

Green Pennant Special

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC. SEPTEMBER 2003

Welcome to another issue of The Green Pennant Special, the official publication of The Omnibus Society of America.

Through this publication we hope to keep our readers informed of events happening in the transit industry in Chicago and other cities in the United States.

• SEPTEMBER OSA MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be on September 5, 2003, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will be start at 7:30 p.m.

The hospital is on California near Foster. Winona is one half block south of Foster. By public transportation, take the 92 Foster to California. From the Ravenswood Brown Line, take the 93 North California from Kimball, get off after it turns onto California from Foster and walk back south. Or, take the 11 Lincoln from Western, get off at Carmen (One block south of Foster) and walk west on Winona.

There is some parking on California and Winona. The parking structure is on the west side of California just south of Foster.

Our program will be titled "Klabish's Kaleidoscope of Transit", a potpourri of modern bus transit around the U.S. presented by Stephen Klabish.

• CTA HAPPENINGS

The CTA is proposing significant improvements to bus service along both South and North Lake Shore Drive. Customers using these routes will experience improved travel time to and from the Loop, new express service to downtown, improved east-west service connections, expanded express service hours and fewer transfers throughout their trips.

A 180-day experimental restructuring of 24 routes serving the Lake Shore corridor will begin August 31, and then be evaluated for its success in meeting customer demand throughout the following six months.

Combined, the South and North Lake Shore Drive bus routes experienced a 17.6 percent increase in ridership over the last five years, the North Lake Shore routes increasing by 25 percent, and South Lake Shore routes increasing by seven percent. The bus routes affected by

this proposal carry 15 percent of all CTA bus customers.

Many of the routes affected by the proposed plan are currently concentrated along major traffic corridors. By realigning local routes to nearby streets and moving already full express buses to Lake Shore Drive earlier in the route, customers will have more and better options for service as well as faster trips. Total cost of the service improvements is estimated to be \$2.8 million, an increase of 5.3 percent over the existing cost to operate the current routes.

South Lake Shore Corridor

Currently, three routes operate in two express zones to serve the South Lake Shore corridor where ridership has increased by seven percent over the past five years. Service is highly concentrated along the Jeffery corridor resulting in frequent east-west transfers as part of the trip. Customers in Hyde Park often encounter crowded buses.

The proposed plan doubles the number of express zones and increases the number of routes from three to five, providing more direct express service to downtown. Direct service reduces the need for transfers and provided a faster, more reliable trip for customers.

A new #26 **South Shore Express** route will operate during weekday rush periods, peak direction only, between 106th/Ewing via downtown via Ewing, 92nd, Commercial, 83rd, South Shore and 67th to Lake Shore. After running express to Jackson, #26 buses will end their trips downtown via Michigan to Chicago.

A new #28 **Stony Island Express** route will operate downtown from 103rd between 4 a.m. and 1 a.m. daily via Stony Island, 56th, Lake Park and 47th to Lake Shore. After exiting Lake Shore/Columbus at Roosevelt, #28 express buses will operate north on Michigan and west on Adams to Union Station. Certain morning and afternoon rush hour trips will operate west to the Medical District.

Rush period buses on the #2 **Hyde Park Express** route will operate in both directions throughout the morning and afternoon weekday rush periods, and will be extended to the University of Chicago hospitals. Morning trips will originate at 57th/Hyde Park and operate via Cornell Drive, Midway Plaisance and Cottage Grove to Drexel Square, where they will return to the regular route east on Hyde Park and north on Lake Park to 47th for express trips downtown terminating at Navy Pier.

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CTA

The **#6 Jackson Park Express** (formerly Jeffery Express) and **#14 Jeffery Express** (formerly South Lake Shore Express) routes will be improved to provide more midday and weekend express options. #6 express buses will operate daily from 4 a.m. until midnight, starting their trips north on South Shore Drive from 79th, going west on 67th to Stony Island and north over the existing via Stony Island, 57th, Hyde Park, Lake Park, 47th and Lake Shore to downtown. #14 express buses will maintain their current routing from 103rd/Stony Island to Madison/Jefferson, making stops north on Jeffery to 67th before running express to downtown. Service will now operate in both directions from 4 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily instead of operating during rush periods only.

A new **#15 Jeffery** route will operate daily between 103/Stony Island and 47th/Red Line, supplementing service along Jeffery. The #15 will provide service between 5 a.m. and 1 a.m. with expanded service hours on East 51st Street.

#1 Indiana/Hyde Park will operate during rush hour only and terminate at Drexel Square instead of 63rd/Stony Island. Customers will still have service all day because the **#4 Cottage Grove** will be routed (as it currently is on weekends) to serve portions of the #1 route (specifically Michigan and Indiana north of 35th Street). In addition, frequent and faster service between Hyde Park and Union Station will be provided by the new X28 Stony Island Express. This will improve service availability during rush hours in the corridor.

#X3 King Drive Express is being renamed from the existing #3L King Drive Limited. The #X3 will provide the same service as the #3L.

#X4 Cottage Grove Express operating weekday rush periods, peak direction only (5:30 a.m. – 9 a.m. northbound and 3 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. southbound), between 95th/St. Lawrence and Michigan/Chicago. The route will make limited stops between 95th/Cottage Grove and Michigan/Roosevelt. The new route will provide faster service between the south portion of Cottage Grove and downtown. In addition, the limited stop route will provide new single ride service to North Michigan Avenue. This eliminates a transfer for many customers.

#47 47th is being extended from Green Line Station east to Lake Park, eliminating the need to transfer for many customers. The hours, frequency and days of service are unchanged.

#51 51st service east of the Red Line is replaced by #15 Jeffery service. This will make the #51 more reliable for customers west of the Red Line. The hours, frequency and days of service are unchanged.

#71 71st/South Shore route combined with **#27 South Deering**. Current routing along 71st Street will be unchanged. New routing south of 71st to 112th/Torrence will be added. Instead of terminating at 71st/Yates, the route will continue over to South Shore, Exchange, Commercial and Torrence to 112th. Service hours remain unchanged (4:30 a.m. – 1:30 a.m.). A new direct link between 69th Red Line and the Southeast Side will be provided.

NORTH LAKE SHORE CORRIDOR

Along the North Lake Shore corridor, two large express zones to downtown currently serve customers. As a result of the changing demographics, the zones now encompass a high concentration of residents. Customers on the north end of the corridor travel on local service for a large portion of their express trip and passengers on the south end encounter crowded buses.

Express bus ridership has increased by 25 percent over the past five years along the corridor. The proposed plan doubles the number of zones that provide service to downtown, adding three new routes and modifying two rush-period routes and four all-day routes.

A new **#134 Stockton/LaSalle Express** route will operate during rush periods, peak direction only, between Belmont/Sheridan and Jackson/Wacker. After making local stops south via Sheridan and Stockton, #134 buses will enter Lake Shore at Fullerton for express trips to East Wacker. Buses will proceed west on Wacker, making stops at Michigan and State, south on LaSalle and west on Adams to Wacker.

The **#135 Wilson/LaSalle Express** rush period route will be modified and renamed the **#135 Clarendon/LaSalle Express**. Trips will start at Clarendon/Montrose, and proceed over the existing #135 route via Clarendon, Irving Park, Inner Lake Shore to Belmont where buses will enter Outer Lake Shore for express trips to East Wacker. Buses will proceed west on Wacker, making stops at Michigan and State, south on LaSalle and west on Adams to Wacker.

The **#136 Sheridan/LaSalle Express** will be modified to operate on Clarendon instead of Marine Drive between Lawrence and Montrose. Trips will operate express on Outer Lake Shore Drive between Irving Park and East Wacker Drive.

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CTA

Buses will proceed west on Wacker, making stops at Michigan and State, south on LaSalle and west on Adams to Wacker.

The **#156 LaSalle** will have additional service between North Avenue and downtown during the morning rush hour. This service expansion is designed to alleviate overcrowding in the corridor.

A new **#143 Stockton/Michigan Express** rush period route, peak direction only, will operate between Belmont/Sheridan and Washington/Michigan. Local stops will be made on Sheridan and Stockton from Belmont to Fullerton before the buses enter Lake Shore Drive for express trips to Oak/Michigan. Local stops will then be made on Michigan from Delaware to Washington.

A new **#144 Marine/Michigan Express** rush period route, peak direction only, will operate from Foster via Marine and Clarendon to Irving Park before running express on outer Lake Shore to Oak/Michigan and making local stops on Michigan from Delaware to Washington.

The current **#145 Wilson/Michigan Express** route will be modified to operate express between Irving Park (instead of Belmont) and Michigan/Oak. The route will operate in both directions on Michigan in the Loop.

The current **#146 Marine/Michigan Express** route will be renamed **#146 Inner Drive/Michigan Express** and will be modified to operate on Clarendon (instead of Marine Drive), between Lawrence and Montrose. #146 buses will continue to enter Outer Lake Shore at Belmont for express trips to Oak/Michigan before proceeding south via Michigan and over the regular route to the Museum Campus.

New Sunday service and later weekday/Saturday service will be provided on the **#147 Outer Drive Express** route, which will operate from the Howard 'L' station to Michigan/Congress, running express on Lake Shore Drive from Foster to Oak/Michigan, and making local stops on Michigan from Delaware to Congress. Weekday and Saturday service will be extended to 1 a.m. #147 buses will run from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. on Sunday/holidays.

The **#151 Sheridan** will terminate at Devon during hours the #147 is operating. The #147 route will cover all trips between Devon and Howard Monday through Saturday.

On Sundays/holidays, the #151 will run all the way to Howard after 8 p.m. (www.yourcta.com)

In an article appearing in the Getting Around column of the Chicago Tribune from August 11, the columnist Jon Hilkevitch reported that some commuters are finding fault with the CTA's plan of major changes for the North and South Lake Shore Drive corridor.

Two of the route changes mentioned were the #145 Wilson/Michigan Express buses that will enter and exit Lake Shore Drive at Irving Park Road instead of Belmont Avenue and the change the routing of #4 Cottage Grove local service to Michigan and Indiana Avenues north of 35th Street.

Current riders of the #145 feel that the CTA is taking away service from people between Irving Park and Belmont and adding nothing to take its place.

CTA officials disagree that their plan is shortsighted and fails to look at the route changes section by section to ensure everyone will receive good service. They said service will be increased on the #146 Inner Drive/Michigan Express route, which runs express from Belmont to North Michigan Avenue on the drive.

Addressing concerns that #146 buses will be mobbed with riders who are forced to switch from the #145, CTA spokeswoman Anne McCarthy said, "There will be more #146 buses, and some of them will operate a shorter route by starting at Montrose, making more seats available between Irving Park and Belmont.

"The local #4 will no longer turn at 35th Street and King Drive to serve the residents of the Prairie Shores and Lake Meadows communities, nor Dunbar High School," said CTA rider Celia Daniels, who is organizing neighbors to push for restoration of the current #4 route.

Daniels said the CTA's move to accommodate Near South Side riders leaves Prairie Shores and Lake Meadows with only one bus route – the #3 King Drive – during non-peak hours to get to work, school and shopping. And she called service on the #3 sporadic.

CTA spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney responded that the #4 is not being realigned to favor service on the Near South Side, although she acknowledged the #3 will be the only route serving King Drive during non-rush hours.

"The #4 is being shifted one fourth of a mile west to serve Indiana/Michigan since the #1 Indiana/Hyde Park will now terminate at Drexel Square," Gaffney said.

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CTA

"The majority of ridership along King Drive occurs in the rush hours, so we believe there will still be adequate service to meet demand." (Getting Around - Chicago Tribune August 11, 2003)

Beginning Friday, June 13, bus customers using the 95th Street bus terminal at the Chicago Transit Authority's Red Line Station began experiencing a temporary change in their drop off and pick up points at the terminal. Due to the start of reconstruction of the heavily traveled bus turnaround, CTA implemented temporary bus stops on adjacent streets to the east and west sides of the terminal. The temporary stops are all within two blocks of the terminal so customers will not have to travel far.

These temporary bus stops are expected to be in place until September when access to the bus turnarounds will return to normal. Final reconstruction, however, will not be complete until the end of the year.

Affected CTA and Pace bus routes and their temporary drop off and pick up points are as follows. Note that several routes will drop off in a location other than where customers will be picked up.

#34 South Michigan, #111 Pullma/111th/115th and #119 Michigan/119th buses will pick up and drop off customers on 95th Street between State and Lafayette.

#29 State buses will pick up and drop off customers at the corner of 94th and State and will also drop off customers on Lafayette near 94th and in the middle of the block, approaching 95th.

Pace route #359 will only pick up on Lafayette near the corner of 94th and #381 will only pick up on Lafayette just south of 94th.

#100 Jeffery Manor Express, #103 West 103rd, #106 East 103rd, and Pace bus route #353 will only drop off customers on 95th Street at the corner of State. These routes, along with Pace #381 will only pick up customers on Lafayette between 94th and 95th.

#108 Halsted/95th and Pace route #352 will pick up on 95th between Perry and Lafayette. Pace route #395 will pick up only on 95th just west of Perry.

#108 Halsted/95th and Pace route #352, #359, #381 and #395 will only drop off on State between 94th and 95th.

The following CTA routes will not be affected during this phase: #N5 South Shore Night Bus, #N9 Ashland Night Bus #95E 93rd/95th, #95 West 95th and #112 Vincennes/111th.

Additionally, passengers taking Greyhound buses will be picked up and dropped off on Lafayette, just south of 94th, although the ticket office in the 95th Street Station will remain open.

The reconstruction of the 95th Street bus turnaround is the first activity in the larger Dan Ryan Red Line Rehabilitation Project and involves replacing the bridge deck, bus lanes, curbs, sidewalks and passenger islands, and refurbishing barriers and fencing. The lighting system also will be replaced.

When the entire project is completed in fall 2006, the CTA will have rehabilitated bus bridges at 69th and 95th Streets, improved signal, communications and power substation systems and renovated seven of the most heavily used stations located between Cermak Road and 95th Street. (www.yourcta.com)

Along with the start of the rehabilitation of the 95th Street bus terminal, the CTA began the rehabilitation of the 69th Street bus bridge one week later on Friday, June 27.

Affected CTA bus routes and their temporary stops are as follows:

#N5 South Shore Night Bus, southbound #29 State, #30 South Chicago and #71 71st buses will stop on Lafayette, in front of McDonald's.

Westbound #67 buses will stop on the north side of 69th Street at State and at Lafayette.

The #169 69th/UPS Express will stop on the south side of 69th Street near the station entrance.

The following bus routes will not be affected by this project:

Northbound #29 State buses will continue to make their normal stops on State in front of Mr. Ben's Meats and Groceries.

Eastbound #67 67th/69th/71st buses will continue to make their normal stops at the entrance to the station. (www.yourcta.com)

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CTA

Mayor Richard M. Daley joined Chicago Transit Authority officials on July 17, to hail the progress of the CTA's largest capital improvement project, the \$482.6 million renovation of the Cermak (Douglas) branch of the Blue Line, by officially cutting the ribbon on the Kostner station, one of eight stations being reconstructed as part of the project.

The new Kostner station involved a complete rehabilitation of the Kildare Avenue station. The name change reflects a new main entrance at Kostner Avenue, which is a major thoroughfare and provides more convenient access for customers. Kildare Avenue, at the east end of the station, is now the secondary entrance.

The state-of-the-art, accessible station, located at 2019 S. Kostner, between Cullerton and 21st streets, offers a number of customer-friendly amenities. The island platform between the northbound and southbound tracks is functional and features benches, overhead heaters and enhanced lighting that add to the comfort of CTA passengers as they wait to board their trains. Canopies have been installed to protect customers from the elements.

A ramp, wheelchair turnstile, TTY telephones and Braille signs offer accessibility for customers with disabilities. Audio/visual, station signs and a public address system are in place to help customers navigate the station and receive important travel information.

As of July 17, 80 percent of the Cermak (Douglas) Rehabilitation Project is complete with the following work in place: caissons, or foundations for the vertical support columns, caisson caps, steel and concrete columns, steel and concrete bents, and track and girder spans.

Going forward, the CTA will concentrate its efforts on:

- opening the seven remaining stations.
- completing track replacement, column adjustment and painting.
- finishing the signal/communications work.
- building the substations, completing the track maintenance, transportation and yard office buildings at 54th Yard; and

- working with the City and Cermak (Douglas) Community Advisory Panel to place community art at all of the stations.

The project, which began in the fall of 2001, will be completed in 2005. Kiewit/Delgado, AJV (A Joint Venture), a construction firm based in Elgin, Illinois, is overseeing the construction portion of the project. (www.yourcta.com)

Funding for two major Chicago Transit Authority construction projects advanced on July 24, in the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives at a mark up on federal FY04 transportation spending. The Committee bill recommends allocating \$85 million in funding for reconstruction of the Cermak (Douglas) Blue Line and \$45 million to expand capacity on the CTA's Brown Line.

The Blue Line project, for which the CTA has a Full Funding Grant Agreement, has been underway since summer 2001. The CTA is completing design and engineering on the Brown Line project and is in the final stage of securing a Full Funding Grant Agreement. It is expected to begin construction later this year. The Blue Line and Brown Line projects are located in the districts of Congressmen Luis Gutierrez, Rahn Emanuel and Danny Davis.

This appropriation is an important step in the federal funding process and enables the CTA funding to advance to the House for consideration. (www.yourcta.com)

West Side commuters are having to walk farther than others to the nearest L stop, getting packed in tighter on the city's buses and are being ignored when it comes to improvements, according to a study that was released the week of June 23 by a public advocacy group.

The Campaign for Better Transit says the CTA "sets a much lower service standard for the West Side."

The report is critical of the CTA's service to the West Side, pointing out that some commuters have to walk more than half a mile for bus service and that trains are unfairly farther apart along the Green Line.

And the services that are available are usually not up to the same standards that they are in other parts of the city, the report asserts.

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CTA

"The CTA must consider West Siders to be sardines because throughout the morning, afternoon and evening, West Side buses carry passenger loads that even exceed the levels deemed acceptable only for rush hours," the study finds.

According to the report, the average passenger load throughout the day – during both peak and non-peak hours – on the #20 Madison bus and the #66 Chicago bus exceeds the CTA's 60-person maximum.

The group also is upset that the transit authority cut bus service along the Lake Street corridor because of low ridership numbers, but has yet to cut routes in other parts of the city that have even lower numbers.

CTA officials, however, say there have been improvements to service on the West Side in recent years and that more could be coming after the agency commissions a study on transportation needs in the area. (Chicago Sun-Times June 23, 2003)

The first of the 226 new articulated buses, equipped with advanced filter traps to reduce emissions by 90 percent, were in service on the #14 South Lake Shore Express route on August 12. Two other 60-foot long buses are being test-driven and outfitted with fareboxes.

About 45 of the buses, which cost \$431,000 each, will be delivered this year and the rest will arrive in 2004, said CTA spokeswoman Robyn Ziegler. The order was delayed due to design changes on the low-floor buses, and the CTA is awaiting a consultant's review of durability tests on the new vehicles before committing to final acceptance of the \$99 million order from North American Bus Industries, Inc. (Chicago Tribune Aug. 13, 2003)

• PACE PATTERN

After holding a public hearing in Geneva to discuss proposed service reductions on Route 921 Mill Creek/Geneva Shuttle on Monday, June 2, the Pace board, at its monthly meeting on June 4, voted to scale back this route effective July 7.

Route 921 is a local weekday rush-hour service that operates to the Geneva Metra Station. Due to a daily average of just 3 riders on the Mill Creek portion of the route, that segment was eliminated. The route will continue operating from the First Baptist Church of Geneva, where more than 100 riders catch the bus.

Also, at the Pace Board meeting held on June 4, the Board gave the green light to comprehensive route changes that are planned to improve bus services in Elgin, South Elgin, Carpentersville, East Dundee and West Dundee. The new plan took effect on Monday, August 25, resulting in a better transit network that responds to changing demographics.

Ten of the 15 existing routes were adjusted, two routes were eliminated and one new route added. Routes were consolidated, unproductive segments eliminated, and new areas served, such as Randall Road. Saturday service was added to select routes, and some buses are out on the road an hour later on weekdays and 30 minutes on Saturdays.

The Pace Board of Directors, at the board meeting held on August 6, reviewed a 2004 budget proposal to be submitted to the Regional Transportation Authority. As part of the budget process, Pace is required to submit a draft budget to the RTA by August 15.

Pace's proposed 2004 operating budget is \$147.3 million, which is a 6.2 percent increase from the estimated 2003 budget of \$138.8 million. The increase is mostly due to rising health care expenses, and higher pension and insurance costs.

Pace's proposed 2004 capital plan totals \$38.6 million, the majority of which is earmarked for new buses and vans. Pace expects to purchase 63 fixed-route transit buses and 121 vans for its expanding vanpool program. After receiving budget proposals from Pace, Metra and the CTA, the RTA will set funding levels and recovery rates by September 15. Pace will use those guidelines to formulate a more detailed 2004 budget plan, which will go to public hearings in Late October and get submitted to the RTA by November 15. In December, the RTA will finalize Pace's new budget, which takes effect January 1. (www.pacebus.com)

Residents of the southwest suburbs who could benefit from five new bus routes to Tinley Park's Metra stations (Oak Park Avenue and 80th Avenue), were invited to a Community Open House to comment on a transit proposal. The Open House, hosted by Pace and Metra, was scheduled for Wednesday, August 20, at the Tinley Park Metra Station at 17381 S. Oak Park Avenue.

Pace and Metra are conducting a Bus-to-Rail study that includes an analysis of existing services and survey current and potential users to identify transit models for improved bus service to Metra stations.

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PACE

Benefits of the joint research could include new park-n-ride facilities, direct bus routes for faster service, schedule reliability between buses and trains, competitive bus pricing, greater travel flexibility due to more frequent trips, and an improved image of public transit.

Pace and Metra are proposing new bus routes to both Tinley Park train stations on the Rock Island District Line for residents of Tinley Park and surrounding towns who commute into Chicago. This transit initiative serves as a pilot project for future transit upgrades in other suburban communities that have Metra and Pace services.

The tentative service design concepts were on display at the Open House. This includes two new routes from the north side of Tinley Park to the 80th Avenue Station, and one bus heading there from a park-n-ride on the south side of town. There are two Tinley Park routes proposed to serve the Oak Park Avenue Station, originating in the north and south sections of town. These proposals will be refined based on community feedback, and could be implemented if there is a demand and funding sources are identified.

• METRA MATTERS

The last week of June and the first week of July saw Metra dedicating a number of new commuter train stations.

On May 29, officials from Metra and North Chicago joined U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and representatives of the United States Navy to dedicate the new \$3.4 million station facilities at the Great Lakes stop of Metra's Union Pacific North Line from Kenosha.

Located south of Buckley Road at Sheridan Road, the new 3,400-square-foot depot made of brick and stone features an exterior tower, 89 new parking spaces, two new platforms and improved access from major roads. (www.metrarail.com)

May 29, also saw Tinley Park Mayor Edward J. Zabrocki join Michael Smith, a member of the Metra Board of Directors, to dedicate a \$5 million commuter station at 6700 South Street in Tinley Park.

The all-new station design features a fully enclosed 3,800-sq. foot warming house made of fondulac rustic-

colored limestone, slate roof with wooden rafters and copper trim, outside canopy with heat lamps for inclement weather, and large windows for views of surrounding areas.

Station amenities include MoJoe's Coffeehouse with wooden counters and computer jacks for customers, wooden benches and chairs to seat 50 people in the waiting area, and two restrooms.

For commuter convenience, the station is also equipped with a covered drop-off area, bike racks, five exits, and four ramps with handrails for people with disabilities.

Other improvements include two 800-ft. asphalt platforms with tactile edges, antique lighting consistent with the village, a stone embankment for newspaper boxes coordinated with the station, and landscaping.

A three-story clock tower with its circular design provides views from all directions. Measuring 24 feet wide at its base, the tower tapers to a height of 38 feet and crowns the station. To enhance traffic flow, the new station was constructed 300 feet east of the previous site. (www.metrarail.com)

Metra officials joined Barrington Mayor Marshal Reagle on June 4, to dedicate a newly rehabilitated and expanded Barrington commuter station, located at 201 S. Spring Street.

New station amenities include a larger commuter waiting area, a coffee vendor, an ATM, and restrooms. The \$3.7 million station improvement cost also includes the rebuilding of both inbound and outbound platforms with new platform lighting and a new 140-foot canopy with shelters along the inbound platform.

Parking improvements include renovation of existing lots, a new 30-space lot east of the station, and electronic fee collection boxes. Also, a new sidewalk with lights and landscaping now connects the station to Main Street. (www.metrarail.com)

Officials from Metra and the city of Crystal Lake broke ground on June 6, for a new train station at Pingree Road along Metra's Union Pacific Northwest Line.

The new station and parking facility will be built at Pingree Road along Crystal Lake's eastern edge, a 26-acre site bounded by Congress Parkway on the south.

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METRA

By far, most of McHenry County Metra commuters step aboard in Crystal Lake. In 1983, 900 riders were boarding in Crystal Lake. Now, there are nearly 1,600 daily.

When completed late next summer, the new station project will feature a 2,000-square-foot depot that will include a pedestrian tunnel under the tracks and two 820-ft. platforms where commuters will enter and exit the trains.

Opening is scheduled for late 2004. Initially, there will be 400 commuter parking spaces with enough available land to expand to 1,700 spaces in the future. (www.metrarail.com)

The morning rush period for commuters riding the Metra Electric District trains turned into a nightmare when an early morning fire Monday, June 23, destroyed a timber trestle in Riverdale.

While commuters faced the inconvenience and delays of finding their way to and from the city, investigators continued to examine the cause of the blaze that completely consumed the key wooden trestle at 137th Street and Perry Road in Riverdale.

All that remained of the 137th Street bridge Monday were smoldering wooden timbers and ties topped by steel rails twisted and deformed by the heat.

Immediately after the fire, Metra chairman Jeffrey Ladd ruled out shuttling passengers between stations on buses, a strategy used last year when the Electric Line was shut down after a train derailed near McCormick Place.

Metra customers were urged to drive to work until service returned, or make their way to the Rock Island District and use those trains. Metra added extra trains to the Rock Island District, for a total of some 8,000 seats.

Ladd said the logistics of running dozens of buses through the suburbs would have done more harm than good.

However, after the media jumped on his remarks as being insensitive to the needs of South Suburban commuters, Metra began running limited shuttle bus service beginning Wednesday morning, June 25, from Metra's 147th Street/Sibley Boulevard station to Metra's Blue Island/Vermont Street station on the Rock Island District Line. Buses were also made available at 211th

Street and Richton Park stations for shuttle service to Oak Forest.

After working continually to replace the destroyed bridge, the Electric District was reopened for service c July 2. (Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, Daily Southtown)

Lightening set fire to an electrical substation and shut down the Electric District Monday morning, July 21, frustrating riders who have had to deal with a number of service interruptions this summer.

On June 23, a historic trestle in Riverdale caught fire, snarling operations for about a week. The day after the line reopened, a freight train derailed, fouling up service again. Then, a few days later, thunderstorms snapped the 1,500-volt overhead wires powering the trains.

But while nature was at fault for Monday's blaze, which started around 4 a.m. at the substation between 69th and 70th near Dorchester, the commuter rail agency in some ways made matters worse.

Shuttle buses weren't dispatched, so riders had to scramble to get to other train lines, hop a bus or drive to work. Some travelers also complained that Metra did a poor job of informing those waiting at stations about the problems.

And Metra was unable to cut off power until around 6 a.m., meaning Chicago firefighters had to wait until then to put out the blaze, confirmed Tom Miller, Metra spokesman.

"We physically could not get in the substation because it was on fire, and they were working on rerouting the power," he said. "With the manpower we had at that time, we certainly did the best we could in cutting the power... Two hours does seem like a long time, but it's a more complicated process than it may appear." (Chicago Sun-Times July 22, 2003)

A study committee has recommended moving forward with plans to extend Chicago's Metra commuter rail line from Kenosha to Milwaukee despite a dispute over who would pay for the \$152 million project.

Kenosha County Executive Allan Kehl is inviting the Milwaukee and Racine county executives and the Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha mayors to a summit meeting to figure out how to proceed, panel chairman Fred Patrie said.

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METRA

Rail supporters say the commuter lines would make it easier for people who live in Milwaukee's southern suburbs to commute to jobs in downtown Milwaukee and for Milwaukee and Chicago residents to work in Racine and Kenosha.

Development around stations along the proposed extension could provide an economic boost to aging communities along the line, particularly Cudahy and Racine, said Patrie and Rosemary Potter, executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Coalition for Transit Now.

"This project offers so many economic development opportunities that we can't lose right now," Potter said.

The federal government will pay \$3.2 million of the \$4 million cost of the preliminary engineering, and the state has appropriated \$400,000, leaving local governments to pay the remaining \$400,000.

The study panel recommended that the state Department of Transportation run the trains and pick up any costs not covered by federal aid and fares.

Patrie, Kenosha County's public works chief, noted that is how Maryland handles commuter trains in the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. areas.

But Wisconsin Transportation Secretary Frank Busalacchi sent panel members a letter urging them to hand the responsibility of providing funding not covered by federal aid and fares to local officials.

Both Transportation Department representatives on the study panel abstained from the final recommendation over that issue.

Patrie said officials could work out the long-term financing and operation issues during preliminary engineering, which is likely to take two or three years.

If all sides agree, trains could be running two or three years after engineering concludes, perhaps by 2007 or 2008, he said. (Associated Press/Chicago Sun-Times August 9, 2003)

• RTA RAMBLINGS

Signaling full support for the first suburb-to-suburb commuter trains in the Chicago area, the Regional Transportation Authority Board, on June 5, approved a

55-mile Metra route that would run from O'Hare International Airport to Joliet and connect more than 100 towns.

Metra's Suburban Transit Access Route, or STAR Line, would cost about \$1.1 billion and take at least a decade to build, depending on funding.

But it marks a fresh approach to urban transit by running trains across the outlying metropolitan area instead of funneling commuters to downtown Chicago. And it would bring much-needed rail service to both established and growing communities from the northwest suburbs to DuPage and Will Counties.

The STAR Line would run west out of O'Hare along the Northwest Tollway (Interstate Highway 90) to the Prairie Stone development in Hoffman Estates, then south along existing tracks of the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern freight railroad to Joliet.

After a 12-0 vote by the RTA board, the next steps include beginning detailed analyses of the project's feasibility and environmental impact.

Metra hasn't provided estimates on the number of riders the STAR Line would serve, to what extent the service would ease traffic congestion or how the state and local financial plan would take shape.

As those studies begin, the RTA and the Illinois delegation in Congress will work to gain authorization and then "new-start" status, which would identify the STAR Line as a bona fide new transit line that would be a contender for funding.

The first part won't be difficult, Congress likely will authorize up to 700 transit projects nationwide, including about a dozen in the Chicago area, when lawmakers are scheduled to renew the six-year federal transportation funding bill later this year.

But only 50 to 100 of those projects will receive a federal funding commitment, which locks in federal grants essential for any major project to advance from glossy blueprints to construction.

"Previous Metra projects have done well in the funding process, but each one must stand up to the rigors," said Michael McLaughlin, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. William Lipinski of Illinois, ranking Democrat on the House Highways and Transit Subcommittee.

(Cont on page 10)

RTA

Lipinski is setting priorities as he seeks the help of House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill) and the rest of the delegation to win new-start ranking for a dozen competing local transit projects that include the STAR Line, the CTA's Circle Line and Pace's efforts to launch a bus rapid-transit system.

"We are batting 5-for-5," McLaughlin said, referring to three Metra and two CTA projects approved as new starts in the current federal legislation. "But there's a limited pot of money and we should not automatically expect or assume to do as well again."

Congressional authorization also likely will be sought during the next legislative cycle for a Metra line from the Loop to south suburban Crete, said Paula Thibeault, interim executive director of the RTA.

Under pressure from Lipinski and Hastert, Metra belatedly announced plans for the Southeast Service after Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill) complained the south suburbs had been neglected when Metra unveiled the STAR Line.

The Southeast Service would use existing CSX Transportation Co. and Union Pacific rail lines and include stops in Dolton, South Holland, Thornton, Glenwood, Chicago Heights, South Chicago Heights, Steger and Crete.

Instead of operating bi-level passenger coaches hauled by diesel locomotives, Metra intends to use self-propelled diesel rail cars carrying 100 passengers apiece on the STAR Line. The trains would range from three to eight cars, depending on the time of day and the portion of the route a train is serving, said Metra Executive Director Philip Pagano.

Seventeen stations would be built on the STAR Line, which would run in the suburbs except for a station at O'Hare where the CTA Blue Line ends. (Chicago Tribune June 6, 2003)

- CALENDAR OF EVENTS -

In cooperation with the various rail and transit enthusiast organizations meeting in Chicago, we present this "Calendar of Events".

Sept. 12. Chicago Chapter - Railway & Locomotive Historical Society meeting. 7:00pm. The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington - Pierce Hall (lower level auditorium). Admission is free. Program - "*Burlington in Steam*," following a CB&Q wayfreight between Galesburg and Mendota in the 1950's, a slide presentation by Jim Singer and Jerry Hamsmith.

Sept. 19. The Railroad Club of Chicago meeting. 7:30pm. The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington - Pierce Hall (lower level auditorium). Donation of \$3.00 requested for non-members. Program - "*Polish Your Polish*," a slide presentation by Raymond DeGroote, Jr covering street railways, suburban and mainline electric operations throughout Poland.

Sept. 26. Central Electric Railfans' Association meeting. 7:30pm. 205 W. Wacker Drive Suite 200 (Securities Training Corp). \$5.00 admission for non-members. Program - Program to be announced.

An online version of our Calendar of Events is available, courtesy of the Shore Line Interurban Historical Society, at www.shore-line.org/calendar.html