



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

JANUARY 2008

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](http://www.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 MEETING

The January meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on January 4, 2008, 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, "*Smaller Midwest Transit Properties of Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan*," will be a slide presentation by Don Ellison.

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.

ELECTION NOTICE

The election for Director of the Omnibus Society of America was held on December 7, 2007, at the December membership meeting.

Vern Rosenthal was running unopposed. Of the 17 ballots received and counted, Vern received 17 votes. There were no write-ins.

\$5.00

Daley urges leader action on transit Says lawmakers must have solution by end of year

By MIKE RAMSEY

GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Published Thursday, December 06, 2007

CHICAGO — Mayor Richard Daley on Wednesday made his latest attempt to prod state leaders into solving the mass-transit funding crisis and intimated that Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan should not waste energy hating each other as they grapple with the issue.

The Chicago region's transit agencies have prepared to impose service cuts and fare hikes next month, barring a long-term cash infusion from Springfield. Daley emphasized that lawmakers must come through before Dec. 31, when cost-control agreements with Chicago Transit Authority unions expire.

"We're all concerned that the legislature won't act on public transportation in the next three weeks," Daley said during a news conference with labor and business leaders. "Springfield must not leave the issue unresolved until next year."

Blagojevich has made little headway in negotiating a transit bailout in recent months with the four legislative leaders, and the topic has occasionally taken a back seat to a proposed statewide construction program Republicans have demanded as a quid pro quo. Complicating matters has been the festering personality conflict between Blagojevich and fellow Democrat Madigan, who did not attend discussions this week in the governor's Chicago office.

A reporter asked Daley about the common perception that Blagojevich and Madigan "hate" each other. The mayor did not say whether he agrees with the assessment, but he said hatred clouds the judgment and has no place among policymakers.

"Hate should not be part and parcel of government or politics any place in this country," Daley said. "I may differ with people; they may differ with me. But no way either one of us are going to hate one another. That is a complete waste of time, I really believe."

Light rail construction break doesn't mean relief

Kerry Fehr-Snyder
The Arizona Republic
Nov. 12, 2007 09:09 AM

The end of the line is coming for street construction on the Metro light-rail line through Tempe.

And for many business owners along the line, the end isn't coming soon enough.

"It's a headache," said Omar Homsy, manager of Haji-Baba, a Middle Eastern restaurant on Apache Boulevard near McClintock Drive.

For Mesa, the construction hassles will last until February. And in downtown Phoenix, road work will continue to July.

The two-year construction project in Tempe restricted access to Haji-Baja, and "The street was a mess before," he recalled. "It was down to one lane, sometimes no left lane, sometimes no right lane.

"Some customers, I haven't seen their faces for six or seven months."

The chaos has settled down more recently, and Homsy said he is looking forward to the project's completion and the beginning of light-rail service in December 2008.

Marty McNeil, a Metro spokeswoman, said contractors are beginning the final push for construction along Apache Boulevard with track work to be done by Monday and street paving with rubberized asphalt to be finished by next Friday.

"So for motorists that means that the majority of the traffic cones will be gone," McNeil said. "Driving will be primarily cone-free and very smooth."

But Nathan Johnson, a minority owner of Watson Flowers, said many business owners along Apache Boulevard doubt that the traffic delays will be over anytime soon.

"They told us we'd have no more than six months of construction in front of our place. Technically, we had that but we won't get two lanes (of traffic) back in front of us until the (light-rail) station is built in front of us," Johnson said.

Although construction has cost his walk-in business about 10 percent in sales, many customers have switched to ordering flowers by telephone, Johnson said.

He said he's also looking forward to light rail and the station that is planned in front of his shop near Price Road bringing a new crop of customers to the area.

"There are a lot of positives," he said. "It has cleaned up the neighborhood, increased the property values, aside from being a good people mover."

Rick Hills, owner of Hills Automotive, said he's looking forward to construction near his shop finishing up and light-rail service eventually bringing new customers to his business on the north side of Apache Boulevard, east of the Loop 101.

The shop doesn't get as many customers who fail their vehicle emission tests at a nearby testing station because many want to avoid the roadwork, he said. The shop used to get two to three customers a week but now gets just two a month.

"People don't want to come through the construction, so they'll go east instead," he said. "I'm definitely looking forward to it (construction) being over. It's definitely been tough."

Hills said he believes light-rail service will help his shop because many of his customers attend or work at Arizona State University and can drop off their vehicles and take the train to work.

"When it finally gets done, it will be good for business," he said.

Light-rail train hits, kills man

Man reportedly did not move as train approached

APRIL BETHEA AND MARK PRICE

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A man sitting on the light-rail track in south Charlotte died Sunday night after authorities said he was struck by a train -- the first time a person or vehicle has been hit by one of the Lynx cars.

The identity of the victim, a man in his mid-30s, had not been released late Sunday pending family notification.

The incident occurred around 7:45 p.m. near the junction of Old Pineville Road and South Boulevard, approaching the Scaleybark station. The light-rail system has been undergoing test runs before its Nov. 24 public debut.

The two-car train had just passed the Woodlawn station and was headed north toward uptown when the driver spotted the man, said Olaf Kinard, spokesman for the Charlotte Area Transit System.

Kinard said the driver threw his emergency brake and blew the train's horn, but could not stop before hitting the man. It can take a light-rail vehicle traveling at 55 miles-per-hour up to 600 feet, or about two football fields, to come to a complete stop.

It wasn't immediately clear exactly how fast the train had been going.

Kinard said northbound trains are allowed to travel up to 55 mph leading to the Woodlawn station, but must slow down to 45 mph before moving onto South Boulevard.

The train's driver had begun to slow down before the incident, Kinard said.

Kinard said two crossarms had lowered and the bells and lights were activated before the train reached Old Pineville Road. The driver also had blown his horn when approaching.

But the man reportedly did not move. The victim was alive when medical crews loaded him into an ambulance, but he died en route to Carolinas Medical Center, authorities said.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police's Transit Authority Unit will investigate the incident. CATS also is running a parallel examination into what happened, Kinard said.

Authorities plan to study the train's "black box," which includes video, to study how the incident occurred.

The driver of the train has been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation, and will undergo drug and alcohol testing, which is standard procedure, officials said.

Sunday's incident marked the first time a light-rail car has been involved in an accident, officials said. However, the transit authority has had to replace seven crossing arms in the past 15 to 16 months, due to motorists who clipped the arms while attempting to beat trains.

CATS has been testing its light-rail system for weeks. The 9.6-mile Lynx Blue Line, which runs from Seventh Street uptown to the intersection of I-485 and South Boulevard, is scheduled to begin free service Nov. 24 and 25.

Regular service at \$1.30 per ride is scheduled to begin Nov. 26.

SAFETY TIPS

CATS offers the following light-rail safety tips:

- It is illegal to drive around lowered crossing gates. Trains always have the right-of-way. They can approach from any direction, on any track, at any time.
- It is unlawful to remain on or near the tracks without authority.
- Don't stand on or near the tracks. Trains have an overhang and may still hit you even if you are not on the track.
- Only cross tracks at designated crosswalks. There are clearly marked signs showing you safe areas to cross the tracks.
- Keep away from all overhead wires that power trains. These high voltage wires will cause serious injury.
- Always hold your child's hand while waiting for the train.
- Cross tracks straight on when riding a bicycle. Cyclists must obey all traffic laws when at grade crossings. —

Ribbon cutting ceremony for light-rail 7:19 AM

By **MARIO ROLDAN / WCNC**
E-mail Mario: MRoldan@WCNC.com

CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- It has 15 station stops, runs 9.6 miles and contains 18 million pounds of structural steel. Businesses at the southern-most of point of Charlotte's new light-rail system hope the LYNX Blue Line will help their bottom line.



"When they were putting in the pavement and things like that, we had to work around it," said Richard Randall of Sonny's Bar-B-Q.

For months, light-rail construction has sometimes gotten in the way of businesses like Sonny's Bar-B-Q on South Boulevard near Interstate 485. Now, Randall hopes light-rail works for them.

"I really think we'll get most of our extra business at night time, people coming home from work, getting into their cars because this is the largest parking deck down here," Randall added.

The only parking garage along the Blue Line sits at the South Boulevard/I-485 station. It has a little more than 1,100 free parking spots.

"A lot of people coming down here for the shopping or coming from the Panthers' game or Bobcats' game, we are really excited about it," said Randall.

Sonny's plans to open early or stay open late on game days, starting with Sunday's upcoming Panthers' game.

Monday morning, political heavy hitters went on a first ceremonial ride but not everyone has been on board with the idea of light-rail from the beginning. Light-rail critics have argued that money would be best spent on roads.

"If we don't have other alternatives besides South Boulevard and I-77, we are not going to have a good quality of life along this corridor," said Mayor

Pat McCrory. "So, the 'tyranny of the present' continues to be what we must fight against."

More than 800 workers have had a hand in building the new rail system, which opens to the public Saturday at 10 a.m.

Crowds jam Lynx line

CATS adds train cars, buses to handle flood of passengers

STEVE HARRISON

Staff Writer

Thousands of riders flooded Charlotte's new light rail line today to participate in the train's inaugural day of service and glimpse the city's next era of mass transit.



Thousands of people jam the light-rail station near Interstate 485 Saturday afternoon. While several thousand waited in line to for the light-rail, hundreds waited for a bus that would return them to their northern stop. TODD SUMLIN - tsumlin@charlotteobserver.com

The unexpectedly large crowds overwhelmed the southernmost station at Interstate 485. There, more than one thousand people formed a line that snaked from the platform back into the parking garage. Police closed the garage to incoming cars because so many people filled the area.

The Charlotte Area Transit System began operating 19 express buses to bring people back to their cars if they didn't want to wait for a return trip. CATS had planned to only use the buses in case of a technical problem, such as a derailment. CATS also is using every available train to handle the demand.

"It's amazing," said CATS chief executive Ron Tober, who participated in a ceremony Saturday morning to launch service. Former Carolina

Panthers safety Mike Minter drove the first train into the Charlotte Transportation Center station.

Many trains were completely full. They would pull into a station, and riders didn't have room to board.

Stations farther north were less crowded, and parking space was available at these lots: Arrowood, Archdale, Tyvola and Woodlawn. Service today and tomorrow is free, and trains depart every 10 minutes.

Passenger Kevin Crockett rode one of the first cars that departed at 10 a.m. sharp from the uptown station near the arena. He shared the car with other dignitaries and officials, including Mayor Pat McCrory, a longtime champion of the \$462.7 million project.

"I think it's beautiful," Crockett said. "It's another notch in Charlotte's belt. I'm really glad to see people supporting it."

The rail line has been a source of civic pride and excitement, and also the cause of a spirited, but unsuccessful, opposition. Earlier this month, voters overwhelmingly opposed an effort to end a sales tax that funds mass transit, including light rail.

The electric-powered, silver and blue rail cars made history this morning on their 9.6-mile journey from uptown to just north of Pineville. The line is the state's first rapid-transit system.

Contractors spent much of the past week scrambling to finish the line, or at least get it in good enough shape for riders.

Free service will continue today until 1 a.m. People can also ride the train for free Sunday, from 7 a.m. until midnight.

When regular service begins Monday at 5:25 a.m., passengers will need a ticket. If they don't have a CATS pass, they should bring cash or coins. The self-service kiosks at the stations don't yet accept credit or debit cards.

Passengers need a \$1.30 ticket to ride. Self-service kiosks now accept only cash and coins.

First Jerusalem light rail train due April 2010

The launch is 18 months behind schedule.

Lior Baron and Orit Bar-Gil 12 Nov 07 13:47

The first line of the Jerusalem Light Railway will begin operating in April 2010 - 18 months behind schedule. Officials from the Ministry of Finance and Jerusalem municipality met today to resolve their differences. The Ministry of Finance has sent a working paper to the municipality concerning, among other things, the timetable for further work on the light rail and work permits, which the municipality has delayed. The municipality is due to review the paper and respond to it, but there has been no significant progress on this matter.

Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski believes that work on the light rail should go forward aggressively one section after another, instead of the current method in which streets are closed while work goes ahead too slowly, in his opinion. The municipality has not yet issued a work permit for the Jaffa Road section of the line or for sections where there is no serious and detailed work plan. The municipality says that the work permits will be issued when serious, detailed plans with timetables are submitted.

Jerusalem municipality director general Yair Maayan said that the parties had agreed to work hard to move forward on the timetable in order to get the railway moving. The municipality has already demanded that the light rail franchisee, City Pass comply with the timetable.

The new timetable has already caused disputes between the Jerusalem municipality and the Ministry of Finance. To date, only two kilometers of track on the fourteen-kilometer route have been laid. The municipality has called on the government to appoint an independent expert to review the reasonableness of the timetable proposed in the pending contract between the government and City Pass. The municipality also wants City Pass to provide large guarantees in the event that there is a further delay in the timetable.

The Knesset State Control Committee recently decided to hold a discussion on the problems and delays in the Jerusalem light rail project. The committee will ask State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss to examine the problems in the project.

*Published by Globes [online], Israel business news -
www.globes-online.com - on November 12, 2007*

Fanfare greets streetcar's return to part of Uptown

Posted by Times Picayune November 10, 2007 7:22PM

By Molly Reid
Staff writer

New Orleanians rejoiced Saturday afternoon as the historic St. Charles Avenue streetcar returned to part of its Uptown route.



Saturday, November 10, 2007

Led by the Warren Easton Marching Band, a line on streetcars rolls down St. Charles Avenue from Napoleon to Lee Circle as RTA officials held a ceremonial run to celebrate the return of streetcar service starting Sunday on this stretch of the line which has been shut down since Katrina.

Spectators lined the streets bearing signs, smiles, cameras and, in a few instances, Mardi Gras beads as streetcar No. 900 made its inaugural post-Katrina run from Napoleon Avenue to Lee Circle, followed later by three other streetcars that made runs all the way to Canal Street.

"This is a symbol of New Orleans, a part of our identity. It's what makes New Orleans feels like home," said District B Councilwoman Stacy Head,

standing on the neutral ground at St. Charles and Napoleon avenues where the Regional Transit Authority held a ceremony to usher in the return of three miles of the line's 6.5 mile route.

Free rides were offered Saturday from 2:30 to 5 p.m., but the \$1.25 fare will be in effect today along the returned route.

Saturday's celebration also signaled "good-bye and good riddance to those awful buses," Head said to the cheers and laughter of more than 200 spectators.

RTA will not entirely discontinue bus service along St. Charles, but will reduce the number of buses on the route from seven to four, RTA spokeswoman Rosalind Blanco Cook said. Bus service will terminate at Napoleon Avenue, where passengers may transfer to streetcars. The agency may remove additional buses after the rest of the St. Charles line, running to Carrollton and South Claiborne avenues, is reopened, which is projected to occur next spring.

Pre-Katrina, the St. Charles line, which extended from Canal Street to Carrollton Avenue and Claiborne Avenue, ran 24 hours a day, but the new Canal-to-Napoleon service will operate daily from 5:27 a.m. to 11:55 p.m. with a fleet of five 1923 Perley Thomas streetcars running 10 minutes apart. If additional riders are expected for special events or conventions, RTA may add more cars, Cook said. Once RTA reopens the rest of the line, round-the-clock service may return, she said.

The St. Charles Avenue line was opened in 1835 and powered by mule-driven streetcars. The line was electrified in 1893. Pre-Katrina, it was powered entirely by the Carrollton Street station, but the restored line currently gets its 600 volts of power from the Calliope Street substation under the Pontchartrain Expressway. Eventually, RTA will connect it with two additional substations at Willow and Valence streets, Cook said.

Pre-Katrina, RTA had already received a \$11.8 million from the federal government to repair the city's century-old catenary system, with work slated to begin after Labor Day 2005. Hurricane Katrina's high winds, however, destroyed most of the St. Charles overhead power lines, taking out a number of poles with it, Cook said.

Post-Katrina, the Federal Transit Authority added an additional \$3 million to the original appropriation, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency

contributed \$420,000 to round out the rebuilding project's \$14.2 million total.

RTA first resumed streetcar service in December 2005 to the Canal Street line, with cars running from the Mississippi River to Crozat Street. The Canal line's red streetcars, which were flooded after the levees breached, were replaced with the green Perley Thomas cars that had been kept out of the floodwater's reach at the Carrollton Street station. By April 2006, the entire Canal line was opened, and in December 2006, service returned to the St. Charles line's Central Business District loop, running from Lee Circle to Carondelet Street. Canal Street and St. Charles Avenue honored this year by the American Planning Association as one of America's 10 great streets.

Preceded down the avenue Saturday by the Warren Easton High School marching band, streetcar No. 900 drew honking of car horns and cheers from pedestrians. The Columns Hotel bore a large banner welcoming back the line, and crowds formed at house parties and watering holes to celebrate its return. Some spectators brought Mardi Gras beads to toss at the streetcars and carried signs reading "Get Your Roll On," "Streetcar: 1, Katrina: 0," and "Dude, There's My Car."

"We could do a lot of things that could help...but getting this back, it's like a miracle," said Pat Rosamond, a resident of Uptown. "You just watch: people's spirits are going to get higher and higher."

New Orleans' streetcars are back on track

By Rick Jervis, USA TODAY

NEW ORLEANS — To Mike Saccoliti, the St. Charles Avenue streetcar is more than just a tourist draw. It's a way to get from the French Quarter to the Columns Hotel for a bloody mary. Or to Tipitina's for a live jazz show. Or his friend's house for a crawfish boil.

Seeing the streetcar — knocked out of service by Hurricane Katrina — partially back in operation signals a giant stride toward normalcy here, said Saccoliti, 49, of Brooklyn, N.Y., who has been visiting New Orleans since 1988.

"It's a sign that stuff's happening," he said.

The historic St. Charles Avenue streetcar, as much a symbol of this city as jazz and blackened redfish, returned to service at 5:27 a.m. Sunday, two years,

two months and 13 days after being battered offline by Katrina. Residents and tourists alike heralded the return of the olive-green, 1920s-era Perley Thomas streetcars as a major step toward recovery.

On Saturday, a high school marching band blasted *When the Saints Go Marching In* and city leaders praised the line's return just before four inaugural streetcars pushed off toward downtown. Onlookers honked car horns, banged instruments, cheered and waved their drinks in a Mardi Gras-like atmosphere as the first streetcars rumbled down St. Charles Avenue. Businesses welcomed back the streetcars with oversized banners.

"It's huge," said City Council member Stacey Head. "This returns a sense of normalcy to New Orleanians. Its part of what you think about when you think about this city."

Part of the appeal is its history. The St. Charles Avenue line, stretching 6½ miles down the broad, oak-lined residential boulevard, first opened to the public in 1835, making it one of the oldest continuously running trolley systems in the world, said Wil Mullet, rail superintendent for the Regional Transit Authority (RTA).

The line began with mule-pulled streetcars, he said. It briefly upgraded to steam-engine cars but returned to the mule cars when female passengers complained of soot from the engine soiling their dresses. The line went electric in 1893 and the Perley Thomas cars, which still are used today, were added in 1923, Mullet said.

The entire line was placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. It's the oldest-surviving urban passenger rail system in the nation, according to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

"It's part of the heritage of New Orleans," Mullet said. "We knew the quicker we could get the St. Charles line back, the quicker we get back the heart of New Orleans."

All 35 historic Perley Thomas streetcars were stored at the Carrollton Transit Station in Uptown and survived Katrina's floods unscathed, said Fred Basha, RTA's director of infrastructure. But the storm tossed oak trees and branches on top of the overhead electrical wires and snapped transit poles like twigs, he said.

The city had planned an \$11.8 million renovation to all of the city's streetcar lines prior to the storm, a project that was accelerated following Katrina, Basha said.

The line will initially run only about half of its 6½-mile stretch, from downtown to Napoleon Avenue, he said. The rest of the line is scheduled to reopen by early next year.

The streetcars are just as heavily used by residents going to and from work each day as by tourists. Just prior to Katrina, the citywide system ran 24 hours a day and served 120,000 passengers daily, Mullet said. That number has dropped to around 25,000 a day, but is expected to steadily rise as lines become operational, he said.

Since the streetcars suffered a two-year absence, the RTA has been running an informational campaign to remind motorists and joggers to look out for the rumbling cars when crossing the tracks, said Rosalind Cook, RTA spokeswoman.

Lawn signs with a picture of a streetcar are planted along the line's grassy median declaring: "We're back on track! Watch out for us!" Some residents have stolen the signs as souvenirs, Cook said.

Though the cars survived Katrina's floods, they now face a new threat: a lack of maintenance specialists trained in keeping the antiquated cars running, Mullet said. Only 33 of the 75 specialists returned after the storm, he said. And there is little money in the city's battered budget to hire more.

As those specialists retire, the pool of people to cross-train others in the field will dwindle, he said.

"There's not a book (where) you can go and learn about these streetcars," he said. "That technology has been handed down from generation to generation. Once these people go, that's it."

Lake Union Streetcar takes inaugural test run

By KOMO Staff

SEATTLE - Seattle's new South Lake Union Streetcar made its first test run Monday.

With Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels at the helm, the streetcar started rolling smoothly and cruised down the track -- a trip that lasted a whole 30 seconds and covered about 200 feet.

The test was mostly to show off the new streetcar,

which will start making dozens of test runs over the next several weeks.



It's the first stage in what Seattle hopes will be an entire network of streetcar routes. And streetcars have proven they draw riders -- when they started the streetcar up in downtown Tacoma, ridership increased three times compared to the same bus route.

Why?

"It's a little more comfortable," said project manager Ethan Melone. "Extra suspension, quiet, and people always have had a romance with trains...and people just enjoy them."

But is it worth the price tag? The streetcar, which should be up and running in December, comes with a \$50 million cost. That averages out to about \$8 million a city block just to build it.

For that hefty price, riders get a street car that runs a little more than a mile from South Lake Union's neighborhood to Downtown Seattle's Westlake.

"It's a step for transportation in Seattle," said Melone.

But Seattle City Councilman Nick Licata says money spent on the streetcar is money not spent for transit in other neighborhoods.

"It's a question of fairness," Licata said. "The city could use improved bus service. The (money) going to pay for that - instead, a portion of it will be going to this one project."

Mayor Nickels insists the streetcar will connect people with future jobs, housing and other transit.

But it will present some unique changes to the area. For instance, the city warns about parking along the streetcar's route, and to be careful to park far enough away so you don't open your car door right into an oncoming streetcar.

"I think over time people will see it as part of the urban landscape and people will take care around it," Nickels said.

As for the construction cost, South Lake Union property owners -- Paul Allen included -- paid half, or \$25 million. The government kicked in the rest.

Now, the city is counting on sponsors and about 330,000 riders in the first year to operate it. The fare will be \$1.50.

As for the old waterfront trolley, which is on temporary hiatus while the city waits to build the new service barn, service will be restored at some point, and in fact, there's talk of expanding it.

However, developers say they are waiting to find out what happens with the Alaskan Way Viaduct before deciding when to put the trolley back in service.

Low floors will give bumpy ride, new bidder for streetcars says

Partial low-floor design would be better, Dusseldorf-based manufacturer advises TTC

JEFF GRAY

From Friday's Globe and Mail November 9, 2007 at 4:33 AM EST

Toronto is taking a risk on an unproven technology for its next generation of streetcars that would make for a bumpier ride and more breakdowns, according to a new competitor for the up-to-\$1.4-billion contract.

The Toronto Transit Commission and other firms bidding for the contract insist that the ground-hugging "100-per-cent low-floor" design specification is reliable and will be better for all passengers, including the disabled.

With an eye on the TTC's expected demands for Canadian content, Dusseldorf-based Vossloh Kiepe is to announce today that it is teaming up with auto and bus parts manufacturer Martinrea International Inc., based in Vaughan, Ont., to compete for the

contract. Other firms that have expressed interest in building 204 light-rail vehicles to replace the TTC's current iconic fleet include Montreal's Bombardier, Germany's Siemens, Czech-based Skoda and the French firm Alstom.

The winner may be called upon to build even more new vehicles if the city's ambitious light-rail expansion plans go ahead.

Peter Maass, president of Vossloh Kiepe's Canadian arm - which has only a handful of employees, says the TTC's recent decision to restrict the competition to designs for 100-per-cent low-floor vehicles is a bad move, because the new technology is unreliable and produces a much bumpier ride since passengers are closer to the ground.

"It is the roughest ride. When you are standing or sitting in it, you are getting this jarring right up your spine, like you wouldn't believe," Mr. Maass said in an interview, adding that some cities in Europe are going back to partial low-floor designs. "... You feel like you are getting tossed around in the vehicle."

Adam Giambrone, chairman of the TTC, said 100-per-cent low-floor cars he has ridden offered a smooth ride, with the exception of one in Helsinki, where he believed the track system may have been partly to blame.

"I have ridden low-floor streetcars all over the world. ... All of them were perfectly comfortable," Mr. Giambrone said.

TTC engineers believe the 100-per-cent low-floor cars are better for passenger flow, and because they lack stairs, reduce the chances of customers tripping on board. They have also concluded that, while the design will be challenging, 100-per-cent low-floor cars may actually be better on the system's unusually tight turns, and less likely to derail than partial low-floor vehicles.

Mr. Maass said his firm will offer the TTC a completely low-floor vehicle if asked, but will try to persuade the transit agency next week to allow it to bid with a 70-per-cent low-floor car based on one it helped build for the German city of Leipzig.

Partial low-floor vehicles use traditional light-rail technology, raised like the current TTC fleet at the front and back, but with a lower middle section for disabled passengers to board.

To make the entire car low-floor means making its propulsion system and other components much smaller, Mr. Maass said, requiring "experimental" technology that can break down. He added that getting such a radical new design to work on the TTC's tracks, which have extremely tight turns and steep hills compared with many European systems, will be an added challenge.

Certainly, Siemens - considered one of the front-runners for the TTC's streetcar deal, along with Bombardier - has had many problems with its 100-per-cent low-floor light-rail vehicles in Europe in recent years, after it emerged that the streetcars' frames were cracking from the strain of the new design.

The debacle with the firm's Combino model - forerunner of the modified Combino Plus that it intends to offer Toronto - forced the German transportation giant to recall hundreds of light-rail vehicles from European cities over the past five years, costing it as much as \$500-million.

Mario Pélouquin, Siemens director of business development for Canada, said the Combino's problems have been solved, and he strongly denied the charge that low-floor technology is flawed.

"... It is proven technology," he said in an interview, adding that the trend is clearly toward 100-per-cent low-floor vehicles.

Mr. Pélouquin disagreed that the cars give a jarring, bumpy ride: "As a passenger, you can feel more what's happening on track below the train. But I wouldn't say it is bumpy. There have been a lot of technological advancements."

Bombardier Transportation Vice-president Mike Hardt also stood by the 100-per-cent low-floor design, which his firm plans to offer the TTC.

Bombardier was embroiled in a controversy during the last major TTC purchase, when the transit agency made a \$674-million deal with the firm to build 234 new subway cars without accepting bids from other companies to protect jobs at Bombardier's Thunder Bay plant. This time, the TTC is accepting bids, but may include Canadian-content provisions.

2 Toronto streetcar drivers treated after bizarre collision

A Toronto streetcar driver was in hospital with neck injuries and another was being treated for shock

after a bizarre accident Tuesday afternoon just before rush hour.

Several passengers were also injured after the two TTC streetcars traveling north and south along Spadina Avenue collided around 3 p.m. ET at the intersection at Dundas Street in the heart of Chinatown.

The northbound streetcar veered off the track and smashed into the southbound streetcar in an accident that appears to have been caused by a switching problem, witnesses said.

TTC crews cleared the crash scene shortly after 5 p.m. and have removed the streetcars to a nearby transit yard for examination.

Passenger Darsh Ramjattan was thrown out of his seat by the force of the impact.

"All of a sudden, I just [heard] a bang. I didn't see it coming; it was just a shock," he said. "I was sitting in the front and I cut my hand."

Christina Paoletta, who was on one of the streetcars involved in the incident, said it all happened quickly.

"I was on the single seat sitting by the window. All of a sudden it seemed like the nose of the streetcar came right towards us, from the left-hand side," she said. "You can see that ... behind the driver's side, it's crushed in."

As paramedics took away the injured, TTC work crews were trying to figure out what happened.

Ramjattan said the driver of the streetcar he was riding, who is now in hospital with neck injuries, told him the northbound streetcar was supposed to have veered east to turn away from the oncoming traffic.

"The driver said the connection switched or something," Ramjattan said. He added that the problem appeared to have "something to do with the track."

Both 23-tonne streetcars rested on the pavement with their wheel carriages twisted in the middle of the busy Spadina-Dundas intersection for about two hours, blocking traffic, before the scene was cleared.

Toronto's \$1.25-billion light-rail gamble

City Hall faces financial, political and technical hurdles before it can get state-of-the-art streetcars out of the station, says Jeff Gray

JEFF GRAY

November 24, 2007

Toronto's decaying streetcar fleet, once made up of iconic "Red Rockets," is rarely now described as a beloved historic symbol of the city. Drivers see streetcars as cumbersome obstacles. Riders despair at how crowded and infrequent they are. And residents near the tracks complain about rumbling vibrations and squealing wheels.

Just like the rusting family beater, the city's streetcars are more than ready for a trade-in. The result - a brand new, state-of-the-art \$1.25-billion fleet of what the rest of the world calls "light-rail vehicles" - will not only rekindle our love of the mostly downtown-centred streetcar system, proponents say, but provide the foundation for a radical expansion of rapid transit in the city.

As Mayor David Miller's planned \$6-billion, 120-kilometre light-rail expansion spreads across dedicated lanes in the suburbs, these sleeker, larger streetcars are supposed to coax thousands of commuters out of their cars and once again become a postcard-worthy symbol of the city. But huge financial, political and technical hurdles remain before 21st-century light-rail cars can roll onto Toronto's 19th-century tracks.

"This is rebranding the streetcar and making it more like what people have experienced in Europe," says Joe Mihevc, vice-chairman of the Toronto Transit Commission. The councillor for St. Paul's is the driving force behind the TTC's streetcar desires.

"... It will set us exponentially on the next level in terms of global cities and environmental sustainability."

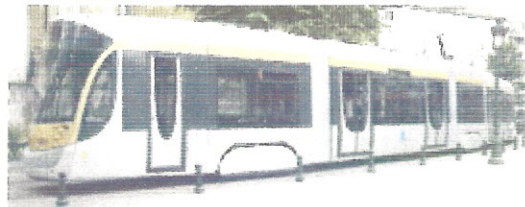
The TTC plans to buy 204 new streetcars at first, but possibly many more later for its suburban expansion lines. The new vehicles, expected to cost as much as \$5-million each, will be "low-floor," free of steps at the doors so the disabled can board, as required by Ontario law. This will also benefit an aging population and parents with strollers.

At about 30 metres in length, the sleek, new vehicles will dwarf the current "articulated" streetcars, and carry more than 260 people when full, compared with 132 passengers on one of the current regular streetcars and 205 on an articulated one. They will have modern amenities such as air conditioning, which are foreign to the current clunkers.

The contract will be the largest streetcar deal in North American history, and one of the largest orders currently up for grabs in the world. And that has massive streetcar makers, and their lobbyists, circling City Hall, even though the province has yet to signal that it will help the city with the bill. A request for proposals is to go out before the end of the year, with the TTC hoping it can award a contract in the spring, and have the cars gradually rolling into service starting in 2011 after two test cars arrive in 2010.

IN THE RUNNING

The two leading companies are Montreal-based Bombardier, which is offering a modified version of its Flexity Outlook, now running in Brussels and



elsewhere; and the Canadian arm of Frankfurt-based Siemens, which wants to build a modified version of its Combino Plus, now running in Lisbon and Budapest.



Also expected to bid on the contract are Czech Republic-based Skoda Transportation and Dusseldorf-based Vossloh Kiepe, with local manufacturer Martinrea International. Other bidders could come forward.

The TTC has committed to a fair competition for the deal after being stung by controversy last year, when it awarded a \$674-million contract for 234 subway cars to Bombardier without competition in order to protect jobs at its Thunder Bay plant. This time, the TTC will include "Canadian content"

provisions in a competitive bidding process. This is common around the world: U.S. rail-transit vehicles, for instance, must have 60-per-cent American content.

When evaluating the bids, sources say, the TTC may award companies as many as 10 points on a 100-point scale, based on how much of the vehicle a company pledges to make in Canada. The companies would not talk publicly in detail about the issue. But sources close to Bombardier have expressed concern that the proposed system may be too lenient, and could allow foreign firms to build much of their product in countries with cheaper labour, and make up the lost points with a lower price. Sources close to other bidders have suggested a fear of the opposite: That the rules may tip the scales in favour of homegrown Bombardier.

Still, Mike Hardt, vice-president of Bombardier Transportation, wouldn't commit in a recent interview to building the new streetcars in Thunder Bay, saying the firm needed to see the TTC's request for proposals first. "Is there going to be local content work?" Mr. Hardt said. "That's a speculation that I can't make. ... We've proven that we can compete from Canada."

Siemens says it will make an effort to use as many Canadian components and do as much of the labour as it can in Canada, but concedes that the car bodies and its trucks will be built at its factories in Austria.

Mario Pélouquin, Siemens's director of business development for Canada, said the TTC or its consultants had approached his firm four separate times with questions about how much domestic content Siemens could guarantee. "We're trying to do more than just putting in the seats [in Canada]," Mr. Pélouquin said. "We're trying to maximize everything that we will do, including supplying parts from Canadian providers."

Other controversies are more technical. For example, the TTC says its 11-metre radius curves are the tightest in the world - many European systems have turns twice as wide - and few light-rail systems have to deal with inclines as steep as the Bathurst Street hill, which has an 8-per-cent grade. The TTC also has wider than usual tracks.

THE DARK HORSE

Vossloh Kiepe, a streetcar-components maker that helped to design light-rail vehicles now running in

Leipzig, has protested against the TTC's decision to accept only 100-per-cent low-floor streetcars on its unique tracks.

Vossloh Kiepe argues that these designs are less reliable than its more conventional 70-per-cent partial low-floor design, pointing to trouble Siemens had with its fully low-floor cars in Europe in recent years. (Siemens, which had to recall hundreds of streetcars after their frames started cracking, says it has solved the problem.)

TTC engineers have concluded after exhaustive testing that partial low-floor models would not be able to climb the system's hills, and may be more likely to derail than 100-per-cent low-floor streetcars, which themselves are hard to adapt to Toronto's curves. Vossloh Kiepe's solution resulted in a streetcar with as many as four sets of internal stairs or ramps. The TTC says it has rejected such a design because it would impede passenger flow and possibly increase the number of "slip and fall" injuries on the system.

Vossloh Kiepe's Canadian representative, Peter Maass, warns that the TTC may be cruising for trouble if it ignores his firm's advice and goes with a 100-per-cent low-floor car. "I don't think we're going to know until that vehicle gets produced as a prototype in 2009 and gets rolling," said Mr. Maass, whose firm is still in talks with TTC.

There have been other headaches; including making sure the newfangled cars will work with the TTC's switches. Mr. Maass also said that modifying European designs to meet North American crash-worthiness standards means, in the words of German light-rail engineers, having to take a lighter European car and *gepanzert* it - literally translated, turn it into a Panzer tank. Many critics, and especially people who live near the tracks, have complained over the years about the weight of the streetcars, at almost 23 tonnes, and the strain - and resulting noise - they produce on the rails. The new ones may actually be heavier, although engineers say the weight will be better distributed.

Once these problems are solved, and the new streetcars begin to arrive, the TTC will face an even bigger challenger, warns Steve Munro, a long-time transit activist who helped to persuade the TTC to reverse its plans to scrap the streetcar system in the 1970s.

The TTC is not replacing all 248 of its streetcars one-to-one, but instead buying just 204 at first, because the new cars are bigger and carry more

passengers. Mr. Munro says this means riders currently frustrated at how infrequent streetcar service is should prepare themselves: "My concern is they are going to end up with this lovely new fleet of cars and offer even worse service than they do today."

Pimp my streetcar

Toronto is shopping for European-style low-floor light-rail vehicles. The TTC says the new fleet will be a quantum leap from the current fleet.

MORE PASSENGERS

At about 30 metres long, with three to five articulated sections and three motorized trucks, the new streetcar will carry, when stuffed to "crush load" capacity, 260 to 270 people. That is more than double the crush load of the current regular-sized streetcars (132) and substantially more than their longer, articulated cousins (205).

BETTER BRAKES

Using new alternating-current motors and state-of-the-art controls, more braking energy will be recovered than on the current cars and converted back into electricity to be fed back into the overhead grid, similar to hybrid automobiles. Sophisticated "spin-slide control" - just like traction control and anti-lock brakes in your car - will help the vehicles stop.

COOL RIDE

Toronto's first electric streetcars in the 1890s had only a coal-fired heater. When the current vehicles rolled into service in 1979, the mediocrity of their air-conditioning system was compounded by windows that didn't open, and had to be modified. The new models will spoil riders with both heating and air conditioning.

ON-BOARD GADGETS

Digital display screens will show the next stop, and automated "smart card" fare readers will allow riders to board at any door. The driver will have computerized controls for propulsion, braking and communications.

A global-positioning satellite system will monitor speeds in work zones. Exterior lights will use light-emitting diodes.

LOW FLOOR

Instead of three steep steps, the TTC is calling for car designs with a maximum floor height at the doors of 35 centimetres, although some models have even lower entry heights. A special ramp will be used to help the disabled and those with strollers, as well as create a bridge to the current platforms, which are only 15 centimetres high. Eventually, as the system expands and the old cars are retired, stations and routes with platforms will be altered to match the cars' height.

THE COMPETITION

Several light-rail-vehicle makers have expressed interest in submitting bids for the TTC's contract of up to \$1.25-billion for 204 new streetcars, including Bombardier, Siemens, Vossloh-Kiepe and Skoda.

Is light rail's next stop Virginia Beach?

By DEIRDRE FERNANDES, The Virginian-Pilot
© November 9, 2007

VIRGINIA BEACH

City leaders are looking at Norfolk's progress on light rail and reconsidering their opposition to extending the line to the resort city.

Several Virginia Beach City Council members said they are interested in reopening discussions with residents about bringing The Tide line to Town Center and the Oceanfront. The move is a shift in thinking in a city where light rail has been the third rail of politics since voters defeated a proposal in 1999.

"A lot of things have changed since the referendum," said Councilman John Uhrin, who represents the Oceanfront. "We now have destinations along the route ... We have Town Center and Granby Street. I think it's time to have those discussions again."

Uhrin and Councilman Jim Wood said they want to hold meetings starting early next year to gauge the public's interest in light rail and have asked Hampton Roads Transit officials to provide information and give an update on Norfolk's plan.

"I would say that it's on the table, but in a very preliminary manner," Wood said.

HRT's plan originally called for a \$1 billion light rail line to run from Norfolk to the Oceanfront with a stop at the Norfolk Naval Base. But the plan lacked

support from many Oceanfront business leaders, and voters in November 1999 rejected plans to study light rail by a 12-percentage point margin. A week later, the Virginia Beach City Council pulled out of regional discussions on light rail and has rarely discussed the issue in public.

That left Norfolk officials to pursue the transportation system on their own. In September, Norfolk's \$232.1 million starter line received \$128 million in federal transit money and HRT awarded the first construction contract Thursday. The Norfolk line will end at Newtown Road, on Virginia Beach's border.

Norfolk City Councilman W. Randy Wright, a light rail advocate, said he has been meeting with Beach officials and Town Center business leaders in recent months encouraging them to get on board.

"I think it's to the advantage of both cities to extend the light rail line," Wright said. "You'd be able to connect the two financial hubs of the cities. ... Town Center and downtown Norfolk."

Last weekend, during their annual retreat, Virginia Beach City Council members started talking about light rail again.

"I think Norfolk has done the heavy lifting," Uhrin said. "From my understanding ... The first leg is definitely the most challenging one to get funded and get on the ground. After that, extensions to that node would be easier."

Councilman Louis Jones said he supports holding public meetings about mass transportation but thinks Virginia Beach should hold off committing to light rail until Norfolk's system is a proven financial success.

Jones said he also wants some guarantee from Norfolk that any rail system would connect to the naval base. That would help base workers who commute from Virginia Beach and ensure the city a certain number of riders, Jones said.

Any light rail extension to Virginia Beach is contingent on the purchase of land from Norfolk Southern Corp.

City attorneys and Norfolk Southern officials have been negotiating for a 10-mile stretch of right-of-way for four years and are still millions of dollars apart. Norfolk Southern is asking for about \$40 million, City Attorney Les Lilley said during the retreat.

The state's Department of Taxation assessed Norfolk Southern's land in Virginia Beach at \$6.4 million this year.

Beach officials said they would be pleased with a per-mile deal similar to the one Norfolk has worked out with the railroad company. Norfolk will pay \$5 million for a five-mile segment and extend a discounted parking plan to the company at a city garage. The parking discount is worth \$2.6 million.

Beach council members said acquiring the property is a priority this year, whether they go with light rail or another form of public transportation.

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Council overturns voter-approved light-rail plan

By DEANN SMITH and LYNN HORSLEY

The Kansas City Star

The light-rail plan approved by voters last year is officially dead, at least for now, repealed Thursday in a perhaps unprecedented vote by the Kansas City Council.

Council members said the \$1 billion-plus plan created by light-rail advocate Clay Chastain was unfeasible and too costly and that they have to move ahead with developing their own plan.

"This plan can never be built," said Councilman Ed Ford, who has led the council's latest light-rail efforts. He said the repeal is not undemocratic because the city charter provides checks and balances that allow the council to overturn initiatives that are unworkable.

City officials and records indicate the council has never before overturned a voter-approved initiative.

Voters will get to consider another light-rail plan; when that will occur is to be decided on Nov. 20.

Some council members support a light-rail election in February, while others think next November will give extra planning time and a better chance for victory.

Before the meeting, Chastain, who flew from Virginia to Kansas City on Thursday in an effort to save his plan, emphatically urged Mayor Mark

Funkhouser not to repeal it. After the vote, he vowed there would be a legal challenge.

The council's repeal, which passed 10-3, preempted a citizen-led initiative to overturn the Chastain plan. But the council then voted unanimously to place the petition initiative repeal on the February ballot as a hedge in case Chastain or someone else challenges the council's own repeal. If there is no court challenge within 10 days, that February election won't be necessary.

Thursday was the deadline for the council to get the petition initiative, organized in part by business tycoon James Nutter Sr., on the ballot.

"We got pushed into a corner by the Nutter proposal after we got pushed in another corner by the Chastain proposal," Funkhouser said.

One council member said the decision to repeal a voter-approved plan was "gut-wrenching." The three dissenters were Beth Gottstein, John Sharp and Cathy Jolly.

Gottstein said the council's repeal will "kill momentum" in favor of light rail because voters will be angry at their will being overturned.

While they were divided on the repeal and when to hold the next light-rail election, council members emphasized that light rail in Kansas City is a matter of when, not if.

"Our community is ready for light rail," Councilwoman Jan Marcason said.

Chastain had hoped to persuade council members not to repeal his plan. Instead, he wanted to have revisions made to his plan and presented to voters in February. But he didn't get a chance to address the council.

After the vote to repeal his plan, Chastain said that 73,998 voters supported his plan last November and that the council was thumbing its collective nose at those voters.

"Today the City Council did a bad thing," he said. "They slapped democracy in the face."

Chastain's plan would have been funded starting in 2009 by a 3/8-cent sales tax that currently funds the local bus operations through 2009. Kansas City Area Transportation Authority officials contend that losing the funds would devastate their operations, and council members want to have an election next year to renew the tax for buses.

The council's decision capped months of activity and negotiations since voters approved Chastain's 27-mile light-rail line from Swope Park to Kansas City International Airport.

Councilwoman Deb Hermann said it had been a mistake for her and her colleagues on the previous council not to take Chastain's ballot initiative seriously last year. City leaders were astounded when it passed, and their dismay only mounted as various experts declared it unfeasible. But the passage of Chastain's plan did force city leaders to develop a strategy regarding light rail in Kansas City. Some say that is the silver lining.

On Thursday, the council unanimously passed a resolution expressing its commitment to placing a plan for light rail before the voters "no later than Nov. 4, 2008."

Much of the spirited two-hour debate involved the timing of when to go back to voters.

Council members Marcason, Cindy Circo, Gottstein and Jolly contend the council has an obligation to put an alternative plan on the February ballot. They support a combination light-rail plan and bus renewal tax offered this week by a citizens' task force.

This summer, the council and the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority signed off on a task force that would develop its own transportation plan. The task force earlier this week unveiled a 12-mile "starter line" route from the Country Club Plaza to Vivion Road with an east branch.

That proposal would cost roughly \$500 million and operate with modern streetcars in city streets because contemporary streetcars are lighter and less costly than traditional light rail. The task force recommended asking voters to approve a 3/8-cent sales tax to fund the plan.

Some task force members have urged council members to seize the momentum and show voters their support of light rail by putting the plan on the February ballot. Cynthia Taylor-McCoy, a co-chairwoman of the task force, said not holding the election in February will cause voters to believe "it will never get done."

The deadline to put an alternative plan on the February ballot is Nov. 27. The last council meeting scheduled for the month is Nov. 20, but it could schedule special meetings on Nov. 26 and 27 if needed.

That still wouldn't be enough time to develop the best possible plan to take to voters, argued Funkhouser and council members John Sharp and Russ Johnson.

The city's voters will support light rail unless the council rushes into a plan, Johnson said. He also fears that the presidential primaries on the February ballot could draw out partisan voters with "extreme" views who would reject the light-rail plan and its funding.

Sharp said the plan put to the voters must represent a consensus of community thought.

"I don't think we are anywhere near that," he said.

Funkhouser wants the next year to develop support for a regional transportation plan and put an initiative on the ballot November 2008 that would cover multiple jurisdictions in western Missouri and possibly eastern Kansas. Others also believe the city has a responsibility to seek federal funds for light rail, but critics say that will only create delays.

The mayor fears a February election will have disastrous results.

"I don't think this starter line is our best shot," he said. "In February, I think it will lose resoundingly."

UMKC students make own light rail plan

BY: Kurt Kloeblen, Staff Writer

Wednesday, November 21, 2007 10:10 AM CST



A CROSS-SECTION of the UMKC students' light rail streetscape shows the street cars on the outside.

With the recent call for a light rail system in Kansas City, it is only appropriate that students take a scholarly look at the situation.

The Urban Planning and Design studio class at the University of Missouri-Kansas City has started a project looking at a potential plan that would travel up Main Street from the Country Club Plaza to downtown.

Students have spent most of their time focusing on

the area from 31st Street to Mill Creek Park, near 43rd Street.

The class selected a light rail design with street cars running outside of traffic lanes, making it easier for people to board from the sidewalks.

The route would have several stops from 31st Street to the park, where it would eventually meet with Main Street by the JC Nichols Fountain.

Students' final selections came after strategically studying the Main Street corridor.

"A huge part of planning is knowing what is actually there," senior Andrew Shearer said. "We went out and went down every street and made inventories of buildings and their condition. That was one of the key parts of what we did."

The class also researched ways in which other cities with light rail systems decided to build.

"We looked at a number of precedents, especially Portland, Oregon," senior Chad Orel said. "We also took a look at Dallas."

The students their proposal is similar to Portland's light rail design, with street cars on the outside of traffic.

"These are attractive because it increases the pedestrian access," Shearer said. "There is a buffer between fast moving traffic and the sidewalk. This requires a lot of infrastructure improvement. You have to build new curbs, redo the sidewalks, build lamps, and get new street treatment. Real estate investors really like it when there is a lot of infrastructure improvements and a lot of money being put into the site. That means property values go up, because there is further permanence."

The class also is looking at future planning for Main Street, assuming that light rail is inevitability. Students said light rail may bring good things for the local economy.

"Part of the planning of this plan is we are under the assumption that there will be significant economic impact," Shearer said.

"Everywhere we looked where light rail came, the development comes," Orel said. "Denver was a ghost town, then light rail came and it has been way better for the businesses around it."

A price tag for the design is not part of their project, but the students realize it would be a high figure.

Queen opens new £800m St Pancras

The Queen has opened a transformed St Pancras station and new Channel Tunnel rail terminal for Eurostar.

Her Majesty said the £800m St Pancras International was "magnificent", and hoped people would consider it as not just a station but as "a destination".

Developers have called it the jewel in the crown of a £5.8bn project to bring high speed rail to the UK.

St Pancras will house high-speed services to Kent, Midland Mainline, Thameslink and six Tube lines.

Accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, the Queen offered her "warmest congratulations" to all those involved in the renovation.

She told guests the high speed rail service, known as High Speed 1, would make a "real difference" to people's lives and bring the UK closer to Europe.

The Queen said: "The remarkable re-birth of this great and gleaming station means that people across the whole of Britain, not just the South East, are suddenly quite a bit closer to Europe.

"And as we look forward to the London Olympics in 2012, it is good to know that a journey from here to the new High Speed 1 station at Stratford will take spectators a mere seven minutes.

"It gives me great pleasure to officially launch High Speed 1, Britain's first high speed railway and to re-open this magnificent station, St Pancras International."

The evening ceremony was completed by actor Timothy West playing St Pancras' designer William Barlow.

The event saw two Eurostar trains and a Hitachi Bullet Train, which will shuttle spectators to and from the 2012 Olympic Park, arriving at St Pancras.

A suspended giant screen featured appearances from F1 driver David Coulthard, actress Kristin Scott Thomas and other personalities.

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, mezzo-soprano Katherine Jenkins and pop singer Lemar provided musical entertainment.

The 68-mile high speed railway line runs from St Pancras to the Channel Tunnel opening at Folkestone in Kent.

Work on the station began in 2001 to enable it to accommodate domestic rail services and Eurostar trains to and from France and Belgium.

The front of the station, Sir George Gilbert Scott's neo-Gothic building, will open as a five-star hotel in 2009.

The new route will cut journey times to Paris by 20 minutes to two hours and 15 minutes, and to Brussels by 25 minutes to one hour and 51 minutes.

FirstGroup set for Footsie

By John Phelps

Laidlaw deal secures profitability of burgeoning UK transport business

FIRSTGROUP, THE Aberdeen-based travel empire, is poised to become the latest Scottish company to join the business world's most exclusive club.

Chief executive Moir Lockhead will this week begin the countdown to membership of the Financial Times Stock Exchange list of the UK's 100 biggest firms when he is due to deliver a robust trading update.

His presentation on Wednesday will stress the benefits of its acquisition of the US Laidlaw operation, which is expected to underpin his claim for promotion to the FTSE 100.

"It looks a racing certainty that FirstGroup will join fellow Scottish companies Royal Bank of Scotland, HBOS, Standard Life and Scottish & Newcastle in the Footsie at the next membership review in December," said one insider.

"The group is now the 87th largest in terms of stock-market value after its recent share-price run and only an unexpected disaster in the next few weeks can spoil the celebrations."

FirstGroup's likely promotion follows a near 40% jump in its share price in the past two months, taking its valuation towards the £3.5 billion mark.

Its chief executive, who started work as a 15-year-old trainee fitter, founded the group back in 1989 when he joined fellow managers in mortgaging their

homes to mount a £4.5 million buy out for the old Grampian Regional Transport group of bus companies.

Its aggressive acquisition policy since then has helped it create the UK's biggest transport conglomerate, running a fleet of some 9000 buses and taking in the ScotRail, GreatWestern, Capital Connect and TransPennine rail services.

Analysts say that these existing businesses are all doing well despite soaring fuel prices and expect directors should be able to lift half-yearly profits by around 10% on the £60m achieved last time.

They point out that the group hedged much of its diesel requirements when oil was trading at less than \$65 (£31) a barrel while trains are benefiting from a 6% surge in passenger numbers and buses should gain from the extension of pensioner concessions from Scotland and Wales to England earlier this year.

But it is the £1.65bn acquisition of the American Laidlaw which has seen the stockbrokers scramble to push out fresh buy notes since the deal was completed at the start of this month.

Analyst Dominic Eldridge at UBS believes the deal could help push profits from an underlying £140m to around £200m for the current year and around £324m in the year to March 2009. Others say the group could make as much as £250m this year. Much, though, depends on FirstGroup's abilities to cut its debt mountain, which has risen to around £2.3bn.

Followers hope that directors will announce an early sale of Laidlaw's Greyhound coach division to concentrate on the core school-buses side and believe that arch-rivals at Stagecoach have already put in an offer short of an anticipated £500m valuation. Another £250m or so could come from the sale of surplus properties and releases from the group's insurance fund.

There is also a widespread expectation that directors will increase their earlier forecasts of \$70m (£34m) cost savings from synergies to above the \$100m (£48m) mark and will confirm that Laidlaw has retained a larger-than-expected share of school contracts.

That acquisition means that 50% of FirstGroup's future income will come from the US and will be quoted in terms of the depreciating dollar. But the

directors are expected to stress that net earnings will be broadly currency neutral because of their US borrowings while fuel requirements and other costs are also linked to the dollar. They may also point to the Laidlaw deal helping to ease forecasts of profitability, as the school-bus income comes from contracts for three to five years ahead.

"The acquisition of Laidlaw increases FirstGroup's contractual revenue stream, as opposed to farebox revenue, from 27% to 38%, even including Greyhound," the UBS analyst said. "Excluding Greyhound, the share of contracted revenues rises to 42%."

Diesel trains OK'd on north corridors

RTD board backs fuel efficiency, noise amendment

By Tillie Fong, Rocky Mountain News
October 17, 2007

The use of diesel commuter trains on the Northwest and North Metro corridors of FasTracks was approved unanimously Tuesday by the Regional Transportation District board.

"I strongly support the commuter rail for the Northwest corridor," said board member John Tayer.

"The technology decision should not distract our attention from achieving that goal."

However, the approval came only after Tayer proposed the "Responsible Rail Amendment" to the measures dealing with the two commuter rail lines, which the other board members endorsed.

The amendment has two provisions:

- One would require RTD to buy commuter rail vehicles that rank high in environmental features, such as fuel efficiency and low emissions.

The vehicles should also have the flexibility to accommodate future advancements, such as hybrid or clean-fuel systems.

- The other part of the amendment would require that RTD work with railroads and local communities to address the noise concerns of residents along the two FasTracks corridors, including finding all possible funding sources to cover infrastructure expenses.

"We need to reach out to the individual residents and take all the input we can," Tayer said.

Earlier, before the board took up the two measures, a number of residents spoke out both for and against the use of diesel trains on the FasTracks corridors.

Those who spoke in favor of diesel talked about the dependability of trains that are self-propelled, and the lack of unsightly overhead electrical wires. Debra Baskett, director of transportation for the city of Broomfield, said, "We can't tell you hurry up soon enough."

But some who favored electrical systems voiced concerns about noise and pollution from diesel trains.

"If the objective of FasTracks is to minimize the impact to the community, using diesel does not meet that objective," said Judy Montero, a Denver city councilwoman.

Next gen buses will parade down Nicollet Mall today

Metro Transit will roll out its new fleet of hybrid-electric and diesel-powered buses with a procession down Nicollet Mall at noon today.

By Tim Harlow, Star Tribune

Last update: November 15, 2007 – 12:31 PM

Metro Transit will roll out its new fleet of hybrid-electric and diesel-powered buses with a procession down Nicollet Mall at noon today.

The 19 buses wrapped in green as part of Metro Transit's "Go Green" campaign will be put into service on Monday, and are the first of 150 hybrid-electric buses the company will buy over the next four years, said spokesman Bob Gibbons.

Metro Transit has operated three hybrid-electric buses since 2002, but the arrival of the new buses is part of the company's plan to change out older buses for those that are more energy efficient and environmentally friendly, Gibbons said.

In addition, the hybrid buses will allow the bus company to comply with the new Access Minneapolis plan, which starting in 2009 will allow only buses running on alternative-fuel to travel on Nicollet Mall.



Buying hybrid buses isn't cheap. Each costs \$556,500 compared with \$356,500 for the standard city bus. But Gibbons said 80 percent of the cost is covered by federal dollars and that the environment will be healthier since the new buses reduce emissions by 90 percent and get 22 percent better gas mileage.

And another benefit: "It will be quieter and shoppers, diners and others on Nicollet Mall will be able to breathe easier," Gibbons said.

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As a transit corridor, lots of options for Robert Street

Buses, light rail and streetcars are on the table during a round of workshops that seek input for the northern Dakota County corridor.

By Kevin Duchscher, Star Tribune

Last update: November 22, 2007 – 7:53 PM

What's your vehicle of choice for moving people between downtown St. Paul and Rosemount? Nonstop buses? Buses with limited stops? Light rail? How about streetcars?

All those options, along with various route configurations, will be on display next week when Dakota County begins a series of workshops aimed at telling the public about the Robert Street Corridor and getting their reactions to seven transit alternatives.

As a potential transitway, the Robert Street Corridor has barely made the radar. Yet population in the area is expected to grow by 30 percent in the next several years, and more jobs are also on the way, said Dan Krom, Dakota County's transit manager.

That is why officials are planning a feasibility study for the corridor, to be finished next spring.

That study would identify the issues and outline the next steps, even though tangible results are still 10 to 15 years away, Krom said.

The Robert Street area -- which includes portions of downtown St. Paul, West St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights and Rosemount -- is unique in the Twin Cities because it hasn't yet been studied for a transitway, said consultant Rick Nau.

"We're trying to identify whether there should be a transitway there, at least in the long-term plan," said Nau, who works in the Minneapolis office of URS Corp., a national planning firm. "It's important to identify the opportunities that exist now, so that the communities along the line can take advantage of them."

At three workshops held in September, officials learned that the public wanted more east-west connections in the corridor, with links to Eagan and the planned Cedar Avenue Corridor; that they preferred light rail to other transit modes, and that they want transit that covers more ground and operates more often.

Next week, the focus will be on different routes and kinds of service. Four alternatives involve light rail, two of them streetcars, and one just buses. Alignments include routes on Robert Street and Hwys. 52 and 55.

Nau mentioned another unique feature of the Robert Street Corridor: its proximity to downtown St. Paul, where the planned Union Depot hub would serve as the terminal. Perhaps nowhere else in the metro area is rural acreage so close to one of the two downtowns, he said.

"There's a lot of development potential that exists in this corridor," he said.

Although people expressed a preference for light rail in September, the streetcar option may be a better fit for the corridor, Krom said.

Both systems run on electricity, but modern streetcars run in the same lanes as cars. It's not as fast as light rail, but infrastructure costs less, the stations are simpler and relocating utilities isn't as complicated, he said.

Streetcars also would feed what Krom called "the rail bias" -- the natural gravitation of commuters toward trains, even with the best bus service. Some parts of Robert Street still have old rails from the

last streetcar system, which yielded to buses in the 1950s.

Dakota County officials are preparing a \$6 million bonding request for the legislative session, partly to pay for more analysis of corridor plans and partly to determine what can be done to improve service now.

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Streetcar group picks board, seeks momentum

By GIL SMART, Associate editor
Sunday News

Published: Nov 18, 2007 12:08 AM EST

LANCASTER, Pa - As Lancaster's fledgling streetcar initiative rolls along, a new group had clambered on board.

The Lancaster Streetcar Co., the non-profit group formed to study whether a \$14.1 million, 2.6-mile trolley loop could work in the city, has added several members to its board of directors, some of them representing some of the heaviest hitters in Lancaster.

They include representatives from local government as well as Lancaster General Hospital, the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau, Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology and others.



Two River Rail streetcars stop at the Museum of Arkansas in Little Rock. If streetcars come to Lancaster, they may appear similar to these Birney-type cars.

Membership on the board doesn't mean an endorsement by the individuals' parent organization. But streetcar backers say it does mean that people's interest has been piqued.

There are still several openings on the board. Additionally, members of the board will travel to

Washington, D.C., next year to lobby for federal funding for the project. A trip to Dallas, Texas, where the McKinley Avenue system "appears to be a system similar to what we plan" is in the works as well, said board chairman Tim Peters, chairman emeritus of Warfel Construction Co.

The board's executive committee consists of Peters, Vice Chairwoman Althea Ramsay of Burle Industries; Treasurer Carlos Graupera, executive director of the Spanish American Civic Association; Secretary Jack Howell of the Lancaster Alliance and at-large member Dave Kilmer, executive director of the Red Rose Transit Authority.

Board members include Lancaster Mayor Rick Gray; Tom Matthews, executive director of the Lancaster Parking Authority; Dr. William Griscom, president of Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology; Cindy Jones, owner of CJ Business Services in Millersville; Adam Matern, a resident of Marietta; Russell McNair of the engineering firm Camp Dresser & McKee Inc., Granite Run; Jose Urdaneta, owner of Urdaneta Photography and a member of Lancaster City Council; Joe Puskar, a vice president of customer support services at Lancaster General Hospital; and Christopher Barrett, director of the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"There are four additional [board] slots to be filled," said Howell. "We have some folks in mind, but they don't necessarily need to be involved in the 'grunt' work of writing bylaws." He said "bars, restaurants and theaters have expressed interest," as they might be major beneficiaries of a trolley that stopped at their doors.

LGH's Puskar said in an e-mail that the hospital was asked to consider providing a board member "as a representative of the largest employer in the community, given our largest facility and location of employees is located in the city and along the prospective route."

The idea of "creating a unique transport system" that better connects the city "seems to have promise,"

While the initiative seems to be slowly gathering support among the county's movers and shakers, there's been considerable criticism from those who worry that a streetcar system would be an expensive anachronism, dependent upon public subsidies to survive.

Responded Howell: "I think people view the world of funding as one big pot, a zero-sum game. We won't build a system if it's dependent upon taking money from the general operating funds" of local government.

Other board members say that along with the criticism, they're seeing a lot of enthusiasm. In addition to the board members, "there are many others who have said 'I love the idea, I have been following it in the paper and I would really like to help — how can I?' " Ramsay said. "We have had people offer us their skills and time, such as a Web site designer, an artist, a marketing expert, people in the construction field who work with roadway issues."

But while the streetcar initiative has begun to roll, it will be a long time before tracks can be laid. Funding is going to be the most important piece of the puzzle, though "you can build this whole system for what it costs to build a mile of freeway," said Howell. It's sustaining it that will be the real challenge, one backers hope to meet via entrepreneurial means — selling sponsorships not just for streetcars themselves but for individual stops, for example.

As they have in the past, streetcar backers stress that it's not about nostalgia, it's about economic development, adding an amenity to the city that will serve as both a tourist attraction and provide effective transportation for those who live and work here.

Particularly with gas above \$3 per gallon, Howell noted, now is the time to revitalize public transportation. And a trolley line would also help ease the parking crunch downtown, as some employers could move parking out to the fringes of the city and have employees take the trolleys in.

But for now, the quiet work goes on. "It's got to be grassroots, because we have no money," admitted Howell. "It's not like we can go out and hire an ad agency."

Gil Smart is associate editor of the Sunday News. E-mail him at gsmart@lnpnews.com, or phone 291-8817.

PATCO to upgrades ticket sales at stations

Friday, November 16, 2007
By Jonathan Vit
jvit@sjnewsco.com

By the last week of November, PATCO will begin retrofitting 13 stations between Camden County and Center City Philadelphia with new Freedom Card fare terminals, replacing the rail line's nickel-and-dime magnetic system.

The new fare system, which features a reloadable tap-and-go plastic card or a paper ticket, will be completely installed by late February once crews remove the antiquated turnstiles and magnetic ticket machines that currently service PATCO stations.

"This will eliminate the need of coins," said Danelle Hunter, spokeswoman for PATCO and the Delaware River Port Authority.

To date, PATCO has approved \$13 million in funds for the development, installation and advertisement of the new fare system.

Thursday evening, Hunter was promoting both the Freedom Card fare system and the newly implemented transit ambassadors program at the Collingswood station, handing out soft pretzels and information about changes along the 14.2-mile rail line.

"It is great because a lot of people are excited about the transit ambassadors program, but they are also so excited about the Freedom Cards," said Hunter. "Our goal is to really enhance the PATCO customer experience when they use the transit line."

PATCO personnel will be stationed at train terminals through the region come February, handing out the Freedom Card and explaining how it works.

The card utilizes EZ-Pass technology, allowing riders to tap the plastic card at new double-door turnstiles and board the train. The card can be prepaid at Freedom Card terminals or attached to a credit card for easy payment.

The system, the first of its kind in the region, has PATCO officials hoping it becomes an industry standard, allowing riders to board a PATCO train in Cherry Hill and transfer all the way to Manhattan with a single card.

"The system ... was designed to be a regional system," said Hunter. "So we designed it so it could be used by other agencies in the future."

Until then, commuters will be able to use the card to board PATCO trains and pay at station parking lots, but SEPTA has discussed using similar tap-and-go technology on their subway system and regional rails.

"This is the beginning of great things for transit," predicted Hunter.

SEPTA to offer 'fare credit' to ease onboard ticket buy

By Paul Nussbaum

Inquirer Staff Writer

SEPTA will begin its "fare credit" program on Monday for rail passengers who pay an onboard ticket surcharge, but the agency's general manager yesterday rejected a state legislator's request to do away with the surcharge altogether.

Rep. Josh Shapiro (D., Montgomery) responded that he would take his battle to get rid of the surcharges to SEPTA board members and may introduce legislation to outlaw the charges.

In August, SEPTA began a new policy to require passengers to pay a higher onboard fare, even if the stations where they board have no ticket agents. Of SEPTA's 153 rail stations, 75 have no ticket sales, and very few booths are open afternoons and weekends. And SEPTA took its last ticket vending machines out of service in January, saying they wouldn't accept newly designed U.S. currency.

Responding to riders' complaints, SEPTA backed off a bit last month, saying it would start a "fare credit" program in which SEPTA conductors will give passengers who pay the onboard surcharge a credit that can be redeemed by buying a return-trip ticket from an agent the same day.

That's as far as SEPTA will go, general manager Faye Moore said yesterday.

"The tariff is the tariff. We're not going to drop it," Moore said. She said SEPTA would have to hold a new round of public hearings on proposed tariff revisions to get rid of the surcharges.

In a letter to Shapiro, she said "on-board cash transactions are very expensive to process and time-consuming for a conductor charged with multiple responsibilities related to safe train operations. This policy is currently in practice in other cities' commuter rail operations for the same reasons."

Shapiro said yesterday, "I just voted for a new law providing half a billion dollars for SEPTA with the goal to implement efficiencies and improvements . . . and the first thing they do is to increase burdens on riders."

Shapiro said he would talk to board members and would consider "legislative remedies" to get rid of the surcharge.

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S.F. to test double-decker bus

Rachel Gordon, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, November 15, 2007

City officials revealed today that they are looking at adding double-decker buses to San Francisco's public transit fleet, and will press one into service later this month for a short-term experiment.

The borrowed double-decker bus will travel along some of the city's busiest transit corridors, including Geary and Mission streets, for example, to see how they perform and whether the riding public is keen on the idea.

At 14-feet tall, city officials say there should be no problem of the buses interfering with overhead utility lines. They also can fit through the Stockton Street tunnel as long as drivers stay in the middle lanes.

Double-decker buses, an iconic transportation option in London, "have a lot of advantages," Muni chief Nathaniel Ford told The Chronicle. Among them: They can hold a lot of people without taking up too much room on the congested streets and will be easier to maneuver through traffic and around corners than the long articulated buses.

They also will be easier to store in the city's already jam-packed maintenance yards because they take up less floor space.

The test vehicle will be able to seat 80, with additional standing room.

Disabled rights activists in the city already have raised concern that the stairs would prevent some riders with mobility impairments from accessing the top deck, which would amount to inequitable service. Ford said Muni is committed to addressing the concern in some fashion.

The bus, manufactured by the British firm Alexander Dennis Ltd., will make its test run in San

Francisco sometime after Thanksgiving before it is delivered to Las Vegas.

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada began operating its double-decker "Deuce" bus service on the Las Vegas strip two years ago and is one of two public transit agencies in the United States to use the two-tiered buses. The system serving Snohomish County and Seattle in Washington began a double-decker bus pilot project over the summer.

San Francisco's test is expected to last about three weeks.

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Gray Line shuts down Vancouver bus tour operations

By Bruce Constantineau, Vancouver Sun
Published: Thursday, November 15, 2007

VANCOUVER - Historic B.C. tour bus operator Gray Line West has shut its Vancouver operations, putting 79 employees out of work.

Owner Armstrong Group Ltd. - which also operates the popular Rocky Mountaineer tourist train - cited intense competition in the Vancouver market as one of the reasons for the shutdown.

"It wasn't just competition from other tour bus operations - like Vancouver Trolley Company and Big Bus," Armstrong Group spokesman Ian Robertson said in an interview. "There are just so many other options available for tourists in the city, like attractions and other activities."

Armstrong Group bought Gray Line West from Greyhound Canada Transportation Corp. in May 2005. Gray Line operations in Victoria and Banff, which employ about 150 people, are not affected by the Vancouver closure.

Gray Line offered sightseeing and charter services throughout Metro Vancouver - including Vancouver-to-Victoria trips, city sightseeing tours, and service to Whistler.

Gray Line was considered an icon in the Vancouver tourism industry, operating as a top performer for decades. CKNW radio personality Bill Hughes broadcast his popular daily Roving Mike show from Gray Line buses, interviewing tourists from all over the world.

Teamsters Local 31 representative Dave Cooper, whose union represents the laid-off workers, called the closure "sad and disappointing."

"There's a lot of history there, and we have guys with up to 38 years of service," he said. "Ask anybody in the tourism industry and Gray Line was looked upon as the flagship."

Cooper noted competition in the Vancouver sightseeing business has grown significantly in the past 20 years, with the number of operators increasing from about 10 to more than 80.

"Name recognition will go so far, but it has become a very, very competitive market," he said.

Workers affected by the closure include drivers, cleaners, mechanics, call centre employees and sales staff.

Robertson said it would have taken millions of dollars to replace the aging Vancouver fleet of 33 motor coaches, something that wouldn't have made business sense.

"We have worked hard at this for almost three years," he said. "It just got to the point where we did not see where this operation would be financially viable, so we made the difficult decision to close it down."

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Frost knocks out high-tech trolley buses in Vancouver

4 extra buses run along 300 kilometres of line to keep them warm overnight

Last Updated: Thursday, November 22, 2007 | 10:20 PM ET

CBC News

Hundreds of commuters in Vancouver shared taxis, walked or even thumbed rides Thursday morning after the city's new trolley buses were out of service because overhead lines were coated with frost.

The Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority said drivers were forced to park their buses all over the city as moist air and cold temperatures overnight left the trolley lines frozen.

Although equipped with ice cutters like the old buses, the new trolleys are so technologically advanced and sensitive that the thin coat of ice on

the overhead lines tricked the onboard computers into thinking the lines were dead, said TransLink spokesman Drew Snider.

"They assume that the poles have lost contact with the wires and they retract the poles — this is designed to keep the poles from failing above and bringing down trolley overheads," he said.

The new bus fleet has 188 high-tech trolleys, which rolled out in the summer of 2006, and almost all of them were grounded when the German-made system couldn't detect electricity, TransLink said.

Snider said the new trolleys were back in operation and engineers were working on fixing the problem so commuters don't encounter the same problem Friday morning.

TransLink spent most of Thursday retrieving dead trolleys and formulating a solution — keeping the wires warm through the night by running four extra buses along 300 kilometres of line and watch the weather.

"We're certain it's going to work," said Stan Sierpina, a spokesman for TransLink's customer service. "We will make sure it works ... We'll have the ice cutters or the frost removers out there."

Questions are being raised on Thursday if there was enough testing done on these buses in West Coast conditions before they were purchased.

This is the third major issues with the fleet. There were problems with power steering in January of this year and trouble with the bike racks.

"It's very, very highly technical equipment and it's going to take some years before we finally get it all finalized," said Bus Mechanics Union spokesman Joe Elworthy.

Schumer, Clinton secure 225Gs for Staten Island Light Rail

by Staten Island Advance

Thursday November 15, 2007, 2:47 PM

Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton announced today that they have secured \$225,000 dedicated for the study and construction of a Staten Island light rail.

The funds will come as a part of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Bill, pending approval by the Senate, and will be

earmarked for a light rail on the West and North shores of Staten Island.

"Any Staten Islander knows that traffic congestion is the first, second and third problem confronting growth and quality of life in the borough, and these light rails are a visionary and effective means to addressing that problem," Schumer said in a release.

"A light rail system will be a major step towards easing the chronic congestion that frustrates Staten Island's commuters, slows productivity and pollutes our air," Clinton said. "I look forward to the President signing this bill into law."

The proposed West Shore Light Rail is expected to transport about 27,000 people per day by 2020, and will run from the Island's south shore, up the West Shore Expressway corridor and across the Bayonne Bridge to the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail. In August, the Island got its first connection to the New Jersey light rail by way of a bus service that travels along Richmond Avenue from Hylan Boulevard, stopping at the Eltingville Transit Center and then to Richmond Avenue, Walker Street and Morningstar Road, before crossing over the Bayonne Bridge and stopping at the 34th Street Hudson-Bergen Light Rail station.

According to the two senators, the North Shore Light Rail project will transport anywhere from 11,000 to 15,000 riders per day along a five-mile route that will make six stops.

"This investment puts us on the path to a smarter and cleaner transportation system," Clinton said.

Nationwide's newest Prevost proves itself on busman's holiday



Sainte-Claire, Quebec-November 8th, 2007—

Patrick Marks, President and CEO of Nationwide Travelers, was out of the office recently for what you might call a "busman's holiday." To be precise, he was driving a brand new H3-41 from Prevost's Quebec factory to Nationwide's headquarters in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Once back home, Marks was pleased to report that Nationwide's newest addition had acquitted itself admirably on its maiden voyage, outperforming the company's 13 older Prevost models in terms of fuel economy.

Fuel economy and environmental concerns were important factors in Marks's decision to purchase the new model. Nationwide takes travelers throughout the U.S. and Canada on motorcoach charters and tours, with the latter comprising 60% of its business. The H3-41's ZF-AS Tronic 12-speed automatic transmission and longer legroom also entered into consideration, Marks adds, since "on extended tours that can run as long as 16 days, comfort is important."

Nationwide, founded in 1974, bought its first Prevost in 1984, initially attracted by the wide body coach design and excellent visibility. As the miles and years have added up, the company has been "proudly Prevost."

They appreciate how the company stands behind its products with exemplary service and goodwill. "Prevost really supports their vehicles," Patrick Marks says, "and if there's an issue, they're quick to resolve it." He also values his association with Regional sales manager Noel Patterson, who has served Nationwide since the 1990s. Marks praises Patterson's product and industry knowledge as well as his easy-to-talk-to style.

With outstanding products and topnotch service quality, it's easy to see why Patrick Marks—and hundreds of motorcoach operators like him—enjoy their busman's holidays.

Prevost is a leading North American manufacturer of premium intercity touring coaches and the undisputed world leader in the production of bus shells for high-end motorhome and specialty conversion. Prevost Car Inc. is owned by Volvo Bus Corporation, which gives it access to the financial strength, product development capabilities, and quality manufacturing technology of the world's second largest motorcoach and transit bus manufacturing group. Volvo Bus Corporation is part of the Volvo Group, the world's largest

manufacturer of heavy-duty diesel engines. Prevost has its main manufacturing facilities in Sainte-Claire, Quebec, Canada. Prevost also has six Parts and Service Centers located strategically in Canada and the United States.
www.prevostcar.com

NJ Transit to rebuild, not replace old locomotives

Posted by the Asbury Park Press on 11/20/07

BY LARRY HIGGS

STAFF WRITER

NEWARK — Electric locomotives almost two decades old have been the backbone of electric rail lines such as the Northeast Corridor, North Jersey Coast, and Morris and Essex lines and have run up 1 million to 1.5 million miles. Now NJ Transit officials have decided it's time to rebuild them. The board of trustees Monday hired Interfleet Technology of Philadelphia for \$2 million to inspect them and recommend technical upgrades. The overhaul is estimated at \$48 million. NJ Transit Executive Director Richard Sarles said it is cheaper to keep the locomotives than to buy new ones.

"It's a judgment call," Sarles said after the meeting. "We know the condition of the locomotives, and it makes more sense to rebuild them."

During the summer, NJ Transit opted out of rebuilding a fleet of 17-year-old Comet III rail cars and elected to spend \$67 million to acquire 45 more multilevel rail cars. Officials said replacing 49 older cars, which would have cost \$1 million each to rebuild, was a more cost-effective solution. The locomotive rebuilding is one to 1 1/2 years away, Sarles said.

Rail advocates at the meeting had a suggestion for the agency: Give the locomotives more power to get trains up to speed more quickly.

"If it is technically feasible, improve the pickup," said David Peter Alan, chairman of the Lackawanna Commuter Coalition. "More pickup means less dwell time in stations. Trains would reach speed more quickly and ease congestion."

Board member Kenneth E. Pringle, who is also the mayor of Belmar, agreed that upgrading the locomotives is "a true concern."

The board also heard concerns from James T. Reilly of Middletown about the ongoing ridership projection studies for the proposed Monmouth-Ocean- Middlesex rail line.

"This study fails to answer the question of how much traffic (the MOM line) will get off Route 9," Reilly said. "You don't need further study to reach a decision."

NJ Transit has been working with representatives of the three counties to determine how much additional ridership would be generated if MOM trains use the proposed second Hudson River tunnel to New York instead of terminating in Newark.

"We've been working with the counties to re-evaluate (rider) demand," Sarles said.

That information should be released to counties in the next "few weeks," Sarles said.

The findings would affect factors such as design of the proposed rail line, parking requirements, station size and equipment needed for trains, Sarles said. That information would be used in the larger study to write the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the MOM line, he said.

Still to be decided is which of three proposed MOM routes will be selected by NJ Transit: a route that begins in the Lakewood area and runs north to connect to either the North Jersey Coast line in Red Bank or Matawan, or to the Northeast Corridor line in the Monmouth Junction section of South Brunswick. A route will not be selected until after the DEIS is done.

NJ Transit's \$600 million train station and not a single parking spot

Posted by Pete McDonough November 19, 2007 2:05PM

All politics are local, and for a Mercer County legislator, there is nothing more local than a parking spot at a train station.



Assemblyman Reed Gusciora recently got a \$60 ticket for parking without a permit at the New Jersey Transit train station in West Windsor. He paid the ticket, but he's hopping mad and is introducing legislation that would allow non-permit holders to park in permit-only areas if no other spaces are available.

You can't blame him. Parking at NJ Transit train stations is virtually impossible. Getting a permit at one of Transit's commuter lots is tougher than getting season tickets for the NY Giants or getting into an exclusive country club.

You'd think NJ Transit would put a priority on expanding parking at its rail facilities, but that's apparently not the case.

In fact, the guys whose mission it is to make the trains run on time spent more than \$600 million to construct the Frank R. Lautenberg Rail Station at Secaucus and built it without a single public parking spot.

In September of 2004, the New York Times reported that the \$600 million mass transit station handled less than 6,000 passengers a day - about half of what Newark Penn Station and a third of what the station in Hoboken handle each day.

In the view of the transportation planners who designed the station, it made sense to spend more than a half-billion dollars so that commuters could

switch from one train to another, but apparently made no sense to give people a place to park so they could switch from their cars to the train, ease congestion and curb air pollution.

I found out about the absence of parking while driving to New York City. Upon hearing that traffic was backed up at the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels, I pulled off the Turnpike at exit 15X to grab the next train, save a lot of time and a little bit of money.

I knew about the Frank R. Lautenberg Rail Station because of its big sign. You can't miss it from the Turnpike. It's the biggest and most expensive building every built on that stretch of the toll road.

I went through the EZ Pass lane got off the highway and was all set to park, only to learn that public parking is unavailable at the station.

Is this any way to run a railroad?

As much as our transportation planners promote grand visions about the development of transit villages, they will never succeed if commuters can't get to them. Mass transit itself simply won't work if riders can't park at the train stations.

Assemblyman Gusciora is absolutely right to take on the cause of beleaguered commuters who can't find a parking spot at NJ Transit's rail stations. Hopefully, the folks at Transit will listen to him and respond by building train stations that include parking lots.

Saint-Eustache, Quebec, November 13, 2007

Nova Bus unveils its Nova LFS Artic articulated bus

Saint-Eustache, Quebec, November 13, 2007 — Nova Bus unveiled the Nova LFS Artic today at the 2007 Trans-Expo bus and transit exhibition in Quebec City. This annual exhibit, held in conjunction with the Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) Fall Conference, attracts over 1,000 decision-makers in the public transportation industry.

This public introduction allowed representatives of the media and industry to meet with company executives and discover the Nova LFS Artic during

a guided tour of the Quebec manufacturer's new articulated bus, in the exhibit booth.

"The Nova LFS Artic is the most recent incarnation of our commitment to our partner clients, who told us of their need for a high-capacity bus. Once again, Nova Bus is proud to offer its partners an integrated product to serve the future of public transportation, with a view to sustainable development," stated Nova Bus President and CEO, Gilles Dion.

Nova LFS Artic: Going to Great Lengths

The Nova LFS Artic articulated vehicle shares its platform with the time-tested Nova LFS, and integrates a number of innovations which focus on safety, reliability and productivity. As with all Nova Bus products, the needs of operators, drivers and passengers have been taken into consideration from the very start in designing the bus.

Adding the Nova LFS Artic on high-traffic routes will enhance Nova Bus clients' productivity and help them better meet the needs of the population they serve. Already, 322 of these vehicles have been ordered by Quebec transit authorities, and the first deliveries, to Montreal's STM and Quebec City's RTC, are scheduled for 2009.



Nova Bus is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Volvo Bus Corporation, the world's second largest motor coach and transit bus manufacturing group. Nova Bus is a leading manufacturer of city, suburban, and shuttle buses in North America, with its Nova LFS and LFS Hybrid Electric Vehicle models. Nova Bus is the first North American heavy-duty bus manufacturer in the urban transportation sector to achieve company-wide ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certifications. The company operates two plants in Canada.

Buses, rail suggested for south county traffic woes

By Meghan Meyer

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, November 20, 2007

FORT LAUDERDALE — Transportation officials' focus shifted from building more roads to adding buses and light rail to U.S. 441 Tuesday as state and local leaders met to discuss alternatives to two proposed connectors between Broward and Palm Beach counties.

The Palm Beach County Commission drew criticism from the state Department of Community Affairs last month after it removed University and Riverside drives from its long-range plans in order to give a troublesome triangular piece of land south of the Hillsboro Canal to Broward County.

The legislature would only allow transferring the 2,000-acre sliver, known as "the Wedge" or "the Golden Triangle," if the county axed the roads, long opposed by residents who feared increased traffic in an area with several schools.

DCA Secretary Thomas Pelham told the commission it must find a way to accommodate the traffic that the two roads would have handled. On Tuesday, Pelham and state Transportation Secretary Stephanie Kopelousos met with county and state officials at District 4 headquarters in Fort Lauderdale to find alternatives.

Among those mentioned by residents and local officials: more access to Florida's Turnpike and extending the Sawgrass Expressway, issues Kopelousos said her department was looking into.

But the alternatives met the same opposition from residents. Officials from both counties suggested instead focusing on providing more public transportation. Rather than add more north-south connector roads, officials should use this as an opportunity to change the way residents think about transportation, Broward County Commissioner Ilene Lieberman said.

"It's an important futuristic issue," she said. "We have to change people's patterns. You can't change that with buses. You can change with light rail, as we've seen in other parts of the country."

More people will start using buses if gasoline prices continue to skyrocket, County Commissioner Burt Aaronson said. Widening and adding high-occupancy vehicle and bus-only lanes to State Road 7/U.S. 441 would move more people more effectively.

"What we're looking at today is the future of Palm Beach County and Broward County," Aaronson said. "Opening University Drive will be nothing but a bottleneck when people start to use it and have to go through five school zones."

Converting an existing lane to transit-only would likely draw the ire of motorists. Buying land to add a new lane could cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

Broward County already plans to widen the road to eight lanes, including two transit lanes, once it finds the money to pay for acquiring right-of-way. The county has also explored the possibility of adding light rail to the corridor.

The details of exactly how and when the buses or light rail would start running remains a problem, DOT District Secretary Jim Wolfe said. His initial reaction, he said, was to have dedicated lanes for transit.

The two counties agreed to hold a joint meeting of both Metropolitan Planning Organizations sometime in December to work out more details.

"The problem is the two counties haven't indicated a common vision for what the future of 441 is," Wolfe said. "Until you have a common vision, we don't know what that looks like. If we are going to promote transit as a solution for a highway that is failing, that needs to be a very high level of transit."

15/08/2007 - ftr in Leeds is live

The **ftr** is now officially up and running in Leeds after First group Chief Executive Moir Lockhead gave the seal of approval to the 21st century vehicle.



Mr Lockhead joined senior figures from Leeds City Council and Metro to officially name one of the state-of-the-art vehicles 'Spirit of Leeds' at a special event on Wednesday May 15th. A formal agreement rubberstamping First's commitment to running a 17-strong fleet of **ftrs** in return for local authority investment on highway infrastructure

improvements was also signed at the event.

The distinctive vehicle is a new mode of public travel that delivers the high quality of a tram with the flexibility of a bus. It has been turning heads in Leeds because of its futuristic look since January of this year when it was first used on the service 4 route between Pudsey and Leeds City Centre – St James' Hospital and Whinmoor.

Encouragingly, since June, when the full **ftr** service went live, the number of passengers using the service 4 route has risen 10% by comparison to the same time period last year.



Moir Lockhead said: "First is delighted to work in partnership with Leeds City Council and Metro to meet this challenge and to work together for the benefit of its millions of customers in the city.

"The **ftr** is an excellent example of a modern vehicle with the wow factor that will encourage more people to leave their cars at home and travel by public transport."

First has made a significant financial investment in the **ftr** project in Leeds. Some £5.4 million has been spent on buying seventeen **ftrs**. Fifty staff have been retrained as pilots to drive the vehicles and forty-seven new jobs have been created as a team of customer service hosts have been employed to assist customers and to collect fares. First is now responsible for running the service on the 21.5km route seven days a week as part of its commercial network in Leeds.

Leeds is the second city in Yorkshire and the UK to benefit from significant financial investment in the **ftr** by First. A fleet of **ftr** vehicles has been operating in York since May 2006. The latest independent customer survey, published in August 2007, showed that 91% of all **ftr** customers rated their most recent journey on the **ftr** in York as good, very good or excellent.

Streetcars desired

Transportation planners turn to the past and start to bring back streetcars to alleviate traffic and lure tourists. But will it work?

Washington Business Journal - by Jonathan O'Connell
Staff Reporter

Forty-five years after increasing auto traffic squeezed the region's streetcars off their tracks, that congestion -- now exponentially worse -- may be fueling their return.

Several new streetcar lines are on track to arrive in the area, planned by municipalities hoping to return their commercial corridors to the pedestrian- and tourist-friendly places they were before the automobile began to dominate the scene.

Urban areas around the country are doing likewise, hoping to ride trolleys toward the dual ends of traffic reduction and tourist promotion.

"What's happened with streetcars is they are both a means of mobility and an economic development assist," said Jim Graebner, who chairs a committee on streetcars for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). Cities everywhere are hoping to leverage the old-made-modern mode of transportation into tourist dollars and traffic reduction, he said. "The streetcar can be the thing that makes it happen."

Locally, the desire for streetcars has centered on two congested corridors in Northern Virginia and two recovering ones in D.C.

The District government is planning streetcar lines along two of its oldest and most blighted commercial corridors, along H Street to Benning Road in Northeast, and from Anacostia to Bolling Air Force Base.

Arlington County is planning a streetcar line for Columbia Pike, one of the most heavily traveled bus corridors in the region.

And Alexandria, hoping to capitalize on a new water-taxi service from National Harbor to King Street, is set to offer a streetcar like free shuttle

service along a fixed 17-block route from the Potomac River banks through Old Town.

While there are recent stories of rejuvenated foot traffic and retail sales around streetcar lines in cities such as Portland, Ore., and Little Rock, Ark., the Washington region has been down this track before: The D.C. streetcar system was the envy of cities around the country during the "trolley fever" that swept the country in the early 1900s. But its last car was taken off the track in 1962, according to Joanie Pinson of the National Capital Trolley Museum in Colesville.

"The trolley was a very clean, nonpolluting form of transportation," Pinson said. Why the idea was allowed to die in the first place, she said, leaves her and other historians to "often shake our heads."

So what will be different half a century later?

Past comes to life

Walk along King Street in Alexandria or Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in Anacostia, and bits of the dark metal tracks that carried passengers a generation ago can still be seen through the pavement.

When streetcars first gained popularity about 130 years ago, the result was a citywide system that by 1960 criss-crossed the District and stretched from Glen Echo in Maryland to the Navy Yard in Southeast D.C., according to maps provided by the trolley museum.

The trolley system then served the same purposes modern supporters still tout -- transit-oriented development and tourism. Pinson said the routes led to streetcar-oriented suburbs, such as Chevy Chase, and frequently linked with ferries (the water taxi of a generation ago) or amusement parks, such as the one in Glen Echo.

Whether the streetcars are coming back is largely a matter of money. When streetcars were first introduced, APTA's Graebner said, they were usually run by private companies. But with modern-day lines costing \$10 million to \$25 million per mile

of track, they are making a comeback only with the help of both large public subsidies and private endorsements, he said.

A hotel built a station for the Little Rock line, for instance, and in Tampa, Fla., the naming rights for a new line were sold to Tampa Electric Co. But even with the combined funding ideas, Graebner said only six of the 35 projects on which he has consulted have been built. "Just because someone thinks it's a good idea doesn't mean it's going to become a reality," he said.

Even so, streetcars are a lot cheaper than heavy rail. Because streetcars operate largely along existing traffic rights-of-way, there are rarely tunnels to dig or bridges to build. Powered almost exclusively via overhead electric lines, they don't produce street-level smog and they run quietly. They are more expensive than buses, of course, but to a tourist there are important differences: no confusing schedules, difficult-to-understand routes or escalators into unknown subway stations. You can't get lost on a trolley. Just keep an eye on the track.

Getting off the bus

In Alexandria, officials are trying to split the difference between the inviting streetcar and the affordable bus. The City Council has set aside about half a million dollars a year for a pilot project along King Street, said Mark Jinks, Alexandria deputy city manager. It won't really be a trolley, but rather a bus with trolleylike design. True, it will run on a straight 17-block line through Old Town, with easily recognizable stops and schedules, but there will be no tracks -- and there will be exhaust. "It's not a municipal bus," Jinks said. "What we've read is that people are reluctant to get on something that looks like a municipal bus."

That project is much further along than the other three. Jinks said the city planned to select a company to build and operate the system by the end of November, with hopes that vehicles will be running in time for the opening of National Harbor and water-taxi service in April. The King Street

service also will be free, run seven days a week and arrive at regular (probably 15 minute) intervals, all important factors for tourists. "The intent is that we want to show the city off to folks from National Harbor," Jinks said.

While Alexandria made a quick, affordable compromise to test the idea, D.C. is planning a large-scale return to streetcars aimed at reaching locals as much as tourists. Its plans begin on two of the city's oldest, most blighted commercial corridors: Anacostia in Southeast and H Street in Northeast. Both areas have Metro stations nearby that the city would like to capitalize on, as well as overlap with the city's Great Streets project.

Although work on the high-voltage electrical structure needed for streetcars already has begun in both areas, the District will test the idea with a \$30 million, 1.3-mile line featuring four stops and three 66-foot streetcars that likely will run in 10-minute intervals. It will originate in the north at the Anacostia Metro station, run down Fifth-Sterling Avenue SE to a stop in the Barry Farm neighborhood, stop again at the Anacostia Naval Station and then continue along a 5,000-foot stretch of South Capitol Street to Bolling Air Force Base. Track construction is expected to begin next spring, according to District Department of Transportation spokesman Erik Linden, with the system to begin operation a year later.

The H Street line, which would connect Union Station to Benning Road NE, is intended to alleviate the heavy bus and car traffic along H Street and help return what was once a popular shopping district to its former grandeur. A much more extensive system -- oddly resembling what the city had in the 1960s -- is being considered for 25 years from now.

Renaissance or gimmick?

But why spend hundreds of millions of dollars to bring streetcars back when the city decided less than a generation ago that they needed to go? Linden cites the technological improvements that have taken place in the past 50 years and the

economic development benefits achieved in cities like Portland, where a new streetcar line attracted \$1.4 billion of development along its 4.7-mile loop.

Those kinds of statistics are on the minds of officials in Arlington and Fairfax counties. They have hopes that a streetcar line would do the same for Columbia Pike. Along with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, county officials are planning a five-mile line from the Skyline area to Metro stations at the Pentagon and Pentagon City, hoping to spur redevelopment along the way, for instance at Baileys Crossroads.

"It's a form of public investment that the development and business community follows, because [streetcars] have a sense of permanence," said Steve Del Giudice, transit bureau chief in Arlington County. Cost estimates for an 11-vehicle system with 14 stops range from \$120 million and \$140 million, Del Giudice said. Although funding is still being worked out, the idea received a boost when the state passed transit dollars for the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority, he said.

Of all the locally planned projects, none is more closely pegged to alleviating congestion for commuters than the Columbia Pike plan. Robin McElhenny, project manager for Metro's Pike Transit Initiative, said Columbia Pike's bus routes are among the heaviest-used in the region, with 14,000 daily riders. "When you have that kind of ridership, we're talking about a substantial demand for transit," Del Giudice said. "People will use it for other than those peak period trips."

Rush to solution

Those peak periods -- rush hour -- are as big a reason as any behind the return of streetcars. When the trolleys were eliminated, it was to make more room for more cars, a faster option that allowed commuters the freedom to come and go to the suburbs as they pleased. Who wanted to be the chump on the rumbling streetcar while shiny cars sped by?

But that freedom has been inexorably limited by traffic, parking and high gas prices -- and made even less appealing by knowledge of the environmental costs. The "infatuation of suburbs and roads," Graebner said, has run its course. "We're going back to an urban lifestyle." Now the question is: Who wants to be the chump in traffic while the streetcar rumbles by?

D.C. streetcar plans for 2030

Through the 1950s, D.C. had a streetcar system that was the envy of cities around the country. But the last car came off the tracks in 1962. Now the District is one of several area cities hoping to bring them back. The planned D.C. lines are:

D.C. trolley line

A citywide plan for streetcars, with nearly 40 miles of routes being considered, is still years away. And at an estimated

\$25 million per mile of track, the project would cost about \$1 billion by the time of its completion in 2030.

H Street line

H Street NE would be the second line built after the Anacostia demonstration project. A big question: Will it go directly to Union Station and Benning Road, or leave passengers to walk over bridges to reach Metro stations at both ends?

Anacostia line

This 1.3-mile section would cost \$30 million and be running by 2009. The four stops stretch from the Anacostia Metro on the north side to Bolling Air Force Base.

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