



Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998

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Good Evening Madam Chairwoman and Committee Members.

As you head into the final days of meetings and public comments preparing your version of the 2026 Milwaukee County Budget, let us tell you that we do not envy you. This budget, by far has to be the most difficult many of you have ever faced.

Let me start by stating that the amount of route reductions and service hours being contemplated for the Milwaukee County Transit System is simply not acceptable. The total elimination of five routes and the reduction of service on several others would leave thousands of riders without affordable transportation options. These riders range from school age children and young adults on their way to class, to the elderly in our community on their way to doctor's appointments, religious services or grocery shopping. These riders also would include people on their way to and from work at many of the businesses along these routes, while also serving those that are visually impaired who utilize some of these routes to get to Industries for the Blind and Beyond Vision.

Last week ATU998 E mailed a proposal to the County Board that could save some service on the routes that are in line for elimination. These routes would consist of "Tripper Routes", which are bus routes with limited hours. There could be service on these routes during peak rush hour times and possibly limited service at shift changes. These Tripper Routes would take the place of full day bus service.

OVER

I believe most of you have seen an E mail from the MCTS Director with a chart showing the estimated cost of tripper buses on Routes 20, 28,33, 34, 55, and 58 to be roughly \$1,700,000.00. Without understanding how MCTS arrived at this number, we believe it to be a fair and equitable solution for the short term and encourage you to vote in favor of this idea.

We are also aware of several ideas and amendments from various Supervisors that would, among other things, keep service on several routes, increase security for the riding public, and invite the business community to lobby their elected officials for public transportation dedicated funding. We applaud this combined effort of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors and want to remind you that our door is always open.

On Behalf of The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998,

Tom Stawicki

Legislative Director/Lobbyist

ATU998

Public Comments on the 2026 Milwaukee County Budget
Barbara Beckert - October 27, 2025

Good evening, Chairwoman Nicholson Bovell, and members of the Milwaukee County Board. Thank you for holding this public hearing on the 2026 budget.

My name is Barbara Beckert, I live in the first Supervisory District. I serve on the Paratransit Taxi Task Force that this board established and other disability related committees. I am retired from Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) but will never retire from advocacy for disability rights.

I'm here today to thank supervisors for your past support for transit, paratransit and funding for a pilot of on-demand paratransit for people with disabilities and ask for your support once again. Milwaukee County's budget presents a transportation crisis for people with disabilities and transit dependent riders. We urge resolve to retain necessary funding to preserve accessible transportation services and access to nutrition, health care, jobs, and much more for people with disabilities and other non-drivers.

Wisconsin DOT estimates that 40% or more of Milwaukee County residents are non-drivers ([geography-non-driver-flyer-april-2022.pdf](#)) and these numbers are growing. Non drivers include people with disabilities, older adults, people under age 16, people over age 16 who delay or never become licensed, low-income workers who cannot afford a private vehicle and households where there are fewer cars than drivers, and drivers who become non-drivers because of increasing disability, injury, or age.

Being a non-driver impacts every aspect of a person's life—where they can live, work, whether they get health care and prescription drugs, purchase healthy food. Most non-drivers have few transportation options and may be unable to affordably get where they need to go on time.

Given that over 40% of County residents are non drivers, I ask you to do everything in your power to sustain transit and paratransit in this budget and moving forward.

- I encourage supervisors to support the Amendment to restore Route 28 after hearing from so many community members about the harmful impacts on individuals who rely on this route to get to work.
- I also support efforts to leverage all available funding including an increase in the Vehicle Registration Fee. I am willing to pay an increased fee but would prefer a funding mechanism that was calibrated to income and ability to pay rather than one size fits all. I understand your options are limited by the state.
- I will continue to advocate for increased funding for transit and paratransit and other specialized transportation in the state budget and urge Milwaukee County to make this a top policy priority.

Paratransit is a vital service for many people with disabilities and older adults. For so many residents who need accessible transportation, no alternative is available. **Paratransit is a lifeline.**

For the past 2 years people with disabilities and community organizations they utilize have endured paratransit services which have not been dependable and have too often failed riders dependent on their services. In addition to service deficiencies, Transdev has contributed \$3.3m toward the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) deficit. Despite significant MCTS management and community advocacy efforts budget and service problems persist. We ask you to take action as follows:

- Maintain the countywide border to border paratransit service area and current fare structure as proposed by the County Executive.
- Develop and implement a plan to ensure more oversight to monitor our paratransit services and budget, and to hold our contractors accountable. Cuts in transit will increase use of paratransit as bus routes are eliminated, shortened and less frequent. This is high risk since paratransit is already struggling with timeliness and reliability, and fiscal challenges. It was shocking to learn of a significant deficit of \$3.3 million.
- Don't give up on same day paratransit. We thank County Supervisors for your past support for a pilot of a new same day paratransit. We are disappointed that the pilot program is not funded or even mentioned in the proposed 2026 budget. Without County Board action, the Same Day Paratransit Service will be an additional casualty, eliminating a reliable option for transportation responsive to situations which cannot be planned 24 hours in advance. Transit plus riders have no other option for public accessible same day transportation.

Along with many others, I put over a hundred hours of my time into work for the same day paratransit pilot and I'm proud of the program that was developed and that met an important community need. While the need for accessible same day paratransit remains, we recognize that the current budget crisis may make it difficult to continue the pilot in its current form.

We ask you to designate a small amount of additional funding to allow Transit Plus to deliver high priority urgent same day transit, such as medical appointments.

Along with other Paratransit Taxi Task Force members, I would welcome the opportunity to work with supervisors and other policymakers to monitor and address the concerns raised in this testimony.

I also support the amendment to provide funding for EvictionFree MKE to sustain legal representation for individuals facing eviction.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service at this challenging time. I can be reached at bpbecker@gmail.com / 414-719-1034.



Milwaukee Affordable Housing Fund | Milwaukee County Brief

Proposal

Allocate \$1MM from Milwaukee County to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) for the creation of the Milwaukee Affordable Housing Fund to support development of affordable housing.

Policy Issue

Development of affordable housing is challenging, and barriers are increasing, particularly for emerging developers and nonprofits that lack the traditional balance sheet strength of established developers. As credit and underwriting standards have tightened, they face additional challenges in accessing capital that requires personal guarantees or increasing collateral requirements. The timeline for many affordable housing projects is also stretching to 2 years or more, as there is increased difficulty in closing funding gaps due to diminished availability of necessary subsidy sources (ARPA, HOME, etc.).

Solution

One common solution employed effectively in other markets is local credit enhancement. LISC Milwaukee proposes to use \$1MM in permanent capital from Milwaukee County as crucial “first in last out” subordinate funding or backstop to unlock additional private capital for a Milwaukee fund that will provide loans for predevelopment, acquisition, construction, and mini-perm loans for a variety of affordable housing projects. Government and philanthropic funds used as credit enhancement are crucial to overcoming barriers to the development of affordable housing.

Leverage

LISC Milwaukee anticipates leveraging the City’s capital investment of permanent, flexible loan capital with private and philanthropic loan funds to achieve a minimum 3:1 leverage ratio. As loans are repaid, the funds will be redeployed into new projects, thereby increasing their impact over time. This equates to a minimum initial loan fund of \$4MM. We are also looking to raise additional credit enhancement from other government entities and philanthropic sources to grow the local fund.

Legislative Background

Milwaukee County established the Economic Development Fund (Resolution 11-601) to support jobs and an increased tax base through economic development. In the 2012 Milwaukee County Budget, two initial investments were approved: a \$1MM workforce and job training investment through WRTF/Big Step and a \$1MM investment to establish the Milwaukee County Revolving Loan Fund (implemented by Resolutions 12-985 and 13-231) through the Milwaukee Economic Development Corporation. That loan fund remains active today, successfully providing small business loans across Milwaukee County and revolving repayments into new loans that support businesses and job growth.

Milwaukee County made additional appropriations from the fund in subsequent years, with the most recent in 2025, when it established a new position and program within DAS Economic Development and Real Estate Services – the “Building Bridges” small business grant program. The adopted Milwaukee County policy establishing and funding the Economic Development Fund using land sales revenue was never repealed or replaced. However, statutory changes to the In Rem process and fewer overall surplus county land sales have resulted in decreased net sales proceeds, even less than the \$400,000 typically budgeted for the department to partially fund operations.

LOCAL INITIATIVES SUPPORT CORPORATION

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WWW.LISC.ORG/MILWAUKEE

Proposal Overview

- **Investment Amount:** Allocation of \$1 million from Milwaukee County to leverage additional public and private sources to establish the Milwaukee Affordable Housing Fund.
- **Recipient Organization:** Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).
- **Purpose:** To help fund the creation of a Milwaukee Affordable Housing Fund aimed at supporting economic development through loans, particularly to nonprofits and emerging developers, specifically for projects that include affordable housing in Milwaukee County.
- **Structure:** The County's investment will serve as permanent restricted capital within the fund, functioning as first loss or backstop to mitigate risk and attract additional private investment. The County investment would be blended with other sources to credit-enhance LISC loans in the target geography, but they will not be formally structured in a separate legal fund entity.
- **Leverage Ratio:** LISC will leverage the County's investment at a minimum initial ratio of 3:1, resulting in total loan capital of at least \$4 million. Over time, the leverage ratio will be even higher as loan repayments revolve into new loans for additional projects.
- **Complementary Funding:** A parallel funding request is being made to the City of Milwaukee to allocate prior expired Tax Increment District (TID) revenues designated for affordable housing. If approved, this investment would help to capitalize a larger fund and lead to additional funded projects and affordable homes for Milwaukee County residents.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased access to capital, particularly for emerging developers.
- Enhanced capacity for affordable housing development and neighborhood improvement.
- Stronger public-private partnership to leverage and drive economic growth.
- Long-term sustainability of the loan fund through risk mitigation and capital recycling.

Background on LISC

LISC is a leading nonprofit Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). Through our [36 local offices](#), a [rural program](#) that reaches more than 2,400 counties in 49 states, and [LISC-founded affiliates and entities](#), we work with a vast network of community-based partners to make investments in [housing](#), [businesses](#), [jobs & financial health](#), [education](#), [safety](#), and [health](#).

We receive our funding from banks, corporations, foundations, and government agencies. We, in turn, use that funding to provide financing ([loans](#), [grants](#), and [equity](#)) and technical and management assistance to local partners and developers.

LISC was founded in 1979 and established a [Milwaukee office](#) in 1995, making this [our 30th year](#) of working in the community with our locally based staff to deploy capital and improve communities. LISC and our affiliates have invested over \$780 million in Wisconsin and helped to develop or improve over 9,500 units of affordable housing. This includes investing over \$30 million in grants, \$81 million in loans, and \$670 million in equity.

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