

**2nd Meeting of the
Transit Coordination Committee
December 3, 2024 – 8:30 AM
Metro COG Conference Room/Zoom**

Members Present:

Deb White, Moorhead City Council, Chair
Denise Kolpack, Fargo City Commission
Julie Bommelman, Fargo Transit Director
Susan Thompson, Fargo Finance Director
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:

John Strand, Fargo City Commission
Ryan Nelson, Moorhead City Council
Dustin Scott, West Fargo City Administrator

Others Present:

Adam Altenburg, Metro COG
Shaun Crowell, MATBUS
Cindy Girdner, Valley Senior Services
Luke Grittner, MATBUS
Taaren Haak, MATBUS
Aiden Jung, Metro COG
Chelsea Levorsen, City of Fargo
Ian McLean, City of Fargo
Matt Pinotti, Transdev
Jordan Smith, MATBUS
Cole Swingen, MATBUS
Lori Van Beek, MATBUS
Megan Zahradka, City of Moorhead

1a. Review and Action on Minutes from November 19, 2024

A motion to approve the minutes for November 2024 was made by Ms. Kolpack and seconded by Ms. Bommelman. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

Mr. Rietz arrived at 8:33 AM.

1b. Discussion on Committee Name

Ms. White explained that with the disbanding of the MAT Coordinating Board, transit staff and others have been looking for a permanent name for the new Transit Coordination Committee. She noted that transit staff were looking to prevent confusion between the Transit Coordination Committee (TCC) and Metro COG's Transportation Technical Committee (TTC).

Ms. Bommelman noted that, besides keeping the current name, other committee name options were the Metro Area Transit Coordination Committee or the MATBUS Coordination Committee.

Chair White asked if committee members had any other naming recommendations. No other recommendations were made.

Chair White asked for a hand vote on which name committee members would like moving forward. She noted that a majority were in favor of renaming the Transit Coordination Committee to the MATBUS Coordination Committee for future meetings.

1c. 2025 Meeting Time/Date Discussion

Chair White explained that, prior to the previous meeting in November, a poll was sent out asking which meeting dates and times worked best for committee members. Mr. Swingen noted that the time that worked for most committee members was the third Wednesday of the month from 9:00 to 10:00 AM, followed by the third Tuesday of the month from 9:00 to 10:00 AM.

Chair White asked for a hand vote on which date worked best for committee members moving forward. She noted that a majority were in favor of meeting on the third Wednesday of the month beginning in January 2025.

2a. Review and Approval of the 2025 Transit Cost Allocation Plan

Mr. Swingen reviewed the 2025 Cost Allocation Plan with the committee. He noted that with the completion of the Transit Reorganization Study and approval of an interim Joint Powers Agreement (JPA), MATBUS has developed a Cost Allocation Plan to split transit costs and revenue between benefiting parties within the MATBUS service area. He explained that the approach to sharing system costs and revenues was overhauled to ensure an equal allocation across all benefit entities.

Mr. Swingen stated that cost-sharing principles were developed in close collaboration between the City of Fargo and the City of Moorhead and led to the development of a new methodology that splits costs by one of four metrics: revenue hours of the total system, revenue hours of the fixed route system, revenue miles of the total system, and paratransit ridership of the paratransit system. He noted that this framework will be implemented with CY25 budget cycles, with the notion that these new systems may course correct over time. He concluded by stating that the cost Allocation Plan was initially reviewed at the Transit Coordination Committee meeting on November 19.

A motion to approve the 2025 Transit Cost Allocation Plan was made by Ms. Kolpack and seconded by Mr. Mastera. The motion was voted on and unanimously approved.

3a. 2025-2026 LinkFM Service Considerations

Mr. Swingen informed the committee that LinkFM began as a free daily circulator route between downtown Fargo and downtown Moorhead in 2015. He explained that in 2020, LinkFM was changed to an episodic service for certain downtown community events, with operating costs shared equally between Fargo and Moorhead. In addition, he noted that Moorhead operates and pays for LinkFM to Bluestem Center for the Arts during certain community-wide events, connecting to Route 5 at the Azool Hornbachers under episodic service funded through MnDOT. He stated that 2024 ridership on LinkFM was 4,091, with an average cost of \$2.29 per ride.

Mr. Swingen explained that, with the demolition of the Moorhead Center Mall and redevelopment of that area of downtown Moorhead, construction will affect available existing parking and current LinkFM bus stops. He stated that transit staff would like to discuss whether LinkFM service should be adjusted, temporarily suspended, or eliminated. He noted that, per MATBUS policy on fare and route changes, eliminating LinkFM would be a major route change requiring a public hearing and approval by the Fargo City Commission and Moorhead City Council. He also provided more detailed ridership statistics for the seven events during which LinkFM operated in 2024, ranging from \$1.34 to \$25.78 per ride based on ridership totals at each event.

Ms. Van Beek explained that, under the new 2025 cost allocation formula, the cost per revenue hour for fixed route service is estimated at \$22,065. Of this amount, Fargo's share would be \$8,165 and Moorhead's share would be \$13,900 (Downtown \$8,165 and Bluestem \$5,735). She noted that with estimated ridership of 4,400 in 2025, the cost per ride on LinkFM would be \$5.01.

Ms. Kolpack asked whether MATBUS would bring back an optimized or hybrid service schedule that accounts for the events with the highest LinkFM ridership and lowest cost per ride such as the Downtown Fargo Street Fair, Trollwood Events, and Pride in the Park. Mr. Swingen responded that eliminating events from LinkFM's schedule may affect federal funding rules for what is considered episodic service, versus what is considered charter service.

Chair White asked whether LinkFM could serve peak hours rather than the entire day for events with higher costs per ride. Mr. Swingen said that that could be a possibility. Ms. Bommelman added that certain guidelines would need to be followed, and that this would need to be advertised ahead of time. Ms. Van Beek also added that employees and volunteers at events often use LinkFM during non-peak hours so as not to take up additional parking spaces available near event sites.

Chair White whether the committee had any additional thoughts. Ms. Thompson stated that she would be in favor of looking at ways to reduce the costs of LinkFM service, knowing that there may be federal restrictions that transit staff would need to look at first. Chair White also noted that she and others on the committee could reach out to event organizers to get their thoughts and opinions on transit needs.

3b. North Dakota Legislative Update

Ms. Bommelman informed the committee that the City of Fargo Transit and Finance Directors met with local legislators on November 22 to discuss transit funding and investment within North Dakota. She emphasized that the four urban transit providers (Fargo, Grand Forks, Bismarck, and Minot) are jointly pursuing additional funding from the state which would not impact existing state aid programs for rural and urban transit providers.

Ms. Bommelman explained that their research suggests the need for annual state funding of \$5 million to \$8 million, and noted that Cass County has 38.5 percent of all transit riders in the state but receives less than 15 percent of state funding. She also noted that 4,700 households in Cass County are without vehicles, many of whom utilize transit to reach jobs. She concluded by providing examples of potential sources of new funding such as commerce or workforce initiatives, new fees on vehicle registrations (i.e. \$5/vehicle), or health and human services funds for social service aspects.

3c. 2026 Driver Services

Mr. Smith explained that MATBUS has executed its final option with Transdev, a private sector operator that provides fixed route dispatch and driver services. He stated that the contract with Transdev will be in effect until the end of 2025, but that transit staff has been working to garner support to potentially transition contracted driver services staff to city employees. He noted the main challenge was that a decision on whether to transition driver services to city employees or continue with contracted services would need to be made early in the next budget process, likely by March or April 2025, and that it would be difficult to change course once a decision was made.

Mr. Smith explained several of the benefits that MATBUS sees in transitioning driver services in-house including the promotion of a one-team culture, better benefits packages, upward mobility, higher quality service, and potential cost savings. He concluded by saying transit staff would provide more information including job descriptions, pay rates, and other details that it would take to bring driver services in-house at a future committee meeting.

Mr. Mastera asked if transit staff felt comfortable that there was enough time to effectively bring on 100 new city employees in three to four months' time. Mr. Smith responded that MATBUS and the City of Fargo have been in discussions about driver services for the past two to three years and felt they would have time to put together the information required for a recommendation in early 2025.

Chair White asked whether transit staff knew the pay implications in transitioning contracted driver services staff to city employee and whether it would be detrimental to other positions requiring CDLs. Mr. Smith responded that the proposed grade that drivers would be starting out on is higher than what Transdev currently provides, plus added benefits that the city would offer. He noted that there would still be some natural staffing turnover but that it would likely be less than it is today.

4. Other Business

Chair White noted that this would be Lori Van Beek's last meeting as Moorhead's Transit Manager. She and the committee thanked Lori for her 42 years of service in local transit operations.

Chair White stated that the next MATBUS Coordination Committee meeting would be held Wednesday, January 15 at 9:00 AM.

Chair White adjourned the meeting at 9:34 AM.