

Title: Climate Action Plan Implementation of Action Item TM-2-2: Increase bus frequency as part of goal to increase transit access and commuter ridership

Description:

Action item TM 2-2: increase bus frequency, is part of the overall goal, TM 2: increase transit access and commuter ridership, which is tied to goal TM 1: decrease commuter and community-wide Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). These goals were set in order to reduce transportation-related emissions which made up 34.4% of community-wide emissions in 2020. While a one-time budget request is not feasible to fund an ongoing service, there are supporting actions that can prioritize increases in access and a transition to transit. Access includes knowing there is a bus system, understanding how to use it, feeling safe and comfortable riding, being able to afford the system, and feeling support from the community and employer/school for riding transit. Increasing commuter participation and access will require education and outreach about MTU routes, schedules, and incentives. The target audience must include those who currently drive; simply providing better service for current riders will not help reach the overall goal of reducing transportation-related emissions.

Requesting Department(s):

Request Type:

Current Status: Not yet started.

Timeline:

Department Point of Contact:

JUSTIFICATION:

What is the request's desired outcome?

By the end of year one, 500 first-time riders will have taken at least one ride on the MTU. At least ten percent of these new riders will purchase a fare or a pass for additional MTU rides. An average of at least ten Rides with Guides per month will be accomplished. At least one New Rider event will be held each month. At least ten new businesses will sign up to try the MTU works program. At least ten MTU+ event trials will occur. Travel planning assistance sign ups will be accepted at all related events. Promo materials will be viewed and shared on social media.

Each subsequent year will see increases in new ridership, participation in new rider events, and overall ridership. The goal is to permanently reduce the numbers of individual drivers creating greenhouse gas emissions.

How will this outcome be measured?

New rider passes will be counted as they are used. Ride Guides will submit attendance reports after each ride. New rider event reports will be filed by the organizers. The MTU counts overall ridership and tracks changes.

What is the methodology used to determine the budget for this project?

Past experience and similar initiatives.

Explain why project will take more than one year to complete?

Currently, there is an 18 to 24 month wait time between ordering a bus and getting one. The system for procuring new equipment goes through the state and depends upon their timelines. In addition, there is a driver shortage in La Crosse and nationwide. Increasing service is one part of increasing ridership. Ensuring what we have right now is being used to its fullest capacity can increase ridership while the funding and logistics are being worked out to increase service.

But, changing behaviors, especially car-driving habits, requires more than just increasing frequency or improving service. Our whole society revolves around cars. A recent meta-study of policies aimed at reducing VMT and increasing transit ridership concludes that, "[C]arrots alone are not sufficient to overcome the entrenched infrastructure and incentives, which today favors car use." This means that besides education and

outreach events, promotional fares, and increased service, some changes to city policies should be considered which will take more than a year to accomplish. In addition, lack of familiarity with the system, lack of understanding about using it, and misinformation about safety, keep people from considering the bus for some trips. It will take time to roll out new information, train volunteers, and schedule programs. The changes must be permanent, not one-time entertainments. So, it is probable that repeated promotions, events, and incentives will be required.

Building ridership within the current system will strengthen the case and increase rider fares that can be used for increasing service, including extending weeknight 1/2 hour service, adding later service on weekends, and ensuring the bus fully serves French Island and the La Crosse Regional Airport.

APPROVAL & OVERSIGHT:

Has request been approved by an oversight board?

Climate Action Plan Steering Committee

Is this request part of an approved master plan?

2023 Climate Action Plan (2019 Carbon Zero Resolution)

Does this request require regulatory/other outside approval?

No

Outside Funding: *(It is possible that grants could be found for some of this. For example*

- AARP Community Challenge grants (applications start in January) may help train Ride Guides or related transit education and outreach events, especially for seniors and diverse communities.
- Section 5310 grants, administered by the state, offer resources for small urbanized areas to increase access and use for and by seniors and disabled citizens.

Does this request require the city to contribute funds?

Does this request use donated funds?

Operating Costs	Source FTEs		Amount				
	Past	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	Total
Request Budget							

FUNDING SOURCES:

SPENDING PLAN:

EXPENDITURE CATEGORIES:

Details:

Year One \$30,000

1. Social and local media campaign to promote transit ridership and encourage first-time riders, especially commuters, to try the bus \$12,000
 - * Contracted and/or volunteer media to educate about how to and benefits of taking the bus, how bus riding helps the CAP, events for new riders, etc. Advertise and promote taking the bus.

2. Training and support for ten volunteer Ride Guides including passes for guides and participants, stipends for volunteers, handouts, support materials \$3,000

* “Bus Buddy” or Ride Guide programs provide support for first-time riders, do outreach in the community, help new riders understand the route and fare systems. (Example: [Minneapolis Bus Buddy YouTube Video](#) and [RSVP Bus Buddy Program in Madison](#))

3. Materials and supplies for 12 *new rider* events and promotions Passes, handouts, promotional material, facility rental, etc. \$6,000

4. Materials and supplies for MTU Works outreach and events and outreach to entertainment and event venues to encourage including transit. Printed material, promotional material. \$5,000

* MTU Works outreach to local businesses and non-profits to encourage them to sign up for reduced-fare passes for employees and/or members. Will also include information about parking cashout.

* MTU+ would be a new program encouraging events, restaurants, entertainment venues to partner with MTU and provide a free fare to get to and from the event and/or a promotional item if the bus is used.

5. New rider and promotional passes \$1,500

6. Training and deploying volunteer travel planners \$2,500

Years Two-Four (\$15,000 per year) \$45,000

1. Social/Local media (update existing materials) (\$500 x 3 years) \$1,500

2. Support for volunteer Ride Guides (\$2,000 per year x 3) \$6,000

3. Materials and supplies for monthly new rider events and promotions (\$500 x 12 x 3) \$18,000

4. Materials and supplies for MTU Works/MTU+ outreach and events (\$4,000 x 3) \$12,000

5. New rider passes and promotional passes (\$1,500 x 3) \$4,500

6. Travel planners - train new/update materials (\$1,000 x 3) \$3,000

BUDGET	2024	2025	2026	2027	TOTAL
Social/Local media	\$12,000.00	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$13,500.00
Volunteer training	\$3,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$9,000.00
<i>New Rider</i> events	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$24,000.00
MTU Works/MTU+	\$5,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$17,000.00
Passes	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$6,000.00
Travel planners	\$2,500.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$5,500.00
TOTAL	\$30,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$75,000.00

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Not part of the budget request, but background information for committee.

RELATED ACTIONS

As mentioned, a recent meta-study of transit policies* found that the most effective policies to encourage people to switch from their cars to public transit make car driving less convenient and more expensive (sticks). Funding for bus service increases (carrots) could, in some cases, come from these policy changes, much as increased taxes on cigarettes not only discourages tobacco use but also helps pay for health and smoking prevention programs.

The top recommendations from the study referenced above include policy changes already recommended by city and county plans such as workplace parking charges, parking cash out schemes, restricting and/or charging

extra for time-sensitive access by private cars, variable rate parking charges, reducing availability of parking (removing spaces), and creating car-free streets (temporary, occasional, or full-time).

The City of La Crosse 2018 Transportation Demand Management Plan already includes parking cash out, variable charges for parking, and other similar “sticks” that can help manage demand *and* fund improved transit (see p. 26, Table 1: TDM Tactics and Goals). Sharing revenue from *parking benefits districts* with the MTU can help fund better services that will reduce the demand for parking. Implementing these *and* the policy and operational changes outlined in the Grand River Transit Service Enhancement & Policy Plan 2015-2025 and the 2021-2024 LAPC Regional Transit Development Plan, can provide the carrots and sticks needed to move people from their cars and permanently reduce transportation-related GHG emissions in our community.

Solutions for funding increased bus service may include

- * Add a \$5 *clean transportation assessment* for every property tax payer. Using a similar formula that allows university students to get an annual bus pass for about \$15 per year per student, provide each property tax payer with three transit day-passes. Because every property tax payer subsidizes the city's parking infrastructure, whether or not they own or drive a car or use the facilities, this would begin to address transportation funding inequities. \$115,000 for an extra half-hour of service is less than \$3 per La Crosse adult per year.
- * Invite volunteer *Clean Transportation* donations (similar to WI affinity license plates) with donors receiving three (or x) free day passes for every \$5 donation.
- * Pay for increased service, planning for increased service every year, using parking fees and fines. Adjust parking fee/fine rates as needed to make up the difference. Possibly, as transit is more used, more rider fares will make up more of the cost and parking will be less in demand.
- * Charge (more) for on-street parking in more areas of the city and use the money to increase service.

* Article: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carltonreid/2023/08/17/sticks-not-carrots-needed-to-get-drivers-out-of-cars-say-climate-scientists/?sh=50cd609529af>

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