



DECEMBER 1990 OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

Welcome to another issue of The Green Pennant Special. It is through this publication that we endeavour to keep the membership informed on happenings in the organization and the transit industry.

### \*\*\* NOVEMBER MEETING \*\*\*

The November meeting of The Omnibus Society of America was held on Friday, November 2, 1990, at the Welles Park Field House located at 2333 W. Sunnyside. The program began at 7:00pm.

Our program for the evening, A Treasury of West Coast Trackless Trolleys was presented by Robert Daly who took us back in time to the west coast of the United States when older model trackless trolleys ruled the streets.

### \*\*\* FLXIBLE FAN TRIP \*\*\*

The OSA conducted a very successful fan trip on Saturday, November 3, 1990, as we ride on one of CTA's last operating "Flxible" buses on our "Farewell to the Lake Street 3700's fantrip.

We left from the CTA bus lane at Chicago Union Station, at 10:30 am, and returned at 2:30 pm., covering many of the routes held down by the 3700 series buses over the years, as-well-as visiting one of the stations on the as yet to open Southwest Rapid Transit line. The 24 riders present had a very enjoyable trip.

In 1968, the Chicago Transit Authority placed an order with the Flxible Company of Loudonville, Ohio for 176 diesel powered "new look" buses. For the CTA, a regular Flxible customer since the 1950's, this would be the last such order placed for over two decades.

Of those 176 coaches (numbered 3700-3875), thirty of them (3700-3729) were of the "narrow" or 96 inch width variety (all others were 102 inches wide). Being among the few buses purchased with the requirements of a specific route in mind, these thirty buses became known as the "Lake Street 3700's".

CTA's route 16 - Lake has always presented an operating problem as far as equipment was concerned. For much of its length, the route operates beneath the structure of the Lake Street 'L'. The segments between Wabash and Wacker on the east and Rockwell and Laramie on the west were constructed with the support pillars in the street (approximately the width of the structure above it). This left a very narrow pair of driving lanes on the street below.

Although wide (102") vehicles can be - and have been - operated on the route, the clearances between passing vehicles is considered insufficient for constant safe operations - hence the need for narrow (96") buses. When converted from one-man streetcars in 1954, buses from the 1600-1619, 1620-1624 and 1700-1799 series of Twin Coaches were used, all being of narrow width. (cont. page 2)

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(FLXIBLE TRIP cont. from page 1)

Retired in the early 1960's, they were replaced by narrow GMC coaches (former Chicago Motor Coach series 1400-1464). Already of advanced age, these vehicles provided maintenance problems, and a permanent replacement had to be found.

The 3700-3729 series buses were delivered in April, 1969, following the delivery of the remainder of the order 3730-3875). Assigned out of North Avenue (and now Kedzie) these buses have held down the route 16 - Lake service faithfully since. After 21 years of dedicated service, the fleet is about to "come in" for the last time. They are the last operating remnant of CTA's once vast fleet of Flexible buses.

### \*\*\* DECEMBER MEETING \*\*\*

The December meeting of The Omnibus Society of America will be held December 7, 1990, at the Welles park Field House located at 2333 W. Sunnyside in Chicago. The meeting will begin at 7:00 pm.

Our guest speaker for the evening will be Bruce Moffat who consented to give our members a slide program on Austrian Motor Transit.

Late this year Bruce traveled to Austria on a ERA trip and the slides he shows tonight were taken on this trip. Hope to see you there.

### \*\*\* MILWAUKEE FAN TRIPS \*\*\*

There are two fan trips scheduled for Milwaukee in December. The first one will be on December 9, 1990, and will be a charter using one of the MCTS Flexibles. The Flexibles are to be retired in Milwaukee in the not too distant future and this trip will be a commemorative last trip. The charter will pick up from in front of the AMTRAK station in Milwaukee at 12:15 pm and will return about four

hours later. Fare will be \$18.00.

The second charter will be one week later on December 16, 1990. This charter will use one of the new ORION 40 foot 102 inch buses that MCTS is now receiving. Again the trip will pick up in front of the Milwaukee AMTRAK station at 12:15 pm and will only last about two hours. Fare for this trip will be \$6.00. Hope to see you there.

### \*\*\* NORTRAN ABOLISHED \*\*\*

The mayors of north and northwest suburbs that make up the North Suburban Mass Transit District (NORTRAN) voted to abolish the district effective December 31, 1990, with control being taken over by PACE on January 1, 1991.

NORTRAN was formed in 1972 by 18 north and northwest suburbs at a time when private bus companies were in danger of going out of business.

NORTRAN's daily operating costs are about \$40,000, of which \$15,000 is covered by fares. The other \$25,000 is supplied by PACE from tax money collected by the RTA. NORTRAN carries about 32,000 passengers a day in 28 north and northwest suburbs.

### \*\*\* 'L' SERVICE CUTBACKS \*\*\*

Beginning December 17th the CTA will eliminate 60 round-trip trains each weekday between 9 am and 2 pm to save a projected \$1.5 million a year.

On this date the intervals between trains on the three main rapid transit lines will be increased from the current 5 minutes to 7 1/2 minutes

From 9 am to 2 pm there will be six car trains instead of the current four car trains and every train will make all stops on the following lines: Lake-Dan Ryan, Howard-Englewood-Jackson Park, (cont. page 3)



( 'L' CUTBACKS cont. from page 2)

and the Congress-Douglas-O'Hare.

There will be 20 fewer round trips on each of the three lines, but there will be as many seats as before. When all stations become 'all-stops', riders who now board at an A or B station may find they are not waiting as long as before for a train.

As covered in the Sun Times of November 20, 1990, using the O'Hare line from the State of Illinois building to the Airport as an example, there are 17 stations on that portion of the line. Of these 17 stations, 14 are now all-stops. This appears to show that this "service change" is actually a service reduction, increasing a passengers wait by 2 1/2 minutes and lengthening their trip on the average of 3 minutes in the non-rush.

### \*\*\* SECURITY FOR LAKE 'L' \*\*\*

The CTA will begin making security improvements at rapid transit stations of the Lake Street 'L' in 1991.

Such work is well under way on the Congress line, where six stations are getting \$1.4 million worth of improvements. Work is completed at Oak Park Avenue, Pulaski, Kedzie and Western, and nearly done at the Racine and Halsted stations. The remaining Congress line stations at Harlem, Austin, Cicero and the Medical Center will be upgraded in 1991.

The improvements include installation of clear plastic panels on both sides of the long ramps from the station entrances to the station platforms, improved lighting and a bright repainting of the station areas.

### \*\*\* CLEAN-AIR BUS TESTS \*\*\*

The CTA will spend more than \$7 million to test

whether natural gas can efficiently run its new buses.

Early next year the CTA will seek bids for 25 natural gas powered buses, which are expected to cost about \$230,000 each. The new buses, which also will require a special service and refueling facility costing up to \$3 million, will operate in Chicago for a year while the CTA determines whether they can operate as efficiently as diesel powered vehicles. The buses are expected in Chicago in 1992.

A new federal Clean Air Act requiring transit systems to operate cleaner fleets may force the CTA to turn to alternate fuels in the next five years. If forced to convert its entire fleet to natural gas, the CTA estimates that it would have to spend as much as \$300 million.

The test buses, which will be air-conditioned and equipped with wheelchair lifts, are expected to be delivered in 1992, and would be tried out on city streets for about a year. Compressed natural gas costs about 20 percent more than diesel fuel, but the mileage would be about the same. The CTA's budgeted fuel costs of \$16.3 million for 1991 represents only 2 percent of the operating budget of \$745.7 million.

The CTA decided not to test two other alternate fuels, ethanol and methanol. Methanol burns at such a high heat that it could injure drivers and service people while ethanol gets fewer miles per gallon than natural gas. Methanol powered vehicles are being tested in Denver while ethanol powered buses are being tested in Peoria.

### \*\*\*TMC'S FINALLY ARRIVING\*\*

The new TMC RTS-08 model buses are finally beginning to show up on the streets of Chicago. They are operating out of 77th Street garage, with North Park garage the next in line for receipt.



# Devotees of CTA's Flxible buses bid them fond farewell

By Gary Wisby  
Staff Writer

Fans of the Flxible bus say that, although nearly extinct, it's an excellent example of urban transportation.

Two dozen of them chartered a special, four-hour ride Saturday as the vehicle nears retirement from CTA service. All are members of the Omnibus Society of America, a Chicago-area club.

Why do they care?

"The Flxibles are the fleet of buses that many people grew up with during the '50s and '60s," said Bill Shapotkin, who directed the trip. Made by the Loudonville, Ohio, bus company with a funny name, Flxibles from that era were supposed to be streamlined. They ended up looking kind of boxy.

"This is the end of an era," Shapotkin said.

Contrary to popular thought, the company did not supply the city with the flexible "big bend" buses that can twist around a corner.

But they did supply almost every other kind of bus.

Andre Kristopans, author of *Chicago Motor Coaches*, said there once were 1,166 Flxibles in Chicago's fleet of 2,400 buses. First purchased in the 1950s, today only 16 Flxibles remain.

And they will be phased out over the next few months as they are replaced by newer vehicles.

Why retire the Flxibles? "Because these things are 22 years

old," said Shapotkin. "They can't go on forever. The government says the average bus lifespan is 12 years."

Saturday's run was along the Lake Street route, with side trips along other Flxible-familiar routes. It was a comfortable ride.

"They were built better," said Dave Stanley, a bus mechanic from Milwaukee. "They have soft seats, too. All the newer ones have the harder seats."

Stanley has his own bus, a Brill, a make that went out of production 30 years ago. Today's bus scene is "bland and homogeneous," he said. "You don't have the variety of builders you used to."

Most bus lines today are municipally owned, but private firms used to make the buses go. "The CTA used to be private companies," Stanley noted.

What makes a bus fan? Said Shapotkin, "I didn't drive until I was 30 years old. I rode the bus every day. After a while, you take an interest."

The club, with 100 members, meets the first Friday of each month at the Welles Park Fieldhouse, 2333 W. Sunnyside. "We have slide and/or movie presentations on motor coach transportation," Shapotkin said.

He said many of the club's 100 members work for bus companies or other transportation firms.

So for them, Saturday's excursion was a busman's holiday.

Contributing: Rich Cahan

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SUN-TIMES/Scott Stewart

A member of the Omnibus Society of America takes a snapshot of one of the city's last Flxible buses on a bus tour Saturday.