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SCAT ridership expected to reach record 2.6 million mark in 2009

Sarasota County Area Transit (SCAT) ridership reached the 1 million mark at the end of February – the earliest date ever in its 30-year history – and is on track for a record-breaking year of up to 2.6 million riders.

While the deepening economic crisis and the appeal of an affordable, safe transportation alternative – public transit – have contributed to the rise in bus ridership, the SCAT route and service improvements implemented in fiscal year 2008 have proven to be extremely popular during these difficult economic times, according to SCAT General Manager Anthony Beckford.

SCAT ridership increased last summer with the addition of two Sunday routes, Route 6 and Route 12, and new 30-minute service Monday-Saturday on Route 12. Also, 30-minute service on the Longboat Key Trolley, operated jointly by SCAT and Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT), has been successful in attracting additional riders, Beckford added. The trolley service is funded in part by the Florida Department of Transportation.

"SCAT offers excellent service and value," Beckford said. "With more frequent bus schedules and expanded hours, SCAT offers a viable alternative transportation choice and contributes to the county's commitment to a sustainable Sarasota."

SCAT, which celebrates 30 years of service to the community on April 9, has served 40 million riders since its inception in 1979.

For the fiscal year that began Oct. 1, 2008, SCAT recorded its 1 millionth rider in late February – a month ahead of schedule from its previous 1 million mark in the previous two fiscal years. In the first quarter alone of the current fiscal year, SCAT ridership increased almost 27 percent.

SCAT is now on target to serve up to 2.6 million riders in the current fiscal year, which runs Oct. 1, 2008 through Sept. 30, 2009, Beckford said. While SCAT surpassed the 2 million mark in each of the past two fiscal years, this year's projected ridership will represent a 13 percent increase over the previous year.

SCAT currently operates up to 44 fixed-route buses, including 10 diesel-electric hybrid buses, on 24 routes Monday-Saturday. It also has an average of 23 paratransit vehicles on the road Monday-Friday, with a reduced number on the weekend. SCAT also offers Sunday service, with a limited system based on combinations of familiar routes at reduced frequencies.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 or visit the SCAT Web site at www.scgov.net/SCAT/.

