

A bimonthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

intransit

Spring 2015 Edition

2015 Transportation Day at the Capitol



From left, Governor Mark Dayton, MnDOT Commissioner Charles Zelle and Metropolitan Council Chair Adam Duinink.



From left, Chisago-Isanti County Heartland Express Transit Director Craig Rempp and Representative Bob Barrett.



From left, Rolling Hills Transit Transportation Director Erlene Welshons, Senator Jeremy Miller, and Rolling Hills Transit Executive Director Wayne Stenberg.



Representative Josh Heintzeman (second from right) with Jefferson Bus Lines staff, from left Tom Thoenke, Becky Alper and Douglas Aretz.

President's Column

Marc Hall



As the legislature heads into the Easter/Passover break, the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA) is advocating with legislators for increased transit funding. The week-long break provides all of us with a great opportunity to meet with legislators at home and communicate the importance of transit service in our communities.

MPTA is here to assist you in contacting legislators whether by phone, email or over a cup of coffee at the local café. Look for updates and alerts along with calls from our staff to help make the case for transit funding.

You have probably been hearing more about transportation in local news stories as the Governor, Lt. Governor and Commissioner Zelle have been traveling around the state calling attention to the need for additional funding. The Move MN campaign has also been out visiting with editorial boards and organizing local meetings to highlight local transit and transportation needs. Thanks to all of the transit system managers who have joined these newspaper visits or local meetings and hearings to explain local transit needs. We will continue to need the participation of transit systems throughout the 2015 Session.

Training is our other big focus and MPTA is hard at work planning an informative and productive Bus Roadeo scheduled for July 17-18 in St. Cloud as well as a joint Minnesota/Wisconsin Public Transit Conference in Duluth from October 19-21. With additional training dollars in our budgets, we can all take advantage of these important events to send staff who will benefit from training on best practices, networking with colleagues and learning more about how to provide the best transit service in a changing environment. We all need some inspiration and assistance so mark your calendars for these events that you can't afford to miss.

If you have suggestions for ways to improve the Bus Roadeo, now is the time to let us know. If you have ideas for session topics for the Transit Conference, we want to hear from you. Your input is always welcome and helps us to make these events useful for you and all of the transit systems in the state.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association is your organization. We all do better when we all belong and contribute to an association that lobbies, educates and builds collaboration among transit providers statewide. We work to improve the relationship with MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council as well as with lawmakers. Please visit our web site: www.mpta-transit.org and don't forget to "Like" us on Facebook.

Your participation and your membership are critical if we are to be successful in providing the quality transit service that our riders need. Thank you to everyone who has maintained membership in MPTA. We are working for you all year long.

Marc Hall, President



Legislative Report

Margaret Donahoe

Transit and transportation funding remains a top priority for the 2015 legislative session. Funding proposals are out and are starting to move through the process. The bottom line issue is whether or not the legislature will raise taxes for transportation. Governor Dayton and the Senate DFL majority are pushing increases in dedicated fees to fund a 10-year commitment to transportation improvements. The House GOP majority would like to fund roads and bridges and some additional bus service with existing revenue. The outcome will hinge on the ability of the two sides to compromise on a plan at the end of the session.

The latest forecast for the general fund projects a surplus for the coming biennium (FY2016-17) of about \$1.8 billion. The surplus has made discussions more difficult when it comes to raising taxes for transportation. Many legislators are saying that the state can't justify raising taxes when there is a significant surplus. We know that transportation has not competed well for general fund dollars and that without increases in dedicated revenue, transportation will not have dependable funding that we can plan on for long-term investments.

For transit, here are the major proposals:

Governor Dayton

1/2 increase in metro sales tax for metro-area transit (\$280M/yr)
Increase in general fund appropriation for Greater MN transit (\$12M/yr) and bike/ped investments (\$2.5M/yr)

Senate

3/4 cent increase in sales tax in metro area for transit with some revenue for bike/ped and roads (\$366M/yr)
Eliminates motor vehicle sales tax on leased (MVLST) for Greater MN Transit
Change in MVST distribution that reduces highway and metropolitan transit percentages to increase Greater MN from 4% of MVST to 8% (\$10M/yr net increase)

House

Cuts and eliminates general fund appropriation for Metro Area Transit (\$110M in next biennium and \$153M in future biennia)
Dedicates existing sales tax on rental vehicles to Metropolitan Transit Capital fund (begins in FY2018-19 \$20M annually)
Dedicates 50% of total sales on leased motor vehicles to Greater MN transit (\$14M/yr beginning in FY2017) Provides a one-time general fund appropriation in FY2016 of \$14M

The Senate Transportation Committee passed its funding bill through the policy committee on March 20th. The bill will need to be heard again in the Transportation Committee before it heads to the full Finance Committee and then the Tax Committee and then on the Senate floor. We are waiting to see the actual language of the House proposal which has been outlined in a press conference. The deadline for passing finance bills is April 24th.

There is also growing discussion of a capital bonding bill this year. MPTA will be working to include funding for transit capital needs for metropolitan and Greater Minnesota transit in the bonding bill if one is developed this session or next session. As always, we need transit advocates to contact their legislators and remind them how important transit service is for their constituents.



Rally for Transportation at the Minnesota Capitol

Save the Date! April 16, Noon to 1 on the Capitol Lawn



*Join transportation advocates, community leaders, Governor Dayton, and other elected officials to **fix transportation this year!***

Take action and get involved by visiting

www.movemn.org



Governor Dayton, MnDOT Commissioner Zelle Visit St. Cloud

Contributed by BERTA HARTIG



Above: Governor Mark Dayton shares his transportation plan at a press conference on March 6th. **Right:** MnDOT Commissioner Charles Zelle at the press conference. St. Cloud Metro Bus Executive Director Ryan Daniel also spoke at the event to recognize the Governor's support of transportation funding. **Below:** MnDOT Commissioner Zelle was also in St. Cloud on February 13th. He spoke at the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce and afterwards toured the Metro Bus Mobility Training Center.



Heartland Express caters to transportation needs of all

By JEAN RUZICKA—reprinted with permission from Park Rapids Enterprise

Park Rapids is a “good place to grow old” and a great place to grow up, thanks to the Heartland Express.

Passengers on “the demand response system” range in age from preschoolers – “it’s silly sock day!” - to senior citizens – “it’s one of the main reasons to move to Park Rapids.”

As the name implies, the schedule “ebbs and flows” based on riders’ needs, Heartland Express coordinator Linda Bair explained. Unlike metro transit, each day’s timetable is based on the passengers’ appointments and requests.

“We love it,” Woodland Court Apartments resident Annette Newland said as she hopped off the bus for grocery shopping day. “I use it all the time.”

“We get calls from realtors asking how far the bus goes,” Bair said of people making home-buying decisions.

“And it’s handicap accessible,” Newland said as she headed into Hugo’s. “I’m so thankful we have this bus.”

The program began in 1989 with three volunteer drivers and a single bus. Five buses now operate, with two full-time drivers and one part-time, along with a pool of part-timers.

Initially, Bair said, just seniors boarded the bus, now it’s a third seniors, a third adults and a third children. The misconception that the program is geared to the elderly has been dispelled.



Abbie Randall, 4, departs the bus with her chauffeur, Roger Hocking, looking on.

Heartland Express recently received two grants - adding a third bus during peak times, Saturday service and increasing the geographical region being covered. The program was one of two in the state chosen for an expansion grant, Heartland Express receiving \$46,000.

The 16-passenger buses provide service to the city as well as a two- to three-mile radius outside Park Rapids, friendly drivers behind the wheel.

The buses travel as far north as 200th Street and Highway 71, west to Western Avenue, east to the Heartland Business Center on Highway 34 and as far south as Piney Park on Highway 71. This area includes north on CSAH 4 as far as Co. Rd. 81 and as far south on CSAH 6 as Conifer Circle.

“We continually track requests for service that may suggest a need for additional service area,” Bair said.

“Public transportation is for everyone,” she said. There are no age, financial or disability requirements.

“We have people going to work, children going to preschool and after school activities and all age groups going to social activities, medical appointments, shopping, exercise programs and



Lists in hands, Florence Klasse, Betty Bruckelmeyer and Eleanor Robertson head into Hugo's for grocery shopping. Driver Roger Hocking is on a first-name basis with many of his passengers.

more,” Bair said.

“We work closely with Community Education, the clinic, the hospital, the schools, businesses, veterans’ services and social services to get people to their day-to-day life needs appointments,” she said.

Day care providers and kids board the bus to head off to events and recreational activities in the summer – “opportunities that would not be available without the buses.” Heartland Express has purchased seats with child restraints to accommodate the mini passengers.

The transportation system was a key player in the Governor’s Fishing Opener.

The ridership increased by 11 percent over the 2013-14 winter, driving the decision for the third bus. Rides are now available from 7:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday through Friday with plans to continue until 5 p.m. in the near future. The Saturday bus runs from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

To schedule a ride, contact dispatch from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 732-3500, option 1, preferably the day

before.

The fare is \$1.50 each way, with exact change required. Monthly bus passes are available for \$30, allowing unlimited rides. There are also punch cards.

Discounted riding opportunities include the grocery run on Tuesdays, with stops at Woodland Court, Heritage Manor, Park Villa, SummerField and River Heights.

Friday, the bus heads to the Silver Social for games of cards at Frank White Education Center for a \$1.50 round-trip fare.

Funding for the Heartland Express is derived from state and federal sources, fares and contracts.



Redley Johnson, 5, gear in hand, boards the bus.



SPEAK UP 4 TRANSIT

WHY I SUPPORT TRANSIT



WE RIDE TRANSIT MORE THAN EVER

More people than ever are riding transit. In 2014, that number was 10.8 billion trips, the most in 58 years!

WE SUPPORT TRANSIT AT THE POLLS

From 2010-2014, an average of more than 75 percent of transit ballot measures were approved by voters



WE TAKE TRANSIT TO WORK & THE DOCTOR

Most people riding transit are taking it to get to or from work or to receive or provide health care. Transit riders are going somewhere to make money, spend money or take care of themselves – essential to strong individuals and vibrant communities



TRANSIT BUILDS STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Frequent, reliable and efficient transit service can have significant positive impacts on property values, commercial activity and community services — all raising greater revenues for local and state budgets. Transit builds places where people want to live, work and visit



TRANSIT SAVES MONEY

After housing, American households spend more on transportation than any other expense, including food

Affordable mobility options are essential to all Americans, especially low-income persons, people with disabilities, seniors, tribal members and veterans

Transit is the most cost-effective way of moving the greatest number of people using the least amount of space and fuel, while also avoiding congestion



TRANSIT LEADS TO BETTER HEALTH

Research has shown that robust transit service allows people to more regularly walk and bike, improving physical fitness and reducing health care costs to society.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AT WWW.CTAA.ORG

Transit Data, Ideas & Trends
Videos: How to Talk Transit
Infographic: We Need More Bus Money
Communicating with Congress Card
CTAA's Reauthorization Priorities

Speak Up for Transit Day is Thursday, April 9th!

It is not the end; it is a new beginning!

Submitted by RACHEL SCHNEIDERMAN

On January 1, 2015, Renville County Heartland Express and Kandiyohi Area Transit joined forces and became Central Community Transit (CCT).

Renville County Heartland Express has been in existence since 1996, and Kandiyohi Area Transit since 1999.

This change occurred as part of MnDOT's "Looking to the Future Initiative."

The challenge has been quite enlightening.

KAT and RCHE have always worked together, and now, they are one unit. There will be numerous changes, but the routes will currently stay the same. CCT hopes to eventually look at adding and making more efficient routes. CCT bus service will strengthen the connection between our communities.

"I feel the public has really embraced the merge of our transit systems," said Schneiderman. "Folks are coming up to us, informing us that they like the new design and logo on our buses."

Again, it is a new beginning and it is welcomed!



CCT gives back to the community

Submitted by RACHEL SCHNEIDERMAN

Central Community Transit in Olivia is working together with the Renville County Hospital and Clinics. The county is building a new hospital right along Hwy 212, east of the city of Olivia. CCT of Olivia plans on working directly with the hospital by transporting numerous trips to their new facility, advertising on the exterior of buses and hopefully transporting local residents to their open house, just like they did for the hospital ground breaking.

St Mary's School in Bird Island and Thrivent Financial is also working with RCH and Clinics. CCT has been asked by the hospital to deliver beautiful bags to Renville County residents who are currently under dialysis care or receiving radiation and chemotherapy. These bags are packed with items that will make their treatment a little easier. Students from Bird Island, St. Mary's School have purchased and covered all costs with their donations and the matching donation of Thrivent Financial. A get well card is also enclosed from the children.



Phil Standfuss, a bus driver with CCT for eleven years, with some of the bags.

MVTA Salutes Drivers-of-the-Year, Classroom Trainer

Edited by LAURA EASH

Recognizing that drivers are the face of the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), the MVTA presented its 15th Annual Driver-of-the-Year Awards at a recognition dinner at Casper's Cherokee in Eagan, on February 25th.

In presenting the 2014 awards, MVTA Board Chair Clint Hooppaw (Apple Valley City Councilmember) talked about how MVTA's drivers are the "eyes, ears and face" of the MVTA. Their routine is varied: answering questions about locations along the route, connections to other buses and more. Their 'office' is their bus. Connie Massengale, MVTA's Project Manager with Schmitty and Sons Transit said, "All of our drivers here tonight are the reason I come to work every day and enjoy my job. They are all deserving of this recognition and I applaud the outstanding job they do everyday." Hooppaw said the MVTA's Driver of the Year dinner is the agency's way to let drivers know how much we appreciate them and the work they do.

The 2014 Driver-of-the-Year recipients are: Linda Cram-Smith, Schmitty and Sons Transit Full-time Driver; and Rick Andres, Schmitty and Sons Part-Time Driver. In addition, a special award was presented to Classroom Trainer Mary Blanchard, who is the first of the Schmitty's staff to work with drivers.

Linda Cram-Smith was selected as "runner up" Driver of the Year last year. She started with Schmitty and Sons in 2001. She currently drives Routes 460 and 465 between Burnsville, downtown Minneapolis and University of Minnesota; has driven

most other MVTA routes during her years of service.

A resident of central Minnesota all of her life, she currently lives in Lakeville, MN. Her family includes one son and two granddaughters. She started driving at age 13 ("I was a farm kid," she reports). In the fifth grade, she asked her school bus driver, "How do you know when the wheels are straight?" She taught driving (both behind the wheel and classroom) to teenagers for three years prior to taking a full-time position at Schmitty's.

"If it has wheels, it interests me," Linda said, adding that she has been a "shop gopher and parts runner all of my life." And, Back to the Fifties is the best weekend of the summer!

Barb Aldridge, Operations Manager, said, "When Linda walks through the door you feel how passionate she is about her job. She is always willing to learn and steps up to help cover PM routes when needed." Project Manager Connie Massengale noted, "Linda keeps me challenged with her ideas and questions. I love that she comes by my office sometimes, just to say 'Hi!'"

Rick Andres says, "I really enjoy driving and meeting and greeting passengers.

He drives a variety of MVTA routes: Routes 437 (Eagan), 478 (Rosemount), 445 (Eagan), 440 (Apple Valley), 444 (Burnsville) and METRO Red Line. He has been a driver for Schmitty's for nine years.

A high school graduate, Andres attended Tech College and he is a certified welder for the MN Zoo. His hobbies include: hunting deer, fishing, and collecting cast iron cookware (vintage & present day). He especially enjoys cooking and baking with his grandkids. He and his wife, Felicia, live in Apple Valley. They have two daughters and two grandchildren.



Pictured, from left, are: Seated: Runner up Full-time DOY Gary McCorquodale, Part-time DOY Rick Andres, Full-time DOY Linda Cram Smith and runner up Part-time DOY Kim Marty. Middle row: MVTA Secretary/Treasurer and Savage Councilmember Jane Victorey, MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller, Rosemount Mayor Bill Droste, Special Award Winner - Classroom Trainer Mary Blanchard. Back row: Burnsville Councilmember Bill Coughlin, Scott County Board Chair and MVTA Vice Chair Jon Ulrich, MVTA Chair and Apple Valley Councilmember Clint Hooppaw, Dakota County Commissioner Chris Gerlach, Eagan Councilmember Gary Hansen, Shakopee Councilor Michael Luce and ex-officio MVTA Board member Mayor Bob Crawford of Elko New Market. Not pictured, Prior Lake Councilmember Mike McGuire.

Criteria in qualifying as a Driver-of-the-Year include:

- The driver must have an excellent safety and attendance record.
- The driver must be recognized by his/her peers as a leader.
- Positive role model for other drivers.
- Nominated by peers or supervisors.
- No substantiated incidents that resulted in a driver complaint penalty during the year.

Runners up were 2nd Place – Gary McCorquodale (full-time driver); Kim Marty (part-time driver) and 3rd Place Gary Hall (full-time driver).

A special award was also presented to Mary Blanchard, Classroom Trainer for Schmitty and Sons. A high school graduate, she has driven all MVTA routes in addition to operating special service needed by MVTA's cities. Mary has driven all MVTA routes, and is the preference of many city staffers when they need a special tour to the Jordan training center, the 911 center in Dakota County, or a

city development tour.

She has been with Schmitty's for 15 years and lives in Eagan. She has one daughter and three grandchildren who she terms, "the loves of my life!"

Mary B, as she is known, describes her job as working with the training program, including classroom work, videos, on-bus training and training using the bus simulator, and "Every day has become adventurous and exciting. No two students are the same, so it is challenging and fun."

Customers' comments about Mary B include:

"We had a perfect bus ride," reports the Eagan Police Department regarding their special service. "Mary was a sweetheart, totally professional, and fun!"

Her boss, Connie Massengale said, "Mary is the perfect classroom trainer. She is professional, but above that she is patient. She is the first person that most of our new employees get to know and her representation of MVTA and Schmitty and Sons is very important."



Transit Ridership in the Metro Area Up Nearly 4%

Edited by LAURA EASH

Metro Transit 2014 ridership is highest in more than three decades

Bolstered by population growth in the greater Minneapolis-Saint Paul region and by changing transportation preferences and expanded service, transit ridership in 2014 was up 3.5% across all providers in the seven-county metro area. Total transit ridership in the region in 2014 was 97.7 million rides.

The region's largest provider, Metro Transit, experienced a nearly 4% increase.

Metro Transit buses and trains carried passengers on 84.5 million trips in 2014, the highest ridership tally since 1981. The ridership figure reflects an increase of more than 3.1 million rides, or 3.9%, compared with 2013. University of Minnesota bus service experienced an increase of nearly 10%, getting a big boost from the Green Line opening in June 2014. Metro Mobility--transportation service for people with disabilities--saw an increase of 8.2%, growth that's expected to continue given an aging population.

"Investment in public transit pays off in ridership," said Council Chair Adam Duininck. "The more we invest in transit, the more convenient and reliable the service becomes and the more people use it. Governor Dayton's proposed half-cent metro sales tax would expedite the build-out of this region's 21st century transit system and would be a smart investment in area residents, the economy, our workforce, and the environment."

Green Line success bolsters Metro Transit ridership

The increase in Metro Transit ridership was bolstered by the rousing success of METRO Green Line light rail transit along the University Avenue corridor since the line's opening in June. Light rail ridership on the line soared to just more than 6.5 million through year's end as riders took advantage of the new option to travel from Saint Paul to Minneapolis and points in between. When combined with bus routes still traveling along University, Metro Transit provided more than 3.4 million additional rides along the corridor.

Metro Transit 2014 bus and rail ridership

Bus: 67,814,305 rides - 224,208 avg. weekday rides
Light rail: 15,999,993 rides - 62,192 avg. weekday rides
Northstar: 721,214 rides - 2,539 avg. weekday rides

Network of providers serves the region

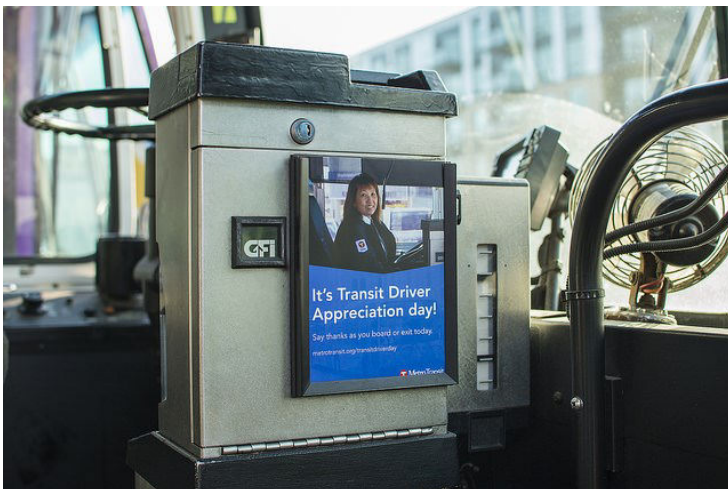
Suburban Transit Providers include Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), Plymouth Metrolink, Maple Grove Transit, and SouthWest Transit. Shakopee and Prior Lake transit systems merged with MVTA earlier this year. The University of Minnesota's Campus Connector offers service between campuses.

Metro Mobility provided nearly two million rides in 2014. Transit Link provides dial-a-ride service in areas with no other transit options and provided nearly 340,000 rides in the region.

2015 Transit Driver Appreciation Day

Photos taken by ERIC WHEELER and information submitted by DREW KERR

Governor Mark Dayton declared Wednesday, March 18, Transit Driver Appreciation Day in Minnesota. Metro Transit and other providers encouraged customers to show their support throughout the day. Photos from an appreciation lunch at the Fred T. Heywood Garage and signage that was used on Metro Transit's buses can be found on Metro Transit's Flickr page.



Mark these 2015 events on your calendar today!

Speak Up for Transit Day

April 9th

Nationwide - visit ctaa.org

Move MN Rally

April 16th

Capitol Lawn, St. Paul

Minnesota Bus Rodeo

July 17th and 18th

St. Cloud

**Annual Conference - with Wisconsin
this year!**

October 19th to 21st

Duluth

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on Facebook and follow @MNPublicTransit
on Twitter for:**

- Legislative updates
- News and retweets from MPTA members
- Local and national media coverage of transit news and issues

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

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