

4A. August Service Update

Action: 1. Receive information and provide staff with feedback.

Staff Resource: Nick Pittman, Assistant Director

Overview

Following several COVID related service adjustments Chapel Hill Transit returned to operating 80% of our weekday and weekend service this spring. As we move into the Fall semester, we are maintaining this level of service and continuing our contract with Carolina Livery. Due to capacity challenges at the Friday Center Park and Ride, the Friday Center South Park and Ride was reopened on August 17, 2022 and the S Route moved back to this lot and mid-day service was returned. All other routes are currently operating; however, the following are still operating with some modification due to staffing challenges:

- A
- CL
- CW
- D
- F
- G
- HS
- J (Weekday and Weekend)
- N
- NS (Weekday and Weekend)
- NU
- RU
- S
- T

Schedules and maps have been printed and distributed. Current schedules are available at www.chtransit.org.

Tar Heel Express season starts on August 27, 2022. In coordination with Transportation and Parking and UNC Athletics we are planning to provide Tar Heel Express Service from Friday Center, Southern Village and Downtown (Coffee Shop stop will operate in place of Giles Horney) for football and we will evaluate staffing and service levels for basketball prior to the season.

With Orange County and surrounding counties in a high level of community spread for COVID we will continue our face covering mandate on vehicles. We will continue to evaluate this with Community Health professionals. Additional information on our continued COVID safety protocols will be covered in the summary below.

Recommended Plan for Incremental Service Restoration

Chapel Hill Transit has continued to stay ahead of state and national trends with our highest priority being the safety of our team members, customers and community and a focus on providing core services to support front-line workers, provide access for those with the fewest options, provide service across the communities we serve and being transparent, clear and consistent in our communications.

As we develop plans for restoring service we will continue to focus on these priorities and have developed the following to guide our recommendations for incremental service restoration in the future, understanding that COVID and other changes will likely require us to be flexible in our decision making.

- Maintain consistent and reliable service and provide customer focused communications.
- Prioritize weekday service delivery on core routes that currently have limited service, starting with mid-day service. With a focus on routes that serve schools, community facilities and areas with no or limited other options (examples include F, G and T).
- Maintain and add service to routes in our frequent network (examples include D, J, NS and RU).
- Restore late evening trips.
- Restore weekend trips.

We plan to continue phasing in services over the fall and winter, based on staffing and COVID, based on the priorities above and will continue to keep the Partners updated.

Staffing, especially for Operators continues to be a challenge. We continue to see this impacting transit providers in the region and country and anticipate this will continue through the current year.

- We currently have 25 vacant full time bus operator positions. Note – it takes about 12 weeks to move from new hire to Operator. All urban systems in the state are operating at reduced service levels – Raleigh just announced another round of service reductions related to staffing. Many major systems, including Charlotte and DC are still operating weekend or modified weekend service delivery schedules during weekdays to try and manager around staffing.
- Our new hiring rate is \$19/hr. and we are starting all new applicants at full time with benefits. We have initiated a sign-on bonus as approved by the Partners Committee. While too early to tell if they will be effective, we have seen an increase in calls and applicants.
- To help attract students to “part time” work, we have created a student operator classification (using existing resources) to try and help us recruit students that might have an interest. Students will go through the same training as full time Operators, using modified schedules and we will work with them to schedule work that fits with class schedules. The link to the posting is below. We are piloting this over the next few months to see if it can be successful and what we will learn from it. <https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/chapelhill/jobs/3642839/student-transit-operator-fixed-route>.

Real Time Information

The latest update from NextBus is that we will receive the new modems in September. Once they have arrived, we can share a rollout schedule. We are in the process of finalizing the contract with GMV and will start implementing the new real time service as soon as possible. We have ordered replacement signs for the stops with large information displays and our plan is to have them in place with the new service. We also have 50 of the smaller solar powered signs that will be deployed upon arrival.

COVID Protocols

Team Member, customer and community safety continue to be our highest priorities and we continue to maintain our COVID protocols:

- Face coverings are required on transit vehicles. We will continue to provide masks on buses for customers.
- Encouraging and supporting (including providing incentives) for vaccinations and boosters – including providing work time, \$400 stipend, and other incentives. Vaccination rate for the department is over 92%.
- Continued messaging about health, wellness, and safety.
- Installed UV systems on all buses and EZ Rider vehicles.
- Implemented temperature screening protocols (along with other personal safety protocols) for all employees and visitors utilizing infra-red technology.
- Installed hand sanitizer devices on all buses (two on each bus and one on each EZ Rider vehicle).
- Installed UV system in facility HVAC system, along with enhanced cleaning protocols.
- Enhanced cleaning protocols for all vehicles.
- Installed barriers for Operators on buses and EZ Rider vehicles, along with additional barriers in areas where customers typically stand.
- Partnered with University and Town of Chapel Hill to increase signage on vehicles and at stops related to face coverings.
- Expanded messaging on social media and buses for all customers related to hygiene information.