

Minutes of Fourth Meeting

**MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT
PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

DATE: September 12, 2007

TIME: 1:30 p.m.

PLACE: Milwaukee County Transit System
Administration Facility
First Floor Conference Room
1942 N. 17th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53205

Committee Members Present

Anita Gulotta-Connelly Managing Director,
Milwaukee County Transit System
Jeffrey S. Polenske City Engineer,
City of Milwaukee
Don Natzke Director, Milwaukee County
Office for Persons with Disabilities
Gary Portenier Program Planning Coordinator,
Milwaukee County Department on Aging
LeAnn Minor Legislative Director,
(representing Richard Riley) Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 998
Peggy Schulz Citizen Member
Nancy Senn Transportation Planning Manager, Milwaukee County
Department of Transportation and Public Works

Staff Present

Albert A. Beck Principal Planner, Southeastern Wisconsin
Regional Planning Commission
Daniel A. Boehm Director of Administration,
Milwaukee County Transit System
Sonia Dubielzig Planner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission
Ronald J. Rutkowski Transportation Planning Director, Milwaukee County
Department of Transportation and Public Works
Thomas V. Winter Manager of Planning,
Milwaukee County Transit System
Kenneth R. Yunker Deputy Director, Southeastern Wisconsin
Regional Planning Commission

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Yunker called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. and welcomed Ms. Schulz to the Advisory Committee. He introduced himself and asked those present to introduce themselves. He indicated that roll call would be taken through the circulation of a sign-in sheet.

CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 24, 2007, MEETING

Mr. Boehm requested that the text on page 5 of the minutes be expanded to clarify the transit system policy for providing information on the schedules of other Milwaukee area transit systems for passengers transferring between systems. Mr. Portenier made a motion to approve the revised minutes that was seconded by Mr. Polenske. The Committee unanimously approved the minutes as amended.

[Secretary's Note: In the minutes of the January 24 meeting, the text in the Secretary's note under No. 11 on page 5, has been revised as follows:

“The Milwaukee County Transit System and transit systems in surrounding counties lack a coordinated system for providing information on the other transit systems' schedules and transfer arrangements. Milwaukee County residents may have difficulties determining how to make transit connections with transit services provided by operators in the surrounding counties because customer service representatives for the Milwaukee County Transit System generally provide schedule details only for the services operated by Milwaukee County. At a minimum, Milwaukee County Transit System representatives provide customers with contact information for the transit systems in the surrounding counties. Transferring passengers also contend with transfer arrangements and fare discounts that are not uniform between the Milwaukee County Transit System and all connecting transit services.”]

REVIEW OF SEWRPC DOCUMENT, “*RECORD OF PUBLIC COMMENTS, MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN: COMMENTS RECEIVED THROUGH MARCH 31, 2007*”

Mr. Yunker introduced the “Record of Public Comments, Milwaukee County Transit System Development Plan: Comments Received Through March 31, 2007”. He explained that the document contains a summary of all the comments received, as well as a copy of every comment submitted. Written comments were submitted via letter, e-mail, the Commission website for the transit system development plan, and comment forms completed at public informational meetings. Comments were also provided orally over the telephone or to a court reporter at public informational meetings. The document also includes copies of attendance records at the public informational meetings, newspaper articles and editorials concerning the Milwaukee County Transit System Development Plan, documentation of the methods used to announce the four public informational meetings, and informational materials distributed at those meetings.

The following comments were made by committee members on the information presented in the record of public comments:

1. Ms. Gulotta-Connelly thanked the Commission staff for their work in putting together the Record of Public Comments, stating that it was useful to have a single document that included all the comments received.
2. Ms. Schulz commended the Milwaukee County Transit System for implementing one of the suggested route alignments on page 5 of the Record of Public Comments. She stated the Greenfield Avenue branch of Route No. 19 was recently extended to go south on Miller Park Way to serve a new Pick 'n Save at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Miller Park Way.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF SEWRPC PRESENTATION, “TRANSIT SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ALTERNATIVES”

Mr. Yunker led the Committee through a presentation distributed at the meeting that included a review of the transit system performance evaluation and of public comments received, and outlined two alternative transit service improvement proposals for the Milwaukee County Transit System. (The presentation is available from the Commission website for the Milwaukee County Transit System Development Plan at: <http://www.sewrpc.org/milwcotdp/advisory.shtm#AdvComMtgs>). He explained that if the Advisory Committee approved the transit service improvement alternatives summarized in the presentation, then Commission staff would develop them in full in a newsletter and Chapter on alternative transit service improvement plans.

During the presentation, the following questions were raised and comments made by committee members:

1. Referring to page 3 of the presentation, Ms. Schulz commented on the performance evaluation finding that overcrowding is not generally a problem on Milwaukee County Transit System buses. She noted that a policy change to permit baby strollers on buses can occasionally create crowded conditions because some new strollers are very large.
2. Referring to page 9 in the presentation, Mr. Yunker explained that the two alternative service plans prepared by Commission staff represent different levels of service expansion. Alternative 1 proposes a 22 percent expansion in fixed-route service to year 2012, or a 4 percent annual expansion. Alternative 2 proposes a 15 percent expansion in fixed-route service to 2012, or 2.9 percent annual expansion. In response to a question from Ms. Gulotta-Connelly, concerning the base year for the percent service expansion, Mr. Yunker replied that year 2007 budgeted service—the same service levels as in 2006—was used as the base year, and the presentation would be modified to make that clearer.

[Secretary’s Note: The words “between 2007 and 2012” will replace the words “to year 2012” in the first bullet points on pages 9 and 18 of the presentation.]

3. Mr. Yunker stated that while the presentation focuses on the operating costs of service improvement alternatives, the necessary capital improvements associated with each alternative were also identified. The total costs for both alternatives include the purchase of replacement buses and additional buses for service expansion, and the installation of bike racks on buses, to address the requests expressed in many public comments. Ms. Gulotta-Connelly commented that the Milwaukee County Committee on Transportation, Public

Works and Transit had considered the issue of bike racks on buses at a meeting earlier that day, and had directed Milwaukee County to apply for federal funds for purchasing and installing bike racks.

4. Referring to the proposed express bus services identified on pages 11-13 of the presentation, Ms. Schulz asked Mr. Yunker to define what was meant by “express bus route”. Mr. Yunker responded that the proposed express services would operate over the routes shown on Map 2, and replace the existing local routes. Bus stop spacing on these routes would be increased to every quarter-mile outside downtown Milwaukee, increasing service speed. Ms. Gulotta-Connelly noted that the limited-stop express bus routes operated by the transit system between 1992 and 2003 were in addition to the local bus service provided over the same streets. She asked Mr. Yunker if the proposed express bus service would completely replace the current local service along those streets. Mr. Yunker confirmed that both alternatives propose replacing the underlying local bus service entirely with express bus service along the affected local routes. He stated that while a more desirable option may be to retain a small level of local service underlying the express service, the cost of implementing limited-stop express bus service in addition to local service would be much higher, and therefore much less likely to be approved by the County. Mr. Portenier stated that the chapter of the transit system development plan discussing the alternatives should make it very clear that express buses would replace local buses on the identified routes.
5. Mr. Polenske asked if the proposed express service would include elements of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service—such as signal priority for buses, reserved bus lanes, or special bus stop platforms—that would promote faster transit travel times. He stated that it would be beneficial to consider signal priority for buses and reserved lanes along the proposed express bus corridors. Mr. Yunker responded that the express bus proposal in the short-range plan is meant to represent the initial step toward BRT, and that the Commission has recommended implementing BRT type services for many years. He noted that the year 2035 regional transportation system plan for southeastern Wisconsin recommends express transit services that would initially consist of buses operating over arterial streets in mixed traffic. Over time, those services would be upgraded to include reserved street lanes and bus priority at traffic signals, and eventually could be considered for conversion to fixed guideway transit. Mr. Yunker noted that the Milwaukee Connector Study is evaluating BRT and guided street tram technology, and at the completion of that study, recommendations could be made to implement a new system of routes with stop amenities and modern vehicles operating over dedicated or reserved lanes. The short-term scope of the five-year plan in this study, however, recognized that limited-stop express bus service in mixed traffic may be all that can be implemented over the planning period.

He also noted that the transit system has faced opposition when implementing previous express bus services from people who did not want to lose their bus stops, or lose a lane of traffic to a dedicated bus lane, and that the incremental approach to implementing express and BRT transit services should improve the political feasibility of the proposed express bus routes.

Mr. Natzke suggested that the study emphasize the increase in service frequency as one of the potential benefits that would result from converting local bus to express bus service. Mr. Yunker agreed and stated that the chapter of the transit system development plan evaluating

the alternatives would provide information on the increase in travel speed and the time saved by bus riders with an express service compared to the existing local bus service.

5. Ms. Schulz suggested that the plan recommend marking express buses in a clearly identifiable way. Mr. Yunker replied that the plan would include a recommendation for using vehicles with a color coding scheme for each route, noting that other transit systems use this approach so that people identify express transit routes by color, such as “the orange line”. Ms. Gulotta-Connelly remarked that Milwaukee County Transit staff had also considered using color markings if a BRT line were to be implemented.
6. Mr. Natzke inquired why one of the proposed express bus routes outlined in the presentation would have the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) as its eastern terminus. He suggested that the Downer Avenue business district in Shorewood should be considered as a possible terminus given the population density and commercial establishments in that area. Mr. Beck responded that UWM is a major activity center that has been identified as a proposed terminus for proposed express bus and guideway routes in past studies. Mr. Yunker stated that Commission staff would discuss extending the proposed express bus route to the Downer Avenue business district when developing the chapter on service improvement alternatives.
7. Referring to Map 2 in the presentation, Mr. Polenske asked why more express bus service was proposed on Milwaukee County’s north side than on its south side, stating that Forest Home Avenue could be considered for an express route. Mr. Rutkowski and Mr. Beck responded that the areas with highest bus ridership are on the north side of the County and, therefore, would have the highest priority for express service. Mr. Yunker stated that an express bus route on Forest Home Avenue would be a logical expansion after the three proposed express bus routes were implemented. He noted that while the short-range transit system development plan identifies three express bus routes, the year 2035 Southeastern Wisconsin regional transportation system plan recommends implementation of a “grid” of five express transit routes serving Milwaukee County.
8. Referring to the proposed expansion of freeway flyer service on page 14 in the presentation, Mr. Polenske asked if the Commission had considered operating the freeway flyer routes over reserved lanes on the freeways, possibly by using freeway shoulder lanes, as is done in some other areas. Mr. Yunker responded that using reserved freeway lanes for buses had been studied in the past, along with using other available rights-of-way such as utility corridors paralleling the freeway. He noted that creating such high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on IH 94 in Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties had been studied in depth during the mid 1990s, as part of the East-West Corridor Study conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. He explained that when they were considered under that study, there was very little public or political support for creating such lanes. In addition, reconstruction of the freeway to provide additional lanes operated as HOV lanes was expected to have substantially greater right-of-way impacts – and associated costs – than reconstruction with additional “standard” lanes due to the need for a barrier to separate the HOV lanes from existing freeway lanes. He stated that HOV shoulder lanes also posed other problems: how to deal with gaps in the freeway shoulder lanes at many bridges, how to continue the lanes through major freeway-to-freeway interchanges--the Zoo, Mitchell, Marquette, and Hale interchanges--and how to handle snow removal.

Ms. Riley asked whether it would be possible to combine the use of shoulder lanes with traffic barriers to permit using an existing freeway lane in a section without a shoulder lane. Mr. Yunker stated that when similar measures have allocated an existing “live” lane to transit or HOV use in other parts of the nation, they were shown to be very unpopular, resulting in the lane being returned to normal use. He also noted that shifting traffic from a reserved lane to an existing lane at bridges would create a bottleneck and cause severe congestion and safety problems.

Ms. Gulotta-Connelly stated that the problems associated with establishing a reserved lane on the freeway raises the issue of what priority treatments could be implemented for express buses operating over arterial streets. Mr. Yunker stated that the express bus services proposed under Alternatives 1 and 2 had been proposed for initial implementation without specific bus priority treatments so that the express bus routes would not be opposed due to the needs of a specific priority treatment, such as removing a parking lane to provide for a reserved bus lane.

9. Referring to Table 1 in the presentation, Mr. Polenske asked how transit service levels for the system with the improvements proposed under both Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 would compare to the service levels provided in the year 2000. Mr. Boehm replied that the 2007 budget provided for transit service levels for the Milwaukee County Transit System that were about 14 percent less than what was provided in 2000. Mr. Yunker calculated that, in order to return to the transit service levels in the year 2000, a service increase somewhere between what was being proposed under Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 would be needed. In response to a suggestion by Mr. Polenske, Mr. Yunker stated that staff will provide a comparison of the service levels for the proposed alternatives in the year 2012 with those in the year 2000 for the evaluation of the transit service alternatives.
10. Referring to pages 23 and 24 in the presentation, Mr. Rutkowski stated that Milwaukee County’s “bank” of unspent Federal formula transit assistance funds had been reduced from the \$8.5 million shown for 2006 to \$3.5 million in 2007, and that the earmarks of Federal discretionary capital funds have amounted to about \$1.5 million annually for 2006 and 2007, down from the \$2.3 million identified in the presentation. Mr. Yunker stated that the figures in the presentation would be revised to reflect the updated information provided by Mr. Rutkowski.
11. Mr. Rutkowski noted that the County’s annual allocation of Federal formula funds was now largely committed to capitalized maintenance and funding transit system operations which left the County to rely on earmarks of Federal discretionary capital assistance to fund bus replacements. He identified an impending crisis for the County’s transit capital program as over 100 buses will need to be replaced in 2010 and 2011 but the County does not know where it will get the Federal transit assistance funds needed to finance the buses. He explained that the County would be unable to use the Federal funds it uses for capitalized maintenance without increasing the County property tax levy, and the Federal earmarks received in recent years did not begin to approach the funding level needed by the County for the bus replacements. He also stated that the County has a limit on bonding of \$30 million and that this needed to be considered in the transit system development plan.
12. Referring to the comparison of alternative local funding options for the transit system discussed on page 30 of the presentation, Ms. Schulz asked if the Commission staff could

identify whether the dedicated local funding source for the public transit system in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area was a motor fuel tax. Mr. Yunker stated that Commission staff would research her question and respond in the minutes to the meeting.

[Secretary's note: Metro Transit is the transit division of the Metropolitan Council, the regional planning agency serving the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Based on its 2008 budget, Metro Transit obtains about 32 percent of its operating budget from farebox revenues; 58 percent from state transit assistance, including 36 percent from the proceeds of a 6.5 percent statewide motor vehicle sales tax and 22 percent from the State general fund; about 8 percent from federal transit assistance programs; and the remaining 2 percent from other local sources. Of the transit systems in metropolitan regions similar to the Milwaukee County Transit System, only one was found to use a motor fuel tax as a source of dedicated funding: Providence, Rhode Island, which uses a 6.25 cents per gallon gasoline tax.]

Mr. Yunker ended the presentation on the transit service improvement alternatives by asking if Advisory Committee members had any additional comments or suggested revisions to the alternatives. Ms. Schulz suggested that the description of the final plan include a discussion of potential actions to give transit service greater visibility and priority in the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County. She identified elements of two projects that she believed should have given greater attention to the transit system: the informational maps on the new kiosks being constructed in downtown Milwaukee which do not show the bus routes, and the visitmilwaukee.org website which does not have a link to the Milwaukee County Transit System webpage. Mr. Polenske agreed that the City and County could possibly work together more to promote the transit system.

Mr. Natzke stated that public transit often suffers from a lack of promotion and suggested that the recommended plan chapter identify potential measures to promote transit use and increase ridership on the system. Ms. Schulz commented that the Milwaukee County Transit System does a good job of promoting itself to people who are familiar with the system or are receptive to using transit service. However, she believed that it should do more to reach out to businesses who do not always consider whether their employees use transit, or know about its programs such as the Commuter Value Pass. Mr. Yunker stated that the chapter of the report presenting the final plan would address the suggestions made by Ms. Schulz, Mr. Polenske, and Mr. Natzke.

Mr. Yunker discussed the need for a regional transit authority in the Milwaukee area and its importance for getting transit service improvements implemented. He noted that Milwaukee County, along with the other public transit operators in the Region, no longer has the financial capacity to operate transit services and that its area of jurisdiction does not fit its service needs. He stated that the transit systems in most other metropolitan areas of comparable size are operated and funded by regional transit authorities (RTA's). He explained that many RTA's were created in the 1970s and 1980s, some when private transit operators sold their assets to local governments, which then operated them as public transit systems. Because many of the private transit operations in those areas extended across jurisdictional boundaries, or the governmental entities did not have the financial capacity to acquire and operate the system, regional transit agencies were created. Mr. Yunker noted that when Milwaukee County assumed control of the transit system in 1975, the scope of services provided by the transit system addressed the needs of its population and fit within its area of jurisdiction, and that the County had the financial capacity to fund its

operation. He noted that both geographically and financially, Milwaukee County no longer is the appropriate government entity to address all the needs of the system.

Mr. Yunker stated that it may not be possible to convince everyone of the need for and benefits of having a good public transit system. However, he indicated that in the time that the Commission has worked with the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Transit Authority, he has seen some change in the attitudes of businesspeople and leaders who are starting to realize the important benefits that public transit provides to the community.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Yunker stated that based on the reaction of the Advisory Committees to the presentation at today's meeting, the Commission staff would proceed with writing the draft chapter detailing the transit service alternatives and the recommended plan. He indicated staff would also prepare a newsletter to present the alternatives, and that a second set of public informational meetings would be scheduled to gather public input on them. He stated that the comments from the public informational meetings would then be used to generate the recommended transit service improvements.

Ms. Schulz asked who had the final authority to approve the plan and implement it. Mr. Yunker replied that the Commission would present the final recommended transit service improvement plan to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, which would then, hopefully, adopt it. However, he noted that the plan is strictly advisory and the County would not be bound to implement its recommendations.

Mr. Rutkowski asked when the transit system development plan was expected to be completed, stating that the audit of the transit system currently being conducted by the State was expected to be completed in May 2008. Mr. Yunker stated that the plan was expected to be finished by then in the summer of 2008.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sonia Dubielzig
Acting Secretary