

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

Inter-office Communication

DATE: 5/11/2022
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation
SUBJECT: MCTS NEXT – Status Update and Service Recommendations
FILE TYPE: Resolution

POLICY

Proposed additions, deletions, and modifications to transit routes and services are subject to approval by the County Executive and County Board of Supervisors.

BACKGROUND

The MCTS NEXT System Redesign was implemented in three phases in 2021. This project was the culmination of a three-year collaborative process to update the route network from a 40 percent high frequency vs. 60 percent low frequency model to a 60 percent high frequency and 40 percent low frequency model (high frequency defined as buses running every 15 minutes or more often). MCTS NEXT expanded the number of high frequency routes (from 10 to 16), expanded service to unserved or under-served job centers, provided faster service by removing lightly used bus stops that were close together, reduced or removed service in areas where the demand for transit was low, and simplified the network to make it easier for riders to understand. The County Board approved the resolution for the redesign in September 2020 (File No. 20-476).

This report provides a status update on early results of the redesign and recommendations for route adjustments based on requests from passengers and a review of ridership and schedule data.

MCTS NEXT Status Update

The early results of MCTS NEXT have been positive in terms of higher ridership and rider satisfaction. Staff compared ridership collected in the first quarter of 2021 (the final phase of MCTS NEXT was implemented in September 2020) compared to prior year. A summary of major findings is as follows:

- System ridership has increased 15% or approximately 6,000 rides per day
- Ridership on high frequency routes increased 10% and represents 75% of all ridership
- Ridership on routes that primarily serve persons of color has increased 17% or approximately 5,000 rides per day.

An annual customer survey (distributed in December 2021) revealed that 75% of all riders reported MCTS exceeds or meets their needs. Similarly, nearly 70% of passengers reported they feel the frequency of service developed during MCTS NEXT exceeded or met their needs.

A further analysis of the impacts of MCTS NEXT will be prepared at the end of 2022 to understand the yearlong impact of the system redesign.

Lessons Learned

There were several lessons learned during the process of preparing and implementing MCTS NEXT:

- Outreach efforts to riders and county supervisors during the development of route plans and schedules is essential.
- Building relationships with neighborhood organizations and transit stakeholders provides information that helps develop plans that better meet their needs.
- Communication with internal stakeholders such as bus operators, schedule makers, and customer agents will aid with a smooth rollout of route changes.
- Installing temporary signs at bus stops is the most efficient way for riders to know what's going on with their route and stop.
- MCTS intends to develop an annual practice of seeking rider's input on service adjustments in the spring and the implementation of route plans in the fall. This will keep the route network up to date to the benefit of riders and the community overall.

Service Recommendations – Fall 2022

In our ongoing desire to be responsive to rider's specific comments after NEXT was implemented, MCTS envisions making marginal adjustments to the route network beginning in Fall 2022. MCTS will modify the following routes in a cost neutral manner to increase high frequency service, reduce or remove service in areas with low ridership, and simplify routes to make them easier to understand. A brief description of the adjustments is as follows:

- High Frequency service on Route 18 (National – Greenfield) will be expanded west of 84th Street to 124th as shown on the map for Routes 18, 54, and 60 (See Map 1 attached).
 - Route 54 (Burnham – National) service will be expanded west of 79th Street along National Avenue to 111th Street and replace Route 18 service.
 - Route 60 (60th Street) one way loop service from 60th & Layton Avenue to Southridge will be eliminated due to low ridership. This change will make it possible to improve the frequency of service between Greenfield Avenue and Layton Avenue
- Route 80 (6th Street) service will be extended via Green Bay Avenue to Good Hope Road and Teutonia Avenue. In addition, service from MATC South to Oak Creek will be eliminated, but it will be replaced with Route 19 (King Drive – S. 13th Street) (See Map 2 attached).
 - Route 19 (King Drive – S. 13th Street) service will be extended via 13th, Rawson Avenue, 6th Street, Drexel Avenue, and Howell Avenue to Puetz Road.
 - Route 35 (35th Street) weekday only service to Green Bay Avenue will be eliminated and replaced with the extension of Route 80 (6th Street).

In addition, one way service on the PurpleLine on Ramsey Avenue, 35th Street, and College Avenue will be eliminated due to low ridership (See Map 3 attached). Route 66 (Burleigh Street) service will be made more frequent due to a strong demand in this corridor. Finally, Route 28 (108th Street) service will be modified to provide a new layover on Forest Home Avenue near Janesville Road. This will address a long-standing need to provide a restroom for bus operators at the end of the route.

Outreach and Engagement Efforts

MCTS has prepared a communications plan to inform and engage riders and stakeholders on service changes. Under this plan MCTS will:

- Host two virtual community meetings to provide route / schedule information to neighborhood and business groups and to underrepresented populations.
- Update our website with revised route maps/schedules in summer 2022. Videos will be prepared to describe key information on the new routings.
- Publish special issues of MCTS Bus Lines and Rider Insider and prepare a press release for local media.
- Develop and install bus stop signage to promote awareness of route/bus stop changes weeks in advance of implementation. Buses will also make audio/visual announcements of changes.
- Provide key materials in Spanish and use a Spanish language interpreter to answer questions.
- Provide new route/schedule information to County Board Supervisors and answer any questions.

MCTS will also meet with ATU 998 leadership and inform them and listen to their suggestions regarding these changes. Furthermore, MCTS will create route maps and display them for operators at both Fond du Lac and Kinnickinnic Stations. These route maps and other training materials will also be on display on the MCTS online portal for easy access.

Title VI Review

Title VI guidelines state MCTS must examine any change to a route to see if it meets the definition of a “major service change”:

- it affects 25% of the bus hours on a route or group of routes,
- it affects 25% of the one-way mileage of a route or group of routes,
- it affects 25% of the daily service period,
- it reduces the frequency of service (increases headway) by 50%, or
- it creates a gap of greater than one-half mile from the nearest alternative service.

A review of the recommended changes indicate they do not rise to the level of a major service change as defined by MCTS Title VI guidelines.

Summary

This report provides a status update on early results of the MCTS NEXT System Redesign completed in 2021. It also includes recommendations for route adjustments for Fall 2022 based on requests from passengers and a review of ridership and schedule data. These changes are in alignment with the MCTS mission to connect our community to jobs, education and life with essential transit services as well as Milwaukee County’s mission to enhance the quality of life in Milwaukee County through great public service.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the 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

MCTS recommends approval of the resolution authorizing the approval of post MCTS NEXT route changes based on requests from passengers and a review of ridership and schedule data.

FISCAL EFFECT

There is no fiscal impact of the resolution. Operating costs will not increase as a result of this change.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Dan Boehm (dboehm@mcts.org), Tom Winter (twinter@mcts.org), and Jesus Ochoa (jochoa@mcts.org) should receive Microsoft Team invites to present this file.

PREPARED BY:

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APPROVED BY:

Donna Brown-Martin

Donna Brown-Martin
Director, Department of Transportation

ATTACHMENTS:

Presentation: MCTS NEXT Status Update and Service Recommendations PowerPoint and Maps 1, 2, and 3.

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