

Loss of state grant, higher operating costs mean Hull-O Trolley won't run this summer

By Carol Britton Meyer | July 6, 2023

The popular Hull-O Trolley won't be making its rounds this summer due to a lack of funding and higher operating expenses.

"In the past, we received [money from a state transportation grant], which we did not receive this year," Adrian Muir, president of the Hull Nantasket Chamber of Commerce, which operated the trolley service, told The Hull Times.

The state portion of the overall cost has amounted to roughly \$25,000 a year in the past. Muir also noted that the cost to operate a trolley service has gone up substantially, and that there were competing requests from other grant applicants.

Last year, in addition to American Rescue Plan Act funding obtained by state Sen. Patrick O'Connor, the cost of this free-to-riders service was covered by \$13,000 in funding from the Hull Redevelopment Authority, \$10,000 from the Town of Hull, a grant from the Save the Harbor/Save the Bay Better Beaches Program, and support from local businesses whose advertisements were displayed on banners on the trolley. Rep. Joan Meschino was also involved with obtaining earlier funding.

"Senator O'Connor, Representative Meschino, the town, the HRA, and local businesses have always responded positively and have been very generous once we had the seed money," Chamber Treasurer Jim Pitrolo told The Hull Times. "Even if we had received the usual \$25,000 from the state this year, we would have had to ask the HRA, the town, and local businesses for further [support]."

In addition, he explained, the cost of running the trolley has "increased tremendously" due to rising gas prices and the higher costs charged by trolley companies to provide service on the weekends, when the Hull trolley normally runs.

"During COVID, several trolley companies were sold to two or three major operators, and they are asking higher prices to provide weekend service," Pitrolo said. "Even if we had received a state grant this year, we might not have been able to raise enough money to provide trolley service. The cost of running the trolley operation the first year was \$35,000, while last year the total came to \$50,000. It's simply a matter of finances."

Pitrolo outlined a couple of possible steps for offering trolley service in future years.

"The first would be to try to get early bids from trolley companies, and once we had those in hand, we could begin the process of looking for grants and donations," he said.

In a statement provided to The Hull Times, O'Connor said: "The summer trolley that the Hull Chamber of Commerce offered was a great way to see and travel in the community. It is my hope that this service can be offered again in the future so that visitors coming to Hull can see how special it is."

O'Connor also explained that member-directed spending, or earmarks requested by state senators or representatives, are not permanent.

"Priorities vary from year to year," he said. "A lot of times, and in this instance, they are ways to seed fund projects in the community to get them off the ground, with the hope that they'd be self-sustaining at some point."

The Hull-O Trolley typically ran on weekends, transporting passengers from the Pemberton Point ferry dock to Nantasket Beach, with stops along the way, during the peak summer season to encourage visitors to leave their automobiles at home in order to reduce beach traffic and to increase tourism, which benefits local restaurants and other businesses. Residents also have free access to this service.

In 2022, Hull-based South Shore Cycles owner Bill Hennessey managed the service. In the first two weeks alone, he reported that more than 400 passengers had already enjoyed riding the trolley.

The year before during COVID, when there was no trolley service, the HRA ran a free Seaside Shuttle Bus with a set schedule from Pemberton Point to Nantasket Junction, with continuous loops on Saturdays and Sundays from the end of June to the beginning of September. This pilot program was not designed as a replacement for the Hull-O trolley nor for the MBTA 714 bus service in town, but rather to demonstrate the need for regularly-scheduled transportation services in town and to help mitigate the loss of the Hull-O Trolley in the summer of 2021.