

# COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

## Inter-office Communication

DATE: 11/12/2021  
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors  
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation  
SUBJECT: MCTS 2021 COVID-19 Update Report  
FILE TYPE: Informational Report

### REQUEST

### POLICY

#### BACKGROUND

Since the start of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) has been diligent about safety for passengers and employees while continuing to provide vital services that our community depends on. Although ridership dropped significantly when the pandemic closed businesses and schools and propelled many of us into a world of virtual meetings, classes and telework, the fact that transit provided trips to essential workers in our community has never been clearer. Simply put, County buses were carrying and continue to carry everyday heroes that support the health and comfort of others even during a pandemic.

To protect drivers and passengers, many operational changes were put into place early during the pandemic and continue to this day:

- MCTS is using all available communication channels — including digital platforms, advertisements, press releases, and on-bus audio announcements and signage to inform riders and employees of important COVID-19 related information.
- Federal regulations require that face masks are worn on board all buses in the United States, regardless of one's vaccination status (thru at least 1/18/2022).
- MCTS buses go through a daily disinfection using EPA-approved and CDC-recommended products.
- MCTS equipped every bus in the fleet with a dispenser to provide free masks for passengers, and installed wall-mounted hand sanitizer pumps.
- MCTS provides disinfectant wipes to our drivers to ensure that they can clean their workspace throughout the day. We also provide masks, hand sanitizer and gloves to employees.
- Maintenance crews at MCTS are using an innovative new air filtration product on buses to help prevent the airborne spread of viruses – including the one that causes COVID-19.

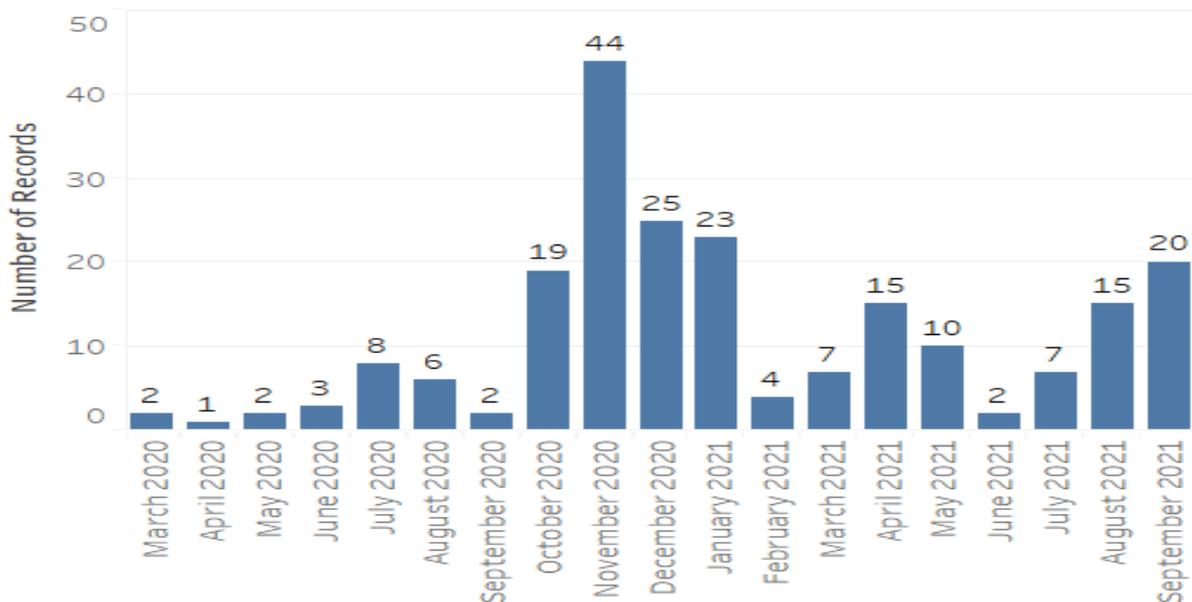
To further protect employees and our community, proof of COVID-19 vaccination is being required of about 130 non-union employees, consistent with the policy of Milwaukee County. MCTS also created a \$100 vaccination incentive.

Non-represented employees are required to submit proof of COVID-19 vaccination before the end of November 2021 or submit a completed medical or religious exemption request form. Unvaccinated MCTS employees will wear a KN95 mask whenever a face mask is required and will no longer be eligible for expanded paid sick leave (EPSL). In addition, a \$20 per bi-weekly pay period surcharge will be applied for unvaccinated employees enrolled in MCTS health insurance.

Despite our focus on employee safety, MCTS employees have taken sick with COVID-19 at rates similar to those that are present in our community at large. From March 2020 through September 2021, 215 employees tested positive for the virus, as shown in the chart below.

Chart A: MCTS employees infected by COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic

### Cases by Month

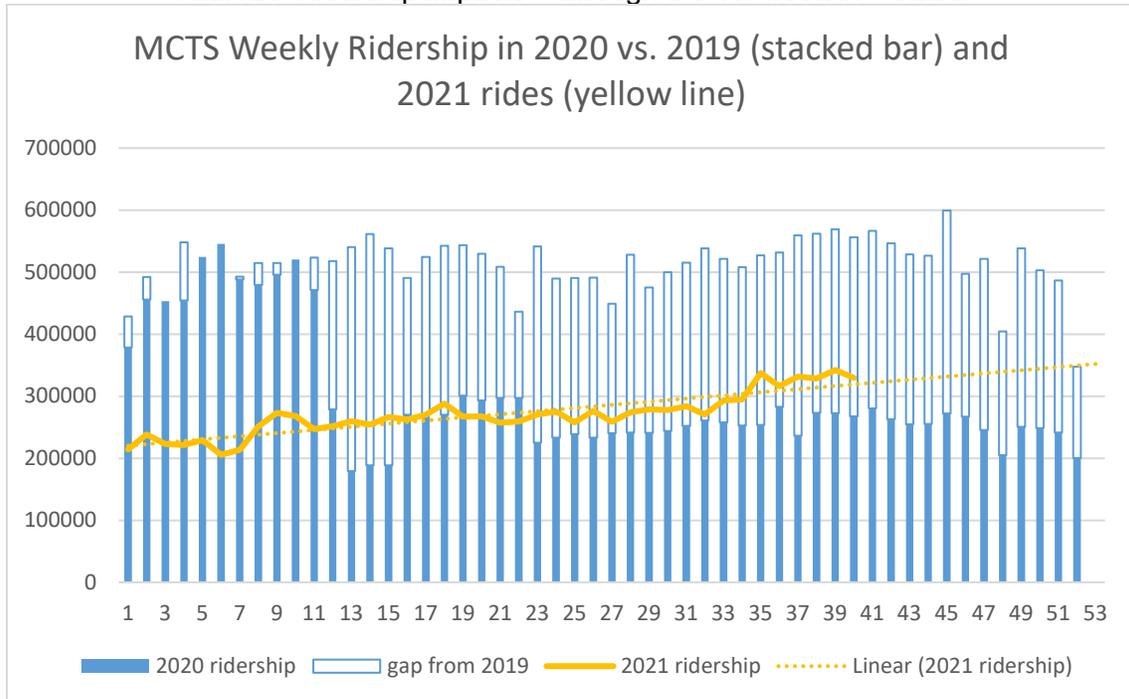


As previously mentioned, ridership was significantly impacted by the pandemic. Although all regular daily routes were continued throughout the pandemic an initial drop in ridership of more than 50% below pre-COVID levels was experienced during the 'safer at home' order. After that initial drop, ridership returned to around 55% before rising in the last few months to nearly 60%.

Recall that school and university focused routes along with freeway flyers were suspended in the early days of the pandemic. School services were reinstated when schools returned to in person teaching. Freeway Flyer routes (Routes 40, 43, 44, 46, 48, 49, 79, & 143) resumed service on August 30, 2021 -- with some schedule adjustments.

The chart on the next page shows 2021 ridership outpacing 2020 ridership. Increased ridership is important because of the attendant passenger revenues.

Chart B: Ridership impacts – through the 1st week in October



MCTS has been able to maintain consistent transit services for our community during the pandemic due to emergency funding relief provided from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSAA), and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). MCTS directly received \$191,424,209 from these federal Acts.

Chart C: Projected Federal Fund Drawdown

Past & Projected Federal COVID Relief Appropriations for MCTS*						
Fund Use	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Transit Operations	\$31.5 million	\$26.5 million	\$71.88 million	\$25 million	\$14.3 million	\$0
Long Range Transit Plan^	-	\$1.2 million	-	-	-	-
North-South Transit Enhancement Project (Capital)	-	-	\$20 million	-	-	-
Couture BEB Charger** (Capital)	-	-	\$1 million	-	-	-
<b>Annual Total</b>	<b>\$31.5 million</b>	<b>\$27.7 million</b>	<b>\$92.88 million</b>	<b>\$25 million</b>	<b>\$14.3 million</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>Total Direct Appropriations to Milwaukee County: \$191.4 million*</b>						
Source: MCDOT						

\*Does not include \$19.7 million of ARPA funds appropriated from the Wisconsin Governor in part (\$6.36 million) being used for the 2022 local match of bus replacement purchases subject to FTA approval  
 \*\*The Couture BEB Charger, part of Capital Project WT126 – BEB Infrastructure and is still under development. A fund transfer may be requested in 2022 otherwise the project will be pushed back to 2023 depending on the project’s development progress  
 ^See Org. Unit 5800 – MCDOT Director’s Office  
 \*\*\*Numbers may not add up correctly due to rounding

Federal funding has been invaluable to assisting in our multi-year response to and recovery from the pandemic. In a few short months, MCTS will close its books on fiscal year 2021 and begin the budget process for 2023. These additional months will allow us to review the actual and projected drawdowns in Federal funds alongside ridership and passenger fare revenue figures to get a glimpse into the future fiscal sustainability of vital transit services in Milwaukee County, whether or not COVID-19 becomes a permanent part of our lives.

#### ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the strategic plan:

- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities – Transit is an upstream investment.
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability – Federal COVID support funds will enable a multi-year approach to the pandemic aiding in our fiscal health and sustainability in the short term.
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities – The availability of transit provides for a healthier community by bridging the gap between where our passengers live and where they need to go to live happy and healthy lives.

#### RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

#### FISCAL EFFECT

#### TERMS (If applicable)

#### VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Dan Boehm, Managing Director, Milwaukee County Transit System, [dboehm@mcts.org](mailto:dboehm@mcts.org)

#### PREPARED BY:

Prepared by: Dan Boehm, President & Managing Director, MCTS

#### APPROVED BY:

*Julie Esch, Deputy Director*

---

Donna Brown-Martin  
Director, Department of Transportation

#### ATTACHMENTS:

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