



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

## **JULY/AUGUST**

**\$5.00**

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](http://www.osabus.com)". At [osabus.com](http://osabus.com) we will be posting upcoming fan trips and meetings information, as well as membership information.

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

### **• JULY/AUGUST MEETINGS**

**The July meeting** of the Omnibus Society of America will not be held due to the July 4th holiday.

**The August meeting** of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on August 7, 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.

## **Chicago Transit Board Names Richard Rodriguez as New CTA President**

3/11/2009

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, Chicago Transit Board appointed Richard L. Rodriguez as President of the Chicago Transit Authority.

Rodriguez joins the CTA from the Chicago Department of Aviation where he served as Commissioner. He has extensive experience in city government, where he has earned a reputation as a strong and creative manager, having also served as Commissioner of the Department of Buildings and Executive Director of the Department of Construction and Permits.

Rodriguez replaces Ron Huberman who was named Chief Executive Officer of Chicago Public Schools in January.

"We want to welcome Rich to the CTA," said Chicago Transit Board Chairman Carole Brown. "His experience in City government should serve him well as he works with us to balance our budget and continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the second largest transit agency in the country."

"I appreciate the support expressed by the Chicago Transit Board," said Rodriguez. "The CTA is a vital resource for this region and it is important that we continue focusing on improving the quality of service we provide. Even in these challenging economic times, we have to find ways to manage and deliver services more efficiently."

Rodriguez has Bachelor's Degrees in Sociology and Communications from Loyola University Chicago and a law degree from Chicago-Kent College of Law. He is a board member of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago and Daughters of Charity Ministries of Chicago and DeVry University.

## **CTA to Use Stimulus Funds for Slow Zone Project in Dearborn Subway**

3/11/2009

The Chicago Transit Authority is moving quickly to put federal stimulus funds to use. Today, the Chicago Transit Board approved a \$56.6 million contract for renewal of approximately 36,000 feet of track in the Blue Line Dearborn subway. Funding for the work is being provided by stimulus funds.

The contract awarded today will remove the existing slow zones and help prevent the creation of new slow zones in the Dearborn subway. In 2007 and 2008, CTA eliminated 6,336 feet of slow zones in the Blue Line subway between the Damen and Clark/Lake stations.

"The allocation of stimulus funding comes at a critical time for CTA as the agency needs funding to maintain an aging infrastructure," said CTA President Rich Rodriguez. "This project will create approximately 400 jobs locally over the course of the work and will allow the agency to continue its efforts to upgrade and modernize the system."

In the summer of 2007, the CTA began an aggressive plan to eliminate slow zones throughout the system. At its peak, slow zones existed on 22.3 percent – or 263,526 feet of the rail system.



As of today, slow zones occupy 8.5 percent or 100,188 feet of track. The CTA rail system contains approximately 1,183,248 feet of track – the equivalent of 224.1 miles.

CTA eliminated slow zones in the Red Line subway last fall and on the O'Hare branch of the Blue Line. Work to eliminate and prevent slow zones continues along the Brown and Red lines.

Slow zones are created due to deteriorating track conditions resulting in trains having to operate at speed restrictions. Work to reduce slow zones includes replacing wood rail ties and old tie plates and replacing track.

Kiewit-Reyes, A Joint Venture was awarded the contract through a competitive bid. Work is expected to begin in mid-April.

## **CTA Uses Stimulus Funds to Purchase Articulated Hybrid Buses**

4/10/2009

The Chicago Transit Authority is moving ahead with its second stimulus fund project with the purchase of 58 articulated hybrid buses. CTA President Richard Rodriguez has signed a \$49 million contract and the buses will begin arriving this fall.

"The CTA is moving quickly on stimulus fund projects. The projects we are pursuing are vital to improving service," said CTA President Richard L. Rodriguez. "New buses improve the reliability of service for customers and enhance the overall experience of riding CTA, just as the slow zone elimination work in the Dearborn subway will do for Blue Line riders."

CTA was able to move quickly on the new bus order because last fall the Chicago Transit Board approved the reassignment of terms of Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's (WMATA) contract option for the purchase of 58 New Flyer articulated hybrid buses pending the availability of funds.

This purchase is in addition to existing orders for both articulated 60' hybrid buses and 40' buses from New Flyer. The 40' New Flyer buses are in the final phase of delivery of an order placed in 2006 for 265 buses. The 60' articulated hybrids are from a 2008 order for 150 buses. Currently 135 of the 150 New Flyer articulated hybrid buses have been delivered and placed in service.

Through this purchase, CTA estimates that the hybrid technology can save the agency more than \$300,000 annually in fuel costs and nearly \$2.3 million annually in maintenance, parts and labor costs over buses currently in service. The 60-foot hybrid's average fuel consumption is 3.7 miles per gallon, a 39 percent increase in fuel efficiency versus non-hybrid 60-foot buses (2.65 mpg). Hybrid buses are quieter, cleaner and run more smoothly than conventional engine systems.

CTA's first project using stimulus funds is track replacement to prevent slow zones on the Blue Line's Dearborn subway. Work on this project is expected to begin in mid-April.

CTA is scheduled to receive \$241 million in stimulus funds. The \$49 million purchase of new hybrid articulated buses and \$87 million track replacement project in the Dearborn subway represent an obligation of 56 percent of CTA's stimulus funds.

## **Expansion of CTA Bus Tracker Nears Completion with the Activation of 19 Routes**

4/13/2009

Progress continues as 19 additional bus routes will be added to CTA's Bus Tracker web site on Monday, April 20. The popular bus service tool provides customers with estimated bus arrival times and real-time service information. When the additional routes are activated, a total of 129 of CTA's 153 bus routes will be part of the Bus Tracker service.

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

"Bus Tracker has become a valuable communications channel for CTA customers by alerting them to the next arriving bus and changes in service that may affect their commutes," said CTA President Richard L. Rodriguez. "Customer communication is a top priority at CTA and we will continue to find ways to enrich existing tools to deliver pertinent travel information to customers."

The CTA will activate the following 19 routes on Bus Tracker's web site on April 20:

- #2 Hyde Park Express
- #N5 South Shore Night Bus
- #30 South Chicago
- #53AL South Pulaski Limited
- #64 Foster/Canfield
- #95E 93<sup>rd</sup>/95<sup>th</sup>
- #95W West 95<sup>th</sup>
- #100 Jeffery Manor Express
- #103 West 103<sup>rd</sup>
- #106 East 103<sup>rd</sup>
- #108 Halsted/95<sup>th</sup>
- #112 Vincennes/111<sup>th</sup>
- #123 Illinois Center/Union Express
- #124 Navy Pier
- #135 Clarendon/LaSalle Express
- #136 Sheridan/LaSalle Express
- #143 Stockton/Michigan Express
- #144 Marine/Michigan Express
- #155 Devon



Results of a recent survey show that as customers become more familiar with Bus Tracker and its features, they have expressed increased satisfaction with CTA service and feel that the reliability of bus service has also improved.

Customers consider information provided through Bus Tracker a valuable resource when traveling the system. One survey observation shows a 30 percent increase in satisfaction along the #8 Halsted route and that a customers' perceived wait time between #8 Halsted buses has decreased by 27 percent when compared to a year ago.

The dedicated CTA Bus Tracker web site ([www.ctabustracker.com](http://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.

## **Cricket Communication Wireless Devices Now Work in CTA Subways**

4/13/2009

Customers who use Cricket wireless services are now able to communicate throughout the CTA's Red and Blue line subways. Cricket Communications, Inc. has signed a 10-year agreement to lease CTA's wireless communications infrastructure in the subways. CTA will receive \$22,250 per month from Cricket for the lease.

Cricket recently completed the installation and testing of its base equipment—comprised of amplifiers, transmitters and receivers—to the CTA wireless infrastructure.

In 2005, CTA completed the installation of technology to enhance CTA's existing two-way radio system and improve subway communications options for CTA, the Chicago Police Department and Chicago Fire Department in the Red and Blue line subways.

The improved telecommunications system also laid the groundwork for the agency to generate additional revenue by leasing its wireless infrastructure for commercial service to allow the use of wireless devices, such as cell phones, text messaging and wireless

Internet modems throughout the 11.4 mile subway system.

Cricket joins Verizon Wireless and U.S. Cellular as the current wireless service providers in CTA's subway system. U.S. Cellular became the first wireless provider to lease use of the infrastructure in July 2006, while Verizon Wireless signed on in August 2008.

CTA continues to work to add additional service providers to the system. As more wireless service providers contract with CTA to use the infrastructure to provide service, more customers will be able to use their wireless devices.

## **SERVICE CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN SOUTH COOK ON JUNE 7**

Third phase of realignments to improve on-time performance and access to popular places

Change has arrived for residents of south and southwest Cook County, in the form of improved transportation options. Extensive service changes will be implemented as part of the third phase of the South Cook County / Will County Restructuring Initiative. By analyzing segments of existing bus service combined with extensive public and stakeholder outreach, Pace developed a plan that would update its south suburban route network to bring it in line with existing demand. Passengers can look forward to improved frequency of buses, extended service hours, new routes and more amenities at bus stops.

Comments received from passengers and other stakeholders during Public Hearings held in April contributed to the formulation of the final plan. Pace Chairman of the Board Rick Kwasneski said, "One of the most important parts of our process is to ensure that the service changes will serve the needs of the countless people that rely on Pace for their livelihood. We're extremely grateful to all who took the time to provide their input."

Although Phase III of the plan involves the elimination of Route 370 Harvey-Chicago Heights, the route will be replaced by extensions or modifications of Route 348 Riverdale Connector and Route 352 Halsted. Route 352 will benefit from more direct routing on the service it provides between the 95th Street CTA Red Line Station and the Chicago Heights Terminal by using Halsted Street for nearly all of its alignment. The current routing involves a deviation west through Homewood before traveling south on Dixie Highway to the Chicago Heights Terminal. A new route, Route 372 Dixie Highway, will preserve service on that corridor between Homewood and Chicago Heights. The changes involving routes 370, 372, and 352 were based on changes in demand, which had increased on the Halsted portion and decreased on Dixie Highway. Ergo, Route 352 was re-routed to



Halsted because it offers greater frequency and extended hours of service.

Other highlights of the revised service plan will include extended night and weekend service as well as increased frequency on the restructured Route 379 Midway-Orland Square and Route 350 Sibley, two of the more heavily traveled routes in the south suburbs. Metra feeder service on routes 451 and 452 in Homewood, Route 460 in Hazel Crest, Route 750 in Country Club Hills, and Route 753 in Matteson will not experience any changes in routing, however schedules will be adjusted to improve schedule accuracy. Timing adjustments will also be made on Route 877 South Suburban Oakbrook Express and Route 888 Tri-State Flyer, both of which operate from the south suburbs to business parks and employment centers in the western suburbs.

Also beginning June 7, Routes 350 Sibley and 352 Halsted will begin operating under a posted stops only policy. Buses on these routes will only stop to board or alight passengers at locations where a bus stop sign is posted, which is a departure from Pace's policy on most other routes that allow stops anywhere along the route where doing so is safe. The change will result in improved on-time performance and reduced travel times. "This is a precursor to Arterial Rapid Transit service in the south suburbs, which will improve on-time performance and reduce travel times through the use of transit signal priority systems and strategic stop locations," said Kwasneski.

There will be no changes in fares resulting from the new service. Pace has actively promoted the service changes to the public via passenger notices, announcements on buses, and staff members distributing new schedules and a special service guide to passengers at transit centers and other key locations prior to the June 7 implementation date. Also, the new schedules have been posted on the Pace website in order to give passengers the opportunity to plan their travel before the first day of the new service. Paper copies of the new schedules will be printed with red ink in order to help passengers distinguish the new timetables from those that will be no longer valid. "We've worked hard to distribute the information to passengers, and expect a smooth transition to the new service," said Kwasneski.

More information regarding the Phase III changes as well as an overview on the South Cook Will County Initiative is available on Pace's website, [www.pacebus.com](http://www.pacebus.com).

#### From Jeff Waxman:

CityLink in Peoria purchased 10 RTS's from CTA. The buses are still in CTA colors with the CityLink logo on it on the right and left side of the bus where the CTA logos use to be. Right now there aren't any intentions on painting them in CityLink colors. Two of the buses have

been salvaged for parts. There also aren't any specific runs that these buses are used on. CityLink gave the buses 2200 series numbers.

4748-2201	4550-2202	4579-2203
4415-2204	4671-2205	4732-2206
4592-2207	4711-2208	4758-2209
4781-2210		

John Anderson the Supt. Of maintenance will send me some pictures which I will forward.

Jeff

## METRA MAY START TAKING CREDIT CARDS

Crains Chicago Business from Daily Herald

If credit card is your preferred method of paying for purchases, then Metra's not been your way to really fly.

But the commuter rail agency is expected to take a giant step into modernity in February by allowing riders to use credit cards to buy tickets from station agents or online.

Currently, it's either cash or check and the lack of choice has brought criticism from passengers and lawmakers in Springfield.

On Friday, Metra Executive Director Phil Pagano acknowledged the agency had been conservative about credit card technology and put the blame on himself. But he noted that implementing credit card use was more complicated and expensive than people realized.

"Frankly, we've been holding off given the economic situation," Pagano said. "But clearly, we need to move forward."

Rejiggering Metra's Web site to accept credit card payments might cost between \$400,000 and \$800,000. Card readers at Metra stations will tally between \$400,000 and \$500,000 plus \$100,000 for phone transmission lines.

Credit companies also have processing fees of about 2 percent amounting to up to \$4 million annually, which Metra would likely have to absorb.

The idea would be to allow people to pay by credit at all stations with ticket agents. However, stops on the Metra Electric Line which travels from downtown Chicago to south suburban University Park isn't staffed. Instead, the Electric Line has ticket machines, so Metra is looking at interim measures to put in place this February.



Offering updated ticket machines that take credit cards is an option, but Pagano estimated that could cost up to \$50 million plus operating costs.

Regarding Internet purchases, Metra is looking at a system where riders could establish private accounts. People who purchase tickets online would receive them through the mail. Eventually, the agency is looking at technology whereby customers could print up tickets, but there are concerns about fraud that need to be ironed out first, Pagano said.

Sen. Michael Bond, a Lake County Democrat, introduced legislation in March that would require Metra to offer the credit card option at 25 percent of stations by 2010 and throughout the system by 2012.

Agency staff will give a detailed report on the issue in June and the board will likely vote on it.

Chairman Carole Doris hoped the move would pre-empt General Assembly action, saying the proposed legislation was the "poster child" of unfunded mandates.

"We will look at this carefully. We want to make a good business decision," said Doris, who represents DuPage County.

Metra directors also voted to spend \$6.6 million to upgrade the agency's revenue accounting computer software, which is outdated. This will enable the switch over to credit cards, officials said.

## Building better locomotives in Dixmoor

March 25, 2009  
BY PHIL KADNER

I call it the Prius of locomotives. The folks at the National Railway Equipment Co. factory in Dixmoor quickly correct me.

The N-ViroMotive system, as they call it, actually is three diesel genset engines controlled by a computer that tells each how much power to generate depending on need.

See, that's sort of like a Prius, without the battery power.

In addition, horsepower is automatically reduced or increased to each of the wheels to improve traction.

I would compare that to Positraction, like in "My Cousin Vinny," but I fear Len Mysiewicz, the shop superintendent, would crack my head with a wrench.

I'm probably the worst guy to be writing this story because my eyes glaze over at the mention of a carburetor.

But to discover that the cutting edge of fuel-efficient, environmentally friendly locomotive technology is taking place in a plant in a tiny south suburb is a stunner.

Actually, National Railway Equipment, founded in 1984, claims to be the world's largest distributor of remanufactured locomotives. It moved its headquarters to downstate Mount Vernon several years ago and now has four plants (three in Illinois, one in Kentucky).

Around 2001, with new federal guidelines for locomotive emissions scheduled for 2012, the company saw an opportunity to not only rebuild engines but create something new. By 2006, it had developed a prototype.

They're called green locomotives because nitrous oxide and carcinogenic particulate-matter emissions are cut by 60 percent. Fuel costs are cut by 50 percent. And the company contends its locomotives are much quieter than the old-fashioned single-engine kind.

President Barack Obama probably didn't have National Railway Equipment in mind when he spoke about investing billions in 21st century fuel-saving technology to create jobs and promote economic growth. But the folks who work in Dixmoor believe that's exactly what they're doing.

Now if only they could get some help.

Metra, the commuter rail agency, plans to purchase 10 new locomotive engines for about \$35 million. When Ed Paesel, a Metra board member and Southland resident, heard about the plan, he notified National Railway.

But the initial bid specifications called for only the traditional, single-engine diesel-powered locomotives.

James M. Wurtz Jr., National Railway's vice president of marketing and sales, said he only wants a fair chance for his company to compete in the bidding process.

National Railway employs about 500 workers at its Illinois plants but also creates jobs for a number of local suppliers. The largest may be Funk-Linko Rail Products in Chicago Heights, a 100-year-old company that began by making signposts. Funk-Linko makes the platforms on which the N-ViroMotive engine system sits.

Other local suppliers include Capital Engineering in Harvey (locomotive cabs and fuel tanks) and a business in South Holland that makes undercarriage components.

U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-2nd), of Chicago, and state Rep. David Miller (D-Lynwood) urged Metra to reconsider its bidding procedures, which were supposed to close Tuesday.

Early Tuesday morning, Metra's executive director and board chairman met with representatives from National Railway and Funk-Linko.



The companies were given five days to determine if they could submit a bid that met federal rail safety standards, according to a Metra spokeswoman.

If they can, the bidding deadline would be extended by anywhere from 30 to 60 days.

But Metra contends that its guidelines already meet or exceed all current standards of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Of course, those are the standards in 2009, not those for 2012 and beyond.

The Metra spokeswoman emphasized that the locomotives will be purchased using Metra's capital funds and a matching grant from the state. Federal stimulus money will not be used.

Back at the National Railway plant in Dixmoor, some employees have been laid off, victims of the economic crisis. Yet there are nearly a dozen locomotives in various states of repair or manufacture throughout the yard.

"It looks like a junk yard from the (nearby) Interstate 57 overpass," Wurtz said, referring to an area littered with locomotive parts.

Indeed, the factory at 144th Street and Robey Avenue is difficult to see from the nearest road. The entrance to the plant is marked by a sign so faded that it's easy to miss.

Rail lines run directly into the plant and just north and south.

Mysiewicz, the shop superintendent, is a genial man who has devoted his life to building locomotive engines. He explains that his father and grandfather also were railroad men.

He's hoping this is his future as well as his past. He allowed me to sit in a locomotive cabin, every kid's dream.

I can't help feeling that Metra ought to give these people a fair shot at landing the bid. Maybe it should consider rewriting the specifications with the future and a local manufacturer in mind.

Requiring fuel-efficient, pollution-cutting locomotives might actually be a good idea.

Rules have been bent for far worse purposes in the history of Illinois.

*Phil Kadner can be reached at  
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## **Metra service: Why Metra is riding slow train to future**

Conductors still manually check tickets, collect cash fares

By Richard Wronski | Tribune reporter

March 23, 2009

Since Metra was formed more than two decades ago, people have made the use of credit cards, cell phones and the Internet second nature.

But Metra conductors still ply the aisles as they did back in 1983, punching paper tickets by hand. And while other transit agencies provide alerts about delayed trains on Web-enabled cell phones, Metra customers stuck on platforms rely on squawky public-address announcements that sound straight from the Thomas Edison era.

Despite ridership that has soared to a record 85 million, Metra still operates, some argue, as if it's stuck in the past.

The practice of manually checking tickets and collecting fares strikes some riders as harmlessly quaint. But it riles others who have to dig down for cash or sign a check because Metra won't take plastic. And don't get people started on the usefulness of Metra's Web site.

So if Metra really aims to be "the way to really fly" in the 21st Century, here are some suggestions from passengers and transportation experts. They're not all about technology, but that's a good place to start:

### **Paper tickets**

Metra runs on paper, as in paper tickets. Although the majority of riders use monthly passes, passengers in January still bought more than 666,000 one-way tickets or used 10-ride tickets, which conductors have to punch individually.

Conductors also sell tickets on board, which can be time-consuming when trains are crowded.

Checking every ticket is necessary, Metra says, because it has an "open" boarding system, unlike the CTA and other closed rail systems that use turnstiles.

Other open rail systems have done away with punching and checking individual tickets. For example, conductors on Boston's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority check tickets with hand-held electronic devices.

"Electronic fare collection is the standard almost everywhere," said Joseph Schofer, a transportation expert at Northwestern University.

On Caltrain, a commuter rail line operating between San Francisco and San Jose, passengers buy tickets from vending machines and conductors make random checks. Anyone without a ticket faces a \$250 fine.

### **Credit cards**



It's cash or checks only on Metra. The line doesn't take plastic because of the processing fees that credit-card companies impose, Metra spokeswoman Judy Pardonnet said.

This would amount to millions of dollars a year and would have to be passed along to customers, she said.

The CTA and other commuter lines accept credit and debit cards while allowing riders to buy tickets from fare vending machines.

Installing vending machines at 240 stations on 11 train lines would be cost-prohibitive for a service that is convenient but not crucial, Pardonnet said.

DePaul University transportation expert Joseph Schwieterman said he was struck by how easy it was to buy a \$2 ticket with a credit card on Portland's MAX light-rail system. Not allowing this on Metra "is a shame," he said.

Meanwhile, other transit systems are bypassing tickets altogether in favor of "smart" versions of MasterCard and Visa cards containing computer chips. These "touch and go" cards don't need to be swiped, allowing quicker boarding.

MasterCard has had a trial under way with the New York transit system since 2006. The CTA said it plans to do the same next year.

### **Train tracker**

For harried commuters, few experiences are more grating than making a mad dash to the station, only to discover that the train is running 15 minutes late.

A system similar to the CTA's Bus Tracker would help by sending service advisories directly to a customer's BlackBerry or similar device.

Metra already keeps track of its trains with global positioning system (GPS) technology and posts service advisories on its Web site, [metrarail.com](http://metrarail.com). It also uses this information to make station announcements over a low-tech public-address system.

But riders such as Kirk Hartley of Orland Park want more.

"Riders for years have been asking for something very basic—to be able to sign up for e-mail alerts for service interruptions, which the airlines have been doing for years," Hartley said.

Metra says it will award a contract this year to upgrade its Web site, which will allow the line to offer a train tracker system.

Other commuter rail lines, including those in Boston and

Long Island, N.Y., already offer real-time information on train schedules, alerts and service advisories.

### **Web site**

The coming improvements to the Web site are long overdue, say experts and customers who agree the site is outdated.

"The Metra Web site looks like an old paper [railroad] schedule posted on the Web," Schofer said. "It is not easy to find or see what you are looking for. And it is not interactive."

For attractiveness and ease of navigation, the mass-transit gold standard might be the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's site, [mbta.com](http://mbta.com).

### **Wireless Internet access**

Although Metra riders can use laptops, they can forget about accessing the Internet.

The MBTA boasts that it offers first-in-the-nation free Wi-Fi service on its commuter trains.

The Boston-area agency plans to have at least two coaches on each train Wi-Fi-enabled by spring.

The MBTA says it costs about \$1 million to install the hardware, plus about \$270,000 a year to service, but the agency expects to make up the cost in additional ridership.

### **Seat hogs**

Passengers who take up more than one seat are a common target of barbs in Metra's on-board newsletter, *On the Bi-Level*.

If trains are crowded, conductors are expected to remind riders to put bags or packages on the floor or luggage rack and to flip over seat backs.

"Frequently the conductor will go through the cars and mention it when people are taking up more than their fair share" of space, Pardonnet said.

### **Cell phone noise**

So you've found a seat and settled in, only to discover another bane of rail commuting: the rider who thinks phone conversations should be conducted in a booming voice.

Metra says it broadcasts reminders and posts notices asking for courtesy, and conductors occasionally remind passengers to be considerate.

But designating "quiet cars" or requiring cell phone users



to talk in vestibules would be impractical, Pardonnet said.

### Toilets

Metra riders have long been challenged in finding convenient toilets.

In August, Metra announced it would cut the number of toilets to install more seats. The goal is to reduce the percentage of cars with toilets from 60 percent to 50 percent of the fleet.

Metra chief Phil Pagano vowed that every other car will have a toilet but added that he didn't believe passengers would notice the difference.

### Bar cars

Metra also decided last year to shut down its remaining 10 "refreshment" cars, where alcoholic beverages were sold.

Patrons were upset, although some riders found the party atmosphere on the cars to be irritating. Now, fans BYO and party on.

### Food and drink

Except for events such as Taste of Chicago or on New Year's Eve, Metra allows passengers to bring drinks on board.

Food is also permitted, although some passengers are sure to find the smell of someone else's sweet-and-sour shrimp dinner annoying.

"We don't have a problem with messes on the trains," Pardonnet said. "People seem to be pretty cooperative with cleaning up after themselves."

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## Megabus introduced Dragon Bus

Megabus, and the obvious demand for low fare express coach service in cities throughout the Northeast Corridor, Coach USA, Paramus, NJ, presents Dragon Bus as its newest iteration on intercity service.



"We will start Dragon Bus using single deck coaches to originate from and travel to the Chinese areas of U.S. cities," says Brian Souter, co-founder and chief

executive officer of the Stagecoach Group, Perth, Scotland. "All these vehicles will be fully equipped with WiFi. This will be a more economy product than Megabus.com, but we will do some selected cross-selling."

Souter says this has worked very successfully in Scotland with Megabus.com and Scottish Citylink, noting the capability to cross sell enables Coach USA to offer customers more frequent services at the times they want to travel.

Last September with little fanfare or publicity Coach USA moved to purchase Eastern Travel and finalized its agreement in February to purchase Today's Bus, once a rival of Eastern Travel.

Eastern Travel routes run between New York City and Washington D.C., while Today's Bus reached into Philadelphia and northern Virginia. This month the two entities will launch as Dragon Bus, a significantly upgraded curbside express service, says Dale Moser, Coach USA president and COO.

Coach USA says 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 by Megabus.com, and provide base offerings with greater frequencies in more locations."

Moser agrees that the one tremendous advantage Coach USA will be able to extend to both Megabus and Dragon Bus patrons is the capability to cross-sell both brands over the Internet.

"The demographic for this type of bus service is growing tremendously," says Moser. "Dragon Bus represents the next big step for this company as we continue to move toward a more complete customer-oriented express service."

Coach USA sees this type of regional intercity transport not only becoming more popular but even more necessary, particularly in light of today's economic forecast. As much as it plans to enhance the basic product, Moser says the average fare of \$25 is still a substantial bargain with greater efficiency than the \$100 to \$200 spent to travel the same distances by train or plane. BR



## At 83, Wade Tours keeps current with modern fleet, fresh destinations, two new 2009 MCI® J4500 coaches

**Schaumburg, IL — April 9, 2009** — Wade Tours, Schenectady, New York, owes its 83 years of success to three things: five generations of hard work; interesting trips that attract both young adults and seniors by the busload; and a superbly modern fleet.

To perpetuate the latter two factors, Wade recently took delivery of two 2009 MCI J4500 coaches. The delivery brings its J4500 fleet to 18 and total fleet to 22 coaches. All of Wade's J4500s are newer than three years old. Its latest comes equipped with clean-diesel technology featuring a Detroit Diesel engine and Allison transmission. Plus, the 2009 J4500s include advanced performance features such as wide-ride suspension, electronic stability control and range of passenger amenities including a state-of-the-art entertainment system with six 15-inch video monitors.



"We're focused on younger adults. We want to give them a motor coach experience that is different from their grandparents'," said Greg De Lorenzo, representing the fifth-generation of family to run the company. "We're attracting them with trips to wine festivals and sporting events, and more day trips and weekend excursions. The J4500 fits right in because our passengers love its curb appeal. They see our bus and are in awe. It's sleek, like a sports car."

De Lorenzo adds that Wade Tours is venturing into new forms of advertising as well, using e-mail blasts effectively and buying more radio spots on multiple stations. It's also promoting the environmental benefits of motor coach travel and the availability of clean-diesel engine technology to schools and universities. "Some colleges are asking us about going green, and we're glad to be able to offer them coaches that emit less emissions," said De Lorenzo, who followed his mother Crystal into the family business, which she manages with her brother, Doug Wade.

Wade Tours began with a single 1926 Studebaker making a 120-mile round-trip run from Schenectady to

Middleburg. The company prospered, providing transportation to historic events including the World's Fair in New York City and the Winter Olympics in Lake Placid. Today, Wade Tours continues to serve the Capital District with the very best coaches and a full-service travel agency for trips all around the world.

"It's been the hard work of past generations that keeps us going forward," continued DeLorenzo, revealing the admiration he has for his grandfather Robert Wade, the company's third-generation owner who can still be found around the office from time to time. "We're close. I have daughter who may be the sixth generation. She'll say 'Daddy, buses.' And she's only three years old."

For more information on Wade Tours and its history, please visit [www.wadetours.com](http://www.wadetours.com)

## La Québécoise upgrades fleet, takes delivery of first seven MCI® J4500 coaches

**SCHAUMBURG, IL — April 27, 2009** — Autobus La Québécoise, Inc., the largest diversified transportation provider in the Canadian province of Quebec, has taken delivery of seven MCI J4500 coaches. These are the first J4500 models for the company; La Québécoise operates a fleet of nearly 600 vehicles from 16 locations throughout northern Quebec. Announcing the purchase, Mathieu Gingras, vice president and director general, said that the new coaches replace older motor coaches, continuing the company's reputation as having the province's youngest fleet.

La Québécoise will use one of the new J4500 models exclusively for transporting contestants and celebrities appearing on *Star Académie*, a hit reality-television program based on a singing competition. The company has outfitted that coach with plush white leather Amaya seating, featuring an elegantly embroidered La Québécoise logo on the headrest. La Québécoise's new J4500s are equipped with clean-diesel engine technology and feature a mix of Cummins and Detroit Diesel engines, all with Allison transmissions, seating for 56 passengers and a state-of-the-art entertainment system with six 15-inch flat-screen monitors.





Built in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the MCI J4500 is the industry's number-one best-selling model. Recognized for its curb appeal, easy-boarding spiral entryway, tiered theater seating, scenery-size windows and smooth ride, the J4500 for 2009 also come equipped with wide-ride suspension, electronic stability control and a SmarTire® tire pressure monitoring system.

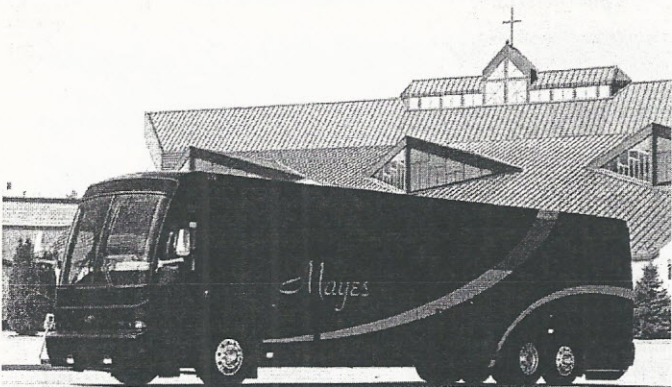
Headquartered in Quebec City, La Québécoise first started with school buses in 1965 and soon diversified into intercity transportation, offering charters, shuttles, airport and long-distance transportation services, and transportation services for the handicapped. The company also operates Heli Express with a fleet of 10 helicopters and Skyjet, a local commuter aviation service. To learn more, visit [www.autobus.qc.ca](http://www.autobus.qc.ca).

## Mayes makes way for newest MCI, a 2009 E4500

**SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 4, 2009** — When Bruce Mayes, founder of Mayes Bus Lines in Knoxville, Tennessee, finds something he likes, he sticks with it. The company's new MCI® E4500 marks the 33rd coach the company has purchased from MCI. Its very first new coach was an MC-9 bought in November 1983. All together, Mayes operates a fleet of 18 MCI coaches and 17 school buses. Its oldest MCI is a 1996 DL3. Mayes easily recalls that it was his ninth MCI.

"I buy one or two MCIs each year," said Mayes, who at 83 still gets to the office at the crack of dawn. "MCI has always been good to me; they go overboard for you. I have experienced a lot of cold winter days in Pembina picking up my MCI coaches, and can tell stories. I like the E because it's pretty, and luxurious. You can charge a high dollar for something that's this good."

This time, Mayes picked up his new E4500 at MCI's Winnipeg plant with Reva Mullins, a driver who has a 25-year career with the company. Both were impressed with the coach's deep Wedgewood blue pearl exterior paint scheme and reflective decal installed by the factory. Equipped with a Cummins engine and Allison Transmission, Mayes' new E4500 features MCI's optional 10.2-inch LCD monitors.



The company's coaches have traveled as far as Alaska and Nova Scotia. Mayes' new E4500 will likely be one of the coaches used on a summer Boy Scout trip to Wyoming. Mayes, whose company has a 30-year relationship with the Scouts, plans on going along as a back-up driver.

Mayes started driving a school bus when he was 16 and founded his school bus company in 1943. "I love what I do," said Mayes, who still puts in long hours. "I tell my sons when you love what you do, 16 hours seems like eight hours."

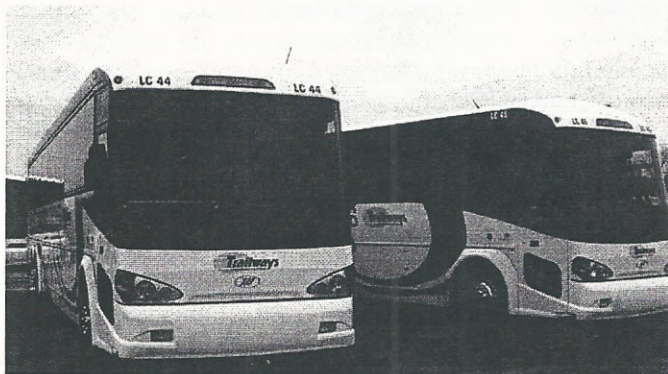
Both of Mayes' sons, Rick and Darrell, assist with operations and have their own school buses. Mayes' grandson, Chris, who played baseball for East Tennessee State, represents the third generation.

"I'm proud of my grandson. I think he's got what it takes. He'll think of something that needs to get done and call up to tell me he's coming back down to the office."

Mayes employs 48 drivers, three mechanics and a two-person clean-up crew. Several of his employees have been with him for nearly 30 years. Says Mayes, who gets most of his business through word-of-mouth, "I know that as long as I have good help, I'll be the best — or at the top half."

## Louisiana Trailways leads in safety with two new MCI® D4505 coaches featuring three-point seatbelts

**SCHAUMBURG, IL — May 4, 2009** — Believing in safety first — and being first — Louisiana Trailways has taken delivery of two new Motor Coach Industries D4505 coaches featuring three-point seatbelts. These are the first two tour and charter coaches in Louisiana Coaches' fleet to feature seatbelts.



"It's a big advantage to be the first company to offer three-point seat belts for increased safety," said Louis Sanders, vice president and general manager. "Our customers are beginning to request the feature, and we have the opportunity to continue to be the leader in safety."



While there are no official regulations requiring seatbelts in passenger coaches, Louisiana Trailways is taking voluntary action to add the new MCI option to its latest tour and charter models. All together, Louisiana operates a fleet of 22 MCI coaches and nine seatbelt-equipped mini buses.

Louisiana Trailways' new D4505s come equipped with SmarTire™, a tire pressure monitoring system designed to improve safety, fuel efficiency and tire performance; a clean-diesel Caterpillar engine and ZF-Astronic transmission power train; and seatbelt-compatible Amaya seats. The coaches also feature a state-of-the-art entertainment system with 10-inch flat-screen video monitors.

Louisiana, a Trailways member, is based in the New Orleans suburb of Marrero, Louisiana. It serves a diverse customer base including tour, charter, corporate and employee commuter shuttles for energy companies. "Business is pretty good," said Sanders, pointing out New Orleans' vital role in the U.S. economy with the presence of energy and oil companies. Convention business is coming back, and a new cruise ship is expected in the fall. Louisiana Trailways is already sold out for a private shuttle during the city's annual Jazz Festival.

Louisiana Trailways was founded in 1990 by Don Sanders. Sanders, a former Greyhound driver, started the company with a single pre-owned MCI 96A3 and a partnership with Trips Unlimited, a local travel agency. By 1994, the company grew to four coaches and Don's son Louis joined. Today, it's one of the premier operators in the industry with a philosophy of quality, service and safety first.

To learn more, visit [www.louisianancoaches.com](http://www.louisianancoaches.com).

## **U.S. spending bill funds Milwaukee streetcar system**

By Larry Sandler of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: Mar. 13, 2009

Ending a 17-year-long dispute, Congress has thrown its support behind a modern streetcar system in downtown Milwaukee.

With local officials deadlocked over how to spend \$91.5 million in long-idle federal transit aid, Sen. Herb Kohl and Rep. David Obey quietly inserted a provision in the massive federal omnibus spending bill to hand 60% of the money to the city for a downtown rail line and 40% to Milwaukee County for buses. President Barack Obama signed the \$410 billion package into law Wednesday.

That's a victory for Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, who has championed a downtown streetcar loop and a defeat for County Executive Scott Walker, who has fought the concept and wanted all the money to go to buses. Kohl

and Obey, both Wisconsin Democrats, acted at the urging of Barrett, their former congressional colleague.

Modern streetcars resemble light rail vehicles, but are smaller and less expensive. Otherwise, they spur the same kind of debate as light rail: Supporters say a fixed rail system stimulates economic development and provides a transportation option that is attractive to both visitors and residents, while opponents say it's too costly and isn't as flexible as a bus line.

As envisioned by Barrett, the streetcars would run in a three-mile loop that links downtown destinations to the Amtrak-Greyhound station. It would connect not only with existing trains and buses but also tie in with proposals for commuter rail and high-speed trains.

That loop could be viewed as a starter system that could be expanded later, said Barrett and Ald. Bob Bauman, another supporter.

"Once you have something in the ground, the debate will change from 'This is the end of Western civilization as we know it' to 'How do we get this line' " the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and other extended to Miller Park,' destinations, Barrett said. That has been the pattern in other cities where light rail lines became popular despite the controversy that preceded them, he noted.

Many questions remain, including the exact route of the streetcar loop; how much the system will cost to build and operate; where the money will come from for other capital and operating expenses; and who will run it. Some of those questions could be answered by the end of the year, through the Milwaukee Connector study, said Pete Beitzel, chairman of the study committee. But elected officials will ultimately decide whether to follow the study's recommendations, noted Beitzel, a Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce vice president.

Barrett, Bauman and Beitzel agreed the streetcar loop would likely cost more than the \$54.9 million in available federal money, but they declined to estimate the total needed. Walker noted the city asked for \$100 million in federal stimulus aid for streetcars, which he said likely would be the total cost. Barrett said he would explore tax-incremental financing and other options to pay the local share of costs.

### **Funding source needed**

Karl Ostby, chairman of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Transit Authority, hailed the deal but urged elected officials to remain focused on finding new revenue sources to replace property tax support for transit. Gov. Jim Doyle's 2009-'11 state budget proposes turning the RTA into a permanent body that could levy a sales tax of up to 0.5% for buses and trains.



Walker said he was glad to get some money for express buses, including a possible route linking UWM and the County Grounds in Wauwatosa. But he restated his previous objections to the streetcar plan, which he has derided as "light rail light." He said streetcars would benefit only a small number of downtown riders instead of transit-dependent commuters.

Bauman, who represents the downtown area, responded that many downtown workers are low-income residents and such residents in other neighborhoods would benefit from spending 40% of the federal funds on buses. As an attorney, Bauman helped win a federal civil rights settlement requiring the state to cooperate in using the \$91.5 million to benefit urban minorities.

Walker also claims the streetcar loop will cost the cash-strapped Milwaukee County Transit System up to \$3 million in state aid, assuming total state transit aid won't increase and any aid for streetcars would come out of the bus system's share. Doyle spokeswoman Carla Vigue said it was too early to tell how future state transit aid would work.

The \$91.5 million is all that remains of \$289 million appropriated in late 1991 for public transit in the Milwaukee area. Over the years, officials have debated and rejected plans for a bus-only highway, a full-scale light rail system, a guided electric bus system and reserved bus and car-pool lanes on I-94.

Meanwhile, the federal government took away \$48 million and state and local officials agreed to spend \$149.5 million on other projects.

In recent years, Barrett has advocated spending part of the money on streetcars and part on express buses, while Walker insisted all of it should be spent on express buses. The connector study is reviewing both plans.

At one point, Barrett proposed splitting the money 50-50, which would have provided \$45.75 million each for streetcars and express buses. Walker rejected that idea and instead suggested spending half on express buses and putting half aside for some future use. Barrett refused.

Now Barrett has \$54.9 million to spend on streetcars and Walker has \$36.6 million for buses, in addition to the \$25.7 million that the federal stimulus package is pumping into the bus system.

County Board Chairman Lee Holloway said he was "disappointed that the county executive's inability to negotiate a compromise reduced the county's share by more than \$9 million," because the 50-50 split "would have been a better deal for Milwaukee County."

## Transit plans could see even more changes

By Larry Sandler of the Journal Sentinel

Posted: May 4, 2009

Last week's late-night legislative deal on regional transit authorities and local sales taxes offers something for everyone - everyone, that is, except Republicans and transit systems outside Milwaukee and Dane counties.

The complex budget compromise, approved by the Joint Finance Committee early Friday morning, provides new sales tax revenue for Milwaukee's city and county governments and creates new agencies to oversee buses and proposed commuter trains in the Milwaukee and Madison areas.

But it offers no help for struggling bus systems elsewhere in the state, and it pointedly cuts two prominent Republicans out of running a new rail authority.

Although Democrats control the budget-writing panel, both houses of the Legislature and the governor's office, they're not united on this issue, and more changes could be ahead as the budget moves through the Assembly and Senate. Here's a look at who would get what if the deal survives the rest of the legislative process and escapes Gov. Jim Doyle's veto pen:

**Milwaukee County:** A 1% countywide sales tax would fund buses, parks and emergency medical services. That tosses out Doyle's proposed three-county 0.5% sales tax for transit alone, in favor of a tax backed by the Milwaukee County Board and by voters in an advisory referendum.

Supervisors say the new tax would raise more than \$130 million, of which million would be used to replace the property taxes now used for those \$67 services. County Board Chairman Lee Holloway and Supervisor Chris Larson applauded the deal. But County Executive Scott Walker, who fought the sales tax, said the move would turn the county into a "tax island."

**City of Milwaukee:** The city would get 15% of the county sales tax revenue, or about \$19 million. Mayor Tom Barrett had pressed for a 0.15% city sales tax to pay for public safety services. Barrett and Common Council President Willie Hines Jr. said the new revenue would help avoid police and fire budget cuts.

**Milwaukee County buses:** A single-county regional transit authority would take over the Milwaukee County Transit System, instead of Doyle's recommendation for a three-county body that would run both buses and trains in Milwaukee, Kenosha and eastern Racine counties. Holloway, Larson and other supervisors had pushed for the single-county body to keep control over sales tax revenue and save the financially struggling bus system.

**KRM commuter trains:** The proposed \$200 million KRM Commuter Link rail line would move forward under a new three-county authority, funded by a \$16-a-car rental car tax. That would replace the existing interim Southeastern Wisconsin RTA and its \$2 rental car tax.



RTA Chairman Karl Ostby said the Federal Transit Administration didn't see the rental car fee as a viable way to fund the rail line and win crucial federal aid. The RTA had originally supported the rental car fee to overcome opposition by Walker and Racine County Executive Bill McReynolds to sales taxes, but the authority later called for a sales tax that would generate revenue for buses as well as KRM.

Neither Walker nor McReynolds, both Republicans, would appoint anyone to the rail authority board. Holloway and Racine County Board Chairman Peter Hansen would name their respective counties' representatives, although the Kenosha County representative would be named by County Executive Jim Kreuser, a Democrat. Walker called that a dangerous precedent.

**Other transit systems:** Dane County would get a regional transit authority, a crucial step toward a proposed \$250 million commuter rail line. But the panel rejected Doyle's call for a Fox Valley RTA, cut the Racine and Kenosha bus systems out of the southeastern Wisconsin transit authorities, and turned down a Legislative Council recommendation to allow other areas to create RTAs funded by sales taxes.

Ostby said the KRM line wouldn't work if the Racine and Kenosha bus systems floundered. Lawmakers and local officials in the Fox Valley and elsewhere had supported RTAs as a way to save their own fiscally troubled public buses.

**Milwaukee streetcars:** The panel called for ending a requirement that voters approve any light rail system in Milwaukee County. That would remove a potential obstacle to Barrett's plan to build a modern streetcar line downtown.

## High capacity bus line coming to Chandler

Mike Branom, Tribune

March 25, 2009 - 7:12PM

East Valley commuters stand to benefit from two mass-transit projects in line for stimulus money.

The Regional Council of the Maricopa Association of Governments unanimously approved on Wednesday evening distributing \$24.4 million in federal funds to a high-capacity bus line connecting Chandler and Mesa, and a park-and-ride lot in Mesa.

In all, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act will bring \$66 million to the Valley for transit.

With \$15 million in funding, the Arizona Avenue Bus Rapid Transit line could open by mid-2010. It will carry passengers the 12-1/2 miles between the park-and-ride lot adjacent to Chandler's Tumbleweed Park and the

Sycamore park-and-ride lot/light-rail station in west Mesa.

Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT, is different from a typical bus line in that the vehicles carry more passengers, have priority at stoplights - when they are not on dedicated roads - and the stops are farther spread out.

Valley Metro planner Ratna Korepella said the 20 stops will have fare vending machines and dynamic signs displaying how much time until the next bus arrives.

A ridership estimate was not available, but Chandler transportation manager Mike Normand said Arizona Avenue/Country Club Drive currently is served by Valley Metro bus Route 112 - which has the city's highest number of passenger boardings per mile.

Mesa already has a BRT line connecting the Sycamore station to the transit center and Superstition Springs Center. Valley Metro Link opened on the same day as Metro light rail, in late December.

Mesa's park-and-ride lot, which receives \$9.4 million in funding, will be placed either at the northeast corner of Baseline Road and Mesa Drive; or near the northwest corner of Baseline and Country Club Drive.

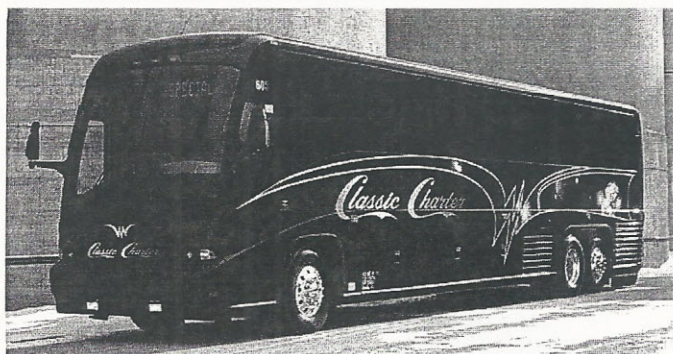
Mesa deputy transportation director Mike James said the latter alternative is preferred, as it could then serve the new BRT line running along Arizona/Country Club.

## Competitive Spirit, new MCI® J4500 keeps Classic Charter growing

**SCHAUMBURG, IL — March 27, 2009** — Classic Charter, based in Visalia, California, and serving the San Joaquin Valley, added a new 2009 MCI J4500 to its fleet. The delivery brings the company's over-the-road coach fleet to 29, now including five J4500s. Classic's new J4500, equipped with a Detroit Diesel engine and Allison transmission, features 110-volt outlets and a state-of-the-art entertainment system with 15-inch video monitors.

"We like the J4500. It's great. Our drivers and riders enjoy it, and it fits in with our company's plans," said Chris Riddington, President of Classic Charter and the second generation to run the company along with his Mother, Sharon Riddington, Vice President of the company; and his wife, Melissa, who serves as Operations Manager.





"In this economy, there's a smaller pie, and we have to work a bit harder, but we've been able to grow by staying competitive," said Riddington, who attributes the strength and dedication of his 75-employee workforce to the company's success. "We have to do everything right. From our office staff to dispatch, drivers to maintenance, these are the links that hold our chain together. We have a good system in place."

Riddington stepped in as President of Classic Charter in 1997 after the death of his father, Les Riddington, who founded the company in 1985. In 12 years, Riddington has tripled Classic's fleet size and now offers charter services to schools, corporations, organizations and international groups, serving communities surrounding Merced, Fresno and Bakersfield. To learn more, visit [www.classiccharter.com](http://www.classiccharter.com).

## **CNY Regional Transportation Authority to Purchase 18 Orion VII CNG Transit Buses**

**ORISKANY, N.Y. (March 16, 2009)** – In an effort to combine environmentally clean vehicles for its communities and to assist local businesses, the Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (CNYRTA) in Syracuse will purchase 18 40' Orion VII Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) transit buses from Daimler Buses North America for delivery in the first quarter of 2010.

"We are committed to the environment and to providing our community with exceptional transportation services. These Orion VII CNG buses fulfill those goals and objectives," said Centro Executive Director Frank Kobliski. "We have operated Orion buses and Orion CNG buses for many years and we are proud to purchase from Daimler Buses – a local bus manufacturer."

The CNYRTA, operator of the Centro public transit system in the region, has an existing fleet of 120 CNG transit buses. The 18 Orion VII CNG buses, manufactured in Oriskany, N.Y., also feature Carrier air-

conditioning units, manufactured in Syracuse. The vehicles boast a stainless steel frame, as well as a Lift-U ramp that features a rising floor.

"This purchase would not be possible without the efforts of Congressmen Rep. Daniel Maffei (D-DeWitt) and Rep. Michael Arcuri (D-Utica), each of whom worked hard to secure funding under the Federal Economic Recovery Act (stimulus) that will be used to pay for these buses," said Kobliski. "Their efforts will create jobs and protect our environment in Central New York."

"We very much appreciate this order from CNYRTA and their confidence in our company, products and people. We look forward to working closely with them on this build and to manufacturing CNG buses for New York State in New York State," said Patrick Scully chief commercial officer for Daimler Buses North America. "The Orion VII will be an excellent fit for CNYRTA's operation."

## **Hong Kong's trams get French driver**

Tue Apr 7, 2009 5:08pm IST

**HONG KONG (Reuters)** - Hong Kong's tram system, which has plied the city's streets for over a century, has been partially bought by a French firm to the consternation of some local heritage activists.

Since 1904, the green trams affectionately known as "ding dings" for the sound of their bells during clattering journeys across Hong Kong island, are a remnant of a bygone age when Hong Kong was but a sleepy, tree-lined British colony before becoming the skyscraper-packed metropolis of today.

The surprise announcement by French environmental and transportation giant Veolia that it had taken a 50 percent stake in the tram operator from Wharf Holdings, with government approval, was met with anger from some activists who said the public should have been consulted beforehand.





"This is a local, iconic mode of transport yet it was secretly sold to a French company," said Loy Ho, a spokesperson for Heritage Watch, a local action rights group set up after the controversial demolition in 2006 of the Star Ferry Clock Tower.

"This makes me very angry," she added. "People have an affection for it."

Veolia stressed that while it had a track record of building and modernizing transport systems across the world, the legacy of Hong Kong's trams would be respected.

"We fully understand that Hong Kong tramway is a unique piece of cultural heritage to Hong Kong people and we are committed to protecting and preserving it," said Cyrille du Peloux, the CEO of Veolia Transport in a statement.

Veolia has the option to buy the remainder of the company at a later date.

Hong Kong officials who've been strongly criticized in recent years for tearing down transport-linked landmarks like the Star Ferry Clock tower and Queen's Pier to allow for harbor reclamation, stressed this niche mode of transport wouldn't also fall victim to development.

"The trams are not only an important form of transportation, for Hong Kong people, the trams are an important part of the city's cultural history," Hong Kong's Transport Secretary Eva Cheng told reporters. "Both companies have pledged to us that they will respect this heritage and preserve the tramway's traditional services."

The trams attract around 230,000 passengers a day, who pay just HK\$2 (26 cents) a ride. Like the Star Ferry, also run by Wharf, Hong Kong's tram system is a popular tourist attraction.

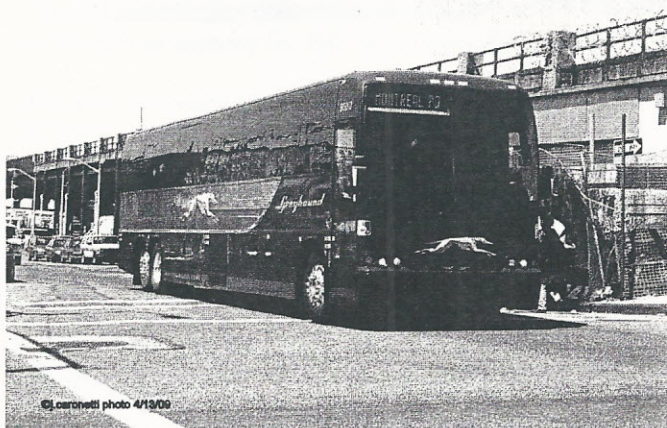
But the 161 trams -- the world's largest fleet of double-decker tram cars -- aren't known for their service standards and have lost money in recent years.

Prior to Wharf, the trams were owned by Jardines, a famous British "hong" or foreign trading house which was founded on the opium trade in the 1830's, and whose history is closely intertwined with that of the former colony.

(Editing by Bill Tarrant)

## Greyhound to offer WiFi and Bolt amenities

A new age of bus travel is headed our way.



Joe Caronetti photo

Old-school bus king Greyhound today is rolling out new BoltBus-type upgrades to its service, including free WiFi, additional legroom, and power outlets on its New York-Montreal and New York-Toronto routes, and the company plans to offer the same amenities on its Boston-New York routes before the end of the month.

Greyhound, the parent company of Bolt, is switching to Prevost X3-45 buses for this service, the same vehicles they use for Bolt. The move is part of a larger plan to upgrade its entire fleet.

Abby Wambaugh, a company spokeswoman, said she was not aware of any timetable yet for the overall conversion.

"When we started with BoltBus," said Wambaugh, "we considered it sort of an experimental thing so we could see how the equipment worked and how it was received by customers."

BoltBus, along with its chief rival Megabus, a unit of Coach USA, launched here last year, offer an alternative to discounters Fung Wah and Lucky Star on the Boston-New York route. With prices beginning at \$1 a seat, both Bolt and Mega sought to lure younger, hipper riders with their upscale amenities.

While some can snag bargain basement seats, most Bolt and Mega passengers will pay something closer to \$15-\$20 each way, which is about what Greyhound charges - and sometimes a bit less with the discounts for, say, students, the elderly, or military personnel.

So is Greyhound thinking of getting rid of Bolt and just competing directly with Mega?

Wambaugh says no. She notes that while pricing is more or less competitive, Bolt is a different brand, with a different image, and going after a different clientele. Wambaugh also notes that there are some real



differences: Bolt offers curbside, express service; Greyhound is a more traditional terminal-based, potentially multistop ride.

What is clear is that things are looking up for bus customers.

(By Paul S. Makishima, Globe staff)

## Megabus builds up buses on busy route

**Low-fare line will use double-deckers on Hub-to-New York runs**

By Katie Johnston Chase  
Globe Staff / May 13, 2009

Megabus, which offers free wireless Internet access and seats for as low as \$1, is rolling out something new along the ultracompetitive Boston-to-New York route: double-decker buses.

Starting today, the company plans to switch all its buses on the route to double-deckers - 13 in all. They're not your typical open-air tour buses packed with sightseers. They seat 81 passengers - 25 more than a regular coach - and they're loaded with amenities that include Wi-Fi access, electronic outlets, and TVs. Some of the newer buses traveling to and from Boston will also have a 51-inch-wide glass ceiling.

The new double-deckers are only 18 inches taller than a regular bus, but this height difference means they can't maneuver inside South Station, where Megabus.com has been based for nearly a year, so the double-deckers will operate out of Back Bay Station. The 13-foot-1-inch buses drop off passengers at Penn Station in New York. Double-deckers are common in Europe, but [Megabus.com](http://Megabus.com), a subsidiary of Coach USA, is the only North American company using them for city-to-city travel, said Dale Moser, chief operating officer. Megabus plans to convert its entire fleet, built by the Belgian company Van Hool, to double-deckers by September.

The change makes sense both economically and environmentally: The bigger buses carry more people, don't require additional drivers, and use less gas. "It becomes a much more environmentally friendly vehicle," said Moser, who added the double-decker buses are four times more efficient than standard buses.

The buses can also be exciting for passengers, said New York University graduate student Denise Birkhofer, who rode a double-decker Megabus on the way back from a trip to Philadelphia to visit art museums last month. It sounded fun, she said, "like having a little piece of London." She sat on the top floor, and she wasn't disappointed.

Not only was it comfortable, but because of the big window in front, she said, "It was kind of like being on a roller coaster."

In Boston, the double-deckers will keep the same schedule, departing from Boston 11 times a day, increasing the capacity of the already well-served route by 275 people a day. The double-deckers leaving from Boston will have the same price structure as the standard [Megabus.com](http://Megabus.com) coaches have - the prices, which currently range between \$1 and \$18 one-way, go up as the buses fill up closer to the departure date. As of yesterday afternoon, Boston passengers could book a next-day round-trip ticket from Boston to New York for as little as \$15.50. Friday and Saturday trips could be purchased for as little as \$28.50.

The rollout of the double-deckers will help meet the growing demand for bus travel in the down economy. Buses are particularly popular on short-haul routes such as Boston-New York, which caters to both business travelers and students.

[Megabus.com](http://Megabus.com), which serves 13 cities in the Northeast and 17 in the Midwest, has nearly doubled its riders each year, according to Moser.

BoltBus (owned by [Greyhound Lines](http://Greyhound Lines) and Peter Pan Bus Lines, which also operates out of South Station) is selling out all its seats between New York and Boston, said Peter Pan executive vice president Robert J. Schwarz. The discount bus line offers Wi-Fi access and one-way tickets for \$1.

"I don't think we've even come close to tapping out the market," he said.

The high-tech access and other amenities on these discount buses may have other low-fare carriers like Chinatown bus operators Fung Wah and Lucky Star feeling the pinch, said Joseph P. Schwieterman, a DePaul University professor who has studied the intercity bus business. Lucky Star, for one, also offers \$1 seats on its buses.

Fung Wah and Lucky Star did not return calls seeking comment.

"Customers no longer need to settle for an obscure operator to travel cheap," Schwieterman said.

"Wireless Internet has given new operators respectability among business clientele as well."

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## Dallas-based Greyhound Lines moving some support jobs to Cincinnati

08:37 AM CDT on Tuesday, May 12, 2009

By TERRY MAXON [tmaxon@dallasnews.com](mailto:tmaxon@dallasnews.com)

Greyhound Lines Inc. will move some of its support jobs from Dallas to Cincinnati this summer as it consolidates those functions with its Cincinnati-based parent, a Greyhound spokesman said Monday.

"As a result of the Greyhound merger with FirstGroup America, several of our departments have been consolidated in order to maximize efficiency and reduce costs," Greyhound's Eric Wesley said.

"That being said, some of the members of these shared-services teams will be moving to FirstAmerica's headquarters, which are in Cincinnati," he said. "But that represents only a part of Greyhound's employee base here. So we remain committed to remaining in Dallas at this time."

Greyhound will be moving departments that handle information technology, risk management and legal issues, with the possibility of accounting functions also going to Cincinnati, Wesley said.

Greyhound currently employs more than 600 workers at its downtown Dallas headquarters, said spokeswoman Kim Plaskett.

"We don't know at this time exactly how many employees will be going to Cincinnati, because details of that plan are still being finalized," she said.

Greyhound has been owned since 2007 by FirstGroup America, one of four operating units of Scottish firm FirstGroup PLC. FirstGroup bought the bus company as part of its acquisition of Laidlaw International Inc., which had acquired Greyhound in 1998.

Wesley said he was not aware of any discussions to move Greyhound's headquarters from Dallas, its home since it moved from Phoenix in 1987.

## MTA plans to roll out 'smart' fare card in October

By Michael Dresser | [michael.dresser@baltsun.com](mailto:michael.dresser@baltsun.com)  
4:18 PM EDT, May 11, 2009

The Maryland Transit Administration has set an October target for rolling out its long-awaited automated fare card system but has deferred its goal of making the service interchangeable with a similar technology in use on Washington's subway and buses.

MTA spokeswoman Jawauna Greene said Monday that the agency, which had planned to introduce the "smart" card technology in December or January, is moving its target date up in response to customer demand.

"They want it now, they need it now," she said.

The cards, which store credits for fares on an embedded microchip, will be accepted on MTA core services buses, light rail and the Metro subway. They will not be usable on MARC trains or commuter buses, Greene said. The MTA's plans had long called for its cards to be interchangeable with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's SmarTrip cards. But Greene said the MTA has been unable to negotiate a revenue-sharing agreement with the Washington agency and has decided to move forward with a Baltimore-only system.

Greene said the MTA is adopting a technology that is compatible with the Washington cards — making it possible to integrate the two systems in the future.

MTA customers would pay an undetermined up-front charge for a card and then would be able to add value to it by depositing cash at MTA machines around the region. In Washington, the up-front charge is \$5, Greene said, but the MTA has yet to decide what the price would be here.

At some point, Greene said, the MTA hopes to upgrade the service so that it can accept credit cards.

Greene noted that the cards would deduct the exact fare for bus trips, thus avoiding overpayments by riders who aren't carrying exact change.

The full fare for a one-way trip on MTA buses, light rail and subway is \$1.60. Greene said she is unaware of any plans to raise fares.

## Metro rolls out big red RapidRide bus design

New federal funding to help service start next year  
By AUBREY COHEN  
SEATTLEPI.COM STAFF

King County Metro Transit rolled out sleek new buses for its planned RapidRide routes Monday and announced \$13.8 million in new federal funding to help the service start next year.

"This is a transit-happy city," Matthew Welbes, executive director and acting deputy administrator of the Federal Transit Administration, said in front of the new red-and-yellow, articulated bus Monday morning.



Metro already has the nation's largest fleet of 60-foot articulated buses, which make up half the agency's fleet, agency General Manager Kevin Desmond noted in a P-I column last December. Articulated buses hold more riders at less cost than smaller buses, but have trouble in snow and ice, which is why the agency parked the buses in December's snowstorm, leading to hours-long waits for frustrated riders.

The new buses won't be any better in snow and ice than existing articulated buses, Metro spokeswoman Rochelle Ogershok said. "We're working with cities to more closely coordinate snow removal routes with Metro routes," she said. "We're also looking at how we might be able to deploy our buses a little differently depending on what the weather's doing."

The new bus-rapid-transit service will feature buses at least every 10 minutes during peak times, stations with real-time information about when the next bus will arrive, and on-board wireless Internet access.

"This is not your parents' bus system, folks," Welbes said.

The new federal transit grant money comes as Metro Transit is facing a projected \$168 million budget hole for 2009 and 2010. Officials made the announcement during the American Public Transportation Association's Bus & Paratransit Conference & International Bus Roadeo, which includes the association's 2009 Bus Rapid Transit Conference.

The traditional bus "was good in its day," association President William Millar said. "This is what is needed in our day."

People avoid bus riding because of uncertainty such as now knowing when the next bus will come or whether it comes back to the same place, Millar said. He said the new service would address those issues.

The new money will go toward buying 16 new hybrid buses, station and shelter improvements and the real-time information system for the RapidRide "A Line," set to serve Tukwila, SeaTac, Des Moines, Kent and Federal Way starting in the middle of 2010.

Bus riders have been "anxiously awaiting" RapidRide since it was adopted as part of the Transit Now plan three years ago, King County Executive Ron Sims said.

RapidRide is scheduled to put 100 total buses on five lines, starting with the A Line and the adding:

- The B Line, between Bellevue and Redmond, in 2011;
- The C Line, between West Seattle and downtown Seattle, in 2011;

- The D Line, between Ballard, Lower Queen Anne and downtown, in 2012;
- The E Line, between Shoreline and downtown along Aurora Avenue, in 2013.

In addition to the diesel-electric bus on display Monday, Metro also set up a RapidRide shelter, including a push-button light to signal buses to stop; and a kiosk with route maps, a reader board showing arrival times and a scanner for ORCA transit cards, allowing riders to board through any door.

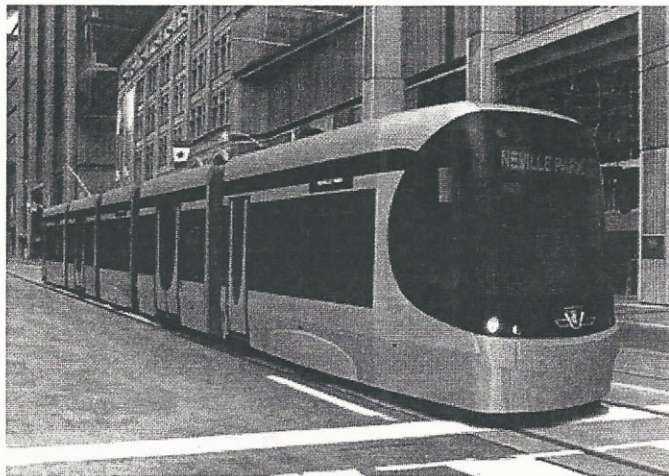
Aubrey Cohen can be reached at 206-448-8362 or [aubreycohen@seattlepi.com](mailto:aubreycohen@seattlepi.com).

## TTC picks Bombardier to supply streetcars

Apr 24, 2009 05:00 PM

**TESS KALINOWSKI**

TRANSPORTATION REPORTER



In a move bound to have Thunder Bay residents cheering today, the TTC has chosen Montreal-based Bombardier for its billion-dollar streetcar contract.

The TTC announced this morning that it has chosen Bombardier's Flexity Outlook car as the base model on which to customize a sleek, new Euro-style ride for Toronto.

At least 25 per cent of the car must be made with Canadian parts and labour and Bombardier has said its Thunder Bay plant is ready to roll.

Bombardier beat out Siemens Canada — part of a German-based company — for the contract worth between \$1.25 billion and \$3 billion.

The initial order will be for 204 30-metre long cars to replace the TTC's existing 30-year-old fleet of 248 Canadian Light Rail Vehicles (CLRVs) and Articulated Light Rail Vehicles (ALRVs) that run on 11 city routes.



The contract will also include an option to build another 364 cars to run on the city's planned Transit City light rail lines into the suburbs.

The cars have the capacity to carry about twice as many people as the old version. They will feature an enclosed driver compartment, boarding from all doors and a computerized fare system to accommodate the new fare technology the TTC is likely to introduce in coming years.

The first of the cars are scheduled to be in the city for testing in 2011 and will be in service by 2012, TTC officials said.

The recommendation to have Bombardier build the cars will go before city councillors on the Toronto Transit Commission for approval Monday.

The award follows about two years of controversy. The TTC went to a strictly monitored request for proposals process on the streetcar contract after it awarded the contract for new subway cars to Bombardier in 2006 without negotiating with competing manufacturers.

The \$710 million deal was designed to support the struggling Thunder Bay economy. But Siemens and some city councillors said it might have robbed Toronto taxpayers of the opportunity to get a better deal on the subway cars.

But when the TTC started the RFP process for the streetcars only two companies submitted bids: Bombardier and a small British firm, TRAM Power.

The TTC said both bids failed to meet its requirements and suggested that Bombardier's car, versions of which run in cities around the world, wasn't technically able to take Toronto's tight turns.

The RFP was cancelled and the TTC went to a negotiated bidding process using the same technical specifications. Bombardier re-entered the race and was joined by Siemens.

Chairman Adam Giambrone stressed today that the streetcars represent "the No. 1 ask of the City of Toronto for the (federal) stimulus dollars."

"We will be looking to negotiate with Bombardier for a higher Canadian content," Giambrone told reporters, adding that "we have to assume that there may be additional cost" for this.

The contract price doesn't include a new maintenance facility required for the larger vehicles, estimated to cost \$345 million, which Giambrone suggested would likely be located in the city's port district.

"The new LRVs will be low-floor, quieter, have features such as air conditioning for greater customer comfort,

and be able to carry almost twice as many people as the TTC's current streetcars do," the commission said.

TTC engineering staff – previously worried that Bombardier's vehicles could not negotiate tight turns on the Toronto track network – "is satisfied that Bombardier's proposed car will operate safely in Toronto."

The decision on funding faces a June 27 deadline beyond which Bombardier's price is no longer guaranteed.

Giambrone observed that the city, province and federal government traditionally split such spending evenly, but "the funding charts often get incredibly complex."

Thunder Bay New Democrat MP Bruce Hyer welcomed the announcement, which "will bring some hope to workers that are left behind by the Conservative government."

NDP Leader Jack Layton, who represents a Toronto riding, added in a statement that parts for the streetcars will come from various Ontario plants and "now it's time for the federal government to do its part and allow the City of Toronto to use its share of the stimulus package for this project."

-with files from The Canadian Press

## **Bombardier sells economic merits of streetcar bid**

Posted: June 16, 2009, 5:39 PM by Allison Hanes

Bombardier is now stepping up to make the economic case for government funds to help Toronto purchase new streetcars.

Late today, a spokesman for Toronto Mayor David Miller released a report commissioned by the company, which has been selected to build the next generation of streetcars for the city at a cost of \$1.2 billion.

The Toronto Transit Commission announced Bombardier as the winning bidder nearly two months ago – before it had secured agreements from the province and the federal government to purchase the vehicles.

A June 27 deadline looms to place the order – but so far both Ottawa and Queen's Park have been skeptical of the contract, suggesting it doesn't qualify for economic stimulus funds.

Bombardier has pledged to manufacture at least 25% of 204 new low-floor replacement streetcars in Canada. As a result:

- The study claims the project would generate 5,700 direct jobs. Most would be in Ontario, including 4,650 at a Bombardier plant in Thunder Bay, while 700 would be in Quebec.



- The company said the project would also create 14,800 indirect jobs – 10,300 in Ontario, and 4,500 in Quebec and Manitoba. Of the jobs in Ontario, 4,105 would be in Greater Toronto.

- The contract would pay out \$1.1 billion in wages, salaries and benefits, \$885 million of it in Ontario, \$230 million of it in the GTA.

- The report also estimate the project would generate \$240 million in revenue to Ontario from sales and income tax and \$244 million to Ottawa – which would "offset and capital grant" by either government to the city.

The TTC has said if it can't order the replacement streetcars from Bombardier by the end of next week, then it won't be able to order up to 400 new vehicles for brand new light rail routes by the time those lines are built with federal and provincial money.

It can only order streetcars for the new lines as an option on the contract to purchase the vehicles for the old lines.

But upper levels of government have been cool to the idea as a candidate for economic stimulus funds.

Just over a week ago, federal Infrastructure Minister John Baird was caught saying Toronto should "F\$%& off" for thinking a manufacturing project would win over thousands of bricks and mortar infrastructure proposed from cities across Canada. (He has since apologized for the profanity).

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty has ribbed Toronto's Mayor about never being satisfied in his quest for transit dollars, despite the fact the province has already pledged close to \$9 billion in the last year.

Ontario Infrastructure Minister George Smitherman also lashed out at Toronto for announcing the streetcar design without having securing money to pay for them.

## **Council votes to double spending on new streetcars**

**But councillors slam mayor for gambling on federal funding for new fleet**

Jun 26, 2009 09:51 PM

**TESS KALINOWSKI**

TRANSPORTATION REPORTER

Everybody got what they wanted out of today's special meeting of Toronto City Council.

The TTC and Bombardier got to seal the deal for the purchase of a new \$1.2 billion fleet of 204 streetcars.

Mayor David Miller got approval to double the city's investment in the cars to \$834 million.

And his critics got to extract their pound of mayoral flesh for Miller's failed gamble to wring \$417 million – about one-third of the cost of the cars – out of Ottawa.

"This is an embarrassment to the mayor; it's an embarrassment for the city. All council is doing is cleaning up the mess," said councillor and former transit commissioner Brian Ashton.

Miller's refusal to accept repeated statements by Transport Minister John Baird that streetcars didn't meet the criteria of stimulus fund was "a shell game in which the mayor lost sight of the pea," Ashton said.

But Miller stood unrepentant in the face of criticism, saying he would play his hand the same if he had to do it over. And, in the end, council voted 36-6 in favour of approving a \$834 million city contribution to the project.

The deal means the TTC will have to defer spending \$417 million on six other capital projects, including a bus rebuild and a new bus terminal on Eglinton Ave.

The streetcars that move about a million people a week in Toronto are too important to let the Bombardier deal expire at its deadline Saturday night at midnight. To do so risks increasing the price – the rival bidder quoted \$500 million more than Bombardier – and forfeiting the province's \$416 million contribution.

"This is probably my proudest moment as mayor of Toronto. We have just secured the transit future of this city for a generation, and we did it very quickly and simply by sticking together as a council," Miller told reporters.

"The new light rail vehicles will provide incredible service to Torontonians. They're accessible, they're low-floor, they're modern, and not only that – they will create thousands of jobs in Thunder Bay and around the 905 for the parts suppliers," he said.

But some councillors complained that Miller hadn't consulted them throughout the weeks he pursued Ottawa, nearly costing the TTC its deal and backing them into a corner to approve twice as much funding during a strike by city workers.

"This is a pretty slipshod way to run what we constantly remind people is the sixth largest government in Canada," said Councillor John Parker.

"Streetcars are on the rails, but the rest of how we operate the city has gone off the rails," said Councillor Peter Milczyn, who sits on the Toronto Transit Commission.

"We're going to pay twice what we thought we would pay for streetcars," said Councillor David Shiner, who scolded the mayor for negotiating with Ottawa without including council. City workers are out on strike, "but we have \$417 million more to put into this streetcar program," he said.



Councillor Karen Stintz voted for it in the end, but complained she didn't like "being held hostage" by the deal.

There was no mention at today's council meeting of rolling back councillors' pay increase.

The city is working with Ottawa to find Toronto projects that would fit the stimulus criteria, such as parks and recreation, sidewalks, water and transit. No details of the application were available, but the city reckons its share of the federal money on a per capita basis comes to \$312 million.

"We're asking for everything we possibly can that fits within the rules that's been approved by council in our capital budget process, and the amount of funding we get will be up to them," Miller said.

Today's meeting was held at the Toronto Convention Centre instead of strike-bound city hall, a decision Miller said was vital to allow the public to attend without having to cross picket lines.

TTC chief general manager Gary Webster said none of the projects being deferred would put service or public safety at risk, including the \$258 million taken from the bus rebuild program – about 70 per cent of the money set aside for it. In the next two years the TTC will strip down a bus to see what the cost of the re-build would be.

"There's about \$120 million left in that budget. If we find, a year or two from now, there's more money required we'll identify that for the budget process," he said.

"If you compare the state of the bus fleet today with the state of the streetcar fleet today, the streetcar fleet is aging, it's unreliable, the oldest cars are 30 years old and need to be replaced, that's what brings us here today. The buses are in pretty good shape. The average age of the buses is shrinking down, they're five or six years old," he said.

Bombardier vice-president Mike Hardt said his company is "thrilled" that full funding is now in place for the \$1.2 billion contract.

Minutes after the city council vote passed, Bombardier received a notice from the TTC, which clears the way for the contract to be signed in the coming days, Hardt said. He added that full production of streetcars should be underway in just over three years.

Meantime, opposition MPs criticized the federal Conservatives for failing to support the streetcar plan.

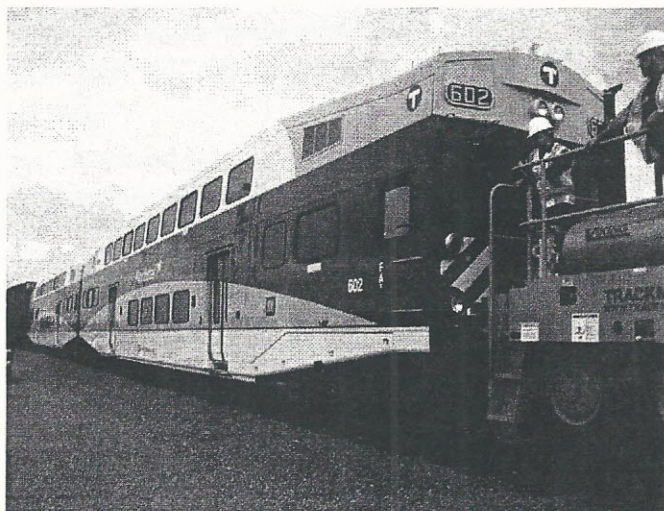
## First rail cars arrive for Northstar commuter line

by Ambar Espinoza, Minnesota Public Radio  
June 17, 2009

Elk River, Minn. — The first two coach cars for the Northstar Commuter Rail line have arrived in central Minnesota, putting the project one step closer to its launch in November.

Each of the passenger cars will seat up to 145 people, with room for standing and storage for bicycles and luggage. Within a few weeks, people will notice trains running on tracks between downtown Minneapolis and Big Lake, as Metro Transit conducts test runs.

Felix Schmiesing, a Sherburne County Commissioner, is chair of the second phase of the Northstar Corridor Development Authority, which aims to expand the line to St. Cloud.



Schmiesing says if Northstar can get a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration, it can expand to St. Cloud. The money, part of the federal stimulus package, would cover about 80 percent of the expansion costs. Schmiesing says the Minnesota Department of Transportation and Northstar officials plan to apply for the grant by early fall.

"And it's not an earmark. It's a grant opportunity," he said. "And we're hoping our congresswoman would take a look at this and give us the green light on it."

Schmiesing is referring to Republican Congresswoman Michele Bachmann. Most of the Northstar Commuter Rail line runs through her Sixth district. Bachmann wasn't available for an interview, but she responded in writing to questions for this story.

Bachmann opposes including federal funding to expand the line to St. Cloud in appropriations bill, because Northstar, in her words, is "not on any of the official lists of priority projects." She has opposed earmarks in the past, but she did send a letter encouraging the Federal Railroad Administration to consider MnDOT's grant application for Northstar.

President Obama has set aside \$8 billion from the economic stimulus package for high-speed passenger rail systems. Schmiesing says Northstar can meet the



grant criteria as an intercity rail project, because it has the potential to connect two metropolitan areas, St. Cloud and Minneapolis.

"We're very hopeful," Schmiesing said. "Right now we have a bit of a perfect storm with the new stimulus money and with the bipartisan support that we're receiving from the governor and from the Democratic administration in Washington."

Schmiesing says the project can be completed faster than any other rail project in the state. He says a lot of the planning and environmental work has already been done, and the project got an unexpected boost during Vice President Joe Biden's visit to St. Cloud in March.

"It was a question that came from the audience and the response from the crowd kind of said it all," Schmiesing said.

Biden said the federal government ought to be able to provide money for the project, and Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar has included \$6 million to expand Northstar to St. Cloud in a Senate appropriations bill for next year.

The Transportation and Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill also includes \$400,000 for Northstar buses to St. Cloud and \$1 million for a Northstar locomotive.

Northstar continues to receive support from the vice president, who has called Governor Pawlenty to talk about how to make the expansion happen.

Schmiesing says St. Cloud Metro Transit will soon begin constructing a park-and-ride lot in southeast St. Cloud, where buses will take passengers from St. Cloud to Big Lake starting in November.

## Transportation experts have an ACE up their sleeves



Three public bus models converge at the Downtown Transportation Center on May 25. At the left is a Citizens Area Transit bus, to the right is a Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) bus used between downtown and North Las Vegas and behind that, a pair of double-deck Deuce buses. When the Regional Transportation Commission begins its ACE

bus routes along the Las Vegas Strip next year, vehicles similar to the MAX buses will be used.

By Richard N. Velotta (contact), In Business reporter

Fri, May 29, 2009 (3 a.m.)

Anyone who has watched tourists load and unload the popular double-decker Deuce buses on the Strip knows that there has to be a better way to move visitors up and down our fabulous neon byway.

The problem is that with the Citizens Area Transit system the fare normally is paid when you get on board. On the Deuce, there's one door in the front (the entrance, where you pay the driver) and one toward the center or back (the exit). Because many of the Strip riders are tourists and pay by the ride — and there are dozens of riders at nearly every Strip bus stop — there is a big logjam to climb aboard.

On top of that, they are tourists so they ask questions like, "Where does this bus go?" Transit officials tried to alleviate some of the continuous questions to drivers by hiring some high school students to serve as "Deuce Ambassadors" to answer Las Vegas and bus system questions.

Because the route is up and down the Strip, by far the most popular route in the system, the long lines never seem to discourage ridership. It's part of the Vegas experience.

Anyone who has been on the Strip during a busy weekend knows that mass transportation is one of the answers to clearing some of the congestion. It's a nearly hopeless cause to suggest that more Strip employees use the buses to alleviate some of the traffic.

Yes, there has to be a better way. And by January, we'll get it. That's when the Deuce's new Strip cousin, the ACE, will make its debut.

Many already have seen what the ACE buses look like. They're running along Las Vegas Boulevard North from downtown Las Vegas toward Nellis Air Force Base.

The Regional Transportation Commission calls the ACE system "the showcase transportation initiative for the Las Vegas Valley." The bullet-shaped vehicles look like — and will function like — light-rail trains. As much as possible, they will travel in dedicated lanes.

I've ridden two of the West's newest mass-transit systems and can attest to the convenience of using light rail in Denver and Phoenix. But unfortunately, light rail is far too expensive for us now. ACE is the logical middle step between traditional bus service and light rail.

So what will set ACE apart from the Deuce?

The biggest difference will be in the paying for a ticket. Instead of buying a pass on the bus, tickets will be



available at stations. Bus loading will be similar to light-rail train loading with doors opening widely to allow passengers to get on and off quickly. Station platforms will be built so that passengers won't have to go up or down steps to get aboard.

In addition, the ACE line — the Strip and downtown route will be known as the "Gold Line" — will have fewer stops than the Deuce, potentially making every trip faster.

The Gold Line will have 16 stations with six in the downtown area in dedicated lanes. The northern end of the route will be at Bonneville Avenue and Grand Central Parkway near the Las Vegas Premium Outlets.

From there, the bus will go north to the World Market Center and to Symphony Park before turning east toward Casino Center and the Fremont Street Experience. Then, it will head south to Garces and Coolidge avenues (the downtown arts district). From that point, it leaves the dedicated lanes for surface streets and continues south via Third Street to Main Street.

The next stop is the Stratosphere, where the bus will cut over to Paradise Road and stop at the Sahara, right below the southern terminus of the Las Vegas Monorail. At Convention Center Drive, it will stop near the Las Vegas Convention Center and cut west to the Strip.

Once on Las Vegas Boulevard, the bus will stop at the Fashion Show mall and Wynn Las Vegas; CityCenter, Bellagio and Paris Las Vegas; Excalibur and the MGM Grand; Mandalay Bay; Town Square and the Callaway Golf Center; and finally, the Las Vegas Outlet Center on the southbound run only.

From there, it curls back to the north, using Warm Springs Road and Gillespie Street, where the southern end of the route is the South Strip Transfer Terminal.

Jacob Snow, RTC general manager, is enthusiastic about the ACE's arrival and last week shared that and his views of other Southern Nevada transportation developments at a breakfast meeting of the local chapter of National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, the Commercial Retail Development Association.

Snow said about 33,000 riders use the Deuce on the Strip every day. With both systems, the commission is expecting 45,000 to 50,000 Strip riders, especially with the prospect of more employee commuters.

Like the Deuce, ACE tickets will cost \$3 a ride, \$7 for an all-day pass and \$15 for a three-day pass.

ACE routes are planned to Henderson and to northwest Las Vegas. The Boulder Highway "Green Line" is expected to be running by late 2010 or early 2011. Snow said to the northwest, the "ACEExpress" would run along U.S. 95 from Durango Drive and use the high-

occupancy-vehicle diamond lanes and the express lanes under construction on Interstate 15.

## **SMART board weighs American vs. European rail cars**

By BOB NORBERG  
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Wednesday, June 24, 2009 at 5:40 p.m.

Last Modified: Wednesday, June 24, 2009 at 5:40 p.m.

Rail car manufacturers made pitches to the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit District on Wednesday, hoping to sell directors on their technology as the deadline to choose a rail car nears.

One of the companies said it could produce the light-weight, European-style trains that directors envision running on the 70-mile commute line through Sonoma and Marin counties.

"You had several presentations, you had several sales pitches," said SMART executive director Lillian Hames, who promised the board a staff recommendation at its July 15 meeting.

The board is choosing between heavy-weight, American-style rail cars that meet federal safety and pollution standards that take effect in 2012 and European-style cars that would require a waiver from federal railroad regulators. The European-designed cars could not run at the same time as freight trains.

Board members were disappointed with the ride quality of the only American-style train they tested, which is being operated in Portland, Ore.

Three companies made presentations arguing for the heavier American-style cars.

Hoping to allay fears about the cars' ride quality, Siemens vice president Robin Stimson told the board the Portland car was made by now-defunct Colorado Railcar, was poorly crafted and that the car built by his company is a better alternative.

Representatives from Brookville Equipment Corp. of Brookville, Pa., and Nippon Sharyo USA of Arlington Heights, Ill., also made presentations of their American-style trains.

The only company at the meeting that said it would produce the lighter cars was Stadler of Switzerland, which makes the cars for the European market and recently branched into the United States.

It has made cars for a rail system in Austin, Texas, which is waiting for federal rail regulators to approve it for operation. It also has the contract to provide cars for a new system in Denton, Texas.



Marius Schmidt of Stadler said the lighter cars will meet all U.S. regulations except for crash and safety, which he said is addressed with an energy-absorbing crash system.

The board has set a meeting for 12:30 p.m. on July 15 in the Sonoma County supervisors' chambers to make a final decision.

The board on Wednesday also adopted a strategic plan that acknowledges there is a \$155 million shortfall over the 20-year life of the SMART tax, caused by declines in sales tax revenue because of the recession.

The plan, however, clings to the 2014 completion and startup date of the rail system, hoping to make up the funding gap with state or federal funds.

Hames also told the board that for the next two years, the tax provides enough money to do the design and engineering work.

The shortfall would not be felt until bonds will be needed to be sold to begin construction, when it is hoped the economy has recovered and tax revenues increase.

## **Transit neglect spans 20 years: conference**

**MEREDITH MACLEOD**

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

(Jun 18, 2009)

The Toronto-Hamilton corridor is "playing catch-up for a lost generation of investment" in its transit system, said a keynote speaker at a transportation conference at McMaster University yesterday.

Leslie Woo, general manager of policy and planning for Metrolinx, said Ontario made significant investments in public transit for several decades until funding dried up in the 1980s.

The regional transit authority's plan, a 25-year, \$50-billion vision called The Big Move, will cut car use, greenhouse gas emissions, commuting times and congestion, said Woo. She said those issues will increasingly affect the region's prosperity and quality of life as what she calls the "GTA chain" adds 100,000 people and 50,000 cars each year.

The first five projects, all in the GTA, are scheduled to be complete by 2015. "That's an enormous step forward in recovering 20 years of neglect."

Rapid transit for Hamilton is "definitely on the agenda", said Woo. The Metrolinx board is slated to make a

decision about Hamilton's \$1-billion proposal for light rail transit next month.

The first-ever Translog conference, hosted by the McMaster Institute for Transportation and Logistics, brought together industry leaders, academics and government officials to talk about needs and innovation in goods movement, public transit and infrastructure.

Researchers from Norway, Turkey, California, Chicago, New York and Montreal will present papers. The conference continues today.

In another keynote address, James Perttula, manager of goods movement policy for the Ministry of Transportation, said the province is exploring dedicated express truck lanes through major urban centres, high-speed passenger rail from Quebec to Windsor, express rail freight corridors and extending the St. Lawrence Seaway season in a bid to boost trade.

If it's done right, light rail transit in Hamilton will transform the city's image and reality, said conference presenter Alyssa Golden, a Queen's University student.

The city must seize the opportunity to ensure all development along transit corridors is made on a walkable scale, that amenities are connected and streetscapes are enhanced with lighting, signage, street facades and public art, she said.

She stressed the need to minimize the "barren, stark wastelands" of surface parking lots that dot the downtown.

"I truly believe that, within 20 years, Hamilton can shed the negative image it has and be seen as a truly amazing place to live, not just in Canada, but in the world," she said.

Golden is an Ottawa native who studied civil engineering at Mac and is now earning a master's degree in urban and regional planning.

Without strict rules, Golden said Hamilton will end up getting "transit adjacent development" rather than development that integrates transit with the core's existing heritage, green space and culture.

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