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ILLINOIS BECOMES FIRST STATE TO OFFER SENIORS FREE TRANSIT

By F.K. Plous

Illinois has become the first state in the Union to offer free mass-transit rides to all of its senior citizens.

That's right—since March of this year, anyone who can document his or her age as 65 or older and can confirm an Illinois address can get a pass entitling him or her to universal, unlimited free riding on the local transit system.

All the candidate has to do is show up at a designated registration site, present the necessary documentation, and hold still for a second while a transit employee snaps a photo. In about 10 days, a photo ID

card arrives in the mail and the recipient literally has a ticket to ride. The plastic pass is read automatically when inserted in bus fare boxes and turnstiles at Chicago Transit Authority rapid-transit stations. On Chicago's Metra commuter-rail system, conductors accept it just as they accept the monthly "flash" ticket that riders fasten to a clip on the back of the seat in front of them.

Immediate impact

Not surprisingly, seniors have responded by riding more.

"April was big, and I can tell you anecdotally that the May response will be even bigger, because people are continuing to sign up," said

Patrick Wilmot, spokesman for the PACE bus system, which operates 249 daily bus routes in the six northeastern Illinois counties served by the Regional Transportation Authority.

"During April, we had 131,330 uses of the pass," Wilmot said. "We estimate our senior ridership at about 3.4 million out of the 39 million trips we provided in 2007."

But the additional riders have not strained PACE's capacity, Wilmot said, because most seniors are retired and do their traveling during the off-peak period between the two rush hours, when plenty of empty seats are available.

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SOARING GAS PRICES MEAN UNPLANNED RIDERSHIP GROWTH FOR DC METRO RAIL

By Jack Corbett

The sudden spike in gasoline prices has spurred unexpected growth in public transit ridership for the Metrorail subway system serving the nation's capital area, as well as at most other rail systems across the country. Since April, Metrorail, the nation's second largest heavy rail system (after New York City's), has cracked its list of top 10 ridership days on five separate occasions, with weekday trips averaging 771,811. Metro's General Manager John Catoe has

cautioned that train capacity could be overwhelmed if gas prices reach \$5 a gallon.

Across the country, high gas prices are motivating people to change their travel behavior, according to a report from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). In the first quarter of 2008, light rail (streetcars, trolleys) increased ridership by 10.3%, commuter rail by 5.7% and heavy rail by 4.4%. When people leave their cars at home, public transit increases tend to show up first on long-haul trips, such as

commuter and light rail, rather than on buses or heavy rail such as subways, according to APTA.

Rail passenger growth caught Metro's planners with their estimates down. Planners had just released forecasts for a less-than 2% annual increase in Metrorail ridership for the next decade when daily passenger counts in 2008 started coming in above 4%. Increased ridership will intensify pressures for Metro to find funding for additional railcars and to meet new demands on the 32-year-old

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NYC TO GET ITS FIRST BUS RAPID TRANSIT ROUTE



in NYC
Transit
history

Mayor Michael Bloomberg (far right) at a March 25 news conference unveiling the buses that will run as part of the Select Bus System, New York City's new line that will connect Co-Op City in the Bronx with Manhattan's Inwood section. (Photo by Edward Reed)

By Andrew Albert

Beginning June 29, New York City will join other cities in the Bus Rapid Transit game, although it will not be as extensive as in some other places. The culmination of a three-year collaborative effort between New York City Transit, New York City Department of Transportation, the New York Police Department, and the New York State Department of Transportation, the BX 12 Select Bus Service, as it will be known, will connect the Inwood section of Upper Manhattan with Co-Op City in the Northeast Bronx. It will also be extended to Orchard Beach in Pelham Bay Park during the summer beach season.

The Select Bus Service will not have its bus lanes physically separated from general traffic, but will have newly marked bus lanes and these will be vigorously enforced by the NYPD. The Select Bus Service will replace the BX 12 Limited service buses, but the span of service will be longer than the Limited was. No local service will be removed by the addition of the Select Bus Service.

The line will begin (or end, depending

on your starting point) at 207th Street & Broadway (the A subway line), stop at 207th Street & 10th Avenue (#1 subway line), Fordham Road/Cedar Avenue (Metro-North Railroad), Fordham Road/University Avenue, Fordham Road/Jerome Avenue (#4 subway line), Fordham Road/Grand Concourse (the B and D subway lines), Fordham Plaza (Metro-North Railroad), Fordham Road/Southern Blvd, the Bronx Zoo, Pelham Parkway/White Plains Road (#2 and 5 subway lines), Pelham Parkway/Williamsbridge Road (#5 subway line), Pelham Parkway/Eastchester Road, Pelham Bay Park (#6 subway line), Baychester Avenue, Edson Avenue, Bartow Avenue, Co-Op City Blvd, and the Bay Plaza Shopping Center. This is considerably fewer stops than the BX 12 Limited service made, and is expected to shave at least 7-12 minutes off the trip, depending on the hour of travel.

Adding to the time savings will be the first off-boarding payment procedure in NYC Transit history. Machines will be set up along 207th Street, Fordham Road, and Pelham Parkway, as well as each of the other stops, to allow customers to purchase their fares before

boarding the buses. This will speed the process considerably, as the time-consuming dip of the Metrocard is eliminated. Proof of payment receipts will be issued by the machines, and random inspections will be conducted, much as is done on the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail system, the Los Angeles Metro, and similar systems. If the system is a success, the MTA would like to add similar Bus Rapid Transit routes in each of the five boroughs of New York City.

Routes have been identified in all boroughs, with the exception of Queens, where the initial route has been the subject of some dispute among local residents and NYC Transit. The Bronx route connects all north/south subway lines in the Bronx, as well as three routes of the Metro-North Commuter Railroad. The vehicles utilized for the Select Bus Service will be the same articulated buses currently in service on many Bronx and Manhattan routes, but will be painted a special identifying color, and will be emblazoned with the Select Bus Service name. Interiors are also decorated differently than current vehicles on the route.

While Bus Rapid Transit is touted in many cities as bringing new riders to transit, this will likely not be the case on the BX 12 Select Bus Route. Ridership is already very high on this, the most important cross-Bronx route. What it is expected to do, however, is showcase how the service might be utilized in parts of New York where there is no subway service, and fast, dependable feeder service to the subways is essential. This will, hopefully, cause more riders to desert their automobiles and switch to mass transit.

With gas prices hovering close to \$5 a gallon, and ridership swelling all over New York's transit system, let's hope that our State Legislature sees the wisdom of financing transit in New York State the way it ought to be, rather than having to go through the constant funding crises we seem to endure every two years or so. Our loyal riders, as well as new converts, deserve nothing less.

Andrew Albert is the Chair of the NYC Transit Riders Council, and riders' representative on the MTA Board.

BALTIMORE ADVOCATES HOLD FIRST SUMMIT

By *Christopher Field*

Baltimore transit advocates held their first ever "Transit Advocacy Summit" on June 12. The summit, modeled on the annual meetings held for years by environmental groups, was held to identify issues hindering mass transit in the area, agree on achievable goals, and outline an advocacy work plan.

While most of the people at the meeting knew each other from working for or against specific projects, this was the first time they gathered to discuss the overall transit situation in the Baltimore region and try to agree on a common voice. The feeling was that we have reached a golden moment when high gas prices, traffic congestion, and global warming concerns have shifted the debate regarding more roads vs. more transit.

Historically, transit advocates in Baltimore have been more divided than unified. There have been issues of city vs. suburbs, rail vs. bus, etc. Many transit advocates have been opinionated and outspoken. This has enabled transit to either take a back seat in the political debate or let the business (read: developer) community drive transit policy.

The meeting was organized by Richard Chambers, Executive Director of One

Less Car. The meeting was moderated by Stuart Sirota, the founding principal of TND Planning Group, a Baltimore-based consulting practice focused on sustainable community design, traditional town planning, and transportation planning for livable communities. Attending the meeting were representatives from the Citizen Housing and Planning Association (CPHA), the Transit Riders Action Council of Metropolitan Baltimore (TRAC), the Central Maryland Transit Alliance (CMTA, mostly made of business interests), some community associations, the director of sustainability for Johns Hopkins University, and the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA).

The meeting started with short (five-to 10-minute) presentations from six participants regarding issues they felt were important. These included the need for transportation options, to rethink our transportation planning methods, and an overview of what is required to make an effective transit system. We then looked for areas of agreement and disagreement. We could easily agree there was a need for better transit. But then the differences appeared as we discussed whether "better" meant "more" (as in additional bus and rail service) or better use of the resources at hand.

We then heard a short presentation on an effort to get all of the region's land-use planning directors, county and city, together to think about the region as one. It was agreed that a next step would be to get the land use and transportation planning directors together.

This author made a 10-minute presentation on his study comparing the MARC commuter rail share of passengers to the local Interstate (see *RUN Newsletter* Vol. 5, no. 1).

After a day's work, we agreed on 10 points:

- 1) Must build on existing vision and infrastructure;
- 2) Must be a regional system;
- 3) Must be coordinated with land use;
- 4) Must include a quantum increase in funding;
- 5) Must be efficiently governed;
- 6) Must be sustainable;
- 7) Must include a rational, public, effective planning process;
- 8) Emphasize public/private partnerships;
- 9) Transportation plan should be fluid and not "set in stone"; and
- 10) We need more time together so that we can speak across the region with one, or at least harmonious, voice.

Christopher Field is President-elect, Treasurer, and Rail Committee Chair of the Transit Riders Action Council of Metropolitan Baltimore (TRAC).

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Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at: **RUN; 55 River Road, Steep Falls, ME 04085 or email to rrudolph@fairpoint.net**

MBTA ON SHAKY FINANCIAL GROUND DESPITE RIDERSHIP GROWTH

By Eric Bourassa

While Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority ridership has surged since the beginning of the year, largely due to rising gas prices, the MBTA Riders Oversight Committee and many transit advocates worry that budget deficits at the T will force higher fares or service cuts next year.

Growing debt costs and high energy bills created a \$74 million deficit in the MBTA's July 1 fiscal year budget.

To bridge the \$74 million gap, the T essentially borrowed money, depleted the agency's deficiency fund, and dipped into the capital maintenance fund.

For now, the T has a balanced budget. But based on the analysis of the T's finances by the bipartisan Transportation Finance Commission last year, the agency is projected to have a deficit of \$40 million to \$60 million for fiscal year 2010, and cannot close another large deficit with borrowing or deficiency funding.

"All this tells me we're headed for service cuts or a fare increase," said Lee Matsueda of the T Riders' Union, which advocates for improved T service. "This is bad timing. More

riders are using public transit because of the economy and the cost of gas. But with no money left in the MBTA's rainy day fund and a \$8 billion crippling debt load, it's inevitable."

For T riders already recovering from the 2007 fare increase, further hikes or service cuts are daunting.

"I can't afford another fare increase. Not now, not next year, not for the service we get today," said T rider and Dorchester resident Michelle McGruder. "The poor and those who need public transit the most are taking the biggest hit. I mean, the student pass jumped from \$13 to \$20 in the last fare increase, and as a parent I can't afford any more."

Transit advocates have been urging that the legislature and Governor Patrick to address MBTA debt, which at \$8 billion with interest is the largest of any transit authority in the country. A handful of state legislators have recommended that the state assume approximately \$1.8 billion in MBTA debt that was the result of Big Dig transit commitments and the cause of three high fare increases since 2000.

Eric Bourassa is MASSPIRG Advocate and Co-chair of the MBTA Riders Oversight Committee.

COMMUTER RAIL NOW LINKS TWO UTAH CITIES

By David Peter Alan

Utah is now the newest state to offer commuter rail service to its residents and visitors. The new "Front Runner" line connects Salt Lake City with Ogden, 36 miles to the north. The Ogden station is located downtown, near historic 25th Street and the museums that now occupy the former Union Station. The trip takes slightly less than one hour, and the one-way fare is \$5. All intermediate stations are the "park and ride" variety.

Service began on May 1 and runs half-hourly during mid-day hours on weekdays, with a small enhancement during peak commuting hours. Trains run hourly on weekday evenings and Saturdays. There is no Sunday service, although it is planned for the future. Salt Lake City's TRAX light rail system did not initially operate on Sundays, either.

Ridership has exceeded expectations, so far. According to Utah Transit Authority spokesperson Chad Saley, there are 4,000 to 5,000 daily riders on the line, compared with initial projections of 3,000. Saley said that 9,300 people rode inaugural runs on Saturday, April 26, although fares were not collected that day.

Trains leave from the same location as Amtrak's *California Zephyr* between Chicago and the San Francisco Bay area, about a six-minute ride from Temple Square in the heart of downtown. UTA has extended the TRAX light rail line to the new transportation center, where it connects with Front Runner trains. Before the TRAX extension, several blocks between the station and downtown were dark and desolate. Now the street has light rail on it, and the stores and eateries that characterize transit-oriented development are springing up along the route.

There are more rail lines planned for the future. The current line will soon extend past downtown Ogden, to Pleasant View. The next line to open will go in the other direction, to Provo. There are also plans to build four new TRAX lines, two of which are already under construction. These expansions are part of UTA's "Front Line 2015" initiative which, according to Saley, will expand the region's rail system by 70 miles in the next seven years.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board Member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He rode Front Runner during its third week of operation.

ILLINOIS MARKS FIRST WITH FREE TRANSIT TO SENIORS

(Continued from page 1)

“They go shopping, they go to their medical appointments, they visit with friends,” Wilmot said. “We have several points on our system with high senior populations, and it really improves their mobility and helps us meet our goal of reducing traffic congestion and pollution. We have had no capacity issues since the program started. It’s been a win-win.”

Came out of nowhere

What’s amazing about the Illinois free-rides-for-senior program is that nobody had expected it, nor had anyone among the state’s vocal and well organized pro-transit lobbies advocated it.

Instead, it emerged full-blown from the head of Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich as a stratagem to end months of deadlocked negotiations with the General Assembly over the size of the state’s projected transit budget, and the size and impact of the additional taxes that would be used to finance it.

Capital need for infrastructure, rolling stock, expansion

Nobody doubted that transit in Illinois—and particularly the long-neglected infrastructure in the six-county Chicago area—needed more money. An RTA report said the CTA, Metra and Pace needed \$10 billion to rebuild deteriorating infrastructure, expand infrastructure capacity, replace beat-up buses and railcars and expand fleet capacity.

On July 16, 2006, a derailment and fire in the CTA’s Blue Line subway connecting the Loop with O’Hare Airport resulted in a National Transportation Safety Board finding that CTA had been deferring maintenance on the line for years and had failed to establish a computerized data base of track inspections and repair timetables. Instead, maintenance-of-way inspectors were recording their findings in chalk on the Blue Line tunnel walls. The CTA actually began borrowing from future federal matching fund payments to catch up with deferred maintenance.

The repair backlog, plus the new projects needed to meet growing transit demand, required a multi-year capital bill on which the legislature and the governor could not agree.

More operating money needed, too

Meanwhile, transit operating costs kept going up. In June 2007, the RTA disclosed its “Doomsday Scenario:” If \$226 million in additional operating subsidies were not forthcoming by September, CTA would have to cut service on 63 bus routes and on two rapid-transit routes; PACE would eliminate two-thirds of its service; and Metra would have to raise fares in 2008 and every year thereafter in which additional operating support was not provided. Metra also said it would have to suspend much of its weekend and late-night service. Downstate systems in Rockford, the Quad Cities, Peoria and other cities would be forced into similar cost-cutting.

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DC-AREA RAIL SEES UNPLANNED GROWTH IN RIDERSHIP

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system. Worse, about one-third of Metrorail’s more than 1,100 rail cars are 30 years old and reaching the end of their useful lives. There’s a minimum five-year lag between ordering new or replacement cars and their being available for revenue service.

The District of Columbia, the State of Maryland, and Northern Virginia, which control the Metrorail and Metrobus (another 400,000 weekday passengers) system, have been sparring with the federal government for years as to the share of new capital spending for railcars and buses that each must contribute. The case for special federal funding is strong; more than half of Metro daily riders are federal workers,

and tourists visiting the nation’s capitol also increase demands on the system, particularly during spring and summer periods.

Regular passengers on the Metro system believe they’ve already (pre-) paid their fair share through fares. Rush hour Metrorail fares were increased in January 2008 by 30 cents to 75 cents each way, depending upon distance, to help prefund an anticipated deficit of \$109 million in the upcoming fiscal year starting July 2008.

The maximum daily round-trip cost increased from \$7.80 to \$9, plus \$4.75 for daily parking at suburban locations. Reserved parking is a \$55 monthly add-on (a \$10 increase) to the daily fee. Thus the total cost for some daily Metrorail

commuters now exceeds \$350 per month.

MetroRiders.Org argued in vain against the prefunding nature of the fare hike, as did many of the more than 400 riders who attended public hearings or emailed their concerns to the Metro Board. Metro last increased fares in 2004 and argued that over the last 12 years base fares had risen 23% for rail and 14% for bus while the overall inflation rate had risen 37%. Going forward, the agency plans fare increases every two years so that needed fare increases can be more gradual.

Jack Corbett is cofounder of MetroRiders.Org. He can be contacted via e-mail at jack.corbett@metroriders.org

INITIAL THOUGHTS ON PASSENGER RAIL CAR REPLACEMENT

An Aging Fleet Confronts Higher Volume, and the Time for Action is Now

**By Richard A. Rudolph,
Chair**

With skyrocketing gas prices, it is no surprise that many Amtrak trains are sold out. Amtrak has only 632 usable rail cars, and dozens more are worn out or damaged. While these can be reconditioned and put back into service, this will only provide temporary relief. Amtrak needs to order a new fleet of cars for intercity travel as well as for cross-country service. Its Amfleet cars are more than 30 years old and the Acela trains which have been operating over eight years already have a million miles on them. Given that the demand for rail travel is expected to continue to rise, the time for action is now.

Writing specifications for bids, picking a vendor and waiting for delivery takes years, even if the money is available. Amtrak officials need to be working on two fronts: requesting funds for additional equipment and seeking input from passengers regarding rail car interior design. This will avoid retrofitting which is costly, sometimes prohibitively so. Past failures point to the need to seek input from the Rail Users' Network and other rail passenger organizations which have a wealth of knowledge and experience.

It is vital for passenger representatives' views to be taken into account at the drawing-board stage and at every subsequent stage. Initial input at the mockup stage is far too late. Experience in the U.K. and Europe has shown that better trains would have emerged had the relevant practical expertise been sought at the earliest opportunity. Failure to consult at the right stage at the right time can condemn a generation of passengers to traveling in trains that are unsuitable or less suitable than those they might otherwise have had.

The coaches and cafe cars in the present Amfleet, which have been recently reconditioned, are a case in point.

While the toilets in the coaches are a considerable improvement, they still leave much to be desired. Within the first half hour of any given trip, they are usually trashed because of the size of the waste receptacle. Passengers wanting to wash their hands have to push upward on the water flow restrictor at the top of the sink, potentially spreading germs to fellow passengers. The sliding doors more often than not are left open or slide open as the train travel around curves.

The redesigned cafe car with table seating is also an improvement over the bar stools provided on the Acela fleet. All too often, there is insufficient space for paying customers. Besides the train crew taking up one or more tables to sort tickets and conduct other business, the cafe car attendant is forced to store supplies on tables that could otherwise be used by passengers desiring to sit down while eating purchased snacks, sandwiches and drinks, rather than returning to their seat in one of the coaches.

What do passengers want??? First and foremost, they want bright, comfortable, accessible, welcoming and well-appointed trains with facilities that cater properly for their journeys. Before deciding which type of train should be purchased, it is essential to consider the characteristics of the routes on which they will be used. While Amtrak needs equipment for regional intercity service, as well as commuter and cross country service, my remarks here will be confined to the former rather than the latter types of service. The following list (which has been adapted from "Tomorrow's Trains Today—Giving passengers the trains they deserve," the U.K.'s Rail Passengers Council rolling stock aspirations) provides some food for thought. Customer advisory representatives on this side of the pond need to further refine this list to capture the needs of North American rail passengers. The list includes:

- Good soundproofing against track and engine noise.
- Air conditioning in all coaches, with adequate power, back-up systems, and an emergency ventilation facility when both systems fail.
- Provision for storing luggage and other personal belongings. This would include easily accessible overhead racks, sufficiently deep to prevent items from falling off, and transparent enough that small items can be seen. Adequate space for luggage racks also needs to be provided close to and clearly visible from seats.
- A mix of airline-style and bay seating with sturdy tables, large enough to accommodate laptop computers, refreshments, etc.
- Large windows to view the surrounding countryside and pull-down shades to prevent sun glare
- Restrooms large enough to accommodate wheelchairs, with doors not opening directly into passenger accommodations. Other toilet facilities should be of a standard design, with common locations for the flush mechanism, paper dispensers, basins, taps, soap dispensers, roller or paper towels, electric hand-dryers and similar accessories.
- At least one car in every consist should be designated as a quiet area in which the use of personal stereos, mobile phones, and loud conversation are not permitted.
- Consideration should be given to providing a section of the train for those traveling with young children. This car should be fitted with baby changing facilities including a shelf and suitable disposal facilities.

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ILLINOIS OFFERS FREE TRANSIT TO SENIORS

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The Hamos plan: a tax increase, but a fair one

Technically, a solution was available. House Transit Committee Chairman Julie Hamos (D-Evanston) had been working for years on a plan to recalibrate and redistribute the sales-tax formula under which Chicago-area transit had been funded since 1983: Residents of Chicago and the Cook County suburbs were paying a 1% sales tax to support transit, but the collar counties were paying only a 0.25 % levy.

Hamos wanted the collar-county contribution raised because the collar counties had experienced a large population increase and a large increase in transit ridership since the formula's 1983 rollout. With 33% of the region's population, 35% of Metra and PACE's weekday ridership and 50 % of Metra and PACE passenger-miles, the collar counties were still contributing only 15% of the RTA's tax proceeds.

Most members of the General Assembly viewed the Hamos plan as fair. But fellow-Democrat Blagojevich vehemently opposed it because it involved a tax increase. A former state representative and congressman, Blagojevich had always played the populist card, and now he was playing it again. Tax increases were off the table.

Doomsday looms, but Rod finds a way

September came and went without the Doomsday Scenario, but the RTA and the three service boards maintained they couldn't hold out much longer. Doomsday was pushed out until December, only to be pushed out once again as the holidays loomed and the General Assembly adjourned. But everyone knew the reprieves had to end sometime in mid-winter. The media hyperventilated as thousands of commuters began formulating their individual Plan Bs.

But while the pressure mounted on both the governor and the legislature, the onus and the spotlight now shifted increasingly to Blagojevich. Simply by being perceived as one against the many, he came to be viewed by the media as a stumbling block. While his rejection of a tax increase looked noble, it also looked phony: After all, the people's representatives and the constitutional originator of money bills, the House of Representatives, had accepted it as fair. Why should the expressed will (and need) of the people be held hostage to the governor's need to portray himself as the people's champion?

Early in January, Blagojevich announced he had found a way to split the baby: He would sign a transit-funding bill that included a tax increase, but *only* if it also authorized free transit passes for all of the state's senior citizens. The governor at last had found a way to be a fiscal tough guy and the people's friend at the same time, and it had taken everybody by surprise.

"The only hint we had was so obscure nobody figured it out," said Richard Harnish, Executive Director of the Chicago-based Transit Riders Alliance. "Somebody in the administration made a couple of phone calls asking how many seniors rode transit."

Harnish confirmed what last year's newspaper clippings seemed to indicate: Despite a blizzard of conflicting arguments about what Illinois' transit systems should look like and how they should be funded, none of the organizations or personalities struggling with the issue had ever suggested that free travel for seniors be part of the package.

"I was not aware of anybody asking for it," said Harnish. "We were too busy just trying to save what we had, prevent the service cuts and get the state focused on a long-term transit buildup."

Moreover, the surprise free-rides-for-seniors privilege, although driven by factors unique to Chicago, covered not only the six-county RTA area, but the entire state, making Illinois the first and only state to offer its seniors free travel. A recent survey by the American Public Transit Association showed that 84% of APTA's members offer reduced fares to seniors, while 26% offer free rides.

"But those are individual agencies," said APTA spokesman Montell Williams. "This is the first time it's been done by a whole state."

EK. Plous is a rail advocate based in Chicago.

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or

contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at:
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visit our new, improved website at: www.railusers.net

SAFETY: COMMON GROUND FOR ADVOCATES, OPERATORS

By Bill Engel

It sometimes seems as if transit operators and transit advocates have an adversarial relationship. For example, advocates want more service at a lower fare, while the operator, faced with budget realities, wants to reduce service and raise fares. Or a system expansion is planned but the routing favored by the advocates does not agree with the one proposed by the operator. Of course, both sides are ultimately concerned with the need for their traveling public to move safely and efficiently within the particular service area. Why not use this common concern for safety to bridge other differences and gain mutual respect between the various parties?

One safety outreach program that is widely used in the U.S. is Operation Lifesaver. Headquartered in Alexandria, VA, OL is active throughout the country as well as in Canada and Mexico. It aims to reduce highway-rail collisions and pedestrian trespassing along railroad property. The program is very strongly supported by the freight railroads but would certainly apply to any heavy or light rail transit system with a surface-level right-of-way.

Each state has a State Coordinator for Operation Lifesaver. In Ohio our State Coordinator is headquartered in Columbus, where he is responsible for overseeing all OL activity in the state. Ohio Operation Lifesaver's Mission Statement reads "Achieve reduction in

Ohio Highway-Rail intersection crashes and pedestrian trespassing incidents through 'Education, Engineering and Enforcement'."

The *Education* aspect of the mission is accomplished by trained, certified OL Presenters giving formal presentations to both adults and children in just about any setting. This would include service clubs, civic organizations, driver education classes, Scout troops, and others. Operation Lifesaver presentations are free. In addition, OL trains police officers how to conduct grade crossing collision investigations.

The *Engineering* aspect of OL is involved with eliminating as many grade crossings as possible as well as upgrading protection at both un signaled and signaled crossings. For example, a crossing equipped with only a crossbuck warning sign might be upgraded to flashing lights. Or a crossing with only flashing lights might get gates as well.

The *Enforcement* part of the OL mission is accomplished by encouraging police agencies to have patrol officers be alert for drivers who disobey the warning signals at grade crossings and issue appropriate citations. Also, Ohio OL works with various freight railroads to sponsor "Enforcement Trains." These can be either a light locomotive with an officer in the cab, or a short passenger train, usually with invited guests from the emergency services community. In the case of the

passenger train there is frequently a video camera feeding pictures to monitors in the coaches, so that every one on board can watch for violators. Police units are alerted to the approaching train or locomotive so that any violators can be cited.

I would suggest contacting your local rail transit agency to learn how they reach out to the public to promote safety on and near their property. If they are already involved with Operation Lifesaver, you could invite them to give an OL presentation at your church or school. Or you could offer to help distribute OL literature at community fairs and festivals.

If there is opposition to a new or expanded rail system based on safety, offer to get involved with educating the public on how to be safe around the new trains. The OL message is very effective in getting the public's attention. We all know how safe rail transit is; we just have to get the word out for the public to be more aware at grade crossings and near tracks.

Operation Lifesaver is having an International Symposium in July titled "Bridges to Safety." It will be held across the river from Cincinnati, OH July 20-23. For more information about either OL or the Symposium, visit their website at www.oli.org. And around the tracks, remember to "Look, Listen, and Live."

Bill Engel is a RUN Board Member based in Clinton, OH.

INITIAL THOUGHTS ON REPLACING PASSENGER RAIL CARS

(Continued from page 6)

- Each train should have space for more than one wheelchair; wheelchair spaces should be provided sufficiently close to enable two wheelchair-users to travel together. The accommodation should be in the coach with seating for traveling companions.
- Braille signage should be placed in legible and accessible positions in the restrooms and door controls should be comprised of standard tactile arrow markings.
- Suitable storage space for bicycles should be provided.

- Food should be stored within kitchen confines and suitable space should be found for train crew to sort/count tickets and to conduct other business.

- Adequate space should be provided for wheelchair users in the cafe car, or provide at-seat service in coach accommodations.

While this may seem like a tall order, the new bi-level New Jersey Transit System cars are an excellent example of the type of equipment that is needed if we are to provide a cost effective alternative to car

travel in the Northeast. The purchase of this type of equipment will also reduce traffic congestion, decrease pollution and improve the quality of life for all citizens in the Northeast. To be sure, they would need to be modified to meet Amtrak's customer needs, but they provide an excellent example of what could be done quickly to meet the growing demand for service in the Northeast. Besides providing good ride quality at high speeds, they provide a lot more seat space and large windows, and there is space at either end for toilets and a food gallery.

NJ TRANSIT SLASHES OFF-PEAK DAILY SERVICE

Lackawanna Coalition Fights Back

By David Peter Alan

New Jersey Transit slashed weekday off-peak rail service on the Morris & Essex Line by nearly half on May 11. The cuts, which were the most drastic in NJT's 25-year history as a rail service provider, were implemented swiftly and without prior notice to the public. The changes were announced as "service adjustments" and riders only learned of their severity when they saw the public timetables issued a few days before the cuts were implemented. Service was reduced from the half-hourly level to hourly during mid-day and evening hours on weekdays. Two trains still run every hour on a portion of the line, but they are scheduled five minutes apart. Weekend service between the historic terminal at Hoboken and any point beyond Newark was essentially eliminated for the first time in history. Weekend trains were also rescheduled to break a connection that formerly saved riders 60 minutes of travel time for certain trips within the Garden State. Peak-hour rail service was not affected.

NJT has also announced that cuts on other lines will go into effect soon, perhaps as early as the first week in August. Executive Director Richard

Sarles announced at the agency's Board meeting on June 11 that some off-peak trains would be "consolidated" and others would be replaced by buses on the Raritan Valley and North Jersey Coast Lines. Management refused to discuss the severity of the proposed service reductions, leading to speculation that the next round of cuts will also be implemented without notice to the riders on the affected lines.

A senior manager at NJT blamed the high price of diesel fuel, even though most of the affected lines are electrified. He claimed that it is far more cost-effective to pay for fuel for a crowded peak-hour train than for a less-crowded train operating outside of peak commuting hours. A few months ago, NJT management proudly proclaimed that the agency had avoided raising fares this year. There was no mention at that time of impending service cuts, so the severity of the recent slashing of M&E Line service was especially shocking to riders.

"If cuts like this had been proposed in New York, hearings would certainly have been required," said Andrew Albert, Chair of the NYC Transit Riders' Council and RUN Vice Chair, concerning a less severe service cut implemented by NJT in

2006. Joseph M. Clift, former director of strategic planning for the Long Island Rail Road said that, in his experience, riders prefer a reasonable fare increase to severe service cuts, if those are the available choices.

The Lackawanna Coalition has questioned the legality of the May 11 cuts, citing a provision in the statute governing NJT that requires a hearing prior to "elimination or substantial curtailment" of service. In a statement issued at the June 11 NJT Board meeting, the Coalition called for the immediate restoration of M&E rail service to the level in effect before May 11 and for public hearings to be conducted under New Jersey's Administrative Procedure Act before any further service reductions are implemented.

The Coalition is involved in an ongoing campaign to enlist the aid of elected officials in securing the restoration of the former levels of rail service, while discussions with NJT managers continue. There are also efforts underway to enlist the aid of other rail advocates in the state, and a grassroots campaign is being planned.

David Peter Alan is Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, based in Millburn, NJ.

ARC PROJECT: OPPOSITION KEEPS GROWING; ALLIANCE ADDS SUPPORT

By Paul Bubny

Bistate support continues to grow for the bistate alliance of rail advocacy groups that oppose New Jersey Transit's (NJT) current plan to build a rail tunnel that would end in a "deep cavern" terminal separate from New York Penn Station (NYP). Mayor Jeremiah T. Healy of Jersey City, the owners of the Newport community on the Hudson waterfront and Manhattan's West Side and Midtown community boards all have stated their opposition to NJT's Access to the Region's Core (ARC) project in its current form. All four stated their positions in letters to NJT to be included in the legal public comment record of the ARC Supplemental Draft Environmental Statement (SDEIS) issued in March. NJT

must respond to all comments in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Healy wrote that NJT's proposed routing of the ARC Project, bypassing the Hoboken Terminal, will reduce Hoboken's share of peak-hour ridership to NYP from 36% to 13%. This threatens future rail service and jeopardizes development of the Hoboken/Jersey City waterfront served by Hoboken trains, Healy wrote.

Marcilia A. Boyle, Senior Vice President of the Lefrak Organization, owners of Newport, criticized the ARC planning effort. "The idea that a major public infrastructure project such as ARC, which will come along perhaps only once in a century, would ignore the economic growth of the community it passes through is seriously deficient from

the points of view of regional planning, smart growth and sound environmental and transportation policy."

Manhattan's West Side and Midtown community boards cited several concerns and problems with the current ARC plan. They include: failure to provide service to the East Side now or in the future, removal of the track connection to Penn Station, the 175-foot/20-story depth and reduced size—from eight tracks to six—of the proposed 34th Street station, and the failure to mitigate the increased pedestrian and traffic congestion in and around West 34th Street that would result from the new station. The boards urged NJT to develop a more responsive project plan.

Paul Bubny is Public Information Officer for the Lackawanna Coalition, based in Millburn, NJ.

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FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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