

August 2008

OmniNews

Hearings Set For Fare Increase

Public hearings will be held in September on PRTC's proposed fare increase and a fare indexing policy. The public may comment on the proposal at the hearings or by submitting comments in writing to PRTC by September 12, 2008.

Written comments may be sent to publichearings@OmniRide.com or mailed to PRTC or dropped off at 14700 Potomac Mills Road, Woodbridge, VA 22192.

Public hearings will be held on:

Sept. 2 and Sept. 11 at Manassas City Hall. Separate presentations will begin at 5 p.m. and

again at 7 p.m.; public comments will follow the presentations.

Sept. 3 and Sept. 10 at the PRTC Transit Center. Presentations will begin at 6:30 p.m.; public comments will follow the presentation.

Under the current proposal, PRTC's discounted fare policy for seniors and those with disabilities would be sustained, and those fares would be no more than half the new cash fares.

Here are the current proposals:

(Continued on page 3)

Fuel Costs and Increased Ridership Lead to Proposed Fare Hike & Budget Changes



By Alfred H. Harf,
Executive Director
of PRTC

Over the course of the past few months, all of America has been making

a painful adjustment to the rapid run-up in fuel prices. For PRTC, this has meant spending much more than budgeted on fuel and experiencing an unprecedented ridership surge as people seek refuge from higher fuel prices.

Since February, ridership on PRTC's OmniRide / Metro-Direct bus services has increased by 17.3% while ridership on the OmniLink / Cross County Connector bus services has increased by 21.4%

These spikes have strained available capacity despite the fact that PRTC has added trips to relieve persistent overcrowding.

Taking stock of these continuing effects, PRTC management created a plan of countermeasures that was approved in principle by the PRTC Board of Commissioners on July 17, 2008. The plan has four major elements:

1. Adjustments to PRTC's FY 2009 budget to:

-Supplement how much is budgeted for bus service so more can be operated as growing ridership warrants;

-Increase the fuel budget; and

-Reduce non-essential budgeted

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

PRTC Preparing A New Website	2
Outstanding Operators	3
I Want to Know...	4

Factors Behind the Proposed Fare Hike

(Continued from page 1)

expenses and tap higher-than-anticipated state assistance to free up resources that can partly fund higher service and fuel costs;

2. Expedited purchase of budgeted additional buses and fareboxes to expand the fleet and add capacity;

3. A proposed FY 2009 fare increase and fare indexing policy for FY 2010 and beyond; and

4. A proposed supplemental appropriation from PRTC's bus-sponsoring jurisdictions.

The additional projected fuel expense and service hours will require an extra \$1.6 million in FY 2009. The combination of funding sources to close this \$1.6 million gap was carefully conceived to rely in part on our riders, in part on our local government sponsors (the taxpayers-at-large), and in part on management resourcefulness in these extraordinary times.

As currently proposed, the fare increase would yield approximately \$367,000 in FY 2009 while the supplemental appropriation would be \$535,000. The remainder would come through deferred budgeted expenses, higher-than-expected state funding and increased passenger revenue.

I encourage everyone to visit PRTC's website, www.PRTCtransit.org to view a PowerPoint presentation that gives an unabridged account of the plan and the factors giving rise to it. The plan also addresses changes in transfer practices necessitated by Metro's decision to eliminate paper transfers effective at the end of the calendar year.

Naturally the proposed fare increase element of the plan is of particular interest to passengers, so I'll elaborate on that element further. It should be understood that the fare increase and the fare indexing proposals are just that – proposals – that riders and all other interested parties will be asked to review and comment on before the PRTC Board is asked to actually adopt them.

The review and comment period will continue into September, with public hearings on September 2, 3, 10 and 11. In addition, comments may be sub-

mitted in email or in writing to PRTC by September 12, 2008. The email address is publichearings@OmniRide.com (please type "public hearing" in the subject line.) Written comments also may be dropped off or mailed to 14700 Potomac Mills Road, Woodbridge, VA 22192.

Once the public comment period is closed, PRTC management will review the comments received and finalize a proposal for the PRTC Board's consideration at its October 2, 2008 meeting. Assuming a fare increase is ultimately adopted, implementation would take effect in the November / December 2008 timeframe.

Although a fare increase was not originally envisioned for PRTC's FY 2009 budget, nor was diesel fuel costs in excess of \$4 per gallon. PRTC also appreciates the fact that fare increases are not something that any rider will welcome, but the extraordinary circumstances we're confronting compel us to propose an increase as one prong of a three-pronged funding strategy.

We do look forward to hearing from you on both the fare increase proposal and the overall plan. Remember — all comments must be received by September 12, 2008. ■

PRTC Launching New Website

PRTC's new website is scheduled to debut this month. The address remains the same, PRTCtransit.org, but the new website has more user-friendly features including interactive Google Maps-based system and route maps. Among the new features:

- Rollover and dropdown menus;
- Buttons to print and email web pages and to change the font size; and
- Quick translation to six foreign languages.

The new website also has a variety of new content including a listing of notable places that can be accessed along each route. ■

Public Hearings Set

(Continued from page 1)

OmniRide

\$4.75/trip with SmarTrip (\$0.75/trip or 18.75% more than at present)

\$6.50/trip with cash (\$1.00/trip more than at present)

Metro-Direct

\$2.40/trip with SmarTrip (\$0.30/trip or 14.3% more than at present)

\$3.00/trip with cash (\$0.50/trip more than at present)

OmniLink / Cross County Connector Option One

\$1.10/trip with SmarTrip or cash (\$0.10/trip or 10% more than at present)

\$2.50 for day pass (\$0.25 more than at present)

OmniLink / Cross County Connector Option Two

\$1.00/trip with SmarTrip (no change from current fare)

\$1.25/trip with cash (\$0.25/trip more than at present)

\$2.50 for day pass (\$0.25 more than at present)

Along with the proposed fare increase, PRTC also proposes to implement a fare indexing policy so future fare increases will be more predictable.

The proposal also addresses changes in transfer practices necessitated by Metro's decision to eliminate paper transfers effective at the end of the calendar year. □

Outstanding Operators

First Transit, the contract provider for PRTC's bus services, chooses one outstanding operator each month for special recognition. If you have a compliment about your operator, please let us know.

Jeanette Bermudez — April 2008

Ms. Bermudez is a very skilled and professional operator who always greets her customers with a smile. She has been with First Transit for two years and currently operates a Dale City OmniRide trip in the mornings and a Lake Ridge OmniRide trip in the afternoons. □

Pamela Jordan — May 2008

A member of the First Transit team for nearly 1 1/2 years, Ms. Jordan is a true professional in all aspects of her on-the-job performance. She is a strategic driver, able to fill in on any OmniRide or OmniLink route at a moment's notice and is currently learning how to dispatch the buses. □

Dorcas Mensah — June 2008

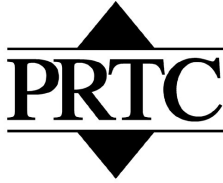
Ms. Mensah is known for her sweet personality, her professional demeanor and her knowledge of all the commuter and local bus routes. She is currently a strategic driver, able to fill in on any OmniRide or OmniLink route when necessary. □

PRTC Adopts Title VI Non-Discrimination Policy

PRTC is committed to a policy of non-discrimination in the conduct of its business, including its federal Title VI responsibilities — the delivery of equitable and accessible transportation services. PRTC recognizes its responsibilities to the communities in which it operates and to the society it services.

It is PRTC's policy to utilize its best efforts to assure that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under its program of transit service delivery and related benefits.

To view the full Non-Discrimination policy, please visit PRTC's website at www.PRTCtransit.org, click the "About Us" button and then go to "Passenger Rights." □



Potomac and Rappahannock
Transportation Commission

PRTC

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**Serving Prince William County,
Manassas and Manassas Park**

I Want to Know...

Has PRTC considered using alternative fuels? —R. M.

PRTC is monitoring the experiences of other transit agencies that are using alternative fuels. This information will help us assess whether alternative fuels would be more cost-effective than the current practice, which uses 100% ultra low-sulfur diesel.

Potentially promising possibilities include compressed natural gas (CNG), hybrid-electric, and a different fuel mix combining diesel and bio fuels like soy. The comparative economics are not yet at the point that any of these alternatives would be more cost-effective than the ultra low-sulfur diesel.

Both CNG and hybrid-electric

buses cost much more than diesel-powered buses, and the former also would require the construction of a new fueling facility costing millions of dollars. So there would have to be fuel cost savings over the life of the bus sufficient to justify these added, up-front costs.

At this point, the savings being reported by the operators who have purchased such buses have not been large enough to justify the investment in purely economic terms. However, a continuing rise in diesel fuel prices and eventual reductions in bus purchase costs clearly have the potential to alter this conclusion.

Another factor that bears on this decision is bus reliability, and

experience to-date comparing the reliability of conventional diesel-powered buses vs. alternative fueled buses has been mixed.

The use of biodiesel instead of 100% diesel also has promise, but again the comparative economics are not yet favorable. It should also be said that bio-diesel fuel mixes are predominantly diesel because manufacturers will honor engine warranties only if the "bio" content is kept small.

Of course, nothing is forever so the conditions I've described here may change as more alternative fuel vehicles enter the nation's bus fleets. This is something PRTC will keep an eye on going forward. ■