Milwaukee County Transit System
Development Plan: 2007-2011

February/March, 2007
Introduction

Milwaukee County Transit System Development Plan

- Evaluation of existing transit system
  - Assessment of transit system and route performance
  - Comparison to “peer” transit systems
  - Identification of unmet transit service needs
- Preparation of short range (5 years) plan of improvements and expansion
Plan being developed by Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC)

- At request of Milwaukee County
- Together with Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) and Milwaukee County Department of Transportation and Public Works
Guiding and directing this planning effort is the Milwaukee County Transit Planning Advisory Committee

- After careful study and evaluation, the committee will propose to Milwaukee County a recommended plan

- Members have been appointed by the Milwaukee County Executive, including representatives from:
  - Transit-dependent populations, minority groups, and business associations
  - Wisconsin Department of Transportation
  - City and County Public Works Departments
  - MCTS
Outline of Presentation

- Executive summary
- Findings: Inventory and analysis of existing transit system
- Findings: Evaluation of transit system performance and identification of unmet transit travel needs
- Findings: Projection of future financial condition of transit system
- Next steps in the transit system development plan
Summary: Key Findings to Date

- MCTS performs significantly better than peer transit systems in service efficiency and effectiveness
- Within Milwaukee County, excellent coverage of residential areas, employment, and major activity centers
- Limited hours and frequency of service on many routes, particularly on weekends
- Lengthy transit travel time on the system, since local bus routes with low overall speed provide majority of service
- Few transit services exist for Milwaukee County residents to travel to jobs and activity centers in surrounding counties. Those that are available have limited hours and service frequency.
Summary: Key Findings to Date—continued

- Transit system depends heavily on State operating funding, which has not kept pace with inflation.
  - MCTS has had to increase fares, cut service, and use Federal capital funds for operating expenses

- Potential service cuts of 35% may be needed by 2010 if State transit assistance funds do not increase sufficiently to address cost inflation, or if there is no new dedicated local funding source for transit.
Inventory and Analysis of Existing Transit System

First stage of study—analysis of existing system and service area. Report examined:

- Existing population and population trends in Milwaukee County and surrounding area
- Existing employment and employment trends in Milwaukee County and surrounding area
- Activity centers for work, school, employment, shopping, government, health
- Characteristics and trends of existing transit system
Existing Transit System

Travel made on transit system

- Work - 45%
- School - 25%
- Shopping - 10%
- Medical, social, recreation or other – 20%

Trends in service and ridership

- Since 2000, MCTS cut annual miles of service by 17%, annual hours by 16%, and increased fares
- Bus ridership declined by 12% between 2000 and 2005
Existing Transit System: Operating Costs

MCTS Operating Costs

- 2005 operating costs: $143 million
- Fare and other revenues pay for about 32% of costs
- Heavily dependent on State transit assistance:
  - 41% of operating budget
  - 63% of public funding
Existing Transit System: Drawdown of Federal Funds

- In 2001, MCTS had $37 million of unspent Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds intended for capital projects.
- From 2001 to 2006, MCTS has used the FTA funds for operating funding to limit increases in County tax levy funding, fare hikes, and service cuts.
- The balance of FTA funds declined to $12 million at the beginning of 2006.

![Drawdown of Federal Transit Capital Assistance Funds](chart)

- **Millions of Dollars**
Evaluation of Transit System: Comparison to Peer Transit Systems

- State study in 2003 compared MCTS to a peer group of 13 similar transit systems
- Similar populations, northern climates, and similar bus fleet size
- MCTS outperformed peers for all measures of ridership and financial performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Measure</th>
<th>MCTS Rank (of 14)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passengers per capita</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passengers per revenue vehicle mile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passengers per revenue vehicle hour</td>
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<td>Farebox recovery rate for all services</td>
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</table>
Evaluation of Transit System: Areas of Excellent Performance

- Excellent coverage of residential areas and employment in Milwaukee County.
  - 91% of County population resides within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of local/shuttle routes
  - 94% of County jobs are within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of local/shuttle routes
  - 81 of 86 major employers (500+ employees) and 22 of 26 office and industrial parks in Milwaukee County are within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of local/shuttle routes
  - 68 of 70 major school, medical, government, shopping, recreation and passenger transport activity centers are within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of local/shuttle routes
Evaluation of Transit System: Areas of Excellent Performance—continued

- **Buses are on-time more than 90% of the time**

- **Overcrowding is not a problem on buses:**
  - Freeway flyers have a seat for every passenger
  - Local routes have no more than 4 passengers for every 3 seats at peak periods

- **26 of 31 local weekday routes exceed the ridership benchmark (22 passengers/hour)**
Evaluation of Transit System: Unmet Needs

Areas Not Served - Bus routes do not serve some areas in west, south, northwest, and northeast

Inadequate Service Hours - On weekends, large areas of the County are served by bus routes operating less than desirable level of 20 hours a day
Evaluation of Transit System: Unmet Needs—continued

Inadequate Service Frequency - On weekdays, large areas of the County are served by bus routes operating with longer than desirable headways.

Lengthy Travel Times - Transit travel time is between 2 and 4 times longer than auto travel time for comparable trips.
Unmet Needs: Limited Service Connecting to Outlying Counties

Unmet needs of County residents for travel between Milwaukee County and the other surrounding counties include:

- **Lack of Service** – Many major activity centers and job concentrations outside Milwaukee County do not have public transit service.

- **Limited Service Hours and Frequency** – If transit service does exist, it is very limited in hours of service and frequency of service.

- **Lengthy Travel Times** – Transit services connecting with surrounding counties often involve using one or more local bus routes with slow travel speeds.

- **Lack of Coordination of Fares** – Transfer arrangements are not uniform among all the transit services connecting with MCTS.
MCTS is heavily dependent on State funding: the State has historically provided about 65% to 70% of public operating funding.

Between 2000 and 2005, the State only increased operating assistance funding by less than 1.5% per year (less than inflation). Milwaukee County funding remained about the same.

MCTS tried to offset the marginal increases in State funding and the stagnant Milwaukee County funding by tapping into their “bank” of Federal transit funds meant for capital expenses.

Milwaukee County’s bank of Federal transit funds may be expected to be depleted by 2010.
Potential Future Direction: Likely Substantial Service Reductions

Potential Future Scenario:

- State transit operating assistance increases at 2% per year
- County tax levy for MCTS is held to 2005 levels ($17 million)
- Fare increases of 15% - 20% over 5-year period
- Drawdown of “bank” of federal transit funds meant for capital projects

Result: Transit system would need to cut 35% of service in 2010

- Much more extensive cut than the cuts of past 5 years
Potential Future Direction: Likely Substantial Service Reductions--continued

- For example, these are the kinds of cuts needed to achieve a 35% reduction in annual vehicle hours:
  - Eliminate 10 of 31 local routes
  - Eliminate all freeway flyer and UBUS routes

- Need for State to restore transit funding sufficient to address cost inflation

- Need for dedicated source of local funding for transit to replace Milwaukee County property tax levy
Next Steps

- Obtain your thoughts on transit system performance, your unmet needs, and your ideas for improvements
- Finalize identification of unmet transit service needs
- Develop alternative service improvement plans, including costs of different plans
- Additional public meetings to obtain additional input on service improvement options and plans
- Develop recommended transit service improvement plan
Tell Us What You Think

Give us your input about the transit system. We are especially interested in:

- What transit system does well
- What needs are not being met by the system
- Potential service improvements

Many ways to give your opinion:

- Written comment: tonight, or send letter or email
- Oral comment with court reporter
- Map of MCTS—place a pin where you have a problem or concern with service
- Potential service changes board—place a sticker to “vote” your preference for service changes