

LOCAL NEWS

A-train's Friday night service at a crossroads

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By Bj Lewis / Staff Writer

At a meeting last week, the Denton County Transportation Authority board considered whether to end the A-train's Friday night service, but ultimately voted to keep it going.

At the monthly board meeting, some members pushed to cancel Friday night service earlier than the close of the pilot period originally set. This led to a workshop and open meeting discussion in which members voted to let the service run through the June 30 deadline.

Tom Spencer and Charles Correll urged their fellow board members to sign off on their proposal to end Friday night service because it has not met stated goals.

"We have a fiduciary responsibility to the board to do what is best for DCTA," Correll said. "This is our poorest-performing service."

Friday night service is part of a trial program, along with Saturday service, to gauge the success of the rail line's potential long-term features. Board members agreed to give the service a year while monitoring the usage statistics, then evaluate it at the end of the trial period to see if it would be continued.

Correll said that since public transit isn't really a profitable venture, the goal should be to lose as little money as possible. Considering factors such as ridership and cost per ride, Correll said the Friday night service was not measuring up.

According to agenda meeting documents presented to the board members, Friday night ridership appears to be trending downward, both over the life of the rail service, which started in June, and since October.

Since October, the performance goal set for the service has been met only three times: Oct. 7; Dec. 2, during the downtown holiday lighting; and Dec. 23.

Friday night service tends to see less than half of the weekday ridership.

Ridership was at its highest July 1 with 186 passengers and at its lowest Nov. 25 with 31 passengers — 27 riding northbound and four southbound.

The current budget includes funds for the Friday night service, and figures show that the budgeted cost, \$110,000, was covering the service.

DCTA President Jim Cline, who recommended to the board that they let the pilot period run its course, said Friday evening that he was still comfortable with that recommendation. Cline said the board tasked him personally with trying to work out a partnership with the city of Denton to help sustain the A-train.

"I'm cautiously optimistic," he said of the partnership. "I've already asked for a meeting with the city manager. They're reasonable people, and we'll certainly have a good discussion on the matter."

BJ LEWIS can be reached at 940-566-6875. His e-mail address is blewis@dentonrc.com.

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