

The **#1 reason**
people ride the bus
is for **work.**



2024 Milwaukee County
Transit System Annual Report

DEAR MCTS COMMUNITY

In 2024, we saw another year of double-digit growth with a **13% increase** in ridership. The majority of our riders--**73%**--report having alternative transportation options, yet they continue to choose the bus as their primary mode of travel. Looking ahead, **30%** plan to increase their bus usage in 2025.

As president of the Wisconsin Public Transit Association, I am keenly aware that this growth trend is not limited to Milwaukee County. Across the state, the demand for public transit is on the rise. According to the state's Non-Driver Advisory Council, **31% of Wisconsinites do not drive**, and in the City of Milwaukee, that figure jumps to **40%**. This surge in demand coincides with U.S. Census data that reflects population growth, further underscoring the need for reliable public transportation options.

To build on this momentum, we are developing a comprehensive 3-year strategic plan. Public transit plays a critical role in driving our region's economy. MCTS needs sustainable funding sources to continue to get people to work. That's why our 3-year strategic plan also includes potential strategies for securing long-term funding.

We look forward to sharing our new plan soon. The timing aligns with a significant milestone as MCTS marks its 50th anniversary.

Julie Esch

Interim President and CEO



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*Cover Source: In the 2024 MCTS Annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, the majority of riders (47%) cited work as their main reason for taking the bus.

COMMUTING MADE SIMPLE



Here are some of the many companies MCTS partnered with in 2024 through our Commuter Value Pass. Is your company interested in making the commute simple? Then let's get to work!



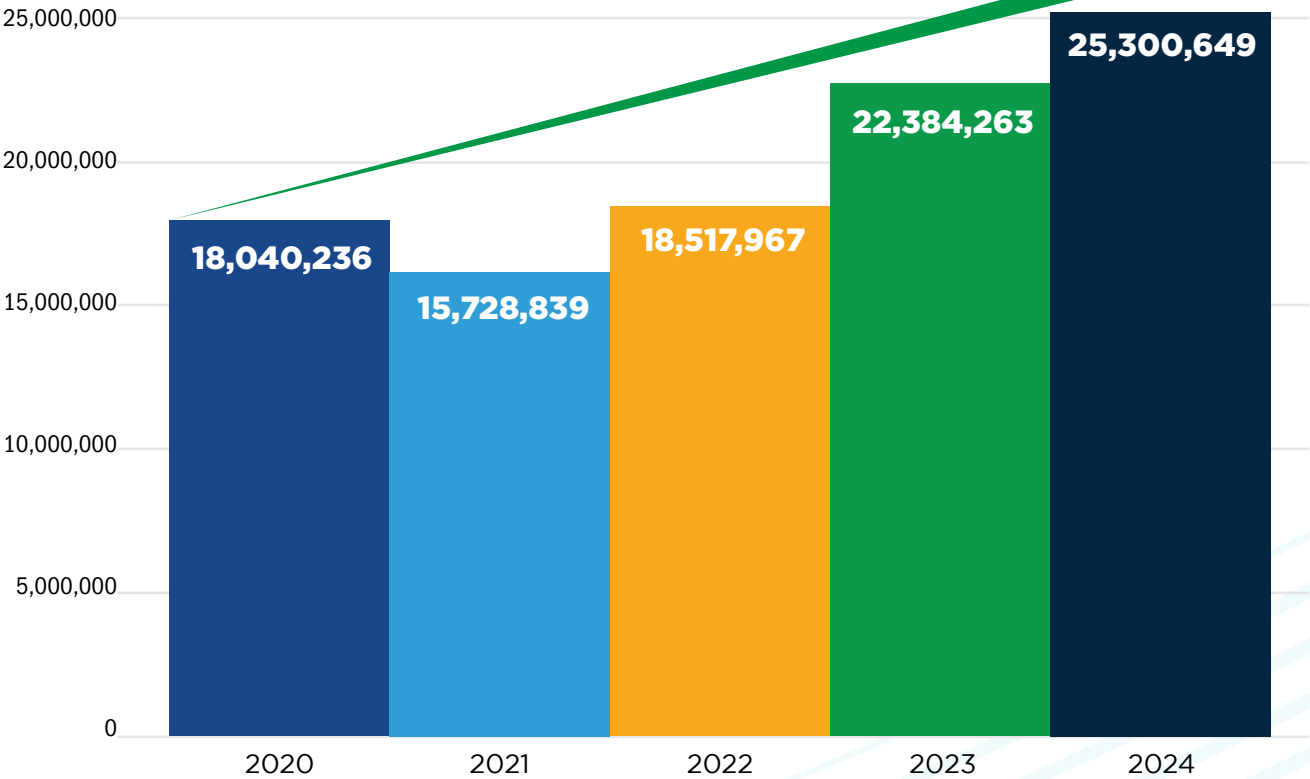
As a large employer in downtown Milwaukee, it is incumbent on us to be able to attract, retain, develop, and advance talent. We need that talented, diverse staff to be able to get to our campuses and so MCTS is an important part of that equation in order for us to be successful.

– Robert Wilks, Northwestern Mutual

Assistant Director of Enterprise, Security, Transportation and Parking

5 YEAR RIDERSHIP GROWTH TREND

13%
increase in ridership
over 2023



Source: National Transit Database (NTD)



2022

BY THE NUMBERS

363
buses

46
routes

17,417,956
total miles served

1,340,958
hours of service

7.6
average bus age in years

81%
on-time performance

14
battery electric buses

3,737
bus stops

635
bus stops with shelters

MCTS CONNECTS

PEOPLE TO:

 **55,000**
businesses

 **386,000**
jobs

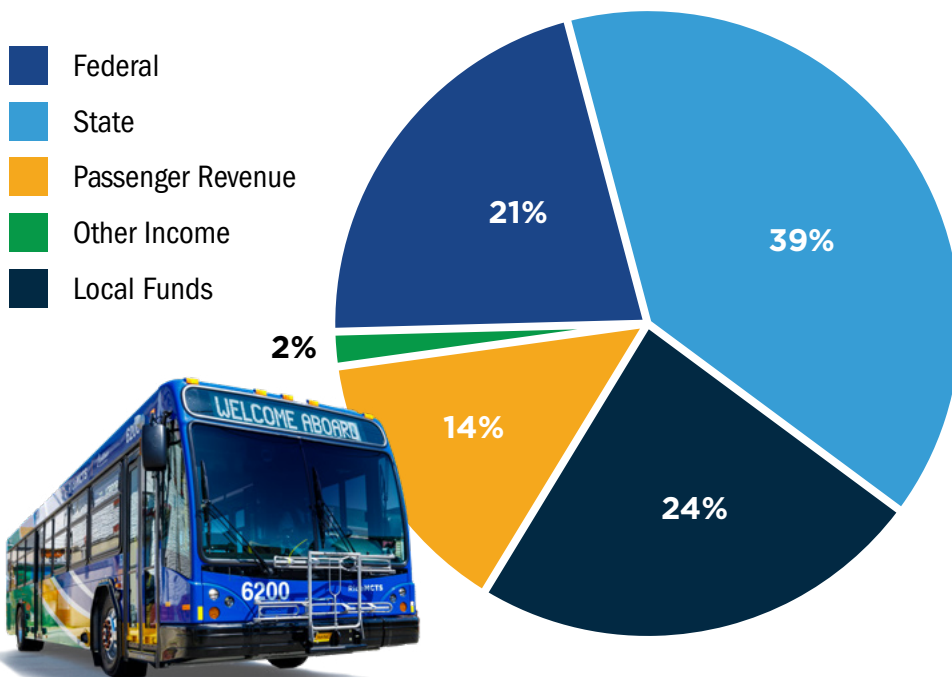
 **24**
hospitals

 **18**
colleges and universities

 **900**
childcare and K-12 schools

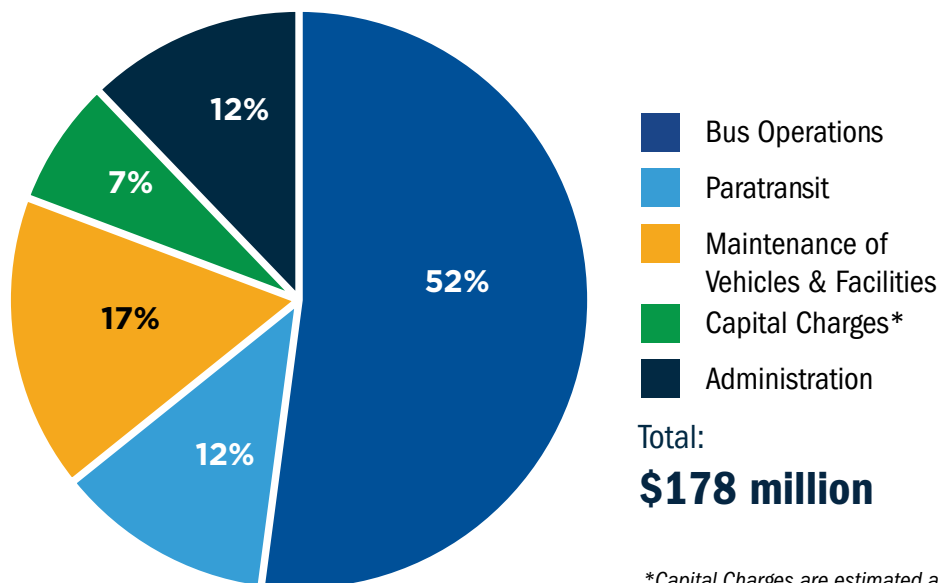
2024

FUNDING BY SOURCE



2024

OPERATING COSTS



Total:
\$178 million

**Capital Charges are estimated and will be finalized after July 2025.*

Funding remains a major issue across all Wisconsin counties, but it's particularly unique to Milwaukee County because of the lack of a dedicated, sustainable source of funding for MCTS. The passage of ACT 12 allowed for allocation of funds that continue to provide a temporary safeguard against major service cuts. However, Milwaukee County's Five-Year Financial Forecast projects that MCTS will hit a fiscal cliff by 2028. Considering this impact, and without a long-term funding solution, MCTS paused the enhancement of its second busiest route, the PurpleLine. This delay allowed MCTS to redirect potentially \$15 million in one-time temporary funds toward operating costs to maintain current service levels. Looking forward, the fiscal cliff continues to loom. In 2026, MCTS will experience an additional cut in the tax levy. This makes it vital for Milwaukee County and MCTS to identify and secure dedicated funding through continued advocacy, innovation, and partnerships.

FUELING THE LOCAL ECONOMY

The Commuter Value Pass (CVP) is a tax-free benefit for employees, and a tax-deduction for employers. It gives employees unlimited rides on any MCTS route, for a stress-free commute to work.

48
companies enrolled

1400
employee participants

“Onboarding and maintaining the Commuter Value Pass program is easy. We find employees who need to take advantage of the program and enroll them through payroll deduction forms.”

– **Camilla Sparks**, St. Kate Hotel,
a division of The Marcus Corporation,
Director of Human Resources

Getting to work is the #1 reason people ride the bus.

**Here are just a few of
the employers who
rely on MCTS**

9,175

Wisconsin Center District
employee rides

7,884

Wisconsin State Fair employee
rides

3,267

Milwaukee Bucks
employee rides

9,941

Milwaukee Regional Medical
Complex employee rides
(pilot program)



FUELING THE LOCAL ECONOMY CONTINUED



EMPLOYEE BENEFITS



A transit benefit can eliminate the thousands of dollars spent annually on commuting costs.



Studies show that these savings increase the rider's standard of living and help refuel the economy.

EMPLOYER BENEFITS



A transit benefit is a cost effective tool in retaining quality employees and reducing turnover.



Employees arrive to work relaxed and on time, important keys to employee productivity.

UPASS: MAKING EDUCATION ACCESSIBLE

Education leads to opportunity.

4

Universities enrolled

84,096

Eligible students

2,452

Milwaukee Public School
passes annually



2024

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

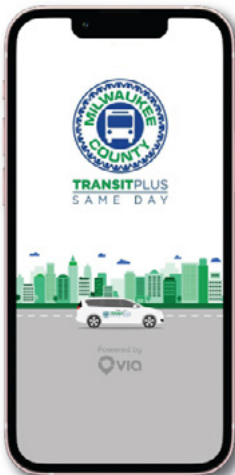
REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

MCTS played a critical role in planning and executing safety and security measures and other related activities including emergency response and staffing the City/ County Emergency Operations Center. MCTS, like much of the County, worked round the clock during the Republican National Convention to help make Milwaukee County shine on the national stage. Partnering seamlessly with federal, state and local law enforcement, MCTS helped facilitate the 4-day event's smooth operation. As an essential service, MCTS made sure to prioritize communication with riders, swiftly updating them on service changes and successfully getting them to their destinations with ease and security.



IN-HOUSE PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENT

Following the County's largest investment in public transit safety in 2024, MCTS took a significant step by establishing an in-house Public Safety Department, hiring new Public Safety Officers. These experts, with extensive experience in security and law enforcement, are employed and trained by MCTS. The new public safety team is already earning positive feedback from bus operators, passengers, and local law enforcement for enhancing community safety. Due to the success of the program, MCTS plans to expand the Public Safety Department even further in 2025.



SAME DAY PILOT FOR TRANSIT PLUS

MCTS is committed to being accessible to all riders. In September 2024, Milwaukee County launched the Same Day Pilot program which offers last-minute transportation for riders with disabilities. This service includes trips vital to health and employment, such as picking up a sick child at school, getting to an Urgent Care visit, or filling a new prescription at the pharmacy. To better serve riders, MCTS expanded the service starting March 3, 2025, enrolling all 5,000 Transit Plus riders. This expansion allows riders access to transportation for a wider range of unexpected, important activities that couldn't be scheduled the day before. While the service has received overwhelmingly positive feedback, it is not funded beyond the pilot. For other travel needs, Transit Plus's ADA van service continues to help, providing 364,360 rides in 2024 alone.

WISGO

The WisGo fare collection system launched off-board fare collection along the Bus Rapid Transit route Connect 1. This service connects people to work, medical and entertainment destinations along the 9-mile corridor.

2024

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

JUNETEENTH BUS

In 2024, MCTS embarked on an exciting new partnership with True Skool, a local nonprofit, to debut the first-ever Juneteenth-themed bus wrap. Designed by artists from True Skool, the vibrant wrap not only commemorates the holiday but also reflects MCTS's dedication to inclusivity and representation. This initiative was born out of direct feedback from riders and the broader community, who expressed a strong desire to see MCTS to honor Juneteenth in a meaningful, visible way. In addition, MCTS proudly continued its longstanding sponsorship with Northcott Neighborhood House, organizers of the Juneteenth Parade and Festival. Our participation in the parade and full-day tabling provided transit resources and information to festival attendees, reinforcing our commitment to supporting the community through accessible and reliable transportation.



NEW SCHOOL ROUTES

MCTS has partnered with Howard Fuller Collegiate Academy to create two dedicated school routes to their new facility. These routes carry over 200 rides a day and ensure students get to school safely and on time. We've also added extra buses to Route 21 to make sure everyone has a seat!

PARTNERSHIP

Management at Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired (IBVI) asked MCTS to provide more service for their employees who have visual impairments. MCTS was able to meet their needs by modifying Route 18 to go the front door of IBVI. This change also benefited bus operators as IBVI provided round the clock access to their restrooms.



MCTS EXCELLENCE

In a powerful example of MCTS's commitment to safety and service, bus operator Keyon Finkley demonstrated MCTS Excellence when he saved a small child from running into traffic on Capitol Drive, one of the most dangerous roads in Milwaukee. The young boy was barefoot wearing only a pajama shirt. Keyon knew the temperature was only in the 30s. He quickly stopped his bus and ran toward the little boy, saving him from running into oncoming traffic. Keyon then called dispatch who alerted the Milwaukee Police Department. While waiting for help to arrive, Keyon stayed with the child, giving him a warm place to sit. The boy was safely reunited with his family. This is an example of one of many children that our bus operators have rescued.

2024

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

LAUNCH OF THE COUTURE TRANSIT CONCOURSE

In 2024, Milwaukee County officially opened a new lakefront transit concourse at The Couture, located on Lincoln Memorial Drive in downtown Milwaukee. The tallest residential building in Milwaukee County, The Couture transit concourse marked the full launch of The Hop's L-Line and the start of MCTS's Connect 1 BRT service, just in time for Summerfest and the summer tourism season.

THE VEL R. PHILLIPS PLAZA OPENS

The Vel R. Phillips Plaza is a new, multimodal transportation space dedicated to Milwaukee and Wisconsin civil rights icon Vel R. Phillips. Located between North 5th Street and Vel Phillips Avenue, directly across from the newly expanded Baird Center, the project transforms a once-vacant lot into a community gathering place that blends traffic calming, pedestrian improvements, transit facilities and more. Through a partnership with the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County, the Plaza serves as a hub for public transit, including the CONNECT 1 BRT service.



“Transit serves as a lifeline to jobs, opportunities, and to improve communities and people’s lives.”

– Kelley Brookins, regional administrator
for the Federal Transit Administration



SERVICE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2024 was also a year of reinforcing our commitment to improving the riders experience as well as their safety. We began the process to add **25** new shelters. These shelters include new safety bollards as well as ADA boarding improvements in 2025. In addition, MCTS launched a pilot program retrofitting **six** shelters with real-time arrival in and audio displays in collaboration with Milwaukee Regional Medical Center. MCTS works tirelessly to ensure that our riders receive the best possible service and that starts at the planning level. MCTS is an integral partner in many state and municipal infrastructure improvement projects. In 2024, MCTS actively participated in the design and planning for **79** street projects as well as the construction phase for **20** street construction projects.

Additionally, MCTS advanced transit supporting infrastructure on **7** projects including: W. Walnut St., N. Van Buren St., W. Highland Ave., W. Hampton Ave., E. North Ave., W. North Ave., and E. Juneau Ave - as well as a new private residential development on 1st and National. These accomplishments highlight our efforts to improve public transit in Milwaukee County.



SERVING PARATRANSIT RIDERS THROUGH TRANSIT PLUS

Providing the highest quality, safe and reliable service to our Transit Plus riders is our highest priority.

Over the past year, MCTS has seen significant service improvements in all areas related to our paratransit services, with several performance indicators going above contract requirements. We continue to meet with our current vendor, TransDev, multiple times per week to improve timely and efficient services to ensure our clients have the transit access they deserve.

Highlights of 2024 include the 364,360 rides served, new technology to enhance service, and collaboration with paratransit riders through a paratransit task force.

- Successful launch of Same Day Ride pilot program including developing program parameters, issuance of an RFI, contract creation, client communication, client data entry, program marketing, and the development of invoicing and contract monitoring processes.
- Applied for and were fully awarded two 5310 grants for 2025-2026- Mobility Management and Account Based Fare Collection.
- Launched IVR reminder call system, My Transit Manager App and My Agency portal to improve customer access to trip information.
- Participated in the interdepartmental Task Force to identify opportunities for improving communication with riders on fixed route wayfinding and service disruptions.
- Created a process to educate conditionally eligible paratransit clients on the availability of travel training to help them learn how to ride the bus when their disability allows it. Developed a Travel Training introduction video as part of this effort.
- Worked with Marketing and Transportation to create new mobility device securement video for bus operators.
- Coordinated the installation of braille signs on BRT platform validators.
- Partnered with Transdev to evaluate and make suggestions to strengthen the ADA sensitivity training provided to new paratransit drivers.
- Investigated and selected a solution for account-based fare collection for paratransit riders.

364,360

rides on Transit Plus in 2024.

TRANSIT PLUS CONTINUED

- Developed and launched a new tracking system for tracking assessments from the point of receiving an application, through scheduling the assessment and corresponding transportation and then entering the final assessment results. This streamlined the assessment process.
- Updated our assessment coding sheet to be more streamlined and efficient.
- Coordinated paratransit service through the duration of the Republican National Convention.
- Developed new Transit Plus Key Performance Indicators Dashboard.
- Implemented a Google API process for comparing the time of each paratransit ride to its fixed route counterpart to evaluate for ride duration violations.
- Oversight, management and support of our contracted provider to improve performance on contract Key Performance Indicators and improve service to our clients.
- Documented, processed and investigated 1,038 complaints and 56 commendations.



TRANSIT PLUS BY THE NUMBERS

Through the end of November, our service has:

- Processed **1,742** incoming applications
- Completed **2,018** ticket orders
- Taken **8,927** Transit Plus Queue Calls

The Mobility Management team has completed:

- ADA sensitivity training for **90** new bus operators
- ADA sensitivity training for **9** new platform instructors
- **307** operators received refresher mobility device training
- **123** sessions of 1-on-1 travel training
- Staffed booths at **7** resource fairs
- **57** Freedom on Wheels group bus training sessions

Reliable, safe public transit options are paramount in addressing health and economic disparities across our community. Every day, the Milwaukee County Transit System connects residents with jobs, education, health services, and recreation. That's why we must continue investing in MCTS to maintain routes, replace our aging bus fleet, and ensure transit security remains throughout the system. I'm looking forward to supporting MCTS and transit-oriented development in the years ahead, because this is about creating family-supporting jobs, helping businesses succeed, boosting property values, and fostering vibrant communities. I'm also ready to work with partners in Milwaukee County and across Wisconsin to advocate for transportation funding from state and federal partners so we can keep providing and expanding public transit services in the future.

DAVID CROWLEY
MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE



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