

MCT

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He spoke extensively to members of Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois during a recent presentation.

“We are building momentum and driving change, and as a result we are changing some of our services to remove obstacles, make them as user friendly and as accessible as possible,” he said. “My predecessor, Jerry Kane, did an amazing job of building an organization that is well positioned to help transform communities and serve residents in a really high-quality way.”

Transportation should not be a barrier for people getting to work, he said.

Madison County Transit offers four primary services:

- Fixed-route bus service — the green and white buses seen operating
- Paratransit for elderly and disabled passengers
- RideFinders, a ridesharing program offered across the nine-county region
- MCT Trails bikeway system, more than 135 miles of scenic bike-ways that have been built primarily on former rail corridors

Employees fall under Agency for Community Transit, a nonprofit organization that contracts with Madison County Transit to operate all of its services.

The bus service recently was simplified by eliminating some zones and reducing some fares. Rides anywhere in Madison County are just \$1. Rides going to St. Louis or St. Clair County are \$3 because the service is making connections with other regional operators such as St. Clair County Transit and Bi-State Development.

Morrison said he sees the cooperative approach with surrounding areas as one of increasing importance. To that end, MCT is attempting to make service faster, more direct and more connected to employers and destinations. The agency recently received Rebuild Illinois funds that will allow it to install a “computer-aided dispatch, automated vehicle location system.”

“That’s a fancy way of saying we are working to get information to our customers and to our operations staff,” he said. “You’ll be able to pull up infor-

mation on your phone, or on a screen at a bus stop that will let you know the bus is three minutes away, or 30 minutes away. It will allow people to plan their trips in a much more efficient manner.”

Under the category of innovation, Morrison said the agency is working in concert with a number of stakeholders on transit- and trail- oriented projects that would allow people to better access the jobs in areas of the greatest need.

“This would involve public-private partnerships and introducing new service in new areas. This is on everybody’s radar screen. We want to help be part of the solution,” he said.

In East Alton, just south of Eastgate Shopping Center, a new park and ride lot is being constructed on Illinois Route 3. The facility should be open this fall and will in part serve a shopping area that is going through a renaissance and serves as one of MCT’s primary park and ride lots for express bus service.

MCT is also looking to do something similar along the Illinois Route 157 corridor in Collinsville but does not yet have a location nailed down.

He talked at length about service in the Route 111 logistics area, where there is close to 10,000 full- and part-time jobs, calling it “top of mind for us, too.”

The corridor contains three major light warehouse industrial parks, the Lakeview Commerce Center in Edwardsville, the Gateway Commerce Center in Edwardsville and Pontoon Beach, and the newest, the Gateway TradePort in Pontoon Beach.

“These are growing, with a variety of multinational corporations. It’s been interesting because every single employer has a different set of shift times. So, trying to serve it with bus service is a challenge but one that we are happy to engage. We have been operating service in the area for 15 years, but recently been looking at ways to do it in the most efficient way,” he said.

A transfer station is being considered along Illinois Route 111 in Pontoon Beach. MCT received a Rebuild Illinois grant for more than \$4 million to

build the station. Various fixed routes that serve the area would then have one “one pulse point to descend upon,” with shuttles taking passengers from the transfer center to the various places of employment in the warehouses.

“The shuttle would operate on a high-frequency basis. What we found, for instance, at Gateway Commerce alone, there are 27 different unique shifts. Many of them fall within three peak windows. We’ve created some express bus service (to the warehouse) from Alton, Collinsville and from St. Clair County where we are seeing the greatest demand.”

A shuttle is already in place and at peak times runs every 15 minutes.

A new 111 transfer station could have space that would allow substation use by local law enforcement, a climate-controlled passenger waiting area, vending, and public meeting space, he said.

“We think this could dramatically improve transportation to and from the warehouse districts here and make those districts distinct in the region, and possibly in the Midwest,” Morrison said.

Regarding the RideFinders carpooling program, which has been around since 1994, there has recently been several productive meetings with employers and others regarding growing the federally funded service. RideFinders was originally formed to reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicles on the road to help meet federal air quality standards, through carpooling and vanpooling.

Riders pays a low monthly fare and efforts are underway to find employers willing to subsidize more of the cost and to reach a wider pool of users.

The average RideFinders commuter experiences just under a 100-mile round trip, which represents a saving of about \$2,400 a year in vehicle costs.

Efforts are also underway to implement several new projects and initiatives regarding the MCT Trails, which already make Southwestern Illinois unique in the region, Morrison said.

“We think the trails are already beauti-

ful, but we’re adding trees, wildflowers and shrubs to some high-visibility areas,” he said. The agency also launched a commemorative tree and bench program allowing people to honor family members, organizations, or businesses.

Morrison said the agency is also installing wayfinding signage to help navigate the system. A pilot wayfinding approach was launched at Mont Junction in Glen Carbon with plans to expand systemwide this summer.

His predecessor Jerry Kane retired in 2019 and was MCT’s only director from 1980 until Morrison, an Edwardsville native who had worked for years at MCT, was appointed. Kane’s preservation of the vital trail corridors is paying off in the attractiveness of the region, Morrison said.

“I don’t think even Jerry could have anticipated the trails’ popularity and how they would impact property values of adjacent property owners and become one of the more sought-after amenities for new homebuyers. It’s been that way for close to 20 years, and we’re very proud of that.”

People come from all over the Midwest to spend a weekend on the trails, he said.

Safety enhancements for the trails are in the works, with MCT officials thinking about bridges and tunnels and as few at-grade crossings as possible.

“Doing so is expensive, but it’s the right thing to do,” Morrison said. MCT is now putting in a tunnel at Route 157 in Collinsville to accommodate the Schoolhouse Trail (near the Culver’s restaurant). A bridge is being considered over Illinois Route 111 in Pontoon Beach for the same trail.

In general the agency wants to do more regionally, he said. He noted MCT is extending its reach to serve an area outside Madison County, by providing high-frequency bus service to St. Clair County and from Metro Link locations to the Illinois Route 111 logistics hub.

MCT has also completed the Quercus Grove Trail up to Staunton and the Goshen Trail to O’Fallon.

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