

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **The Power of Community:**

**Fargo City Commission approves United Way of Cass-Clay's collaboration with MATBUS to bring new public transportation services to workforce in the Industrial Park and alleviate barriers to employment for thousands of local people and businesses**

Fargo, ND – On June 3, 2019, representatives from United Way of Cass-Clay and MATBUS presented to the Fargo City Commission and requested their approval of the United Way Workforce Transportation Project to collaboratively provide public transportation for employees working in the Industrial Park and meet the demands of the workforce. The Fargo City Commission approved the United Way-led project, and public transportation via an on-demand TapRide service will begin in August of 2019. The transportation services will fulfill a long-standing need and eliminate an important barrier for individuals seeking employment, and empower employers to attract and retain employees. The total cost to implement the project in 2019 is estimated to be approximately \$95,000. United Way, through the UNITED for Workforce Development Pathways Initiative, will be providing up to 50% of the project cost, to ensure successful implementation. The Fargo City Commission has approved funding for the remaining project cost, with United Way's matching funds.

Knowing that one out of nine local people in Cass and Clay Counties are living in poverty, and by 2020, our local workforce will need an additional 30,000 employees in our community, United Way has been working collaboratively to provide solutions to increase access and remove barriers for individuals to enter the workforce.

According to demographic data provided by MATBUS, there are currently more than 19,588 jobs available in the Fargo Industrial Park, which refers to the area north of main avenue and west of Interstate 29, and includes more than 40 businesses, such as Marvin, Cardinal IG, John Deere Electronic Solutions, Northern Pipe Products, and Tecton Products, and includes more than 20 businesses identified as primary sector companies by the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation.

Over the last 12 months, United Way led more than seventy meetings with community partners, businesses and government entities, and the barrier of reliable transportation continued to be a consistent theme of individuals seeking employment and businesses seeking employees. In a recent survey to employers in the Industrial Park, two-thirds of respondents said that reliable transportation would benefit employee retention at their business. "There are a number of individuals that would be great employees (at our business), but they don't have reliable transportation," said Kelsey Kasten, Human Resource Manager at Cardinal IG.

"United Way of Cass-Clay is proud to collaborate with MATBUS to provide a solution to one of our community's most complex issues – transportation for individuals to attract and retain employment. Increasing access to transportation for individuals in our community will have a positive impact on our businesses community, and is an innovative and lasting solution to lifting people out of poverty," said Thomas Hill, Community Impact Director for United Way of Cass-Clay. This collaborative work is part of United Way's Bold Community Goal to Lift People Out of Poverty.

Prior to the transportation project led by United Way, there has not been a public bus route available in the Industrial Park in since the 1990's, or approximately 30 years. Currently, the closest bus stop is at least 1.5 miles or an approximately 30-minute walk to many of the employers in the Industrial Park. According to a recent survey to local service providers that provide assistance to individuals such as employment, housing, and education, service providers indicate that they currently do not have clients working in the Industrial Park and 82% of respondents reported that their clients do not have reliable transportation to get to work and 100% reported that reliable transportation would benefit their clients' ability to work. In roundtable discussions with service providers, one service provider commented that she currently does not have any clients who work in the Industrial Park, and estimates that having reliable transportation would have helped 25 people get jobs in the

Industrial Park last year. Several service providers have provided letters of support to the Fargo City Commission expressing their gratitude to United Way for exploring solutions to eliminating this barrier to gainful employment in our community.

Public transportation will be provided by MATBUS via TapRide, which is an innovative, on-demand bus service that allows riders to receive a “curb-to-curb ride” via access to existing main MATBUS systems, and operation times can be adjusted to meet the demands of riders. The TapRide system will follow the same pay structure as current MATBUS services. For example, adult fare is \$1.50, and a 30-day pass is \$40. Community members will be able to utilize the TapRide transportation services beginning in August of 2019. Between May and August of 2019, United Way will provide the resources needed for education, outreach, promotion and successful implementation of TapRide services and ensure current and potential employees and employers are aware of the new public transportation service.

“We have seen the success of the TapRide service in and around the NDSU campus as a cost-effective way to provide public transportation to our community. This is an innovative solution and partnership for our community, and the collaboration with United Way has been, and will continue to be beneficial as we implement this service in the Industrial Park,” said Matthew Peterson, MATBUS Assistant Director of Transportation. Collaborating partners on the United Way Workforce Transportation Project include MATBUS, the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Corporation and the City of Fargo. In addition, Microsoft's TechSpark has also invested support for the TapRide project through a \$10,000 cash grant. "Microsoft's TechSpark work is focused on helping create economic opportunities, and our Tap Ride grant to United Way is an example of how a smart investment can help connect people with good jobs here in Fargo," said Taya Spelhaug, Microsoft TechSpark N.D. manager.

“A main economic target of the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation is primary-sector companies – those who bring new wealth to our region from a larger, regional, national and international customer base. One of the leading challenges is workforce, and many employees rely on public transportation. We value the collaboration and partnership with United Way on this issue, and support the effort to increase reliable transportation services for employees working in the Industrial Park,” said Joe Raso, President & CEO of the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation.

The United Way Workforce Transportation Project is part of the UNITED for Workforce Development Pathways Initiative which works to:

- Establish and increase collaboration among workforce agencies-educational institutions and community organizations to leverage and align resources
- Identify and remove gaps and barriers that currently exist for individuals to enter the workforce
- Increase access to supportive services that assist individuals in attaining employment
- Position underemployed and unemployed workers on a path to long-term family sustaining employment

The UNITED for Workforce Development Pathways Initiative is collaboratively funded by The Chamber, City of Fargo, Cornerstone Bank, FM Area Foundation, Greater Fargo-Moorhead Economic Development Corporation, Microsoft, the Otto Bremer Trust, West Central Initiative and private investors. MATBUS is the public transportation system serving the communities of Fargo and West Fargo, ND, and Moorhead and Dilworth, MN. MATBUS provides convenient, cost-effective city transportation throughout the metro area, linking riders to employment, education, healthcare, entertainment, and more.

United Way of Cass-Clay improves lives by activating resources to solve complex community issues and create lasting social change through 4 Bold Community Goals: Reduce Hunger & Homelessness, Prepare Children to Succeed, Help People Be Independent and Lift People Out of Poverty. United Way of Cass-Clay works to harness and activate the power of community across Cass and Clay Counties—resulting in a better tomorrow for everyone.

For more information, please contact United Way of Cass-Clay at [unitedway@unitedwaycassclay.org](mailto:unitedway@unitedwaycassclay.org) or visit [www.unitedwaycassclay.org](http://www.unitedwaycassclay.org). Media representatives may contact Kristina Hein-Landin, United Way of Cass-Clay Brand Management Director at [kheinlandin@unitedwaycassclay.org](mailto:kheinlandin@unitedwaycassclay.org) or 701-388-4660 (mobile).