

# COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

## Inter-office Communication

DATE: 12/30/2021  
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors  
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation  
SUBJECT: Diversity & Inclusion at MCTS - a Pathway to Equity and Organizational Excellence  
FILE TYPE: Informational Report

Although the last two years have been marred by a global pandemic and attendant issues ranging from workforce challenges to supply chain breakdowns, MCTS continues to work to improve in its service to the community. This report tells the story of a mission driven transit system that is on a course to transform into an exceptional organization through performance management, and intentional inclusion. A framework for tackling operational and administrative challenges with workgroups representing various levels of experience from multiple departments is described. A follow-up report mid-2022 will share how the work of these groups helps to establish and prioritize objectives and strategies consistent with goals for the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS).

### BACKGROUND

Transit is vital to our community and aids in achieving the vision of becoming the healthiest County in the state by advancing racial equity. Transit services are 'upstream' investments that help to address root causes of health disparities in Milwaukee County and aid in dismantling barriers to diverse and inclusive communities. We apply a racial equity lens to our budget process and major decisions, resulting in budget recommendations and fiscal decisions that enhance the transit system and the County's long term fiscal health and sustainability. We review and revise processes to enable increases in the number of contracts awarded to minority and women-owned businesses. We break down silos within our own organizational hierarchy and between MCTS and the County. We strive to create a culture across MCTS of bias awareness, inclusiveness, and appreciation for diversity to foster organizational unity, equity, and innovation. Our efforts are intentionally consistent with the County's strategic plan.

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) and Office Professional Employee International Union (OPEIU) are also both supportive of the vision to become the healthiest County in the State. We seek to partner with labor to be successful in serving our community, while we operate within a framework of an MCTS specific mission, vision and values that are fitted to transportation.

### MCTS Mission

*Our mission is to connect the community to jobs, education, and life with essential transit services.*

### Vision

*To be the preferred transportation choice through service excellence and innovation.*

MCTS is an outcome focused, performance-oriented organization which means we do not simply administer a service, but rather, we deliver a product. We are proactive, not reactive, in our efforts to control for circumstances and conditions that lead to preferred outcomes. Furthermore, organizational processes and activities that support our preferred outcomes must be performed in a fashion that is in alignment with who we are as a company... our values.

### MCTS Values

Respect, Integrity, Excellence, Equity, Collaboration, and Innovation

MCTS is unique as a large employer. We have a very diverse workforce, and we appreciate that this internal diversity is a strength. Our transformation into an outcome driven organization, requires that we harness the collective expertise of the entire organization and do so in an intentionally inclusive way. At the core of these efforts is a systematic approach as follows:

- identifying, defining, and unwrapping problems.
- Identifying needed resources.
- regulating stress but establishing an appropriate amount of urgency.
- focusing attention on the key issues surrounding the challenge.
- empowering employees by establishing ownership.
- protecting and amplifying the voices of leaders who do not have “authority”.
- Innovating.
- defining success.
- Identifying and managing to the activities that support our preferred outcomes.

This approach does not just generate desired outcomes, but it engages with employees at various levels of the organization in a way that provides a spotlight on their unique experience, knowledge, viewpoints, and skills. Giving employees an opportunity to be noticed, heard, and appreciated by their peers and leaders in the organization builds confidence and opens pathways to advancement and equity. At the end of the day, transit leaders are cultivating the diverse talent around them, sharing responsibility and authority.

Diversity at the highest levels of the organization has at times been lacking, especially in comparison to other areas of transit. We know that we have an approach that can foster a deep bench of talent in the form of engaged employees who are both eager and prepared for advancement. While intentional inclusion enables contributors to impact our success now, these efforts also prepare the talent around us to be successful in pursuit of increasing responsibility within our organization tomorrow, next week, next month and on and on into the future.

### **MCTS Working Groups**

MCTS developed organizational excellence working groups to aid in achieving our mission, continuing our transition to becoming a performance and outcome driven organization, and doing so in an inclusive manner that is both supported by our values and is sustainable.

Workgroups originated from a discussion by several employees representing the majority of MCTS departments and locations who came together to talk about our mission and what it means.

Initially, the group determined that to achieve our mission, our route network must be:

- **Viable** – meeting the transportation needs of the community.
- **Safe** – addressing real and perceived safety issues related to employee and passenger security, pedestrian safety, accidents, and critical response.
- **Reliable** – including the on-time delivery of scheduled service.
- **Customer focused** – as expressed through clean buses, friendly bus operators and responsive staff.

This shared knowledge about what is needed to be successful became a foundation for our efforts around organizational excellence. With a focus on passengers, employees, and equity several questions were asked:

- What does it mean to be viable, safe, reliable and customer focused?
- How do we get there and what are the obstacles?
- In addition, how do we achieve organizational excellence in a manner that is consistent with our values?
- How do we measure excellence, in other words whether we are tracking towards or meeting our mission?

MCTS workgroups became the means to the answers to many of these questions. Through work groups, we want our interactions with each other, our passengers, and stakeholders to be honest and respectful. Collaboration not only ensures engagement but increases morale and job satisfaction. Innovation increases efficiencies, emphasizes problem solving and encourages continuous improvement and learning. Groups celebrate their successes together, bonding, and improving productivity. It also increases appreciation for one another, resulting in improved problem solving and support.

There are numerous examples of workgroups at MCTS, as described below.

### Reliability Committee

The reliability committee focuses on consistency in the quality of transit services experienced by our passengers. Targeted objectives of the committee include:

- Improving the cash farebox rollers reducing dwell times and delays, freeing up Rt. Sups.
- \$1 and \$5 bill image scan improvements.
- Operator event planning.

### Security Review Group

This workgroup ensures that we continue to make safety and security a priority at MCTS by:

- Reviewing all physical security infrastructure at all facilities.
- Reviewing and recommending safety and security enhancements on-board buses and at or near bus stops.

### Safety Excellence Committee / Transportation Dept.

This Workgroup's scope emphasizes giving attention to the needs of our largest workforce, in our largest department. Focus areas and actions included:

- Moved Trainers to stations-resulting in fewer calls to dispatch and better Operator support and recommend eventual build-out of training classrooms at stations/garages.
- Designed and built an on-line route training portal.
- Meet weekly with HR to determine status of employees on sick list.
- Directed operators to contact manager when not coming in to work rather than Clerk.
- Encouraged station supervisors to call operators if on the sick list but not on FML.
- Support safety awareness efforts and provides support for the Vehicle Accident Review Committee (VARC) team.
- Implemented 're-connect' classes, which led to higher retention for class attendees.
- Random, on-road Operator wellness checks.
- Developed New Operator outreach processes.
- Soft on-boarding at the stations after new Operator starts working.
- Designed and implemented an accident/incident electronic record system known as SAFER.

### Vehicle Accident Review Committee (VARC)

The focus of this group is to conduct unbiased reviews of, and investigations into accidents to accurately determine fault so that efforts can be undertaken to reduce accidents and improve safety for employees and passengers.

### Safety Management Systems Group (SMS)

A safety management system provides for goal setting, planning, and measuring performance so that a safety management culture can be woven into the fabric of an organization. The SMS Working Group is focusing on:

- Defining how the organization is set up to manage risk.
- Identifying workplace risk and implementing suitable controls.
- Implementing effective communications across all levels of the organization.
- Implementing a process to identify and correct non-conformity and non-compliance issues.
- Implementing continual improvement in safety.

### Equity Committee

This committee suggests changes that will develop a company culture of inclusivity that appeals to all employees. It is a cross-departmental workgroup that was established to advance our organization's commitment to racial equity through specific actions. To date, the committee has been involved in:

- The creation of an annual employee survey, which included questions about perceptions on MCTS's commitment to racial equity.

- The workgroup reviewed existing job descriptions using a racial equity lens and suggested modifications to the application process.
- The workgroup considers topics raised by members or other employees. For example, all- company clean up around facilities in Spring 2021 and then again, this past fall was advanced for purposes of having a positive impact on the neighborhoods in which we work while also building employee unity.
- These efforts have been celebrated in internal employee publications.

### Attendance and Retention Committee

This working group evaluates workforce trends and focuses on positive steps such as:

- New Operator bonuses
- Improving relief points and layovers
- Increasing the number of straight runs.
- Reducing number of Operators needed on weekends.
- “Right sizing” service levels for staff shortages.
- Identifying gaps in FMLA oversight.
- Overseeing the on-boarding of bus operating training including adopting the Red Kite program model, which includes resiliency building workshops, consulting, and coaching that helps the workforce to rise above burnout, conflict, and other obstacles to wellness.
- Recommending weekend supervision at stations.
- Developing a company intra-net system.

### **Professional Development**

As our workgroup concept matures, we recognize that it can also create conditions that enhance professional development of group members. To this end, the MCTS Project Management Department is creating a standardized approach to how teams and individuals work within committees and workgroups. Standardization in problem solving and communication of problems/solutions becomes a form of training or mentoring that will improve professional skills of employees participating in workgroups and advance our efforts towards organizational excellence. This group focuses on:

- Problem definition – What are we solving for?
- The use of exploratory data and explanatory data.
- Knowing your audience.
- Effective data visualization and narrative creation – presentation skills.
- Next steps in approval process and implementation for objectives and strategies.

### **Summary**

Diversity and intentional inclusion at MCTS are a pathway to opportunity and equity. It is a long journey to organizational excellence, but we’ve taken the first steps and are committed to it. By honoring our values while we are guided by our mission, we can achieve the MCTS vision and uphold the County’s Vision. Along the way, MCTS is committed to giving employees a voice and

providing for a seat at the table, which in turn enables opportunities for employees to be noticed and realize that their efforts do make a difference for the organization and within our community. These efforts build future leaders at Transit and enhance our collective achievement of outcomes pursued by the organization.

The workgroup framework also supports a meaningful analysis of current practices and identifies gaps that can be addressed by objectives and strategies that when accomplished help us to achieve our goals in support of the MCTS mission. A follow-up report mid-year will focus on objectives and strategies for MCTS in 2022 and beyond.

#### ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The first page of this report references the intersection of MCTS's efforts and all areas of the County's strategic plan.

#### RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

#### VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

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