

Grand opening held for FACT facility

Amy Revak Herald-Standard | Posted: Thursday, September 23, 2010 4:00 am

What was a wish-list project idea for a public bus transfer center a couple years ago is now reality thanks to federal economic stimulus money and a cooperative effort between agencies. Numerous public officials and community members gathered Wednesday for the grand opening of the Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation transfer center, and collaboration and cooperation were the theme of the day.

"This was a someday-down-the-road thought until the economic stimulus money became available," said FACT director Lori Groover-Smith. "With the help of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority and the Fayette County commissioners, we were shovel-ready and began."

Groover-Smith said the purpose of the glass and brick center, located in the Fayette County Business Park in South Union Township, is to provide a more comfortable place for FACT riders to wait.

The building is located on more than two acres of land formerly owned by the redevelopment authority, which is developing the business park.

The project cost more than \$1 million and was constructed using primarily money from the federal economic stimulus package. The 40-by-48-foot, single-story building includes two offices, a mechanical room, restrooms and a waiting/vending area for bus patrons.

The waiting area contains about two-dozen seats. Also, two electronic signs give patrons up-to-the-minute information on the status of their bus routes.

Each of FACT's nine fixed-route buses make stops at the transfer center, which will include a staff member at the site during operation. The hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. A free shuttle also operates from the site hourly, taking trips to medical and shopping destinations in the area.

When it isn't operational, the transfer center will be a secure building and not open for public use.

Andrew French, executive director of the redevelopment authority, said less than a decade ago, the 277-acre business park was a vacant piece of property, and now the

site contains medical offices, retail stores and restaurants, in addition to the new transfer center.

French said the transfer center, which opened for business on Sept. 1, would be an asset to the business park, and he is glad to be a partner in the effort.

Fayette County Commission Chairman Vincent Zapotosky said the "beautiful building" would offer great services to clients and consumers.

"Although it was a quick decision, it took a lot of thought and collaboration," Zapotosky said.

Commissioner Vincent A. Vicites said it was "really a cooperative, team effort."

Vicites said \$900,000 in stimulus money was only received because of quick action. He said the county was only given a week to come up with a plan for the center.

As work continues for additional medical offices in the park directly across from the transfer center, Vicites said the next challenge is to put a residential development in the last undeveloped part of the park aimed at senior citizens, who could have access to the shopping in the park by using the transportation services available through the transfer center.

"It's money well spent. It truly was a team effort," Vicites said.

Gwendolyn Ridgley, chairwoman of the Fayette County Transportation Executive Committee, said the center is a very much-needed asset to the community to help with more efficient and streamlined transportation for the area.

"Certainly, this is evidence of one of the projects using the stimulus money for the benefit of the community at large," Ridgley said.

Dorothy Polach of Hopwood, who rides the bus every day, said she thinks the new transfer center is "really, really nice."

Polach was enjoying the warm weather and sitting on a bench outside the center and talking with the wife of a driver who attended the festivities.

"This is a nice, friendly, safe environment for our riders to sit and wait to get on the bus. We're excited for the riders and FACT. We're continuing to help others and that's what matters," said FACT program specialist Jill Streit.