

PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION, MBTA LAUNCHING NEW HYBRID BUSES

Purchased with ARRA Funds, New Buses Will Reduce Pollution, Arrive in Time for Earth Day

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BOSTON - Tuesday, April 20, 2010 - As part of Governor Patrick's commitment to strengthening public transit and improving customer service, transportation officials from the Patrick-Murray Administration today announced the rollout of a new fleet of 60-foot articulated low floor diesel hybrid buses that will serve bus-dependent communities in Boston.

The fleet of 25 emission-controlled, eco-friendly buses was purchased with federal stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and will allow the MBTA to serve more bus riders on some of its most popular routes. The buses will reduce pollution in Boston neighborhoods through a hybrid system capable of improving fuel efficiency by 20% or greater compared to conventional diesel buses. Additional benefits include reduced vehicle noise and improved brake life. At a cost of just over \$915,000 each, it is the first purchase of 60-foot vehicles in five years.

"This project will improve safety and convenience for travelers," said Governor Patrick. "That's what we are trying to do in transportation, and we are making good progress."

Arriving in time to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, MBTA General Manager Rich Davey joined MassDOT Secretary and CEO Jeffrey Mullan to

celebrate the delivery of the first eight buses to the Southampton Bus Facility, with four put into service immediately on bus route 39 (Forest Hills to Back Bay). The remaining 17 buses will be deployed into service at a rate of two to three buses per week through the end of June. Buses will also be distributed to Route 28 (Mattapan Station to Ruggles via Dudley) and the Silver Line Washington Street route.

"Thanks to the support of our congressional delegation, this significant investment in our transportation system not only reflects our Administration's focus on innovation and clean energy but also our dedication to improve customer service for commuters," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray.

"These new hybrid buses are a winner for better air quality, lower carbon emissions and more money in our passengers' pockets. This wouldn't be happening without the investments the Recovery Act is bringing to Massachusetts. We have to reinvent the way America uses energy and Massachusetts is leading the way," said Senator John Kerry.

"The Governor has been clear - our priority is to strengthen public transit in every corner of the Commonwealth. As a symbol of that commitment, in addition to the over \$300 million in ARRA transit funds provided to us by the Obama Administration, we have also transferred \$55 million in highway funding to critical transit improvement projects," said Secretary Mullan.

"With the support and commitment of the Patrick-Murray Administration, we continue to make sound investments to strengthen our transportation network," said GM Davey. "We will continue on this path to ensure customers are provided reliable, accessible and safe service."

"I applaud the MBTA for expanding its fleet with these high efficiency, low emissions vehicles," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles. "These hybrid buses will reduce fuel costs as well as air pollution. I am pleased to see MassDOT working to reduce transportation's carbon footprint."

"The addition of the Diesel Hybrid Flyers is a step in the right direction towards accessible and environmentally sound transit in the City of Boston. Not only will

these new buses be more energy efficient, but they will additionally be more accessible by riders who depend on them for transportation," said Representative Jeffrey Sanchez. "The 39 Bus Route, which runs through my district, is the most heavily used route in the City and the addition of the Diesel Hybrid Flyers will surely make an impact on the overall health and safety of the residents of Boston."

Additional vehicle amenities on the new hybrid buses include:

- Vehicle accommodates 106 passengers - 57 seats, 49 standees (2 wheelchair locations).
- Passenger's egress through extra wide 41-inch center and rear doors.
- An ADA compliant wheelchair ramp is provided at the front door, and the entire curbside of the bus kneels to further accommodate passenger boarding and alighting.
- Vehicles are equipped with high-visibility LED destination signs, new color main data terminals for the GPS-based Computer Aided Dispatch /Automatic Vehicle Locator (CAD/AVL) system. This includes automated "next stop" voice announcement, and an automatic passenger counter system.
- A 10-camera on board video recording and surveillance system provides additional security, with a "Live Look In" feature enabling MBTA Transit Police to remotely access and monitor internal bus activity.
- Buses are equipped with an easy to operate exterior bicycle rack capable of storing two bikes.

The new buses originate from the Southampton Garage serving 12 Boston communities including: Jamaica Plain, Longwood, Fenway, Back Bay, Dorchester, Roxbury, South End, Chinatown, South Boston Waterfront, East Boston and Boston's Financial District. There are approximately 55,000 daily boardings on the Southampton routes with the Silver Line 5 route the most heavily used with 14,700 customers.

Celebrating the first delivery of vehicles at Back Bay Station, transportation officials cut a ribbon introducing the first bus into service and provided a demonstration of the on board video recording and surveillance system. Officials then participated in the inaugural run along bus route 39.

In celebration of Earth Day 2010, MassDOT and the MBTA have partnered with the American Public Transit Association (APTA) to highlight the use of public transportation to help save the environment.

Facts & Figures

Public Transportation Increasing Ridership:

- In 2009, Americans took 10.2 billion trips on public transportation.
- 35 million times each weekday, people board public transportation.
- Since 1995, public transportation ridership has increased 31 percent.

Public Transportation Reduces Greenhouse Gases and Conserves Energy:

- The "leverage effect" of public transportation reduces the nation's carbon emissions by 37 million metric tons annually - equivalent to the electricity used by 4.9 million households.
- To achieve similar reduction in carbon emissions, every household in New York City, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Denver and Los Angeles combined would have to completely stop using electricity.
- People living in households within one-quarter mile of rail or one-tenth mile from a bus stop drive approximately 4,400 fewer miles annually compared to persons in similar households with no access to public transit.
- This equates to an individual household reduction of 223 gallons of gasoline a year.

Public Transportation Reduces Gasoline Consumption:

- The "leverage effect" of public transportation, supporting transportation efficient land use patterns, saves 4.2 billion gallons of gasoline - more than three times the amount of gasoline refined from the oil imported from Kuwait.
- Public transportation use saves the equivalent of 900,000 automobile fill-ups every day.
- The typical public transit rider consumes on average one half of the oil consumed by an automobile rider.

For transportation news and updates visit MassDOT online at our website:

www.mass.gov/massdot, blog: www.mass.gov/blog/transportation, or follow MassDOT on twitter at www.twitter.com/massdot.

For more information on APTA's environmental outreach efforts, contact Virginia Miller at vmiller@apta.com or call 202-496-4816.



Access Advisory Committee

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A reminder- the next AACT meeting will be on
Wednesday, April 28 from 1 to 3 PM.

Please find attached the following: AACT meeting notices, the agenda, an article on the MBTA new Hybrid Buses, the MBTA reports from the System-Wide Accessibility; THE RIDE reports from the Office for Transportation Access; and MBTA contractor reports for THE RIDE from the Joint Venture of Thompson Transit and YCN Transportation LLC, the Veterans Transportation LLC, and the Greater Lynn Senior Services. A Boston Globe article where the reporter attended the February meeting and interviewed several AACT members.

If you have questions or concerns please call 617 973
-7507 or reply to this e mail.

Thank you,

Janie Guion
AACT Coordinator

Cost of rides for disabled soars at T Budget grows twice as fast as ridership

By Noah Bierman, Globe Staff | March 28, 2010

The MBTA's specialized service for the disabled, The Ride, is a lifeline for tens of thousands of people in Eastern Massachusetts, allowing those who are too disabled to drive, ride a bus, or take the subway to make their way to jobs, to stores, to doctors, and home.

But the program, visible through its yellow-striped vans and sedans, has become a huge budget concern for the cash-strapped transit agency, which has quadrupled spending on The Ride from \$21.4 million to \$84.8 million over the past decade.

The Ride, with 36,000 regular users in 60 cities and towns, has grown far faster than any other mode of transportation run by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. The number of trips — nearly 2 million this budget year — has doubled over the past decade, and the program is projected to continue growing as the region's population ages. Four years from now, the MBTA expects The Ride to make 2.6 million trips, at a cost of \$122 million.

As the number of users rises, the cost to the MBTA of each trip is growing even faster. In 2000, the agency spent \$20 for each one-way trip it provided. This year, each trip costs the MBTA \$43, but passengers pay only \$2, the same rate as a cash subway fare.

The MBTA, which each year considers service cuts and fare increases as it struggles to manage heavy debt, offers a variety of general explanations for the huge increases in trips and costs. Officials say they believe the aging population,

cuts in funding for local services to the disabled, and the high quality of The Ride have caused usage to rise, and that high fuel prices, a recently unionized workforce, vehicle maintenance expenses, and improvements to the service itself have driven up costs.

But fiscal watchdogs, including the state auditor, say that a lack of competition, as much as anything, has contributed to the growth in costs for an agency that can ill-afford to leave expenses unchecked. During the years of heavy growth for The Ride, the MBTA has awarded large contracts to the private vendors who run the service with little or no competition. At the same time, several other agencies that provide transportation to the disabled, in Massachusetts and around the country, have taken tougher steps to bring costs under control.

Even MBTA insiders say the agency will have a hard time sustaining The Ride if costs continue climbing at the current pace.

“It’s a very, very expensive way to provide service,” said Grace Shepard, a former MBTA board member. “Yet if you don’t do it, people aren’t going to be able to get around.”

Demand increases

The T began providing special service to disabled riders in 1977, at a time when many transit stations lacked working elevators or escalators. By 1990, with the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, such programs became a requirement for all transit agencies that provide bus service.

“Very few people take paratransit because they want to take it,” said Chris Hart, a consultant and activist who uses a wheelchair and has both sued and consulted for the MBTA.

“They take it because it’s the last option.”

Transportation Secretary Jeffrey B. Mullan said it’s important to recognize that many people flock to The Ride because they need it and “we do a damn good job.” And MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo said the increase in use of The

Ride parallels similar increases “in all transit agencies across the country.”

Former MBTA general manager Daniel A. Grabauskas said the eligibility requirements for The Ride, which are determined by the federal government, are flexible enough that they may encourage some people whose disabilities would not prevent them from riding subways or buses to use The Ride.

“It’s a relatively low cost [to passengers] for door-to-door service,” he said. “We may be carrying more of the population that the system wasn’t necessarily designed to carry.”

Asked how the MBTA prevents fraud by consumers who could ride the subway or buses, Pesaturo said the T determines eligibility based on applications from customers — certified by the customers’ own health care providers — that explain how their disability prevents the use of the regular MBTA system.

The T has made some attempts to persuade people who use The Ride to try the standard bus and subway system, handing out CharlieCards with unlimited free trips and sending managers to address advocacy groups twice a month. MBTA statistics show the cards have been used 186,000 times over the past two years, saving The Ride an estimated \$4.6 million.

The T’s service, in several ways, exceeds federal requirements, covering a larger geographic area than is required, and scheduling rides within 30 minutes of the time requested by each passenger, rather than the 60 minutes required under federal rules. The T also provides door-to-door service for all Ride passengers, even though federal rules allow drivers to drop passengers at the curb unless they request further assistance.

“Our customer base has beat us up for many, many years to continue to get better quality out of the system,” said James

Folk, director of operations for the MBTA. “And that’s why we’re designed the way we are.”

There are complaints from passengers about The Ride: some report difficulty getting through to live dispatchers when vans show up late; some are frustrated that trips need to be scheduled a day in advance; and still others say drivers can be rude. But MBTA statistics show the agency attracts just one formal complaint for every 1,000 trips, a fairly good record for a large transit agency.

Even as the T spends more every year on The Ride, it also spends hundreds of millions of dollars building elevators at old subway stations, equipping buses with lifts for people with wheelchairs, and installing bumpy strips at the edges of subway platforms for the blind. The impetus came from a landmark class-action settlement, in 2006, with the Boston Center for Independent Living, that required the T to spend \$310 million on upgrades over five years.

“The BCIL settlement agreement has done a lot of good,” said Don Summerfield, a disabled activist from Cambridge who usually takes buses and subways. “But it’s allowed naysayers to say ‘I don’t want to spend another dime on those dirty disabled people.’ ”

A service that caters to all

On a recent Thursday morning just before 8, Jean Georges, a 38-year-old Haitian immigrant who has driven for The Ride for six years, pulled out of a Waltham garage full of vans and sedans and into glaring sun, listening to public radio on his way to his first pickup, a sight-impaired couple in West Roxbury with jobs in downtown Boston. To Georges’s right was a screen with a GPS device that told him his schedule, including basic information about his passengers’ needs; behind him was a wheelchair lift to help the mobility-impaired get on and off the van.

Over the course of his day, Georges traveled twice to Beacon Hill, to take an 89-year-old lawyer to her law firm on

Arch Street and later to take a 70-year-old part-time house cleaner home to Dorchester. He made pickups or drop-offs at four medical offices, a grocery, and the Goodwill store in the South End. He typically ferries 14 or 15 passengers a day, he said; on average, each driver carries 1.6 passengers per hour, meaning many vehicles carry just one or two people at a time.

“It’s not just old people getting on the vans,” said Nina Kagan, Georges’s first pickup, a 40-year-old woman who clutched Georges’s arm as she walked into the van. “It’s disabled people getting to their jobs.”

Mary Brault of Medford needed Georges to carry her walker and knapsack while she slowly climbed up three steps to the van’s vinyl seat. She had just visited her eye doctor, near Massachusetts General Hospital, and was depending on The Ride to allow her to swing by CVS to get some medication, to attend a daily Mass, and to have lunch at Wendy’s. Without The Ride, she said, “I wouldn’t go any place. I’d just be staying in my house.”

“It’s too cold and I’m too sick” to use buses and subways, she said. “I can’t hardly breathe.”

By early afternoon, Carly Simon was playing on the radio as Georges helped Pearlina Dorch, one of two wheelchair passengers on the day’s runs, up the mechanical lift at the rear of the van. The 86-year-old woman, who lives near the Christian Science building, was heading to Stop & Shop to catch a sale on crackers and paper towels.

“I know a lot of drivers, and they know me,” Dorch said.

“When they see that I’m the one they’re picking up, then they don’t goof around.”

Dorch lives alone and depends on The Ride to take her food shopping every two weeks, to visit friends at nursing homes, and to attend church, she said.

“I don’t have any other way of traveling,” Dorch said.

Rising costs, few bidders

There are two questions facing the MBTA: The first is whether it can manage the system it has more efficiently. The second is whether that service can be altered without undermining the rights of disabled residents.

Over time, the T has built a program that favors service improvements over cost containment by, for example, providing incentives and penalties, based on on-time performance, to three private ventures that run the service. In 2007, The Ride's costs ranked in the middle of a group of 12 large transit agencies studied by the T. But since then, The Ride's costs have risen by more than \$10 per trip.

Under federal law, the MBTA is allowed to charge users of The Ride no more than twice the amount of the lowest fare on a bus or subway. The cheapest ride on the T is the \$1.25 it costs to ride a bus using a CharlieCard, so theoretically the T could charge users of The Ride as much as \$2.50. But to keep the percentage increase reasonable, the T board instead raised the rate to \$2, from \$1.50, in 2007.

The three operators that run The Ride have all been in place since 1995, reflecting a lack of competition that may contribute to the spiraling costs, according to a report issued in December by state Auditor Joseph DeNucci. In the most recent bidding, last year, two of the companies faced no competition.

"There aren't a lot of companies that do this kind of work," said Paul Strobis Jr., who oversees the contracts for the T. But the auditor argues that the T has not been aggressive enough in encouraging competition or overseeing costs.

"When you have sole-source bidding, there's no incentive for containing costs," said Glenn Briere, a spokesman for DeNucci. In general, he said, "there has been a tendency at the T to enter into contracts that have turned out to be more favorable for the contractor than for the T itself."

Strobis said MBTA managers asked several large companies why they chose not to bid on The Ride contracts

when they were up last year. Some said the timing was bad. Executives at one company felt it would have been too difficult to unseat the incumbent contract holders.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation, which now oversees the T, initiated its own audit of The Ride in November, after its costs were flagged in an outside review. “It is a large cost center,” said Mullan, the transportation secretary. “It’s also a federally mandated program that we are required to provide. That doesn’t mean we can’t and won’t and don’t look at cost.”

Other approaches

Other transit agencies, both inside and outside Massachusetts, have tried more aggressive approaches to trimming costs.

In Fitchburg, the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority runs a state program — similar to The Ride, although with less demanding federal requirements — that takes children and adults to medical and rehabilitation appointments. To keep costs low, the agency deals with 169 small contractors that provide trips in several regions around the state. Each business submits new bids every three months for small batches of trips. A computer program matches passengers with the cheapest available trip, like an online travel agency. Montachusett trips within the Boston region cost the agency \$15.50, or about 40 percent of what the MBTA spends.

“You can maximize the quality, make it a Cadillac service, or maximize how you use public money,” said Bruno Fisher, chief operations officer for Fitchburg’s transit authority.

In Portland, Ore., the local transit agency, TriMet, helped to found and fund a nonprofit agency that coordinates van programs for people with disabilities around the region, which often duplicate one another’s services. The Ride Connection in Portland provides a central telephone number that links customers with a network of shuttle programs, many of which use volunteer drivers. If a senior citizen

needs a ride to the grocery on a Monday, a travel navigator may suggest he wait until Thursday, when a single shuttle can take an entire group from the neighborhood, said James Uyeda, resource manager for the program.

In Seattle, King County Metro Transit spends much more time and money than other transit agencies reviewing passenger records, conducting assessments, and even following passengers with cameras, in an effort to catch people who misuse the special service. As a result, the number of passengers taking the service has grown only about 10 percent over the past decade.

Park Woodworth, who runs Seattle's program, said transit agencies have to scrutinize spending on services for the disabled to preserve them for those who truly need them. "It's something that is taking 10 or more percent of transit's budget, so it's an area that smart transportation agencies are putting a lot of focus on."

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