



SMTD moves ahead with bus route overhaul

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Life could be getting a little easier for University of Illinois Springfield students who don't have cars.

The Springfield Mass Transit District board on Monday adopted an overhaul of the city's bus routes that includes a new route that runs directly from UIS and Lincoln Land Community College to the Wal-Mart on South Sixth Street.

The new route is part of wide-ranging changes that are designed to eliminate routes with low ridership and create new bus lines where there is a demand.

Steven Black, a UIS student who is chair of a new group called Citizens for Accessible Safe Transportation, said students would appreciate the route to Wal-Mart. He said he some students walk from campus to Wal-Mart because it's the closest place to get groceries and other items.

"This is something the students have been pushing for since the beginning of all these changes," Black said. "The students really wanted a way of getting to and from Wal-Mart directly, without needing to go downtown and transfer, which would have required a 45- to 50-minute trip."

Linda Tisdale, executive director of the SMTD, said the district is in the process of tweaking some of the proposed routes. Public hearings will be held to give the public a chance to comment further, and the board could adopt additional changes as a result of those meetings.

The hearings possibly could be held in April. The new routes would begin this summer.

The overhaul involves some of the most significant changes to the bus routes since the mass transit district was formed in 1968.

In general, the district is adding service to the southwest portion of Springfield. People who work in that area have requested additional bus service, Tisdale said.

A consultant worked out the changes after meeting with community residents.

Michael Warden, president/business agent for Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1249, the union that represents bus drivers, said the changes needed to be made.

"There are routes we are running that are non-productive," Warden said. "This will allow us to not have buses out there using fuel where there's nobody being picked up."

Black said the direct route from campus to Wal-Mart also should be attractive to students because the Golden Corral restaurant near Wal-Mart is popular with them.

"The desire of the campus is that we have a community that is accessible to everyone, including those who don't have the ability to drive," Black said.

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New routes

To see the proposed new Springfield Mass Transit District bus routes: Go to www.smtd.org, click on Announcements, and scroll down.

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Wait a minute. How about all those cars parked at UIS housing? Can't they drive themselves? I remember when they doubled the parking lot budget at housing and doubled parking fees because little Johnny was bring too many cars to school.

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