

# intransit



## Increasing capacity through strategic partnerships

By LINDA BAIR, Hubbard County Heartland Express

Adding a bus may increase capacity, but adding a proper dispatching system was the key to maximizing it. For a small system like Hubbard County Heartland Express investing in expensive AVL technology didn't make financial sense; however, a partnership Paul Bunyan Transit make perfect sense.

For years our Hubbard County Heartland Express provided public transit services within the city of Park Rapids and the surrounding area with only one bus for both demand response and deviated route services. The driver dispatched his rides from a cell phone. When a second bus was added, it was clear the current dispatching system presented safety and efficiency issues.

### Hubbard County Heartland Express operates Monday-Friday:

- Demand response service within Park Rapids City Limits
- Deviated route service from Laporte into Park Rapids, daily
- Deviated route service from Park Rapids through small communities into Bemidji, twice a month
- Coordinate volunteer driver program for public transportation to medical appointments and public events

By partnering with Paul Bunyan Transit, we have maximized our ridership capacity and also have increased safety with very little additional expense. We gained very inexpensive access to AVL technology. After installing the necessary equipment to our two buses, Paul Bunyan Transit was able to roll our needs into their existing personnel and equipment with no additional expense. Our ridership capacity has increased dramatically with our ability to group rides. Safety is improved because drivers are no longer distracted by answering the phone and booking rides. Our partner, Paul Bunyan Transit has gained a fiscal advantage with minimal expense. We also feel that this has opened the door for all kinds of coordination options among our small systems up here in Region 2.

The biggest challenge to this partnership was helping our clients adjust to a less personalized service. Previously, they scheduled their rides directly with the driver who knew where they lived just by mentioning their name. The service was akin to a taxi cab. Now, they call an out-of-towner who asks them for their address. And, they must wait longer to be picked up because their tip is grouped with others nearby. For Paul Bunyan Transit, the concept of being able to travel from one end of town to the other in just five minutes was an adjustment.

### Hubbard County Ridership

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| 33% | people with disabilities |
| 26% | elderly                  |
| 25% | children                 |
| 16% | adults                   |





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## President's Column

Decisions made in Washington and St. Paul have direct and far-reaching consequences for all of us. With an unprecedented state government shut down impacting people all across the state, this may be a message that resonates a little more. Many people are angry, frustrated, and anxious. Maybe a greater realization will sink in that government funds valuable services and participation in government is critical if people want to have some say in decisions impacting their lives.

For transit riders, the government shut down may not have an immediate impact as the bus or train continues to show up on time, but if the shutdown continues for many weeks, some service will have to cease. The final budget agreement may well have a more serious impact as cuts to the general fund dollars for transit will likely be included in the budget for the coming biennium.

### **Some sobering thoughts to consider:**

- Transit systems are likely to see cuts in the general fund budget for transit when an agreement is finally reached. Many systems will be facing these cuts just as they have spent down some or all of their reserves.
- The projections for revenue from the motor vehicle sales tax (MVST) have been overly optimistic for nine out of the last 10 years.
- The Metropolitan Council is planning for significant budget cuts and is planning meetings regarding fare increases and service reductions.
- Greater Minnesota transit systems are being told to plan for at least a 10-15 percent cut in current funding levels.
- Fuel prices and other cost increases will impact budgets — consuming forecasted increases in MVST revenues.
- Federal funding for transportation may also be cut as Congress and the Administration struggle with the successor to SAFETEA-LU.
- For transit systems that can't maintain service with local dollars, current riders will look for other alternatives and ridership may be negatively impacted into the future.

*Continued...*

## You can make a difference!

Let people know what is happening with transit service in their communities and why additional funding is so important.

Local news media are happy to get stories and information they can use and it doesn't cost any money. Riders are happy to speak up for a valuable service they need. Legislators will meet you over a cup of coffee and learn more about the services you provide. And MPTA is here to assist with information, talking points, materials, meeting organization and moral support.

People are clearly paying more attention to what government does and how it is funded. This is a great opportunity to engage people and help them understand the value of transit in Minnesota.

Margaret Donahoe  
Advocacy Director  
Minnesota Public Transit Association



## Legislative Report

### State Shutdown

The lack of agreement between the legislature and the governor on a biennial budget for the state means that payments to transit systems from the state will not be made as usual. As the state deals with a government shutdown that is historic in terms of its scope and the number of government functions not operating, we can only hope that the shutdown will be brief.

The state's Constitution does not allow funds to be spent without an appropriation but at the same time, the Constitution requires the state to ensure the safety and well being of its citizens along with honoring federal and other obligations. A Ramsey District judge heard petitions filed by the Attorney General and the Governor regarding how the state should function in the absence of an

enacted two-year budget. She ruled very narrowly and allowed only the list of services recommended by the governor be funded.

For MnDOT the recommendation is to keep 217 people working and allow the following services to be funded:

- Emergency Highway Repair
- Aeronautic Navigation
- Emergency Communications Networks
- Truck Permitting
- Incident command and support for critical services

The operation of the Stillwater Lift Bridge was also added to the list of critical services.

The Judge did agree with the position of the League of Minnesota Cities, the

Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities and the City of St. Paul regarding Local Government Aid legislation. Those funds have already been lawfully appropriated and should be paid on schedule.

The Metropolitan Council, as a political subdivision of the state, can operate with funds outside of state resources. The Council has determined that it is able to continue to operate transit services, including Metro Transit bus and rail, Metro Mobility, Transit Link and other contract services, at least for a period of time. The Council also plans to continue construction activities on the Central Corridor Light Rail Line.

In Greater Minnesota, transit systems will decide if and for how long they will continue to provide service

*Continued...*

## President's Column, continued

The negotiations between the governor and the legislature and between the President and Congress may seem impenetrable, but citizens can and do make a difference when they stand up and get involved.

Many organizations and interest groups are making their cases and some will be deemed more important than others. We have a responsibility to ensure that voices are heard in support of transit services. It's critical that you reach out to legislators, to the governor, to the news media and to your riders. Beyond

the immediate shutdown, there are longer-term implications for the future of transit service in our state.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association continues to work with our members to gather information and speak out with a strong message regarding the importance of transit service. We want to hear from you. How will reduced funding impact people in your communities?

In addition to working in St. Paul, MPTA representatives also meet with our Minnesota Congressional

Delegation every year to advocate for federal transit funding. This year Sherry Munyon and I attended the Transportation Alliance Fly-In in June where we saw the disagreement over the level of government spending mirrored in the debate at the federal level. The latest extension of SAFETEA-LU is scheduled to expire at the end of September and there is little agreement on how to fund transportation into the future. Again, transit may be looking at significant cuts in funding at the federal level in addition to state level cuts.



## Legislative Update, continued

absent payments from the state. Most systems have indicated they would operate for a number of weeks (2-8 weeks) but a few have very little or no capacity to operate much beyond July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Governor Dayton vetoed the transportation budget bill at the end of the regular session, objecting to the steep cuts in funding for transit (\$109 million for Metropolitan Area Transit and \$7.6 million for Greater Minnesota Transit).

While negotiations between the governor and the legislature continued up until the evening of June 30<sup>th</sup>, the disagreement over increasing taxes remained. Throughout the session, Republican legislative leaders had insisted that the budget for the biennium not be increased above the \$34 billion projected to be brought in over the next 2 years. The Governor proposed a mix of spending cuts and revenue increases with the revenue mainly raised through an increase in the income tax on the top 2 percent of earners. At the end of the day, the two sides remained \$1.4 billion apart in dealing with the \$5 billion budget deficit.

### Federal Update

At the federal level, many of the same arguments have gripped Washington as the President and Congress face a deadline of August 2<sup>nd</sup> to raise the federal debt ceiling or risk defaulting on US debt. Republican leaders in the House are insisting on steep cuts to reduce the federal deficit while the Democratic Senate and the White House insist that some investments be included in the final deal.

In terms of a new transportation authorization act, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica (R-FL) announced tentative plans to unveil details on

his proposal for a six-year surface transportation authorization bill. In recent meetings with transportation industry leaders, Mica announced that formal introduction of the legislation will take place the week of July 11, and committee markup the week of July 25.

The House-passed budget resolution

## Contact Lawmakers!

**Think about what a cut of 10-15 percent in state funds will mean for your system and then add a 30 percent cut in federal funds. How will your riders be impacted?**

Then contact your state legislators, the governor, your Congress person and our two US Senators and let them know what the combined impact of these cuts will mean for transit in your community. They need to understand the full picture: state cuts, federal cuts and cost increases while demand for transit service continues to rise.

You can make a difference with a brief letter or e-mail. The Minnesota Public Transit Association is here to help so let us know if you need assistance in communicating with lawmakers and the media.

developed by Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI) requires cuts in transportation programs of over 30 percent compared to current levels and therefore the authorized funding level will be approximately \$230 billion over six years. This is the funding level that the committee believes can be sustained by revenues deposited into the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) over that period, assuming no increases in revenue or additional general fund transfers. The bill will also authorize funding to be appropriated from the General Fund of the U.S. Treasury for specific programs, although how this impacts the New Starts program and other General Fund surface transportation programs has not yet been detailed. It's not clear if Chairman Mica will get floor time to pass his bill before

the current extension of SAFETEA-LU expires at the end of September.

Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-CA) announced that the Democratic and Republican leadership of her committee have reached an agreement in principle on an authorization bill at funding levels of \$339.2 billion, which is equal to current levels, adjusted for inflation. It is not clear, however, whether Senators James Inhofe (R-OK) and David Vitter (R-LA) will have the support of Republican leaders in the Senate.

While Boxer acknowledges that a six-year bill is preferable to a two-year bill, she stated recently that a six-year bill may be unrealistic, considering the additional funding needed to supplement

the existing trust fund revenues required for a longer term bill. Boxer plans to introduce her bill the week of July 11 and markup shortly thereafter assuming a financing solution

The Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), who is also the chairman of the EPW Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, needs to find approximately \$12 billion in offsets to fund a two-year surface transportation bill. Senator Boxer has asked all transportation stakeholders to contact members of the Senate Finance Committee to urge them to support funding for a surface transportation authorization bill of at least two years.



## Minnesota Public Transit Conference Wednesday-Friday, October 12-14 at St. Paul RiverCentre, St. Paul, MN

This year's Minnesota Public Transit Conference planning has already begun with a focus on useful information for everyone involved in transit. You will be able to choose from training sessions featuring important strategies for training staff, improving customer service, managing technology and marketing your transit service. In addition, you'll get the latest news from agency officials on activities at both the state and federal levels that directly affect you.

Conference participants will also get a first-hand look at the products and services offered by major vendors serving transit systems at one of the largest Vendor Exhibitions in the Midwest. Everything from buses to software to seating will be on display.

As always, this year's conference will provide great opportunities to see old friends, meet new people and learn from your colleagues about best practices in the transit field. It's an exciting time to be involved in transit! Don't miss this opportunity to make your transit service better through new ideas and inspiring presentations that will prepare you for the challenges ahead.



### Guy Doud

- National Teacher of the Year - 1986
- Best Selling Author, "Molder of Dreams"
- Host of Award-Winning Education Films

[Link to Registration Page](#)



## Twins Express – Direct to Target Field

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

In 2010, with the opening of the new downtown Minneapolis Target Field, home of the Minnesota Twins, SouthWest Transit received many requests for transportation directly to the field.

Acting on these requests, the Twins Express Route 682B was established and quickly became a hit with Twins fans.

“It’s so much easier than driving and looking for parking,” said a rider recently, “especially because I’m not very familiar with the downtown area.”

Another fan added, “It saves me money and relieves stress. The bus drops us off just a block from the field and picks us up at the same spot.”

This route services all weekday games (except holidays) from East Creek Transit Station in Chaska, SouthWest Village in Chanhassen and SouthWest Station in Eden Prairie.

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## Rainbow Rider dominates Roadeo

Article from the *Alexandria Echo Press*

Rainbow Rider driver Chuck Sprenger took first place in driving competition which was held in Red Lake, MN. May 14, 2011. Chuck drives for Rainbow Rider in Todd County; he has been a bus driver for four years. Rick Hanson placed 2nd at the Roadeo, Rick drives for Rainbow Rider in Douglas, Pope, and Grant County he has been a bus driver for three years. Alan Altepeter placed third, Alan drives for Tri-Valley out of Crookston and has also won at the Region and State competition.

The Northern Tier Transits consist of transit systems in the North West Region; drivers came from Tri-Valley Crookston, Becker County, Paul Bunyan Bemidji, Heartland Express Hubbard County, Otter Express Ottertail County, Red Lake, and Rainbow Rider. The Northern Tier Transits systems have been hosting a Regional Roadeo and training session since 2009.

These drivers will go on to the State Bus Roadeo competition July 22 and 23, 2011 to be held in St Cloud, MN.



Pictured left to right: Third place - Alan Altepeter, Tri-Valley; Second place - Rick Hanson, Rainbow Rider, in Douglas, Pope and Grant County; First place - Chuck sprenger, Rainbow Rider in Todd County;



## DTA drivers receive ADA training

By TOM ELWELL, Duluth Transit Authority

For the past 12 years, the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) has worked with Midwest Medical Supply to provide ADA training for new drivers on securing passengers with a variety of motorized wheelchairs. DTA trainers, as well as Midwest Medical staff, regularly conduct training sessions at Midwest Medical. Trainees are instructed on how to apply tiedowns and straps to motorized wheelchairs on the bus. Driver trainees also are instructed on passenger sensitivity and protocol required when securing disabled riders in wheelchairs. Midwest Medical Supply provides this free training to DTA drivers for the benefit of their wheelchair clients.



Midwest Medical trainer wheels on the bus to begin training session with DTA driver trainees.

**More wheelchair riders are using regular route DTA service than ever before.** Wheelchair ridership on DTA buses totaled 7,637 in 2010 — a 54 percent increase since 2006. In 2010, STRIDE transported 25,637 passengers.

## Renville County Heartland Express advertising campaign

By RACHEL SCHNEIDERMAN, Renville County Heartland Express

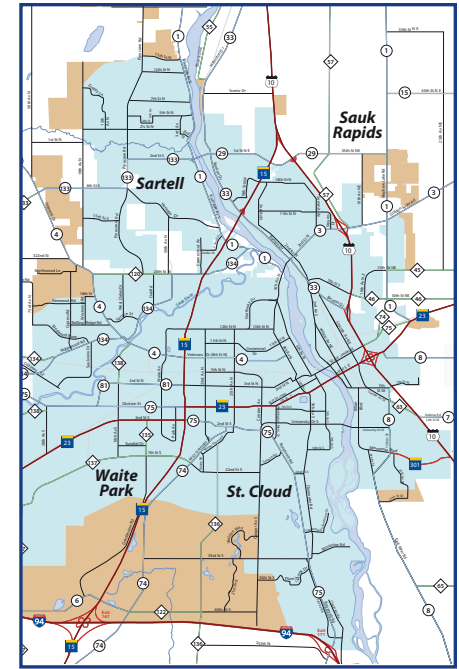
Renville County Heartland Express (RCHE) dispatcher, Janelle Schmoll holds RCHE's new advertising campaign, her grandson, Cole Patrick Gilberts. The transit staff has all pitched in to pay for t-shirts of all sizes, with different slogans. We feel that it has been great advertising— our ridership increased 29 percent last year. With a cutie like that, wouldn't you ride the transit bus?



This map illustrates St. Cloud Metro Bus Dial-a-Ride (DAR) service boundaries.

Click on map to view a detailed Metro Bus system map.

-  Former DAR Extended Service Area  
ADA riders certified before April 1, 2011, are grandfathered service to this area.
-  Current DAR Service Area



## St. Cloud Metro Bus changes Dial-a-Ride boundaries

By BERTA HARTIG, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Metro Bus created the Dial-a-Ride extended area service in May 2000, as a way to bridge the gap until Fixed Route service could reach much of this area. Since then, routes have been added to cover much of the extended area; however, the remaining areas have become more difficult to adequately serve, resulting in trip denials for ADA riders.

To control growth of the service and to provide better service to the core, Metro Bus pulled back its Dial-a-Ride boundaries to serve only that which is required by law: within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from any fixed route.

This change increases the efficiency of the service. Metro Bus was spending a lot of resources to serve one or two riders per trip in the extended area, when the same amount of resources could serve many more in the core.

April 1, new service area boundaries went into effect. Current ADA riders traveling in the extended area were grandfathered service, but any new riders —ADA or General Public— are only able to travel within the new service area boundaries.

## Metro Bus implements new Dial-a-Ride standby program

On April 1, Dial-a-Ride started a new Standby program. It's already shown signs of great success for reducing denials.

When someone calls to schedule a ride and is told that there isn't anything available at their requested time they are now asked if they'd like to be put on a standby list and be called if a ride becomes available. Prior to this program, these rides would have been considered denials.

This program came to fruition after a brainstorming session between two long-term Call Center staff, Mark Hoff and Marie Richardson. Mark reviews the standby list daily

and reviews each driver's schedule to find a ride at the passenger's requested time.

During the first month of operation, 57 of the 75 standby requests were scheduled rides, which is a 76 percent success rate. The program continued to show success with 87 percent of the standbys being scheduled the first half of May. By the end of June, 86 rides were given, and only six of those on standby were unable to be scheduled.





Volunteers participating in a north Minneapolis clean-up effort boarded Metro Transit buses at Brookdale Shopping Center on June 4. Metro Transit provided free shuttles for about 2,000 workers who helped pick up debris in neighborhoods hit by the May 22 tornado.

## Metro Transit helps victims of Minneapolis tornado

By PETER RAEKER, Metropolitan Council

Staff from across Metro Transit were called into action after a deadly tornado swept through north Minneapolis on May 22, destroying homes, downing trees, snapping power lines and covering streets and yards with debris.

The agency deployed support buses in the wake of the storm, providing temporary shelter for those who were displaced.

The following week, Metro Transit offered scores of free shuttles in neighborhoods throughout north Minneapolis — a core service area — as part of an effort to bring storm victims to relief centers at the Minneapolis Convention Center and other locations.

Because the storm was declared a federal disaster, Metro Transit will be working with FEMA and partner agencies for reimbursements for its efforts. The agency regularly deploys support buses and staff in times of need as a community service, said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb. So far this year, Metro Transit has sent buses to more than 30 separate events including fires and gas leaks.

“When people are evacuated from their homes or first responders need a place to regroup, the value of a safe, hospitable place can’t be overstated,” Lamb said. “It’s just another example of showing that transit is there when people need it.”

The agency’s support of tornado victims continued on June 4, when Metro Transit provided shuttles for volunteers who worked during the North Side Clean-Up Day. More than 2,000 volunteers rode buses that day.

Civic leaders took note of Metro Transit’s work to support the community. Among the praise was this note to Gov. Mark Dayton’s office from City of Minneapolis officials:

“Like in every other request we’ve had for our Metro Transit partners, they were willing to help out and got right on the project after our first call.”

## Metro Transit marketing projects recognized in state contest

By PETER RAEKER, Metropolitan Council

The Northern Lights Awards, sponsored by the Minnesota Association of Government Communicators, recognize outstanding work in communications and public relations by public agencies. Winning entries receive either an award of excellence (the top award) or an award of merit.

Metro Transit’s website redesign project won an award of excellence. The redesigned website, which launched in April 2010, provides easy navigation and access to commonly used transit tools — the interactive Trip Planner, online schedules, NexTrip, among others — on nearly

every page.

The agency’s fall 2010 marketing campaign, which targeted bus routes that were not performing up to their full ridership potential, also won an award of excellence. The campaign’s creative look took cues from self-help books to pose driving and congestion as a problem that Metro Transit can eliminate.

This year’s contest drew 143 entries from across the state; 68 of those entries were selected as award winners.

Bill Millar APTA President,  
Len Simich, SWT CEO



## SouthWest Transit again receives national honor for bus safety

By LINDA SPEVACEK, SouthWest Transit

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has awarded SouthWest Transit its 2011 Gold Award for Safety for bus systems operating 1 million – 4 million passenger trips. APTA is an international organization that has represented the transit industry for over 100 years, since 1882.

“Congratulations to the 2011 Bus Safety & Security Excellence Award winners,” said APTA President William Millar. “These winning public transportation systems have exemplary programs that create and sustain exceptional workplace cultures of safety and security and add value to all of us in the bus transportation industry.”

This is the fourth year that SouthWest Transit has been honored by APTA for its safety program. The APTA “Gold Award” is presented to the nation’s top transit agencies for their safety record and their commitment to improving the safety

of transit employees, customers, and communities through the application of effective safety initiatives.

“Safety and security are of utmost concern to SouthWest Transit. It takes a great deal of effort to ensure the safety of our riders,” said SouthWest Transit’s Commission Chairperson Nancy Tyra-Lukens. “To win these prestigious awards is truly outstanding and is testament to the commitment of each and every person who is a part of SouthWest Transit.”

The Gold Safety Award is awarded to the transit property who demonstrates through its operating statistics that it is the top safety performing transit agency in the Country. Things such as the number of preventable accidents per miles driven, lost time due to workplace injury and miles driven between vehicle road calls are just some of the statistics collected and compared.

Other winners include Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority of Des Moines, Iowa (more than 4 million and fewer than 20 million) and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority of Cleveland, Ohio (more than 20 million passenger trips).

“This is not about just one person or one team doing the right thing. It’s about everyone working together to make sure our customers are safely transported to and from work and home. This award recognizes the hard work, extensive planning and dedication of every staff member of SouthWest Transit,” said Chief Executive Officer, Len Simich.

“The ‘Expect the Best’ credo shown on each of the buses reflects the responsibility SouthWest Transit places on its staff to provide not only a safe ride, but a ride that is as reliable and enjoyable as possible,” said Simich.

## MVTA Board Awards Contract for intelligent Transportation Systems Base Architecture to RouteMatch

By ROBIN SELVIG, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority

The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) Board of Directors awarded a contract for Intelligent Transportation Systems Base Architecture (also known as an automatic vehicle locator – AVL – system) at its June 22 meeting.

“This is an exciting move for the MVTA,” said Board Chair Willis E. Branning, who was a member of the Board’s “Special AVL Committee.” He continued, “During the past two years, we carefully researched systems that would best meet the needs of the MVTA and we believe RouteMatch will be an excellent long-term technology partner with the MVTA.”

The Special AVL Committee also included Rosemount Mayor William Droste and At-Large Board member Wally Lyslo of Burnsville. The committee reviewed the regional system in place at Metro Transit and other area providers, and then directed staff to seek other options. The Committee wanted to ensure that the solution will not only meet current needs, but will take advantage of future technologies without a complete system replacement. In addition, a “hosted” solution was considered consistent with the MVTA’s approach to contract for services. Both the Board Special AVL Committee and the MVTA Technical Committee agreed on RouteMatch as the vendor of choice.

The objective of the AVL project is to “improve the operational efficiency and performance of the MVTA,” according to Executive Director Beverley Miller. “These desires can be summarized in two main goals: 1) Improve overall dispatching and operating efficiency, and 2) Increase availability of transit information and dissemination,” she said.

RouteMatch Software, which currently works with more than 350 transit agencies nationwide, will be providing MVTA with integrated, yet modular transportation

software, accompanying hardware, and traveler information services. RouteMatch’s CAD/AVL solution will serve as the base of MVTA’s system which will help MVTA more effectively manage its fixed routes and on time performance, and locate its vehicles. The contract also includes the purchase of the Android-based Samsung Galaxy tablets for 120 vehicles. These versatile devices will help MVTA bus drivers conduct in-vehicle navigation, real-time data collection and route/schedule adherence.

“MVTA is a terrific example of a progressive transit agency that values open, scalable solutions to accommodate a large commuter ridership between metro and suburban communities,” said Tim Quinn, Executive Vice President and Co-founder of RouteMatch Software. “We’re thrilled that Minnesota Valley has chosen RouteMatch’s technology and our team of engineers, implementation consultants and customer support specialists. We look forward to partnering with MVTA to achieve their immediate and long-term goals.”

The MVTA will take a phased approach to the project and requires a scalable system with a well-defined upgrade path to technologies that support Automated Passenger Counting, Automate Voice Annunciation, On Board Dynamic Message Signs, and additional Traveler Information Systems (TIS). The ability to share information with the regional system is also an important component of the project.

The project is being funded by a variety of sources including the MVTA’s 2010 National Transit Database (NTD) fund allocation that has been exchanged into Regional Transit Capital (RTC) bond funds, and RTC funds from MVTA’s 2011 NTD allocation which was approved by the Metropolitan Council on June 22. Additional components will be added to the system as funding is obtained.



## Mankato to overhaul transit system

BY DAN LINEHAN, Free Press Staff Writer, *The Mankato Free Press*

July 3, 2011 <http://mankatofreepress.com/latestnews/x1435410890/Mankato-to-overhaul-transit-system>

MANKATO — Mankato transit Supt. Mark Anderson doesn't think comparisons with the Twin Cities bus system are very helpful.

Yes, it would be nice to have the convenience of a bus coming to your stop every 15 minutes. But Greater Mankato just does not have the population to support the critical mass that makes public transportation preferable for people who have their own vehicle.

It's a chicken-and-egg scenario that has no easy answers, but the city's transit system is about to embark on a major study to make its buses more convenient and efficient.

The City Council recently approved a \$197,000 bid for the study from Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, though a contract had not yet been signed as of late last week. The Minnesota Department of Transportation is paying \$160,000, the city \$30,000 and Minnesota State University \$10,000.

The study is so expensive in part because the consultant will have to gather a ton of data to determine where people are living, and when and where they are going.

Anderson said the study aims to do three things: redesign routes, plan implementation of a faster-moving system called bus rapid transit and plan for a four-county bus system.

While a Metro-like system is out of reach, Anderson expects the study to transform public transit in Mankato.

### Route routing

Of the city's 11 bus routes, some are successful, meaning they carry more than 13 or so passengers per hour, and some are not, meaning they generally carry fewer than 11 per hour.

The most effective routes have shorter wait times, with one MSU route lasting all of 8 minutes and a different route taking a whole hour.

Another barrier is "fractured" services, where a bus makes regular stops for a period of time and then picks up service several hours later. If you're taking Route 5 to North Mankato from the Cherry Street stop, there's only one stop between 8:30 a.m. or so and 2:30 p.m.

The obvious way to solve these problems is to have more hours of operation, but Anderson isn't confident that more state funding is in the works anytime soon. That could happen if the city gets designated as a so-called "5307 system," which is triggered by population growth and allows the city to apply for federal funds directly, instead of through the state.

But Anderson is confident the consultant's report can help the city increase ridership even without spending more money.

One of the ways to do that is to more accurately determine where people live and work and where they want to go. Some of the most popular routes connect those big "trip generators," like MSU and Walmart. That will take in-depth analysis of Census data as well as surveys.

### Buses, rapider

In larger cities, bus rapid transit, called BRT, gets its own lane but that's not likely to happen here.

"Internally, we talk about BRT light," Anderson said.

The idea behind BRT is quick service between two hubs, with feeder routes to deliver people to the hubs. A BRT line may only have one or two stops between its major destinations, or hubs.

The quicker service is designed to make traveling by bus comparable to driving.

### Four-county system

Blue Earth, Nicollet, Le Sueur and Waseca counties are among the only ones in the state without a regional transit system, Anderson said. One of the goals of the study is to plan or create one over the next decade.

The first step will likely be to create "corridor" service, meaning buses between the major towns and cities.

The study will also examine the Mankato transit system's operations plan, including tweaking the details of how the buses operate.

It might include, for example, the system's "flag down" policy, which allows anyone to signal for a bus to pull over.

Small-town convenience like this may have to disappear in order to create a faster, more efficient system.

The study was slated to begin with a meeting on July 15, but the state shutdown is postponing that meeting until Aug. 15. The study is slated to be finished next summer.

## [June Metropolitan Council Chair message](#)

## [Council sets public hearings for potential transit service, fare adjustments](#)

The Metropolitan Council is planning a series of public hearings to collect public input regarding potential transit service reductions and fare increases, which may be necessary given anticipated shortfalls in the regional transit operations budget.

## [Bottineau Transitway study focuses on four alignments — Bus rapid transit, light rail being considered](#)

Transit planners in Hennepin County are studying light rail transit (LRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT) on a combination of four primary alignments in the Bottineau Corridor. The Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority is gathering public input at six open house meetings throughout the corridor in June in preparation for developing a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) on the project.

## [In the battle against congestion, TMOs are on your side](#)

In the battle against congestion, Twin Cities employers and commuters have strong allies in a small group of nonprofits identified by their collective acronym, TMOs.

These small offices work with commuters and employers to reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicles clogging up area highways during the morning and afternoon rush hour (which actually stretches to more than two hours on both ends).

The region's four Transportation Management Organizations are better known to the public as:

- Commuter Connection (Downtown Minneapolis)
- Commuter Services (494 Corridor)
- Commute Solutions (Anoka County)
- Smart Trips (St. Paul)



Council Chair Susan Haigh



Map excerpt shows routes being considered in for the southern portion of the Bottineau Corridor.

## Central Corridor Making Tracks News

Central Corridor LRT Update

# Making Tracks



[Read News](#)

## On the Web

### [Jobs, service on the line as transit faces unprecedented cuts](#)

BY DAN OLSON, *Minnesota Public Radio*

June 27, 2011

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/06/27/metro-transit-cuts/>

### [Aging away from mobility](#)

BY RIORDAN FROST, *MINNESOTA 2020*

June 25, 2011

<http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/news/2011/06/22/aging-away-mobility>

### [Local services brace for a shutdown](#)

BY KARIN ELTON, *Marshall Independent*

June 29, 2011

<http://www.marshallindependent.com/page/content.detail/id/528682/Local-services-brace-for-a-shutdown.html?nav=5015>

# intransit

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