

B-LINE DIAL-A-BUS SYSTEM IN BATAVIA

Robert P. Aex

Executive Director, Rochester-Genesee Regional Transit Authority
Executive Vice President, Batavia Bus Service, Inc.

Batavia, New York, is a small community located half-way between Rochester and Buffalo. It has a population of about 18,000, a wide main street, and considerable automobile traffic.

On June 3, 1971, newspapers in Rochester, where the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority is located, and in Batavia, where the bus system operates, reported that the authority was taking over the bus system. The Batavia papers also carried stories for 2 or 3 days about a new concept, dial-a-bus, that was to replace the old fixed-route system.

The buses in the old system were about 13 years old and had traveled about 650,000 miles each. The seats had been reupholstered many times. During 1969-1971 the vehicles were frequently out of service because of breakdowns. Ridership and revenues were decreasing, and expenses were increasing. The annual operating deficit was about \$7,000 even though the vehicles were fully depreciated.

The B-Line, the name given to the new dial-a-bus service, was further announced in a descriptive brochure mailed to every address in the city of Batavia. The brochure described the manner in which the B-Line would operate, the fares, the operating hours, and so forth. In addition, newspaper advertising and posters further described the B-Line and the individual services.

Dial-a-bus service was installed on October 11, 1971, when many community leaders were invited to meet at one of the local shopping centers, view the buses, and ride in them in a parade. The old buses were allowed to operate for 14 days after the start of the new system. Then, on October 22, it was announced that the old loop bus was "going, going, gone" to "bus heaven" after 13 years and 650,000 miles.

SERVICE

Batavia is not much different from most communities. Automobiles fill city streets, and traffic congestion is bad at times. In an urban renewal project, cleared land has had to be used on a ratio of 3 to 1 for automobile parking space and for new buildings. Our goal is to break the almost complete dependence on the automobile.

B-Line service is designed to fully meet the transportation needs of people in the community. It provides transportation from any point within the city to any other on a 20-minute schedule. Door-to-door transportation to and from day-care centers, schools, colleges, and work eliminates the need to drive an automobile or be driven in one. B-Line service also includes the delivery of small packages within the city.

Special services are provided for senior citizens who live in a high-rise apartment project on Main Street. Dial-a-bus picks up passengers at the entrance of the project and takes them downtown or wherever they want to go. Two days a week there is free bus service on a Shoppers Special paid for by a local retailer. A local bank also pays for free bus transportation to banks. The bus drivers help the elderly to get on and off the buses and provide any other assistance needed.

Dial-a-buses serve public housing projects and make it easy for women to go shopping accompanied by their children. The buses also pick up and deliver passengers at the front doors of the several hospitals in Batavia.

Service has been expanded several times since it began on October 11, 1971. When service was extended to LeRoy and Stafford, 2 nearby communities, the size of the bus fleet was increased. We started with three 23-passenger Flxettes and

have added a fourth 23-passenger Flxette and a 10-passenger Ford Courier.

We recently announced a Bankers Special, chartered by a local bank on scheduled dates, on which passengers may ride free to do banking in the downtown area. Free bus service in cooperation with the local merchants was also offered for shopping trips downtown between the hours of 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORD KEEPING

Bus drivers take all their commands from dispatchers by radio. The dispatcher uses a 6- by 4-ft control board, radio, telephone, and magnets. Our productivity goals are 10 passengers per vehicle per hour for general service and 17 for subscription service.

Communication between the base station and the vehicles has been by radio. A 20-ft antenna on top of a 100-ft tower enables signals to be sent and received throughout the service area. Vehicles are equipped with 2-way mobile units: 1 frequency to receive messages and 1 frequency to send messages back to the base station.

Recently, it was decided to experiment with digital communications. An application has been prepared to be submitted to the Federal Communications Commission for permission to install and use radio telemetry equipment. Initially, a 30-day experiment will be conducted through the use of telemetric equipment at the base station and in 2 vehicles. The results will be evaluated, and a decision will be made to order equipment for the base station and all vehicles on a lease-purchase basis for a 6-month trial. If the trial is undertaken, a second evaluation and a decision will be made regard-

ing the use of this equipment. It is hoped that digital communications will reduce voice messages by at least 50 percent and will permit reduction in dispatching personnel required.

Paperwork is kept at a minimum. Drivers carry a vehicle log on the bus while on dial-a-bus service. An inside office form is used as a reservation list for home-to-work or home-to-school service. A route sheet is used by the driver when he is on subscription service. A small form is used by the telephone operator on which to record requests for service.

A few operating reports are important. One shows the number of hours each vehicle operates each day and the hours on each type of service. The totals are carried out for the day and for the week. A weekly ridership report tells management what is happening in the various categories of service and establishes the level of vehicle productivity for each week.

RIDERSHIP

Ridership increased from 944 in the first week to more than 1,500 at the end of the fifth week and to more than 2,000 at the end of the sixteenth week. The fixed-route system carried about 75,000 riders per year, and the B-Line is expected to carry about 100,000 to 110,000 during its first year.

Productivity for dial-a-bus service has ranged from 7.0 to 12.0 and has averaged 9.0. Productivity for subscription services has ranged from 12.0 to 17.0 and has averaged 15.0.

COSTS AND REVENUES

Vehicle operating costs, exclusive of driver wages, have been computed to be

15 cents per mile to cover maintenance and operation including gas, oil, tires, repairs, insurance, and depreciation and excluding administration and debt service. Driver wages are computed at \$3 per hour plus 20 percent for fringe benefits. Total system costs per vehicle-hour have been computed to be \$13.54 per hour to cover all costs including administration and debt service. Total system costs per vehicle-mile have been computed to be 62.34 cents per mile to cover all costs, including administration and debt service.

After 7 months of operation, income from all sources for the month of April 1972 covered all of the direct operating expenses and part, but not all, of depreciation. Additional income has been developed from advertising, package delivery, and dial-a-bus charters.

Fares are as follows:

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| To work and return, 10 trips per week | \$4.00 |
| To school and return, 10 trips per week | \$3.50 |
| To college | \$4.00 |
| 11 tickets per trip | \$0.36 |
| Dial-a-bus, per trip | \$0.60 |
| Day-care service, per trip | \$0.25 |
| Charters, per hour | \$8.00 |

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY

We ran coupon ads in the paper that read, "The B-Line wants to know. . . ." Posters were also used to give details of the different services such as those to work, to school, and to college.

Various promotional gimmicks were developed to increase the awareness of the new service. A very successful promotion was in the form of "I Ride the B-Line" buttons. We also offer free tickets to people who have not ridden the B-Line.

We also prepared a brochure that was

mailed to government and industry leaders throughout the area.

We have had national publicity in the syndicated column of James J. Kilpatrick, in Nation's City magazine, and in stories written about other dial-a-bus operations throughout the country.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION

Question: Can you say anything more about your proposed use of digital communication?

Answer: We are now controlling these vehicles by the use of radio, telephone, and a control board. We have under consideration a proposal for digital communication—radio and teleprinting. I hope we do try digital communications, but I cannot indicate at this time what action the board will take.

Question: Do you have union drivers? And, if so, how do you get around having to take the packages on and off buses for your customers?

Answer: We do not have union drivers yet. How do we get the drivers to do this and that? Our approach to both union and nonunion people is that, with bus ridership decreasing all over the country (we are losing 6 to 8 percent of our riders a year in Rochester) if we do not do something pretty soon, there are not going to be any jobs for anybody. We must not only expand but also provide service of a new kind—personalized service to people. Drivers, if there will be any drivers' jobs, will have to fill the needs just like the company will have to.

Question: How much of a deficit do you have, and how do you make it up?

Answer: At the present time, the income from all sources—fare box, advertising, package delivery, and charters—

is meeting all of our direct operating expenses and part, but not all, of depreciation. We believe that we will not be very far into the next fiscal year before we will be able to close the gap.

Question: How do you make up the deficit?

Answer: At the present time, we are covering all of our direct operating expenses, and therefore we have a positive cash flow. The deficit that now exists is confined to depreciation. There is no deficit to be made up; it simply means that, if we cannot close the gap by the time these vehicles have to be replaced, we will have to go somewhere else to get the money for new vehicles. We are hopeful that we will be able to do so. In other words, there is a positive cash flow; \$200,000 was borrowed to buy the old bus company and to add new equipment. That money is being paid back with interest, and we expect the income to do that also. At the present time, I think we are well along toward our goal, but I would be misleading you if I told you that we had completely made it.

Question: If this service has rates higher than those of the fixed-route operation it replaced, will you have any problem with residents over the higher rates?

Answer: The previous fixed-route system suffered from a very rapid and steadily decreasing ridership. The owners had no capital to replace the equipment, nor did they have the heart to do it because it was a losing venture. The fare on the old fixed-route system was 25 cents. If you compare the fixed-route and dial-a-bus fares, it is 25 cents versus 60 cents; for work service, it is 25 cents versus 40 cents; and for school service, it is 25 cents versus 35 cents. In 6 months, we have increased the rider-

ship 30 percent over what it was under the old fixed-route system.

Question: How many hours per day are you in service and how many days per week is there service? What is the average time for pickup and delivery?

Answer: We have a parameter of 20 minutes that we try to use—20 minutes from the time a person calls, we try to pick him up, and 20 minutes from the time he gets on the bus, we try to deliver him to his destination. We are averaging about 10 minutes. We operate from 6 a.m. til 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Question: Will you explain again how you pay for your capital and interest?

Answer: It is paid for out of income from all sources. If there is anything we are sure of, it is that the fare box alone (at these fares) will not cover the load.

Question: What are you doing about working for lower fares in the inner city?

Answer: When we first examined the Batavia situation, we found that one of the greatest sources of taxicab revenues was the welfare department. We are convinced that the primary consideration is not fares but service. Is it service that somebody needs? And is it service that is dependable and reliable? For the kind of service we are giving in the city of Batavia, it is the judgment of the citizens—not ours—that our service is reasonably priced.

Question: What is the wage rate for the drivers?

Answer: Our drivers are averaging \$3.00 an hour plus 20 percent fringe benefits. However, we expect that that will be changed shortly. If not by us, then by somebody else!