When it opened in 1989, the original Skyway was known as the Automated Skyway Express (ASE). It was only 3/8 of a mile long, had only three stops (Convention Center, Jefferson Street and Central Station) and cost 25 cents to ride.

Now, the Skyway has eight stops (five downtown and three on the Southbank) and is 2.5 miles in length. It takes only 11 minutes (FCCJ to Kings Ave.) to ride the entire length of the Skyway line. Over half-million passengers ride the Skyway each year.

J. Charles Sawyer Retires After 16 Years on JTA Board
After serving on the JTA Board of Directors for 16 of the past 20 years, including two as its Chairman, Charles Sawyer has passed the torch to attorney Michael Cavendish. Sawyer has helped lead the Authority as only he can do. Sawyer was, in part, responsible for giving life to the Skyway back in the late 1980s. While the stunted growth of the downtown business district initially hurt ridership on the people mover, a renewed interest in the core from both business and residential developers has now sparked talk of Skyway expansion. Sawyer also played a large part in getting the Dame Point Bridge built. At one time, the bridge was considered a financial waste, but now is a vital link between Arlington, Southside, the Beaches and all points north. The building of the Dame Point Bridge created development in areas that would never otherwise have seen growth. The commitment of Charles Sawyer to this agency can never be thoroughly measured, but his contributions will last decades into the future.

Meanwhile, Sawyer’s replacement, Michael Cavendish, is sure to bring a new and interesting perspective to the board. His legal expertise will be an asset as JTA moves forward with its long-range plan of forming joint, public/private partnerships. Read more about both Sawyer and Cavendish in this issue of Making Moves.

The cost of doing business has finally caught up with JTA. After nearly nine years of keeping transit fares untouched, the Authority was forced to increase prices on some of its fares. The Authority staff held four public hearings to discuss the impact to riders and receive feedback from those affected. The last time JTA raised its fares, gasoline was only 75 cents per gallon. Now, gas routinely hovers around $3 per gallon. Unfortunately, JTA could no longer absorb the rising cost of fuel expenditures. The new fare prices took effect in October.

Perhaps you’ve seen our shiny, new silver buses on the roads of Jacksonville. The JTA is proud to continually provide our passengers with the latest in transit comfort and efficiency. We have over 20 of the new buses and more on the way. This is just part of our commitment to building the best transportation agency in America.

We encourage you to read about these and all the great stories in this edition of Making Moves. We welcome your feedback and appreciate your interest in JTA.
Kings Avenue Station Breaks Ground

“BRT will significantly enhance the transportation experience for hotel guests, area employees and Jacksonville residents alike,” said Mike Miller, JTA Director of External Affairs. “It (BRT) will be a more efficient, expansive service utilizing the latest transportation technology. The potential for having BRT here is just another piece of this development that will make it so unique.”

Once it’s finished, Kings Avenue Station will feature 4,500 square feet of retail space and a total of 220 rooms in a dual Hilton brand hotel, the Hilton Garden Inn and Homeewood Suites.

I’m excited that Mike Balanky and his partners are moving forward with this project,” said the Mayor. “I think we’ll see this entire area of San Marco change for the better as a result of this development.”

Balanky and his partners are building a 165,000 square foot shopping and hotel center on 10.4 acres of land owned by JTA that had been a surface parking lot next to the Kings Avenue parking garage and Skyway Station. The key to making this deal work, said Balanky, was access to both JTA’s parking garage and the adjacent Skyway Station for quick and convenient transportation to the convention center and into downtown.

Blaylock states Kings Avenue Station is exactly the type of development he wants to see grow at other locations around Jacksonville.

“When developers consider transit and incorporate existing or future transit options into their designs, it will enhance that development’s diversity and potential,” said the JTA Executive Director/CEO. “Without the parking and transit options that were in already in place, the Kings Avenue Station is just another development. Mike Balanky and his group took what was already here and made this location more viable.”

Besides having Skyway and the JTA fixed-route bus service as current transit options, the Kings Avenue Station has been identified as a possible future location for a bus rapid transit (BRT) super stop.

Regency Bypass Opens to Traffic

There are many pockets of congestion throughout the city of Jacksonville. One of the worst is the Regency area – where the Arlington Expressway, Atlantic Boulevard, Southside Boulevard and Monument Road all meet. Traffic in that area can be scarier than a Fiddler Kruger horror film. But thanks to the long-awaited opening of the Regency Bypass, motorists can now “bypass” this congested area completely.

JTA opened the final portion of the project, the southbound ramp that connects Southside Boulevard to westbound Arlington Expressway on Wednesday, October 8.

By using the bypass, motorists traveling from the Northside, Arlington or the Beaches to Downtown can now avoid much of the congestion by using 9-A or Merril Road to the Southside Connector, then “connecting” directly to the new bypass ramp just west of the Regency Square Mall and the Arlington Expressway without ever stopping.

Eastbound travelers on the Expressway can use the bypass to head north into Arlington or across the Dame Point Bridge, again avoiding the Regency clog.

This was a project over 13 years in the making. In 1994, the JTA contracted with Reynolds, Smith and Hills for a planning study to improve traffic flow between the Southside Connector and the Arlington Expressway. Following that study, Parsons Transportation Group was hired to look at design solutions for the Regency area and produce construction plans for this project. Actual construction on this nearly $33 million project began in January 2004.

Construction took an interesting turn last summer when work crews, fearful for motorists’ safety, shut down the Southside Connector for 10 days to install 400-foot steel girders for the new flyover ramps across the highway.

“This was a more complex design and more difficult construction than most other projects we face,” said JTA Chief Engineer John T. Davis. “The unique curve and angle of the ramps and the unusual length of the ramps did cause some difficulty. That is why we took the extra precaution of closing the Southside Connector when we did. We did not want to place any motorists in harm’s way while we installed those huge steel girders across Southside Boulevard.”

Besides the two new ramps between the Expressway and Southside Connector, the project also included construction of the north and southbound Regency Square Boulevard North, a roundabout on the Expressway’s north service road and the replacement of a box culvert which carries Strawberry Creek under the Arlington Expressway, its two service roads and the two new ramps.

It was the replacement of the Strawberry Creek box culvert that extended the length of this project far beyond what was originally planned.

“The box culvert was failing and posed a significant threat if it had collapsed,” Davis said. “The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) asked us to replace the culvert as part of our project. FDOT found the funding and we went in and fixed the problem.”

The additional work added two years to the project completion date. One ramp that was not added to the project was a northbound ramp from the Expressway (in front of the mall). Davis said the anticipated cost $25 million for the ramp and right-of-way versus the number of vehicles that would be using a ramp in that direction estimated at only 300 trips per day by the year 2030 did not make it economically feasible.

“Motorists traveling westbound on Atlantic Boulevard and/or the Arlington Expressway (near the mall), have several other options if they want to head north. A new ramp there just didn’t make sense,” added Davis.

What will make a lot of sense to commuters is using the new Regency Bypass to miss much of that scary Regency traffic.
Charles Sawyer Leaves Board After 16 Years

Charles Sawyer

Charles Sawyer is practically a legend at JTA having served on the Board of Directors for 16 of the past 20 years, including two as its Chairman. Jacksonville attorney Michael Cavendish replaces Sawyer on the board.

Sawyer first came to the JTA Board of Directors back in June 1987. He quickly became an advocate for the downtown people mover that would become known as the Skyway. Sawyer was, in large part, responsible for getting the Skyway up and running.

The “bridge to nowhere” was another key project completed under Sawyer’s tenure. The Dame Point Bridge, once thought to be non-essential, is now a vital connector between Arlington, Southside, Beaches and North Jacksonville. Sawyer’s vision helped create an economic boom in areas once forgotten and unused.

Sawyer has been a steady force on a sometimes turbulent board. A man of conviction, Sawyer often gets his point across without saying a word.

“When I first joined the board, I learned a lot just by paying attention to what Charlie thought was important,” said JTA Board Chairman Cleve Warren. “He is a very wise man.” Sawyer will now spend more time at his private winery, stomping grapes and creating new vintages to enjoy. Meanwhile, his replacement, Michael Cavendish, has some big shoes to fill.

“The JTA will carry on,” said JTA Executive Director/CEO Michael J. Blaylock. “Michael (Cavendish) brings some unique experience that will certainly help the Authority as we move forward with our plans to be the regional transportation provider. But after seeing Charlie Sawyer sitting in one of those board seats for 16 years, it just won’t be the same without him.”

Sawyer was honored at the August board meeting with a special video tribute, a resolution and a distinguished service award honoring his long and dedicated commitment to JTA and the community.

Cavendish Joins JTA Board; Replaces Sawyer

Above: Sawyer joins former Jacksonville Mayor Tommy Hazouri, former JTA Executive Director Miles Francis and other dignitaries at the grand opening of the Dame Point Bridge.

Left: Congresswoman Corrine Brown and Mayor John Peyton join Sawyer to celebrate his 16 years service to JTA.

Right: JTA Executive Director/CEO Michael J. Blaylock presents Sawyer with a tribute video of his 18 years at JTA.

New Beaches Route an Early Success; Daily Ridership Doubles Since Opening

There was a famous car commercial that once pronounced “you asked for it, you got it…” about its product. Well that same slogan can be said for JTA’s new Beaches route – the BH-50. Employers in the Ponte Vedra Beach area asked for help getting their employees, many of who were living across town on the Northside, to work. And when your own slogan says “Regional Transportation Solutions,” it’s not only a challenge, it’s your mission.

“Keeping citizens employed is a noble cause,” said Fred Heley, service planning manager, about the new service. “A large percentage of the more than 20.6 million passenger trips we’ve had in the past two years was getting people to and from their jobs. That’s important.”

Annette Summerlin is one such person benefitting from the new BH-50. Summerlin was able to get her new job as a housekeeper at the Marriott Sawgrass resort thanks to the new route.

“I don’t have a reliable car. So before the BH-50, there was just no way to get out there to the Sawgrass area,” said Summerlin. “I love my job and if not for JTA and the BH-50, it wouldn’t have been possible.”

Summerlin, who lives on the Northside, got her job through the Gateway WorkSource office, one of the many agencies and employers that JTA worked very closely with while planning this new route.

“The BH-50 is opening up new opportunities for prospective employees and making it easier for us as an employment agency to place people in new jobs in this area,” said Deloris Quaranta, a supervisor at WorkSource’s Gateway office. “It’s great!”

The new BH-50 service began with lots of meetings to determine the possibility of ridership and at what time those riders were needed most. Surveys were done, trip planning was mapped out and a route quickly took shape. The key was speed and efficiency. This route would need minimal stops, but stops at key pick-up points to maximize ridership while keeping travel time to a minimum. It was decided to initially schedule two trips each morning and two in the afternoon. After a recent ride home on the BH-50, Summerlin called JTA to say thank you.

“It is 4:15 and I am already home with my kids,” Miller said. “Thank you so much!”

Quality time with your family, a new job, a more relaxing ride home – just a few of the advantages of riding the new BH-50 by JTA.
Why BRT is the Better Choice for Jacksonville

The idea is to use rail as a complement to bus rapid transit. To better understand each system, how they work and why one may be better suited than another in particular situations, let’s examine what each system does.

Bus rapid transit (BRT) often runs on exclusive lanes or major arteries, avoiding typical traffic congestion found on regular bus service or traveling in your own personal vehicle. It is flexible, however, not locked into one set of tracks. BRT can also utilize Intelligent Transportation Systems such as queue jumping and signal priority to gain ground ahead of regular congestion.

Light rail (commonly referred to as LRT), however, runs on overhead electric power and generally transports passengers within an urban environment. LRT runs at slower speeds and typically has more stops than does commuter rail. Bus rapid transit (BRT) often runs on exclusive lanes on major arteries, avoiding typical traffic congestion found on regular bus service or traveling in your own personal vehicle. It is flexible, however, not locked into one set of tracks. BRT can also utilize Intelligent Transportation Systems such as queue jumping and signal priority to gain ground ahead of regular congestion.

So which is better? Each system has its own merits and serves its own specific purpose. In Jacksonville, however, it is believed that BRT is the best system to mobilize more people. In short – BRT is the better way. Proponents for light rail typically argue two main points in favor of LRT use here in Jacksonville – existing rail lines and cheaper cost. However, a closer examination shows neither to be accurate. (see graphs)

First, let’s look at the existing rail lines. While it’s true there are three sets of active rail systems running through the Jacksonville area (FEC, CSX and Norfolk Southern) in addition to the abandoned S-Line, each has its own challenges. See the old S-Line as the perfect setup for light rail in Jacksonville. But after closer examination, the S-Line is far from the perfect scenario.

What used to be the S-Line, weaves from downtown to the Gateway Shopping Center on the northside (see map). What might seem like an excellent opportunity for LRT may actually work better as a neighborhood circulator.

“The S-Line is a curvaceous route that is better suited to a slower neighborhood circulator-type transit service rather than a direct rapid type service,” said Scott Clem, JTA Director of Strategic Planning. “In addition, the S-Line has numerous cross streets that also make it better suited to a neighborhood circulator service. JTA is currently re-evaluating the merits of the S-Line as part of its commuter rail study.”

Meanwhile, the City of Jacksonville currently plans to use the S-Line for its rail-to-trails program, giving area walkers, runners and cyclists new recreation space.

Many local proponents of rail here also point to the existing rail line along Philips Highway as one that could be used for LRT and the business growth along this corridor would seem to support that argument. So far, there has been one significant drawback to that plan—the railway’s private owner has said no. Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) has made it clear to this point that it has no intentions of selling or leasing its tracks, but might consider selling right-of-way along its tracks. JTA will continue to explore its options with FEC as a way to keep LRT as part of the transportation discussion.

“The CSX railroad, which parallels Roosevelt Boulevard (US 17), is a good opportunity for commuter rail,” says Ed Castellani, engineering consultant to JTA. “CSX is also a private railway, Agreements would have to be reached to either buy the tracks (as TODT has done in the Orlando area) or lease the right to use tracks. Both of these arrangements would be viable, but expensive.”

When BRT is constructed, the foundation for LRT is put in place. If a route is extremely popular and gains enough ridership to support LRT, the cost to convert the rails to LRT would put that time schedule in jeopardy. The Skyway, a commuter rail system in Eugene, Oregon will improve traffic flow throughout the city.

The FTA concurs with using BRT in Jacksonville as the primary mobility source and the main component of Jacksonville’s Regional Transportation System plan.

For the foundation work is already completed. Rail lines and power are added to the existing right-of-way and a light rail train system is born.

Comparisons between BRT and LRT are often made, including by some urbanites here on the First Coast. They are rarely made, however, using an apples-to-apples test as most systems differ so greatly. In one city, Los Angeles, you may offer the perfect look at how BRT and LRT match up head-to-head.

Los Angeles, the nation’s second largest city, has both BRT (called the Orange Line) and LRT (light rail transit called the Gold Line). LA’s Gold Line (LRT) opened in 2003, while the Orange Line (BRT) opened in 2005. Each is about 14 miles long and each has 13 stations, approximately one mile apart. Both were built at-grade, have signal-priority granting the transit vehicles green lights at intersections and both serve primarily a suburban, middle-class area. These nearly identical routes, length and number of stops makes for a perfect comparison of LRT versus BRT.

BRT guideways like this one in Eugene, Oregon will improve traffic flow throughout the city.

Over the coming years, that means less track time will be available for commuter rail traffic, severely limiting the commuter travel window. Castellani says existing track usage would prevent running the commuter trains more frequently than every 30-60 minutes. Expanded freight traffic would put that time schedule in jeopardy. The frequency issue is an important factor in having a successful transit system. Castellani adds that the flexibility of BRT makes it more ideal, even with the existing rail lines. He cites the Skyway as the perfect example of what can happen to rail over the new, improved BRT system.

“The Skyway is basically an elevated LRT. It was designed to move downtown workers people from parking lots into the city’s core business district,” said Castellani. What happened though, was that the businesses and major employment centers moved to the suburbs. You can’t just pick up and move the Skyway or any other rail system.

When BRT is constructed, the foundation for LRT is put in place. If a route is extremely popular and gains enough ridership to support LRT, the cost to convert the rails to LRT would put that time schedule in jeopardy. For the foundation work is already completed. Rail lines and power are added to the existing right-of-way and a light rail train system is born.

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What Time Is It?

For the first time in nearly nine years, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority Board of Directors approved a change in transit fares. Since 1999, just the cost of fuel alone has increased more than 200%. So, it has been costing JTA more money to provide the same services for many years and JTA has been able to avoid passing that cost increase on to our customers. But now, the revenue we generate from our fares simply isn’t able to keep up with the rising costs.

The good news for our customers is that JTA will still have some of the lowest transit fares in the entire state of Florida.

JTA employees in many departments communicated this important proposal to our customers in a variety of ways.

3:25 p.m., 86\(^{\circ}\)F

JTA continues to search for new ways to improve the customer experience. That is why new digital signs were installed at the Rosa L. Parks/FCCJ Transit Station downtown. The large signs feature both the current time and temperature and can be clearly seen from across the transit station.

“I felt it was something that needed to be added for our customer’s sake,” said Michael J. Blaylock, JTA Executive Director/CEO. “That is information they need to know and now they have it without running over to the small monitors to see what time it is.”

Blaylock added that when people depend on your transportation services, you owe it to them to give them as much information as possible. The signs are located on both the east and west sides of the customer service building, directly above the ticket windows.

Service Planning, Customers Talk Route Changes

Service Planning Manager Fred Haley tells JTA bus riders how their input helps influence bus route changes.

JTA Responds to Rising AirJTA Demand; Expands Service to River City Marketplace

AirJTA, the Jacksonville Transportation Authority’s downtown-to-airport shuttle service added a new stop on both inbound and outbound service runs to entice potential employees and those looking for a good deal. This special JTA transit service now makes stops at the River City Marketplace, the new outdoor shopping center on Jacksonville’s Northside. The expanded service kicked off September 4.

“Adding the River City Marketplace to the AirJTA service provides a major employment, shopping and entertainment destination to this route,” said Fred Haley, JTA Service Planning Manager.

The AirJTA route (also known as the NS33) began in June 2006 with express service from downtown directly to hotels and restaurants along Airport Road and the Jacksonville International Airport (JAX) terminal. Since February 2007, ridership on AirJTA has increased by 47 percent and demand for a stop at the new mall has been overwhelming. The new expanded service allows employees, hotel guests or business travelers with extended layovers, to enjoy great restaurants and shopping at the River City Marketplace or zip into Downtown in only 30 minutes for just $3 each way.

JTA Wins National, State Marketing Awards

October 2007 was a very good month for JTA marketing. On October 9, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) selected the Jacksonville Transportation Authority’s AirJTA brochure as its first place winner during the 2007 AdWheel Awards held in Charlotte, NC. Then on October 23, JTA’s new Bikes on Buses (BoB) instructional video grabbed top honors from the Florida Public Transportation Association (FPTA) at its annual conference in Orlando.

This was the second time in the past three years that both organizations have honored JTA for its marketing and communications efforts.

The AirJTA brochure, designed to resemble an airline boarding pass, is for the Authority’s airport shuttle service that runs from downtown to the Jacksonville International Airport. Inside the award-winning brochure are inserts featuring the route map, costs, parking options and the daily AirJTA schedule. APTA named the brochure first in the print schedule category.

After recently eliminating the permitting and training requirement for its BoB program, JTA produced a step-by-step, web-based instructional video in both English and Spanish to teach potential users about mounting their bikes on JTA buses. The award-winning video is available for viewing at www.jtafla.com.

River City Marketplace
The Uzbekistani delegation, hosted by the U.S. Department of State’s International Visitor Leadership Program, requested to meet with staff and tour the Connexion facilities like Uzbekistan, a service like the JTA could be a force for change. Connexion staff members gave the four person, Russian-speaking delegation, two of whom were disabled, a day-long, detailed overview of JTA’s paratransit service functions and operations. Staff emphasized the service’s benefits to the disabled community, especially for those who can not access the fixed route bus system. The delegation was also given a tour of the Connexion control center and the eligibility and training center. During the tour, delegation members were able to meet with and observe the employees and staff while they were actually performing their assigned duties. The delegates were particularly impressed that disabled employees were working in the Connexion Control Center—a rarity in most underdeveloped countries.

After the tour, Oybeck Isoqov, Chairman of Disabled People’s Society of Uzbekistan, remarked that it was “essential to develop and implement a similar program in Uzbekistan” and he was “very impressed” with the Connexion operation. He added, “We need to convince our government that this is a needed service in our country and now we can show them that it does work.”

This was Connexion’s first visit by a foreign country’s officials. According to Connexion Manager Patricia Collins, “It was an excellent opportunity to exhibit our operation on a global scale. It was truly a great JTA day.”

A group of advocates for people with disabilities traveled more than 10,000 miles to the United States just to see JTA Connexion in action. The group hopes to duplicate this vital service back in their homeland. For the untold millions of disabled citizens in former Soviet-controlled republics like Uzbekistan, a service like the JTA Connexion could be a force for change. The Uzbekistani delegation, hosted by the U.S. Department of State’s International Visitor Leadership Program, requested to meet with staff and tour the Connexion facilities to see the operations and services of a successful paratransit service firsthand.

Scott Clem, JTA’s new director of strategic planning and research, is not new to the First Coast. Clem spent the past 15 years working in St. Johns County in various planning and operational capacities, including assistant county administrator for operations. Clem began his extensive career in Tallahassee over 25 years ago as a planner for the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

In his new role, Clem will focus on the Authority’s plan to develop a comprehensive, multimodal transportation system involving transit, highway engineering and other initiatives to support the needs of the region. Meanwhile, former director of strategic planning, Steve Arrington, is now the director of business development and special projects. In his new role, Arrington will oversee the funding and building of the Jacksonville Regional Transportation Center in LaVilla. When completed, the JRTC will house a new JTA bus terminal, Greyhound station, an expanded Skyway facility and parking garage, Amtrak, a traffic management center, retail suites and JTA offices. Arrington will also be researching new funding sources for the Authority.

JTA joined City of Jacksonville officials, coworkers, friends and community members in honoring longtime JTA advocate Julian A. “Jack” Gillup at a special retirement event celebrating his 16 years serving Jacksonville’s disabled community. At the ceremony, JTA’s Ken Middleton presented Gillup with a special engraved clock recognizing his outstanding contributions to the Authority and the disabled community.

For example, when Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Manager Ken Middleton worked in the CTC department, it was Jack Gillup who initiated Middleton’s nomination to receive the “Man of the Year” award from the Mayor’s Disability Council. After so many years of service, Gillup leaves behind a legacy of impressive accomplishments including the establishment of the annual Jim Brady Scholarship Program for students with disabilities and the authorship of Jacksonville City Ordinance 2002-8889, which requires Jacksonville businesses to make their properties accessible to all persons with disabilities.

The First Coast Chapter of the Florida Planning and Zoning Association (FPZA) selected the Jacksonville Transportation Authority as its “Redevelopment Award” winner for its Main Street bus shelter project. The award was presented at the chapter’s annual banquet October 13 at the historic Bayfront Hilton in St. Augustine.

The FPZA praised JTA for the way the design and construction of the shelters contributes to the continued redevelopment of the Springfield Town Center.

“The shelters exhibit the commitment of the JTA to help revitalize the historical nature of the Springfield area while providing for mass transit and ridership needs,” said FPZA chapter Treasurer Al Walker.

JTA facilities manager Van Dyke Walker accepted the award on behalf of the Authority.

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Senior Team Greets New Faces

Chad Reese
Transit Chief Operating Officer

The JTA Senior Team has two new members and a third has a new title to go along with some new responsibilities.

Chad Reese, Ph.D., has been named as the transit chief operating officer replacing former JTM president Tom Jury. Reese comes to the JTA after seven years as general manager at Veolia Transportation where he ran transportation services for the cities of Phoenix, Arizona and Austin, Texas.

Reese also has transportation experience in Florida, with manager positions in Gainesville and Tampa. While under his direction, the Regional Transit System in Gainesville was named Small Transit System of the Year by the American Public Transportation Association.

Reese is a 1995 graduate of Troy State University with a Master’s Degree in public management. In 2008, Reese earned his doctorate in organizational leadership. Born and raised in Alabama, Reese says coming to Jacksonville feels like “coming home.” As transit chief operating officer, Reese will manage the day-to-day operations of the bus, Skyway, maintenance and Connexion divisions.

Reese began his duties on July 23.

Springfield Bus Shelter Design Honored

The First Coast Chapter of the Florida Planning and Zoning Association (FPZA) selected the Jacksonville Transportation Authority as its “Redevelopment Award” winner for its Main Street bus shelter project. The award was presented at the chapter’s annual banquet October 13 at the historic Bayfront Hilton in St. Augustine.

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**BRT for Jax**

continued from page 7

The BRT line was expected to start out averaging between 2,000 weekday boardings and then grow to 22,000 within 15 years. Remarkably, the BRT had topped its 2020 projection by its seventh month. By comparison, the LRT line was expected to start with around 30,000 weekday boardings, increasing to 60,000 within 20 years. However, the actual LRT ridership has been lower than that of the BRT – obviously far below projections.

The capital cost of the BRT was $349 million (or $25 million per mile). The LRT cost more than twice that amount – $869 million ($51 million per mile). The operating cost also favors the BRT, costing about 54 cents per passenger compared to the $1.08 for each LRT passenger.

In Jacksonville the numbers also favor BRT. While projected 2020 daily weekday ridership numbers are slightly higher on LRT (BRT – 34,000 to LRT – 41,000), the projected cost makes BRT a much better deal. A 34-mile BRT system here is expected to cost between $380-$557 million ($11-$16 million per mile). The BRT on the other hand would cost a total of $1974 million - $1.1 billion or $29-$32 million per mile. No matter how you look at it, BRT is the most cost-effective choice – the better choice – for Jacksonville. Not only does JTA think so, too so does the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The FTA carefully considers cost, mobility and other key factors when deciding to fund projects like LRT or BRT. The FTA concurs with using BRT in Jacksonville as the primary mobility source and the main component of Jacksonville’s Regional Transportation System plan. JTA continues to study other key factors when deciding to fund projects including the latest developments with the Regional Transportation System (RTS) initiatives such as the bus rapid transit system, the commuter rail study and the river transit study. Council members also received detailed updates on JTA construction and engineering projects including the Better Jacksonville Plan.

After the working session, council members hit the road on one of JTA’s brand new buses to take a traveling tour of key construction projects around Jacksonville.

**New JTA Buses, Design a Hit with Passengers; Plain White Design Replaced with Bold, New Look**

Newly elected city councilmen Don Redman, Clay Yarborough and Johnny Gaffney listen intently to a presentation on bus rapid transit.

JTA understands that getting up to speed on a new job can be challenging, so recently, JTA invited the newly elected city council members to a special JTA workshop to give the members a complete review on JTA operations, services and its strategic initiatives.

“Because we work so closely with our city council members on important regional transportation issues, it is essential to share JTA’s strategic plans,” said Executive Director/CEO Michael J. Blaylock. “The council and this Authority are dedicated to working together to meet and exceed the transportation needs of the Northeast Florida community now and in the future.”

**BoB Permits Eliminated**

The JTA has revamped its Bikes on Buses (BoB) program. Permits are no longer required to take your bike along on any of JTA’s 175 buses. New instructional brochures and videos are now available on the JTA Website to teach Bollers how to use the bike racks. Visit www.jtafla.com to view the videos in English or Spanish or to download the instructional brochure.

They’re sleek, silver and are getting plenty of attention wherever they go. They are the first 23 of what will eventually total three dozen new buses rolled out recently by the JTA. Some is the plain white paint scheme so familiar for all these many years. The new buses have a bold, new look – silver with a red and yellow forward motion-like design intended to promote the progressive movement of this Northeast Florida transportation agency.

“The JTA is remodeling its entire transit system to be more customer-focused and these new buses will play a major role,” said JTA Executive Director/CEO Michael J. Blaylock. “They really do enhance the passenger experience.”

Not only do these new buses, built and distributed by the Gillig Corporation, look great inside and out, they are more environmentally friendly, offering lower exhaust emissions than the older and more traditional buses. Exhaust emissions on the new buses meet today’s federally mandated diesel exhaust emission standards.

JTA’s buses will also run on cleaner burning low sulfur diesel fuel and get better gas mileage than ever before. The Authority’s older buses average 3.5 miles per gallon and the new buses average over four miles per gallon. While one-half mile per gallon may not sound like much, when you factor in the number of miles these buses accumulate each year, the savings is remarkable. Consider this – each bus will save nearly 18,000 gallons of fuel over its lifetime. That adds up to over 642,000 gallons of diesel fuel saved by adding the 36 new buses to the fleet.

This new look is a great first step towards introducing some of JTA’s upcoming changes in bus services. Not only are the buses improving, the routes and customer service are improving as well.

“We have found that passengers enjoy riding on a public transit vehicle that is clean, comfortable and fun to ride in,” said Chad Reese, JTA’s Transit Chief Operating Officer. “The new buses have a great, warm and friendly look that attracts customers to try transit as an alternative to the high cost of gasoline and the frustration of traffic congestion.”

All of the new buses offer a low-floor entry as passengers can board with minimal effort. Interior amenities include comfortable seating in a temperature-controlled environment.