



Spring 2014

## Dickson pilot project set to launch April 28

Plans are being made to offer a two-week pilot project for express bus service from the City of Dickson to downtown Nashville.

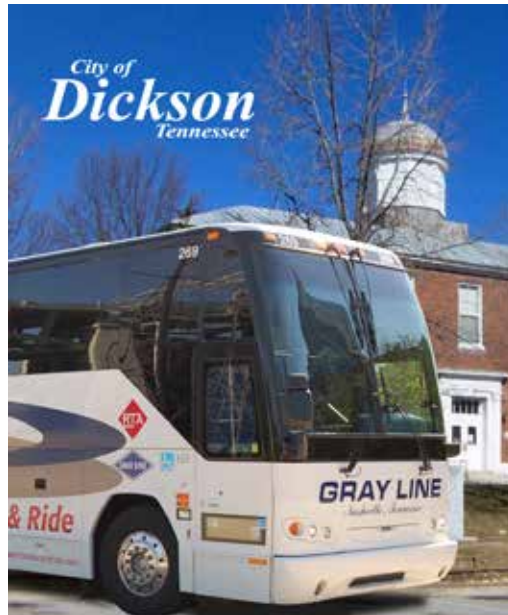
Free service will be available to the first 56 passengers each weekday from April 28-May 9 and will be operated by Gray Line of Tennessee for the RTA.

This pilot project is being offered to gauge the interest of commuters in the Dickson area.

The morning bus will depart from the City of Dickson at 6:40 a.m. and arrive at Music City Central in downtown Nashville at 7:40 a.m. The afternoon bus will depart from Music City Central Bay 7 at 4:38 p.m. and arrive in Dickson at 5:40 p.m. A Park & Ride lot will be located at the Walmart on Beasley Drive in Dickson.

"Accessible public transportation is important to our community," Dickson County Mayor and RTA Board Member

Bob Rial said. "This initiative will demonstrate not only that there is a great need for transit in our area, but it will show our residents how easy and beneficial it is to use public transportation."



## Join us at Nashville Earth Day Festival April 19

This year's Earth Day Festival will be held at Centennial Park on Saturday, April 19 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Members of the Nashville MTA and RTA staff will be present to promote the many benefits of public transportation in the Middle Tennessee region. The Nashville MTA also will have a hybrid bus on display for attendees to explore.

The free, family-friendly festival will feature exhibits and activities to help educate Nashvillians about protecting our environment. For more information regarding the event, please visit [www.nashvilleearthday.org](http://www.nashvilleearthday.org).



## Hamilton Springs awarded \$1.6 million grant for commuter rail station

The Music City Star will soon be adding another rail stop to its route. The RTA was recently awarded a \$1.6 million federal grant by the Nashville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to fund the completion of Hamilton Springs Station located in Middle Tennessee's first transit-oriented development (TOD).

The Hamilton Springs Station will be the Music City Star's seventh regional rail station. Currently in the design phase, construction of the station is expected to begin in the spring of 2015.

Lebanon is among the highest in population growth in Tennessee, with a 33 percent population increase since 1990. The addition of the train station will create a new point of access to the Music City Star and increase ridership significantly.

Phase one of the 396-unit luxury Hamilton Springs apartment community opened last fall. Other residential housing and businesses centered by the train station are planned. A key feature of TODs is the emphasis on transit modes other than the automobile.

"The RTA board and I are pleased to partner with Jack Bell Builders and the MPO on our region's first transit-oriented development," said RTA General Manager Lora Baulsir. "We are looking forward to opening the new station."



RTA GM Lora Baulsir and former CEO Paul J. Ballard unveil a plaque dedicated to Sheila Watkins Varga at the Mt. Juliet train station

## RTA honors Sheila Varga

On July 30, 2013, Middle Tennessee lost one of its most admired Music City Star riders and supporters – Sheila Watkins Varga. In recognition of her many achievements – participating in the Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee’s inaugural Transit Citizen Leadership Academy, as well as being the president of the Regional Commuters Association – the RTA placed a commemorative plaque at her daily boarding station in Mt. Juliet.

A dedication ceremony to unveil the plaque was held on March 25. Family members and friends gathered as former RTA CEO Paul J. Ballard, RTA Communications Director Patricia Harris-Morehead, and fellow Music City Star riders Clyde Hicks and Johna Starcher provided remarks about Sheila’s love of the train and public transit.

When passing by the plaque, those who admired or were influenced by Sheila’s dedication to improving public transit in the region, as well as those who did not know her, are invited to pause for a moment of silence to honor this “Special Friend of the Music City Star” who was among the original group of riders to board the train in September 2006.

## Music City Star financially secure

### Commuter rail not effected by short-line controversy

The current funding freeze affecting Tennessee’s short-line railroads has led to speculation there will be a disruption in the Music City Star’s service. The RTA is confident that the operation of the Music City Star will continue unimpeded since it is not funded by this revenue source and is not a short-line; it is a commuter train. The particular track utilized by the Music City Star is actually owned by Nashville & Eastern Railroad Authority (NERA).

In mid-October 2013, a federal judge in Nashville stopped the state from collecting the tax that supplied funding for rail improvements for the short-line railroads in Tennessee. The money for these improvements comes from the state’s Short Line Equity Fund, which receives its money from a seven percent tax the state charges on diesel fuel for railroad locomotives. Lawsuits were filed by the large railroad companies claiming the tax is discriminatory. Payments out of the

equity fund to the short-line railroads were suspended by TDOT pending the outcome of appeals.

The situation is being monitored, and there are a number of options available to address this revenue problem for the state’s short line railroads. To begin, the state is appealing the decision and is not going to allow this vital network of rail lines to go away, permanently injuring the economic well-being of many Tennessee counties. The jobs and business losses would be immediately felt by the state’s economy. And finally, there will be other opportunities to bring revenue sources to the table to prevent the Music City Star from being harmed.

Legislation is pending in the General Assembly that will change the way large railroads are taxed. Since TDOT has about \$40 million in the fund, the RTA is optimistic that NERA and the other short-line rail authorities will soon begin receiving the funds again.

## NEWS & NOTES

### Search for new CEO

The Nashville MTA Board is conducting a national search to replace former MTA/RTA CEO Paul J. Ballard, who left Nashville to become president and CEO of the Fort Worth Transportation Authority. A few of Ballard’s many RTA accomplishments include directing the start-up of the Music City Star, expanding regional bus service, and consistently increasing ridership for both MTA and RTA.

### RTA rebranding

The RTA Marketing Committee has been discussing the need to re-examine the RTA’s marketing brands of services. Members of the RTA Board are excited to begin this process with a series of meetings beginning this month to examine the overall brand position. As part of this rebranding exercise, you may see more of the RTA staff on buses conducting surveys in order to gather more information for future marketing needs.

### Track rehab

The Music City Star is currently in the middle of the first phase of track rehab; between three and four thousand wooden ties have been replaced thus far. Additional tie curves, spikes, ballasts, culverts and welding of the rail also are needed to increase speed allowances and keep safety our top priority. Plans for a new rail passing siding construction also are underway to enable service expansion.



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