

**Utilities Committee**

Wednesday, June 3, 2020

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1 The Meeting of the Utilities Committee was called to order at 7:04 p.m. on Wednesday, June 3,  
2 2020. It was noted that the meeting had been announced and a notice posted at City Hall.

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4 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Jim Olson, Ald. Dan Stevens,  
5 Ald. Diane Wulf, Village of Holmen Trustee Brandon Cain, Village of West Salem Trustee  
6 Leroy Brown

7  
8 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Mayor Kim Smith, City Attorney Amanda  
9 Jackson, Financial Services Director/Treasurer Fred Buehler

10

11 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

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13 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Ald. Stevens, to approve the minutes from the previous meeting  
14 as printed and on file in the City Clerk’s Office.

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16 On voice vote, motion carried.

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18 **Item 3 – Public Input (limited to 3 minutes/individual)**

19

20 Ald. Olson called for anyone wishing to provide public input.

21

22 **Kim Smith, Mayor, City of Onalaska**

23 **436 Mayfair Place**

24 **Onalaska**

25

26 “I just wanted to mention for the information of the committee we have a new senior living  
27 center that is open for occupancy in Onalaska called Havenwood. They are working with La  
28 Crosse MTU to discuss some options for expanding the MTU route out to Havenwood. They  
29 already come to Gundersen, so it would just be a little further. I just wanted to bring that to  
30 everyone’s attention so that they were aware this is something that is perhaps forthcoming in the  
31 future.”

32

33 Ald. Olson called three times for anyone else wishing to provide public input and closed that  
34 portion of the meeting.

35

36 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

37

38 **Item 4 – MASS TRANSIT**

39

40 A. Shared Ride Transit:

41

42 1. Financials (Justin Running or Paul Woodward/Fred Buehler)

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44 Justin reported the March 2020 statistics:

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- 46 • **West Salem Trips:** 496 (a decrease of 201 from March 2019)
- 47 • **Holmen Trips:** 877 (a decrease of 491 from March 2019)
- 48 • **Onalaska Trips:** 2,000 (a decrease of 867 from March 2019)
- 49 • **Total Trips:** 3,373 (a decrease of 1,559, or 31.61 percent, from March 2019)
- 50 • **MTU Passes:** 438 (a decrease of 224 from March 2019)
- 51 • **Agency Trips:** 796 (a decrease of 321 from March 2019)
- 52 • **Year-to-Date Trips:** 12,848 (a decrease of 933 from March 2019)
- 53 • **Revenue:** \$53,478 (a decrease of \$1,467, or 2.67 percent, from March 2019)

54

55 Justin cautioned that the April 2020 statistics likely will show a more dramatic decrease, and he  
56 told committee members Shared Ride has made some modifications to the service. The  
57 modifications include limiting vehicles to one individual or one family at a time, and no ride  
58 sharing. Justin told committee members he believes there was a reduction in hours, and he said  
59 it took more hours to do fewer rides. As a result, Justin said it will end up costing more because  
60 the revenue is not there, but the hours are not down drastically.

61

62 Leroy asked if the other systems reflect the same decrease in ridership.

63

64 Justin said yes, telling Leroy, “We’re down drastically statewide.” Justin also said he has not  
65 seen a significant increase in individuals going out in public as he thought they would even  
66 though the State of Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down Governor Tony Evers’ “Safer at  
67 Home” order in May. Justin said, “We’ve seen an uptick, but we’re not back to business as  
68 usual. I think it’s going to be quite some time before we see that happen. That is one of the  
69 things we’ll have to address. Ridership might not come back for awhile, but the hours are  
70 probably going to stay close to in step with what they had been previously. We’re continuing  
71 with those procedures right now, and we’ll continue with that likely for awhile throughout the  
72 summer until we get an ‘all clear,’ and I don’t see that coming any time in the very near future.”

73

74 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Leroy, to accept the Shared Ride Transit Financials.

75

76 On voice vote, motion carried.

77

78 2. Customer service/complaint regarding transit system

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80 Ald. Stevens said he had been given a copy of an email forwarded by former Village of Holmen  
81 Trustee Micah Wyss regarding a complaint registered by a woman who resides in Holmen. Ald.  
82 Stevens said the woman was employed in the City of Onalaska and attended school in the City of  
83 La Crosse. Ald. Stevens noted MTU is a different system than Shared Ride, and he said it is his

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84 understanding there are instances when transfers may occur between the two. Ald. Stevens said  
85 there might be some confusion as to when transfers are available, from where they are available,  
86 and if there are additional fees. Ald. Stevens said there was “a general sense of frustration” as  
87 the woman was denied service because she did not have the additional fee and thus had to walk  
88 home. Ald. Stevens said he recognizes that MTU and Shared Ride are different systems, adding  
89 he is not certain what the answer is. Ald. Stevens told committee members he had looked  
90 through the menu, and he said it appears to be a little confusing. Ald. Stevens asked if perhaps  
91 there is a way to make it clearer for riders going between MTU and Shared Ride.

92  
93 Justin said he agrees with Ald. Stevens that there must be clarity and perhaps some  
94 documentation so that there is no confusion. Justin said the woman should not have been left  
95 stranded even if there had been a misunderstanding and she had “missed a window.” Justin  
96 expressed confidence that Paul Woodward will work with the supervisor to ensure there is a  
97 procedure in place so that no one is left stranded again. Justin said Shared Ride could have given  
98 the woman a ride and educated her, and he told committee members she likely would have been  
99 pleased with that and paid the driver promptly after the service. Justin said, “That was on our  
100 end. We should have never left her stranded. It would have been a good opportunity for  
101 education, and some compassion on our part.”

102  
103 Ald. Stevens asked Justin if there is goodwill between MTU and Shared Ride so that transfers  
104 would be honored. Ald. Stevens asked if it is required, or if there are grants from the State of  
105 Wisconsin for working together. Ald. Stevens also asked, “What’s our best practice versus, what  
106 do we need to do?”

107  
108 Justin said the transfers were implemented when his father, Richard, was with Shared Ride and  
109 Pete Carlson was at MTU, noting it was something they had agreed to put together. Justin told  
110 Ald. Stevens he does not know the history behind it, and he said he knows it is not uncommon  
111 across the state for different entities like this to work together. However, Justin also said he does  
112 not know if there is a standard, per se, adding, “I think it’s what works for everybody in the area  
113 and the DOT allows some flexibility because federally we’re not allowed to duplicate service.  
114 MTU cannot serve areas Shared Ride can serve, and vice versa. So instead of having to drop you  
115 off at [Valley View] Mall, pay full freight to get there and pay full freight on the way home, the  
116 transfer is a nice, seamless way for people to utilize mass transit from the south side of La Crosse  
117 out to the end of Holmen.”

118  
119 Fred said he believes former Alderperson Dennis Aspenson, who served on the Utilities  
120 Committee, had been instrumental in starting the program and working with the City of La  
121 Crosse. Fred said if someone pays MTU to ride to Valley View Mall, he/she receives a free pass  
122 and Shared Ride will not levy a charge if he/she wishes to continue to Center 90. Fred said the  
123 city charges the fee to someone who wants to go from Onalaska, Holmen, or West Salem to La  
124 Crosse. The individual gives the MTU driver a coupon after transferring from the Shared Ride  
125 vehicle, and there is no charge.

Reviewed 06/05/2020 by Fred Buehler

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126

127 Ald. Stevens asked how much revenue would be lost if the transfer were a straight up transfer  
128 that went one way or the other.

129

130 Fred told Ald. Stevens he is not sure what he is asking.

131

132 Ald. Stevens noted the woman coming from the City of La Crosse would have had to pay an  
133 additional fee.

134

135 Fred told Ald. Stevens that is incorrect and said the woman had paid for it coming from La  
136 Crosse to Valley View Mall. There would have been a free pass from Valley View Mall to her  
137 destination, meaning Onalaska, Holmen, or West Salem.

138

139 Justin explained that the woman would be picked up for free and driven to her destination if she  
140 rides an MTU bus into the service area.

141

142 Ald. Stevens said the woman essentially had gone to the incorrect place.

143

144 Paul Woodward said he believes it was more of a timeframe issue, telling committee members,  
145 “The problem is the duplication of services in the eyes of the FTA. I think there had to be a time  
146 limit on that transfer so that we didn’t run afoul of the FTA rules. That’s my understanding.  
147 That’s really the sticking point in the whole thing: How do we provide that additional service  
148 that I think we all want to provide, but not risk the FTA funding for both entities?”

149

150 Justin said MTU runs routes at different points in the day, noting at some points the route runs  
151 from the transfer center in La Crosse to a different destination in Onalaska in the morning than it  
152 does midday. Justin said Shared Ride may do transfers to that destination when the bus is not  
153 running to that further destination. Justin said, “If the bus is running to that, you cannot free  
154 transfer. You can get off at the mall, do your shopping, call a cab and we can take you to your  
155 destination, wherever it may be, but it can’t be a free transfer. I think that’s what the issue here  
156 was. It was at a time period of the day when the bus was running close to where she was  
157 wanting to go, but the free transfer wouldn’t have been honored. Nonetheless, we shouldn’t have  
158 left her stranded. We shouldn’t have made her walk. I’m disappointed in our staff for that  
159 happening, and we’ll work on that. But it’s a good opportunity to kind of relook at everything  
160 and make sure that everything is working the way we intended.” Justin added that Paul is  
161 reviewing policies, and he said Paul might recommend some changes.

162

163 Ald. Stevens asked Justin how to convey to the typical rider that there are rules and factors that  
164 need to be taken into consideration.

165

166 Justin suggested creating a pamphlet or placing a flier in Shared Ride vehicles, and ensuring that  
167 the rules are posted on the city and Shared Ride website and spelled out very clearly. Justin said,

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168 “I think we need to review what we’ve got, and if we have some holes on our website, shore  
169 them up. Maybe [we need to] review the pamphlet ... add some information and get it out to the  
170 folks.”

171

### 172 3. Practices/Procedures since COVID-19 for the Shared Ride Program

173

174 Fred told committee members he had received notification in mid-April from Federal Transit  
175 Authority representative Evan Gross, who serves as the city’s spokesperson from Region 5 for  
176 the State of Wisconsin. Fred said Evan told him the City of Onalaska has available federal  
177 funding from the 5307 CARES Act in the amount of \$769,296. Fred said he telephoned Evan,  
178 and both City Administrator Rindfleisch and Amanda also participated in the call. Fred said he  
179 asked Evan if the entire United States receive this type of funding, and Evan told him yes. Each  
180 transit system that was receiving federal funding received between three times the amount they  
181 normally would have received, and that is how the sum of \$769,296 was calculated. Fred said  
182 the city received approximately \$270,614. Fred said he must now do a grant, and he told  
183 committee members he will work with Justin on possibly recouping some funds. Fred asked  
184 Justin how many different transit systems he operates in the state.

185

186 Justin said two.

187

188 Fred said he will speak to Evan about obtaining one or two new vehicles, and he referred to  
189 Justin’s earlier comments about the fact Shared Ride currently allows only one person per ride,  
190 noting the mileage on the Shared Ride vehicles adds up quickly.

191

192 Justin said it is his understanding he cannot be reimbursed via this fund for purchases he has  
193 already made, such as 110 gallons of hand sanitizer and reusable fabric masks. Justin said some  
194 cities are purchasing Plexiglas dividers that are installed between the driver and the passenger.  
195 Justin admitted he does not particularly like them as they depersonalize the trip a little bit;  
196 however, they are being installed in some areas as a safety measure. Justin said the city is  
197 utilizing the funding to purchase and install the guards, adding, “If the city wants to buy any  
198 safety and security items, those should be covered.”

199

200 Where I get fuzzy because I haven’t been involved in the conversation is, can you use some of  
201 that to fill a revenue loss gap? Fred will have to work with his individual to determine that.  
202 Ridership revenue is going to be down ... I bet it’s going to be down \$3,000 in April, and likely  
203 that much again in May. That will come directly out of the city’s pocket, so I don’t know if you  
204 can use that for that kind of funding or not. ... We’re more in tune with the safety and security  
205 components.”

206

207 Fred noted Running, Inc. gets paid per hour, and that Running receives 10,280 hours per year.  
208 Fred said Running likely will maximize its hours by only carrying one passenger at a time  
209 instead of two or three, and as a result likely will not have as much revenue.

Reviewed 06/05/2020 by Fred Buehler

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210  
211 Justin noted Running was down approximately 200 hours in March, and he said, “We’re down a  
212 little, but not enough to make up for the shortfall in revenue. But we cannot be down any less  
213 hours. ... We’re probably back to normal hours as ridership has ticked up a little bit now coming  
214 into June.”

215  
216 Fred asked Justin if it would be correct to say Running was never down and not functioning.  
217

218 Justin said Running was functioning.  
219

220 Fred said he might be mistaken, but he thinks MTU had temporarily shut down due to the threat  
221 of COVID-19.  
222

223 Justin noted very few systems around the state had stopped providing service, and he said none  
224 of the services Running, Inc. provides ever stopped. Justin said, “It was critical that we stayed  
225 operational to get these folks where they needed to be.”  
226

#### 227 4. Approval of the 2020 State of Wisconsin Urban Mass Transit Grant 228 Agreement 229

230 Fred said the State of Wisconsin was working with the federal government regarding the  
231 allocation for Wisconsin. Fred referred to the copy of the agreement found in committee  
232 members’ packets and noted the following:  
233

- 234 • He had submitted an \$871,926 grant.
- 235 • The total anticipated revenue is \$214,000.
- 236 • The 5307 grant allotment is \$270,614.
- 237 • 85.20 state assistance is \$202,504.
- 238 • The estimated local match is \$184,808.  
239

240 Fred noted he has received a grant agreement that has been signed by Mayor K. Smith, and he  
241 said he is waiting for the State of Wisconsin to send back the agreement to Ian Ritz. Fred said  
242 the committee must vote to accept the grant.  
243

244 Motion by Ald. Olson, second by Brandon, to approve the 2020 State of Wisconsin Urban Mass  
245 Transit Grant Agreement.  
246

247 On voice vote, motion carried.  
248

#### 249 5. Set date/time for the Program of Projects hearing 7/8/2020 at 7:15 p.m. 250

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251 Fred said the time should be changed to 7 p.m. on July 8, which is the starting time of the next  
252 Utilities Committee meeting. Fred said the reason for the Program of Projects hearing is it is  
253 required in order to receive federal funding. Once the state contract is approved, the Program of  
254 Projects hearing recaps what was stated earlier in the state contract.

255  
256 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Leroy, to set the Program of Projects hearing for 7 p.m. on  
257 Wednesday, July 8, 2020.

258  
259 On voice vote, motion carried.

260

261 6. Accept the modifications to the City of Onalaska Title VI Plan

262

263 Fred said that every three years, one of the requirements to receive federal funding under the  
264 registry is that the city must have an updated Title VI Plan. Fred noted that Running, Inc. also  
265 services Sun Prairie, and he said both Sun Prairie and West Bend had sent him their respective  
266 Title VI plans. Fred said he had examined the city's existing plan as it compared to the  
267 respective plans for Sun Prairie and West Bend, and he told committee members there were  
268 adjustments that needed to be made. Fred said time constraints prevented him from putting the  
269 census material onto the draft, and he noted some committee members had received a copy later  
270 of the figures that were inserted. Fred said Evan has asked that a resolution accompany the Title  
271 VI program update, and he said the Common Council will approve Resolution 28-2020. There is  
272 a cover letter stating that the city has modified the plan, and it is endorsed both by the Utilities  
273 Committee and the Common Council.

274

275 Motion by Ald. Stevens, second by Ald. Wulf, to accept the modifications to the City of  
276 Onalaska Title VI Plan.

277

278 On voice vote, motion carried.

279

280 B. MTU:

281 1. Transit Financials 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter information (Adam Lorentz)

282

283 Fred noted MTU's data has been included in committee members' packets. Fred referred to the  
284 number of Free Fare Passengers (95) for 2020 and said he assumes that is what the committee  
285 had been discussing earlier tonight. Fred said he will ask either Adam or Tim Koterwski to give  
286 him memos.

287

288 2. Practices/Procedures since COVID-19 for the MTU program

289

290 Ald. Olson said he assumes MTU's practices for COVID-19 are not drastically different, but it  
291 probably would be prudent to have a document regarding the practices and procedures.

292

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293 Ald. Stevens said he would like to see the differences between Shared Ride and MTU.

294

295 Fred noted the City of La Crosse had received substantial funding – two to three times of what it  
296 normally would receive.

297

298 C. Holmen Transit Input (Holmen Rep.)

299

300 No report.

301

302 D. West Salem Transit Input (West Salem Rep.)

303

304 No report.

305

306 E. Onalaska Transit Input (Onalaska Rep.)

307

308 No report.

309

310 **Item 5 – UTILITIES**

311

312 No Report

313

314 **Adjournment**

315

316 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Ald. Stevens, to adjourn at 7:48 p.m.

317

318 On voice vote, motion carried.

319

320

321 Recorded by:

322

323 Kirk Bey