

County of Milwaukee Interoffice Communication

DATE: October 1, 2021

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

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

SUBJECT: Milwaukee County North-South Transit Enhancement Study – Status Update (Tier 1 Evaluation)

FILE TYPE: Informational Report

BACKGROUND

In Milwaukee County's 2021 Recommended Operating Budget, County Executive David Crowley outlined that the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) and Milwaukee County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) are coordinating with the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) to study transit improvements from the north to the south of Milwaukee within the proximity of 27th Street and MCTS' PurpleLine.

The County Executive's recommendation recognizes a need to invest in the 27th Street area as part of North-South Transit Enhancement Study since the corridor serves some of the most concentrated areas of underrepresented populations in the City of Milwaukee, which is among the most racially segregated metro areas in the Nation. The investment aligns with Milwaukee County's 2019 declaration of racism as a public health crisis and its commitment to addressing the root causes of racial inequities.

SEWRPC is undertaking an incremental evaluation process, described in the following three steps, that will progress to the final phase of the analysis:

- The first step (Tier 1 Evaluation) defines the alternatives to be evaluated and recommended, including the transit technology and the identification of alignment options. This evaluation step results in the elimination of some of the alternatives considered and is the subject of this report.
- The second step (Tier 2 Evaluation) will further assess the alternative alignments defined in step one and identify potential station locations along the alignments, using the evaluation criteria outlined in the table below. This evaluation step may also result in the elimination of some of the alternatives considered.
- The third step (Tier 3 Evaluation) builds upon any alternative still under consideration after the second step. Any remaining alternative will be evaluated against federal criteria for transit projects to determine if refinements should be made.

At the conclusion of the third step of the evaluation process, a locally preferred alternative (LPA) will be recommended to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, city councils, and village boards for adoption. The LPA will be the transit investment alternative that best meets the purpose of and need for the project and is competitive for funding through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) capital investment grant funding program. This feasibility study is

scheduled to be completed in 2021, and a letter to FTA requesting to enter project development is expected to be sent in early 2022.

This evaluation process will provide sequential, high-level analyses of the range of alternatives that include the transit mode technologies—bus rapid transit (BRT), light rail and rapid streetcar—followed by the alignments associated for those mode(s) that remain under consideration. In the case where insufficient information is available at this level of evaluation, the alternatives will be carried forward into further, more detailed analyses, under the Tier 2 analysis.

For the alternatives to advance to the Tier 2 analysis, they would first have to meet the defined purpose for, and needs of, the transit enhancement in the corridor.

Tier 1 Evaluation

SEWRPC presented a report in December 2020 (File #20-897) discussing the goals of and processes being undertaken for the study. This status update describes the recommendations of the Tier 1 Evaluation derived from robust public outreach and feedback from key stakeholders including but not limited to riders, businesses, and local municipalities.

Technology

Table 1 shows the results of the transit technology evaluation, where BRT is rated as the recommended transit technology that is most compatible with the study corridor.

Table 1: Transit Technology Evaluation Results

Technology Type	Typical Capacity (Right Sized Mode)	Typical Service Characteristics	Environmental Characteristics	Potential to Catalyze Development	Consistency with Corridor Character	Consistency with Local and Regional Plans	Typical per Mile Capital Cost	Final Evaluation
Bus Rapid Transit	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	PASS
Light Rail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	FAIL
Rapid Streetcar	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	FAIL

Light rail and rapid streetcar had some public support for their implementation in the study corridor, but the analysis showed that BRT is the best option at this time. If transit funding in the region would increase and light rail or rapid streetcar became financially viable, this study corridor would be considered along with other corridors to determine the most appropriate and cost-effective route to implement light rail in the region.

Alignment

Table 2 shows the results of the route alignment evaluation, indicating which BRT route options are rated as most compatible for the study corridor and recommended to be further evaluated in the Tier 2 analysis.

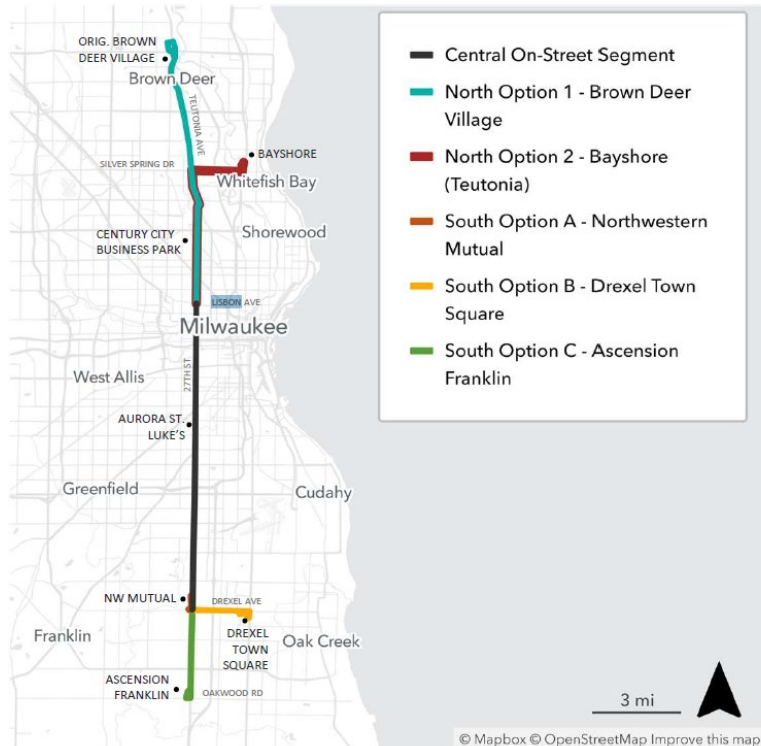
Table 2: Route Alignment Evaluation Results

Transit Route Alignments	Segment Characteristics	Congestion	Accessibility	Environmental Impacts	Consistency with Corridor Character	Final Evaluation
North Option 1 <i>Brown Deer Village via Teutonia Avenue</i>	●	●	●	●	●	PASS ^a
North Option 2 <i>Bayshore via Teutonia Avenue, Silver Spring Drive and Port Washington Road</i>	●	●	●	●	●	PASS
North Option 3 <i>Bayshore via Hampton Avenue, Green Bay Avenue, Silver Spring Drive, and Port Washington Road</i>	●	●	●	●	●	FAIL
North Option 4 <i>Original Brown Deer Village via 30th Street rail corridor (to Lisbon Avenue)</i>	●	●	●	●	●	FAIL
Central Segment <i>27th Street from Drexel Avenue to Lisbon Avenue</i>	●	●	●	●	●	PASS
South Option A <i>Northwestern Mutual Franklin Campus</i>	●	●	●	●	●	PASS
South Option B <i>Drexel Town Square (via Drexel Avenue)</i>	●	●	●	●	●	PASS
South Option C <i>Ascension Franklin (via S. 27th Street)</i>	●	●	●	●	●	PASS ^a

^aNorth Option 1 and South Option C will be further evaluated as part of an open BRT model that would be paired with North Option 2 and South Option B, respectively.

Based on the results of the BRT route alignment evaluation, the following alignments are recommended to advance to the Tier 2 analysis (shown in Map 1).

Map 1: Remaining Route Alternatives Under Consideration



North Option 2 resulted in the most favorable evaluation among the factors considered in this analysis, offering a direct route to Bayshore as well as serving the greatest number of people and jobs per route-mile. North Option 1 will also be evaluated further as part of an open BRT model, providing periodic service to the Brown Deer Village. Like North Option 2, North Option 1

also serves a significant number of people and jobs, however existing land use and roadway characteristics are less conducive to transit. Pursuing North Option 4 as part of this project may limit the ability of the 30th Street Rail Corridor to host a planned bike trail and future commuter/regional rail service, as right-of-way needed for those transportation investments would be consumed by a paved transitway. North Option 3 will also not be considered for further evaluation because North Option 2 offers a more direct route to Bayshore while also providing transit access to more people and jobs.

Regarding the southern route alignment alternatives, all three options are being carried forward to the Tier 2 analysis, with a recommendation that South Option C (Ascension Franklin via S. 27th Street) be considered as a leg of an open BRT system if such a model is recommended in the more detailed Tier 2 Evaluation. An open BRT system would provide periodic service to the southern destinations in the study corridor by allowing buses to continue off the end of the primary BRT route on 27th Street. This system could be advantageous to allow the transit enhancement to serve both Drexel Town Square and Ascension Hospital during different periods of the day, without significant cost increases as stations would be limited, and dedicated lanes may not be necessary in these locations.

The recommended BRT alignments for the study corridor will be further evaluated for future ridership, transit service plan development, and cost estimates as part of the Tier 2 Evaluation, which may include further elimination of routes. Those alignments that remain after the Tier 2 Evaluation will be refined in the Tier 3 Evaluation of this feasibility study. In later phases of the project, environmental review, preliminary engineering and design, more detailed information, mapping, and surveys will be conducted and considered for the preferred alternative alignments and station locations prior to finalizing design and construction.

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 information purposes and there is no request at this time.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

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ATTACHMENTS:

Milwaukee County North-South Transit Enhancement Study – Status Update

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