

DCTA heads down right track

Published: 24 August 2012 08:10 AM

We realize that mass transit has many critics, although it's been our experience that the number of naysayers typically drops as gasoline prices increase.

Fact is, rail and bus services like those offered by the Denton County Transportation Authority, Dallas Area Rapid Transit and other agencies are assets that should be appreciated by each of us.

Sure, we love our pickup truck. Riding along area freeways in that thing is like cruising in a big airliner. It's comfortable and will hold anything that we might happen to buy on our trips to the mall, area auctions or other sales that we like to frequent.

But filling the tank can be downright painful. In fact, we noticed that the numbers on the signs had gone up again this morning when we visited the pump. Some predictions are that the price of a gallon of gas will go even higher.

We've never understood exactly why gas prices seem to be eternally rising, but we're resigned to the fact that the price will never go down as fast or as much as it goes up. We foresee a future of paying higher and higher prices for fossil fuels.

And while we may not live long enough to hear the ultimate gulp as the last drop of gas is consumed, we believe that the tank will finally run dry.

The point is, we're all going to need mass transit eventually, and the sooner we admit that and get on board, the better off we'll be.

The DCTA and other mass transit agencies that now serve North Texas offer benefits that we can take advantage of now, and we need to check those out and see if we can make them work for us.

Sure, it would be impossible to create a schedule that would make everyone happy, but we like that the DCTA is trying to meet the needs of consumers. The most recent addition to the A-train schedule — midday service — is definitely a step in the right direction.

The recent rail service changes were approved in late May after the DCTA's board of directors agreed a midday rail service was top priority. That decision was based on input from train and bus riders in the spring.

The schedule changes are designed to be friendlier to a rider's routine activities. Commuters should find it easier to travel home in the middle of the day, travel to work after class, and attend midday events during the week and on weekends. It's too early to gauge the effects of the new schedule, but a few riders and officials are optimistic, said Dee Leggett, DCTA communications and planning vice president.

"We think the changes will actually increase ridership all around, even for the bus services," she said.

DCTA officials said the changes are part of a bigger effort to increase overall use and comprehension of the train and bus routes. Other changes DCTA officials will soon implement include expanding bus connections and scheduling, and late-night weekend services.

DCTA also will work to improve how riders navigate the transit system.

"Transit systems can be intimidating," Leggett told us. "We want to be able to help people understand the system by creating a comprehensive plan and guide for them."

Sounds like a good idea to us. We've got a feeling that a lot of folks may be intimidated by the system, and the sooner that changes, the better the odds that they will get out of the gas pump lines and freeway traffic jams and into the A-train.

The addition of midday service and other promised improvements should help make rail accessible to more consumers.

Like we said, the system isn't perfect, but DCTA appears to be on the right track.

