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## Firm selected to study local transit systems

By DON SERGENT [dsergent@bgdailynews.com](mailto:dsergent@bgdailynews.com) Nov 9, 2018

A Pittsburgh-based engineering and consulting firm has been awarded a \$125,000 contract to study the city of Bowling Green's GO bg Transit system and Western Kentucky University's Topper Transit bus system, with hopes of making the two public transit systems more efficient and possibly even merging the two.

The Bowling Green-Warren County Metropolitan Planning Organization's policy committee approved Michael Baker International as the vendor for the study at its Monday meeting.

Working out of its Louisville office, MBI will conduct a three-part study that it expects to wrap up in May. The study will be paid for with \$100,000 in Federal Transit Administration funds, \$11,000 from WKU and \$14,000 from the city of Bowling Green.

MBI, which has more than 3,000 employees and nearly 100 U.S. locations, has the expertise to analyze the transit systems, according to Brent Childers, director of neighborhood and community services for the city.

“They have experience in similar types of studies in other communities,” Childers said. “We felt like they had the most competitive proposal.”

The MBI proposal includes three phases: an evaluation of Topper Transit’s operational efficiencies; a management structure evaluation for GO bg Transit; and a study of the feasibility of merging the systems.

The first phase, which is expected to be completed by Jan. 15, is welcomed by WKU Parking and Transportation Director Jennifer Tougas, who has already been forced to make changes in Topper Transit because of university budget cuts.

“The committee felt that Baker was the best fit for what we’re looking for,” said Tougas, who oversees a Topper Transit system that carried close to 800,000 passengers last year. “They have a great deal of experience in helping to improve transit systems.

“The comprehensive operations analysis they’re doing will be an opportunity to improve efficiencies and make sure our routes match up with the needs in the community.”

That study of Topper Transit will be followed by the evaluation of GO bg Transit, which is expected to be completed by March 1. This evaluation will come about three years after a \$55,000 study of the city’s bus system was done by consultant WSP Parsons Brinkerhoff.

Implementation of changes recommended by that consultant resulted in a drop in ridership for GO bg Transit, which is operated by Community Action of Southern Kentucky under a contract with the city of Bowling Green.

The city is receiving \$1.2 million this year in FTA funds to operate a public transit system and matches that with \$430,000 out of the city’s general fund. GO bg Transit operates six routes that cover most of downtown Bowling Green as well as the Greenwood Mall and Lovers Lane areas.

GO bg Transit, which has averaged just over 100,000 passenger trips per year over the last three years, has undergone some changes. Carroll Duckworth started Aug. 1 as CASK’s director of transportation services. He replaced Donna Tooley, who had been in

that role for 17 years.

Duckworth believes the new study has potential to help both transit systems.

“Community Action and GO bg Transit look forward to working with the city of Bowling Green, WKU, the Metropolitan Planning Organization and Michael Baker International in a joint study to provide the most effective and efficient transit services possible to the citizens of Bowling Green,” Duckworth said. “In the meantime, our administrative staff and drivers will go about our business of providing transit services in a customer-friendly, professional manner to the many citizens who depend on GO bg for their rides to work, school, medical appointments, grocery shopping and other transportation needs.”

Patty Dunaway, an executive with MBI’s Louisville office, said the consulting firm has experience helping merge overlapping transit systems in larger cities.

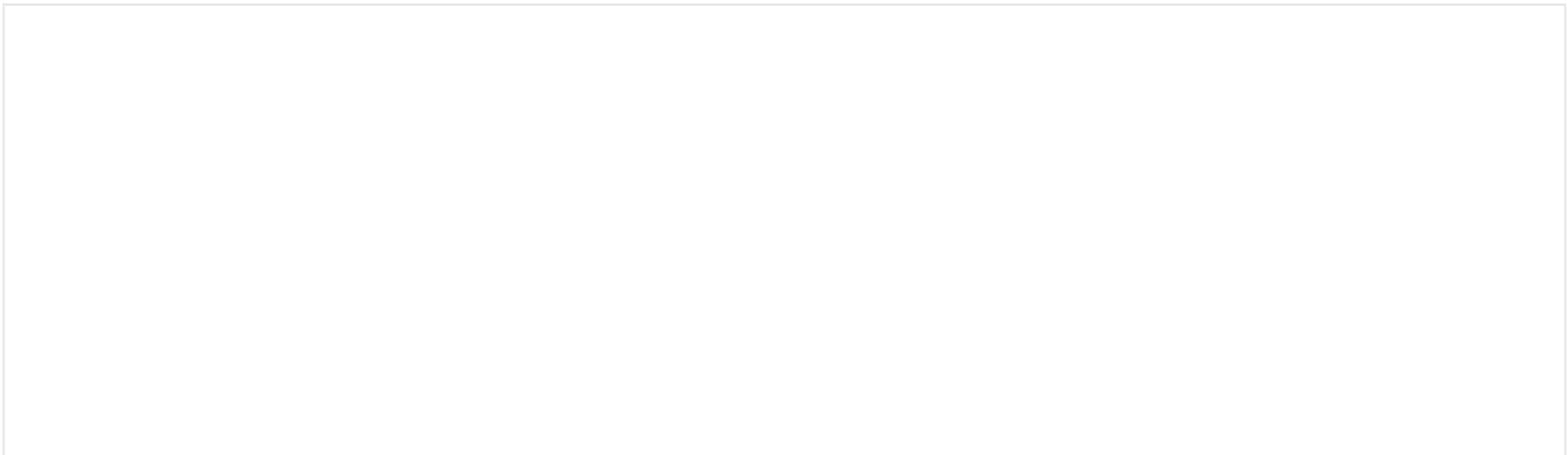
“It isn’t common, but where two systems have overlap or serve the same communities of people and there are potential opportunities to improve service and create efficiencies, then sometimes communities want to examine it,” she said.

The timetable calls for MBI to complete the merger feasibility study by May 15 and then make recommendations.

“We will look at the pros and cons (of a merger) and see if there would be cost savings,” Dunaway said. “We will make a recommendation, but it may or may not be followed.”

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Duckworth to lead Community Action transportation services

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