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**MCT's 20X Gateway Commerce Express serves passengers connecting to MCT from the Emerson Park MetroLink Station to access the Gateway Commerce Center.**

## Transit, collaboration Efforts helping industrial parks grow

The Telegraph

**PONTOON BEACH** — Collaboration between logistics companies, local governments and transit agencies are helping feed the demand for labor in Madison County's growing logistics industry, according to officials from St.

Louis Regional Freightway.

For more than a decade, Madison County Transit has been expanding its service in the warehouse district along Illinois 111, especially to the Gateway Commerce Center, where the workforce

is a key contributor to the 9,500 warehouse employees in Edwardsville alone.

As demand for labor grew among major employers such as Amazon, World Wide Technology, Crescent, Hersey and others, staying up to speed on their evolving workforce needs was critical to ensuring a transit service model that delivered. It was noted that World Wide Technology recently signed one of the region's largest industrial lease agreements adding two million square feet to its regional footprint and an estimated 1,500 additional jobs.

This has created both stress and opportunity for transit operators.

MCT Managing Director SJ Morrison credits Mary Lamie, vice president of multimodal enterprises for Bi-State Development and head of the St. Louis Regional Freightway, for getting people together to talk about the issues and develop plans to deal with them.

"In her unique position as both head of the St. Louis Regional Freightway and a member of the leadership team at Bi-State Development which also operates Metro Transit, Mary Lamie helped set up key meetings to bring those familiar with the evolving workforce transportation needs to the table," said Morrison. "A lot of valuable information came from those meetings which influenced how we continue to adapt our service to these employment centers."

Among the critical things learned was that shift change times at the industrial parks did not always align with the peak available service. One route that provided service to the busy industrial corridor had buses that left at 3:30

a.m. and they were overcrowded, even with three buses serving the route. Some individuals coming from Alton or Collinsville were having to take three or more different buses to reach the industrial parks, resulting in a commute that

could last up to 90 minutes or even two hours in some cases. MCT decided they could do better.

Ultimately, the plan called for identifying three peak periods for the industrial parks, which turned out not to be same as normal commuter rush hours, and working to retrofit the bus service accordingly, adding services where there is the greatest demand and reducing it where there is little demand. Even during the COVID-19 global pandemic, demand for transportation to jobs within the Gateway Commerce Center has not declined.

In August 2020, MCT added two new express routes from the Alton and Collinsville areas directly serving the warehouses throughout Gateway Commerce Center. The new express service significantly reduced travel times for riders from those communities, making it possible to complete the one-way trip in as little as 25 to 30 minutes in many cases.

The new 24X express route from Alton and 25X express route from Collinsville have made modest ridership gains since their inception, even as the pandemic has raged on, as operations within many of the logistics related businesses continued or even accelerated. In all, between its express routes and shuttles to and through Gateway Commerce Center, each weekday MCT operates total of 117 trips to and from the industrial park. The transit district also serves Lakeview Commerce Center and the new Gateway Tradeport Park, which is home to one of the region's newest Amazon facilities.

In response to growing demand, MCT also introduced the 20X Gateway Commerce Express in May 2019, serving passengers connecting to MCT from the Emerson Park MetroLink Station to access the Gateway Commerce Center. The 20X has seen significant growth over the last 18 months and that growth continued even in the midst of the pandemic. To accommodate the continued rise in demand, several additional trips were added in

the morning and afternoon, with the new trips producing an average ridership increase of 81 percent between May and October 2020.

"The Freightway's role in bringing all the stakeholders together with the transit agencies to better communicate their specific needs was significant," said Steve Zuber, principal with Barber Murphy Commercial Real Estate Solutions, who recognizes the importance of public transit access to economic development. "People were heard, and something was done because of it. The outcome underscores how phenomenal the spirit of cooperation is within this region."

Lamie noted that many people representing a large number of interests were able to get together to work on solutions to common problems.

"The openness to collaborate has strengthened the business climate and resulted in a workforce competitive edge as the growing companies in the region's various industrial parks are able to more efficiently get their employees to and from their facilities," said Lamie. "The No. 1 criteria for site selection is workforce availability, and Metro Transit and MCT are stepping up to provide reliable access to workforce transportation to a larger labor force, helping support and attract new manufacturing and logistics industries to the region's bi-state market and creating opportunities for expansion for existing companies."

For specific MCT schedule details, timetables are posted at [www.mct.org](http://www.mct.org) and will be available at MCT stations, on MCT buses and at locations throughout Madison County. MCT also oversees RideFinders, the region's rideshare program, and it continues to modify its vanpool program to offer more direct, customized vanpool options at reduced rates, providing another alternative to reach the industrial parks. For details about MCT services, call 618-797-4636, visit [www.mct.org](http://www.mct.org), or e-mail [info@mct.org](mailto:info@mct.org).

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