

## ***Temple Fixed Routes to Merge***

Several years ago, The HOP combined three routes serving Copperas Cove, creating one new route that served the high points of the existing routes. Through such efforts, The HOP and the city were able to realize cost effectiveness and service efficiencies by reducing service to low performing bus stops without sacrificing service to those bus stops used most by transit passengers. A few years later, The HOP took the same approach merging routes 2 and 3 to create a new route 2. Again, most passengers were still able to use The HOP fixed route service in that area, again with greater cost effectiveness and service efficiencies. About the same time, routes 5 and 6 were merged, creating a new route 5 that provided more efficient, more cost effective service. That route 5 has grown to be one of the best used and most productive routes in the system, and was the highest performing route for September.

The HOP now plans the same approach for fixed route service in Temple. A few years ago, a new fixed route 520 was added to the two routes then in service, routes 510 and 530. Much of route 520 served the same area as served by route 510 – VA, Scott & White facilities on S 31<sup>st</sup>, Temple College, Wal-Mart and Temple Mall. Since then, ridership is solid for all Temple routes, but not as strong a performance factor as before route 520's implementation. Route performance for fixed route service is measured in terms of passengers per service hour. Ideally, each route would exceed 10 passengers per service hour, a level that has been reached by 520 and 530, and exceeded by 50% for route 510 (at more than 15 passengers per service hour). However, prior to the route changes, route 510 exceeded 20 passengers per service, and was often the highest performing route in the system.

During the period since route 520 was implemented, transit funding has become a more critical point for public transit, including The HOP. Funding levels provided at the state and local levels have not kept up with the cost of service, and federal funding through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has actually decreased in the last couple of years, putting an increasing burden on the city to provide more funding for the system, or be more creatively efficient. The immediate future is likely to see the same or even worse funding limitations, and Hill Country Transit District (HCTD), operator of The HOP, determine to review the service and to consider ways to improve efficiency. This process is in keeping with the requirements of the Central Texas Regional Transit Advisory Group (CTRTAG), a group appointed to establish performance measures for public transportation in central Texas, and which includes recommendations for The HOP to consider efficiencies.

HCTD staff conducted an in depth review of the bus service at each bus stop for all three routes currently operating in Temple. Through that review, HCTD staff was able to identify bus stops that had little use, bus stops with high use, and all levels of use between. Passengers seem to adapt best to route changes with the fewest changes, so HCTD looked to keep two of the current routes as similar as possible, merging the third route into the other two. The result is the elimination of route 520, with major stops in east Temple being covered through a re-alignment of route 530.

This change will certainly have an adverse impact on some passengers who use The HOP. Impacts may include walking farther to a bus stop, transferring to another route, riding longer, waiting longer for the bus, and, in some situations, possibly limiting use of The HOP altogether. However, The HOP and the passengers who use The HOP must accept the fact that each public transit service must strive to provide efficient, cost-effective service, an objective HCTD supports. Reasonable efforts must be made to sustain as much service as possible using the funding that is available so service is guided more by demand than by the funding availability.

The HOP plans to implement these changes January 1, 2017. Public comment is invited, and HCTD has announced a public hearing to be held in the Temple city council chambers from 3:30 PM until 4:30 PM, Tuesday afternoon, November 29, 2016. The public is invited to attend. Director of Urban Operations Robert Ator said "Maps of the current and proposed service will be available, as well as information as to how specific bus stops will be affected. Route maps can be seen on The HOP's web site.