

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

Inter-office Communication

DATE: 3/17/2023
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation
SUBJECT: Update on Summerfest Bus Service and other transportation options for the summer festival season
FILE TYPE: Informational Report

REQUEST

The 2023 Adopted Budget requested follow-up reporting, with a specified deadline, under the provisions of Amendment No. 01, by Supervisors Nicholson, Sumner, Taylor (5), Johnson, Jr., Martinez, and Clancy:

MCDOT and MCTS shall provide a report back to the County Board by February 2023 with an update on Summerfest bus service and other transportation options for the summer festival season.

BACKGROUND

MCDOT and MCTS staff have met with representatives from Milwaukee World Festivals, Inc. (MWF) regarding their request to operate transit service to Summerfest in 2023. Specifically, MWF is requesting MCTS operate all aspects of service to three park ride lots (College, Brown Deer, and Watertown Plank), including providing buses, bus operators, managing fare sales, and all planning / operational services. MWF stated they would not provide any financial support nor any guarantee of ridership.

For the sake of context, MCTS has not provided service to Summerfest after 2019 due to two reasons:

- The steady reduction in the bus fleet due to budget reductions means there are not enough buses to provide the service (at least at the level back in 2019).
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market has resulted in an ongoing shortage of bus operators (despite MCTS efforts to recruit, hire, and train new operators).

MCTS will have approximately 15 buses in the summer for any potential service to Summerfest (these buses are used on school routes during the spring / fall). For the sake of comparison, operating a full slate of service to Summerfest in 2019 required 70 buses.

Fortunately, the new Connect 1 Bus Rapid Transit line will be able to provide service from the Watertown Plank park ride lot to downtown. In addition, MCTS operates several regular routes to downtown that are within a short distance to Summerfest.

It should also be noted that Federal Transit Administration (FTA) charter regulations prevent MCTS from simply restarting service. MCTS was able to provide freeway flyer service to Summerfest as an exception under FTA rules while it provided regular freeway flyer service. Since freeway flyer routes were eliminated in the 2023 Budget, these regulations require that private sector bus companies be given the first opportunity to provide this service. If no companies registered as charter providers with the FTA submit a bid, then MCTS would have the right to provide the service.

MCTS continues to meet with MWF regarding their request and will inform the County Board of the final decision on whether service can be provided, and if so, the level of service.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the strategic plan:

3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

FISCAL EFFECT

No fiscal impacts, informational only

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Denise Wandke, Managing Director, MCTS (dwandke@mcts.org)

PREPARED BY:

Denise Wandke, President, and Interim Managing Director, MCTS

APPROVED BY:

Donna Brown-Martin

Donna Brown-Martin
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