

CATS Says 15-minute Intervals Would Cost Millions, Take 100 Buses

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- Those lucky enough to have their own wheels will likely find Aaron Jordan's commute from his home off South Boulevard hard to fathom.

"I have to take the number 12 bus to the train and then the train to here, downtown," Jordan explained.

He's not done. He then transfers to a north Mecklenburg express bus. "I get off the number 63 and get on the number 99 to go to Davidson." That's three buses and a light rail ride, all to get to work or visit his mother. "To get to where I'm going from here it only takes me 20, 25 minutes in a car, versus two and a half to four hours sometimes," he said.

Weekend bus service is obviously less frequent. "It's just on Sunday's a lot of buses any more frequently than hourly," added commuter Neal Morewood.

That lack of frequency hasn't helped Charlotte Area Transit bus ridership numbers, which, overall, have gone down in recent years. "I would take the car, especially if you have a job where you're on a time limit," Aaron added.

CATS has been working since 2018 to re-design and restructure its system through the [Envision My Ride initiative](#).

"Too many of our routes have headways," CATS Executive Dir. John Lewis said. "That is the intervals between buses of 30 minutes, 45 minutes, or even an hour."

Lewis says phase-2 of that program aims to address commutes like Aaron's.

"Our goal is that no CATS bus route will have a frequency of greater than 15 minutes," Lewis explained. Meaning riders like Morewood wouldn't face a long wait in the case of just missing the bus. "I time it better so that I don't have to wait a full hour between bus rides."

But those 15-minute intervals come with a hefty price tag. "That would require an additional \$32 million investment. That would take care of the annual costs to pay for the additional drivers, mechanics, and extra fuel.

"And, at the same time acquire an additional 100 vehicles, to meet that goal level," Lewis said. "I think more people would want to ride the bus if it did," Morewood added.

Despite how successful light rail has been, the majority of transit system users ride the bus. "We're working with our funding partners at the city and county level to work towards that goal," Lewis said.

It directly impacts the well-being of people like Neal and Aaron. "This bus pulled off, now I got to wait down here for a whole hour, just to go back up," Aaron Jordan said as he waited at the Uptown transit center for the bus.

But when it's your only option, he says there's no reason to complain.

"You got to do what you got to do if you want to get there, it get you there, it takes a while, but it gets you there," Jordan said.

Phase three of Envision My Ride deals with making CATS bus service more reliable. That includes the bus-bike lane only pilot project currently on 4th Street in Uptown. CATS says it's shortening travel times for routes using the lane. At the end of that pilot, Lewis says they are hoping to expand the project to other corridors.

Lewis adds that ridership in December was actually up by 3 percent, compared to that same time in 2018. He says they are looking to invest in more amenities that will help increase ridership and service reliability.