

# Cocoa Beach adds bus route for seniors

BY R. NORMAN MOODY • FLORIDA TODAY • NOVEMBER 5, 2008

Cocoa Beach and Cape Canaveral seniors have long pushed for a community center of their own along a bus route.

For starters, they will get the bus route. The city of Cocoa Beach has partnered with Space Coast Area Transit to launch a bus service to the Cocoa Beach Country Club, where the seniors currently operate in borrowed space. The bus will travel between Fifth Street South, the Public Library and the country club. The new route will cost \$84,150 a year.

"I really think it's a great idea," Maggy Simony, 88, said as she arrived Monday at the Freedom 7 Senior Community Center -- as their space at the country club is called -- to play bridge.

Simony said she and her daughter have agreed that she would give up driving when she turns 90, at which time she would likely use the bus.

The 12- to-16-passenger bus will run every half-hour for eight hours, five days a week starting in July.

"I think the time will come when I don't feel like getting into traffic," said Stephanie Clark, a retiree who lives in Merritt Island and plays mahjongg once a week at Freedom 7. "I'd take the bus."

Peter Cunningham, president of Freedom 7 Senior Community Center, said the bus service will allow more people who don't drive to participate in activities.

"This is a temporary fix to try to get more people to the senior center," he said.

Cunningham said he believes the bus service would be used not only by seniors, but also by others to get to the tennis courts, swimming pool, golf course, schools and to other activities in the area.

"There is a heck of a lot of activity on Minutemen Causeway," he said. "All those activities warrant a bus service."

Jim Liesenfelt, director of Space Coast Area Transit, said the two-year trial run could be discontinued at anytime if it doesn't work or attract enough riders, though officials expect it to gradually increase the number of passengers. It will likely start with about six to seven passengers per hour.

"It will tie into the (Cocoa Beach) trolley and will have some easy transfer points," he said. "It will fit in with all our other routes."

Cocoa Beach City Commissioner Skip Williams said he brought up the idea after residents asked him about bus service. The City Commission decided unanimously to move ahead with it, he said.

The new service is only expected to generate \$3,100 in bus fares so the city and the state will split the remaining cost. Liesenfelt said that's not unusual. Only about 10 to 12 percent of the cost of running fixed bus routes are usually covered by bus fares, he said.

"For the few people who can't go to the senior center because they can't drive their car, it's worth it," Williams said. "It's priceless to them."

Williams said the goal is still to build the seniors their own center, but in today's tough economic times that's unlikely anytime soon. "We don't feel we'll be able to find a permanent home within two years," he said. "In the interim, at least people can get there."

