

TRIANGLE COMMUTER NEWS

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Downtown Parking May Be In For A Renaissance Of Its Own

Although parking in the Golden Triangle has become tighter and more expensive than ever in recent years, additional space for commuters and visitors to Pittsburgh's central business district may be on the horizon. During the past few months, plans to develop a series of major new parking facilities in and around the Golden Triangle have been made public. Several of the proposed parking facilities are expected to be either privately developed or built through public-private financial partnerships. At the same time, as many as eight garages which are currently owned by the city's Parking Authority are being offered to private investors for an asking price of \$78 million to retire current debt and to help finance additional city-owned parking.

The most ambitious of the new facilities would be a garage holding as many as 5,000 cars, just east of the Civic Arena. It would be linked to Steel Plaza 2,200 feet away on Grant Street by a people-mover, possibly using a low-speed form of maglev technology. In May, a group of investors discretely opened discussion of the idea with local officials. Their initial public reactions to the concept were supportive, although both the city and county expressed reticence about offering bond guarantees.

In addition to accommodating a large number of commuters — some of whom would enjoy

easy access to the I-279 North HOV-lane — a project of its type could also improve pedestrian access to the Civic Arena, promote development above PAT's current Steel Plaza LRT station, and help to spawn new maglev-related industry in the region, according to county spokesman Kevin McGavick.

Parking rates for the new Civic Arena facility may prove to be an obstacle, however. With proposed parking fees of \$10 a day, which may be required to finance the project's construction, it is unclear whether the garage would be able to tap into the same pool of commuters who currently park at the Arena's open lot for \$3.75. Parking Authority garages, for example, currently provide all-day parking within the Golden Triangle for \$7.50. However private garages along Grant Street, including ones at USX Tower and One Mellon Center, now fetch as much as \$15.

Another garage project, led by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, would be sited at the corner of Penn Avenue and Seventh Street in conjunction with a new office tower whose anchor tenant is expected to be Federated Investors. The 650-car garage, which would accommodate office workers and short-term visitors during normal work hours, would feature an unusually large number of exits to handle the high volume of traffic generated by patrons leaving town after major evening

cultural events. At this point, neither the Cultural Trust or Civic Arena projects have construction timetables associated with them.

However, groundwork on a 500-car garage being built in conjunction with the new downtown Lazarus department store at Wood Street and Fifth Avenue is already underway. The centrally-located garage, which will be owned by the Pittsburgh Economic and Industrial Development Corporation, leased to the Parking Authority, and operated by a private management firm, will feature rates and hours of operation designed to accommodate shoppers and other short-term users. It is expected to be ready by the time the store opens in late 1998.

This past summer, Pittsburgh's Parking Authority abandoned its plan to build a 1,400 car garage along First Avenue between the Liberty and Panhandle bridges, near the new Municipal Courts building. The \$17 million project fell apart when PAT found itself unable to commit to building a new \$13 million LRT stop for garage patrons. As an alternative, the proposed garage site — which is now operated as a surface parking lot by the city — will be expanded by the addition of an adjacent city-owned parcel of land, as well as by the purchase of a 5-acre property formerly owned by CSX, into a 900-space surface lot linked to town by a free shuttle van. ▲

PAT Ponders New Downtown Bus Routing System

The initial fact-finding stage of a two-year Port Authority study leading to a complete overhaul of its bus routing system through downtown Pittsburgh has now concluded, according to PAT spokeswoman Christine Evans. Over the next few months the project's second phase, which involves analyzing reams of traffic and passenger information collected earlier this year and running computerized tests on eight alternative downtown loops, will be conducted.

The study, which grew out of PAT's Airport Busway project, initially focused on optimizing the flow of buses in and out of town along its soon-to-be-built 8.1 mile right-of-way. However its findings are closely linked to the

agency's concern over the impact of Ft. Pitt bridge construction on current bus schedules and routes. On a normal weekday, nearly 1,000 buses cross the Ft. Pitt Bridge. The 30-year old span is slated to go into restricted service during two years of deck replacement and structural repairs once the new Airport Busway to Carnegie is completed in 2001.

As part of the study, PAT is examining the routes of all its buses that enter the Golden Triangle. With downtown serving as the hub in PAT's radial hub-and-spoke system, buses serving almost 100 separate routes now loop through the city's central business district. Other transit operators in the region with service into Pittsburgh, including BCTA,

Mid-Mon Valley, Westmoreland County Transit and GG&C Bus Lines, are also participating in the study.

The initial phase of the study, which was conducted under PAT supervision by consulting engineers Michael Baker, Inc. and McCormick-Rankin International, collected information on downtown office space, employment statistics, parking conditions and auto traffic as well as its own boarding and discharge patterns. The study's implementation phase, which cannot be completed until the new Airport Busway opens, is expected to improve the performance of the region's entire bus fleet. ▲



New Pitt Vans Experiencing Few Gas Pains

Twenty University of Pittsburgh passenger vans powered by natural gas were introduced into service during 1996.

Handling characteristics of the vans, which replaced a similar number of 15-passenger gasoline-powered vehicles at Pitt, are indistinguishable from conventionally-fueled vans, according to university transportation director Bob Harkins. "We've had no problems at all with the natural gas components," he said. "The drivers have reported no differential in terms of performance, or power, or shifting or anything like that. Unless you tell somebody they're in a vehicle powered by natural gas, they can't tell."

The new Chrysler Corporation vans, which are operated as part of an already-established university vanpool program serving 15 separate groups of riders, arrived factory-equipped for natural gas use. A South Side

natural gas pump, operated by Equitable Gas Company, is used to refuel the vans. Details concerning the construction of an Oakland station, which had been part of the original plan, are still being worked out, according to Harkins.

Behavioral and technical analyses are also integral parts of the university's natural gas van project. The research is funded through a \$700,000 three-year federal research grant, now in its second year. Transportation engineer Graham Bullen of Pitt's Engineering School is conducting a study of commuter profiles to ascertain who is most likely to use van pooling and why. Professor James Cobb, a specialist in fossil fuels, is analyzing emissions and engine wear to document the potential environmental effects of a large-scale conversion to alternate fuels by commercial vehicles in the region.

To help encourage such vehicle conversions,

natural gas is exempt from road use taxes, no matter who uses it. As a result, the fuel cost is equivalent to about 75¢ a gallon, Harkins said.

Interest in demonstrating the practicality of natural gas as a motor fuel is now very keen. "We had support from the state, we had support from the federal government, we had support from Equitable," Harkins noted. "All of them have pitched in funds to support and to get this project off the ground. It's been a very unique blending of state, federal, local, public and private commercial ventures to get this going."

Funds to support natural gas conversion initiatives through federal CMAQ (Congestion Management and Air Quality) grants funded by ISTEA were part of the 1995-1999 Transportation Improvement Program that SPRPC promoted two years ago. ▲

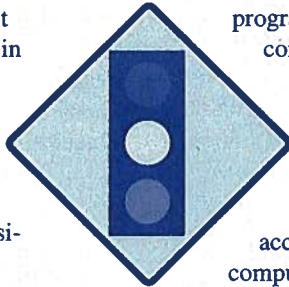
Centralized Downtown Traffic Signals About To Get Green Light

This coming fall, one of the most significant traffic improvements in a generation will come on line in downtown Pittsburgh. But its arrival comes with an irony, according to city traffic engineer Darryl Phillips: if it works well it will be all but invisible to the public.

The project, which carries the unwieldy name of Computerized Traffic Responsive Traffic Control System or CTRTCS, will eventually place most of the city's 600 traffic signals under the control of a centralized computer. The computer, which constantly monitors the city's changing traffic conditions, will have the ability to select signal timing programs accordingly.

Phase I of CTRTCS, which included the installation of fiber optic cables and underground conduits throughout the Golden Triangle, will centrally control downtown Pittsburgh's 93 traffic lights as well as five more in the Station Square area. Loop detectors buried in the middle of most downtown blocks have also been installed to track the flow of traffic and to relay that information to the system's central computer, which is expected to arrive next fall.

Once it's up and running, the system will select from a library of timing plans previously developed by traffic engineers and



programmed into the computer. The computer will choose the best timing plan based on traffic conditions as monitored by the system's loop detectors.

"We're going to be starting out with six timing plans," according to Mr. Phillips. "The computer will have the capability to operate on time-of-day, as we do now.

But it could also monitor the traffic flow and determine that even though it may be 9:00 in the morning, a different timing plan would be the most appropriate.

"Once the system's operational, things like stadium events, cultural district events, and Civic Arena events will all have special timing plans. As the traffic starts to build at the end of a Steelers game, for example, the signals in the downtown area would react and go to their special timing plan," he said.

Although no specific performance criteria have been set for the CTRTCS, other major cities which have installed comparable systems have always seen improvements in traffic flow, according to Mr. Phillips. A similar result was found in study by SPRPC completed in 1996. It determined that significant improvements in travel times would result if the region's 2,000 traffic lights were re-timed. "Projects like this have often resulted in 25% reductions in vehicle

delay and fuel consumption," Mr. Phillips said.

Other municipalities in the region are also improving safety and easing traffic flow by adding computer technology to their own traffic signals. For example, all 34 of the intersections controlled by traffic lights in Monroeville are currently outfitted with sophisticated microprocessors, some of which actually control two or three nearby intersections. But a long-term project to link as many as 20 of them to a central computer with the capability of overriding the local controllers is now well underway. In addition, a system allowing emergency vehicles to preempt local signal timing as they approach busy intersections is also being installed on at least 20 of the municipality's traffic lights.

Pittsburgh's CTRTCS project, which has been primarily financed by federal grants, will likely never extend to control every traffic signal in Pittsburgh. However, Mr. Phillips pointed out, electronic monitoring of the city's various intersections by loop detectors would offer planning and maintenance capabilities that are not otherwise available. "But that's obviously down the line," he said. "In the future, money for expansion will be put where it's most effective." ▲

Transit Service Extends North And West Of Town

Two new transit routes went into service during the closing months of 1996 linking downtown Pittsburgh with two of the region's fastest-growing areas: the Airport Area and southwestern Butler County.

On November 18, Port Authority Transit introduced its Airport Flyer service. Also known as the 28X, PAT's new route is served 19 hours a day, 7 days a week, by five leased wheelchair-accessible minibuses that shuttle riders between the Airport, the Golden Triangle and Oakland for \$1.95 in each direction. Along the way, they also loop through Robinson Town Centre, for which passengers are charged \$1.60. Total travel time from Carnegie Mellon University to the upper-level departure area of Pittsburgh International Airport is 44 minutes off-peak, 51 minutes during rush hours.

Rider acceptance along the new route was immediate. During its first three weeks the service, which departs at 45 minute intervals starting at 5:30 AM, carried 3,200 passengers. Its riders include a mix of airport workers,

airline travelers, and shoppers. On the Sunday after Thanksgiving—one of the busiest retail days of the year—PAT was forced to add another 17 trips, primarily to accommodate riders shopping at Robinson Town Centre. As ridership patterns stabilize and the agency gains experience with its new service, additional schedule refinements will be made, according to PAT customer service representative Christine Evans.

North of town, beginning December 9, the Butler County Transit Authority began offering regular bus service from the city of Butler, through Evans City, Zelienople and Cranberry, to as far south as Northway Mall on McKnight Road in Ross Township. Its Wednesday-only schedule of service to the North Hills is designed to dovetail with PAT's 12A North Hills Shopper route, which serves other North Hills shopping sites as well as downtown Pittsburgh. On the remaining weekdays, its service stays within Butler County.

As in the case of PAT's Airport Flyer, Butler

County's new service, which has been funded for a year-long test, uses a 20-passenger minibus. However it is primarily directed to shoppers rather than commuters and it maintains a schedule that varies in frequency and routing according to the day of the week. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, operating hours begin at 8:00 AM and conclude at 5:40 PM. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, service starts at 8:35 AM and ends at either 5:22 or 4:39 PM, depending on the day.

Within fairly narrow limits and by advance reservation, the new Butler Transit service will deviate from its primary route to pick up disabled passengers. However, to avoid unduly lengthening travel times for other passengers, departures from normal routes will be restricted to stops within a quarter-mile of its official departure points. Four round trips are scheduled every weekday but Wednesday, when increased one-way running times of as long as 112 minutes limit service to three round trips. Cash fares vary from \$1.25 to \$2.00, depending on distance. ▲

Vanpool Riders Needed

Weekday vanpools to downtown Pittsburgh depart from and return to communities throughout the region. Current passenger openings include the following:

From: Butler

Work Times: 7:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Penny Furne
Phone: 281-8799

From: Butler

Work times: 7:00 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$94
Contact: Thomas Shewalter
Phone: 562-6722

From: Greensburg, Jeannette, Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Elaine Cutway
Phone: 434-2192

From: Greensburg

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Harry Keenan
Phone: 227-7750

From: Greensburg, Irwin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$100
Contact: Colleen Stubbs
Phone: 471-5300 x252

From: Imperial

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Ronald Senovich
Phone: 681-8311

From: Irwin, North Huntingdon

Work times: 8:30 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$110
Contact: Patrick Rafferty
Phone: 565-2169

From: Irwin, North Huntindon

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Joe Goffner
Phone: 236-2913

From: Latrobe

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$100
Contact: LuAnne Stepanic
Phone: 236-1945

From: Lower Burrell, Vandergrift

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Dom Antoniono
Phone: 594-5155

From: McKeesport, Versailles

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: William Bury
Phone: 392-8773

From: Monaca, Ambridge

Work times: 8:00 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Cindy Robinson
Phone: 234-0517

From: Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$84
Contact: Harry Banks
Phone: 433-4835

From: Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Frank Triolo
Phone: 255-7508

From: New Kensington, Plum

Work times: 8:00 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$83
Contact: George Carabin
Phone: 433-3432

From: North Huntingdon

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$68
Contact: Bill Conley
Phone: 433-4771

From: North Huntingdon, Irwin

Work times: 8:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$93
Contact: Don Douglass
Phone: 236-2908

From: Pleasant Hills

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Wade Fox
Phone: 391-5590 x 312

From: Robinson

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$93
Contact: Ray Terpack
Phone: 633-3792

From: Washington, Cannonsburg

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$95
Contact: Kathleen Jones
Phone: 234-5979

From: West Newton, Belle Vernon

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Sandra Rees
Phone: 227-3030

From: White Oak, North Versailles

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$72
Contact: Debbie Manning
Phone: 762-2709

From: Robinson

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$93
Contact: Ray Terpack
Phone: 633-3792

From: Washington, Cannonsburg

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$95
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Phone: 762-2709



Fragments Of A Bicycle Path Network Are Coming Together

Piece by piece, a network of bicycle paths leading into downtown Pittsburgh is beginning to take shape. In addition to serving as scenic enhancements and recreational assets, these pathways offer commuters who have both time and stamina the possibility of traveling safely into the Golden Triangle by muscle power alone. Although progress has been slower than many local cyclists had hoped for, a series of developments during the last quarter of 1996 have put such a bicycle network closer to reality.

* The city's December purchase of land from CSX Railways for a 900-car fringe parking lot near the new Municipal Courts building included a right-of-way extending several miles further east along Second Avenue to the bottom of Greenfield Avenue. The city plans to build a Park 'n Ride lot with federal funds at the Greenfield end. A Riverfront Trail for bicyclists and pedestrians will follow the corridor to the fringe lot, where shuttle buses will whisk riders into downtown.

* When land becomes available, the city plans to extend the bike and pedestrian pathway into Schenley Park and Oakland via Panther Hollow. The city is also studying the possibility of converting the J&L hot metal bridge which links the Pittsburgh Technology Center

with the South Side and with the Three Rivers Heritage Trail on the south shore of the Monongahela, into a bicycle-pedestrian facility.

* Between the East End and Oakland, new wayfinder signs will be posted by early spring marking three different bicycle routes along lightly traveled neighborhood streets.

* A bicycle advocacy group developing the Steel Heritage Trail is attempting to put a trail across the Glenwood Bridge, less than five miles from downtown and within striking distance of the newly acquired CSX property in Greenfield. The Steel Heritage Trail picks up where the Three Rivers Heritage Trail leaves off and follows the Mon-Yough Valley south. Both trails are segments of the Allegheny Trail, which begins in Pittsburgh and continues east as far as Washington, DC.

* The city's proposed new Nine-Mile Run housing development, sited on an abandoned slag dump just east of Squirrel Hill, is also expected to be served by a trail. That trail will likely be linked to the Three Rivers Heritage Trail at the Monongahela River, a short distance up river from the Homestead Bridge.

* A proposal to build a linear park in conjunction with the Port Authority's East Busway

extension is now part of PAT's request for final design work on the project. The Pennsylvania Mainline Interborough Linear Park, as it is called by its promoters, would include a footpath and bikeway connecting a series of communities between Edgewood and Braddock. The trail would parallel the recessed busway and sometimes follow a cantilevered surface above it. It would also provide an opportunity to be linked to the Steel Heritage Trail somewhere in Swissvale.

* Along both sides of the Allegheny, progress on portions of various trails is continuing. They include a major riverside route promoted by Friends of the Riverfront as well as other new trail segments following the river in Lawrenceville, on Washington's Landing, in Millvale, and along the North Shore on Pittsburgh's Near North Side.

* SPRPC is required by federal law to prepare a bicycle and pedestrian component of its long-range regional transportation plan. Work on such a plan will involve using the agency's geographic information system to outline a potential bicycle network for the region that includes the work of numerous local trail development groups and coordinates the linkage of their projects. ▲

What Do You Think?

If you would like to comment on any of the articles in this issue of *Triangle Commuter News* or if you have any story ideas or commuter-related issues that you would like to see developed in future editions, please write or call us at the address noted on the mailing panel, below. ▲



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The Waterfront • 200 First Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15222 • Phone: (412) 391-5590
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