

County of Milwaukee Interoffice Communication

DATE: 2/10/2023

TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: Informational Update on Route 88 Brown Deer Road Service Adjustment

FILE TYPE: Informational Report

REQUEST

This report details the service area expansion and improved efficiency of Milwaukee County Transit System's (MCTS) Route 88 (Brown Deer Road) in December 2022.

BACKGROUND

Route 88 began service in June 2021 as part of the MCTS NEXT Route Redesign project. The route operates primarily along Brown Deer Road between Green Bay Avenue and 124th Street & Bradley Road. It also serves segments of N. 107th Street, Bradley Road and N. 124th Street. Major destinations along the route include the Marketplace of Brown Deer, Pick 'n Save, Walgreen's, Walmart, Woodman's, Sam's Club and Aldi. With three buses each day, the route provided riders with a frequency of one bus every 20 minutes.

During the process of creating the 2023 Budget in Spring 2022, MCTS was directed to propose some reductions in service due to future fiscal constraints. Route 88 was chosen as a route from which one bus could be removed to reduce operating costs. The reduction to two buses meant buses would arrive less frequently throughout the day—approximately one bus every 30 minutes.

Later in the Summer, residents from the Westridge Apartments (7901 W. Glenbrook Road) contacted Milwaukee County DOT and MCTS officials regarding the lack of transit service in this part of the far northwest side. Most residents at this complex are senior citizens or persons with mobility challenges. MCDOT and MCTS staff visited the facility to listen to residents' transportation needs and to analyze the feasibility of providing new transit service to this area. During this process, MCTS identified that Route 88 could be modified to serve these residents as well as other multi-family buildings and apartment complexes (see maps on subsequent pages). This route change was implemented in December 2022.

A comparison of Route 88 average daily ridership before and after the change showed an increase of 25%, from 338 to 424 daily rides. This gain is especially positive as it occurred despite the decrease in the frequency of service. Route productivity also

improved from 6.8 passengers per bus hour to 11.0 passengers per bus hour. These improvements confirm the importance of Route 88 in the Brown Deer Road corridor despite its buses arriving only every 35 to 40 minutes.

MCTS attributes these gains to the convenience for residents along N. 76th Street, Glenbrook Road and N. 85th Street to travel to work or shopping opportunities and to connect to other routes along Brown Deer Road. This gain is also a byproduct of the bounce-back from the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be reiterated, however, that it is uncommon for ridership to increase when the frequency of service is reduced.

This positive news notwithstanding, it must be stated that federal stimulus funding used to maintain this route (and many other routes, as well) will expire as soon as Fiscal Year 2025. According to the “Five Year Financial Forecast 2023 – 2027” prepared by the Office of the Comptroller, stimulus funds provided to MCTS will no longer be available to offset transit services. They conclude, “It is imperative that the County strategically address the forecasted fiscal Cliff in FY2025. Without proper planning, major disruptions to transit service could occur in FY2025”. With rising expenses and flat or decreasing funding, it will be more challenging for MCTS to provide fixed route transit service to an ever-expanding footprint of residential, commercial, educational and entertainment development throughout Milwaukee County. While the need for transit is clear and critical, the need for commensurate funding must now follow.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.

3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.

3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability.

3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes only, unless otherwise directed.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

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