

**Buses**

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In the wake of cutbacks in service and elimination of routes, possible privatization of the Luzerne County Transportation Authority is a hot topic of conversation among riders.

LCTA officials say that privatization is still a possibility, that it is still studying proposals for feasibility studies to privatize some or all of its routes.

**Some riders walk or hitch rides to make it to a bus stop.**

"If the buses go private or if they change the routes again, I may have a problem. I have to take two buses to get to class," Kathy said.

Jim also must take two buses to class, one from West Pittston to Public Square, then Bus 6 to the Back Mountain.

Misericordia students may take advantage of several types of bus passes or special tokens available for 80¢.

Senior citizens are also concerned. Not having any bus service would be a hardship, they say.

Although they ride for free during certain hours, funding from the Pennsylvania Lottery reimburses the LCTA for almost all of their fares.

It's a bargain, compared to the rates charged by downtown parkades, \$2.50 a day or \$40 for a monthly permit, or parking lots, which charge a flat 60¢ per hour with no cap. Meters cost 25¢ for 15 minutes.

"Too many people need the bus to go to the doctor, dentist and shopping," said Sally, one of nine seniors on the Saturday run from Wilkes-Barre to Dallas. "Some of us can't see a movie and have never been to a Kirby show because there aren't any night buses."

"We're out of luck if we want to go somewhere Sundays, holidays and nights. There aren't any buses," said Mary, another senior citizen. "If the bus company has to go private, I'd love to see Al Boscov take it over. He always takes care of the senior citizens."

Service to the Back Mountain's outlying areas is also a problem.

Because the buses only go as far as College Misericordia, Rob Belangio had to walk from Sweet Valley to Dallas several weekends ago to catch a bus.

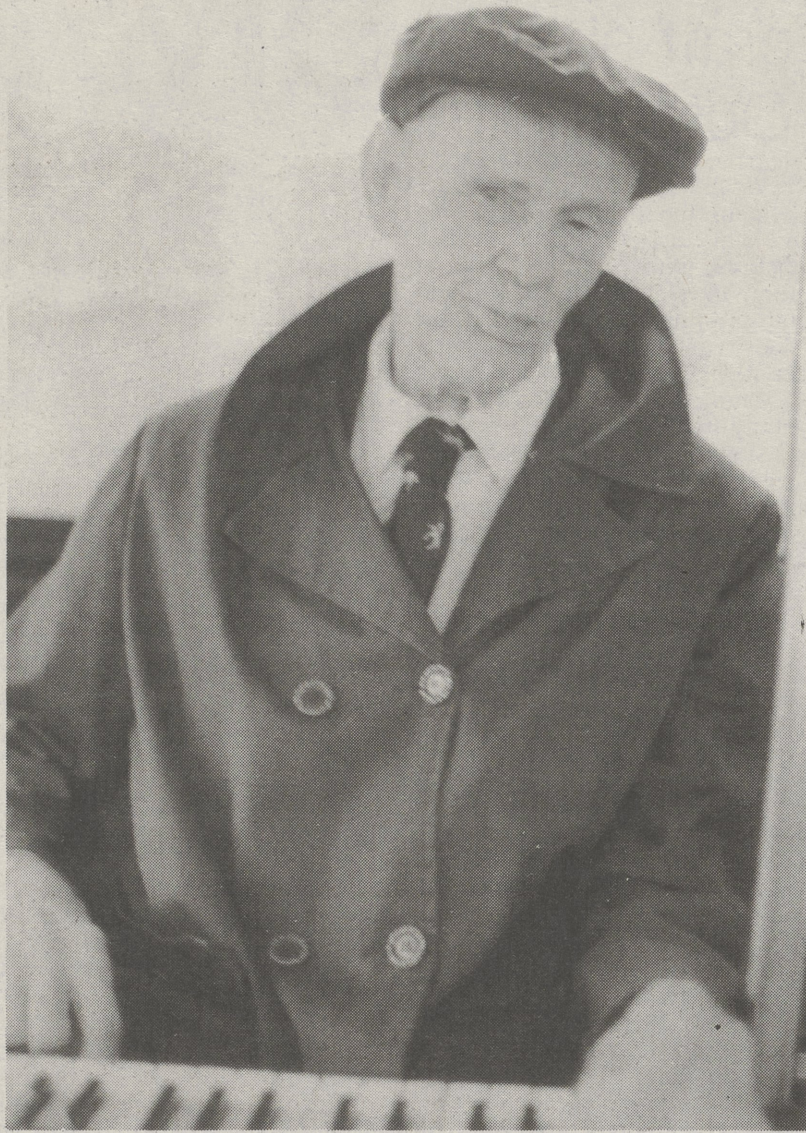
He and Lamoreux would love to see some type of limited service, even once or twice a day, to Harveys Lake and rural areas.

Back Mountain riders would also like to see possible later runs during the week and a way to get change if the rider doesn't have exact change for his fare.

Use of the buses has declined over the past two decades.

After the 1972 flood, the newly-formed Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA) launched an aggressive public relations campaign.

Radio commercials urged area residents to "Go-go bus, Gus!"



POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

**LIVENING THINGS UP** - On his way to town to run an errand, Dallas resident John Henninger cheered up the commuters on the 7:25 Monday morning bus with an impromptu concert on his portable keyboard.

At the same time, the LCTA held a "Color the Bus" contest, in which students submitted original color schemes for the new, modern vehicles, which still sport the winning design.

Today, Gus still rides the bus, but not as frequently. While ridership has declined, costs have risen.

Citing falling state and federal subsidies, increases in employee wages and rising operating costs, the Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA) attempted to cut drivers' and mechanics' wages by \$2 per hour effective October 1, a move which has prompted the drivers' union to request an injunction against the pay cuts and seek binding arbitration on the matter.

While area residents are would like to see more service, especially to outlying areas, the LCTA has already gone on record that it will disband by April, 1994 if arbitrators rule in favor of the drivers and mechanics.

Many riders using bus 6 to and from Dallas are concerned about further possible changes in the LCTA.

Cutbacks in routes and service could result in lower ridership, which could lead to further cutbacks, they say.

"They are very right," said Theresa Parsons of the LCTA. "It's a vicious circle."

Using smaller buses isn't a viable economic measure because it still costs the LCTA an average of \$55.19 per hour to operate them, Parsons said. Smaller buses get the same fuel mileage as full-size buses and the drivers must still be paid the same rate.

In the past, a sudden rush on one of the more popular runs has made it necessary for the LCTA to send out an additional bus, especially on market day.

Because federal funding has decreased by \$1/2 million, over the past eight to 10 years, the LCTA has considered subcontracting out low-use routes to private services and advertised for carriers, Parsons said.

No one was interested.

Other belt-tightening measures include discontinuing unprofitable routes, eliminating service between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. and raising fares.

"This is the problem we're facing," Parsons said. "It's a dilemma and we had no other choice but to economize. The sad part is that people are losing their jobs because they have no transportation. We certainly feel for the people but our hands are tied."

**Trash prices**

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If the one-or two-bag limit is chosen, customers would have to pay between 75¢ and \$1.50 for each additional bag beyond the base figure, depending on the hauler.

"The worst case scenario is that people's trash bills may be lower," Bagley said. "The main cost is to get the hauler in front of your house. The price difference between one or two bags isn't that great - the contractor doesn't care."

Changes in the recyclables market won't affect DAMA's customers either way, Bagley said.

Danella currently pays recycling centers between \$5 and \$10 per ton to get rid of comingled recyclables (plastics, glass and aluminum and bi-metal cans) and \$27 per ton of newsprint.

Even if a huge demand for newsprint or plastics should suddenly spring up, neither Danella nor DAMA can pass the savings on to the customers.

"Once the municipalities approve the contract, we're locked into it," Bagley said. "It doesn't matter if they're paying to get rid of recyclables or for some reason get paid for them."

Another possible change in the garbage collection program is limiting the bag weight to 30 lbs. Customers occasionally put out heavier bags, Bagley said. For example, a trash compactor can easily squeeze 60 lbs. of garbage into one bag.

DAMA has 90 days to select a hauler and billing program, which it will recommend to the three participating municipalities.

"We're only the agent. The municipalities make the final decision," Bagley said.

While allowing customers unlimited bags uses up available landfill space, municipal officials are concerned that a one-bag limit with a fee for extra bags could backfire, resulting in "inappropriate" methods of trash disposal, such as burning, midnight dumping or sneaking out to supermarket dumpsters.

"Since we began the trash program, we are receiving fewer complaints about residents burning trash in their backyards and are finding much less trash tossed along Green Road, or in other rural areas," said Kingston Township manager Jeff Box.

"The idea behind a one-bag option is to accommodate those who truly generate only one bag of garbage per week," Box said.

DAMA has billed every customer along its garbage collection routes, regardless of whether or not they use the service. Some customers who don't use the system still refuse to pay these bills, saying that they have been

*"It's like the sewer bill or school taxes. Your house is hooked up to the sewer whether you flush or not. You pay school taxes whether you have children in school or not."*

Tom Bagley  
DAMA executive director

"The three municipalities have enacted ordinances requiring people to use the service," Bagley said. "People may choose not to use it, but we still must pay our contractor to go past their house. It's like the sewer bill or school taxes. Your house is hooked up to the sewer whether you flush or not. You pay school taxes whether you have children in school or not."

Bagley said that a lien simply insures that any outstanding bills against a property owner are paid before the property changes hands.

"We have never gone to the magistrate and the sheriff to sell a home to satisfy a lien, although we have the right to do so," Bagley said. "I have never heard anyone around here say that they wanted to do that."

Some have received letters notifying them that a lien will be placed against their homes for the amount owed.

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