



APTA Expo 2011 in New Orleans

Article and photos by Larry Plachno

APTA's Expo offered a wide range of public transportation vehicles from rail to bus, from traditional to alternative fuels and from brand new designs to tried-and-true models. The Millennium RTS belongs in this last group. Originally built by General Motors in 1977 as a temporary interim bus model, it has subsequently survived four ownerships and is undoubtedly the most popular city transit bus in recent decades.

Every three years the American Public Transportation Association holds their Expo show for suppliers to the public transit industry. It was scheduled for October 3-5, 2011 at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans.

On the negative side, the timing was a bit touchy. It followed the BusCon show in Chicago by two weeks and preceded the Busworld show in Europe by about two-and-a-half weeks. We know of several companies that planned to attend or display at all three shows, so this became a hectic travel and trade show season. On the positive side, the weather was absolutely delightful with

sweaters and jackets unnecessary. New Orleans was at its finest in the area of food. And, for those who ask, all three trolley lines appeared to be fully operational with the historic streetcars running on St. Charles and the newer streetcars on Canal and Riverfront.

We were particularly interested in the APTA Expo this year because of expectations that reduced federal and state funding would cause some changes in public transit operations and most likely create increased opportunities for private sector operators. It is perhaps significant that Michael Melaniphy was recently unani-

mously selected as the new president and CEO of APTA. While Melaniphy has been involved with the industry for 23 years, it is noteworthy that his last 10 years have been spent in the private sector at MCI. I might mention that outgoing president Bill Millar, who has served APTA for 15 years, very graciously stopped by our booth at the show to greet us.

I hesitate to name compass directions in New Orleans because they can be confusing. Many of us tend to think of downriver as south and upriver as north but with all of its curves and turns, I suspect that the Mississippi actually flows north past the Convention Center. The Expo extended from Hall D to Hall J in a straight line that one floor manager insists was three-quarters of a mile long. IBM graciously provided a fleet of golf carts that shuttled up and down the main hallway providing a local form of public transportation during the event.

An obvious difference between regular bus shows was that the APTA Expo had numerous exhibitors dealing with rail vehicles ranging from streetcars to commuter rail and even diesel locomotives. At least four display areas included full or partial rail cars and several booths showed model trains. The most impressive was a full articulated electric rail car built in Switzerland standing on conventional rails bolted to ties sitting on the convention show floor. There were three other rail cars but without wheels.

One end of the Expo was heavily populated with rail exhibitors while the other end was predominately bus, including a special area dedicated to CNG power. It was obvious that the rail side of the exhibit area had more traffic. In spite of the huge display area, the actual number of buses on display fell slightly short of the number we saw two weeks earlier at BusCon. We did have difficulty getting good photos of some of the buses because of the lack of open space and the attendees walking past.

APTA's Expo also differed from other events by having a very high level of exhibitor networking. While numerous component suppliers are involved with bus manufacturing, this number is even greater on the rail side. For example, there were suppliers that provided third rails, overhead trolley equipment, modern controllers, doors, air conditioning and even wheel sets. Networking was judged to be so important that on Tuesday afternoon, the show was closed to attendees so that the exhibitors could network with each other.

At the same time it might be mentioned that attendees in the public sector may not be actual buyers as in the private sector. In the public sector, major purchases are often arranged through a bid process rather than a management decision.

As far as trends are concerned, I was particularly impressed with the progress towards alternative and sustainable fuels (see the article on Alternative Fuels in the September, 2011 NATIONAL BUS TRADER). In addition to CNG and propane being available in some of the mid-size buses, MCI showed a CNG-powered commuter coach. Both hydrogen and electric power have caught the attention of many because they are not fossil fuels and hence truly sustainable. Buses in regular use powered by hydrogen and batteries were on display. Any major advance in batteries at this point will turn the tables towards all-electric buses.

Expectedly, transit buses were the majority of buses on display followed by cut-aways, although there were a few coaches. Here is a brief description of the buses exhibited generally in the order of coaches, transits, cutaways and others.

Motor Coach Industries (MCI) had a large booth area that looked like a New Orleans park and was easily the most attractive booth at the show. Two coaches were displayed on one side and a third at the back. In front was a conventional D4500 Commuter Coach painted white with special exterior graphics and a transit door. It had a transit coach interior without a restroom. On display immediately behind was a J4500, the only true charter and tour coach at the show. Parked at the rear of the booth was one of the new CNG-powered commuter coaches going to Los Angeles Department of Transportation. This coach was equipped with a bike rack in front and had the CNG equipment in the underfloor compartments.

Of special interest was the new ACTIA multiplex system, a fourth-generation state-of-the-art multiplex diagnostics system that is now standard on every MCI commuter coach. For more information on the MCI Commuter Coach, see the article in the October, 2011 NATIONAL BUS TRADER. MCI made two presentations during the show. The first was to acknowledge the order for 84 CNG-powered 40-foot commuter coaches by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. These were not MCI's first CNG-powered commuter coaches since some have been operating in New Jersey for several years.

The second presentation was to acknowledge Callen and Coleen Hotard, owners of Calco Travel. Recently, they bought Hotard Coach back into family ownership after several years of being owned by others. Their pastor, Father Mark Beard, was a surprise guest who praised the Hotards for their support of their church and their community. In recognition, MCI gave the Hotards a large size model bus.

A little ways down the center aisle, **Prevost** and **NovaBus** shared a booth. Prevost showed their new commuter coach based on their popular X3-45 model (see the Octo-



What makes the APTA Expo different from other bus shows is the addition of streetcar and other rail exhibitors on the show floor. This railcar from Stadler was built in Switzerland and displayed on rails bolted to ties placed on the convention floor. There is both streetcar and railroad tracks to the rear of the convention center, but I would have liked to have been there to see how they brought it in.

ber, 2011 issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER). The power train included a Volvo D13 engine and an Allison transmission. A wheelchair lift was located in the center of the coach. The interior included blue cloth seats and overhead parcel racks with courtesy modules above each seat.

NovaBus showed their two-door hybrid electric transit bus. With a length of 40 feet the seated capacity is up to 41 passengers.

Power is a Cummins ISB 6.7 280 horsepower engine. The second bus was the NovaBus LFX model, a three-door articulated. Designed for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) applications, the LFX can move substantial crowds when operated on a dedicated roadway.

Finding **Dina** on the show floor was a little bit of deja vu recalling the 1993 UMA show in Miami where Dina unexpectedly rolled in with buses and pretty girls. This

MCI easily had the most attractive booth at the Expo. It had both grass and sidewalks and gave the appearance of a New Orleans park. Conveniently, two MCI Commuter Coaches and an MCI charter and tour coach were parked around the area.





Dina's Linner model was essentially a short, suburban model with a rear door but no restroom. This photo shows the driver's area with the manual 6-speed Fuller transmission shift lever.



Dina's BRT articulated bus had platform doors on its left side for loading at high level platforms. Drivers would need some skill to bring the bus close to the platform without hitting it.

time the girls spoke English and could answer questions but Dina's return was unexpected. When MCI pulled out of the factory in Sahagún, Mexico, we were under the impression that Dina was beyond repair. What we learned was that Dina struggled for eight years to repay debt to suppliers and employees before a major investment in 2008 allowed them to open the Sahagún plant. Dina is still controlled by the Gómez-Flores family.

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Three buses were on display, The Dina Ridder model is basically a two-door, low-floor transit bus. Included in the drive train is a Cummins ISL engine and an Allison transmission. Adjacent was Dina's Linner model. It looked like a short suburban model with a length of about 34 feet and a second door nearly at the rear. The interior looked

more like a suburban with nicer cloth seats and a parcel rack but no restroom. While it was powered by a Cummins ISB engine, it was very unusual in having a Fuller FSO manual 6-speed transmission. I can not remember the last time I saw a stick shift bus on a show floor on this side of the Atlantic.

The third bus was a four-door articulated with a length of approximately 60 feet. It was powered by a Cummins ISM engine and had an automatic transmission. What made it unusual was platform doors on the left (driver's side) for use at high level BRT station platforms. Dina's staff insisted that there was no guidance system used pulling into stations so getting the bus close to the platforms without hitting them depended entirely on driver skill. We also noted "Made in Mexico" signs on two of the buses but

were not able to determine whether Dina had a way to comply with Buy America.

BCI America had a booth but no bus on display. BCI is affiliated with an Australian company that builds buses in China. For more information see the "Curious Coachowner" column in the September, 2011 issue of NATIONAL BUS TRADER. While they are going to be offering a charter and tour bus, their reason for being at APTA is because they will also be offering a transit bus to the American market.

The new BCI transit bus will be all-electric using lithium ion batteries and regenerative braking. It can be charged in two hours and offers a substantial operating cost savings. Based on current diesel fuel and electric costs, the BCI all-electric transit bus reportedly will offer fuel cost savings of as much as 75 percent.

Two Belgian-built **Van Hool** transit buses were displayed by **ABC Companies**. The first was their relatively standard two-door transit with a lift and is known as their A300L model. It seated 37 passengers and had a drive train that included a Cummins ISL engine with a Voith transmission. It also had rooftop engine cooling. This model is in operation in several locations in North America. Krapf's Coaches just purchased a third one for their regular route service in Pennsylvania.

The second bus on display was the hydrogen-powered 32-passenger A300LFC. It is basically a hybrid electric using a UTC fuel cell and a Siemens electric drive. This is a new generation hydrogen bus with an improved UTC fuel cell, lithium ion batteries and hybrid features. Several are now in operation including 12 in California that followed upon the original three hydrogen fuel cell buses operated by AC Transit for several years. Look to see hydrogen hybrid fuel cell power become more accepted in the future.

This Prevost Commuter Coach shared a booth area with two transit buses from NovaBus. This view looks towards the main walkway and shows the wheelchair lift and door towards the center of the coach. MTA in New York recently placed an initial order for 90 Prevost Commuter Coaches.





The people from Daimler displayed this Sprinter minibus. It offered a lift behind the regular passenger door and a baggage compartment at the rear.



Sharing booth space with the Sprinter was this Orion VII low-floor Clean Diesel bus with a Cummins engine and a ramp for handicapped access.

Other news at ABC includes expansion of their refurbishing line and going beyond Greyhound to refurbishing coaches for other carriers. In addition to extending the life of these coaches, ABC's refurbishing process can update systems and amenities to bring these coaches up to date and provide current amenities.

The people from **Daimler** showed a Sprinter van, two Orion transit buses and a partial shell that allowed attendees to inspect their window and sidewall construction. One Orion transit was their Orion VII clean diesel model. It had a drive train that included a Cummins ISL engine with a Voith transmission. Handicapped entry was by way of a ramp at the front door. The second Orion transit bus had two doors, a low-floor

design with BRT styling, and was powered by a Cummins ISL engine.

Also on display was a Sprinter Minibus. It had separate driver's doors on both sides, a lift behind the regular passenger door and a rear luggage door. The partial shell was only a few feet long but was full size and you could walk into it. This gave attendees a good idea of the quality of Orion bus construction.

Easily the most popular and proved-in-service transit design on the show floor was the **RTS** model from **Millennium Transit Services**. This unique model was originally designed by General Motors to be a short-lived interim and modular model until the new Transbus went into production. The first RTS buses were delivered to Long Beach

in 1977. Since the Transbus program was not successful, the RTS continued on in production. Greyhound purchased the RTS production line from GM and moved it from Pontiac, Michigan to Roswell, New Mexico under the MCI name. Nova Bus then took over for a few years until Millennium Transit Services stepped in. Some of the people involved were once part of the MCI staff in Roswell.

Millennium plans to put the traditional RTS back into production at Roswell in 2012. Future plans include a low-floor model as well as a wide range of power options including conventional Cummins diesel, CNG and hybrid systems using diesel, gasoline, CNG and fuel cell power.

New Flyer is headquartered in Winnipeg, Manitoba but has facilities in Minnesota to complete buses that comply with Buy America provisions. They had two transit buses on display. The shorter bus was a Metrobus hybrid going to WMATA in Washington, D.C. It offered a low-floor design with a ramp at the front door. The second bus was their Xcelsior model low-floor articulated. It had a ramp instead of a wheelchair lift and offered both conventional power as well as hybrid drive.

Easily qualifying as one of the tallest and most unusual buses on the show floor was the Enviro 500 from **Alexander Dennis**. Available in lengths of 40 and 42 feet, the Enviro has the ability to swallow substantial crowds. While the typical seated capacity is 83 (30 on the lower deck and 53 on the upper), there are layouts that provide for up to 99 passengers. The Cummins engine is standard, but Allison, ZF and Voith transmissions are available.

The staircase to the upper level is located behind the driver. Being essentially a low-floor bus, an optional ramp is available along with an interior layout that includes space for two wheelchairs on the lower level. The bus on display was built in the UK but the

ABC Companies showed the latest version of the Van Hool hydrogen fuel cell bus. Now into a new and improved generation, the hydrogen fuel cell technology from UTC is an increasingly practical and sustainable alternative for public transit. A dozen similar buses are in service in California for AC Transit and neighboring operations.





The Alexander Dennis double-deck bus is available in different models including a transit version and sightseeing versions. Although a design from the UK, it can comply with Buy America provisions.



The RTS was introduced in 1977, the same year as NATIONAL BUS TRADER. Millennium plans to put the RTS into production at Roswell, New Mexico in 2012 with a low-floor version planned for the future.

Enviro 500 can comply with Buy America provisions by being assembled in the United States by Eldorado-National.

Based in Hayward, California, not far from San Francisco, **Gillig** is a traditional transit bus builder with buses operating in many cities in North America. They had three buses on display. Their low-floor hybrid diesel electric bus was painted white with patriotic red and blue graphics. Nearby and painted green and gray was a single door low-floor suburban commuter bus. It had modern BRT-like styling and a bike rack on the front. Painted a bright red and yellow was a low-floor CNG bus that apparently was going to Long Beach Transit.

North American Bus Industries (NABI) in Anniston, Alabama has an interesting heritage going back to a Hungarian bus manufacturing company called Ikarus that once partnered with Crown. Other acquisitions include Optima (the former Chance amusement ride company) of Wichita, Kansas and a portion of the Blue Bird commercial bus division from Fort Valley, Georgia. They showed two transit buses.

Painted a tasteful gray was their 40 foot LFW Gen III low-floor model. It featured both stainless steel and aluminum construction. The standard drive train includes a Cummins engine and an Allison transmission although CNG and hybrid options are available. It is interesting that the windshield is available in a single piece configuration. It is available in lengths of 32 to 40 feet with seated capacities from 25 to 40.

NABI's BRT articulated bus was somewhat hidden by pillars and signs so we could not get good photos. It had a length of 60 feet with two units, three axles and three doors. The sloped front offered modern, aerodynamic styling. This design was available as either a 42-foot single unit or the 60-foot articulated with either diesel or CNG power.

Based in Charlotte, North Carolina, **DesignLine** has a heritage that goes back to New Zealand in 1985. Although originally a coach builder, DesignLine developed a line of hybrid transit buses using small engines and regenerative braking that won awards. The company recently received a contract to build 76 CNG-powered commuter cruiser buses for New Jersey Transit.

On display was DesignLine's EcoSaver model. Looking very modern, the EcoSaver is a hybrid that incorporates a small turbine engine with regenerative braking and batteries to reduce emissions. The bus on display was similar to the eight buses currently in service at Charlotte's Douglas International Airport. The interior included a long luggage rack to the rear of the front passenger door.

One of the more interesting buses on display was a 27.5-foot community shuttle bus known as the Vicinity. Developed by a company named **Grande West Transportation**, the Vicinity was specifically engineered for use on neighborhood streets. The body is built by Yaxing in China and a prototype is being tested by BC Transit in Vancouver, British Columbia. The prototype has only a single entrance door and its low-floor design permits use of a ramp at the door. Power is provided by a Cummins ISB engine. The Vicinity does not comply with Buy America and is currently only being offered in Canada.

A company known as **BYD America Corporation** had their all-electric, three-door transit bus on display. This same bus was on display at the earlier BusCon show and reportedly will also be on display at Bus-world in Europe later in October. BYD is a

DesignLine's EcoSaver model is a hybrid that uses a small gas turbine engine for generating power. This one was similar to eight buses serving Charlotte's Douglas International Airport. It had a rack for luggage immediately behind the front door.





The Proterra battery-powered bus is already in service in Pomona. It uses an overhead charging station that recharges the bus in only 10 minutes.



A Chinese company, BYD, is an established battery manufacturer that got into auto making and then developed this all-electric battery-powered bus.

Chinese company that manufactures batteries. An unusual situation pushed them into building automobiles where their past battery experience encouraged them to get into building electric cars. That, in turn, prompted BYD to develop their electric bus.

The interior of the bus has very few fixed seats and hence is made more for crush capacity than regular seating. It does appear to have good technology and a reasonable range but it is unclear whether the bus could comply with Buy America provisions.

Based in Golden, Colorado, **Proterra** showed an all-electric bus that is currently in commercial service. Known as the Ecoliner, the low-floor bus seats 37 passengers and has a ramp at the front door. It uses lithium titanate batteries under the floor and has a 50-mile range. What makes the Proterra bus practical is that it can pull beneath

an overhead device and recharge in 10 minutes. Three buses are already operating in Pomona, California and three buses are being delivered to San Antonio with another three going to Tallahassee.

While the people from **Stallion** did not display their charter and tour bus, there was one Stallion on the show floor. It was shown by the Angel Trax people and used to show their mobile video surveillance solutions.

Eldorado-National had one of the larger display areas with five vehicles on display. It appears that three of these vehicles were shown at BusCon while a fourth was similar to a bus that had been displayed at BusCon. Already sold to the MTA in Flint, Michigan was a cutaway with a wheelchair lift at the side near the rear. It had been converted to propane power by Roush. Nearby was Eldorado's low-floor Aero Access cutaway model.

It was 102 inches wide, could seat 19 passengers plus the driver and had a ramp at the front door. The smallest of the vehicles on display was their Amerivan. Basically a modified Grand Caravan, it offered a low floor and a ramp for wheelchair entry.

The Passport HD model was a larger cutaway but still low-floor. Built on an IC chassis with a Maxxforce engine, it had an Allison transmission and a width of 102 inches. There was a ramp at the front door. Eldorado's fifth vehicle was the E-Z Rider II transit bus. This two-door low-floor transit bus was powered by a Maxxforce engine and offered ramps at either or both doors.

IC Bus had three different buses on display. The AC series cutaway had seats for 12 passengers plus wheelchair space at the rear opposite the curbside lift at the rear. The AC series chassis will be available to all body builders with either the Maxxforce diesel or a V-8 Maxxforce gasoline engine.

The larger HC series cutaway had room for 32 passengers but was available in lengths of 23 to 38 feet with capacities of from 18 to 45 passengers. A Maxxforce diesel engine and an Allison transmission make up the standard drive train, but hybrid electric drive by Eaton is also available. The largest bus on display was IC's RE Commercial bus series with a flat front and rear engine. It had a two-door transit configuration with a lift at the back door. The unit on display was already sold to the Franklin Regional Transit Authority. It had a bike rack in front and a lift at the back door.

Located in New Paris, Indiana, **Turtle Top** had two buses on display. Painted white was an Odyssey cutaway on an E-450 chassis. It could run on flex fuel. The other bus was a cutaway painted black. It was their Business Class M2 model and was painted for Bauers.

Glaval Bus from Elkhart, Indiana showed three buses. Painted white was their new

IC Bus showed their RE Commercial bus. It has a flat front design and is powered by a Maxxforce engine. This bus on display had a wheelchair lift at the back door.





Champion Bus showed their UC Defender model. This mid-size cutaway was built on an IC Bus chassis and had a wheelchair lift at the curb at the rear.



NovaBus showed their two-door hybrid electric transit bus. It had a Cummins 280 horsepower engine, a length of 40 feet and a seated capacity of 41 passengers.

Legacy cutaway model. This is built on a Freightliner S2C chassis and is powered by a Cummins 6.7 liter engine. The Titan II LF model is a low-floor cutaway built on a Chevy G4500 chassis. Its low floor permits the use of a ramp instead of a lift. The third bus on display was Glaval's Cable Car Classics-themed bus. Basically an Apollo trolley model, it was built on a Freightliner MB65 chassis and was powered by a Cummins ISB 6.7 liter engine. It offered a lift at curbside at the rear.

Champion Bus from Imlay City, Michigan showed a single bus. It was their UC Defender model, a cutaway painted white. Built on an IC Bus chassis with a Maxxforce engine and an Allison transmission it could seat 18 passengers with two wheelchair positions. A lift was provided at the curbside at the rear.

Located in Elkhart, Indiana, **Goshen Coach** showed their low-floor model cutaway. Built on an E-450 chassis it had a ramp at the front door. This model is available up to 27 feet long with a capacity for up to 24 passengers.

Based in Middlebury, Indiana, **Arboc Mobility** displayed three buses on the show floor. Painted white with a green stripe was a small low-floor cutaway on a Chevy chassis. It had a ramp at the front passenger door. A larger cutaway, painted white, was their Spirit of Freedom model. Built on a Chevy chassis it also offered low-floor features. The most interesting of the three buses was their Spirit of Liberty Model. This is a low-floor, flat front bus that had a ramp at the front door.

MV Sales from Fairfield, California showed their MV-1. This is a mini-van powered by CNG that uses a ramp for handicapped access. This same vehicle was also on display at BusCon.

Several other buses on display were not actually for sale but were displayed on the show floor to show some particular product or service.

Impco Automotive from Union City, Indiana specializes in the design of alternative fuel systems. They had a cutaway on

display in the CNG area to show what they can do. The low-floor bus came from Arboc Mobility and was built on a Chevy 4500 chassis. It had doors in the rear on both sides where the CNG was stored.

Gentex offers a scaffolding system that allows maintenance staff to easily and safely work on equipment located on bus roofs. This is increasingly important what with alternative fuel systems, rooftop air conditioning and rooftop engine cooling systems. They borrowed an Orion transit bus from the New Orleans RTA (fleet number 259) to show how their equipment works.

Three different lift companies used buses to show how their lifts work. The three lift companies were **ARI Hetra**, **Sefac** and **Rotary Lift**. All of the buses were smaller cutaways borrowed from dealers.

In addition, there were two Sprinters on the show floor to demonstrate products. We also noted two personal vehicles on the

Several buses on the show floor were used to sell various products. Here, Gentex uses a New Orleans RTA Orion transit bus to demonstrate their rooftop scaffolding.



Three streetcar lines were in operation in New Orleans. This Canal Street car paused to pick up a load of passengers at Carondelet on the way to the Mississippi River.



show floor but did not include them in our tabulations. One of these was an electrically-powered car.

Nancy wanted to bring things for our booth at this APTA Expo that would be difficult to carry on an airplane, and I wanted

extra camera gear. Hence, your NATIONAL BUS TRADER staff arrived and stayed in our converted coach during the show. We were parked at the French Quarter RV Resort which is located about two blocks from the French Quarter and about four blocks from Canal Street. They have a very clean camp-

ground with good security and are highly recommended by our staff.

For those interested in exhibiting at or attending the next APTA Expo, you can mark your calendar for October 13-15, 2014. The location will be Houston, Texas. □

Your NATIONAL BUS TRADER staff arrived at the APTA Expo by coach and stayed at the French Quarter RV Resort. This very clean and gated campground was only two blocks from the French Quarter and four blocks from Canal Street. Commercial buses were also using this location for secure parking.



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