

## **RECORD OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

### **RACINE COUNTY PUBLIC TRANSIT PLAN: 2013-2017 TRANSIT SERVICE IMPROVEMENT ALTERNATIVES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This report documents the comments received on a series of transit service improvement alternatives developed as part of the Racine County Public Transit Plan. Comments were received during a formal public comment period of February 7, 2013, through March 15, 2013, and during public meetings held on March 6, 2013, at the Corinne Reid-Owens Transit Center in Racine and on March 12, 2013, at the Veterans Terrace in Burlington.

The Racine County Public Transit Plan is a short-range, five-year plan for public transit in Racine County being prepared by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission at the request of the City and County of Racine. The plan will include recommendations for transit service and capital improvements for both the City and County transit systems over the period 2013 through 2017. The preparation of this transit plan is a joint effort by the staffs of Racine County, the City of Racine, and the Commission. The plan is being guided by an Advisory Workgroup that includes representatives from all units of government in Racine County and a wide variety of agencies and populations with an interest in transportation in the County. The Workgroup is responsible for proposing to the City of Racine, Racine County, and the Commission, after careful study and evaluation, a plan identifying the recommended transit system improvements over the next five years. The Workgroup approved the proposed transit service improvement alternatives, which were developed by the Commission staff working closely with City and County staff, for public comment.

The report presents in a series of appendices:

- Written and oral comments received from February 7, 2013, through March 15, 2013, including comments submitted at the public meetings held on March 6 and 12, 2013 (Appendix A).

- Attendance records of the public meetings held on March 6 and 12, 2013 (Appendix B).
- Materials announcing the two public meetings and summary materials distributed at those meetings (Appendix C).
- Newspaper articles and editorials concerning the Racine County Public Transit Plan (Appendix D).

The following section provides a summary of the comments received, and the Commission staff responses to those comments.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND RESPONSES**

During the period of February 7, 2013, through March 15, 2013, a total of 41 persons provided comments regarding the proposed transit service improvement alternatives developed as part of the Racine County Public Transit Plan. Oral comments were provided during public meetings held on March 6 and 12, 2013. Written comments were provided on forms available at the public meetings or via letter, email, or through the study website ([www.sewrpc.org/racinetransitplan](http://www.sewrpc.org/racinetransitplan)).

### **General Comments Related to Public Transit in the City of Racine, Racine County, or between Racine County and Surrounding Counties**

A total of four persons provided comments related to general transit service issues and did not identify specific transit service improvement alternatives.

- Two persons indicated a need to provide additional public transportation options for persons with disabilities.
- One person expressed opposition to any of the proposed alternatives that would have the potential to require the County to provide increased funding for public transit.

Response: The plan recognizes that limited funding is available to implement transit improvements. Commission staff analysis indicates that the County may be able to implement several of the proposed County alternatives within its current level of funding. For example, the

County shuttle service, if operated as public transit as proposed under County Sub-alternative 1C, would be eligible for Federal and State rural transit operating assistance funds. Using these funds has the potential to reduce the County's share of operating expenses for the shuttle service. There are, however, several alternatives that would likely require additional County funding during the five-year plan period or beyond, particularly those that would replace or expand eligibility for the existing eligibility-limited County demand-response service, such as the public shared-ride taxi program proposed under County Alternative 2.

- One person indicated that there was a need to provide public transit or specialized transportation to the Aging and Disabilities Resource Center (ADRC) in Ives Grove for individuals living within the City dial-a-ride (DART) paratransit service area.

Response: Currently, the City's DART paratransit service provides specialized transportation to seniors and persons with disabilities for trips made entirely within 3/4 mile of City fixed-route, non-commuter service, while the County's existing demand-response transportation service provides specialized transportation to seniors and persons with disabilities residing outside the City's DART paratransit service area. The service area for the City's DART paratransit service does not include the ADRC. In order for specialized transportation to be provided to seniors and persons with disabilities from within the City's DART paratransit service area to the ADRC in Ives Grove—which is west of IH 94—the County and City would need to reach an agreement on which party would be responsible for serving those trips. In terms of public transit, the public shared-ride taxi program proposed under County Alternative 2 would provide a public transportation option for all individuals wanting to travel to the ADRC from anywhere in the County—including seniors and persons with disabilities residing within the City's DART paratransit service area.

- One person expressed support for addressing the transportation needs of individuals without access to an automobile.

**Comments Related to the City of Racine and/or  
the Preliminary Recommended Alternative for the City of Racine Belle Urban System**

A total of 12 persons provided comments specifically related to the preliminary recommended alternative for the City of Racine Belle Urban System (BUS).

- Three persons indicated that proposed changes to the alignments of specific BUS routes under the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS would make it difficult or inconvenient for them to continue to use the BUS. Two of the commenters indicated that changing the BUS Route No. 86 loop to the proposed out-and-back Route No. 6 would make it more inconvenient to get to St. Mary's Hospital from their residences near Lathrop Avenue and Durand Avenue. One of the commenters also suggested that there is a need to provide a late night public transportation option for patients at St. Mary's Hospital that need to return home. One of the commenters suggested that the proposed Route No. 25—a combination of existing Route Nos. 2 and 5—would make it inconvenient to get to work at Modine Manufacturing Company from his residence in the Lake Park area. He suggested that ridership on the existing Route No. 5 may be increased by operating the route through downtown, and that if Route Nos. 2 and 5 are to be combined, consideration be given to operating the proposed Route No. 25 over Memorial Drive rather than over Taylor Avenue between Durand Avenue and 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

Response: The proposed changes under the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS are intended to improve the convenience and efficiency of the BUS, recognizing the limitations of existing and projected future funding levels. In doing so, there will be some individual riders that will be inconvenienced. City and BUS staff will need to consider these riders when determining whether to implement the proposed changes or make revisions to these changes. It should be noted that the changes to Route Nos. 5 and 86 are being proposed in an attempt to increase ridership on the routes, as both routes were identified among the weakest-performing routes in an evaluation of the transit system conducted as part of the plan.

- Two persons indicated that the BUS should continue to serve Lakeside Curative Services on Lincolnwood Court in the City of Racine.
- Two persons expressed support for establishing the proposed southwest transfer point in the Regency Mall area.
- One person expressed general opposition to the proposed changes to the BUS because they would have the potential to confuse existing users of the BUS.

Response: Under the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS, many of the proposed changes would address concerns identified during a previous public outreach and involvement effort for the plan in 2009<sup>1</sup>. One such concern was that the current BUS midday schedule is confusing because between 9:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., the bus routes alternate between 30- and 60-minute service frequencies. The proposed changes would make the midday schedule more understandable, with consistent 60-minute service frequencies during the midday. It should be noted that whenever there are changes made to bus system routes or service levels, there is the potential to cause confusion for existing users. Should any of the proposed changes be implemented, City and BUS staff would provide sufficient notice to users of the exact changes for each BUS route that are being implemented so that users can make adjustments to their travel.

- One person suggested that the BUS replace some of its larger buses with small buses in order to reduce costs, indicating that many of the larger buses appear to operate with excess seating capacity.

Response: Commission staff analyses for other transit studies has determined that there may be no cost savings from replacing a fleet of large buses with small buses, and there may in fact be increases in costs. First, like street and highway vehicle traffic, passenger demand on bus systems is peaked, with significant travel occurring during the morning and afternoon rush hours. During these hours, a larger bus is required to carry all passengers. A system with a fleet of small buses would require two buses to carry the same number of passengers in those peak hours. As the bus driver represents the majority of the cost to operate a bus service, this would mean a significant increase in operating costs. And, in addition to higher operating costs, the capital cost of small buses would also be higher than large buses when considered over the lifetime of the bus. While the purchase price of a small bus may be one-half that of a large bus, its expected service life (about seven years) is typically about 60 percent of that of a large bus (about 12 years).

Using a mixed vehicle fleet—where large buses operate during peak times and small buses operate during off-peak times when the additional capacity of a large bus is not needed—also would increase costs. First, capital costs would be greater as both large and small buses would need to be purchased. Also, the two vehicle types would require

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<sup>1</sup> Record of Public Comments, *Racine County Public Transit Plan: 2012-2016*, June 2011.

different spare parts, so additional parts would need to be purchased. Operating costs would also increase as drivers and maintenance personnel would need to be skilled in operating and maintaining the two vehicle types, which would require additional training. The need for a driver to return to the garage to exchange a large bus for a small bus would increase costs as well.

It is also worth noting that large buses operating with excess capacity at certain times and on certain routes can be compared to streets and highways or airports, which are necessarily sized and constructed according to the peak traffic they may need to carry. Most of the time, these facilities have significant excess capacity, but can handle more traffic when demanded by high travel volumes during peak times. A public transit system is very similar in this regard.

- One person suggested that the BUS should provide service to the Amtrak Station in the Village of Sturtevant.

Response: BUS Route No. 27 currently provides all-day service to the Amtrak Station on weekdays. Route No. 27 operates into the City of Racine, connecting to Route No. 3 at J. I. Case High School and to Route Nos. 1, 4, 7, and 86 at Regency Mall. Under the preliminary alternative for the BUS, connections between Route No. 27 and other BUS routes would be further improved by constructing the proposed southwest transfer point in the Regency Mall area.

- One person requested that the plan include specific recommendations for the locations of passenger shelters at stops along BUS routes.

Response: In 2011, the City of Racine obtained a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5309 Bus and Bus Facilities Livability Initiative Program to purchase and construct new passenger shelters. The City has used that grant to replace two existing shelters and construct shelters at 27 new locations. Commission staff will work with City staff to prepare a priority listing of additional locations with high passenger boarding volumes that could be considered for future shelters. Implementation of future shelters would depend on the ability to obtain additional Federal capital assistance funding and to provide the required local matching funds.

- One person suggested that the BUS provide service to the Marcus Renaissance Cinema in the Village of Sturtevant on weekends.

Response: BUS Route No. 27, which serves the Marcus Renaissance Cinema, currently only operates on weekdays. Given that the route was recently changed in September 2012, the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS does not propose any changes to the route at this time. However, BUS staff intends to monitor the performance of the recently-changed Route No. 27 to determine whether further changes are necessary and whether the route should be expanded to operate on Saturdays and/or Sundays.

- One person indicated that there is a need for the BUS to provide later evening service for individuals that attend support group meetings at the office of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Racine County, which is located on DeKoven Avenue in Racine.

Response: The existing BUS Route No. 2 currently provides direct service to the NAMI office. The route currently operates weekdays until about 6:30 p.m., but many of the support group meetings at the NAMI office are held in the evening, typically ending around 7:30 p.m. As such, those attendees are able to travel to an evening support group meeting on the BUS, but are not able to make the return trip home on the BUS. The NAMI office would continue to be directly served under the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS by the proposed BUS Route No. 25, but the alternative does not propose extending the hours of Route No. 25 due to funding limitations. However, should additional funding become available, the City may want to consider providing later evening service on the proposed Route No. 25 to provide return trips for those attending NAMI support group meetings.

- One person suggested that the BUS continue to serve areas of concentrated employment in the City of Racine, such as Huck Industrial Park on the northern side of the City and Olsen Industrial Park on the southern side of the City.

Response: Under the preliminary recommended alternative, the proposed Route No. 25—a combination of existing Route Nos. 2 and 5—would continue to provide all-day service to Huck Industrial Park and Olsen Industrial Park.

- One person indicated that there was a general need to improve the BUS to attract new riders.

Response: The preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS was developed assuming the total transit operating budget would remain relatively flat over the five-year planning period and local funding also would need to remain at about the year 2012 funding level. Commission staff identified and evaluated several potential desirable service improvements, which could be considered beyond the proposed changes above should additional funding become available. The service improvement options include adding service on the proposed Route No. 6, providing service to the Village of Sturtevant, establishing express bus service between the Cities of Racine and Kenosha, and extending Saturday service hours to 9:40 p.m.

- One person expressed concern that the proposed changes to the BUS would require a fare increase.

Response: A fare increase is not proposed under the preliminary recommended alternative for the BUS. The alternative system would not require an increase in local operating assistance over the existing system, and in fact, is estimated to slightly reduce the amount of required local operating assistance. However, in case the City determines that it become necessary to reduce the local funding that it provides to the transit system at some point over the next five years, a fare increase of \$0.25—from \$2.00 to \$2.25—was identified and evaluated for later in the plan-period to help the transit system avoid making cuts to service.

### **Comments Related to Racine County and/or the Transit Service Alternatives for Racine County**

A total of 28 persons provided comments specifically related to the proposed transit service improvement alternatives for Racine County.

- 25 persons expressed opposition to County Sub-alternative 1C, which would involve the County operating the existing Shuttling People Around Racine County (SPARC) shuttle service as a public transit service open to the general public. The commenters expressed support for the County continuing to operate the existing Burlington SPARC shuttle service, but expressed concern that the



County would not be able to provide the same personalized service as the current Burlington SPARC service if the County were to operate the service as public transit. One of the commenters suggested that meeting the requirements associated with using Federal transit operating and capital assistance funds, as proposed under County Sub-alternative 1C, would require significant additional County funding and that the County should not implement any public transit services that would utilize Federal funding. One of the commenters suggested that the County consider operating the existing Burlington SPARC service on Saturdays, in addition to its current weekday service.

Response: County Sub-alternative 1C proposes that the County continue to fund and pursue refinements to the shuttle program, including the current Burlington SPARC service. This could include modifying routes, dropping routes, and trying new routes. It also suggests that the County accommodate trips made by the general public in addition to trips by seniors and persons with disabilities, while maintaining the same general service levels and fares as the existing Burlington service. Under Sub-alternative 1C, the County could continue to contract with a private operator to provide the same level of personalized service that is currently being provided.

Operating the shuttle service as public transit would make it eligible for rural transit operating assistance through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 non-urbanized area formula grant program and State Section 85.20 transit operating assistance program. The combination of Federal and State funds available through these programs may be expected to cover about 55 to 60 percent of annual operating expenses during the five-year plan period. The local share of the operating assistance for the shuttle could come from the combination of the State Section 85.21 specialized transportation assistance allocation to the County and the County's required match for the 85.21 program funds. The combination of these funding sources would be expected to limit the County's annual share of operating expenses to about \$8,000 between 2013 and 2017—compared to County funding for the existing shuttle service of about \$13,000 in 2011.

It should be noted that Federal ADA regulations require public transit operators to use vehicles that are accessible to persons with disabilities, including those using wheelchairs. If the County uses Federal transit assistance to fund the shuttle service proposed under Sub-alternative 1C, the operator of the shuttle service must use wheelchair-accessible vehicles. The County's current contract with Kenson Enterprises,

the private operator of the SPARC shuttle service, includes the costs for vehicles provided by Kenson, which are not accessible. If the County purchases accessible vehicles with Federal capital assistance and provides those vehicles to the contract operator of the service for a nominal fee, it would meet the Federal ADA requirements. For the Burlington SPARC shuttle (and any other shuttle implemented in a non-urbanized area), the County could apply through the FTA Section 5311 non-urbanized area funding program. Federal capital assistance, if obtained, would cover 80 percent of the cost of vehicle purchases.

- Two persons commented that First Transit vehicles, which are used for the County demand-response transportation service, tend to drop riders off in the Burlington area and then wait idle for long periods of time.
- One person indicated that there is a need for additional transportation options for individuals and families that participate in programs offered by Love, Inc. in Burlington, including a need for transportation from the Burlington area to the Racine area, particularly for medical appointments.

Response: Many of the participants in programs offered by Love, Inc. are seniors or persons with disabilities and are eligible to use the County's existing demand-response transportation service. Many of the other participants are BadgerCare recipients and are eligible for Medicaid non-emergency medical transportation currently coordinated by LogistiCare. One additional transportation option, operated by the County from June of 2012 through January of 2013, was a cross-county shuttle called the Racine County Link. The Link was open to the general public and served cross-county trips between the Burlington and Racine areas. However, the County eliminated the Link because it did not receive Federal Section 5317 New Freedom to continue operations in 2013. The Link was also experiencing low ridership. Two of the County alternatives that would increase the transportation options available for Love, Inc. participants would involve replacing and expanding the existing County demand-response transportation service—County Sub-alternative 1A (expanding eligibility of the County's demand-response service to all clients of the County Human Services Department) and County Alternative 2 (replacing the existing County demand-response service with a shared-ride taxi program open to the general public). It should be noted that either alternative has the potential to require a significant increase in County funding by 2017 or beyond.

- One person expressed support for a combined City DART paratransit and County demand-response service east of IH 94 proposed under County Sub-alternative 1B.
- One person expressed support for the public shared-ride taxi program proposed under County Alternative 2.
- One person expressed support for a vanpool program proposed under County Alternative 3.
- One person suggested that the Racine County Link was unsuccessful because the route was too long and the service was not advertised well enough.

**Comments Related to the Transit Service Alternatives  
for Travel between Racine County and Surrounding Counties**

A total of six persons provided comments specifically related to the proposed transit service improvement alternatives for travel between Racine County and surrounding counties.

- Three persons expressed support for providing public transportation between Burlington and Milwaukee, such as establishing the commuter bus route proposed under Inter-County Alternative 4.
- Two persons expressed support for establishing a commuter rail service to and from Racine.

Response: Several members of the plan’s Advisory Workgroup have expressed support for establishing a commuter rail service to and from Racine. One such service which was recently studied was a potential commuter rail line between Kenosha, Racine, and Milwaukee. Appendix C to the plan report discusses this commuter rail line and its current status. A regional transit authority was created in 2009 by the Wisconsin State Legislature and Governor, with the authority to construct and operate this proposed Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee (KRM) commuter rail line. However, in 2011 this authority was dissolved by the Wisconsin State Legislature and Governor, and Federal earmarks which had been obtained to provide the funds necessary to continue KRM commuter rail studies were withdrawn. Given that the Racine County Public Transit Plan is a short-range plan—identifying actions to be implemented within the next one to five years—it

appears highly unlikely that a commuter rail service could be established during the five-year plan period.

- Two persons indicated that there was a general lack of public transportation options for travel between western Racine County and surrounding counties.
- One person suggested that the express bus service between Kenosha and Racine, proposed under Inter-County Alternative 3, should also include stops at Regency Mall and Carthage College.

Response: Express bus service is a limited-stop public transit service, with stops usually spaced about every 1/4 mile to one mile along an express bus route. The proposed route for the express bus service between Kenosha and Racine under Inter-County Alternative 3 would have an estimated one-way running time of about 60 minutes between the downtown transit centers in Kenosha and Racine. This running time is very desirable for scheduling purposes and makes it easy for potential riders to understand the schedule. Serving additional locations that would add distance to the route and make them less direct—such as Regency Mall or Carthage College—would likely increase the estimated one-way running time to more than 60 minutes. However, additional alternative route alignments—possibly including alignments to serve these locations—would necessarily be considered in more detail should the Cities of Kenosha and Racine determine to pursue implementation on an express bus service.

- One person requested more advertisement for the Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha commuter bus route operated by Wisconsin Coach Lines (WCL).

Response: Inter-County Alternative 1 proposes increasing the service frequency on the existing Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha commuter bus route. This alternative also recommends additional steps that the City of Racine should consider to integrate the route with existing BUS routes—regardless of whether or not service frequency is increased. These steps include adding the commuter route alignment to the BUS route map and requesting that the City of Kenosha also add the alignment to the Kenosha Area Transit (KAT) route map; establishing consistent charges for transfers between the commuter route and the local routes of the Racine and Kenosha transit systems; and providing information about the commuter route and its schedule at the Racine transit center and on the Kenosha and

Racine transit system websites and anywhere else information about the two Cities' transit systems is displayed. These steps would promote coordination between commuter and local transit services by making it easier and more attractive to use the two services.

- One person expressed support for the extended BUS Route No. 1 to the UW-Parkside campus proposed under Inter-County Sub-alternative 2B.

### **Other Comments and Suggestions**

- One person suggested that a private taxi service is needed in the City of Racine and environs to serve evening trips and fulfill same day service requests. The commenter suggested that consideration be given to encouraging a private operator to provide taxi service, perhaps by providing partial public funding or a tax break to the operator.

Response: A taxi service in the City of Racine with reasonable response times was previously identified as an unmet need during an earlier stage of the development of the Racine County Public Transit Plan. Currently, there are no private taxi operators in the City of Racine area.

- One person suggested that the City should establish a bicycle sharing program as a way to improve access to the BUS and promote increased ridership on the BUS.

Response: A bicycle sharing program would be a potential way to increase access to the BUS by providing a transportation option for transit users to get to bus stops or to their final destinations, thus promoting increased ridership. This type of program can have other benefits as well, particularly for tourists and visitors to the City, but also for local residents. This comment will be provided to City staff for their consideration.

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