

# DAKOTA

## TRANSPORTER

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### Building on a Strong Foundation

Ron Baumgart, River Cities Transit  
Dakota Transit Association  
President

Over the years, leaders and members have built a secure foundation for the Dakota Transit Association (DTA), using their perseverance and dedication to create an organization rich in experience and focused on the future of transit in the Dakotas. What would the members of today do without that? Now, when it's time to use that foundation as our springboard into the future, DTA is in the best position possible to meet tomorrow's challenges.

So far this year, the DTA Board of Directors has met twice to look at these challenges and determine just how the association can meet and exceed them. Thanks to the assistance of Bruce Fuchs, North Dakota DOT, and Bruce Lindholm, South Dakota DOT, we have a clear idea of where the road ahead lies.

It is inevitable that changes will come. We feel those changes will only enhance the work done by our predecessors.

While good training is provided at the annual DTA convention, we have decided to build upon that opportunity by offering two additional training sessions per year. One session will be held in the western parts of North and South Dakota while the other will be held in the east. This plan will provide the latest information and training to both directors and drivers.

The board will also take a more active role in lobbying state legislators and Congressional delegations. Part of the salary for an executive director who will assist in lobbying in North Dakota will be funded by DTA funds. In South Dakota, a lobbyist will be hired to represent our voices at the Legislature and the U.S. Capitol. We have earmarked \$5,000 a year per state for this effort.

We're planning for some fun, too. A Bus Rodeo will be held jointly for both states in Minot this fall. During the weekend of August 28-29, the Rodeo will be held Saturday and two training sessions will be held on Sunday. This is

an opportunity to test your skills as well as network with other drivers and directors.

Don't forget the Driver of the Year awards. Start thinking about who you wish to nominate for this honor. Nomination forms will be distributed and will be available on our website by May 1. The deadline for returning entries is June 1.

Finally, our newsletter and web page is going to be managed by the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center, a part of North Dakota State University in Fargo. Jill Hough and Gary Hegland will head the project. In the future, forms, sign-ups and other information will be available on the Internet. More news about this as it becomes available.

Remember that our membership drive is on. Send in those DTA dues for 2004 as soon as you can.

I'd like to thank the other members of the Board of Directors for their great ideas and assistance. We will meet again in May.

Safe driving.

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## Funding and Other Issues



Bruce Fuchs, NDDOT

It's a case of "don't count your chickens before they hatch" regarding federal transportation funds. The U.S. Senate passed a transportation bill with significant increases in funding for the 5309 program for FY 2004. Many of you have asked when we'll receive that

money.

Unfortunately, the bill is stalled. The U.S. House of Representatives has not agreed to the bill or anything like it. That means no money yet for computers, vehicles or bus barns. That's where we'll be until the House and Senate concur on a bill.

In North Dakota we're planning our training schedule for the coming year. Project managers, please let us know the areas where you need assistance and we'll try to plan our training programs accordingly. Also, let us know how many individuals will need PASS recertification in the coming year. We'll also need to know how many new drivers will need their initial PASS training.

Keep your drivers certified to reduce the liability of your organization. Drivers will also be able to provide passengers with better service and react appropriately in emergency situations. Ultimately, having well-trained drivers reflects well on your service and your agency.

Over the past 18 months we've noticed that some programs are not participating in our training. Why? Is the training not addressing your needs? You need to let me know why you are not participating. Training is absolutely essential to maintaining our transit systems.

## House Passes Highway Bill

On a 357-65 vote the U.S. House of Representatives passed a \$275 billion highway and transit bill on April 2. The bill is now in conference committee as members try to reconcile the bill with a \$318 billion packaged passed by the U.S. Senate in February. Both versions of the bill represent an increase from the \$218 billion spent for the 1998-2003 program. The White House has threatened to veto any bill that costs more than the \$256 billion it recommends.

## Transit Issues In South Dakota

Bruce Lindholm, SDDOT



It has often been said that if an organization is not growing, it's dying. To keep transit healthy, we have encouraged the expansion of transit into new communities and encouraged providers to market service to increase ridership. We realized that expanding transit and increasing ridership was going to cost money and we have been very successful at increasing the level of funding available to providers. Statewide, ridership has increased by 25 percent in our non-urban public and human services systems. At the same time, state and federal funding has increased by 50 percent from \$1.8 million FY 2001 to \$2.7 million in FY 2004.

Several issues relate to funding and ridership. The first relates to performance – if more monies are put into transit systems to increase transit availability, we would certainly hope to see that increase in ridership, otherwise it becomes difficult to justify additional funding. I am fairly comfortable with the increases in ridership in South Dakota as a whole, although some systems have not increased ridership in spite of greatly increased funding. I believe ridership has not risen as fast as funding because of increased costs (fuel and insurance) and latent funding demands (salaries and equipment needs).

Marketing transit is not only done at a provider level. When I work to obtain additional funding from established sources or obtain new funding, I am marketing transit. I explain the benefits. I explain the costs. And I explain why we need more money and what we expect to get from the increased expenditure. Public officials fund programs that they think are important. Expanding transit so that it is more a daily, normal part of people's lives makes it more visible and more important to public officials. The more that I can show what great things are happening in transit – the easier it is to make my case that transit is important and worth funding.

We need everyone's help to get transit funding where it needs to be. As transit providers, the best thing you can do is market your service and increase your ridership. If your system has declining ridership, I encourage you to closely examine your system to find out why. It is difficult to overstate the importance of this – the better job you do, the more likely it will be that you will have an opportunity to continue doing it.

## Outstanding Performance Leads to Award for Transit Drivers

Annette Gross, a driver for Prairie Hills Transit in Spearfish, was named "South Dakota Driver of the Year" by the Dakota Transit Association in Grand Forks in September. Gene Melby, a driver for Wells/Sheridan transit in Harvey, was named "North Dakota Driver of the Year."



According to Gross's nomination, "The only folder thicker than her training file is the folder with letters of thanks from riders." She was cited as an exemplary employee with a clear driving record and excellent people skills. She was recently honored by a local school for her idea to plant a tree in memory of a 6-year-old rider who died from a brain aneurysm. She also assisted in the rescue of a man who crashed his car into a light pole.

The managers who nominated her also wrote, "Nettie is not only bubbly and full of energy, she has a heart bigger than most of our fleets. She is the employee who is able to transition in and out of each and every position while maintaining the work ethic and enthusiasm that are essential." Gross has been a driver for the Prairie Hills Transit for more than 3 years.

Melby's nomination says, "He is the type of employee that we all hope to be fortunate enough to find. He is



reliable, responsible and always puts safety first. He is always there whenever needed and consistently goes above and beyond in his service to his passengers and

to Wells/Sheridan Transit." He has been a driver for the transit agency since 1990. The nomination notes that Melby is especially good at working with mentally challenged and physically disabled passengers. When the agency experienced financial difficulties, Melby offered his position to two employees who had been laid off. He retired from driving, but returned to hold the position for another driver who was ill. That driver eventually passed away and Melby continues to work as a driver part-time.

## Trilling for Transit

by Brenda Schweitzer, Manager  
Arrow Public Transit

We all struggle with the never-ending challenge of raising our match funding, no matter what size the project. The biggest obstacle seems to be figuring out a fund-raiser. When someone comes to you with not only an idea, but they want to do all the legwork, you jump at it!

Arrow Public Transit offers public transportation in Lemmon, Bison and Faith, S.D. We are a sparsely populated area located in the very northwest corner of the state. If you have been through our area, you know the miles it takes to get anywhere! Service in Faith and Bison is limited. Lemmon offers in-town public transportation with several contracts and out-of-town scheduled trips as well. In Bison we have a contract with the Head Start program, and offer trips from Bison to Lemmon, Hettinger, N.D., and Bowman, N.D., as needed for medical, shopping or recreational needs. Community support has proven the need for public transportation in this area of the Dakotas.



This past Christmas season, the Hurry & Hustle Community Club of Bison contacted us about using our 15-passenger van and our driver to go Christmas caroling. The plan gets better, as this caroling would be a fund-raiser for Arrow Transit!

Anyone wanting the community club to sing for them, a neighbor, friend, etc., contacted the organization and paid them \$5, or a donation of their choice. The women then delivered musical greetings around town in an old-fashioned sort of way. The group stopped at several homes in the community of about 500 people, singing their songs, getting on and off of our vehicle several times. At the end of the night, the trip count for this fund-raiser was 65, and Arrow Transit was given the proceeds of \$250. Every dollar counts, and for a night of bringing holiday greetings to residents of this small community, everyone involved felt the giving spirit.

## State Gas Tax Exemption Legislation Proposed for North Dakota Transit Operators



Michael Simonson  
Transit Planner, City of Fargo

In 2003, a bill was introduced in the North Dakota Legislature to eliminate the 21 cents per gallon state gas tax paid for fuel used in public transit vehicles. House Bill #1482, introduced and carried by Rep. Steve Zaiser (D) of Fargo, had broad support from urban and rural transit organizations, but ultimately failed. The North Dakota Department of Transportation and the North Dakota League of Cities moderately opposed the bill. They acknowledged the worthiness of the bill's objectives, but felt it would set a bad precedent by opening NDDOT coffers.

Transit operators understand that public transportation is an essential service to both urban and rural areas. It is becoming increasingly more important as our population ages. Many people rely upon public transportation for basic necessities such as medical services, food, etc. Public transportation enables people to live at home longer, decreasing the need for costly elderly housing/care facilities. Perhaps most importantly, it provides dignity to our elderly and disabled by helping them maintain their independence.

Public transportation is primarily funded by tax dollars. Both rural and urban systems are challenged to meet the needs of their citizens with limited resources. The gas tax on public transportation vehicles reallocates local public transportation funding to the state. Ironically, NDDOT returns some of this funding to local governments for public transportation. Most states, including Minnesota and Montana, do not pay state gas taxes for fuel used in public transportation vehicles. This creates issues for transit systems operating on state borders, such as the one in Fargo-Moorhead.

Early on, NDDOT raised concerns about the possibility of the commercial operators benefiting from the bill. To eliminate this concern, the bill was written to apply only to vehicles used solely for public transportation purposes. The bill (#1482) and the fiscal note can be viewed at the ND Legislative Council website: <http://www.state.nd.us/lr/assembly/58-2003/leginfo/bill-inquiry/>.

The fiscal note prepared by the ND Tax Department projected state revenue loss for the 2003-05 biennium at \$300,000. While \$150,000/year is only a small portion of NDDOT's budget, it is significant to transit operators. With fuel prices headed for all time highs, it will be more difficult than ever for some transit operations to provide necessary services. The need for this bill is greater now than ever

before. The benefit of the bill to a transit operator can quickly be determined—take the number of gallons of fuel used times 21 cents.

Transit operators in both North and South Dakota should rally to support this or a similar bill for the upcoming legislative sessions. Many good pieces of legislation do not pass on the first attempt, but, with modification and education, subsequently go on to become law. The bill should have broad support from legislators representing both rural and urban districts. It is a good bill for the benefit of all Dakotans. By working to improve the bill, and building broad support up front, the bill may well pass this time.

### See You at the Rodeo

The North Dakota/South Dakota Bus Rodeo and Driver Training will be held Saturday and Sunday, August 28-29 in Minot. The event marks the first year that South Dakota has participated in the annual event.

Drivers from both states will compete on the same course together, but will be scored separately. A North Dakota winner and a South Dakota winner will be named for the rodeo competition.

There will be two simultaneous training sessions for drivers. Pass training will be taught by Rick Thoms and Darrell Francis. Thoms is the manager and Francis is the treasurer of Souris Basin Transportation in Minot. A hands-on driver training course will be taught by Darrell Michalenko, manager of Minot City Transit.

The number of drivers participating in the training will be restricted, so registration will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Additional information will be sent out later this summer. Hotel accommodations for Rodeo participants will be at the International Inn in Minot.

## Educational Updates

### Drug and Alcohol Policy Updates

The FTA Office of Safety and Security recently clarified rules for alcohol and drug tests following accidents involving lifts on mass transit vehicles. The FTA has determined that because lifts constitute equipment used in revenue service and their operation is essential to the operation of the vehicle and protection of the public safety, their operation should be included in the accident definition. Therefore, the FTA clarified its position expanding its interpretation of "operation of a vehicle" to include operation of its lift. Thus, fatalities associated with the operation of a lift will require the conduct of FTA drug and alcohol post-accident tests for the driver and any other covered employee that could have contributed to the accident. Non-fatal accidents associated with the operation of the lift that result in bodily injury requiring immediate transportation to a medical facility will also require the conduct of FTA drug and alcohol post-accident tests unless the employee can be completely discounted as a contributing factor.

### Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications

The FTA prescription and over-the counter medications toolkit was developed in response to growing concern about the use of prescription and over-the-counter medications that can affect the performance of safety-sensitive duties. To assist grantees, FTA created a toolkit of sample policies, procedures, training materials and post-accident documentation procedures that are currently in use at transit agencies across the country. Print copies were mailed to grantees in August. To download another copy of the toolkit, go to <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/>

### DTA on the Web

The Dakota Transit Association will launch its Web site, <http://www.dakotatransit.org/>, within the next few weeks. The site will feature information on the association, training opportunities, recent newsletters and links to other useful Web sites. Let us know what you would like to see on the Web site and visit frequently to keep up with changes and new information.



Patrick Nichols at work on the new DTA Web page.

### FTA Substance Abuse Seminar Set for Sioux Falls

The one-day seminar is set for April 20 at the Holiday Inn City Centre in Sioux Falls. It will provide essential facts and information to facilitate employer's compliance with DOT's 49 CFR Part 40 and FTA's 49 CFR Part 655. A high-level overview of the regulation will be discussed as well as how employers may treat both over-the-counter and prescription drugs. Transit agency managers, safety managers and third-party contractors for transit substance abuse programs are encouraged to attend. Registration is free, but space is limited. For more information contact Olivia D. Alexis at (617) 494-3344 or (617) 494-3798 or by e-mail at [olivia.alexis@volpe.dot.gov](mailto:olivia.alexis@volpe.dot.gov). To register on-line go to <http://transit-safety.volpe.dot.gov/Training/655Seminars/>.

### Random Testing Rates Unchanged

On Jan. 5 the Federal Register announced the random testing rates for employers subject to the Federal Transit Administration's drug and alcohol rules. The random testing rate for drugs remains at 50 percent while the random testing rate for alcohol remains at 10 percent.

## Why Join DTA?

Paying your membership dues allows the Dakota Transit Association to accomplish its mission on your behalf. The association encourages cooperation among members in dealing with public transportation issues to:

- Provide a medium for the exchange of ideas, information, and experiences.
- Collect, compile and make available to members comparative data and information relative to public transportation in the Dakotas.
- Promote training for members through joint development, sponsorship and implementation of workshops, seminars courses, employee exchanges etc.
- Facilitate the establishment of more suitable types of insurance coverage.
- Enable local operators to provide safe, adequate, and cost-effective transportation through operating programs such as insurance and purchasing.

If you haven't renewed your membership, do it today. If you can't find your membership renewal invoice or have other membership questions, contact Linda Freeman at (701) 385-4364 or Kenmare Wheels and Meals, Inc. P.O. Box 481; Kenmare, ND 58746

## Calendar of Events

**April 20, 2004**

**FTA Substance Abuse Training Sessions**

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

**April 23, 2004**

**SURTC presents a TEL8 Transit Technical Assistance Workshop: "Managing by the Numbers"**

**May 2-6, 2004**

**APTA 2004 Bus & Paratransit Conference**

Denver, Colorado

**June 13-18, 2004**

**CTAA Moving Mountains EXPO 2004**

Seattle, Washington

**August 28-29, 2004**

**DTA Rodeo**

Minot, North Dakota

**September 20-23, 2004**

**2004 Dakota Transit Association Conference**

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

**October 10-13, 2004**

**APTA 2004 Annual Meeting**

Atlanta, Georgia

## Upcoming Training

**Upcoming Training Sessions:**

**Date are all "to be determined"**

- Web Page Development
- Marketing Transit on a "Shoe-String" Budget
- Survey Development
- AND MORE!

## James River Transit may Blaze a New Trail for Transit Systems in Small Cities across the Region

The agency is exploring development of a fixed-route transit system to complement its existing paratransit operation. The study is being conducted with funding from the North Dakota Department of Transportation and expertise from the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center, part of North Dakota State University's Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute.

"Over the course of the last three to four years we've found that many of our clients are unable to afford much extra transportation. We want to look at ways to make transit more affordable to them," says Carol Wright, executive director of James River Community Center and Senior Services, the agency that operates James River Transit.



As in many small cities, younger families are migrating to larger urban areas, leaving behind a larger proportion of individuals with special needs. Those individuals often rely heavily on transit systems and have a limited ability to pay for them. At the same time, declining tax bases pose serious challenges to transit funding.

The cost of providing a paratransit ride for a James River Transit client is about \$5.96 per passenger. The cost of providing fixed-route service in Fargo, N.D., and Moorhead, Minn., is \$2.72 per passenger and \$2.36 in Minot, N.D. The proposed system in Jamestown would have stops at common paratransit destinations like clinics, grocery stores and service agencies.

"We're hoping our system can be a model," Wright says. "If adding some form of fixed-route system would work for us, other communities could modify our plan for their systems." Only three of North Dakota's 45 transit systems offer fixed-route service.

Currently, the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center is evaluating how a fixed-route service might serve riders in the Jamestown area. Researchers conducted surveys and focus group meetings. "It was important for the researchers to see first hand the issues that we face," Wright says. She notes that 97 percent of current riders are elderly, physically disabled, diagnosed with a chronic mental illness or developmentally disabled.

"We have large number of support services here, so we have a higher than average number of people with special needs," Wright explains. "That's all the more reason to explore development of a transit option like this. But we have to be sure that it meets the needs of the riders and not just the needs of the agency."

Once survey and focus group results are analyzed, researchers will work with James River Transit to analyze a proposed fixed-route system. The researchers will also evaluate the system's cost effectiveness and how it can be integrated with the existing demand-response paratransit system. The study is scheduled to be completed this fall. For updates, see <http://www.surtc.org/research/fixedRoute.php>.

## After Hours Transit? Call a Cab

A new taxicab company is bringing new vigor to an after-hours transit service offered in Dickinson, N.D.

In addition to the regularly scheduled transit service offered by Elder Care in Dickinson, the agency also offers transit from 5 p.m. to midnight on weekdays, from 7 a.m. to midnight on Saturdays and from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Sundays. The after-hours service is provided through an agreement with a local taxicab company.

Deb's Cab won the contract for service within the past year. Deb's Cab replaces Queen City Cab, the company that has been providing the service since it was instituted in 1991.

The new provider has breathed new life into the service, says Midge Kuntz, executive director of Elder Care. "The benefit to passengers is phenomenal and it's greatly appreciated. They remember what it was like before this service was provided, when they couldn't go anywhere after regular hours. Now they can and it's affordable," she says.

Riders can qualify for the subsidized service by being 60 years old or older, disabled, or classified as low-income. Qualified riders apply for a "blue card" from elder care. When they request a ride, they show the card and pay a one-way fare of \$1.75.

The driver records the rider's name and other information from the card and that documentation is turned into Elder Care each month. "We're able to look at the statistics and tell you exactly which group is using the contract services," Kuntz says.

In addition to the fare, the cab company also receives a base contract fee from Elder Care. The company must provide a handicap-accessible vehicle and comply with FTA drug and alcohol policies.

Last year, Elder Care provided 43,160 rides. Of those, 13,392 were provided by the contracting cab company. Of those rides, Elder Care provided 6,010 rides to passengers in wheelchairs. Of those, 1,335 were provided by the cab company.

Kuntz attributes the success of the agencies transit programs to the formation of a local transit board, the Dickinson Transportation Board. The formation of that board in 1991 helped address dissatisfaction with local transit services, consolidate efforts and improve services as evidenced by the innovative contract with the cab company.

"For groups looking to improve transit, I would encourage them to form a transit board," Kuntz says. "Rather than individual agencies working on their own, you bring a lot of people together working for the common good."

The Dickinson Transportation Board has 13 member representing the city commission and advocates for the disabled, children, low-income residents and other agencies interested in public transportation.

## Fargo Transit Center Remodeling Completed

The \$1 million remodeling of the Ground Transportation Center in Fargo has transformed a building of the 80s into an updated and appealing downtown facility.

The GTC is the transfer station for Metro Area Transit buses that serve Fargo and Moorhead. Federal funding paid for many of the changes made to the facility. They include new flooring, counters, lighting, seating and an indoor play area. Workers also improved the dispatch center, added extra storage space, and constructed a lounge where bus drivers can take their breaks. Mechanical systems were also repaired or replaced.

Outside renovation work involved sidewalk and street repairs, landscaping and a new look for the air exchange ducts in front of the building.



Left to right, Mike Simonson (Transit Planner), Rob Lynch (Fargo City Commissioner), Jean Rayl (Fargo City Commissioner), Bruce Furness (Mayor), Mark Voxland (Moorhead City Mayor), Julie Bommelman (Transit Administrator), and Lori VanBeek (Moorhead Transit Manager).

A grand reopening was held Jan. 14 with Fargo Mayor Bruce Furness and Moorhead Mayor Mark Voxland in attendance. Voxland commented on the increased daily usage of the center and transit in the cities which defines the necessity and popularity of transit as a means of transportation. Furness expounded on the continued shared commitment between the two cities which has made the transit system a great success story and a great asset.

Metro Area Transit statistics show ridership rose 8 percent in 2003, up by 40,000 passengers from the previous year. About 536,000 passengers rode Metro Area Transit in 2003.

## New Newsletter Publisher

With this issue you will notice the Dakota Transit Association newsletter has a new name, "Dakota Transporter," and a new publisher, the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center, a division of the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University. The newsletter will continue to highlight opportunities, issues and ideas that will be useful to transit agencies across North and South Dakota. Within the next several months, newsletters will be available on the Web and we may eventually move to e-mail delivery to improve timeliness and efficiency.

If you have ideas for articles and features in coming newsletters let us know. We welcome submitted articles and photos. To make submissions, or for questions, contact editors: Gary Hegland at (701) 231-6436 or [gary.hegland@ndsu.nodak.edu](mailto:gary.hegland@ndsu.nodak.edu); or Jill Hough at (701) 231-8082 or [jill.hough@ndsu.nodak.edu](mailto:jill.hough@ndsu.nodak.edu).

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The **Dakota Transporter** is a North and South Dakota newsletter, geared toward the rural, small urban, and specialized transit industry, in keeping the DTAs transit providers up-to-date on the news and information from across the nation and the states.

If anyone has any news or items of interest they would like to share with us, please send it to the **Dakota Transporter**. We also welcome your comments about the newsletter.



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