



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

MAY/JUNE 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.com". At osabus.com we will be posting upcoming fan trips and meetings information, as well as membership information.

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

• MAY/JUNE MEETINGS

The May meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on May 1, 2009, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening, "**South American Trolley Buses**" will be a video presentation by Melvin Bernero.

The June meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on June 5, 2009, and will be a slide presentation by Myron Lane.

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.

CTA Announces Largest Expansion of the Bus Tracker Program with the Addition of 24 Routes on March 2

2/12/2009

On Monday, March 2, the largest expansion of the Bus Tracker web site took place with the addition of 24 routes. Customers will have access to real-time service information for a total of 110 of CTA's 153 bus routes—nearly 72 percent.

CTA Bus Tracker is a web-based program that uses global positioning system (GPS) technology to provide customers

\$5.00

with the locations and estimated arrival times of buses operating along activated bus routes.

"Successful programs like Bus Tracker are changing the public's perception of public transit and are contributing factors as to why many of our customers are continuing to use our bus and rail services," said Acting CTA President Dorval Carter. "The feedback CTA has received from customers indicates Bus Tracker is a welcomed and valuable tool, particularly during inclement weather, as it allows customers to reduce the amount of time spent waiting outside at a bus stop."

Next week, CTA will begin posting signs at bus stops along the following 24 routes, which will be activated on the Bus Tracker web site on March 2:

#1 Indiana/Hyde Park	#X54 Cicero Express
#8A South Halsted	#57 Laramie
#14 Jeffery Express	#65 Grand
#15 Jeffery Local	#66 Chicago
#24 Wentworth	#70 Division
#28 Stony Island	#71 71st/South Sho
#X28 Stony Island Express	#72 North
#29 State	#73 Armitage
#34 South Michigan	#74 Fullerton
#49A South Western	#76 Diversey
#53 Pulaski	#111 Pullman/
#54 Cicero	111th/115th
	#119 Michigan/119t

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.

2008 MARKS NEAR-RECORD RIDERSHIP FOR PACE

40.5 Million rides is agency's highest total since 1991

More rides were taken throughout the Pace system during 2008 than any of the previous 17 years, marking the second highest annual total in agency history. The release of the final 2008 ridership coincides with the announcement by the American Public Transit Association estimating that Chicago-area transit riders saved an average of \$10,456 versus the cost of driving over the course of a year.

The combined ridership on fixed route buses, paratransit, dial-a-ride, and vanpool added up to roughly 40,497,000, topping 40 million for the first time since 1999. The figure also represents a 3.4 percent increase over the final total from 2007. The increases are largely attributed to higher fuel prices, route restructuring, and other aspects that make transit a viable alternative to driving. "Fuel prices were a major factor in encouraging more people to use transit," said Pace Chairman of the Board Richard Kwasneski. "However, it was up to us to provide safe, friendly, and accountable service to ensure that people continued to ride even though gas prices came down and the economy began its decline, and that's why we were able to continue to improve ridership."

Fixed route ridership during the year was roughly 31.7 million, and was boosted by the Free Rides for Seniors program that began in March and attracted just over 1.5 million rides on Pace since its inception, averaging nearly 4,700 rides on weekdays during December. In October, 2008, the RTA's Circuit Permit was implemented, allowing registered people with disabilities that are part of the state's circuit breaker program to ride free on fixed route service. The new pass accounted for more than 71,000 uses at the end of the year on Pace, including 44,500 in December.

Paratransit ridership totaled more than 3.6 million throughout the region during 2008. "Despite the system problems that occurred when we implemented computerized dispatch in March, we were able to not only increase capacity, but on-time performance as well," said Kwasneski. Pace officials also believe that paratransit ridership may have been even higher, but the Free Rides for Seniors and Circuit Permit programs likely encouraged some people to use fixed route service in order to save money versus paratransit fares.

Vanpool ridership during 2008 came in just under 2 million, and Pace added 57 new vans to its fleet, to remain the second largest vanpool program in the U.S. "The flexibility that vanpool offers- with riders being able to set their own schedule and routing, along with the flat

monthly fares allowing for easy budgeting of commuting expenses- show why this program is a great fit for many people in our service area," said Kwasneski.

The need for an infusion of new capital funding for transit in the region is amplified by the ridership gains. Pace is in dire need of replacing roughly one out of every six buses in its fleet because of high maintenance costs or increased likelihood of breakdowns. "Adding new buses to our fleet is essential to moving forward because it will help us to continue to provide reliable, efficient service, as well as use more of our new funding sources, such as the Suburban Community Mobility Fund to develop new routes to areas underserved by transit," said Kwasneski.

Federal Stimulus Enhances Pace Infrastructure

President Obama recently signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, perhaps better known as the Federal Stimulus Plan. Pace will be receiving roughly \$33 million to fund infrastructure improvements.



As called for in the legislation, the money must be spent on "shovel-ready" projects, meaning that it should be used within 180 days of being received. Federal guidelines state that this money must be used for capital infrastructure, such as the purchase of buses and construction of buildings, and cannot be used to fund operations. As a result, the money cannot be used to enhance or expand bus service.

Pace has been working for several months to develop plans for the stimulus funding, and will easily meet this deadline. Doing so may enable Pace access to additional funding if other parts of the country aren't able to use their stimulus money in the time allowed.

Once the funding is received, Pace will purchase the following:

- 162 Paratransit vehicles
- 58 Thirty-foot fixed route buses
- 44 vans for the Vanpool Incentive Program

- Additional vehicles including service trucks and vans for operational supervision

Newer buses use less fuel and have lower maintenance costs, which will immediately help to reduce our operating expenses. As the State of Illinois continues its work on developing its own capital investment plan, Pace may receive additional funds available to further allow for the replacement of aging vehicles and other infrastructure improvements.

CTA Bus Customers May Encounter Challenges for Upcoming Rush Periods

Buses Will Remain Out of Service Until Inspected by Structural Expert

CTA is cautioning bus customers to allow additional time for upcoming rush periods starting this evening. As a precaution CTA is removing from its fleet those 60 foot long articulated buses manufactured by North American Bus Industries (NABI) due to a structural crack in one of the buses. The buses will remain out of service until an independent structural expert can inspect them and advise the CTA on their safety. There have been no accidents or injuries related to this problem.

Today's action will result in more crowding during the peak rush hour periods because the CTA will have the equivalent of 90 fewer buses available for service at those times. The most significant impact to customers is expected to be between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. on weekday mornings and from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. weekday evenings.

These buses represent 6 percent of CTA's bus fleet and have generally been assigned to routes that operate along the Lakefront. CTA is deploying information specialists at select downtown bus stops this afternoon to advise customers who travel on buses during these times to allow extra travel time and expect more crowded conditions. Where possible, CTA is also recommending that riders consider adjusting their travel time or switching to rail service instead. Additional rush period trains have been added on the Red, Blue, Brown, Green and Pink lines.

"We deeply regret the inconvenience that this will cause our customers, but we believe it is best not to continue using these buses for service until we have an assessment from the experts," said Acting CTA President Dorval Carter. "The safety of bus riders has to be our priority."

The CTA purchased 226 of the accordion-style buses from NABI beginning in 2003. The buses have a warranty for 500,000 miles or 12 years. The bus that failed was approximately five years old and had 152,000 miles.

It is important to note that NABI is just one manufacturer of articulated buses used in the CTA's fleet. The CTA recently began procuring articulated buses from New Flyer of America, Inc. and currently has 94 of its buses in the fleet, with new ones arriving at a rate of about three per week. The New Flyer buses are not affected by today's action.

PACE BOARD FORMS NEW ADA COMMITTEES

Application process begins immediately and will be open to the public

Following the Blue Ribbon Committee on Paratransit's report to the Pace Board in December, Pace is taking swift action to implement one of the committee's recommendations: formation of committees that will serve in an advisory role regarding the agency's transit service for people with disabilities. The groups are likely to begin convening in April. "It was our intent to capture the spirit of the Blue Ribbon Committee's recommendations, and I'm confident that we've used their input to develop a committee structure that will be beneficial to both riders and to Pace," said Karen Tamley, a Pace Board member who also serves as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities in Chicago.

The Pace Board elected to create two 15-member panels, with one focusing on service within Chicago and another dedicated to suburban service. This is a slight variation from the recommendation, which was to have a 30-member panel with two subcommittees dedicated to either city or suburban service. "There was some debate on which approach should be used," said Pace Chairman of the Board Richard Kwasneski. "Ultimately we decided that the best approach was to have separate committees at the onset in order to avoid competition and to improve the manageability of their initial meetings. If ever the time comes in which this may need to be revisited, we have the flexibility to do that."

The new committee will be formed through an application process that is open to the public. The Blue Ribbon Committee's recommendation specified that members of the new ADA committee must be paratransit riders; however anyone with an interest in improving service for people with disabilities is welcome to apply. "We were concerned that the original recommendation would have instantly barred countless parents and other advocates that would be excellent candidates," said Kwasneski. "We would be potentially depriving ourselves of some outstanding individuals willing to volunteer their time and energy." Though all are welcome to apply, the by-laws under which the advisory boards will operate state that a majority of members must be eligible for ADA paratransit service.

Applications will be mailed to all of the roughly 40,000 registered riders in the six county area, distributed

through workshops and other advocacy organizations, and will be available for download at www.pacebus.com. The Pace Board will be responsible for screening the applications and selecting the committee membership. The original recommendation called for the Board to appoint the first five members on each committee, which in turn would appoint the remaining ten. "We felt that by selecting all of the members, it would improve the transparency and impartiality of this part of the process," said Kwasneski.

Pace has already implemented several key measures recommended by the BRC: the agency's 2009 marketing plan calls for devoting a majority of its budget to improve communication with the people who use paratransit service, customer service training has been enhanced, and the agency is priority paratransit vehicle purchases if federal stimulus capital funding is received. Furthermore, the Board plans to direct staff to address remaining Blue Ribbon Committee recommendations with the newly-formed panels. "This presents an excellent opportunity for staff to work collaboratively with the new committee and gives the committee members the chance to begin working on important tasks right away." Other items to be addressed in conjunction with the advisory boards later in the year will be reviewing the results of a RTA performance audit of paratransit operations and expanded promotion of the Circuit Permit, which provides free rides on fixed route service to registered people with disabilities meeting certain income requirements.

Plans call for announcing the initial membership of the boards at the April meeting of the Pace Board of Directors, with their first meetings expected later that month.

Metra to add '2nd train' warnings

West line upgrade aims to make track crossings safer

By Richard Wronski | Tribune reporter
February 14, 2009

In an effort to make commuter stations safer, Metra will soon begin installing flashing signs that alert people when more than one train is passing.

The so-called second-train signals are intended to warn people who wait for one train to pass before crossing the tracks but fail to notice another approaching train, Metra officials said Friday.

That's what happened in 2004 to Michael DeLarco, 10, of Schaumburg. The 5th grader had just gotten off an eastbound Metra train in River Grove, when he started across a pedestrian walkway and was struck and killed by a westbound express.

Metra plans to start installing the signs as part of a \$112 million upgrade of its Union Pacific West line, scheduled to begin in March. The line carries 30,000 passengers a day and runs 60 Metra and 60 freight trains daily.

Metra says it will be the first time in the U.S. that the warning signs will be installed at stations along an entire line. Second-train warning signs are used in other states but only at some crossings on a line, officials said.

Officials unveiled a prototype that displays a red flashing "Danger" above the message "Another Train Coming." A warning also will be sounded.

Metra plans other safety improvements at the UP West stations, including barriers to divert people from tracks at crossing gates, escape areas to keep pedestrians from being caught between lowered gates and tracks, and more fencing.

Work will begin in March at UP West stations in Maywood, Melrose Park, Bellwood and Berkeley. It will continue through 2010 at stations between Elmhurst and Geneva.

The work will allow for better on-time service on the UP West line, Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano said.

Metra and the Union Pacific Railroad will share the cost of the project.

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Metra readies fix for UP West line

By Marni Pyke | Daily Herald Staff

Commuters traveling along Metra's Union Pacific West Line should expect faster, safer trips as a result of an ambitious improvement plan, officials pledged Friday.

Metra and Union Pacific Railroad are splitting the cost of a \$112 million upgrade. The project includes adding a third track to segments in Geneva and Melrose Park, installing caution signs at stations when trains are coming and providing safety gates to prevent accidents.

The UP West line between Chicago and Elburn is among Metra's busiest. At the same time, Chicago is a crucial crossroads for UP, with about 25 percent of its freight traveling through the region.

UP ends up idling freights about six hours a day during peak periods to allow Metra trains quick passage.

With three tracks in place throughout the line and upgraded signals, "trains will be blocking crossings less," UP Executive Vice President of Operations Dennis Duffy said.

"There'll be less fuel consumption, trains can move at a faster pace, less conflicts and more reliable service."

Expanding the railway in Geneva has drawn concerns from residents living near UP right-of-way where the third track will be built. And the city is worried about losing parking spaces because of the construction.

"The No. 1 concern seems to be the noise of sitting freight trains," said Metra Director Caryl Van Overmeiren, who represents Kane County.

Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano said the agency was committed to working with the community to resolve differences.

What won't likely cause disagreements, however, are plans to make stations safer for travelers. Metra will install train advance warning systems, which will be the first of their kind in America, officials said.

There are also new designs in store for walkways, gates and fences to keep pedestrians out of harm's way.

The upgrades should result in a 50 percent drop in delays for passenger and freight trains and should pave the way for future expansions involving additional trains, Pagano said.

The work will be completed in phases, starting this spring with station work in Maywood, Melrose Park, Bellwood and Berkeley. The second stage will be in mid-2009 at Winfield and Geneva.

The final phase is expected to occur in 2010 involving Elmhurst, Villa Park, Lombard, Glen Ellyn, College Avenue and Wheaton stations.

Metra will pay for its share using federal capital funds. The agency has about \$9 million in savings from a previous construction project and has budgeted \$28 million in its current budget and \$20 million next year.

The tracks once belonged to the Chicago & North Western Railway. "This was the system UP inherited," Pagano said.

Metra train car to be wrapped

CHICAGO (Feb. 6) —A Metra train car is getting a presidential makeover this month as part of an advertising test that could lead to extra revenue for the commuter rail agency.

The car will be wrapped on both sides with an advertisement from the Illinois Bureau of Tourism that features the likenesses of the four presidents with Illinois roots: Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses Grant, Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama. One banner reads, "Follow their path. The presidential trails of Illinois," while another reads, "Take a trip with the presidents. The presidential trails of Illinois." Each features the tourism bureau's

motto, "Mile after Magnificent Mile," and its website address, enjoyillinois.com.

Over the course of the four-week campaign, the wrapped car will be rotated among several Metra lines, including the Milwaukee North, Milwaukee West, UP Northwest and Rock Island. Metra's advertising contractor, Clear Channel Metra LLC, is conducting the test to see how well the material holds up to Metra's operations and Chicago's weather. The wrap is a vinyl material with a removable adhesive that is made especially for bus and train cars. The material does not significantly block the view out of the windows.

The wrapped car will make its first appearance along the Milwaukee District North route between Chicago and Fox Lake on Monday, Feb. 9, departing Union Station at 5:12 p.m. Media interested in a photo opportunity at Union Station should contact Metra Media Relations at 312-322-6776.

All material, artwork and labor were donated by Clear Channel and its contractors to perform the test. The Illinois Bureau of Tourism, which is not being charged for the advertisement, was chosen as the sample client. After the test is completed, Clear Channel will calculate labor and production costs and determine what kind of revenue could be generated. They will also survey potential buyers. Metra expects that the program could eventually generate tens of thousands of dollars per ad campaign.

"We are exploring all opportunities to boost our non-fare income, which is important as we strive to maintain reasonable fares and keep our revenues in line with expenses," said Philip Pagano, executive director of Metra.

This test is different from one conducted several years ago that featured a "Go Bears" banner. The new wraps are larger, and Clear Channel believes they would be a more attractive product.

Metra trains on Saturday on track in Palos-Orland

by Kevin Olsen
staff reporter

Area residents will soon be able to take Metra's SouthWest Service line to and from downtown Chicago on Saturdays.

The SouthWest Service line will run three trains from Manhattan to Union Station in Chicago and three trains back from Chicago starting Saturday, March 21.

The line, which extends from Manhattan to Chicago's South Loop, stops in Oak Lawn, Chicago Ridge, Worth, Palos Heights, Palos Park and Orland Park among other towns further south.

All of the mayors along the service line have been proponents of Saturday service for years, said Pat Jones, Palos Park village administrator.

"They have been pushing for this for years," Jones said. "It's so instrumental to our property values and services."

The service is part of a two year trial program, said Metra spokesperson Meg Reile. Last October, Metra and RTA approved \$640,000 to fund the first year of service. If the service is successful and obtains enough riders, it is possible service could be extended for Sundays as well. However, Reile said that is a long way from being evaluated since Norfolk Southern uses the rails on the weekends for freight.

Reile said Norfolk Southern played a big role in making the service possible because Metra runs on the company's lines. Scheduling conflicts made it difficult for Metra to offer weekend service previously.

The line will run three inbound and three outbound trains on Saturdays. All-day passes will cost \$5, and as many as three children under 12 can ride for free with a paying adult.

The Saturday trains will make all of the regular stops and there will not be express trains, Reile said. The trains will depart from the 179th Street stop in Orland Park at 6:32 a.m., 11:17 a.m. and 3:32 p.m. At the 153rd Street station in Orland, the trains depart at 6:37 a.m., 11:22 a.m. and 3:37 p.m. The 143rd Street stop in Orland will depart at 6:40 a.m., 11:25 a.m. and 3:35 p.m.

The train will depart Palos Park Metra station at 6:46 a.m., 11:31 a.m. and 3:41 p.m. It will depart Palos Heights at 6:50 a.m., 11:35 a.m. and 3:45 p.m.

Trains will arrive at Union Station at 7:40 a.m., 12:25 p.m. and 4:40 p.m. The outbound trains will depart Union Station at 1:30 p.m., 5 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. A full schedule can be seen on metrarail.com.

"People in the region have been asking for years for service on Saturdays," Reile said.

"It's vital for our vitality and serving our community," Jones said.

Reile also said seniors can ride the Saturday trains for free with a RTA ID. The identification cards can be obtained by going online at rtachicago.com or by calling the RTA travel information center at 836-7000. The number is applicable from any area code and any questions on ID's, times, connections and more can be answered.

Metra is also offering a weekday mid-day train on the SouthWest Service line that will begin Monday, March 23, Reile said. The train will depart Union Station at 12:35 p.m. and arrive in Manhattan at 1:57 p.m.

This is part of the March 12, 2009 online edition of The Regional.

City bus companies may merge by July

BY SUSAN BROWN
sbrown@nwtimes.com
219.836.3780 | Saturday, February 07, 2009 |

HAMMOND | The Northwest Indiana Regional Bus Authority will meet next week with Hammond officials on a transition plan to consolidate the Gary, Hammond and East Chicago transit services as instructed by the Northwest Indiana Regional Development Authority.

RBA Executive Director Tim Brown said while he and Hammond officials have had some preliminary discussions, they will hold their first formal meeting on Wednesday.

Expected to participate are representatives of Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr., the City Council, Hammond Transit and its contracted bus provider, First Transit.

Brown said a transition plan involves multiple issues. Each transit service's property assets, personnel and contractual obligations need to be determined as part of the consolidation, he said.

Brown said he already has met with Gary Mayor Rudy Clay, only part of the board of the Gary Public Transportation Corp. and a financial consultant.

"The mayor himself does not control the board," Brown said. "They are a separate entity."

The board members present at the meeting had many questions and left the meeting saying they would get back with him, Brown said.

Hammond Transit Director Keith Matasovsky said the consolidation plan differs from that presented to the City Council last year where the RBA proposed taking over the bus systems gradually over a three- or four-year period.

Since then, Hammond Transit lost its bid to be funded through 2009. Service in Hammond has been reduced and is set to end entirely by July 1. "We (now) want to do it before Hammond goes out of business," Matasovsky said.

In not funding bus service with tax dollars this year, McDermott and the council had agreed to support it with gaming dollars through June in anticipation of the RBA receiving funding to regionalize bus transportation.

Most recently, at the council's first meeting Jan. 12, a motion to adopt a resolution sponsored by 2nd District Councilman Al Salinas in support of a food and beverage tax to support bus service failed to even

receive a second.

"I was dumbfounded," Matasovsky said. "I have no clue why that didn't pass."

When Northwest Indiana Community Action shut down its on-demand service last week, the first of the area's bus services to fold, Matasovsky registered dismay. "It's looking more discouraging that it has looked to me for a while," he said.

He questioned why the RDA's millions hadn't been specifically allocated toward its four-fold mission, which included the Gary airport, South Shore rail, busing and the Marquette Greenway project.

"Then there would be no need to pass new taxes," he said of the funding quagmire the RBA is facing.

Stop for popular buses to New York moved again

**Timothy Warren Washington Times
Tuesday, February 10, 2009**

Two bus lines made popular by their inexpensive District-to-New York City fares were forced Monday to move their pickup and drop-off spots from G Street Northwest to the former Convention Center site.

"That spot proved to be too disruptive to people who lived on that street, so we worked," said John Lisle, D.C. Department of Transportation spokesman.

Megabus and BoltBus have been operating in the District only since spring 2008, but this marks the second time the city has moved them.

For the past six weeks, the Greyhound-owned BoltBus and Coach USA-owned Megabus used a section of G Street Northwest, in front of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library. However, they were forced to move because of complaints by nearby residents, city officials said. Prior to that, the companies operated on 11th Street Northwest near the Metro Center, which was causing problems with the Metro Bus service at the site.

Both lines have experienced rapid growth since arriving, with round-trip fares to New York City ranging from \$1 one-way to \$40 round-trip.

Megabus, for example, has transported nearly 250,000 passengers since starting service in the District in June 2008. The company handles 10 daily arrivals and departures.

"We've seen steady growth," said Dale Moser, president of Coach USA. "Obviously there is a travel and passenger need for what we are providing. It is

something that is easy to access, and people still want to travel even though they have to stretch their dollar."

Mr. Lisle said the latest deal was made with help from D.C. Council member Jack Evans, Ward 2 Democrat, and the office of Mayor Adrian M. Fenty, Democrat.

Mr. Moser said he also worked with city officials on the move to the former Convention Center site, now a 10-acre parking lot one block from the Metro Center subway station, at New York Avenue and Ninth Street Northwest.

Other companies that run similar routes from the District will not move to the former Convention Center site, including New Century Travel, which started before 2008 and will continue operating from H Street Northwest, in Chinatown.

The former Convention Center site is planned for redevelopment as D.C. City Center. Construction is expected to begin this year, which could result in yet another depot change for the buses.

"Obviously the redevelopment of that site could be involved in determining how long they will be there," Mr. Lisle said.

Coach America commits to 100 MCI coaches, takes delivery of first MCI® D4505s with seatbelts

SCHAUMBURG, IL — January 19, 2008 — Motor Coach Industries (MCI) has announced a 100-coach commitment from Coach America, a leading provider of ground transportation services in the U.S. Coach America said it plans to purchase both MCI D4505 and MCI® J4500 models to fulfill 2009 equipment upgrades across the U.S. New coaches will be used in a number of Coach America operations, including its Crew Transport division that provides employee transportation to industries such as rail, mining, oil and gas, airlines and construction.



"MCI is a good equipment choice for us," said George Maney, president of Coach America. "We value MCI's

product reliability and the aftermarket support required to keep the equipment running efficiently around the clock. We're committed to keeping our fleet current, while offering our customers the latest in safety, performance and accessibility features."

Already, MCI has delivered 24 MCI D4505 coaches to Coach America's Gillette, Wyoming, location. Coach America will use the new coaches, the first D4505 models MCI has equipped with three-point seatbelts, for certain employee-transportation contracts.

The new D4505s, equipped with Cummins engines and Allison transmissions, feature seatbelt-compatible Amaya seats. While there are currently no regulations requiring seatbelts in passenger coaches, Coach America ordered the option to respond to a customer request.

"Coach America is a highly regarded, progressive industry leader that puts a strong emphasis on providing safe, dependable, high-quality service to its customers," said Tom Sorrells, MCI president and CEO. "In many ways, Coach America is reshaping the industry. Its Crew Transport division is mapping out new markets, making the motor coach a more viable transportation choice for corporations and their employees. We're proud to be their lead supplier."

Coach America, based in Dallas, provides transportation services including charter, contract transportation, sight-seeing tours, and casino and airport shuttles in 22 states. It operates the second-largest fleet in the U.S. with over 3,000 vehicles, including over 1,600 motorcoaches. Coach America reports that it maintains a number-one position in most of the 30 major markets where it operates in the western, southeastern and mid-Atlantic regions of the U.S.

Anchor Trailways takes first new MCI models; marks 20th anniversary

SCHAUMBURG, IL — January 26, 2009 — Anchor Trailways of Tennessee has built its reputation as a superior provider of ground transportation with a fleet of mostly MCI pre-owned coaches. Now, as the company anticipates greater growth in its 20th year, Anchor has decided to add two new clean-diesel MCI® D4505 Fast Track coaches, its first new coaches in about 10 years and its first-ever new MCIs.

"By the way our business is moving, we wanted to buy new coaches," said Jared Stancil, vice president of Anchor Trailways and nephew of John Stancil, owner and founder. "We have doubled our fleet in the past couple of years with gently-used MCI D models. We count on the model's reliability and MCI parts support. Our drivers and mechanics like the D as well. Now, with the new models, we can promote clean-diesel engine technology, as we see that becoming more important to our corporate and contract customers."



Serving Tennessee, Northwest Alabama, and Western Kentucky, Anchor is based in metropolitan Nashville, and has additional offices and service centers in Tuscumbia, Alabama, and Paducah, Kentucky. All together, the company operates a fleet of 80 coaches, plus other vehicles, and employs more than 100 people.

Anchor's business is comprised of tour, charter and contract work, including serving the Department of Defense. "We've grown our business by continually seeking out new opportunities," said Mark Szyperki, director of Business Development. Creativity is a big part of the company's strategy. Its Holiday World Express trip takes travelers to Santa Claus, Indiana, in the summer, and the company sees continued growth in schedule and contract service, now accounting for 30 percent of its business.

A Trailways member since 2000, Anchor takes advantage of the benefits, tapping into GPS provisions and other value services offered by the organization. The company is an active member of the United Motorcoach Association, Alabama Motorcoach Association and the Tennessee Motor Coach Association, where Jared serves on the board of directors.

To learn more visit, www.anchortrailways.com.

Setra Operator Northeast Trailways Acquires Richards Coach

Greensboro, N.C. (February 4, 2009) — Northeast Trailways of Lewiston, Maine announced the acquisition of Richards Coach. The union of the two companies allows Northeast Trailways to expand its customer base in the southeast region of Maine, while continuing to grow its clientele in central Maine.



Northeast Trailways was established in January 1999 as a transport service for Sunday River Ski Resort guests with one van, a mini-bus and a single full-size coach. Northeast Trailways has since grown to include a full range of charter services to individuals and groups of any size for all occasions. Today Northeast Trailways' Setra fleet consists of three Setra S 417 motorcoaches, two Setra S 217s and three Setra S 215s among others.

"The acquisition of Richards Coach was a perfect fit for our company and allows us to grow our client base throughout Maine," said Scott A. Riccio, President of Northeast Trailways. "Our fleet of Setra motorcoaches also allows us to differentiate ourselves from our competitors. Our customers prefer and routinely ask specifically for our Setra motorcoaches."

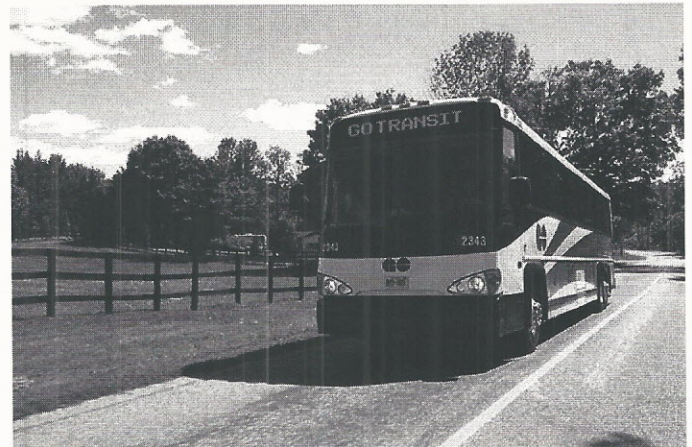
Northeast Trailways is the official transportation provider for the Portland Seadogs, the Double-A affiliate of the Boston Red Sox, as well as the Lewiston Maineiacs hockey team of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League.

Northeast Trailways is a member of the United Motorcoach Association, American Bus Association, the New England Bus Association, the Androscoggin County Chamber of Commerce, Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce, Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Portland. Northeast Trailways operates a safe and dependable operation meeting all state, federal and USDOT requirements. Northeast Trailways has been an approved Department of Defense certified operator since 2004.

Toronto's GO Transit gets two MCI Hybrids as part of 21 Commuter Coach delivery

SCHAUMBURG, IL — March 2, 2009 — GO Transit, the Province of Ontario's public transit system serving the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, has taken delivery of 21 new Commuter Coaches from Motor Coach Industries. Two of them feature hybrid diesel-electric technology.

The two MCI Hybrid commuter coaches represent a step toward GO Transit's Strategic Plan, GO 2020, which calls, among other things, for the agency to serve as an environmental role model and reduce the carbon footprint of its passengers. MCI introduced the new-generation Hybrid last year. Based on the all-time best-selling MCI D-Series coaches, the exceptionally quiet MCI Hybrid coach is equipped with a smaller clean-diesel Cummins engine and an Allison Electric Drive Propulsion System. GO Transit's other 19 new MCI Commuter Coaches are D4500 powered by clean-diesel engines and Allison transmissions.



GO Transit's new coaches feature 57 comfortable, forward-facing seats, overhead airflow controls, reading lights and other comforts designed to attract suburban and other distance commuters. GO Transit was the first agency to purchase the new-look D4500 when they debuted in 2005. The agency favors the MCI D4500 for its elegant BMW Designworks-styled exterior, upscale passenger appeal and overall build quality.

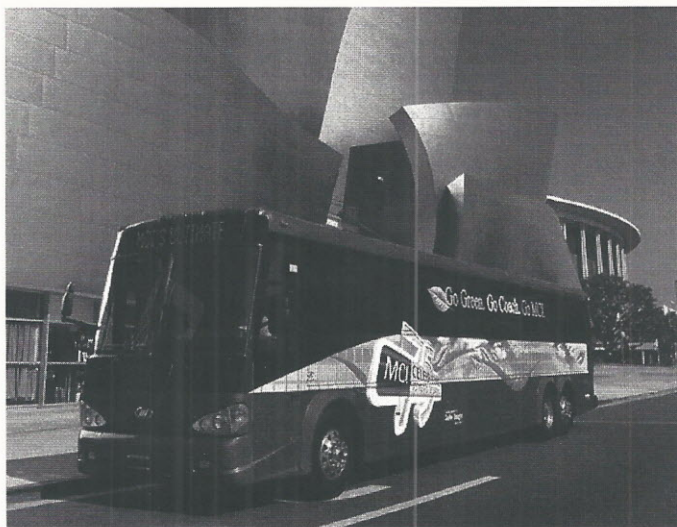
"GO Transit is the first agency in Canada to put our Hybrid to work," said Michael Melaniphy, MCI vice president, Public Sector. "It shows a deepening of their commitment to protecting the environment — something for which, by having created a world-class transit system, they've already earned a lot of credibility. Hybrid or new clean-diesel, we're proud to be a part of it."

GO Transit is Canada's first provincially created and funded transit agency, serves a population of six million and carries more than 215,000 riders a day on trains and buses combined. Currently, GO's fleet of 384 buses, of

which 320 are made by MCI, carry about 35,000 bus riders a day.

Driving safety: MCI adds Electronic Stability Control to D4505, D4005, Commuter Coach models

SCHAUMBURG, IL — February 17, 2009 — Since its inception, MCI's D-Series has appealed to drivers, delivering performance and reliability that has made it the industry's all-time best-selling coach. Now drivers and owners will gain even more confidence from the model. MCI is adding Meritor WABCO Electronic Stability Control System (ESC) to its Commuter Coach, D4505 and other D-Series coach models coming off line April 2009.



A cutting-edge safety technology, ESC assists the driver when vehicle stability enters a critical area in dangerous road or traffic conditions.

There are three components to the system that all work together to improve vehicle handling. ESC combines Roll Stability Control (RSC) along with the added directional stability system which enhances driver control in slippery conditions. This system is integrated into the existing Meritor WABCO six channel Anti-lock Braking System (ABS).

ESC, like ABS, is automatic. ESC becomes active when the Electronic Control Unit senses instabilities in cornering, sudden changes in direction, dangerous conditions like slippery lanes, and avoidance maneuvers. If the coach is sliding in a curve, for example, ESC works to correct the orientation by automatically applying brakes on the appropriate wheels, performing faster and more effectively than what a driver is able to achieve manually. The system also detects rollover thresholds and actively slows the vehicle when those thresholds are exceeded.

An indicator lamp on the dash lets the driver know that ESC is available when needed, and drivers will notice a difference when ESC is functioning. When activated, such as after rapid lane changes or cornering on slippery surfaces, the driver must continue to steer and use the brake pedal or accelerator as may be appropriate and/or necessary under the circumstances. ESC is not a substitute for the driver. Instead, by automatically adjusting engine torque, engaging the engine brake, and/or selectively applying the brakes, it assists the driver to bring the vehicle back to its intended direction, thus helping the driver control the coach without compromising the smooth, steady MCI ride.

"The system improves vehicle performance," said Michael Melaniphy, MCI vice president, public sector. "It's a great tool. ESC is part of MCI's continuing commitment to coach improvement and is the newest part of what makes our coaches the best on the roads today."

Meritor WABCO is one of the world's leading providers of electronic braking, stability, suspension and transmission automation systems for heavy-duty commercial vehicles.

Royal Star Hawaii strikes gold with six new MCI® E4500 coaches, first in fleet to feature clean-engine technology

SCHAUMBURG, IL — February 18, 2009 — How do you exceed the expectations of passengers already primed for top Oahu resorts and unforgettable scenery? If you're Royal Star Hawaii Motorcoach Tours & Destination Services, you make sure they ride in absolute luxury aboard an MCI E4500. And you make sure your equipment is in pristine condition — which is why Royal Star has added six new E4500 coaches to its fleet.



Royal Star was one of the first companies to buy the E4500, formerly named the Renaissance, after the model debuted in Hawaii during ABA's annual meeting in 1996. Royal Star was so impressed, it bought 12. Today, its fleet of E4500 models stands at 22, all 5 years old or newer.

"We love the E," said Marc Rubenstein, vice president and general manager of Royal Star Hawaii, who witnessed the model's unveiling. "It is a beautifully designed, solid, reliable luxury coach. Together with our emphasis on unparalleled service, the E differentiates us from other Hawaii operators. Every time we go to ABA's marketplace or an industry event, it's great fun to run through the E4500 and ask, 'Okay, what's new that we can use to update our fleet?'"

What's new for Royal Star's latest coaches is even more luxury. Innovative handling and safety features on Royal Star's 2009 MCI E4500s include wide-ride suspension, electronic stability control, a reverse sensing system and an upgraded SmarTire® pressure monitoring system — all standard. Other standard upgrades include a multi-function steering wheel, enhanced lighting with soft-start, fade-off fluorescent aisle lighting, and a Blaupunkt Pro-Line System that offers concert-hall sound and 15-inch, flat-screen video monitors.

Royal Star selected a Cummins engine and Allison Transmission powertrain combination, Amaya Brasil seats with self-retracting footrests, and Aesys destination signs. "We bought Michelin tires, and with the wide-ride suspension, it rides like a dream," said Rubenstein.

The new, clean-diesel engine technology is an additional benefit, according to Rubenstein. "Hawaii's clients are very eco-conscious so the environmental advantages have become a selling point."

Tourism industry veteran Ron Howard established Royal Star Hawaii in 1996 to complement Star of Honolulu Cruises & Events, which has grown to include four cruise ships and recently celebrated 50 years in business. The current fleet of 40 vehicles is split into two categories — the deluxe line of Royal Star E coaches, and Superstar, for budget-conscious customers. "Our business strategy is to offer a choice of vehicles, price groupings and services to fit everyone's needs," said Rubenstein. "But no matter what, you're getting the same high quality service, clean, superbly-maintained vehicles and Aloha Driven drivers. It's a strategy that works very well for both us and our clients." To learn more, visit RoyalStarHawaii.com.

OC Transpo Takes Delivery of First Two Orion VII Diesel-Electric Hybrids with Lithium-Ion Technology

ORISKANY, N.Y. (Nov. 18, 2008) —OC Transpo, the urban transit service for the City of Ottawa, ushered in a new era of technology as it took delivery of two Orion VII diesel-electric hybrids with new lithium-ion energy storage systems from Daimler Buses North America. The two are the first of an order of 202 that will be delivered over the course of the next two years.

The first two Orion VII hybrids delivered will be running

in Ottawa on a pilot basis. Councillor Alex Cullen, chairman of the transit committee, said the city wants to ensure the buses will operate well in this climate and geography. He noted that they have operated well in New York, which began using hybrids in 1998 and now has over 800 in service.

Councillor Cullen noted the buses would also bring environmental and economic benefits, including a reduction in fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions.



The Orion VII hybrids use up to 35 percent less fuel, and the entire fleet is expected to reduce carbon emissions by over 5,000 tons annually, depending on the duty cycle in which the buses operate.

"We are confident that the two Orion VII hybrids with lithium-ion technology will perform well in the pilot test as well as the other 202 buses for this order," said Patrick Scully, chief commercial officer for Daimler Buses North America. "The Orion VII bus with lithium-ion technology will help reduce costs over the vehicle's life as it requires no battery conditioning and will assist in keeping operating costs low."

About Lithium-Ion Technology:

Introduced into production in 2008, the lithium-ion energy storage system is over 3,000 pounds less than the previous design resulting in improved carrying capacity and better fuel economy. The six year design life is twice as long as the previous design and is backed by a two-year standard or five-year extended warranty. The lithium-ion energy storage system provides the best power and energy density of battery technology today.

China gets rail project in Mecca (China Daily)

China is to sign a deal with Saudi Arabia to build a light rail system in Mecca to help transport millions of pilgrims, a senior diplomat said.

Yang Honglin, Chinese ambassador to Saudi Arabia, told China Daily the deal will be signed "soon" but he didn't confirm whether it would be done during President

Hu Jintao's three-day visit to the country, which started yesterday.

"China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) is now talking with the Saudi Arabian authorities about the deal," Yang said.

CRCC, along with a Saudi Arabian company and a French transport company, will finish the project in 2013, International Islamic News Agency reported.

A source with the Foreign Ministry said CRCC's deal is worth \$1.77 billion. But the company yesterday refused to confirm that figure.

With a speed of 360 km p h the rail line will be able to take pilgrims from Mecca to Medina, the two holiest sites in Islam, in just half an hour, it said.

It will be able to "rapidly evacuate the crowd at the peak of the Hajj pilgrimage", Yang said.

According to Yang, Saudi Arabia entrusted the Chinese government to designate a Chinese enterprise for the project last month. It was the first inter-governmental project between the two countries after they agreed to consolidate cooperation on infrastructure construction last summer.

Saudi media reported last October that their government intended to invest \$5.3 billion in five light rail systems linking key locations of the annual Hajj pilgrimage in west Saudi Arabia, including Mecca, Mina and the Hill of Arafat.

The lines will reportedly be able to carry 5 million pilgrims.

Visit of cooperation

Hu's ongoing visit to the country is his second in three years and is the first trip overseas he has made this year.

"This reflects that the Chinese leadership highly values the strategic friendly relations with Saudi Arabia," Yang said.

It was reported China Petroleum & Chemical Corp, Asia's biggest oil processor, and Saudi Aramco, the world's largest oil exporter, may sign crude supply and refinery service accords during Hu's visit.

Saudi Arabia has been the largest overseas supplier of crude oil to China.

Colorado a popular choice for Expo Light Rail route

By Melody Hanatani

February 13, 2009

OLYMPIC BLVD — It happens every day before and after school, groups of young children walking up and down the busy corridor here, carrying backpacks and chatting as cars speed by.

While it's hardly the most pedestrian-oriented street, parents at Crossroads School fear that it will be even less so if Olympic Boulevard is chosen as the route for the anticipated Exposition Light Rail when it comes to Downtown Santa Monica from Culver City.

Parents and administrators of the private school, which has two campuses along the boulevard, came out in full force at the City Council meeting earlier this week when Expo authorities briefed officials on the results of the Draft Environmental Impact Report in which the different alignments were discussed.

MTA authorities are expected to select an alignment following the 45-day comment period for the DEIR.

The report, which was released last month, explored four different route options, including two that would travel along the Metropolitan Transportation Authority-owned right-of-way, which hits various Los Angeles streets before branching off to either Colorado Avenue or Olympic Boulevard, and another set that would divert from the right-of-way and take Venice Boulevard to Sepulveda Boulevard before traveling down either Colorado or Olympic.

Any route that would take Olympic would require the rail to go above grade with an elevated station at the current Sears automotive site on Fourth Street and Colorado.

The overwhelming sentiment among councilmember's and residents at the meeting was that Colorado was the preferred alternative.

"We need to look carefully at the fact that it wouldn't be in the best interest of children ... to have those rail lines running along the middle of Olympic Boulevard," Mary Farrell, a crossroads parent and trustee, said.

In addition to both Crossroads campuses, Olympic is also home to the Police Activities League, which is an afterschool program, and Memorial Park, which has a skate park and hosts youth baseball games.

Liz Resnick, the upper school director for Crossroads, pointed out that many students travel back and forth between the two campuses throughout the day since the athletic facilities are located on the north side of Olympic. She added that the school uses the median, which would get taken out, for emergency evacuation.

The Exposition Construction Authority is in the process of constructing the first phase of the project, which will take the light rail from Downtown Los Angeles to Culver City, costing approximately \$868 million. The second phase, which would bring Expo to Downtown Santa Monica, is estimated to be completed in 2015 and cost anywhere from \$932 million to \$1.4 billion, depending on the alternative.

Taking Colorado would cost about \$50 million less than Olympic, Expo authorities said.

The Olympic alternative has also received opposition from the Santa Monica Treesavers because of the proposed removal of 44 coral trees along the landscaped median.

"San Vicente (boulevard) to the north and Olympic to the south define and give identity to the city with the wonderful line of coral trees," said Gillian Ware, an artist and tree advocate.

The Colorado alignment would remove one travel lane in each direction, eliminate parking on one side and could require property acquisition.

Expo authorities are also looking into opening a maintenance yard at the current Verizon site, which is between the right-of-way and Exposition Boulevard. The facility would be used to check trains' brakes, horns and lights. The site is near residences.

Councilmember Bobby Shriver said he was shocked to see a maintenance yard proposed for that section of the city.

"We should do whatever we can to prevent that from happening," he said. "It seems to me if Verizon sells that property; we should buy it and build some housing there."

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Hampton Roads public transportation plan unveiled

By Debbie Messina
The Virginian-Pilot
© February 13, 2009

Transportation planners have drafted a long-term blueprint for public transit in the region, including enhanced bus service, expanded light rail, and new ferry and commuter rail service.

The "Transit Vision Plan for Hampton Roads," released Thursday, does not offer price tags or ways to pay for the projects. Costs and ridership estimates will be developed over the next several months.

Current transit offerings have been called skeletal by Hampton Roads Transit's president, Michael Townes. Many buses run only hourly, and large chunks of the region are not served.

The new plan is far more extensive than anything discussed in the past.

The core of the proposal is a light-rail network in the urban areas supported by express bus and bus rapid transit - buses that run on dedicated lanes - in the suburban areas. Commuter rail would bring workers

from the suburbs to the commercial cores, and intercity passenger rail would connect Hampton Roads to Richmond and beyond.

Among the specific proposals:

- Extending the light-rail line now under construction in Norfolk to Norfolk Naval Station, the Virginia Beach Oceanfront, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk and the Peninsula.
- Building commuter rail between Norfolk and North Carolina through Chesapeake and between downtown Portsmouth and downtown Suffolk.
- Running ferry service connecting Norfolk with Hampton and Newport News until light rail can cross the harbor.
- Implementing a bus rapid-transit line at the Oceanfront in Virginia Beach.
- Establishing an intermodal transportation hub near Harbor Park in Norfolk linking light rail, commuter rail and bus lines.
- Expanding express bus routes.

Robert Case, a transportation engineer who manages the study for the Hampton Roads Metropolitan Planning Organization, said there is growing political interest in shifting resources from highway projects to transit. He said such a shift would be a "sea change" and would require changes in land use and funding priorities. The plan calls for creating higher-density and mixed-use development patterns in some areas to support an expanded transit network.

"The plan is intended to identify those locations so the cities and counties, if they want these things, can make their land-use decisions accordingly," Case said.

It's projected that about 820,000 residents would live close enough to use the higher-speed transit services. In South Hampton Roads, about 320,000 residents would live within walking distance of an expanded light-rail system.

Funded by the state, the \$400,000 study was developed by consultants and managed by the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

"A broad and integrated regional transit network will increase mobility options, contribute to energy and natural resource conservation and strengthen the regional economy," the report states.

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Metro may be nearing deal on next 4 light rail lines

By ROSANNA RUIZ
Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle
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After two years of negotiations with two firms, the Metropolitan Transit Authority may be close to reaching a deal with a contractor to build and operate its next four light rail lines.

"We're in final negotiations," said George Smalley, a Metro spokesman. "In a negotiation, though, you never know until it's really over."

The pending breakthrough with Parsons Transportation Group comes three years before Metro has said all five of its additional rail lines will be complete. The fifth rail line, the University line, remains in preliminary stages of development; another agreement will have to be reached on that line.

Despite the tight time frame for the new lines, Metro officials say they are sticking to the 2012 target date.

Metro's Red Line, which runs along Main Street, has been operational since 2004.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority's board has to approve the contract, which will likely appear on this week's agenda, Smalley said.

Last April, Metro announced that Parsons Transportation Group would design, build, operate and maintain four of its rail lines after yearlong negotiations with Metro's first choice, Washington Group International, fell apart. In the end, WGI and Metro were "hundreds of millions" of dollars apart, Metro's President and CEO Frank J. Wilson said at the time.

Wilson declined to reveal WGI's estimate for the North, Southeast, East End and Uptown lines, but the figure was made known to Parsons.

An analysis prepared last year put the cost of all five new rail lines, including the longer and costlier University line, at \$2.6 billion.

Negotiations with Parsons covered maintenance and operation, elements not common in most rail contracts, industry sources said.

Any design flaws discovered during the first few years of operation will be taken care of by Parsons, Smalley said.

'Still set on that path'

Metro leaders remain confident that the five lines, which total 30 miles, can be completed on schedule.

"We're still set on that path," Smalley said, "but it doesn't mean it's going to be easy."

Valley Metro light rail in Phoenix opened its 20-mile, \$1.4 billion line in December after four years of construction.

Metro's negotiation process seems to have taken a reasonable length of time, given the scope of the project, said Henry Kay, a Maryland Transit Administration deputy administrator.

"I can see us easily taking that long to contract for far less value with far less at stake," Kay said. "They're making a commitment to provide service over many years."

Negotiations began in January 2007, when Metro announced WGI would be its builder. After the deal failed, Metro paid WGI \$77 million for its preliminary work which was handed over to Parsons. Metro has paid Parsons \$11.8 million for its work under a temporary agreement.

Among the "moving parts" involved in the deal include the unknown amount of funds Metro may receive in the stimulus package, Smalley said. Metro has requested \$410 million to help begin work on the North and Southeast lines and an additional \$70 million to convert high-occupancy vehicle lanes into toll lanes.

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Metro withholds rail deal's cost before vote

By ROSANNA RUIZ
Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle
March 3, 2009, 9:40PM

The Metropolitan Transit Authority continued to withhold the anticipated overall price tag on its next four light rail lines Tuesday in advance of Wednesday's board vote on a contract with Parsons Transportation Group.

Metro spokesman George Smalley said the cost, which he described only as "more than \$1 billion," would not be disclosed until just before the board of directors votes on the contract Wednesday afternoon.

An analysis prepared for Metro last year estimated the cost of the four rail lines, plus a fifth in a later stage of development, at \$2.6 billion. Last spring, Metro President and CEO Frank J. Wilson was emphatic that the overall cost of the five lines would not exceed \$3 billion.

Agency officials Tuesday evening released a 22-page executive summary stipulating that Metro will pay up to \$632 million to proceed with the project, but left blank the spaces for overall fixed costs of the East End, North, Southeast and Uptown rail lines. A planned fifth line, the University line, lags behind the other four and is not included in the contract.

The summary was Metro's first disclosure about any of the contract terms. Metro officials continued to insist Tuesday that the final scope and cost had not been finalized, even though the vote was moved up a day from Thursday. The board met in executive session to review the proposed contract Tuesday afternoon. Board Chairman David Wolff did not return calls for comment afterward.

Earlier this week, Wolff defended the agency's silence, saying negotiations likely would continue until the last possible moment before the vote and the terms likely would change.

Vote at 2 p.m. Wednesday

The board is scheduled to vote at 2 p.m. Wednesday at Metro's downtown office.

"If the public can't find out what's going on until two seconds before the board makes a decision, that's just too late," said Jennifer Peebles, of the nonpartisan Texas Watchdog. "If they are not giving details before the vote and not allowing us a chance to weigh in, they're making decisions in a bubble."

Robin Holzer, chairwoman of the Houston-based Citizens' Transportation Coalition, agreed.

"CTC members are eager for Houston to have more and better transit and this Metro contract is on the critical path to getting that done," she said. "So, we're very interested in the terms of the contract — what we're going to get and for how much."

Last April, Metro announced that Parsons Transportation Group would design, build, operate and maintain four of its rail lines after yearlong negotiations with the transit agency's first choice, Washington Group International, failed to result in an agreement. Metro and Washington Group parted ways still hundreds of millions of dollars apart, officials said then.

Metro leaders say all five planned lines — totaling nearly 30 miles — are scheduled for completion in 2012.

Four-part plan

According to the executive summary released Tuesday, the proposed agreement covers four areas and four contractors: Parsons Transportation Group will serve as the "facility provider," the overall project manager; HRT will be the design-builder; railcar manufacturer CAF USA Inc. will be the vehicle supplier; and Veolia Transportation, which operates systems in 150 cities in the United States and Canada, and Parsons will team up as the operations and maintenance contractor.

Parsons and Veolia will be required to operate and maintain the system for at least five years following completion of the project.

The proposed contract includes incentives and penalties, and sets out milestones for both Metro and its contractors.

Stimulus aid awarded

For example, Metro is required to order 103 rail cars, at a cost of \$3.15 million each. Failure to order all of the cars will result in a higher price per vehicle. Metro also must order the first car within 11 months or face cancellation of its contract with the vehicle supplier.

Designer HRT also would be able to terminate its contract if Metro fails to issue an order for the East End rail line by Aug. 31.

The proposal also sets a base subcontracting goal for small- and minority-owned businesses of 35.6 percent, or \$335 million. The maximum amount that can be subcontracted to small- or minority-owned businesses is \$940 million.

The proposed agreement states that Metro will finance the East End line. Financing for the other corridors will be arranged separately.

Metro has requested at least \$500 million from the Federal Transit Administration to help fund construction of the North and Southeast lines.

The federal government has awarded Metro \$92 million in economic stimulus funds to help jump-start construction on the rail lines.

In 2001, Metro spent \$300 million to build its 7.5-mile rail line along Main Street, which began operating three years later.

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Houston awards light rail expansion contract

06 Mar 2009 | *Railway Gazette*

USA: Houston's Metropolitan Transit Authority board of directors voted unanimously on March 4 to award a \$1.46bn design, build, operate and maintain contract covering the construction of four more light rail lines to the HRT joint venture headed by Parsons Transportation Group.

Following from the city's initial light rail line opened in 2004, the East End, Southeast, North and Uptown routes, totaling about 32 km, are expected to be completed and open for revenue service by the end of 2012. Parsons has been working on the projects for more than a year under an \$11.8m temporary contract. The initial phase of the main works contract will total \$632m. This includes \$90m for utilities diversion work on the North and Southeast corridors. Another \$390m will

fund construction of the East End corridor, and a maintenance facility.



Finally, \$118m has been allocated for purchase of 29 new low floor LRVs to be supplied by CAF USA. The first 10 of these cars are intended to operate the East End line, and the other 19 will increase capacity on the existing Main Street line.

A separate contract will be let for construction of the University line and an intermodal hub near the city centre.

The HRT joint venture consists of Parsons, Granite Construction, Kiewit Texas Construction and Stacy & Witbeck. HRT is expected to subcontract much of the operations and maintenance of the new lines to Veolia Transportation under an agreement which also provides a five-year warranty period for any design defects.

Higher fares proposed for Northstar Commuter Rail line

Trips from farthest stops to Minneapolis would cost 50 cents more than earlier plan

By Brady Gervais
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Posted: 02/18/2009 12:01:00 AM CST

Even before the first train has run, the cost to ride the Northstar rail line into downtown Minneapolis could jump 50 cents for commuters at its farthest stops.

The Metropolitan Council's transportation committee is proposing that one-way fares rise to \$8 for the trip from Big Lake into Minneapolis, up from \$7.50. The fare from Elk River would rise from \$5.50 to \$6. The rest of the fares would remain the same as they were in a plan rejected in the fall.

The 40-mile Northstar Commuter Rail line is expected to carry 5,000 passengers daily once it makes its debut late this year.

A proposal in September that would have set fares ranging from \$3.25 to \$7.50 one way was rejected after Met Council leaders said the prices were too low. Officials said then that they wanted the fares to cover about a third of the cost to operate the rail line — about what riders pay for other bus and light-rail services in the Twin Cities area.

But Northstar commuters would have to be charged \$10 for a one-way trip from Big Lake in order to get 30 percent "farebox recovery." The money generated from the newly proposed fares is projected to cover about 21 percent of the line's operation costs, Met Council officials. A Big Lake City Council member who sits on the Northstar Corridor Development Authority — which includes members from counties and cities along the rail line — expressed concern this fall about the \$7.50 fare. If gas prices stay low, riders from Big Lake would probably think twice before paying \$8 to travel on the line, Chuck Heitz said.

The new proposed fares along the route include:

- ☐ Big Lake: \$8
- ☐ Elk River: \$6
- ☐ Anoka: \$4
- ☐ Coon Rapids: \$4
- ☐ Fridley: \$3.25

Before deciding on the fares, the Met Council will vote Feb. 25 on public hearings.

The council will take up the fare issue again after the public comment period.

Brady Gervais can be reached at 651-228-2171.

Commuter rail plan to D/FW Airport chugs forward

BY LESLIE WIMMER Ft Worth Business Press
February 23, 2009

A commuter rail line designed to take Fort Worth residents to and from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport is moving closer to construction.

The Fort Worth Transportation Authority recently wrapped up the environmental phase of development on the rail line, called the Southwest to Northeast Rail project, which has been in the works since the mid-'90s. The commuter rail line is planned to run on already existing, lightly-used freight rail lines, and will start its service near Sycamore School Road in southwest Fort Worth, said Dick Ruddell, president of the Transportation Authority. The line will then move through the Texas Christian University area and into Downtown, then head northeast into downtown Grapevine, and end at the north entrance to D/FW Airport.

Once the line reaches D/FW Airport, it will meet up with a Dallas Area Rapid Transit light rail line to connect passengers to Dallas' public transportation network as well, Ruddell said.

"The plans for the Southwest to Northeast project started several years ago when the North Central Texas Council of Governments and the Regional Transportation Council did a study of regional rail and regional transit and what was needed," Ruddell said. "This Southwest to Northeast corridor was identified as a high-ridership and low-cost and highly likely and viable to undertake." The latest cost estimate for the project is \$471 million, Ruddell said, and that amount is due to be updated later this spring.

The majority of that money will be spent on equipment purchases, improvements to existing rail lines, construction of new rail lines where they are needed, and for work on signals on the rail line, Ruddell said. A small portion of the money has also been set aside for land purchases and construction at rail stops.

The money will come from several sources, Ruddell said, including sales tax revenue from the city of Grapevine, sales tax revenue from the Transportation Authority, about \$20 million from a transportation bond package passed in 2007, about \$60 million from the North Central Texas Council of Governments, grant funds from the Texas Mobility Fund, and funds from a federal grant program.

The corridor's estimated completion date is between 2012 and 2013.

The Southwest to Northeast corridor is one route that will make up the 250 miles of regional rail planned in the Texas Local Option Transportation Act, formerly known as the Rail North Texas project, said Fort Worth City Council member Jungus Jordan.

The Rail North Texas initiative took on a new name Feb. 16, when State Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, filed the Texas Local Option Transportation Act in the State Legislature.

The Act would give counties the ability to hold a bond-style vote with residents to choose types of funding options to take on to pay for needed transportation projects.

Some funding options North Texas officials have chosen as possibilities are a drivers license fee, a motor vehicle registration fee, a new resident impact fee, and others. "Here is essentially the philosophy of what we're doing on the Local Option Transportation scenario, we will use both federal and state funds, if stimulus money comes forth for rail or transit, we would use that as well, and we would use the local option referendum or local option bond package as either the supplement or a last resort funding source" for the 250-mile rail project, Jordan said. "We want to make sure we have efficiently used all other available money before we go to the bond package for local voters."

For now, the Southwest to Northeast Rail line is planned to carry 15,000 commuters per day, Ruddell said. In

comparison, the Trinity Railway Express currently is carrying 11,000 commuters per day.

The type of rail car that would run on the line has not been chosen yet, Ruddell said. Currently, the Transportation Authority is looking into a Diesel Motor Unit, which is a self-propelled train as opposed to rail cars that have to be pulled by a locomotive.

During the early stages of operation, the Transportation Authority may operate the two-level Trinity Railway Express cars for a time, Ruddell said.

The self-propelled trains would look similar to DART light-rail vehicles.

In the long-term, Ruddell said, the Southwest to Northeast Rail line is intended to help traffic congestion between Fort Worth and D/FW Airport, and to increase air quality.

"Our roads, our major highways, are crowded now. They're congested now during the peak hours, plus our Metroplex is projected to double in population by 2030," Ruddell said. "In 20 years, we're going to have twice as many people as we do now and we don't have the room to build twice as many highways. Even if we did, they would be crowded. We have to find some kinds of alternative transportation besides highways. When you get to this level of congestion and size we need alternatives and the earlier the better. The longer we wait, the more expensive it's going to be, and the more congestion we'll have."

On the Web: www.sw2nerail.com

WSTA will switch to hybrid buses

Diesel-electric vehicles will reduce pollution while doubling fuel mileage

By Paul Garber | Winston-Salem Journal Reporter
Published: March 1, 2009

The Winston-Salem Transit Authority is buying 10 new diesel-electric buses, the first step in a plan to replace its fleet of 52 with the more energy-efficient hybrids.

Transit officials like the hybrids because they use less fuel and put fewer pollutants into the air.

"It's a new era for us, and we're going to be totally committed to that technology from now on," said WSTA director Art Barnes.

It will take several years to overhaul the entire fleet, Barnes said. The federal government will help pay for buses after they've been on the road for 12 years, Barnes said. The last time the city bought buses was in 2001.

The buses are made by Gillig, a California manufacturer, and use a transmission made by GM-Allison. The battery

is on the top rear of the bus connected by wires to the engine below.

The buses could improve air quality in Forsyth County at a critical time, said Pat Reagan, the director of monitoring at the county's environmental-affairs office.

The Triad is close to landing on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's list of counties with dirty air. Guilford and Davidson are already on that list. Once a county falls into the so-called nonattainment category, it can lead to restrictions on area businesses, Reagan said.

The arrival of the 10 new buses should help remove hundreds of pounds of pollutants from the air, he said.

"It does make a difference," he said. "Any little reduction could mean the difference between being an attainment area or a nonattainment area."

The agency has used computer models to estimate how much emissions will be reduced by the new buses, and plan to do testing on the real buses once they arrive, Reagan said.

It's not the first time that WSTA has tried the hybrid buses. The agency bought two prototype buses in 2004 and ran them on routes that served Winston-Salem State University. Those buses were eventually taken off the road because they were so often in need of repairs, usually involving their electrical systems.

The technology has improved in the five years since, Barnes said. "We've learned our lesson about waiting for technology to be tested," he said.

To make sure, WSTA's maintenance director, John Ashford, traveled to Seattle last spring to research its fleet of more than 200 hybrid buses similar to what WSTA is buying.

Ashford was looking at how reliable the buses were, what kind of mileage they were getting, and the costs to maintain them.

"They seemed to have performed as well as a regular diesel bus," Ashford said.

GM-Allison had a demonstration bus for a day in Winston-Salem last year. WSTA ran that one on a route to the mall, and it performed well, Ashford said.

At low speeds, the buses rely mostly on battery power, but their diesel engines take over as they pick up speed, Ashford said.

WSTA was accepted into a program under which the federal government will pay 90 percent of the cost for each of the new buses, which cost \$547,700 each. The state and the city will split the remaining 10 percent of the cost, Barnes said.

The federal government usually pays 80 percent of the price of a bus, but it pays more for the hybrids because of their environmental and fuel-economy advantages, Barnes said.

As of October 2007, only five of the 818 buses in the state's urban-transportation bus fleet were hybrid diesel-electric buses, according to a report by the N.C. Transit Alternative Fuels Committee. The national figure was 2 percent to 3 percent, but more than 20 percent of new buses on order were for hybrids, according to the report.

When the WSTA board made the decision to buy the buses, the price of diesel fuel was closer to \$4 a gallon than it is now. But Barnes said that the buses will still be cheaper to run. Currently, the city's buses get about 3.5 miles a gallon and Barnes said he expects the hybrids to get about double that amount.

The 10 new buses could arrive by the end of the year, he said.

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HART Plans To Order New Buses With Stimulus Funds

By RICH SHOPES | The Tampa Tribune

Published: February 24, 2009

Updated: 02/24/2009 01:04 pm

TAMPA - Bus riders will get a smoother ride next year thanks to millions in federal stimulus funds.

Hillsborough Area Regional Transit is poised to get \$15.1 million and says it will use some of the cash to buy 29 buses and refurbish 124 others.

If approved Monday by its governing board, HART will order the buses right away to take delivery next year. The agency also plans to install shelters and benches at more stops and fix up its maintenance yard on 21st Avenue.

"What this really does is give us a lot more options. We were facing some pretty tough deficits in terms of shortfalls in our capital funding," HART executive director David Armijo said.

Successive funding shortages pushed HART's bus rotation schedule two years behind, also triggering higher operational costs.

Buses typically have a 500,000-mile lifespan. Exceeding that can cause maintenance and fuel expenses to increase because older buses are more prone to breakdowns and less efficient than new vehicles.

The buses will be introduced across HART's service area.

Riders will notice immediate differences. For one thing, the vehicles will be lower to the ground to make it easier to board for people in wheelchairs or pushing strollers. They'll also have more seat padding and improved suspensions for a smoother ride.

"We anticipate a 10 to 15 percent increase in fuel economy," maintenance chief Philip Hale said.

In a separate move, HART last August ordered 28 buses to replace some vehicles. Those will arrive this fall. Between the two orders, "this will get us up to date," Armijo said.

HART ridership has grown on average 7 percent a year over the past five years. The agency projects it will expand its fleet from 234 buses to 400 buses, or by 71 percent, in the next 10 years.

Reporter Rich Shopes can be reached at (813) 259-7633

Capital Metro rail to start on time -- but trains could be limited

05:54 PM CST on Friday, February 27, 2009
By JIM BERGAMO
KVUE News

The Capital Metro rail line from Leander to downtown Austin remains scheduled to begin March 30, but there is a possibility that technical difficulties could limit the number of trains put into service that day.

Friday night marks the last chance to attend an open house for Capital Metro rail, but it's the first time some commuters learned of possible safety issues at certain intersections.

Maria and David Stephen lined up an hour early for the Capital Metro rail open house.

"The size, the color, it's just fantastic, something I want to be in," Maria Stephen said.

"There's been such a great interest since we've had these open houses; people can see a train at a station, the reality has set in and we're looking forward to giving commuters a new option," Capital Metro Spokesman Adam Shaivitz said.

But often new things bring problems. Capital Metro says one involves what's called signal pre-emption technology -- where if a train approaches an intersection it will activate the traffic signal to allow any car trapped on the tracks to get a green light and move forward.

It's similar to what happened earlier in February at 53rd and Airport when some vehicles became trapped on the tracks when all the gates went down. Police had to manually lift the gates to free the drivers. Capital Metro says all eight intersections along Airport Blvd. -- from I-

35 and the Hancock Center to Lamar -- have signal preemption problems.

"So what we're doing is when the trains are out there testing, we're placing our APD officers who work security for Capital Metro as an added safety precaution to make sure there aren't any issues with cars stopping on the tracks," Shaivitz said.

There's also an issue with shunting -- shunting occurs when the train wheel actually touches the track, completing an electrical current which allows the signal systems to operate and allows dispatchers to see where the trains are at all times. Capital Metro says there are some intermittent shunting problems at random locations. The Stephens' seem to disagree on how commuters would react to any possible delays or reduction in trains that may result from those problems.

"The way they set it up, there's supposed to be a lot of trains to move a lot of people, and it's kind of wasting our money if it can't operate like it was planned," David Stephen said.

"I'm a little concerned, but with anything new you're going to have a problem that's going to have to be corrected," Maria Stephen said.

If problems persist, Capital Metro says it could use a fleet-in and fleet-out schedule, where only southbound trains from Leander to downtown would run in the morning and only northbound trains, from downtown Austin to Leander, would run in the evening.

At the moment Capital Metro is still planning to run all of its train routes come March 30.

March start for passenger rail likely as feds give OK

By Ben Wear
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF
Sunday, March 01, 2009
Originally published Sept. 30, 2008

Federal regulators are no longer standing in the way of Capital Metro opening its passenger rail line.

March is the likely opening date now for the Leander-to-downtown Austin rail project, about a year later than original estimates. One of the feared reasons for delay - a lack of federal permission - was cleared up Monday. That means that Capital Metro board members, when they meet Wednesday to set a tentative opening date, will be looking only at construction timelines to determine when to cut the blue ribbon.

The federal approval was an issue because of concerns that the Swiss-made, light-rail-style cars might not be sturdy enough to run on tracks shared with freight trains. But Federal Railroad Administration and Capital Metro officials said Monday they have agreed that as soon as possible the transit agency will design and install a steel cage to surround fuel tanks on its six trains, tanks that

the railroad administration said in February were insufficiently sturdy.

Cap Metro will also prepare a number of other documents requested by the regulators, principally outlines for testing, inspection, safety and other operational issues. The 32-mile passenger line can open without those cages in place, Capital Metro Executive Vice President Andrea Lofye said, and will be installed on the train cars later.

"The constraints on our schedule, at this point, are caused by the construction issues," Lofye said. The agency has begun building the last two stations only in the past few days, as well as two siding tracks that will be needed for northbound and southbound trains to pass each other.

To open the line in December, which had been the target date for the past couple of years, the agency would have had to do so with just seven of the planned nine stations open; the Kramer Lane and Howard Lane/MoPac Boulevard (Loop 1) stations would still be under construction.

"The gist is that we have reached consensus with the FRA on how we will address each of the issues" raised by the federal agency in February, Lofye said. Capital Metro in 2006 first asked the railroad administration for a general waiver for the cars, believing that its project was similar in character to passenger lines in New Jersey and San Diego that ultimately fell under the auspices of the Federal Transit Administration instead.

That federal agency's physical requirements, since it normally deals with light rail systems running on tracks where there is no freight traffic, are not as demanding as those of the railroad administration. The San Diego Sprinter vehicles, for instance, according to Lofye, have fuel tanks identical to those on the Swiss-made Capital Metro vehicles.

And in all three cases - Austin, San Diego and the New Jersey River Line - the vehicles are self-propelled, diesel-powered train cars similar in character to light rail vehicles. Freight cars use the same track on all three systems, albeit at different times of day.

But the railroad administration in this case, perhaps influenced by Capital Metro's decision to refer to its Leander line as "commuter rail" rather than light rail, decided that it should retain authority over the project.

There were questions in transit circles about how long the federal agency might take to grant Capital Metro authority to open the line, or if it might reject the vehicles outright. That will not be the case, provided Capital Metro follows through on the promises it is making now.

"My understanding from the team who went down there and sat down with them for a week is that all of these

issues are being hashed out satisfactorily," said Warren Flatau, a spokesman for the railroad administration.

His agency, Flatau said, will give its official sanction later, "assuming they do everything they promised to do. And that's a big if."

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Coach USA prepares new Dragon Bus intercity service for Spring launch

Coach USA, Paramus, NJ, is readying Dragon Bus for intercity service throughout the Northeast Corridor. *Busride Magazine*

Based on the success and growing popularity of Megabus, and the obvious demand for low fare express coach service in cities in the Northeast, Coach USA moved to purchase Eastern Travel last September, and last week finalized its agreement to purchase Today's Bus, once a rival of Eastern Travel.

As Chinatown-type operations, Eastern runs between New York City and Washington D.C.; Today's Bus reaches into Philadelphia and northern Virginia. The two entities will launch as Dragon Bus in early April as a significantly upgraded curbside express service says Coach USA president and COO, Dale Moser.

Now in what Coach USA says is the transition phase, the acquisitions did not include any of the companies' rolling stock, and that Dragon Bus is gradually replacing the fleet with a number of new D model MCIs in time for the spring launch.

"The objective here is to greatly enhance the service and safety levels in this type of bus operation," says Moser. "We will replace the equipment and integrate many of the same services offered in Megabus.com, and provide base offerings with greater frequencies in more locations."

Moser says one tremendous advantage Coach USA will offer is the capability to cross-sell both brands to Megabus and Dragon Bus patrons over the Internet.

"The demographic for this type bus service is growing," says Moser. "Dragon Bus represents a big step for this company in moving to a more customer-oriented express service."

Coach USA sees this type of regional intercity transport only growing, particularly in light of today's economic forecast. As much as it plans to enhance the product, the average fare of \$25 is still a substantial bargain with perhaps greater efficiency than the \$100 to \$200 spent to travel the same distances by train or plane.

Federal stimulus will help, but not cure, transit budget deficit

by Dan Olson, Minnesota Public Radio
February 23, 2009

St. Paul, Minn. — Federal stimulus money will help address, but won't close, a transit budget deficit in the Twin Cities. The shortfall is due in part to sharp drop off in transit operating money that comes from the sales tax on motor vehicles sold in Minnesota.

Metropolitan Council chairman Peter Bell said some of the \$65 million in stimulus money will be used to buy new equipment.

"What we hope to do is use the federal dollars for capital, primarily for the purchase of buses but we may use some of it for park and ride facilities," Bell said. "We have a three-car train program in Hiawatha we want to initiate. We need more vehicles for metro mobility as well, and then the dollars that we have currently allocated for capital will move over to cover that \$45 million operating deficit."

Bell said the money may purchase as many as 113 replacement buses, additional cars for both Hiawatha light rail and Northstar Commuter rail as well as park-and-ride expansions at Maplewood Mall or in Woodbury, Maple Grove and Apple Valley.

Transit City full speed ahead

Planners refine details as first of 7 proposed light rail lines to break ground this fall

Mar 04, 2009 04:30 AM
TESS KALINOWSKI
TRANSPORTATION REPORTER

They have talked about it. They have even advertised it on billboards.

The TTC's Transit City vision of breathing new life into Toronto's suburban avenues using Euro-style light rail is clear.

Now, with the first of seven proposed Transit City lines set to break ground, planners are down to the nuts and bolts of how the system will function. Big decisions are being made with almost unprecedented speed, thanks to a shorter environmental assessment process and the province's stated commitment to public transit.

Shovels go into the ground on Sheppard East in September. The Eglinton Crosstown line and Etobicoke-Finch West lines will follow next year, if Queen's Park delivers the anticipated funding in this month's provincial budget.

But there are potential pitfalls. Kennedy station "is the classic example" of mistakes the TTC is trying to avoid

with Transit City, said Mitch Stambler, manager of service planning.

"The transfer between the subway and the Scarborough RT at Kennedy is just incredibly customer-unfriendly, and we are determined to never, ever replicate that kind of thing," he said. A Kennedy makeover is in the works.

Meantime, engineers and planners are poring over plans for Don Mills station, the likely junction for the Finch West and Sheppard East light rail lines and the Sheppard subway.

Originally the TTC had been considering whether to tunnel under Highway 404 to connect the Sheppard LRT with the subway at track level there, or to extend the subway another stop to accommodate commuters to the business park at Consumers Rd.

The subway extension is less likely now that regional transportation planning agency Metrolinx has asked the TTC for a continuous east-west route across the city's north end.

Several scenarios are being studied to create that path. But the most likely would see the Finch West line, originally expected to terminate at Finch station, travelling on the Don Mills LRT line to Don Mills station, where it could link to Sheppard East.

The idea of eliminating the need to take stairs, escalators or elevators to transfer between the subway and Sheppard LRT was fine. But it probably isn't doable if there are two LRT lines to contend with, so the TTC is considering its options, Stambler said.

"What if we brought in Sheppard and Etobicoke-Finch both at concourse level? What if we bring Sheppard East in at subway level and Finch West and Don Mills in at concourse level, so they're not exactly continuous but the transfer again is quite convenient?" said Stambler, outlining the options.

The TTC is also looking at connecting Eglinton Crosstown with the SRT. That has implications for the Scarborough RT, including whether the RT is converted to light rail along the existing grade-separated alignment.

The aging RT technology can't run at street level because of its electrified rail. But LRT, with overhead wires, could run on the RT's alignment.

"Nobody should think for a minute that going to light rail would be a loss of capacity or lower quality than the RT, because the modern LRT vehicles are going to be spectacular compared to anything the city's seen," Stambler said.

As the project moves forward, the list of extensions to the system continues to grow. The TTC is considering several options, including taking the Sheppard East line

to the Toronto Zoo and connecting the 512 St. Clair streetcar right-of-way to the Jane Street LRT.

Morph Seattle trolleys into a new Green Line

We'd save millions over those fancy streetcars the City favors, and get better service with green electric "eTrolleys."

By Matt Fikse

The route map beguiles, looking like a Futurama-fantasia to a city that has seen such wild dreams before: a network of transit lines running through downtown Seattle and radiating out to the neighborhoods, each route flowing with zero-emissions vehicles departing every few minutes, shuttling Seattleites day and night. Don't be shocked. It already exists.

The time has come for the City of Seattle to grab hold of — or perhaps take charge of operating — the Seattle electric trolley system in order to put it to its highest and best use. As things are, the electric trolley system is being run like just another bunch of bus lines by a transit agency to which the trolleys appear to be an afterthought.

The City of Seattle (if it could get control of them) or even King County Metro (if it could be troubled to rethink them) should re-imagine, re-equip, and re-launch an upgraded trolley system as a new-era city transport system. Service to neighborhoods could be revitalized and hundreds of millions of dollars saved compared to investing in a new network of expensive rail streetcars. City Councilmember Tom Rasmussen is on the right track. In the face of Mayor Nickels and Councilmember Jan Drago's streetcar mania — and its whopping \$599 million price tag — Rasmussen is going to need more folks on board to bring his clearer vision and leadership on this issue to the fore. Better hurry before more streetcar checks get signed.

By making simple upgrades to equipment, routes, marketing, and management, Seattle's "historic" electric trolley lines could become an important, clean, quick-to-implement neighborhood transit backbone: think of an entire fleet of jumbo Prii (minus the vat's worth of toxic chemicals at the core of each of those hybrid battery packs) gliding through the city.

Join us now as our fancy takes flight to imagine Seattle's new "Green Lines" — Routes A through M. (See illustration.) Such a re-launched fleet of green electric "eTrolleys" could be operating with new vigor citywide years before the streetcar ever gets to Broadway. Consider that cities around the world report that when they replace a bus line with a rail streetcar, ridership often goes up by as much as 20 percent. However, recent estimates here indicate that a mile of streetcar is nearly five times more expensive to build than a mile of electric trolley service — \$40 million v. \$8 million per

mile according to reports. Whatever calculus had suggested that somehow it would be seen as reasonable to spend five times more on streetcars only to carry one-fifth more riders is certainly obsolete in the current economic reality.

Instead let's reflect on why more people tend to ride streetcars than buses on the same route. Then, let's make our new eTrolleys more like those streetcars and capture most of the value at a fraction of the cost.

There are some good guesses out there why ridership goes up when a streetcar replaces a bus. With a streetcar people understand that they are frequent; a person can easily intuit the route (look at the rails); and they are comfortable and fun to ride. Modern systems also offer quick boarding via floor-level stops with roll-on, roll-off capability. Trains are routed and scheduled to keep things moving at a decent clip.

If we reboot Seattle's eTrolley system we can provide nearly all those advantages and will see many more people opt on board as a result. Our current trolley fleet is modern enough, having been acquired earlier this decade. With an upgrade to the brand (paint them that bright European green) the eTrolleys could acquire some cache — the transit equivalent of a Zipcar. Build ramped stops and platforms level with the floors of the eTrolleys. Eliminate a few of the least-used stops and re-route a few lines to quicken the travel pace. Change the fare structure so you always pay when you board (up front) and exit from the rear. Go so far as to fiddle with traffic signal timing and cueing so the eTrolleys have shorter waits at the lights.

And for heaven's sake do what Portland did years ago: put a countdown clock at the stops so that you can walk up ready to board without having to check a website or printed schedule. Just a glance (or a listen; some have spoken updates too) and you'll know if you have time to grab coffee before the next eTrolley arrives. Make the stops, signage, and the routing all clear, visually integrated and cutting edge from a design point of view. To make the routes obvious, paint a big bright eTrolley-green stripe along the curb of every route. (A practical homage to Seattle scalawag John Doyle Bishop, who used to goad buddies into helping him paint a green stripe down Fifth Avenue, to honor St. Patrick.)

Most importantly, take a wee bit of that \$599 million and increase the route frequency to every 10 or 15 minutes. Many of these concepts are already familiar to King County Metro. They'll be using some of them in the new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines which are arriving soon. With regional BRT stars in their eyes, it's going to be hard for Metro to offer the old city trolley lines so much as a glance.

This is one of those times that an old familiar thing (our aged electric trolley system) morphs into something completely different — and better — if you squint at it just so and try looking at it from a slightly different angle.

So, let's take the Green Line to Lake Washington for a picnic next Saturday, what do you say?

Seattle-to-Tukwila light-rail line runs out of "cushion" for a July 3 start

Sound Transit is almost done building its first line from Seattle to Tukwila, but there's still some drama over whether it will open exactly on July 3, as promised.

By Mike Lindblom

Seattle Times transportation reporter

Sound Transit is almost done building its first line from Seattle to Tukwila, but there's still some drama over whether it will open exactly on July 3, as promised. When construction began five years ago, the schedule included 180 days of "float," a cushion in case things went wrong. The float is now zero, says a January progress report published this month.

The most difficult part of the route is a one-mile Beacon Hill Tunnel, which includes an underground station 165 feet deep, and an elevated station near Franklin High School.

Progress was delayed by soil slides, an investigation into a fatal construction accident, occasional slowdowns with the tunnel-boring machine, and strained relations between transit and contractor officials. December snow is blamed for wiping out the last nine days of cushion.

Ahmad Fazel, the light-rail director, continues to vouch for the July 3 deadline, barring some calamity. "I'm not an odds maker; I'm not in Vegas right now. I'm saying, right now, the project stands to be open on time," he said. Even if it doesn't, Sound Transit has apparently succeeded in meeting the project budget of \$2.4 billion to reach Tukwila. If current trends hold, there will be about \$125 million in unspent reserves left over, to be spent on extensions to Northgate or Federal Way.

Schedules are especially sensitive to Sound Transit, because of the agency's troubled early history. In 1996, voters approved a 21-mile project from Seattle's University District to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, but costs doubled, causing delays. Its credibility shaken, Sound Transit nearly collapsed.

Elected officials running the agency split the light-rail plan in two, to build the southern end first, in hopes it would create momentum for more. They guessed correctly; voters last fall approved suburban lines to be finished by the early 2020s, and the agency held a groundbreaking ceremony last week for a tunnel to Husky Stadium.

Meanwhile, the Beacon Hill Tunnel schedule is going down to the wire — crews are stringing overhead lines that power the trains in one of the twin tunnel tubes. Work is under way 24 hours a day, said Fazel. Millions of dollars are being spent to reach the finish line:

- Tunnel contractor Obayashi has been offered new incentives of up to \$2.7 million, to finish certain jobs quickly, so electrical and signal contractors can gain access. The initial \$280 million contract is now \$303 million, and will increase a few million more to cover cost-of-living pay raises for union workers and expected claims by Obayashi.

- GETS, the signal contractor, took a \$3.8 million pay boost, for the inconvenience of performing work around the tunnel crews.

- PB Americas, which monitors the tunnel's quality control, will get \$3 million extra because work is extended through May. If delays occur, they would likely be measured in days or weeks, rather than a prolonged wait for the public to ride the trains. The line is more than 96 percent finished, and train testing is under way.

In the Federal Transit Administration's view, the job is "under budget and on time," said spokesman Paul Griffo. The next two miles, to the airport, are supposed to open Dec. 31.

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CityLink looks to replace vehicles

By TERRY BIBO
of the Journal Star
Posted Mar 06, 2009 @ 08:22 PM

PEORIA —

On the one hand, \$4.2 million in federal stimulus money may enable CityLink to replace its entire fleet of vans for the disabled, plus 20 aging buses.

On the other, pent-up demand for vehicles probably means it will take a year or more to see those new vehicles on Peoria streets. Even with stimulus money, CityLink has only half the funds it may need for new vehicles. Some of its existing buses have been in service for more than a million miles.

"We really have been struggling the last few years to keep service on the road," CityLink general manager Tom Lucek said Friday.

Lucek was responding to news from the office of U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., that final numbers had been released for the transit portion of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Nationwide, the U.S. Department of Transportation has \$7.4 billion for transit in the stimulus bill. Illinois' share is \$467.5 million.

The Regional Transit Authority in Chicago will get \$414 million. About \$240 million of that total goes to the Chicago Transit Authority. The Illinois Department of Transportation has more than \$53.3 million to distribute around the rest of the state. After the usual method of

allocating such money by population, Peoria will get \$4.2 million.

"We're the only mass transit district in the area," Lucek said. "The funds come directly to us."

He said some state funds already have been promised for new vehicles, and U.S. Rep. Aaron Schock, R-Peoria, has offered a \$380,000 earmark in the current budget for additional help. Including the stimulus money, which is 100 percent federally funded and doesn't require a local match; CityLink could replace the 31 vans used to transport disabled passengers.

"We'll be going out for a completely new fleet of paratransit vans for the disabled," he said. "Any money that's left over will go for new buses."

Lucek estimates the specially equipped vans will cost \$80,000 each, while new buses may be \$340,000 to \$360,000 apiece. Even if the money can stretch to purchase 20 buses, there are 54 in the fleet. Many buses are more than 20 years old. The Peoria transit district recently bought 10, 40-seater buses for \$9,027 from Chicago, where they were about to be scrapped. He estimates it would take \$11 million to replace both vans and buses.

"Those things are all very much appreciated," Lucek said. "But we really had a need for twice that amount." He said CityLink has 180 days to enter into a contract. "The vehicles themselves probably won't be here for a year," he said.

Nearby Bloomington/Normal Public Transit System is slated to receive slightly less than \$2.5 million. General manager Pete Weber said the money "couldn't have come at a better time," because they are about to construct a new facility that will include offices, maintenance and storage. "We can't even store the buses we have in the existing facility," Weber said, adding this money will be used to offset building costs, and then get vehicles. "In the absence of these stimulus funds, it would probably be a while before the fleet could be expanded. This really helps."

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Moover, Conn. River Transit To Get New Buses

By BOB AUDETTE, Reformer Staff

Posted: 03/10/2009 03:02:23 AM EDT

BRATTLEBORO -- Patrons of a pair of transit agencies in southern Vermont might find themselves riding new buses soon courtesy of the Economic Recovery Act. With a number of public transit buses in Vermont in need of replacement, the \$5.7 million expenditure proposed by the Vermont Agency of Transportation will help the state buy 33 new buses, said AOT spokesman John Zicconi. "We have a backlog of 41 buses that meet our criteria for replacement that we have been unable to afford," he said.

It's not yet known if the Legislature will approve AOT's request to spend the money on new buses. "There are other things public transit money could be used for," said Zicconi, such as updating or repairing public transit facilities. "Our proposal is to spend all the money on the buses."

When the Legislature returns from its two-week recess, he said, it needs to make its decision quickly. Other states will also be looking to purchase new buses, so it's important that the state gets its order in to prevent delivery delays, said Zicconi.

If all goes as planned, Connecticut River Transit will get two buses -- a 40- and a 14-seater -- and the Deerfield Valley Transit Authority will get two 34-seater buses. Randy Schoonmaker, executive director of DVTA, said his agency had applied for the new buses, but has not yet heard back on whether its request would be granted. "In our line of business, we wait until we get the grant agreement."

DVTA operates 22 buses, from 14-seaters up to 34-seaters.

Ridership on DVTA vehicles has increased 15 percent in just the past few months, and the agency has had to schedule extra buses to meet peak demands. Two new buses won't be enough to meet the DVTA's needs, said Schoonmaker.

"We have capital needs for more than the two buses." Nonetheless, he's not looking a gift horse in the mouth. "Anything we get from the stimulus package would be a bonus. We would be very grateful to get anything out of the ordinary." The \$5.7 million is part of \$126 million the state is getting for transportation needs, said Rep. Mollie Burke, P-Brattleboro, a member of the House Transportation Committee.

"Everyone agrees there is a need for more public transit in Vermont," she said, but the state's rural nature makes it hard to connect with everybody who needs transportation.

Having new, environmentally friendly buses might mean some of Vermont's transit agencies will be able to extend their lines, said Burke.

"This is a good use of stimulus funds," she said. Another \$700,000 has been set aside for rehabilitating buses, wooden bus shelters constructed by Vermont companies and vehicles for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Nationwide, the bill provided \$10.1 billion for the Federal Transit Administration.

Other Vermont transit agencies aided by this funding include Advance Transit, Addison County Transit Resources, Green Mountain Community Network, Green Mountain Transit Agency, Marble Valley Regional Transit District, Rural Community Transit, Special Services Transportation Agency and Stagecoach Transportation Services.

No new buses are planned for the Brattleboro Beeline, said Zicconi.

"The equipment at the Bee is in good shape and doesn't qualify for the replacement list," he said.

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