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Photo Courtesy of MATBUS

### **Prairie Five RIDES among many Transit Systems providing FREE rides to vaccination sites**

Anoka County Transit, SouthWest Transit, Trailblazer Transit, Fond du Lac Transit, Moorhead MATBUS and Prairie Five RIDES are among many systems providing transportation for free to vaccination sites.

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### **Remembering the life of Eric Pearson**

Honor Eric and celebrate your friendship by sharing your stories

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### **Arrowhead Transit Expands into the Metro area with Chisago and Isanti Counties**

The expansion went into effect March 1.

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# President's Column



**MPTA President  
Ryan Daniel**

It's spring in Minnesota and that means things are heating up at the Capitol. As the harsh weather thaws, vaccine distribution is picking up steam, more federal funding has been approved and the state budget picture has become very sunny!

On behalf of the MPTA Board, I want to thank you for sending in your stories and videos about how your transit system has been adapting and stepping up to assist your communities. We're working to send those stories and videos out to local news media and local legislators so they can see first-hand how transit is serving people with food deliveries, access to essential work and medical appointments and now access to vaccination sites.

While things are starting to look up, we can't relax when it comes to fighting for transit systems. We know that recovery from this pandemic will be a long haul. It will take time for institutions and businesses to open up and for riders to return. It will be up to all of us to convince people that transit is safe and a great option for getting where they need to be. Our continued advocacy efforts will be important and we want to be a partner with you in that work.

The state budget projection has moved dramatically from a \$1.3 billion deficit to a \$1.6 billion surplus. That's a huge game changer. The additional support from COVID relief packages at the federal level has boosted the estimates for state income, sales and corporate taxes. That takes a lot of pressure off the legislature to cut areas that rely on general fund dollars in order to balance the state budget.

Given the governor's recommendation of a status quo budget for transit we want to make sure that legislators understand the importance of maintaining our state funding levels.

MPTA continues to work closely with the Office of Transit and Active Transportation on funding distribution issues, policy questions, training needs and support for events that bring everyone in transit together to learn and collaborate. We really appreciate our partnership with OTAT.

The Rodeo Committee is hard at work preparing for a great event in July in St. Cloud. With a large outdoor venue, we're looking forward to a fun and safe event that provides important training for our operators. We hope to see you there!

MPTA is also starting the planning process for the MN/WI Public Transit Conference which will be held in October in Duluth. This event always provides valuable networking, information, updates from federal and state agencies and participation from many vendors who support the conference. We're always looking for your input when it comes to the conference. Please let us know if there are topics, speakers or other requests you may have. Our goal is to host the best transit conference possible! Send me an email with any suggestions or input: [rdaniel@stcloudmtc.com](mailto:rdaniel@stcloudmtc.com)

Thank you again for your membership and support of MPTA! It's been a long year, but spring and sunnier days are here.

*Ryan I. Daniel*

# Legislative Report

## **2021 Minnesota Legislative Session** *Budget Forecast - from \$1.3B Deficit to \$1.6B Surplus*

Minnesota Management and Budget announced new forecasts for the current FY20-21 biennium and the next biennium FY22-23. While the November, 2020 forecast had projected a significant budget deficit for FY22-23 of about \$1.3 billion, the new forecast reflects a huge turn around leaving almost \$1.6 billion in surplus funds.

There had been indications that the February forecast would show an improvement over the November forecast; this change is much more dramatic than anticipated.

Governor Walz had developed his budget recommendations based on the November forecast so he will be presenting a revised budget in the coming weeks. The legislature will begin to put together budget bills and work to have them passed out of committee by the end of March.

The transportation budget may benefit from some additional general fund dollars but is not likely to change significantly in light of the new February forecast.

Transit Assistance Fund Revenues (\$ in millions)				
FY	Feb. '21	Nov. '20	\$ Change	% Change
2018 (act)	346	346	-	-
2019 (act)	361	361	-	-
2020 (act)	357	357	-	-
2021	382	387	(4.5)	-1.2%
2022	406	401	5.3	1.3%
2023	417	413	4.2	1.0%
2024	437	434	2.5	0.6%
2025	462	460	1.6	0.4%

Greater Minnesota Transit Revenues (\$ in millions)				
FY	Feb. '21	Nov. '20	\$ Change	% Change
2018 (act)	68	68	-	-
2019 (act)	70	70	-	-
2020 (act)	65	65	-	-
2021	70	70	(0.0)	-0.1%
2022	74	72	2.1	3.0%
2023	76	74	1.9	2.6%
2024	78	78	0.2	0.3%
2025	82	83	(1.1)	-1.3%

MnDOT has issued a new Transportation Funds forecast and there is pretty good news for transit funds. Assuming that the general fund appropriation for both Metropolitan Area Transit and Greater MN Transit remains at the base level, transit should see an increased level of funding with slightly better news for the Transit Assistance Fund in addition to the federal funding.

The forecast for revenue from the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) is up slightly as well as the forecast for the sales tax on motor vehicle leases (MVLST).

According to MnDOT, a Greater Minnesota Transit Account policy was developed in 2018 to provide an appropriate amount of reserves in the fund to protect against significant shifts in revenue or spending. The policy specifies the fund maintain a minimum of 10 percent of the total balance forward from the previous year. At this time, the fund is again in compliance with this policy. At the time of the November forecast the fund was not in compliance due to the immediate challenges facing public transit in Greater Minnesota.

# Legislative Report

## **Governor's Budget Recommendations**

### Metropolitan Area Transit

**General Fund base level funding** =\$89M in FY22; \$88.63M in FY23

- Metro Mobility
  - FY22: \$56.416M
  - FY23: \$55.976M
- Transit System Operations (light rail and commuter rail)
  - FY22: \$32.654M
  - FY23: \$32.654M

**•Regional Transit Capital (RTC) Bonds authorization** = \$48.4M in 2021; \$50M in 2022

- Used for replacement buses, facilities, and other capital enhancements
- Leverages federal funds
- Includes Metro Transit, Metro Mobility, Suburban Opt-outs, and Dial-a-Ride

### Greater MN Transit

**General Fund base level funding**

- FY22 - \$17.75M
- FY23 - \$17.75M

### **Transit Assistance Account**

- FY22 - \$71M
- FY23 - \$73.5M

### **Trunk Highway Fund**

- FY22 - \$952,000
- FY23 - \$952,000

### **Federal**

- FY22 - \$77.1M
- FY23 - \$42.3M

## **Bills Under Consideration**

### HF586 Volunteer Driver Definition

MPTA has been working to secure passage of legislation that would address some of the problems that have arisen for volunteer drivers being taxes on mileage reimbursement and facing higher insurance premiums from some insurance companies.

One of the issues leading to these problems has been a lack of clarity around what is a volunteer driver versus someone who drives for Uber or Lyft since that has not been clearly defined in law.

HF586 deals with this challenge by stating that a "volunteer driver" means an individual who transports persons or goods on behalf of a nonprofit entity or governmental unit in a private passenger vehicle and receives no compensation for services provided other than the reimbursement of actual expenses.

Passage of this legislation is a first step toward making it easier for volunteer drivers. MPTA is also working to enact a state tax break for volunteer drivers as well as making changes at the federal level to allow volunteer drivers to be paid at the mileage reimbursement rate used by businesses.

### HF1306 Administrative Citations for Fare Evasion

This bill modifies the penalty for some transit fare nonpayment violations, to allow issuance of an administrative citation as an alternative to a criminal citation administered through the judicial process.

An effect of the bill is to create two separate options to enforce fare-related violations:



# Legislative Report

(1) as a misdemeanor, which is currently treated as a payable offense that could potentially follow a judicial process in the courts and that carries a fine and court surcharge totaling \$175 (with other fees potentially applying); or (2) through an administrative citation administered by the Metropolitan Council, with a fine amount that must be at least \$35 but is determined by the council, potentially with an escalating structure for failure to pay or repeat offenses. A single fare violation could only be enforced through one or the other of these options.

## **Bill Introduced – Not Moving**

SF75 Public transit statewide 25 cent fare establishment; public transit fares elimination study requirement; appropriation

This bill would mandate that all transit fares in both Greater Minnesota and in the metropolitan area could not exceed 25 cents. The authors intend that the state would backfill the lost revenue. If appropriate revenue is not provided this could negatively impact the bottom line for transit system losing fare revenue. This might also negatively impact contract revenues. We would want to see a dedicated source of replacement funding, not general funds that we will have to fight to protect and increase in the future.

## **Federal Funding**

The passage of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 will translate into a huge turnaround for the State of Minnesota as well as providing additional funding for transit systems around the country.

The November, 2020 budget forecast for the state projected a general fund budget deficit of around \$1.3 billion, largely due to the impact of the pandemic.

Legislators, advocates and the governor all approached the 2021 session, assuming that their main job would be balancing the budget to compensate for the significant loss of tax revenue. However, better than expected economic activity combined with major funding assistance from the federal government has produced a dramatic change from the \$1.3 billion deficit to a \$1.6 billion surplus. Now, the governor needs to revise his budget recommendations and everyone is quickly moving to discussions about how to spend additional funding even if most of the dollars are one-time funding.

Both the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) of 2021, passed in December, and the proposed funding in the American Rescue Plan were considered in Minnesota's most recent economic forecast, which project the state would have a \$1.6 billion surplus going into the next two-year budget.

State Management and Budget Commissioner James Schowalter noted, "This federal impact is going to increase consumer spending, it's going to increase business activity which in turn increases taxable activity in Minnesota, which results in the revenues."

However, the Feb. 26 forecast did not take into consideration what now appears to be a major distribution of cash to the state: money that can not only cover lost revenues but pay for pandemic-related costs already covered by the state as well as pay for any future state programs related to COVID-19 relief. Minnesota lawmakers have appropriated around \$750 million in state funds to respond to the pandemic for costs, such as help for the health care system and aid to businesses.

# Legislative Report

Minnesota is expected to receive \$4.72 billion from the federal government. Of that total, \$2.6 billion will go directly to the state government while \$2.1 billion will go to local governments in Minnesota. A separate allocation of \$20 billion will be sent to the nation's tribal governments.

For transit systems, the American Rescue Plan provides \$30.5 billion. This follows the \$25 billion provided in the CARES Act and the \$14 billion provided in the CRRSA bill.

The \$30.5 billion for transit includes:

- \$26.09 billion for urbanized area formula grants;
- \$317 million for rural area formula grants;
- \$50 million for mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities grants;
- \$100 million for non-urbanized intercity bus program recipients;
- \$25 million for planning grants;
- \$2.21 billion in grants for recipients in need of financial assistance to maintain operations over and above the aid that has been provided; and
- \$1.68 billion for qualifying projects in the CIG Program, which includes \$250 million for Small Starts projects and \$1.43 billion for New Starts and Core Capacity projects. An APTA analysis found 23 projects would be eligible for these funding allocations.

A primary objective of the \$30.5 billion of emergency transit funding is to ensure that public transit agencies receive sufficient funding under this bill, when combined with their prior COVID-19 transit allocations pursuant to the CARES Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), to equal **132 percent** of urbanized areas' public transit operating costs.

## Minnesota

### CARES Act

- \$227M Metropolitan Area Transit
- \$54M Greater MN Transit (5311 funds - \$40M)
- \$27M 5307 funds

### CRRSA

- \$185M Metropolitan Area Transit
- \$14.6M Greater MN Transit
- \$5M Duluth Transit Authority
- \$2.2M St. Cloud Metro Bus

### American Rescue Plan (APTA Estimate)

- \$313M Metropolitan Area Transit
- \$10M Duluth
- \$7.5M St. Cloud
- ? 5311 Allocation
- Southwest Light Rail project will receive about \$30 million of additional CIG funding

	CARES Act	CRRSA	Rescue Plan
5307 Urbanized	\$22.69B	\$13.26B	\$26B
5311 Rural	\$2.4B	\$678.2M	\$317M
5310 Elderly		\$ 50M	\$ 50M
CIG Program			\$1.68B
Financial Asst Grants			\$2.20B

# Legislative Report

## Congressionally Designated Projects

Committee on Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro [announced that the Committee will accept Community Project Funding requests](#) (i.e., earmarks) from Members of Congress for the upcoming FY 2022 appropriations bills. Each Member of Congress will be limited to 10 Community Project Funding requests. To be considered for inclusion, Members of Congress must show that a project has community support and submit a financial disclosure statement demonstrating no financial interest in the project.

For more information on the Community Project Funding process, please see the [House Appropriations Committee Guidelines on FY2022 Community Project Funding](#).

In addition, on March 3, House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter A. DeFazio (D-OR) and Highways and Transit Subcommittee Chairwoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) issued a [press release](#) announcing that Members of Congress will be able to submit requests for highway and transit project designations in the next surface transportation authorization bill. The Committee is expected to issue guidance on this process later this month.

## U.S. Department of Transportation Announces \$180 Million Funding Opportunity for Low or No Emission Transit Vehicles & Facilities

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced the availability of up to \$180 million in competitive grant funds through a [Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\) for FTA's Low or No Emission \(Low-No\) Grant Program](#).

The [Low-No Program](#) helps eligible project sponsors purchase or lease low- or no-emission vehicles and supports facilities that use advanced technologies to provide cleaner, more energy efficient transit operations in communities across the country. This year's NOFO will prioritize applications with an environmental justice component as well as those that will support workforce development activities to help America's transit workers succeed.

Complete proposals must be submitted electronically (funding opportunity FTA-2021-001-LowNo) through the GRANTS.GOV "APPLY" function by April 12, 2021.



# Featured Industry Members

## About GILLIG LLC

GILLIG is the leading manufacturer of heavy-duty transit buses in the United States. We offer a portfolio of clean energy propulsions including zero-emission battery electric, diesel-electric hybrid, near-zero emission compressed natural gas and clean-diesel, all designed on the proven GILLIG Low Floor platform to maximize fleet commonality. Since 1890, our dedicated employees have been supporting customers and delivering on promises to improve quality of life through transformative mass transit solutions.

## Jefferson Lines: Your #1 Bus Experience

Jefferson Lines has been Your #1 Bus Experience for over 100 years. Family-owned and operated, Jefferson is one of the nation's largest motorcoach operators. Through valuing community, convenience, and innovation, Jefferson Lines has grown its scheduled service to 14 states throughout America's Heartland with charters in Minnesota and Montana and connections to over 3,000 locations across the United States.

Jefferson established an early reputation by being an innovative problem solver of pertinent issues within the industry. Starting with introduction of multi-passenger buses after World War I to acquiring a fleet of snow plows to keep roads clear during the 1920s; supporting war efforts by providing military transportation for servicemen in the 40's; to being one of the first motorcoach companies with on-board Wi-Fi and bus tracker technology.



From initial design through final assembly, each GILLIG bus is designed and built by American workers in Livermore, California, who are committed to building and supporting the safest and most reliable transit buses in the United States. GILLIG buses are known for their unmatched quality and have earned their reputation as the lowest-cost buses to maintain and operate. Our products help reduce congestion, contribute to a cleaner environment and provide mobility to all. GILLIG is also proud to create American jobs and recycle tax dollars back into the community to further support public transportation. Further information about GILLIG can be found at [www.gillig.com](http://www.gillig.com).



The entrepreneurial spirit that defined the company in years past, remains strong today. Jefferson continues to grow as an independent bus company with a focus on convenience and value by connecting communities, civic institutions and transportation partners. Its strong reputation continues to be founded in the belief that every community and every customer deserves safe, convenient, and affordable transportation that exceeds their expectations.

Jefferson continues to look for ways to keep passenger experience safe and convenient. Jefferson Lines was one of the first bus companies to reduce the seats sold on buses to provide better social distancing for passengers during COVID-19.



# Prairie Five RIDES among many Transit Systems providing FREE rides to vaccination sites

Many Transit systems statewide announced that they will be assisting with transportation to and from vaccination sites including Anoka County Transit, SouthWest Transit, Trailblazer Transit, Fond du Lac Transit, Moorhead MATBUS and Prairie Five RIDES. This month, MPTA was able to sit down with Emily Castaneda of Prairie Five RIDES for a Q&A about all of what went into this decision

## **1. Why did your system decide to offer free rides to those getting covid vaccines?**

For many residents in our communities, transportation may be the obstacle standing between them and their health. COVID-19 has had a great impact on all of us and providing a free ride to a vaccination site is a small way in which we can ease one person's life and also do our part in protecting our communities' health against COVID.

## **2. How does the process work?**

Passengers can simply call in as if they were scheduling any city bus transportation

## **3. Can anyone ride with those on their way to their vaccine appointments?**

Yes, passengers on their way to vaccination sites may bring attendants to assist them in arriving safely.

## **4. How do you think this will help the community?**

We hope that by providing free rides, it will help individuals and communities as a whole stay healthy and protected against the virus while also helping vaccinations sites get more people to their service faster.



## **5. How did you implement this system to help transit riders get to vaccination appointments?**

This decision was made early last week, we have almost all of our drivers currently vaccinated with their first shot and round two starts this week. Since we are running this in conjunction with our public transit the only thing that changes is, we won't be charging for these rides.

## **6. Why do you think this is important?**

We think this is important because for many of our passengers public transit is essential for them to reach basic needs. We are offering these rides for free to make sure that anyone who wants to receive the vaccine can arrive at the site with ease and peace of mind.

## **7. What is your goal with this new service?**

To be of service to our passengers and communities.

## **8. Tell me about how the pandemic has impacted Prairie Five RIDES.**

Throughout the pandemic, the safety of our drivers and passengers has been our primary concern.

# Prairie Five RIDES among many Transit Systems providing FREE rides to vaccination sites

Although we are continuing to run at 50% capacity, we strive to accommodate as many rides as possible to ensure everyone has the opportunity to reach essential appointments, shopping, etc.

## 9. What steps has your system taken to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic?

Running at 50% capacity, requiring face masks be worn by drivers and passengers, installing plexiglass on vehicles to protect drivers, disinfecting vehicles throughout the day

## 10. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about transit or where people can get more information about your system and this service?

We would like any potential or current passengers to know that we are available and striving to accommodate all ride requests with their health and safety at the forefront. To access our information and to find out more about Prairie Five and Prairie five RIDES, please visit our webpage at [www.Prairiefive.org](http://www.Prairiefive.org) or follow us on Facebook, as we constantly are sending out updated information about the Prairie Five RIDES program on Facebook.

**With transit systems all over the state working to resolve issues created by the pandemic such as the need for increased cleaning, help with food delivery and transporting people to COVID testing sites, to where we are now with transit assisting in the transportation of people to and from vaccination sites, bus systems have been adaptable and ready to help face the challenges amid the pandemic. Transit systems are now critical for helping people who can't drive to get to vaccination sites. Transit funding needs to be continued and supported by the legislature.**

### RIDES FOR VACCINATIONS



Trailblazer Transit will offer transportation at **NO COST** to the customers for any rides related to a COVID-19 vaccination. Caretakers and children may also ride along at no cost. Customers will need to schedule their vaccination appointment and then contact Trailblazer to schedule transportation. Rides for vaccinations are scheduled subject to bus availability and are coordinated with other rides in normal fashion.

Please call toll-free 1-888-743-3828 to ask any questions and to schedule your transportation.

**Our Buses are Clean, Safe and Comfortable!**

**1-888-743-3828 • [www.TrailblazerTransit.com](http://www.TrailblazerTransit.com)**

### If You Have Forgotten Your Mask



**We are Happy to Supply One for You.**

# New Ulm City council moves forward with new bus service

## Story Courtesy of the New Ulm Journal

NEW ULM - The New Ulm City Council approved moving forward with a fixed-route bus service for Brown County.

The city is looking at a fixed-route bus service for residents, employees, visitors and students. The city has partnered with Brown County Heartland Express, the transit service provider that operates demand-response service within New Ulm and all of Brown County.

The fixed-route bus service would run on a set schedule with stops located at major local destinations along a set route through the community.

City Manager Chris Dalton said this was not about approving the specific bus route, but to approve moving forward with it to let Brown County present it to the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Brown County is in the process of putting together its proposed transportation budget for MnDOT. As part of the budget, they would like to present MnDOT with a new fixed route bus service.

Draft routes have been created, but the final route is to be determined with help from Heartland Express. The proposed roundtrip loop would be no more than 90 minutes. If approved by MnDOT, the City would be responsible for 15% of the route cost and have a two-year commitment. The rider fee could help cover the 15% share. The city would also be responsible for advertising and signing the route.

After the first two-year period the city would be responsible for a 20% match for a new bus purchase.

Councilor Larry Mack where the funds for the project would come from and whether the money would be set aside for the bus purchase.

Dalton said the bus route would be a 2022 project and would be included in that year's budget. Money set aside for the bus would depend on rider usage.

Mack said he was contacted by a person excited about the bus route, but they wanted to know if it would be a cash or token-based system.

Dalton said it will likely be a cash-based fee to start but could move to token or transit pass later.

Councilor Les Schultz said he was excited about the process. Based on responses he received, most wanted the roundtrip loop to be an hour.

Schultz also asked if there was a veteran discount.

Brown County Transit Director for Heartland Express Pat LaCourse said no discount is offered in Brown County, but it was a possibility. LaCourse said there might be funding available through Veteran Services to assist with it.

LaCourse said it will take time to integrate the bus route. The first step was MnDOT approval. LaCourse said MNDOT was favorable to this project, but the city would likely not hear back on approval until June or July.

Schultz made the motion to forward the fixed-route bus service for Brown County to present to MNDOT. The motion was unanimously approved.

# Meet DTA's Interim General Manager

Duluth Transit Authority said a tearful goodbye to former General Manager, Phil Pumphrey, after he was reassigned to a new transit system. Now, Rod Fournier is serving as the Interim General Manager for DTA while the dust settles. Read on to learn more about him!

## **1. What is your role with DTA?**

My current role is “interim” General Manager at the DTA

## **2. What have you done for transit in the past?**

Previously at the DTA I served as the Director of Scheduling, Director of Operations, and Assistant General Manager.

## **3. Why do you continue to work in transit?**

Transit is the ultimate customer service industry and I love the evolving technologies to help create great rider experiences.

## **4. What are your current goals with DTA?**

Our current goals at the DTA are to complete our current Comprehensive Operational Analysis which we have named “The Better Bus Blueprint”, and implement the recommended service changes that come from that.

## **5. Why do you think transit is important to our community?**

Transit is a core service in any community and is crucial to providing equal access to education and jobs.



## **6. Is there anything you'd like to say to Phil for his years of service at DTA?**

The DTA would like to thank Phil for his service at the DTA and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

## **7. Tell me about yourself.**

I am a life long transit “geek” and started working at the DTA 33 years ago as a driver and have enjoyed every minute. The professionalism and dedication of our staff is what makes the DTA such a great public transit agency.

## **8. What do you like to do outside of work?**

I enjoy all forms of auto racing, spending times outdoors at a lake, and watching my kids become successful adults.

## **9. Who would be the best person to contact now that Phil is gone to get more information on DTA and transit happenings?**

The best contact would be our Marketing Director Dave Clark or myself.



# Keep an Eye out for MPTA Videos on Transit Amid the Pandemic

**Transit has continued to serve Minnesotans Amid the Pandemic. We want to show everyone all transit is doing to serve communities.**

Keep an eye on MPTA's social media for a video series on everything transit systems across Minnesota have done to support our communities.

## **Video topics include:**

- Food delivery
- Cleaning, spacing and PPE,
- A General overview of everything transit has done
- System-specific videos

## **And more!**

**Make sure to like, comment and share our videos.**

We need to encourage our communities to support transit, as transit has supported them when they needed us most.

**Send the videos to your family, friends, legislators and more!**



**Check out the latest MPTA videos here!**

# Arrowhead expanding to metro area

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

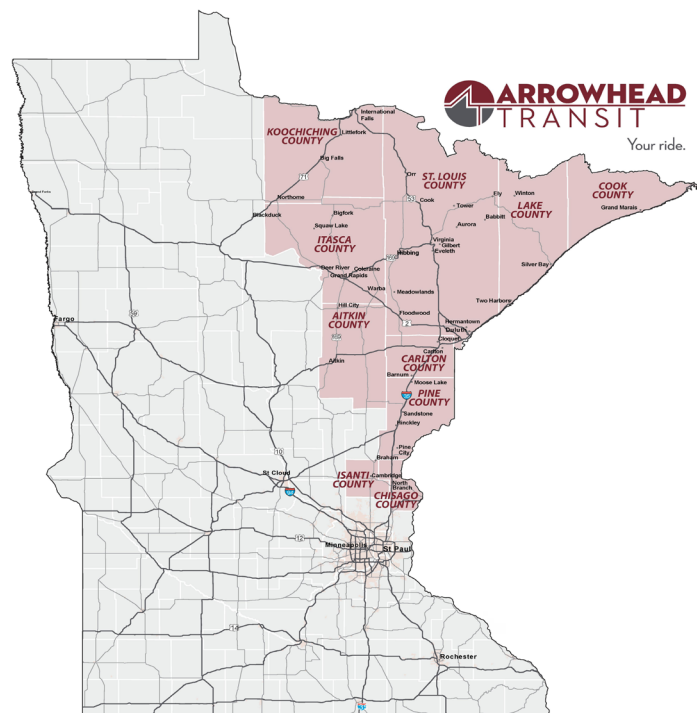
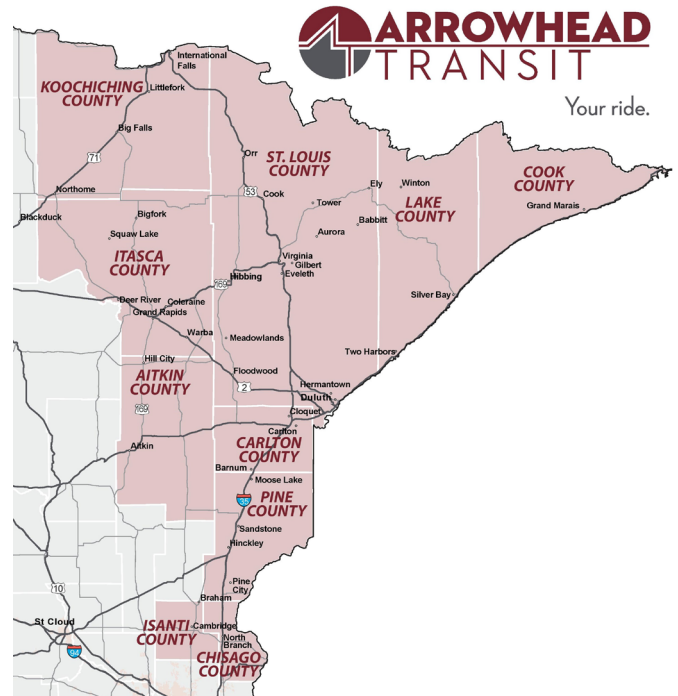
Arrowhead has extended its service area, and now offers public transportation in both Chisago and Isanti counties. The expansion went into effect March 1.

The service change is in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and Heartland Express, which previously provided transportation services in those communities. Arrowhead offers Dial-A-Ride, Scheduled Rides and a Volunteer Driver Program in both Chisago and Isanti counties.

The bus routes offered by Arrowhead are identical to what was available through Heartland Express. Those routes include: Cambridge Dial-A-Ride, Cambridge to Brahm, Cambridge to Isanti, Cambridge to North Branch, Cambridge to Princeton, North Branch Dial-A-Ride, North Branch to Pine City and South Chisago County.

In the near future, Arrowhead will consider modifying the services offered in both Chisago and Isanti counties by evaluating its operations and seeking community input.

Bus fares and schedules are listed by visiting [www.arrowheadtransit.com](http://www.arrowheadtransit.com) and clicking on the county schedules tab.





# Metro Transit On the Clock/Off the Clock: John Coleman Jr.

By John Komarek  
Thursday, February 6, 2020  
[Metro Transit Rider's Almanac Blog](#)

**Name:** John Coleman Jr.  
**Lives:** Minneapolis  
**Job:** Bus Operator  
**Garage:** Heywood  
**Years of service:** 32

## How did you come to work at Metro Transit and what do you do?

When I was 21 years old and in college, my first son Jurell was born. To provide for my family, I dropped out and found work at Metro Transit. What drew me here was great pay and benefits. I thought I was going to be here for a few years and now I've been here half my life. This job has helped me provide for my sons Jurell and Jhamar and buy a house. And, today, I'm one of the most senior bus operators in my garage.

## What do you like the most about being "On the Clock"?

The best thing about being a bus operator is that the world comes to you. A bus is a place where people from all walks of life encounter each other. When I'm driving, I can interact with people with different backgrounds, ethnicities, and languages. In one day, you can meet a doctor on their way to work or an immigrant from a far-away country. Driving a bus can be like a mobile school, everyone has stories and information to share, if you're willing to talk to them. Some riders even suggest books, which I read voraciously during breaks, especially if they're non-fiction books about history.



## What are your favorite activities when you're "Off the Clock"?

Due to my baritone voice and love of singing, my nickname around the garage is "Barry White." I credit my dad for my love of music and my talent. He was a blues singer from New Orleans who re-located to Minneapolis. My dad was my favorite singer and I think he had a million-dollar voice.

For the last four years and counting, I've performed "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," or the Black National Anthem at Heywood to celebrate Black History Month. It's truly an honor to sing this song each February. The spirit beckons me to do something that can help give a voice to millions who struggled and sacrificed to make life better for me. When I sing this, it's my small contribution and recognition of their struggle, from the sacrifices of people generations ago to my own father who recently passed away.

**[See a video of John Coleman Jr. Singing here!](#)**

# In Memory of Eric Pearson



By now, you've all likely heard the sad news of our dear friend Eric Pearson's passing, and if not; please see link [Eric's Obituary](#) and attachment shared by Braun.

We'd like to honor Eric and celebrate our friendship by inviting you to share your stories using the below Video connection/instruction. All videos will be sent through to Braun and consolidated, then shared with his family at a Memorial Celebration in May (5/8) to let them know how much Eric meant to ALL of us and the impact he had on our Transportation Industry. He will greatly missed!

- Use of phones is good, please shoot horizontally (no vertical videos please).
- 30 sec. or less (if possible) - I know this could be difficult since many of us have really good stories, but due to the number of people sharing, the time will add up quickly (Ex. 30 sec. X 50 people = 25 minutes of video time)

- Deadline: All videos MUST be sent in by March 15, so Braun has time to process and put it all together (their goal is to complete by early April)

- Best way to send will be to use Microsoft OneDrive or [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com). We Transfer is best option. Tom Jones is the contact, so Log In to (and/or sign up) to We transfer and email address to send video is [Tom.Jones@braunability.com](mailto:Tom.Jones@braunability.com).

The Pearson family is currently deciding how best to memorialize and celebrate Eric's life amid the constraints of the pandemic. We will share information as it's made available. At this time, we pause to honor his memory and ask that you keep his family in your prayers as they mourn his loss."

Pearson was well known amongst MPTA members. He is regarded as a nice and easy-to-work with soul with a sense of humor. He will be deeply missed. MPTA extends their deepest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Eric Pearson.





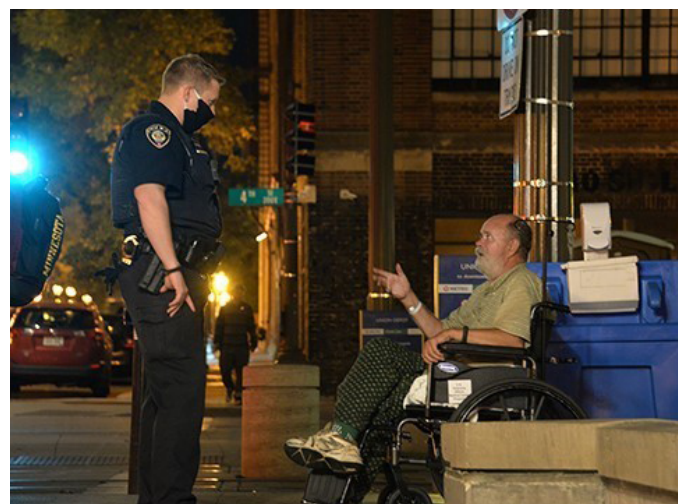
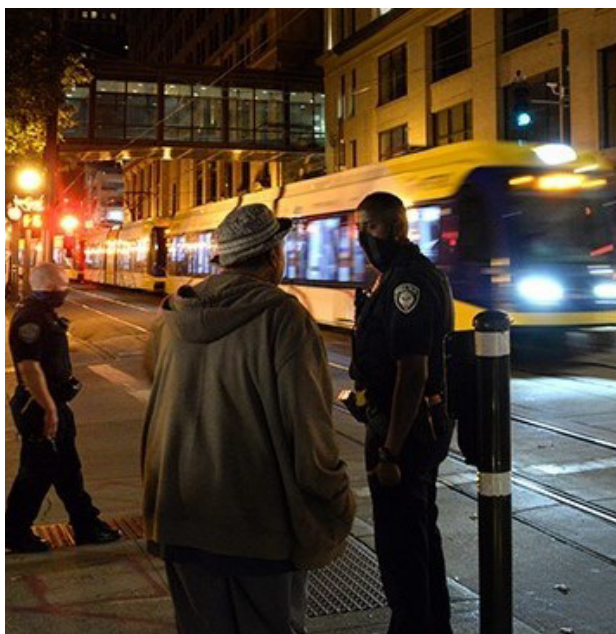
# Transit Police help move nearly 400 people into permanent housing

**By: Laura Baenen**  
**Metro Transit**  
**Senior Communications Specialist**

Nearly 400 people have found permanent housing in the two years since the Metro Transit Police Department and the Metropolitan Council's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) partnered to help those sheltering on transit. The first move-in facilitated by the partnership occurred on Feb. 6, 2019.

"The partnership between MTPD and HRA has been nothing but amazing," said Capt. Brooke Blakey, who was instrumental in creating the department's Homeless Action Team (HAT) in early 2018.

HAT is a dedicated group of officers and staff who spend their nights on light rail vehicles building trust by providing food, clothing and other assistance. The team also has special vans to transport people to temporary shelters and do initial health screenings.



The partnership with the HRA has allowed HAT members to refer some of the people they encounter to the HRA's federally funded rental assistance program (the vouchers are being directed to adults ages 18 to 61 who have a disability and have previously engaged with Metro Transit police or other service provider).

After a referral, HRA coordinators help individuals find housing and adjust to their new living situation by providing advice on paying bills, housekeeping, and setting boundaries.

Between February 2019 and February 2021, the HAT team referred 161 households to the HRA, collectively moving nearly 400 people into safe housing.

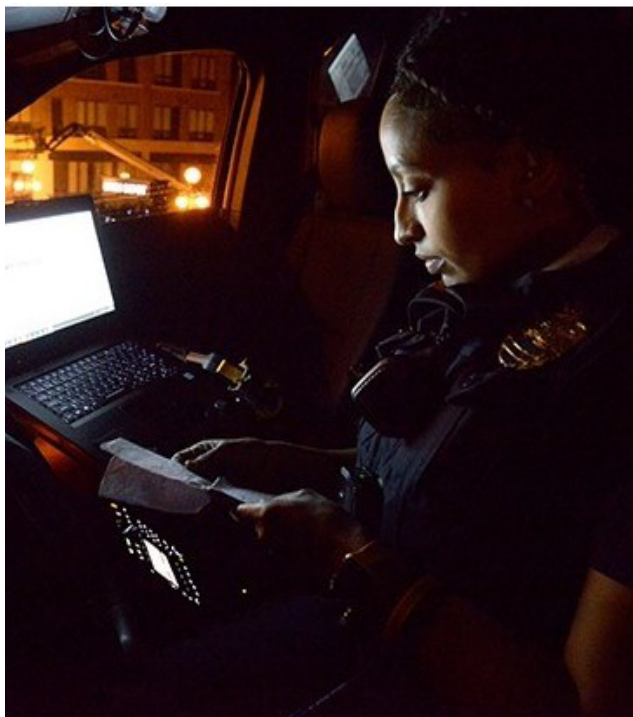
While homelessness is a common issue in the transit industry, the coordination between police, the HRA, local and state agencies and service providers is considered rare, nationally.

"I think you're on the cutting edge of this, working to get the homeless some help so they don't keep coming back," said Dan Boyle a San Diego, Calif.-based transit consultant who has studied the response to homelessness by agencies across the country.

# Transit Police help move nearly 400 people into permanent housing

In September 2020, the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and seven chamber partners recognized the shared effort to move people into safe housing with a Local Government Award. The organizations credited transit police and HRA staff for continuing to check on past referrals while expanding their reach, and said: "Once you are able to change the trajectory for one person in a family, others start to see that change is possible."

The HAT team currently includes officers Sgt. Tim Lawrence, Capt. Brooke Blakey, officers **Katherine Kompelien**, **Beverly Rodriguez**, **Daniel Schmit** and **Quentin Waterkamp**, and civilians **Carol LaFleur** and **Alexis Myers**.



[Learn more about the Council's efforts to expand affordable housing.](#)

## Upcoming Events:

### **2021 Rodeo**

July 9-10, 2021

Best Western Kelly

Inn & Suites in

St. Cloud, MN

Details Coming Soon...

### **2021 Minnesota Public Transit Joint Conference with Wisconsin**

Oct. 4-6, 2021

Duluth Entertainment  
Convention Center

Details Coming Soon...



## 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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