

# 2015 Metro Transit Accomplishments

## Ridership tops 85.8 million, continuing decade of growth

The METRO Blue Line set a new annual ridership record and system ridership increased for the 11th time in 12 years as customers took more than 85.8 million rides on buses and trains operated by Metro Transit in 2015. Ridership increased 1.4 percent over 2014, by nearly 1.2 million rides, and reached its highest level since 1981. Annual ridership has increased about 23 percent since 2005. Average weekday ridership on all modes in 2015 was approximately 276,400.

**Blue Line:** More than 10.6 million rides were taken on the Blue Line, the highest annual ridership since it opened in mid-2004. The previous record of nearly 10.5 million rides was set in 2010. Average weekday ridership topped 30,000 for eight consecutive months. The state's first light-rail line also celebrated an important milestone in January, surpassing 100 million total rides since its opening.

**Green Line:** Nearly 12.4 million rides were taken on the Green Line during its first full year of operation. Average weekday ridership was 37,400 and for several months exceeded the 2030 forecast of 41,000 average weekday rides. Ridership in the Central Corridor, including the Green Line and bus routes 16 and 94, has nearly doubled since 2013, when service was provided by buses alone.

**Bus:** There was an 8.6 percent decline in total bus ridership, reflecting a transition from buses to light rail and construction that led to prolonged detours on multiple routes. In all, more than 62.1 million bus rides were taken in 2015, including 51.3 million urban local rides, 8.7 million express rides and 2.1 million suburban local rides.

**Northstar:** Northstar ridership increased slightly over 2014, to 722,637 rides. December's average weekday ridership was up 12 percent over the same month last year. Ridership improvements were due in large part to restored reliability: trains arrived at their final station within four minutes of schedule 96 percent of the time.



**Special events:** Metro Transit provided more than 575,000 rides to and from the 2015 Minnesota State Fair, the highest express and regular route ridership in event history. With fans traveling to the new St. Paul Saints ballpark, TCF Bank Stadium and Target Field, single-day light-rail ridership topped 100,000 for the first time ever on Thursday, Sept. 3. Ridership to Twins games at Target Field increased 16 percent and about 28 percent of fans took transit to Vikings games at TCF Bank Stadium, generating nearly 289,000 total rides during the regular season.

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## **Bus stops improve with new shelters, signs**

Efforts to improve the waiting experience at bus stops began taking shape across the region. New shelters were installed at 51 locations and another 60 shelters were replaced in Minneapolis, where Metro Transit assumed responsibility for shelters that had previously been under private ownership. In addition, 2,300 new bus stop signs with route numbers, maps and instructions that help customers access real-time NexTrip departure information using a mobile device were installed. Digital displays with NexTrip information were activated at all light-rail platforms and new displays were installed at 16 high-traffic bus boarding locations.

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## **Customers turn to website, texting for transit information**

The demand for transit information continued to grow in 2015. Customers requested real-time departure information using NexTrip more than 84 million times – more than double the number of requests made in 2012. Another 18,000 NexTrip requests were made through a service that provides this information by text message. Around 6.3 million trips were also planned using Metro Transit's online Trip Planner. And around 8,500 people had signed up to receive text or e-mail Rider Alerts about scheduled service disruptions by year's end. While customers adapted to new technologies, the Transit Information Center remained a vital resource: TIC representatives helped customers plan 1.2 million trips, answering calls with a record-low hold time of 43 seconds.

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## **A Line construction gets underway**

Heavy construction was completed at stations for the region's first arterial Bus Rapid Transit Line, the A Line. Opening on June 11 2016, the A Line will provide an improved bus experience with faster and more frequent service, specialized vehicles and train-like features including off-board fare payment and enhanced stations with more amenities and security features.

The line will operate between the Rosedale Transit Center in Roseville and the METRO Blue Line's 46th Street Station in Minneapolis, serving several employment, retail and residential

destinations along Snelling Avenue, Ford Parkway and 46th Street. The line will also provide a connection to the METRO Green Line's Snelling Avenue Station.

The first A Line buses also began arriving in late-2015.

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## **Go-To Cards, passes make fare payments faster and easier**

In 2015, more than half of customers paid their fares with an electronic Go-To Card, which makes boarding simpler and more efficient. Building on this trend, Metro Transit partnered with HOURCAR to allow customers of the car-sharing service the ability to use their Go-To Card for vehicle entry. Go-To Card readers were also added to Northstar Link buses that provide connecting express bus service between the Northstar Commuter Rail line's Big Lake Station and St. Cloud.

The popular Student Pass program grew with the addition of a Summer Student Pass and a school-year pilot at Johnson High School in St. Paul. Student Pass ridership increased 12.5 percent from 2014, to almost 4 million rides. Several large employers, including Regions Hospital, Be the Match, Delta and the Mall of America, joined the Metropass program, providing employees a low-cost, unlimited-ride transit passes.

In December, Metro Transit launched a six-month low-income fare pilot program that allowed households participating in the Council's rental assistance program to buy fare passes that automatically provide discounted fares. Results from the Transit Assistance Program will inform next steps.

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## **Developing the workforce of the future**

To prepare for generational retirements, Metro Transit significantly increased its recruitment efforts. Job opportunities were promoted at more than 100 outreach events, including Employment Open Houses and operator testing events. To introduce students to career opportunities at Metro Transit, Metro Transit participated in both the Step Up and Urban Scholar internship programs. An innovative training program was also launched, putting job seekers on a path toward full-time employment as a Mechanic-Technician through a combination of career and college readiness, support toward earning a technical degree and a paid internship.

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## **New technology improves bus, rail fleets**

Metro Transit received 68 new buses – including 24 60-foot articulated buses and the first arterial BRT bus – in 2015. Most of these buses replaced older vehicles that had reached the end of their service life. Several improvements were also made: equipment that allows data to be transferred more quickly and efficiently was installed on three-quarters of all buses; a system that automatically announces bus stops and other key destinations was implemented on all routes; and free WiFi was introduced on a portion of the fleet. With a continued focus on preventative maintenance, buses traveled an average of 7,510 miles between maintenance road calls – double the reliability from a decade ago. Three manufacturers also demonstrated electric bus technology for customers and staff, providing information that will help inform future fleet planning efforts.

To bolster the reliability of light-rail vehicles, pantographs specially-designed to cut through ice were installed and work began on a second, more extensive overhaul of the trucks bolted to the bottom of each vehicle, containing the electric motors and gearboxes that move trains down the tracks. Progress was also made on the exterior refurbishment of Bombardier light-rail vehicles. In addition to addressing corrosion from a decade of use, the trains are being repainted to match the color scheme of the newer Siemens vehicles. Light-rail vehicles traveled an average of more than 39,000 miles between service call in 2015.

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## **Transit Police expand, build diversity**

The Metro Transit Police Department continued its growth, swearing in 25 new officers in 2015. By year's end, the department had 109 full-time officers and 89 part-time officers. The department's newest officers completed an expanded academy that includes community outreach and cultural awareness training. Many of the department's newest hires speak a second language and Spanish language courses were offered to help officers communicate with non-English speakers. Transit Police also established new beats in North Minneapolis and St. Paul's East Side while continuing to concentrate on both downtown St. Paul and Minneapolis. In addition, a new juvenile unit was created to assist with cases involving first-time youth offenders.

Transit Police responded to more than 46,000 calls for service – three times the number from 2013. There were an additional 34 requests for mutual aid or "Rescue Buses" that provide shelter to emergency responders and residents during emergencies. Felony assaults on operators reached an all-time low, while property crime decreased. Officers completed more than 2.6 million fare inspections on light rail and Northstar.

Chief John Harrington was named the Minnesota Public Transit Association's Transit Professional of the Year. In 2015, Harrington traveled to Mogadishu to assist with police training and later

hosted law enforcement officials from that country. The department also hired the country's first Somali-born female officer.

In 2015, Metro Transit also advanced plans to expand its Heywood Campus, including the construction of a new headquarters for the Metro Transit Police Department.

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## **Despite detours, service stays on track**

Street Operations coordinated more than 1,800 detours, including an ongoing closure of Nicollet Mall that forced several routes to move to Hennepin Avenue in downtown Minneapolis. More than 170 routes schedules were adjusted during the year due to the detours. Despite the service disruptions, buses operated within five minutes of their schedule more than 87 percent of the time.

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## **A 'go-to' resource for Transit-Oriented Development**

Metro Transit's Transit-Oriented Development Office continued to serve as a go-to source for staff, local partners and developers working together to maximize the impact of transit investments by hosting forums and sharing expertise. To prioritize efforts, the TOD Office evaluated and ranked more than 100 Council-owned parcels along existing or planned transitways in the seven-county metro region.

In late-2015, the TOD office began negotiating with the City of St. Paul and the St. Paul Port Authority to explore the possibility of building a new Major League Soccer stadium on Council-owned property near Snelling Avenue that would be served by both the METRO Green Line and the A Line. Initial steps were also taken to evaluate development possibilities on land adjacent to the Green Line's Central Station, the Blue Line's Fort Snelling Park & Ride and the Northstar Fridley Station.

The TOD Office also worked closely with staff from the Green Line Extension and Blue Line Extension project offices to explore how best to support transit-oriented and joint development opportunities along those planned transitways.

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## **Setting the stage for future service improvements**

In spring 2015, the Metropolitan Council approved the 2030 Bus Service Improvement Plan, which provides a framework for expanding bus service as additional funding becomes available. The plan identifies more than 100 service improvements that build on the existing transit network by expanding coverage, improving the frequency and span of existing service and add

new reverse commute services. Taken together, the improvements have the potential to generate an estimated 29 million annual rides by 2030.

In addition to local, express and suburban service, planning for additional Bus Rapid Transit lines also advanced in 2015. A design contract was secured for the METRO Orange Line, which will provide BRT service on I-35W between Minneapolis and Burnsville beginning in 2017. And a Draft Station Plan was introduced for the C Line, which will provide arterial BRT service on Penn Avenue between Brooklyn Center and downtown Minneapolis.

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## **Using data to drive decision-making**

To aid in future planning, Metro Transit's Strategic Initiatives Department created new tools that allow staff to better understand ridership trends and address service issues such as on-time performance and safety. A master contract with the University of Minnesota was executed to streamline future research partnerships.