

Chicago Tribune

Additional bus-on-shoulder service coming to Stevenson; possible some day on Edens

By Richard Wronski, Tribune reporter | August 11, 2014

The bus-on-shoulders commuting option that began as an experiment three years ago on the Stevenson Expressway (Interstate 55) has proven so successful service will be enhanced and possibly replicated on the Edens Expressway (I-94)

The bus-on-shoulders commuting option that began as an experiment three years ago on the Stevenson Expressway has proven so successful that service will be increased on that roadway and may be added to the Edens Expressway, officials said Monday.

Average daily ridership on the two bus routes that operate between the Southwest Suburbs and Chicago has grown to just under 1,000, an increase of about 226 percent since the pilot program began in 2011, officials said.

In addition to higher ridership, on-time performance is consistently over 90 percent compared with 68 percent prior to the start of the project, officials said.

The Illinois Department of Transportation said it expects to complete a study this fall that will determine what improvements are needed to bring similar service to the Edens Expressway (I-94) shoulders between Foster Avenue and Lake-Cook Road.

IDOT is taking lessons learned from the Stevenson program and applying them to the often-congested Edens, Pace spokesman Patrick Wilmot said.

On the Stevenson, Pace buses use the expressway shoulders as a passing lane when traffic is moving slower than 35 mph. The buses are restricted to traveling no more than 15 mph over the top speed of vehicles in the expressway lanes and never faster than 35 mph.

Under a state bond program, \$9.5 million was allocated to upgrade and prepare the I-55 shoulders to enable Pace buses to use the inside inbound shoulder for the morning rush hour and inside outbound shoulder for the afternoon return trip. Pace Routes 755 and 855 connect the Southwest Suburbs, downtown Chicago and the Illinois Medical District.

IDOT is spending an additional \$363,000 to further improve the shoulders from Kedzie Avenue to just west of the Dan Ryan Expressway (Interstate 90/94) so the existing service on the Stevenson can be extended three miles east later this year, officials said.

Expansion of the program was authorized under legislation approved by the General Assembly in June and signed Monday by Gov. Pat Quinn.

“By making minimal investments in our existing infrastructure, we are providing big dividends for commuters and families throughout the region,” Quinn said in a statement.

In addition to making the bus-on-shoulders program permanent, the new law permits Pace to expand the program and include more routes.

On Aug. 18, Route 855 will be split into three routes, 850, 851, and 855.

Officials said the change will mean fewer stops for customers, and faster travel times. The three new and revised routes, along with the existing Route 755, also boost the number of trips from 35 to 50 daily.

The Illinois Tollway's rebuilding of the Jane Addams Memorial Tollway (I-90) will include wider shoulders to accommodate Pace buses from the Kennedy Expressway (I-90/94) to Barrington Road in 2016 and future service expansions to Rockford.

The Tollway also is designing the new Elgin O'Hare Western Access project to accommodate bus-on-shoulders service.