

KEN GOLDEN

April 16, 2013

TO: Members of County Subcommittee on Transit

From: Ken Golden, Chair

RE: **POSSIBLE COUNTY ROLE IN TRANSIT**

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER IS TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION ABOUT A POSSIBLE COUNTY ROLE IN TRANSIT. In thinking about what this committee might recommend for a county role, it struck me that some general principles/assumptions can be identified some of which would likely need to be assumed and which might influence any idea we might propose for the idea to gain traction with county policy makers.

These include:

1. The County will have to be willing to commit some money and/or other resources for the County to be viewed as a credible player in the transit field.
2. Given the current funding environment and the likelihood of continued fiscal limits, new sources of funds would likely have to be found if the county was to make a meaningful contribution to transit. Redeploying funds that support ongoing operations of an existing program is unlikely to be supported especially given the importance of county programs for the social safety net and environment.
3. Any role the county proposes to play should respect the role and contribution of other all units of government currently involved with transit.
4. Since the County's current transportation funding emphasizes connecting the communities of Dane County, it would be consistent and logical for the county to build on that role by connecting communities with transit.
5. Any proposal should both assume the future existence of an RTA but be able to accomplish something in the absence of an RTA.
6. County financial participation should be targeted to transit system expansion.
7. With funding comes a role in governance. If you pay, you play. The County's role in transit governance should support the County's transit program, whatever that program ultimately is. The county's involvement with transit governance should respect and continue the involvement of the entities currently involved transit funding and governance. A county governance role should be consistent with the contribution it makes.

POSSIBLE PROGRAM IDEAS

1. With these guiding principles in mind, I propose the county's transit program build on the county's current and historic role in transportation. This involves funding services that connect the communities of Dane County. Historically this has involved funding only roads. This was appropriate when Dane County was smaller and predominately agricultural where the smaller communities mostly supported agriculture and these roads supported farm to market transportation. Now, the role of maintaining or improving county roads facilitates inter-city commuting and associated land use, the very sprawl many in county government oppose.

In light of this, the County's transit program should be directed at giving these commuters modal choice. This might involve the county financially participating in supporting any specific transit routes that connects cities and villages in the Madison Metropolitan area or any route that runs on a county trunk highway. Funding could be for the cost of the entire route or for a percentage of the cost of the service hours used to operate transit vehicles on that route or subsidizing the local share of capital expenses.

Key for this idea is to be fair to Madison and the other funding partners who have already committed resources to transit. The program should not be biased to only new transit services but should be applied to new and existing routes. For example, it could fund a portion of the local share of both the Central city portion of the route and to the route extension that connects to the community. If service were extended to Sun Prairie, the county could fund either all or a percentage of the route from the Capital to Sun Prairie.

2. A second idea might be to use the same logic as above but limit the county's financial participation to the Bus Rapid Transit service. Again, the expectation would be to use the costs of the entire route as the base. Of the four route identified in the current study, the South (Park St. to Fitchburg) and East (to Sun Prairie) have intercity potential. The west might if service were to be provided to Middleton.
3. A third idea might be to also apply county funds to connect low income neighborhoods to employment centers. This could be integrated with ideas 1 and 2. For example, the county might assist Madison and Madison only with the cost of extending BRT service past the Northport Shopping Center to cover the housing further north on Northport Drive all the way to Central Wisconsin Center and/or Mendota Mental Health Institute.

FUNDING

So where do we get the funds for this. I see three possible sources of funds for this, one new and one by re-prioritizing funding from an existing county transportation funding program if this is allowed):

1. Based the experience of Cleveland and other cities, a BRT system can be expected to generate new development along the corridors it covers. The county collects property taxes from these new developments (unless used to a TIF district). I propose that any property taxes collected from a development occurring within one quarter mile of a BRT route be ear-marked for a new county transit support program. This could involve a declining percentage of additional funds if development is more distant from the route. I believe the City of Portland did something like this thru assessments to support their trolley service though I heard this many years ago.
2. A second possible source of funds would be for the county to broaden the program that supports maintenance and improvements on county trunk highways to include a fixed percentage for transit. This would modernize the program and reduce the county's role of facilitating vehicular commuting.
3. A third source of county funding is not currently possible under current state law. It would involve permitting the county to assess property owners who own property on county trunk highways. Clearly the method used by the city where road frontage determines assessments would be problematic for agricultural lands so perhaps a formula that considers a combination of # of driveways and land use (ag. vs. residential) might be workable.