

Pace Unveils First Pulse Express Bus Service Plans For Milwaukee Avenue, Niles

By TOM ROBB Journal & Topics Reporter | Posted: Saturday, April 4, 2015 8:30 am

The Pace Suburban Bus system's Arterial Rapid Transit program will roll out first in Niles along the Route 270 Milwaukee Avenue line from Jefferson Park to Golf Mill. Pace officials also revealed the new service has a name: Pulse.

Pace and village of Niles officials announced a public meeting to discuss plans for the new Pulse service on Wednesday, Apr. 22 at the Niles Park Dist. Oasis Fun Center at 7877 N. Milwaukee Ave.

The 7.6-mile route from the Jefferson Park Blue Line CTA and Metra terminal on Chicago's Northwest side to Golf Mill Mall would see 10 stations, two terminals at Jefferson Park and Golf Mill and eight in between, with one about every half-mile.

Construction is expected to begin sometime next year. The full service is not expected to begin until 2017.

Stations would be located along Milwaukee at the Jefferson Park Transit Center at Lawrence Avenue, Central Avenue near Foster, Austin and Ardmore avenues and Milwaukee, Highland Avenue near Devon and Nagle, Touhy Avenue, at Harlem, Howard and Milwaukee, Oakton Street, Main Street and Dempster Street before ending at Golf Mill.

Pulse buses would have several advantages over typical bus service. The buses would include a traffic signal priority (TSP) system that is an advanced GPS-based tracking system which can also communicate with traffic signals.

Unlike police and fire first responders who have the ability to override a traffic light, the TSP system would be able to send a request to stoplights that a green be extended by up to 10 seconds or a red turn green a few seconds sooner than it otherwise would, to stay on schedule.

Traffic conditions could merit the system to deny a request, Wilmot said.

Integration of the TSP system alone is expected to shave 20% off typical Route 270 ride times.



Milwaukee Avenue Pulse Bus Station Map

A Pace map identifies 10 stations for an arterial rapid transit bus that would run through Niles between the Jefferson Park CTA and Metra terminal to Golf Mill once built in 2017.

Wilmot said other features of the system such as slightly elevated “stations” that would bring passengers flush with a bus door’s height, more limited number of stops and the fact that stops would be located at intersections just beyond the stoplight are all designed to speed boarding times, shaving more time off a trip.

Cost of construction for stations and traffic signal integration is expected to reach \$8.5 million. New buses purchased from the California-based El Dorado corporation would cost \$4.5 million. Buses would be built in Kansas, Wilmot said.

Money for the project is coming from a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grant administered by Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Wilmot said 90% of travelers on the Route 270 bus board at one of the 10 sites designated to be stations.

Pulse buses would run along Milwaukee Avenue once every 10 minutes during peak hours and once every 15 minutes during off-peak hours. On weekends Pulse buses would run about every 15 minutes from the early morning until 10 p.m. They would continue until midnight on weekends running every 30 minutes.

There would be a net increase of buses along Milwaukee Avenue, but regular Route 270 service would be reduced to once every 30 minutes on weekdays and once every 60 minutes on weekends between Jefferson Park and Golf Mill.

Route 270 buses moving north of Golf Mill into Glenview would maintain about the same frequency they currently do.

Wilmot said the TSP system would not be controlled by drivers. He said the systems monitoring both the bus and traffic conditions would send requests to traffic.

One thing used other with non-Pace express bus systems is a dedicated bus only lane. Wilmot said that would not be the case with the Pulse system. Rather, buses would travel in regular traffic as they do now.

Unlike the dark blue of the regular Pace and Niles Free buses, Pulse buses would be purple so riders would be able to easily tell the difference between them.

Wilmot said naming the system Pulse, much like a Los Angeles transit system also running a similar service, and Oakland, CA, both calling their express systems Rapid, also gives the clarity to riders.

The village of Niles has been very involved in the project for years.

The idea for an enhanced suburban bus service was identified first in Pace’s 2020 Vision Plan adopted in 2001. The Milwaukee route was identified as a priority in a 2009 arterial rapid transit study by Pace.

Wilmot said the Niles Free Bus that could serve as a circulator for the Pulse service was a key factor in making that route a priority.

Other Pulse routes are expected to come, not only through Niles but other Northwest suburbs as well.

Niles village officials said Pace presented long range plans to the Northwest Municipal Conference at their Thursday, Mar. 26 meeting that includes express bus services on 24 Arterial Rapid Transit corridors and 11 expressway corridors.

Wilmot said the Milwaukee bus is the first Pulse project and a Pulse route mirroring the Route 250 Dempster Street line that runs from the Kiss & Fly near O'Hare Airport to the Davis Street CTA station in Evanston would be the second Pulse project followed by one in the Western suburbs.

Other routes that could also see Pulse service through Niles and in parts of the Northwest suburbs include Golf Road, Harlem and Touhy avenues. Wilmot did not have a timeline for when those projects might take place.