

Number of riders goes up

By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

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Denton County Transportation Authority officials have been enjoying positive ridership numbers for the A-train since the beginning of midday rail service.

As part of the August schedule changes, midday rail service was phased in, and the agency has seen an increase in ridership of more than 50 percent.

"The real tell is the first two weeks of classes. That's what we compared — this year to last year and what that meant to ridership," said Dee Leggett, vice president of communications and planning.

The A-train carried 760 more passengers during the first 10 days of the fall semester than DCTA served over the same stretch of time in 2011, officials said.

While there was no midday A-train service then, DCTA did offer a bus option for midday travel. Leggett said that service was good, but less consistent, and travelers were often stuck in the same traffic that the A-train can now help them avoid.

"That lack of reliability impacted ridership," Leggett said. "That's why we wanted to demonstrate what our baseline comparison was last year and the impact of adding midday rail service."

Leggett said the agency is not only getting additional midday riders, but that total ridership has gone up, as well, and is now 53 percent ahead of last year, with the A-train carrying almost 730 passengers more per day than in 2011.

Leggett said board members were given the ridership data last week, and DCTA president Jim Cline said agency officials were pleased with the numbers.

Cline attributed the ridership growth to how well the peak-period service and the midday service work together.

"It gives you the opportunity to have much greater latitude with your route planning, if you're a commuter," Cline said.

While riders may not be using the service daily, it can make those peak-hour trips more attractive and give the rider flexibility.

Another element is the riders themselves, Cline said.

"We're beginning our second full year of operation. A lot of transit is spread by word of mouth. When people say, 'hey it works for me,' more and more people use it."

Cline said the midday is a big part of the increase, and coupled with the continuation of good, steady performance and a positive option for travel, the numbers should continue. In the meantime, officials will be looking to get feedback from the public on the recent schedule changes.

"We're still looking for ways to improve, and we'll continue to work on that," Cline said.

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