

Green Pennant Special

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

On the morning of June 25, 2006, the Chicago Transit Authority inaugurated the new Pink Line which operates from 54th/Cermak to the Loop via the Paulina Connector. This new line replaced existing Blue Line Douglas Branch service via the subway, except for certain rush service trips that still travel via the Dearborn Subway to O'Hare.

Bruce Moffat supplied these photos of the first scheduled train on the Pink Line.



A number of Chicago-area railfans and OSA members were onboard the first trip on the new service. 0400 wakeup call anyone.

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.

• SEPTEMBER OSA MEETING

The September meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on Sept. 1, 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 "More Musings by Mullenbach," will be a slide presentation showing transit around the USA by Mike.

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 editor of Green Pennant will be taking a six-month hiatus from producing the Green Pennant Special beginning in January 2007.

OSA is looking for a volunteer or volunteers to take over publication of GPS during this time period. The party or parties would need internet access to help assemble news stories and of course a computer with a good word processing or publishing program.

If any member would like more information, please see Melvin Bernero at any OSA meeting.

• CTA CORNER

June's increase in Blue Line service has shaved minutes off commutes for many riders, but others have been delayed regularly aboard trains waiting to pull into the Forest Park station.

Since the weekly number of outbound trains on the Forest Park branch nearly doubled to 175 in June, trains have been backing up west of the Harlem Avenue stop as motormen wait for trains ahead to unload passengers.

Chicago Transit Authority officials said they identified the problem in the first few weeks of service increase, which began June 25. Trains now pull away from the Forest Park platform, near Des Plaines Avenue, and into the yard more quickly, agency spokeswoman Robyn Ziegler said. (www.chicagotribune.com July 28, 2006)

The Chicago Transit Authority will spend \$225,000 on a comprehensive rail assessment following a subway derailment that sent more than 150 people to hospitals.

A contract approved Wednesday, August 9, 2006, calls for Crete-based Holland Co. to examine the distance between rails – cited as a possible factor in the July 11 derailment – as well as the rail height and alignment in areas that cannot be inspected by CTA equipment, officials said.

CTA President Frank Kruesi said the agency has taken an "extremely conservative" approach to assessing track condition since the derailment and particularly along the rail line between downtown and O'Hare International Airport that was the site of the accident.

CTA staffers said slow zones have been instituted on 15 percent of the O'Hare line, up from about 2 percent in late June, with many limiting speeds to 15 mph.

Kruesi also noted that extremely high temperatures like those during the area's recent heat wave can cause rails to expand, resulting in misaligned tracks, so the CTA has added even more slow zones and increased inspections.

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CTA

Federal investigators have said the track at the site of last month's derailment was too wide prior to the accident, but they have not reached final conclusions on the cause.

The derailment occurred when the last car of an eight-car train heading to O'Hare went off the track, causing material underneath to catch fire. As many as 1,000 people may have been on the train: more than 150 were sent to area hospitals. (www.dailyherald.com August 10, 2006)

Two cranes carefully lifted separate spans of a pedestrian bridge into place over the Des Plaines River Wednesday, August 23, 2006, speeding the day when thousands of bicyclists, lawyers and residents of the western suburbs will be closer to their destinations.

The bridge, which is expected to open in the fall, will link the Illinois Prairie Path with the CTA's Blue Line.

Cyclists will be able to take the Blue Line to the last stop in Forest Park where they can pedal as far as Elgin or Aurora. Likewise, west suburban bicyclists will be able to tour the lakefront without using their cars to get downtown.

And for many employees and patrons of the Maybrook courthouse in Maywood, the bridge will provide a short walk from the 'L' line to the courthouse on the west bank of the Des Plaines River in Maywood.

Although crews from K&K Ironworks in Chicago deftly maneuvered the sections into place and bolted them together Wednesday, the 190-foot bridge won't be open until a path leading to the bridge is built and several security measures are completed, said Forest Park Village Manager Michael Sturino. An Illinois Department of Transportation spokesman said the bridge likely will be opened in late October.

Among the safety measures will be lighting and emergency call boxes. The bridge also will be able to accommodate a patrol car if an emergency arises. (www.chicagotribune.com August 23, 2006)

• PACE PATTERN

The cost of providing reserved rides to the disabled throughout the Chicago region is expected to soar to \$82 million next year, but Pace officials have not decided yet if they will increase fares for Chicago residents.

Pace Executive Director T.J. Ross told the suburban bus board Wednesday, August 2, 2006, it would be premature to call for a paratransit fare hike because the agency is still waiting for the Regional Transportation Authority's plan on how the service should be funded. The report is due this fall.

Pace has been providing paratransit rides in the suburbs but took over the Chicago Transit Authority's responsibility of delivering them in Chicago on July 1. While suburban paratransit riders pay an average of \$3 per ride, the CTA charged \$1.75, which Pace has not changed since taking over the service.

The CTA board flirted with a paratransit fare increase last year but ultimately opted against it after it was opposed by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley.

Pace board member Aaron Shepley said it's unfair that the possibility of raising city residents' paratransit fares would be left to his agency.

"He's the champion," Shepley said of Daley. "We're the villains."

The legislature has set aside \$54 million for paratransit during the last two legislative sessions. But with ridership expected to grow, Pace estimates the cost could swell to \$82.1 million next year, or about \$28 million more than what the legislature provided for this year.

The paratransit costs were included in a 2007 budget presentation that the staff made to the Pace board at its meeting on August 2. Pace expects its operating budget will be about \$167 million next year, up 5.8 percent over the 2006 spending plan, but that does not include the federally mandated paratransit service.

As it has for the last four years, Pace expects to use capital funds to help cover its operating expenses, a practice that in the past has delayed projects such as buying buses.

The budget asks the RTA to provide \$4.6 million to Pace to cover the expense of accepting the CTA's seven-day pass on the suburban bus system. This year, the RTA gave Pace \$2 million to accept the pass. But with so many using the pass on Pace's system, the agency expects the total cost for the year will be as much as \$3 million, which means the agency will provide about 4 million trips for free, said Terry Brannon, a Pace deputy executive director.

The seven-day pass issue, along with rising fuel costs, has helped create an operating deficit, with 2005 expenses expected to run about \$7.3 million over budget, Brannon said. (www.chicagotribune.com August 2, 2006)

Pace's new route that takes passengers back and forth between Wheaton and Naperville through the College of DuPage campus is being touted as the transit system's wave of the future.

The new route may not seem that innovative, but it is the first bus route to take passengers between the county's two largest cities on the same line. (Cont on page 4)

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PACE

It is also the first bus to stop at the poplar Danada Square shopping plaza at Butterfield and Naperville roads in Wheaton.

It began service on Monday, August 7, with buses picking up passengers at 6:20 am from the Edward Hospital campus in Naperville and 7:05 am from the Wheaton downtown Metra station. Both directions end service at about 10:30 pm. The route runs only Monday through Friday, with more buses during rush hours and hourly during off-peak hours.

It will cost riders \$1.50 to ride the bus in any direction, although some believe Pace should lower the fare to attract riders. (www.dailyherald.com August 3, 2006)

• METRA MATTERS

Metra officials have outlined plans for a possible future expansion of the Union Pacific Northwest commuter line, which would include adding more trains to the line and expanded service to McHenry County.

While some communities along the line are excited about the prospect of expanded service, officials in Barrington are concerned that plans to add more trains could actually increase traffic gridlock in their town.

The Union Pacific Northwest Line is Metra's longest line, extending from Chicago west to Harvard, with a seven-mile northern branch to McHenry. The train line includes stops in Park Ridge, Des Plaines, Mount Prospect, Arlington Heights, Palatine, Barrington, Fox River Grove and Cary.

Part of Metra's expansion plan calls for extending a northerly branch in McHenry County from McHenry to Johnsburg, where a new station would be built, and constructing new rail yards in Johnsburg and Woodstock.

Metra also is proposing infrastructure improvements that would allow it to increase the number of daily trains that run along the line. Under the plan, the total number of daily trains is expected to grow from 63 to 74, with a potential expansion of express trains from 19 to 24 a day.

"This expansion would better serve McHenry County and western Lake and the growing population there," said Metra spokesman Patrick Waldron.

But Waldron said the proposed expansion has not yet been funded, and there's no specific timetable for completion. He said it would take at least four years after federal funding becomes available to design, acquire land and make the improvements. No cost estimates have been determined, but the total improvements likely would cost in excess of \$100 million.

Barrington Village President Karen Darch said while she's pleased Metra is looking at ways to improve service along the line, she worries that an increased number of trains may cause more traffic congestion in the village. Instead of more trains, Darch said she would like to see Metra consider longer trains with additional cars that could carry more passengers.

If Metra does increase the frequency of trains, Darch said it may need to look at grade separations at the rail-roadway crossings in Barrington. Another alternative that may help alleviate some of the congestion is more commuter buses that would transport passengers from the train station to and from their jobs, she said. (Pioneer Press OnLine (Glenview IL June 30, 2006)

Now that it appears plans to rebuild and relocate Wood Dale's Metra station to the east – something long sought by several aldermen – are delayed if not dead, they've decided to do the next best thing.

Alderman on Thursday, July 20, agreed that rather than wait an estimated 30 years to get funds needed from Metra to move east, city officials would just knock the current one down and start over.

Last year, the city council approved plans for a renovated train depot with a new roof and façade, a washroom and an interior design that would include a coffee shop.

But those plans were derailed when the city's staff recently learned the cost of renovating the station could exceed that of tearing it down and rebuilding.

"Staff now is recommending that we knock down the current walls, put up new brick, keep the floor and foundation and build a totally new station around it," City Manager Frank Williams said. "Everything in there would be new; new walls, new doors, new windows, new everything."

"This would be a unique building in the center of our community," he continued. "This would be different from any other train station."

In recent months, the council has secured about \$350,000 from home builders working in the city to help fund the improvements to the station the city leases from Metra for \$10 a year.

Williams and City Services Director Gary Holm said the project could likely be done for \$350,000 but added any additional costs could be paid through the local tourism fund.

First Ward Alderman Marshall Subach said the city should be prepared to spend more than \$350,000 to ensure the quality and unique design of a new depot. (www.dailyherald.com July 22, 2006)