



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC. JANUARY 2006

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.

• JANUARY OSA MEETING

The January meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on January 6, 2006, 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 "*Motor Bus Society wanderings*" will be a slide presentation presented by William Reynolds highlighting some of the recent Motor Bus Society conventions around the United States.

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 held its election to fill two positions on our Board of Directors. William Shapotkin and Melvin Bernero were reelected to three year terms.

• CTA CORNER

Mayor Richard Daley has ordered the Chicago Transit Authority to scrap a plan to increase fares for disabled riders next year and said Thursday December 1st the system for handicapped customers should be

overhauled to reduce costs.

Advocacy groups applauded Daley's comments, but it was unclear if he will sway the CTA board to abandon its plans to double the fare to \$3.50. CTA Chairman Carole Brown could not be reached for comment but issued a statement saying "The mayor's concerns are important to me."

"We want to work with our paratransit customers to find ways to reduce the cost of paratransit to the CTA and to our paratransit customers, especially for those with very low income," she added, noting the issue would be discussed at the board's December 14th meeting.

Daley, who believes the fare should remain \$1.75, is the latest critic of the CTA board proposal, which would hike fares January 1st for the curb-to-curb dial-a-ride service, which is provided to people who have disabilities that prevent them from using fixed bus and rail routes.

Advocates for people with disabilities have sharply criticized the plan. Even Brown backed off from the proposal last month, saying she will recommend the fare hike be changed to \$3 at the board's December meeting so it would match the amount Pace charges. Pace is slated to take over the region's paratransit service next summer.

But at a news conference December 1st, Daley said even \$3 is too much. He met this week with Brown and told her the CTA should review the proposal. Daley appointed three of the six CTA board members, including Brown.

"You cannot increase by 71 percent or more and say, That's it," the mayor asserted. "People are going to wonder what's happening. A lot of these people, some don't even work. Some are working at low scale. They can't afford it, and they are disabled."

Daley's remarks came one day after angry riders showed up outside his City Hall office, calling for him to oppose the increase. Alderman and advocacy groups have also assailed the planned hike, saying it could force riders to make difficult decisions about what trips to make.

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CTA

Advocacy groups applauded the mayor's remarks.

"We're encouraged," said Gary Arnold, a spokesman for Access Living, an advocacy group that also provides services to the disabled. "We're glad he supports not raising the fares. Paratransit is vital for people with disabilities who need the service and are on limited income."

Indeed, Daley's proposal to keep the fare at \$1.75 goes beyond what Equip for Equality, another advocacy group, recommended in a letter to Brown dated Thursday, December 1st. The group suggested the fare be increased to \$2 to match the new cash fare for fixed bus and train routes that goes into effect on January 1st.

Daley's proposal echoes one that CTA President Frank Kruesi made to the board at his budget presentation in October. Kruesi recommended keeping paratransit fares \$1.75 rather than making any major changes, because Pace is slated to take over the service in July. But the board rejected Kruesi's recommendation. At its November meeting, it let stand a decision it made in June to double fares to \$3.50, generating about \$1.7 million more revenue next year for the cash-strapped agency. The board also noted that paratransit services cost the agency on average more than \$25 per ride.

The move shocked advocates for people with disabilities and paratransit riders.

Daley said he was not upset with CTA officials but said the fare increase "should have never happened." He also said the fare hike should have been discussed again after the agency's proposed 2006 budget was introduced. (www.chicagotribune.com December 2, 2005)

Federal funding for six Chicago Transit Authority capital projects has been included in the FY 2006 Federal Transportation Appropriations bill which became law on November 30. The funds are vital to ensure effective transportation networks that provide economic opportunities and support livable communities in Illinois. The authorized CTA projects will benefit customers in the city and suburbs, and those who transfer from Metra and Pace.

The appropriation identifies specific projects and specific funding amounts for those projects in 2006. The \$88.7 million in funding is slated for CTA capital projects designed to rehabilitate the infrastructure and continue the CTA's efforts to bring its system to a state of good repair.

The Federal Transportation Administration 2006 appropriation includes \$88.7 million for the following CTA projects:

- Brown Line Capacity Expansion Project (Full Funding Grant Agreement): \$40 million.
- Cermak (Douglas) Rehabilitation Blue Line (Full Funding Grant Agreement): \$45.2 million.
- Circle Line/Ogden Alternatives Analysis: \$1 million
- Yellow Line Alternative Analysis: \$1 million
- 95th Street Station (Red Line) Improvements: \$800,000
- Purple Line Viaduct Replacement: \$750,000

The State of Illinois' Illinois FIRST program provided matching funds for the Brown Line Capacity Expansion Project and the Cermak (Douglas) Rehabilitation of the Blue Line. That program has ended, however, and legislators are working to create a successor program.

Congress approved the conference agreement on the FY 2006 Appropriations for the U.S. Departments of Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, and the Independent Agencies on November 18, providing \$8.590 billion for federal transit programs during the current fiscal year – 12.3 percent or \$944 million more than the FY 2005 level.

While state and federal funds have enabled CTA to make substantial improvements to its infrastructure, it still faces more than \$2 billion in unmet capital needs which are necessary to bring its system to a state of good repair. (www.transitchicago.com December 8, 2005)

Adding value to and checking balances on Chicago Transit Authority Chicago Cards is now more convenient with new locations for reloading available throughout the CTA service area. CTA officials announced 65 locations will begin offering the new Touch-n-Go reloading service December 1. Along with a promotional fee waiver period which also began December 1, the Touch-n-Go pilot was initiated to encourage customers to make the switch to smart card technology and avoid a CTA fare increase for cash paying customers scheduled to take effect on January 1.

The 65 retail outlets participating in the Touch-n-Go pilot are Currency Exchange stores located throughout the CTA service areas. A specially-designed portable device – similar to a credit/debit card machine at retail check out counters – allows each retail outlet to provide the service. Customers give the clerk the Chicago Card and cash.

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CTA

The clerk uses the device to electronically add value to card. The card along with a receipt is returned to the customers. Customers can add as little as \$1.75 to their Chicago Cards using the touch-n-Go device.

In addition to the new 65 neighborhood locations, customers can continue to add value to Chicago Cards at the vending machines at CTA's 144 rail stations in neighborhoods throughout the service area.

Currently more than 200 non-CTA outlets such as Currency exchanges, Jewel-Osco and Dominick's Finer Food stores that already provide other types of CTA fare media are also offering Chicago Cards.

Chicago Cards are also available at CTA's main office at 567 West Lake Street from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., via mail, on line at CTA's web site www.transitchicago.com, or by calling 1-888-YOUR-CTA (1-888-968-7282), Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

As of November 19, there were 224,046 Chicago Card and Chicago Card Plus cards in circulation. Of those, more than 94,000 are Chicago Cards, a 49 percent increase over year-end 2004. Chicago Card Plus circulation is at 129,738, a 63 percent increase over 2004 those who prefer a farecard option where the value is stored in an account and reloads automatically.

The Chicago Card holds up to \$100. Value is stored on a Chicago Card, just as it is on a magnetic strip Transit Card, but it offers additional features such as faster boarding on buses and trains. The Chicago Card, like its account-based counterpart Chicago Card Plus, resembles a credit card and enables customers to simply touch the card against a target on bus fareboxes and rail turnstyles, and go. The extra seconds saved for each customer make travel even more efficient as those seconds add up and shave time off the boarding process for everyone.

In November, the Chicago Transit Board approved the CTA's 2006 budget which increases cash fares by 25 cents and eliminates cash transfers and Rush Shuttle fares on January 1. Fares will not increase for customers who use either of the Chicago Card options, passes on buses or trains, or for bus customers who use magnetic strip Transit Cards.

The budget also established a waiver of the \$5 purchase fee for Chicago Card and Chicago Card Plus from December 1, 2005, through March 2006 as an additional incentive for customers to switch.

Retail outlets participating in the pilot receive 1.8 percent rate of commission on the amount of value added to Chicago Cards. This provides an additional incentive for merchants offering the ability to add value and check balances of Chicago Cards.

The two-year contract for the purchase and installation of the machines is with Cubic Transportation Systems, which owns the patent on the type of smart card technology used by the CTA. Cubic manufactured the CTA's current automated fare collection system which was installed in 1997. (www.transitchicago.com)

On December 14, 2005, the Chicago Transit Board approved a \$2.9 million 10-year lease agreement with U.S. Cellular to provide wireless communication service in CTA's 11.4 mile subway system. Service is expected to be activated by summer 2006. Earlier this year CTA completed installation of the infrastructure necessary to enhance communication capability in the Red and Blue Line subway system. CTA invested in the technology to enhance its existing two-way radio system and improve subway communication options for CTA, Chicago Police Dept. and Chicago Fire Dept/EMS personnel. In addition, the system also allows CTA to generate additional revenue by contracting use of the system to wireless service providers for the benefit of transit customers.

Initially, only U.S. Cellular customers will be able to use their wireless devices in the subway, however, CTA is working to add additional service providers to the system. As more Chicago-area wireless service providers contract with the CTA to provide services, more customers will be able to use their wireless devices throughout the CTA's subway system. Over the next several months, U.S. Cellular will order, install and test its base equipment, comprised of amplifiers, transmitters and receivers, to the CTA infrastructure. (www.transitchicago.com December 14, 2005)

• PACE PATTERN

A public hearing on Pace Route 712 Wheaton Shuttle was scheduled for Monday, December 5, 2005, at the DuPage County Complex, 421 North County Farm Road in Wheaton. The hearings were to be held in Room 1-500 B of the Jack T. Knuepfer Administrative Building from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Pace hopes to get riders' ideas for improving the routes performance. About 100 people ride the route daily, but since the fare is just a quarter only 6% of the operating costs are covered by farebox revenue, an amount far below most of Pace's services. (Cont on page 4)

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PACE

Although elimination of the service is under consideration, the hearing was arranged to discuss other options as well, such as reducing the level of service, changing the routing or increasing the fare.

Route 712 operated between the Wheaton Metra Station, downtown Wheaton and the DuPage County Complex. The shuttle service started in late 1979 at Metra's request. Metra subsidized 75% of the operating costs for the route until 2003, when they cited low ridership as their concern. Pace has been communicating with representatives from DuPage County who are interested in maintaining the route. (www.pacebus.com November 21, 2005)

Back in August a major detour was put into place on Pace Route 353 95th-Riverdale-Homewood which serves the CTA Red Line 95th Street Station and the Homewood Park-n-Ride. The detour was needed because 130th Street was closed to rebuild a viaduct and Indiana closed to rebuild a trestle bridge. It also presented Pace with an opportunity.

Pace knew from comments from the public and local officials that bus service was needed in Riverdale on 138th Street, so 138th Street became part of the detour. The detour routing provided a chance to test if there was real interest. As it turned out, a significant number of passengers did board on 138th Street between Halsted and Indiana. On weekdays there was a daily average of 441 trips.

Although the South Cook – Will County Initiative, which will restructure service in this area, is underway, Pace decided to take immediate advantage of this new market. Route 348 138th Street Riverdale Connector began operating on November 30th between the Riverdale Turnaround and 127th and Lowe. Route 353 resumed its regular route. (www.pacebus.com December 15, 2005)

The Pace board unanimously approved a plan on Wednesday, December 6, 2005, that outlines how it will provide specialized rides for disabled people in the Chicago area next year, though several board members expressed concern about obtaining the money to implement the program.

Approval of the plan marks the first major step toward Pace taking over the Chicago Transit Authority's curb-to-curb handicapped rides on July 1. That move is required under a state law that was passed earlier this year.

For this year, CTA budgeted \$52.5 million to cover its paratransit services. Because Pace is responsible for providing CTA's paratransit service for the final six months in 2006, its paratransit costs, now at \$25 million, could grow by an additional \$25 million next year.

Although the new state law requires the Regional Transportation Authority to fund the region's paratransit, the RTA is not responsible for submitting a funding plan to the state legislature until April 2007, Pace officials said.

"Without this funding, obviously Pace cannot begin to implement the plan," said board member Richard Welton.

Pace board member Thomas Marcucci said the suburban bus agency cannot simply cut a program so it can pay for paratransit because the costs to provide the rides are too high.

"This is a bus collision coming if the funding does not follow on the mandate," Marcucci said.

The plan calls for keeping paratransit service the same. (www.chicagotribune.com December 8, 2005)

• METRA MATTERS

During the afternoon rush on November 23, 2005, a Metra commuter train was involved in a serious grade crossing accident on Grand Avenue in the western suburb of Elmwood Park.

The train, which left Chicago Union Station at 4:25 p.m. headed for Antioch, probably was carrying between 400 and 500 passengers when the accident occurred.

The train struck five vehicles and set off a chain reaction that ultimately involved as many as 15 vehicles.

Crossing gates appeared to be working properly when the train went through the intersection.

Chief Michael Marino of the Elmwood Park Fire Department said two people were extricated from their cars, including one woman whose car caught fire after she was pulled free. Civilians helped emergency workers rescue people from vehicles which were scattered near the accident site, he said.

The rail crossing cuts through a busy diagonal intersection that runs into Chicago. A large sign above the tracks reads: "Long crossing. Do not stop on the tracks."

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METRA



Officials did not know how fast the train, which was running express, was traveling when the accident occurred, but the speed limit for express trains on that line is 70 mph. (www.usatoday.com November 23, 2005)

In a related article in the Chicago Sun-Times on December 24, 2005, state leaders on Friday, December 23, 2005, announced plans to make that crossing safer – including cameras focused on catching drivers who stop on the tracks.

Illinois Transportation Secretary Tim Martin said the state would conduct a study to determine if building a bridge or tunnel to separate tracks from the street – at a cost of up to \$60 million – is feasible. The study would take about a year and cost \$500,000.

Already since the November 23 accident, an electronic sign was put up on Grand Avenue warning drivers not to stop on the tracks.

State Sen. Don Harmon (D-Oak Park) and Rep. Angelo “Skip” Saviano (R-Elmwood Park) plan to push a bill giving towns authority to install cameras – similar to the red light cameras Chicago uses – to identify crossing scofflaws. The lawmakers said that since the crossing is on private property owned by Metra, a state law is needed.

The cameras would photograph license plates, and car owners would be mailed tickets. The concept has been tested at two crossings in DuPage County, where the number of rail violations dropped by as much as 87 percent according to IDOT officials.

Martin said IDOT can’t simply install a camera without determining how effective it would be at Grand Avenue and without publicly seeking bids for the equipment.

Elmwood Park Village Manager John Dalicandro said village police have not ticketed drivers who stop on the tracks because, technically, the crossing is private property.

But Metra spokesman Judy Pardonnet said the village does have authority because stopping on the tracks violates state law.

Martin said Gov. Blagojevich has ordered a round of safety improvements be made at the crossing within six months, including:

- Additional pavement markings near crossing.
- Installing in-pavement lights near the crossing.
- Reconfigure traffic signal timing and sequences for stop lights east of the crossing at 76th, 75th and 73rd Avenues.
- Remove eastbound “No Right Turn” blank-out signs at 75th and 73rd Avenues
- Remove tall vegetation from the landscaped areas near the southeast corner of the crossing.

(www.suntimes.com December 24, 2005)

The Elburn Village Board and Metra, the last week of November, agreed to pay nearly half again as much as expected to build a train station near downtown Elburn. But one village trustee maintains the original estimate was never more than a “ballpark figure.”

“The original numbers were never hard and fast because Metra has never built anything like this before,” said Trustee Jeff Metcalf.

“We decided we wanted a little more, and it turned out this is how much it will cost.”

Bids for the 400-square-foot Prairie-style station came in at nearly \$582,000 – about \$181,500 more than the original estimate of \$400,480. Metra will pay \$100,000 of the cost increase, leaving Elburn to cover the remaining increase, said village President James Willey.

The village’s \$315,000 revised total tab for the station will come from transportation impact fees from the Blackberry Creek subdivision, not from property or sales tax revenues, Metcalf added.

Commuter train service is expected to start in Elburn in January, with construction of the station slated to start next spring. Metra will provide a temporary warming shelter until the station is completed (www.chicagotribune.com December 2, 2005)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 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: \$4.00 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.
Need more information? <http://www.osabus.com/>
- 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.
Admission: Free
Program: "The Bloomer Line" and "The Powder River Line and other Western Railroad Hotspots," a slide presentation by local railfan and nationally published photographer Paul Burgess.
Need more information? bbmolony@juno.com
- Jan 6 (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: Railroad Pictures of Lee Pickett -- Jerry Hilton.
Need more information? <http://www.nrhswis.org/>
- Jan 11 (Wednesday). Twentieth Century Railroad Club meeting.** 7:00-9:00 PM
Location: Electricians Union Hall (600 W. Washington)
Admission: \$3.00 admission for non-members.
Program: "The Kankakee Line," a look at the Chicago & Interurban Traction," a slide presentation by author and noted historian William M. Shapotkin.
Need more information? <http://www.20thcentury.org/>
- Jan 13 (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: To Be Announced. <http://www.rrsociety.org/>
- Jan 13 (Friday). Chicago Chapter -- NRHS meeting.** 8:00-10:00PM
Location: Lincoln Center (935 Maple Ave) in **Downers Grove.** (2 blocks south of Downers Grove (Main St) Main St Metra/BNSF Station)
Admission: Free
Program: To be announced.
Need more information? <http://chicagonrhs.com/>
- Jan 20 (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: "North to Alaska," a look at the Alaska Railroad, a slide presentation by Raymond DeGroote, Jr.
Need more information? <http://www.railcc.org/>
- Jan 21 (Saturday). Chicago Chapter - Pennsylvania Railroad Technical & Historical Society meeting.** 2:00-4:30 PM
Location: Pullman Historical Society (112th/Cottage Grove Ave)
Admission: Free
Program: To be announced. For further info, call Norm Bell (815-463-9075)
- Jan 27 (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: "Western Michigan Interurbans and Connecting Night Boats to Chicago," a presentation by Carl Bajema.
Need more information? <http://www.cera-chicago.org/>
- Feb 3 (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: \$4.00 for non-members.
Program: "Vintage Transit," a slide presentation by Mike Charnotta.
Need more information? www.osabus.com

January 1, 2006


Omnibus Society of America

Admission and Guest Policy

Starting in 2006, the admission charge for non-members attending membership meetings will be \$4.00. Members in good standing, their spouses, parents and children under the age of 16 are exempt.

Members are encouraged to bring guests' to our monthly membership meetings. When doing so, introduce your guest to the gatekeeper where they will be asked to sign the guest book. Guests' are allowed to attend one meeting within a 12 month period without payment of an admission charge. However, on occasion, a consensus of board members and officers attending the meeting may waive the 12 month restriction.

Non-members putting on a program are guests of OSA and can never be charged admission. Guests' of program presenters are excluded from the admission charge and the 12 month rule. They will be asked to sign the guest book.


President,

Omnibus Society of America