

## Selma to change bus service to save money

By Kyle Lazarus

[klazarus@selmaenterprise.com](mailto:klazarus@selmaenterprise.com)

The city of Selma is considering changing its transit system to a complete fixed-route system run by the Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission. At a workshop March 2, the Council voted to receive more information about the change, with the fixed-route system coming before the Council officially on April 6. The change in service is the first of many looks that the Council will be giving at all departments in an attempt to save money in any way possible because it has a \$1 million budget shortfall. The fixed-route system -- which hasn't been approved by the Selma City Council yet -- could potentially save the city roughly \$50,000.

The transition itself would start on July 1. However, the transition to a complete fixed-route system would take over a year. If the change is approved the system would be completely transitioned by July 1, 2010.

There is currently one fixed-route bus in Selma that covers downtown and shopping centers. Under the new plan there would be multiple fixed-route systems running in the city to different areas.

There are advantages and disadvantages to a fixed-route system, as Council members and Recreation and Community Services Director Mikal Kirschner noted. Selma's current system is a pick-up system, where passengers call in to the Selma Senior Center to have a bus pick them up. The new system would have all of the buses on a fixed-route system except one, which would be dedicated to the usual pick-up system.

Additionally, service would be much more consistent with the fixed route system because the Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission has a fleet of drivers, including on-call drivers that are able to fill in for sick or vacationing Selma drivers.

"One of our biggest complaints is how long it takes people to get picked up," said Kirschner.

Out of 18 operations in Fresno County, only four cities still operate their own transit systems. At the transit workshop March 2, Jeff Webster of the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency said that any changes to the system would come before the Council and have public hearings.

"[Under the new plan] complaints would be directed to the EOC," said Webster. "We have a form which would be submitted to me and then we talk to the city manager about the outcome."

Webster said that Selma has one of the largest riderships in Fresno County. He also noted that Measure C funds could help.

"In the future, if you went to a fixed-route system and you needed benches or overhangs, that service could be paid for by Measure C funds," Webster said.

Already, the drivers on Saturday are employed by Fresno County Economic Opportunities Commission.

"The dispatchers would remain at the senior center because people are used to that," Kirschner said.

Lauri Linder, senior program coordinator at the Selma Senior Center, said that seniors rely heavily on the door-to-door pick-up service.

"They need to walk out their front door and get into a vehicle," said Linder. "They truly do depend on it, especially the frail."

She said the seniors would still rely on the dedicated on-call pick-up service if the service switched over to fixed-route.

City officials said that they have received a variety of complaints over the years and know that while the fixed-route system might be more consistent, it will be tough for many of the passengers to adjust.

Joe Castillo has been working for Selma transit for 22 years. Castillo did not like the idea of changing the system.

"Truthfully, I don't think a route would be good," he said. "These people are used to getting picked up in front and when you have babies and you're holding stuff and you have to walk to a route, that's not a good thing."

Castillo did admit that Selma transit has largely "spoiled the riders."

Selma Mayor Dennis Lujan said that there is always challenge bringing a new system to people used to an old one. Lujan noted the public is fickle -- and spoiled with the transit system.

"Unless you have a limo to pick someone up in 30 seconds they're going to be upset," said Lujan. "Then you have some people that you're going to do that and they're still going to be upset. That's the public."

Lujan promised that the Council would be "going through every department in the city of Selma looking for money, especially with a \$1 million deficit.

"It's \$10,000 here, it's \$10,000 there, we're not going to find \$1 million in one department," Lujan said.