

**OFFICIAL NOTICE AND AGENDA**  
of a meeting of the County Board, Committee, Agency,  
Corporation or Sub-Unit thereof,

COUNTY OF MARATHON  
WAUSAU, WI 54403

**MARATHON COUNTY METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION'S  
TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE  
AMENDED AGENDA**

**JANUARY 25, 2022**  
**1:00 pm**

**LARGE CONFERENCE ROOM**  
**210 RIVER DRIVE, WAUSAU, WI**

**Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Commission Purpose:** *The Commission shall be concerned with studies and recommendations relating to activities including but not limited to land-use; natural resources; utilities; and transportation systems within the metropolitan planning area. (Commission Bylaws last updated: 12-18)*

**Committee Purpose:** The Transit Oversight Committee shall be concerned with monitoring and providing information to the consulting firm, RLS & Associates, tasked to create a Transit Development Program (TDP) for the Wausau MPO area.

**Committee Membership:** John Robinson - MPO Chair, Katie Rosenburg - Wausau Mayor, Becky McElhaney - Transit Commission Chair, Gaylene Rhoden - Rib Mountain Administrator, Keith Donner - Weston Administrator, Will Harris - County Board, Robert Tess - Wausau School District, Kathi Zoern - Transit Commission Member

Persons wishing to attend the meeting by phone may call into the telephone conference beginning **five (5) minutes prior to the start time indicated above using the following number:**

**PHONE NUMBER: 1-408-418-9388**  
**ACCESS CODE: 2482 153 8265**

**Please Note:** If you are prompted to provide an "Attendee Identification Number" enter the # sign.  
No other number is required to participate in the telephone conference.

**When you enter the telephone conference, PLEASE PUT YOUR PHONE ON MUTE!**

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

1. WELCOME / CALL TO ORDER
2. REVIEW AND FINALIZE THE PUBLIC SURVEY
3. **SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP RESULTS**
4. CONSULTANT'S WORK ON SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS
5. ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA AND MEETING DATE
6. ADJOURN.

**Any person planning to attend this meeting who needs some type of special accommodation in order to participate should call the County Clerk's Office at 715-261-1500 or e-mail [infomarathon@mail.co.marathon.wi.us](mailto:infomarathon@mail.co.marathon.wi.us) one business day before the meeting.**

SIGNED   
PRESIDING OFFICER OR DESIGNEE

EMAILED TO: Daily Herald 848-9361 City Pages 848-5887  
Mid-west Radio Group - 848-3158  
CenterState Marketplace - 446-2370

EMAILED BY: BI

EMAILED DATE/TIME: 01/19/2022 12:30pm 2:20PM

NOTICE POSTED AT COURTHOUSE:

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Metro Ride Public Survey**

To understand the impact that Metro Ride has on you and our community and the changes that could be made to better serve you, Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Organization and Metro Ride are creating a 5-Year Transportation Development Plan. Metro Ride service changes could result from this plan and we need your input.

Please complete this brief survey by February 15, 2022. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes and the results can have an impact for many years to come.

If you have any questions about the survey or need assistance, please email Nathan Bubash at [nbubash@rlsandassoc.com](mailto:nbubash@rlsandassoc.com) or call him at (937) 299-5007. Thank you in advance for your time!

Did you know?

### **Metro Ride provided more than 460,000 rides during 2019?**

Also, throughout the COVID pandemic Metro Ride has remained on the front lines serving as an important transportation resource for Wausau and providing over 407,000 rides per year in 2020 and 2021.

### **Metro Ride bus service costs between \$6.00 and \$10.00 per ride. Passenger fare is only \$1.75.**

That cost is shared between the City, State, and Federal Transit Administration. Approximately 28% of the operating budget comes from local sources.

An additional 11% of the budget also comes from passenger fares. Even though the actual cost of a trip is between \$6.00 and \$10.00, the out-of-pocket cost to a passenger is only \$1.75 (adults), \$0.85 for riders age 65 or older and individuals with a disability, and \$1.50 for students. For even more savings, monthly passes can be purchased by frequent riders.

#### **1. Where do you live?**

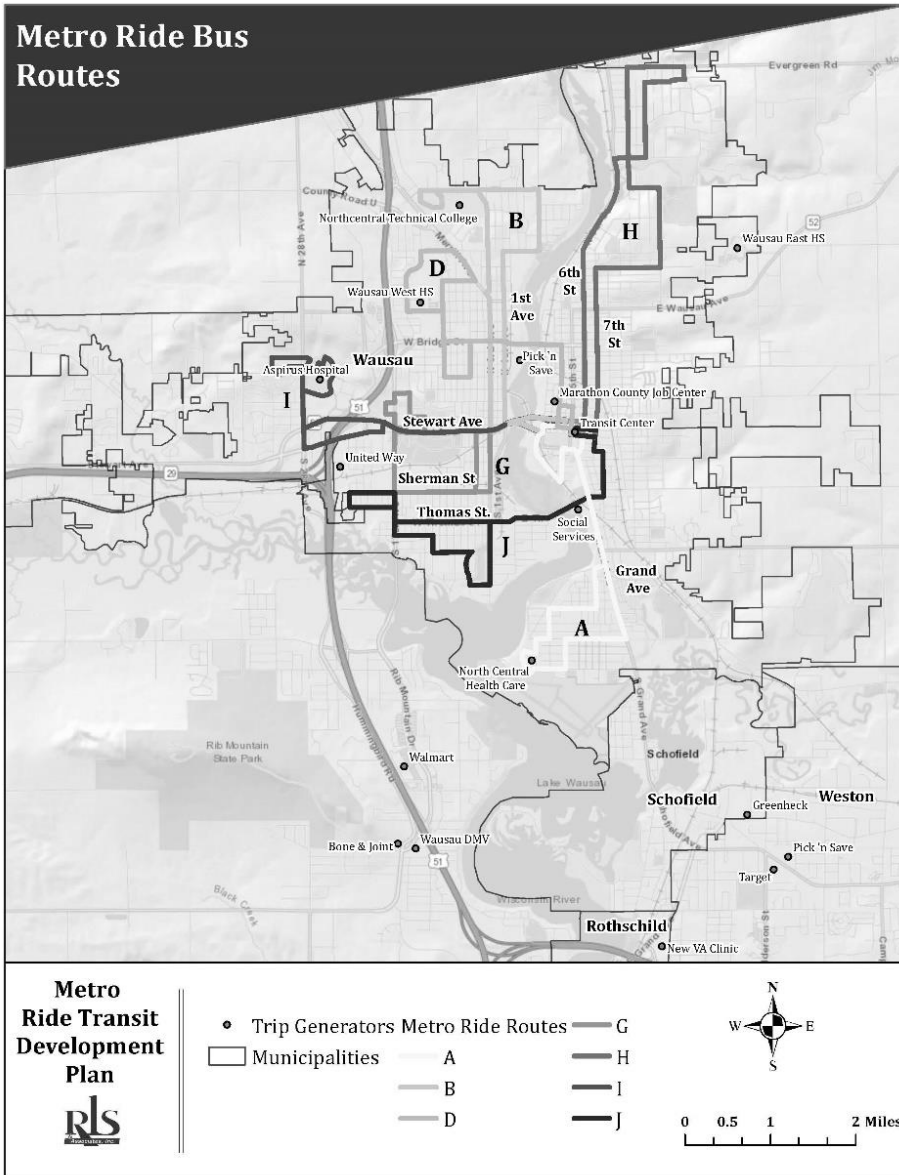
- Wausau
- Weston
- Rib Mountain
- Schofield
- Rothschild
- Kronenwetter
- Mosinee
- Other (Please specify):

If you live in Wausau, please answer the next two questions, if not, please skip to question 4.

#### **2. Do you know what Metro Ride routes serve your neighborhood?**

- Yes
- No

## Metro Ride Bus Routes



Please take a look at the map below and see if you can find your neighborhood on the map.

3. What Metro Ride routes serve your home and work? (Select all that apply.)

- Route A
- Route B
- Route D
- Route G
- Route H
- Route I
- Route J
- None
- I'm not sure

4. Do you need to travel to destinations for work, medical care, shopping, or other reasons?
  - Yes. The destinations I need are usually in the City of Wausau
  - No. The destinations I need are usually in another town/municipality
  
5. Which municipalities do you most often need to travel to?
  - Wausau
  - Rib Mountain
  - Weston
  - Schofield
  - Rothschild
  - Kronenwetter
  - Mosinee
  - Other (please specify)
  
6. Do any of the following apply to you? (Select all that apply.)
  - I represent a local employer with employees that use Metro Ride
  - I represent business or medical office with customers that use Metro Ride
  - I represent a local business that is not within Wausau City Limits
  - I represent a local government within Marathon County
  - I represent an organization serving people who need to use Metro Ride and may have no, or few, transportation options
  - I am a Metro Ride employee
  - I live in Metro Ride's service area
  - None of the above
  
7. Which of the following statements best describes your use and/or awareness of Metro Ride? (Select all that apply.)
  - I rely on Metro Ride for all or most of my transportation
  - I ride Metro Ride for some of my transportation needs and it is an important part of my budget and life
  - My child/children ride to and from school or afterschool activities
  - I rarely ride but would like to ride more often
  - I don't ride Metro Ride but like knowing it is an option if I need it someday
  - I have a car or other means of transportation and don't ever think about using Metro Ride
  - I know about Metro Ride but I do not regularly use it
  
8. If you aren't using Metro Ride now, how likely is it that you would ride if it were available where you live and when you need to go?
  - I use it now and will continue to ride
  
  - I would use it regularly

- I would use it occasionally
- I am not at all likely to use it
- I would let my clients, constituents, or employees know about using Metro Ride

9. What would you change to make your public transportation service options more appealing to you? (Select all that apply)

- Provide service to/in Weston/Schofield/Rothschild
- Have service available to/in Rib Mountain
- Provide service after 6:30 PM during the week
- Provide service before 6:30 AM during the week
- Have service available on Saturdays
- Serve different areas of Wausau
- Pick me up at my house and take me directly to where I am going/no shared rides with others
- More reliable/On-time for picking me up/dropping me off
- Offer wheelchair-accessible vehicles
- Offer a trip reservation app or website to schedule transportation
- Other (please specify)

10. Currently, the full fare is \$1.75 per ride. If Metro Ride was fare-free, would you be more likely to ride?

- I would be more likely to ride
- I would ride the same amount
- I would not be more likely to ride

11. Would you support your local community government spending money in the annual budget to pay for Metro Ride services that would operate in your community if the current service area were expanded?

- Yes
- No

12. If no additional funding is available to your local government, would you support your community decreasing spending in one area of its budget in order to help fund Metro Ride services that would operate in your community?

- Yes
- No

13. Do you have difficulty getting the transportation you need to any of the following types of destinations?

|   | No difficulty         | Sometimes difficult   | Frequently difficult  | Always difficult      | Not applicable to me  |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Employment/Work                           | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Medical offices, clinics, or hospitals    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mental health care                        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Dental care                               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pharmacy                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Shopping                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| College                                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Human service agencies or                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other trip purposes<br>government offices | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

14. If you lost the ability to drive today, how would you get around?

- Public transit
- Taxi/Uber/Lyft
- Friends/family
- Walking/Bicycle
- Other (please specify):

15. Are you concerned that, in the future, you or a friend/family member in the local area may not drive and will need public transportation options?

- Extremely concerned
- Concerned
- Slightly Concerned
- Not Concerned

Transportation is a necessary part of most personal budgets for Americans. Metro Ride passengers who buy a monthly pass each month spend \$504 per year on Metro Ride. In

Wausau, these passengers may also need to include taxi/Uber/Lyft fares or reimburse family and friends if the bus service is not available to meet all of their needs (i.e. evening trips to the grocery store or early shifts at work).

16. In 2020, the average U.S. household spent about \$800 per month on transportation. Does your household spend more or less than the U.S. average?

- Less than \$100 per month
- \$101 to \$200 per month
- \$201 to \$300 per month
- \$301 to \$400 per month
- \$401 to \$500 per month
- \$501 to \$800 per month
- More than \$800 per month

17. What kinds of transportation expenses did you include in your estimate above?

- Metro Ride bus passes/fare
- Car payment/value
- Automobile insurance
- Fuel for the car
- Taxi/Uber/Lyft fares for local trips
- Parking
- Other (Please specify):

18. Would using Metro Ride save you money in your transportation budget if you could use it for transportation to work, school, afterschool, or appointments?

- Yes
- No
- Yes, I am already a rider and I would save more money if I could use Metro Ride for more purposes.

19. Do you have any other comments about transportation services in the Wausau area?

## HIGHLIGHTS OF FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Here we provide a summary of key themes and highlights of the focus group feedback.

**1** Focus group participants recognized the value of the current transit service in terms of creating access, fostering independence, and providing a clean and safe alternative to other transportation options like taxis and ride services for many community members. However, focus group participants also perceived that Wausau is lagging behind other communities in Wisconsin (Appleton and the Fox Valley, Eau Claire, Madison, Marshfield, etc.) and elsewhere in terms of recognizing the value of transit in making a community an attractive place to live and work, especially among younger demographics. In other communities, public transit is a part of the fabric of the community and is broadly seen as an alternative to cars and is used by professionals, youth, college students, seniors and others to access jobs, entertainment, and shopping. Many of the individuals in the focus groups grew up in or have frequently traveled to other communities in Wisconsin with public transit and have first-hand appreciate for how it can add to community life.

**2** Focus group participants identified three primary limitations of the current transit service, including:

- Lack of service to Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield, and/or Weston, which is needed for community members to access jobs and shopping.
- Current hours of 6:30 am to 6:30 pm can limit the ability of people to access first shift work; to volunteer in the community in the evenings; complete errands after work; or attend evening events in the city like Concerts on the Square, performances at the Grand Theatre, or socialize with friends.
- Lack of Saturday service.

**3** Among the other limitations noted by focus group participants are: in some cases, long distances to walk to the closest available bus stop [one participant noted the closest bus stop to their house is 2 miles] and the need for more technology on busses, especially a display or audio announcement of the upcoming stop or next major intersection.

**4** Specific ideas for improvement to Metro Ride that were offered by the focus group participants include:

- Expand service into Rib Mountain, Schofield, Rothschild, and/or Weston, especially to include more grocery stores and shops like Aldi, Target, Walmart, and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). If services are expanded into Rib Mountain, the DMV was viewed as an essential stop. Greenheck and Crystal Finishing were cited in all three focus groups as employers who are facing a demand for workers and could potentially benefit from bus access in terms of helping to fill open positions.
- Expand routes or hours to better support access to jobs, including first shift at work (for example, the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street Industrial Park) and more grocery stores on a bus route.
- If Metro Ride cannot expand outside the city, then expanding hours within the city would be desirable. For example, offering Saturday service or running later in the evenings, especially in the summer so people could attend concerts or Woodchucks games and still be able to get home.
- Consider smaller vehicles and whether there is a potential cost-savings that could be used to enhance services.



- Technology investments such as scan-able passes, WiFi, and digital or audio displays of upcoming stops.

**5** Participants noted that a perceived lack of bus riders is often used as a reason to discount the value of the bus service or to not justify making changes. However, participants noted the need to consider that the lack of riders may be due the bus not going where people need or want to go and that when adding routes or improvements, there should be enough time allowed for people to “catch on” to the new services and for there to be adequate promotion and building awareness of the new services. In other words, “build it and they will come” was the way one participant described it. They also noted the need to promote new service enhancements in order to create awareness and build demand. In one group, a previous pilot initiative to offer a Friday bus to Rib Mountain was noted as an example of a service that was not promoted and therefore it was not surprising that it did not succeed.

**6** Participants noted that there is a significant need to rebrand the value of transit in the community and that there are misperceptions that “only those people” ride the bus. The culture of some of the surrounding communities is: “we don’t want those people coming here.” There is a need to change misperceptions and stigma surrounding the image of “who rides the bus.”

**7** Participants noted that there are existing perceptions that the current transit is largely a student bus service within the city or a social service that only economically disadvantaged and/or differently-abled members of the community use. The participants felt strongly that transit needs to be framed as an economic development and workforce development issue and the business community would be central to the successful implementation of any actionable plans. Whether the business community would be willing to help contribute to the funding of expanded services to help meet workforce needs could be explored, including providing employers opportunities branding on buses as a source of revenue to fund expansion of services.

**8** Transit planning overlaps with other City of Wausau public policy issues, including future resettlement of Afghani refugees, as well as land use planning.

**9** Participants were wary that changes or improvements in transit would result from this planning process. Some felt that there is a history of inaction after investing in or participating in similar planning processes in the past. There is a sense of “leadership inertia” and being stuck in the status quo. Some felt that a transit champion or someone to “stick their neck out” for transit would be needed to implement a new vision for transit in the Wausau area. Participants did recognize the funding constraints may be a reason behind why change may be difficult. Roadblocks at the county supervisor level and lack of buy-in from leadership in surrounding communities were also cited as barriers to change.

**10** Several participants had lingering memories of the decision by Weston to not continue bus service and the divisiveness of the discussions at the time. The hope is that this can be avoided in the future. Participants had recollections of how polarizing it was when Weston voted on the transit service and there is hope that communities could come together on the issue of transit. All noted that funding and turf battles surrounding funding are always a barrier.