

MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN



SUMMARY BROCHURE

OCTOBER 2010

At the request of Milwaukee County, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, together with the Milwaukee County Transit System and the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation and Public Works, has developed a short-range (five-year) transit development plan for the Milwaukee County Transit System. The final plan was approved by the Milwaukee County Public Transit Planning Advisory Committee, whose members were appointed by the Milwaukee County Executive. This brochure provides an overview of the plan and the Advisory Committee recommendations.

Work completed in preparing the plan included: review of population, employment, land use, and travel patterns in Milwaukee County and the Milwaukee area; review of the existing transit system including an assessment of its performance and financial condition; identification of unmet transit travel needs of Milwaukee County residents; consideration of three alternative transit service improvement plans; and the identification of a final plan of operating and capital improvements for the transit system along with its funding needs. More comprehensive information about the plan and how it was developed may be found at www.sewrpc.org/milwcotdp.

RECOMMENDED SHORT-RANGE IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM

The final recommended transit system development plan for the MCTS would restore the service which was eliminated over the last several years and would focus on transit improvements that would make public transit in Milwaukee County more competitive with travel by private automobile and increase transit ridership by improving both the convenience and speed of transit service. The plan proposes to expand existing transit service by about 22 percent (about 4 percent per year over the five-year implementation period) from about 1,327,500 vehicle hours of service in 2010 to about 1,628,500 vehicle hours after all recommended service changes are implemented (see Table 1). Dedicated local funding such as a 0.5 percent sales tax will be necessary to implement this service expansion. The plan serves to identify the transit improvement and expansion which could occur upon enactment of such dedicated transit funding. The specific improvements to MCTS bus services that are recommended under the plan are described below.

New Local Bus Routes and Adjust Alignments of Existing Local Bus Routes

The plan proposes to extend or add several bus routes in the far northern, western, and southern portions of the County, restoring service that was eliminated over the last several years. The proposed local route changes will provide: an east-west route to serve the commercial and office development along Brown Deer Road; better transit service coverage in north-central and western Milwaukee County; an extension of local bus service to the Village of Hales Corners; and an extension of local bus service to industrial and office parks in Franklin and Oak Creek. The changes would restore the local bus services over Route Nos. 14, 33, and 35 that were reduced or eliminated under the 2010 Milwaukee County budget.

Table 1

RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS FOR THE BUS SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM UNDER THE RECOMMENDED PLAN

Service Description	Estimated Recommended Plan Annual Vehicle Hours	Percent Change from 2010 Budget Vehicle Hours	
		Total	Average Annual
Total 2010 Budget Bus Service	1,327,500	--	--
Increment for Recommended Service Improvements			
- New Local Routes and Route Extensions and Restored Local Bus Services ^a	64,000	4.8	
- Remove Bus Turn-backs on Selected Local Routes to Provide Consistent Headways over Route ^c	20,000	1.5	
- Expand Service Hours on Local Routes to Desirable Service Levels ^b	13,000	1.0	
- Reduce Headways on Local Routes to Desirable Service Levels ^b	118,000	8.9	
- Upgrade Freeway Flyer Bus Service	32,000	2.4	
- Convert Local Bus to Express Bus Service ^d	54,000	4.1	
Total Increment for All Improvements	301,000	22.7	4.2
Total Under the Recommended Plan	1,628,500	--	--

^aIncludes restoring the service cuts made to Routes No. 14, 33, and 35 under the 2010 Milwaukee County operating budget.

^bService hours and frequencies on the local routes outside express bus corridors with the highest ridership would be increased to meet desirable service frequencies and service hours for both weekday and weekend periods of operation.

^cBus turn-back points would be eliminated from weekday, Saturday, and Sunday service schedules.

^dExpress bus routes would be implemented along Route Nos. 10 and 30 between the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; along Route Nos. 18 and 23 between Summit Place (S. 70th Street and W. Greenfield Avenue) and Midtown Center (N. 60th Street and W. Fond du Lac Avenue); and along Route Nos. 27, 80, and 63 between S. 27th Street and Sycamore Street (Wal-Mart) and the Bayshore Shopping Center. The express routes would replace existing local bus service between the points identified except along Wisconsin Avenue between N. 35th Street and Cass Street where local service over Route No. 30 would be continued.

Source: SEWRPC

Elimination of Bus Turn-back Points Along Local Routes

The plan proposes the elimination of bus turn-back points along local routes where some buses turn around before reaching the terminus of the route thereby providing less frequent service at the ends of the route. The recommended plan proposes to provide the same service levels on weekdays and weekends over the entire lengths of Route Nos. 35, 57, and 64, including at the ends of each route.

Extension of Service Hours for Local Bus Routes on Weekdays and Weekends

Service hours for selected local bus routes would be extended under the plan to cover 20 hours a day on weekdays and weekends. Weekday schedules would be extended for two routes, and Saturday and Sunday

schedules would be lengthened on the 15 highest-ridership local routes, and on the five routes converted to express service.

Increases in Service Frequency on Local Bus Routes

Under the plan, the frequency of service would be increased on the 15 highest-ridership local routes, in addition to the five routes identified below which are to be converted to express service. The plan recommends that “headways”, or the amount of time between bus arrivals at a stop, should be no more than 10 minutes during weekday peak periods; no more than 20 minutes during weekday off-peak periods; and no more than 30 minutes on weekends.

Upgrades to Freeway Flyer Service

The plan proposes upgrading freeway flyer service to ensure that a minimum of 10 bus trips over each freeway flyer route during weekday morning and afternoon peak periods; creating one new freeway flyer route so that each route stops at no more than two park-and-ride lots (a service standard); and adding two midday round-trips to each freeway flyer route.

New Express Bus Service

The plan recommends converting local bus service to express bus service over parts of five local routes serving high ridership corridors in order to improve transit travel times. The three express routes recommended under the plan include: Route 10/30X running from the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center in Wauwatosa to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) over portions of Route Nos. 10 and 30; Route 18/23X operating between Summit Place (S. 70th St. and Greenfield Avenue) and Midtown Center (N. 60th Street and Fond du Lac Avenue) over portions of Route Nos. 18 and 23; and Route 27X extending from the Bayshore Town Center to Wal-Mart over Route No. 27. A possible fourth express bus route could be Route 11X running from the near north side at W. Capitol Drive and Holton Street through downtown to Milwaukee County’s General Mitchell International Airport. All routes would operate between 5:00 a.m. and 1:00 a.m. seven days a week, with frequent service (7-10 minutes during weekday peak periods, 9-16 minutes during weekday off-peak periods, 10-20 minutes on weekends).

Passenger Fares

The plan also proposes that increases in passenger fares for both bus and for paratransit services be limited to an increase of no more than the rate of overall price inflation over the planning period. Adult cash bus fare would be increased by \$0.25 from \$2.25 to \$2.50 per trip, the weekly pass price would rise by \$1.00 from \$17.50 to \$18.50, and fares for people with disabilities using Transit Plus would be increased by \$0.50 from \$3.25 to \$3.75 per trip. The increases allow fares to keep pace with increases in operating expenses.

Operating and Capital Costs

Factors affecting costs and funding for the transit system were analyzed by Commission staff along with projections for the next several years. The recommended plan will require total annual operating assistance of approximately \$160.4 million in the fifth year of the planning period. Significant capital investments will also be necessary to maintain the existing transit system equipment and facilities as well as to provide for the recommended service improvements. The total cost of these needed capital projects for the five-year planning period was estimated at about \$113.5 million, with the County’s share estimated at about \$19.6 million.

An analysis of the capital and operating funding required for the recommended plan clearly indicated that the current local property tax levy funding would be inadequate to improve and expand the system. A 0.5 percent sales tax would be sufficient to address the backlog in bus replacement needs and expand transit services as proposed under this plan. In the absence of local dedicated funding, the continued reduction in transit service and increases in transit fares well beyond the rate of general price inflation may be expected. Moreover, a reduction in transit service may be expected when the transit system replaces up to 198 buses over the next few years. The reduction could be as high as 25 to 35 percent if all 198 buses need to be replaced. Fewer replacement buses may be needed if the size of the bus fleet is reduced by future service reductions,.

CONCLUSIONS

The transit development plan demonstrated that the Milwaukee County Transit System outperforms comparable transit systems in terms of ridership and financial performance, and does well at serving population, employment, and activity centers within Milwaukee County. However, due to the reductions in transit service over the last several years, service to employment and activity centers has declined significantly with an estimated 40,000 fewer jobs now served by the transit system as compared to in 2001. The study identified areas where the system does not adequately serve Milwaukee County residents' travel needs and service improvements were needed. The alternative proposing the broadest level of service improvement (about 22 percent service expansion) was chosen for the recommended plan as it would restore eliminated services and improve the convenience and speed of transit service.

Financially, the transit system faces problems, largely stemming from a heavy dependence on State transit operating funds that have not increased with inflation, and no increases in County funding provided through the property tax levy. Over the past decade, the transit system has been forced to reduce service, increase fares, and use Federal funds intended for capital improvements to pay for operating expenses. The funding sources currently relied on for the transit system are insufficient to maintain the current level of transit service. Given the estimates of operating and capital expenses and potential local funding needed for the recommended service improvements, Milwaukee County cannot, even in the short term, continue to rely on the County property tax levy to provide local funding for the transit system. This was recognized by the County electorate in November of 2008 when it approved an advisory referendum calling for a one percent increase in the County sales tax with an anticipated 0.5 percent going for public transit. The future of transit in Milwaukee County depends on securing such permanent dedicated transit funding.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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A mailing list has been developed of individuals and organizations interested in receiving summary information. If you would like to directly receive such materials in the future or if you would like copies in an accessible format, please contact us.