



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.

• APRIL OSA MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be on March 4, 2005, 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 will be a slide presentation by noted rail/transit photographer Myron Lane.

• CTA CORNER

Five painful scenarios outlining deep CTA cuts and fare increases were presented March 8 to the transit agency's board as it develops a contingency plan to take effect July 1 if the General Assembly does not boost transit funding, officials said.

CTA officials have used the prospect of an impending transit crisis—unsuccessfully so far—to sharpen funding pressure on the legislature, which is grappling with a \$1.1 billion state deficit in the next fiscal year.

CTA president Frank Kruesi, who advised his board in December to postpone service cuts set for January in the hope lawmakers would approve funding this spring, insists he is not bluffing.

Kruesi and CTA Chairman Carole Brown said the transit agency would have no other choice this time except to cut service, raise fares or do both.

Legislature action on transit funding, if it occurs, might not develop for several months. The CTA board, however, must approve a contingency plan by April to leave enough time to implement service cuts or other changes by summer.

The January service cuts would need to be doubled—to about a 40 percent reduction in bus and rail schedules—to whittle down a projected \$55 million deficit for the year.

The service cuts would eliminate dozens of bus routes, slash overnight and weekend services on both rail lines and most bus routes, and scuttle more than 1,500 CTA jobs.

A second option—increasing fares—would not be limited to a 25-cent hike in the \$1.75 base fare, according to officials familiar with the plan prepared by the CTA staff. CTA fares were last raised in January 2004.

Raising the base fare by 25 cents would generate about \$25 million annually or about half that amount this year if imposed in July. Other fare-hike options will be presented, but each case would cause a loss in riders, officials said.

The three other scenarios involve significant increases in passenger-waiting times between buses or trains; a combination of service cuts and fare increases; and a mixture of service cuts and longer waiting times, the officials said.

They indicated that fare increases would reduce the severity of service cuts and enable the CTA to provide at least a semblance of existing service, especially during peak commuting hours. But CTA officials warned customers would face longer walks to make connections between buses and trains.

CTA board members, angered over missteps made by the agency's staff in managing the \$530 million Brown Line renovation, pointedly directed the planning staff to stay away from issuing recommendations on possible service cuts or fare hikes. The staff was told to stick with providing factual data to the board.

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CTA

Yet no specific sources to enhance transit funding have garnered political support. Suburban mayors and officials at Metra, the commuter railroad, are worried that lawmakers from Chicago will try to reslice the existing funding pie—helping the CTA at Metra's expense.

The only transit funding proposal offered to date has received little support. Gov. Rod Blagojevich has called on lawmakers to tax business purchases of software to fund a CTA bailout, but the business community has lobbied hard against the proposed tax.

Lawmakers are expected to consider a range of alternatives, including changing the Regional Transportation Authority formula that funds mass transit in northeastern Illinois. About half the transit funding in the region comes from sales-tax collections in the six-county area, doled out in varying amounts to the CTA, Metra and Pace. (www.chicagotribune.com March 9, 2005)

Alarmed about serious defects in its new extra-long buses, the Chicago Transit Authority has stopped payments on the \$102 million contract because the financially struggling manufacturer is resisting demands to fix many of the problems, transit officials said.

The most worrisome flaw involves cracks that developed in the chassis of a bus that was put through an accelerated durability test, officials said. The test involves running a bus 12,000 miles on a track that contains potholes and other hazards to approximate the wear and tear the fleet of buses would experience over time.

The 226 new accordion-style buses, produced since 2003 by North American Bus Industries Inc. (NABI) are warranted for 12 years or 500,000 miles. But cracks around the axles and the joint connecting the articulated midsection of the 60-foot-long test bus have raised questions about the vehicles' service life, said Richard Winston, CTA executive vice president of transit operations.

The CTA is still waiting for delivery of the last two buses. The entire order was supposed to be completed in January 2004, but it was delayed by assembly-line problems, forcing the CTA to keep some of its older buses on the streets longer.

Winston said the bus maker has made several improvements—some more successful than others—

during production of the buses. But the company still has not provided the CTA with a plan to ease the structural fatigue along the frame, Winston said. CTA officials have demanded a plan and assurances that NABI will pay for the changes before the transit agency will free up more than \$16 million in payments it is withholding.

The top official at NABI, whose parent company, NABI Rt., is based in Hungary, said he is committed to resolving the problem, but the CTA must cooperate by reinstating the \$16 million in payments that were recently cut off.

The new CTA buses are the first accordion-style vehicles made by NABI with a low-floor design aimed to ease passenger boarding and exiting. Winston said it is unclear whether the structural fatigue caused by high loads placed on the bus frame is linked to the new design.

Despite warning flags raised by the accelerated durability test, NABI began production, and the CTA, urgently needing to replace its aging fleet, conditionally accepted them. The agency was assured by NABI officials that the vehicles are safe and remedies would be implemented.

The buses cost the CTA about \$430,000 each, compared with about \$341,000 for a standard 40-foot bus. (www.chicagotribune.com March 13, 2005.)

• PACE PATTERN

Pace, the suburban transit agency, held a public hearing to discuss the proposed elimination of two subscription bus routes that are experiencing decreased ridership and facing a lack of funding. The future of Routes 1024 Chicago/Warrenville and 1027 Homewood/Chicago Ridge/Warrenville was addressed on Tuesday, March 22, in room 112/114 of Building 3 at BP Cantena, 4101 Winfield Road in Warrenville.

Both routes are geared to bring workers to BP and International Truck & Engine in Warrenville and Naperville during weekday rush hours. Route 1024 operates from Chicago's Lincoln Park and Lakeview neighborhoods, while Route 1027 provides trips from Homewood and Chicago Ridge. Each route is subsidized by BP, which has decided to end its financial assistance on March 31. Without BP's funding, both routes will not meet Pace's minimum performance standards. Each route carries about half of Pace's minimum subscription-route standard of 30 riders per trip. (www.pacebus.com March 4, 2005)

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PACE

Better access to O'Hare Airport. A Fast one-seat ride on Golf Road between Evanston and Schaumburg. New service to requested destinations like The Glen in Glenview. Its all part of Pace's bus route improvements in the north and northwest suburbs. After a year of collecting detailed data, gathering helpful public input, and designing a more efficient transit network for local residents, the comprehensive route changes were implemented Sunday, March 20, in portions of 22 communities. It's the result of a truly collaborative process.

Pace is reallocating its resources to serve a greater number of passengers with its limited budget. Portions of routes that carried few riders were eliminated, while popular destinations and busy corridors got increased service. There are 13 Pace routes that experienced modifications in the North Shore Initiative.

The improvements include better service to O'Hare Airport due to an extension of Route 250 Dempster Street, providing a one-seat ride from Evanston, Morton Grove, Skokie, Park Ridge, Niles and Des Plaines. Trips operate every 20 or 30 minutes. Route 208 Golf Road links the Davis Street CTA Station in Evanston to Woodfield Shopping Center in Schaumburg, with future plans of stretching the east-west arterial route all the way to Elgin. Service operates every 30 minutes and the cost is just \$1.50 regardless of how far you travel on Golf Road. Route 423 was extended to The Glen of Glenview and the Harlem CTA Station, while Route 226 Oakton Street began offering new service in December to downtown Des Plaines on weekdays.

Other reconstructed routes include 209 Busse Highway, 210 Lincoln Avenue, 421 Wilmette Avenue and 422 Linden CTA/Glenview/Northbrook Court. Saturday service was discontinued on Routes 204 Dodge, 210 Lincoln and 254 North Cicero/Skokie Boulevard. The routes eliminated are 212, 220 and 228, but many of those riders can use one of the restructured routes. (www.pacebus.com March 8, 2005)

Pace buses were a little less empty last year than 2003, and they are fuller still this year, thanks to an improving economy and a fare deal with the Chicago Transit Authority.

In 2004, 34.5 million riders took Pace buses – a 1.9 percent increase over 2003, when ridership hit a 19-year low of 33.7 million.

The growth continues so far this year, too. Through February 28, Pace carried 5.5 million riders – a 7.6 percent increase over the first two months of last year.

While more people are riding public transit to school or work, Pace's ridership jumped after September 23, when the suburban bus agency began accepting all CTA fare cards, spokesman Blaine Krage said.

Pace estimates 45 percent of its riders transfer to and from the CTA.

This has been a good year so far for Pace, the often-overlooked sibling of the Regional Transportation Authority's family.

Pace turned in the biggest ridership increase last year – the CTA carried 444.5 million passengers, a 0.1 percent increase despite a 25-cent fare hike, while Metra dropped to 73.8 million rides from 74 million in 2003 – which reversed a four-year slide.

Pace also unveiled a new blue and white color scheme and its "WebWatch" system, which allows riders with Internet access to track buses in real time and know when they will arrive at given stops. (Daily Herald March 23, 2005)

• PACE PATTERN

Bending to pressure from state officials, Metra, on March 11, said it planned to allow bicycles on trains during weekday non-rush hours and weekends starting in June.

The proposal, presented with some staff reluctance to the Metra board for an expected vote next month, signals a long-awaited backpedaling from the rail agency's historic opposition to bikes on Chicago-area commuter trains.

The Chicagoland Bicycle Federation has been prodding Metra for 15 years, but only recently has Springfield weighed in on the issue. Illinois Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn is backing legislation, sponsored by state Rep. Marlow Colvin (D-Chicago) that would require Metra to allow bikes on its trains during off-peak hours.

Bicycles would be prohibited on weekday trains arriving in Chicago before 9:30 am and leaving the city between 3 pm and 6:30 pm.

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METRA

Bikes would also be banned during the Taste of Chicago summer food festival and on trains leaving the city between noon and 6:30 pm the Fridays before Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Bicycles would be permitted on all weekend trains except during major events downtown.

Riders would be limited to two bikes in the wheelchair storage areas of accessible trains. Metra has more than 400 accessible cars.

Cyclists could not block aisles or vestibules, and they would have to move to other cars or leave the train entirely if disabled passengers need the wheelchair space, officials said.

-CALENDAR OF EVENTS -

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

Apr. 8. Chicago Chapter-R&LHS meeting. 7:00pm. The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington - Pierce Hall (lower level auditorium). Admission: Free. Program - *"To be announced,"*

Apr. 15. Railroad Club of Chicago meeting. 7:30 pm. The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington - Pierce Hall (lower level auditorium) Donation: \$3.00 requested. Program - *"To be announced."*

Apr. 16. Kenosha Streetcar Society. Second annual PCC excursion using (maintenance permitting) Cincinnati, Chicago and Pittsburgh cars. Leaving from McCarthy Transit Center. 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. \$15.00 fare for members and non members.

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

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