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METRO TRANSIT PROJECTS 2006 RIDERSHIP AT 73.8 MILLION;  
HIGHEST ANNUAL TOTAL IN 22 YEARS

MINNEAPOLIS/ST. PAUL — (Nov. 15) — Metro Transit said today it expects to end 2006 with 73.8 million rides - the highest annual ridership since 1984.

"After weathering a difficult budget shortfall in 2005, which required us to implement both fare increases and service cuts, I challenged our staff to deliver 71 million rides this year, about 1.5 million more rides than in 2005," said General Manager Brian Lamb. "I thought 71 million rides was a stretch goal. Clearly, we are delighted with our performance, topping our own goal by 2.8 million rides."

Lamb thanked Metro Transit customers for their business.

"Two-thirds of bus riders and 80 percent of train riders own cars yet they find enough value in our service to leave their cars at home and travel by transit," he said.

Lamb pointed to higher gas prices and growing congestion as important factors in stimulating ridership. "It is important to note that even though fuel prices have moderated somewhat, customers are not re-thinking their transition to transit," he said. "Thus, I believe that frustration with congestion is a major motivator especially since about 80 percent of our customers are using transit for work or school trips."

Lamb also gave credit to the role of employers in promoting transportation alternatives in the workplace. More than 140 employers are enrolled in the Metropass program. These employers typically subsidize a portion of the cost of an annual transit pass for their employees. The 24,000 Metropass holders took 5.3 million rides in the first 10 months of this year.

"I would also salute our employees for the quality service they provide to our customers," Lamb said.

Through September service-related complaints are down 19 percent and employee commendations are up 6 percent when compared with the first nine months of 2005, he said.

Metro Transit is a service of the Metropolitan Council. Its bus and train operations provide more than 90 percent of the fixed-route public transportation in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area.

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