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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

JUNE 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](http://www.osabus.com)". At [osabus.com](http://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.

**The OSA has begun to offer for purchase photo DVD's** containing scanned images of slides and photographs from the collection of Melvin Bernero.

The DVD's contain close to 300 images each and the current offerings consist of: CTA buses (color and black & white on one DVD); Northern Illinois (color and black & white on one DVD); CTA/CSL streetcars (black & white); CTA 'L'/Subway (color and black & white on one DVD); Transit Properties of Wisconsin (color and black & white on one DVD) and Chicago Trolleybuses (color and black & white on one DVD).

All the DVD's are priced at \$15.00 and can be purchased at any OSA meeting from Melvin. We plan on offering them by mail in a few months.

All funds raised by the sale of these DVD's go into the OSA general fund to help support the Omnibus Society of America.

## • JUNE OSA MEETING

**The June meeting** of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on June 2, 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 will be a slide presentation by John LeBeau.

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.

## • CTA CORNER

**Already scrambling for cash**, the Chicago Transit Authority soon may face a whopping annual pension bill of more than \$200 million, which could force the agency to cut service or increase fares drastically and could affect funding for Metra and Pace.

In an effort to shore up the CTA's anemic pension fund, a budget bill passed by the General Assembly the first week of May requires the CTA to start making monthly payments in 2009 that would total at least \$200 million in the first year and would grow annually through 2058.

The legislation doesn't come with any additional dollars from Springfield, leaving transit officials to figure out how the cash-strapped agency would come up with the money if Gov. Rod Blagojevich signs the bill.

The \$200 million represents about 20 percent of the agency's current \$1.04 billion operating budget. It is nearly four times the size of the \$55 million shortfall that prompted the agency to threaten dramatic service cuts, fare hikes and layoffs last year. That scenario, which would have eliminated 54 bus routes, killed the Purple Line Evanston Express elevated service, reduced late-night bus and rail service and laid off 2,000 workers, was avoided when the legislature came up with more funds.

Some question whether the latest legislation is setting the stage for massive reform of transit funding in the region, especially since the RTA could be asked to redirect funds for Metra and Pace to the CTA to help it cover the pension contribution.

The RTA now is developing a strategic plan that it hopes to take to the General Assembly after the November elections.

As of January 2006, the pension plan was only 39 percent funded. Today, it is likely about 32 percent or 33 percent funded, said John Kallianis, executive director of the retirement fund. The shortage could bankrupt the fund in 2012.

The issue drew the attention of House Speaker Michael Madigan last year, which is part of the reason the provision appears in the new legislation. (Cont on page 2)



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## CTA

Madigan spokesman Steve Brown noted that the CTA has more than two years to figure out a way to come up with the money, which is designed to get the pension plan 90 percent funded by 2058. ([www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) May 7, 2006)

**As soon as 2009, elevated** train riders could experience a quieter, smoother ride on new rail cars because of a \$577 million contract approved Wednesday, May 10th by the Chicago Transit Authority board.

The train cars, which will be tested for up to a year, will have aisle-facing seating and increased aisle room, making it easier for people to bring baggage on the train and spread out inside the car.

While the number of seats – 40 – won't change, the new cars will have more amenities: two wheelchair positions, seven security cameras, electronic maps and destination signs, officials said.

The CTA will begin to test 10 rail cars on the mainline system early in 2009. After running the cars on a rigorous schedule to test their performance in Chicago's frigid, snowy winter and its hot, humid summer, the agency should start receiving additional cars in late 2009, officials said.

Initially the cars will be tested on the Blue and Pink Lines, but eventually they will be used throughout the system. More than 50 have been earmarked for the Brown Line, which is undergoing a \$530 million renovation.

The contract with Bombardier Transit Corp., which could grow to nearly \$1 billion, marks the largest purchase in the history of the agency, CTA President Frank Kruesi said. The initial order for 406 cars will be funded by a combination of federal dollars, an Illinois Department of Transportation grant and bonds.

This contract award marks the CTA's first rail car purchase since the 1990's, when cars were bought for the opening of the Orange Line and to replace older cars on the Brown and Yellow Lines. Wednesday's vote also wraps up a nearly 18-month-long process in which bidders spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, including some that hired public relation firms, trying to get the contract, officials said.

One of the most notable changes will be the aisle-facing seat configuration, which has not been seen on the CTA since the 1960's, when the 1914 built 4001-4128 Cincinnati Car Company rapid transit cars were retired

from passenger service. The configuration will make the aisles 6 inches wider at their narrowest point, allowing riders more space to board and making it easier for riders, especially those carrying something, to board the train, Kruesi said. ([www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) May 10, 2006)

The Chicago Transit Authority has completed work to improve the flow of bus traffic at its Navy Pier bus turnaround facility located just north of Grand Avenue.

**On Friday, May 26 at 5 am**, CTA buses serving Navy Pier began entering the bus turnaround from the west end so that when they reach the staging area, buses face approaching customers allowing easier identification of the route information.

In addition to the existing bus shelters, CTA has added new canopies, lighting, fencing, sidewalks and benches, as well as a new area for customers to exit the buses on the north side of the turnaround.

The reversal of bus traffic will be particularly helpful during the busy summer months when millions of people attend various activities at the pier and lakefront and hundreds of thousands take the CTA to get there.

CTA provides bus service to Navy Pier via the #2 Hyde Park Express, #29 State, #65 Grand, #66 Chicago, #120 North Western/Wacker Express, #121 Union/Wacker Express and #124 Navy Pier bus routes.

Chicago-based Oakley Construction Company, Inc, served as the construction contractor on the \$541,290 project, through a competitive bid process. Funding was provided by the Regional Transportation Authority. Construction began in February 2006. ([www.transitchicago.com](http://www.transitchicago.com) May 25, 2006)

## • PACE PATTERN

**Lake in the Hills officials said** the week of May 8th they are thinking about dropping the Dial-a-Ride Pace bus service available to seniors and people with disabilities because costs may triple this year.

The village expects to pay Pace as much as \$37,240 by the end of the year, although it budgeted only \$11,400.

The reason for the increase is that Laidlaw, the contracted bus company under Pace, began charging this year for downtown between stops, said Shannon Andrews, assistant village administrator.

Pace charges the village \$49 per hour to operate the bus, which has a \$1 fare and a weekday service from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm.

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## **PACE**

Andrews said the village may drop Pace and direct residents to bus service provided by Grafton and Algonquin Townships. A drawback would be reduced hours of service. ([www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) May 13, 2006)

## • **METRA MATTERS**

**North Central Service commuters** who are upset that their ride has become longer since Metra expanded service in January may soon get some relief now that the commuter railroad has proposed running four new semi-express runs on the route.

But Canadian National, which owns the tracks, must still sign off on the plan. Metra Executive Director Philip Pagano told a crowd gathered to discuss the issue at Buffalo Grove Village Hall on Monday, May 8.

Under Pagano's proposal, Metra would add two inbound semi-express trains in the morning and two outbound semi-express trains in the afternoon on the line, which runs from Chicago to Antioch. In addition, Metra would add a train that would depart Chicago in the midmorning, Pagano said.

The express trains would skip stations that have low numbers of boarding's. Pagano would not identify which trains would run express or any other specifics because of the ongoing negotiations with Canadian National.

The railroad is evaluating the proposal to see if it would work with current traffic patterns, according to Jim Kvedaras, Canadian National's senior manager for U.S. public and government affairs.

In January, Metra doubled its service on the line to 20 trains after completing a \$218 million project that added 16.3 miles of track and four stations, among other things.

Some riders complained last winter that the expanded service didn't live up to Metra's billing that it would increase the number of trains to 22. They also were upset that there was only one inbound express morning run. Others complained that the additional stations make their travel time longer, the new schedules have condensed the window of peak-hour trains, and reverse-commute trains needed to be better timed. ([www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com) May 9, 2006)

**Metra's Ogilvie train station** is set to harbor Chicago's only year-round fresh market and a dozen or more eateries and shops in the path of thousands of daily suburban commuters.

In all, the plan calls for 12 street-level retailers, eight restaurants and a grocery store-sized fresh food market run by a French company famous for operating markets crammed with vendors on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

The \$40 million development will be carved from two blocks of street front beneath the station's tracks, which include lines that handle 95,000 daily trips through Lake, McHenry, Cook, Kane and DuPage counties.

Construction should start in August, with the first stores opening the fall of 2007, the developers say.

The project has been stalled for five years. The developers, headed by a former Metra board member, say they had to overcome difficulties pitching the odd location and a crash in the retail industry after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Metra leased the space, now a barren basement with concrete facing the street, for 99 years to the development firm in return for revenue from the project in 2001.

On Friday, May 12th, U.S. Equities Realty founder Robert Wislow told board members he has deals with a restaurant and the French market operator.

Those contracts, which will account for more than half the available space, will make the property more attractive to lenders, said Wislow, a Metra board member from 1993 to 1997.

Metra Director Phil Pagano said Metra stands to make \$29 million over 25 years under the current plans. Metra will be asked to invest \$6 million to improve the property for the plans. But Pagano said the agency will make additional money from that investment.

The biggest attraction is expected to be the 15,000-square-foot fresh market. Wislow said he toured famous markets in Seattle and Toronto with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, who had pushed for the market to draw both residents and tourists. Chicago has pledged \$12 million in funding. For Chicago, this will be the city's only fresh food market, with various vendors selling meat, flowers, poultry, cheese, fish and bakery items, among other goods.

The stores and restaurants will line Canal Street on the east, Clinton Street on the west, and Washington Street on the south as well as Randolph Street's underpass and below Metra's Suburban Concourse, where riders can access the train platform via stairwells at the rear of the station.

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## METRA

The Suburban Concourse will also add small shops along the platform walls, hawking convenience items like drinks and snacks.

Wislow, whose firm has developed retail outlets in Amtrak's Union Station and key elements of Millennium Park won the right to develop the property from Metra with little competition, Pagano said.

Metra requested proposals from the general development industry, and the only other firm to make a pitch dropped out during negotiations, he said. ([www.dailyherald.com](http://www.dailyherald.com) May 13, 2006)

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**June 2 (Friday). Blackhawk Chapter – NRHS meeting.** 7:30-10:00 pm. (Doors open at 7:00 pm)

Location: Gladys Fox Museum (SW corner of 9th Street (Ill. Rt 7) Washington Street in *Lockport*.

Admission: Free

Program: 16MM movies taken in the 1970s of the "J" between Gary and Joliet

**June 3 (Saturday). Wisconsin Chapter – NRHS meeting.** 7:30-10:00 pm.

Location: South Woods of Cudahy – 5404 S. Pennsylvania Avenue in Cudahy, WI.

Admission: Free

Program: A presentation by Curt Richards.

**June 9 (Friday). Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, Chicago Chapter.** 7:30-10:00 pm.

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

Admission: Free

Program: To be announced.

**June 9 (Friday). Chicago Chapter – NRHS meeting.** 8:00-10:00 pm.

Location: Lincoln Center (935 Maple Ave) in *Downers Grove* (2 blocks south of Downers Grove Main Street Metra/BNSF station.

Admission: Free

Program: To be announced

**June 10 (Saturday). Kenosha Streetcar Society meeting.** 1:00-4:00 pm.

Location: Joseph McCarthy Transit Center (54th St east of Sheridan Rd – 3 blocks east of Kenosha Metra/UP Train Station), *Kenosha, WI*.

Fare: \$15.00 Adult/\$7 – children under age 12.

Trip will use both the Toronto and Cincinnati streetcars.

**June 14 (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: To be announced.

**June 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: "A Sesquicentennial of Service – 150 Years of IC/Metra Electric suburban operations in Chicago," a slide presentation by John Allen.

**June 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: "Illinois Terminal," a presentation by Dale Jenkins.