

CRANES

Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability

On behalf of its member organizations and individuals, advocating collaboratively for the environment of the South Central Wisconsin region (eight counties: Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Rock and Sauk) toward a high quality of life; an ecologically sustainable and just culture; and, the celebration of the beauty of this place, both natural and built.

VISION

The Capital area's environment, including water, land, and air resources, will be conserved or restored to ensure the region's quality of life and the beauty of this special place, for all who live or visit here, now and in the future.

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

*Earth/Art® Resources
Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy
League of Women Voters ~ Dane County
Madison Area Bus Advocates
Madison Audubon Society
Sierra Club ~ Four Lakes Group
West Waubesa Preservation Coalition*

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A Wisconsin Non-Profit [EIN 26-4056421]

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(a tax-exempt 501(c)3 non-profit)
BusAdvocates.org

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TO: Madison Transportation & Planning Board (TPPB)
FROM: *Capitol Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability* (CRANES)
DATE: 16 August 2021
SUBJECT: Metro Fare Options

Dear TPPB members:

CRANES supports the Madison Area Bus Advocates position paper on cash fares; this is important for equity reasons, among others. Going fare-less systemwide would of course the best option overall for equity.

As we have done since late spring, CRANES today requests that TPPB delay any action on fare options as long as possible, and no earlier than October.

We have noted staff's pre-emptive and pre-mature recommendation against consideration of FFT even before public input. We also note the lack of a public engagement plan for this issue; contrast that with the robust plan for the JWA route redesign project.

In late spring, CRANES advised the TPPB and Transportation Commission (TC) that scheduling public input on this matter for late July and early August would be problematic. As predicted, there have been delays getting information from city staff/contractors, due to their travel/vacations.

Getting reviews of the Metro study by FFT experts during these summer months also has, as anticipated, proved difficult. Four reviews promised by national/international experts have been only partially completed, or are as yet to arrive.

As staff has stated to TPPB, public meetings/hearings heretofore have not been held during the summer, because post-secondary campus communities have a reduced presence. Staff justified this significant departure from public participation practice by claiming that there will be no substantive changes for those communities. That is however not true for the FFT option, because of implications for changes to current partner revenue structures. It is not even true for the digital fare collection options explored in the Metro study, if only on technical or rider preference grounds.

As Metro staff has already confirmed to TPPB, there is no need to act now. There likely is not a need for Metro staff to let RFPs by December. *In a conversation earlier today with the regional sale representative for a major provider of digital fare collection equipment, it was that stated that only 180 days would be required for provision of such equipment, once a contract is finalized. This includes site installation and training, and assumes no contract add-ons.*

It is hoped that a complete analysis of the Metro staff fare options report can be completed in September.

We can however already say that other local and outside expert reviewers have pointed out several basic problems with the Metro fare options study, especially as regards FFT, that argue for TPPB delaying action today. Some of these problems have already been shared with you. For example, the FFT portion of the study relies mostly on a traditional cost benefit analysis, and a narrow version at that, with almost no consideration of social benefits (including equity).

Also, the city's existing urban forestry fee was used as a proxy for calculating per residential household cost ranges; this likely is very misleading and almost certainly legally indefensible. Furthermore, calculations for this proxy were done

with Madison boundaries in mind, without consideration of the Metro service area (which includes several other cities) much less the entire county or the southcentral WI region, which do or can benefit from FFT.

Also, there were no surveys of:

- 1) Drivers (with implications for recruitment/retention, as well as Metro expenses)
- 2) Corporations (regarding potential underwriting)
- 3) Municipalities (regarding moving to an inter-municipal agreement on tax or fee revenue).

Staff claims that there is no viable way to fund FFT. This is however impossible to ascertain on the basis of this study. It is also unclear as to why Dane County's executive objected to the Mayor of Madison's request for consideration of potential countywide transit revenue sources.

There was also no survey of bus riders, a key stakeholder regarding equity. Staff has, in presenting the study, claimed that a \$2 fare is of no consequence (adding that riders are focused on service, as though these two matter are mutually exclusive). This is contradicted by multiple FFT studies, as well as the IMPLAN economic impact analysis done for Kansas City (attached); note also that analysis emphasis on how FFT can free up household funds for housing, a pressing equity issue there and here in Madison.

Reviewers were somewhat shocked by the "Lessons Learned" section. They pointed out that it seems to be a groundless dog-whistle for fears about homeless riders. The Metro report exaggerates the small relevant portion (1.5%) of incidents during the March-September fare free pandemic service period; it also fails to identify how many of those incidents were due to an initial failure to provide necessary additional transit service between the Warner Park men's night shelter and The Beacon, forcing riders who were homeless onto commuter lines already constrained by a capacity already reduced by pandemic-related public health orders.

The "Lessons Learned" section also quotes a Metro manager recommending fares as a solution to this problem and to that of loopers (folks who ride the bus without a destination in mind). Charging a fare is however a barrier to all low income folks, not just persons who are homeless, with profound equity implications, as well as possible legal implications. Competent managers for existing and new FFT systems elsewhere have communicated to us that ridership by the homeless has been a non-issue, even during the pandemic. Some systems have proactively partnered with existing social agencies (at no additional cost). To deal with loopers, Corvallis OR simply added a sentence to its rider behavior protocols, requiring all persons to exit the bus at the end of a loop. Only one FFT transit system, fairly new, reported relevant problems, but they seem not to have managed proactively their situation at all. Conversely, L.A. Metro reported that assaults on drivers have dropped to nearly zero on their pilot FFT service. This seems relevant to Madison, given the recent assaults on bus drivers here (by persons who were not homeless, it should be noted).

Reviewers to date have also pointed out that the study's authors were not identified, and that the Metro manager who was interviewed for the study's "Lessons Learned" section was not identified. Metro staff has since provided this information to us, but the public version of study has not been revised to share this information.

In closing, CRANE would like to remind TPPB that employees of Madison and some other municipalities, as well as many post-secondary campus community members, already use our transit system on a fare free basis. We applaud the extension of fare free transit (FFT) to some youth this summer.

We urge Metro to consider extending FFT to other community members, as is being done elsewhere on the basis of equity. For example, Boston's regional transit service has converted a line that is heavily used by persons who are low income essential workers to fare free. Here in Madison, it would make sense to pilot FFT on an existing line that has capacity. It also very likely makes sense to consider piloting FFT on the south and north (BT light) legs of the BRT system, for equity reasons.

Thank you for your timely consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



CRANES Vice-President