Bloomington Transit System Redesign Project

Frequently Asked Questions and Comments
December 2019

Transit Riders and Supporters:

Thank you to all those who have submitted questions and comments throughout BT's system redesign project. Your input is invaluable as we consider service changes to create a better bus system for Bloomington. This document is meant to clarify commonly asked questions and comments received. If you have additional questions or comments, please direct them to Zac Huneck, planning & special projects manager, at huneckz@bloomingtontransit.com.

Project Background

Why undergo a system redesign?

- Bloomington has grown, and BT routes have become more strained for time in competition with increased traffic congestion. Updating routes to better reflect current and anticipated traffic conditions means routes would be better able to stay on-time, riders may more reliably make transfers, and drivers have necessary time for rest.
- Creating efficiencies in the system can mean improved geographic coverage for new areas of growth that currently have no bus service
- Ridership on BT has been in decline for the past 4 years

When are changes proposed to take place?

- **Early 2020:** Input gathered through BT's public outreach will be presented to the Bloomington Public Transportation Corporation Board of Directors, who will make final decisions on service changes based upon feedback received.
- **August 2020**: Implementation of final service changes proposed to take effect
- **2020-2021:** Service adjustments are expected to be made to redesigned routes based upon operating data and rider feedback

Guiding Principles of the Project

Many questions regarding the proposed system redesign reflect the rationale of the principles guiding the project:

- ***Budget-neutral service changes*** would preserve the same total annual operating hours across the bus system. The service changes proposed in this project are designed to reallocate the same amount of available resources by reducing circuitous routing, reducing overlapped route coverage, and directing resources to times of day when more riders use the buses. It is always the goal of BT to add new service (increase frequency, expand geographic coverage), but BT lacks the additional funding needed to do so substantially. In no way is the system redesign project designed to reduce overall operating costs.
- ***Develop more symmetrical routes*** that run on the same path for both inbound/outbound stops. This means riders may more intuitively know where to locate stops.
- ***Develop regular service intervals*** for all routes. All stops on a route would be served during all operating hours (e.g. Orchard Glen bus stops would not be bypassed during peak hours). All routes would also operate on a clock-face schedule, so that schedules times are easier to keep track of.
- ***Create more direct paths*** that eliminate circuitous routing through parking lots and less-traveled neighborhood streets. Routing buses on main corridors means more efficient bus service, which can free up resources to improve service throughout the system and provide a faster more direct trip on transit.
- ***Ensure a diversity of destinations*** on all routes. By ensuring a mix of destination types (residential, grocery, service organizations, retail shopping, education) routes may be better able to sustain ridership throughout the day.

Frequently Asked Questions and Comments

The following questions reflect frequent comments and questions expressed through BT's online Service Change Survey, and through public input sessions:

"Why are you shortening some routes instead of expanding?" – *Regarding Proposed Route 1*

Where routes are shortened, as with the proposed Route 1, the Recommended Service Scenario is following some of the guiding principles of the route optimization study to make routes simpler and more direct. When routes become too long and circuitous, they can become

inconvenient for riders, confusing for potential riders, and more costly to operate. Moreover, some routes have to be shortened to ensure timely connections with other routes at the downtown transit center.

"Why . . . stop at 7pm? All buses should have a later time on the weekdays so people working night shifts can get home." – *Regarding routes proposed to end service at 7:00pm (proposed routes 1, 4, 5, 12, 14, 40)*

The Recommended Service Scenario proposes elimination of evening service for several routes. Changes to the span of service hours are proposed where fixed route service carries comparatively fewer passengers—sometimes less than 10 passengers per hour (the typical low-end threshold of productivity for BT and within the transit industry). When fixed route service is unproductive, BT must consider if resources can be better allocated elsewhere to serve more riders. However, as a public transit agency, BT's goal is not only to serve the most riders, but to serve those who depend on public transit the most. Public feedback is crucial for finding the right balance between these often competing goals. BT is also examining the possibility of a different type of service known as *microtransit** that could be a more efficient way to provide service after 7 p.m. on certain routes.

What is Microtransit?*
Microtransit is a relatively new method of providing transit service that strives to combine the on-demand convenience of ride-sharing services (e.g. Uber/Lyft) with the affordability of public transit. To use microtransit, riders would hail a ride on a smartphone app or call a dispatch center, and then be directed to a location to catch a ride. Passengers would share a ride with others using the service. Unlike Uber/Lyft, microtransit is staffed by professional drivers in dedicated vehicles. All microtransit vehicles would be wheelchair-accessible.

BT is considering the option of employing microtransit in those areas proposed to lose evening service. The service would be zone-based, and intended to complement fixed route service. The same fare structure as used on fixed routes, including passes and transfers, would apply on microtransit.

"The long route is fine, can the schedule be made more reliable by adding buses or ensuring that they depart on time instead?" – *Regarding Proposed Route 2*

The current Route 2 West has become strained for time due to increased traffic and congestion. Consequently, the Route 2 West too often arrives at the Downtown Transit Center behind schedule, forcing it to depart behind schedule as well. Adding a bus would increase frequency, but it would not improve the ability of buses to stay on schedule, while also adding substantially to operating costs. The proposed Route 2 would continue to run a 30 minute total trip time, as does the current Route 2 West. By decreasing the length of the route, the bus

would have the necessary time to complete the route on-time, giving riders more reliable transfers downtown, and giving drivers necessary time to rest.

"How will we access either Whitehall shopping area to get to jobs, etc? Where could you possibly situate stops along W. Third to enable easy access to either area? Many riders can't walk far but aren't eligible for BT Access . . . Is the addition of Ivy Tech/Cook going to service more riders than the current route?" – *Regarding Proposed Route 3*

The Recommended Service Scenario proposes that transit vehicles discontinue direct service through parking lots throughout the bus network to speed up overall service. BT remains very sensitive to the fact that the loss of direct service may introduce barriers for riders with disabilities or mobility issues. The Recommended Service Scenario is the basis for ongoing discussions, and we remain open to making adjustments based upon the feedback we receive.

The W 3rd St corridor highlights some of the issues of providing transit service where improvements to the pedestrian environment—sidewalks, bus stops, crosswalks--are sorely needed. BT is committed to collaborating with the City and State to see that necessary infrastructure improvements are made should service changes be implemented.

Direct service to the Ivy Tech/Cook campus is included in the Recommended Service Scenario in response to input received from riders and community members throughout the process of the Route Optimization Study. A recent transportation survey conducted by the Bloomington Economic Development Corporation of both Ivy Tech students and Cook employees found that around 700 people would be interested in using public transportation for their daily commute to and from the campus.

"It doesn't look like the route actually goes to campus. I'd like to see it go all the way to campus (to Daniels Way) to facilitate use of buses for both Ivy Tech and the industrial corridor." – *Regarding the proposed Route 3*

The route is currently proposed to proceed all the way to Daniels Way, turn right on Zenith Dr, and right onto N Waynes/Park Square Dr where it would follow a similar path to the current Route 3 West.

"I don't have any issues with how the west side of route 3 is being tinkered with, but the current route 3 is used by many as a nice direct route from the west side to the east side of town. It would be better if you were to still keep a 3 east in connection with the 3 west."

The east/west crosstown connection currently provided by Route 3 East and Route 3 West would be replaced by the Route 3 (on the west side) and primarily Route 90 (on the east side).

East/West and North/South designations are proposed to be eliminated to avoid confusion when making transfers, and for new BT riders unfamiliar with the bus system in Bloomington. In this case, a crosstown trip would require transferring buses at the Downtown Transit Center.

"Adding more route numbers will likely add to confusion but you do need more routes and services. Why not add without changing existing routes?"

BT's proposed transit system redesign is a budget-neutral project. Total operating hours across all routes remains effectively the same in the Recommended Service Scenario. Adding new service is always an objective for BT, but would require additional funding. Funding sources from the local, state, and federal levels are not expected to increase in the near-term. Through the Route Optimization Study, BT seeks to explore ways that current resources may be more effectively used to deliver fixed route service in Bloomington.

The route numbering itself is intended to eliminate any confusion where Routes are numbered the same (i.e. Route 1 north and Route 1 south).

"The problem is that no buses are available to anyone along some areas and citizens cannot ride the university buses."

One goal of the system redesign project is to extend BT service to some areas in Bloomington not currently served. The Recommended Service Scenario includes new areas of coverage, including the W Tapp corridor, the site of the new IU Health Hospital, and the campus of Ivy Tech and Cook.

All IU Campus buses are fare-free and available to everyone. Anyone may board an IU Campus Bus at any time without ID free of charge.

"Does the off peak time mean when the bus stop coming from downtown?"

Being a college town, Bloomington has a different "peak" period than most cities. We consider "peak" to mean 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays. The "off-peak" is after 7 p.m. on weekdays." The terms "peak" and "off-peak" have no correlation with when buses stop running downtown.

"But what does it add? Why eliminate something if the return isn't greater than what you lost?" – *Regarding elimination of service on Kirkwood Ave for the proposed Route 5.*

The purpose of this change is to make service to the transit center more direct without deviating two blocks north to Kirkwood and then back two blocks south to 3rd Street. Thus the travel time to the transit center would be shorter. We understand that some people want to go to Kirkwood and would rather not walk the additional two blocks. Thus we are considering keeping Route 5 on Kirkwood.

"Will this have a stop near BUGS gym?" – *Regarding extension on W Tapp in the proposed Route 12*

In areas where BT would be providing new bus service, such as the corridor on W Tapp, BT staff will collaborate with neighborhoods, business owners, and organization leaders—including the Bloomington United Gymnastics School—to place new bus stops in convenient, accessible locations.

"The proposed route 40 does not appear to go directly to the SW YMCA. Please reconsider this change. Although the Y is close to the street, the access road has a steep incline and no sidewalks, which makes it dangerous and inconvenient." – *Regarding the proposed Route 40*

BT recognizes that several proposed service changes including the change to the YMCA in the Recommended Service Scenario would be difficult to implement due to poor pedestrian infrastructure in parts of the city. The study's recommendations bring to the fore the challenges of operating in the built-environment, which is often not designed with public transit in mind. For the recommended service changes to be implemented safely and effectively, some substantial pedestrian infrastructure improvements would be needed. BT staff have begun discussions with those at the City of Bloomington to identify areas where pedestrian infrastructure improvements would be most useful. We understand the concern due to lack of good pedestrian infrastructure from the street to the YMCA and we will take that account as we consider adjustments to the proposed changes to Route 40.

"Does this mean stops would be added on the north side of Winslow, allowing passengers to catch the bus on Winslow before or after it goes to Burks?" – *Regarding the proposed Route 40*

Yes, in the proposed route configuration stops would be added to the north side of Winslow Rd. The proposed path would run west on Winslow>south on S. Walnut>east on Burks Dr>north on Walnut Street Pk>east on Winslow.

"Where is the data to show that there are not enough riders embarking and disembarking at the current Tulip Tree stop? Is this even the rationale? There are families, students, undergraduates, staff, graduates, faculty, visiting faculty, post doc, visiting scholars, children, and a vast international student population; why would this stop EVER be considered for removal?" – *Regarding the proposed Route 90*

The rationale behind the proposed elimination of the deviation into Tulip Tree apartments is based upon creating routes with more direct paths. BT recognizes that Tulip Tree is a popular origin and destination for riders. BT also recognizes the challenging pedestrian environment on 10th St, which is not ideal for transit access. These are considerations that will be weighed by BT staff and the Board of Directors in determining final service changes. Further, we will discuss

options with IU Campus Bus in terms of how transit is provided into Tulip Tree. Ideally, either BT or IU Campus Bus would provide service into Tulip Tree. This is another great example where a major destination or origin is not well oriented for transit use. When buses have to deviate into and out of so many places along a route, it slows the service down and makes it less attractive to many users. Nevertheless, we'll endeavor to make the best of a situation a Tulip Tree that is far less than ideal in terms of its transit orientation.

"I'm not sure if the 90 bus would travel west or east down 10th, but if it went west down 10th I would really like that." – *Regarding the proposed Route 90*

Buses on Route 90 would travel both east *and* west. Route 90 is a bi-directional loop route, meaning that buses would be running both clockwise and counter-clockwise during service. In effect, riders would be able choose which direction they would prefer to take at the same level of frequency at a given time throughout the day. The proposed Route 60 would also operate in the same way. The bi-directional loop service concept would be new to the BT bus network, and allows for more options for riders through an efficient use of resources.

Is BT raising its fares as part of the project?

No.

Is BT proposing to undergo a system redesign to save costs?

No, reducing overall costs is not an objective of the project. BT does not expect substantial funding increases in the near-term, but also does not expect substantial funding decreases. The purpose of the project is to create a more efficient bus network, with less duplication of coverage, so that current resources may be more effectively used to serve more riders. Overall resources for transit in Bloomington are expected to remain approximately the same as they currently are.

If you have additional questions or comments, please direct them to Zac Huneck, planning & special projects manager, at huneckz@bloomingtontransit.com or (812) 336-7433 ext. 106