

MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN: 2009-2013



SUMMARY BROCHURE

JANUARY 2009

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, is preparing a short-range transit development plan for the Milwaukee County Transit System for the period 2009-2013.

The short-range transit development plan has produced to date the following key findings: 1) the Milwaukee County Transit System performs significantly better than comparable peer transit systems nationwide with respect to service efficiency and effectiveness; 2) within Milwaukee County, the Milwaukee County Transit System provides excellent coverage of residential areas, employment locations, and major activity centers; and 3) the transit system does have deficiencies with respect to long transit travel times and limited hours and frequency of service provided on many routes, particularly on weekends.

Using the evaluation findings and public feedback from a series of public informational meetings, staff identified several priorities for improvements:

- Extend routes to unserved areas;
- Reduce transit travel times;
- Increase service frequency on major routes; and
- Increase service hours to 20 hours per day on more routes

Alternative Service Improvement Plans

The Commission developed three potential service plans, or “alternatives”, for making short-term (five-year) improvements to the transit system. Alternatives 1 and 2 proposed two levels of investment in addressing the priorities for service improvement. Alternative 3, which maintains service at 2008 levels, represents a baseline for comparison against the other alternatives. The table on page 2 compares the proposed service expansions, equipment needs, and estimated ridership under Alternatives 1, 2, and 3.

Alternative 1: Extensive Service Expansion

Of the three potential service improvement plans, Alternative 1 represents the most aggressive attempt to address the priorities for service improvement. Overall, the plan would:

- Expand fixed-route bus service by about 22 percent (4 percent per year) from 1,340,000 bus hours budgeted for in 2008, to 1,629,000 bus hours in 2013. This service level would be 1 percent below the 1,650,000 bus hours provided in 2000.

**COMPARISON OF SERVICE LEVELS, ESTIMATED RIDERSHIP,
AND CAPITAL NEEDS UNDER ALTERNATIVES 1, 2 AND 3**

Service Characteristic	Alternative 1: Extensive Service Expansion	Alternative 2: Limited Service Expansion	Alternative 3: Maintain Existing System
Fixed-Route Service Annual Vehicle Hours, Year 2013	1,701,000	1,613,000	1,394,000
Percent increase over 2008	22	16	--
Average Annual Percent Increase	4.1	3.0	--
Transit Plus Paratransit Service Annual Vehicle Hours, Year 2013	437,000	437,000	437,000
Percent increase over 2008	3	3	3
Estimated Total Annual Bus and Paratransit Ridership, Year 2013	47.6 million	45.4 million	40.5 million
Percent Increase over 2008	11	6	-5
Expansion of Transit Service Area	New routes and route extensions to northern and southern portions of County	New routes and route extensions to northern and southern portions of County	No change
Express Bus Routes	3 express bus routes	3 express bus routes	No express routes
Freeway Flyer Service	10 freeway flyer routes; each route would make 10 trips every a.m. and p.m.; two midday round trips on each route	10 freeway flyer routes; each route would make 10 trips every a.m. and p.m.	9 freeway flyer routes; routes make between 4 and 10 trips every a.m. and p.m.
Turn-back Points on Local Routes	Eliminate turn-backs on weekdays and weekends	Eliminate turn-backs on weekdays only	No change
Headway Improvements	15 local routes and 3 new express bus routes would meet headway standards for all time periods	10 local routes and 3 new express bus routes would meet headway standards for all time periods	3 local routes meet headway service standards for all time periods
Hours of Service	Expand weekday hours on parts of Routes 35 and 80. Provide 20 hours of service on Saturdays and Sundays on 15 local routes (in addition to express buses)	Expand weekday hours on parts of Routes 35 and 80.	No change
Bus Fleet Purchase Requirements	204 buses to replace aging fleet plus 75 buses to expand fleet	204 buses to replace aging fleet plus 60 buses to expand fleet	204 buses to replace aging fleet

Source: SEWRPC.

- Increase Transit Plus paratransit service by about 3 percent by 2013 (keeping pace with anticipated growth in ridership).
- Boost annual ridership by an estimated 10 percent, from 42.8 million (in 2008 budget) to 47.1 million in 2013.

Alternative 2: Limited Service Expansion

Alternative 2 represents a scaling back of the proposal in Alternative 1, but would still address most of the priorities for service improvements. Overall, Alternative 2 would:

- Expand fixed-route bus service by about 15 percent (3 percent per year) starting from 1,340,000 bus hours budgeted for in 2008 and increasing to 1,540,000 bus hours in 2013. This service level would be about 5 percent below the 1,650,000 bus hours provided in 2000.
- Increase Transit Plus paratransit service by about 3 percent by 2013 (keeping pace with anticipated growth in ridership).
- Boost annual ridership by an estimated 6 percent, from 42.8 million (in 2008 budget) to 45.3 million in 2013.

Alternative 3: Maintain Existing System

Alternative 3 represents a baseline for comparing against the other alternatives. It presumes maintaining fixed-route bus service at the existing 2008 levels:

- Maintain fixed-route bus service at the 1,340,000 bus hours budgeted for 2008. This service is about 19 percent less than 1,650,000 bus hours of service operated in the year 2000.
- Increase Transit Plus paratransit service by about 3 percent by 2013 (keeping pace with anticipated growth in ridership).
- Depress annual ridership by an estimated 5 percent, from 42.8 million (in 2008 budget) to 40.5 million in 2013, due to the fare increases that were assumed for all scenarios.

Capital Needs for Alternatives 1, 2, and 3

All proposals would require the following capital investments: 1) a total of 204 buses to replace part of the current aging fleet; 2) replacement fareboxes to be installed in the existing fleet; 3) bicycle racks to be placed on the existing fleet; 4) various repairs, renovations, and upgrades to MCTS facilities; and 4) various transit enhancement projects, such as improving bus stops and shelters.

In addition, both Alternatives 1 and 2 would require additional capital investments. Alternative 1 would require 75 additional buses and bike racks; Alternative 2 would require 60 additional buses and bike racks.

Assuming Milwaukee County's priority is to use the limited Federal funds first on necessary capital projects, the Federal share for capital funding of each of the alternatives is approximately 80 percent. Milwaukee County's projected local share for the necessary capital investments would be \$20.6 million over the five-year period to implement the extensive service expansion in Alternative 1, \$19.6 million for the limited service expansion in Alternative 2, and \$15.6 million to maintain the existing system in Alternative 3.

Operating Funding Needs of Alternative Service Plans

Three funding scenarios (best-case, average, and worst case scenarios) were used to calculate the possible range of operating costs and the public funds needed for each of the three transit service improvement alternatives. Depending on the funding scenario, Milwaukee County's share of operating expenses could increase greatly by 2013. In 2008, Milwaukee County used \$22.2 million from the property tax levy for transit operating expenses. Even if the County were to simply maintain the existing system (Alternative 3), by 2013 it would have to contribute \$75.7 million of property tax levy for transit operating expenses under the worst-case scenario, \$49.5 million under the average scenario, and \$32.6 million under the best-case scenario.

Options for Dedicated Funding for Transit

Given the estimates of operating expenses and the potential local share needed, Milwaukee County cannot, even in the short term, continue to rely on the local property tax levy to fund the transit system. An analysis of potential new revenue sources indicates that an additional 0.5 percent County sales tax would be sufficient to provide the local funds to maintain the existing transit system and implement the needed transit service improvements.

Conclusion

Both the performance evaluation and the substantial public comment regarding MCTS service identified areas where the transit system currently does not adequately serve Milwaukee County residents' travel needs. Alternatives 1 and 2 present service improvements to address those needs; Alternative 3 offers a baseline for comparing against 2008 service levels.

The current funding sources for the transit system are insufficient to maintain the system at current levels, let alone make needed improvements. Given the estimates of operating and capital expenses and potential local share, Milwaukee County cannot, even in the short term, continue to rely on the local property tax levy to fund the transit system. The future of transit in Milwaukee County depends on securing a permanent source of dedicated funding.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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