

# In Transit

A quarterly newsletter published by the Minnesota Public Transit Association.

## August 2019 Edition

### INSIDE

#### President's Report

*Craig Rempp*

#### Legislative Report

*Margaret Donahoe*

#### Meet the Director

*Feat. Brenda Brittin, Rainbow Rider*

#### 2019 Minnesota State Bus Rodeo

*Samantha Schwanke*

#### MN Public Transit Conference & Expo

*Samantha Schwanke*

#### Metro Bus Celebrates 50 Years of Service

*Nate Ramacher*

#### Brown County 5-Year Transit Plan

*Gage Cureton*

#### Brown County Heartland Express Celebrates 25 Years

*Pat LaCourse*

#### SouthWest Transit Awarded FTA Grant

*Brittany Stevens*

#### Travel Trainer Program Scott County

*Stacy Finn*

#### Mankato Transit System Looks to Expand

*Mark Fischenich*



# President's Column



## Craig Rempp

Transit Director  
Greater Mankato Transit System

The 2019 Minnesota Public Transit Conference is right around the corner! You can sign up today for this year's conference which will be held October 9-11th at the RiverCentre in St. Paul: <https://www.mpta-transit.org/event/2019-minnesota-public-transit-conference-expo>

This year we're Planning For Greatness with important trainings, breakout sessions, networking opportunities, updates from federal and state agencies and our Annual MPTA Membership Meeting and Awards Ceremony. Everything you need to know – you can get it here. This is a must-attend event for everyone in transit in Minnesota!

With fewer transit systems and larger transit systems, we're encouraging folks to send more staff to the conference with sessions focused mechanical issues, customer service, performance outcomes and transit operator safety. Systems that send 3 or more people to the conference will get a break on the registration price.

We're currently accepting nominations for our Transit Awards. Please think about deserving people you think should receive an award in the following categories: Distinguished Career, Transit Professional of the Year, Transit System of the Year, Management Innovation, and Minnesota Bus Operator of the Year. You can read award descriptions and submit your nominations here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WD8LXX6>.

Our MPTA Annual Membership Meeting provides an opportunity for everyone to come together and talk about issues while connecting with colleagues and friends. This is your transit association so we want to hear from you about how MPTA can best serve you in the coming year. Please plan to attend the MPTA Annual Meeting on October 9th from 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm at the RiverCentre.

Thank You to everyone who competed and everyone who helped with the 32nd Annual Minnesota State Bus Rodeo! Marshall was a great host for the event. We have lots of photos from the Rodeo on our [MPTA Facebook page](#) so check it out and make sure you Like our page and Follow our posts.

Congratulations to all the winners:

### Large Bus Competition

First Place: David Palm, Metro Transit

Second Place: Jerry Schmitz, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Third Place: Rick Roser, Duluth Transit Authority

Drivers Choice Award: Jerry Schmitz, St. Cloud Metro Bus

## Small Bus Competition

First Place: Todd DeZurik, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Second Place: T.J. Johnson, Otter Express

Third Place: David Peacock, St. Cloud Metro Bus

We also want to thank the Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) for their assistance in securing a couple of bus simulators to have on hand for people to try out. The RTAP Committee is considering using RTAP funds to purchase a bus simulator that would be available to all of the systems in Greater Minnesota to assist in training drivers. There was a lot of support and interest expressed in moving forward with this idea.

Please make sure you have approved your [5-Year Transit System Plan](#). These plans are full of valuable information -- not just for each system -- but in aggregate they provide a powerful tool for making the case that transit needs greater state, federal and local investment. MPTA is grateful to OTAT for supporting these plans and providing consultant services to make these plans a reality. The final step is for each system manager to give final approval to the plan and potentially present the plan to a governing body. Thanks so much for your work on these plans!

Enjoy the final days of summer and see you at the Minnesota Public Transit Conference in October.



Above: Last year's Transit Award winners. From L to R: Braegelmann, MN Bus Operator of the Year; Wynder, Management Innovation with MVTA; Kirchoff, Distinguished Career; Opatz, Transit System of the Year with Maple Grove Transit; Welshons, Transit Professional of the Year; and Knauer, Distinguished Career.

Below: An L3 Driver Training Solutions representative assists John Simonette, a bus operator with SMART Transit. L3 was one of two bus simulator vendors present at this year's Roadeo.



# Legislative Report

**Margaret Donahoe**

Executive Director

Minnesota Transportation Alliance

Although the 2020 Legislative Session doesn't officially begin until February 11<sup>th</sup>, the first steps toward putting together the major work of the session – a capital bonding bill – have already begun.

State agencies and local governments have submitted over \$5 billion worth of project requests for the bonding bill that is expected to be passed in 2020. Most bonding bills in recent years have hovered around the \$1 billion mark.

MnDOT's Office of Transit and Active Transportation has submitted a request for \$15 million in General Obligation bond proceeds for Greater Minnesota transit. Funding will be used to preserve current public transit facilities and improve and expand service, including conducting predesign and design activities, constructing and equipping transit facilities.

OTAT will be conducting a solicitation for facilities projects from Greater Minnesota transit systems in July of 2019, noting that funding is contingent on receiving capital funding. By the early fall of 2019, the intent is to develop a multi-year program of candidate projects that is prioritized based on an objective measure of need, local support as reflected by inclusion in their local plans, and being construction ready or on a path to being construction ready within the timeframe identified.

The Metropolitan Council is requesting \$50 million in general obligation bond proceeds for its Busway Capital Improvements program. The bond funds would advance the development of three additional projects in the next two years and would aid the build-out of the BRT network before 2030. This network would link nearly 500,000 jobs and residents via transit and expand the reach of the METRO network of dedicated guideway LRT and BRT projects. Together, this vision will keep the Twin Cities region more economically competitive with peer regions in the nation and world.

Several local governments have also submitted requests for bond funds for transit projects including the Red Line 147<sup>th</sup> Street Station Skyway project, the Rush Line BRT project, the Riverview Corridor and a regional transit hub in Northfield for the Hiawathaland Transit system.

Bus Rapid Transit projects have received strong bipartisan support at both the state and federal levels. Service began on the new C-Line between Brooklyn Center and Minneapolis in June, featuring eight new electric buses providing frequent service along the eight-mile route.

Federal funding was awarded for the Orange Line that will help establish bus rapid transit between Burnsville and downtown Minneapolis via Interstate 35W. The \$74.1 million federal grant means the \$150.7 million project is fully funded. The Orange Line is a 17-mile bus route connecting Minneapolis, Richfield, Bloomington and Burnsville. It will provide frequent, all-day service in both directions, seven days a week

with limited stops. With dedicated stops akin to those of the light-rail trains, the Orange Line will include a tunnel underneath Interstate 494 to provide service to the Best Buy campus, as well as a stop at the intersection of Know Avenue and American Boulevard in Bloomington.

At the federal level, Congress and the President agreed to spending levels for the next two fiscal years along with lifting the debt service ceiling in an effort to avoid another government shutdown.

The deal increases military and domestic spending by \$320 billion over two years compared to existing law. It increases overall discretionary spending from \$1.32 trillion in fiscal 2019 to \$1.37 trillion in 2020 and \$1.375 trillion in 2021.

Congress will need to finish work on the 12 separate appropriations bills, including Transportation and Housing and Urban Development (THUD) in September before the start of the new fiscal year which begins October 1<sup>st</sup> or pass continuing resolutions to keep the government open. The good news is that with the agreement signed by the President, both military and non-military funding will be increased and we anticipate that funding levels for both highways and transit will be consistent with those provided in the last two fiscal years – funding levels that were higher than those authorized in the FAST Act.

Here are some of the federal issues MPTA has been following:

**Volunteer Driver mileage reimbursement** – Congressman Collin Peterson has authored a bill (HR2072) to get rid of the 14 cent per mile charitable reimbursement rate so that volunteer drivers can receive the business rate set by the IRS. Rep. Peter Stauber and Rep. Angie Craig have signed on as co-sponsors to this bill.

**FAST Act Reauthorization** – The 5-year transportation authorization act will expire in 2020. The Senate has started working on a new 5-year transportation authorization act that significantly increases funding levels above the FAST Act for the highway title. The Senate Banking Committee needs to put together the transit title and the Finance Committee needs to do the tough work of figuring out how to pay for the bill. We need the House to start working on a bill as well. With 2020 being a big election year it can be difficult to get much done so the more work that can do in 2019, the better.

**H.R. 3935: Protecting Patients Transportation to Care Act** — On July 24, U.S. Representative Earl “Buddy” Carter (R-GA-1) introduced a bill [H.R. 3935](#) to make NEMT one of the mandatory benefits enumerated in the Medicaid Statute. On July 25, Rep. Stanford Bishop (D-GA-02), a co-sponsor of the bill, spoke and provided testimony (PDF) on behalf of the proposed bill during a House Energy and Commerce Member Day hearing. The Protecting Patients Transportation to Care Act will codify the long-standing Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) regulation that mandates that states provide NEMT to all beneficiaries with no other form of available transportation to medically necessary health services. The goal of this bill is to simply preserve the status quo. The provision will require that states provide prior authorization or utilization management to assure that the benefit is provided with the lowest cost, appropriate mode of transportation, that the beneficiary is eligible for the service and is riding to a medically necessary, covered Medicaid health benefit. It would be great to have this legislation pass in both the House and Senate.

# Meet the Director

## Samantha Schwanke

Program Coordinator

Minnesota Transportation Alliance



Meet the Director is a column to introduce readers to new transportation directors of public transit systems in Greater Minnesota. This issue's column features Brenda Brittin, the Director of Rainbow Rider Transit. Brittin started her transportation career at Rainbow Rider Transit in September of 1998. She began as a bookkeeper and was most recently appointed as Director in February of 2018.

When asked what her biggest achievement at Rainbow Rider Transit was, Brittin answered, "The biggest achievement for me is having a wide spread knowledge of Rainbow Rider as a whole, I

have been involved in every aspect of the business with the exception of driving and maintaining a bus."

Brittin's favorite part of working at Rainbow Rider Transit has been, "Definitely all the people, board members, employees, passengers, [that] I have met over the years."

Outside of work, Brittin enjoys spending time with her husband and her two daughters.

To learn more about Rainbow Rider Transit, visit their website at <http://rainbowriderbus.com/>.

If you would like to nominate your director, please email [Programs@transportationalliance.com](mailto:Programs@transportationalliance.com).



# 2019 Minnesota State Bus Rodeo



**Samantha Schwanke**  
Program Coordinator  
Minnesota Transportation Alliance

The 32nd Annual Minnesota State Bus Rodeo took place Friday, July 12 through Saturday, July 13 in Marshall, MN. Community Transit of United Community Action Partnership hosted the event. The course was at Southwest Minnesota State University.

This year's Large Bus Competition winner was David Palm of Metro Transit with a total of 517 points. Second place went to Jerry Schmitz of St. Cloud Metro Bus with 485 points and third place went to Rick Roser of Duluth Transit Authority with 479 points.

This year's Small Bus Competition winner was Todd DeZurik with 609 points. Second place went to T.J. Johnson of Otter Express with 527 points and third place went to David Peacock of St. Cloud Metro Bus with 516 points. The Driver's Choice Award went to Schmitz. All contestant scores can be viewed on [our website](#).



From L to R: Johnson, Schmitz, DeZurik, Palm, Roser, and Peacock.

Thank you again to all of our participants! Photos from this year's event can be viewed on our [Facebook page](#). Next year's event is Friday, July 10 and Saturday, July 11 in Rochester, MN. First Transit in Rochester will be hosting the event. More information will be coming in 2020.



# Minnesota Public Transit Conference & Expo

**Samantha Schwanke**

Program Coordinator

Minnesota Transportation Alliance



The 2019 Minnesota Public Transit Conference and Expo is Wednesday, October 9 through Friday, October 11 at the [RiverCentre](#), located at 175 W Kellogg Blvd in St. Paul, MN. There is a [block of rooms at the Holiday Inn St. Paul Downtown](#), located at 175 W 7th Street in St. Paul. This year's theme is "Planning for Greatness."

The vendor expo area will be open at 10:00 AM and from 12:00 to 3:00 PM on Thursday, October 10. Registration is open for vendors and attendees. Links to register can be found on [our website](#).

This year's training sessions are on recruiting and retaining staff, and on measuring outcomes and improving performance. Both trainings are on Wednesday, October 9, with the staff training continuing into Thursday. The conference also features a tour of the Green Line Maintenance Facility from 3:30 to 5:30 PM on Thursday, October 10. The tour capacity is 80 people.

The keynote speakers this year are Scott Burrows and Tane Danger. Burrows will kick-off the day on Thursday and will speak on vision, mindset and grit: success strategies to help you stand up to any challenge. Burrows is an inspirational speaker who challenges audiences while adding takeaway value with high energy, humor and substance. Burrows has published a book "Vision Mindset Grit!" and has delivered his story in 45 states and at least 10 countries.

Danger will close the conference on Thursday. Danger has been performing, directing and teaching improv comedy since 2003. The Theatre of Public Policy was started by Danger and Brandon Boat to communicate feelings of political disconnect and isolation through the creative art of improv comedy. Danger will be speaking on creativity, problem-solving and working across divides in the public sector.

This year's breakout session topics range from updates for mechanics to transit operator safety to electric buses. Don't miss the opportunity to learn and network!

Keep an eye on our [website](#) for updates and additional information.



# Minnesota Public Transit Conference & Expo Schedule

## Wednesday, October 9

8:00 AM – Registration Opens

10:00 AM to 12:00 PM – Training Session I: Recruiting Staff – *Caryn Souza, CTAA*

1:00 PM to 3:00 PM – Training Session II: Measuring Outcomes, Improving Performance – *Jill Cahoon, AECOM*

2:30 PM to 4:00 PM – CEO Summit

4:00 PM – MPTA Annual Meeting 5:30 PM – Transit Awards

6:30 PM – Welcome Reception

## Thursday, October 10

7:30 AM – Registration Opens 8:30 AM – General Session

- Welcome
- Keynote Speaker – *Scott Burrows: VISION - MINDSET – GRIT Success Strategies to Help You Stand Up to Any Challenge*

10:00 AM – Break in Vendor Expo Area

11:00 AM to 12:00 PM — 3 Breakout Sessions

- Latest Updates for Mechanics — *Ken Krych, North Central Bus Sales; Duane Doe, First Transit*
- Customer Service — *Caryn Souza, CTAA*
- Transit System Planning – *Tori Nill, OTAT; Margaret Donahoe, MPTA*

12:00 PM to 3:00 PM – Lunch and Vendor Expo

3:00 PM to 5:00 PM — Training Session I Continued: Retaining Staff — *Caryn Souza, CTAA*

3:30 PM to 5:30 PM – Tour: Green Line Maintenance Facility

6:30 PM – Reception, First Transit

## Friday, October 11

7:30 AM – Registration Opens

8:00 AM to 9:15 AM – General Session: *Metropolitan Council Chair Nora Slawik; MnDOT Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher (invited)*

9:30 AM to 10:30 AM – 3 Breakout Sessions

- Transit Operator Safety – *Scott Stark, St. Cloud Metro Bus*
- Transit Oriented Development – *Lucy Galbraith, Metro Transit; NDSU*
- Technology and Transit

10:30 AM to 11:00 AM – Break

11:00 AM to 12:00 PM – 3 Breakout Sessions

- Micro Transit and Role of TNCs
- FTA Update — *Kelley Brookins, Regional Administrator*
- Electric Buses

12:15 PM – Lunch and Closing Speaker — *Tane Danger, Theatre of Public Policy*

# Metro Bus Celebrates

## 50 Years of Service

# METRO BUS

### Nate Ramacher

Marketing & Communications Manager  
St. Cloud Metro Bus

On Wednesday, June 12, St. Cloud Metro Bus unveiled their newest bus. Bus #741 is wrapped with special graphics featuring the 50 Years of Service logo, a panoramic view of the mighty Mississippi River flowing through the service area and the Metro Bus Operations Center with the fleet on display.

The St. Cloud Metropolitan Transportation Commission formed in July of 1969 and service began in October of the same year. For the last 50 years, Metro Bus has proudly served St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park.

“The bus represents our community, our service and the efforts of all those who contributed to providing safe, friendly, reliable service over the last 50 years,” explains Metro Bus CEO Ryan Daniel. “We are so proud of the work our employees put in 359 days a year. This bus displays the extent of their service as well as our community and serves as our flagship vehicle. We cannot wait for everyone to see it!”

St. Cloud Metro Bus operates 7 days a week and provides approximately 2 million Fixed Route, Dial-a-Ride and commuter bus rides annually in St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park. For more information about St. Cloud Metro Bus, visit [ridemetrobus.com](http://ridemetrobus.com).



# Brown County 5-Year Transit Plan

## Gage Cureton

Staff Writer

The Journal

Read the full article here: <https://www.nujournal.com/news/local-news/2019/07/24/county-board-hears-5-year-transit-system-plan/>

NEW ULM — Brown County Commissioners filed a Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Five-Year Transit Plan Development after hearing a presentation from multinational engineering firm AECOM Representative Calves (Will) Gullermo during a meeting Tuesday.

“MnDOT’s goal [sic] the idea is to meet about 90 percent of the needs for transit services by 2020,” Gullermo said. “Some of the benefits of the plans that were done for both Brown County and the neighboring systems are how to improve coordination to meet transit service needs around different parts of the state, try to increase ridership and usage of the network in general.”

Gullermo said he’s been working with Brown County Heartland Express Transit Manager Pat LaCourse’s office for almost a year to determine service planning and prioritization chapters within the public transit system.

The Five-Year Transit Plan Development calls for a step-by-step process with revitalization and additions to key points within the system beginning 2020.

2020 calls for a continuation of extended hours of service in New Ulm from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with additional hours of service 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. on one weekday in Brown County. A new vehicle storage and maintenance facility in Sleepy Eye is also proposed in addition to the continuation of replacing older vehicles.

Gullermo said the transit system may also benefit from a part-time marketing specialist that could assist in the rebranding of the Heartland Express name and likeness.

“The Heartland Express name is seen as maybe it’s a little tired,” he said. “It could use some kind of refreshing.”

The plan also calls for a potential marketing partnership with TRUE Transit in Mankato for a connecting service.

In 2021, the plan proposes an initiation of a new deviated fixed route service in New Ulm 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

“That would operate similarly to the east-west corridor that you see in the county,” Gullermo said. “Likely operating on a fixed route just within the community.”

He said the plan is still within its early-stages with determining the operating costs of a 12-hour day.

In 2022, a Saturday pilot service of four to five hours of service in New Ulm is proposed with additional hours of service 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. on two weekdays in Brown County. An addition of card readers and online reservations to the RouteMatch system is also proposed. By 2023 and 2024, continued

maintenance on updated transit vehicles is conducted, Gullermo said.

LaCourse expanded upon the part-time marketing position proposed within the plan. He said the marketing specialist could work with TRUE Transit in Mankato to potentially expand Brown County Heartland Express into a connected service with Mankato.

He said TRUE Transit will soon be providing service with Land to Air Express to offer a free bus service from New Ulm to Nicollet, Le Sueur and Blue Earth counties into the Land to Air terminal in Mankato.

“It’s kind of in the beginning stages right now, but it’s something that if that could develop, Brown County Heartland Express could certainly find a theater into that,” he said.

The Five Year Transit Plan Development was filed, motion by Commissioner Scott Windschitl, seconded by Commission Anton Berg.

## Brown County Heartland Express Celebrates 25 Years

### Pat LaCourse

Transit Manager

Brown County Heartland Express

Brown County Heartland Express celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> year of providing transit rides to the citizens of Brown County through their partnership with MnDOT. July 19 marked the beginning of their 26<sup>th</sup> year. Brown County Heartland Express operates demand response service throughout Brown County and morning and afternoon deviated route transit service between New Ulm and Springfield.

In other news at the system, Human Services Director Tom Henderson, who was also the Director of Brown County Heartland Express, is stepping aside on July 31 after 46 years of service to the citizens of Brown County.



For more information, visit [Brown County's website](#).

# SouthWest Transit Awarded FTA Grant

## Brittany Stevens

Marketing Coordinator  
SouthWest Transit



SouthWest Transit is excited to be the recipient of a \$290,500 Access and Mobility Partnership Grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). This grant will be used to operate and purchase vehicles for SouthWest Transit's SW Prime MD pilot service.

Expected to begin Monday, October 7, SW Prime MD is an innovative approach to providing non-emergency medical transportation services through public micro transit services. In partnership with Ridgeview Medical, SW Prime MD will provide service to Ridgeview facilities in Waconia, Chaska and Chanhassen. SouthWest Transit hopes to eventually grow the service through additional partnerships with the medical community.

SouthWest Transit's project was one of 37 projects across the United States to be awarded a grant by the FTA. It was the only project awarded in the state of Minnesota.

"SouthWest Transit is excited about what this grant means for our SW Prime MD service," said SouthWest Transit Chief Executive Officer Len Simich. "Our community will benefit from having a new safe and easy way to access the medical services they need."

SouthWest Transit (SWT) provides express and local bus service to residents of Eden Prairie, Chanhassen, Chaska, Carver, and surrounding communities. SWT operates five park-and-ride locations, including its main hub and the SouthWest Station in Eden Prairie. Additional information and complete schedules for SWT can be found at [www.swtransit.org](http://www.swtransit.org) or by calling our customer service line at 952-949-2BUS (2287).



# Travel Trainer Program

## Scott County

**Stacy Finlon**

Marketing Coordinator  
SmartLink



# SmartLink

Moving about independently can often be difficult for many individuals in Scott County. Scott County is considered more rural than some of our larger metro neighbors and transportation options are more limited compared to some of the more urban counties in the Twin Cities Metro area. Driving outside of Scott County can often be intimidating or perhaps not possible. Weather, distance, road speeds and unfamiliarity with how to navigate public transportation can all be barriers for individuals living or working within Scott County.

The Travel Training program was added by SmartLink Transit over a year ago and has since had a positive and creative impact on both individuals and communities. A Travel Trainer is a resource to help people navigate transportation options, read bus schedules, use online transit tools and provide an overall sense of independence to those seeking ways to move within the county and, just as importantly, to help people expand their travel log outside of Scott County.

Amy Melby, Scott County Travel Trainer, has this to say, "My favorite part of Travel Training is diving in, getting on the bus alongside of individuals and walking them through the process until they are comfortable with using public transportation."

Here is a great example of how Travel Training has made a positive impact for one County resident: In the Fall of 2018, Tammy, a Shakopee resident, needed to get to downtown Minneapolis to the Social Security Office. Tammy was nervous about driving downtown, finding parking and navigating the downtown grid of one-way streets. Tammy found information about the free Travel Training service and gave SmartLink a call. She scheduled an appointment to work with Melby and to learn what her options were so she could make the trip. Melby worked out the bus route, helped Tammy download the information on her phone and gave her a huge boost of confidence to complete this trip on her own. "Travel Training was a saving grace for me and has opened up the world to possibilities I did not think were possible," says Tammy.

SmartLink's mission is to be the "go to" resource for any travel or mobility needs for those that live or work in Scott County. Having Melby on board as our Travel Trainer to work with individuals to find travel solutions is a great example of how SmartLink is invested in supporting the many communities within Scott County.



Photo from Star Tribune.

# Mankato Transit System Looks to Expand

**Mark Fischenich**

Newspaper Reporter

Mankato Free Press

Read the full article here: [https://www.mankatofreepress.com/news/local-transit-looks-to-expand-despite-drop-in-ridership/article\\_3a9e6c14-b3d0-11e9-b456-4f13f1731e99.html](https://www.mankatofreepress.com/news/local-transit-looks-to-expand-despite-drop-in-ridership/article_3a9e6c14-b3d0-11e9-b456-4f13f1731e99.html)



After years of growth, ridership on Mankato's transit system dropped in the first six months of 2019. But city leaders see plenty of positives in the latest numbers and are continuing to explore expanded service.

Use of municipal buses has dropped nationally with lower gas prices, and a drop in enrollment at Minnesota State University also contributed to the 6.6% decline in ridership, Mankato City Manager Pat Hentges said.

The longer trend, though, shows that the number of riders has doubled since service was significantly expanded in 2012.

"Overall, we've seen a steady increase in ridership," Hentges said.

With that in mind, the city is examining the possibility of greatly increasing the number of hours that bus routes operate, considering purchasing the transit system's first electric buses, and likely recommending the extension of a popular summertime program that offered free rides to K-12 students.

In some areas, demand is growing.

The system's mobility bus service, which provides rides during regular bus-route hours for people with physical and mental disabilities, added a third route 11 months ago. Since that time, ride requests have more than doubled, filling to capacity a fourth bus that was added in January. A fifth bus is now being planned.

Mankato Community Development Director Paul Vogel, who oversees the Mankato Transit System, said the expansion of bus routes into Eagle Lake and the extended hours of other routes meant the mobility buses were available for more hours in more areas.

"It's the availability," Vogel said of the big jump in ride requests. "I think the demand was there, but the availability wasn't previously."

A dial-a-ride type service introduced in several Mankato neighborhoods that don't have regular bus routes has not caught on.

"Ridership is low," Vogel said of Kato Flex, adding that changes are coming to make the service more attractive.

More popular has been free rides on the transit system for kids who show a Mankato Area Public Schools ID card this summer. In the first three weeks after the program was implemented on June 6, 469 free rides were provided — nearly 300 more than the same period the previous year.

Originally intended as a summertime offer, the free use of the bus system may continue into the school year.

"I think the recommendation will be to continue it," Vogel said.

Mankato is planning to make a federal grant request for a pilot project to expand bus service hours into the evening. That's particularly important for people who work night shifts, Vogel said.

"Demand continues for second, third shifts and also youth to get to and from after-school activities," he said.

Mankatoans also may see electric buses added to the city fleet. Xcel Energy is offering grants for charging stations for electric vehicles, so that could reduce the cost of setting up the city's bus garage to juice up electric buses.

But those buses cost 30%-40% more than a diesel bus, Vogel said, so more information is needed on whether lower operational costs will offset those higher purchase prices. It's also unclear whether state and federal grants will help subsidize the steeper prices of the electric buses.

Finally, 13 new bus-stop shelters are being added to the transit system, Vogel said: "We expect those will start getting rolled out this month."

# In Transit

The logo for the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA) features the letters 'MPTA' in a large, bold, orange font with a white outline. Below the letters, the full name 'MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

## Upcoming Events

**2019 MN/WI Public Transit Conference & Expo**

*Wednesday, October 9 — Friday, October 11 in Saint Paul, MN*

*RiverCentre*

Find event information: [MPTA Events](#)

“Like” and “Follow” MPTA on Facebook and Twitter for news from MPTA members and local and national media coverage of transit news and issues.

