



OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2013

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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 **osabus.org**. At **osabus.org** 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 6, 2013, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program will be a DVD presentation by Melvin Bernero.

The October meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on October 4, 2013, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening will be a presentation by long-time member Myron Lane on Chicago and its suburban bus operators.

Quinn appointee Zuccarelli quits CTA board

Crain's Chicago Business Greg Hinz August 13, 2013

The widening mess that has enveloped the Chicago area's public transit operators claimed another victim today, with the resignation of embattled Chicago Transit Authority board member Frank Zuccarelli.

In a letter to Gov. Pat Quinn, Mr. Zuccarelli said he'd agreed to be appointed to the board "with a singular purpose in mind — to be a strong advocate for meeting the mass transit needs of the residents of the south suburbs."

But Mr. Zuccarelli's decision to continue to be paid \$128,000 a year as the Thornton Township supervisor and to accept the \$25,000-a-year CTA post became an immediate lightning rod after Metra and the Regional Transportation Authority officials resigned amid ethical controversies.

State law generally bans such double-dipping, but Mr. Zuccarelli profited from a loophole that exempts township posts.

Mr. Zuccarelli referenced that matter in his letter, saying, "I do not want political grandstanding to distract from the critical issues or stand in the way of what people in the south suburbs need. Therefore, it is with great regret that I ask you to withdraw my appointment."

The appointment eventually would have required at least a confirmation hearing by the Illinois Senate, and Mr. Quinn's main renomination foe, former presidential Chief of Staff Bill Daley, had called on the Senate to reject Mr. Zuccarelli, saying that the only transportation experience the "clear double-dipper" has is "driving voters to the polls."

The resignation comes a day before Mr. Zuccarelli likely would have faced a storm of media questions at tomorrow's monthly CTA board meeting.

Mr. Zuccarelli got the CTA post earlier this summer, just weeks after a Cook County panel on which he'd served ceased paying its members \$35,000 a year.

He asked that the governor name another south suburban person to succeed him. Mr. Quinn is expected to comply with that request, though no name immediately surfaced.

State budget cuts could cost CTA millions of dollars, transit officials say

Cuts could hasten a new round of fare hikes and reduced service, they add

July 24, 2013|By Jon Hilkevitch | Chicago Tribune reporter

The CTA, Metra and Pace face losing millions of dollars in state funding for the reduced-fare program that serves senior citizens, disabled riders and students.

The CTA is absorbing new state budget cuts starting this month and stretching into next year that could set the transit agency back millions of dollars and possibly hasten a new round of fare hikes and reduced service, transit officials said.

The cuts, which also affect Metra and Pace, stem from an almost 50 percent cut by the General Assembly during fiscal year 2014 in the state subsidy for reduced fares. The subsidy helps offset the cost of providing reduced fares to senior citizens, disabled riders and students.

"This is real money we are losing, money that was buying fuel and paying for bus drivers and so on," said Joseph Costello, executive director of the Regional Transportation Authority, which oversees the three transit agencies.

The Illinois Department of Transportation set a total of about \$34 million for the reduced-fare program for the fiscal year that began July 1, the same amount as in recent years. The legislature subsequently cut it to \$17.6 million.

Lawmakers approved the funding cut to help address other needs and ease pressure on the state budget, officials said.

The CTA receives about 84 percent of reduced-fare funding, which is distributed based on the actual cost of providing the roughly half-price fares, officials said. Metra receives about 9 percent and Pace gets about 7 percent of the grants from IDOT.

Even at \$34 million, the state reimbursement doesn't come close to covering the whole cost of the reduced fares, transit officials said, nor does it include any expenses the transit agencies incur to provide free rides to eligible low-income senior citizens and disabled riders.

The cost of reduced fares for the three agencies typically exceeds \$100 million annually, according to the RTA. The cost of reduced fares, mandated under federal and state laws, is projected to keep rising as the region's population ages and the number of eligible riders increases, officials said.

The funding reduction will cost the CTA \$6.8 million in the second half of 2013 and a total of almost \$14 million through the middle of next year, according to the agency.

Free rides on the CTA are growing at a rate of 5 percent this year, based on ridership data through June, officials said.

Reduced-fare rides on CTA buses and trains have shot up from 39 million in 2011 to 45 million last year and are on pace to top 50 million this year, CTA spokesman Brian Steele said.

"Reduced-fare funding is a critical piece of the CTA's operating budget, and any reduction puts pressure not only on our current budget but our 2014 spending plan as well," Steele said.

The state funding cut, piled on top of other transit budget challenges, could lead to service cuts or fare increases next year, although transit officials said planning for their 2014 budgets is still in the preliminary stages and it is too early to make predictions or issue warnings to riders.

The CTA raised the prices on all its passes this year. Metra increased the price of its 10-ride tickets, after the commuter rail agency's biggest-ever fare increase in 2012.

Metra's reduced-fare subsidy will be cut by about \$700,000 in the second half of 2013 and by a total of about \$1.5 million through mid-2014, according to the RTA.

"We will cover it by reducing expenditures," Metra spokesman Michael Gillis said. "For instance, our (staffing) head count is currently under budget. We've

also been helped by diesel fuel prices, which currently are trending about 20 cents a gallon under budget."

Pace officials said the financial implication of the funding cut is a reduction of about \$1.8 million through June 2014.

"We communicated our concerns about this to members of the General Assembly before it was made official, so we're disappointed that it passed," Pace spokesman Patrick Wilmot said.

Officials from all three transit agencies said they will press to have full funding during an upcoming legislative session.

"If the funding isn't restored, we believe we can amend our budget to cover the loss in some way that won't affect riders," Wilmot said, "but it's hard to say now what could happen if this becomes a long-term issue."

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Consultant spending worries remaining Metra leaders

Daily Herald Marni Pyke 8/12/2013

Damage control over Metra's latest scandal has cost \$18,000 so far, and it's only a small piece of the consulting pie that's surpassing \$300,000 as the agency deals with fallout from the exit of CEO Alex Clifford and allegations of corruption.

And what troubles some remaining members of Metra's greatly diminished board is they had no idea money was flying out the door.

On April 3, Clifford sent a letter to his board with accusations of misconduct by top officials and political meddling at the agency over jobs and contracts.

A power struggle ensued at Metra, which is responsible for shuttling thousands of commuters to work and home every day.

Amid the chaos, what was one of the first things the agency did?

Hired a PR firm to put a positive spin on a very bad situation.

None of the spending went to a vote, and Metra is still keeping important details of the consultants' contracts secret, despite FOIA requests from the Daily Herald.

Clifford left in June after directors approved an up-to \$718,000 separation agreement that's sparked outrage.

But back on April 9, a few days after the April 3 memo, the head of Culloton Strategies, a media and strategic communications firm, wrote to Metra attorney Andrew Greene thanking him for the offer of a job. The firm would "provide crisis communications counsel and strategy for your firm related to a client embroiled in an employment action, investigation and potential litigation," wrote Dennis Culloton — a former press secretary for

Gov. George Ryan — whose firm handles high-profile clients such as the Ricketts family.

My initial work will be to discern the threat level of this issue becoming public in the Chicago news media and then to consult with you on the best response for the client. We will also work with you to develop a strategy and message to prepare for any other media leaks or external communications challenges as well as to discuss proactive approaches to best protect the client's legal and reputational challenges," Culloton said.

"Challenges" is an understatement. Clifford accused former Chairman Brad O'Halloran and Director Larry Huggins of condoning pressure from Speaker Michael Madigan and other lawmakers over jobs along with conflicts of interest regarding contracts. Both men, who resigned recently, have denied any wrongdoing and have stated they had concerns about how Clifford ran the railroad.

O'Halloran authorized hiring Culloton Strategies, Greene said,

"My firm (and therefore Culloton Strategies) represent Metra. We report to the board," Greene said in an email.

But although the firm reports to the board, several directors said they had no idea Culloton Strategies was representing them.

That's a wake-up call, said Director Jack Schaffer of

ary.
"Whoever the next chairman is ... we need to have a clear policy about what they can and cannot do," he said. "The board's been cut out of the process."

After former CEO Phil Pagano committed suicide amid a financial scandal, the board established safeguards to watch over the chief executive officer. "But when there's no longer a CEO, who's watching the chairman?" Schaffer asked. He added, "that's no reflection on (Acting Chairman) Jack Partelow who I trust."

Naperville resident Partelow also thinks it's time to rein in consultant costs, but he won't do it solo.

"I want people to know what I know," he said. "There's just seven of us now and it's imperative we're all on the same page."

My tally for separation agreement-related consultants reached \$284,000, but that doesn't include July, a bad, bad month for Metra with resignations and lengthy beatdowns before the RTA board and state lawmakers. It's safe to assume the costs will easily top \$300,000.

Here's a quick recap of the consulting fees:

- Lawyers Hinshaw & Culbertson received \$52,420 through mid-June for what O'Halloran characterized as an investigation of ethics violations by former U.S. prosecutor Rodger Heaton that found no wrongdoing. Metra is keeping Heaton's report secret.
- Culloton Strategies received \$18,236 through June 30 for spin control. Exactly what they did for Metra remains a mystery.

- Mediation of the separation agreement by former Cook County chief judge Donald O'Connell came to \$17,155.

- Work by the law firm of Laner Muchin that represented Metra in negotiations with Clifford's attorneys come to \$85,423 through May.

- Separation agreement counsel by Greene's firm totaled \$112,000 through May.

The crisis won't go away for Metra as enraged Illinois lawmakers call for the board's resignation and the restructuring of the agency every week in news releases. Meanwhile, ongoing investigations by the RTA and two state inspectors general continue.

And for the record

Dennis Culloton emailed, "I was hired by the board counsel, Andy Greene. I represented the board."

A Metra spokesman said that the agency has existing contracts with Johnston & Greene, Laner Muchin as well as Hinshaw and Culbertson. O'Connell was hired through the Laner contract, officials said. The board would only be required to formally act if a new contract was requested and if the amount of that new contract exceeded \$100,000.

One more thing

Metra's website talks about a commitment to transparency, yet FOIA responses are full of redactions.

Exactly what Culloton's firm did for Metra is unknown. Metra attorneys blacked out specifics on invoices, although the agency did not redact the same information in responding to a FOIA request about its other PR consultant — Mack Communications.

Metra's attorneys also blacked out all details about what Greene's law firm did for the agency. The Daily Herald has appealed the redactions to the Illinois attorney's general's office.

Your voice

My pen is so powerful it caused Raymond Bellock indigestion. "I almost gagged at your suggestion last week that the Metra chairmanship become an elected position," he wrote. (Note to self: Tone down prose.)

"Please name one elected official at any level of government that we, the electorate, can say without equivocation that he/she is doing their job in an efficient and nonpolitical fashion. After Jesse White (is he elected?) I can think of no one.

"I do have an alternative with ready access to qualified nonpolitical candidates. My plan is that the Class 1 railroads over whose tracks Metra runs their trains be approached to designate one of their employees to fill this chairman role for a one-year period. Split the employee costs. Rotate the chairmanship in this fashion in succeeding years with the order of rotation being the annual train miles run by Metra over their rails. One might protest that one year is too short because of the learning curve. This may be true in the beginning. However, I feel that this will help to drive change in a

forward direction, simplify the bureaucracy created any time a politician needs to create a job for a family member, etc. Certainly, the chosen person should have no learning curve regarding operational railroad issues! Anything but an elected official!"

String of resignations hasn't derailed Metra — yet

Down four board members and a CEO, Metra is still functioning — though barely.

But that's assuming no more resignation letters are being inked among the seven remaining members of the board running the suburban rail agency swept up in a patronage scandal. That's exactly what some elected officials want.

"I'm demanding that all seven resign en masse immediately," said state Rep. Jack Franks (D-Marengo). "If they don't, the governor just should remove them."

The board needs six of its 11 members for a quorum, Metra spokeswoman Meg Reile said. That's just to get Metra's day-to-day business done. For more significant matters — such as replacing former Metra chairman Brad O'Halloran after he quit Thursday — a supermajority of eight members is needed.

"That is off the table for the time being," Reile said after Larry Huggins became the fourth board member to resign Friday and left just seven seats occupied.

Huggins' and O'Halloran's resignations followed those of Kane County's Mike McCoy and DuPage County's Paul Darley.

DuPage County Board Chairman Dan Cronin, responsible for replacing Darley, said he's in no hurry to pick a replacement. He'd rather Metra get to the bottom of the patronage allegations first. Cook County Commissioner Elizabeth "Liz" Doody Gorman, who helped appoint O'Halloran, is in no rush either.

"I'm not going to just appoint somebody to appoint somebody," Gorman said.

Stephen Schlickman thinks they should move faster. He's a former executive director of the Regional Transportation Authority and is now executive director at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Urban Transportation Center. He said rebuilding Metra's board is urgent so a new chairman is picked.

"It's urgent to find a chairman who will lead the effort to find a CEO," Schlickman said.

And it's the CEO's job to put priorities in order for a rail system once, but no longer, considered preeminent in the nation, he said.

That is especially the case as Metra's latest scandal continues to unfold. It began with a generous \$718,000 severance package for the outgoing CEO and quickly grew to include allegations about patronage, contracts and political pressure.

It led Mayor Rahm Emanuel to force Huggins' resignation Friday. O'Halloran stepped down Thursday in the wake of further revelations about \$22,000 he received in his retirement accounts from Orland Park.

O'Halloran was a trustee there — but resigned from that position Thursday as well — and state law barred him from being compensated for that job while he was on the Metra board.

That came after former Metra CEO Alex Clifford testified at a marathon hearing last month and said House Speaker Michael Madigan pressured him to give a raise and a promotion to certain employees. Clifford contends that O'Halloran and Huggins pushed him to go along with Madigan, with O'Halloran voicing concerns the agency's funding would be affected — charges O'Halloran and Huggins have denied.

This and past scandals at Metra have led Franks to call the rail system a "repository of patronage."

He said Metra board members should be elected, and he's calling on Gov. Pat Quinn to remove every remaining one if they haven't resigned by Monday.

He said Quinn should replace them with an emergency manager.

"I want the whole system blown up," Franks said.

It's not quite that simple, said Brooke Anderson, the governor's press secretary. Quinn can only remove board members based on reports from the state inspector general and after a public hearing has been held.

Pace Talks Bus Plans Niles Trustees

Transit Agency Undergoing Studies To Integrate New Area Bus System With Niles Free Bus

Posted: Wednesday, August 7, 2013 2:22 pm | Updated: 2:47 pm, Wed Aug 7, 2013.

Pace Talks Bus Plans Niles Trustees By TOM ROBB Journal & Topics Reporter

Pace Suburban Bus, officials were scheduled to discuss plans for an arterial rapid transit (ART) system at the local Niles bus system that would feed it with Niles village trustees at a village board meeting last week.

ART buses behave more like trains with dedicated stations riders prepay to enter. Like train lines, ART stations are spaced further apart with fewer stops and faster ride times.

Pace spokesman Patrick Wilmot said because there are so many fewer stops, having local circulators buses along ART routes is critical for riders.

Niles trustees have called for cuts in the Niles Free Bus (NFB) for years but ART plans relied on NFB to serve as a local circulator.

Pace Bus Rapid Transit Project Manager Brandy Kellar appeared before Niles trustees at a committee of the whole meeting Tuesday, July 23.

Administrative delays in the ART program at Pace delayed a planned study of the NFB until recently.

Pace officials let a bid process late last month to find a firm to conduct the Niles circulator bus study Pace spokesman Patrick Wilmot said.

Bids are expected to be unsealed Wednesday, Aug. 7 after which time Wilmot said Niles village officials would work with Pace and the consulting firm to conduct a study of the NFB system.

Wilmot said that study is meant to maximize efficiency and ridership on NFB lines while also serving ART stops and could take 12 months to complete.

While the NFB study continues, preparations will be made to roll out the first phases of a large scale ART system of express buses.

One of the first of those lines to be implemented in the Chicago Suburbs would be the Milwaukee Avenue ART from the Jefferson Park Metra and CTA station to Golf Mill with a study and implementation timeline running from May 2013 to June 2014.

Wilmot said part of the reason the Milwaukee ART is being moved up is because the majority of the route is contained within the village of Niles and only a small part in the city of Chicago. The ART project has the support of the Chicago Dept. of Transportation.

The second line in the first phase to come on line would likely be the Dempster ART that would travel from the Davis Street Purple Line CTA station in Evanston through Skokie, linking with the Yellow Line station at Oakton Street, through Morton Grove, Niles Park Ridge before turning south through Des Plaines to the O'Hare Kiss N' Fly in Rosemont that connects with O'Hare Airports terminal train system.

Wilmot said the Dempster ART travels through more communities making its implementation more complex.

Later in Phase 1 would come the Harlem Avenue ART line beginning in Niles at Milwaukee Avenue connected to the Milwaukee ART and traveling south to 95th Street on Chicago's South Side.

Longer term plans call for Golf Road and Touhy Avenue ART's that would run through Niles along with other routes along Milwaukee and Sanders Road to Wheeling, Lincolnshire continuing deep into Lake County, routes along Irving Park Road into Elk Grove Village, routes from Des Plaines south on Route 83 and Northwest to Kane County and from Des Plaines to near Wauconda. Long term plans also call for routes to stretch from Des Plaines to West Dundee.

new PACE bus plan worries some county residents

By JOHN ROSZKOWSKI lcjedit@lakecountyjournal.com

Created: Tuesday, August 6, 2013 11:13 a.m. CDT

At a public hearing Monday, proposed major changes to the Pace suburban bus service in Lake County met with some disapproval as well as a petition with 200 signatures asking for bus service to the YWCA in Gurnee.

Held at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, it was the second of two public hearings to get resident input on the plan. Pace officials are expected to consider the plan for approval Aug. 14.

Pace's proposed changes will affect service on Routes 565 Grand Avenue, 569 Lewis Avenue, 570 Fox Lake-Gurnee Mills, 571 Zion, 572 Waukegan-Grayslake-Westfield Hawthorn, and 272 Milwaukee Avenue North.

Under the plan, the frequency of service will be increased on heavily traveled bus corridors such as Grand Avenue, Washington Street and Sheridan Road. More bus routes will also connect at the College of Lake County in Grayslake, making it easier for commuters to transfer between different routes.

Service on some routes will be reduced due to low or declining ridership. For example, the portion of Route 570 between Fox Lake and Rollins/Fairfield roads would no longer operate on Saturdays. The frequency of service would also be reduced on Route 569 Lewis in the Waukegan area during the middle of the day. In downtown Waukegan, routes will operate on a posted stops only basis to reduce travel times and improve on-time performance.

Seth Morgan, a senior planner with Pace, said the proposed changes reflect demographic changes that have occurred in the county over the last 40 years and the need for improved service in the central and western parts of Lake County.

"There has been a major demographic shift in the county since the 1970s," he said. "What we're seeing is that Waukegan is still important, but so is the central corridor."

One of the major benefits for commuters of the plan is that four bus routes will make connections at the College of Lake County, making it easier for commuter transfers between routes, according to Morgan. "It opens up a lot of connections that aren't possible in that part of Lake County right now," he said.

One resident, who takes the bus from Grayslake to Fox Lake for work, voiced concern over the plan to discontinue Saturday service along Route 570 between Rollins/Fairfield roads and Fox Lake. He noted that many younger people who live in the Fox Lake and Ingleside area also use that route to get to work at Great America or Gurnee Mills on Saturdays.

Resident Timothy Allen was also critical of the plan to discontinue Saturday service on Route 570 to Fox Lake.

"I believe the western part of Lake County is terribly underserved by public transit," he said. "You're not

helping people, you're decreasing service. I really don't understand the thinking of this."

Meanwhile, several representatives of the YWCA Lake County urged Pace to consider expanding service in the Tri-State Parkway area of Gurnee.

Cheryl Hudson-Jackson and Joy Bah of the YWCA Lake County said the YWCA moved its office to Tri-State Parkway in Gurnee about a year ago and there is currently no bus service in that area. They presented petitions with signatures from more than 280 people calling for bus service to the Tri-State Parkway area.

Hudson-Jackson said many of the women they serve are moms with strollers and some have to walk along the roadway to get to the YWCA because of the lack of bus service. "Buses coming through Tri-State would be very important to us," she said.

Emily Karry, director of planning and programming for the Lake County Division of Transportation, said that the county worked closely with Pace on a market analysis and survey of residents and Pace users in 2012.

Many of the findings and recommendations of that study were incorporated into Pace's proposed restructuring plan, such as improving transfers between bus routes at CLC and modifying existing bus routes to better reflect ridership trends, she said.

"The goal of this is to improve service to Lake County residents," she said.

No more public hearings are scheduled on the Pace plan. Pace officials say residents can still make comments on-line at www.pacebus.com by visiting the public hearing comments page. If the plan is approved, it would take effect sometime later this year.

CTA reveals new look for next generation of rail cars

8/2/2013

Agency provides proposed new seating configuration for cars that could arrive as soon as 2016

As part of a continuing plan to modernize its rail fleet, the CTA today announced it has developed a new, customer-friendly rail car seating configuration for the next generation of rail cars that it plans to purchase and introduce as early as 2016.

The new seating design, created after careful study of existing design, passenger flow, capacity and comfort, is a hybrid of the best features from existing CTA rail car styles—incorporating both forward- and aisle-facing seats. The CTA conducted both empirical research as well as customer surveys to develop a recommended seating configuration.

The proposed configuration for the 7000 series, as the next generation is called, will be provided to manufacturers bidding on the rail car project, which could be up to 846 cars and cost nearly \$2 billion. The

7000 series is designed to replace the oldest rail cars in the CTA's fleet, reducing the average age of the CTA's fleet to around 10 years by 2022. The CTA issued an Invitation for Bids in February 2013 for the rail cars and expects to select a manufacturer by January 2014.

These rail cars, expected to begin delivery around 2016, will replace current rail stock that is nearing or beyond 30 years of age. Replacement of these aging cars will reduce service delays from mechanical breakdowns and save millions of dollars in operating costs.

"Under Mayor Emanuel, the CTA continues its aggressive plan to modernize the nation's second-largest transit system, which provides more than 1.7 million rides each weekday," said CTA President Forrest Claypool. "This includes significantly upgrading our bus and rail fleets, replacing aging vehicles, improving passenger comfort and enhancing service reliability. After careful study, the CTA believes the proposed seating design will provide customers with an optimal car that is comfortable, smooth and reliable for passengers, while maximizing passenger flow and capacity."

In the new design, the front of the car would offer aisle-facing seats to maximize standing space.

The middle of the car would feature an asymmetrical mix of forward-facing and aisle-facing single seats and seat pairs, similar to the configuration found on rail cars used on the Brown and Orange Lines (3200 series cars), which allow for more passengers to stand with ease.

The rear of the car would include rows of forward-facing seat pairs, providing the maximum number of forward-facing seats in area that will not impede passenger flow.

Additional features include two locations per car for passengers with wheelchairs. Also, the rail car configuration could include offset poles and straps for standing passengers on each side of the aisle, instead of poles located directly across the aisle from each other, which increases the chances of passengers standing back-to-back and inadvertently blocking the aisle.

The new design would have as many as 38 seats, compared with 38-46 on other rail cars. The proposed configuration would have a more even mix of forward-facing (53%) and aisle-facing (47%) seats in a design that promotes more efficiency in boarding and exiting the train while providing passengers several standing and seating choices.

The CTA fleet currently consists of approximately 1,300 rail cars. The new 7000 series cars would replace the CTA's oldest rail cars, including the approximately 400 2600 series, which were built between 1981 and 1987 by Budd Company. Additional, later-year options could allow for the timely replacement of the 256 cars in the 3200 series, which were built in 1992-93 by Morrison-Knudsen. In addition, the CTA could expand its rail fleet if ridership trends or system expansion warrants.

CTA is currently adding the newest generation of cars, the 5000 series, manufactured by Bombardier, to its fleet. The CTA has added more than 290 of the cars, of

a total planned 714 rail cars, on the Pink, Red and Green Lines. The 5000 series cars are replacing 2200 series cars manufactured by the Budd Company in 1969-70, 2400 series cars built by Boeing-Vertol between 1976 and 1978, and a portion of 2600 series cars built by Budd between 1981 and 1986.

CTA announces study to modernize West Side branch of Blue Line

6/20/2013

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) today announced a Blue Line Forest Park Branch Feasibility/Vision Study to assess future needs for the entire branch between the Clinton and Forest Park stations. The study would launch a long-range planning strategy for serving customers with a modernized rail line and could stimulate new economic development for the West Side along the Eisenhower Expressway.

The study will be paid for by a combination of local and federal funds, the latter because of a federal earmark secured by U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL). The analysis is being performed in coordination with the Village of Oak Park, which has contributed local funding to analyze livability issues near Blue Line stations in Oak Park and in Chicago, as well as the IDOT studies in the corridor.

"The Blue Line is a critical piece of Chicago's transit infrastructure, helping tens of thousands of Chicagoans get to work and school on a daily basis," said Mayor Emanuel. "The Blue Line will play a large role in the future development of the West Side of Chicago and I am pleased that we continue to look for efficiencies and new opportunities to improve service."

"This study is one of the many investments in transit made under the leadership of Mayor Emanuel that will bring the Chicagoland area's system into the 21st Century and serve passengers for decades to come," said Durbin. "Leveraging federal funds for the Blue Line project will help attract economic investment and sustainable development to the city's West Side and to Oak Park, while creating and retaining local jobs."

Added Oak Park Village President Anan Abu-Taleb, "The resilience of our transportation network depends on improved and expanded public access to the high quality, affordable and reliable transit service the Blue Line can provide. We applaud the CTA's commitment to examining the present and future needs of this critical transit asset, and extend our gratitude to Senator Durbin for his long-term support of I-290 multimodal solutions and alternative forms of transportation."

The Blue Line runs through the Eisenhower Corridor "Neighborhoods Now" planning area, in which \$186 million in public-private investments are being implemented through a coordinated community improvement plan. Approximately 2,000 new jobs are projected to be created through the initiative, which aims

to leverage local transportation assets in support of entertainment and educational opportunities on the Near West Side, among other priorities.

The Blue Line Feasibility analysis will be done in coordination with the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) current planning for the Circle Interchange and Reconstruction of the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway. The Forest Park Branch shares the right of way with the I-290, operating within the median of expressway. Currently IDOT is conducting its Circle Interchange Rehabilitation Project and the I-290 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Study that are currently assessing the transportation needs of the Kennedy/Dan Ryan (I-90/94) and Eisenhower (I-290) expressways.

"The Blue Line Forest Park study is a key step in investing in transit on the West Side," said Chicago Transit Board Chairman Terry Peterson. "We look forward to partnering with the Illinois Department of Transportation to develop a long-term multi-modal plan that will meet transportation needs along the I-290 Eisenhower Expressway corridor, and ultimately generate new economic development for the West Side."

The Blue Line Forest Park Branch was built in 1958 and has a growing list of "state of good repair" needs. The CTA study will evaluate the entire branch to determine how best to address modernization needs of its 55-year-old infrastructure, station/terminal needs, customer access points and Park & Ride access along the expressway.

"The CTA continues to make critical investments in our bus and rail infrastructure system-wide," said CTA President Forrest Claypool. "The CTA is committed to creating effective plans for the short and long-term needs of this 55-year-old branch of the Blue Line, a critical transportation line for the West Side that serves many employers, including UIC and the Illinois Medical District, and provided more than 9.7 million rides last year to CTA customers. And we'd like to thank Sen. Durbin for the support of federal funding to make this study possible."

As a long-range plan is developed, CTA has several other projects that are either under way or planned and will improve the service and experience for customers on the West Side:

- **Forest Park Branch Heavy Maintenance:**

In 2014, CTA will make track and other structural repairs on the Forest Park Branch, improvements that will increase safety and reliability until a more comprehensive reconstruction plan is devised and funded.

- **CTA Bus Tracker Shelter Displays:**

In May, CTA crews installed new CTA Bus Tracker displays at 45 bus shelters throughout the west side, which are in addition to the estimated 25 displays installed in 2011 during the first half of the project.

- **CTA Train Tracker Displays:**

By this fall, all 145 CTA rail stations will be equipped with at least one CTA Train Tracker display. Crews are installing these displays at stations along the Forest Park branch and by the end of June, all stations will have estimated train arrival times on display

- **Austin Station Renewal:**

This summer CTA maintenance crews will perform a "swat team" style approach to renewing the Austin Blue Line station to repair, clean and make improvements to the station.

- **#35 35th Experimental Service:**

The CTA is currently testing experimental service for the #35 35th bus route that extends service to include 31st Street between Kedzie and Cicero avenues. The route extension is based on increased potential ridership demand in the corridor, and offers improved connections to the CTA's Red, Green and Orange lines, additional CTA and Pace bus routes, and Metra's Cicero station.

- **Green Line Upgrades:**

Customers along the Harlem/Lake Green Line branch will benefit from working beginning soon that will upgrade the line's network and communications infrastructure. As part of this project work, stations along this branch will receive new public address systems, upgraded and/or additional security cameras and new electronic signage throughout the stationhouses and platforms.

- **Bus Rapid Transit:**

Earlier this spring, Mayor Emanuel, CTA and the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) announced plans to develop a vision for faster and more reliable transit in Chicago, which will include studying Bus Rapid Transit on a 16-mile stretch of Ashland Avenue between 95th Street and Irving Park Road. CTA and CDOT will begin working with local stakeholders on developing the plan that would create faster, more reliable bus service. The first phase to be implemented would be from Cortland Avenue (1800 N) to 31st Street.

This summer CTA will share a variety of potential options or alternatives as part of its Blue Line study. During that time, CTA will obtain feedback from the community and key stakeholders and return with final concepts in the fall which will be coordinated with the I-290 EIS meetings.

Anyone interested in the Blue Line Forest Park Branch Feasibility/Vision Study can submit inquiries to BlueWestStudy@transitchicago.com.

The study area street boundaries extend a block east of the Clinton Station at Canal Street on the east to Mannheim Road on the west, and between Madison Street on the north to Roosevelt Road on the South. It is expected to be completed by early 2014.

CTA Announces Retirement of 2200-Series Rail Cars

8/7/2013

Agency holds "retirement ceremony" for hard-working 40-year-old rail cars, known for their "blinker" doors, as part of ongoing modernization of rail fleet

In 1969, the Chicago Cubs led the National League East Division for 155 days before winding up second for the season behind the New York Mets. The first man walked on the moon, and "Sesame Street" debuted.



And, the CTA launched a new line of rail cars—the 2200-series—that were innovative for the time and were built to help a city that was in the middle of dramatically expanding rail transit. The cars featured large windows and an unpainted, horizontal-fluted stainless steel exterior, a break from traditional rail cars at the time, and unique ductwork that distributed air conditioning more uniformly throughout the rail cars.



After more than 40 years as the Chicago Transit Authority's oldest rail cars, the agency today retired the rail cars built in 1969-1970, today most distinctive for their pivoting "blinker" entry doors. The cars are being retired as CTA continues to upgrade its rail fleet as part of an aggressive modernization and infrastructure plan by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and CTA President Forrest Claypool. The CTA continues to add its newest, state-of-

the-art rail cars, the 5000 series. More than 290 have been deployed to the Red, Pink and Green Lines with a total of 706 of the new cars expected to be in place by the end of 2015.



To commemorate the millions of rides provided for more than four decades by these rail car workhorses, the CTA today held ceremonial last rides on the Blue Line for the public and media on a train made up of 2200 cars, complete with exterior decals and advertising cards from the period.



Some fun facts about 2200 rail cars:

- Originally, 150 of the 2200s cars built by Budd Company of Philadelphia were purchased in 1969-1970 for use on the Dan Ryan branch of what today is called the Red Line to 95th and the extension of what is today called the Blue Line from Logan Square to Jefferson Park, both rapid-transit projects launched by the City of Chicago in 1967.

- The 2200-series moved permanently to the Blue Line by summer of 1983. The 2200-series cars are somewhat unique in that they have only been assigned to a few routes during their 40-plus year careers; some cars have spent their entire service life on a single route, unusual for "L" cars.

- These cars are the only CTA cars in recent years that featured the "blinker door" configuration, in which the doors to the train open inward into the car rather than slide horizontally.

- They were refurbished in the early 1990s and underwent another overhaul in 2004.

- A motorman's cab that opened up for passenger use when not in service and a plain front end with only inserts of fiberglass for the windows and lights were additional innovations for the period.

- While some 2200-series cars were retired as early as the 1970s, just a few years into their service lives, due to accidents or other mishaps, 144 of the 150 cars built remained in service into the 21st century. Retirement of the cars did not begin in earnest until 2010.

The old rail cars will be sold for salvage. Two of the rail cars will be placed in the Illinois Railway Museum.

Express Bus puts two new D4505s to work

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 27, 2013 — Celebrating nearly 30 years in business, Express Bus owner Tom Curtis knows what works for his Hattiesburg, Mississippi, business: good service, solid relationships and a regularly updated fleet of MCI® D4505s. Its newest two arrived in late April.



"It's been my workhorse coach for 29 years," says Curtis. "As long as we've been buying new coaches, we've been with MCI. The D coach is by far the best on the road."

Express Coach's newest D4505s include lavatories, PA systems, DVD players and VHS capabilities, along with WiFi and DirectTV that's installed post-purchase. The new vehicles are part of a 13-coach, all-D fleet — and all have been purchased with the help of the same MCI sales representative, Rob Lessor.

Curtis didn't start out looking to make such long-term associations. He started his business in 1984, when he bought two pre-owned coaches to provide shuttle service to the World's Fair in New Orleans. His goal was to make a quick profit, sell the coaches after six months and return to his full-time insurance business. It didn't work out that way.

"We didn't make that much profit from the fair, but before I knew it, we had all sorts of people calling us for charters," said Curtis, who quickly saw that the Hattiesburg area was underserved. His company, incorporated as Shuttle Services but doing business as Express Bus, won work from area universities and colleges as well as from local churches and other groups. Soon Curtis found himself adding to his fleet, and he left the insurance business behind.

Today, Express Bus has a solid client mix that includes college athletic teams; military contract work from Camp Shelby, the country's largest National Guard training center; and general charter clients. Many of his customers have been with the company for more than 20 years.

"We have a good, solid clientele, but we have to maintain top-quality equipment," says Curtis. "Being military-approved is a very stringent process. We go through that audit every two years, and our safety record is excellent. When other companies need extra vehicles for convention work, they call us, because they know they can get quality equipment."

Express Bus has its own maintenance shop with two full-time technicians, part of the company's 20-plus employees. Many of his drivers have been with the company for 20 or more years as well. And the future looks good.

"We realize the importance of charter now and in the future," says Curtis. "With people going short to medium distances, there will always be a need for it, and for people who provide quality vehicles and services at a fair price. We think there will always be demand."

To learn more about Express Bus, visit www.theexpressbuscompany.com.

LA's Corporate Coach Charter & Tours elevates group travel experience; adds first Setra S 417

SCHAUMBURG, IL — July 15, 2013 — Corporate Coach Charter & Tours is bringing a higher level of luxury travel to Los Angeles with its new Setra Top Class S 417. The German-made model features premium seating with three-point passenger seatbelts, wood grain accents, mini-fridge and Top Sky glass roof.



"Some companies think all that is required in group transportation is getting people from point A to point B. We aspire to a higher standard," said President Paul Eshaghi, who founded Corporate Coach Charter and Tours in 1990. "We have always been about the details and customer service."

Starting out as a small executive van service, Corporate Coach Charter & Tours made the jump to deluxe motor coach charter service when their well-known corporate clients demanded it.

With solid experience in limousine service in the Los Angeles area, the company applies the same higher customer service standards to the charter industry. "Our high-priority commitment is to make sure we provide our clients with a pleasant transportation experience from start to finish," said Eshaghi. "In our utmost endeavors, we take pride in satisfying all our clients' ground transportation charter needs."

The specifics include Corporate Coach's highly trained, professional, well-dressed drivers, along with knowledgeable office staff and pristine, late-model, fully loaded equipment with comfortable plush interiors and extra amenities such as complimentary bottled water and WIFI service.

The Setra S 417 fits in with the company's image and high standards for performance and safety. The Setra S 417 has a superior suspension system for a smooth, quiet ride, and its front collision guard, cornering lights and rain/light sensors are just a few of the model's safety features.

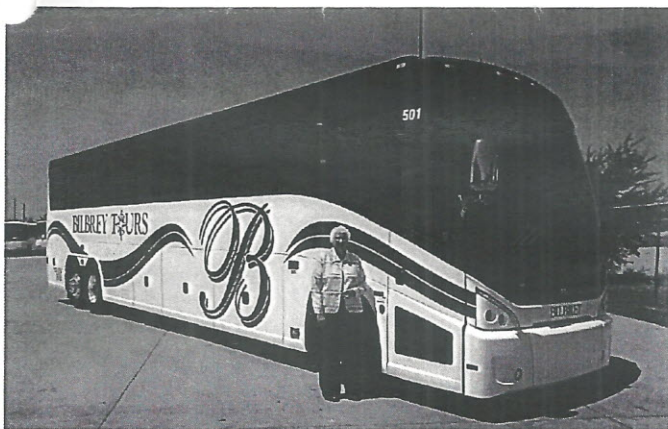
Corporate Coach had its eye on the Setra for some time, and the company acted after MCI became distributor of the brand last summer. "I am keen on MCI's support, already being a very satisfied MCI customer," said Eshaghi. "When I heard the MCI is representing Setra, it made it easier to decide. The Setra has beautiful European styling different from all other European

buses, and no one else has the Top Sky glass roof. People notice this coach, and customers are asking for it by name."

Corporate Coach Charter has rapidly grown to more than 30 employees and a fleet of 25 vehicles including 10 coaches and several executive mini-coaches operating out of a newer, self-owned facility with in-house maintenance and cleaning crew in Inglewood, California (5 minutes from LAX and major freeways). With a 90-percent customer return rate, Corporate Coach caters to high-end corporate clients. Since its inception over 20 years ago, Corporate Coach Charter has found its niche in offering luxury transportation to many Southern California high profile corporate and private clients. As their slogan states, "Transportation with Elegance." Corporate Coach pays special attention to all details in meeting all their clients' requests and more. Learn more at www.ccctours.com or call (800) 452-2622.

Bilbrey Tours stays the course with new MCI® J4500

SCHAUMBURG, IL — July 25, 2013 — Repeat business doesn't just drive Bilbrey Tours — it also informs the company's purchasing decisions. Case in point is the Abilene, Texas company's new MCI J4500, delivered July 22.



"We think the new coach is beautiful, and MCIs have always worked well for us," said Lena Bilbrey, president. "That's why we decided to stay with MCI."

The 2013 J4500 is one of two coaches in the Bilbrey fleet, joining an MCI E4500. The new J4500 has a clean-diesel Cummins engine, three-point seatbelts and a media hub for tour escorts, along with all the standard safety and performance features for which the best-selling model is known. The model underwent a redesign for 2013, gaining a taller look, distinctive angled headlights and technology advances including Actia multiplexing.

Having only two coaches allows Bilbrey Tours to lavish personal attention on its customers, about 80 percent of whom are repeat clients, according to Bilbrey. "This is what we can do well," says Bilbrey, who owns the company with her husband, Cleve. Her daughter,

Rhonda, is also an integral part of the business, which employs five people full time, plus eight additional part-timers. "We are very hands-on. We make a real effort to give our customers the best value and let them know how much they're appreciated. Our customers become our friends."

Now in its 24th year, Bilbrey Tours started as a home-based business, growing out of Lena Bilbrey's love of travel. The company moved into office space and bought its first coach in 1998.

Bilbrey Tours runs about 40 tours a year, mostly across the United States and Canada, but also to international and cruise destinations. Bilbrey says she has sent customers to all 50 states and 47 countries.

"We specialize in wholesome travel," said Bilbrey. "Whether it's a sporting event or a gospel concert or a quilt show, and whether it's a tour of two days or 15, we will have something to please everyone."

Including, she says, a shiny new coach.

Bilbrey Tours is a member of the National Tour Association, Cruise Lines International Association and the American Bus Association. For more information, visit www.bilbreytours.com.

International Stage Lines rewards loyal riders with four new 2013 MCI® J4500 coaches

SCHAUMBURG, IL — June 27, 2013 — While credit card companies repay loyal customers with redeemable points, International Stage Lines, a premier motor coach operator in Vancouver, rewards riders with new equipment. George Almas, General Manager, asserts the company's four new 2013 MCI J4500 coaches demonstrate its care for customers. "We have a loyal group of core customers, and we are updating our fleet for them," said Almas, who has been leading the family-owned business for more than 20 years. "Our customers deserve the best, and for us that has always been MCI. We like everything about the new J4500 from its curb appeal to its safety advances, and cleaner, greener engine technology. We have a five-year plan to upgrade our fleet. This is the time to do it, especially with all the improvements that have taken place over the past few years."

International Stage Lines' new J4500 coaches safety features include three-point passenger seatbelts, Electronic Stability Control, a fire suppression system and air-pressure tire monitoring. The company added optional 110-volt power outlets at every seat.

"It's impressive to see the quality that goes into an MCI model," said Almas, who traveled to MCI's Winnipeg plant with drivers to pick up the new coaches. "MCI is as dedicated to their core customers as we are to ours, and it's been this type of relationship that has made us remain loyal with an MCI fleet."

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With a reputation for excellent customer service, International Stage Lines holds star status with group tours traveling to Western Canada and the Western U.S. from around the world especially Japan and Europe.

"Our reputation grew rapidly after the 2010 Olympics," said Almas. "Our customer base stays strong.

In the summer, travelers want to see the Canadian Rockies, and in the winter they come to ski Whistler. Vancouver also completed construction on a new convention center, and that's been tremendous for us as well."

Founded 35 years ago by George Pullman and Robert W. Myhre, International Stage Lines has relied on MCI coach models since day one. Today the company operates a fleet of 39 MCI coaches and employs a staff of more than 85 people in offices and maintenance facilities in Richmond, British Columbia. The company transports more than a million passengers a year, specializing in group tours, schools and corporate.

International Stage Lines is a member of NTA, Tourism Vancouver and Motorcoach Canada. More information can be found at www.islbus.com.