

MERIDEN 2020

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TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Juliet Burdelski, Director of Economic Development
DATE: May 13, 2015

SUBJECT: Summary of Shuttle Bus Trial and Findings

In 2015, the City of Meriden partnered with the Meriden Housing Authority and the YMCA to implement a downtown shuttle bus trial. The purpose of the shuttle bus program was to determine if there was interest in having a shuttle bus program serving downtown businesses, housing and the new transit center over the long term and also to alleviate the loss of parking associated with the closure of the Colony Street municipal parking lot.

The City operated the shuttle bus trial for six weeks in February, March and April 2015. The City hired the YMCA to operate the shuttle bus during the weekday morning and afternoon hours (7:30 AM-12:00 PM and 4:30 PM-5:00 PM). The driver was responsible for collecting ridership data and picking up passengers at 7 designated stops along a 12 minute loop through downtown. The City promoted the shuttle bus to downtown employers and residents through a print flyer, through postings on the City of Meriden and Meriden2020.com websites, at two downtown Meriden community meetings, in two articles in the *Meriden Record Journal* newspaper and through the installation of colorful bus stop signs along the route. Information on the shuttle bus program was also discussed by the City Council in February, which is broadcast on public access TV. Middlesex Community College promoted the shuttle to students through an email correspondence from the director of MxCC Meriden Center. The shuttle bus was equipped with a GPS tracking device and mobile app (Ridesystems) so that riders could track the location and pickup time of the shuttle bus. The Meriden Housing Authority allowed public parking at the 83-space State and Mill Street lot (161 State Street), which was a designated stop on the shuttle bus route. The MHA also promoted the downtown shuttle service to the Mills residents through the February and March monthly newsletter.

During the six week trial period, 36 riders used the shuttle bus service, an average of 1-2 riders per day. The low ridership was likely due to the lack of awareness about the shuttle bus program as a “stand alone” transit service not linked to other fixed route systems. Further, the transit bus used by the YMCA for the trial is identified (wrapped) as a YMCA bus, not a free downtown shuttle, which may have confused potential riders. The availability of parking, the lack of consistent enforcement of on street parking rules, and the low fines for any parking violations, likely all contributed to the low ridership levels. During the trial period, the weather was well below normal temperatures which also likely deterred ridership (even with real time information available).



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Middlesex Community College students were asked, as a part of a class assignment, to ride and write about the shuttle bus trial. Overall, the students thought having a shuttle bus serving MxCC and the downtown is a good idea, with one student stating, “I feel this is a great attribute to the college in helping students get to school without worrying where they are going to park and walk to campus”. Another student wrote, “I will be catching the bus come warmer weather since I can walk from my house to Hanover St. to ride the shuttle, then back once school is over”. Several students recommended promoting the shuttle bus further, adding buses to the route to reduce wait times, extending the route beyond the downtown, and running the shuttle additional hours.

Overall, the trial was a success in that the City and downtown stakeholders were able to gain valuable information regarding public attitudes regarding transit use in downtown Meriden. To help further study what types of transportation improvements may be needed in the downtown, in 2016, the South Central Council of Governments has agreed to conduct a “First Mile/Last Mile” study of the Meriden Transit Center to formally investigate what infrastructure or other improvements are needed to maximize use of the new commuter rail service and the Meriden Transit Center. For example, the study will explore gaps in transit service (such as a downtown shuttle, employer shuttles serving major employers and the commuter rail station, or a community college shuttle serving Middlesex Community College campuses in Meriden and Middletown) that, if added, could facilitate increased use of the Meriden Transit Center and commuter rail. The study will also examine sidewalk or other improvements or amenities (information kiosks, public art etc.) that can help provide clear paths and encourage pedestrians, bicycles, the disabled, the elderly or others to access the new transit station. Under a 2015 TOD Pilot grant from the state, the City will also be conducting an employer survey to determine how the City and state can assist local and regional businesses and major employers fully take advantage of the new commuter rail service and transit bus system. The City looks forward to the journey to continue to investigate innovative ways to address the need to improve mobility and accessibility in downtown Meriden.



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