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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, August 28, 2012

DART's annual ridership increases 10 percent, exceeds 4.5 million

Total ridership at the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority exceeded 4.5 million during the fiscal year that ended June 30, a year-over-year increase of approximately 10 percent.

The total represents the third highest year of ridership since 1984, topped only by the record-breaking years of 2008 and 2009. DART Commission Chair Steve Van Oort, mayor of Ankeny, said the ridership increase shows a growing demand for transit services.

"We hear all the time that people want more transit service," Van Oort said. "And this is being demonstrated by more people in the seats."

Total ridership includes all rides given on DART's trio of services: fixed-route bus service, paratransit bus service and the RideShare vanpooling program. More than 4.1 million rides, or 90 percent of the total, were provided by fixed-route bus service.

DART General Manager Elizabeth Presutti said many factors influence transit ridership, including the price of gasoline and the availability of transit service. However, neither of these can be fully attributed for the increase this year.

Gasoline rose in price between January and April, contributing somewhat to ridership increases during that period. However, gasoline prices were in a state of decline most the rest of the year.

Meantime, the level of bus service was maintained at 2010 levels – when services were cut back due to a budget shortfall at the time – throughout the first 11 months of the fiscal year. The expansion of bus service underway as part the DART Forward 2035 Services Plan began taking effect in mid June and will continue in November; ridership under those changes will be reflected in next year's annual totals.

"Without any major factors clearly driving these numbers up, it's apparent that the increase stems from general demand for bus service," Presutti said.

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority is the public transportation provider that serves Polk County. DART operates a family of transportation services that makes getting around the Greater Des Moines area easier and more convenient. For more information about DART services, schedules, route changes, or directions to the nearest DART stop, go online to www.ridedart.com or call 515.283.8100.