

Frequent riders say buses in and out of Atlantic City convenient

Claire Lowe

ATLANTIC CITY — During the mornings inside the bus terminal at Atlantic and Ohio avenues, a steady flow of people moves in and out to purchase tickets, check schedules or grab a seat and wait.

A large screen displays routes and times, and workers behind glass-enclosed windows answer questions. The terminal's population is eclectic, a mix of city residents going to work, tourists headed into and out of town, and others just looking for relief from the elements. Outside, a line forms at the stop picking up residents to go to Ventnor, Brigantine, the Hamilton Mall and beyond.

A recent Ducktown revitalization study called the city's public transportation network "robust" and found that nearly a quarter of residents use public transportation to get to work — more than twice the state rate and four times the county rate.

The bus system is a staple of city living, and frequent riders say getting around Atlantic City isn't an issue, although they face minor challenges connecting elsewhere in the county.

"It's just getting used to where you have to go, actually," said Liz Carasick, of Atlantic City. The 35-year-old lost her license and has been taking the bus for years.

"Going out of the city, there's a decent amount (of buses), but they need to run more frequently," Carasick said.

Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson said getting into Atlantic City has never been a problem for residents, and he doesn't see the number of routes in the county as an issue either.

"If their ridership was more, they would have more buses put on," Levinson said.

Although bus ridership in South Jersey is much lower than in the central and northern regions of the state, it is one of the most popular ways for workers from Atlantic County to get to work in Atlantic City. Almost 9,000 Atlantic County residents working in Atlantic City use public transportation.

Asked how it determines routes, NJ Transit, which operates the 13 routes in Atlantic City, said it constantly monitors ridership patterns to determine whether adjustments are needed.

Because of the 24/7 nature of the casino resort, busing in Atlantic City doesn't have a "dedicated" peak time.

"Most bus lines that serve A.C. operate 24/7. There is an increase in frequency during the traditional peak times (6-10 a.m. and 4-8 p.m.) on some lines, but most operate consistently throughout the day," said Lisa Torbic, senior public information officer for NJ Transit.

Steven Ellis, 61, boarded the 502 at the West Jersey Avenue transfer point in Pleasantville one weekday morning in May, on his way into the city for a doctor's appointment. The stop, which has a large, octagonal

plexiglass enclosure, was filled with people waiting for buses. After a brief wait as more passengers boarded, it took another 15 minutes to get into the city. This bus route runs about every half hour from Pleasantville, around the clock. Ellis said it is very convenient.

“I love taking the bus as long as I can catch it,” said Ellis, of Egg Harbor Township, who previously lived in the city. “If you miss the bus, then you’re stuck, then you gotta wait for the next bus or you gotta walk.”

Antonio Flores, 60, of Northfield, lived in Atlantic City for many years before moving to the mainland. Flores, who works a swing shift at Harrah’s Resort, said he has never had a driver’s license and doesn’t need one because he takes the bus or finds a ride when he needs one.

For Flores and many others, learning the bus schedule was intimidating at first, but they caught on quickly.

“I just had to find out on the bus schedule what time the bus was coming, or better yet I logged onto the NJ Transit app and write the bus stop number and saw what time the bus was coming,” Flores said — NJ Transit buses are equipped with GPS technology that helps users know exactly when to expect their ride.

It is easy to pick up, but the rides can be long, even when traveling a short distance. It takes Flores about 45 minutes to get from his home in Northfield to work in the Marina District. He is used to the wait and often carries a book to read.

Carasick said one of the hardest parts of using public transportation is grocery shopping.

“You have to take everything on the bus, so you have to limit what you’re doing,” she said, and make more frequent trips to the store.

Keisha Jones, 33, of Atlantic City, lost her license two years ago and had to start taking the bus to get to work. Jones, who was riding the 501, said that although she was born and raised in the city, using public transportation was foreign to her.

“I got the hang of it, but it’s frustrating because you can’t do what you want,” Jones said.