

NEWS

Trackless Trolley hits the streets of Chillicothe

Megan Becker Chillicothe Gazette

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CHILLICOTHE— With a bright red exterior and shiny gold and rustic wood features on the inside, the Chillicothe trolley is designed to bring excitement to Chillicothe community members and visitors for years to come.

The Chillicothe Transit System officially welcomed its long-awaited trackless trolley with a ribbon-cutting on Friday. The trolley came after a nine-month Bloomberg-Harvard innovation track that used community surveys and engagement to find ways to improve public transit within the city.

More: Transit department provides on-demand rides, trackless trolley coming soon

Chillicothe Mayor Luke Feeney said bringing the trolley to life was his first experience engaging the community to create something positive in Chillicothe.

"We spent a whole year on trying to figure out how we can make this transit system really be a better and a bigger asset for the community," Feeney said. "Where we are today is a result of all that engagement and willingness for people to step out of their comfort zones and see a future and a possibility for Chillicothe."

Megan Vanbuskirk, owner and founder of Paper City Coffee, said she is the self-proclaimed number one fan of the trolley.

"I had the chance to participate in the Harvard-Bloomberg innovation track with the city and other community members and leaders," Vanbuskirk said. "I honestly wasn't really sure what to expect, but I was completely impressed with the imagination, the critical thinking and also the time that was being dedicated to making the transportation better for people in this city."

She said she helped to ensure the trolley would serve the community "in ways that were actually helpful." She said after researching and determining the logistics of buying a trolley, she knew Chillicothe had to have one.

"Being a part of the revitalization of Chillicothe is honestly one of the greatest joys of my life. It's really an honor that I've been able to be a part of that through Paper City," Vanbuskirk said. "I hope that this project coming to life inspires you to add one positive thing to the city."

Bobbi Kellough with the Chillicothe-Ross Chamber of Commerce said the trolley is the answer to the parking problem downtown.

"One of the main topics of conversation that we hear at the Chamber is there's no place to park downtown so that we can visit the local shops. Well, we know there's plenty of parking downtown, and that we have public lots, but now we have such an exciting answer to get them," Kellough said. "This is just another addition to the list of why people should live work and play enjoy Chillicothe and Ross County."

Scavenger Hunt

Last month, the city of Chillicothe announced a scavenger hunt competition encouraging community members to search for small, wooden trolleys across the city. Anyone who found one of the ten trolleys would win two seats on the first trolley ride.

The city gave clues as to where to find the trolleys, such as "this location is the beating heart of Chillicothe transit," and "the founder of Chillicothe's resting place stands at this beautiful corner."

Liz Gibbons-Camp found a trolley at Millenium Grove and secured the first ride on the trolley.

The clue she deciphered was, "Approximately 10 acres of 100 historic trees, this location was founded at the turn of the century as part of the national USDA project. Look for the tree named after the first U.S. president to be impeached by the house."

Trolley Schedule

The trolley will run on a downtown loop on Fridays from noon to 8:30 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. to destinations like the city pool, the library, restaurants and other popular spots downtown. The trolley is free to ride and wheelchair-accessible.

With corporate visitors coming to Chillicothe hotels during the week, the trolley will also act as a hotel shuttle on Tuesdays from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. and travel between Fairfield Inn, Hampton Inn and Christopher Inn, as well as other downtown destinations.

Asti Powell, director of planning and development, said the hotel shuttle service may expand to other days of the week, depending on demand.

The Chillicothe City Council approved the appropriation of \$200,000 for the purchase of the trolley, but the final cost was under budget at about \$160,000.

The trolley will be used for the downtown loop and hotel shuttle in the summer, with historical and Christmas light tours in the winter to provide unique experiences to community members and visitors.

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