



Feb. 14, 2008

NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Higher fuel prices, cost savings spur people to ride ValleyRide Intercounty Express bus service

NAMPA, Idaho – Escalating gas prices, combined with the desire to save money, have spurred a substantial increase in demand for ValleyRide’s Intercounty Express bus service, according to ValleyRide officials and bus riders interviewed on Wednesday. ValleyRide saw bus ridership soar by 3,000 people (boardings) or 60 percent between July and October in 2007, and after the holidays, ridership remains strong, officials said.

“We’re continuing to see ridership increase, particularly on the Intercounty Express routes,” said Kelli Fairless, Executive Director of Valley Regional Transit (VRT).

Bus riders on the ValleyRide #40 Nampa/Meridian Express confirmed Wednesday that high fuel prices and dramatic cost savings by riding the bus have inspired them to ride the bus. The Express route departs Karcher Mall at 6:30 a.m., makes brief stops at the BSU West Campus in Nampa and at Gold’s Gym in Meridian, and then takes the freeway into downtown Boise, arriving at 7:25 a.m. Four different express routes travel many times daily from Canyon County to the Boise area to accommodate the demand.

“When gas prices went above \$2 several years ago, I decided to try it,” said Georgeann Williams of Nampa, who works at the Idaho Elks Rehabilitation Hospital in Boise. “My employer pays for three-quarters of my pass, so I pay only \$16 a month.”

Williams says riding the bus has reduced her stress meter by 80% during the morning commute. She has made fast friends with many riders she sees every day. They sing Christmas carols when the bus is stuck in traffic mired down by ice and snow, and they gave gifts to their bus driver, Stephanie. “This bus is full every day,” she says. “We usually have a few people standing in the aisles.”

Dan Narsavage of Nampa, a GIS analyst in the Ada County Assessor’s office, said his employer also covers the majority of the cost of his monthly bus pass, leaving him to pay only \$13. “With my truck, I can’t get into Boise and back on \$13 for one week, much less one month,” Narsavage says. “It’s pretty much a no-brainer.”

“When people ask me how the commute was, I say I don’t know because I don’t notice it when I’m riding the bus,” he says. “In the summer, I often ride my bike.” Each bus has a bike rack equipped for two bikes. If the racks are full, Narsavage may wait for the next bus so he can bring his bike to work and take a Greenbelt ride at lunch.

Kristi Bowers, a Boise State University student from Caldwell, says she saves \$50-\$60 a week by riding the bus for free with her BSU I.D. BSU has a contract with ValleyRide to provide free

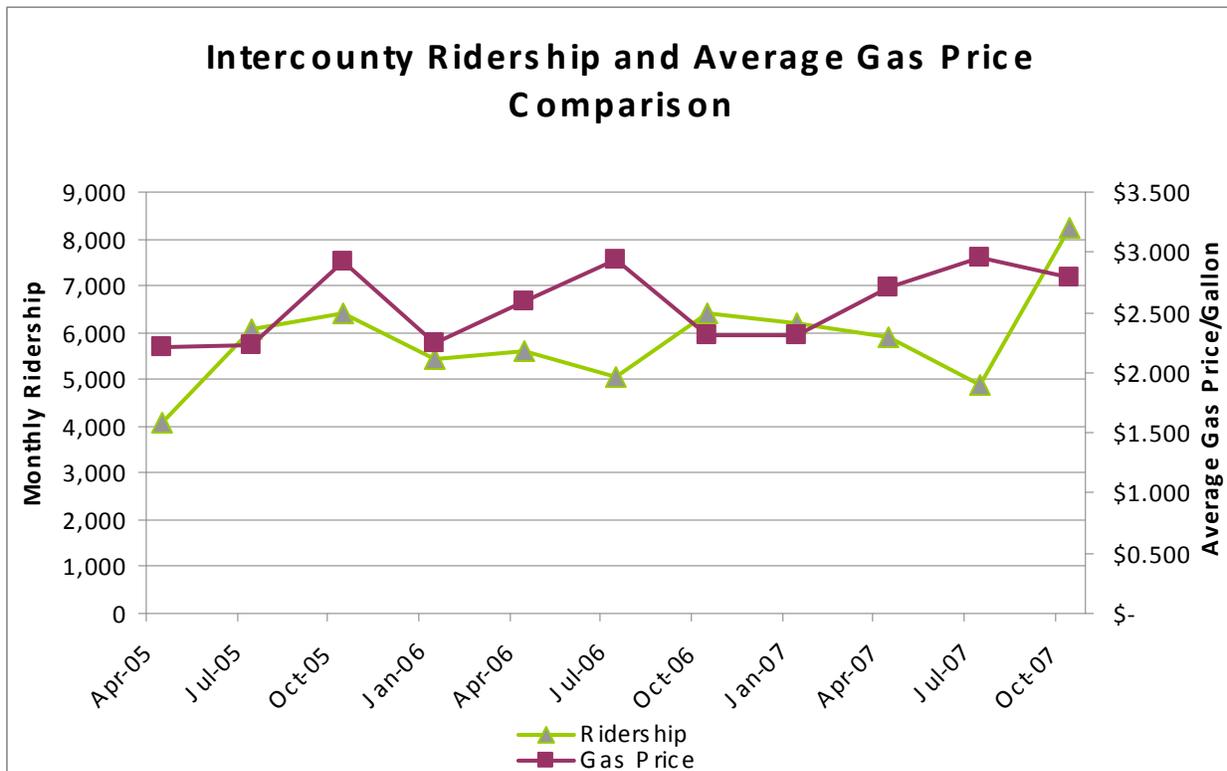
bus service to students, staff and faculty. “For me, it really comes down to the cost savings,” Bowers said. “I’m a student, so every penny counts.”

Over in the back corner of the bus, Mike Gibson chatted with other passengers about the benefits of riding the bus, while checking his email on a remote computer. Gibson says he doesn’t have a choice – he’s blind, and taking public transportation is the only way he can get around. “I’ve been riding the bus for four months since we moved here from Denver,” Gibson says. “I like the short commute from BSU West to BSU – it only takes 45 minutes.”

Gibson was checking his email on Braille Note machine, which also contains books that he can read on the bus and other files.

All of the bus riders said they like the Express service, but if more people start riding the Intercounty lines, there will be a need for more buses. “On some days, we’ve had as many as 16 people standing in the aisles,” Bowers said.

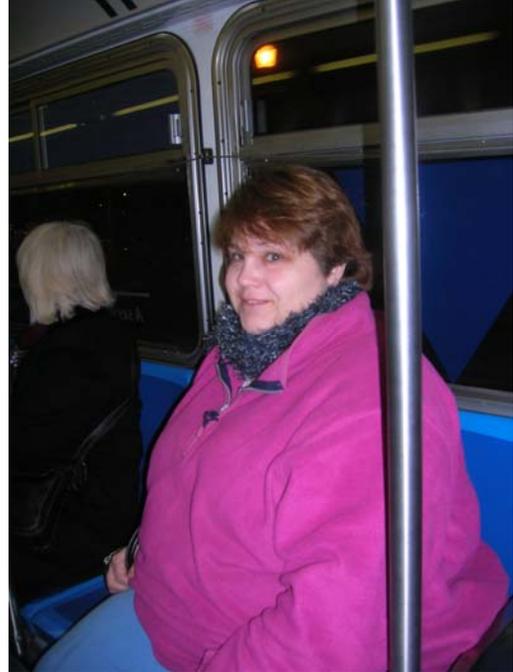
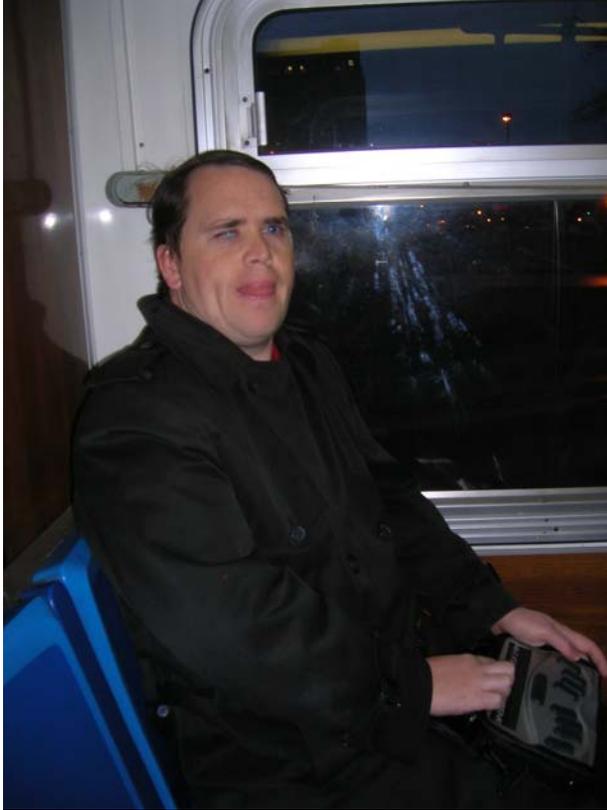
To pay for more buses or to expand routes, Fairless said the Idaho Legislature would need to pass legislation to give cities or counties local option sales tax authority or local communities like Nampa and Caldwell may be asked to increase their contribution to provide local matching funds for more buses. “It would come down to finding more money to pay for increased service,” she said.



For more information about ValleyRide’s Intercounty bus service, call ValleyRide’s Customer Service Department at RideLine, 345-RIDE (7433).

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Still photos of bus scenes on the Nampa/Meridian Express #40



Kristi Bowers, a BSU student from Caldwell. She rides the bus for free

Mike Bishop, a BSU staffer from Nampa who is blind and rides the bus every day.



Dan Narsavage, left, and other Canyon County folks on the bus.