

Watsonville bus service to be increased

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In a gamble that better service will bring out more riders, the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District will increase bus service in the Watsonville area starting Dec. 10.

If the experiment fails and new riders are not forthcoming, the transit district will probably have to drop routes, said SCMTD general manager Scott Galloway yesterday.

"This is the gutsiest thing we've done in a number of years," said Galloway. "We will be able to sustain it only if ridership is high enough."

Routes 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, and 79 — serving areas from Corralitos to Shady Oaks Drive to East Lake Avenue and elsewhere — have all been altered to provide more direct routes to major shopping areas and to reduce transfer-waiting time, Galloway said.

Route 71, connecting Watson-

ville to Santa Cruz, which used to run every half-hour, will now run every 15 minutes, Galloway said.

The slogan of the new route system is "More with Four," indicating that nearly every route will serve four major shopping areas in Watsonville.

Passengers may also ride the buses for free during the first four days the new routes are in effect, Dec. 10 through 13.

Buses will feed from various neighborhoods into one of about

three central-circuit routes. At some point in its route, nearly every bus will go by the downtown transit center, the Crestview Center, the Freedom Centre, and Watsonville Square, at the corner of Green Valley Road and Main Street.

For instance, one new route, the 74 line, will originate at the downtown transit center at East Beach and Rodriguez streets, traverse Lincoln Street to Madison Street and the Crestview Center, then run along Freedom

Boulevard to Airport Boulevard and the Freedom Centre. Then it will traverse the Shady Oaks neighborhood, turn back onto Green Valley Road, and stop at Watsonville Square before proceeding along Main Street back to the transit center.

Other routes take various streets, but nearly all stop at the major shopping areas.

Passengers may also readily transfer at shopping areas to buses going more directly to other shopping areas, said

Linda Fry, a transit district planner.

Galloway said, "This is an attempt to make South County service work."

The shopping center at Freedom and Airport boulevards will become a key transfer place, instead of Watsonville Community Hospital, which had been the place where most bus lines met in Watsonville, said Fry.

Transfer time between buses can therefore be spent shopping instead of pacing back and forth in front of the hospital, Galloway said.

Galloway also said no rider should have to wait longer than 15 minutes to transfer to a different line under the new system. Under the current system, buses are frequently late, causing waits of up to 55 minutes for the next bus, Galloway said.

For the transit district to maintain the new routes, they must generate at least 20 passengers per hour, Galloway said. To keep the 71 bus running every 15 minutes, at least 30 passengers per hour must ride it.

Bus fares will remain the

same for the new routes, Galloway said: 50 cents a ride for regular passengers, with all-day passes available for \$1. Senior citizens may ride for 25 cents a ride, or 50 cents for an all-day pass. People over 70 years of age may buy all-day passes for 20 cents.

The transit district recovers only 17 percent of its operating cost from passenger fares, Galloway said. State and federal grants pay for the rest.

Galloway said the district also hopes to spiff up the Watsonville transit center within the next two years. The district has purchased the old Crocker Bank site on Rodriguez Street, and plans to build a new waiting area and improved outdoor shelters. Galloway said he hoped ground-breaking for the project would occur before Jan. 1, 1989.

Galloway said the route alterations and improvement plans for the downtown center come in the wake of a public hearing the transit district held in Watsonville in May 1986.

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
Register-PAJARO
November 19, 19