

CITY OF MADISON TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

ACTION ITEM DETAIL - JUNE 24, 2020

ACTION TITLE: Approval of the Metro Transit Illustrative Service Restoration Map for Aug. 2020

PRESENTED BY: Metro Transit, Justin Stuehrenberg

ACTION SUMMARY

Metro has developed an illustrative map for the restoration of service in August 2020 as ridership starts to return in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This map represent approximately 85% of the pre-COVID-19 service levels. Transportation Commission (TC) is being asked to approve this illustrative map.

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, Metro substantially reduced service, suspended fare collection, instituted capacity limits on the bus, and added staff time to sanitize buses due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the dramatic drop in ridership that resulted. Since that time, ridership on the system has begun to increase as Dane County entered phase 1 and now phase 2 of the reopening plan. Also, the University of Wisconsin has indicated that they will reopen in some capacity in August of 2020, signaling a significant expected increase in ridership. However, we expect some level of bus capacity limits will remain.

Also due to the pandemic, expected tax revenues to the City of Madison and partner entities, as well as fare revenues, have dropped. Because of this, Metro's financial outlook is unknown but likely to be worse than prior to the pandemic. The Federal CARES Act is providing some relief in the short term, but that likely will not address longer term impacts. Prior to the pandemic, Metro had been operating at a significant deficit in the number of bus drivers on staff due to high turnover rates and a tight labor market. Currently, approximately 15% of the budgeted bus driver positions are vacant. This had resulted in significant overtime expenditures and challenges with providing the scheduled service.

Finally, Metro is initiating a comprehensive Network Redesign study in the coming months that will include a significant public outreach effort. This study is likely to result in a substantially revised route network in 2021.

DISCUSSION

Given the uncertain financial outlook, Metro is seeking to only restore the amount of service that we have a high degree of confidence can be fiscally sustained for years to come. Metro is proposing to build a service plan around the number of bus drivers we have now, which would result in roughly 85% of pre-COVID service levels and substantially reduce the overtime costs going forward. If revenues exceed our expectations as we move forward, we can incrementally add services back in the future.

Given the proposed reduction in service and the need to maintain capacity on high-demand routes in order to keep buses from exceeding COVID-19 related capacity limits, this largely mirrors the existing service map. Some neighborhoods had service prior to the pandemic but that service was removed in March and have been operating without any service for the past 3 months. Many of those neighborhoods would not see their service restored with this plan. The illustrative network map highlights these coverage changes, and Metro staff is seeking TC approval for this plan in order to proceed with the development of route-by-route detail and equity analyses. This additional detail would be presented at the July TC meeting for final approval.

Given the extraordinary circumstances of this pandemic, Metro has not had sufficient time to conduct outreach efforts that would have been considered standard for changes of this magnitude prior to the pandemic. Technically, these changes would all be service enhancements when compared to existing service levels. Metro is proposing to use the Network Redesign study to conduct the outreach around what service coverage is appropriate for Madison going forward, and if restoration of coverage is warranted it would be done through that process.

It's important to note that while there won't be a significant public outreach effort at this time, the team is analyzing impacts to equity to ensure that these changes are not disproportionately impacting disadvantaged communities.

Here is a summary of how to read the map:

- No shading – Trips will continue to serve the corridor
- Red shading – No service currently operating, and is NOT proposed to be re-introduced
- Yellow shading – No service currently operating, and IS proposed to be re-introduced in some capacity
- Green shading – Service was previously only on weekends, but now running weekdays as well, and is proposed to continue on Weekdays
- Blue shading – Service was previously only on weekends, but now running weekdays as well, and is NOT proposed to continue on Weekdays