

## **COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**

### **Inter-office Communication**

DATE: 1/6/2021

TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors

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

SUBJECT: From the Director of the Department of Transportation and Managing Director of the Milwaukee County Transit System, an Informational Report on the Temporary Suspension of Freeway Flyer Service

FILE TYPE: Informational Report

#### **BACKGROUND**

Freeway flyers were paused during the pandemic and then re-started in fall 2020 when Downtown employees were projected to return to in-office work. The Delta variant of COVID-19 followed by Omicron has hindered that return to work, leaving freeway flyers at record lows in ridership. To counter, increased absenteeism among our bus operator ranks, stemming from Omicron infections and work fatigue (pandemic burnout), Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) officials made the decision to temporarily suspend Freeway Flyer bus routes to allow the resources designated to park-ride lot service to be used on local services.

On January 5th, MCTS announced that it will temporarily suspend Freeway Flyer Routes 40, 43, 44, 46, 48, 49, 79, and 143 beginning on January 10, 2022, and lasting through March 6, 2022. To communicate this change, MCTS prepared press releases, informed stakeholders, and adjusted its website and mobile App, among other efforts to inform about the service modification.

MCTS is being impacted in similar ways to other transportation providers, like airlines, that have had to cancel flights due to workforce issues. MCTS workforce shortages and absenteeism persist despite opportunities for over-time pay each day. Consequently, through the holidays and into the new year, MCTS has not had enough drivers available to meet shifts and maintain the service that our customers need and expect. The temporary suspension of these transit services will improve service reliability through the Omicron surge.

#### **Title VI analysis**

Under FTA rules, a service equity analysis is required to be prepared if a suspension in service lasts longer than 12 months; this suspension is planned for 2 months. Given the exemption, it is useful to consider the fact that MCTS recently presented a report in June 2021 – Suspension of Freeway Flyer Service during COVID-19 (Title VI Report) – consistent with Chairwoman Nicholson’s request for routine updates on reviews for disparate impacts (File No. 21-32).

In summary, the June 2021 report discussed the suspension of freeway flyer service that occurred at the time of the ‘safer at home order.’ In that report an analysis of the freeway flyer network revealed that flyer routes predominantly serve people in non-minority and non-low-

income census tracts. A further analysis of the percent change in service in minority and low-income census tracts was determined to be less than the percent change in service in non-minority and non-low-income census tracts, meaning that a suspension of freeway flyer service – then or now – does not have a disparate impact on the minority population nor a disproportionate burden on the low-income community of Milwaukee County.

#### ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the strategic plan:

- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity.
- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.
- 3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability.
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

#### RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

#### FISCAL EFFECT

#### TERMS (If applicable)

#### VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

#### PREPARED BY:

Prepared by: Dan Boehm, President & Managing Director, MCTS

#### APPROVED BY:

*Donna Brown-Martin*

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Donna Brown-Martin  
Director, Department of Transportation

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors  
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk