

intransit



Minnesota Bus Roadeo Results: Rochester drivers place in top three for large bus division; St. Cloud scores top honors in small bus category

On Saturday, July 20, 2013, the City of Rochester hosted the 26th Annual Minnesota Bus Roadeo competition. More than 100 people attended, including drivers, judges, logistic support and spectators. Drivers from as far as Red Lake to as close as Rochester represented their systems and displayed their driving skills with hope to be named the top bus driver in Minnesota.

The Roadeo provides an opportunity for drivers to be recognized for the jobs they do every day, while gaining new insights through specialized training and a challenging timed competition. The Bus Roadeo is divided into two categories: Large and Small Bus. The first place winner in the Large Bus group earns the opportunity to represent the state at the American Public Transit Association's International Roadeo. The first place winner in the Small Bus group is able to advance to the Community Transportation Association of America's national competition.

This year, two Rochester Public Transit drivers, employed by the city's contractor First Transit, finished in first and third place in the large bus division: Chris Daniels and Dennis Piens, respectively. Both Daniels and Piens were first year competitors.

Ken Rakke, St. Cloud Metro Bus, placed second. Rakke is a veteran competitor at the State Roadeo.

In the small bus division the top two honors went to St. Cloud Metro Bus drivers Todd DeZurik (first) and David Peacock (second). Jeffery Iceman of Red Lake Transit, earned third. None of these drivers were new to the winners list.

Driver's Choice Award (Selected by Roadeo contestants)

The Driver's Choice Award is given to the contestant who best demonstrates the spirit of the profession through concern for customers and community, as well as the sense of sportsmanship and camaraderie displayed to fellow drivers during the competition. Roadeo contestants select the recipient of this prestigious award. A driver can only receive this honor once in his/her career. This year George Booker, First Transit, was honored with this award.

Roadeo Winners pictured above: Dennis Piens, Rochester Public Transit (3rd place Large Bus); Ken Rakke, St. Cloud Metro Bus (2nd place Large Bus); Chris Daniels, Rochester Public Transit, (2nd Place Large Bus); George Booker, First Transit (Driver's Choice Award Winner); Todd DeZurik, St. Cloud Metro Bus (1st Place Small Bus); David Peacock, St. Cloud Metro Bus (2nd Place Small Bus); and Jeffrey Iceman, Red Lake Transit (3rd Place Small Bus)



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President's Column

As always, it's a busy summer for the Minnesota Public Transit Association with the conclusion of another great Bus Rodeo and the planning that we're doing for the fall Transit Conference.

I want to thank all of the members of the planning committee for the 2013 Bus Rodeo and applaud them for a job well done. On a picture-perfect day in Rochester, bus drivers from around the state competed as they honed their skills. This event takes many hours of planning and a dedicated team making it all work on the day of the Rodeo. Many thanks to everyone who was involved in this year's event. Check out the MPTA web site for the results of the competition and great photos.

Our next big event will be the 2013 Minnesota Public Transit Conference scheduled for October 14-16 in St. Cloud. As always, this event will feature important training sessions, great motivational speakers, plenty of learning sessions and exceptional entertainment in a great location. You can't afford to miss out on this year's conference. With policy changes at the state and federal levels, the conference is a great opportunity to stay updated on the latest policies and practices.

Look for registration materials and more information about the conference on our web site: www.mpta-transit.org

MPTA will also be working this summer with the larger transportation community to build public support for additional transportation funding. As always, we struggle to maintain and expand transit service to people in our communities. Funding is the key to providing high-quality transit service that meets people's needs. We'll be spending the summer and fall working to raise awareness of the importance of transit service and the benefits of investing additional tax dollars to improve service throughout the state.

On a more personal note, after 27 years of service to St. Cloud Metro Bus, I have decided to move on to the next step in my life. It's true that I thought my next step would be leading Metro Bus, but that is not the case. After careful consideration, I've decided to end my career at Metro Bus and in public transit management. As I move on I wish all the best for everyone in the agency, especially the incoming executive director, Ryan I. Daniel, who starts later this month. I encourage all of you to give this East Coaster a warm welcome to Minnesota.

Finally, with this change in my career path, this will be my last year as MPTA President. It's been a great pleasure to serve you as President the past eight years. I'm looking forward to my last fall conference in St. Cloud and hope to see you there. I'll share more details in the upcoming October issue of *InTransit*.



Margaret Donahoe
Advocacy Director

Minnesota Public Transit Association

Legislative Report

It's that time of the year—time for capital bonding requests. State agencies and local governments have been assembling their wish lists for the next capital bonding bill.

Reports are out in the media that there is widespread agreement for a bonding bill in 2014 of about \$850 million. With strong support among legislators and the governor for a major capital bonding appropriation, we need to keep reminding people of the capital needs that many transit systems have and the need for new lines.

Let's make the 2014 Session the "Infrastructure Session," one that includes both a bonding bill and a transportation funding bill so the state can make needed investment in our public assets.

State agencies submit their requests for bonding dollars to the administration. The governor's office will sort through all of the requests and the governor will announce his bonding recommendations closer to the start of the legislative session.

MnDOT Bonding Requests

The request for Greater Minnesota Transit funding was ranked as the second highest priority for MnDOT.

The agency is requesting \$8,240,000 in 2014 for the following projects:

- City of Mankato: Facility Improvements (Phase III): \$360,000
- City of Rochester: Downtown bus stop and Transit Hub improvements: \$2,080,000
- Duluth Transit Authority: Facility Refurbishments: \$1,640,000

- Kandiyohi Area Transit Joint Powers Board: Willmar Additional Bus Storage Garage: \$440,000
- Rainbow Rider Transit Board: Elbow Lake Bus Garage Grant County: \$640,000
- St. Cloud Metro Bus: Operations Center Vehicle Storage Addition & Improvements (Phase I and II): \$3,080,000

The City of Mankato is moving its Department of Public Works to the former Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) building at 501 South Victory Drive. A portion of the facility is being remodeled for the transit system including a bus garage, maintenance area, wash facility and office space. This request is for Phase III, which will entail an addition to the administrative offices and improvements to maintenance area that were not included in Phase I and II. The total cost of Phase III is \$450,000 of which 80 percent, or \$360,000, is proposed to come from bonding with the remaining 20 percent or \$90,000 from local funds.

The City of Rochester plans improvements to downtown bus stops as well as hubs in northwest Rochester and at St. Mary's Hospital. Total cost of the facilities is \$2,600,000. Bonding is proposed for 80 percent, or \$2,080,000, with local funds covering the remaining \$520,000.

The Duluth Transit Authority plans refurbishments to existing facilities totaling \$2,050,000. Bonding is requested for 80 percent, or \$1,640,000, with local funds covering the remaining \$410,000.

The Kandiyohi Area Transit Joint Powers Board proposed a bus storage garage in Willmar. Total cost of the garage is \$550,000 of which 80 percent, or \$440,000, would be bonded and \$110,000 would come from local funds.

Legislative Report, continued...

Legislative Report Continued...

The Rainbow Rider Transit Board proposed a bus garage for Elbow Lake in Grant County. Total cost of the garage is \$800,000 of which 80 percent, or \$640,000, would be bonded and \$160,000 would come from local funds.

St. Cloud Metro Bus proposed vehicle storage additions and other improvements to their operations center. Total cost of these improvements is \$3,850,000 of which 80 percent, or \$3,080,000, would be bonded and \$770,000 would come from local funds.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) - \$3,200,000

Program consists of the following:

- Funding for one, possibly two, solicitations for infrastructure projects that aim to increase safe and convenient opportunities for children to walk and bicycle to school in communities across Minnesota.
- It is anticipated that this will fund about 20 projects such as sidewalk improvements, traffic calming and speed reduction, pedestrian and bicycle crossings, on-street bicycle facilities, shared-use paths, secure bicycle parking facilities and traffic diversion improvements in the vicinity of schools.

Metropolitan Council Bonding Requests

\$81 million for Southwest LRT

The Southwest project schedule requires that state and local funding be committed by mid-2014. Therefore, the \$81 million in state bonding shown in the 2014 biennium will need to be requested in the 2014 legislative session.

The Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT) Project is a proposed approximately 15 mile extension of the Central Corridor LRT line from downtown Minneapolis through the southwestern suburban cities of St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie as identified in the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan. Project activities funded by state bonding may include environmental analysis, preliminary engineering and final design, the acquisition of public land and buildings and the construction of the transitway including support facilities, bridges, tunnels, track, stations, and park-and-rides.

Heywood Bus Garage - \$20 million

This proposal is to construct a bus garage for an expanded Metro Transit bus fleet. The Metropolitan Council is planning to locate this new transit bus operations and maintenance facility at 830 North 7th Street in Minneapolis (former Ragstock site) on property currently owned by the

Metropolitan Council. The capacity of the facility would be optimized based on space constraints with a minimum goal of 185 buses.

This new facility would include approximately 340,000 square feet and would provide interior bus storage, maintenance, fueling, washing, parts storage, support space, operations space, administrative offices and rooftop parking. Site work includes demolition, environmental soil cleanup, staff parking

Arterial BRT - \$15 million

The A Line (Snelling/Ford) and B Line (West 7th Street) will be the region's first arterial Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines. Opening in 2015 and 2016, respectively, these lines will improve transit speed and customer comfort along two of Metro Transit's most heavily used bus corridors. Arterial BRT is limited-stop, premium bus service with technology-rich transitway stations for an improved experience. Customers will enjoy rail-like features like off-board fare payment and real-time next bus arrival signs at stations, raised platforms for near-level boarding, and substantial, heated shelters. Transit signal priority will give buses extended green lights.

Metro Orange Line - I-35W South BRT - \$20 million

The METRO Orange Line is a proposed 16-mile Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line serving Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington, and Burnsville. Project improvements also benefit BRT express service from multiple providers serving Lakeville, Apple Valley, Savage, Eden Prairie, Edina, Eagan, and Rosemount.

Project activities funded by state bonding may include environmental analysis, preliminary engineering and final design, the acquisition of public land and buildings and the construction of the transitway including bridges, stations, roadway improvements and park-and-rides.

Transitway Capital Improvement Program - \$60 million

The purpose of the Transitway Capital Improvement Program is to build and improve transitways identified in the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Policy Plan and recommended by the Governor's Transportation Finance Advisory Committee. Transitway activities funded through the Capital Improvement Program may include environmental analysis, preliminary engineering and final design, the acquisition and betterment of public land and buildings and the construction, improvement and maintenance of transitways including stations, park and rides, and lane and shoulder improvements which may include the state trunk highway system.



SouthWest Transit drivers participate in wheelchair training

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

SouthWest Transit has been awarded national awards for its safety and security programs.

“We pride ourselves on the ongoing training we conduct to ensure our drivers are proficient in serving our riders’ needs,” said Len Simich, CEO of SouthWest Transit. “All of our buses are ADA accessible and it’s important that our drivers are adept in handling the equipment involved.”

At their recent Safety Meeting, drivers were divided into groups of three. The goal was to complete boarding and de-boarding of the wheelchair on each of our three different styles of buses. This allowed the drivers to experience the process from both the passenger and driver viewpoint. Each group was timed on every bus style as well as monitored for many key safety and customer service features, all with a point value. Scores were added to pick the winning team.



October 14-16 2013

River's Edge Convention Center
St. Cloud

Mark your calendars!

Join your colleagues and friends at the **2013 Minnesota Public Transit Conference.**

We have a great line up of:

- Speakers • Tours • Training Sessions
- Vendor Exhibits • New Ideas & the Latest Trends
- Great Entertainment

Keynote Speaker: Chip Eichelberger

Transform Your Organization - Develop Leaders

Chip shows how the power of making even one new decision can ignite tremendous performance improvements. He can help transform your team from a followership model to an ownership model. This shift can lead you, your team, and your organization to dramatic and quick results.



SouthWest Transit riders give agency high marks in annual survey

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

In April, SouthWest Transit (SWT) staff was on site at all its park and ride facilities to greet riders and ask that they complete the annual Rider Survey. Almost 1,800 surveys were handed out; over 86 percent of the surveys were completed and returned. The vast majority of them indicated that SWT riders are very pleased with the service.

“We take these survey results and our riders’ opinions very seriously,” said Len Simich, CEO of SouthWest Transit. “These results, along with our own monitoring, are used as the basis for changes we will look at in the upcoming year.”

Ninety-nine percent of those who completed the survey say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall service provided by SWT. In specific areas the cleanliness of the buses and transit facilities as well as the drivers’ safety and courtesy were ranked high by more than 99 percent of respondents.

Service reliability and on-time performance also ranked very well at 98 percent.

Comments from riders include:

- Compliments for Wi-Fi equipped buses with requests for more Wi-Fi service
- Requests for more service especially from outlying suburbs

- Approval of the rider-requested quiet zone for cell phones
- Appreciation for the SWT phone app with requests for more features
- Anticipation of the opening of the East Creek Station and Ramp in Chaska

Some other interesting results from the survey include:

- Women make up nearly 55 percent of the riders
- Over 76 percent ride SWT five days a week
- 79 percent of the riders would drive alone if the bus were not available
- Eden Prairie residents account for 52 percent of the riders, with 13 percent from Chanhassen, 11 percent from Chanhassen, and 24 percent from surrounding communities
- More than 79 percent of SWT riders stated that they would prefer SouthWest Transit express service to light rail service

SWT is proud of being an organization focused on customer service, with innovations such as Wi-Fi equipped buses and a real-time phone app.

“We continue to work towards making our riders’ experience on SouthWest Transit the best it can be,” said CEO Simich.

New Metro Bus Executive Director to start August 19

By BERTA HARTIG, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Ryan I. Daniel, WSO-CSS, joins Metro Bus as the new Executive Director starting August 19.

He signed a 5-year contract, which includes an annual base salary of \$96,283 and vacation, insurance and retirement benefits.

“I’m excited to be part of the Metro Bus team,” said Daniel. “During my first 30 days I will focus on meeting all of our employees, getting to know the community and connecting with all of the officials who work with Metro Bus.”

Daniel was the Manager of Bus Service for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority in Washington, D.C., the nation’s 6th largest transit system. He has over 10 years of experience in transit, and has worked for the MTA New

York City Transit and Central Ohio Transit Authority. He has been a bus operator and training manager during his career. He has a bachelor’s degree from York College, Jamaica, NY and a master’s degree from Dowling College, Oakdale, NY. He also has extensive training with the United States Department of Transportation in transit safety and security.



Ryan I. Daniels joins Metro Bus on August 19

Daniel replaces David Tripp who retired from Metro Bus in April, after 33 years of service to the organization.

Friendly Rider celebrates its ten year anniversary in operation

By BRADLEY R. SCHOENHERR, Freelance Writer

Nestled between the cities of Detroit Lakes and Brainerd, about 70 miles southeast of Fargo, lies the city of Wadena, which serves as a viable hub for many of the surrounding townships, cities, and freeways.

Here, director George Behl and his team of transit professionals operate the ever-growing Friendly Rider public transit service to serve the greater Wadena county and northern Todd county. In April, Friendly Rider celebrated their 10-year anniversary.

Every year, the service has seen significant growth in ridership and public admiration, and we can expect such trends to continue. Since their first full year in operation, Friendly Rider's ridership has more than doubled, from 24,409 rides in 2004 to 52,483 rides in 2012. Even more noteworthy is the increase in ridership in the city of Staples, which started in 2007 with 4,093 rides, and has since more than doubled, with a total of 9,556 rides in 2012.



“The public has really embraced Friendly Rider’s presence in the community and has changed and shaped many lives within it,” Said Behl. “Many people have come to depend on the service to get around and interact in ways they otherwise couldn’t.”

It hasn’t been without its challenges. Over the last 10 years, there have been those who openly opposed the service, calling it a waste of taxpayer money and time. “I remember an incident when I talked to someone who openly opposed our presence in the community. That individual is now a regular rider on our transit system, and depends on us daily” Said Behl. “We’ve changed a lot of people’s opinions about public transit, and we strive to continue to do so.”

Another challenge for Friendly Rider has been convincing people that public transit can be an alternative option.

“There’s a preconceived notion that public transit is only for those who need it,” Said Behl.

“However, I truly believe that public transit can be for everyone. I always tell people to give us a chance, and I think you’ll find that we can get you where you need to go conveniently, easily and affordably.”

Friendly Rider has had no problems with its team of drivers. Working closely with the Wadena County Volunteer Driver Program, Behl stated that he has been blown away by the level of efficiency and professionalism of his drivers. “I’m blessed to be able to work with the individuals that drive our busses,” Says Behl. “Friendly Rider has become known for the friendly and professional service that they provide—it really has become their transit system.”

As we look back at the past ten years and celebrate their achievements, George Behl and his team look forward to many more years to come, and anticipate future challenges and accomplishments in the coming decade.



Ridership has more than doubled in the past 10 years.



U-Pass program sees annual increase in student ridership

By HEATH HICKOK, Duluth Transit Authority

As a college student, your focus should be on studying and figuring out what you want to do with your life. Getting from point A to point B should not be a priority or major concern. However, when you're in a new town and your family is far away, finding transportation to class, a part-time job or even the grocery store can present a challenge.

The Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) recognized this nearly 13 years ago when it developed the U-Pass Program. Through the U-Pass Program, students at local colleges and universities ride the DTA for FREE. It is an added benefit that the universities pay for because they know it helps them and their students.

As more students ride the bus, parking becomes less of an issue and the limited amount of property around campuses can be utilized for expanding academic facilities rather than parking. There are now over 35 percent more students on the University of Minnesota – Duluth (UMD) campus than there was in 2000. Even with this increase in student population, they've been able to decrease parking by 500 spaces and have no need to build a new parking ramp.

DTA Board President, John Brostrom, was with UMD as the Assistant Director of Program Services when the program began in the fall of 2000. Initially, everyone thought it would take time for the program to gain momentum and be accepted by the students. However, when ridership numbers after the first year reached 5-year projections, it was clear that it would be a huge success. College-student ridership was a mere 4,000 a month before the program began. Now, the DTA transports that amount in less than two days!

"We knew the program would be successful, but we didn't know it'd be this successful," said Brostrom. "It's been the most effective program UMD has established with an off-campus partner."

The DTA U-Pass program is successful because it meets a need in the community and provides service to a growing sector of the population. Every fall semester, families from across the region travel to Duluth with their children who are beginning a new chapter in their lives. For many of these young people, it is the first time leaving their home towns and their first experience using a public transit system.



"Early on we learned that it didn't make any difference if our students were from Burnsville or Baudette - in Baudette there was no mass transit and in Burnsville, the students drove a family vehicle and most likely had never set foot on a transit bus. The great equalizer occurred when they arrived in Duluth to attend UMD and started riding the DTA's buses," said Brostrom.

With an enrollment of nearly 11,000 students, UMD is the largest post-secondary school in the DTA's service area. All of the major colleges and universities in the Twin Ports also participate in the U-Pass program. In fact, the DTA just renewed contracts with the College of St. Scholastica (CSS) and the University of Wisconsin – Superior (UWS). Lake Superior College (LSC) has experienced an increase in enrollment over the past few years and the number of their students using the DTA's U-Pass Program has also increased significantly. Overall, U-Pass ridership accounts for roughly 17 percent of the DTA's total annual ridership.



Transit Alternatives: A different take on public transportation

By BRADLEY R. SCHOENHERR, Freelance Writer



**Transit Alternatives Driver Kitty
is ready for passengers**



Transit Alternatives
"A program of Productive Alternatives, Inc."

Transit Alternatives is perhaps one of the most unique public transit systems in Minnesota. Located in Fergus Falls, this transit system is operated by a non-profit organization called Productive Services.

Productive Services provides services and goods to disabled and disadvantaged members of the community, including job placement, detox centers, and even a thrift store. Productive Alternatives was already providing transportation for some of their services, when MnDOT approached them with a proposition. The result: a public transit service titled "Transit Alternatives: Otter Express."

On August 1, 2006, Productive Services partnered with MnDOT to bring the citizens of Otter Tail county and its neighboring counties an efficient, effective public transit system.

In their first full calendar year in 2007, Transit Alternatives recorded 102,973 total rides. They've been steadily growing their ridership each year, with projected total rides of 131,477 for 2013. The demographic with the highest increase— young children riding to daycare and preschool.

Since the program's inception, the routes have expanded to reach more communities and open new opportunities for those who ride Transit Alternatives. Contracts with Day Training & Habilitation to provide rides for persons with disabilities have been made, and have opened new doors of mobility for these individuals. With Sunday services in the Moorhead area and a weekly route to Hawley, the transit program continues to grow each year.

Daryn Toso, Director of Transportation Services, commented on his experiences with Transit Alternatives over the years. "MnDOT has been great to work with. They have been very supportive of our services and assisted us with expansions in Otter Tail, Rural Clay and into Wilkin County in August of this year."

What started as a perk for those using Productive Services has developed into so much more. From scheduling rides to after school activities and sporting events, to delivering freedom and mobility to those who need it most, and even serving as an inexpensive option for longer drives to neighboring counties, Transit Alternatives: Otter Express really has become what its name implies, a viable, alternative option of transportation.

In the News...

New city transit facility moves forward \$6.5 million bus hub planned for Hoffman and Victory

By MARK FISCHENICH, Mankato Free Press

Originally printed: July 22, 2013

A new Mankato transit facility — in the planning and money-acquiring phase for nearly five years — should be under construction next year with completion expected in 2015.

The \$6.5 million project will be constructed on the north side of the city's public works complex in the former Minnesota Department of Transportation regional headquarters at the intersection of Hoffman Road and Victory Drive. [Read more](#)



MATBUS celebrated the arrival of a four 40-foot hybrid vehicles in May at a special black-tie event in Downtown Fargo. The Xcelsior New Flyer buses and are the largest to be utilized in the region, were manufactured and assembled in Minnesota and are future evidence of MATBUS' commitment to the environment.



Inducting the new fleet during the ribbon cutting ceremony: Ambassador, Chamber of Commerce; Gregg Schildberger, MATBUS; Ross Watson, New Flyer; Mike Williams, City of Fargo - City Commissioner & Transit Coordinating Board Member; Harold Pedersen, City of Fargo - Fleet Services Manager; Kevin Trana, MATBUS; Gene Fife, MATBUS; Amy Nash, Downtown Community Partnership - Sustainability Coordinator; Julie Bommelman, MATBUS; Melissa Sobolik, City of Fargo - City Commissioner & Transit Coordinating Board Member; Erik Diederich, North Dakota State University - Student Body Vice President; Ambassador, Chamber of Commerce

U-Pass program sees annual increase in student ridership

(continued from page 8)

The program is so successful at UMD, that in 2012 the DTA recognized its 5 millionth U-Pass passenger. Just for comparative purposes, total ridership at UMD for the 2007-2008 school year was 420,292 and in 2011-2012 it was 569,361. As ridership continues to outpace enrollment, clearly more students are choosing to leave the car at home and ride the bus. These young people are the public transit passengers of the future.

“It was also our hope that students would develop mass transit riding habits that they’d carry with them the rest of their lives - and these habits would have been started at UMD while riding the DTA.” Brostrom said.

LSC has also seen significant increases in ridership. In 2008, ridership was 117,690 and in 2012 it was 184,554. 2013 is on pace to be another banner year. In fact, since last September every month except for January has had record ridership. The DTA is installing a new transit system map along with a new passenger hand schedule rack at the LSC transit hub to accommodate for this increase in demand.

The future of public transit in Duluth is bright. As the DTA’s system grows and evolves, the U-Pass program will be a key component. If student ridership continues to increase at its current pace, the DTA will be recognizing its 10 millionth U-Pass passenger in no time. Currently, the DTA’s total U-Pass ridership numbers are at 6.9 million and should hit 7 million in August.

METRO Blue Line marks ninth anniversary

By JOHN SIQVELAND, Metro Transit



For the last four years, Lisa Nguyen-Gaulke has relied on the METRO Blue Line to reach her job in downtown Minneapolis, a trip she estimates takes half the time she'd spend commuting by car from her Standish-Ericsson home.

Nguyen-Gaulke also uses the Blue Line to get to Twins games or other weekend events and as an easy connection to the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. Combined with their bikes, Nguyen-Gaulke's use of the Blue Line allowed she and her husband to downsize to a single vehicle two years ago.

"It makes a big difference, especially with gas as high as it's been recently," Nguyen-Gaulke said this week.

Nguyen-Gaulke is among a growing number of residents who — nine years after the Blue Line's opening and more than 30 years since it was first envisioned — have come to see light rail as an integral part of their daily lives.

As the Blue Line marks another anniversary today, here's a quick snapshot of how the state's first light rail line is performing and a look at what is yet to come.

Ridership is exceeding expectations. Nearly 10.5 million customers boarded Blue Line trains in 2012, a record number of passengers for the 11-mile light rail line. Ridership levels have been trending nearly 30 percent ahead of projections for the year 2020. In Metro Transit's 2012 Customer Survey, 60 percent of respondents said

they were on their way to work; 15 percent were running errands and 9 percent were on their way to school. Riders said they chose transit because they had no access to a vehicle, wanted to avoid stress and avoid gas and parking expenses. More than 42 percent of passengers have ridden for more than five years and more than 90 percent rated service as "good" or "excellent."

Development is surging. At the north end of the Blue Line, housing and office projects are planned or underway in the North Loop and near Target Field. Directly adjacent to the Nicollet Mall Station, a 26-story apartment building is rising from the ground — the first high-rise in Minneapolis in 30 years. Plans to add offices, green space and apartments near the site of the new Vikings Stadium are taking shape. East of the 38th Street Station, a 180-unit apartment building, Longfellow Station, is nearing completion. And in Bloomington, plans for a 50-acre transit-oriented development around the Bloomington Central Station are taking shape as the Mall of America continues to expand.

Property values along the corridor have been strengthened. Single-family homes within a quarter-mile of the Blue Line have sold for 4.2 percent more than homes in a comparison area, with values increasing an average of \$5,000 per home. A 2013 study found home values within a half-mile of hi-frequency transit like the Blue Line performed 48 percent better during the recession compared to those farther away.

Connectivity is growing. With the opening of the METRO Red Line last weekend, customers in the south metro have access to a frequent, all-day service connecting to the Blue Line at the Mall of America Transit Station. In 2014, the METRO Green Line will provide light rail passengers with a convenient connection to St. Paul and the University of Minnesota. When the Interchange transit hub adjacent Target Field opens next spring, connections between transit services, including the Northstar Commuter Rail line and bus service, will further improve. Future connections include the Snelling Bus Rapid Transit Line, which would run from the 46th Street Station and along Snelling Avenue to Rosedale Center, and the Green Line Extension, which would run light rail between Minneapolis and Eden Prairie.

Service will continue to improve. A dozen new light rail vehicles have been added to the Blue Line fleet in the past few months, providing service with all three-car trains during peak periods and special events. The vehicles are designed to be more energy-efficient and comfortable for passengers. Planned streetscape improvements on Hiawatha Avenue will make the corridor more inviting to pedestrians and bikers. And reconfigured traffic signal technology will help move traffic more quickly along Hiawatha Avenue. A growing police force will provide additional law enforcement presence throughout the entire Metro Transit system.

metro council.org

& JOHN SIQVELAND, Metro Transit

METRO Red Line averages 800 riders per weekday

After three weeks of regular service, customers are boarding METRO Red Line buses an average of 798 times each weekday, and an average of about 450 times on weekend days. The new bus rapid transit (BRT) service, which operates along Cedar Avenue and Highway 77 from Apple Valley to the Mall of America, began on June 22 and is the first of its kind in the Twin Cities.

Average weekday ridership is forecast to reach 975 after the first full year of service, growing to 1,600 in 2017. The METRO Red Line provides additional options for those travelling the Cedar corridor and complements existing express bus and local connecting bus service.

[Read more](#)

Mid-year 2013 Metro Transit ridership: 40 million

Through the first half of 2013, customers have boarded Metro Transit buses and trains 39.9 million times – 312,000 more rides than the same period last year (a 0.8 percent increase).

[Read more](#)

Metro Transit's safety and security efforts earn industry accolades

Metro Transit's safety record is getting attention both nationally and locally from industry peers. The agency has landed three safety-related awards from industry groups this year, including a "Gold Standard" rating for its transit security program announced last month by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

[Read more](#)

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