

# intransit

## Summer 2015 Edition

### SMART Transit Expanding to Waseca County

SMART Transit, a division of Cedar Valley Services, Inc., is excited to announce plans to partner with Minnesota Valley Action Council to begin providing public transportation services in Waseca County effective January 1st, 2016.

SMART Transit was formed in January of 2014 under the umbrella of Cedar Valley Services when transit agencies formerly known as Albert Lea Transit, Austin Mower County Area Transit (AMCAT), and Steele County Area Transit (SCAT) consolidated into one agency for the purposes of reducing costs, pooling resources, and providing more extensive services to the areas served.

Minnesota Valley Action Council has delivered transportation services in Waseca County for over 30 years and looks forward to working with Cedar Valley Services – SMART Transit to expand and enhance the transportation services offered there.

At present, Waseca County is the only remaining county in the state of Minnesota that does not offer formal public transportation service.

For more information, please contact SMART Transit Manager Melinda Estey at 507-444-2346 or [TransitManager@CedarValleyServices.org](mailto:TransitManager@CedarValleyServices.org).

### Upcoming MPTA Events!

#### MN Statewide Bus Roadeo

July 17-18, 2015



[Click here for more information and to register](#)



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# President's Column

**Marc Hall**



While the outcome of the 2015 Legislative Session is extremely frustrating and disappointing, we made real progress in making transportation funding a higher priority. At the start of the session, there were real questions about the need for additional funding and how much new revenue is really needed to address transportation needs. By the end of the session, there was agreement all around that a multimodal, multiyear funding package that addresses needs statewide was necessary and that the 10-year level of additional funding needs to be between \$7 and \$11 billion.

MPTA and many other organizations were lobbying hard for ongoing revenue increases, but we did hear from legislative leaders and the governor that they will take up the issue of transportation funding during the 2016 Session along with a major capital bonding bill and a tax reform bill.

A summary of the outcome of the session is included in the *Legislative Report* in this issue of In Transit.

In addition to advocating at the state level, MPTA members were out in Washington, D.C. in early June visiting with members of Minnesota's Congressional Delegation to let them know how critical federal dollars are for transit systems all across the state. In addition to concerns about the future of the New Starts program in the face of short-term continuing resolutions, we expressed our frustration with the changes to the Bus and Bus Facilities program under MAP-21 which have resulted in fewer dollars for rural transit systems to purchase new equipment. MPTA will continue to work with Congressional members to increase federal funding for transit in Minnesota.

It's time to register for the annual Public Transit Conference! This year we're teaming up with Wisconsin to provide a great learning experience. The "Coming Together for Transportation Excellence" Public Transportation Conference will be held October 19-21st in Duluth. We have a great line-up of training, expert speakers and informative sessions that you and your staff can't afford to miss. There are changes in policies, new requirements that you need to know and updates on the latest action in transit from state and federal officials. This is THE event for transit in Minnesota so be sure to sign up now at: <http://mpta-transit.org/event/2015-mnwisc-public-transit-conference-expo>

There are changes in the RTAP program so if you have questions about registration, please call Laura Eash at 651-659-0804.

As always, MPTA is busy working to provide you with the best training, the best information and the best representation in St. Paul and Washington DC. We can only be successful with your participation so thank you for being a member of MPTA and joining your colleagues at key events.

We'll see you at the Roadeo in July!

Marc Hall, President



## Legislative Report

**Margaret Donahoe**

The 2015 Regular Session and Special Session have now concluded with all of the necessary budget bills passed into law and signed by the governor. A capital bonding bill was also passed during the one-day special session, but it contained no funding for transit projects. For transit, legislation provided for continued funding at current levels but no major increases as we had hoped.

After months of pressure and lots of talk about transportation funding being a priority for the 2015 Session, the legislature passed and the governor signed a transportation budget bill that largely maintains status quo levels of funding for highways and transit. There is a small chance that during special session more could be done.

With projections of a budget surplus of close to \$2 billion in the general fund, advocating for state tax increases for transportation has been an uphill battle. The House majority wanted to take advantage of positive revenue projections to reduce taxes, particularly on businesses. The House passed an omnibus tax bill with around \$2 billion in tax cuts. The Senate and the Governor wanted to increase spending in a number of areas including education. With very different approaches, the leaders in the House and Senate agreed on budget bills to keep the government running with some increases in areas like nursing home care but less overall spending than the governor and Senate had proposed. The tax bill did not need to pass in order to keep the government running and tax increases for transportation were not necessary to keep MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council operating so those were both left on the table, leaving close to \$1 billion of the \$2 billion surplus unspent.

Senate Majority Leader Bakk had repeatedly said that agreement on a tax bill would only come with an agreement on increases in transportation funding. With both of those left undone, Senator Bakk and House Speaker Kurt Daudt have said they want to deal those bills during the 2016 Legislative Session.

The House and Senate had passed very different versions of HF4, the omnibus transportation budget bill, with significant increases in revenue provided in different ways.

In the Senate, increased funding for transit in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area would have been provided through a ¾ cent increase in the Metropolitan Area sales tax which would have been collected by the state in the entire seven-county metro area rather than in the five counties currently collecting the tax. The revenue would have been shared among the Metropolitan Council for transit service, the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) for construction and operation of transitways and bike and pedestrian investments.

For Greater Minnesota Transit, the Senate bill would have provided increased funding by increasing the current statutory distribution of the motor vehicle sales tax (MVST) and eliminating the existing MVLST, in addition to increasing the general fund base by \$6 million per year.

# Legislative Report

## *Continued from page 3*



The House approach was to dedicate existing revenue streams to transportation through several statutory dedications including the dedication of sales tax revenue on rental vehicles (starting in FY2018) that would be distributed to transit budgets along with a one-time general appropriation from the budget surplus. For Metropolitan Area transit, the House proposal would have reduced overall funding for transit by phasing out the current general fund appropriation while making the current open and standing appropriation of MVST part of the biennial budgeting process.

The House proposal for Greater Minnesota transit included increasing the amount of funding from the sales tax on leased vehicles, a 50-50 split of the \$32 million now going to the general fund (MVLST) along with a one-time appropriation from the general fund.

The conference committee on HF4 could not reach agreement on a bill with significant increases in revenue and so a “lights on” approach was used to pass the basic funding MnDOT and the Met. Council need to keep functioning by using SF1647 as a vehicle for those appropriations. The conference committee on HF4 remains in place and can technically meet again during the 2016 Session.

So at the end of the day, the MVLST distribution has not changed. The first \$32 million collected will continue to be deposited in the general fund with the remaining revenue split 50/50 between Greater Minnesota Transit and 5 of the 7 metro area counties for highway purposes. Revenue estimates project that this revenue will grow in the future.

There is no change in the current distribution of MVST (60% to highways, 36% to metropolitan area transit and 4% to Greater MN transit). There is no increase in the metropolitan area sales tax and no elimination of the general fund appropriation for transit.

Proposals to provide separate funding for active transportation were also not included in the final bill. Some funding was provided for the Safe Routes to School program (\$500,000 per year for this biennium) along with a stipulation that local governments need to require developers to include safe routes to school infrastructure in new subdivisions in order to qualify for these funds.

The final transportation budget bill includes a new, one-time, appropriation for a demonstration project by suburban transit providers who would like to offer more suburb to suburb service along with funding for Transportation Management Organizations (TMO) in the metropolitan area. An additional seat was created on the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) for an elected official representing one of the suburban transit providers.

The final bill, along with the growth in MVST, provides an increase of \$6,079,000 for Greater MN transit over the previous biennium with \$5 million in a one-time appropriation from general fund for the biennium. The bill provides an increase of \$99,612,000 for Metropolitan Area transit over the previous biennium.





Below is a summary of funding proposals and the final appropriations in SF1647:

|                                     | FY14-15 Biennium | FY16-17 Final    | FY16-17 Senate     | FY16-17 House    |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| MnDOT Office of Transit GF Base     | \$ 39,453        | \$ 34,490        | \$ 34,490          | \$ 34,490        |
| MnDOT Office of Transit GF Increase |                  | \$ 5,000         | \$ 12,000          | \$ 14,000        |
| MnDOT Office of Transit MVLST       | \$ 41,813        | \$ 39,475        | (\$ 39,475)        | \$ 57,025        |
| MnDOT Office of Transit MVST        | \$ 52,830        | \$ 61,140        | \$122,280          | \$ 61,140        |
| MnDOT Office of Transit TH          | \$ 1,550         | \$ 1,620         | \$ 1,719           | \$ 1,550         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                        | <b>\$135,646</b> | <b>\$141,725</b> | <b>\$131,014</b>   | <b>\$168,205</b> |
| Passenger Rail GF                   | \$ 1,000         | \$ 1,000         | \$ 1,000           |                  |
| Safe Routes to School GF            | \$ 1,000         | \$ 1,000         | \$ 1,000           |                  |
| Metropolitan Council                |                  |                  |                    |                  |
| Bus and Rail Operations GF Base     | \$187,693        | \$153,252        | \$153,252          | \$153,252        |
| Bus and Rail Operations GF Cut      |                  |                  | (\$ 39,373)        | (\$110,329)      |
| Bus and Rail Operations Change      | (\$29,700)       | \$ 27,300        |                    |                  |
| Metro Sales Tax increase ¾ cent     |                  |                  | \$606,300          |                  |
| Transit Asst. - MVST                | \$475,447        | \$550,300        | \$519,700          | \$550,300        |
| Suburban Pilot Project              |                  | \$ 2,000         |                    | \$ 3,000         |
| TMO Funding                         |                  | \$ 200           |                    | \$ 400           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                        | <b>\$633,440</b> | <b>\$733,052</b> | <b>\$1,239,879</b> | <b>\$596,623</b> |

**Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT)**

Last session, the Health and Human Services budget bill contained many policy recommendations made by the Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Advisory Committee that did not have a cost implication to DHS. This year’s bill includes changes in the description of services available for reimbursement by MA and the types of records that providers have to keep in order to receive payment; makes substantial changes to the rates for NEMT providers under MA. The new language ties the rates paid to the type of transportation service provided, not the type of vehicle. The language also provides a rate add-on if the services are provided in certain rural areas. The bill also eliminates the 4.5% rate decrease levied upon NEMT and ambulance services that started in 2012.

# Governor's Fishing Opener On Lake Vermilion



From *LARRY RODGERS*

Arrowhead Transit was part of the festivities at the Governor's Fishing Opener on Lake Vermilion. Kelly McClelland drove the Transit bus to provide tours of the Soudan Mine during the day on Friday, May 8.



Martin Lepak, Transportation Advocate for Arrowhead Transit, caught Governor Mark Dayton on his way back to his car after his speech in the Tower, MN park and asked if he could get a picture of him shaking hands with our driver. He happily agreed.

A few minutes later, Lieutenant Governor Tina Smith came by. She is shown with both Martin and Kelly in front of the Arrowhead Transit bus.







## Becker and Wadena

### counties merging transit

*Reprinted with permission from PIPPI MAYFIELD at DL-Online*

Becker and Wadena counties' public transit system are about to become one.

"Becker and Wadena counties obviously have two great systems and we're trying to make it a better one," said Ryan Damlo, transit director for the two counties.

Damlo was hired in March to take on the task of supervising the merger of the two counties into one transit system. He brought a draft of a joint powers agreement (JPA) to the Becker County Board of Commissioners, asking them to look through it and approve it in July.

"This outlines what we're going to look like at the end of the merger," he said.

The Becker and Wadena counties' board of commissioners would each have two commissioners on the newly formed transit board of directors, and then there will be a citizen appointed as well. One three-year term will be appointed by Becker County commissioners, and then the following term, the Wadena County commissioners will appoint someone.

Damlo said he would like both Becker and Wadena county boards to approve the JPA before the end of August so he can apply to the Minnesota Department of Transportation for one contract, versus having to do two contracts, one for each county.

Once the approval is in place, the counties will be able to work on training and utilizing resources in each county. He said that while the counties have very similar systems, there are differences as well. For instance, repairs on the vehicles are handled differently, as is the money collection for the entity.

MnDOT pays about 85 percent of the transit budget, and this agreement is one of many throughout the state. MN Office of Transit Program Coordinator Bev Herfindahl said that people hear "consolidation" and get scared, but really each county will still have its own system but with some shared positions.

"We've had a lot of mergers and there are more to go," she said. While the JPA will join the two counties, "control still stays here," Damlo said of each county, meaning it doesn't go to the state or a large entity. Director Rusty Haskins will stay on in Becker County.

"I want to run it as a business and run it well," Damlo said.

And in running that business, he would also like to grow that business. One thing he has tried in Wadena and had great success at is getting kids to ride the public transit bus for summer rec programming. He said he would like to implement that in Becker County eventually as well.

Herfindahl said that more and more people want to live at home longer, and public transit is trying to help make that more doable by providing transportation.

Besides an agreement between the two counties, Damlo said the other major hurdle he's working on is a new name for the combined transit department.

If either of the two entities should decide the merger isn't working, the contract states that each county will essentially leave with what they came to the table with in the beginning. If they came into the agreement with three busses, they will leave the agreement with three busses.

Follow Pippi on Twitter at @PippiMayfield.

## MVTA 2015 Transit Ridership Up 7.4 Percent from First Quarter 2014

*Submitted by ROBIN SELVIG & edited by LAURA EASH*

Minnesota Valley Transit Authority ridership for the first quarter of 2015 is up 7.4% from the same period in 2014.

“This is very exciting,” said MVTA Board Chair and Apple Valley Councilmember Clint Hooppaw. “We have been working very hard to provide a valuable service to our residents and riders and I believe they are responding by using transit.”

Key ridership notes for the first quarter include the following:

- MVTA officially merges with Prior Lake and Shakopee as of Jan. 1, 2015.
- New Route 493 began service in February and averaged about 70 riders per day.
- Route 478 had trips added in the fall of 2014 and these trips have given ridership a boost (up 55 percent as compared to this time last year). Additional trips will be added in May 2015.
- MVTA also launched a new website at [www.mvta.com](http://www.mvta.com) including web and smart phone access to the web portal for tracking buses. Further, MVTA offered a new how-to-ride video.

“The MVTA has implemented many additional tools that are useful to riders,” said MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller. “By the end of May we will have free Wi-Fi on all MVTA buses, we have tools whereby riders can track our buses via the NexTrip signs in downtown Minneapolis or our web portal, and we look forward to launching our own smartphone app by the end of June.”

## MVTA Earns APTA GOLD Award Mall Opening Safety Program

*Submitted by ROBIN SELVIG & edited by LAURA EASH*

In early May, The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has announced the 2015 winners of its Safety and Security Awards program; in the category "Fewer than 4 million passenger trips annually" MVTA was selected to receive a Gold Award for creating a safety program associated with the opening of the Twin Cities Premium Outlets Mall in August 2014.

The APTA Bus Safety & Security Excellence Awards recognize public transportation organizations for their innovative and proactive programs dedicated to improving safety and security for their employees, passengers, and the public. The top honor is the GOLD Award, which is given to agencies with the best overall bus safety or bus security program selected by an independent panel of judges.

In the award application, MVTA focused on the partnership between the City of Eagan, Simon Properties, SRF, MVTA and others to create a safe environment that could be replicated on other high traffic days such as Black Friday.

“This project was unique,” said MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller, “because of the close collaboration between partners. Everyone had a main goal in mind: keep mall-goers, riders and the community safe in the process of opening weekend and beyond.” She added, “Creating a common goal, making sure riders, shoppers and the public were safe, and carrying that forward throughout the process was a major triumph for all organizations.”

Eagan TV produced a video for MVTA about the project to be presented at the Awards presentation.



## SouthWest Transit Receives a TSA Partnership Award

Submitted by VIRGINIA STOWERS

SouthWest Transit received the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Partnership Award on May 15, making the agency the only non-TSA team to be recognized. This award was given in recognition of SouthWest’s Emergency Preparedness Plan, continued efforts to evaluate and keep this plan updated and the agency’s strong connections with local, county, and other emergency personnel.

“It’s quite an honor for us to be recognized by the TSA for the emergency preparedness activities every

Southwest Transit employee demonstrates each day to keep our customers safe,” said SouthWest Transit Chief Executive Officer Len Simich, “This is truly an award in which everyone can share.”

SouthWest Transit attended a tabletop discussion with the TSA and emergency responders from around the country in March. There, several emergency situations were discussed, along with best practices for handling each situation. Exercises were also run to train personnel on how to handle a variety of emergency situations.

SouthWest Transit is honored to receive this award and looks forward to a continued partnership with the TSA.



## Top operators recognized for safe driving, customer service

*Submitted by DREW KERR*

Every weekday morning, operator Rodney Smith makes four 12-mile journeys between Normandale Community College and downtown Minneapolis on Route 535.

With a full load of customers in tow, he guides a 40-foot bus through rush hour traffic on Interstate 35W, maneuvers through several lanes to pick up or drop off customers at Lake Street and navigates through congested downtown streets.

Despite the challenges, Smith maintains a safe driving record that stretches back to his first day on the job 35 years ago. Asked how he's been able to do it, Smith said he'd never really paused to consider his impressive streak.

"It's not like you're marking the days on the calendar," Smith said. "You just have patience and take it day by day."

Metro Transit has been keeping a calendar, though, and earlier this month Smith was among a group of five Metro Transit operators recognized for 35 consecutive years of safe driving.

The recognition came at the Ovations Awards Ceremony, Metro Transit's annual operator appreciation event. More than 50 bus and light rail operators celebrating career milestones were honored for their safe driving records, customer service and attendance at the event.

Two operators were recognized for 30 consecutive years of safe driving and two operators were recognized for 25 consecutive years of safe driving. Another 16 operators were honored for 25 combined years of safe driving and others were celebrated for reaching 25-, 20-, 15-, 10- and 5-year milestones.

Several operators in attendance credited their success to simply being aware of their surroundings, a cornerstone of the Safety Keys training operators go through every three years.

"It's a lot of skill, a lot of experience, a lot of good training – and maybe just a little bit of luck," said operator Duane Lundgren who, while being a self-described klutz, has tallied 30 consecutive years of safe driving.

General Manager Brian Lamb took the opportunity to thank operators for their service, commitment to customers and leadership in the organization.

He credited operators for helping Metro Transit grow ridership in ten of the last 11 years – the first such period of growth in a century – and said they all played an important role in shaping the next generation of top operators.

"It isn't just about what we build, it's about who we are," Lamb said in his address. "And you are the best of who we are."



*Mark these 2015 events on  
your calendar today!*

**Minnesota Bus Rodeo**

July 17th and 18th

*St. Cloud*

**Annual Conference - with  
Wisconsin this year!**

October 19th to 21st

*Duluth*

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to Laura: [laura\\_eash@mpta-transit.org](mailto:laura_eash@mpta-transit.org)

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