

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

16-31

DATE: January 6, 2016

TO: Michael Mayo, Sr., Chairperson, Transportation, Public Works & Transit Committee

FROM: Brian Dranzik, Director, Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: Free Bus Rides for Individuals Traveling to Receive ID Documents and/or Registering to vote.

POLICY

Budget Amendment 1A012 requires the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) to develop a proposal to arrange free bus rides for individuals traveling to receive identification documents and/or registering to vote. The plan is required to be submitted to the County Board of Supervisors no later than February 1, 2016, for review and approval. \$20,000 is placed into an allocated contingency account within the DOT-Transit budget to effectuate the plan, subject to County Board Approval.

BACKGROUND

The 2016 Budget places funds in an allocated contingency account within the DOT-Transit budget to fund free bus rides for individuals traveling to receive identification documents and/or registering to vote.

It is not feasible for MCTS to directly provide buses that can take individuals to destinations where they can receive an identification document and/or register to vote, because the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) heavily regulates charter service.

To meet the intent of the amendment, MCTS could distribute M-Card Lite smart cards to Milwaukee County residents. M-Card Lite is a disposable smart card made available for sale to non-profit organizations and social service agencies. A two-ride option of the M-Card Lite costs \$4.00 and each card includes two initial bus fares and transfers that are valid for 90 minutes.

MCTS has a central office that is not a convenient walk up distribution location for bus fares. To overcome barriers to effectively distributing transit fares for the intended purpose from a single office, it was originally suggested that M-Card Lite cards could be distributed with help from the County Board of Supervisors; each representing about 53,000 people. However, after review by Corporation Counsel it was determined that this distribution method would not be feasible because of election related State statutes and campaign ethics rules.

In addition to distribution difficulties, it must also be acknowledged that it will be very difficult to ensure that bus fares will actually be used for the intended purpose. As such, any proposal for free rides involving the distribution of a fare form could open up the possibility of fraud since the fare card itself has a monetary value and, therefore could be resold after distribution by MCTS.

MCTS has more control over rides that are arranged through its paratransit van service providers for eligible individuals. MCTS can work directly with these contractors to provide fare free paratransit rides to destinations at which individuals can receive identification documents and/or register to vote.

Proposal for Free Bus Rides

Fixed Route Services – MCTS proposes to make 3,400 M-Card Lite two-ride disposable smart cards available to residents seeking to travel to receive identification documents, and/or registering to vote. To obtain a round-trip fare, interested individuals will log-on to the MCTS website: www.ridemcts.com or call a dedicated phone number to obtain information about the program. Public awareness about this program will be generated by press releases and social media.

By filling in an on-line form, or by calling a dedicated phone number, a round trip fare via M-Card Lite can be requested to be mailed to any valid address within Milwaukee County. The cost to provide each round-trip ride, including postage and handling is \$5. Estimated budget for fixed route services: \$17,000.

Paratransit Services – MCTS proposes to make 50 round-trip paratransit van rides available to paratransit eligible individuals seeking to travel to receive identification documents, and/or registering to vote. The cost to provide each round-trip ride is \$60. Estimated budget for paratransit services: \$3,000.

M-Card Lite two-ride disposable smart cards will be mailed to residents, and paratransit van rides provided until the budgeted amount of \$20,000 is exhausted.

Prepared by: Dan Boehm, Managing Director, MCTS

Approved by:

Brian Dranzik
Director, Department of Transportation

cc: Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Executive
Theodore Lipscomb, Sr., Chairman, County Board of Supervisors
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, County Board of Supervisors
Raisa Koltun, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Executive
Chris Abele