

Agenda Item 1b

**5th Meeting of the
MATBUS Coordination Committee
March 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
Peyton Mastera, Dilworth City Administrator
Ben Griffith, Metro COG Executive Director

Members Absent:

Mike Rietz, Moorhead Assistant City Manager
Dustin Scott, West Fargo City Administrator
Brit Stevens, NDSU Transportation Manager

Others Present:

Adam Altenburg, Metro COG
Heidi Benke, MATBUS
Shaun Crowell, MATBUS
Taaren Haak, MATBUS
Jean Henning, City of Fargo
Aiden Jung, Metro COG
Nancy Morris, City of Fargo
Matt Pinotti, Transdev
Cole Swingen, MATBUS
Megan Zahradka, City of Moorhead

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. Strand and seconded by Mr. McDougall. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

1b. Review and Action on Minutes from February 19, 2025

Mr. Mastera noted that the motion to approve the order and contents of the overall agenda in February was not made by him. Mr. Altenburg confirmed this was an error on his part.

A motion to approve the minutes for February 2025 as corrected was made by Ms. Thompson and seconded by Ms. Flanagan. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2a. LinkFM Final Recommendation

Mr. Swingen explained that at the previous MCC meeting, it was recommended that LinkFM be eliminated for the remainder of 2025 and all subsequent years. He noted that after discussion with the committee, it was decided to postpone the motion to address the following questions and concerns:

- Will the MNDOT allow LinkFM to be operated outside of service hours for the Trollwood Mainstage Musical?
- How does Moorhead receive funding for LinkFM events? Will canceling LinkFM events affect funding in any way?
- Event partners should be informed about the possible cancellation of LinkFM. They could be asked if they would participate in funding the service.
- Consider operating LinkFM for Pride in the Park until the State of Minnesota-funded bus is retired in 2027, allowing Bluestem time to develop alternatives.
- LinkFM should be continued as normal for the Celtic Festival, due to the short amount of time before the event.

Mr. Swingen stated that MATBUS staff had contacted the appropriate parties and determined:

- MNDOT will not allow LinkFM to be operated outside of service hours.
- LinkFM events are included in the annual Fixed Route contract with MNDOT. MNDOT will need to be made aware of the change in service levels, but no funds will need to be returned to the state, due to an anticipated overspend on the MNDOT contract.
- All event partners have been contacted. Upon further study and discussion, MATBUS staff determined that any potential financial contribution from event organizers would not enable MATBUS to deliver LinkFM service, due to physical barriers beyond each party's control. Event organizers will look for alternative transportation options if needed.
- The Pride in the Park event can still be operated as is for the duration of the state-funded bus's life.
- LinkFM will operate as normal for the Celtic Festival.
- Due to construction around the former Moorhead Center Mall, LinkFM will not be able to service any downtown events during the summer of 2025.

A motion to approve the elimination of all LinkFM events, besides Pride in the Park through 2027, was made by Ms. Kolpack and seconded by Ms. Thompson. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2b. MATBUS Driver Services and Transition Recommendation

Ms. Bommelman provided an update on the ongoing driver services discussion. She explained that the current contractor relationship with Transdev includes drivers for fixed routes in Fargo and Moorhead (West Fargo and Dilworth are included through Fargo and Moorhead), drivers for paratransit in the same geographic areas and during the same hours as fixed route, management, safety oversight, training and road supervision of drivers, and an office clerk. She stated that the City of Fargo has a contract with Transdev for the entire metro area and that the existing contract expires December 31, 2025, with no option years remaining.

Ms. Bommelman noted that MATBUS has two discernable opportunities for driver services: (1) rebid the contract through an intensive procurement process or (2) hire the drivers and their management staff as City of Fargo employees to coincide with the expiration of the contract to avoid service interruptions.

Ms. Bommelman explained that the procurement process is labor intensive for MATBUS staff, is heavily regulated, and requires approximately six months from start to finish. She also noted that there is a need to garner assistance from the City of Fargo Procurement staff if this route is chosen. Alternatively, she explained what it may look like should MATBUS hire the drivers and their management staff as City of Fargo employees to coincide with the expiration of the contract with Transdev. She noted that this would include approximately 80 drivers, six senior drivers, five road supervisors, management staff, temporary/non-benefited costs for six part-time positions, full benefits deduction (based on the percentage of employees that have health insurance benefits through the City of Fargo), and overtime costs.

Ms. Bommelman explained several likely advantages in drivers and management staff becoming City of Fargo employees including: higher wages than under the current contract, better benefits, no union restrictions, more flexible scheduling, increased retention and job satisfaction, management staff focusing on operations rather than corporate tasks, and city staff having control over hiring employees and training. She noted additional considerations including: driver scheduling software likely to be purchased in April to increase scheduling efficiencies, driver services contract expected to increase between 15 and 25 percent based on previous new contract years, and improved morale and benefits as well as a cohesive team mentality. She also noted two major lawsuits from Transdev driver accidents that are pending settlement, and that the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund (NDIRF) is currently liable for the \$2 million per occurrence due to the current driver contract. Without a driver contractor, ND state statute limits a municipality's liability to \$500,000 per occurrence.

Ms. Bommelman concluded by noting that there was a suggested motion to Item 2b but requested that this be tabled so that MATBUS could continue conversations with the City of Fargo about future driver services.

A motion to table the recommendation was made by Mr. Griffith and seconded by Ms. Bommelman. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3a. Safety and Security Update

Mr. Swingen provided a brief safety and security update for incidents reported in February 2025. He noted that security staff are currently upgrading to higher quality security cameras and that communication has been good with Signal Security, the new security provider. He also noted that MATBUS is still looking to meet with the Fargo Police Department to create a safety committee or task force.

Chair White asked whether MATBUS staff had seen an uptick in loitering, especially with the City of Fargo Winter Warming Center having been moved to 25th Street S. Mr. Swingen responded that the loitering numbers have been consistent with previous years, but that those numbers tend to be higher in the morning hours. Chair White asked whether more could be done with street/mobile outreach for non-emergencies. Mr. Swingen answered that street outreach's hours of operation make it difficult to respond to some non-emergencies. He praised Signal Security staff for successfully de-escalating recent situations.

4. Other Business

Chair White stated that the next MATBUS Coordination Committee meeting will be held Wednesday, April 16 at 9:00 AM.

Chair White adjourned the meeting at 10:04 AM.