

To: CapMetro Board of Directors  
From: Sharmila Mukherjee, EVP, Chief Strategic Planning and Development Officer  
Date: October 16, 2023  
Re: Public Feedback Responses – January 2024 Proposed Service Change

Below are responses and additional context regarding comments and suggestions made by community members during the January 2024 Service Change Public Hearing and Board Committee Meetings held on October 11, 2023. Topics include Pickup service hours; Routes 18, 217, 335, 392, 339; ridership calculations; and ridership at the Esperanza Crossing stop.

The proposed January 2024 Service Change includes:

- Discontinuation of Service Suspension and Service Change for Reductions – Service suspensions on Express routes 981 and 987, E-Bus are proposed to become permanent. Daily service frequency reductions on Routes 18, 217, & 335 would now be an official service change. These routes consistently had the lowest average daily ridership and lowest performance when compared to other High-Frequency Routes.
- Minor Bus Schedule Adjustments – To improve on-time performance, select routes may receive minor adjustments to their schedules.
- Minor Rail Schedule Adjustments – Rail on Weekdays and/or Saturdays may receive minor schedule adjustments to ensure more efficient and reliable service.
- New Pickup Zone – Implement a new Dove Springs Pickup zone in southeast Austin that will provide a flexible service in southeast Austin and a connector to the future Pleasant Valley Rapid service.

In some of the answers, you will note mentions of our Transit Service Plan, which we will start in 2024 and complete in approximately 18 months. The Transit Service Plan was described in more detail in the [Service Change memo](#) provided to the Board on August 10, 2023; the effort will comprehensively examine the services we provide, aiming to better serve our customers and the broader community. A primary focus continues to be ensuring equitable and accessible services, in alignment with our new, Board-approved [Service Standards and Guidelines](#).

Should Board Members have any questions regarding the information below or the proposed January 2024 service change, please contact [Ed.Easton@capmetro.org](mailto:Ed.Easton@capmetro.org).

### **Provide earlier Pickup service for the Dessau zone**

In Spring of this year, CapMetro staff provided a presentation to the Board regarding the Pickup Service - including details on performance and needs for each of the current 10 zones. The presentation also included discussion of additional zones in the future (Dove Springs proposed for early 2024 and Decker/Loyola area proposed for 2025), and potential expansion of existing zones based on community need. Demand for CapMetro Pickup service continues growing, and additional resources are needed to address current and future demand.

During Public Comment, a request was made to consider extending the start time of Dessau Pickup to begin at 6 a.m., an hour before the current 7 a.m. start of service. Currently, Leander Pickup is the only zone to offer a 6 a.m. start time; this coincides with the need to coordinate transfers with limited Express and Rail service offered in this community.

In early 2024, staff will provide a list of recommendations and priorities for the program designed to address on-time performance, ridership, and resource allocation based on need. Earlier morning operation is one consideration under review, in addition to later evening and weekend service. CapMetro staff will consider all the requests and suggestions we have received regarding Pickup, in addition to data from existing zones and our network-wide analysis, to make a comprehensive proposal regarding modifications to Pickup service across the CapMetro system. The proposal will be based on resource availability and constraints. Staff recommends waiting for this comprehensive review to make any additional changes to existing zones.

### **Route 217 was intended to be temporary**

When the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA) began construction for improvements to U.S. 183, CapMetro split Route 17 (now Route 2) into two pieces to improve on-time performance and reliability. This change was treated as a service change complete with public outreach, a Title VI service equity analysis and Board approval, and the original intent was to realign this route at the conclusion of highway construction. However, there have been multiple changes that make rejoining the old versions of the routes more difficult including the interlining of Routes 2 & 17 in January 2023, the opening of Esperanza Crossing, and changing transit demand. Additionally, subsequent to the highway construction beginning, CapMetro partnered with CARTS to open the East Side Bus Plaza which improved connectivity between several CapMetro and CARTS services in this area, making transfers easier. CapMetro staff intends to review transit service in this area during the Transit Service Plan with a specific focus on exploring opportunities to improve service in the Montopolis corridor.

### **Route 18 provides connections for UT students**

CapMetro reduced the frequency of Route 18, along with other routes, in September 2021 in response to an urgent staffing and resource crisis impacting transit service. At the time, Route 18 was selected for a reduction because schools were still operating in a limited capacity, and ridership on the 18 was some of the lowest ridership among CapMetro high frequency routes. By reducing frequency on lower-performing routes, CapMetro was able to reallocate resources where needed to meet changing demand, such as the Route 300, and provide reliable and predictable transit service. To reinstate the pre-COVID frequency on Route 18 will result in less frequency and reliability on other, more-in-need routes. CapMetro has heard from UT students residing along Lake Austin Blvd that they need better connections to campus on the weekends either by Route 663 or Route 18. CapMetro's Planning Department is continuously looking at ways to improve transit connections in partnership with the University of Texas, including meeting regularly with the Shuttle Bus Committee comprised of students, staff, and faculty to determine the best transit service of UT students.

The resident also suggesting eliminating Route 465 to provide more frequent service on Route 18. Route 465 is a rail connector connecting MLK Station to downtown and is designed to coordinate with the Red Line with minimal wait time for transferring customers (in CapMetro's experience, customers will only connect to a bus from the Red Line if the wait is minimal and timed). Route 465 also operates with limited resources during Weekdays (including a short span) and does not operate on Saturdays and Sundays. An increase in overall resources would be required to modify frequency on Route 18, beyond what Route 465 has currently available.

### **Increase the frequency of Route 392 to every 30 minutes from 45 minutes**

Route 392 is intended to operate every 35 minutes on weekdays and every 30 minutes on weekends. CapMetro will continue to monitor the on-time performance of this route.

### **Route 339 hours of operation were reduced**

Prior to CapRemap in 2018, the Tuscany and Walnut Business Creek Park area (currently served by Route 339) was served by Route 323. Due to low ridership and productivity, the section along Walnut Creek Business Park for Route 323 was proposed for elimination. During public input, the Board instructed staff to replace this area with a

“coverage” route with minimal frequency and span. New Route 339 was created with less hours than the previous service.

In 2017, Tuscany and Walnut Creek Business Park was served from 5 a.m. until about 11p.m. on weekdays. In 2018 new Route 339 served this area from 6 a.m. to approximately 9 p.m. (approximately 3 hours shorter in span). In January 2023, Route 339 service hours were increased, serving the area until approximately 10 p.m. and CapMetro staff are monitoring the service and continuing to assess needs. As we move forward with the future Transit Service Plan, we will be conducting a needs assessment of all areas of the system in relationship to recently approved Service Guidelines and Standards.

### **Route 335 Ridership and How Ridership is Calculated**

Route 335 continues to suffer from low ridership year after year. Both before the pandemic and during the peak of the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, Route 335 has consistently been among the three lowest ridership routes across the entire high-frequency network, along with Routes 217 and 18. CapMetro reduced scheduled frequency in 2021, and ridership for Route 335 continues to under pace ridership recovery on other routes. Due to ongoing resource constraints and the need to reallocate limited resources to meet the need of services and areas where ridership is recovering faster, staff maintains its recommendation of continuing to operate the 335 at a 30-minute frequency.

During public comment, a concern about how CapMetro calculates riders per hour was raised. Specifically, the community member noted a concern that CapMetro bases riders per hour on scheduled hours versus actual hours operated. Doing this may result in misleading route productivity data (riders per hour) on routes that have dropped service or on routes that have additional service hours added due to demand or special events. CapMetro uses automatic passenger counters onboard the vehicles to count passengers boarding and alighting, and a customer who does not board is not counted in any way.

CapMetro completed a monthly and annual analysis for Route 335 and found that we lost less than an average of 1% of scheduled service on the 335 in any given month. When reviewing the difference between scheduled and actual hours operated and customers served, this difference between scheduled and actual with loss changed our measure for Riders per Revenue Hour by no more than 1/10<sup>th</sup> (or 0.1). While we do not know how many customers did not board our service due to inconvenience caused by dropped service, it is unlikely to significantly boost ridership enough to warrant a restoration of frequency on Route 335 compared to other routes with more demand.

Regarding data labeling on the CapMetro dashboard, staff are working to ensure proper labels and explanations of calculations are available.

### **Ridership at Esperanza Crossing**

During the Board Committee Meeting, a Board Member enquired about ridership from Esperanza Crossing. Since the start of the August Service Change, approximately 33 customers get on or off the bus at Esperanza Crossing on weekdays. Approximately 20 customers get on or off the bus on weekends. CapMetro also installed a new shelter at this location in summer 2023, in alignment with the Board-approved Service Standards & Guidelines (pictured below).

