

**Director of Transportation Opening Remarks at
Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Transportation & Transit Committee Meeting
June 6, 2023**

Chairwoman and Committee Members,

The list of potential service reductions to MCTS's fixed bus route network that you are about to hear may come as a surprise to Milwaukee County residents and some in the County Board. Despite the multiple reports to the County Board from MCDOT, MCTS, the Budget Office and the Office of the Comptroller detailing how much our transit system is underfunded, this potentially critical issue still does not seem to resonate across our community and region. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, all signs pointed to MCTS being forced to absorb rising operating costs, higher union wages and benefits, all amongst a growing service area. This perfect storm brewed against a backdrop of stagnant or reduced revenue from the State of Wisconsin.

Now, with the State Legislature possibly approving only a marginal increase in Mass Transit Aids and with the shared revenue/sales tax debates still in flux—we're at a crossroads. Over the last several years, to become as lean and efficient as possible, MCTS has shrunked its facilities footprint, its staff, its service area and reduced its frequency on various bus routes all while eliminating Freeway Flyer routes and service to Summer Festivals, State Fair, Brewers games and most schools and job shuttle routes. Frankly, it's a miracle that we were also able to do this while developing historic and monumental projects such as Bus Rapid Transit.

To meet MCTS's 2025 budget, it appears likely that the County Board of Supervisors will need to vote to eliminate up to 16 bus routes. That's what this has come to. There is nowhere else to cut. We should not allow MCTS to wither away into a system that runs buses only every 30 to 60 minutes. That inferior level of service has proven to be unproductive, inefficient and, frankly, puts more people in their cars and on our roads. Instead, we must seek to maintain high quality, enhanced transit service like CONNECT BRT, the North-South Transit Enhancement Project, and the benefits of MCTS Next.

The County will continue to seek federal funding to enable us to convert the most productive transit routes into premier BRT corridors while simultaneously maintaining the remaining network of high ridership, high frequency fixed routes. These routes attract thousands of riders every day and that ridership is rebounding since the onset of the pandemic.

However, what this also means is—without proper levels of funding—the elimination of essential, local, lower frequency, lower ridership bus routes will likely be something that the County Board decides on. What does that mean to the average rider in your district?

Chairwoman Coggs-Jones, imagine being a rider of Route 22 on Center Street and, in 2025, your closest east-west route will be on North Avenue, a half-mile away. Why? Because service on Center Street could be eliminated. So could service on Highland, Vliet, Hopkins, Congress and Port Washington Road.

Supervisor Shea, put yourself in the shoes of a Route 52 rider on Pennsylvania Avenue and, in 2025, your closest route will be on Packard Avenue, one mile away. No more service on Layton Avenue or Lake Drive, either.

Supervisor Logsdon, imagine being a rider of Route 55 on Layton Avenue and, in 2025, your closest east-west route will be on Oklahoma Avenue, two miles away. Service on Layton Avenue, S. 108th Street and S. 92nd Street would be cut.

Supervisor Burgelis, imagine you are a rider on the South Side who currently rides any of the six east-west routes spanning the four miles between National Avenue and Layton Avenue. If you choose to implement these proposed eliminations, riders on the South Side would only have two east-west routes remaining—Route 18 on National-Greenfield and Route 51 on Oklahoma. Service on Lincoln, Mitchell, Burnham, Greenfield Avenue, Miller Park Way, S. 43rd and S. 60th Street—all gone.

To ATU 998 leadership, bus operators and mechanics. While the union and MCTS now have a much more collaborative relationship, bringing compensation rates and benefits closer to expectations—that comes at a cost. As mentioned earlier, you know that MCTS has a very limited budget that has essentially been stagnant from the State of Wisconsin that has not been reflective of these increased costs. Therefore, the more of that budget we give to you, the less service and the fewer bus routes and amenities we can provide to our community. The stark reality is—without significant increase in funding—MCTS will need far fewer bus operators and mechanics starting in 2025. Without your union's support, that's the inevitable future. YOU are our partner—we need your advocacy just as much as we need our County Supervisor's advocacy. What will you do in helping us get the message out there to the community?

Committee members, this is how our community will be impacted by these proposed cuts:

- 1) 2,300 employers will no longer have a bus route nearby
 - 2) 70,000 jobs would no longer be accessible by transit
 - 3) 6 employers with over 1,000 employees each would go unserved
 - 4) 132 employers with over 100 employees each would be without a bus route
 - 5) 47 public housing facilities
 - 6) 7 hospitals
 - 7) 51 nursing homes
 - 8) 26 pharmacies
 - 9) 108 schools
 - 10) 10 colleges or universities
 - 11) An average of over 7,000 rides each day would be lost
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- 12) Nearly 122,000 residents of Milwaukee County would no longer live near a bus route
 - 13) Over 18,000 people living in poverty
 - 14) Over 56,000 people of color
 - 15) Over 12,000 car-free households
 - 16) Over 16,000 people living with a disability
 - 17) Over 3,000 people that currently take transit to work

The state of our local economy and community hinges on a robust transit network. Milwaukee County residents' mobility will be severely handicapped if these eliminations come to pass. Jobs and educational opportunities will be more arduous, time-consuming and costly to access. Senior citizens will become more isolated. The county's various on-demand transportation services, which are far more expensive to operate, will be called on more and more by our residents in need. Less bus riders means more cars on our streets—the one thing we simply cannot afford, considering the alarming levels of distracted and reckless driving already occurring throughout the County.

I cannot encourage enough for the County Board to explore solutions that appropriately align the County's limited resources to address the immediate fiscal challenges of MCTS. Furthermore, we must continue to advocate for dedicated funding sources for transit whether with the State or by any other means. Alert your constituents, your district's businesses and community partners to advocate for the same.

Thank you for your time and I'll hand it off to MCTS to share more details from their report.