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Equity and Access: Consider Public Lands and Parks

Prepared for the **Transportation Policy and Planning Board and the Transportation Commission** - City of Madison (7/2021)

Access to Parks and Trails

Access to public lands is more than simply transportation to facilities. It can include entrance fees, a lack of gear or equipment, facilities that don't meet the needs of differently abled, a lack of experience or just feeling safe and welcome. These barriers are real and need to be addressed as well. But whether or not you can even get to the park of your choice to participate in the recreational activity of your choice provides the starting point for addressing access issues.

Why is this important now?

The City of Madison and Madison Metro are undergoing significant redesign and infrastructure changes that will determine the future of transportation in Madison, the surrounding communities and Dane County. These include: the implementation of a BRT system, the overall Madison Metro Redesign effort, and the Connect Greater Madison (2050) update of the Regional Transportation Plan.

Sierra Club Four Lakes Group - Positions on Access

The Four Lakes Group, as well as the Wisconsin Chapter and the National Sierra Club has advocated for equity and access both in transportation work as well as in our parks and public lands work. Specifically, the Four Lakes Group has supported

- transit oriented development projects (Oscar Meyer & Westgate mall for example),
- expanding bus service to City of Madison Parks (Vilas Park Master Plan update)
- expanding public transit access to Dane County Parks and to plan ahead for making improvements that would enable public transit access as a part of the current Dane County Parks Plan.

The disconnect between workers and job centers

The [Arrive Together Report](#) published in October 2018 and co-authored by a coalition of transportation advocacy organizations in Wisconsin, focuses on the need to address the disconnect between transit systems and routes, workers and the location of jobs in communities including Madison. These disconnects also impact access to recreational locations.

The analysis of the Madison Metropolitan Area starting on page 41 indicates that we have work to do. Systemic racism practiced by design through redlining, infrastructure development or lack of it resulted in pockets of people of color and low income isolated from other neighborhoods, jobs and parks.

Access to Parks and Trails in Madison & Dane County

These pockets also overlap to some extent with an analysis done by the Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization of Environmental Justice Priority Areas and Employment Centers. [This presentation given on January 6th 2021](#) to the Greater Madison MPO Board provides confirmation that there is a need to improve transportation that will benefit the residents of the priority areas. The analyses from this presentation should be considered in both the transit development plan and the Metro Network Redesign as recommended in the presentation.

South side gaps in service

An important pattern identified in these analyses was that short distance trips (4 miles or less) are not well served as they are often lateral (adjacent neighborhoods) in nature which is not well served by the current transit system. One such zone identified stretches from south of the beltline on either side of Highway 14 east towards the Capital Springs Recreation Area and William G Lunney Lake Farm Park, a recreation area and park that Dane County Parks has identified as important for public transit.

Dane County Parks access

In order to expand access to Dane County parks, we recognize that Madison Metro is the main provider of public transit in our region. And we understand that without authorizing legislation for Regional Transit Authorities, which the Sierra Club has long supported, what is possible right now may have limits.

However, it has not stopped the Four Lakes Group from looking ahead during the last Dane County Parks planning process and the completion and now implementation of the Dane County Climate Action Plan. Nor should it keep our region and the City of Madison from looking ahead during the current planning processes and opportunities underway.

Specifically, during the parks plan, the Four Lakes group offered the following comments and recommendations:

The Four Lakes Group supports improving transportation access to parks and open space lands. These public lands need to be accessible to people with disabilities and those who cannot or do not drive. The plan should include a transportation goal and measures that include:

- *Provide additional linkage between parks and open space lands through the growing system of bike and hiking trails.*
- *Plan and implement several models for use of mass transit to reach two to five destination parks.*
- *Link the public lands and trails to existing and proposed transit routes for buses. Pick several routes that could be easily modified and then pick two or three that would require more significant adjustments to connect over the next five years.*
- *Examine the resource allocation amongst parks both nearby and remote with the objective of ensuring that everyone in the urban centers can reach a Dane County Park or Open Space without using a personal automobile.*
- *Continue to expand opportunities for people that are differently abled and trails that are both wheelchair and stroller accessible.*

Access to Parks and Trails in Madison & Dane County

- *Make sure to include bus-friendly turn-arounds, pull-ins or parking as appropriate in operational upgrades to lands.*

Dane County Parks Analysis of Transportation and Park Access

We have been working with Dane County Parks Department and attached are two documents that the Department has prepared.

The first is an analysis prepared by Dane County Parks Department in preparation for a recent meeting with representatives from Madison Metro and the Redesign Team.

Please note the discussion of the differences between county and city parks and the recreational niches that the county parks serve.

Dane County Parks Department prioritized the Capital Springs Recreation Area corridor that includes the Lussier Family Heritage Center located in the William G Lunney County Park. The Center is becoming a focal point for activities, interns, youth programs and it offers camping within the city boundaries.

The second document is a summary of a joint survey. We undertook the survey anticipating the Madison Metro Redesign with a desire to know more about transportation access issues in our community while recognizing transportation is only one of a range of issues keeping people from enjoying our parks and public lands.

The bottom Line

Today, we can plan for and achieve the mutual goals of access to jobs, health care, education and recreation.

Currently, public transit serves six properties in the Dane County Parks System. At the end of the redesign process, more Dane County park properties should be connected to the system. And the Connect Greater Madison 2050 Regional Transportation Plan should reflect this and a more ambitious vision connecting the people in Greater Madison to public lands via the public transit system.

Should you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Liz Wessel, Land Equity & Access team for the Four Lakes Group, 608-238-9934 or lizard59sc@yahoo.com.