

# Improving the ride

The Bethlehem Gadfly Neighborhoods January 4, 2021

🧶 *Latest in a series of posts about neighborhoods* 🧶

Goals for our city: more walking, biking, taking a bus. Some people in our town *have* to take buses. It's a necessity. But, in general, we want to encourage more people to take buses.



And Bethlehem became the site of a “first” in the way of improving busing.

Our Councilwoman Negron (on the right) presiding!

A new kind of bus-stop bench.

This occasion reminds Gadfly about his profitable reading in walkable city guru Jeff Speck two summers ago (another tip o' the hat to Tony Hanna for the recommendation).

Speck outlined four lacks in much of public transit:

- urbanity: stops must be in the heart of the action. (The bus from the northside that Gadfly took dropped him at 3rd and Webster when his goal was New and Morton — close to a half-mile walk.)
- clarity: a simple line or loop, easily pictured in one's mind.
- frequency: every 10 minutes a standard for any bus line that wants to attract riders. (Gadfly experienced 30 and 60 minute frequencies.)
- pleasure: make rides social, fun — the most overlooked element. (Definitely not fun for Gadfly: seats uncomfortable, cramped space, often dirty, etc. The bus terminal was awful.)

Gadfly walked, bused from north to south side for 50 years. He knows a bit about buses. Still much in the way of improvement needed.

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*selections from Tom Shortell, "An innovative bus bench? LANTA introduces two-seater with touchless lighting for narrow sidewalks." Morning Call, December 22, 2020.*

When people think of innovation, public busing probably isn't the first thing to rush their minds, but LANTA is hoping the bus bench it unveiled Tuesday may soon become a widespread success.

During a brief ceremony at Broadway and Fiot Street in south Bethlehem, officials unveiled a SolStop Bus Bench. The two-seat bench is built around a light pole that riders can activate without having to push a button. The street furniture is the first of its kind in the United States, LANTA Executive Director Owen O'Neill said, but the public transit organization could install more throughout the region if it's well received.

Advocates of public transit encourage communities to build bus shelters to make riding the bus more enticing — no one wants to be out on a cold, rainy evening waiting for a ride. But O'Neill said the shelters often don't fit on the narrow sidewalks in inner cities, where bus routes tend to be most popular. Even regular benches may be too bulky.

The bus bench LANTA installed over the weekend should avoid those problems. while also improving lighting, he said. Most street lights are designed to illuminate the road, not the sidewalk or curbs where pedestrians wait for the bus.

The benches also save LANTA a lot of money compared with a normal shelter, O'Neill said. About \$1,500 a pop, the benches cost a quarter of a typical shelter, and are less expensive to install. LANTA has to pay a few thousand dollars in engineering if it wants to install a bus shelter: Host communities need to know the shelter won't interfere with neighboring properties or pose a public risk. Installing the benches, by comparison, costs a few hundred dollars, O'Neill said.

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