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COLTS: Riders supportive of fare increase

RICH HOWELLS

SCRANTON – Only a handful of people have commented during public hearings held by the County of Lackawanna Transit System on proposed fare increases due to inflation, but officials say those who have were supportive of the slight increase.

COLTS proposed that full cash fares should increase from \$1.25 to \$1.50 on July 2 and again to \$1.75 on July 1, 2013. Transfers will go up a quarter in both 2012 and 2013, and a new Day Pass will be added on July 2 for \$3.50, which will increase to \$4 on July 1, 2013. Seniors and children will continue to ride for free.

The first meeting was held on March 6 in the COLTS board room, 800 North South Rd., Scranton, though no members of the public attended. Only six signed in at a March 7 meeting at The Mall at Steamtown on the second floor, next to the Variety Shop.

A final meeting at the mall is scheduled for March 24, and the 30-day comment period ends April 5. Only written comments are accepted, and residents can submit comments to COLTS Fare Increase, 800 North South Rd., Scranton, Pa., 18504, or via e-mail to info@coltsbus.com with "Fare Increase" in the subject line.

The first commenter, James Dermalis, a 75-year-old retired Carbondale resident, told the COLTS board on Wednesday that it was "about time" fees increased, as this is the first in more than 17 years.

"I come to the mall; I go to shop and spend the day. There's nothing in Carbondale. It's a small town," Dermalis said, adding that he takes the bus to Scranton almost every morning.

"The morning bus is crowded. Sometimes it's like standing room only... Even if they raise it to \$2, it's no problem there. That's reasonable compared to gas prices."

When reached for comment on March 9, COLTS Director of Communications Gretchen Wintermantel said the general consensus was that the increases were fair given the current economic climate of the area and the country.

"Everyone was really understanding for the most part, I think," Wintermantel said.

Average riders, she said, are seniors and people who commute five days a week.

"We're starting to see more people that have cars just utilize the buses, which is good, whereas before I think the average rider didn't have a car. They relied on the bus to get to and from work," she noted.

COLTS will also be rolling out route changes in the first week of July, through information on these changes will likely not be available until late spring, Wintermantel said. These changes are unrelated to the fare increases, she continued.



James Dermalis of Carbondale, left, speaks with COLTS Executive Director Robert Flume about proposed changes in the system's bus fares during a March 7 hearing at the Mall at Steamtown.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Mail your thoughts on proposed fare increases to: COLTS Fare Increase, 800 North South Rd., Scranton, Pa., 18504 or email info@coltsbus.com with "Fare Increase" in the subject line. Comment period ends April 5.

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