

intransit

Spotlight on: Duluth Transit Authority

By HEATH HICKOK, Program Coordinator,
Minnesota Public Transit Association

Imagine a frigid January morning and the temperature is well below zero. At 5:55 am, she puts on her jacket and laces up her boots. It's still dark out and the 6 inches of fresh snow is going to make for a difficult commute — that is for most people. She walks a block and is patiently waiting at the bus stop by 6:00 am. A few minutes later, the Duluth Transit Authority's (DTA) #9 bus arrives on time as usual.

At the office, none of her coworkers have arrived yet. While she drinks her coffee and checks emails, the sun begins to rise over Lake Superior. People begin shuffling in and the commotion turns the once quiet office into a hive of activity. Near the coffee pot, people begin sharing their difficult and oftentimes dangerous driving stories. By then, she has already finished two cups of coffee and several tasks on her list.

The woman is my 63 year-old mother, Debra, who has worked at Duluth's

largest employer, Essentia Healthcare, for more than 12 years now. Needless to say, she always arrives on time.

Her story, much like many others who use public transportation in Duluth, is a positive one. In a city built on a hill that spans nearly 30 miles, the DTA has provided dependable transit service for more than 130 years. At first, public transit in Duluth consisted of trolleys and streetcars. However, as the city grew during the Industrial Revolution, the streetcars were replaced by buses and ridership continued to increase.

The DTA, which provides service in Duluth, Proctor and Superior, Wisconsin, maintains a modern fleet of 62 transit buses, including Hybrid electric buses. In addition to regular route services, the DTA operates curb-to-curb STRIDE (Special Transit Ride) services for disabled riders and the Port Town Trolley seasonal circulator service for summer visitors. In 2012, the DTA provided 3,261,494

rides in the communities they serve. This was the fifth consecutive year with ridership over 3 million. Many of these riders are students. In fact, the DTA recently recognized their 5 Millionth U-Pass rider. This program gives FREE passes to UMD students.



In May of 2012, the city of Duluth and the DTA announced that the proposed Multimodal Transportation Center (MTC) had received all funding required to complete the \$27.5 million project. It is moving forward and is expected to be under construction by the end of this year and completed in late 2014. The MTC will provide an indoor terminal area for the transferring of bus passengers. It will include an 8-bay bus boarding platform, along with an indoor passenger-waiting area, seating and public restrooms. The MTC will include a DTA-staffed information desk for ticket sales and transit information. It will also include a bike storage area, a police substation, and both public and private parking.

The city of Duluth's administration has been supportive of the Multimodal Transportation Center. Duluth Mayor Don Ness has worked with the DTA on securing the necessary funding to move the project forward. Mayor Ness believes that the MTC will have a positive impact on the community and

DTA profile, page 5



Heath Hickok, MPTA Program Coordinator, will profile a different transit system each issue.



Tony Kellen
President

Minnesota Public Transit Association
Director of Operations & Technology
St. Cloud Metro Bus
tkellen@stcloudmtc.com
320.529.4481

President's Column

Thank you to everyone who attended Transportation Day at the Capitol in February! We had a core group of transit representatives who visited with legislators about the importance of transit service in their communities and the need for additional transit funding. We also had a chance to hear from newly confirmed MnDOT Commissioner Charlie Zelle in addition to hearing from legislators who will be making key funding decisions. The people who attended made a real difference in our efforts to raise the profile of transit in the state so thank you for taking the time speak up for your systems.

As the Legislative Session progresses, we need more advocates to contact their local legislators and urge their support for additional transit funding. Without additional revenue, transit systems will continue to struggle in the face

of rising fuel and other costs. We have a real opportunity this session to obtain more transit dollars, but it will take a concerted effort by everyone to make that happen.

It only takes a few minutes to send a quick e-mail to your legislators describing the work you do and the people who rely on transit service in your community. If you're not sure who your legislators are, just use this handy district finder.

MPTA will be hosting transit showcases to bring legislators together with folks from the transit systems in their districts. If you are interested in participating, send a quick e-mail to Heath Hickok.

Although the weather is cold, the Bus Rodeo will be coming up sooner than you think. This year, the Rodeo will held in Rochester from July 19-20. This MPTA

event is great experience for bus drivers and helps promote the safety of transit service.

You'll notice a new format for our MPTA Updates as we improve our communication tools. Look for us on Facebook and Twitter and help spread the word by "liking" us and joining the effort to promote transit.

Thank you for your membership in the Minnesota Public Transit Association. We're continually working to improve our services and work for you in both St. Paul and Washington, D.C. We will continue to raise the visibility of transit service and monitor all the action at the Capitol. If we all take a little time to make a phone call or send an e-mail or reach out to our riders, we can help ensure a brighter future for those who rely on transit in Minnesota.



More than 20 people from transit systems throughout the state attended the 2013 Transportation Day at the Capitol. Here are some MPTA members talking transit before the opening remarks.

Margaret Donahoe
Advocacy Director

Minnesota Public Transit Association



Legislative Report

It's a busy time at the Capitol and the Minnesota Public Transit Association is hard at work on your behalf.

We have recent good news to celebrate. The federal sequestration will not impact federal formula dollars for transit so we should not see any reductions in federal funds. Of course the next big deadline is the end of March when the current Continuing Resolution keeping federal dollars flowing expires. Another CR will probably be passed; the question will be how long it will last.

At the state level, good news has come out with latest general fund budget projection. According to Minnesota Management and Budget, November's forecast budget shortfall of \$1.090 billion for FY 2014-15 has been reduced to \$627 million. Revenues now are forecast to be \$36.116 billion, \$323 million (0.9 percent) more than earlier estimates. The spending forecast has been reduced \$117 million (0.3 percent) to \$36.744 billion. These changes, combined with a \$23 million reduction in net reserves, reduce the projected shortfall by \$463 million.

For the biennium that we're currently in – FY2012-2013, the new forecast projects a surplus of \$295 million by end of the biennium. This money is all committed to repaying the shift in school aid that was enacted in the last budget.

With a smaller budget deficit to deal with, the legislature should have an easier time balancing the budget and making needed additional investments in important areas like transit.

Governor's Budget Recommendations

The governor's budget recommendations for transit were released in January. These are generally viewed as the starting point for the committees and are not typically altered too much when the majority in the legislature is

from the same party as the governor. In this case, Governor Dayton has a DFL majority to work with in both the House and Senate and so the legislature will want to track with his budget recommendations on appropriations; however some of his proposals for raising tax revenue are seen as controversial and may not be enacted by the legislature.

Greater Minnesota Transit

The general fund appropriation recommended by the Governor is simply the inflationary increase incorporated into the base. Revenue from the motor vehicle sales and lease tax is projected to be up by \$10 million and federal funds are projected to increase by almost \$40 million. The governor does not recommend any additional funding for Greater Minnesota transit to expand service despite the recommendation by the Transportation Finance Advisory Committee that funding for transit outside the Twin Cities area be increased by \$32 million per year.

MPTA Transit Proposal

The Minnesota Public Transit Association is supporting legislation (HF1044/SF927) that would increase the sales tax in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area by $\frac{3}{4}$ cent for a total local tax of 1 cent.

The revenue would be roughly split between the Metropolitan Council, for bus transit, and the Counties Transit Improvement Board, for transitways:

- 41.5 percent to the Metropolitan Council for bus transit in the metropolitan area, including suburban transit providers;
- 41.5 percent to the Counties Transit Improvement Board;
- 7.0 percent to cities in the metropolitan area
- 7.0 percent to counties in the metropolitan area and
- 3.0 percent to the Metropolitan Council for regional

Legislative Report Continued...

Budget Activity: Transit				
Current, Base and Governor's Recommended Expenditures				
(Dollars in Thousands, Biennial Totals)				
	General Funds	Other State Funds	Federal Funds	All Funds
Current Biennium Expenditures (FY 2012-13)	\$30,046	\$71,456	\$109,641	\$211,143
Current Law Expenditures (FY 2014-15)	\$32,665	\$81,751	\$149,498	\$263,914
Governor's Recommended Expenditures (FY2014-15)	\$32,665	\$81,751	\$149,498	\$263,914
\$ Change from FY 2014-15 Current Law to Governor's Rec	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
% Change from FY 2014-15 Current Law to Governor's Rec	0%	0%	0%	0%

bicycle, trail, and pedestrian infrastructure and maintenance to be distributed as grants to park districts in the metropolitan area and to local units of government in the metropolitan area.

The bill also dedicates all of the revenue from the sales tax on leased vehicles to transportation with \$9 million directed to metropolitan area county highway needs and the remaining funds directed to Greater Minnesota transit. Total revenue for each year of the next biennium from the leased vehicle sales tax is estimated at approximately \$42 million.

In addition, the bill provides \$8 million in general obligation bond proceeds for transit facilities in Greater Minnesota and \$95 million in GO bond dollars for metropolitan area transit projects.

Please take a minute to thank the bill authors: HF1044 (Rep. Melissa Hortman rep.melissa.hortman@house.mn) and SF927 (Senator Champion sen.bobby.champion@senate.mn) and encourage your own legislators to support the bill.

The Chairs of the Senate and House Transportation Committees plan to develop a comprehensive transportation funding bill after the Easter/Passover break in March. It will take a big advocacy effort to convince the legislature that transportation funding is an important priority for this session. Your voice will be critical as we work to generate support for needed transit funding.

MetroCouncil				
Current, Base and Governor's Recommended Expenditures				
(Dollars in Thousands, Biennial Totals)				
	General Funds	Other State Funds	Federal Funds	All Funds
Current Biennium Expenditures (FY 2012-13)	\$83,816	\$459,644		\$543,460
Current Law Expenditures (FY 2014-15)	\$135,599	\$470,273		\$605,872
Governor's Recommended Expenditures (FY2014-15)	\$88,799	\$504,033		\$592,832
\$ Change from FY 2014-15 Current Law to Governor's Rec	(46,800)	\$33,760		(13,040)
% Change from FY 2014-15 Current Law to Governor's Rec	(35%)	7%		(2%)

SouthWest Transit gives back to the community

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

In addition to the regular service SouthWest Transit (SWT) provided in 2012, it also participated in several local events such as Chanhassen's 4th of July parade and business expo; Chaska's River City Days parade and Touch a Truck event; and Carver's Steamboat Days parade.

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

SWT also continued its "job-seeker" program, providing "Flash Passes" for free bus rides to help people in their search for employment.

Twins Express service continued in 2012 providing rides to Target Field from our three Cities, and service to the Como Zoo was offered throughout the summer, providing a fun-filled day to the young families in our service area.

In September, SWT spearheaded an effort to allow firefighters, families and friends to easily attend an event at the State Capitol honoring Minnesota's fallen firefighters.

On Veterans' Day, all veterans rode free and the agency recognized all veterans currently on our staff. A bus was wrapped to honor all who served.

And in December, riders and staff donated toys and food for the annual Toys for Tots drive and local food shelves, and many rode our Holidazzle Express. SWT once again hosted an event for local seniors at the Chaska Lodge with an Eden Prairie high school choir performing, followed by a trip to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.



In December, SouthWest Transit hosted an event for seniors, which included a performance by an Eden Prairie high school choir and a trip to the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

DTA profile

will compliment other new business developments in the downtown area.

"We're very excited about the Multimodal Center and what it means for downtown Duluth. Not only will it provide better access for bus riders, bicyclists, and folks who use other forms of public transportation, but the Northwest Passage Skywalk will also serve as the key link between downtown and Canal Park, especially the DECC," said Ness.

The DTA is always looking towards the future of public transit in their region and beyond. General Manager, Dennis Jensen, has been with the DTA since 1979 and believes that the MTC could be used as a model for other transportation centers across the state of Minnesota.

"We like to think that we are laying the groundwork for the future. We know that owning and operating a car is not for everyone, and transportation centers like this will become a means by which Minnesotans can access whatever mode of public conveyance they need to move around the state or the cities and towns in which they live, whether it is by bus or rail or even bicycles. Having all transportation modes available at a single, well designed, attractive and secure location will be a benefit to everyone using the public transportation system," said Jensen.

The MTC will also serve as a boarding location for Jefferson Lines and Indian Trails Inter-City Lines, along with Arrowhead Transit

and LCS Coaches. The project will include the re-construction of the Northwest Passage skywalk to the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center (DECC), which will be designed with a pedestrian/bike walkway; and a new skywalk connection to Superior Street through the current Transit Center East building.

Whether you're a UMD student who rides the bus as part of the U-Pass program, a senior citizen who needs to visit the doctor, a visitor looking to explore the city, or one of the 6,000 employees at Essentia Healthcare who save 50 percent on monthly bus passes; the Duluth Transit Authority will be there providing dependable and convenient public transportation for all.



DTA U-Pass Program surpasses 5 million riders

In January, Nicholas DeShaw (right of UMD mascot) became the 5 millionth rider for the U-Pass Program. Pictured with DeShaw are DTA General Manager Dennis Jensen (left) and Pat Keenan, Director of Student Life Operations (right).



DTA transported 3,261,494 riders in 2012 DTA ridership continues upward trend, up 25% since 2005

By TOM ELWELL, Duluth Transit Authority

Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) ridership for 2012 surpassed the 3 million rider mark for the fifth consecutive year. Ridership for 2012 was down slightly by just 2,983 rides or .09 percent less than 2011 at 3,261,494 — the second highest passenger count since 1993. DTA ridership has steadily improved over the past few years and is up 25 percent since 2005.

DTA Bike & Bus ridership for 2012 also surpassed the previous year's total. In its 18th year of operation, the Bike & Bus service transported 27,924 bicycles — up 9.9 percent over 2011. The DTA began providing the Bike & Bus service on a year-round basis in 2009.

U-Pass ridership for 2012 at UMD, College of St. Scholastica, Lake Superior College and UWS remained steady with 808,485 rides

— virtually matching 2011 ridership levels. UMD joined the U-Pass Program in 2000 and surpassed the 5 millionth U-Pass rider milestone in January 2013, as Nicholas DeShaw prepared to board the Route #11 bus at Kirby Transit Hub. He has been a U-Pass rider since his sophomore year.

DeShaw is a senior majoring in both Education and American Indian Studies and will start student teaching next fall. DeShaw, whose hometown is Holland, Michigan, volunteers at the non-profit Avalon Educational Institute in downtown Duluth, where he teaches Marshall Arts, dance and fitness classes.

U-PASS ridership at UMD has increased every year since 2000 and accounts for nearly 12 percent of the DTA's annual ridership. However, during fall and spring semesters,

U-PASS ridership accounts for nearly 20 percent of DTA's system-wide ridership. U-PASS ridership at UMD has averaged a half-million riders a year since 2008.

Prior to the establishment of the U-PASS Program in 2000, DTA ridership at UMD averaged just 4,000 a month. UMD ridership today tops the 4,000 every 2 days. Since 2000, enrollment at UMD has increased by more than 30 percent to nearly 12,000 students. The only expansion of on-campus housing since 2000 was an addition to Griggs Hall in September of 2011. No additional parking lots have been constructed on campus since 2000. UMD's campus expansion and growing enrollment would not have been possible without the transportation of students living off-campus on the U-PASS Program.



MVTA 2012 ridership in best top three ever

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

Total Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) ridership for 2012 was 2,546,411, steady with 2011 ridership and only 70,000 rides from the MVTA's 2008 high ridership mark.

Highlights of the 2012 ridership include:

- Reverse commute ridership (bringing workers from the core cities to employment areas in the suburbs) increased by 12 percent.
- Route 475 (Apple Valley/Cedar Grove to U of M) now operating for more than a year, had ridership for 2012 increase 47 percent from 2011 ridership, confirming that the University market is strong.
- Local Route 445 (Eagan to Mall of America) Sunday ridership was up more than 10 percent.

■ The top three MVTA routes based on ridership are: 1) Route 460 (Burnsville express to/from downtown Minneapolis); 2) Route 477 (Apple Valley express to/from downtown Minneapolis) and 3) Route 444 (Savage/Burnsville/Cedar Grove/Mall of America local service seven days per week)

“The economy continued to recover and gas prices were up and down throughout the year,” said MVTA Chair Gary Hansen (who also serves as a City of Eagan Councilmember). “This helped contribute to full buses and stable ridership. And, we look forward to more growth in 2013,” he said.

The MVTA is well-positioned to continue ridership growth, according to Beverley Miller, MVTA executive

director. Specifically, she said, “we have the September 2012 expansion of Route 465 service from Burnsville to downtown Minneapolis/University of Minnesota all day long, the opening of the Rosemount Transit Station in December 2012 with additional express service to Minneapolis and possibly St. Paul funded for 2014, and the anticipation of the METRO Red Line service on Cedar Avenue slated to begin in May/June 2013.” She also noted that the MVTA will also improve Route 464 express service between Savage and downtown Minneapolis in June and is reworking local service specifically in Apple Valley and Eagan in connection with the opening of the METRO Red Line.

Gary Hansen re-elected MVTA Board Chair for 2013

The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) Board of Directors elected officers for 2013 at its organizational meeting on Jan. 30. Gary Hansen, Eagan City Councilmember, was re-elected Chair. Hansen also serves as Chair of the Suburban Transit Authority (STA), a group of suburban transit providers including MVTA, SouthWest Transit, Plymouth Metrolink, Maple Grove Transit and Prior Lake Laker Lines/Shakopee Transit (operating jointly as the BlueXpress).

Clint Hooppaw, Apple Valley Councilmember, was elected Vice Chair; Jane Victorey, Savage City Councilmember, was re-elected Secretary/Treasurer. Other members of the Board include: Dakota County Commissioner Liz Workman; Burnsville Councilmember Dan Kealey; Rosemount Mayor William Droste; and Jon Ulrich, Scott County Commissioner.



Gary Hansen

Front: Scott Wessel, Barb Derrick, Charlie Rother; Back: Beverley Miller, MVTA Executive Director; Jane Victorey, MVTA Secretary/Treasurer and Savage City Councilmember; Clint Hooppaw, MVTA Vice Chair and Apple Valley City Councilmember; Liz Workman, Dakota County Commissioner to MVTA Board; Dan Kealer, City of Burnsville Councilmember to MVTA Board.



Drivers-of-the-year, farebox technician saluted at MVTA recognition dinner

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

Recognizing that drivers are the face of the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), the MVTA recently presented its 2012 Driver-of-the-Year awards at a recognition dinner. MVTA Board Vice Chair Clint Hooppaw noted that “Our drivers are the eyes, ears and face of the MVTA. They answer a variety of questions and their ‘office’ is their bus. MVTA’s drivers are well-trained and take pride in their work.”

The 2012 Driver-of-the-Year recipients are: Barb Derrick, Schmitt & Sons Transit full-time driver; and Scott Wessel, Schmitt & Sons part-time Driver.

In addition, a special award was presented to Farebox Technician Charlie Rother, who is considered the “whiz” when working with fareboxes, Hooppaw said.

Barb Derrick has been an MVTA driver for more than five years. During her term with Schmitt and Sons, she has driven and knows nearly all MVTA routes. She also received the Driver of the Year Award for 2008.

Connie Massengale, MVTA’s Project Manager, said, “Barb has really made an impact on riders and her peers. She is always willing to help out when asked, and goes the extra step to treat people respectfully.”

Scott Wessel has been driving MVTA buses for Schmitt & Sons for six years. Massengale commented, “Scott has annually received our yearly incentive award for perfect attendance and no preventable accidents for the past six years. He’s a great person and we appreciate having him as an MVTA driver.”

A special award also was presented to Charlie Rother, farebox technician for Schmitt and Sons. Rother has worked for Schmitt & Sons for 10 years, and also serves as a sub-driver for MVTA. He has 20 years of driving background and has completed the GFI Genfare Training Course (farebox training).

Dan Schmitt, President of Schmitt and Sons, said, “Charlie exemplifies what any employer would want in an employee: Integrity, good work ethic, positive attitude, dedicated. He is very good at his job — he watches costs, but does not sacrifice quality. Something that I always like is whenever I see him, no matter how busy he is, he always has a smile!”

Criteria for qualifying as a MVTA Driver-of-the-Year:

The driver must have received one or more customer comments commending superior driving or customer service; The driver must have been recognized at a monthly meeting during the past year; The driver must have an excellent safety and attendance record. The driver must be recognized by his/her peers as a leader.

The award consists of a plaque, an MVTA personalized down vest and uniform shirt, and an MVTA scarf.

Maple Grove Transit attains record annual ridership

By MIKE OPATZ, City of Maple Grove

Maple Grove Transit finished 2012 with 827,673 riders, which is a 3.30 percent increase from the 2011 ridership figure of 801,230. That is increase of 26,443 riders. The 2012 ridership mark represents the highest annual ridership level attained by Maple Grove Transit with the previous record being 807,437 in 2008.

The City of Maple Grove established Maple Grove Transit (MGT) in June 1990. MGT has an eight-member Transit Commission to provide user input into the operation and planning of the system. Presently, MGT has commuter express service to and from Minneapolis utilizing 47 round trips on five routes. The commuter service utilizes five park-and-rides lots and fleet of 35



buses. MGT also offers a dial-a-ride program using four vans for paratransit service within Maple Grove.

Behind the scenes at SouthWest Transit

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

SouthWest Transit (SWT) prides itself on its safety record and recognizes the effort its vehicle technicians plays in this success. A recent article in the *SunCurrent* newspaper let the public know that a lot of work goes on behind the scenes to keep our fleet of 61 buses on the road, in good repair.



SouthWest Transit maintains a fleet of 61 buses.

The maintenance crew begins work at 4 am Monday-Friday, making sure the vehicles are ready for drivers to pull out for their runs. A technician is available until the last bus reaches the garage, generally about 11:00 pm.

Our staff of seven technicians inspects buses every 3,000 miles. Preventative maintenance repairs are scheduled generally based on time or mileage. Unscheduled repairs come about from issues found during inspections. Drivers write up matters they feel need to be looked at, and we

sometimes hear from riders who notice something they think isn't quite right. Everything gets checked out; the goal is to catch a small problem before it puts a vehicle out of commission.

With several different types of buses in our fleet, staff needs to be well-trained. Webinars and visits from some of the bus manufacturers provide much of the training. Computer software keeps track of when repairs need to be scheduled and when repairs are done.

In addition the vehicles being well-maintained mechanically, SWT buses are washed and mopped, cleaned inside and outside, each day, twice a day during winter weather.

All of this attention to detail allows us to assure our riders that on SouthWest Transit they can Expect the Best.

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

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

Next issue is May 2013. Submission Deadline: April 26.

metro council.org

Transportation Advisory Board selected projects for federal funding

The Metropolitan Council's Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) is receiving public comment on the draft amendment to the 2013-2016 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The proposed amendment includes 74 new projects, using \$159 million in funding, chosen through the TAB's regional solicitation process for construction in years 2015-16. [Read more.](#)

Mayors from across the region endorse governor's transit sales tax proposal

Momentum is building in support of Gov. Dayton's proposal for a new quarter-cent sales tax dedicated to transit in the seven-county metro area. And that support is coming from cities across the region. [Read more.](#)

Demand at regional park-and-rides remains high

Demand for park-and-ride spaces by commuters in the Twin Cities continues to be high.

That's a key finding from the 2012 Annual Regional Park-and-Ride System Survey, which tracks use of park-and-ride and park-and-pool facilities in the metro region. More about Park-and-Ride facilities.

With 18,104 users, the 2012 survey recorded the second highest use ever of the regional park-and-ride network.

"Four of Northstar's five park-and-rides have seen double digit growth rates over the past year," he said [Read more.](#)

Construction is under way at the Maplewood Mall Transit Center to add 1,000 park-and-ride spaces.



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

InTransit Contributors

Margaret Donahoe, Transportation Alliance
Tom Elwell, Duluth Transit Authority
Heath Hickok, MPTA
Tony Kellen, St. Cloud Metro Bus
Mike Opatz, City of Maple Grove
Robin Selvig, MVTA
Linda Spevacek, SouthWest Transit
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