

WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSIT COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

ORDER NO. 1131

IN THE MATTER OF:

Served April 16, 1971

Application of D. C. Transit )  
System, Inc., to Add Route )  
M-3. )

Application No. 675

Application of D. C. Transit )  
System, Inc. to Abandon Its )  
D. C. Downtowner Minibus )  
Service. )

Application No. 676

Docket No. 228

On February 5, 1971, D. C. Transit System, Inc. (Transit) filed Application No. 676 to abandon its Downtowner Minibus Service, and Application No. 675 to add Route M-3. Transit sought the proposed new route only if it were to be allowed to discontinue the Downtowner, so the two applications were combined into Docket No. 228. The M-3 would operate only on weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., between the Southwest Mall along the F Street business district and Connecticut Avenue to Columbia Road. The original proposal was that a flat 25-cent fare would be charged.

The discontinuation of the inexpensive downtown shoppers service drew substantial adverse public reaction, and after consultation with the Commission staff, Transit filed major amendments to its proposal for Route M-3 on March 4, 1971. As amended, the M-3 would operate using a unique fare-zone structure which would retain the 10-cent fare in the F Street area presently served by the minibus.

Three zones would be established along the route, a south zone between the Southwest Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue and 7th Street, a middle zone between 7th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue and 14th and F Streets, and a north zone between 14th and F Streets and Connecticut Avenue and California Street. The fare for travel in all three zones would be 35 cents. The fares for rides of two zones or less vary depending on the width of

the zones, with a trip within the north zone or between the north and middle zones costing 25 cents, and a trip within the south zone or between the south and middle zones costing 20 cents. A system of zone checks will enable the route to maintain the 10-cent fare for trips entirely within the middle zone, the area previously served by the minibuses; but the collection and control of separate fares for other one-zone trips would be so complex and time consuming as to be impractical. As the fare for those trips will be less than the normal 40-cent fare, we do not see that patrons in those areas have cause for complaint.

The amendments also altered the route to include some changes recommended by the District of Columbia Highway Department, so that the M-3 would run as follows:

NORTHBOUND - From the north roadway of the Southwest Bus Terminal at 9th and D Streets, S. W., east on D Street, north on 6th Street, west on Independence Avenue, north on 7th Street, S. W. and N. W., west on F Street, north on 15th Street, west on service road of K Street, northwesterly on Connecticut Avenue, around Dupont Circle, northwest on Connecticut Avenue, northerly on Columbia Road and cut-off to California Street and west on California Street to Connecticut Avenue.

SOUTHBOUND - From California Street and Connecticut Avenue, southeasterly on Connecticut Avenue, around Dupont Circle, southeasterly on Connecticut Avenue, east on DeSales Street, south on 17th Street, east on K Street, south on 15th Street, east on F Street, south on 7th Street, N. W. and S. W., east on Independence Avenue, south on 6th Street, west on D Street and north into the Southwest Bus Terminal.

A hearing was held on the application as amended on March 31, 1971. Transit's reasons for seeking to discontinue the Downtowner were financial. The service has been losing money for some time despite efforts to adjust it. On December 10, 1969, Transit filed a proposed timetable which would have decreased the frequency of service on the Downtowner to every four minutes, from every three minutes. The change was justified as providing a more easily

maintained schedule, and as allowing the route to operate utilizing one less vehicle, thereby reducing operating losses. By Order No. 1030, served March 24, 1970, we allowed the schedule change. However, we recognized at that time that perhaps some further adjustments would be necessary to make minibus service viable.

In the meantime, on March 13, 1970, Transit had included in an application for a general fare increase, a request that the minibus fare be raised from 10 cents to 20 cents. In Order No. 1052, issued June 26, 1970, we denied Transit's request to double the fare because we felt that the increase would effectively kill the Downtowner as a shoppers' service. At that time we warned that the service might not be able to operate at a loss indefinitely and that "innovative means to provide proper financial support for this service" were needed. We stressed the benefits to the business district the Downtowner provided and called upon local businessmen to provide some financial support for it. Our discussion was distributed to business organizations and Transit was directed to pursue the matter with them; however, as of today, more than a year later, no very substantial response has come from the business community.

Transit presented evidence that for the twelve months ended November 30, 1970, Downtowner revenues did not even cover operators' wages. Further, it presented testimony that the existing minibuses are subject to numerous and expensive maintenance requirements and need immediate replacement.

The minibus vehicle itself is one of the major issues in this proceeding. Transit's original minibus fleet was depreciated over a five-year period, and in fact, more than half of that original fleet is no longer operable. The minibus, with its low floor and peripheral seating, is well suited to shoppers' needs; however, its short life span, frequent maintenance requirements, and high original cost make its utilization uneconomical at a fare level consistent with this type of service.

In order to meet the problem, Transit proposes to replace the Downtowner minibuses with the M-3, a service which would utilize 44-passenger, air-conditioned transit buses.

The M-3 would retain the 10-cent fare in the F Street corridor presently served by the minibus but would, it is anticipated, by route extensions at either end, generate sufficient additional

patrons to be economically feasible. The new route would inaugurate direct service from the growing Southwest employment area to downtown, and would also provide reduced-fare shoppers' service along lower Connecticut Avenue.

Transit proposes to schedule service at six-minute intervals initially. However, it presented testimony that it had additional 44-passenger vehicles which were idle during the mid-day, and that it would increase frequency of service as ridership warrants.

At the hearing held on Transit's application, several business organizations appeared to oppose the substitution of a new service for the Downtowner. Appearing were representatives of Park & Shop, Inc., Downtown Progress, Downtown Jaycees, Metropolitan Washington Board of Trade, and the Washington Board of Realtors. Their testimony was substantially similar and to the effect that they would be happy to see a new route such as the M-3 but that they desire the retention of minibus service along F Street. We do not dispute their testimony concerning the favorable public image of the minibus or the benefits it brings to downtown businesses and the city as a whole. However, we are convinced that the realities of the financial results of continued use of minibuses, unless some source of revenue other than the ratepayer can be found, support discontinuance. We further believe that, in all the circumstances, the M-3 proposal offers a reasonable substitute for the minibus service with the added virtue of offering a service that should generate new off-peak ridership.

In our previous orders concerning the minibus, and particularly in Order No. 1052, we have sought the assistance of the very parties who protest this application and who benefit from the service. In fact, Transit has been engaged in continuing discussions with members of the business community with a view to the establishment of a subsidy or some other form of assistance in support of the Downtowner. Although these discussions have not, as yet, borne fruit, each of the representatives of the protesting business organizations assured us that they would be happy to do whatever they could to preserve the Downtowner Minibus. In addition, we are aware of the fact that Secretary of Transportation Volpe publicly spoke of aiding establishment of an expanded minibus system for downtown Washington in a speech to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments on February 16, 1971. We would, of course, welcome any Federal initiatives for assisting the continued operation of minibuses, but, again, nothing of substance has yet been proposed.

Perhaps a program could be formulated which would enable Transit to continue to operate a minibus without additional burden on regular route riders; but if such a program is to be forthcoming, it must be produced now, while existing minibus equipment is still operable. Therefore, we will authorize the M-3 to be operated and will allow the discontinuance of the Downtowner, but we will delay the effective date in order to allow further time for interested parties to develop an alternative to the M-3 proposal, if they care to do so.

Finally, we have noted that the M-3 as proposed would not operate on Saturday, traditionally one of the heaviest shopping days of the week. Transit offered no satisfactory justification for this omission, and we believe that some type of downtown shoppers' service should be operated on Saturdays, at least along F Street. We will further use the hiatus herein established to give Transit an opportunity to submit a proposal for such a service if it does not wish to operate the M-3 on Saturday.

**THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED:**

1. That Applications Nos. 675 and 676 of D. C. Transit System, Inc. be, and they are hereby, granted effective June 1, 1971, on a provisional basis to the extent that, if a reasonable and substantial proposal for maintaining a viable minibus service is presented to the Commission by May 17, 1971, this authority may be suspended or withdrawn without further hearings.

2. That D. C. Transit System, Inc. submit to us a proposal for operation of a downtown shoppers' service on Saturdays, by April 28, 1971.

BY DIRECTION OF THE COMMISSION:



GEORGE A. AVERY  
Chairman