

# TRANSIT INSIDER

MCTS NEWS FOR STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS



QTR 4, 2021



Our goal is to bring you informative transit news and insights that will assist your work with constituents and advocates.

# THE ROAD AHEAD

## DAN BOEHM, MCTS MANAGING DIRECTOR

As we close out the fourth quarter of 2021, let's reflect on what we accomplished this year. The biggest change our system has seen in decades was successfully rolled out in three phases. And even though we still have an overall decline in ridership due to the pandemic, the shining star is that riders are coming back to transit.

Ridership has increased 13% when we compare Spring-Summer-Fall this year compared to those months last year. We attribute this gain due to the jump from 40% high frequency service to 60% that was accomplished through MCTS NEXT.

We also celebrated the groundbreaking of the state's first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line. Elected officials including the Governor, prominent business leaders and community stakeholders came out to support this innovative project.

Operations during the second year of the pandemic kept everyone focused on safety. Bus cleaning protocols were kept in place, and we even added another layer of protection by applying a virus-blocking spray on all our bus filters.

Other noteworthy projects included sourcing our first order of battery electric buses (BEBs) from Nova Bus and upgrading bus station infrastructure to maintain the forthcoming electric fleet.

Needless to say, our employees throughout the agency have been busy.

We faced some budgetary challenges, but the Governor and the federal government made it clear that public transportation is worth investing in to get people to jobs, education and life.

Looking ahead to 2022, we have a lot to achieve. We'll welcome 60 new clean diesel buses, 11 battery electric buses, roll out a new, system-wide fare collection system, and plan for the launch of the BRT.

Through it all, we continue to put maximum effort into hiring excellent Bus Operators to maintain the service our valued riders have come to expect.

I look forward to seeing you on the bus in 2022!



# WHO'S DRIVING OUR SUCCESS

Each issue will spotlight an MCTS employee or department delivering on our mission.



**DAVID BUTLER**

Fond du Lac Station Manager

I've worked for MCTS for the past 27 years. During this time, I've held several different titles, but have been working as the Fond du Lac Station Manager for the past eight months. I was very excited to receive this opportunity because it allows me to have closer relationships with all MCTS employees, not just those who work at the Station. I love what I do!

Fond du Lac Station has a total of 407 Operators - nine of which work as Extra Clerks - one Administrative Assistant, three full-time Clerks and five Supervisors. Our team is a strong one, and recognizes that when we all come together, the company as a whole is able to provide better transit service.

A little-known fact about me is that I have an appreciation for all types of cars and am a big football and basketball fan. I like to attend car shows and have a love for classic vehicles preferably 1960 thru 1980. It's unusual that I've had a love for the Dallas Cowboys for many years, but as far as all other sports, I root for the Home Team!



**RAYMOND MA**

Kinnickinnic Station Manager

I started at MCTS as a rehire Bus Operator in 1989. Since then, I've risen through the ranks of Platform Instructor, Route Supervisor, Dispatcher and now Station Manager at Kinnickinnic (KK) Station. I've been in my current role since April 2021, but have been involved in station operators since February 2005 as a Station Supervisor. I was promoted to Interim Station Manager at Fiebrantz Station in 2018, and Fond du Lac Station manager in 2019.

KK Station has 298 Operators, four full-time Clerks and three Station Supervisors. I feel we share our sorrow, cherish our success and show the company's tender, loving care to others. MCTS has taught me more about embracing diversity and how to be an approachable manager.

My favorite thing to do outside of work is whipping up a meal to share with family.

# TRANSIT ADVOCACY

## MOBILISE

The Regional Transit Leadership Council has officially changed its name to MobilISE. Their name is new, but their mission remains the same: to unite regional leaders across SE Wisconsin around the value of multimodal transportation. Like MCTS, they understand that transportation choices – transit, biking, walking, rideshare and on-demand services, are critical in building an economy that attracts new talent and one where more people can access the opportunities that exist.

### **They work to advance regional transportation alternatives in several ways:**

**Leading the way toward new, innovative multimodal transportation.** They are leading groundbreaking partnerships around planning and implementing on-demand shuttles that help transit riders bridge the “last mile” to suburban job sites. One of these **partnerships** recently won a \$1 million national grant to implement a “microtransit” pilot connecting workers to job sites in Menomonee Falls, from four pick up spots in Milwaukee. And **another** was funded by WEDC and United Way to plan and implement similar services in eastern Waukesha County and southern Milwaukee County.

**Convening regional leaders.** They are bringing leaders together around tangible, practical solutions to transportation challenges, including their virtual “Intersections” series. MobilISE’s annual events draw diverse, regional representation and move our region from talk to action. To view videos of their most recent regional symposium, visit their **website**.

**Championing transformative projects.** They advocate for projects that will change how SE Wisconsin gets around, from bus rapid transit and expansions of bike share and ride share programs, to road redesigns that make our streets safer for all users.

MobilISE understands that fast, frequent and reliable fixed route transit is the backbone of Milwaukee’s transportation system and, by extension, our region’s economy. We must prioritize transit in all its forms, break down regional silos and work toward a truly regional vision for mobility.

To find out more, visit **MobilISE’s new website**.



# WHO'S RIDING?

## RIDER PROFILES

### **How long have you been riding the bus?**

I have been riding MCTS for almost my entire life, and most consistently from 2015 – present.

### **What is your primary reason for riding?**

It's safer to ride the bus than to drive a car as there are too many fatalities on the road.

### **Do you use the bus other than to travel to work?**

I use the bus primarily to go shopping, get to appointments, and anywhere else I need or want to go in the County.

### **Do you have a regular bus driver? Any thoughts on him/her, or general service you receive.**

My Route 54 Operator is always willing to chat with his riders and delivers an excellent experience – real smooth guy!

### **How did COVID-19 affect your bus travel?**

COVID-19 did not impact my travel as the buses have always shown up on-time. I would take the early buses, for example, to go shopping, get in the store and out, then head home. The system is very reliable and safe.

### **What's something interesting about riding the bus people might not know or think about?**

The buses these days have seats with more space, are more comfortable and deliver a smooth ride. I also like that the Operators have a shield to help protect them, which ultimately protects me too as a rider, so they can focus on driving safely. The bus is therapeutic to me, because you get to see different people all the time. You may know some of the riders, but haven't seen them for years, and they suddenly start riding again. "Riding the bus gives you a chance to see what's going on in the city where you live; new restaurants or buildings being constructed, different renovations, and new stores popping up. You can't see all that while driving a car!"

### **If you could encourage someone to try riding the bus, what would you say?**

The bus is safer than driving a car; you're protected from fatalities, and you can get to where you need to go.



**JAMES  
ROBERTSON**

Nickname:  
Handsome Jimmy

### **Any other fun fact about your personal experience riding the bus?**

MCTS has the best staff and transit system in America! Everyone at MCTS is always willing to help; they not only take the public's suggestions, but actually implement them.



**WISCONSIN REPRESENTATIVE DEB ANDRACA (DISTRICT 23) TALKED WITH BUS PASSENGERS RIDING THE GREENLINE DURING HER MOBILE MEET UPS WITH MCTS SESSION ON NOVEMBER 4.**



**MILWAUKEE COUNTY SUPERVISOR SEQUANNA TAYLOR ON ROUTE 60 ON DECEMBER 1.**



**MILWAUKEE COUNTY SUPERVISOR FELESIA MARTIN ON ROUTE 76 ON DECEMBER 2.**

## **TRANSIT SPOTLIGHT** **NEW MOBILE MEET UPS HAS** **SUCCESSFUL START**

Mobile Meet Ups with MCTS is our newest community outreach program. It connects Milwaukee County and Wisconsin elected officials to their constituents on board MCTS bus routes and at bus stops. Plus, officials can personally experience and witness “MCTS Excellence on Board.”

Through our Mobile Meet Ups, officials can host informal opportunities to talk one-on-one with residents who live and work in their districts about issues of concern to them.

In the program’s debut this fall, **State Representative Deb Andraca** (District 23) hosted a session on the GreenLine. **Milwaukee County Supervisors Felesia Martin** (District 7) and **Sequanna Taylor** (District 2) made connections on Routes 76 and 60, respectively. **State Senator LaTonya Johnson** (District 6) and **State Representative Supreme Moore Omokunde** (District 17) will meet bus riders while on the RedLine on December 9.

Mobile Meet Ups with MCTS is a year-round program. MCTS assists with the planning of each session by identifying the routes and bus stops. To learn more or to get assistance with coordinating a trip, contact MCTS Community Outreach & Internal Communications Coordinator Jacqueline Zeledon at [jzeledon@mcts.org](mailto:jzeledon@mcts.org) or 414-937-3253.

# NEWS ON THE STREET

## EAST-WEST BUS RAPID TRANSIT



Construction is well underway on the East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in the Milwaukee metropolitan area. The Zenith Tech (ZTI) team and partners are working diligently to reach 50% completion by the end of 2021. This nine-mile, regional, modern transit service will connect major employment, education, and recreation destinations through downtown Milwaukee, Milwaukee's Near West Side, Marquette University, Wauwatosa, and the Milwaukee Regional Medical Center (MRMC).

As the first of its kind in the state of Wisconsin, this is both a challenging and exciting project for ZTI to be a part of. The team has to tackle a variety of urban construction activities including coordination between municipalities, complex utilities installation, and trade coordination within a complex project schedule.

Construction began on June 1, 2021, with a tentative completion scheduled for Fall 2022.

The team will be just west of Marquette University's Campus by the end of this construction season. During the winter

months, project partners will work on setting shelters at stations where the concrete is complete and traffic signal priority integration. In April 2022, ZTI will begin construction at Marquette University's campus and move east.



# PROJECT FEATURES

- 33 STATIONS BEGINNING AT THE WATERTOWN PLANK PARK & RIDE AND WORKING EAST.
- ZENITH TECH IS PROVIDING CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT SERVICES, SETTING STATION SHELTERS, CONCRETE PAVEMENT, CURB & GUTTER, ADA RAMPS, AND SIDEWALKS.
- **SUBCONTRACT PARTNERS:**
  - CONCRETE REMOVALS
  - REINFORCED STATION FOUNDATIONS
  - INSTALLATION OF UTILITIES
  - TRANSIT SIGNAL PRIORITY INTEGRATION
  - CONNECTING NEW STORM SEWER TO THE EXISTING SEWER
  - ELECTRICAL WORK AT EACH PLATFORM TO ACCOMMODATE THE INSTALLATION OF A SNOWMELT SYSTEM, REAL-TIME TRACKING SCREENS, TICKET VENDING AND VALIDATING MACHINES, ILLUMINATED SHELTERS AND PYLON SIGNS, RAMPS, AND STEPS LEADING TO THE PLATFORM.
  - SURVEYING SERVICES, GRADING, AND ASPHALT PAVING

TO STAY UP TO DATE ON ALL THINGS BRT VISIT THE BRT CONSTRUCTION WEBSITE [HERE](#).

Great collaboration and teamwork between HTNB (Construction Management Consultant), subcontractor partners and MCTS have been key to a successful first season of this project.

The team continues to communicate effectively and work through issues together to ensure this project is a huge success for Wisconsin.







## MCTS IN THE COMMUNITY SENIOR SMART RIDES

The Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) launched a new outreach program for senior citizens or anyone who has a relative, friend, or neighbor who's looking to become more independent throughout their golden years.

MCTS teamed up with local partners to hold two free in-person "Senior Smart Ride" seminars that explored transportation options for seniors in Milwaukee County.

### OCTOBER SESSIONS TOOK PLACE AT

Clinton & Bernice Rose Senior Center  
Wilson Park Senior Center

Hands-on learning opportunities and presentations developed especially for seniors were given by MCTS, Transit Plus, Milwaukee County Department on Aging, and Milwaukee Police. Attendees learned how to qualify for Paratransit door-to-door van service, how to ride fixed route buses, how to pay, bus etiquette, safety while traveling to their destination, and so much more. Seniors also completed applications for reduced fare bus fare cards. An MCTS bus took attendees on a short ride around the neighborhood to demonstrate what riding the bus is like. Watch for more Senior Smart Ride events to come to more community centers in 2022!

# GRANT FUNDS USED TO STRENGTHEN EMPLOYEE FINANCIAL WELLNESS ADVANCING RACIAL EQUITY

In late 2020, MCTS was awarded a grant of \$46,000 to focus on financial wellness programs for its workforce with a primary focus on Bus Operators and Maintenance Staff. The grant funding has helped MCTS's Human Resources Department focus on connecting with employees to deliver solid financial information on issues like debt management and household budgeting. Working on financial fundamentals has helped employees save for goals like education or homeownership and increase savings for retirement.

As of program launch, roughly 25 percent of MCTS bus Operators and Maintenance Staff took part in the company's 457 Deferred Compensation plan. **MCTS Employee Benefits Coordinator Tiara Cooper**, with help from the financial wellness grant, has been tasked to increase the 457 Deferred Compensation Plan participation. We sat down with her to learn more about her role at MCTS and what she's doing

to help prepare MCTS employees for retirement.

**How long have you worked at MCTS?**  
1 year and 8 months

**What is something about working in transit you think is unique or interesting?** The interesting part of working at MCTS is having union members and non-union members. I came from corporations that were not unionized and this has been a learning experience. I've also enjoyed working with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with FEI. The EAP is a great program for employees that offers counseling services, work-life services, legal and financial services, and more.

**Why did MCTS want to apply for the grant?** Milwaukee County Transit System wanted to apply for the grant to bring Financial Wellness to the company and assist employees to work towards financial freedom.

**Why was it important to educate our employees about financial wellness?**

The statistics for Milwaukee County show that our county is less knowledgeable when it comes to financial wellness, especially managing monetary funds.

**A recent study\* on 401(k) savings disparities across racial-ethnic groups found that African American and Hispanic workers had a tendency to participate and save less, take more loans and hardship withdrawals, and choose investments with lower rates of return. Among employees over the age of 45 who completed a financial wellness assessment, African American and Hispanic employees were more likely to report having taken out a retirement plan loan or hardship withdrawal, and less likely to be on track to achieve income replacement goals.**

\* ARIEL/HEWITT STUDY, 2012. "401(K) PLANS IN LIVING COLOR: A STUDY OF 401(K) SAVINGS DISPARITIES ACROSS RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS."  
[HTTPS://WWW.ADN.COM/ATTACHMENTS/THOUGHT-LEADERSHIP/ARIELHEWITT\\_401K\\_STUDY\\_RESULTS.PDF](https://www.adn.com/attachments/thought-leadership/ARIELHEWITT_401K_STUDY_RESULTS.PDF)

**What type of employee feedback or participation have you seen since starting the program?** Employees are thankful for the programs that are educating them about college tuition reimbursement, investments, first-time home ownership, and much more. The participation in MSA seminars is growing, and we're already seeing increased enrollment in our 457 retirement plan.

**How many types of programs are there for our employees?** My Secure Advantage (MSA) and the 457 Deferred Compensation Plan are the two financial programs currently offered, but we are seeking more benefit (cost-saving) programs in the future. The Benefits team is looking to bring more Wellness programming to MCTS in 2022.

**Anything else you'd like readers to know?** I want the readers to know that education doesn't stop once you depart from secondary school. Learning is a continuous process of life. Therefore, every person should continue to learn new things whether it's formal or social learning. The main purpose of the Wellness Program is to transform employees both physically and mentally to help change their lives.



## TIARA COOPER

Employee Benefits Coordinator

You can reach her at  
[tcooper@mcts.org](mailto:tcooper@mcts.org)

MSA

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## GOING THE EXTRA MILE MCTS HOSTS PUBLIC ALLIES

FOR THE FIRST TIME, MCTS IS PARTNERING WITH PUBLIC ALLIES, A NATIONAL MOVEMENT COMMITTED TO ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY BY ENGAGING AND ACTIVATING THE LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE. MCTS WELCOMED THREE MILWAUKEE-BASED ALLIES, WHO BEGAN THEIR 10-MONTH TENURE IN SEPTEMBER, TO OUR MARKETING, PARATRANSIT SERVICES, AND TRANSIT PLANNING DEPARTMENTS.



**ABIGAIL LYNCH**  
Marketing

**Abigail Lynch** is a 2020 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) alumna, where she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Urban Studies. With the Marketing Department, Abigail will work directly with Community Outreach & Internal Communications Coordinator Jacqueline Zeledon, and Business & Customer Services Manager Jennifer Ortega on new initiatives and ongoing projects. We look forward to making use of the skills she gained as a former U-PASS customer, a two-time UWM Research Assistant and a Shift Supervisor for Starbucks to help us better serve our customers. Already, Abigail has shown her ability to do market research - tapping into teen demographics and finding contacts at non-profits and associations who would benefit from discounted bus fare for employees.



**ISABEL SANCHEZ**  
Paratransit

**Isabel Sanchez** was born and raised in Milwaukee. She has worked in her family's business and has volunteered from an early age. Her volunteer activities have included mentoring high school students, volunteering at the Milwaukee Rescue Mission and serving as a coach with the Special Olympics. In the Paratransit Department, Isabel's primary responsibilities will include supporting the implementation of a new client scheduling software module and creating a way for MCTS to better communicate with and track riders.

We are excited to have Isabel join our team to provide service to riders with disabilities.

# GOING THE EXTRA MILE

## MCTS HOSTS PUBLIC ALLIES



**LEEAN LE**  
Transit Planning

Taking a year away from her undergraduate studies at UW-Milwaukee to serve with Public Allies, **Leean Le** will continue her career in public service that has already provided her a wealth of diverse experiences. Those include volunteering at the Riverwest Food Pantry, helping plan the Social Justice march from Milwaukee to Washington, D.C. in 2020, assisting a local Criminal Justice Lawyer and, most recently,

working as a Crisis Stabilizer with Rae of Hope. This Public Allies AmeriCorps apprenticeship with MCTS Planning will provide Leean exposure to a variety of challenges and opportunities. Leean will be responsible for sending out automatic passenger count (APC) assignments and tracking ridership by route and bus stops, enhancing our agency's Public Participation Plan and Limited English Proficiency Plan, and making progress on MCTS's first-ever Service Design Guide. She will also be involved with rider and stakeholder outreach preceding the launch of the BRT. Learning the entire process of how and why a bus route changes and how that service change impacts the people of Milwaukee will enable Leean to grow her voice as an advocate and shape the rest of her career as a public servant.

## WINTER SERVICE CHANGES

Public transportation agencies typically adjust service four times a year to account for road construction, long-term detours, new commercial developments, school schedules, ridership trends, and staffing requirements.

The new Winter Service Changes take effect on **Sunday, December 5**. Schedules that are changing include: **11, 14, 20, 21, 22, 28, 33, 51, 54, 55, 57, 76, 88, GoldLine & PurpleLine**. Check buses or [RideMCTS.com](https://www.RideMCTS.com) for updated schedules.

**MORE DETAILS**



# INNOVATION NEWS

## MINNESOTA / WISCONSIN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION CONFERENCE

“Resilient and Strong” was the theme of this year’s combined transit conference held in Duluth, Minnesota October 4-7. Transit agencies throughout Minnesota and Wisconsin sent representatives to discuss topics ranging from Route Design, Security, Micro Transit, Technology, Battery Electric Buses, Marketing, and more. There was a special presentation about Federal Funding led by national transit leaders – Kelley Brookins (Federal Transit Administration Region V), Scott Bogren (Community Transit Association of America) and Paul Skoutelas (American Public Transportation Association). The session focused on the latest action by Congress and the administration that will impact federal funding and policies related to transit.

### **MCTS leaders were featured in three breakout sessions:**

**Ron McCorkel**, Director of Maintenance, reviewed best practices and lessons learned for electrifying the fleet and facilities in preparation for the agency’s first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route and battery electric bus (BEB) deployment coming in 2022.

**Kristina Hoffman**, Director of Marketing and Communications, summarized major initiatives and analytics related to advertising campaigns and community outreach activities.

**Jeff Sponcia**, former Planning Manager, reviewed the successful launch of the MCTS NEXT route redesign project in the Transit System Planning and Route Design session.

The conference was held in person at the sprawling Duluth Entertainment Convention Center located on Lake Superior. Transit vendors from across the country had the opportunity to visit one on one with agency reps at the Expo.



# TRANSIT THOUGHTS

## FEDERAL INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

On November 15, 2021, President Biden signed the historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill into law. Building a stronger, more resilient public transit network is one of the key focus areas.

Here's an excerpt from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, written by The White House:

“The transportation sector in the United States is now the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions. The legislation includes \$39 billion of new investment to modernize transit, in addition to continuing the existing transit programs for five years as part of surface transportation reauthorization. In total, the new investments and reauthorization in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provide \$89.9 billion in guaranteed funding for public transit over the next five years – the largest Federal investment in public transit in history. The legislation will expand public transit options across every state in the country, replace thousands of deficient transit vehicles, including buses, with clean, zero emission vehicles, and improve accessibility for the elderly and people with disabilities.”

[READ MORE ABOUT THE LAW HERE](#)



“

*Improve transportation options for millions of Americans and reduce greenhouse emissions through the largest investment in public transit in U.S. history.*

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BY EMAILING [MARKETING@MCTS.ORG](mailto:MARKETING@MCTS.ORG)



## MISSION:

MCTS connects our community to jobs, education and life with essential transit services.



## VISION:

To be the preferred transportation choice through service excellence and innovation.



## VALUES:

Respect, Integrity, Excellence,  
Equity, Collaboration, Innovation