

TRIANGLE COMMUTER NEWS

NOVEMBER 1994

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Ridesharing? Call 471-POOL



Buses Get the Green Light



Port Authority buses operating along Saw Mill Run Boulevard are about to exercise an advantage not available to ordinary passenger cars. As the buses approach any of six key intersections, a special transponder installed on board will silently activate a receiver at the intersection. If the traffic light is green as the bus approaches, the signal will remain green for an extra few seconds — long enough to allow the bus to pass through the intersection — before it turns red. However as a safety measure, if the signal is already yellow or red as the bus approaches, nothing unusual happens. PAT's "extended green light" program is a \$52,000 demonstration project being conducted jointly with PennDOT. It is part of a concerted effort to encourage South Hills commuters to use public transit as a way of mitigating the massive traffic jams expected from the pending closure of the Fort Pitt Bridge and Tunnel for rehabilitation. The traffic signal technology which PAT has installed on 50 of its buses has already been tested and put into use in various other U.S. cities, including Cleveland. ▲

Study Targets Incentives to Ridesharing

Carpool information, transit vouchers, a third-party vanpool program, and a guaranteed ride home are the strategies which hold greatest promise for increased ridesharing among commuters to the Golden Triangle, according to a recent study conducted for SPRPC by the COMSIS Corporation. In addition to identifying a system of incentives, the study proposed a "Three Rivers Commuter Assistance Program" geared toward reducing traffic by raising the number of riders per vehicle.

Increasing the region's use of ridesharing will be an uphill struggle, the study points out. Solo driving increased from 62% to 67% of the commuting population between 1980 and 1990, and PAT ridership recently hit a 30-year low. Cheap fuel, free parking, and a decline in the share of overall travel represented by work trips, have all contributed to the growth in single-occupancy vehicles. As a result, an oil embargo or a shock to the traffic system of the magnitude that a Fort Pitt Bridge-Tunnel rehabilitation project would create, may be required to reverse the trend away from ridesharing, the study notes.

In conducting its research, COMSIS surveyed more than 200 employers in downtown Pittsburgh and convened focus

groups of company representatives as well as solo commuters. Their goals were to identify the problems that people associated with ridesharing and to determine what incentives would be most likely to succeed in attracting workers and their employers into company-approved commuter assistance programs.

A number of solo drivers noted that the flexibility and convenience they expect in their working lives are not consistent with conventional ridesharing incentives. The lower cost of ridesharing did not appear to be a major incentive in attracting solo drivers toward pooled commuting. Saving time, on the other hand, was seen as an important advantage to traveling by private car. As a result, even though a number of different approaches each hold the potential to reduce solo driving to some extent, the study concluded, no single approach is likely to succeed by itself. However a comprehensive program, based on a cooperative effort between employers and those who provide the ridesharing services, may work, the study said. Such programs have a greater likelihood of success if they are well promoted, involve a variety of incentives, and provide ridesharing alternatives under the umbrella of a single workable program, according to the study. ▲

Bicycle Commuting Gains Status In Region

Bit by bit, bicycle enthusiasts are winning the support of public officials for a region-wide network of bike trails and bike lanes. Unlike the closed-loop recreational bike trails now in many public parks, the regional bikeway system contemplated by its supporters would link different communities and destinations to one another. It would, for the first time, provide safe routes for bike riders to commute into

Oakland and the Golden Triangle from residential neighborhoods and suburban communities.

Segments of some trails have already open in parts of the region. A portion of the Three Rivers Heritage Trail, which will ultimately stretch twelve miles from Washington's Landing on the North Side to Sandcastle Water Park in the Hays section of Pittsburgh, opened on October 22.

An eleven-mile segment of the Butler-Freeport Trail opened in early November. The Allegheny portion of the Yough River Trail, which will eventually lead all the way to Washington DC, opened on October 8. And other trail segments, including portions of the 52-mile Montour Trail, have already been completed.

Other trail projects are in the works, *Continued on page 4*

Broadcast Traffic Reporters Keep Commuters in the Fast Lane

Before leaving for work, and again on their way back home, Tri-state area commuters can grab a quick roundup of road conditions from their choice of broadcast traffic reports. Along the way, they can learn how far traffic is backed up, where construction has restricted traveling lanes, whether accidents have forced new detours, and other current information to help them plan their routes and estimate their arrival times.

Three reporting services, each with its own distinctive operating methods and roster of broadcast stations, cover Pittsburgh's traffic scene every working day. With reports scheduled at frequent intervals throughout the morning and afternoon rush hours, commuters can follow unfolding conditions, watch for unexpected detours, and find alternate routes when needed.

Over the years, a long list of local radio stations initiated, and later discontinued, their own traffic reports. Helicopters and fixed wing aircraft duelled for position over key traffic arteries in cities all around the country. Even stations that couldn't afford to operate a plane used helicopter sound effects to accompany their reports, according to industry insiders. Today in Pittsburgh, just three traffic reporting organizations serve all of the region's major radio and TV outlets.

AAA —

Veteran radio reporter-producer Jay Pochapin has run the West Penn/West Virginia AAA traffic reporting service single handedly since 1983. From the 62nd floor of the USX Tower in downtown Pittsburgh, Pochapin is able to see traffic throughout the Golden Triangle and for several miles up each of the three river valleys.



Although about two-thirds of what he reports is learned by observing from his 850-foot perch above Grant Street, Pochapin also relies on a variety of other sources. He regularly scans 60 different emergency radio frequencies, talks by phone to state police and PennDOT, solicits calls from commuters with mobile phones, and works with the KDKA newsroom staff. His reports are carried on KDKA radio and television five days a week.

Hearst Corporation — On most days, aviator Neal Spense feeds live traffic reports to Pittsburgh's Hearst broadcasting stations — WTAE-AM, WTAE-TV and Variety 96 FM — from a cruising altitude of 2,000 feet, or approximately 1,000 feet above



ground level. In addition to piloting a chartered high-performance Cessna through local skies, Spense also serves as the stations' traffic spotter and on-air reporter. An 18-year veteran of local traffic reporting, Spense has cultivated a network of emergency service workers who regularly keep him posted about noteworthy developments. He is also in constant contact with news staff members at WTAE, who monitor an assortment of other news sources and relay developments on to him. As a result, in addition to keeping commuters abreast of traffic developments, Spense has sometimes been in the position of breaking news stories which are unrelated to road conditions.

Metro Traffic

Control — A nationwide service headquartered in Houston, Texas, Metro Traffic supplies traffic reports to radio and TV stations in 51 U.S. cities as well as several European capitals.



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Detours, Delays and Diversions

A series of major road and bridge closings affecting traffic into downtown Pittsburgh are in the process of being lifted as the region's construction season winds down. The Tenth Street Bridge to Pittsburgh's South Side, the Seventh Street Bridge to the North Side, the Smithfield Street Bridge between downtown and Station Square, the Eckert Street Bridge along Ohio River Boulevard, and the Monongahela Incline to Mt. Washington are among a number of key transportation assets which are back in service, at least through the winter season. However the Smithfield Street Bridge will be closed again next year to allow sandblasting and repainting.



Among the projects which will affect traffic during the coming months:

Sixth Street Bridge. The last of the three Allegheny River sister bridges to be rehabilitated, the Sixth Street Bridge linking downtown to the North Side will be closed to all traffic through September, 1995.

Freeport Road. Rehabilitation of Freeport Road through Harmar's commercial district between Rt. 910 and the Turnpike will create lane restrictions and lengthy traffic delays through late November, when work on the project will be suspended until it resumes in the spring.

I-79. A 4.5 mile concrete slab replacement project in both directions between Robinson and Groveton will limit traffic to one lane in each direction through Thanksgiving. A separate repair project, along a one mile segment of the highway between Canonsburg and Southpointe, will also restrict traffic through late November. ▲

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Transportation Demand Management Strategies Approved By SPRPC

A long-range transportation plan adopted by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission on September 26 has incorporated a series of transportation demand measures intended to reduce solo driving, particularly for work trips. The Commission's plan serves as the basis for federal transportation funding in the region.

Five separate strategies, which the plan visualizes using in combination, are voluntary in nature. They are expected to cut the region's single-occupancy vehicle traffic by five percent through the year 2015. The five transportation demand management measures identified in the plan include increased efforts to promote ridesharing, such as ride matching services and preferential parking for pool vehicles; employee benefit programs such as "TransitChek" to provide incentives for employees to pool rides and use public transit; aggressive promotion of flexible work hours to flatten travel peaks; promoting and supporting the use of telecommunications as an alternative to

traditional commuting; and implementing new information technologies collectively known as Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems to improve travel choices.

The plan, which federal law required SPRPC to complete by October 1, was crafted to address a long series of planning requirements, including a reduction in exhaust emissions. The plan's emphasis on shifting single occupancy traffic into more efficient modes of travel is a response to the transportation law's close ties to U.S. Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. The degree of emphasis on these strategies varies with each region's air quality status. In several metropolitan areas with serious or severe air quality problems, such measures are mandatory and far more extensive than in southwestern Pennsylvania.

SPRPC's adoption of a long range transportation plan has made programs designed to promote its transportation demand management strategies eligible for federal support. ▲

Broadcast Traffic Reporters Keep Commuters in the Fast Lane *Continued from page 2*

In addition to providing its familiar on-air coverage for approximately 25 Pittsburgh-area broadcasters, Metro Traffic offers a specialized pre-dawn regional broadcast service directed to long-distance truckers, which focuses on Interstate highway and weather conditions. For its Pittsburgh-area rush hour operation, Metro Traffic keeps a chartered plane aloft and features periodic reports from an on-board traffic spotter, as well as live reports from its operating hub, housed in Allegheny Center. Six on-air announcers, including Carol Finelli and Greg McAtee, provide reports to subscribing radio and TV stations in southwestern Pennsylvania. In addition to monitoring area emergency services, Metro Traffic maintains contact with an assortment of transit operators and commercial fleets in the region. It also works closely with experimental advanced-technology traffic information systems in selected metropolitan areas throughout the country. ▲

Vanpool Riders Needed

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

From: Export, Murrysville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$88
Contact: Barry Ryan
Phone: 234-6152

From: Gibsonia

Work times: 7:30 - 4:15
Monthly fare: \$78
Contact: John Guadagnino
Phone: 433-6254

From: Greensburg

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$92
Contact: Gary McConnell
Phone: 644-6695

From: Holiday Park, Plum, Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Richard Conrad
Phone: 281-6900

From: Imperial

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$64
Contact: Ronald J. Senovich
Phone: 681-8311

From: Irwin, N. Huntingdon

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Joe Goffner
Phone: 236-2913

From: Irwin, N. Huntingdon

Work times: 8:30 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Donald Douglass
Phone: 234-5230

From: Irwin, N. Huntingdon

Work times: 8:30 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Patrick Rafferty
Phone: 565-2169

From: Mars, Valencia

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$76
Contact: Patrick Dickson
Phone: 433-4549

From: Monaca, Ambridge

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$85
Contact: Cindy Robinson
Phone: 234-0517

From: Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Harry Banks
Phone: 433-4835

From: Murrysville, Monroeville

Work times: 8:00 - 4:45
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: Mark Gibson
Phone: 497-6792

From: Natrona Heights, Allegheny Valley

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$92
Contact: Carolyn Nulph
Phone: 261-3640

From: Pleasant Hills

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$65
Contact: Wade Fox
Phone: 391-5590 x312

From: Plum Boro, Penn Hills

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$70
Contact: John F. Smith
Phone: 255-7717

From: Robinson Twp., Forest Grove

Work times: 7:30 - 4:30
Monthly fare: \$75
Contact: Ray Terpack
Phone: 633-3792

From: Steubenville, Weirton

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$80
Contact: Don Lawrence
Phone: 321-3129

From: Washington, Meadowlands

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$90
Contact: Steve Lissan
Phone: 433-5390

From: Weirton, W.Va.

Work times: 8:00 - 5:15
Monthly fare: \$82
Contact: Dana Grim
Phone: 255-4432

From: West Mifflin

Work times: 8:00 - 5:00
Monthly fare: \$65
Contact: Adesta T. Kondas
Phone: 633-3892





PAT Upgrades its Snow Emergency Communications

With memories of the brutal 1993-94 winter season still fresh, Port Authority Transit is planning to upgrade its rider information system concerning snow emergency service. "We're looking at improving the communication to our riders so that they know that on days when we have two feet of snow that we're not going to get where we normally go. We can't get up all the steep hills. We can't get into all the local streets," according to PAT public affairs manager Judi McNeil.

"But instead of telling people to 'get to a main artery,' we'd like to be a lot more specific about which radio and TV

stations will carry the information and what exactly we mean by an 'artery.' All of our November timetables include a box with information on snow emergency service. That should give us a better chance of getting across exactly where you can catch your bus."

PAT's work on improving its response to snow emergencies received a strong boost from the agency's success in developing a Standing Detour Manual. For each bus line, the manual provides a regular alternative route to accommodate the normal cycle of parades, festivals, races and other seasonal events that affect routine service. These are not just

occasional disruptions. On a typical summer day, according to Ms. McNeil, as many as one-third of the PAT routes may be detoured for construction and special events.

Improved communication with PAT's regular riders is seen as a step toward implementing a more comprehensive winter emergency plan, which was first tested by the agency last winter. Once it is fully operational, the plan will also include strategies for informing occasional riders as well as the disabled community about designated snow routes and stops. ▲

Bicycle Commuting Gains Status In Region

Continued from front cover

including the North Hills Commuter Bikeway, which has received more than \$1 million to develop a 19-mile path between downtown Pittsburgh and the Butler County line. A bikeway between Oakland and downtown Pittsburgh was included as an element of SPRPC's recently-completed transportation plan. And a Bikeway Concept Plan for Allegheny County, approved in 1992, includes 160 miles of bikeways in eleven different corridors.

Although some planners are skeptical about how much potential bicycles really offer as a form of daily transportation in southwestern Pennsylvania, their proponents have been persistent. They have

urged public officials to develop policies which would make commuting by bicycle a more attractive transportation alternative.

To accommodate their concerns, SPRPC convened a high-level 25-member Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Group in mid-October. Later that month it held a public workshop to address the planning issues that will affect the development of a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian strategy for the region. The advisory group will meet again on December 8 and a follow-up workshop will be held sometime later. Meeting and workshop times will be advertised in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. ▲

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. ▲

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