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Photo courtesy of Crystalin Patrick and Big Woods Transit.

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President's Column



By Craig Rempp

The Minnesota Public Transit Association is here for you, so please let us know how we can be helpful as we all navigate through these unprecedented and challenging times.

MPTA continues to be in touch with state legislators and Congressional members, working to get policies and funding that will help all of us keep our buses out there serving our customers. While the political gridlock is frustrating, we know how important it is to keep transit needs visible and to make our voices heard. Thanks for your partnership in this work.

MPTA will also be providing opportunities for you to hear from elected officials, access more training and receive important updates and information. Watch your email inbox for notices about webinars with legislators and new training opportunities.

The 2020 Minnesota Public Transit Conference is scheduled for October 5-7 in Rochester at the Mayo Civic Center.

The MPTA Board is excited about offering a new hybrid event so our members can participate either in-person or remotely. As transit systems and the transit industry work to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, we have some great sessions and training opportunities lined up that will focus on how to communicate the safety protocols being implemented by systems that make riding the bus safe and how to recover riders and clients. We will discuss the new environment we find ourselves in and how to continue to offer great transit service as well all learn to live with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future.

The governor has announced that events of up to 250 participants are allowed with proper social distancing, safety protocols and the wearing of masks as we all work to help Minnesota businesses and our economy recover from this pandemic. The Mayo Civic Center and local caterers are working with us to ensure that safety protocols are used, with proper spacing of all participants, a mask requirement and careful food service protocols. For those who wish to participate in the conference remotely, we will provide audio and video participation for all sessions including training sessions and break-out sessions as well as the general sessions and interviews with all of our vendors and sponsors. Visit the [MPTA web site](#) for more details on the conference.

Don't forget that the conference also includes the MPTA Annual Meeting and awards for transit system personnel who have gone above and beyond. We need to hear from you about deserving folks you want to nominate for one of our awards.

We will continue to stay in touch and let you know about new developments and resources that you can use. We're all going through a tough time, and we hope to share stories and help each other out at the annual Minnesota Public Transit Conference. See you there – even if it's via Zoom.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Rempp". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Register Today for the Minnesota Public Transit Conference

October 5-7th
Mayo Civic Center -
Rochester, MN

[Join Us!](#) For a **New Hybrid Event** with Participants both **In Person** and **Attending Remotely**.



Attendees:

Support MPTA by attending our conference. Get access to many trainings on topics such as emergency preparedness and communication and outreach, meet up with transit professionals and more!

Conference schedule available on our [website](#).

Vendors:

- An 8X10" booth in Expo Area
- Registration for 2 people to attend the conference
- Promotion before, during and after the conference
- Opportunities to talk with participants - both in person and remote attendees

And more! Info on our [Expo webpage](#).



Sponsorship opportunities available on our [website here!](#)

[Register online now! www.mpta-transit.org](http://www.mpta-transit.org)

Sponsor the 2020 Minnesota Public Transit Conference

**Monday, October 5th -
Wednesday, October 7th
Mayo Civic Center in
Rochester, MN.**



Sign up to become a sponsor for the 2020 conference on our website [here.](#)

Sponsorship opportunities:

\$1,000 Gold Level Sponsor, includes 3 representatives

- Presentation of 2-minute video throughout the conference
- Special recognition at the MPTA Meeting and Welcome Reception
- Prominent logo and company description in conference program
- Recognition in conference packet
- Prominent display on all signage at events* and registration area
- Prime location for booth and three attendee registrations included

\$500 Silver Level Sponsor, includes 2 representatives

- Recognition in conference program
- Logo and Company description displayed for remote attendees
- Recognition in conference packet
- Displayed on all signage at events
- Better location for booth and two attendee registrations included

\$275 Bronze Level Sponsor, includes 1 representative

- Displayed on all signage at events
- Recognition in conference program
- Recognition in conference packet

Exclusive Event Sponsorships:

Available First Come First Serve: In order to be eligible for an exclusive event sponsorship one's organization must already be either a vendor or sponsor on some level.

\$300 Hand Sanitizer Sponsor- Your logo on hand sanitizer.

Sold out! \$300 Face Mask Sponsor- Your logo on attendee face masks.

Register for the 2020 Washington D.C. Fly-In

Sept. 22-24.

The Alliance is now offering *both in-person and remote participation* for the 2020 D.C. Fly-In

Join us to speak with your elected officials and get more information on transportation in Minneosta.



Why is it important to go?

1. The FAST Act expires in September, 2020 - We need to send a strong message in support of reauthorization.
2. The House and Senate have developed Initial Transportation Authorization Proposals and Committees are active.
3. BUILD, INFRA, ROUTES Grant Proposals under consideration.
4. If you would like to meet your Congressional Representatives, Alliance Staff will be arranging individual meetings for you.

Tentative Schedule available online.

- Breakfast via Zoom with Members of Congressional Delegation
 - Discussion of Federal Transportation Funding
 - Presentation: New Changes to NEPA
 - Group Meetings with Staff
 - Federal Transit Funding
 - Update on Transportation Revenue and Construction in Other States
- And so much more!***

**Register today to participate either online or in-person
at www.transportationalliance.com**



Legislative Report

The Minnesota Legislature continues to hold special sessions this summer but has not been able to do much in the way of assisting transit service throughout the state.

Governor Walz continues use the peacetime emergency powers that many other governors are using to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergency powers allow him to make decisions and issue executive orders designed to react to the changing situation. Republican legislators have objected to continued use of emergency powers by the governor, arguing that the situation in Minnesota is no longer an emergency. The governor has extended the powers originally granted to him by the legislature for 30-day periods in June and July. Extending the time period requires the legislature to be in session. Legislators can vote to deny the extension of emergency powers but both bodies have to pass a resolution to that effect. Republicans who are in the majority in the Senate have voted twice to deny the extension of emergency powers but the House, which is controlled by Democrats, has not supported that action so the governor continues to hold emergency powers.

While passage of a capital bonding bill was supposed to be the main work of the 2020 legislature, politics has gotten in the way and we find ourselves – after a 5 month regular session and two special sessions – without a bonding bill. Both the House and Senate have put forward bonding proposals in the short special sessions that were called that were supported by the majority party in each body, but bonding bills require a two-thirds vote, not just a simple majority, in order to pass. That means that votes are needed from the minority party as well. Each attempt at passing a bonding bill has failed due to a lack of votes from minority members. Republicans in the House have tied their support for a bonding bill to a requirement that the governor give up his emergency powers which would nullify all of the previously existing executive orders.

The proposal put out by the House – HF3 – would provide \$55 million for Bus Rapid Transit in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area along with \$2 million for Greater Minnesota transit and \$1.75 million for a transit hub in the City of Northfield. The Senate bill included \$12 million for BRT and \$2 million for Greater Minnesota transit.

	Governor's Recs	Senate SF4 - S S 1	HF3 - Special Session 2
MnDOT			
Safe Routes to School	\$10,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$3,000,000
Passenger Rail Program	\$10,000,000		\$3,000,000
Greater MN Transit	\$10,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000
Northfield Regional Transit Hub	\$2,500,000		\$1,750,000
Metropolitan Council			
Bus Rapid Transitways	\$55,000,000	\$12,000,000	\$55,000,000

Legislative Report

The legislature is expected to be back for another special session in August when the current 30-day extension of emergency powers expires. The governor and legislative leaders have said they will not be able to pass bills that spend money or increase borrowing due to a previously scheduled bond sale in August.

Federal securities law requires the state to present its financial position to investors so they can make informed investment decisions. The financial position cannot change for a short period before or after the bond sales in August. According to Minnesota Management and Budget, this means the next opportunity for the Legislature to make any changes to the budget, including a bonding bill, must wait until late September when this blackout period ends.

MPTA and other transportation advocates will continue to push for passage of the capital bonding bill in 2020.

Another casualty of the lack of action by the legislature is a tax bill with language providing a tax write-off for volunteer drivers. The House combined the tax bill and bonding bill in HF3 and the legislation included language that allows a subtraction for reimbursement paid by a charitable organization to a volunteer in excess of the federal charitable rate (14 cents/mile). The subtraction is limited to the reimbursement rate for businesses (currently 58 cents/mile). It would be effective for tax year 2020 and expires after tax year 2029.

Federal Action

Congress continues to debate the next steps in dealing with the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. After passing several major bills to assist businesses and families, the House and Senate have put out very different proposals for the next step. With the additional \$600 in unemployment insurance now expired, there is some pressure for Congress to agree on some kind of additional unemployment as well as assistance for schools, businesses and local governments.

Significant transit funding was included in the CARES Act that was passed with bipartisan support. The \$25 billion in funding was significant but larger metropolitan transit systems are in need of another round of assistance.

Led by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), transit providers are collectively asking for at least \$32 billion from the federal relief package being negotiated as many say their agencies have suffered fare losses of between 70 and 90 percent because of the pandemic. They say they continued to operate over the past five months, providing rides to essential service workers such as hospital employees and grocery store clerks. Meanwhile, transit agencies also are a focal point for state and local recovery plans, helping to shuttle workers back to offices and preparing for the possibility of schools reopening in the fall.

Unfortunately, the Senate's next relief package, the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability and Schools Act (HEALS Act) does not contain any funding for transit.

Legislative Report

The latest House proposal, the HEROES Act contains a little over \$15 billion in assistance for transit systems. The goal is for both sides to negotiate and reach a deal, but with the House plan at \$3 trillion and the Senate plan at \$1 trillion and very different ideas of what to fund, the two sides are very far apart. In fact, the Senate Republicans are divided over the HEALS act with some Republicans attacking the proposal as too large and not needed.

At the same time, Congress needs to pass a budget for the coming federal fiscal year. The FY2020 appropriations run out end of September. The House has been working on the FY2021 budget, but the Senate has not passed any of the 12 appropriations bills needed to pass.

The FAST Act, the 5-year surface transportation authorization act, is also set to expire at the end of September. The House passed a major infrastructure package – the Moving Forward Act – at \$1.5 trillion that includes the Invest in America 5-year surface transportation authorization. However, this legislation passed with only Democrats supporting it and has no chance of moving in the GOP controlled Senate. The Senate has passed a highway title for a new 5-year surface transportation authorization act, but the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee which has jurisdiction over the transit title has not put out a new proposal for a surface transportation reauthorization.

We're probably looking at short-term extensions of transit funding at the federal level, adding more uncertainty at an incredibly challenging time for transit systems around the country.

As we head into election season, lawmakers at both the state and federal levels need to hear about importance of transit service and the need for additional funding to maintain this critical service and the jobs associated with it.

**Keep up
with MPTA
by visiting
our website
or following
us on Twitter
or Facebook at
**@MNPublic
Transit****

COVID's Impact on transit centers around Minnesota

Since the pandemic hit, almost every transit organization in the state has been hit hard.

Some have taken inspiration from others including preventative and safety measures, and others are looking toward the future and what this will mean in a post-pandemic Minnesota.

MPTA talked with multiple transit groups throughout the state to see what's happening and what the overall sentiment is.

Overall, ridership is down. Hubbard County Heartland Express is down about 80%, Duluth Transit Authority's (DTA) ridership is down about 28% compared to last year, and Mankato Transit System (MTS) has declined about 60% from their normal summer schedule.

"Due to the early shutdown this spring for Minnesota State University, Mankato, our ridership dropped by almost 90% during that 2 month period," said MTS's Superintendent of Transit, Craig Rempp. Richard Crawford, Minnesota Valley Transit Authority's (MVTA) Public Information Manager also noted a decrease in ridership.

"Similar to other transit agencies, our express service to downtown Minneapolis dropped off dramatically with employees not going to work during the pandemic. Our local bus ridership was more resilient, although sustained significant declines as well," he said. Every transit group is handling the pandemic in their own way, adapting to challenges as they come.



File Photo Courtesy of Hubbard County Heartland Express

"MTS has made many procedural and protocol changes in response to COVID-19. Some of the changes are; stopped charging passengers fares to eliminate the need to touch the fair box, every other day rotation of buses to allow complete cleaning and sanitization of each bus, rear entry on buses, hand sanitizer available on the buses for passengers, face mask available for passengers at no cost, promoting social distancing on the buses, and drivers most wear face mask when in close proximity to passengers," Rempp said.

MTS also plans to implement more changes within the next 60 days, which include: passengers required to wear face masks while on the bus, plexiglass barriers installed by drivers, and sanitizing buses daily. Meanwhile, MVTA has also made some major changes.

"From the onset of the health crisis, MVTA has followed guidance from state and federal health experts. In addition to promoting social distancing guidance, MVTA implemented enhanced sanitation efforts on our buses and at facilities.

COVID's Impact on transit centers around Minnesota

We also implemented a variety of new procedures, such as: removed printed schedules and other products to reduce material handling, placed additional hand sanitizers on buses, provided masks on buses for customers who forgot to bring their own, (and) MVTA has promoted health guidance from state and federal authorities and referred customers to the CDC and Minnesota Department of Health for additional information,” Crawford said.

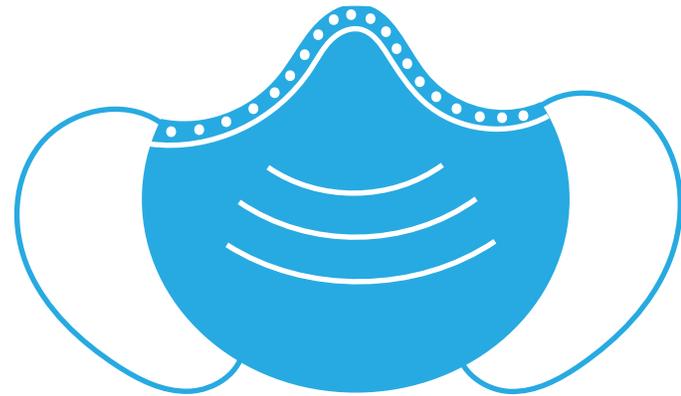
According to Phil Pumphrey, the DTA has implemented similar changes including cleaning extensively and frequently, mask wearing, ordering driver barriers, and increased messaging and marketing among other things.

These adaptations to the ‘new normal’ have been on everyone in the transit industry’s mind, and some are wondering if many of them will stick around after this is all over.

The sentiment, so far, is that we may see some lasting changes in the transit industry.

“The health and safety of our customers have always been top priorities for MVTA but we anticipate enhanced sanitation on buses and facilities will be even more critical for the future,” Crawford said.

“Some of the changes such as the barriers will stay in place permanently. Others like daily sanitization of the buses, required face mask use, and social distancing could become seasonal in response to different health concerns we encounter in the future,” Rempp said.



With ridership down and these changes, some of which may be permanent, there comes a final question. Will people come back to transit once the pandemic calms down and even ends?

There is some uncertainty in this area, but most transit professionals spoken with are optimistic.

“Based on an MVTA customer survey, we anticipate the vast majority of our previous customers will resume using public transit when they return to work,” Crawford said.

Some transit systems depend on other factors such as how schools and businesses will be operating in the future.

“I believe ridership for MTS will eventually return to or close to normal. A large part of our passenger base is college students and K-12 students. Depending on how these institutions operate in the future will have a large impact on our ridership,” Rempp said.

Transit remains an important part of Minnesota and keeping us connected.

COVID's Impact on transit centers around Minnesota

According to Pumphrey, it provides access to employment, education, housing and opportunities, and it broadens the participation in our social fabric by all social economic levels.

Rempp echoed the importance of transit in Minnesota.

“Having worked for two different transit systems in Minnesota and serving as president of Minnesota Public Transit Association I have come to see how important public transit is for all. It doesn't matter if you live in the metro area, rural urban areas, small towns, or on a farm, public transit is very important for the wellbeing of the individuals, communities, and economy of the state of Minnesota. Even if ridership has dropped and takes time to recover it is vital that public transit systems stay whole and keep functioning for the good of everyone,” Rempp said.

For those looking for more information regarding COVID-19, the [MPTA website](#) currently has resources listed to help transit groups including a buyer's guide, information on cleaning vehicles, and more.

**Special thanks to MTS, DTA and MVTA
for their help with this article.**

Featured Industry Members

Every Mile Matters with Telin

Telin Transportation prides themselves on service after the sales. Satisfaction is one of their highest priorities as they want to keep people coming back. According to their website, Telin offers the highest quality original equipment manufactured parts (OEM) to keep buses on the road. Their tech line is there to help your technician repair any issues.

Telin has a reputation of being the best of the best. Not only do they have some of the most experience people in the bus industry, but also work to continue education to keep up with changing technology. They also attend national and local conferences on safety and compliance as well as factory training for everything they work on.



Telin Transportation sells, leases and services new and used school buses, commercial buses and shuttle buses in the upper Midwest including Minnesota, Wisconsin, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Lakeville, Monticello, Becker, Hennipin County, Scott County, Dakota County, Retirement Homes, Senior Centers, School Districts, Churches, Nonprofit Organizations and more.

Build for Tomorrow, Today.

WSB is a forward-thinking design and consulting firm created on the idea that culture drives results. The group specializes in engineering, community planning, environment and construction services.

Founded in 1995, the organization values strong relationships, collaboration and forward-thinking. They think outside the box and work to help one another produce thoughtful and creative ideas to meet the needs of every project.



WSB has worked on multiple transportation projects including the I-94 East Metro Interchange Study, Lake Valentine Road Traffic and Pedestrian Study, Shakopee's Historic Downtown improvements and more.

They believe the future is what we make it, and they challenge what has been done in order to figure out what could be done in the future.

Thank you to our vendor members!

MVTA Honors First Responders and Essential Workers

Minnesota Valley Transit Authority is looking a bit blue. Don't worry! That's a good thing.

MVTA honored first responders and essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic by illuminating its new Apple Valley Transit Station sign in the color blue.

"We salute all the first responders, health care workers and other essential workers who have been on the front lines of the health crisis," said MVTA Chief Executive Officer Luther Wynder. "We have been proud to provide transportation to essential workers during the health crisis."

First responders, health care workers and essential workers have become the front-line heroes during the COVID-19 pandemic, and MVTA wanted to recognize their critical contributions during this time.

The recently completed sign at Apple Valley Transit Station is part of a modernization project that has been ongoing since the Summer of 2019. The project added two levels and about 350 parking spaces at the parking ramp that has been one of the most heavily used in the region.

In addition to the parking expansion, the transit station now has:

- A second elevator at the ramp.
- Energy-efficient LED lighting.
- Accessibility improvements on existing levels at the main entrance.
- Additional security cameras to improve public safety.



Photo Courtesy of MVTA.

The new modern sign at the ramp includes the MVTA logo and the ability to illuminate the building in different colors, hence the blue for first responders and essential workers.

MVTA has also been implementing new efforts to keep their buses and transit centers clean and safe amid the pandemic.

"Those measures include enhanced sanitation on buses, limited material handling, and the promotion of social distancing measures including face coverings recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and the state of Minnesota," said MVTA's Public Information Manager Richard Crawford.

Minnesota Valley Transit Authority is the public transportation provider for seven cities in Dakota and Scott counties.

"We've been honored to provide essential trips for these workers during this challenging time," Crawford said. More information on MVTA and their improved facility can be found online at <https://www.mvta.com>.

Forest River acquires REV Group's shuttle bus business

On May 8th, Forest River Inc. acquired REV Group's shuttle bus business, just in time for the summer months.

REV Group and Forest River are very different companies that share one big common denominator: they both help with the transportation and transit industry.

Forest River focuses more on recreational vehicles such as RVs, travel trailers, fifth wheels, and much more, while REV Group does everything from fire trucks to ambulances and more, but they also have shuttle bus brands including two more well-known brands: Champion Bus and El Dorado. They have a reputation of "performance, product quality and unique features," a Forest River press release stated.

Forest River also acquired, Federal Coach, World Trans, Krystal Coach, and Goshen Coach from REV group. With these brands and their products, Forest River is now able to provide for many more causes including everything from retirement communities and transportation companies to churches or colleges.

"We are excited to welcome Champion Bus and El Dorado to Forest River," stated David Wright, of Forest River. "Both organizations have built a history of integrity, quality and innovation and enjoy an excellent reputation in our industry today. As we navigate these challenging times, the addition of these historic and iconic brands to the Forest River family enhance our ability to provide products and a customer experience that is second to none. We look forward to working with our dealer partners as we better position Forest River's shuttle bus divisions for the future."



Forest River Inc. was founded in 1998 by Peter Liegl. He has a vision of an RV company dedicated to allowing people to enjoy the outdoors with better recreational vehicles.

After purchasing some assets of Cobra Industries, the company started manufacturing pop-up tent campers, travel trailers, fifth wheels and park models. Since then, Forest River has continued to grow and now operates multiple facilities throughout the United States creating Class A, B and C motorhomes, travel trailers, fifth wheels, toy haulers, pop-up tent campers, truck campers, park model trailers, destination trailers, cargo trailers, commercial vehicles, buses, pontoons, and mobile restroom trailers.

Article Sources:

RVBusiness.com

REV Group website

Forest River website

BOTL releases toolkit to combat human trafficking

Here in Minnesota, especially in the sleepier parts of the state, it can feel as if big issues such as human trafficking just don't happen, but that is far from the truth.

Thousands of children and adults in the United States and Canada are trafficked every year. Human trafficking has also been reported in all 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces. This is not a big city or regional issue – it's global and it is our job as transit professionals to ensure transportation workers and transit professionals are equipped to both notice the signs and be ready to help those being preyed upon.

Busing on the Lookout (BOTL) recently released a toolkit for transit agencies and organizations to use to implement anti-human trafficking training and policies in their operations. And now, with many transit groups lowering the amount of trips sent out per day, is a great time to train employees on what to watch out for and what to do if they suspect human trafficking.

The toolkit, titled, Transit on the Lookout, is available on the MPTA website under our [Updates and Reports tab](#).

According to the toolkit, "Human trafficking—or modern-day slavery—is a global problem in which people are illegally bought and sold for forced labor or commercial sex. Through the use of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception or the abuse of power, traffickers prey upon their victims' vulnerabilities—such as their youth, condition of poverty, migration status or dreams of love and opportunity—while profiting off of their exploitation."



The toolkit also stated that in 2018 Polaris, the organization that runs the National Human Trafficking Hotline in the U.S., found that 42% of all survivors interviewed said their traffickers used local or long-distance buses at some point to transport them or meet with them.

BOTL success:

BOTL has been a success in the past and helped those in trouble get out of their situation and seek help. For example, according to the toolkit, in 2018 a transit agency in Washington showed the BOTL training video and a week later an employee saw an emotionally distraught woman walk into the transit center and approached her to see if she needed help.

"The employee learned that she had just been released from the hospital after being beaten, raped and robbed. She revealed information that suggested she was a victim of sex trafficking. She didn't know what city she was in, had no phone and no money," the story in the toolkit said.

The employee helped the woman to contact a friend she believed to be safe, and got her a bus ticket.

BOTL releases toolkit to combat human trafficking

Multiple employees in the transit center pooled their cash to make sure the woman had some money to help her on her journey. They found her in the exit/ recovery stage as she was on her way to escaping and rebuilding her life, but this is not the only time in which transit organizations may come across victims of human trafficking.

The stages of human trafficking and how they cross paths with transit:

There are four stages of Human trafficking: Recruitment, exploitation, exit and recovery.

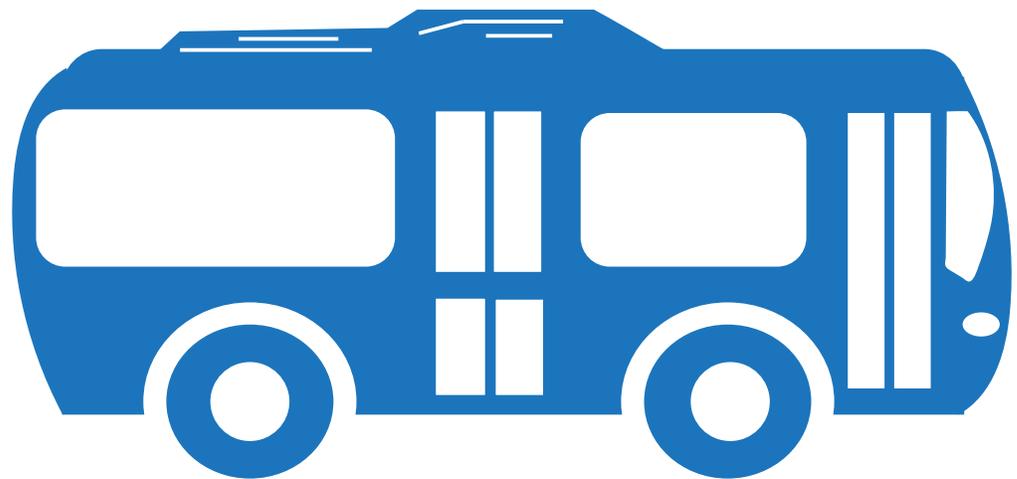
Recruitment is when traffickers target people, often in vulnerable situations. Traffickers may go to bus stops to find their targets and this is where they can make their initial contact. Other times, they make initial contact online, which leads potential victims to transit as they may be traveling to supposedly meet a new significant other or start a new job they've always wanted.

Red flags may include: minors traveling without adult supervision and cars that are frequently at the transit center or terminal but no one gets out.

Exploitation: during this stage, human traffickers may utilize transit to send victims to and from places to be sold.

Red flags may include: anyone offering to exchange sex for money, anyone who acknowledges having a pimp or needing to meet a quota, passengers who are not allowed to speak for themselves or make eye contact, passengers with bruising, branding or other physical trauma, and passengers whose tickets, money, identification documents, or phone are being controlled by another person.

The Exit stage is when transit can serve as a life saver to survivors. When they are able to get away, a bus may be the first place they go to in order to get out and far away.



BOTL releases toolkit to combat human trafficking

While victims may be working to get away, they are still vulnerable. They could be lured or tricked into going back, and this is another moment where it can be critical to intervene and help them find the resources they need to escape.

Red flags may include passengers who look dirty, disheveled, or seem confused, lost, panicked or afraid.

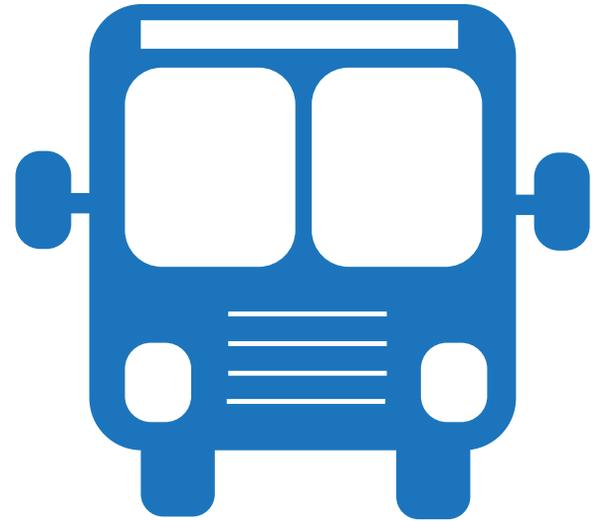
Recovery: Survivors of human trafficking have officially gotten out of their situation, but now must work to build a new and steady life. During this stage they may need support in multiple areas of their lives, not just physical health and finding a job and a place to live, but also mental health resources and possibly working to vacate criminal records that were held over them or accrued during their exploitation.

What transit agencies can do to help:

According to the toolkit, transit agencies play an important role in helping victims escape to safety. BOTL believes there are four “critical steps” transit agencies should take.

Transit systems should look to implement training for all employees, establish a policy on how and when to report, connect with anti-human trafficking task forces at the city or state levels and launch a public awareness campaign.

BOTL offers free training materials for bus drivers, terminal workers and more for those interested.



The Human Trafficking hotline is also available anywhere in the United States at 1-888-373-7888. More information on BOTL training and the toolkit are available [here](#) or on their [website](#).

Article sources:

[BOTL website and toolkit](#)

[Polaris website](#)

[CTDC website](#)

Combatting COVID with disinfecting technology

Article submitted
by Mike Klauda

North Central Bus
& Equipment Inc.

In late April, North Central Bus and Equipment experienced our first positive case of COVID-19. An employee notified us on a Monday morning that he was home sick, was experiencing COVID symptoms and had went in for a COVID test. On late Tuesday afternoon, we received word from him that his test was indeed positive. Wednesday morning, we received a call from another employee who had contact with the person who tested positive that he was also experiencing symptoms. Based on this, we elected to call all our employees and send them home with pay for five days. Our hope was to keep anymore cases at bay until we could determine the best course of action to keep everyone safe and to look at options for disinfecting our facilities.

Research led us to a company based in Alexandria, MN called Industrial Building Cleaners (IBC). After some further education, we hired IBC to come down to disinfect all facilities and vehicles where the two known employees who were positive had been. IBC introduced us to electrostatic disinfecting technology that uses charged hydrogen peroxide as the primary cleaning solution. IBC chose hydrogen peroxide because it is safe, effective (CDC efficacy of 6 on a scale of 1 to 6, with a 6 being the most effective), evaporates quickly and leaves no harmful residue.

Two weeks after our second positive employee, we received notice from third employee mid-morning on a Monday that she was home and had tested positive for COVID-19. This time, armed with the knowledge we acquired and a disinfecting machine we procured from IBC, we were able to disinfect over 50,000 square feet of office, shop and warehouse space in St. Cloud and Mounds View in a few hours that afternoon.



The buildings were completely disinfected and ready for employees on Tuesday morning. Talking to our team members the next day, everyone was comfortable that we had taken the appropriate steps and expressed no reservations about coming back into the buildings and vehicles they were working on.

After our experiences, we thought that other companies would benefit tremendously from using this electrostatic disinfecting technology to thoroughly disinfect their vehicles and facilities on a regular basis. We formed a new company set up specifically to sell this equipment called Cloud Disinfect It. We then contracted with a subsidiary of IBC called BioFence, to become the exclusive distributor of this electrostatic disinfecting machine in the upper Midwest.

Based on our COVID-19 experiences, we believe we have a commercial grade, cost effective product to give customers and employees piece of mind that you are doing everything you can to keep your facility and vehicles disinfected and safe. We went from being closed for five full days the first time we had a positive employee, costing us tens of thousands of dollars, to a point now where if we have a positive, we would send employees home for no more than a couple hours while we disinfected the building making it safe to return the same day. If you are interested in learning more about our disinfecting technology, please do not hesitate to contact Mike Klauda at mikek@northcentralinc.com, 612.839.5892 or Bryan Techel at bryant@northcentralinc.com, 952.270.9328.

Rainbow Rider Remodels

Rainbow Rider's complete remodel of their dispatch center has created both convenience and a smoother working environment for dispatchers.

"Before, we had completely open area, with no walls and all the dispatchers were facing away from one another," said Rainbow Rider's Human Resources Manager, Jennifer Olson. "Additionally, the radios were all very (far) apart from each other, so it made it very difficult for some dispatchers to get to a radio if they were on the phone across the room. The lack of walls made it very loud when they were on the phone and also if anyone was having a conversation around that area."

The old dispatch center also didn't accommodate five dispatch computers.

With the new remodel, which they had been planning for about a year, noise levels are down and it has created a more private work environment for employees.

"We made the area larger by knocking out a wall and closing off an exterior doors. Additionally, we had two complete walls put up, so that dispatch can have more quiet and privacy. Something completely new were the addition of cubicles, which gives each dispatcher their own personal space and helps quiet the noise of phone calls.

We also installed a two-way radio at each cubicle, which is super convenient," Olson said.

Dispatchers at Rainbow Rider are enjoying the new space.

"Everyone can organize their space to accommodate their needs," said Dispatcher Sally Scott.

"With having my own space that is not in the open and enclosed. I am able to hear all customers clearly on the phone and able to get accurate information for pick up and drop off," said Dispatcher Aleta Behrends.

The remodel in total took Rainbow Rider about two months.

"I truly believe this is a great thing for the dispatch team," Behrens said.



Photo courtesy of Rainbow Rider displays the transit organization's newly remodeled dispatch center.

Tri-CAP Alters Operations to Address Basic Needs

Article Submitted by
Amy Christensen

Director of
Transportation
Services

Tri-CAP, Inc.
Transportation
Department

In response to COVID-19, Tri-CAP Transportation has taken steps to help with meeting the basic needs of individuals and families residing in Tri-CAP service areas. Among the recipients of food shelf deliveries are the communities of Onamia, which is considered a food desert, and Big Lake, which ranks among one of the higher median incomes in the Central MN region. Additionally, other Departments within the Tri-CAP agency have partnered to deliver basic needs bags to those who meet income guidelines.

As a Community Action Program, Tri-CAP's mission is to expand opportunities for the economic and social well-being of our residents and our community. The idea of delivering food to residents aligns well with this mission so outreach efforts were implemented very early on in the COVID fight. Further, food assistance is not specific to areas that do not have easy access to food and demonstrates that the affects of COVID have no economic barriers.

During the State stay at home orders issued by Governor Walz, ridership on Tri-CAP buses plummeted. We had buses, we had drivers, but we didn't have many passengers. It was appropriate to re-direct available resources in the fight against poverty and what a better way to do that than with the transportation resources that were readily available. In coordination with the Director of Planning and Development, the Transportation Department and the Family Resources Department, Tri-CAP explored ways to be responsive and purposeful. Not knowing where or when the next meal might be available creates stressors on any household. This was quickly deemed an area in which Tri-CAP could help. Individuals



Photo Courtesy of Tri-CAP.

and families have expressed their deep appreciation for Tri-CAP's assistance, as have the local food shelves with whom Tri-CAP is partnering. With demand increasing, food-insecurity is only one part of the impact of COVID on many households across the country. As Tri-CAP explores additional ways to address the far-reaching effects of poverty during COVID-19 such as inadequate shelter, job loss, and access to internet for families for distance learning, the agency will continue to work with food shelves as partners, as well as other stakeholders to assess local needs and respond with available resources.



Photo Courtesy of Tri-CAP.

SouthWest Transit Main Facility Construction Update

Article Submitted by
John Hagen Miller

Marketing & Public
Outreach Manager

SouthWest Transit

In the fall of 2019, SWT started work on a \$6 million, 10,000 square-foot expansion at our main facility in Eden Prairie on County Road 62 just west from Interstate 494. Construction was delayed somewhat due to the COVID-19 pandemic but is now back on track and is scheduled to be completed by August. Once complete, the facility will be able to accommodate all SWT buses, the maintenance shop and the agency's administrative offices.

Also, an updated driver lounge, a 100+ person training room for staff, new floor drains in the maintenance bays and new asphalt around the entire facility.

When the construction is done and the timing is right, an open-house will be planned! All will be invited to stop by and tour the facility and meet some SWT staff members.



Arrowhead delivering meals on bus wheels

**Article Submitted
By Tony Potter**

**Marketing &
Public Relations
Coordinator**

Arrowhead Transit

The economy has been hit hard by COVID-19, and the transit industry has been no exception. Arrowhead, located in Northern Minnesota, has taken a creative approach to keeping busy during the ongoing pandemic.

Arrowhead has helped distribute boxes of produce to residents throughout the following counties: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, Pine and St. Louis. The distributions have been hosted on a weekly basis since May 28 by Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA), which is a nonprofit organization that operates Arrowhead Transit.

Arrowhead has provided 50 buses to transport 4,157 boxes, or 70,669 pounds, of produce to partner organizations and their clients during the past six weeks. Arrowhead has also donated several staff members each week to handout boxes of produce during parking lot distributions in both Hibbing and Virginia.

In total, AEOA has distributed approximately 9,000 boxes -- and 153,000 pounds -- of produce to those in need. Their efforts, along with assistance from Arrowhead Transit, will continue throughout the summer with several more distribution events scheduled.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has asked transit agencies to use their resources to provide residents in their communities with access to food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The performance of the drivers has been great," added Lucas Warren, Arrowhead Transit Manager. "They are out there working hard, just like a normal day."



AEOA and Arrowhead Transit staff work together to load buses with boxes of produce during a distribution event at the AEOA Housing and Weatherization office in Hibbing.

Arrowhead staff is pleased to help with these efforts, and thankful for the additional work being provided to them at this time. Ridership has been reduced by nearly 100,000 passengers from March through May compared to those months last year due to the threat of COVID-19 spreading. The statistics for June are not yet available.

"The drivers are all happy to keep working, yet are worried about the public," said Julia Dupla, Arrowhead Transit Manager. "They have really been great, and are working together to make sure everyone has enough work to do."

Arrowhead has also waved bus fares since March 23 to limit contact between passengers and drivers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This change is expected to continue through the end of summer as many people still need transportation to vital services such as doctor appointments, the grocery store and work.

Arrowhead delivering meals on bus wheels

“The drivers are extremely dependable and know their passengers’ needs,” said Sandy Wheelcor, Arrowhead Transit Manager. “The drivers are eager to help anyone with anything that they can. They are flexible and adapt well to change, which is important in transit because everything is constantly changing.”

To further protect against COVID-19, the drivers are being asked to clean the buses more often. They’ve been provided with ample supply of hand sanitizer, cleaning wipes, disinfectant, safety gloves and personal protective equipment (PPE) masks.



AEOA and Arrowhead Transit staff work together to load buses with boxes of produce during a distribution event at the AEOA Housing and Weatherization office in Hibbing.

CCT Installs Bike Racks

Article submitted by
Patti Flannigan

Office Coordinator

Central Community
Trust

Did you know that Central Community Transit has buses with a bike rack installed on the front that serve the Willmar City Route? CCT has partnered with Kandiyohi-Renville County Statewide Health Improvement Partnership to provide bike racks on two of the CCT buses.

Each rack is able to hold 2 bikes, the first rack is in operation and is running Monday through Friday on the Willmar City Route so that it will be able to reach all areas of the City of Willmar 5 days per week. The other bike rack is currently installed on a bus route that is providing county wide service and Willmar Service.

We strongly suggest that if you would like to use the bike rack, that you contact our dispatch center to provide us with a 48 hour notice so that we can best accommodate your requests. Call CCT for more information 320-214-7433.



CENTRAL COMMUNITY TRANSIT

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www.cctbus.org



Photos courtesy of CCT display the new bike racks on their buses.

Q&A: St. Cloud Metro Bus Goes Back to Full Service

On June 17, 2020 St. Cloud Metro Bus announced that they would go back to full service on Metro Bus Fixed Route, Dial-a-Ride and ConneX services beginning Sunday, July 12th.

According to their website, the Metro Bus Mobility Training Center in downtown St. Cloud and Operations Center will also be re-opening to the public shortly after on July 13. The Transit Center will also resume posted hours on July 12.

MPTA reached out to Nate Ramacher, the Marketing and Communications Manager at St. Cloud to learn more about what led Metro bus to go back to full service and what changes they have made to adapt to the current situation.

Below is our Q&A.

Why is St. Cloud Metro Bus going back to full service?

We received quite a bit of feedback that our limited hours were challenging for customers who needed to make essential trips. Increasing ridership also created a need for more service hours to spread out ridership and enable more social distancing. Metro Bus COO Dave Green explains, "As additional businesses opened back up we wanted to be there for our customers and the employees of said businesses."

Why did you all choose July 12th as the day to go back to full service?

We had to balance the desire to provide needed service with the requirement to give our customers and employees sufficient notice of the change to service times and options.



Photo Courtesy of St. Cloud Metro Bus displays their downtown transit center.

July 12 worked best for achieving both of those goals and allowed for our Maintenance staff to ensure all buses were prepared to return to normal services hours.

How busy do you think your buses will be when you go back to full service?

It is hard to say but we expect ridership to be well below normal levels. We do not expect buses to ever be more than 50% full on most of our routes.

What does this (going back to full services) mean for your drivers and riders?

For our Operators, it means they will be returning to their normal shifts and also seeing a sharp increase in their overall hours on the job.

Our customers will enjoy greater flexibility when planning their trips and, potentially, more opportunities to socially distance on our buses and at our facilities.

Tell me about the impact of not collecting fares.

Q&A: St. Cloud Metro Bus Goes Back to Full Service

By not collecting fares, we are obviously seeing an impact on our revenue. However, the importance of creating a safe ride for our customers and Operators takes the fore at this time. We have also received thanks from our customers for making their commutes more affordable during these tough times.

Why are so many transit systems choosing not to collect fares now?

We cannot speak for other systems but suspect they are weighing the same factors of customer and employee safety versus revenue.

Is it possible that you'll have to close up some routes again? What would determine that?

The effects of COVID-19 obviously play a huge role in this and our hope is employees and customers stay healthy. We do not think it is likely we will have to reduce service again but we all know anything is possible in 2020!

Tell me about your ridership through this all. Is it down? Did it go down but now it's back up?

Ridership is still down but has come up since taking a sharp decline this spring. For example, our ridership in April 2020 was approximately 21% of April 2019. Last month (June), ridership was up to about 39% of last year's total for June. We expect ridership to keep trending up as our communities reopen.

What has St. Cloud Metro Bus been doing to keep buses and stations clean and keep riders and drivers safe?



Photo Courtesy of St. Cloud Metro Bus shows a Dial-a-Ride bus leaving the fueling station.

We sourced powerful cleaning agents for using on our buses and at our facilities. We also changed the way we process buses for cleaning with a focus on each bus being cleaned before returning to service each day. Face masks, face shields and sanitizer has been made widely available to employees and masks are also available to our passengers. Social distancing and other governmental guidelines to combat the spread of COVID-19 have been widely and regularly communicated internally and externally to encourage our employees and customers to protect themselves and others.

More information on St. Cloud Metro Bus's reopening can be found on their website www.ridemetrobus.com



Photo Courtesy of St. Cloud Metro Bus shows a ConneX bus on the road in Sartell.

Upcoming Events:

Washington D.C. Fly-In

Tuesday, Sept. 22
-Thursday, Sept. 24
[Register Here!](#)

2020 Transit Conference & Expo: Mayo Civic Center in Rochester, MN

Monday, Oct. 5
-Wednesday, Oct. 7
[Register Here!](#)



Photo courtesy of Tri-CAP

Contact Us:

Have a story for us?
Want to nominate someone for "Meet the Director?"
Reach out to us here:
[Katie Leibel](#)
Program Manager

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