

FROM PAGE 1A

TRANSIT CENTER

transit center.

The outdoor kiosks feature buttons that let you toggle through information across different routes. They stand quite tall, but an accessibility button toward the bottom of the kiosk will play an audio reading of information on the screen or recolor the screen for riders who need a high-contrast display.

“It seems really simple, but it’s so impactful as a passenger,” Elliott said. “You may have had that feeling of waiting and not knowing and when are things coming, but now you’ve got a beautiful display to tell you the things that you need to know.”

New paint, floors and lighting on the outside make the center much brighter and easier to see around at night.

But one of the newest features of the renovation is still in the works. A bodega space, which is currently being used as storage, will someday be a service hub where non-profit and community agencies can set up shop and share resources with passengers.

Many of Lextran’s riders are low income or do not own a car. The bus system provides essential transportation not just to get to work, but to access several nonprofit and social services agencies. Some of those groups could meet



TASHA POULLARD tpoullard@herald-leader.com

A customer service representative waits for the next Lextran customer to assist in sound-control booths at the newly renovated Transit Center in downtown Lexington, Ky, on Feb. 6, 2026.

riders where they are at the downtown center.

“We think the space has a lot of opportunity,” Elliott said. “We’re trying to gage interest in what types of programming (different community organizations) have, what needs they might have, how to accommodate it in this space.”

The space could also host community input sessions or educational events for Lextran itself.

While the transit center was under construction from April 2025 to mid-January 2026, passengers

boarded buses along High Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. The temporary set-up worked very well operationally, Combs said, but did put stress on riders being exposed to hot summer weather or icy winter temperatures.

Combs said there was one unexpected benefit of the temporary outdoor boarding.

“People who don’t normally interact with the system got to see how many people we serve because we were much more visible than we were (at the transit center),” Combs said. “I heard that over and over again. ‘Oh my gosh, that many people ride the bus?’”

WHAT’S NEXT FOR LEXTRAN IMPROVEMENTS?

Now that the new transit center is reopened, Lextran is moving toward other new services.

Lextran will pilot a new downtown circulator from April to October of this year. Four small buses will run two routes connecting National Avenue business through downtown to the Distillery District on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings.

A new microtransit pilot will launch sometimes this summer, allowing riders to book trips on an Uber-style service in an area of northwest Lexington.

Persistent advocacy from local faith group BUILD led to Lexington’s Urban County Council allocating money to Lextran for that pilot.

“It’s going to be a very big year for us,” Combs said.

FROM PAGE 1A

BILL

sounded the alarm that it would hurt patients of all political and cultural stripes, particularly those in the LGBTQ community, giving providers broad ability to decline care. The bill passed 8-2 out of the Senate Health Services Committee Wednesday, and now goes to the Senate.

Critics also said it shifts the paradigm of who is protected — the patient in need of care or the provider administering that care.

“This bill would, in fact, shift the protections of patients to become the protections of providers. And religiously held discrimination, or, shall we say, ‘sincerely held religious beliefs,’ is a notoriously inaccurate, hard to govern, difficult to discern method. It really does open the door to anyone saying, ‘I don’t want to, because I don’t want to.’” Kent Gilbert, lead pastor at Union Church in Berea said during the meeting.

Douglas pointed out that the bill includes an exemption for emergency medical treatment.

When pressed by Sen. Karen Berg, D-Louisville, who is also a physician, on what examples he’d cite where a provider might

exercise their medical conscience right under the bill, Douglas said that he’d been in clinics where the owners change prescriptions that are written for patients, implying that he wouldn’t go along with that.

The list of health care services that could be denied by a professional under the bill include: referral; testing; diagnosis; dispensing or administering any drug, medication, or device; psychological therapy or counseling; record keeping procedures; creating medical records and notes related to treatments; prognosis and therapy.

Chris Hartman, executive director of the LGBTQ advocacy group the Fairness Alliance, said that the scope of the bill is far too broad.

“A receptionist could refuse to check in a patient wearing a MAGA hat, a custodian could refuse to clean an interracial couple’s room in the maternity ward or an unmarried mother single mother. A pharmacist could refuse to provide HIV prevention drugs. A nutritionist could refuse to serve a gay patient, and they could sue the hospital

if they get moved to a different shift or if any disciplinary action is taken,” Hartman said

He added that if lawmakers are concerned with abortion, there is already a statute allowing them to opt out of that procedure, which is essentially banned under Kentucky law.

‘PATIENTS ARE THE ONES WHO SUFFER’

Bridget Pitcock, a Louisville nurse, testified that she thinks delays in care due to the bill — with patients having to seek another provider willing to provide care — could hurt health outcomes.

“Delays don’t just affect one person. They have lifelong consequences and public health implications,” Pitcock said. “As health care providers, we take an oath to do no harm. That oath does not change based on who the patient is or what someone believes. Religious and political beliefs do not belong in the exam room. When belief overrides evidence, patients are the ones who suffer.”

Douglas said that forcing physicians to go against their beliefs to carry out care undermines trust in a well-respected profession that makes critical decisions every day. “We’re not construction workers, folks,” he

said, highlighting the level of training required to become a physician.

“I’m tired of us taking our most highly trained, our most intelligent, our most dedicated people, and telling them ‘You don’t have proper morals,’ which is what we’re telling them,” Douglas said. “And we’re also telling them that ‘my morals trump yours, because I wouldn’t do the things that you’re going to do.’”

Joining Douglas in presenting the bill was Greg Chafuen, senior counsel for the conservative Christian advocacy legal group Alliance Defending Freedom. Current U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson got his entry into politics working for Alliance Defending Freedom. Lawyers with the organization, which wrote the model for Mississippi’s anti-abortion legislation, which was challenged and eventually led to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in a 2022 U.S. Supreme Court case.

The Alliance Defending

Freedom has successfully passed similar bills in Tennessee, Idaho, Montana and elsewhere.

Douglas made the point that giving providers an out from performing medical care they disagree with could improve care.

“This bill protects those who wish to follow their strongly held conscious beliefs, as long as it does not put others in danger or even interfere with the rights of others,” Douglas said. “There are always other health care providers that they can use as options, that the patient can seek — and after all, no patient wants a health-care worker, especially a physician, to do something they’re not comfortable doing, or do something that they’re not trained to do.”

Douglas also said that opposition to the bill was informed by unwarranted “fears” and emotion. He argued that patients are responsible for most medical outcomes, not providers.

He added that providers shouldn’t be criticized for not wanting to go along with “psychosocial changes” in society.

Sen. Steve Rawlings, R-Union, said he had heard from University of Kentucky College of Medicine students concerned about “their conscience rights,” who decided to move to Florida, where a similar bill is state law.

“I don’t see this as a withholding care type of bill. This is about recruiting doctors and upholding their conscience rights,” Rawlings said.

Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, voted for the bill, but expressed a desire to narrow it.

“I struggle with the fact that I’ve not received one phone call from any physician my district,” Carroll said. “It’s not that I disagree with the moral connotations of this ... I think maybe a narrowing of this bill would be in order to address, maybe, elective procedures that would be in conflict.”

FROM PAGE 1A

RESTITUTION

rials. Then the roof repairs were never done, and customers were unable to get their deposits back. Former employees of Lexington Blue said Pagel ran the company like a cult of fraud and intimidation.

According to the judge’s judgment, Lexington Blue’s various companies, “unjustly enriched themselves through their unlawful conduct.”

A hearing to determine damages is scheduled for Feb. 13. Lexington Blue was ordered to pay restitution to consumers harmed, disgorge all funds received through unlawful conduct, pay civil penalties of up to \$2,000 per violation or up to \$10,000 per violation if the consumer was 60 or older. Lexington Blue also must pay costs and expenses of the litigation and investigation.

It is unclear what, if

any, money former customers may actually see, but according to the news release, this is “paving the way for the Office of the Attorney General to begin compensation efforts.”

The company, which closed abruptly in April, is in Chapter 7 bankruptcy, and Pagel and his wife, Courtney, are in Chapter 7 personal bankruptcy.

Both the Pagels and the company claim to have no assets. The company filed for Chapter 11 reorganizational bankruptcy on June 16, 2025, and was converted to liquidation on Aug. 21.




SALE

50% Off All Fall/Winter Clothing & Shoes



112 CLAY AVENUE | LEXINGTON, KY
859-255-3188 | PEGGYSGIFTS.COM

Bardstown, KY Seeks Proposals to Reimagine a 1914 Landmark on Court Square



Nelson County Fiscal Court, Kentucky invites qualified parties to submit proposals for the purchase and adaptive redevelopment of the Old Historic Post Office, located in Bardstown's National Historic District and the Bourbon Capital of the World.

Download Details at:
nelsoncountky.gov/old-historic-post-office-rfp/