

**86th Meeting of the
Metro Area Transit Coordinating Board
March 17, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

Members Present:

Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council
Brian Arett, Valley Senior Services
Paul Grindeland, Valley Senior Services
Kevin Hanson, Chair
Steve Lindaas, Moorhead City Council
Jackie Maahs, Concordia College
Brad Olson, West Fargo City Commission
Brit Stevens, NDSU
Annie Wood, MSUM

Members Absent:

Arlette Preston, Fargo City Commission
Larry Seljevold, Moorhead City Council
Teresa Stolfus, M|State
John Strand, Fargo City Commission

Others Present:

Lisa Bode, City of Moorhead
Julie Bommelman, City of Fargo
Shaun Crowell, City of Fargo
Taaren Haak, City of Moorhead
Michael Maddox, FM Metro COG
Matthew Peterson, City of Fargo
Edward Pearl, First Transit
Jordan Smith, City of Moorhead
Cole Swingen, City of Fargo
Lori Van Beek, City of Moorhead

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Hanson called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

2. Action Items

a. February 3, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Olson identified that Tony Grindberg was listed as a member. As Mr. Grindberg no longer serves on the Fargo City Commission, there was a request to update. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Mr. Arett. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

b. Preliminary Budget Discussion – Julie Bommelman & Lori Van Beek

i. Capital Improvement Plans

Ms, Bommelman drew attention to listing for the 2022 – 2026 Capital Improvement Program, which included a number of improvements that would

be cost-shared with the City of Moorhead, including mobility management and bus purchases. This includes a local share \$1.2 million, however Ms. Bommelman acknowledged that grants and other funding will likely not cover all improvements. MATBUS will therefore prioritize what needs to be addressed.

Mr. Hanson asked to clarify if the \$1.2 million local share should be viewed as the maximum amount and whether there is an expectation that they will not receive the total amount. Ms. Bommelman confirmed that they do not expect to reach the total \$1.2 million and that the listed local share is merely a wish list.

Mr. Lindaas asked if MATBUS is falling behind in terms of funding for the vehicle fleet. Ms. Bommelman confirmed that they are pretty well set and waiting for the consortium that Duluth and Minnesota is leading. Part of the funding has already been set aside. They do not have any additional vehicles that need attention. Mr. Smith confirmed that they are all caught up with funding.

A motion to approve the projects for consideration in the budget was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Ms. Wood. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

ii. Review Five-year Plan Recommendations

Ms. Van Beek explained that \$150,000 is normally set aside for replacement of vehicles and other equipment. Whatever is not spent goes into reserve for future expenditure. Almost all projects listed are for replacement. Funding for facility improvements have already been set aside, including air-conditioning which has been switched from 2021 instead of 2022. On the wish list for 2026 is funding for an expansion of the fixed-route system. This all fits within the capital improvement allocation.

A motion to approve the projects for consideration in the budget was made by Mr. Arett and seconded by Mr. Lindaas. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

c. U-Pass Contracts for 2021-22 Proposed Rates – Lori Van Beek

Ms. Van Beek explained that each year, there is an arrangement with the three colleges in Moorhead to provide funding to match state grants for transit. This is usually 30% of fare-box revenue. Because fares have not been collected in the past year, they plan to use 2019 fare-box revenue as a base. The City of Moorhead asked the colleges for enrollment numbers. After asking for a recommendation from the board, they will then meet with the colleges to determine further negotiations.

A motion to recommend the proposed rates for U-Pass Contracts for 2021-22 was made by Mr. Arett and seconded by Mr. Olson. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

d. Moorhead 2021 Title VI Program 3-year Update – Shaun Crowell

Mr. Crowell informed the board that every 3 years, they submit an updated Title VI Program to the FTA. He asked for a motion to bring it to Moorhead City Council next week.

Mr. Hanson asked if this update was standard. Mr. Crowell confirmed that this update every 3 years follows a standard template.

A motion to recommend bringing the Moorhead 2021 Title VI Program 3-year Update to Moorhead City Council was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Mr. Olson. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

e. Changes to Moorhead Routes 6 & 9 – Taaren Haak

Ms. Haak explained that route changes started when they had received information regarding new developments on the east side of town that were not accessible via transit. The route changes would maintain Route 6 transferring at Dilworth Walmart, but would be removing travel through the CashWise parking lot. Route 6 and 9 are interlined. Changes to Route 9 address serving the Vista Center for Education more effectively. The current bus stop is across the street from the center and there have been some concerns about the safety of riders. Changed to the route reversed the loop so that the bus now stops on the same side of the street as the Vista Center. Riders can request to be let off in the parking lot. Timings for both routes will be similar and the changes are budget neutral. Route 6 will also be reversed. Public hearings had been set. The first public hearing was held by the City of Dilworth, although there have been no public comments for or against the changes. A second public hearing will be held by the City of Moorhead.

Mr. Lindaas commented that the updated Route 9 will now serve the location of the new Clay County offices. Ms. Bommelman added that Cashwise has notified to remove bus routes from their parking lot. They have had a number of discussions but are yet to confirm changes to Route 3. However, Routes 4, 6 and 9 will be removed from the parking lot.

Mr. Hanson asked to clarify whether this will be a 1-year pilot program. Ms. Haak confirmed that it will be. They will monitor the changes and adjust according to the upcoming TDP.

Ms. Wood asked whether they expect any changes to be made from upcoming public comments. Ms. Bommelman re-iterated that they consider every public comment, however, they do not expect any serious comments as the route changes will not drastically affect riders.

A motion to recommend the described route changes to Moorhead City Council was made by Mr. Arett and seconded by Ms. Wood. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3. Informational Items

a. Update on Mask Requirements for Transit – Julie Bommelman

Ms. Bommelman informed the board that the City of Fargo is likely to lift their mask mandate on March 22. However, President Biden issued an executive order according to CDC guidelines which puts in place a federal requirement (until mid-May) that will require masks for transit and transit facilities. This includes employers and riders.

Mr. Hanson asked whether there is any signage on the buses or language given to drivers. Ms. Bommelman confirmed that MATBUS vehicles do have notices on them. Furthermore, there have been social media postings alerting riders of the mask requirements.

b. Update on Safety Plan to Include Metro Senior Ride – Jordan Smith

Mr. Smith explained that after approval of the safety plan, an amendment was later made to include Metro Senior Ride. They were also added to the safety committee.

Prior to the presentation by Mr. Peterson, Mr. Smith gave a quick update on construction projects, including letting the board know that the GTC exterior renovation will be starting this spring and going out for bid in the next couple of weeks.

c. 2021 Operations Reports – Matthew Peterson & Lori Van Beek

Mr. Peterson shared a presentation of the 2021 Operations Report. 2 months of data compared January and February 2020 and 2021. These comparisons so far show reduced ridership as expected. MATBUS hopes that ridership numbers will increase come April 1 when fares will start being collected again. Mr. Peterson explained that without fares, ridership counts are less accurate. They anticipate similar 2021 ridership levels to 2020 from April onwards. Revenue hours are similar between 2020 and 2021. Paratransit ridership has been increasing and is almost back to normal. As expected, the decrease in ridership also decreases rides per hour. There haven't been as many events due to the pandemic, which explains the decrease in social media presence between early 2020 and 2021. MATBUS is hopeful that as life returns to normal, there will be more events posted on social media. The team have done a great job looking into feedback, and there haven't been any concerning complaints overall. However, they are looking into increasing security at the GTC in response to some recent reported incidents. MATBUS expects to see an increase in feedback from public hearing comments due to the upcoming TDP. There has been a significant reduction in collisions so far, particularly compared to 2019.

Ms. Wood asked how we can get accurate numbers for ridership while we are not collecting fares. Mr. Peterson said that it comes down to funding. They only have a handful of vehicles with Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs). Therefore, counting passengers is largely a manual process done by drivers. More funding is needed if MATBUS is to collect more accurate counts using technology. This being said, MATBUS rigorously reviews passenger counts regularly for any anomalies. Ms. Van Beek added that without college IDs being used upon boarding, it has been harder to identify college ridership and discern who is an adult versus a college rider.

Mr. Hanson asked what has possibly helped preventable accidents decrease from 2019. Mr. Peterson said that training has helped significantly. There is generally a more positive mentality among the drivers, working together under Ed Pearl. In addition, they evaluated route times in mid-2019 to avoid bus drivers being rushed to meet tight schedules.

d. Interesting Transit Articles

Ms. Van Beek drew the board members attention to some transit articles that were shared with them and encouraged people to view if interested.

4. Other Business

Hearing no other business, Mr. Hanson adjourned the meeting at 8:54 AM.