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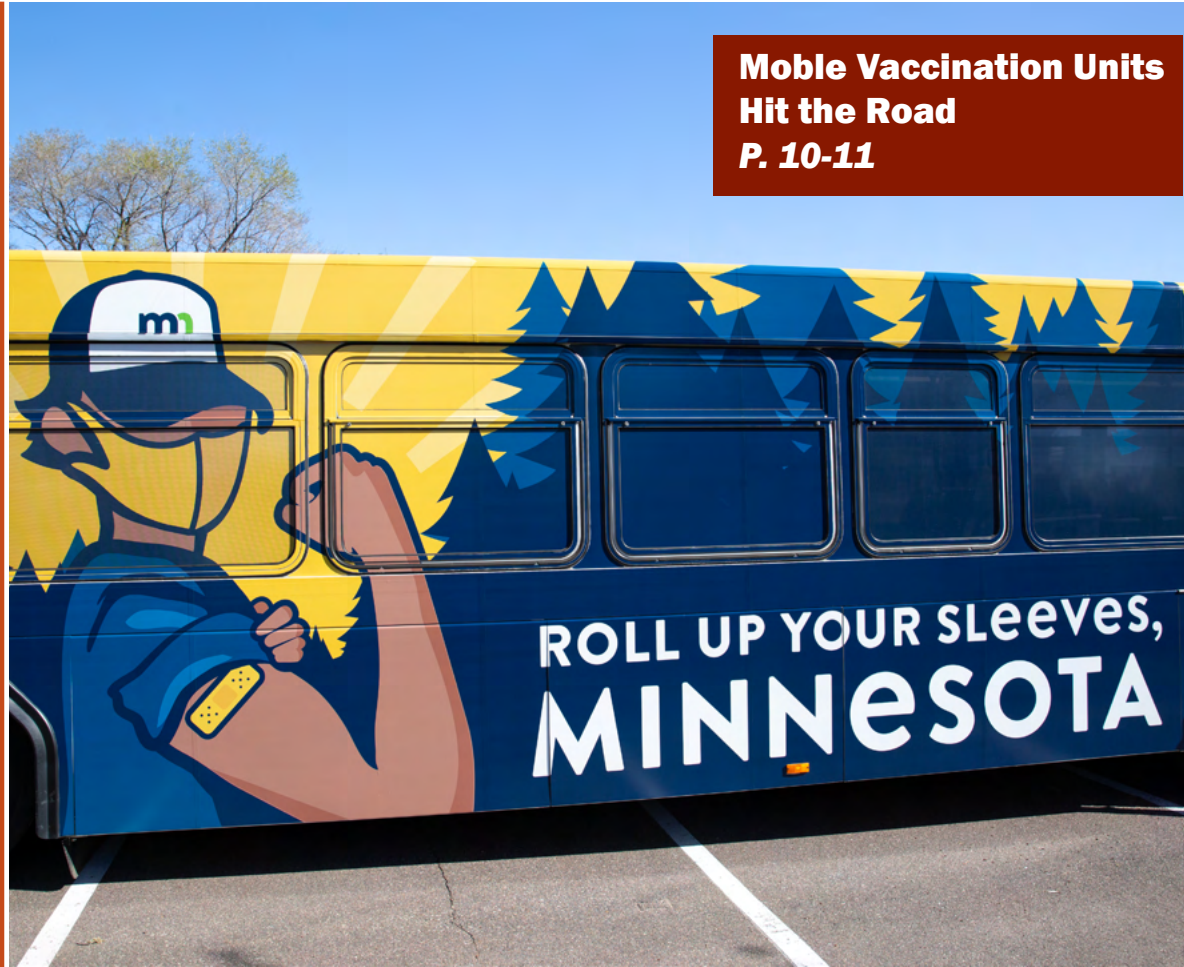
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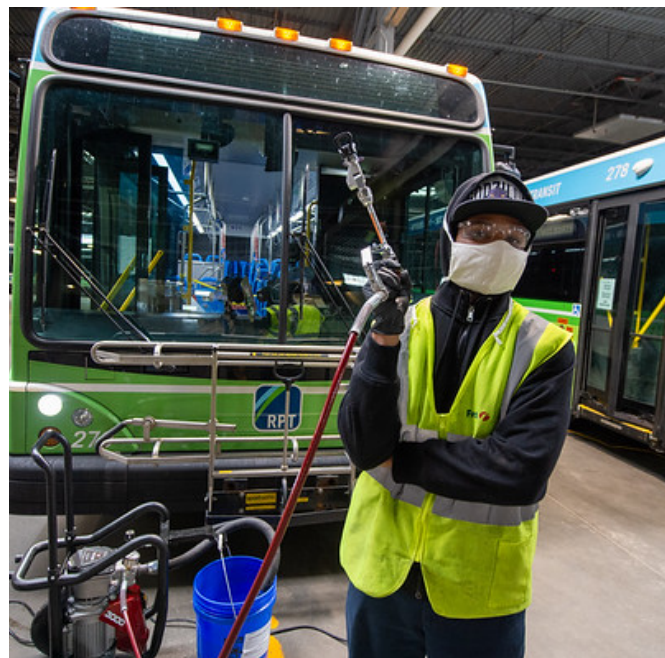
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**Cover photos courtesy of MN Dept. of Health and
Rochester Public Transit**



Celebrating Transit Worker Appreciation Day

March 18, 2021 was Transit Worker Appreciation Day. MPTA celebrated with a series of videos recognizing transit systems statewide for everything they did amid the pandemic.

How did YOU celebrate?

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President's Column



**MPTA President
Ryan Daniel**

“normal” with riders returning to use our services. Check out all the details on the MPTA web site.

I want to thank everyone who serves on the planning committee for the Bus Rodeo. It takes a lot of work to develop the agenda, manage the course and plan a great experience for all of the participants. It helps to have experienced transit folks leading the way as well as great staff. I want to send a special shout-out to Katie Leibel who has been doing great work as Program Coordinator for MPTA. We want to thank her for her efforts as she moves on to a new job and wish her all the best.

MPTA continues to lobby on your behalf as legislators and the governor make important decisions impacting transit funding and transit policies. MPTA has worked hard to push for changes to policies related to volunteer drivers and continues to speak out regarding the critical role transit systems are playing during the pandemic and how important transit service will be as the state recovers. Thank you for sending your stories, your photos and your videos. Thank you for connecting with your local legislators and local elected officials. It makes a difference.

As we look toward the fall, we are optimistic that more activities will be happening around the state and more transit service will be needed.

We hope you're planning to join us at the Bus Rodeo in beautiful St. Cloud July 9th and 10th! We're excited about seeing friends and colleagues in person as we host this great annual event. The event will be carefully following all COVID safety protocols and will provide a great opportunity for training and information sharing as we all focus on getting back to some level of

We can all benefit from sharing our experiences and learning more about how other transit systems are preparing for the future. This year's joint Minnesota/Wisconsin Public Transportation Conference in October will allow all transit professionals to get together for important training sessions, updates, networking and sessions on best practices during this challenging time. We can't wait to see you at the transit conference in Duluth.

Thank you again for your membership and your support of MPTA. Working together and sharing our experiences will allow all of us to get through this difficult time and come out stronger. Please let us know if we can be of assistance. We hope to see you soon!

Ryan I. Daniel



MPTA
MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

Join us for the 2021 Bus Roadeo St. Cloud, MN

Minnesota Public Transit Association



July 9-10
2021

Bus Roadeo

St. Cloud, MN

Registration \$175

Registration coming soon www.mpta-transit.org

Friday-

6:00 p.m. Pizza Party Contestant Mixer

Saturday -

5:00 a.m. Breakfast

7:30 a.m. Competition course including:

- wheelchair securement
- left hand turn
- rear duals clearance
- Lunch catered noon-1

7:00 p.m. Banquet Dinner and Awards



Connect with us! @MNPublicTransit



651-659-0804

Legislative Report

The 2021 Legislative Session is heading into the home stretch with the regular session scheduled to end on May 17th. The big question is whether or not legislators will complete work on a two-year budget and adjourn by that date. A new two-year budget needs to be signed into law prior to July 1st, the start of the 2022 fiscal year, in order to avoid a state government shutdown. Most political observers are expecting the legislature and governor to need a special session after May 17th in order to complete their work.

One of the complicating factors is the passage by Congress of the American Rescue Plan providing an additional \$2.5 billion to the state of Minnesota. This amount is in addition to funding specifically for transit and for local governments. Legislators would like to have some influence over how the \$2.5 billion in federal funds are spent. If the legislature is not in session, the governor will have the power to decide the use of the dollars. At this point in time, state officials are waiting for guidance from the federal government on exactly how the \$2.5 billion may be spent and what expenditures are not permissible.

Some legislators would like to have the one-time federal funds used for capital projects that may otherwise be funded with bonds. The Minnesota Senate released a proposal for the federal funds that directs about \$1 billion in federal funds to transportation projects.

The House and Senate have passed their versions of the transportation budget for the coming biennium. The bills are very different in many ways, especially in terms of funding for metropolitan area transit. The Senate bill dramatically cuts the general fund appropriation for metropolitan transit with the assumption that federal funds will provide the resources necessary to keep transit operating in the metro area for the next several years. The House bill includes an increase in MVST as well as a new ½ cent metro sales tax that significantly increases funding for transit.

Transportation Budget Bill (HF1684/SF1159)

Office of Transit	Gov Rec FY22-23	Gov Rec FY24-25	House FY22-23	House FY 24-25	Senate FY22-23	Senate FY24-25
General Fund	\$34,498	\$34,498	\$37,896	\$34,498	\$36,362	\$36,362
Trunk Highway	\$1,904	\$1,904	\$1,904	\$1,904		
Total Transit and Active Transportation	\$36,402	\$36,402	\$39,802	\$36,402	\$36,362	\$36,362
Auto Parts Sales Tax			\$1,456	\$14,546		
MVST increase			\$3,077	\$4,739		
Met Council						
Transit Operations	\$65,308	\$65,308	\$66,422	\$65,372		\$32,659
Metro Mobility	\$112,392	\$111,952	\$112,392	\$111,952	\$10	\$55,981
Total Met Council	\$177,700	\$177,260	\$178,814	\$177,324	\$10	\$88,640
Metro Sales Tax 1/2 cent			\$376,000	\$540,600	\$20	
MVST Increase			\$27,694	\$42,651		

Legislative Report

House

- Directs the Metropolitan Council to impose a 0.5 percent transit sales and use tax within the “transit taxing district” (an area within the council’s jurisdiction where the council provides regular route transit service and imposes a property tax levy for transit capital). Provides for sales tax administration, allows use of funds for transit purposes, and authorizes the council to issue revenue bonds backed by the sales tax revenue. Effective for sales on or after January 1, 2022.

- Increases the rate for the motor vehicle sales tax, from 6.5 percent to 6.875 percent. Effective January 1, 2022.

- Modifies distribution of a portion of state general sales tax revenue that is attributed to sale of motor vehicle repair and replacement parts. Distributes the funds:

FY22-23

- o 6.5% Small Cities Assistance
- o 2% Townships
- o 0.5% Greater MN Transit
- o Remaining to HUTDF

FY24-25 and on

- o 74% to the Highway User Tax Distribution (HUTD) fund;
- o 13.5% to the Small Cities Assistance program;
- o 7.5% to town roads;
- o 5% to Greater Minnesota transit.

- Reinstates and revises an advisory committee (that had expired). Renames it the Active Transportation Advisory Committee. Specifies membership and tasks, directs MnDOT staffing support, provides for expenses, and sets an expiration of June 30, 2031.

- Revises a calculation for the minimum amount that MnDOT must annually allocate from federal funds to transportation alternatives projects (e.g., bicycle, pedestrian, and trail-related work).

- Greater Minnesota transit account. Revises the share of motor vehicle sales tax revenue that is made available to MnDOT for greater Minnesota transit program administration, to be up to two percent of annual revenue (instead of a fixed dollar amount).

- Directs the Metropolitan Council to use its lowest emission buses on regular bus routes that serve areas identified as having poor air quality. Directs the Metropolitan Council to develop a zero-emission transit vehicle transition plan for the council’s transit fleet. Sets planning and deployment requirements.

- Transit safety reporting. Requires the Metropolitan Council to provide an annual legislative report on transit safety and administrative citations. Specifies report contents. Authorizes the Metropolitan Council to issue administrative citations for nonpayment of a transit fare, including issuance by non-sown personnel. Specifies policy and process requirements.

- In each February and November forecast of state revenues and expenditures the commissioner of management and budget must incorporate a state obligation from the general fund for the annual net costs to the council to implement Metro Mobility.

- The council may issue certificates of indebtedness, bonds, or other obligations under this section in an amount not exceeding \$98,400,000 for capital expenditures as prescribed in the council's transit capital improvement program and for related costs, including the costs of issuance and sale of the obligations.



MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

Legislative Report

Senate

- Requires the commissioner to develop and implement a project selection process for every program or process the commissioner uses to evaluate, prioritize, or select capital projects; award grants for capital projects; or allocate funding or resources for capital projects, including trunk highway and general obligation bonds. The commissioner must consult with relevant stakeholders before developing and implementing a policy. The commissioner must adopt the policy by November 1, 2022, and publish it on the department's website. The commissioner must report to the legislature by February 1, 2023, on the policy.

- Requires the commissioner, in collaboration with the commissioners of revenue and management and budget, to submit a report to the legislature on transportation revenues and expenditures in the state. The report is due by January 1, 2022.

- Allows for third-party testing for commercial driver's license (CDL) road tests. The commissioner must apply existing provisions relating to third-party testing of school bus drivers to third-party testing for CDLs.

- Requires the commissioner of management and budget to include in the February and November forecasts a state obligation from the general fund for the annual net costs to the council for MetroMobility.

- Requires counties (Metro) to fund current and future guideways. This includes, planning, design, engineering, and construction costs; operating costs; and capital maintenance. This section is effective July 1, 2021.

- Requires each replacement service provider (or "opt-out" provider) to submit an annual report to the Council with its projected total operating expenses for the current calendar year and its projected operating reserve fund balance. The Council's report must also include the Council's projected total operating expenses for the current calendar year and its projected operating reserve fund balance.

- Prohibits the use of money from a local governmental unit to pay for costs of operations or maintenance for a busway. This section is effective July 1, 2021, and applies to busways that begin revenue operations before January 1, 2023.

- Requires the Council to distribute federal COVID-19 funds to the replacement service providers (or "opt-out" providers) pursuant to the federal urbanized area formula. Requires replacement service providers to report to the legislature on all expenditures of COVID-19-related federal funds.

- Requires the commissioner of transportation and the Council to request approval from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to discontinue operations of the NorthStar commuter rail.

A conference committee has been appointed to work out the differences between the two versions of the bill. Conferees for the Senate are Senator Scott Newman, Senator John Jasinski, Senator Jeff Howe, Senator David Osmeck, Senator Karla Bigham. Conferees for the House are Representative Frank Hornstein, Representative Erin Koegel, Representative Luke Frederick, Representative Steve Elkins, Representative John Petersburg.

Legislative Report

Volunteer Driver Provisions

House Commerce Bill

Clarifies that a private passenger vehicle driven by a volunteer driver is not a transportation network company vehicle. Clarifies that a private passenger vehicle driven by a volunteer driver is not a commercial vehicle.

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.

Senate Tax Bill

Volunteer driver reimbursement. Provides a subtraction for the amount of mileage reimbursements paid by a charitable organization to a volunteer driver. The reimbursement rate for charitable organizations is 14 cents per mile, and the reimbursement rate for businesses is 56 cents per mile. For volunteer drivers, reimbursements above the volunteer driver rate are included in taxable income. The subtraction equals reimbursements received in excess of 14 cents per mile up to the limit for business mileage. Effective beginning in tax year 2021.

Bonding Bill

The House Capital Investment Committee has been meeting regularly throughout the 2021 session while the Senate Capital Investment Committee has only met a couple of times. It's not clear if a significant bonding bill will be passed and if will include more cash than is normally included. The House committee passed a bill that contains a much higher funding level than is usually proposed in a budget year.



For transit, the bill includes:

- Passenger Rail - \$25.5 million
- E Line BRT - \$40 million
- Electric Transit Vehicle Infrastructure - \$1 million
- Safe Routes to Schools - \$8 million

Transit Governance

Legislation was introduced and heard on an information-only basis in the Senate Transportation Committee that would change the role of the Metropolitan Council with respect to transit operations. Senate File 2375 requires the Department of Transportation to administer the replacement service provider program (suburban transit systems) and amends the allocation of motor vehicle sales tax revenue so that funds that are currently distributed to suburban systems would be deposited in the Greater MN transit assistance account.

Another bill, SF2199, establishes the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Board as part of the Department of Transportation and eliminates the authority for transportation and transit planning and construction from the Metropolitan Council.

More discussion on this issue is expected over the interim.

Legislative Report

Federal Transit Funding

The President has laid out his major infrastructure plan, the \$2.3 trillion American Jobs Plan. For transportation, the plan has been presented as providing additional funding over and above the normal formula funds.

- \$85 billion for Transit
 - o \$55 billion for transit state of good repair
 - o \$25 billion for transit expansion
 - o \$5 billion for Americans with Disabilities Act implementation

Republicans in Congress have called the President's plan too large and not focused enough on traditional infrastructure – roads, bridges, transit, broadband and water. They have also expressed opposition to the proposal to pay for the plan which involves increasing the corporate tax rate, which in 2017 was cut from 35% to 21%, up to 28%. Senate Republicans released their version of an infrastructure plan which included funding for transportation over a 5-year period. The level of funding for transit is smaller than current funding levels which they argue reflects the fact that transit systems have received significant one-time additional funding through COVID relief packages.

Federal Transit Funding – 5 Year Proposals

FAST Act - 2015 - \$70B

House Moving Forward - 2020 - \$105B

American Jobs Plan + formula -2021 - \$178B

Senate GOP Plan - 2021 - \$61B

The FAST Act is set to expire at the end of September. Last year Congress extended the act for one year. Committees in both the House and Senate with jurisdiction over a new 5-year authorization have begun work to develop that legislation. The House Transportation and Infrastructure committee has indicated that it will start with the bill passed out of committee last year, the Moving Forward Act. The goal is for the committees to take action on a new authorization by Memorial Day.



Featured Industry Members

BYD, the Technology Pioneer

Founded in 1995 as a technology pioneer, The BYD (Build Your Dreams) mission is to change the world by providing a total solution to reduce the world's reliance on petroleum. BYD's innovative products are leaders in multiple sectors, including battery-electric automobiles, buses, medium- and heavy-duty trucks and forklifts; the SkyRail monorail system; solar power generation and energy storage systems.

BYD North American headquarters is located in Downtown Los Angeles, with a 550,000-square-foot bus manufacturing facility in Lancaster, California. BYD is the first electric bus manufacturer with a fully unionized workforce (SMART Local 105) and a Community Benefits Agreement establishing training and apprenticeship programs for workers with traditionally high barriers to employment.

Over 60,000 BYD electric buses are in service around the world and over 500 electric buses built in the United States are servicing American customers.

TARABUS by Gerflor - the world-leading non-slip transit flooring

TARABUS by Gerflor is the world leading non-slip transit flooring, dedicated to bus and coach applications. Gerflor Tarabus is designed to be extremely durable and last the life of light, medium, and heavy-duty buses. The wear layer is 100% pure PVC that makes it very dense and durable while maintaining easy cleanability. The CSI particles make the floor highly slip resistant and exceeds all ADA slip resistance requirements. Tarabus has a glass fiber web that offers dimensional stability and resists shrinking and cracking. It has a unique proprietary textile backing for superior adhesion offering both a mechanical and chemical bond. Tarabus meets FMVSS 302, Docket 90, and is anti-microbial including the coronavirus.



All transit bus models have been successfully passed federal safety and reliability tests with high marks. BYD Products are Buy America compliant.

BYD's non-toxic Iron-Phosphate battery chemistry makes it the safest choice available on the market today. BYD is a publicly traded company with 60% of its stocks owned by U.S. investors. Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway is the largest single shareholder at 8%.



Gerflor's TARABUS diversified range meets customer requests and offers trend setting designs, such as our Tarabus Design range that offers digital print with nearly unlimited patterns. The digital print also allows us to provide digitally printed Watch Your Step logos that can be adhered to the step risers that will last the life of the vehicle. Combined with our aluminum step nosing, Step Bus, this creates the safest stepwell area in the industry.

Contact me with questions. Larry Mabery
larry.mabery@gerflor.com

Minnesota Department of Health and Metro Transit team up with others to provide mobile vaccination clinics

Transit systems are now critical for helping people to get to and from vaccination sites. For those who cannot drive, or who choose not to drive, accessing vaccination sites can be a challenge. Metro Transit and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) worked together to create a solution that brings vaccines to the people.

Metro Transit and MDH worked together with the Metropolitan Council and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota to retrofit a fleet of six Metro Transit buses that are not in use due to low ridership from the pandemic. These buses have been turned into mobile vaccine units with a clinic inside of the bus. These mobile clinics will now be deployed to communities that might not have access to as many vaccine opportunities. The Minnesota Department of Health plans to use these mobile units throughout the entire state.

Emily Smoak, mobile vaccine units lead for the Minnesota Department of Health noted in a recent interview for a video by the Minnesota Public Transit Association (MPTA), that more options are needed. “The mass vaccination efforts are great in that they provide thousands of vaccines at a time, but they’re pretty limited in where they’re available.”



Her team was asked what types of gap-filling strategies could be developed. She likened vaccination efforts to a glass with rocks in it; the rocks represented mass vaccination clinics, pharmacies and healthcare systems. “There are still the gaps in between the rocks, and what we were trying to do was develop a strategy that could serve as that really fine-grain sand that can help fill in the additional gaps. The feedback that we had been given was to meet people where they already are,” she said.

The uniqueness of having a mobile vaccine unit is that it can be driven to numerous locations, providing vaccine access when there might not otherwise be access. The mobile vaccination units help to not only eliminate transportation barriers that prevent people from receiving their vaccine, but also eliminate technology and language barriers.

“A program like the mobile vaccine units would not be possible without a strong partnership of transit agencies. The partnership between Metro Transit and the Metropolitan Council has been absolutely key in making the Mobile vaccine units a reality. Minnesota is definitely leading the nation in this type of vaccine opportunity, and it’s only possible because of our strong inter-agency and public/private partnerships,” Smoak said.

Minnesota Department of Health and Metro Transit team up with others to provide mobile vaccination clinics

Transit systems statewide have gone out of their way this year to serve Minnesota residents with multiple efforts, including grocery delivery, while engaging in extra cleaning and ensuring the use of personal protective equipment by staff. The Minnesota Public Transit Association would like to thank all transit systems and workers statewide for everything they have done to help our communities.

Many transit systems are now stepping up to provide free rides to and from vaccination appointments to assist with vaccine distribution including: Minnesota Valley Transit Authority, Trailblazer Transit, Anoka County Transit, SouthWest Transit, Fond du Lac Transit, MATBUS, Prairie Five RIDES and others.



To show our support for everything transit has done for our state, MPTA created videos showcasing multiple transit systems in their efforts to assist communities. Two videos were also recently posted on food delivery efforts and practices meant to keep buses and transit facilities clean and safe. Videos will be shared on MPTA's social media accounts, @MNPublicTransit.



Coverage of the mobile vaccination units was seen all over the metro area in the Star Tribune, Pioneer Press, on WCCO and channel 5. And soon the units will be deployed all throughout Minnesota, not just in the metro area, to vaccinate those who have the most barriers to finding clinics and information.



Celebrating Transit Worker Appreciation Day

Transit was named an essential role in Minnesota back in March of 2020. Since then, transit systems statewide increased their efforts to serve their communities. From increasing PPE and cleaning on buses, to encouraging social distancing and transporting essential workers and passengers on essential errands, transit has continued to serve Minnesota. The use of fogging machines, blocking off seats, the installation of barriers and much more helped keep transit safe for those who needed it this year.

MPTA celebrated Transit Worker Appreciation Day on Thursday, March 18, 2021, by creating multiple videos, on topics such as food delivery, cleaning amid the pandemic, transportation to essential errands and vaccination sites and so much more.

The videos recognize the improvements and services provided by essential transit systems, and the great work that transit workers have been doing from increased cleaning efforts to serving the community with food delivery, essential trip transportation and more.



Cleaning

The use of fogging machines, blocking off seats, the installation of barriers and much more helped keep transit safe for those who needed it this year.

“Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic SWT has had procedures in place to ensure the safety of everyone using our services and those who run it,” said John Haggemiller, The Marketing and Public Outreach Manager for SouthWest Transit, a system featured in one of MPTA’s many videos.

“In addition to requiring both riders and all SWT staff to wear masks, all SWT vehicles and facilities are cleaned and disinfected daily or after every trip, plexiglass barriers have been installed both around the driver and throughout the passenger cabins for enhanced safety, seating is limited on all SWT vehicles to ensure safe social distancing, passenger loads are monitored in real-time to ensure overcrowding does not occur, passenger waiting areas are marked with social distancing floor markers, all SWT staff undergo temperature checks daily, and all vehicles have been newly equipped with a state of the art ion air purification system to further ensure the highest level of safety possible on our vehicles.”

Food Delivery

Outside of their increased cleaning efforts, transit systems also went above and beyond their call of duty to assist local food shelves, food programs and citizens who could not travel to get food or prescriptions on their own. Large and small systems did their part to assist those in their community. For example, SMART Transit of Owatonna delivered over 62,000 meals back in July.

Celebrating Transit Worker Appreciation Day



Besides that, Arrowhead Transit provided 50 buses to transport 4,157 boxes, or 70,669 pounds, of produce to partner organizations and small systems such as Prairie Lakes transit assisted with grocery delivery, food shelf assistance and more.

“Back in mid-March during the beginning stages of the pandemic, SMART wanted to see where it could offer assistance to the communities by utilizing the resources we had so that we could continue to support those in need – we just knew it was going to look a little different this time around,” said Kirk Kuchera of SMART Transit. “I believe that we all learned that when people come together, huge things can happen!”

“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.”

Transportation looked a bit different this past year amid the pandemic, with systems bringing goods and services to community members instead of the other way around, but they still were able to meet their goal: serving their community in any way possible.

Going forward, the disabled, elderly and under-privileged communities will need help getting to and from vaccination appointments. Transit systems are critical for helping people who can't drive to get to vaccination sites. Moorhead MATBUS, SouthWest Transit, Prairie Five Rides, Trailblazer Transit and Anoka County Transit have already announced their plans to help transport individuals to vaccination sites, and other systems are expected to follow.

Bus systems demonstrated that they are valuable community resources, with or without the pandemic.

They provide access, mobility and independence to community members. The state needs to ensure that transit systems remain well-funded well into the future, as they did not forget us when we needed them most.

To show our support for everything transit has done for our state, the Minnesota Public Transit Association will post videos showcasing multiple transit systems in their efforts to assist communities starting with this one. Videos will be shared on MPTA's social media accounts.

Transit funding needs to be continued and supported by the legislature. MPTA would like to thank all transit workers for everything they do to keep Minnesota moving.

The videos can be found on the [Minnesota Transportation Alliance's YouTube](#) site here along with MPTA's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Q&A: What is a Certified Travel Trainer?

Jennifer Olson, Rainbow Rider's HR Manager, recently became a certified Travel Trainer. We sat down with her to get more information on what this means and how it can help different systems.

1. What is a certified Travel Trainer?

a. A Travel Trainer teaches people to travel independently on public transportation. According to RTAP, "Travel Training is one method that transit agencies have used successfully to bridge the learning gap for new riders, especially seniors and persons with disabilities... the hope is that engaging inexperienced riders in using transit systems, they can become more comfortable and eventually use transit independently."

2. How did you get certified?

a. I earned my certification through EasterSeals Project Action Consulting. The following steps are needed to be completed before obtaining certification:

1. Completing a series of foundation and elective course
2. Completing the required 60 credits within 2 years (of signing up for the course)
3. Successful completion of travel training practicum (which is conducting a real-life/real-time travel training and showing proof that that this occurred)
4. Passing an online test to verify knowledge in travel training

Here's the details of that information: <https://www.projectaction.com/certification-programs/travel-trainer-certification/travel-training-certification-requirements/>

3. What does this mean for Rainbow Rider?

a. In addition to my HR duties, I am now available to provide this training to prospective passengers in all of the counties we serve.

4. Why is it important?

a. It's so important because there are many people out there that would like to get around and live an independent life, but don't have the means to do so.

5. Do lots of transit systems have or need certified travel trainers?

a. From what I was able to see from my training courses, it's a more prominent thing in urban areas. This is because the transit systems in more populated areas are much more complicated than what we have in our area. We're talking mostly fixed route services and the need for one person to make stops and transfers before they get to their destination. So, a part of their travel training would consist of teaching them how to walk to a fixed route stop and how and when to get off the bus to get onto another bus. However, in this area, travel training is not common. In fact, I may be the first one in the West Central part of Minnesota. I know some of the other transit systems in this area are looking into it and are wanting to get certified, but I'm not exactly sure where they are with that. There is definitely a need for it everywhere you go! For our area, I think because it's so brand new, people don't quite yet know what to do with it, but I have a feeling that once it gets going, it'll be a huge part of the community as it relates to traveling with public transportation. Travel Training in this area looks different as we are a door-to-door, dial-a-ride service, so it's actually less challenging for the prospective passenger, which is a good thing!

6. Why did you decide to get certified?

a. From what I remember, our MnDOT coordinator told my Director about it and she loved the concept and felt I would be a good fit for it.

MnDOT Researches Public Transit Rebound after COVID Ridership Decline.

Ridership decreased and fluctuated tremendously amid the pandemic.

Experiences on public transit have changed along with everything with the addition of extra PPE, cleaning and more. There's blocked off seats, plastic barriers, mask requirements and much more. What will new behaviors and practices will stay and what will go as we return to normal? That's what MnDOT is working to find out.

"Last year, the Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) at MnDOT decided to fund a research proposal from the University of Minnesota to look community perceptions of public transit and shared mobility around safety and COVID-19 in Greater Minnesota, said Elliott McFadden, the Greater Minnesota shared mobility coordinator with MnDOT. "The goal is to understand what tactics and strategies these transportation service providers can implement as we move out of the pandemic to build public confidence and accelerate return ridership. We plan to have a set of recommendations for transportation providers to implement when the research is done."

The research team will survey both the transit industry at-large and around 1,000 residents of Greater Minnesota to better understand options and attitudes.

"We want to have a playbook of recommended actions for public transit agencies and shared mobility providers to implement to help them accelerate a return to pre-pandemic ridership numbers," McFadden said.

The surveys have not started yet, but Mcfadden noted that they have seen a general caution about public transit from the general population based on other survey data out there.



"For much of the pandemic, the CDC and other medical experts have cautioned against public transit usage out of an abundance of caution (although there are no documented outbreaks from public transit usage.) While transit saw a large ridership decline at the beginning of stay-at-home orders, core services quickly stabilized to serve essential workers and those dependent on public transit. Most of the initial decline came from commuters who could telecommute, and we are starting to see ridership numbers recover as more of the economy opens up."

Despite the decrease in ridership, there has remained a population that needs functioning public transit to get to work and run errands.

"Even in the middle of the strictest stay-at-home orders, essential workers in our communities were using public transit to get to their jobs and keep our society functioning. As the pandemic continued, public transit agencies stepped up to deliver meals and give free rides for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations," McFadden said.

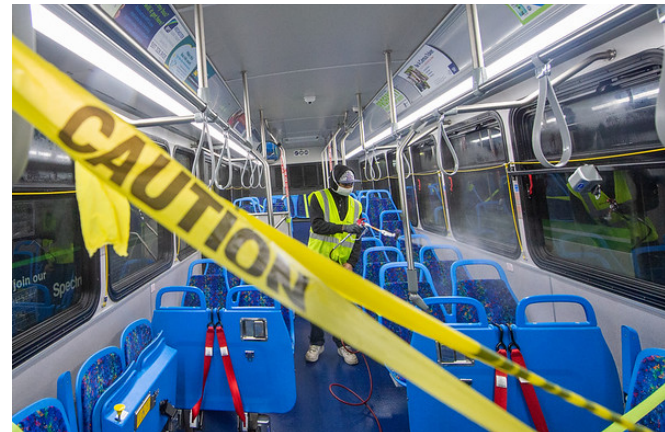
And it was noted that as long as one wears a mask on transit systems, they are generally pretty safe from the Corona Virus.

MnDOT Researches Public Transit Rebound after COVID Ridership Decline.

McFadden noted that even after the pandemic is over some practices may stay in place such as plexiglass dividers and more flexible service routing as they have additional operational and customer service benefits. There is also a renewed interest in contactless payment technologies as a way to safely collect fares that may stick around.

“In January, OTAT received notice that we are being awarded a COVID-19 Research Demonstration grant from the Federal Transit Administration to explore contactless payment systems and how they impact public perceptions of safety and convenience. We will be working with 8 rural public transit agencies in Western Minnesota to test app-based and card reader-based contactless payment systems as well as a mobile trip planner app. The University of Minnesota team will continue their research on this project to better understand how this technology fits into driver and rider safety, operational efficiency, and improved customer experience,” McFadden said.

The goal is to test this technology in 2022 and determine whether MnDOT and the public transit agencies want to make a long-term investment in these solutions.



In the meantime, OTAT will also be working on the first research in the county to look at the impact of COVID-19 and ridership recovery strategies for rural and small urban transit and shared mobility.

“Trip planning apps like Moovit and Transit have done some research on rider attitudes in very large systems like New York and Chicago. The needs of rural and small urban communities are very different from these large cities, so we think this research will have value not just to Greater Minnesota but other similar systems around the U.S.,” McFadden said.

The research is just beginning, but OTAT and the U of M are already seeing a lot of interest from the public transit and shared mobility industries in this research because it will be critical to help them recover post-pandemic.

“Public transit has proved to be an invaluable tool during the pandemic, and as we return to normal, it will be a critical part of providing freedom of movement and green transportation options to Minnesotans,” McFadden said.

The document with the results of this research is expected to be ready in early 2022.

Public Transit Pilot Program Coming to Rochester

The Connected & Automated Vehicles Office of MnDOT will begin operating a new, autonomous circulator shuttle in late summer in Rochester, MN. It won't replace or substitute transit options for riders in Rochester, but rather is a shuttle with applications toward future transit.

The project is a small shuttle and the route was designed for assessment within a city to see how it fit with the streets within the community. It was selected through the MnDOT Connected and Automated Vehicles (CAV) Challenge RFP process, which allows industry, researchers, communities – and anyone -to propose an idea using CAV technology if it advances the state's transportation, equity, public health, sustainability and other goals.

Two EasyMile EZ10 shuttles will operate in downtown Rochester. The shuttles are low speed and will hold six seated passengers. It can hold up to 12 people, if standing passengers are permitted. These are highly automated vehicle technologies, known as a Level 4 technology, which means it can operate without a driver, steering wheel or pedals.

There will be an onboard ambassador, who has the ability to take over operation from the shuttle if needed.

The project proposes an urban route in downtown Rochester. It will be open to the public with 12 months of operation.

The project was originally scheduled for 2020, but was delayed to due to COVID-19 Pandemic.

"We wanted to be strategic about when to introduce the shuttles to the community," said Kristin White, the Executive Director of the Connected and Automated Vehicles Office at MnDOT.



White noted that First Transit and the shuttle provider, EasyMile, now use state-of-the-art sanitation and cleaning solutions, in addition to strictly following CDC and Minnesota Department of Health guidelines and requirements.

"We are working with our partners to limit the number of passengers, create adequate physical distancing, and requiring all passengers to wear face masks. Other precautions will be taken in addition to routine cleaning, sanitizing and monitoring," White said.

The company decided to hold this pilot project in Rochester as this was the proposal from First Transit, where the company has a transit operation, and the city shows the strong commitment to community health, partnering with Mayo Clinic, Destination Medical Center and the City of Rochester.

"We are hopeful that it will provide useful data and experiences in an urban situation in a northern climate to continue the improvement, evolution and understanding of the technology with an AV shuttle," White said.

The Duluth Transit Authority – Building a Brand Around the Comeback

Submitted by David Clark
Director of Marketing
Duluth Transit Authority

The Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) has shared in the adversity and challenges faced by transit systems and other public and private entities throughout the past year-and-a-half. Despite these headwinds, the mid-sized system serving the Twin Ports and surrounding communities, has been busy breaking ground on projects aiming for a future with enhanced technology, infrastructure, and overall rider experience.

In early 2021, the DTA announced the “Better DTA Movement”, a campaign around a collection of current and upcoming projects, which initially included new website content, which documents what the region can expect in the near term.

The current phases of the campaign include a soon-to-be-launched MyDTA mobile payment application which pairs with the Transit App to deliver an end-to-end payment and trip planning solution and sets the stage for future Fare Capping and Account-based ticketing. This technology suite will complement newly installed GenFare Fast Fare fareboxes on the entire DTA fleet.

The DTA is also in the route design phase of a Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) that has been branded “The Better Bus Blueprint” which will lead to a newly proposed system redesign aimed at route efficiency, optimization, frequency, and connectivity.

The DTA has hired Connetics Transportation Group (CTG) on the study, which has worked on many successful and innovative projects nationally. As a component of the COA, the DTA is also in the process of conducting a bus stop consolidation initiative, investments in amenities such as shelters, benches, solar lights, landing pads, live bus tracking, art installations, bike lockers, wayfinding, hubs, and more.

It goes without saying that this set of projects is complex and ambitious, but none of this would be possible without funding from, and collaboration with our governmental partners. The Minnesota Department of Transportation, State Legislature, Federal Transit Administration, and Local Governments in the Twin Ports Region have been partners in the process of launching these key initiatives.

Additionally, the DTA is participating in an autonomous vehicle study with the University of Minnesota, The Local Road Research Board, and the Duluth Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council. The project aims to study and model autonomous service in the Miller Hill Mall area.

Stay up to speed on the progress of the Better DTA Movement initiatives at www.DuluthTransit.com, and the Duluth Transit Facebook Page as the advertising and public information campaigns continue to roll out in the months ahead.



Regional development concentrated along high-frequency transit corridors

Submitted by Drew Kerr
Metro Transit
Rider's Almanac Blog

Nearly \$14 billion in development was permitted along high-frequency transit corridors between 2003 and 2019, and another \$9 billion in development is expected to soon follow, a new study found.

The figures are included in the recently updated Development Trends Along Transit report from Metro Transit's Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Office. Data from 2020 data will be available later this year.

Sean Sweeney, co-founder of Hall Sweeney Properties, said proximity to the METRO Blue Line's 46th Street Station was an integral factor in the company's decision to build the MN46 Apartments two blocks away. The development is also adjacent to a METRO A Line station.

"We have law students who take the light rail to campus, and young professionals who work downtown and at the airport who use the light rail as their main mode of transportation," Sweeney said. "It allows them in many cases to live without a car, a major cost savings."

After MN46 leased up ahead of projections, Sweeney decided to build another apartment complex across the street. "The proximity to high-frequency transit options for our future tenants played a significant role in our decision to pursue and build this project," he said.



More than a third of all the region's new multi-family units permitted in 2019 are in 3% of the regional land area served by high-frequency transit. Combined, these developments represented \$1.8 billion in permit value, which can exclude things like land value.

"It is both possible and likely that these numbers underestimate the value associated with development near high-frequency transit," Metro Transit TOD planner Amy Yoder said.

The \$8.9 billion in development planned along high-frequency transit represents 68% of the region's future planned development. This new development will add another 35,000 multi-family units, more than doubling the number of residences with immediate access to high frequency transit.



UCAP Community Transit honored with "Special Recognition Award."

Community Transit administered by United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) was awarded the inaugural International Student Award Ceremony's "Special Recognition Award" as a symbol of their appreciation for their commitment and support to Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU) on-campus and off-campus international students' community. The purpose of this award is to honor individuals/organizations that contribute to making the course of our academic experience in Marshall, easier and productive.

"It is an honor to have the SMSU International Student Organization recognize our staff of dispatchers and drivers for the great work they do. We are very proud of the working relationship we have and what the students bring to our community," said Cathleen Amick, UCAP's Transportation Director.

Community Transit provides flexible route service that connects SMSU students to locations throughout the City of Marshall. The routes include two passenger stops on-campus and many of the other passenger stops are strategically placed within the community to provide students who live in off-campus housing easy access to the campus.

"Community Transit has been providing services to the students for over 14 years. In that time, we have gained support especially by the international students as we are often their first experience when they are getting to know the community and surrounding areas in Southwest Minnesota," Amick said.

UCAP's community transit helped the college amid the pandemic. Many of the international students at SMSU were unable to go back to their home country during the pandemic.



For this reason, among others, Community Transit never stopped running the routes throughout the pandemic.

"It is very important to make sure all community members including students have access to essential needs such as food and healthcare," Amick said. "Our drivers are committed to giving students a great experience. They are the best at helping the students navigate their way around town."

The routes are just one resource in UCAP's family of transportation services. UCAP also provides dial-a-ride services, non-emergency medical transportation services, elderly transportation services, and volunteer driver services available to all residents in Southwest Minnesota. If you would like to know more, please visit communitytransitswmn.org.

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...



Photo courtesy of SMART Transit

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Want to nominate someone for "Meet the Director?"

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