

Waco Transit adds night services for workers, students

By J.B. SMITH jbsmith@wacotrib.com | Posted: Wednesday, January 9, 2013 12:00 am

Starting this week, public transportation in Waco isn't just a daytime thing.

A new Waco Transit service allows people to book van rides home from 9 to 11:30 p.m. from anywhere in Greater Waco for just \$3.

The Evening LINK initiative, overseen by the Heart of Texas Workforce Board with public and private funding, is intended to remove transportation barriers for late-shift workers and students.

As of the first night Monday, there were no takers, but officials were getting out the word and hoping to see ridership grow to 30 to 40 people per night.

"I believe it's going to bust out completely once word gets out," said Natalie James, Waco Transit director of service development. "It's going to be booked."

For college student Becky Borden, who signed up for the program Tuesday, the Evening LINK is an answered prayer.

Borden, who has no car, lost her job at an insurance company recently and is going to McLennan Community College for a degree in health information technologies.

"I've been worried, because one of my classes was only offered at night, and I thought, 'How am I going to get home?' " she said.

Borden said the program will keep her from having to spend \$20 for a cab ride home each Monday, and may free her up for part-time work.

"It's been hard for me looking for a job, because it had to be during the day," she said. "Now that I know I can schedule a bus to pick me up, it broadens what I can do."

Waco Transit and Heart of Texas Workforce board officials say they are confident of the demand for nighttime service based on discussions with employers and surveys of bus riders.

Waco Transit runs fixed-route bus service from 5:15 a.m. to 7:15 p.m. weekdays and from 6:15 a.m. to 8:15 p.m. Saturdays.

Waco Transit director John Hendrickson said evening workers in fields such as retail, food service,

hospitals and manufacturing often can take public transportation to work. But they have to depend on taxis or rides from co-workers or family to get home.

Evening expansion

He said he would like to further expand Waco Transit evening services.

“I think this will be a good indication of future demand for evening service,” he said. “This could be a turning point to see if there’s a need.”

The 2 1/2-year program costs \$830,976, with half coming from a Texas Department of Transportation “reverse commute” grant, and half coming from local sources. Those include the workforce board, Sanderson Farms, McLennan Community College and Texas State Technical College and several private employers.

Under the program, Waco Transit picks up riders in a five-mile radius of Greater Waco using 14-passenger vans.

Julie Talbert, contract manager for the workforce board, said employers have noted that transportation problems cause employee turnover and absenteeism.

“It’s a really big problem, and it doesn’t just affect one person,” she said. “It may affect four other people who rely on one person for a ride.”

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At a glance

Waco Transit now offers rides home through the Evening LINK service. Reservations should be made 24 hours in advance.

Hours: 9 to 11:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday

Cost: \$3

Service area: Five-mile radius from Greater Waco

Contact: Waco Transit at 750-1620