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Lynx cuts may hit disabled, veterans

The agency's proposed cost-saving measures could hit the disabled and veterans hard.

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Facing steep increases in fuel and operating costs, Lynx may cut Sunday bus service on more than 15 routes and end weekday service after 7 p.m. on nearly 30 routes.

The agency also is looking at reducing special services for the disabled.

"This is absolutely insane," said Dwight Sayer, president of the National Association of Blind Veterans, at the first of a series of public meetings on the changes Tuesday night.

Sayer said he was angry because proposed route cuts include Link 13, which takes veterans and workers to the Orlando VA Medical Center.

He is also worried by changes to special services that would let off disabled riders at the curb rather than help them through the front door of their destinations.

About 200 people showed up at Tuesday's meeting to comment on proposed service cuts scattered throughout Orange and Seminole counties.

Lynx is targeting routes that have lower ridership or could be consolidated with others.

The proposed cuts come when Lynx ridership is up 7 percent as commuters search for ways to escape high gasoline prices.

But the bus agency faces its own \$7 million increase in fuel costs next year while its funding partners -- Orlando and Orange, Seminole and Osceola counties -- are tightening their own budgets.

Earlier this month, Lynx approved cuts affecting about a dozen routes that brought savings of \$726,000. The next set of cuts could total as much \$14 million -- more than 10 percent of the agency's current overall budget of \$114 million.

Lynx would need \$20 million more to maintain services and meet rising costs in 2009 that include a further \$4.5 million in services for disabled and needy riders and \$3.2 million in raises under a union contract.

"We can only operate the service that is funded," Lynx spokesman Matt Friedman said. "These are potential changes. We want to know how it will affect people."

Other cost-saving proposals could include closing routes with low ridership and reducing the number of buses serving certain routes.

Friedman said all proposals are in the discussion stage but called a fare increase "the last thing we want to do."

The public will be able to comment on July 29, Sept. 16 and 17. The board plans to vote Oct. 23.

Riders can leave comments by calling 407-841-2279 or by e-mail at the agency's Web site, golynx.com. Click on "contact us."

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