

# Agenda Item 1b

**7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the  
MATBUS Coordination Committee  
May 21, 2025 – 9:00 AM  
Metro COG Conference Room/Zoom**

**Members Present:**

Deb White, Moorhead City Council, Chair  
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:**

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

**Others Present:**

Adam Altenburg, Metro COG  
Aaron Bartling, Bolten & Menk  
Heidi Benke, MATBUS  
Shaun Crowell, MATBUS  
Cindy Girdner, Valley Senior Services  
Josh Gordon, Transdev  
Luke Grittner, MATBUS  
Aiden Jung, Metro COG  
Ian McLean, City of Fargo  
Linda Ohnstad, Citizen  
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. Strand and seconded by Mr. Griffith. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

**1b. Review and Action on Minutes from April 16, 2025**

A motion to approve the minutes for April 2024 was made by Mr. Mastera and seconded by Mr. Griffith. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

## **2a. MATBUS Driver Services Update**

Ms. Bommelman provided an overview of the transition of MATBUS staff from being employed under the contract with Transdev to becoming City of Fargo employees. She reported that the transition plan was presented to the MATBUS Coordination Committee during its April 2025 meeting. At that meeting, a motion was approved authorizing staff to bring a recommendation forward to the City of Fargo Budget Team, Administration, and City Commission for approval.

Ms. Bommelman further noted that MATBUS staff presented the final proposal to the City of Fargo Finance, Administration, and Human Resources (FAHR) Committee. The proposal was discussed and approved to be brought forward to the Fargo City Commission for final consideration. She explained that the next steps will include completing the final phase of the Transit Development Plan (TDP), reviewing and vetting any suggested route adjustments and fare changes. These changes will be brought to the applicable governing bodies for public hearing and formal adoption.

Ms. Bommelman also noted that the only position not part of the existing contracted team is a Human Resources Generalist. This position was approved to occur outside of the regular budget process to help facilitate the transition of contracted staff to City employment in late 2025.

## **2b. MATBUS Transit Development Plan Update**

Mr. Bartling provided an update on the progress of the MATBUS Transit Development Plan (TDP). The update included the following key elements:

- A review of the planning process conducted to date
- An overview of public engagement activities and input received throughout the process
- A summary of meetings held with the Study Review Committee (SRC)
- Ridership analysis identifying where passengers are boarding and where system loads are highest
- A presentation of the various service scenarios shared with the public for feedback
- Identification of a preferred scenario, developed based on feedback from the public, the SRC, and MATBUS staff
- Introduction of an enhanced scenario, which includes additional service options focused on the West Fargo area
- An update on the Coordinated Plan and its integration with the broader goals of the TDP

Mr. Strand raised concerns about when the financial aspects of the Transit Development Plan (TDP) should be addressed, considering the ongoing budgeting concerns faced by the City of Fargo. Chair White acknowledged these concerns but noted that Fargo's budget difficulties are a separate issue from the TDP itself.

Ms. Thompson pointed out that the timing of the TDP does not align with the City's budget cycle, meaning that budget assumptions will have to be made in order to move forward. Mr. Bartling added that while the plan can be adjusted based on available resources, the preferred scenario is cost-neutral.

Mr. Swingen informed the group that upcoming conversations with the City of West Fargo regarding expanded transit service may offer a way to offset some of Fargo's financial burden. Ms. Flannagan noted that the timeline for budget completion is tight, and Mr. Smith added that the misalignment of budgets has been a recurring issue for many years. In response, Ms. Thompson emphasized the need for continued discussion to work through the budgeting challenges.

Chair White suggested that reallocating more resources toward West Fargo could increase ridership and ease financial pressure on Fargo. She then posed a question about the City of Fargo's long-term commitment to maintaining the integrity of the transit system. Ms. Thompson assured the group that the City of Fargo would continue to support the system to the best of its ability, within existing budgeting limitations.

### **2c. Safety and Security Update**

Mr. Swingen provided an update on safety and security efforts at MATBUS. He noted that since the last board meeting, improvements have been made to how incident information is displayed, including formatting and the redaction of individual names to protect privacy. He reported that overall, there have been fewer incidents since the new security company began. Mr. Swingen also shared that MATBUS holds biweekly meetings with security staff to stay apprised of safety concerns.

### **3a. Fare Increase and Fare Structure Recommendation**

Mr. Swingen presented a proposal to increase MATBUS fares. He explained that the item was introduced at the previous board meeting and that the intent behind the proposed fare increases is to generate additional local revenue to help address the City of Fargo's budgeting shortfalls. He emphasized that one of MATBUS's key challenges is the lack of long-term, sustained funding, and noted that fare adjustments could serve as a step toward addressing that gap.

Key elements of the proposed fare changes included raising the adult cash fare from \$1.50 to \$2.00, introducing a new 7-day pass while eliminating the current 14-day pass, increasing the paratransit fare from \$3.00 to \$4.00, and adjusting the price of MATBUS Connect passes. Mr. Swingen also discussed the expected decline in ridership that often accompanies fare increases.

Mr. Strand asked whether a reduction in ridership could lead to a loss of federal funding, and whether scholarship or assistance programs might be implemented to support disadvantaged riders. Mr. Swingen responded that many MATBUS users already receive fare support through local agencies, and that any increased costs would likely be absorbed by those agencies rather than passed on to the individual riders.

Mr. Smith suggested that MATBUS could potentially develop an application process to provide discounted passes for qualifying individuals, noting that retaining riders is more important than maximizing fare revenue. Chair White added that implementing such a program would likely require additional staff time and resources. Chair White also recommended removing the proposed increase to the monthly pass, noting that MATBUS is already on the higher end of the fare spectrum for monthly rates.

Ms. Thompson added that during the current legislative session, lawmakers questioned why MATBUS had not raised fares in response to funding gaps. She believes that this move could demonstrate to the legislature that MATBUS is taking steps that could potentially strengthen its case for increased state support. Mr. Swingen concurred, noting that while fare increases may lead to reduced federal funding due to lower ridership, they may also improve the system's probability of state-level funding.

A motion to approve the proposed cash fare increases while maintaining current pass fares was made by Ms. Bommelman and seconded by Mr. Strand. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

### **3b. Proposed DBE Goals for Fargo and Moorhead 2026-2028**

Mr. Crowell presented an item on establishing a new overall goal for Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) participation in its federally funded projects scheduled in FY 2026-2028. He noted that the proposed goals will be 0.49 percent for the City of Fargo Transit, and 0.44 percent for City of Moorhead Transit. It was noted that both goals for the City of Fargo and City of Moorhead could be approved in the same motion.

A motion to approve the proposed DBE goals was made by Ms. Bommelman and seconded by Mr. Strand. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

### **4. Other Business**

Mr. Strand raised the issue of whether the current meeting schedule is adequate, noting that with current budget considerations, one meeting per month may not be sufficient. Ms. Bommelman agreed and suggested that extending meetings to 90 minutes could allow for more discussion of agenda items. Mr. Strand concurred and proposed that the board move forward with 90-minute meetings. The board agreed unanimously.

Linda Ohnstad asked to provide a public comment regarding fare enforcement. She reported instances where drivers were not collecting all fares. In response, Mr. Smith explained that drivers are trained to avoid escalating confrontations, and in cases where a rider refuses to pay, drivers may allow them to ride without payment. Mr. Swingen added that drivers do report fare evasion, and individuals who repeatedly fail to pay may be subject to trespassing.

Ms. Ohnstad also expressed concern about proposed fare increases. Chair White acknowledged the concern and clarified that any proposed fare changes would be subject to a public hearing, which would provide an opportunity for further public input.

Chair White stated that the next MATBUS Coordination Committee meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, June 18 at 9:00 AM.

Chair White adjourned the meeting at 10:25 AM.