

2007 Strategic Plan for Madison Area Bus Advocates

Summary Madison Area Bus Advocates maintain that:

1. The first priority in our vision of an area-wide transit system is for an improved and expanded regional bus system.
2. Bus riders are not second class citizens and need to provide input into decision making.
3. We need a Regional Transit Authority and a source of dedicated funding for transit.
4. No major road improvements or road construction should be planned without the inclusion of a viable transit way.
5. There should be at least 6 different types of bus service including but not limited to a core service running almost all the time, direct commuter service to and from outside Madison, peak commuter service with limited stops within Madison, circulators and shuttles, service for special need populations, and connectors to intercity transport carriers.
6. Metro Transit would be enhanced by implementing more sophisticated “way-finding” items such as user-friendly maps, schedules, and signage.
7. Our transit system can benefit by closer relations with the research and education facilities of the University of Wisconsin’s flagship campus that houses such colleges, institutes and research centers as the College of Engineering, the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, the La Follette School of Public Affairs, and the Midwest University Transportation Center.
8. The use and availability of various bus passes should become much more commonplace in employment and other settings;
9. There should be more incentives for people to ride safe, clean, affordable, efficient and convenient transit (whether in the form of tax deductions, discounts; priority for ticket sales; etc.).

Main Body

The first priority in our vision of an area-wide transit system is for an improved and expanded regional bus system that serves more people, places, and trips throughout the Greater Madison Area, both in the inner core and in outer reaches. Good public transit supports the dignity and freedom of all individuals, creates an open, hospitable and welcoming community, respects the environment, opens economic opportunity to all and moves people to where they need to go. Madison’s bus system may be considered by some to be good in relative terms, but it is not adequate to serve as a baseline from which to compare anything. It needs to be vastly improved.

There must be a more open and democratic process to transit decision making. Too often, important decisions are made affecting the quality of service to bus riders without ever consulting the people affected by those decisions. This can range from safety on buses, to the nature and content of advertisements, to the re-routing, elimination or addition of a bus line, or to the placement or elimination of a bus stop or bus shelter among other things. Citizen advisory committees designed to provide lay input into management decision are often insufficiently consulted or, when consulted, bypassed if their recommendations are at odds with what other bodies want to hear. Since bus users are not second class citizens, their voice must be heard, and part of our mission is to empower and amplify that voice, making decision making more democratic.

A regional transit system needs a **regional transit authority**. The City of Madison has become a central city surrounded by suburbs that were independent localities at one time but no longer are. They are parts of an interdependent system. For historical reasons, the state legislature still needs to enable the **legal** existence of a regional transit authority. Among other benefits, such a body could provide the dedicated revenue source that would even out a balkanized tax structure and provide the

assurance often required for federal or state aid. Government representatives from this area need to be more assertive of our need for a legal regional transportation system.

Ideally, future transportation schemes that involve road expansion or road construction will include lanes for **transit ways** that could accommodate express buses, streetcars or some kind of rail. Transit should be accepted as a real way to move people and should be considered when transportation planning is done. No significant transportation improvement should be undertaken without a serious examination of transit facilities. Capacity problems in the overall transportation system should be addressed with increased transit service before any road widening. At a minimum, this will require the coordinated effort of Planning and Engineering departments on the municipal, county and state levels. Madison Area Bus Advocates wants fiscally sound investment in our infrastructure.

The bus system should ideally include at least six separate types of runs that could use different size buses at different times for different fares:

1. Core or “Local” service throughout the day (including early mornings, late nights, weekends and holidays);
2. Commuter service to and from communities outside Madison into Madison;
3. Peak Hour commuter service with limited stops within the built-up urbanized area;
4. Specialized services such as Metro+;
5. Circulators or shuttles;
6. Connectors to Intercity Transportation Carriers (train stations, bus hubs or airports).

At the moment, because Metro is functioning with insufficient resources, it is trying to design routes that serve more than one function or cannot offer the service at all. The result is that many people who would use the bus use another travel mode instead, including driving a single occupancy vehicle (SOV). Consider for instance the need for express buses. Residents of outlying areas should be able to take a bus that goes from a designated point directly downtown with only one or two stops in between, rather than having to endure a long trip on a Local bus that stops every few blocks and has to weave in and out of traffic. Few people will willingly endure an 80-minute trip compared to what would take 15 minutes by automobile or 20 minutes by bicycle. Once downtown, transit riders should find corridors where service is frequent and direct. And rather than needing an automobile, visitors should be able to take the bus everywhere, starting at the locus of their arrival to Madison, whether they have come by train, bus or air. Although there may be few travelers late at night, early in the morning or on the weekends, the only type run that is currently using smaller buses is Metro+ but there is no good reason that other runs could not. The only type run that is currently charging different fares is, again, Metro+ because most other service is some modification of a distorted “local” or peak-hour service. But there is precedence for express service and long-distance service costing more than local service.

Greater flexibility in charging different fares for different people on different routes (e.g. youth, adults, seniors, disabled; local, circulator etc.) could involve the use of **Smart Cards**. A reusable Smart Card would enable the fare box to deduct the correct fare without requiring the rider to have the exact cash on hand, have different passes for different runs or continually purchase monthly passes or 10-ride cards. Related to this should be the expansion of **unlimited ride pass** programs. A significant proportion of Metro’s business involves providing rides to people with unlimited ride passes but the number of institutions presently involved, both public and private, is small. Passes should become an expected employment benefit and an expected component of student college fees. Passes should be available through such civic groups as Condo associations and Senior Centers. Currently, there are tax incentives on the federal level for passes for work-related travel. They should be used much more than they are now. There should be tax incentives on the state level as well and our representatives should help promote this initiative.

In the short term, there could be the implementation of a sophisticated "way-finding" program for transit users. This would include the existence of user-friendly route maps and schedules, good on-street signage and information which clearly directs users to designated boarding points at the proper time (and which clearly marks a stop as inoperative during a detour). Buses with alternate routes need to be labeled such, perhaps with characters such as A and B. There could be consideration of unique identification of major routes, services and associated transit vehicles, facilities and amenities. It is helpful to identify major routes with colors, for instance calling them "the red line" or "the blue line."

Madison Area Bus Advocates helps foster research into issues of transit system finance, fuel efficiency, technology, regulation and successful transit practices elsewhere. This is done primarily by coordinating efforts with transportation, planning, communications and public affairs researchers at the flagship campus of the University of Wisconsin. The University's Engineering College houses the Midwest Regional University Transportation Center. The University's Nelson Institute of Environmental Studies offers a graduate certificate in Transportation Management and Policy, primarily to students enrolled in Urban and Regional Planning and Civil Engineering programs. The University's La Follette School of Public Affairs offers a graduate program in Public Affairs in which system finance can be researched. This will be enhanced by our nonprofit tax status that enables us to procure funds with which to underwrite student internships and commission thesis-based reports. The University campus itself has an award-winning transportation department that balances the land needs of such facilities as dormitories, offices, parking, and classrooms.

There is need for better community education efforts regarding what does and could exist to counter the prevailing notion that automobiles are synonymous with transportation. This is hampered by the fact that many planners only think in terms of car travel, and even a growing proportion of Madison's own households are not within access of a bus line. We are again fortunate to be the home of the University of Wisconsin's School of Journalism and Mass Communication that has an internship program and a new Web-based news medium focused on Madison neighborhoods, *Madison Commons* (<http://www.madisoncommons.org/>). Madison Area Bus Advocates also maintains a web site that has reproduced relevant fact sheets and articles from local newspapers, is involved in writing articles for neighborhood newsletters, writing opinion pieces and letters to the editor of local daily and weekly newspapers, and asks that all its sponsored research be summarized so as to post it on the web.

The current bus system needs better marketing, outreach and connection with the community. Better marketing would not have a competition for tickets to an event in Wisconsin Dells, as was the case in the summer of 2006, but would seek to advertise events in Madison hosted by a Madison business and accessible by a Madison Metro Transit bus. Better outreach and connection would solicit business involvement and schedule bus routes in conjunction with the start and end of work shifts. It could make the benefits of Commuter Choice better known to both employers and employees, would make more loan officers aware of Smart Commute, and would make more enterprises interested in becoming outlets for Metro passes and cards. There should be periodic updates for area elected officials and key staff, and there should be more effective use of feedback from users. System management should ride the bus at least once a month so they could see the problems faced by users firsthand as well as show users they care. Better marketing could involve displaying local visual art work on buses, at shelters, and at transfer points, including the art work of students in area schools. Better marketing could also involve displaying locally-based poetry. Transfer points could provide outlets for locally-based musical groups as well as vendors.

Madison Area Bus Advocates, an independent group of citizens, stands ready to help achieve these goals.