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Kingsport Area Transit Service adjusting bus routes

Service to offer free rides throughout the month of May

Public transit agencies across the United States continue to struggle with the effects of the pandemic. These struggles include a decline in ridership, a lack of qualified drivers and shortages in vehicles and equipment.

Though the Kingsport Area Transit System has continued to offer reliable and efficient transportation for residents throughout the pandemic, the system is not immune to these nationwide challenges.

As a result, beginning May 1, KATS will be adjusting to a new bus route schedule, going from five bus routes to four. No changes are being made to KATS' Dial-A-Ride ADA/65/Job Assist programs.

For the entire month of May, KATS will be offering free rides for bus passengers so riders and drivers will have the time and patience to familiarize themselves with the new routes.

"The challenges we're facing are not unique to Kingsport. Public transit agencies across the nation are all facing the same issues," said Chris Campbell, public transportation manager for the City of Kingsport. "Our hope and goal will be to add additional bus routes when driver and equipment shortages have improved in the future."

Currently, KATS has five bus routes with 253 stops where 23,600 residents live within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to a stop. Under the new bus route schedule, KATS will have 208 stops where 24,200 residents live within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to a stop.

"Even though we will be dropping about 45 bus stops, nearly all coverage will remain intact," said Timothy Land, transit planner for the City of Kingsport. "Today, roughly 44% of Kingsport residents live within $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of a bus stop and this will remain true after the switch."

According to KATS, 90% of surveyed transit agencies across the United States reported having to reduce service levels due to the effects of the pandemic.

KATS internal software program allows ridership data to be collected and utilized on a continual basis. As variables change with the times, studying transit trends and collecting ridership data is vital to continuing to offer an outstanding service to Kingsport residents.

“Since KATS offers both a fixed route bus service and on demand programs, it is important that decisions made are equally beneficial to the continued quality of all services,” Campbell added. “Eliminating this fifth route will help improve availability on the Dial A Ride van service.”

KATS conducted a customer survey March 13-17 in order to collect valuable input from the community regarding the bus service as a whole and potential changes. A public meeting was then held at KATS on April 11 to discuss operational issues, and the proposed redesign to address them. Attendees offered excellent questions and seemed to agree that the new proposed route design would still meet their needs.

For information about the new bus routes, please visit www.kingsporttransit.org, the Ride Systems app, or call 423-224-2613.

About the City of Kingsport

Founded in 1917, the [City of Kingsport](http://www.cityofkingsport.com) (pop. 55,400) is located on the Tennessee-Virginia border at the crossroads of I-81 and I-26 near the geographic center of the eastern U.S. The city is widely known as a planned community, designed by renowned city planner John Nolen and wrapping around the foot of Bays Mountain – a 3,750-acre park, nature preserve, planetarium and observatory. Kingsport is recognized as an International Safe Community by the National Safety Council, a Healthier Tennessee community, and won the 2009 Harvard Innovations in American Government Award for its higher education initiatives. While many city names are duplicated throughout the U.S., there’s only one Kingsport – a fact that invokes community pride, known locally as the “Kingsport Spirit.”