

Rogers debuts free, on-demand public transit

By Javier Hernandez

In January of this year the city of Rogers partnered with Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) to arrange zero-fare transportation for the general public. They join Springdale and Fayetteville in providing passengers with free bus fares. Rogers also implemented On-Demand Transit, a feature that allows riders to request bus rides in real time. Rogers is the second city in the country to offer this type of service to its residents and the first to offer it without a fare.

The on-demand buses will travel from the Historic Downtown Rogers District to the Pinnacle Hills area with stops at recreational and retail areas, including the Rogers Aquatic Center, Walmart AMP and Supermercado. Residents can download the “On-Demand Transit” app and request a ride to any point along the route. Users will receive expected bus arrival times when using the system. Riders may also board the bus and indicate their desired destination to the driver.

The city hopes to speed up public transportation by servicing users within a goal time of 15 to 20 minutes. Rogers will also continue to provide residents with traditional fixed-route transportation without the use of ride-request technology. “We hope that this program will provide our citizens with fast, safe and reliable access to work, meetings, shopping and events within the city,” Mayor Greg Hines said. “Considering the buses will have bike racks, cyclists will also be able to easily access all of our beautiful trail systems.”

On-Demand Transit allows passengers to schedule trips between bus stops using the app, a computer or by calling the ORT office. In traditional public transportation models, the buses travel along a fixed route, regardless of any obstacles such as traffic or construction. The on-demand model will allow buses to skip any stop where there are no active users and set alternative routes to avoid any known impediments. The system works by determining an optimal route dependent upon the number of users, their locations and their destinations.

Bus ridership increased 11 percent in January 2020 compared to January 2019, with 1,298 Rogers citizens



Rogers has ramped up its free public transit system with ride-request technology.

utilizing the service. The city expects to see lower ridership numbers at the beginning of the program but predicts the program will gain popularity as more residents are made aware of the service. Buses currently have a capacity of 18 passengers but can be upgraded to larger buses that hold 40 passengers.

The service runs 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and is closed on holidays. Due to public health and safety concerns caused by COVID-19, ORT limited the number of passengers to 10 people (nine passengers plus the driver) on any ORT vehicle at any given time and expects to follow state health regulations to continue to service customers in the safest way possible. Updates can be found on the ORT website.

Transportation is a major community and economic development concern for many cities across Arkansas. As new technologies are developed and implemented, community leaders can look to cities like Rogers to benchmark and learn best practices.

To learn more about ORT and the On-Demand Transit service, go to www.ozark.org.



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