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## Fort Collins bus service makes the grade

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If anyone knows what it's like to ride a Transfort bus, it's Junior McGee.

The Fort Collins native rides the bus every day whether it's to the grocery store or the post office, and he has almost no complaints about the transit system.

"It's a big help, no doubt," he said Friday morning at the Downtown Transit Center while waiting to catch bus No. 5 to Poudre Valley Hospital.

McGee's sentiments seem to resonate among riders.

According to the 2008 Transfort Bus Rider Survey, which surveyed 2,377 people, a growing number of riders are more satisfied with aspects such as timeliness and helpfulness of drivers.

Almost 78 percent of those surveyed were either very satisfied or satisfied with service being on time and 86.6 percent of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the helpfulness of bus drivers.

"The trend here that I see is the vast majority of our bus passengers are satisfied or very satisfied with our service on the street right now," said Judith Lavelle, marketing analyst for Transfort and Dial-A-Ride.

The survey, conducted April 30 on all regular bus routes, asked riders about the origin and destination of their trips, rider demographics and opinions of the bus system.

Ultimately the results will be used in combination with a strategic operating plan - being put together now - to address budget issues and for planning future routes.

The largest percentage of riders continues to be CSU students, with 50 percent of respondents using Colorado State University bus passes, and 60 percent of riders are between the ages of 16 to 25.

Transfort also is encouraged that 61 percent of respondents have a valid driver's license and still choose to take the bus, Lavelle said. That percentage is down from 65 percent according to a 2005 onboard survey.

"There's a stereotype it's homeless people riding the bus and that's not the case," she said.

The most prevalent concern of the transit system is the lack of service after 6 p.m. and the frequency of service.

In both categories 35 percent were dissatisfied with the two aspects, while 26 percent each said they're somewhat satisfied but it needs improvement.

The lack of night service is the biggest downside for Morgan Burrell, who lives near the Super

Wal-Mart.

"I have bad feet and sometimes I have to walk home," she said.

Lavelle recognizes those rider concerns and said a solution won't happen in a day.

"It's not a surprise to us," Lavelle said. "Our service doesn't meet the needs of everybody, and it probably never will; but our goal is to maximize service to our riders."

The MAX bus rapid transit that will run up and down the Mason Corridor every 7 to 10 minutes will help increase efficiency, she said. Eventually routes from the east and west will feed into the main line and create a grid system.

Lavelle hopes to administer an onboard rider survey annually, although not one as lengthy as the 2008 survey.

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