

# Public Transit Needs Assessment

The 2013-2017 Transit Development Plan for the Madison Urban Area (TDP) describes public transit needs in the cities of Madison, Fitchburg, Middleton, Sun Prairie, Verona, and nearby towns and villages. This urban area covers all fixed-route public transit systems in Dane County. The needs identified in the TDP relate to many aspects of transit service, including coverage area, frequency, capacity, scheduling, facilities, and travel times. The needs shown below summarize needs identified in the TDP outside of Metro Transit's core service area.

Projects and programs that address these needs are recommended for use of available federal, state, and local funding. This includes the federal Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities) program.

The number in parentheses indicates the general funding priority: 1 - maintain existing service, 2 - respond to growth, and 3 - respond to emerging community needs.

## ■ **Expansion of Metro Transit fixed-route and paratransit service, including a new bus storage and maintenance facility (1, 2)**

Bus service was expanded in east and southeast Madison (new routes 31, 33, and 35) with the August 2013 Metro Transit service change. Areas in need of bus service include the Village of McFarland, north Middleton, far southwest Madison, Waunakee, DeForest, and Sun Prairie. In addition, many residential and employment areas have only limited service or peak-period-only commuter service, and they lack off-peak, weekend, and paratransit service. In some cases, all-day service exists, but travel times are long enough that fixed-route public transportation is not practical. For instance, a mid-day, weekend, or evening commute from west or south Madison to east or north Madison may require two transfers and take over an hour.

Any expansion of peak-period transit service would require additional capacity for bus storage and maintenance. Metro Transit's garage on East Washington Avenue at Ingersoll Street is currently operating beyond capacity. New service in low density areas that cannot justify conventional fixed-route service may be

appropriate for flexible point-deviation service designs with small buses or cutaway vans, similar to Monona Lift. Enhancing service within Metro Transit's existing service area would improve people's access to jobs and services and reduce reliance on specialized transportation.

## ■ **Expanded service days and hours in areas with Metro or other public transit service (3)**

Overall, the span of service of most Metro Transit routes is good compared to peer systems. However, many low-wage workers work second- and third-shift jobs that may start or end when Metro Transit is not operating. Holiday service ends at about 7:00 pm, when many low-wage workers do not have the day off. Some transit agencies operate a skeletal "Night Owl" service between the end and start of normal service.

## ■ **New regional fixed-route bus service (3)**

Bus service is needed to connect Madison with regional neighbors in Dane County like DeForest, Sun Prairie, Cottage Grove, Stoughton, Evansville, Oregon, Mount Horeb, and Mazomanie; and also nearby places in surrounding counties like Columbus, Waterloo, Fort Atkinson, Sauk City, and Baraboo. This service may consist of either commuter service or a few trips scattered throughout the day. The service may have a demand-response component to it to serve medical or other trips meeting demonstrated needs, similar to Monona Lift or Sun Prairie Shuttle. Routes may be designed to connect with other transit service at transfer points or continue to central Madison.

## ■ **Improved accessibility and amenities at bus stops (1, 3)**

Metro Transit and the City of Madison are in the process of systematically upgrading bus stops to include concrete boarding platforms. However, many bus stops do not have these platforms, making it difficult for non-ambulatory people to use the fixed-route system. Benches are an important amenity for seniors in particular to

rest while waiting for the bus, and new benches and shelters may make it possible for some riders to transition from paratransit to fixed-route.

■ **Transit fare assistance for low-income families, homeless people, and conditionally eligible paratransit riders (1, 3)**

Providing fare assistance for people to use existing public transit, specialized transit, taxi, or other services is often the most cost-effective way to provide transportation for low-income people. Fares for taxi services – even publicly subsidized shared-ride services – can be particularly difficult for low-income people to afford. Additionally, providing conditionally eligible paratransit riders with a free transit pass to encourage fixed-route use has shown potential to achieve substantial cost savings for Metro Transit and increased mobility for the individual.

■ **Mobility training and fixed-route orientation (1)**

Navigating the Metro bus system can be a challenge, particularly for trips that involve a transfer, for new riders who are used to driving themselves, and for people with mental health, cognitive, or developmental disabilities. Training is needed, particularly for seniors, people with disabilities, and those who do not speak English well, who could use the fixed-route bus system with some coaching and encouragement. In many cases, removing this barrier improves people's mobility and independence while reducing Metro's cost by reducing reliance on paratransit. Mobility training and fixed-route orientation may include individual or group guidance sessions, in-person meetings, and/or travelling with the person until they feel comfortable making the trip on their own.

Although many users can become comfortable using fixed-route transit after a single training session, some users may need ongoing mobility training and transfer supervision. An example of transfer supervision would be deploying a staff member to a Metro Transit transfer point at key

times when people with disabilities are known to travel. The staff would assist individuals as needed and watch for problems such as people boarding the wrong bus.

■ **Safety on the Metro Transit system (1)**

Behavior problems and safety concerns are ongoing issues on some Metro Transit bus routes and at some of the transfer points, particularly the South Transfer Point. Metro Transit has addressed many of these issues by installing cameras on buses and at transfer points and by maintaining a police presence at the South Transfer Point during times when problems have been reported.

■ **Improved trip planning, usability of transit systems, and availability of informational materials (1, 3)**

Metro Transit distributes a full-size color system map and Ride Guide (with timetables and other information) aboard its buses and at selected locations. Trip planning is also available using Google Maps and other real-time electronic data sources. These materials need to be consistently improved upon for ease of use. Other peripheral transit systems, like Sun Prairie Shuttle, Monona Public Transit, and Portage Public Transit do not have similar maps and timetables. In some cases the information is available but is very difficult to find. Large-print materials would be useful for individuals with impaired vision.

■ **Improved regional schedule coordination and fare integration for fixed-route transit systems (1)**

The fixed-route transit systems in the Madison area – Metro Transit, Sun Prairie Transit, Monona Public Transportation, and Portage Public Transit – overlap at various locations such as East Towne Mall and the Capitol Square. Transfers are loosely coordinated but further integration of the systems would allow riders to more easily make connections. Integrating the fare structure would improve the mobility for the people using

the system because they would not have to pay two separate fares. Apart from transfers from Metro Transit to Monona Public Transportation, transfers are currently not honored among these systems. Where possible, suburban transit trips should provide timed transfers to the most direct Metro Transit routes so that travel times are minimized.

■ **Additional accessible private, on-demand taxi service (2, 3)**

Metro paratransit and other wheelchair-accessible specialized transportation services generally require a reservation at least a day before the trip. This does not allow for spontaneous or emergency trips. Metro paratransit service is also not available at times when the fixed-route services in the area are not running. Private wheelchair-accessible taxi service fills this gap in needed service. Union Cab and Van Go Taxi provide wheelchair-accessible on-demand taxi service; other cab companies only serve ambulatory passengers. Funding is needed to purchase new vehicles as well as to train drivers and to assist with lost fare revenue as a result of serving passengers with disabilities. The limited number of wheelchair-accessible vehicles can result in long waits for a taxi at certain times.

■ **New shared-ride taxi service and vehicles (1, 2)**

In small communities, publicly subsidized shared-ride taxi service is often the most efficient form of public transportation. Sun Prairie and Stoughton currently have the only publicly subsidized shared-ride taxi systems in Dane County. Other growing communities such as Verona and Waunakee could also use the approach to provide transit service within their communities and to neighboring suburban communities.

■ **A new intermodal bus terminal in central Madison (1, 3)**

With the closing of the Badger Bus Depot on Bedford Street in 2009, a new intermodal terminal is needed in central Madison. Besides centralizing intercity bus services, the terminal may serve regional transit riders using the new and expanded services described above.

# Specialized Transportation Needs Assessment

The following specialized transportation service needs were identified. The number in parentheses indicates the general funding priority: 1 - maintain existing service, 2 - respond to growth, and 3 - respond to emerging community needs.

Projects and programs that address these needs are recommended for use of available federal, state, and local funding. This includes the federal Section 5310 (Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities) program.

## ■ **Mobility management and improved information on specialized transportation services (1, 3)**

Dane County offers mobility management services to people to help them navigate the various public transit, paratransit, and specialized transportation systems that may be available to them. Some individuals are not fully aware of the wide variety of programs and their eligibility requirements; this is further complicated by the fact that some programs use multiple service providers, and some different programs use the same service provider. Continued funding is needed to maintain Dane County's one-call center. Improved information on specialized transportation services would help new and occasional users utilize the programs.

## ■ **In-person eligibility assessments for Metro Paratransit (1, 3)**

Metro Transit successfully demonstrated with a pilot project that it can transition from form-based assessments to in-person assessments to determine eligibility for its paratransit service. In-person assessments are substantially more accurate than form-based assessments because a staff member can interact with and observe the applicant. Accounts from the in-person assessment pilot program suggest that some applicants overstate the severity of their conditions in an attempt to become eligible while others understate the severity of their condition. More accurate assessments may systematically reduce Metro Transit's paratransit operating cost by shifting ineligible applicants

to fixed-route transit. Additionally, in-person assessments have been helpful in assisting people with travel training and fixed-route orientation because it connects people directly with Metro staff.

## ■ **Continued and additional personalized transportation to work for low-income ambulatory people (1, 2)**

With the consolidation of the Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program with MAP-21, YWCA may be forced to scale back or even eliminate the very important YW Transit JobRide program. This program is useful for people who cannot afford transportation to and from their jobs, but who are not elderly or disabled. In many cases personalized transportation is the most cost-effective way to provide this service where fixed-route transit is not feasible. Service needs are 24 hours per day and 365 days per year. This type of service also needs to have the flexibility to stop at day care centers en route for workers who care for children. The service should also be designed to provide group rides where possible.

## ■ **Financial assistance for low-income people to purchase or repair a vehicle for employment transportation (3)**

There is a need for financial assistance to low-income people to purchase or repair vehicles for employment transportation in areas or situations where public transit service, specialized transportation, and ride sharing are not practical – primarily in rural areas. The program should require participants to participate in the ridesharing program and should include financial planning and assistance to help recipients succeed in paying back the loan. Driver's license fees, insurance, and registration have also been identified as barriers for low-income people to access transportation.

■ **Additional scheduled group transportation services, particularly in areas with no public transit service (2, 3)**

Dane County's group ride programs (primarily GAS and RSG) are an effective way to meet the basic day-to-day needs of seniors and people with disabilities. Additional shopping and nutrition trips would improve options for these people.

■ **Funding for additional specialized transportation trips that are currently underserved. (3)**

Additional trips for purposes that are currently underserved, such as social activities, would be beneficial to seniors and people with disabilities. Frail seniors without friends or family members available to drive them to normal day-to-day activities may become isolated from society. Basic transportation services are vital to maintaining quality of life. Geographic areas with a need for additional service include DeForest, Waunakee, and Stoughton.

■ **Employee transportation assistance programs (1)**

The Madison Area Transportation Planning Board employs a full-time Transit Demand Management and Rideshare Program Coordinator who works with individuals and large employers in Dane County to promote and coordinate ridesharing, van/carpooling, transit, and other transportation alternatives for employees. However, additional resources are needed to encourage more employers to assist employees with transportation to work and provide incentives for them to do so. The need is particularly great in areas outside Metro's transit service area. For some low-wage workers, carpooling with fellow employees may be the most effective way to get to work. The outreach/advertising budget for the program is very limited.

■ **Additional funding for mileage reimbursement for RSVP volunteers (1)**

The cost of owning and operating a vehicle continues to increase. Continued and additional funding for mileage reimbursement is needed to maintain this program.

■ **Greater availability of affordable, accessible vehicles for non-profit organizations and agencies (1, 2)**

The cost of owning, insuring, and maintaining a vehicle is a barrier for many non-profit organizations and agencies. Solutions to increase the availability of vehicles may open new opportunities for seniors and people with disabilities.

■ **Flexible, short-notice medical transportation (3)**

Better transportation options are needed for seniors and people with disabilities for flexible, short-notice medical transportation. This service could be performed by on-call volunteers using their own vehicles or a more formal program. One particular unmet need is for medical trips involving sedation (which includes surgeries and other procedures). In those cases, the patient needs to be discharged to someone who can accept responsibility for them for 24 hours.

■ **New vehicles for paratransit, wheelchair-accessible taxi, and other specialized transportation services (1, 2)**

Paratransit and other light-duty transit vehicles typically last about five to seven years, necessitating routine vehicle procurements. Maintaining late-model fleets improves safety and fuel efficiency. Hybrid diesel-electric and alternative-fueled vehicles should be prioritized to help achieve sustainability goals. No procurements for new Metro paratransit vehicles are expected within the time-frame of this plan.

### ■ **Technology improvements on paratransit and specialized transportation services (3)**

Real-time arrival information is available on computers and smart phones for Metro Transit fixed-route buses, but not for Metro Paratransit or other specialized transportation services. Adding this service would be an asset to riders when their vehicle is running late – a situation which results in the highest number of complaints for paratransit. Fare collection and other technology improvements like online trip planning are also needed. Improved dispatching technology has proved to reduce costs while maintaining or improving service.

### ■ **Planning for new service and changes to existing service (3)**

Planning work is needed to advance the strategies presented in this plan. The availability of data showing how the various public transit and specialized transportation systems operate and how people use the system is limited. Community surveys may be helpful to determine if potential new services would be used.

# Coordination Needs

The following coordination needs were identified:

- **Establish a designated recipient and selection process for federal Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310) grants**

The MPO is in the process of working with Metro Transit to establish Metro Transit as the designated recipient of Section 5310 grants. Under this agreement, the MPO would be responsible for selecting projects and administering a competitive selection process, if used, and completing a project management plan. Metro Transit, as the designated recipient, would administer the grants.

- **Continued and improved coordination between Metro Paratransit service, Dane County Specialized Transportation Services, and other private services**

The City of Madison and Dane County coordinate successfully, minimizing duplication. This effort should be supported and expanded as new service needs are addressed.

- **Improved coordination of medical trips both within and between communities, and from surrounding counties**

Medical transportation to hospitals and medical centers in the Madison area is difficult for people who cannot make the trip themselves. Improved coordination has the potential to significantly reduce duplication and provide useful service.

Dialysis trips are particularly difficult to coordinate, despite the need for patients to make routine visits. Incentives are needed for dialysis centers to coordinate schedules for patients that live close to each other. Staff resources are needed to improve coordination between drivers. For instance, a relative driving a patient may trade trips with other drivers so that patients can receive continuous care and drivers do not have to miss work shifts.

- **Consideration of transportation needs by municipalities and human service providers when siting senior housing, medical facilities, shopping centers, and employment centers**

Senior housing, medical facilities, shopping centers, employment centers, and destinations need to be located in areas that are effectively served by public transit, including paratransit.

- **Continued and improved coordination of job training and transportation, and other employment transportation with public transit**

- **Regional Collaboration on expense reduction strategies**

Innovative solutions to reduce costs while maintaining or expanding service levels may be found with regional collaboration.

- **Increased data collection and surveying**

The readily available data on specialized transportation use is limited. In addition, there may be unknown needs for new and expanded service. New hardware and software on vehicles may be needed for data management and to streamline data collection.

- **Continue to utilize Dane County specialized transportation services and Metro Paratransit to maximize the stretch of available resources**

Some riders are eligible for multiple programs. By assigning trips strategically, Dane County and Metro Transit are able to provide the most service with available resources.

- **Coordination of eligibility requirements**

Dane County and Metro Transit need to continue to coordinate with each other to assure changes in eligibility do not result in unexpected eligibility gaps. Eligibility coordination may extend to statewide None-Emergency Medical Transportation as well.

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- **Medicaid and Medical Assistance  
Waiver fare reimbursement**

Some individuals who arrange for paratransit or specialized transportation trips are eligible for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation service, which is funded through Medicaid. These trips need to continue to be identified for reimbursement.

- **Coordination with Non-Emergency  
Medical Transportation**

Coordination with NEMT was not available with previous providers. The ability to coordinate with the current provider is unknown but may provide an opportunity to reduce duplication.

- **Need for sharing of publicly funded  
vehicles by social service agencies**

Vehicles that are underutilized during some parts of the day may be shared among different agencies or operators. Additionally, used vehicles may be sold or transferred in some cases.