



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

OCTOBER/DECEMBER 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.org". At osabus.org 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.

• OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER MEETINGS

The October meeting of the Omnibus Society of America was held on October 2, 2008, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting started at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening "*Vintage Potpourri*", was a continuation in the series of vintage bus slides taken by Chuck Tauscher over the years.

The November meeting of the Omnibus Society of America was held on November 7, 2008, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting began at 7:30pm.

Our program for the evening was a presentation by long-time bus photographer John LeBeau.

The December meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on December 5, 2008, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30pm.

Our program for the evening will be a slide presentation by Ed Montejano, a long-time resident of Milwaukee.

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.

• OSA ELECTION NOTICE

Enclosed in this issue of The Green Pennant Special you will find a ballot for the election of Directors of The Omnibus Society of America.

Vote, or write-in for only two current members of OSA. If more than two names are voted for, the ballot will be rejected and not counted.

The ballots must be received by the beginning of the December OSA meeting. The ballots can either be mailed to the address on the front of the postcard or brought to the meeting.

About that old train bridge. . .

BABY STEP | City would use it to link trains with Michigan Ave.

You know that old up-in-the-air railroad bridge over the Chicago River by Kinzie -- the one people like to use as a backdrop for funky, urban wedding portraits?

The bridge connects to a Union Pacific train tunnel running under the Apparel Center, the Merchandise Mart and other buildings east toward North Michigan Avenue.

For more than 20 years, the city has been talking about making use of that tunnel to create a transit link from Union Station and the Ogilvie Transportation Center to Michigan Avenue.

Now, the city is taking a baby step toward making the "Carroll Avenue" connection a reality. By year's end, the city's transportation department will issue a "request for proposals" for an "alternatives analysis" that will look not only at the Carroll Avenue site proposal, but also at other possibilities for a link from the West Loop to Michigan Avenue -- like using Illinois Street or Lower Wacker Drive.

Why does the city need to spend \$1.6 million in federal money and a \$400,000 city match on an alternatives analysis when officials already *know* they want to use Carroll Avenue?

"An alternatives analysis is required as part of the process," says Luann Hamilton, deputy commissioner for the division of project development for the Chicago Department of Transportation, a hurdle the city needs to clear to ask for federal "New Start" funds.

The city envisions a streetcar -- or an express bus -- picking up passengers at the train stations and carrying them north along Clinton. City officials would like to create an underpass under the Metra tracks so cars and buses wouldn't have to wait for the train.

The city would have to retrofit the old, raised bridge so it would carry the buses. Then, the bus or streetcar would be able to run along Carroll, without the interference of stop lights or other cars, to carry people straight east to Michigan Avenue, where they could get to shopping, Streeterville and the Northwestern Memorial Hospital complex.

Now, the way to get from the train stations to Michigan Avenue is by bus or taxi, going through traffic, or by a Chicago Water Taxi up the river during the months that it runs.

The city has discussed some version of the Carroll Avenue plan since at least 1986. The current version made it into the city's 2003 Central Area Plan, which talked up a range of transit and other improvements. A West Loop Transportation Complex along Clinton is part of that plan.

The total Carroll Avenue project would cost "tens of millions of dollars," and it certainly won't happen in this decade, Hamilton says. The alternatives analysis alone would take about 18 months.

While waiting to get the project going, the city has worked on protecting the right-of-way even as construction has gone on in the area, making sure the space is preserved. The Trump Tower, for instance, incorporated the opening into its design.

We'll check back in 2010 to see if the Carroll Avenue project finds the money to happen, or if that \$2 million in analysis funding was spent in vain. Meanwhile, if you want photos in front of that bridge, take them now.

AIG woes could cost RTA

Transit agencies nationwide could be on the hook for a combined \$1 billion as a result of insurance giant's troubles

October 24, 2008

By MARY WISNIEWSKI Transportation Reporter

Transit agencies around the country could be on the hook for more than \$1 billion as a result of the financial troubles of American International Group, the insurance giant that was saved by a federal bailout, but Metra and CTA officials said they expect relatively little fallout from the AIG mess.

The issue involves "leaseback" arrangements under which transit agencies sold assets like rail cars and facilities to investors, then leased them back. The agencies got cash; investors got a tax credit.

The deals required a guarantee by a financial institution — in most cases, that was AIG. But when AIG's credit rating tumbled along with much of the U.S. economy, that left the transit agencies obliged to pay back investors.

Metra got cash gain of \$43.7 million in 1998 from a railcar deal. But Judy Pardonnet, a spokeswoman for the commuter-rail line, said Thursday that AIG was able to provide additional collateral early this month to secure obligations. The change cost Metra \$75,000, Pardonnet said.

The CTA has three leaseback deals involving AIG worth \$39.4 million, including a \$16.5 million deal for the L's Green Line. CTA spokeswoman Sheila Gregory said two of the three investors on the Green Line deal have asked the CTA to replace AIG as the guarantor on the deal. The CTA is "confident" that it can replace AIG, and has not incurred any losses, Gregory said.

Also Thursday, the RTA approved 43 projects for next year — including an expansion of Metra's Southwest service to the weekends and a new CTA bus route on 31st Street.

Metra adding Saturday service to

SouthWest line in March

Grant of \$680,000 fuels March start for trains as part of 2-year trial program

By Joel Hood | Tribune reporter

October 24, 2008

Service along Metra's SouthWest route will extend into Saturdays beginning in March, thanks to a \$680,000 grant from the commuter railroad and the Regional Transportation Authority.

U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-Ill.) joined community leaders from around the southwest suburbs in Chicago Ridge on Thursday to unveil the two-year project. Metra plans to offer six trips on Saturdays, whisking passengers along the route to and from Union Station in Chicago. Trains will run in the morning and evening, but the specific schedules have yet to be worked out, said Phil Pagano, Metra's executive director.

Metra's investment in weekend service is significant, Pagano said, because it underscores how rapidly Chicago's suburbs are growing. In 1983, there were only three commuter trains for the SouthWest route, which includes stops on Chicago's Southwest Side, Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge, Orland Park, and, ultimately, Manhattan. Today, there are 30 trains serving that region, Pagano said.

"There is growing demand for transit in the suburbs," said Steve Schlickman, executive director of the RTA. "I'm confident that this project will be a tremendous success."

One reason the train schedules are not finalized, Lipinski said, is that transit officials are working with freight haulers to ease congestion on that rail line. Increasing

commuter trains will not reduce the number of freight carriers, but it may change when they run, said Lipinski, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The grant money will pay for weekend service for a year, Pagano said, but officials want to test the program for two years. If Saturday service becomes popular, Pagano said the program could extend to Sunday.

"Many residents in my district have viewed weekend trains on this line only as a dream," Lipinski said. "I have no doubt that if you run it, [the people] will come."

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End of line for city's free trolleys

By Jon Hilkevitch | Tribune reporter November 4, 2008
Chicago's free trolleys—also known as a tourist magnet on rubber wheels—will cease operating next year in a proposed belt-tightening move.

The downtown area's network of free trolleys was born in 2000 shortly after Mayor Richard Daley returned from a visit to San Francisco, home to historic cable-car lines where passengers pay fares to ride.

Chicago's trolleys were initially paid for by a federal congestion-relief grant. Since 2004, the trolley has been funded directly by the city, which hired a private company to run the service.

Daley proposed scrapping the trolleys in his 2009 budget, saving \$1.7 million annually. No opposition to the plan has emerged in the City Council or at the CTA, which lost potential fares to the competition from the free trolleys.

City dwellers are a distinct minority on the trolleys. Some 88 percent of the trolley users are out-of-towners and visitors from Chicago's suburbs, according to a survey conducted for the city.

"The free trolleys provided a valuable service. However, it was not an essential service," Brian Steele, spokesman for the Chicago Department of Transportation, said Monday.

The last day of service is scheduled for Jan. 4.

Last year, the free trolleys carried more than 730,600 riders on four routes. Ridership this year through Sept. 30 was almost 936,000, officials said.

The free trolleys run on corridors serving Navy Pier, North Michigan Avenue, the Museum Campus, and Lincoln Park Zoo, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and the Chicago History Museum.

The trolleys have operated daily from Memorial Day

through Labor Day and on weekends through the fall and holiday season.

The trolleys connect to Union Station, the Ogilvie Transportation Center and Metra's LaSalle Street station.

The three main trolley routes will continue to operate mostly on weekends through the holidays. Trolleys will operate Friday, Nov. 28, as well as daily from Dec. 20 through Jan. 4.

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PROPOSED 2009 PACE BUDGET INCLUDES FARE INCREASE AND NEW SERVICE

October 15, 2008 5:30:00 PM
Media Release Office: (847) 228-4295
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Economy, budget pressures force first fare increase since 2001

The Pace Board of Directors released the proposed 2009 budget and although fares on suburban fixed route operations will rise for the first time in eight years, the agency intends to develop new service for the region. "We realize that no one likes a fare increase, but the pressures of a slow economy and rising expenses have become too much to bear," said Richard Kwasneski, Pace Board Chairman. "Implementing this fare increase is important to maintaining financial stability during these volatile times."

The regular adult fare will increase by \$0.25 to \$1.75, and adult fares on Metra Feeder service as well as in Local Fare Zones, found in Joliet, Aurora, Elgin, and Waukegan, will increase by \$0.50 to \$1.75. Vanpool fares would rise by 10% under the proposed plan. Budget pressures related to increased expenses and lost revenue necessitated the increase. Fuel costs are projected to overrun budgeted expenses by \$8 million in 2008, free rides programs and the veto of funding for the state's half-fare reimbursement added up to lost revenue of between \$4.5 and \$6 million, and the soft economy resulted in \$6 million less to Pace in public funding than was anticipated. Additionally, the lack of a reimbursement from the RTA for Pace's acceptance of the CTA's 7-day, U-Pass, and Visitor/Fun passes has resulted in \$6.4 million worth of rides on the Pace system for which Pace receives virtually no revenue. Without a resolution regarding this issue, Pace proposes to eliminate acceptance of these passes effective January 1, 2009. "We realize this may place a strain on some passengers and it's inconsistent with the goal of creating a seamless regional system, but we cannot afford to provide what amounts to free trips to over 20% of our ridership base," said Kwasneski. A recent survey by the American Public Transportation Association

revealed that 61% of transit agencies nationwide are considering a fare increase to deal with fuel costs.

No fare increases for ADA Paratransit service are included in the proposed budget. "Our Blue Ribbon Committee on Paratransit is working toward completion of its report, and the RTA is set to begin an audit of paratransit service, so we feel it's premature to make any changes to the fare structure if either of those bodies recommends operational changes," said Kwasneski.

The availability of new funding, a result of legislation passed in January, will allow Pace to invest \$7.5 million into the development of new transit service for the region. "It is our intent to partner with the counties and communities we serve to make good use of the money we're investing in service expansion," said Kwasneski. "A year ago, we were preparing for a transit doomsday and massive job cuts, so needless to say, we're pleased that the General Assembly had the foresight to invest in transit and allow Pace to expand service in 2009." Development of new bus service may be hampered, however, by a lack of available equipment. Pace is in dire need of replacing about 1/6th of the roughly 700 buses in its fleet. To develop new service, Pace will need to expand the size of its fleet but must first give priority to replacing buses that are beyond their useful life. "This is an example of how the need for a comprehensive State capital funding plan is having an effect on our operations- we cannot develop new service until we have the ability to expand our fleet."

The Suburban Service operating budget, comprised of fixed route bus, vanpool, and non-ADA dial-a-ride programs, amounts to \$204.6 million. The Regional ADA Paratransit budget, which consists of Chicago and suburban paratransit operations, totals \$107.2 million. The capital budget, strained in recent years by the need to divert capital funding to cover operating deficits, adds up to \$43.3 million.

At its October meeting, The Pace Board of Directors voted to release the proposed 2009 budget for public review and comment. Thirteen public hearings are scheduled at which the public can review the budget document, hear a brief presentation, and comment for the public record. The document is also available for download and review at www.pacebus.com. Comments can be submitted via e-mail through the Pace website or by mail to Pace Government Affairs, 550 W. Algonquin Road, Arlington Heights, IL 60005. The Pace Board will review the public comment record and has the opportunity to make changes before approving the budget for submission to the RTA Board of Directors, where it will be reviewed and included in the 2009 RTA budget following approval in December. "The budget cycle we employ is mandated by law and takes several months to complete, but it provides the public with transparency and plenty of opportunity to participate in the process," said Kwasneski.

South Cook County - Will County Initiative

The South Cook County - Will County Initiative is the latest and largest of Pace's service restructuring initiatives, encompassing 82 communities in Will County and south and southwest Cook County, 48 bus routes and approximately 40 percent of Pace's overall ridership.

Goals of the Initiative include aligning Pace service with current travel needs and demographics, improving service reliability and developing new transit options beyond fixed bus routes. Pace is working closely with communities, businesses, its customers, regional transportation and planning organizations and social service agencies to ensure that service changes will meet area needs.

August 2008

Joliet area public hearings for South Cook County-Will County Initiatives were held.

November 2008 Updated!

Heritage, South and Southwest Divisions Changes November 2008

Heritage Division, First Phase

The routing and schedules that will take effect November 24, 2008 for Routes 501, 504, 505, 507, 508, 509, 511, 832, 834 and the West Joliet Call-n-Ride are now available, below.

Heritage Route Schedules take effect November 24

Route	New Name
501	West Jefferson
504	South Joliet
505	West Joliet Loop
507	Plainfield
508	East Joliet
509	Forest Park
511	Joliet-Elwood-Deer Run
832	Joliet-Orland Square
834	Joliet-Downers



West Joliet Call-n-Ride

Please note that Routes 502, 503, 506 and 831 will not have new schedules or routing as these routes will be discontinued on that date.

División Heritage, Primera Fase

La ruta y los horarios que entrarán en efecto a partir del 24 de Noviembre, 2008 para las Rutas 501, 504, 505, 507, 508, 509, 511, 832, 834 y el West Joliet Call-n-Ride serán anunciados.

Tome nota que las Rutas 502, 503, 506 y 831 no tendrán nuevos horarios o rutas ya que estas serán discontinuadas en ésta fecha (17 de Octubre, 2008).

Southwest Division First Phase

Effective Sunday, November 23, 2008, Routes 379, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, and 386 will serve Posted Stops only in corridors that also have CTA service in the city of Chicago; Routes 381, 385 and 386 routing will be adjusted to improve service to the 5th Municipal District Circuit Courthouse in Bridgeview and connections between Routes 381 & 386; and Route 385 routing will be adjusted to improve service to Rivercrest Center and Wal-Mart in Crestwood.

Southwest Route Changes take effect November 23/24

Description

Route	New Name
379	West 79th Street
381	95th Street
382	Central/Clearing
383	South Cicero
384	Narragansett/Ridgeland
385	87th/111th/127th
386	South Harlem

South Division First Phase

Effective Sunday, November 23, 2008, Routes 349, 352, 353 and 359 will serve Posted Stops only in corridors that also have CTA service in the city of Chicago.

South Route Changes take effect November 23/24

Description

Route	New Name
349	South Western
352	Halsted
353	95th/Riverdale/Homewood
359	Robbins – South Kedzie

Spring 2009

Public hearings for the second round of service changes in southern and southwestern Cook County.

Implementation of the second round of service changes:

- Restructuring of South and Southwest Cook County service, with more direct and reliable service to major destinations and improved connections throughout the area

2010 and Beyond

Implementation of additional service improvements in the South Cook County – Will County area

Pace thanks you for your patience and involvement as the Initiative continues to move toward implementation. Should you have comments to offer at any time, please send us an e-mail or call us at (847) 364-7223.

It's a 'Go' for giving buses priority through intersections

*by Annie Martin
Oct 23, 2008*

When a fire truck or an ambulance flies down a busy street, sirens screaming and lights flashing, it's no surprise to most drivers that a red light can prematurely become green or an already-green light can be prolonged.

Now a few suburban buses have the same power – and selected city buses will too, starting in January.

Most of the intersections on Cermak Road between Harlem Avenue and 54th Avenue are now equipped with sensors that trigger the traffic signals when a Pace bus passes over them. This system has been in place about a decade, spokesman Patrick Wilmot said.

"A lot of people don't even realize it's there but they are

saving anywhere from a couple of minutes to several minutes per day," Wilmot said. "It can add up to a fairly considerable time savings."

Chicago is just starting to implement what many other cities have had for several years, Wilmot said.

"In Los Angeles ... they have entire corridors that are built upon having this technology and also some other service improvements that have made massive cost savings, improved performance and shortened travel time," Wilmot said.

The Cermak Avenue system has been so efficient; Pace has been able to use one fewer bus on those routes than it did before the changes.

Pace is hoping to bring some of those benefits to other Chicago neighborhoods in the next year. The agency is planning to implement the signal system on Halsted Street, 159th Street and Sibley Street.

These intersections will actually receive a more sophisticated system than the one that is in place on Cermak Road, Wilmot said. The dispatching office will be able to monitor the performance of the system in real time, allowing the agency to correct any problems and measure how much time is saved. The total cost of the project is about \$3 million.

But the new system shouldn't give drivers headaches, Wilmot said. It will be able to refuse to give the bus a green light if there's too much traffic that needs to get across the intersection. In addition, the implementation includes timing the lights to allow traffic to flow more quickly.

Pace will likely rearrange some of the bus stops where the new signal priority systems are implemented, Wilmot said.

"In order to maximize the time savings, and really reduce the dwell time, you want to move bus stops to the far side of the intersection," he said.

This is because the bus loses time if it stops to pick up or drop off riders just before it goes through the intersection.

The Chicago Transit Authority announced in June it will test a similar system on two segments of Western Avenue. The equipment will be installed at five intersections between Armitage and Diversey and another five intersections between 59th Street and 63rd Street. As many as 30 buses operating on the Western Express route will be able to activate the traffic light equipment.

Conducted by the city, the study is funded by a \$652,000 grant from the Regional Transit Authority. The pilot program will run from January until July.

Delores Williams said she rides the Cermak Avenue buses every day to work, shopping and entertainment. Williams, a criminal investigator for the Cook County Sheriff, said she hadn't heard about the signal prioritization but it didn't sound like a bad plan.

"I think it's a good idea, mainly because it will not only keep the buses on schedule but it will help people get where they are going sooner," the 61-year-old said as she waited at a stop on Cermak Road in Berwyn.

Pamela Kizior rides the bus every day to J. Sterling Morton West High School in Berwyn. The 19-year-old senior said she hadn't heard of program, either. Did she like the notion?

"If it's able to make the bus go through the traffic easier, yeah," Kizior said.

Lowell's South Shore line on fast track

BY KEITH BENMAN
kbenman@nwitimes.com
219.933.3326 | Friday, October 24, 2008

INDIANAPOLIS | Local transportation officials soon will seek federal funds to build the South Shore extension to Lowell and go back to the drawing board on the Valparaiso extension, officials revealed in a Thursday legislative hearing.

Because of its lower cost, the Lowell line has a chance to win federal funding whereas the Valparaiso line would be unlikely to win the same, Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District general manager Gerald Hanas told a key legislative commission.

"In the short run, we can go forward with the Lowell project," Hanas said. "The Valparaiso project will get a face-lift in the project plans."

NICTD wants to study the feasibility of running the Valparaiso extension on the former Amtrak corridor from Gary to Valparaiso, Hanas said. The previous plan was to run it on Canadian National rights of way.

Hanas and state Rep. Chet Dobis, D-Merrillville, testified Thursday before the Commission on State Tax and Financing Policy at the Indiana Statehouse. The commission is chaired by state Rep. Peggy Welch, D-Bloomington.

For now, the Lowell line has several advantages in the race for funding from the Federal Transit Administration's New Start program, Hanas said.

The cost for building the Lowell line is lower -- \$551 million as compared to \$673 million for the Valparaiso line. It also meets federal cost-efficiency mandates. And according to forecasts, the Lowell leg would attract almost as many riders as both branches combined.

Valparaiso Mayor Jon Costas said he understood NICTD's reasoning and that he had been briefed on the situation.

"While it means we may have to wait a few years for our line, we will have a better chance of ultimately getting the whole project built," Costas said.

The total capital cost for building out both lines would be \$902 million. Both lines would share five miles of new track from Hammond to Munster. The total project goes by the name of the West Lake Corridor Extension.

Projects approved for the New Starts program receive up to 50 percent funding from the federal government. For the Lowell line, that would leave about \$225 million for local communities to come up with.

Hanas said the most optimistic timeline for the Lowell branch would have people riding the trains in four to five years.

In a swift five minutes of testimony, Dobis said he would again be introducing legislation in the upcoming session that would deal with the local share of funding for the South Shore extension.

But he told the commission he wanted to keep all funding options open and would reveal the preferred one only when he submits his bill.

Previous proposals for a wheel tax and for using a share of state sales tax funds have been shot down, with the latter idea stopped in its tracks in the Indiana Senate last session.

Dobis indicated after the hearing that he may again push for some form of state funding, perhaps in conjunction with legislators from central Indiana who want to build their own commuter line.

"What about a statewide answer?" he said. "If it's statewide it doesn't have to be local."

Environmental Study Released on Transit Project

Written by Lisa Kubota - lkubota@kgmb9.com

November 02, 2008 10:31 PM

This is what everyone's been waiting for, the rail study detailing pros and cons of Honolulu's mass transit project. The city has said the system would cost \$3.9 billion. The study says, including interest, the Salt Lake route in today's dollars would cost nearly \$4.3 billion.

When you add in inflation, the number goes up to almost \$5.3 billion when the project is finished. Adding an airport extension to the route would cost about \$5.3 billion in 2008 dollars, adjusting for inflation and that goes up to nearly \$6.5 billion.

"The fact of the matter is, what we have here is the finance charges that are interest and inflation, and that's

what those numbers are, and we can afford to pay for it," Mayor Mufi Hannemann said.

"We're talking about the largest public works project ever in our state and it involves our children, our grandchildren, and their children because they're going to be paying for this boondoggle," Ann Kobayashi said.

The mayor says the draft environmental impact statement backs up his position, that the project will benefit Oahu.

"Traffic congestion is going to be reduced by double the number that we talked about so for every 100 cars on the road, we said initially, 11 cars were going to come out. Now we're talking 22, 23 cars," Hannemann said.

Opponents point to this table in the study, comparing the difference between a Salt Lake route and no rail system.

"Six percent use the bus in their no build alternative. Seven percent use bus and rail in the build alternative. The headline here is five billion dollars, one percent," Panos Prevedourous said.

Critics also questioned why the city released the full report four days after it got the green light from the Federal Transit Administration.

"There are churches, hospitals, schools, so many homes and small businesses and yet no one knew about this and we still don't know the whole cost of the project," Kobayashi said.

"For those who say it took so long - you're buying into Ann Kobayashi. She doesn't know these things cause she's not a mayor. She's not been part of the administration. We've turned it around very quickly," Hannemann said.

Mesa sees light rail as a turning point

Many hope route will help deteriorating area

With nearly 453,000 residents, Mesa counts a population larger than Miami, Minneapolis or St. Louis.

But the city has struggled to become more than a Phoenix bedroom community.

Mesa has attempted economic-development project after project to diversify its economy, which has good-paying aircraft-manufacturing jobs but also many low-paying telemarketing and retail jobs.

Metro light rail is seen as the latest way to change Mesa's fortune.

The city's initial stretch of the line is only a little more than a mile, but the impact could be among the most dramatic along the entire 20-mile route.

Neighborhoods, mom-and-pop shops and west Mesa, in particular, could be changed.

City officials, business leaders and development experts hope the train will bring a new identity to the city when it starts running down this stretch of Main Street.

Already, light rail has put new polish on Main Street: new paving, sidewalks and landscaping. Apartments, strip malls and businesses that were able to survive the construction are sprucing up before the trains start carrying passengers into the area.

Mesa plans a new free downtown circulator bus system that would work in tandem with light rail to expand and improve service.

The system would help light-rail riders access various downtown locations, including the Mesa Arts Center, Banner Health's office complex and Hohokam Stadium.

"Light rail is going to bring people into Mesa and let them see how great and unique west Mesa is," said Jo Ellen McNamara, executive director of the West Mesa Community Development Corp.

Neighborhoods

Mesa resident Jennifer Mott has seen late-night drug busts in her neighborhood, Pepper Place, which sits a few blocks from the light-rail line.

Doors are broken in. Police are yelling. People are running into the street.

That kind of chaos would immediately cause most people to think about moving elsewhere. But Mott, a stay-at-home mother and head of the Pepper Place Neighborhood Association, and her husband decided to stay.

They knew that the light rail was coming. It would bring a renewed interest in the area's 1950s ranch homes on roomy lots. It could increase property values.

"We've kind of banded together and tried to stick it out through the ups and downs, and we feel like this is a turning point for our neighborhood," Mott said.

She took a picture of the first train she saw zoom down Main Street during testing of the system.

There hasn't always been a high-level of enthusiasm for the light rail in Mesa. When the transportation system

was proposed, many Mesa residents were against the project.

"I think a lot of the resistance was to spending money," Mott said, adding that "as soon as gas prices did what they did, it silenced the last of the critics."

She and her neighbors are excited to be able to take the light rail to sporting events and concerts in downtown Phoenix, shops on Mill Avenue in Tempe and Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport.

The family's bet to stay put is starting to pay off.

"We were hoping that this neighborhood would turn from a meth zone into more of a yuppie zone," she said.

Mom-and-pop shops

Brothers Nathan and Jacob Johnson's great-grandmother was a shrewd businesswoman.

In the 1920s, Irene Watson went door to door in Mesa selling rosebushes and used the profit to buy a shop on Main Street. Watson's Flowers still occupies that building, which is near the second-to-last light-rail station.

Nathan, 27, and Jacob, 28 - the fourth generation - are getting ready to take over the family business.

"We've made it through the Great Depression, World War II and now the light-rail construction," Nathan Johnson joked.

His sense of humor has been important.

The construction started in October 2005 and dropped the shop's sales by 20 percent each year. Watson's opened another location in Gilbert, a decision that probably saved the entire company from going out of business.

Yet both brothers believe the light rail will be worth the headache. The neighborhood has been spiffed up. Transients that once roamed the street have largely moved on. Run-down motels and other businesses have been torn down.

"We have talked to merchants in other cities who got light rails in front of their stores just like ours and all of them said the construction was difficult but afterward it was the most wonderful thing they ever had happen to them," Nathan Johnson said.

West Mesa's future

What could the neighborhoods of the light-rail line in west Mesa look like in a decade?

William Jabjiniak, the city's economic development director, doesn't see the standard apartment complexes and strip malls that dominate the Valley's suburbs.

He sees a modern take on the urban, walkable neighborhoods that dominate East Coast cities. It could be an affordable area for young professionals and students who go to school in or work in Tempe or Phoenix.

"As development increases on the rail line, we're looking to change toward higher density and a bigger diversity of uses," he said.

That means having multistory buildings that combine shops, stores, condominiums and apartments. Such a dramatically new way of living is an educational process for everyone, he said.

"Is it going to take a little cajoling and hand-holding? Yes," he said. "Do we think the development community is smart enough to seize the opportunity? Absolutely."

Old trolley buses ship out

By Jeff Nagel - BC Local News

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Eighty retired TransLink trolley buses are getting ready to set sail for Argentina.



A recently retired Flyer Industries bus is hoisted aboard the freighter Wisdom, to be shipped to a new life in Mendoza, Argentina.

Jhenifer Pabillano/The Buzzer Blog

The buses are being sold to the city of Mendoza where they'll be returned to service.

Loading aboard the freighter Wisdom began at Fraser Surrey Docks Thursday and is expected to continue until Monday.

Each trolley is towed to the dockside, hoisted gingerly into the hold and then positioned with a forklift.

The ship sails first to Valparaiso, Chile, where the buses will be loaded onto trucks for the 350-kilometre journey to Mendoza over the Trans-Andes highway and through a three-kilometre alpine mountain tunnel.

Mendoza, a city of 900,000 in western Argentina has an electric trolley system covering 75 kilometres of streets.

The local transit authority is paying \$2,300 per bus, \$700 more than scrap value, plus shipping costs.

TransLink paid more than \$1 million a piece for the new trolleys that have taken over service here.

Mendoza is only taking about a third of the 244 old trolleys TransLink has decommissioned.

The remaining 164 have been scrapped, except two being restored by the Transit Museum Society.

The buses had logged an average of 1.2 million kilometres' service over 26 years

MBTA Gives Passengers Free Rides

Team 5 Undercover Investigation Shows Employees Waving Fares

POSTED: 3:36 pm EDT October 30, 2008

UPDATED: 11:57 pm EDT October 30, 2008

BOSTON -- The MBTA's own employees are adding to the transit system's financial problems by not collecting fares, an investigation by Team 5 Investigates found. This comes at a time the agency is struggling to stay on financial track.

It is \$8 billion in debt, has raised parking fees and is poised to increase fares in 2009.

But with the agency mired in debt, Team 5 Investigates found some MBTA's own employees add to the loss column by just waving passengers on to buses and trolleys.

The "Charlie Card" was supposed to make things simpler on the trains and buses. Passengers just needed to put money on the card, tap, and ride. But Team 5 Investigates spent six days on buses and trains with an

undercover camera. They found it was not unusual to get a free ride.

"I've done it a couple of times," said one trolley passenger.

Drivers on some buses waved passengers right on, even those who were ready to pay. Day after day on the above ground Green line trolleys, all the doors opened and passengers walked right on. They weren't asked to pay their fare or prove they had a Charlie Card or a monthly pass.

"I guess it's up to the discretion of the driver," said one trolley passenger. "I don't think it's right," said another rider.

Some passengers were captured on video looking surprised when they boarded without having to pay. One third of the MBTA's revenue comes from fares. One half comes from a portion of the state sales tax. With the MBTA now over \$8 billion in debt, and fare hikes looming, employees were observed letting revenue slip away.

Team 5 Investigates showed our video to the state chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. "A video speaks a thousand words. This is pretty clear," said Sen. Steven Baddour. "In today's climate, every penny counts. We are looking at serious reforms and cuts, and here's an opportunity where people can do a better job."

MBTA General Manager Dan Graubauskas declined to watch Team 5 Investigates' video, but consented to an interview.

Team 5: "Your agency is \$8 billion in debt. Wouldn't every fare count?"

Graubauskas: "Every fare does count."

Team 5: "So why aren't they collected?"

Graubauskas: "The fact of the matter is that bus drivers, operators, trolley operators know that part of their job is to make sure that everyone pays. It shouldn't be somebody who is just deciding to shirk their responsibilities. If they are working for the T, they've got to make sure to collect fares."

Transportation advocate Eric Bourassa said there's also pressure on operators to stay on schedule.

"A person who is monitoring the line by GPS can call the bus driver and tell them that they are behind schedule," said Bourassa. "They know they should get people on as fast as they can and move to the next station."

Team 5 Investigates asked Graubauskas if drivers felt pressure to keep on schedule.

"Well, certainly we have to maintain a schedule, but that's no excuse for not paying," said Graubauskas. Drivers on the Green line are supposed to make announcements when the trains are crowded, asking passengers to come forward and pay their fare. But during our observations, no announcements were made about fare collection.

The MBTA said it ticketed 650 passengers this year for fare evasion. But those were passengers, not employees. After Team 5 Investigates told Graubauskas about drivers failing to collect, he said he may take disciplinary action.

"They'll be brought in to see if in fact they weren't doing the job," he said. "There will be progressive discipline. If we need to get back out there and do self enforcement, then we will do that."

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Blackhawk buys five new MCIs to meet market demand

SCHAUMBURG, IL — October 22, 2008 — Business is booming in Bloomer, Wisconsin, at least for the coach company that calls the town home. Blackhawk Express has taken delivery of five MCI motor coaches this year, four of them in the past two months. The three new J4500s, including two Anniversary Editions, and two D4005s bring the company's fleet to 15 coaches, all of them MCIs.



Owner D.J. Joswiak attributes the company's recent growth largely to the quality of its equipment. "We've noticed a huge boom in business, and we think it's the fleet," said Joswiak. The new D4005s and Anniversary Edition J4500s all have Satellite television, WiFi and other premium features. The satellite television has been an especially big hit, says Joswiak, especially with college and senior charters. "There's been more excitement in the senior market than we were expecting," said Joswiak, citing his customers' ability to go on tours without missing Green Bay Packers games. He also says onboard television serves as a valuable

icebreaker for passengers and eases the boarding process.

The new 40-foot D4005s are equipped with Cummins engines and ZF Astronic transmissions; Joswiak says he is so far happy with their fuel mileage and handling. Of the new Anniversary Edition J4500s, Joswiak says, "They're beautiful coaches." The two newest J4500s made their inaugural trips to New England on fall color tours.

Another key in the Blackhawk Express success strategy is the company's focus on existing clients. "We work harder to keep current customers than we do to gain new ones," said Joswiak. "If we do a good job with current ones, the new ones will come."

Founded 26 years ago, Blackhawk Express serves a wide variety of charter clients, including tour operators, schools and the military. Joswiak runs the company along with his wife; their two children joined the business this year as well. In all, the company has about 45 employees, including drivers, and has its own maintenance facility.

Cavalier Coach Trailways caters to professional set with two new MCI® D4505 models

SCHAUMBURG, IL — October 20, 2008 — With a roster of clients that include Ivy League colleges and schools, it's no surprise that Cavalier Coach Trailways makes smart choices. Proof are the company's two newest coaches, MCI D4505s, the industry's all-time best selling models with proven reliability and enduring elegance.

Equipped with Cummins engines and Allison transmissions, the coaches use Ultra Low Sulfur fuel and are cleaner, emitting fewer emissions. "A number of colleges demand newer equipment; they want a very professional look," said Joan Libby, president and founder of the Boston-based tour and charter company. "We give a fair value and keep a modern fleet."



A successful women-owned, SOMWBA-certified company, Cavalier has contracts with several colleges and schools in the Boston area providing shuttle services between campuses. Charters include annual events such as the Boston Marathon. The company also runs a commuter line for MBTA from Northborough and Framingham.

Libby founded Cavalier in 1987 after a career in the tour business, taking over leases of five coaches from another company. Today, Cavalier's fleet numbers 12 coaches and 16 mini buses, and a full service shop. She is one of several women to have built a successful bus business. "It's taken determination and perseverance," said Libby, who credits her employees for their contributions. "We have a family atmosphere. Many employees have been here 15 to 5 years at least."

Libby's high standards extend to safety, maintenance and the look of the fleet. The company puts safety first, with a full-time staff member dedicated to safety and training. "A vehicle must be maintained properly; it's an investment that pays back," said Libby.

"Everybody knows a coach is a billboard running around," said Libby. Cavalier's are noted for their colors of lavender, dusty rose and light silver.

A member of Trailways since 2006, Libby appreciates the network. "Their standards are high; it's been a terrific membership for us."

A lifelong Bostonian, Libby stands out for her service to the community and the industry. She is on the board of the United Motor Coach Association, serving as marketing chairperson. She is also a founding member of the Motorcoach Council, dedicated to increasing industry awareness on a national level.

For more information visit,
www.cavaliercoachtrailways.com.

Discovery charts new ground with luxurious, cutting-edge, clean-diesel MCI models

SCHAUMBURG, IL — October 13, 2008 — Passengers traveling with Discovery Coach, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, will find new vehicles of exploration: two special-edition MCI® J4500s featuring luxurious interiors and the latest in electronic upgrades. Powered by clean-engine technology mandated by the EPA, the new coaches are expected to be as good for ridership as they are for the environment.

"These coaches give us something new on the street," said Dennis Prigge, Discovery president and third-generation partner in the family-owned company. "We are distinguished for personal service, and we like to be the first to offer our customers the very latest and give them features they can't find anywhere else."



On board, amenities include extra leg-room with luxurious, spacious Amaya seating and airline-style tray tables, a high-end Blaupunkt entertainment system with six flat-screen video monitors, enhanced lighting, satellite radio and television, and WiFi connectivity. There are also 110-volt outlets throughout the cabin for passengers who have electronic devices to use or recharge.

Additionally, Discovery's new J4500 models are equipped with a Cummins engine and ZF Astronic transmission, using ultra low sulfur fuel, reducing particulate matter by 90 percent from previous models.

MCI built the special-edition models to commemorate its 75th anniversary. Discovery plans to promote the new equipment in a variety of ways, especially the WiFi and satellite TV. It is overhauling its website, too, to better reflect the Discovery brand, which is celebrating 60 years.

"Our business continues to grow each year and we need to keep our fleet up with the latest innovations," said David Prigge, another third generation family partner and the marketing director. "Because our company is relatively small, we are able to give our clients personal service. We have a top notch office staff and safe, professional drivers who take care of our customers from start to finish."

The company was founded in 1948 by John and Lucille Prigge and their son Jerome. Another son Jim joined the company shortly thereafter. Today, in addition to Dennis Prigge and his brother David, Discovery is owned and operated by forward-thinking family members including their sister Jerilynn Boettner, vice president; and her husband, Phil Boettner, corporate controller. The fourth generation of the family is represented by the Boettner's son Jason, who works in dispatch for the company's school bus operations and drives motorcoach as well.

Even the company's headquarters offers something unique. In February of 2007, the company renovated the former 1906 CNW historic train station at 1139 Pennsylvania Avenue, transforming it into attractive operations center for its charter and tour office. Discovery keeps its 11 coaches and 80 school buses, operated under Prigge's School Bus Service, in an adjacent service facility and yard.

For more information, visit www.discoverycoach.com.

A step up to luxury: Royal Coach puts a wealth of amenities on new MCI® E4500 LX

SCHAUMBURG, IL — September 22, 2008 — Serving a sophisticated, affluent Northern California clientele, Royal Coach Tours has taken delivery of a low-emission MCI E4500 LX model that's rich in amenities. "Even in a weak economy, our customers will spend more for luxury," said Sandra Allen, Royal president. "We're located in Silicon Valley, one of the wealthiest counties in the U.S. There is a need in our market for this type of coach."

With style Ms. Allen likens to a limousine, Royal's E4500 LX features soft leather seating for 42 passengers by National Seating. Each generously spaced seat also offers a footrest, airline-style, pull-down trays, and a cup holder. The coach, converted by Creative Mobile Interiors, Grove City, Ohio, includes conference tables and a rear galley with Euro-style cabinetry and solid-surface counters with ample workspace. Passengers enjoy a deluxe entertainment system with flat-screen video monitors; satellite radio and TV; iPod and wireless connectivity. There are eight 110-volt outlets throughout the cabin, allowing passengers to charge their laptops and cell phones.

Outside, Royal's LX sports custom graphics befitting the coach's star billing in the company's 32-coach fleet, which currently includes 10 E4500s. Royal will take delivery of another E4500 next month. Royal's new E4500 LX coach also features clean-diesel engine technology that lowers particulate matter by 90 percent. Currently, Royal has retrofitted several coaches, 1994 and newer, with diesel particulate filters. "Greener coaches are necessary; it's what customers want," said Ms. Allen.



MCI markets the E4500, distinguished for its turning radius, luxury and advanced electronics, in an LX edition to offer operators the ultimate in upgrade opportunities.

"Royal Coach has created a new benchmark for the model," said Patricia Ziska, MCI vice president and chief customer officer. "There is certainly a trend toward high-end interiors. Our LX editions provide operators with the flexibility to design an interior that fits their business plan."

The new coach made its maiden voyage picking up passengers at Harrah's Casino and, later, transporting the NFL's Oakland Raiders. Many other customers explored the new LX at Royal's lavish open-house September 17; which included a luncheon especially for representatives of "Loyal Royals," a travel club with over 1,000 members. Additionally, Royal is creating a virtual-tour video of the coach for its website.

Royal Coach is the largest motor coach operator in the South Bay area. Founded in 1960, the company is led by second generation family members Ms. Allen and her brother Dan Smith, vice president. Originally called Smith Charter Bus Service, the name changed in 1979 when their mother, Joanne Christian, CEO, visited the Royal Coach Inn and liked the elegant name. The company's new slogan, "A Step Up to Luxury," fits its model of providing exceptional luxury transportation. Their enviable service earned a 2006 Vision Award from the United Motorcoach Association. Royal Coach operates its own tour agency and full-service maintenance facility. Royal Coach is a member of industry groups including the California Bus Association, UMA, and IMG. To learn more, visit www.royal-coach.com.

New Flyer Introduces XCELSIOR

New Flyer Industries Inc. ("New Flyer") the leading manufacturer of heavy-duty transit vehicles in Canada and the United States, introduced Xcelsior, the customer-centric evolution of the standard transit bus today at the APTA EXPO in San Diego, California.



Its many product improvements make Xcelsior a "best-in-class" vehicle. Xcelsior is lighter weight than New Flyer's current standard bus designs by approximately 10%. The lighter weight of the vehicle is expected to immediately deliver improved fuel economy to our customers. Upgraded styling, a redesigned bumper and LED headlamps were incorporated to address our

customers' expectations for an advanced vehicle design. A single-reduction axle, all wheel disc brakes and improved access to components will address maintenance concerns. Accessibility has been greatly improved with a wider door and entry area, a lower front step and an improved ramp angle. The single-reduction axle, along with the rooftop AC and improved insulation, is expected to reduce noise. Passengers and drivers will enjoy an improved ride quality, better visibility, interior LED lighting and many other interior advancements.

"Xcelsior incorporates the reliability and quality of our proven low-floor platform while delivering many new features," said John Marinucci, New Flyer's President and CEO. "As the industry leader, we knew it was critical not to compromise our vehicle reliability, but we also recognized that customers' needs had changed since we introduced our robust product line. Through a comprehensive market analysis, we were able to identify opportunities to deliver maximum benefits to customers at lower projected life cycle costs."

Customer-driven objectives were established and progress against these objectives was measured throughout the design and build process. Evolving market demands and an increased focus on reducing operating and maintenance costs were at the core of the development process. Xcelsior delivers a more enjoyable experience for both drivers and passengers. Fuel economy is anticipated to increase thanks to reduced weight and lower maintenance costs are achieved through a number of product advancements.

"Xcelsior is the result of listening to our customers," said Paul Smith, Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing for New Flyer. "Xcelsior, which means 'higher, elevated, always upward,' embodies the intent of this vehicle and embraces the spirit of New Flyer. We expect that it will address the needs and concerns of transit properties throughout North America because Xcelsior is designed for excellence."

Premier Coach Takes Delivery of 27 New Setra S 417 Luxury Motorcoaches

Greensboro, N.C. (October 23, 2008) – For over 16 years, Premier Coach of Colchester, Vt. has stood out among New England bus companies because of its superior service, modern fleet, support staff and drivers. Premier Coach made a commitment to its customers and its fleet by purchasing 27 Setra S 417 luxury motorcoaches from Daimler Buses North America.

"At Premier Coach we pride ourselves on providing one of the most modern fleets in North America," said Randy Charlebois, general manager and vice-president of Premier Coach. "The Setra S 417 offers unmatched curb appeal in the luxury motorcoach market and we are proud to be one of the largest owners of the Setra S 417

in the country."



The large order now gives Premier Coach a total of 38 Setra S 417 luxury motorcoaches in their fleet. The new coaches are all painted Premier's signature silver metallic color and come with rear windows, tray tables, entrance and aisle carpeting, along with all the standard luxurious appointments of the Setra S 417.

Since 2003, Premier Coach purchased 71 new Setra S 417 luxury motorcoaches.

Introduced to the North American market in 2003, the Setra S 417 continues to set the benchmark in luxury motorcoach travel by comfort and innovation to both guest and driver alike. 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.

"Premier Charter has been a long and valued customer of Setra and this recent purchase of 27 Setra S 417 luxury coaches personifies their commitment to providing the absolute best to their customers," said Tom Chezem, vice president of motorcoach sales for Daimler Buses North America. "

For more information on Premier Charter, please visit www.premiercoach.net or call (800) 532-1811.

Motor Coach Industries Receives Approval for All "First Day Motions" in Its Voluntary Chapter 11 Filing

Approval to Borrow Up to \$278 Million from DIP Financing Facilities

Court Authorizes MCI to Continue Payment of Employee Wages and Benefits

Company Production and Service Operations Continue without Interruption

SCHAUMBURG, IL — September 17, 2008 — Motor Coach Industries ("MCI" or the "Company") today announced the approval of all of its "first day motions" by

the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware (the "Bankruptcy Court").

MCI was granted approval to access \$278 million of its \$315 million debtor-in-possession ("DIP") financing facilities. GE Capital is the arranger and largest lender of the senior DIP facility that will refinance MCI's existing first lien debt and provide additional liquidity necessary for day-to-day operations. Goldman Sachs Credit Partners, L.P. is the arranger of, and Monarch Alternative Capital LP (through certain of its affiliates and funds under its management) is participating in, the junior DIP facility. These funds will be used to continue to pay employee wages and benefits, compensate vendors, and improve liquidity during MCI's voluntary financial restructuring. The Company was also granted approval to continue all customer programs without interruption and pay post-petition expenses without seeking court approval. MCI also received approval to continue to honor its current standard limited warranties on coaches.

"Approval of the 'first day motions' by the court will enable MCI to continue operations without interruption while we proceed with our restructuring efforts. MCI intends to work closely with all of its stakeholders to implement our pre-negotiated restructuring plan and emerge by February 2009," said Tom Sorrells, President and CEO. "We're pleased with the quick action and support by the Bankruptcy Court, which will enable us to progress with our plans."

As previously announced, MCI and its U.S. subsidiaries filed voluntary petitions for Chapter 11 on September 15, 2008 to implement a pre-negotiated restructuring plan to be funded by Franklin Mutual Advisors, LLC and certain of its affiliates. The Company's Canadian operations are not included in the filing. MCI's filing has been assigned case number 08-12136, and MCI has requested that all of its Chapter 11 cases be administered under that case number. Additional information regarding the cases can found at the Company's web site: www.mcicoach.com.

MCI is advised by Rothschild Inc., AlixPartners LLP and Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP.

Additional information regarding court-filed documents is available to the public at <http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov>, <https://ecf.deb.uscourts.gov> or at www.kccllc.net/motorcoachindustries.

North American Bus Industries to resume production of "CompoBus"

Anniston, AL (July 8, 2008) – With a forward-looking vision for its operations, the Los Angeles County Metro has placed an order for 260 CompoBuses from North American Bus Industries, Inc. The CompoBus gets its name from its structure which is manufactured from a

composite material consisting of a lightweight, reinforced glass/carbon-fiber material.

Los Angeles is the home to maybe the strongest car culture in the country. In order for bus transit to begin to be successful here, we have to be able to offer the styling and comfort of a car in a bus. The CompoBus reshapes the clunky old image of the bus into that of a modern, fast and comfortable conveyance," said Roger Snoble, LAC Metro Chief Executive Officer.

The NABI CompoBus is a 45-foot vehicle that weighs roughly the same as the company's traditional 40-foot bus, enabling it to provide a lower operating cost per passenger mile as compared to buses with traditional steel structures. The CompoBus allows a seated passenger count of 46, as compared to 38 on 40-foot buses.

"The CompoBus is the way we are moving into the future," said Marc Littman, LAC Metro Director of Public Relations. LAC Metro plans to replace its aging fleet of 40-foot steel-structure buses over the next five years with CompoBuses. The 260 buses in their initial order will cover their needs for the next two years. LAC Metro has an option to purchase up to 740 more over the following three years to give it a total of as many as 1,000 new CompoBuses. "It is a way for us to add more seating capacity in a low-floor vehicle, while holding the line in operating costs, with gas at more than \$4 a gallon; we see the usage of mass transit only going up. So the additional seating that the CompoBus offers is going to be a very welcome asset for us," Littman added. "This bus certainly has operational benefits that are hard to argue with," said Bill Coryell, VP of sales, North American Bus Industries, Inc., Western Region. "In addition to the increased seating capacity, the lightweight composite material is extremely crash-resistant."

"These buses are incredibly rugged. I've seen cars bang into them, and bounce off!" Littman said. "When you consider that LA has the most congested freeways in the U.S., you see that our buses are exposed to a lot of opportunity for accidents. We have 2,000 buses on the street, and in a typical day, there is at least one accident involving those buses. So, the added safety for our operators and passengers is very important to us."

"I would use the word 'ideal' in describing the functionality of this body structure," said Coryell. "It never rusts or corrodes, and it's extremely rugged. In standard crash-worthiness tests, cars just bounce off this bus. The front of the car is wrecked and it hardly even scratches the bus. It's remarkable." Coryell said the composite design also makes repairs easier and faster when a section of the body is damaged.

North American Bus Industries, Inc. first developed the CompoBus concept as an outgrowth of the Federally-funded Advanced Technology Transit Vehicle (ATTV) project, which pioneered this type of composite body construction. "We thought the composite concept had a lot of merit, so we designed this bus from a clean sheet of paper using the same composite technology," Coryell said.

"We produced nearly 200 of them, and the operators that tried them absolutely loved them. It was a real performer," Coryell said. However, North American Bus Industries, Inc. opted to discontinue the CompoBus due to production costs that were higher than originally anticipated.

"But, the LAC Metro is very progressive. They were operating 100 of the 45-foot CompoBuses, and found they offered such positive operational benefits that they encouraged us to restart the manufacture of them," Coryell added. "It's a great success story."

In addition to its operational benefits, Littman said the CompoBus' visual styling and passenger amenities played a role in their decision to make the CompoBus the workhorse of their fleet. "We really like the futuristic look this bus has. We think it makes a statement about the quality passengers can expect from Metro." Drivers and passengers both appreciate the CompoBus' smooth, quiet comfortable ride. "But most of all, passengers like the added seats," Coryell added, "because there's less of a chance that they will have to stand or wait for the next bus."

North American Bus Industries, Inc. is particularly excited to be involved in the development of this bus," Coryell said. This is the leading edge of mass transit. And the CompoBus offers tremendous benefit to the operator. I think it's an extremely well engineered and elegant product that will progressively increase in demand."

The CompoBuses ordered by LAC Metro feature Cummins ISL 280 HP CNG engines, coupled with Allison 5-speed automatic transmissions with lock-up torque converters, air disc brakes on all wheels, and 6 CNG tanks mounted discreetly in a recessed area of the buses' roofs. Delivery of the initial 260-bus order will begin in the fourth quarter of 2008, and be completed by June 30, 2010.

About Us: North American Bus Industries, Inc. markets three successful transit bus brands: NABI, Optima and Blue Bird offering a complete line of standard and low-floor, heavy-duty 30', 35', 40', 42', 60' and 65' (articulated) transit buses at its facilities in Anniston, Alabama. North American Bus Industries, Inc is the market leader with its sleek and most advanced

designed BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) vehicles which offer a cost effective alternative to expensive light rail. The transit buses are available with clean diesel, CNG, LNG, or diesel hybrid-electric propulsion systems.

Sprinter ridership hovers around 8,000 per day

By PAUL SISSON - Staff Writer | Thursday, October 30, 2008 6:06 PM PDT

NORTH COUNTY — Sprinter light-rail ridership has grown 26 percent since early April, according to data provided this week by the San Diego Association of Governments, but to hit first-year goals the new line will have to pick up the pace a little.

North County Transit District directors said Thursday they're confident that a boost in college ridership, and continued tweaks to the train's schedule, will accelerate the pace of Sprinter growth into the new year.

Transit district Chairman Ed Gallo, an Escondido city councilman, said he believes the Sprinter is poised to see another big spike in riders as college students become more aware of the service.

"I'm telling you, once the parking fees at Palomar (College) and Cal State San Marcos go up, and they are going up next year, we're going to see another big spike," Gallo said. "I've ridden the train with these kids, and I've talked to them, and they always say the same thing: 'This beats looking for a parking place.'"

The \$589 million Sprinter rail line stretches along a 22-mile route from Oceanside to Escondido, with 15 stops along the way.

College students have always been considered a backbone constituency for the train. More than 50,000 students are enrolled in Cal State San Marcos, Palomar College and MiraCosta College in Oceanside. Rider counts tallied by Sprinter fare inspectors do not break down riders by type, so it is difficult to say exactly how many college students are riding.

But the numbers do show a steady increase for the Sprinter.

After opening with schedule-busting crowds for its first week of operation, the Sprinter hit its low April 2, with 6,566 riders. Just after the fall semester began, the line hit its peak, with counters tallying 8,658 riders in mid-September.

Ridership has fallen off a bit since then, reaching 8,308 in the most recent count on Oct. 17.

From its lowest total in early April, to its most recent

count in mid-October, Sprinter ridership has increased 26 percent. If that rate continues, the new line will carry nearly 10,500 riders on its first birthday, March 9, 2009.

That would be about 1,100 riders per day shy of the 11,600 passengers predicted by the San Diego Association of Governments.

Linda Culp, a senior planner with the agency, said that, without having operated the Sprinter for a whole year, it is hard to know whether the prediction of first-year ridership was realistic.

"You could look at it and say maybe it needs to grow a little bit faster, but I think we should probably watch the counts a bit more before we see any kind of trend," Culp said.

County Supervisor Bill Horn, a transit board member who voted against the Sprinter project for years, said he would not be dismayed if the Sprinter didn't quite hit its target by the end of its first year.

"I don't think it's a problem. It took us awhile to get the ridership up for the Sprinter," Horn said. "The important thing is that thousands of them are out there riding it every day, and it's seeing a steady increase."

Encinitas Mayor Jerome Stocks, who represents his city on the transit board, said he believes the Sprinter can hit its marks and added that carrying more than 8,000 riders a day is already a triumph.

"Each rider represents another car not adding to our traffic congestion," Stocks said.

Dave Roberts, a Solana Beach councilman, added that a new smoking ban on all North County train platforms and bus stops could have a positive effect for ridership.

"The new no-smoking ban should even add to our riders' satisfaction, now that they won't have to endure secondhand smoke on Sprinter platforms or see cigarette butts wash into our storm drains," Roberts said.

Contact staff writer Paul Sisson at (760) 901-4087 or psisson@nctimes.com.

Councillor lauds LRT project

(Posted Date: Thursday, October 30, 2008)

By Karolyn Coorsh

Bill Saundercook is lauding plans to put a light rail line along Jane St. He likes it so much, in fact, he's hoping to extend it to the waterfront.

The Parkdale-High Park councillor says light rapid will ease congestion on one of the busiest streets in

Toronto's west end.

The line is one of seven proposed for the city as part of the expansive Transit City project.

Current plans include building a 17-kilometre dedicated route from the Bloor-Danforth subway to Steeles Ave.

He said the LRT will also be a "nice connecting link" to the Bloor, St. Clair, Eglinton and Finch transit corridors.

"It's all about connections," said Saunderson, who is also a TTC commissioner. "We're looking at some very important east-west routes and these routes now need to be connected to north-south routes."

At an Oct. 23 TTC commission meeting, Saunderson asked staff to study the potential of extending the line further south to the waterfront.

By taking it toward the Queensway, he said, there's more space to loop around. It also avoids creating a terminus at "the very tight and awkward" Jane and Bloor intersection.

The TTC is also studying the possibility that the Jane line may also have to go underground near Bloor, as the streets are too narrow for dedicated transit lines.

But the councillor said he wants to see the majority of the line remain above ground.

"For it to go below grade for any section of Jane is going to be extremely expensive," he said. "It becomes the cost of a subway."

The \$630-million line has not been named a priority, and is set to begin construction in 2013, the second last line to be complete in the Transit City initiative.

Group wants interurban back on track

Rail for the Valley seeks municipal support for old-fashioned transit solution

David Hogben, Vancouver Sun
Published: Friday, October 31, 2008

An Abbotsford group is recommending a light-rail transportation service that would be running in time for the 2010 Olympics.

The Rail for the Valley committee, formed about 18 months ago, will ask Abbotsford council on Monday to support a light-rail demonstration project along the old interurban rail route that once connected New Westminster to Chilliwack.

"Ideally, it could run from Scott Road [SkyTrain station in Surrey] to Chilliwack," Rail for the Valley spokesman John Buker said in an interview Thursday.

Exactly how far the line would run would depend on whether other municipal governments decide to join in. If not, the line would be more modest, Buker said. "It could be a small project from Abbotsford to Chilliwack."

Buker said tracks are still in place on the old interurban electric line, which operated from 1910 to 1950.

Buker envisions the demonstration line as a method of gaining public support for a line which could eventually cross the Fraser River and extend to downtown Vancouver.

Two other projects aimed at showing off light-rail transit by 2010 are already in the works, one in Surrey and one in Vancouver.

Consultant Peter Holt, who has been working with Surrey city officials to restore a service on a section of track in that city, however, thinks the 2010 Winter Games deadline is too tight to complete a service between New Westminster and Chilliwack.

He said Surrey's Heritage Rail demonstration project between Newton and Cloverdale is expected to come into service in 2010, but probably not until after the Feb. 12-28 Olympics.

He said the 11-kilometre stretch could be a tourist attraction. After it is operational, Holt said, the most probable expansion would be from Cloverdale to Langley and from Newton to Scott Road.

Surrey Mayor Dianne Watts is supporting light rail over the provincial government's preference, a SkyTrain extension.

"TransLink has estimated the cost of light rail at \$27 million per kilometre versus \$127 million per kilometre for the Evergreen Line [through northeast Metro Vancouver] and \$233 million for the UBC/Broadway Line," states a policy paper on Watts's election website.

In Vancouver, the city has signed an agreement with transportation giant Bombardier to operate a 1.8-kilometre demonstration streetcar line linking the Olympic Village with Granville Island. The line, which will run from Jan. 21 to March 21, 2010, is expected to use borrowed streetcars from the Brussels Transport Co.

Holt said obtaining cars quickly for the lines might be problematic because there is a worldwide shortage of rail cars.

TransLink spokesman Ken Hardie said light-rail transit south of the Fraser River is an option for the future, but TransLink now is more interested in expanding the capacity of the West Coast Express north of the river.

Eventually that line could cross the Fraser River and reach Chilliwack.

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ONLINE: Comment on this story at
vancouver.sun.com/usaid

Trolley buses deserve a rethink

JEFF GRAY
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October 27, 2008

Word that the batteries on top of the TTC's barely two-year-old hybrid-electric buses are conking out at alarming rates has prompted political finger-pointing and tough talks with manufacturer Daimler Buses North America about how to fix the problem.

But the real shame in the hybrid affair is that powering a bus with electricity is actually not that hard, and certainly doesn't require cutting-edge 21st-century technology. How soon we have forgotten our humble trolley bus.

Compare and contrast. Our high-tech hybrid buses, which started arriving in 2006, now need their \$12,000 rooftop batteries replaced after just 18 months. And even when they are working properly, it turns out that these buses burn only about 10-per-cent less fuel than conventional diesel buses.

Our trolley buses, the first generation of which rolled into service in Toronto in 1922, were 100-per-cent electric, produced zero local emissions, and were quiet compared with roaring diesels, although they depended on unsightly overhead wires for their power.

By the 1980s a fleet of about 130 trolleys, beloved by transit geeks, worked a number of busy mostly west-end routes, as well as up and down Bay Street. They were allowed to die on the vine in the 1990s, after the TTC decided the steep cost of renewing the vehicles and their wires was not justified by what was deemed at the time a marginal environmental benefit.

Steve Munro, a transit activist, points out that Toronto's trolley system, which had been allowed to deteriorate, was euphonized to make way for an environmental fad of the early 1990s: buses powered by compressed natural gas. But, in a situation similar to its current hybrid problem, the TTC soon ended up scrapping or converting the natural-gas buses to diesel, as they turned out to be leaky, unreliable lemons.

Gary Webster, the TTC's chief general manager, said in an interview in his office last week that the transit agency's engineers are working on a "30,000-foot view" of the pros and cons of getting back into the trolley game, which will likely be completed early next year.

Trolley buses, while common all around the world, he said, have a number of drawbacks. For one thing,

installing and maintaining the overhead wires is expensive, and the investment can be justified only on busy routes with frequent service.

And while much has been made of the hybrid-electric buses' \$734,000 price tag - compared with \$500,000 for a conventional bus - a single trolley bus can cost more than \$1-million. (To qualify for federal subsidies, the TTC had to buy buses that run on either unreliable natural gas or new hybrid-electric engines, and it chose hybrids.)

Environmentalists will also point out that the electricity trolleys use has to come from somewhere, including the province's dirty coal-fired power plants, Mr. Webster said, adding that the latest "clean diesel" buses produce negligible local pollution, although of course they still produce greenhouse gases.

At the moment, Mr. Webster and the TTC are focused on getting Daimler to fix the faulty hybrids, which remain under warranty. The commission is also trying to get out of a deal with Daimler to have 130 more hybrids - although with improved but unproven lithium-ion batteries - delivered next year.

But the TTC is still expecting another 66 hybrids with the old failing lead-acid batteries - already bought and paid for - to arrive between now and the end of the year.

PATH riders will have to say goodbye to QuickCard

By Larry Higgs • Gannett New Jersey • October 26, 2008

People who use the PATH rail system soon will have to say goodbye to the QuickCard, the old paper card used for years to pay fares. But a more high-tech way to "tap and pay" may be coming next year for riders of the PATH, MTA and some NJ Transit buses.

Port Authority of New York and New Jersey officials are working with MasterCard on a "tap and pay" smart card. The card would be similar to MasterCard's PayPass, which has been used on an experimental basis to pay for fares on the Lexington Avenue line of the New York City subway system.

Officials are looking at how to expand that technology to pay fares on NJ Transit buses, PATH trains and New York City subways and buses.

But first, the QuickCard, which has been used since 1990, will go the way of the subway token, starting Nov. 30. Vending machine sales of the fare cards will begin to be phased out in the remaining PATH stations where they are sold.

Currently, QuickCards are still available from machines at PATH's Newark Penn, Hoboken Terminal, Pavonia-Newport, Exchange Place and the World Trade Center stations until Dec. 31. QuickCard sales at PATH's other

stations in New Jersey and Manhattan have been discontinued.

Use of the reusable SmartLink cards has increased significantly since they were introduced last year, with 120,000 riders now holding them. The cards are popular because they have to be swiped at turnstiles, since they have embedded chips, and do not expire.

The SmartLink cards also offer a per-trip discount for purchases of multiple ride increments, and the convenience of replenishing the number of rides with a credit card. Passengers can protect themselves against loss by registering the card.

Officials are looking toward testing a regional "tap and go" fare card early next year.

In February, the Port Authority board of commissioners entered an agreement with MasterCard Worldwide and NJ Transit to develop and test a "tap and go" payment card and other devices at all 13 PATH train stations and on two connecting NJ Transit bus routes.

This card is to be compatible with the MTA's current test of contactless bank cards in the New York City subway system.

The pilot program is expected to launch next year, said Ron Marsico, PATH spokesman

The agreement between the Port Authority, NJ Transit and MTA dates back to a 2005 memorandum of understanding that called on all of the agencies to explore regional payment options.

The MTA launched its own pilot test of contactless payment cards with MasterCard Worldwide in July 2006 on the Lexington Avenue subway line. Contactless tap and go readers were placed in 80 fare turnstiles at 30 subway stations through that program.

That type of system can't be implemented systemwide on NJ Transit because there is a much more complex fare structure on commuter rail and bus lines, said Dan Stessel, NJ Transit spokesman.

"We have thousands of fare combinations; it's a different challenge from a turnstile system with one or two fares," Stessel said. "We are not looking at it for commuter rail and bus and multiple fare zone trips."

A tap and pay system could be an option for light rail or a simple fare structure such as one-zone bus trips, Stessel said. It's too soon to tell exactly where the tap and pay technology could be implemented on NJ Transit, he said.

The pilot project's goal is to determine whether such a tap and pay system is viable for riders to use on all the

region's transit systems, including New York City subways and buses.

Contactless payment will be available exclusively to MasterCard PayPass customers during the initial two months of the test on PATH and to other bank-issued contactless card customers for the balance of the test period of about eight months, Marsico said.

High-Capacity Double Deck Bus Drives Mega Sales for ABC Companies

ABC Companies has recently signed a contract with Coach USA to add 96 new Van Hool TD925 Double Deck Intercity buses to their Megabus and commuter fleets. "The 96 new vehicles represent an investment in the future for Megabus," says Roman Cornell, Vice President National Sales, ABC Companies. "They have innovated the way millions of Americans travel in cities throughout the Midwest and the Northeast by offering low-cost high-quality transportation. We feel confident that the addition of these new TD925 Double Deck vehicles is key to the firm's continued explosive growth," stated Cornell.

The Van Hool TD925 is attracting significant attention based on the environmental impact it delivers. "This vehicle takes up to 81 drivers off the road on every run. That can add up to lower fuel consumption per passenger mile, fewer emissions, less traffic congestion and a more efficient and affordable way for passengers to travel," says Dane Cornell, President and CEO, ABC Companies.

The 81-passenger, 13.1' high Van Hool TD925 Double Deck bus will help Megabus meet their growing demand for affordable travel, with a host of features that give passengers a high-tech, high-end experience such as:

- Comfortable reclining seats with safety belts
- Incredible panoramic views
- Reading lamps and 110V power outlets
- Free WIFI
- On-board restroom
- ADA access

Dedicated Service Technician to Support Megabus & Northeast Region.

As part of their continued support to customers in the Northeast and specifically to facilitate the Megabus purchase, ABC Companies has placed an additional dedicated Van Hool Service Technician at their Northeast facility in Camden, NJ – further enhancing round-the-clock service and maintenance support of the TD925 Double Deck, as well as ABC's full line of Van Hool equipment. ABC offers comprehensive warranty services, full parts support and comprehensive fleet services from their nationwide network of world-class

facilities featuring the latest diagnostic tools and state-of-the-art fabrication systems designed to cover a wide range of professional care and complete repair, collision, mechanical and refurbishment services.

MTA to cut commuter bus routes

Harford, Howard service, MARC trains to be reduced

By Michael Dresser October 17, 2008

The Maryland Transit Administration is proposing to eliminate six commuter bus routes, reduce the number of rides on others and cut back on its increasingly popular MARC train service as a result of severe revenue shortfalls, the O'Malley administration announced yesterday.

Among the services the MTA plans to drop are routes between Baltimore and Columbia, and Laurel and Bel Air. Also on the chopping block are two commuter routes feeding into the Washington Metro system, one between Annapolis and New Carrollton, and the other between Waldorf and Suitland.

Commuter bus lines have been among the fastest-growing forms of transit use as long-distance commuters have left their cars in park-and-ride lots to save on expensive gasoline and parking. MARC train service, including that on two lines linking Baltimore and Washington, has also attracted a growing number of riders in recent years.

The cutbacks, which will be the subject of public hearings, are being proposed despite Gov. Martin O'Malley's outspoken support for increased funding of mass transit. Before the recent revenue shortfalls, the administration had supported additional commuter bus lines and an ambitious long-range plan to expand MARC service.

Maryland Transportation Secretary John D. Porcari said the cuts - forced by a severe drop in gas tax collections and the other revenue streams that go to the Transportation Trust Fund - would be temporary.

"We would hope to restore and enhance service as quickly as possible, but unlike the federal government, we can't print money," he said.

But a leading transit advocate was not mollified, contending the O'Malley administration should have looked for cuts in other areas.

"To force more people into their cars when everyone's belt is just about as tight as it can get just doesn't make sense," said Otis Rolley, president of the Central Maryland Transportation Alliance.

Porcari said the administration has made reductions in all areas of transportation, including aviation and highways.

"While we don't want to have any service reductions, these are modest," he said.

Simon Taylor, assistant administrator for operations, said the MTA sought to cut services on lines with relatively low demand, though he acknowledged that ridership has been growing on all commuter bus and MARC lines.

On the MARC Penn Line, the MTA plans to eliminate the last two evening round trips of the day. It also proposes to run fewer trains on the Brunswick line linking Western Maryland with Washington. Holiday service would be curtailed on all MARC lines, with no trains running on Veterans Day, Columbus Day and the days after Thanksgiving and Christmas. The holiday cuts would start this year; the other changes would take effect Jan. 12.

Taylor said the proposal includes no cuts to service on the MTA's Light Rail, Metro or core metropolitan bus routes.

Ed Cohen, of the Transit Riders Action Council of Metropolitan Baltimore, said the cuts are coming just as more people are depending on transit services.

"It's not cutting fat. There's no fat to cut," said Cohen, a past president of the advocacy group. "It is certainly counterproductive in trying to develop a transit system that is essential to a functioning 21st-century urban economy."

Public hearings on the proposal will be held at various locations around the state from Nov. 15 to Nov. 25. The two Baltimore hearings will be Nov. 18 at noon and 5 p.m. at the state office complex, 301 W. Preston St. A complete list of hearing dates and times can be found at www.mtamaryland.com.

TRANSIT CUTS

The MTA proposes to eliminate these commuter bus lines:

- Nos. 310, 311, Columbia to Baltimore
- No. 320, Laurel to Baltimore
- No. 412, Bel Air to Baltimore
- No. 913, Waldorf to Suitland Metrorail
- No. 921, Annapolis to New Carrollton Metrorail

The agency also proposes other cuts to commuter buses, MARC trains, and holiday bus and train service. For a complete list, go to www.mtamaryland.com