COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-office Communication

Date: 4/22/2026

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

From: Joe Lamers, Director, Department of Transportation

Subject: From the Director, Department of Transportation, providing an Informational Report Regarding the Benefits of Transit Service in Milwaukee County.

File Type: Informational Report

BACKGROUND

At the request of the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation (MCDOT), the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) is conducting a study to quantify the benefits of transit service provided by the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS). The study evaluates how MCTS supports the region by assessing data such as travel demand modeling, crash rates and emissions levels, peer system comparisons, basic financial analysis, and federal valuation guidance.

This presentation shares preliminary key findings, to date, as the study moves toward completion. It highlights initial findings on the essential role MCTS plays in economic value creation and regional mobility in Southeast Wisconsin. It also invites input from the County Board on what information points are most useful as the final report is drafted.

To date, SEWRPC's analysis identifies a reinforcing relationship between service quality, ridership, and financial performance. When transit is reliable and frequent, riders incorporate it into daily routines, stabilizing ridership and revenue. This is especially important in Milwaukee County, where one in eight households does not have a personal vehicle, 77 percent of residents live within walking distance of a transit stop, and 82 percent of essential jobs are located near transit.

Service investments made between 2021 and mid-2025, including the MCTS NEXT redesign and the CONNECT 1 bus rapid transit line, shifted the system into a sustained period of ridership growth. MCTS has recovered 86% of pre-pandemic ridership; faster than any Midwestern peer system. Cost per bus trip has also decreased by 29 percent since 2021, falling to $5.86 as operational efficiency improved.

The study also quantifies significant regional economic benefits. MCTS service helps the region avoid an estimated $300 million per year in costs that would otherwise be felt across the wider region, including residents, employers, and people who travel into or through the County for work or recreation. Approximately $125 million of this benefit comes from reduced congestion, while an additional $76 to $116 million reflects fewer crashes on roads that would otherwise carry more vehicles. The remainder is due to reduced air pollution and associated health impacts. Improved transit access also enhances workforce mobility. Following the MCTS NEXT redesign, the number of jobs reachable within 30 minutes increased by 32 percent.

When the study is complete, the results will be documented in a comprehensive report that will be shared with the County Board of Supervisors. It is anticipated to be finalized in 2026.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity.
3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities

FISCAL EFFECT

This report is informational only.

TERMS (If applicable)

N/A

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

- Joe Lamers, Director, Department of Transportation, MCDOT Director's Office
- John Rodgers, Deputy Director, Department of Transportation, MCDOT Director's Office
- Jennifer Sarnecki, Deputy Chief Transportation Planner, SEWRPC, jsarnecki@sewrpc.org
- Tony Mattingly, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner, SEWRPC, amattingly@sewrpc.org

PREPARED BY:

Tony Mattingly, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner, SEWRPC, in coordination with SEWRPC, MCDOT, and MCTS Staff

APPROVED BY:

Joe Lamers

Joe Lamers, Director, Department of Transportation

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