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Lost in transit shuffle

Fair Oaks, Orangevale bus riders feel left in a lurch

BY SCOTT THOMAS ANDERSON / scotta@newsreview.com



Bonnie Lindemann stands at her regular bus stop near the border of Fair Oaks and Orangevale.

Sacramento Regional Transit is preparing to launch the largest reconfiguration of public bus routes in 30 years, expanding services into Elk Grove and shifting a number of buses to neighborhoods where there's potential to grow ridership.

But not everyone's happy about the reshuffle.

Some riders in Fair Oaks and Orangevale say RT's data-driven approach reduced them to disposable statistics and stranded their suburban pockets. They also claim a lack of outreach from RT left their community without a voice.

RT officials said last week they tried to solicit input from Fair Oaks and Orangevale riders and promised to monitor impacts to see if adjustments need to be made after the changes take effect in September.

Fair Oaks resident Bonnie Lindemann doesn't drive and uses RT as her primary transportation. In December, she learned from a fellow rider that major routes within what RT calls its "Sunrise Hub" would be eliminated.

Lindemann says she hadn't seen any bulletins about this on the buses. Concerned, she asked her driver, who encouraged her to attend the public meetings RT was holding. But RT didn't hold any meetings in the places Lindemann expected, particularly the Fair Oaks and Orangevale libraries. The only meetings Lindemann could find to attend were in downtown Sacramento, which can take well more than an hour to get to by bus from Fair Oaks.

Once Lindemann finally saw the planned route eliminations, she realized it meant she'd be doing an extra 25 minutes of walking a day.

"I didn't get to see what their grand old plan was until January 14th," she recalled. "It was awful and cold and pouring down rain that day. I was in despair because everything I was using, they were getting rid of."

Another Fair Oaks resident who's concerned is Dawn Saunders. She knows first-hand about the impact that lost routes could have on families. Saunders' daughter spent the last few years attending high school within the San Juan Unified School District, which doesn't offer school buses for students. Saunders' daughter relied on RT buses to avoid walking 3 miles to school along a path with several roadside memorials where pedestrians were killed.

"I never heard a thing," Saunders said of the proposed changes. "It's not like our supervisor told us, either. The entire community is represented by Sue Frost, and now the entire community isn't going to have bus service."

RT spokeswoman Jessica Gonzalez said the canceled routes around Sunrise Hub, specifically routes 24 and 28, were two of its lowest-performing routes, only averaging 11.5 boardings an hour.

"We took a host of factors into consideration, because we understand it's a really big deal," Gonzalez said. "We want higher performing routes because it gets more people around."

Gonzalez added that RT is filling the service gap in Fair Oaks and Orangevale with Smart Ride, an on-demand, micro-transit service.

James Boyle, RT's director of planning, says he's working with San Juan Unified to see if four new RT routes can be added to address parental concerns.

"That's something we're in the process of doing," Boyle stressed.

But for Lindemann, who worries that older and intellectually disabled riders will just stay home rather than try to navigate a

micro-transit service, RT's plans are nothing to celebrate.

"A fixed route is far more rideable than a dial-a-ride," she noted. "They said they were just cleaning up squiggly lines on their map, but all those lines are real people."

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Bonnie Lindemann
Fair Oaks resident