

# Milwaukee County Transit System: Special Events

## Summary:

Summerfest is a world class music festival that is held every year on Milwaukee lakefront near downtown Milwaukee. It attracts up to 100,000 persons per day over an 11 day period and causes serious traffic, parking congestion. In response to these problems, Summerfest staff and the Milwaukee County Transit System began to serve the festival with a modest shuttle service between Wisconsin Avenue and the main gate of Summerfest. The Milwaukee County Transit System service has grown to serve nearly a quarter of a million trips to a wide variety of festivals and special events.

## Description:

Summerfest is Milwaukee's oldest festival and is held on the lakefront. The location of the grounds is off the usual Milwaukee County Transit System's regular routes. With the increase in attendance at Summerfest, parking and traffic demands were high. Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) saw a demand for transit due to high parking and traffic demands on Summerfest grounds. Also, MCTS patrons wanted a transit connection to the festival grounds. Over the years, other events were held on the Summerfest grounds.



The Milwaukee County Transit System started to service Summerfest in 1977 with a modest shuttle service on Wisconsin Avenue to the main gate. At one time, MCTS only had the shuttle service on Wisconsin Avenue. In 1979 MCTS provided flyer express service to Summerfest from the park-and-ride lots. The process of providing transit service to special events like the festivals took six to eight years to evolve.

During the late 1970s, Festa Italiana was the first ethnic festival to request the service. With more and more ethnic festivals, MCTS started to provide more service because of the number of festivals and attendance. Demand for shuttle services increased.

The idea to provide shuttle services for special events originated within the management staff at MCTS. About 35 years ago, in the late 1960s, people showed demand to get to Summerfest. By providing shuttle services to Summerfest, MCTS connected people to Summerfest. For 2002 Summerfest, MCTS provided 455,000 rides to Summerfest, 156,000 rides to the Wisconsin State fair and 160,000 to other special events.

Initially, a portion of the operating costs for providing shuttle services to the State Fair was paid for by State Fair. Eventually, the operating costs for the State Fair shuttle services were folded into the MCTS budget. For the State Fair, the MCTS's responsibility to provide shuttle services increased with the increase in the number of riders. In the beginning, MCTS involved providing shuttle services for 3000-4000 riders. Now, there are more than 4000+ riders in one day just from the Watertown Plank drop-off/pick-up point alone.

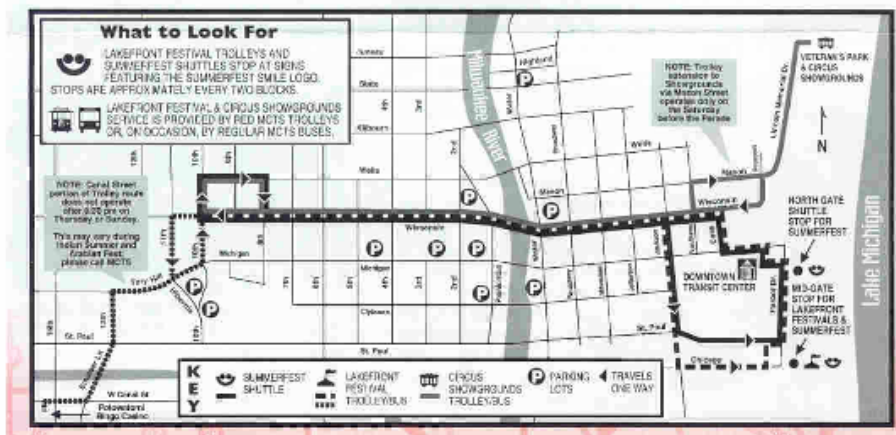
In the beginning, special events busing was a less formal part of festival operations. In the early 1980s, the Summerfest staff realized traffic and parking demand. A workgroup involving the MCTS, Police, Sheriff, parking and security staff, and Summerfest staff was formed. This workgroup is a year round working group.

Shuttle services for other festivals besides Summerfest uses the basic operating scheme of Summerfest. For some festivals, the operating scheme is similar to Summerfest since they are held on the same location. For other festivals not held on the same grounds, the basic operating scheme for Summerfest is used as a basis for operations. Ethnic festivals do not need that much planning since they are very similar from year to year, and from festival to festival.

After servicing several festivals, MCTS stopped charging new festivals for the service. The operations costs were eventually folded into the regular budget. The MCTS still provides shuttle services for the Milwaukee Brewer Home baseball games. The MCTS had provided services to the Milwaukee Bucks games since the mid-1980s but the

services were cancelled last year in 2002. For the Brewers games, shuttles run from Wisconsin Avenue to Bluemound Avenue to the gate while making certain stops on Wisconsin Avenue.

### MCTS Shuttle & Trolley Map



## User Assessment

### Customers:

Transit is considered more when and where people perceive parking problems. MCTS is flexible, being able to provide transit services wherever possible.

No other organizations or private groups were involved in the implementation of shuttle services for special events. In

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fact, no elected officials were involved in the implementation. Since providing special events busing is more of a day-to-day matter and not a policy change, elected officials were not involved. Through the budget process, MCTS integrated the special events of the service hours into the regular operating budget. No one opposed the idea of providing special events transit services.

### **Agency:**

The planning stages were evolutionary based on customer demand and the number of events that came up. In the planning stages, there was no opposition to MCTS providing shuttle service during festivals or special events. Many of the decision makers were pleased with the expansion of transit services.

## **Technology Assessment:**

### **Relative Benefits:**

The benefits for MCTS in providing the special events shuttle services have to do with the provision of "service fulfill": MCTS's role in the community. Providing the special events shuttle services allows MCTS to introduce transit service to the public (especially to those who are not regular transit users). Providing special events shuttle services helps to build a positive reputation.

The advantage of special events shuttle services is the opportunity to build positive reputation about transit. The disadvantage is that not having a reliable service will have the opposite effect. Having a reliable service is an important aspect of the operations. This is real important because people will complain if services are not reliable.

MCTS benefits from having service for customers who may not use transit for any other purpose and that also helps MCTS to get support for transit in general. Special events busing may give people an idea to try regular service if they think highly of the special event services provided by MCTS.

### **Trial process:**

Initially, MCTS invested a lot on marketing in efforts to reach a group that did not use transit regularly. Riders on special events shuttle buses were not necessarily regular riders of MCTS. Since operating shuttle services could get expensive, marketing is very important to protect investment. More marketing means more return on revenues. Basically, the key to success is good planning.

### **Observability:**

The success of the special events shuttle services was observed through the increase of festival/special events riders. The ridership that the MCTS has achieved meets or exceeds the minimum standards that justify service.

### **Complexity:**

Traffic and access issues sometimes pose as obstacles. From time to time but more so recently, budget issues have created hurdles. If there are too many events, having a lot of events could run up operating expenses because some drivers are on time-and-a-half. Servicing too many events could become an expensive service to provide.

The complexity of providing shuttle services for special events is a matter of an equity issue. The question is how one picks and choose which special events to service. Equity can be as important as productivity. One needs to consider the issue of having the shuttle services available to all special events.

### **Cost:**

Early on the operations costs for Summerfest was budgeted into the MCTS annual budget. At first, ethnic festivals had to pay for shuttle services, but the costs were eventually budgeted into MCTS's annual budget. Special events' busing does not have its own budget, but rather the budget is rolled into the regular MCTS budget based on historic costs.

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### **Consequences of Failure:**

The risks involved were that there were no guarantees that MCTS will break even since attendance is subject to weather and economy. One cannot plan for this type of transit service since it is demand responsive. The consequences of failure could be that it could be more expensive than planned.

For example, for this year operations costs for special events were less expensive but also generated less revenue. Depending on the years, Summerfest festivals are close to breaking even and some do not even break even. MCTS has been able to absorb the loss by not having to add more service. However, the worst is when one expects more and not gets it. A number of festivals have low attendance. It is possible that some of the festivals could get cut from services if the attendance is really low and not enough riders are on the shuttle buses.

### **Implementation Issues:**

Mr. Caruso advises the following: understand the event or events as much as possible, be consistent with frequency, have enough vehicle capacity, and plan for the end of the

festivals, especially and the end of each night of the event. It is essential to “know the event.” For example, because the State Fair starts earlier, it has a higher daily turnover rate than other festivals. Some people arrive early and leave in the afternoon, whereas some people arrive in the afternoon and leave when the event closes. It is important to know the event to plan for demand turnovers in the festivals.

It is highly advisable to work with the event staff and centralize drop-off points on the festival grounds. It is also important to reserve bus lanes around the festivals grounds. Furthermore, Mr. Caruso advises, not to have too many different schedules in place. It is advisable and important to be consistent with frequency of buses.

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