

## **County of Milwaukee Interoffice Communication**

DATE: February 10, 2023

TO: Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: Milwaukee County North-South Transit Enhancement Study – Status Update (Tier 3 Evaluation and Recommended Alternative)

FILE TYPE: Informational Report

### **BACKGROUND**

In Milwaukee County's 2021 Recommended Operating Budget, County Executive David Crowley outlined that the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) and Milwaukee County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) are coordinating with the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) to study transit improvements from the north to the south of the County within the proximity of 27<sup>th</sup> Street and MCTS' PurpleLine.

The County Executive's recommendation recognized a need to invest in the 27th Street area as part of North-South Transit Enhancement Study since the corridor serves some of the most concentrated areas of underrepresented populations in the Milwaukee area, which is among the most racially segregated metro areas in the Nation. The investment aligns with Milwaukee County's 2019 declaration of racism as a public health crisis and its commitment to addressing the root causes of racial inequities.

Subsequently, in the 2022 Adopted Capital Budget, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors approved project WT153, Engineering, Design and Environmental Review for the North-South Transit Enhancement Project.

The Tier 3 Evaluation is SEWRPC's final report in this study and is intended to make any necessary refinements to the recommended alternative, outline how it satisfies federal guidance criteria for transit grants, and describe next steps as the effort moves forward into project development as defined by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The Tier 2 Evaluation report (File No. 22-834) included a recommended alternative that identified a route alignment with generalized potential station locations and roadway configurations (including running-type, vertical separation of dedicated bus lanes from general traffic lanes to help curb reckless driving, and bike facility recommendations), and the fourth and final round of public involvement did not require any refinements to that route alignment, there are no additional alternatives still under consideration. Therefore, additional evaluations and refinements are not included in the Tier 3 report.

A preliminary draft of the Tier 2 Evaluation report—including the draft recommended alternative was made available to the public to review and provide feedback prior to finalizing that report. The following changes were made as a result of suggestions provided by the public:

- Information was added about recommendations for bicycles on buses for the proposed

#### BRT service

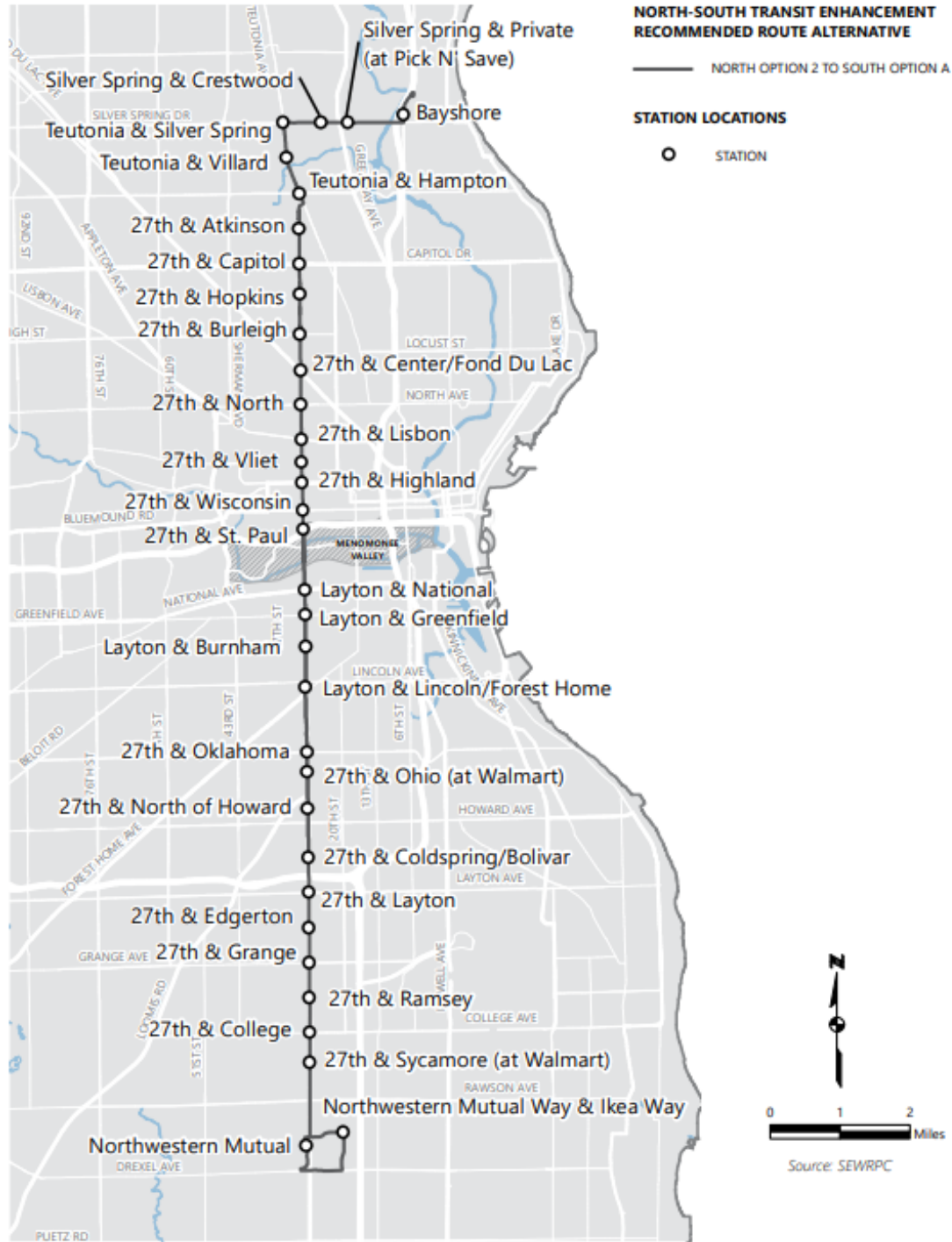
- A note was added that Milwaukee County may consider a future east-west transit connection in southern Milwaukee County
- A recommendation was added that co-locating bikeshare stations near BRT stations be considered as detailed station siting is completed
- A recommendation was added that public and driver education efforts be considered to help bus drivers and bicyclists understand how to use the shared bus-bike lanes correctly

Public and stakeholder feedback also pointed to concerns that the draft recommended route alternative would not serve several major job centers in southern Milwaukee County, including the Franklin Business Park. However, the recommended alternative does not extend into these areas due to the lack of supportive density and the increased cost associated with extending the route to these areas. In response to those concerns, this study recommends that a series of last-mile solutions be considered to connect riders of the proposed BRT service to these job centers. More details about options that could be considered are included in Appendix A of the Tier 3 evaluation. Additional details about public feedback are available in the Public Involvement Summary report. All project reports are available at: <https://www.mkenorthsouth.com/library>

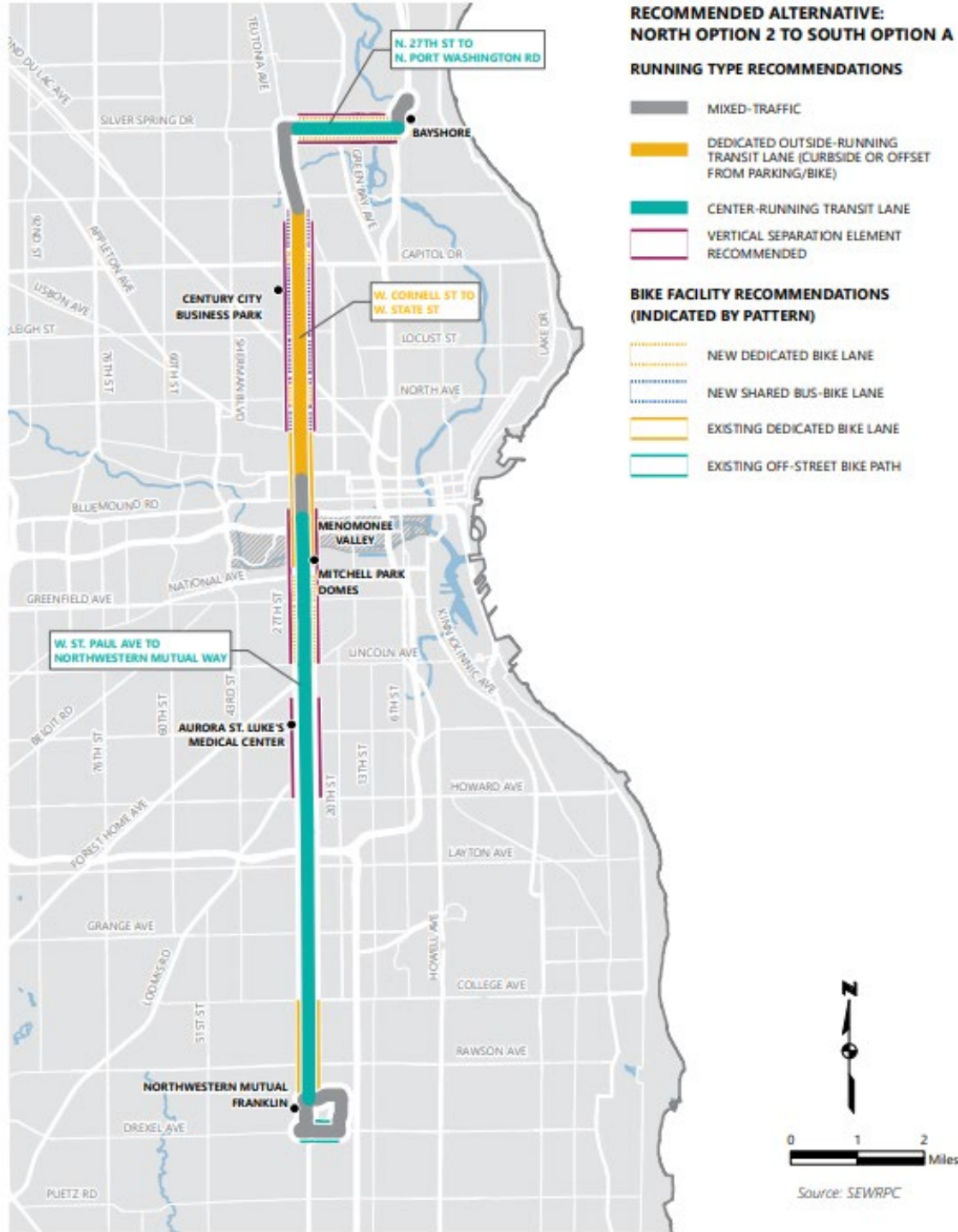
Beyond the modifications described above, no changes or additional refinements to the recommended route alternative or roadway configurations are being made at this time. Further refinements will be necessary as the project moves into the next phase of project development and more detailed design, engineering, and environmental work is completed, in addition to more public involvement.

The final recommended route alternative with potential station locations is shown on Map 1 and recommended roadway configurations are shown on Map 2—all of which are unchanged from the Tier 2 Evaluation report recommendations.

### Map 1: Recommended Route Alternative and Potential Station Locations



### Map 2: Recommended Route Alternative and Potential Station Locations



#### Next Steps

- Compliance with Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program Requirements
  - The recommended alternative and identified transit enhancements fulfill the Federal requirements for a BRT service, hence the County sent a letter in December 2022 to the FTA requesting to enter project development as a first

step to securing a CIG. The County's request was approved by the FTA on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

- **Project Development**
  - The Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors approved \$20 million in the 2022 Adopted Capital Budget to fully fund engineering and environmental clearance, and the project has also been included in the regional transportation improvement program (TIP).
- **NEPA and Engineering**
  - During project development, a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document and preliminary and final engineering would be completed. As part of the request to enter project development, Milwaukee County provided an expectation for the level of environmental documentation required for the project. The Tier 2 analyses showed very few impacts on the natural and human environment for the recommended alternative.
  - Considering the level of analyses performed in the feasibility study, the project's preparedness for future phases is high and risk to the project schedule and budget is low. The NEPA document will confirm the recommended alternative as the locally preferred alternative (LPA), however, it is expected that further refinements will be made to the recommended alternative during the NEPA and engineering phases. Final design of the LPA will take place to define design details, amenities, costs, including the bus purchase cost, and schedule. With no real estate acquisition expected for the project, Milwaukee County is prepared to complete the project development phase in 2024/2025.
- **Project Rating and CIG Agreement**
  - After NEPA and preliminary engineering are complete, Milwaukee County can request preliminary project justification rating from the FTA prior to final design and preparation of a construction bid package. Before construction of the LPA, project justification ratings will be prepared for mobility, environmental benefits, congestion relief, economic development, land use, and cost effectiveness.
  - The project justification accounts for 50 percent of the project evaluation and rating, and a local financial commitment makes up the other 50 percent. Local financial commitment includes the identification of the local share of funds, which need to be a minimum of 20 percent of the total project cost, as well as evidence that Milwaukee County has stable and dependable financial resources.
- **Construction**
  - After completion of project development, it is reasonable to expect the project justification and the local financial commitment would be granted a medium rating, which is an acceptable rating to move forward with a Small Starts grant agreement. Milwaukee County expects to have a Small Starts grant agreement in place in 2025 and will solicit bids for construction of the LPA, which can begin with the grant agreement in place. Construction is expected to last for two years with the service expected to open in 2028.
- **Public Involvement**
  - The extensive public outreach effort that was undertaken as part of this feasibility study will continue throughout the next phases of the project. The project website address, [mkenorthsouth.com](http://mkenorthsouth.com), will be used to extend the continuity for stakeholders as will the project email address, [info@mkenorthsouth.com](mailto:info@mkenorthsouth.com). The list

of stakeholder contact information that was collected throughout the feasibility study will be used for outreach as the project development phase begins.

### Project Schedule



### ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

- 2C: Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.
- 3A: Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.
- 3B: Enhance the County’s fiscal health and sustainability.
- 3C: Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.

### RECOMMENDATION

This report is for information purposes and there is no request at this time.

### VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Benjamin McKay, Interim Executive Director, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission ([bmckay@sewrpc.org](mailto:bmckay@sewrpc.org))  
Carrie Cooper, Principal Transportation Planner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission ([ccooper@sewrpc.org](mailto:ccooper@sewrpc.org))

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### APPROVED BY:

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Donna Brown-Martin  
Director, Department of Transportation

ATTACHMENTS:

Milwaukee County North-South Transit Enhancement Study – Status Update

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