

Green Pennant Special

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

JULY 2008

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Welcome to another issue of The Green Pennant Special, the official publication of The Omnibus Society of America.

Through this publication we hope to keep our readers informed of events happening in the transit industry in Chicago and other cities in the United States.

Visit the Omnibus Society of America website at "www.osabus.com". At osabus.com we will be posting upcoming fan trips and meetings information, as well as membership information.

Please visit our site when you have a chance and give us your opinions and comments.

• JULY MEETING

There will be no July meeting of the Omnibus Society of America because the first Friday in July is July 4th. See you on August 1.

PACE AND BREMEN TOWNSHIP DEDICATE COMMUNITY VEHICLES

Officials for Bremen Township and Pace teamed up for the dedication of two new buses for the township's Senior Wheels program. The event, at the Bremen Township offices in Markam, also marks some of the first examples in Southwest Cook County of the vehicle type that will be the hallmark of Pace's new Municipal Vehicle Program, which provides moderately-sized, accessible vehicles to units of local government for the development of transportation programs.



Pace Chairman Rick Kwasneski (right) and Bremen Township Supervisor Maggie Crotty (second from right) celebrate the partnership that provided new vehicles for Bremen's Senior Wheels program.

The community vehicles- slightly smaller than Pace's suburban paratransit vehicles- offer passengers more maneuver and service than larger vehicles. Pace Board

Chairman Richard Kwasneski said, "These buses are more spacious than vans, which is a benefit to passengers. They are also less costly to operate than larger vehicles."



The vehicles, built by American Crusader, were purchased using a federal grant, negating the need to use local money for their purchase. They feature an electronic side entrance door with electric step and passenger assist rails for easy entry, and a raised roof and center aisle for improved access to seats. The buses are accessible via a lift at the rear of the vehicle.

The Municipal Vehicle Program gives units of local government the opportunity to work with Pace to develop a transportation program tailored to the needs of the community. Pace will assist with the planning and development of the service and determine the vehicle type that is appropriate- ranging from vans to the American Crusader buses. "Communities are able to design the program in a way that will meet their specific needs- we will work with them to develop the service that is the best fit," said Kwasneski. These vehicles will be used for the Bremen Township Senior Wheels program, which provides service to shopping and other key community destinations.

CTA Details Efforts to Mitigate Rising Fuel Costs.

06/11/08

Higher Energy Prices are Putting Pressure on Operating Budget Study to Provide Short and Long Term Energy Solutions for CTA.

The Chicago Transit Authority's use of measures to combat rising fuel costs and improve fuel efficiency across its bus fleet is already proving to be successful for the agency. Despite an increase in the miles traveled, strategic adjustments have lowered the amount of fuel used and increased the average miles per gallon (mpg) for the bus fleet.

CTA is aggressively seeking ways to manage rising fuel costs and mitigate their impact on the CTA's budget. CTA's Budget Office calculates that every \$0.10 change in the price per gallon of fuel increases expenses by \$2.4 million. With fuel prices at \$4.53 per gallon as of May 26, the CTA could potentially accrue fuel expenses of \$25 million over what was budgeted this year.

In May 2007, the CTA bus fleet averaged 2.76 mpg, accumulated more than 6.17 million miles and used nearly 2.23 million gallons of ultra low sulfur diesel fuel. Despite an increase in mileage of nearly 35,000, for a total of 6.20 million miles in May 2008, the fleet's average miles per gallon improved to 3.27 and fuel consumption decreased by 335,500 gallons to 1.89 million gallons.

"Through simple measures such as relocating where some of our buses begin their routes; redesigning our newer buses to be lighter in weight; and limiting the use of our older, less efficient buses, the CTA saved 335,500 gallons of gas in May 2008 versus May of last year," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "With the rising cost of ultra low sulfur diesel fuel, this equates to approximately \$1.2 million in savings for the CTA in one month. We're eager to see the continued improvement in these areas as more of our aging buses are retired and replaced with more fuel efficient, low emission buses and hybrid buses that will begin arriving late this summer."

"This study will provide us with useful tools of analysis as we continue to aggressively look for ways to manage our costs and improve our performance," said Chicago Transit Board Chairman Carole Brown. "With the growing demand for public transit, this study is important in continuing to offer our customers affordable and reliable service."

On Wednesday, the Chicago Transit Board also approved a \$113,000 contract for a transportation energy study to identify short-term solutions to reduce bus energy costs and long-term strategies to improve fuel efficiency. The study will also include recommendations on new technologies and alternate power sources, as well as other measures to reduce fuel consumption and provide options for sustainable energy.

"The efficient use of energy, whether fuel for buses or electricity for trains, is critical for our operations as well as the impact it has on the environment," added Huberman. "Fuel costs are certainly the immediate focus today, but this study will also allow us to better plan for the future."

Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), Inc. will conduct the transportation energy study. Funding for the study is provided by federal funds allocated by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

Other energy efficiency measures already in progress at the CTA include accelerating the purchase of 150 articulated hybrid buses manufactured by New Flyer Industries. By assuming the last contract option from King County Metro, Seattle's public transit agency, the CTA was able to lock in savings of \$60,000 on the purchase price of each hybrid bus.

The CTA estimates that the hybrid technology will save the agency nearly \$7 million annually in maintenance, parts and labor costs over buses currently in service including more than \$900,000 annually in fuel costs. The CTA will begin receiving the buses this summer and have all 150 by spring 2009 instead of the original schedule of late 2010.

In addition, before completing its order for 400 low-emission 40-foot buses from New Flyer of America, Inc., the CTA was able to reduce the weight of these new buses by approximately 1,000 lbs. By switching from a stainless steel chassis to carbon steel and by using a smaller, more efficient engine, the gas mileage increased from 3.18 mpg to 3.28 mpg.

Each of the 400 buses is expected to average 40,000 miles per year in travel making the annual savings in fuel costs more than \$565,000, just by operating a lighter vehicle. Furthermore, because the newer buses are 38% more fuel efficient than the buses they are replacing, the total savings to the CTA over the anticipated 12-year life span of the buses is nearly \$80 million. The CTA began taking delivery of the new low emission buses earlier this year, with 110 currently in service, and expects to have all 400 by spring 2009.

Combined, the CTA expects that these steps will save \$91.5 million over the 12-year average life of the buses compared to the costs to operate the current fleet of buses.

CTA to Evaluate Battery-Powered Hybrid Electric Bus

06/17/2008

New Technology May Further Improve Gas Mileage

As part of continuing efforts to mitigate rising fuel costs, Chicago Transit Authority officials today said they are evaluating a new hybrid electric bus that has the ability to nearly double the miles per gallon of current CTA hybrid buses. The DesignLine ECOSaver IV Hybrid Electric bus – which is being loaned to CTA – uses an innovative propulsion technology that is different from the existing hybrid drives.

CTA's Budget Office calculates that every \$0.10 change in the price per gallon of fuel increases expenses by \$2.4 million. With fuel prices at \$4.53 per gallon as of May 26, the CTA could potentially accrue fuel expenses \$25 million over what was budgeted this year. As a result, the CTA is actively researching fuel efficient vehicles to introduce into the fleet. The CTA's oldest buses average 2.77 miles per gallon and its 40-foot hybrid buses average 3.95 miles per gallon. The DesignLine Hybrid has averaged seven to eight miles per gallon in other cities and the test period will help determine if the buses will run as effectively in Chicago.

"We are looking forward to the opportunity to test drive this new hybrid electric bus to see how it handles the streets of Chicago and to compare its fuel efficiency to our current hybrid buses," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "Energy efficiency, whether fuel for buses or electricity for trains, is critical for our operations as we continue to find ways to minimize costs. It also has a positive impact on the environment."

"Chicago is always leading by example when it comes to finding innovative and environmentally-friendly ways to improve the quality of life for our residents," said Mayor Richard M. Daley. "Finding solutions to handle the rising cost of fuel is important for our public transportation system and we're looking forward to trying this new technology."

The CTA fleet currently has 20 hybrid buses – 10 operate on a parallel system and 10 use a series drive system. An additional 150 New Flyer Hybrid articulated buses on order will operate on the parallel system. The DesignLine Hybrid is different from the existing hybrid drives and can increase fuel economy by 100% over standard buses and 25% over other hybrids.

The ECOSaver uses batteries to run an electric motor rather than the standard diesel engine of CTA's current hybrids. When the batteries lose power, a small turbine engine turns on to recharge the batteries. The turbine engine shuts down as the batteries continue to power the bus. This hybrid configuration produces lower emissions than other hybrids and also reduces noise pollution.

Increased fuel economy is gained from the turbine's smaller size (45 hp versus 285 hp for a standard bus engine) and because the engine is not running continuously. In addition, the construction of the bus is three tons lighter to further increase fuel savings.

The DesignLine Electric Hybrid bus offers reduced emissions, improved fuel economy, reduced noise pollution, increased passenger comfort and lower maintenance costs.

The DesignLine ECOSaver Electric Hybrid bus is manufactured by DesignLine International LLC headquartered in North Carolina and costs approximately \$580,000. CTA's current 40-foot hybrids

cost approximately \$570,000 each and a regular diesel bus cost between \$350,000 and \$375,000 each.

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Furthermore, because the newer buses are 20% more fuel efficient than the buses they are replacing, the total savings to the CTA over the anticipated 12-year life span of the buses is nearly \$80 million. The CTA began taking delivery of the new low emission buses earlier this year, with 110 currently in service, and expects to have all 400 by spring 2009.

Combined, the CTA expects that these steps will save \$91.5 million over the 12-year average life of the buses compared to the costs to operate the current fleet of buses.

CTA also encourages those who still drive to join in the American Public Transit Association's "Dump the Pump Day" on Thursday, June 19. The day is designed to encourage people across the country to ride public transportation to save money, conserve gasoline and help reduce greenhouse gases.

CTA to Seek Private Sector Partners for Airport Express Service

06/11/08

CTA to Complete Core Work on Tunnels and Station Shell This Year

Chicago Transit Authority President Ron Huberman said that after a thorough review of the CTA's Block 37 project to develop a transit center, track connections and direct airport train service, he plans to recommend to the Chicago Transit Board that the CTA go out to bid for a private sector partner to building out the station and develop and operate the service.

"I have carefully read the business case for airport service and believe that a premium service built and operated in conjunction with a private sector partner is the way to go," said Huberman. "To replicate the success of premium service in other major cities, we really need to leverage private sector resources and expertise."

Huberman said staff will work with the City of Chicago which is partnering with the CTA to develop a request for proposals to seek that partner. In the meantime, the CTA will continue constructing underground tunnels to connect the Red and Blue Lines to the new station. It will also continue to work with Joseph Freed & Associates, the Block 37 master developer, to finish the shell of a station that would serve both lines. Scheduled work on both is expected to be completed by the end of 2008.

Huberman said that it would not make sense to completely build out the station or create the final tunnel connections until a partner is selected because final layout, technology and finishes are dependent on an operating plan.

"We have limited capital resources and would prefer to direct them toward removing slow zones, replacing aging buses, updating signal systems, and investing in other improvements to our existing system. The work we have done so far is valuable, but we don't want to spend additional money speculating on a future partner's needs," said Huberman.

The cost to complete the tunnel work and the station shell will cost an additional \$45.6 million. Build out costs would be more and would depend on the needs of the future partner. The project was conceived in 2003 and the initial budget estimate was \$213.3 million with a CTA share of \$130 million.

Huberman has identified three primary factors that impacted the project budget: construction costs, the site conditions and the site logistics.

Since the initial budget was developed in 2003, construction and materials costs have increased by 26 percent. In addition, the CTA work occurred several stories beneath street level and construction crews encountered more challenging conditions than anticipated. There was still a significant amount of foundation and debris from previous structures on the site as well as a staggering amount of utility work.

The other factor was site staging. With two contractors and all their heavy equipment working together in a limited space, there have been significant logistical challenges that have resulted in more work being done at night and on weekends, at a higher cost.

Huberman said that he replaced the prior project management team last fall and praised the new team for identifying the problems and providing workable solutions.

"The CTA is committed to developing a premier service that will enhance Chicago's standing as a world-class city. Tapping into private sector expertise at this stage allows us to leverage our existing investment in this project, creates an opportunity for outside investment, and can bring in partners who have experience building and managing premium services," said Huberman. "It also enables us to direct our limited capital resources to some areas with more immediate needs."

20 Routes to be Added to the CTA Bus Tracker Program in June

06/16/08

Expansion of program will be more than one-third complete with 52 routes

Effective Monday, June 23, CTA customers will be able to access real-time travel information for a total of 52 CTA bus routes following the addition of 20 new routes to the Bus Tracker system. Bus Tracker is a web-based program that uses global positioning system (GPS) technology and provides real-time information to customers via the dedicated CTA Bus Tracker web site (www.ctabustracker.com).

"With the addition of the 20 new routes in June, CTA will be one-third of the way in completing its expansion of the Bus Tracker program. And more customers will be able to enjoy the benefits of knowing when the next bus is scheduled to arrive," said CTA President Ron Huberman.

Signs have been posted at bus stops along the following 20 bus routes that will be added to the Bus Tracker program on June 23:

- #54A North Cicero/Skokie Blvd
- #56 Milwaukee
- #56A North Milwaukee
- #68 Northwest Highway
- #77 Belmont
- #78 Montrose
- #80 Irving Park
- #X80 Irving Park Express
- #81 Lawrence
- #81W West Lawrence
- #84 Peterson
- #85 Central
- #85A North Central

- #86 Narragansett/Ridgeland
- #88 Higgins
- #90 Harlem
- #90N North Harlem
- #91 Austin
- #92 Foster
- #152 Addison

The dedicated CTA Bus Tracker web site provides customers with a route map with icons indicating the location and direction of each bus currently in service, an alarm feature that will alert customers when a bus is approaching their selected bus stop, as well as the arrival times at bus stops.

For customers to access the arrival times of buses along a route, the CTA Bus Tracker web site is accessible from a computer and web-enabled wireless devices. BlackBerry™ users must have version 4.1 or higher. Personal digital assistants (PDAs) must have full Internet access capabilities through web browsers that support HyperText Markup Language (HTML) such as Internet Explorer®. Customers who use PDAs will be able to access the arrival time display only. Cell phone users should contact their wireless service providers for information on their phone's Internet capabilities.

Metra adding trains to deal with rush-hour crunch

Weekend service will also get more trains, officials say

By Richard Wronski | Tribune reporter

Metra riders who find themselves caught amid standing-room-only crowds on Union Pacific North line trains will get some relief this month when additional cars are added to rush-hour trains, officials said Friday.

Facing record high ridership, Metra also will add weekend trains to fill hours-long gaps on the UP North and Milwaukee District North lines.

Both actions come in response to chronic overcrowding exacerbated by commuters fleeing Edens Expressway reconstruction, which resumed in April.

New cars will be added May 19; the extra weekend trains will start running May 23.

Officials say there is not enough spare equipment to go around. The problem is so severe that the agency is repurchasing five 1950s-era bi-level coach cars sold to a

Virginia commuter line several years ago, Executive Director Phil Pagano said.

The equipment shortage will continue unless the Illinois legislature and Gov. Rod Blagojevich can agree on a public works funding measure, including billions for mass transit maintenance and system enhancements, officials said.

Metra's last major purchase of 200 bi-level cars came in 2000 at a cost of \$398.6 million under the state's now-expired Illinois First public works program.

Metra will add from one to three cars on some UP North trains, Pagano said. Coach cars can hold 135 to 152 passengers.

The UP North Line, operating between Waukegan and the Ogilvie Transportation Center, carried more than 2.3 million riders in the first quarter of 2008, an increase of 14 percent over the same period in 2007.

The UP North and the Milwaukee District North line between Fox Lake and Union Station will get four additional Saturday trains and two additional Sunday trains.

The adjustments will mean new schedules for the UP North and on Milwaukee District North and West lines. New timetables should be ready by Thursday, Metra said.

Edward Paesel, executive director of the South Suburban Mayors & Managers Association and former Sauk Village mayor, joined the Metra board of directors Friday. Paesel was appointed to represent South Cook County by suburban county commissioners.

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Operator error may have caused L train derailment

May 28, 2008

BY MARY WISNIEWSKI Transportation reporter
mwisniewski@suntimes.com

Operator error may have caused a CTA train to derail on a South Side track Wednesday, sending 14 people to the hospital with minor injuries.

CTA President Ron Huberman said that the motorman, a 31-year-veteran identified by the union as William Jones, 57, may have failed to stop the train for a red signal on the Green Line just before the track diverges into two directions.

Huberman said the operator also may have manually overridden a "trip" that automatically stops the train after the red light signal was passed. The train then apparently proceeded into the junction before the

switches were properly set, which caused the derailment of the first two cars.



CTA President Ron Huberman (left) was with firefighters on the elevated tracks where a Green Line L train derailed at 59th and Calumet.

John H. White/Sun-Times

"It appears the operator overrode the trip and proceeded forward," Huberman said. "That is still preliminary and this is what we're investigating."

The Green Line train derailed in the South Side Washington Park neighborhood at 10:08 a.m. The train was going south toward 63rd and Cottage Grove.

The CTA reviewed the operator's record for the last four years and found no violations. He had to take a drug test and is being interviewed about the incident, Huberman said.

Rick Harris, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 308, which represents train workers, said there should be no rush to judgment.

"I don't believe in knee-jerk reactions," Harris said. He said the CTA is acting as if the public needs to get an answer right away, before officials have had time to investigate.

"The gentleman involved was a seasoned motorman with an exemplary record," Harris said.

CTA spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney said Jones received recertification training in February.

Ten passengers and a CTA employee declined treatment, officials said at the scene of the derailment at the 59th Street junction near Garfield.

Service was restored on the Green Line north of 55th around noon. South of 55th, the CTA was using shuttles as of 5 p.m. It was not known when train service would be restored south of 55th on the Green Line, as the CTA is still investigating the incident.

One passenger on the train, Aaron Hampton, used a cell phone to call his fiancé Annetta Ross.

"Everyone was shook up," said Ross, who described how passengers shared a cell phone to call friends and family members following the derailment.

Asked if the derailment might discourage her from riding the L in the future, Ross replied, "I don't even like the train, anyway."

Chicago tries to ease traffic mess around train stations

Changes include allowing 2-way traffic, limiting curb access at Union Station and the Ogilvie Transportation Center

Reconfiguring some one-way streets near downtown Chicago's commuter rail stations to handle two-way traffic and restricting access to curb lanes where taxicabs, buses and cars compete for space are key pieces of a new city study.

The goal is to improve safety and ease traffic around *Union Station* and the *Ogilvie Transportation Center*, according to city transportation officials.

Rush-hour commuters who walk near the rail stations have either witnessed or experienced close calls and crashes. It seems there are no guaranteed safety zones—not even on sidewalks or in marked crosswalks—as vehicles weave, jut and sneak through an obstacle course of hazards.

Chicago police and traffic-control officials have been aware of the Wild West mentality for years, but recommendations to fix the problems—through tougher enforcement of traffic laws and traffic-engineering changes—often were briefly embraced, then ignored. Reconfiguring some one-way streets near downtown Chicago's commuter rail stations to handle two-way traffic and restricting access to curb lanes where taxicabs, buses and cars compete for space are key pieces of a new city study.

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The incident Thursday involving an out-of-control taxicab mowing down two pedestrians near the *Adams Street* entrance to Union Station was an accident waiting to happen. Fortunately, the two women hit by the taxi did not suffer life-threatening injuries.

Whether the accident will help generate serious attention toward the new ongoing traffic study remains to be seen, but it's clear public demand for change is strong.

"Stand on any street corner near Union Station and you won't wait long to see a pedestrian pounding on the hood of a cab or a delivery truck that is pushing its way through the crowd," said Metra commuter Marcia Wallace of Willow Springs.

The problem is not so much the number of vehicles, but how those vehicles jockey aggressively for advantage—sometimes recklessly—amid hordes of pedestrians going to or from Metra and Amtrak trains at the rail stations, city officials said.

"We realize we don't have enough curb space in the area for all the modes of transportation," said Rich Hazlett, coordinating planner at the Chicago Department of Transportation.

Officials from CDOT, the Office of Emergency Management and Communications and other city agencies are working together to complete the long-promised traffic study of the commuter corridors around Union Station. They hope to have it ready for implementation, in phases, starting later this year.

In addition to changing the direction of travel on some streets that are still to be identified, officials are considering installing or removing turning lanes in some places and adjusting traffic-signal timing.

They also plan to relocate some taxicab stands, bus-loading zones and parking meters, as well as spaces reserved for disabled drivers, said CDOT spokesman Brian Steele. The distance disabled drivers would have to travel to reach the train stations will not increase, he said.

Essentially every inch of curb space is being looked at in the area bounded by *Madison Street* on the north, *Van Buren Street* on the south, the Chicago River on the east and *Clinton Street* on the west, officials said.

The area of scrutiny includes an intensified focus on *Adams*, *Jackson Boulevard*, *Canal Street* and *Clinton* near Union Station, officials said. Those streets handle 12,000 to 14,000 vehicles on average each weekday, according to CDOT.

On the *Canal Street* side of Union Station, the chaotic mix of taxis, CTA buses, shuttle buses going to office buildings and intercity long-distance buses—all competing for space and customers—has heightened

the danger.

The situation got worse after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks when Amtrak, which owns Union Station, closed the taxicab courts on the *Clinton* side of the station, city officials said.

"We told Amtrak that moving out the cabs was a contributing factor to the problems at Union Station," Hazlett said.

When the cabs were prohibited from entering the station, designated cabstands were created on *Adams*, *Canal* and *Jackson*. However, the reality has been that cabdrivers pick up and drop off passengers anywhere they choose.

Amtrak defends its decision, citing security concerns about a potential car-bomber driving explosives into the heart of Union Station by using the driveway leading into the former taxicab courts.

"These traffic issues existed before security concerns led Amtrak to close the service road under the station to public access," Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari said.

"Amtrak stations in Chicago, Philadelphia and elsewhere are limiting access to previously public areas, just as security concerns have reduced public access at airports and other transportation facilities."

On another point, city officials and Amtrak are in agreement.

A passenger drop-off and pickup area used by long-distance buses on the east side of *Canal*, between *Adams* and *Jackson*, would be relocated a block south under an ordinance before the City Council.

The law was proposed after Megabus, an intercity bus company, began operating service to Chicago in 2006. The Megabus coaches park on the east side of *Canal*, often blocking traffic lanes.

The ordinance would require all intercity buses to use a proposed bus stand between *Jackson* and *Van Buren*, but still on the east side of *Canal*.

"Megabus exacerbated the traffic congestion in front of Union Station," Hazlett said.

Amtrak supports the bus stand relocation away from Union Station because the Megabus service competes with Amtrak on some routes, and Megabus customers use restrooms and other facilities reserved for Amtrak and Metra passengers in Union Station.

"Our priorities have been the safe passage of Amtrak and Metra passengers to and from the station . . . and better general traffic flow," Magliari said.

Contact Getting Around at jhilkevitch@tribune.com or c/o the Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611. Read recent columns at www.chicagotribune.com/gettingaround

Cash call for tram tracks

THE TELEGRAPH CALCUTTA INDIA A STAFF REPORTER

Concretisation of the city's remaining 66 km of tram tracks will start very soon. The process started in 2004 and 76 km have already been completed.

Transport minister Subhas Chakraborty on Tuesday said: "We have asked for funds. We want to start work before monsoon and complete it ahead of Puja 2008." Though the project requires Rs 5 crore, work can start even if we get Rs 3 crore now, he added.

Finance minister Asim Dasgupta, in a meeting held at Writers' Buildings on Tuesday to discuss the project, sought a report on the condition of the tram tracks to be repaired.



Concretisation of 66 km of tram tracks is pending for funds. A Telegraph picture

"The money will be sanctioned after I get the report. A proper plan to control the traffic has to be worked out, since tram services will be suspended while the repairs are on," he said.

The meeting at Writers' was attended by transport secretary Sumantra Chowdhury, finance secretary Dipankar Mukherjee and Calcutta Tramways Company chairman Rajdeo Goala.

The repairs will be carried out on the stretches between Shyambazar and Khanna cinema, Shyambazar and Belgachhia, Hazra and Tollygunge and Judges' Court and Gariahat at the initial stage, said a transport department source.

Chakraborty said the government would launch a set of new-look trams of "international standard" next year. He claimed the trams "will change the look of the city".

Officials and engineers were sent abroad to survey trams for the new look, said a transport department source.

Trolley with 30 aboard derails, catches fire on the Green Line

By Martin Finucane

Globe Staff / May 15, 2008

A trolley derailed and caught fire early yesterday on the Green Line's B branch, forcing service to be shut down all day while workers made repairs.

The MBTA, which offered replacement bus service, said that trolley service should resume this morning.

The trolley had roughly 30 passengers on board at 1:30 a.m. when it derailed on Commonwealth Avenue near Chestnut Hill Avenue.



A crew tried to remove the Green Line trolley from Commonwealth Avenue near Chestnut Hill Avenue yesterday. The trolley had about 30 passengers on board at 1:30 a.m. when it derailed. (GEORGE RIZER/GLOBE STAFF)

The trolley hit a pole and damaged overhead wires, said MBTA spokeswoman Lydia Rivera.

None of the riders was hurt, but the crash caused some significant damage to the trolley and the track, she said.

Bill Meyer, assistant to the Boston fire commissioner, said the cause of the fire may have been electrical. He said callers reported hearing an explosion and seeing flames on the roof of the trolley.

Robert Katz, who lives a block away from the accident, said he could see the smoke from his window.

"I saw the thing burning before the Fire Department got there," he said.

Riders were bused between the Boston College and Washington Street stops.

Rivera said an investigation would determine how the accident happened, but "right now, we're just trying to bring our service back to normal."

Globe correspondent Kate Augusto contributed to this report.

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Feds Investigating Deadly Green Line MBTA Crash

Trolley Operator Killed In Collision; 10 Passengers Hurt

BOSTON -- Federal transportation investigators have begun the difficult task of determining what caused a Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Green Line trolley to crash into the back end of a train ahead of it in Newton Wednesday, killing the train operator.



MBTA officials said the operator, identified as Terrese Edmunds, 24, was a part-time driver who had been employed with the 'T' since last July.

"This is a terrible tragedy and our hearts go out to the family of Ms. Edmunds and also our prayers for the speedy recovery of the others who were injured," Newton Mayor David Cohen said.

Ten other passengers on the two-car trains were injured in the collision, which occurred about 6 p.m. near the Woodland Station stop. Both trolleys were headed outbound toward the Riverside stop, which is the end of the D line.

The Green Line, with more than 250,000 daily passengers, is the most heavily-used light rail system in the nation.

It took rescue crews more than seven hours to extract Edmunds' body from the mangled wreckage located near the Brae Burn County Club golf course. They spent hours painstakingly sawing through the metal of the crushed car to remove her remains, the firefighters briefly removing their helmets and bowing their heads in silence when they were finally able to locate the trapped victim.

"There's no speculation as to what might be the cause. We're going to leave that to the experts who come on the scene as we reconstruct what happened," MBTA General Manager Dan Grabauskas said.

What investigators do know is that there were roughly 200 people on board the two trains when the crash occurred. The first train had stopped, as required, at a red light ahead of the Woodland stop before starting its slow approach to the T stop. The second trolley plowed into it from behind, lifting both trains off the track and ripping the wheels from the second trolley.

"People were screaming, confused. I mean, there were fires on the sides. I looked quickly and there were people under the trains. It was a scary thought," passenger Barry Gallup said.

MBTA officials did not say how fast the train was traveling. Typically, they run no faster than 40 mph through the stretch of Newton where the crash occurred.

People in neighboring homes said they heard what sounded like a huge explosion and they ran through backyards to see what had happened.

"We use the services almost daily and I am just grateful that my family wasn't involved. But my heart is breaking for the families (of the victims)," neighbor Maria Arcese said.

EMTs treated five passengers at the scene. Six were taken to area hospitals and one was flown by helicopter to Boston Medical Center with serious injuries.

"It's a miracle that more people were not hurt," one neighbor said.

MBTA officials said commuters would be bused Thursday on shuttles between the Riverside and Newton Highlands stops while the track remains closed near the crash scene.

Shuttle buses will be stopping at Waban and Eliot stations to pick up passengers, then taking them to Newton Highlands for the remainder of the trolley ride into the city. Passengers were advised to leave at least 30 extra minutes for the commute. It was unclear how long the MBTA would have to continue shuttling passengers along that portion of the route.

Many early passengers Thursday were still trying to understand what had happened.

"I'm surprised it happened, especially with the track improvements that they did, that this happened. So, I don't know why, something like that ... especially when the train, the first one, was stopped," one passenger said as he prepared to board a shuttle at Riverside.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators will be on the scene for at least five days, but it may be a full year before the results of their probe into the cause of the crash are known.

UTA contracts for 77 light-rail cars, options 180 more

Request is the largest-ever order for transit cars from Siemens' plant in Sacramento

By Brandon Loomis

The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 05/15/2008 12:15:16 AM MDT

Utah's rail revolution is about to power up with a massive train order, accelerating the program to a pace unseen at any American transit agency.

The light-rail system that started in 1999 and now runs 69 electric rail cars just ordered 77 new ones, with an option for many more. The initial order is for \$277 million with Siemens, and breaks that company's record for the largest-ever light-rail vehicle order, the company will announce today.

It's far larger than Siemens' last order, a 55-car batch for Denver.

The Germany-based corporation builds rail cars in Sacramento, Calif.

This is a large order," Utah Transit Authority spokeswoman Carrie Bohnsack-Ware acknowledged. "However, many agencies that are experiencing high growth on their systems have larger orders. . . . This is, however, Siemens' largest single order out of their Sacramento facility."

The purchase is part of UTA's "Frontlines 2015" program extending TRAX light rail from downtown to Salt Lake

City International Airport and from the Salt Lake-Sandy rail line to West Jordan, West Valley City and Draper. The program and the rail cars are funded 80 percent through local sales taxes and 20 percent by the federal government.

Siemens' news release about the contract lists an option for 180 more rail cars, though UTA General Manager John English said the agency most likely won't use that many. It's common practice to secure more than needed at a good bulk price, he said, then offer the excess to another transit system that needs the cars. That's how UTA bought its first light-rail cars, on an option from San Diego's system, he said.

"I'm not sure why we have an option for 180. Wishful thinking, maybe," English said. "We probably will always order more than we need, in order to get a good buy."

UTA will need the initial 77 cars and more to operate the four new rail lines, though, he said. And Bohnsack-Ware said the option gives UTA wiggle room if the rider response is bigger than expected, as was the case when TRAX first opened.

"If we see this huge crush of riders like we did on the Sandy-Salt Lake line and we need to buy more, then we can," she said.

UTA is scheduled to break ground on the new Mid-Jordan TRAX line today.

Siemens built 40 of the cars already in use on TRAX. They're the newer, sleeker cars as opposed to used cars purchased from other agencies. The new order is for Siemens' S-70, a more rounded model used in San Diego, Houston and Charlotte, N.C. It's also more accessible for those with disabilities because its floor aligns with the station platforms, eliminating the stairwells, Bohnsack-Ware said.

"Winning the Salt Lake City UTA contract demonstrates the confidence our customers have in Siemens and our products well into the future and further enables us to reinforce our long-term commitment to the riding public," Siemens Transportation Systems CEO Oliver Hauck said in a statement. The company has grown its Sacramento work force by 30 percent in the past two years.

Megabus may end bargain bus service from Los Angeles

The bus company, which touted \$1 fares, will stop taking bookings on several routes and expects to decide by Friday whether to pull out of the city.

By Jane Engle, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
06:32 PM PDT, May 12, 2008

Talk about a cheap fling that didn't last: Apparently even \$1 fares to San Francisco and Las Vegas aren't enough to lure Angelenos out of their cars.

Megabus.com, a subsidiary of Coach USA that began bargain bus service in August from Los Angeles, has stopped taking bookings on several routes for trips after June 8. Megabus stopped serving San Diego and Phoenix from L.A. earlier this year and may end all service from the city.

Dale Moser, president of Megabus.com, said today that the Paramus, N.J., company, which operates a thriving network in the Midwest and elsewhere, expects to decide by Friday whether to pull out of Los Angeles.

"Quite frankly, the ridership hasn't been as robust as we'd like," Moser said. "We might just have to discontinue" the service.

Although the company's 56-seat buses sometimes pull out of Los Angeles 75% or 80% full, they sometimes carry as few as 12 riders, he said. "We're not seeing increasing trends. The graph has leveled off."

That's in sharp contrast to the Midwest, where Megabus.com serves 17 cities and has seen its business increase 137% during the last year, Moser said. The company, which began service in April 2006, recently expanded to eight East Coast cities.

Moser said he didn't know why more Californians haven't turned up to Megabus.

Given high gasoline prices, congested roads, growing environmental consciousness and marquee destinations such as Los Angeles and Las Vegas, "we all truly believed that this would be an outstanding market," he said.

"Maybe, truth be told, we were unable to get them out of their cars," he said.

As of today, Megabus.com had stopped taking bookings from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, San Jose and Millbrae for trips after June 8, and from Los Angeles to San Francisco and Oakland after June 22, Moser said.

He said those actions were precautions, pending a final decision.

"We will honor the tickets that have been sold," he said. "We're not going to leave passengers stranded."

jane.ingle@latimes.com

Groupe H lie knows Prevost quality since over 50 years

Sainte-Claire, Quebec, May 12th—When Group H lie took possession of a new H3-45 Prevost coach recently,

it was continuing a tradition that goes back half a century.

In 1954, Bruno H lie founded Autobus H lie Inc. in St-G regoire, Quebec, to transport students to area schools—by taxi. With business growing rapidly, it was not long before he went in search of a larger vehicle, his first bus: a Prevost.

Groupe H lie continued to grow, adding regional interurban transport, regularly scheduled service to regional ski areas, and an active charter operation that today takes travelers all over Canada and the United States.

Bruno's three sons—Pierre, Jocelyn, and Normand—now lead the business. In the late 90s the company grew by acquisition (Autobus H lie, Autobus Bourassa, Autobus Lucien Roy, and Autobus L. Roy & Fils) and now has some 140 employees, including a number of H lie family members, and over 100 vehicles in its fleet. They range from the ever-present yellow school buses to a stable of handsome Prevosts, including the brand new one that sports colors from the company's new palette.



From left to right, Serge Gonthier, Prevost Regional Sales Manager - Eastern Canada and Jocelyn H lie - Vice-president Fleet superintendent / Purchases coordinator from Groupe H lie, taking delivery of the new H3-45 at the Prevost Service Center in St-Nicolas, QC.

Pierre H lie, president, said that in choosing its most recent Prevost the company was attracted by vehicle features like the BERU tire monitoring system, automatic fire detection monitoring, and electronic stability program.

Groupe H lie has the high standards you would expect from an operation with over 50 years of success under its belt. Vehicles are carefully chosen and meticulously maintained, quality service remains the byword, as does attention to detail—there is even online lost-and-found

reporting capability for Groupe H lie travelers. Just the sort of thing that would surely make Bruno H lie proud! For more information on Groupe H lie, visit www.autobushelie.com

Nova Tours of Maryland joins Prevost

Sainte-Claire, Quebec, April 23rd—You could say that Nova Tours of Germantown, Maryland, is a “new old” company. Nova Tours has been in business 5 years, but with a seasoned veteran at the helm. That would be managing director Daniel Lee, who has 25 years of industry experience. Nova Tours has several older vehicles in its fleet, as well as a brand new 2008 Prevost H3-45. And it serves an established customer base with transportation and tours in both the Washington, D.C. metro area and throughout the eastern half of North America, including Canada. Nova Tours further distinguishes itself in the market by offering tour packages that feature English or Mandarin-speaking guides.



Nova Tours' Managing Director, Daniel Lee and his wife Elaine with Tim B tner, Prevost Regional Sales Manager, Mid-Atlantic US at the Prevost plant when taking delivery of their new Prevost H3-45.

Nova Tours' recently acquired H3-45 is the company's first Prevost, and Daniel Lee is delighted with the choice. Having been in the business for many years, he was familiar with all kinds of motorcoaches and well aware of Prevost's reputation for quality. “They're known for their endurance, when well maintained,” he says, “so this purchase represents good value for the long run.”

Safety also was a vital concern. Lee is impressed by both the structural integrity built into Prevost vehicles and the company's dedication to ongoing engineering innovation. One feature he especially likes is the new coach's Electronic Stability Program. Nova Tours drivers, who also had input into the coach selection, are pleased to take the wheel of the gleaming new H3-45. And its luxurious comfort makes passengers happy, especially those on Nova Tours' longer trips, who may be on the road as many as 10 days.

Daniel Lee also enjoyed picking up the new coach at Prevost's Sainte-Claire plant, even though he traveled smack in the middle of the snowiest winter in Quebec's recorded history. While he had visited the area many times before, Lee recalls this was a particularly pleasant trip. Like most new customers, he toured the Prevost plant and, before taking the wheel to return home, also enjoyed Old Quebec City. “And the snow,” he recalls, “was very beautiful—it was a spectacular experience!”

Florida's Classic Bus Lines adds first clean-diesel MCI® J4500 coaches to fleet

SCHAUMBURG, IL — April 28, 2008 — Classic Bus Lines, Coral Springs, Florida, has taken delivery of two new MCI J4500 models, bringing its all-MCI fleet to eight coaches. The new J4500s, purchased from MCI's Fast-Track program, are equipped with clean-diesel CAT engines and ZF ASTronic transmissions. They are Classic Bus Lines' first clean-diesel coaches.



“The new coaches have been wonderful so far,” said Bob LaPointe, who runs the company with his wife; president and majority shareholder, Joyce. “I was even happy with the fuel results,” he said, describing the coaches' maiden voyages to Washington, DC; Florida and Georgia.

MCI customers for nearly 30 years, both LaPointes are enthusiastic about MCI coaches in general. “MCI makes coaches that last,” said Bob LaPointe. Said Joyce LaPointe, “They're the best. Fifteen years from now, you'll still see my buses running up and down the road. We wouldn't buy anything else.”

The LaPointes first opened Classic Bus Lines in 1980, building to a fleet of 28 MCI coaches until they sold to Coach USA in 1997. In 2003, the LaPointes decided they wanted to keep busy and went back into business with two coaches.

Classic Bus Lines was able to rebuild quickly, which Joyce LaPointe attributes to their solid reputation. Charter clients include the Honda Golf Classic and various schools, organizations and tour groups. Much of their multi-day charter business comes from international groups looking to tour the United States. Classic Bus

Lines has its own maintenance facility, owned by the LaPointes' son, David, and their employees total 11, including drivers.

Gulf Coast Tours expands fleet with two new MCI models

SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 5, 2008 — Gulf Coast Tours, a popular tour and charter operator in Mobile, Alabama, is in an enviable spot. Ideally located in a popular city that's additionally convenient to several more in Mississippi and Florida, Gulf Coast Tours has grown steadily over a decade, adding one or two motor coaches a year. Recently, the company added two more MCI models, an MCI® D4505 and a J4500. These coaches feature EPA-mandated engine technology that reduces particulate matter by 90 percent. The D4505 is equipped with a Detroit Diesel engine and Allison transmission, and the J4500 features a Cat/ZF Astronic powertrain combination.



From left, Ed Chamblee, Gulf Coast Tours CEO is joined by Jimmy Breckenridge, President

CEO Ed Chamblee, who started Gulf Coast Tours with one mini coach in 1999, bought the company's first MCI, a D model, in 2001. "We've had extremely good luck with the D4500," said Chamblee, an industry veteran who also started Smoky Mountain Tours in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, before selling it and moving to Mobile. Today, more than two-thirds of Gulf Coast Tours' 18 coaches are D models. "This is our first J4500. It's such a beautiful coach. We contract with a lot of bands, and we like the extra baggage space on the model."

During the school year, Gulf Coast serves several college and university athletic programs. In the summer, business flips to charters for church groups, family reunions and tourism to the area. Gulf Coast also offers packaged tours to popular destinations and operates a few daily schedule-service routes to local casinos. It operates its own maintenance shop and its management team, including Jimmy Breckenridge, president, oversees 45 employees. To learn more, visit www.gulfcoasttoursandtravel.com.

Real McCoy: Kingston operator takes delivery of first new J4500 coach

SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 9, 2008 — McCoy Bus Service and Tours, Kingston, Ontario, has taken delivery of its first-ever new coach, an MCI® J4500 equipped with a Cat engine and a ZF Astronic transmission. Well located between Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, and Syracuse, New York, the operator has grown aggressively since owner Shawn Geary bought the company from Ivan McCoy in 1992.

With 23 coaches and about 60 employees, McCoy serves a thriving tour business and provides shuttle service for nearby Queen's University and Kingston General Hospital. It is the official transportation supplier for the Kingston Kimco Voyageurs and Kingston Frontenac's Major Junior A Hockey Team. The company also owns a maintenance facility that does fleet servicing for other bus and light-truck customers. "We're a small market, so we have to be diverse," said Geary, who drove for McCoy, then a livery service, before buying the company from the owner upon his retirement.



Geary started out with the company's original sedans and limos, then added a minibus, and then another. Soon he realized it was time to move up to a full-size motor coach. "It's worked out really well," said Geary, who runs the business with his wife, Kristine. "We can do a day trip to Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa or Syracuse. It's just a little farther than people want to drive themselves. That's especially true if there's a show that doesn't get off until 11 p.m. People don't really want to drive home."

Geary, who bought the business when he was only 27, still has big plans for McCoy, and he's looking forward to accomplishing some of them with a brand-new coach. "It's exciting," he says of the coach. "It feels special. It looks special. Anything new is wonderful."

Peoria Charter makes news with its three new clean-diesel MCI® D4505s

SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 14, 2008 — All three major television stations, the local newspapers and radio stations sent reporters to Peoria Charter's April unveiling of its three new MCI D4505 models powered by clean-diesel technology. "We saw our delivery as a great opportunity to show that we're green," said Peoria Charter President Bill Winkler, the third-generation family member of this highly successful operator in central Illinois. Winkler credits his wife Cindy, vice president, for her public relations talents, and the marketing support provided by MCI's "Go Coach, Go Green, Go MCI" initiative for its successful media coverage. "If it wasn't for MCI taking the lead with its green campaign and marketing support, I don't know if we would have had thought to hold a press conference."

Winkler used facts from MCI's materials and demonstrated the smokeless exhaust with a white-glove demonstration to the TV crews. In an interview with the *Peoria Star Journal*, Winkler pointed out that a full bus of 56 people traveling 100 miles takes 14 gallons of fuel, while taking the same number of people the same distance by car would use 70 gallons of fuel. "I was able to give the press real numbers. That's what they want," said Winkler, who noted that coverage increased awareness. "People in the community have said 'I see you're going green.' Our industry is doing all this work and investing money toward improving the environment. People need to know what this industry is doing for the future."



Peoria Charter's new coaches, equipped with Cat engines and ZF Astronic transmissions, replaced older MCI vehicles in its 59-coach fleet. The average age of a Peoria Charter Coach is eight years. Peoria Charter also uses an 11-percent biodiesel blend in its fuel mix to further reduce emissions. The company also recycles oil and its tires.

The company has two locations, Peoria and Urbana, Illinois. In addition to charter trips throughout the country, Peoria Charter provides transportation to colleges and businesses around the state as well as operating a daily airport shuttle between Peoria and Chicago, with scheduled service to both Midway and O'Hare airports.

"Our wheels are rolling," said Winkler. "As soon as the press conference ended, we sent the new coaches out."

To learn more, visit: PeoriaCharter.com

Swept Away Coach & Tours Takes Delivery of Four Van Hool Coaches.

Faribault, MN... ABC Companies recently delivered Swept Away Coach and Tours, of Savannah GA, four (4) 2007 Van Hool C2045E coaches. These coaches are equipped to match the rest of their luxury fleet, with a multi monitor DVD system, Hi-Fi Stereo Audio and CD player, a full fabric interior, and reclining seats with footrests and armrests. Each has a Caterpillar C13 engine and ZF Transmission. The coaches were painted with two being red, one teal green, and one charcoal. This unique touch added more eye-catching appearance to the already colorful Swept Away fleet.



Todd McElmurray, Swept Away's CEO and Managing Director, said "All four of these coaches have Van Hool's new rear window option, as well as wireless PA's. With the addition of these Van Hool's, we are proud to continue to be the red carpet, VIP transportation specialist throughout Georgia and South Carolina."

Entering their fourth year of operation, Swept Away has grown to 11 late model coaches, and operates out of Savannah, Atlanta and Charleston. They offer luxury charter transportation service to destinations throughout the US and Canada, as well as providing packaged tours, convention shuttles and guide service. Owners Henrietta Smith and Todd McElmurray have more than 35 years of transportation expertise between them. Ms. Smith retired after a 24 year stint at GrayLine of Savannah, and partnered with Mr. McElmurray to found Swept Away.

Brian Pinckney, ABC Senior Account Executive, remarked, "I've known and respected Henrietta and Todd since I've been in the industry. They've been able to grow rapidly because they are committed to first rate customer service, going above and beyond for every client, and have managed to attract an extraordinarily talented group of drivers. That's a winning combination."

A past vice president of the Motorcoach Association of South Carolina and past board member of the Georgia Motorcoach Operators Association, McElmurray says he's been in buses "since birth" and that "The Van Hool S₃ has proven to be reliable, and exceeds our customer's VIP expectations. ABC's consistent nationwide service support gives us peace of mind. Brian Pinckney and Roman Cornell stepped up to the plate to make our buying experience enjoyable and seamless. They really made us feel like a part of the ABC family."

Horton's Transit Service Adds two Van Hool Coaches to Fleet.

Faribault, MN... ABC recently delivered two new 2008 Van Hool C2045E coaches to Horton's Transit Service, of Chapel Hill NC. Powered by Cummins engines coupled to Allison B500 transmissions, these coaches are equipped to match the rest of the luxury fleet, with a multi-monitor DVD system, Hi-Fi Stereo Audio and CD Player, public address system, a full fabric interior, and reclining Amaya Torino seats with foot rests. They also have added Van Hool's new rear window option.



Brothers Lenon and Larry Horton founded their company in 1990 with an 05 Eagle. They soon bought a second used coach from Claude Payne, and their relationship with ABC grew from there. As the business thrived, they began purchasing new Van Hool's.

"We're happy with ABC and Van Hool. There are other brands out there, but we've been treated so well, there was no reason to consider them. Our passengers and drivers love the C2045."

Horton's serves North Carolina's Research Triangle region with charter service to all of the US and Canada. With 16 drivers, 3 Van Hool's, a mid-sized coach and two vans.... "We go wherever there is a road."

Lenon and Larry maintain a cordial relationship with long time friend Claude Payne, but as ABC grew and territories adjusted, Brian Pinckney has become their ABC Account Executive. He says, "I really enjoy the Horton's... they've been loyal customers for 12 years, and they continue to grow because they take care of their customers, and their coaches."

NADA BUS, INC., Takes Delivery of Van Hool T2140.

Faribault, MN... ABC Companies recently delivered three new T2140 Van Hool luxury coaches to Nada Bus Inc. in Commerce, California. Equipped with Detroit Diesel Series 60 engines coupled to Allison D500 transmissions, this brings the number of Van Hool T2140 coaches that Nada has purchased in the past 12 months to four.

Founded in 1980 by Hiroshi Nada to serve inbound Japanese tourists, the company has grown to 18 full sized coaches. Mr. Nada's clients demanded a superior level of luxury and quality, and he built his company around meeting their expectations.

In keeping with Nada's philosophy of providing the finest transportation available, this coach is equipped with a multi-monitor DVD system, Hi-Fi Audio and CD Players, full fabric interiors, wireless microphone and reclining Amaya Torino seats with foot rests, as well as Van Hool's unique rear passenger window.



Over the years, Mr. Nada came to the conclusion that domestic travelers would appreciate those high standards and began to serve the whole Los Angeles market with charters, transfers and the variety of additional services illustrated on their web page www.nadabus.com.

ABC Senior Account Executive Charlie Walser said, "Nada has always maintained a high standard of service and is one of the most respected carriers in the Southern California market. ABC is proud to serve them."

HME Executive Coach Adds Seventh Van Hool to Fleet.

Faribault, MN... ABC Companies has announced that HME Executive Coach, of Irving Texas, has taken delivery of their seventh Van Hool coach. The 2008 C2045E is equipped with a Detroit Diesel/Allison drive train, and the striking black coach has leather trimmed Amaya seats, 27" large screen video monitors, satellite TV and Van Hool's exclusive new rear window.

ABC Account Executive Bob Holloway says "Executive offers their clients the finest service available. This coach typifies their dedication to providing top quality transportation. I enjoy working with a company that puts this much effort into serving their customers."



The Chaudhry family founded A2Z Transportation as a limousine service in 1985. By 2004, newly opened Executive Coach was doing a great deal of convention work in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, using chartered buses. Mr. Chaudhry concluded that the best way to control the service's quality was to operate his own coaches.



Executive has grown into the largest privately owned transportation company in Texas, and has two more of these specially equipped Van Hool's on order. Mr. Chaudhry says "We're committed to having a modern fleet. New coaches are good for our customers and the

environment. Executive style transportation and service is our specialty."

While based in Dallas/Fort Worth, Executive also provides service out of Austin and Houston. In addition to charter coaches and limousines, they offer "meet and greet" service and convention shuttle and planning. "Limousine customers expect a high level of luxury. We've made an investment in providing coaches that meet that standard... the only difference is that... they're bigger."

ABC's service has been excellent, but even more important, our Account Executive, Bob Holloway, is always there when we need him. He's even helped get emergency parts on weekends. That kind of support is worth a lot to us."

Galaxy Limousine & Executive Charter Takes Delivery of its First Setra S 417 Motorcoach

Greensboro, N.C. (April 29, 2008) – Galaxy Limousine & Executive Charter, Inc., a full-service transportation company with its headquarters in Tulsa, Okla., took delivery of its first Setra S 417 motorcoach. The Setra S 417 will compliment Galaxy Limousine's existing fleet of limousines, vans, SUVs and shuttles.

"After a lot of market research, we chose the Setra S 417 because of its passenger amenities, which include satellite television and internet access while traveling," said Jim Nicolotti of Galaxy Limousine & Executive Charter. "It was also very important to find a manufacturer who could provide outstanding support and that is what Daimler Buses offered with the Setra S 417."



Introduced to the North American market in 2003, the Setra S 417 is setting the benchmark in luxury motorcoach travel by comfort and innovation to both guest and driver alike. Galaxy Limousine's Setra S 417 comes with such appointments as a satellite television

and wireless internet access, as well as a rear window, auto retract seatbacks, a refrigerator, a back-up camera, tray tables and a card table. The ultra-modern, spacious S 417 also provides guests with a state-of-the-art audio system, which includes five 15-inch monitors positioned throughout the cabin.

"At Daimler Buses North America we remain a committed partner for all of our customers, offering levels of service rarely experienced anywhere else," said Tom Chezem, vice president of motorcoach sales for Daimler Buses North America. "Our extensive, coast-to-coast service network throughout the United States and Canada provide our customers much needed piece of mind."

Scrap trolleys: report

Replacing aging fleet with hybrids would save nearly \$100M

By NICKI THOMAS, SUN MEDIA

City officials say the plug should be pulled on Edmonton's trolley bus system - and at least one councillor says it's about time.

"I don't understand why we didn't get rid of trolley buses ages ago," said Coun. Kim Krushell.



A recent report from the city's transportation department backs Krushell up, recommending that the system be phased out by 2010 and the vehicles be replaced with hybrid buses.

"I think that the writing is on the wall for council to see and these reports clearly show that it doesn't make economic sense or environmental sense to put a huge amount of money into revamping our existing trolley system," she said.

The report found that "while the energy costs for a trolley bus itself are substantially below those of either the clean diesel or the hybrid," the cost of maintaining overhead systems and substations makes the actual cost of running a trolley "approximately double those of

the other two technologies."

Edmonton's 32 trolley buses are almost 30 years old and at the end of their life cycle.

By 2010, the cost of a new trolley bus is estimated to hit \$950,000, while a hybrid will come with a price tag of \$650,000 and a clean diesel will ring in at \$425,000, the report notes.

The report also takes into account the cost of maintaining and upgrading the overhead system.

"Replacing the trolley buses with hybrid buses would avoid costs of \$99.7 million," concludes the report.

Meanwhile, a group fighting to save the trolleys said in a press release that Edmonton is out of step with other cities when it comes to a greener fleet.

"Other cities using trolleys report benefits ranging from energy conservation to greenhouse gas reduction and even operational savings and increased ridership. Instead of rushing to get rid of our system, Edmonton needs to take a more positive, pro-active approach that will reflect well on our city," said Brian Tucker, chair of the Edmonton Trolley Coalition, a citizens' group.

Tucker raised questions about the report's cost projections and pointed to environmental reasons for keeping trolleys in service.

"Trolleys have zero in-street emissions, a major plus in our congested urban core. There are opportunities to invest in alternative energy to run our trolley bus and LRT systems, making a real difference to area-wide emissions," he said.

While the report did state that trolley buses are emission-free on the road, the emissions from coal burning to produce electricity are actually higher than diesel or hybrids.

"The only way you are really going to get serious environmental impact with trolley buses is if you expand the system across the city. And to do that, you're talking about a minimum of \$2.4 million per kilometre of extension of track," said Krushell, adding that she believes that money would be better spent on expanding the LRT.

A public hearing on the issue will be held on June 10 before going to the transportation and public works committee.

TTC hybrid bus batteries losing their power

Cells only lasting half of time promised

JEFF GRAY Globe and Mail

May 16, 2008

The box-like batteries on top of the Toronto Transit Commission's brand new and premium-priced hybrid electric-diesel buses are lasting only half as long as their manufacturer promised.

They were supposed to last five years, but about a third of the lead-acid battery cells in use in the current fleet of 275 hybrids - which started arriving in 2006 - have already worn out, Gary Webster, the TTC's chief general manager, said in an interview.

The battery failures come on top of TTC testing that has shown the buses are producing just half the expected fuel savings, using just 10 per cent instead of 20 to 30 per cent less diesel than a conventional bus, although TTC officials expect this number to improve.

Still, Mr. Webster defends the decision to buy the Orion VII hybrids - which cost \$734,000, compared with \$500,000 for a conventional bus. He says the TTC and the manufacturer, Daimler Buses North America, are trying to sort out the battery problem, which is covered by the warranty and not costing the TTC money.

"We think the hybrid bus is a good bus. That's the bottom line for us. It's got some issues, absolutely," Mr. Webster said. "... We think we're going to address these issues."

By year's end, the TTC will have 564 hybrid buses - making up about a third of its bus fleet - with much of the cost of buying them covered by the federal and provincial governments in funding that mandated buses using alternative fuels. Within five years, close to half of the TTC's fleet is scheduled to have hybrid engines.

But Adam Giambrone, the city councillor who chairs the TTC, said the battery problems mean the jury is still out on whether the buses were a good investment: "We're still formulating our opinion on the hybrids."

He said the hybrid engine could be a "transitional technology" and that down the road, electric buses could come onto the market, or the TTC could, on busier routes, even return to using trolley buses - powered by overhead wires like streetcars - which it abandoned in the 1990s.

Mr. Webster said yesterday that New York has had some similar problems with its fleet of Orion VII hybrids.

But Jake Keyes, a spokesman for Daimler, which runs the former Orion Bus Industries plant in Mississauga where the buses are partly manufactured, said the battery problem was specific to Toronto's buses and has not occurred with its other hybrid buses running in New York and San Francisco.

The company's newer models include a different, lithium-ion battery that Mr. Keyes said lasts longer, but Mr. Webster said the TTC is not convinced the new battery will fix its problem.

"... We've said to them, 'Happy to consider it, but you've got to prove to us these things actually function,' " he said.

It is common for transit agencies to run into kinks with new vehicles, and the TTC has had problems before, including with vehicles running on compressed natural gas that it bought from Orion Bus Industries in the 1990s.

It has had to scrap 50 of those buses and convert another 50 to diesel, after engine problems, potentially leaky gas tanks and other complaints.

The TTC blames its hybrid buses' fuel-economy problems on the fact that they are being used more on suburban high-speed routes, where hybrid engines are less efficient.

Once more of the buses are running on stop-and-go congested routes downtown, Mr. Webster says, their fuel economy numbers should go up as the bus can rely more on the electric power it creates with its regenerative braking system.

The fuel-economy problems, which likely cost the TTC \$1.3-million this year, are a small part of what is expected to be a massive rise in diesel costs as a fixed-price contract for fuel runs out at the end of this year.

The TTC estimates that its fuel bill could go to \$97-million next year from \$65-million this year, and Mr. Webster has said the transit agency may even consider a "fuel surcharge" for riders.

It's high fives for hybrid bus after tests

IRWIN BLOCK, The Gazette

Published: Friday, May 02

They offer a smooth, relatively silent ride and they produce fewer greenhouse gases.

These are first impressions, and proven advantages, of hybrid buses now being tested in Montreal.

Journalists and Montreal Transit Corp. officials rode the bus from the Palais des Congrès to the Parc métro yesterday and it was a pleasure compared with the firm's first-generation of low-floor buses many called lemons.

As a hybrid accelerates, its electric motor - powered by a 24-volt battery - is the main energy source until it reaches higher speeds, then the bio-diesel engine takes over. Energy used in braking recharges the batteries, located on the roof of the bus.

Eight of the buses will be introduced on regular bus routes in the Notre Dame de Grâce, Côte des Neiges, LaSalle and Verdun areas. Among elements being

monitored is how the number of passengers affects the fuel economy of the hybrid system.

"The major difference for the rider will be the noise level," said MTC engineer René Leduc, a bus user. "When you take off from a stopped position the diesel engine does not have to work as hard, the number of revolutions per minute increases slowly and gradually, acceleration and breaking are smoother than on a regular bus."

The energy that was wasted before as heat when the driver used the brake to stop is now re-used to charge the batteries, leading to savings in fuel saved and fewer greenhouse gases.

Said driver Marie Cyr: "It's a soft, silent ride, very comfortable to drive."

STM upgrades, ditching lemons

By Dan Delmar, *The Suburban*

First generation low-floor buses are finally being replaced and Montreal's transit authority is going on a spending spree, STM Vice-chairman Marvin Rotrand told

Nova Bus LFS models, some only eight years old, will be replaced by just over 450 newer models made by the same firm, a subsidiary of Volvo. The STM has also ordered more than 200 articulated (or accordion) buses from Nova, with the first expected to hit the road in the fall of 2009. The 165/535 route along Côte des Neiges Rd. is among those expected to be served by the new buses, which are 20 feet longer than normal models.

The Suburban.



More than 200 articulated (accordion) models from Nova Bus will be in use by the STM.

Based in St. Eustache, Nova has struggled in other markets because of the poor performance and high maintenance costs for the first batch of low-floor, wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Two American assembly plants were closed because of a lack of sales in 2002, but the STM remained a loyal customer. Lately, things are looking up for Nova, with the addition of the articulated buses and a new Plattsburgh, New York assembly plant to come.

"I think Nova makes a good product," Rotrand said. "With the first generation, some performed well and

others less well. They're now in their third and fourth generation and the current product seems to be performing well."

Having Nova buses tied up in the garage certainly didn't help improve timeliness on the STM's routes. Rotrand said sticking to schedule is the biggest complaint and it's something they're aware of, and working on. On top of replacing the lemon models, 90 buses will be added to the fleet every year for the next four years. Thirty lines on the island will see noticeable improvements by the end of the year, he said.

Both the provincial and federal governments neglected to upgrade urban public transit programs throughout the 1990s, Rotrand said, but new money is finally beginning to flow. A provincial government program gives bonuses to transit authorities who increase their ridership by eight percent; the STM hopes to achieve this by increasing bus and metro service by 16 percent. Rotrand noted that an NDP amendment to a Paul Martin Liberal budget injected an extra \$800 million into public transport across Canada.

Downloading responsibilities like transit on Canadian cities has "put a lot of pressure on Montreal and other municipalities. We haven't always had the luxury of upgrading our equipment."

Nova Bus receives conditional Town of Plattsburgh Planning Board approval

Plattsburgh assembly plant gets conditional planning OK

By DAN HEATH
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- Nova Bus received approval from the Town of Plattsburgh Planning Board to perform preliminary foundation work for its \$25 million bus assembly plant Tuesday night. The Planning Board unanimously approved the State Environmental Quality Review at its monthly meeting. It also approved issuance of a foundation permit before the full detailed preliminary plan has been approved. "This will be a wonderful addition to the community," said The Development Corp. President AdorÃ© Flynn Kurtz.

The plant is to be built by V.I.P. Structures of Syracuse. The Development Corp. will sell the property to V.I.P. Structures, who will sell it to Nova Bus once the facility is completed.

V.I.P. Structures President Charles Wallace Jr. said the company still needs to receive a State Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit from the State Department of Environmental Conservation, a letter from the Army Corps of Engineers about wetlands that are actually former farm ditches and a review of

its foundation plan by the Town Codes Enforcement Office.

"I anticipate we will get (a foundation) permit within the next week or so. We will start site work immediately after," he said.



That site work and other aspects of the construction are expected to be awarded to local contractors, Wallace said. Those contracts will be awarded on an ongoing basis, he said.

Work should start by June 1 at the latest, with the production area completed by Jan. 5, 2009, and the offices by Feb. 15. Nova Bus will start installing equipment once the production area is done and assembly of buses is expected to start sometime in March.

Stantec Consulting Senior Traffic Engineer David DeBaie presented details from an updated traffic study that showed minimal impacts at three intersections on Banker Road -- Route 374, Tom Miller Road and Route 3. Those impacts were minimized because Nova production staff will start work at 7 a.m. and finish at 3:30 p.m. Kurtz said the engineering and design team did a great job.

"It's all about being prepared and having a good developer," she said.

Nova Bus is a wholly owned subsidiary of Volvo Bus Corp., the second-largest motorcoach and transit bus manufacturing group in the world. There are more than 3,500 Nova Bus low-floor buses in service in the United States and Canada.

The company is based in Ste-Eustache, Quebec. The 136,000-square-foot manufacturing facility will be in The Development Corp.'s Banker Road Industrial Park on the east side of Banker Road north of UPS. By comparison, the UPS building is about 40,800 square feet.

That location, which is also in the City of Plattsburgh Empire Zone, allows Nova Bus to meet Federal Transit Administration Buy America requirements that are a necessary part of most large transit authority contracts.

The company expects to initially employ 150 to 175 colleagues, a figure that is expected to reach 300 at full capacity and possibly 435 if success leads to expansion. Production employees are expected to make between \$12 and \$18 per hour.

The state will provide a \$1.3 million JOBS NOW capital grant. An additional \$1.65 million could come from the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority and the New York Office of Small Cities.

Plattsburgh Town Supervisor Bernie Bassett said he was pleased to see the plans for Nova Bus continue to move forward. He said there have been too many times when North Country residents were disappointed when an announced project didn't materialize.

"Nova Bus will not be one of those disappointments," Bassett said.

He said it is important to note that Nova Bus does not have a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement, and will pay school, land and special-district taxes on the property. Some of that money will be reimbursed because the property is in the City of Plattsburgh's Empire Zone.

Bassett said the town is home to a number of high-profile projects, including the successful start of Plattsburgh International Airport, Target, Hampton Inn and Suites, redevelopment of the North Country Shopping Center and the Gateway Theater at that location and White Pine Commons.

"The recent announcement that Laurentian Aerospace continues to move forward is also very exciting and another sign the North Country and Clinton County are a good investment," Bassett said. "This is a good time for those entering the job market and those looking for new opportunity. It's an exciting time to be in the Champlain Valley."

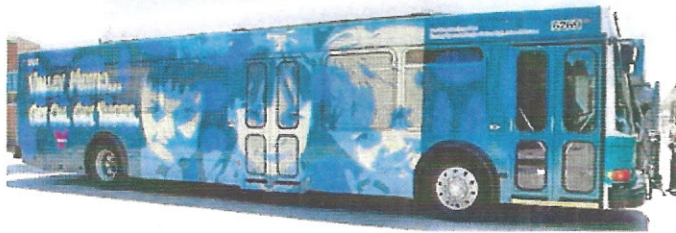
dheath@pressrepublican.com

Tempe Student Designs Winning Bus Wrap

Artwork features message: Get On Get There

PHOENIX (May 8, 2008) – Tommy Spencer, a senior at McClintock High (Tempe), has his winning artwork featured on a Valley Metro bus. Students across the

Valley were asked to create a bus wrap design with a message that shows how public transit can benefit the Valley's youth.



With a message of Get On Get There, the artwork features bus-sized faces of children in a bright blue setting. The intention of the contest and the winning art design is to communicate the virtues of riding the bus: saving money, providing easy and safe transportation, and improving air quality.

Out of more than 70 entries Valleywide, the following winners were chosen for their creativity in designing a bus wrap.

- 1st Place – Tommy Spencer, senior at McClintock High School, Tempe
- 2nd Place – Kirby Danuser, senior at Mesquite High School, Gilbert
- 3rd Place – David Callahan, junior at McClintock High School, Tempe
- Honorable Mention – Carlos Roa, sophomore at McClintock High School, Tempe
- Honorable Mention – Luis Hernandez, senior at McClintock High School, Tempe

Sponsoring the event is bluemedi—the company that produced the wrap for the bus. The bus will be serving various bus routes in the Valley for one year.

Phoenix bus gets patriotic makeover

Connie Cone Sexton
The Arizona Republic
May. 17, 2008 12:00 AM

Victoria Vaughan misses her 19-year-old daughter more than she can say but is proud of the work she is doing to serve her country in the military.

About two dozen Valley residents who have loved ones serving in Iraq turned out to decorate the bus, in preparation for today's Armed Forces Day. The participants are members of the Arizona National Guard's 996th Area Support Medical Company Family Readiness Group, which helps develop and run family-outreach programs.

Vaughan, 41, was ready to do her part, as well, Friday, as she helped adorn the inside of a Phoenix city bus with posters, stars and various patriotic mementos.

The decorating party was held in a parking lot at the National Guard location near 56th Street and McDowell Road. Vaughan showed up for her daughter, Spc. Shaunna Vaughan, who is a mental-health specialist. "When she left, she took my heart," her mother said. "But she's where she needs to be."



Debbie Voorhis, 43, co-chair of the readiness group, came to work on the bus with her son, Jarred, 9. She was there to honor her husband, Sgt. Rick Voorhis, who left three months ago for Iraq. "I'm keeping busy but I never thought I'd get through this," she said.

A route schedule for the Flag Bus is available at www.phoenix.gov/publictransit.

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES BUSINESS SECTION

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

Smoothing the Rides on Greyhound

By AMY ZIPKIN
Published: May 17, 2008

AS the summer travel season approaches, oil and gasoline prices continue to rise. Gas cost an average of about \$3.75 a gallon nationwide earlier this week. Oil prices are setting records almost daily, passing \$125 a barrel. As for airlines, most experts expect the coming months will bring delays, full and overbooked flights, and additional fees for a second checked bag and for changing flights.

What does that portend for the bus, long in eclipse as a means of transportation? Is it ready for a comeback? David Leach, the president and chief executive of Greyhound Lines, recently discussed changes at his company, the slowing economy and new bus services. Here are excerpts from the conversation:

Q. In 2007, Laidlaw, your parent company, was acquired by FirstGroup of Scotland, the largest bus operator in Britain. It started a new chapter for you, after bankruptcy in the early 2000s and schedule reductions in the middle of the decade. What has this acquisition meant for your customers?

A. We reviewed our terminal operations, our capital investment of buses, our ticketing systems, our safety culture and our environmental practices and came up with ways to improve those and offer a better quality of service to our customers through enhanced ticketing systems like more Internet and kiosk-driven systems. We've been able to take their expertise and compare it to ours, allowing us to gain insight into efficient terminal operations and reducing our operating costs.

Q. To what extent have you been able to dispel the notion of the bus as a cumbersome means of travel?

A. From 2004 to 2005, we eliminated more than 1,000 unprofitable locations and reduced the number of stops between major cities. Since then we've been focused on promoting services between points that are 450 miles or less. The average trip length has been cut almost in half for most of our customers in those shorter-haul markets.

Q. What impact is the specter of a recession having on your business? Has it had an impact on ticket prices to this point?

A. As people have less disposable income, we become more of a viable option. The cost of driving personal vehicles has significantly increased. We've always been known as offering affordable low fares that are alternatives to the automobile.

Q. We hear so much about sustainability and efforts to go green. What initiatives do you have on the drawing board for alternative fuels and technologies?

A. Traveling by bus right now stands as the most environmentally friendly way to travel. In general, motor coaches provide 184 passenger miles per gallon of fuel compared to cars, which achieve on average 28 passenger miles per gallon. Carbon dioxide emissions are reduced by an average of 85 percent per passenger mile for every person who chooses to ride a bus instead of driving alone. In our current fleet of new buses, we meet the 2007 E.P.A. standards for greenhouse gas and particulate-matter emissions. We're in a very early stage exploring the use of alternative fuels.

Q. Travel has become synonymous with increased security concerns. Amtrak requires photo IDs and the Transportation Security Administration conducts random ticket verifications. How stringent is security on buses now?

A. Making bus travel safer is a challenge because we've got thousands of locations that we serve, many of them in rural America. Since 9/11, we've made significant

changes to our procedures to increase safety and lower risk. We've taken to being very aggressive in enforcing a zero-tolerance policy with respect to unruly or aggressive passengers. We do periodically screen for prohibited items through a wand program supported by the Department of Homeland Security. We're currently in the process of purchasing new onboard communications systems that put drivers in touch with our operations center in Dallas and give them direct access to emergency services as required.

Q. What concerns do you have now about passenger safety that aren't currently being addressed?

A. Our biggest concern is funding. Since 2003, the T.S.A. has provided us with more than \$16 million in grants for expanding our current security activities. The bus industry seems to come in at the end of the other transportation modes and unlike airplanes, which are fully funded, we have to continue to fund security protocols out of our fare box.

Q. In late March you started an alternative to the New York to Washington shuttle called BoltBus, with advertised fares as low as \$1 one way, offering extra legroom, free Wi-Fi and power outlets. You already have a competitor on that specific route called Megabus.com. What was the rationale behind this effort and what customer are you trying to reach with it?

A. Over the last several years we watched the curbside operations of several carriers in New York City and the travel from New York to Philadelphia to Washington to Boston. They've done a very good job of attracting new riders into the industry. The consumers we're targeting are Internet-savvy, students, young professionals — those folks who don't own a car but are looking for an alternative community-specific origin and destination.

Q. How does the BoltBus differ from a scheduled Greyhound?

A. There's a difference in the way the consumer views the bus. They like the cool factor of the BoltBus. They like the fact that it's almost a secret to them that there's a curbside operator operating off a street corner in New York, and hey, the price is a good price. We've seen the attraction of a whole new rider to the bus business that's a nontraditional Greyhound rider.

High-speed buses planned for Belfast

High-speed bus services will provide the next generation of rapid transit in Belfast, transport minister Conor Murphy has said.

West and east Belfast and the Titanic Quarter should be included in the £147 million pilot scheme and construction is to begin in 2011, he added.

Trams, similar to the Luas in Dublin, would be too large and expensive for the population expected to use the

service, but dedicated lanes and halts will be provided for the so-called trams-on-wheels alternative.

Mr. Murphy said: "Transportation experts have concluded that the most appropriate system for the city is a modern and high-class bus based system.

"I imagine it as a service offering improved speed, reliability, comfort and access features over conventional public transport.

"It is a service that should be segregated from other traffic as much as possible with new vehicle designs that enhance the journey and reflect Belfast as a 21st century city."

Over 3,000 passengers are expected to use the buses during the morning rush hour.

Routes under consideration include from Dundonald in the east to the city centre; from the Titanic Quarter to the city centre and on to Queen's University and the City Hospital and from west Belfast via the Royal Hospital to the centre.

Mr. Murphy added: "This is our opportunity to create a new dynamic transportation system for the city, one that helps link people to jobs, hospitals, schools and colleges.

"One that links communities to the city centre and the emerging opportunities in Titanic Quarter.

"A system that can be expanded to other parts of the city in due course, a system that attracts drivers out of their cars as they see the advantages of rapid transit."

The Sinn Fein minister wants to attract private finance for the scheme and has earmarked £111m of public money.

Light rail is unlikely to be adopted because it would cost significantly more, a total of £590m, and would only deliver around 600 extra users.

However, junctions and infrastructure like bridges will be designed to allow later conversion if numbers merit it.

Kerbs will be used to keep traffic off the route and there will be halts where tickets can be bought while waiting, cutting the time at stops.

There could also be crossings where traffic is stopped to allow the buses through.

The new scheme may involve hybrid buses using electricity, at less cost to the environment.

It is hoped there will be a bus every few minutes at peak mes.

Belfast already has a number of bus corridors and park and ride facilities as officials try to encourage public transport.

Findings of the KPMG Atkins consultants' report are expected to go to consultation.

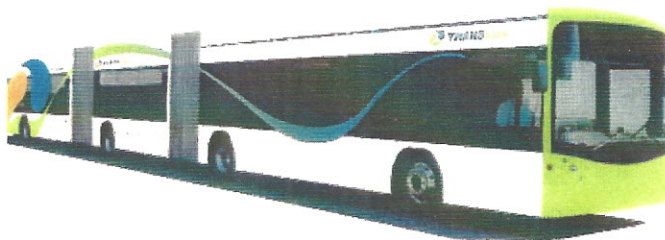
Giant 'superbuses' to hit Brisbane's streets

Christine Kellett | March 23, 2008 | Brisbane Times

The State Government will shop overseas for a fleet of giant 100-seater 'superbuses' to ease the traffic squeeze.

The mammoth vehicles will be three times the length of a regular bus and at least a third larger than articulated "banana buses" currently on the road.

Premier Anna Bligh will invite Australian and international companies to come up with a design - and name their price - from next week.



The giant buses will be trialed in Brisbane's busway network, but the government has not ruled out deploying them on other busy South East Queensland routes if needs arise.

"For a vehicle to be considered it needs to have a carrying capacity of at least 100 passengers - well in excess of a regular articulated or banana bus," Ms Bligh said.

"We will be looking for vehicles that can expand the capacity of the current fleet, but that are also value for money."

The government has challenged manufacturers to explore a number of different designs and engine types, including low-polluting "green" options such as hybrid and ultra-low sulphur diesel models.

It has refused to say how much it has to spend on the vehicles, but indicated a trial could begin as early as next year, with the South East Busway likely to be the first to begin running the 'superbuses'.

Ms Bligh said expressions of interest would be sought between March 26 and May 9.

Tempe-Mesa light rail test put on hold

by Gary Nelson - Jun. 9, 2008 01:14 PM
The Arizona Republic

History was put on hold Monday in east Tempe and Mesa, but not for long.

About four miles of light-rail line from Sun Devil Stadium to the Sycamore Street station was to have gotten its first-ever workout Monday, a slow-speed run to uncover any kinks as the system nears its December inauguration.

It wasn't the train or the track that failed Monday, however. It was the testing equipment.

A camera that was to monitor the train's connection to the overhead power line went on the fritz, according to Hillary Foose, spokesman for Metro Light Rail Inc.



Mark Henle/The Arizona Republic

Daniel Nasearella leads a light-rail car on a live wire test at walking speed through College and Fifth Street in Tempe on Monday.

That camera won't be part of the train's normal operating equipment, she said. But it was necessary on Monday because checking out the electrical line was to have been a big part of the test.

"Apparently it was working this morning when they were checking out the train and all its components," Foose said after the test was called off. But after the train rolled from the yard in east Phoenix to the station near Sun Devil Stadium, the camera failed.

From there, Metro had planned to run the car at about 4 mph to the Sycamore station, with technicians walking alongside to look for problems. "We're testing all the components of the system," Foose said.

One big part of the testing, she said, is to get drivers and pedestrians used to the sleek, quiet trains that will run up to 35 mph along mostly unguarded streets. Only five intersections along the entire 20-mile line will have crossing arms, Foose said. The rest will rely on normal traffic signals to keep trains and cars apart.

Despite Monday's glitch, testing will accelerate as the year speeds along.

Foose said the Tempe-Mesa test likely would be rescheduled for this week, and by the end of the summer the entire line will have had its initial inspection.

By November, Foose said, people all along the line can expect to see trains every 10 minutes, at normal operating speeds, as final bugs are worked out.

One problem that's already been fixed, Foose said, is the cracks that were found in at least 17 sections of rail after contractors used the wrong kind of torch in construction.

The \$1.4 billion light-rail line opens Dec. 27, the Saturday after Christmas, with free rides on the inaugural weekend.

Each rail car can carry up to 200 people at standing-room-only capacity, and with the system's ability to hook three cars together, as many as 600 people could leave their cars and trucks behind every time a train rolls.

Service hours haven't been set yet, but Foose expects trains to run perhaps 4:30 a.m. to midnight every day.

In coming months, Mesa faces a major decision whether to extend the line from the Sycamore station into downtown - and, if so, what route to take. Some favor running the rails right down Main Street at least to Mesa Drive; others prefer moving them a block north or south to either First Street or First Avenue.

Rail's use of energy subject of debate

Savings depend on how many ride, type of fuel used to generate power

By Sean Hao
Advertiser Staff Writer

Honolulu's planned commuter rail system will consume enough electricity each day to power about 9,250 homes, or a community the size of Hawai'i Kai. That shouldn't pose a risk of energy shortage and could lower transportation-related air pollutants and energy use as people switch from automobiles to trains, according to the city.

The potential positive impact on the environment is a key benefit of the \$3.7 billion elevated commuter rail line, said Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann.

"We are already a community that is 90 percent dependent on fossil fuels and this is all about reducing our dependence on that and using alternative forms of energy," he said. "We're putting Honolulu in a good place to continue to do our part to reduce global warming."

Environmentalists agree that mass transit can be a green transportation alternative. Whether rail is more energy efficient and reduces air pollution hinges on

factors such as ridership and the fuel used to generate electricity.

"Based on the experience of Mainland cities and cities around the world, it seems certain that rail has been a good option for most of those cities," said Randy Ching, chairman of The Sierra Club O'ahu Group. "I would hope it would be similar here, but I haven't seen definitive numbers either way yet.

"If I were convinced that this would be well used and a lot of people would get out of their automobiles to ride the rail, then I think there's no question on a cost per mile, per passenger basis rail would be a more viable option than the personal automobile," Ching said.

The city plans to start building the elevated commuter rail line late next year, with the first segment from East Kapolei to Leeward Community College opening in 2012. The total 20-mile route to Ala Moana would open in phases through 2018.

In 2030, the train system is expected to consume an average of about 18.5 megawatt hours of electricity, according to New York-based Parsons Brinckerhoff, the project contractor.

The power needed could exceed 18.5 megawatt hours because that estimate does not reflect the energy used in the generation and transmission of electricity by Hawaiian Electric Co.

The power needed by the train is relatively small when compared with O'ahu's total daily peak demand of about 1,241 megawatts of electricity, according to HECO.

HECO said there should be no problem supplying the train with power, along with other potential new projects such as new housing developments and the planned University of Hawai'i West O'ahu campus.

The train "is a big project obviously," said HECO spokesman Peter Rosegg. But, "It would be wrong to see (the train) as some big gorilla coming down the road. It is one of the small monkeys and there are a number of small monkeys and they're going to get here at different times."

While the train's demand for electricity could be relatively small, peak transit hours — and electrical needs — are likely to coincide with Honolulu's overall electricity demand peak, which occurs in the early evening.

The added load from the train also is expected to come at a time when HECO forecasts reserve capacity shortfalls of as much as 130 megawatts in 2014, according to a report filed this year with the Public Utilities Commission. That's assuming the utility completes a 110-megawatt generator at Campbell Industrial Park sometime next year.

A reserve capacity shortfall increases the risk of generation-related power outages. However, that is not expected to be an issue on O'ahu unless HECO's two largest power generators are taken offline for some reason. Even then, HECO would hope to manage demand to prevent an outage, Rosegg said.

"We can and will accommodate the energy needs of the transit program," Rosegg said. "These needs will not be the driver for another power plant."

To help meet electricity needs, HECO is looking at renewable energy sources, including wind, solar, waste-to-energy and ocean power, the company said. The utility's new Campbell Industrial Park generator will use biofuels, which HECO said will only come from farmed palm oil plantations that haven't been cut out of native forests.

Whether rail is more "green" than other transportation modes also depends on how many people opt to park their cars to ride mass transit. Critics have questioned whether a Honolulu rail line can generate high ridership without serving Waikiki, UH-Manoa and Honolulu International Airport. The city plans to eventually expand service to those locations, but there is no money earmarked for such expansion.

Even without serving those areas, the commuter rail line is expected to attract more riders when compared with other alternatives studied, including expanding TheBus fleet or creating managed traffic lanes, according to Parsons Brinckerhoff.

When combined with TheBus, overall mass transit ridership is expected to increase to 7.4 percent of total transit trips in 2030; up from 6.1 percent projected if the commuter rail line is not built. The transit system also is expected to reduce daily vehicle trips by 45,000 on O'ahu.

Higher mass transit use could mean daily transportation energy consumed in 2030 would be about 3 percent less than if the city were to build managed traffic lanes, according to Parsons Brinckerhoff. The energy needed to run the commuter rail system or an expanded TheBus fleet would be nearly the same.

Rail energy reductions are based on the higher energy efficiency and passenger load factors of rail transit. Commuter rail requires 2,743 Btu of energy per passenger mile, according to the Department of Energy. A Btu, or British Thermal Unit, is equivalent to the energy needed to raise 1 pound of water by 1 degree Fahrenheit. In contrast, an automobile uses 3,445 Btu of energy per passenger mile.

City officials argue that transit ridership could outstrip expectations as gasoline prices rise and traffic congestion grows. However, higher gasoline prices also are expected to spur the development and adoption of

more fuel-efficient autos. That means that, some day, autos could be more energy efficient than rail.

By 2035, the average auto will consume an estimated 2,500 Btu per passenger mile, according to an April article published by the libertarian Cato Institute. "A proposed light rail line that promises to save energy not only needs to be more efficient than today's autos, it must be more efficient than future autos," wrote the article's author, Randal O'Toole.

Any evaluation of the energy savings generated by rail also needs to consider the massive amount of energy required during construction, according to the Cato report. For example, construction of the fixed guideway will require between 3.7 trillion and 4.9 trillion Btu of energy, according to Parsons Brinckerhoff. That compares with the 3 trillion to 4.2 trillion Btu of energy needed to build a managed lane mass transit system.

Another issue for the rail line is its impact on air pollution. Regional emissions would range from zero to 4 percent less with the rail system or an expanded bus service. That compares with zero to 4 percent higher for managed traffic lanes, according to Parsons Brinckerhoff.

Further details about the project's environmental impact are expected to be disclosed in a draft study scheduled for release this summer. Local environmental groups said they're reserving judgment on endorsing the transit project for now.

"There are certainly some benefits of rail, but the aesthetics, the route, the amount of energy used — all of that plays a role," said Henry Curtis, director of Life of the Land. "Therefore I don't know of any environmental groups that have looked at rail and said yes or no."

Reach Sean Hao at shao@honoluluadvertiser.com.

Depot food plans stir tension

Civic, business leaders disagree over proposed restaurant for Amtrak station

By LARRY SANDLER
lsandler@journalsentinel.com

Posted: June 8, 2008

Fast food could arrive before fast trains at Milwaukee's newly renovated Amtrak-Greyhound station.

After trying unsuccessfully to attract a sit-down restaurant to the space next to the Amtrak gates, the developers who led the downtown station's \$15.8 million overhaul say they are now considering a proposal for a convenience store that would be linked to a Subway, a Cousins Subs or a Dunkin' Donuts.

That idea is enough to give downtown Ald. Bob Bauman indigestion.

"You don't spend \$15.8 million to build an iconic structure and have a Dunkin' Donuts as your primary food service," Bauman said. "This should be a destination restaurant location."

Mayor Tom Barrett agreed, saying, "C'mon, we can do better than this. . . . This is our building of first impressions for people who get off the train. We don't want our first impression to be, 'Is this all there is?'"

Bauman, the chairman of the Common Council's Public Works Committee, wants a sit-down restaurant in the 3,487 square feet reserved for retail use in the station.

When the state Department of Transportation developed plans several years ago to convert the downtown Amtrak station into a combined hub for trains and intercity buses, Bauman led a successful fight against a more modest station upgrade that would have included a drive-through food service window. Barrett's administration joined him and eventually helped set up a tax-incremental financing district to bear part of the costs of a more extensive revamp.

The result has been renamed the Milwaukee Intermodal Station, a gleaming, glassy structure that officials have hailed as a proud gateway to the city. In the future, it also could become the gateway for two passenger rail systems still in the planning stages: the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative's high-speed trains to Chicago, Madison and the Twin Cities, and the KRM Commuter Link service to Kenosha, Racine and the southern suburbs.

But restaurateurs aren't convinced they have a place in that gateway, says Scott Mayer, president of Milwaukee Intermodal Partners. Mayer's firm, an arm of Los Angeles-based Wilton Partners, is managing the station under a public-private partnership with the state.

Instead, Skylark Automatic Vending Co. has proposed a convenience store with a fast-food outlet attached, Mayer said. Subway, Cousins Subs and Dunkin' Donuts are all in talks to be the fast-food outlet, but no leases have been signed, Mayer said. He said the sandwich or doughnut shops would be good for business travelers seeking a quick breakfast before catching morning trains to Chicago.

Skylark, of Milwaukee, also operates the station's vending machines, but a Bauman news release that said the retail space would be used for "a vending machine emporium" was not accurate, Mayer said.

Restaurants cool to site

The station's leasing agent, CB Richard Ellis, has pitched the space to numerous local and national restaurant operators for a sports bar or some other type

of sit-down establishment for more than two years, "but there was no real interest," Mayer said. The restaurateurs "decided there's not enough business to justify the cost," he said.

Bauman said restaurant operators turned away because the costs were too high.

Mayer's firm is asking annual rent of \$20 a square foot, plus overhead charges of \$15 a square foot, and the retail tenant would have to pay for building the site, Mayer said. Bauman said it could cost a tenant as much as \$500,000 to put in a full restaurant kitchen, in addition to more than \$120,000 a year in rent.

Mayer said the rent and overhead charges were standard market rates, but that his firm and the leasing agent would be willing to negotiate with anyone who offers a reasonable proposal. He noted that a previous restaurant had failed in the old train station, and no one wanted to repeat that experience.

Bauman and Barrett called on the Transportation Department to pressure Milwaukee Intermodal Partners to come up with something better. If necessary, Bauman said, the state should buy out the developer.

But Chris Klein, executive assistant to state Transportation Secretary Frank Busalacchi, said the station's food service plan was out of the state's hands, and spending \$3 million to buy out the developer would be "just silly." And Mayer said it was inappropriate for Bauman to suggest the state terminate its relationship with his company over this issue.

Bus service: Overhead costs are also at the heart of a separate dispute over intercity bus service at the station.

Under its deal with the state, Greyhound is in charge of the bus gates at the west end of the station. It subleases space to Indian Trails and Lamers bus lines, and to the Racine-Kenosha service of Wisconsin Coach Lines, an arm of Coach USA. Greyhound also sells tickets for the other bus lines.

But two other Coach USA lines, the Airport Express buses to Chicago's O'Hare International Airport and the low-cost Megabus service to Chicago, pick up and discharge passengers outside the station, on N. 5th St. That has caused tension with Greyhound and has raised concerns about safety.

Greyhound is negotiating with Coach USA to bring the other bus lines into the station, said Bauman and bus company representatives.

All of the Coach USA operations want to be in the station, but "it's about paying our fair share," said Tom Dieckelman, vice president of Wisconsin Coach Lines. For example, Megabus sells all of its tickets over the Internet and wouldn't want to pay for the services of Greyhound ticket agents, he said.

Greyhound is now seeking a federal grant to lower the overhead costs. Greyhound spokesman Dustin Clark declined to provide details of the talks, but said federal aid would be helpful.

Dieckelman added, "That would help everyone in this day and age, when it's \$4.50 for a gallon of diesel fuel and more than \$4 for a gallon of regular gas."

Bus Rapid Transit - Deficiencies and Defects

By Paul Weyrich

Having written recent commentaries favoring streetcars and light rail and objecting to the Bush Administration's push for so-called Bus Rapid Transit, I have received email asking just what is wrong with Bus Rapid Transit anyway, especially since conservative and libertarian think tanks such as the Reason Foundation and the CATO Institute are all for it. My correspondents are correct. I owe my readers an explanation as to why I am against Bus Rapid Transit.

Let me count the reasons. First, as I have mentioned before, riders much prefer rail to buses when given a choice. If the object of transit is to get drivers to leave their cars at home, then rail is by far the better way to go. Second, rail attracts investment. I have cited Portland's multibillion stipulated investment but even in the smaller city of Kenosha, Wisconsin the single two-mile-long streetcar line has attracted a remarkable amount of investment and when a second line will go from downtown to uptown development will be yet more pronounced. There is no example anywhere of Bus Rapid Transit's attracting development. Riders know that a bus route can be changed overnight. Rail has a far greater permanence to it.

Streetcars are primarily neighborhood circulators. They stop every couple of blocks to bring people where they want to go. Bus Rapid Transit is more like light rail. Much of it has its own private right away. Some lines have high-level platforms like rail so passengers use fare machines and need not spend time paying the fare aboard the bus. Streetcars are not designed for speed yet the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) justifies funding bus rapid transit because it is faster. That alone shows FTA prejudice.

I mentioned that rail is more expensive to build but cheaper to operate. However, the highly respected transit consultant, Ed Tennyson, who served as Director of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation some years ago, contends that rail does not have to be more expensive to build.

In any case, the two biggest costs in running a transit operation are labor and fuel. Of late rail has been carrying large passenger loads not seen since World War II. I have not seen data suggesting that Bus Rapid Transit lines have broken any record. Let us, for the sake of argument, stipulate that a light rail line and a Bus

Rapid Transit line will each carry 70,000 passengers per day. Now many light rail lines operate as many as four articulated rail cars together as one train. To equal the number of passengers carried, the bus system would need to operate between six and eight vehicles. That four-car train can operate with a single motorman whereas each bus must have a driver. So we are talking about a ratio of six or eight to one. That bus system gets mighty expensive. We know what diesel fuel costs these days. Some newer buses are powered by natural gas, which is still very expensive. Yes, the cost of electricity has gone up some but not nearly as much as diesel or natural-gas fuel.

Those concerned about the environment must know that buses are hardly helpful in reducing greenhouse gases. Modern electric plants produce little pollution. Nuclear plans supply 20% of our energy. They produce no pollution of the kind which concerns us at all.

Then there is the matter of speed. Both buses and rail cars can run at the same top speed. But the acceleration and deceleration rate of a rail car or train is much faster than that of a bus. That is why rail systems can maintain better schedules than buses. And there is the question of replacements. Buses don't last for more than 15 years, with overhauls maybe 20. Electric rail cars, on the other hand, if well maintained can operate indefinitely. The SEPTA Red Arrow Division operated streetcars and interurban cars that were some 60 to 70 years old before they finally were replaced. Ever come across a 70-year-old bus in regular service? Boston, Philadelphia, Kenosha and San Francisco operate PCC streetcars from the 1940s and 1950s seven days a week. Those are modern quiet streetcars developed by the President's Conference Committee in the 1930s to attempt to stave off competition from automobiles and buses. They will be able to operate for at least another 15 years.

One only can hope that the new Administration in 2009 will have a more enlightened view toward rail transit. Some 30 cities are serious about wanting streetcars and another 10 light rail systems will be built if the Federal Transit Administration is fair in how it evaluates what is best for a community.

Group to seek public input on rail transit

The rail system used to carry passengers from Hamilton County to the Indiana State Fair could be used to take commuters to and from work by 2012.

The Indianapolis Regional Transportation Council is moving ahead with public meetings to present the city's Metropolitan Planning Organization's recommendation of the Nickel Plate Line as the Northeast Corridor rail transit route, which would run from Noblesville to Indianapolis.

The proposal is the first of seven in a proposed region-wide rapid transit system.

The Nickel Plate Line is the track that is used each year as the FairTrain route linking the Indiana State Fairground and Fishers. The majority of the line is owned by the Hoosier Heritage Port Authority and is currently used by the Indiana Transportation Museum for leisure excursions.

Transportation officials say such a system could be up and running within four to 10 years.

On April 30, the MPO presented a route and technology recommendation to meet the long-term transit needs of the Northeast Corridor. This preliminary recommendation, part of the rapid transit study DIRECTIONS, was made at a special joint meeting of the IRTC, the decision-making body of the transportation planning process.

The MPO also recommends diesel light rail technology to provide rapid transit service along this route.

Additional meetings will be held throughout the spring to accommodate further public review and comment, including at the Gene B. Glick Junior Achievement Center on June 17, Fishers Town Hall on June 18, Indianapolis Central Library on June 24 and an, as yet, unscheduled day-time downtown Indianapolis location.

In addition, the MPO and the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority will address special stakeholder groups located throughout the corridor.

To schedule a presentation for your group, call 327-5136 or 327-7585.

Greyhound station still strong after last year's move

BY LUIS HERNANDEZ •
LHERNAND@VISALIA.GANNETT.COM • JUNE 11, 2008

While the new Greyhound bus station in downtown Tulare is thriving, the old location was recently purchased by the city and will be part of the corporation yard's expansion — a project that could take some time to complete.

Greyhound bus agent Guy Laber said the station's relocation was a welcome move.

"Everything has been more convenient," he said. "Being here, we're more centrally located. It makes it more convenient."

That's something Greyhound customers have told Laber.

"There's no dust, no mud to deal with," he said. "We have received many compliments."

After being located at 3909 South K St. for 14 years, the Greyhound bus station moved in February 2007 to 407

North K St. to be closer to Tulare InterModal Express, or TIME, terminal.



Passengers board a Greyhound bus at the Greyhound Station on N. K St. in Tulare on Monday. (TERESA DOUGLASS)

And as far as Laber is concerned, the new location is a bus depot befitting Greyhound.

"It's pretty to come by here at night and look at all the lighting. It's absolutely beautiful," he said. "It looks like it should be in San Francisco."

The new location is the third for the bus depot. Before moving to J Street, the depot was located on South M Street. Laber said he hopes the North K Street location will be the last for the Greyhound station.

"We have a 10-year lease," he said. "I am sure it's open for renewal. I don't think the city has any complaints. I have a good relationship with the city."

While there hasn't been a spike in Greyhound bus ridership, business is steady, Laber said.



Guy Laber, left, talks to Robert Diana, both of Tulare, at the Greyhound Station in Tulare on Monday. (TERESA DOUGLASS)

After a nearly year-long negotiation period, the city council approved the \$423,000-purchase for the 45,415-square-foot property.

Tulare Public Works Director Lew Nelson said after seeing the property was up for sale, following a master plan that called for the corporation yard to expand, he sought to purchase it.

However, the property purchase is just one of several more to come.

Nelson said the Master Plan calls for expanding up to Gooding Street. While other lots have already been bought, one of the key properties is Lott Drilling Co. on Gooding.

"It will be a long, long, long time before we own that property," Nelson said.

The two sides are aware a potential deal could be struck.

"They're aware we're interested in buying if they're interested in selling," Nelson said.

But interest alone won't get this land purchase done. Nelson said city officials must follow acquisition rules, which include paying what appraisers estimate the property is worth.

"And I am not going to spend money on an appraisal if the property owner is not interested in selling," he said. "The appraised value is what we can pay."

Phone messages left for Lott Drilling Co. weren't returned.

There are immediate plans for the former Greyhound location. Nelson said the building will be removed and the property cleared. To use the property, Nelson said a fence would have to be installed.

"We could see," Nelson said.

And with plenty of room at the corporation yard, there's no need for additional space, Nelson said. The approach will be to wait until the adjacent property owners are ready to sell.

"There is no timeline for expanding," he said.

U changes direction on light-rail trains

University of Minnesota President Robert Bruininks said the university will support running the trains on Washington Avenue.

By JIM FOTI, Star Tribune

Last update: June 12, 2008 - 12:20 AM

The University of Minnesota will set aside its long-held objections and support the running of light-rail trains on Washington Avenue, University President Robert Bruininks said Wednesday.

"The university does not want to be in the position of bringing this project to a grinding halt or jeopardizing its possible future," said Bruininks, who will urge the Board

of Regents to approve the route in meetings today and Friday.

In an interview at Morrill Hall, he said the university's negotiations with other public agencies have resulted in "enormous progress" on concerns such as traffic, hospital access and the impact on sensitive research equipment -- and who might pay for solutions.

Planners of the 11-mile Central Corridor light-rail line have twice voted in support of running trains through the East Bank campus on Washington Avenue, but in recent months the school has been vocal in its preference for a northern alignment that would take trains through Dinkytown, and it paid for a study of such a route.

The study "had some encouraging findings," Bruininks said, but acknowledged that the northern route fell short of meeting current federal requirements on costs and ridership.

The university's change of heart will help the project meet a September deadline for applying for the federal money that's expected to pay for half the line, which would open in 2014.

In 2001, the Board of Regents approved a resolution stating its preference that the line follow the northern alignment or be placed in a tunnel under Washington Avenue.

The tunnel was deemed too costly earlier this year, and on May 28, the Central Corridor Management Committee and the Metropolitan Council eliminated the northern alignment from consideration.

"This isn't about being arrogant. It's not about being elitist," Bruininks said, indirectly addressing critics who have accused the university of trying to delay the \$892 million line. "It's about being serious about the issues that have to do with how this campus and the surrounding communities really work."

A five-block stretch of Washington in the heart of campus would be closed to automobile traffic, and in doing so, "we can't create chaos elsewhere," Bruininks said. Granary Road, a new street that would roughly follow the northern alignment, as well as improvements to East River Road, must be part of any mitigation package, he said.

Bruininks said that he'll recommend that the regents fully support the at-grade alignment with the necessary mitigations -- and that even two weeks ago, he wasn't prepared to make such a recommendation. He expects the board to pass the resolution.

"It's a big change-of-course," he said. "... I think the northern alignment is a more creative option, but I have concluded with some reluctance that we simply can't get there."

Bruininks said he doesn't expect the university to bear the brunt of the mitigation expenses. Costs related to building a new transit line "should not come out of tuition or the academic budgets of the University of Minnesota," he said.

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Czech trams head for Washington

After success in Oregon, Škoda trams to debut in U.S. capital

June 11th, 2008 issue

For the Post

Talk to many Americans who've lived in Prague — or anywhere in Europe, for that matter — and sooner or later they'll comment on how nice the trams are.

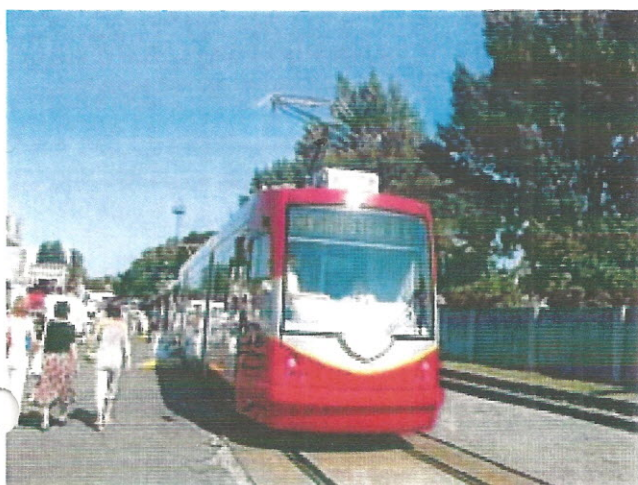
Take Reuben Berger, an American who has lived in the Czech capital for three years and takes trams to his various English-teaching jobs. "They're great," he said during a cell phone conversation from a tram. "And it's not just the convenience. I also feel better about not creating as much pollution."

When choosing the next place he'll live, Berger will look for a city with good public transportation — and now he

may be able to find some new options back in the United States.

Washington, D.C., has set its sights on a streetcar line — and has gone so far as to invest nearly \$10 million (160 million Kč) for three trams from the Czech Republic. But there's a hitch. Although the trams, or streetcars, were bought three years ago, the track on which the trams will run has yet to be built in the U.S. capital.

Manufactured through a now-defunct joint venture between Škoda and Inekon, the trams are still in the Czech Republic, stored at the Ostrava Transport Company. Fortunately the trams are under warranty and, like cars, are taken out regularly (without passengers) to keep them in good condition and tested. They are expected to be moved to Washington later this year.



While Milan Haloun, sales director of Inekon Group, says Washington invited bids to build a new rail line in April, D.C. Department of Transportation Director Emeka Moneme has told news media that no timetable has been set for the tracks' installation, but he hopes the city will focus on the project this summer.

Czech exports

Until the triumph of the automobile, trams were a staple of many U.S. cities. These days, although some like San Francisco and New Orleans (locale of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*) still operate lines, most cities are light years behind their European counterparts in terms of public transportation.

There are signs that America is catching up, however. About a dozen other U.S. cities, including Baltimore, San Diego, Los Angeles and Minneapolis, have light-rail systems, and at least 80 cities are studying the idea of streetcars.

Portland, Oregon, for one, has a tram program up and running — and it uses cars made in the Czech Republic. Covering 7.2 miles, the rail system is a loop that includes a hospital, several waterfront neighborhoods and a university. The first streetcars were purchased from

Škoda-Inekon in 2001, and more were added last year. A similar system, also using Škoda-Inekon cars, currently operates in Tacoma, Washington.

And now, Washington, D.C., is joining the list.

"The district purchased the streetcars from the Czech Republic because it had an opportunity to participate in a procurement that was under way with the city of Portland," said Freddie Fuller, a spokesman for the D.C. Department of Transportation. "By participating in Portland's procurement, it helped expedite the process for the district."

Fuller added that, while he personally is not familiar with Prague's tram system, he has used trams in other European cities, such as Bordeaux, France. "We're really intrigued with their wireless propulsion system," he said.

Limited opportunity

Overall, the trend toward a streetcar revival in U.S. cities — or at least the effort to modernize public transportation — would seem to indicate that Czech manufacturers like Škoda are poised to benefit.

"By winning a tender in the United States, Škoda is tapping into a potentially lucrative market that remained elusive to this point," Škoda spokeswoman Radka Pistoriusová told *The Prague Post* last year following the Portland deal. "[Trams] currently account for some 50 percent to 60 percent of our production."

Because of a strict federal "Buy America" law, though, the majority of trams in the United States must be made, meaning opportunities for companies like Škoda to crack the market have limits.

Meanwhile, Berger says a U.S. streetcar revival sounds interesting, but, for now, he's still weighing his options.

"Actually I'm thinking about going to Moscow first," he said.

James Tressler can be reached at news@praguepost.com

Rail system has defenders, detractors — Indianapolis, In

By Chris Sikich
Posted: June 17, 2008

People are looking forward to getting to work more quickly and saving on gas, but they're concerned about the environmental impact of diesel train engines.

Those were some of the sentiments expressed Monday at the first public meeting on a proposal to build the region's first rail system, which would connect the Noblesville area to Downtown Indianapolis using the old Nickel Plate rail line.

Transportation planners with the Metropolitan Planning Organization are recommending a \$160 million light-rail mass transit system with engines capable of using biodiesel. They say it can be running in three to five years.

Ehren Bingaman, executive director of the Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority, said the reduction in cars on the road would make up for any pollution caused by diesel engines.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization is still studying potential ridership numbers. But the authority, which would oversee the mass transit system, estimated up to 5,000 cars a day might be taken off the roads.

Bingaman also said riders would get to Downtown more quickly on trains than by fighting roadway congestion.

Gail Rothrock, 55, Noblesville, was one of several people who attended Monday's hearing who said they would ditch their cars for a ride into the city.

She spent a "personal best" \$54 last week to fill her Toyota Camry. Commuting daily to Indianapolis, that won't last a week, she said.

"I know there are some days when I would like to sit and work on the computer or read the newspaper." A train would allow her to do that, she said.

Not everyone at Monday's session was sold on the need.

O'Brien Bassett, 40, Indianapolis, said he would like to see bus service along existing roads, saying that would save a "colossal" amount of money. He also said gas prices won't be as high as \$4 forever.

"We shouldn't have to subsidize people who chose to live far from work," Bassett said.

At first, the system would run in 30-minute intervals during peak morning and afternoon driving times and would rely on an expanded IndyGo bus system to get people to and from stations.

If fully built in 2035, the route could feature two sets of tracks and 19 stations. That would cost tens of millions more. Planners say taking the extra step of converting the system to electric could raise the price even higher, to \$690 million. Six other proposed routes to other suburban areas would cost even more.

Brenda Havens, 44, Indianapolis, an information technology professional who can't drive because she has poor eyesight, is looking forward to all seven routes being discussed. In the meantime, she could use the first when she visits clients in the Fishers and Noblesville area. She likes the starter route, saying it's something that can be accomplished in a short period and then built upon.

Howard West, 40, Indianapolis, lives and works in the Castleton area and hopes mass transit gets cars off the road. He'd also take the train to Indianapolis for events such as Indy Jazz Fest and Indiana Black Expo or just to walk along the canal.

"I think everybody should support this," he said.

The route is being considered first in part because I-69 is the heaviest traveled road into the city, because the Noblesville area has no direct interstate into the city, and because most of the right of way along the Nickel Plate line is already secured.

The Metropolitan Planning Organization is gathering input in public meetings this month, and it will make a recommendation in late July or early August on the route and technology to the Indianapolis Regional Transportation Council. If that group, headed by Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard, approves the route and technology, an environmental study would begin this year.

Call Star reporter Chris Sikich at (317) 444-5545.

Sound Transit considers expansion plans' cost benefits

Progressive Railroading

Public transit expansion in the Puget Sound region would pay for itself within 15 years through time and energy savings, according to a recent benefits-cost analysis conducted for Sound Transit by Parsons Brinckerhoff.

Sound Transit's board is considering three system expansion options: a 20-year plan to add more than 50 miles of light-rail service, and two 12-year proposals that would add 18 to 23 miles of light-rail service and increase commuter-rail service. The board also is determining whether to place one of the options on the November 2008 ballot or wait until 2010.

The study assessed the impacts of transit expansion options on regional travel patterns in five categories: number of new transit riders; travel time savings for new and existing riders; savings in vehicle miles traveled because of new transit; paid parking saved for new riders; and reduction in delays caused by traffic congestion.

The study found that expanding Sound Transit's rail system would save between 13 million and 34 million vehicle hours annually through reduced vehicle delays, depending on the option chosen.