

**83<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the  
Metro Area Transit Coordinating Board  
September 9, 2020  
Virtual Meeting**

**Members Present:**

Jim Aasness, Dilworth City Council  
Kevin Hanson, Chair  
Steve Lindaas, Moorhead City Council  
Jackie Maahs, Concordia College  
Brad Olson, West Fargo City Commission  
Brit Stevens, NDSU  
Teresa Stolfus, M|State  
John Strand, Fargo City Commission  
Sara Watson Curry, Moorhead City Council  
Annie Wood, MSUM  
Brian Arett, Valley Senior Services

**Members Absent:**

Tony Grindberg, Fargo City Commission  
Paul Grindeland, Valley Senior Services

**Others Present:**

Lisa Bode, City of Moorhead  
Julie Bommelman, City of Fargo  
Taaren Haak, City of Moorhead  
Joseph Kapper, SRF Consulting  
Michael Maddox, FM Metro COG  
Matthew Peterson, City of Fargo  
Jordan Smith, City of Moorhead  
Cole Swingen, City of Fargo  
Lori Van Beek, City of Moorhead  
Deb White, City of Moorhead

**1. Call to Order and Introductions**

Chair Hanson called the meeting to order and introductions were made. A quorum was present.

**2. Action Items**

**a. January 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Aasness and seconded by Ms. Watson Curry. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

**b. Mass Transit RFP**

Ms. Bommelman spoke about the RFP for mass transit operational services. She explained that the RFP would only be for driver and management services and not for fixed route dispatchers. Proposal bids were accepted from August, with all proposals due by September 23. Ms. Bommelman thanked all those that have volunteered to be part of the RFP evaluation team. She then outlined some of the considerations they expect bidders to emphasize in their proposals

such as safety, employee benefits, organization structure, incentive proposals, technology advances, projected revenue, performance expectations, paratransit, facility operations as well as following any federal, state and local requirements. The current contractor, First Transit, is expected to put forward a bid. The RFP is for a two-year contract with three additional one-year options beyond that period which will give MATBUS greater flexibility.

Pre-bid presentations are to take place later in the day and Ms. Van Beek mentioned that following review, one or more of the bidders may be interviewed further. A quick turnaround is to be expected.

Mr. Hanson asked about the number of bidders and how they have reached out to potential companies. Ms. Van Beek said there were about four companies expected to put forward bids and that the RFP was advertised locally and nationally in Transit Talent magazine.

Ms. Bode asked about plans to communicate and assure current MATBUS staff of job security. Mr. Peterson mentioned plans to meet with the City of Fargo HR and current dispatchers. First Transit is aware of the RFP and all current dispatchers would have their jobs guaranteed under the City of Fargo unless they choose to stay with First Transit. Ms. Bommelman added that a memo will be distributed to all involved. Ms. Van Beek said that current drivers would be offered jobs with whichever contractor is selected, with minimum wages and benefits maintained.

Mr. Hanson asked how many years the City of Fargo has contracted First Transit. Ms. Van Beek confirmed that the City of Fargo has used First Transit since 1997 and the City of Moorhead since 2002.

Ms. Watson Curry asked for clarification on the timeline for the evaluation team. Ms. Van Beek confirmed that proposals are due on September 23, the review and interviews will occur until Oct 7 and the contract will start in January.

### **c. GTC Renovation Update**

Ms. Bommelman started by explaining the initial need for the GTC renovation and the facility study in 2018. The underground parking structure was addressed by a separate project. Operations were relocated to 401 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave N while the renovation is completed. The project is expected to be complete, with a certificate of occupancy, within the next week or so. The long-term goal is to cross-train both paratransit and fixed route dispatchers at the GTC and there will be more office space for staff. The final changes have improved visibility and oversight. There are plans to finish the exterior next spring using the remaining available grant funds.

Mr. Peterson mentioned that cameras have already been set up and a video is up on the MATBUS website that documents the progress of the renovation. There are now a number of areas at the GTC where electronic kiosks and screens will be set up as well new conference space. New lobby seating includes USB charging ports and discussion is still ongoing in regards to public Wi-Fi being available. Fareboxes will have Wi-Fi capability for real time ridership numbers.

Ms. Watson Curry asked about access to the new video showing the renovation progress. Mr. Peterson agreed to share a link.

Mr. Lindaas asked about a grand re-opening and whether this will be done virtually due to covid. Mr. Peterson said that a small re-opening will take place with measures in place for health safety, however details are yet to be determined.

**d. MATBUS Transit Authority Presentation**

Mr. Maddox introduced the Transit Authority study in collaboration with MATBUS and SRF which will look at the future organizational structure and funding of transit in the region following the FM metro becoming a TMA.

Mr. Kapper from SRF proceeded to give a presentation on the study. The study aims to improve communication between partner agencies, streamline processes, address funding gaps and provide a road map for implementation. Mr. Kapper then outlined a long-term recommendation which would create a new North Dakota government agency and taxing authority. An interim recommendation is also offered which includes placing the management and operation of MATBUS under Metro COG. Once established, a ND authority could eventually be expanded to become a bi-state authority. This agency would be governed by a new Transit Authority Board and managed by a single Transit Director with existing management staff hired by the new authority. Given assumptions regarding growth and future funding changes, Mr. Kapper summarized some of the financial alternatives they considered to increase funding. The study has found that a new ND Transit Authority with the ability to levy a sales tax or property tax millage has the greatest potential to address current and future funding needs. A roadmap for implementing this plan breaks the process down into three phases over three years including the tasks necessary for a successful transition. A backup policy would also need to be drafted in the event the ND legislature is unwilling to pass enabling legislation.

Mr. Strand asked about the ability for the region to access community development block grant funds. Mr. Kapper agreed they are a possible source of funding and can be used for capital projects in particular.

Ms. White expressed her concern for establishing a single-state transit authority in which Minnesota would be treated as “clients”, no longer eligible for funding they are currently receiving. Mr. Kapper clarified that funding will still be provided by the state of Minnesota. It is believed that funding will remain at the same level.

Ms. Wood asked about local appetite for increased taxes for transit. Mr. Kapper acknowledged the problem but said it would be important to communicate the benefits. In conversations, the City of Fargo has expressed that there would be room for raises in tax for funding transit.

Mr. Olson asked what would happen if no organizational changes are made once the FM metro becomes a TMA. Mr. Kapper reiterated the significant funding shortage which would likely result in budget cuts and service reductions if there were no new sources of revenue. Mr. Maddox added that although there may not be a large funding gap initially, as the region grows the funding gap would continue to widen. Mr. Peterson agreed that there would be little transit improvements or expansion of service if no changes were made.

Ms. White asked about the difference in tax for transit between ND and MN residents. Mr. Kapper explained that a new ND taxing authority may make up for some of that difference. However, the MN side would still purchase service from the ND agency similar to that of the

Duluth Transit Authority between Duluth, MN and Superior, WI. Mr. Maddox added that in conversations with MnDOT, the state has agreed to help fund transit in the Moorhead to make up for much of the gap. It was noted that this conversation occurred pre-covid. It was clarified that a new ND transit agency would not have the authority to tax MN residents. Ms. Bode further asked to confirm that this would give Moorhead the autonomy to raise transit funds through whatever means they wish. This was confirmed by both Mr. Kapper and Mr. Maddox.

Mr. Hanson asked about how capital acquisition would work from the Minnesota side, for example if Moorhead wanted to purchase more buses. Mr. Kapper spoke to sharing assets, better co-ordination and receiving direct funds from the FTA for capital expenditure. Mr. Maddox also spoke to Metro COG's role as a regional agency and its ability to also leverage funds to fill in those gaps.

A motion to support the MATBUS Transit Authority study to be presented to the Fargo City Commission and the Moorhead City Council was made by Mr. Olson and seconded by Mr. Strand. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

### **3. Informational Items**

#### **a. Operations Reports**

Mr. Peterson presented ridership statistics for the year-to-date. As expected, ridership across the board is down due to the pandemic. There have been internal conversations about possibly reducing service, however frequency has been helpful for social distancing. First Transit has been experiencing a shortage of drivers. Revenue hours and revenue miles have fallen this year largely due to fewer paratransit users. While bus rides per hour are down from last year, paratransit rides per hour are up. MATBUS calls have also been up since June. Mr. Peterson then outlined feedback including top complaints, reported incidents, missed trips, system failures and collisions throughout the year.

#### **b. Transit COVID-19 Response**

Ms. Haak spoke about communication efforts to inform the community about transit service in light of the pandemic. This has included online news posts, rider alerts through direct email, social media and physical posters on transit and transit hubs. At first, MATBUS used an alert header on the website to give the public updated information. Since some staff members were unable to edit the header to keep it updated, a covid response website was created. Ms. Haak then continued to outline the timeline for MATBUS' communication of their covid response thus far. This has included the first covid update alert post in March 12, NDSU suspending services and West Acres Mall closures. During this time there has been little service reduction while there have been increased cleaning processes on buses and MATBUS has continued to communicate public health and safety advice to the public.

MATBUS went fare-free on March 23 which will continue through 2020. Back door boarding is permitted and plexiglass barriers were installed to separate drivers and their passengers. Route 2C was suspended, drivers in Moorhead supported Meals on Wheels and helped to sanitize buses between trips and extra buses were added in May to allow for greater social distancing. In April, MATBUS started offering a grocery delivery service for paratransit customers. This service was then expanded to seniors aged 60 and older.

Masks have been required on Moorhead buses since July 25, and masks became a requirement systemwide a week later. Complementary disposable masks were initially available onboard. There are re-usable cloth masks available upon request at the downtown transit hub. These requirements, helpful information and other updates are posted on the covid response website.

**4. Other Business**

Hearing no other business, Mr. Hanson adjourned the meeting.