

Milwaukee Avenue rapid-transit bus service to begin by year's end

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News

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Construction is underway on 10 Milwaukee Avenue express bus stations, setting the stage for the first line of a planned PACE rapid-transit network between Jefferson Park and Niles. | Alex Nitkin / Sun-Times

Alex Nitkin | For the Sun-Times

Construction is underway on 10 Milwaukee Avenue express bus stations, setting the stage for the first line of a planned rapid-transit network that's supposed to begin service between Jefferson Park and Niles by the end of the year.

Buses on the PULSE Milwaukee Line are to run every 10 to 15 minutes between the Jefferson Park Transit Center and the Golf Mill Shopping Center in Niles, making the 7.6-mile trip 25 percent faster than the existing No. 270 bus, according to Pace, the suburban transit agency.

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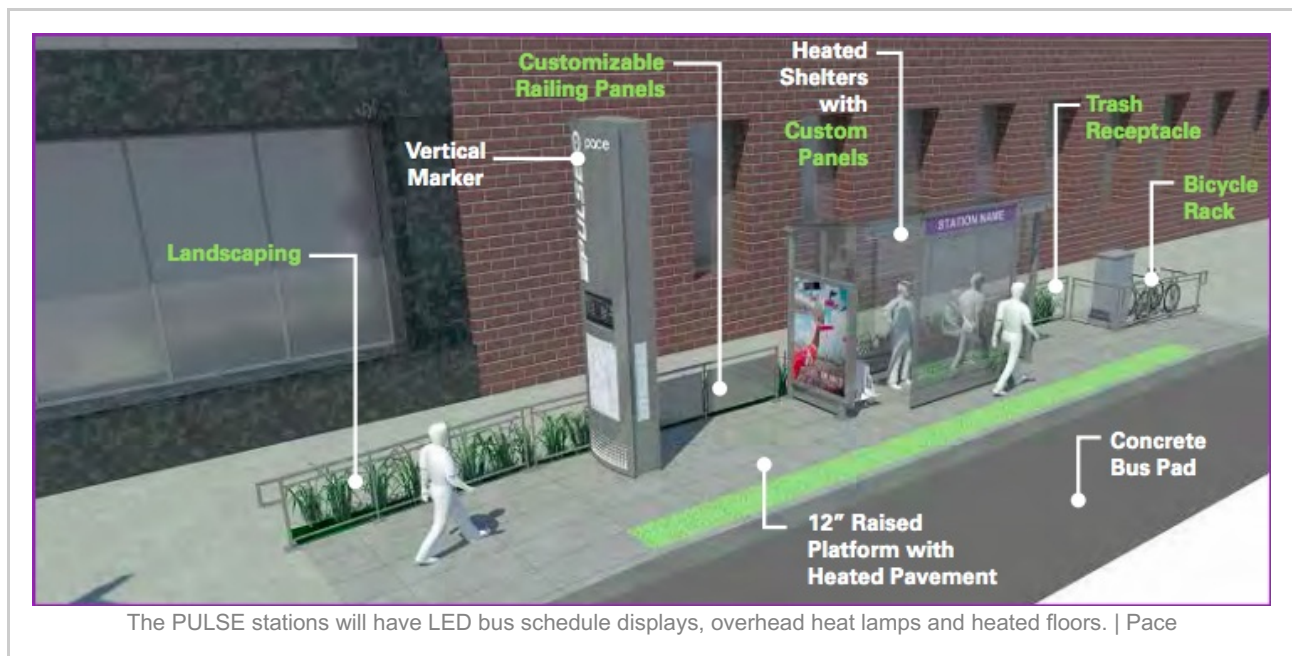
Pace is rolling out new buses for the route, equipped with Wi-Fi and charging outlets in every row of seats, spokeswoman Maggie Daly Skogsbakken said.

The stations are to include LED displays of bus schedules, overhead heat lamps and heated floors to melt snow and ice.

The new buses and stations will cost about \$14 million, officials said, most of that from a federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grant.

Planners designed the stops like miniature L stations, complete with their own art designs, in an effort to attract riders, said Charlotte O'Donnell Obodzinski, the agency's supervisor for rapid transit.

"It's easy for people to forget about bus service when the only thing marking it is a sign planted in the ground," Obodzinski said. "So we're trying to create . . . our own kind of rail network, where communities are seeing the investment. And we're attracting more investing around it."



The curbs are being built to be flush against the bus entrances so wheelchair users can roll aboard without having to wait for electric ramps, Obodzinski said.

With a "transit signal priority" system that turns traffic lights green for buses when they're behind schedule, the station upgrades should mean riders can expect the buses to run on time all day, she said.

“For people who live in Niles and don’t have cars, this is going to mean they can suddenly get downtown very easily,” Niles Mayor Andrew Przybylo said. “You get right down to Jefferson Park, and 20 minutes later you’re in the Loop.”

The promise of new transit has brought a rush of development along Milwaukee, Przybylo said. Metra has asked for proposals for a new station near Touhy Avenue, and he said developers envision an entertainment district “comparable to Rosemont” around the Leaning Tower YMCA.

PULSE also is drawing attention to Jefferson Park, where three multi-story apartment buildings are set to be built near the transit center over the next two years, according to Ald. John Arena (45th).

“What we’re showing here is that we’re not just thinking in the traditional hub-and-spoke model that’s sending everyone downtown,” Arena said. “We’re seeing more companies relocating to the Northwest Side. Our infrastructure has to reflect that.”

Pace has published a long-range plan to build 36 rapid-transit bus lines through the city and suburbs, including a 15-mile Dempster Street line set to run between the Davis Street CTA station in Evanston and O’Hare Airport beginning in 2019.



What the PULSE buses will look like. | Pace



A rendering of a PULSE system bus stop. | Pace