

TRANSIT INSIDER

MCTS NEWS FOR STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS



QTR 1, 2021



Our goal is to bring you informative transit news and insights that will assist your work with constituents and advocates.

WHAT'S NEXT IS RIGHT HERE!

Dan Boehm, MCTS Managing Director

This issue of Transit Insider coincides with the launch of the first phase of MCTS NEXT, our system redesign that has been years in the making. Thanks to you – our riders, community leaders and transit advocates – these upgrades are now a reality.

A lot of behind-the-scenes planning has been happening to train our bus operator workforce on the new routes, along with marketing efforts to educate the public. This year, we've held four virtual community education sessions via ZOOM, including one in Spanish, where riders had the opportunity to hear from and ask questions about the route updates directly with MCTS Planning staff. Please check the community calendar on our website to register for future sessions related to the second and third phases of MCTS NEXT.

Everything you need to know about MCTS NEXT can be found on our newly updated [website](#) or by calling our MCTS NEXT hotline at 414-344-6711. If you want to learn about a

particular route, you'll find detailed written explanations, interactive maps, and videos narrated by transit Planners who take you through changes step-by-step. On the bus, riders will hear MCTS NEXT audio messages customized by route in English and Spanish, along with a special issue of our Bus Lines newsletter, also in English and Spanish. And, each bus stop that has changes will feature a detailed temporary sign. This is all in addition to our 24/7 telephone hotline and a comprehensive advertising campaign.



With the system upgrade, you'll also see new graphics on our signage, timetables and maps too. My personal favorite is the new symbol for High Frequency routes.

Along with MCTS NEXT, 2021 will be filled with more exciting transit news. I look forward to sharing it with you soon!



MCTS
NEXT

**ACCORDING TO APTA,
AN INVESTMENT OF
\$10 MILLION IN PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION
GENERATES ABOUT \$30
MILLION IN INCREASED
BUSINESS SALES, AND
RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY
VALUES FOR HOMES
LOCATED NEAR PUBLIC
TRANSIT WITH HIGH-
FREQUENCY SERVICE
“PERFORMED 42% BETTER
THAN OTHER AREAS.”**

WHO'S DRIVING OUR SUCCESS

Each issue will spotlight a MCTS employee or department delivering on our mission.

I oversee the Schedule and Planning teams at MCTS. Both teams work together to create bus service that gets people where they want to go when they want to go there.

Our Schedule team uses industry-standard software (HASTUS) to create bus schedules that are used by riders for every route in the system. The Schedule team consists of a Manager and three Schedule Makers. Schedulers pay close attention to numerous details such as the frequency of service and the time a driver first pulls out a bus from the garage to start the route as well as the time the driver pulls into the garage at the end of the night. Schedulers also create the day's work for bus drivers by "cutting" the schedule into their assignments. Both efforts are done on a quarterly basis to comply with the contract between MCTS and ATU Local 998 (bus driver's union).

The Planning team is responsible for analyzing 60+ bus routes in the system and recommending changes that will improve riders' ability to use transit. The team consists of a Manager and two Planners. Planners use specialized software tools such as REMIX that calculates the cost of operating bus routes as well as displays demographic and employment data. Planners also use software that allows riders to see and hear announcements of the next bus stop/transfer corners as well as other useful information. Finally, Planners also make sure MCTS is compliant with federal regulations such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.



TOM WINTER

Director of Schedule & Planning

The most fulfilling aspect of working for MCTS is knowing that I am helping people accomplish their goals...In doing this work, I feel I am making Milwaukee a better place to live.

You can reach him at
twinter@mcts.org.

WHO'S DRIVING OUR SUCCESS (CONTINUED)

Both Planners and Schedulers work extensively with other teams at MCTS including Transportation, Marketing and IT. They also contribute as members of MCTS's Reliability Committee, Safety Committee and Racial Equity Workgroup.

When I began my career at MCTS in 1990, the process of creating schedules and transit planning was quite manual. Schedules were written on oversized sheets of paper while Planners did all their work with pencil and paper. Since going to a computerized schedule software system in 1995, MCTS has gone through three additional software upgrades. Another major change has been increased outreach to riders and the public on transit matters. This expansion has also been driven by improvements in technology such as hosting webinars and now Zoom meetings.

The most fulfilling aspect of working for MCTS is knowing that I am helping people accomplish their goals, i.e., by getting to their job or for going shopping. In doing this work, I feel I am making Milwaukee a better place to live.

I originally gained interest in transit planning while studying geography for my undergrad and graduate education. I also wanted a career that would fulfill my desire to serve others.

I am particularly energized about the work that's been done over the past five years and is now coming to fruition, e.g., the MCTS NEXT route redesign project, the East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project and now the potential for a future transit enhancement along 27th Street. I am also encouraged that outreach to our community and stakeholders is now part and parcel of our work at MCTS.



OPERATOR TRAINING PAY INCREASE BOOSTS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Attracting and retaining valuable talent is a goal for any company. Recently, MCTS took steps to boost its recruitment and retention for bus operators.

Starting January 1, 2021, the training wage for bus operators increased to \$15/hour. Bus operators are paid the training wage for the first 5-6 weeks of classroom and driving instruction. Trainees with a current CDL license train for 5 weeks, those without get an extra week of training to obtain their CDL. Once the training is complete, their wage increases to the first-year rate of \$20.36 per hour. Each year, MCTS conducts approximately 8 training classes with 15-20 students per class.

Some would-be hires would drop out of the training process because of the former hourly training rate. Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Nathaniel Holton shared the idea of the wage increase with MCTS's Training and Human Resources Department – all agreed, and the decision received top-level support. Nationally, the \$15/hour amount is popularly seen as a living wage.

“It’s the right thing to do to help the Operators during their training period. For the organization, the higher wage is key to recruitment and retention,” said Holton.

NATIONAL TRANSIT EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION DAY

March 18, 2021 is Transit Employee Appreciation Day. MCTS is working behind the scenes to plan some special gestures to help thank its employees for their hard work and dedication to the community.





INNOVATION NEWS

BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT) CONSTRUCTION **COUNTING DOWN TO STATE'S FIRST BRT LINE**

Construction is scheduled to start this Spring on Wisconsin's first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line.

The nine-mile East-West BRT will allow MCTS to better connect major employment, education and recreation destinations through downtown Milwaukee, Marquette University, Milwaukee's Near West Side, Wauwatosa and the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center.

BRT passengers will enjoy more efficient, higher frequency service thanks to the utilization of battery-electric buses, dedicated bus lanes, traffic signal priority, off-board fare collection, optimized stop locations, state-of-the-art platforms that allow for easy boarding, and other exciting amenities.

BRT service is expected to start in Fall 2022. In the coming weeks, MCTS will announce the vendor who will manufacture the battery-electric buses that will be used along the BRT.

"THE EAST-WEST BRT WILL HELP ENSURE MORE ACCESS TO RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION AND MAKE IT EASIER FOR FOLKS TO GET TO WORK, HOME, AND SCHOOL. I APPRECIATE THE WORK OF OUR LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL PARTNERS TO MAKE THIS PROJECT POSSIBLE."

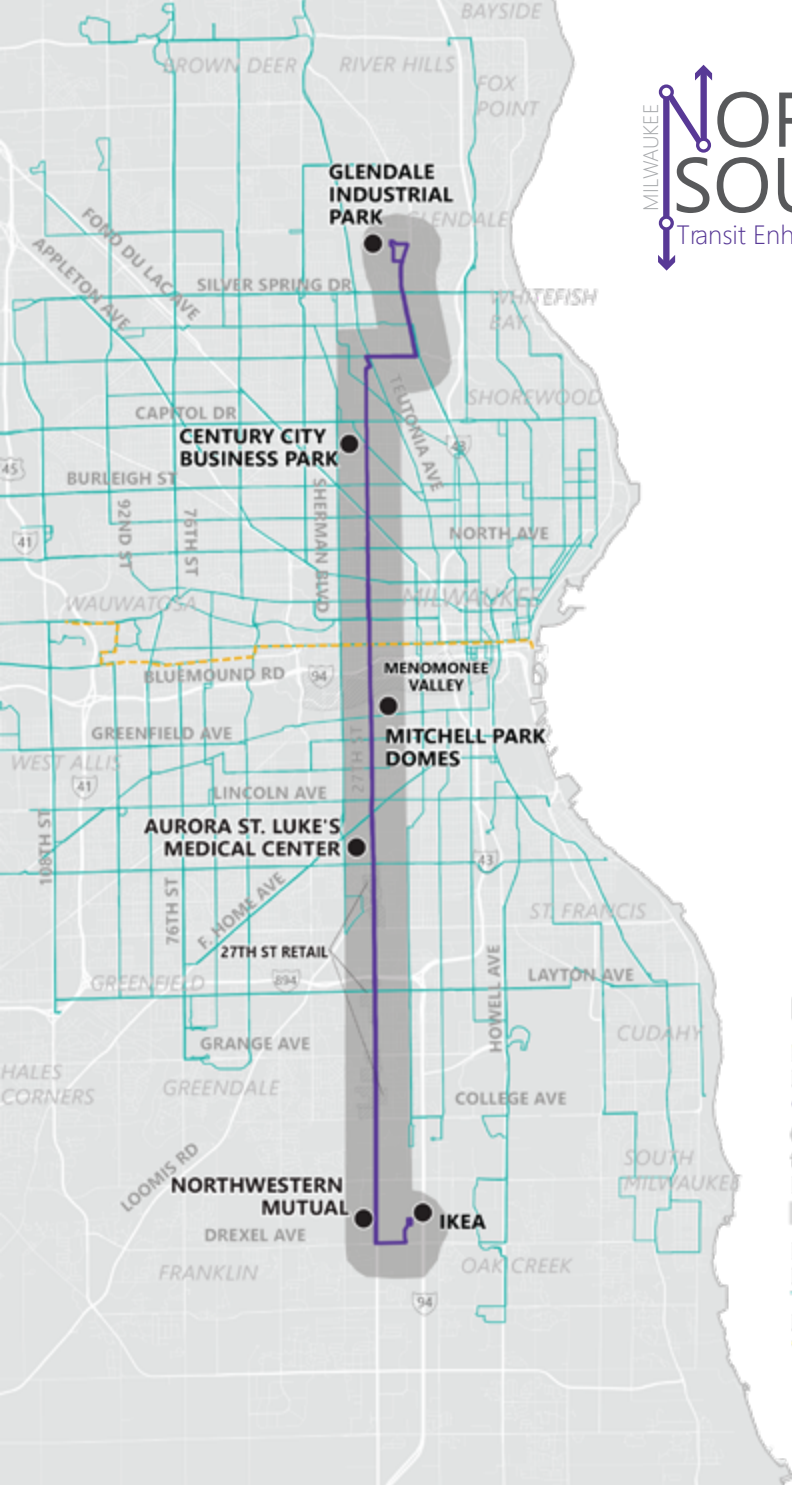
-Governor Tony Evers

"BUS RAPID TRANSIT WILL STRENGTHEN OUR ENTIRE TRANSIT NETWORK AND MOVE MILWAUKEE COUNTY CLOSER TO FULFILLING ITS VISION OF ACHIEVING RACIAL EQUITY AND BECOMING THE HEALTHIEST COUNTY IN WISCONSIN."

-Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley

"TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS LIKE THIS ARE VITAL TO THE REGION'S FUTURE AND ARE NECESSARY TO BUILD A MORE EQUITABLE, ECONOMICALLY RESILIENT SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN."

-Kevin Muhs, Executive Director of Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC)



NORTH SOUTH

Transit Enhancement

NEWS ON THE STREET PUBLIC INPUT ON N-S 27TH STREET CORRIDOR STUDY

Milwaukee County and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) are making progress on the North-South Transit Enhancement Study along and near 27th Street. Read more about the project in our third quarter 2020 issue on page 8 [here](#).

The study will analyze the feasibility of options that would enhance transit service, increase frequency, reduce travel times, add amenities, and potentially

expand the existing Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) PurpleLine service area. Both rail and bus services will be evaluated.

The first public meetings were held virtually in February 2021. Participants learned about existing transit in the corridor, the purpose and goals for the study, project timelines, and had opportunities to provide feedback.

CLICK HERE TO VISIT [MKENORTHSOUTH.COM](https://mkenorthsouth.com) FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO REGISTER FOR FUTURE MEETINGS



KAYLA JIMENEZ



ANYA RAMOS



IMAN SNOBAR

ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

ROSA PARKS STUDENT ESSAY SCHOLARSHIP

WINNERS ANNOUNCED

On civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks' birthday — which is also National Transit Equity Day — MCTS announced the winners of its first-ever Rosa Parks Tribute Scholarship essay contest.

High school seniors in Milwaukee County who will attend a trade school, college, or university were invited to submit a short essay inspired by Parks' famous quote, "Each person must live their life as a model for others."

More than 50 essays were submitted and reviewed by a diverse panel of staff from MCTS, the Milwaukee County Department of Transportation, and the Milwaukee County Office on African American Affairs.

The following three students were chosen to each receive a \$1,000 scholarship towards their higher education:

Kayla Jimenez (Ronald Reagan High School, Milwaukee)

Anya Ramos (Audubon Technology and Communication High School, Milwaukee)

Iman Snobar (Ronald Reagan High School, Milwaukee)

Read their essays published in Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service [here](#). MCTS congratulates the winners and thanks everyone who participated to make this inaugural year a success!

TRANSIT ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT

REGIONAL TRANSIT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL (RTLTC)

LAST MILE SOLUTIONS ADD VALUE TO FIXED ROUTE TRANSIT NETWORK

Bus transport is one of the oldest and most common modes of transportation developed to move large numbers of people within a city or county. Fixed transit works best when focused on a core network that serves the most populous and business-dense areas. Among its advantages – affordability, the majority of riders use it to get to work or school, it reduces traffic congestion and lowers carbon emissions.

In fact, a total of 87 percent of trips on public transit have a direct impact on the local economy. **(Source: American Public Transportation Association/APTA)** However, there are instances where fixed route bus service is not always the answer due to a geographical mismatch between job seekers, open jobs and access to transportation.

That's where the **Regional Transit Leadership Council (RTLTC)** comes in. The RTLTC, headed by Dave Steele, is Southeastern Wisconsin's united voice and platform for regional multimodal transportation. Its leaders understand that multimodal transportation is central to the region's long-term economic health and vitality.

To thrive as a region long term, the RTLTC has activated various Task Forces aimed at solving unique transportation needs, or last-mile solutions connected to fixed route transit.



DAVE STEELE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE REGIONAL TRANSIT
LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Thank you RTLTC for spearheading a COVID-19 relief collection effort to provide bus drivers with gift cards in 2020! Your "Thank a Bus Driver" campaign raised enough cash donations to Purchase gift cards for MCTS, Waukesha Metro, The Hop, and Racine Transit.

In addition, the RTLTC coordinated with the Harbor District to collect gift cards for restaurants in the district.



Situation: Potawatomi faced challenges in helping workers reliably get to the casino. Even though Potawatomi is situated in the Menomonee Valley at the center of the city, transit links are too far away (e.g. National Avenue, Wisconsin Avenue or on the 16th Viaduct), and can be hazardous in bad weather or during shift changes in the middle of the night. Other employers in the Valley faced similar challenges.

Solution: RTLCL commissioned a study which looked at ways to help employees at Menomonee Valley business bridge the “last mile.” They looked at van shuttles, circulators and rideshare services as alternative options.

Result: in 2019, Potawatomi began a partnership with Lyft in which employees are provided vouchers to Lyft rides as an employee benefit. All employees are eligible.

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Sheri Schmit – Milwaukee Regional Medical Center

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

WHEN TRAGEDY STRIKES, BUSES PROVIDE SAFE HAVEN

MCTS dispatchers work closely with the Office of Emergency Management, Red Cross, law enforcement and other first responders who regularly request buses for use during emergencies.

Our large vehicles are desirable because they can provide a safe space for warming, cooling, counseling, or transporting civilians displaced or affected by fires, gas leaks, weather destruction, building evacuations, neighborhood evacuations, and mass casualty incidents.

In addition to house fires, MCTS buses were used in 2020 to assist in the aftermath of shootings at Miller Brewing and Mayfair Mall.

Depending on the time of day and availability of operators and buses, MCTS can usually provide service within a half hour of the request. At that point, our Street Operations Team works with officials at the scene to coordinate logistics.



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When disasters like home fires strike in the Milwaukee area, I know we can count on our partners at MCTS to provide respite for our neighbors in need. Out of the freezing cold of a Wisconsin winter night, MCTS buses provided a warm, comfortable place for our American Red Cross volunteers to address the needs of people displaced by fires. And MCTS drivers bring their noted compassion to our teams and those in need at these traumatic scenes.

**- MARK THOMAS, REGIONAL CEO/SOUTHEAST WI EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, AMERICAN RED CROSS OF WISCONSIN**

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TRANSIT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

BUBLR BIKES

Bublr Bikes, Greater Milwaukee's nonprofit bikeshare operator is extremely excited to partner with the City of Milwaukee to add 26 new Bublr stations in 2021 as well as bring electric assist (e-assist) bicycles into Bublr's fleet.

The new stations are primarily funded by a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant the City of Milwaukee received. While a few of these stations will provide infill in some gaps downtown, most of the locations will be expanding Bublr's service footprint on the northwest and southwest sides of Bublr's current footprint. You can find a map of the proposed expansion stations at bit.ly/Bublr2021Expansion. In addition to allowing Bublr to expand into more Milwaukee neighborhoods, this expansion is also exciting as it connects the Milwaukee Bublr stations to the stations in West Allis and Wauwatosa.



TRANSIT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT (CONTINUED)

BUBLR BIKES



Bublr is also thrilled that this expansion includes the addition of e-assist bicycles to the Bublr fleet. When Madison, WI added e-assist bicycles to their bikeshare fleet they saw a whopping 166% increase in ridership.

Bringing e-assist bicycles into the fleet is another way to enhance our great relationship with MCTS. A study in Seattle found that pairing e-bikes with transit gave people access to 35% more jobs without lengthening commute times. Since 80% of Bublr stations are already co-located with MCTS stops, Bublr hopes that adding e-bikes will help more people reach more jobs without longer commutes. This is especially exciting when one thinks about the East-West BRT. Bublr will have stations near each of the BRT stops so the pairing of BRT with e-assist bikeshare could really help the Milwaukee region rethink their commute.

If you want to learn more about combining MCTS and Bublr to make your commute better, check out the Buslr Card (<https://bublrbikes.bcycle.com/join-now>) – an RFID sticker that Bublr and MCTS co-created. It's specifically designed to go on your M•Card and once applied, functions as an integrated pass allowing you to move seamlessly between MCTS and Bublr.

MCTS IN THE COMMUNITY

MCTS BUS SHELTERS FEATURE ARTWORK FROM MLK, JR. CONTEST

Murals on two Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) bus shelters now feature winning artwork from the Marcus Performing Art Center's 2020 Martin Luther King, Jr. Art Contest, which was open to K-12 students in Milwaukee, Wauwatosa, and West Bend.

The first shelter is located across the street from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School at MLK Drive and Concordia Avenue in Milwaukee. The second shelter is alongside Golda Meir School Upper Campus at MLK Drive and Pleasant Street.

Each mural includes multiple designs — inspired by Dr. King's life and values — created by children and teenagers enrolled at Fairview Elementary School, Fernwood Montessori, Golda Meir School, Luther Burbank School, McLane Elementary School, Milwaukee Spanish Immersion School, Roosevelt Creative Arts Middle School, Wauwatosa East High School, Wedgewood Park International School and West Bend West High School.



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT THE TWO NEW MURALS](#)



MCTS IN THE COMMUNITY (CONTINUED)

MCTS installed the murals as part of its annual sponsorship of the Marcus Performing Art Center's Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration. This year's event, which was virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, took place January 17 at 1:00 p.m. Members of the public are invited to watch a replay of the event [here](#).

Dr. King was an activist committed to peace, justice, and equality. As a visionary leader of the civil rights movement, King fought for racial and economic justice for the oppressed.

"Each year, we look forward to highlighting young people in our community who interpret Dr. King's words and actions through art, speech, and writing," said Kendra Whitlock Ingram, President and CEO of the Marcus Performing Arts Center. "Showcasing winning artwork on bus shelters along MLK Drive is a creative way to make sure these important messages are seen by a wide audience."

"This year's event – including the debut of these special murals on bus shelters – was a celebration of the milestones already achieved and also a reminder of the important work yet to come," said Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley. "We stand on the shoulders of giants like Dr. King as we move forward on the path to achieve racial equity in order to become the healthiest county in the State."

A wide range of unique murals have been installed on nearly two dozen MCTS bus shelters in recent years as part of the popular Bus Shelter Art Project. Visit [RideMCTS.com/Art](https://rideMCTS.com/Art) to see the designs and learn how you can bring artwork to your neighborhood.





DID YOU KNOW?

MCTS IS THE 26TH LARGEST TRANSIT SYSTEM IN THE NATION. MCTS ALSO MANAGES TRANSIT PLUS, THE PARATRANSIT SERVICE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, WHICH DELIVERS AN ADDITIONAL 513,000 RIDES THROUGH THIS SERVICE.

NEW FEDERAL MASK MANDATE

On February 1, the CDC announced federal mask requirements for public transportation employees and users to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. MCTS in turn updated on-board signage to emphasize the continued need for bus drivers and riders to continue wearing masks while on board. The good news is that since MCTS installed mask dispensers on board all buses in the fleet, mask wearing compliance is above 96 percent. You can learn more about our COVID-19 response by visiting RideMCTS.com/Coronavirus and RideMCTS.com/Health.

U.S. DOT NEWS

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg (@SecretaryPete) was confirmed on February 2. With the safety of the traveling public and America's workers at the center of its mission, the team will work toward economic recovery, racial equity, and combating climate change. "President Biden has been clear: stronger infrastructure is a key to building our country back better than it was before."

ON BOARD TRANSIT NEWS FROM AROUND THE U.S.

“In truth, a city’s bus service is as good as its leaders and voters want it to be. Where voters have funded better bus services and cities have worked to give them priority, as in Seattle, ridership has soared. But most U.S. cities have a large unmet demand for frequent bus service, which is why cities investing in more frequent service have seen ridership rise.”

-Jarrett Walker (@[HumanTransit](#)),
“*The Bus Is Still The Best*” *The Atlantic*, 2018

HERE ARE SOME
INTERESTING ARTICLES
AND BLOGS TO CHECK
OUT FOR NEWS ABOUT
URBAN AND TRANSIT-
RELATED TOPICS

**BLOOMBERG: POST-COVID
TRANSIT RIDERSHIP**

STREETS BLOG USA

BLOOMBERG CITYLAB



TRANSIT BUDGET OUTLOOK

Previous reports have shown how MCTS faced significant annual budget deficits prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Milwaukee County helped close the budget gap in the 2020 budget so that Freeway Flyers could keep operating. But by March, when the economy shut down because of the virus, every transit agency in the country faced a new budget challenge, as ridership and passenger revenue fell sharply.

Congress acknowledged the significance of transit in keeping our economy moving, especially in a pandemic, by providing Federal funding in the form of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES). MCTS judiciously allocated its \$54 million over two years – 2020-2021 – to keep the full fleet running to serve essential workers, and to provide enough space on vehicles for social distancing by implementing a 15-rider limit.

MCTS will use approximately \$53 million in CARES II (the second phase of CARES funding) monies to keep buses running at pre-pandemic levels throughout 2022-2023.. That said, MCTS still has \$40+ million in capital needs in each of the next two years. Bottom line, CARES funding is being used exactly as Congress had intended, to support essential workers during the pandemic. In addition, it is widely recognized that transit needs to be there when schools, restaurants and entertainment venues – all businesses that have been hardest hit by necessary safety closures – re-open, and our economy seeks to roar back stronger than ever.



TRANSIT BUDGET OUTLOOK (CONTINUED)

The CARES funding came at a time that allows us to take a pause in order to work with State and local partners to determine how best to fund critical transit services in the long run.

Transportation comprises 7% of Governor Evers' proposed 2021-2023 biennial state budget. MCTS acknowledges and appreciates the 2.5% increase in transit funding annually recommended by Governor Evers. The recognition that more state support is needed to get us through annual inflation so that we can best meet the local and regional needs of our community for transportation access to jobs, education and life with essential transit services is commendable. But, in the end, the emergency relief from CARES is simply a short-term remedy – it's no panacea. We need real, long-term funding solutions to provide efficient and affordable transportation for the very people who help stimulate the economy every day.

WHETHER OR NOT YOU PERSONALLY USE THE BUS, IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT THE ESSENTIALS OF LIFE ARE SUPPORTED BY EMPLOYEES WHO USE TRANSIT. CONSIDER THIS:



That package from Amazon may have only been possible because of employees taking the new Route 81 to the distribution center in Oak Creek.



Last year, MCTS was petitioned frequently by Kroger, owner of Pick 'N Save and Metro Market stores, in an effort to ensure that MCTS would keep operating in the pandemic, because many of their shelf-stockers and check-out clerks ride transit.



Healthcare workers on the front lines take the bus or rely upon that daycare worker (who takes the bus to a childcare center) to afford them the opportunity to face the frontlines of the pandemic knowing that their children are safely cared for.

UPCOMING ISSUE

Watch your e-mail for our next newsletter featuring topics such as:

- E-W Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Construction Update
- MCTS Seeks BRT Presenting Sponsor
- MCTS Selects Battery Electric Bus (BEB) Vendor
- MCTS NEXT: Phase 2
- Expansion of Bus Shelter Art Project



MISSION:

MCTS connects our community to jobs, education and life with essential transit services.



VISION:

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



VALUES:

Respect, Integrity, Excellence, Equity, Collaboration, Innovation

