



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

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**RUN 05-2010**

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.

### • SEPT/OCT MEETINGS

The September meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on September 3, 2010, 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 "Buses of the Lower 48" will be a slide presentation by member John Le Beau.

The October meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on October 1, 2010, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm. Our program for the evening will be presented by Mike Charnota. We will also be conducting a silent auction at the meeting. Further information will be forthcoming in September.

## New Metra commuter cars on way

### State bond program clears way for 160 new Electric Line cars

August 13, 2010|By Richard Wronski, Tribune reporter

Relief is finally on the way for long-suffering riders on Metra's Electric District Line serving the South Side and south suburbs.

Metra's board on Friday authorized the \$560 million purchase of 160 new commuter cars, half of which will have restrooms — good news for riders who have complained for decades about the lack of onboard facilities.

"We've been promising that whenever the state passed a bond program, that (buying new cars) was our first priority," spokesman Michael Gillis said.

The new cars will replace 1970s-era Highliner coaches that have been rehabbed several times, officials said.

The first batch of new cars is expected to arrive in about two years, officials said.

Metra had been waiting since at least 2005 for state funding to buy the cars.

The breakthrough came with the legislature's passage of a public works bond program intended to create jobs.

Gov. Pat Quinn last month announced approval for more than \$500 million worth of mass transit projects, of which Metra will use \$119 million for the first payment.

Metra officials also announced that the agency foresees a \$17 million budget shortfall this year, due to declining sales tax and farebox revenues.

Chairwoman Carole Doris said it was premature to talk about the need for a fare hike or service cuts, and that Metra was looking at ways to economize.

"A (fare increase) would be a difficult thing to do for our riders in a time when everyone is challenged by the economy, and so that's certainly not our first option," Doris said.

Officials also sought to allay concerns from UP North Line riders about schedule changes resulting from Metra's plan to repair 22 century-old North Side bridges.

The project will require shifting trains from double- to single-track service, officials said.

Acting Executive Director Bill Tupper said Metra will monitor ridership and readjust the train schedules to reduce adverse effects on riders.

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## 'Open-fare' technology not embraced elsewhere

U.S. cities said to be keen on this next-generation fare technology appear to be far from sold on the idea

John Lorinc

From Wednesday's Globe and Mail Published on Tuesday, Jul. 27, 2010 8:54PM EDT Last updated on Thursday, Jul. 29, 2010 12:14AM EDT

While the Toronto Transit Commission drives ahead with its scheme to allow riders to pay by simply tapping their bank or credit card on a "contactless" reader, some of the other cities said to be keen on this next-generation fare technology appear to be far from sold on the idea.

The approach, known as "open standard-based fare payment," is part of a strategic push by the credit card industry into the huge market for small value transactions: candy bars, newspapers, take-out coffee. What's more, officials with Mastercard International – which wants to gain a toehold in the \$72-billion global transit fare market – say they have had quiet discussions with the City of Toronto.

But in Chicago, the financial institutions that were once aggressively promoting just such a fare system appear to have lost some of their ardour in the aftermath of the 2008 credit meltdown. "From my perspective, I feel the jury's out in terms of interest on private side," says Leanne Redden, deputy executive director of Chicago's Regional Transportation Authority.

Her advice to Toronto officials: "It may not be bad to sit back for six to 12 months and see how it plays out, and learn from others' mistakes."

That message runs directly counter to the bullish signals coming out of the TTC in recent days, as it moves ahead with idea in defiance of Queen's Park and its Presto smart card plan. The TTC hopes to tender the project as early as the fall.

Touting "open fare" as passenger-friendly technology, TTC chair Adam Giambrone has said cities like New York, Washington, Philadelphia and Chicago are "actively pursuing" this approach, which, he predicts, will make paying fares "like shopping at a retail store."

However, interviews with those cities' transit authorities indicate that their projects are either early-stage pilots (New York/New Jersey), stuck in the request-for-proposal phase (Chicago) or stalled

indefinitely due to budget cuts (Philadelphia). "We're not far along at all," says Reggie Woodruff, a spokesperson for Washington's Metro system, adding that such a scheme is "far in the future."

None of the agencies involved can provide a business plan that demonstrates clear savings to riders. A spokesperson for the South-Eastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, which serves Greater Philadelphia, said the estimated capital cost was about \$100-million before the project was put on hold.

Officials with Mastercard International declined to specify what kind of ongoing "interchange" fees would be charged to participating transit agencies.

"We're very confident that the benefit to riders, [bank] issuers and transit will greatly outweigh any associated cost," says Cathleen Conforti, senior vice-president for Mastercard's global pay pass solutions.

Mastercard's published merchant interchange rate schedule indicates that it charges U.S. commuter or passenger rail agencies 1.5 per cent plus 10 cents per transaction. For a \$3 adult ticket on the TTC, that rate structure works out to be just over 10 cents, or about 3.4 per cent on top of the regular fare price.

Paul Korczak, a Brooklyn-based consultant, was hired by the TTC in June to prepare a request for proposals. Mr. Korczak, who ran New York City's fare collection system for many years, argues that such transaction fees, plus the outlay associated with installing an open fare system (for example, the pads where riders can tap their cards, transmission equipment and the processing network) would cost less than traditional fare collection systems (printing tokens, tickets and passes, salaries, counterfeiting, cash handling).

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) allocates \$500-million every year to print Metrocards – a magnetic strip reloadable card introduced in the late 1990s – and collect cash fares. By contrast, the TTC spent only \$67-million on its fare system in 2008, according to spokesperson Danny Nicholson.

When New York several years ago allowed riders to purchase Metrocards using credit or debit cards both inside stations or at participating retail outlets, says Mr. Korczak, the number of cash transactions fell "dramatically," leading to savings on fare collector salaries and cash handling expenses.



The move to contactless bank or gift cards – which is being tested between June and November of this year on New York's Lexington Avenue subway and select bus and commuter rail routes – takes it one step further, he adds.

MTA spokesperson Aaron Donovan predicts the cost reduction in New York could be substantial. "For every dollar we collect in fare, we spend 15 cents on fare collection. If we can reduce that by one cent or two cents, that would result in a savings of hundreds of millions per year."

For the New York/New Jersey trial, Mastercard supplied the equipment for the trial free of charge and has ensured its brand is associated with the project; Mr. Donovan said the outlay for a system-wide roll-out "has yet to be determined."

The Ontario government has been developing Presto, a smart card, for use on GO Transit, parts of the TTC and other systems. Mr. Giambrone says the project received \$140-million in funding from Queen's Park, but the TTC would require more than \$350-million to get it up and running system-wide. Transportation Minister Kathleen Wynne has urged the TTC to halt work on the open fare model.

### **The Consultant**

In June, the TTC approved an untendered contract to hire long-time MTA official Paul Korczak and his business partner Dennis Marshall, a one-time investment banker who has advised the Chicago Transit Authority on private-public partnerships, to develop an open-fare business plan, write a request-for-proposal and conduct information sessions with TTC staff. Mr. Korczak says the contract is worth \$1.3-million, will last for about five months and doesn't involve any other staff besides himself and Mr. Marshall.

## **UIC to cut commuter shuttle**

### **University says ridership is down**

08/11/2010 10:00 PM

By GREG SKINNER

Staff Reporter Chicago Journal

Citing financial woes, the University of Illinois-Chicago announced plans to end rush hour shuttle service between the Illinois Medical District and two commuter rail stations in the Loop.

Vice Chancellor for Administrative Services Mark Donovan sent the cancellation announcement to staff late last week along with word that ending the service was part of the Campus Master Plan to provide "better and more efficient service."

Service is expected to end by the first week of October at the latest.

The shuttle primarily serves University of Illinois Medical Center staff, providing rides to and from Ogilvie Transportation Center and Union Station, where commuter trains connect suburban home-life with city work-life. Students also use the service to commute and join staff in paying \$2 per ride. Busses serve six stops each morning and seven stops in the afternoon.

"The other medical centers have buses, now UIC does not," said medical center employee Kathy Lusher.

During Monday's afternoon rush hour, Lusher stood at shuttle stop at TK, waiting for the next available bus with fellow employee Roberta LeMonica — a shuttle rider for the past 10 years. Both are daily riders and say it's well used and needed.

But Bill Burton, a university spokesman, described the shuttle as a high-cost redundancy to Chicago Transit Authority routes. He noted the CTA's 157, 60 and 7 buses run from the medical district to the rail stations.

"We just don't have the ridership," Burton said. "It's just not working."

The shuttle program delivered employees and students throughout the medical district at a deficit for 10 years, according to Donovan's letter. The university can no longer operate the busses at a deficit, he wrote.

Lusher said she sees about 15 people on each shuttle she rides. On Monday, three shuttles left the medical center between 4:00 and 4:30 p.m. Each held less than four riders bound for the train stations.

The shuttle, which riders said offers safe and reliable transportation, falls under "auxiliary services," and Burton said all such services have to break even financially. He was unable to say what the shuttle's annual deficit was, nor how many people use it.

A fare increase is not a likely solution to the problem because to do so would result in a rate above the Chicago Transit Authority's rate, Burton said.



Before dropping the service altogether, Donovan wrote that a search is under way for a shuttle transportation partner within the medical district

"We have been exploring and will continue to explore opportunities with institutions in the area to develop a program that would operate at a break-even point and not require a subsidy," Donovan wrote.

Speaking in Donovan's place, Burton said he would not speculate on what opportunities might be explored with which institutions.

"There are a number of institutions that have a large number of employees and students," he said.

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## **Change may be good but what about pricey Metra change orders?**

By Marni Pyke | Daily Herald Staff

What I love about transportation is that it's a revolving smorgasbord of issues. It was only last year I was sitting at an Illinois Senate hearing watching Illinois tollway officials get grilled on problems with the oases.

Well, this year, it's Metra on the hot seat appearing before the State Government and Veterans Affairs Committee Wednesday.

The hearing requested by Sen. Susan Garrett is intended to delve into financial and management practices at Metra, which is still reeling from the suicide of its former CEO Phil Pagano.

Pagano died in the midst of a probe into financial misconduct at the agency. Officials said he received more than \$475,000 in unauthorized vacation pay and forged Chairman Carole Doris' signature on related forms.

And since the scandal broke, there have been further revelations about abuses of power under Pagano, who had broad executive authority. These include select employees getting contributions to a 401(K) plan in addition to retirement plans, executives receiving extra weeks of vacation authorized by Pagano, questionable sick day and vacation payouts to a favored few, and some curious change orders for a lobbying firm.

Expect Garrett, a Lake Forest Democrat, to ask questions about the latter issue involving the Carmen Group. The Carmen Group is a Washington-based lobbying firm whose leaders

include John Ladd, an executive managing director and son of former Metra board Chairman Jeff Ladd. Documents show more than \$1.7 million in change orders added to already lucrative Carmen contracts. I was intrigued by two that weren't even typed but handwritten in a messy scrawl. They totaled \$568,750 and \$712,000. The work involved lobbying Congress to give Metra money for capital projects, such as improvements to the UP West and Northwest lines.

Metra officials did not comment on the lobbyist question other than to say Jeff Ladd excused himself from voting on a Carmen contract in his last year as chairman in 2006. Regarding the Senate hearing, spokeswoman Judy Pardonnet said Doris was looking forward to updating senators of all the steps the agency was taking to ensure accountability and transparency.

I wasn't able to connect with the Carmen Group last week, but will include their perspective when I write about Wednesday's hearing.

### **Flotsam and jetsam**

- In other Metra news, state Sen. Martin Sandoval said he's been approached by people in the transportation industry to seek the vacant executive director position. The Chicago Democrat who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee said last week, "I'm looking at my options, but I'm quite happy being senator."

- Gov. Pat Quinn announced Thursday about \$443 million was being distributed to Metra, Pace and the Chicago Transit Authority for capital projects. Not to rain on the parade, but it's not really news. We've known for months those agencies were due to get funding from the capital bill. And don't forget, the state still owes the Regional Transportation Authority about \$262 million in operating funds to be distributed to the three transit agencies. In fact, the RTA is borrowing money to make ends meet.

So where's the \$443 million going? The CTA will use the money for repairs and improvements to stations and track. Metra will rehab stations including Naperville, Geneva and Fox River Grove and buy electric rail cars. Pace will buy new environmentally friendly buses and paratransit vehicles, replace its radio system and build a transit center at Toyota Park where the Chicago Fire play.

### **RTA clings to Metra hopes for KRM**



Southeastern Regional Transit Authority officials said Monday they're still hoping they can convince the Chicago-area Metra commuter train system to run a proposed rail line from Milwaukee to Kenosha.

But they conceded Metra is still showing no interest in doing that.

The KRM Commuter Link was originally conceived as an extension of Metra's service north from Kenosha, where its Union Pacific-North line ends. However, Metra nixed that idea, saying it's an Illinois agency that doesn't have authority to operate in Wisconsin. The Kenosha station is a holdover from a predecessor rail line, because Metra found it less expensive to keep running service there than to build a new turnaround point south of the border.

After the initial rejection, planners recast the KRM as a Wisconsin-based rail line that would connect to Metra, with passengers transferring at Kenosha. The closest parallel would be the South Shore Line, which provides rail service to Chicago, linked to Metra but under the auspices of the Northwestern Indiana Commuter Transportation District.

With a recent turnover in Metra leadership, however, RTA Chairman Karl Ostby and Ken Yunker, executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, tried again to pitch the idea of Metra management of KRM. Ostby said such a move would cut overhead costs for the Wisconsin line, which is projected to cost \$283.5 million to build and \$20.4 million a year to operate, starting in 2017.

Metra officials didn't change their stance, Ostby told RTA board members Monday. But the Metra managers were "very open" to working with the RTA to coordinate their trains' schedules with the KRM for easier passenger transfers, he said.

And in what he noted was a sharp contrast to the "no one will ride it" rhetoric of Milwaukee talk radio, Ostby said the Metra officials' biggest concern seemed to be how they would handle all the passengers expected to transfer from the KRM.

## **New consolidated bus routes gain traction**

Some problems, but riders pleased on inaugural day of realigned travel

August 3, 2010

BY CHELSEA SCHNEIDER KIRK, (219) 648-3072

HAMMOND -- Danny Caro likes his bus predictable.

The Hammond man stood outside of the Dan Rabin Plaza on Monday with a handful of other riders acclimating themselves to the new bus routes launched by the Northwest Indiana Regional Bus Authority.

"It's still on time so that's always good," Caro said. "I mean that's the most important thing. Riders want something on time."

He picked up the Red Route near his house on Sheffield Avenue and rode to Dan Rabin, where he connects with suburban Chicago's Pace Bus Service. Caro's bus route used to make stops in East Chicago and Bishop Noll Institute, but one check of his clock told him Monday's ride was streamlined.

"I got here 10 minutes early," Caro said.

While Caro and fellow riders said the service was on time and as expected, Monday's inaugural run of the consolidated, northern Lake County bus service wasn't without the first-day hiccups. A bus on the Orange Route broke down in the morning, and as of around 10:30 a.m., the line was still running slightly late, according to RBA Executive Director Tim Brown.

Some riders on the Orange and Blue routes were also confused on the A and B labeling used to distinguish whether a bus goes clockwise or counterclockwise.

"We didn't do A/B on our maps, so we are going to correct that," Brown said.

Brown said ridership was strong on Monday, but he was hesitant to say it was better than normal. As expected, routes heavily used on the former Hammond service were seeing the same levels of riders on the new routes, Brown said.

Riders waiting at the plaza said it will take time to become familiar with the new routes, but most were happy with the schedule because buses run longer and drop off at more places, including the Lake County Government Center in Crown Point.



"I'm going to like it," said Joe Guerra of Hammond, who waited to catch the Red Route to run errands with his wife before work. "Looks like they run every half hour. It used to be every 90 minutes."

The RBA took over the Hammond Transit System in January and kept up the old Routes 1-5 while they worked with community members to consolidate.

The new routes, distinguished by colors, are a realignment of the former Hammond bus service with added regional destinations. The Red Route serves primarily the same area as the former and well-ridden Hammond Route 1. The local Blue and Orange routes serve a mix of the rest of the former city routes.

The new Green Route runs on Indianapolis Boulevard from 106th and Ewing on the southeast side of Chicago to Main Street in Highland, and the Brown Route serves as a connector for the Green and Red routes for service to the Lake County Government Center.

And more buses are on the way. First Transit, the operator of the former Hammond service and the new northern Lake County service, will add 13 buses for use on regional routes at the end of October.

"Thank God they kept some service," said Shirley Turbin, who was waiting to take the Orange Route. "I like the Crown Point service. Hammond lost its Board of Health so riding there for legal documents will be great."

Turbin plans to take the buses frequently especially since her family's car is in the shop.

"I like the way it's laid out," Turbin said. "I'm going to try to take them all to get familiar with the routes."

## **HK century-old tram service set to raise fare**

Hong Kong Tramways, which operates the century-old tram service on the Hong Kong Island, said Thursday it had submitted an application to the city's government for increasing its fares on Nov. 1 this year.

In the new fare, adult passengers need to pay 2.5 HK dollars for each trip, 25 percent higher than current charge. Children need to pay 1.3 HK dollars for a trip, 30 percent higher. A monthly ticket will cost 210 HK dollars, instead of 170 HK dollars currently.

The operator said in a statement that Hong Kong tram fare had not changed for the past 12 years. During the 12 years, tram ridership has continuously decreased by 1.5 percent per annum, which means the revenue from its core business has been decreasing.

Over these years, there has been little investment in service improvement, resulting in reduced competitiveness of tram service and therefore reduced ridership, it said.

Hong Kong Tramways said it had conducted a comprehensive passenger survey and extensive stakeholder's engagement for improvement in tram service since April 2009 when French Veolia Transport assumed management responsibility of the Tramways.

A series of service improvement plans had been devised after over one year's examination and planning, which had been submitted to the city's government for its approval.

"A sustainable improvement plan requires substantial investment on a sustained basis. This will not be possible without a stable revenue stream generated from the fare ...," said Bruno Charrade, Managing Director of Hong Kong Tramways.

Hong Kong Tramways' profits in 2009 dropped to 8.8 million HK dollars, which is far from enough for

investment in sustainable service improvement. It is projected Hong Kong Tramways would start to incur losses starting from 2011 without the proposed fare increase, said the company.

"Fare increase is the only realistic option for ensuring the financial stability of Hong Kong Tramways. Even after the proposed fare increase, tram fare still remains by far the lowest among all local public transport services," said Charrade.

He also said Hong Kong Tramways would offer special concessionary fare for senior citizens, which means no increase for senior citizens in the first year. Starting on Nov. 1 in 2011, fare for senior citizens would increase by 10 percent to 1.1 HK dollars each trip.

Hong Kong Tramways operates a tram system in Hong Kong and one of the earliest forms of public transport in Hong Kong.

Locally known as "Ding Ding", the tram has been an essential part of Hong Kong Island's daily life since 1904. The tramline stretches from Kennedy Town in the island's west to Shau Kei Wan in the east, encompassing both bustling residential and dynamic city life.

Each day 240,000 residents commute by tram.

Trams in Hong Kong have not only been a form of transport for over 100 years, but also a major tourist attraction and one of the most environmentally friendly mass transit systems.

Traveling by tram allows passengers good views of the lively street life and a wonderful opportunity to get up-close with the real Hong Kong.

Currently, Hong Kong Tramways owns and operates a fleet of 163 tramcars, including two antique tramcars. It is the world's largest fleet of double-deck tramcars still in service.

Source: Xinhua

## **A Vote for Ehrlich Kills Purple Line Dreams**

Republican gubernatorial hopeful promises to nix the proposed rail line

By TENEILLE GIBSON

**Updated 3:05 PM EDT, Wed, Aug 4, 2010**

One year ago today, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley announced his support for a light-rail line over a rapid bus system that would link the Bethesda and New Carrollton Metro stations. Now, that decision could cost him votes in November.

The Purple Line's original opponents are looking to O'Malley's opponent to reopen their cause, according to the Washington Examiner. Republican gubernatorial hopeful Bob Ehrlich promises to kill current light rail plans in favor of the bus rapid transit system.

Ehrlich's spokesman, Andy Barth, told The Washington Examiner that a bus route is more cost-effective and will mean fewer trees along the trail will be lost.

"I'd vote for Ehrlich in a heartbeat," a registered Democrat in Chevy Chase told the Examiner. "It's a deal breaker, as far as I'm concerned," said another Chevy Chase resident.

O'Malley did admit last year that a rapid bus line would cost a third as much as light rail and would steer clear of the popular Capital Crescent Trail between Bethesda and Silver Spring. But he also said light rail emerged as a better option because it's more cost-effective and rider-friendly.

And O'Malley does not appear shaken or stirred by the possible loss of votes. His spokesman Mark Giangreco said in an e-mail that "O'Malley stands with business community and with the thousands of



families that need this long term commitment to transit and sustainable development."

It's been a 20-year effort to get public transportation between Montgomery and Prince George's counties without having to pass through the District.

Right now, the Purple Line project is awaiting permission from the Federal Transit Administration to enter the next phase of the project -- preliminary engineering.

"It's really not the time to reopen this issue," Stewart Scharwitz, executive director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, told the Examiner. "It's going to be hard enough to get funding for new transportation projects."

And if the Purple Line receives federal funding, construction could begin in 2013/2014. It would likely take three to five years to complete construction.

## **Detroit moves forward with plan for light-rail project**

**Leonard N. Fleming / The Detroit News**

*Detroit* -- Construction on the Woodward Light Rail project from downtown to Eight Mile is expected to begin next year, and the federal government has pledged to conduct an environmental impact study required for the plan to move forward.

City, state and federal officials announced plans for the study today at a news conference on the steps of the Detroit Institute of Arts -- one of the proposed stops on the route. The study, which officials expect to take a year to 18 months to complete, must be done to so that federal matching funds can be used.

The total project, which will create a light-rail system with multiple stops to spur economic growth along the Woodward rail corridor, is expected to cost anywhere from \$450 to \$500 million. So far, \$125 million in private and public funds have been raised to complete the first phase of the project with the hope that the federal government will pick up much of the rest.

As far back as Coleman Young's first term as mayor, there's been a great deal of discussion and efforts to develop a light-rail system here in the city," said Mayor Dave Bing. "Today we are here to announce that we've reached a major milestone

on the road to turning the dream of light rail into a reality in the city of Detroit."

Bing, who has been pushing for this project since taking office last year because he sees it as integral to Detroit's rebirth, was joined by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Gov. Jennifer Granholm and a host of other city, state and federal officials touting a project that has long been in the making.

"If you've visited other cities as I have to see the impact of light rail, you see the development that it generates is equally important to the convenient transportation that it provides," the mayor said.

LaHood said this light rail project will become a "model for the country" given the public and private partnership to raise funds for the project to see that it gets completed.

"Projects like this cannot be done just with public dollars," LaHood said. "This will become a model for the country: public-private partnerships, foundations coming together with the state, the city, the entire delegation around the idea that if you build it they will come. I believe that."

Bing administration officials say the project could create as many as 10,000 jobs. Granholm said the downtown light rail project will now open to the door to other light rail connections to projects planned for Ann Arbor and a high-speed rail project to places like Chicago.

The plans call for multiple stops and the ones under consideration are: Wayne State University, Tech Town, Detroit Medical Center, Campus Martius Park, College for Creative Studies, the State Fairgrounds and the New Center/ Henry Ford Hospital area. The federal government has yet to conduct ridership studies, but that will be part of the environmental impact statement conducted over the next year, officials said.

The first phase of the project that would begin in 2011 will stretch from downtown to West Grand Boulevard, approximately 3.4 miles. The second phase will go from Grand Boulevard to Eight Mile and is estimated to be completed by 2016.

The first public meeting regarding the Woodward Light Rail Project will be held Aug. 14 at the Considine Little Rock Family Life Center.

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## Milwaukee's streetcar system the most partisan?

Milwaukee Magazine August 16, 2010

Steve Schuster

Across the country, in cities like Minneapolis, St. Louis and Charlotte, N.C., plans are underway to bring streetcars back. There are now streetcar systems in more than 40 cities, according to the website [railwaypreservation.com](http://railwaypreservation.com). Milwaukee is about to join this group, but it's getting there with far more partisan bickering than in some cities.

Take St. Louis for example – the St. Louis hybrid-electric streetcar plan was the result of joint efforts by both Democrats and Republicans at various levels of government and private sector investors, including real estate developer Joe Edwards, who all made it possible for St. Louis to apply for federal grants. That's according to Maggie Hales, interim executive director at East-West Gateway Council of Governments, the Metropolitan Planning Organization overseeing the project in St. Louis.

"We have received strong bipartisan support for the trolley project from diverse political stripes. In the St. Louis area we understand the importance of urban, rural, and suburban (living). It is absolutely imperative for us to be competitive with other metropolitan regions, to attract employers. We think it's important to have (good) public transportation," Hales says.

The trolley plan in St. Louis was designed to alleviate traffic congestion while connecting visitors and residents to golf courses, museums, cultural centers, universities, shopping, art and entertainment in a 2.2 mile loop, according to Edwards – just a bit longer than Milwaukee's planned route of 2 miles.

Why were St. Louis Republicans and Democrats so united in supporting a streetcar? Their top reasons, according to Edwards, were "economic development, tourism and neighborhood stabilization."

Minneapolis is in the preliminary stages of a streetcar route that will travel nine miles, and the city has plans for as many as six more routes. According to Charleen Zimmer, a consultant to the city, the issue hasn't come down to Democrats versus Republicans. "There are people here who support it and those who question it, but it's not a partisan issue," said Zimmer.

Milwaukee native and now Minneapolis resident Jonathan Strauss says he supports street car plans in both cities. Strauss, an attorney named one of ten of Minnesota's "Up & Coming Attorneys," worked on transportation litigation matters pertaining to the Minneapolis light rail system.

"The sad thing is that in the 1950s Minneapolis had one of the best networks of streetcars in the country, but they tore it down in the interest of urban renewal; and now most people regret it. Milwaukee had streetcars, too. I remember my father telling me about taking (the streetcars) to Braves games from Downtown Milwaukee," Strauss says.

Strauss also says the issue has had its moments of partisan disagreements in the Twin Cities:

"Republicans have expressed their opposition to streetcars in Minneapolis, too."

Still, the Milwaukee situation is pretty unique: There was bickering over how to use \$235 million in federal funds for transit in Milwaukee going back to the early 1990s. Democrats like former mayor John Norquist were at odds with Republicans over how to spend the money, and the issue was rejoined by Mayor Tom Barrett, a Democrat, and Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker, a Republican. Barrett worked through Democrats in Congress to get approval to use \$54 million of the federal money for streetcars, a decision Walker still contests.

"It should be used to improve and upgrade the existing (county bus system), not to create transit that will compete with the buses," Walker contends.

But Milwaukee city officials argue streetcars will actually improve bus ridership numbers because the proposed route will not only provide links to several bus routes but will also connect to the intermodal Greyhound/Amtrak station in downtown Milwaukee, providing additional modes of transportation for commuters, tourists and residents.

"There isn't a major American city that isn't developing streetcars. Once you start, people will want it. We are confident with our ridership numbers and projections," says Patrick Curley, chief of staff to Mayor Barrett.

However, Walker argues that street cars are not necessary to foster economic development, citing the success of Milwaukee's Third Ward sans street cars. "The bottom line for us ... even if you like



streetcars, (the federal money) could have all been (better) spent on the bus system," Walker reiterates.

Walker and Barrett have also argued over whether the streetcar system will divert state funding that now goes to buses to the new streetcar system. Walker says yes; Barrett says no.

Meanwhile, the city of Charlotte is planning to build a 1.5-mile streetcar starter route with six stops and three replica trolleys in advance of a future 10-mile streetcar route, according to Azania Z. Herron, spokesperson for the Charlotte Area Transit Systems. Odds are the system is being built with a lot less partisan wrangling.

## **New NABI Buses Soon to Arrive in Birmingham**

**Anniston, AL** (August 411, 2010) – When the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA) needed to replace its aging fleet of buses, transit officials turned to North American Bus Industries. As a result, NABI has recently delivered the first of 12 new compressed natural gas (CNG) buses to Birmingham. The other 11 buses will follow shortly thereafter. The purchase of these buses is being made in part by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) economic stimulus funding program.



In order to expedite the process, BJCTA was able to turn to another agency who allowed them to contract for some unused options. "The use of an assignment (unused options) made the process seamless, and resulted in a quicker turnaround of a contract and will ultimately result in the new buses being delivered more quickly" commented Collina Washington, BJCTA's Procurement Manager. Chris Dabbs, Regional Sales Manager for NABI added, "Birmingham was able to acquire buses of a proven design and make relatively few changes. The end

result is an excellent bus, delivered in a timeframe that will support BJCTA's need as they start in a new and improved direction. The opportunity for this assignment was an ideal fit for BJCTA".

Transit in Birmingham has a long history. With approximately 120 fixed route buses, the agency is the largest in the state and is a leader in the use of clean and efficient compressed natural gas as the primary fuel in its transit bus fleet. "BJCTA is poised to take some major steps toward improving the service provided to and deserved by our passengers. A new BJCTA will emerge and transit will be taken to the next level in Birmingham", states Executive Director Peter Behrman. Also new in Birmingham is Behrman who assumed responsibility for directing the Birmingham system, in May. A longtime industry professional, Behrman will be the new driving force for the future improvement of BJCTA.

This new direction at BJCTA will quickly be evident with the new NABI buses. The sleek new buses will be quieter, more dependable, while sporting a new paint and graphics design. In addition to the new exterior design, the buses will feature dependable wheelchair ramps, security cameras, audible annunciation systems, bicycle racks, and brilliant new destination signs.

## **Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus has awarded 5-year Contract to NABI for CNG Buses**

**Anniston, AL** (July 22, 2010) – The City of Santa Monica has awarded a multi-year contract to NABI and has issued a Notice to Proceed (NTP) for the purchase of nine forty-foot low-floor CNG transit buses with options to purchase up to an additional 58 buses over the 5-year contract period subject to approval by the City Council.

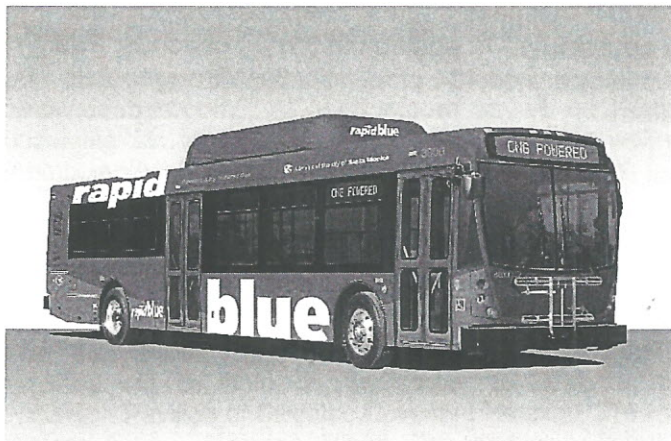
The purchase of these buses is being made in part by the Federal American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) economic stimulus funding program.

These new alternate fueled CNG transit buses will replace nine forty-foot diesel powered buses, which have exceeded their 12-year useful life and thus is consistent with the City's policy on sustainability. Additionally, the desirability of forty-foot low-floor buses for operation on Santa Monica Big Blue Bus (SMBBB) fixed route services will continue to



enhance SMBBB's operational efficiency and service quality.

"NABI has always been very helpful in meeting and understanding our needs," said Dan Dawson, customer relations manager for the Big Blue Bus. "A good example is these new 40-foot buses, which have many of the enhanced features we're looking for, including a sleeker design, better lighting and cleaner burning CNG fuel."



**NABI 40-LFW**

With these additional nine 40-foot buses as well as the sixteen 60-foot articulated CNG buses recently awarded to NABI, 100 percent of Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus fleet will be powered with alternate fueled propulsion systems.

According to NABI's Senior Vice President, Joe Gibson, we are extremely proud of this contract award and NTP for forty-foot transit buses. We are equally pleased that the City of Santa Monica and Big Blue Bus have the confidence in NABI to build high quality and reliable transit vehicles for not only its forty-foot bus needs, but also for its sixty-foot articulated bus needs from SMBBB's contract award to NABI last Fall and the more recent exercise of an articulated bus option.

### **Swarthout adds luxury touches to new MCI® D4505**

**SCHAUMBURG, IL — August 6, 2010** — Through carefully chosen options and additions, Swarthout Coaches, Inc., Ithaca, New York, is proving that a coach lauded for its value also can be applauded for its luxury. Swarthout's new MCI D4505, delivered in June, offers premium seating with 110-volt outlets at every other seat, a DVD entertainment system, Wi-Fi and other upper-end finishing touches.

"I was looking for a good, solid, dependable coach. We chose the D4505 because it fit our budget and anticipated lower operating costs, which mirrors people's spending habits right now," said Robert Swarthout, president and owner of the 60-year-old company. "We opted for a good looking interior, new exterior graphics and aluminum wheels. Also, we put Wi-Fi on all of our coaches."



Swarthout, which runs a fleet of 12 coaches, half of them MCI D models, does a lot of its business with area colleges, including Cornell. "The Wi-Fi goes over really well with the college kids, and we expect the electrical outlets to be popular as well," said Swarthout, who says the company's latest D4505 is the first new MCI it has purchased since 1998. Swarthout also does group-charter work and offers trips to New York-area attractions, casinos and entertainment venues.

The new D4505 is powered by a Detroit Diesel engine and Allison transmission. The D4505 is part of the best-selling model family in motor-coach history.

Swarthout, which has been serving the New York area since 1950 under Swarthout family leadership, started with a single school bus. The company, which employs 27 staff, prides itself on its safety procedures. To learn more visit, [www.goswarthout.com](http://www.goswarthout.com)

### **Paul Revere adds six MCI® D4505 coaches**

**SCHAUMBURG, IL — August 6, 2010** — Paul Revere Transportation LLC has added six new MCI D4505 models to upgrade its fleet of 20 motor coaches it runs in its line haul, public transit, shuttle and charter services throughout the greater Boston area.



The new coaches replace six older coaches in the Revere system. The new MCIs are wheelchair lift-equipped and feature Wi-Fi connectivity to keep riders working and communicating while traveling on more extensive runs. The new coaches are powered by clean-diesel engine technology outfitted with a Cummins engine and Allison transmission. The coaches also included exterior and interior destinations signs and a "talking bus system" that audibly announces upcoming stops.



The Chelsea, Massachusetts, company is using the coaches on its Logan Express service to both Braintree and Woburn, Massachusetts, and on its shuttle to Boston Logan Airport terminal. The company also operates a shuttle service to the Boston Longwood Medical Area.

General Manager Doc Dailey points out that the company brought six D4505s into its fleet two years ago, adding that the company has "been with MCI since our business started. We're very happy with the equipment." In addition to the 20 coaches, Paul Revere operates 124 other vehicles throughout its system.

Paul Revere is one of the largest transportation companies in New England and the 17th largest private bus company in the United States. More than a third of its coach fleet is clean-fueled. For more about Paul Revere, go to [www.paulreverebuses.com](http://www.paulreverebuses.com).

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