

Dunn County Dunn County Transit Commission



2017 TRANSIT SYSTEM MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Final Report | February 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is required by Wisconsin Statute to conduct a management performance review of all urban transit systems receiving state aid at least once every five years. This report summarizes the 2017 Management Performance Review (MPR) for the Dunn County Transit Commission, more commonly referred to as Dunn County Transit (DCT). This marks the first MPR for DCT.

The MPR process consisted of three main activities: performance analysis, written questionnaire completion, and an on-site interview and facility review. The review team conducted a performance analysis in July 2017 to inform the areas of focus for the questionnaire and on-site interview. An electronic questionnaire form was sent to the DCT Transit Manager in August 2017. The on-site interview and facility review was conducted on November 2, 2017.

This report consists of five sections: System Overview; Analysis of System Performance; Policy- and Decision-Making Processes; Functional Area Review; and Recommendations Summary. The Functional Area Review focuses on transportation operations, vehicle and facility maintenance, finance, planning, scheduling, and marketing aspects of the transit system. Below are summary tables that highlight the findings of this MPR Final Report.

Analysis of System Performance

Table i: Peer Analysis Performance Summary

Performance Objective	Measure	National Peer Comparison (2015)	Wisconsin Peer Comparison (2015)	National Time Trend Performance (2011-2015)	Wisconsin Time Trend Performance (2011-2015)
Cost effectiveness	Operating expense per passenger trip	▲	▲	▲	▲
Service efficiency	Operating expense per revenue hour	▲	▲	●	●
Service efficiency	Passenger trips per revenue hour	▲	▲	▲	▲
Market penetration	Passenger trips per capita	▼	●	▲	▲
Market penetration	Revenue hours per capita	▼	●	▼	●
Passenger revenue effectiveness	Average fare per passenger trip	●	▼	▼	▼
Passenger revenue effectiveness	Operating Ratio	▲	▲	▼	▼
Passenger revenue effectiveness	Subsidy per passenger trip	▲	▲	▲	▲
Key to Symbols	▲	Performs better than peer average			
	●	Performs worse than peer average but within satisfactory range (one standard deviation from mean)			
	▼	Performs outside satisfactory range			

Policy- and Decision-Making Processes

Table ii: Assessment of Policy- and Decision-Making Processes

Criterion	Rating
The manager has sufficient authority and control to manage in an efficient manner.	
The lines of authority, responsibility and accountability are well defined and appropriate.	
The lines of communication provide for sufficient exchange of information to ensure decision makers are knowledgeable on issues.	
The current organizational structure is conducive to effective and efficient operation.	
Key to Symbols	Structures and procedures are conductive to effective operations
	Structures and procedures are adequate with room for improvement
	Structures and procedures are insufficient

Functional Area Review

Table iii: Summary Assessment of Functional Areas

Functional Area	Rating
Transportation Operations	
Vehicle and Facility Maintenance	
Finance	
Planning	
Scheduling	
Marketing	
Key to Symbols	Structures and procedures are conductive to effective operations
	Structures and procedures are adequate with room for improvement
	Structures and procedures are insufficient

Recommendations Summary

Table iv: Summary of Recommendations

Functional Area	Recommendation	Priority
Policy- and Decision-Making Processes	No recommendations	-
Transportation Operations	Phase out the flag-stop policy that allow passengers to board at any point along a fixed route; install marked bus stops along all fixed routes using TCRP guidelines; develop bus stop signs that name Dunn County Transit explicitly.	High
	The Transit Manager should administer the random drug and alcohol program.	High
	Collect on-time performance data for fixed-route service – through upgraded software or manually by drivers.	Medium
	Conduct semi-annual ride checks with each driver to evaluate driving performance.	Medium

	Consider additional training opportunities for management staff.	Medium
	Examine if Transit Mutual Insurance would produce a lower cost with the same amount of coverage.	Low
	Analyze impacts of bringing staff into County as County employees.	Low
Vehicle and Facility Maintenance	No recommendations	-
Finance	Update website and employee handbook to clarify eligibility and operations policies associated with the Red Cedar service; it should be marketed to all DCT customers as a public transit service, and included in online and print materials.	High
	Analyze Public Works charges to determine if there is currently a capital cost component that can be used for transit equipment.	High
	Develop a capital plan that provides a mix of 100 percent local funds and FTA funding for appropriate elements.	High
	Update employee handbook to accurately reflect eligibility and fare revenue policies associated with the Stout Route.	Medium
Planning	Initiate a Transit Development Plan update in the next fiscal year.	High
	Per FTA Circular 4702.1B, submit updated Title VI Program to FTA; post on system website once adopted.	High
	In the next Transit Development Plan include a task that analyzes fleet needs, including maintenance and storage costs, and passenger load requirements.	High
	Develop system standards and performance measures against which observed performance should be measured. Regularly monitor service in comparison to system standards and report findings to the Transit Commission monthly.	Medium
	Define when a trip is considered on time; develop a process for systematically monitoring on-time performance in comparison to the system's established goal.	Medium
	Educate the UW-Stout staff and student government about state and federal transit funding, and their own role in creating transit-supportive policies and operating environments. Develop a working relationship with permanent UW-Stout staff, particularly one who acts as a liaison between the student government and University administration.	Medium
	Develop an ADA Transition Plan to assess conditions and prioritize bus stop improvements. Establish a yearly budget allocation for continued improvement for ADA accessibility at all bus stops.	Medium
	Understand the network of managed care organizations in the region and DHS programs that offer a transportation benefit; explore the feasibility of becoming a certified NEMT service provider.	Medium
	Update the ADA Paratransit Plan to reflect current service offerings.	Medium
	Update public materials and the website to publicize and clarify evening and Saturday complementary ADA paratransit service.	Medium
	Through a partnership with UW-Stout students, study the economic, environmental, and social benefits of low- and no-emission buses (e.g., all-electric), and analyze the pros and cons of various options to guide future investments (granted UW-Stout students continue to prioritize the issue).	Low
Scheduling	No recommendations	-
Marketing	Update primary website to include a rider's guide to using the service that includes the following topics: reservation and cancelation policies, pick-up and drop-off policies, vehicle accessibility and mobility accommodations, detailed fare information, fixed-route pick-up and drop-off policies, rider code of conduct, etc. Provide link to social media page.	High

Use overhead destination signs on all public transit vehicles, identifying the route/service in operation.	High
Evaluate brand image and develop strategies to strengthen system's branding, with a focus on consistency and clarity.	Medium
Update dunnride.com to be better integrated with the rest of the system's online content. Add system branding, fare and contact information, and a link to the primary website.	Medium
Establish database of customer contacts and resolutions. Develop and document policy for responding to customer contacts in a timely manner. Share complaints with Transit Commission.	Medium
Invest in targeted social media advertisements.	Low

PART I: SYSTEM OVERVIEW

While it serves all of Dunn County, DCT service is centered on the city of Menomonie, where the University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout) is based. Per the latest U.S. Census Bureau data, there are about 16,300 permanent residents in Menomonie.¹ With approximately 9,400 enrolled students, the UW-Stout has a significant impact on the community and transit service provided.

DCT is a unique rural transit system that has several characteristics of a typical rural transit system combined with the frequent, fixed-route service necessary to meet the needs of a university. The system was created in 2008 as a successor to Disabled and Elderly Transportation (DET) to create a system that served both “urban” and rural transportation needs. DCT transitioned from an entirely demand response service to include fixed routes in 2010. DCT today operates traditional fixed-route, point deviation, and demand response services that meet and exceed required Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit, along with other specialty transit services.

Service Characteristics

DCT operates three fixed routes with in accordance with published schedules at designated bus stops. The Community route operates weekdays from approximately 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The route sweeps in and out of downtown Menomonie and the UW-Stout campus en route to destinations on the north, south, and east edges of the city; this amounts to hourly service to most destinations along the route. The Saturday Community route is available from about 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on an hourly headway; it runs only when UW-Stout is in session. The third fixed route, the Stout Route, operates weekdays on 13-minute headways from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Door-to-door demand response service (sometimes referred to as “Doorstop” or “Dial a Ride” at DCT) is available to those ages 60 and older, or who, because of their disability, are unable to access the fixed-route system. Available weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m., DCT meets most of its complementary ADA paratransit requirements with this service. Demand response service operates across a series of five timed zones, such that a vehicle travels within all five zones within one hour. Demand response zones go beyond the minimum complementary ADA paratransit service area. Additional rural demand response service is available weekdays throughout the county, with fares varying based on origin and destination.

DCT also has a point-deviation service designed primarily around agency agreements. Known as Red Cedar, the service stops at a limited number of points throughout Menomonie on a regular schedule, with deviations made by request by calling DCT dispatch. Public information about the Red Cedar service is scarce. Lastly, the system facilitates a volunteer driver program for medical trips within and outside Dunn County.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.



DCT offers several fare types to its customers (Table 1). Fares can be paid by cash or pass; DCT drivers do not provide change. UW-Stout students and staff ride fixed routes for free with a school ID.

Table 1: Fare Structure

Service Type	Fare Type	Cost	Service Type	Fare Type	Cost
Fixed-Route	Regular Cash Fare	\$1.50	Demand	Elderly/Disabled	\$3.00
	Elderly/Disabled	\$0.75		Response	Rural to Menomonie
	UW-Stout Student/Staff	Free	Rural Intercity		\$3.00
	Day Pass	\$4.00	Agency - Menomonie		\$10.00
	Monthly Pass	\$45.00	Agency - Rural	\$15.00	
			ADA Corridor Route	\$4.00	

Fleet

Summarized in Table 2, DCT’s revenue fleet consists of seven buses of various sizes and capacities, with four vehicles in operation at peak times. DCT’s spare ratio is 75 percent, relatively high.

Table 2: Revenue Fleet

Service	Year	Vehicle Type	Capacity	Mileage	Over Age	Over Mileage
Stout	2014	Medium Size, Medium-Duty Bus 30 Ft	26-45	25,616		
Stout	2014	Medium Size, Medium-Duty Bus 30 Ft	26-45	76,392		
Agency	2010	Medium Size, Medium-Duty Bus 30 Ft	26-40	144,891	X	
Demand Response	2011	Medium Size, Light-Duty Bus 25-35 Ft	18-30	138,486	X	
Demand Response	2011	Medium Size, Light-Duty Bus 25-35 Ft	18-30	134,539	X	
Agency	2010	Light-Duty Bus <30 Ft	18-30	182,060	X	X
Community	2012	Light-Duty Bus <30 Ft	16-30	177,379	X	X

Per Federal Transit Administration (FTA) rolling stock useful life policy guidelines², DCT’s medium size, medium-duty buses have a minimum useful life of at least seven years or 200,000 miles; its medium size, light-duty buses have a minimum useful life of at least five years or 150,000 miles; and its other

² Federal Transit Administration. Circular 5010.1E: Award Management Requirements. 2017. Page IV-25.
https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/Grant%20Management%20Requirements%20Circular_5010-1E_1.pdf

light-duty buses have a minimum useful life of at least four years or 100,000 miles. Based on their age, five of DCT's seven buses have exceeded their minimum useful life or will do so in short order.

Facilities

The new FTA-funded DCT facility was constructed in 2016. It consists of an eight-bus storage garage with bus wash bay, and new operations offices with driver amenities, a conference room and offices for dispatch and management. Adjacent the DCT facility is the Dunn County Public Works Department maintenance facility, where DCT buses are maintained.

PART II: ANALYSIS OF SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

Part II of this report examines system performance data. A quantitative assessment of DCT’s performance was conducted as one of the initial tasks in this review. Since there are no recognized industry standards for most measures of transit system performance, common practice is to compare the performance of a system to the average values of a peer group of systems.

Peer Groups

The selection of the peer group for Dunn County is based on a review of rural systems in the National Transit Database (NTD). The NTD is used because its data are readily available and consistently reported. The NTD also contains systems that have service areas comparable to the Dunn County service area. Two peer groups were selected for comparison: a national peer group and a Wisconsin peer group.

This review attempted to select peer systems in cold-weather states based on service area population and density, as well as on the mode of service operated. An effort was made to select Midwest transit systems where limited fixed route service is focused on a small town. Only systems that operate fixed route services were considered.

The national peer group includes systems in Iowa, Indiana, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Ohio. Table 3 contains operating statistics for Dunn County and the selected national peer systems for 2015. These operating statistics are the basis for the performance measures included in this analysis. Only fixed route service data are included in the peer analysis.

Table 3: 2015 Operating Statistics – National Peer Systems

	Revenue Hours	Unlinked Passengers	Operating Expenses	Passenger Revenues
Ashland, KY	10,542	126,879	\$684,841	\$40,231
East Chicago, IN	9,348	171,522	\$916,017	
Frankfort, KY	12,112	150,245	\$883,461	\$31,832
Marion, IN	12,400	275,552	\$1,121,371	
Marshalltown, IA	7,207	111,543	\$644,991	\$94,326
Middletown, OH	13,923	163,388	\$825,746	\$114,986
Ottumwa, IA	15,877	154,654	\$835,052	\$93,440
Winona, MN	17,285	254,494	\$625,529	\$129,945
Peer Average	12,337	176,035	\$817,126	\$84,127
Dunn County	9,719	153,606	\$566,594	\$69,456
Percent of Average	79%	87%	69%	83%

This review recognizes the limitations of using other Wisconsin small bus systems for peer comparison. Each system operates in a vastly different environment, serves different markets, and has a unique management structure. However, Wisconsin peer systems also provide context for operating conditions within the state. Because it is customary in this review to compare each small bus system to others in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin peer comparison is included in this review. Table 4 contains operating statistics for Dunn County and the selected Wisconsin peer systems for 2015. These operating statistics are the basis for the performance measures included in this analysis. Only fixed route service data are included in the peer analysis.

Table 4: 2015 Operating Statistics – Wisconsin Peer Systems

	Revenue Hours	Unlinked Passengers	Operating Expenses	Passenger Revenues
BART/Bad River	7,439	46,076	\$344,123	\$27,861
Manitowoc	23,122	342,667	\$1,979,654	\$223,953
Menominee Tribe	70,755	157,373	\$3,928,952	\$95,271
Merrill	7,426	69,768	\$504,620	\$79,709
Rusk Co.	11,491	60,293	\$1,071,610	\$123,255
Sawyer Co.	37,022	77,578	\$1,612,093	\$231,847
Stevens Point	19,958	260,159	\$1,657,656	\$110,542
Peer Average	23,367	145,940	1,458,163	120,237
Dunn County	9,719	153,606	\$566,594	\$69,456
Percent of Average	42%	105%	39%	58%

Performance Measures

The peer analysis in this section compares DCT to its peers in five categories using eight specific measures, as organized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Performance Objectives and Performance Measures

Cost effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating expense per passenger trip (WisDOT core measure)
Service efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating expense per revenue hour (WisDOT core measure)
Service effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passenger trips per revenue hour (WisDOT core measure)
Market penetration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passenger trips per capita (WisDOT core measure) • Revenue hours per capita (WisDOT core measure)
Passenger revenue effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average fare per passenger trip (Added measure) • Passenger revenue per operating expense (WisDOT core measure) • Subsidy per passenger trip (Added measure)

Each measure is used to assess DCT’s performance in two ways:

- **Comparison to peer average for most current year.** Year 2015 NTD data is used. This is the most recent year for which NTD data is available for all peer systems (at the time of analysis, summer 2017). Consistent with the WisDOT approach to measuring performance, performance will be considered “satisfactory” within one standard deviation of the peer average (arithmetic mean). The system’s performance is considered “outside the satisfactory range” if it falls more than one standard deviation outside the mean.
- **Comparison to peer average for annual rate of change.** The average annual rate of change from 2011 to 2015 is calculated as follows. NTD data from reporting years 2011 to 2015 is used.

$$\text{Annual rate of change} = (\text{Value}_{2015} / \text{Value}_{2011})^{1/4} - 1$$

For the trend analysis, the system’s annual rate of change is compared to the national and Wisconsin peer average rates of change. The system’s trend performance is considered

“satisfactory” within one standard deviation of the average rate of change. Beyond a standard deviation away from the average rate of change, the system’s trend performance is considered “outside the satisfactory range.”

Five-Year Trend Summary

Table 5 and Table 6 show DCT’s operating statistics and performance measures for 2011 through 2015. The average annual rate of change for the five-year period is calculated for each statistic and measure and shown alongside the national and Wisconsin peer average rates of change.

Table 5: Operating Statistics – Five-Year Trend (Peer Analysis)

Operating Statistic	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Average Annual Rate of Change (5 year)		
						Dunn County	Wisconsin Peer Average	National Peer Average
Revenue hours	11,058	9,576	9,858	11,854	9,719	-3.2%	-3.1%	-4.9%
Passenger trips	53,567	103,158	124,011	159,088	153,606	30.1%	2.8%	-5.4%
Operating expense	\$473,817	\$537,485	\$589,960	\$861,198	\$566,594	4.6%	2.2%	-3.4%
Passenger revenue	\$242,069	\$184,498	\$78,362	\$90,166	\$69,456	-26.8%	0.7%	-4.6%

Table 6: Performance Measures – Five-Year Trend

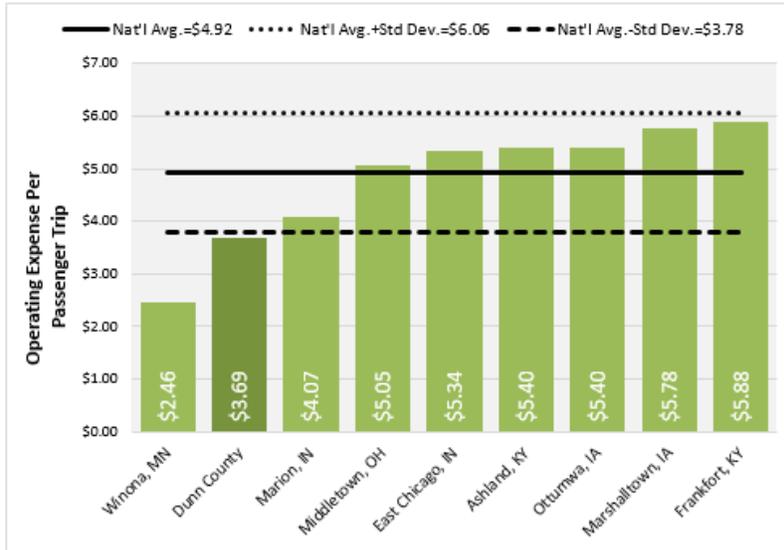
Performance Measure	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Average Annual Rate of Change (5 year)		
						Dunn County	Wisconsin Peer Average	National Peer Average
Operating expense per passenger	\$8.85	\$5.21	\$4.76	\$5.41	\$3.69	-19.6%	-0.2%	2.2%
Operating expense per revenue hour	\$42.85	\$56.13	\$59.85	\$72.65	\$58.30	8.0%	5.4%	1.9%
Passengers per revenue hour	4.8	10.8	12.6	13.4	15.8	34.4%	6.4%	-0.2%
Passengers per capita	1.9	2.4	2.8	3.6	3.5	16.1%	0.5%	-5.4%
Revenue hours per capita	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	-13.6%	-5.0%	-4.9%
Average fare per passenger	\$4.52	\$1.79	\$0.63	\$0.57	\$0.45	-43.8%	-1.0%	1.3%
Operating ratio	51%	34%	13%	10%	12%	-30.0%	-1.8%	-0.9%
Subsidy per passenger	\$4.33	\$3.42	\$4.13	\$4.85	\$3.24	-7.0%	1.3%	2.6%

It should be noted that DCT service changed drastically between 2008 and 2011 with the introduction of fixed routes and service oriented toward UW-Stout students. This, in combination with potential changes to accounting practices and/or ways in which data were reported to NTD, may likely be contributing to atypical average annual rates of change in some measures. The trend analysis used in this report relies on heavily on 2011 and 2015 data. Where the average annual rate of change is atypical, DCT year-to-year trends should be considered as an alternative.

Cost Effectiveness

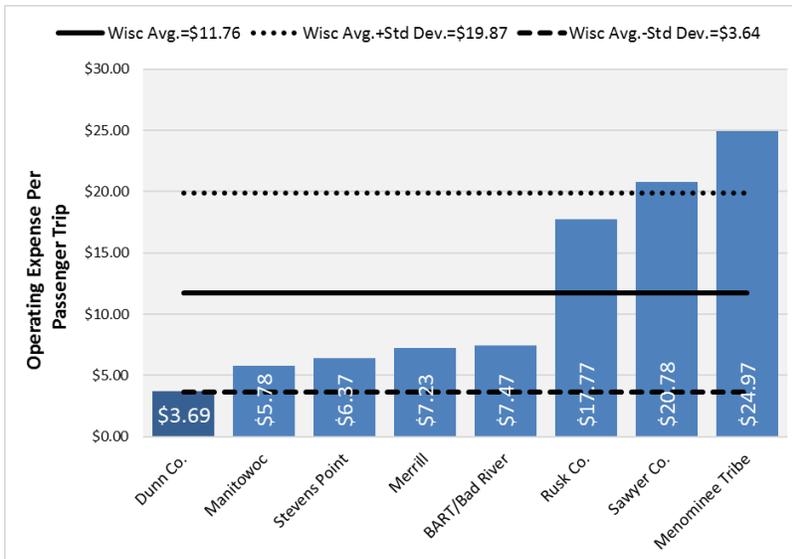
Cost effectiveness addresses transit use in relation to the level of resources expended. The primary measure for comparison under this area is **operating expense per passenger trip**. The lower the cost per passenger trip, the more cost effective is the service.

Figure 2: Operating Expense per Passenger Trip, 2015 National Peers



In 2015, DCT spent an average of \$3.69 on each passenger trip; this is lower than the national peer average of \$4.92 (Figure 2), and the Wisconsin peers average of \$11.76 (Figure 3). When compared to the both national and Wisconsin peers, DCT's operating expense per passenger trip is better than average.

Figure 3: Operating Expense per Passenger Trip, 2015 Wisconsin Peers

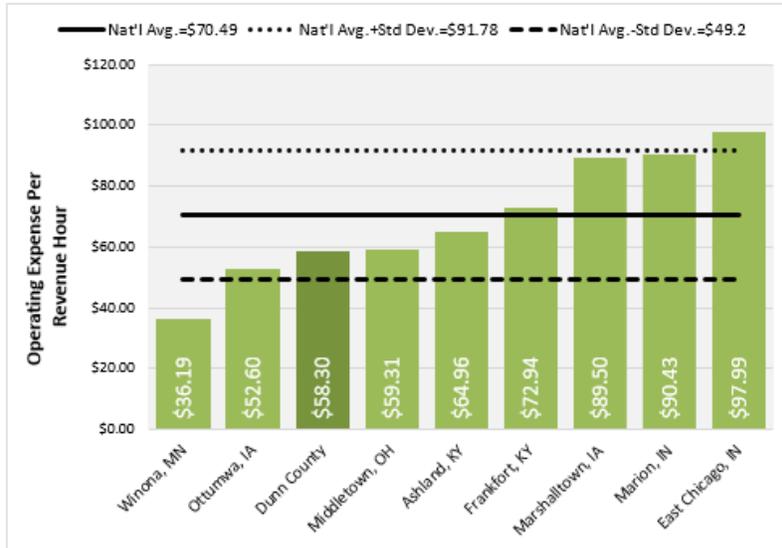


DCT's per-passenger expense fluctuated between 2011 and 2015 but have fallen overall (Table 6). Over the five-year period, DCT's operating expense per passenger trip decreased at an average annual rate of 19.6. By comparison, the average of national peers increased at an average annual rate of 2.2 percent; and the average of Wisconsin peers decreased at an average annual rate of 0.2 percent. DCT's performance trend in terms of operating expense per passenger trip performed better than the national peer and Wisconsin peer groups.

Service Efficiency

Service efficiency examines the amount of service produced in relation to the amount of resources expended. **Operating expense per revenue hour** is the measure used to assess how efficiently a system delivers service.

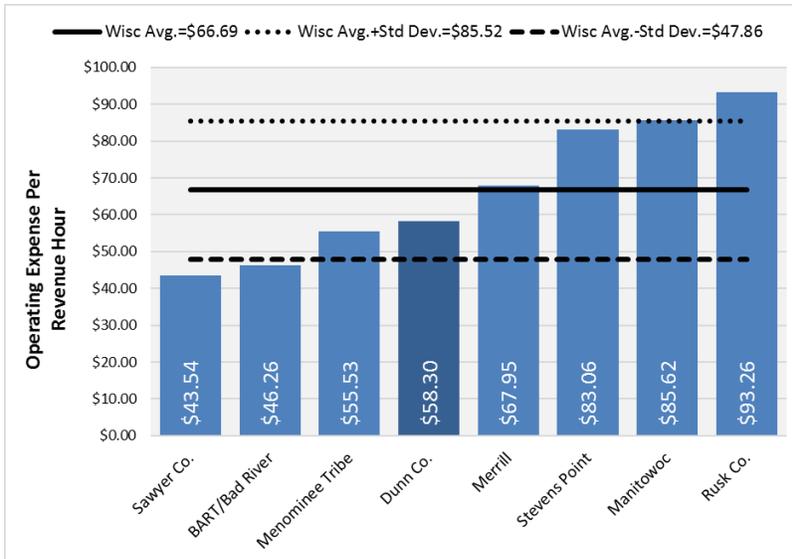
Figure 4: Operating Expense per Revenue Hour, 2015 National Peers



DCT's cost of providing one hour of revenue service in 2015 was \$58.30, notably lower than the national peer average of \$70.49 (Figure 4). DCT's service efficiency performed better than the national peer group average.

Compared to its Wisconsin peers, DCT's operating cost per hour was lower than the peer average of \$66.69 (Figure 5). DCT's service efficiency performed better than the Wisconsin peer group average.

Figure 5: Operating Expense per Revenue Hour, 2015 Wisconsin Peers

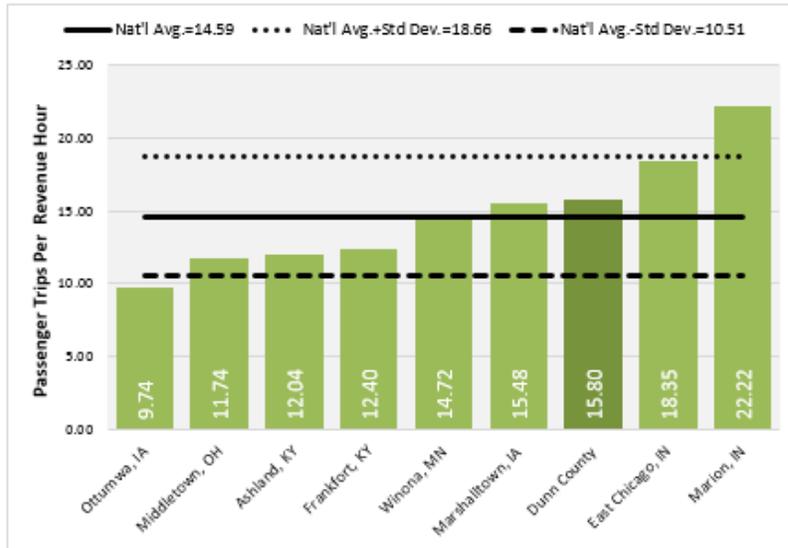


The trend analysis in Table 6 shows that, between 2011 and 2015, DCT's operating cost per revenue hour increased steadily with a dip in 2015. Table 4 shows DCT's increase at an average annual rate of 8.0 percent. The national peer group average rate during this period was a 1.9 percent increase, and the Wisconsin peer group average is 5.4 percent increase. DCT's hourly operating expenses rose at a satisfactory rate relative to the national and Wisconsin peer groups.

Service Effectiveness

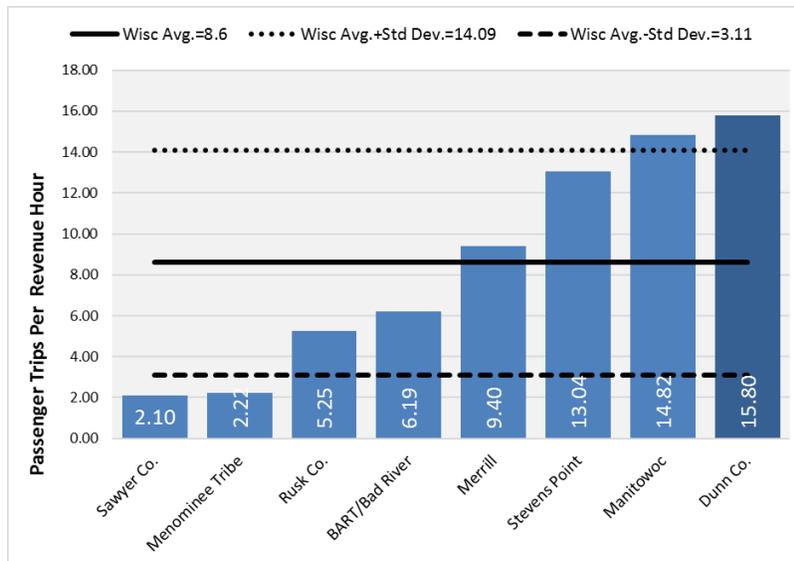
Service effectiveness is a measure of the consumption of public transportation service in relation to the amount of service available. **Passenger trips per revenue hour** is the measure used to assess service effectiveness.

Figure 6: Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour, 2015 National Peers



In 2015, DCT handled an average of 15.8 passenger trips per hour on its service. This value is within the upper half of the national peer group (Figure 6) and is the greatest of the Wisconsin peer group (Figure 7). DCT service effectiveness is better than the average performance of the national and Wisconsin peer group averages of 14.6 and 8.6 passenger trips per hour, respectively.

Figure 7: Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour, 2015 Wisconsin Peers

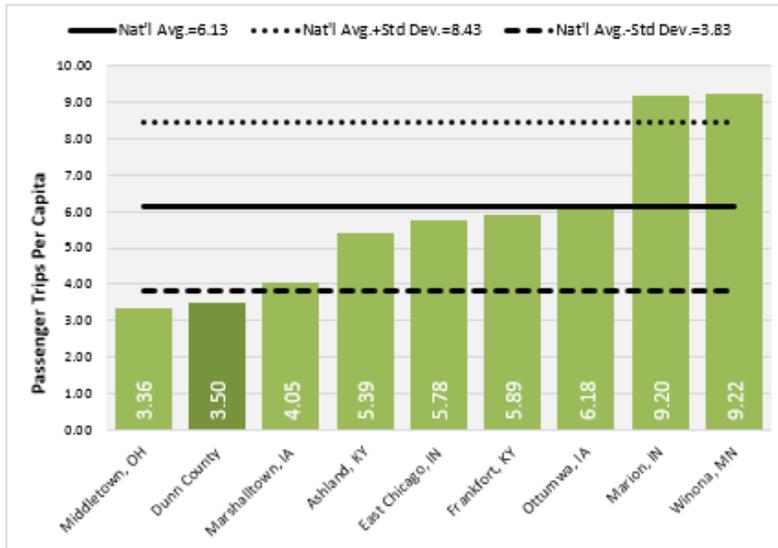


DCT's productivity increased between 2011 and 2015, with an average annual increase of 34.4 percent (Table 6). In this time the national peers decreased at an average annual rate of 0.2 percent, and the Wisconsin peers increased at an average annual rate of 6.4 percent. DCT's productivity growth was better than the national and Wisconsin peer group average rates.

Market Penetration

Passenger trips per capita is an indicator of overall usage of the transit system in the DCT service area. This measure can be interpreted as the average number of times each service area resident uses DCT each year.

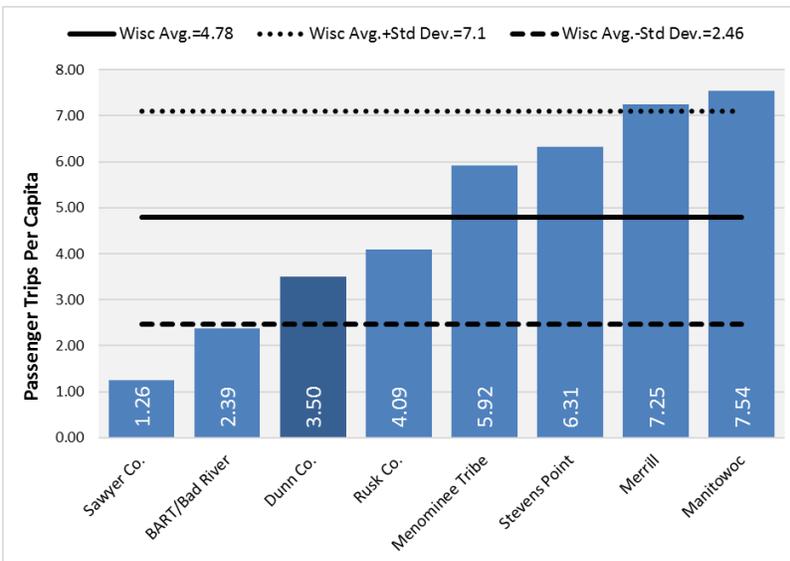
Figure 8: Passenger Trips per Capita, 2015 National Peers



DCT carried 3.5 passenger trips per capita in 2015. In other words, the average resident of the DCT service area boarded the bus 3.5 times during 2015.

Passenger trips per capita carried by DCT is below the average for the national and Wisconsin peer groups (Figure 8, Figure 9). DCT's market penetration, as measured by passenger trips per capita, is outside satisfactory range relative to the national peers, and below average but satisfactory relative to the Wisconsin peer averages.

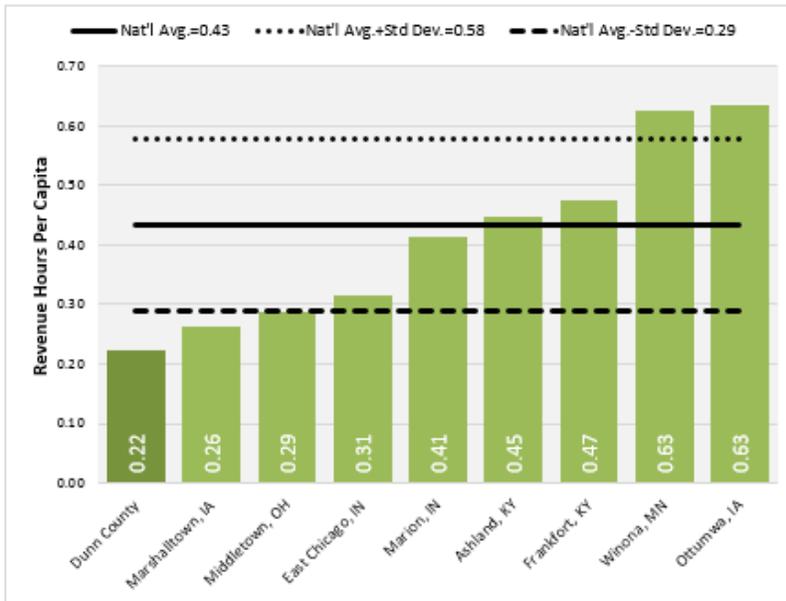
Figure 9: Passenger Trips per Capita, 2015 Wisconsin Peers



The trend analysis in Table 6 shows that, between 2011 and 2015, DCT's passenger trips per capita increased at an average annual rate of 16.1 percent. In comparison, the national peer average decreased 5.4 percent annually, on average; the Wisconsin peer average increased 0.5 percent annually, on average. DCT's system performance trend, in terms of passenger trips per capita, was better than both national and Wisconsin peers.

Revenue hours per capita is the performance measure used to assess service availability.

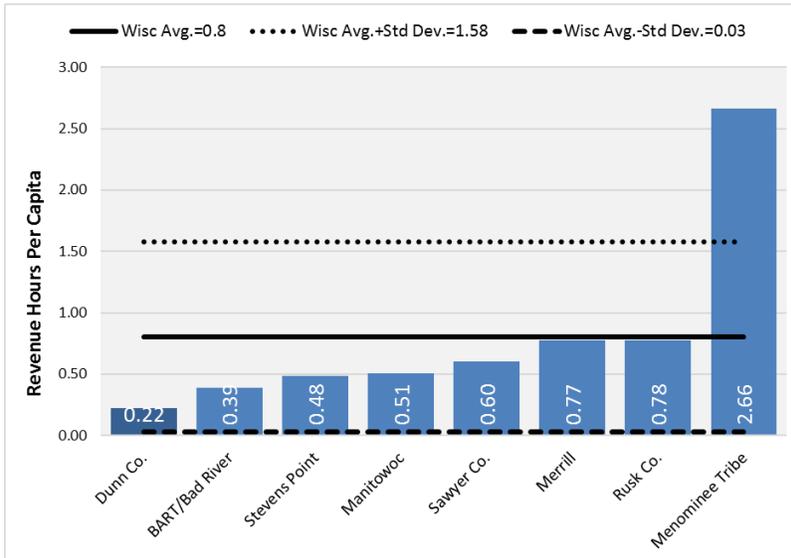
Figure 10: Revenue Hours per Capita, 2015 National Peers



In 2015, DCT provided 0.22 revenue hours annually for each person in its service area. This level of service availability is outside satisfactory range compared to the national peers (Figure 10). In comparison to Wisconsin peers, DCT provided fewer revenue hours per capita, but performed within the satisfactory range (Figure 11).

Between 2011 and 2015, DCT's revenue hours per capita decreased at an average annual rate of 13.6 percent (Table 6). During the same period, the national peer average rate of change was a 4.9 percent average annual decrease, and the Wisconsin peer average rate of change was a 5.0 percent average annual decrease. DCT's revenue hours per capita performance trend is within satisfactory range compared to Wisconsin peers, but outside satisfactory range compared to national peers.

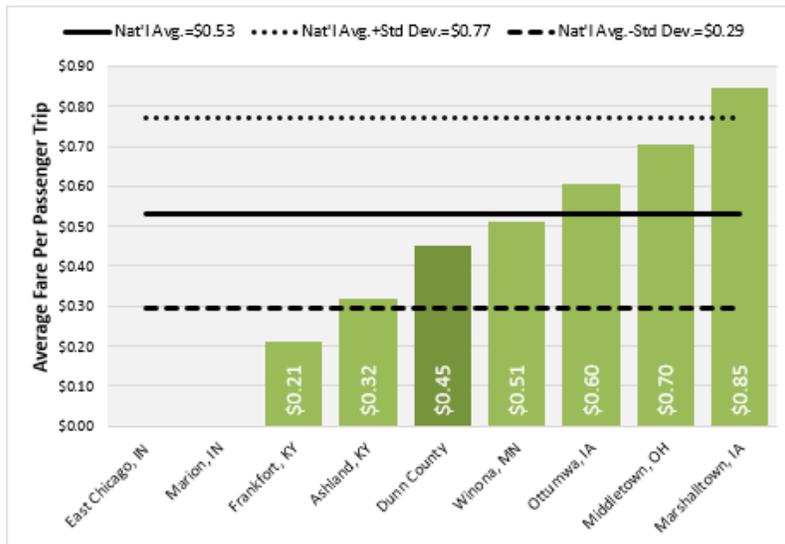
Figure 11: Revenue Hours per Capita, 2015 Wisconsin Peers



Passenger Revenue Effectiveness

The **average fare per passenger trip** measures the amount each passenger is paying to use the service. The higher the average fare, the more cost is being borne by the passenger.

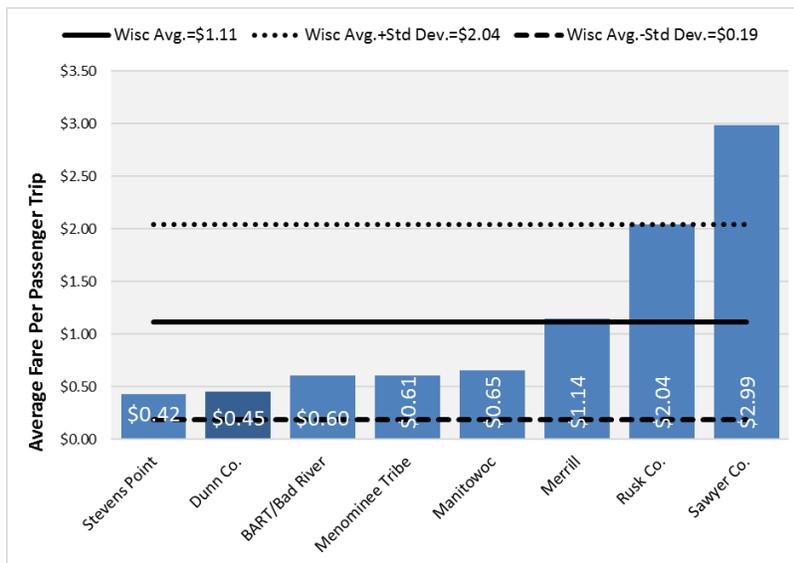
Figure 12: Average Fare per Passenger Trip, 2015 National Peers



In 2015, the average DCT passenger paid \$0.45 for a ride. This is below the national peer average of \$0.53 (Figure 12) and the Wisconsin peer average of \$1.11 (Figure 13). As measured by average fare per passenger, DCT's passenger revenue is within satisfactory performance range relative to the national and Wisconsin peer averages.³

DCT's average fare per passenger decreased between 2011 and 2015 at an average annual rate of 43.8 percent (Table 6).⁴ During the same period, the national peer average fare climbed by 1.3 percent annually, and the Wisconsin average decreased by 1.0 percent annually. DCT's average fare has been decreasing and the rate is below the satisfactory ranges for the national and Wisconsin peer group increase rates.

Figure 13: Average Fare per Passenger Trip, 2015 Wisconsin Peers

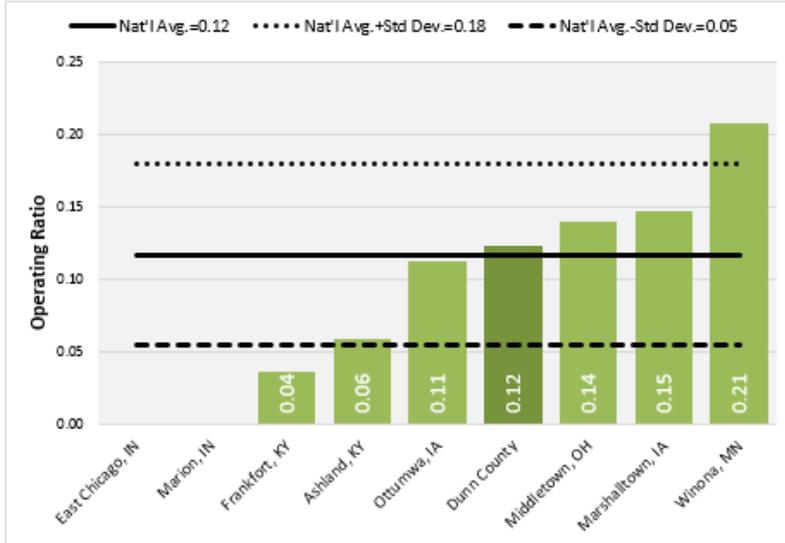


³ East Chicago and Marion, national peers, have fare free systems and are not included in the average or standard deviation calculations.

⁴ This may be the result of changing accounting practices and/or ways in which data were reported to NTD.

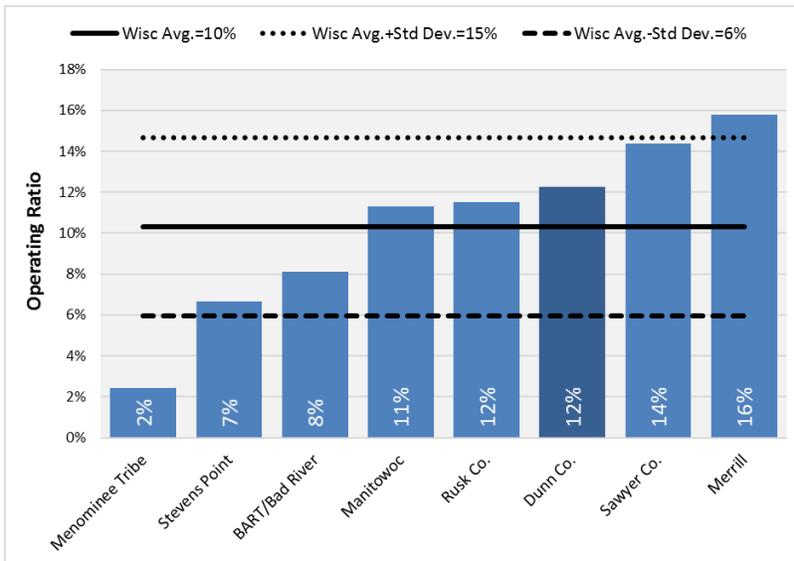
The **operating ratio of revenue to operating expenses** measures the level of operating expenses that are recovered through passenger fare payment. This measure is also simply referred to as the **operating ratio**.

Figure 14: Operating Ratio, 2015 National Peers



DCT collected \$0.12 in passenger revenue for every \$1.00 of operating expense in 2015; in other words, the system recovered 12 percent of its operating expense through the farebox. This operating ratio is about equal the national peer average (Figure 14) and above the Wisconsin peer average of 10 percent (Figure 15). DCT’s operating ratio performs better than that average for both national and Wisconsin peer groups.⁵

Figure 15: Operating Ratio, 2015 Wisconsin Peers



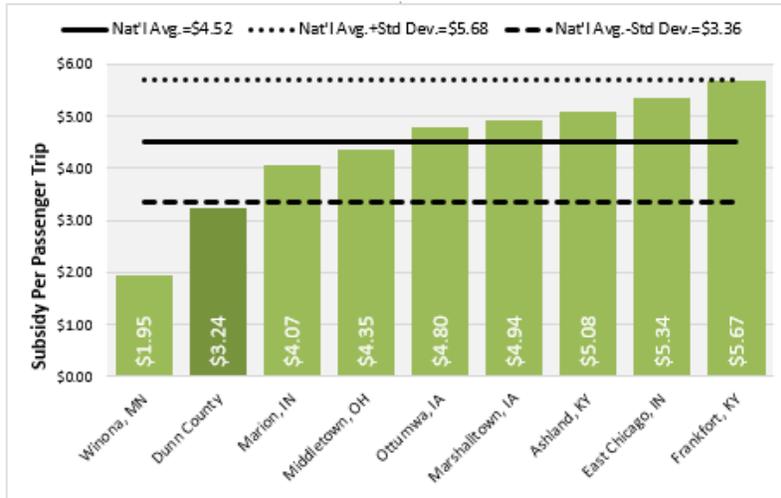
DCT’s operating ratio has been decreasing. Between 2011 and 2015, DCT’s operating ratio decreased by an average annual rate of 30.0 percent (Table 6).⁶ During the same period, the national peer average decreased by an average of 0.9 percent annually, and the Wisconsin peer average decreased by an average of 1.8 percent annually. DCT’s operating ratio performance trend is outside satisfactory range for both the national and Wisconsin peer groups.

⁵ East Chicago and Marion, national peers, have fare free systems and are not included in the average or standard deviation calculations.

⁶ This may be the result of changing accounting practices and/or ways in which data were reported to NTD.

Net expense (subsidy) per passenger trip is used to measure the cost of each passenger trip that is paid for by public operating subsidy. Net expense per passenger trip is calculated by subtracting passenger revenues from total operating expenses and dividing by total trips. The higher the operating subsidy, the more local, state, and federal resources are required to cover expenses.

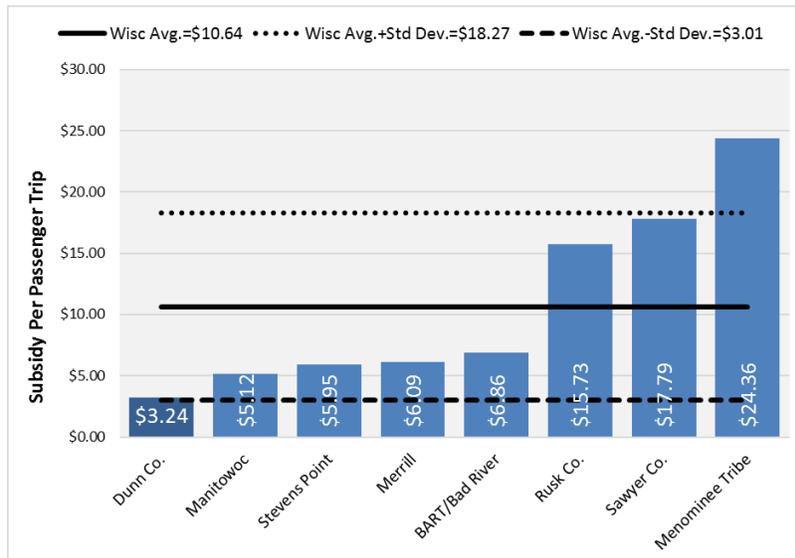
Figure 16: Subsidy per Passenger Trip, 2015 National Peers



In 2015, DCT had \$3.24 subsidized per passenger trip. DCT's level of subsidy is lower than the national peer average of \$4.52 (Figure 16) and the Wisconsin peer average of \$10.64 (Figure 17). In both cases, DCT's subsidy per passenger trip is performing better than the national and Wisconsin peer groups.

The trend analysis in Table 6 shows that DCT's subsidy per passenger trip decreased by an average rate of 7.0 percent between 2011 and 2015.⁷ During the same period, the national peer average increased by an average annual rate of 2.6 percent, and Wisconsin peer average subsidy increased by an average annual rate of 1.3 percent. DCT's subsidy per passenger trip performance trend is better than the average compared to the national and Wisconsin peer groups.

Figure 17: Subsidy per Passenger Trip, 2015 Wisconsin Peers



⁷ This may be the result of changing accounting practices and/or ways in which data were reported to NTD.

Performance Summary

The symbols in Table 7 indicate the measures for which DCT is better than average, satisfactory, or outside satisfactory range.

Table 7: Peer Analysis Summary

Performance Objective	Measure	National Peer Comparison (2015)	Wisconsin Peer Comparison (2015)	National Time Trend Performance (2011-2015)	Wisconsin Time Trend Performance (2011-2015)
Cost effectiveness	Operating expense per passenger trip	▲	▲	▲	▲
Service efficiency	Operating expense per revenue hour	▲	▲	●	●
Service efficiency	Passenger trips per revenue hour	▲	▲	▲	▲
Market penetration	Passenger trips per capita	▼	●	▲	▲
Market penetration	Revenue hours per capita	▼	●	▼	●
Passenger revenue effectiveness	Average fare per passenger trip	●	▼	▼	▼
Passenger revenue effectiveness	Operating Ratio	▲	▲	▼	▼
Passenger revenue effectiveness	Subsidy per passenger trip	▲	▲	▲	▲
Key to Symbols	▲	Performs better than peer average			
	●	Performs worse than peer average but within satisfactory range (one standard deviation from mean)			
	▼	Performs outside satisfactory range			

DCT had satisfactory performance in 2015 when compared to its peer systems, except for the performance measures of passenger trips per capita, revenue hours per capita, and average fare per passenger trip. Otherwise, all other performance measures were above average or within a satisfactory range compared to the national and Wisconsin peer groups. DCT’s operating ratio—a key financial measure—exceeded the peer average for both national and Wisconsin peer groups in 2015.

DCT also performed better than average or within satisfactory range in most performance measures when measuring trends between 2011 and 2015. DCT’s revenue hours per capita trend is outside satisfactory range compared to national peers. Additionally, DCT’s average fare per passenger trip and operating ratio are decreasing at a greater rate than both the national and Wisconsin peer averages. As noted previously, this may be the result of drastic changes to services provided starting around 2010/2011, changing accounting practices, and/or ways in which data were reported to NTD. DCT’s operating ratio increased from 10 percent to 12 percent between 2014 and 2015. However, during this time the average fare per passenger trip decreased from \$0.57 to \$0.45.

PART III: POLICY- AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

This section contains a description of the policy- and decision-making processes in place at DCT and the County as they relate to transit service.

Organization

DCT is a division of the Dunn County Public Works Department. The transit system is led by the Transit Manager, who has been in the position for about a year. The Transit Manager reports to the Public Works Director/Highway Commissioner. The Transit Manager is assisted by an Office/Safety Manager and Dispatcher/Trainer. There are nine part-time DCT drivers.

The Transit Manager is a County employee. All other employees work for a contracted employment agency, currently P.I.E. Employment. The employment agency is responsible for hiring drivers and supervisors. Drivers are trained by the Operations/Safety Manager and Dispatcher/Trainer.

Transit Commission

The Transit Manager reports to a nine-member Transit Commission comprised of elected County Supervisors and resident representatives (including from UW-Stout) who provide an advisory role overseeing system policies and major service changes and collect public comments. The Transit Commission is overseen by the Public Infrastructure Committee, which reports to the County Board. The Transit Commission holds monthly public meetings that the Transit Manager contributes to.

Policy-Making Process

The policy-making process involves a collaborative effort between the Transit Manager, Office/Safety Manager, Public Works Director/Highway Commissioner, and the Transit Commission. The Transit Manager is given reasonable discretion to develop and implement policy related to daily operations, service development, and employee management. These, as well as major policy changes related to fare structure and capital planning, go before the Transit Commission for its consideration. Strategic long-term planning and short-term operations planning is also chiefly the responsibility of the Transit Commission and Transit Manager.

The Transit Manager shared several goals that she is actively addressing; these include: cross-train office staff; update marketing materials; present to and attend community boards and events; recruit and retain a back-up part-time driving staff; restructure the local share fee structure; and fleet replacement.

Conclusions

In general, the policy- and decision-making processes in place at DCT appear to be functioning well. Table 8 contains the review team's assessment of DCT's performance on the four criteria used to measure the effectiveness of the system's policy- and decision-making processes.

Table 8: Assessment of Policy- and Decision-Making Processes

Criterion	Rating
The manager has sufficient authority and control to manage in an efficient manner.	
The lines of authority, responsibility and accountability are well defined and appropriate.	
The lines of communication provide for sufficient exchange of information to ensure decision makers are knowledgeable on issues.	
The current organizational structure is conducive to effective and efficient operation.	
Key to Symbols 	Structures and procedures are conducive to effective operations
Key to Symbols 	Structures and procedures are adequate with room for improvement
Key to Symbols 	Structures and procedures are insufficient

PART IV: FUNCTIONAL AREA REVIEW

Part IV of this report contains a review of the following functional areas:

1. Transportation Operations
2. Vehicle and Facility Maintenance
3. Finance
4. Planning
5. Scheduling
6. Marketing

These areas were chosen because they have an impact on long-term capital requirements as well as short-term financial resources needed for daily operations and short-term capital planning.

A detailed review questionnaire was completed by the DCT Transit Manager prior to the review team's on-site meeting in November 2017. In its response, DCT answered all questions and provided extensive supporting material for the review team. The on-site review was conducted on November 2, 2017. The process consisted of an informal discussion with the Transit Manager and other appropriate staff members responsible for specific functional areas.

1. Transportation Operations

Operations Management and Driver Communications

The Transit Manager and Office/Safety Manager share the role of supervising daily transit operations. On-duty supervisors play a key role in ensuring a high level of service. A good transit management practice is to have a supervisor on duty during all hours of bus operations. At DCT, on-duty supervision is provided for all hours of bus operations except from 5:15 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. One bus is operating during this time on the Stout Route. However, DCT supervisory staff are on-call during this time. The lack of evening supervision is less critical given the design of the Stout Route – an 8-minute shuttle route operating on 13-minute headways.

There are mechanisms in place for effective driver-management communication. DCT and County policies and procedures are documented in an extensive manual. Service changes and policies are communicated to drivers through meetings, bulletins, and employee mailboxes.

Driver: Pre-Trip, Post-Trip, and In-Service

Extensive pre-trip and post-trip procedures are in place at DCT. Drivers are required to complete a pre-trip inspection report prior to pullout, documenting starting mileage, fluid levels, and engine, exterior, and interior conditions. Post-trip inspection report documents ending mileage and any damage or problems observed while in operation. Sufficient fitness for duty protocols are in place.

DCT fixed routes operate using marked bus stops on the public timetables. However, the service is primarily a flag-stop system, where passengers can board and alight at any location deemed safe by the driver. Flag-stop systems are inherently unsafe, as often passengers, and sometimes drivers, do not necessarily know how to identify a safe location along the route for the bus to stop.

Converting the fixed-route system from a flag-stop to a marked bus stop-only system would ensure the safety of passengers and drivers and minimize collision risks. Bus stop signs should be placed at

appropriate intervals along the major travel corridors in Menomonie, which would also improve awareness that the bus system is open to all passengers. Bus stop signs should explicitly name DCT and be clearly identifiable. Standards outlined in the Transit Cooperative Research Project (TCRP) *Report #19: Guidelines for the Location and Design of Bus Stops* can be used to guide the conversion to a bus stop-only fixed-route system.

Recommendation: Phase out the flag-stop policy that allow passengers to board at any point along a fixed route; install marked bus stops along all fixed routes using TCRP guidelines; develop bus stop signs that name Dunn County Transit explicitly. *Priority: High.*

Vehicles are not equipped with automatic passenger counters (APCs). As such, the driver plays a significant role in collecting passenger data. All drivers track passengers by stop and document special fares. DCT has automatic vehicle locator (AVL) systems installed in all vehicles; drivers do not document timepoint arrivals. DCT uses Ecolane demand response dispatching software. On-time performance metrics are currently available for the demand response services but not for the fixed-route services. DCT should begin collecting and analyzing on-time performance data for its fixed routes to measure the quality of its service. This can be accomplished by directing fixed-route drivers to collect timepoint arrival data while in service, or by working with Ecolane to add fixed-route on-time performance tracking functionality to the existing dispatch software.

Recommendation: Collect on-time performance data for fixed-route service – through upgraded software or manually by drivers. *Priority: Medium.*

Training and Risk Management

The driver training program at DCT is excellent. It is comprehensive, with a combination of out-of-service and in-service training that covers vehicle maneuvering, safe driving, maintenance, and operating procedures. The driver's progress through the training program is documented, and drivers are evaluated appropriately. Training is tailored to the skills and abilities of the trainee.

Driver performance evaluations are the responsibility of P.I.E., the contracted staffing agency. There is no formal process, but the Operations/Safety Manager indicated that she is developing forms and guidelines. Ride checks are done informally but should be scheduled twice per year.

Recommendation: Conduct semi-annual ride checks with each driver to evaluate driving performance. *Priority: Medium.*

The Transit Manager and the Operations/Safety Manager should examine the additional professional development opportunities offered by Wisconsin Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP), Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), or Transportation Safety Institute (TSI).

Recommendation: Consider additional training opportunities for management staff. *Priority: Medium.*

DCT has a very good safety record, with approximately one reportable collision per year. Insurance claims are processed through the County Risk Management Program. Transit Mutual Insurance (TMI), a statewide, transit-exclusive insurance pool, may provide an economic benefit to DCT.

Recommendation: Examine if TMI would produce a lower cost with the same amount of coverage. *Priority: Low.*

Random drug and alcohol testing is administered by the Office/Safety Manager. However, because she is in a safety-sensitive position, she too is in the drug testing pool. It is recommended that the Transit Manager, who is not in a safety-sensitive position, administer the random testing process.

Recommendation: The Transit Manager should administer the random drug and alcohol program. *Priority: High.*

Staffing and Retention

All DCT staff are employed by a staffing agency, except the Transit Manager, who is a County employee. The contracted staffing agency, P.I.E. Employment, is charged with hiring drivers and supervisors. As such, it is the responsibility of P.I.E. to address staffing shortages and to provide an adequate number of drivers for service. Any overtime charges necessary to supply enough drivers for the schedule is the responsibility of P.I.E.

There is a driver shortage and retention issue at DCT; more generally, there is a labor shortage in Dunn County. Competition for workers with a commercial driver's license (CDL) is significant in the area due to many private-sector jobs available that require a CDL and pay a higher hourly rate with better benefits. Currently, there are five long-term DCT drivers; the remaining four DCT driver positions turn over frequently. As such, some drivers are required to work extra shifts during vacations or illnesses. Additional part-time drivers would make scheduling easier.

An analysis of bringing the staff into County employment could determine if a net savings could be achieved. However, the responsibility for hiring procedures and other employment liabilities would become the responsibility of the County. Careful analysis is needed to determine the risk/reward of bringing the employees in-house.

Recommendation: Analyze impacts of bringing staff into County as County employees. *Priority: Low.*

2. Vehicle and Facility Maintenance

The vehicle and facility maintenance procedures were briefly reviewed, and a tour was given of the DCT facility and adjacent Public Works garage during the on-site visit. The DCT storage garage and operations office are in a new FTA-funded building, completed in September 2016. It is a stand-alone building adjacent to the Public Works campus. All buses are stored inside at night, and a wash bay with a wand washer is used to clean buses.

Vehicle maintenance is performed by the Dunn County Public Works Department at their maintenance facility at a contracted rate by Public Works employees. However, a mechanic is not on duty during all hour of DCT operation. It is unclear if a mechanic is available on weekday evenings and Saturdays.



DCT storage garage and operations office, constructed in 2016.

Daily Vehicle Servicing, Inspections, Preventive Maintenance, and Repairs

DCT has appropriate daily vehicle servicing, inspections, and preventative maintenance procedures in place to aid effective on-street service. The maintenance facility and is overseen by the Public Works Director/Highway Commissioner and the Shop Supervisor. For unscheduled repairs, the Shop Supervisor decides whether the repair can be done effectively at Public Works or whether it should be done at a local private repair shop in Menomonie. Some repairs, such as alignment, are always done at a private shop due to lack of equipment. The Shop Supervisor balances cost, ability, and scheduling when determining whether Public Works will make the repair. Private sector cost, scheduling of work, and the amount of time a bus will be out of service are all considerations. This decision-making process allows for the most efficient repairs for the buses.

Maintenance and repair activities for each vehicle in the fleet are not tracked using an asset management software; however, records are kept electronically using Microsoft Word and Excel files. DCT provided 2017 maintenance records for all vehicles, and inspections were completed within an acceptable range of the scheduled mileage.

Maintenance Costs

The current maintenance budget is inadequate to allow necessary repairs to old buses to keep them running. In addition to contracting out more significant repairs to local shops, DCT has a maintenance agreement with Public Works based on an hourly charge. The County could increase the vehicle maintenance budget beyond normal inflationary guidelines due to the age of the equipment or analyze whether to buy new buses with local funds. A reasonable expectation should be a significant increase in maintenance cost in the next year. Recommendations related to capital planning can be found later in this report.

3. Finance

The finance function at DCT is adequately sophisticated. As a Dunn County department, typical county financial structures are in place. DCT management staff and County staff share some financial task responsibilities.

Cost Allocation, Fare Collection, and Revenue Control

The fixed Stout Route serves the UW-Stout campus and is primarily used by students and staff, whom ride fare free on all DCT fixed routes with a valid UW-Stout ID card. The Stout Route is funded by WisDOT and FTA public transit dollars and open to the public. However, as stated in the fare collection section in the *Dunn County Transit Employee Handbook*, “Only Stout students and staff ride [the Stout Route], this is included in their tuition, **so no fare required** [emphasis added].”

While infrequently users, non-UW-Stout students and staff are eligible to ride the Stout Route; they must pay a fare to board, just as they would on any other DCT service. The employee handbook should be updated to direct driver to collect fares from those who board the Stout Route but do not display a valid UW-Stout ID card.

Recommendation: Update employee handbook to accurately reflect eligibility and fare revenue policies associated with the Stout Route. *Priority: High.*

There is very little public information regarding the Red Cedar service. The Red Cedar route is public transit – funded with WisDOT and FTA grants – and should be marketed as such to the public. The route, a point-deviation service, is designed based on agency agreements and requires one bus to operate. However, there is no reference to the service by name on the DCT website. The only information alluding to the service is the mention of agency fares.

Recommendation: Update website and employee handbook to clarify eligibility and operations policies associated with the Red Cedar service; it should be marketed to all DCT customers as a public transit service, and included in online and print materials. *Priority: High.*

Absent the above, DCT’s fare collection and revenue handling processes are appropriate. Fares are collected aboard buses using non-registering locked fare boxes. Fixed-route drivers do not make change for passengers. Revenue counting involves more than one person and is done in a secure area. Daily passenger counts collected by the drivers are reconciled with the counted fares.

Budgeting, Grants, and Capital Planning

Annual operating budgets are developed on a calendar year basis consistent with the WisDOT funding calendar. Dunn County Department of Health and Human Services – through its County Elderly and

Disabled Transportation Assistance program (s. 85.21) funds – the City of Menomonie, and UW-Stout Student Senate contribute to the local share of DCT operating budgets.

As stated above, Dunn County Public Works Department performs DCT vehicle maintenance at a contracted rate. The hourly charge from Public Works to DCT includes marginal and fixed charges. There may currently be a small capital cost component in the hourly charge that accrues to Public Works. Further analysis is needed to quantify this charge and determine if it should be applied only to DCT's separate vehicle purchases. These funds could be a component of the 20 percent local share for FTA capital purchases.

Recommendation: Analyze Public Works charges to determine if there is currently a capital cost component that can be used for transit equipment. *Priority: High.*

The change in WisDOT distribution of FTA funds for capital, and the uncertainty about the growth of FTA capital programs, may require DCT and its three local funding partners – Dunn County Department of Health and Human Services (s. 85.21 funds), City of Menomonie, and UW-Stout Student Senate – to increase its own capital funding contributions. Thorough examination of various funding scenarios would provide a sound basis for determining future capital budgeting needs. A more robust dedicated capital fund will provide financial security for the local share for future purchases. A five-year capital plan with a realistic program of 100 percent locally funded items and 80 percent federal/20 percent local funding for FTA purchases would determine the investment required by DCT to keep the system in good physical shape.

Recommendation: Develop a capital plan that provides a mix of 100 percent local funds and FTA funding for appropriate elements. *Priority: High.*

4. Planning

Planning Functions

Strategic and service planning functions at DCT are completed by the Transit Manager and Office/Safety Manager, with insight from stakeholders and the Public Works Director/Highway Commissioner. To best address the specific needs of students, the Transit Manager works closely with the UW-Stout student government. DCT's most recent Transit Development Plan (TDP) was completed by West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (WCWRPC) in 2013.

The newer urban-oriented services provided by DCT are maturing and have become relatively stable. A TDP would assist DCT in implementing performance metrics to review the current services, identifying and examining demographics that are favorable for transit, developing a comprehensive capital plan, and evaluating the relationships between the City, County, University, and other stakeholders. A TDP will examine the short-term and long-term opportunities for transit in Menomonie, as well as financial scenarios. Building in a comprehensive public outreach project as part of a TDP would help determine all the potential markets for transit service and how well they are being served.

Recommendation: Initiate a Transit Development Plan update in the next fiscal year. *Priority: High.*

Per FTA Circular 4702.1B, Title VI Requirements and Guidelines for Federal Transit Administration Recipients, DCT is required to update and submit its Title VI Program to FTA once every three years. The Title VI Program posted the DCT website was last updated in April 2014.

Recommendation: Per FTA Circular 4702.1B, submit updated Title VI Program to FTA; post on system website once adopted. *Priority: High.*

Performance Evaluation

There are no performance standards or goals for DCT's individual services and routes. Ridership is counted, but there are no initiatives in place to capture potential growth areas or to determine if service changes are needed. Five-year trends on individual services are not analyzed. Establishing performance standards and monitoring system performance can help ensure that service meets locally-established objectives and can highlight areas for improvement. Performance measures such as those in Figure 1 should be monitored regularly.

Recommendation: Develop system standards and performance measures against which observed performance should be measured. Regularly monitor service in comparison to system standards and report findings to the Transit Commission monthly. *Priority: Medium.*

As stated earlier in this report, DCT collects on-time performance data for its demand response service using Ecolane dispatch software. DCT should also begin collecting on-time performance data for its fixed-route service, either through manual data collection or by making dispatch software upgrades. However, DCT does not currently have a defined standard for what constitutes a bus as being on time (e.g., a window of zero minutes early to three minutes late relative to the published schedule/reservation time could be defined as "on time"). Further, an on-time performance goal (e.g., 90 percent of all pick-ups/timepoint arrivals being on time) has not been established.

Recommendation: Define when a trip is considered on time; develop a process for systematically monitoring on-time performance in comparison to the system's established goal. *Priority: Medium.*

Service Changes and Public Input

Proposals for service changes are reviewed by the Transit Manager. Changes deemed by the Transit Manager to be major are brought before the Transit Commission prior to approval by the County Board. Major service changes are subject to public meeting and notice. Public meetings are held as part of the monthly Transit Commission meetings. The Transit Manager gathers feedback from regular users and UW-Stout students regularly to improve the system.

Coordination

DCT management regularly coordinate with staff from other County departments, including close collaboration with Public Works Department management staff. The Transit Manager also sits on the Board of the Dunn County Economic Development Corporation. DCT regularly coordinates with UW-Stout and its agency partners in the community.

Despite concerted effort, coordination and long-term planning with UW-Stout's student government has proved challenging for DCT. Because of the constant turnover in student government representation, effecting changes in funding levels from student fees, and negotiating service changes and capital investments, are difficult. Moving forward, DCT should attempt to engage UW-Stout students through an existing UW-Stout staff liaison between the administration and the student group (e.g., University staff assigned to oversee the student group). Establishing additional relationships with permanent University administration staff may result in greater year-to-year continuity and longer-term

partnerships with the UW-Stout student government, reducing the potential negative impacts of an ever-changing student government.

Engaging with UW-Stout's student government through UW-Stout staff could improve the chances of implementing transit-supportive policy changes related to land use, parking, and capital and operating funds. However, doing so will require DCT to engage and – most importantly – educate UW-Stout student leaders and staff. The UW-Stout student government and staff must first fully understand the nature of current state and federal transit funding, and how its investment in DCT is leveraged to unlock otherwise unavailable State and federal funding.

DCT should prioritize discussion with UW-Stout about its current transit funding mechanisms and strategies for how they could be enhanced. It may be the case that UW-Stout student government funds are better suited to be allocated towards capital investments (guided by a University capital improvement plan) rather than towards annual operating expenses. Such could result in a less volatile funding situation for DCT, and steadier service levels and bus conditions for students.

Moreover, to allow its limited funding to go farther, the student government and UW-Stout staff must acknowledge its role in creating a physical operating environment that is conducive to efficient transit service. They must also understand how they provide incentives or disincentives to transit use on campus through the cost of parking and the availability/quality of pedestrian infrastructure.

Recommendation: Educate the UW-Stout staff and student government about state and federal transit funding, and their own role in creating transit-supportive policies and operating environments. Develop a working relationship with permanent UW-Stout staff, particularly one who acts as a liaison between the student government and University administration. *Priority: Medium.*

The last Dunn County Locally Developed Transportation Coordination Plan was completed in 2013. A follow-up plan is set to begin in 2018, led by WCWRPC. DCT should play an active role in developing this plan update. Doing so will shed light on transportation needs and opportunities to better coordinate and improve transportation services in the County. The coordinated planning process will also present an opportunity to network with other transportation providers, and foster collaboration on addressing any service gaps that may exist.

Ridership on the Red Cedar and demand response services has declined over the last several years as more private providers enter the marketplace. There may be an opportunity for DCT to become a non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) provider. Other NEMT providers may be drawing off some DCT passengers for trips within Menomonie and Dunn County.

Recommendation: Understand the network of managed care organizations in the region and DHS programs that offer a transportation benefit; explore the feasibility of becoming a certified NEMT service provider. *Priority: Medium.*

Capital Planning

A comprehensive review of ADA accessibility at bus stops has not yet been completed. This should be completed in concert with the installation of several new bus stops as the fixed-route system discontinues the flag-stop boarding policy. An ADA transition plan that includes a prioritization of bus stop improvements should be established. The County should then allocate funding for continued ADA improvements at all bus stops.

Recommendation: Develop an ADA Transition Plan to assess conditions and prioritize bus stop improvements. Establish a yearly budget allocation for continued improvement for ADA accessibility at all bus stops. *Priority: Medium.*

The DCT capital plan includes the purchase of one or two buses per year, which will be adequate with the current fleet of seven buses. The Transit Manager is hoping to use FTA Section 5339 Grants for Bus and Bus Facilities program funds to secure four new buses over next four years. DCT currently has buses of various makes and sizes. Moving forward, vehicle procurement should be tailored to the needs of the system and its services based on observed and anticipated ridership.

Recommendation: In the next Transit Development Plan, include a task that analyzes fleet needs, including maintenance and storage costs, and passenger load requirements. *Priority: High.*

UW-Stout students have for some time expressed a desire for DCT to replace its fleet using more environmentally-friendly buses. Alternative energy source technology related to transit buses has changed substantially in the last decade. However, large transit systems nationwide have increasingly been replacing their traditional diesel buses with battery electric ones. Significant advances in battery storage and charging mechanisms, as well as vehicle weights and configurations, make battery electric buses attractive to some transit systems. Further, limited FTA funds are being made available through the competitive FTA Section 5339 Low or No Emission Vehicle Program to promote the prevalence of cleaner bus technology.⁸

Should UW-Stout student leadership continue to request a cleaner bus fleet, a thorough evaluation of current battery electric bus technology and its application across the nation would be needed to determine if battery electric bus can be applied to DCT in a financially feasible manner. The cost of improvements to existing facilities, maintenance requirements, and possible FTA funding options would be the responsibility of DCT.

Recommendation: Through a partnership with UW-Stout students, study the economic, environmental, and social benefits of low- and no-emission buses (e.g., all-electric), and analyze the pros and cons of various options to guide future investments (granted UW-Stout students continue to prioritize the issue). *Priority: Low.*

ADA Paratransit

Upon investigation, it appears DCT is meeting its complementary ADA paratransit requirements using a hybrid point deviation version of its daytime weekday service. However, this is poorly communicated and unclear in public materials. The DCT ADA Paratransit Plan was last completed in 2015 and should be updated to reflect the current scope of services.

Recommendation: Update the ADA Paratransit Plan to reflect current service offerings. *Priority: Medium.*

Door-to-door demand response service (sometimes referred to as “Doorstop” or “Dial a Ride” at DCT) is available weekdays 7:30 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. However, the fixed Stout Route operates until approximately 9:00 p.m. on weekdays, and the Saturday Community route operates 8:50 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. To meet

⁸ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/lowno>

ADA requirements, the Stout Route operates as a point deviation route in the evening on weekdays; and the Saturday Community route will deviate up to ¼ mile from its fixed route, upon request.

To receive complementary ADA paratransit service during weekday evenings and Saturdays, one must call ahead and schedule a deviation request while the DCT dispatch office is open – weekdays 6:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. This is not made clear in public information materials and should be better publicized.

Recommendation: Update public materials and the website to publicize and clarify evening and Saturday complementary ADA paratransit service. *Priority: Medium.*

5. Scheduling

Relative to its size and complexity, scheduling practices at DCT are conducive to efficient operations. However, as described previously in this report, DCT is experiencing a driver retention issue that is affecting drivers' work schedules. Overtime accrued because of this is being paid by the staffing agency. DCT should continually seek driver retention solutions, including evaluating bringing its staff into County employment.

6. Marketing

Marketing Functions

DCT has a good advertising program relative to systems of comparable size in Wisconsin, which is largely the responsibility of the Transit Manager. In many ways, DCT excels at marketing its service; however, its brand and the content and delivery of its public information is inconsistent.

Marketing initiatives at DCT consist primarily of brochures, social media, its websites, and outreach with community organizations. Most printed materials have a generally consistent look and most services have a good map. The Transit Manager maintains relationships with educational, medical, housing, and other agency partners in Menomonie and the County. Managed care organizations that provide transportation present a challenge to maintaining the DCT ridership base. Sales calls to these organizations may result in mutually beneficial relationships if DCT can provide service at lower cost when needed by their clients.

Web Presence

The first of DCT's two websites is a part of the County's. The primary website – co.dunn.wi.us/transit – provides basic information about the services, including route maps, fares, and a phone number to call for demand response services. However, the website does not host a rider's guide or its more detailed policies related to reservations, operating, and fares that would be useful for new riders. Nor does the website promote DCT's well-designed social media presence. This information does exist in some offline printed materials; however, it should also be made available online.

Recommendation: Update primary website to include a rider's guide to using the service that includes the following topics: reservation and cancellation policies, pick-up and drop-off policies, vehicle accessibility and mobility accommodations, detailed fare information, fixed-route pick-up and drop-off policies, rider code of conduct, etc. Provide link to social media page. *Priority: High.*

DCT's second website – dunnride.com – is a mobile-friendly real-time bus stop application with route maps and next-trip schedule information for its three fixed routes. This is an excellent tool not often used by transit systems of this size. Real-time, stop-level information provides DCT riders a higher level of customer service and information, while also instilling confidence in those who may be hesitant to try fixed-route transit for the first time. However, dunnride.com alone does not provide adequate information about fares or other system policies; it does not link to the system's primary website; and there is no DCT branding or contact information. [Dunnride.com](http://dunnride.com) does link to DCT's well-used and maintained Facebook page, which the primary website does not link to.

[Dunnride.com](http://dunnride.com) is clearly a tool targeted at UW-Stout student and staff riders (mobile-friendly, no fare information listed since they ride fixed routes for free), but DCT should not limit its functionality and usefulness to just one segment of its ridership. New and existing Community and Saturday Community route riders who are not UW-Stout students and staff could also benefit from this powerful tool; it should include information pertinent to them as well.

Recommendation: Update dunnride.com to be better integrated with the rest of the system's online content. Add system branding, fare and contact information, and a link to the primary website. Priority: Medium.

DCT maintains an excellent social media presence. Content posted on its Facebook page consists of general information about using the service, special events and service changes, and highlights the transit system's value in the community. Social media is one tool that can highlight and magnify the strong relationships between passengers and the transit system. DCT's social media does so successfully but could be improved through targeted advertising. Facebook advertisements can be targeted to potential passengers based on geography and demographics for relatively low cost.

Recommendation: Invest in targeted social media advertisements. Priority: Low.

Branding

DCT does not have a particularly strong brand image. It has been largely perceived as a service for elderly and disabled residents. Much work has gone into marketing the service to UW-Stout students in recent years, to some success.

Adding bus stops, branded bus stop signs (unbranded sign in picture 1 below), overhead destination signs, and consistent and clear logos on buses are relatively simple changes that will help solidify the system's role as a community asset. Most DCT buses have overhead destination signs that go unused. These should be used on all buses operating public transit service. All future buses purchased should have overhead destination signs or be capable of incorporating them.

Recommendation: Use overhead destination signs on all public transit vehicles, identifying the route/service in operation. Priority: High.

DCT buses and informational materials feature several brands and images that are not consistently applied. Buses feature the "Enroute: Driving Community Together" logo and design scheme along the side (see picture 2 and 3 below). This was developed through partnership with UW-Stout students. While attractive and reflective of the community, "Enroute" does not effectively communicate that the service is public transit and operated by Dunn County. In fact, the words "Dunn County Transit" appear on the bus in just one place: in small font, next to the Facebook icon along the side of the bus (picture 3). A window decal of the Dunn County seal is located on the rear sides of the buses but is not

prominent (picture 4). Absent from buses is the “Dunn County Transit Commission” logo that is used most consistently across printed materials (picture 5).



(1) DCT fixed-route bus stop sign that does not name the service. (2) All buses feature the “Enroute” branding with illustration along the side. (3) Detail of the “Enroute” on-bus branding. (4) Dunn County seal window decal on buses. (5) Dunn County Transit Commission logo, featured on printed materials but not on buses.

DCT should evaluate its brand image and develop a branding scheme that it applies consistently throughout its public-facing materials (i.e., print, online, on buses), and which clearly identifies the service as public transit.

Recommendation: Evaluate brand image and develop strategies to strengthen system’s branding, with a focus on consistency and clarity. *Priority: High.*

Customer Contacts and Complaints

The Transit Manager and Office/Safety Manager handle any significant customer contacts and all customer complaints. All relevant customer contacts – customer complaints, as well as comments and suggestions – should be documented and progress tracked in an electronic database.

Recommendation: Establish database of customer contacts and resolutions. Develop and document policy for responding to customer contacts in a timely manner. Share complaints with Transit Commission. *Priority: Medium.*

Conclusions

This review’s assessment of each functional area is presented in Table 9. Ratings are based on the degree to which the function’s structures and procedures are conducive to continued effective operations of the system. Specific recommendations for each of the functional areas are contained in the following section.

Table 9: Summary Assessment of Functional Areas

Functional Area	Rating
Transportation Operations	
Vehicle and Facility Maintenance	
Finance	
Planning	
Scheduling	
Marketing	

	Structures and procedures are conductive to effective operations
	Structures and procedures are adequate with room for improvement
	Structures and procedures are insufficient

Dunn County Transit efficiently delivers high-quality service to meet the demands of diverse passenger bases. The transit system has built strong relationships with community stakeholders, businesses and its passengers. Although the transit system is performing adequately, implementing a variety of strategic initiatives will result in strengthening the system, protecting it from risk and liability, and poising it for future growth.

Installing marked bus stops along all routes and making them ADA compliant will not only improve safety measures for passengers and drivers, but it will also increase visibility of the transit system within the community and reinforce that it is available to all community members. DCT should focus on defining its brand and presenting it to the public in a clear and consistent manner as a means of growing ridership. There are strong systems and successes in place from which to build. Completion of an updated TDP will bring about other strategies that can be implemented to grow ridership and improve service delivery. Creating performance measures and standards will help determine any services that may need improvement, while identifying potential areas of future growth.

Long-term financial stability is a priority of DCT management, which is achievable if the appropriate steps are put into place now. Analysis of some current procedures could result in cost savings. In addition, development of a cost model for a capital plan and determination of the most effective manner for funding capital will be critical in the organization’s financial planning initiatives.

Implementing the appropriate mix of strategic planning and improvement initiatives will provide the tools needed to build upon the system’s current strengths, while stabilizing and preparing DCT for a positive future, to ensure the longevity and stability of the system.

PART V: RECOMMENDATIONS

This review’s recommendations are summarized in Table 10.

Table 10: Summary of Recommendations

Functional Area	Recommendation	Priority
Policy- and Decision-Making Processes	No recommendations	-
Transportation Operations	Phase out the flag-stop policy that allow passengers to board at any point along a fixed route; install marked bus stops along all fixed routes using TCRP guidelines; develop bus stop signs that name Dunn County Transit explicitly.	High
	The Transit Manager should administer the random drug and alcohol program.	High
	Collect on-time performance data for fixed-route service – through upgraded software or manually by drivers.	Medium
	Conduct semi-annual ride checks with each driver to evaluate driving performance.	Medium
	Consider additional training opportunities for management staff.	Medium
	Examine if Transit Mutual Insurance would produce a lower cost with the same amount of coverage.	Low
	Analyze impacts of bringing staff into County as County employees.	Low
Vehicle and Facility Maintenance	No recommendations	-
Finance	Update website and employee handbook to clarify eligibility and operations policies associated with the Red Cedar service; it should be marketed to all DCT customers as a public transit service, and included in online and print materials.	High
	Analyze Public Works charges to determine if there is currently a capital cost component that can be used for transit equipment.	High
	Develop a capital plan that provides a mix of 100 percent local funds and FTA funding for appropriate elements.	High
	Update employee handbook to accurately reflect eligibility and fare revenue policies associated with the Stout Route.	Medium
Planning	Initiate a Transit Development Plan update in the next fiscal year.	High
	Per FTA Circular 4702.1B, submit updated Title VI Program to FTA; post on system website once adopted.	High
	In the next Transit Development Plan include a task that analyzes fleet needs, including maintenance and storage costs, and passenger load requirements.	High
	Develop system standards and performance measures against which observed performance should be measured. Regularly monitor service in comparison to system standards and report findings to the Transit Commission monthly.	Medium
	Define when a trip is considered on time; develop a process for systematically monitoring on-time performance in comparison to the system’s established goal.	Medium
	Educate the UW-Stout staff and student government about state and federal transit funding, and their own role in creating transit-supportive policies and operating environments. Develop a working relationship with permanent UW-Stout staff, particularly one who acts as a liaison between the student government and University administration.	Medium

	Develop an ADA Transition Plan to assess conditions and prioritize bus stop improvements. Establish a yearly budget allocation for continued improvement for ADA accessibility at all bus stops.	Medium
	Understand the network of managed care organizations in the region and DHS programs that offer a transportation benefit; explore the feasibility of becoming a certified NEMT service provider.	Medium
	Update the ADA Paratransit Plan to reflect current service offerings.	Medium
	Update public materials and the website to publicize and clarify evening and Saturday complementary ADA paratransit service.	Medium
	Through a partnership with UW-Stout students, study the economic, environmental, and social benefits of low- and no-emission buses (e.g., all-electric), and analyze the pros and cons of various options to guide future investments (granted UW-Stout students continue to prioritize the issue).	Low
Scheduling	No recommendations	-
Marketing	Update primary website to include a rider's guide to using the service that includes the following topics: reservation and cancelation policies, pick-up and drop-off policies, vehicle accessibility and mobility accommodations, detailed fare information, fixed-route pick-up and drop-off policies, rider code of conduct, etc. Provide link to social media page.	High
	Use overhead destination signs on all public transit vehicles, identifying the route/service in operation.	High
	Evaluate brand image and develop strategies to strengthen system's branding, with a focus on consistency and clarity.	Medium
	Update dunnride.com to be better integrated with the rest of the system's online content. Add system branding, fare and contact information, and a link to the primary website.	Medium
	Establish database of customer contacts and resolutions. Develop and document policy for responding to customer contacts in a timely manner. Share complaints with Transit Commission.	Medium
	Invest in targeted social media advertisements.	Low