

Grand River Transit Enhances Services in Cambridge

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Grand River Transit (GRT) in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, has implemented a number of new initiatives to improve riders' experiences on the regional transit system.

GRT was established in 2000 by the Region of Waterloo and last year provided over 15.8 million rides within the region. One of the greatest things about the quick and extensive routes is that many more people in Cambridge have the option of switching to a mode of transportation that is healthier, often less expensive and more environmentally conscious.

The Ainslie Street Transit Terminal in Cambridge is a busy transportation hub and has features such as flat panel screens that use Global Positioning Systems (GPS) on-board the iXpress buses to provide exact bus arrival times for the iXpress and scheduled times for other buses. Covered shelters for passenger waiting areas are also a valuable amenity. This is one of only two large terminals in the system, the other being the Charles Street Transit Terminal in Kitchener. With approximately 500 employees, 220 buses, 57 routes, 25 accessible vehicles, and four vans for busPLUS routes, GRT is constantly changing to serve regional needs.

Cambridge has 20 of the 57 routes across the region and two busPLUS routes through newly developed areas of the City such as Cherry Blossom and Saginaw. These busPLUS routes which use a smaller vehicle are implemented early to generate ridership in advance of using full size buses in newly developed areas of Cambridge.

Another feature of GRT is bicycle racks on the fronts of all buses in order to promote eco-friendly travel even off of the bus - a wonderful option to mix modes of transportation. This encourages transit riders to use the bus for longer distances and then transfer to their bike.

One way GRT has changed to attract ridership is providing enhanced route planning capabilities for users. The EasyGO trip planner is an online trip planning system much like Google Maps, only much more informative and specific to the area. The system has been in use since June 2008 and clarifies information for easier access to routes for Cambridge citizens.

The EasyGO trip planning system includes features that allow a user to search for a desired destination based on city or landmark and it will not only show you what bus route to take but also indicate how much you would have to walk or whether a bus transfer is needed. For example, to get from the Ainslie Street Transit Terminal in Downtown Galt to the W.G. Johnson Centre in Hespeler Towne Centre, a trip that traverses Cambridge from the south end to the north end, it would take approximately 40 minutes, 33 of those on the bus and the other 7 minutes by walking.

EasyGo Next Bus Call and Text Messaging are available wherever and whenever you need to get the next departure times for your stop. Simply call 519-585-7555, our new automated phone system. Decide if you want the next bus times for the day or a future day, key in or say your four-digit bus stop number (posted at your bus stop) to get the next departure times for the stop or if you need to know more, you have the option to speak to a customer service agent. If you do not have time to chat, text messaging is the way to go. Simply text 57555 and key in your four digit bus stop number in the message body, and route number (if multiple routes at the stop) and press send. You will receive a text message back with the next three scheduled times the bus will be at the stop.

Another feature separate from the EasyGO that enhances GRT for Cambridge riders is the detailed map on their website highlighting city heritage trails, bicycling paths, and other features such as schools and churches. Some examples of this are Route 59 - Christopher that goes to the Moffatt Creek Park and Trail, Route 56 - Dunbar that goes to the Linear Trail, and Route 71 - Melran will take you to the Woodland Glen Trail.

The many ways GRT reaches out to assist its riders does pay off. According to a Transit Planner for GRT, Neil Malcolm, in a recent survey it was found that the majority of transit users like the service.

"In general, about eight out of 10 transit users believe GRT is either excellent or good at the on time performance of buses (79 percent) and the overall level of service (75 percent)," said Malcolm.

Another way GRT improved its services was in 2005 with the launch of the iXpress route that travels from Cambridge to Conestoga Mall in 75 minutes. This route runs every 15 minutes from 6 am to 6 pm Monday through Friday and every 30 minutes during evenings and weekend. Daily average boardings started out at 3,300 in 2005 and in 2008 had reached over 9,000, which shows that the iXpress route is doing well.

Wendy Wong, a resident of Cambridge, says the iXpress route is important because it makes it easier for her to visit her family in Waterloo.

"I take Grand River Transit often and it is always on time. It is great to have. For me to visit my daughter in Waterloo it is nice because I only have to take one bus and I don't have to stop a lot to get there," said Wong

Taking GRT in Cambridge is very worthwhile and will help towards your own personal goals for being environmentally friendly and will also save you money. For only \$2.50 (or less using tickets or passes) you can get on the bus at Ainslie Street and go all the way to Elmira or anywhere else you need to be in the region, it is much cheaper than driving your car that far and without all of the hassle. According to Neil Malcolm, it is a huge benefit to take GRT because of the money you will save.

"Taking public transit provides many benefits including cost savings as compared to car ownership, improving personal health, and helping to protect the environment," said Malcolm. "Transit riders can relax, read or nap during their commute instead of fighting with and stressing about daily traffic."

Finally, in order to maximize overall transit service quality and efficiency, GRT has initiated a study to comprehensively redesign the current conventional bus network to be fully integrated with the proposed Rapid Transit system. A Rapid Transit system would have a significant impact on the transit network in terms of capacity, travel times, and connectivity and a modified-grid system would be developed where cross-town GRT routes would connect with Rapid Transit stations.

For more information about GRT or to access the EasyGO trip planner visit the website at <http://www.grt.ca> or call: 519-585-7555.