

County of Milwaukee
Interoffice Communication

DATE: 6/17/2020
TO: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation
SUBJECT: Resolution Approving of MCTS NEXT System Redesign Project

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 County Board of Supervisors adopted resolution File No. 17-435 in June 2017 which authorized MCTS to study a 60/40 service delivery option and present findings in a written report, including maps of service impacts and route truncations, to the County Board for review and approval.

The context behind this authorization was the 2018 Budget. MCTS was asked to present ridership data on routes that could be modified or eliminated to balance a potential shortfall. It was noted in the resolution that MCTS route network operated at a 40/60 service model, meaning 40% of service was considered high frequency (buses arrive at least every 15 minutes, if not more often) and 60% of service consisted of routes with longer wait times, even up to an hour.

Given the mandate from the County Board of Supervisors, MCTS embarked on a three-year project to evaluate the entire transit system network, route-by-route, to determine changes that could provide more high frequency service with more connections and increased accessibility for riders. Knowing the profound impact such changes would have on riders, MCTS developed an extensive public participation plan to not only inform but to engage riders and stakeholders. Our goals were to give riders a voice on what they want transit routes to look like, to be inclusive of all riders, including underrepresented populations, and to give people multiple opportunities to provide feedback. This project also had to be designed to be cost neutral, i.e., it must fit within the operating cost of the annual budget.

This report presents the findings of this project, and, as required by the 2017 resolution, submits it to the County Board for review and approval.

Timeline Summary

June 2018 - MCTS NEXT concepts of creating faster service with more connections and increased accessibility for riders were introduced to riders and stakeholders at multiple public meetings across Milwaukee County.

December 2018 – MCTS drafted two system redesign proposals (60/40 and 80/20) and presented them to riders and stakeholders for review / comment. There was solid support for increasing the number of high frequency bus routes, and a preference for the 60/40 network.

March 2019 – MCTS presented a draft Recommended System Map based on the 60/40 network to riders / stakeholders. This plan was presented to the public for review and comment.

May 2019 - MCTS updated the draft Recommended System Map based on comments from riders and stakeholders.

July 2019 – At the request of the County Board, the Office on African American Affairs (OAAA) reviewed the MCTS NEXT System Redesign. OAAA recommended MCTS seek ways to enhance awareness to key stakeholders, including surveying riders on the bus, to identify ways to ensure that all segments of the population are fully included in the decision-making process, and to work closely with Transit Services Advisory Committee.

January / February 2020 – In order to better align MCTS NEXT with Milwaukee County's vision to advance racial equity, MCTS made several route adjustments to the plan prepared in May 2019. Changes were also necessary due to route modifications / reductions in the 2020 Budget. The 2020 Recommended System Map can be found at <https://www.ridemcts.com/programs/mcts-next/mcts-next-recommended-system-map> (See Map 1 -- 2020 MCTS NEXT Recommended System Map).

Service Impacts - High Frequency Service

The high frequency route network would be expanded from 10 to 16 routes in NEXT providing high quality service to new areas of Milwaukee County (See Map 2 -- High Frequency Routes - Current and 2020 Recommended System). This reflects a key component of the project, i.e., to build a network more focused on high ridership corridors that increases revenue and builds a more sustainable system.

New high frequency routes were created in areas with medium-to-high ridership and with high population densities and/or high job densities. The following routes / corridors met those qualifications:

- New OrangeLine – National Avenue - Greenfield Avenue
- New Route 15 – Kinnickinnic - Holton
- Route 35 – 35th Street
- Route 51 – Oklahoma Avenue
- New Route 60 – N. and S. 60th Street
- New Route 76 – N. and S. 76th Street

The expansion of high frequency service greatly increases the number of people and jobs that will be served on the network (see below).

High Frequency Network Population / Jobs Served	Current 40/60	MCTS NEXT 60/40	Difference	Percent Change
Total Population	314,271	480,073	+165,802	+53%
Total Jobs	185,847	229,149	+43,302	+23%
Minority Population	185,734	275,562	+89,828	+48%
People with Limited Incomes	88,310	121,458	+33,148	+38%
Senior Citizens	32,998	52,808	+19,810	+60%
Persons who Speak Limited English	23,256	35,525	+12,269	+53%
Persons with Disabilities	41,798	63,370	+21,572	+52%
Persons with No Vehicles	63,797	84,493	+20,696	+32%

Service Impacts - Low Frequency Service

High frequency service was created by reducing service in areas with low frequency service (buses arrive every 16 to 60 minutes) that had low ridership (See Map 3 – Route Impacts Map). MCTS did not eliminate any existing routes but only segments of routes. Most of these reductions were from routes where service was “branched”, i.e., service alternated between traveling on two different streets. (such as segments of S. 20th, S. 68th, S. 84th). Some other segments were removed to create a route with faster service, i.e., Watertown Plank / N. 124th and N. 91st / Allyn. Despite these changes, the total number of rides on all segments to be removed represents only 1% of the daily ridership in the entire system.

Conversely, the creation of the new network gave MCTS the opportunity to provide new low frequency service to previously unserved job centers. New service will be operated on Miller Park Way, Bradley Road, and S. 108th Street and N. 124th Street. MCTS was also able to create two new low frequency routes. Routes 65 (Hopkins – Congress) will replace segments of Route 80 and the BlueLine. Route 88 (Brown Deer – 124th) will create one route along Brown Deer from Green Bay Avenue to N. 107th and then extending to N. 124th & Bradley.

Service Impacts - Daytime Service

MCTS will operate three routes where service runs during the daytime to serve the majority of riders in these areas. New Routes 20 (S. 20th) and 68 (Port Washington) along with Route 52 (Clement) have acceptable daytime ridership. Evening ridership, however, is very low and could not be justified from a productivity standpoint.

Considering all the changes to the system, it should be noted 97% of the total population currently living within one-fourth mile of an MCTS bus stop will continue to have transit service. Similarly, 98% of the jobs served will continue to have service. The very high numbers point back to the original intent of MCTS NEXT, i.e., it reduces low frequency underutilized service and reallocates it to create high frequency service in areas where the demand for transit is higher.

Bus Stop Balancing

Bus stop balancing refers to judiciously removing selected stops to increase the speed of service and shorten riders' travel time. Properly balanced bus stops make overall service faster and more reliable, while still preserving convenience and walkability. MCTS can shorten travel times for riders by removing stops that are too close together, not used very often, or do not meet standards for being accessible to persons with disabilities. MCTS would continue to serve stops at key destinations and points of interest such as transfer corners, major employers, schools, and residences for elderly persons and persons with disabilities. A majority of riders (60%) said they would be willing to walk a little extra to get faster service.

MCTS bus stops have traditionally been located one-eighth mile apart on east-west routes and one-fourth mile apart on north-south blocks. MCTS recommends moving to a one-fourth mile spacing for east-west service (keeping mind other considerations as noted above). This change would reduce the number of stops from 5,100 to 3,800. For the sake of perspective, the transit system in Columbus removed 1,200 bus stops during their route redesign project. After stops are balanced, 85% of riders would still be able to use their same bus stop. 15% of riders would have to walk 1-2 blocks more to get to a bus stop.

Outreach and Engagement Efforts

MCTS informed and engaged riders and stakeholders using a variety of techniques so their insights could inform decisions on service changes. MCTS hosted 13 public houses, including one in Spanish, that were attended by 450 people. All meetings featured a presentation by planners along with informational

boards/maps to facilitate one-on-one and group discussions. Meetings were widely advertised to the public (including the County Board). MCTS buses were also programmed to make audio and visual announcements about the meetings thus reaching potentially every rider in the system.

MCTS also held 43 meetings with stakeholders that represented the interests of minority and low-income populations, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and transit experts/supporters:

- Milwaukee County Transit Services Advisory Committee*
- Milwaukee County Transit Plus Advisory Committee
- Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope
- Dominican Center – Amani Neighborhood
- Milwaukee County Department of Aging
- City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works*
- Independence First
- Disability Rights Wisconsin
- Beyond Vision
- Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission*
- Coalition for More Responsible Transportation
- UWM School of Urban Planning
- Wisconsin Policy Forum
- Layton Boulevard West Neighbors*
- Wisconsin Bike Fed*

* sent letter of support for MCTS NEXT

MCTS also hosted a virtual open house webinar for people who were not able to attend the meetings in person that had over 1,300 unique views. Planners also prepared surveys (including in Spanish) that were distributed electronically, onboard buses, and to neighborhood organizations. Over 750 responses were received and compiled. It should be noted MCTS received feedback from residents of all zip codes in Milwaukee County through the public outreach process

Given bus operators are route experts, MCTS sought their input by going to the operating stations. They offered many insights from their perspectives on riders, e.g., riders would welcome adding service to Miller Park Way since they see people walking there. They also requested that routes be designed with restrooms at the layover endpoint. All routes, in fact, were designed to have layovers adjacent to business or public buildings that have accessible restrooms. MCTS also sought comments from Amalgamated Transit Union 998 leadership. They were interested in how routes would be allocated to the stations and emphasized the importance that routes get people to employment centers.

All in all, there were a total of 4,000 interactions with riders and stakeholders over the course of this project.

Title VI Review

MCTS Title VI guidelines require any service change be examined to determine if it meets the definitions of “major service change”. A major service change is confirmed if any of five measures take affect:

- Does the change affect 25% of the bus hours?
- Does the change affect 25% of the one-way mileage?
- Does the change affect 25% of the service span?
- Does the change reduce the frequency by 50%?
- Does the change create a gap in service greater than one half mile?).

If a major service change is confirmed, MCTS must prepare a service and fare equity analysis (SAFE). The SAFE indicates whether the change has a disparate impact on the minority population or disproportionate burden on the low-income population. If either impact exists, MCTS must take steps to avoid, minimize, or mitigate the impacts where practicable.

Naturally, applying these thresholds to MCTS NEXT indicate it is a major service change. Consequently, MCTS performed a SAFE analysis.

The process of completing a SAFE involves several calculations. The first step was to measure the number of annual people trips traveling through each tract in the current system as well as in the 2020 Recommended System. These data sets were evaluated for both the low-income population and for the minority population. A comparison was then made between the number of annual people trips for the low-income and non-low-income population and similarly between the minority population and the non-minority population.

The next step in the process was to compare the percent change in annual people trips for each pair of population groups, i.e., minority to non-minority and low income to non-low income. If the difference in percent change is less than 80% (known as the Four-Fifths rule), then the impact on the minority or low-income groups would be considered disparate and disproportionate, respectively. If the difference in percent change was higher than 80%, then the impacts would not be considered disparate or disproportionate.

A review of the data indicates the changes contained in the 2020 MCTS NEXT Recommended System Map would not have a disparate impact on minority populations nor a disproportionate burden on low-income populations (see table below). This plan would bring more useful transit service throughout the county. Due to the relatively low proportion (19.9%) of low-income residents in Milwaukee County, service is expanded slightly more for the non-low-income population. Conversely, as minorities compose 40.3% of the county's population, service is expanded far more for minority residents compared to non-minority residents.

Population Group	Annual People Trips Before	Annual People Trips After	4/5ths Rule	Percent Change
Low Income	53,248,955	58,316,103	87%	10%
Non-Low Income	40,880,245	45,359,834		11%
Minority	52,697,420	58,768,335	>100%	12%
Non-Minority	41,431,780	44,907,602		8%
Total	94,129,200	103,675,937		

A "People Trip" is defined as the total population served by a route (or group of routes) multiplied by the annual scheduled trips on that route (or group of routes)

Advancing Racial Equity

At the May 2019 meeting of the TPW&T Committee, a motion was approved to have the Office on African American Affairs analyze MCTS NEXT from a racial equity lens standpoint. MCTS later met with OAAA representatives over the summer and learned about the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE) framework of normalizing, organizing and operationalizing racial equity. OAAA also asked MCTS to complete a racial equity tool worksheet for MCTS NEXT.

OAAA's follow up report to the TPW&T Committee contained the following recommendations:

- Align Milwaukee County's Fair Deal workgroup's recommendation for adjusting State Shared Revenue payments on other, non-mandated services, like public transit.
- Continue to expand MCTS's outreach efforts and seek ways to enhance awareness to key stakeholders and identify ways to include resident / rider feedback on the front-end of decision-making.
- Utilize MCTS staff and/or stakeholder partners to survey riders while they ride on the bus.
- Work closely with Transit Services Advisory Committee (TSAC). Consider expanding TSAC committee by-laws to expand community resident representation (as an appointed committee member). Offer TSAC members racial equity training, to help equip the committee in reviewing/making racial equity decisions. Align TSAC to MCTS outreach efforts.
- OAAA also suggested MCTS research models on public participation and data collection used by other transit systems.

Based on our preliminary understanding of how to advance racial equity, MCTS made several adjustments to the 2020 Recommended System Map. A sample of the larger changes is noted here:

- Route 35 was converted into a high frequency route. It will also be extended to serve a major grocery store at 60th & Layton.
- The BlueLine was extended to 124th & Bradley and gives residents on the northwest side new access to three major grocery stores.
- New Route 65 will give residents on Hopkins Street access to more destinations places to go by extending service along Capitol Drive, Fond du Lac Avenue, and Congress Street to N. 92nd Street. Riders will also see more frequent service on weekends (buses run hourly on Route 80 today).
- New Route 88 simplifies service for riders along Brown Deer Road by having one route that travels from Green Bay Avenue all the way to N. 124th & Bradley, providing service to three major grocery stores.

Summary

MCTS NEXT is 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.

Under MCTS NEXT, Transit will provide faster service with more connections and increased accessibility. This strategy can move more people to their destinations faster, more frequently and easier, which will strengthen the transit system's ability to contribute to economic competitiveness and quality of life in the County. Riders and stakeholders support the concepts of MCTS NEXT. Once approved, this plan creates a template for implementing incremental service changes consistent with the recommended plan. As was done before, MCTS would create a well-rounded public outreach campaign to notify riders before any changes would take effect. The County Board also would be informed of every change before it would be implemented.

FISCAL EFFECT

There is no fiscal impact of the resolution to approve MCTS NEXT 2020 Recommended System Map. Operating costs will not increase as a result of this change.

RECOMMENDATION

MCTS recommends approval of the resolution authorizing the approval of the MCTS NEXT System Redesign Project / 2020 Recommended System Map.

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Approved by:


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