

# Green Pennant Special

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE OMNIBUS SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

**JULY-AUGUST 2014**

**RUN 04-2014**

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](http://osabus.org). At [osabus.org](http://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.

## • JULY/AUGUST MEETINGS

The July meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will not be held due to the July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday. However, we will be sponsoring a free trip to our 2014 members to the Illinois Railway Museum on July 5, 2014.

Pick up at Union Station will be at 9:00 am at the CTA bus stop on the south-west corner of Jackson and Canal, with a second pick up at Rosemont at 9:30am. Admission to the museum and dinner after will be the responsibility of attendee.

We plan on leaving the museum at 5:30pm and stopping for dinner before returning to Chicago.

The August meeting of the Omnibus Society of America will be held on August 1, 2014, in the Anderson Pavilion of Swedish Covenant Hospital. The meeting will start at 7:30 pm.

Our program for the evening will be a digital presentation by Mel Bernero on the west coast, old and new.

## CTA Moves Forward with 95th, Wilson Station Projects

6/11/2014

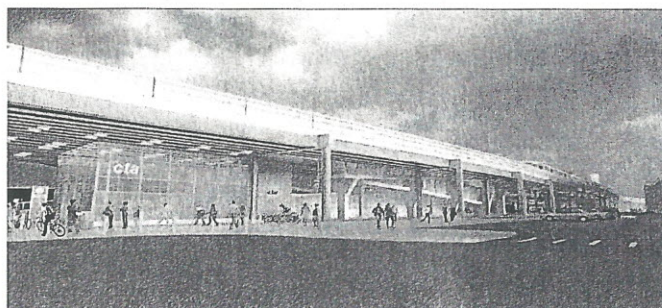
**Construction to begin later this year on modern, expanded stations to serve Red Line customers, surrounding communities**

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is taking the next steps in modernizing the Red Line.

The CTA Board Wednesday approved the award of two construction contracts for the Wilson and 95th/Dan Ryan stations—projects that will replace and expand existing stations and provide customers with a convenient, 21st century transit experience.

"The Red Line is the backbone of the CTA rail system, carrying nearly 40 percent of all rail rides," said CTA President Forrest Claypool. "These investments will benefit not only the thousands of customers who use them each day, but also the surrounding communities."

The Board approved the award of both the \$153.6 million construction contract for the Wilson station reconstruction project, and a \$23.1 million contract for the initial foundation and retaining wall work for the 95th/Dan Ryan station to Walsh/2-in-1 Joint Venture, which was selected for both projects following separate bidding processes.



Proposed rendering of an accessible auxiliary entrance to the Wilson Red Line station on Sunnyside Avenue.

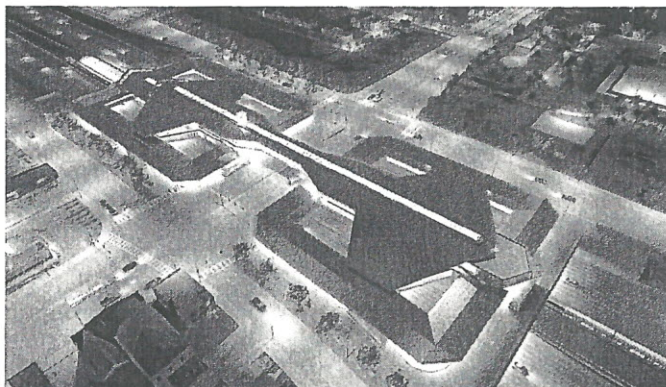
The \$203 million Wilson project will replace the badly deteriorated station house, built in 1923, with a new, modern and accessible station that will also serve as a new transfer point between Red and Purple Line service. Project work also includes the reconstruction of 2,200 feet of century-old elevated tracks, signals and supporting infrastructure that will be relocated from the street and sidewalks along Broadway and Wilson to the west to create a safer and more pedestrian-friendly environment. This comprehensive station work will be performed within the footprint of the existing station, which is located in the Uptown Square Historic District, and with minimal impact to 24/7 rail service. Work is expected to begin in the fourth quarter of 2014.





The new \$240 million 95th Street/Dan Ryan station project will replace and expand the existing structure, built in 1969. The station sees 20,000 customers on an average weekday, and serves as both the southern terminal of the Red Line and as a bus terminal for more than 1,000 weekday CTA and Pace bus trips.

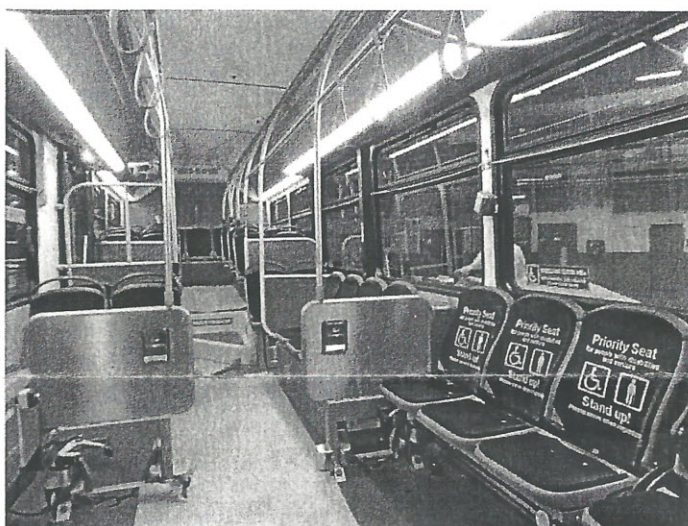
The construction will replace the existing, cramped station with two station buildings—one north and one south of 95th Street. The new arrangement will not only benefit rail customers, but allow for more efficient bus operations and provide a safer, more convenient pedestrian environment. Work is expected to begin in fall 2014.



Both projects are part of Mayor Emanuel's Building a New Chicago program, with support from Gov. Pat Quinn's Illinois Jobs Now program, which is updating infrastructure that is critical to the city and includes improvements that will help CTA continue to serve customers as effectively as possible. Funding for both projects come from federal, state and local sources.

## CTA Xcelsior buses arrive

The CTA has received their two all-electric New Flyer Xcelsior XE-40 buses. The buses are numbered 700-701 and are currently at Kedzie Garage. The buses are to be wrapped in two different ecological themed wraps. The above information and the two photos were supplied by Bruce Moffat.



## New MCI® J4500, smart-sized fleet, keeps Thielen Coaches going strong

**DES PLAINES, IL — June 6, 2014** — With a business strategy to stay small, run a newer fleet and concentrate on customer service, Thielen Coaches of Redwood Falls, Minnesota, has stayed the course, providing exceptional service to charter clients for 42 years. Its newest MCI J4500 coach, delivered in February, builds on a company trend to provide newer equipment with plenty of extras.

Richard Thielen started the coach side of the company in 1976, following in the footsteps of his father, who purchased a school bus company in the 1960s in Little Falls, Minnesota. To get the charter business going, Thielen mostly relied on a fleet of MCI pre-owned coaches. The purchase of the company's first new coach, a 2003 MCI J4500, paved the way for many more newer J4500s to follow, including the MCI's 75th-anniversary edition, a loaded 2009 show coach. In many ways, the company's newest coach offers even more bells and whistles. These coaches, along with a group of dedicated and customer service oriented drivers, has built the charter business to what it is today.





## Trinity Coach adds four new MCI® J4500 coaches

**DES PLAINES, IL — May 23, 2014** — Trinity Transportation, Wyandotte, Michigan, is all about offering reliability and upscale amenities to its tour and charter customers. So two years ago, when the company took a close look at MCI's "Reliability Driven" J4500, it knew it had to give the model a try. Fast-forward two years and nine MCI J4500s later. The latest four 2014 models were delivered in March.



"What's made us happiest has been the reliability," said Austin Arksey, Trinity Sales Director, also citing the coaches' value as an attraction. "We've had great feedback from drivers and mechanics as well as from our customers."

Trinity's latest J4500s have Wi-Fi and 110-volt outlets at passenger seats as well as three-point seatbelts and the full range of standard J4500 amenities, including a top-of-the-line entertainment system, tiered seating, and MCI's patented spiral entryway. Trinity's 2014 models also boast a more fuel-efficient, clean-diesel Cummins engine with Allison transmission. Standard safety features including electronic stability control, tire-pressure monitoring and a fire-suppression system. The coaches additionally sport LED headlights, a taller look, smooth end cap and other enhancements courtesy of a recent design update.

Arksey says Trinity was also won over by MCI's sales staff and MCI's after-sales support. While Arksey says the coaches were able to hit the ground running, MCI "stepped up to the plate" when one coach had an issue. Said Arksey, "Throughout the service process, they checked in with us. We know things are going to happen with coaches, but we want the comfort of knowing that we can call someone and have support."

The Trinity fleet includes 35 motor coaches as well as mini-coaches, school buses and vans, for a total of more than 300 vehicles. Trinity Coach is a part of Trinity Transportation Group, which also includes Trinity Transportation, Trinity Cars and Trinity (Airport) Shuttle. The company was founded in 1981 as a van and sedan service; current owner Jerry Sheppard purchased it in 1995 and started building. The company quickly moved into school bus contracts and bought its first coaches in 2000. Sheppard numbered his first coach 1771 — a combination of the ages of his three children that year.

Thielen's new J4500 features Amaya seats with standard three-point passenger seatbelts; arm and footrests, cup-holders and magazine nets. Other added amenities include window shades, six LCD widescreen video monitors and an enhanced sound system. The new coach is also equipped with Alcoa Dura-bright Aluminum wheels, back-up camera and dash cam. Equipped with a Cummins clean-diesel engine that delivers near-zero emissions, and an Allison B-500 Transmission, the coach has a number of standard safety systems, including Electronic Stability Control; SmartWave® tire-pressure monitoring; and an Amerex fire detection & suppression system. The new coach is also equipped with MCI's wide Ride suspension. "Our MCI representative Aram Nikitas helped us put the coach specifications together," said Joe Thielen. Vice president. "We have bought several new J4500s from Aram and his attention to detail is fabulous and we greatly value his suggestions and advice."

"Our goal is to provide an upscale level of service by offering higher quality, newer coaches," continued Thielen, who runs the family business with his father Rick. "We like the look and the curb appeal of the J4500 and the consistency it brings to our fleet from a marketing standpoint. Our coaches travel coast to coast. With a matching fleet and our signature red paint scheme, our coaches get noticed."

To Thielen, the interior comforts on its coaches are just as important. Four of Thielen's J4500s, including its newest coach, have what the company calls "stretch-seating," a 52 seat passenger configuration rather than the standard 56 seat layout. Thielen added: "We transport a lot of tour groups that appreciate the extra leg room. All our coaches are equipped with 110 volt plug-ins and Wi-Fi. These are popular with our younger and more professional groups as well as with the larger tour companies we serve."

All together, Thielen operates a matched fleet of seven MCI J4500 coaches, model-year 2006 to 2014, plus a new 33 passenger mini-coach and 20 school buses. Thielen's coaches operate out of its 31,000 square foot, heated facility that houses its maintenance facility, corporate offices, and fleet storage in Redwood Falls. Thielen employs 35 full and part-time employees. Learn more at [www.ThielenCoaches.com](http://www.ThielenCoaches.com).



It appears to have been a lucky number. Today, with about 500 employees and several southeast Michigan locations, Trinity offers tours and charters throughout the U.S., including month-long trips to Alaska. It has served high-profile events including the Ford 500, the Superbowl and the NHL Winter Classic. It also operates line-run service to Cedar Point, the Ohio area's premier amusement park. More information is at [www.trinitytransportation.com](http://www.trinitytransportation.com).

## Krapf's Coaches raises bar with high-end MCI® J4500

**DES PLAINES, IL — May 14, 2014** — Krapf's Coaches, West Chester, Pennsylvania, has welcomed a new 2014 MCI J4500 into its fleet. The coach is outfitted with outlets at every seat, Wi-Fi, woodgrain flooring, leather-trimmed seats and other amenities that make it the new luxury flagship of the Krapf fleet.



Gary Krapf, president and third-generation leader of the family-run company, credits his purchase decision both to a long history of buying MCI vehicles and a narrowing gap in today's coaches between base price and upgrade costs.

"The coach has a richer look," said Krapf. "The high-spec amenities have become more reasonable, and MCI has made them more available. Plus, with the new style of the J4500, the coach has greater street appeal."

The new coach also features a clean-diesel powertrain that has been optimized to yield better fuel economy, along with MCI's MDSS suspension system and standard safety features that include electronic stability control, tire-pressure monitoring and a fire-suppression system.

Delivered in late March, the coach has been assigned to a driver who recently won the Pennsylvania Bus Association Driver of Distinction Award for her many years of safe driving.

One of the most successful, diversified coach operators in the eastern United States, Krapf got its start in 1942 with a single school bus. Today, the company runs about 2,000 school buses across five states; it also operates paratransit vehicles, transit buses, fixed-route shuttles, vans and other vehicles that make up a "non-yellow" fleet of about 140. Relying on a mostly MCI fleet, Krapf

Coaches' charter business serves the East Coast with trips that extend across the U.S. and Canada.

Named 2009 Operator of the Year by METRO Magazine, and a company noted for its eco-conscious practices, Krapf is a member of the International Motor Coach Group, American Bus Association, United Motorcoach Association, Pennsylvania Bus Association and Global Passenger Network. It is also a Motorcoach Council Founding Partner. Learn more at [www.krapfcoaches.com](http://www.krapfcoaches.com)

## Adventure Tours ushers in new age in luxurious green travel; showcases eco-efficient 2014 MCI® J4500 with seatbelts, Wi-Fi at DOT Earth Day Fair

**WASHINGTON, DC — April 22, 2014** — Adventure Tours, a Clinton, Maryland, charter company, is shedding light on the greenest form of motorized transportation, displaying its new 2014 MCI J4500 coach at the Department of Transportation's Earth Day Fair, Tuesday, April 22. Motor coaches are an especially eco-friendly way to travel since they release less carbon dioxide than any other mode of powered transportation and use 82 percent less fuel per passenger mile than even a hybrid car.



With its new J4500, Adventure Tours joins the American Bus Association and Motor Coach Industries, manufacturer of the coach, in promoting green travel at the fair. The event, at DOT's LEED-certified building, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, also features green-initiative displays and consumer information booths.

Adventure Tours, which serves the Washington, DC, area, recently took delivery of two new wheelchair-lift-equipped MCI J4500 coaches. The 2014 J4500 comes with a more fuel-efficient, clean-diesel powertrain for near-zero emissions. Standard safety features include Electronic Stability Control, tire-pressure monitoring and an Amerex fire-suppression system. Passengers enjoy plush seating for 56 with three-point seatbelts and six 15-inch LCD monitors. Adventure Tours added 110-volt power outlets at each seat and Wi-Fi. The MCI J4500 has been North America's best-selling coach model for 10 years running.

Owner Mohammed Khan, who started Adventure Tours with a three-bus fleet in 1999, sees digital amenities



available on today's motor coaches as another driving force behind the company's success. "Passengers are absolutely using power outlets and Wi-Fi. Mobile technology is an essential part of everyday life. Our vehicles are fully equipped to support the demand and use of these devices in every way," said Khan, whose company recently transported Para Olympians to the White House and serves the Department of Defense.

Today, to serve its growing roster of convention, corporate, academic and government clients, the company operates 10 coaches, most of them model year 2012 or newer. Part of the reason for its newer fleet is the company's push for a greener tomorrow. "We all have to do our part," said Dave Buckingham, General Manager of Adventure Tours, and 30-year veteran in group transportation. "We're striving to be greener. With today's engine technology, emissions are nearly pure. Plus, our trips take the cars off the road that people would have used to drive to the destinations."

In recent years, the EPA has been mandating that engines be increasingly cleaner with each new powertrain generation. As the leading builder of intercity coaches in the U.S. and Canada, MCI is going the EPA one better by making its clean-diesel powertrains even greener — and more cost effective — by making them more fuel-efficient. According to MCI's 2014-model comparison tests, the MCI J4500 shows a minimum 7.76% improvement in fuel economy.

Not that fuel economy is all up to the coach. Driver behaviors can impact fuel economy by up to 30 percent, with each hour of idling estimated to cause a one-percent drop in fuel economy.

At Adventure Tours, drivers, many of whom have been with the company for nearly a decade, adhere to strict idling policies. Says Buckingham, who leads extensive driver training sessions and monthly safety meetings, "We're very conscious in that regard. Achieving a high level of environmental sustainability in passenger travel is a core component our driver training program. We leverage technology to review and enforce that on a daily basis. Drivers are rewarded for reaching higher levels of efficiency on a regular basis." Learn more at [www.adventuretoursbydawn.com](http://www.adventuretoursbydawn.com).

## AT&T Charter Services takes delivery of 2014 Van Hool CX

"I think we're on a first name basis with every one of our customers," says Denny House, of Louisburg, NC, based AT&T Charter Service. "We run 13 coaches and our tour company offers more than 100 tours a year, so it takes some effort. That sort of personal attention is what makes us special. When customers need help at odd hours, they not only get someone on the phone - it's someone they know." AT&T is a unique mix of tradition and innovation. The same family owned company that won Metro Magazine's 2009 award as one of the nation's seven most innovative motorcoach operators still has its office in Bobby and Ann House's home,

where it began with a used coach in 1989. Their fleet is one of the most modern in North Carolina's Research Triangle.



Ann House, a country music enthusiast, took the family on an annual trek to Nashville, Tennessee, for the "Fan Fair" event. One year she decided to charter a bus, and bring along some friends. The trip was successful, but exhausting, and she vowed not to do it again. After three more successful trips, the family decided to buy a used coach and go into the business that now had them hooked.

AT&T Charter serves schools, colleges, churches and businesses in North Carolina and southern Virginia with luxury charter service, while sister company, A&B Tours, offers prepackaged, fully escorted tours to destinations throughout the United States and Canada. "When we recently expressed an interest in adding additional coaches, ABC responded with enthusiasm and competence," according to House. "There are other fine coaches out there, but their responsiveness was a real confidence booster. We already had a good relationship with Brian Pinckney so buying Van Hool's made sense. We enjoyed working with him and Ryhan Cornell."

AT&T recently took delivery of a 2014 Van Hool CX 45 with a Detroit DD13 engine and an Allison B500G5 transmission. The ADA accessible luxury coach is equipped with Braun wheel chair lift, Saucon WiFi and TDS, 110 volt outlets at every seat position, an REI Elite entertainment system with 15" monitors, and Alcoa Dura Bright aluminum wheels. "We are excited to welcome Ann, Bobby & Denny to our ABC family with their first new Van Hool," said ABC Account Manager, Ryhan Cornell. "It's rewarding to serve a company like AT&T that offers traditional service and relationships, while embracing the newest technology and amenities for their customers."

## TCS expands fleet with two 2014 Van Hool TX45's

"It's been almost two years since I bought the company, and if you'll pardon the pun, it's been quite a ride," says Terry Fischer, owner of Orange, California based Transportation Charter Services (<http://tcsbus.com/>). "It was a fine company at that time, and with a combination



of new market opportunities and my personal experience, we've launched into several new directions." When Fischer bought the 20 bus operation (now expanded to 25) it had a fine reputation in Southern California, doing mostly local charters, specializing in serving school and religious groups. His management skills were developed over a career that began with pulling wrenches in the garage of the family bus business and driving coaches while in college, and eventually included everything from maintenance through operations and sales.



"We're enhancing TCS's repertoire" he points out. "We're now doing long distance charters, luxury tours, and collegiate athletics as well as some other market segments that were not part of the TCS book of business. The previous owners had offered fine quality customer service, and what I've tried to do is use my 28 years of motorcoach experience to improve utilization. We've refined preventative maintenance, and worked hard at adding services to our loyal customer base, performing convention services and transfers, as well as offering repair service to other companies." Perhaps the most exciting part for Fischer has been watching TCS's corporate culture embrace the growth. "We have a great team and they love the new directions. It's a fun and exciting place to work, and our customers sense that."

TCS's Mission Statement says they want "to offer an exceptional customer experience through providing clean, safe and reliable transportation with outstanding customer service." To that end they recently took delivery of two 2014 Van Hool TX45s.

The 56 passenger luxury touring coaches are powered by Detroit D13 engines and Allison B500 G5 transmissions, and feature REI Elite Entertainment Systems with 15.4" monitors, 110 volt outlets and WiFi. Both coaches are equipped with a Saucon TDS GPS integrated system that monitors coach performance, safety features and location. One coach is configured with two passenger entrance doors and a traditional European center restroom. Both have safety equipment now standard on Van Hool coaches, including Kidde fire suppression, 3 point seatbelts, Smartwave tire monitoring, automatic traction control, lane departure warning, back-up camera and UN ECE-RU66 rollover certification.

ABC Companies is Van Hool's exclusive US distributor, and their Senior Account Manager, Charlie Walser, said "It's exciting for all of us at ABC to work with TCS. Terry has taken a really good company and made it extraordinary.

"The Van Hool is a proven product that our passengers and drivers love. ABC considered my background as an asset, and really worked with me in all sorts of ways to assist in our growth. It would have been difficult to have made so much progress without ABC's help," says Terry.

## New Mexico Texas Coaches adds 2013 Van Hool C2045 to fleet

Chris Knittel, President of New Mexico Texas Coaches learned the basics of the bus business at an early age. "My father, Jack Knittel started the company in 1988, just about the time I was born. From the time I was old enough to walk in the door, I was doing 'bus' things, and literally grew up in the business." He says, "When my Dad passed away unexpectedly in 2009, I was young to be taking on this much responsibility, but I already had quite a bit of experience. My mother, Denise Madrid Boyea, remains majority owner of the company, but she entrusts me with the day-to-day operation of the company."



Carlsbad NM based New Mexico Texas Coaches ([www.1800buslimo.com](http://www.1800buslimo.com)) started using taxis and minibuses shuttling railroad workers and later parlayed that experience into a Department of Energy contract hauling employees near the company's facility. As the company grew, it became clear that there was an opportunity to serve the charter coach market in both Carlsbad and Lubbock, Texas, and New Mexico Texas Coaches now operates 30 vehicles, including 9 luxury coaches out of facilities in both cities. Offering everything from limousines and mini coaches to 57 passenger motorcoaches, they've evolved into one of the region's most diversified transportation companies.

Knittel points out, "I learned early on that the key to success in operating buses is setting high standards in every aspect of the business. We hire the best people we can find, with special emphasis on first rate drivers. Our staff is committed to excellence. When one of our coaches shows up for a job, its driver looks sharp in a



uniform that's a visible symbol of the quality service we provide. We operate late model equipment and work hard at keeping it in like-new condition."

New Mexico Texas Coaches just took delivery of the newest motorcoach in their fleet, a 2013 Van Hool equipped with a Detroit DD13 engine driving through an Allison B500G4 transmission. The 57 passenger C2045 offers passenger amenities including Alcoa Dura Bright wheels, WiFi, 110 volt outlets, satellite radio, and an REI Elite entertainment system with 15" monitors. Additional equipment includes a backup camera, 3 point seat belts and Saucon TDS to supplement Van Hool's standard features including a 6 channel ABS system, Lane Departure Warning, Automatic Traction Control, Fire Detectors, Electronic Stability Control, and a Tire Monitoring System.

Zane Gray, Account Manager for ABC, Van Hool's exclusive US distributor pointed out, "This Company is in a growth mode, and it's pretty obvious why. They're easy to work with, energetic and extremely responsive. Chris's attention to every aspect of the business is remarkable.. ABC is delighted to be working with a spirited company like New Mexico Texas Coaches. We think they have a great future ahead of them, and we are going to work hard to be part of it."

Knittel says, "We've operated several brands of coaches, and they're all good. We've found that ABC and Van Hool offer a unique combination of a top notch product supported by a responsive service organization.

All our coaches offer a great experience for our passengers, but the Van Hool/ABC team does it more efficiently, allowing us to put more of our energy into other parts of the business."

## **Nova Bus to deliver 55 Nova LFS buses to the Toronto Transit Commission**

**Nova Bus has secured an order valued at \$32.6 million for 55 buses to the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), the largest transit authority in Canada. Delivery of the first of the 40-foot diesel buses, including a pilot bus, will begin in 2015.**

"We are very proud to maintain our partnership and trusting relationship with the Toronto Transit Commission," said Jean-Pierre Barakat, President of Nova Bus. "This new contract follows an order for Nova LFS Artic buses placed in 2012. We are excited to continue with this next step and look forward to provide the City of Toronto with proven 40-foot buses, tailored to their needs."

Once again, Nova Bus demonstrated its competitiveness and showed it is the company that best meets the public transit needs of the Greater Toronto Area. This new order consolidates Nova Bus position as the leading transit bus manufacturer in Canada and strengthens its presence in Ontario.



The vehicles will be entirely assembled in Canada at the company's main plant in St-Eustache, Quebec and will include a high level of Canadian content. Nova Bus and the Volvo Group count on more than 65 component manufacturers and suppliers in Ontario, with millions of dollars in spending each year in the Greater Toronto Area.

The TTC evaluation criteria for the purchase included a proven vehicle with a long history of reliability, a high degree of Canadian content, and a mandatory requirement for a stainless steel structure that is unique to Nova Bus among Canadian bus manufacturers. TTC's vehicles will also include a specially designed driver's barrier. This safety feature heavy duty design is made from sturdy steel and includes an upper glazing section made of tempered glass.

## **CAF to supply Boston Green Line LRVs**

Written by David Briginshaw Railway Age

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) has approved the purchase of 24 light rail vehicles from Besain, Spain-based Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles (CAF) for Boston's Green Line, the light rail transit portion of the "T."

Roughly half the \$118 million contract is being funded by a Federal Transit Administration "New Starts" grant. The bodysells and underframes will be manufactured in Spain, with final assembly taking place at CAF USA's plant in Elmira, N.Y. Delivery will start in late 2017.

The new LRVs will be the ninth generation of vehicle to operate on the four-branch Green Line. The units will be designed to meet the latest disability requirements with 70% of the vehicles being low-floor. There will be four wheelchair/stroller locations as well as four perch seats



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in the central section. All priority seats will have space underneath to accommodate guide dogs and other mobility equipment.

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The new vehicles will include crash energy management features and they will be equipped with external and internal CCTV. They will also feature dynamic computer-controlled lighting, heating, and cooling technologies to improve passenger comfort.

Later this year, MassDOT expects to award a contract for 74 new metro cars for the Red Line and 152 cars for the Orange Line.

Under a \$1.3 billion project, the four-branch Green Line will be extended from its current terminus at Lechmere Station (Cambridge) north to Somerville and Medford, Mass., roughly parallel to Interstate 93.

## New Metro Silver Line start date announced for July 26

By The Associated Press, Jeff Goldberg

June 23, 2014 - 06:24 am

McLEAN, Va. (AP) - After decades of planning, delays and blown budget projections, Metro officials said Monday that they expect a \$2.9 billion segment of a new Silver Line serving northern Virginia to open next month.

On a conference call with reporters, Metro General Manager Richard Sarles said enough progress has been made to safely project July 26, as the date the five new stations will open.

The inaugural train will leave the Reston station at noon, Sarles said.

The line runs through Tysons Corner from Reston to Falls Church on a route that roughly parallels the Dulles Toll Road. Preliminary work has begun on a second phase that will extend the line to Dulles International Airport. Phase II is projected to open in 2018.

Regional planners had sought the Metrorail extension for decades. Ten years ago, when planning began in earnest, officials believed the line would cost \$1.5 billion and be finished by 2009.

The project teetered on collapse for several years as federal rail officials questioned the cost of the project in relation to the projected ridership. Engineers shaved costs in part by opting to build nearly all of the line above ground, disappointing those who believed a tunnel would be a less disruptive alternative.

When construction began in 2009, the plan had been for passenger service to begin late in 2013. But construction delays pushed the start date back by seven months. Sarles said Metro lost between \$2 million and \$3 million in projected revenue every month that service was delayed.

One positive about the July opening, Sarles said, is that it occurs in late summer months when many Washingtonians are on vacation and ridership dips, allowing for a smoother transition as Metro adjusts its train schedules to accommodate the new line.

Sarles said it is an "unlikely possibility" that any problems will pop up between now and July 26 to postpone the projected opening. The biggest item left on the to-do list, Sarles said, is obtaining certificates of occupancy from state officials.