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Cover Photo Courtesy of St. Cloud Metro Bus

What's New?

Join the 2021 Roadeo Committee - Provide input for next year's Roadeo. This is great to add to a resume and an even better way to voice your opinion

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2020 Transit Award Winners - Find out who won each category and where you can check out the Awards Video.

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President's Column



With my run as President of MPTA coming to an end, I want to thank everyone on the MPTA Board and all the members for your support and friendship over the years. It's been great to get to know so many professional, caring people who are committed to transit in Minnesota.

For those who participated in our MPTA Annual Meeting, you'll know that the association will be in good hands with Ryan Daniel from St. Cloud Metro Bus as President and Phil Pumphrey with the Duluth Transit Authority as Vice President. We really appreciate their interest in moving MPTA into the future with plans to grow the association and increase the services we provide for all of our member systems and companies.

MPTA continues to adapt to deal with the challenges we're all facing with a global pandemic. We're here to provide resources and information and to promote our member companies and the sponsors who help make our events possible. As rules and regulations change, as the situation changes and as funding opportunities arise, we'll make sure you are kept updated.

With our 2020 Minnesota Public Transit Conference we took a hybrid approach that allowed for both in-person networking and collaboration as well as remote participation by people from all over the state. It was great to see some of our members and catch up, as well as learning from experts in transit and leaders at the national level who are mobilizing advocates and pushing for the future of transit in our country.

We greatly appreciate the continued involvement and support of the Office Of Transit and Active Transportation at MnDOT and the Metropolitan Council. The updates from Commissioner Kelliher and Chair Zelle provided important information and their participation was greatly appreciated.

The great thing about a virtual conference is that it continues to live on after the event is over. I encourage everyone to visit the MPTA web pages for the conference to access [recordings of the sessions](#), powerpoint presentations and handouts and to visit the [Virtual Booths](#) that we developed for our sponsors. These booths provide great information on new products and services for transit systems including contact information for people with the companies who can help you out. With this new technology, the transit conference is available any time you want to experience it!

As we gear up for 2021, MPTA will be working hard to represent you and the need for increased investments in transit in Minnesota. Your input and participation will be critical as we all work to recover from this pandemic. The world may have changed, but we understand the crucial role that transit plays in allowing people to work and live independently throughout the state. With a strong association, you can continue to provide the important services that our communities and residents need.

Thanks for the great experience as MPTA president and thanks for the great memories!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Pumphrey".

Legislative Report

State Legislative Action

Maybe the fifth time is the charm. The Minnesota Legislature was finally successful in passing a capital bonding bill during the fifth special session called since the end of the regular session. This last special session was once again called so that Governor Walz could extend his emergency powers for another 30 days. The legislature was called back on October 12th and on October 14th the House of Representatives passed HF1 – a major capital bonding bill. The Senate then passed the same bill on October 15th and sent the bill to the governor for his signature.

After months of advocacy and frustration, MPTA members are extremely grateful that legislation was passed with funding for transit capital projects. Unfortunately, the final bill did not contain the tax provisions MPTA had been fighting for. An earlier version of the bonding and tax bill included language providing a state tax write off for volunteer drivers but the final bill did not contain that language.

The 2020 bonding bill set a new precedent by finally breaking the \$1 billion mark in General Obligation (GO) bonds. Previously, the legislature had been hesitant to go above \$999 million and pass a bill totaling more than \$1 billion. This year, they agreed to \$1.3 billion in GO bonds, along with \$300 million in trunk highway bonds, \$147.4 million in appropriations bonds and \$38.779 million in general fund cash for a total of \$1.878 billion – a new record for a bonding bill.

Bonding bills require a 3/5ths vote rather than a simple majority so bipartisan support was needed. In the House, at least six GOP votes were needed if all the DFLers voted for the bill.

That proved to be tough to get during the regular session as well as during the July special session. In the Senate, the Republican majority was more supportive of passing a significant bonding bill but the level of funding was smaller in the initial Senate bonding proposals. Negotiations behind the scenes and pressure from advocacy groups resulted in fairly strong political support from both sides of the aisle. In the House, the final vote for HF1 was 100-34 and in the Senate the vote was 64-3. Both parties recognized the importance of taking action to increase investments in infrastructure projects and create jobs at a time when the state's economy is suffering.

The largest appropriation for transit, \$55 million to the Metropolitan Council, will build two arterial bus rapid transit lines: the D Line which connects Brooklyn Center to the Mall of America, and the B Line which connects Uptown Minneapolis to downtown St. Paul.

Through implementing the A Line busway, Metro Transit has proven fast, frequent, and comfortable transit service can improve ridership in a cost-effective manner. The D and B line projects will be implemented in high ridership corridors carrying over 35,000 average daily passengers, yielding faster travel times, increased ridership, and enhanced access to destinations through the metro area. The bill includes:

- B and D lines: \$55 million
- Greater Minnesota Transit: \$2 million
- Northfield Regional Transit Hub: \$1.75 million

Legislative Report

- Electric Vehicle Support: \$2 million
- Safe Routes to School: \$3 million
- Rogers Bike/Pedestrian Project: \$2.2 million
- Shakopee Bike/Pedestrian Project: \$2 million
- Hastings Bike/Pedestrian Project: \$1.5 million.

MPTA looks forward to working with OTAT on how the \$2 million in funds for Greater Minnesota transit will be distributed.

MPTA will be gearing up for what promises to be a challenging 2021 Legislative Session. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the state funding picture from where it was back in February of this year.

There has been some better news lately. In the calendar quarter from July to September, tax collections have been \$593 million more than what was predicted in May. That's 12.7 percent higher than was predicted. While the numbers are a little better — half a billion dollars better — the state still has a large deficit to resolve. Last February, Minnesota Management and Budget projected the state would end its current two-year budget period, in June of 2021, with a \$1.5 billion surplus. The May, 2020 update erased the surplus and replaced it with a \$2.4 billion deficit.

MMB has also looked forward to the following budget period, which will run from mid-2021 to mid-2023 and foresees an additional \$4.7 billion hole if no changes are made to current taxes and current spending between now and next summer.

We haven't seen immediate cuts, partly because the state also has built up a \$2.36 billion rainy day fund. But it can't be spent both to resolve the current budget's shortfall and the next budget's deficit. Republicans in the legislature have been urging Governor Walz to start making budget cuts now to ease the difficulty of balancing the budget when the next Legislature convenes in January.

For transit systems, the reliance on an annual general fund appropriation makes future budgets uncertain. In addition, the statutory dedication of the sales tax on leased motor vehicles (MVLST) could be at risk with a major budget deficit. While the projection in the May forecast of a dramatic drop (50%) in MVST, that drop did not materialize, which is good news for all transit systems since MVST has become the largest source of funding for all transit systems.

We will all be anxiously awaiting the release of the November forecast to get more definitive estimates for the budget shortfall and the performance of MVST in recent months.

Of course, the outcome of the 2020 elections will also have a major impact on the level of support for transit systems. The governor is not up for re-election, but both House and Senate members are up. The DFL has a 16-vote majority in the House and the control of that body is not expected to change.

Legislative Report

The GOP has the majority in the Senate but with a margin of three votes. Control of the Senate could change and that would give the DFL control over both bodies of the legislature and the governor's office.

Federal Legislative Action

On the last day of the federal fiscal year, Congress passed H.R. 8337, Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act to prevent a federal government shutdown and continue current appropriations through December 11, 2020. In addition, the bill includes a one-year extension of the surface transportation authorization act – the FAST Act. This keeps federal funds for transit available to states at current funding levels.

Division B of the bill, the Surface Transportation Program Extension, authorizes at least \$12.6 billion for public transit investment and includes several critical public transit priorities:

- Authorizes public transit funding for FY 2021 at amounts equal to the FY 2020 authorization as provided by the FAST Act (P.L. 114-94) and distributes the funds in the same manner as the prior year;
- Prevents a \$6 billion (or 60 percent) across-the-board cut of FY 2021 transit formula funds to each public transit agency by prohibiting application of the Rostenkowski Test;

- Deposits \$3.2 billion in the Mass Transit Account (MTA) of the Highway Trust Fund to ensure that the MTA will not run out of funds and FTA will be able to process grants in the upcoming fiscal year; and

- Extends the authorization for transit-oriented development (TOD) projects for Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loans and loan guarantees (which expires September 30, 2020) to September 30, 2021.

While talks have been on again and off again for months, it appears that another stimulus package with funding for transit will not be passed prior to the election. The House passed the HEROES Act in May with \$32 billion in additional transit funding but the Senate did not take up the bill. The Senate has developed its own stimulus funding proposals at a much smaller scale, but those plans did not contain any additional funding for transit and were not taken up by the House.

On September 21, 2020, the House passed H.R. 3935, the “Protecting Patients Transportation to Care Act”, by voice vote. The bill adds Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) to the list of mandated Medicaid benefits by codifying current Medicaid NEMT regulations. In addition to mandating the NEMT benefit, the bill requires the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to convene a stakeholder working group to focus on Medicaid program integrity issues, and other challenges in providing NEMT services.

Legislative Report

The legislation also mandates that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services assess the guidance that CMS provides to states on the federal requirements for NEMT. Furthermore, H.R. 3935 includes driver requirements for providing NEMT services. Finally, the bill requires the Government Accountability Office to conduct a nationwide study on NEMT coverage to identify safeguards to prevent fraud and abuse in the program.

In August, U.S. Senators Tina Smith (D-Minn.), Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) introduced bipartisan legislation to improve public transportation in certain rural communities across the country. The *Investments in Rural Transit Act* would increase the federal share to eighty percent for operating assistance in certain areas with high transit dependency. For a transit project to qualify, it must serve a county that meets one of the following criteria:

1. An “area of persistent poverty,” defined by the Census as a county in which at least 20% of the population has lived in poverty during the most recent 30-year period.
2. A county with many older Americans, where at least 25% of residents are over the age of sixty- five.
3. A county with healthcare shortages, defined as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) by the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA).

4. A county with low population density, defined as having no more than 20 people per square mile, based on Census data.

With so much at stake, MPTA will be working closely with lawmakers at both the state and federal levels to advocate for needed funds to keep transit systems operating and growing into the future.



2020 Minnesota Public Transit Conference and Expo

Thank you to everyone who joined us this year both online and in-person!



Join us next year in Duluth for a joint Public Transit conference with Minnesota & Wisconsin!

Mark your calendars!
October 4-6, 2021
at the
Duluth Entertainment Convention Center

Presentations from the conference are available on our website as well as recordings of almost every session.

Simply click on the presentation or recording you'd like to view!

Check them out here:

<https://www.mpta-transit.org/event/2020-minnesota-public-transit-conference>

Our **online Expo** is also still available on our website here:

<https://www.mpta-transit.org/expo>



2020 Minnesota Public Transit Conference and Expo

Thank you to all vendors and sponsors who supported us in-person and remotely!

Thank you to our sponsors



Gold

- Cummins
- Ecolane
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- A&J Mobility
- ARBOC
- PCTrans
- Routematch by Uber

Bronze

- APTA/TCRP
- Hogleund Bus Company
- Optibus
- Safety Vision
- SRF Consulting Group
- Wendel
- WSB

Be sure to check out the virtual booths [online here!](#)

Get information about products and services and how to contact these vendors

Vendors include:

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Join us next year, October 4-6 in Duluth, MN for a joint conference with Wisconsin!

2020 Transit Awards

Congratulations to all of our award winners this year!

[Check out the Awards Video on our website here!](#)



Metro Transit Employees accepting their awards



2020 Award Winners

Distinguished Career:

Dave Jacobson, SouthWest Transit
Carla Montgomery, Duluth Transit Authority

Transit Professional of the Year:

Cathleen Amick, United Community Action Partnership
Brian Funk, Metro Transit

Transit System of the Year:

Rochester Public Transit

Management Innovation:

Metro Transit for their **Transit Assistance Program**. This program allows lower income residents to use a bus or train for just \$1 per ride with a Go- To Card.

Minnesota Bus Operator of the Year:

Melanie Benson, Metro Transit



Thank you to our 2020 Vendor Members!

Thank you to our 2020 Vendor Members for continuing to support not only MPTA but transit as an essential service all over the state of Minnesota during this unpredictable year.

2020 Vendor Members:

- A&J Mobility
- Alexander Dennis Inc.
- American Seating Company
- Creative Bus Sales
- CTS Software
- Ecolane
- First Transit
- Gerflor USA
- Hogle Bus & Truck
- Kelderman Air Ride Suspension
- LHB, Inc.
- MORRYDE International Inc.
- North Central Bus & Equipment
- Optibus
- PCTrans
- Proterra
- Q'Straint
- Rosco Vision Systems
- Roush CleanTech
- Routematch Software
- Safety Vision
- Safe Fleet Bus & Rail
- Schmitt and Sons Transit
- Telin Transportation Group, LLC
- USSC Group
- Walker Parking Consultants
- Wendel Companies



Vendor Member Benefits:

- Vendor members and transit systems will be published on our website to show off your commitment to transit needs in our state.
- Opportunities to sponsor and attend events such as the Minnesota Public Transit Conference and Bus Rodeo for training.
- The option to attend events both online and in-person to meet transit professionals, learn about the latest developments impacting transit and more.
- Information on transit happenings through our InTransit newsletter, social media and more. Your company can also be featured in our newsletter.
- The ability to advocate for transit needs with elected officials at the state and federal levels.

There's still time! Become a 2020 Vendor Member here.

SMART Transit Delivered over 62,000 meals

Back in mid-March, SMART Transit wanted to offer assistance where it could in communities. This was at the beginning of the pandemic in the United States, and SMART wanted to use their resources to support those in need, but this time it would look a bit different from what they are used to - transporting people to where they need to go. They would be helping to deliver meals to the food-insecure and those in need.

This all started with some emails sent out to many of SMART's partners in the different communities they serve. SMART was able to arrange some level of meal delivery to three different counties.

"We handled the logistics in nearly all of the situations, from route design to planning who would take each route," said SMART's Transit Manager Kirk Kuchera.

Volunteer drivers were even used to help deliver to some communities.

"Delivering meals offered our drivers a great opportunity to stay busy and keep them working, but more importantly, it continued to give them a sense of purpose and allowed them to continually help those in their communities, some of which they have come to know over the years," Kuchera said.

SMART Transit staff contributed to the delivery of over 62,000 meals, with SMART buses delivering well over 55,000 meals alone.

The meal delivery process wasn't all easy, though.

"There were definitely challenges - from adding 200+ people to a delivery program

overnight to lack of volunteers, everyone pulled together and made it happen. In some cases, there were some extremely long days and some hard work put in, but overall we overcame everything that was thrown at us," Kuchera said.

The meal deliveries were done with 2,000 plus hours worked and over 15,000 miles driven, all over the course of 100 days, 70 of which meals were delivered on.

"Without a doubt this helped the community in many ways - we were able to give seniors an opportunity to stay in their homes more which allowed them to stay safe and healthy. A portion of the meals delivered were from local restaurants which were purchased from local company Hormel Foods (250 meals each day of the week) so this helped local businesses during a time of need," Kuchera said.

On two different days, SMART buses delivered over 2,000 meals to seniors each day, and at one point had 12 buses delivering meals at once spanning three different counties.

At one point the local news station, KIMT3 News, was even covering SMART Transit's great act of kindness.

Now, SMART is continuing to offer limited support to one of the local programs by delivering to the most vulnerable and disabled with one bus since most programs have their delivery systems back in place or are offering a new model that includes curbside pick-up.

Those interested in assisting in the effort to help the food-insecure can contact their local United Way or senior centers to see if volunteer opportunities are available. **11**

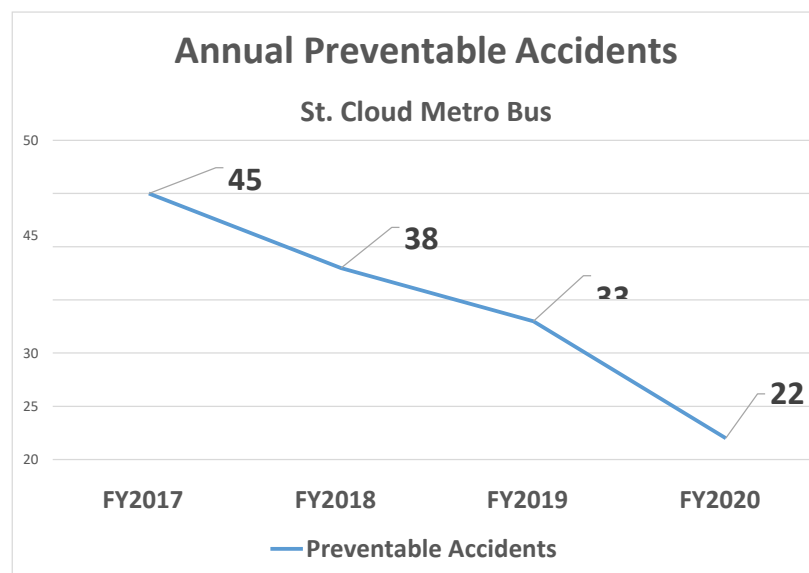
St. Cloud Metro Bus Innovates for Safety

Article Submitted by
Nate Ramacher
Marketing and
Communications
Manager
St. Cloud Metro Bus

At St. Cloud Metro Bus, the safety of customers and employees is the number one priority at all times. Metro Bus's mission to provide safe, friendly, reliable public transportation services means constantly working to reduce accidents. Using innovative technologies and programs, Metro Bus reduced preventable accidents from a total of 45 in FY2017 (Oct. - Sept.) to just 22* in FY2020, a reduction of over 50%!

Their team-led, performance-driven and employee-minded approach produced sustainable results and improved service, further positioning Metro Bus as an elite transportation provider in the State of Minnesota. These efforts ensure the safety and success of employees and allows Metro Bus to provide safe transportation to the residents of Central Minnesota.

Preventable Accident Numbers



Beginning in FY2017, Metro Bus began developing several programs as part of an Accident Reduction Package. The combined effects of these programs produced the desired results of continually reducing accident totals over the following years.

Remedial Training

As part of the Accident Reduction Package, the Metro Bus Operations and Training & Safety Departments implemented a remedial training process based on Operators' history or step in the discipline process. This reminds Operators of Metro Bus's expectations and facilitates them receiving the attention of training staff, practicing proper driving protocol and working on correcting their habits or behavior at each level.

Vehicle Back-Up Procedure

In both FY2017 and FY2018, over 60% of preventable accidents in the Metro Bus paratransit division (Dial-a-Ride) resulted from Operators not inspecting the area behind their bus prior to backing up. In early FY2018, the Metro Bus team began work on a Vehicle Back-Up Procedure. This procedure required the use of a certified spotter (CDL licensed employee or an employee trained in hand motions and appropriate backup methods) or required a complete walk-around prior to moving a vehicle in a backward motion.

This procedure also notified employees of potential additional consequences if they did not follow the procedure.

St. Cloud Metro Bus Innovates for Safety

Article Submitted by
Nate Ramacher
Marketing and
Communications
Manager
St. Cloud Metro Bus

In FY2019, preventable Dial-a-Ride accidents due to employees not checking behind their vehicle prior to moving in a backward motion decreased to 40%, a 26% reduction from the previous year!

Accident Review Committee

In FY2018, Metro Bus created an Accident Review Committee. This committee consists of a Street Supervisor (a different Supervisor than the one who responded to the accident), an Operations Manager and a member of the Training & Safety Department. Creating a team to review each accident produces a thorough, objective evaluation of each accident to determine preventability. This also allows for varied perspectives and provides all-around feedback so employees are aware of all areas of needed improvement.

Operator Training Activities (OTAs)

Each year, Metro Bus Operators are required to attend OTAs consisting of two hours of classroom training and two hours of behind the wheel assessment and practical application. This allows employees to refresh their skills and have a member of the Training & Safety staff provide encouragement, support and advice.



Accident Board

In FY2018, a digital board was installed in the Metro Bus garage providing a visual cue to help employees be more attentive to the number of days passed since a preventable accident occurred. This increases communication and awareness and creates positive, friendly competition and cooperation.

September accident report

- 1** Non-preventable
- 1** Preventable
- 1** Bus vs. car

Newsletter

Each month, employees are provided with a breakdown of the total accidents that occurred the previous month. This includes preventable accidents, non-

preventable accidents and a brief description of each type of accident. This allows employees to always know overall performance from the prior month and encourages continual improvement.

Metro Bus continues to strive for the ultimate goal of zero accidents. CEO Ryan I. Daniel shares the importance of continuous improvement, "At Metro Bus, we recognize how crucial it is to reduce accidents in order to keep our passengers, staff and equipment safe. We have achieved great gains over the last several years and still have many miles to go to be 100% accident free!"

*Service was reduced to approximately half of pre-COVID levels for about two months in FY2020, potentially affecting total accident numbers.

Big Updates at Rolling Hills Transit

Rolling Hills Transit has been taking some big strides while still coping with the pandemic.

Most recently they had four big updates as they continue to grow.

1. Acquired two transfer buses.

The long wait to get new buses during the pandemic, not only from funding issues, but also from product and part delays has taken its toll on everyone. Rolling Hills is happy to announce that they have acquired two transfer buses.

“We are very excited to have (the buses) during this time when there has been such a long wait for new buses,” said Operations Manager Melinda Fields.

2. Three Expansion routes coming soon

Similar to bus parts and bus deliveries slowing to a crawl, months ago many systems were cutting down on routes with the pressure of the pandemic.

Not anymore! Rolling Hills Transit is opening three expansions. They include the Preston/Harmony area, one in Kasson and one in Caledonia. They will be ordering buses for these route expansions soon.

But the biggest of their updates is what they are doing not only for their community, but all of Minnesota.

3. The Greater MN COVID-19 Dispatching project

Rolling Hills Transit has taken on the Greater MN COVID-19 Dispatching project.

What does this mean?



Rolling Hills Transit Buses courtesy of Melinda Fields

“Our Volunteer Driver Program is heading this and will be taking calls from all over MN from riders who are COVID positive or have COVID symptoms and need to get to medical appointments,” Fields said.

Their dispatcher will then call the STS provider for the area to arrange a ride for the client.

Many transit and transportation organizations have been searching for systems willing to help with the transportation of COVID positive patients during the current pandemic, making this not only an important update for the system, but a great service to all Minnesota communities.

4. Growth, jobs and more.

Rolling Hills Transit is still growing.

With this comes more needs that must be met and the opportunity for more jobs. The transit system recently hired a Fleet & Facilities Specialist to help with day to day operations as they grow their routes, bus numbers, what they do to help their community and more.

Keep up the great work Rolling Hills Transit! We are all learning and growing with one another, and it is always great to see a system leading the way for others.

Featured Industry Members

Optibus - A Technology Pioneer

[Optibus](#) is a cutting-edge software platform that brings much-needed innovation to the essential mobility mode at the heart of our cities: public transportation. Optibus leverages a robust combination of artificial intelligence, advanced optimization algorithms and distributed cloud computing to make public transportation smarter, better and more efficient – and ultimately nourish freedom of movement and sustainable cities.

A cloud-native SaaS company founded in 2014, Optibus powers complex transit operations in over 300 cities



around the world, planning and scheduling the movement of vehicles and drivers to improve the quality and reliability of transit service and make operations more efficient.

Optibus has been recognized by the World Economic Forum as a Technology Pioneer (2020) and by Gartner as a Cool Vendor (2018). It is headquartered in Tel Aviv and has offices in New York, Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, London and São Paulo.

(www.optibus.com | info@optibus.com)

Transit is for Everybody

Routematch by Uber is a proud supporter of the transit community and MPTA. We believe accessibility, mobility, and spontaneity are achievable for every rider, and our goal is to build mobility ecosystems that leave no person behind. It is our mission to develop human solutions that focus on people and deliver flexible and scalable tools to agencies and their riders.

One important tool we offer agencies today is automated “contactless” fare collection, which social distancing guidelines is making more relevant than ever. It provides riders and their loved ones greater convenience and safety, and also gives agencies tools to streamline reporting and administration. Future pay capabilities are also emerging to further improve fare operations.



Routematch by Uber brings together our decades of experience serving public transit agencies, with expanded rider reach and awareness, and excellent user experience. Our vision is to meet transit agencies where they are, be mindful of rider preferences, and work with agencies to bring best in class technologies. This combination holds exciting opportunities for the transit industry, which will include innovative new service models, while combining existing ones in new ways. Together, we blend powerful technology with genuine service, connecting transit agencies to their future and riders to their opportunities. Because when everyone has access to transportation, individuals, communities, and societies thrive. We look forward to working with you and ask and hope that you will help shape this journey with us.

SouthWest Transit increased express bus service to Downtown Minneapolis and U of M

**Article Submitted by:
John Haggemiller
Marketing and Public
Outreach
SouthWest Transit**

On Sept 8th we began our increased express bus service to Downtown Minneapolis and the University of Minnesota Campus. We currently have 17 routes to downtown Minneapolis that begin at 5:30 am and run in 15-minute frequencies. Eight of the morning routes make two stops at the U of M – Anderson Hall (West Bank) and Oak & Delaware. We re-opened the Carver Station last month and have four morning routes leaving that facility.

SW Prime, our local/on-demand ride service recently expanded to now include Normandale Community College. SW Prime can be booked by phone or the downloadable app and rides to campus can be booked up to 3-days in advance. SW Prime is a curb to curb, on-demand ride like that of Lyft & Uber and can bring you anywhere you need to go. Prime operates in Eden Prairie, Chanhassen, Chaska, Carver, & Victoria. SW Prime reservations are taken from 6:30am – 6:30pm M-F.

Since the start of the pandemic, we continue to do everything possible to provide safe environments for all passengers and employees. All employees are masked with temperatures checked every day. Stations are cleaned and sanitized multiple times daily and buses are sprayed hydrostatically with all touchpoints wiped after every route. The buses have state-of-the-art onboard air filtration systems that are maintained regularly. We are following all CDC guidelines regarding safe social distancing – Stations have been outfitted with distance markers on floors and passenger capacity is limited on all buses



Photo Submitted by SouthWest Transit

with additional buses ready to deploy if passenger counts get close to max. As an added layer of passenger protection, SWT is installing plexiglass seat separators in all the express service buses. These barriers on the front and backs of seats, coupled with our staggered row seating creates more of a self-contained individual riding compartment.

Giving back to the communities we serve has always been a top priority for this agency. Since early April, SWT has been working with PROP Foods & Bountiful Basket to help deliver foods to those who cannot easily access the food shelf. Both have worked out to be wonderful partnerships and the result speaks for itself.

Arrowhead modernizing its web presence

**By Tony Potter
Marketing &
Public Relations
Coordinator
Arrowhead Transit**

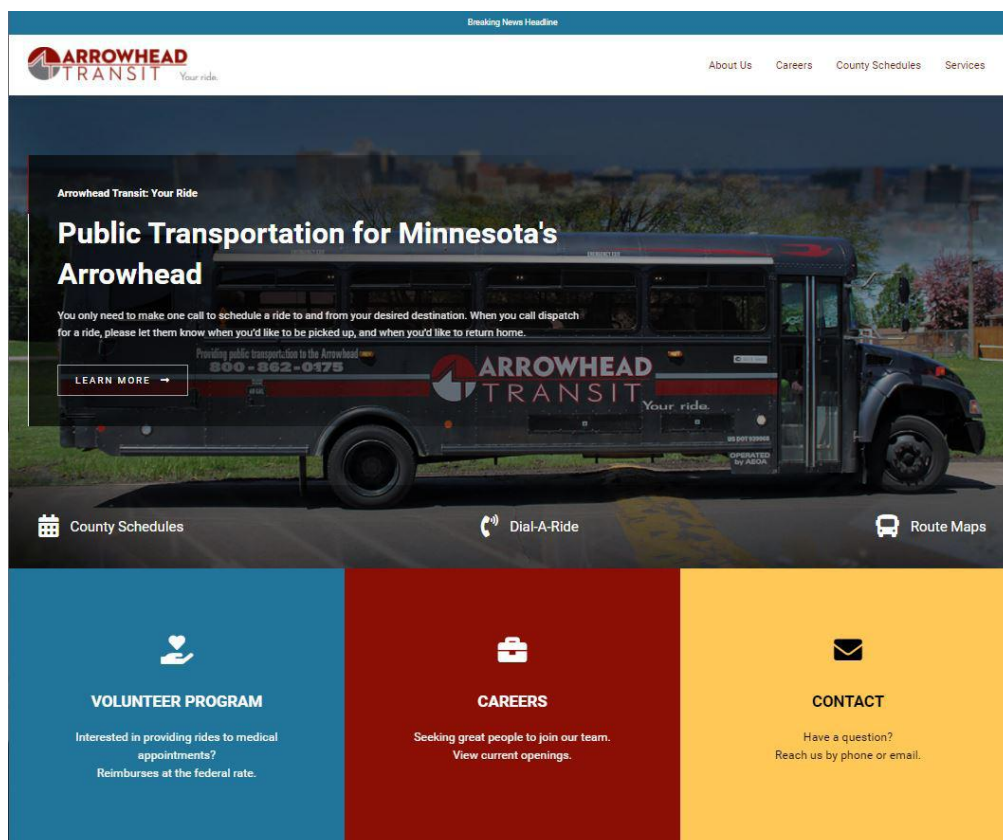
A great first impression goes a long way. In today's day and age, a website is a business's first chance to build its customer base.

Arrowhead is in the process of developing and designing its first new website in several years. The update will provide the website with a fresh, modern feel while making it user-friendly. It's expected to be launched in late fall to early winter.

Recent feedback that Arrowhead staff has received from visitors of the current arrowheadtransit.com is that it's blocky, outdated and difficult to navigate. During the past several months, strong efforts have been made to remedy all of those issues.

The improvements of the new website begin with a home page that will feature four drop-down menus and several tiles to easily navigate through the website. An updated feature of that page will be an identifiable breaking news banner located at the top of the page. This will be used to inform riders of route changes and other important information. There will also be a variety of helpful links at the bottom of the home page.

Potential and current riders will be able to learn more about the history, mission and goals of Arrowhead on the newly incorporated about us page. The contact page will be revamped to include a contact form, as well as clickable links to make a phone call or send an email.



Arrowhead modernizing its web presence

By Tony Potter
Marketing &
Public Relations
Coordinator
Arrowhead Transit

The email link will be available to all users while the phone call feature is only available when using a smartphone.

The employment opportunities landing page will list all jobs with an “apply now” button that redirects to the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency’s (AEOA) career opportunities website. There will also be a contact form for potential applicants seeking more info regarding job openings.

Both the county schedules menu and landing page will feature links to all eight counties currently served by Arrowhead. Each link will bring users to a landing page for that specific county, including its respective route info and printable brochures.

Information about Arrowhead’s services, which include Dial-A-Ride, Scheduled Rides and the Volunteer Driving Program, may be accessed from the services tab located at the top right of the homepage.

That tab will redirect users to a landing page listing three tiles, one for each service. To learn more about a specific service, simply click on the appropriate tile to be brought to a landing page featuring details about that service.

The biggest upgrade perhaps will be that of the maps. Accessible by the “route maps” button on the homepage, an interactive map of Minnesota’s Arrowhead Region will appear. The map will have markers identifying each city and/or county served by Arrowhead.

When a user clicks on a particular service area, the map will zoom in to highlight what routes are available in that area. It will also include a listing of all route times and bus fares. This differs immensely from the current website where route maps are only available by opening PDFs of the brochures.

Adding a modern feel to the website is important to Arrowhead. A news feed from Arrowhead Transit’s Facebook page will be showcased on various pages throughout the website. An entirely new feature to the website will be the addition of a YouTube widget to showcase the bus company’s recent commercials and other informational videos.

To further make the website user-friendly, it will be both Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant and have a language translator.

More features may be added to the website before it’s launched.

The website modernization team continues to monitor and review the development of the new website to ensure it provides all the necessary information to current and potential riders.

Look for the new website to launch in late 2020. An announcement will be made on Arrowhead’s social media pages prior to the launch.

DTA Partners with Local Stakeholders on Traffic Signal Priority Rollout

Article submitted by:
David Clark
Director of
Marketing
Duluth Transit
Authority

The Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) recently announced some exciting new changes along a section of Grand Avenue in the western service corridor. Several signals between Carlton Street and 59th Avenue West have been fitted with Transit Signal Priority (TSP) devices. TSP helps keep buses on time by situationally extending a green light for buses or shortening the length of a red light. This process is accomplished through communication between on-board bus technology and stationary traffic signals.

“We are very excited about the benefits of this project because it will improve travel time for thousands of passengers daily in West Duluth.” “We want to thank Alliant Engineering, the City of Duluth, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation for their contributions to making this happen,” remarked Phil Pumphrey, DTA General Manager.



File Photo Courtesy of DTA Facebook page



In addition to this TSP component are a series of bus stop changes along this section of Grand Ave. The DTA removed five current bus stops and better positioned another five to improve efficiency and take further advantage of the TSP benefits. This set of changes was rolled out on Monday, October 12th and has been met with positive feedback by stakeholders in the market.

The TSP project kicks off a full slate of system improvements planned over the coming months. Other notable items include mobile trip planning and payments, farebox upgrades, a COA initiative, and added passenger amenities. All this follows a recent successful rollout of driver protective barriers, which were installed earlier this fall to address covid-19 concerns and the general safety of DTA bus operators moving forward.

Tri-CAP's new Facility in Little Falls

Tri-CAP's new transit facility in Little Falls is expected to be completed around February 2021.

The Little Falls facility project has been in the planning stages for approximately 5 years.

"After working with architects on the conceptual design as well as with MnDOT to meet capital procurement requirements, the project was moved forward by the Tri-CAP Board of Directors for proposed construction in 2020. The footprint consists of a six-stall bus garage with connected office space," said Director of Transportation Services, Amy Christensen.

The facility was created because the one Tri-CAP currently operates out of in the Little Falls location is less than satisfactory.

"In order to properly house agency vehicles and provide an adequate environment for staff to perform their inspection, driving, and office duties, a physical plant that is conducive to bus operations is needed," Christensen said.

This new place is different from other transit facilities in that the design takes into consideration training and growth opportunities, as well as innovative technologies that connect this location to Tri-CAP's main hub in Waite Park.

"In consideration of future transit needs, this location will offer stronger connectivity and opportunities to further advance technology, streamline operations, and restore confidence in public transit," Christensen said.



The construction site for the new Little Falls Facility. Photo Courtesy of Tri-CAP.

This new facility will help Tri-CAP to achieve their goals in numerous ways. Morrison County and, more specifically, the City of Little Falls is one of the busier locations Tri-CAP Transportation serves.

"Having unique geographic features with a river that divides the City and two bridges that connect the East and West sides, make for complex scheduling needs. Complicated by rail that also runs through the City, and an expansive 10-mile radius, the Dispatch team works to meet the on-time needs of the passengers under unpredictable circumstances. Tri-CAP has long partnered with Morrison County for both public transit and volunteer driver needs and continues to respond to the emerging transit needs of that region," Christensen said.

Christensen believes that a new facility that protects the buses from the elements will promote longevity of the fleet and create opportunities to continue responding to expansion needs in that region.

Tri-Valley Assists Thief River Falls Area Food Shelf

Since May, Tri-Valley Transit has been teaming up with the Thief River Falls Area Food Shelf to help in delivering CFSP (NAPS) boxes to the community both in Thief River Falls and rural families.

Tri-Valley is working with the Director, Alice Hunt, of the Thief River Falls Area Food Shelf to receive the monthly list of deliveries. Tri-Valley dispatch then schedules and sets up the route for their 1 or 2 drivers to make the deliveries.

“The idea to start this was to help solve a problem that (there) was too many delivery requests brought on by COVID-19,” said Lizzie Vedbraaten, the transit route coordinator.

“When talking with Alice one day she voiced this problem and I said yes I think we can help with that.”

During May and June Tri-Valley delivered 80 boxes of food.

“This service helps the community in that we are able to reach more people with the Thief River Food Shelf and T.H.E Bus working together in delivering the CFSP (NAPS) boxes,” Vedbraaten said. “When talking with the drivers, Gary Anenson and Dean Lubitz, they both stated how it makes them feel as though they are a bigger part of the community that they serve as they are able to give back.”

The food delivery isn't the only thing that has changed with Tri-Valley since the beginning of the pandemic. Like many other transit facilities, they have had to adapt with the challenges.

During the pandemic they altered their Rider Policy to require riders to wear masks and to social distance on the buses. They did provide masks on the buses but it took some time to receive them from a manufacturer. Tri-Valley limited the number of riders to 4 on Class 400 buses so they could social distance. They also provided disinfectant wipes along with bleach/water solution and disinfectant sprays for the bus drivers to continue to sanitize the buses on a daily basis. The buses were thoroughly cleaned by the maintenance department on a weekly basis.

They plan to continue some if not all of these measures after the pandemic ends since this addressed a community need that will probably not go away after the pandemic.

“Tri-Valley Transit staff have been very resilient and flexible in working to provide transit service throughout our communities. The staff has done an excellent job. They have been very caring and willing to do what it takes to get people in touch with basic needs and services,” Vedbraaten said.

Tri Valley Transit's mission is to enhance the economic, social and environmental health of the communities they serve by providing public transportation services for everyone that are safe, reliable, accessible and affordable. More information can be found on their website at <https://www.trivalleytransit.org/>.

St. Cloud Metro Bus Announces Participation in APTA Health and Safety Commitment Program

Metro Bus announced Wednesday that it has joined the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) "Health and Safety Commitments Program," the public transportation industry's overarching pledge to passengers that public transit systems are taking all the necessary measures to operate safely as the nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The health and safety of passengers and Bus Operators is the most important priority for Metro Bus. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Metro Bus has worked tirelessly to keep customers safe from infection from the coronavirus on all services including Fixed Route, Dial-a-Ride, ConneX and Northstar Link. By signing on to the APTA Health and Safety Commitments Program with more than 200 other public transit systems, Metro Bus and the public transit industry are actively working to instill confidence in customers that it is committed to protecting them.

The Health and Safety Commitments Program was developed after asking transit users from across the country what measures would make them feel more confident riding public transportation amid concerns about COVID-19. From this research, the industry identified four key areas transit systems need to address to earn customers' confidence:

- Following public health guidelines from official sources
- Cleaning and disinfecting transit vehicles frequently and requiring face coverings and other protections
- Keeping passengers informed and empowered to choose the safest times and routes to ride
- Putting health first by requiring customers and employees to avoid public transit if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or feel ill

Metro Bus pledges to meet these commitments by creating specific policies that are effective for our system, our customers and our community. A key component of the Health and Safety Commitments Program is the shared responsibility of our system and our customers to follow the guidelines.



We're protecting each other.



WE'RE DOING OUR PART

Cleaning & disinfecting

YOU'RE DOING YOURS

Wearing face coverings



St. Cloud Metro Bus Announces Participation in APTA Health and Safety Commitment Program

Customers rely on us to follow these commitments, and Metro Bus relies on customers to protect themselves and others.

“We are committed to the health and safety of everyone who is connected to our service including passengers, employees and other members of the general public. APTA’s Health and Safety Commitments Program helps direct our efforts to accomplish the first directive of our Mission, which is to provide safe, reliable and friendly public transportation services,” Metro Bus CEO Ryan I. Daniel said.

Metro Bus is committed to continually addressing and implementing pillars of the Health and Safety Commitments Program. Current efforts include:

- Updates to our cleaning procedures to increase effectiveness.
- Ongoing installation of Bus Operator shields to create a safety barrier at fareboxes.
- Implementation of social distancing and mask wearing recommendations for customers and requirements for all employees.

“This program is a commitment that this industry is making to all those we serve now and to those who we look forward to serving,” said Nuria I. Fernandez, APTA Chair, and General Manager and CEO of Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. “Public transportation is and will be vital to the social and economic recovery of our nation.



St. Cloud Metro Bus Fixed Route buses entering CNG Fueling Station. Photo Courtesy of St. Cloud Metro Bus

But getting there requires us to win back our ridership and encourage new riders to view public transit as a preferred mobility choice. We believe this commitment program will help do this.”

“The program being launched today is the public transportation industry’s pledge to promote sensible policies and practices designed to keep transit users and transit employees safe during the COVID-19 crisis,” said APTA President and CEO Paul P. Skoutelas. “It is a logical extension of the innovation and commitment we have been demonstrating for the past several months – and it makes the need for at least \$32 billion in additional emergency funding that much more urgent and critical.”

Rainbow Rider Celebrates 25 Years

Rainbow Rider is celebrating 25 years of service this year.

In 25 years, Rainbow Rider has employed 170 people with 50 currently still employed. 45 county commissioners have held a place on their transit board, five Transit Directors have been employed with them, and they were assisted by four MnDOT Project Managers.

Of those people, Brenda Brittin, their current director, has worked with them for 22 of their 25 years, starting as a bookkeeper and later appointed to the Director position in 2018.

It all began on September 18, 1995.

“The first Rainbow Rider Bus put on more than 3,500 miles looking to pick up its first passenger,” Brittin said.

Since then, Rainbow Rider has provided approximately 3,291,188 rides (80,216 of those provided by a volunteer driver) while driving approximately 15,273,417 miles.

Rainbow Rider’s first budget application to MnDOT for 1995 projected operating expenses of \$211,850 and revenues of \$25,000 with 24,500 anticipated rides, but only actually provided 7,638 that first year using 9 transit buses.

“Today, we are operating on a two-year budget with projected operating expenses of \$7,493,917 and revenues of \$1,135,882 with 350,000 anticipated rides using 38 transit buses,” Brittin said.



File Photo courtesy of Rainbow Rider

As a 5311 rural transit system, Rainbow Rider provides service in Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, Todd and Traverse counties. Rainbow Rider currently has facilities in Lowry, where their administrative and dispatch offices along with its maintenance shop are stationed, as well as Alexandria and Long Prairie. They also have one vehicle in both Morris and Wheaton.

In the 25 years they have been in service they have owned 90 vehicles and provided over 3 million rides which has helped them fulfill their mission to meet transportation needs of residents in Douglas, Grant, Pope, Stevens, Todd, and Traverse Counties.

The transit company is dedicated to the highest quality of customer service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and company spirit.

It’s been an eventful 25 years for Rainbow Rider and their expansion within the counties they serve. Here’s to another 25 more.

Upcoming Events:

2021 Roadeo
Details Coming Soon...

2021 Minnesota Public Transit Joint Conference with Wisconsin
Oct. 4-6, 2021
Duluth Entertainment Convention Center
Details Coming Soon...

Join the 2021 Roadeo Committee!

The 2021 Roadeo Committee is humbly asking for volunteers to be on our planning committee. Help us to make our event great and fun for everyone.

- Vote on what you want to see in our roadeo.
- Help us brainstorm ideas, meet new sponsors, and more.
- Voice your opinion.
- Great for a resume and experience planning events and working with transit professionals.



Interested? Send us an email at Katie@transportationalliance.com



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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