



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2011

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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.

• JAN/FEB MEETINGS

The January meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on January 7, 2011, 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 member John Le Beau titled "Canadian Coaches" (Part 1), a look at transit properties in Canada".

The February meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on February 4, 2011, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening will be a slide presentation by William Reynolds.

OSA Happenings

John Le Beau and Vern Rosenthal have been elected to the OSA board at our December meeting.

If any members would like to receive their Green Pennant Special by email please let Melvin Bernero at mbernero@prodigy.net know and he will begin to email you The Green Pennant Special.

2011 dues for membership in the Omnibus Society of America are now being accepted. Dues for the year are \$30.00 and can be paid in person at any OSA meeting or by sending a check or money order to our post office box.

CTA to buy 2 all-electric buses

October 28, 2010 3:25 PM

The Chicago Transit Authority received a \$2.2 million federal grant on Thursday to buy two all-electric buses.

The battery-powered buses -- the first buses with an all-electric propulsion system in the CTA fleet -- will be tested to see how well they perform in regular service, officials said.

"We anticipate that the buses will be used for shorter runs," CTA spokeswoman Noelle Gaffney said. The buses will be used as part of the agency's initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, she said.

The two buses will be standard 40-foot models, but officials have not settled on a brand to purchase or announced when the pilot project will begin, Gaffney said. The buses will operate out of one garage that will be equipped with quick-charging units.

The CTA currently operates 228 diesel-electric hybrid buses and 1,553 diesel buses, officials said.

Meanwhile, Metra was awarded about \$341,000 to install automatic shutdown and startup systems in about 27 locomotives. By shutting down instead of idling locomotives, Metra estimates it will save 800,000 gallons of diesel fuel and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 80,000 tons annually.

Both grants supporting environmentally sensitive transportation projects were awarded through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction and Clean Fuels programs.

-- Jon Hilkevitch

State provides \$32M for Joliet transportation hub

By Alicia Fabbre Special to the Tribune Oct. 28 at 4:52 p.m.

Standing at Union Station this afternoon, Gov. Pat Quinn announced a \$32 million grant for a multi-modal facility that would help make downtown Joliet a transportation hub.

The grant will allow for the construction of a new facility, immediately south of the existing Union Station, which serves as a hub for everything from high speed rail to local bus service.

"We can get all these folks under one location," said Jim Haller, Joliet's director for community and economic development. "You can walk downtown and take a bus to an airport or take the train to downtown Chicago and points beyond. It really does open up Joliet to make it more accessible to the world."

The \$41.7 million project will be funded through the state grant, another \$7.5 million from Joliet, and \$2.2 million from Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway. The new facility is expected to create 650 construction jobs.

"This project will revitalize downtown Joliet and improve safety for the 800,000 passengers who use the city's Union Station every year," Quinn said in a prepared statement.

Last year, Joliet officials submitted a grant request for federal funds to build the new facility, but the project was not selected. Last week, the city's efforts to secure federal funding for the project also met the same fate.

Haller said it had appeared the city would need to secure smaller grants through various agencies to make the project a reality – a process that would have taken 10 years or more, Haller said. The state grant will make the project a reality within two years.

"This is what happens when economic development, business and government work together to get things done," Will County Executive Larry Walsh said. "I am proud of what this will do for the county seat of Will County."

Haller said the city will begin working on drawing up plans for the project, which includes a new platform for train passengers, a turnaround for bus traffic and a new building to house a waiting and ticketing area for the various transportation services.

Quinn and Joliet officials touted the project as a boom for the downtown district pointing to the number of jobs it would create and the businesses a new transportation facility would draw.

While Quinn's announcement – which also drew Congresswoman Debbie Halverson and Illinois State Senator AJ Wilhelmi – comes just days

before the Nov. 2 election, city officials noted they first began talking about the project two years ago and have been working to secure funding for the project.

"The need was identified a long time ago and the desire on the part of the state to try to help us was identified a long time ago," Haller said.

Megabus.com expands footprint in North America

16/11/2010

- **New hub created in Washington DC, linking 11 additional destinations**
- **Services from New York to link cities in Connecticut and Massachusetts**

megabus.com, Stagecoach Group's market-leading budget inter-city coach service, is extending its footprint in North America from next month.

A new hub is being created in Washington DC with an expanded service to 11 new locations, while services from New York will link additional cities in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Customers will be able to travel with megabus.com from Washington to Boston; Buffalo, N.Y.; Charlotte, N.C.; Frederick, Md.; Hampton, Va.; Harrisburg, Penn.; Knoxville, Tenn.; Pittsburgh; Raleigh/Durham, N.C.; Richmond, Va.; and Toronto.

It will mean megabus.com will serve 14 cities from its Washington hub, offering multiple daily departures at fares from just \$1 plus booking fee.

New York services are also being extended to cover Hartford, Conn., and Amherst, Mass., proving five daily departures and bringing the total number of cities serviced from the Big Apple hub to 15. Routes to and from Pittsburgh and State College, Penn., will also be doubled to four daily departures.

The improved services and new routes will start operation from 15 December 2010 and customers can start booking via the website from today (16 November 2010).

Dale Moser, President and Chief Operating Officer of megabus.com in North America, said: "megabus.com just keeps on growing as customers look to make their dollar go further. We are delighted we have been able to expand further in

North America to bring our great value fares to more locations."

Elliott L. Ferguson, President & CEO, Destination DC, said: "By expanding its footprint in the DC market, megabus.com is making DC even more accessible and affordable to travelers. The new routes and additional service will also make DC more appealing to the young, tech-savvy travelers, business travelers and families we want to attract, as well as to international visitors who are exploring other cities on the East Coast and beyond."

George Fertitta, CEO of NYC & Company, the City's marketing, tourism and partnership organization, said: "We are pleased that megabus.com is expanding its New York City service just in time for the winter travel season. There's never been a better time for those travelling to the five boroughs to experience the City's energy and excitement at such extraordinary value."

More than seven million passengers have now travelled with the service in North America since the successful concept was exported from the UK in 2006. In addition to low fares, megabus.com's services in North America offer customers environmentally-friendly coaches, free Wi-Fi, power outlets and toilets.

Earlier this month, megabus.com confirmed that it had bucked the economic downturn by creating more than 200 jobs in North America over the past two years as passenger demand for low-cost travel continues to grow.

- Visit www.megabus.com for additional information about service, schedules, arrival and departure times and fares.

New express buses rolling to Staten Island next year

Published: Monday, November 22, 2010, 9:32 AM
By **Maura Yates silive.com**

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- Staten Island express bus riders can look forward to 50 brand new coach buses that will be heading to the borough next year.

The new Prevost buses are among an order of 90, meant to replace New York City Transit's current aging fleet of Motor Coach Industries, or MCI buses, now averaging about nine years old.

They are scheduled to be delivered between October and December 2011.

"The roads of Staten Island are particularly difficult on the equipment," said MTA Board Member Allen Cappelli, who noted that any opportunity to replace old buses with new ones is always welcome, especially considering Islanders spend the most time commuting on them.

The Prevost X3-45s have the same number of seats as the current fleet, 57, and are powered by Volvo engines assembled in Maryland, that meet the latest emissions requirements. They will be covered by a 12-year structural warranty.

The new Prevost's, which cost \$549,568 each, are slightly less expensive than a brand new MCI bus, which costs \$547,476, before about \$18,000 more for upgrades to meet 2010 emission requirements.

Prevost is a Canadian company, but 10 percent of the components used in the buses will be made in New York State. The company has agreed to build a portion of buses ordered under future contracts at a Plattsburgh, N.Y. manufacturing facility.

Feds to Ohio: Your high-speed rail project is officially dead (and New York thanks you)

Published: Thursday, December 09, 2010, 8:11 PM Updated:
Friday, December 10, 2010, 9:52 AM
By Stephen Koff, The Plain Dealer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The train has left the station, and few people in Ohio are happy about it.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said Thursday that the federal government is taking away \$400 million it had awarded Ohio for a passenger rail project. The train would have provided service between Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati.

Instead, the money will be sent to California, New York, Florida and other states planning high-speed train service, because Gov.-elect John Kasich told President Barack Obama's administration that he has no intention of ever building the passenger line.

With average speeds from 39 mph to 50 mph initially, the so-called 3-C line in Ohio would hardly qualify as high-speed or attract enough passengers, Kasich said, and would require an annual subsidy from Ohio taxpayers of \$17 million.

LaHood and Obama could not change Kasich's mind, so the federal government on Thursday said that's fine, because other states want the money. Ohio's portion and an even larger sum being revoked from Wisconsin, where another incoming governor won't build a railroad, create a \$1.2 billion windfall for other states' passenger projects.

A congresswoman from New York, Louise Slaughter, even cheered the decision, saying, "If other states don't want their high-speed rail money, New York will take it because we understand that high-speed rail is an essential element to our transportation system and a good rail system is an important element of our national security."

Yet Kasich is not counting this as a clear win, because he says the federal government should have allowed him to use the \$400 million to fix bridges, freight rail crossings and roads in Ohio. If that wasn't allowed, the money should have gone to the Treasury for debt reduction, said Kasich, a Republican and onetime chairman of the budget committee in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"Governor-elect Kasich is disappointed that the White House is not giving Ohio the flexibility he has asked for to use the money for infrastructure needs like freight rail that can spur commerce and economic growth," his spokesman, Rob Nichols, said. Kasich "finds it tragic," Nichols said, "that instead of saving taxpayer money, they would simply waste it elsewhere."

The U.S. Department of Transportation said there was no choice but to spend Ohio's rail money on other high-speed lines, because it was required in last year's economic stimulus bill.

Ohio has 492 other projects

Besides, that bill, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, has already provided Ohio with \$1.1 billion for 492 projects improving roads, bridges, transit and airports, LaHood told Kasich in a letter just after Kasich defeated current Gov. Ted Strickland in the November election.

Strickland, a Democrat in his final weeks in office, said LaHood's announcement marked "one of the saddest days during my four years as governor."

"Because I see jobs leaving Ohio, I see resources leaving Ohio, I see vital infrastructure leaving Ohio," Strickland said. "I can't understand the logic of giving up these vital, job-creating resources to

California and Florida at a time when so many Ohioans need jobs."

Democrats in Congress and at the Statehouse voiced similar reactions. They saw the rail project as a catalyst for jobs, and some said the speeds of the proposed train would have accelerated as tracks were straightened and improved over time.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown said that by "turning our backs on this federal investment, we are turning our backs on an opportunity to bring rail manufacturing jobs to Ohio."

U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge of Warrensville Heights said it means the loss of 8,000 jobs -- the number of spinoff jobs projected once service was running - and called the decision "a sucker punch in this kind of economy."

U.S. Rep. Betty Sutton of Copley Township called it "extremely disappointing," saying that jobs will be created and infrastructure improved in other states -- but not in Ohio.

Not a 'done deal,' advocates say

Yet rail advocates aren't giving up.

"Until grant agreements with the new state recipients have been signed, we don't consider this a done deal," said Bill Hutchison, president of All Aboard Ohio, an association that championed the prospect of inter-city Ohio rail travel.

It takes months for agreements to be finalized, and even \$385.1 million of Ohio's award was not yet under agreement, he said. As for the other \$14.9 million, for preliminary engineering, it is "is under a grant agreement" with the Ohio Department of Transportation "and cannot simply be taken away," Hutchison said.

The federal government has not asked for that smaller sum back, however. LaHood specifically stated a revocation of \$385 million from Ohio and \$810 million from Wisconsin, although he added that the Federal Railroad Administration will work with these states to determine whether they have already spent money under their contracts that should be reimbursed.

The money will be redirected in this manner, LaHood said: California, up to \$624 million; Florida, up to \$342.3 million; Washington State, up to \$161.5 million; Illinois, up to \$42.3 million, New York, up to \$7.3 million, Maine, up to \$3.3 million,

Massachusetts, up to \$2.8 million, Vermont, up to \$2.7 million; Missouri, up to \$2.2 million; Wisconsin, up to \$2 million for the Hiawatha line, and smaller sums for Oregon, North Carolina, Iowa and Indiana.

Metro gets \$4M grant to buy 12 buses

St. Louis Business Journal

Date: Friday, November 5, 2010, 11:09am CDT

St. Louis transit agency Metro said Friday it will use a \$4 million federal grant to buy 12 buses.

The Federal Transit Administration notified Metro that its grant application had been approved through the FTA Clean Fuels Bus Grant program to buy buses that meet current federal emissions requirements.

Metro said it needs more buses to restore services that were cut in March 2009 amid budget constraints. St. Louis County voters approved a half-cent sales-tax increase in April 2010 to provide \$80 million a year to restore service and rebuild the bus fleet. Metro began implementing service restoration in June and said Friday it has been working to speed up bus acquisition

"This grant gets us closer to the number of buses we need to fully restore service to our customers," Metro Chief Operating Officer Ray Friem said in a statement. "We've been managing our fleet to cover the higher demands of restoring service. This grant, plus Metro's contribution of \$1 million in a local match, will be an important step toward rebuilding the fleet to meet our customers' needs.

"Our goal is to get back to our base business plan where we replace about one-15th of our fleet each year," Friem said. "Eventually, our target is to consistently buy 30 new buses a year. Right now, with us short on buses, we are expediting our purchase schedule and obtaining grants such as this one is very helpful in those efforts."

Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus Exercises an Option for 5 Additional CNG Articulated Buses for Rapid Blue Lines

Anniston, AL - September 23, 2010 - Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus has exercised an option, including the issuing of a Notice to Proceed (NTP) for five (5) additional 60-BRT CNG articulated vehicles. This order is in addition to the 11 60-BRT

CNG articulated vehicles previously awarded to NABI. All 16 articulated vehicles will be produced/delivered in a single production run for delivery in early-to-mid 2011.

According to Big Blue Bus staff, these 5 additional articulated CNG vehicles will provide the extra seating capacity to allow the Big Blue Bus to operate three fewer PM peak 40' overload buses for an annual estimated savings of 4,528 hours, which translates into a cost savings of approximately \$200,000 annually.

Big Blue Bus staff announced that these option buses will replace aging transit vehicles that are approaching 15 years old. These new buses will be less costly to maintain, enhance customer comfort and reduce service interruptions.

According to NABI Senior Vice President Joe Gibson, we continue to be pleased to have a repeat customer such as Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus for its 60-foot articulated bus needs as well as its 40-foot bus needs with the recent contract award and NTP for (9) 40-foot CNG buses.

NABI's Sirius Enters European Bus Market

Kaposvar, Hungary (September 17, 2010) – Hungarian dignitaries and NABI officials proudly unveiled the "Sirius"...a new NABI transit bus specially designed for the Hungarian bus market.

NABI is a major supplier of transit buses in the USA; however, in recent years its Hungarian operations have been limited to partially finished buses exported to the U.S. for final assembly.



"The Sirius is an exciting entry into an exciting market for NABI," noted Jim Marcotuli, NABI President and CEO. "NABI has taken advanced, streamlined body styling features from its popular U.S. 'BRT' model and has made important adjustments to meet European standards. And now this sleek, distinctive new body is applied to a state-

of-the-art MAN chassis to create the Sirius, for Hungarian public transportation operators."

Ferenc Baranyai, Director of NABI's Hungarian operations sees a viable market opportunity in Hungary for the new product. "Market demand is promising," he commented, "Local public transportation operators now report collective demand for up to about 3,000 units over the next five years."

In recent years NABI's Hungarian operations in Budapest and Kaposvar only manufactured products exported to the U.S. for final assembly in NABI's Anniston, Alabama plant. Interestingly, during this time, NABI's engineers in Hungary played an integral role in the development of NABI's BRT, the model from which the Sirius was derived. With its own engineering and manufacturing capabilities already operational in Hungary, Baranyai is understandably enthusiastic about now producing and delivering finished buses domestically.

Production of the Sirius will also help stimulate Hungary's economy. Its domestic production will generate engineering, manufacturing and service work at NABI, and it will also create jobs with domestic suppliers of material and equipment used in the Sirius' body.

The Sirius is a twelve meter (forty-foot) bus designed for city and suburban routes. Its German MAN chassis uses a six-speed automatic transmission coupled to a clean, quiet MAN diesel engine which not only meets current Euro-5 standards, but already fulfills the requirements of the rapidly approaching EEV emissions standards. Its smooth, six-speed automatic transmission, with neutral bus-stop and automatic lock-up modes, offers excellent economy under all operating conditions. A bright, spacious interior accommodates up to 113 passengers, and three wide doors assure safe and efficient passenger flow, even in crowded urban operation. But perhaps most importantly, the chic and distinctive design of the Sirius will not only please passengers...it will also provide a bold and distinctive statement regarding the organization that operates it. The debut of the Sirius included ceremonial delivery of the first bus to the city of Kaposvár. Jozsef Csapo, General Director of Kaposvar Public Transportation, Ltd. announced, "We have been using NABI buses in our fleet for over five years with outstanding support and with excellent operator and passenger satisfaction. Now we are

quite excited to introduce NABI's beautiful new Sirius into our fleet."

The NABI Sirius is the first member of a family of products designed to meet the needs of public transportation operators throughout Central Europe. Its modular construction enables the derivation of alternative sizes, and its versatile driveline arrangement enables the application of the latest clean propulsion systems, including compressed natural gas (CNG) and the emerging hybrid electric-drive systems.

Eglinton, Finch lines threatened by Scarborough subways

Tim Foran InsideToronto.com Dec. 8, 2010

Building Mayor Rob Ford's two promised subway extensions to Scarborough would use up essentially all of the \$8.15 billion in provincial transit funding committed for Toronto, leaving no money for trains on or under Eglinton or Finch avenues, according to an analysis based on TTC cost estimates.

Extending both the existing Sheppard (from Don Mills) and the Bloor-Danforth (from Kennedy) subway lines - respectively, the number one and two transit priorities outlined by Ford in his campaign platform - to Scarborough Town Centre (STC) would cost \$7.2 billion. The figures are included in a TTC briefing note that was presented to Ford's transition team on Nov. 9 and that was supplied to this newspaper by St. Paul's Councillor and former TTC commissioner Joe Mihevc.

Though not included in the briefing note, the TTC's per-kilometer estimates for subway construction indicate it would also cost an additional \$1.3 billion to extend the Sheppard subway west from Yonge Street to Downsview Station at Allen Road, a section also included in Ford's platform.

Those costs therefore wouldn't leave money to build either subway or light-rail trains underneath Eglinton and Finch, as Ford has asked the TTC and Metrolinx to study, said Mihevc.

"It's not doable and everybody knows it," he said.

Mihevc is pushing for the retention of the individual plans already endorsed by city council and the province's transportation planning agency, Metrolinx, for four new light-rail transit (LRT) lines. They include routes along Eglinton Avenue from Kennedy station to Jane Street, with the majority of

the line underground (Laird Drive to Black Creek); Finch Avenue, from Keele Street to Humber College; and Sheppard Avenue from Don Mills to past Malvern. The fourth line would replace the aging Scarborough Rapid Transit trains with LRT cars along the existing right-of-way to McCowan station and then continue to Sheppard via Centennial College.

The Finch, Sheppard and just under half of the Eglinton LRT lines would consist of dedicated tracks at street level under existing plans. TTC spokesperson Brad Ross said the objective is to widen those roads so no existing traffic lanes are removed. However, critics have pointed out the at-grade trains would prevent cars from turning left at some intersections and Ford has said plans for Transit City and any new at-grade trains are dead. He has asked the TTC to report back in January about strategies to bury the lines underground.

Ford's newly appointed TTC chair and Eglinton-Lawrence Councillor Karen Stintz said it's premature to conclude the Finch and Eglinton lines can't be built underground as well as building Ford's proposed subway extensions, all for the province's \$8.15 billion. Both the province and Ford have rejected adding more funding to that amount.

The existing budget for the Eglinton LRT - which a Metrolinx spokesperson stated "would be the backbone of travel across Toronto" due partially to its connections to GO Transit lines and TTC subway stations - is already \$4.6 billion, and only 10 kilometres of the 19-km route are scheduled to be underground. Asked if it wasn't logical to deduce the budget would increase by building the entire line underground, Stintz responded: "That's part of the plan and the review and so I'm waiting for the review to come back."

Adam Chaleff-Freudenthaler, who organized a canvass in Stintz's ward Saturday, Dec. 4 to save Transit City, said while everyone claims they like subways, they have to admit there's a huge extra cost involved.

"As the plan starts to come back in January, anybody who represents an Eglinton ward is going to have to fess up to the fact that saying you're going to bury it (the entire route) means there's going to be extra cost that isn't covered...and may well mean that we never see that line that we've been promised for so long."

The TTC's estimates for the Sheppard and Bloor-Danforth subway extensions are essentially double

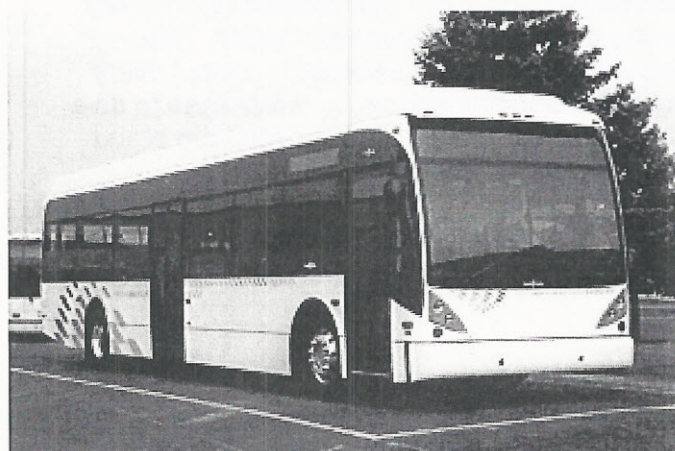
what Ford said they would cost in his campaign platform. He said it would cost \$3 billion to complete the Sheppard subway line from Downsview to STC, and \$1 billion to extend the Bloor-Danforth subway along the existing elevated Scarborough Rapid Transit (SRT) route to McCowan station.

The TTC's briefing note states the SRT can't be replaced with a subway on the existing right-of-way because both the radius of the curves between SRT stations are too tight and a tunnel section at Ellesmere doesn't support subway trains. It states a different alignment for the subway extension is needed, and estimates it could be extended to STC from Kennedy with one new station at Lawrence Avenue for \$3.1 billion, including vehicles and a new maintenance facility.

The Sheppard subway extension from Don Mills to STC would cost an estimated \$4.1 billion, including a new maintenance facility. The estimate is based on a route running along Sheppard to just past Kennedy before running south to STC.

Krapf Coaches Takes Delivery of New Van Hool A300L Transit Coaches

Krapf Coaches Inc. (www.krapfbus.com) is a rarity. The West Chester, Pennsylvania, based transportation company is operating a transit line successfully without government subsidies. George Krapf Jr. founded the company over 65 years ago and three generations of Krapf's have built a multifaceted company with 8 locations, spanning three Middle Atlantic States.



Krapf's currently operates more than 1000 school buses, 30 luxury motorcoaches, 35 transit buses and 88 Paratransit vehicles, offering charter, tour, school as well as transit and Paratransit services to

multiple areas. Their transit division alone carries more than 550,000 passengers a year.

In 1992, Krapf's took over what was known as "Route A" between Coatesville, Downingtown, Exton and West Chester, Pennsylvania, and has continued to operate and improve it to the point where they are transporting more than 1,200 passengers daily. In 1994 they became the first private contractor to run scheduled service for Philadelphia's SEPTA, and currently operate four routes for SEPTA.

Krapf recently took delivery of two new Van Hool A300L low floor transit coaches. The buses are powered by Cummins ISL engines coupled to Voith D864.5 Four Speed transmissions.

Gary Krapf, President of Krapf Coaches remarked, "We ran good used buses for years on this route, but we think these will serve our customers better, and we expect to save money on maintenance. The new coaches will reduce emissions, and the low floors provide great access. We work hard to serve these communities and try to do it for less money than a public agency."

"ABC's Jay Oakman, and their staff worked hard to make this happen. These are a new type of bus for us, and ABC worked out a creative way for us to operate them with a minimum of risk. If things go as we expect, we'll be getting more for our lines, and some other work that's on the horizon," Krapf said.

ABC Companies is Van Hool's exclusive distributor in North America. Account Executive Jay Oakman pointed out, "With this acquisition, Krapf demonstrates once again that diversification is key to thriving during shaky economic cycles. This family-owned business is involved in almost every aspect of transporting people, and manages to do a quality job in each one. All of us at ABC are proud to be part of their success."

Kentucky's Blue Grass Tours on the lead with two new 2011 MCI® J4500 coaches

SCHAUMBURG, IL — December 1, 2010 — Blue Grass Tours knows what it takes to be great. From its popular "Horses, Hooch and History" tours and trips to the Kentucky Derby, to transporting championship sports teams, Blue Grass Tours of Lexington, Kentucky, relies on its professional staff and the best equipment on the market, including two new MCI J4500 coaches, to keep the company

one of the state's most successful ground-transportation providers.



As the best-selling coach in the industry, the J4500 features an easy-boarding entryway, scenery-sized windows, a state-of-the-art-entertainment system and a smooth-riding wide-ride suspension. Blue Grass Tours considers the model a sure thing. "It's a superior coach," said Wah (Wallace) Jones, Jr., founder and owner of the family-operated company. "We've also been very pleased with MCI's service and support."

A competitive spirit is the hallmark of Blue Grass Tours. Prior to starting Blue Grass Tours, Wah Jones was a professional baseball player. His father, Wah Wah Jones, is a celebrated sports hero in Kentucky, famous for his role in winning University of Kentucky's NCAA men's basketball championships in 1948 and 1949, an Olympic gold medal, and many UK football team victories. Wah Jones, in turn, took what he learned from his father and his own experience on the baseball field to start Blue Grass 32 years ago.

"I had to fight to get authority to start the business because the industry was just starting to be deregulated and the competition was fierce," said Jones. "I started with one Eagle in late 1980 and painted it blue and white. The phone started ringing in 1981, and by December of that year, I had bought three new coaches in a year's time."

Steady growth followed. Today, Blue Grass is a stable force and industry leader. It operates 20 coaches, two custom VIP conversion coaches, four vans and limousines. In addition to tours and charter services, Blue Grass offers customized tours through its tour department.

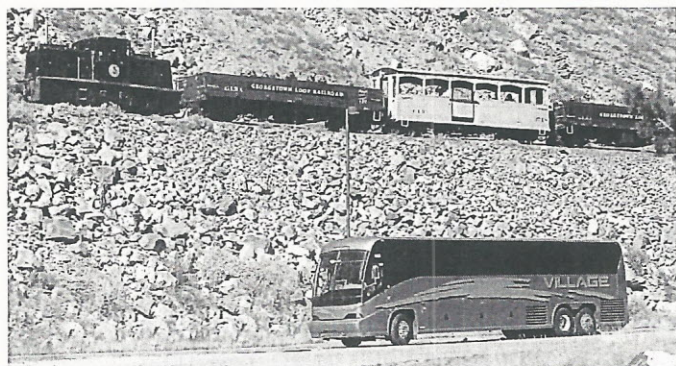
"It's a great business to be in. I believe in offering the best looking, well maintained equipment at a

fair price. It's a tough business. To succeed, companies have to do it the right way." Now, the next generation is preparing to carry on. Corey, Wah's son, plans to eventually run the business after earning a degree in Accounting and Business Administration from Transylvania University, consistently ranked among the top liberal arts colleges in America.

"We're operating our business the right way," said Jones. "I'm very happy with where we are today." To learn more, go to www.Bluegrasstours.com.

Village Tours targets high-end trips with new deluxe MCI® J4500 coach, featuring wood-look flooring, passenger seatbelts

SCHAUMBURG, IL — November 15, 2010 — Village Tours, Wichita, Kansas, knows how to satisfy customers with high expectations. That's why it has outfitted its latest coach, a 2011 MCI J4500, with top-tier amenities including video monitors, Wi-Fi, 110-volt outlets, leather headrests, extra leg room and a simulated wood floor that offers elegance upon boarding. It's also the first Village Tours coach to offer three-point passenger seatbelts.



The new MCI J4500, one of six that Village Tours owns as part of a 24-coach fleet, is powered by a Cummins engine and Allison transmission. "We bought our first MCI J4500 in 2008, and we've had good luck with the model," said Jeff Arensdorf, who has owned the 30-year-old company with his father, Norm, since 2000. "MCI has been very receptive to us, and it was spec'ed out the way we like it."

While the J4500 is part of Village Tours' plan for attracting passengers on the high end of the luxury-seeking scale, the company is just as good at meeting the needs of customers with more basic needs.

Village Tours, which also operates a facility in Oklahoma City, offers its customers several levels of vehicles, including Deluxe, Super and Economy coaches. New luxury coaches, such as the J4500, typically start life at the company as Deluxe tour coaches before being moved to charter operations after three or four years. Once the coach reaches about 10 years of age, it is put into the Economy fleet. "We started offering that as a response to the economy," said Arensdorf. "While some customers are willing to pay more for top quality, there are others who are shopping purely on price. This gives us a way to compete."

Village Tours also offers a few Sleeper coaches that are popular with sports teams and Super coaches that are highly customized. The fleet also includes mini coaches.

Village Tours, which has been recognized for its excellence by organizations including Bus Ride Magazine, is proactive in other ways as well. It's an effective user of Facebook, using the social networking site to advertise tours and special deals to more than 600 fans.

City Council members back off from complaints about Loyola Avenue streetcar spur

Published: Saturday, December 04, 2010, 8:00 AM

By Bruce Egger, The Times-Picayune

Four City Council members fired off an irate letter last month to the Regional Transit Authority, blasting the agency's plans for a Loyola Avenue spur of the Canal Street streetcar line.

Councilwomen Jackie Clarkson, Susan Guidry, Stacy Head and Kristin Gisleson Palmer said the RTA's plans ignored concerns that council members had expressed about the proposed locations of the line's tracks and stops, including their wish to have the tracks run in a separate lane reserved only for streetcars and emergency vehicles.

They said the line's alignment also conflicted with the city's master plan, making the design illegal, and said the RTA had "repeatedly discounted or ignored valuable public input."

They also charged the RTA with planning to artificially pump up ridership numbers on the new line by forcing passengers on many bus lines to transfer to streetcars to get to Canal Street.

In the face of such scathing criticism from elected officials, the city's chances of getting the \$45 million in federal money needed to build the line could have been in deep trouble.

But a week later, RTA General Manager Justin Augustine responded with an 11-page, point-by-point rebuttal of each of the council members' numerous complaints.

And on the same day, the four councilwomen sent a new letter to Augustine and, significantly, the Federal Transit Administration saying that Augustine's letter was "sufficient to address our concerns" and their original comments should not be taken as "justification for a finding of significant impact" -- in other words, a reason for the FTA to withhold its money.

Even though their original five-page letter excoriated the RTA's plans for the new line, the council members said the letter was "in no way intended to suggest any displeasure or dissatisfaction" with the Loyola project. It was, they said, meant only to "provoke thoughtful debate and discussion."

In his letter, Augustine said city officials and council members had agreed in April to proceed with current track designs, postponing a decision on whether to create a transit-only lane until after the city does a comprehensive traffic study. He said the plans don't violate the master plan's land-use guidelines and, in any case, the master plan does not control federally financed capital projects.

He denied that the RTA has ignored public comments and said no decisions have been made on whether various RTA bus lines will continue running to Canal Street or will end at the Union Passenger Terminal on Loyola, although his comments suggested that the RTA considers the terminal to be a logical transfer place for many transit riders.

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Northstar marks a year of commuter rail service

by Tim Nelson, Minnesota Public Radio
November 16, 2010

St. Paul, Minn. — Minnesota's first commuter rail line is marking its first anniversary this morning, as Northstar trains pull out of Big Lake at 5 a.m. and Minneapolis about an hour later.

This year, nearly 600,000 people have stepped aboard the line's trains for the half-dozen round trips Northstar makes daily between Big Lake and downtown Minneapolis.

But there haven't been as many riders as Northstar's builders had hoped when the line opened with great fanfare. Ridership is running about 5 percent below projections -- or about 30,000 fares. The shortfall is expected to worsen to as much as 15 to 20 percent below projections for the rest of this year.

Still, commuters who use the line are happy that they can take the train instead of driving.

"Traffic's pretty bad, and the train is a lot easier," said Jeff Burrell, a systems administrator who lives in Coon Rapids. "It's cheaper than paying for filling my tank every four days. It's convenient, it's more convenient [and] it's a smoother ride than the bus."

The spacious cars and reliable service are draws for commuters, with trains that run on schedule about 96 percent of the time.

"Less gas, easier on the car," said Ruthann Petrell, who rides the train to commute from Ramsey. "Bad weather -- I don't have to drive in the snow."

The main reason for the lower than expected numbers is the economy, Metro Transit Spokesman Bob Gibbons said.

"With an unemployment rate of 7 percent, there are fewer people going to work," Gibbons said. "And that is magnified by the nature of Northstar service. It is designed specifically to take people to and from work."

There are other factors, as well. Gas prices and building occupancy rates have fallen, making it cheaper to drive to and park in downtown Minneapolis. Improvements to a main commuting artery, U.S. Highway 10, may also make it a little more bearable to drive.

Those factors may also have contributed to a smaller dip in Metro Transit ridership overall.

But both supporters and critics are calling for Northstar to do better.

Andrew Seldon, president of the Minnesota Association of Railroad passengers, said parts of Northstar were ill-planned. He said Northstar's main shortcoming is the lack of through service to job centers such as the University of Minnesota.

A second big problem is that lack of a midday round trip prevents Northstar from being used by any of the many people who are driving into downtown Minneapolis to go to the doctor, to go shopping, to do whatever else people are going to do in downtown Minneapolis.

Seldon said separating the bus and train terminals in Coon Rapids was a mistaken bureaucratic fiat from Washington.

"You could literally cut a hole in the fence and walk from the parking lot to the train as easily as you could walk to the bus," he said.

But many of the problems can be fixed with better connections, he said, noting that the Central Corridor light rail line is scheduled to link Minneapolis and St. Paul in 2014.

Others say Northstar should be a lesson for supporters of more trains, including an extension of commuter rail to St. Cloud, and for proposed lines going into St. Paul from Hinkley and Hastings. Northstar officials said earlier this month that they won't apply for federal funds to extend the line to St. Cloud, citing projected ridership numbers.

Jonathan Blake, vice president of the Freedom Foundation of Minnesota, a conservative think tank, said taxpayers subsidize about 80 percent of the fares for each person that gets on the train.

"What we would love to see is that Northstar really catches on, that ridership skyrockets -- and that taxpayers can be taken off the hook for this," Blake said. "That's just not reasonable."

But Metro Transit officials say that number is typical of commuter rail lines around the country, and that Northstar is actually hitting its financial goals, despite the sag in ridership numbers.

Still, they're hoping to bring those up. Metro Transit is offering free rides on Northstar today and tomorrow to get new riders to try the train -- particularly as winter approaches.

Hydrogen bus launched on London tourist route

UK's first permanent hydrogen bus described as 'stepping stone' to rolling out the clean technology across the country

The UK's first permanent hydrogen bus will be launched on a popular tourist route in London today. Seven more hydrogen buses will be added

to the RV1 route -- which takes in Covent Garden, the Tower of London and the South Bank -- by mid-2011.



The initiative, which follows a trial of three hydrogen buses in the capital between 2003 and 2007, has been described as a "stepping stone" to rolling out the technology across the country. The launch will also coincide with the opening of the UK's largest hydrogen refueling station in Leyton, east London.

The new bus, which was designed specially for London, will begin carrying passengers tomorrow. It produces water vapour from its tailpipe and can operate for more than 18 hours without needing to refuel.

"These are the next generation of hydrogen fuel cell hybrid buses that were designed and developed based on the findings of our trial," said David Edwards, a spokesperson for Transport for London. "We will be closely assessing the performance of these buses and the new technology they use. Should the buses prove reliable and suitable for the needs of London we could consider extending the fleet."

The buses contain batteries that can store electricity generated by the hydrogen fuel cell -- a device that combines hydrogen and oxygen to produce power and water as a by-product -- in addition to energy generated during the braking process. As a result, they can travel much farther than the ones trialed in London as part of the EU-sponsored Cute -- Cleaner Urban Transport for Europe -- project in 2003. The new buses were designed by the consortium of businesses that furnished Vancouver with a fleet of 39 buses in 2009. "The main difference is that those buses were designed to withstand temperatures below -20C," said David Hart, a hydrogen fuel expert based at Imperial College who was involved in Cute.

More than 4,300 deaths are caused in London by poor air quality every year, costing around £2bn a year. The new buses will go some way towards tackling this dire problem, says Hart. "All that comes out of these buses is water vapour, so you don't get all of the nasty nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides and particulate matter that diesel buses pump out into the air." The buses may also reduce carbon emissions – but only if the hydrogen they run on is generated using renewable electricity rather than electricity produced by burning coal, he said.

One key hurdle to rolling out the buses across the UK is cost – but Edwards is optimistic that the situation will improve soon. "This technology is currently very new, with these buses being designed to suit the London operating environment.

As such, with development costs, these buses are typically more expensive than their traditional hybrid diesel counterpart. But as the technology is proven along with the environment benefits they bring, the commercial market for these buses should open up and we expect the costs to drop dramatically," he said.

London is one of a handful of cities around the world to adopt hydrogen buses. In May 2003, Madrid became the first city in the world to run a regular hydrogen bus service. Hamburg, Perth and Reykjavik quickly followed suit. Berlin's Clean Energy Partnership project, which began in 2006, aims to put 14 hydrogen buses and 40 hydrogen cars on the road by 2016. The largest hydrogen project in the world – the Hydrogen Highway – is based in California and has so far built 30 refueling stations. In December 2009, Amsterdam also launched Nemo H2, a tour boat powered by hydrogen.

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