

Compass says VRT changes are a symptom of lack of transit funding

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A bus sits outside the ValleyRide Happy Day Transit Center in Caldwell.
Courtesy of Valley Regional Transit

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To address transit shortcomings and encourage future ridership, Valley Regional Transit announced changes to a number of its existing routes.

“We have a wealth of information on what services are being used and what’s not, where people want to go,” said Valley Regional Transit spokesman Mark Carnopis.

In total, the company enacted changes to 19 of its services, including increased service on State Street and two additional trips to the airport that will run until 9:30.

In addition to updated routes, VRT is also partnering with ride-sharing service Lyft to get residents to stops along routes and their destination for \$2. According to the VRT website, the company will cover up to \$6 of the ride if riders register their Lyft account with VRT, but the service is only available at select stops along certain routes.

“We will be monitoring it closely,” Carnopis said. “It’s kind of a pilot program, if it takes off we can extend it (to other routes).”

Carnopis said the combination of increased frequencies on routes and consolidation of redundant routes such as the Hyde Park route will incentivize new riders while continuing to serve existing riders.

Carnopis said the plan “does the most good” with the current resources available to VRT.

The company faces financial restraints, the Idaho Press previously reported.

Because the state does not have a dedicated funding source, it relies on a mix of federal dollars and voluntary contributions from the municipalities it serves.

A planner for the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, or Compass, said while VRT is doing the most with its current resources, it won’t be enough to solve transportation issues in the Treasure Valley in years to come.

“I think it’s safe to say that it’s not a positive thing when we have to cut some services, but this is a reality of the funding we have,” said Liisa Itkonen, principal planner at Compass.

Itkonen doesn’t think the blame is on VRT, rather the state for not having a dedicated funding source for transportation.

“What VRT is doing right now is they are trying to maximize the effect of their existing resources,” she said. “What that means is they are going to have to pull some other routes.”

To solve the Treasure Valley's transportation funding issue, Compass wants the state to change its position on local option sales tax, Itkonen said. Alternatively, a voter-approved property tax transportation fund could help Compass reach its priorities, which are laid out in its Communities in Motion 2.0 plan.

"It's something that we want and we want to pursue," Itkonen said, referring to the local option sales tax.

While Compass does work with lobbyists at the state Legislature, Itkonen said there are no drafted bills she is aware of that would address any of the organization's priorities.

This story has been updated to correct some of the information originally reported.

Xavier Ward covers Ada County for The Idaho Press. You can follow him on Twitter at @XavierAWard.

Route Changes

1 Parkcenter: 1 Parkcenter and 18 Harris Ranch are now combined into a single route that serves Boise State, Parkcenter and Harris Ranch. The Warm Springs and Eckert remains a part of the route.

2 Broadway: Extended to Law Avenue and continuing to the Boise Airport with 30-minute peak service.

3 Vista: 15-minute peak time service, 30-minute mid day service and service until after 9 p.m. weekdays.

4 Roosevelt: Now runs to Boise Airport.

5 Emerald: Streamlined service to the Towne Square Mall.

9 State Street: Frequency increased to 15-minutes during peak service on weekdays and 30-minute service on Saturday.

9X State Street Express: Replaced with with Lyft collaboration.

10 Hill Road: Services extended to North End and streamlined to serve Hill Road.

11 Garden City: Services changed to run in peak ride period rather than the middle of the day.

12 Maple Grove: Service extended north to serve Gary and Gillis stop.

14 Hyde Park: No longer running. Services combined into the 10 Hill Road and 16 VA/Hyde Park Loop.

16 VA/Hyde Park: Extended to serve the Hyde Park.

17 Warm Springs: Streamlined to provide two-way service on Warm Springs with 30 minute peak service.

18 Harris Ranch: Consolidated with the 1 Parkcenter.

28 Cole/Victory: Changed to now serve Liberty and Barrister.

40 Nampa/Meridian Express: Improved on-time performance, serving all current destinations via a one-way loop through downtown Boise that will reverse directions based on the time of day.

41 Happy Day Transit Center/Boise State: Combined with route 42.

42 Happy Day Transit Center Towne Square Mall: Improved on-time performance and streamlined service to serve Franklin and Overland. Cancelled service at Towne Square Mall.

51 East Nampa: Reduced to peak times only Monday through Friday.

Lyft Stops

9 State Street stops: Gary and Saxton, State Street and Glenwood, State and Pierce Park, State and Mercer, State and Marketplace and State and 35th.

7A/7B Fairview: Milwaukee and Ustick, Milwaukee and Fairview, Towne Square Mall, Fairview and Cole and Fairview and Curtis.

8/8X Five Mile, Five Mile/Chinden: Chinden at Hewlett Packard and Five Mile and Country Squire.

12 Towne Square Mall to Maple Grove route: Maple Grove and Ustick.