

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-office Communication

Date: 2/15/2024

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

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

Subject: From the Director, Department of Transportation and the President and Managing Director, Milwaukee County Transit System providing an Informational Report regarding Milwaukee County Transit System Security.

File Type: Informational Report

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**POLICY**

It is the policy of the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) to provide informational reports upon request of County Board supervisors.

**BACKGROUND**

An update about the progress made regarding security enhancements as part of the 2024 Adopted Budget.

**NARRATIVE**

During the 2024 budget process, MCTS recommended a number of security measures that would enhance the current security measures that are already in place at MCTS. While specific security measures are not mandated by local or federal authorities, MCTS has a number of security elements that support operators and passengers, many of them above and beyond when compared to other agencies across the country.

- A 24/7/365 Dedicated Dispatch Office
- A dedicated Safety, Security and Project Management Department to manage contracted and physical security infrastructure
- A 10-HD camera system with Live-Look capabilities on board every bus
- A discreet, silent alarm button on every bus to covertly alert Dispatch during incidents

- An operator shield on every bus – MCTS was one of the first agencies in the country to do so and buses are currently ordered with the largest shield available
- Red Kite de-escalation training provided to all bus operators, as well as fully staffed internal training department
- MCTS Route Supervision field personnel to provide a direct MCTS presence during incidents and accidents
- Secured facilities with CCTV, access control, panic alarms, fences, etc.
- SAFER electronic reporting system to collect incident and accident data for trend analysis.
- Contracted security with over 2000 hours of on the street support each week

Through the use of these measures, as well as other efforts, from 2022 to 2023 MCTS saw a **42% reduction in physical operator assaults**, largely in part due to a policy which removed operators from the fare collection process. MCTS has also seen increased success with coordination from the District Attorney's Office to charge cases involving crimes against MCTS personnel, passengers and property. Thanks to this enhanced coordinated lead by the MCTS Manager of Safety & Security, ten cases are in the process of being charged since late 2022.

Regarding cooperation with Local ATU-998, the labor union representing the majority of MCTS frontline employees, updates were made to the extended rider policy. Both parties were able to discuss at monthly meetings and come to an agreement on the policy which was put into effect and communicated to staff on December 1, 2023. While extended riders themselves are not necessarily a cause for concern, there is the potential for this relatively benign issue to turn critical, which is why this policy is so important.

MCTS has also continued to upgrade physical security at all MCTS facilities. The three major facilities, FDL, KK and Fleet Maintenance, have undergone a complete CCTV replacement. New gates and fencing upgrades were also added to all three facilities. In 2024, MCTS will continue to investigate and design solutions to fully secure all facilities moving forward.

As part of the 2024 budget, MCTS was awarded approximately \$1.5 million to enhance existing security measures. Specifically, as part of those efforts, MCTS has committed to the following:

- Adding **256 additional hours to contracted security services**, plus one additional squad vehicle – this change was made January 14, 2024 and MCTS will continue to monitor the impact
- Adding 3 additional MCTS employees – including two **Public Safety Supervisors** to provide oversight to contracted security personnel in the field, as well as one **Security Dispatcher** to provide a consistent, high quality Dispatch response to security incidents – positions are targeted to be filled March 2024
- Additional training for key MCTS staff including the new positions, Dispatchers and contracted security personnel to improve the response during incidents involving individuals with mental health and other sensitive issues – this training will continue throughout 2024

In addition to these initiatives, MCTS will continue to cooperate with ATU-998, local law enforcement, the DA's office, DHHS, BHD, OEM and any and all other third parties who have stake in the safety and security of MCTS. MCTS will also continue to research and outreach to peer systems to share experience and gain knowledge and perspective regarding similar issues.

Through this type of cooperation and research, MCTS has learned about new tactics and products and is currently working on a number of projects:

- In January of 2024, MCTS met with representatives from the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division and learned how to best take advantage of the mobile crisis hotline and will begin using it when appropriate
- Many transit agencies across the country have launched campaigns to encourage passengers to respect their bus operator, as well as fellow passengers. MCTS will be launching its "Respect" campaign in June, 2024
- In cooperation with ATU-998 MCTS has conducted peer research regarding CCTV monitors on buses, as well as a new prototype of operator shield currently being tested in New York. We are working to pilot these enhancements on board MCTS buses, hopefully later in 2024 (depending on product availability)

Overall, 2024 will see many updates and changes. MCTS encourages everyone to look to the future while work continues to learn and improve. While transit security has proven to be a challenge for transit systems across the country, MCTS has a team of dedicated professionals with decades of experience who are ready to meet the challenge.

## **ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN**

- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity.
- 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.

## **FISCAL EFFECT**

There is no fiscal effect.

## **TERMS (If applicable)**

N/A

## **VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

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## **ATTACHMENTS:**

PowerPoint

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