



in transit

Minnesota Public Transit Association



MPTA award winners honored at State Transit Conference

ST. CLOUD— The Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA) presented its 2007 awards at the Minnesota Public Transit Conference in St. Cloud on October 29, as part of its annual meeting.

Minnesota Representative Shelley Madore received the “Friend of Transit” award.

Paul Bunyan Transit of Bemidji was named the “Transit System of the Year.”

Bob Works received the “Distinguished Career” award.

Bernadette “Bernie” Struck of Dawson Heartland Express was named “Transit Professional of the Year.”

Duluth Transit Authority received the “Management Innovation” award for their U-Pass Program.



Struck named Transit Professional of the Year

MPTA President Tony Kellen and Bev Herfendahl of Mn/DOT present Bernadette Struck of Dawson Heartland Express with the award.



Distinguished Career Award

Director of Mn/DOT's Office of Transit, Donna Allan, presents Bob Works with the award. Works recently retired from Mn/DOT and was instrumental in many projects including Heartland Express, B-BOP and Share the Road bicycle safety campaigns.



Paul Bunyan Transit of Bemidji named Transit System of the Year

MPTA President Tony Kellen presents award to Gregory Negard, Executive Director of Paul Bunyan Transit, Curt Oakes, Bemidji City Planner and LuAnn Anderson, Paul Bunyan Operations Manager.

From the President



Tony Kellen, President
Minnesota Public Transit Association
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Thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, the 2007 Minnesota Public Transit Conference was a huge success! We had a great turnout of participants from all across the state, outstanding speakers, informative breakout sessions, a huge vendor exhibition with over 50 companies and wonderful entertainment supplied by First Transit/Laidlaw Transit.

Folks who attended the conference expressed their enthusiasm for the program

and are looking forward to next year's conference.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association is extremely grateful to vendor sponsors, volunteers and agency staff who made

Minnesota Public Transit Association   

this event happen. The schedule for upcoming transit conferences includes:

- September 29-October 1, 2008 St. Paul River Centre
- September 14-16, 2009 Duluth (DECC)
- September 13-15, 2010 Rochester (Mayo Civic Center)

For those of you who were not able to attend the conference this year, mark your calendar for next year and make a commitment to attend and receive valuable training, insights, inspiration and support from fellow transit providers and advocates. It truly is an important event, one that brings everyone together in support of quality transit service.

If you have suggestions or comments regarding the 2007 Transit Conference, please let us know. We're always working to improve the content and structure of the event, so your insights as a participants are helpful.

With the annual Minnesota Public Transit Conference behind us, MPTA will be focusing more heavily on legislative issues as we prepare for the 2008 Legislative Session. The Session convenes on February 12, 2008 and there will undoubtedly be a great deal of attention on transportation funding needs. We will be advocating for the inclusion of capital funding for facilities and transitways in the capital bonding bill as well as additional operating dollars. As always, your advocacy is absolutely critical to our success in meeting our clients' needs and providing quality transit service throughout Minnesota.



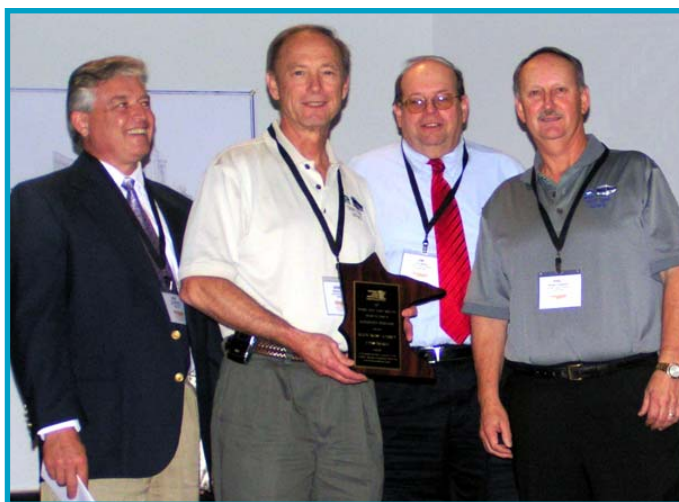
Keynote speaker Vance Opperman



Donna Allan of Mn/DOT addresses the state of Greater Minnesota transit.



Arlene McCarthy of the Met Council addresses the state of transit in the Metro Area.



DTA receives Management Innovation Award

Don Mohawk of Mn/DOT (on left) congratulates DTA team - General Manager Dennis Jensen (holding award), Jim Heilig and Phil Torgerson.

Legislative Update

Margaret Donahoe
Legislative Director
Minnesota Transportation Alliance



Legislative Panel Provides Insight on Transit Funding

The 2007 Minnesota Transit Conference featured a legislative panel that provided participants some interesting perspectives on the upcoming 2008 Legislative Session.

The panel consisted of: Senator Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing), Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee; Representative Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), Chair of the House Transportation Committee; Representative Shelley Madore (DFL-Apple Valley); Representative Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover) and Representative Dan Severson (R-Sauk Rapids).

Each of the panelists talked about the important role that transit service plays in getting people where they need to be and maintaining independence. All of the legislators agreed that transportation funding will be a key issue during the next session and that the House, the Senate and the Governor will all have to work together to find common ground in order to make progress and increase transportation funding.

All of the legislators expressed support for including a provision in the transportation funding bill authorizing the counties in the 7-county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area to levy an increase of up to ½ percent in the metro sales tax with funds dedicated to roads and transit. That provision has not been supported by Governor Pawlenty.

There were concerns expressed over the idea of dedicating one-half of the capital bonding bill to transportation. Several legislators argued that state has too many other capital needs to devote such a large share of the bonding bill to one area. Another area of concern noted by legislators is the proposal to place a constitutional amendment on the ballot dedicating a state sales tax increase of 3/8 percent to the

environment and the arts. With a limit as to how much of a sales tax increase will be accepted, an increase in the sales tax for areas other than transportation will make passage of a transportation funding bill with adequate funding for transit much more problematic.

Legislators appeared optimistic that action will be taken next session to address transportation funding problems because the state has reached a point where the issue can no longer be ignored. They indicated that the legislature is unlikely to pass a "roads only" bill and will need to put together a balanced package with funding for both roads and transit. The panelists made it clear that transit advocates need to speak up and keep up the pressure. All legislators need to hear from their constituents about the importance of transit service and the need to increase the state's investment in this area. Without strong, visible support from advocates, other issues will draw attention away from transit funding needs.



Sherry Munyon presents Representative Shelley Madore with MPTA's Friend of Transit Award.



Legislative panel assemble at Conference: Senator Steve Murphy (DFL-Red Wing), Representative Shelley Madore (DFL-Apple Valley), Representative Kathy Tingelstad (R-Andover), Representative Bernie Lieder (DFL-Crookston), and Representative Dan Severson (R-Sauk Rapids).

APTA names St. Cloud Metro Bus as America's Best Transit System

ST. CLOUD—The St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission (Metro Bus) has been named the best transit system of its size in North America by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The award - the Outstanding Public Transportation System Achievement Award - was presented to Metro Bus at the APTA Annual Meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina on October 9, 2007. The Conference brings together over 2,000 transit industry professionals from around the world.

Metro Bus was also voted #1 in 1990. No other Minnesota transit system can claim multiple wins as "America's Best"; in fact, very few nationwide can. "To receive this national award twice is humbling," said David W. Tripp, Metro Bus Executive Director. "Our success is due to people -- the customers we are privileged to serve, our employees who provide impeccable service, our community leaders and business and agency partners with whom strong relationships are valued. In several days we will also be reaching the 2,000,000 annual rider plateau for the first time since 1949, bringing further pride to this organization."

Congratulating Metro Bus on behalf of the State of Minnesota, Governor Tim Pawlenty said "this prestigious award is testament to your outstanding dedication in providing safe and dependable public transportation to the St. Cloud Metro area". "Our dedicated Metro Bus employees work hard to ensure the highest quality of service, and the Board is immensely proud of them," said Commission Chairman Paul L. Ringsmuth. "It also recognizes the broad support we receive from our four communities which helps maintain this critical public service."

APTA gives out the Outstanding Achievement Award annually to honor transit systems demonstrating exceptional efficiency and effectiveness. "Congratulations to St. Cloud Metro Bus for being recognized as the 2007 top transit agency in North America in the category of 1-4 million trips annually," said American Public Transportation Association President William W. Millar. "With strong ridership increases; a culture that emphasizes safety; and the implementation of technological innovations, St. Cloud is a transit system that demonstrates excellence. Receiving this prestigious honor means that St. Cloud Metro Bus and its employees are the "best of the best" in North America." APTA is a nonprofit international association of 1,500 member organizations, including bus, rapid transit and commuter rail systems. APTA members serve more than 90 percent of people who use public transportation in the United States and Canada.



Confetti celebration upon awarding "System of the Year" to Metro Bus at the recent APTA Conference. Pictured from left: Tony Kellen, Director of Operations; Dave Kleis, Mayor of St. Cloud; Paul Ringmuth, Chair, Metro Bus Board of Commissioners; Carolyn Garven, Member, Metro Bus Board of Commissioners; David Tripp, Executive Director; and Tom Cruikshank, Director of Planning and Marketing



St. Cloud Metro Bus staff celebrated their selection as America's Best Transit System with a pig roast party.



Transit in the News

Forner re-elected state CTAA delegate

MINNESOTA—MPTA Treasurer Jackie Forner of Chisago Isanti Heartland Express was recently re-elected as the Minnesota State Delegate for the Community Transit Association of America (CTAA). Her term will be effective through the end of September 2010.

CTAA Delegates play a crucial role in the development of important policies and priorities. Much of their current legislative and political focus is based on the information CTAA obtains from their delegates around the country.

CTAA delegates participated in discussions at its recent conference concerning policy development in the areas of transportation design, technical assistance and educational activities to help better serve the needs of CTAA members and the transit industry.



Jackie Forner

New bus service between Burnsville and Duluth on The Jefferson Movie Express

BURNSVILLE—Jefferson Lines announced new premium service between the Burnsville Transit Station and Duluth. The service on Jefferson's Movie Express includes bottled water, a snack and viewing a recently released movie. Passengers can board the bus at the Minnesota Valley Transit located at 100 E. Highway 13 in Burnsville.

"Given the high cost of fuel and concerns for our environment we feel the time is right to offer a new kind of bus service. This is an exciting venture for Jefferson Lines", said Charlie Zelle, President and CEO of Jefferson Lines. "We are very pleased that the Minnesota Valley Transit has agreed to partner with us on this new service."

"The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) is excited to participate with Jefferson Lines in this new venture," said MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller. "We

hope to accommodate many students, parents and residents wishing to travel between Burnsville and Duluth."

Initially Jefferson will operate two schedules weekly. The schedule for Duluth departs at 10 a.m. on Fridays and arrives in Duluth at 1:50 p.m. The Movie Express then returns from Duluth dropping off University of Minnesota students as well as others from the Duluth community. That bus arrives in Burnsville at 5:25 p.m. The Movie Express leaves Burnsville at 3:15 p.m. on Sundays arriving in Duluth at 6:30 p.m. It then leaves Duluth to return to Burnsville arriving at 10:30 p.m. Passenger can depart the bus in Duluth at the Duluth Greyhound terminal, the Downtown Duluth Transit Center, the College of St. Scholastica, or the University of Minnesota Duluth.

Metro Transit set ridership record

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL—Metro Transit today reported record ridership for the month of August. The agency recorded 7.36 million bus and train rides last month – the first time in 25 years that ridership for any single month exceeded 7 million.

August ridership was 5.3 percent higher than August 2006.

Monthly ridership gains are attributable to a number of factors, said Brian Lamb, general manager. They include higher ridership due to the collapse of the I-35W bridge, spiking fuel prices, a general frustration with congestion and record State Fair ridership. (Nine of the 12 days of the fair are recorded in the August results.) Ridership on express buses was up nearly 17 percent to 1.1 million while core urban local route ridership was up 3.3 percent to 5.1 million. The

Hiawatha light-rail line contributed 864,000 rides to the monthly total, 10 percent lower than last year due to the closing for 12 months of Humphrey Terminal Station for airport construction. The station re-opened to rail service this month.

For the entire State Fair, Metro Transit recorded 986,114 rides, up 5.8 percent, or nearly 53,600 more rides than last year. State Fair ridership set a Metro Transit record. Nearly 30 percent of those attending the fair arrived on a Metro Transit bus.

For the first eight months of the year, Metro Transit has tallied 50.3 million rides, up 4.8 percent, or 2.3 million rides, over the same period last year.



Transit in the News



Metro Transit wins national marketing awards

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL—Metro Transit announced today that one of its 2007 television commercials won top honors in the TV advertising ward is a prestigious accomplishment and should be celebrated as a mark of originality, creativity, and excellence in public transportation marketing and communications,” said APTA President William W. Millar.

Metro Transit’s winning entry, which is airing now on Twin Cities broadcast and cable channels, has an environmental theme. The 30-second spot suggests that citizens set about fixing the earth as they strive to fix other things in their lives.

“The message of the TV spot is a compelling and effectively presented,” said Bruce Howard, Metro Transit’s director of marketing. “The tagline of the commercial also draws attention to our Go Greener Initiative in which we embrace hybrid electric propulsion with the environmentally friendly biodiesel fuels.”

The ad was produced under Metro Transit direction by Periscope, the largest independently owned advertising agency in Minneapolis. In addition to the TV award, Metro Transit received one of two awards presented in the competition’s New Media category. Metro Transit was recognized for a web-based interactive map that is part of its 21 Hop + Shop promotion. The promotion is a partnership between the transit agency and businesses along Lake Street in which the merchants offer discounts to transit customers when they show their bus passes or transfers.



Bruce Howard



Design for Northstar locomotive unveiled

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL—Metro Transit last night unveiled the graphic design to be used on locomotives for Minnesota’s first commuter train, the Northstar commuter rail line. The locomotive design was revealed at a meeting of the Metropolitan Council. It features interlocking arcs of color (red, yellow and white) on a blue background, leading to a bold yellow star.

“The design gives the train a distinctive look that will be easily recognizable as it travels along Highway 10, and is viewed by thousands stuck in traffic as the trains speed past,” said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb. “The use of color is reminiscent of Hiawatha light-rail trains while keeping the ‘north star’ icon that has been associated with the project during its 10 years of development.” View the design [HERE](#). High-res: 624K file

The 40-mile Northstar Line will travel between Big Lake and downtown Minneapolis. Service will consist of five weekday round trips, along with a weekday reverse-commute trip and weekend service. Trains will make the quick trip at speeds of up to 80 mph, with a direct connection to Hiawatha light-rail trains in downtown. Total project cost is estimated at \$320 million.

The unveiling follows other recent milestones for the project:

- Congress last week began a final 60-day review of the application for \$156.8 million in federal funds. Earlier the application was approved by both the Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Department of Transportation. That puts the project on track for securing final approval in December.
- The manufacturer of the train’s passenger cars will be determined in early December and a contract awarded once the federal funding agreement is executed. The first order calls for 17 cars, which are expected to be delivered in 2009. The graphics for passenger cars will subtly mirror the locomotive design.
- Four remanufactured MP-36 (Motive Power, Inc.) locomotives have been purchased and are scheduled to be delivered to the Twin Cities in fall 2008.

The Northstar project is a cooperative effort between the Northstar Corridor Development Authority, Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, Minnesota Department of Transportation with the support of Governor Pawlenty and Minnesota’s congressional delegation.



Transit in the News

Mn/DOT announces Greater Minnesota's Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedom projects for 2008

GREATER MINNESOTA—Mn/DOT's Office of Transit is pleased to announce the successful JARC and New Freedom projects, which are the outcome of the first such applications in Greater Minnesota under SAFETEA-LU.

The application process began in late February, workshops were held throughout the state in March and applications were due June 15. The statewide review committee met in July and recommended projects for funding. Contracts will be executed in December with project start-up in January 2008.

The following projects are funded under JARC:

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, Inc. - Rural Rides Transportation Coordination Project in Greater St. Louis & Lake Counties to work with low-income households to reach employment and employment training services offering coordinated transportation options.

Chisago-Isanti County Heartland Express - Bus Shelters for Cambridge and Braham as identifiable stops for new deviated route.

Community Resource Connections, Inc. - Project Connect to develop and implement computerized networking system enabling increased access to transportation in Bemidji, Walker, Park Rapids, Bagley and Counties of Beltrami, Northern Cass, Clearwater, Hubbard and southern Koochiching.

Duluth Transit Authority - Airpark Service and Airport Service Expansion to major employers.

Metropolitan Council - Van-GO, which transports individuals from "collar" counties to suburban employment sites in Twin Cities metropolitan area.

City of Moorhead - Increased frequency of summer weekday service from 60 to 30 minutes on four routes to provide seamless work trips.

St. Cloud Metro Bus - New fixed route to Industrial Park.

St. Cloud Metro Bus - Addition of fixed route Dial-A-Ride on Sundays to accommodate work trips.

The following projects are funded under New Freedom:

Tri-County Action Program, Inc. - Mobility management function - Transportation Resource Center (TRC), to provide transportation referrals in Benton, Morrison and Stearns Counties, development of a volunteer driver administrative and operating support with complimentary wheelchair accessible vehicle and marketing plan to promote the multi-county one call phone number to assist disabled individuals in accessing services.

Tri-Valley Opportunity Council, Inc. - Acquisition of accessible vehicle for volunteer transportation program in five counties, addition of a travel training instructor to customize travel training curriculum for individuals with disabilities and marketing plan to provide education and awareness of program.

VINE Faith in Action - Development of mobility management functions for Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties and limited mobility management in LeSueur, Waseca and Faribault Counties and expansion of volunteer driver programs.

Western Community Action Partnership - Acquisition of a lift-equipped vehicle and two bus shelters to provide service on a new flexible fixed route in Marshall and to college.



DTA plans new route with JARC funds

The Duluth Transit Authority is planning a new commuter route with JARC funds to serve major employers Cirrus Design (above) and United Healthcare (on right).





Transit in the News

Former Minnesota Viking joins Central Corridor LRT staff

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL—Former Minnesota Vikings defensive back Joey Browner and Dana Dellis, a former employment counselor for Goodwill/Easter Seals, have joined the Central Corridor LRT Project's community outreach staff. Browner has worked as an events coordinator following his NFL career with the Vikings and Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

Besides working for a nonprofit organization on the corridor, Dellis' qualifications include fluency in Spanish and English. Also joining the outreach staff as an intern is Kent Hranicka, a former Wisconsin legislative aide. Hranicka is studying for his master's degree in urban and regional planning at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute.

St. Cloud Metro Bus honors 2 millionth rider

ST. CLOUD—After an amazing buildup of anticipation, Metro Bus had its 2,000,000th rider Thursday, September 27, 2007, at 8:30 a.m. on the East Side Route. The winner is Melody Thayer of St. Cloud, who has recently become a regular rider taking Metro Bus to work in Sartell. Upon learning that she was the 2,000,000th rider, Ms. Thayer was overcome with emotion and expressed her gratitude over and over. As the winner of the prize package, she won twelve months worth of 31-day Metro Bus passes, a \$300 gift certificate from Coborns and a 3-day weekend package from Lutsen Ski Resort.

"Metro Bus is grateful for the continued community support and our riders for making this a very special, historic day," said David Tripp, Executive Director of Metro Bus. The winner was congratulated by Metro Bus Chairman Paul Ringsmuth, Waite Park Mayor Carla Schaefer, Sartell Mayor Tim O'Driscoll, St. Cloud Mayor Dave Kleis, State Representative Dan Severson, and Metro Bus Commissioner Steve Hennes.



Melrose introduces new service

MELROSE—The official ribbon cutting celebration was held at the Melrose City Hall on September 5th to introduce new service. This ribbon cutting marks the beginning of busing that will operate from 8:00 am to 2:30 pm Monday thru Friday. The service in this western Stearns County community is provided by the Tri-CAP Transit Connection. Pictured wielding the scissors is honored guest, State Rep Bud Heidgerken flanked by city and other officials.

All guests were treated to cake and lemonade as part of the celebration and were given complimentary rides to try out the bus. All passengers rode free through Sept 14th to mark the beginning of five day a week service. Linda Elfstrand, Transit Director at Tri-CAP said that this service is the direct result of a very committed local committee that was instrumental in getting this service off the ground by fundraising and raising community awareness.





Transit in the News

Metro Transit customers can order, recharge and register cards online

New features added recently to the Go-To Card system make paying transit fares easier than ever for customers on Metro Transit buses, Hiawatha Line trains and suburban transit systems. The Go-To Card is a durable plastic card that tracks cash value and 31-day passes on a microchip. That means instead of using cash or inserting a magnetic fare card into a fare box, customers with a Go-To Card simply touch their cards to a reader and their fares are recorded instantly.

Transactions can be done online

Customers can store up to two 31-day passes on their Go-To Cards plus up to \$200 in stored value. In October, Metro Transit implemented a feature that allows customers to add stored value, order a new card and register a card over the internet. In addition, customers can now use stored value to pay for up to eight companion fares at once.

Go-To Card technology was first used in October 2005 by customers who carry Metropass, the employer-subsidized transit pass. Metro Transit continued an incremental roll-out of the system over the past two years, first with stored-value functionality and then with 31-day passes. The agency has now launched a marketing campaign to alert customers about this convenient way to pay transit fares.

“Metro Transit and our regional transit partners have worked hard to deliver this new fare collection system and revolutionize customers’ rides with speed and convenience,” said Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb.

Demand for Go-To Cards is strong

Fare products using Go-To Card technology:

- Go-To Cards: 13,410
- Metropasses: 27,000
- Go-To College Passes: 2,000
- U-Passes: 19,000

The number of customers using the Go-To Card throughout the Twin Cities has grown fast this year. On April 1, more than 2,370 Go-To Cards were in circulation. By September 1, around 13,410 customers were using Go-To Cards as stored value or 31-day passes.

That total does not include specially programmed fare products — like Metropass — that use Go-To Card technology. Go-To College Passes — available to students at participating colleges and trade schools — have employed Go-To Card technology since that program debuted in August 2006. Beginning this fall semester, all U-Passes — available to University of Minnesota students — are using the technology as well.



As passengers board, they quickly swipe their Go-To Card over the screen and proceed to a seat.

A tool for hassle-free travel

The Go-To Card provides a variety of handy features:

- Faster boarding. Instead of inserting a card into the farebox, customers can touch their Go-To Card to the reader, and fares are deducted instantly.
- Rechargeable convenience. Customers can store up to \$200 in stored value. When a card’s value gets low, value can be added at metrotransit.org or at Metro Transit stores, any rail ticket machine or select retail outlets.
- Security. If a card is lost or stolen, customers are protected as long as their cards are registered. Once reported lost, a new card is reissued with all the remaining value minus a \$5 service charge.
- Regional acceptance. The Go-To Card is accepted for regular-route service on all Metro Transit buses, Hiawatha Line trains and suburban transit systems.





Transit in the News

Met Council OKs \$2.5 billion transportation package

It's a \$2.5 billion package of highway and transit capital projects recommended for federal funding. The 2008-2011 Transportation Improvement Program, or "TIP" for short, was approved by the Metropolitan Council in September.

Among the big highway projects included:

- Rebuilding Crosstown at I-35W and adding a lane for vehicles carrying more than one passenger.
- Completing a new segment of Trunk Highway 212 from Eden Prairie through Chaska.
- Upgrading Trunk Highway 169 to a freeway between County Highways 81 and 109
- Major transit capital projects in the TIP are new bus purchases, including hybrid electric buses for fuel economy and environmental benefits, the Northstar commuter rail line, bus rapid transit on Cedar Avenue and light-rail transit on Central Corridor.

It's not a wish list

TIP is a short name for a big program that identifies and recommends metro-area transportation projects for federal funding. In addition to investments in highway and transit projects, the TIP includes projects that enhance bike and pedestrian facilities and promote air quality improvements.

"The Council is the MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) for the Twin Cities region, which means all federal dollars for metro-area transportation projects must be identified in the Transportation Improvement Plan," said transportation planner Carl Ohrn.

"It's also important to note that the TIP is not a wish list," said Ohrn. "It has to be realistic, as we're required to identify the sources of funding that we expect to be available for the recommended projects. Projects get into the TIP as they're identified and agreed to by local, regional and state officials, and they move out of the TIP as they're completed."

Local officials have extensive input

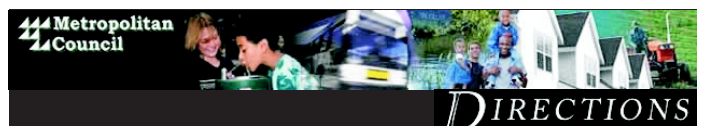
The TIP is updated annually and prepared jointly by the Metropolitan Council and Minnesota Department of Transportation. The Transportation Advisory Board to the Council conducts the public review and involvement process prior to Council adoption.

The TAB is a 33-member body composed of locally elected officials, representatives of government agencies involved in transportation issues, citizen members and members who represent transit, freight and non-motorized transportation modes. The board advises the Metropolitan Council on transportation issues and helps develop plans and programs to meet the transportation needs of the seven-county metro area.

For a complete accounting of the hundreds of projects in the TIP, you can find the report online. Copies are also available for \$5 by contacting the Regional Data Center at 651.602.1140 or data.center@metc.state.mn.us.



Metro Transit will receive federal funding through the TIP to purchase additional hybrid-electric buses for its fleet.





Transit in the News

Along the Central Corridor

Outreach staff bridging gap between public, LRT planners

How do you say “catenary” in Hmong or Swahili? How do you elicit information from people, who don’t think their opinion will matter, that can help engineers design the Central Corridor light rail transit?

You hire outreach coordinators who speak eight languages among them and can draw on their varied life experiences to talk face-to-face with residents, business people and community groups.

The Central Corridor LRT Project this summer hired Nkongo Cigolo, Jessica Hill, Shoua Lee and Rita Rodriguez to do community outreach, and assigned each a territory on the route based on their language skills and backgrounds. The coordinators, along with Robin Cauffman, manager of public involvement for the project, have been hitting the streets to reach people who would be unlikely to attend public meetings or contact them.

As intended, the outreach staffers have learned things useful for project planners that they couldn’t have found out over the phone. Time is of the essence because important decisions must be made by spring, such as:

- Whether to build a tunnel through the University of Minnesota.
- Whether to make St. Paul’s Union Depot a terminus.
- The extent of reconstruction on University Avenue.

Meeting people on their own turf

Sometimes, getting the information needed to help make the big decisions requires breaking bread with the public. When Cauffman went to give a speech about the LRT project to a gathering of the Norske Torske Klubben in St. Paul, she enjoyed cod slathered in butter with the Norwegian-American men’s cod-eating club.

When Hill dropped in on the Overflow Espresso Café’s grand opening one evening this month, she discovered more than a new place to have coffee. There was a lot of traffic.

Traffic in the Prospect Park section of Minneapolis is high on Hill’s list of concerns. “Prospect Park’s portion of University Avenue is narrower and has so much truck, student and residential traffic,” Hill said. “I am documenting everyone’s concerns, including parking layout, delivery locations and access to businesses to present to the engineers so that we can have a solid plan for the construction phase of the project.”

All of the outreach coordinators occasionally work evenings and weekends to talk with the public. They worked at the Metro Transit booth at the State Fair to distribute flyers and answer questions. Their intelligence gathering takes them to art fairs, music festivals and ethnic chamber of commerce events to hear the concerns of people who otherwise might not come to them.



The public is always welcome to stop in and meet the outreach coordinators anytime during business hours Monday through Friday at the new Central Corridor LRT Project Office in the Griggs Midway Building, 540 Fairview Ave. N., in St. Paul.



Coffeehouse owner Molly Barnhart (left) and outreach coordinator Jessica Hill chat during the September grand opening for the Overflow Espresso Café at 2929 University Ave. SE., Minneapolis. The coffeehouse is on the Central Corridor LRT route.





Transit in the News

Community groups are advising the project team

Every month, the coordinators attend evening meetings of the Business Advisory Council (BAC) and Community Advisory Committee (CAC), groups that were created by the project to receive updates and provide advice. They also held several public open houses on summer evenings in community centers, a grocery store, a church and a senior housing complex. What they have learned will be very useful to consultants beginning preliminary engineering work that must be completed in less than a year.

"At the BAC meeting last night, we were discussing the first six stations," Cauffman said. "Nell McClung from the Griggs Midway Corp. noted that the location of the Fairview station floods every time it rains. That's just the kind of thing we need to know about." A project staffer noted the street flooding problem at Fairview and University to share with engineers.

Outreach coordinator Rita Rodriguez went a step further by arranging for an engineer to visit two businesses with her to answer the owners' technical questions about how they would be impacted by construction. She did this after recalling her own frustrations trying to get information in the mid-1980s when curbs and sidewalks were reconstructed outside her mailing service business on University Avenue and the building was renovated.

"As a business owner, I looked at what I would have wanted to know," Rodriguez said. "I couldn't take the time to go to meetings back then to get information. Both owners are feeling like they've been heard and also that I'm going to keep them in the loop."

Taking a ride on Hiawatha

To help the public better understand the project, Shoua took 13 community members from the Aurora/St. Anthony neighborhood for a ride on the Hiawatha LRT train.

"None of them had been on the Hiawatha before and had reservations about light rail going on University," Lee said. "After a few minutes on the train, several of them started saying much more positive things about the light rail. Comments I heard were that the light rail was a very nice, comfortable ride."

Face-to-face meetings are invaluable with groups with limited English skills.

"One challenge with languages is trying to explain things like catenaries and right-of-way, which often do not have an exact translation into other languages," Lee said. "Sometimes, it comes down to simply bringing graphics with you or sketching out some graphics to explain how the trains will run down University Avenue."



Tené Wells (left), president of WomenVenture, and outreach coordinator Rita Rodriguez discuss the advantages for the nonprofit organization's transit-dependent clients of LRT. A Central Corridor LRT station is proposed in front of the Midtown Commons building at 2324 University Ave. in St. Paul where WomenVenture has its office.



Community outreach coordinator Shoua Lee (left) peruses the lunch menu with Hai Truong, owner of Ngon Vietnamese Bistro in St. Paul. Truong told Lee he believes the half-mile distance between light rail stations on University will increase pedestrian traffic and neighborliness in the area.



Transit in the News

Language skills are invaluable

Cigolo, who came to the United States from Africa to attend the University of Minnesota, speaks Swahili, French, Spanish and two dialects of Bantu, a group of languages spoken in equatorial and southern Africa.

"I find it useful being an immigrant myself to communicate with other immigrants," Cigolo said.

On a visit to the Rondo Community Library, he encountered a group of Somalis who spoke Swahili. "We chatted in Swahili about Central Corridor LRT, and it was very useful because some of the people in the group could not understand English."

Misinformation about the project is something all of the outreach coordinators have encountered.

The owner of Christo's, an African clothing and cookware shop, told Cigolo she had heard that the project would be acquiring buildings, shutting down businesses.

"I pulled out a brochure and showed Christo a map of how LRT will run in the middle of University Avenue," Cigolo explained. "I also showed her a map of the proposed alignment with proposed stations. She said that the LRT was a very good project and mentioned that she would want to ride the trains."

When Lee hears people say they shouldn't bother to give feedback because project planners won't listen, she said, "That's when I tell them how many outreach coordinators have been hired to engage the community. I tell them that if they don't tell us important things about their neighborhoods, such as where their access points are, or where the dependent elders are in the community, then it's impossible for us to know and plan for them."



Ephrem Mekonnen (left), an owner of Piazza Market at 512 N. Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, talks with outreach coordinator Nkongo Cigolo about the location of the nearest LRT station.

in transit

Minnesota Public Transit Newsletter

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RTAP Training Classes

Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) offers training in passenger assistance, defensive driving and abuse prevention. In 2007, RTAP is offering refresher courses and training for newly hired employees. New hires should take the full eight hours of Passenger Assistance, four hours of Defensive Driving and four hours of Abuse Prevention. Refresher training should be taken once every three years after the initial new hire courses have been completed. Register for classes by completing the form posted on the Office of Transit's web-site at: www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/Form/index.html. **RTAP calendar is subject to change. For the most up-to-date listing, see the 2007 RTAP training calendar at www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/RTAP/rtaptrng.html.** For more information, contact RTAP Coordinator Lynn Frank at 651/296-1610 or lynn.frank@dot.state.mn.us.

November

17 Driver Refresher Training — Mankato Area — 8 a.m. - Noon

December

- 01 Driver Refresher Training — Bemidji Area — 8 a.m. - Noon
- 08 Passenger Assistance Training — Brainerd Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- 08 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Rochester Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- 15 Defensive Driving/Abuse Prevention — Fergus Falls Area — 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Transit Events

Sept. 29 - Oct. 1, 2008 Minnesota Public Transit Conference — River Center - St. Paul, MN

FOR SALE: Tri-CAP has two Diamond Fareboxes on stands for sale. One is in working order, and the other needs repair or could be used for parts. Both keyed alike. \$50.00 or best offer for both. Buyer transports or pays shipping. Call Linda Elfstrand at 320/257-4445 or email Linda.Elfstrand@tricap.org.

SEND NEWS

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