

Comments to the Ad Hoc Long Range Planning Committee of Metro

August 18, 2007

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These comments expand upon my verbal statement at the TPC meeting on August 14th.

I'd like to thank the committee for their work so far on the interim report.

Keep Serving the Center City

1. One of the statements in the report that resonated with me especially was under the Marketing section (p. 10). The report stated that it is more cost-effective to retain existing riders than to attract new ones. On a similar note, it may be more cost-effective for Metro to concentrate its marketing in its well-served corridors, rather than in areas of the city with commuter-hour-only bus service. It may make the most sense to do targeted new rider recruitment in these areas of the city. New riders in these well-served corridors will be more satisfied with the product (service), so that customer loyalty to the service may be easier to retain once the initial recruitment has happened.
2. It is important not to reduce service in well-served corridors in order to extend commuter service further to the periphery. This risks losing established riders, while investing resources into difficult new-rider recruitment. This violates the cost effectiveness principle noted in the report and cited in #1 above.

Businesses Need to Support Metro

3. One suggestion to expand the financial resources available to Metro is to partner more with businesses, especially those who have pledged to be environmental. For example, MGE has been successful promoting its wind power product to businesses that want to promote an environmental image. Organizations to target include the kind of businesses that advertise in Sustainable Times, or who belong to the Dane County Clean Air Coalition. Metro may also want to partner with MGE or Focus on Energy on co-marketing and to leverage Metro's limited resources to arrange joint tabling at fairs and various environmental events.
4. Even if companies reject the opportunity to join the bus pass program, these firms can still take many other actions to actively support Metro. In fact, Metro may wish to establish "gold" and "silver" level supporters lists, as well as an annual award ceremony, to encourage businesses to become active Metro supporters. Examples of actions companies can take include: (a) pledge to orient all new employees on how to commute to their work site by bus and offering several weeks of free passes for new employees (b) keeping bus route info handy for employees and customers (c) encouraging bus riding among employees by running regular newsletter articles on bus topics, organizing internal promotions and prizes, and doing surveys to better identify employee obstacles to using transit (d) organizing group trips on transit.

5. I would especially like to see grocery, healthcare, and dental offices become more active in facilitating transit use by their customers.
6. I hope Metro does not slow down its efforts to expand the bus pass program to other large employers. Employers to target include the state, the county, MMSD school district, MATC faculty, American Family, etc. Some of these employers already have existing bus pass programs for some portion of their campus occupants, so expanding these programs would involve synergies.

City and County Can Do More to Support Metro

7. It would be desirable if the city and county would more actively support Metro. The city and county can integrate Metro marketing into most contacts with the public, and each of these could be an opportunity to bundle a Metro message. Some of these transactions include: (a) Reserving a park shelter (b) Buying county arts commission calendars (c) Attending major city or county-sponsored events such as the County Fair, “Celebrate Madison” or the Halloween festival (d) Distribution of garbage, recycling and moving day notices put out by Streets Dept. (e) Citizens buying on-street parking permits for their neighborhood. The City and County can also take steps to integrate Metro messages into their ongoing operations. For example, Monona Terrace and the Overture Center could do more to be friendly and helpful to transit riders, such as putting links to Metro on their web site, and messages in their programs and ticket packages encouraging patrons to ride the bus to their events. Monona Terrace particularly, as a “green building” should do more to help its users ride transit rather than drive to events.
8. The city and county should consider offering preferred entry or other perks to attendees to their events who get there on transit. Events such as Dane Dances, Halloween, etc.
9. The city and county both have leaders who frequently put out environmental messages. These efforts could be more often done in partnership with Metro, and using their visibility to build community pride in our environmental transportation option: the bus. The Mayor should do a ride-along on Metro, similar to his ride-along with the police (but shorter and more of a celebration). City and county leaders should involve Metro in their Earth Day efforts.
10. If federal and state funding continues to drop and other options are not bringing in needed funds, a fair way to fund Metro might be a tax on parking spots in the county.

Airport Service

11. To improve transit options to get to the airport, Metro might start a shared-ride van service to the airport. I’ve ridden these [private] services in some other communities, and they provide a nice hybrid of door-to-door service with lower cost than a single-occupancy private taxi.

More Partnerships

12. Metro may want to consider the feasibility of creating a Downtown Transit Center. This could be an office similar to the Transportation Center at UW-Madison, where patrons can get personal assistance with trip planning, buy passes, pick up maps, learn about bus options to Milwaukee, etc. This Center could be combined with existing efforts such as the downtown Ambassadors' effort, and potentially housed in the Overture building, Monona Terrace, or another city office. It should be welcoming to residents and visitors.
13. The report noted the potential to bring music and art to bus stops. This brings up an opportunity for Metro to partner with community groups. Since Metro is short of marketing resources, it might be to Metro's advantage to arrange volunteer trades with community groups. For example, in exchange for being allowed to place their art in shelters, perhaps a community group could volunteer to staff a table promoting Metro at an event or do other volunteer work for Metro. Metro could also ask these community groups to include bus route information on their event notices.

Support Bus Drivers

14. I hope Metro can build a long-term strategy for its service based on supporting its bus drivers. One of the Cost Management references (p.9) noted that bus drivers take more sick leave than other city staff. This may be reasonable if bus drivers' jobs are more physically demanding and involve more stressful contact with the public than a typical city job. A more apt comparison may be to see if our bus drivers take more sick leave than bus drivers in other similar cities. Recently I read an article about the very poor level of health of long-distance truck drivers, and I wondered if parts of this situation applied to bus drivers, too. For example, Schneider Trucking has been testing most of their truck drivers for sleep apnea and found a shockingly high incidence of this dangerous condition (and offered treatment). I also heard a NYC taxi drivers' union representative talk this spring, and he mentioned the physical toll of taxi driving on the drivers. To combat this problem, the union has set up a gym at their depot near the airport, where drivers can work out during the periods when there are fewer fares.
15. Overall, it is in our interest to recognize our bus drivers as an important resource for keeping our buses safe. Also, Metro can encourage bus drivers to live a transit-oriented lifestyle and become "ambassadors" for Metro.

Etc.

16. **Pay phones.** The elimination of pay phones from the public sphere is a safety issue that affects bus riders more than other citizens. It would be helpful if Metro does what it can to resist the elimination of pay phones. Metro could identify where pay phones exist at or near its stops, perhaps keep a map of these locations on its web site, and evaluate whether additional options are needed for their

- patrons. Pay phones are especially helpful to avoid stranded passengers in poor weather at remote bus stops. Pay phones are more basic and important than GIS technologies to track the bus or internet access on the bus.
17. **Reduce air pollution from tailpipes.** I would like to see what retrofit technologies are available to lower emissions from buses. Perhaps some of the technologies that work on trucks, such as oxidation catalysts, could also be helpful on buses. This could also help combat the public impression that buses are dirty.
 18. **Growing elderly population.** To build support for Metro in more rural areas, Metro should remind the community of the important service that it provides for the elderly who cannot, or do not wish to, drive. Much of our population is aging, and the bus will become more important for this group.
 19. **Fun places to go on transit.** One marketing idea is to develop a booklet with a list of fun places to go on transit. This is a common transit marketing technique in larger cities, to show people that transit is useful for more than commuting.