

Minutes of Third Meeting

**MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT
PLAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

DATE: January 24, 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

Peter W. Beitzel Vice President, International Trade,
Transportation, and Business Development, Metropolitan
Milwaukee Association of Commerce
Rodney A. Clark Director, Bureau of Transit and Local Roads,
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Brian Dranzik Research Analyst,
(representing James G. White) Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Anita Gulotta-Connelly Acting Managing Director,
Milwaukee County Transit System
Leticia Keltz Support Services Manager,
United Migrant Opportunity Services
Mike Loughran Project Engineer,
(representing Jeff Polenske) 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
Nancy Senn Transportation Planning Manager, Milwaukee County
Department of Transportation and Public Works

Staff and Guests 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
Christopher Johnson Assistant Transit Planner,
Milwaukee County Transit System

Michael J. Maierle Long-Range Planning Manager, City of Milwaukee
Gregory Patin Neighborhood Development Planner, City of Milwaukee
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 1:30 p. m., introduced himself, and asked those present to introduce themselves.

CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE APRIL 21, 2005 MEETING

A motion to approve the minutes as presented was made by Mr. Clark, seconded by Mr. Natzke, and carried unanimously by the Board.

REVIEW OF PRELIMINARY DRAFT OF CHAPTER V, “EVALUATION OF THE EXISTING TRANSIT SYSTEM,” OF SEWRPC COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PLANNING REPORT NO. 279, “MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN: 2007-2011”

Mr. Yunker provided an overview of Chapter V, “Evaluation of the Existing Transit System”. He explained that the chapter begins with an evaluation of the entire transit system, followed by a route-by-route performance review, a consideration of unmet transit service needs, a comparison with peer transit systems, and concludes with a projection of what could happen to the system over the next five years if recent trends continue. He noted that the five-year projections for the transit system were alarming in that the system could be required to reduce service by 35 percent by 2010.

Mr. Beck led the Committee through a section-by-section review of the chapter, asking for comments and questions from the Committee on the information in each section. The following questions were raised and comments made by Committee members:

1. Referring to Table 5-1, Mr. Portenier commented that using “population served” in the text and table seemed to overstate the total number of people who might use the transit system. He suggested that throughout the chapter, the text be modified to clarify that not all of the 850,900 people residing within the walk-access service area of the system are capable of using transit. Mr. Yunker replied that throughout the chapter, the phrase “population [or employment] served” would be replaced with “population [or employment] residing within one-quarter mile of a bus route”. He also commented that the Milwaukee County Transit System service area does include the vast majority of the population and employment located in Milwaukee County.
2. Mr. Yunker apologized for the faint colors in Map 5-6 and in other maps throughout the chapter, and assured the Committee that the maps and graphics in the final study report would be reproduced correctly. He stated that a better quality reprint of Map 5-6 will be attached to the minutes (see Attachment 1).
3. Mr. Portenier called the committee’s attention to the text under “Major Land Use Activity Centers Served” and “Transit Supportive Land Areas Served” on pages 6 through 8, noting

that there was a strong focus on serving employment concentrations with transit throughout those two sections. Mr. Yunker confirmed that the plan has an emphasis on connecting Milwaukee County residents with employment, because work trips comprise a large part of transit system ridership. Mr. Boehm observed that a major concern of transit systems is connecting residents with employment.

Mr. Portenier stated that it was important not to overlook the other non-employment transportation needs of the County population. Mr. Natzke commented that including the major activity centers serving the elderly and disabled population would help to illustrate how well the transit system serves the needs of the transit-dependent population, and he and Mr. Portenier suggested measuring the transit service coverage of senior centers, nutrition sites, and rehabilitation centers. Mr. Yunker stated that the chapter would be expanded to include an evaluation of the transit service coverage of these activity centers.

[Secretary's Note: Map 5-7a, "Major Public Senior Centers, Nutrition Sites, and Rehabilitation Centers in Relation to the Walk-Access Service Area for the Milwaukee County Transit System and Connecting Bus Services" was added after Map 5-7 and included as Attachment 2.]

4. Referring to Table 5-6, Ms. Keltz noted that the Job Center South had been relocated to 2701 S. Chase Avenue in August 2006 and is now called Job Center Southeast. Mr. Yunker stated that Table 5-6 and Map 5-9 would be revised for the final report to reflect the new location for the job center.
5. Mr. Beck drew the Committee's attention to Map 5-14 showing ratios of transit travel time to automobile travel time. He commented that one reason for the slow transit travel times shown is that the headways on many routes had been lengthened as a result of service cuts implemented in recent years. Mr. Natzke asked if, given the longer headways of the transit system, the plan alternatives should include consideration of transfer centers or timed-transfers between routes. Ms. Gulotta-Connelly recalled that the Milwaukee County Transit System had investigated using transfer centers 20 years ago. Mr. Yunker stated that public comment on this issue would be sought at the public informational meetings that would be held for the transit system development plan.
6. Referring to Figures 5-4 through 5-10, Mr. Portenier suggested that the presentation of the routes in the graphs displayed could lead to misinterpretation of the data, as the routes were not ordered in the same manner for each graph. Mr. Beck stated that the graphs displayed the routes in order of best-performing to worst-performing for each measure used, and that this presentation approach facilitated identification of the routes that could be candidates for service changes. Mr. Yunker stated that a summary graph with the routes identified in ascending order of route number would be added in the conclusions on pages 17 through 19 for those interested in reviewing performance by route.

[Secretary's Note: As the transit system primarily uses passengers per revenue vehicle hour to measure route performance, a summary figure for the overall performance of transit system routes was developed for this measure. Figure 5-10a, "Passengers per Revenue Vehicle Hour for Milwaukee County Transit System Local/Shuttle Routes in Ascending Route

Number Order: 2004” was inserted after page 19 in Chapter 5 and has been included in Attachment 3. The figure identifies the bus routes of the system in ascending order of route number. The following text was also inserted after the first sentence of the fifth summary point on page 19:

“Figure 5-10a displays the passengers per bus hour for the local/shuttle routes in ascending order of route number to facilitate comparison of route productivity across weekdays, Saturdays, and Sundays.”]

7. Referring to Figures 5-4 through 5-10, which display measures of the effectiveness and efficiency for each local route in the system, Mr. Yunker noted that some of the service improvements that may be considered under the alternative plans--such as extending service hours, improving headways, and extending service into outlying parts of Milwaukee County--could potentially reduce the service effectiveness and efficiency of the existing transit system routes. He stated that this would be identified in the evaluation of the alternative plans.
8. Referring to the text on page 22 discussing the reductions in service frequency and hours that have occurred since the year 2000, Mr. Natzke asked if ridership had dropped as a result of the service cuts. Mr. Clark responded that his staff had reviewed the changes in ridership and service levels on the Milwaukee County Transit System and believed that the reductions in service since 2000 clearly led to reductions in ridership. Mr. Natzke suggested that the Advisory Committee needed to clearly communicate that finding.
9. Mr. Maierle commented that existing County bus service generally is very good at serving riders who make trips of 4 miles or less in length; however for longer trips, such as work trips to job locations some distance from riders’ homes, the transit system does not do as well. Mr. Maierle observed that it would require creativity on the part of planners to address the transit service needs of both short and long trips. Mr. Yunker replied that the transit system needed different types of transit services to address the problem, such as local service for the shortest trips and faster express and freeway flyer services for long trips. The service would need to be integrated, with convenient transfers between all three.
10. Mr. Maierle remarked that Figure 5-1 and Maps 5-10 through 5-12 would be useful to transit riders, since they display the routes and route segments operating with the longest service hours and with the shortest headways. He suggested that this information should be made available in some way to riders.
11. Referring to the text on page 24, which indicated that the fares charged by the transit operators outside of Milwaukee County are not well coordinated with Milwaukee County Transit System fares, Mr. Natzke commented that there is also a lack of coordination in providing information to riders on the services available to travel outside Milwaukee County. For example, customer service representatives at the Milwaukee County Transit System do not provide schedule information on the transit services in Waukesha County, or the required fares.

[Secretary’s Note: The following wording regarding coordinated information between Milwaukee and surrounding counties will replace the first two

sentences of the final bullet under “Unmet Needs for Transit Travel outside Milwaukee County”, on page 24 of Chapter 5:

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

12. Mr. Natzke suggested that the plan should include a section on bus stop location and accessibility, noting that some bus stops are not in convenient locations or do not have basic features and amenities to support riders. As an example he cited the bus stop at Bayshore Mall, which he and other disabled riders have found to be inconveniently located. Mr. Yunker stated that stop location and accessibility problems at bus stops would be considered during development of needed capital improvements for the recommended plan.
13. Mr. Clark commented that the plan should include an assessment of the congestion relief provided by the transit system. He noted that one of the benefits identified of having a good public transit system was the potential to reduce traffic volume and congestion. Mr. Yunker stated that this analysis will be conducted as part of the evaluation of alternative improvement plans.
14. Referring to the excellent performance of the Milwaukee County Transit System identified in the peer group comparison on pages 24 through 26, Mr. Clark pointed out that a major reason why the transit system performs so well is its compact service area, which is limited to Milwaukee County. He stated that the transit system ranked 12th out of the 14 systems for the size of its service area, and that having a smaller service area makes it easier to provide cost-effective and efficient transit service.
15. Mr. Yunker stated that the final section of Chapter V, the “Future Direction of System Performance,” outlines the potential future financial condition of the transit system. He stated that since the year 2000, State, Federal, and County funding for the transit system has not kept pace with inflationary increases in operating costs and, as a result, the transit system has had to reduce service and raise fares. He indicated that the system could face more drastic cuts in service by the year 2010 if those trends continue and the County, as expected, replaces a major portion of its bus fleet. He drew the Committee’s attention to the financial projections shown in Table 5-13 which incorporate the drawdown and ultimate depletion of the County’s bank of unspent FTA Section 5307 Program funds, and the continuation of annual increases in State transit aids of only 2 percent, and no increase in the County property tax levy for the transit system. He noted that the projections indicate the transit system may need to reduce service by about 35 percent by the year 2010.

Mr. Patin asked Mr. Yunker to explain what he meant by the “bank” of Federal transit funds for capital projects. Mr. Yunker stated that he was referring to the unspent balance of past allocations of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 Program funds to Milwaukee County. He stated that the County receives an annual allocation of these funds which can be used for capital projects or for some elements of annual operating costs, including maintenance costs and paratransit operations. He noted that unlike Federal highway funds, which must be used in the year received or else they are lost, Section 5307 funds can be rolled over, or “banked,” for three years beyond the year they are allocated. He stated that Milwaukee County had accumulated a significant unspent balance of about \$30 million of these funds through the 1990’s with the intent of using it for fleet replacement and facility needs. However, the County since the year 2000 has been drawing down this balance to \$8 million in 2007 to provide operating funds for the transit system instead of using them for capital projects.

Ms. Gulotta-Connelly added that since the year 2000, the transit system has postponed the purchase of new buses, in order to continue using the Section 5307 capital funds to cover operating expenses. She noted that many of their buses are nearing the age at which they should be replaced. She said that if the current funding trends continue, about 130 buses will need to be replaced, around the same time that the transit system will use up the last of the “banked” funds.

Mr. Portenier noted that the transit system used to have a 50 percent farebox recovery rate, but that the rate has declined to about 33 percent today. He suggested that one reason for this decline was that the increased use of federal transit assistance funds for operating expenditures after the year 2001 had created a disincentive to raise fares.

16. Mr. Portenier expressed his concern that the transit development plan does not present enough information on transit services for the elderly and disabled, including the Transit Plus Program and the services offered by the County Department on Aging and Department of Health and Human Services. He suggested that the report should identify and discuss the other specialized transportation services in the County that help support the public transit system. He noted that when service cuts are made to the Milwaukee County Transit System, the specialized transportation services may need to absorb some of the demand for public transit. Ms. Senn agreed and suggested that the section on possible service reductions should mention the effect reductions in bus service may have on the County’s specialized transportation services. As an example, she noted that reducing fixed-route bus service could result in a reduction in the County’s Transit Plus paratransit service, which in turn would result in a higher demand for the specialized transportation services provided by the County Aging and Health and Human Services Departments.

[Secretary’s Note: The following paragraph has been inserted before the last two sentences of the section on “Future Direction of System Performance”, on page 28 of Chapter V:

“The service reductions in both options A and B may, in turn, place additional service demands on County specialized transportation services. Reductions in the County’s fixed-route bus services could permit a reduction in the hours of operation and service area

coverage for the County's Transit Plus paratransit service, and could result in higher dependence on and use of the transportation services provided by the Milwaukee County Department on Aging and Department of Health and Human Services. Reductions in bus service would also increase the need and demand for employment-related transportation services provided by social service agencies and organizations in the County."]

17. Referring to Table 5-13, Mr. Portenier pointed out that there have been changes to the funding levels for the State Section 85.21 Specialized Transportation Assistance Program for Counties which increased the funds provided to Milwaukee County. He asked if those changes were reflected in the numbers in Table 5-13. Mr. Beck stated that the increase in State 85.21 program funds had been factored into the projections in Table 5-13.

There being no further discussion, a motion to approve the preliminary draft of Chapter V, "Evaluation of the Existing Transit System," as amended, was made by Mr. Portenier, seconded by Ms. Gulotta-Connelly, and carried unanimously by the Committee.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF FIRST ISSUE OF THE SEWRPC NEWSLETTER FOR THE MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN ENTITLED, "MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT PLAN: 2007-2011"

Mr. Yunker led the Committee through a review of the draft of the first Newsletter for the Milwaukee County Transit System Development Plan. He explained that the newsletter summarized the first five chapters of the plan, with an emphasis on the transit system evaluation findings—particularly the areas of excellent performance and unmet transit needs—and the potential future financial condition of the transit system. He said that the draft newsletter would be revised to reflect comments provided by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors Transportation, Public Works, and Transit Committee, including: the addition of a statement on the benefits of transit; the addition of data on transit travel trip purpose; and added emphasis on the need for increased state funding and dedicated local funding. He stated the Newsletter would be widely distributed prior to the meetings through direct mailings to individuals on a mailing list compiled by the Commission and would also be provided to agencies and organizations for their distribution. Copies could also be available at the public informational meetings.

The following questions were raised and comments made by committee members regarding the newsletter and the upcoming public meetings:

1. Mr. Boehm asked if there would be more than one set of public meetings on the transit system development plan. Mr. Yunker replied that there would be at least two, and perhaps three, sets of public informational meetings.
2. Mr. Clark asked about the kinds of comment that the Commission was hoping to receive at the public meetings. Mr. Yunker stated that in particular comments on the following two topics would be encouraged: first, whether the evaluation of the existing transit system correctly identified the areas of excellent performance and the areas of unmet transit service needs; and second, suggestions for service improvements that should be considered during the development of alternatives in the next stage of the transit plan.

3. Mr. Natzke suggested scheduling the public meetings in February or March in order to allow sufficient time to notify people of the meetings. He recommended using Transit TV or placing notices on buses as one way of notifying bus riders about the public meetings. He also stated that the newsletter should be available electronically and in large-print or audio formats that are accessible to visually-impaired individuals. Mr. Boehm said that Commission staff could work with the transit system's marketing staff to place signs announcing the meetings on buses and to provide an electronic announcement on Transit TV.

[Secretary's Note: Mr. Natzke's suggestions for providing the Newsletter in accessible formats, placing signs on buses, and providing announcements on Transit TV were implemented. A complete listing of all the announcements and outreach efforts for the public informational meetings is documented in the Record of Public Comments which will be distributed to the Advisory Committee for review at the next meeting.]

4. Mr. Portenier asked who would be on the mailing list for the Newsletter. Mr. Yunker replied that the list was being developed from the mailing list used to distribute Commission Newsletters for the regional transportation system plan for the year 2035 which included the elected and other public officials from Milwaukee County and its municipalities, and individuals and organizations who over the years have expressed an interest in planning and transportation issues. In addition, staff had added those who had been invited to, or attended, a special workshop on public transit-human service coordination held in Milwaukee County in late August 2006. Mr. Maierle suggested that the Newsletter mailing list for the transit system development plan should also include individuals and organizations on the mailing lists for the Milwaukee Downtown Transit Connector Study and the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) Commuter Link study. Mr. Yunker stated that those mailing lists would also be used and requested that Advisory Committee members forward any mailing lists they would suggest to the Commission staff to help compile a comprehensive mailing list for the transit system development plan Newsletter.

[Secretary's Note: The final newsletter mailing list was compiled from several mailing lists, including those for the Commission's Newsletters for the regional transportation system plan for the year 2035, the KRM Commuter Link study, the Milwaukee Downtown Transit Connector Study, and the mailing list for the Milwaukee County Public Transit-Human Service Coordination workshop held in August 2006. Also, Mr. Portenier helped by overseeing distribution of approximately 2,000 newsletters to senior centers, nutrition sites, and senior housing complexes in Milwaukee County.]

5. Ms. Senn asked if Advisory Committee members should attend the Public Informational Meetings. Mr. Yunker encouraged Advisory Committee members to attend the meetings. He said the meetings would run from 4:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and would be conducted as an "open house", at which attendees can talk individually with staff members, with a PowerPoint presentation at 6:00 p.m. There would be opportunities for individuals to leave written comments or make an oral comment to a court reporter.

6. Mr. Natzke asked where the planned Public Informational Meetings would be held. Mr. Yunker replied that the planned locations identified in the draft Newsletter included HeartLove Place on Martin Luther King Drive, the United Community Center on South 9th Street, and the Downtown Transit Center. Mr. Natzke stated that those locations sounded appropriate.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Yunker stated that the Commission staff would schedule the next meeting of the Advisory Committee after staff had completed summarizing the comments made at the series of public informational meetings and developed transit service improvement alternatives. He noted that the agenda for the next meeting would include a review of the comments from the public meetings and a discussion of potential transit system service improvements. He stated that two or three more meetings of the Advisory Committee would be needed to complete the plan. Mr. Boehm noted that the Advisory Committee meeting had excellent attendance from the Committee members, and thanked everyone for participating.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sonia Dubielzig
Acting Secretary

KRY/AAB/SD/sd/mlh
8/24/07
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