

Mass transit may be a necessity for B-CS

By JED YOUNG
City Reporter

With gasoline prices expected to reach \$2 per gallon by the end of the year, mass transit in Bryan-College Station may soon be a reality.

Saturday's bond election will give Bryan voters the chance to tell city officials how they feel about mass transit, via a referendum question included on the ballot.

According to a Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) report, the proposed program is a public bus system that will have a route along Texas Avenue between 25th Street in

Bryan and FM 2818 in College Station.

There are three primary transfer points proposed: Manor East Mall, Culpepper Plaza and the old Bryan central business district. Sub-routes would run through most of the rest of the two cities.

The buses would operate at 30-minute intervals during normal weekdays with fares of 50 cents during peak hours and 25 cents for the remaining hours. Peak times would be during morning and evening rush hours.

Estimates call for four, 45-

passenger buses and thirteen, 20-passenger buses. Support facilities would include an administration office building and a maintenance shop.

The proposed system was designed after extensive studies by the TTI and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) of Bryan-College Station.

According to MPO figures, Bryan-College Station taxpayers would

MPO members include Brazos County Judge Richard Holmgren; Carol Zeigler, department of highways and transportation engineer; Dr. Charles E. McCandless, chief planning officer at Texas A&M; Larence Bravane, College Station mayor; and Bryan City Councilman Joe Hanover.

After MPO has decided on a new program, each member will present the ideas to the body he represents for approval, Williamson said. If a program is approved, MPO will apply for federal funds.

In 1975, MPO authorized TTI to conduct studies, financed by the Federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration, on mass transit in Bryan-College Station, including studies on a public bus system.

According to the report by TTI changes have occurred as a result of the recent rapid growth increasing the need for public transit.

Changes include urbanization of retail shops and the disappearance of the neighborhood grocery store.

"The lack of mobility has become a major problem facing several segments of the population, especially the low-income level group," the report said.

Also, Williamson said, "We're beginning to see two things; a lot of people walking and hitch-hiking around town."

Williamson continued saying, "One of our big problems is... if the differential between (a person's) in-

come and paying to get to work drops off, then he might go back on welfare."

According to MPO and TTI estimates, the initial capital investment totals \$2,180,000. Federal and state funds would cover 93 percent of this figure, leaving Bryan-College Station with a tab of \$153,000.

"On one hand it is expensive but when compared to other city services, it is minimal," said Tom Urbanick, TTI assistant engineer.

In comparison, Bryan and College Station annually spend \$454,000 and \$545,000 respectively on city parks alone, while \$876,000 and \$342,000 are spent by the two on city streets.

The annual operating investment would total \$425,000 after farebox revenue (money from the actual bus fares) and the federal government would cover half of this deficit, leaving \$212,500 in operating costs.

Operating costs for the two cities would be determined by the number

The proposed increase for property owners is five cents per \$100. For example, the owner of a \$30,000 home now paying \$216 in property tax would see an increase of \$15 or a new tax total of \$231 to finance a mass transit system.

Bryan-College Station leaders must now decide whether to go ahead with the transit program and start applying for federal grants. Since it is not possible to obtain a U.S. Department of Transportation grant unless the local source of matching funds is identified, city officials must also decide on the means of financing the program.

The only essential deadline would be before all the funds are allocated to other cities, said Hanover. According to Al Mayo, College Station city planner, the actual process, from the time of application to implementation of the bus system could take up to three years.

Three years from now, the situation may be severe as far as gas prices and availability, said Mayo. If the process was started then, it would take three more years for a bus system, if the funds were available at that time.

College Station recently sent questionnaires to the public as part of the city's community development study. Four questions on mass transit were included.

One of the questions read, "Should mass transit be made available in College Station?" Sixty-nine percent of those interviewed said yes and 30.3 percent said no. But when asked, "If a system was put into operation, would you favor supporting the system through increased taxes?" 49.8 percent said yes and 50.2 percent said no.

According to Mayo, a lot of people may not consider using the system or paying for it now, but attitudes may change if the gas situation gets out of hand.

As far as approval by the College Station City Council, Mayo said the system is still in the early stages of planning and the councilmen do not have enough information to make a decision.

The Bryan City Council is putting the transit question on the bond

election ballot and it will read... or against establishment... and financing of a public transit system in cooperation with the city of College Station, with estimated initial capital cost to the Bryan of \$165,000, with estimated capital cost of \$227,000.

Hanover says he is not optimistic about the council's approval as he is about voter opinion of the referendum.

Even though there is pessimism among the Bryan council members, Hanover said, "I'm convinced in three years, we'll need a system."

According to Williamson, council members do not have to abide by voters' opinion.

"The council has the choice in the matter," he said. "They could do it right now without ever going to the people or if they get a referendum, that passes, they still do not have to implement the program."

One question arises if the A&M students are expected to use the public transit buses, would they interfere with Transportation with the prizes shuttle buses?

"I don't think there would be complications," said Williamson. One of the Austin, Austin city transit bus and Transportation Transit prizes work together.

According to Brady Branch manager for Transportation Enterprises, the proposed system a linear route up and down

Bryan and College Station annually spend \$454,000 and \$545,000 respectively on city parks alone, while \$876,000 and \$342,000 are spent on city streets.

Avenue, with only two stops... But Burnett said the transit system "could possibly slow down (overall) growth as a company of a bomb..."

The final decision is up to the councilmen of each city, and the citizens' opinion poll may have determined the outcome.

Since federal loans take time to be processed and since the state is limited, Williamson said this is a "do-or-die" proposition. The drive don't get things going right now may be too late, he said.

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have to finance 7 percent of the initial cost, totaling \$153,000 jointly.

The organization is designed to examine all phases of transportation for the two cities, from airport improvements to street repair.

All mass transit or transportation programs must go through MPO before they can be pursued by either city, said D.D. Williamson, supervising planning engineer for the department of highways and transportation.

To prevent overlapping of federal funds, MPO approves all applications for federal aid in transportation for either city, Williamson said.

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"On one hand it (mass transit) is expensive, but when compared to other city services, it is minimal," said Tom Urbanick, assistant engineer for TTI.

of vehicle miles of service logged within that city," said Williamson.

Williamson said an increase in the property tax is an example of how money could be acquired locally, although that proposal has not been passed.

Urbanick said other alternatives for local finances were studied, including a sales tax, but the property tax was proposed by MPO.

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