

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-office Communication

Date: 8/18/2023

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

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

Subject: From the Director, Department of Transportation providing an Informational Report regarding an update on Milwaukee County's 2023 Areas of Persistent Poverty Grant Award.

File Type: Informational Report

BACKGROUND

In March 2023, the County Board approved File No. 23-444, authorizing the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) to apply for and accept funding under the Areas of Persistent Poverty Program. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced on Jan 9, 2023, the opportunity to apply for \$20 million in competitive grants under the FY 2023 Areas of Persistent Poverty Program and on July 20th, 2023, a total grant of \$440,000 was awarded to Milwaukee County. The local share of \$40,000 has been requested in MCDOT's 2024 Requested Budget.

MCDOT will lead a multi-organizational effort to study the feasibility of a shared Bus-Bike Only Lane on 35th Street between W. Vliet Street and W. National Avenue connecting the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County's North and South Sides which, if implemented, will lead to improved transit reliability and safer, more accessible multimodal travel opportunities for all users of this vital Milwaukee corridor, including some of the most vulnerable and underrepresented residents in Milwaukee County. The study will feature two different one-month long Public Engagement Temporary Scenarios where temporary traffic control equipment, signage and other materials will be set up to simulate how and where a Shared Bus-Bike Only Lane would work, enabling residents and roadway users to see and experience the changes in a temporary format. Residents, business owners, employees and users in this corridor will have multiple ways to receive and provide commentary on how the temporary materials impact their mobility and quality of life in English, Spanish and Hmong. That feedback will be instrumental in shaping any long-term and permanent recommendations for 35th Street resulting from the study.

Enhanced multimodal access and traffic calming are critical needs on this street. Of the four total lanes of mixed traffic on most of this segment of 35th Street, two northbound and two southbound, there are no dedicated bus lanes, no protected bike lanes and only 3/4 of one mile of painted bike lanes. Motorist speeds on this stretch of 35th Street, especially on the viaduct, can range from 45 to 65 miles per hour despite posted

speed limits of only 35 miles per hour. The environment for multimodal users on this street is dangerous, to say the least. This claim is backed up by data:

According to crash data from Wisconsin County Traffic Safety Commission Crash Mapping from 2018-2022, on this segment of 35th Street, there have been six fatalities, 20 serious injuries and 114 minor injuries resulting from crashes. Additionally, there have been hundreds more crashes not causing injuries over this period.

Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) operates Route 35, a High Frequency bus route operating from 4AM to 1:30AM daily with 15-minute peak headways, on this street. The average weekday ridership is 1,419 rides across all bus stops on this portion of 35th Street and those stops connecting with Route 35. Often times, buses must pull out of traffic to serve the 20 bus stops (10 stop pairs) on this segment of 35th Street, thus causing the bus to be delayed while waiting to pull back into traffic. At busier intersections like S. 35th & National and N. 35th & Wisconsin, the bus sometimes is forced to wait through one or two traffic signal cycles before it even reaches the bus stop to board and alight passengers. With its current infrastructure and operation, 35th Street is not designed to prioritize bus service. A lane dedicated to bus and bike travel would enhance public transit in this corridor, grow ridership, reduce automobile travel and calm traffic for the thousands of daily users of 35th Street. The federal funding of a feasibility study for this potential enhancement that Milwaukee County is receiving is a welcome investment to a long-overlooked area of the Milwaukee community that has experienced segregation, isolation and has been subjected to auto-centric infrastructure for decades.

Additionally, there are two Bublr Bikeshare stations within one-quarter mile of this street, but usage of these stations is inhibited by the lack of a protected bike lane connecting the two. In fact, the part of 35th Street that has a Bublr Bikeshare station directly on it, (N. 35th Street & W. Clybourn Street) has no bike lanes of any kind. Riders are forced to ride on the sidewalk, endangering pedestrians, or ride in mixed traffic on 35th Street, endangering themselves. In a corridor where areas of persistent poverty are ever-present and Historically Disadvantaged Communities are common, access to more transportation modes that are safe, efficient, cost-effective, and frequent need to be available for all residents and users.

The lack of on-street parking, enhanced transit infrastructure and bike lanes on this segment of 35th Street makes it an attainable goal to study the feasibility of implementing permanent infrastructure such as a shared Bus-Bike Only Lane in both directions. Equitable transportation access will result, enabling residents and users of the 35th Street corridor to safely and easily access the various employment, educational, shopping, dining, parks and transit connections throughout this essential Milwaukee artery.

MCDOT plans to hire a consulting firm to carry out the feasibility study and bring key stakeholders like City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works, Milwaukee County Transit System, Bublr Bikes, Wisconsin Bike Fed and many others to the table

throughout this planning and public engagement processes. The study should conclude in late 2024.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

The Director of the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation recommends this report be received and placed on file.

FISCAL EFFECT

The total cost of this project is \$440,000, \$400,000 of which (90%) is the grant award from the FTA and \$40,000 of which (10%) is the local match which will come from MCDOT operating funds.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

Julie Esch, Deputy Director, Department of Transportation

PREPARED BY:

Jeff Sponcia, Transportation Program Planning Manager, MCDOT Director's Office

APPROVED BY:

Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

ATTACHMENTS:

Power Point Presentation

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