



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

MARCH/APRIL 2009

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.

• MARCH MEETING

The March meeting of the Omnibus Society of America was held on March 6, 2009, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting started at 7:30pm.

The program will be a slide presentation by Fred McGullam on New York, New Jersey and London, England.

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.

• APRIL MEETING

The April meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on April 3, 2009 in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W Winona Avenue., Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30p.m.

The program will be a slide presentation by John LeBeau.

CTA Bus Tracker Program to Expand in January with the Addition of 11 Routes

1/13/2009

Web Site's Popularity Continues to Grow

On Monday, January 26, CTA will add 11 additional routes to its Bus Tracker web site, giving customers access to real-time service information for a total of 86 out of 153

\$5.00

bus routes. CTA Bus Tracker is a web-based program that uses global positioning system (GPS) technology to provide customers with the locations and estimated arrival times of buses operating along activated bus routes.

"Data gathered by CTA staff indicates that Bus Tracker's popularity is continuing to grow as a tool for customers, with more than 2.7 million visits since the program launched in April 2008," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "As CTA ridership continues to grow, we remain focused on improving the overall travel experience and quality of information for our customers. With Bus Tracker and the rail digital displays launched last week, customers have improved access to very specific CTA service information to better plan their commutes."

Information analyzed by CTA also indicates the number of visitors to the CTA Bus Tracker web site has steadily increased, particularly since the onset of cold weather.

Since November 1, the web site has logged an average of approximately 20,000 visits per weekday.

In addition, approximately 15 percent of all visits to the site are from wireless devices—indicating customers are using the web site while on-the-go.

Routes new to the web site beginning January 26 are:

#3 King Drive	#X3 King Drive Express
#4 Cottage Grove	#X4 Cottage Grove Express
#22 Clark	#38 Broadway
#49B North Western	#82 Kimball/Homan
#93 California/Dodge	#96 Lunt
#97 Skokie	

The dedicated CTA Bus Tracker web site (www.ctabustracker.com) provides customers with a route map where icons indicate the location and direction of buses currently in service on up to five routes, an alarm feature that alerts customers when a bus is approaching their selected bus stop, and the estimated arrival times at bus stops.

The CTA Bus Tracker web site is accessible from computers and web-enabled wireless devices for customers to view the arrival times of buses along a route. BlackBerry™ users must have version 4.1 or higher. Personal digital assistants (PDAs) must have full Internet access capabilities through web browsers that support HyperText Markup Language (HTML) such as Internet Explorer®. Customers who use PDAs are able to access the arrival time display only. Cell phone users should

contact their wireless service providers for information on their phone's Internet capabilities.

CTA Announces Increased Ridership in 2008

1/14/2009

CTA Has Now Achieved Ridership Increases in 10 of the Past 11 Years

The CTA today announced that 2008 combined bus and rail ridership increased by 26.8 million rides, a gain of 5.4 percent over 2007 ridership, for a total of 526.4 million rides. It is the highest ridership level since 1992 and the highest single year ridership gain in 34 years.

"The slow zone elimination effort, progress of the Brown Line capacity expansion project and adjustments to provide more efficient service have improved our customers' day-to-day experience on CTA and are directly related to the growth in ridership despite the struggling economy," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "New buses, and cleaner vehicles and facilities are helping attract new customers and influencing existing customers to ride more."

"The healthy growth of ridership in 2008 reflects the fact that our commitment to improving transit is being recognized by our customers despite some of the inconveniences that go with making those improvements," said Chicago Transit Board Chairman Carole Brown. "In the long run we are improving our system for our customers and providing service while that work is underway."

Ridership increased 4.5 percent on weekdays in 2008, averaging 1.68 million daily boardings. Ridership also increased by 7.3 percent on weekends and holidays, showing that many customers are not only riding CTA for their daily commutes but also for their travel needs outside of traditional working hours.

Bus ridership recorded the largest surge with a total of 328.2 million rides provided for the year, an increase of 18.9 million rides, or 6.1 percent higher compared to 2007. CTA made great strides in improving bus reliability over the past 12 months. Ridership increased more than 12 percent on bus routes where reliability improvements were made. In addition, riders along the north lakefront corridor heavily contributed to the growth in bus ridership as many switched to nearby bus service as an option to avoid the congestion caused by three-track train operation at the Belmont and Fullerton stations.

As a convenient option for riders impacted by three-track operation, the #147 Outer Drive Express saw a 15 percent increase in ridership. With the resumption of four-track service in December at Belmont and Fullerton, CTA expects that some bus riders may migrate back to the rail system this year.

Rail ridership increased by 4.1 percent compared to 2007, recording a total of 198.2 million rides provided for the year, an increase of 7.9 million rides over the previous year. Rail ridership in 2008 was at its highest point since 1968.

Ridership increased on all eight rail lines in 2008. Contributing to the increased rail ridership for the Blue Line's Dearborn subway and O'Hare branch was the completion of the slow zone elimination work which allowed trains to return to normal speeds. Slow zone elimination work was also performed on the North branch of the Red Line and on the Brown Line providing customers with faster travel. In addition, renovation work was completed on six Brown Line stations and CTA introduced eight-car train service during morning and evening rush periods which helped to boost ridership numbers.

The only significant drop in rail ridership was at those stations closest to O'Hare, largely due to the decline in air travel throughout the year. Ridership was slightly down at Midway station however Midway serves as a major connection to bus service. The Yellow Line reported a 21 percent increase in ridership as a direct result of the addition of weekend service. Pink Line ridership also continued to grow, increasing by 12 percent over 2007. The Pink Line has almost doubled its ridership in a four year period.

CTA to Increase Frequency of Express Bus Service on Select Routes

1/14/2009

Agency to Test Enhancements on Western, Garfield and Irving Park

The Chicago Transit Board today approved experimental service enhancements along three express bus routes in an effort to improve the overall efficiency of the routes. Frequency will be increased on the #X49 Western Express, #X55 Garfield Express and #X80 Irving Park Express routes and decreased on the corresponding local routes.

"Express routes were originally implemented to provide greater speed and reduce travel times for customers, the addition of buses on these routes will increase the number of customers that we are able to accommodate with express service," said CTA President Ron Huberman. "When these changes are put into place this spring, customers along these three routes will experience a faster and more efficient ride."

The CTA currently operates nine express routes as limited-stop service on streets that also have local service. In the time since they were introduced, CTA has

seen a 16.3% increase in total ridership on these nine routes.

These experimental service enhancements will change the ratio of express to local service along the three test corridors – more express buses will be running along these routes. By changing the ratio, CTA will not incur any additional cost from providing additional express service.

CTA research has shown that express corridors are most effective when there is a higher ratio of express to local service. A minimum 15-minute frequency will be retained on the local service.

Western is the third busiest route in the system with over 36,000 customers per weekday in the corridor. Irving Park routes – both local and express – carry 17,500 people per weekday. Garfield routes carry 16,000 per weekday. These three corridors provide the agency with the chance to study a variety of locations and impacts of increasing express service.

The #49 Western Express route was introduced in 1998, the #X55 Garfield Express and #X80 Irving Park Express routes were introduced in 2002.

Improved Reliability End Result of CTA's Performance Management Process

1/14/2009

Chicago Transit Authority President Ron Huberman reported today that CTA's on-time performance improved in 2008 as a result of a performance management initiative that identifies and tracks key factors that influence reliability.

Over the past year, the CTA has measured the efficiency and on-time performance of buses and trains, and has identified and tracked the behind the scenes activities that influence performance, such as preventative maintenance, percentage of slow zones and manpower levels.

"We hold managers accountable and track overall performance of the organization. The direct result is improved service for our customers," said Huberman. "Through the performance management process, the CTA was able to provide better and more reliable service to its customers in 2008, and that contributed to significant increases in ridership throughout the year. In 2009, CTA will continue to build on these successes to further improve service for its growing ridership."

For rail customers, travel time has improved as a result of an aggressive plan to eliminate slow zones. Slow zones now exist on about seven percent of the rail

system, down from 22.3 percent in October 2007.

Despite an aging fleet with some rail cars nearing 40 years old, mechanical problems decreased by 16 percent and trains were able to travel an average of 38% farther before experiencing a defect. More reliable cars contributed to more reliable service: During rush periods, 83% of trains came within one minute of their scheduled arrival time.

Big gaps between buses – measured by arrivals that are either double the scheduled headway or 15 minutes between buses, whichever is greater - have decreased by 31 percent since fall 2007, and the number of buses arriving within one minute or less of buses ahead has decreased by 24 percent.

Through performance management, the CTA has embarked on an aggressive maintenance program to schedule the replacement of parts nearing the end of their useful life before they fail. By developing a system to catch up on preventative maintenance – the amount of overdue jobs has been reduced by 45 percent – the number of buses held in due to defective equipment has dropped dramatically since last year. CTA has experienced a 99.9 percent decrease in bus runs held in for defective equipment since August 2007. Training for managers on absenteeism and the demand for more accountability has decreased the number of daily runs cancelled due to manpower shortages by 82 percent since August 2007.

Performance management has also helped the CTA identify areas that continue to need review. This fall, the CTA changed the way in which it is counting bus service disruptions in order to improve the consistency and accuracy of the data collected.

"We are proud of these success stories, but we know we still have work to do to make the CTA customer experience the best that it can possibly be," said Huberman. "Given the difficult economic environment, it is also paramount that we understand the value we get for every dollar we spend and make the most out of the resources we have available."

In May 2007, the CTA implemented a performance management process that focuses on a data-driven management model aimed at improving operational efficiencies which in turn enhance the customer experience. All CTA departments are responsible for managing to targets based on key performance and financial metrics organized around five goals – safe, on time, clean, courteous and efficient.

Chicago Transit Board Appoints Acting President

1/30/2009

Experienced Executive to Provide Stability and Continuity during Transition

The Chicago Transit Board today appointed Dorval R. Carter Jr. to serve as Acting President of the CTA. Most recently, Carter has served as the CTA's Executive Vice President for Operations Support and has been responsible for directing the planning and operations functions for multiple departments including Human Resources, Purchasing, Public Affairs, Government and Community Relations and Finance.

Chicago Transit Board Chairman Carole Brown said that because of Carter's extensive transit experience and familiarity with CTA issues, his appointment will ensure a smooth transition period until a new CTA President is named. "Dorval is a seasoned professional and experienced manager who understands the CTA and the challenges it faces. He is well respected by the Board and his colleagues within the CTA, and through his many years in the transportation field, he has established strong working relationships with the RTA, FTA, our unions and sister agencies."

Prior to joining the CTA in 2000, Carter spent 10 years at the Federal Transit Administration where he was Assistant Chief Counsel for Legislation and Regulation and managed the office responsible for preparing and directing the federal legislative and regulatory agenda for the FTA. Before moving to Washington, DC, he was the Regional Counsel of the FTA Region 5 office in Chicago and responsible for all legal issues affecting FTA's \$650,000,000 annual federal transportation program in a six-state region.

Carter has previously served as a member of the FTA's Procurement Council and is a Senior Fellow on the Council for Excellence in Government. He is also a member of the Transportation Research Board where he serves on the Group 4 Legal Council, the Committee on Transit and Intermodal Transportation Law, and the Transit Cooperative Research Program.

Carter began his career with the Chicago Transit Authority as a staff attorney where he held various positions including General Attorney and Deputy General Attorney for Corporate Law.

Carter received his Juris Doctor degree from Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC, and received his Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration and Economics from Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

He is a member of the Board of Directors for City Year Chicago, a national youth service organization and a member of the Board of Saint Anthony Hospital in Chicago.

CTA President Ron Huberman resigned this week to accept a position as Chief Executive of the Chicago Public Schools.

Prevost introduces redesigned H-Series coach, new Volvo

Prevost is starting off the New Year by introducing a new design for its H Series of motorcoaches. Its redesigned front end integrates numerous functional improvements, such as distinctive proprietary headlamps that deliver a high halogen output. "This is the first styling change we have implemented on the H3-45 since 2003," said Prevost VP Coach Sales Dann Wiltgen. "We felt it was important for us to enhance the look of our coach while providing our customers with a distinctive styling advantage."



In addition, this facelift allows the company to offer additional technologies that will enhance safety and driver performance, Wiltgen said.

The new design also offers better access for different sizes of replacement tires. "We increased the space of the spare tire compartment to allow alternative tire sizes that can help improve fuel efficiency and the comfort and ride of the coach," Wiltgen said.

Additionally, the company is introducing a new vehicle for 2009 — the Volvo 9700 — available in Canada and the U.S, which meets both countries' governmental vehicle safety standards.

"This is the first time a Volvo motorcoach has been introduced into the U.S. and Canada," said Wiltgen. "As a new entry into this market this coach, which will be built by Volvo and backed by Prevost, our customers can be assured of having a secure and reliable working tool that is preconfigured to offer the best complete package

and at the same time is well adapted to improve the profitability and efficiency of our customer's business." The new coach, which features a striking modern design, will be offered with three different interior color themes, distributed by Prevost and supported by its service network.

Large windows and mirrors with integrated close-quarter mirrors provide enhanced visibility, while Bi-Xenon headlamps offer excellent night-time visibility and a longer lifespan than conventional lamps. Large taillights are positioned high up on the body so they can be seen clearly.

On the interior, the air-suspended driver's seat with seat belt can be adjusted to provide individually tailored positioning behind the wheel. In addition, the climate in the driver's compartment can be regulated separately. On the passenger side, the Volvo 9700 will be equipped with three-point seat belts as well as individually adjustable air vents for each seat.

Volvo introduced numerous safety features on the 9700 including front impact protection (FIP) and knee impact protection systems, which help protect the driver in the event of a frontal collision. The vehicle's front underrun protection system helps improve the safety of passenger car occupants in the event of a frontal collision with the bus. Volvo is the first vehicle manufacturer to fit this type of under-run protection system to buses, according to the company.

Other safety-enhancing and comfort-boosting solutions include the Hill Start Aid, — offered on the I-shift — which stops the bus from rolling backward when starting on a hill.

Supplementing the 9700's disc wheel brakes is the Volvo engine brake. With the help of the brake blending function, the auxiliary brakes perform as large a part of the braking work as possible before the wheel brakes are activated. The Volvo 9700 comes standard with an electronic stability program, which significantly reduces the risk of the bus rolling over or driving off the road both in normal road conditions and when the surface is slippery.

The vehicle is equipped with Volvo D13 engine from Volvo Powertrain, featuring improved fuel economy, extended oil change intervals and an updated engine

brake that's up to 20 percent more powerful. In addition, the 9700 is equipped with I-Shift intelligent gear-changing system, which is lighter, more compact and quieter than previous generation components.

Like other products in the Prevost family, the new vehicle will feature the vertical installation of the diesel particulate filter and rooftop diffuser, allowing for less heat to be generated in the engine compartment and reducing the need for special heat precautions.

Greyhound Can Go 'Green,' FirstGroup's Chief Says

By Angela Greiling Keane

Jan. 14 (Bloomberg) — FirstGroup Plc, the owner of Greyhound Lines, is pressing U.S. lawmakers to include bus purchases in the economic stimulus plan, Chief Executive Officer Moir Lockhead said.

Government incentives to buy new motor coaches would help create manufacturing jobs and cut emissions by replacing buses with older engines, Lockhead said yesterday in an interview in Washington. FirstGroup, based in Aberdeen, Scotland, entered the U.S. market in 2007 by buying Greyhound bus-service parent Laidlaw International Inc.

Lockhead traveled to Washington this week in part to meet with lawmakers and regulators and lobby for a role in President-elect Barack Obama's proposed two-year, \$775 billion economic stimulus package. Industries from construction-equipment makers to airlines are seeking to benefit as Congress prepares to consider the measure.

"This is not me sitting here looking for a handout," Lockhead said. "I'm not interested in that. What I'm interested in is investment, short-term investment that delivers a relatively quick return in economic performance."

On Jan. 10, Obama released a study saying his plan would create as many as 4 million jobs by the end of 2010. Environmentally oriented "green" jobs in the plan would include developing renewable sources such as wind, solar and biofuels, as well as work in companies that supply energy-efficient technologies and less-polluting forms of coal.

A Labor Department report last week showed the nation lost 2.6 million jobs in 2008, the most since 1945. Obama hasn't announced details of the plan, which includes about \$300 billion in tax cuts.

Navistar, Daimler, Volvo

Laidlaw, now known as First Student, also is the largest operator of yellow school buses in the U.S. FirstGroup is Britain's biggest train operator.

A stimulus package that includes buses could boost orders at North American manufacturers such as Warrenville, Illinois-based Navistar International Corp. and Daimler AG's Thomas-Built Buses, where FirstGroup buys its school buses, and Volvo AB's Prevost Car Inc., which supplies motor coaches for Greyhound, Lockhead said.

The company would like to lower the average age of its Greyhound vehicle from almost 10 years to about seven years, Lockhead said. Newer buses are better for the environment because they pollute less, he said.

Infrastructure Spending

Lockhead, in his first trip to Washington as CEO, met with House transportation committee Chairman James Oberstar, a Minnesota Democrat who last week proposed spending \$85 billion on infrastructure in the stimulus measure.

FirstGroup wants to capitalize on the decline in U.S. driving, Lockhead said. U.S. motorists drove 100.1 billion fewer miles in the 12 months through October as the economy entered a recession, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

Greyhound revenue fell 4.5 percent in the third quarter ended Dec. 31, FirstGroup said today in a statement. The company, which also operates Greyhound long-distance service in Canada, blamed "disappointing" ridership at Thanksgiving and Christmas, which it said are "traditionally busy" periods.

During his visit, Lockhead also met with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which regulates bus safety, and aides to Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Texas Republican, and Frank Lautenberg, a New Jersey Democrat.

The pair, with Senator Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, have pushed Congress to pass bus-safety legislation that would include requiring seat belts.

Three-Point Belts

FirstGroup supports a belt requirement for coaches so long as there isn't a requirement to retrofit those already in service, Lockhead said. The company's latest generation of Greyhound coaches has three-point seat belts.

"It would be very difficult on some of the older buses," he said. "If you look at 10 years time, all the vehicles will have seat belts. So start now, that's my advice."

Legislation that Brown and Hutchison sponsored in the last Congress would have required long-distance bus

operators in the U.S. to have seat belts and sturdier windows and roofs for new coaches and to better train drivers. The measure will be reintroduced this year, said Joanna Kuebler, a spokeswoman for Brown.

From 1994 to 2005, 571 people died in 400 motor-coach crashes, according to Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, an alliance of consumer, health and safety groups and insurance companies, citing U.S. Transportation Department data. In 2007, 51 were killed in motor coach crashes, according to a December presentation to an agency advisory committee on motor carrier safety.

"The only way we're going to get these safety requirements in place is to have federal legislation with deadlines for the administration to meet," said Advocates Vice President Jacqueline Gillan in an interview.

The U.S. in October issued a rule requiring bus seat belts only on new small school buses weighing less than five tons.

To contact the reporter on this story: Angela Greiling Keane in Washington at agreilingkea@bloomberg.net

Coach USA orders 45 MCI coaches with three-point seatbelts

SCHAUMBURG, IL — January 12, 2009 — Motor Coach Industries (MCI) has announced that Coach USA has placed an order for 45 MCI coaches. The order includes 27 MCI® J4500 coaches; 13 MCI® D4505 coaches destined for operations in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin; and five MCI J4500 coaches for Coach Canada.



Coach USA has been actively purchasing MCI models for the past three years, upgrading its fleet with the latest innovations. Coach USA ordered its coaches with Cummins engines, ZF Astronic transmissions, Ricon wheelchair lifts and Amaya seats with three-point seatbelts. The new coaches will also feature Amerex fire suppression systems and provisions for GPS installation.

Coach USA's new J4500 coaches come with wide-ride suspension, the intuitive intelligence of Electronic Stability Control, a reverse sensing system and a Blaupunkt Proline entertainment system — all standard

features on 2009 J4500s. With its stylish good looks, spiral entryway and tiered seating, the MCI J4500 has been the industry bestseller for four consecutive years.

Coach USA operates about 2,000 coaches and owns over 20 local companies in North America that operate scheduled bus routes, motor coach tours, charters and city sightseeing tours. The local companies are each independently managed and operated to meet community needs. Coach Canada covers the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, providing services in Toronto, Montreal, Kingston and Niagara Falls. To learn more, visit www.coachusa.com.

Coach USA is owned by Stagecoach Group, a leading bus and train operator based in the United Kingdom. Stagecoach was recently named one of Britain's top 10 "Most Admired Companies" in an authoritative survey of corporate reputation during Management Today's annual review of Britain's top companies.

MCI customizes D4505 with steel sides for Newton Bus Service

SCHAUMBURG, IL — January 13, 2009 — Newton Bus Service, Gloucester, Virginia, which has been running its distinctive silver-sided coaches since 1953, took delivery of its first new MCI coach since 1981: an MCI® D4505. While the coach may sport a classic look on the outside, with its fluted stainless-steel panels, it's all modern luxury inside.



Equipped with satellite television, extra-plush seating by National, window shades, seat trays, magazine holders, and a host of other amenities, the new-look D4505 is powered by a Detroit Diesel engine and an Allison transmission. Warren Newton, president of the company started by his father, Alvin, says he has practical reasons for preferring stainless steel panels. "With the stainless steel panels, if they're damaged, we can change them that day and be back on the road. There's less down time for the coach," said Newton, who today runs the company with the assistance of his wife, Sabina, and his son, Casey.

Newton said he returned to MCI largely because it could provide the steel paneling on its D4505. "MCI has always had a good quality product. We like the new-look D with its smooth windows, and it has proven technology. Ours is performing quite well."

Newton Bus Service has a fleet of about 40 coaches between its charter and school-bus operations. In addition to charters, it provides contract service to the United States Department of Defense. Augmenting its headquarters in Gloucester, Newton has a terminal in Richmond that allows the company to better serve the Washington, DC area. Newton, which employs about 65 people, also runs scheduled service for employees of Northrop Grumman.

Newton is active in several associations. Warren Newton has served on the VMA Board of Directors for many years and as past president of the Virginia Motorcoach Association. In addition, he continues to serve on transportation committees for VMA.

Kobussen Buses Trailways takes four MCI® J4500s with seatbelts

SCHAUMBURG, IL — December 30, 2008 — Wisconsin's Kobussen Buses Trailways has begun taking delivery of the first four new 2009 MCI J4500s with three-point seatbelts. MCI has made three-point seatbelts available as an option on all its new models.



Though there are no current laws that require such equipment, Dan Kobussen, who helps run the family company, said: "We think seatbelts are going to be a standard part of the future coach."

Kobussen Buses, which runs a dozen coaches, mostly MCIs, was the first operator in Northern Wisconsin to embrace MCI's clean-diesel engines, and its latest coaches have Wi-Fi, 110-volt outlets, GPS, Sacon asset tracking and all the new features for 2009.

Kobussen Buses got its start in 1938 when Dan's dairy-farmer grandfather, Elwood "Goldie" Kobussen, began transporting students to and from Kaukauna High School. The company, then known as Kaukauna Bus Service, started serving schools in other communities as well, finally changing its name to Kobussen in 1976. In 1983, the company expanded into luxury motor coach charters.

Today, the company, a Trailways member, serves a wide variety of charter clients, continues to serve schools, runs a paratransit service, maintains a scheduled service route and moves troops for the Department of Defense. Employing some 400 people, it has five locations and adheres to the motto, "Family Pride in Every Ride." Its website is www.kobussen.com.

Trans-Bridge Lines renews purchasing commitment with MCI

SCHAUMBURG, IL — December 10, 2008 — Declaring MCI its preferred motor coach supplier, Trans-Bridge Lines, one of the nation's leading family-owned operators, has committed to purchasing only MCI coaches to meet its new coach needs for the next three years. In 2008, Trans-Bridge has taken delivery of three new MCI® D4505s and two pre-owned J4500 coaches, and plans to purchase a new J4500 coach by the end of the year. MCI models make up the vast majority of Trans-Bridge's 72-coach fleet.



"MCI models are good for us," said Tom JeBran, president of Trans-Bridge. "We like MCI's responsiveness to its product and customer support. We have taken advantage of MCI's training program, webinars, and 24/7 ERSAs program, and feel their support of my operation deserves our buying commitment."

Trans-Bridge has been purchasing MCI coaches for decades, supporting many of MCI's historic innovations. Trans-Bridge was one of the first companies in the nation to take delivery of the MCI Renaissance® coach (now named the E4500), featuring the industry's first spiral entryway. The company currently has three original 1998 E4500 models and five later-model E4500s in its fleet. Trans-Bridge was also among the first to take delivery of MCI's new-look D4505 unveiled in 2005. Its newest MCI D4505s are powered by clean-diesel engine technology and are the first to feature Amaya seats upholstered in environmentally friendly fabric. The fabric, from LaFrance Industries, is made from 100-percent recycled, efficiently woven materials designed specifically for bus applications.

Interiors are as important to Trans-Bridge as its signature decals. "Our passengers do notice our coaches, and we like our seat fabrics to set a mood. We'll more than likely continue to feature the new fabric in our next D4505s," said JeBran.

Trans-Bridge, owned and operated by the JeBran family, second- and third-generation family members of A.J. Ferraro who founded the company in 1941, carries more than 1.3 million passengers a year. The company provides daily service to New York City, as well as Newark and JFK Airports. An affiliate company, Trans-Bridge Tours, Inc., offers tours throughout the U.S. and Canada, including one-day excursions to Atlantic City, sporting events and shows as well as overnight trips to popular destinations.

The company is a member of the American Bus Association, United Motorcoach Association, International Motorcoach Group, the Greater New Jersey Motorcoach Association, the Pennsylvania Bus Association and the National Tour Association. To learn more visit www.Transbridgebus.com.

Miami's La Cubana takes delivery of five 2009 MCI® J4500 coaches

SCHAUMBURG, IL — December 5, 2008 — Known for its vibrant, multicolored coaches, La Cubana Bus Lines in Miami has added five new coaches to its modern, all-MCI fleet. The five new 2009 MCI J4500 models are equipped with the latest updates in safety and performance features including wide-ride suspension and Electronic Stability Control. Inside, there is plush seating by Amaya for 51 passengers, a driver bunk and a state-of-the-art Blaupunkt entertainment system with flat-screen video monitors. The new coaches are powered by a Caterpillar engine and Allison Transmission clean-diesel powertrain combination.



Like all the coaches in La Cubana's fleet, the new J4500s' exteriors display a strikingly distinct rainbow designed exclusively for the company. Beneath the bold graphic, each coach is painted a different color to help customers identify individual coaches. A strong believer in new equipment, La Cubana constantly updates its 11-coach MCI J4500 fleet.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary, La Cubana was founded in 1978 by Jose Raul Espinosa. Today, the company is led by Espinosa's daughter, Rosa Alvarez, vice president, who has made La Cubana a premier operator in South Florida. Dedicated to serving the Hispanic market, La Cubana offers daily service between Miami and New York City, with stops in between, as well as weekly service from Miami to Atlanta.

To learn more visit www.lacubanabus.com.

BC Transit renews partnership with Nova Bus for the purchase of 115 Nova LFS vehicles

Saint-Eustache, Quebec, January 8, 2009 — Nova Bus is proud to announce that BC Transit has restated its confidence in the company by exercising a contract option for 115 transit buses which will feature a sleek and updated exterior.

Nova Bus Vice President Business Development Mr. Jean-Pierre Baracat welcomed the news, adding, "BC Transit has selected Nova Bus as partner in previous years and we are pleased with this new vote of confidence. We are deeply committed to supplying them with the vehicles that meet their expectations."

BC Transit spokesperson, Joanna Morton, indicated that Nova Bus was selected for the high quality of its products, saying, "Nova Bus was able to meet our requirements and was successful in BC Transit's RFP and evaluation. We are pleased with their high level of customer service, and more importantly, the performance of Nova Bus' vehicles."

This is one of the orders that will be assembled in the new Nova Bus plant in Plattsburgh, NY. With a full production schedule for 2009, the new plant will operate full time to meet the level of service and care that Nova Bus' clients have come to expect.

Nova Bus is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Volvo Bus Corporation, the world's second largest motorcoach and transit bus manufacturing group. Nova Bus is a leading manufacturer of city, suburban, and shuttle buses in North America, with its complete line of Nova LFS vehicles. Nova Bus is the first North American heavy-duty bus manufacturer in the urban transportation sector to achieve company-wide ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certifications. The company operates two plants in Canada and one plant in Plattsburgh, New York, which will start vehicle deliveries in the second half of 2009.

Subway tunneling finished

Boring no more: machine going back overseas

Friday, January 16, 2009

By Mark Roth, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Port Authority officials will be saying *auf wiedersehen* to their \$10 million German boring machine in about two months, now that it has finished the second of two 2,240-foot tunnels beneath the Allegheny River.

The machine chewed through the last of the dirt beneath the North Shore yesterday, and before long, it will emerge in the launch pit from which it started out just about one year ago.

The twin tunnels are designed to connect the authority's light rail system from Downtown to the North Side area that includes PNC Park, Heinz Field, the Carnegie Science Center and the new casino.

The boring machine, made by Herrenknecht AG, finished the first tunnel last July, and then, after being laboriously swiveled around beneath Stanwix Street, started chewing the second tunnel back to the North Side in October.

As the machine moved forward at about 35 feet per day, 4-foot-long concrete tunnel rings were assembled and bolted together behind it.

There are just three more of those rings to put together in the second tunnel, said Winston Simmonds, the authority's rail operations engineering officer.

In the process, the authority has removed about 69,000 cubic yards of dirt and other material -- equal to about 7,000 dump truck loads.

The Port Authority had leased the German machine, so it will now be disassembled, raised by crane to the surface and sent back to Germany by truck and ship for reuse on a future job.

The tunneling contract, which included work on the first of two North Shore rail stations, came in on time and on budget, at \$163 million.

The entire project will not be so lucky. Escalating concrete and steel prices will drive the project above its \$435 million target amount, Mr. Simmonds said, but he could not say by how much.

As for the tunnels themselves, much work remains. Contractors will spend another year pouring a concrete pad for the trains and installing lighting and rails.

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U.S. to finance 40 percent of light rail extension costs

By LARRY LANGE
P-I REPORTER

The federal government will increase its contribution and finance more than 40 percent of the cost of extending

Sound Transit light rail service from downtown Seattle to the University of Washington.

Groundbreaking for construction will be in a few weeks, and work to remove buildings from a Capitol Hill station site will begin this month.

Federal Transit Administration acting chief Sherry Little said Thursday her agency will finance \$813 million of the \$1.9 billion project. Federal approval came, Little said, after her agency insisted that Sound Transit add \$127 million in "contingency" amounts for unforeseen costs of tunneling, "one of the riskier components" of the expense.

Approval of the grant will signal the start of construction of the 3.15-mile line, which will extend through a tunnel under downtown to underground stations, one at Broadway and John on Capitol Hill and the other at Husky Stadium at the UW.

The line is scheduled to be completed and carrying passengers between the university, Capitol Hill, downtown and Seattle-Tacoma International Airport by 2016. Two other light rail segments are scheduled to open this year, first between downtown and Tukwila and then to the airport, all part of Sound Transit's first stage of development.

A second, separate stage, approved by voters in November, is to extend the light rail system north from Husky Stadium to Lynnwood by 2023 and south to Federal Way by that same year. The second phase also will extend rail to part of Redmond by 2021.

The agency promises the UW line will provide a nine-minute trip from the UW, compared with 25 minutes by bus, and a three-minute trip from the UW to Capitol Hill, compared with 22 minutes by bus. It predicts the line will attract 70,000 daily boardings by 2030, more than 60 percent of the total ridership predicted for that year for the system.

Tunneling work will begin near Husky Stadium later this year and involve evening and overnight trucking of dirt as it's dug from the new shafts. The hauling from Capitol Hill will be during daylight hours, but may require variances from noise limits in both locations as contractors move thousands of truckloads of dirt.

"Truck hauling will be the main impact," said Sound Transit spokesman Bruce Gray. "There's going to be a lot of tunneling going on around here for a while."

Little said her agency asked for and agreed to pay part of a higher cost estimate mindful that the cost of some tunnels nationwide has exceeded initial estimates. Sound Transit's tunnel through Beacon Hill, where trains are to begin running this summer, exceeded the initial estimate by nearly 31 percent because of unstable soil and water discovered after the work began.

Sound Transit officials said the Beacon Hill tunnel work went well but the problems were at the station, which had to be relocated.

Light rail director Ahmad Fazel said additional soil samples were taken in cross-passages along the UW route. Fazel said there should be fewer construction risks on the UW route than under Beacon Hill, though "there's going to be water over there that needs to be taken care of."

UW line stations will be dug down from the surface to a shallower depth to reduce the risk of unstable soil, based on lessons learned from Beacon Hill, Sound Transit officials said.

Steve Kramer, a UW civil engineering professor with knowledge of soil conditions, said soil under hilly areas is dense enough to be amenable to tunnel boring. "It could be a lot worse," said Kramer, who said he didn't have detailed knowledge of the ground in the corridor. "Things can change and change relatively rapidly in a very short space ... it's not something anyone would claim to be done with 100 percent accuracy."

Sound Transit officials said they're confident the budgeted costs will cover what might happen. "It's as well done as humanly possible," said Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, Sound Transit's board chairman.

The federal grant is scheduled to be paid to Sound Transit through the construction period. Congress must approve each allocation, but officials said an agreement signed Thursday commits the federal government to paying the full grant amount. The \$1.9 billion cost accounts for inflation and financing costs during construction but not the cost of repaying bonds after construction, Gray said.

The tunnel will be dug east from Pine Street downtown, underneath Interstate 5 to the Capitol Hill Station and north to the UW under state Route 520 and the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

Surface-level work will occur at Husky Stadium, at Capitol Hill and at a retrieval pit for tunnel-boring operations at Pine Street. Later this month a contractor, NRC Environmental Services, is expected to begin demolishing vacant buildings Sound Transit acquired at the Capitol Hill station site. That work will continue through the middle of the year.

Once tunneling begins at the UW, trucks will be hauling dirt during evening and overnight hours, after peak commuting times, to prevent clogging rush-hour traffic. Gray said there's no way to avoid evening hauling.

Trucks will enter the UW work site and leave with dirt on Montlake Boulevard Northeast, Gray said, though the rest of the route is yet to be determined. On Capitol Hill, trucks will enter the station site from Denny Way, pick up

tunneling spoils and exit it on John Street to get to yet-to-be named disposal sites.

Traffic may be a tight squeeze on Denny and Olive Way as trucks maneuver. New crosswalks may be needed and parking may have to be removed to improve sightlines, Gray said.

Gray said there are no restrictions on night hauling on Capitol Hill, but neighbors "let us know they've got some issues" with it. Details will be worked out with contractors and the city. He could not say how many truck trips will be taken from the work areas but it's expected to be in the thousands. About 12,000 truckloads were taken out of 2-mile-long Beacon Hill tunnels.

Before Thursday, Sound Transit received \$19.6 million in federal cash for initial design work on the UW line. Agency spokesman Geoff Patrick said it expects to receive \$100 million more this year and \$110 million annually from 2010 through 2014, subject to annual appropriations by Congress.

The remaining amounts are expected to be paid in by 2016, the year the line is scheduled to be operating for passengers.

P-I reporter Larry Lange can be reached at 206-448-8313 or larrylange@seattlepi.com. Read his Traffic Watch blog at blog.seattlepi.com/seattletraffic.

MPR agrees to collaborate on light rail

The public radio station will work with Met Council engineers on a plan to reduce noise and vibrations near MPR headquarters.

By JIM FOTI, Star Tribune

Last update: January 15, 2009 - 12:03 AM

In what could be more of a cease-fire than a peace treaty, Minnesota Public Radio and the Central Corridor light-rail line have agreed to work together on reducing the noise and vibrations that will come from trains on Cedar Street in downtown St. Paul.

After a meeting called Wednesday morning by St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, MPR pledged to collaborate with Metropolitan Council engineers, who say that when the line opens in 2014, the media company's headquarters will actually experience *less* vibration than it does now.

"Our engineers and consultants remain skeptical," MPR President Bill Kling wrote to Met Council Chairman Peter Bell after the meeting. "Our participation in this process does not commit us to accept its results. ... We reserve without limits our right to act in defense of our facilities and our mission."

In part because of the ongoing mitigation efforts, the Federal Transit Administration in recent days pushed back the project's timeline by a few months, Bell said Wednesday. The FTA also wants more time to crunch numbers and to review the final designs for the 11-mile line, so the current goal is to begin construction in late summer of 2010 instead of early that summer.

MPR wanted to push the planning back further so it could evaluate the mitigation plans, which will now be accelerated. "The steps that MPR has taken today are very positive," said Bell.

The media company has been using its airwaves, its website and the editorial pages of Twin Cities newspapers to call for moving the light-rail route off Cedar Street, where trains are slated to pass within a dozen feet of buildings that house its broadcasting and recording studios. Bell has said repeatedly that the route won't be changed.

"The fact that has been overlooked in this process for quite a while is that there was no mitigation plan," said Jeff Nelson, MPR's director of public affairs. "We were just speculating on both sides of the issue as to how effective mitigation can be."

Now, he said, "we will be with them every step of the way to ask questions, to provide data, to make sure that we're putting together the best plan possible, recognizing that mitigation may not be possible."

Mark Fuhrmann, the rail line's project manager, indicated Wednesday that a number of technologies can be used to make the Central Corridor a better neighbor to both MPR and the University of Minnesota, which has sensitive research facilities near the line. One method involves putting the tracks on what's called a "floating slab" -- concrete with giant steel coils underneath to absorb vibration.

Shredded tires could also serve as shock absorbers beneath the tracks, while a third option uses something called "resilient fasteners," which let the rails wiggle independently of the material underneath. Such fasteners are in use on the Hiawatha line in a few places, including the Lindbergh terminal at the airport.

Jim Foti • 612-673-4491

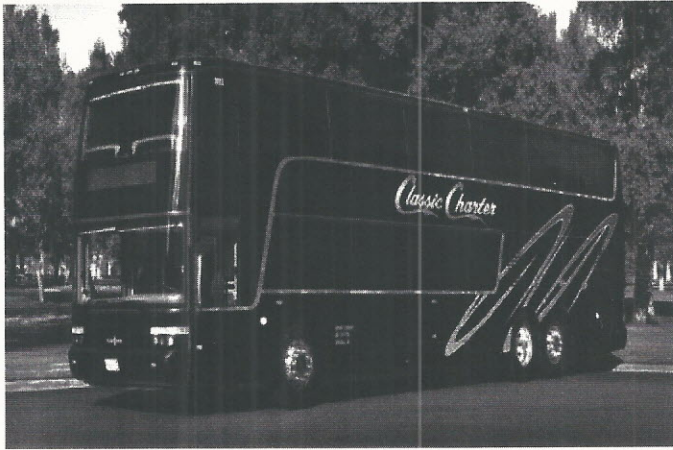
ABC delivers to California, Salt Lake City

ABC Companies recently delivered a new, 81-passenger TD925 Van Hool Double Deck coach to Classic Charter, of Visalia, Calif., and to Salt Lake City-based Le Bus.

Both coaches are powered by Cummins ISM 450 HP engines coupled to Allison Gen IV automatic transmissions, and are equipped with multi-monitor DVD

systems, and reclining seats with foot rests and seat belts.

Founded in 1985 by Les Riddington with two used buses, Classic Charter now operates 32 full size coaches with the second generation behind the wheel.



Le Bus is descended from Rock Springs-Jackson Bus Lines, founded in 1949 by Mike and Marjorie Zanetti in Rock Springs, Wyo., and has grown to more than 130 coaches.

Heading into the sunset at 60 mph

Posted by Joseph Rose, The Oregonian January 21, 2009 16:02PM

The first ride of WES left the station 15 minutes late. TriMet officials on board train promised that won't be the norm.

If you're curious about riding commuter rail through Washington County, do it while the trains have that new car smell. I'm riding into the sunset on a self-propelled diesel multiple unit (DMU) train that's in pristine condition.

Between flashes of industrial back lots, the scenery blurring past the window is often easy on the eyes. Walking trails. Ponds. A few patches of pines. All of those poor auto commuters stuck on Oregon 217. Hah! Suckers!

Those are the people that TriMet general manager Fred Hansen expects to hop onto commuter rail when the 14.7-mile line opens on Feb. 2.

"The people who are sick and tired of getting stuck in a parking lot every morning and night," Hansen explained, as he stood in the middle of the aisle, glad-handing with about 200 dignitaries, TriMet employees and reporters taking this afternoon's maiden voyage.

The train horn blows as it rolls through an intersection south of Beaverton.

The WES (Westside Express Service) trains use existing freight tracks to provide service to Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville, connecting to a dozen bus lines, and MAX Blue and Red lines as well as bus service at each station.

Someone who works at Nike or Intel, Hansen said, can get off at a stop and grab a connecting light-rail train or bus. He loves that I'm testing out the train's free WiFi system. "See," he said, giddily, "you can sit and do your work and it's only a half hour from Beaverton to Wilsonville."

The train stops at the Hall/Numbus station and waits for imaginary passengers to exit and board. A woman's voice announces, "The doors are closing." Hey, that's the woman from the MAX trains. The very same voice.

Hansen expects WES to carry about 2,500 riders a day during its first year of operation. "Actually, I think it will be more once people realize the attractiveness of this," he said.

Jeff Hamm, director of C-Tran in Vancouver, believes it.

"This is nice," Hamm said. "It's definitely not light rail. It's comparable to Amtrak."

How so? Comfort, speed, style, Hamm said.

Oh, and the gentle rocking of the moving cars. "It's enough to rock a baby to sleep," he said.

Hey, one more thing to do on WES. Just don't miss your stop.

-- Joseph Rose; josephrose@news.oregonian.com

Sun Tran unveils new buses, routes

Posted: Jan 22, 2009 10:05 PM CST

Updated: Jan 22, 2009 10:05 PM CST

By Som Lisaius and Christopher Francis



Tucson's Sun Tran bus system is getting a new look and new destinations.

Sun Tran unveiled state of the art buses Thursday, January 22, 2009, part of 19 new buses and expansion vehicles. These are the first new buses Sun Tran has seen in 17 years.

On Monday, February 16, Sun Tran is launching new weekday service from Oro Valley and Rita ranch to downtown Tucson. The expanded routes are part of the Regional Transportation Authority's \$500 million commitment to improved infrastructure and service.

"If there's one thing people have said to me is, we need to be able to get to our jobs," says Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup.

Eventually the plan will unite the entire region, from the northern most points of Oro Valley and Marana, all the way down to Sahuarita and Green Valley.

Arizona RTA Unveils Regional Seamless Transit System

The Tucson, Arizona-based Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) introduced plans for a regional seamless transit system. The regional seamless transit concept began with voter-approval of more than \$500 million in transit service improvements.

In order to ensure that all of the new transit services work together as efficiently as possible, the RTA formed a working group in 2006 to discuss the best way to retain and attract riders to the growing regional system. The working group included all the transit partners from the jurisdictions to develop the regional approach.

On Jan. 31, 2008, the RTA Board approved the group's recommendation for a seamless transit system and the funding needed to implement the improvements.

The components of the regional system will be phased in:

The first is a newly branded look and family of names for all regional transit vehicles. Colors for the new image are a mix of metallic silver, blue, yellow, and white and will be used on all the vehicles to provide a unified look.

The timing of the new look is in conjunction with the delivery of 47 new Sun Tran buses, 37 of which are funded through the RTA, and 42 Sun Van paratransit vehicles. The buses will begin going into service on Feb. 16.

The branding includes a commonly linked name for all the transit services beginning with the word "Sun" to tie it to the name associated with the largest transit system currently in operation, Sun Tran.

The new names include: Sun Express for all express buses serving outlying areas; Sun Van for Van Tran; Sun Connect for Pima County Rural Transit routes

serving Ajo, Marana, San Xavier, Tucson Estates, and Green Valley/Sahuarita, and future neighborhood circulators in Marana and Oro Valley.

Sun RideShare is the new name for RideShare, a vanpool and carpool program that is managed under Pima Association of Governments, which also manages the RTA.

New park-and-ride lots in Oro Valley and Rita Ranch also will open in February to support new Sun Express service, which is funded by the RTA (see related press release). Additional park-and-rides will open at a later date to support other regional service expansions.

Work is already under way to develop consolidated customer information for the seamless system. Elements include a new Web site featuring trip planning, schedules, maps and fare information; a single customer service center with one phone number; and a transit schedule booklet that includes information for all the transit providers.

A new fare payment technology will become available in 2010 with the introduction of a "smart card" that people may use on Sun Tran, Sun Express and Sun Connect.

This will simplify the process of transferring from one transit vehicle to another, including the modern streetcar. The smart card will be tapped on a fare collection box, allowing for faster boarding, and deducts the appropriate fare every time it is used.

New signage for bus stops and transit centers will be installed in the future to provide improved information about the integrated system, connection information and maps.

The funding for the regional seamless system concept is \$8.2 million and includes \$2.9 million for the system branding, consolidated customer services and enhanced bus stop information.

"It's important to note that the buses which are being delivered for service in February are new and would have required design work regardless," said Gary Hayes, executive director of the RTA. "It was more cost efficient to purchase these vehicles with the new colors rather than redesign the look at a later time."

Hayes also noted that during the current economic situation, the RTA Board-approved projects and services that are being implemented are helping to support local business.

"When we initially presented the RTA plan to Pima County citizens, one of the factors we conveyed is that an investment in transportation will lead to new jobs and increased economic productivity," Hayes said. "Over the life of the plan, thousands of jobs will be created to support road construction projects, new transit services and other improvements. In fact, local businesses are

thankful for the work the RTA has been able to provide during these tough times."

Scania, Marcopolo Win BRT Supply Contracts

By: Chanel Pringle

28th January 2009

The City of Johannesburg on Wednesday announced the names of the two bus manufacturers which would supply buses for Phase 1A of the Rea Vaya Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, in a contract worth R391-million.

Executive Mayor Councillor **Amos Masondo** said during a press conference in Johannesburg that Scania South Africa would supply and deliver the chassis and engines for 143 BRT buses.

Macropolo South Africa would supply the bus bodies.

All the buses would be delivered before the start of the 2009 FIFA Confederations Cup in June, but would be fully imported from Brazil and not locally manufactured.

While all the manufacturers that had tendered for the project, including Scania and Marcopolo, had the ability to assemble and manufacture the buses locally, the tight timelines to the Confederations Cup had made this impossible.

Subsequent orders would, however, be locally manufactured.

The manufacturers would deliver 41 articulated buses, which could transport up to 112 passengers and 102 complementary buses that could transport up to 81 passengers.

The manufacturers have also made the necessary provisions for disabled persons in wheel chairs to use the buses.

The buses would all have Euro IV diesel engines, with Euro III engines being the minimum standard recommended in the national specifications, said Masondo.

Nine manufacturers had initially submitted tenders to a request for information issued by the city, of which five were shortlisted to participate in the request for proposals phase.

Only four manufacturers had made final submissions.

The R2-billion Rea Vaya BRT system will stretch 94 km and make use of dedicated median lanes on current roads to transport passengers in the City of Johannesburg.

Plans to launch the public transport system were first announced late in 2006, with the BRT system expected reduce the worsening congestion in the city.

Edited by: Mariaan Webb

Public gets look at new double-deckers

Laurie Wink

The News-Dispatch

PORTER, Ind. - New double-decker cars slated to be used by the South Shore Line were shown off Friday by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District to its board members and the public at the Dune Park station.

Fourteen of the new 300-series cars are being added to service the increasing number of South Shore riders. Greg Yovich, NICTD assistant chief mechanical officer, is in charge of bringing the new cars online. He said 10 have arrived in Michigan City, and the final four are leaving Milwaukee on Monday, heading for Michigan City.

The double-deckers have two upper rows of seats - one on each side of the car and facing each other. The upper seats are accessible by stairways. Yovich said the new cars meet the latest requirements for people with disabilities. Wide platform areas are offered between cars, which have seating areas where chairs can be folded, accommodating wheelchairs. The stainless steel restrooms are accessible for people with disabilities as well.

Seats are cushier, seat backs are higher and there is more leg room, Yovich said. Passengers will be able to easily maneuver seats to face the front or back of the train, or arrange them to face each other for those traveling in groups.

NICTD board member Mark Yagelski, who's also a La Porte County Council member, was impressed with what he saw inside the new car.

"It was spacious and had that new car smell you hope will stay," Yagelski said. "I like the top deck and loved the seating.

"My wife can't handle sitting backwards, and now you can just flip the seats over."

The shiny silver South Shore additions have more computerized functions than older cars, Yovich said.

Test runs have been conducted with the new cars, and all the double-deckers should be ready to roll in March.

Contact Laurie Wink at lwink@thenewsdispatch.com.

South Shore rejects cooperation on buses

The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District board unanimously rejected a move Friday to cooperate with the Regional Bus Authority.

By an 11-0 vote, the board rejected a "statement of shared goals" that would have had the two coordinate bus and train service and explore combining two boards into one.

"Why do we need them?" said NICTD board member and Lake County Commissioner Fran DuPey shortly before the vote. "We're doing just fine."

NICTD operates the South Shore commuter railroad, which runs from Chicago to South Bend.

Looming large behind the board's decision was the RBA's proposal to fund regional bus service with a food and beverage tax. The Lake County Council is considering enacting the tax.

NICTD board member and Lake County Councilwoman Christine Cid wanted to know if the resolution expressed support for the food and beverage tax.

John Parsons, NICTD marketing and planning director, said the statement did not.

DuPey said she wanted to go on record against the food and beverage tax before Friday's vote was taken. Cid and other board members also seemed anxious to put distance between themselves and the tax.

If the tax is enacted by the Lake County Council and approved by county commissioners, the proceeds would go to the RDA under state legislation passed in 2005. The RDA already has committed to funding public transit with any money it gets from a food and beverage tax.

The movement to get the RBA and NICTD to cooperate more closely has been spearheaded by RDA Chairman Leigh Morris.

Contacted after Friday's vote, Morris said the RDA was leaving the decision on enacting the food and beverage tax up to government leaders. But if enacted, he said the RDA would use it for public transit.

The RDA will push the two transit providers to continue talks on working more closely together, Morris said.

"It's in their interest to work together and build a stronger public transport system in Northwest Indiana," Morris said.

Former Metro leader boards Cincinnati streetcar effort with proposal

Business Courier of Cincinnati - by Dan Monk Senior Staff Reporter

The former CEO of Cincinnati's Metro bus system has assembled a team of local contractors to build and operate a proposed new streetcar line.

Michael Setzer, who left Metro last March to become regional vice president for Chicago-based Veolia Transportation, is listed as the lead contact person for Cincinnati Streetcar Development Partners. It's one of four groups that responded to a city of Cincinnati request for streetcar proposals.

"I'm encouraged that we have that kind of interest," said Michael Moore, interim director of the city's department of transportation and engineering. "I hope it means that we've got some good alternatives for a partner."

A city consultant estimated a rail system linking the riverfront to Uptown neighborhoods surrounding the University of Cincinnati would cost \$185 million. City Manager Milton Dohoney has pegged it at up to \$219 million. City officials have identified \$67 million in funding sources.

Last month, they placed streetcars on a list of "ready to go" projects assembled by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. It is lobbying President Obama to spend heavily on infrastructure in cities. Cincinnati estimated a \$132 million federal contribution to the streetcar system would lead to the creation of 150 jobs. It was one of four dozen projects in which the city requested \$435 million for roads, sewers, water works and economic development improvements. It predicted the 48 projects would create 4,012 jobs.

City leaders also asked streetcar vendors to describe how they would cover up to \$91 million in financing costs.

Four submitted proposals: Setzer's company; URS Washington Division; Herzog Contracting Corp. of St. Joseph, Mo.; and Bombardier Transit Corp. of Bensalem, Pa.

Among Veolia's partners are Parsons Brinckerhoff Inc., HDR Engineering Inc., DNK Architects Inc., Burgess & Niple Ltd., Wordsworth Communication Inc. and Property Advisors Inc. with PNC Capital Markets LLC. Setzer declined to comment pending a city interview process, but a competitor considers him a frontrunner.

"We'd consider the Veolia group our primary competition, in part because of Mike's experience locally," said Dave Warmald, senior project engineer in URS's downtown office.

Capital Metro Red Line

Final price tag for commuter rail: \$105 million

Overrun modest by recent standards, but agency did not count up to \$35 million in related costs.

By Ben Wear

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Friday, January 30, 2009

You won't see a price tag on Capital Metro's shiny red-gray-and-white passenger trains when the 32-mile Leander-to-downtown-Austin line opens March 30. But if there were such a label, it would say, "\$105 million."

That amounts to a cost overrun of \$15 million, or about 17 percent, from the \$90 million estimate that the transit agency put before voters in 2004.

That overage, which the agency acknowledged in the past few months, would fall into the lower range for busting budgets on passenger rail, at least based on a 2006 Transportation Research Board study of 16 recent projects showing that on average spending was about 30 percent above original projections.

Capital Metro has continued to assert that as much as \$35 million in other, directly related costs be attributed instead to the agency's freight rail operation on the same tracks, or to its bus business or to general agency operations.

Capital Metro's stance stands in contrast to at least one sibling transit agency, North County Transit District in San Diego, which attributed all the costs on its recent project to passenger rail whether or not they benefited freight service running on the same track. The project's costs overall fall into the lower end for passenger rail, primarily because Capital Metro already owned the track and bought the bare minimum of train cars to get rolling.

Among the costs excluded by Capital Metro: \$7.4 million for a Leander park-and-ride lot built next to the coming train station; \$11.3 million for new crossing gates and a centralized track control system; \$1.7 million for "commuter rail startup;" \$2.1 million of the cost of the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard rail station and plaza; and \$463,000 for safety fencing alongside the tracks.

And the local hit on taxpayers included an additional

\$30 million because Capital Metro, after telling voters in 2004 it would seek that much in federal funding, decided shortly after the election that doing so would delay the project and dropped the effort.

No matter what number should be on that final price tag, Capital Metro executives say, Central Texas is getting a bargain.

"Even \$105 million is still pretty much a shoestring compared to these others," said John Almond, the rail project director, pointing to the installation cost per mile of recently opened passenger rail lines in Salt Lake City, San Diego, New Jersey and Albuquerque, N.M.

Capital Metro, at \$105 million, will have spent about \$3.3 million a mile to open its line. That's about a tenth of the dollars-per-mile figure in New Jersey. The other three spent between \$9 million a mile and \$22 million a mile, according to Capital Metro figures.

But as Capital Metro acknowledged from the beginning, the Red Line to Leander had some built-in cost advantages.

Capital Metro already owned the railroad, the middle portion of an old 162-mile-long Southern Pacific freight spur between Llano and Giddings. It had spent at least \$8 million in the early years of this decade replacing substantial portions of the welded rail, wooden ties and old bridges.

And the agency decided to buy (at a cost of about \$38 million) just six of the self-propelled diesel cars that will carry passengers. That move kept the proposed cost under the politically significant \$100 million figure but also meant that capacity will be limited in the early years.

Other agencies that recently opened passenger lines generally had to lay new track, and most made much larger initial orders of rolling stock.

The 22-mile Sprinter line north of San Diego, which opened last March, bought twice as many cars and had to replace the entire length of track where, as with Capital Metro, freight was already running.

According to Tom Kelleher, spokesman for Sprinter operator the North County Transit District, the pre-existing track and signal system from Oceanside to

Escondido was sufficient to serve the slow-speed freight trains. But, as was the case with Capital Metro's line, an overhaul was necessary for passenger rail to run at 55 mph.

So the transit agency there replaced the entire track and installed a much more sophisticated signal control and dispatching system (as Capital Metro did here). The entire \$480 million cost was assigned to passenger rail.

"We didn't need a new track for the freight," Kelleher said. "All of that was for the light rail."

Capital Metro took a different approach, excluding most costs that in some way benefit its freight rail line as well.

As for the overrun the agency does acknowledge, Almond points to higher-than-predicted inflation and to program changes the agency made along the way: a permanent maintenance center, at \$5.5 million, rather than a temporary facility pegged at \$2.4 million; a \$5.8 million bridge over the intersecting Union Pacific track near Round Rock, which will prevent delays from freight trains blocking the Capital Metro track; the expanded version of the Howard/MoPac station; and the centralized control system.

Voters said yes to what amounted to a bare-bones rail line. Upon reflection, agency officials say, they decided an upgrade was the prudent way to go.

"At the beginning, it was a starter system," Almond said. "We wanted to take advantage of our track, build some stations and go. As we got into it, we realized there was a lot more we could offer."

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Supervisors revive monorail idea, approve 'letter of interest'

Nels Johnson

Posted: 01/28/2009 11:00:36 AM PST

Although the prospect of commuters rocketing over Marin in space-age pods may be a little out there, county officials are interested in a high-speed monorail transit system.

Marin County supervisors said a pilot project could bring SkyTran, a futuristic high-speed monorail still under development, to Marin as a key public transit link complementing the SMART rail project approved by voters last year.

The program, boosted by Supervisors Judy Arnold and Charles McGlashan, could connect the Civic Center with the SMART rail system, or be set up at other sites.

The project "could be a first step to a countywide system enhancing bus and ferry service, as well as the SMART rail system," Arnold and McGlashan said in a letter to colleagues. Last year, Arnold boosted the SkyTran program as an alternative to SMART.

The electric SkyTran system involves two- or three-person "pods" capable of traveling non-stop at 150 mph between cities. The vehicles do not have drivers, but use computers, sensors and radar collision systems to navigate. Unimodal Transport Solutions of Westlake Village, a firm founded in 2003 to develop the transit system, says it is 10 times less expensive than light rail.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday approved a "letter of interest" to Unimodal that can be used to attract private financing for a project in Marin. Santa Cruz and San Jose have each requested a formal plan from Unimodal for larger-scale projects.

"We recognize that this is only a first step in this process and that many discussions and public meetings will need to follow to determine the feasibility of this project, to identify a location for the pilot, and to analyze environmental impacts," Arnold and McGlashan said.

The two supervisors said Marin is in a good position to win state transit grants to help finance the project. Both state Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, and Assemblyman Jared Huffman, D-San Rafael, support the move.

"In the past year SkyTran has progressed from the design phase into building and testing physical prototypes, and has also identified partners for project management and private financing," Arnold reported. "Pods are being produced in Southern California for assembly at the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View and a financing partner, IERS, is interested in funding a demonstration project that is up and running as soon as possible."

The board dispatched a letter to Unimodal, saying the county could provide right-of-way for a pilot project, help obtain permits and open the door for state grants.

A Marin project would "provide connectivity with existing and future transit to demonstrate the efficacy and convenience of this innovative technology," the county letter to Unimodal says, adding the system "would eventually integrate more comprehensively with other transit options countywide to serve commercial, retail, residential, government and entertainment centers."

Christopher Perkins, CEO of Unimodal, on Wednesday applauded the move, saying, "Marin County's leadership in bringing green transportation solutions to the region is a key to future economic prosperity and quality of life."

Perkins said that although Unimodal's vehicles can zip along at high speeds, "our technology would be deployed appropriately in Marin County, moving at the speed you would expect cars to travel."

Fares of 15 to 25 cents per mile would cover costs of the firm's "personal rapid transit system that has high speed, low cost and low maintenance characteristics," he said, adding the first pod will be assembled in March.

"By doing this on county property we can put in a showcase," Perkins said of a Marin project.

County supervisors traded quips as they unanimously dispatched a letter of interest to Perkins.

"I think it's great you have cast yourselves along with the Jetsons," Supervisor Steve Kinsey told colleagues Arnold and McGlashan.

"Is this one of the times I can't roll my eyes?" asked Supervisor Hal Brown.

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Mesa light-rail stop gets portable toilets

Andre Bowser, Tribune

February 6, 2009 - 6:28PM

After riding the Valley Metro light rail Friday to Mesa's first and last stop at Main Street and Sycamore - all the way from downtown Phoenix - Chandler resident Carlos Smith said he had to "go."

Walking double-time, he crossed the street from where he was waiting for a bus home and shuffled into a blue portable toilet for some much-needed relief. He didn't care that the commode accommodations weren't first class.

"Stinky is better than nothing," Smith said with a chuckle.

Mesa officials installed the portable toilets Wednesday after receiving outcry from light-rail riders who complained that the last stop on the new 20-mile-long rail line, as well as other stops, offered no options for riders to relieve themselves.

Mesa Vice Mayor Kyle Jones said the portable solution is only a stop-gap measure while the city considers its options for something a bit more permanent.

"We figured while we're discussing it and there's a need, let's just put some port-a-potties there," Jones said.

Mike James, deputy transportation director, said the three units will cost the city \$300 each month, at a price of \$100 per unit.

Valley Metro is responsible for maintaining the station with tasks such as emptying trash receptacles and cleaning the surface of the station and surrounding area, James said. He said Waste Management owns the units and will service them during the length of use by the city.

The three units are located in the park-and-ride area off Main Street that's under the city's control, he said.

Hillary Foose, spokeswoman for Valley Metro light rail, tipped her hat to Mesa. "The Porta-Johns at the Sycamore transit center are solely a City of Mesa initiative," she said.

Foose said Valley Metro has received a mixed response to the lack of rest room facilities along the line.

"We're getting people who express concerns about no rest rooms and we're getting people who express no need for them," said Foose, who explained that the average rail ride is 8 miles. "I do think some of the cause for concern related to rest room facilities are some of the individuals riding for leisure, the whole 20 miles and back."

Foose said light-rail officials had a different focus when starting up the service. "We wanted to refine the system that we have and concentrate on passenger service," she said.

Facility construction, maintenance and security would have taken away from the service's priority, she said.

"There are tremendous maintenance costs and safety concerns," Foose said of building and maintaining structures at various points on the nascent rail line.

For now, Mesa is the last stop on the line, but the first when it comes to providing rest room facilities.

Jones said the city has yet to establish a timeline of how long the talks will take or when they will even broach a more permanent solution to the portable toilets. He said the portable units will serve as a sort of test.

"Let's see how they fare, and whether they get abused or people take care of them," Jones said. "The burden would fall upon Mesa for a rest room at that location" if one is put in place in the future.

As Melissa Thomack of Chandler rushed her 5-year-old son, Nicholas, into one of the facilities Friday, the expression on his face said the portable option came none too soon.

Squirming in his pants, she opened the door as he rushed inside before her.

"My son really likes to ride the buses," she said as she stepped out of the tiny blue unit, her smiling little boy with less wiggle in his step. "It's his first time riding on the light rail."

Virginia Beach inches closer to light rail goal of \$40 million

By Deirdre Fernandes
The Virginian-Pilot
© February 6, 2009

The city may get some federal money to help buy the Norfolk Southern right of way, the most likely route for a light-rail line. A committee of the Metropolitan Planning Organization has agreed to let Hampton Roads Transit use \$6 million of federal funds toward a light-rail study and the right-of-way purchase.

The members of the planning organization will have to formally approve the use of the funds in April.

HRT is expecting an increase in transit funds through the stimulus package and wants to set aside some of that money for light-rail issues, said Tom Holden, the agency's spokesman.

"We want the flexibility to use the money when it gets there," Holden said.

About \$5 million of the federal funds would help pay for the right of way and the rest would be spent on a light-rail environmental study, said Bob Matthias, assistant to the Virginia Beach city manager.

The city plans to submit a grant request today for \$20 million from the state, Matthias said.

The total price for the 10.6-mile line, which bisects the city roughly parallel to Interstate 264, is \$40 million.

The City Council has informally agreed to spend \$10 million to buy the land. Norfolk Southern would continue to receive \$5 million in utility easement payments.

"I think we're just about there," Mayor Will Sessoms said. "I feel good about it."

The city and Norfolk Southern could have a deal to buy the land in the next two months, Sessoms said.

Virginia Beach elected officials have been trying to find enough money to close the deal for the past month.

Sen. Kenneth Stolle put in a budget amendment in January requesting a total of \$25 million in state mass-transit funds to help buy the land.

Between the grant request and Stolle's amendment, city officials are hoping to get the state money, Matthias said.

"One is the backup," he said. "It's belts and suspenders."

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Councilmen push stimulus money for Metro Rail extension

By Brian Meyer
News Staff Reporter

Extending Metro Rail into the suburbs and removing the Niagara section of Thruway from the waterfront would be

beneficial ways to spend federal stimulus money, Buffalo lawmakers said today.

In 8-0 votes, the Common Council urged federal officials to consider both big-ticket projects as they eye ways to spend billions of dollars for infrastructure improvements.

Extending Metro Rail to the North Campus at the University at Buffalo and other destinations in Erie and Niagara counties would be an ideal use of stimulus aid, said sponsor Joseph Golombek of the North District.

When the line was first proposed, planners envisioned it shuttling commuters from downtown to UB's North Campus. Other proposed extensions also were touted, including lines that would link downtown with the airport in Cheektowaga, and connections to the Tonawanda and Niagara Falls.

When Metro Rail began service in 1985, planners viewed the line from the foot of Main Street to UB's South Campus as a "starter segment." Nearly a quarter of a century later, the route remains a six-mile stretch that some critics have branded "the train to nowhere."

The Council urged the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority and Western New York's congressional delegation to apply for federal stimulus aid for light rail extensions. Golombek noted that UB's 2020 Plan — a road map for retooling the university — would be greatly enhanced by a rail extension.

But NFTA Executive Director Lawrence M. Meckler said trying to secure stimulus aid to extend the rail line would face major hurdles. Such an expansion would first need approval from federal transportation officials, and Meckler said there's a long way to go before that happens. The NFTA is engaged in a study that assesses the feasibility of various rail extensions, and the review won't be completed until June.

"The timing wouldn't work," Meckler said, referring to the push to obtain federal stimulus aid for the project. "The Council is well intentioned, but it's just not that easy."

When the NFTA last attempted to secure money for a Metro Rail extension in 2001, Meckler said officials in Washington concluded that none of the options met the threshold for federal funding. He said one concern involved the absence of a dedicated revenue source to help absorb operating expenses. Meckler said he hopes the project might be better positioned to secure federal aid in the future, but he warned the process could be lengthy.

The Council also unanimously voted to ask the federal government to launch a study that looks at options for removing or relocating the Niagara Thruway, a highway that critics have branded a concrete barrier to waterfront access.

Over the decades, numerous ideas have been floated that range from putting some of the highway underground, to moving the Thruway to existing railroad beds. Golombek said the latter strategy would improve shoreline access in the Black Rock and Riverside neighborhoods.

Golombek said the Thruway is one reason property values have declined in some areas.

"Returning valuable waterfront access to residents stabilizes neighborhoods," he said.

Bill introduced to bring light rail system to Clark County

By Cy Ryan

CARSON CITY – A light rail system connecting Henderson and the proposed new airport in Ivanpah, south of Las Vegas, could be a gold mine, says Sen. Mike Schneider, D-Las Vegas.

Schneider has introduced Senate Bill 115 to require local governments to work cooperatively to establish a fixed guideway corridor from Henderson to North Las Vegas. Local governments would determine the route and to the "extent practicable, acquire and use any rights-of-way necessary."

The light rail system could be fueled by solar power from Boulder City, he said.

The bill would establish three interconnected corridors in Clark County along the Union Pacific Railroad.

One would run between Nevada State College and the South Strip Intermodal Transportation Terminal off Sunset Road. Another would run from the South Strip terminal to the downtown Las Vegas transportation terminal, and the third would run between the downtown Las Vegas terminal and the proposed North Las Vegas regional campus of UNLV.

The bill requires the corridor to include, to the extent possible, the Henderson branch of the Union Pacific Railroad.

A proposal by the Regional Transportation Commission in 2007 to build a 33-mile light rail along that branch was strongly opposed by Green Valley residents who live along the right-of-way. The RTC board changed its priorities for mass transit in the Las Vegas Valley in light of the opposition.

The bill does not mention the proposed Ivanpah airport, but Schneider suggested after he introduced the bill that it could extend that far.

Clark County is struggling to meet federal air quality standards and the system could aid in that effort, as well as relieve traffic congestion, he said.

The bill was referred to the Senate Energy, Infrastructure and Transportation Committee.

New bus service connects southern Pa. to Md.

ASSOCIATED PRESS • FEBRUARY 2, 2009

BALTIMORE — Southern Pennsylvania commuters who travel down Interstate-83 into Maryland can now take

advantage of bus line connecting York and Shrewsbury to Baltimore's light rail system.

York County's public transportation system, rabbittransit, will run six round trips each weekday between York and Shrewsbury, Pa., and the Timonium and Hunt Valley area.

The rabbitEXPRESS service is aimed primarily at York County residents who work in Maryland, but rabbittransit Executive Director Richard Farr says Marylanders could take advantage of the service too.

The cost of the trip will be \$5 each way, but monthly passes are available at a discount of about \$64 off the daily rate.

The three-year demonstration project funded by the federal government's Congestion Mitigation Air Quality fund is starting as budget problems prompt Maryland to shed commuter routes.

New York-bound travelers get one more bus option

Washington Business Journal - by Tierney Plumb Staff Reporter

A new D.C.-to-New York City bus service called Tripper Bus plans to hit the road Feb. 13.

Promotional fares start at \$1 each way, with other seats available at \$5, \$10 and the standard price of \$25 each way. The bus service will pick up and drop off passengers near the Rosslyn and Bethesda Metro stations. The New York pick-up and drop-off point is at Penn Station.

The private company is the latest bus line to roll out \$1 deals. Bolt Bus, a Greyhound bus carrier, started offering similar fares last March between D.C. and New York.

According to Betty Unger, Tripper Bus' chief executive, the 20-bus fleet "connects people to D.C. and New York City with convenient pick up and drop off locations near Metro and train stations at a price that travelers can not beat if driving, flying or taking the train."

Tripper is targeting younger travelers and families that live outside of the beltway, as well as college students going back and forth for school breaks.

One promotional offer is letting passengers get one free ride with four \$25 ticket purchases. Each bus seats up to 55. There are two different charter companies being used.

The service was originally going to launch late last year to coincide with holiday peak travel but some bus amenities were not ready yet.

Those include free wireless service and electric outlets.