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*An Analysis of the Impact of Proposed 2011  
Milwaukee County Transit Service Reductions on  
Access to Employment*

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## ***ABOUT THIS REPORT***

In 2008, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Economic Development (CED) produced a study that examined the impact of transit service reductions since 2001 on access to employment in the Milwaukee metro area. This report updates the previous study by examining how service reductions by Milwaukee County Transit Service (MCTS) proposed for 2011 would affect transit service for regional employers.

This report was written by Joel Rast, associate professor of political science and urban studies and director of CED. All GIS and data analysis was done by Peter Armstrong and Catherine Madison. We are grateful for the assistance of the Milwaukee County Transit System in the preparation of this study.

CED is a unit of the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The College established CED in 1990 to provide university research and technical assistance to community organizations and units of government working to improve the Greater Milwaukee economy. The analysis and conclusions presented in this report are solely those of CED and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of UW-Milwaukee, or any of the organizations providing financial support to the Center.

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## *Introduction*

In May 2010, the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) announced it faced an estimated \$10.2 million budget shortfall for 2011. Transit officials identified increased operating costs and anticipated reductions in federal and state aid as the principal causes of the shortfall. For several years, analysts have warned that MCTS faces an imminent budget crisis unless a dedicated local funding source for transit is secured.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the transit systems of most other major metropolitan areas, local funding for MCTS comes from a county property tax levy under which transit competes with other county-run services during each budget cycle for a share of property tax revenues. Intense competition for local revenues along with years of steadfast opposition by the County Executive to increases in the property tax levy have prevented the local portion of the MCTS budget from rising sufficiently to close the budget gap. As a result, MCTS has been forced to reduce service, raise fares, or both every year since 2001.

To respond to the projected 2011 budget gap, MCTS prepared a schedule of bus route eliminations and route reductions that would, if implemented, reduce the transit system's current operating costs by nearly \$7 million. The current proposal by MCTS would eliminate all but two freeway flyers and shorten or eliminate several additional bus routes. Hours of service on existing routes would be reduced as well.

It is important to emphasize that the final 2011 county transit budget will be determined jointly by the County Executive and the County Board. The menu of service cuts prepared by MCTS is only a starting point in the budget process. This study examines only those service cuts proposed by MCTS, not the 2011 county transit budget which will be finalized by the County Board later this year.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the service cuts proposed by MCTS, if put into effect, would impact access to job locations in the MCTS service area. We begin by examining the current MCTS route structure. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), we map all job locations that are presently served by the MCTS system. Next we examine the proposed 2011 route structure, mapping all bus route eliminations or reductions. We then determine which job locations would lose transit service if the proposed service reductions were

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<sup>1</sup> See Public Policy Forum, *Milwaukee County's Transit Crisis: How Did We Get Here and What Do We Do Now?* (2008); Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, "SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 279: Milwaukee County Transit System Development Plan: 2009-2013, Preliminary Draft" (2007); and Thomas A. Rubin, *Milwaukee Transit Study: Preliminary Phase I Findings* (2008).

implemented, and provide an estimate of the number of workers that would be affected. We conclude with an examination of individual bus routes. For each bus route that would be eliminated or shortened under the proposed 2011 route structure, we map the job locations that would lose transit service. This allows us to rank each route or route segment affected in terms of the impact it would have on access to employment.

The principal finding of this report is that implementation of the entire menu of service cuts proposed by MCTS would result in the loss of bus service to 1,778 of the 19,951 employers currently served by MCTS, a decline of 8.9 percent. All but 5.7 percent of these employers are located in suburban areas of Milwaukee County. At a minimum, 24,350 jobs in locations currently served by MCTS would become inaccessible by transit.

### ***Current MCTS Transit Service***

MCTS currently operates a total of 49 bus lines that are concentrated in Milwaukee County but also include several freeway flyer routes that serve locations in Ozaukee and Waukesha Counties. The size of the system, calculated by totaling the length of each individual bus route and adding them all together, is presently 720 route miles, down from 957 miles in 2001. Map 1 shows the current MCTS route structure.

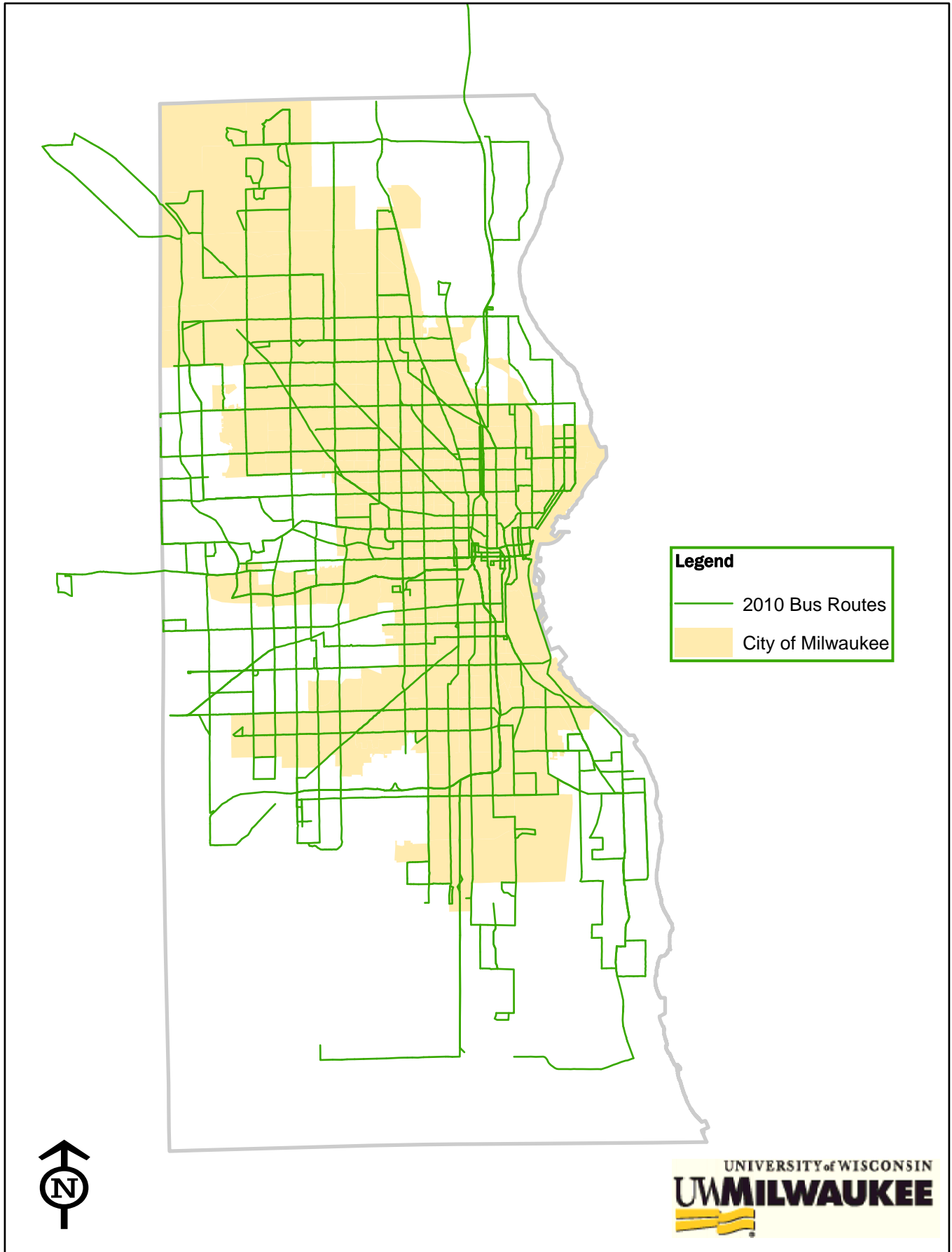
Under the present bus route structure, a total of 19,951 employers are served by MCTS. This includes 18,626 employers in Milwaukee County and 1,325 employers in areas outside Milwaukee County that are served by MCTS freeway flyer routes. We arrived at these numbers by identifying and mapping all employers located within ¼ mile of a bus stop. The general guideline for transit planning is that most people will walk ¼ mile to get to a bus stop.<sup>2</sup> While some people are willing to walk further than this, transit use declines significantly as distances exceed ¼ mile.

How many jobs are represented by the 19,951 employers that are currently served by MCTS? Unfortunately, we cannot determine that number precisely because our data source for employers does not include precise information on the number of employees at individual

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<sup>2</sup> See Sean O'Sullivan and John Morrall, "Walking Distances to and from Light-Rail Transit Stations." Transportation Research Record 1538. Transportation Research Board, Washington, DC (1995): 19-26; and Fang Zhao, Lee-Fang Chow, Min-Tang Li, Albert Gan, and Ike Ubaka, "Forecasting Transit Walk Accessibility: A Regression Model Alternative to the Buffer Method." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board, Washington, DC (2003).

# Map 1: Milwaukee County Transit System 2010 (Current) Bus Routes



workplaces.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it provides a range (1-4 workers, 5-9 workers, etc.) for each employer.

Table 1 provides employment ranges for all establishments located within ¼ mile of a MCTS bus stop. Thus, for example, there are 8,230 employers with between 1 and 4 workers in locations served by MCTS. Likewise, there are 3,339 employers with between 5 and 9 workers, and so on. We provide an extremely conservative estimate of the total number of employees at workplaces served by MCTS by using the minimum number of workers listed for all establishments. By totaling the far-right column of Table 1, we find that the current MCTS route structure serves workplaces that employ a *minimum* of 277,075 workers. The actual number is, in all likelihood, substantially higher.

**TABLE 1. Employers Served by MCTS, 2010**

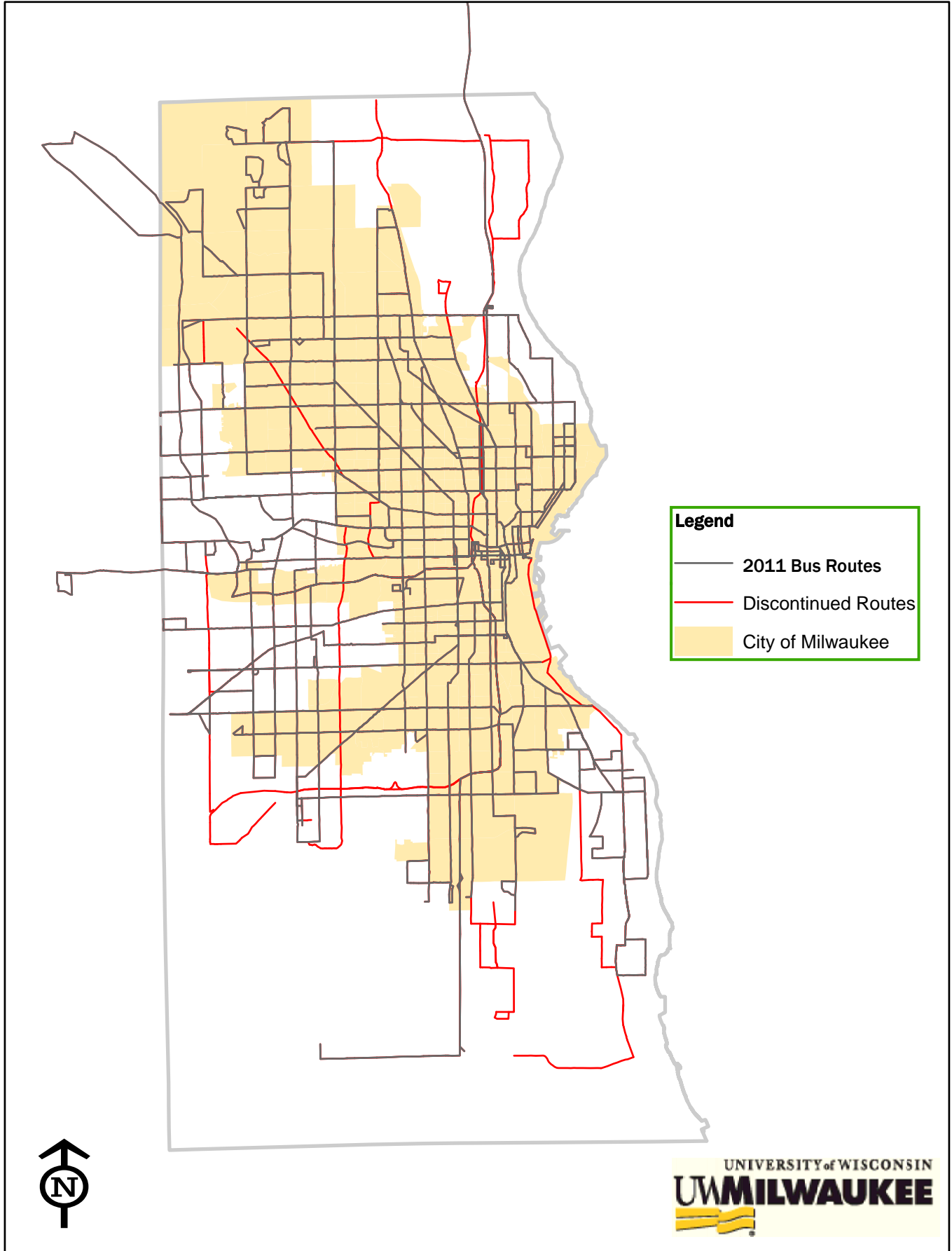
<b>Number of Employers</b>	<b>Number of Workers</b>	<b>Minimum Total Workers</b>
8,230	1-4	8,230
3,339	5-9	16,695
2,671	10-19	26,710
1,952	20-49	39,040
862	50-99	43,100
508	100-249	50,800
124	250-499	31,000
43	500-999	21,500
40	1,000+	40,000

## ***MCTS Transit Service Proposed for 2011***

During the spring of 2010, MCTS officials prepared a schedule of bus route eliminations and route reductions that would help close the transit budget gap projected for 2011. This proposal includes the elimination of 13 bus routes, including freeway flyer routes 39, 40, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49 and local routes 28, 64, 68, and 219. Service on portions of local routes 12, 15, 27, and 80 would also be eliminated. A detailed schedule of proposed service reductions can be found in Appendix A. Map 2 shows existing bus routes and route segments that would be discontinued under the proposed 2011 route structure. Altogether, the proposed cuts would reduce the size of the MCTS system from 720 route miles to 533 route miles, a reduction of 26 percent.

<sup>3</sup> For employer locations, we use 4<sup>th</sup>-quarter 2009 SNAP data provided by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.

# Map 2: Milwaukee County Transit System 2011 Proposed Bus Routes





Using GIS, we calculate that implementation of the entire menu of proposed route eliminations and route reductions would result in the loss of bus service to 1,778 of the 19,951 employers currently served by MCTS, a decline of 8.9 percent. Map 3 shows the locations of all employers which are presently served by MCTS but which would lose service under the proposed 2011 route eliminations. As Map 3 indicates, the vast majority of employers facing possible service losses are located outside the city of Milwaukee in suburban areas of Milwaukee County. Only 5.7 percent of the total number of employers affected are located in the city of Milwaukee. Table 2 identifies the municipalities in which employers facing possible service losses are located. As this information suggests, one likely consequence of implementing the proposed service reductions for 2011 would be to make it difficult or impossible for transit-dependent workers and job-seekers in Milwaukee to reach many job locations in suburban Milwaukee County. Given Milwaukee's already high poverty and jobless rates, especially for African Americans, this scenario is particularly troublesome.

**TABLE 2. Locations of Employers to Lose Transit Service Under Proposed 2011 Route Structure**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Number of Employers Affected</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Bayside	95	5.3
Brown Deer	131	7.4
Cudahy	67	3.8
Fox Point	125	7.0
Glendale	376	21.1
Greendale	36	2.0
Greenfield	165	9.3
Hales Corners	116	6.5
Mequon	2	0.1
Milwaukee	102	5.7
Oak Creek	285	16.0
River Hills	2	0.1
St. Francis	10	0.6
South Milwaukee	47	2.6
Wauwatosa	44	2.5
West Allis	163	9.2
Whitefish Bay	12	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,778</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# Map 3: Employers to Lose Transit Service Under Proposed 2011 MCTS Route Structure

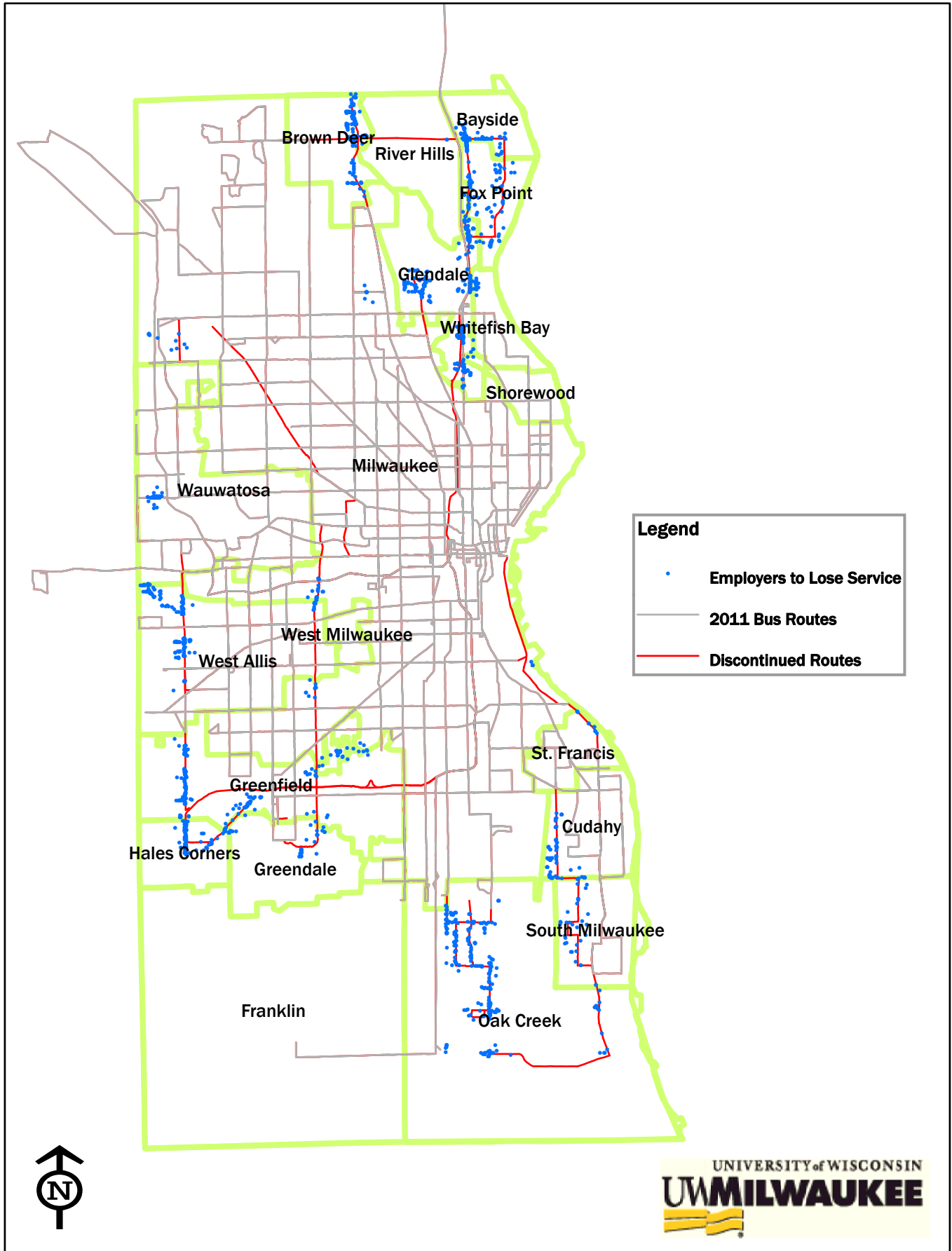


Table 3 provides employment ranges for workplaces that would lose transit service if the proposed 2011 route eliminations and route reductions are implemented in full. Table 3 shows that *at least* 24,350 jobs in locations currently accessible by transit will become inaccessible if the proposed service cuts are implemented. (Again, this number is calculated by totaling the far-right column of Table 3.) Once again, because our data source provides a range rather than a precise figure for numbers of workers at individual establishments, the actual figure is quite likely to be far higher than this.

**TABLE 3. Employers to Lose Transit Service Under Proposed 2011 Route Structure**

Number of Employers	Number of Workers	Minimum Total Workers
645	1-4	645
315	5-9	1,575
286	10-19	2,860
176	20-49	3,520
94	50-99	4,700
68	100-249	6,800
11	250-499	2,750
3	500-999	1,500
0	1000+	0

## *Route-Specific Analysis*

As indicated above, service cuts proposed by MCTS for 2011 would eliminate 13 bus routes and shorten four additional routes. To determine more precisely how route reductions and eliminations would affect service to local employers, we examined each route individually. Table 4 shows the number of employers that would lose service on each route scheduled for elimination or reduction.

As Table 4 indicates, the impacts of proposed route reductions or eliminations are unevenly distributed. The elimination of four routes—44, 45, 46, and 47—would have no impact on service to employers because all employers located along those corridors would continue to be served by different bus routes that are not targeted for elimination. By contrast, the elimination of routes 28 and 68 alone would result in the loss of service to 854 employers, nearly half of the total number of employers who would lose service if the entire schedule of service cuts proposed by MCTS is implemented. Route 28 runs along the western boundary of

Milwaukee County from Layton Blvd. to Silver Spring Drive. Route 68 serves numerous commercial establishments located along Port Washington Road as far north as Bayside.

**TABLE 4. Service Impacts of Bus Routes Proposed for Elimination**

<b>Bus Route</b>	<b>Number of Employers To Lose Transit Service</b>
39	1
40	7
43	161
44	0
45	0
46	0
47	0
48	55
49	2
28	326
64	123
68	528
219	82
12 (segment elimination)	138
15 (segment elimination)	112
27 (segment elimination)	90
80 (segment elimination)	153

## *Conclusion*

As we have argued elsewhere, there is a growing consensus that strong, healthy public transit systems are essential to the economic well-being of metropolitan regions.<sup>4</sup> In making decisions about where to locate corporate headquarters or new production facilities, businesses routinely include a region's public transit system among the factors to be evaluated. Transit helps connect workers to jobs, a function particularly important in cities like Milwaukee with large low-income populations lacking access to automobiles. Transit also improves access to traditional employment centers, particularly downtown business districts, helping to maintain these areas as vibrant business locations despite the decentralizing effects of urban sprawl.

The transit service reductions identified and analyzed in this report have been proposed by MCTS in response to a projected \$10.2 million budget shortfall for 2011. While this

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<sup>4</sup> See Joel Rast, *Out of Service: The Impact of Transit Cuts on Access to Jobs in Metropolitan Milwaukee*. UWM Center for Economic Development (2008).

represents a starting point in the preparation of the county transit budget for 2011, the actual 2011 budget for MCTS will be determined jointly by the County Executive and the County Board. On October 1, 2010, the County Executive is scheduled to present the recommended executive budget to the County Board. During October and early November, the County Board Finance & Audit Committee will analyze the recommended budget and propose amendments. We urge the County Executive and the County Board to consider the analysis presented here before finalizing the MCTS budget for 2011. Particularly in the current economic climate, a substantial reduction of transit service to regional employers would create further difficulties for a regional economy that is already showing few signs of life.

Finally, we join others in urging state and local policymakers to pass the necessary legislation to create a dedicated local funding source for transit in Milwaukee County. The chronic budget shortfalls experienced by MCTS in recent years are due in no small part to the competition MCTS faces every year for a share of county property tax revenues. This arrangement, highly unusual for a large transit system like MCTS, is no longer sustainable. A proposal for a county sales tax to replace property tax funding for transit was approved by Milwaukee County voters in an advisory referendum in 2008. State and local policymakers should respect the preferences of voters and act soon to establish a permanent, dedicated funding source for transit that would help put MCTS on more solid financial footing.



**Appendix A**  
**2011 Budget -- Potential Route Eliminations, Segment Eliminations and Modifications Effective 1/3/11**  
**Ranked by Passengers Lost Per Bus Hour Saved**



Entire Route Eliminations									
Local Fixed and Trip Based Routes	2009 Ave. Daily Rides	Annual Rides	Annual Hours Saved	Annual Ridership Lost	Pass. Lost Per Bus Hour Saved	Annual Savings	Annual Revenue Loss	Annual Net Savings	Comments
Route 219 Oak Creek Shuttle	34	8,670	1,464	8,670	5.9	\$101,210	\$12,140	\$89,070	No alternatives
Route 68 Port Washington (only includes County funded service - no JARC funds)	623	122,430	8,825	68,900	7.8	\$610,250	\$62,700	\$547,550	East-West service at transfer corners
Route 64 60th Street	403	120,900	7,956	65,700	8.3	\$550,160	\$59,790	\$490,370	East-West service at transfer corners
Route 28 108th Street (only includes County funded service - no JARC funds)	1,249	200,580	12,502	141,430	11.3	\$864,510	\$128,700	\$735,810	East-West service at transfer corners
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		452,580	30,747	284,700		\$2,126,130	\$263,330	\$1,862,800	
Freeway Flyer Routes									
Route 45 Watertown Plank Flyer	81	20,660	2,196	20,660	9.4	\$151,820	\$45,250	\$106,570	No express alternative to regular freeway flyer service. If regular freeway flyer service is eliminated, the associated reduction of the size of the fleet will prohibit MCTS from providing the extra service needed to operate Summerfest freeway flyers. The only alternative for Summerfest flyer service would be the Route 7 shuttle along Wisconsin Avenue.
Route 47 S. 27th - Holt Flyer	144	36,760	3,126	36,720	11.7	\$216,180	\$80,420	\$135,760	
Route 39 Timmerman Flyer	138	35,250	2,772	35,290	12.7	\$191,670	\$77,290	\$114,380	
Route 49 Brown Deer - Northshore Flyer	280	71,390	5,523	71,400	12.9	\$381,940	\$156,370	\$225,570	
Route 40 College - Ryan Flyer	280	71,360	5,393	71,400	13.2	\$372,940	\$156,370	\$216,570	
Route 44 Fair Park - National Flyer	191	48,600	3,608	48,710	13.5	\$249,510	\$106,670	\$142,840	
Route 48 South Shore Flyer	256	65,380	4,157	65,280	15.7	\$287,420	\$142,960	\$144,460	
Route 43 Whitnall Flyer	331	84,450	5,077	84,410	16.6	\$351,080	\$184,860	\$166,220	
Route 46 Loomis - Southridge Flyer	353	89,910	5,378	90,020	16.7	\$371,890	\$197,140	\$174,750	
Summerfest Routes 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, & 49	23,587	259,450	6,576	259,460	39.5	\$931,500	\$700,540	\$230,960	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		783,210	43,806	783,350		\$3,505,950	\$1,847,870	\$1,658,080	
Segments of Routes to be Eliminated or Restructured									
Route 80 Eliminate service south of MATC to Puetz Road	5	1,280	191	1,280	6.7	\$13,220	\$1,160	\$12,060	No alternatives
Routes 15 & 53 Eliminate Route 15 on Penn. - 15th between Layton and Drexel. Extend Route 53 to replace Route 15 on Clement - Howard - Penn. to Layton and extend to Packard. Install turn-back on Route 15 at Oklahoma	174	52,200	4,500	52,200	11.6	\$311,180	\$47,500	\$263,680	No alternatives south of Layton Avenue. Route 53 service replaces Route 15 service north of Layton Avenue.
Route 12 Eliminate service from Florist Ave. to County line (includes County and JARC funded service)	800	204,000	8,160	204,000	25.0	\$564,260	\$185,640	\$378,620	No alternatives
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		257,480	12,851	257,480		\$888,660	\$234,300	\$654,360	
Weekday and Weekend Service Span Reductions									
Weekdays Eliminate service before 430am and after 12am	480	122,400	18,717	122,400	6.5	\$1,294,280	\$111,380	\$1,182,900	No alternatives
Saturdays Operate Sun. service on Sat. on Rtes. 10, 11, 12, 14, 31, 33, 35, 51, 53, 54, 57, 67, & 80	2,140	111,280	11,133	111,280	10.0	\$769,860	\$101,260	\$668,600	All routes still available (except at reduced frequency)
Sundays Operate service only from 6am to 12am	1,606	83,510	4,243	83,510	19.7	\$293,420	\$75,990	\$217,430	No alternatives
Saturdays Operate service only from 6am to 12am	3,760	218,080	9,193	218,080	23.7	\$635,700	\$198,450	\$437,250	No alternatives
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		535,270	43,286	535,270		\$2,993,260	\$487,080	\$2,506,180	
<b>TOTAL</b>		2,028,540	130,690	1,860,800		9,514,000	2,832,580	\$6,681,420	

NOTE: 2011 Operating Cost -- \$69.15 per hour; Fare Revenue -- \$0.91 for local routes, \$1.40 for Shuttles, & \$2.19 for Freeway Flyers. Ridership shown is unlinked passengers. The extension of Route 27 to the Glendale industrial park is also eliminated due to the loss of funds from the Job Access - Reverse Commute program.