

## NEW HAVEN/STATE

# Bus pass offer hits snag

## Some existing riders confused by mayor's phone call

By Elizabeth Benton  
Register Staff

**NEW HAVEN** — Alberta Witherspoon is one of 23,335 city residents who got a call Monday from Mayor John DeStefano Jr. offering 10 free bus passes.

The veteran bus rider was enticed. She immediately rang the 800 number to claim her passes. After three busy signals, she finally got through, only to be told she did not qualify because she already rides the bus.

Witherspoon is in good company.

Of 1,200 people in the New Haven and Waterbury area who called the hot line since Gov. M. Jodi Reil first unveiled the promotion Nov. 17, only 385 have qualified, said state Department of Transportation spokesman Kevin Nursick. The state does not keep city-specific data, but Nursick said calls similar to Witherspoon's have picked up since DeStefano's message went out Monday.

While DeStefano's message said

"as a new user, you can ride Connecticut Transit to work for free," the majority of calls were from current bus users, or from people not going to work, Nursick said.

"I thought it was unfair. ... I thought, 'Gee, I'll have 10 free rides.' Turns out I didn't get anything," Witherspoon said while sitting at a bus stop on the Green.

"This is a trial ride incentive available to people commuting to and from work, who are not current bus riders. It is meant to entice folks who otherwise haven't used, or wouldn't try, public transportation," Nursick said.

"Obviously we're not law enforcement here. We're not going super in-depth here. We will ask your name, where you work, what are your hours, to be able to tell if (the bus) is a viable option," he said. "We do get background info to determine if it is a legitimate request."

An operator at the 800 number handling the offer asked a Register reporter, "Do you currently ride the bus," and asked

for work information, including the Register's address, and what bus lines would be used, among other questions, before saying he could mail the passes.

"The governor's press release was very clear in terms of the trial rides," he said. "There may have been a little bit of confusion with the well-intentioned announcement from the mayor," Nursick said.

City spokeswoman Jessica Mayorga said the mayor's office received between 15 and 20 calls Monday inquiring about the bus pass offer. Five of those callers were upset about not qualifying, and four who qualified called to offer thanks.

"We definitely learned something from this. There are a lot of people who will benefit from this," Mayorga said.

"There are some people who would have preferred to have more detail in that original phone message," she said.

The city had limited the message to 30 seconds, "for courtesy," Mayorga said. "Nobody wants to

receive a lengthy phone message. This is something that's new to us. There is, of course, a learning curve. For next time we may want to take into consideration additional details," she said.

The mayor's message was his first using the city's automatic dialing system, intended primarily for emergencies. DeStefano autodialed the 29,390 city phones with listed land lines on Monday, successfully leaving 23,335 automated messages announcing the DOT's offer.

The DOT has had a free bus pass program in the Hartford area for about a decade, but this is the first time such an offer has been expanded statewide, according to Jim Stutz, transportation supervising planner with the Bureau of Public Transportation.

In 2006, the DOT distributed 132 free 10-trip passes for local rides, and 199 ten-trip passes for express buses to Hartford area residents.

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Peter Casolino/Register

Work continues on the rail line along Waterfront Street in New Haven this week, the second phase of an extensive rail line project.

## Rail line project moving forward

By Ed Stannard  
Register Metro Editor

**NEW HAVEN** — The rail line that ultimately will carry raw materials from ships docking in New Haven Harbor to distant points in the United States and Canada is slowly inching its way further into the port area.

Michael Piscitelli, acting director of the city Department of Transportation, Traffic and Parking, said the project is in its second phase, which will extend the line to the United Illuminating Co. at the end of Waterfront Street.

"From our perspective, it's actually starting to take shape," Piscitelli said.

He said the rail line originally was to be laid after a new Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge was built, but since that has been delayed, the rail was moved up. The city used the designer of the nearby Interstate 95 reconstruction project, URS Corp., to avoid any of the future bridge's piers.

Providence & Worcester Railroad is doing the work, which could be completed before the year is out, Piscitelli said.

The first phase, bringing the line from the Tomlinson Bridge to Waterfront Street, was completed in 2006 for \$1.3 million, he said. The current project costs \$1.5 million.

"The next phase is bundled," Piscitelli said, reconstructing Waterfront Street and bringing spur lines over the street to the property lines of the port companies, such as Gateway Terminal. That will cost \$7.3 million. "Ultimately, the last phase will be bringing those spur lines into the port right out to the docks," Piscitelli said. The cargo-handling businesses will share that cost, he said.

While some steel has been shipped along the finished rails, what will enable the line to be

extended is the demolition of 201 Waterfront St., a building owned by New Haven Terminal, which the state took by eminent domain over the objections of Mayor John DeStefano Jr.

"Now that that building's gone, it is going to enable that line to go further down," said Christopher Gallucci, assistant district engineer for the state Department of Transportation's New Haven Harbor highway-improvement program. The site will be used as a waste stockpile area, replacing the site near the city rail yards that is used now.

"When we excavate material from the (highway) projects ... it'll go there and be tested for contamination," Gallucci said. Then it will be reused if it's clean, or shipped out if it's not, using the rail line.

Another benefit of a finished rail line will be to reduce the need to haul salt, rock and other material over city streets. For example, Gateway has a storage area at East and Hamilton streets.

"From the city's perspective, it has a lot to do with reducing truck traffic," Piscitelli said. "Those truckloads are not only expensive — they increase the cost of doing business in New Haven — but they also affect air quality."

Once the Waterfront Street section is finished, "now it connects the port to the national rail grid," Piscitelli said. The line crosses the Tomlinson Bridge, runs along East Street, then State Street, through the Quinnipiac Meadows area to the Cedar Hill Rail Yard in North Haven.

Piscitelli gave much of the credit to the DOT, which he said has done an "outstanding job keeping this project moving."

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## Getting ready for the show



Melanie Stengel/Register

Christian Lane, right, and the Trinity Boys Choir rehearse Friday in preparation for a performance Sunday.

### IN BRIEF

#### City's magnet schools to hold open houses

**NEW HAVEN** — The New Haven Public Schools will hold a series of open houses beginning in January to help people learn more about magnet schools.

A citywide magnet fair will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Jan. 16 at the Field House, 480 Sherman Parkway.

Representatives from all of the magnet schools will be there to answer questions.

Also, two interdistrict magnet fairs will be held at Hill Regional Career High School on Legion Avenue, the first for pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, from noon to 2 p.m. Jan. 12. The second, a high school interdistrict magnet fair, will be held from noon to 2 p.m. Jan. 19.

For information, call the magnet school office at 946-7415.

#### Woman's Club sets Christmas luncheon

**NEW HAVEN** — The New Haven Woman's Club will hold its annual Christmas luncheon Dec. 7 at the New Haven Country Club, with social hour at 11:30 a.m. and lunch at 12:15 p.m.

The program will include holiday songs by vocalist Margaret Holcomb and a reading of Charles Tazewell's classic, "The Littlest Angel," by actor and playwright Jean Lane.

Members will bring hats, mittens, and scarves for children in the New Haven area. Call 288-8753 for information.

## After 3 days, heat back on at West Rock nursing home

By William Kaempffer  
Register Staff

**NEW HAVEN** — The boilers were back on Friday at a West Rock nursing home, three days after a malfunction left the facility without heat as nighttime temperatures hovered around freezing.

Some assistance from the state Department of Public Health prevented a large-scale relocation of the roughly 96 residents who live at West Rock Health Care at 34 Level St.

The mishap occurred Tuesday, when employees reported hearing a loud rumbling from the basement. Fire officials believe a

delayed ignition took one of the boilers out of commission, and the second already was off-line as part of an asbestos abatement project at the facility.

The prospect that patients might have to be evacuated was real enough that American Medical Response was told of the possibility of a large-scale evacuation.

"The whole intent was that we did not want to do that," said Fire Chief Michael Grant. "You obviously do not want to move anybody, if you can absolutely avoid it, out of the shelter of a health care facility."

The Fire Department was on scene all night and electric heat-

#### The prospect that patients might have to be evacuated was real enough that American Medical Response was told of the possibility of a large-scale evacuation.

ers were brought in to get the patients through the cold as officials looked for alternatives.

The city contacted the state Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, which enlisted the state Department of Public Health, which boasts an \$8.25 million mobile field hospital, funded by state bond money in 2006, that includes a series of tents and is roughly the size of a football field

when all 100 beds are set up.

The hospital is designed for any situation where people need to be quarantined, and has electricity, heat, air conditioning, fresh water, showers and bathrooms.

The heat is provided by a 25-kilowatt diesel generator that runs a 144,000 BTU heater, which was hauled down and set up Wednesday and pumped warm air into the West Rock

building until the boilers were back up, said Leonard Guercia, chief of the operations branch of the state DPH.

"It was an excellent utilization of disaster resources," said Guercia.

Grant said the furnace malfunction likely was related to the asbestos project, which requires the contaminated area to be sealed airtight in plastic sheets.

That probably led to an oxygen deficiency in the area that caused incomplete combustion of the natural gas and a delayed ignition, which caused the flue pipes to separate and knocked out the boiler.



**Lighthouse Point Park,**  
Nov. 17-Dec. 31.  
**Hours:** Sun.-Thurs. 5-9 p.m.;  
Fri.-Sat. 5-10 p.m.

**Admission:** \$10/vehicle;  
\$25/mini-bus; \$50/bus.  
**Info:** www.newhavengoodwill.easterseals.com

Proceeds benefit Easter Seals Goodwill Industries



## Week may begin with state's first taste of winter weather

By Abram Katz  
Register Science Editor

Connecticut will receive its first bitter taste of winter 2007 Sunday afternoon as a storm deposits snow, freezing rain, and cold windy rain before fleeing east, meteorologists said.

Frigid northerly air will then move in, dropping temperatures below normal through the middle of the week.

Northwestern sections of the state faced a winter storm watch Friday, emphasizing conditions will vary between the start of the storm Sunday and its finale Monday afternoon.

Residents north of the Interstate 95 corridor can expect 1 to 3 inches of snow, topped by sleet and freezing rain, while the shoreline's snow will be largely washed away by rain Sunday night, said Nelson Vaz, National Weather Service meteorologist.

Driving late Sunday and rush hour Monday will be hazardous in areas hit

with freezing rain, Vaz said. "People have to slow down and leave more distance between cars. Better still, stay home if you don't need to go out," he said. "It could be kind of treacherous," Vaz said.

"Get your snow shovels out and be prepared," said Marisa Fenger, meteorologist at Penn State. "The Monday morning commute might be fun."

Geoff Fox, meteorologist with WTNH, said light snow in New Haven will give way to a period of sleet late Sunday. Cities to the north will get freezing rain instead.

Freezing rain is hazardous because falling raindrops freeze on contact, coating roads, sidewalks, trees, and everything else with a layer of ice. Sleet comes down as raindrop-sized bits of ice that, while slippery, is not as slick as a patina of ice.

Warm air with winds from the southwest will convert precipitation to rain, spreading from the shoreline inland.

Fox said Friday that it is not possible to forecast accurate snow or rain totals that

far ahead of the complex storm, which will start in the southwest and wax and wane before re-strengthening off the coast of New England.

Residual summer heat in Long Island Sound will keep a ribbon along the shore snow-free, Fenger said. "A few miles inland it will remain all snow. There could be a decent amount. It could be plowable," she said, and last through Monday afternoon.

The cold that rushes in after the stormy low pressure is safely out to sea could squeeze remaining humidity out of the air in the form of snow squalls.

A cold, nasty rain Monday will be driven by 20 mph to 30 mph northwesterly winds with gusts up to 45 mph, Vaz said.

Nighttime temperatures will descend into the teens and 20s. Daytime highs will stay below normal, in the 30s on Tuesday and Wednesday. The normal high for this time of year is 48 degrees and the normal low is 33. There is a slight chance of snow both days.