

# Rural bus agency launches new name, new route

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*The Post and Courier*

Rural residents know it as the Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester Rural Transportation Management Association. But why bother saying all of that just to catch the bus?

TriCounty Link sounds much better, transportation officials said Thursday when they announced the rural bus agency's new name and revealed its new tricolored logo.

Executive Director Will Hutto called the name change the "advent of a new era."

Next week, TriCounty Link launches a new route that will link riders in McClellanville and Awendaw with two Mount Pleasant stops operated by the Charles-

ton Area Regional Transportation Authority. The new route will operate on weekdays and will be free to ride for the first two weeks. Additionally, starting on Monday, all other rural bus routes also will offer free rides through Sept. 28.

Hutto said the improved connectivity and more-frequent pickup times should help people get around more with less headaches. "Someone doesn't have to get on a bus and travel into Charleston and spend all day when they only wanted to spend an hour or two," he said.

TriCounty Link riders would connect with the CARTA Route 40 Mount Pleasant bus or the CARTA Express bus that goes to the Kmart off Johnnie Dodds Boulevard.

They would pay \$2.25 to board

a TriCounty Link bus and would be given a transfer slip to board a CARTA bus. The return trip would differ slightly, however, because riders would pay CARTA's fare — \$1.25 for fixed routes or \$2 for Express — plus 25 cents to switch buses. CARTA charges for transfers.

McClellanville Mayor Rutledge Leland said lower-income rural residents who depend on the bus and elderly people who don't drive should especially benefit from the recent improvements. "I know that if we can make the times work and make it convenient, people will use it," he said.

TriCounty Link officials also hope to implement a new route on Johns Island in November.

The Moncks Corner-based bus

system recently added six new buses to its fleet and has ordered six more. Each vehicle costs about \$60,000. Federal earmarks paid for about 80 percent of the cost for each new bus, and the state Department of Transportation picked up the remaining cost, which TriCounty Link will pay back in annual installments over the next three years.

Charleston County Council has allotted TriCounty Link about \$382,000 from half-cent sales tax money available next year for mass transit, and the bus system will use the funds for its new routes.

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