



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

SEPT/OCT 2009

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

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

Visit the Omnibus Society of America website at "www.osabus.com". At osabus.com we will be posting upcoming fan trips and meetings information, as well as membership information.

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

• SEPTEMBER MEETING

The **September meeting** of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on September 4, 2009, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening will be a slide presentation by Ed Montenjano on Milwaukee Transit.

The **October meeting** of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on October 2, 2009, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital, 2751 W. Winona Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting will begin at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening will be a slide presentation by David Stanley.

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

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

CTA Officials Dedicate New Wellington Brown Line Station

8/14/2009

16 of 18 Stations Now Completed on Capacity Expansion Project

Chicago Transit Authority officials today dedicated the new Wellington station on the Brown Line.

The station reopened to customers July 30 after a 16-month temporary closure for construction as part of the line's capacity expansion project.

Wellington is the sixteenth of 18 stations included in the Brown Line capacity expansion project to be completed. To date, work also has been completed at Kimball, Kedzie, Rockwell, Francisco, Western, Sedgwick, Montrose, Addison, Southport, Armitage, Diversey, Chicago, Damen, Irving Park and Paulina.

With the completion of Wellington, all of the Brown Line stations temporarily closed for renovation now are open. Although construction remains under way at Belmont and Fullerton, service continues to operate at both stations.

"We are pleased to mark the completion of renovations at Wellington," said CTA President Richard L. Rodriguez. "Modernizing the station and making it accessible to customers with disabilities will help meet the transit needs of CTA customers for many years to come as well as contribute to the development of the surrounding community."

At Wellington, a new station house was built in the same location as the previous station house, and a new auxiliary exit was built just north of the station on Nelson Street for added customer convenience and passage.

With the addition of two elevators, the Wellington station now is accessible to customers with disabilities. With this station reopening, 89 of CTA's 144 rail stations are accessible.

The platforms at Wellington were reconfigured to accommodate eight-car trains which allow more customers to board. Other conveniences include accessible turnstiles, brighter lighting, new signs - including Braille signs - and bike racks.

As part of the partnership between CTA and the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs, artwork is part of station renovations in the overall project. At the Wellington station, Martin Donlin created an art glass storefront that depicts human figures in motion, as if passing through the station.

Prior to the start of construction, the average weekday ridership at the Wellington station was 2,700. Average weekday ridership on the Brown Line is more than 80,000.

CTA Outlines Next Generation Fare Collection Project

8/12/2009

Request for Proposals to be Issued Later this Month

Today the Chicago Transit Board was provided a report on plans to transition to a new farecard payment system. This project would introduce the use of contact-less credit cards, debit cards and prepaid cards to ride the system. CTA expects to issue the request for proposals for a two-step competitive procurement process this month.

The transition would save the CTA in money now used to issue fare media and manage the fare payment and collection system. The contact-less fare payment system would reduce the need for customers to carry cash or have the right denomination or currency to ride the system. In addition, the same card that would pay for fares to ride CTA also could be used for everyday transactions such as purchases at retail outlets, thereby reducing the number of cards an individual would need to carry.

The first phase of the procurement process will examine the CTA's options for developing the card – considering possible procedures, management and cost of the program. After reviewing these proposals and developing a final plan, the second phase will give companies the opportunity to submit proposals for the actual implementation of the program.

"The CTA continually seeks initiatives that will help improve efficiency and convenience for customers," said Chicago Transit Board Chairman Carole Brown. "With this new system, customers would benefit from the faster boarding times and ease of use as nearly all fare transactions would be touch-and-go."

The farecard would be a smart card containing a computer chip that allows customers to pay a fare and also serves as a standard credit or debit card tied to a customer's bank or credit card account. A prepaid card could provide the option for customers who choose not to have the card tied to a bank account.

"CTA wants to examine ways to use the technology available today to transition to a more modern contact-less fare media system," said CTA President Richard L. Rodriguez. "Once implemented, the smart card would bring the agency's fare paying process more in line with the way people prefer to conduct their business."

The CTA expects to complete the two-step RFP process and begin the transition to an open fare system next summer.

T-Mobile Wireless Services to be Available in CTA Subways by Late Winter

8/12/2009

The Chicago Transit Board today approved a contract with T-Mobile Central, LLC (T-Mobile) to lease the Chicago Transit Authority's wireless communications infrastructure in the Red and Blue line subways. T-Mobile will become the fifth wireless service provider to lease the subway network. The contract is expected to generate a minimum of \$3.1 million in new revenues for the CTA for the duration of the 10 year contract.

The installation and successful testing of T-Mobile's base equipment – comprised of amplifiers, transmitters and receivers – in the subways will take place over the next several months. T-Mobile's services are expected to be activated later this year.

In June, the board also approved a similar contract with AT&T, whose services also are estimated to be available later this year. Currently only customers with wireless services through Cricket Communications, Verizon Wireless and U.S. Cellular are able to use cell phones and mobile devices in CTA subways.

"As CTA continues to face budget challenges, it is important to pursue initiatives like this that provide benefits for customers while producing revenue for the CTA," said CTA President Richard L. Rodriguez.

Revenue from the wireless service providers currently leasing the subway network is expected to generate a minimum of \$15 million for the CTA over the life of the contracts.

CTA completed the installation of technology to enhance its existing two-way radio system and improve subway communications options for CTA in 2005. The improved telecommunications system also laid the groundwork for the agency to generate additional revenue by leasing its wireless infrastructure for commercial service. The wireless infrastructure allows the use of wireless devices, such as cell phones, text messaging and wireless Internet modems throughout the 11.4 mile subway system.

CTA continues to solicit the participation of additional wireless providers to offer their services to customers in the subway. As more wireless service providers contract lease the infrastructure, more customers will be able to use their wireless devices and maintain communication across their entire trip along the system.

PUBLIC HEARING SET FOR ROUTE 714 COD-NAPERVILLE- WHEATON

Proposed elimination to be discussed because of lack of funding

Following the sunset of federal funding that was supporting the route's operations, Route 714 College of DuPage-Naperville-Wheaton is proposed for elimination, and that proposal will be discussed at a public hearing to be held August 19, from 5:30pm-6:30pm at the College of DuPage's Open Campus Center, Room 128A. The College is located at 425 Fawell Boulevard in Glen Ellyn.

Route 714 began operating in August, 2006 thanks to a federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality grant that supported 80% of the cost of the route and was identified in the DuPage Area Transit Plan as an important connector of two of the county's largest communities. Ridership grew since the route was implemented, but averaging 298 riders per day through the first half of 2009 has not allowed it to reach levels necessary to meet minimum performance standards. Because of strong community support from DuPage County, the cities of Naperville and Wheaton and other stakeholders, a subsidy agreement was arranged in order to provide the funding necessary to sustain the route. "Any time that we have a route that is borderline with respect to performance criteria, we seek partnerships that will allow the route to continue operating," said Pace Executive Director T.J. Ross. "Unfortunately, in this case, we were not able to secure the funds necessary to maintain the route; a situation that's exacerbated by the rough economy which has affected our ability to expand our budget to accommodate it now that federal funding has run out."

Route 714 operates between Edward Hospital in Naperville and the Wheaton Metra station, with stops along the way at the Naperville Metra station, Danada East, the Illinois Institute of Technology's Rice Campus, the College of DuPage, and Wheaton College. Service is available weekdays between 6:30am and roughly 7pm. A steering committee comprised of Pace staff and stakeholders from the communities and destinations served by the route met regularly and together developed a plan to reduce service levels in June, 2008 to meet the level of federal funding available. "Countless hours have been invested into planning, marketing, and keeping the route in line with expected costs," said Ross. "There has always been a wealth of support and effort toward this route, but the realities of the economy leave us little choice but to propose elimination."

The proposal calls for elimination to take place in mid- to late October. The precise date of proposed elimination will be announced at the hearing.

Bus service from Indy will blanket state

By Seth Slabaugh Indystar.com
Posted: August 16, 2009

MUNCIE - A \$2 million federal grant will be used to revive abandoned and unprofitable intercity bus routes in Indiana next year, including runs from Indianapolis to Muncie, Bloomington and South Bend.

Those most likely to benefit are college students with limited funds and no automobiles living far from home; the elderly, who have less ability or desire to drive; the disabled; and low-income residents who don't own a car.

"I think it's great," said Linda Muckway, 51, Muncie, who uses a power wheelchair because of cerebral palsy.

Muckway travels to Indianapolis to attend meetings concerning home care, disabilities and 2-1-1, the phone number people can call to get information about health and human services.

"People also want to go to Indianapolis for enjoyment -- shopping, the state fair or whatever," Muckway said. "Like, I've been to Pacer games before."

The Federal Transit Administration grant will subsidize bus service in 2010 between Muncie and Indianapolis; between Columbus and Indianapolis; between South Bend and Indianapolis; between Indianapolis and Evansville, including Bloomington; and between Louisville and Evansville.

The Indiana Department of Transportation awarded the grant to Miller Transportation, Indianapolis, which is affiliated with Trailways. Miller is a charter bus and school bus provider that also operates a daily commuter service from Carmel, Fishers and Greenwood to downtown Indianapolis.

The Indianapolis-Muncie route will stop in Yorktown, Chesterfield, Anderson, Pendleton, Ingalls, Fortville, McCordsville, Oaklandon and Post Road. INDOT officials say final fares are not yet available.

Tentatively, passengers would leave Muncie at 7 a.m. and arrive in Indianapolis at 8:23 a.m. Passengers would leave Indianapolis at 5:30 p.m. and arrive in Muncie at 6:53 p.m.

Service will begin in January.

The Muncie-Indianapolis federal subsidy for next year is \$281,587.

In its grant application, Miller says its intercity feeder service will provide cities on the new routes access to the national intercity bus network.

United Coach and Tour renews fleet with five 2009 MCI® J4500 coaches

SCHAUMBURG, IL — August 11, 2009 — With a long record of success in the travel and tour industry, Don Williams, owner of United Coach and Tour (UCT), makes purchasing decisions based on experience. Over the years, he has found that newer coaches, equipped with purposeful options, lead to good returns. The Bowling Green, Kentucky, company recently replaced its fleet with five 2009 MCI J4500 coaches. In 2009, MCI made wide-ride suspension, electronic stability control and a state-of-the-art Blaupunkt entertainment system standard features. UCT added backup cameras, fog lights, cordless microphones and satellite TV to its coaches, which are outfitted with Cummins engines and ZF AStronic transmissions.



"We decided to go with the Fast-Track MCI J4500," said Williams. "It's a beautiful coach and has everything we need." Williams first became acquainted with motor coaches as co-owner of a travel agency. "We had trouble finding good equipment that you could count on; that's when we decided get into the coach business." In 1992, Williams bought United Coaches from Vandalia in southern Illinois and purchased his first new coach, an MCI® D4500, in 1994. Through the years, 28 other MCI D-Series, J4500 and E4500 coaches followed. "I trust MCI," said Williams, who uses MCI's service center in Lebanon, Tennessee, for maintenance. "I count on the service center for parts and service. They understand us and the coaches."

UCT serves the Kentucky and Tennessee area with transportation to local events, convention shuttles and charters for schools and universities. The company also offers custom travel planning for groups, packaged tours to entertainment venues and adventure trips including NASCAR weekends.

Williams, 70, continues to mentor his staff and appreciates their dedication. He applauds the job Don Webb, operations manager, and Kelli Phelps, manager, are doing at running the business. "I feel very fortunate for the opportunities and the breaks that were before me, and to work with the people I do. My decisions are for their welfare."

To learn more visit www.unitedcoachandtour.com.

Federal funds support private and public operators' purchase of 35 MCI D-Series coaches

SCHAUMBURG, IL — July 15, 2009 — Between federal grants and stimulus funds, private and public operators across the country are benefiting from capital assistance by the U.S. government. Motor Coach Industries (MCI) announced that it has delivered three MCI® D4505 coaches to Anchor Trailways and has orders for more than 23 D-Series coaches from Jefferson Lines, Fullington Trailways and Delta Bus Lines. At the same time, MCI has delivered six D-Series commuter coach models to Metro RTA of Akron, Ohio, and has orders for five commuter coaches for Utah Transit Authority as well as one for Cape Cod RTA.

Operators are making their purchases with funds available through various Federal Transit Administration programs including FTA 5311(f). Stimulus funds were added to FTA 5311(f) under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The 5311(f) program allows operators to obtain capital funding for equipment purchased to serve underserved rural areas, especially those not served by rail or smaller airlines.

"It's gratifying to have stimulus funds at work, retaining jobs, expanding routes and providing transportation services where none existed," said Michael Melaniphy, vice president of MCI's public sector division, whose team has been working closely with many of MCI's customers seeking federal funding. "With every job retained or created, there is a multiplier effect, benefiting a diverse group of vendors and suppliers throughout the U.S., not to mention the benefits our over-the-road coaches bring to commuters traveling longer distances to get to their jobs."

MCI's D-Series model meets Buy America and other ARRA requirements. MCI offers the comfortable, dependable, Altoona-tested MCI D-Series in clean-diesel or Hybrid configurations, and has thousands of coaches at work in commuter service across the country.

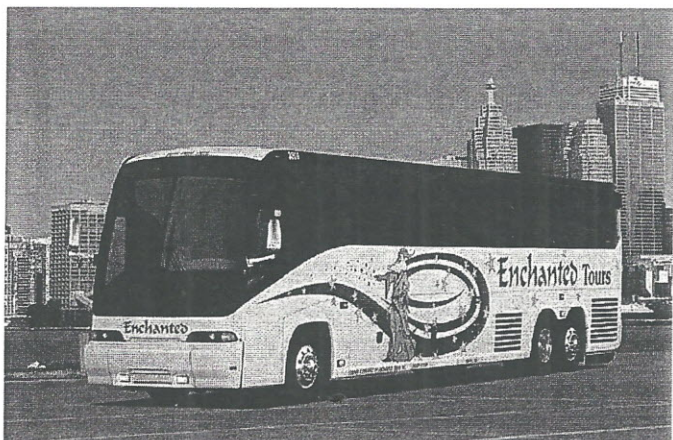
The deadline for grants to be submitted by state agencies to the federal government was July 1, and some operators have not yet been notified of approval.

Minnesota's Jefferson Lines will use the new D-Series coaches to operate existing service as well as some expanded service. Delta Bus Lines, Greenville, Mississippi, will expand service throughout the state with five new commuter coaches. Anchor Trailways, Nashville, Tennessee; and Fullington Trailways, Clearfield, Pennsylvania, plan to use their new coaches on scheduled service routes.

MCI said deliveries to these operators will begin at the end of summer and continue through fall.

Enchanted Tours charms passengers with new MCI® E4500 coach

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 30, 2009 — Enchanted Tours knows how to exceed customer expectations. It counts on the elegance of the MCI E4500 coach. "It suits our business needs," said Ed Allen, founder and owner of the tour company located in Southern New Jersey.



Featuring a magical wizard exterior graphic design, Enchanted's new E4500 is as awe-inspiring inside. It comes equipped with an upgraded Blaupunkt entertainment system, a DVD player, 15-inch flat screen video monitors, 110 volt outlets and plush seating for 56 passengers. "It has everything we want," said Allen, who recently returned from a 12-day trip to Texas with the new coach. "It's the best of the best."

Founded in 1992, Enchanted was named by Allen's wife Rose. Their son, Efrain, a graphic designer in New York City, www.efrainart.com, created the company's wizard emblem. The tour company serves a Tri-State area that includes Southeastern Pennsylvania and Northern Delaware, and offers planned motor coach trips across the country. It has never operated more than one or two coaches in any given year. This delivery marks Enchanted's fourth MCI coach and third E4500. "By offering our customers a new coach and personalized service, we get a lot of repeat business," said Allen who runs the company with his brother Tom as office manager. "We stay very busy."

To learn more visit www.enchantingtours.com.

MCI orbits Kennedy Space Center with six additional MCI® D4505s

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 30, 2009 — While some Americans travel through space, more than a million travel through the Kennedy Space Center every year. To help make those journeys more possible — and comfortable — the Orlando-area complex has taken delivery of six additional MCI D4505 coaches.



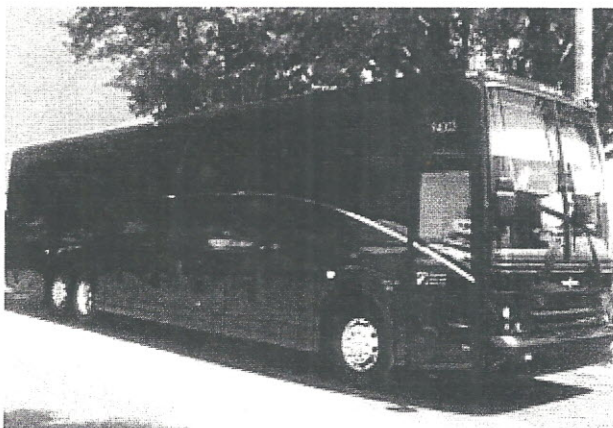
Operated by Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts, the Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex's MCI D4505 coaches feature comfortable transit-style seating as well as Ricon wheelchair lifts; coaches are powered by Cummins ISM engines with engine brakes and Allison B500 transmissions. The coaches are additionally equipped with REI entertainment systems featuring eight LCD monitors, stereo CDs and MP3 players.

The Visitor Complex transports more than 1.5 million visitors yearly to attractions at the 140,000-acre Kennedy Space Center. Sightseers hop aboard MCI coaches at the complex's own bus depot to visit exhibits including the Apollo/Saturn V Center, LC 39 Observation Gantry and Space Station Processing Center. Tours at the NASA facility also include a look at the massive launch pads and the gigantic Vehicle Assembly Building.

Delaware North has chosen MCI since 1999, ordering a total of 64 MCIs.

DATTCO Inc, of New Britain, CT,

recently put three new Van Hool T2145's and a TD925 Double Deck coach into service. These coaches represent the final four deliveries of the ten units DATTCO ordered from ABC Companies, Van Hool's exclusive North American distributor, in 2009.



DATTCO executives traveled to the Van Hool plant in Belgium to refine the specifications and features and they got extra help on interior appointments from ABC's

Judy Cornell. The order was unique, involving three models of coaches in 4 different configurations. There were three C2045 Charter coaches, two TD925 double deck coaches, three T2145 "Tour" class coaches and two T2145 "DATTCO Experience" coaches. Both double decks and one each of the "Charter" and "Tour" class coaches are ADA equipped.



DATTCO's Coach and Tour Group Vice President Dennis Lyons pointed out that all 10 coaches have seat belts, REI's high end entertainment systems, laptop power outlets, leather headrests, perimeter lighting and Van Hool's European styling and ride. "We opted for Alcoa Durabright wheels, perimeter lighting, Saucon GPS, Aesys electronic destination signs and an ABC graphics-package. We then build on that quality base, by offering two increased levels of amenity. Our 'Tour' coaches have 57 leather trimmed seats, enclosed parcel racks, wireless PA, 8 channel audio with MP3 inputs, individual headsets, PC interface, and 23" video monitors."

"Clients looking for ultimate in luxury transportation can book the 'DATTCO Experience' coaches. These improve on the 'Tour' package with 48 full leather seats, a rear lounge with a full galley featuring Kuerig single brew coffee maker, microwave and refrigerator, tray tables, digital video and DirecTV."

Don DeVivo, DATTCO's President said, "We strive to provide exceptional quality on every trip. ABC and Van Hool offer a combination of first rate support and real creativity in building coaches that fit that philosophy. They help us provide value for our customers. Whether they're on a short charter to a ballgame, or a luxury tour, we can offer coaches that fit our clients' unique needs and budget."

ABC Companies recently delivered a new Van Hool C2045 to Little Rock Tours. Equipped with a Ricon wheelchair lift, this represents the tenth full sized coach operated by this rapidly growing Arkansas-based luxury carrier.

The coach is powered by a Detroit Diesel Series 60 engine coupled to an Allison B500 Gen 4 transmission.

The custom designed interior includes Van Hool's unique contoured parcel rack with a DVD player displaying on six 22" LCD video monitors, Amaya Torino seats, and the large rear passenger window. Little Rock Tours' bright graphics and Alcoa DuraBright wheels give the bus outstanding curb appeal.



While attending a family reunion, TV personality Cary Martin took a sightseeing tour of Minneapolis and asked himself why Little Rock didn't offer something similar. In February of 2003 he started Little Rock Tours and took the concept a step farther. Using his experience as a journalist, put together a unique combination of trained tour guides and video vignettes of local attractions as they appeared in movies and historical settings.

"We think of our sightseeing coaches as 'Theater Buses'," Martin said. "The huge video monitors on the new coach really enhance the experience for our customers." The concept worked and Little Rock Tours has grown to 13 vehicles. In addition to sightseeing tours, the company also offers charters and outbound tours throughout the US, a Murder Mystery Dinner Theater, as well as Receptive Services.

In 2006, Martin opened a new 13,800 square foot facility. "In addition to providing charter and tour planning, we're able to offer a complete range of coach services in downtown Little Rock," he said. "It also makes it easy to maintain our own fleet to our high standards and makes Little Rock a coach-friendly city."

"ABC Senior Account Executive, Bob Holloway, has worked hard for a long time to earn our business. He stopped by one day with a Van Hool demo, and our customers and staff loved it. We weren't planning on buying a coach, but it was such a nice fit that we went ahead," Holloway added, "Cary is energetic and has an obvious love for the travel industry. He's fun to deal with and manages to be both creative and organized. That's a rare combination and all of us at ABC are delighted to be part of Little Rock Tours' success."

MetroRail: Still no opening date

By Ben Wear | Wednesday, August 19, 2009, 09:46 AM

AUSTIN Capital Metro officials, still working to solve various issues with its commuter rail line, can't yet say when the line will open.

When the line does open, agency officials said, some of the morning and afternoon runs on the 32-mile line between Leander and downtown Austin might start at stations further up the line rather than at the end points.

In the fourth monthly update since an eleventh-hour postponement of an announced March 30 opening date, Capital Metro said it had completed training engineers, completed adjustment to railroad crossing "safety equipment pending any new issues," finished some track repairs at the U.S. 183 frontage road and Parmer Lane crossings and completed work on "signal preemption" technology meant to clear cars from places where the track is near a street traffic signal.

The agency will give the public another update "in mid-September if not sooner."

Still to be done, according to an agency update released this morning:

Finalize rail service schedules. "Some trips may begin or end at stations other than Downtown or Leander," the agency said, "to optimize the level of service based on available track capacity."

Complete "signal technology adjustments and enhancements," including moving equipment meant to detect the presence of trains up the line and trigger closing of gates.

Voters were told before the November 2004 election authorizing construction of the commuter line that it would open in spring 2008. That was later adjusted to fall 2008, then to the March 30 date. After the March 30 postponement, agency officials said they would not announce a new opening date until they were absolutely sure of the timing.

One proposed route for Southwest LRT line gets a nod

BY DYLAN THOMAS

// Funding formula favors Kenilworth Corridor //

Supporters of light rail transit on the Midtown Greenway cautioned against a rush to judgment in August, when a

report to transit policymakers seemed to indicate a different route had a far better shot at winning federal approval.

Their preferred route for a Southwest Light Rail Transit (LRT) line, Route 3C-2, fared poorly in a comparison of construction costs to user benefits. Another popular choice, Route 3A, running between Cedar Lake and Lake of the Isles, came in right on target.

Council Member Ralph Remington (10th Ward), who proposed Route 3C-2, wasn't ready to concede in August.

"That report is sending out the wrong signal," Remington, who sits on the Southwest LRT Policy Advisory Committee that will recommend a final alignment later this year, said.

"If we want to build public transit that's going to be sustainable for the next 50 to 100 years, then we have to put a lot more thought into it and give some real thoughtful analysis on where population density is going to grow the most," he said.

Remington said that area is in and around the Midtown Greenway through Uptown. An LRT connection to the suburbs would build an important connection between Uptown residents and suburban jobs, he argued.

But Hennepin County Commissioner Gail Dorfman, who chairs the Policy Advisory Committee, said the cost advantage for 3A over 3C-2 was hard to ignore.

Both 3A and 3C-2 follow the same route between Minneapolis and Eden Prairie, the LRT line's southwestern terminus. Both were estimated to attract roughly the same number of riders, about 28,000–30,000 per day by 2030.

Route 3A would cost an estimated \$1.1 billion–\$1.25 billion to build. The cost to build Route 3C-2 was higher — \$1.6 billion–\$1.8 billion — in part because it would run in a tunnel between the Midtown Greenway and I-94.

Annual operating costs for 3A also came in lower at \$23 million–\$25 million, compared to \$27 million–\$29 million for 3C-2.

Those figures were included in a consultant report delivered to the Policy Advisory Committee Aug. 10. That report gave 3A an edge in the time saved by commuters, as well.

Dorfman said all of those numbers contribute to the cost-effectiveness index, or CEI, that weighs cost against user benefits. Hitting the right number on the CEI is crucial to winning federal funds, which will cover half the cost to build Southwest LRT.

"Right now — and it could change — but right now the

Federal Transit Administration says, unless you have a CEI of \$29, don't even come talk to us about a project," she said.

The consultants put Route 3A at \$28-\$31; Route 3C-2 landed at \$44-\$48.

Looking for riders

It was expected those CEI numbers could change by late August. Still, many observers doubted it would make a big difference for the Midtown Greenway route.

The consultants' Aug. 10 report relied on outdated comprehensive plans for Minneapolis, St. Louis Park and Eden Prairie. Comprehensive plans describe a city's vision for future growth, including where people and businesses will be located in coming decades.

Remington said a revised report, accounting for the high-density growth expected around the Midtown Greenway, could boost the CEI score for Route 3C-2.

"It probably won't impact the CEI more than \$2, or so, but it is a consideration," he said.

Many wonder how ridership estimates for the two proposed routes could have been so close in the first place. After all, 3C-2 runs through densely populated Uptown, while 3A follows a bicycle trail past lakes and parkland.

The other City Council member on the Policy Advisory Committee, Robert Lilligren (6th Ward), said the answer is the Federal Transit Administration wants to fund projects that attract new transit users. Route 3C-2 would run near Lake Street and Nicollet Avenue, two areas already well served by bus transit.

Lilligren said the ongoing debate over cost and ridership obscured another important point: Light rail functions better at higher speeds over relatively long distances on a dedicated right-of-way. Route 3A comes closer to that ideal.

For transit service in urban neighborhoods, Lilligren said, "a street car line would be better and, until then, bus service."

The Minneapolis perspective

During an open house on the potential Southwest LRT routes at Minneapolis Central Library Aug. 13, a map showing Route 3C-2 seemed to draw the largest crowd.

Tera Muellerleile of Cedar-Isles-Dean, a 3C-2 supporter, said it just made sense to her that light rail should go where the people live: in Uptown.

Muellerleile said she worried about the impact Route 3A might have on green space in the Kennilworth Corridor — not to mention the direct impact on her.

"Route 3A runs through my backyard," she said.

Pete and Kim Rhodes said they'd rather not see Route 3C-2 run past their 105-year-old home in Whittier, where they also operate a recording basement studio susceptible to noise and vibrations from passing trains. High-frequency bus lines already serve the neighborhood, they added.

Still, several people without a backyard in the fight asked the same question: What will this light rail line do for Minneapolis?

Alex Anderson of Kingfield said he wanted to see transit service in the Midtown Greenway one way or another. With no specific plans for a streetcar on the table, light rail could be a good choice, Anderson said.

"Either [route] is going to be good for the metro area," he said. "[Route] 3C-2 is probably going to be better for the city, itself."

Thursday, August 13, 2009

Detroit may cut weekend bus service

David Josar and Leonard N. Fleming / The Detroit News

Detroit -- The city Department of Transportation has proposed ending Sunday bus service, eliminating service on Saturday nights and curtailing more than a dozen routes by the end of September as the city grapples with its deteriorating finances.

A series of public hearings is scheduled later this month to get feedback before deciding whether to implement any of the ideas.

Bus drivers, daily riders and public advocates warn that the impact could be dire.

"This could be devastating," said Megan Owens, executive director of Transportation Riders United, a Detroit-based nonprofit that advocates for public transit improvements. "There are a lot of people who need the bus to work on weekends or go to church."

Ed Cardenas, a spokesman for Mayor Dave Bing, cautioned that the detailed service cuts initially released by the city "were very preliminary" and had not been properly vetted by ordinary channels.

"This is all part of the normal DDOT process," Cardenas said. "Everything is on the table."

The bus drivers union has warned for weeks the proposed cuts were coming.

"This is just going to put more people out of work. People need the bus to get to their jobs," said Henry Gaffney, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union, which represents roughly 1,000 bus drivers. "This is an essential service. People don't ride the bus by choice."

The loss of bus service hits the poorest residents hardest, according to an April 2009 Brookings Institution report.

The report found that 77 percent of jobs in Metro Detroit are 10 miles from the city center, a scenario that makes it harder on the working poor, many of whom don't have access to a vehicle.

Gaffney estimated 50,000 people ride the bus on Sundays, and the Saturday service cut would affect another 20,000 people.

Earlier in the day, the city publicly released a detailed list of the proposed reductions and followed up with a statement that "at this time, there is no service interruption or changes to existing schedules."

The announcement of the proposed cuts came three days after Mayor Dave Bing said he will lay off 1,000 workers in upcoming weeks, and that he needs the city's union employees to take 10 percent pay cuts by Aug. 28 to stave off receivership.

Without those other changes, Bing repeatedly has said the city will not be able to pay its bills starting in October.

On Wednesday, Bing traveled to Chicago where he meet with the two top bond rating agencies, Moody's Investors Service and Standard and Poor's, to discuss the city's myriad financial problems

In January, Standard and Poor's downgraded the city's credit rating to BB, or junk status.

Another bond ratings downgrade could be disastrous for the city because it would make additional borrowing more difficult and more expensive because Detroit would be charged a higher interest rate.

Public transportation in Detroit and the region has always been a sore spot as leaders, starting in the 1940s, decided to invest more money in roads and highways instead of buses, trains and more affordable ways of travel.

In recent years, though, that had changed, Owens said.

She noted that Detroit has just opened its Rosa Parks Transit Center, bike racks are being installed on buses, city drivers are on schedule 85 percent of the time and there is now a proposed light-rail project along Woodward Avenue.

But the proposals being touted by the DDOT could change that.

"This could be crippling," she said.

Although the service reductions vary from route to route, the wait on the No. 36 Oakland Route, for example, would increase from about seven minutes to 27 minutes. On the No. 19 Fort, the wait for buses would jump from about four minutes to 14 minutes.

Already, a spokeswoman for the SMART bus system, which operates in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne

counties but does not receive any funding from Detroit, said they may have to re-evaluate how they operate in the city if a switch by Detroit officials overtaxes their system.

On weekends, SMART buses will pick up and drop off people in Detroit, although at other times they only transport people from outside the city to several key locations and do not pick up other passengers or make additional stops.

"If the city cuts service, we will have to re-evaluate how we are operating," spokeswoman Beth Dryden said.

She added that SMART has seen its bus ridership increase 11 percent on Sundays this fiscal year.

The elimination of weekend service would spell disaster for 26-year-old Ashton Rodgers, who takes the bus from his eastside apartment to a restaurant in Mexicantown where he works.

"This is going to cost me big time," Rodgers said, explaining that since he doesn't have a car, he may need to take a cab home Saturday and to and from work on Sunday. "That's 30 or 40 bucks and I only make \$8 an hour."

City Council members are already trying to protect bus services, which some consider a core service.

"While I understand the need to restructure city government to be more in line with available revenues, I think we need to closely examine non-core services before we begin to consider any adjustments in core services such as police, fire, public works and others," Councilwoman Alberta Tinsley-Talabi said in a statement. "As we move forward to right-size city government, my review will focus first on non-core services and I urge my colleagues to join me in this approach."

djosar@detnews.com (313) 222-2073

First imports Greyhound brand for coach network

Greyhound: Scania Irizar coaches for UK are inspired by latest American vehicle design



America's iconic Greyhound bus brand is to debut in the UK as First Group launches a new coach network that will compete with rivals National Express and Stagecoach.

The first UK Greyhound coaches will run between London Victoria and Portsmouth and Southampton with services scheduled to launch on September 14. First says it hopes to roll-out further routes in 2010.

In the USA and Canada Greyhound offers the only countrywide network of coach services - one which has featured in films and songs for nearly a century. Greyhound UK will offer fares starting from £1, plus 50p booking fee, available online from greyhounduk.com.

The Greyhound UK coaches will have leather seating, free wi-fi, power sockets, air-conditioning and complimentary newspapers. First says the Scania Irizar coaches will have up to 20% more legroom than rivals' vehicles while traffic light displays on the coach dashboards will inform drivers how well they are driving their vehicle.

All Greyhound UK coaches will be named after women from popular American songs such as Sweet Caroline, Barbara Ann, Jolene and Peggy Sue.

First's decision to create a new coach network follows the launch of Stagecoach's Megabus routes in Britain 2003 to compete with established coach operator National Express. Greyhound, which First acquired in 2007, also competes with Megabus for passengers in North America. First says the new UK Greyhound routes will offer faster journey times than existing coaches between London and the south coast. They will also go head-to-head with the Stagecoach-owned South West Trains franchise which provides rail services between London and Southampton.

Sir Moir Lockhead, First Group chief executive, said: "For 95 years Greyhound has been an icon of American life carrying millions of people across the USA and Canada. Since First Group took over Greyhound in 2007, we have hoped to bring this famous brand across the Atlantic and I am absolutely delighted to reveal the first authentic Greyhound coaches in the UK."

"Our services will be more attractive than rival bus and train options, but we also believe that Greyhound UK's growth will come from persuading more people to leave their cars at home and opt instead for our coaches. By providing these services at an unbeatable price, and doing so with the carbon footprint around 23% of journeys by private car, we think we will really make an impact on how people will travel in the future."

Greyhound UK is headed up by managing director Alex Warner, who was train operator Midland Mainline's customer services director before joining First as UK bus business director in February 2008. He said: "On September 14th we will launch with an hourly service each way between London and Portsmouth and London and Southampton. These services will be provided with convenient kerb-side pickups at a number of locations in both south coast cities with all services in London arriving and departing from Bulleid Way, Victoria railway station, London."

Warner added: "Greyhound services will also integrate with ferry services to and from the Isle of Wight. All services will be non-stop between the two cities, taking under two hours and providing a journey time advantage up to 40% over other coach operators whose services typically stop a number of times at intermediate locations including Heathrow."

Greyhound UK's branding is based on the recently introduced new brand identity in the US. Working with First brand manager Avril Gill, creative communications agency Lawrence and Pierce developed this identity to suit the UK market. As well as adapting the brand guidelines, the agency focused on the livery and interior specification, where the style of the UK coaches is significantly different to those in the US. Physical issues with the size and structure needed to be overcome without diluting the look.

A multimedia advertising campaign will target a young, technologically savvy demographic with online advertising complemented by more traditional print and field marketing activities. First believes the Greyhound coaches will be used by the large student populations in the cities served along with commuters, day trippers and those attending sporting and other entertainment events. (Source: Transport Briefing)

High-end buses to make bid for Lexus commuters

David R. Baker, Chronicle Staff Writer

Monday, March 2, 2009

Call it a corporate shuttle bus, without the corporation.



Mike Pepka / The Chronicle

On Tuesday, a San Francisco company that runs luxury shuttles for the likes of Google and Yahoo will start a new, weekday bus service connecting Marin County, San Francisco and San Jose.

The buses will be the same kind of tricked-out rides that Bauer's Intelligent Transportation uses for its corporate clients, with padded leather seats, television screens, free Wi-Fi and power plugs for laptops. But they will be open to anyone who wants to pay the fare - \$8.20 one way on most routes.

"We're trying to get people out of their Mercedes or Lexus, people who wouldn't ride public transit," said company Chief Executive Officer Gary Bauer.



Mike Pepka / The Chronicle

Each route will have just a handful of stops. To deal with the spread-out urban geography of the South Bay, the stops are located near prominent companies or transit hubs. The Sunnyvale stop, for example, is at North Mathilda and Fifth avenues, near Juniper Networks, Lockheed Martin and a light rail station for the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority.

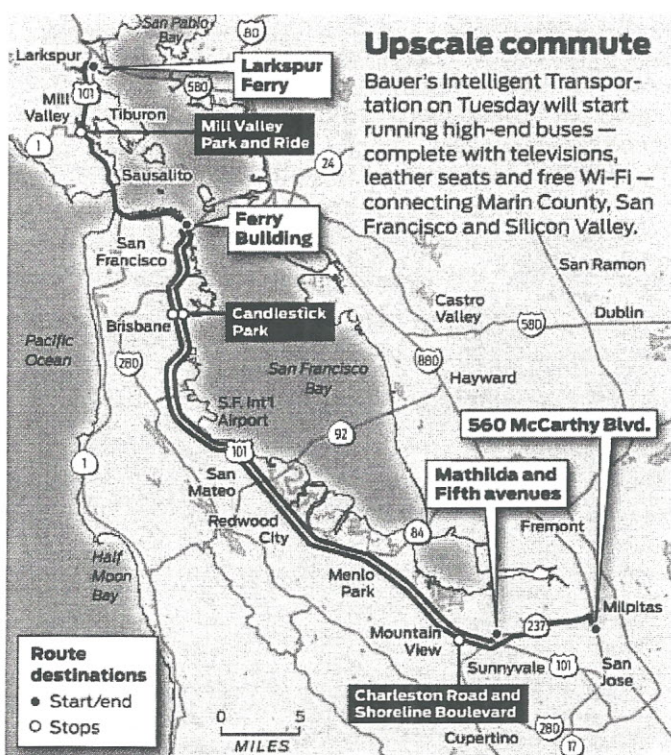
The buses will have coffee and breakfast available for purchase, served by a "ride host" much like an airline

flight attendant. A passenger can leave San Francisco's Ferry Building at 5:30 a.m., eat, watch the morning news, work on the laptop and arrive in Sunnyvale at 6:45 a.m.

"We want to encompass all that and make it one seamless transaction for you," Bauer said. "We're looking to give you back 10 hours of your life" each week.

The new bus service, called Wi-Drive, also will give San Francisco companies another way to comply with the city's new commuter benefits ordinance. The law, which took effect in January, requires businesses with 20 or more workers to reimburse employees for transit fares, offer them free shuttle service on company-funded vehicles or set up a payroll deduction that lets them use pretax wages to purchase transit passes.

"It's a chic way of taking advantage of the ordinance," said San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi. He wasn't thinking of high-end buses when he wrote the ordinance, but he said he's pleased to see businesses coming up with new ways to respond.



Creative solution

"I expected that new, emerging modalities would become part of the landscape," Mirkarimi said. "I welcome the creativity."

Rod Diridon, head of the Mineta Transportation Institute at San Jose State University, said the bus lines were an interesting idea. But he questioned whether commuters willing to let someone else drive would choose the buses

over Caltrain, which runs a similar route, costs less and skips the Peninsula's crowded freeways.

"With auto congestion increasing all the time, I'm not sure how they're going to compete," he said.

Bauer is banking on the buses' amenities and atmosphere. The kind of customer his company is targeting, he says, isn't interested in the utilitarian buses and trains of existing mass-transit systems. In addition, Wi-Drive goes places that Caltrain and BART don't, such as Larkspur.

Right now, those people are driving to work, Bauer said, with their cars adding a little bit every day to global warming. If he can fill each 52-seat bus with former car commuters, each bus will prevent 1,310 tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere every year, he said.

"We're not here to take people away from public transit," Bauer said. "We're not trying to step on anyone's toes. We want to complement what they do."

Payment particulars

Wi-Drive customers who buy a fare receive a plastic card with a magnetic stripe on the back and a Web site address on the front. On the Web site, they can set up an account and prepay fares from their credit cards, as well as reserve seats. Buying a month's worth of rides lowers the price, to \$7.38 one way on most routes.

The next time customers board the bus, they swipe their Wi-Drive card at the door, deducting the fare from their account.

To launch the service, rides will be free from March 3 to March 6. The following week, Bauer's will offer half-price fares. Then on March 16, fares rise to their regular level.

If the service proves a success, Bauer's will expand it to such locations as Stockton, Fairfield, Napa and Santa Cruz.

Wi-Drive details

For more details on the Wi-Drive service, go to bawerswi-drive.org

E-mail David R. Baker at dbaker@sfchronicle.com.