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DART seeks feedback on possible major service cuts in Des Moines

Without funding increase, transit services face significant cuts

DART is seeking input on a possible 40 percent reduction in bus services that would occur over five years. Public input opportunities are being offered as the Des Moines City Council decides whether to pay more than it can collect in property taxes, to keep DART's existing bus services or make cuts to services.

DART will host several opportunities from November 15 to December 15, 2023, for riders and community members to learn about the options the city is considering and to share how cuts to services would impact them.

"Public transit is an essential service intended to provide every central lowan the opportunity to fully participate in our community regardless of ability or income," said DART Commission Chair and West Des Moines Mayor Russ Trimble. "Many of the individuals who use DART do not have other transportation options, which means a significant reduction in bus service will impact the daily lives of some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community."

"Unfortunately, transit service and funding have not been keeping up with our region's growth," said DART CEO Amanda Wanke. "Our population has grown 24% in the last decade while DART service has only grown 1% due to funding constraints. As a result, many transit trips already take two or three times as long compared to driving. A cut to services would not only impact thousands of central lowans who rely on public transit as part of their daily lives, but also hinder the growth and vibrancy of our region as people have less access to jobs, services and opportunities."

Potential cuts to services stem from a challenge the City of Des Moines faces in funding public transit. Its contribution to DART exceeds what it can collect in property taxes, the funding mechanism set by the Iowa Legislature. The city's contribution to DART will continue to increase under a new funding formula that aligns what each community pays with the level of services received, and approximately 70 percent of the service DART provides is in the City of Des Moines.

The Iowa Legislature gave the City of Des Moines the option of increasing its franchise fee – a tax on gas and electric bills – up to 2.5 percent to help fund public transit. If the

Des Moines City Council chooses to increase the franchise fee by the full 2.5 percent, the city could generate enough revenue to maintain bus services at the current level and reduce property taxes for the next few years. A homeowner in Des Moines with a \$100 utility bill would experience a \$2.50 per month increase in their franchise fee. In addition, non-profit and government organizations that do not pay property taxes would contribute to DART through franchise fees.

If the City of Des Moines does not commit to funding DART above what it can collect in property taxes, DART will have to cut services by 40 percent over five years. The first round of service cuts would begin in November 2024, affecting nearly all local bus routes in Des Moines. Service cuts would result in significantly longer travel times and less service throughout the day.

Individuals who live in the City of Des Moines and those who would be directly impacted by a potential increase in taxes or a cut to DART services are encouraged to attend one of six public meetings and to complete a survey at a public meeting or online.

Central Iowans can learn more about the issue, find public meeting times and locations, and take the survey at www.ridedart.com/service-cuts.

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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