

Southeastern Wisconsin **Regional Planning Commission**



The Value of Milwaukee County Transit System

Key Findings from the Transit Benefits Report

May 2026

Overview



- Milwaukee County asked SEWRPC to quantify the value created by MCTS
- The Transit Benefits Report offers a data-driven picture of the benefits MCTS produces, building on VISION 2050
 - *It also explores how those benefits are connected to ridership and service levels*

Process



- SEWRPC used Federal guidance, regional travel demand modeling, EPA emissions modeling, MCTS data, and Census data to answer these questions in consistent, measurable terms.



~\$345 Million Per Year

in avoided regional costs | ~\$2.9 billion over 10 years

Benefits accrue to all road users.

~\$155 M Congestion & Delay
25,000 fewer person-hours in traffic each weekday

~\$78 M Vehicle Operating Costs
425,000 vehicle miles of fuel and wear avoided each weekday

~\$76 M Avoided Crash Costs
700–900 fewer crashes per year; 2-4 fewer fatal crashes a year

~\$36 M Emissions & Health
92,000 metric tons CO₂e avoided annually + reduced NO_x, SO_x, PM_{2.5}



The ~\$345M figure is conservatively estimated.



NOT MONETIZED
Travel Time Reliability

A predictable network lets people and goods move on schedule, making jobs and services dependably reachable across the region.



NOT MONETIZED
Other Health Benefits

Active transportation like more walking add health gains that this report does not put a dollar value on.



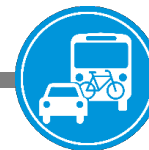
NOT MONETIZED
Travel Options

Per SEWRPC's Transit Rider Survey 16% of riders would not have been able to complete their trip that day without the bus.



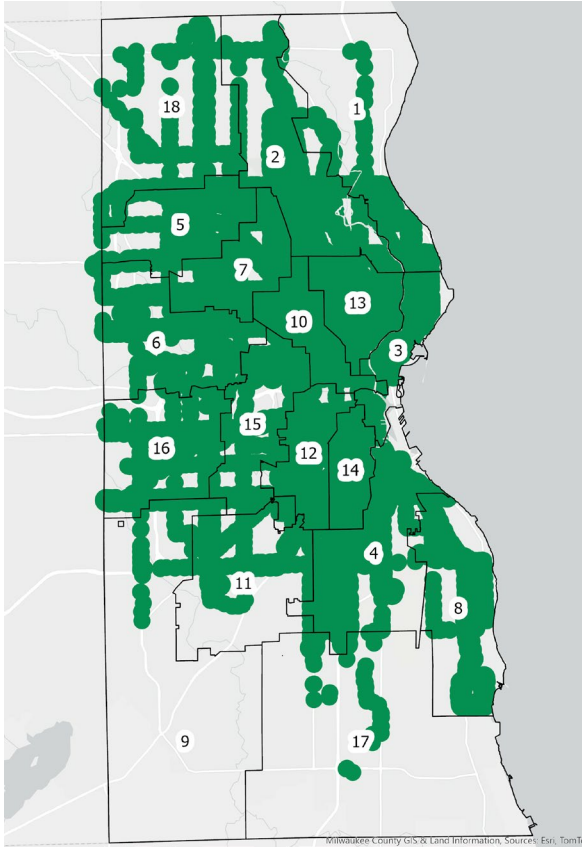
NOT MONETIZED
Avoided Car Ownership

Riding the bus costs about \$1,200 a year. Owning a car costs around \$12,200. The difference stays in household budgets.



MCTS Reaches Most Residents

MCTS connects most Milwaukee County residents to most of the destinations they need to reach.



● MCTS Service Area

77%

of Milwaukee County residents within walking distance of a bus stop

~708,750 residents live within the fixed-route service area

DESTINATIONS SERVED

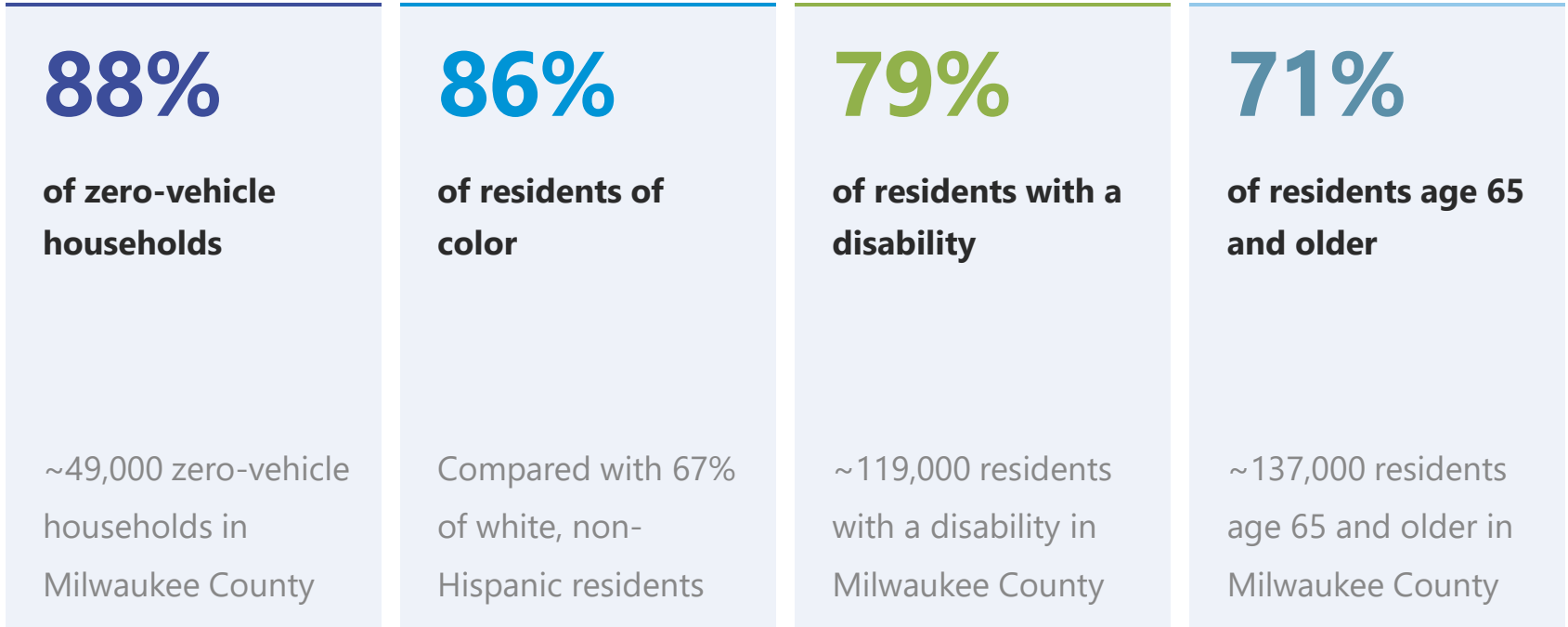
All jobs within 5-min walk	78%
Essential jobs within 5-min walk	82%
Hospitals	39 of 45
Grocery stores	125 of 134
Senior centers	59 of 64
Major employers	422 of 514

Sources: American Community Survey 2024 5-Year Estimates, Table B03002; SEWRPC Quartersection Data, based on 2020 U.S. Census.



Who Depends on MCTS

The following metrics represent those living within walking distance of an MCTS stop:



Sources: American Community Survey 2024 5-Year Estimates, Tables B03002, B08201, B18101, B01001.

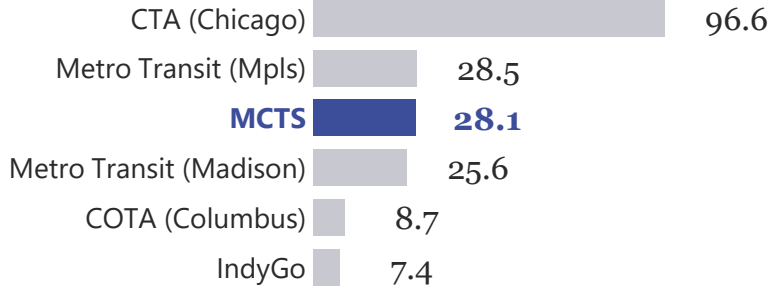


MCTS Outperforms Peers

MCTS generates these benefits while operating at the top of its peer group for efficiency.

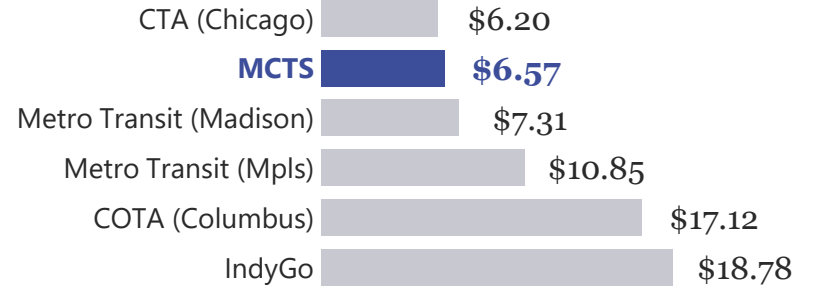
RIDERSHIP PER CAPITA (2024)

Trips per service-area resident — MCTS ranks 3rd



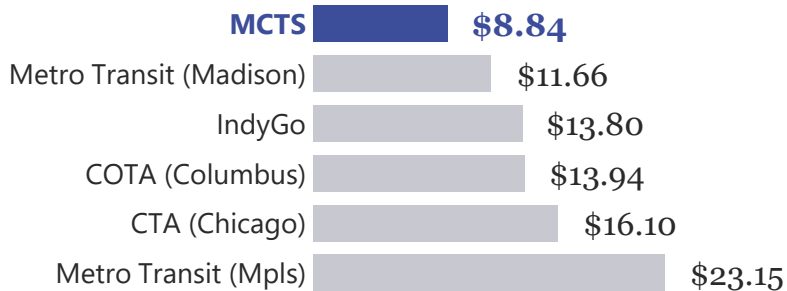
COST PER TRIP — ALL MODES (2024)

Lower is better — MCTS is 2nd-cheapest



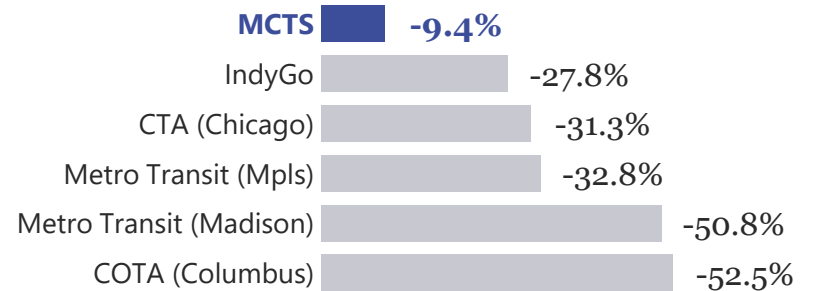
OPERATING COST PER REVENUE MILE (2024)

Lower is better — MCTS leads the peer group



POST-PANDEMIC RIDERSHIP RECOVERY

Per-capita change 2019→2024 — MCTS leads peer group



Source: National Transit Database (2019–2024). Peer systems: CTA (Chicago), Metro Transit (Minneapolis–St. Paul), Metro Transit (Madison), COTA (Columbus), IndyGo (Indianapolis).



Transit Dollars Circulate Locally

The money spent to operate MCTS flows through the regional economy in notable ways.

1. Local Wages

- MCTS employs ~1,000 people
- The **\$117.5m** in wages are largely spent within the region at local businesses, on housing, and on services that employ other residents

2. Vendor Spending

- Operating the system requires local goods and services
- These expenditures flow to businesses and workers throughout the county

3. Outside Investment

- 64¢ of every \$1 spent on transit, since 2014, has come from Federal & State sources
- Transit brings annual Federal and State dollars into Milwaukee County

This framework, based on the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) economic impact methodology, is different than the avoided-cost estimate described earlier. This details how MCTS' direct spending supports the local economy.



This report is being finalized. Today's conversation is an important step in that process.



MCTS System Redesign

- MCTS will engage a consultant to develop service options based on expected funding
- The data in this report can help inform the process.



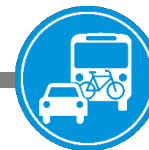
VISION 2060

- SEWRPC has started work on the region's next long-range transportation and land use plan
- The processes developed in this report will inform that effort



Transit Planning

- SEWRPC, MCDOT, and MCTS have scoped a potential follow-up study that builds on this report



Highlights from today:

- ~\$346M a year in avoided regional costs
 - ~\$2.9B over 10 years
- MCTS' reaches 77% of Milwaukee County Residents.
 - 86% of residents of color
 - 88% of zero-vehicle households, and
 - 80% of residents with a disability
- MCTS leads the peer group on cost per revenue mile and post-pandemic recovery
- 64¢ of every transit dollar spent in the last 10 years comes from Federal & State sources

Jennifer Sarnecki, AICP

Deputy Chief Transportation Planner
jsarnecki@sewrpc.org

Tony Mattingly, AICP

Senior Transportation Planner
amattingly@sewrpc.org



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