

**AustinPost**



## Capital Metro Stresses Patience For MetroRapid Ridership

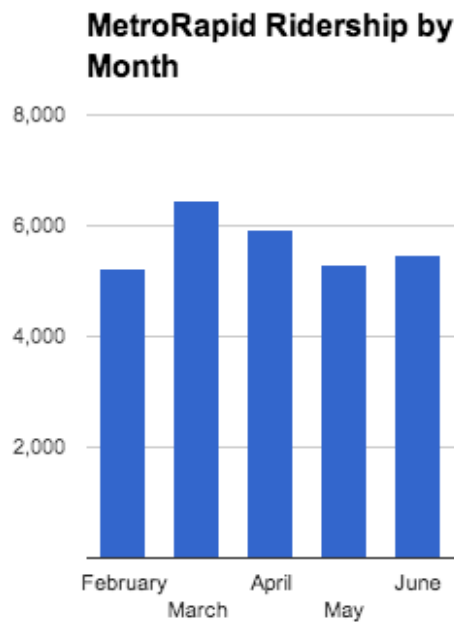
By Gene Davis

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Despite criticisms of a slow start, Capital Metro spokesman Dan Sawson says MetroRapid, the rapid bus transit system that launched in late January, is on track.

Asked whether MetroRapid is experiencing lower-than-expected ridership, Dawson said that while the general public might want to see immediate results, it takes time for a new route to catch on.

“It is a normal life of a line to start somewhere,” he said.



Here is the average weekday ridership of MetroRapid (see accompanying chart):

- February: 5,214
- March: 6,456
- April: 5,929
- May: 5,295
- June: 5,469

(The March spike in ridership is at least partly due to SXSW.)

The average weekday MetroRapid ridership has been hovering below 6,000 riders since it launched. In April, Capital Metro President/CEO Linda S. Watson said in a statement that weekday ridership was continuing to grow.

Randal O'Toole, a public policy analyst with the Cato Institute and frequent critic of high-speed rail, said that the numbers prove that Austinites overall aren't very interested in public transit. He said that according to the Census Bureau, only 2.2 percent of workers in the Austin urban area live in households without cars. Of that 2.2 percent, only 25 percent take public transit, he said.

"The (MetroRapid) numbers look pretty pathetic, and they aren't increasing every month like the agency claims," he said.

Route 801, the MetroRapid route that launched Jan. 26 and connects Tech Ridge to Southpark Meadows via UT and downtown, essentially replaced two existing routes. KUT reported that the spring ridership on Route 801 fell 11 percent from the combined ridership of the two routes that served the area the previous year.

Meanwhile, Capital Metro is testing a new MetroRapid route that will officially start on Aug. 24. The 803 will go from The Domain to the University of Texas, traveling through downtown Austin to the Westgate Shopping Center. Dawson said he expects the 803 to increase the popularity of MetroRapid.

"Over time, as people get more used to it and make behavioral changes, we expect to see it grow," he said.

Capital Metro touts MetroRapid as offering faster, more comfortable, and more predictable service. The bus service offers free WI-FI, real-time arrival information, and the ability to use a mobile app to buy tickets.

View a MetroRapid route map below.

