

**88th Meeting of the
Metro Area Transit Coordinating Board
October 20, 2021
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
Teresa Stolfus, M|State
Annie Wood, MSUM

Members Absent:

Brian Arett, Valley Senior Services
Jackie Maahs, Concordia College
Arlette Preston, Fargo City Commission
Brit Stevens, NDSU
John Strand, Fargo City Commission

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
Edward Pearl, First Transit
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 at 8:02 AM. A quorum was present.

Ms. Van Beek introduced new members and members in new positions to the board including the new City of Moorhead Accountant Megan Zahradka to replace Mary Frahm who retired in June. Cole Swingen was promoted to Matthew Peterson's position as Assistant Transportation Director for the City of Fargo and Luke Grittner has taken the place of Mr. Swingen's position of Planner.

2. Action Items

a. May 19, 2021 Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Olson and seconded by Mr. Lindaas. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

b. Proposed Fare Structure Changes with Pay as you Go and Best Fare

Ms. Van Beek explained that in December 2019, MATBUS received new fareboxes that were then installed in June 2020. Since then, they have not had the opportunity to introduce all the features that come with the new fareboxes yet. MATBUS has renamed its system for cards and mobile ticketing to “Connect”. There are separate Connect Cards for the fixed-route and paratransit system. This is the first time the paratransit system has had a farebox and card rather than everything being done in cash. Connect Cards are available at the GTC or in the Connect online account portal. There is also now a MATBUS Connect App which allows riders to load money to their account and pay by phone. The new payment system will now be “Pay as You Go” or “Best Fare” which means that riders will pay for each ride each time they board the bus rather than purchasing a pass. By eliminating all passes (other than the 1-Day Pass), instead you can earn the best fare as you ride more frequently. You never pay more than \$3 a day or \$42 a month for adult fare/\$27 a month for discount fare. A month is now considered as 31 days. MATBUS considered giving a free transfer for each payment however, considering some trips take multiple transfers, it was decided that having a 90-minute ticket was best. There are no changes in cash fare and riders paying in cash will still receive a transfer ticket. 1-Day Passes will still be \$5 if purchased on board (\$2 more than if riders switch to the new Connect Pass). It has been 12 years since the last pass price increase. In implementing the new farebox system, there are fees that MATBUS has to pay (5 cents plus 5% per transaction). The 90-Day Youth Pass can be earned at \$27 and a Semester Pass is also available for college staff and students not included in the U-Pass program. This is good for 120 days. MATBUS is considering increasing this pass from \$45 to \$60. A Business Pass will also be available (previously the Downtown Pass and Sanford Pass) which will be sold to employers. MATBUS is considering increasing this pass from \$22.50 to \$27. Ms. Van Beek then went through a summary of the benefits of the new MATBUS Connect fare system including no need for transfers, no expiration and the ability to reload funds remotely. There are also no changes in cash fare for paratransit riders. MATBUS will continue to sell coupon books. As required by MnDOT, considering there is no fixed-route service on Sundays, the general public will be able to ride paratransit vehicles on Sundays for \$25. Moving forward, MATBUS will be looking for approval from the City of Fargo and Moorhead to then implement at start of the new year. A public hearing will be set and there will be a testing period as well as a pilot program.

Ms. Wood asked if MATBUS has done any calculations to see how this will all impact farebox revenue as part of the U-Pass agreement. Ms. Van Beek said that they have not. In deciding not to increase fares, if they don't receive enough farebox revenue they can supplement losses with CARES Act funds as needed. Ms. Wood added that considering universities are paying a percentage of farebox revenue according to the U-Pass agreement, she is concerned about how farebox revenue is calculated when changes to the fare structure are made. Ms. Van Beek does expect that farebox revenue will go down, but agreed that MATBUS needs to meet with the colleges to redo the memo of understanding as well as review pass prices moving forward post-covid.

Chair Hanson asked if you were to lose your smartcard, if the data would still be securely stored somewhere. Ms. Van Beek affirmed that the data would still be stored in the online portal as long as the smartcard has been registered. There is a \$5 to replace any lost cards and MATBUS can then transfer any money from the lost card onto the new one. They can also comp people rides in the meantime if they had just loaded money onto their lost card, so there would be some options. Chair Hanson asked if someone could just use a credit or debit card to board a

bus without going to the GTC first. Ms. Van Beek clarified that they couldn't. They could set it up on their phone while they are waiting for the bus but not directly on the bus as payment. Chair Hanson also asked if this new fare system will give MATBUS better data on ridership. Ms. Van Beek stated that they already have good data for ridership but additionally it will give them interesting data on how people are paying.

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

3. Informational Items

a. Update on GTC Phase 2 Construction – Julie Bommelman

Ms. Bommelman updated the board on the next phase of the GTC construction for exterior work. This was accompanied with photos of the construction in progress as well as project renderings. This work includes replacing the roof, canopies over the deck area, upgrading exterior lighting, repairing pedestrian deck areas with fencing and adding new exterior furniture.

b. 2021 Operations Reports – Cole Swingen & Lori Van Beek

Mr. Swingen presented the MATBUS operations report for the year-to-date. There was an increase in Fargo and Moorhead ridership at the start of 2021 which then fell in April, coinciding with the re-introduction of fares. The second half of the year has seen a slow but steady increase in ridership. NDSU ridership was low but steady through the spring semester and has started to increase again in the fall. MATBUS expects these ridership numbers to return close to normal in the coming months. Paratransit has seen a significant increase in ridership, with more paratransit riders than ever before in recent months. Apart from paratransit, LinkFM (due to service for the Street Fair) and Route 1 (serving Concordia down 8th St), all other fixed-route services were stagnant or down on ridership compared to the year previous. Ms. Van Beek reminded the board that good data for college riders was not available throughout much of the pandemic. College students did not use their passes/show their student IDs when service was fare-free, so ridership was manually tallied by drivers during that period. College ridership is now on the rebound in past months as students are returning to campus. Compared to the year previous, ridership for the elderly and disabled has increased while all other age groups decreased. For on-time performance comparing 2020 to 2021, MATBUS is working with the First Transit team to analyze why Route 20 is an outlier with a 18% decrease compared to the year previous. Link FM was also an outlier that saw a significant decrease which may have been due to service for the Street Fair. Ms. Van Beek added that they have started implementing their green light priority project, with updated traffic signals along bus routes in Moorhead to help increase on-time performance. Mr. Swingen then went through the feedback report which included a summary of complaints, reported incidents, missed trips, collisions and other feedback items.

c. Interesting Transit Articles

Ms. Van Beek shared some interesting transit articles for informational purposes, including difficulty enforcing masks.

Chair Hanson asked Ms. Van Beek and Ms. Bommelman whether they have seen more incidents with enforcement of masks. Ms. Bommelman affirmed that they have. Barriers have been put up to keep drivers enclosed but there have been a couple of occasions when drivers have had

things thrown at them, spit on or punched in the face. Although these are anomalies, MATBUS has done everything they can to help mitigate those incidences including extra training.

4. Other Business

Hearing no other business, Chair Hanson adjourned the meeting at 8:58 AM.