

MBS 2014 FALL CONVENTION REPORT

MICHIGAN

October 16-19, 2014

The Motor Bus Society held its 2014 Fall Convention in Michigan on Thursday to Sunday, October 16-19, 2014. During those four days, we visited a dozen different operators, as well as a rebuilder and a museum collection, in nine different Michigan cities and one in Ohio. The convention hotel was the Comfort Inn and Suites in Ann Arbor which proved to be a good headquarters location.

For those who would like to travel along, Sid Keyles has posted an online photo album with captions that will help follow the itineraries each day of the Convention. The album may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/lzdacfd>

Day 1 (Thursday, October 16):

Jackson, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids

The first stop on Day 1 was the Jackson Area Transportation Authority Transfer Center. The Gillig Advantages we saw date from 2008 to 2012 and carried at least seven different multi-colored paint schemes. The Center is right downtown and we saw two of the half-hour pulses. Most of the Gilligs were 35-foot models, a few, 30 feet.

The second stop was Battle Creek, home of Kellogg's cereal. The Battle Creek Transit Transportation Center is right across the street from the Amtrak station and intercity bus terminal. Battle Creek's small fleet consists of six Bluebirds, six Gilligs (four of them 29-foot long), and two Eldorado vans.

After Battle Creek, we visited Kalamazoo, where our stop at the Metro Transit Transportation Center included lunch. The Metro Transit fleet is almost all 35-foot Gillig Advantages, including 11 hybrids, but there are eight 40-footers on the roster. The oldest five buses are from 2000, including four of the eight 40-footers. After the downtown stop, we visited Western Michigan University. Campus bus service is provided by Bronco Transit, a division of Indian Trails, with

40-foot New Flyer DLF's rebuilt by Midwest Bus. They have a very attractive paint scheme of Brown and Gold, the WMU colors. Metro Transit also serves the WMU campus.

Next stop was the Rapid Central Station, near downtown Grand Rapids. The Rapid uses almost exclusively Gillig Advantages, mostly 40-footers. The oldest buses are from 2004. There are some BRT hybrids dating from 2007 as well as a number of 2013s and 2014s. The newest BRT hybrids are used on The Rapid's Silver Line, with a unique silver, white and green paint scheme. The Silver Line is billed as Michigan's first Bus Rapid Transit line and opened as recently as August 25th. We saw extremely busy activity at the Central Station and the display solidified this first day as 'Mostly Gillig Day'. After a long ride from Grand Rapids, we arrived back at the hotel a bit later than scheduled, but quite satisfied.



Western Michigan University's "Bronco Transit" 40' New Flyer #22.

Jackson Area Transportation Authority #480, a 2008 Gillig.



Grand Rapids "Silver Line" Gillig BRT #1097.



Day 2 (Friday, October 17):

UofM, Flint, Indian Trails and Lansing

Our first stop on Day 2 was the Central Campus Transit Center at the University of Michigan. The University has several Gillig hybrids in service, but the bulk of the fleet consists of standard 40-foot Gillig Advantages in the University colors of Blue and Gold. Ann Arbor Transit also serves the Transit Center with a number of routes. Service was quite frequent on both operations, which offered many photo opportunities.

We then travelled to Flint, where our first stop was at the garage. Flint has one of the oldest fleets we saw on the trip. The bulk consists of New Flyer D40LF's from 1996 and Blue Birds from 2001. There are also RTS's from 1983 and 1989, one 1998 New Flyer D40LF, several MCI's from 1995 to 2006, and a Van Hool hydrogen fuel cell bus from 2010 which was out of service. The only new buses are 16 New Flyer XDE40 Xcelsior hybrids from 2012 and 2013. After a very nice garage visit, we proceeded to the downtown terminal, which contained lovely glass work by each platform, plus a statue of Rosa Parks. We saw mostly Xcelsiors in service, although some New Flyer D40LF's were also seen. We then stopped for lunch at the Genessee Valley Center.

After lunch, we visited the main garage of Indian Trails in Owosso. They also have garages in Romulus and Kalamazoo. We saw a few Prevost and MCI J4500 charter coaches as well as several state-owned MCI D4500's used on regularly scheduled public runs. There was also a New Flyer D35LF transit bus in generic Indian Trails paint. While in Owosso, we visited Midwest Bus Corp. where we saw many Boston MBTA Neoplans, as Midwest has a contract to rebuild 192 of them; about 100 have been delivered so far. We were given access to the yard where we saw retired buses from many transit operators, including Milwaukee, Palmtran (Florida), Cincinnati, Ft. Myers, Grand Rapids, SMART, and CDTA (NY). It was a very nice time for hunting older buses.

Last stop of the day was the Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA) Transportation Center in downtown Lansing, Michigan's State capital. Unlike most properties we visited, CATA does not have any Gilligs in its fleet, using New Flyer buses exclusively. There are Flyer D40LF's and D60LF's from 2001 to 2005; DE40LFR's and DE60LFR's from 2006 to 2010 (all hybrids); and XDE40 Xcelsiors from 2011 to 2014 (also all hybrids). The New Flyer artics are used on Michigan State University routes except in the summer. We enjoyed seeing the varied New Flyer fleet and the downtown terminal.

Day 3 (Saturday, October 18):

Ann Arbor, Toledo and SMART

We left the hotel on Saturday morning and traveled only a short distance to reach the garage of the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, known locally as "The Ride." AAATA has only Gilligs in its fleet: Advantages purchased from 1999 to 2003 and BRT models purchased from 2007 to 2013. All but the newest 5 of the BRT models are hybrids. The garage was well lit for photos, and our hosts arranged for 3 buses to be posed outside as well.



Grand Rapids DASH (Downtown Area Shuttle) Gillig #7511.



University of Michigan Gillig #3053.



Flint Mass Transportation Authority #1120, a 1989 GMC RTS.



CATA #603, a 2013 New Flyer Xcelsior hybrid in Lansing.



TARTA Gillig BRT #819 in Toledo.



Brand new SMART 2014 Gillig Hybrid BRT #3009 in Detroit.

We then traveled to downtown Toledo, Ohio, where the Toledo Area Rapid Transit Authority (TARTA) runs 80-minute pulses on Saturdays. There are more than a dozen routes, so we saw many buses, all either 2010 Eldorados or 2012 Gillig BRT's. With such a long headway, we didn't want to miss a pulse and we got there with plenty of time to spare. After time downtown, we visited the TARTA garage where, in addition to TARTA equipment, the Ohio Museum of Transportation (OMOT) stores some of its historic collection.

TARTA has a varied fleet; in addition to the Eldorados and Gillig BRT's, there are 1998 and 1999 Gillig Advantages, 2002 and 2003 Thomas 235's, 2008 small buses from North American Bus, 2006 Blue Birds and two RTS's from 1990 and 1994. We saw several buses from the OMOT collection, including an ex-Greyhound PD-3751, a few GM old looks and a few new looks from GM and Flxible. Needless to say, it was a very good stop.

After lunch at the Franklin Park Mall in Toledo, we went to the Oakland Terminal (garage) of Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), which operates suburban bus service in the Detroit area (formerly SEMTA). The overwhelming majority of the SMART fleet consists of 29, 35 and 40-foot Gillig Advantages from 2002 and 2003. We saw plenty of these in Oakland and additionally we did get to see three brand new 2014 Gillig hybrid BRT buses in a new blue and gold paint scheme.

After photographing many more SMART Gillig Advantages in the standard red and orange livery, our hosts brought out a 2013 Gillig BRT hybrid in a dark green and white paint scheme. Evidently, there are three 2013 models and three 2011 models in the fleet. We were told about SMART's two 2010 New Flyer DE60LF's in another garage, and it was arranged for us to stop there. Upon arrival, we saw one of them, 3002. Given the short notice, our SMART hosts couldn't have been more accommodating. After a short ride, we arrived back at the garage and headed back to the hotel.

Saturday evening saw the regular flea market; business meeting and guest appearance take place at the nearby Sheraton Hotel. Our guest speaker was Kenneth Henry, vice-president of operations and maintenance at Indian Trails. He gave an informative and interesting presentation on the company. After a short business meeting at which President Dino Mandros updated those present on Convention plans and Trustee Sid Keyles summarized the topics discussed at the September 17th Board Meeting, Ken Schramm narrated a slide presentation highlighting the history of streetcar and bus operations in Detroit. It was very well received.

Day 4 (Sunday, October 19): Detroit DOT

Our first stop on Sunday was at Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) Shoemaker Terminal in an industrial area of northeast Detroit. We were given free rein to take photos inside and outside the garages, and saw a variety of the DDOT fleet, including some buses pulled out for us to get the best photos. DDOT has about 160 RTS's that were new in 2001 and 2002, 196 New Flyer D40LF's that were new in 2003 to 2005, 50 similar New Flyers that were new in

2010, and 42 Gillig Advantages acquired in 2011 to 2012. In addition, there are four hybrid Gillig Advantages purchased in 2012. Shoemaker had each type, except the hybrids.

The next stop was at the DDOT Gilbert Terminal where all types, including the hybrids, are maintained. Between the two garage stops, we were able to sample the entire fleet. We then proceeded to the Rosa Parks Transit Center, which also served as our lunch stop. A surprise was waiting there for us in the form of a former Detroit (DSR) fishbowl, 2621. DDOT also brought an RTS downtown for us to photograph. The Downtown area was abuzz, as there had been a morning marathon race and people were arriving and tailgating for the early afternoon Lions game.

The Detroit People Mover has a stop adjacent to the Transit Center and many of the group rode and photographed the trains. Some also walked over to Woodward Avenue, one of the main streets downtown. It is currently being torn up due to construction of a new downtown light rail line which is scheduled to open next year. The Transit Center itself is very photogenic and there was much bus traffic to shoot also. It was a very good stop for us.

We bypassed the downtown Greyhound Terminal and took advantage of the time left by stopping at the Blake Transit Center in downtown Ann Arbor. At Blake, we saw mostly AAATA Gillig BRT hybrids, although one of the new diesels did make an appearance. In addition, we saw a few Air Ride/Michigan Flyer buses.

That service is a joint venture between AAATA and Indian Trails to provide scheduled bus service from East Lansing and Ann Arbor to Detroit Metropolitan Airport. After two pulses at Blake, we returned to the hotel, which marked the formal end to the Convention.

In Summary:

Special thanks need to go out to our hosts at each of the properties we visited. The hospitality we were shown at all of our stops during each of the four days of activity was universally positive and made for great visits. Many of our hosts went above and beyond in assisting us during the stops making them more enjoyable and informative. All comments of those in attendance indicated that this was a very successful Convention in terms of places visited and adherence to schedule.

Much credit for that is due to Dino Mandros, Director of Conventions (as well as MBS president), who, in addition to providing rosters for the properties visited, ran a tight ship on all four days of touring. Kevin Nicol helped immensely with the Convention flyer and itinerary; Mike Glikin did the pre-trip visits with Dino and was instrumental in making the itineraries as good as they were; Sid Keyles made the hotel arrangements and worked to insure that we stayed as close to schedule as possible, resulting in one of the best on-time performances for an MBS Convention.

Mike and Dino served as the "bus guides" for Bus #1 during each day of the Convention, and Sid and Tom Scheffer served as the "guides" for Bus #2, helping guarantee that events went according to plan, and Kevin and Andrew Grahl helped pose buses for better photos during many of our stops. Thanks to all.

2015 MBS Membership Renewal

The 2015 MBS Membership Renewal form is included with the current edition of the MCA. Dues are payable by check, money order, or PAYPAL, and should be sent by February 1, 2015 to avoid being dropped from the mailing list. Please fill out the specific details on the return portion of the notice. Members paying via PAYPAL are requested to return the bottom slip via e-mail or US Mail.

Motor Buses on Facebook

There are two new ways of keeping up to date on MBS happenings: the Motor Coach News Facebook page, and the new MBS Facebook page. The links for members to get "friended" are:

Motor Coach News:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/493002670802416/>

Motor Bus Society:

<http://www.facebook.com/motorbussociety>



Future Conventions

The Spring 2015 MBS Convention in the Connecticut Valley will have a fourth day. With Thursday added, present planning is for one day in Southern Massachusetts, one day in Rhode Island, and two days touring Connecticut, the order yet to be determined. The headquarters hotel will be in downtown Hartford. Convention materials will be up on the MBS website in early January 2015 and will be mailed to members with the first 2015 edition of Motor Coach Age.

The Fall 2015 MBS Convention in Halifax, Nova Scotia has been rescheduled for Thursday, October 15th; Friday, October 16th; and Saturday, October 17th. Planning is for the first two days of the convention as the longest travel days, with Saturday being a local day. Stay tuned for further details.

E-mail list

If you would like to be added to the MBS Secretary's e-mail notification list, please send us your address.

MBS Contact Information

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