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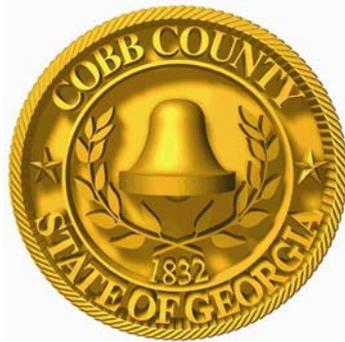
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A route from Kennesaw to Atlanta: County looks to upgrade bus service connecting colleges, universities

by Meris Lutz

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MARIETTA — Passengers taking the popular Cobb Community Transit Route 10 bus from Kennesaw to Midtown Atlanta may soon face fewer delays and faster service as the county considers measures to improve the existing route and add express service with fewer stops.

If the board approves both plans — one to upgrade existing service and the other to implement an express bus — it would represent an investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars over the next three years.

Route 10 is one of the most highly-trafficked bus routes in the Southeast, accounting for 25 percent of all CCT boardings, Faye DiMassimo, the county's

transportation, told the Cobb Board of Commissioners on Tuesday.

Consultants from the two firms working on each plan respectively updated commissioners on their progress at the meeting.

Bill Ball, CEO of Tindale Oliver and Associates, opened by outlining the objectives of the Route 10X implementation plan for express service, which seeks to reduce travel time, alleviate overcrowding on the regular Route 10 bus, and test the viability of premium service for other CCT routes.

“The basic goal was to balance mobility and access, mobility being the fastest trip possible, access being providing access at certain stop locations,” Ball said. “The more stops you provide, the less mobility you have.”

The proposed express route is composed of seven stops with travel time an estimated 90 minutes from one end to the other, whereas regular bus service takes approximately two hours.

Stops would include the Big Shanty Park-and-Ride in Kennesaw; the Marietta Transfer Center; Kennesaw State University's Marietta campus; Windy Hill Road; the Cumberland Transfer Center; the MARTA Arts Center Station and MARTA Midtown Station. The buses would utilize Akers Mill Road to access the Interstate 75 HOV lane in an effort to save time.

Ball proposed a timeline that would see the board vote to approve the new service in January and order buses by March. The county has been approved for a federal grant of \$1.6 million over three years to put toward operating costs, with a local match of \$320,000.

The implementation study was carried out for \$180,000, of which \$144,000 came from federal funds and \$11,000 was paid by the county. Life University and Southern Polytechnic State University, now part of Kennesaw State, split the remaining \$25,000 cost, according to Sheri Kell, spokesperson for the county.

Eric Meyer, planning division manager of Cobb DOT said the county does not have an estimated startup cost yet.

Following Ball's presentation, the BoC then heard from Glenn Water, a senior planner with Connectics Transportation Group, working with Parsons Brinkerhoff Inc., which carried out a performance evaluation of the regular Route 10 bus.



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Water said the Route 10 bus is responsible for a million passenger rides a year, but that punctuality and overcrowding were daily issues.

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"If you've driven through any portion of this route, you've likely noticed that traffic has been on the increase, particularly during the morning and afternoon rush hours," said Water. "Of course this has had a negative impact on Route 10's on-time performance, which has also created crowding conditions where buses are fully loaded."

By shifting resources from ridership lulls to peak times and adding one additional bus in the afternoon and an extra trip in the morning, Water said the county could improve service for an additional \$68,000 annually.

Other recommendations included modifying the bus's route to access Interstate 75 HOV lanes at Akers Mill and Northside and shifting stops south of Akers Mill to MARTA route 12 while potentially adding stops in the Atlantic Station area.

If approved, Water projected that implementation could begin in May.

The county paid Parsons Brinkerhoff \$60,352 for the Route 10 evaluation.

Speaking after the meeting, Commissioner Bob Weatherford said the total implementation costs for the proposed express service was yet to be determined, but he was generally supportive.

"I think if it's justified by ridership we should pursue that," he said, acknowledging that public transportation has never been self-sufficient. "It's one of the services we provide as a government."

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