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Late-night McKinney Avenue Trolley service back on track



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Managers of the McKinney Avenue Trolley say they have dropped discussions about curtailing late-night weekend service, saying traffic congestion in Uptown has improved.

In March, Phil Cobb, chief executive of the McKinney Avenue Transit Authority, said idling vehicles on trolley tracks during peak hours in Uptown were disrupting service to the point that the popular attraction was unable to keep a reliable schedule.

If the situation didn't improve, he said then, trolley officials would consider stopping service after 10 p.m.

Currently, the trolley runs from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and to midnight on Friday and Saturday — when restaurant and bar business in Uptown is at its peak.

After Cobb's complaint became public, Amy Gibson, executive director of the nonprofit group Uptown Dallas, worked with Dallas police to come up with a solution.

Gibson said police assigned to the neighborhood, especially those on bicycle patrol, agreed to become increasingly vigilant about cars, especially taxis, that often stop or cruise slowly along the trolley's pathway during peak clubbing hours.

"They've been actively and aggressively writing tickets on McKinney Avenue," she said.

Cobb said the situation has improved to the point that he has abandoned the idea of shortening the weekend schedule.

Even had the situation not improved, it is unclear whether the trolley authority could arbitrarily curtail service. The trolley authority's contract with Dallas Area Rapid Transit, which heavily subsidizes the streetcar service, requires that the trolleys run until midnight on weekends.

Asked if he had been unaware in March of the contractual obligation, or if he was just trying to make a point, Cobb replied. "Both."

"I had forgotten we had these obligations," he said. "But I guess I was speaking partly out of frustration."

While Gibson said she was happy to help lighten congestion for the trolley — which is such a neighborhood icon that it is portrayed on Uptown Dallas' logo — the traffic caused by Uptown's popular nightlife scene has created problems for many of the area's residents and business owners.

Residents on streets surrounding McKinney — the neighborhood's spine — have long complained about the noise and congestion, and some business owners fear gridlock could eventually discourage visitors.

To that end, she said, Uptown Dallas has hired an urban designer to focus on neighborhood issues such as traffic flow. His report will be completed in the fall.

Another factor in the decision to continue service, Cobb said, was the city's revocation of the valet stand permit in front of Del Frisco's Grille, near the McKinney Avenue Transit Authority car barn. There, lines of automobiles backed up over the tracks, sometimes impeding the trolley's passage for 10 or 15 minutes, Cobb said in March.

Since the permit was suspended, the stand has been moved around the corner to Hall Street, removing what Cobb called "a major chokepoint."

But a Del Frisco official said that the move had nothing to do with making life easier for trolley motormen, and that it may only be temporary.

"It was revoked because construction across the street closed a traffic lane," said Arthur Mooradian, Del Frisco regional manager. "I honestly don't think it had anything to do with the trolley."

In any case, Del Frisco staff members are working to get the permit restored. The company has nothing against the trolley, Mooradian said, but "it's convenient for our guests that the valet stand be in front."

For now, at least, Cobb is pleased with the change.

"My motormen tell me they're definitely having fewer problems these days," Cobb said. "We haven't had the disruptions that were causing so many delays."

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So, basically, Del Frisco's moved their valet stand around the corner and things got better...but, now they want to move that stand back where it impedes the trolley tracks.

This begs the question: how does one petition to block re-issuance of that valet permit? If Del Frisco's wants to refuse to be a good neighbor, Uptown should extend them no courtesies.

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Peggy Beil 1 day ago
Del Frisco's = Poor Corporate Citizen. The Trolley is a treasure. Del Frisco's is just another haughty overpriced steak joint. My husband grills a better steak at home.

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