



February 2013

OmniNews

New OmniLink Buses Arrive

Not only does PRTC have five new OmniLink buses, but the buses have a new look with an exterior paint scheme featuring shades of teal and the circular logo that PRTC uses to brand its services.

The new buses were placed into service in February, enabling PRTC to move five OmniLink buses that were purchased in 2004 into the contingency fleet to be called back into service as needed. This is the first time that PRTC has been able to create an OmniLink contingency fleet.

The buses still feature bike racks and the interior is unchanged. The vehicles will not be assigned to specific routes but will be rotated throughout the service area.



Older OmniLink buses in the active and contingency fleets will not be repainted with the new design.

Later in 2013, PRTC will receive 11 additional new OmniLink buses, replacing the remaining 2004 models. Once these buses are in service, most of the older OmniLink buses will be sold.

The five buses cost \$384,000 each and are paid for with a combination of 80% state / 20% local funding. ■

Tysons Schedules Revised Save Time in the Express Lanes

PRTC has revised the OmniRide Tysons Express printed schedules now that the I-495 Express Lanes have opened.

The new toll lanes, which are free for buses and HOV 3+, enabled PRTC to reduce the route's travel time by an average of 20 minutes. The new schedules take effect on February 18. Revised print schedules are now available and online schedules will be updated prior to February 18.

OmniRide's Tysons Express serves two local stops: at the Woodbridge VRE station and the Route 123/ I-95 commuter lot, before taking the HOV lanes on I-95 and the Express

Lanes on I-495 to Tysons. There, commuters have their choice of 16 destinations and also can connect to an eastern Tysons shuttle.

There are four trips to Tysons in the mornings and five return trips in the afternoons.

To encourage people to try Tysons Express, promotional fares are offered at \$2.65 with a SmarTrip card or \$3.30 cash. ■

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PRTC Ridership Declined in 2012

PRTC transported 3.2 million passengers in calendar year 2012, a 2% decrease compared with the previous year and the first annual decline since 1999.

In 2012, the OmniRide and Metro Direct commuter bus services carried more than 2.2 million passengers, a 3% decrease compared with 2011. The OmniLink and Cross County Connector local bus services carried 985,000 passengers, a 2% decrease compared with 2011.

PRTC attributes the decline to two factors: Congress's decision as 2011 drew to a close to reduce the maximum allowable federal commuter transit benefit from \$230 to \$125 per month as of January 1, 2012; and a significant reduction in gas prices that occurred on the heels of the benefit reduction.

The commuter transit benefit allows employers to financially encourage the use of transit and vanpools. The incentive is pre-tax money that an employee sets aside and/or a tax-free fringe

benefit provided by the employer. While private employers can choose to provide this benefit, it is required for federal employers.

From March 2009 through December 2011, commuters could apply a maximum of \$230 monthly toward their commute if they used public transportation or a vanpool. When the maximum monthly benefit was decreased to \$125, approximately two-thirds of PRTC's commuter customers faced a significant increase in bus fare.

Ironically, the drop in the transit benefit coincided with an increase in the monthly parking benefit from \$230 to \$240. Transit agencies around the country criticized the disparity saying it would encourage people to drive. In our area the disparity also encouraged more slugging, since many commuters have the discretion to slug or ride transit and often do both in a single day.

"When riders realized they weren't getting as much money to pay for their commutes, some chose to slug more often to stretch their benefits while others calculated that driving would be less expensive," said PRTC Executive Director Alfred Harf.

Looking ahead, a resumption of increased ridership is expected because, beginning in January 2013, Congress restored parity by setting both the transit and parking benefit at \$245 per month through calendar year 2013. ■

PRTC 2013 Executive Committee Named

The PRTC Board of Commissioners has appointed a new Executive Board for 2013.

- Chairman Michael C. May, of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors;
- Vice Chairman Francis C. Jones, Mayor of Manassas Park;
- Secretary Robert Thomas, of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors;
- Treasurer Matthew Kelly, of the Fredericksburg City Council;
- Immediate Past Chairman John D. Jenkins, of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors;
- At Large Member Jonathan L. Way, of the Manassas City Council; and
- At Large Member Gary F. Skinner, of the Spotsylvania County Board of Supervisors. ■

Transit Benefit Increased

In January, Congress approved an increase in the maximum allowable federal commuter transit benefit from \$125 to \$245 per month. This makes the transit benefit equal once again to the parking benefit through calendar year 2013.

With this increase, those eligible for the transit benefit will spend less money out-of-pocket when using transit or a vanpool rather than commuting alone. The federal transit benefit is accepted on PRTC buses and many other forms of transportation in the Washington metropolitan area.

To learn if your employer offers transit benefits and whether you qualify for the maximum amount, please contact the Benefits Administrator at your workplace. ■

Outstanding Employees

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

And we are pleased this month to introduce a new *OmniNews* feature for the behind-the-scenes personnel: Technician of the Quarter.

Operator of the Month

Lisa Dupree — May 2012

Known by her passengers for service with a smile, Ms. Dupree currently operates trips on the Dumfries OmniLink route. In her free time, she enjoys computers and music. Originally from Fairfax, she and her two children live in Woodbridge. She has been with First Transit for more than 5 years. ■



Tim Wirick — June 2012

Mr. Wirick is a familiar face for PRTC passengers, having been a bus operator for the agency since 1998. He currently operates trips on the Manassas Metro Direct service and says the things he likes best about his job are his passengers and his regular bus, #182. Originally from Pennsylvania, he now lives in Prince William County. ■



Claudia Gomez — July 2012

A native of Mexico, Ms. Gomez has lived in the area for 15 years and has worked at PRTC for nearly two years. She currently operates three trips on the Dale City and Lake Ridge OmniRide routes. In her spare time she enjoys cooking, exercising and swimming. Ms. Gomez requested that her photo not be included. ■

Flor Rodriguez — August 2012

Seeing his regular passengers every day and getting them safely to their destinations is the best thing about his job, according to Mr. Rodriguez, who has been with First Transit since August 2011. He currently operates trips on the

South Route 1 and Manassas OmniRide routes and in his spare time enjoys spending time with his family. Originally from El Salvador, Mr. Rodriguez now lives in Dumfries with his wife and two children. Mr. Rodriguez requested that his photo not be included. ■

Earl Marshall — September 2012

A Virginia native, Mr. Marshall has been an operator with First Transit since August 2008. He currently operates trips on the Tysons Express and Cross County Connector routes. His hobbies include Bible studies, chess, repairing older cars and working out. He lives in Stafford County with his wife and has two children. ■



Gwendolyn Robinson — October 2012

Ms. Robinson is celebrating her 10th year of working for First Transit and currently operates trips on the Manassas Park OmniLink service. The Prince William County resident enjoys meeting people and likes that her job gives her opportunities to do so daily. In her free time, she enjoys reading, movies and staying physically active. Ms. Robinson requested that her photo not be included. ■

Technician of the Quarter

Matthew Osei—3rd Quarter 2012

A First Transit employee for eight years, Mr. Osei is an Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certified transit technician. He was born in Ghana and now makes his home in Woodbridge with his wife and four children. In his spare time, he enjoys soccer, basketball and golf. Mr. Osei requested that his photo not be included. ■

Carlos Barrancos—4th Quarter 2012

Mr. Barrancos joined First Transit in late 2010 and is Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certified as a medium/heavy duty truck/transit technician. Originally from Bolivia, he now lives in Dumfries with his wife and two sons. In his free time, he enjoys soccer. Mr. Barrancos requested that his photo not be included. ■



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

I Want to Know...

I heard that PRTC is offering Travel Training. What does that mean and who is eligible? — S. W. of Triangle

Thanks for your question! Yes, PRTC last year entered into a partnership with:

- Prince William County Area Agency on Aging;
- Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation; and
- Medical Transportation Management (MTM)

to provide a free travel training program called *On-The-Go*.

Travel training is just that — training for those who are unfamiliar with public transportation and how to use transit.

The *On-The-Go* travel training program promotes independence for people with disabilities, older adults and others by

teaching them how to use PRTC buses to access services, medical facilities and a variety of leisure activities in the community.

The program provides one-on-one or group training opportunities for those who want to learn how to ride or gain confidence when using public transportation.

Trainees spend time in a classroom environment and in-the-field to get first-hand experience using public transportation.

Anyone who wishes to learn how to use PRTC buses is eligible for travel training. Group training allows for general bus familiarization.

Individuals are eligible for one-on-one training if it is determined that they require more intensive instruction and/or repetitive travel to be able to use PRTC buses.



On-The-Go also offers a Train-the-Trainer program to educate those who currently provide travel training services and those who may provide such services in the future.

To learn more about *On-the-Go*, call 888-513-1614 or visit PRTCtransit.org, click on the “Special Programs” tab and then click “Travel Training Program.”

Before you know it, you'll be *On-The-Go!* 