

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-office Communication

DATE: 8/31/2023

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

FROM: Dan Basile, Operations Director, Milwaukee County Transit System

SUBJECT: Milwaukee County Transit System Report regarding safety and security recommendations.

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**BACKGROUND**

As part of recent discussions and recommendations regarding safety and security, MCTS would like to provide an update of current initiatives and results.

**NARRATIVE**

The safety and security of our personnel and passengers is our number one priority. While incidents involving gunfire on a bus are very serious, they are extremely rare. MCTS operators, maintenance and administrative staff are the foremost Transit experts in Wisconsin. We have operated the transit system since 1975 and there is no other entity more capable than us of overseeing all aspects of the system in Milwaukee County. We are committed to the County's vision of making Milwaukee County the healthiest county in the state, while also protecting our personnel and passengers.

Many of the leaders of our organization have sat behind the wheel of a bus, including our President, Denise Wandke. Our Dispatchers, Trainers, Route Supervisors and a number of other safety and security focused positions are also staffed primarily by former operators. No one understands the need and importance of a quality security response better than them. They have sat in the seat and they have waited for help to arrive. Our operators have an extremely important job. They keep our County moving and our job, which we take extremely seriously, is to keep them safe.

We are a proactive, data driven organization. At any given time, there are as many as 200 buses out on the road. We collect information daily to help make intelligent and accurate decisions. Including decisions that allow us to focus limited resources on the routes and locations with the highest number of security incidents.

However, it is important to understand that we are not immune to the many social concerns that plague our community. Security incidents fall into one of two categories. Disruption vs. Critical. An overwhelming percentage of our security incidents are disruptive in nature. This does not mean that we do not take the disruptive incidents lightly. Every incident is taken seriously. I would like to highlight two types of disruptive security incidents that make up over 80% of our total security incidents - extended riders

and people who board the bus without paying the fare. Addressing these two types of incidents will effectively mitigate more serious incidents.

The first type is extended riders. They are defined as individuals who board the bus and continue to ride without a destination. They tend to be un-housed individuals who want to be warm or cool during extreme weather or are simply looking to rest or pass the time in a safe, comfortable environment. Many of the people have addiction and/or mental health issues. Again, transit is an extension of the community and traverses all aspects of life in Milwaukee County.

The issue of extended riders is relatively benign on the surface. However, our analysis shows that this disruptive issue can lead to an assault if it is not addressed in a patient, compassionate, and professional manner. Our objective is to keep this issue from escalating, while staying consistent with County values.

So, what are we doing? We started with operator training. We are providing Red Kite training for all operators. Specifically, operators work with the trainers and learn best practices for disarming and de-escalation techniques. Secondly, we've partnered with the County's Department of Health and Human Services. We will provide names of chronic offenders, and locations where we experience many of the problems. They will then be able to proactively intervene in the field and connect the individuals to resources they need. They will also board at locations when we need their help.

DHHS will also provide training for key MCTS operations and security personnel on how to effectively work with people in need and those with mental or emotional concerns. In addition, all security and Route Supervisor personnel carry and are trained to administer Narcan nasal spray.

Finally, security personnel will meet the bus and escort the extended rider off the bus. We try to do so in a location where the passenger can obtain needed resources. Again, our main objective is to effectively deal with the situation and not allow it to escalate to something more serious.

The other disruptive security incident we see the most is fare evasion (i.e., people who board the bus without paying fare.)

Our analysis indicates that most operator / passenger conflict resulted from the operators policing the farebox. If a passenger fails to pay the fare, our policy has always been to remind the passenger to pay. If they refuse, allow them to have a seat and report the issue to Dispatch.

However, we have found that even this gentle reminder to pay the fare can escalate into an unnecessary verbal exchange, and a potential physical encounter between the operator and passenger. To mitigate potential conflict, operators are now instructed not to verbally engage with passengers about fares, and to simply press the TCM button when someone boards without paying. The incident is coded by time and location. We

are then able to proactively place security personnel at locations where we are seeing the most fare evasion and address the issues before they occur. It is important to that with this change, MCTS is currently trending above our per passenger revenue targets.

Our proactive strategy that focuses on keeping disruptive incidents from escalating into something more severe has resulted in an across-the-board reduction in operator assaults. Compared to the first eight months of 2022, the first eight months of 2023 have seen a **42%** drop in operator assaults (which are defined as assault by the Wisconsin State Statute). In addition, incidents of operators being threatened or harassed has dropped **24%** during the same time.

By addressing these two types of common, disruptive incidents, we are being proactive and we are seeing results.

In the event that an incident is severe, MCTS Dispatch is trained to deploy the appropriate resources as needed, including MCTS Route Supervisors, AUS TSO's, law enforcement or emergency responders.

MCTS staff work to collect critical information in collaboration with local law enforcement, including video of the incident, which is extremely effective in helping to identify and pursue charges against offenders.

MCTS also works closely with the District Attorney's office to pursue charges. In 2022, MCTS hired a dedicated security staff member with a background in law enforcement who acts as a liaison between MCTS and the District Attorney's office to ensure we are supporting any effort to ensure offenders are brought to justice. This resource also follows up with the MCTS operators after an incident to ensure their well-being, answer any questions and assist with required paperwork.

Since 2017, MCTS has collected incident reports electronically, which has led to better data and trend analysis, which will only continue to improve as our tools, technology and staff grow more sophisticated. We have also made several Capital investments and other investments to improve security on board our buses and our facilities over the last several years:

- Operator shields on all buses
- Updated video surveillance system on all buses, included 10 HD cameras and remote download capabilities
- Upgraded lighting and entrance security at operator parking lots
- Updated CCTV at all MCTS properties
- Red Kite training to give operators the tools to interact in stressful situations with better outcomes
- Update fare policy to remove operator from fare enforcement
- Partnering with the TSA on how to observe and report suspicious behavior
- As of Tuesday 9/5, new AUS policy to ride buses for up to 6 hours a day

Thanks to many of these efforts, the 2022 employee engagement survey has shown that our own employees are feeling more confident in safety and security efforts at MCTS. In 2021, MCTS began asking targeted questions regarding safety and security and across the board responses were more positive in 2022. While there is still work to do, the trends are encouraging.

<b>% Increase</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Survey Item</b>
10%	54%	64%	MCTS has appropriate measures in place for employee security (e.g. cameras, lighting, card access, fences, Transit Security Officers etc.) (#20)
2%	67%	69%	I have sufficient training and education regarding security protocols and what to do during a security incident. (#21)
8%	57%	65%	When I am at work, I feel safe. (#22)

In summary, safety and security is not an MCTS only issue. It is an issue Milwaukee County is grappling with, as well as many of our fellow transit systems across the county. We will continue to be proactive and look for creative solutions and partnerships that can be pursued within the constraints of our budget. Safety and security is a priority for MCTS, and while the recent incidents are extremely serious, they are also extremely rare. Riding the bus is safe and according to the majority of our employees, working at MCTS is safe as well.