

Metro adds bus service for first time in years



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Metro passengers will have more opportunities to catch the bus when the district adds runs next month.

Small expansion marks big shift in direction

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

After four years of service cuts, the county's transit agency is reversing course.

The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District is adding new runs to its schedule as part of route changes designed to help riders make smoother connections and get to work and school on time.

"It's real minor so far, but it's the beginning," said transit planner Ian McFadden.

Since the dot-com bust, Metro has suffered financially, prompting service cuts and fee hikes. But district leaders, who earlier this



year passed a five-year plan that reorganizes spending and counts on some additional federal and state funding, are now moving forward with a plan to improve service that includes some expansion.

Beginning Sept. 7, two additional Highway 17 Express buses will shuttle afternoon passengers from Cavallaro Transit

Metro is adding runs to its schedule starting Sept. 7. 'Headways,' the agency's guide to the bus system, will reflect the changes on Sept. 1.

Metro

Continued from Page A1

Center in Scotts Valley to Silicon Valley. Ridership on this route has soared recently, even though ridership on other routes has not completely rebounded since last year's 35-day strike.

In the county, the district is adjusting schedules between cities to reflect traffic conditions at different times of day. Other routes have been rescheduled to help kids get to school on time and adults to get to work at the top of the hour.

"These are not expensive changes for us, but they definitely will improve the service and connections for people," said Mike Rotkin, chairman of the district's board.

Regular passenger Paul Marcellin-Sampson, president of the Metro Riders Union, commended Metro for the changes. Last summer he experienced how inaccurate the scheduling was when he rode the bus to Cabrillo College four times a day.

With the new schedule, "When you get on the bus at Cabrillo College, you now know when to expect the bus," he said.

So frequent riders should pick up a new "Headways," Metro's guide to the bus system, which includes all updates. The newest issue will be available Sept. 1, and is free on all buses. Marcellin-Sampson will post wallet-sized schedules on the Riders Union Web site, www.ride-thebus.org, and the schedule will be on the district's home page, at www.scmtd.com.

"It's going to make for much smoother and much faster travel over the hill, and it's going to make for more predictable schedules between Santa Cruz and Watsonville," Marcellin-Sampson said. "I'm very excited, I think it's a big improvement."

Contact Genevieve Bookwalter at gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com.

See METRO on PAGE A12