



GGT Bus Fares Increase, Services Decline

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Recent monetary cutbacks to the Golden Gate Transit system have posed large problems to residents of Marin County who rely on the bus system, especially those living in the Canal.

In November 2003, Golden Gate Transit tried to decrease a \$202 million deficit by cutting one-third of its bus routes. Some Canal residents had to transfer three times or more to get to their destination. During the first two months GGT received many complaints (although they have since declined) from Marin County residents.

"It certainly seems that things have settled out," said Mary Currie, GGT's public-affairs director. "Customer concerns and issues on the service changes that began November 2 have decreased dramatically."

Now the district is facing a projected \$131 million shortfall for the coming five years. To decrease this deficit, GGT has had to increase the local Marin fares by 10 percent, effective July 1, 2004, raising fares from \$1.80 to \$2.

"The changes we are making in July are not necessarily in response to any problem that generated a great deal of customer complaints, but instead we're just trying to make things work better," said Currie.

Many bus riders are unhappy with the new fares.

"The increment of bus fares will affect the economy of bus users, generally to low-income people," said frequent rider Delia Alfaro.

Users think that the fares are unfair because generally, buses are for those who don't have enough money to buy a car. Even if they did, they would face the problem of gas; the average price-per-gallon in the Canal is \$2.26.

"I can't afford a car in this county because of the gas," said Canal resident and construction worker Roberto Sanchez. "But if GGT is going to increase the fares that much, I better get one; otherwise I am going to end up poorer than [I am] now."

Many of the Canal residents are undocumented, meaning that they cannot get a driver's license. Due to this, they rely on buses for transportation. In comparison to other counties, they are not getting a bargain. In San Francisco, for example, bus fares are only \$1.25 for adults and 35 cents for students.

"Two dollars is too much for Marin County," said bus user Brigitte Schrod. "It's OK if you go a little bit farther away, for example San Francisco or Santa Rosa, but not in Marin."

Other Marin County residents, especially immigrants, continue to be concerned about the increased bus fares.

"GGT knows that even if they increase the fares one more dollar, undocumented people will still be taking the buses because they don't have any other option," said a Canal resident.

RESOURCES:

For comprehensive information on Golden Gate Transit, visit: www.goldengatetransit.org