

**David Dooley, Planner with the Delaware Transit Corporation, DTC or DART, spoke to the Hot Topic group as a bonus to the main presentation on Complete Communities Enterprise Districts on 2/26/2018.**

Three considerations when deciding where and when buses will go are frequency, directness of bus routes, and density or a "Transit Rich Environment". DART operates its fixed route lines with a 20% fare box recovery for New Castle County. Of course transit is subsidized, but highway travel for automobiles is also subsidized. Flex-routes are not very productive, often performing poorly when compared to traditional fixed route transit. Talk of Micro transit and Autonomous Transit, all likewise have so far borne out rather low ridership productivity when compared to traditional fixed route transit service.

While the recent changes of bus stop around and near Rodney Square have garnered a lot of negative press, some promise is seen in "Combo" routes (two routes combined into one and traversing through the city center). The two highest average daily ridership bus lines in the system currently are two of these new "Combo routes;" the Route 4 and Route 13. Of the 39 Fixed Route lines for New Castle County, the top 19 performing bus routes capture over 95% of the total daily average transit ridership! Stated in the reverse, 20 of the poorest performing DART Bus Routes account for only 5% of the total average daily ridership.

Rodney Square's service as a bus hub presents a dilemma. It was never intended to serve as a bus hub; there are no rest rooms and there is insufficient room for a large number of buses to layover. Historically, transit only served 10<sup>th</sup> Street until Market Street, never fully encasing Rodney Square until 1994 when DART brought about the use of Rodney Square as a "defacto" transit hub for Wilmington. This provided a convenient location for buses which stopped and provided transfers on King, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets. The Rodney Square transit activity intensified with the so-called "pulse system" in the early 2000's. This Pulse System has been noticeably diminished over the past 5 years, but still the perception persists that Rodney Square is a "Transit Hub." With the amount of activity and the location so central to the core business activities in the downtown, Rodney Square should continue to have transit service on the Square, at least on 10<sup>th</sup> and on 11<sup>th</sup> Streets, but only "Stop and Go" service (meaning no layover or recovery time at this location). The newly proposed transit hub near the train station (Front and Walnut Street) would provide a transfer point and offer off street movements for DART buses. Its location ten blocks south of the heart of the Central Business District creates some logistical challenges, but depending on how future buses are aligned, it could provide a working, if less than ideal, alternative.

David pointed out that it's difficult to establish new bus routes to serve new areas, primarily because people don't want the bus stops near their homes or businesses. Another factoid which David shared is that technology, such as transit apps, etc., have not facilitated noticeable gains in ridership. It is a nice feature to have, but transit ridership growth is more determined by frequent service along a well defined and a rather direct/straight bus route through a densely populated, "Transit Rich" area. He hoped more people, officials and the public in general, would take notice of transit's ridership: "Where it is performing well, and where it is performing poorly?"

Some of the lower ridership routes and areas with spread-out development patterns, over sparsely populated areas, should be intensely questioned. "Is this where we want to expend our public resources? One bus with one operator costs the same to run in an hour whether it receives 5 riders in that hour or 40 riders in that hour. Where should that tax payer-funded

resource go to serve the greatest number of its citizens? Furthermore, once effective transit routes are in place, they should probably remain as placed, so to build ridership -- similar to a rail line – once laid, it is very difficult to move to a new location, so choose wisely.

Looking toward the future, David said that DART tries to allocate resources where the service will capture ridership. He said that the 80/20 principle is in play in transit planning: 80% of your ridership is captured by less than 20% of your bus routes. We definitely need to provide more service on known transit corridors. DART needs to increase its Saturday and especially Sunday service; Sundays of today are not the same as Sunday travel patterns of yesteryears. We've gotten very positive feedback with "Combo routes," We should implement more of them.

Groups like the League of Women Voters need to demand greater efficiency. Embrace healthy, robust transit corridors that entice people to ride bus routes ALL DAY for varied purposes. No need to categorize trips into "Choice" versus "Dependent" Riders... Simply **"We Riders! Universal and United!"**