

The Commuter

Note to Commuters from Lou Neely

The current contract with Suburban must be placed in the context of the legal battle which extended over the past 10 years. When we attempted to bid the bus service with competition between Suburban and Academy, there were many issues which Suburban challenged through the Federal court system. Even though Academy won the bid, based upon the Local Public Contracts Law, Suburban challenged the Interstate Commerce Provisions in Federal court, as well as a number of other issues. One of the issues that became clear during the Federal litigation was the fact that the State maintains control over the type of bus, quality of the bus (including HVAC), and safety of the bus. The ruling that the Township has no authority to enforce, implement, or question bus quality the above in any way was based upon the Federal case and State Law.

During the second round of litigation Suburban challenged at the State Superior Court and again various issues were clarified, but it was made abundantly clear that the Township does have the ability to establish certain quality control issues, although they are few. We have the ability to enforce quality control issues as limited by our contract. Interstate transportation and commuter bus service is primarily controlled by both the Federal and State governments and they leave little discretion to the local authorities. Therefore, based upon State law and the results of litigation, it is clear that any complaint with regards to the HVAC systems or lighting systems for a bus must be lodged with the New Jersey Department of Transportation. The complaints cannot be lodged by the Township. Complaints must be lodged by individual commuters and then the State may undertake an investigation after the fact.

Left to the Township are those issues summarized in a prior communication of mine. The Township did establish a section on liquidated damages for certain violations. At the same time, the Township has permitted Suburban time to comply with the various provisions of the contract, one of which is to order the ticket machines and have them installed in a timely manner. Suburban indicates that by April the machines should be fully installed and functioning. Issues such as dispatchers, drivers' communication, the 25/10 rule and dropped bus complaints will be judiciously implemented and Suburban will comply or they will pay damages. This will occur in a systematic manner and will result in a better commute than currently exists, although I might state the East Brunswick level of service is better, more secure and frequent than any place in the State. Due process of contract provisions will be adhered to or Suburban will pay.

42 Trip Ticket Book Refunds

If you have mailed your 42 trip tickets back to Suburban Transit prior to their expiration date, you should have received a refund check back by now. If you have not yet received your refund check, you should contact Suburban Transit at 732-249-1100 or 800-222-0492.

Cold Buses

The CPAC has received numerous complaints in the recent months regarding buses that were not adequately heated during the commute. This issue has been extensively discussed with Suburban Transit numerous times. According to Suburban Transit, this problem occurs for a variety of different reasons. Some of these problems are more easily addressed by Suburban Transit than others. Actions that Suburban Transit has taken to address this issue include: (1) improved driver training on the operation of the bus's HVAC systems, (2) dispatchers are to check the status of each bus's HVAC system before it is released for the trip, and (3) certain equipment that takes an especially long time to warm up has been reassigned to runs that give the equipment more opportunity to warm up prior to being loaded with passengers.

One issue that can not be easily resolved is that under Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) rules, the length of time buses are permitted to idle is strictly limited. While this may protect our environment, it may also mean that on cold mornings that it may not be possible to heat buses up to reasonable temperatures prior to loading them with passengers. It is possible that it may not be feasible for Suburban Transit to comply with DEP idling rules and still have the bus passenger compartments at a reasonable temperature on a cold morning when the bus is first placed into service. We will continue to discuss with Suburban and if necessary the DEP, the possible methods for Suburban Transit to comply with DEP idling rules and still have the bus passenger compartments at a reasonable temperature on a cold morning when the bus is first placed into service. This is also obviously a seasonal issue that will soon be solved by warming spring weather.

NJ Transit

Fare increase under consideration: NJ Transit is in the process of considering a fare increase for their various services. Detailed information about the proposed fare increases and other associated changes can be found on the NJ Transit web site at http://www.njtransit.com/sf_fare_policy.shtml. According to the material we have seen to date, the changes currently under considerations would have the one way East Brunswick to PABT fare go from \$7.85 to \$8.90. The monthly pass for this same service would go from \$184 to \$208. This monthly fare compares to the \$220 that Suburban Transit charges for its monthly pass for virtually the same route.

Service issue contact: As mentioned in a previous Commuter, representatives of NJ Transit attended our January CPAC meeting. We had an opportunity to discuss numerous issues with them. We are still waiting for a formal response to some of these issues. If you wish to contact the NJ Transit representative directly with any issues our local contact is: Thomas Edward Clark, Regional Manager, Government & Community Relations. His e-mail address is telark@njtransit.com. As always, we would appreciate copies of any e-mails that you would share with us so we can monitor any issues as they arise.

Bus capacity: During our meeting with NJ Transit the issue of the passenger capacity of their various buses was discussed. One question discussed was why do the different types of NJ Transit buses have different rules on the number of standees permitted on the bus. We were told that these different rules are due to the bus maximum weight limitations, and are not due to passenger safety issues.

Passenger Courtesy

We have received numerous comments over the years about passenger courtesy, or the lack thereof. We have compiled a list of how all of us can make our commutes a little easier and less stressful if we all cooperate together. Please feel free to e-mail us at ebcommuter@yahoo.com if you have additional suggestions or comments.

Cutting in line: There have been situations (especially in the Port Authority Bus Terminal) where a person lets a relative or friend "cut in line" ahead of others patiently waiting in line. This is rude behavior and against common courtesy. No one is above waiting their turn in line for the next seat. If you want to be with your relatives or friends, then it your option to go to the back of the line with them. We are all tired after a long day and we would not be happy if we lost a seat on the next bus due to those who "cut in line."

Parking between the lines: Please park between the lines in the parking terminals. This is especially important in Neilson Plaza where the spots are narrower. If you take two spots, that might mean that some other commuter will not be able to find a place to park since Neilson sells out most days. By the way, this is an offense for which the township can and does give tickets to commuters.

Newspapers: Please remove your newspapers from the bus. Please do not leave them on the bus for another passenger to have to deal with them. All of the buses are used for several trips a day. Each of us appreciates a clean bus when we board.

Cell phones: Our buses are not private offices. Please keep in mind that many other commuters can listen to your "private conversation" on a bus. In addition, especially in the morning, many commuters prefer to sleep on their ride in so your helping keep the ride quiet is appreciated.

"Sharing" a seat: The buses used by Suburban Transit have double seats and are meant for two passengers. Please do not make it difficult for a second passenger to sit on your bench, especially if the bus is crowded and it is obvious that the seat will be needed for the passenger load that the bus will be carrying.

Reclining seats: While the seats on Suburban Transit buses do recline, given the very limited leg room between seats, we would suggest that passengers refrain from reclining seats. If you feel you need to do so, it is more courteous to ask the passenger behind you (if the seat is occupied) does he or she mind? How many passengers really like to sit in a seat behind a "recliner." Not many that we have seen in our commuting experience.

Passenger drop-off and pick-up: Please use the designated areas for passenger drop-offs and pick-ups. **PLEASE DO NOT USE THE EXCLUSIVE BUS LANES AS THIS IS VERY UNSAFE FOR BOTH THE DRIVER AND PASSENGERS.** If the provided areas are full to capacity, please find another temporary safe place to drop-off or wait for your passenger.

Closed bus doors: Suburban Transit drivers have been instructed to NOT open bus doors for additional passengers during commuting hours once the doors have been closed. The purpose of this policy is to make sure that these buses remain on their schedule. Another bus is always just a few minutes away during commuting hours. Please cooperate with this policy.

Receive Newsletter and Commuter Service Information by E-mail

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