

RACINE COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT PLAN: 2013-2017



Recommended Transit Service Improvement Plan

NEWSLETTER 3

SEPTEMBER 2013

This newsletter describes the final recommended public transit plan for the City of Racine and Racine County for the years 2013-2017. The final plan was developed by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission at the request of the City and County of Racine, and was approved by the Racine County Transit Plan Workgroup (see the box to the right) formed to guide the effort. Recommendations for improving transit service in the City and County included in the plan were prepared within the constraints of expected available funding, recognizing that City and County funding will likely not be increased over existing levels, and are summarized in this newsletter.

WHAT THE PLAN HAS COVERED

- Evaluated the performance of the City of Racine Belle Urban System (BUS);
- Evaluated other public and human services transportation provided in Racine County;
- Identified the unmet transit travel needs for trips within Racine County and to/from other counties;
- Developed and evaluated transit service improvement alternatives for the BUS that address the performance evaluation, including unmet transit service needs;
- Developed and evaluated transit service improvement alternatives for the remainder of the County outside the BUS service area, to address unmet transit needs;
- Obtained public input on proposed transit service improvement alternatives; and
- Prepared a final recommended transit service improvement plan for Racine County over the next five years.

The Next Steps for the plan are summarized on page 8 of this newsletter, and include actions to adopt and implement the plan recommendations.

RACINE COUNTY TRANSIT PLAN WORKGROUP

The Racine County Public Transit Plan was developed under the guidance of a Workgroup formed specifically for the plan. Representatives from all units of government in Racine County and a wide variety of agencies and populations with an interest in transportation in the County were invited to participate in the Workgroup. A list of the agencies and organizations can be found on the plan website:

www.sewrpc.org/racinetransitplan

WHAT'S INSIDE

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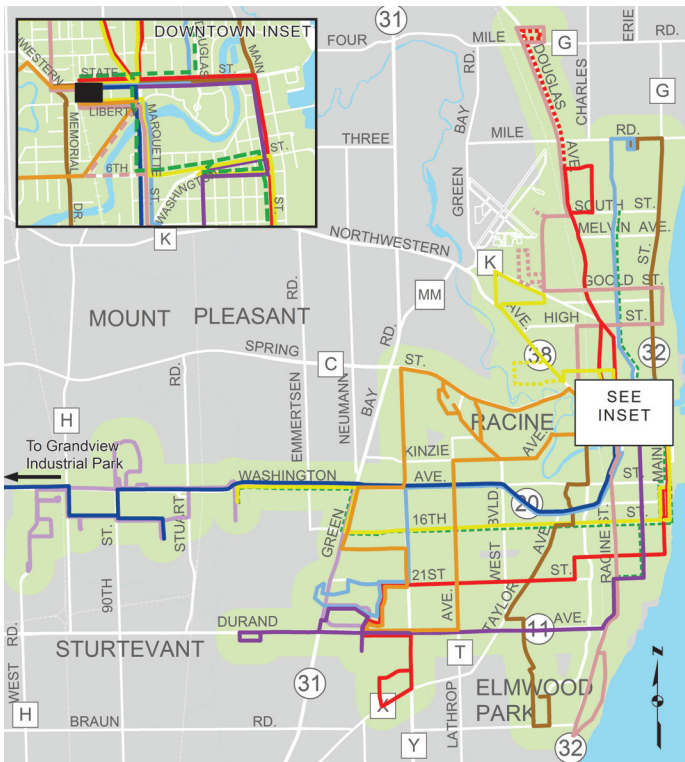
CITY OF RACINE RECOMMENDATIONS

City Recommendation 1: Restructure the Routes of the Belle Urban System

Map 1 shows the current Belle Urban System (BUS) routes. City Recommendation 1 proposes that the City of Racine pursue a revised structure for the regular routes of the BUS. The recommendation is based on the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS presented in Newsletter 2, and is “financially constrained,” keeping the local share of the needed annual operating assistance between about \$1.52 and \$1.65 million over the five-year planning period. The goal of the revised route structure in the final plan is to equalize the route lengths for all regular routes serving the Corinne Reid-Owens Transit Center. Restructuring the routes in this way would allow regular routes to “pulse” at the Transit Center on each trip, resulting in a more understandable midday schedule, and significantly reduce layover times during evenings and weekends. In addition, having each route fit into the same round-trip schedule allows the City more flexibility during times when a budget shortfall is anticipated for the system.

Map 1

EXISTING BUS ROUTES (AS OF SEPTEMBER 2012)



- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| BUS ROUTES | | |
| ROUTE NO. 1 | ROUTE NO. 7 | TRANSIT CENTER |
| ROUTE NO. 2 | ROUTE NO. 20 | 1/4-MILE WALK ACCESS |
| ROUTE NO. 3 | ROUTE NO. 27 | |
| ROUTE NO. 4 | ROUTE NO. 86 | |
| ROUTE NO. 5 | ROUTE NO. 30 | |

Source: City of Racine Department of Transportation and SEWRPC.

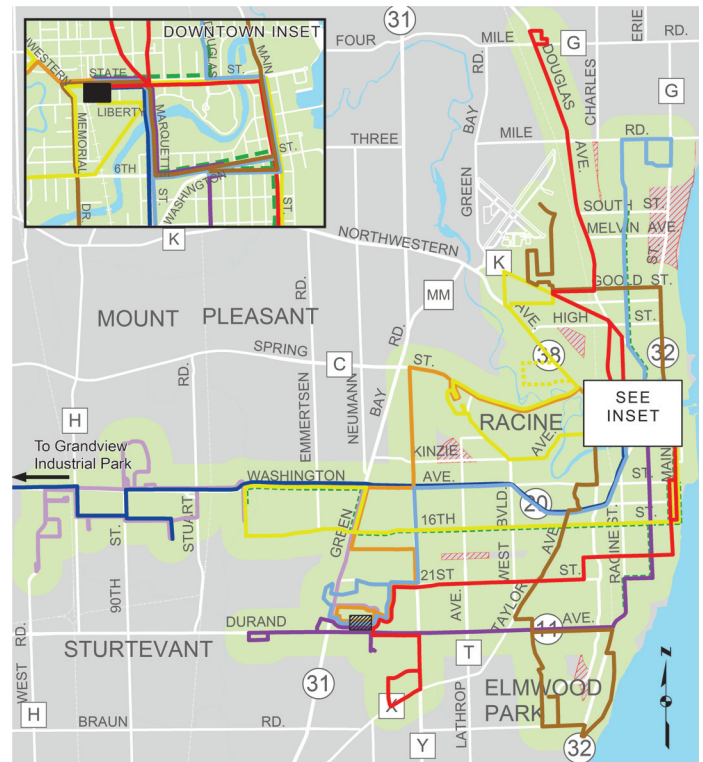
Due to the City’s development pattern, achieving equalized route lengths is a difficult task and some longer routes may have difficulty running a round-trip within 120 minutes. As such, the City should use the plan as a guide while it further refines the recommended routes, making sure new developments are served and any running time issues are addressed.

Recommended BUS Route Structure

Map 2 shows the recommended route structure, which combines poor-performing routes, reconfigures routes to serve recent development, and attempts to equalize route running times between the Transit Center and the outlying route endpoints. Each route is designed to run from its endpoint (either northern or southern) to the Transit Center and back in 60 minutes. When northern and southern route segments are paired together, the resulting route would have a total round-trip schedule of 120 minutes. Transfers between routes would also be improved by constructing a proposed southwest transfer point at Regency Mall.

Map 2

RECOMMENDED ROUTE STRUCTURE



- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BUS ROUTES | | |
| ROUTE NO. 1 | ROUTE NO. 7 | TRANSIT CENTER |
| ROUTE NO. 2 | ROUTE NO. 20 | PROPOSED SOUTHWEST TRANSFER POINT |
| ROUTE NO. 3 | ROUTE NO. 27 | AREAS THAT WOULD LOSE TRANSIT SERVICE UNDER RECOMMENDED STRUCTURE |
| ROUTE NO. 4 | ROUTE NO. 30 | 1/4-MILE WALK ACCESS |
| ROUTE NO. 6 | | |

Source: City of Racine Department of Transportation and SEWRPC.

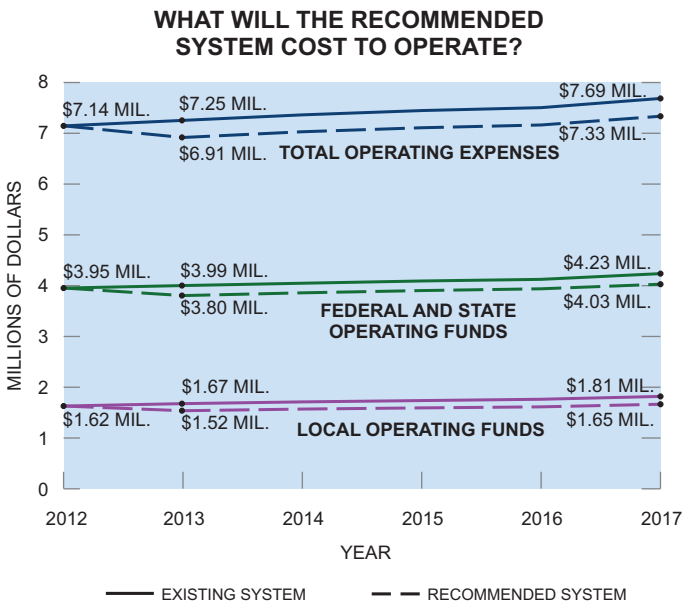
CITY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

Service Frequency and Time Periods

Nearly all regular routes would run every 30 minutes during peak periods and every 60 minutes during off-peak periods and on weekends (except Route 6, which would operate every 60 minutes all day). The reduced service hours established in January 2012 would be maintained. On weeknights, the last trips would leave the Transit Center at 9:10 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, the last trips would leave the Transit Center at 6:10 p.m.

Operating Funding Needs

Overall, the transit system's annual revenue hours would be slightly reduced—from 81,200 revenue hours in the system's 2012 budget to 77,000 under the recommended system. Ridership is assumed to modestly increase by 1 percent per year—from about 1.06 million revenue passengers in 2012 to about 1.11 million in 2017. Compared to continuing with existing service levels, the recommended system would save about \$340,000 in total operating costs and \$150,000 in required local operating assistance in its first full year.



Source: SEWRPC.

Capital Needs

The recommended system does not require any additional capital investment over the existing system. Over the five-year planning period, the following significant capital investments will be necessary:

- Maintain an existing fleet of 35 heavy-duty buses by replacing a total of 20 buses.
- Replace seven existing paratransit buses (in service since 2009) with new paratransit buses.

- Lease/purchase land at Regency Mall for a small transfer facility.
- Make various repairs, renovations, and upgrades to BUS facilities.

Over five years, 80 percent of these capital costs could be funded by a total of about \$8.8 million in Federal funds, with about \$4.8 million already obtained and used to buy 14 new buses in 2013. The City of Racine would need to provide a local share of \$2.2 million, with the City already providing about \$1.2 million for the required 20 percent local match for the 14 new buses.

Options if Operating Funding Levels Change

While the recommended system is designed with essentially flat operating funding levels, it is recognized that future funding levels may change. There are several possible service improvements that the City could consider if more funding becomes available (listed below). These improvements combined would cost about \$1.2 million more to operate annually, requiring \$1.0 million more in net operating assistance, with \$450,000 in additional local operating funds.

The following potential service improvements could be considered should additional funding become available:

- Add service on the new Route No. 6.
- Provide service to the Village of Sturtevant.
- Establish an express bus service between the Cities of Racine and Kenosha.
- Extend Saturday service hours from 6:40 p.m. to 9:40 p.m.

If local funding levels needs to be reduced, the City could consider these service reductions or, in the alternative, a fare increase:

- Eliminate new Route No. 2 on Saturdays.
- Eliminate Route No. 1 south of the Transit Center after 6:30 p.m. on weeknights.
- Eliminate Route No. 1 south of the Transit Center on Saturdays and/or Sundays.
- Increase cash fares by \$0.25.

These options combined would reduce the recommended system's needed annual net operating assistance by about \$400,000. If even more severe funding cuts are faced, another option would be to cut back routes that run every 30 minutes during peak periods to run every 60 minutes all day. If done on all routes, total operating assistance would be reduced by about \$720,000 in the first year, with local assistance reduced by about \$240,000. As a less drastic option, the City could also select individual routes to cut back to 60 minutes all day, based on performance.

CITY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

City Recommendation 2: Improve Coordination between City and County Paratransit Services

The City operates the Dial-A-Ride Transport (DART) service, providing Federally-mandated paratransit services within 3/4 mile of a fixed BUS route to people who cannot use the City's fixed-route service due to a physical or mental impairment. The Racine County Human Services Department provides demand-response transportation to seniors and people with disabilities outside the DART service area, and to seniors within the DART service area.

One of the plan alternatives proposed combining the City DART paratransit service and County demand-response transportation service east of IH 94. This would create a single coordinated paratransit service for seniors and people with disabilities. However, due to limited public comments supporting this concept, recognition of it being a very complex task to undertake, and concerns about how it would be funded, the plan does not recommend combining the two services at this time.

Instead, under City Recommendation 2, the plan recommends that the City and County work together to improve coordination between their demand-response transportation services east of IH 94. In particular, the coordination efforts should involve the following:



Improving coordination between City and County paratransit services could significantly benefit the City, County, and seniors and people with disabilities that use either service.

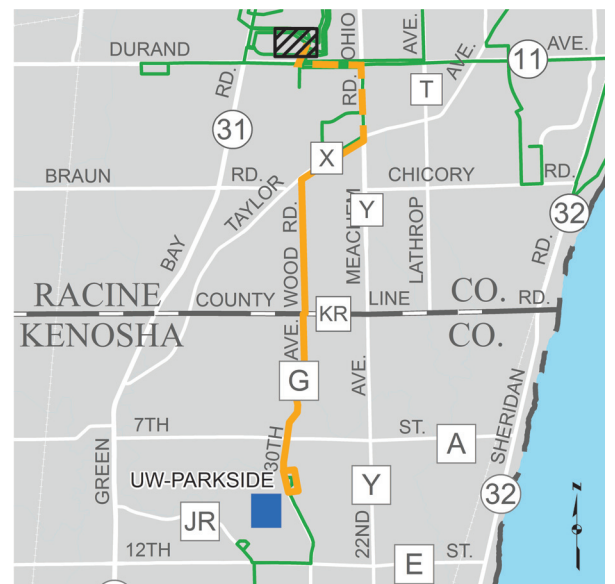
- Addressing a potential gap between the two services resulting from the way the current service areas are defined. Due to this gap, trips by people with disabilities from within the DART service area to outside the DART service area may not currently be served.
- Improving coordination and collaboration between the call centers for the two services.
- Working toward possibly establishing an integrated call center to provide a single point of contact for information and/or dispatching for users of both services.

City Recommendation 3: Improve Transportation to UW-Parkside Campus

Currently, the University Police operate a campus shuttle service on weekdays when class is in session, with two round-trips between the UW-Parkside campus and the McDonald's at Taylor Avenue and Meachem Road in the City of Racine. Based on one of three plan alternatives, City Recommendation 3 involves the City working with UW-Parkside officials to extend and increase the existing University shuttle service to the City of Racine. The other two options, which involved the City operating a local public transit service to campus, were not recommended because both would require additional local funding during a time of significant constraints on local funding.

Specifically, the plan recommends that the City encourage the University to extend its two round-trips north by about 1.2 miles to the proposed southwest transfer point at Regency Mall. This extension would provide students and staff access to the four or five BUS routes proposed to serve the southwest transfer point. The plan also recommends that the City encourage the University to operate an additional extended round-trip during the midday period, resulting in a total of three daily round-trips. Map 3 below shows the recommended University shuttle service extension.

Map 3
RECOMMENDED UW-PARKSIDE SHUTTLE EXTENSION



IMPROVING AND EXTENDING UW-PARKSIDE SHUTTLE SERVICE

- EXISTING SHUTTLE
- SHUTTLE EXTENSION
- EXISTING LOCAL BUS ROUTES
- COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
- ▨ PROPOSED SOUTHWEST TRANSFER POINT

Source: SEWRPC.

Since the annual cost to operate the improved shuttle service would likely be funded through the University or student fees, UW-Parkside would ultimately need to determine whether to improve its shuttle service.

CITY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

City Recommendation 4:

Integrate Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha Commuter Bus Route with BUS Routes

Wisconsin Coach Lines (WCL) currently operates a commuter bus route between Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha. One of the plan alternatives proposed increasing the weekday service frequency on the route from seven to 10 round-trips. However, the plan recognizes that the additional local funding for this improvement, which would likely need to be provided by WCL or the Cities of Racine and Kenosha, may not be available during the next five years given current and expected financial constraints. As such, the plan does not recommend increasing the service frequency on the commuter bus service at this time.

ABOUT THE MILWAUKEE-RACINE-KENOSHA COMMUTER BUS ROUTE

The Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha commuter bus route, currently operated by Wisconsin Coach Lines (WCL), includes seven round-trips on weekdays between 5:15 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. The weekday trips are focused on the morning and afternoon peak periods. Six round-trips are also operated between 8:15 a.m. and 10:37 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays. The service is funded through operating revenues and the State urban mass transit operating assistance program.

However, the plan does recommend that the City of Racine take steps to integrate the route with existing BUS routes, which was suggested as part of the proposed alternative. The following three actions would promote coordination between commuter and local transit services by making it easier and more attractive to use the two services:

- Add the commuter route alignment to the BUS route map and ask the City of Kenosha to add the alignment to the Kenosha Area Transit route map.
- Establish consistent charges for transfers between the commuter route and the local routes of the Racine and Kenosha transit systems.
- Provide information about the commuter route and its schedule at the Racine Transit Center, on the two systems' websites, and anywhere else information about the two Cities' transit systems is displayed.

RACINE COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS

County Recommendation 1:

Continue Current Approach to Meeting Transit Needs in Western Racine County

Two of the plan alternatives proposed ways to replace and expand the County's existing eligibility-limited (seniors and people with disabilities) demand-response transportation service west of IH 94, including expanding eligibility to all Racine County Human Services clients and establishing a public shared-ride taxi service. Given that either option has the potential to require significant additional County funding during or beyond the five-year plan period, neither is recommended at this time.

Instead, under County Recommendation 1, the plan recommends that the County continue its current approach to meeting transit needs in western Racine County, which involves maintaining the existing eligibility-limited demand-response transportation service, and implementing transportation services on a trial basis in communities with anticipated demand. After evaluating the performance of each trial service, the services that experience high enough demand should be continued and those with low demand should be eliminated.

Using this approach in recent years, the County implemented several new transportation services within and between communities in the County. Some have been unsuccessful, like the Racine County Link, which was a cross-county shuttle service operated from June 2012 through January 2013, but was eliminated following low ridership and not receiving a second year of Federal funding for 2013. A more successful example has been the Shuttling People Around Racine County (SPARC) program initiated by the County in 2011. Two initial SPARC shuttle routes attempted in the Mt. Pleasant and Waterford areas were eliminated due to low ridership, but a third route in the Burlington area has experienced much higher ridership and the County has increased the Burlington service.



The County's current approach to meeting transit needs in western Racine County resulted in the popular Burlington SPARC shuttle service. The plan recommends continuing this approach, trying new transportation services where demand is expected.

COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

County Recommendation 2: Establish Commuter Bus Service between the Cities of Burlington and Milwaukee

County Recommendation 2, based on one of the plan alternatives, recommends that Racine County establish a commuter bus service between the City of Burlington and the Milwaukee central business district. The County could establish the service with limited financial risk by applying for a Federal Highway Administration Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) grant. A CMAQ grant could be used to demonstrate the service, funding about 80 percent of the total operating cost for the first three years. Passenger revenues could provide almost all of the needed 20 percent local matching funds.

The service would provide two round-trips on weekdays, focused on service from Burlington to Milwaukee in the morning and the reverse direction in the afternoon. Racine County could contract for operation of the route from a private transit operator, much like Waukesha County contracts for commuter bus service. Fares would be \$3.25 each way.

Map 4 shows the proposed route alignment over STH 36 and IH 43, as well as proposed park-ride lots that would be served by the route. The County could also consider other variations on that route.

WHAT IS COMMUTER BUS?

Commuter bus is a limited-stop public transit service focused on providing work commute trips (often referred to as “freeway flyer” service). Commuter bus connects urban centers through buses operating over freeways or major highways, with stops spaced every three to five miles. Many commuter bus routes already exist in southeastern Wisconsin, with most focused on serving work commute trips to downtown Milwaukee.

The estimates (above right) assume the County obtains CMAQ grant funding for the first three years of operation. Following that period, the service would be funded through operating revenues, County funds, and Federal and State rural or urban transit operating assistance funds. Continuation of the service beyond the demonstration period would depend on the actual service performance and the availability of the necessary County funding.

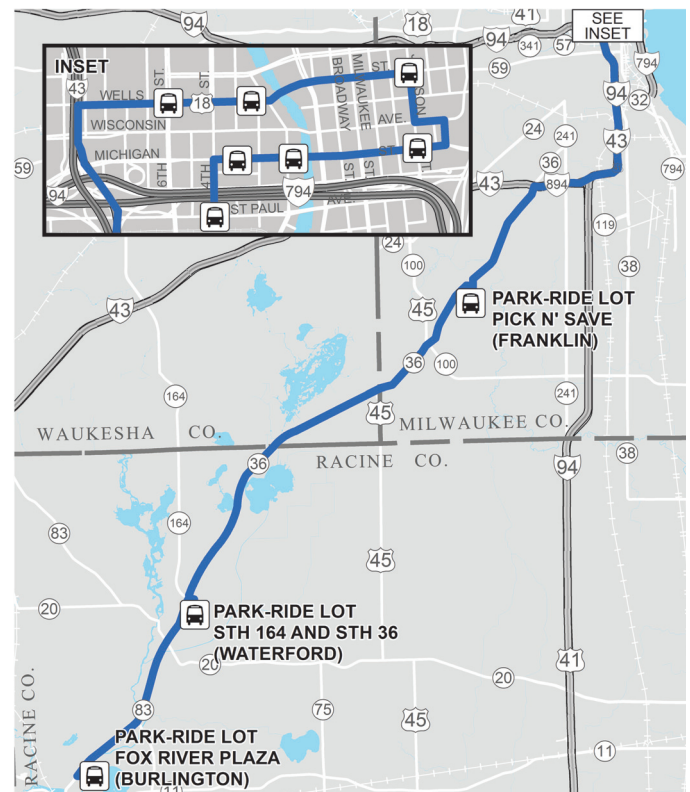
Ridership and Financial Estimates

	Ridership	Operating Expenses	Local Funding*
Year 1 (CMAQ)	12,800	\$204,000	\$5,000
Year 3 (CMAQ)	18,400	\$216,000	–
Year 5 (State 85.20/ Federal 5311)	20,500	\$230,000	\$40,000

*Local funding from Racine County. During CMAQ demonstration period, passenger revenues can be used as local matching funds.

Map 4

ESTABLISH COMMUTER BUS SERVICE BETWEEN BURLINGTON AND MILWAUKEE



ESTABLISHING COMMUTER BUS SERVICE BETWEEN BURLINGTON AND MILWAUKEE

— PROPOSED BURLINGTON-MILWAUKEE COMMUTER BUS ROUTE ALIGNMENT



PROPOSED COMMUTER BUS STOP (ADDITIONAL POSSIBLE PARK-RIDE LOT COULD BE CONSIDERED IN WIND LAKE AREA)

Source: SEWRPC.

COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

County Recommendation 3: Improve Coordination between City and County Paratransit Services

County Recommendation 3 is described in more detail on page 4 of this newsletter under City Recommendation 2. These dual recommendations suggest that the City of Racine and Racine County work together to improve coordination between their existing demand-response transportation services east of IH 94. Specific coordination efforts are highlighted on page 4 to that end.



City Recommendation 2 and County Recommendation 3 suggest ways to coordinate City and County paratransit services east of IH 94.

County Recommendation 4: Continue Existing Shuttle Service and Monitor Required Level of County Funding

One of the plan alternatives proposed operating the existing County shuttle service (Burlington SPARC) as public transit, serving trips made by the public in addition to those made by seniors and people with disabilities. Doing so would allow the County to use Federal and State rural transit operating funds to reduce the level of County funds needed to operate the service. However, while many public comments showed support for the SPARC service, they were opposed to operating the service as public transit for fear of losing the service's personalized nature.

Given the opposition, and potential added responsibilities and costs needed to meet Federal requirements, the plan recommends that the County continue to operate the shuttle service as it does currently. SPARC serves mostly seniors and people with disabilities, allowing the general public to use the service as space permits. The plan further recommends monitoring the level of County funding required to operate the service, and revisiting the proposed concept should there be enough demand by the general public in the future. At that time, the County would also need to be certain that there is Federal capital funding available to buy wheelchair-accessible vehicles, which are a Federal requirement for public transit operators.

County Recommendation 5: Establish Guidelines for Vanpool Programs in Anticipation for Future Demand

One of the plan alternatives proposed two options for forming a vanpool program, which would provide group transportation for long work-trip commutes starting or ending in the County. The first option would be for the County to buy vans and run the program. The second option would be for the County to have a private operator run the program. However, given Waukesha County's recent unsuccessful vanpool experience, and limited public comments in support of vanpools, the plan recommends proceeding with caution in regards to pursuing a vanpool program.

County Recommendation 5 suggests that the County apply guidelines for what would be desirable to start a vanpool program, should there become demand for vanpools in the future. Proposed guidelines for the County to use are in the blue box below.

PROPOSED GUIDELINES FOR STARTING A VANPOOL PROGRAM IN RACINE COUNTY

Vanpools should:

1. Be limited to individuals with work trips that start or end in Racine County that cannot be made on existing public transit systems;
2. Have at least five members per van commuting together to and from work;
3. Serve workers with long work commutes, typically at least 15 miles in length;
4. Serve workers who share a single employer or work in an area with a concentrated group of employers with similar shift start- and end- times; and
5. Serve workers who live near each other or who can independently travel to a common departure point, such as a park-ride lot.

With the above guidelines set, the plan recommends that the County wait to pursue a vanpool program until a group of employers or employees express interest. Interested employers could be located in Racine County or possibly in Kenosha or Milwaukee Counties that have Racine County residents as employees. If there is enough interest, the County could then work with a private vanpool provider to limit the County's financial risk, and either subsidize user fees or partner with employers willing to contribute to part of the cost of the service.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE RACINE COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT PLAN: 2013-2017

- The Commission will publish the final plan report (see below).
- The City of Racine and Racine County would consider formal adoption of the plan, with subsequent adoption or endorsement by the Regional Planning Commission, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, and the concerned city, village, and town boards in Racine County.
- The City of Racine will need to take the specific actions described in the plan report to implement the revised BUS route structure and the other City recommendations. Racine County will need to take the specific actions described in the plan report to implement the County recommendations.

FINAL PLAN REPORT

The complete final report will be published in SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 286, "Racine County Public Transit Plan: 2013-2017" in Fall 2013. An electronic version of the report will be available through the plan website listed below.

PLAN WEBSITE

An electronic version of this newsletter, study report chapters, meeting minutes and materials, and all other plan materials are available on the plan website:

www.sewrpc.org/racinetransitplan

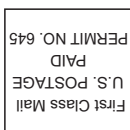
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