

# WAUKESHA AREA TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

## Executive Summary

### INTRODUCTION

At the request of the City and County of Waukesha, the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) prepared this short-range transit development plan (TDP). The TDP includes both Waukesha Metro Transit and Waukesha County Transit and evaluated the current systems and analyzed potential transit service recommendations to meet the needs of the community. The plan also includes a set of recommended service changes for the transit system. The study of transit services in the City and County of Waukesha was conducted within the framework of VISION 2050, the long-range regional land use and transportation plan adopted by the Commission in 2016, and updated in 2020. VISION 2050 proposes a substantial improvement and expansion of transit service in Southeastern Wisconsin over the next 30 years.

Commission staff prepared the plan in a joint effort with the staffs of the City of Waukesha and Waukesha County. The plan was guided by an Advisory Committee including representatives from the City and County, local municipalities, and interested educational and business groups and non-profit organizations. After careful study and evaluation, on November 29, 2022, the Advisory Committee approved the transit service recommendations for the City and County of Waukesha that are included in this plan. Subsequently, the City of Waukesha adopted the Transit Development Plan on December 20, 2022, and the Waukesha County Public Works Committee received a report on the final plan on January 12, 2023.



## EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES AND TRAVEL PATTERNS

### Waukesha Metro Transit

Waukesha Metro operates ten routes in a radial network, which originate from the Downtown Transit Center. The bus routes serve key destinations such as the Waukesha Memorial Hospital, Waukesha County Technical College, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at Waukesha, shopping centers, and public and private K-12 schools. The current schedules are designed so that they meet at the Downtown Transit Center approximately every 30 to 35 minutes during the weekday peak periods and approximately every 60 to 70 minutes during other weekday times and weekends. This cycle, or “pulse” scheduling allows passengers the opportunity to transfer conveniently between bus routes and complete a trip with minimal delay. The adult cash fare is \$2.00, with 31-day passes and 10-ride cards available for \$50.00 and \$18.00, respectively. There are reduced fares offered for students, seniors, and people with disabilities.

The City of Waukesha offers paratransit service for persons whose disability is of such a nature that they are unable to use fixed-route transit services. Waukesha Metro Transit Metrolift is a curb-to-curb, demand-responsive service that operates within the municipal boundaries of the City of Waukesha and within 0.75 miles of the fixed route outside the City. The one-way fare for a Waukesha Metrolift ride is \$4.00 and Ride Cards for two rides can be purchased for \$8.00 at Metro fare outlets. Ridership for Waukesha Metro’s fixed-route bus service carried 578,000 boarding passenger trips in 2019. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel behavior, transit ridership is slowly returning but has not fully recovered with Waukesha Metro transit ridership at about 60 percent of pre-pandemic levels.

### Waukesha County Transit

Waukesha County provides commuter transit services between Waukesha County communities, downtown Milwaukee, and the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Main campus. The commuter routes currently operating under a contract with Wisconsin Coach Lines include 901, 904, and 905. As of this writing, Route 79, the Menomonee Falls Flyer, which is operated under contract with the County by MCTS, has been suspended since January 2022 and was eliminated as part of the 2023 budget. Waukesha County provides curb-to-curb, demand responsive paratransit service for people with disabilities within 0.75 miles of Route 901 and extended paratransit service is provided for an additional fee. Reservations are required by noon the day prior to the requested trip. Service hours are 5:30 a.m. to 7:20 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Waukesha County funds portions of local transit services that provide connections between Waukesha County and Milwaukee County including the approximately three-mile portion of the route that extends outside the City of Waukesha serving numerous retail outlets and restaurants along Bluemound Road between the Goerke’s Corners Park & Ride Lot and Brookfield Square mall. Waukesha County also contributes a portion of the operating expenses for the Gold Line between Brookfield Square Mall and 124th Street. Beginning in June 2023 Route 1 will extend to the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC) to connect with MCTS CONNECT (Milwaukee County’s new bus rapid transit system), with buses coming every 20 minutes.

One-way adult cash fares for the 900 series routes are \$3.75 for Route 901 and eastern fare zones on Route 904/905 and \$4.50 for western fare zones on Routes 904/905. Similar to regional and national commuter bus ridership trends, Waukesha County Transit has experienced declining ridership over the past ten years which was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, local transit services funded by Waukesha County along the Bluemound Road Corridor generally perform well, as they serve as a major connection between Waukesha County and Milwaukee County.

## EVALUATION OF EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

As part of the Waukesha Area Transit Development Plan, the existing Waukesha Metro and Waukesha County Transit services were evaluated by comparing their performance to a series of standards developed by the Advisory Committee. These standards were developed to evaluate how effectively existing transit services fulfilled the three objectives the Advisory Committee identified for the transit systems. A number of these standards required comparing the transit services to peer systems from across the country, which were identified based on similar service types, routes, ridership, budgets, and served areas of similar density to the Waukesha Metro and Waukesha County Transit systems. The results of this performance evaluation are summarized below:

### Waukesha Metro Transit

- Overall Waukesha Metro performs very well
- Provides relatively good coverage of activity centers, population, and employment in the City of Waukesha
- Some routes have alignments with numerous turns to accommodate the street grid and hills
- The best performing route segments serve major commercial areas or pass through the Transit Center
- Fulfills the service effectiveness and cost effectiveness performance standards
- Routes that have poor performance were studied and changes are included in the draft recommendations

### Waukesha County Transit

- Waukesha County transit services provide fairly good coverage for residents commuting to jobs and activity centers in Milwaukee County
- Waukesha County Transit's local bus services (Route 1 extension and Gold Line connection) perform better than the commuter bus services (900-series, Route 79)
- Waukesha County transit services do not meet the operating expenses per revenue vehicle hour standard or the operating expenses per passenger mile standard
- Potential changes to routes, runs, service areas, and service periods are considered for routes that do not meet performance standards

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

Following the performance evaluation of the City and County's existing transit services, focused outreach was conducted between February and April 2020, to gather feedback from business groups, educational institutions, and organizations serving individuals who use public transit to understand transit use, challenges and barriers, and ideas for improvement. General themes from this outreach effort included an interest in on-demand transportation options for businesses, requests to consider cross-county travel options, and suggestions to expand marketing of transit services. Based on this input, a set of potential transit recommendations were developed.

To gather feedback on the draft transit recommendations, a formal public involvement process was held in October 2022 through November 2022. The public involvement process included three public meetings, an online survey, and opportunities to submit comments via email, fax, phone, online comment form, or mail. In addition, a business-focused meeting was held to discuss draft fixed-route route bus changes, potential transit enhancements along the Bluemound Road corridor, and on-demand transportation options. Major themes from the public involvement process included overall support for restructured Waukesha Metro routes, request for longer service hours and greater frequency (particularly on Route 1), general understanding about service reductions on Waukesha County Transit commuter bus routes, interest in on-demand transportation to improve access, and support for paratransit services.

## RECOMMENDED TRANSIT SERVICE PLAN

The Recommended Transit Service plan seeks to improve the performance of each transit system and was developed in careful consideration of the comments and ideas received from the Advisory Committee, Waukesha County businesses, transit riders, non-profit organizations that serve clients that use transit, students and parents/guardians in the Waukesha Public School District, and the public related to this effort. The Recommended Transit Service Plan is presented in three elements. The first element discusses potential recommendations for the fixed-route transit services operated by the City of Waukesha and Waukesha County. The second element provides recommendations related to potential on-demand or flexible transportation services that could replace or extend existing fixed-route bus services. The third element describes potential recommendations to paratransit services in the City of Waukesha or Waukesha County intended to increase efficiencies or expand the individuals served. The following table summarizes each recommendation and the implementing agency to assist the City of Waukesha and Waukesha County as they consider their potential roles under each potential option.

### **Fixed-Route Transit Service Recommendations**

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted all elements of daily life, including the commute to work, with Waukesha Metro ridership at about 60 percent of pre-pandemic levels and commuter bus service on routes 901, 904, and 905 at about 20 percent of pre-pandemic levels. Nationally, the pandemic has shifted the long-term outlook for in-person work as many employers consider permanent remote work and hybrid work options, further impacting demand for traditional commuter bus services. Given this context, the system included in the following recommendations focus on smaller-scale route changes in response to the performance evaluation conducted as part of this planning process, with some slightly-larger changes associated with the already-planned improvements to Route 1.

#### ***Implement Transit Enhancements on Metro Route 1***

During this planning process, the City of Waukesha and the City of Brookfield requested that Commission staff develop a more in-depth analysis of potential transit enhancements from downtown Waukesha to the MRMC. The purpose of the analysis was to generate discussion and provide details that help the communities determine if and how to move forward with transit enhancements or bus rapid transit (BRT) along the corridor, including the extent of improvements, the potential benefits of such improvements, potential funding sources, and next steps. Based on recent discussions with local governments along the corridor, a feasibility study is being conducted to consider potential station locations, pedestrian amenities, the extent of additional dedicated lanes, ridership, costs, benefits, funding sources, and timing of possible enhancements. Public involvement will occur as part of the feasibility study process.

#### ***Restructure Waukesha Metro Routes***

This recommendation envisions that the route updates would occur in two phases, with the first round of potential updates occurring in coordination with revisions to the Route 1 to serve the MRMC beginning in 2023, to match the anticipated start of revenue service for MCTS CONNECT. Based on the proposed changes to Route 1, nearby routes (Route 2, Route 3, and Route 15) are proposed to be updated to provide coverage to these neighborhoods, businesses, and important destinations. The remaining Waukesha Metro routes (4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) will be updated in subsequent years, potentially as soon as 2023, pending public input. Operating expenses are expected to decrease due to reductions in service hours with shorter trip lengths.

The recommendations also include options for future Waukesha Metro route changes based on ridership levels, which may include straightening or removing segments if ridership does not return to 2019 levels. It is recommended that any future change consider how it might impact areas with high transit needs, access to major activity centers, pedestrian access, and steep terrain that can reduce access.

	City of Waukesha	Waukesha County	Both
<b>Fixed-Route Transit Service Element</b>			
Implement Transit Enhancements on Metro Route 1			✓
Restructure Waukesha Metro Routes	✓		
Service Options for Route 9 and Route 15	✓		
Combine Routes 904 and 905, with Runs Terminating at Goerke's Corners and the City of Delafield		✓	
Option to Eliminate Stops on the 904/905 West of Goerke's Corners Park-Ride Lot		✓	
Reduce Frequency on Route 901		✓	
Implement an Enhanced Fare Payment System			✓
Consider Fare Policy Changes			✓
Implement Prioritized Improvements to Waukesha Metro Bus Stops	✓		
Continue Exploring Alternative Bus Propulsion Systems and Sizes for Future Purchases	✓		
Pursue Coordinated Transportation Solutions with Regional Transit Operators			✓
Develop an Enhanced Marketing and Travel Training Program			✓
<b>On-Demand Transportation Service Element</b>			
Implement Employment-Related On-Demand Transportation Solutions			✓
Replace Poorly Performing Waukesha Metro Segments or Times of Day with On-Demand Transportation Services	✓		
Develop Supplemental On-Demand Paratransit and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Options			✓
Develop Mobility Hubs			✓
<b>Paratransit and Specialized Transportation Service Element</b>			
Continue Collaboration Between the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Waukesha County, Waukesha Metro, and Waukesha County Transit on Paratransit Services			✓
Long-Term Option to Consider Providing County-Wide Shared-Ride Taxi Service		✓	

### Service Options for Route 9 and Route 15

The recommendation for Route 9 considers removing service to Ingleside Hotel, due to low ridership, and includes routing options that would serve the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), GE Healthcare, and WCTC. Based on public input, which requested that participants rank their preference for these destination options, service to the DMV and WCTC was identified as most preferred, with GE Healthcare also receiving some preference.

The recommendation for Route 15 will serve destinations along Roberta Avenue and Tenny Avenue, north of Sunset Drive and locations south of Sunset Avenue. Based on public input, where participants were asked to identify which locations should have regular transit service, there was preference indicated for locations north of Sunset Drive (Roberta Avenue and Tenny Avenue), with additional interest in serving locations south of Sunset Drive (Big Bend Road, E. Rivera Drive, and S. East Avenue). Therefore, Route 15 is recommended to serve locations both north and south of Sunset Drive.

### ***Combine Route 904 and 905, with Runs Terminating at Goerke's Corners and the City of Delafield***

Given the declining ridership trends on Waukesha County Transit's commuter routes, which were trending downward even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this recommendation includes a lower level of service by combining Routes 904 and 905 and ending runs at either Goerke's Corners Park-Ride Lot or Nagawaukee Park-Ride Lot. It is estimated that these changes would reduce annual operating expenses by approximately \$160,000 and reduce annual operating assistance by about \$150,000.

### Service Option: Eliminate Stops on Routes 904 and 905 West of Goerke's Corners Park-Ride Lot

If ridership remains at current levels, Waukesha County could consider eliminating stops west of the Goerke's Corners Park-Ride Lot for all runs of Route 904 and 905. It is estimated that this service option would reduce annual operating expenses by approximately \$218,000 and reduce annual operating assistance by approximately \$203,000.

### ***Reduce Frequency on Route 901***

The recommendation would reduce service on the Route 901 by eliminating two eastbound and two westbound runs. These changes to westbound service may result in only one remaining run that serves as a "reverse commute" for travel from Milwaukee County to Waukesha County and no mid-afternoon service between UW-Milwaukee and Waukesha. However, the East-West BRT and the Waukesha Metro Route 1 will provide frequent, all-day service that will assist passengers requiring this trip. It is estimated that this recommendation would reduce annual operating expenses by approximately \$162,000 and reduce annual operating assistance by approximately \$151,000. Waukesha County could consider an option to continue the number of runs on Route 901 but end the trips at Goerke's Corners Park-Ride Lot. It should be noted that while service reductions are considered for the 900-series services in Waukesha County, portions of this plan consider enhancements to Waukesha County services provided along the Bluemound Corridor (Route 1 Extension, GoldLine Extension) to provide greater service frequency in a corridor that is the best performing route and serves as the main connector to Milwaukee County.

### ***Implement an Enhanced Fare Payment***

An enhanced fare payment could offer the opportunity to support seamless regional connectivity for commuters traveling between Waukesha County and Milwaukee County. As these fare payment and transportation service innovations continue to evolve, they provide options that enhance the passenger experience and encourage ridership. As these technologies continue to be implemented in the region, it is recommended that Waukesha Metro continue to discuss options with the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) to provide seamless transfers and mobile payment options, starting with the Route 1 extension between the MRMC and the downtown Waukesha Transit Center.

### ***Consider Fare Policy Changes***

Waukesha Metro may consider establishing a fare threshold, called fare capping, for frequent transit riders by upgrading their transit pass to a higher-level, such as a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual pass when the threshold is met. Fare capping would be implemented concurrently with the adoption of advanced fare payment technologies that can count how frequently a passenger uses the system. More information on how to implement fare capping will be available as MCTS pursues it in 2023. In addition, some transit agencies in the U.S. implemented fare free programs to boost ridership, improve operations, and enhance social equity. Within this context, the Advisory Committee indicated that this effort should include an analysis of eliminating fares on Waukesha Metro. Should the transit system move towards a no-fare system, a pilot program targeting small groups or service zones is recommended to analyze the stability of the program and ensure its success. For example, a fare free program could be piloted with certain rider groups such as seniors or youth to study how the change impacts ridership, customer satisfaction, and system performance. In addition, certain areas, such as the core downtown area, could be fare free to promote mobility between downtown businesses and services.

### ***Implement Prioritized Improvements to Waukesha Metro Bus Stops***

At the request of the Advisory Committee, Commission staff collected and analyzed bus stop data for 589 stop locations served by Waukesha Metro and Waukesha County Transit, during June through September 2020. Data collected included the presence of pedestrian accommodations, bus pads, curb ramps, bus shelters, and amenities. The information gathered identified locations in need of bus stop improvements, indicating that some Waukesha Metro Transit bus stops are missing amenities or are not located near accessible paths. This recommendation includes a list of stops needing improvement, with the first tier representing the highest priority. Prioritizing the first two tiers will assist Waukesha Metro in meeting a recommendation from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to ensure that all bus stops are accessible to people with disabilities.

### ***Continue Exploring Alternative Bus Propulsion Systems and Sizes for Future Purchases***

This recommendation compares several bus fuel types for potential use by Waukesha Metro Transit including diesel, diesel-electric hybrid, battery electric, and hydrogen fuel cell. It also includes different-sized vehicles that could be used for fixed-route, paratransit, and potential on-demand services. Some public comments suggested that smaller buses be considered as a cost savings measures. However, the 35-foot transit buses utilized by Waukesha Metro are the shortest buses that meet Metro's needs for longevity, capacity, and cost. Therefore, it is recommended that Waukesha Metro continue to use buses similar to the existing size for fixed-route services. Waukesha Metro Transit has completed needed fleet replacements in 2022 and no new replacements are planned until 2027. As transit vehicles are replaced, Waukesha Metro could consider a range of vehicles that may have greater fuel efficiency and are smaller to accommodate potential on-demand transportation services while continuing to provide paratransit services.

### ***Pursue Coordinated Transportation Solutions with Regional Transit Operators***

As part of the anticipated reconfiguration of commuter bus services, Waukesha County has an opportunity to collaborate with transit operators in Washington County and Milwaukee County to provide coverage for Waukesha County residents to major destinations and employers while leveraging each operators' services. This coordination may also include stops at the Watertown Plank Park-Ride Lot or on the campus of the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center, which would allow passengers to access locations in Waukesha County along the Route 1, connect to the East-West BRT to access downtown Milwaukee, and to access destinations served by the Washington County Commuter Express.

### ***Develop an Enhanced Marketing and Travel Training Program***

This recommendation envisions leveraging and expanding outreach about transportation options, building on the current efforts of travel trainers and staff at Waukesha Metro Transit, Eras, and the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Waukesha County. Local and national examples are provided in the recommended plan that aim to renew ridership, address safety concerns, and strengthen community partnerships.

### **On-Demand Transportation Recommendations**

#### ***Implement Employment-Related On-Demand Transportation Solutions***

This recommendation proposes that on-demand transportation services be focused on job clusters within eastern Waukesha County, such as the Villages of Butler, Menomonee Falls, and Pewaukee and the Cities of New Berlin and Pewaukee. Within the Region, the FlexRide Milwaukee service provides one example of the utilization of on-demand service to expand access to employment opportunities. FlexRide is a research pilot funded with a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation and led by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. On-demand rides are provided on weekdays between 4:30 a.m. and 11:30 p.m. and the vehicle operators are independent contractors largely utilizing their own vehicles. In June 2022, MobilISE and partners including the Waukesha-Ozaukee-Washington Workforce Development Board, received a \$4.2 million Workforce Innovation Grant to sustain and expand FlexRide Milwaukee. At the time of writing, specific locations to be served with future on-demand services are being determined. Waukesha County and the City of Waukesha will continue to be involved in project planning and updates.

#### ***Replace Poorly Performing Waukesha Metro Segments or Times of Day with On-Demand Transportation Services***

This recommendation considers how microtransit services could provide an extension of fixed-route segments that are determined to be unproductive or an extension of the span of service to serve late night or weekend trips. If ridership does not rebound to pre-pandemic levels, it is expected that existing transit service could be reduced or eliminated along certain segments or during times of the day or week that experience lower ridership such as evenings and weekends. An example of this type of service is in operation in the City of Green Bay where Green Bay Metro launched GBM On Demand in August 2020 and expanded the service area in August 2021, to complement and extend the City's existing transit service.

#### ***Develop Supplemental On-Demand Paratransit and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Options***

Waukesha Metro could consider partnering with ride-sourcing companies such as Uber and Lyft to provide on-demand paratransit and non-emergency health care transportation rides as a supplement to existing paratransit and specialized transportation services. One option would allow health care providers to schedule rides on behalf of patients. Another option would include health insurance companies expanding benefits to include transportation to and from medical appointments. Lastly, another type of emerging service includes paratransit providers partnering with ride-sourcing companies to supplement existing paratransit services. These three models could be considered within the timeframe of this plan to supplement the traditional paratransit services.

#### ***Develop Mobility Hubs***

Mobility hubs are places of multimodal connectivity that provide a range of transportation options and amenities for safe, convenient, and efficient travel. The most common elements include bus infrastructure, vehicle connections, bicycle connections, signage and travel information, active use space, and safety features. Two potential locations in Waukesha County were identified by the Advisory Committee for locating a mobility hub, including the Goerke's Corners Park-Ride Lot in the Town of Brookfield and potential locations near Brookfield Square Mall in the City of Brookfield. Future coordination to discuss potential amenities, maintenance, and funding will be needed with the communities, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and property owners.



### **Paratransit and Specialized Transportation Service Draft Recommendations** ***Continue Collaboration Between the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Waukesha County, Waukesha Metro, and Waukesha County Transit on Paratransit and Specialized Transportation Services***

The Waukesha County Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) finalized the Waukesha County Specialized Transportation Program Review Study on August 2, 2022, which included program alternatives to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and awareness of the services. This recommendation incorporates several strategies identified in the program review, which focused on changing processes within the control of Waukesha County to improve the delivery of service and prepare for any future service changes. In the short-term, strategies may include resuming quarterly transportation coordination meetings with taxi providers, the RideLine contractor, Waukesha Metro, Waukesha County Transit, and the Milwaukee County Transit System to identify opportunities for training and joint procurement. In the medium-term, this on-going collaboration may identify strategies, such as options to pursue a technology pilot program and establish service standards.

#### Service Option to Provide County-wide Shared-Ride Taxi Service

The Waukesha County Specialized Transportation Program Review Study noted that a single contractor to operate a curb-to-curb or corner-to-corner public transit service could be considered in the long term. While out of scope for the Waukesha County Specialized Transportation Program Review Study, this service option would address an unmet need in Waukesha County for transportation for those who cannot or would prefer to not drive outside of existing transit service areas by providing a county-wide public shared-ride taxi program. However, any service enhancements would require a reprioritization of local funding. Given that this service option would require extensive coordination with Waukesha County Transit, Waukesha Metro, the ADRC, and current senior taxi providers, this option is likely outside the planning horizon for this plan.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The short-range transit service plan presents recommendations and service options for the City of Waukesha and Waukesha County to make informed decisions in the face of future uncertainties. The plan represents the culmination of the study of existing transit services, the evaluation of existing and potential transit service recommendations, and the consideration of input from businesses, transit riders, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations about the future of transit in the City and County of Waukesha. As the City and County consider the recommended transit service plan, they will need to balance all service objectives outlined in Chapter 3, Public Transit Service Objectives and Standards, while minimizing costs.

