

**County of Milwaukee**  
**Interoffice Communication**

**DATE:** 6/17/2020  
**TO:** Marcella Nicholson, Chairman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation  
**SUBJECT:** MCTS Service Response to Demonstrations

POLICY

This report is for informational purposes only.

BACKGROUND

Global protests over the death of George Floyd on May 25<sup>th</sup> by Minneapolis Police Officers has energized and unified our community against racism.

Protest marches and demonstrations were initially met with a declaration of a state of emergency, and the deployment of the National Guard. In times of emergency, the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) is called upon by the Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) on behalf of community partners and public safety officials to help. MCTS buses are used year-round by the Red Cross, firefighters, and law enforcement during fires, gas leaks, evacuations, and multiple other types of incidents. In winter months, buses provide a warm place for individuals and families to gather when they are displaced during emergencies. In warmer months, buses provide a cool place for individuals and families to gather when displaced during emergencies. In this situation, MCTS buses were used to transport law enforcement and the National Guard in order to avoid a larger number of military humvees on the streets of our community.

The state of emergency declaration was also cause for the local Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to be opened. An EOC is a central location for coordination of municipal police, sheriff's deputies, National Guard, fire departments, emergency responders, and other County, State and Federal public safety professionals who come together to share information and resources.

Milwaukee County's participation in the local EOC is led by the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) staff were invited into the EOC to better coordinate information that would be helpful to MCTS dispatchers, street supervisors and managers that have to identify appropriate detours for buses to move around peaceful protest marches, which often included hundreds of cars stretching for many city blocks.

The MCTS staff person embedded in the EOC received access to the latest known direction of travel of the protesters and acted as a liaison between our team and MPD command. Having the most up to date information allowed MCTS to communicate with on street staff and bus operators about when and where to take a detour route. In turn, detour information was also shared with passengers whenever possible.

MCTS also brought value to the members of the EOC through its dedicated on-bus video surveillance system. The onboard cameras and live look-in were used to monitor activity when buses were nearing a demonstration. In numerous instances buses would get stuck in a protest or a sea of cars heading to or leaving from a demonstration and video would be requested by MPD to see what was happening within the crowd, especially, when there were reports coming into the EOC stating that our bus operators and

passengers were in peril. The relief resulting from confirmation that bus operators and passengers alike were ok cannot be overstated.

MCTS's presence in the EOC was also helpful to MPD during those times when buses were identified as an obstacle to public safety professionals who were working in advance of demonstrations to safeguard protesters from on-coming traffic, which at times meant closing entire intersections. To the degree that MCTS could help this cause, it would detour in advance of MPD and National Guard closures whenever asked.

Although protests were peaceful, after dark and leading into early morning hours, an unsafe reckless car driving culture would emerge in our community. The EOC routinely received reports of very concerning calls, not just for reckless driving, but also for shots fired, vandalism and arson. Consequently, MPD would order MCTS to remove all buses from a large section of its service area. On one occasion, MPD ordered us to get all buses off of the streets from a huge area bordered by Silver Spring Drive on the north side, Lincoln Avenue on the southern side, 64<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, and the lakefront on the east. This section of the County is where most MCTS buses operate. Exiting from this area was ordered for the safety of bus operators and passengers, as well as the County's equipment, as there was a high risk of becoming a victim in that area.

The Director of the Office of Emergency Management and the Director of Transportation for MCTS made mutual recommendations to shut down transit early on several dates, as described below:

Saturday, May 30, 2020 – buses could not be safely returned to the Fond du Lac garage/station location near 35<sup>th</sup> Street and Fond du Lac Avenue. Buses were pulled into the MCTS Fleet Maintenance Facility on Vine Street near 17<sup>th</sup> and Fond du Lac instead. Service was not suspended early on this first night, but buses eventually had to be transferred back to Fond du Lac garage/station once things calmed down; this process went on until 4:00am on Sunday morning. Operators were also shuttled back to their cars parked at the Fond du Lac garage/station throughout the night and early morning hours. There were nearly constant reports of gunfire around the Fond du Lac garage/station that night. In addition, a bus was abandoned near 27<sup>th</sup> Street & Fond du Lac Avenue because the operator feared for their safety. The EOC ordered a SWAT team to help recover that vehicle. Many roads were impassable that night due to traffic, protests, and reckless driving. Many intersections on the northside of Milwaukee were blocked by protestors in cars. For example, Route 22 buses on Center Street were pulled in due to Center Street being impassable. MCTS street operations staff helped to extricate Route 22 buses.

Sunday, May 31, 2020 – At 11:43pm all buses were ordered to pull in due to reports of nearly constant gunfire in the neighborhood near 17<sup>th</sup> Street and Fond du Lac, as well as near the Fond du Lac Avenue garage/station.

Monday, June 1, 2020 – At 10:09pm all buses were ordered to pull in. Buses could not operate on most Streets east of the Milwaukee River, including around the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee where multiple bus routes converge.

Tuesday, June 2, 2020 – No buses pulled in early that night.

Wednesday, June 3, 2020 – at 11:43pm, all buses were ordered to pull in. High Speed chases, and cars driving erratically, including on sidewalks was a safety concern. Most of the buses were detoured to the extent they were not serving routes at all. This is the night that buses did not operate in a huge area bordered by Silver Spring Drive on the north side, Lincoln Avenue on the southern side, 64<sup>th</sup> Street on the west, and the lakefront on the east.

Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup> through Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup> – it was recommended by those gathered in the EOC that MCTS should plan to close early on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> after being forced into early ends to transit service for the sake of employee safety on the other occasions during the week.

Public comments in response to early closures of transit reminded us all that it is better to know in advance that service would be changed than to find out when it is too late to make alternate plans.

Passengers thanked MCTS for announcing the closure through a press release and various other communication means early in the day on June 4<sup>th</sup> so that alternate travel arrangements could be made for that evening and the following nights of that weekend. MCTS strives to balance the safety of riders and operators with riders' transportation needs, in consultation with (and frequently at the request of) EOC members.

#### RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

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