Dickson pilot project set to launch April 28

Plans are being made to offer a two-week pilot project for express bus service from the City of Dickson to downtown Nashville.

Free service will be available to the first 56 passengers each weekday from April 28-May 9 and will be operated by Gray Line of Tennessee for the RTA.

This pilot project is being offered to gauge the interest of commuters in the Dickson area.

The morning bus will depart from the City of Dickson at 6:40 a.m. and arrive at Music City Central in downtown Nashville at 7:40 a.m. The afternoon bus will depart from Music City Central Bay 7 at 4:38 p.m. and arrive in Dickson at 5:40 p.m. A Park & Ride lot will be located at the Walmart on Beasley Drive in Dickson.

“Accessible public transportation is important to our community,” Dickson County Mayor and RTA Board Member Bob Rial said. “This initiative will demonstrate not only that there is a great need for transit in our area, but it will show our residents how easy and beneficial it is to use public transportation.”

Join us at Nashville Earth Day Festival April 19

This year’s Earth Day Festival will be held at Centennial Park on Saturday, April 19 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Members of the Nashville MTA and RTA staff will be present to promote the many benefits of public transportation in the Middle Tennessee region. The Nashville MTA also will have a hybrid bus on display for attendees to explore.

The free, family-friendly festival will feature exhibits and activities to help educate Nashvillians about protecting our environment. For more information regarding the event, please visit www.nashvilleearthday.org.

Hamilton Springs awarded $1.6 million grant for commuter rail station

The Music City Star will soon be adding another rail stop to its route. The RTA was recently awarded a $1.6 million federal grant by the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to fund the completion of Hamilton Springs Station located in Middle Tennessee’s first transit-oriented development (TOD).

The Hamilton Springs Station will be the Music City Star’s seventh regional rail station. Currently in the design phase, construction of the station is expected to begin in the spring of 2015.

Lebanon is among the highest in population growth in Tennessee, with a 33 percent population increase since 1990. The addition of the train station will create a new point of access to the Music City Star and increase ridership significantly.

Phase one of the 396-unit luxury Hamilton Springs apartment community opened last fall. Other residential housing and businesses centered by the train station are planned. A key feature of TODs is the emphasis on transit modes other than the automobile.

“The RTA board and I are pleased to partner with Jack Bell Builders and the MPO on our region’s first transit-oriented development,” said RTA General Manager Lora Baulsir. “We are looking forward to opening the new station.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
RTA honors Sheila Varga

On July 30, 2013, Middle Tennes-
see lost one of its most admired Music
City Star riders and supporters – Sheila
Watkins Varga. In recognition of her
many achievements – participating in
the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennes-
see’s inaugural Transit Citizen Lead-
ership Academy, as well as being the
president of the Regional Commuters
Association – the RTA placed a com-
memorative plaque at her daily boarding
station in Mt. Juliet.

A dedication ceremony to unveil
the plaque was held on March 25.
Family members and friends gathered
as former RTA CEO Paul J. Ballard,
RTA Communications Director Patri-
cia Harris-Morehead, and fellow Music
City Star riders Clyde Hicks and Johna
Starcher provided remarks about Shei-
la’s love of the train and public transit.

When passing by the plaque, those
who admired or were influenced by
Sheila’s dedication to improving public
transit in the region, as well as those
who did not know her, are invited to
pause for a moment of silence to honor
this “Special Friend of the Music City
Star” who was among the original group
of riders to board the train in September
2006.

RTA GM Lora Baulsir and former CEO Paul J. Ballard unveil a plaque dedicated to Sheila Watkins Varga at the Mt. Juliet train station

Music City Star financially secure

Commuter rail not effected by short-line controversy

The current funding freeze affect-
ing Tennessee’s short-line railroads
has led to speculation there will be a disruption in the Music City Star’s
service. The RTA is confident that
the operation of the Music City Star
will continue unimpeded since it is not
funded by this revenue source and is
not a short-line; it is a commuter train.
The particular track utilized by the
Music City Star is actually owned by
Nashville & Eastern Railroad Author-
ity (NERA).

In mid-October 2013, a federal
judge in Nashville stopped the state
from collecting the tax that supplied
funding for rail improvements for the
short-line railroads in Tennessee. The
money for these improvements comes
from the state’s Short Line Equity
Fund, which receives its money from
a seven percent tax the state charges
on diesel fuel for railroad locomotives.
Lawsuits were filed by the large rail-
road companies claiming the tax is
discriminatory. Payments out of the
equity fund to the short-line railroads
were suspended by TDOT pending
the outcome of appeals.

The situation is being monitored,
and there are a number of options
available to address this revenue
problem for the state’s short line rail-
roads. To begin, the state is appeal-
ing the decision and is not going to
allow this vital network of rail lines
to go away, permanently injuring the
economic well-being of many Ten-
nessee counties. The jobs and busi-
ness losses would be immediately felt
by the state’s economy. And finally,
there will be other opportunities to
bring revenue sources to the table to
prevent the Music City Star from be-
ing harmed.

Legislation is pending in the Gener-
al Assembly that will change the way
large railroads are taxed. Since TDOT
has about $40 million in the fund, the
RTA is optimistic that NERA and the
other short-line rail authorities will
soon begin receiving the funds again.

NEWS & NOTES

Search for new CEO

The Nashville MTA Board is conducting a national search to replace
former MTA/RTA CEO Paul J. Ballard, who left Nashville to become
president and CEO of the Fort Worth Transportation Authority. A few
of Ballard’s many RTA accomplishments include directing the start-up
of the Music City Star, expanding regional bus service, and consist-
tently increasing ridership for both MTA and RTA.

RTA rebranding

The RTA Marketing Committee has been discussing the need to re-ex-
amine the RTA’s marketing brands of services. Members of the RTA
Board are excited to begin this process with a series of meetings be-
ginning this month to examine the overall brand position. As part of
this rebranding exercise, you may see more of the RTA staff on buses
conducting surveys in order to gather more information for future
marketing needs.

Track rehab

The Music City Star is currently in the middle of the first phase of track
rehab; between three and four thousand wooden ties have been re-
placed thus far. Additional tie curves, spikes, ballasts, culverts and
welding of the rail also are needed to increase speed allowances and
keep safety our top priority. Plans for a new rail passing siding con-
struction also are underway to enable service expansion.

Follow us on twitter:
@MiddleTN_RTA

Music City Star Tracks is a publication of the Regional Transportation Authority of Middle Tennessee. For more infor-
mation about our services, visit our website at RTArelaxandride.com or call Customer Care at (615) 862-5950.