



MobiliSE Receives More Than \$4 Million State of Wisconsin Grant to Expand Workforce Mobility Options, Increase Access to Jobs for Working Milwaukee Parents

Workforce Innovation Grant from Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Department of Workforce Development Will Expand FlexRide Milwaukee to Connect More Workers With Jobs in South, West Suburbs

MILWAUKEE (June 29, 2022) – A more than \$4 million grant from the State of Wisconsin will help MobiliSE connect workers in the City of Milwaukee with jobs in the south and west suburbs – including working parents who are struggling with rising child care and transportation costs.

Gov. Tony Evers announced the Workforce Innovation Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation and Department of Workforce Development at a news conference on Wednesday.

The grant will fund the expansion of FlexRide Milwaukee, an on-demand rideshare service currently connecting Milwaukee workers with jobs beyond the reach of bus lines in the Menomonee Falls and Butler area. The additional funds will sustain the service and expand it to other parts of the region starting in 2023. The grant will also fund long-distance shuttles to select job sites outside of expansion communities.

The grant places a focus on working parents, positioning high-quality child care centers along Milwaukee County Transit System bus routes in Milwaukee as “mobility hubs.” Participants who use FlexRide from a “mobility hub” will receive cost assistance for child care and rideshare vouchers for emergency rides during the workday. Rideshare services will also be provided for workers needing transportation outside bus service hours and outside FlexRide service areas.

A nonprofit transportation management association (TMA) will administer the programs with local, state and federal funds, as well other private sources. It will be organized by MobiliSE with a board of directors of business, community and workforce development leaders from across the region. A contracted provider will operate the service.

“We are grateful for Gov. Evers and the State of Wisconsin stepping up to help get more people to work by reducing the twin barriers to employment: lack of affordable access to



transportation and child care,” MobilISE Executive Director Dave Steele said. “We are thankful for the work of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, UW-Milwaukee and other project partners in launching the FlexRide pilot. We look forward to building on that foundation.”

Added Steele: “This is the next stop on the road to fulfilling the vision of MobilISE – a stronger Southeastern Wisconsin through better connectivity, whether you have a car or not. We’re not there yet, but this grant will make a real difference.”

Said MobilISE Board Chair and former Wauwatosa Mayor Kathy Ehley: “MobilISE has united leaders across Southeastern Wisconsin around last-mile solutions like this for years – and now we are bringing one to life as the first truly regional approach to innovative workforce transportation. Still, we know the majority of jobs in Southeastern Wisconsin remain out of reach for unemployed or underemployed individuals. The COVID-19 pandemic and rising gas and car prices have exacerbated this problem. This grant funding will help close that gap.”

Added MobilISE Vice Chair and community volunteer Samantha Maldonado: “This grant will help deliver more equitable access to employment opportunities, education and resources for working mothers – and many others – across the region, reducing the time and cost of child care and of getting to work.”

The announcement comes three months after the official launch of the FlexRide Milwaukee pilot, funded by a \$1 million National Science Foundation grant to UW-Milwaukee and SEWRPC. Riders can use an app to request rides to jobs or job interviews from two large neighborhood zones on the north and northwest sides of Milwaukee. Drivers typically pick up riders from the nearest street corner and take them to any workplace in the Menomonee Falls and Butler area. Depending on the zone, the cost is either free or \$1.50 for a one-way trip.

FlexRide ridership has increased steadily since its launch, gaining momentum in recent weeks. Since early May, weekly ridership has grown 170%, to roughly 130 rides taken each week. The grant is expected to fund up to 750 riders and at least 100 participating businesses and child care providers at any given time through 2024. Thousands of riders could ultimately be served during the life of the grant.

“The FlexRide Milwaukee pilot has been a unique opportunity to figure out how microtransit could help connect residents to jobs beyond the reach of our region’s transit services,” said SEWRPC Executive Director Kevin Muhs. “This grant from the state will



help the FlexRide partnership to expand services and help solve a long-standing problem facing the region.”

Mobilise will coordinate all grant activities, convening partners, tracking outcomes and reporting. Project partners include SEWRPC, Employ Milwaukee and the Waukesha-Ozaukee-Washington Workforce Development Board.

Said Employ Milwaukee President and CEO Chytania Brown: “Transportation is one of the most significant barriers to employment for thousands of people in Milwaukee. This grant will reduce that barrier and help connect people to jobs. We’re excited as an organization to promote this expanded service.”

Efforts to expand FlexRide Milwaukee come following a study completed this spring exploring the issues of “last-mile” connections between Milwaukee workers and suburban employers. Mobilise and SEWRPC – in partnership with the WEDC, United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County, Mandel Group, the City of Franklin, GRAEF, and M7 – led the study, which was performed by HNTB.

Said Steele: “We hope this is just the start. From expanded bus rapid transit to taking a seat at the table on the I-94 East-West reconstruction project, Mobilise will continue to bring leaders together to advocate for enhanced multimodal transportation and reduced transportation inequities across the region.”

For More Information

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