



Friday night service derailed

DCTA board votes to end late-night runs for A-train

By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

Published: 25 May 2012 12:00 AM

A-train riders interested in Friday night service have until June 30 to enjoy it.

After heated discussion, Denton County Transportation Authority board members voted 6-5 to scuttle the late-night service next month, eschewing recommendations from agency staff to adjust the service's hours to run later to better line up with Dallas Area Rapid Transit service.

The board approved a number of other service changes with the idea of improving ridership for the A-train, including adding midday service, beginning Saturday service earlier and running it later into the night, and moving the DCTA fare boundary to the Trinity Mills Station so riders getting off there would not need to purchase a regional pass.

Midday commuter service has been by bus only, but the board voted to add two southbound A-train trips and three northbound trips during those hours.

The new Saturday rail service will extend into early Sunday morning.

Those changes are scheduled to take effect Aug. 20.

As expected, the most heated debate was over Friday night service.

Discussion began in an afternoon work session and continued into the regular meeting. Board member Dave Kovach, who represents The Colony, said Friday service was taking money away from other priorities.

"I still have serious concerns those funds could be used for some of the other items we chose not to do that were next on the staff's wish list," he said. "Special-events service [and] Saturday service, to me, still seem to be services that would likely generate more passengers than Friday night service does."

Tom Spencer, who represents small cities on the board, ran down a list of statistics as he gave his stance against Friday night service continuing. He said weekday ridership is 91 percent of the total while Friday night riders account for less than 1 percent.

"If you will vote for this, I don't see how you can call yourself financially responsible," he said. "It makes no sense to do this. It's time we made a financially responsible decision and not a political decision."

Spencer proposed that providing midday service to shore up weekday service for commuters was the way to grow ridership.

Denton representative Richard Huckaby said that expectations for the Friday night service were more than they should have been. He said the agency should make adjustments to the service but let it continue, and Highland Village representative Paul Pomeroy voiced his agreement.

Lewisville representative and board President Charles Emery said the agency started a Friday night service model that was different from the one being recommended by the staff. He pointed out that other service options that board members suggested were experiments like the Friday night service was.

He argued that the board should consider keeping the Friday night service and finding ways to increase its ridership.

The Denton City Council has been lobbying DCTA to keep its Friday night service intact, saying it was a vehicle to draw people into downtown.

After the vote, council member Kevin Roden pointed to Saturday service as evidence that non-commuters were interested in riding the train. He conceded that Friday night ridership wasn't where officials wanted it to be, but said that changing the schedule was the right response to that problem.

For a new public transportation system, especially in Texas, Roden said people need the "window drug" of Friday night, Saturday or special-event service to try the train without feeling the pressure of using it to commute to work.

“This shows a lack of vision on the part of the board,” Roden said. “Dentonites will be disgruntled, and I hope there is an opportunity for them [DCTA] to come around.”

Staff Writer Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe contributed to this report.

BJ LEWIS can be reached at 940-566-6875. His e-mail address is blewis@dentonrc.com.