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2024 Legislative Session Summary

2024 Bus Rodeo

July 19-20

Canterbury Downs, Shakopee



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President's Column



It's summer and we're gearing up for the big Minnesota Bus Rodeo! This is a great annual event that gives us an opportunity to support and recognize our hard-working bus operators.

This year the **Roadeo will be held in**

Shakopee July 19-20th at Canterbury Downs. We want to thank our host system - MVTA for all of their support and work on the Roadeo. There are lots of opportunities to get involved - judging, volunteering and of course, sending drivers to the event where they will have fun, learn new skills and take part in training. **Registration is available now on our website:** <https://www.mpta-transit.org/event/2024-mpta-bus-roadeo>

It's not too soon to plan to attend our **MPTA Statewide Public Transit Conference October 14-16 in Mankato.** Once again, we're planning an education-packed conference with important training sessions, breakouts on new topics, a huge vendor expo and fun networking activities. **You won't want to miss the big get-together of the year for transit professionals in Minnesota!**

The 2024 Legislative Session was disappointing in terms of transit funding, but some important policy provisions were debated and some were passed into law. You can read more about the outcome of the session in our Legislative Update in this newsletter. Once again, our MPTA lobbyist Sherry Munyon worked with legislators to improve the laws impacting transit systems.

Thanks to everyone who attended Transportation Day at the Capitol! Getting to know local legislators and telling our stories about the importance of transit service in their districts is critical for future transit support.

Activity at the federal level will also be important and MPTA will continue to monitor developments that impact systems as well as funding opportunities. We will also continue our work at the federal level to institute changes to the mileage reimbursement rate for volunteer drivers so that they are not losing money as they provide this important service.

There are still funding opportunities through federal grants that will continue until the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) expires in FY2026. Federal funding has been critical for transit systems all across the country. We will have an update on federal funds and issues as part of the Minnesota Public Transit Conference in October.

MPTA is busy speaking out for you and for transit riders all across the state. Please reach out to me with any feedback, suggestions or concerns.

On behalf of the Board of the Minnesota Public Transit Association, please accept our heartfelt thanks for your membership and participation with MPTA. If you have not yet renewed your membership, please do so. You can send a check or pay online at: <https://www3.thedatabank.com/dpg/154/donate.asp?formid=MPTADues>

I hope to see you soon at the Roadeo and the transit conference!

Sincerely,

Ryan Daniel
MPTA President

Legislative Report

The 2024 Legislative Session - the second year of the biennium - was supposed to focus on passage of a capital bonding bill. Typically, the legislature passes a two-year budget during the odd-numbered years and a two-year bonding bill during the even-numbered years. However, this pattern has been disrupted a few times in recent years and this year's session was nothing if not unusual!

While the budget forecast for the current biennium provided \$3.7 billion in surplus funds, the forecast for the following biennium indicated a deficit of \$1.5 billion. Legislators were largely in agreement about the need to spend additional funds cautiously so that cuts could be avoided in the next biennium.

The capital bonding bill was discussed and debated all session long in committee hearings, draft proposals were put together, but ultimately, no agreement was reached and no bonding bill was passed when the legislature adjourned on May 20th. MPTA had been advocating for additional funds for transit capital projects and will continue to push for dollars to support facilities and other capital needs.

In the area of transportation, the legislature first passed an omnibus Transportation Policy bill - Chapter 104, and then passed an omnibus Transportation Supplemental Budget bill - Chapter 127. The budget bill wound up being included in a huge omnibus bill passed at the last minute that included tax provisions, spending in a number of areas besides transportation and quite a few policy provisions. The original intent was to have the transportation budget included in an omnibus bill with spending for housing and labor but as time ticked away and disruptions and filibusters dominated the floor sessions, leadership decided to aggregate quite a few bills into one and pass it all on a party-line vote.

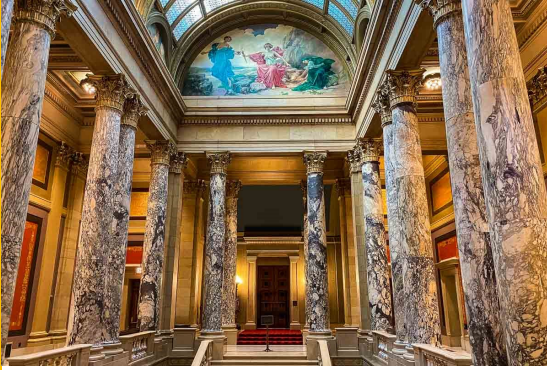
The Transportation Policy bill included changes and updates to some of the statutes governing Greater Minnesota transit. The Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) had convened a task force to look at cleaning up some of the statutes. The task force agreed to the changes proposed in the law and there was no opposition expressed as the bill made its way through the process.

The Transportation Supplemental Budget bill included some policy provisions that impact transit in Minnesota.

- Annually by January 15, the Metropolitan council must submit a financial review that details revenue and expenditures for the transportation components under the council's budget. At a minimum, a financial review must identify:
 - (1) the actual revenues, expenditures, transfers, reserves, and balances in each of the previous four years;
 - (2) budgeted and forecasted revenues, expenditures, transfers, reserves, and balances in the current year and each year within the state forecast period;
 - (3) for the most recent completed year, a comparison between the budgeted and actual amounts under clause (1); and
 - (4) for the most recent completed year, fund balances for each replacement service provider under section 473.388.



Legislative Report



The Supplemental Budget bill for transportation also includes a requirement for metropolitan counties to report on the collection and use of funds they will receive from the new 3/4 cent metropolitan area sales tax that was enacted in 2023.

Legislation was introduced this session that called for **transit systems statewide to purchase zero-emission vehicles only starting in 2030**. MPTA members raised serious concerns over the challenge of meeting this requirement in just a few years and availability of electric

buses as well as the additional cost of the vehicles and the new infrastructure and staff training that would be required with new electric buses.

MPTA worked with legislators to have the language amended and exempt transit systems in Greater Minnesota from this mandate. The final law states that:

- ◆ The Metropolitan Council must establish a bus procurement strategy so that beginning on January 1, 2035, any qualified transit bus purchased for regular route transit service or special transportation service is a zero-emission transit bus.

A new issue that came up rather late in the session - **dynamic transportation options for Greater Minnesota transit** - was brought by advocates in the disability community who would like to see more coordination of service in Greater Minnesota, including the use of transportation network companies (TNC) like Uber and Lyft, as well as taxicab service.

The original legislation required two pilot programs that would need to be implemented fairly quickly and did not include many of the key stakeholders working in transit in Greater Minnesota. MPTA worked with legislators to change the language to ensure that more of the players and more of the issues involved would be part of the process.

- ◆ The commissioner must study, in collaboration with identified stakeholders in subdivision 3, increasing access to transit and transportation options, including ridesharing or other dynamic transportation options in rural, nonmetropolitan areas. The report must identify existing gaps in transportation service in greater Minnesota.

By February 15, 2025, the commissioner of transportation must report the results of the study to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over transportation policy and finance.

The commissioner must outline and make recommendations on establishing a proposed rural dynamic transportation options pilot program in coordination with a rural transportation coordinating council. The proposed pilot program must attempt to increase service in the rural transportation coordinating council's area by identifying gaps in service and propose options to increase mobility, including but not limited to the use of transportation network companies or taxis with access to wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Stakeholders include: The Minnesota Council on Disability, representatives of the blind community, representatives from taxicab, private providers and TNCs, representatives of 5311 and 5307 transit systems, local governments, MCOTA and RTCCs.

- ◆ **Commercial driver workforce** - The new law also deals with issues surrounding the shortage of drivers with commercial driver's licenses. DPS and MnDOT must jointly study and develop recommendations to address driver shortages of commercial vehicle drivers. The study must examine test access, driver compensation and retention, training and other regulatory action.

MPTA is working with OTAT to identify a representative from Greater Minnesota transit to be part of this study. The final report is due February 15, 2025.

Mark Your Calendars for the 2024 Bus Rodeo July 19-20 in Shakopee



Office of Transit and Active Transportation Spring Workshop

The Office of Transit and Active Transportation, along with RTAP, hosted a very informative and productive Spring Workshop May 8th and 9th.

The [materials](#) and [presentations](#) are posted on the RTAP website, including the link to the Transit Jeopardy game (the tool we used is free and can be used for your own training games!) Part of the team who won Transit Jeopardy is pictured above with hosts Alex (played by Chad Hermes, OTAT) and Mayim (played by Kayla Sullivan, Transit Alternatives).



MPTA appreciated the opportunity to provide a legislative update during the Spring Workshop. It's a great event for sharing experiences and providing input as MPTA works to represent transit systems all across the state.

**** Reminder** for MPTA Bus Rodeo July 19-20:**

[Scholarships](#) from RTAP may be available to help with costs, subject to the scholarship policies listed on the Minnesota RTAP website. Please note that scholarships are only available for agencies receiving FTA section 5310 or 5311 funding or Tribal Transit agencies.

Resources for Rural Transit Day, July 16

Learn more about this event and access resources to celebrate this day in your agency and community on the [National RTAP Rural Transit Day](#) webpage. Resources include a proclamation template and ideas for how to recognize and celebrate the day.

National RTAP is also collecting transit tokens for its [Rural Transit Day Time Capsule](#) (regardless of if they are in current use). If you would like to participate, mail your token to Cara Marcus, National RTAP, 5 Wheeling Avenue, Woburn, MA 01801.

THANK YOU MPTA CONTRIBUTORS!

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Schmitt & Sons is headquartered in Lakeville, MN, our hometown since 1941.

The fleet began as a one bus operation in 1952 and has grown to operate over 300 buses. The expansion has also opened doors for new areas of business in charter and public transit. In 2000, Schmitt & Sons purchased the rights to the Gray Line Tours franchise for Minnesota. Within Gray Line, we operate a large fleet of school buses, mid-coaches, and motorcoaches. Schmitt & Sons has also served in the public transit sector for over 20 years.

Our services now reach beyond passenger transportation to include our state-of-the-art repair and maintenance shop. We hire only the most experienced and qualified mechanics and body repair experts.

On January 1, 2016, owners Danny & Sue Schmitt proudly announced that the company is now an employee-owned enterprise. Danny and Sue truly believe that our company would not be allowed to thrive without our hard-working and friendly staff. Therefore this benefit is now available to qualifying employees. Both Danny and Sue are currently on the board of directors for the company.

St. Cloud Metro Bus: On the move, improving service

Moving Metro Bus Forward

Change can bring new connections and help transit move forward. Literally. St. Cloud Metro Bus has been busy preparing internally and externally for upcoming growth and change within the service cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, Sartell and Waite Park. They are creating new connections with the opening of an additional transit hub in Waite Park in the next few years while The [Long Range Transit Plan: Metro Bus Forward](#) is shaping and improving current Metro Bus service.



Long Range Transit Plan

In the fall of 2023, community feedback was gathered and three surveys were launched to understand how people travel, evaluate Metro Bus services from a customer perspective and learn how transit can best serve customers.

495 unique responses highlighting trip details, service satisfaction and customer information were gathered from a [September 2023 onboard survey](#) of customers using Metro Bus services. 167 valid



responses were recorded on the November 2023 online Community Survey with questions addressing overall travel patterns, Metro Bus use and perceptions of public transit in the service area.

The key findings from these surveys resulted in a [State of the System report](#) evaluating growing and maintaining ridership, improving system efficiency, and ensuring service supports the

communities. It also provided comparisons with similar communities and systems to the cities Metro Bus serves to help inform system decisions.

Next steps for the Long Range Transit Plan include proposed service recommendations to be presented to Metro Bus staff and the communities in the Metro Bus service area. Feedback will be gathered on the proposed recommendations before an implementation plan moves forward.

Secondary Transit Hub

On January 16 Metro Bus finalized the acquisition of two parcels of land in Waite Park for the construction of an additional transit hub. This hub was identified in the previous Long Range Transit Plan update and a 2019 feasibility study as a need to improve service to western portions of the Metro Bus service area. The addition of this hub will allow shorter bus trips as well as help reach unserved and underserved areas. "We're excited about the addition of this hub," says Dave Green, Metro Bus COO. "It will allow us to enhance service in a way that we haven't been able to do previously." Metro Bus plans to open the hub in the next 1-2 years and have any service adjustments from the Long Range Transit Plan align with the opening of the hub.

CITY LEADERS MARK TRANSIT HUB DEVELOPMENT WITH GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY

[Northfield News, June 11, 2024](#) By PAMELA THOMPSON pamela.thompson@apgsomn.com

Holding golden shovel heads aloft, Northfield city leaders broke ground Wednesday afternoon on the new Northfield Transit Hub, which will be located just north of the restored Northfield Train Depot.

State Rep. Kristi Pursell, Mayor Rhonda Pownell, City Administrator Ben Martig, City Engineer Dave Bennett, Chamber President Jane Bartho, and Save the Depot Director Alice Thomas tossed a shovel full of dirt in the air while more than 75 community members cheered them on.

Pownell, Batho, Pursell, Thomas and Dianne Ford with ThreeRivers/Hiawathaland bus lines each delivered brief remarks about the significance of the occasion. They thanked the dedicated city staff, Save the Depot donors and supporters and all the interested community members who helped shepard the project from idea to fruition.



State Rep. Pursell told onlookers that “forethought and fortitude” were the two words that came to mind regarding the transit hub project.

“I’m so pleased to support this project,” she said. “Thank you to all who played a pivotal role in moving it forward.”

Mayor Pownell told the crowd that the “convenient, affordable, dependable and sustainable” transit hub was intentionally situated in the heart of Northfield and “not in a remote park” so that everyone benefits.

The city of Northfield was awarded \$1.75 million in state bonding funds to complete the transit hub. Construction on the project starts June 10 and is expected to be complete in October.

The site will include a building and a pavilion. The new building features two levels, one at street level and one at rail level, a waiting room, restrooms and an elevator.

This site will serve as a connection and transfer point for local and regional bus and other transportation options. Hiawathaland Transit, which serves as a bus service in Northfield and Faribault, is expected to use the transit hub as its Northfield hub. Hiawathaland will continue to serve its current routes.

Just a few years back, the Depot was slated for demolition. A group of dedicated volunteers, along with the city’s support, was able to move the Depot from its blighted site. Now the Depot has lovingly been restored, has a sculpture garden and hosts a variety of events throughout the year including nonprofit organization meetings, private social events and art events.

Save the Northfield Depot has long been advocating for MnDOT to pursue passenger rail service from the Twin Cities to Kansas City with a stop in Northfield.

How Rochester is improving its transit system for people with disabilities

[Rochester Post Bulletin - June 8, 2024](#)

By Randy Peterson

ROCHESTER — It's been more than two decades, but Tracy Schramm remembers her first ZIPS ride. "Literally, they took me to my first day at work back in January of 2002," she said of her use of [Zumbro Independent Passenger Service](#), a shared-ride transit service designed for individuals unable to use fixed bus routes.

Since that first ride, she's considered the Rochester Public Transit program a crucial connection to work, medical appointments and leisure activities.

"I use it for anything and everything," she said of the door-to-door transportation service catering to people with disabilities.



Today, Schramm, who uses a powered wheelchair to get around, is a member of Rochester's Advisory on Transit, an appointed volunteer board that works with city staff to offer insights into transit operations and needs. She said her reliance on the service is one reason she's been quick to point out concerns, as well as suggested fixes.

The lack of reliability, along with new transportation programs being started by agencies serving people with disabilities, was among factors cited as the number of rides began declining in the following years.

A 2022 Transit Development Plan pointed to a 38.4% drop in the number of rides between 2017 and 2019, but also noted recovery in passenger counts since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are seeing a rebound when it comes to ridership," said Karli McElroy, the city's new mobility coordinator. "We are pretty much on track to be at or slightly above what we were at or above what we were prior to COVID."

Ia Xiong, who is interim manager for Rochester's transit and parking systems, said the Rochester City Council's approval of a new staff position provides a chance to focus on strengthening the service and meeting future needs. "I think this position is just going to help it grow," she said.

After dropping to fewer than 8,000 rides in 2020, service is now near or slightly above the level seen in 2019, when 41,600 rides were reported.

Rochester Public Transit Improving Customer Experience

Rochester Public Transit is making strides to make transit more accessible and convenient. A couple of projects underway include a bus stop improvement project and the rollout of a new computer-aided dispatch and automatic vehicle location (CAD/AVL) system.

The bus stop project is assessing over 200 bus stop locations throughout the city with the goal of improving their condition by bringing them up to ADA standard and updating rider amenities. Plans are at 90% completion and construction is expected to begin this fall.

RPT is also replacing the DoubleMap AVL system with a new CAD/AVL system by EQUANS. The new system is scheduled to be in operation in June and will provide both users and transit system officials with better tools to manage the bus service's daily operations. Customers will now use the Transit app for real-time bus location and trip planning. Last year, RPT implemented RPT Mobile Fare, an app from Genfare for mobile fare payment.

Fargo City Commission hears recommendation for MATBUS restructuring



[Fargo Forum, June 9, 2024](#)

By Ingrid Harbo

FARGO — There are alterations ahead for MATBUS as funding and staff changes bring the transit service into a transitional period.

The Fargo City Commission discussed the possible changes in an informational meeting on Friday, June 7. A reorganization

study for the transit service proposes changes that would bring all MATBUS services under the city of Fargo's roof, different from the joint Moorhead-Fargo arrangement under which it has historically operated.

At present, MATBUS is jointly operated by the city of Moorhead and city of Fargo, with staff in each city. Both cities contract the company Transdev for fixed-route driver services. However, longtime Moorhead Transit Manager Lori Van Beek plans to retire soon, and as Fargo grows, the amount of federal funding MATBUS receives for operations has decreased.

KLJ Engineering has been conducting a reorganization study of the transit department under a contract with the cities of Fargo and Moorhead since 2023, said Wade Kline, who presented KLJ's proposal for how to restructure the transit service.

When the Fargo-Moorhead area's population rose above 200,000, the formula determining how much operating assistance funding the service received from the federal government changed, said Kline. Between fiscal year 2023 and fiscal year 2024, the city of Fargo was expected to lose \$600,000 in federal operating assistance, while the city of Moorhead was expected to lose about \$270,000 in federal assistance, Kline said.

The financial situation of the bus service will be important to be aware of when planning the future of the bus service, said Susan Thompson, city of Fargo finance director.

Revenues, like ridership, state aid and NDSU revenue, have remained flat over the last 10 years, Thompson said. However, expenses continue to rise. Expenses of energy, driver services and security services have all doubled, and the expense of salaries has risen as well.

Sustaining MATBUS will require looking into other funding opportunities, said Fargo Mayor Tim Mahoney, including increased funding from the legislature.

"To me, the reality is that we can't sustain this funding as a city, we just don't have the funds to fund that and we don't have a model — sales tax is out," Mahoney said. "It would be hard to do sales tax for transportation. The public won't necessarily support that."

The reorganization study helps the city understand the long-term condition of MATBUS, said city administrator Michael Redlinger.

"This wasn't created overnight, it's not going to get solved overnight and this is something that is really strategic and long range," Redlinger said. "It's going to take five years of effort, I think, to really put us in the right direction."

Metro Transit's free fare pilot drives big ridership increase in Twin Cities

The first six months of a pilot program allowing free bus rides on two Metro Transit routes indicates that the idea is popular among riders, though the results are uneven.

The big picture: There's a growing movement for free transit in U.S. cities, and the Minnesota Legislature mandated that Metro Transit give it a spin.

The 18-month pilot should shed more light on the viability of expanding the concept. Zoom in: On Route 32, which runs in the north metro between Robbinsdale and Rosedale Center, weekday ridership from July through December increased 38% compared to the same period the previous year when people had to pay to ride.

That's a much higher increase than overall Metro Transit bus ridership, which rose by 11% during that same time. The other side (of town): On the 62 route, which runs north and south through downtown St. Paul, connecting West St. Paul to Shoreview, ridership only increased 18%.



The intrigue: Metro Transit didn't have an explanation for why one route was more popular than the other. The 62 is more of a commuter route and also rolls through downtown St. Paul, which is a transfer point for a lot of other routes. The free rides don't extend to transfers.

What they're saying: State Rep. Sydney Jordan (DFL-Minneapolis) who authored the free fare legislation, rides the 32 bus. She told Axios that the feedback in her district has been positive.

"There's a lot of good data that shows that we should look more into this."

State of play: Fares account for about 10% of Metro Transit's \$566 million in revenue, according to the Star Tribune. At the time of the launch, the pilot was expected to result in a loss of nearly \$1 million in fares.

Yes, but: Fare enforcement has been one of Metro Transit's tools for increasing public safety on light rail trains. What, if any, effect on public safety the free fares have had won't be clear until the transit agency provides a full report at the end of the 18 months.

Plus, the transit agency is spending \$37.7 million to upgrade its payment system, which would seem to indicate that it isn't planning for wide-scale free fares anytime soon.

Between the lines: State Rep. Brad Tabke (DFL-Shakopee) authored a transit safety bill last session. He told Axios that fare enforcement is not the best long-term approach for safer buses and trains.

"Having free fares helps get more people on transit, which makes it safer," he said.

Reality check: There isn't serious backing at the Legislature to make Metro Transit a fully free system, Tabke added.

FTA Announces \$7.8 Million in Grants to Help Connect People to Health Care and Other Critical Services

Thursday, June 6, 2024

The President's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law adds significant funding to transit pilot program

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) today announced \$7.8 million for 17 projects that will improve public transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals. The grants support organizations that coordinate public transportation for underserved groups, allowing them to access healthcare, community services, education, and jobs by building partnerships among health, transportation, and human services providers.

FTA's Innovative Coordinated Access & Mobility (ICAM) Pilot Program – supported by more than \$24 million in funding over five years from the President's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – increases access for Americans all over the country, with a focus on health and wellness. Today's announcement supports transportation improvements, from designing new trip scheduling technology to buying transit vans, in 15 states.

"Transportation is a lifeline that connects Americans to essential services, like health care, and today we're supporting innovative projects to help more people connect to the help they need" said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

"These transportation projects, made possible by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will help people with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals access the health services they need."

By improving the coordination of transportation to critical services for people who have been underserved in the past, the ICAM program supports the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to improving public health, including mental health. The program provides an opportunity for older adults and people with disabilities and in low-income communities.

"This program supports statewide and regional strategies to help ensure people who are especially challenged in accessing healthcare can reach those critical services," said FTA Acting Administrator Veronica Vanterpool. "We are pleased to provide resources that help reach into the sometimes-overlooked areas of our nation to ensure no one is left behind."

In response to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), FTA received 24 eligible proposals. Projects were selected based on criteria described in the NOFO.



**Federal Transit
Administration**

APTA Calls on Congress to Fully Fund Public Transportation Investments in FY 2025



**American
Public Transportation
Association**

Washington, D.C., June 13, 2024 –

M.J. Maynard, Vice Chair of the American Public Transportation Association and CEO of the Regional Transportation Commission of

Southern Nevada, testified today before the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit on behalf of APTA.

In her [testimony](#), Maynard focused on the critical investments needed to improve our nation's public transit, passenger rail and multimodal infrastructure. She emphasized the positive impact federal investments are having on local communities and the national economy, particularly in supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs.

"Given the enormous economic impact of our industry, if you have a transit problem, you have an economic problem," Maynard said.

"Public transportation does far more than carry people from one destination to another; our industry helps carry the economy," Maynard added. "Every dollar invested in public transportation generates five dollars in long-term economic returns. And the impacts are felt across the nation – to more than 2,000 suppliers in 48 States and Washington, D.C., including smaller urban and rural areas where buses, railcars, and their parts are often manufactured."

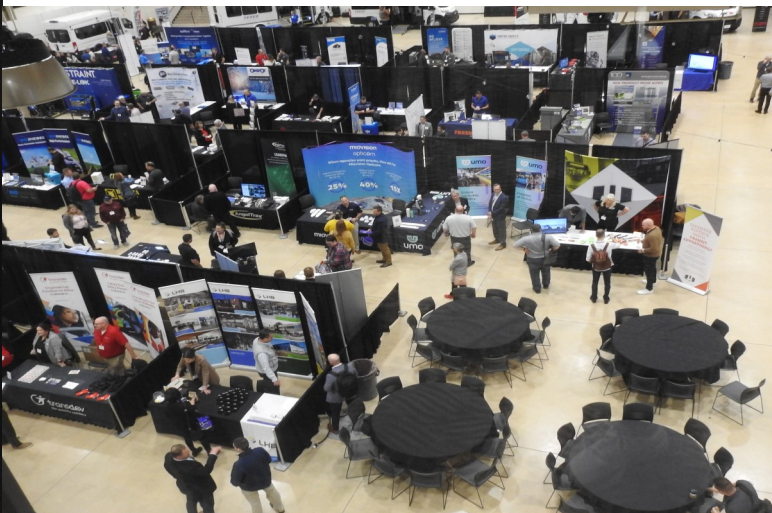
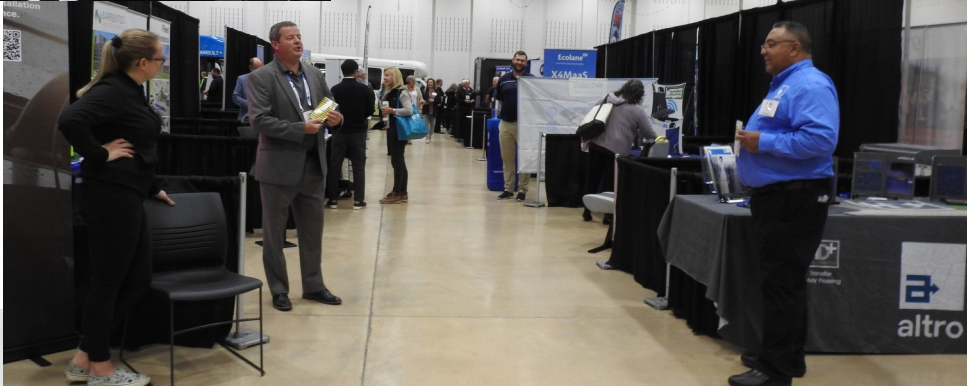
"Investment in public transportation helps communities of all sizes flourish—connecting workers to jobs, students to school, and people to healthcare," Maynard said. "America's strength and progress have always been built on mobility and the opportunity it provides. Public transportation is changing lives."

Maynard echoed a [letter](#) APTA sent to House and Senate Appropriations Committee leaders last month urging Congress to honor the promise of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and fully fund public transit and passenger rail in the FY 2025 Transportation- HUD Appropriations Act.

"These funds will provide the resources necessary to invest in our nation's economic future, bringing systems to a state of good repair, providing rural access, and driving innovation and clean technologies," she said.

For more information on APTA's advocacy efforts and the importance of BIL investment, please visit [Advocacy, Legislation, & Policy – American Public Transportation Association \(apta.com\)](#)

Mark Your Calendars for the 2024 Public Transit Conference - Oct 14-16 in Mankato



Upcoming Events:

MN Rodeo
July 19-20
Shakopee, MN

Minnesota Public Transit Conference
October 14-16
Manakto, MN



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