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metro-link
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CONNECTING THE BISMARCK-MANDAN
METROPOLITAN PLANNING
ORGANIZATION (MPO) PARTNERS
Autumn / Winter 2015 Edition



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EDITOR'S DIALOGUE

Greetings! This is the 7th edition of Metro-Link. This edition we have chosen to spotlight our area's public transit provider: Bis-Man Transit. It is our intention to provide you, our stakeholders and the public, with more information about Bis-Man Transit and to deepen your understanding of this important transportation option. First off, a giant THANK YOU to Bis-Man Transit for providing the MPO with the information and images found throughout this edition. Included within this newsletter you will find an insert designed to explain everything you need to know about riding the bus. We recommend saving this insert for future reference, and encourage everyone to experience the system for themselves.

To better acquaint myself with Bis-Man Transit, I spent an afternoon riding the CAT bus route E-1 and E-2. That ride connects Kirkwood Mall to Gateway Mall, and passes through downtown, the Capital Grounds, the Cathedral District and Memorial Highway. On this ride two things stood out. First, I noticed how clean the CAT busses are compared to some other public transit systems I have ridden in the U.S. Second, I was impressed that my bus driver, Craig, knew all of his regular riders on a first name basis - something you don't find in bigger city transit systems! I like to think I am a seasoned bus rider from my days living in Portland, OR and this friendliness was a really refreshing difference.

We are all aware that there are many negative stereotypes about transit service. Such as: *Busses are dirty. Drivers are unfriendly. It takes too long. Only those who are unsafe to drive use the bus...* But the reality is that our transit system is a safe, efficient and reliable mode of transportation. It is healthy for you, your pocket book and the environment.

On average, 450 people use Capital Area Transit service daily. One rider, Rande Sailer, a 32 year old Bismarck resident, has been riding CAT since 2007. I talked to Sailer who states, "I take the CAT bus most of the time. It is cheaper and more affordable than driving and way more convenient than paratransit."

There is no one type of transit rider. *Kids, adults, seniors, professionals, veterans, bicyclists, parents, disabled, students...* all enjoy the benefits of transit services. They ride to: *get groceries, go to school, arrive home from work, visit friends, get a haircut, visit a park, go shopping...* the list goes on.

Sailer uses the CAT for most of her trips. She appreciates the cleanliness and comfort of the Bis-Man Transit system and feels it is very safe. She sees all ages and all professions riding the CAT.

Another benefit of riding the CAT is the ability to explore the city and learn to navigate. Sailer agrees, "After I moved here from Beulah, the CAT really helped me learn my way around the Bismarck-Mandan area." What better way to see the area than with near panoramic views and the ability to read, check emails, relax or even get to know your neighbors who are riding along.

CAT provides year round service, 6 days a week excluding Sunday and holidays. Bus service is available from 6 AM to 7 PM daily, with limited service on Saturday. This is important in a region with extreme temperatures.

Another benefit of CAT is the ability to combine types of transportation. Sailer appreciates that during the summer months she can bring her bike on the CAT and use it in combination with the bus service: "I prefer to ride my bike more in the summer, but during the winter months I rely exclusively on the CAT bus service due to the cold winters."

The MPO wants you to consider what CAT can do for you and encourages you to take a ride soon.

~Will Hutchings

TRANSIT THROUGH THE YEARS

Fall 1986 – Committee that would become the Transit Board was established.

April 1987 – Bis-Man Transit Board was incorporated.

October 1989 – North Dakota Council on Developmental Disabilities awarded a two-year grant to the organization.

May 1990 – A limited service for individuals with disabilities began.

June 1990 – Bis-Man Transit Board contracted with Central NoDak Development Corporation for management staff and office space.

July 1998 – Work on a new facility was finished and the Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center was dedicated. The organization moved from its location on Bowen to East Rosser.

August 2000 – Consultants were hired to conduct a transit study in the Capital Area regarding the need and desire for public transportation.

July 2001 – A proposal based on the transit study was accepted by the Bismarck City Commission and the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

August 2003 – A recommendation was approved for the fixed-route system to be named Capital Area Transit.

December 2003 – A competition was held among Bismarck State College commercial art class students to design a logo for the CAT. Catherine Dalzell's design won the competition.

May 2004 – The fixed-route system, Capital Area Transit, was dedicated and the system's first rides were given.

June 2006 – CAT bus shelters were erected in Bismarck.

October 2010 – A feasibility study was performed to expand the Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center garage area.

May 26-June 5, 2011– CAT buses provided 7,715 trips for volunteers to sandbag sites in the community due to flooding.

March 2012 – The Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center garage expansion was completed.

May 2012 – Gary Schumacher, through Schumacher Transportation, began providing operations for Bis-Man Transit.

March 2013 – CAT surpasses 1,000,000 rides provided.

November 2013 – RouteMatch goes live on Transit vehicles.

August 2014 – A contract was signed with Rimrock Trailways to provide service outside of the Capital Area.

July 2015 – Robin Werre retired as Executive Director.

August 2015 – Roy Rickert hired as Executive Director.

U-MARY STUDENTS TO CONDUCT SURVEYS



Students from the University of Mary will be volunteering their time to conduct surveys on Capital Area Transit (CAT) service. The purpose of the survey is to get a better sense of what riders expect from the fixed-route service. This will be an update to previous surveys conducted by Bis-Man Transit. It will sample individuals who utilize public transit. Students will survey a variety of factors including riders' socio-economic demographics, usage patterns, and opinions on marketing and technology.

Bis-Man Transit wants to publicly thank those students for their public service. Kalen Ost, Marketing Director &

Mobility Manager for Bis-Man Transit, states, "A project like this would not be possible without a lot of people pitching in. I am absolutely thrilled the school and its students are supporting us in this endeavor."

Volunteers will be on CAT busses from 10 AM to 3 PM on October 21, 2015.

Did you know...

Transit Ridership Reduces Congestion



Every day EACH CAT Bus saves 45.14 Automobile Trips.



**Based on 2014 Total Bis-Man Transit Fixed Route Ridership*

CONGRATULATIONS ROBIN WERRE!!!

The MPO would like to congratulate Robin Werre on 25 years of service to Bis-Man Transit. Werre celebrated her retirement on July 15, 2015, at the Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center. On that day a party was hosted in her honor, and coincided with a celebration marking the 25th year of Bis-Man Transit's first service rides. Under Werre's direction, Bis-Man Transit launched in 1990 with paratransit services. Throughout her years of leadership as the Executive Director of Bis-Man Transit, she spearheaded the expansion of services including the addition of fixed-route (CAT) and building Transit facilities. At the July 15 event, Werre announced that she would receive the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at its annual banquet in Fargo. On October 1, Werre was presented with this recognition award for her efforts in starting and growing the capitol city's transit system. Bis-Man Transit Board Member Ben Ehreth states, "Robin's impact can be witnessed in nearly every aspect of the area's public transportation service that exists today. Robin's passion and commitment to public transportation services will be missed, however she has helped to form a strong foundation from which to build upon."



Werre is a graduate of Bismarck High School and Bismarck Junior College. She received a bachelor's degree in sociology from Mary College. Her first career was with Job Service of North Dakota. In 1978, she was selected as one of 10 outstanding Women of America. She was also instrumental in launching Bismarck's Pride Inc., served on the Bismarck Mayor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, and as executive director of the North Dakota Council on Developmental Disabilities for a year before leading Bis-Man Transit. While at Bis-Man Transit, she was a member and treasurer of Community Elder Service Network and chair and member of the Dakota Center of Independent Living.

RICKERT JOINS BIS-MAN TRANSIT AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In August 2015, Bis-Man Transit hired Roy Rickert as the new Executive Director to oversee Transit operations. Rickert has replaced Robin Werre, who retired in July 2015. In order to spotlight the second director of our region's transit system, the MPO reached out to Rickert and asked him about his background and his new charge at the helm of Bis-Man Transit.

Rickert hails from Bloomington-Normal, IL. He is from a large family, the youngest of nine children, and has been married for 16 years. He and his wife have 3 children whom he states "take up most of his time". When he does have time for hobbies, he enjoys working with his hands, shooting and metal detecting.

Rickert's past experience is an asset to the growing Bis-Man Transit. He was previously the Transit Operations Director for Connect Transit and is proud to have worked his way up through the ranks as a driver and an operations supervisor prior to obtaining that position. During Rickert's time as the operations director, the Connect Transit system progressed from being an unknown entity to being voted the best small system in America by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) for 2014. He acknowledges that this was accomplished by increasing public awareness, technology, rebranding and opening the lines of communications with politicians. Rickert claims, "The system went from the dark ages of public transportation to being a beacon, with an increase in ridership of over 40%."

Coming from a small system has provided him the opportunity to experience just about every aspect of public transit from driving to procurement to political lobbying. He was a member of the Leadership APTA class of 2013 which allowed him to visit and experience transit systems across the United States.

Rickert is excited about joining Bis-Man Transit. He acknowledges that the employees are impressive and says they are very dedicated to the system and have many ideas for improvement. He further believes that Bis-Man Transit has the potential for tremendous growth which will help serve the growing community. Marge Ellefson, President of the Bis-Man Transit Board of Directors commented, "This is an exciting time to be involved with Bis-Man Transit. Roy has the vision and enthusiasm to take this Transit to the next level. He is a perfect fit for this operation."

As the new director, he is keenly aware of the mutually beneficial relationship that Bis-Man Transit has with the MPO. He believes that having a strong working relationship with the MPO ensures the transit system is involved in the planning process and that service can grow with the community's needs.

We asked what goals he envisions for the future of Bis-Man Transit. He said his aim for the system is to ensure it is a viable transportation choice for everyone in the community, regardless of their options. Since Bismarck is the capital of North Dakota, he believes that the public transportation provided here should be a showcase for visitors. However he recognizes that in order to make this vision a reality, changes will need to be made from the ground up. These changes will need to include things such as changes in operating policies, service times, route structure, and customer amenities. Rickert states, "Change can be difficult for many people but if opposition is met with open communication and sound reasoning, the process can be accomplished with a win for the community."

Rickert believes the biggest improvement that the Bis-Man transit system can make is encouragement to grow ridership on fixed routes and place less emphasis on the paratransit system. He states, "The level of service should be similar for each mode of operation and as it stands now, that is not the case. Once the two modes are in better alignment, resources may become available to allow for a more user friendly experience such as higher frequency routes, extended hours, and possibly Sunday service."

When asked about what he likes about the Bismarck-Mandan region, Rickert states that he has been most impressed with how incredibly nice and helpful the people are here and claims the fleischkuechle is "pretty awesome, too!"

The MPO is excited to welcome Roy Rickert to our area and Bis-Man Transit!

The Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center is the hub for the CAT and paratransit systems. In addition it provides space for administrative activities, as well as the organization responsible for CAT and paratransit operations, Schumacher Transportation which performs operations such as dispatching, vehicle cleaning and mechanic work. The Transit Center was built in 1998 and expanded in 2012.

At the Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center, customers can purchase passes, receive training on how to ride CAT and Paratransit, rent a meeting room, and have access to soda and snack machines. There is also access to Taxi 9000, the Jefferson Lines Depot, and West River Transit - the paratransit service provider for rural central North Dakota.

The center is located at 3750 E Rosser Ave in Bismarck. Phone: (701) 258-6817



HOW TO RIDE

A HANDOUT GUIDE TO BIS-MAN TRANSIT BUS SERVICES

Bis-Man Transit provides high quality, convenient, reliable and safe public transportation services in an efficient manner across our region. For those who have never ridden on a public bus, one of the most common obstacles/fears is learning how the system works. Bis-Man Transit wants to help people learn to ride the bus. For more information visit the Bis-Man Transit website and review CAT 101 or any of their training videos. Additionally, staff are available to assist as well.

GETTING STARTED

Twelve CAT routes cover a majority of the Bismarck and Mandan area. The routes also provide service in the vicinity of schools, hospitals, and grocery stores, as well as many of the major shopping centers.

The CAT provides service six days a week, Monday through Saturday. The first route of the day begins just after 6 AM, with the final route concluding just before 7 PM. Saturday service is more limited than the Monday through Friday service, as shown on the CAT map. Saturday routes begin later than the Monday - Friday routes, and are not as frequent throughout the day. The CAT does not provide service on six holidays each year: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

PREPLAN: ROUTE & TIMES

Before you board a bus, some pre-planning is necessary to ensure your trip is a success. Most important is identification of your destination and time of arrival. CAT routes and schedule information is available on printed maps, on the Bis-Man Transit website, or through the free mobile app RouteShout. Transit offers help planning your trip, too! Fill out an online "CAT Trip Planner" form and you can receive a customized trip plan.

BOARDING

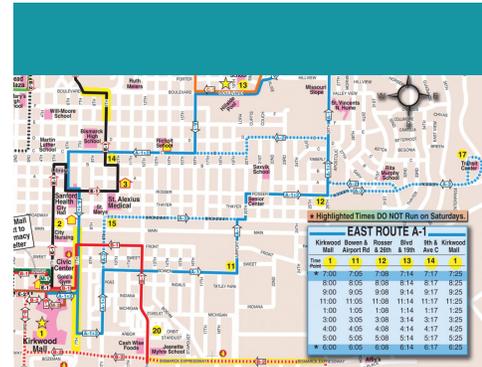
CAT busses use a 'Flag-System' for boarding. Customers can board a bus at nearly any point along its route. To catch a CAT bus, riders are advised to wait along their intended route, on the passenger side of the road. As the bus approaches, you must wave to the driver, alerting him or her that you intend to ride the bus. As the bus stops, it will "kneel" as the front corner of the bus drops to curb height to make it easier to board. Riders should catch the CAT on the corners of the blocks and not the middle of the blocks. There are a handful of places throughout the community where it is not safe to have a bus pull over, and these streets are marked on the CAT map with a yellow highlight on the roads. Along these 'No-Stop Zones' busses will only stop at the designated stop locations, marked with a 🚏 symbol (hand inside of a stop sign).

PAYMENT

With CAT you can pay per trip or utilize one of the passes. If you pay as you go it is recommended to use exact change. If you do not have exact change you will be issued a CAT card with the remaining dollar value. Tickets can also be purchased at the Bis-Man Transit office located at 3750 E Rosser Ave in Bismarck. These tickets are not activated until used for the first ride.

There are two types of rates on the CAT: the normal rate is \$1.25 for a one-way fare, \$5 for an unlimited one-day pass, and \$30 for a 30-day unlimited pass. There is also a discounted rate for students (grades K - college) with a valid ID, seniors over the age of 60, paratransit members, individuals utilizing Medicaid, and individuals with disabilities. The discounted rate is 50 cents for a one-way fare, \$2.50 for an unlimited one-day pass and \$20 for a 30-day unlimited pass.

Bis-Man Transit has partnered with United Way to provide rides to school for at-risk students through the 'Neighbors Network' program. Another program is available to individuals whose return trip occurs outside CAT hours of operation. If riders have a valid 30-day unlimited pass they can request a 'Guaranteed Ride Home' voucher from a CAT driver. This voucher is good for \$5 off a taxi ride home from work or school.





SITTING BACK and ENJOYING THE RIDE

Once you have boarded the bus and paid for your trip you will need to find a seat. Riders can sit back and enjoy the scenery or talk with other riders. Food is not allowed. However beverages with screw cap lids are permitted.

TRANSFERS

Depending on your destination you may need to make a connection to another route. You can do this at 5 locations indicated with a ★ symbol (yellow star). Most transfers occur at the Central Hubs, located at Kirkwood Mall and Gateway Mall. In most cases the buses arrive at hub locations about five minutes before the next buses are scheduled to leave a mall location.

Riders can also transfer to another route at a Transfer Point. Transfer Points are located at Simle Middle School, Arrowhead Plaza and Bismarck State College. Riders are asked to let the driver know their desire to transfer. The driver will radio ahead to ensure the connecting bus does not leave without the customer.

If you would like to transfer between routes, you can request a transfer slip, which will cover the cost of the connecting ride.

DISEMBARKING

When you near your destination, you will need to alert the driver of your intention to get off the bus. About a block before you would like to disembark you must pull a cord that runs along the inside of the bus along the window. This alerts the driver to stop so you can disembark. When the driver sees the alert, he or she will look for the nearest safe area to pull the bus over. The bus will again “kneel” to help make your step off the bus easier.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

CAT also offers some additional amenities:

All CAT buses are accessible. Each CAT bus is equipped with a ramp or lift that can assist riders entering and exiting the bus. Once on the bus there are specially-designated areas with flip up seats to accommodate a wheelchair. The driver may secure a wheelchair with tie-downs before the bus departs. Riders using wheelchairs must be able to get on and off the bus independently. Additionally, service animals are allowed on CAT buses.

The front of all CAT buses are outfitted with bike racks that hold two bikes. If someone wants to utilize these racks, they are advised to come to the Bismarck-Mandan Transit Center and go through a short course that explains how to properly load a bike onto the rack. The rider will then be issued a card he or she can show the driver when they would like to utilize the racks.



PARATRANSIT SERVICE

The paratransit bus service provides an invaluable service to our community, ensuring mobility for our seniors and citizens with disabilities. Compared to the fixed-route bus, a paratransit bus is smaller, holding 15-17 passengers. Presently Bis-Man Transit has 21 paratransit buses and three vans available for paratransit customers to use.

Unlike a fixed-route bus that runs on a predetermined route, paratransit offers more flexibility in its coverage area. This allows riders to be picked up and dropped off as close to their origin and destination as possible. Additionally, these buses are equipped with a lift for someone using a wheelchair, or if someone has difficulty negotiating steps. The vehicles are more maneuverable than the larger CAT busses and get closer to building entrances.

In order to utilize paratransit service, a customer must first have their application approved. Applications are available online. A customer must call the scheduling office between 8 AM and 5 PM at least one day in advance of their trip. Rolling schedules for a reoccurring scheduled trip can also be created. A paratransit bus will arrive within 45 minutes of the arrival time. Upon arrival, a customer boards the bus via the stairs or lift, and can pay for their ride using either exact cash (\$2.50 per trip) or a \$10 punch card. The customer then rides to their destination.

To be eligible to ride paratransit you must be over the age of 60 or have a disability. To show disability, applications must be signed by a human service professional (i.e. counselor, nurse, doctor, case manager).

