

Agenda Item 1b

**4th Meeting of the
MATBUS Coordination Committee
February 19, 2025 – 9:00 AM
Metro COG Conference Room/Zoom**

Members Present:

Deb White, Moorhead City Council, Chair
Denise Kolpack, Fargo City Commission
John Strand, Fargo City Commission
Julie Bommelman, Fargo Transit Director
Susan Thompson, Fargo Finance Director
Sebastian McDougall, Moorhead City Council
Jenica Flanagan, Moorhead Finance Director
Mike Rietz, Moorhead Assistant City Manager
Brit Stevens, NDSU Transportation Manager
Ben Griffith, Metro COG Executive Director

Members Absent:

Dustin Scott, West Fargo City Administrator
Peyton Mastera, Dilworth City Administrator

Others Present:

Adam Altenburg, Metro COG
Heidi Benke, MATBUS
Dan Benson, Sanford Health
Shaun Crowell, MATBUS
Cindy Girdner, Valley Senior Services
Josh Gordon, Transdev
Luke Grittner, MATBUS
Taaren Haak, MATBUS
Aiden Jung, Metro COG
Ian McLean, City of Fargo
Matt Pinotti, Transdev
Jordan Smith, MATBUS
Cole Swingen, MATBUS

1a. Approve Order and Contents of the Overall Agenda

A motion to approve the order and contents of the overall agenda was made by Mr. Mastera and seconded by Mr. Griffith. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

1b. Review and Action on Minutes from January 15, 2025

A motion to approve the minutes for January 2025 was made by Mr. McDougall and seconded by Mr. Rietz. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2a. City of Fargo Transit Department Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Drug and Alcohol Policy Manual

Ms. Bommelman explained that in response to a recent FTA drug and alcohol audit, City of Fargo Transit and the City of Fargo Human Resources have updated the FTA Drug and

Alcohol Policy Manual that covers employees who work in safety-sensitive positions. She noted that positions included equipment technicians, inventory purchasing, maintenance technicians, fleet services attendees, fixed route dispatchers, and transit interns.

A motion to authorize staff to bring the FTA Drug and Alcohol Policy Manual to the Fargo City Commission was made by Mr. Rietz and seconded by Mr. Griffith. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2b. LinkFM Update and Recommendation

Mr. Swingen explained that, since 2020, LinkFM has provided episodic service for certain pre-approved community events in Downtown Fargo, the Hjemkomst Center, and Bluestem Amphitheater, with operating costs shared between Fargo and Moorhead. He stated that multiple parking ramps have been constructed in the Downtown Fargo area in recent years, which has eliminated much of the demand for the service. He also noted that the demolition of the Moorhead Center Mall has greatly reduced the site's parking capacity, and that LinkFM will no longer have the ability to service the Trollwood Mainstage Musical at Bluestem Amphitheater due to MATBUS operating hours ending at 10:15 PM. He explained that changes have led MATBUS staff to recommend the elimination of LinkFM and noted that the elimination of the route is expected to reduce MATBUS expenses by roughly \$9,372.

Chair White asked if there had been any coordination with organizers with the Downtown Street Fair, which historically accounts for the highest ridership for LinkFM. Mr. Swingen responded that they would be reaching out after discussion by the committee.

Ms. Kolpack stated that she felt the committee was missing some information that would help make an informed decision regarding suspension of episodic service to certain events. However, she noted that service cuts were going to be needed somewhere due to budgeting constraints.

Chair White asked that representatives from Fargo reach out to organizers of the Downtown Street Fair and Moorhead reach out to event organizers at the Hjemkomst Center and Bluestem Amphitheater.

Item 2b was tabled until further discussion at the next meeting.

2c. 90-Minute Transfer Policy

Mr. Smith explained that the current transfer policy allows a rider to pay a fare and receive a transfer ticket valid for 90 minutes. He noted that transfer tickets can be utilized to board a different bus or route to get to their destination and that once the 90 minutes have expired, the rider is required to pay another fare.

Mr. Smith stated that MATBUS has three methods of paying fares: cash, mobile device, or a Genfare Link account. However, he explained that the methods of receiving a transfer by the three payment methods are not treated equally and have created issues for riders since paper transfer tickets and the connect card are currently set up to have limitations on what bus or route a rider can use a transfer.

Mr. Smith proposed eliminating restrictions on paper transfer tickets and the connect card so that the transfer ticket would be good for traveling on the system for 90 minutes, regardless of which route a rider took. He noted that a negative impact is the potential for riders to pay a fare, get to their destination, perform their task, and return home while only

paying a single fare. Although this instance may happen occasionally, he predicted this would not have a noticeable impact on fare revenues.

A motion to approve the elimination of restrictions on the 90-minute transfer policy was made by Mr. McDougall and seconded by Mr. Rietz. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2d. Real Time Passenger Information Pilot Program

Mr. Swingen explained that in the summer of 2024, MATBUS transitioned to a new fixed route bus software (GMV Synchronatics) to provide more accurate real-time information to passengers and streamline transit dispatching operations. He informed the committee that an optional module this software offers is the ability to provide passengers with a phone number that they can either call or text to get real-time information on when their next bus arrives. He proposed pursuing a pilot program with this real-time passenger information to gauge passenger interest and estimate the financial impact on the transit system. He stated that the initial setup cost was \$3,725 and that the annual service cost was estimated to be \$2,178. He noted that additional signage would need to be purchased for each pilot program bus stop, and the expected cost was \$20 per sign.

Chair White noted that MATBUS was looking to include only 20 out of approximately 823 bus stops in the pilot program, or two percent of all bus stops in the area. She asked if MATBUS knew the percentage of ridership those 20 stops would likely cover. Mr. Swingen answered that it would likely target stops that had between 10 to 25 passengers a day. He noted that MATBUS could potentially add additional bus stop locations or a ridership target per stop to get a better gauge of usage. Chair White said it would be ideal to look at adding additional stops to help get enough data on program usage.

A motion to implement the real-time passenger information pilot program targeting stops that make up 10 percent of total ridership was made by Mr. Rietz and seconded by Mr. Strand. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2e. Route 24 – Sanford Health amber Valley Campus Request and Route Change

Mr. Grittner explained that Sanford Health had requested Route 24 service their new Amber Valley Campus beginning April 2025. He noted that on-the-road testing had shown that servicing the Amber Valley Campus would add approximately three minutes to the overall trip length of Route 24. He stated that this change was discussed with drivers and driver supervisors, who saw no issues with this route change.

Mr. Grittner explained that another Route 24 change had been suggested due to frequent detours and event traffic in and around the Scheels Arena and the Sanford Family Wellness Center. He stated that this change would remove one bus stop at the Sanford Family Wellness Center, which had .2 boarding per day according to 2023 ridership data, and would reduce overall trip length by two minutes.

A motion to approve the proposed route change was made by Mr. Rietz and seconded by Ms. Thompson. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3a. 2026 Driver Services

Mr. Smith stated that MATBUS had been working with the City of Fargo Human Resources to finalize job descriptions and pay classifications to potentially bring driver services in-house as City of Fargo employees. He explained that, through this process, an initial cost comparison between having drivers as contracted staff versus city employees was

developed. It showed that costs for contracted staff would be estimated at \$10,146,942 versus \$10,195,785 as city staff, about a \$50,000 difference. He noted that the estimated cost for drivers being city employees includes drivers being fully benefited while also offering higher wages. Mr. Smith and Mr. McLean stated that there is also concern about insurance costs for vehicles driven by contracted workers and that premiums would likely be lower if drivers were city employees.

Chair White explained to the committee that this item would need to be voted on at the next meeting and encouraged members to come forward with any questions.

Mr. Rietz asked if there would be additional staffing impacts to payroll or human resources should drivers become city employees and if those costs would be shared with other jurisdictions. Mr. Smith answered that those costs would be included in the indirect allocation plan and passed through that way. He said that it would likely include at least one additional staff member within the City of Fargo Human Resources to manage approximately 100 additional potential employees. Mr. Rietz asked for those indirect costs to be reflected in the final cost estimate.

Ms. Flanagan mentioned that it would be helpful to look at additional ways in-house driver services may show a reduction in overall costs. Ms. Thompson noted that this may need to be part of a larger discussion about future budget considerations for MATBUS.

Ms. Bommelman emphasized the timing criticality not only with city budget discussions but also because it takes approximately six months to bid out contracted driving services.

3b. Ridership Update

Mr. Grittner provided a brief ridership update on paratransit ridership data from 2023 and 2024. He noted that there had been a five percent increase in ridership during that period, increasing from 57,545 in 2023 to 60,436 in 2024. He stated that previous quarter ridership updates will be given at committee meetings in April, July, and October, and that an annual update will be given in January. He mentioned that ridership data is also available upon request.

3c. Safety and Security Update

Mr. Swingen provided a safety and security update noting improved relationship building with the Fargo Police Department and the implementation of a new security contract with Signal Security, with an additional four hours of coverage and body cameras for officers.

4. Other Business

Ms. Bommelman concluded with an update from the North Dakota legislative session. She informed the committee that a senate bill had been introduced for an additional \$15 million in funding for fixed route and paratransit services to Fargo, Bismarck, Grand Forks, and Minot urban transit providers. She noted that the initial amount had been reduced to \$5 million and that the bill was currently being discussed in the appropriations committee, where the amount may have been reduced even further. She concluded by saying that the senate bill also included a legislative management study to better assist with the long-term transit funding needs.

Chair White stated that the next MATBUS Coordination Committee meeting will be held Wednesday, March 19 at 9:00 AM.

Chair White adjourned the meeting at 10:14 AM.