

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council President Ed Cameron and Members
From: Mayor Sean Reardon
Date: February 26, 2024
Re: Proposed Changes to MeVa Routes

The Administration is updating the City Council on proposed changes to the fare-free bus routes operated by the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MeVa). MeVa last adjusted routes on April 3, 2023, which included new names and routes for the buses. The Route 19 bus route was adjusted to serve the MBTA Commuter Rail Station and added service to the Towle Office Building while continuing to make stops at Anna Jaques Hospital, the Newburyport Senior Center, and the Market Basket at Port Plaza. The Route 20 Bus was changed from the prior inefficient and underutilized Newburyport one-way shuttle loop and instead doubled service between the Commuter Rail Station and downtown Newburyport, while also directly serving Salisbury Beach.

Since initiating the new routes in April, Newburyport has worked with MeVa to respond to resident feedback and to better publicize the routes. Particular attention was paid to working with residents of Heritage House, who are frequent users of MeVa service. Six months into the new service, the City began to hear more frequently from residents on Oakland Street and Highland Avenue about issues with service and whether there would be better routes for these buses. The City and MeVa worked to collect more data and evaluate what may make sense for these routes.

In response to the community, MeVa proposed a new route for the Number 19 bus in early February 2024, that would remove service to the Towle Building and Merrimac Street west of Route 1, which would take the buses off of Oakland Street. The proposed new routing would also remove service from Highland Avenue and instead use Toppans Lane to connect from High to Low Street and would use State Street to connect from Merrimac to High Street. The route would only serve Anna Jaques Hospital from High Street, but we are working with the Hospital to make sure this would still work for their employees and others using transit to access AJH, including working with the community to develop attractive wayfinding to the hospital.

MeVa's data showed residents traveling to both the Towle Building and AJH use the door-to-door miniMeVa vans at a much greater rate than the fixed route buses. miniMeVa is also fare-free and provides specialized transit for seniors and those with disabilities through smaller vehicles to take them directly to the hospital and other locations—as such, they are much better able to use the narrower Highland Avenue or the parking lots adjacent to AJH's main entrance. We believe that between this service and transportation offered by the Newburyport Council on Aging and others, we will still be able to meet the needed level of assistance to those accessing the hospital. We are committed to working with MeVa to make sure that everyone who could benefit from the full family of transit services offered are aware of what is available.

Other benefits of the proposed new service include more direct service between Heritage House and the Newburyport Library, Market Basket and the CVS on Pond Street, which has all been requested by residents. In addition, there will be a timed transfer at the Costello Transportation Center in Amesbury in both directions for riders traveling to Haverhill.

The City is holding public meetings along with MeVa to review the new proposed Route 19, which is attached. Pending approval by the MeVa Advisory Board, the new routes would take effect Monday, April 8th. We believe these new routes will enhance service to the Newburyport community and best meet the needs of transit riders.

As a reminder, MeVa offers free transit throughout the Merrimack Valley. The system will also be transitioning from being a flag system, in which riders can hail the bus anywhere along its route, to instead having defined stops that will be marked by signage. The City looks forward to continuing to work with MeVa leadership to better serve residents and the greater Newburyport community.

New Routing for MeVa Route #19 in Newburyport (starts Monday, April 8th)

Note: Route #20 routing remains the same



19

