

# Transit Riders Manifesto

Madison Area Bus Advocates ([www.busadvocates.org](http://www.busadvocates.org))

## Summary

1. **Public** transportation is a basic **public** service for everyone, not just for those of low income or for people who cannot drive a car. There is no place for means-testing fares.
2. As long as there are no tolls for **public** roads, entry fees at **public** parks, or user fees for myriad other **public** services, there should be no fare for core bus rides. In contrast, parking is expensive as it uses land that could be used for other purposes, and should be priced accordingly—this includes parking at **public** parks, parking at **public** schools, parking at community centers, parking at **public** libraries, and parking at the curbs of **public** roads.
3. The initial focus of any regional transit planning needs to place primary attention on improving and expanding the current system, the bus, as an efficient, clean, convenient, safe and affordable means of travel throughout the Madison Area.
4. Transit riders are not second-class citizens and their input should be sought to better inform decision-making pertaining to transit and land use plans.
5. There should be at least six different types of transit runs including 1) core service running all the time, 2) extra commuter service at peak times, 3) express service with limited stops, 4) circulators and shuttles, 5) paratransit, and 6) connectors to intercity transport carriers.
6. Core service should run 24 hours a day, every day of the week, at least every 20-30 minutes to accommodate 2<sup>nd</sup>- and 3<sup>rd</sup>- as well as 1<sup>st</sup>-shift workers. Commuter service during peak hours should run at least every 10-15 minutes within Madison's transfer points.
7. There should be express service that makes bus riding time-competitive with the automobile for a significant proportion of the population.
8. The Madison Area should have a downtown intermodal terminal for local bus, intercity bus, and intercity rail.
9. Major transfer points should be bustling, vibrant centers of commercial and public activity, rather than dead places located far away from anything else.

## Main Body

Public transportation is a basic public service, similar to our collective interest in public safety, public health, public schools, public parks, public roads, and public libraries. Although Madison's bus system used to be a private for-profit company, it was acquired by the city and turned into a public utility on a par with public roads and municipal parking lots. At that time, fares were low for everyone, but there was no intention for public transportation to only be for poor people or to be means-tested. In fact, having fares at all was a vestige of the earlier for-profit situation and could have been eliminated entirely. Just as public roads are built and maintained with tax money shared by all, so should basic public transit be built and maintained with tax money shared by all. Fares for rides on public transit are logically analogous to tolls for driving on roads. Special bus runs could exact fees but basic runs should not. However, as sustainable travel modes reduce traffic congestion, place fewer demands on the environment, benefit health, facilitate economic activity, and generally promote the public welfare, a good case could be made for having the entire cost subsidized, even as user fees exacted for other types of travel increased.

Fiscally responsible initial plans for a regional transit system should build upon our current system and fit population size. In the Madison area, that means initial plans should focus on the current bus system and also extend the use of shared-ride taxis, van pools, car pools, and smaller 21-30 foot buses in addition to larger, articulated buses. As transit gains acceptance as the best way to travel in most circumstances, street cars, commuter rail, and/or light rail may make sense, but not initially.

Currently, Metro Transit schedules and plans its routes without input from either bus drivers or bus riders (potential or current). The 2009 system audit by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation

recommended that a formal mechanism for driver input be established—this welcome recommendation needs to be extended further to acknowledge the importance of consumer input from bus riders. Current and future bus riders are not second-class citizens and their input needs to be sought for any important decisions to be made pertaining to transit and land use plans.

Metro Transit now almost exclusively runs slow, 40-foot, diesel buses in mixed traffic. Instead, there should be different-sized vehicles running on different types of lanes, stopping more or less frequently, and using environmentally friendly power sources. There needs to be a core service that stops frequently and runs all the time, every day of the week, at 20-30 minute intervals. There also needs to be extra peak-hour service on weekdays that runs every 10-15 minutes. There need to be regular shuttles for such runs as from downtown to the airport or the Truax Campus of Madison College. There needs to be specialized transportation for people who cannot use mainline service. Connectors between local and inter-city transit carriers also need to be provided

In addition to slow, local runs with frequent stops, there should be express buses running frequently enough to make bus travel a serious travel option for most taxpayers, not just those who have no other choice. It should be possible, for example, to take an express bus from a Transfer Point (north, south, east, or west) to downtown in 15 minutes or less every day of the week.

Since it should be possible to get around Wisconsin without a car, the Madison area needs a centrally-located multimodal terminal where there can be seamless transfer between inter-city and local transit. The last downtown rail depot in Madison was eliminated years ago, while the last intercity bus terminal was eliminated at the end of August 2009. The capital city of Wisconsin has no intercity transit depot—it should have, and having one should be a priority of the Regional Transit Authority.

A glaring indication of the lack of bus rider input into decision-making is the location of transfer points. The four main transfer points in Madison were located away from natural locations because of objections from people who do not use the bus but who *did* get to have input. Transfer points in Madison are now located a distance away from anything else, are unsafe and, while provided with a roof, are open to the wind and cold underneath. Instead, transfer points should be located at vibrant centers of activity where people can connect from different directions, stay warm and safe, accomplish small errands, and/or have refreshment while waiting for a transfer.

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