

Asheville offers transportation options



GWEN WISLER
GUEST COLUMNIST

There's no one way to get where you need to go in Asheville — there are many ways. These days people can combine bicycling with taking the bus. Walking on a greenway has become more than recreation. Our greenways are now designed with destinations in mind, linking neighborhoods to neighborhoods or sometimes neighborhoods to downtown. While the city of Asheville has made good progress in improving our options, we continue to explore ways to expand all forms of active transportation. The city soon expects to receive the results of an Asheville in Motion study. This study will guide development of our transportation system in the future.

The city of Asheville currently has 4.5 miles of greenway completed with another 4.5 miles slated for construction between 2015-17. Two years ago, the city expanded its vision of greenways by moving the division from Parks & Recreation to the Transportation Department. The intention is to design our greenways to form connections between greenway spaces to destinations around the city.

Our bicyclists have more access than ever. Since 2002, the city has completed 15 miles of on-street bike lanes. Seven miles of streets have lanes on both sides of the road, with 2.5 on the uphill side of the road with shared lane markings on the other side. Another 5 miles have shared lane markings on both sides of the street. So we are making progress supporting our active community of bicycle commuters.

There are good reasons for us to consider alternative and multiple transportation choices. Foremost is the cost factor. AAA estimates the annual cost of car ownership to be \$8,698. And there's the carbon footprint to consider. According to the EPA, the majority of greenhouse gas emissions from transportation are CO2 emissions resulting from the combustion of petroleum-based products, like gasoline, in internal combustion engines. In other words, cars.

The city of Asheville has made multimodal forms of transportation a priority by investing in our transit system to reduce our carbon footprint and to provide for all citizens who need transportation. In recent years, the city has expanded hours and routes along major corridors while keeping fares among the lowest in the nation: currently \$1. This year we added Sunday service.

ART (Asheville Redefines Transit) provides service from its 650 stops 5:30

a.m.-10:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 8 a.m.- 6 p.m. Sundays and holidays. We provide 30 minute frequency on all the major corridors within the city. Our routes serve UNC Asheville, A-B Tech, Mission Hospital, medical parks, public schools, Grove Park Inn, grocery stores, VA Medical Center, city and county recreation facilities, Biltmore Village, Asheville Regional Airport and Warren Wilson College and extend to the town of Black Mountain. To date, the number of residences in the city that are within one quarter mile of a transit route is about 73 percent. In those areas with a density of more than 4,000 persons per square mile, 99.9 percent are within a quarter mile of a transit route.

The city of Asheville and ART are committed to sustainable transit. The city's fleet includes 23 biodiesel buses (which include seven hybrid/diesel buses).

ART employs new technology to make finding a bus easier. By logging onto www.nextbus.com/ART from a smartphone or computer riders can plan their trip and track a bus's real-time arrival. Riders who have phones can text 41411 then enter "nextART," space and the 3-digit bus stop I.D. or dial 828-253-5691 and press 5 to get the same information.

In short, as the city of Asheville has focused efforts on sustainable and

smart growth we've realized that transportation is key for people who want to live healthier lifestyles and contribute to a cleaner environment. Mobility options are vital to ensure equity across the city so all members of the community can have access to jobs, education, health care and recreation.

Of course, there are challenges with using any public transit system. Buses can be late, or sometimes early. That's where www.nextbus.com/ART assists. Riders need to plan their trips, possibly building additional time into their travel. Weather is a consideration when walking or biking to the bus stop. Our 100 bus shelters help in that regard, with another 50 benches at stops to add comfort. More of both are planned.

However, there are many benefits to using ART. If you are traveling downtown or to the airport, you don't have to deal with parking hassles or costs. You are making an ecofriendly choice. And saving money.

ART has 5,000 passengers per day. That adds up to 1.45 million rides per year. Still, we'd like to see those numbers grow. So put the ART option in your transportation toolbox.

Let's work on getting out of our cars a bit more.

Gwen Wisler is a member of Asheville City Council.