

Allow me to share with you an excellent mass-transit plan

I have often commented that greater Madison needs a comprehensive transportation system to connect the airport, surrounding communities, hotels, and shopping areas with the Downtown. Now we have a high-speed rail system potentially bringing even more people into the Downtown and when they step off the train they will step into ... almost nothing. Mass transit Madison is clearly not for the masses.

Ideas in the past have fallen on deaf ears; commuter rail, trolleys, bus rapid transit, or BRT, and other ideas have been suggested but usually were given neither a fair hearing nor a fair chance of succeeding. I believe this is because they were never presented as part of a comprehensive plan involving a mix of transportation options. As long as we keep looking for one fix, we will never develop the comprehensive system that will actually place Madison on the transportation map.

I have seen the transportation mecca in the form of Greater Vancouver's www.travelsmart2010.ca, and the system that it represents. In fact, during the recent Winter Olympics they were able to move an additional 200,000 people around on a daily basis while actually reducing auto traffic in the city during the event. Forget the Olympics — they have reduced auto use in the city by 7 percent despite an increase in vehicles owned. They use a number of modes of transportation to accomplish this, from BRT to bikes, with both trains and trackless trolleys in the mix. The system is cool and cost effective, and it works.

Oh well, here is my plan for Travelsmart Madison 2020.

The Red Line

Runs from terrace to terrace (Memorial Union to Monona Terrace) via the Capital. The vehicles are electric with high-efficiency clean diesel generators producing the power, available now from Mercedes Benz and others. This can be swapped out for zero carbon hydrogen fuel cells when China brings them to market. These "on street" units could look like San Francisco



KEN HARWOOD is executive director of Lafayette Development Corp. and edits and publishes WisconsinDevelopment.com.

Contact: ken@wisconsindevelopment.com
Web site: www.kenharwood.com

Now we have a high-speed rail system potentially bringing even more people into the Downtown and when they step off the train they will step into ... almost nothing. Mass transit Madison is clearly not for the masses.

trolleys or British double decker buses to make them attractive to tourists and conventioners. A \$5 or \$10 day pass would be available for unlimited use.

The Blue Line

A shuttle system from the airport to the Downtown hotels and the new convention

center transit stop, for that critical train-to-plane link. Natural gas would power this system and it would be a public-private partnership between the rail system, airport, hotels and MG&E. Free to ride, but tip the driver.

The Green Line

This would be a BRT system Downtown to Middleton with stops at Greenway Station, Middleton, Hilldale, Memorial Union, the Arts District and the Convention Center. Hybrid buses with dedicated lanes on University Avenue and Park Street. There would also be a yellow line doing the same thing down East Wash and Willy Street. The buses would be tie-dyed.

The Purple Connectors

Light rail from surrounding communities to Downtown. But only after a trial BRT system has proven that there is critical mass sufficient to justify the cost.

The Silver Streak

Milwaukee to Madison, coming soon! I have mentioned in the past that I think the money spent on the new high-speed rail system could be better allocated and will be wasted if there is not a better option than the current Metro in place for passengers to continue to their final destination once they get to Madison.

I need also to mention that the private sector has figured out a way to actually make money in the Madison market by providing reasonably convenient buses from Madison to Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Chicago. If the stars align, we may see more cost-effective flights from the airport with the addition of a new airline or two, and our current bike system is already one of the best in the world.

With a lot of planning and careful investment, we can have a transit system to rival Vancouver's, or anyone else's for that matter.

But Ken, you ask, what's "The Arts District"? That's another column. ■