

Winter
2010



LCTA Adds Hybrid Buses to Fleet

The Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA) unveiled three new diesel-electric hybrid buses on Friday, December 11, 2009 at the LCTA headquarters in Kingston.

The introduction of the hybrid buses into the fleet represents a new era of low-emissions public transit buses for the area. The new buses will produce 50% less nitrous oxides (NOx), and up to 90% less particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and hydrocarbons. "These buses represent the future of the LCTA", remarked Stan Strelish, Executive Director of the LCTA. "This is the beginning of a multi-year transition where buses that serve the Wyoming Valley region will be cleaner, quieter, and more fuel-efficient."

Five additional hybrids have been ordered and they are expected to be introduced into the fleet sometime next year. Two of the five new hybrids will be smaller (30-feet) than the standard 35-foot buses. Another seven hybrids will be added to the fleet in 2011. If all goes according to LCTA's long-term plan, fifteen of the thirty-two buses used in daily operations will be diesel-electric hybrids by 2011.

The LCTA can expect about a

30% decrease in diesel fuel usage in each of the hybrids. Expected cost savings are dependent on the cost of fuel in the future, and the number of miles a bus is driven over its lifetime. Maintenance costs for the hybrids are estimated to be 30-50% lower than conventional buses.

The cost for each hybrid bus was approximately \$522,000, bringing the total cost for the three new buses to about \$1.6 million, of which \$1.1 million was federally funded, \$440,000 was state funded, and \$9,900 was locally funded.

The Gillig Hybrid bus is a variant of the low-floor model that is powered by a clean diesel-electrical pro-

pulsion system. In addition to saving fuel and reducing emissions, the hybrid produces a smoother ride than conventional buses.

The hybrid bus produces electricity through the braking process. As the bus decelerates, energy is converted into electricity, and recharges the onboard batteries through a regenerative braking system. Up to 40% of the energy needed to accelerate the bus comes from the energy saved during this process.

"LCTA is proud to be leading the charge with a progressive approach to protecting our environment, and further relieving pollution, and reducing our dependence on foreign oil," Strelish remarked.

Submitted By Stan Strelish



Front view of new hybrid bus

National and 2 Local Transit Operators See Ridership Decrease in 2009

According to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), transit ridership decreased nationwide in 2009 after experiencing a 52-year high in 2008. The most common explanation is decreased gas prices and increased unemployment across the country.

Locally, COLTS' ridership de-

creased about 6.1%, from 1,987,625 riders in 2008 to 1,867,689 passengers in 2009.

LCTA ridership also decreased from 1,661,014 passengers in 2008 to 1,639,799 in 2009, a 1.27% decrease.

Hazleton Public Transit, however, experienced an

increase in ridership. The number of passengers in 2008 was 242,126 versus 247,209 in 2009, resulting in a 2% increase.

According to the APTA, about 60% of transit trips are for employment purposes. As jobs increase, transit ridership is also expected to increase, both locally and nationally.

Hazleton Intermodal Center Opens

The Grand Opening for the Hazleton Intermodal Center, known as the Church Street Station, was held on November 16, 2009. The 10,000 square-foot facility serves as the hub for Hazleton Public Transit (HPT) buses, as well as regional and out-of-town bus companies, and provides taxi services. It offers citizens a spacious, climate-controlled waiting area, counters for purchasing tickets, and an extensive security system. A large awning outside protects transit riders from the elements as they wait to board buses. In the spring, an automated system will be installed to inform riders about bus arrival and departure times.

HPT and the Hazleton Parking Authority offices are located in the new facility, and space for retail development is available at the front of the building. The exterior of the building - brick with stone accents



Mayor Barletta, HPT Acting Director Renee Craig, and several local and state dignitaries, cut the ribbon for the Church Street Station.

- is reminiscent of the former Hazleton train station that once stood on the site.

The Church Street Station was designed and built to incorporate future development, including the construction of up to four parking decks above the current structure. Hazleton City Mayor, Louis Barletta, is actively seeking funding to

proceed with this next phase of the project. "The Church Street Station is desperately needed", the mayor said at the grand opening. "Over the past few years, we have seen increases in our ridership. Everyone, from seniors to students, relies on Hazleton Public Transit buses to take them to school or to a store, to the mall, or to destinations in three counties." The Mayor proposed the idea of a centralized hub in the City to improve transportation and traffic conditions in the downtown, as well as to provide economic development opportunities, shortly after he took office in 2000.

Mayor Barletta praised HPT Acting Director, Renee Craig, and all the HPT bus drivers and employees for their diligent efforts toward making the Church Street Station a reality.

Submitted By Renee Craig

COLTS Route Analysis Project Underway

The County of Lackawanna Transit System (COLTS) is currently in the process of doing an analysis of the entire county bus system. COLTS has hired Clear View Strategies, a Pittsburgh-based public transportation consulting firm, to conduct the study.

"One of the main objectives of the analysis is to determine which improvements can be made by changing and streamlining the 28 routes now in place", said Bob Fiume, Executive Director of COLTS. "Another objective is to identify which areas of the county are currently not be-

ing served by COLTS and determine where new routes are needed."

The last time COLTS did a major route analysis was about 15 years ago, and except for minor tweaks, bus routes have not changed. "Because of all the development that has occurred in both residential areas and the business sector over the past 15 years, this is a good time to take a look at the system", Mr. Fiume said.

Lynn Colosi, and other members of the consultant team, have been riding the buses to collect data, make observations and review all the routes. Ms. Colosi has spoken with

riders, local officials, planning agencies, senior citizens, major employers, colleges, and COLTS employees to gather input and ideas.

COLTS also hired two former bus drivers on a part-time basis to help administer a written survey of bus riders. COLTS officials are tallying the survey responses and will provide them to Clear View Strategies. The route analysis is expected to be completed by the end of March of 2010, with the recommendations from the study being implemented by July 1.

Submitted By Gretchen Wintermantel

Three Area Freight Users Receive State Grants

On December 11 2009, Governor Rendell announced that \$24.5 million from PENNDOT's Rail Freight Capital Budget/Transportation Assistance and Rail Freight Assistance Programs was awarded to 39 freight rail companies and users across the Commonwealth.

According to Governor Rendell, "Upgrading and expanding our freight rail lines helps maintain service and also opens the door to greater business opportunities. These investments will help meet

growing demand for freight rail service, and also help ease highway congestion by reducing the number of trucks on our roadways."

The state will invest \$15 million from the capital budget program, and an additional \$9.5 million from the Rail Freight Assistance Program in freight projects this year.

The three local grant recipients are:

Hazleton Creek Properties - \$250,000 for Phase II of a 4-phase project, including

construction of track for disposal of dredge materials on a brownfield site slated for re-development;

Redevelopment Authority of Luzerne County - \$203,700 to replace ties and resurface track;

Valley Distributing & Storage Company - \$186,850 to rehabilitate track, turnout and on-site grade-crossing, and do excavation and drainage work.

Tree Planting on Hazleton Trail A Community Effort

Through the efforts of Vincent Cotrone, Urban Forester for the Penn State Cooperative Extension Service, and Lynn Conrad from Northeast PA Urban and Community Forestry Program, the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership (GHACP), an affiliate of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, 20 trees were recently planted along the Greater Hazleton Rails-to-Trails.

The 20 flowering crab apple and red maple trees will beautify the first 1000 feet of the trail that was stripped of all vegetation many years ago. The trees will also help create a riparian buffer that will prevent washouts along the trail.

Bob Skulsky, Executive Director of GHACP, said, "The project was a wonderful demonstration of partner-

ing in Luzerne County. From initially getting the trees from the U.S. Forestry Service grant, and then having different organizations, including C&D Mulch Recycling,

Hazle Township, Hazleton City, Hazleton City Water Authority, GHACP Rail-to-Trails volunteers, and 32 MMI Preparatory School students donating equipment, supplies, and their time to plant the trees, it was a win-win situation."

The trees were put up for adoption as either memorials to loved ones, or were sponsored by area businesses to show their support of the trail and advertise at the same time. All the trees were adopted within ten days of being advertised.

The project was also successful in that it educated all the volunteers on how to plant trees via the bare-root method rather than the ball-root method.

Submitted by Bob Skulsky



Volunteers participate in the tree-planting project along the Hazleton Rails-to-Trails.

Local Technical Assistance Program Classes Scheduled

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA) has partnered with PENNDOT to coordinate the Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) training series for the spring. LTAP has been serving Pennsylvania's municipalities with transportation road maintenance and safety training since 1983. Services available through LTAP include workshop training, on-site technical assistance, updates on the latest technology and innovations, field demonstrations, library and informational materials, and newsletters.

These services are available to all municipalities in the state, and are provided at little or no cost to the user.

The following classes have been scheduled for the spring:

Stormwater Management - Wayne County

Date: Tuesday, March 16, 2010
Time: 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Location: PPL Wallenpaupack Environmental Learning Center
126 PPL Drive (off US Route 6)
Hawley, PA 18428
Telephone: 570-253-7076
Registration: LTAP Website or NEPA

Principles of Paving - Schuylkill County

Date: Monday, April 5, 2010
Time: 8:00 AM - 3:00 PM
Location: Schuylkill Community Education Council
1-7 W. Centre St.
Mahanoy City, PA 17948
Telephone: 570-773-1270
Registration: LTAP Website or NEPA

Asphalt Roads: Common Maintenance Problems - Lackawanna County

Date: Wednesday, April 21, 2010
Time: 8:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Location: PENNDOT District 4-0
55 Keystone Industrial Park (O'Neil Highway)
Dunmore, PA 18512
Telephone: 570-963-4061
Registration: LTAP Website or NEPA



For more information on LTAP, go to www.ltap.state.pa.us or contact Kurt Bauman, NEPA, at 655-5581.

Attendees participate in a Stormwater Management course held at NEPA on May 12, 2009.

**LACKAWANNA/LUZERNE METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

Published By: Luzerne County Planning
Commission
Contact: Nancy Snee
Telephone: 825-1564
E-Mail: Nancy.Snee@luzernecounty.org

MPO Web Page:
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PENNDOT District 4-0
www.neparoads.com

Bus Rapid Transit—What Is It? Can It Work Here?

The Lackawanna/Luzerne Bi-County Comprehensive Plan (BCCP) and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) include a proposal to develop a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system as a means of reducing congestion, providing access between the major cities in the 2-county area, and providing an attractive alternative to the automobile.

Ideally, BRT buses travel in a dedicated lane and use traffic signal prioritization technology to extend the green segment of traffic signals. This allows buses to travel through a corridor faster than standard buses or cars. BRT buses are also equipped with GPS technology, so riders can tell exactly when the BRT bus will pick them up at the station. It is estimated that BRT buses improve reliability of service by 25-30%.

Pre-boarding ticket sales at vending machines at the BRT stations also save passengers time, since they can enter the bus via multiple doors and do not have to stop to put tokens into a fare box.

BRT systems are also cheaper to build and operate than light or

heavy rail systems.

There are four large cities that have BRT systems or are working on pilot projects, including New York City and Chicago.

Although a BRT system may not be able to function here exactly the same as it would in a large city initially, especially in regard to having dedicated lanes, it can still provide benefits for Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties' residents.

There is currently no bus service between Hazleton, Mt. Top and Wilkes-Barre. A BRT bus could provide that service, plus provide links to Scranton and Carbondale in Lackawanna County. BRT buses could also be used to service some of the larger employers in the area, and would provide service later in the evening than local buses currently do.

As for the costs of initiating BRT service, Joe Bucovetsky, Transportation Planner, from McCormick Taylor Engineering and Planning, Inc. explained, "We've taken the position that there are no extraordinary costs in initiating BRT - just the costs of the buses themselves, and the marginal costs of a driver and vehicle maintenance. The po-



Map depicting proposed BRT routes

tential incremental addition of other features of BRT - new shelters, raised platforms, ticket machines, Park-n-Ride [facilities], exclusive travel lanes - obviously infer additional costs, but we would like to

emphasize that these are not 'up front costs for BRT.'

Opportunities to institute BRT service in the 2-county area will be explored over the next few years.