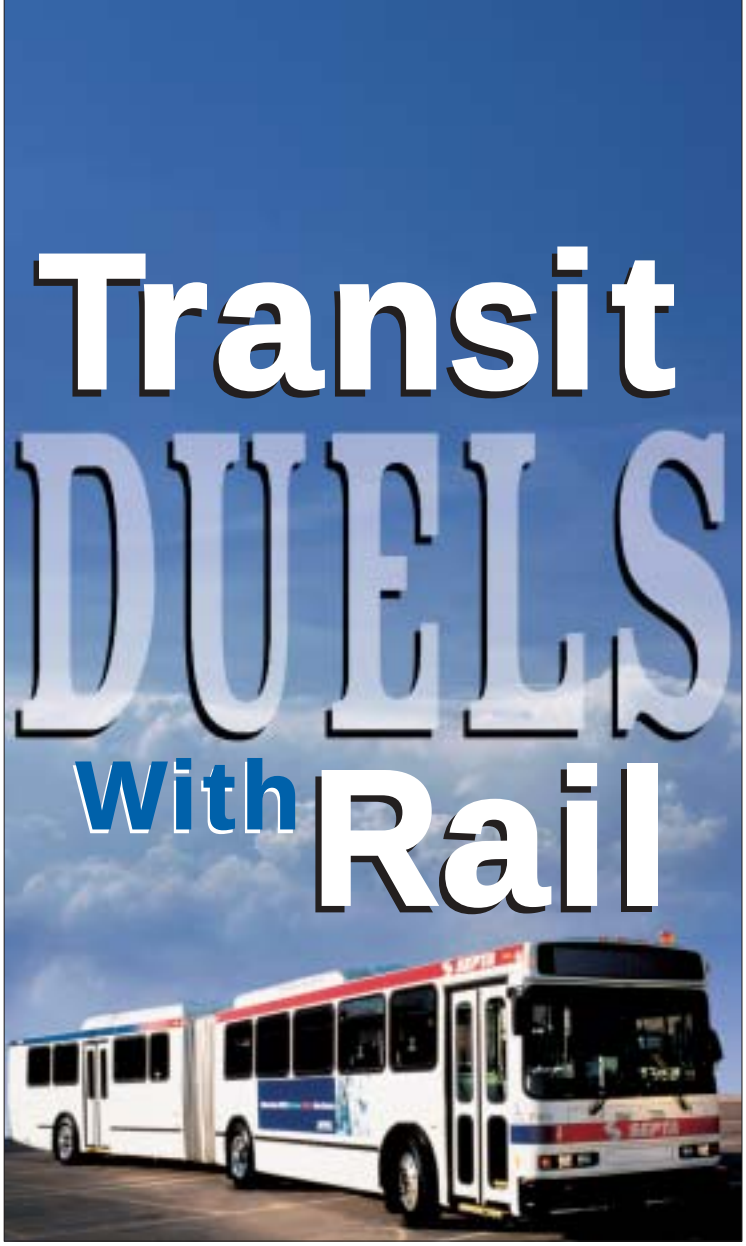
Bus Rapid Transit DUELS With Rail

Here's help in promoting 'rubber-tire transit' even though its sexier alternatives get better press.



Articulated buses, such as this Neoplan 60-foot coach, are suited for BRT because of their high capacity and other amenities such as GPS, voice annunciation and automatic destination signs. This bus will be used by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority for a new exclusive transit lane in a shopping area in downtown Philadelphia. It will run 12 blocks, about 1.2 miles, on a one-way main thoroughfare.

BY LENNY LEVINE
Executive Editor

THE NAME **Annie Mae Bullock** won't get you very excited, but change it to **Tina Turner** and the pulse quickens. So it is with changing your name from **Lumbering Exhaust-Spewing Bus** to **Bus Rapid Transit** (BRT). It's sexier, and is the transit buzz phrase *du jour* ever since the industry got hot and bothered with tales out of **Curitiba**, Brazil.

In some cases, however, it may not be sexy enough.

Louisville, Ky., has been studying, debating and planning its major transit corridor for two years, and sources close to the endeavor say light rail transit (LRT) will triumph over BRT as the mode of choice.

The penultimate hurdle was cleared at press time when Louisville's **Policy Committee** recommended LRT. That group is composed of the mayor, a judge, planners and residents. The **Working Group**, composed of residents, had earlier recommended LRT. The final hurdle will be cleared about the time you read this when the board of the **Transit Authority of River City** (TARC) makes the final decision on either (B) or (L)RT.

"The allure of rail got people excited, where it was hard to get them interested in buses," says **Nina Walfoort**, a TARC public affairs consultant. "That was the feedback we got from residents."

Even if Louisville chooses trains over buses, it doesn't mean the death of buses there. The 12-mile corridor will be developed with highly integrated feeder bus and background bus systems.

When Louisville began thinking about expanding transport, choices in the debate included more buses and more roads. Those two ideas were shelved and the choices winnowed to BRT and LRT. Part of the mandate for the corridor is to provide an alternative to

an interstate highway, which will reach capacity within a decade.

Support for the corridor goes beyond the potential customer, says TARC Executive Director **J. Barry Barker**, because supporters outside the service area are thinking beyond their immediate needs and about what the new system will do for the community.

Marie Keister, also a TARC consultant, said TARC's decision was not capricious. "We looked at it hard for a long time," she says.

Keister tells this story of why BRT does better in the model comparing it to LRT:

BRT runs more frequently and there's less money up front. So that probably means more passengers. But rail will actually attract more people, and the model doesn't show that. So the models say one thing, but we have to ask the public if it's true—will more of you ride trains? They say, "If this is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars, I'd rather be riding a train."

A TARC logo.

BRT projects abound

Louisville notwithstanding, many BRT projects are planned, being built or in successful operation.

Eugene, Ore., is one of 10 cities chosen by the **Federal Transit Administration** (FTA) to participate in its BRT demonstration program. **Lane Transit District** in Eugene proposes to implement BRT in a variety of exclusive lane configurations on a 10-mile pilot corridor.

Lane lists these benefits: attracting more riders, travel time competitive with cars, less time for most commutes, less parking in crowded areas, frequent service, many of rail's benefits at a much lower cost and a foundation for future transit improvements such as LRT.

Ottawa's Transitway busway system carries 200,000 passengers daily on up to 190 buses at peak. It has 31 stations, 20 bike and ride locations and 2,140 parking spaces for cars. Peak ridership is 10,000 per hour per direction.

The **Miami-Dade (Fla.) Transit Agency** has an 8.2-mile busway that takes passengers to Metrorail in just 25 minutes. Full-size buses and minibuses operate on the busway, which enter it at major intersections. Thirty stations are tucked among shrubs along the busway.

The Dulles Corridor in **Virginia** outside **Washington, D.C.**, uses BRT as a prelude to rail. The four-phase project has this scenario: (1) doubling bus service in one county (2) increased bus service in two counties (3) BRT (4) new rail service. That has been studied and discussed since the 1960s.

In **Cleveland**, the Euclid Corridor Improvement Project combines BRT with an existing rail line. Euclid Avenue, a major boulevard, will get landscaping, limited-access busways and pedestrian areas will be enhanced to encourage transit use. Street parking will be eliminated. Trolleybuses are envisioned along the busways. Two new transit centers are proposed, as are relocation of six heavy rail stations.

Honolulu has proposed a 12.6-mile limited stop busway using HOV lanes on expressways and exclusive lanes downtown.

The **Charlotte (N.C.) Transit System** plans an extended HOV lane to implement BRT to meet the city's transit needs in a main corridor through 2025. Part will be in a rail right-of-way. Charlotte voters approved a half-cent sales tax expected to raise $50 million a year for a regional transit system that will have both rail and BRT.

Elsewhere in the state, officials from the **Durham-Raleigh** area are debating the merits of BRT vs. rail, mindful that each is a competing rapid transit system.

Traffic is pre-empted

Elsewhere in the world, bus-only lanes and traffic pre-emption through transponders on the buses or loops in the roadbed abound.

In **Auckland**, New Zealand, peak-period curb bus lanes have improved transit speed.

An elevated guided-bus system is being developed in **Nagoya**, Japan.

You may have seen examples of this photo before as just about everyone's favorite example of bus rapid transit. It's the express buses in Curitiba, Brazil, and their rail-like stations. The system there has stirred interest worldwide, especially in the United States.

Dual-mode buses will operate in mixed traffic on regular roads or in semi-automatic mode on the exclusive lanes.

In **Manila**, a private consortium, **Philtrak PMS**, with some government support, plans a 22-mile BRT system using low-floor, articulated buses. The $91 million project will open with 110 articulated buses and 110 shuttle buses. Ridership of 180,000 a day is expected.

In **Curitiba**, Brazil, a BRT system with its aesthetically-pleasing tubular stations and double articulated buses have caught the transit world's attention. Other Brazilian cities also have busways, with buses from many private operators operating on them. Some corridors have up to 350 buses an hour during peak, making them nearly a moving sidewalk.

> ***"If this is going to cost hundreds of millions of dollars, I'd rather be riding a train."***
>
> *Marie Keister, TARC consultant, quoting residents*

Next, as BRT becomes more sophisticated, there will be: guided buses, driverless buses, minimal dwell time, more use of alternate fuel, ITS features (locators, stop announcements, signal priority) and routine express and local service.

All that is actually possible now. M