

November 11, 2008

Dear Alders:

As you weigh the arguments for and against a bus fare increase, I hope you will consider the need to raise fares to protect Metro's financial stability and to invest in badly needed service improvements. Here are a few points that have occurred to me as I have followed the debate:

The city has made modest improvements in Metro's rolling stock, but in the estimation of many, has not improved Metro's service for many years. Rather than raise fares, we have balanced the budget by service cuts. Incomprehensibly, we cut out entire routes that were extremely popular, doing more to lose some riders and inconvenience others than any fare increase could accomplish.

Failure to improve service to peripheral or isolated neighborhoods is as bad as service cuts to the central city. People who live at the City's periphery need efficient bus service, too. In some peripheral areas there is none, and in most others, it is very inadequate.

The system has a safety problem that is both real and perceived. I imagine you have all heard from someone who has said, "I don't think it's safe to use the transfer points or to ride the bus at night." How can we retain loyal riders and attract new ones without investing in additional security?

Metro has burned through its operating reserve. This is too much like the State of Wisconsin operating without a rainy day fund. We all know it is a poor practice. We shouldn't set up Metro to continue without a reserve.

We need to extend to small employers the type of service contract Metro has negotiated with large employers and schools. Investing in this kind of contract will diversify Metro's ridership in important ways.

The Mayor's proposal to expand the Transit for Jobs program will help a significant number of lower-income riders get to work. This expansion will be another good investment in building ridership.

I agree that a \$.50 rate increase is a big bump. In hindsight, it probably would have been better to increase fares in smaller periodic increments than to wait until a large one became essential. However, postponing a fare increase now will make problem even worse, and probably sooner rather than later. I urge you to vote in favor of the \$.50 fare increase.

Sincerely,

Judy Olson

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