

**89th Meeting of the
Metro Area Transit Coordinating Board
March 16, 2022
Virtual Meeting**

Members Present:

Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council
Paul Grindeland, Valley Senior Services
Kevin Hanson, Chair
Steve Lindaas, Moorhead City Council
Brad Olson, West Fargo City Commission
Larry Seljevold, Moorhead City Council
Brit Stevens, NDSU
Teresa Stolfus, M|State
John Strand, Fargo City Commission

Members Absent:

Brian Arett, Valley Senior Services
Jackie Maahs, Concordia College
Arlette Preston, Fargo City Commission
Annie Wood, MSUM

Others Present:

Julie Bommelman, City of Fargo
Shaun Crowell, City of Fargo
Taaren Haak, City of Moorhead
Luke Grittner, City of Fargo
Michael Maddox, FM Metro COG
Jordan Smith, City of Moorhead
Cole Swingen, City of Fargo
Lori Van Beek, City of Moorhead
Megan Zahradka, City of Moorhead

1. Call to Order and Introductions

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

2. Action Items

a. October 20, 2021 Meeting Minutes

The October meeting minutes were unavailable at the time of the March meeting. It was decided that this would be reviewed and approved at the next MAT Coordinating Board meeting. No action was required.

b. Fargo Title VI Plan – Shaun Crowell

Mr. Crowell explained that they are required to update their Title IV program every three years. Moorhead's Title VI Plan was updated last year and this year they have worked on an update to Fargo's which is due this year.

Mr. Hanson asked to clarify that this is a mandatory plan that is reviewed on a regular basis and if there were no major changes to the plan for this update. Mr. Crowell confirmed that there were no real changes other than updated information gathered from the past three years.

A motion to recommend approval to the Fargo City Commission was made by Mr. Olson and seconded by Mr. Grindeland. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

c. 2023 Preliminary Budgets/Capital/FTA Section 5307 Highlights – Julie Bommelman and Lori Van Beek

Ms. Bommelman and Ms. Van Beek presented highlights of the proposed 2023 budget. This included an excerpt from the 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Ms. Bommelman spoke first regarding the City of Fargo's capital projects for 2023. She did point out an error in the numbers presented for the replacement of 2010 para scheduling software. The federal share for the project should have been marked as \$80,000 and the local share as \$20,000. Other proposed capital projects included purchasing of support equipment, Metro Transit Garage upgrades and bus replacements.

Mr. Hanson asked how this proposal compared to previous years. Ms. Bommelman confirmed that this is a typical budget similar to other years.

A motion to provide the CIP to the Fargo budget team and recommend the 2023 projects for consideration in the 2023 budget was made by Mr. Olson and seconded by Mr. Seljevold. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

Ms. Bommelman then continued to summarize the City of Fargo's proposed operating budget for 2023. The 2023 operating budget estimates higher increased costs for fuel, technical support, First Transit services, custodial, snow removal and hauling, paratransit and farebox cards. The overall increase from FY22 to FY 23 is approximately 7% on the high end. A table comparing the operating costs between financial years was presented. Ms. Van Beek added that the City of Moorhead also shares some of these costs.

A motion to provide the 2023 operating budget to the Fargo budget team and recommend the projections for consideration in the 2023 budget was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Mr. Strand. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

Ms. Van Beek presented the City of Moorhead's proposed 2023 capital projects. This included a paratransit vehicle replacement, facility improvements, replacing facility equipment and updating technology.

Mr. Hanson asked to confirm whether federal and state funding for capital projects was typical for this budget. Ms. Van Beek explained that Moorhead has not been spending their full yearly apportionment and is allowed to bank that for future larger purchases. Therefore, there is an increase using past funds from 2022.

A motion to provide the 2023-2027 CIP to the Moorhead City Manager and recommend the 2023 projects for consideration in the 2023 budget was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Mr. Grindeland. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

Ms. Van Beek then presented the City of Moorhead's proposed 2023 operating budget. Preliminary indications are that the State increase may be between 7-10% to address staff shortages and wage increases implemented by transit agencies across Minnesota. No new service changes are proposed at this time.

Mr. Grindeland asked if there had been any discussions about increasing fares for paratransit. Ms. Van Beek replied that no such discussions have been had.

Mr. Lindaas brought up the need to address fuel price increases. Ms. Van Beek mentioned that the State of Minnesota has an economic forecaster who provides an average cost of fuel for their grant application and alluded to information that Jordan Smith will present later in the meeting regarding the fuel bid process. Mr. Smith added that the City of Fargo bids out fuel 6-months in advance.

A motion to direct staff to move forward with operating budgets and grant applications for 2023 in coordination with the Moorhead City Manager was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Mr. Aasness. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3. Informational Items

a. Address Staff Shortages – Lori Van Beek & Julie Bommelman

i. Amendment to First Transit Contract

Ms. Bommelman explained that a contract amendment with First Transit was approved by the Fargo Commission and Moorhead Council, due to driver shortages and the need to attract new and retain existing staff. This amendment included increasing pay for drivers, reducing the number of steps on the pay scale and increasing the First Transit management fee to cover wage increases.

ii. Other GTC Staff

Ms. Bommelman and Ms. Van Beek also presented other strategies that MATBUS have implemented to attract drivers as well as operations supervisors and dispatchers. This has included wage increases and advertising on buses.

iii. Temporary Service Reductions due To Driver Shortage – Cole Swingen & Taaren Haak

Ms. Haak explained that there have been temporary service reductions since January 10, due to continued driver shortages. All services have been ending at 9:45pm, plus there have been additional timetable reductions to specific routes. This is in effect until at least May 2022, with a two-week notice given before reinstating service. Riders have been alerted of these changes through news releases, website posts, social media and posters at the GTC. Mr. Swingen then presented a summary breakdown of reduced services by route.

Mr. Hanson asked if MATBUS had received any complaints or comments about the reduced service. Ms. Van Beek noted that cutting service at 9:45pm was not a big issue, however riders have been anxious about reducing frequency on Fargo routes due to longer wait times if riders miss their bus. Increasing frequency of service on popular routes is a priority once MATBUS is able.

Mr. Lindaas spoke about the usefulness of the MATBUS app to see where buses are. He wondered about the data they can collect from this. Ms. Van Beek confirmed that this information is useful when analyzing frequency by route, bus stop and time of day to determine where service can be reduced.

Mr. Lindaas also asked about other incentives to attract drivers. Ms. Van Beek mentioned incentives for referrals or sign-on and safety bonuses.

b. Federal Triennial Review Update – Julie Bommelman & Lori Van Beek

Ms. Van Beek explained that this Federal Transit Administration triennial review was a review of a four-year period due to covid. MATBUS requested for an extension and were able to submit by the February deadline. Staff will be conducting a review of the document items before a final virtual meeting with the results held in June. A summary list of the required items for review were presented.

c. TMA/Large UZA Letter to FTA (Splitting Funds Formula) – Julie Bommelman & Lori Van Beek

Ms. Bommelman went through some context regarding Fargo-Moorhead urbanized area (UZA) becoming a Transportation Management Area (TMA). This occurs once a UZA exceeds 200,000 in population, which Fargo-Moorhead is expected to have reached upon completion of the 2020 census. This could potentially be in place by the start of the federal fiscal year, October 1, 2022. A designated recipient will receive apportioned funds from the FTA and be responsible for managing those funds. The designated recipient of the funds must provide a “split letter” if they wish to authorize another public entity to be a direct recipient for Section 5307 funds. The amount of funds available to direct recipients is determined cooperatively by the public transit provider, the MPO, and the designated recipient for the UZA. The FTA encourages the designation of a single designated recipient for each UZA, including UZAs that span more than one state. Ms. Bommelman summarized that a discussion will need to be had to determine who the designated recipient will be before passing this information on to the respective governors in each state. Ms. Van Beek added that this summer the FTA will notify the UZA of how much funding they will receive.

d. 2021 Annual Achievements Report – Julie Bommelman & Lori Van Beek

Ms. Van Beek presented a summarized list of achievements from this past year. This included implementing bus green light priority, farebox upgrades, awarded bids for replacement of buses, approving a new account-based fare structure with mobile ticketing, route changes and shelter upgrades. Mr. Smith spoke about facility improvements that were completed in 2021, including most of Phase 2 of the GTC construction project. Ms. Van Beek mentioned completing the five-year Transit Development Plan, having begun implementation of the Safety Plan and beginning a new two-year contract with First Transit.

e. Request for Proposals – Cole Swingen

i. Shelter Window Cleaning

Mr. Swingen spoke about the bids MATBUS will be requesting in 2022. This includes a 5-year contract to clean all MATBUS bus shelters and empty trash receptacles on a weekly/biweekly basis.

ii. Shelter Snow Removal

MATBUS will bid for a 5-year contract to clear and remove snow from all MATBUS shelters, as well as the Metro Transit Garage and GTC.

iii. Custodial Services at GTC & MTG

MATBUS will also bid for a 5-year contract to provide daily custodial services for the Metro Transit Garage and GTC facilities. Mr. Swingen also mentioned purchasing replacements for day-to-day scheduling software for both paratransit and fixed route operations.

f. Genfare System Implementation Update – Lori Van Beek & Jordan Smith

Ms. Van Beek presented an example screenshot of the Genfare system. This will go live no later than April 30th and MATBUS has been successful in testing out the mobile app thus far. There will also be an education campaign with videos of how to use it.

g. Mobility Management Updates – Shaun Crowell

Mr. Crowell provided a quick run-down of what they have been working on. He explained that they will be resuming in-person Travel Trainer Training at the GTC in March. They are in the process of updating the 2022 FM Ride Source Directory and have updated the MAT Paratransit Brochure. They have also submitted the Fargo Title VI Program for approval and are working on the DBE goals for Fargo and Moorhead for the next three years. In 2021, they processed 288 MAT Paratransit applications (up from 203 in 2020) and continue to be active members of the Civil and Human Rights Task Force through Freedom Resource Center.

h. 2021 Year-end Operations Reports – Cole Swingen & Lori Van Beek

Mr. Swingen gave an overview of some of the trends in transit ridership in 2021. Despite slight decreases in ridership on most routes between 2020 and 2021, there was a significant increase in paratransit riders over the same period, having recovered to 2019 levels. Ms. Van Beek added that the same decrease in ridership in 2021 was observed in Moorhead. Some of this decrease in ridership can be explained by the resuming of fares after having been fare-free for much of 2020. There was a general increase in college ridership in 2021 as students returned to in-person classes. Metro Senior Ride ridership is on its way to recovery. On-time performance across Fargo routes was a mixed-bag in 2021 whereas Moorhead on-time performance improved slightly across most routes. Mr. Swingen also went through a summary of reported incidents and collisions, which increased from 2020.

i. 2022 Jan-Feb Operations Report – Cole Swingen & Lori Van Beek

Ms. Van Beek pointed out that ridership for Senior Ride is up so far this year. Mr. Swingen showed that ridership across many fixed routes has continued to decrease compared to this time last year. Route 33 however has seen an increase of 271% due to college student ridership, making up for much of the decrease in ridership elsewhere in Fargo. Ms. Van Beek showed that Moorhead has continued to see a decrease in ridership in the first two months of this year. On-time performance so far this year has been decent despite the winter weather. Mr. Swingen also went through a summary of reported incidents and collisions from the start of this year.

j. Marketing Activities and Annual Marketing Plan for 2022 – Taaren Haak & Luke Grittner

Mr. Grittner spoke about MATBUS Connect, the new transit passes and mobile ticketing app set to launch in May. They have been testing, preparing educational materials and working with outside vendors on promotional marketing. Ms. Haak also provided an overview of other marketing activities coming up including LinkFM and community events, creating more short educational videos and creating a year-round campaign to update riders about system improvements. Moorhead is also looking forward to having their marketing/communications intern more involved this summer.

k. 2022 Fuel Bids – Jordan Smith

Mr. Smith went through some numbers regarding fuel price bids. Bids so far have been within the budgeted amount and the most recent bid was accepted in January, before fuel prices went up. MATBUS will be bidding out in July for fuel in 2023. They hope that fuel prices remain stable until then.

l. Interesting Transit Articles

Ms. Van Beek directed the board's attention to some interesting articles she included in the packet, mostly about driver shortages across the country and wage increases to attract more drivers.

4. Other Business

Hearing no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 AM.