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**2025 MN & WI Public Transit
Conference - Thanks to
everyone who attended!**

President's Column



Thank you to everyone who attended the 2025 Minnesota and Wisconsin Transit Conference in Rochester! With close to 200 attendees and over 60 exhibitors, this year's event provided a great opportunity to learn and connect with the transit community. We're already looking

forward to next year's conference in St. Cloud.

I want to give a special note of appreciation to all our MPTA Award winners this year:

Distinguished Career: **Christine Kuennen**, Metro Transit

Transit Professional of the Year: **Colette Hanson**, Arrowhead Transit

Transit System of the Year: **Arrowhead Transit**
Management Innovation: **MVTA Zero Emission Transit Initiative**

Minnesota Bus Operator of the Year:

Kevin Hemann, SMART Transit

David Peacock, St. Cloud Metro Bus

Friend of Transit: **Charlie Zelle**, Metropolitan Council

We're proud of all the dedicated professionals who work hard to provide quality transit service year-round!

At our MPTA Annual Meeting on October 6th, our members voted for both returning directors and new faces on the Board. For 2026, the board will be led by:

President – **Brandon Nurmi**, Arrowhead Transit

Vice President – **Jeremy Monahan**, Prairie Lakes Transit

Secretary – **Kayla Sullivan**, The Otter Express

Treasurer – **Erik Hansen**, SouthWest Transit

This will be my final newsletter as President after more than five years at the helm of MPTA. It has been an incredible honor to lead this association and to work alongside so many dedicated professionals who share a commitment to strengthening public transportation across Minnesota. Over the years, I've had the privilege of collaborating closely with our federal and state partners to help shape policy and funding that support the growth and sustainability of our transit systems.

A particular highlight was welcoming FTA Administrator Marc Molinaro to Minnesota his decision to make our state his first official visit speaks volumes about the strength, innovation, and leadership demonstrated by Minnesota's transit systems.

Another longtime MPTA board member Luther Wynder is also stepping down next year. I want to thank Luther for his service on the board and participation in MPTA events, including spearheading the now-annual CEO Summit at the transit conference, which has become a highly valued and well attended session.

MPTA will be busy this fall and winter preparing for the 2026 Legislative Session, working with OTAT on funding and policy issues impacting transit systems, reaching out to legislators and agency leaders, and monitoring federal actions that affect all Minnesota transit systems.

When I step down as President in January, I know that MPTA will be in excellent hands with the new board and with Brandon Nurmi taking the wheel. I'm confident that the association will continue to grow and flourish because of you, the members of MPTA, who bring passion, energy, and innovative ideas to our collective mission. Together, we are ensuring that Minnesota's transit future remains strong and sustainable.

Thank you for your partnership!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan I Daniel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ryan Daniel
MPTA President

MPTA

MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

Legislative Report



Federal Update

Congress did not complete appropriations action prior to October 1, 2025. The Antideficiency Act (31 U.S.C. §§ 1341-1342, 1511-1519) generally bars the obligation or expenditure of Federal funds in the absence of appropriations. As a result, Congress must enact a CR to provide interim budget authority and prevent a government shutdown. When a funding gap occurs, Federal agencies are generally required to shut down affected projects and activities, which includes the prompt furlough of non-excepted personnel.

According to DOT, during the government shutdown, FTA operations will continue because the personnel are financed by the Highway Trust Fund or advance appropriations under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Therefore, none of FTA's 517 employees are furloughed.

The impact on FTA activities is less clear. FTA has sufficient liquidating cash to support several months of reimbursements for previously approved projects. In addition, activities funded by IIJA advance appropriations will continue during a lapse in annual appropriations. However, it is unlikely that FTA will be able to approve new grants during the shutdown. To the extent that FTA activities involve other agencies, the personnel of those agencies (e.g., Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of the Interior) may be furloughed, which could stop progress on projects.

While most federal government shutdowns last for less than a week, this one is shaping up to be one of the longest. While Republicans hold the majority in both the House and Senate, 60 votes are needed in the Senate to avoid a filibuster and move legislation and Republicans don't have 60 seats. A partisan argument over if and when lawmakers need to act to extend subsidies for the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplaces led to the current shutdown.

Democrats in the Senate refused to vote for the Republican short-term funding bill that passed the House but did not include an extension of the health care tax credits. Democrats are also hoping to repeal cuts to health care programs that were put in place as part of the GOP spending and tax bill that passed over the summer.

Reauthorization of Surface Transportation

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) will expire at the end of September, 2026. Congress has been holding hearings and seeking public input as to the development of a new multi-year surface transportation authorization act. MPTA has been communicating with member of the Minnesota delegation regarding the importance of increasing transit funding for systems in our state.

We are working closely with national groups to strengthen our voice. Messages that are consistent with many groups advocating for transit include:

- Continue stable, consistent federal funding of transit.
- Increase Formula Funds for Rural and Statewide Bus and Bus Facilities Investment.
- Reform regulations: recognize the challenges for smaller systems; eliminate unnecessary, burdensome requirements, such as FTA's Bus Spare Ratio limitation and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Commercial Driver's License Under-the-Hood testing requirement for bus operators.



Legislative Report

- Streamline the environmental review process by reforming real property acquisition for public transit and passenger rail projects and expanding the use of Categorical Exclusions.
- Reduce the time for administrative review for many existing requirements, such as Labor Standards, Buy America, and CIG project requirements.
- Ensure that public transit agencies have effective voting representation on Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).
- Increase the Small Transit Intensive Cities Program (STIC).

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) experienced significant staff reductions through a series of deferred resignation offers from the Trump administration, which resulted in about 33% of its staff leaving. This was part of a larger trend of staff reductions across the Department of Transportation (DOT), though the FTA was one of the hardest-hit agencies.

Minnesota Legislative Update



The 2026 Legislative Session is scheduled to begin on February 17, 2026.

With a two-year budget passed last year, the 2026 session will focus more on capital bonding projects and policy issues. MPTA will be advocating for increased funding to meet transit capital needs along with playing defense to maintain transit operating funds and weighing in on potential policy changes.

State agencies have submitted their agency bonding requests for 2026. These requests are sent to the governor's office where they are considered for inclusion in the governor's capital budget recommendations. For transit, the Metropolitan Council has requested:

- \$75 million in general obligation bonds for development of busway capital improvement projects. Requested funding would advance arterial bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor development including, but not limited to, environmental analysis, engineering, design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction. Requested funding would advance the development of the H Line (Como/Maryland, from Saint Paul to Minneapolis via the University of Minnesota) corridor.

MnDOT has requested:

- \$10 million in general obligation (GO) bonds to support public transit service throughout Greater Minnesota. Funding will be used to preserve current and develop new public transit facilities. Both the five-year system plans and the transit development plans include facility needs throughout the projected duration of each plan.

In August 2025 MnDOT will solicit applications for projects in 2027-2030. The following projects maybe eligible for bonding and may include predesign, design, constructing, and equipping transit facilities: • Hubbard County – Cost: ~\$3.8 million - A new facility including offices, bus storage, and bus wash. Watonwan County – Cost: over \$2 million – A new facility including offices and bus storage.

2025 Bus Rodeo - July 18-19



Congratulations to Winners and Participants in the 2025 Bus Rodeo!

Thank You! to Arrowhead Transit for hosting a hugely successful Bus Rodeo. Participants enjoyed great training and networking opportunities along with the chance to test their skills on the course.

A huge shout out to all of the volunteers who make this event happen - Thank You!



Small Bus Winners: 1st Place: **David Peacock**, St. Cloud Metro Bus; 2nd Place: **Keith Drake**, St. Cloud Metro Bus; 3rd Place: **Jason Rieck**, Three Rivers Community Action. Drivers' Choice Award: **George Dupuis-Wilson**, Arrowhead Transit
Ryan Daniel, MPTA President and **Brandon Nurmi**, Arrowhead Transit Manager pose with the award winners.

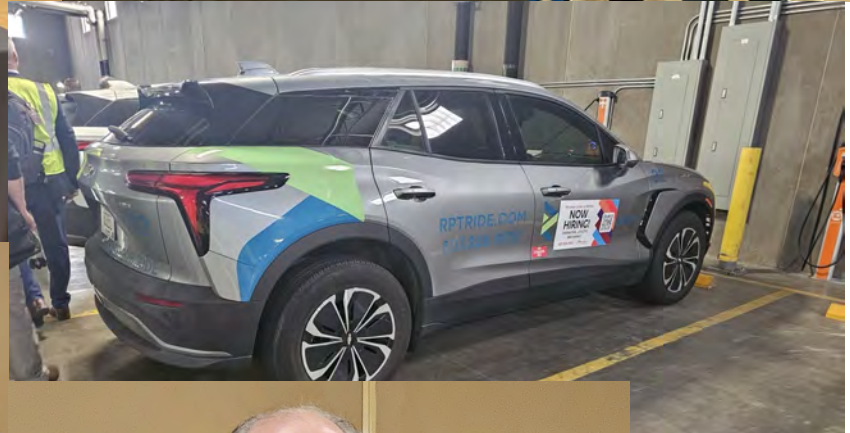
Large Bus Category Winners: 1st Place: **Jonathan Dumenya**, Metro transit; 2nd Place: **Jason Hiivala**, St. Cloud Metro Bus; 3rd Place: **Carl Hallberg**, St. Cloud.



2025 Joint MN & WI Public Transit Conference

October 6-8

Rochester, MN



Office of Transit and Active Transportation Update



OTAT Staff Updates

Assistant Office Director Caroline Miller is on parental leave into December

Welcome Hally Turner! Hally is joining us temporarily from the Office of Transportation System Management through the end of the year to work on key projects during Caroline's absence.

Hally has over 11 years of transportation experience. At MnDOT, Hally has worked in the Policy Planning Unit advancing transportation equity and coordinating the Statewide Multi-modal Transportation Plan.

Welcome Senior Transit Planner Austin Bell!

Retirements/Moves

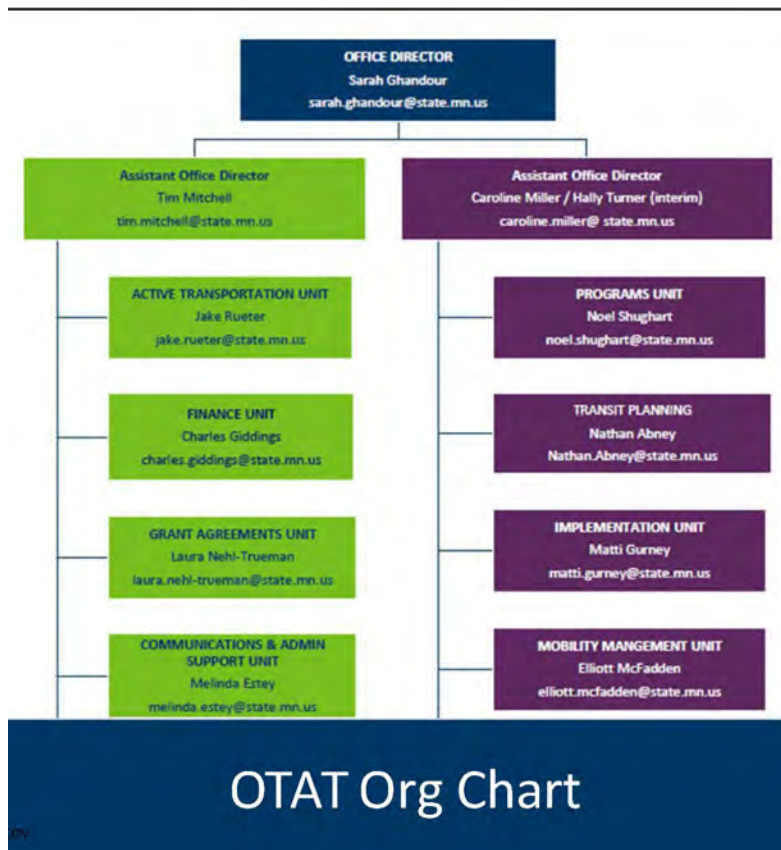
- Chuck Morris Retirement (April)
- Transit technology management and guidance transitioning to Kathy Schultz
- BlackCat transitioned to Voni Vegar
- Tom Gottfried Retirement (August)
- Transportation Access work transitioned to Mobility Management Unit
- Gary Taft Retirement (October)
- Vehicle Asset Management transitioned Sean Upshaw
- National Transit Database reporting transitioned to Senior Transit Planner Austin Bell
- Upcoming Retirements (February)
- Laura Nehl-Trueman – Supervising Staff Attorney/Grants Unit Supervisor

Introducing the Communications & Administrative Support Team! (CAST Unit)

Led by Melinda Estey with support from Chris Ward

Streamline, simplify, manage information including policies and procedures and ensure accessibility and understanding both internally and externally.

RTAP Program now led by Cathleen Amick.



ROUSH CleanTech and Its First-Ever Propane Bus Prove Durability

Over a decade ago, in 2012, Blue Bird and ROUSH CleanTech partnered on the original Blue Bird Vision bus equipped with a ROUSH CleanTech propane fuel system.



Now, 15 years later, that same propane school bus has continually operated in the Boys and Girls Club of Martin County's day-to-day activities since 2014.

The 2012 model year bus, the first of its kind, initially served as a demo bus for Florida Transportation Systems before it was purchased in 2014 by Florida's Boys and Girls Club of Martin County. Since then, it has served as a critical component of their mission to provide after-school and summer programs for area youth.

The Boys and Girls Club's initial decision to invest in propane technology stemmed from its commitment to environmental responsibility and economic efficiency. With the success of the first bus, the Boys and Girls Club purchased a second Blue Bird Vision Propane bus in 2015. Both propane buses continue to operate daily, transporting up to 70 students per trip from local schools to club facilities through Martin County.



Since the inception of ROUSH CleanTech 15 years ago, we've been working to create safe, reliable and environmentally friendly propane systems for school buses. All ROUSH CleanTech propane products are certified to the ultra-low NOx level of 20 mg/bhp-hr. This standard offering is 90% cleaner than the current EPA standard for NOx and 99% cleaner in NOx than diesel vehicles built before 2007.

For 15 years, we've built a foundation of transparency in our operations, clarity in our products, and enduring relationships with our

customers and partners. This has led to many success stories, saving school districts and operators more than \$100 million annually in fuel costs while also significantly reducing harmful emissions for children, drivers and surrounding communities.



Rainbow Rider FINALLY breaks ground on new facility in Alexandria

Facility Timeline



- Need for facility determined during preparation of Five Year Plan 2018
- Pre-application preparation Most of 2019
- Completed MnDOT Application for Facilities and Large Capital August 30, 2019
- MnDOT Contract awarded with Federal funding December 28, 2021
- Purchase land at 2109 Winona Rd SW in Alexandria January 31, 2022
- Signed agreement with Stone Group Architects February 6, 2023
- First Round of Bids May 2024
- Accepted 1st contractor May 2024 – rejected, did not meet DBE requirements
- Accepted 2nd contractor August 2024 – rejected, did not meet DBE requirements
- Accepted 3rd contractor September 2024 – rejected, did not meet DBE requirements
- Second Round of Bids March 2025
- Accepted 1st contractor March 2025
- Signed agreement with Nor-Son Construction June 9, 2025
- Ground Breaking August 11, 2025
- Anticipated Completion July 2026



Members of the Rainbow Rider Transit Board

Staff of OTAT and Rainbow Rider



Garage space/parking stalls: we have 15 routes that run in Alexandria and around (Douglas County) Monday – Friday. We are on track to provide approximately 138,000 rides in 2025 with 86,000 (or 62%) within Douglas County.

Conference/training room: our current facility in Lowry (built in 2005) has a conference room big enough for about 30-40 employees. This new facility has a conference room big enough for approximately 60 people, as we now have 58 employees.

One Year Later: Hibbing Public Transit by the Numbers

When Arrowhead Transit officially became Hibbing's public transit provider in August 2024, our goal was to stabilize, improve, and grow the Dial-A-Ride system in a way that truly met the community's needs.

Now, one year into service, we've compiled a full-year report for the Hibbing City Council—and we'd like to share that same information with you.

Since taking over operations, we've more than doubled the city's monthly average ridership—from approximately 1,362 riders per month in early 2024 to over 3,100 riders per month as of June 2025. This includes consistent usage from adults, as well as steady growth among elderly, disabled, and non-ambulatory riders.

New classification-based reporting allows us to understand who we're serving and where more work is needed. We've introduced Saturday and Sunday service, launched a fare structure that balances affordability with sustainability, and ensured that no ridership was lost during the ticket exchange period.

We're actively working to expand service access to groups that face transportation barriers. A recent Arrowhead Transit survey of students at MN North-Hibbing showed that:

- 63% do not own a vehicle
- 63% receive Pell Grants
- 38% rely on public transit
- 25% are first-generation college students

These indicators matter. They show us that our public transit system isn't just a convenience—it's a lifeline.

We've also heard from passengers across Hibbing who are grateful for longer service hours, consistent scheduling, and improved response times. Looking ahead, we're working toward the October 2025 launch of our online scheduling system, with a rider app expected by early 2026.

Our full August 2025 report is now available to view. It includes detailed data, rider classification breakdowns, efficiency metrics, and questions the City of Hibbing asked us to answer transparently. You can read the full PDF here:

[Read the Full Hibbing Transit Report \(PDF\)](#)



Transit System News

Morris Transit Celebrates 50 Year Anniversary!

Congratulations on 50 years of service and a bright future with growing ridership!



Fargo's budget deficit prompted proposed Matbus cuts, fee increases

After residents spoke out about how proposed changes to city bus services would affect them, city of Fargo officials say they are tweaking the city's proposed contribution to Matbus.

Assistant City Administrator Brenda Derrig said the city of Fargo is seeking ways to bring its proposed Matbus contribution from \$3.5 million to around \$4 million.

The original Matbus budget for 2026 called for the city of Fargo to pay \$5 million for the cross-border transit system. When the city came back with a \$3.5 million proposal, around 10 different route changes and service adjustments, along with fare increases, were proposed to make up for the gap in funding.

Proposed changes garnered dozens of comments from riders, including in-person comments at a Fargo City Commission public hearing and nearly 70 written comments.

"We recognize maybe all those cuts are too impactful to the system," Derrig said.



Rochester celebrates Halloween with Link or Treat transit event



The city of Rochester celebrated Halloween while promoting its upcoming Link Bus Rapid Transit system through a family event called Link or Treat.

The Halloween-themed event allowed families to learn about Rochester's first-ever Link Bus Rapid Transit system while participating in seasonal activities. Families attended in costume and took part in trick-or-treating, games and activities.

The Link project will transform transportation in Rochester. Construction is already underway, with services anticipated to start in summer 2027.

The system will provide a fare-free transit option connecting destinations across the city.



Duluth Transit Authority seeks 43% levy increase amid funding crisis

A bright new art installation at a Central Hillside bus shelter underscores the critical role public transportation plays in residents' lives, even as the Duluth Transit Authority faces potential service cuts due to a significant funding shortfall.

The colorful artwork at the corner of Sixth Avenue East and Third Street, created by artist Tiffany Fenner, represents the stories and lives of bus riders in a neighborhood where nearly half the residents lack personal transportation.

"45% of the Hillsiders are without transportation, and so public transportation is a lifeline for many of those folks," said Fenner.

Fenner's installation marks the beginning of a partnership between the DTA and Zeitgeist to bring artwork to bus shelters across the city in the coming years.

The timing of this celebration of public transit creates a stark contrast with the financial challenges facing the agency.



SEP 29 – OCT 5
WEEK WITHOUT DRIVING

DTA
zeitgeist
Help transform transportation

Week Without Driving is an annual week for drawing attention to the many barriers non-drivers experience while commuting in a car-centric transportation system.

Join the movement of people calling for safe routes for all. Share your story during **#WeekWithoutDriving** from Sep 29–Oct 5 and tag **@ZeitgeistDuluth** to win prizes!

CHECK OUT NEW ART ON 6TH AVENUE EAST BUS SHELTERS

The Twin Ports Bus Shelter Art Project is a unique effort by the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) and Zeitgeist Center for Arts & Community to spread art across the community, celebrate public transit, and encourage ridership by beautifying bus shelters with original artwork by regional artists. Beautifying shelters on 6th Avenue East with art by Tiffany Fenner marks the first of many shelters to be transformed in the coming years. Visit zeitgeistarts.com/transportation to follow the initiative and receive updates about open calls for art proposals.

The DTA is requesting a 43% increase in their levy to offset declining state funding, with General Manager Chris Belden warning that service reductions may be inevitable without additional revenue.

"Most likely, where that would have to come from is service, and what we would look at is minimizing the impact to our riders and starting with the least impactful and working our way down," said Belden.

The DTA eliminated its ambassador program, which operated in partnership with Downtown Duluth's Clean and Safe Team.

"Folks from that company help our passengers find their routes," said Belden. "They provide a little bit of soft security in our transit center and do a little bit of cleaning, so it's been a great partnership, but unfortunately, we're unable to afford that contract going forward."

The Duluth City Council approved the DTA's proposed maximum levy at a Sept. 22 meeting but indicated further discussions are needed before the final levy is determined.

While the levy could increase by 43%, the DTA's total budget would grow by only about 5% — what Belden describes as a typical year-to-year increase driven by maintenance and wage costs.

On-demand transportation service links Grand Rapids to rural and tribal communities

MPR News

With the tap of a button or short phone call, community members living in the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's Ball Club community can request a free ride with the recently expanded transportation service, goMARTI.

Minnesota's Advanced Rural Transit Innovation, or goMARTI, launched its pilot program three years ago to test free, autonomous and on-demand transportation services in rural Minnesota's "challenging winter conditions." Until two months ago, the program primarily served the community of Grand Rapids, providing over 30,000 rides since its initial launch.

The company that manages the project, The PLUM Catalyst, worked with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to bring transportation services to Ball Club, the tribal nation's southernmost community along Highway 2.

Tammy Meehan Russell, president and chief catalyst for The PLUM Catalyst, says in addition to the tribal community, over 70 new pick-up and drop-off locations include those in La Prairie, Cohasset and Deer River.

"We wanted to really understand the needs, especially in a rural community or rural area like Grand Rapids," Meehan Russell said. "By leveraging technology and funding that's going toward technology and technology development, we're able to also fill a gap and show this need for transportation in a region like this."

GoMARTI's fleet includes electric and hybrid vehicles, and autonomous vehicles with self-driving capabilities. Most of the vehicles are wheelchair accessible. Despite self-driving capabilities, Meehan Russell says drivers are still in the car when using autonomous vehicles, which primarily service the immediate Grand Rapids area.

Kyle Fairbanks serves as district one representative for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. He says transportation is a major barrier in Native communities.

"Just the lack of our band members having that transportation prevents them from seeking everyday needs, from health care to groceries and being able to get to school," Fairbanks said.

He emphasizes health care needs, noting the increased access goMARTI has provided since its expansion. He hopes the tribe will continue to work with The PLUM Catalyst to further expand services to more communities within the reservation.



New express bus service will replace Northstar rail line in Big Lake, Elk River

[The Minnesota Star Tribune](#)

The Metropolitan Council voted Wednesday to enter into a contract with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to provide express bus service from Big Lake and Elk River to downtown Minneapolis.

New Route 882 will begin service on Jan. 5 in place of the beleaguered Northstar commuter rail line, which the council voted to shut down due to low ridership and high operating costs.

Northstar's last run will happen over the first weekend of January as the train will serve fans headed to the Vikings' final home game of the season.

Then buses will fill the void.



Bus trips from Big Lake to downtown Minneapolis would take 77 minutes and 51 minutes from Elk River, according to a presentation delivered to the Met Council earlier this month.

The Met Council had previously approved replacing trains with two express routes serving Northstar park-and-rides in Ramsey, Anoka, Coon Rapids and Fridley. That left Elk River and Big Lake with no substitute for Northstar, even though nearly half of the rail lines' riders boarded in the two communities in Sherburne County, according to Metro Transit.

The two cities are outside the Met Council's jurisdiction and "we do not have the authority to operate service outside the seven-county metro area," Adam Harrington, Metro Transit's director of service development, told the council's Transportation Committee earlier this month. "What we are trying to do is capture current Northstar riders."

MnDOT does have authority to run bus service outside the metro area and contract with the Met Council to offer the service.

"I think it is a good move," Transportation Committee member Judy Johnson said. "It's about getting people to work downtown."

The contract would allow Metro Transit to operate the new service for the next two years using coach buses. Fares would be \$3.25 one way.

Upcoming Events:

MN Roadeo
July 17 & 18
Carver, MN

**Minnesota Public
Transit Conference**
October 19-21
St. Cloud, MN



2026 MPTA Bus Roadeo



Be a part of the fun!



July 17 & 18, 2026

Carver, MN

Contact Us:

Have a story for us?

Reach out to us here:

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