

A bimonthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

intransit

February 2018 Edition

Put These Important 2018 Dates on Your Calendar!



Transportation Day at the Capitol

March 7th
St. Paul, MN

Minnesota Bus Rodeo

July 13th and 14th
Duluth, MN

mpta-transit.org/events

MN/WI Public Transportation Conference & Expo

October 15th to 17th
La Crosse, WI

News from St. Cloud Metro Bus

This year's Hockey Day Minnesota events were held in St. Cloud January 19 and 20. According to media reports there were about 25,000 attendees for the two days of festivities. Nearly 1,500 trips were taken on the free shuttle routes Metro Bus operated for the events.

Metro Bus welcomed the Girl Scouts at their Transit Center on Saturday, February 3, to kick off their annual cookie sales event and showcase their new Mini King Kong ad. After sharing cookie samples with customers, the scouts learned about Metro Bus by touring the Transit Center and taking a ride on the bus.



President's Column

Craig Rempp



Thanks for your membership and involvement in the Minnesota Public Transit Association. This year promises to be a busy one with a number of important projects and policy initiatives that we believe will improve transit service throughout Minnesota.

The 2018 Legislative Session began on February 20th. This session will be fast and furious so we've been working to get legislation drafted that will provide funding for capital needs in the state bonding bill as well as policy changes that should provide more clarity around transit funding issues. **Please be sure to join us in St. Paul on March 7th for Transportation Day at the Capitol.** This is the one day of the year we ask folks to come to the Capitol and meet with legislators to help educate them about the importance of transit service in their districts.



Many of you have been contacted by **Debra Brisk, the Project Coordinator** for the development of five-year transit plans for each transit system in Greater Minnesota. She is working with Sara Dunlap from the Office of Transit at MnDOT to coordinate this effort and allow each system to develop its own, tailored plan for the future of that system. MnDOT has committed to hiring consultants to work with each transit system to assist in gathering information and developing the five-year plans with input from local officials and community members. Please watch for updates on this project from MPTA.

Another area MPTA will be involved with is changes to the rules governing transit in Greater Minnesota. MnDOT has begun a rulemaking process to review all of the current rules and take input regarding changes that would improve transit service. MPTA is interested in changes that would allow for less of a local match to access state dollars and for systems to enter into contracts that are longer than one year in duration.

The planning process for the Minnesota/Wisconsin Public Transit conference is gearing up. **This year's joint conference will be held in LaCrosse from October 15-17.** If you have suggestions for topics or training that you would like to see covered at the conference or if you would like to be part of the planning committee, please let me know: craig.rempp@co.isanti.mn.us

We're bidding a sad farewell to Laura Eash, our MPTA Program Manager as she moves on to another organization and new challenges. We greatly appreciate all of the work Laura has done for MPTA including working on the Roadeo and the conference. The MPTA Board will be looking for a new program manager and we'll let you know when the new person is on board.

We also want to wish **Tim Kirchoff all the best as he retires from Anoka County Transit.** Tim has been our MPTA Treasurer and a very active Board member. We appreciate his great service over the years.

As always, we want to hear from you. Please let us know how MPTA can work for you. We look forward to seeing at the upcoming Transportation Day at the Capitol and this summer at the Bus Roadeo.

Craig Rempp

President



Legislative Report

Margaret Donahoe

The Legislature is back at work for a short 2018 Legislative Session. This year is not a budget year, the two-year budget for transit was passed during the 2017 Session, but adjustments could be made depending on the level of funding in the general fund. This year, the focus will be more on the capital bonding bill and possible changes to the tax code in light of the new federal tax law.

In November, the budget forecast was for a slight deficit in the general fund. Things have changed on a number of fronts: federal funding for the Children's Health Program has been approved, tax collections are up for 2018 and the new federal tax law could mean more money for Minnesota. The expectation now is that the state will have a budget surplus when the February forecast is announced at the end of the month. This is good news for transit systems in terms of general fund appropriations not being at risk for cuts.

MPTA will be advocating for a number of transit projects to be included in the capital bonding bill:

- ◆ Suburban Transit Association demonstration project buses \$3.5 million
- ◆ Rochester Bus Garage \$4 million
- ◆ Southwest Transit \$12 million (\$6 million state bonding, \$6 SWT match)
- ◆ Minnesota Valley Transit Authority River Valley Garage and Park & Ride \$17 million
- ◆ Metro Transit Heywood Bus Garage \$50 million

Another issue of concern has been mileage reimbursement for volunteer drivers. Recent changes in the interpretation of the current law have put transit systems in the position of having to change their reimbursement rate to 14 cents per mile or tell their volunteers they will need to report any reimbursement above this amount as income. The 14 cent per mile rate was set many years ago, and it no longer reflects the cost of operating a vehicle. This discourages people from volunteering their time. Senator Amy Klobuchar is working to introduce legislation at the federal level that would equalize the reimbursement rate for charitable reimbursement and business reimbursement. At the state level, a clear definition for volunteer drivers versus people who drive for services like Uber or Lyft would be helpful. MPTA will be working to help keep volunteer drivers on the road.

There may be some legislation introduced dealing with the governance of transit systems in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. MPTA will be monitoring any bills that deal with this issue.

The legislature will have a couple of new faces after two special elections were held, but the overall partisan make-up of the legislature has not changed. One issue that still remains has to do with whether or not a legislator can serve in the Senate and serve as Lt. Governor at the same time. Senator Michelle Fischbach moves from President of Senate to Lt. Governor because former Lt. Governor Tina Smith was appointed to fill the US Senate seat left vacant by Al Franken. Senator Fischbach would like to remain in the Minnesota Senate where the GOP has a one vote majority (34-33). A court challenge to serving both roles was recently thrown out due to the fact that the legislative session had not yet begun and no votes were taken so no harm has been done. We'll see how this plays out during the session.

With a short session, we don't anticipate major changes in transit funding and MPTA will be closely monitoring and working on policy changes that might be proposed. Please let us know if you have any legislative issues, questions or concerns.

MATBUS Transit Facility

Analysis & Development Strategy



Article originally published in Fargo-Moorhead Metro. Council of Govt's Metro COG newsletter

Since August 2017, MATBUS and Metro COG have been working on a transit facility analysis and development strategy. Part of the reason for this study is that the current rolling stock of MATBUS has grown substantially since the Metro Transit Garage (MTG) was first designed in 2006. Growth in the fleet has resulted from continued increases in ridership and also changing demands of MATBUS ridership, including growth in paratransit services. New route development and increased headways on several routes has resulted in a greatly expanded rolling stock of buses and other transit vehicles. Understanding future system growth is critical to managing facility expansion at the MTG, evaluation of the Ground Transportation Center (GTC) in downtown Fargo, and identifying improvements to future major and minor system hubs - including existing hubs at West Acres Mall and the Courtyard by Marriott in Moorhead.

In addition to fleet growth and changes in ridership, the size and diversity of MATBUS staff has evolved greatly over the past decade - with additional changes anticipated in the years ahead. Changes to MATBUS staff not only relates to the number of employees; changes are also anticipated based on decisions related to contractors and the potential transition to a more unified administrative structure to support a transit authority for the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area. Understanding the administrative and organizational framework for MATBUS is critical to planning for future facilities at both the GTC and MTG.

The recently completed 2016-2020 Transit Development Plan (TDP) outlines a conservative, yet thoughtful, expansion of MATBUS routes in the metropolitan area. Some of these improvements are imminent and programmed in Metro COG's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). As part of the analysis and development strategy, many of the route concepts in the TDP will be evaluated for consistency with future needs of MATBUS - specifically, their impacts on existing and future facilities at both bus stops and transit hubs. Additionally, more exploration is needed on longer term route concepts and operational service levels. Understanding future operational changes assists in a better understanding of how to improve and expand transit facilities, and also accounts for more progressive system facility needs for MATBUS at both at the stop level and at minor and major system hubs in the area.



West Acres Transit Hub

Photo by KLJ



Statewide Transit News

County to test electric shuttle on greenway - Southwest Journal, February 16, 2018

MVTA ridership approaches 3 million in 2017 - MVTA press release, February 12, 2018

Transporting community with quality service
Transit Alternatives continues to Provide rides
for three counties - The Fergus Falls Daily Journal, December 26, 2017

Rural transit system offers free rides to urge newcomers to try the bus - Mankato Free Press, December 8, 2017

Transit board holds retreat to talks prices, expanding services - Le Sueur News-Herald, November 8, 2017

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Send submissions for the next *InTransit* to margaret@transportationalliance.com.

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