

A bimonthly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

# intransit

**Winter 2016 Edition**

## **Join MPTA at Transportation Day at the Capitol 2016!**

Don't miss your chance to be heard on transportation issues and funding needs by state legislators!

*MPTA staff is available to arrange appointments.*

**March 16, 2016 from 8:30 AM - 2:30 PM**

Regional Council of Carpenters - Great Hall

710 Olive Street, St. Paul, Minnesota 55130

**Registration is Only \$35 for MPTA Members! [Register Today](#)**



# President's Column

**Craig Rempp**



*What does the future of transit look like?* More and more we seem to be confronted by the prospect of a new future that is coming quickly. More transit systems are merging together and offering new ways for people to get around. New services will be available to people soon such as rides provided by Uber or Uber Assist or Lyft. New funding has been approved at the federal level and local options or new funding partnerships may be happening in the very near future. All of these trends will change how we think about mobility and how we provide public transit service. The Minnesota Public Transit Association will be working to help you track all the changes and to assist our member systems as we navigate a new future.



MnDOT's Office of Transit continues to work on updating the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan, the 20-year vision for transit in Greater Minnesota. As we think about the future, it's critical for all of us to provide feedback on the Transit Investment Plan including information on what is needed in our communities. We can't predict the future, but we can put some ballpark numbers around unmet needs for transit service in the immediate future. How would your system spend some additional funds from the state or federal government? In the current political climate there is a huge amount of competition for dollars so we have to be able to articulate why transit systems need funding. If we aren't playing offense, we'll have to play defense and fight to keep the dollars we have today.

MPTA is gearing up for the 2016 Legislative Session and we're encouraged by repeated statements from state leaders that transportation funding is a top priority for the session. The Governor and leadership in both the House and Senate and both political parties agree that a transportation funding package – which was not agreed to in 2015 – should be passed in 2016.

While a lot of attention is given to road and bridge needs, MPTA is working to make sure that transit needs are also a significant area of attention and dollars. In order to be successful, we need transit systems to help mobilize local leaders and transit riders. Legislators have to hear from people in their communities about the importance of the transit service they use. You can make a huge difference in our efforts to provide stable funding that grows with the cost of putting service on the street by working with MPTA to raise the visibility of transit.



## President's Column

**Craig Rempp**

**One of the easiest ways to make a difference and help secure a brighter future for transit is to join us at Transportation Day at the Capitol on March 16th.** This event brings transportation stakeholders together with key legislators to make our case for why transportation is so important in our state and why they need to act this session to stabilize and increase transportation funding. **MPTA will do all of the work for you: handle the registration, make appointments with your legislators, provide talking points and information you can share and make sure you have a great day.** Register today on our web site: [www.mpta-transit.org](http://www.mpta-transit.org)

Speaking of the future of transit, I will be part of a break-out session at Minnesota's Transportation Conference (March 8-10) at the RiverCentre in St. Paul talking about the future of transit in Minnesota. This is the largest and most diverse Minnesota transportation conference that is held annually with thousands of stakeholders, local government officials and agency staff from MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from colleagues from many areas of the transportation community. Check out the program and other details for Minnesota's Transportation Conference at: <http://mntransportationconference.org>

The future of the Minnesota Public Transit Association depends on your support and participation. I'm very excited to have a new, energetic Board of Directors for MPTA for 2016. Our goal is serve as a resource for any information, training or assistance you may need. Look for an invoice for 2016 dues and be sure to join your colleagues in supporting your transit association. The results of MPTA's work show up in your budgets every year and we want to build on our past successes.

See you in March,

Craig Rempp

President

### Share your feedback on the Greater MN Transit Investment Plan!

- ♦ Learn more on the [MnDOT website](#)
- ♦ Take the [survey](#)
- ♦ Try out the [Build Your Transit System](#) tool
- ♦ Visit [the interactive map](#)





# Legislative Report

***Margaret Donahoe***



The fiscal picture for the State of Minnesota is bright. The most recent budget forecast shows a healthy surplus projected for the state's general fund. The surplus is estimated at \$1.9 billion after required transfer, an estimated \$1.2 billion is available for the legislature to deal with when lawmakers return to St. Paul March 8th to begin the 2016 Legislative Session.

The budget forecast should be good news for transit in Minnesota but it remains unclear what impact this will have. House Republicans have argued that the budget surplus makes it impossible to raise taxes – even those that are dedicated for transportation purposes. That makes an increase in the metro sales tax for transit more difficult. On the other hand, some additional general fund dollars could be appropriated to transit throughout the state.

Of course, a significant budget surplus brings out many interests and funding needs. Among the areas receiving attention for additional dollars:

- Early childhood education
- Broadband investments
- Tax cuts
- Local government aid increases
- Programs to reduce racial inequalities
- Water infrastructure

The good news is that legislators and the governor continue to talk about the need for additional transportation funding and are keeping transportation on the table as a priority for the 2016 Session.

MPTA will be lobbying and fighting for transit funding that is adequate, stable and predictable. The association supports a level of funding for both Greater Minnesota Transit and Metropolitan Area Transit that builds out the bus systems over the next 15 years.

Lack of sufficient resources has led to many greater Minnesota communities putting in a higher local share than required by statute and inhibiting the expansion bus service in the metropolitan area.

To meet the funding need MPTA supports dedication of the leased vehicle currently in the General Fund being dedicated for transportation purposes with a split of 50% for Greater MN Transit with 50% for the five suburban ring counties. If Greater Minnesota Transit funding needs are not met through leased vehicle revenue, seek a more equitable distribution of MVST revenues or another dedicated source.

MPTA also supports a \$2 million appropriation from the general fund for new service mandates, statewide (no local match requirement) to meet requirements of the Olmstead order.



## Legislative Report

**Margaret Donahoe**

To meet the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area's needs, MPTA support sales tax increase in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area to a full one percent (*which is an increase of  $\frac{3}{4}\%$  in Hennepin, Ramsey, Anoka, Dakota, and Washington, and a 1% increase in Carver and Scott who do not have a tax today*). MPTA strongly urges dedication of funds to grow the bus by 4% a year as well as providing for a 4% growth to suburban transit systems and providing for growth in the areas served by other contracts.

MPTA also supports Suburban Transit providers request for \$4.5 million for the suburb to suburb bus demonstration project.

You can make a difference in the outcome of the 2016 for transportation! Join us for Transportation Day at the Capitol March 16th. This is a critical event for demonstrating statewide support for transit and highway funding. The more people we have in St. Paul on March 16th, the stronger our voice will be in reminding legislators that new funding remains unfinished business from the 2015 Session.

This is our year. Let's make 2016 a year for progress in stabilizing transit funding for systems all across Minnesota.

## New program to assist job seekers with transportation

*Submitted by BERTA HARTIG*

Free bus passes are available to low-income individuals who are actively job-seeking or who have started a new job. The passes are part of a new program offered by St. Cloud Metro Bus and funded by a Morgan Family Foundation grant.

The Metro Bus Transportation Emergency Fund program provides bus passes to low-income individuals who need transportation for job-related activities during that transitional time between job-seeking and when they have the financial means to purchase their own bus pass (e.g. their first paycheck). As applicable, a 7-Day, 31-Day, or 10-Ride Metro Bus pass or Northstar Link Commuter Bus or Northstar Line Commuter Rail pass will be provided to an individual who can demonstrate need.

"This is a referral-based program," said Debbie Anderson, who is coordinating the program at the Metro Bus Mobility Training Center. "Social service agencies will apply for the program on behalf of their clients. The agencies will screen for financial need and verify employment activity."

More information about the program can be found on the Metro Bus website, [ridemetrobust.com](http://ridemetrobust.com), and at the Metro Bus Mobility Training Center, 700 West St. Germain Street, Suite 100, St. Cloud, MN 56301, or by calling the Mobility Training Center at 320.529.4497.



# News



## DTA Breaks Ridership Records for both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

*Submitted by HEATH HICKOK and edited by LAURA EASH*

The Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) is pleased to announce that ridership on both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day reached all-time highs since the inception of the service in 2011. The DTA offered free rides on New Year's Eve from 5:00 p.m. to 2:20 a.m. on all regular-route service. Free rides were provided to 2,104 persons this year compared to 2,004 passengers in 2014 and 1,758 in 2013.

The program is supported with funding from sponsors such as Miller Lite, Fox 21, and Red Rock Radio. Bernick's, the distributor for Miller Lite in Duluth and Superior, also contributed to the promotional efforts of the campaign. This was the fifth year that the DTA has offered free rides on New Year's Eve and the second year featuring Miller Lite as the Presenting Sponsor.

Since its inception in 1987, the Miller Lite Free Rides program has provided more than 5 million people with a safe ride home and is an important part of MillerCoors overall commitment to helping prevent drunk driving. The program was offered in eleven other cities across the country including the Twin Cities market where Metro Transit is the public transit partner.

"Through our partnership with DTA, Miller Lite provided a record number of Free Rides, taking countless cars off the road so people could ring in the New Year safely," said Diane Wagner, responsibility commerce manager for MillerCoors. "We hope this program will encourage Duluth residents to continue making a plan for a safe ride home from their celebrations throughout the year."

Dan Clouse, general manager at Fox 21, was also pleased with the results of this year's campaign.

"This is a program we are definitely proud to be part of each year as a Supporting Sponsor. And we're particularly pleased to hear that a record number of people used this service to celebrate safely as they welcomed in 2016." Clouse said.

The DTA views this campaign as a model that other public transit systems could use to help promote safe and responsible celebrations on New Year's Eve. These types of collaborative efforts have proven to be successful.

"The community response to this promotion has been very positive. We received calls from different venues who were asking about the bus schedules near their events, so we know people are aware of the campaign," said Dennis Jensen, DTA General Manager. "New Year's Eve is a time for celebration, and we like to think that we are providing a means by which everyone can enjoy the evening, without jeopardizing their safety or the safety of others by driving while impaired." continued Jensen.

The DTA also offers a limited Holiday Service Schedule on New Year's Day. This service is not offered for free, but the record number of passengers each year clearly reflects a need in Duluth for the operation of transit services on holidays. Ridership was 2,377 this year compared to 2,303 passengers in 2014 and 1,990 in 2013.

### A Note from Keven Anderson about Harold Jennissen's Retirement

Harold Jennissen, Director of Rainbow Rider Transit in West Central Minnesota (Pope, Douglas, Grant, Stevens, Traverse and Todd Counties), celebrated and was celebrated December 18, 2015 with a reception in Alexandria, Minnesota. Harold retires after twelve years as director and almost eight years prior experience with Rainbow Rider as a board member. He was a focal point in Rainbow's growth from five buses and seven employees to over 55 employees and a fleet of 55 buses providing 165,000 rides.

Harold plans on enjoying his grandchildren and continuing to travel with his wife Jean. Farewell Harold, happy trails and safe travels - you will be missed.



### A Note from Rachel Schneiderman

It is funny how you dream of the day that you will be retiring, and before you know it, that day is here!

I have now been an employee of Renville County for over 30 years. I have been with the transit system since 1996, in some way or another. In 1998, I became the transit coordinator and a few years later, the transit Director of Renville County Heartland Express. I have enjoyed the challenge, met awesome transit friends, and as you all know "I LOVE MY JOB!" I have always taken pride in being a part of the Minnesota Transit Systems. It will be quite an adjustment, not going to work every day, but there are other means to be involved with the transit system, like volunteer driving, participating as a committee member on the Operations Board, and being an advocate for all transit systems.

In 2015, two systems merged and we became Central Community Transit. Tiffany Collins is the new Transit Director for CCT's Olivia office as well as the Willmar Office. The employees are adjusting to the changes, there are a few. As we all know, change is hard. With a positive attitude, we are making it work.

I would love to thank each and every one of you, for being a transit friend. Special thanks go to my DPM Bev Herfindahl (who was always there for me), Mike Schadauer, Tom Gottfried, Sara Lenz, and Chuck Morris. Donna Anderson, Cara Nielsen, Dennis Smith, Tiffany Collins, Marge Smith, Daryn Toso and Sandy Owen: Thanks for all the wisdom, encouragement, and most of all your friendship!

## **Shakopee/Maple Grove Transit Service Launched In January**

### **30-Minute Frequency During Morning, Afternoon Peak Periods**

*Submitted by ROBIN SELVIG*

A “first of its kind” collaborative effort began transit service on Tuesday, January 19, 2016 serving Eden Prairie, Hopkins, Maple Grove, Plymouth and Shakopee. Funded directly by the Minnesota Legislature, the Suburban Transit Association (STA) will provide suburb-to-suburb service on Route 494, with a one-seat ride between Shakopee’s Marshall Road Transit Station and Station 73 in Plymouth (via SouthWest Station or the Golden Triangle in Eden Prairie) with connecting service to/from Maple Grove Transit Station.

“Jobs and economic development are very important to me,” said Rep. Tony Albright (R-55B of Prior Lake). “This suburb-to-suburb demonstration project has the potential to serve thousands of employees in the southwest Twin Cities metro area. I am proud to have authored the bill in the House and am excited to follow the results beginning in January.”

Designed to demonstrate express bus service between suburbs can be successful in the Twin Cities, Route 494 is aimed at increasing access to major employment and commercial centers throughout the Twin Cities western suburbs.

The service plan includes 20 trips operating about every 30 minutes, in both northbound and southbound directions during the morning and afternoon peak periods. Buses will be operated by the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTa), SouthWest Transit and Plymouth MetroLink.

A local peak fare (\$2.25 per trip) will be charged on this demonstration route. Transfers to local or other routes may include an additional fee. All buses will be equipped with regional fare equipment and will accept Go-To cards, Metropasses, tokens, Stored Value cards and cash. Change is not available.

“I have been a long-time supporter of our suburban transit providers,” said Sen. Jim Carlson (District 51: Eagan & Burnsville). “Providing a ride from Shakopee to Maple Grove increases opportunities for commuters from Dakota County and the south metro, and is an excellent way for us to grow transit while serving the unmet needs of employees and employers along the route.”

Visit [www.S2S494.com](http://www.S2S494.com) for more information.



## MVTA Ridership Continues Upward Trend

*Submitted by ROBIN SELVIG*

The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) ridership continued its upward trend, setting a record again in 2015 with a total of 2,965,964 rides in 2015. This is an increase of 5.5 percent from 2014.

MVTA Executive Director Beverley Miller stated, “The MVTA continues to provide a valued service to our residents and that is played out with increasing ridership. There is significant potential for increased ridership during the next few years. This includes service on our new Route 493 from Shakopee to downtown Minneapolis that was introduced in February, and Route 494 – the collaborative service of the Suburban Transit Providers that will begin Jan. 19 serving Shakopee, Eden Prairie, Plymouth and Maple Grove.”

“The MVTA is proud of our 2015 ridership growth,” said MVTA Board Chair and Apple Valley Councilmember Clint Hooppaw. “The merger with Prior Lake and Shakopee certainly accounts for a portion of the increase, but we introduced a new route in Shakopee, and some of our existing routes saw good growth due to trip additions or rider trends.” He noted, “Our anecdotal data also indicates that amenities as Wi-Fi on our buses, additional service to the University of Minnesota, and operation of the METRO Red Line BRT service (under contract with the Metropolitan Council) have all contributed to our growth.”

MVTA’s 2015 highest ridership routes are Route 460 (Burnsville to/from downtown Minneapolis) with 434,181 rides for the year; Route 477 (Apple Valley to/from downtown Minneapolis) with 354,060 rides, Route 444 (local service between Burnsville/Savage/Cedar Grove and Mall of America) with 244,543 rides, and Route 460 (all day service between Burnsville and the University of Minnesota with select trips also serving downtown Minneapolis) with 260,302 rides.

Routes with the highest ridership gains in 2015 were: Route 420 (local service between Rosemount and Apple Valley) up 7.2 percent, Route 440 (local service between Apple Valley/Minnesota Zoo/Cedar Grove/VA Medical Center) up 2.3 percent, Route 460 (express service between Burnsville and downtown Minneapolis) up 2.5 percent and Route 478 (express service between Rosemount and downtown Minneapolis) up 61.6 percent due to trip additions.

The greatest growth by service type was experienced on Minneapolis weekday express service, up 10.2 percent, and Reverse Commute service, up 3.9 percent. The MVTA experienced record Average Weekday Ridership in both the months of September and October with 11,387 and 11,467 rides respectively.

Service changes for 2016 include the addition of three buses/additional trips for service between Shakopee and downtown Minneapolis (begins in February), the addition of five buses/additional trips for service between Apple Valley, Burnsville and Eagan and downtown St. Paul plus the addition of service between Rosemount and downtown St. Paul (begins in February), the addition of STA Collaborative Route 494 (Shakopee, Eden Prairie, Plymouth and Maple Grove beginning Jan. 19) and enhancements to the local service in Shakopee that will begin in May.



# News



## **Total metro area ridership reaches nearly 99 million**

*Submitted by DREW KERR and edited by LAURA EASH*

### **2015 was a year of continual record-breaking for the regional transit system**

Transit ridership – across all types of transit and service providers – continues to climb, reaching 98.8 million in 2015. This is a total increase of 1.5% over the year before, as ridership continued to shatter records throughout the year. A growing population, changing travel preferences, and an expanded transit system helped boost ridership to record levels.

The total includes rides on all of the region’s transit providers combined, and counts all types of transit – commuter rail, METRO Blue, Green and Red lines, express and local bus routes, Metro Mobility, Transit Link, and Metro Vanpool.

“The demand for transit is increasing as our transit system grows,” said Metropolitan Council Chair Adam Duininck. “Transit is an investment with a big payoff. It supports our region’s economy, and provides people with reliable options to get where they need to go – to jobs, services, school, health care, and recreation.”

### **Light rail’s share increasing**

Metro Transit’s light rail lines are becoming a major contributor to regional transit ridership. With the first full year of operation for the METRO Green Line, light rail’s share of all regional transit ridership climbed to more than 23% (23 million rides), compared with less than 11% in 2013.

The METRO Blue Line carried more than 10.6 million rides, its highest annual ridership since it opened in mid-2004.

### **Total Metro Transit ridership up, bus ridership down**

Of all transit rides in 2015, 87% were provided by Metro Transit—the region’s largest transit provider, which is a service of the Metropolitan Council. Metro Transit released its ridership numbers, showing that buses and trains carried passengers on 85.8 million trips,\* an increase of 1.4% (nearly 1.2 million).

Metro Transit buses provided more than 62 million rides throughout the Twin Cities area.

That figure was less (down 8.6%) than the year before due to several factors. With discontinued limited-stop bus service along the Central Corridor, customers opted for light rail on the Green Line. Also in play were changes in bus routes caused by construction that led to prolonged detours on multiple routes.

Looking at Central Corridor service as a whole, however, including bus routes #16 and #94, the combined transit ridership increased about 30% over 2014 and nearly doubled since 2013, when service was provided by buses alone.

The Northstar Commuter Rail Line accounted for more than 722,000 rides. The METRO Blue Line, connecting Minneapolis to the Minneapolis – Saint Paul International Airport, the Mall of America and points in between, accounted for more than 10.6 million.

Bus: 62,106,089 rides, 204,986 avg. weekday rides  
Light rail: 23,003,457 rides, 68,873 avg. weekday rides  
Northstar: 722,637 rides, 2,548 avg. weekday rides

## Other highlights

- Ridership on the METRO Red Line between Apple Valley and the Mall of America on Cedar Ave./Hwy. 77 remained essentially unchanged, at about 265,000 rides.
- The number of rides served by suburban transit services topped 5.1 million in 2015, down less than 1% from the year before. The suburban providers and their ridership figures:

Minnesota Valley Transit: 2,700,554

SouthWest Transit: 1,079,338

Maple Grove Transit: 837,335

Plymouth Metrolink: 500,918

- Rides on Metro Mobility—transportation service for people with disabilities—increased 6.8% to more than 2.1 million. Metro Mobility ridership is expected to continue to grow as the region's population ages.

The Metropolitan Council is the regional planning organization in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Council runs the regional bus and rail system, collects and treats wastewater, coordinates regional water resources, plans regional parks, and administers funds that provide housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income families. The Council board is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor.

\*Metro Transit ridership includes trips on Maple Grove Transit routes, which are operated by Metro Transit.



*Buses that will be used on the region's first arterial Bus Rapid Transit line are beginning to arrive.*



Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit, or SMART, now serves Waseca County. Service includes a city bus loop with eleven stops and demand-responsive transit. Routes will expand next month. Visit [smartbusmn.org](http://smartbusmn.org) for more information.

Volunteer driver services in the county are now provided by Semcac. Visit [semcac.org/transportation](http://semcac.org/transportation) for more information.

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- 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](mailto:laura_eash@mpta-transit.org)

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