

## Utilities Committee

Wednesday, August 5, 2020

1

1 The Meeting of the Utilities Committee was called to order on Wednesday, August 5, 2020. It  
2 was noted that the meeting had been announced and a notice posted at City Hall.

3  
4 Roll call was taken, with the following members present: Ald. Jim Olson, Ald. Dan Stevens,  
5 Ald. Diane Wulf, Village of West Salem Trustee Leroy Brown

6  
7 Also Present: City Administrator Eric Rindfleisch, Financial Services Director/Treasurer Fred  
8 Buehler, City Attorney Amanda Jackson, Amanda Running of Running, Inc., La Crosse MTU  
9 Transit Manager Adam Lorentz, Ald. Tom Smith

10  
11 Excused Absence: Village of Holmen Trustee Brandon Cain

### 12 **Item 2 – Approval of minutes from the previous meeting**

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

17  
18 On voice vote, motion carried.

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

20  
21  
22 Ald. Olson called three times for anyone wishing to provide public input and closed that portion  
23 of the meeting.

### 24 **Consideration and possible action on the following items:**

#### 25 **Item 4 – MASS TRANSIT**

##### 26 A. Shared Ride Transit:

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

28  
29 The June 2020 statistics are as follows:

- 30  
31  
32  
33  
34  
35
  - 36 • **West Salem Trips:** 431 (a decrease of 111 from June 2019)
  - 37 • **Holmen Trips:** 574 (a decrease of 538 from June 2019)
  - 38 • **Onalaska Trips:** 1,816 (a decrease of 689 from June 2019)
  - 39 • **Total Trips:** 2,821 (a decrease of 1,338, or 32.17 percent, from June 2019)
  - 40 • **MTU Passes:** 332 (a decrease of 211 from June 2019)
  - 41 • **Agency Trips:** 594 (a decrease of 432 from June 2019)
  - **Year-to-Date Trips:** 19,548 (a decrease of 7,818 from June 2019)

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- 42 • **Revenue:** \$85,922 (a decrease of \$24,679, or 22.31 percent, from June 2019)

43  
44 Amanda Running told committee members Shared Ride Transit is giving one ride at a time.  
45 Amanda said there is an agency in the state that purchased punch cards, and they have been  
46 purchased by MyChoice. However, MyChoice representatives have said MyChoice is not  
47 purchasing punch cards. Therefore, there is a decrease in agency statistics due to that, and  
48 Amanda said that is a decrease to anticipate moving forward once the COVID-19 pandemic has  
49 subsided, and she told committee members she believes MyChoice will change its stance in the  
50 future.

51  
52 Ald. Olson told Amanda Running someone had told him he had received complaints about the  
53 condition of the vehicles in which they had ridden, noting that they were very dirty.

54  
55 Amanda Running told Ald. Olson she had not been made aware there was a shortage of cleaning  
56 supplies, and she promised to speak to Paul Woodward and the supervisor.

57  
58 Leroy told Amanda Running some individuals have been uncertain about riding in a Shared Ride  
59 Transit vehicle as they do not know if the vehicles will be clean. Leroy suggested attempting to  
60 find a way to broadcast the steps that are being taken to keep the vehicles clean and riders safe.

61  
62 Amanda Running noted Shared Ride Transit does not have a social media presence “for our end  
63 of it.” However, Amanda said Shared Ride Transit has the ability to post a statement regarding  
64 the cleaning of its vehicles on its website by next week. Amanda also said Shared Ride Transit  
65 has addressed the State of Wisconsin’s mask mandate, noting supervisors have asked drivers to  
66 ensure they are meeting the state’s guidelines. Amanda told committee members Shared Ride’s  
67 dispatchers have been diligent in asking individuals if they are experiencing COVID-19  
68 symptoms, and they also informing them a mask must be worn when they board the cab.  
69 Amanda said she hopes these actions will give individuals peace of mind about riding in a  
70 Shared Ride vehicle.

71  
72 Fred told committee members he had received a notice in July from the Federal Transit  
73 Authority informing him the state’s small Shared Ride providers would receive more than 10,500  
74 masks for drivers. Fred noted the City of Onalaska had received a box that contained an  
75 unknown quantity of masks. A Shared Ride employee picked up that box for the drivers.

76  
77 Amanda Running estimated the box contained 500 masks, noting that each package contained  
78 five masks. Amanda also noted Shared Ride had received 3-ply tie masks this past April from  
79 Coon Valley. Drivers either could utilize the masks and return them or purchase them for \$10  
80 apiece. Amanda said all of Shared Ride’s drivers should have access to masks through the  
81 organization.

82  
83 Leroy suggested that perhaps the City of Onalaska could share Shared Ride’s webpage or have a

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84 link to it. Leroy also said he could speak with Village of West Salem Administrator Teresa  
85 DeLong about sharing the link.

86  
87 Amanda Running promised to continue working with MyChoice to help the company through its  
88 process.

89  
90 Motion by Ald. Stevens, second by Leroy, to accept and place on file the Shared Ride Transit  
91 Financials for June 2020.

92  
93 On voice vote, motion carried.

94  
95 2. **Resolution 33-2020** – For the Shared-Ride Taxi Program in City of Onalaska,  
96 Village of Holmen and Village of West Salem for 2021

97  
98 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Leroy, to approve Resolution 33-2020 – For the Shared Ride  
99 Taxi Program in the City of Onalaska, Village of Holmen and Village of West Salem for 2021.

100  
101 On voice vote, motion carried.

102  
103 3. Request for funding by La Crosse County in the amount of \$7,500 for the  
104 Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (S.M.R.T.) Commuter Bus Service

105  
106 La Crosse County Planner Charlie Handy told committee members 2019 was La Crosse  
107 County's first year of administering the S.M.R.T. Commuter Bus Service, taking over for the  
108 City of Prairie du Chien. Charlie reported that 2019 was a successful year for the service, noting  
109 that ridership had grown significantly last year. However, the service also suffered a significant  
110 financial loss that totaled approximately \$30,000. Charlie told committee members the fact 2019  
111 was the county's first year administering the program was a significant factor in the service's  
112 financial loss, as was the fact there were fewer rural participants in the program (La Crosse  
113 County received significantly less funding from the City of Viroqua and other areas). Charlie  
114 expressed his gratitude that the City of Onalaska had budgeted \$7,500 in its 2020 budget for the  
115 S.M.R.T. program, and he told committee members S.M.R.T. representatives believe the 2019  
116 shortfall will be covered by the end of 2020. This would represent a \$60,000 turnaround.  
117 Charlie told committee members the city's contribution allowed him to speak with other  
118 municipalities about the shortfall as well as the importance of the S.M.R.T. program. Charlie  
119 said showing the city's new commitment was very helpful in getting other municipalities to  
120 contribute to this project. Charlie said part of his goal is to increase financial support both from  
121 the City of La Crosse and the City of Viroqua.

122  
123 Charlie next addressed the S.M.R.T. program's ridership, noting the program's representatives  
124 projected a 50-percent decrease in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the  
125 decrease in ridership is only between 10 and 15 percent compared to 2019. Charlie said he

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126 attributes that to a very strong core of riders who are employed by the healthcare industry.  
127 Charlie noted a significant percentage of the S.M.R.T. program's riders are employed by one of  
128 the healthcare facilities either in the City of Tomah, the City of Sparta, the City of Onalaska, the  
129 City of La Crosse, or the City of Viroqua. Charlie said S.M.R.T.'s representatives believe the  
130 healthcare workers have "sold [the service] to each other" and are recruiting riders. S.M.R.T.  
131 representatives are working on converting non-ADA buses, and Charlie noted the federal  
132 purchasing process will take some time. S.M.R.T. representatives also hope to add two electric  
133 buses to the fleet, and they are expected to arrive in 2021. Charlie noted the number of moving  
134 parts in an electric bus is approximately 1/25<sup>th</sup> or 1/30<sup>th</sup> of the number of moving parts in a diesel  
135 bus. Charlie expressed hope Running, Inc.'s maintenance costs will decrease significantly, and  
136 while there will be challenges with both the topography and the weather, there will be a  
137 significant number of batteries in the electric buses.

138

139 Ald. Olson addressed the route the S.M.R.T. bus services, noting he travels to most of the  
140 municipalities along the route due to the industry in which he is employed. Ald. Olson told  
141 Charlie the amount of territory the S.M.R.T. program covers is impressive, and he thanked him  
142 for caring about individuals and providing the service.

143

144 Fred said he wants to know if City of Onalaska representatives would be interested in budgeting  
145 \$7,500 for the S.M.R.T. program in the 2021 budget.

146

147 Ald. Stevens asked Fred if the \$7,500 is paid from the utility or the General Fund.

148

149 Fred told Ald. Stevens that Onalaska, Holmen, and West Salem must bear 20 percent of the costs  
150 of the overall transit system in relation to Shared Ride. These costs assist in receiving both  
151 federal and state funding. Fred said, "In reference to this item in particular, as well as MTU, that  
152 is above and beyond. Those two items would be coming from, in addition to, proportionate of  
153 the Shared Ride program, the City of Onalaska would also be levying for its cost on the MTU if  
154 we wish to continue that continual service we've had in the past, as well as this S.M.R.T. item."

155

156 Ald. Stevens stated that while he really likes the regional transportation approach, "Our  
157 responsibility right now is with this utility [and] to keep the transportation moving locally. Right  
158 now it looks like we're down in revenue by almost \$25,000, so we're tracking to lose \$50,000 of  
159 that portion."

160

161 Motion by Ald. Stevens to decline the additional \$7,500 funding for the Scenic Mississippi  
162 Regional Transit (S.M.R.T.) Bus Service for 2021 due to economic circumstances.

163

164 Ald. Stevens invited Charlie to appear before the committee in 2021 and request funding for  
165 2022, and he said that while he likes the program, he does not believe the city is currently in a  
166 position to fund the program.

167

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168 Fred noted the City of Onalaska will be receiving four vehicles over the next two years due to  
169 CARES Grant funding, and he also noted the city will not be paying the 20 percent as the federal  
170 government will cover the entire cost of the vehicles. Fred told committee members he had sent  
171 documentation both to the Village of Holmen and the Village of West Salem showing the grant  
172 is now complete. The City of Onalaska may purchase two vehicles this year, and two more next  
173 year.

174

175 Ald. Olson asked Fred if that means the city will have extra funding for transportation.

176

177 Fred told Ald. Olson the City of Onalaska will not be spending at least 20 for the vehicles, and  
178 he said the city was required to pay 20 percent of the cost of the last set of vehicles the city had  
179 received, while the federal government paid the remaining 80 percent. Fred noted the federal  
180 government will cover 100 percent of the costs for the next four vehicles the city receives.

181

182 Ald. Olson asked Ald. Stevens if he now has a different opinion after hearing Fred's explanation.

183

184 Ald. Stevens asked if the incoming vehicles will be part of the S.M.R.T. program.

185

186 Fred told Ald. Stevens that S.M.R.T. is above and beyond what the incoming vehicles are for,  
187 and he noted the city will enjoy significant cost savings (approximately \$6,600 per vehicle).

188

189 Ald. Stevens asked if it is possible to share the total expected revenue to the budget at this point  
190 after an adjustment has been made for the CARES Grant.

191

192 Fred told Ald. Stevens revenue is different as it relates to mass transit. Fred explained that  
193 Shared Ride is paid a certain amount per hour for providing services, and he noted the city runs  
194 31,604 hours per year at a rate of \$27.51 (this is the rate for 2020). If Shared Ride does not  
195 operate 31,604 hours, it is not being paid. Fred said that while Shared Ride's financials might  
196 show there has been a decrease in revenue, it only operates the hours it is called. Fred said, "If  
197 there are no people calling for service, the provider is not being paid, either." Fred noted Shared  
198 Ride had run 11,657 hours the first two quarters of 2020, meaning it is on pace to run fewer than  
199 the 31,604 hours for which it has been budgeted. Fred said, "If this trend continues, the provider  
200 is not going to be taking in the dollars that it anticipated, which was \$869,426."

201

202 Ald. Wulf stated as a point of order that it would be in the committee's best interest to have a  
203 second to Ald. Stevens' motion if discussion is to continue.

204

205 Motion by Ald. Stevens, second by Ald. Olson, to decline the additional \$7,500 funding for the  
206 Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (S.M.R.T.) Bus Service for 2021 due to economic  
207 circumstances.

208

209 Amanda Running told committee members she has Shared Ride's actual payroll hours versus

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210 budgeted hours through July 25, 2020. Shared Ride's total budgeted hours through July 25 are  
211 17,874, and payroll totals \$15,624. Amanda noted Shared Ride is 2,250 hours under what it is  
212 budgeted.

213

214 Fred noted there would be 3,857 fewer hours (2,250 hours divided by seven months, multiplied  
215 by 12 months).

216

217 Amanda Running said Shared Ride's hours could increase over the next five months, but they  
218 also could decrease. Amanda said she does not see Shared Ride making up 2,250 hours on top of  
219 its other hours, and she told committee members she anticipates Shared Ride will provide fewer  
220 hours for which it has been budgeted.

221

222 Fred said the city would not be eligible for reimbursement of lost hours because the contract did  
223 not allow for that to happen. The contract also does not allow the city to alter the language in its  
224 contract with Running, Inc. Fred said the city would not be able to recoup approximately  
225 \$40,000 via the CARES Grant.

226

227 Charlie noted the City of Onalaska operates the Shared Ride service for a number of different  
228 municipalities, and also that the city has a contract with Shared Ride when it has to purchase  
229 capital equipment.

230

231 Fred told Charlie he is correct and said the proportion of the entire budget, with capital and  
232 operating, is split by the proportion number of trips in June, July, and August. Fred said the  
233 number of trips in those three months is what he calls the allocation between Onalaska, Holmen,  
234 and West Salem.

235

236 Charlie noted S.M.R.T. operates in four counties (La Crosse, Monroe, Vernon, Crawford), and  
237 he said S.M.R.T. representatives request funding on a yearly basis from the approximately 18  
238 municipalities it serves. Charlie also said, "We don't have a contract like you do. When we do  
239 capital purchases, we have to float that bounce each year whether we have an up year or a down  
240 year so that when we do have a big capital purchase like we did last year, we're going to see a  
241 loss. Then for the next few years hopefully we can make up that loss, then when we get to  
242 another capital purchase we're OK. We don't have that luxury of having a contract like you do  
243 with the number of municipalities we work with. We ask that you maintain that amount each  
244 year so that S.M.R.T. can operate.

245

246 This is not a donation to La Crosse County. La Crosse County's budgeted amount that we  
247 budget for S.M.R.T. each year is \$30,000. Last year La Crosse County gave S.M.R.T. \$64,000  
248 to try to help float that bounce of a large capital year. I would ask that you strongly consider  
249 maintaining that amount every year, and I will go to every municipality we work with – all 18 of  
250 them, all four counties – and ask that same thing. Obviously it's your decision. But if this is a  
251 system you want to operate efficiently [and] effectively, and if you think this is a valid public

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252 service, then we ask that your funding level be maintained at the same level each year. That's  
253 the point I would just like to make, and thank you for the opportunity. I know it's not an easy  
254 decision."

255

256 Ald. Wulf asked if the motion was to deny the \$7,500.

257

258 Ald. Olson said he believes so.

259

260 Ald. Stevens asked Fred if he feels comfortable that the City of Onalaska can afford to allocate  
261 \$7,500 for the S.M.R.T. program.

262

263 Fred told Ald. Stevens he would like him to consider reconsidering his denial and approve the  
264 funding in the 2021 budget. Fred said both he and City Administrator Rindfleisch feel more  
265 comfortable with the committee including funding for S.M.R.T. in the budget and having City  
266 Administrator Rindfleisch remove it compared to City Administrator Rindfleisch putting it in the  
267 2021 budget and the Common Council removing it.

268

269 Ald. Stevens reiterated he understands the value of the program, but he also said he is acutely  
270 aware of the some of the issues the city will be facing. Ald. Stevens noted the city will be facing  
271 other difficult decisions, and he said he wants to build as much flexibility and give the city as  
272 many options as possible. Ald. Stevens said this item may be revisited if there is any funding  
273 remaining, and he told committee members this is something he would be inclined to support in  
274 a year with fewer financial challenges. Ald. Stevens also said he is not certain the committee  
275 ever received an answer regarding what the net difference was to the budget.

276

277 Ald. Wulf stated she will be making a motion to approve the \$7,500 if the motion on the floor  
278 fails.

279

280 On voice vote, Ald. Stevens voted aye, Ald. Wulf voted nay, and both Ald. Olson and Leroy  
281 abstained.

282

283 City Administrator Rindfleisch noted the motion failed as there is no majority to pass it.

284

285 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Ald. Olson, to approve \$7,500 funding for the Scenic  
286 Mississippi Regional Transit (S.M.R.T.) Bus Service for 2021.

287

288 On voice vote, motion carried, 2-1, with one abstention. (Ald. Stevens voted nay, Leroy  
289 abstained from voting).

290

291 B. MTU:

292

1. Transit Financials 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter information (Adam Lorentz)

293

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294 Adam shared the following:

295

- 296 • MTU has collected approximately \$145,000 less in fare box totals and pass revenue than  
297 it did at this time in 2019. MTU will earn approximately \$411,000 less than it did in  
298 2019 if it does not accept pass fare tokens or bus passes the remainder of the year.
- 299 • MTU will not collect passes through August. Adam said he does not see MTU  
300 reimplementing pass fares the remainder of 2020. This is for the safety of the drivers and  
301 passengers, as well as the financial hardships people are currently facing.
- 302 • Overall ridership was down approximately 50 percent as of July 1. This is due in part to  
303 MTU limiting service in the City of La Crosse for more than one month, and also because  
304 MTU had only allowed \_\_\_\_ rides in an attempt to encourage people to stay home when  
305 the state's "Safer at Home" order was in place. No seats were blocked off.
- 306 • MTU will receive another new clean diesel bus that is part of its current order, which was  
307 five clean diesel buses. The sixth bus originally was slated to arrive in 2023. The new  
308 buses are expected to be in service by 2021.
- 309 • Adam said he hopes to receive two electric buses by the end of 2021.
- 310 • All of MTU's buses that are 2002 models or older will be removed from the fleet with the  
311 arrival of the eight new buses.

312

313 Fred asked Adam if some of MTU's losses for 2020 can be reimbursed via the CARES Grant.

314

315 Adam reported the City of La Crosse MTU had received slightly more than \$6 million in  
316 CARES funding, and he said the model to utilize the funding is "slow and steady." The final  
317 rollout of the funding was July 1, but MTU was notified in April it had secured funding. The  
318 CARES funding may be utilized to help supplement the 8520 local share, and it may be utilized  
319 until January 2021. Adam said the 5307 funding MTU had received may be utilized for capital  
320 expenses or 100 percent COVID-19 related expenses. Adam stressed the \$6 million is not for  
321 2020, noting that while it will help fill the gap for 2020, it will be utilized for both 2021 and  
322 2022. Adam said he does not know where the shared revenue will come in, nor does he know  
323 about federal and state funding for 2021. Adam also said he does not know where MTU's  
324 revenue will be, nor does he know how UW-La Crosse and Viterbo University will proceed  
325 during the 2020-21 academic year. Adam said that although MTU has signed agreements with  
326 both institutions for the 2020-21 school year, it had given reimbursements for the 2019-20  
327 academic year due to cut service as it ended early. Adam said he is negotiating with MTU's  
328 contracted advertising agency and noted he is looking at a 50-percent decrease to \$60,000 in  
329 revenue.

330

331 Adam told Fred that MTU will utilize the funds for its lost revenue, and he said the FTA is  
332 allowing MTU to utilize the funding for everything. This includes revenue loss for fares,  
333 increased expenses related to COVID-19, two steamer machines, wages for service employees  
334 who currently work six days a week, UV wands for drivers, and masks. Adam told committee

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335 members he hopes to submit the agreements between MTU and the City of Onalaska by  
336 September 1. The agreements will then go before the MTU board for approval in late October.  
337 Adam noted the City of La Crosse had taken the brunt of the service reduction, and he told  
338 committee members service was not impacted to the City of Onalaska, the Town of Campbell,  
339 and the City of La Crescent. Adam also told committee members that even with the challenges  
340 MTU has faced due to the pandemic, its Facebook page has more than 430 followers, and its app  
341 was downloaded more than 3,000 times from mid-2019 to mid-2020.

342

343 Motion by Ald. Olson, second by Ald. Wulf, to accept the MTU Transit Financials for the 1<sup>st</sup> and  
344 2<sup>nd</sup> quarters.

345

346 On voice vote, motion carried.

347

348 C. Holmen Transit Input (Holmen Rep.)

349

350 No report.

351

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

353

354 Leroy said he believes it would be beneficial to maintain some element of remote conferencing  
355 even when the committee eventually returns to meeting in person in the City of Onalaska's  
356 Common Council Chambers.

357

358 E. Onalaska Transit Input (Onalaska Rep.)

359

360 No report.

361

362 **Item 5 – UTILITIES**

363

364 No Report

365

366 **Adjournment**

367

368 Motion by Ald. Wulf, second by Ald. Olson, to adjourn at 8:14 p.m.

369

370 On voice vote, motion carried.

371

372

373 Recorded by:

374

375 Kirk Bey