Brevard College Students Resolve to reThink

Community partners kick off the 2nd Annual Resolve to reThink Your Commute Day

Space Coast Area Transit started off the New Year in style! During the 2nd Annual Resolve to reThink Your Commute Day held on January 15, 2015, Eastern Florida State College (EFSC) renewed a “Students Ride Free” funding agreement with the transit agency. The kick-off ceremony, held at the King Center for the Performing Arts on the EFSC Melbourne campus, was MC’d by Courtney Reynolds, Director of reThink, a program of the Florida Department of Transportation and the lead agency that coordinated the event.

Ancel Robinson, president of the EFSC Student Government Association, began the celebration by stating, “Without transit service, our students would be lost. I know, because I am one of them; I have been riding the bus to school and to work for the last four years.” Sandra Handfield, the Provost for EFSC, followed up by telling the audience that last year, EFSC students took 146,643 free trips aboard Space Coast Area Transit. “That staggering figure means our students can get to campus and save money, money they can use to take another class, pay their bills, or save for the future. For countless students, transit service is a lifeline for continuing their education and advancing their careers, it helps make a college education accessible.”

Richard Laird, Vice President, Financial & Technical Services at EFSC recalled that when speaking to students, he is often told how riding the bus makes it financially possible for them to attend school. “The college’s long standing relationship with Space Coast Area Transit remains invaluable and is among the most important that we have in Brevard. It adds an element to higher education that is often overlooked: the critical role that public transportation plays in our cities and neighborhoods,” he said.

Jim Liesenfelt, Director of Space Coast Area Transit, responded by stating, “we love partnerships like this, where a school cares enough about the transportation options available to their students that they will provide free bus service to them. It creates a transit culture and shows people at an early age that the bus is a viable and a smart commute.”

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Broward County Transit Debuts its First Commuter Coach

Broward County Transit (BCT) customers got their first look at the agency’s ‘New Rides’ during February’s public showcase event held outside of the Broward Governmental Center in downtown Fort Lauderdale. The newest additions to the BCT bus fleet are built for comfort, safety and hi-tech convenience on the road. The fleet includes a 45-foot Motor Coach Industries (MCI) bus used for the 95 Express Service routes from Southwest Broward to Miami-Dade County and a propane-fueled vehicle used to transport TOPS! Paratransit customers.

The new 95 Express Service fleet will hit the road this spring. Among the features of the new MCI buses are 55 high-back seats with extra hip-to-knee space, Wi-Fi, LED reading lights and A/C vents, electrical outlets, USB ports at each seat and plenty of space for carry-ons.

The new paratransit propane-fueled vehicles have been in service since January 1st, seating 10 customers, including up to three wheelchairs. They also have a state-of-the-art digital security system with cameras, improved body style and adjustable temperature comfort systems.

In preparation for the public showcase, BCT invited Broward County Commissioners, its transit partners, customers and local news media.

Melbourne Mayor Kathy Meehan concluded the festivities on a perfect note by telling the crowd, “it is paramount for Brevard County to continue to invest in public transit services in order to help our economy continue to grow and thrive. I hope everyone takes the Resolve to reThink Your Commute challenge in 2015; it will make our futures brighter and our community healthier. I know that this year—whether it is sharing a ride with a co-worker or taking the bus to work or a meeting—I’ll be joining Brevard citizens in reThinking!”
TECO Line Streetcar System Extends Service Again to German Cruise Ship Visitors

Tampa's TECO Line Streetcar System began service three hours earlier on Wednesday, February 18, to serve the more than 1,200 tourists voyaging aboard the German cruise ship AIDAVITA. The TECO Line Streetcar was ready with service to downtown shopping, restaurants, and other tourist venues.

In partnership with the business community, the special service was made as part of the organization's ongoing commitment to creating dynamic partnerships with the communities it serves.

“The TECO Line Streetcar System is pleased to offer this special service to benefit our tourists, customers, and the entire city,” said HART Chief Executive Officer Katharine Eagan. “We are proud to see that the Tampa Bay area appreciates that we listen and respond to what our customers and partners tell us they need in order to get to work, to play, or wherever they need to go.”

Preliminary numbers compiled by HART, for example, showed that ridership on the TECO Line Streetcar System surged nearly 300 percent to more than 1,065 by noon, before adding more passengers in the afternoon for an all-day total of 1,774. Wednesdays have averaged 575 passenger trips so far in FY15.

The event marked the ship’s third visit to Tampa, and each time approximately 1,200 German passengers from this ship came to Ybor City, arriving early morning and staying until mid to late afternoon. Many Ybor City businesses opened early and the TECO Line Streetcar System offered special early service so that both visitors and local merchants could take full advantage of the unique opportunity.

Orange LYMMO Line to be Extending North

At the request of the City of Orlando, LYNX’s Service Planning Department has been working on implementation of a northern extension to the Orange LYMMO line for the April 2015 Service Change. This 1.5 mile extension will travel north on Magnolia Avenue starting at the Orange County Courthouse to Marks Street where the route turns west to Orange Avenue and heads south on Orange Avenue to the Orange County Courthouse and links into the existing Orange Line route.

The northern extension is anticipated to serve the hotels and office buildings in this corridor, known as Uptown North Orange, as well as the multitude of new apartment complexes springing up along this corridor. There are five apartment complexes that have recently opened comprising 1,463 units, two more apartment complexes under construction with 613 units and an additional 746+ units in the planning phases for the Orlando Sentinel site. In all, almost 3,000 housing units will be served by the LYMMO extension, as well as the Marks Street Senior Center, the Boys and Girls Club, and several office buildings and hotels.

It is anticipated that the headways will extend from five minutes to seven minutes in the peak hours and from ten minutes to 15 minutes in the off-peak hours. The change in headway frequency offsets the costs of the additional route miles for our funding partner, the City of Orlando.
What Do the U.S. Military and LYNX have in Common?

LYNX will now join the ranks of live, virtual, and constructive simulation. Since October, the highly interactive state of the art Transit Simulator System (TSS-MB-2000) has officially been operational as an additional tool to the Training and Development Division.

An agency-wide joint effort by TSS Project Manager, Stephen Berry and LYNX University Manager, Maria Colon, will supplement current, new and veteran operator training with highly interactive driving simulation before going into the transit environment. There are currently four certified Sim Instructors in which our lead instructor, Zerry Hogan, is responsible for safe and effective operation. Support from our Procurement, Planning, Facilities, Risk and Safety, and Marketing departments have been instrumental to our success.

The goal of using simulation technology is to allow operators to participate in hands-on real-time problem solving. The experience is heightening by using industry standard preventative techniques to reduce SAS (simulation acquired sickness) and acclimation before an operator is trained.

The training objective using the simulation is to train operators and maintenance personnel on real world scenarios such as nighttime rainy weather against dense aggressive traffic patterns.

Simulation allows us to assess performance and competency of individual learners as well as solicit and collect feedback on overall simulation experience. The simulator is currently being used for refresher training, defensive driving techniques, accident preventable training, and decision-making skills.

Tri-Rail Goes Social

Since 1989, Tri-Rail has been connecting residents and visitors throughout South Florida. 26 years later, in order to continue to meet the needs of the public, Tri-Rail has announced the addition of its most recent connection: Social Media!

Keeping with the agency’s goal to better communicate with passengers, Tri-Rail has engaged in the social media spectrum to maintain an active presence with the public, while disseminating timely alerts and updates to passengers that follow its social media pages. As the current culture has become ingratiated with social media channels, public transportation agencies throughout the country have been taking the opportunity to link with the public in this unique platform. Many passengers already depend on digital newsfeeds for their news and general information.

Maintaining an active presence on social media will allow Tri-Rail to connect with members of the public, amplify the agency’s marketing efforts, and alert passengers with service updates in a platform they are already familiar with. Tri-Rail has setup pages on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+ and YouTube, with additional sites being considered for the future.

To find and follow Tri-Rail’s social media pages, visit:

- Facebook: [www.facebook.com/trirail](http://www.facebook.com/trirail)
- Twitter: [www.twitter.com/tri_rail](http://www.twitter.com/tri_rail)
- Twitter alerts: [www.twitter.com/TriRailAlerts](http://www.twitter.com/TriRailAlerts)
- Instagram: [www.instagram.com/tri_rail](http://www.instagram.com/tri_rail)
- For Google+ and YouTube, enter ‘Tri-Rail’ in the search field
Bay Town Trolley Helps Local Families in Need

Bay Town Trolley partnered with Chautauqua Learn and Serve Charter School for the 2014 Harvest Trolley initiative, an annual food drive that encourages community members and local businesses to donate non-perishable food items.

The system offered a free, one-way ride for those who donated three canned food items onboard system buses, October 27 through November 1. All proceeds from the drive go to the local Salvation Army for distribution to local families in need.

“First Transit is pleased to have partnered with the Chautauqua School for this year’s Harvest Trolley,” said Nancy Lohr, who serves as First Transit’s General Manager for Bay Town Trolley. “It’s great to see the community come together for such a worthy cause. We’re honored to be a part of that.”

This was the fourteenth year that the system has worked with Chautauqua on the event. Last year, the Harvest Trolley initiative gathered enough non-perishable food items to feed more than 400 individuals in the area.

“The Harvest Trolley food drive is an initiative that our students love getting involved with,” said Cynthia McCauley, Executive Director of Chautauqua School. “From the dedication of our students, to the participation of local business partners, we’re always overwhelmed by the amount of support the drive receives.”

More than 20 local organizations agreed to serve as donation locations, and the food drive surpassed last year’s donations by collecting enough food to feed 600 local families in need. The Harvest Trolley effort continuously brings the community together year after year, showing the compassion of members of the Bay County community. Bay Town Trolley plans to continue this tradition of giving for years to come.

For more information about Bay Town Trolley, please visit www.baytowntrolley.org or call (850) 769-0557.

Riding ECAT Leads To Improved Health

Escambia County Area Transit (ECAT) representatives set out to show just how beneficial riding public transit can be to individual health. Studies show that regularly taking public transit can result in positive health impacts across the board. As compared to their driving counterparts, transit riders experience lowered heart rate and blood pressure, to name a few. The ECAT Team took to the streets to see just how the numbers measured up.

Hooked up to a portable heart rate and blood pressure monitor, team member’s vitals were monitored before, during and after the trip. Once the ride was over, the same route direction and distance were traveled while driving a car.

The results translated into a healthier commute using public transit. When riding the bus as a passenger, participant heart rates averaged twenty-eight percent lower compared to being behind the wheel of a car. Blood pressure stats were also significantly decreased while riding the bus, with averages reaching 122/80 as compared to 127/102 while driving.

“The entire team is excited to spread the word about the positive effects of public transit on the community and individual health,” said Vikki Garrett, Planner at the West Florida Regional Planning Council. “Public transit is a great resource to the Pensacola community, and our team is dedicated to making sure that commuters know just how beneficial it can be to ride ECAT.”

Riding public transit also results in increased physical activity levels. According to the American Public Transportation Association, public transit users spend an average of 19 daily minutes walking, compared to the the six minutes average of most North Americans. During the experiment conducted by ECAT, the team member recorded a total of 206 calories burned while traveling by bus. Studies show that regular physical activity leads to improved longevity by lowering the risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis and depression.

From community-wide to individual health, the benefits of public transit are substantial. With the results of their health experiment showing just how great riding public transit can be for health, the ECAT team continues to strive to increase ridership among those who are looking to make a healthy lifestyle change in 2015.

For more information about ECAT, please visit www.goecat.com or call Tonya Ellis at (850) 595-3228.
OCT Surprises Local Veteran with Year-long Bus Pass

Representatives of Okaloosa County Transit (OCT) surprised local veteran John Greely with an annual bus pass on January 8. Mr. Greely was nominated by close friend Shannon Powell in OCT’s recognition of military veterans, which called for community members to nominate local military veterans to be honored for their service to the nation.

Local Air Force veteran John Greely valiantly served in the Vietnam War, and is a daily rider on OCT. Those close to him say that he is the first person to offer a hand to someone in need, and never asks for anything in return. The team at OCT was so moved by Mr. Greely’s story that they chose to award him with the grand prize of an annual pass.

“As a veteran, this particular initiative was very important to me,” said Bob Berkstresser, Program Manager of Okaloosa County Transit. “We were extremely moved by the community response to this initiative and are thrilled at the opportunity to recognize these local heroes and customers of OCT for their service and sacrifice.”

Throughout the duration of the contest, nominations poured in with heartfelt stories about the bravery and sacrifices of these extraordinary individuals. In an effort to honor a member of each branch of service, three additional nominees were awarded one-month passes.

“With such a significant number of veterans using OCT as a primary source of transportation, the team was pleased to provide them with such a meaningful gift,” said Vikki Garrett, Planner at West Florida Regional Planning Council and staff to the Okaloosa-Walton Transportation Planning Organization (TPO).

The contest, which ran on the OCT Facebook page for the entire month of November, garnered a great amount of momentum within the community, and the team at OCT was impressed by the generous manner of all who participated. Due its success, the team plans to continue the contest in 2015.

For information about Okaloosa County Transit, please visit www.RideOCT.org or call Bob Berkstresser at (850) 833-9168.

Rail Fun Day

Hundreds of children and families came out to Tri-Rail’s annual “Rail Fun Day” on January 24 at the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport at Dania Beach Station. The free day of family fun featured interactive games, giveaways, arts and crafts, food trucks, a kids talent show and more.

As part of the Rail Fun Day festivities, eleven talented young stars under 17 from Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties, took center stage competing for the $500 grand prize and the winning title during “South Florida’s Kids Got Talent.”
StarMetro Encourages Community to Dine and Donate

In an effort to collect food for local families in need, StarMetro partnered with local food bank, Second Harvest of the Big Bend, for their annual Stuff the Bus food drive. The one-month food drive kicked-off in January 2015 with a record of 40 local partners serving as donation points throughout the community. As a last call for donations before the campaign ended, StarMetro hosted their first-ever Dine and Donate event at the C.K. Steele Plaza.

The system called for community members to stop by the main StarMetro plaza to bring their last-minute donations and grab a bite to eat. Local food trucks sold food on site, with a portion of proceeds going directly to Second Harvest. The riders, drivers and community members dropped by the plaza to enjoy local fare and live music provided by the Shelter Band.

“The Dine and Donate event was a fun way for us to get people excited about our Stuff the Bus food drive,” said Executive Director of StarMetro, Ivan Maldonado. “It was great to see everyone coming together to help such a great cause within the Tallahassee community.”

StarMetro also offered free rides onboard buses to those who donated non-perishable food. Two items resulted in a free one-ride pass, and three items got riders free fare for the day.

The Dine and Donate event was greatly enjoyed by riders, and resulted in the donation of many food items to help feed local families. Due to its success, StarMetro plans to continue to hold the event as part of the campaign each year.

For more information about StarMetro services, please call (850) 891-5200, visit www.talgov.com/starmetro, like StarMetro’s official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/starmetrotransit or follow them on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ridestarmetro.