

TRANSPORTATION

City Council OKs historic bus route overhaul for 2017

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem City Council approved the biggest overhaul of bus routes in Winston-Salem Transit Authority history during its meeting on Monday, Dec. 21.

The new routes will be implemented January 2, 2017. The WSTA will spend the next year preparing for the new routes by reprogramming its computer systems, moving bus stops, and training employees. It will also be implementing a massive campaign to inform riders about the changes.

"This is an important undertaking," said City Council Member Dan Besse, who heads the Public Works Committee.

"We've had a bus system in Winston-Salem run by the city of Winston-Salem for decades. It has never been systematically reviewed and revamped until now."

The Public Works Committee and City Council directed WSTA to review their routes and found that the incremental changes made to the routes, some of which are decades old, had made them inefficient and didn't provide the best service possible, particularly when



Besse



Montgomery



it came to how long it took riders to get where they needed to go. The 28 new routes are designed to shorten ride times and pro-

vide more service to popular destinations with crosstown routes and circulator routes. Riders will no longer have to go to the bus station downtown to transfer for most routes, since there will be numerous transfer points throughout the city.

City council members said that it was important that rider feedback was incorporated into the new routes and they felt WSTA had been responsive to its riders.

"We have a bus system that has historically served people who have had no other choice in terms of transportation," said City Council member Derwin Montgomery. "It is very important in the process that we take it into high consideration that this is a

lifeline that links individuals to jobs, to access to shopping, to access to healthcare."

WSTA initially used automatic passenger counter information and a survey of passenger's origins and destinations to design new routes. Bus rider feedback on the new routes was gathered in May and June as the WSTA held more than 20 public comment meetings. Feedback also came from riders online and from City Council members who passed on their constituents' concerns about the changes to WSTA. Feedback resulted in changes to at least a dozen of the new routes, including the inclusion of places like Green Street United Methodist Church's Shalom Project, Crystal

Towers apartments and Industries for the Blind. New routes also came about from feedback, such as the circulator route for the Southeast Ward to fill in an area that was left unserved by the new routes.

The WSTA was initially instructed to create a cost neutral plan for new routes and make adjustments. The final plan ended up taking the annual cost of the bus system from \$5.3 million to \$5.8 million, which was too much for City Council Member Robert Clark, chair of the Finance Committee, and who was the one "no" vote on the new routes. Other city council members said they felt the additional cost was a good investment in a needed service.



Photo by Todd Luck

One of the many Winston-Salem Transit Authority bus stops throughout the city. WSTA will be changing its bus routes in 2017.

Atkins CDC will run part of Union Station

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

The City Council voted Mon., Dec. 21 to put the Atkins Community Development Corporation in charge of a part of the planned Union Station transportation center.

Renovations on Union Station are planned to start early next year. The former train station located beside Winston-Salem State University will be turned into a local and regional bus hub, augmenting the nearby Clark Campbell Transportation Center downtown, and is eventually envisioned to be used for

regional and long distance rail service. Atkins CDC will manage one-third of the building devoted to commercial use.

"We'll be looking for tenants who can supply commercial uses that are complementary to the transportation focus of the project," said Atkins CDC Executive Director Carol Davis.

Davis said while there are no plans yet as to exactly what will occupy the



Davis

space, businesses offering food, drink, reading materials and other things appealing to travelers would be a good fit.

Union Station was built in 1926 and is on the National Register of Historic Places. It housed an automobile repair shop for years before it was purchased by the City in 2012. Renovations to Union Station are funded with limited obligation bond money, which only required City Council approval and not a public vote, and are separate from the bonds approved by voters last year.

Atkins CDC was started by Winston-Salem State University to be a catalyst for economic development in the areas

around the campus. The CDC is responsible for turning the building that formerly housed the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive into the Enterprise Center, a small business center that currently houses 24 businesses.

The city will pay Atkins CDC \$120,000 a year to manage part of Union Station. The CDC will pay the city a lease of \$120,000 per year plus 85 percent of the revenue it makes from sublet leases of the space in the building. The agreement is for ten years and rates could be renegotiated after five years.



Photo by Tevin Stinson

Darryl Williams, father of Travis Page, holds a sign that reads "Honk 4 Justice" during a recent rally held on the corner of Stratford Rd. and Hanes Mall Blvd. on Saturday, Dec. 19.

Father of Travis Page speaks against racism and hate speech

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Protesters gathered at one of the city's busiest intersections Saturday afternoon to rally against all forms of hatred that are currently sweeping the nation.

While residents raced to the mall to grab that last minute gift, a number of organizations including Occupy Winston-Salem, Winston United Against Hate, Black Lives Matter and others gathered at the corner of Stratford Road and Hanes Mall Boulevard in the spirit of solidarity and unity against the rising tide of hatred that the country has seen in recent months.

Rally organizer Kim Porter said she is tired of seeing refugees scapegoated, Islamophobia, and tired of seeing blacks killed by police officers. Porter mentioned if you're black in America, you are four times more likely to be killed by a police officer.

"We're tired of all the hatred that is going on in

this country today," said Porter. "What gets played out in the media is the hate speech and not the message of love, justice and equality that most of us believe in."

While many held signs referring to immigrant-bashing and hate speech, the majority of the protesters attended the rally to call for immediate and timely release of the police body cam footage of the death of 31-year-old Travis Page who died in the custody of four police officers.

As cars zoomed by blowing their horns in support of the peaceful protest, Porter said that although she understands an investigation is underway and an autopsy has to be completed, the citizens are demanding the video footage be made public.

"We don't know the facts and we don't pretend to know the facts, but we want the video to be released as soon as possible," She continued, "We don't want to interfere with the investigation, but we want the truth."

Darryl Williams, the

father of Page, spoke during the rally as well.

Williams said he believes God brought this situation in his life for a reason. For the past ten years or more, Williams has been advocating for equality and justice.

"When this came to me, I felt it was really a catalyst for me to be able to say some of the things that need to be said," Williams said.

Williams mentioned that the media has painted a negative picture of his son and as a result, human dignity is lost. According to Williams, "People don't feel it's necessary to treat Travis like a human or with any dignity and this is an issue that we are seeing too often in America."

"I have a lot of questions that need to be answered," he said. "Was there gun residue on his hands? Were there any drugs in his system? These are all accusations that have been made about my son and I need answers before I sign anything."

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Did you know that more than 1/2 of all pregnancies are unplanned? Talk to your provider about planning your next pregnancy.

(Remember... folic acid should be a part of every woman's diet to help prevent birth defects.)

