



WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

George Twigg, City of Madison, (608) 266-4611

Joshua Wescott, Dane County, (608) 266-4114

Mark Wolfgram, Wisconsin Department of Transportation (608) 266-5791

David Trowbridge, City of Madison, (608) 267-1148

www.transport2020.net

**TRANSPORT 2020 SUBMITS FEDERAL NEW STARTS APPLICATION TO
ENTER PRELIMINARY ENGINEERING**

MADISON – Transport 2020, a major transportation planning initiative for Dane County and the Greater Madison Metropolitan Area, has submitted a New Starts Application to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for its Locally Preferred Alternative to proceed to the next phase of project development - Preliminary Engineering.

Transport 2020, a transportation planning consortium sponsored by Dane County, the City of Madison, and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, with support from UW-Madison, the Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), has been working since 1998 to develop long-term regional transportation solutions for the future of Dane County.

The long-term transportation system improvements proposed by Transport 2020 are a multi-modal system consisting of commuter rail, express bus services, park-and-ride lots, and improvements to local bus service. This transit vision will represent significant progress toward meeting the regional transportation, economic development and quality of life goals established at the outset of the Transport 2020 project, goals that also are reflected in the adopted plans of Dane County communities.

“The time is right to make a major new investment in transit that will reduce our dependency on oil, spur economic development throughout the county, and keep our workforce moving for the foreseeable future,” said County Board and Transport 2020 Chairman Scott McDonell.

The first piece of this long-term transit vision recommended to move forward - and the piece being submitted to FTA for approval - is a 16-mile east-west commuter rail line operating within an existing freight rail corridor between the City of Middleton and an area just southwest of the City of Sun Prairie, directly through the Isthmus of the City of Madison. Extensions of this system to serve many communities in Dane County are anticipated over time. Such extensions may include other communities such as Fitchburg, McFarland, Stoughton, Oregon, Cottage Grove, DeForest, Waunakee, Cross Plains, Black Earth and Mazomanie. In addition, a short near-term extension to the north could provide direct service to the Dane County Regional Airport.

“With 80,000 people driving into Madison every day for work and with \$4.00 a gallon gas, having a train option would really help a lot of people,” County Executive Kathleen Falk said.

When service begins (potentially by 2015), trains would run every 20 minutes in each direction during peak travel periods, with an overlapping segment between Union Corners and Whitney Way, providing double the service in central Madison (i.e., trains every 10 minutes). 17 stations would serve the new rail service, with park-and-ride facilities at 4 stations near the periphery. In addition, new regional express bus service to numerous Dane County communities and improved local bus services would be added to supplement and coordinate with the rail service. Diesel-multiple-unit cars (“DMUs” or self-propelled coaches) or new hybrid technology commuter rail vehicles would be utilized. The capital cost of the project is estimated to be \$255 million (in 2007 dollars), with an annual operating cost of \$10 million.

"This project will provide multimodal transit connections between residential and employment concentrations throughout the Madison region, improve mobility, and enhance transit access for all area residents and workers," said Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz. "It will also promote a desirable development form along the east-west travel corridor and within Dane County communities."

Several Transit Options Considered

In the alternatives analysis undertaken for the Transport 2020 corridor, a range of transit system alternatives were identified and examined to determine which alternative best addressed the goals of the project and the need for improvements in the corridor. These alternatives were all designed to provide comparable levels of service aimed at meeting the needs and serving the travel markets in the corridor, and included both bus and rail alternatives. Bus alternatives examined included a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system as well as enhancements to Madison’s existing highly utilized bus system operated by Metro

Transit. The analysis of costs and benefits of these alternatives included operations planning, capital and operating costs estimation, and expert evaluation of potential real estate development in station areas. It also included the opinions of Dane County citizens who have contributed numerous comments during the study process.

The BRT Alternative would need to provide the same level of service as the rail alternatives via a dedicated transit lane. That dedicated lane would need to extend for the entire length of the east-west transit corridor, and buses would need priority operations at intersections of other streets. To achieve these operating characteristics, new right-of-way would be required, as opposed to conversion of existing lanes to bus-only lanes, due to the severely limited traffic capacity that now exists throughout the isthmus and east-west travel corridor. These right-of-way needs proved to be a fatal flaw for the BRT alternative, given the constrained roadway network (particularly on the Isthmus). In contrast, the commuter rail option provides a dedicated transit lane for the entire length within the existing railroad right-of-way and does not delay the trains at intersections (i.e., trains have priority at street intersections).

In comparison to the Metro bus enhancement alternative, the commuter rail LPA offers superior point-to-point travel times and reliability. This will become most evident over time, as development along east-west travel corridor and traffic congestion grows into the future. The rail alternative would provide attractive service not just in the plan forecast year (2030), but especially in later years – in 40, 50, 75 years from now. Travel conditions in those “out-years” will see rail corridor travel times remaining constant, while auto and bus travel times become unacceptable (as has been the experience in countless growing U.S. cities).

Regional Transportation Solutions Needed to Accommodate Growth and Commuting Challenges

The high-level of commuter rail service offered by the Transport 2020 project is needed in Dane County to help accommodate expected population and employment growth, and to address growing commuting challenges.

According to an August 2007 Wisconsin Department of Administration report, Dane County has added more new residents since the 2000 U.S. Census than any other Wisconsin county, outpacing official population projections. In fact, Dane County has added twice as many residents as Waukesha County, the county with the second most new residents added since 2000.

By 2030, official population projections estimate that Dane County will reach almost 600,000 residents (a 36 percent increase from 2000). Note that if very recent current growth trends noted above (2000-2007) are realized, Dane County would grow to a population of 630,000 by 2030. Over that same period, employment in Dane County is projected to increase to be 382,000 workers (an increase of 34 percent). Nearly 70 percent of the forecasted growth in jobs is expected to occur in the area served by the Transport 2020 project.

A majority of residents in most Dane County communities (outside Madison) commute to Madison for employment. In fact, the number of employees commuting to Dane County from surrounding counties has nearly doubled during the 10-year period 1990-2000, growing from 16,000 to 30,000, a trend that is expected to continue.

Many of these residents commute daily to jobs located along the Transport 2020 east-west travel corridor. Due to the fact that Madison's physical geography is constrained by two lakes, alternative east-west street corridors through the study area are limited. Currently, traffic volumes during both the a.m. and p.m. peak periods on University and East Washington avenues are congested, operating primarily at highway Level of Service (LOS) E, with some spots now operating at LOS F. University Avenue currently carries between 50,000 and 55,000 ADT (average daily traffic) and East Washington Avenue carries between 50,000 and 60,000 ADT. Neither of these arterial roads can accommodate added physical capacity due to dense commercial and residential developments on both sides of the streets. Ongoing street improvements for capacity are limited to spot upgrades at intersections. These congested roadways will make the Transport 2020 system an attractive option for many of these commuters - given the reliable, consistent nature of the rail service.

###

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

David M. Trowbridge, AICP, Project Manager

City of Madison, Department of Planning and Development

P.O. Box 2985

Madison, WI 53701-2985

Tel: 608 267-1148

E-mail: dtrowbridge@cityofmadison.com