

Green Pennant Special

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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

JULY 2006

The Chicago Transit Authority has received the first of its new Optima Opus transit buses. Here are a few photos of #500 that was on display at Skokie Shops during the 3rs Rail Roundup-Bus Rodeo held there on Saturday, June 17, 2006.

The photos were taken by OSA member Robert Madison.



As can be seen from the photographs, the design and color scheme it is painted in is completely different from what the CTA is currently using.

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.

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 are also offering them by mail.

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

• JULY OSA MEETING

The July meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on July 7, 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 "OSA Fantrips past," will be a slide presentation of long-ago bus fantrips by David S. Stanley.

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

The state will not give the cash-strapped Chicago Transit Authority more money to cover its pension obligations, House Speaker Michael Madigan wrote CTA officials Monday, June 12th in a stern warning that could force the agency to consider fare increases and service cuts.

Madigan wrote that if the CTA fails to cover its newly required pension payments, expected to be more than \$200 million annually starting in 2009, the state will take money out of the CTA's operations allocation.

"There should be no expectation that the General Assembly will step in with additional transportation moneys to help the CTA meet its pension obligations," Madigan wrote to CTA President Frank Kruesi and Chairwoman Carole Brown. "I would ask that you keep these points in mind as you manage available resources and develop future budget plans."

CTA spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney said the agency will take Madigan's remarks into account and will make sure the Regional Transportation Authority also considers his comments as it develops a plan for the region's transit agencies.

The head of a tax watchdog group said Madigan's message was a stinging notice that the CTA's budget problems could significantly worsen in coming years.

The pension payment program was tucked into the budget bill in the waning hours of the last legislative session. The bill, signed into law this month, requires the CTA to make annual contributions to its pension fund starting in 2009 with the goal of having it 90 percent funded by 2058.

With the pension only about 32 or 33 percent funded, CTA officials expect the annual payment will be more than \$200 million annually, which represents about 20 percent of the agency's current \$1.04 billion operating budget.

Without additional funding, the agency could be forced to make massive service cuts and increase fares drastically. The obligation also could jeopardize the CTA's ability to issue bonds for items like the 406 new rail cars the board recently agreed to buy.

Last year when the CTA was facing a \$55 million budget shortfall, it threatened to eliminate 54 bus routes, kill the Purple Line Evanston Express train service, reduce late-night bus and rail service and lay off 2,000 workers. Those plans were scuttled when the General Assembly came up with more funding.

Then, both Kruesi and Brown expressed hope that the issue would prompt the General Assembly to address the need for more transit funding. (Cont on page 3)

(Cont from page 2)

CTA

Madigan, who took a keen interest in the CTA's pension problems during a legislative hearing last year, said Kruesi and Brown's comments prompted his letter because he wanted to "debunk any notion" that the state would step in to help the CTA make the pension payments.

"The legislation puts the onus on the CTA, not the state, to find the moneys necessary" to get the pension plan 90 percent funded, he wrote. (www.chicagotribune.com June 12, 2006)

On June 14, 2006, the Chicago Transit Board approved a lease agreement with the Regional Transportation Authority for office space within the Chicago Transit Authority's main office building at 567 W. Lake Street.

The 10-year lease has a five-year extension option and will generate more than \$648,000 in revenue for CTA. In addition, the agreement requires the RTA to provide an estimated \$220,000 in capital improvements to the 2,177 square-foot property. The RTA Board approved the lease agreement at its May meeting.

Under the agreement, the RTA's Reduced Fare office and Customer Service office will relocate from 175 W. Jackson, to 567 W. Lake. The RTA office handles Reduced Fare Permits and provides general RTA customer service. A Reduced Fare Permit allows eligible seniors, veterans and persons with disabilities to ride the CTA, Pace and Metra at a reduced rate. The RTA office also will house a Pace office for paratransit customers who wish to purchase Taxi Access Program (TAP) vouchers.

The lease agreement with the RTA was developed using common retail practices through the services of Transwestern Commercial Services, LLC. Trans-western manages the CTA headquarters building and acts as a broker for CTA to lease retail space within the building. CTA leases additional spaces within the building to 7-Eleven and soon, Quizno's. (www.transit-chicago.com June 14, 2006)

• PACE PATTERN

To cover unexpected costs associated with providing all specialized rides for the disabled in the Chicago Area, Pace would receive some additional funding from the Regional Transportation Authority under an agreement the suburban bus agency's board approved Wednesday, June 7, 2006.

The funding includes up to \$1.15 million for items like vehicles and computer software in addition to an unspecified amount for operating costs, according to a copy of the agreement. The RTA board still must vote on the document, Pace spokeswoman Judi Kulm said.

Starting July 1, Pace will take over the Chicago Transit Authority's paratransit service, putting Pace in charge of all dial-a-rides for eligible handicapped people in the six-

county area.

The legislature has agreed to give Pace \$54 million to help cover the costs, but Pace officials said Wednesday, June 7, that there was a hole in the budget estimates because the CTA did not raise its paratransit fares on January 1.

The CTA board had considered hiking fares as high as \$3.50 but later opted to keep them at \$1.75.

Pace charges \$3 for most paratransit trips, though the fare is \$2.50 in some areas. Although there are no immediate plans to increase fares in the CTA service area, Pace officials have said plans could change after the RTA completes a study on how to fund paratransit.

Under the agreement, the RTA would give Pace an unspecified amount of money to help fill the budget gap. (www.chicagotribune.com June 8, 2006)

TOYOTA PARK, a new outdoor multipurpose entertainment venue and home of Chicago Fire Soccer in Bridgeview, partnered with Pace to offer shuttle service to and from Midway Airport for all the Fire's home games and other select stadium events.

TOYOTA PARK, located approximately 15 minutes southwest of Chicago at 71st and Harlem, celebrates its grand opening June 24-25. In addition to serving as the home of Chicago Fire Soccer, the stadium will host a variety of music, entertainment, community and sporting events.

Pace is providing shuttle service between the CTA Orange Line Midway Station directly to TOYOTA PARK. The shuttle is a variation of Pace Route 386 South Harlem, called Route 386 Toyota Park Express.

The shuttle service will leave from the Midway CTA station at 20 minute intervals beginning two hours prior to the start of Chicago Fire Soccer games. The Route 386 Toyota Park Express will depart from TOYOTA PARK thirty minutes after the game or fireworks.

Pace will be monitoring the number of riders to make sure enough buses are on hand for everyone returning to the CTA station. (www.pacebus.com June 14, 2006)

• METRA MATTERS

The Buffalo Grove Metra station will close at the end of June to allow for upgrades

The station originally was scheduled to close June 1st, but village Finance Director Scott Anderson said the bidding process will continue for a few more weeks.

Another 630 square feet of shelter will be added to the station in the project organized by Metra. The station will be closed for at least three months, but shelters will be provided in the area. (Cont on page 4)

(Cont from page 3)

METRA

Anderson said the station is one of the smallest on the North Central Line and Metra is expanding it to what it should originally have been.

"It actually is right-sizing the building to what it should have been years ago," Anderson said. "With the demand for service and now the new double-track, there's more ridership now."

Metra recently added more trains to the line in that double-tracking project. Metra also has been expanding the parking lot at the station, going from 600 spots to about 1,000. (www.dailyherald.com June 1, 2006)

Replacement of the Metra Electric Roosevelt Road Station has been delayed for the past two years due to a lack of funding promised by the state in 2004.

The station, which resembles a run-down fishing shack, stands in sharp contrast to the manicured lawns and colorful gardens that sit just east of the tracks along a foot path that takes visitors to the popular Museum Campus. Metra had hoped a new depot that would better fit its environs would be built by this year, but the project stalled after the state failed to give the agency grant money it had approved in 2004.

"We agreed today, and we agreed in 2003, that the station absolutely needs to be replaced," said Metra spokeswoman Judy Pardonnet, referring to the year the agency submitted its grant application.

Illinois Department of Transportation spokesman Mike Claffey said that the \$2.8 million grant would be given to Metra in the next few months. He attributed the delay to a lack of money for major infrastructure projects.

But Pardonnet said Metra officials have been told several times that the money would arrive "in a week," yet the agency still has not received the funds. Even if the commuter railroad gets the money in the next few months, the earliest it could start work would be next year, she said.

Under the plan, Metra would use the money to move the railroad tracks so the city could build a new station at the 11th Street pedestrian bridge. The \$8.7 million Chicago Department of Transportation project also calls for constructing new platforms and two elevators between the bridge and the platforms, making them accessible to the handicapped, said Brian Steele, a city Transportation Department spokesman.

The city was prepared to start construction last year, but Metra asked city officials to wait because the commuter railroad had not received the state funds, Steele said. (www.chicagotribune.com June 8, 2006)

Metra officials apologized to their BNSF passengers Friday, June 16th, one day after the discovery of soap powder on the tracks caused a nearly four-hour shutdown of the system's busiest line and stranded thousands of people on trains for up to three hours.

The problem continued Friday morning when Metra cancelled some trains and rerouted others to comply with federal law that requires crews to rest for 10 hours after a 12-hour shift.

On Thursday, Metra halted service on the Chicago to Aurora (BNSF) Line for nearly four hours after sacks of stearic acid fell off a Cicero-bound freight train, scattering them along a 27-mile stretch from Aurora to Cicero.

The discovery stranded 12,000 riders and packed others into the nearby Union Pacific West Line, where regular riders reported standing-room only conditions. While some outbound trains made it to Hinsdale, riders said they were left to fend for themselves. Some called friends and relatives for rides; others walked home. Riders who were dropped off at other stations complained of a shuttle bus shortage, a problem Metra acknowledged on its Web site. Commuters also complained that Metra gave them little information about the reason for the problems or direction on alternate ways to get home.

Authorities in Downers Grove, where the first sacks were discovered, initially handled the investigation. But once officials learned the bags were spread over 27 miles, village officials handed the case over to the BNSF.

But the railroad did not have a hazardous material team immediately available, Ladd said. Ultimately, BNSF crews and contractors boarded an empty train and traveled along the tracks, picking up the sacks, railroad spokesman Steve Forsberg said.

BNSF continues to investigate how the bags fell off a train, which typically has sealed doors on its trailers and containers, Forsberg said. (www.chicagotribune.com June 16, 2006)

In one of the previous issues of Green Pennant we mentioned that the Navy Pier Loop was reversed. Here is a photo of the current arrangement.

