

A bimonthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

intransit

Fall/Winter 2015 Edition

**Thank you for attending this year's MN/WI Public
Transportation Conference and Expo in Duluth!**



*Award recipients at the MPTA Awards Ceremony on Monday,
October 19th at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center.*

For a complete list of winners, see pages 2-3.

For more photos from the conference and vendor expo, see page 7.

President's Column

Craig Rempp



Thank you for your support! As I take over the reigns as President of the Minnesota Public Transit Association, I want to thank you for your support of my nomination as president and for your support of MPTA.

We have had a busy year in 2015 and 2016 promises to be just as important. In 2015, MPTA joined with groups from all across the state to advocate for additional transportation funding and succeeded in making transportation a top legislative priority. As we head into the 2016 session, the pressure is on to increase investments for transit systems and highways statewide. With the expectation of a strong budget surplus, we need to keep reminding legislators of the need for additional funding for transit service.



At the federal level, there are great expectations that Congress will finally pass a 6-year surface transportation authorization act with stable and hopefully, growing revenue for transit systems. We will keep you updated on all of the action in Washington.

Our 2015 Minnesota/Wisconsin joint transit conference was a major, successful event with great turnout from transit systems and informative sessions and training opportunities. The conference provided a wonderful chance to visit with colleagues from Wisconsin and learn more about best practices and important trends from representatives of national associations as well as other states. We were fortunate to have strong support from the companies that support the transit community and we want to especially thank all of the companies that sponsored and supported this important annual event. Make sure to visit the MPTA web site to access presentations from speakers and view photos from the conference:

www.mpta-transit.org

The MPTA Annual Meeting was also held in conjunction with the conference. This year we honored colleagues who have shown outstanding leadership and commitment to transit service. Awards were given to the following recipients:

Distinguished Career:

BEVERLEY MILLER, MINNESOTA VALLEY TRANSIT AUTHORITY



President's Column

Craig Rempp

Transit Professional of the Year:

GREGORY NEGARD, PAUL BUNYAN TRANSIT

JOHN HARRINGTON, METRO TRANSIT POLICE

Transit System of the Year:

ST. CLOUD METRO BUS

Innovation Management:

METRO TRANSIT STUDENT PASS

ST. CLOUD METRO BUS MOBILITY TRAINING CENTER

Minnesota Bus Operator of the Year:

WILLIAM "BILL" BARRY, MARTIN COUNTY TRANSIT

In addition, we said farewell to some long-time transit system managers: Linda Elfstrand, Tri-Cap Transit Connection; Harold Jennissen, Rainbow Rider Transit; Cara Nielsen, Lincoln County Heartland Express; Rachel Schneiderman, Renville County Heartland Express. These members will definitely be missed!

The MnDOT Office of Transit is currently working to update the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment plan so please add your input as the process unfolds. MPTA will be gathering comments and sending our collective feedback to the Department.

Our MPTA Legislative Committee is working to develop our 2016 legislative priorities. We will be supporting a number of options to increase funding for transit service in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and in Greater Minnesota. Please let me know if you have any suggestions or legislative concerns.

One of my top priorities for the coming year is to improve communication with members and the association as well as between members and state and regional agencies and between members and local government officials. I want to hear from you as we develop our plans for 2016!

We are here to serve as a resource for you so please don't hesitate to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,

Craig Rempp

President

Legislative Report

Margaret Donahoe



Transportation advocates often feel as though the work done to push for additional funding goes nowhere and little progress is realized. This can go on for a number of years and then suddenly – seemingly out of nowhere – a legislative body gets busy and passes major legislation.

We're seeing this scenario play out at the federal level as Congress rushes to get a 6-year surface transportation authorization act passed by the end of the year – a feat that has not been accomplished since SAFETEA-Lu was passed in 2009. All of the work done by advocates to keep pushing, to keep hammering and to keep the message out there is paying off in terms of agreement on a stable, multi-year bill and a consensus that the transportation bill is a “must-pass” piece of legislation for Congress.

MPTA has weighed in with the members of Minnesota's Congressional delegation, letting them know how important federal funding is for transit service all across Minnesota. Our main messages: increase funding as much as possible, including allocating the dollars available over 5 years instead of 6 so that funding is actually increased rather than maintained at current levels; and restore the Bus and Bus Facilities program that was cut under MAP-21. In addition, we are opposed to language that would limit the federal match for transit capital projects to 50% rather than 80%.

It's an exciting time in Washington and we're all waiting anxiously to see if Congress will get the job done. **Be sure to send a quick email to your member of Congress and our two US Senators asking them to do all they can to get a multi-year authorization act to the President's desk with strong funding levels for transit service.**

At the state level, transportation funding continues to be in the mix of issues that rise to the top when the 2016 Legislative Session is discussed. Thanks to the work we have done to elevate the importance of transportation, there is still pressure to get the job done and develop a long-term plan for addressing transportation needs.

As the 2015 Session came to a close, both the House and Senate had passed major transportation plans that promised an increase in funding of somewhere between \$7 billion and \$11 billion over the next 10 years. Unfortunately, differences over whether or not to raise taxes led to a stalemate over long-term funding.

Legislative leaders continue to say that transportation, along with tax cuts and a capital bonding bill remain to be completed during the 2016 Session. The question now is whether or not the legislature will address the real, ongoing needs in transportation or whether one-time funding from the surplus and the bonding bill will be the best that can be agreed to in a short session.



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Legislative Report

Margaret Donahoe

At the close of the 2015 Session, the budget surplus remained largely unspent with about \$850 million on the bottom line. The November forecast for the state's general fund budget is expected to add to that surplus. The argument has been that the legislature can't be expected to raise new revenue for transportation when the state has a significant budget surplus, but the exact amount of that surplus that would fund transportation has yet to be clearly defined. Plenty of other items on the legislative agenda could eat up much of the surplus including tax relief, early childhood education, programs that will close the disparity gap between white and minority Minnesotans, providing benefits to unemployed mine workers and increasing the state's budget reserve.

Transit advocates have been advocating for an increase in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area sales tax that is dedicated to transit along with an increase in the revenue from the sales tax on leased vehicles that helps to fund Greater Minnesota transit. The general fund appropriation for transit operations could also be increased as well as general obligation bond proceeds directed to transit projects in the capital bonding bill. Last session, the Senate funding bill included an increase in the metro sales tax and additional MVST dollars for Greater Minnesota transit. The House bill provided some one-time funding for transit capital in the Twin Cities region along with an increase in the leased vehicle sales tax revenue for transit outside the Twin Cities area.

The pieces are in place for a significant increase in transit funding, but a short session (March to May) in an election year will make agreement on a long-term plan challenging. Advocates will need to keep raising awareness and calling attention to transportation funding needs if we want to keep the legislature focused on this issue.

Everyone needs to talk to local legislators and local government officials about the importance of transit service and the cost increases that make expanding service to meet growing demands difficult. If we don't keep transportation on the radar screen by making noise, other issues will dominate the session and once again, transportation will be left for another day. It may seem like banging our heads against a wall, but you never know when an agreement will be reached and significant legislation will suddenly be on the table. The one thing we can guarantee – if we don't speak up, there will be no incentive for the legislature to take action in 2016.

Mark your calendars for Transportation Day at the Capitol – March 16, 2016, St. Paul.

Remembering Greg Negard



Special thanks to LUANN BLEILER and SARAH LENZ

Greg Negard passed away on Thursday, November 19, 2015 at the age of 62.

Greg joined the Paul Bunyan Transit staff as Executive in December 2004. The next year, he collaborated with the local DAC to do all their transportation, which resulted in an additional four routes. In 2006, Paul Bunyan Transit received MPTA's Transit System of the Year award. In July 2015, Greg retired, and in October, he received MPTA's Transit Professional of the Year award.

From 2007 to 2012, Greg was an active member of the Bus Rodeo Planning Committee. The Rodeos were a passion of his. Greg also served on the Bemidji City Council, sat on the MPTA and RTAP Boards, and was involved in Transportation Day at the Capitol as well as many other community and political events.

During Greg's time as Executive Director, Paul Bunyan Transit went through lots of exciting events and changes, including going from a five to 25 bus system with sixteen routes (up from six) and 30 employees (up from ten), as well as:

- 2008 - Hosted the MN Statewide Bus Rodeo.
- 2010 - Built a twenty stall bus facility with a bus wash and a two stall mechanics bay. Remodeled the office building, adding a dispatch center, two new offices, conference room and reception area.
- 2011 - Became the depot for Jefferson Lines, hired a Mechanic to provide all bus and building maintenance, and collaborated with Hubbard County Heartland Express to provide automated dispatching for the buses in the city of Park Rapids from the Bemidji Office.
- 2012 - Hosted the MN Statewide Bus Rodeo.
- 2015 - Merged with Far North Transit (Roseau, Warroad and Baudette) which added a facility and 7 buses in January. Collaborated with Focus (Roseau) to provide transportation for their clients.

Visit [All-States Cremation](#) to view the obituary and sign the guestbook. A memorial service will be held in Bemidji in the early spring of 2016.





Thanks for attending this year's conference & expo!



Dennis Jensen, Duluth Transit Authority's General Manager, was recognized at the 20th Annual First Transit Reception Tuesday evening.



Conference attendees enjoyed lunch before checking out the vendor expo floor on Tuesday afternoon.



John Sweeney from the Brave New Workshop in Minneapolis entertained with his keynote address.



Above: Aleda Johnson, Duluth Transit Authority's Director of IT and Sustainability Coordinator, welcomed vendor expo attendees to the DTA booth.



Left: MPTA President Craig Rempp (left) and MnDOT Commissioner Charlie Zelle.

Installation of new bus stop signs continues

Submitted by DREW KERR & edited by LAURA EASH

After a [successful pilot](#), around 2,300 new bus stop signs with enhanced information will be installed this fall.

The new signs include route and unique stop numbers, as well as instructions for accessing real-time predicted departure times through [NexTrip](#). Signs at stops with higher ridership will also include a route map, frequency information (for the trunk of the route) and indicate the direction that buses serving that stop travel.



Installations began earlier this week in St. Paul along routes 63 and 64. Signs will be installed along more than 20 additional routes that serve North Minneapolis and the northwest suburbs in the coming months.

New signs will be installed at all of Metro Transit's 12,000 bus stops through 2017. Sign installations will be prioritized based on ridership.

Around 100 new signs went up earlier this year in North Minneapolis and Brooklyn Park to give customers an opportunity to provide feedback. Some minor design changes were made after the pilot (for example, frequency charts now indicate a range of time instead of using the terms morning, mid-day or evening).

The new signs are part Metro Transit's broader [Better Bus Stops](#) program. With funding from a federal Ladders of Opportunity grant and other resources, more new and replacement waiting shelters will be installed in the coming years.

NexTrip signs added to several new locations

Submitted by DREW KERR and edited by LAURA EASH

Digital displays that provide NexTrip information have been installed at several busy boarding areas around the region, nearly doubling the number of signs up systemwide.

NexTrip signs are now located at transit centers in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Brooklyn Center, Columbia Heights, Maplewood, Robbinsdale and Roseville. Signs have also been added to bus stops near several [METRO Blue Line](#) stations, including Franklin, Lake Street/Midtown, 38th Street and 46th Street.

The signs provide real-time predicted departure information for all routes departing within 15 minutes at the stops where they are located. The sign posts also have buttons that can be pushed for audio announcements of upcoming departure times.

NexTrip signs have been in use since 2009. Digital displays with NexTrip information were activated at all light-rail stations earlier this year.

New [downtown St. Paul bus shelters](#) that opened at busy boarding locations this year also include NexTrip signs.

Metro Transit is focusing on improving bus boarding areas through its Better Bus Stops program. In addition to NexTrip displays, enhanced signage and shelters are being installed at sites across the region.



Innovative training program provides aspiring mechanics skills, opportunity

Submitted by DREW KERR and edited by LAURA EASH

Launching this fall, the Metro Transit Technician Program will provide participants college and career readiness training, support toward earning a degree and an internship with the Bus Maintenance Department.

Metro Transit is leading the effort in coordination with Twin Cities R!SE and Hennepin Technical College. The Federal Transit Administration is supporting the effort with a \$203,000 grant, part of a larger national effort to address a looming worker shortage in the transportation industry.

The Metro Transit Technician Program was promoted this year at area schools and a series of Employment Open Houses. Chosen from among hundreds of applicants, a group of 40 program participants will complete college and career readiness training this fall.

Promising candidates will be enrolled in a two-year associates degree program at Hennepin Technical College in fall 2016. While pursuing their degree, participants will complete internships at Metro Transit, gaining experience while earning competitive wages. Full-time Mechanic-Technicians start at around \$24 an hour.

“Economic disparities are increasing in our state, so this partnership comes at a critical time,” said Tom Streitz, President and CEO at Twin Cities R!SE. “Twin Cities R!SE is excited about the immense generational impact this program will have on participating individuals and their families.”

Merrill L. Irving Jr., Ed.D., President at Hennepin Technical College, said the school looks forward to helping students on their way to successful careers. “HTC values degree and certificate programs that redefine the economic status of our communities and workforce,” Irving said. “This program supports the college’s mission while also creating high-wage career opportunities for students through advanced technical education.”

Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb said, “Recruiting from all corners will help us address critical workforce needs,” he said. “But, more than that, we recognize everyone deserves a chance to achieve their full potential and want to actively participate in making opportunities available.”



News



Applicants needed for new Equity Advisory Committee

The Metropolitan Council is seeking applicants for a newly created advisory board to help advance equity in the Twin Cities region.

The Equity Advisory Committee will advise the Council in advancing equity in the region, and specifically how the Council implements the equity commitments in Thrive MSP 2040, the region's long-range development plan. Members of this committee will influence Council decisions related to regional policies on transportation and transit, local planning, housing, environmental issues and more.

"We're looking forward to the work of this committee and the diverse range of viewpoints and voices this will bring to our decision-making processes," said Council Chair Adam Duininck. "Our Council and our community partners are anxious to begin recruiting members so the committee can get to work in early 2016. This group will play a key role in helping the Council realize its commitment to creating more equity in our region."

The committee will have 21 members, representing geographic districts to assure region-wide representation, as well as people from different races, incomes, abilities and backgrounds. It will include four sitting Council members. There will be two co-chairs – one Council member, and one member of the community. Terms will be staggered so approximately half the members will be up for reappointment every two years.

Applications will be accepted through at least Jan. 4, 2016. To apply, visit the [Equity Advisory Committee page](#) or contact the Council's [appointments coordinator](#) at 651-602-1630.

Applicants will need to fill out an application and indicate both their interest in equity issues and experiences that might help the selection committee evaluate candidates. Applicants will be interviewed and evaluated in early 2016.

Four partner coalitions actively advocated for creating the committee – the Blue Line Coalition, Community Engagement Steering Committee, Equity in Place, and SWLRT Equity Commitments. These groups will also be involved in evaluating candidates.

**Visit *Rider's Almanac*, Metro Transit's blog,
to read
[Balancing the books between the farebox
and the bank](#)**



Eastview High School Students Produce MVTA, School Spirit Bus Panels

Submitted by ROBIN SELVIG and edited by LAURA EASH

Students enrolled in Eastview High School's Multimedia class have produced interior panels for display in local and express Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) buses. The panels focus on themes involving school spirit and transit.

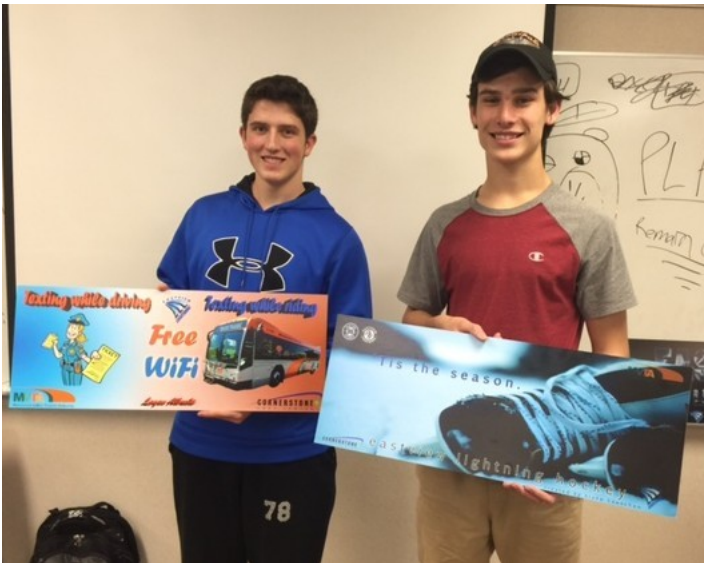
The students from three Multimedia classes, taught by Nick Fornicoia, had their work reviewed by MVTA staff, with winning entries from each class selected in the two categories. First Period Winners (below, left) were: MVTA Category – sophomore Ashley Barington, daughter of Michelle Barington of Apple Valley; School Spirit – junior Jack Mason, son of Greg and Susie Mason of Eagan. Fifth Period Winners (below, right) were: MVTA Category – sophomore Ethan Pichardo, son of Elizabeth Pichardo of Apple Valley; School Spirit – sophomore Dominic Petersson, son of Sandra Castillo of Apple Valley. Sixth Period Winners (next page) were: MVTA Category – junior Logan Albrecht, son of Joelle and Patrick Albrecht of Apple Valley; School Spirit – junior Blake Hoeschen, son of Al and Ruth Hoeschen of Apple Valley. The students received a \$25 gift certificate to Best Buy for their efforts and all participating students received an “actual size” panel of their work. All panels are installed on MVTA buses throughout the seven cities served.

As part of their class, students were to complete a project using software such as Adobe Photoshop, along with a variety of graphics and images. The MVTA had the panels printed and dry mounted by Cornerstone Copy Center, for display on the interior of MVTA buses.

“It is so much fun to see the creative efforts of today’s students,” said Robin Selvig, MVTA Customer Service Manager. “Students are very sophisticated in using graphic tools and techniques to complete their projects. We hope it is fun for the students to receive life-size copies of their bus panels and we invite them to ride the buses to see their work,” she said.

This project is part of a strategic partnership between the MVTA and area schools. Other area high schools interested in participating in this program are invited to contact the MVTA. Cornerstone Copy Center also participates by producing the panels for a reduced price.





Sixth Period Winners junior Logan Albrecht, son of Joelle and Patrick Albrecht of Apple Valley, and junior Blake Hoeschen, son of Al and Ruth Hoeschen of Apple Valley.

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- Updates on federal legislative action
- News and retweets from MPTA members
- Local and national media coverage of transit news and issues

Send submissions for the next *InTransit* to Laura: laura_eash@mpta-transit.org

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