

# Municipal Moments – Week 3



04/02/2017 - The results of our recent community survey indicate there is one particular weakness the City of Kerrville continues to grapple with: Public Transportation. Without a personal vehicle, getting from 'point A' to 'point B' becomes a major obstacle that can affect an individual's health and livelihood.

However the issue of public transportation in Kerrville is a complicated issue with a lengthy history. It is my goal through this week's column to provide some background on the history of public transportation in Kerrville and some information about ongoing efforts to provide more reliable public transportation to our area.

The City of Kerrville has previously provided public transportation to citizens on two separate occasions. The first ever city bus service was made available by the Kerrville Bus Company in 1942. The bus line established at that time provided service to the center of town and as far out as the Veteran's Hospital on Legion. Based on archives of the Kerrville Mountain Sun, that bus route lasted a number of years but ended sometime in the late 1950's.

The push for public transportation came again in the late 1970's. Sometime around 1977 the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation conducted several citizen surveys to gauge the interest and need for public transportation in communities around Texas. The results of those surveys indicated with the growing retirement population in Kerrville there was a need, and significant level of interest, in establishing a reliable public transportation system.

In 1979 the city learned of an Urban Mass Transportation Grant it could obtain from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration with the assistance of AACOG. The grant would provide \$258,000 to establish a fixed route 'mini-bus' system, with the stipulation that the state contribute \$43,000 and the city contribute approximately \$23,000 to get the program off the ground. The City applied for the grant in March of 1979 and proceeded to purchase three 20-passenger buses equipped with hydraulic lifts for the handicapped in October 1979. The cost of each bus at that time was just over \$50,000 according to the Kerrville Mountain Sun.

By August of 1980 the bus system, named 'Kerrtran,' was up and running with three fixed routes. Between the three routes, service was available within one quarter mile for 90 percent of city residents. The buses ran from 6:45a.m. to 6:45 p.m. six days a week and regular fares were set at 60 cents, with a discounted rate of 30 cents for seniors and students.



That resolution as passed by city council stated:

- “ 1. There is no public need or necessity for a bus system utilizing fixed routes in Kerrville.
  2. That it is not fair to the general taxpayer of the city to continue to subsidize the bus system where there is so small a demand...
  3. That the amount of the operating losses are so substantial that an emergency exists.
- It is unanimously resolved that as of Saturday, March 14, 1981 at 5:00 p.m. the city shall cease operating a bus system on fixed routes.”

I believe the key takeaways from this experience are that providing a fixed route public transportation system is very costly and in order to make it work you need a solid commitment from a large portion of the population. Despite the many surveys which indicated a vast potential for ridership in Kerrville in 1980, the reality is only a mere fraction of citizens actually utilized the service.

That's not to say the needs and makeup of our community are exactly the same today as they were 30 years ago, or that the city is completely ignoring the issue. Currently we are very lucky to have the services offered by Alamo Regional Transit through The Alamo Area Council of Governments. ART provides on demand, curb to curb transportation service to a 12 county area, including Kerr County, from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Despite the availability of that service, we continue hearing that there are unmet transportation needs.

In our 2008 Comprehensive Plan, goal 4.6 of our Transportation Master Plan was to develop a public transportation program to provide reliable, convenient and affordable service to persons traveling within Kerrville.

An independent local group has graciously stepped up and already started much of the work needed to proceed with addressing the transportation needs of the Kerrville community. Members of this group have tirelessly worked to disseminate surveys and identify the current transportation needs of Kerrville citizens. Now they are in the process of reviewing that information and determining how to launch a sustainable local program that will adequately address the needs of our local population.

The city remains eager to see what they come up with. The door for public transportation remains open, however, we certainly don't want to repeat any of the costly mistakes of the past.

- Don Davis  
Interim City Manager, Kerrville