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DART Commission Proposes Solution to Fund Public Transit

DART releases public input results informing next steps in the City of Des Moines.

The DART Commission has presented the City of Des Moines with an option for funding DART services that involves a compromise among all member communities and DART. The proposed solution would provide funding stability for the next few years while the DART Commission, staff and the community engage in a process of reimagining the regional public transit system.

The funding solution includes:

- DART member communities agreeing to phase in a new funding formula from 8 to 12 years, lessening the annual increases for the City of Des Moines over this time period.
- The City of Des Moines committing to provide additional funding equivalent to a 1.5% franchise fee for at least the next three years.
- DART cutting \$2-3 million in expenses, which includes making cuts to services, to lessen the impact on property taxes for all member communities and account for the City of Grimes withdrawal in Fiscal Year 2026.

The public input DART collected in November and December is informing possible paths forward. Engagement in the process was high with 1,136 survey responses and 253 participants at public meetings. Most respondents were DART riders who live in Des Moines. Most riders and residents agree the City of Des Moines should increase the franchise fee to provide additional funding to maintain services or find additional funding to expand services. Riders shared a variety of perspectives on how they would be impacted by service cuts.

“The number of people who showed up to have their voices heard and who took time out of their day to complete our survey demonstrates strong support for our regional transportation system, as well as the critical nature of the system in lives of our riders,” said Russ Trimble, DART Commission Chair. “For many, DART is the lifeline between them and their education, their jobs, food, and medicine. The DART Commission has presented the City of Des Moines with a path forward that uses the funding tools available to maintain as much service as possible, with a commitment from all member

communities to contribute while we work together to re-imagine the future of transit in central Iowa.”

“We know that decisions about how to fund a regional transit system are difficult, with limited tools available, and that any cuts to service would impact riders who depend on public transportation,” said Amanda Wanke, DART CEO. “We’re grateful to everyone who took the time to participate in public input. The feedback has informed a possible solution that we believe balances the interests of taxpayers, transit riders, and all member communities, while we work toward a new vision for our public transit system. We will continue to do everything we can to provide the most efficient and effective services possible with the level of funding we receive as a critical service that helps drive the economic and social vibrancy of our region.”

The proposed solution addresses a funding shortfall of \$7.6 million over the next five years. The City of Des Moines’ contribution to DART is increasing under a new funding formula that the DART Commission adopted several years ago, intended to align cost with level of service for all member communities. The new formula has resulted in the city’s contribution exceeding the maximum amount DART can collect in property taxes for public transit. The Iowa Legislature gave the City of Des Moines the option of raising its franchise fee on gas and electric utilities by up to 2.5% to fund public transit. If DART does not receive additional revenue, the public transit agency will need to cut services by up to 40% over five years.

Late last year, DART sought feedback from the public on level of funding for DART services; how DART should prioritize cutting services, if needed; and how possible cuts to bus services would affect riders. A report summarizing the feedback received is available at www.ridedart.com/service-cuts.

If service cuts are needed, DART will use this public input to develop proposed service changes that would begin in November 2024. DART anticipates holding public input in mid-spring to get feedback on proposed changes.

About DART

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART) is Iowa’s largest, and only, regional transit agency, providing service in and around Polk County. DART operates a family of transportation services, providing 3.2 million annual rides that connect thousands of people every day to jobs, school, healthcare and other essential destinations. Twelve communities make up DART’s service area, where the agency carries out its mission to enrich lives, connect communities and expand opportunities for central Iowans. For more information about DART services, schedules, route changes, or directions to the nearest DART stop, visit the website at ridedart.com, download the free MyDART app or call 515-283-8100.

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