

intransit

March 2014 Edition

2014 Transportation Day at the Capitol

This year's Transportation Day at the Capitol packed the Kelly Inn's Capitol Hall Room with representatives from transportation organizations from around the state. Following opening remarks and a welcome, attendees were briefed on the Transportation Alliance's Progress In Motion and Move MN campaign activities. At lunchtime, state legislators visited and spoke, including Senators John Pederson and Matt Schmit along with Representative Frank Hornstein and House Speaker Paul Thissen.

All day attendees headed over to the State Office Building and Capitol to meet with their legislators. The program at the Kelly Inn continued with those not in meetings hearing an update on federal transportation funding as well as the Alliance legislative overview for this year's session.

The day concluded with an energizing Move MN rally in the Capitol Rotunda where hundreds of people gathered to support transportation funding.

See page 5 for more photos!

Thank you MPTA members with employees in attendance!



Anoka County Transit

Chisago-Isanti Co. Heartland Express

DARTS

Duluth Transit Authority

Greater Mankato Transit System

Jefferson Lines

Metropolitan Council

MN Department of Transportation

Pipestone County Transit

Rolling Hills Transit

St. Cloud Metro Bus

Transit Alternatives, Otter Express

Wendel



Marc Hall, MPTA President

Photo Credit: AFSCME Council 5 Twitter

President's Column

With the 2014 Legislative Session in full swing, the Minnesota Public Transit Association is busy working for you as we advocate for increased transit funding.

MPTA is part of the Move MN campaign, an effort to build a stronger, more diverse and focused campaign. Move MN has been organizing people all around the state, generating more news coverage, using social media and other technology to reach people and coordinating lobbying efforts around a comprehensive transportation funding package. The campaign is also using grassroots strategies and this is where we need your help. The campaign is gathering postcards from transit users all across Minnesota to let legislators and the governor know how important transit service is for thousands of people in our state. We need your help in distributing and collecting postcards from transit riders. MPTA will send you postcards and we simply ask that you collect completed postcards from riders and send them back to us. We'll take care of getting them to the right legislators and to the

governor's office.

March 13th was Transportation Day at the Capitol with many people coming to St. Paul to talk to legislators and hundreds of people rallying for transportation funding at the Capitol. Thank you to all of the transit representatives who attended this important event. We were able to send a strong message to legislative leaders about the urgent need for additional funding for transit systems statewide.

MPTA will continue to lobby on your behalf for increased transit funding in both the capital bonding bill and as part of the transportation funding bill moving through the legislature. We need your involvement to reach your legislators and secure the votes we need to be successful. Your legislators will listen to you and your riders. It only takes a few minutes to send an email or leave a voicemail message. Without the voices of advocates talking to legislators, transit needs will not be addressed.

The demand for transit service is increasing nationwide and in Minnesota. But without adequate resources, we won't be able to meet the needs of our communities. Please join your colleagues in advocating for transit. Just check the MPTA web site for more information on what's happening and how you make a difference.

Thank you for your membership in the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

Marc Hall, President



Legislative Report

By MARGARET DONAHOE

Transportation Funding Bill HF2395 (Hornstein)/SF2107(Dibble)

Legislation introduced by the Chairs of the House and Senate Transportation Committees would provide a permanent increase in dedicated funding for transit, highways, bridges, and bike/ pedestrian facilities. The bill was heard and passed out of the House Transportation Finance Committee on March 20th and was re-referred to the House Tax Committee.

For transit systems, the bill includes:

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cent increase in the local sales tax in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. Combined with the current $\frac{1}{4}$ cent levied for transit purposes, this would bring the local sales tax for transit up to a full 1 cent and would impose the tax in Carver and Scott Counties, counties that opted not to levy the $\frac{1}{4}$ cent tax authorized in 2008. This increase in the metro sales tax is estimated to generate:
 - ◇ FY2015 - \$347,758,176
 - ◇ FY2016 - \$357,831,936
 - ◇ FY2017 - \$365,208,877
- Dedication of 100% of the sales tax on leased motor vehicles (MVLST). Currently, the first \$32 million is deposited in the general fund and the remaining dollars are divided with 50% for Greater Minnesota Transit and 50% for five metropolitan area counties (excludes Hennepin and Ramsey) for county highways. As introduced, the bill would have divided all of the revenue from the MVLST with 70% for Greater MN transit and 30% for metropolitan counties. This is MPTA's position. The bill was amended in the Transportation Committee to provide 60%

of total revenue for Greater Minnesota transit and 40% for all seven metropolitan area counties for road and bridge work. This provision would provide the following increase for Greater Minnesota Transit:

- ◇ FY2016 - \$24,195,000
- ◇ FY2017 - \$24,712,000

The estimated unmet need for Greater MN transit is \$45 million per year so this leaves a funding gap of a little over \$20 million per year.

- A new 5% gross receipts tax on fuel would increase revenue into the Highway User Tax Distribution fund by \$266,115,000 in FY2015; \$395,758,000 in FY2016 and \$372,484,000 in FY2017. Transit systems would be exempt from this fuel tax.
- A competitive grant program for Greater MN projects using federal transportation funds. The program must spend a minimum of \$16 million in excess of the average annual spending on Greater Minnesota transportation alternatives projects in federal fiscal years FY2010-FY2012. These funds would be available for safe routes to school infrastructure, bike and pedestrian elements of a main street program, and planning, construction and maintenance of bike, trail and pedestrian infrastructure. MnDOT would be required to create criteria and a transparent process for awarding these grants.
- A requirement that the Metropolitan Council and other metropolitan cities that own transit shelters and stops establish design specifications to ensure that shelters and stops are maintained in good working order. A requirement the Metropolitan Council consult with the Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee concerning all proposed procurements of transit vehicles.

Legislative Report

Continued

The Senate Transportation Committee is expected to take up the bill on April 2nd and may pass the bill on to the Senate Tax Committee. The bill faces a serious uphill battle to get out of the Tax Committees in both bodies. Legislators will have to hear from the public about the need for this legislation to pass.

Capital Bonding Bill

This year is the traditional bonding year and legislation will be heard to provide general obligation bond proceeds to many projects throughout the state including transit capital projects.

A bill introduced by Capital Investment Committee Chair Alice Hausman (HF3250) would provide \$1.35 million for Greater Minnesota transit with \$1.1 million to St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission for phase I of the Metro Bus operations center vehicle storage addition and \$250,000 to Kandiyohi Area Joint Powers Board for an additional bus storage garage in Willmar.

The governor had recommended \$1.13 million for Greater Minnesota transit.

Under the House bill the Metropolitan Council would receive \$50 million for the Transit Capital Improvement program. Eligible projects include: Lake St. and I35W transit station in Minneapolis, Bottineau Blvd; East 7th Street in St. Paul, I-94 Gateway Corridor, Penn Avenue North BRT, Red Line BRT, Red Rock, Riverview, Robert Street, Rush Line and Snelling Avenue corridors.

The governor had recommended \$10 million for arterial BRT projects and \$7 million for the Metro Orange line (I-35W South BRT).

Nonemergency Medical Transportation Legislation SF1660/HF3059

Legislation is moving this session that modifies nonemergency medical transportation services covered under Medical Assistance (MA).

The bill requires DHS to implement a single administrative structure for nonemergency medical transportation once the assessment tool is available or July 1, 2016, whichever is later, and outlines the assessment tool's requirements, including that it be Web-based and developed in coordination with the Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

The bill specifies that transportation services covered by MA include those provided by nonemergency medical transportation providers, taxicabs, public transit and not-for-hire vehicles, including volunteers.

Requires nonemergency medical transportation providers to follow operating standards for special transportation services, and exempts public transit, volunteers and not-for-hire vehicles from these operating standards.

Requires a MnDOT report on recommendations for changes to laws and rules that are needed to implement the act including the amount of the fee needed to cover costs related to supervision of inspection and certification.



Transportation Day at the Capitol

March 13, 2014



Marc Hall, Craig Rempp and Becky Alper



Senators Matt Schmit and John Pederson



City of Milaca

Water Main Break

Abridged by Laura Eash with permission from an incident report by Helen Pieper, Transit Director for Kanabec Co.-Timber Trails Public Transit.

At 10:16 AM on January 3, 2014, an email was sent from dispatchers saying that there was water entering the Kanabec Co.-Timber Trails Public Transit building from an unknown source.

Transit Director Helen Pieper radioed Dispatch and was told the water was continuing to rise; Pieper advised Dispatch to get electronic equipment moved to the desktops, and any supplies up high. The Milaca driver called in saying he couldn't get to the storage room due to flowing water. When it became clear that the situation continued to worsen, staff was directed to open the garage doors and evacuate the building, meeting at a business far enough up the street that the rising water would not be an issue.

Pieper contacted Information Services, requesting an alternate site for three dispatchers be set up. Dispatchers were then directed to come to the courthouse in Mora where accommodations would be set up. The Transit Director notified the County Coordinator that there was a developing situation in the Milaca facility and that most likely there was going to be property and equipment damage. The Transit Director also notified MnDOT District 3 Project Manager Sue Siemers and Sarah Lenz. Pieper notified the local radio station KBEB there was a water main break and that dispatch was being relocated; the buses were running as usual and phones would be working as soon as possible. Public Service announcements were made.

While driving to Milaca, Pieper called the City of Milaca for an update and was informed that there was a rupture in the main water line and that it emptied the water tower. Upon arriving, she drove through 6-8" of water on the street but was able to get to the building. The carpeting was wet and very dirty with silt in the office area about four feet in from the exterior walls; there were large areas of silty-muddy residue in the cold storage and vehicle stalls. The water that had not flowed through and out of the building was freezing, creating large areas of ice. The heat vents were filled with dirty water but the furnace continued to run; power was still on. Pieper received a call from the Kanabec County engineer who asked about details and let her know there would be a disaster clean-up crew in as soon as possible. He had heard about it on the radio. The dispatchers had taken pictures as they were leaving and more photos were taken.

Pieper returned to Mora where Dispatch had been set up in the IS department; phone lines had been forwarded. Dispatchers needed dry clothes and food, but were already starting to take calls and get back on track. KBEB radio was notified systems were back up and taking calls. Total down time was about two and three-quarters hours.

The water bubbled up and flowed over the ground, so it was considered "Black" water making this a Category 3 event. That meant all carpet and vinyl would be replaced; any wet sheetrock or insulation would also have to be replaced. Clean-up began that evening and a crew in the morning worked on the ice and the damage in the cold storage area. A heating/cooling company was there also pumping out the water in the vents.



Transit System Profile: Rolling Hills Transit

Vehicles were removed on the following day, Saturday, January 4th. The whole office was full of fans and dehumidifiers. Dirty ice in garage stalls chipped and peeled off easily. The sheet rock in the office tested wet, even moving up the interior walls separating the offices.

January 16th Update

Water was restored on Friday January 10, 2014.

Insurance authorized clean up and repairs. Jerry Pedersen, Building Maintenance Supervisor for Kanabec County is directing the various vendors through the re-hab process.

The re-hab will include replacement of carpeting in the whole building, replacement and patching of the affected sheet rock and repainting of the whole office and bathroom portions of the building, replacement of the flooring in both bathrooms; a very rough estimate of the total cost is about \$15,000.

Three of the dispatchers worked out of a room at the County Courthouse in Mora through the end of February. One dispatcher continues to work in Milaca in an area unaffected by the water.

The buses continue to be stored in the building.

Want to read more? Visit the Mille Lacs County Times website to read "Catastrophic break: 500,000 gallons of water emptied from Milaca water tower in a half hour"

By LAURA EASH

I recently spoke with Erlene Welshons, Transportation Director of Rolling Hills Transit, Semcac's transit system. This Community Action Agency (CAA) was



founded in the 1960s to help fight the War on Poverty and serves low-income populations in seven SE Minnesota counties (limited services in another four). All are welcome to ride Rolling Hills Transit!

Erlene told me the name Rolling Hills Transit came from a Semcac employee contest. Bus driver Wayne Sandberg submitted the winning name and he won a Minnesota Zoo prize. Erlene helped design the new logo.

With the new name and logo have come several other changes, Erlene said. There has been an increase in both calls to the office and ridership. An Operations Manager and more dispatchers have joined the staff. Service has been added in Spring Valley and Rolling Hills Transit now operates in Stewartville. The transition has gone well for the most part, though Erlene did note bus drivers, who were used to reporting to Erlene, now report to dispatchers as well.

Visit semcac.org and click on Transportation to learn more about Rolling Hills Transit.





Metro Mobility Exceeds On-Time Performance Goals

By METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

New technology on Metro Mobility buses has boosted on-time arrivals to an average of 97% of rides. In several instances, providers have managed 99% on-time performance on some days.

The technology has also reduced Metro Mobility's use of the regional 800MHz radio communications system by 50%, leaving more open channels for police and other emergency communications.

Drivers, dispatchers get information quickly

The Automated Vehicle Location/Mobile Data Computer system allows dispatchers to track the location of vehicles. This helps dispatchers determine if a driver is on schedule and decide whether an upcoming pick-up should be reassigned to another driver. It also allows dispatchers to share information, such as a cancelled ride, with the driver via a computer screen near the driver. This reduces the time that dispatchers and drivers spend on the radio system.

In addition, drivers get turn-by-turn directions to their pick-up and drop-off locations, nearly eliminating the occasions that drivers, especially new ones, get lost.

"These tools have improved Metro Mobility's productivity and on-time performance," said Metro Mobility Manager Andrew Krueger. "We're very pleased with the return on our investment."

The Metropolitan Council administers contracts with three private companies—Transit Team, First Transit, and DARTS—as well as Scott and Anoka Counties, to provide Metro Mobility service in different parts of the region. A side benefit of the new technology for the providers is that it helps with driver retention, because newly hired drivers now get lost less frequently and manage their time better, one of the providers told Krueger.

Customer complaints are down

Krueger said that as the technology was implemented throughout fall 2013, on-time performance rose from an average of 94% to 97%, exceeding the benchmark of 95%. Customer complaints declined as well. In the last quarter, complaint levels were less than 1 per 1,000 rides, compared to 1.11 per 1,000 rides previously.

Metro Mobility is shared public transportation for certified riders who are unable to use regular fixed-route buses due to a disability or health condition. Rides are provided for any purpose.

Metro Mobility provided a total of 1.8 million rides in 2013, serving 16,000 customers.



Transit Attracts 94.3 Million Riders in 2013

By METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Regional transit ridership continues to climb, edging up .4% to 94.3 million in 2013.

That figure includes rides on all transit providers in the Twin Cities metro area combined, and counts all modes – commuter rail, METRO Blue and Red lines, express and local bus routes, Metro Mobility, Transit Link, and Metro Vanpool.

“Transit is a driver of economic prosperity in this region, connecting people to jobs, services and recreation,” said Council Chair Susan Haigh. “And the demand for a robust transit system continues to grow.”

Express ridership sees healthy increase

Express bus service increased .8%, more than 103,000 rides, led by healthy increases in express ridership on suburban providers like SouthWest Transit and the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority. Local bus service – which represents 61% of all transit rides – was up .5%, more than 304,000 rides.

The first six months of METRO Red Line service between Apple Valley and the Mall of America on Cedar Ave./Hwy. 77 drew 130,734 riders.

Northstar has highest annual ridership yet

Northstar Commuter Rail, operated by Metro Transit, had its highest annual ridership since opening in November 2009 at 787,239. The overall 12.4% increase is attributable to a fare reduction made permanent in April and the addition of a station in Ramsey late in 2012. Average weekday ridership – the line’s primary commuter market – increased 17%.

Ridership on METRO Blue Line light rail dropped 3.2% from record-setting 2012 levels to 10.2 million. This was chiefly due to planned service interruptions for construction and maintenance projects on several weekends throughout the year. Projects included the first-ever smoothing of all miles of track, completion of the junction with the METRO Green Line, and accommodating a major reconstruction of the 34th Ave./I-494 interchange in Bloomington.

Average weekday ridership on the Blue Line continues to exceed projections for the year 2020 by more than 25%.

Metro Mobility ridership on steady rise

Notable is a 5.1% increase in Metro Mobility rides to more than 1.8 million. Metro Mobility ridership has been increasing steadily for many years, regardless of the economy.

Of all transit rides in 2013, 83% were provided by Metro Transit – the region’s primary transit provider. Metro Transit had an overall ridership increase of .4% (315,244 rides) in 2013 – the fourth consecutive year of ridership growth. Last year, customers boarded Metro Transit buses and trains 5 million more times than four years ago.

From DREW KERR

Metro Transit, partners stage emergency preparedness exercise

Over a dozen agencies and more than 250 individuals participated in a full-scale emergency preparedness exercise near Stadium Village Station on the METRO Green Line on Tuesday, March 18th. It simulated a light-rail train derailment and bus accident (see photo).

President Obama gets Green Line's first ticket

President Barack Obama received the first "honorary" ticket on the METRO Green Line during his visit to St. Paul on Wednesday, February 26th. The ticket, which Obama signed and returned, was just one highlight of his stop at the Green Line's new Operations and Maintenance Facility in the Lowertown neighborhood, where a majority of the 200 Green Line operators and maintenance staff will be located. The facility will also be used to clean, store and inspect light-rail trains.

2013 Fact Book Now Available at metrotransit.org/facts



Public invited to create commemorative art for METRO Green Line opening

Metro Transit is inviting the public to play a part in the METRO Green Line's grand opening by submitting artwork for a commemorative poster that will be distributed when service begins June 14. Submissions for the commemorative poster contest can be sent now through Friday, April 11. Entrants are encouraged to incorporate the METRO Green Line name, a METRO Green Line train and build on a "connections" theme. The contest is open to all Minnesota residents who are at least 18. For details visit metrotransit.org/postercontest.

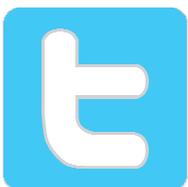


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— Coverage of MPTA events — Legislative updates

— News and retweets from MPTA members

— Local and national media coverage of transit news and issues



From ROBIN SELVIG, MVTA

Sen. Jim Carlson Named “Friend of Transit” at MVTA Board Meeting

The Suburban Transit Providers presented a “Friend of Transit” award to Sen. Jim Carlson at the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) Board of Directors meeting on Jan. 22. STA chair Gary Hansen and incoming MVTA Chair Clint Hooppaw presented the award.

James Clark, representing the Suburban Transit Association (STA), offered comments about Sen. Carlson’s support of transit and in particular his carrying a bill, in a bipartisan manner with Sen. Eric Pratt of Shakopee, to make sure allocations to the Suburban Transit Providers were included in the transit funding bill. He is one of several legislators recently honored by STA for their efforts on behalf of transit.

MVTA’s Operation of METRO Red Line Boosts Ridership to Record Level

Total ridership for 2013 was 2,706,416, a record level for the MVTA and topping the previous record 2008 ridership by more than 67,500. “MVTA’s operation of the METRO Red Line service on Cedar Avenue boosted us over the record,” said MVTA Chair Gary Hansen who is also an Eagan Councilmember. “MVTA contracts with the Metropolitan Council to provide the Red Line service, which accounted for 130,733 of the rides,” Hansen added.



Back from left: Beverley Miller, MVTA Executive Director; Bill Droste, Mayor of Rosemount/MVTA Board member; Jon Ulrich, Scott Co. Commissioner/MVTA Vice Chair; Bill Coughlin, Burnsville Councilmember/MVTA Board Member; Liz Workman, Dakota Co. Commissioner/MVTA Board member; Gary Hansen, Eagan Councilmember and former MVTA Chair; and Clint Hooppaw, Apple Valley Councilmember and MVTA Chair. Front from left: David Lies, Liz McLeod, Fesseha Mekonnen.

MVTA Salutes Drivers-of-the-Year, Operations Manager

Recognizing that drivers are the face of the MN Valley Transit Authority, the MVTA presented its 2013 Driver-of-the-Year awards at a recognition dinner on February 26th.

The 2013 Driver-of-the-Year recipients are: Fesseha Mekonnen, Schmitty and Sons Transit Full-time Driver; and Liz McLeod, Schmitty and Sons Part-Time Driver.

In addition, a special award was presented to Schmitty and Sons Operations Manager David Lies, who has taken a key leadership role in implementing MVTA’s selected Computer-Aided Dispatch/Automatic Vehicle Locator system.

The runner’s-up were 2nd Place – Randy Bloom of Burnsville and 3rd Place – Linda Cram-Smith of Lakeville.

MnDOT releases 2013 Transportation Highlights

Video

By MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The week of March 25th the Minnesota Department of Transportation released its 2013 Highlights video that features several projects started or completed last construction season. The four-minute production includes a blend of work performed in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area and a variety of Minnesota communities, including International Falls, Moorhead and St. Cloud.

Minnesota's statewide multimodal system is featured in video segments that include freeways and highways, freight, aviation, bicycling and pedestrian projects. The video also details cost- and time-savings, while providing specifics on flexible design and unique construction processes used to stretch transportation dollars and reduce impacts to business and traffic.

The video can be viewed online at www.mndot.gov

Steele County Area Transit now Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit

By LAURA EASH

On the 1st of this year, Steele County Area Transit became Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit (SMART), owned and operated by Cedar Valley Services. In addition to Steele County, SMART provides public transit in Mower and Freeborn Counties.

This change came as part of the MnDOT Office of Transit's Transit for Our Future Initiative, which aims for coordination, cooperation and consolidation through:

- ◆ Improve customer access, including greater service availability

- ◆ More efficiencies in management in light of increased federal requirements
- ◆ Reinvest any realized savings in more service

SMART's official website is smartbusmn.org. It includes contact information, trip planning information like schedules and maps and social media links.





Upcoming Events of Interest

Come to the Community Transportation Association's Community Transportation Expo! Highlights include:

- ◆ Sunday, June 8: National Community Transportation Roadeo & Awards Banquet
- ◆ Tuesday, June 10: Trade Show Opening and Reception
- ◆ Wednesday, June 11: Local Transit Tours, Sessions
- ◆ Thursday, June 12: Big Night Out, Sessions
- ◆ June 7—13: Free rides on Metro Transit

Visit ctaa.org to learn more and register.

This year's Minnesota Bus Roadeo will be held July 11th and 12th in Duluth. The event will be held at the Duluth Heritage Sports Center, and the event hotel is the Holiday Inn and Suites of Duluth. On Saturday, there will be a Northshore Scenic Railway Tour followed by the awards ceremony in the evening.

Visit <http://mpta-transit.org/event/2014-minnesota-bus-roadeo> to learn more. Please continue to check back as this year's website is still being updated with new information.





InTransit newsletter is a bimonthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA). Opinions and views expressed in this publication may not necessarily be those of the Minnesota Public Transit Association or its members.



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Upcoming Events

2014 CTAA Community

Transportation Expo

June 8 - 13 in St. Paul

2014 MN Bus Roadeo

July 11 - 12 in Duluth

2014 MPTA Annual

Conference and Expo

September 9 - 11 in St. Paul

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

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