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I-35W relief: Free bus rides downtown

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BY GORDON DICKSON
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FORT WORTH — A new express bus service from far north Fort Worth to downtown is open for residents who want an alternative to dealing with traffic on Interstate 35W.

The bus rides will be free through May 30 as an incentive to get motorists to try the new park-and-ride lot on the southbound side of I-35W, south of Golden Triangle Boulevard, according to officials at the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, also known as the T.

"It was very peaceful letting someone else take the wheel," said Les Carpenter, an AT&T network technician who rode the bus for the first time Wednesday.

Carpenter, who lives in the Woodland Springs neighborhood a few miles east of the park-and-ride lot, caught the first bus downtown at 5:40 a.m.

"It was a little earlier than I would normally leave home, which is usually around 6, and the bus is a little stiff," Carpenter said. "But overall it was positive. I definitely think it's worth another try, especially while it's free."

Although the service is off to a slow start — 11 people rode on May 12, the first day, and slightly larger crowds arrived on later days — public transit supporters believe it has tremendous potential. About 22 people rode Wednesday, officials said.

I-35W is scheduled to be under construction through 2018 as part of a massive makeover that includes the addition of two toll lanes in each direction from Interstate 30 near downtown to north of U.S. 287, the Decatur cutoff.

"It's really good because it gives us some new service up north," T President Paul Ballard said. "We get a lot of calls about service to Alliance and generally to the north quadrant. This allows us to really establish a presence."

The buses depart at 5:40, 6:15 and 6:40 a.m. and generally take 30 to 40 minutes to get downtown. The service, known as Express Route 63, makes several stops along Houston Street downtown, so riders can choose a place closest to their destination to get off. Or they can stay on the bus until the route ends at the Intermodal Transportation Center, 1001 Jones St.

In the afternoon, the buses return to the park-and-ride lot at 5:05, 6:05 and 6:45 p.m. The buses depart from the ITC and make a handful of stops along Throckmorton Street before leaving downtown, and after that, there are no more stops until buses reach the park-and-ride lot.

Buses typically use I-35W as the main route to downtown, although drivers and dispatchers have discretion to use alternate routes when traffic is unusually heavy, Curvie Hawkins, T assistant vice



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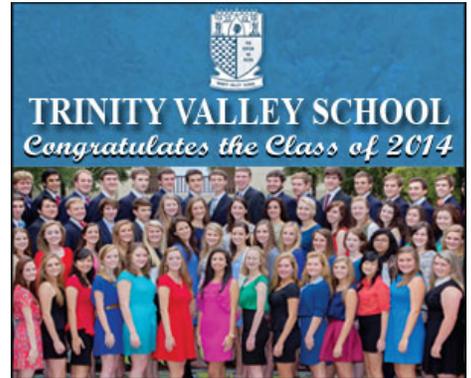
New park-and-ride

The Fort Worth Transportation Authority opened a park-and-ride lot last week to serve far north Fort Worth and the Alliance area.

- The new North Park & Ride is at 10157 North Freeway, Fort Worth. It's on the southbound frontage road south of Golden Triangle Boulevard.
- From I-35W, exit Golden Triangle Boulevard and follow the southbound frontage road about a half-mile. The lot is on the right.
- For information visit [the T online](#).

Source: Fort Worth Transportation Authority

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president for planning, has said. Even so, the idea is not necessarily to get buses to downtown quicker than private automobile traffic, but to give riders an alternative to dealing with the traffic themselves.

"You'll be able to read the newspaper, take a nap, do work or whatever," Ballard said. "It becomes productive time, not just lost time."

The service operates weekdays. Although there is no fare during the introductory period, riders who want to transfer to other buses or the Trinity Railway Express downtown will be required to buy tickets at the usual prices.

Once the introductory period is over, riders will be asked to pay a regular T fare to ride the buses from the new park-and-ride lot. A T monthly pass costs \$60 for bus only, or \$80 to \$160 for those who also want to ride TRE. Lower fares are available for children, seniors and people with disabilities.

Also, several major Fort Worth employers offer subsidized bus passes that allow workers to ride for free or at a discount.

Long time coming

Plans for the North Park-And-Ride, as it is named, were in the works for nearly five years. The facility has 196 paved parking spaces, two bus lanes, four shelters, landscaping and security cameras. There are no permanent restrooms, although last week a portable toilet apparently installed for use by construction workers remained at the western end of the lot.

Cindy Sears-Clemmons, a sales manager at Jacobs engineering firm downtown, said during a public meeting on the project in February that she believed the park-and-ride lot would make public transportation a more viable option for many other residents of far north Fort Worth.

"As the traffic gets worse, you're going to find more people are going to ride," she said.

Only one other bus service operates regularly north of Loop 820 — Route 62 Summerfields Express. But that bus arrives in the area only once each weekday morning and returns once each afternoon. That service will not be affected by the park-and-ride service, at least for now, T officials said.

Gauging interest

T officials say it's too early to project how many people may want to ride buses from the new park-and-ride lot.

Several years ago, the T experimented with two express routes to Fort Worth from north and south Arlington. Those services attracted fewer than 100 riders daily and were discontinued.

But unlike the I-20 and I-30 corridors between Arlington and downtown, the route along I-35W in far north Fort Worth is chronically congested.. A 12-mile trip to downtown often takes 45 minutes or more, and the portion of the corridor between I-30 and North 28th Street in Fort Worth is considered one of the the most congested roads in the state, according to a publication titled [100 Most Congested Roadways](#), by the Texas Department of Transportation.

Motorists in that area, where I-35W shrinks from three lanes in each direction to two, waste more than 2 million hours collectively a year, according to the report.

The \$1.6 billion makeover of I-35W officially kicked off this month. A private consortium known as North Tarrant Express Mobility Partners was hired to do the job. That group also has performed the reconstruction of Loop 820 and Texas 121/183 — also known as the North Tarrant Express — a \$2.5 billion project scheduled to be completed this year.

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