

PRESS RELEASE



Contact **Clarene Mitchell**, Director of Communications and
Collaboration – Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin,
Inc.

Telephone/Email (office) 414-933-0064 Ext. 214 or (cell) 414-736-1546 /
cmitchell@bhcw.org

Contact Rev. Willis Brisco, President – Milwaukee Inner-city
Congregations Allied for Hope

Telephone/Email 414-264-0805 / Brisco@micahempowers.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2014

\$13.5 MILLION TRANSPORTATION VICTORY FOR BLACK HEALTH COALITION OF WISCONSIN AND MILWAUKEE INNER-CITY CONGREGATIONS ALLIED FOR HOPE

Central city residents will benefit from new bus routes that will connect riders to suburban job hubs.

Milwaukee, WI, May 21, 2014– In what is being seen as a landmark victory, Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin, Inc. (BHCW) and Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAHA) have reached an agreement with the Wisconsin and the U.S. Departments of Transportation to spend \$13.5 million to create and expand bus routes linking Milwaukee central city residents to employment opportunities in suburbs North of Milwaukee County.

The agreement is the result of a lawsuit by BHCW and MICAHA who combined their forces in a legal challenge to create mass transit opportunities to coincide with the massive \$1.7 billion Zoo Interchange that was set to repair and expand the busiest interchange in the state. The lawsuit, initially filed in 2012, has been settled through court supervised mediation sessions, presided over by U.S. federal judge Lynn Adelman. Over the course of the next four years, settlement dollars will be used to right the injustice of the original Zoo Interchange plan.

The settlement covers up to \$11.5 million over four years for bus routes that will have the dual goals of easing interstate congestion as well as transporting workers between Milwaukee and suburban communities. An additional \$2 million over four years to transit providers to help enhance services. This could include real-time route information and outreach to boost ridership. The funds will flow directly from the Federal DOT, to the Wisconsin DOT and then to Milwaukee County for distribution to MCTS.

The final routes and enhancements services must be mutually agreed upon by the plaintiffs and the State. It is important to note that Milwaukee County will not be on the hook to financially support the new bus routes.

"This is good news for a community that has the sad distinction of having a Black male unemployment rate higher than 50% and the Black/White employment gap being number one in the country." stated Dr. McManus, President/CEO of Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin. "It is hoped that through the course of the funded four years, the importance of the routes will be readily seen by the involved counties and the state and efforts will be made to secure other funding for the continuation of the bus routes." Quality health is more than just having access to medical care; it is also influenced by where one lives, works and plays - the social determinants of health. BHCW is a community based health advocacy organization; their 25th anniversary was marked in 2013. The advancement of employment opportunities for Milwaukee central city residents is a necessary tool to address the many health disparities that the community experience.

Although new bus routes have not been fully finalized yet, the initial route will link transit riders to employment opportunities in Menomonee Falls, with special emphasis on the city's industrial park. Other routes could include major employment hubs in New Berlin and Germantown. The first route(s) will begin in August.

"This is one of the beginning steps in a thousand mile journey to expand transportation outside the boundaries of Milwaukee County," expressed Rev. Willie Brisco, MICAH President. "This allows bridges to be built between communities thus giving way to us working together for the benefit of all." MICAH is a multi-racial, interfaith organization committed to addressing justice issues that have an impact on the community and on the members of MICAH congregations. MICAH's goal is to empower people to act together in pursuit of justice, and to organize so that people of many traditions can come together to speak with one voice for justice. MICAH deals with many issues.

The lawsuit could not have been successful without the excellent work of the plaintiffs' attorneys. Legal counsels for the lawsuit were Karyn Rotker, Senior Staff Attorney for the Wisconsin ACLU, and Dennis Grzezinski of Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA). "We've long said that improved transit is necessary to achieve racial equity and environmental justice. This settlement is a step forward towards meeting those critical goals," said Karyn Rotker. "MEA is pleased to have worked on behalf of the BHCW and MICAH to obtain this significant funding to expand much-needed transit service between inner-city Milwaukee neighborhoods and jobs and commercial centers in the suburbs to the west of Milwaukee County. We hope that future state and federal decision-making regarding major highway projects in the region will do a better job of addressing the needs of transit-dependent residents" said Grzezinski. BHCW and both attorneys have been involved in local environment justice issues for ten years.

It is expected that the settlement will be completed soon and all routes will be finalized within 2-3 weeks.

###