

Green Pennant Special

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC. DECEMBER 2005

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.

Visit the Omnibus Society of America website at "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.

• DECEMBER OSA MEETING

The December meeting of the Omnibus Society of America was held on December 2, 2005, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening "*Milwaukee and the MCTS*" will be a slide presentation presented by local Milwaukee transit photographer Ed Montejano.

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.

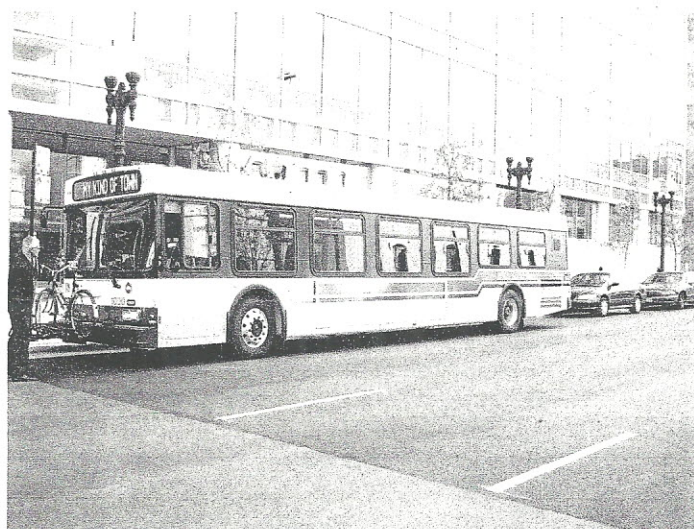
The Omnibus Society of America is holding elections to fill two positions on our Board of Directors. Enclosed you will find a postcard ballot for voting. Vote for two members only (write-ins acceptable) and either mail or bring to the December meeting

• CTA CORNER

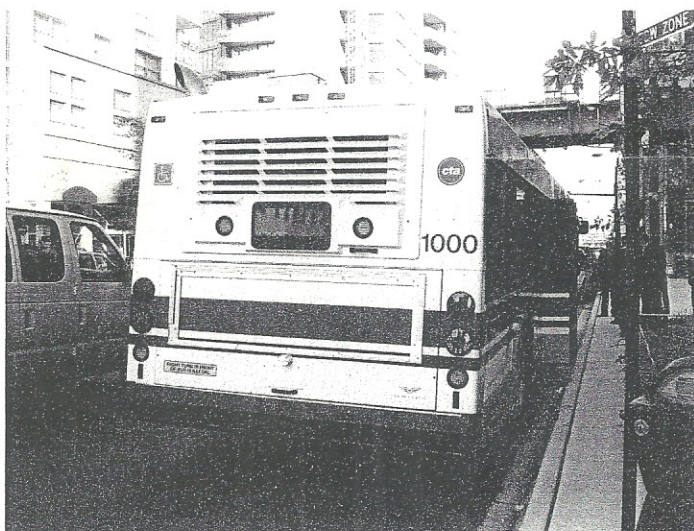
The Chicago Transit Authority unveiled its newest bus the morning of Tuesday, November 8, 2005, at a press conference at Navy Pier. The new bus, a New Flyer D40LF, is a standard 40-foot model featuring a low floor

design, air-conditioning, wheelchair ramp, automatic announcement system, and a low emission engine.

The bus is part of a \$95 million order for 265 buses, which includes 20 diesel electric hybrid buses.



"This bus purchase represents the CTA's continued work to upgrade its fleet. With each bus purchase the CTA incorporates new environmentally-friendly technology so that we reduce emissions and our fleet continues to evolve and improve," said CTA President Frank Kruesi. "In addition to 20 hybrid buses, the entire order includes low floor emission engines which will further reduce annual emissions levels of the CTA fleet by 203 tons – or 10 percent."



Pictures supplied by Bruce Moffat VIN# 5FYD4FS195B028549

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CTA

Each New Flyer bus will produce 60% fewer emissions than the 1991 Flxible Metro buses it will replace.

The exterior of the new bus is nearly identical to the existing New Flyer D40LF buses that were delivered to the CTA in 1995. However, several changes can be found inside.

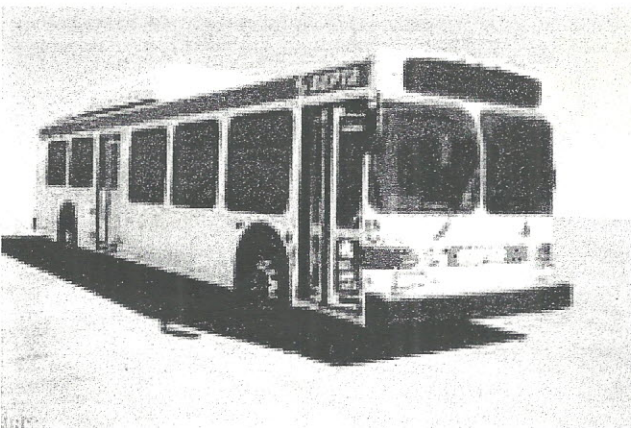
The new bus includes a more ergonomic seat design, strap hangers, and an easy-touch rear door.

The CTA will receive 20 New Flyer DE40LF hybrid buses as part of the order. The CTA will test these buses for at least a year to see how they perform in Chicago's extreme weather conditions. But the CTA also wants to determine if the buses can reduce operational expenses enough to justify buying more, CTA President Frank Kruesi said at the press conference at the Navy Pier bus terminal. Two types of hybrid designs, known as a parallel and a series, will be tested.

With the hybrid purchases, the CTA joins a growing movement among transit agencies to use diesel-electric vehicles to reduce emissions and save on fuel and maintenance costs. About 25 agencies nationwide use hybrid buses, though fewer than 10 of them have 10 or more hybrids, according to Virginia Miller, an American Public Transportation Association spokeswoman.

Transit officials point to the hybrid's cost, which is about \$200,000 more than a conventional bus, as the reason why more are not on the road.

The CTA will pay about \$530,000 for each hybrid, compared with \$341,000 for a conventional bus, agency spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney said.



Delivery of the new buses will begin in January 2006 and continue through the rest of next year. The buses will replace more than half of the 1991 Flxible Metro series buses currently in use.

While options exist in the order for up to 1,050 buses, the exercising of these options is dependent on the creation of a new capital funding program by the Illinois State Legislature. (www.ChicagoBus.org/www.chicagotribune.com)

Less than a week after the Chicago Transit Authority board modified a plan to double paratransit fares to \$3.50 next year, the agency's chairwoman is recommending the increase be lowered to \$3, officials said on November 15.

If approved at next month's board meeting, Carole Brown's proposal would soften the blow to riders who use curb-to-curb dial-a-ride service. It is provided to people whose disabilities prevent them from using conventional bus and rail routes.

Brown's recommendation, made after consulting with transit officials and members of the disabled community, also would create a uniform fare for paratransit riders in the six-county region.

The Pace suburban bus system currently charges \$3 for paratransit rides and is scheduled to take over CTA's service July 1. Pace spokeswoman Judi Kulm said the agency was not consulted on the decision but endorsed it.

"We are all for it," Kulm said. "It's going to be easier to have one fare across the board."

But some disabilities rights groups, which had criticized the plan to raise fares to \$3.50 in January, still were not satisfied.

"Basically, the only people who are going to be able to afford this are people with higher income," said Kevin Irvine, a senior transportation advocate for Equip for Equality, an advocacy group. "Other people are just going to be forced to not make trips that they are now making, and this is going to increase the isolation and lack of opportunity for people with the most significant disabilities."

Irvine contends the CTA could find other money in its budget to continue to help pay for the rides, which cost the transit agency about \$25 apiece to provide. The current fare is \$1.75.

Irvine said a new state law will require Pace to cover 10 percent of its paratransit costs out of the fare box in 2007. Using CTA's cost estimates, that means the fare for rides in CTA's service area would not have to be more than \$2.50, he said.

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CTA

But CTA officials said a 10 percent farebox recovery ratio would mean a \$3 fare.

Brown's recommendation came after the CTA Board was sharply criticized for backing a plan to double fares for paratransit riders at its board meeting last week.

In doing so, board members rejected CTA President Frank Kruesi's recommendation to keep the fares at \$1.75 because Pace was slated to take over the service July 1. The CTA board estimated the fare increase would generate about \$1.7 million in additional revenue next year.

If it changes the fare hike to \$3, it would reduce the anticipated revenue to about \$1.5 million, CTA officials said. (www.chicagotribune.com November 15, 2005)

• PACE PATTERN

Pace is hoping to get another chance at a first impression.

Transit officials said they have ironed out the wrinkle evident when its Randall Road 529 bus line launched last month and plan to welcome the newest route with a little fanfare.

A grand-opening ceremony was planned for 10 a.m. Monday, November 6, 2005, at the Kane County Judicial Center in St. Charles, which marks the tail end of the route connecting Aurora and Montgomery to the Tri-Cities.

Officials say there is a critical need for public buses to help feed the region's retail corridor with workers and shoppers. And if it succeeds, it will likely become the first of several routes along Randall Road. Within the next three to five years, Pace officials hope to open a similar connection between downtown Elgin and the booming business corridor on Randall in Elgin and South Elgin.

By 2020, Randall is predicted to become a major bus thoroughfare in the county connecting north to south and all the towns in between.

"This is a portion of service in Kane County everyone has been asking for for a long time," said Michael Bolton, deputy executive director of strategic services for Pace. "Right now we are marketing primarily to the employers, but eventually it will be promoted to the apartment complexes and the shoppers in the area."

Bolton views the route as key to connecting immigrant, low-income and youth workers in Aurora and Montgomery with service-industry jobs along Randall. Something employers have said is vital to their success.

The new portion of the line from Provena Mercy Hospital in Aurora along Randall Road to Route 38 opened October 24. It had a host of problems including help line operators who didn't know when or where the buses stopped and little information online about the new route. The buses spent their inaugural day mostly empty.

Pace officials promise the kinks have been worked out and riders should be able to get along with ease.

Currently, the Randall Road portion of the route carries about 50 people a day. Officials hope over time to increase that number to 15 or 20 riders per service hour.

Although the Aurora portion of the route was kicked off with fanfare and "travel ambassador," making sure riders grasped the changes; the approach in the Tri-Cities has been more subdued.

Officials have targeted Delner-Community Hospital, Lowe's and Sam's Club to convince the employers that Pace is a good transportation option for current and potential employees.

A visible presence, other than the small metal signs marking bus stops, has been minimal, but officials said that will pick up once bus shelters materialize. Pace is working with Kane County officials on where to locate the shelters. Pace hopes to mimic programs in northern suburbs where a company that sells advertising for the walls of the shelter maintains the building and shares the revenue with Pace and the municipality.

Although Pace would like to attract senior citizen and disabled riders, the shelters will sit close to Randall Road, leaving decent walk across parking lots to reach many of the big box shops.

Liability issues simply prevent the buses from mixing with passenger cars and pedestrians in the store parking lots, Bolton said.

As a compromise, Pace plans to put the shelters as near to sidewalks and parking lot edges as possible. The agency also has partnered with township paratransit services such as dial-a-ride to offer connections within three-quarter miles of the route for those with disabilities that find it difficult to hike to Randall Road or home. (www.dailyherald.com November 5, 2005)

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PACE

The first public transit offering to link Naperville, Wheaton and College of DuPage could hit streets as soon as next summer.

But first, logistics of a new bus route need to be firmed up.

Residents of both towns are being urged to attend a pair of public meetings the week of November 13 or to fill out a Web-based survey to provide input on desired pick-up times, frequency of route runs and other details.

The bus would leave from Wheaton's downtown train station and connect to the College of DuPage in Glen Ellyn, Danada Square shopping center in Wheaton and either Naperville's Edward Hospital or its downtown train station.

The route is a high priority in the DuPage Area Transit Plan.

"This is the first proposal that really came from that overall, countywide transit plan," said Brad Boese, a Wheaton staff planner. "In that sense, it's a big deal."

Naperville transportation planner Bob Dean said the route stands out among others in the plan as perhaps the most viable for several reasons, including access to shopping and school.

"College of DuPage is the biggest community college in the Midwest and is one of the biggest in the whole country," Dean said. "Right now, there's not much service there. And they've been very interested in improving service."

Naperville and Wheaton produce the most students – roughly 5,000 combined – at the college.

Roughly \$1 million in federal funds have been earmarked for the route's first year of operations.

If the route is embraced by the community, long-term plans call for it to extend south to 95th Street in Naperville and North to Schaumburg.

"Ultimately, we hope this would be successful and really show that the overall county plan has some worth," Boese said.

Pace, the suburban bus service, will oversee the route. Because the company doesn't have buses available for the route, it will hire a private company to start the service. (www.dailyherald.com November 11, 2005)

Pace's Board approved the 2006 budget at their November 9 meeting. It does not call for any general fare increase or service reductions. As a result, few people attended the budget public hearings. The budget is being submitted to the RTA and Pace officials are meeting with them soon to discuss paratransit costs and the funding outlook.

Pace will be adding 96 new vehicles to its fleet as part of a contract the Board authorized that allows the purchase of up to 222 buses over the next five years. The 30 foot buses are accessible with low floor ramps and have fully contoured seats.

Pace Executive Director T.J. Ross reported that Pace gained riders in October 2005 with a 6.6% increase over October 2004, year-to-date Pace ridership is up about 8% over last year. Pace vanpools, which reached the 500 mark in April, now total 588. (www.pacebus.com)

• METRA MATTERS

Like their CTA counterparts, Metra riders will have to pay more to ride the commuter rail lines next year now that the agency's board has signed off on a 5 percent fare hike.

Without discussion, the board on Friday, November 11, 2005, unanimously approved its \$536 million 2006 operating budget containing the fare increase.

Barring any objection from the Regional Transportation Authority, the fare hike would go into effect February 1. It will be the first increase since 2002 and fifth in Metra's 21-year history.

Metra staff last month cited skyrocketing fuel costs and increased security expenses in recommending higher fares.

Diesel fuel bills for 2005 are expected to be \$42.2 million; \$15.5 million more than budgeted. Security costs for the year have been estimated at \$16.5 million, \$1.3 million above budget thanks to heightened security following this summer's train bombings in London.

Metra uses a distance-based fare system, meaning the cost depends on the length of the trip.

The fare increase would be nominal for most Metra riders. But those who also use CTA bus shuttles between train stations and their places of work in downtown Chicago will see a far higher jump in their commuting costs.

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METRA

The CTA board this week voted to double the shuttle fare, to \$2 from \$1 a ride, beginning January 1. The weekly cost to ride the shuttles twice every workday will go to roughly \$80 a month from about \$40.

Even with the fare increase approved on November 11, Metra still would be short of funds for its operating expenses. To help cover the gap, Metra will use capital dollars to cover operating expenses, tapping \$32.9 million in capital, up from \$15.1 million this year. (www.chicagotribune.com November 11, 2005)

• RTA NEWS

Chicago Transit Authority and Pace riders who want to know when the next bus is scheduled to arrive at their corner soon will have that information available at their fingertips under a plan the Regional Transportation Authority approved on Thursday, November 3, 2005.

As early as next June, callers to the RTA's Travel Information Center (836-7000 from any of the Chicago region's area codes) no longer will have to wait for an operator to get Pace and CTA bus schedules. Instead they will be able to use an automated system by dialing the route number or saying it over the phone, according to Phil Shayne, RTA director of regional services.

The new feature is expected to cost the RTA no more than \$254,000, under an amended contract with First Data Government Solutions LP.

The program should reduce costs of operating the telephone line. The RTA must pay 85 cents for each call handled by a telephone operator, officials said.

According to a two-week survey of callers to the telephone line, about 14 percent wanted CTA bus information and 11 percent asked for Pace bus schedules, Shayne said. Metra schedules already are available on the automated system.

Until 2004, it handled about 3 million calls annually. But those numbers jumped to about 4 million in 2004. For 2005, RTA officials expect to handle about 4.8 million calls.

RTA officials aren't sure what sparked the surge but noted that more people are calling from their cell phones. (www.chicagotribune.com November 4, 2005)

• BUS NEWS

The regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada unveiled Las Vegas' new double-decker bus, The Deuce, Thursday morning October 27, 2005, at Caesars Palace.



The Deuce will take over all routes previously operated by the Citizens Area Transit (CAT) buses, according to RTC General Manager Jacob Snow. The new fleet of 50 buses, each worth \$580,000, were custom-made in London. The buses each carry 97 passengers with 53 seats on the upper deck and 27 on the lower deck. There is room for an additional 17 people to stand. The new transit vehicles will run 24 hours-a-day on the Strip.

RTC General Manager Jacob Snow thinks the new buses will only have a limited impact on transportation in the tourist corridor. "I do not think that The Deuce will affect taxis business on the Strip," he said. It might, however, cut into the potential monorail riders, he added.

The Strip bus route is one of the only routes that actually generate revenue according to the Deuce Public Information Officer Sue Christiansen. Visitors pay a premium for bus rides on the Strip and revenue generated from that goes back into the bus system and is used to finance other routes within the city.




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**Nov 18 (Friday). The Railroad Club of Chicago meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM**

Location: The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington -- 3rd Floor). (S/E corner, Washington/Clark)

Admission: \$3.00 donation requested from non-members.

Program: "Sixty Years of Trains in Florida, Mexico and the Caribbean" a slide presentation by Jon Marton.

**Nov 25 (Friday). Central Electric Railfans' Association meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM**

Location: 203 W. Wacker Dr -- 2nd Floor Auditorium. (S/W corner, Wacker/Wells)

Admission: Free.

Program: "Some "Current" History of the 'L,'" a slide presentation by Lou Gerrard.

**Dec 2 (Friday). The Omnibus Society of America meeting. 7:30-10:00PM (doors close at 8:00 PM)**

Location: Swedish Covenant Hospital -- Anderson Pavilion (2751 W. Winona Ave). (S/E corner, Winona/California -- 1 block south of intersection of Foster/California)

Admission: \$3.00 for non-members.

Program: "Milwaukee and the MCTS" a slide presentation by local transit photographer Ed Montejano.

**Dec 2 (Friday). Blackhawk Chapter -- NRHS meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM (doors open at 7:00 PM)**

Location: Gladys Fox Museum (S/W corner of 9th St (Ill Rt 7)/Washington St in Lockport.

Admission: Free

Program: Annual meeting, election of officers and holiday party.

Need more information? Email: [bbmolony@juno.com](mailto:bbmolony@juno.com)

**Dec 9 (Friday). Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Chicago Chapter meeting. 7:00-10:00 PM**

Location: The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington -- 3rd Floor). (S/E corner, Washington/Clark)

Admission: Free.

Program: A presentation by Darwin Simaninitis.

**Dec 9 (Friday). Wisconsin Chapter -- NRHS meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM**

Location: North Shore Congregational Church (7330 N Santa Monica Blvd) in **Fox Point, WI.**

Admission: Free

Program: Kevin Deefer of TRAINS Magazine and Jeff Madden.

Need more information? [www.nrhwis.org/](http://www.nrhwis.org/)

**Dec 16 (Friday). The Railroad Club of Chicago meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM**

Location: The Chicago Temple (77 W. Washington -- 3rd Floor). (S/E corner, Washington/Clark)

Admission: \$3.00 donation requested from non-members.

Program: "The Galena & Chicago Union -- The Freeport Branch of The Chicago & NorthWestern Railroad," a slide presentation by noted rail & transit photographer William M. Shapotkin.

**Dec 23 (Friday). Central Electric Railfans' Association meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM**

Location: 203 W. Wacker Dr -- 2nd Floor Auditorium. (S/W corner, Wacker/Wells)

Admission: Free.

Program: "The Last Days of Pole Cars in Evanston -- 1971-1972," a slide presentation by Jack Doyle.

**2006**

**Jan 6 (Friday). The Omnibus Society of America meeting. 7:30-10:00PM (doors close at 8:00 PM)**

Location: Swedish Covenant Hospital -- Anderson Pavilion (2751 W. Winona Ave). (S/E corner, Winona/California -- 1 block south of intersection of Foster/California)

Admission: \$3.00 for non-members.

Program: "Motor Bus Society Meanderings," a slide presentation by William Reynolds highlighting some of recent Motor Bus Society conventions around the United States.

**Jan 6 (Friday). Blackhawk Chapter -- NRHS meeting. 7:30-10:00 PM (doors open at 7:00 PM)**

Location: Gladys Fox Museum (S/W corner of 9th St (Ill Rt 7)/Washington St in Lockport.