

The other side of the story...

START's Free Ride is Over

Funny how START is only now exploring funding options. They've been pursuing a utopian dream with little thought for efficiency. Actually, it's more pitiful than funny. After decades of operation, they're just now worrying about future sustainably.

Most businesses, public or private, learn the importance of a funding model. They don't have the luxury of ignoring their customers.

And START has two sets of customers, riders that want transportation and taxpayers that pay the bills. They're getting poor marks from both.

Ignoring their poor performance, the department has grown wildly, adding buses, a storage facility, 5.75 acres of Karns Meadow, and new routes to nowhere. All with nary a worry about who would pay for it. Now, it's time to pay the piper.

START has sucked up every federal grant they could get. They've bled the budgets of town and county dry. They've turned to SPET so often they finally got a resounding "NO" at the polls last fall.

Voters know that START is a bloated, inefficient agency. They want to see a realistic plan before they pour more good money after bad.

In an act bordering on desperation, START recently explored funding alternatives including a presumptuous grab at parking meter quarters before the town even decided to implement a paid parking program. They also want to tax rental cars, tax short-term lodging (in addition to the lodging tax), and impose a transit impact fee. START's answer is and always has been more TAXES.

How about efficiency, getting fare-box recovery up to its peers? The numbers don't lie. START carried a million riders in 2017 with a budget of \$4.1M. That ridership represents about 1% of the total traffic on county roads. Would it then take \$8M a year to carry 2% of total traffic? START obviously is not a "transportation solution".

You simply can't run a business, public or private, the way START does. The agency has had its head in the sand, believing its own PR. They pat themselves on the back for alleged dazzling ridership numbers and explore ways to add more buses, more workspace, more housing.

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Truth is, their utopian dream is a farce. Mass-transit only works when you have masses of people like Chicago or New York City. We don't have that. A bare-bones system is all that's needed in Jackson Hole.

The only reason START exists as it does, with monster buses running about town mostly empty, is so big-growth proponents can point to it as a solution when they allow huge hotels and other projects to be woefully under-parked. People will take the bus; it will carry them, they say.

The bus exists as an excuse to approve Big-Growth projects in both town and county. Jackson Hole Mountain Resort doesn't pay anywhere near their fair share for the START services they get.

Like everyone else, they're hooked on the free ride, the free money. Taxpayers, however, are tired of subsidizing a failed bus system. They want to see more riders on the empty busses and fare-box recovery where it belongs.