

# Collier's free shuttle service to North Naples beaches starts up



It was a foggy and cool Friday morning as Collier County rolled out a fleet of two buses designed to shuttle Naples beachgoers to and from the shore during season for free.

Around 10 a.m., one of the buses sat empty near a bus stop waiting for potential passengers. There was only one rider during a two-hour window.

Omar De Leon, senior planner for Collier Area Transit, hopes word of mouth and visibility shed light on the county's new beach shuttle service.

"It being the first week, it might be tough," De Leon said. "We started our marketing campaign earlier this week to make sure people are aware of it. This weekend we expect people will use the service more."

The goal is to relieve stress on crowded North Naples beach parking lots, De Leon added.

The beach shuttle service runs through April 30 and operates four days a week circulating between two North Naples beaches — Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park and Vanderbilt Beach.

Other stops include Conner Park and Mercato in North Naples. Riders can park for free in Conner Park at 111th Avenue North, which has 158 parking spaces.

Buses run from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., then again for sunset from 4:30 to 7:10 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

The short loop starts near the Publix at the northeast corner of Immokalee Road and U.S. 41. The buses head west along Immokalee Road into Delnor-Wiggins Pass State Park, then south on Vanderbilt Drive to Vanderbilt Beach, back east to Mercato and then turn north on U.S. 41 to return to the starting point.

The wait time is about 15 to 20 minutes.

Riders can hop on at any existing bus stop along the route, including those near Publix and Mercato stores. The county does not have deals in place to allow beach parking at those centers.

Riders can wave for the trolley to stop like a taxi anywhere on the route.

The buses are easily recognizable, with an animated beach scene inspired by the Naples shore on both sides.

The county tried an unsuccessful version of the trolley last year. It started at North Collier Regional Park, off Livingston Road, almost 30 minutes by bus from the beach, charged a full bus fare and circled back around only once an hour.

De Leon said he hopes the newer, improved version sticks.

The county plans to review the service in about a month and address any changes that need to be made.

"And as it grows, we're looking to identify other parking areas; that way people can park-and-ride," De Leon said.