

Bike Racks on Buses Update

“Putting bike racks on our buses has proven to be one of the most cost effective, and easy to implement, strategies we have ever used to increase ridership, improve our image and serve our community.” -- Barry Barker, Executive Director of Transit Authority of River City

The integration of bicycles and transit is spreading quickly and new ways of integration continue to be developed as local governments and transit agencies see the benefits of increased ridership, additional revenue, expanded service area and an improved image of public transit. As part of their benchmarking study, the Thunderhead Alliance surveyed 50 comparable cities within the US to determine the integration of transit and bicycles. Of the 45 cities who responded to questions regarding bike racks on buses, only four cities—Amarillo, Milwaukee, New York and Omaha—reported none of their buses being equipped with racks. Furthermore, of Wisconsin’s transit agencies, twelve of the twenty currently implement a Bike Racks on Buses program.

What are Bike Racks?

Bike Rack on Bus programs consist of racks allowing bicycles to be transported on public transit buses and public outreach and marketing of the program. The racks are very user-friendly, allowing bicyclists to load and unload their bicycles within seconds and allow transit users and bicyclists alike many benefits. The diagrams below show the procedures for loading and unloading a bicycle from the racks.

Campaign Update

Currently, the BFW and MCTS are poised, waiting to see if the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors and County Executive Walker will adopt a County Budget inclusive of the \$32,500 to implement the program. As determined by the County Budget, in mid-November the program will either begin to be implemented by MCTS or the BFW will begin reformulating a new strategy for the campaign.

History of the Campaign

In 2006, during Bike to Work Week, the BFW launched a formal campaign to see a Bike Racks on Buses program implemented in Milwaukee. In this time, the campaign has seen enormous progress: the BFW and Milwaukee County Transit Systems (MCTS) are now working together to see this program come to fruition; the BFW has won the support of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors; the BFW has grown its grassroots base in Milwaukee and has been able to utilize this core on multiple occasions. It is because of the grassroots nature of the Bike Racks on Buses campaign that has led to such success.

Over a decade ago local residents and small business owners, many of whom were BFW members, began organizing for a Bike Racks on Buses program to be implemented in Milwaukee. Through their efforts over a thousand signatures from supporters were gathered, the issue was covered in local media, and ultimately a strong base of support was established. With the launch of the BFW’s Bike Racks on Buses campaign, additional signatures were collected, over a dozen strong letters of support were gathered from people such as Congresswoman Gwen Moore, Robert Harris the Regional Director of the State of WI Department of Health and Family Services and Ann Beier the Director of the City of Milwaukee’s Office of Environmental Sustainability, media events were organized drawing attention to the issue, and meetings were held with Milwaukee County Supervisors to gain their support.

In September 2007, the campaign reached a new height when a resolution authorizing MCTS to apply for funding for the program passed the Transportation, Transit and Public Works Committee. That resolution was later affirmed by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in a vote of 6-12 during the 2008 January County Board meeting. Yet, in March the program was nearly de-railed when Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker vetoed the resolution only 18 hours before the County Board meeting, citing inaccurately that the program would cost MCTS an additional \$140,000 annually where in truth the program has the capacity to bring \$43,759 in revenue to MCTS. With mere hours to act and needing to convince at least one additional Supervisor than who had voted in support in the program in January, the BFW set out to secure support of the program to override the veto. By mobilizing BFW members to call their Supervisors and a long night by BFW staff calling Supervisors and sending out media advisories, the veto was overridden in a vote of 16 to 3! Thus, the override swayed three Supervisors to vote in favor of the over-ride who had not previously voted in favor of the program, again showing the strength of the campaign!

From there, the BFW worked with MCTS to file an application for Transportation Enhancement funding which was submitted in April 2008. The application was ranked highly in the grading process and was on its way to be funded when in September MCTS pulled the application in a decision to instead leverage Transit Enhancement funding. Each year MCTS receives Transit Enhancement funding of which 1% has to be spent on programs and marketing efforts, yet in recent years MCTS has not been able to come up with the 20% local match required to use any of these program/marketing funds and consequently the money available has accumulated. Furthermore, only a 5% local match of \$32,500 is needed to satisfy the local match as the Federal Transit Administration who oversees the funding, has prioritized funding Bike Racks on Buses programs by reducing the local match required from 20% to 5%.

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Benefit of a BROB program on Biking

Building Bicycle-Friendly Communities

A Bike Rack on Bus program will aid in making Milwaukee more bicycle-friendly; communities that are bicycle-friendly are often seen as places with high quality of life because they:

- ? Improves the environment by reducing air pollution, noise and greenhouse gas emissions while also improving the quality of public space.
- ? Boosts the economy by creating a community that is appealing for new residents, tourists and businesses.
- ? Reduces congestion by decreasing the number of trips taken via motor vehicles.
- ? Saves lives by creating safer conditions for bicyclists which improves the safety of all other road users.
- ? Increases accessibility for residents of all ages and incomes to participate socially and economically in the community.
- ? Improves the health and well being of the population through routine physical activity and by reducing air pollution.
- ? Saves city funds by increasing the efficient use of public space and public transit while decreasing the need for costly new road infrastructure.

BROB Programs Increase Biking

A Bike Rack on Bus program will increase the number of people using their bicycles for transportation by providing the reassurance of a guaranteed ride home. One of the main reasons inhibiting people by commuting by bike is the concern of being stranded either by mechanical issues, poor weather or needing to get home in an emergency. A Bike Rack on Buses program provides people the confidence they need to try commuting by bike. With more people commuting by bike, there will be decreased automobile traffic congestion and air pollution and an increase in personal health and safety.

Benefits of a BROB on Transit

Increased Ridership & Revenue

It is projected that MCTS will experience a 0.2% to 1% increase in ridership leading to an increase in revenue after implementation of a Bike Racks on Buses program. Although this projection is below the national average of a 1% to 2% increase, it is reflective of what MCTS sees as its peer group (St. Louis, Columbus, Cleveland, Kansas City) and Chicago.

Service Area is Expanded

By providing access to transit via the bicycle, service area is expanded. Whereas MCTS is only able to reach people within a ¼ mile walking catchment area at this time, the addition of a Bike Racks on Bus program will expand the catchment area to a 1-2 mile radius. By being able to utilize biking on either end of their commute, those affected by MCTS’ route cuts and reduced service hours will still be able to access transit.

Demographic Served

Bike Racks on Bus programs largely serve a demographic which is low-income and in need of public transportation. The National Center for Transit Research has determined that the largest user-group of Bike Racks on Buses programs are Hispanic and African American males who earn less than \$30,000 and often even under \$20,000 a year. The 2000 census shows that of Milwaukee County’s population, 12% are Hispanic and 36.9% are African American while at the same time, 53.6% of Milwaukee County’s population earns less than \$34,999 annually.

Volunteering

If funding is secured to implement the program with adoption of the Milwaukee County Budget, MCTS hopes to have bike racks installed on MCTS buses by Bike to Work Week! In order to promote the program, the BFW will help MCTS with marketing and promotional efforts. When this comes to fruition, the BFW would love the input and participation of members to help with the development of a marketing plan which would include the marketing materials, distribution of materials, demonstration of the racks at tabling opportunities and events, etc.