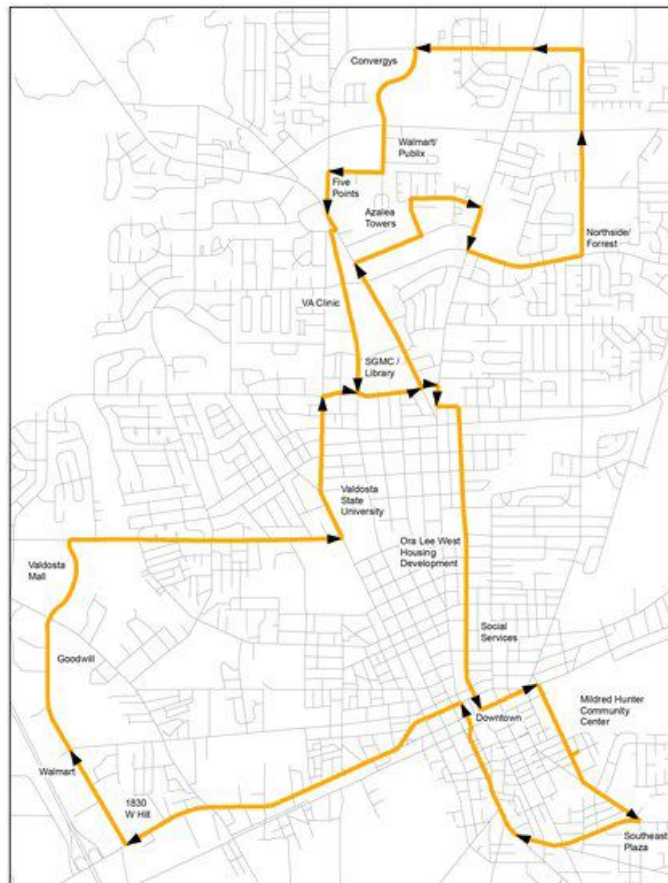


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Pilot shuttle program merges routes

By Terry Richards terry.richards@gafnews.com 18 hrs ago



Shuttle route

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VALDOSTA — The city's prototype public transit program is merging its two routes into one.

The shuttle program, that was launched Oct. 15 by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission with one southerly route, added a north loop March 21. The pilot program was originally meant to end Thursday, but has been extended until Sept. 30.

J.D. Dillard, the commission's transit and mobility coordinator, said in a press release the change is the result of a reduction in funding for the project for Fiscal Year 2017. Funding is through a grant the Georgia Department of Human Services receives from the Georgia Department of Transportation in conjunction with the Federal Transit Association.

The combined route will add additional stops in more residential areas, while removing stops along Gil Harbin Industrial Boulevard, Wiregrass Tech and eLead/Fresh Beginnings locations. The route will begin at the Mildred Hunter Community Center and make a figure-eight loop throughout the community, using the South Georgia Regional Library as its midpoint. The loop should take approximately 90 minutes to complete, contingent upon trains, traffic and any incidents along the route, Dillard said.

The shuttle will operate Monday-Friday from 7 a.m. — 7 p.m. and Saturday from 8:30 a.m. — 4 p.m. Dillard said the shuttle will not run July 4 for the Independence Day holiday and Sept. 5 for the Labor Day holiday.

New shuttle stop signs will be printed with a QR code for citizens to scan with their smart devices, which will take them directly to the program website for more information, he said.

Stops on the new combined route will include the Mildred Hunter Community Center, Southeast Plaza, Downtown Valdosta, 1830 W. Hill Ave., Walmart (Norman Drive), Goodwill, the Valdosta Mall, Valdosta State University, South Georgia Regional Library, Azalea Towers, Northside/Forrest, Convergys, Walmart (Inner Perimeter), Five Points, the VA Clinic, Ora Lee West and Social Services.

The pilot program was intended to gather data on the sort of transportation system Valdosta needs.

Rides are free for those people who sign up for the pilot program, but early reports indicated ridership was low.

In an earlier interview, City Manager Larry Hanson said the shuttle averages about 20 passengers a day.

Dr. Tom Hochschild, a Valdosta State University assistant professor of sociology, said he believes the low ridership is from people not knowing about the program.

To ride, passengers must register online at <http://www.sgrc.us/transportation-home.html>.

Terry Richards is senior reporter at The Valdosta Daily Times.

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