



Buses for People, People for Buses

Madison Area Bus Advocates

busadvocates.org

Bus Stop Spacing in Madison

Overview and Recommendations January 31, 2015

Contact: Susan De Vos (info@busadvocates.org)

Position Summary

The Madison Area Bus Advocates (MABA) opposes the elimination of bus stops throughout the older and more densely settled areas of Madison as proposed in the Transit Development Plan for 2013-2017. The proposed eliminations conflict with Madison's efforts to realize the quality of life that a balanced transportation orientation toward pedestrians, bicycles, mass transit, and cars offers.

Background

Land Use Decision-Making

Taking away bus stops facilitates past and continued poor land use decisions that lead to urban sprawl and drain community resources and funds. Studies show that strong transit service in denser areas of cities supports increased property values, increases local tax revenues, and increases quality of life for residents and visitors.

Bus Stop Distances Impact Transit Utilization

Surveys have found that the distance to public transit affects ridership. One survey found 70 percent of riders will walk 500 feet for normal daily trips, but only 40 percent are willing to walk 1,000 feet, and even fewer will walk greater distances.¹ Other studies, based on travel times to transit, find that each additional minute of walking time to transit increases the likelihood of travelers using a car instead of mass transit.²

A recent survey by the Maryland Transit Authority (MTA) shows that nationally mass transit providers typically space stops close together, with guidelines as close as 500 feet or less, in densely populated areas.³ Most transit entities surveyed by MTA use population density, and demand driven by employment and activity centers, as key determinants for bus stop locations.

Plan Design Must Keep Riders with Special Needs in Mind

Planning for bus stops must consider the needs of people with disabilities and elders. Federal law, since 1970, has established clear policy that transportation systems receiving federal funds

¹ U.S. DOT. (1986) *Personal Travel in the U.S., Volume II, A Report of Findings from the 1983-84 Nationwide Personal Transportation Study*.

² Hedel, R., Vance, C. 2006. Impact of Urban Form on Automobile Travel: Disentangling Causation from Correlation. TRB Conference. Paper Number 07-0972.

³ [Maryland Transit Authority \(2014\) Bus Stop Optimization Policy \(Pilot\): Bus Network Improvement Project - Phase One Plan](#), p. 4. Nationwide Survey of Transit Providers

must make special efforts in the planning and design of mass transportation facilities and services "so that the availability to elderly and handicapped persons of mass transportation which they can effectively utilize will be assured...." Publ.L. 91-453, Publ.L. 93-643, See 23 USC §142, *note*. This policy has subsequently been reaffirmed and incorporated into other provisions of law, including Sec. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Transit Development Plan 2013-17 Proposal

"Quarter-Mile" Spacing Rule

The Transit Development Plan (TDP) 2013-17 proposal recommends closing bus stops in order to establish a "quarter-mile" (1,320 foot) spacing rule throughout Madison regardless of settlement pattern. This approach fails to follow approaches, based on research and practice, showing that population density, employment and activity centers, and riders with special needs should all factor into decisions on bus stop distance spacing. It also fails to follow Madison's Metro Transit's own experience with riders in our community.

While Madison's Metro Transit has focused on roadway speed as the basis for spacing bus stops, data in the TDP show a clear relationship between Madison's population density and transit use. For example, "ridership is heaviest along University Avenue and the Isthmus" (p 3-31). Despite its high bus use, these are the very areas targeted for bus stop elimination.

Unfortunately, initial TDP plans proposed eliminating bus stops of particular importance for people with disabilities and elders including such locations as the WilMar Neighborhood Center (Bearly St.), the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired (Livingston St.) and the Social Justice Center (Few St.). Clearly, better planning is required to assure that elderly and people with disabilities can effectively use Madison's bus service. The TDP and Metro may not, under federal regulations, make actual mass transit less able to be "effectively utilized" by elderly and disabled people by necessitating that elders and people with disabilities use paratransit service as an alternative.

Rationale for Reducing Stops and its Lack of Evidence

Madison's Metro Transit staff have repeatedly stated that the reason for eliminating stops is to make service faster and more reliable, so riders can make bus connections and to better serve Madison's periphery. However, Metro's data show that only 20% of people use bus transfers and speed improvements are minor (e.g. one to two minutes were saved, round trip, on Gorham/Johnson Street after their stop eliminations).

Community Support for Existing Bus Stops

In 2013, Metro proposed eliminating bus stops on Crescent Rd. and Red Arrow Trail in a low income neighborhood, so passengers could make their transfers at the South and West Transfer Points. Residents opposed eliminating the stops using arguments similar to ones voiced at the WilMar Neighborhood Center. After their alder also publicly opposed the elimination, the Transit and Parking Commission ultimately rejected Metro's recommendation. This experience suggests that the TDP needs to be revised; that transfer points need relocating while bus stops should not be eliminated.

Dismantling Current Transport Oriented Developments While Planning New Ones on the Outskirts

Recently the city received \$300,000 from the federal government to plan Transit Oriented Developments on its outskirts in the name of "transportation equity" even as Metro proposes

eliminating bus stops in current Transit Oriented Developments located in older parts of town. Transportation equity should include making housing more affordable in older parts of town.

MABA's Recommendation

In the short term limited-stop buses at peak hours could skip selected bus stops to speed up travel. Add special buses or, in a worse-case scenario, turn the regular bus into a limited-stop bus at especially heavily-used hours. There is precedence for even that, with the #15 on the west side. In the medium term, relocate the transfer points and eliminate the parking minimum from the City's zoning code.