

New MCAT route to St. Petersburg begins April 1

Skyway ConneXion offers express route for passengers from downtown Bradenton to St. Petersburg

MANATEE COUNTY, FL (March 18, 2016) – Next month for the first time ever Manatee County Area Transit (MCAT) will launch a route to St. Petersburg marking the first time MCAT passengers can use public transit to cross the Sunshine Skyway Bridge.

The new route, called the Skyway ConneXion, will connect MCAT riders to St. Petersburg and Pinellas County for the first time. The route will begin at DeSoto Station, but Manatee riders can also hop on the bus at the downtown Bradenton transfer station and at the Palmetto station (see attached map). The route makes three stops in Pinellas County before terminating at Bay Pines VA Hospital, including stops adjacent to major transfer stops in for Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority passengers.

The fare to go over the Skyway Bridge is \$5 for one-way or \$10 for round trip. Passengers can also purchase a \$10 one-day unlimited pass for all MCAT local routes and the Skyway ConneXion route. Riders can also purchase a \$3 fare for express service within either county, but the fare becomes \$5 if they cross the Skyway. The \$5 ConneXion fare is the same fare veterans currently pay for rides to Bay Pines.

MCAT Manager Bill Steele said the idea for the new route began last fall when MCAT began using a full-size MCAT bus to transport veterans to Bay Pines rather than a smaller paratransit vehicle. Since the previous paratransit VA service was already part of MCAT's operating budget, the new ConneXion route will operate with no additional expense.

"Veterans will be able to continue to receive medical transportation to the VA and we'll be filling a void in regional connectivity that will benefit the general public," Steele said. "We're using existing resources, so there are no additional costs. It's really a win-win-win proposition.

For more information on Manatee County Area Transit, visit www.mymanatee.org/mcat and follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ridemcat

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