

Beaming to buses: Embark to offer Wi-Fi service

By: Brian Brus The Journal Record July 10, 2015 0



An Embark bus transports passengers throughout Oklahoma City. (Photo by Brent Fuchs)

OKLAHOMA CITY – Embark bus riders will be given access to Wi-Fi Internet service by this fall under an agreement with Satellite and Wireless Solutions.

The Central Oklahoma Transportation and Parking Authority approved the deal Friday. It is expected to increase the bus system’s value to riders, particularly businesspeople and college students who have work to do, COTPA spokesman Michael Scroggins said.

“At one time, air conditioning was considered an amenity on public transportation,” he said. “Expectations of service levels change over time.

“That’s one of the things we heard from people who don’t currently ride the bus,” he said. “We might consider it if you had Wi-Fi so we can take back the time that we lose during the ride.”

Cleveland Area Rapid Transit has been providing free Wi-Fi for about two years, CART spokeswoman Vicky Holland said. The 15-bus, fixed-route system that services the University of Oklahoma and the rest of Norman connects to Embark.

“The biggest feedback we got was from the commuters to Oklahoma City,” she said. “We run four times a day to Oklahoma City; they run back and forth twice. So those people who are on the bus the most really appreciated the Wi-Fi. The 70 percent of our riders who are OU students or faculty said getting Wi-Fi was important to them also.”

Satellite and Wireless bid \$89,000 to provide enough units for 59 buses and three years of service, the lowest price of four submissions. The company’s proposal also included the option to purchase up to 26 additional units with five years of licensing and support and three years of security. A rebate lowers the final cost by \$4,400. The high bid in the group was \$650,000 by AEM Group.

The project will be funded 80 percent by a federal Department of Transportation grant and 20 percent by the city budget. The deal will provide opportunities for revenue generation through online ads, Scroggins said. With the exception of agreement to typical terms of use, the system will be free to the public.

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