

SASY Neighborhood Council
January 8, 2015

Dear Madison Alderpersons:

The Schenk-Atwood-Yahara-Starkweather Creek (SASY) Neighborhood Association is greatly disturbed by your support for eliminating numerous bus stops on Madison's Isthmus. Based upon the vociferous public opposition to this policy expressed at a public meeting on January 5, 2015 at the Wil-Mar Neighborhood Center attended by at least 75 people, it is apparent that these proposed cuts do not represent the interests of the community.

Cutting established bus stops in the high-ridership Isthmus areas will not save appreciable amounts of time, nor will it lead to comparable levels of bus service on the periphery of town. However, this change may force would-be riders into private vehicles, or onto paratransit. The higher-use Isthmus stops/routes produce the most ridership revenue for Metro. So why cut service to the Isthmus to send mostly empty buses to the periphery?

If nobody boards or alights at a particular stop, the bus can pass by without slowing down, but the stop will be there for those who need it. Bus service can never compete with private vehicles for speed or convenience. Rather, it provides an environmentally-friendly and much-needed community service.

At the meeting at Wil-Mar, city staff took a "straw poll." Attendees overwhelmingly voted against removing any stops. Many people at the Wil-Mar meeting stated they chose to live on the higher-priced Isthmus precisely because of its convenient location, including frequent bus service. Living on the city's periphery would have required them to be largely dependent on a private vehicle for transportation, which they did not want to be. These are the very riders—the so-called "choice riders"—that Metro depends upon for much of its ridership.

Do you plan to ignore Isthmus residents who do not own a private vehicle? More and more isthmus residents--millennials, elders, low-income individuals, those with mobility issues, and others rely on transit to get around. During Madison's icy and snowy winters, it is especially difficult for those with mobility limitations and young children to walk an extra block to reach a bus stop, which is what the cuts will necessitate.

We are very concerned that the short-sighted elimination of convenient bus stops on the Isthmus will reduce transit ridership and increase use of private vehicles. This is surely contrary to Madison's sustainability plan. Increased use of private vehicles service will lead to increased vehicle congestion and the release of health-damaging pollution and carbon dioxide, a major contributor to climate change. In the past we have been proud of Madison's reputation as a progressive city fostering sustainability. Now we wonder if the city's sustainability initiatives are simply "window-dressing".

The plans for eliminating bus stops have proceeded without much publicity. Is this “implementation by stealth?”. The first round of bus stop cuts on Madison’s east side was in the Johnson/Gorham Street corridor, including the planned elimination of the stop nearest to Yahara House, an organization providing job and life skills services to low-income people with disabilities. Only significant last-minute advocacy was successful in reinstating the Yahara House stop.

Now the bus stop serving the busy Wil-Mar Neighborhood Center is slated for removal. Many Jenifer Street bus users also walk the short distance to the numerous businesses on Williamson Street, including the Willy Street Coop, Mallatt’s Pharmacy, and St. Vincent’s. One of the stops serving these businesses is slated for elimination, a significant inconvenience for riders carrying bags of groceries and other purchases. Were these businesses notified about the proposed changes?

Studies show that strong transit service in denser areas of cities supports increasing property values, increased tax revenues for city government, and supports the quality of life that many residents want. Eliminating bus stops undermines these values.

Due to the extent of opposition expressed by an informed public at the January 5th meeting, and the apparent lack of full disclosure and public notice at the time this policy was discussed and adopted, MABA requests that you promptly halt any and all additional bus stop eliminations throughout the Isthmus pending a series of public hearings providing full disclosure on the extent and impact of bus stop cuts.

Please act promptly to reverse this ill-conceived and unresponsive policy.

Sincerely,

Brad Hinkfus, Chair
SASY Council

cc: MPO
Mayor Soglin