

Agenda Item 1b

**11th Meeting of the
MATBUS Coordination Committee
September 17, 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
Mike Rietz, Moorhead Assistant City Manager
Peyton Mastera, Dilworth City Administrator
Brit Stevens, NDSU Transportation Manager
Ben Griffith, Metro COG Executive Director

Members Absent:

Dustin Scott, West Fargo City Administrator

Others Present:

Christopher Cohen, Citizen
Shaun Crowell, MATBUS
Brenda Derrig, City of Fargo
Josh Gorgen, Transdev
Luke Grittner, MATBUS
Ingrid Harbo, The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead
Jean Henning, MATBUS
Aiden Jung, Metro COG
Ian McLean, City of Fargo
Linda Onstad, Citizen
Matt Pinotti, Transdev
Megan Zahradka, City of Moorhead

1a. Approve Amendments to the Agenda

Chair White suggested moving Item 3b before 3a so that the committee could discuss proposed route and service changes before the proposed 2026 budget. A motion to approve the order and contents of the agenda as amended was made by Mr. McDougall and seconded by Ms. Thompson. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

1b. Review and Action on Minutes from September 11, 2025

A motion to approve the minutes for September 2025 special meeting was made by Ms. Kolpack and seconded by Ms. Bommelman. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

2. Public Comment Period

Chair White informed the committee that time would be allotted for public comments. She noted that members of the community wishing to speak would be allotted three minutes.

Christopher Cohen, resident of Fargo, addressed the committee about the proposed 33 percent cut to MATBUS. He said he believes the cut is unfair, especially since no other city departments are facing such a large reduction. He suggested that, instead of placing the burden on one department, the budget cuts should be shared more evenly across all departments. He also proposed a few areas where cuts could be made instead, including the airport and streets budgets

Linda Onstad, resident of Fargo, spoke to the committee about the proposed budget cuts. She said the size of the cut would negatively affect the people who rely on the bus. She agreed with Mr. Cohen that the cuts shouldn't fall mostly upon one city department and should instead be spread more fairly across the city. She also pointed out that the current bus service is already at a minimum level for what the city and region needs.

3b. Proposed Route and Service Change Approval

Ms. Bommelman presented the Proposed Route and service changes. She gave a brief overview of the proposed changes:

- **Route 13:** The proposed change would reduce the frequency of Route 13. Route 13 would only depart the Ground Transportation Center at :15 after the hour. Currently Route 13 departs at :15 and :45 after the hour from 6:15 AM to 5:45 PM Monday through Friday.
- **Route 14:** The proposed change would reduce the frequency of Route 14. Route 14 would only depart the Ground Transportation Center at :45 after the hour. Currently Route 14 departs at :15 and :45 after the hour from 6:15 AM to 5:45 PM.
- **Route 15:** The proposed change would increase Route 15 from a 60-minute route to a 90-minute route to improve on-time performance. A pilot program of this change was introduced in May of 2025 to determine the effectiveness of this change.
- **Route 16:** The proposed change would eliminate Route 16 (Transit staff discussed this proposed change with the Fargo Housing Authority; with Route 14 servicing 4th Street going past the old High Rise, there were no concerns about serving the new public housing at the same location.)
- **Route 18:** The proposed change would reduce Route 18 from a 90-minute route to a 60-minute route. Route 18 would end at the Essentia Health clinic on 32nd Avenue S, and would no longer service any areas south of 32nd Avenue S. The northern portion of the route would also be adjusted to service the Cass County Jail and surrounding areas.
- **Route 20:** The proposed change would reduce Route 20 from a 60-minute route to a 30-minute route. Route 20 would only travel as far east as 42nd Street S. This would eliminate service to the Cass County Jail and surrounding areas.
- **West Acres Transit Hub:** The proposed change is to no longer utilize the West Acres Transit Hub as a transfer point for MATBUS routes. Instead, transfers would be made at the Walmart bus shelter, located at the intersection of 47th Street S and 11th Avenue S. This change would affect Route 14, Route 15, Route 20, and Route 24 (as well as Route 16 if it is not eliminated).
- **Industrial Park On-Demand Service:** The proposed change would eliminate the Industrial Park On-Demand Service.

- **Paratransit Service:** The proposed change would eliminate Sunday Paratransit services. Currently, MAT Paratransit operates from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Sundays.

Ms. Kolpack expressed some confusion, noting that many of the discussions she has participated in had suggested there would be fewer changes to the system.

Chair White responded by expressing hope that the proposed adjustments would help mitigate some of the negative impacts of the significant cuts. She added that she hopes the decline in federal revenues due to reduced ridership can be offset by some of the new scenarios under consideration. She noted that some of the originally suggested cuts had already been removed from consideration after discussions with administrative staff.

Chair White expressed strong concern about the proposed service reduction on Route 13, which would cut the route in half. She emphasized that Route 13 is the second highest ridership route in the MATBUS system and serves the far north area of Fargo, which includes the highest number of individuals living under the poverty line. She strongly opposed the cut, arguing that it would disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Additionally, she pointed out that the proposed reduction is not recommended in the current Transit Development Plan (TDP) and implementing it would go against the plan's guidance. Ms. Bommelman added that while Route 11 and NDSU routes also serve north Fargo, they do not reach as far as Route 13, and the NDSU routes only operate during the academic year.

Ms. Bommelman shared that there has been some discussion about potentially rerouting Route 14 to serve a new low-income housing complex. If this reroute occurs, it may also allow for an increase in service frequency on the route. No formal decisions have been made yet regarding these potential adjustments.

Ms. Bommelman explained that if Route 14 is rerouted as discussed, it could potentially cover the area currently served by Route 16. This would allow MATBUS to reduce redundancy while still maintaining service to key locations.

Ms. Kolpack opposed cutting Sunday paratransit service, highlighting that MATBUS received funding from the state legislature specifically to support paratransit services. She warned that cutting this service could harm the agency's long-standing relationship with the legislature. Ms. Bommelman suggested that rather than eliminating service altogether, MATBUS could reduce the number of buses in use on Sundays. Chair White noted that only ten to 12 individuals currently use the service on Sundays and suggested that a single bus might be sufficient. However, Mr. Crowell explained that a previous attempt to operate with one bus resulted in frustrated riders not having a ride. He cautioned that such a reduction may not adequately meet demand. Chair White concluded by emphasizing that the overall cost of Sunday paratransit service is relatively low and that the individuals who use it often have no other transportation options available to them.

Chair White noted that before acting on the proposed cuts that the committee should move to Item 3a and discuss the 2026 budget.

3a. MATBUS 2026 Budget Approval

Ms. Bommelman gave an overview of the 2026 budget, highlighting the 2026 budget with no service reduction, the 2026 budget that was discussed prior to September 10, and the reduction in federal 5307 revenue due to a loss of ridership. She presented two new

proposed 2026 budget scenarios which incorporate feedback from the public, the MCC, and administrative staff from Fargo and Moorhead. The budget options included:

Scenario #1

Base Budget

Summary:

- No Route 16
- No Sunday Paratransit
- No Industrial Tap Ride
- Reduced frequency on Route 13
- Potential suspension of positions (retains FTEs)

Total Revenue:

- Fargo: \$3,981,524.14
 - Moorhead: \$4,157,501.85
 - West Fargo: \$445,701.28
 - NDSU: \$740,979.36
 - **Combined Total: \$9,325,706.63**
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Scenario #2

Scenario #1 + Add Back Sunday Paratransit

Summary:

- Adds Sunday Paratransit service (\$68,000 expense)

Total Revenue:

- Fargo: \$4,028,117.51
 - Moorhead: \$4,168,565.74
 - West Fargo: \$456,330.60
 - NDSU: \$740,692.78
 - **Combined Total: \$9,393,706.63**
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Scenario #3

Scenario #1 + Restore Route 13 Frequency

Summary:

- Returns Route 13 to full frequency
- Adds back ridership, revenue miles, and revenue hours (\$240,000 expense)

Total Revenue:

- Fargo: \$4,253,397.15
 - Moorhead: \$4,130,344.36
 - West Fargo: \$441,560.33
 - NDSU: \$737,404.79
 - **Combined Total: \$9,562,706.63**
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Scenario #4

Scenario #3 + Add Back Sunday Paratransit

Summary:

- Includes full Route 13 frequency
- Includes Sunday Paratransit (\$240,000 + \$68,000 total expenses)

Total Revenue:

- Fargo: \$4,299,989.82
- Moorhead: \$4,141,408.26
- West Fargo: \$452,189.64
- NDSU: \$737,118.91
- **Combined Total: \$9,630,706.63**

Following Ms. Bommelman's overview of the proposed 2026 transit budget changes, Ms. Thompson raised concerns regarding the estimated \$240,000 cost associated with restoring 30-minute frequency on Route 13. She noted that the figure seemed high and requested that staff revisit and verify the calculation. Additionally, she pointed out that only three public comments were received regarding the proposed changes to Route 13.

Chair White responded by highlighting that the proposed reduction in Route 13 service contradicts the recommendations laid out in the Transit Development Plan (TDP), which was developed through significantly more thorough public engagement. She expressed concern that the current proposal could undermine the direction previously established in the TDP.

Ms. Flannagan added that while the projected loss in federal revenues might not have a direct impact on the 2026 budget, it could lead to more significant financial challenges in future years. She stressed the importance of considering the long-term implications of such reductions.

Chair White further emphasized that even if Route 13 frequency and Sunday Paratransit services are restored, the City of Fargo would still face a 24% budget reduction. She agreed with citizen feedback that suggested spreading budget cuts more evenly across departments rather than placing a disproportionate burden on transit services.

Ms. Kolpack noted that there was a clear breakdown in communication throughout this process. She emphasized the need to revisit the cost allocation formula in future planning efforts and stated that rebuilding trust among stakeholders must be a priority moving forward.

Chair White asked Ms. Bommelman to provide an update on internal operational changes at MATBUS. Ms. Bommelman reported that one staff position remains vacant and is expected to stay unfilled for the foreseeable future. She stated that operations have not been negatively impacted by this vacancy, making it an area where modest cost savings can be realized without affecting service.

Ms. Derrig shared concern that the actual costs associated with bringing all MATBUS drivers under City of Fargo employment might end up being slightly higher than previously estimated. Mr. Strand inquired about cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) being proposed by other jurisdictions and expressed interest in seeing a comparative overview. Ms. Bommelman noted that the City of Fargo is currently planning a three percent COLA increase. Chair White concluded the discussion by stating that there appears to be consensus around supporting Budget Scenario #4, which restores both Route 13 frequency and Sunday Paratransit service.

A motion to recommend budget scenario 4 as presented to the Fargo City Commission was made by Ms. Kolpack and seconded by Mr. Rietz. The motion was voted on and was approved 10-1.

Chair White noted that a motion still needed to be made for Item 3b.

A motion to recommend the elimination of Route 16, and the Industrial Park On-Demand Service to the Fargo City Commission was made by Mr. Rietz and seconded by Mr. McDougall. The motion was voted on and was approved 10-1.

3. Other Business

Ms. Bommelman reminded the committee of the upcoming schedule. She stated that on September 29, the recommendations voted on at the MCC meeting will be presented to the Fargo City Commission for final approval. She also mentioned that staff are still in the process of posting all job openings related to the transition of drivers to City of Fargo employment.

Chair White concluded by reminding the committee that the next MCC meeting would be Wednesday, October 15 at 9:00 AM

Chair White adjourned the meeting at 10:22 AM.