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KRM Corridor Transit Service Options: Frequently Asked Questions

by Thomas A. Rubin and Robert W. Poole, Jr.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1 How many net new transit riders per day would the proposed KRM commuter rail system attract, by 2035?

In a 2007 study, Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Authority (SWRTA) projected new weekday transit ridership 4,817 by 2035.[1]

2 What is the total cost per new passenger for each trip?

$28 per ride or more than $14,000 a year for a five-day a week commuter. (The cost was determined by applying the Federal Transit Administration's "New Starts" costing methodology to the data in the SWRTA report.).

3 How much of the boarding fee is paid by passengers?

Less than $3 per trip.

4 What are the best alternatives to the proposed commuter rail system for the KRM corridor?

a. Commuter express bus service on I-94 (possibly, with park-and-ride lots) between Kenosha and Racine and downtown Milwaukee, plus additional destinations, such as the growing job sites in Waukesha County, coupled with East-West bus service to connect with the I-94 bus service.
b. Bus Rapid Transit-light, a semi-express bus service on arterial roadways with traffic signal preference, is a very low cost option which has been quite successful in Los Angeles.
c. Expanded van pool programs provide another very low cost option. Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) operates 27 vans with Milwaukee County Transit System

(MCTS) operates 27 vans with passenger fares covering 100% of operating costs. They are used extensively in the Chicago suburbs with a fleet of 740. Greater Seattle (King County) has 1,273 vans.

5 Why does the Reason study support Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) which was rejected by SEWRTA?

SEWRTA studied one only type of BRT which requires dedicated lanes added to existing surface streets, in the lakeside corridor only. This type of BRT cost almost as much as the commuter rail alternative for slower travel.

Other types of BRT such as express bus service and Bus Rapid Transit-light could be quite valuable, especially because the growth in both Kenosha and Racine is occurring closer to I-94 than in the central cities and along the lake where KRM would run with enough riders, BRT could serve as its own feeder line from Regency Mall or Renaissance Park as examples.

Besides low cost, BRT implementation could be achieved in one year and is not subject to environmental clearance requirements. If unsuccessful, it could be discontinued or altered.

6 Is there any evidence that express bus commuter service is more cost-effective than commuter rail?

Yes, in the State of New Jersey, there are both extensive commuter rail and freeway express bus service into Manhattan. The taxpayer subsidies per passenger and per passenger mile for bus service are less than 20% of those for commuter rail service.

Both commuter rail and express bus service can be usable and productive transit options depending on the needs of the communities they could serve; all such comparisons must be done via a detailed study in the specific transportation corridor being considered to be of value in making such decisions.

7 Will adding commuter rail in the KRM corridor address the region's most pressing public transit need?

No. Southeastern Wisconsin's top priority must be to prevent further deterioration of the Milwaukee County Transit System, expanding MCTS and other transit services to serve the needs of transit users who cross county lines.

MCTS serves a much lower income population with few transportation options.

KRM commuter rail is projected to add 4,800 new daily transit riders by 2035. From 2000 to 2007, MCTS ***lost*** 86,000 daily riders—and the downward trend is accelerating.

The cost per new passenger boarding is estimated to be $28.01 for KRM. In 2007, the total cost per passenger was $3.08 for MCTS, for a shorter average trip.

8 Are SWRTA's estimates of job creation and economic growth, if KRM commuter rail is implemented, credible?

No. SWRTA's analysis projects only what the impact of the capital and operating spending on the project will be, plus a multiplier effect. It does not consider the comparative economic impact of letting the taxpayers keep their money to spend on their own.

Much of the impact of major capital cost items would not be felt locally; for example, there is no local manufacturer of the specialized commuter rail cars that are specified.

The small level of ridership would not be sufficient to have a significant impact, particularly when distributed among the nine stations.

A few hundred people using each rail station each day is very unlikely to generate the $2+ billion in estimated real estate impact. Any increase, however, may be offset by decrease elsewhere in the counties.

9 What happens if the commuter rail line is a failure?

First, it is extremely rare for any public official to acknowledge that a project of this type was a "failure."

If the ridership was half of what is projected, the service will very likely continue to be operated, although perhaps reduced somewhat from the current plan. If the project receives the anticipated level of Federal spending, shutting it down would require repayment of most of these funds, paying off a "dead horse" with no source of funding to do so.

10 What impact would KRM commuter rail have on street traffic?

Reason estimates that there are 53, at-grade, street crossings on the route which will be transited by 28 trains per day causing about 1500 street closings each day.

The peak number of trains per hour would be four which would mean one closing and train whistle or bell four times per hour during rush hours.

11 Is KRM an efficient way to travel from Milwaukee or Racine to Chicago?

No. Transit time from Milwaukee to Kenosha on KRM would be 53 minutes. Assuming only a five minute wait for a train change, the commute from Kenosha to Chicago on Metra is 105 minutes for a total of 163 minutes (2 hours and 43 minutes).

Amtrak has seven trains per weekday each way between Milwaukee and Chicago with a transit time of 89 minutes (1 hour and 29 minutes) and 66 minutes between Racine and Chicago.

12 How accurate have costs and ridership been for other, major transit systems?

A 2007 Federal Transit Administration report to Congress states that the average actual cost of the 21 "New Starts" proj-

ects studied came in at 20.9% above cost, and average actual ridership was only 63.6% of estimated ridership.[2]

13 What impact would KRM have on other transportation in the state?

KRM commuter rail will take money from other state funded transportation systems.

$53 million of the $250 million capital cost would come from the already stressed Wisconsin Transportation Fund, making that amount unavailable for other state funded transportation.

$4.3 million of the $14.5 million annual operating cost would come from the Wisconsin Transportation Fund, making that amount each year unavailable for other state transit operating subsidies.

Some KRM expenditures will compete for fixed amount, federal "formula" transportation funds to the detriment of other transit systems in the state.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement* (Draft EIS), June 2007, prepared for Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Transit Authority (SWRTA)
2. Pages 8 and 32 respectively http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/CPAR_Final_Report_-_2007.pdf http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/CPAR_Final_Report_-_2007.pdf, Appendix, pages 8 and 32, respectively, accessed December 6, 2008.

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3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 400
Los Angeles, CA 90034
www.reason.org