

Go Greenway

More than 10,000 rides monthly



ROBERT C. REED | RECORD PHOTOS

Greenway bus traveling along Main Avenue NE towards Union Square.

Transit system goal: Ease traffic and improve air quality

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HICKORY

It costs Greenway Public Transportation an average of \$13.06 per ride to haul passengers in Catawba, Caldwell, Burke and Alexander counties.

The company is exceeding its goal of \$13.63 per ride.

Passengers pay \$1.25 per ride on the city buses and \$2.50 each way for a ride on the Dial-A-Ride van service.

Last year Greenway, formerly known as Western Piedmont Transit Authority following merger of area transit systems including Piedmont Wagon, racked up 300,000 rides with



Tom Southerland, Paul Price and Donaki Guest ride a bus traveling along North Center Street towards Frye Regional Medical Center.

an operating budget of \$3.92 million.

Like most public transportation companies, Greenway is not self-sustaining and is not intended to be,

said Greenway Public Transportation Executive Director Ed Clifford.



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ABOVE, LEFT: Kim Sadler, driver supervisor with Greenway Public Transportation, checks a money box on a bus. **ABOVE, RIGHT:** Ted Richmond of Hickory prepares to pay bus fare as he boards a bus traveling along 21st Avenue, NE **BELOW, LEFT:** Scott Young, maintenance director with Greenway, discusses local bus routes in Catawba County. **BELOW, CENTER:** Howard Abernethy, lead technician, performs maintenance on a Greenway bus. **BELOW, RIGHT:** Jessica Lees rides a Greenway bus traveling along North Center Street.

TRANSIT SYSTEM: Greenway's executive director says he hopes to double ridership

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About a third of Greenway's operating budget comes from federal grants. Another third comes from the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the remainder of Greenway's money comes from a complicated blend of local contracts and grants from entities including the Department of Social Services and Medicare.

The buses

Four full-size buses serve Hickory, Newton and

Conover while one 22-foot bus serves Taylorsville.

Greenway runs two biodiesel buses and plans to bring a third biodiesel bus online next month, said Building and Vehicle Maintenance Supervisor Scott Young.

Two of Greenway's main goals are to ease congestion in the metropolitan areas it serves and to help improve air quality by reducing the number of cars on the roads, Clifford said.

The more people that ride the buses, the closer Greenway comes to accomplishing its goals.

In January there were

11,768 rides recorded on Hickory, Newton and Conover's buses and in February there were 10,856.

Last month Greenway ordered a new hybrid bus purchased with a \$600,000 in federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement grant.

The bus is due to be delivered in 18 months.

Young said the glut of other cities who have gotten the same grant has overwhelmed the manufacturer and delayed the delivery of the new bus.

It will be put into service when it arrives and one of

the buses currently in use will be taken out of service.

The vans

City buses are an important part of Greenway's business but the Dial-A-Ride van service "represents slightly more than 80 percent of the operation," according to Greenway's 2010 budget report.

Fifty-five vans operate throughout the rural areas in Catawba, Caldwell, Burke and Alexander counties.

The vans hold from eight to 15 passengers and are available to anyone who

needs a ride. The vans are booked on a first-come, first-served basis and tend to cater to the elderly, said Operations Manager Patti Foster.

They take riders to area and regional hospitals, dialysis clinics, pharmacies and general shopping destinations. The vans also make runs to cities outside the boundaries of the four counties Greenway serves including Asheville, Charlotte, and Boone.

"I consider it life sustaining," Foster said.

Last year, each bus ride cost Greenway an average of \$5 while each van ride

cost the company an average of \$20, Clifford said.

His goal is to double the system's ridership by increasing the vans' productivity. He'd like to provide 600,000 rides per year.

Greenway is in the process of ordering five new 28-foot diesel vans and five 22-foot hybrid vans. The 10 vehicles are expected to cost \$1.45 million and will be paid for with federal stimulus grant money.

To learn more about Greenway, go online at my-greenway.org or take advantage of Greenway's Free Fare Day on April 1.

Free Fare Day is on Earth Day, Thursday, April 22, 2010. The Free Fare will be offered on the Fixed Route Bus Service in the cities of Conover, Hickory, and Newton and the Town of Taylorsville.