

Janesville Transit System Transit Development Plan



Executive Summary

Prepared by:



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Janesville Transit Development Plan: Executive Summary

In 2022, Janesville Transit System (JTS) embarked on its most recent Transit Development Plan (TDP), which will guide the agency's implementation of bus system improvements from 2023 to 2027. The 2023-2027 TDP process included a detailed analysis of existing conditions, extensive stakeholder and community outreach efforts, and recommendations for near-term and long-term improvements. This Executive Summary serves as a condensed companion to the final report.

Introduction and Context

The TDP process was guided by JTS' agency-wide goals as identified in the Janesville Area 2020-2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP):

- To promote the role of public transit in the overall Janesville community transportation system.
- To maintain a fiscally sound public transit system as a vital service worthy of public support similar to that provided for other basic City services.
- To serve the public transportation needs of senior citizens, disabled persons, youth, and major employment centers in an efficient, safe, comfortable, and reliable manner as defined by industry standards.
- To comply with all regulations and mandates set forth by the Federal Transit Administration and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

These goals guide the operations and planning approaches JTS employs to meet current and future needs.

System Overview

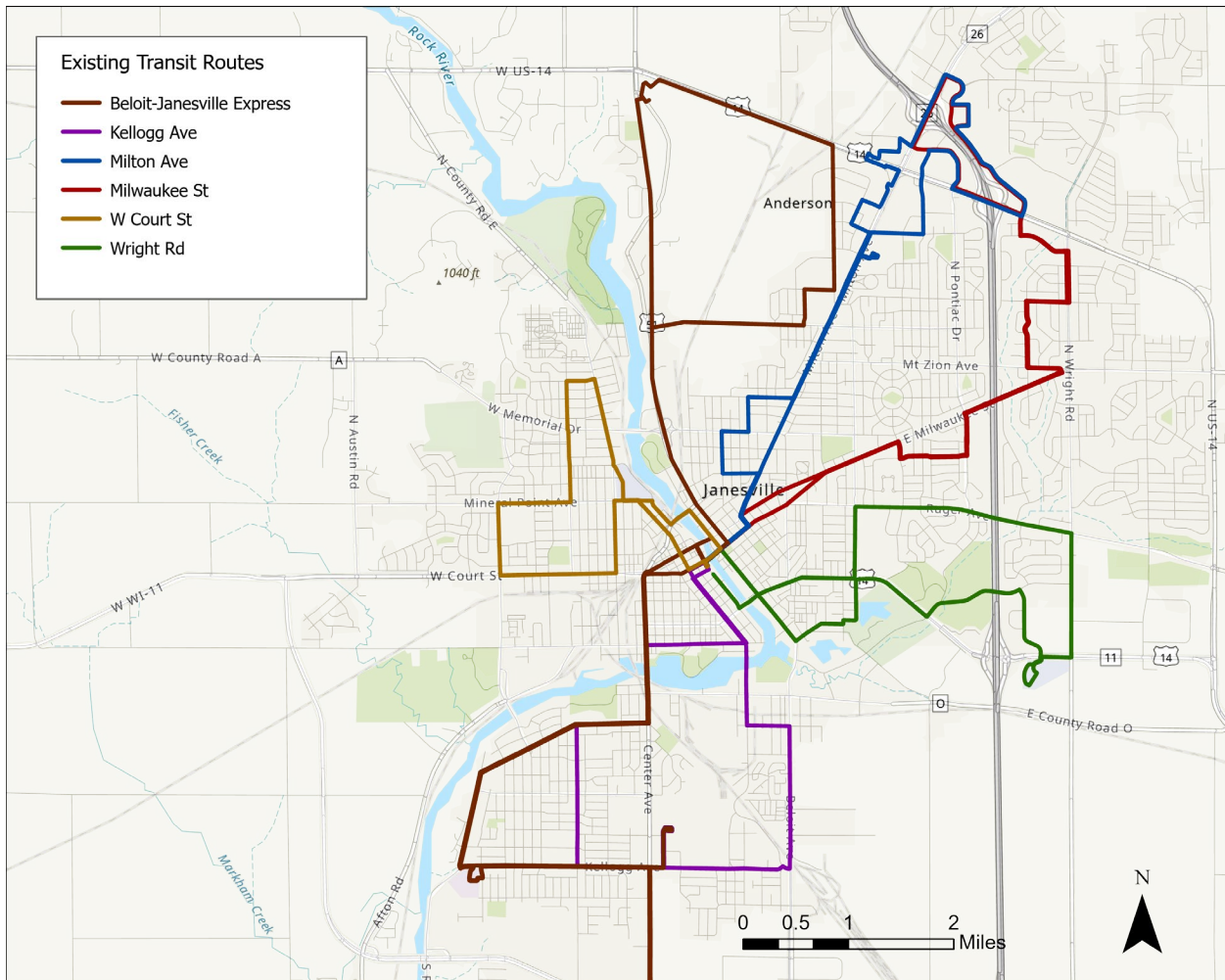
The City of Janesville provides public transit as JTS, serving over 480,000 passengers annually. JTS operates five local fixed bus routes; three local evening routes; the Beloit-Janesville Express (BJE), a regional express route; school tripper service; and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit. The JTS fleet includes 17 revenue vehicles, most of which are heavy-duty, 35-foot buses.

Fixed-Route Bus Service

JTS operates nine regular fixed routes (Figure 1). Five of these routes operate on Saturdays. Operating within a hub-and-spoke, timed-transfer (or pulse) system, all routes serve the Transfer Center in downtown Janesville to facilitate transfers. Weekdays, each of the six regular routes

operate from 6:15 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. on 30- or 60-minute headways; the BJE operates similar hours with 60-minute headways. Service between 6:15 p.m. and 10:15 p.m. on weekday evenings is provided via three Nightside routes, which allow deviation from the route upon request. On Saturdays, the regular routes operate from 8:45 a.m. to 6:15 p.m. once every 30 to 60 minutes. There is no service on Sundays.

Figure 1. Existing Transit Routes (Daytime, Excluding Trippers and Specials)



Needs Assessment

Based on an analysis of current transit performance, as well as the feedback received through community engagement efforts, a number of key needs were identified. These include the following:

- Building on the strengths of the system.** The majority of changes recommended in the previous TDP were implemented by JTS. Staff indicate that the changes have been successful, and riders agree: 93 percent of current riders said JTS meets their needs “well” or “very well.” The strengths of the current route network can provide a foundation for future expansion.

- **Prioritizing the needs of non-drivers.** 80 percent of JTS riders surveyed do not have a valid driver's license. When asked about their travel choices, 60 percent of JTS riders said they would have carpooled, walked, biked, or rolled if transit were not available, and nearly 30 percent would not make the trip. Ensuring service remains available to non-drivers is key to preserving ridership and expanding access to opportunity.
- **Reducing barriers to employment.** When asked about transportation as a barrier to employment, 23 percent of JTS riders said they have quit or lost a job because it was hard to get to work. Reasons cited include the lack of bus service at shift times and difficulty walking due to inclement weather. Improving access to employment destinations (particularly those that are not well-served today) would help JTS support the employment and workforce development needs of Janesville residents and businesses.
- **Right-sizing investment in lower-productivity routes.** Given the changes in travel patterns over the last five years (including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic), changes to certain low-productivity routes may be warranted. JTS should explore ways to better match capacity to demand, including by shifting resources to more productive routes. Strengths of the transit system can be found at key economic activity centers and the Milton Avenue route, and ridership along portions of the Wright Road route and BJE County Loop have had challenges in ridership recovery.

When discussing potential changes to service, riders prioritized the following:

- **Expanding hours and days of service.** When asked to prioritize potential service improvements, riders identified adding Sunday service and later evening hours as top service expansion concepts.
- **Improving on-time performance.** Riders indicate a need for greater attention to service reliability to reduce deviation from scheduled arrival and departure times and ensure better transfer connections.
- **Preserving service where possible.** In the event of budget cuts, riders indicate that a fare increase is preferable to a service reduction.

These principles guided the development of the recommendations for the 2023-2027 TDP.

Beloit-Janesville Express

The TDP included specific analysis of the BJE route, which connects the two urban centers of Beloit and Janesville in Southern Wisconsin, providing critical links to Rock County services and other public and private activity centers. Jointly operated by BTS and JTS, the BJE is the longest route in either transit system and functions as a true regional transit connection. Since the last TDP was completed, the BJE has undergone significant changes in ridership, as well as shifts in customer destinations along the route. These changes include the following:

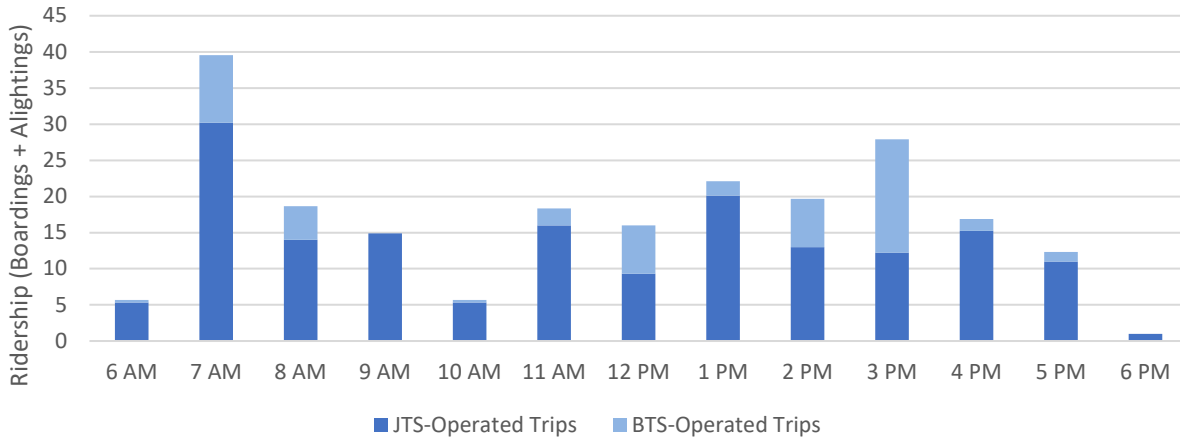
- The relocation of most Rock County social services from the northern County Loop portion of the BJE to the new Daniel Hale Williams Resource Center (DWRC) at 1717 Center Ave.;
- The opening of new employment centers along or adjacent to US-51, including the Dollar General distribution center at 101 Innovation Dr.;

- Significant reductions in ridership across the BTS and JTS systems due to the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Pending consolidation of KANDU Industries locations that will result in the closure of the Barberry location along the County Loop.

Throughout the TDP process, efforts were taken to develop a comprehensive understanding of current strengths, weaknesses, and travel patterns along the BJE. These included meetings with drivers in July and November 2022, collection of detailed ridership data by JTS (May-June 2022) and BTS (December 2022), and direct observation of passenger activity.

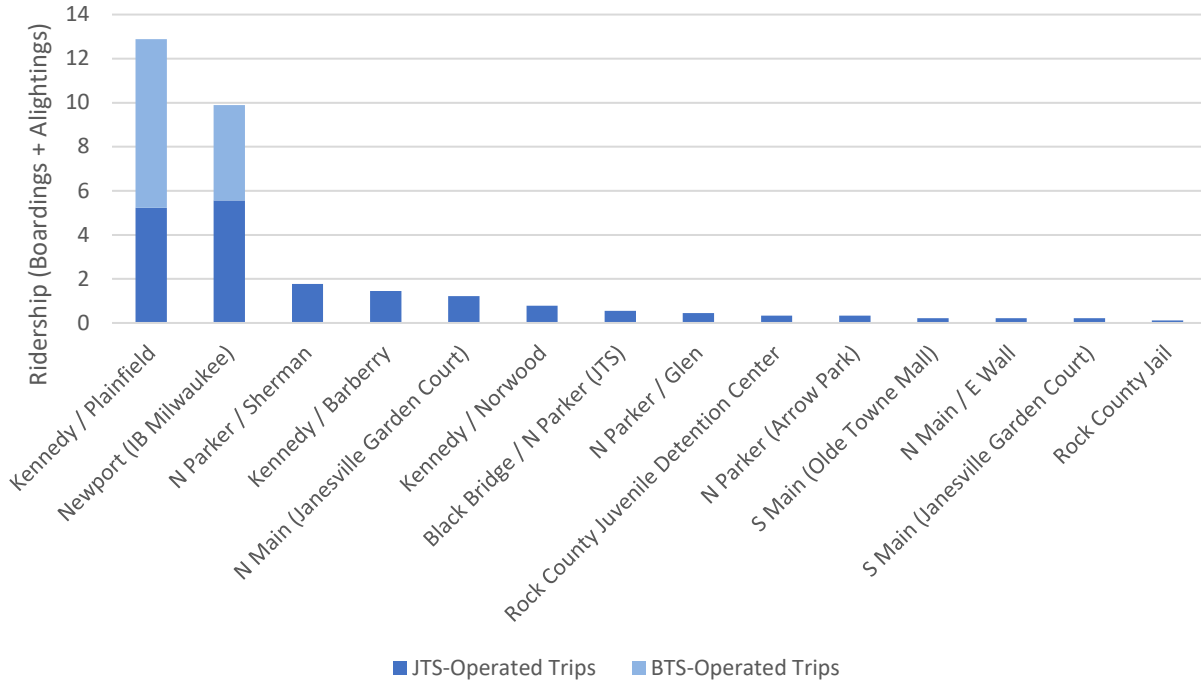
Figure 2 shows the BJE’s average weekday stop activity (including boardings and alightings) by time of day. The peak hours for usage of the BJE are from 7 to 8 AM and 3 to 4 PM. These hours correspond to times of day when the BJE deviates to serve KANDU Industries and IBVI on the County Loop. Ridership activity is less pronounced during midday and evening hours.

Figure 2. 2022 Average Weekday Stop Activity by Time of Day (BJE)



Ridership on the BJE’s County Loop is concentrated at Kennedy/Plainfield (KANDU Industries) and Newport (IBVI). These stops average 10 to 13 boardings and alightings per day, as shown in Figure 3. Other stops on the County Loop average less than one rider per day. In addition, nearly 80 percent of ridership activity on the County Loop occurs on just two trips: the 7:45 AM and 2:45 PM departures from downtown Janesville. Ridership on the County Loop outside these trips is extremely limited, averaging less than or equal to one roundtrip rider per day.

Figure 3. 2022 Average Weekday Stop Activity (County Loop)



Recommendations

Recognizing the uncertainty regarding future revenue and funding for transit, the Janesville TDP outlines three potential future operating scenarios: the Reduced Revenue Scenario, the Current Revenue Scenario, and the Opportunities Scenario. The Reduced Revenue Scenario responds to customer priorities and preserves access to the most essential trips while reducing overall operating costs, offering two potential options for service reduction based on local priorities. The Current Revenue Scenario includes changes that optimize the current bus network while maintaining current service levels and operating costs. Finally, the Opportunities Scenario outlines potential service expansion recommendations that could be implemented if and when additional resources become available.

Reduced Revenue Scenario

Potential Service Reduction Approaches

Option 1: Preserve Frequency

Trimming an hour or two on either end of a route’s span of service would allow for a relatively small reduction in annual expenses while preserving frequency. However, given the proven demand for its current level of service – and calls for expanding service to include Sundays – there is little more than small changes (an hour here and there) that could be made if reductions are necessary.

The second strategy for reducing costs while preserving frequency could be to eliminate the system’s least productive daytime weekday routes. In the section on system performance, Wright Road and the BJE were JTS’ worst performers for productivity. Eliminating either of these routes would save JTS the cost of operating one vehicle and the associated labor costs. Eliminating both would save the cost of two.

Option 2: Preserve Coverage

The most impactful strategy for reducing system operating expense while maintaining coverage is removing a bus from the system operations. This is done either by completely redesigning routes to significantly reduce the cycle time, or by reducing service frequency. For JTS, absent of eliminating a route completely, reducing frequencies is the only viable option available to reduce the number of buses in service. For example, reducing frequency would mean a route that today operates once every 30 minutes would operate once every 60 minutes.

Within the existing JTS route structure, three routes operate on approximately 30-minute cycles: Kellogg Avenue, West Court Street, and Wright Road. Within this context, two of the three existing routes with 30-minute cycles could be paired, or “interlined”, resulting in a trip once every 60 minutes on both Route A and Route B.

There are three options under this scenario that could be employed: Kellogg Avenue and West Court Street could be paired; Kellogg Avenue and Wright Road could be paired; or West Court Street and Wright Road could be paired. It is recommended that the Wright Road and West Court Street routes be paired in this scenario because the pairing maintains an easily legible east-west pattern and Wright Road currently has one of the least productive performances. This strategy would eliminated the cost of using one bus in service and the associated labor costs.

Table 1. Summary of Reduced Scenario Service Concepts

No.	Service Concept	Net Annual Revenue Hours	Net Annual Operating Cost*	Net Vehicles Required	Negative Ridership Impact
1A	Weekday Service: Reduced Span by 1 hour	-1,548	-\$185,760	0	Medium
1B	Saturday Service: Reduced Span by 1 hour	-255	-\$30,600	0	Low
1C	Eliminate BJE	-3096	-\$371,520	-1	High
1D	Eliminate Wright Road	-3580.5	-\$429,660	-1	Minimal
2	Interline Wright Road and West Court Street	-3580.5	-\$429,660	-1	Minimal

*Estimated based on assumptions of fully-allocated cost of \$120 per revenue hour for fixed route service.

Current Revenue Scenario

The Current Revenue Scenario includes minor adjustments that can be implemented without any increase in local funding. These adjustments include minor changes to improve on-time performance and allocating service toward the most productive parts of the system. Table 2 lists the recommended changes by route.

Table 2. Proposed Route Changes (Current Revenue Scenario)

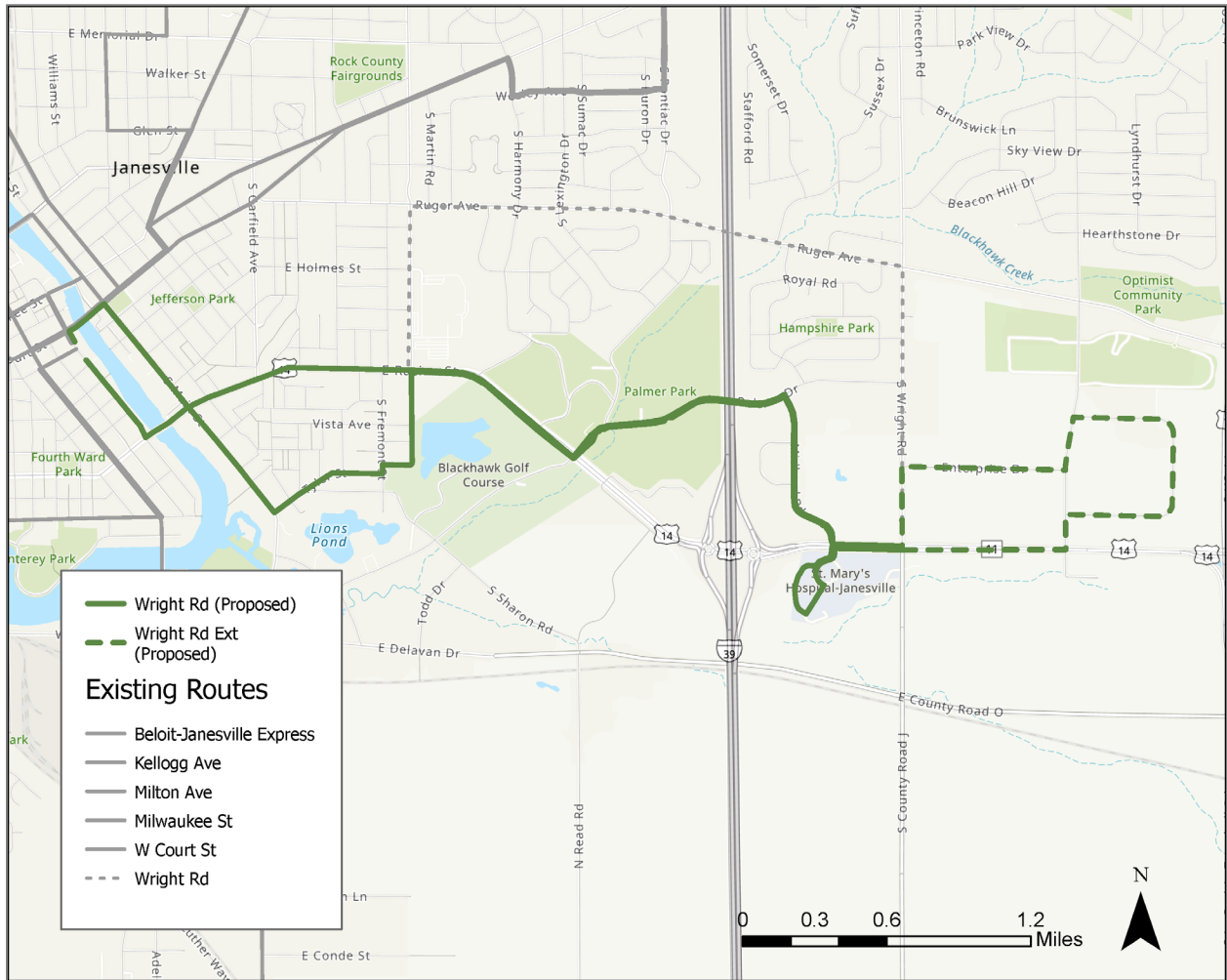
Route Type	Route	Proposed Changes
Regular Local (Weekdays Only)	1: Milton Ave	No Changes
	2: Kellogg Ave	No Changes
	3: Wright Rd	Streamline route and provide more bi-directional service along Racine St. and Palmer Dr. Extend route to east side industrial park (Enterprise Dr./Wuthering Hills Dr./Capital Cir.). Discontinue service along low-ridership segments of Randall Ave./Ruger Ave./ Wright Rd. Maintain current trip schedules with minor timepoint adjustments (no additional resources required).
	4: Court St	No Changes
	5: Milwaukee St	No Changes
Express Route	6: Beloit-Janesville Express	Truncate BJE by removing County Loop service north of downtown Janesville Tripper service would be provided for KANDU at shift times
Nightside Route (Weekdays Only)	7: Nightside-Milton Ave	No Changes
	8: Nightside-East	No Changes
	9: Nightside-West	No Changes

Route-Specific Recommendations

Wright Road Route

Adjustments to the Wright Road Route would include streamlining the route and provide more bi-directional service along Racine St. and Palmer Dr. This saves time and makes the route easier to understand by eliminating the loop pattern. Streamlining the route would also free up the resources needed to extend route to the southeast side – providing more direct access to employers including Grainger Industrial Supply and other major industrial employers along Enterprise Drive and Capital Circle east of the existing route. These changes are shown in the map in Figure 4.

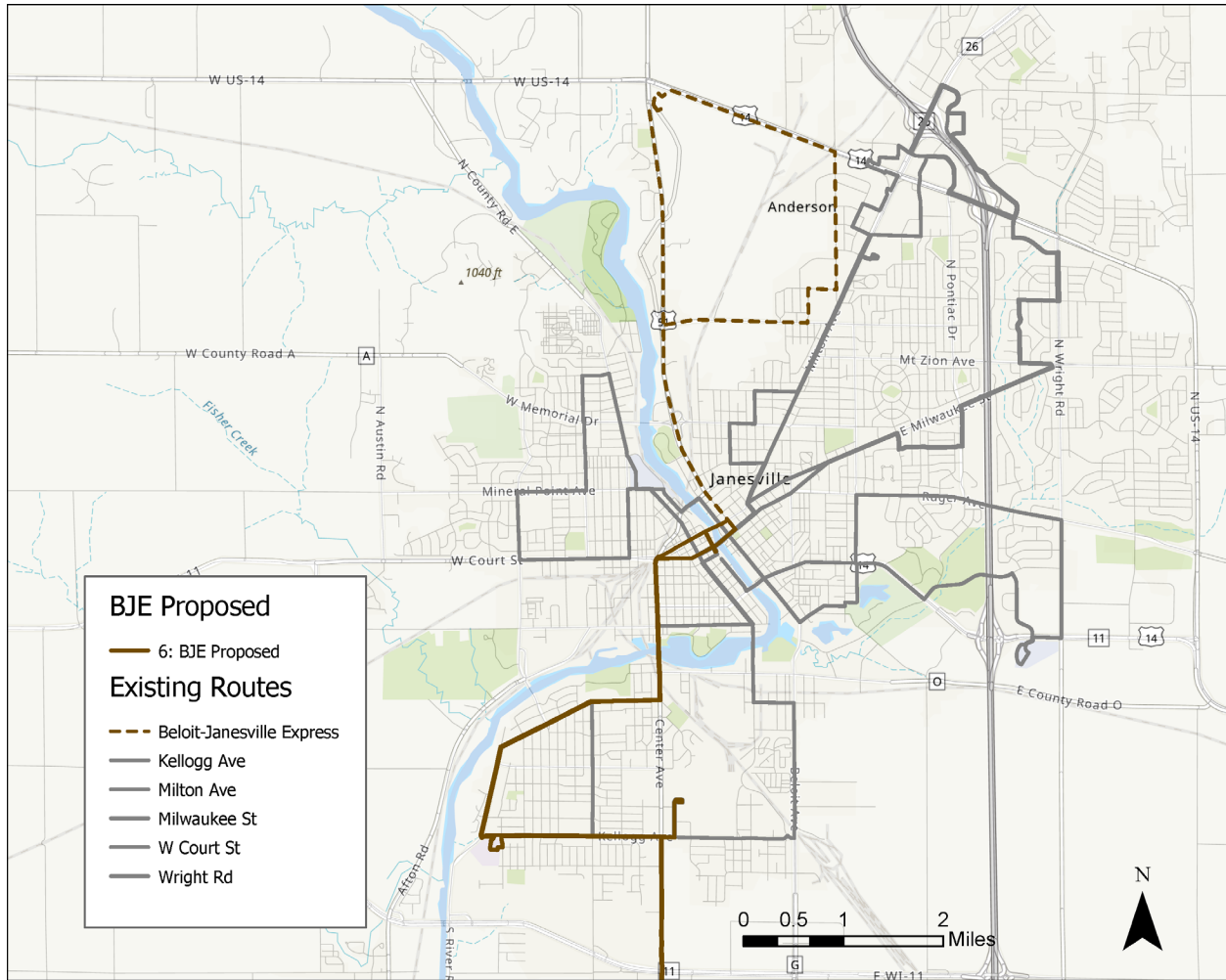
Figure 4. Proposed Wright Road Route Changes



Beloit-Janesville Express

The Beloit-Janesville Express (BJE) runs weekdays between the city of Janesville and the City of Beloit. The BJE travels north from the Beloit Transfer Center, through the JTS Downtown Transfer Center, then continues to Highway 14. In the Current Revenue Scenario all-day service on the County Loop north of the JTS Transfer Center would be phased out, leaving tripper service for the 7:45 AM and 2:45 PM trips only (Figure 5). Stop activity is very low on this part of the route and does not warrant regular fixed-route transit. This area could be better serviced through tripper routes to key destinations like KANDU and eventually Demand-Response service.

Figure 5. Proposed BJE Route changes



Opportunities Scenario

The Opportunities Scenario assumes a condition of increased revenue that would allow JTS to expand service through an on-demand microtransit program.

Service Priorities

In an increased-revenue scenario, JTS would have the opportunity to address a wide range of identified needs. These needs include:

- Expanded service to geographic areas that are currently unserved
- Prioritizing access to employment
- Adding service to new hours or days of week.

To address these needs, the Opportunities Scenario recommends that JTS explore adding a microtransit to pilot a demand-response service to meet travel needs in areas and during hours where/when fixed-route buses are not available.

Microtransit Overview

Microtransit, an emerging mode of transportation that allows customers to make on-demand reservations via a smartphone app or telephone call, can offer an attractive customer experience for transit trips in low-density areas or during off-peak service hours.

Many peer agencies across the country and within Wisconsin have studied or implemented elements of microtransit service, including Green Bay Metro and Valley Transit (Appleton).

Recommendations

Functionally, peer systems with microtransit programs organize service in zones or neighborhoods where riders can travel to or from destinations within. The Opportunities Scenario includes three proposed microtransit zones that are shown and described in the section below.

MICROTRANSIT PROJECT SPOTLIGHT: GREEN BAY METRO

In 2020, Green Bay Metro launched GBM On Demand, the agency's new, on-demand microtransit service. This service offers smartphone-enabled shared rides within four daytime zones and to designated transfer points, as well as throughout the Green Bay Metro service area during late-night hours.

Prior to launch, GBM On Demand was informed by a microtransit feasibility study, as well as extensive collaboration with the operator and paratransit provider, Via Transportation, Inc.

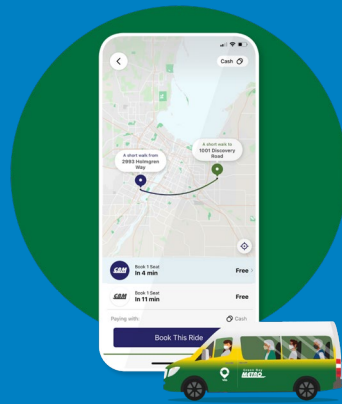


Image Credit: Via.

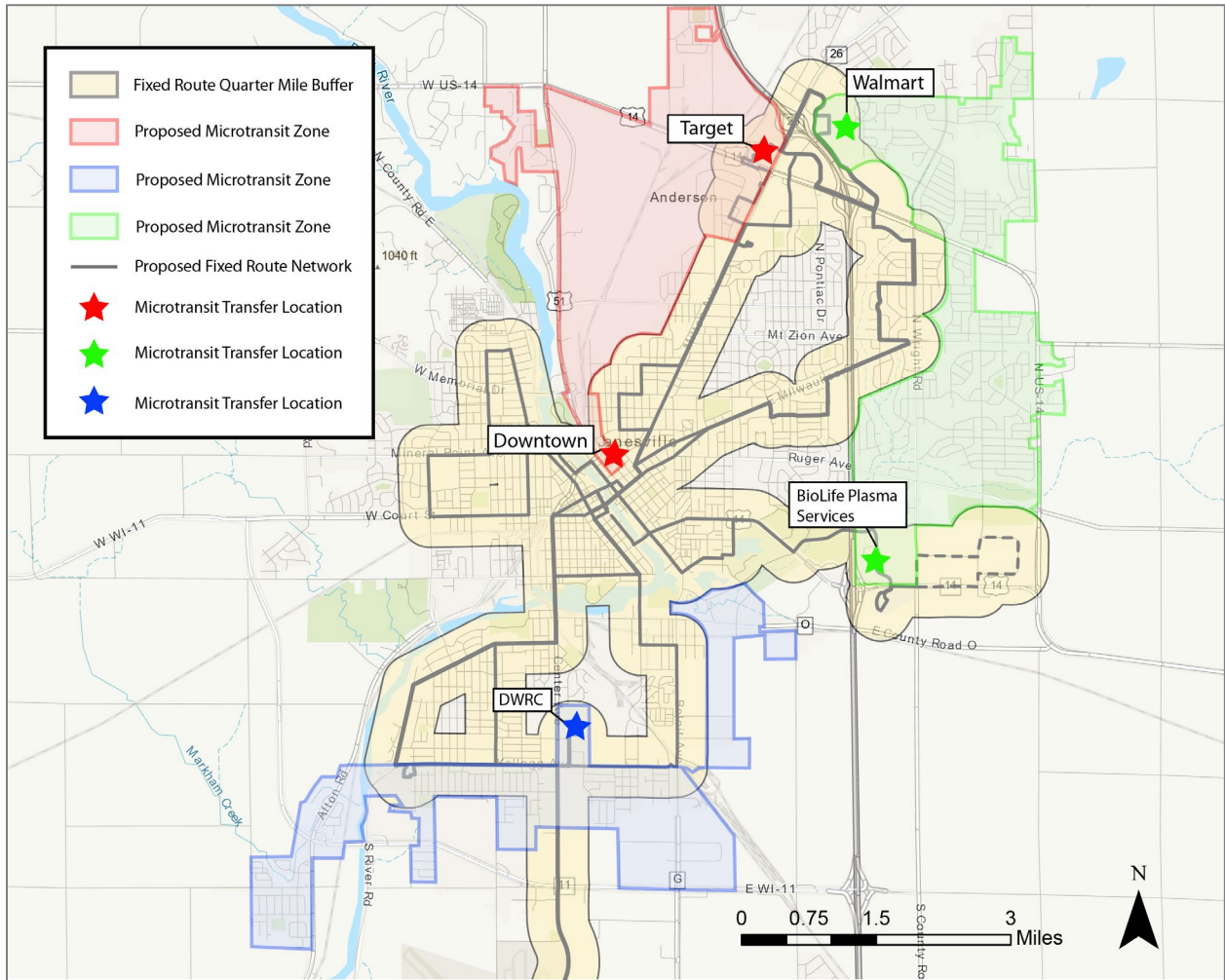
More information available at <https://greenbaywi.gov/GBM-On-Demand>.

Proposed Microtransit Zones

The Opportunities Scenario includes three recommended microtransit zones that would provide service in areas that do not have or may not have regular, fixed route service in the future. Riders could travel to and from destinations within one zone or from one zone to another. Each zone would have one or more transfer points to connect to the fixed route network. The locations of each zone are shown on the map in Figure 6.

The proposed microtransit zones would only provide service within Janesville City limits. This eliminates the need for any immediate intergovernmental service or funding agreements. In the future, coordination with other municipalities in Rock County could be considered based on program performance and regional development.

Figure 6. Proposed JTS Microtransit Zones



Conclusion

The Janesville TDP provides a roadmap for near-term service changes and long-term opportunities for JTS over the next five years. Building on the previous TDP and the strong performance of the transit system, the proposed route modifications will help JTS better match transit service to customer demand. As JTS looks to the future, the Opportunities and Reduced Revenue scenarios will assist the agency in planning for success across a range of potential policy environments, always prioritizing the needs of customers and access to essential destinations. By implementing the recommendations of this report, JTS will continue in its mission to serve the City of Janesville and travelers throughout the region in an effective, fiscally responsible manner for years to come.