



National Bus Trader

The Magazine of Bus Equipment for the United States and Canada

Volume XLIV, No. 1

December, 2020

Serving the bus industry since 1977.

Visit us at www.busmag.com.

- Keolis Moves People
- Are Mergers the Answer?
- Time to Choose a Strategy
- Now is not the Time to Skip on Bus Maintenance



Keolis Moves People

by Larry Plachno

Photos courtesy of Keolis unless otherwise indicated

Keolis is an international company that manages and operates transportation systems of all types. In addition to rail and bus, the company is also involved with a variety of other transportation modes including coaches, trolley buses, river shuttles and cable cars. This scenic photo shows the RTC Ride service in Reno, Nevada.

In common with several previous articles, this one originated with questions to our “Curious Coachowner” column. Presumably due to increasing contracts and operations in North America, readers have been asking about Keolis. Since it was not possible to adequately respond in one or two paragraphs, we did the research for this article.

A simple answer is that Keolis is an international company headquartered in Paris, France that manages and runs transportation systems. While they own some systems, they also operate and manage operations for government and private companies. This can include virtually all aspects of the operation including labor negotiations and coordination with planning agencies.

The company can trace its roots back more than a century to earlier companies. What was probably the first was organized in 1908 as the Société des transports automobiles. Another was founded in 1911; an electric company named Lesexel that helped to develop tramways. In addition to creating

subsidiaries, other companies were acquired or merged and reorganized. This led to the creation of two companies: Cariane that concentrated on interurban service and VIA-GTA that concentrated on city service.

SNCF became the leading shareholder in VIA-GTI in 1999 and then merged this with Cariane in 2001 to create Keolis. Since someone will ask, we can say that research so far has not turned up the origin or meaning of the Keolis name. By 2005 the company was already active with a rail franchise in the United Kingdom. In the following years, Keolis took control or began managing bus and rail companies around the world.

Keolis is owned (70 percent) by SNCF (Société nationale des chemins de fer français), the French National Railway Company and (30 percent) by Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (Quebec Deposit and Investment Fund).

SNCF is a major European rail operator owned by France. It has a staff of about 260,000 and operates throughout France

and a few neighboring countries. It is probably best known for its high-speed TGV trains that operate on several routes. My wife Nancy and I have ridden on a number of them and have been impressed with the fast and comfortable service. The newer cars are double deck and have a refreshment bar in each trainset. SNCF also has a 70 percent holding in Thalys International that runs international trains and 55 percent of Eurostar International that operates rail service through the Channel Tunnel to England.

The National Assembly of Québec created Caisse in 1965 to manage the funds of the Québec Pension Plan. It is basically a pension plan management and investment operation and has subsequently been entrusted with other pension and insurance funds. It has investments all over the world including Keolis.

Today, Keolis operates public transport networks for 300 transport authorities in 16 countries on four continents. The company's operations include 10 modes of transporta-

tion including trains, buses and coaches, trolleybuses, shared private driver vehicles, bike sharing, carpooling and carsharing, 100 percent electric autonomous shuttles, river shuttles and ferries, and urban cable cars. Keolis transports about three billion passengers annually.

Expectedly, Keolis has extensive operations in France. Transit service is provided in Bordeaux, Brest, Dijon, Lille Lyon, Orléans and Rennes. The 260-vehicle Transports Daniel Meyers was purchased in 2016. In Germany, Keolis operates regional train services under the Eurobahn name. Keolis is the second largest bus operator in Denmark having merged City-Trafik with Nettbuss thus creating Keolis Denmark. Keolis also operates the first tramline in Denmark in Aarhus.

In 2012, Syntus in the Netherlands was acquired and renamed Keolis Nederland. Keolis Norge was created in 2008 in Norway and has been fully owned by Keolis since 2014. Keolis operates rail franchises in the UK.

In India, Keolis has the operations and maintenance contract for the Hyderabad Metro Rail Project. Keolis began operating the Pujiang line in Shanghai, China in 2018 and a year later began operating the people mover system at Pudong International Airport in 2019 and the Songjiang tramline in a suburb of Shanghai a year later.

Keolis has also been active in Australia. It holds 51 percent of Keolis Downer, the company operating the Melbourne tram system and the G:link light rail line on the Gold Coast. March of 2015 saw Keolis Dower take



At the cutting edge of technology is the Keolis operation in Pau, France. It includes a six-kilometer Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line serving 14 stations. The buses are 18-meter articulated tram buses using hydrogen-electric power systems. VAN HOOL.

over Australian Transit Enterprises with its 930 buses. Later, they took over the Newcastle Buses & Ferries business under a 10-year contract and also operate the Newcastle Light Rail system.

Keolis operations on this side of the Atlantic started in 2002 and are based in Boston and operate under the Keolis North America name since there are operations in both the United States and Canada. There are 6,000 employees transporting more than 116 million passengers per year. Operations

in North America include local and express fixed-route buses, interurban and urban transit, light rail, electric automated shuttles, taxis, traditional and electric school buses, paratransit, airport and charter transportation as well as on-demand transport.

What makes Keolis so versatile is that they can provide a wide range of services as required by customers. Hence, they can provide what is often called a “turn key” operation with public transportation. In North America, Keolis offer a wide range of services including:

- Safe on-road operations and monitoring
- On-time performance
- Daily transit operations
- Run cutting and scheduling
- Fare media management
- Key performance indicator reporting
- National Transit Database (NTD) reporting and auditing
- Liability monitoring and management
- Personnel development
- Labor negotiation and harmony
- Facilities management
- Fleet management
- Fleet maintenance
- Alternative fuel operations and management
- Coordination with Metropolitan and Regional transportation planning agencies

In 2012, Keolis acquired Orléans Express in Canada and subsequently expanded operations as Keolis Canada, a subsidiary of Keolis America. Most of its operations are located in Montreal including the Exo Mascouche sector. The

While its roots go back as far as 1908, Keolis is a modern company operating the newest rail and bus equipment in many areas. The major owner of Keolis is SNCF, the French National Railways. Shown here are two SNCF trains at Garde du Nord station in Paris. NBT.



company provides intercity, charter, airport, urban, school and paratransit services with a fleet of 392 vehicles including 62 coaches. Keolis is the second largest intercity operator in Canada. Keolis also is a partner in the operations of the Ion rapid transit system in the Waterloo Region of Ontario.

Keolis has numerous operations in the United States. In California, it operates paratransit service in Van Nuys, Lancaster and Fresno. Noteworthy is that Keolis operates local and express routes for Foothill Transit in Southern California with a fleet of 139 vehicles including 14 Proterra electric buses. This includes express bus service to Pasadena and downtown Los Angeles.

Foothill Transit is known for their pioneering electric bus operations using the Proterra buses.

In Nevada, Keolis operates fixed route local and express transit routes in Las Vegas for the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada. This service includes the resort corridor of Las Vegas Boulevard as well as the Deuce on the Strip and the Strip and Downtown Express routes. Week-day ridership on these routes is nearly 120,000 with 87,000 riders on Saturday and 76,000 on Sunday. It might be noted that in 2017, Keolis partnered in the launching of a self-driving autonomous shuttle project in downtown Las Vegas.

Further north, in the Reno area of Nevada, Keolis has been operating and maintaining the RTC Ride fixed route bus service in Ashoe County since July 2019. This operation serves more than seven million annual passengers on 56 peak-operated vehicles operated on 27 routes.

In Florida, Keolis provides several services at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport including the employee shuttle, terminal connector, transport to car rental services and remote parking shuttle connector. Partnering with Broward County Transit, Keolis operates Pompano Beach's fixed-route bus service.

Keolis has been active in North Carolina operating the Greensboro Transit Authority's fixed route and paratransit services since January of 2019. This service includes 16 routes plus five Higher Education Area Transit routes that provide approximately 3.8 million passenger trips annually. Since November of 2018, Proterra electric buses have been included in the 43-bus fleet.

Since 2010, Keolis Rail Services Virginia has operated the Virginia Rail Express (VRE) serving the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C. Keolis is credited with increasing ridership, improving customer service scores and improving on-time performance. The newest Keolis operation in Virginia is the OmniRide bus service of the Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission. Keolis was awarded a five-year contract that starts on November 1, 2020.

The largest rail operation managed by Keolis is in the Boston area. Since July 1, 2014, Keolis has been operating the 14 commuter rail lines of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Credited with being the fifth busiest in the nation, MBTA commuter rail serves 127,000 passengers daily with 14 lines, 138 stations and 500 daily trains serving Greater Boston and Rhode Island. Future plans propose a commuter rail extension to New Hampshire. Keolis introduced the MBTA Commuter Rail app. to help plan travels. An enhanced version

In addition to bus operations, Keolis also runs several rail services. This photo by George Tenney shows trains of the Virginia Rail Express. The trains connect Northern Virginia suburbs with Washington, D.C.



Keolis operates the local and express fixed route transit operations for the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada. In addition to local residents, the operations on Las Vegas Boulevard and Strip routes carry many visitors to Las Vegas. Weekday ridership is 120,000 and less but still impressive on weekends.



will provide additional features including commuter rail travel times.

Keolis calls itself an expert in multi-modal transportation. They partner with public policymakers, transportation leaders, technology companies and community organizations who want the highest level of service and the most innovative transportation

systems for their cities. Keolis says that it is dedicated to passengers' individual needs and works to provide more enjoyable, and more sustainable commute options for all of the passengers they transport around the world. It is perhaps noteworthy that the mantra of the Keolis organization is "Thinking Like a Passenger." □

Keolis operates numerous different transportation systems at many locations in both the United States and Canada. Shown here is the fixed-route bus service in Pompano Beach, Florida that is operated through a partnership with Broward County Transit. Just south of here, Keolis provides several services at the Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.



From the

December, 2020

Issue of

National Bus Trader

9698 W. Judson Road • Polo, Illinois 61064

Ph: (815) 946-2341

Fx: (815) 946-2347

www.busmag.com