



Tough Choices are Prudent

A response to Foster's Daily Democrat's January 10, 2012 Editorial

To be sure, COAST and the City of Dover, as partners in the FastTrans project need to make difficult yet prudent choices.

This project has been a very positive success by nearly all measures. We have implemented a new public transit service within the City that has carried over 180,000 passengers since its inception. Additionally, COAST has been able to operate the project under budget.

For all of its success, not all of the FastTrans services were being well utilized at all times of the day. The early evening runs were utilized much less frequently than runs during the rest of the day. This is a very different reality than your statement that some of the routes are inefficient because they have only one or two regular riders. On Jan. 9, COAST and the City took sensible action and carried out their decision to eliminate less productive runs.

This fall, COAST will be expanding its Route 2 bus services which will largely duplicate one FastTrans route through the city. The initial assessment is to eliminate this duplicative FastTrans bus route (Rte. 35). We, COAST and the City, need to make sound operational and fiscal choices that, although tough, are practical considerations.

The initial FastTrans fare was set low to encourage Dover residents, employees and visitors to try the new services. Just as with the Portsmouth Trolley system, COAST and the City anticipated a likely increase in the fare to a level that will cover more of the cost of providing the service. It is now that time.

The Dover FastTrans project has been primarily funded with USDOT Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) funds, which can only be used to fund the initial few years of a project such as FastTrans. These funds are currently projected to expire sometime in the early summer. This is as expected, and not forcing an early review of the FastTrans program. Rather, this is a review to ensure we carry forward only those services that have demonstrated long-term value for the City.

In the meantime, the Federal Government has failed to reauthorize surface transportation funding, and instead is continuing to "kick-the-can" on long-term funding down the road. This failure means that continued federal support for projects like FastTrans is uncertain. The potential effect of this will be to force the elimination of some FastTrans services that are showing growth (even strong growth), but will not have fully developed prior to the expiration of the CMAQ funding.

Your assertion that FastTrans needs to be weaned off the public dole is ill informed. Public transit and FastTrans is a piece of our transportation infrastructure, has created good jobs and is operated for broader community benefits. These include affordable access to jobs, education and commerce, economic development, public health, congestion reduction and air quality improvement to name a few. It is unreasonable to expect that FastTrans can continue to provide a public service without public support.

We have enjoyed Foster's support of this very successful implementation of public services within the City of Dover. We hope to also enjoy your support as we undertake the important process of making the tough decisions necessary to ensure we prudently invest limited tax dollars in those services that have proven to have long-term value to the community.

Rad Nichols
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