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**Photo by the Marshall Independent and Washington Post**



**Labor Shortages Are Hampering Public Transportation Systems, Challenging the Recovery of City Life**

There just aren't enough workers to keep these systems running. Labor shortages are plaguing public transportation systems in nearly every big city, disrupting one of the critical support systems of modern urban life and complicating the recovery of an industry that has struggled mightily during the pandemic. battered by the pandemic.

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# President's Column



**MPTA President  
Ryan Daniel**

Happy New Year! Welcome to 2022, another year when we are all working toward recovery from the pandemic with goals for increased ridership and more normal activity for all of us.

The Minnesota Public Transit Association is working hard to speak out for all transit systems as we head into another

challenging year. Our Board of Directors is committed to providing our members with the best events, the most in-depth and current information and strong outreach to decision makers and elected officials to raise the profile of transit and how important this service is for thousands of Minnesotans.

MPTA will continue to work on ways to reduce barriers for volunteer drivers, support capital funds for needed facilities and technology and work with systems on ways to retain and attract people into the transit workforce.

MPTA is working to assist with defining the needs that transit systems face as well as ensuring that the distribution of new funds is the most effective for our members.

Our events in 2022 will include our Bus Rodeo in July. We're really excited to be hosting the 35th Annual Bus Rodeo in Austin July 15th and 16th. This will be a great event with important opportunities for training, networking and support for our critical bus operators!

Our statewide transit conference will be held in St. Cloud this year from October 24th to the 26th. Plan now to bring your staff and join us as we prepare for an exciting new future in transit.

The 2022 Legislative Session begins at the end of January with good news on the budget front. That means that we are in a great position to access both state and federal funds as all deal

with the challenges of recovering from COVID including rising prices, staffing shortages, technology needs and ridership challenges. If we all work together and speak out for the needs of our communities and our riders, we have real opportunities to make progress and improve transit service.

At the MPTA Annual Meeting, we held our Board elections. Our new MPTA Board for 2022:

- Ryan Daniel, President
- Luther Wynder, Vice President
- Daryn Toso, Secretary
- Nick Lemmer, Treasurer
- Mike Klauda, Vendor Representative
- Joanne Brackey, SMART Transit
- Brenda Brittin, Rainbow Rider
- Tiffany Collins, Central Community Transit
- Matt Fyten, SouthWest Transit
- Alan Herrmann, Smartlink
- Nick Leske, United Community Action Partnership
- Ted Nelson, Prairie Five Rides
- Jim Wolter, Rolling Hills Transit

Please reach out to any of us with your questions, feedback and concerns. We are here to work with you to advocate for all transit needs in Minnesota. Your membership makes a difference so please renew your MPTA membership for 2022 and work with us to support and improve transit throughout the state.

Sincerely,

Ryan Daniel

President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan I. Daniel".

# Legislative Report

## Federal

We're learning more about the impact of the new federal infrastructure law for transit systems in Minnesota. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will provide significantly more funding over the coming five years. Of course, federal funds require a local match ranging from 10% for some programs up to 50% to be competitive with other states and regions for discretionary grant programs.

The IIJA authorizes up to \$108 billion to support federal public transportation programs, including \$91 billion in guaranteed funding.

The priorities for the new law are: Safety, Modernization, Climate and Equity. The Federal Transit Administration has created a new web page with information and fact sheets about the new law which is referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL): <https://www.transit.dot.gov/BIL>

For the country, the increase in funding from FY2021 which was funded under the FAST Act to FY2022 which is funded under IIJA ranges from a small increase in bus formula funds to a 52.5% increase in 5337 State of Good Repair formula funds.

### Mass Transit Formula Funding (Million \$\$)

	FY 2021 <u>FAST Ext.</u>	FY 2022 <u>IIJA</u>	Increase <u>Mil. \$\$</u>	Increase <u>Pct.</u>
§5303/5304 Planning Programs	143.1	183.7	+40.6	+28.3%
§5307 Urbanized Area Formula	4,851.0	6,298.2	+1,447.2	+29.8%
§5310 Elderly/Disabled Formula	292.9	419.4	+126.5	+43.2%
§5311 Rural Formula	643.0	800.9	+157.9	+24.6%
§5311(c)(1) Indian Reservations Formula	30.8	35.0	+4.2	+13.8%
§5311(c)(2) Appalachian Transit Formula	20.0	26.3	+6.3	+31.3%
§5329 State Safety Oversight Formula	29.9	32.0	+2.1	+7.1%
§5337 State of Good Repair Formula	2,709.9	4,133.4	+1,423.5	+52.5%
§5339(a) Bus Formula	592.9	599.5	+6.6	+1.1%
§5340 Fast-Growth State Supplement	300.7	348.3	+47.6	+15.8%
§5340 High-Density State Supplement	309.4	392.8	+83.4	+27.0%
<b>TOTAL MASS TRANSIT FORMULA FUNDING</b>	<b>9,923.5</b>	<b>13,269.4</b>	<b>+3,345.9</b>	<b>+33.7%</b>

### FTA Competitive

	<u>FY22 Mil \$</u>
Regular Buses	447
Zero Emission Buses	1,122
CIG (IIJA BA only)	1,600
ASAP ADA Upgrades	350
Low-Emission Ferries	50
Rural Ferries	200
<b>Subtotal, FTA</b>	<b>3,769</b>

# Legislative Report

For Minnesota, total transit funding is estimated at \$820 million over the five-year period from FY2022 through FY2026.

<b>IIJA - Transit Funding</b>							
	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	TOTAL IIJA
Minnesota	\$121,653,743	\$156,579,242	\$159,949,870	\$164,190,129	\$167,625,940	\$171,948,361	<b>\$820,293,541</b>
<b>IIJA - 5307 Funds</b>							
	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	TOTAL IIJA
Minneapolis/St. Paul	\$86,035,235	\$108,530,309	\$110,902,696	\$113,936,855	\$116,393,558	\$119,486,164	<b>\$569,249,581</b>
Duluth/Superior	\$3,311,438	\$4,258,741	\$4,350,157	\$4,466,803	\$4,561,496	\$4,680,435	<b>\$22,317,633</b>
Grand Forks/East Grand Forks	\$1,585,496	\$2,033,125	\$2,077,062	\$2,133,124	\$2,178,635	\$2,235,800	<b>\$10,657,745</b>
La Crosse, WI-MN	\$2,470,237	\$3,170,420	\$3,238,794	\$3,326,038	\$3,396,862	\$3,485,822	<b>\$16,617,936</b>
Mankato	\$1,147,768	\$1,468,004	\$1,499,916	\$1,540,637	\$1,573,693	\$1,615,214	<b>\$7,697,464</b>
Fargo/Moorhead	\$3,990,277	\$5,107,244	\$5,218,089	\$5,359,525	\$5,474,343	\$5,618,561	<b>\$26,777,762</b>
Rochester	\$2,925,862	\$3,758,036	\$3,838,943	\$3,942,179	\$4,025,985	\$4,131,251	<b>\$19,696,393</b>
St. Cloud	\$3,051,605	\$3,919,396	\$4,003,785	\$4,111,463	\$4,198,876	\$4,308,672	<b>\$20,542,193</b>

For Greater Minnesota Transit, the increase from FY2021 to FY2022 is shown below:

<b>Greater MN Transit</b>	<b>FY2021 (Base Year)</b>	<b>FY2022</b>
<b>5311</b>	\$14.2M	\$18.4M
<b>5339</b>	\$ 4.3M	\$ 5.6M
<b>5307</b>	\$11.8M	\$15.4M
<b>5310</b>	\$ 4.3M	\$ 5.6M

Decisions on how to spend the increased funding from IIJA will be made in the coming months. This additional funding comes on the heels of funding for transit provided under the three COVID relief bills.

For Greater Minnesota transit, funds provided under the 5311 program through the COVID legislation:

**CARES Act:** \$42M

**CRRSAA:** \$14M

**American Rescue Plan:** \$11M

**Total:** \$65M

Minnesota now has a reserve of more than \$40M in 5311 formula funds to apply to the 2023 program and beyond.

The next meeting of the Transit Advisory Committee in February will help to determine the investment levels in these categories over the next four years:

- Operations
- Vehicles
- Facilities
- Marketing
- Technology

# Legislative Report

## State

MPTA is gearing up for the 2022 Legislative Session which begins on January 31, 2022. This is the second year of the biennium when the legislature typically focuses on putting together a capital bonding bill. The two-year budget was passed last year during the 2021 Session.

Big news was delivered in early December when the state announced a historic \$7.7 billion budget surplus. Larger increases in individual income tax and general sales tax receipts have largely been behind the new numbers. Things may change somewhat in the coming months. The legislature will wait until the February, 2022 forecast is released to make decisions about the budget, but many interests are lining up to argue for a share of the surplus.

For transportation, ensuring that the state can match and maximize federal transportation dollars will be a priority.

The November forecast showed higher than anticipated revenue from the motor vehicle sales tax (MVST) while the motor vehicle lease sales tax (MVLST) was down slightly. Overall, the Transit Assistance fund is projected to grow steadily, reflecting the higher prices of motor vehicles.

MPTA will be working with all of our members to reach out to legislators and let them know how important stable transit funding will be as we move into a new future with costs increases, growing demands for new technology, buses and facilities and ongoing workforce challenges.

## Transit Assistance Fund Revenues

Nov. 2021 vs. EOS 2021

(\$ in millions)



# SouthWest Transit Update

**By: Jake Simich, SouthWest Transit**

The SouthWest Transit Commission recently announced long time CEO Len Simich will be retiring by the end of the first quarter 2022. Simich had informed the Commission of his retirement plans last spring, and this October the Commission contracted with the national placement firm KL2 Connects to begin the search for Simich's replacement.

Simich has been at the helm of SouthWest Transit since 1997. During his tenure he helped grow the agency's ridership by over 400%, constructed four structured transit stations as well as SouthWest Transit's administrative and maintenance facility, instituted the regions first transit-oriented development (SouthWest Station) in Eden Prairie, and helped establish one of the nation's first and most successful micro transit systems - SouthWest Prime.

Under his guidance SouthWest Transit has been honored as the National Transit System of the Year by the American Public Transportation Association; A two time honoree as the Minnesota Transit System of the Year by the Minnesota Public Transit Association; The first Minnesota transit agency ever honored as the recipient of the National Environmental Excellence Award given out by the Federal Highway

Administration; A three time recipient of the Minnesota Management Innovation Award; A seven time national award winner as the nation's top transit agency for safety and security; And was the first Minnesota Transit agency to receive the Excellence in Safety, Security, and Emergency Preparedness Award from the Federal Transportation Security Administration.

Current SouthWest Transit Chair and Chaska City Council member Mike Huang described Simich as "a champion of innovation, and as someone who always placed the needs of our communities and customers first."

Former SouthWest Transit Chair and Metropolitan Council member Craig Peterson called Simich "the best leader he has ever worked with. I've watched him pull so many rabbits out of hats that I just came to accept the fact if something could get done, Len was the leader to do it."

Current Eden Prairie Mayor and former SouthWest Commission member Ron Case summed things up by saying "Simich has been the face and voice of the agency from almost the beginning. We all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to him for making SouthWest Transit one of the most stellar public transportation systems in the nation."



# Changes Coming to Rochester Public Transit

**By: City of Rochester**

<https://www.rochestermn.gov/Home/Components/News/News/8519/1121>

A new year is here and changes are on the way for Rochester Public Transit.

In just a couple of weeks, RPT will start to increase the number of trips it makes annually by more than nine percent and will serve new areas. Locals including Michelle O'Rourke and Trent Maloney don't use RPT. The couple would consider using the bus service if they need to because of the changes.

"I think that's great. It cuts down on other people driving and helps people carpool. If it's more accessible, then I would use it more," O'Rourke tells KIMT News 3.

With RPT making more trips, more than 2,000 residents will have service. Kimberly Chase is a rider and appreciates the service updates.

"I think it's good. People need to take the bus. It's hard to find a parking place downtown I hear," says Chase.

The schedule for each route will also be adjusted to improve on time performance for each bus.

The changes will be effective January 16. For more details on how routes will be impacted, [www.rochestermn.gov/](http://www.rochestermn.gov/).

The changes will improve the availability and efficiency of transit operations by increasing the number of trips by 9.6 percent annually across all routes and by serving new areas, bringing new transit service to an additional 2,200 Rochester residents.

Timetables for all routes will be adjusted to improve on-time performance and to add more frequent service in some cases. All weekday routes will now conform to a three-digit naming convention.

New routes—numbered 103, 202, 204, 206, 306 and 309—will replace previous route variations, take on service removed from one or more existing routes, and in some cases, expand service into new areas.

New route maps and timetables will be posted on the RPT website 2 weeks prior to the start of service, and a new schedule will also be printed. Because the changes are widespread, RPT strongly recommends customers review the new information and plan accordingly to ensure they avoid missing the bus.



# Metro Purple Line Receives Key Federal Approval

**By: Metropolitan Council**

<https://metrocouncil.org/News-Events/Transportation/Newsletters/Purple-Line-FTA-Project-Development-2021.aspx>

The METRO Purple Line, a bus rapid transit line that will operate between Saint Paul and White Bear Lake, has received approval to enter the Project Development phase of the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts program. Project leadership now transitions from Ramsey County to the Met Council.

"The Metropolitan Council is proud to prioritize this East Metro investment," said Metropolitan Council Chair Charlie Zelle. "With our local government partners, including Ramsey County, we look forward to seeing the significant economic, social, and environmental benefit the Purple Line will bring to our region."

Supporters heralded the development as a boost for employers who believe fast, frequent, all-day BRT service will attract and retain workers. "A lot of jobs cannot be performed at home in this corridor, which has three hospitals and a shopping mall," said Shannon Watson, vice president of public affairs for the St. Paul Area Chamber. "That is not likely to change, making the Purple Line a lifeline for people going to work, outpatient visits, and running errands."

"Workers and employers, residents, students, and seniors are demanding high-quality transit as they look at where they want to live, work, and grow their businesses," Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt said. "Purple Line BRT is a key transportation solution to help our vibrant East Metro communities stay competitive and connected to the entire region."

Formerly known as the Rush Line, the 15-mile Purple Line will connect Saint Paul, Maplewood, White Bear Township, Vadnais Heights, Gem Lake, and White Bear Lake. BRT lines feature frequent service with enhanced stations and buses.

As currently planned, the Purple Line will serve 21 stations, mostly following Robert Street and Phalen Boulevard from downtown Saint Paul, Ramsey County rail right-of-way (shared with the Bruce Vento Regional Trail), and Highway 61

north of Interstate 694 into White Bear Lake.

Major employers along the Purple Line include Regions and Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare hospitals in Saint Paul, M Health Fairview St. John's Hospital in Maplewood, and the Maplewood Mall. Other destinations include Lowertown, the Saint Paul central business district, Payne-Phalen, Hmong Village, Phalen Regional Park, and downtown White Bear Lake.

## **Next steps**

In early 2023, federal approval will be sought to move into engineering, allowing design work to be completed. The Federal Transit Administration will then review the project's scope, schedule and budget.

In 2024, a federal funding application will be submitted and construction will begin. The Purple Line is expected to open in 2026.

The FTA and Ramsey County would each pay about half of the total project cost, now approximately \$475 million, with opening operating costs shared equally by the Metropolitan Council and Ramsey County.

## **Ridership reassessments required, trail to be preserved**

Project staff have heard concerns about ridership projections and how the project will affect the Bruce Vento Regional Trail.

Planners expect the Purple Line will see about 7,000 average weekday rides by 2040. "It's reassuring to know the FTA requires reassessment of ridership as the project advances and especially before the Metropolitan Council submits its final application for federal funding," project director Craig Lamothe said.

Through co-location of the line and the Bruce Vento Regional Trail, the safety of trail crossings at local roads will be improved. "I am so pleased that the METRO Purple Line will preserve the trail named after my late husband, who represented Minnesota's Fourth District in Congress from 1977 to 2000," said Metropolitan Council Member Susan Vento, whose district includes much of the line. "Bruce would have just loved it."

# TRUE Transit's 5-Year Anniversary

**By: True Transit**

<https://www.southernminnesotanews.com/true-transit-approaching-5-year-anniversary/>

True Transit, the public transportation system for three area counties, will celebrate a milestone anniversary next week.

January 5 marks True Transit's 5th year in operation, serving Blue Earth, Nicollet, and Le Sueur counties.

The service began in January 2017 with a single bus and the goal to provide affordable transportation in the rural areas of Blue Earth, Nicollet, and Le Sueur counties. More than 1,200 rides were provided in the first year. True Transit has now expanded to five buses that provide nearly 1,000 rides per month and more than 30,000 rides over the last five years.

True Transit provides dial-a-ride service throughout Blue Earth, Nicollet, and Le Sueur counties, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Rides are \$5 each way. Reservations are required and can be scheduled online.



# Transit Bus Fares Will Go Back to Old Rates



**By: Deb Gau, Marshall Independent**  
[marshallindependent.com/news/local-news](http://marshallindependent.com/news/local-news)

MARSHALL — The COVID-19 pandemic led to a lot of changes for local transit, including a temporary reduction in bus fares. While not everything for Community Transit is back to normal yet, the reduced fares will be ending Friday.

“All of our previous fare collection procedures and costs are back beginning January 1,” said United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) Transportation Director Nick Leske.

The cost of monthly ride passes for travel within a single city will be going back up to \$70, and monthly passes for travel between communities will be \$80.

Leske said Community Transit needs to go back to its normal fare prices because additional funding that was available to transit systems during the pandemic is expiring at the end of the year.

Community Transit will need to rely on its normal sources of operating funding, which comes from the Minnesota Department of Transportation and from passenger fares.

“In a normal year, our contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation only covers part of our operations. Passenger fares help cover the rest. We couldn’t exist long term without them,” Leske said.

In 2020, UCAP had to make reductions to area transit services in response to the

COVID pandemic, said Shelly Pflaum, mobility administrator for UCAP.

Fare rates were also cut in half, with temporary funding sources helping to make up the difference.

“During the pandemic, we only sold monthly ride passes, and we sold them for a suggested fee of \$40,” Leske said.

UCAP stopped selling its normal \$25 ride cards and tokens to cut down on hand-to-hand exchanges between passengers and drivers.

Starting Saturday, “Those options will be available on buses again for those who don’t want to purchase a monthly pass,” Leske said.

The purchase of monthly ride passes will need to be done at a UCAP office just like they were done before the pandemic, Leske said.

In addition to the \$70 and \$80 monthly passes, Community Transit also has regular route buses in Marshall, Pipestone and Redwood Falls. Rides on Community Transit route bus rides are \$1 per person. The base fare for an in-town dial-a-ride bus is \$2 when scheduled at least a day ahead of time. If a dial-a-ride is scheduled the day of the ride, the base rate is \$2.50. Fare increases in \$1 increments, based on distance traveled.

More details on Community Transit fares are available online at [communitytransitwmn.org](http://communitytransitwmn.org).

Pflaum said Community Transit is still facing some limitations after COVID like a shortage of drivers across its eight-county system.

“In most of our counties we are short or very short on drivers,” Pflaum said. “We’re not alone in that.”

Driver shortages can affect the availability of some bus routes in Marshall, or the number of days a week that the routes run, Pflaum said.

# Labor Shortages are Hampering Public Transportation Systems, Challenging the Recovery of City Life

By: Eli Rosenberg, Washington Post

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/>

In Houston, the public transportation system is offering new bus drivers bonuses of \$4,000. For mechanics, it's \$8,000. In St. Louis, bus service has been cut by more than 10 percent. In New York, transportation officials are trying to lure retired subway operators back to their old jobs.

There just aren't enough workers to keep these systems running. Labor shortages are plaguing public transportation systems in nearly every big city, disrupting one of the critical support systems of modern urban life and complicating the recovery of an industry that has struggled mightily during the pandemic. This is raising new challenges for many cities, which have already been battered by the pandemic.

"I would characterize us in the midst of a labor crisis," said Taulby Roach, president of Bi-State Development, the nonprofit that runs St. Louis's public transportation system, Metro Transit. "There's no question."

The system is short about 150 positions out of about 1,400 to 1,500 front-line employees total, Taulby said — about 10 percent.

It is yet another sign of how deep the disruption to the labor market remains, nearly two years into the pandemic.

Complaints about the labor shortage have been loudest in industries with grueling and often low-wage work, including fast-food restaurants

and hospitality. But the persistence of shortages in a field like public transportation shows the depth of complications for the labor market: Even some stable and well-paying jobs are no longer desirable to many workers, for a complicated range of reasons.

And a shortage of transportation workers can have ripple effects across a number of other fields. When bus routes are curtailed or trains run less frequently, it can disrupt the efforts of other workers to commute. And if costs go up to recruit more employees, riders could face higher fees.

Transit officials across the country described the issue as twofold: On one hand, there is now fierce competition for workers with commercial driver's licenses, the standard needed to drive buses in most municipalities in the country, as agencies compete with delivery services like FedEx, UPS and Amazon for workers. And on the other hand, attrition rates have skyrocketed, as burned-out transit workers have left for other jobs or early retirements. (Amazon founder Jeff Bezos owns The Washington Post.)

The bus-dominated St. Louis system has had to reduce service by about 10 to 12 percent to cope with the gap, reducing the frequency of some routes and eliminating a few express options outright.

"We have the budget capacity to maintain all of them," Roach said. "But quite frankly, we don't have the operators and it's really impacting service, and we're doing everything we can."



Attrition rates have been abnormally high. While St. Louis used to lose about seven operators a month, it has been losing between 21 and 25 a month since the early part of this year.

On top of that, hiring has proved challenging, although a \$2,000 bonus the agency began offering has helped sweeten the pot.

In Portland, Ore., the region's transit operator, TriMet, announced earlier this month that it would be

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reducing service by 9 percent because of similar labor woes. Hiring has proved to be the biggest obstacle there.

“Our recruitment numbers haven’t been where they needed to be,” said Tia York, a spokeswoman for the agency. “We’ve had weeks where there are just a handful of people in new operating training classes. Before the pandemic, we would hire dozens of people every month. We’ve gotten a little bit behind in hiring, and now with the national labor shortage, it’s been a struggle to get the number of applicants we need to fill training classes and get new operators.”

TriMet, which operates 84 bus routes over a 500-square-mile area, is down about 45 operator positions out of 1,000. Bus operator training is not a rapid endeavor — it takes seven weeks to get new workers trained, although the program is fully paid.

To tackle the issue, the service raised its starting pay by \$4 an hour in October, to \$21.36, but the hike made little difference, York said. A \$2,500 bonus it began offering at the end of November has proved more effective, increasing applications fivefold over the course of the first week.

York said the agency didn’t fully understand all the causes of the labor issues but knew it was part of a broader movement by some workers away from customer-facing work.

Elsewhere, public transportation service has been affected by labor issues in Los Angeles, Seattle, Austin, Houston, New York City, New Jersey and the D.C. area, where some bus systems are down by 10 percent or more in staffing. Riders in Philadelphia and Chicago have made similar complaints.

In states such as Utah, Colorado and Ohio, transportation officials are having trouble finding enough workers to clear the roads after snowstorms. Amtrak has been bracing for potential service cuts, if a substantial number of its employees refuse to be vaccinated against the coronavirus by the company’s Jan. 4 deadline.

And the surge of cases from the omicron variant could further exacerbate the issue.

Patrick Coomer, 61, a bus operator in Portland for the past nine years, said in an interview that bus-driving jobs had always been high-pressure but have only grown more stressful since the pandemic.

Coomer said customers, including some emotionally disturbed people, constantly challenge him about the system’s mask mandate. Attacks on operators remain a persistent threat, too, he said.

Coomer has had to quarantine at home three times in the past year after developing covid-like symptoms, but has not contracted the virus yet. The labor shortages mean that some bus routes are more crowded with riders than ever.

“It’s often only standing room at rush hour, which makes me nervous having to deal with people who don’t want to wear masks during a pandemic, not knowing who’s been vaccinated and who hasn’t,” he said. “There’s also frustration from riders who think you’re late, but you’re right on time, if maybe the bus ... ahead of me got canceled. We’re always faced with challenges, and now we’re facing new ones.”

The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, which represents drivers such as Coomer, said there are about two people leaving the workforce for every one person getting hired recently. Coomer says he personally knows about 10 people who have left, about half moving into early retirement and another half to take new jobs, like a younger co-worker who left to drive for FedEx, who he says has told him she’s much happier now that she doesn’t have to deal with angry riders.

“She doesn’t have people breathing down her neck, people complaining, sending in false or misleading complaints about her,” he said. “She’s doing really well and I’m happy for her.”

Coomer says he’d love to retire but keeps working because he is the main income earner in his house.

Bill Bradley, an official at ATU Local 757, said operator jobs have grown less desirable in recent decades. Many job benefits, such as pension payments, retiree medical benefits and

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apprenticeship programs, were cut back in the austerity following the Great Recession.

Meanwhile, wages from many private industries have caught up and often surpass those offered by TriMet, he said. Unpredictable or irregular schedules in a 24/7 transit operation have always been a drawback, he said, but the toxic public sphere has pushed even more people away. So people are jumping ship to go work at delivery companies or take other commercial driving jobs, like log or cement truck driving.

“I’ve seen management talk about how the next generation, millennials, how they job hop,” he said. “Well, there’s nothing keeping them at jobs. There’s no reason to stay. You drop out because that’s how you grow your wages now — there’s no other benefits that come with staying longer. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

In New York, officials from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which runs the nation’s largest public transit system, have gotten so desperate for workers that they sent letters to about 700 retired subway operators, offering them \$35,000 to come back to work for three months.

The shortage has cascaded into thousands of trips being delayed or canceled, but getting new operators trained takes between six and nine months.

John Samuelsen, president of the Transport Workers Union of America, said the MTA, which is controlled by the state of New York, deserved blame for the shortage after intentionally letting the agency’s staff levels drop through attrition earlier in the pandemic.

“Herein lies the freaking incredible genius of this bureaucratic mess that the MTA allowed itself to become,” he said. “They said it was nice to reduce head count to save a few pennies, but it was the ultimate penny-wise, dollar-foolish decision that they’ve ever made in their history, perhaps. ... I distinguish New York from other cities because these are self-inflicted wounds that are not just part of the overall trend about worker shortages.”



MTA chief executive Janno Lieber, who took over in July, has confirmed that the organization shed some 3,300 jobs earlier in the pandemic by eliminating positions with vacancies. The MTA said in a statement that it was “exhausting every avenue to quickly increase the number of available train crews.”

Across the river, New Jersey Transit is offering bonuses between \$3,000 and \$6,000 for bus operators.

Houston’s metro transit agency has also been hit by the double-barrel blast of high attrition and recruiting challenges.

To help close a gap of about 100 operators, it has begun offering bus and rail operators signing bonuses of \$4,000 and mechanics bonuses of \$8,000.

The agency is also in the process of approving a wage increase for drivers, spokeswoman Tracy Jackson said. Some service was cut in the early days of the pandemic, Jackson said, but the agency hasn’t had to make any additional cuts because of the shortage. Daily ridership, at about 160,000, remains less than 60 percent of its former level.

“Hiring slowed at the peak of the pandemic for obvious reasons, when state and local governments put in place stay-home orders,” Jackson said. “And that, combined with attrition, which is always part of the equation, is the reason we’re working to bring more operators on board now.”

# U.S. Department of Transportation Announces Key Priorities, Funding for Public Transportation Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

By: Federal Transit Administration

[www.transit.dot.gov/about/news/us-department-transportation-announces-key-priorities-funding-public-transportation](http://www.transit.dot.gov/about/news/us-department-transportation-announces-key-priorities-funding-public-transportation)

WASHINGTON – The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is the largest investment in American infrastructure in generations, and marks an inflection point for American transit. It will boost transit funding for communities all over the country by an average of 30% – helping communities address maintenance backlogs, modernize and expand. The new funding provided under the bill will help transit agencies reduce the current maintenance backlog by 15% and replace more than 500 aging subway, light rail, and commuter rail cars. It will further modernize the nation’s transit fleet by replacing more than 10,000 fossil-fuel powered transit vehicles with cleaner electric or low-emission transit vehicles.

Following President Biden’s signing of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal into law, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Transit Administration (FTA) today announced key priorities and historic funding amounts for public transportation. The law authorizes up to \$108 billion, including \$91 billion in guaranteed funding for public transportation – the most significant federal investment in transit in the nation’s history.

Transportation passengers across the country will see more reliable transit service as older



vehicles and facilities are repaired or replaced, and cleaner air in their communities thanks to a transition to low- and no-emission transit vehicles. The funding will help us respond to climate change, while creating more ways for people to get to work, to play, to access healthcare, and to visit friends and family.

“As the transit industry renews ridership, this historic support will help us transform the way we plan and use public transportation in the United States,” said FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez. “Long-overdue investments in transit infrastructure will deliver new and expanded public transit services, especially in communities that have suffered from historical funding inequities.”

Key priorities for public transportation under the legislation include:

- **Safety:** The law will enhance state safety oversight programs by strengthening rail inspection practices, protecting transit workers and riders from injuries, and ensuring safe access to transit.
- **Modernization:** The law will reduce the maintenance backlog by repairing and upgrading aging transit infrastructure and modernizing bus and rail fleets.
- **Climate:** Funding in the law will support replacement of thousands of transit vehicles, including buses and ferries, with cleaner, greener vehicles.
- **Equity:** Investments in the law will improve transit service for communities that have historically had more limited access to transit and provide for substantial upgrades to accessibility.

Key funding levels and programmatic changes for public transportation over a five-year period (Fiscal Years 2022 to 2026) include:

- Increased funding for FTA formula and competitive grant programs for America’s communities, including:
  - \$33.5 billion for the Urbanized Area Formula Program to support transit operations in 500 communities across the country.

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- \$23.1 billion for the State of Good Repair program to assist in financing capital projects to maintain public transit systems.
- \$5.6 billion in Low or No Emission Vehicle Competitive Grants to support the transition of transit vehicles to low or zero emission technologies.
- \$5.1 billion in Buses and Bus Facilities formula and competitive grants.
- \$4.6 billion for Rural Area Formula Grants to support transit investments and operations in rural areas communities, including \$229 million for Public Transportation on Indian Reservations formula and competitive grants.
- \$2.2 billion for the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program.
- \$3.9 billion for additional Urbanized and Rural Formula Program assistance through the Growing States and High-Density States formulas.
- \$966.4 million to support Metropolitan and Statewide Planning programs.
- Up to \$23 billion for the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program, with \$8 billion guaranteed to invest in new high-capacity transit projects that communities choose to build.
- Four new competitive grant programs, including a guaranteed:
- \$1.75 billion for an All Stations Accessibility Program to reduce the number of legacy rail transit stations that remain inaccessible to individuals with disabilities.
- \$1.5 billion for Rail Vehicle Replacement Grants to replace railcars that are past their useful life and improve reliability, safety and accessibility for transit passengers.
- \$1 billion for Ferry Service for Rural Communities to improve access and mobility in areas where ferry service is a critical link for communities.
- \$250 million for an Electric or Low-Emitting Ferry pilot program to support the transition of passenger ferries to low- or zero-emission technologies.
- \$193 million for transit research activities and \$62 million for technical assistance and workforce development activities.

To support the implementation of these historic funding investments and new programs for public transportation under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, FTA is preparing fact sheets and related information for transit agencies, recipients of federal funding, and other transit stakeholders. Learn about funding and programs on FTA's website and through additional webinars and outreach that will take place in the coming weeks and months.



**Federal Transit  
Administration**



MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

# In-Transit

## Upcoming Events:

**2022 Bus Rodeo**  
*July 15-16, 2022*  
Austin, MN

**2022 MPTA  
Transportation  
Conference**  
*October 23-25, 2022*  
St. Cloud, MN



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