

TRANSIT Times

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Mumma Ready to Face Transit Challenges – Again

With the new year, we welcome our new chair, Dave Mumma, Transit Director of the Janesville Transit System, who is ready to “hit the ground running” on state transit issues. Here are some of his thoughts as he takes the gavel for 2008:

This will be my second turn as chairperson of the WURTA executive committee; the first was in the mid-1980s.

As I look toward the challenges which face us during the next two years, I have to confess to more than a little *déjà-vu*. At that time, after several years' work, we were successful in convincing the legislature to raise the percentage of transit operating expenses funded by state assistance (under Section 85.20) from 30% to 37.5% for all systems in the state. Some twenty years later, we find many systems in the same predicament or worse.

I look forward to working with our members and our legislative leaders to address this situation through a multi-faceted approach to renew and reinvigorate state support for transit. We

recognize transit's vital part in the multi-modal transportation system, which is central to Wisconsin's economic growth and the quality of life – that we prize so highly.

We also recognize that transit in Wisconsin is a regional issue. Therefore, we will also move forward to secure legislation that permits the formation and operation of Regional Transportation Authorities (RTAs) that will give local governments maximum flexibility to determine how to form and fund these logical next steps in the development of transit service in our state.

Finally, as our existing transit infrastructure ages – with resulting increases in operating and maintenance costs at the same time we experience increasing demands for service – it



see Mumma, page 4

Making Life Easier for Visually Impaired Riders

“Bus driver” Dan Wenzel, Director of the Wisconsin Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired (seated, back), and Colleen Dunphy (center), an Orientation and Mobility Instructor, lead an exercise in the obstacles faced by sight-impaired riders during the 2007 Wisconsin Transit Conference. Using canes and wearing blindfolds or special goggles, conference attendees (from left) Michele Gavin, Betty Walsh, Steve Skelly and Rita Harmon learn firsthand what it's like to get on a bus without being able to see. The lesson of this breakout session was the importance of providing appropriate accommodations for blind and visually impaired riders. Read more about the conference on page 4.



WISCONSIN
URBAN & RURAL
TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

RTAs – The Time is Now!

By Gary Goyke, *WURTA Legislative Liaison*,
Chuck Kamp, *General Manager, Metro Transit (Madison area)*,
Greg Seubert, *Transit Director, Metro Ride (Wausau area)*

These are truly exciting times in Wisconsin for public transit systems and the communities we serve. Serious public policy discussions are being held at the local level and in the state capitol as leaders across the state debate the potential role of Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) in strengthening our urban and rural communities.

The timing of the debate is fascinating, with discussions about urgent concerns related to increasing fuel prices, global warming and the aging of the population. The dialogue even addresses new ways of looking at national security that place greater emphasis on reducing our dependence on foreign oil from the Persian Gulf and countries that are not considered strong U.S. allies. Investments in public transportation are being seen as methods of addressing all of these larger concerns, making the RTA debate at state and local levels in Wisconsin particularly compelling.

On a personal level, transit managers across the state see the need for RTAs to offer a way to increase local control in stabilizing transit funding and providing a regional governance structure to more effectively serve our communities. Most, if not all, municipal-owned transit systems in Wisconsin serve multiple municipalities.

Building on Regional Cooperation

Coordinating transit services across local boundaries and sharing resources to save taxpayer dollars is a longstanding practice. Public transit systems serve as leading examples of regional cooperation in the delivery of basic public services. Local leaders are asking whether the same approach can be considered for other municipal services, including police, fire, public works, parks, public health and more. We're living in an

age in which taxpayers are asking for more innovation and efficiency, and we should be asking these questions as well.

An RTA structure appears to hold many important advantages over municipal ownership and governance of community transit systems. For example, in the 2010 census, the Fox Cities and Green Bay will go over the 200,000 population threshold, causing reductions of millions of dollars in federal transit funding. A regional response to this impact will prove more effective.

In the Fox Cities alone there are more than a dozen local government units funding public transit, including cities, villages, towns and counties. Service changes that involve multiple municipalities require multiple local budget approval processes annually, thereby causing a disproportionate focus on micro-management rather than regional economic and community development.

For the Good of the Community

Finally, and most importantly, consumers will benefit by being able to get to their jobs, their schools, their medical appointments, and other destinations anywhere in the region, rather than having limited public transit service options created by lines on a map and a lack of inter-municipal coordination. This is especially important as the population ages and older adults want to remain active and productive in their community, even as they consider turning in their car keys.

To be fair, the municipal ownership model has worked reasonably well in Wisconsin in the past because community leaders have risen to the occasion and done the right thing for the larger community good. However, the ongoing discussion about the changes happening in our neighborhoods and across the planet suggests the time for RTAs in Wisconsin is now.

Legislative Day 2007



Racine Mayor Gary Becker, one of several speakers presenting his views on the state of transit in Wisconsin, speaks during the third Rotunda Day at the state capitol in May. Members of Wisconsin transit systems also met with their local legislators and staff to describe financial concerns over the state's operating assistance program and explain WURTA's support of Regional Transit Authority legislation. Sen. Roger Breske, Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, convened a public hearing to rally support for state RTA legislation. Representatives of WisDOT, WURTA, Wisconsin Association of Taxicab Owners (WATO), and Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin (TDA) shared information at booths set up throughout the rotunda.

Save the Date!
Please join us for Legislative Day '08
Wednesday, May 21, 2008
Best Western at the Inn on the Park

New Transit Marketing Program Unveiled

“Ride the Bus...Save Your Energy!” is the call to action in a fully integrated new campaign to increase bus ridership across the state.

The Wisconsin Statewide Transit System marketing assistance project – a

joint effort between the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and WURTA transit systems – uses print, radio and TV spots, bus cards, Web banner ads, plus cinema ads. All are available in English and Spanish and can

be customized to local markets.

SaveYourEnergy.org – a dedicated Web site – makes it easier than ever for people to find out all they need to know about the transit system serving their community. The site has links to participating systems as well as to a cost calculator, current gas prices and air quality report.

The campaign, created for WisDOT by Staples Marketing, has received an enthusiastic welcome. It is the first new marketing effort since 1999.

This print ad – customized for Valley Transit – is one of several presented in the new transit marketing campaign, which also includes radio and TV spots, bus cards, Web banner ads, plus cinema ads.

Sheboygan Disability Policies Win Honors

Regional Transit Connection (RTC) – part of the Sheboygan Transit System – received honors from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR).

Governor Jim Doyle and DWD Secretary Roberta Gassman signed the certificate presented in recognition of RTC’s “special commitment to progressive employment practices for people with disabilities and their excellence in expanding employment opportunities.”

RTC gives individuals with disabilities the mobility to gain independence. A large number of participants are from RCS (formerly Rehabilitation Center of

Sheboygan). Sheboygan Transit/RTC may be their only source of transportation. For many, that’s their lifeline. RTC also works with potential RCS clients to help determine their level of skills and abilities for placement in the workforce.

The award is particularly significant as Sheboygan Transit began operating the service in January 2007 as RTC. David Rautmann, Dispatcher and Scheduler, who has a physical disability, is very instrumental in the ongoing suc-

cess of this program.

The DVR, RCS and HearthStone of Wisconsin, an advocacy group for people with disabilities, co-sponsor the annual Sheboygan County employer recognition luncheon in October, which is National Disability Employment Awareness month.

Sheboygan Transit System staff (from left) David Rautmann, Dispatcher and Scheduler; Traci Nugent, Operations Supervisor; and Ron McDonald, Parking and Transit Director, are proud to be honored for their commitment to people with disabilities.



In Memoriam

Richard A. (Dick) Martin, 63, passed away Nov. 25, 2007. He worked for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transit, as an Urban Transit Program Manager for about three decades, until his retirement several years ago. We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude for his professionalism, assistance and proactive spirit that shaped the state’s Transit Assistance Program from its inception.



With Our Thanks...

We are grateful for Gwen Larson's outstanding service as WURTA chair this year. She has led our efforts with great energy and with an ever-present smile. Thank you, Gwen! Kudos also to our retiring board members, Robert Johnson and Jason Pape, for their contributions to resolving Wisconsin transit issues.

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will be important to ensure that a robust source of capital funding is available, particularly from the federal level, to allow transit systems to provide safe, reliable and cost-effective services for the citizens who rely on them every day for their transportation.

All of us in WURTA will work closely as part of an intense effort over the coming months to achieve these goals. I'm confident that with the support of our members and friends, we will be successful.

Transit Conference Highlights

The 2007 Wisconsin Public Transit Conference – held October 16-18 in Beloit and Janesville – set a new attendance record with nearly 150 registered attendees, including 35 vendors.

The conference offered more than 20 exceptional breakout sessions ranging from progressive topics such as Regional Transit Authorities, to coordinated planning, to transit-oriented development and alternative fuels/hybrid vehicles.

Marisol Simon, Region V Regional Administrator, and FTA Region V staff also provided in-depth updates on federal transit funding issues and program changes. WisDOT's Rod Clark gave a candid report on the current status of transit funding in Wisconsin and the top ten issues facing public transit systems over the next 20 years.

State Senator Judy Robson received WURTA's "Friend of Transit" award for her continued advocacy and support of public transportation.

Thank you to the 2007 conference hosts: Dave Mumma, Janesville Transit; Michelle Gavin, Beloit Transit System; Pat McGinty, Brown Cab Services; and Steve Skelley, Rock County Specialized Transit. The 2008 conference will be held in Waukesha in late September.

Green Bay Hires First Transit



Christopher Phelps

Christopher Phelps has been named General Manager of Green Bay Metro under a five-year contract with First Transit. He and Operations Director Spyros Saucier, also with First Transit, came on board in May and are responsible for day-to-day operations and strategic management solutions.

Currently, the system has 39 vehicles, 24 of which have exceeded their useful life by FTA standards. "We now have funding for three or four new buses. We hope to have them early next year," Phelps said.

First Transit also operates the transit systems in Superior, Wis., and Duluth, Minn.



754 Williamson Street
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 255-1166
www.wisconsintransit.org

Executive Board

Dave Mumma, Chair
Transit Director
Janesville Transit System
mummad@ci.janesville.wi.us

Anita Gulotta-Connelly, Vice Chair
Managing Director
Milwaukee County Transit System
aconnelly@mcts.org

Lynn Gilles, Secretary
Transit Manager
Fond du Lac Area Transit
lgilles@ci.fond-du-lac.wi.us

Herb Mallinger, Treasurer
Finance Director
Milwaukee County Transit System
hmallinger@mcts.org

Robert C. Johnson, At-Large
Transit Director
Waukesha Metro Transit
rjohnson@ci.waukesha.wi.us

Ron McDonald, At-Large
Transit Director
Sheboygan Transit System
rmcdonald@ci.sheboygan.wi.us

Pat McGinty, Taxicab Member
Owner, Brown Cab Service
browncab@sbcglobal.net

Randy Veenhoven, Vendor Member
Regional Director
ISE Corporation
rveenhov@isecorp.com



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www.wisconsintransit.org

for more extensive information on the state's public transportation systems and providers. The site is an excellent resource for consumers, policymakers and others interested in the transit industry. You'll also find archives of the WURTA *Transit Times*, charts on the business of transit and other useful information.