



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

AUGUST 2008

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

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

Visit the Omnibus Society of America website at "www.osabus.com". At osabus.com 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.

• AUGUST MEETING

The August meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on August 1, 2008, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening will be "*Buses of London England*", presented by Fred McGullam.

The hospital is on California near Foster. Winona is one half-block south of Foster. By public transportation, take the 92 Foster to California. From the Ravenswood Brown Line, take the 93 North California from Kimball, get off after it turns onto California from Foster and walk back south. Or, take the 11 Lincoln from Western; get off at Carmen (One block south of Foster) and walk west on Winona.

There is some parking on California and Winona. The parking structure is on the west side of California just south of Foster.

Bus Shuttles to Replace Service between O'Hare & Rosemont Stations for Three Weeks Beginning Tuesday July 8, 2008.

The CTA reminds customers that rail service between the O'Hare and Rosemont Blue Line stations will be temporarily suspended starting the morning of Tuesday, July 8th through Sunday, July 27 due to slow zone elimination work. **Beginning at 3 a.m. Tuesday, July 8, bus shuttle service will replace rail service between the O'Hare and Rosemont stations.** The bus shuttles will run 24 hours a day, the same hours of operation as the Blue Line.

Normal rail service will resume Monday, July 28.

Crews will be working to replace deteriorated rail, ties, tie plates and spikes that, when completed, will allow CTA to

lift slow zone restrictions currently in effect for trains traveling between O'Hare and Rosemont.

While work is underway, Blue Line trains will make all stops to Rosemont station where customers will transfer to bus shuttles to complete their trips to O'Hare.

Customers at the Rosemont station will exit trains to transfer to CTA buses at the bus terminal en route to O'Hare. At O'Hare customers will board and alight buses at the O'Hare Bus Shuttle Center located in the airport's lower level near the flight Arrivals area (O'Hare terminals 1, 2 and 3). The bus shuttle trip between Rosemont station and O'Hare takes approximately 10 minutes. CTA personnel will be available at both locations to direct customers to awaiting buses.

Since October 2007, slow zones system-wide have been reduced from 22.5 percent to 12.8 percent.

Mayor Daley and CTA Launch New Supervisor Information System and Innovative Employment Program

New Programs Will Help CTA Streamline Operations and Improve Transit for Residents

City of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and Chicago Transit Authority President Ron Huberman today provided details on how technology and the CTA's Apprentice Program are helping the agency cut costs while improving the quality of service for customers.

"As you all know, I continue to challenge all city agencies to improve the quality of service they provide to our residents—each and every day. For the Chicago Transit Authority, this means looking for new, creative ways to provide safe, reliable and clean service to riders," said Mayor Daley during a press conference at the 74th Street CTA bus garage, 1907 W. 74th Street.

In August, the CTA will make the majority of its bus supervisor positions mobile rather than assigned to fixed locations. Using Bus Tracker, and a new application called Supervisor Information Management System or SIMS, bus supervisors will have access to real-time information to better manage the on-time performance of buses, and deal proactively with bus bunching and service delays to riders. CTA bus supervisors will no longer be assigned to stationary positions with clipboards to manage bus service.

With the implementation of SIMS, supervisors can be mobile so that they can provide real-time assistance to operators and customers, and make real-time decisions to minimize service delays. They will also have GPS-enabled phones and wireless laptops similar to those used by the Chicago Police Department which will also improve communication and tracking with the CTA's Control Center. This new technology is expected to save the CTA approximately \$1.5 million.

Bus Tracker

Bus Tracker, www.ctabustracker.com, is CTA's web-based program that uses global positioning system (GPS) technology to provide real-time information on buses as they travel their routes. On July 21, 15 more bus routes will be added to the Bus Tracker web site bringing the total number of routes accessible through Bus Tracker to 67. In addition, new program enhancements and upgraded features, such as Google-based mapping, will provide customers and supervisors with improved capabilities.

"CTA continually looks for ways to improve the customer experience by getting better information into the hands of customers," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "Customers will find that the Bus Tracker improvements will make it easier to navigate and access information in one convenient location."

Routes that will be added to Bus Tracker on July 21 include:

- #7 Harrison
- #8 Halsted
- #10 Museum of Science & Industry
- #12 Roosevelt
- #17 Westchester
- #18 16th/18th
- #38 Ogden/Taylor
- #52 Kedzie/California
- #125 Water Tower Express
- #126 Jackson
- #129 West Loop/South Loop
- #146 Inner Drive/Michigan Express
- #147 Outer Drive Express
- #148 Clarendon/Michigan Express
- #156 LaSalle

Other new features include:

- **Bus Icon Roll-Over Information Boxes** – displays the route name and number; direction of travel; final destination; and the next four estimated bus arrivals for that particular bus selected. Separate links also will be provided allowing customers to access a route's schedule and the progress of all buses operating along that particular route via the Street View function.
- **Routes Selection** – customers can select up to five routes that can be simultaneously displayed and tracked on the Bus Tracker map. For easier identification, each route is color coded on the bus location map and also listed in the map legend at the bottom of the features.
- **Find Stop** – allows customers to locate a stop along any CTA bus route activated on Bus Tracker.
- **"Stops" and "Buses" Checkboxes** – by selecting either of these options, customers can hide or display all bus stops and buses in operation for their selected route(s). If a customer chooses to display the bus stops along their selected routes, each location will be represented by red dots. By clicking on the red dots, customers will be informed as to when the next bus is predicted to arrive at that particular bus stop.

Ex-Offender Apprentices Program

In November, CTA launched a new initiative in which hard-to-employ individuals and ex-offenders were hired to participate in the CTA's Apprentices program. As part of the program, the agency selected 50 individuals to complete job readiness training through the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (MOWD), which partners with non-profit community organizations to help hard to place individuals re-enter the workforce. This grant program helps subsidize the costs non-profit community organizations spend in assisting ex-offenders. Currently the CTA program has 156 individuals that are assigned to cleaning both bus and rail cars.

"The Apprentices program helps the CTA in its efforts to provide a clean traveling environment for customers and provides a second chance for individuals who have faced difficult times in their lives get back on their feet," said Mayor Daley. "As I have said many times before, our families, our neighborhoods and our city's economy all benefit when formerly incarcerated individuals achieve their independence and lead healthy, responsible lives."

Individuals who successfully complete the job training program are placed in a pool of candidates that are eligible to participate in the program. When apprenticeships become available, CTA receives

resumes from the MOWD, interviews the candidates, administers drug testing and provides additional hands-on rail and bus cleaning training for those selected.

"The program we have been operating is one of the largest transition programs in the country," said Huberman. "It offers the longest term for workers to prove themselves, nine months, where many other programs are limited to only 12 weeks."

The apprentices work various shifts, five days a week and make \$9.50 per hour. CTA's goal is to transition the best workers into permanent positions. From the original 50 in the program, CTA is in the process of hiring seven on a full-time permanent basis.

Mayor Rides First Light Rail Train

POSTED: 4:03 pm MST July 10, 2008

PHOENIX -- Phoenix's first light rail train parted traffic and cruised into its new downtown station Thursday as officials hoped to erase a long-held stigma of being one of the last major cities in the West without a commuter train.



The \$1.4 billion, taxpayer-supported METRO light rail stretches 20 miles through Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa and promises to have a train at each of its 24 stations every 10 minutes during peak times. It officially opens in December.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Mayor Phil Gordon said as the gray and turquoise air-conditioned train cruised into the Washington Street/Central Avenue station. "This is not like the old Chicago El's. This is not dirty. This is moving people efficiently and effectively."

Gordon and other city leaders expect the trains to transform Phoenix's slumbering downtown area, ferrying thousands of pedestrians onto city sidewalks. They say it will lure new shops to the area and turn rows of shuttered buildings into prime real estate, Gordon said.

Look around you, it's already transformed downtown Phoenix," Gordon said. "There are couples out here with

their children, people jogging, new bars and restaurants and taverns and boutiques."

Engineers were testing to make sure the train connected without any problems to the overhead power source connecting the rail.

For decades, proposals to invest in mass transit stalled in city boardrooms. Residents fretted about rail stations near their homes. Others wondered if it was smart to spend billions of dollars to lay train tracks through Arizona's sprawling communities.

While Denver, Salt Lake City, Dallas and other Western cities planned and installed commuter rail lines, Phoenix residents said their city was meant for cars.

In 2000, voters in Phoenix finally approved a sales tax increase for light rail and other transportation projects. METRO, which is run by a transportation agency that's funded by cities in the Phoenix area, has spent the past several years designing the cars and weaving train tracks through city streets.

Officials expect 26,000 boardings per day in the first year. Passengers will pay \$1.25 per trip, the same as they would for a bus.

One of the first changes people will notice when the trains start running later this year is reduced traffic during major sporting events, METRO CEO Rick Simonetta said.

"We can put three cars together to carry as many as 600 people," Simonetta said.

"When you think about a ball game ending, or a (Phoenix) Suns game ending, or something down at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, we'll have the ability to really move a lot of people," he said.

METRO officials will spend the next few months testing the light rail tracks and getting them ready for commuter use. They also plan to expand the track to surrounding communities during the next two decades.

Glenn Darby, 25, joined a crowd of residents and city workers to watch the sleek light rail car arrive for the first time. Darby, who lives in a condo in downtown Phoenix, said the train will make life a lot easier.

"We don't have a grocery store downtown, and it makes it rough for people to try to move here," Darby said. "It's really kind of dead out here. If you need a late night snack, there's nowhere to go."

John Vandercook, 24, agreed. Vandercook, a hotel concierge who lives downtown, said he'll park his Mini Cooper and save on gas money when the train comes in.

"Finally, Phoenix will be a real city. You won't have to drive everywhere, not have to wait 30 minutes in the heat for a bus," Vandercook said.

"This is something that's going to change life for a lot of people."

For now, Columbus streetcar proposal is off-line

Funding worries send plan back for revision
Friday, July 11, 2008 3:14 AM

BY ROBERT VITALE
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Faced with a City Council that's nervous about the cost, Mayor Michael B. Coleman's administration is retooling its plan for streetcars in Columbus.

He's not giving up on the idea, though. Spokesman Dan Williamson said changes in the works are "not in terms of whether, but how."

Money is the issue. A financing plan offered in March relies on the city's general fund for more than a quarter of its \$103 million total. That makes council members skittish because Columbus already faces a \$75 million general-fund deficit projected for 2009.

A revised funding plan will take another six to eight months, said Mike Brown, Coleman's urban ventures coordinator. The delay means streetcars likely wouldn't make their debut during the city's bicentennial in 2012.

Changes to the financing plan are consistent with the mayor's comments all along that it would be tweaked before it's sent to the City Council, Brown said.

Councilman Kevin L. Boyce, however, described an overhaul that's much more extensive.

"They are going to go back to the drawing board," he said yesterday. "The first scenario they proposed was not agreed upon."

Boyce has pressed Coleman for more research on the potential benefits along a streetcar line. Comparisons to Portland, Ore., don't convince him, he said, because that city had commitments from developers before it laid tracks.

The administration will send the City Council a request before its August recess to keep consultants on the payroll to address financing issues and study streetcars' impact on traffic and parking, Brown said. But consultant John Rosenberger said the Coleman administration hasn't given instructions yet about what needs to change in the financing plan.

Coleman first proposed streetcars in his 2006 State of the City address. He offered the details this year: A 2.8-mile line between Downtown and Ohio State University would be built mostly with money from a new 4 percent tax on Downtown parking, a new 4 percent tax on tickets

to entertainment and sporting events along High Street, an increase in parking-meter rates, a contribution from OSU and a shift of existing parking-meter income from the general fund.

In addition to addressing concerns about the \$3.6 million that would be taken out of the general fund each year, the administration has yet to specify which events and venues the proposed ticket tax would cover.

A proposal to set aside new Downtown property taxes for Downtown amenities originally mentioned streetcars among the eligible improvements. But they were stripped out of the final legislation that the council approved on Monday.

Brown said Coleman wants to seek more federal funding for the project because city officials from across the country sense a change in Washington's attitudes about mass transit.

Coleman doesn't want to wait, though, until the economy improves, Williamson said. The mayor sees streetcars as a step toward a broad commuter-rail system for central Ohio.

Councilwoman Charleta B. Tavares said she would like to address the bigger transit picture. Central Ohio Transit Authority buses are bypassing riders on some routes as spiraling gas prices boost ridership.

"If I'm going to spend money, I want to get more people more places," Tavares said.

Tavares said she also thinks city officials should address the projected general-fund deficit before looking at financing for streetcars. An economic-advisory panel appointed by Coleman and council members early this year is studying tax increases and other options for closing the gap between rising city expenses and flat income.

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Breakthrough! We have a tunnel

Port Authority's 500-ton tunnel boring machine arrived in a Downtown receiving pit Thursday night after a mechanical problem forced it to shut down about six feet from its destination.

The machine's arrival was delayed for nearly 12 hours while workers repaired a problem on a conveyor belt system that helps move debris out of the tunnel, the first of two to be dug for the \$435 million North Shore Connector project.

"It's a significant milestone," said Winston Simmonds, Port Authority's construction manager. "We completed the tunnel in a reasonable time and it was done safely, without any worker injuries."

The machine emerged in the pit about 7:45 p.m. as its drill head broke through a concrete wall, spewing a liquid-dirt mixture into the pit and knocking chunks of concrete from the wall.

Workers cheered and clapped when the wall fell apart, revealing the drill head. Some had stood and watched for hours, listening to the grinding and churning as the machine neared the pit.

The boring machine then stopped and was expected to remain idle until later today.

Workers planned to remove steel beams from the pit that would allow the machine to move unimpeded into the opening.

The mechanical problem was relatively minor, and workers have dealt with similar issues while digging the 2,000-foot transit tunnel under the Allegheny River from the North Shore since January. The timing of the breakdown was inconvenient as officials and media were anticipating a ribbon-cutting-style welcome yesterday morning.

The faulty bearing was not located inside the boring machine. Rather, the bearing is part of a conveyor system that shuffles the digging debris out of the tunnel and to a temporary plant along General Robinson Street in the North Shore. There, the debris is separated from liquid, which helps it move through the tunnel, and is hauled to landfills.

Workers for North Shore Constructors received a replacement part from an Ohio supplier.

Similar mechanical issues have caused minor setbacks during the work.

The only major problem reported during the project occurred when the boring machine stopped for about a month after hitting an area of clay and buried tree pieces in April. The mix of thick clay and the tree parts clogged the lines pumping the debris mixture back to the North Shore.

Otherwise, the boring machine crossed beneath the river with few problems -- and often much faster than projected. Officials estimated it would move about 30 feet a day, but at times it surpassed 60 feet a day.

The boring machine not only is digging the tunnels, it is installing a 22-foot diameter concrete shell. The tracks for light-rail vehicles will be installed later.

When completed in 2011, the 1.2-mile light-rail tunnels will extend the T from the Gateway Center station in Downtown to stations in the North Shore. One station will be underground along Reedsdale Street not far from PNC Park, and a second station will be elevated across from Heinz Field.

Now, workers will remove the machine from the end of the tunnel, turn it around and begin digging a second tunnel back to the North Shore. It will take as long as six weeks to move the machine and get other equipment ready before digging can resume. The second tunnel will run nearly parallel with the first and closer to PNC Park.

Transit officials have said the overall project will exceed the \$435 million budget, but they have not yet released details. The cost overruns so far are related to construction of new stations.

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Trolley study is mostly praised

By Sylvia Cooper | Staff Writer

The Downtown Development Authority's plan to spend \$37,000 in special-purpose sales-tax money for a trolley study received mostly positive reviews from Augusta commissioners Monday.

"I think if we do something like this it will put us on the cutting edge," said Mayor Pro Tem Betty Beard. "This would be a tremendous beginning."

Commissioner Calvin Holland said it is what he calls "thinking outside the box."

But Commissioner Jerry Brigham had questions about long-term costs.

"We know the city of Atlanta has the MARTA tax to underwrite public transit," he said. "Augusta doesn't have a MARTA tax. How are we going to fund the long-term costs of operations? That's the real question."

The Augusta transit system already loses about \$4 million a year, and that loss is covered by transfers from the general fund that come mainly from property taxes.

The authority's executive director, Margaret Woodard, said a trolley could help revitalize downtown Augusta by promoting economic development on its route.

"Twenty to 30 times what you invest in a trolley is going to come back in re-development," she said. "Little Rock's return on investment was 920 percent. Developers want to develop along the line for two reasons. No. 1, it shows a real commitment by the city to invest in some type of transportation that's energy-efficient, and No. 2, they don't have to build parking as much as they would."

The 4.5-mile light rail track would run on Broad Street, along part of the Augusta Canal and up 15th Street to the Medical College of Georgia complex, with the expectation that people would ride it downtown for lunch.

Commissioner Don Grantham proposed a 60- to 90-day trial of that concept using a bus, but transit planner Uriah Lewis said that had been tried before and didn't work due to traffic in the area around Harper Street.

Fifty percent of the money to build the track, estimated to cost between \$50 million and \$175 million, could be paid for with money from the federal Small Starts programs and the private sector, Ms. Woodard said.

In addition, it could possibly be powered by the Augusta Canal, making it the first such trolley system in the country, she said.

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Graffiti taggers hit new Sound Transit train in Tukwila

A new Sound Transit train was vandalized this weekend while on display facing Interstate 5 in Tukwila.

By Mike Lindblom Seattle Times transportation reporter



Sound Transit parked a new train next to Interstate 5 at Tukwila, where the public would see the agency's progress toward next year's grand opening of the light-rail system.

Trouble is, the site was also a prime showcase site for taggers.

The vandalism was reported to transit officials early Saturday. The train is to be cleaned by today, spokeswoman Linda Robson said.

It has been parked on an elevated guideway near the southbound freeway lanes -- just north of exits to Southcenter and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. It's a conspicuous place where 131,000 vehicles pass each weekday in the southbound direction alone.

A passer-by, Mike Muller of Tacoma, said he phoned Sound Transit several days ago to complain that the train looked like a prime target, and was assured the agency has 24-hour security.

He worried that taxpayers would be stuck with a cleanup bill, he said.

But Sound Transit invested up front in paint-removal equipment and training, so its own crews will clean the damage at "minimal" cost, Robson said. "It's one of the things you plan for when you operate an urban transit system."

Transit-board members wanted the display next to I-5 to encourage support for light rail, said Pete von Reichbauer, R-Federal Way, a transit-board and Metropolitan King County Council member. A sales-tax boost to expand the system might hit the ballot this fall.

Other trains are stored behind a steel fence at the system's maintenance base in Seattle's Sodo District.

This one was pushed through the Beacon Hill tunnel and the Rainier Valley to Tukwila three weeks ago, to test clearances along the line. Robson said it is being kept on the line's south end for summer testing, as ongoing tunnel work would block a nightly return to Sodo. Full-power testing is planned in the Rainier Valley in August.

Officials figured the elevated site would be difficult to attack, and that drivers on I-5 would see and report any mischief, Robson said. Managers will reassess whether to keep it there, she said.

Light rail is scheduled to begin from downtown to Tukwila next July, and to the airport by the end of 2009.

The damage and its costs will be assessed Monday, Robson said. One of Seattle's South Lake Union streetcars needed five hours of scrubbing after a smaller tagging attack Feb. 18 inside its maintenance base.

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Getting mileage from recycled NJ Transit cars

Friday, July 04, 2008
BY TOM FEENEY
Star-Ledger Staff

What does it take to make a retired rail car with more than 40 years of hard service in New Jersey attractive to transit agencies elsewhere in North America? A surge in gas prices doesn't hurt.

The steeply higher prices at the pump have created an unexpectedly brisk market for the bruised and battered aluminum vessels NJ Transit has been sending off to retirement in recent months.

Higher gas prices have led to higher demand for mass transit. That has forced transit agencies to scramble for ways to add capacity quickly. And that scramble has led transit officials in Pennsylvania, California, Utah and Montreal to the cramped, tired, wheelchair-inaccessible

rail cars that began rattling along the tracks in New Jersey during the early years of the first Nixon administration.

The level of interest now is stronger than it probably would have been in years past because of the higher gas prices," NJ Transit spokesman Dan Stessel said. Rail ridership around the nation has soared along with the price of gasoline. Nationwide, it was up by 5.4 percent in the first quarter of this year alone, said Virginia Miller, a spokeswoman for the American Public Transportation Association. Many rail agencies are operating at or near capacity and are looking for ways to meet the new demand.

NJ Transit's response to increased ridership has been the purchase of 279 multilevel rail cars from Bombardier Transportation. Those cars carry about 20 percent more passengers than the single-level cars they replace. As the multilevels have been put in service on the Northeast Corridor and the North Jersey Coast Line, NJ Transit has shuffled Comet V cars from those lines to others. That has enabled it to ease its oldest stock -- the Comet I cars -- into retirement.

"One hundred and four of them are being retired," Stessel said. "Tired is probably the best word to use to describe them, and that might be generous." But one agency's castoff is another agency's salvation. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority Philadelphia is operating near capacity. It saw its ridership grow in the first quarter of this year by more than 10 percent, double the national growth. The agency has ordered 120 new cars for its regional rail system from Rotem USA, but those are not expected to begin arriving until late 2009.

So it struck a deal with NJ Transit to lease eight Comet I cars for two years at a cost of \$15,000 per car, per year. The battered Comets will enable the agency to meet demand until its new cars are ready, General Manager Joseph Casey said when the lease deal was announced last week.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority in Montreal has agreed to lease at least 14 of the cars at the same cost, Stessel said. Officials from Metrolink in Southern California are scheduled to visit New Jersey next week to check out what remains of the 104 retired Comet I cars and iron out a lease.

In addition to those leases, which Stessel said will bring NJ Transit about \$500,000 a year, the Utah Transit Authority has bought 25 of the cars for \$35,000 apiece. It is refurbishing them at a cost of \$400,000 per car and will use them to augment its fleet of multilevel cars, spokeswoman Carrie Bohnsack-Ware said.

One said the agency expects the refurbished cars to last 15 or 20 years. As for the other cars, they eventually will be returned to NJ Transit to take the ride they probably

would have had they not been leased -- a trip to the scrap yard.

New England Coach going places with two new MCI® D4505 coaches

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 16, 2008 — Don Leonard learned what it takes to be successful in the tour industry in 1988 when he started Festive Adventures, a tour agency in Manchester, New Hampshire. By 2001, he branched out, starting New England Coach with one motor coach. Today, New England has a fleet of seven coaches including two new MCI D4505 coaches, and Festive Adventures is stronger than ever. "We are growing at just the right pace," said Don Leonard, whose fleet features 27- and 55-passenger models. "We like having a variety of models to accommodate different group sizes. The D4505 is performing well for us. It's a good coach; it suited our needs."



New England's two new D4505 coaches are equipped with Cummins engines and Allison transmissions and were purchased through MCI's Fast-Track program, which keeps models in stock and available for immediate delivery. This is New England's first purchase of MCI equipment in the last several years.

New England provides prompt and efficient service throughout the New England area for school groups, senior outings, sporting events and airport services. To learn more, visit www.newenglandcoach.com

Opulent MCI® E4500 LX delights Bliss

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 13, 2008 — Bliss Charters, a family-owned motorcoach operator serving Northwestern Ohio, is living up to its name while breaking new ground in luxury travel. Its new MCI E4500 LX coach features the ultimate in customized interior cabin amenities designed to please its passengers.

Bliss, based in Fostoria, Ohio, customized its new E4500 LX and configured it for 42 passengers instead of the traditional 56, for ample comfort and leg room. Riders relax in brown-piped, saddle-toned genuine leather "Brazil" seating by Amaya, featuring a footrest, individual eight-channel audio, pull-down tray and cup holder. Six

flat-screen LCD monitors assure that passengers enjoy the deluxe entertainment system.



The coach also features conference tables and a rear galley with Euro-style cabinetry and solid-surface counters. The flooring imitates natural stone, with earth tones predominating for an overall feel of understated elegance.

"We really wanted to go upscale and give our riders a classy ride," said Paul Feasel, president of Bliss, who credits his wife, Linda, for making many of the selections to create an interior that is luxurious yet easy to maintain. "The interior reflects a high taste level, yet my wife had a practical approach, making sure that it would be easy to clean."

To bring a new level of luxury to his area, Feasel first considered converting an older MCI model but changed his mind when he saw the LX at its UMA Expo unveiling. "We thought we would buy in 2009, then looked at the market, studied the package and decided to buy now," said Feasel. "MCI made it easy to accomplish. This coach puts us way out in front. No one in the area offers this level of luxury."

Bliss' new E4500 LX made its maiden voyage to Akron, Ohio, on a dinner-package tour, impressing and surprising riders. "It was a very good day. Passengers were awestruck; they couldn't believe it," said Feasel. "We gave them the red-carpet treatment, and more tour groups and charters are going to want that type of service."

Bliss was founded by Paul's parents, Bill, now deceased, and Joella Feasel, in 1988, when Bill transitioned out of the automotive business. The company was named after Bill's father, Bliss Carlton Feasel. "My Mom made the comment that Bliss means complete happiness, and it stuck," said Paul, who bought the company with his wife in 2000. Today, Bliss operates a seven-coach MCI fleet, services its own equipment and employs 18 drivers, continuing its tradition of giving passengers a heavenly ride.

Hall's Alaska continues MCI fleet conversion: Latest J4500 gets galley, first-class legroom, GPS, more

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 5, 2008 — John Hall's Alaska is all about spoiling its passengers. Not only does the Lake City, Minnesota, operator work to find the 49th state's most intriguing undiscovered corners, but it strives to do so in the most comfortable coaches it can find. And for the last three years, those coaches have all been MCIs.



John Hall's newest, an MCI® J4500 delivered last month, has all the signature bells, whistles and then some: a custom galley, full REI entertainment system, on-vehicle vacuum, Saucon GPS, 110-volt outlets and, perhaps most importantly, only 50 Amaya seats so passengers can stretch out and enjoy the scenery more fully. John Hall's Alaska even keeps CD burners on its coaches so passengers can offload their camera memory sticks. The J4500, part of John Hall's all-MCI fleet, is powered by a clean-diesel Cummins engine and a ZF Astronic transmission.

"We're kind of the Tiffany's of Alaska travel," said John Hall, who first entered the tour business in 1983 with a single Fxible coach under the name of Anderson House Tours. The company's fleet and focus changed over time, and John Hall's became Alaska's first specialty tour company in 1998. Says Hall, "We're insistent that we have the newest fleet in the state".

Indeed, Hall's oldest coach is a 2005 MCI. For several years, another manufacturer figured prominently in the fleet, but MCI won Hall back with its quality and service. Today, Hall's standards for his coaches are matched only by his passion for all things Alaska. He first saw the state when he was 12 years old. Still, during his early years as a tour operator, his focus was more on the lower 48 states and Canada. "We used to do 100 different tours — we did Branson, we did them all," said Hall. Eventually, his love for Alaska and super-attentive customer service won out. "We're kind of pioneers," said Hall. "We do things bigger companies can't do, because we only have 44 passengers per coach."

Hall's Alaska runs about 15 itineraries, which the company promotes during winter travel shows. "But word of mouth and repeat business is what really drives us," says Hall. This summer the company is headed up toward the Arctic Circle and other less-traveled spots detailed at the company's website, www.kissalaska.com.

Wichita's Village Charters welcomes its first MCI® J4500 coach

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 5, 2008 — Eight years into their business, Norman Arensdorf and his son Jeff, owners of Village Charters, continue to bring new travel options to the community. The company's new J4500, made by Motor Coach Industries, is the industry's best-selling model, renowned for its easy-boarding spiral entryway, scenery-sized windows and tiered theater-type seating offering front-row views throughout.



Village Charters' coach, equipped with a Detroit Diesel engine and Allison transmission, features a state-of-the-art entertainment system with six 15-inch Blaupunkt monitors and seats by Amaya.

"We have some MCI D models in our fleet, heard about the popularity of the J and wanted to give it a try," said Norm Arensdorf, president of Village Charter, who purchased the company and its 15-coach fleet in 2000. Village was established in Wichita in 1980 and expanded to Oklahoma in 1989. Since the purchase, Village's fleet has grown to 27 coaches. Arensdorf attributes the growth to superior customer service as well as vehicle diversity to meet a broad range of travel requirements to accommodate groups of any size. Village transports sports teams as well as smaller, local charters and manages over 200 motorcoach tours a year including a run to Alaska.

The company, which operates its own service center and employs a staff of 60, is an active member in both UMA and ABA. In 2005, Bus Ride Magazine honored the company with its annual Industry Achievement Award.

To learn more visit www.villagetours.com

Northern Illinois University expands green commitment with two new MCI® J4500s

SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 23, 2008 — Joining a fleet of 25 hybrid cars, and fueled by a 20-percent soy biodiesel blend, Northern Illinois University's two new MCI J4500s are part of the Dekalb school's commitment to environmentally friendly transportation.



The coaches, equipped with Cat C-13 engines, ZF Astronic transmissions and DVD monitors, bring the coach fleet to five. They are also the school's first new coaches in several years — and are its first models with automatic transmissions and lavatories, much-appreciated amenities on long-distance trips. NIU has been buying MCI coaches since 1968. NIU uses its fleet to transport athletic teams, bands, choirs, groups on field trips, shuttles and more.

"We've been pretty happy with the coaches," said Bill Finucane, transportation manager for the school, which enrolls about 25,000 students. "The cleaner-burning engines were definitely very attractive. We're trying to be a greener fleet, and we've been using biodiesels and hybrid cars for five years now. An institution of higher learning ought to be able to take the lead in that."

Finucane is also proud that NIU took one of the first MCI® 102D3s with a wheelchair lift. It is still in service. One of the two new J4500s have wheelchair lifts as well. "It's a great benefit for students that use wheelchairs to have accessible transportation," said Finucane.

NIU's coaches now sport redesigned, brighter graphics as well. "It's much more apparent they're our buses," said Finucane.

Four new MCI® D4505 coaches land in Indian Trails' fleet for Michigan Flyer airport shuttle

SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 23, 2008 — As ridership in it's Michigan Flyer shuttle service continues to soar,

Indian Trails is giving passengers more reasons to ride, rather than drive, to Detroit Metro airport. Its four new MCI D4505 motor coaches, which went into service on May 14, are powered by new clean-diesel engine technology that lowers pollutants by 90 percent.



In addition, riders enjoy high-tech onboard amenities including WIFI, satellite TV with flat-screen monitors, and multi-channel XM satellite radio. Individual headset ports, soft overhead lighting and airflow controls and extra legroom make riding on Michigan Flyer a first-class experience. The new coaches also are equipped with wheelchair lifts.

Departing daily from East Lansing, Jackson and Ann Arbor to Detroit Metro, Michigan Flyer service includes curbside drop-off at the airport's two terminals. Advance bookings by phone or the website is encouraged, and fares include family discount rates.

"Passengers have responded enthusiastically to the service, and we've surpassed our 100,000-passenger mark," said Gordon Mackay, president of Indian Trails, which partnered with Michigan Flyer to launch the airport shuttle service in November 2006. "We've estimated a savings of 13 to 16 million automobile vehicle miles and a \$3-million savings in gasoline."

Indian Trails' new coaches for its Michigan Flyer service are equipped with Cummins engines and ZF Astronic transmissions. The new engine technology, mandated by the EPA, features a diesel particulate filter, uses ultra low sulfur diesel for a smokeless exhaust, and significantly cuts emissions from earlier models.

In its 98th year, Indian Trails is one of the nation's oldest and largest regional motor coach lines in the U.S. It operates a fleet of 51 coaches, mostly MCI model year 2003 or newer, from three modern facilities in Owosso, Kalamazoo and Metro Detroit. To learn more, visit www.indiantrails.com. or www.michiganflyer.com.

Executive Coach adds two new Prevost vehicles

Sainte-Claire, Quebec, May 23rd — Executive Coach, Inc., a Texas-based transportation company, recently added two new Prevost H3-45 models to its motorcoach fleet.



Executive Coach requested Prevost's new clean engine technology, with the Volvo engine.

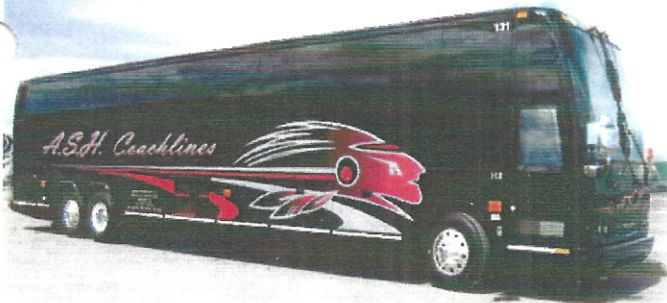
Executive is one of the fastest growing charter bus companies in the United States and is the largest privately owned operation in Texas. Its total fleet currently numbers 120 vehicles, ranging from limousines and minibuses to nearly 30 luxury coaches that are fully equipped with premium amenities. Prevost's make up nearly one-third of the coach fleet.

Wes Cruz, Director of Operations for Executive Coach, explained that Prevost was one of the first vehicles that Executive bought after it began operation in 2004. The company has been very happy with all its Prevost coaches, particularly in terms of engine performance. In its most recent acquisitions, Executive Coach requested Prevost's new clean engine technology, with advanced tracking and mechanical warning notifications on the Volvo engine. Mr. Cruz reports that thus far "it has been worth the investment." Also, drivers are especially impressed with the good turning radius of the H3-45 and the availability of the warning notifications, which ultimately increases uptime. Executive Coach is pleased to report that the most recent Prevost acquisitions have enhanced daily operations.

For more information on Executive Coach, visit www.usacoach.net

Prevost helps A.S.H. Coachlines travel in comfort and style

Sainte-Claire, Quebec, June 20th, 2008 - A.S.H. Coachlines is busy covering ground—lots of it. From its base in central Newfoundland, A.S.H. takes charter and tour passengers as far west as Alaska and the Yukon, and as far south as Florida and Texas.



A.S.H. Coachlines recently took delivery of two new Prevost H3-45s

Mark Hurley, who founded A.S.H. and owns the company, together with his brother, Jason, recently took delivery of two new Prevost H3-45s. Fully equipped with satellite TV, wireless Internet, leather interiors, and the ergonomically designed cockpit with its "smart wheel" offering key functions access on the steering wheel, the new coaches join a 24-vehicle fleet that is nearly 100% Prevost.

The company began purchasing Prevost in 2005. At first, they were drawn by "the look of the bus," Mark Hurley recalls, that distinctive profile that affords passengers a fine panoramic view. Their many tour and sports team customers—not known for traveling light—quickly came to appreciate Prevost comfort and the spacious baggage capacity.

The Hurley brothers and their staff were also quick to appreciate that the Prevost reputation is built on more than appearance. For one, "they are very driver-friendly vehicles," says Mark Hurley. Then there is the company's legendary service. Whether A.S.H. needs regular service, parts, or after-hours assistance, they receive treatment that Mr. Hurley calls "second to none."

While A.S.H. handles routine maintenance when vehicles are home in Newfoundland, he explains, there are bound to be times on the road when repairs or assistance are needed. "Prevost is always there," he adds, "with a voice, not a machine." That is why folks at A.S.H. Coachlines tend to describe Prevost as "the big corporation with a small-company feel."

University of Vermont Adds Two New Orion VII CNG Transit Buses

ORISKANY, N.Y. (For Immediate Release) — Green isn't a concept lost on the state of Vermont. The Green Mountains that run through the state give Vermont its state nickname, The Green Mountain State. The name Vermont itself comes from the French name *Verts Monts*, literally translated as Green Mountains. The concept of Green isn't lost on the University of Vermont either as the university just added two new 40' Orion VII

Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) transit buses from Daimler Buses North America.



The University of Vermont (UVM) now has a fleet of four Orion CNG buses, having taken delivery of two in 2007, with an additional unit to be delivered later this year. The CNG fleet is the product of a partnership between UVM, the City of Burlington, Vermont Gas Systems, Inc., and the Federal Transit Administration to improve air quality and develop Vermont's first "fast-fill" natural gas refueling station.

"These clean-burning Orion vehicles represent a significant advance over older technologies and are a fitting symbol of UVM's wide-ranging commitment to the environment," said Katherine Decarreau, UVM Director of Transportation and Parking Services. "These Orion CNG buses will help keep us at the forefront of efforts to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and help keep our air clean."

Compared to petroleum diesel, CNG emits approximately 50% fewer nitrogen oxides (NOx), a major contributor to smog and greenhouse gas formation. As an added benefit, natural gas engines reduce noise pollution; they are about 15 decibels lower than diesel.

"The Orion VII CNG transit buses are a perfect solution for the University of Vermont," said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for Daimler Buses North America. "The university's commitment to reducing emissions and using environmentally friendly alternative fuels is to be commended."

A Yankee Line Adds Four New Luxury Setra S 417 Motorcoaches

Greensboro, N.C. (May 19, 2008) – A Yankee Line, a tour and charter company known for high-end, customized group tours, recently purchased four new Setra S 417 luxury motorcoaches from Daimler Buses North America. A Yankee Line's 45-foot fleet is comprised entirely of Setra S 417 motorcoaches.



"The Setra S 417 allows us to offer our customers a very comfortable, state-of-the-art ride that is truly memorable," said Don Dunham, co-owner of A Yankee Line. "In addition to its curb appeal, the Setra S 417 offers the latest in entertainment electronics such as satellite television and radio, which our customers love."

A Yankee Line, located in Boston, has offered first-class and deluxe customized group tours for over 20 years. The four new Setra S 417 luxury motorcoaches are equipped with Setra's own exclusive Ambiente leather seats. They also come equipped with extra high-end amenities such as satellite television, XM satellite radio, GPS, multi-channel audio systems and galleys.

Introduced to the North American market in 2003, the Setra S 417 is setting the benchmark in luxury motorcoaches by providing comfort and innovation to both guest and driver alike. The ultra-modern, spacious Setra S 417 interior cabin design provides guests with a state-of-the-art audio system, which includes a CD/DVD player and five 15" monitors positioned throughout the cabin. The Setra S 417 provides added value through many cost savings benefits for the operator including extended maintenance intervals, an industry-leading multiplex electrical system with self diagnostics, and a low maintenance HVAC system.

"A Yankee Line is renowned for providing superior service and care for its customers and we are proud to be the luxury motorcoach of choice for them," said Tom

Chezem, vice president of motorcoach sales for Daimler Buses North America. "The Setra S 417 provides all the luxury appointments to make the customer feel relaxed and safe."

Established in 1980, A Yankee Line is Boston's largest motorcoach carrier. The coaches are especially equipped for the charter and tour market. In addition to chartering coaches to tour operators, A Yankee Line also maintains tour packages for groups and clubs. The company is a member of the International Motorcoach Group (IMG), National Tour Association (NTA), American Bus Association (ABA) and United Motorcoach Association (UMA). For more information on the company and its services, visit the web site at www.yankeeline.us.

Regular bus riders knew big benefits before gas prices soared

These loyalists list convenience, low cost, relaxation, good company as reasons to ride.

By KELLEY BOUCHARD, Staff Writer Portland Press Herald

Beverly St. Clair climbed into the Metro's No. 1 bus Friday morning and settled into a seat for a short trip up Congress Street to The Root Cellar, a volunteer service agency.

A retiree who lives in South Portland, St. Clair volunteers at The Root Cellar every Friday. Each week, she takes the South Portland Bus Service into Portland and rides the Metro to Washington Avenue in the East End.

"My husband and I have one car, which he takes to work every day, and it's a long walk from South Portland," St. Clair said with a smile.

Officials who run Portland's public bus system are hoping an overhaul of the city's bus routes will entice more people to ride the Metro by making it more convenient. But for regular riders like St. Clair, the bus line already fills a valuable transportation need.

St. Clair rides the bus a lot, she said, because it's convenient and inexpensive. But she wishes the South Portland bus ran on Sunday, too. "I'd use it to go to church or go shopping at the Maine Mall," she said.

At the wheel of the No. 1 bus on Friday morning was Peter Folger, who has been a bus driver, on and off, for four decades.

Folger gets to know his regulars pretty well, including workers who take the bus early each weekday from Munjoy Hill to St. John Street to work at Barber Foods and Cozy Harbor Seafood.

"I see about 25 of them every day," Folger said. "They're hard workers and they're real decent people."

Bill Ridge, Portland's deputy police chief, started riding the South Portland bus to work almost daily last spring. The bus drops him off at Monument Square and he strolls to the police station on Middle Street.

He's allowed to take his police car home each night, but he leaves it at the station.

"I like the commute," Ridge said. "I don't have to worry about traffic. I bring a book and I read. I meet all kinds of people. And it saves gas. Even if the city's paying for it. And one less vehicle on the road is better for everybody."

Ray Conrad started riding the Metro when his driver's license was suspended. Now, it's a regular thing.

A floor installer who lives on Washington Avenue in Portland, Conrad rides the bus to work when he has a job in the city, and he uses the bus to take his niece to day care.

"It works for me," Conrad said. "And it's a lot cheaper than other alternatives."

Glenn Holland is a retiree who lives on Munjoy Hill and rides the Metro almost daily. He uses it to go to Falmouth, Westbrook and the Maine Mall area.

To make ends meet on a fixed income, Holland buys a monthly pass for \$37.50.

"That's cheap," he said. "I don't need a car. I've got the buses, and they do fine."

His only complaint is that once in a while a bus will be 15 to 20 minutes late.

Nick Waterman, who also lives on Munjoy Hill, is a construction worker who was injured recently on the job. He has a car, but he rides the bus daily to medical appointments or to take his daughter to dance lessons or to see a movie in the Maine Mall area.

"With gas prices what they are now, it's ridiculous," he said. "Plus, it saves maintenance on the car."

Staff Writer Kelley Bouchard can be contacted at 791-6328 or at:kbouchard@pressherald.com

City tackles bus-route tangle

The goal is to simplify congested city peninsula routes for faster service to more destinations.

By KELLEY BOUCHARD, Staff Writer Portland Press Herald

Riding Portland's public bus system, the Metro, can be daunting for anyone unfamiliar with routes that zigzag across the city's downtown peninsula.

If you figure out which bus to take and where to get on, you'll have to wait 20 to 55 minutes for the next one to come by. If it's after 6 p.m., your chances of catching a bus drop dramatically as some routes end service at the close of the business day.

The No. 8 bus in particular follows a tangled path that loops and criss-crosses the downtown center. Targeted destinations include Mercy Hospital and Maine Medical Center in the West End, Hannaford Shopping Center on Back Cove and Catholic Charities in the East End.

"It's a very meandering route," said Kevin Donoghue, a city councilor. "We're trying to change that."

For the first time in more than 30 years, the Greater Portland Transit District is making a serious effort to untangle Metro bus routes in downtown Portland in the hope of making Maine's largest municipal bus service more accessible and enticing.

District officials say they want to increase ridership that's up nearly 16 percent since 2000 and answer what they believe is a growing demand for more efficient mass transit in Maine's largest city. Their efforts are prompted by a variety of economic and environmental factors, including rising fuel costs and traffic congestion.

They say the proposed changes would benefit residents and visitors alike, improving Metro's links to South Portland, Westbrook and Falmouth and streamlining connections to other mass transit, such as the Downeaster passenger train, Casco Bay Lines ferry service, The Cat high-speed ferry to Nova Scotia, and Portland International Jetport.

The goal is to straighten and expand routes on Portland's congested peninsula so they cover a wider area and provide faster, more direct service to more destinations. The proposals, which aren't expected to increase the \$1.25 fare, will be reviewed at three public meetings during the next two weeks.

"We're trying to simplify the system so it's easier for more people to use," said Donoghue, who heads the council's transportation committee and sits on the Metro's board of directors.

Donoghue also chairs a committee that is developing a variety of recommendations to encourage alternatives to single-occupant vehicles, including an overhaul of local bus service.

A VESTED INTEREST

Portland residents – and taxpayers in general – have a vested interest in the Metro. Portland taxpayers fund \$2.2 million (37 percent) of the district's \$5.9 million annual operating budget. The remainder is covered by fares (\$1.4 million), federal subsidies (\$1.4 million) and taxpayers in Westbrook (\$388,000), Falmouth (\$77,000) and across Maine (\$120,000).

The idea of improving Portland's bus routes isn't new. Metro directors, city officials and regional transit authorities have been talking about it for several years. In that period, 2000 to 2007, Metro's annual ridership has increased 15.8 percent, from 1.24 million to 1.43 million individual passenger trips, said Denise Beck, Metro spokeswoman.

Interest in mass transit has jumped in recent months, boosted by higher fuel prices and a desire to reduce traffic congestion, parking demand, pollution and other environmental impacts. Comparing Metro's ridership during the first six months of 2007 and 2008, the number of passenger trips increased about 3.5 percent year over year, from 700,148 to 724,653.

David Redelfsen, Metro's general manager, said the district hasn't surveyed riders on who's taking the bus and where they want to go. But drivers report a wider variety of riders, including workers interested in minimizing wear on their vehicles, avoiding high gas prices and reducing greenhouse gases.

"For a long time there's been a stigma that riding the bus is only for low-income people who can't afford a car," Redelfsen said. "But more and more people are starting to realize that public transportation is for everyone."

Redelfsen said route improvements should boost Metro's ridership 5 percent to 10 percent over three years, which would be an increase of about 75,000 to 150,000 trips per year.

That's a reasonable expectation, according to Tom Meyers, director of the South Portland Bus Service, which shares free transfer privileges with Metro. After South Portland streamlined its bus routes in 2001, its ridership increased 13.6 percent in one year, from about 154,155 trips in 2002 to about 175,061 trips in 2003.

"It took about a year and a half for people to really (understand) the changes, but once they did, it really

made a difference," Meyers said. "Anytime you straighten a route, you take out all the wiggles, you make it more efficient, you make it a more attractive transportation alternative."

Under the Metro's proposal, the No. 8 bus route would be divided and expanded into No. 8 East and No. 8 West. New destinations on the reconfigured route include the University of Southern Maine campus, between Forest and Deering avenues, which currently doesn't have direct service from downtown routes.

Both No. 8 routes also would serve the new Ocean Gateway passenger terminal on the eastern waterfront, Franklin Arterial and the burgeoning Bayside neighborhood, which has a variety of new commercial and residential developments and hosts a growing number of health and social services.

The No. 8 West would provide direct service to Mercy Hospital's new campus on the Fore River Parkway and the Portland Transportation Center on Thompson's Point, which is the terminal for the Downeaster and Concord Trailways interstate bus service.

In addition, the No. 1 bus route, which serves Congress Street, Munjoy Hill and Valley Street, would be combined with the No. 5 bus route, which serves the Maine Mall and the jetport. As a result, there would be a direct connection between downtown neighborhoods and the outer Congress Street area.

The combined route may one day extend to Westbrook, so residents there would have direct bus service to the mall, jetport, transportation center and Maine Medical Center, Donoghue said.

The route changes sound good to Jeremy Gregor, a construction worker who lives in Portland and rides the Metro.

"I think it's great if it gets more people to ride the bus," he said.

On the down side, while straightening routes is expected to increase efficiency and frequency of bus service, some riders would have to walk a few blocks farther to catch a ride.

"There is a tradeoff," said Mark Adelson, deputy executive director of the Portland Housing Authority and a member of the city's Peninsula Transit Study Committee. "For people with physical disabilities, having to walk a greater distance may be a problem. That's something we'll be looking at closely."

Still, Adelson believes the benefits of upgrading Portland's downtown routes clearly outweigh the costs, especially for the renters he represents, including residents of low-income housing projects and recipients of Section 8 rental subsidies.

"We're talking about expanding where they can catch the bus and where it takes them," he said. "The demand is there and it's just going to continue to grow."

Staff Writer Kelley Bouchard can be contacted at 791-6328 or at:kouchard@pressherald.com

Reality check for Staten Island's rail plans

by Maura Yates and Phil Helsel

Saturday July 12, 2008, 9:00 AM

\$1.4 billion price tag for North and West Shore lines proves daunting

The prospect of new North and West Shore rail lines that would form a transit triangle around Staten Island is either the only hope for the borough's car-choked roads, or a pie-in-the-sky proposal that will end up gathering dust on a bookshelf in some planner's office.

The faster travel speeds offered by rail, along with a proposed link to New Jersey, have been embraced by elected officials and business leaders who say they're the key to ensuring a smooth commute through a borough that is fast running out of growing room. It's also seen as a means to lure more businesses to the Island, and as a way to connect more residents to New Jersey's job market.

But like most things that sound so appealing, an enormous price tag is attached: About \$1.4 billion stands between the hopes for an efficient Staten Island rail network and the reality (\$1 billion would be needed for the West Shore and \$400 million for the North Shore).

The desire is there, say Staten Island commuters, desperate for increased and better transportation options. And the political interest is there, represented across the spectrum of the borough's elected officials. But interest and desire alone won't raise a nickel for the project.

Who'll take charge in raising the caboose-loads of money needed for these projects?

Republican Rep. Vito Fossella, the borough's pipeline to Congress, says it starts with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the state agency that, along with the Port Authority, would likely play a major role in the establishment of any new Island rail routes. More than any other entity, he says, the MTA can make the North Shore and West Shore rail projects happen if it makes them a priority. It's a big "if."

Although the MTA has had some recent successes on Staten Island, such as significant improvements to local bus service, and a major role in the startup of a popular new bus line to Jersey City, the agency appears to have limited interest in delivering rail results to Staten Island. When repeatedly pressed by the Advance for an interview with chief executive Elliot G. Sander on the subject, a spokesperson declined, saying the agency is "not looking to make news on this just now." Last spring, Sander told the Advance that he supports both rail projects, but warned they would be next to impossible to pull off without the revenue generated from the proposed congestion-pricing plan -- which ultimately failed. Fossella says MTA leadership is critical. "Unless you have a ready, willing and able participant in the MTA that's going to truly be a champion, the federal government, Congress and others are just not going to release money for projects" such as these.

Though the MTA is poised to scale back its next five-year capital plan due to increasing budget deficits, the agency is still planning to spend billions on Manhattan's Second Avenue Subway project. The question remains whether the agency can spare a billion or so for Staten Island rail projects.

"That's what we need from the MTA," Fossella said. "We need them to be true champions at the federal level for this project that's important for Staten Island, not just the multi-billion-dollar Second Avenue Subway."

Pointing to the lawsuit brought against the MTA to minimize the traffic impacts caused by Verrazano-Narrows Bridge construction, Fossella called for a team effort encompassing all Staten Island legislators to push the agency to widen its focus to this borough's rail needs.

"It's got to be a united front, Democrats and Republicans, sitting down at the table at every level of government, with these agencies, saying that this is a priority for the people of Staten Island, and it cannot relent until and unless it's done," Fossella said.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey would play a big role in any plans to establish a Staten Island-to-Bayonne rail link. Despite repeated requests, its executive director, Chris Ward, was unavailable for an interview with the Advance for this story.

A spokesman for the bistate agency issued general commitments to helping the borough on future transportation challenges -- but offered nothing concrete. In response to a question about a 2004 Port Authority study of the North Shore line, the spokesman, Steven Coleman, did say: "The Port Authority still believes this is a project worthy of further consideration in planning for Staten Island commuting and North Shore development."

With both Fossella (end of 2008) and Conservative Borough President James P. Molinaro (end of 2009)

nearing the end of their terms in office, their focus is largely limited to securing funding for the studies that will lay the groundwork for the rail future. Along with civic leadership from the Chamber of Commerce and all other Island elected officials, the task of leading the charge to get the train lines built will largely fall on the successors to Fossella and Molinaro.

For his part, City Councilman Michael McMahon, (D-North Shore), a congressional candidate, has pledged to make solving Staten Island's transportation woes his first priority if elected. "It's not only a question of transportation, it's an incredible economic shot in the arm for both the North Shore and West Shore," McMahon said. The borough's Republican party has yet to nominate a candidate.

Republican Councilman James Oddo, a candidate for Molinaro's seat, sees the funding issue as a huge challenge for the borough's leaders, but one that can be accomplished. "We've got to try," he said. "It comes down to that. No matter how daunting, we've got to try." "New York City is one of very few places across the country that has mass transit demands like this, and the federal government hasn't made a lot of money available for transit," he added. "Within that, with those limited dollars, you're competing against the big boys. You're competing against Manhattan, and the Second Avenue Subway, and all of their projects, and little old Staten Island unfortunately gets what's left. To date, that hasn't been much, and that's why it's a daunting task."

There's precedent with these far-reaching dreams, however. "New Jersey Transit never believed they would get funding for the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail," said Jonathan Peters, a finance professor and transportation expert at the College of Staten Island. Yet perseverance and political will got it done. "It might be a bit of a slog, but I think a defeatist attitude is one of the biggest problems we have."

THE PLANS

The two new corridors, one that would run along the North Shore from St. George to Mariners Harbor/Arlington, and the other which would travel along a still-to-be-determined route along the West Shore, have the promise of carrying tens of thousands of passengers a day, and would shave travel time dramatically. Both proposals include a connection across the Bayonne Bridge to the 20.6-mile Hudson-Bergen Light Rail to Jersey City and Hoboken, and the PATH train to Manhattan.

A revitalized North Shore rail system could carry as many as 15,000 riders a day by 2015, and could complete the 5.1-mile trip in about 15 minutes -- far less than the average 30-40 minute trip by bus.

Passenger service on the old North Shore rail ceased in 1953 (a victim of increasingly efficient local bus service) and freight service stopped in 1991, leaving the right-of-

way largely intact. However, most of the tracks have rotted or washed away, and the old stations have been lost to the passage of time. In some spots, the shoreline would need to be rebuilt where it has slipped into the sea.

The West Shore project would begin with a clean slate, which is why its price tag more than doubles that of the North Shore project. The original proposal called for a light-rail line running partially along the West Shore Expressway median, reaching the Pleasant Plains park-and-ride (near the Pleasant Plains Staten Island Railway station) on the southern end, and the Bayonne Bridge on the northern end.

A study completed in 2004 estimated that as many as 31,000 riders a day could use that line by 2020. Increasingly unbearable traffic has already drawn commuters back to rail service, with a 9 percent growth in ridership on the Staten Island Railway in both 2006 and 2007.

THE STUDIES

Talked about for nearly two decades now, the North Shore project is further along, with a detailed feasibility study funded by the Port Authority completed in 2004. That study showed that there were enough people living along the North Shore corridor to support rail service, although residential densities were at the low end of the spectrum used to determine such a project's viability. The study found that rail service would help alleviate future traffic in the area, and would provide opportunities to improve the North Shore's economic conditions.

The West Shore project is already halfway through its own year-long \$350,000 study of three possible route alternatives. The highly detailed city-funded study is being conducted by New Jersey-based consulting firm Systra USA. The West Shore line would include a transfer point to the North Shore rail and the Staten Island Railway. A possible spur to the Staten Island Mall and future Fresh Kills Park are also being considered, as well as stops at the Corporate Park in Bloomfield.

Each plan has pros and cons, explained Tamila Spinner, senior vice president of the Staten Island Economic Development Corp. (SIEDC) and project coordinator for the West Shore project. The SIEDC will host a public open house on July 24 from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield, to collect feedback on the possible choices.

When the current West Shore study is completed sometime around March 2009, both projects will be on equal footing, and ready to advance to the Alternative Analysis phase, which includes a look at potential environmental impacts that would be caused by the projects moving forward.

Since both studies share a common goal of linking to New Jersey's rail network, it would be best for them to

proceed together to determine the best way for the different lines to intersect with each other, the Staten Island Railway and New Jersey Transit trains, several transportation experts said.

"These things should be looked at in a coordinated fashion," said Jeff Zupan, senior fellow for transportation at the Regional Plan Association, a non-profit organization that works to promote better transportation, community design and economic competitiveness throughout the Tri-State area. "They're kind of being done as though they're on other sides of the moon."

FUNDING THE NEXT STEPS

Before federal funding can be awarded to the projects, both must undergo the exhaustive Alternative Analysis process as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The analysis looks at all the possible options involved, from which route the tracks will follow, to which type of trains to use and how best to cross over roadways. The choices are compared against the "no build" option of doing nothing.

But securing funding for such necessary studies -- although they amount to less than 1 percent of the cost of construction -- has been a challenge for elected leaders.

The task will become even tougher now, as transportation agencies across the country vie for a limited pot of money to pay for their own projects in preparation of the reauthorization of the federal transportation bill next year.

Before either the North Shore proposal or West Shore proposal sees its first railroad spike, both face a path that seems as long as the Trans-Siberian Railway. About \$3 million to \$5 million is needed for the follow-up studies of each line before funding and construction can begin.

Attempts to secure study funding for the North Shore project have been successful in past years, with \$3.25 million allocated two years ago by Sens. Charles Schumer and Hillary Rodham Clinton. That money was lost, though, when the spending bill in which it was contained was never finalized by the congressional conference committee and sent to the president for a signature. The project again failed to score funding this week when a Senate appropriations committee finalized its list of projects that would receive money.

The only funds currently set aside for either \$3 million to \$5 million study is \$220,500 secured in December by Schumer and Clinton.

Molinaro remains committed to getting the environmental study under way before he leaves office in 2009, and said he expects funding to be secured for the North Shore portion of the analysis by the end of the year. Schumer last week reaffirmed his commitment to transportation issues on Staten Island, whose workforce faces one of the longest commutes in the country.

"We must develop more mass transit options to relieve the traffic-plagued streets of Staten Island," Schumer said in a prepared statement. "The light rails will move tens of thousands of commuters daily to and from work, taking thousands of cars off the road."

But if federal help doesn't pan out, don't expect any financial help from the state, some of the Island's Albany legislators say.

In fact, the state Department of Transportation released its New York State Rail Plan this week, addressing freight and passenger rail issues. Its five references to Staten Island focused on freight rail on the West Shore. The 174-page report did not contain a single mention of the North Shore or West Shore rail projects.

"I don't think many of my upstate colleagues even know what the North Shore of Staten Island is," said Assemblywoman Janele Hyer-Spencer (D-Mid-Island/Brooklyn). "I have not felt either at the city or the state level that there is much of a push to see either one of these things happen."

The last real discussion about funding the North Shore rail study was months ago, during the height of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's congestion-pricing debate. Before the state Assembly ultimately decided to block the proposal, members of the borough's Assembly delegation sought assurances that the money raised would fund the multi-million dollar North Shore rail study.

The MTA capital plan, which was contingent on the passage of congestion pricing, did include funding for the North Shore study, as well as other perks, such as 33 new express buses for the Island. The defeat of the mayor's pricing plan took those promises off the table.

A mayoral spokesman pointed to the city's funding of the current preliminary West Shore rail study, as well as the North Shore and West Shore Land Use studies, and an analysis of a South Shore fast ferry, as examples of Bloomberg's commitment to the Island's transit needs.

"These are all studies that we are funding through city money, or would have through congestion pricing, which speaks to the importance with which we view them," said spokesman Stu Loeser. Importance aside, a cautious optimism remains.

"I think eventually we will see it," said Assemblyman Matthew Titone (D-North Shore). "Will I see it in my lifetime? No. But I think we will reach that pressure point where there is no choice but to create these alternatives."

ENGINEERING ISSUES

Peters, the CSI transportation expert, said that although the borough faces horrific traffic due to unfortunate choices made during the building of some key roads like the Staten Island Expressway, many other decisions

made in past generations, such as not developing the North Shore rail right-of way, building Richmond Avenue to its full eight-lane width, and incorporating room for rail on the Bayonne Bridge, add up to give the borough an advantage when it comes to competing with other projects.

"Staten Island has a very, very good hand. These things are hard to replace," he said. "These are really good cards. We just have to play them well."

The Bayonne Bridge was built with rail in mind, with space set aside for tracks running across the span. But though it's the common denominator for both rail projects, the bridge is also a source of uncertainty. Even if funding becomes available to finance the project, there are still engineering challenges to overcome, including how to run a train over the steep span. Even more problematic is the future for the existing bridge, which is now the subject of a year-long study to consider its replacement with a taller structure, or a tunnel, to accommodate the next generation of colossal cargo ships destined for local ports.

SHOT IN THE ARM

If built, the two rail lines would also allow Staten Islanders to tap into another growing job market in Jersey City's financial center, previously out of reach to many because of an inconvenient commute. The only current transit service that links to New Jersey is the S89 bus that travels along Richmond Avenue, across the bridge, and to the Hudson-Bergen line's 34th Street station in Bayonne. The route carries about 830 riders a day.

"We can move people onto the Island and we may be able to attract businesses," said Ms. Spinner of the Staten Island Economic Development Corp. "There is a tremendous potential for economic gain and quality of life for our residents."

Peters' research, presented this spring as part of a conference hosted by CSI's Center for the Study of Staten Island, pointed to residential growth in cities like Houston and Los Angeles after light rail systems were installed there.

Closer to home, since the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail opened in 2000, that system has helped spur the building of more than 10,000 housing units with an estimated sales value of more than \$5.3 billion, according to one study.

"All the doubting Thomases should just look over the bridge to Bayonne and see there that the partnership between the county government, and federal and state government and New Jersey Transit made their dream for a light rail into reality," McMahon said. "It is possible, and it was done less than 10 miles away from where we want to do it."

European-style fast bus coming to Utah

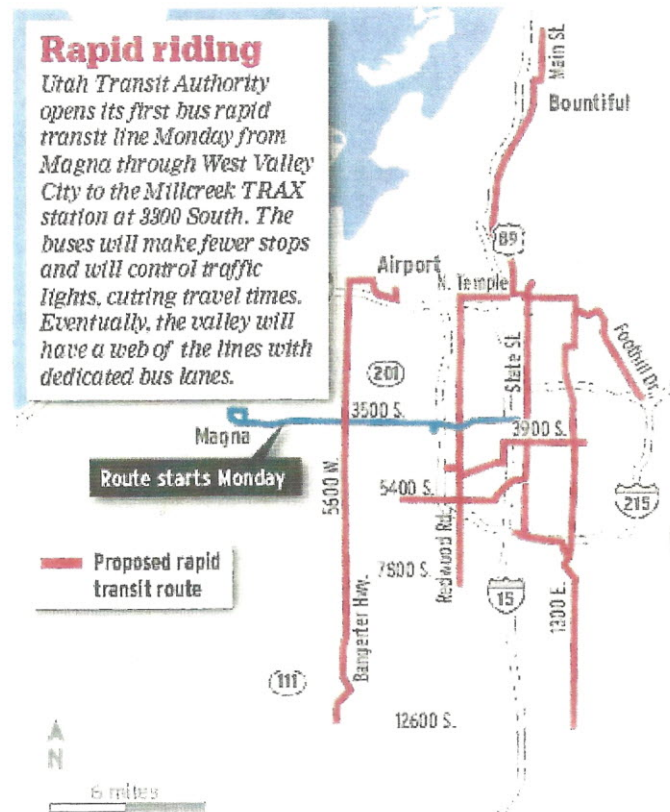
This rapid transit line to Magna will operate much like TRAX

By Brandon Loomis

The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 07/13/2008 09:02:20 AM MDT

SOUTH SALT LAKE - Utah's newest transportation option arrives here Monday, a bus called MAX that moves people faster from Magna through West Valley City to the Millcreek TRAX rail station.



Source: Wasatch Front Regional Council

The Salt Lake Tribune

Bus rapid transit, a series of buses that act more like light rail with their own dedicated lanes, is popular in Europe and South America, and fast gaining ground in North America. The Utah Transit Authority's first line travels mostly along 3500 South Street from Magna past Valley Fair Mall to TRAX at 3300 South, with one arriving every 15 minutes. It makes only 14 stops east of Magna, helping shave a half hour or more off of a route that now takes up to an hour and a half, depending on traffic.

When the state finishes construction and utility work on 3500 South next year, the new buses will have their own lanes down the middle of the street, saving up to 20 percent more time. At that point the covered bus stops will move to the street's center.

MAX buses have three doors, including one by the rear seat, and riders will purchase tickets from vending machines before entering the bus. As on TRAX, riders will be on an honor system and transit cops will spot-check for fare payment.

"The main concept is to get people on it and off it quickly," UTA spokeswoman Carrie Bohnsack-Ware said.

The agency will wait to evaluate the popularity of this and a similar line planned to shuttle Provo riders from Brigham Young University to FrontRunner commuter rail when that train reaches Utah County, then decide whether and where to build more dedicated bus lanes. But the regional planning authority, the Wasatch Front Regional Council, is banking heavily on the concept in its 30-year transportation plan.

Bus rapid transit is planned for routes that have heavier ridership projections than conventional bus routes but not enough to justify light-rail construction, Wasatch Front spokesman Sam Klemm said. By 2030, regional officials expect to have bus rapid transit going south from the University of Utah on Foothill Drive, north from Salt Lake City into Davis County, and south from the airport along 5600 West, among other, shorter routes. The council may switch to streetcars instead for Davis County, because local officials favor that, Klemm said.

The next bus rapid transit line likely will be along 5600 West, in conjunction with Mountain View Freeway construction. Ultimately that line would be converted to light rail, closing a TRAX loop from downtown to the airport and then south to the Mid-Jordan rail line now under construction.

The MAX system is tens of millions of dollars cheaper than a light rail line would be for 3500 South. The total cost for seven buses, the stations and the dedicated lanes will be about \$17 million, according to UTA, compared with \$100 million for a TRAX line. It is funded entirely through local taxes. Local buses on the route will continue to run, making more frequent stops.

Las Vegas has run a federal demonstration project with 7 1/2 miles of bus rapid transit since 2004, netting 2.5 million riders last year, from downtown toward Nellis Air Force Base via Las Vegas Boulevard.

"We've heard great things from our riders and we like it so much we're creating a new system that will connect really the entire Las Vegas Valley," said Tracy Bower, Las Vegas Regional Transportation Commission spokeswoman.

Other cities developing rapid bus transit systems include Oakland and Berkeley, Calif., Cleveland, Eugene, Ore., and Kansas City, Mo.

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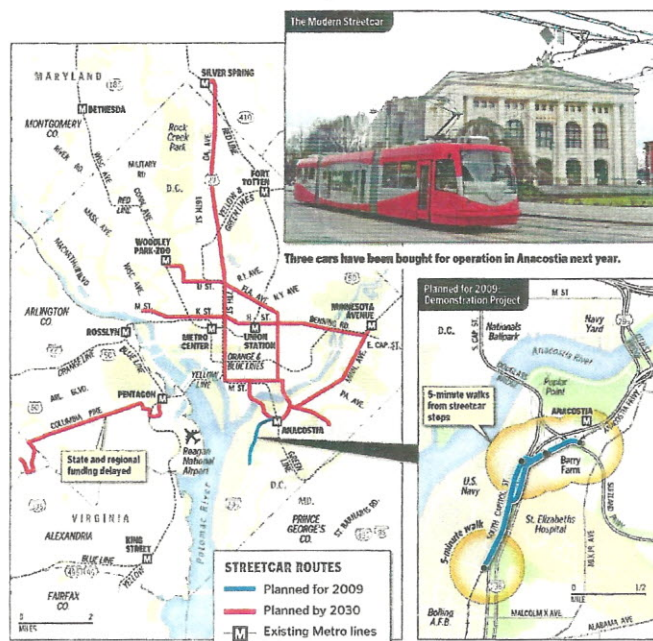
Transit Plan on Track

Streetcars Could Be Running on D.C. Roads by Late Next Year

By Lena H. Sun
Washington Post Staff Writer
Sunday, July 13, 2008; Page C01

The District's on-again, off-again streetcar project has reached a critical stage: Officials are to unseal bids next month and award a contract this fall for construction of tracks and other infrastructure. Three new modern streetcars have been bought and are sitting in storage in the Czech Republic.

If all goes according to plan, the red-and-gray streetcars could be running along a 1.3-mile stretch from Bolling Air Force Base to the Anacostia Metro station by late next year. That segment, which will cost about \$45 million, would be part of an extensive network of streetcars and rapid bus service that transportation officials envision will stretch across the city in coming years.



Like transit planners elsewhere, District officials see the modern streetcar as a way to connect inner-city neighborhoods and jump-start economic development without harming the environment. Transportation officials are to give an update on the project at a public hearing tomorrow convened by D.C. Council member Jim Graham (D-Ward 1).

District transportation planners hope the streetcars can do for Washington what they did for Portland. In Oregon's largest city, the streetcar system that began operating in 2001 is credited with accelerating redevelopment along an eight-mile continuous loop, turning a once-deteriorating area of warehouses into one full of restaurants, upscale hotels and galleries. Planners say that every dollar spent on the system resulted in \$18 of development. The Czech-built streetcars, the same type bought by the District, inspired a local brewery to make a beer in their honor, Streetcar Ale.

The renaissance of streetcars, a form of light rail, has been taking place across the country for the past several years. Light rail, which includes modern streetcars, had the highest percentage of ridership increase — 10.3 percent — of all transit in the first quarter of this year over the same period last year, according to the American Public Transportation Association.

Streetcars share lanes with automobiles and ride on rails built in existing streets. Power comes from overhead electric wires.

The small-size trains are quiet, efficient and environmentally friendly, carrying people through high-density areas on short inner-city trips, reducing automobile traffic and parking.

At a time of "higher-than-ever fuel costs and greater-than-ever concerns about air quality," the appeal of streetcars is especially high, said Chris Zimmerman (D), Arlington County Board member.

Northern Virginia also has a streetcar project, a five-mile line along Columbia Pike in Arlington and Fairfax counties. Progress on that \$172 million project is behind the District's, and because of Virginia state legislators' failure to come up with transportation funding, that streetcar line is certain to be delayed even further, officials said.

The projects coincide with plans in Maryland to build a light rail or bus rapid transit Purple Line extending inside the Beltway from Bethesda to New Carrollton.

In the District, the Anacostia streetcar segment is anticipated to have 1,400 daily riders, mostly made up of federal workers, District employees and city residents, according to transportation officials. The cars would travel with automobile traffic, on in-street embedded track occupying one of the lanes. For the past year, the three streetcars have been stored at the manufacturer's site in Ostrava, Czech Republic.

Graham said he called tomorrow's hearing after attending a light rail conference in Istanbul last month representing Metro, for which he is a board member. The conference prompted him to question the project's scope and location, he said.

He has asked for a temporary hold on a budget request to transfer \$10 million from another District transportation project, the 11th Street bridge, to the Anacostia streetcar segment. The initial streetcar line is funded entirely with District moneys.

"I don't think there's been a council oversight hearing on this project in more than five years," he said.

Although he supports streetcars and light rail, Graham questioned whether the planned Anacostia route made the most sense. It would be convenient for federal workers, he said, "but what are the direct benefits for the people of the District of Columbia? . . . Is this the most bang for the buck that we can get?"

Streetcar routes along H Street NE and K Street downtown might have more benefits, he said. City transportation officials say they hope to eventually run streetcars along K Street and in Capitol Hill and other corridors, adding a layer to the transit options created by the increasingly strained underground Metro system.

One streetcar route under consideration would follow the path of the popular DC Circulator bus from Benning Road and H Street NE to Union Station, then K Street, and then to the west side of downtown, according to Emeka Moneme, District transportation director.

"We have limited roadway capacity in the city, and this is a way to move more people," Moneme said.

Officials say Anacostia was chosen because it is underserved by transit and economic development. Several housing, retail and commercial projects are planned for the area around the

Anacostia station. Streetcars can "really spur economic development," Moneme said.

Streetcars and the other infrastructure needed to run them are viewed by developers as a permanent commitment to improving a community, he said. By comparison, a new bus route can always be eliminated.

The streetcars to be used in Anacostia, manufactured by Skoda-Inekon in Plzen, Czech Republic, are about eight feet wide and 66 feet long, smaller than a typical Metrorail car. The District cars cost \$3 million each.

The District project began several years ago. As part of the planning, city officials and residents traveled to Portland a few years ago -- some went twice -- to see its streetcar system firsthand.

Kenneth Davis, a District resident who made the trip, said he was sold on the merits of streetcars after riding. Some earlier proposals had irked residents who feared that any benefit the light rail line might bring would be outweighed by increased traffic and reduced curbside parking.

"It was impressive to watch the streetcars moving down very narrow streets," he said. "They didn't interfere with traffic or parking."

D.C. officials say one concern is the high rate of pedestrian traffic incidents around the Anacostia Metro station. Adding a transit service will require more control over pedestrian access, they said.

Officials said a 12-inch deep track slab design will reduce the time needed to construct the tracks.

The Anacostia project was originally slated to be longer, about three miles, and to run along CSX tracks between Bolling Air Force Base and Pennsylvania Avenue. But the city and CSX couldn't agree on a lease.

In 2005, officials proposed running the tracks along a stretch of Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue and Good Hope Road SE to Minnesota Avenue SE but abandoned those efforts after community opposition. Residents said the roads were too narrow for streetcars.

In January 2006, the project was shortened to 1.3 miles, running on its current alignment from Bolling, on South Capitol Street, to the Anacostia Metro station, with stops at the Navy Annex and Barry Farm on Firth Sterling.

The last District streetcar stopped running in January 1962. But for almost a century, streetcars clattered along steel tracks dug into the broad boulevards of the District and its suburbs, in one of the most extensive trolley systems in the country.

In Washington, a congressional ban on overhead wires in the heart of the city poses a special problem.

Unlike the Anacostia demonstration, where cars would draw power from a pole that connects with overhead wires, a more extensive streetcar network would need to rely on newer technology, such as a self-propelled system powered by battery, Moneme said.