

After 50 years of County monopoly, it is time to look at different options

City Hall should bring transit \$ back to city taxpayers

Overwhelming majority of transit users are City residents

Yesterday's announcement that Milwaukee County's transportation director stepped down over widespread concerns of a "surprise" \$11 million budget deficit looming over the bus system could not be more ironic: it was July 1, 1975, fifty years ago that Milwaukee County took over public transit.

With the goal of making the system "regional", Milwaukee County took over privately operated bus transit from the Milwaukee and Suburban Transit Corporation. That entity was the result of a purchase of transit from the Milwaukee Electric Railway and Transport Company. Milwaukee Electric Railway was created in 1938 when it was split off from the public utility Wisconsin Electric Power Company, due to state laws about utility holding companies.

City of Milwaukee officials should take the legal and administrative steps to petition the Federal Transit Administration and WisDOT to distribute public dollars for transit to a city agency. This would be akin to how and when Milwaukee took over state/federal workforce development dollars from County government about 20 years ago.

In order to operate successfully, Milwaukee should build out the electric streetcar system so that it has the capacity to accomplish more and better results to the public. The current footprint is too small and disconnected from actual travel patterns. The following list is just the start of missed opportunities for streetcar routes:

1. **Fiserv Forum** and **Bronzeville** district (absurd and a huge wasted opportunity).
2. fast growing urban enclaves like **Walker's Point, Harbor District & Bay View**.
3. And, of course, the streetcar should travel north of Ogden to serve **UWM** and East Side riders.
4. Importantly, the streetcar should carry passengers to **Potawatomi Hotel Casino** and **American Family baseball park** as well as links to **the 27th street corridor—the heartbeat of Milwaukee's urban working class neighborhoods on the north and south sides.**

This geographical distinction is important: The neighborhoods, older and newer, east of 27th street contain the most densely packed neighborhoods, crowded local streets, plentiful businesses and employers and loads of cultural and recreational opportunities. **Doing everything we can to make transit an everyday, everybody activity is going to mean beefing up the portions of Milwaukee east of 27th stree.**

For destinations west of 27th street, the city of Milwaukee could easily either operate connections, contract with other municipalities, neighborhood/business districts, or even Milwaukee County or another County. But there are simply not enough trips to justify having permanent, full day operating schedules to every point of suburban Milwaukee – *the demand is simply not there.*

That's another irony: as Milwaukee County faced questions about Denise Wadke's departure last year and now Donna Brown's resignation, Milwaukee County spent millions of taxpayer dollars on a second bus rapid transit route that nobody asked for and each step forward MCTS took, it became more obvious that this project was not going to work. Meantime, the county blew millions of taxpayer dollars on planning and outreach.

It's a sad comparison: City of Milwaukee uses its wheel tax funding to improve local roads, and Milwaukee County sends the \$17 million to the failing Transit system.

Put simply, the city of Milwaukee is already the lead government agency for:

- Water and sewers
- Parking
- Economic development and neighborhood revitalization
- Libraries
- Street cleaning and sanitation
- Road construction
- Licenses/Permits for business operations like shopping, restaurants, grocery stores, health care facilities, etc.
- Largest Police and Fire departments in the county

These are all important agencies that are necessary to collaborate with transit operations. They all need to work together and effectively to deliver results. **Along with the changes required under ACT12, local government in Milwaukee is at a serious turning point.**

County government does not and should not hold a monopoly on running transit and honestly, if you look at the core mandated services of county government they have nothing to do with transit. County government is simply an arm of state government, administering the Courts, jail, health and safety net services. Maybe they could takeover the City's Health department as part of the transit swap. I do not pretend to have all the answers, but I think asking important questions should start immediately for all of us.

Let's work together to get Milwaukee County government to focus more on its core, and show better results from judges, jails, child welfare, and safety net programs. The time to move transit to City Hall is now.

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