Response to November 9 Public Hearing

November 29, 2022
Metro Transit

The Transportation Commission heard a summary from Metro Transit staff related to implementation steps for the Transit Network Redesign. These items included:

- Route name updates
- Draft system map
- Minor route changes
- Draft start and end times
- Draft bus stop locations
- Title VI results

The Transportation Commission then held a public hearing on these items. Metro Transit staff heard several questions and comments during this public hearing and have prepared the following responses. Questions have been summarized.

Q: Is it possible to do a more detailed Title VI equity analysis using finer geography than the census block groups?

A: This is a complicated question and was asked by several people, so it will be answered in several layers.

The needed demographic data is not available at the census block level, only at the block group level. The Title VI analysis used, in part, third party software called Remix. Because of the limitations in the census block data, this software assumes that populations in block groups are uniform and that only the portion of a block group within a ¼ mile buffer of a bus stop is served, not the entire block group as was suggested by several commenters.

While there may be individual examples, there is no widespread evidence to suggest that total populations, or low-income or BIPOC populations, are concentrated away from the proposed Transit Network Redesign routes within census block groups. The Transit Network Redesign planning fundamentally worked to concentrate bus service in neighborhoods that rely on the service. Because of this effort, it is more likely that low-income and BIPOC residents are concentrated closer to the frequent routes as opposed to being uniformly distributed in the block groups.

The Title VI analysis that was performed exceeded federal requirements for a Title VI analysis. It found that on average most people were significantly better served with the proposed network than the existing network by a large margin, and that these benefits extended to low-income and BIPOC residents equally or more than others. There is no reason to believe that the analysis, done in some other way, would produce any significant differences.

Q: Can the Title VI Service Equity Analysis be reviewed by a third party?

A: Having the Title VI analysis done by Jarrett Walker with Metro Transit's oversight is considered standard practice in the transit industry. The analysis was quantitative in nature and followed a well-prescribed federal process with the help of a third party software, Remix, which is the gold standard in the industry. Title VI analyses are a core tenant of transit planning at agencies and Metro Transit would risk loss of millions of dollars in federal funding by presenting a flawed analysis. Jarrett Walker and Associates are professionals in the field that would not risk the impact to reputation, and future contracts, by presenting a flawed analysis.

A third party review would essentially involve redoing the Title VI analysis. This work could take about 6 months and cost up to $50,000. Just like the JWA one, that analysis would be funded, reviewed, and presented by Metro, which would inevitably result in these exact same criticisms.

The negative reaction to the Title VI analysis has come from a few interested parties who have been consistent in their opposition to the Transit Network Redesign. There has not been any evidence presented that the analysis is flawed. Metro Transit stands by our commitment to equity and are supportive of the positive outcomes of the Transit Network Redesign that are evident from the analysis.

Q: Regarding the double counting of transit trips near the transfer points in the existing scenario, is there any way to quantify this double counting, or correct for it?

A: The team discussed a few ways to account for this double counting in a quantitative way, such as combining existing routes together rather than having them end at the transfer points. However, our concern was that any of these methods would be arbitrary and difficult to defend. In the effort to be as transparent as possible, we decided to simply report the results as they were developed and describe the issue.

Q: Does the Title VI analysis apply to the current network, or the network as it existed before the COVID pandemic?

A: It applies to the current network effective in 2022.

Q: Can the onboard survey results from 2015 be used to evaluate the equity effects of the Transit Network Redesign?

A: These results were not used directly for several reasons. First, the onboard survey is 7 years old. Second, the survey does not take non-riders into account. Some people, including low-income and BIPOC residents, likely did not ride the bus because the system did not work for them, and thus were not surveyed. Ignoring these people would perpetuate their lack of access to the system. Third we do not have transit schedules developed for the Transit Network Redesign network. Consequently, it is not possible to compute exact travel times for the trips recorded during the survey. Staff did hand calculate a comparison of common trips and these examples were presented at the public meetings. Staff have also examined the origins and destinations in north and south Madison from the 2015 onboard survey. We have found that the majority of these captured trips started or ended near Park Street or Northport Drive, where service will be substantially increased. Therefore it is likely that any analysis using the 2015 onboard survey data would find benefits to these riders. For example, between the Beltline, Erin Street, the Arboretum, and Monona Bay, 306 surveys were conducted with an origin or destination along Park Street or Badger Road where service will be increased, and 77 surveys were collected near Fish Hatchery or the Route 13 service area, where service levels will be marginally decreased.

Q: Did the analysis look at jobs everywhere or just downtown?

A: It looked at all jobs throughout the region using the most accurate data available.

Q: Using the first and last trips chart provided, is it possible to find out if people will be able to make it to a certain location by a certain time?

A: Not completely. That level of detail will only be available when schedules are completed. Unfortunately, schedules cannot be completed until this coarser level of detail is understood. Full schedules will be reviewed early in 2023. When that happens, staff can make adjustments to partial trips if needed.

Q: Some letter routes like B, C, and D can sound similar, particularly for people who rely on the audible announcements. What can be done to make sure people can clearly hear route names and stop locations?

A: We are installing new equipment on buses as part of a technology upgrade, so we hope that with this upgrade the quality of the audio or our ability to play the audio will be improved. In addition, we have used the same voiceover person for a number of years. With this technology upgrade, we can look at re-recording all of these files with new voices, with cleaner recordings, and make sure to focus on clearly annunciating the differences in these sounds.

Q: Will BRT routes A and B get a different name or branding than simply A and B?

A: Unless given a different direction from the Transportation Commission, staff is proposing that they will be branded as Routes A and B. Metro had initially explored designating BRT routes with colors, which is a very common practice, but this idea was unpopular. Further, some routes like F and R will also be part of the BRT system. Therefore the current plan is to designate routes with regular service with letters, and routes with limited service with numbers.

Q: Some people have difficulty distinguishing between colors, particularly red and green. How will the new system map be readable for colorblind users?

A: The different route categories on the map will be designated with lines that vary in darkness and thickness so that they can be interpreted by colorblind people. The particular red and green colors used on the map were developed with high contrast to help colorblind users distinguish between the lines. In addition, all route lines will be labeled directly with the route name.

Q: How will service to the Catholic Multicultural Center on Park Street be affected?

A: The CMC currently has two bus stops within a short walking distance. One, at Park and Beld, is about 750 feet away and would see service double, from 4 buses per hour to 8 buses per hour. That 750 feet is equivalent in length to a single city block in many parts of Madison, which is well within a reasonable expectation of a walk to transit. Another, at Fisher and Bram, is about 500 feet away and would see service reduced from 2 buses per hour to 1, with the "O" route now on a one-way loop. The total number of buses serving the CMC is actually increasing from 6 to 9 per hour, or an increase of 50%

Q: Will there be a new fare system? The current one is too inflexible.

A: Metro Transit is replacing and modernizing its fare collection technology. This project, separate from the Transit Network Redesign, will make it easier for people to pay fares by using a variety of different accepted fare media, replacing the existing magnetic strip cards. Users will be able to purchase fare products easier through an online portal and at various vending machines at BRT stations rather than having to wait for cards to be sent through the mail. Riders will also have more options in fare products.

Q: Will Routes 80-84 be affected by the Transit Network Redesign?

A: For the most part, no. The only direct effect is that no bus service will be on the 400-600 blocks of State Street, so Route 81 will need to be adjusted. Metro Transit is working with UW staff to determine a revised routing.

Q: How can information be made available to blind people?

A: We try to be very careful to make sure all of our online information is screen reader friendly. Making map information accessible is always a challenge. When service has been finalized, we will produce turn-by-turn descriptions of all new route patterns and post links to this information on our individual route pages. We did this when we released our draft individual redesign route maps. We will also stay in touch with our contacts at the Dane County Federation of the Blind about materials that may need tweaking or still need to be made accessible to screen readers. We can also offer phone appointment or Zoom training sessions with our call center reps if someone would like some in-depth information on how new routes and service operate.

Q: Can schedules be adjusted to accommodate early morning trips west towards Old Sauk Road?

A: Staff have reviewed this request and this trip will be accommodated through partial trips. A westbound rider will be able to get to destinations near Old Sauk and Junction Road before 7:00 am, which may require a transfer at Sheboygan Avenue.