

DART in 2035: A west central station, freeway access

[Kim Norvell](mailto:knorvell@dmreg.com), knorvell@dmreg.com

9:44 a.m. CDT October 6, 2016



(Photo: The Register)

The Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority knows the demand for public transportation is changing, and it wants to be ready for the future.

The agency released an updated draft plan Wednesday — in celebration of its 10th birthday — that looks to 2035 and how new demands like population and employment growth, ride-sharing and technology can be incorporated into the public transit system. Now, DART is looking for feedback on three separate scenarios to decide what investment the metro is willing to make.

"I think there's kind of a revolution happening in terms of transportation," said DART communications officer Amanda Wanke. "If you think about it, there was no Uber 10 years ago, there were no iPhones. We're making sure we're planning now to keep up with these changes."

DART released its original long-term plan five years ago, but rapid increases in population growth forced the agency to look at how it's serving the metro's changing demographics. Greater Des Moines' population is now expected to reach 600,000 people by 2020. Original estimates had that forecast for 2035, Wanke said. In addition, more than 143,000 new jobs are expected in the metro by 2050.

DART also knows there are fewer teenagers in the metro who have driver's licenses and more residents in the urban core (17 percent) who do not own cars, Wanke said. Both present a higher demand for frequent and easily accessible public transportation, she said.

Both riders and non-riders are being asked to review DART's plan for the future and provide input so the agency knows where and how to spend its money. The agency is also looking for feedback on how much of an investment the public is willing to make, because no matter the scenario it needs to find new sources of revenue — whether that's increased taxes, higher fares, more city, state and federal funding, or a combination of both. Those revenue streams help fund the agency now.

Plans range from annual operating costs of \$66.8 million to \$114.5 million, starting in 2035. DART's current service is projected to cost \$53.9 million in 2035.

All plans call for buses to run more frequently, an increase in stops and shelters, and transportation hubs throughout the metro. Here's a breakdown of some of the proposals:



A mobility hub could give riders access to shareable cars and bikes to help reach far-off destinations, one idea the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority is considering for the future. (Photo: DART/Special to the Register)

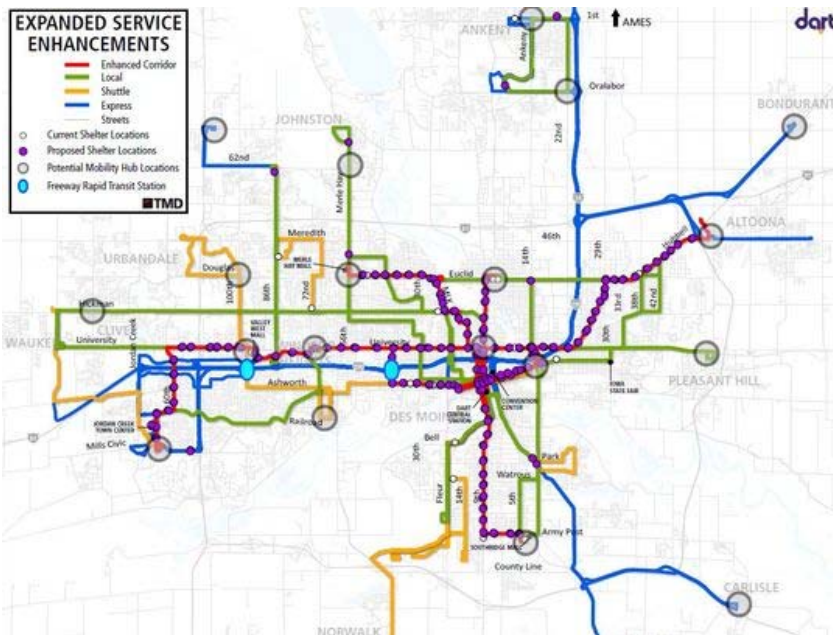
Station in the western suburbs

DART wants to add up to 19 "mobility hubs" throughout the Des Moines metro where riders can access several types of transportation at one stop. Riders could drive from the hub in a ride-share option, such as Uber or Zipcar, or rent a bike from a Des Moines BCycle station.

This expands access for riders whose jobs or destinations aren't within walking distance of a bus stop, Wanke said.

While the locations and sizes of mobility hubs are not yet determined, plan on seeing a large one somewhere in the western suburbs. It would be similar in size and scope to the DART Central Station at 620 Cherry St. in downtown Des Moines.

Anywhere from 30 to 250 new shelters — simple structures where riders can sit or stand outside of the elements — are also proposed.



This map shows the most enhanced proposal for DART's long-term plan at an annual cost of \$73.3 million, according to ideas released Wednesday by the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority. (Photo: DART/Special to the Register)

More stops, longer hours

Buses are proposed to run every 20 minutes on all local routes. About 8 percent of Des Moines' population now has access to buses that run every 20 minutes, but expansion options could give that access to 42 percent to 60 percent of residents.

Service hours could be expanded to 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Saturdays, and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sundays.

DART also wants more convenient access by providing stops every quarter-of-a-mile in high-demand areas. The most expansive plan calls for expanding service to Ames, Indianola, Norwalk and Waukee.



DART could look to add a designated bus/carpool lane on the freeway. (Photo: DART/Special to the Register)

Freeway rapid transit

DART hopes to work with the Iowa Department of Transportation on ways buses can bypass congestion on the freeway so riders aren't stuck in traffic. This could include options like a dedicated public transportation and carpool lane or use of freeway shoulders as bus stops.

Other options include adding freeway bus stops to on/off ramps or driving riders to bus stops that are closer to the freeway. Both would prevent the bus from having to fully exit the freeway, which would cut time.

Public input

Surveys will be open until Nov. 18. The survey and the entire DART Forward 2035 Plan can be accessed at www.dartforward2035.com (<https://dartforward2035.com/>). Users can also text DART2035 to 41411 for more information.

There is also a list of public meetings on the website at which DART will present the plan and ask for public feedback.

It will then shape a final plan according to the public's priorities and preferences. A final plan is expected in late winter or early spring.

Read or Share this story: <http://dmreg.co/2e3x6OO>