

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE Inter-office Communication

DATE: 8/12/2022
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation
SUBJECT: MCTS - Improving Run Times and Layovers for Operators
FILE TYPE: Informational Report

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

In addition to the service improvements made during the MCTS NEXT Route Redesign project, MCTS was intentional about making driving a bus a better job for our nearly 700 operators. Operating a bus requires hours of sitting, coupled with changing traffic and weather conditions, while providing high quality customer service to our riders. While some of these aspects are beyond our control, MCTS does have control over how schedules are prepared. As such, it is incumbent upon us to be diligent about making them as accurate as possible.

The purpose of this report is to describe the actions taken by MCTS to improve run times as part of MCTS NEXT and thereafter, add time during layovers, and improve access to restrooms for operators. It will also describe our ongoing commitment to collaborate with operators and ATU Local 998 on these important issues.

Scheduling Run Times

Setting run times generates much discussion in the transit industry and at times disagreements, over how much time should be in a route's schedule. Most transit systems develop run times based on an average of data collected from on board equipment and from doing individual test runs. Both methods allow us to review how well operators run on time throughout the days and months of the year. MCTS uses two sources of on-board equipment (automated vehicle location and automated passenger counter equipment) that produce detailed on time reports. We supplement this data by doing ride checks with staff from the Safety, Security, and Training Department and Transportation Department.

MCTS strives to meet the following goals when setting run times:

- Provide operators with a realistic schedule they can drive at a safe, reasonable speed.
- Provide riders with an accurate schedule they can rely on to get to their destination.
- Avoid instances where operators run early (will skip passengers or wait through green lights at traffic signals) or late (buses will then "bunch" or run back-to-back)
- Maximize being on time (defined as being 2 min. early to 5 minutes late).
 - MCTS goal is for operators to be on time 90% of the time.

Factors that Influence being On Time

There are many challenges that make it difficult for operators to run on time. The following is a brief list of factors:

- Ridership and the number of bus stops along the route
- Road Construction (planned and unplanned)
- Weather conditions
- Traffic Congestion
- Traffic Signal Timing

In the end, a transit system creates schedules for the “average” day, but often, there is no average day.

Improve Run Times – Current Status

MCTS has updated run times for nearly every route in the system within the past 2 years. For the sake of context, there are 37 fixed routes in the system with each route having a weekday, Saturday, and Sunday schedule for a total of 111 schedules.

Many of these schedule updates were made in response to direct requests from bus operators while the remaining were related to route changes made under MCTS NEXT. In 2022, MCTS updated 46 schedules specifically requested by operators and / or ATU Local 998 leadership. MCTS meets with ATU 998 President Donnell Shorter and Vice President Mike Brown throughout the year to learn about routes which they recommend run time changes.

MCTS has an established process for bus operators to provide comments on changes they believe should be made to a route’s schedule:

- Drivers are provided an Operator Service Report form where they can describe in detail the changes they feel should be made to the schedule.
 - These forms are available at the stations as well as online via an employee website.
 - After completed, the forms are sent to the Department of Service Development for review and analysis.
- Planners then investigate the driver’s comments:
 - Review on time performance data for other drivers on the route.
 - Review ridership data for route segments in question
 - Contact staff at the Stations, Dispatchers, and Route Supervisors to better understand the nature of the request.
- After the review is finished, planners will make a recommendation on if and where the run time along the route needs to be changed.
 - If approved, the recommendations are submitted to schedule makers who do the actual work of preparing the new schedule.

In addition, the Schedule Manager and Planning Manager have gone to the stations to listen to operators concerns about run times prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward, we are committed to restarting this process or have virtual meetings depending on the state of the pandemic. Finally, staff from the bus stations will also forward requests from operators to change run times.

Making Layovers Longer

According to the labor contract, the time in a layover cannot be less than four minutes at each end of a trip or 7% of the round trip run time on a route. The layover is the period of rest for the operator at the conclusion of each trip typically designated at both ends of the route. As MCTS NEXT was implemented during 2021, MCTS gradually added time to the layover such that the average layover today is eight minutes or twice the minimum amount of time allowable in the contract. There are no four-minute layovers on any route. Longer routes are given up to ten to 12 minutes at each end of the route. Finally, a review of the average percent of bus hours in layover shows MCTS is comparable to our peer transit systems.

Improving Access to Restrooms

Almost every route today provides access to a restroom at both layover locations. Prior to NEXT, only 75% of routes had a restroom at the layover. This improvement came about as planners specifically designed routes that would end near businesses such as a gas station or a coffee shop. In addition, MCTS took a further step and had route supervisors go to each layover and estimate how much time it takes to walk from the layover to the nearest business with a restroom.

MCTS continues to monitor and improve access as new route changes are planned. For example, the upcoming change to Route 28 (108th Street) will relocate the layover to S.108th Street & Grange Avenue where there are multiple businesses that provide access to restrooms. Route 28 operators today do not have access to a restroom at the south end layover at the Hales Corners park-ride lot. This change means operators will have access to a restroom at every fixed route layover in the system.

Summary

This report provides a description of the steps taken during MCTS NEXT to improve run times, add time to the layover, and improve access to restrooms for operators. It also describes our ongoing commitment to collaborate with operators and ATU Local 998. These efforts 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:

- 1A: Reflect the full diversity of the county at every level of County government
- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
- 2A: Determine what, where, and how we deliver services to advance health equity.
- 2B: Break down silos across County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

FISCAL EFFECT

There is no fiscal impact of the resolution.

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Denise Wandke (dwandke@mcts.org), Tom Winter (twinter@mcts.org), and Jennifer Wilder

(jwilder@mcts.org) should receive Microsoft Team invites to present this file.

PREPARED BY:

Prepared By: Denise Wandke, Interim President & Managing Director, MCTS
Tom Winter, Director of Service Development, MCTS

APPROVED BY:

Donna Brown-Martin

Donna Brown-Martin
Director, Department of Transportation

ATTACHMENTS:

Presentation: Improving Run Times and Layovers for Bus Operators PowerPoint.

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