

Building a Better Bus System
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Testimony for the Hearing on the Ad Hoc Long Range Metro Transit
Planning Committee's Midterm Report

Rethinking Management and operations from top to bottom

We will never be able to think of everything there is to make a better bus system. But, we can apply modern management theory to empower everyone from the Manager to the driver to help build a better bus system. Here are some ideas to create an organizational structure that fosters constant innovation:

Incentives to do the right thing: Modern management theory uses the metaphor "get the right people on the bus, get the wrong ones off the bus." The idea being, we need to make sure that the people running the show and making the buses work are motivated to make it even better. Here are some ideas to help make that so:

Align the incentives of everyone on the Metro management, all the way down to the front line drivers toward quality service and efficiency. For example,

Reward drivers who drive judiciously and don't drive with fast braking & accelerating. There is the example of Railroads which have discovered that fuel efficiency can vary as much as 30% from engineer to engineer merely because of train operational habits. Savings can be split between drivers, the system (for service improvement), and the taxpayers. That way, everyone is bought into an improved system!

Reward management for mode shifts to transit, biking & walking. Make this across the board such that the Plan Dept, Traffic and Engineering are all rewarded for getting more people out of cars.

Consider hedging against future fuel increases. Ladder the hedges such that the risk & volatility is decreased. Fuel will not be getting cheaper. Savings from this should be realized by Metro in the form of even better, expanded service.

Routes & Land Use

Directness: Begin to design routes as a big city would-direct, not wandering.

Bus Rapid Transit-Start with a modified, more direct version of the 6. This should be an add-on, not a replacement of existing service. This has been detailed by MABA.

Design of cities closely correlates with transit usage. Note that the Madison Comprehensive Plan calls for Transit-Oriented development, walkable, bikeable, etc. Yet most development in new areas is single-use only. This means more cars. It also is a landscape that cannot be served well by transit.

Suburbanization of Services: The private sector must be made to understand how difficult it is when they locate critical services (especially medical care) out in the transit-deficient suburbs.

The 10 & 11: It was a severe blow to the transit-oriented neighborhoods when these lines were axed. The 10 & 11 connected the "workforce housing" on the near east side to the "workplaces" (the hospitals & UW). And they worked. The 11 was the 2nd most productive route in the system. The 10 was the 4th most productive. They were slashed in a very underhanded way. They must be brought back. Here are the advantages the 10 & 11 provided to commuters:

*Direct
Frequent
Not flocked with other buses
No transfers required
Convenient inter-neighborhood connectivity
No hang up on the square/transfer point
Time competitive with the automobile*

Bonus Buses-Paratransit: To provide an affordability option, permit para-transit providers to go onto the mainline as an adjunct service. It would only be at the choice of the para-transit rider, but would offer a significant discount (1/2 or less) if the ride can go along a mainline route for a significant distance and pick up standard fares along the way. This would not only provide a cheaper ride for para-transit riders, but would also increase the frequency of the service for standard-fare paying riders.

Advance Signal of bus arrival: Make it easier to know when the bus is coming. The "MAX" bus rapid transit system in Kansas City has sheltered bus stops that flash when the bus is on the way. This would be ideal especially in the core area of the city where bus stops are often near coffee shops-i.e., convenient waiting areas for the bus. And this would be particularly helpful in heavy snowfall events when the buses often go off schedule.

Park & Rides are abysmal relics of the 1970s. We need Transit-Oriented Development, not more asphalt. Goerke's Corners on the outskirts of Milwaukee is the most abysmal place on the planet. P & Rs do nothing to help our air quality. The first 30 seconds after turning the ignition switch is the most polluting, emitting 90% of the pollutants a car will emit that day. This means we need places that are designed around transit, not the car. And P & Rs do little to relieve congestion where it is worst. If P & Rs are adopted, they should be limited in scope and coordinated with already paved, but underutilized lots. Sherman Plaza comes to mind. Movie theater lots are another prime spot. And P & Rs should be scattered along the line, not

concentrated at one location so as to not be disruptive of normal business.

Politics-state, local, federal

County: Make it publicly known that our county officials have not shared in their transportation responsibilities for urban residents.

State: Make it known that our state level representatives have and continue to fail us by working hard for highway funding for sprawl while choking off transit funding.

Federal: Broadcast the fact that federal highway policy promotes sprawl while degrading transit.

Fair Fare Pricing

Pricing: The entire subject of pricing to demand needs to be discussed further here. For example, why not price fares according to peak pricing models used by the private sector from cell phones to airlines? Further information about transit pricing can be found at the Victoria Transportation Policy Institute (<http://www.vtpi.org>).

Tax Bennies of Transit: There needs to be a better marketing of existing tax benefits of transit. Parking Cash-Out, Commuter Choice, however it is named, provides a tax-free way to buy transit passes. Both employers and employees benefit from this federal tax break.

The Need for a Free Market in Transportation Options: Here are some random musings about current regulatory mechanisms that drive car use while inhibiting other modes:

Overcapacity of highways that generally sit more than 3/4 empty for all but 2 hours of the day.

Undercapacity of bus network, particularly on a frequency of service basis

Overpriced bus service

Underpriced parking citywide

Transportation benefit for car drivers (free parking)

Lack of transportation benefit for human powered transportation, carpooling or transit

Overcapacity of car storage

Undercapacity of pedestrian amenities (lack of density, building behind a sea of asphalt, etc.)

Exorbitant wheel tax for bicycles (registration, that when summed up for a family of 4, two bikes each, adds up to more than that of the cost of state car registration)

No city wheel tax for cars