MORE ARE ON BOARD WITH TRAVEL OPTION



The new upgraded downtown trolleys come with an updated system for riding. The route has been adjusted slightly, but more noticeably, the trolleys will be running on Drive game days. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

TROLLEYS EXPAND DOWNTOWN'S REACH

More cars, fixed-stop system, new app make service rider-friendly

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The downtown trolley, with its open sides and jingling bell, has become a familiar sight and sound in Greenville since its introduction in 2006. With its free rides and old-fashioned sensibility, it adds a charming appeal to Main Street.

But now, with a city center that stretches over a mile and a half of restaurants, bars, shops and other destinations, the trolley's purpose has moved beyond novel attraction. It's an important form of public transportation, too.

Greenville's city center was once condensed into a few blocks of Main Street between Coffee Street and the Hyatt, an easy hike.

Not so much anymore, said Barry Nocks, professor emeritus of planning at Clemson University and chair of the Greenville Design Review Board. "The whole scale from the north end down to the West End is getting too large to walk easily."

The trolley, he said, "makes further development of the downtown possible. It's kind of the next step."

With increased growth has come increased

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demand for the trolley, leading to the announcement earlier this month of two new trolleys being added to Greenville's fledgling fleet. The first of those began providing parking transportation for Greenville Drive games Monday and started regular downtown service Thursday night.

With the upgraded trolleys comes an updated system for riding. The route has been adjusted slightly, but more noticeably, the trolleys are going from a flag-stop system to a fixed-stop system and will be running even on Drive game days.

"We want to be consistent so that folks downtown — our visitors and our residents — know that the trolley will be there every night, Thursday through Sunday. That's the start. Eventually seven days a week," said Mark Rickards, director of Greenlink, which took over operation of the trolleys in recent months.

Eric Morris, an assistant professor of city and regional planning at Clemson University, said the trolleys are often just as much recreational as they are utilitarian and contribute more toward downtown character and quality of life.

Rickards said that among the goals with the trolleys is to provide a unique attraction for Greenville's downtown, as well as convenient transportation for hotel guests, North Main and downtown residents, and weekend visitors.

"It's part of the growth. It's part of the attraction of it," he said.

City councilwoman Amy Ryberg Doyle said she's heard calls from other neighborhoods near downtown seeking a trolley route similar to the one that loops through the North Main area.

"We realized the popularity of them was so critical," she said. "We've seen ridership grow and grow year after year."

The original partnership with the Drive, which helped introduce the trolleys to Greenville, called for the transport to be available for downtown shuttling only when it wasn't needed to get fans to and from the parking lot at County Square on game days.

With the addition of the two trolleys, the second of which is expected to arrive within the month, the city can now keep its regular downtown route running even while making sure the Drive stadium gets the service it needs. Fans will also be able to catch the trolley from the stadium to other areas of downtown if they're heading out for a night on the town after the game.

The new fixed-stop system — there will be about 20 stops along the route — will allow the trolleys to run more smoothly and predictably, Rickards said. Riders can expect to see the brightly colored trolleys at the stops about every 15 minutes, he said.

Signs marking the stops are expected to be up by Labor Day, Rickards said. Meanwhile, riders can still catch trolleys the old-fashioned way with a wave of the arm.



Two trolleys are being added. The first of those began providing parking transportation for Greenville Drive games Monday and started regular downtown service Thursday night. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

The new route will operate as a loop that leaves Fluor Field and travels north along roads that run parallel to Main Street. The trolley will loop around at the intersection of North Main and Earle streets and then head south on Main Street for the 2-mile trip back to the stadium. On weekends during the day, a special route will detour out to Heritage Green for a stop at the Children's Museum of the Upstate.

Coming changes also include a mobile app that will allow riders to track where the trolley is in real time, Rickards said.

To mark the introduction of the new trolleys, the first 100 riders on Friday night will receive free T-shirts.

The city unveiled the addition of two new trolleys earlier this month. Painted red and royal blue, the trolleys are handicap-accessible and come with "all the bells and whistles," including wood benches, bike racks, TV monitors and a conductor whose official job duty will be showing off downtown Greenville, said Trey Fouche, board chairman of the Greenville Transit Authority.

The existing trolleys, 20 years old and care-worn, will be kept as back-ups, Fouche said.

The Drive contributed $77,000, or 20 percent of the total cost, for the two new trolleys.

Trolley hours of operation are will remain 6 to 11 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturdays and 1 to 8 p.m. Sundays. Find route and riding information at www.greenvillesc.gov/RideGreenlink/forms/TrolleyMap_2014.pdf.

Staff writer Anna Lee contributed to this report.