Memorandum

TO: All Mayors, Village Presidents, and Town Chairs in the MPO Planning Area and Dane County Executive

FROM: William Schaefer, Transportation Planning Manager

DATE: July 6, 2020

RE: Notice of Public Hearing on Proposed Amendment to the Regional Transportation Plan 2050 for the Madison Metropolitan Area to Add East-West Bus Rapid Transit Project to the Fiscally Constrained Plan

This is to notify you of a proposed amendment to MATPB’s Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) 2050 for the Madison Metropolitan Area. The RTP amendment would add the East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project to the fiscally constrained plan along with a Satellite Bus Garage project. Specifically, it would add the projects to Appendix A – Project and Policy Recommendations of the RTP, retitling the table “Arterial Street/Roadway and Major Transit Capital Improvement Projects: 2017-2050” and adding a Transit Capital Projects section listing the BRT project (up to $147 million total cost, including design, street improvements, and rolling stock) and the Satellite Bus Garage ($22 million cost; $12 million for RE and PE) as planned projects in the 2020-2035 timeframe.

The RTP recommends implementation of a BRT system and specifically calls for project planning leading to an initial BRT project (see Transit section of Chapter 5 of the RTP – Needs Analysis and Recommendations). However, the BRT system was not included as part of the official, fiscally constrained plan. Federal transportation planning rules require that regional transportation plans include a financial capacity analysis to demonstrate that the estimated costs of projects in the official, federally recognized plan can be covered using projected revenues based on existing and reasonably likely new funding sources (See Chapter 6 of the RTP – Financial Capacity Analysis). This is to ensure that regional transportation plans don’t just contain a “wish list” of projects. At the time, an initial project from the planned BRT system hadn’t been identified and it also wasn’t clear that the City of Madison would be able to move forward with an initial project without a new source of funding. The RTP did anticipate an amendment to the RTP to add BRT to the official, fiscally constrained plan once the initial project and the funding to build and operate it had been identified. The amendment is being proposed now.

Background

Following MATPB adoption of RTP 2050 in 2017, the City of Madison passed a resolution in early 2018 supporting a BRT inter-agency staff team recommendation to pursue an initial BRT project in the east-west corridor consistent with the 2013 BRT Feasibility Study led by MATPB. Later in 2018, the city hired a consultant to develop the scope and begin preliminary design (“Phase 1 pre-project development”) for the initial project and submit an application to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for Small Starts application.

In 2019 the city approved a vehicle registration fee of $40 per vehicle that went into effect in March 2020. Some of the revenues from the fee will be used to fund the BRT project. The city approved a 2020-2025 Capital Budget, which includes $128.5 million (including anticipated FTA Small Starts funding) for the planning, design, and construction costs
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for the initial east-west BRT project1. The city received a federal grant for the purchase of property at the former Oscar Mayer plant for a planned satellite bus garage facility, and has budgeted funding in 2020-22 for the purchase, design, and construction improvements for the new garage.

The East-West BRT Planning Study was completed in early 2020, and in April 2020 the city adopted a resolution endorsing the recommended routing and other design details for the initial East-West BRT Project (“Locally Preferred Alternative” or “LPA”) and recommending advancing the project into the next phases of engineering, design, and environmental evaluation. The East-West BRT LPA runs from East Towne Mall to West Towne Mall. It is 15 miles in length, includes 27 stations, and would run every 15 minutes weekdays until 7 p.m. and every 30 minutes from 7 p.m.-12 a.m. weekdays and on weekends. The estimated capital cost (in 2020$) is approximately $130 million. The annual net operating and maintenance cost of the BRT line is estimated to be $2.9 to $3.7 million. See map below of the LPA and Madison East-West BRT Planning Study Locally Preferred Alternative Report for more information on the project.

The city sent a letter to FTA in May requesting entry into Project Development in pursuit of an FTA Section 5309 Small Starts Grant for the BRT project. The city expects to complete sufficient documentation to request a project rating from FTA in September. Environmental documentation is scheduled to be completed in winter 2021. If successful in receiving a Small Starts grant, the agreement is expected to be executed in 2022 with service starting in spring 2024 following construction. See graphic below showing BRT schedule and key tasks.

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1 The city is considering transferring BRT bus purchases from the Metro Transit budget to the BRT budget to increase the local match percentage and increase grant application competitiveness.
The City of Madison has committed the necessary local funds, which along with its existing federal/state funding for design and the anticipated Small Starts grant, will cover the cost to complete project development and construct the project. The city’s currently adopted 2020-2025 Capital Budget includes $128.5 million for the project for planning/design and capital costs in 2020-2023. The city’s 2021 Capital Budget update is proposing to merge Metro Transit capital funds to achieve bus replacement goals. The budget will be revised this year to account for an updated capital cost estimate for BRT street improvements.

In terms of revenue, the city will have the new $40 vehicle registration fee to partially support the BRT capital cost and ongoing O/M costs. The fee is expected to generate around $8 million per year in new revenue. While some of this revenue will be used to support general Metro operating expenses and at least initially replace property tax revenue that would otherwise go to support Metro, the new revenue source is important. There are also three Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts located in different segments of the corridor, which is another potential funding source in addition to local property tax revenue.

A restructuring of the local bus route system in conjunction with implementation of the East-West BRT Project is planned to eliminate duplicate service in the BRT corridor and provide connections to BRT. This will result in some offsetting operating cost savings, which is the reason for the range for the estimated net additional operating cost. A route network design study will be initiated this summer to develop the plan for restricting the route system.

Based on the high average daily ridership in the corridor (around 16,000), large number of residents (70,000) and employees (56,000) served, plans for redevelopment in the corridor, past BRT projects funded in the U.S., and other factors, Madison has a very high likelihood of securing a Small Starts funding grant, if not in 2022, then in the near future.

Based on all of this information, the East-West BRT project, along with the Satellite Bus Facility, are proposed to now be added to the fiscally constrained RTP 2050. It should be noted that an East-West BRT project is being amended into the RTP, however some details regarding the exact limits of the project, roadway improvements, and even the routing in certain areas (e.g., planned route through the UW Research) are still subject to change based on the final design work, final cost estimates, and outcome of the Metro route network design study.
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Public Hearing and Anticipated MPO Action

The following is the date of the public hearing on the RTP 2050 amendment, which provides an opportunity to provide oral comments to the board.

Public Hearing
Wednesday, August 5 at 6:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting hosted via Zoom
[Note: See agenda when posted for information on how to register to speak]

Written comments regarding the RTP 2050 amendment must be submitted by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, August 4. Please address written comments to the MATPB office or email them to MATPB staff at mpo@cityofmadison.com.

MATPB anticipates taking action on the RTP 2050 amendment following the public hearing unless the board receives comments expressing concerns prior to or at the hearing in which case action could be delayed.

Cc (via email):
- MPO Policy Board and CC List
- MPO Technical Committee and CC List
- MPO Citizen Advisory Committee
- Administrators/Clerks in the MPO Area
- Dane Co. Supervisors in MPO Area
- Dane Co. PW & Transp. Committee
- City of Madison Alders
- WisDOT Central and SW Region Staff Contacts
- Federal and State Resource Agency Contacts
- Ho-Chunk Nation Contacts
- Interest Organization Contacts
- City of Madison Transp. Policy & Planning Bd. & TC
- Local Transp. / Public Works Committees
- City of Madison Neighborhood Associations