

## Item 24-0641: Proposed Valley Transit Evening & Saturday Service Modifications

### Fox Cities Transit Commission

Tues, May 21, 2024 2:50PM

#### George Dearborn (Chairman) 08:22

Then the more interesting one. Ron, you're gonna go over the proposed modification, potential modification of services for Valley Transit.

#### General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 08:32

Yes, thank you, Chair.

#### George Dearborn (Chairman) 08:33

Thank you.

#### General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 08:35

So...pre COVID, it was difficult to find employees who wanted to work the number of hours necessary for a top-rated transit system. Post COVID it has proven next to impossible to retain or find qualified employees. In the almost eight years that I've been here, I think I've experienced about 15 minutes where we were fully staffed with drivers. Post COVID, it has been getting worse and worse and worse.

#### General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 09:11

We're having people apply. As soon as they hear the hours that we operate, they go, "I don't want anything to do with it. I don't want to work nights. I don't want to work Saturday night," and people are going elsewhere. So right now, our table of organization is at 36 full time operators. Today I have 17 of 36 full time operators available. Just by sheer numbers that tells you that doesn't work real well.

#### General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 09:39

We started looking at, you know, what are the service deliveries options that might be available to us. And you know, Valley Transit is committed to providing transportation throughout the Fox Cities in multiple modes of transit and transportation, like our VT connector service as an example. When we looked at what the issues, or how much we had to modify, we settled on about 320 hours a week. So that's—at 40 hours a week, that's eight positions that we needed to modify.

#### General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 10:16

So, what we're proposing is that we cut approximately 320 hours a week from our fixed route bus service and transition to the connector service that's available. So, what we're proposing is operating the buses basically from six o'clock till six o'clock on weekdays, and from eight o'clock until one o'clock on Saturdays. In the evening hours on weekdays and after one o'clock on Saturdays, we would transition to the connector service which has been out there for a number of years.

#### General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 10:52

What I'm also proposing as because we're transitioning from the fixed route to that, that I would recommend we establish a fare that's equal to what the cash fares for the bus right now. And that's a \$2 one-way fare. So, passengers would not be allowed to use their bus pass, because we don't have a mechanism to read it on the on the contractors' vans, but it would be a \$2 fare which makes it affordable for people to get their transportation.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 11:20**

So, with this scenario, about 90% of our riders will remain on our buses. During those non-peak hours, we would offer up a demand response shared ride micro transit system for \$2 trip. So, in essence, they would schedule a trip, get picked up, and get a ride door to door when the bus is not running. So, and in the wintertime, they wouldn't have to wait out in the inclement weather. They'd get picked up at their door and delivered to their destination directly during the non-service hours for the bus.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 12:00**

The other side of this is there is some regulations coming down the pipe from the Federal Transit Administration. They have proposed regulations (we don't know when they'll be implemented, but we anticipate the regulations will be coming out very soon) that limits operators' driving time to 10 hours a day. So, we know that's coming. We would have to comply with that. We're also looking at that as part of this analysis and this change in service levels. So that would also be part of it. Because we don't want to have to make a change and go back and make another change.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 12:39**

I will tell you that—because he's not here, I will tell you I did receive a call from Larry Wurdinger today. As you know, Larry's a regular rider of the system, and one of the things he asked, "Is there any potential to going to 6:15 on Saturday?" so Monday through Saturday are all the same, instead of having an earlier day on Saturday. We looked at that. It really comes down to numbers to have the staff to be able to do it.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 13:09**

One of the things that we talked about is next year we already have a plan in place to do a transit development plan with East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. So, one of the things we would look at as part of that TDP would be incremental implementation of additional services as we get staffing. So, if we end the service at one o'clock, if we get additional staffing, maybe we look at adding back in that Saturday afternoon service, or as another option, maybe we look at some of the things that have been talked about over the year. Maybe there's a router to where we should have a 30-minute departure instead of a one-hour departure—route 20, route 15, route 30, maybe—those types of things. Those are larger discussions we get into with each municipality, but, so, those are the kinds of things we're looking at.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 14:00**

You know, I will also tell you and looking forward with our scheduling, we do not have enough staff to operate the weekend following Fourth of July. We are going to be closing on July 5 and July 6 and putting out notice in advance that we do not have this staff to operate. I think we're far better off to give people the notice so they can plan for alternative transportation, but we just don't have the bodies to get behind the wheel because of people on vacation. And there's only a few of them, but we're that short that we just don't have the staff to operate. Even if I put all my supervisors out there behind the wheel, we still would be short operators to operate on those days.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 14:45**

I guess I'll open it up to questions, concerns, comments. I should—let me back up for just a second. So, what we have to do with this, we have this proposal in front of us. When we look at making these types of changes, we are required to go out and have a public hearing. I'm proposing we have a public hearing on June 4 which is the Tuesday following the week of Memorial Day, and then we would continue to get comments through the 10th of June which is Monday, and then come back to the Transit Commission on Tuesday the 11th for you to take action on the proposed changes, review the comments that we received, and look at alternatives. With that, I guess I'll entertain any questions, comments, concerns?

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 15:31**

I guess, you know, one of the one of the people that come into my business, she stops in; she's waits by the bus a lot, but she works in Kaukauna, lives in Appleton, but she's always going back to Appleton like eight o'clock. I don't—I'm not really sure how this is going to help her. And Saturdays seems like one o'clock is really early. I mean summertime, kids taking the bus out to the mall, or whatever. I don't know. This seems—it seems drastic changes.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 16:01**

It is.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 16:02**

And it is curious to me that, you know, what is the employment problem? I know it's busing staffing, I get it, but you know, other people, we got enough room—people in this room right now are doing stuff. I mean, there's people out there; what can we do to get them to drive for us? I mean, it's kind of—it just seems odd because other places [do many] paper mill or whatever, they are employ—you know, they are getting people to work shift work and all that, you know, and I'm just saying, what's the difference here?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 16:29**

I would argue that everybody's in an employment crisis. I don't know who's that staffed fully. Some are better than others, but I can tell you, like I say, we've had about 15 minutes of full staffing since I've been here. You know, I can tell you that we've spent a lot of money on marketing. We've—we're involved in employee job fairs, and in fact, I think we've got one coming up in a week or two. Is it tomorrow? Tomorrow we've got one coming up. We're continuing to do that, and I know that we have the human resources department with the city of Appleton assist us with that. And you know, I think Jay is with us. He's the director of human resources for the city. But I think he could very well attest on the efforts we've been going to try and find people. And it's—

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 17:28**

We're still finding someone to do the van then right? You know what I mean? Like there's still—

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 17:32**

Well, there's a difference. No. The people doing the van are not required to have a CDL because of the size of the vehicle. And when I talked to the contractor, they said there has actually come back around where they're finding drivers to come back to work now. But they don't require them to have a CDL because of the size of the vehicle. They only have about four or five passengers.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 17:49**

So just so I'm clear on it. Would this would the van then just do the same bus routes at those times? Or just it's purely based on—

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 17:57**

Demand response. Yep. Demand response; door to door. And clearly, I can tell you from a manager of a transit system to have to make this change, I you know, I—it wouldn't have been my first recommendation if we didn't have to do this. But I think that, you know, having an alternative out there—quite frankly, I think those that you know, want need the service might find that this is actually not bad because they can schedule the trip and get a ride directly to their door rather than walking by—

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 18:37**  
at midnight on the weekend and Saturday too.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 18:39**  
Yep. Yep, exactly.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 18:41**  
So, a little more mobility training, huh?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 18:45**  
Yeah, Sarah is gearing up, I can tell you. But I think it's—not everybody's going to be happy, but I think it's a good alternative. You know, other places around have already done this. Green Bay's switch to this mode, I think a couple of years ago already, and we're kind of the last system standing in this part of the state that's offering fixed route night service. Everybody around us—Green Bay's done around six o'clock. Oshkosh is done around six o'clock. Fond Du Lac's done around six o'clock. Manitowoc's done around six o'clock. So, we're kind of coming into line with what everybody else is doing, and there's only a small pool of CDL drivers and they're just not coming in.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 19:30**  
I guess another question then, is there a smaller bus, a non CDL bus that we could launch? I'm just trying to sort out some alternatives?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 19:38**  
You mean buy another fleet of buses? That's probably not in the cards. You know, we have the vans that are under contract.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 19:54**  
I don't think anybody's happy about this.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 19:59**  
Clarification, when we say the service is done at six or 6:15. What does that mean? Does that mean the buses are back at the transit system and the service is done? So, if you're catching a bus, your last chance might be at five o'clock or 5:15? It's got to be returned and out of service.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 20:22**  
So, what we're anticipating is the last buses leaving at quarter to the hour, like the hourly routes, so their last one, I believe, would be at 4:45 and get back in in downtown at 5:45. And then we can, in theory, transition them or get them transported to where they need to go. The half hour routes, I think we would still have one last departure at 6:15. So basically, everything will be back in the barn by about seven o'clock at night. So that's why we said, okay, six o'clock would be the timeframe, people can transition to the micro transit VT connector service. So, there could be a little bit of overlap there.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 21:11**  
I think clarifying this as much as possible—

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 21:15**  
And that's one of the reasons—that's one of the reasons we wanna have a public hearing, so people come in. I'm really intending to have an informal public hearing. You know, typically government public hearings is

somebody comes in, and they talks, and we don't say anything, and I really want this to be an informal process; we can have a two-way conversation. Because people are gonna have a lot of questions and how it impacts them independently, or individually. And, you know, I just—we just mentioned mobility management and travel training. That's going to gear up significantly.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 21:46**

How confident are we that we will have sufficient resources with the Connector service to take care of this? Because you said roughly 90% are going to be okay. That's 10%, and who knows how that's going to flow. But if we stumble taking care of that as we make this transition, I think this is gonna be a hardship—for some people significant. Maybe others adapt, but it could be difficult, and I think we need to be really thoughtful in what we plan and what we say so that there's no misunderstanding and that we've done our homework.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 22:27**

So, I've had a couple of conversations with Running Incorporated. They've told me they've been successful in getting enough drivers and as soon as we make the decision to move forward, they'll gear up their hiring for some additional drivers. They're confident they'll be able to do it and assured us they'll do the best job possible to get it done. Can I tell you there absolutely will not be a hiccup? I can't. I'm planning on not having a hiccup, but as we know, there's always a potential, unfortunately.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 23:04**

Excuse me. If Sarah Walker is this person comes into my place, she's just trying to find a ride home, and it's 8:15. She calls the Transit Connect, and they door to door. \$2? Pretty good deal.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 23:21**

That is.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 23:23**

Well, that's a good question. So, on the Connector, we do ask them to call two hours in advance. And most of our riders know well in advance of two hours because they're catching buses, they timetables. And you know there could be some negotiation there too depending on busy they are. Say, "Well, you want an eight o'clock pickup. I can pick you up at 7:45 or 8:15." But those negotiations will likely happen. But yeah, I think it's a pretty good option considering the circumstances.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 23:55**

**[His microphone did not pick up the first part of his question.]** ...is Valley Transit 2 a half hour?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 23:59**

They will operate like that. Yeah, there's, there's gonna be some negotiation. We just—we can't operate without a window. It's just—you can't do it. It's a shared ride system, and you have to try and figure out somewhat of an efficient operation to get more than one person on the vehicle, especially with if the volume goes up for a trip or two. We're gonna have to max out capacity in the vehicles.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 24:02**

Yep. Go ahead please.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 24:10**

Do you have call or is it something—I don't know if we—I know we don't even have an app anymore, but is there, you know, would there ever be a booking thing on the app?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 24:38**

So, we use a software package called EcoLane for that service. We've been talking with them. I think they have one available. We do not have it yet, but that's something we're looking into. And if we don't have it immediately, it's something we're looking at getting into. The other side of this is we're very close to starting to look at a contactless fare system which could be utilize both on the bus and paratransit system. So those things are coming. They won't happen in time for July, but those are things that are happening in the background. Also.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 25:10**

There's another question. A couple there. Okay.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 25:15**

I think Mike had a—

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 25:17**

Mike, did you want...?

**Mike Patza (Commissioner) 25:17**

I did have a question. So, the \$2 rate for this connector service, is that offset by the cost savings that you're going to see from eliminating the fixed route service? And that—has that been analyzed? and I guess I have one more question, so I don't have to talked again. Would the change—if this were to move forward, would it happen immediately? And would it be permanent? Or would there be any second look at it in the future?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 25:42**

The fare of \$2. We wanted to remain consistent and not make it unaffordable those that needed transportation during our off hours. We believe, worst case scenario, that this will be a budget neutral change. So, yes, we will have less dollars being spent on drivers if they're not on the streets, but it's going to cost us more for the fixed route—for the connector service. As far as is this permanent? Again, we're planning on working with East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission early next year to start a transit development plan and work through the process as to how do we move forward? Because we do believe that we are going to probably attract some employees once we're operating 6 to 6. But then what's the best scenario moving forward? And those discussions will be to come, but that'd be the process.

**Mike Patza (Commissioner) 26:38**

Okay. I just want one follow up question. I don't think this would happen, but is there any discussion or concern about this type of on demand service being abused in any way? You know what I mean? Like a typical rider might not use it, but someone that's downtown at 11 says, "Oh, I can't get an Uber. I'm going to call Valley Transit." And that's probably not our intention, right? I mean, has that been discussed at all? Or is that a concern?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 27:02**

You know, it's possible. You know, I—certainly two bucks, you know. But I don't think it's going to be used widely. I think most of the people who are used to using Uber, like getting into a nice car and versus a van that's been used all day long. And, you know, sure, there's going to be some probably, but I don't think that's going to be the issue.

**Mike Patza (Commissioner) 27:27**

Sure. Thank you.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 27:28**

As I was just thinking about that, too. And I lost my—sorry, I lost my train of thought, but it was...

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 27:37**

I think, Diane...

**Diane Dexter (Commissioner) 27:40**

Does the public hearing in front of the full transit commission, or who attends the public hearing?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 27:45**

We will publish it as a special Transit Commission meeting. So, if the commissioners want to attend, they can publish it that way, just in case we end up with a quorum so we're legal. It's not required that you're there. We're going to do it in here. It will be recorded. But, you know, and we will bring all the comments back to you for consideration.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 28:10**

Is there any concern? Because to me it seems like cutting a lot of bus service, we're building the new transit center, spend all this money, millions of dollars here this and that. You know, what it feels like. Is there any concern that the grants or anything we're applying for money's gonna be affected by the amount of operations we're actually and capabilities we have?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 28:28**

No, there's—no, I don't see that as an issue.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 28:31**

Yes, go ahead.

**Claire Holzschuh (Commissioner) 28:31**

Had a just a quick question. Okay. You said 17 out of 36 is what you have for the full-time operators. Can you just touch on like current employee retention and kind of what that looks like? And if anyone has left, like, have you done exit interviews to kind of see maybe where some other issues lie?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 28:52**

Sure. When I got here, probably about 80% of our workforce was eligible for retirement. We had a very aged workforce, and Jay can probably speak on that better than I can. But we had a very aged workforce. So, a number of people who are here for their careers have retired. We've hired a number of people that have stayed on. We've also hired some people who got into this and thought it was going to be—I'll use an example. We've had people come in and say, "Well, I've driven a school bus before; I can do this." It's not—it's a different animal. And they come in and they start doing and they find out I don't want to do this. I can't deal with 14 different things going on at once. And they leave. And that happens. But I think our biggest issue was the retirements and then just not being able to recruit the new drivers to replace them.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 29:56**

You know, understand over the years, employees would come in, and they were wanting to get in a job with the city so to speak, because they could get in, they knew they had good health insurance, they were in the state retirement system, and they were planning for their future to be career employees. Many of the employees today could care less about the retirement system because they only plan on working somewhere for about two

or three years, and they're going to move somewhere else. Health insurance isn't what it used to be. So, the mentality has changed, and many times I think we're hearing that it's the hours, and I don't—Jay, do you...what are you? He's director one. Is that accurate, Jay? I mean?

**Director Jay Ratchman (HR) 30:43**

Thank you. I'd be happy to comment. We do exit interviews with all employees, or at least put that offer out. In fact, we have been meeting with the employees for years talking about the contract, the union contract. I mean, this goes back quite a few years. We even worked with the union to create a part time pool of employees to help supplement the schedule to make it easier to be a full-time driver. Even going through the changes that we're talking about right now, we sat down with the union, the leadership, representative from Teamsters, and we asked "What is it?" because we need you to be part of the solution. And we were told straight out from the leadership, "It is not the wage. It is the schedule." So, we are listening to our employees. Absolutely.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 31:37**

So, a different funding source is not necessarily going to help, if we do an RTA or that sort of thing. So, it sounds like. So, it's not money. Yes please, go ahead.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 31:45**

I have a question about the difference or the similarity between the Connector service and how Valley Transit II works. They're both van based. How are they distinguished at this point in terms of hours of availability, and which one do you call to get your ride? One used to be you got to call certain amount of time ahead. Now we're talking maybe two hours. I think clarifying which is to be used when. And I'm assuming with this schedule, there is no Valley Transit Two on Sundays.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 32:25**

The Valley Transit Two that is on Sunday would stay. That's very limited.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 32:29**

I know. Yeah.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 32:32**

We haven't talked about taking that off.

**Rick Detienne (Commissioner) 32:34**

But what's the difference between the Connector and Valley transit two?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 32:40**

Well, Valley Transit Two is a system we're obligated to provide per the Americans with Disabilities Act that is supposed to complement the fixed route bus service for people who with disability, because the disability cannot use a fixed route bus service, and we have to provide a demand response paratransit service. That's operated by Running Incorporated. That has to operate the same hours that the buses operate, and the regulation says we can charge up to two times cash bus fare, so the bus fare for paratransit, VT Two, is established at \$4 a trip. That will continue to run when the buses are running, as we're required to do.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 33:20**

Outside of that we would go to the VT connector service, which is currently and will continue to be operated by Running Incorporated. It's the same phone number. And depending on the type of trip they request or the time of day, it will be very clear with the schedulers what's available. So, if somebody calls on Saturday at three



o'clock for an ADA trip, they say, "Well, the ADA paratransit VT Two is not available, but the VT Connector is." It's the same vans, same level of service, so they could take the connector service just like they would anything else. That's our that's our plan. Mike?

**Mike Patza (Commissioner) 34:01**

This may be a stupid question, but I don't know the answer. So, I'm gonna ask it anyways. What's—so if you want a VT connector trip, what's the service—I mean, what exactly is the service area? Is there an established service boundary for your Valley Transit? You don't have to be in a route, right? Because you go door to door? So.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 34:17**

That's a good question. So, one of the things—the VT Connector service was implemented many years ago, in partnership with United Way. That service went out to an extended service area that included all the way out to Vinland and other areas. As of—starting in January 1, United Way's unable to partner with us anymore. So, what I'm proposing is with effect of this change, that we looked at the extended service area portion of it, that the Connector Service is only available within the municipalities that are partners of ours. So, you know, that's really where it ends up

**Mike Patza (Commissioner) 34:59**

With our municipal boundaries.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 35:00**

Yeah, our municipal laundries. Yep.

**Mike Patza (Commissioner) 35:02**

Perfect, thank you.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 35:03**

So, if someone call, try to get to Combined Locks, then we weren't offer it.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 35:10**

Correct. And there are a small handful right now that are traveling from Kimberley to Combine Locks. And that's where we utilize the United Way funding to supplement those things so it didn't come back to the other municipalities.

**[Question asked off microphone.]**

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 35:42**

...eyeing up per night, how many rides you might be offering to supplement that?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 35:47**

I don't have the exact numbers off the top of my head. But it seems to me like the first hour that the buses are off the street, there might be a maximum of 50 trips taken. I think that—I don't think we will hit that mark. That's what's being taken on the bus right now. I don't know how many people that equates to. That's passenger trips. And then it drops down significantly throughout the night. It kind of drops way down, and then near the end of the night, you get a couple of work trips out there. But it drops drastically. And then we get to Saturday. You know our bus ridership is about half of what the weekday is. So, when you start looking at those off hours, the numbers really go down rapidly.

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 36:25**

Would it be on Running Incorporated if it took off and actually people started using it like hundreds of rides a night? Understanding, would that cause a problem? Or would they just be trying to deal with that, because that's the contract or whatever?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 36:41**

We would have a problem on our hands, and I would come back to the commission, and probably looking at increasing the passenger fares for some fare elasticity to make it more cost effective for us to get that in line. Because what I can't do is go back to the municipalities and say, "Well, geez, I need another million dollars because of this change." So, we're gonna have to figure out how to control it. I just don't see that happening. I, you know, I think the max hour is about 50 trips, and I think we calculated it at about, it'd be 80—you'd have to average 82 trips an hour to get to the break-even point of the service that we're not going to have on the street. So, I just don't see it hitting that point. Good question though.

**Ronald Torrance (Commissioner) 37:33**

What is the capacity of the Connector service?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 37:37**

Van—each van?

**Ronald Torrance (Commissioner) 37:38**

Well, I mean, each van carries a certain—but how many drivers do they have on the road? You say 50 trips, but?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 37:44**

Well, they typically have about 30 drivers and they said they'd gear up, if they know they're doing this, they'll gear up and get some more. But, you know, again, it's—it shouldn't be a single person in a van, you know, and going to the connector service is far different than what the VT Two is because VT Two—a high number of those trips are mobility impaired individuals and mobility devices and such, which creates a longer trip time per person versus the VT Connector where the vast majority of those are ambulatory individuals, which are very quick trips. And you can—in theory, we should get more efficient to get more people on the shared ride vehicle. And so you need less vehicles to get the same amount of trips done.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 38:36**

Any other questions? Please go.

**Alderperson Brad Firkus (District 3) 38:40**

Thank you, chair. I actually just happened to read an article last night about this same situation in other cities and how they're shifting a lot of their resources towards more micro transit versus fixed route. Some of them are stating it under ridership. But I think based on our situation with the driver capacity, something has to be done. And this is probably fair, because we do not want to keep burning out drivers are going to have an even worse issue. But I do believe, and a lot of comments have touched on this, that we just can't—it's—it wouldn't be a viable or sustainable route to end up relying more and more on connector, more and more on these micro transit options, in favor of the fixed route just because the labor doesn't work out. I mean, even though it's easier to find drivers as he said without—who don't need CDLs, but and they, you know—those are still people who are working on job and are going to need to be paid.

**George Dearborn (Chairman)** 39:40

Right.

**Aldersperson Brad Firkus (District 3)** 39:41

I would say based on the situation right now, this is probably the best option to keep things afloat, but definitely encourage anything and everything that can be done. I don't know—I haven't—I don't really have ideas, and I'm not going to pretend that there's some easy idea that nobody's just thought of yet in the last, you know, 8, 10, however many years that this has been going—you know this trend has been going. But I definitely would say, whatever medium to long term plan we have, we definitely have to keep working at whatever we can for ensuring the fixed route service rebounds.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit)** 40:17

I appreciate that comment. And I guess I've got a few things. When we have our transit development plan next year, I would encourage as many of you as possible to participate. I know there's a few of you in here that participated last year. I think, Carol, you were probably just about every meeting, I think. It's good for our commissioners to get involved and hear what's going on and bring concerns related to their community back to the group and hear what the discussions are. And, Brad, you're right. We're not alone in this. A lot of people are transitioning to the micro transit mode of transportation.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit)** 40:54

We're fortunate. We've had this mode for a long time, so we're not bringing in a new mode of service. Many of our passengers have been utilizing this or a combination of the services for a long time. So in that regards, we're a step ahead. And that's—I think that's going to be the thing that helps us in this transition is it's already out there. And, you know, we've talked about the VT2, we've talked about the Connector service, but, you know, Calumet county still has their services that we fund. Northern Winnebago Dial A Ride is still out there. Outagamie County Rural, Outagamie County Elderly Services are still out there that we provide as part of our services. So, this is just one portion of many modes of transportation that we provide, and, you know, based on the lack of available employees, I think it just makes sense to go to this mode of service and still transport about 90% of our passengers on a fixed route bus, and then the remaining 10%, take care of that with a micro transit and continue that. And, again, we'll get into the TDP process and hopefully come up with some good ideas and where we go in the future.

**George Dearborn (Chairman)** 42:09

Yes.

**Carol Kasimor (Commissioner)** 42:13

It's the first announcement of this proposal. So there—to this point, there hasn't been any feedback from whether the riders or anyone else?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit)** 42:26

I have had discussion with our employees internally, but it has not gone out publicly yet because I wanted to come out and talk to the board and the commissioners of what we're what we're facing. So, I anticipate tonight, we will put up notices in the buses. So tomorrow morning there will be public hearing notices on the buses. We will get to Running Incorporated to start handing out flyers to the passengers on VT2, the Connector so that they're aware. Deb is going to be publishing a notice in the Post Crescent which we need to do for the public hearing. And our social media will get this out. I suspect the city of Appleton will broadcast it along with ours. So, we'll start getting the notice out as early as tomorrow morning. And then we'll have the public hearing on the on the fourth and then back here on the 11th and be able to talk through all the comments that we heard.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 43:20**

But given the circumstances, Ron, I mean, what—there are really no other alternatives? I mean, we can try to continue to operate as we are, but we're short of drivers and the service will start to decline that way.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 43:34**

Well, we're to the point now that, you know, we're going to be closing the fifth and sixth of July because we don't have staff. And we are to the point now where we're going to be canceling services on a regular basis. If we don't do this, it'll be haphazard. We just—we have 17 of 36 drivers available.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 43:52**

And you're saying throughout the country? That's correct.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 43:55**

It's to the point it's not sustainable. And quite honestly, if we didn't have the dedicated team that we have right now, this would have come to a head far sooner. We've tried to bite the bullet, so to speak, and get people in here. You know, Jay can talk about the efforts that we tried in recruitment. It's—we're turning over every stone we can. But it's really now to the point that we have to do something.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 44:22**

And this is this is happening nationally, as you said. I've seen the articles in other parts of the United States. They just—they're cutting back services. It's a real challenge, but I agree the fixed route system is the most efficient way. It's the best way from an energy standpoint. Having multiple services, small routes, is not the ideal. But this to me, given the circumstances, this is probably the only alternatively available right now.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 44:50**

Having the fixed route buses carrying 90% of our passengers is the most cost effective and efficient way to do that by far. Having the micro transit supplement during the non-peak times is an applicable situation to do that. So, you know, ideally, if we could have hired more drivers, that would be great, but we'll look at how do we move forward in the future and look at what's coming. But yeah, if we weren't making this decision today to start having these conversations, we'd be here in a couple months whenever the Federal Transit Administration regulations come out. Our hand would be forced, and we wouldn't even have a conversation. Say, "It's done. The law changed." So and that's coming. So, we're going to be a step ahead of it.

**Diane Dexter (Commissioner) 45:46**

Whichever decision or action we take on June 11, does that have to be moved to the Common Council for approval of our action?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 45:55**

No. The Fox Cities Transit Commission determines what our route structures are, and how do we provide service. It will go to the Council, but the way the way the statute is written for us and the way it's written, this commission, one of the things they do is look at the service route services that we provide.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 46:23**

Yes?

**Greg VandeHey (Commissioner) 46:24**

Good friend of mine's daughter goes to Appleton North and takes the bus now. Let's say she's at a play that night, stays there. There's no age restrictions on this, right? Like she's, you know, whatever, 15 years old, could call at 8:15 and take this. Now, what if she was with a group of friends all going to similar spots? Would they pick up a whole group and drop them off individually?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 46:46**

They probably would. I would expect. I mean, if the if you call them and said, "Well, we have, you know, four people, five people going," they're going to want to get it done with one person. The more efficient they do, the better off they are financially. So, you know, it's in their best interest to fit as many people in with one driver as possible. But it is a shared ride system. Ideal ideally, that would be perfect.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 47:14**

Anyone else. Like, I won't say "Thank you," Ron, but I know this is a real challenge that we've got to deal with. I think the public hearing will be interesting to see how that moves ahead. We don't have a lot of alternatives. Yeah, please.

**Ronald Torrance (Commissioner) 47:33**

One question. We're investing a lot in a new transit center, both south and here in the city, and so yet we're cutting service? What's the perceived perception going to be to the public that, oh, they're building all this, spending all this money, but yet they're cutting services?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 47:53**

Well, I would say we're not cutting service. We're transitioning to a different mode of service. We haven't cut services. We just have a different mode to ride. Secondly, about 90% of our passengers are still going to be on the fixed route bus which needs all the infrastructure in place to operate the fixed route system. So, we're talking a very small percentage of riders in that. So. What will their perception be? I don't know. We will have to do something to educate them if that comes up, and answer their questions.

**Ronald Torrance (Commissioner) 48:26**

Okay.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 48:26**

It's good. Good point, though.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 48:27**

No difference than our interstates and our local roads. I mean, there's certain peak periods when you need more lanes. The rest of the time, you can go anywhere you want with no traffic at all. So very similar with public transit. Anyone else?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 48:46**

I would say if you have questions, comments, concerns in the meantime, feel free to give me a call. Be glad to talk through it with you. Otherwise, we'll send you out a notice. But June 4 at 3:30pm we plan on starting a public hearing in these chambers right here. 3:30 on Tuesday, June 4. And then we'll be we'll be taking comments through the afternoon of June 10. And then come back to meet with you on June 11. Thank you.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 49:23**

If there's no one else on that issue, the next item is request for future agenda items. I don't think there are any and you've not gotten any comments other than I got a call but it wasn't related to agenda items. I asked for that to be on the agenda but he was not interested. So, following that next meeting dates and time. We got June 11 and June 25. You're recommending we cancel the 25th.

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 49:51**

Yeah, I believe we'll handle all of our business on the 11th, and then the 25th. And just let me go back and clarify. What I'm hoping to do is start this change in mid-July. And depending on what the comments are and how we proceed on the 11th of June, hopefully that buys us enough time to figure out if we can start around the 15th or if we have to wait to like the 22nd of July. But there is an urgency to get this done from a staffing perspective, so but those discussions will come forth.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 50:22**

Please go ahead.

**Diane Dexter (Commissioner) 50:24**

Is there a stop time on the public hearing? Do you have to be here for like an hour or as long as people are here, or is there an open time or whoever's here at 3:30?

**General Manager Ron McDonald (Valley Transit) 50:37**

We're going to call a hearing to order at 3:30. I will be here for over an hour if people show up. I'm not going to call it at 3:30, if nobody's there at 3:35 walk out the door. I'll be I'll be here to make some time available. I fully anticipate we'll have people coming in to talk to us. Good question.

**George Dearborn (Chairman) 50:56**

Good.