

The Valley Breeze

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Shuttle bus will transport city's late-shift workers

'After hours' service will begin April 1

By [Brenna McCabe](#), Valley Breeze Staff Writer



WOONSOCKET - With the possibility of more service cuts in the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority's future, the Family Resources Community Action program is ready to pitch in.

FRCA's Way to Work Transportation Center is set to launch an "after hours" pilot shuttle service on April 1.

From left: Nancy Paradee, FRCA Deputy Executive Dir., Tracey Abrams, FRCA Development & Communications Dir., Bill Legare, President, Valley Transportation Corp, Kathy Coyne, General Manager, Valley Transportation Corp., and Dawn Camara, FRCA Way to Work Coordinator with the new Way to Work shuttle van. The pilot shuttle service will provide transportation to city resident employees who require transportation after the RIPTA service hours at Diamond Hill plaza.

It aims to provide transportation to employees working second or third shifts at local businesses or organizations on its route.

"We're really addressing the barrier here, helping people get to and from work," FRCA Development Director Tracey Abrams said. "At a time like this when the economy is making things hard for the city, this will provide a much needed service."

FRCA's data shows that of 164 residents who completed surveys in 2009, 52 percent reported a need for transportation for access to second and third shift jobs. Additionally, the U.S. Census in 2000 showed 17.3 percent of Woonsocket residents did not own vehicles, which was higher than the state average of 10.9 percent.

Elizabeth Featherston, owner of the Subway at Diamond Hill Road, said the shuttle service will also benefit employers because it allows them to keep reliable employees on the night shifts.

"It's going to be wonderful," said Featherston, who also owns another Subway in North Smithfield and Super Scoops & Java in Woonsocket. "A lot of my employees start at minimum wage here, and in this type of economy, no one can afford to buy a vehicle to get to work. Ninety-percent of my staff uses public transportation."

The store owner said she had an issue the last time RIPTA made service cuts to the Diamond Hill area in November because some of her employees had difficulty getting to and from work.

"A lot of them were good employees that I had for over two years," she said. "They were reliable. But after that, some people said they were going to go back to a store closer to home and others were looking into other options. Now we are able to look at moving people to our Diamond Hill location and having a safe way for them to travel."

The last RIPTA bus to arrive at Diamond Hill Plaza Monday through Friday is at 7:26 p.m. The pilot shuttle service is slated to run after 9 p.m. and stop some time before midnight. Way to Work Coordinator Dawn Camara said the after-hours shuttle will not only provide reliable transportation, but allow for more flexible employee schedules and pay raises for those promoted with more responsibility and hours.

"Obviously, the state is grappling with the economy right now," Abrams said of RIPTA service cuts. "This stuff takes time, and we wanted a more immediate, flexible solution. We've done this in a creative kind of way so that it will help inform RIPTA of the city's needs later. We just need to come up with a good model."

All potential passengers must register with the Way to Work Transportation Center in order to participate in the pilot program. Camara said to apply, each passenger must be a Woonsocket resident and have proof of employment. Successful applicants will receive a registration card at no cost, but will have to pay a \$2 one-way fare to the shuttle driver at the time of pick-up.

"Even though this project is partially funded through the Rhode Island Foundation and the Federal Transit Authority (Job Access and Reverse Commute) grant, we instilled riders' fees because we want it to be self-sustaining," Abrams said.

FRCA also teamed up with Valley Transportation for use of a van. If the project is successful and there is high demand for the service, Camara said the FRCA will consider revisiting start and end times, and possibly expanding the shuttle's route.

"It's hard to say how this is going to play out," Camara said. "But we're going to set it up at various locations and once we know who the riders are and how many loops can be done, we can assess where we can expand. Right now the need is in the Diamond Hill area."

Applicants may apply over the phone, online or at the transportation center. To register, e-mail waytowork@famresri.org or go to www.famresri.org