

TRANSIT INSIDER

MCTS NEWS FOR STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS



QTR 4, 2020



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

THE ROAD AHEAD

Dan Boehm, MCTS Managing Director

When the COVID-19 viral pandemic hit our nation this spring, transit was quickly considered critical transportation infrastructure by Federal, State and local governments. MCTS transported healthcare workers along with many others who work in essential service industries. Even though ridership dropped to half its normal level, the availability of federal funding provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020 helped keep ample buses on the road so riders could be physically distanced. It is unclear when ridership will return to normal, but one thing is clear — transit will continue to be important for our community during the pandemic and as a prerequisite for businesses to reopen.

Even though the federal CARES Act funding is helping MCTS offset passenger revenue losses in the short term (2020-2021), we cannot lose sight of the fact that, in order to stabilize and expand transit in Milwaukee County and southeastern Wisconsin, we need additional state aids and local tools to raise revenue.

If the status quo — stagnant funding— persists, the risk that transit service contracts is very real. As transit contracts, automotive traffic will overwhelm city streets, jobs will be further out of reach for vulnerable residents, air quality will worsen, and health disparities along lines of race and class will grow wider.

For the first time in many years, the State of Wisconsin's 2019-2021 biennial budget included a critically needed increase in mass transit and paratransit aid. Looking ahead, additional State aid will be necessary to stabilize local transit services. At the same time, State and local governments are facing revenue challenges as a result of COVID-19. Providing Milwaukee County the opportunity to pursue a 1% local option sales tax would offer a more sustainable revenue source to continue operations for essential services like transit — at no cost to the state.

Increases in funding will help MCTS provide transit service in a way that ensures healthcare access and continuation of economic activity. Through decisive action, State lawmakers can provide better transit, and combat the inequities in public health and economic status that the pandemic squarely put a spotlight on. Nondrivers and people who rely on transit enabled our communities to survive during the darkest days of the COVID-19 crisis. As we emerge from the pandemic in 2021, it is critical to preserve access to opportunity through safe, affordable, and convenient public transit. We clearly need help from the State and ongoing support from the Federal Government now, as much as ever.

Everyone who values transportation can help by advocating for transit with elected officials. [Click here](#) to enter your address and find out who your representatives are.

TRANSIT SPOTLIGHT

MCTS NEXT: COUNTY BOARD APPROVES PLAN

On September 24, the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors approved MCTS NEXT, the agency's first comprehensive route redesign project in decades. MCTS will now present its plans to roll out system changes to the Transportation, Public Works and Transit Committee on December 2. A detailed communications and public outreach plan will be announced in January. Once fully implemented, MCTS NEXT will help more people get to work, school and everywhere they are going — faster and easier.

MCTS NEXT

Benefits of MCTS NEXT include:



Expanded High Frequency Service

This means there will be a larger number of routes where buses come every 15 minutes or better. 160,000 more people and 43,000 additional jobs will be served by these high frequency routes



More service along high-demand corridors



Less waiting when transferring between routes



Service that is easier to use and understand



New service to major job centers and grocery stores



Faster travel times

Click [here](#) to watch videos explaining the changes that will be coming to specific routes.

MCTS NEXT is cost-neutral — meaning it was created based on the existing budget to ensure that operating costs remain consistent.



NEWS ON THE STREET A FRESH LOOK

MCTS and the South 27th Street Business Improvement District (BID) are partnering on a project that will beautify three existing bus shelters on Milwaukee's south side.

The BID is working with local artists and fabricators to produce custom-made metal panels (see graphic to left) that will be installed in place of glass on three shelters at 27th and Oklahoma, and 27th and Ohio in the coming months.

This project ultimately benefits area businesses, bus passengers and the general public, who will all appreciate the fresh look!

**ARTIST'S RENDERING OF METAL PANELS THAT
WILL BE INSTALLED ON SHELTERS.**

WHO'S DRIVING OUR SUCCESS

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

In her role as Director of Transportation at MCTS, Denise Wandke leads a massive team that includes more than 800 bus drivers, route supervisors, transit security officers, dispatchers, trainers, and support staff.

Denise, who is the first woman to ever hold this position in Milwaukee County, started working for MCTS in 1994 as a part-time bus operator out of the Fond du Lac Station. Over the next 27 years, her hard work and dedication broke barriers within the company and led to nine different promotions. Prior to her current role, Denise served as a bus operator, platform instructor, relief station clerk, route supervisor, dispatcher, coordinator of dispatch operations, station supervisor, division manager, and assistant director of transportation.

This unique set of experiences means she has firsthand knowledge of what her staff face each day, which is helpful when it comes time to solve problems and make difficult high-level decisions.

"I've done it all — and there isn't anything I wouldn't do," Denise said. "My employees are the reason I get up every day. They're the reason I'm here."



DENISE WANDKE

"Everyone has a story, and it's important that I have empathy for everyone I meet."

You can reach her at dwandke@mcts.org.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

WHO'S DRIVING OUR SUCCESS CONTINUED...

Denise is known for going above and beyond the call of duty. When winter storms shut down the city and buses were stuck in deep snow, Denise was regularly seen with a shovel digging the vehicles out. When unrest led to significant service interruptions, Denise was in the field to monitor conditions and help coordinate detours. Once, when Denise arrived at a company-involved accident, the bus driver burst into tears because he was so grateful that she cared enough to check on him.

Denise's coworkers enjoy her sense of humor and positive attitude. Denise credits her way of thinking, in part, with an experience she had as a new bus driver. One day, she was in a bad mood while behind the wheel. Then she met a passenger who was paraplegic and used a motorized wheelchair to get around. The man's wheelchair was controlled by a device that he held in his mouth. As she helped him exit the bus, the smiling passenger looked up at her, thanked her, and told her to have a great day.

"I'll never forget that moment — which changed my life," Denise said. "It just gave me a whole different perspective. It helped me realize that everyone has a story, and it's important that I have empathy for everyone I meet."



Director of Transportation Denise Wandke helps shovel out a bus stuck in snow last winter.

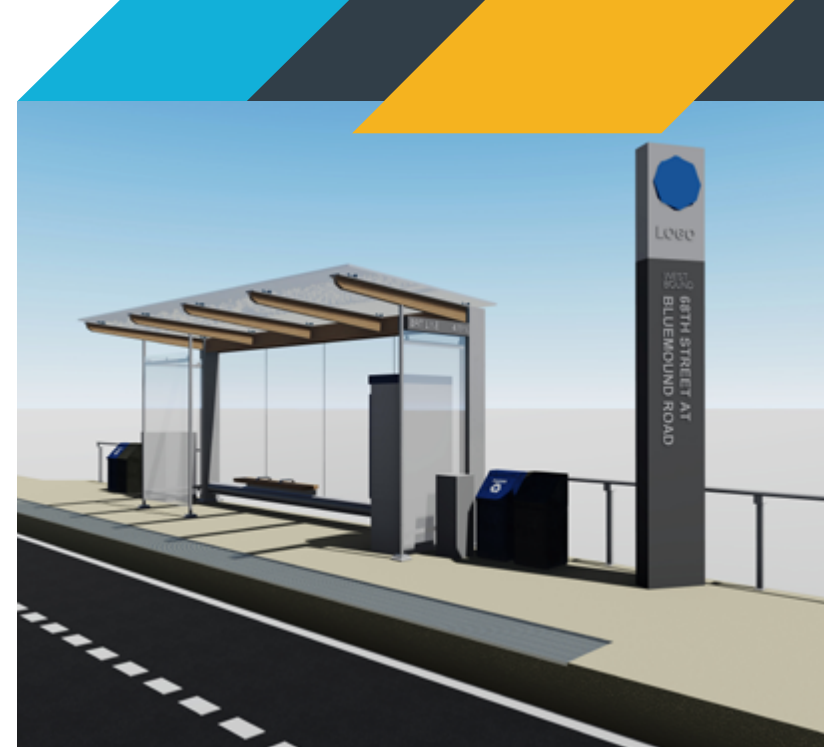
INNOVATION NEWS

BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT)

The new year is expected to bring with it progress on the East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line in Milwaukee County — a first-of-its-kind project in Wisconsin.

MCTS recently completed a risk evaluation and assessment required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The FTA concluded that the project design was within the acceptable risk levels and the County and MCTS can advance toward requesting construction contractor bids.

Meanwhile, the County anticipates receiving a final BRT grant agreement from the FTA as early as December, barring any unforeseen circumstances or delays. The current schedule will take advantage of the 2021 construction season with revenue service beginning in Fall 2022.



MCTS MAKES PROGRESS ON BATTERY ELECTRIC BUS VENDOR SELECTION FOR THE EAST-WEST BRT

As of this writing, submissions from the Battery Electric Bus (BEB) RFP are being scored. The next step in the RFP process will be virtual presentations by the vendors. After that, the RFP committee will evaluate pricing and technical scores. We anticipate awarding a vendor by the end of 2020. Eleven BEBs will be built specifically for the BRT route. It takes approximately 18 months to build a battery-powered bus from start to finish.

ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

RACIAL EQUITY WORKGROUP SCRUBS JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR POTENTIAL RACIAL BIAS

The MCTS Racial Equity Work Group is undertaking a large-scale initiative to review job descriptions. For each description, the group will examine and evaluate whether the position has the following:

- Educational requirements that are tailored to the needs of the position. Also, if there are any groups that could be disproportionately impacted by these requirements.
- Any potential unintended consequences of these requirements, and if so, what can be done to mitigate them.
- Required tests that are appropriately tailored to the job function.
- Any other aspects of the job description that may create a racial equity concern.

Recommendations from the Racial Equity Work Group will be shared with MCTS's Human Resources Department which continuously updates job descriptions as positions become available.



**MCTS IS COMMITTED TO ACHIEVING RACIAL
EQUITY SO THAT MILWAUKEE CAN BECOME THE
HEALTHIEST COUNTY IN THE STATE.**

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

PARATRANSIT DIRECTOR APPLAUDED FOR WORK WITH COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

At the October 14, 2020 meeting of the Finance Committee, 13th District Supervisor Willie Johnson, Jr. spoke highly of MCTS's Director of Paratransit Services, Fran Musci. Supervisor Johnson said that he appreciated Fran's consistent attendance and standing report that she provides to the Commission for Persons with Disabilities. Members of the Commission, such as Supervisor Johnson, are appointed by the County Executive. The Commission is organized by the Milwaukee County Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD). Its mission is to promote the independence of persons with disabilities, remove attitudinal and environmental barriers, promote maximal level of independence with dignity for persons with disabilities, and has primary responsibility for assessing and finding solutions for the needs of Milwaukee County residents with disabilities.

Fran's monthly paratransit report to Commission members offers insight into transit issues and other trends that might impact persons with disabilities — both with paratransit and fixed route service. Fran has been providing monthly reports to the Commission for three years since taking the role of

Paratransit Director. She started her transportation career with MCTS in April 2004. Typical topics revolve around budget, constituent issues, and answering questions from members of the Commission. The goal of the Commission meetings is to enhance conversations between the OPD, the public and transit to meet the needs of persons with disabilities in Milwaukee County. A recent example of a successful collaboration between MCTS paratransit and other County departments was making voting accessible. That effort included partnerships with the Department on Aging, the Disability Resource Center and the Aging Resource Center, to enable seniors and people with disabilities to vote.

Fran enjoys helping bring all Milwaukee County service groups together to support equal access and to connect persons with disabilities to all Milwaukee County services.



MCTS IN THE COMMUNITY

NEW COMMUNITY PAGE ON RIDEMCTS.COM

Find out what MCTS is doing with community partners and participate in community listening sessions by monitoring our new calendar feature at RideMCTS.com/Community.



GET INVOLVED WITH THE BUS SHELTER ART PROJECT

The Bus Shelter Art Project is a unique effort by MCTS to spread art across the community. This innovative program, which started in 2018, gives local artists access to the most exclusive canvases in town: MCTS bus shelters! We encourage non-profits and neighborhood groups to contact MCTS to learn how to sponsor the installation of murals on bus shelters in their area!

SEE PROJECT HERE



NEW ROUTE PROVIDES ACCESS TO JOBS

MCTS launched a new bus route this fall that connects Milwaukee County residents with jobs at Amazon's new fulfillment center in Oak Creek.

Route 81 (Amazon-Oak Creek) began service on October 11, operating seven days a week between the intersections of N. 35th Street & W. Fond du Lac Avenue in Milwaukee and S. 13th Street & W. Ryan Road in Oak Creek. Buses have stops on portions of W. Fond du Lac Avenue, N. 17th Street, W. Walnut Street, N. and S. 6th Street.

In addition to operating along those busy corridors, Route 81 also connects with 16 existing MCTS bus routes. This means passengers who use Routes 12, 14, 19, 21, 22, 30, 31, 33, 35, 56, 57, 60, 80, GoldLine, BlueLine and PurpleLine can transfer to Route 81 from neighborhoods all across the County.

MCTS worked closely with officials from Amazon and the City of Oak Creek to make sure the route's schedule synchronizes with employee shift times at the facility.



ROUTE 81

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This new MCTS bus route is an example of how Milwaukee County is investing in equity and seeking to bridge the gap in racial disparities across the board. With this new route, residents now have access to an exciting employment opportunity that would have otherwise been out of reach.

*-Milwaukee County
Executive David Crowley*

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Amazon is now Oak Creek's largest employer and we're pleased that folks all across Milwaukee County now have access to these new jobs thanks to Route 81 and the entire MCTS transit network.

*-Oak Creek Mayor Dan
Bukiewicz*

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We commend Milwaukee County for investing in public transit to connect their residents to job opportunities, not just at Amazon, but throughout the County.

*-Director of Operations
at Amazon's Oak Creek
Fulfillment Center Cody
Voegerl*

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ON BOARD

U-PASS CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY, MOUNT MARY IS LATEST TO SIGN ON TO PROGRAM

MCTS's U-PASS program officially launched in 1995 with UWM, Marquette and MATC. U-PASS has generated more than 2.2 million rides each year. Now that figure will grow with the addition of Mount Mary University, which entered into a contract offering the U-PASS for the 2020-2021 academic year.

U-PASS is a valuable student amenity, as it provides unlimited rides across the entire MCTS system all semester allowing students access to campus, library, work, and social activities.

The MCTS Business Services and Planning teams started meeting with Mount Mary's Office of Student Affairs in Fall 2018. They collaborated to customize a student survey and found that:

- Students were excited the University was exploring U-PASS and wanted their feedback.
- Students said the U-PASS was a pathway to job opportunities with a safe way to travel to/from campus.
- Students wanted the freedom to travel around the city and not feel landlocked when living on campus.
- Students who commuted to campus liked having the bus as an option.



MCTS CURRENTLY PARTNERS WITH 6 LOCAL HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- UWM
- MARQUETTE
- MATC
- MIAD
- MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY
- BRYANT & STRATTON

**CONTACT JENNIFER ORTEGA,
BUSINESS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
MANAGER, FOR MORE INFORMATION.
(414) 937-3248 JORTEGA@MCTS.ORG**

MCTS ADDRESSES HUMAN TRAFFICKING

To help observe National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month in January, MCTS is getting ready to launch an effort to fight human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a modern-day form of slavery that denies freedom to women, men and children around the world — including Wisconsin. In some cases, traffickers trick, defraud or physically force victims into providing sex for money. In other cases, victims are lied to, assaulted, threatened or manipulated into working under inhumane, illegal or otherwise unacceptable conditions.

Those committing these crimes use America's roads, highways, railways, rivers, and skies to traffic victims. Public transportation is sometimes used because it is low cost, has greater anonymity in ticket buying and has less direct interaction with government officials.

MCTS is committed to raising awareness among the public and teaching employees how to recognize and report suspected cases. MCTS will provide its bus drivers, route supervisors, transit security officers, and dispatchers the tools they need to help make a difference. Look for more information about this important campaign in the coming months.

A poster with a dark background. At the top, it says "Sex Trafficking, Forced Labor, Domestic Servitude:" in white. Below that, a yellow banner reads "HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS HAPPENING IN OUR COMMUNITY". The center features a close-up of a young woman's face with a serious expression, set against a background of many small, faded faces. Below her, another yellow banner says "ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM." Underneath that, white text reads "IF SOMETHING DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT, IT PROBABLY ISN'T. REPORT TIPS AND GET HELP 24/7:". At the bottom, there are three contact options: "CALL 1-888-373-7888" with a phone icon, "TEXT 'BeFree' (233733)" with a text icon, and "CHAT LIVE HumanTraffickingHotline.org" with a chat icon. A circular logo for "WISCONSIN COUNTY" is in the bottom right corner.

Sex Trafficking, Forced Labor, Domestic Servitude:

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS
HAPPENING IN OUR COMMUNITY**

ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM.

IF SOMETHING DOESN'T SEEM RIGHT, IT PROBABLY ISN'T.
REPORT TIPS AND GET HELP 24/7:

 **CALL** 1-888-373-7888  **TEXT** "BeFree" (233733)

 **CHAT LIVE** HumanTraffickingHotline.org



UPCOMING ISSUE

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

- MCTS NEXT: Phase 1 Rolls Out in Spring.
- E-W Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Updates.
- N-S 27th Street Corridor Study Updates.
- MCTS Student Essay Scholarship Honoring Rosa Parks.



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

[READ ARCHIVED VERSIONS OF TRANSIT INSIDER HERE](#)

