



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.

The Omnibus Society of America is happy to unveil its new website "www.osabus.com". At osabus.com we will be posting upcoming fan trips and meetings information, as well as membership information.

Please visit our site when you have a chance and give us your opinions and comments.

• SEPTEMBER OSA MEETING

The next regular meetings of the Omnibus Society of America will be on September 3, 2004, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

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, "CTA-Transit in the Second City", will be a slide presentation on bus transportation in Chicago by Keith Poorly.

• CTA HAPPENINGS

The start date for renovation of the CTA Brown Line has been pushed back months by construction bids at what CTA president Frank Kruesi described as "shocking high levels."

Kruesi said the bids would force the CTA to solicit new proposals for rebuilding the North Side elevated line, which has been set to begin this spring. Kruesi said he now hopes the project will get underway late this year,

Officials say the scheduled completion date, December 31, 2009, has not changed.

The costliest undertaking in CTA history – even before the latest bids had been received – the Brown Line project included \$530 million to renovate 18 stations, lengthen platforms, upgrade track and signals and make the line accessible to disabled riders.

That figure included design, engineering, property acquisition and insurance costs, as well as actual construction.

But two bids recently submitted for the construction phase only came in at \$420.5 million and \$541.2 million, respectively, Kruesi said.

The project may have been too large and too complex to bid in a single contract, so the CTA now plans to re-bid the work in several smaller increments, Kruesi said. "By organizing the bid package into several pieces, we hope to attract more bidders at more competitive prices," he said. (Chicago Tribune.com June 9, 2004)

The Chicago Transit Authority's pension plan is in danger of drying up in 10 years unless sweeping changes are made, including concessions from employees and retirees, the fund's director told the transit agency's board on June 9, 2004.

Investment losses in 2001 and 2002 totaling almost 20 percent, plus rising health-care costs, threaten the future of the retirement fund, which now has \$1.3 billion in assets, said John Kallianis, director of the retirement plan.

Kallianis cautioned that the assets could be depleted in 2014 unless contributions are significantly increased, benefits are cut and better investment results are forthcoming.

The CTA contributes \$32 million a year, or 6 percent of payroll, to the fund. CTA employees pay about \$16 million, or 3 percent annually.

Increasing the total contribution to 22 percent, from the current 9 percent, would still result in a declining trend in the funded ratio, said Alex Rivera, an actuary consultant with Gabriel, Roeder, Smith & Co.

CTA President Frank Kruesi said he would push for reforms in the health-care benefits provided, particularly for retirees, when the next collective-bargaining agreement is negotiated with CTA unions.

Currently, 8,200 CTA retirees pay no health-insurance premiums, a situation Kruesi said is unprecedented among public agencies in Illinois. Until recent changes, CTA employees could retire with full health-care benefits at age 55 with only three years of service. (Cont on page 2)

(Cont from page 1)

CTA

The consultants said that requiring retirees to pay for a significant percentage of their health-care costs, among other benefit changes, would stop the downward spiral and help cover benefits. (www.chicagotribune.com June, 10, 2004)

The CTA is applying for a \$48 million federal loan to help finance a transit superstation on the long-vacant Block 37 downtown, transit agency officials said on June 14, 2004.

The authority is completing the application after receiving the go-ahead from the Federal Transit Administration to request the loan, CTA spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney said.

She said any action taken by the CTA is contingent on the city and developer Mills Corp. completing talks to build the station, which would be located between the Red and Blue Lines and offer rail connections to the Orange Line.

Express trains to O'Hare International and Midway Airports would serve the \$213 million station development, bounded by State, Randolph, Dearborn and Washington Streets. Included in the tentative plan are condominiums, office and hotel towers and retail space.

The project would be funded through a combination of federal grants, city contributions, bond proceeds and private investment.

The Chicago Transit Authority is converting the overhead power source on the west end of the Yellow Line to the more efficient third rail system already in use on the remainder of the rail system. Skokie Mayor George Van Dusen joined CTA officials to highlight the conversion, which is already underway. Third rail power will replace overhead catenary wires that power trains between the Skokie station and Crawford. The yellow Line already runs on third rail power between Crawford and CTA's Red Line Howard station.

"This is another important investment that the CTA is making to improve its infrastructure so that customers can enjoy a more pleasant, convenient, reliable commute," said CTA president Frank Kruesi. "Third rail power will improve reliability on the Yellow Line, preventing possible service disruptions such as those that result when overhead wires freeze up and break in the winter."

The Yellow Line is a non-stop shuttle that operates from Dempster Street in Skokie to the CTA's Red Line Howard Street station in Chicago. To minimize service disruptions, the majority of the conversion work is performed on weekends when the line is not operation.

The project involves the installation of 23,000 feet of contact or third rail and underground duct banks and electric cable at grade crossings. The cables carry contact power under streets allowing vehicles to cross the tracks without touching the contact rail.

Removal of the overhead catenary wire will take place once new infrastructure is in place and thorough testing of physical, electrical and safety elements has been completed. CTA expects to complete the project before the end of the year.

The 23,000 feet of contract rail going in along the Skokie Swift is a new aluminum composite used in Europe but just making its way into the United States transit industry. The composite material is easier to handle, install and replace than the heavier contact rails currently used elsewhere on the system. The new rail weighs approximately 450 pounds per section compared to the older aluminum clad and solid steel rails, which weigh from 1,400 to 1,900 pounds. CTA has all three types of contact rail on the system.

The Yellow Line between Dempster and Crawford is currently the only location on the CTA rail system not powered by third rail power. In addition to improving reliability and comfort for CTA customers, the conversion gives the CTA the flexibility to use standard railcars interchangeably on the Yellow Line and the rest of the system.

The Federal Transit Administration, Regional Transportation Authority and the Illinois Department of Transportation are funding the \$6.3 million project. (www.yourcta.com)

• PACE PATTERN

Riding both Pace and the Chicago Transit Authority in the same trip should get easier starting in September, as Pace is poised to accept even more CTA fare cards.

Riders can currently use the CTA's regular fare cards, 30-day passes, "Smart Cards" and transfers on Pace but cannot use CTA 7-day cards, U-Pass or Visitor/Fare cards.

(Cont on page 3)

PACE

That would change starting September 1, under an agreement approved on August 5, 2004, by the Regional Transportation Authority's board of directors.

Pace's board of directors on August 4, 2004, unanimously approved the measure, under which Pace would accept those CTA cards through 2005 while getting reimbursed up to \$2 million by the RTA for doing so.

The RTA will provide additional operating funds to Pace based on the trips provided by Pace to riders using the additional CTA passes. The intergovernmental agreement requires that the CTA and Pace provide the RTA with the necessary data to make this calculation quarterly, and requires that the RTA audit the data annually.

Pace estimates that it will receive about \$2 million annually in additional operating revenue through this agreement and plans to start accepting the additional passes September 1. The RTA will amend its 2004 budget by \$700,000 to provide additional operating funding to Pace to cover the cost of accepting the new passes for the remainder of the year.

Per the agreement approved by the RTA Board, pace will accept the additional CTA passes on its regular bus service only. The passes will not be valid on its subscription bus or vanpool services. The RTA will reimburse Pace for up to \$2 million annually for the acceptance of the additional passes only. The CTA will continue to reimburse Pace for the acceptance of its 30-day passes.

The RTA, the CTA, Metra and Pace are currently working with the consulting firm of Booz Allen Hamilton to develop functional criteria and cost estimates for a universal fare system that would be used by riders on all three of the region's public transit services. Booz Allen is currently examining how Metra, Pace and the CTA currently collect and distribute their money, their computer operations and daily monetary reconciliations. Booz Allen is also gathering comparison data on other universal fare systems and the potential costs of installing such a system. With this information, the consultant will develop the technical specifications for a "request for proposals" that the RTA will issue to hire a firm to actually install such a system. While the creation of a working universal fare system is dependent upon available funding, the RTA hopes to complete this study by the end of the year. (www.rta.com)

As part of its comprehensive Vision 2020 plan, Pace is launching another major restructuring effort to improve and maximize the use of suburban bus routes. Pace's Fox Valley/Southwest DuPage Initiative aims to make buses more efficient and effective in that region by emphasizing speed and availability. Public forums will be held in September and November as part of this planning process. Dates will be announced when available.

The Fox Valley/Southwest DuPage Initiative involves 45 bus routes that operate in the communities of Aurora, Naperville, Bolingbrook, Lisle, Warrenville and surroundings towns. Paramount to the success of the project is input and direction from Pace bus riders and communities at large. An extensive public outreach effort will help ensure that the recommended improvements and end results are community based.

Pace has formed a Community Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee to provide input into the planning process. Public meetings and employer forums will add insight this summer and fall. In addition, Pace is collecting detailed data through passenger counts, surveys, focus groups and discussions with officials from each community about their local transit options.

The 45 Pace routes being analyzed in the Fox Valley/Southwest DuPage Initiative are Routes 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 532, 533, 534, 673, 675, 676, 677, 678, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 713, 781, 783, 784, 787/788, 802, 820, 821, 822, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 834 and 855.

A proposed restructuring plan is expected to come before Pace's Board of Directors in December, and improvements could begin to be implemented in the Fox Valley/Southwest DuPage area in spring 2005. Pace's Vision 2020 plan is generating significant improvements to the way public transportation is provided in Chicago's suburbs. (www.pacebus.com)

In preparation for the double tracking of the North Central rail line that will be completed in late 2005, Pace is working with several agencies to determine the feasibility of employer-based shuttle bus services that could operate to several Metra stations between Chicago and Antioch.

A consulting team led by TY Lin International is assisting Pace in the comprehensive study, which focuses on employers within three miles of Metra stations on the North Central Line. (Cont on page 4)

PACE

The Pace team also includes Metra, the Transportation Management Association (TMA) of Lake Cook, the Regional Transportation Authority, the Illinois Department of Transportation, and Valerie S. Kretchmer & Associates. Employers with 50 or more employees in the targeted areas will be surveyed.

"We are surveying their employees who live in Chicago and along the North Central line to gauge their interest in a new shuttle service, taking into account their work start and end times," said Valerie Kretchmer.

Potential shuttle routes will be designed based on employer input and survey responses. Ridership estimates will be developed by station and route.

"With the expanded Metra service starting late next year, now is the time to conduct the surveys, analyze results and determine which employment centers can effectively use buses or vans to connect to North Central stations," said TY Lin Vice President John LaPlante.

The MA of Lake Cook has already worked with Pace in developing a highly effective shuttle bus service in the Lake-Cook Road corridor. "We hope to model the new service after our successful Shuttle Bug service, which serves 30 employers with 14 routes, averaging more than 1,100 daily passengers," said Executive Director Bill Baltutis of the TMA of Lake Cook.

The results of this study will provide the foundation for greatly enhanced bus and rail transit in Lake County and Northern Cook County. The 11 Metra stations included in the study are Antioch, Lake Villa, Round Lake Beach, Prairie Crossing/Libertyville, Mundelein, Vernon Hills, Prairie View, Buffalo Grove, Wheeling, Prospect Heights and the O'Hare Transfer Station. Pace is targeting a new market of employers that will help bolster its future.

"Traffic congestion is growing in Lake and Cook counties, and these shuttles will provide a convenient and cost-effective way for employees to commute to work every day," said Pace Executive Director T.J. Ross. (www.pacebus.com)

Like most 20-year-olds, Pace has grown up and now is concentrating on where its future lies. Created in June 1984 as part of the Regional Transportation Authority's reorganization, Pace's initial mission was to stitch the tattered remnants of nine

separate, regional and municipal bus systems into a coherent whole.

Having done so, Pace officials now are taking a hard look at how they can better compete with the car, which suburban residents show no sign of abandoning even with gasoline prices that earlier this year reached averages above \$2.18 per gallon.

In that vein, Pace is about to launch an ambitious new program in DuPage County that, if it works, might make the service a more reasonable option for commuters, shoppers and even parents shuttling children to sports practices.

By all accounts, Pace came through its original growing pains successfully. The agency replaced a decrepit bus fleet and rebuilt or renovated nine maintenance garages, stabilized myriad fare structures and streamlined transfers between Pace and the Chicago Transit Authority routes, and centralized everything from gasoline to insurance purchases.

Today, the system's 700 buses roll on 240 routes that cover 210 communities spread across 3,500 square miles and carry 35 million passengers a year.

Its Vanpool Incentive Program supplies 456 minivans to groups of commuters who share the van's operating costs, while 356 specially outfitted buses provide service for disabled riders.

Pace's Vision 2020 program is examining not just individual routes, but entire regions to see how local service can be improved.

But the number of people riding Pace's vehicles each year is essentially the same as it was in 1984, and the agency now must take in 40 percent of its \$147.3 million budget from the fare box. Pace's first operating budget was \$56.4 million, and then, it had to recover 27.6 percent of its operating costs from the fare box.

And Pace is still searching for its niche in the sprawling suburban region where people are spread out, love their cars and tend to opt for trains rather than buses – when they're not driving.

The Northeastern Illinois Regional Transportation Task Force recommends Pace be folded into Metra – a suggestion both agencies reject. Pace also must fight public stereotypes of buses that carry just a handful of riders and of buses being used only by the poor. (Cont. on page 5)

(Cont from page 4)

PACE

"It is kind of a mixed picture with Pace," says Joseph Schwieterman, director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at DePaul University.

Compared to cities like Denver, Los Angeles and Seattle, where bus services are major players in the suburbs-to-downtown market, Schwieterman notes Pace: has had trouble carving a niche in longer-haul routes, due to the strength, maybe I should say enormity, of our commuter rail system."

On a positive note, he said Pace puts Metra stations within reach of thousands of households and helps alleviate parking shortages in many towns. (Daily Herald June 30, 2004)

• METRA MATTERS

Metra officials on June 11, 2004, confirmed the \$1 million purchase of about 7 acres in downtown Bartlett, paving the way for development of a new commuter station and about 700 parking spaces.

The purchase also allows village officials to move forward more quickly with other downtown redevelopment plans, they said.

"It's a critical piece in the overall development of our town center," said Bartlett Community Development Director Jim Plonczynski.

The Metra plot is on the north end of the town center. It also lies just south of the existing depot, which dates back to 1873, according to a book on the history of Bartlett, "Images of America BARTLETT Our Past and Our Progress."

A storm sewer Plonczynski said was essential for the town center will be built into the construction and is expected to speed up completion of the rest of the project.

Metra hopes to start in July and plans to complete all construction by the end of 2005, said spokesman Tom Miller. (Daily Herald June 12, 2004)

South suburban residents, officials and transportation planners in the early part of June began putting together specific plans for a Metra commuter rail line proposed for southeastern Cook County and eastern Will County.

Although the line, if built, likely wouldn't be up and running for another decade, the gathering gave officials and residents an opportunity to consider development projects along the planned route.

The meeting also helped planners get an idea of how people in the south suburbs would use the line, said Margery Al-Chalabi, a planning consultant to the rail project.

The proposed \$524 million Metra line – extending from Chicago's LaSalle Street station to Crete in eastern Will County on existing CSX Transportation Co. and Union Pacific tracks – would include stops in Dolton, South Holland, Thornton, Glenwood, Chicago Heights, South Chicago Heights, Steger, Crete and Balmoral Park, just south of Crete.

Although long touted by planners as necessary for more south suburban residents to access positions in the region's fertile job markets, especially the Loop and the area around O'Hare International Airport, the proposed southeast commuter rail line languished near the bottom of Metra's priority list until last year.

Then, when political leaders protested the agency's apparent snub of the south suburbs in announcing plans for an outer-ring commuter rail line serving O'Hare that would stop in Joliet, Metra officials made it a priority.

Although Metra would construct the commuter line, the cost of building stations and other developments along its route would be the responsibility of towns served by the line, said Stephen Schlickman, a financial consultant to the mayors and managers group.

During the session held in Glenwood Village Hall, officials and residents had the opportunity to question and make suggestions to planners about the rail line and alternate transit modes.

The suggestions could be included in the South Suburban Commuter Rail Corridor Land Use and Local Financing Study begun by Metra this year with a grant from the Illinois Department of Transportation and matching funds from the RTA.

To meet federal guidelines, Metra also hired a consultant to perform an alternate study to determine whether other types of transit, such as rapid transit or express bus service between the southeastern suburbs and the Loop, might be a better alternative. (Chicago Tribune June 19, 2004)

(Cont on page 6)

METRA

Metra, which advertises its commuter rail service as "the way to really fly," began a major project June 21, 2004 at O'Hare International Airport.

The construction is a key to the expansion of the railroad's North Central Service between downtown Chicago and Antioch in Lake County. Service on the route is scheduled to increase from 10 trains a day to 22, including more stops at O'Hare, starting in late 2005.

The Metra work, which involves widening the railroad bridge over Interstate Highway 190, which leads to and from O'Hare, will require lane closings on eastbound I-190 for about eight weeks, which started June 21, 2004. Intermittent lane closings during the night will reduce I-190 to a single lane, officials said.

Officials advise air travelers who live in the city to ride the CTA's Blue Line to O'Hare instead of driving.

The \$25 million expansion of the railroad bridge, a quarter mile east of Manheim Road, and building a third set of tracks over the bridge are part of Metra's \$225 million expansion of the North Central Service line, four new stations, more parking and new locomotives and passenger coaches, is on schedule for completion by late 2005, said Metra spokesman Tom Miller.

The new stations will be in Rosemont, Schiller Park, Franklin Park and River Grove. When the expansion is complete, Metra will add 12 trains a day on the line.

The frequency of service to the Metra station at O'Hare, near Remote Parking Lot F, will also be increased, accommodating more air travelers during non-peak hours. The travel time is 30 minutes from Union Station to O'Hare on the North Central Service line. Riders take a free shuttle bus to the People Mover to reach the terminals. (www.chicagotribune.com June 21, 2004)

Thomas J. McCracken, Jr., who has headed the Regional Transportation Authority for 10 ½ years, said on June 9, 2004, he will not seek re-election when his term expires at the end of June.

McCracken's departure comes as a state task force's recommendations to revamp the RTA leadership are pending in Springfield and the Chicago area's three transit agencies face the prospect of deficits as they begin to formulate budgets for 2005.

McCracken was first elected RTA chairman in 1993 and has been chairman longer than anyone else. He previously spent more than 10 years in the General Assembly.

He said he is proud of the accomplishments during his stewardship as the RTA, which oversees the finances of the CTA, Metra and Pace. He managed the largest capital program in RTA history and saw the authority earn a AA bond rating from the nation's top rating services. In the past decade, the RTA has adopted balanced budgets each year. (www.chicagotribune.com June 10, 2004)

- CALENDAR OF EVENTS -

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

Sept. 8. Twentieth Century Railroad Club meeting. 7:00pm. Electricians Union Hall (600 W. Washington Blvd) Admission \$3.00. Program - "To be announced."

Sept. 10. Chicago Chapter - Railway & Locomotive Historical Society meeting. 7:00pm. The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington - Pierce Hall (lower level auditorium). Admission is free. Program - "To be announced."

Sept. 10. Kenosha Streetcar Society meeting. 7:30pm - 9:45pm. Immanuel Methodist Church (54th/Sheridan - 1-1/2 blocks east of the Kenosha Metra/UP Train Station), Kenosha, WI. Donation asked of non-members: \$5.00 Program - "The Last Pole Cars on the Evanston CTA Rapid Transit," by John F. Doyle.

Sept. 17. 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 - "Switzerland," a slide presentation by noted rail/transit photographer (and world traveler) Raymond DeGroote, Jr.

Sept. 24. Central Electric Railfans' Association meeting. 7:30pm. 205 W. Wacker Drive Suite 200 (Securities Training Corp). Admission is free. 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

OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA

CHARTER TRIP TO ROCK ISLAND/DAVENPORT
OCTOBER 2, 2004

PICKUP

8:30 A.M. DES PLAINES BLUE LINE STATION
10:00 A.M. HUSKIE LINE GARAGE, DEKALB, IL

RETURN

8:00 P.M. HUSKIE LINE GARAGE, DEKALB, IL
10:30 P.M. DES PLAINES BLUE LINE STATION

FARE: \$20.00 MEMBERS, \$25.00 NON-MEMBERS

Come join the Omnibus Society of America on our trip to the cities of Rock Island, IL, and Davenport, IA.

We will depart the Des Plaines Blue Line station at 830 a.m. using Jeff Waxman's ex-Huskie Lines Fishbowl and head towards Dekalb and the Huskie Lines garage. There, we will change busses and board one of Huskie Lines new Gillig low floors for the continuation of our trip to Rock Island and Davenport.

We are planning on arriving in Rock Island at 12:00 p.m. and after a lunch stop continue onto the joint municipal bus garage for a tour and talk. After the tour, we will board one of their buses for a four hour trip around Rock Island and Davenport to photograph the bus fleets at transfer points and terminals in the two cities.



Departure from Rock Island will be at 5:00 p.m., with a dinner stop enroute back to Chicago.

Arrival back in Dekalb is planned for 8:00 p.m. and the Des Plaines Blue Line station at 10:30 p.m.

Join us for a day of riding various types of equipment on one of OSA's longer trips in quite a while. We hope to see you there.

