," said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb. "Now the question is how many million rides above our goal will we be by the end of the year."

The agency recorded increases in all major service categories for the first six months of 2008, led by a 16.2 percent increase in riders on the Hiawatha light-rail line. Through June, ridership on Hiawatha was at 4.6 million.

Ridership on urban local services was up 9 percent. Those customers logged 29.5 million rides through June. In addition, express bus ridership was up 8.7 percent, and suburban local ridership saw an increase of 7.6 percent.

Customers who participate in three fare pass programs – Metropass, U-Pass and Go-To College Pass – also contributed to Metro Transit's strong results.

Through June, Metro Transit recorded 3.9 million rides from customers who use a Metropass, a transit pass that employers provide, often picking up all or part of the cost for their employees. That change represents a 19.6 percent increase over the same time last year.

Ridership by University of Minnesota students using U-Passes was 27.7 percent higher than the first six months of last year. Go-To College Pass use by students at participating colleges, universities and trade schools was up 300 percent.

Metro Bus ridership up 14.3 percent through June

ST. CLOUD –Like many transit systems throughout the nation, ridership has spiked at St. Cloud Metro Bus. Comparing the first six months of 2007 to 2008, ridership is up 14.3 percent. It is projected to increase even more before the year is through.

In July, ridership reached a record high with a 30.1 percent increase from the previous year.

"In my 28 years of working in transit, I've never seen a single month with that large of an increase," said David Tripp, St. Cloud Metro Bus executive director. "And, it happened when St. Cloud State University wasn't in its regular nine-month session."

Reasons for the shift go beyond increasing gas prices. St. Cloud Metro Bus implemented the new "Route 75" in January and started Sunday fixed route service in May. They also started a special Late Nite route for St. Cloud State University students.

Of the 134,000 additional trips taken in the first half of the year, Sunday Service accounted for just under 10,000 of them, Late Nite nearly 8,000 and Route 75 just over 7,200.

"We are meeting the needs of our customers in an economical way," said Tripp. "By adding a fixed route to an area formerly served by our Dial-a-Ride program, we reduce our overall cost of providing service while increasing capacity to provide rides for the general public and people with disabilities."

St. Cloud Metro Bus was able to implement Route 75 and Sunday service using a JARC grant from Mn/DOT. Late Night service is 100 percent funded by St. Cloud State University (SCSU) students. Late Nite was so well received that the SCSU approved expenditures for another year of service.



Transit in the News

MVTA prepares for opening of Cedar Avenue BRT

BURNSVILLE – The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) began its promotion of the new Cedar Avenue BRT Line with the introduction of a bus wrapped to display the line. The bus made its launch during – Hop on Transit Day – in the Minnesota State Fair Parade.

“We wanted to help people begin to identify with the line,” said MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller. “The graphic we are using is dramatic and displays the location of the five stations/stops along the line, and offers a sense of speed in traveling between these locations and the transfer point at the Mall of America.”

The wrap was designed by Rick Schuster of Think Graphic Design. “The image visually suggests some of the advantages of BRT” he said, continuing “the speed and simplicity of the line, the rail-like operation with a single route and limited stops at dedicated stations — while also representing the connections that the BRT line will make through the communities served.”

“The changes that are forthcoming on the Cedar Avenue corridor are significant,” said MVTA Board Chair and Burnsville Mayor Elizabeth Kautz. “We are constructing stations and stops at Cedar Grove, in the area of 140th St., in the area of 147th St. and at the site adjacent to the existing Apple Valley Transit Station. A station in Lakeville, at 179th & Cedar, is also planned.”

This is the second time that the MVTA has wrapped buses to commemorate the opening of a line. The first was to commemorate the opening of the Hiawatha Light-Rail Line, where the MVTA wrapped two buses to look like the original Hiawatha train that operated between Minneapolis-St. Paul and Chicago by the Milwaukee Road. This time, four buses are being wrapped to operate in the Cedar Avenue Corridor (Routes 442, 445), as well as to draw attention to new express service between downtown Rosemount and downtown Minneapolis (Route 479).

The MVTA also partnered with 3M in using a reflective wrap to make the buses “pop” during the evening hours when the buses are on the road, according to Marv Olson, sales representative for 3M.

The reflective vinyl wrap affixed to the two Gillig and two New Flyer transit buses is expected to last for about 2-3 years. Until the actual service begins, the buses will be marked “Arriving Soon.”

The MVTA operates a fleet of 112 buses of varying sizes and manufacturers. The MVTA is the public transportation provider for the businesses and residents of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, Rosemount and Savage.





Metro Transit launches “Nextrip” information tool

MINNEAPOLIS –Transit customers in the Twin Cities now can use NexTrip, a new tool launched by Metro Transit in July, to check departure times of buses – down to the minute.

NexTrip provides real-time departure and schedule information to customers through Metro Transit’s website (metrotransit.org), by phone or at select transit stops in the Twin Cities. Customers also can access NexTrip with hand-held devices like Blackberries.

Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb today demonstrated the new technology at the Commuter Connection resource store in downtown Minneapolis.

“NexTrip is an important enhancement to our customer service efforts,” said Lamb. “By leveraging technology we already have in place, we can provide amenities like NexTrip to give our customers even greater confidence in the reliability of their service.”

Customers can access NexTrip by clicking on the tab next to the Quick Trip Planner on Metro Transit’s home page. To get real-time departure information, customers select their route, the direction they are traveling and their closest transit stop. If a trip is leaving that stop in the next 20 minutes, NexTrip shows the departure times. It also shows schedules for trips leaving beyond the 20-minute window.

Real-time information is generated from an automatic vehicle location (AVL) bus-tracking system. AVL systems use global positioning satellites to monitor the location of buses as they travel Twin Cities streets, sending location updates every 60 seconds by wireless technology to a central database. NexTrip accesses this database and compares schedule information with the vehicle’s predicted travel time to determine real-time information.

Metro Transit began testing the online version of NexTrip in April, inviting early adopters to use the feature and provide feedback.

The real-time technology is used in other ways to get real-time and schedule information to customers. Customers can call 612-373-3333 to access real-time information by phone. The phone system has voice recognition, so customers can say selected commands rather than pressing buttons on a touch-tone phone.

NexTrip signs are available at Uptown Transit Center and at the park-and-ride lot at I-394 and County Road 73. More signs are planned as part of the Urban Partnership Agreement project that will help relieve congestion in and along the I-35W and Cedar Avenue corridors.

Minnesota Partnership for Safe Mobility selected to receive federal assistance for senior mobility initiative

MINNESOTA–The Minnesota Partnership for Safe Mobility (MPSM) has been selected by the National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST) as one of six transit initiatives to receive training and funds toward developing a state-wide older driver action plan that includes alternative transportation systems. MPSM is a collaboration of 16 public, nonprofit, and academic experts whose mission is to “influence policy, create new initiatives, and promote research to improve the safety and mobility of Minnesota’s aging population.”

Ten MPSM members will meet in Dallas in September to begin the work with five other states. Each state will receive \$5,000 to implement their action plan as well as on-going technical assistance. The Minnesota MPSM team includes staff from DARTS, the Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging, Mn/DOT Offices of Transit, the Department of Motor Vehicles and Public Safety, the State Highway Patrol and the MN Dept. of Health. DARTS will be the lead agency and fiscal agent for plan implementation.

NCST, in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), solicited proposals for comprehensive older driver safety plans that were unified in approach and inclusive of alternative transportation systems. NCST and its partner organizations will assist states in coordinating local organizations, in addressing older driver obstacles, and in providing transportation alternatives in urban and rural locations.

By 2030, Minnesota’s population of persons over age 65 will grow to 1.2 million and the related proportion of drivers will grow rapidly as well. In 2006, 14.7 percent of licensed Minnesota drivers were over age 65 and licensed drivers 85+ has risen 28.7 percent since 2001. In 2006, older drivers were involved in only 7 percent of all traffic accidents in Minnesota, but accounted for 17 percent of all traffic fatalities. This points to the need for good multi-disciplinary planning that keeps older drivers safely driving and assists in transitioning them from the car to alternatives when they are more at risk and can longer drive.



Cut transit fare to 25 cents

by Senator John Marty

July 21, 2008

METRO — \$4 per gallon gas is causing great hardship, but Minnesota can turn that problem into an opportunity to protect the environment, reduce traffic congestion, and help low and middle income people cope, simply by substantially cutting public transit fares.

Unfortunately, just when we should be increasing bus and rail ridership, the Metropolitan Council proposes to move us in the opposite direction by raising fares. Boosting fares reduces ridership, while cutting fares increases it.

The Met Council's decision to raise fares due to higher fuel prices and insufficient funding is not surprising, but it is disappointing. When these higher fares reduce the number of riders, it simultaneously increases the number of auto trips, which in turn produces more congestion and wear and tear on roads.

What if we tried a bold new approach to transit and transportation issues? Imagine what would happen if we reduced all transit fares to 25 cents per ride. Experience from around the country shows that ridership would soar. The biggest problem with such a change would be that Minnesota's transit systems would be unable to handle all the passengers.

Too many transit riders? If we are concerned about too many cars on the road and the congestion and environmental harm from those cars, this sharp increase in bus and rail passengers is a problem we'd love to have. Transit systems would need to add routes and increase frequency. And with more routes and more frequent service, ridership would increase even more.

The Twin Cities, where three quarters of the population lives in the suburbs, lacks sufficient suburb-to-suburb transit. One creative constituent proposed to the Met Council that we add a series of bus routes on the I-494/694 beltway. During rush hour they could use the freeway shoulders to bypass congestion.

Additional transit corridors and more frequent service would be needed throughout the state. As new buses are added, the use of hybrid and clean fuel technology would provide even greater environmental benefits.

This proposal would require a significant increase in state support for transit systems to make up for their lost fare revenue and higher costs. But it would be the least expen-

sive way to handle growing congestion and reduce auto emissions.

The cost is not as much as some would think. Cutting fares for Metro Transit from the current \$1.50 - \$2.75 down to a flat 25 cent fare for buses and LRT would obviously reduce fare box revenue. But the public already pays well over three-fourths of the cost of the transit system, so lower fares take away only a small portion of the revenue. In fact, with the jump in ridership, the public cost of each individual ride would drop significantly. (A bus or rail car costs virtually the same amount to operate whether it has fifteen or fifty passengers.)

Alternatives to this proposal are not cheap. The Met Council's proposed fare increase is projected to bring in about \$7 million more per year. Even so, they project a revenue shortage of \$30 to \$40 million per year by 2011. On top of that, the cost of expanding roads and highways to handle the growing congestion has a price tag in the billions, not the millions that transit improvements and fare cuts would require. Also, this cost analysis excludes the environmental costs of driving more cars and building more roads. The 25 cent fare proposal would ultimately save taxpayers money.

There are other benefits of the 25 cent fare. It would provide much-needed savings for low-income people struggling with high food and energy costs. The enhanced service to handle the surge in passengers would make it easier for seniors and others who rely on transit to get to their doctor, the store, their church or wherever they need to go.

The Met Council has the unbelievably timid goal of doubling transit ridership by 2030. Under that scenario, the increase in riders wouldn't even keep up with population growth and road congestion would continue to get worse. Minnesota's transit systems are already behind those in many other states and further yet behind those in other countries.

If we follow this bold vision instead, we can make things better, likely doubling ridership in four years. And then doubling it again four years later.

The Met Council is headed in the wrong direction. They should cancel the fare increase now, and prepare to go to the legislature in January to get funding to cut fares.

To prime this discussion I introduced legislation, Senate File 3888, which would establish a flat 25 cent fare for bus and rail in public transit systems in communities throughout Minnesota. This legislation would not solve our transportation woes, but it would be a big step forward.





Transit in the News

Central Corridor LRT Update



City of St. Paul considers parking management strategies after Central Corridor LRT is built

The city of St. Paul is exploring using metered and time-restricted parking and enforcement of parking regulations to promote frequent turnover of parking spots once the Central Corridor LRT line is built. For more information about these strategies, visit the Hot Topics section in the top left corner of the Central Corridor LRT Project's home page at <http://www.metrocouncil.org/transportation/ccorridor/centralcorridor.htm>. The city identified these potential next steps after the LRT project's parking analysis showed new surface lots on University Avenue are unlikely because ample parking exists, the city's development strategy discourages them and that building parking lots would require property acquisition. The project's study found 15,300 parking spaces within one block of University, while a 2006 study by the city found 25,000 spaces in private lots within a quarter mile of the seven LRT stations in St. Paul. Also, 560 on-street parking spots were identified on north-south cross streets within a block of the corridor. Of University's 1,150 existing on-street parking spots, 175 will remain once the LRT line is built. Mandatory features, such as station platforms, took away 625 spots, while highly desirable features requested by the public, such as non-signalized pedestrian crossings, eliminated 250 spots. Forty spots were lost due to requests for secondary station access. Expanding station platforms to accommodate three-car trains in the future took out 20 spots, and 40 spaces were removed to minimize lane transitions.

Converting outer lanes on University Ave. for parking would result in congestion, failing intersections

Converting University Avenue's outer lanes for on-street parking during standard business hours would cause traffic congestion and intersection failures, according to a study by Central Corridor LRT Project engineers. They are working with the city of St. Paul and Ramsey County to determine if on-street parking should be allowed after 7 p.m. The study plotted hourly traffic volumes for five segments on University between Highway 280 and Rice Street to determine when two lanes in each direction are necessary. During standard business hours, volumes were greater than 700 vehicles an hour, the threshold for two lanes each way.

Testing shows vibration can be mitigated at churches, broadcast stations, university research facilities

Vibrations impacts from Central Corridor LRT trains can be mitigated at four University of Minnesota research facilities, KSTP-TV, Minnesota Public Radio and Central Presbyterian Church and the Church of St. Louis King of France in downtown St. Paul, according to a study for the Central Corridor LRT Project. Resilient track fasteners installed during construction can mitigate vibration impacts at all locations, except the university's Hasselmo Hall Nuclear Magnetic

Resonance facility where a floating concrete slab would be required under the track. These techniques have been used elsewhere around the country to mitigate vibration impacts. Field testing was performed in May following Federal Transit Administration guidelines.

Newest outreach coordinator is fluent in Vietnamese
Hue Pham, who speaks Vietnamese in addition to English, replaces Nkongo Cigolo as outreach coordinator, representing the Snelling and Lexington station areas. Cigolo resigned earlier this year to help his family in Africa recover from a series of earthquakes. Pham, an Augsburg College business administration graduate, has worked at the Children's Home Society Family Services managing its Vietnam and Thailand programs. Previous work experience includes management positions at AT&T Corp., IBM and as a Wilder Foundation consultant. Pham can be reached at 651-602-1559 or hue.pham@metc.state.mn.us

Regents OK agreement for Washington Avenue transit/pedestrian mall traffic mitigation

Regents for the University of Minnesota have approved a memorandum of understanding on \$27 million in traffic mitigation, including \$11.1 million for converting Washington Avenue into a transit/pedestrian mall. The MOU also includes \$5.1 million for East Bank campus area street connections and funding for modifying some intersections. In addition to Central Corridor project funding, the Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority, city of Minneapolis and university agreed to seek funding outside of the project costs for these betterments. "We're confident that with these mitigations and community betterments, this new light rail line will be a positive addition to our campus and the backbone of a modern regional transit system," University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks said.

Preliminary designs for Central Corridor unanimously approved

The cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis and the Ramsey and Hennepin county boards have unanimously approved preliminary design plans for the Central Corridor LRT Project. The plans show the location of track, roads, turn lanes, sidewalks, curbs and gutters, bus stops, crosswalks, proposed on-street parking spaces, traffic signals, station platforms and existing conditions.



Hennepin County studies options for Bottineau Transitway

Hennepin County is conducting a detailed alternatives analysis to determine if investing in light-rail transit (LRT) or bus-rapid transit (BRT) is feasible in the Bottineau Corridor study area.

The analysis will determine which transit mode is best suited for the corridor as well as the best location for a transitway alignment. When complete in summer 2009, the analysis will provide comparisons of various BRT and LRT options and a base line bus alternative. Commuter rail was studied in the preliminary phase of the analysis, but is recommended for elimination.

Hennepin County and the Metropolitan Council had planned to implement

BRT in the Bottineau Corridor study area, which parallels Bottineau Boulevard (Cty. Rd. 81) in a north-westerly direction out of Minneapolis. But a variety of factors led to reconsideration of this choice, including changing attitudes toward transit in the region, the overwhelming popularity of Hiawatha LRT, and recent development growth in the study area.

Bottineau Transitway Alternatives Analysis Study Area



Bottineau is one of five corridors identified as a "Tier 1" transitway in the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan, adopted in 2004. A transitway is a premium transit service offering improvements in service and speed, which may include dedicated right-of-way.

A 2008 study of the regional transit system by the Metropolitan Council evaluated the potential of more than two dozen transit corridors in the region and confirmed Bottineau's strong transitway potential. The study indicates that the density of existing and projected population and jobs in the Bottineau Corridor may support the development of LRT as part of a region-wide transitway system plan. The study's recommendations will likely carry into the Council's policy plan update late this year.

Population, jobs are growing in the corridor

Residents of the corridor got a chance to look at and comment on the preliminary options during a series of open houses held by the county in late July at five locations dispersed along the corridor.

At the Sumner Library open house in north Minneapolis, project officials talked about the corridor. "A lot is happening in the Bottineau Corridor," said Joe Gladke, Manager of Engineering and Transit Planning for the county. He cited the corridor's strong population and job growth, highlighting Maple Grove at the northwest end of the corridor, as well as Target's corporate offices in Brooklyn Park.

The growth has led to an increase in traffic congestion, according to Joe Kern, who is leading the technical analysis team for SRF Consulting, the firm Hennepin County has hired to perform the alternatives analysis. Another reason to take a look at a dedicated transitway investment is that \$4 per gallon gas is creating "a growing demand for travel options," Gladke said. And in order to obtain federal "New Starts" funding for the transitway, an alternatives analysis is required, he said.

Either BRT or LRT would differ from a typical bus route because the stations are further apart, a dedicated transitway is faster and more reliable, and improved vehicles and amenities enhance the customer experience. "We're looking at the super-highway of transit," Gladke said.

Residents weigh in on route options

The county will evaluate LRT and BRT on two trunk alignments through Robbinsdale and Crystal, including use of right-of-way in an existing Burlington Northern-Santa Fe railroad corridor or a parallel roadway. Two north-end alignments will be studied, leading to Brooklyn Park, Maple Grove, or both.

On the south end of the corridor, the transitway could use Lowry or Broadway Avenues to Lyndale Avenue, or Olson Memorial Highway (Trunk Hwy. 55). These alignments would connect with downtown and other transitways near the new Twins Ballpark and new inter-modal station, where Northstar commuter rail and Hiawatha LRT will intersect.

Gladke emphasized that one of the primary screening criteria is to make sure the chosen alignment is accessible to people who depend on transit. The line would be designed so that buses would connect with it as they do along the Hiawatha line, where Metro Transit reoriented bus service to make good connections with the train, resulting in faster trips to key destinations.

Barbara Milon, executive director of the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, said that planners need to involve the community so that the project can be integrated with efforts to support business and work force development, as well as housing. "Faster and quicker is wonderful but if we don't involve the people living in the community then we have really missed an opportunity," she said.

A Community Advisory Committee, comprised of residents and community groups from each city along the corridor, is providing ongoing input as the planning proceeds. Periodic open houses and public meetings are also planned. Technical and policy advisory committees engage agency stakeholders and communities along the corridor. The Council, including Metro Transit, serve on these committees and will work with the county and its consultants on detailed aspects of project planning.





Minnesota Public Transit Newsletter

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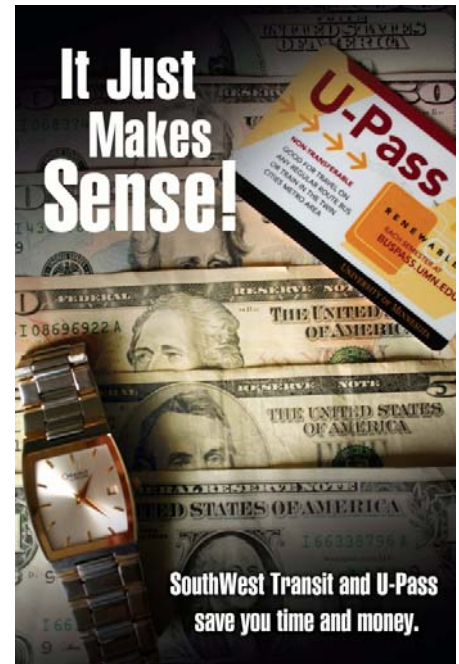
Southwest Transit promotes U-Pass to area University of Minnesota students

EDEN PRAIRIE –Continuing an annual program, SouthWest Transit has once again mailed postcards to University of Minnesota students living in the areas the transit system serves.

“We work with the U of M each year to have them mail these postcards encouraging students to take advantage of U-Pass, a really great program that is offered to the students,” said Len Simich CEO of SouthWest Transit. “We pay for the design, production and all mailing costs for the campaign, but the U actually takes care of addressing the cards to ensure student confidentiality.”

The U-Pass is a highly discounted transit pass that allows the student to ride any transit service in the metro area including SouthWest Transit and the other suburban lines as well as Metro Transit buses and light rail for the one fee per semester.

The theme for SouthWest Transit’s postcard effort this year is “It just makes sense – SouthWest Transit and U-Pass save you time and money.”



“We also take part in the University’s transit event held on the first day of school,” said Simich. “We believe that if we can reach these students and get them to ride transit to and from school and around town, they will see firsthand the benefits and we believe many of them will become life long users of public transit.”

Contributors

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Metropolitan Council Directions

SEND NEWS

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in transit Bulletin Board

Transit Events

Sept. 29 — Oct. 1 Minnesota Public Transit Conference — River Center — St. Paul, MN

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