

**87<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the  
Metro Area Transit Coordinating Board  
May 19, 2021  
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  
Arlette Preston, Fargo City Commission  
Larry Seljevold, Moorhead City Council  
Brit Stevens, NDSU  
John Strand, Fargo City Commission  
Annie Wood, MSUM

**Members Absent:**

Brian Arett, Valley Senior Services  
Paul Grindeland, Valley Senior Services  
Teresa Stolfus, M|State

**Others Present:**

Lisa Bode, City of Moorhead  
Julie Bommelman, City of Fargo  
Shaun Crowell, City of Fargo  
Taaren Haak, City of Moorhead  
Mary Frahm, City of Moorhead  
Michael Maddox, FM Metro COG  
Jordan Smith, City of Moorhead  
Cole Swingen, City of Fargo  
Lori Van Beek, City of Moorhead

**1. Call to Order and Introductions**

Chair Hanson called the meeting to order. A quorum was present.

**2. Action Items**

**a. March 17, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

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

**b. Procurement Manual Update – Mary Frahm**

Ms. Frahm explained that the State of Minnesota had made some changes to the MATBUS procurement manual to align with federal guidelines, including raising the micro-purchase threshold. In 2018, MATBUS approved the update. She requested the board to recommend taking this up with Fargo and Moorhead.

A motion to recommend revised transit procurement policies to the Fargo City Commission and the Moorhead City Council was made by Mr. Strand and seconded by Mr. Aasness. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

**c. Preliminary 2021 Operating Budgets – Julie Bommelman & Lori Van Beek**

**i. Fargo – Julie Bommelman**

Ms. Bommelman shared a preliminary overview of the 2021 operating budget for Fargo transit as MATBUS is fast approaching their budget process. She also mentioned that 6 dispatchers were taken on from the contractor and so far this has been successful. 4 staff positions have been added in the past 13 years and there is a request to restructure current staff as well as a request to hire an additional person, part-time to start. Ms. Bommelman continued to break down the budget by different departments. Some of the proposed budget purchases include increases in regular fleet driver services, paratransit driver services, security services, including security at the GTC. Mr. Smith also added some other Metro Transit Garage proposed purchases such as recruiting intern technicians, computer services and gasoline. Ms. Bommelman also outlined capital requests such as a West Acres shelter, miscellaneous support equipment and bus replacements. Some of the proposed budget changes are shared with Moorhead.

Mr. Strand asked how going fare-free during the pandemic has impacted transit and if going fare-free is something that could be made permanent in the future. Ms. Bommelman said there were some surprising positives and riders were very appreciative of the change. CARES Act money made up the differences in lost revenue, therefore MATBUS would need to look into how operation costs could be covered without farebox revenue if the system were to go fare-free. Bus operators also ran into some more issues with riders however Ms. Bommelman did not want to discount it as an option in the future.

Considering hiring difficulties, Chair Hanson asked if there has been any analysis of the hourly wage and benefits necessary to attract job candidates. Mr. Smith said that they have found their previous pay to be lower when compared to their competition, which mostly constitutes private sector repair shops and dealerships. The last three equipment technicians hired have started at a higher grade step than normal. This has meant that mid-tier technicians are closer in pay to more experienced technicians. Therefore, MATBUS is looking to also reclassify the pay of supervisor technicians.

Mr. Lindaas asked a follow up question about current turnover for entry-level positions as well as whether MATBUS has explored other opportunities to attract talent. Mr. Smith noted that current turnover is not that bad and that they have had discussions with HR about other possible benefits such as providing loan-forgiveness and ways they can retain interns past their internship programs.

Chair Hanson asked whether Ms. Bommelman is comfortable with the budget allocated for security. Ms. Bommelman confirmed that she is.

A motion to direct staff to move forward with the preliminary operation budgets and grant applications was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Ms. Preston. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

**ii. Moorhead – Lori Van Beek**

Ms. Van Beek explained that the grant application process is coming up. CARES Act funding is being applied to the local share. The State of Minnesota has placed a 2% cap on budget increases. There are some additional staffing needs coming up, need for increased driver services and shelter cleaning. There are no exact budget numbers yet.

Mr. Lindaas is whether there are any anticipated concerns about the 2% cap on budget increases. Ms. Van Beek said that they are currently under-budget for 2021 however, if they are over, they can ask for more based off an existing contract. They can also use CARES Act funding to help with the budget.

Chair Hanson asked about the difficulty with disseminating the CARES Act funding. Ms. Van Beek said there is already an existing grant for the CARES Act money which can be used as the local match for the next few years.

A motion to direct staff to move forward with the preliminary operation budgets and grant applications was made by Mr. Lindaas and seconded by Ms. Wood. 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 which will go out for bid. One of the main projects is to replace the canopy system and replacing the lighting to LED. The changes will also improve pedestrian safety.

Chair Hanson asked whether there are plans to have in-person open house to show off the new renovations. Ms. Bommelman confirmed that they expect to have a substantially complete exterior renovation in time for the Dakota Transit Conference in September.

**b. Update on COVID-19 Changes – Julie Bommelman**

Ms. Bommelman noted that despite masks no longer being mandated by the cities, an executive order has extended the requirement for masks on transit until September.

Ms. Lindaas asked about how the response has been to mask requirements on transit. Ms. Bommelman said that generally people have been co-operative, despite resistance from the odd individual. Mr. Lindaas noted that perhaps there should be signs with the mask requirement end date to avoid confusion. This would ensure that people are aware that the mandate is still in effect. Ms. Bommelman agreed that they will also be updating their social media to reflect this.

**c. Update on Farebox System Implementation & Pilot Program – Lori Van Beek**

Ms. Van Beek explained that the farebox update has been moving quickly. MATBUS started collecting fares again on April 1 and drivers were retrained on the existing fare system. Later in

May, drivers will be trained on the new account-based farebox system. This will be compatible with smartphones. Cash and card will still be accepted to load cards at the GTC. There will be a pilot program for passengers to test the system as well as a media campaign to let the public know.

Mr. Lindaas asked whether the new fare system has the ability to track data about the rider. Ms. Van Beek expects that the new account-based system will be able to track some of that data, including where riders board, however riders may be able to turn their information off. They will still be learning more about the capabilities of the system in weeks to come.

Mr. Lindaas also asked whether there is a reason why there isn't a single transit pass that can be reused like other cities. Ms. Van Beek said that passing through multiple cities makes it a little difficult.

**d. Update on Transit Development Plan 2021-2025 – Michael Maddox**

Mr. Maddox gave an update on where they are at with the Transit Development Plan. There are a couple of meetings left to finalize the plan. A draft document is expected to be complete by the end of May or first week of June. There will also be a special MAT Coordinating Board meeting in June to present the plan to the board.

Ms. Van Beek asked if there will be a Doodle poll sent out to schedule the presentation. Mr. Maddox confirmed.

**e. 2021 Operations Reports – Cole Swingen & Lori Van Beek**

Mr. Swingen presented an MATBUS operation report for the year so far, compared to data from 2020. There is still a general decrease in ridership for most bus routes. Due to being fare-free, demographic data such as the number of student riders may be inaccurate. However as of April 1, college students will begin to use their student IDs again and data accuracy is expected to improve. Seniors have started to come back to Senior Ride recently. On-time performance has also seen slight decreases across the system in Fargo but has increased in Moorhead.

**f. Interesting Transit Articles**

With no responses to interesting transit articles shared this week, Chair Hanson asked the board whether there were any construction concerns coming up this season. Ms. Van Beek said there will be a lot of detours planned and this information will also be updated online.

Mr. Maddox added that the US10 corridor will be reconstructed in the near future. This will have impacts on transit. Also, the possible construction of the 11<sup>th</sup> St grade separation would shut down three key streets in Moorhead. Mr. Maddox invited MATBUS staff to be a part of the process to review the dynamic assignment model in planning the stages of project construction.

**4. Other Business**

Hearing no other business, Mr. Hanson adjourned the meeting at 9:09 AM.