Madison Metro Transit: Transfer Point Centers

Summary:

It took nine years of planning, but on July 19, 1998, the Madison Metro Transit changed overnight into the timed transfer departure system. The Madison Metro Transfer Point Project began its planning process in 1989 and culminated into a system of four transfer points. Now with four transfer transit centers, the buses leave on the ½ hour and on the hour, like an airport. This new system is unique that the whole system is timed around four transfer points.

The time-transfer departure system consists of four transfer points: N, E, S, and W. The N transfer point is located in between N. Sherman Ave. and Packers Avenue, just north of the MATC Tech Center. The E transfer point is located on Milwaukee St., just west of the Main Post Office. The South transfer point is located off of W. Badger Rd., east of the Town of Madison Hall. The W transfer point is located on Tokay Blvd., northeast of the Social Security Administration and west of the Westgate Mall. These four transfer points provide travel access to both downtown Madison and the suburbs of Madison.

Description:

The late 1970s and early 1980s brought about the start of the job/retail exodus from downtown. In the 1980s, many businesses and retail establishments were locating outside downtown Madison and into the Madison suburbs. With retail and jobs moving out of the city, Madison Metro needed to find a way to serve those no longer needing to come into the city for retail and employment. In addition, a consultant study in 1985 identified the need to provide transit services in the suburbs. Thus, Madison Metro
embarked on a planning process to modify the current system to include services in the suburbs.

In 1990 some of the Madison Transit staff members went out to Pierce, Washington to look at the transfer centers operations already in place for two years. In June 1993, Madison Metro conducted a public input session with regard to what type of improvements were necessary; conducted surveys of drivers and riders, met with public officials in Madison and all surrounding areas about the type of needed improvements. Madison Metro staff members started to put lines on the map, and developed the routing scheme in late November/December of 1994. Madison Metro unveiled its first new plan since the old one was unveiled in 1995 as the Metro concept.

In October 1996, Madison Metro held public meetings for locations of transfer points. A series of public meetings were also held on route systems. Madison Metro was hoping to implement the final plan in the summer of 1997. Madison Metro had already attained neighborhood approval for the final plan. Due to a funding shortfall, the implementation was not possible in 1997. Additional state funding in 1998 enable Madison Metro to implement the Madison Metro Transfer Point Project in the summer of 1998.

Originally, the transfer centers were designed to provide access for transferring, but also retail for shopping and other conveniences. The original plan consisted of two centers to be located in a commercial location but Madison Metro was unable to obtain neighborhood approval. In the following planning stages, a modified plan consisted of seven to eight transfer centers. One of the City Council even approved the plan and the area had to be rezoned. This plan also did not work because Madison Metro was
unable to get 2/3 majority of the City Council to agree on the plan. In the second plan, the transfer centers were to be located away from the neighborhood. Thus, Madison Metro had to look for a different neighborhood/sites. Finally, the plan that was eventually adopted had the transfer centers separate from the neighborhoods near a commercial manufacturing district. The transfer centers were located as remotely as possible and spartan in design, used primarily for transferring.

The four transfer centers provide a timed transfer system departure where the buses leave on the ½ hour and on the hour, like an airport. The operating concept was driven by the responses to the design. It is very unique that the whole transit system is timed around four transfer points.

User Assessment

Customers:

Since the Madison Metro is a department of the city, it had to go to city hall for approval of the new system. In fact, Madison Metro needs city approval for any fare, service, or budget changes. Fortunately, the city hall approved the concept of the new timed transfer system

Agency:

There were several stages of the planning process. The original plan had enclosed transfer centers, but the neighborhood did not like the enclosed idea. The neighborhood feared that the enclosed transfer center would attract kids and the homeless. The original plan even had seating available. To prevent possible loitering around the transfer centers, the plans changed to the current design of open air and no seating available.

With any new building construction, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is necessary. After the EIS, Madison Metro held public hearings and meetings but did not get people’s attention. Madison Metro then hired architects to come up with the designs. Once the design process began, Madison Metro took the designs to the public. During the preliminary design process, neighborhoods started to organized for resistance. It took two years of meetings to come to a consensus: what they should look like, where it should be located, and how to design routes with the least impact.

The City of Madison contracted service to the surrounding communities. The planning was all done internally, and no private groups and no political officials were involved in the planning process.
Technology Assessment:

Relative Benefits:

With the current system, Madison Metro is able to accommodate new growth more easily. As the city expands outwards, the new system is set up to accommodate the new growth without affecting the whole system. In the old system, because of cross-town routes, new growth affected the whole system. Now, new growth only affects the nearby area.

Amongst the ridership, only 20% needs transit as their mode of transportation, 50% of the riders are commuters, and 30% are students. Madison Metro can easily adjust the service levels better with the new system since the routes are shorter. Madison Metro can also easily change the frequency of the routes based on ridership. Efficiency savings are also included in the system, which means shorter travel time for passengers.

Some of the advantages are that now people who are traveling to areas outside of downtown in the periphery have shorter trips and non-transfer routes to downtown are also available. Eighty percent of the passengers go to the downtown area for work during peak times, and the rest travel during non-peak times. Timed transfer system has inefficiencies already built into it. Passengers have either ½ hour or 1 hour to get to their destinations. From the North transfer point to the South transfer point, travel time is scheduled for 1-hour, but it really does not take 1 hour. Delays are also built into the wait time.

The downside of the new system is the inconvenience to some passengers and the loss of productive time due to transfers. One of the disadvantages of the new system is that during rush hour, a trip that usually takes less than one hour could take one hour.

Trial process:

For some people, travel time increased due to transfers. The City of Madison was very supportive of Madison Metro’s change from the start. It just took a long time to complete the project. Madison Metro has a 25% ridership turnover. During the first year of implementation, ridership decreased but eventually went up as expected.

It will take at least five years, realistically, to implement the same type of system in another city. To save time, good principles can be obtained from Madison. Even with public approval and routes already set up, and lessons learned from Madison, realistically, it will take at least 5 years for implementation.

Observability:

The success of the program was observed from the number of complaints received, and monitoring ridership at the route and system levels. Service improvements are
necessary every year. There were no inputs from the general public since 1995/6. Forums and public hearings were held after the implementation of the project. Many drivers were skeptical at first, and some within management were also skeptical. During the planning process, one year before implementation of the new system, Madison Metro had “driver ambassador teams” facilitate help sessions all over the city to convince the public that it was going to work.

**Complexity:**

What was originally thought to take 2-3 years to implement, took ten years of planning and implementation. For the first plan, a timeline was established. However, when the first plan did not work out, the second plan in 1993/4 did not have a timeline. All planning was done internally.

To service growing trends, the idea of the original plan came from the consultant study. Because the neighborhoods had the “NIMBY” (not in my backyard) attitude and people did not want major public facilities in their backyards, the planning and implementation of the new system took longer than expected.

Madison Metro advises, “don’t expect everyone is going to like it initially and don’t be afraid.”

**Cost:**

Because of the 25% increase in service hours, operating costs increased 25%. Operations also increased with the purchase of more buses and hiring of additional drivers. A federal 8020 grant provided $2-3 million in funding.

The current operating costs for the transit centers involve only maintenance. Maintenance costs for the transit centers became a part of Madison Metro’s regular operating budget.
Federal money is used for capital expenses only, and is used for bus rotations. State funds 45% of the operating expenses, fares cover 20% of the operating costs, and the rest is provided by the local city.

**Consequences of Failure:**

There were standards already established for timed transfers system. Edmonton Canada, Pierce (Tacoma) Washington, and Dayton Ohio already had timed transfer systems in place. Madison Metro learned from their experiences. However, Madison Metro’s current system is homemade, catered to the needs of Madison residents.

**Implementation Issues:**

It was difficult to try/implement the project due to neighborhood opposition during the first planning process. During the second planning process, Madison Metro interacted more with their customers and implementation went smoothly.

Initially, Ms. Sharon Persich (project manager) and Mr. Paul Larrousse (former general manager for Madison Metro, now Director, at Rutgers National Transit Institute) were the main people involved in the project. With regard to scheduling routes and transfers, both Ms. Persich and Mr. Larrousse went to the public first to get their feedback. After assessing affects and impacts of the new schedules, Ms. Persich and Mr. Larrousse reworked the schedules to meet rider demands. Still new issues and problems arose. Within the first year of implementation, Madison Metro made 2 – 3 changes to deal with problems. Madison Metro revised headway times and made a few changes in some areas.

Ridership decreased initially but increased in the second year of implementation. Madison Metro took risks in implementing the new time transfer system. The new system could have “screwed up” people’s trips and decreased ridership. The potential loss of ridership is risk. To evaluate the success of the program, a survey is conducted every five years.

Madison Metro advises that a champion is needed to carry out the proposed new project. In addition to having a champion for the project, it is also necessary to have key local staff and policymakers behind you. Without a champion, local staff and policymakers, one could possibly face heavy resistance to change. In 1988, Mr. Larrousse (who left three years ago) served as the champion for the project as the new general manager of Madison Metro. Mr. Larrousse worked with the mayor and key council people in getting the city backing.

What’s next for the City of Madison Metro: currently in the procurement process for funding of Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL), will have Automatic Passenger Counters
(APC) within one year, and will have auto announcements on board, all new fare box system and smart card reader in the next two years.

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