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DART proposes short-term compromise to avoid drastic service cuts

DART releases public input results informing next steps for funding and service

The DART Board of Commissioners is proposing a compromise solution for the Des Moines City Council to consider that would avoid drastic service cuts and provide stability for DART riders and the region for the next few years. During that time, the Commission, staff and community will engage in a process of reimagining the regional public transit system to ensure a shared vision, funding and service model that meets the long-term needs of the region.

The funding solution would entail:

- The City of Des Moines would need to provide additional funding equivalent to at least a 1.5% franchise fee for the next three years. A 1.5% franchise fee increase would result in a \$100 utility bill increasing by \$1.50 per month, which is an additional \$18 per year.
- DART would reduce expenses by \$2-3 million, which includes making cuts to services, to lessen the impact on property taxes for all member communities.
- The DART Commission would lengthen the phase-in of the funding formula that began in 2021 from 8 to 12 years, lessening the annual increases for the City of Des Moines. This requires a slightly higher contribution from suburban communities over the next few years than originally planned.

The public input DART collected in November and December is informing possible paths forward. Engagement in the process was high with 1,136 survey responses and 253 participants at public meetings. Most survey respondents were DART riders who live in Des Moines. Most riders and residents agree the City of Des Moines should increase the franchise fee to provide additional funding to maintain services or find additional funding to expand services. Feedback from non-riders was mixed, with 55% of non-riders supporting additional funding and 45% preferring DART cut services. Riders shared a variety of perspectives on how they would be impacted by service cuts. A report summarizing the feedback received is available at www.ridedart.com/service-cuts.

“The number of people who showed up to have their voices heard and who took time to complete our survey demonstrates strong support for our regional transportation system, as well as the critical nature of the system in the lives of our riders,” said Russ

Trimble, DART Commission Chair and Mayor of West Des Moines. "For many, DART is their lifeline to jobs, education, food and medicine. The proposed compromise is hard for all stakeholders involved, but the DART Commission and staff are committed to finding a path forward to maintain as much service as possible while we work together to reimagine the future of transit in central Iowa."

"We know that decisions about how to fund a regional transit system are difficult, with limited tools available, and that any cuts to service would impact riders who depend on public transportation," said Amanda Wanke, DART CEO. "We're grateful to everyone who took the time to participate in public input. The feedback has informed a possible solution that we believe balances the interests of taxpayers, transit riders, and all member communities. This solution will provide stability for the next several years while DART works with the Commission, riders and the community to establish a new vision and long-term plan for regional transit service in central Iowa."

The proposed solution addresses a funding shortfall DART is facing because the City of Des Moines' contribution to DART is increasing under a new funding formula the DART Commission adopted several years ago, intended to align cost with level of service for all member communities. The new formula has resulted in the city's contribution exceeding the maximum amount DART can collect in property taxes for public transit. The Iowa Legislature gave the City of Des Moines the option of raising its franchise fee on gas and electric utilities by up to 2.5% to fund public transit. If DART does not receive additional revenue, the public transit agency will need to cut services by up to 40% over five years.

DART anticipates holding public input in mid-spring to share the specific service reductions that will take effect in November 2024, including specific route and schedule impacts, and to get feedback on the proposed changes.

About DART

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART) is Iowa's largest, and only, regional transit agency, providing service in and around Polk County. DART operates a family of transportation services, providing 3.2 million annual rides that connect thousands of people every day to jobs, school, healthcare and other essential destinations. Twelve communities make up DART's service area, where the agency carries out its mission to enrich lives, connect communities and expand opportunities for central Iowans. For more information about DART services, schedules, route changes, or directions to the nearest DART stop, visit the website at ridedart.com, download the free MyDART app or call 515-283-8100.

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