TESTIMONY OF

LINDA S. WATSON

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

LYNX

CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT

OF THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

****

June 5, 2008

Submitted by

Linda S. Watson
LYNX

455 North Garland
Orlando, FL 32801
Tel: 407-254-6017

lwatson@golynx.com

LYNX

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify to you on the challenges of bus only transit systems.

I have been asked to testify on the maintenance needs of the bus system in Central Florida but I think you will find that most of what I have to say applies to any transit operation that includes buses. I will also address some of the challenges we face and the role of federal funding and policy decisions on the operation of our system.

LYNX – THE CENTRAL FLORIDA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

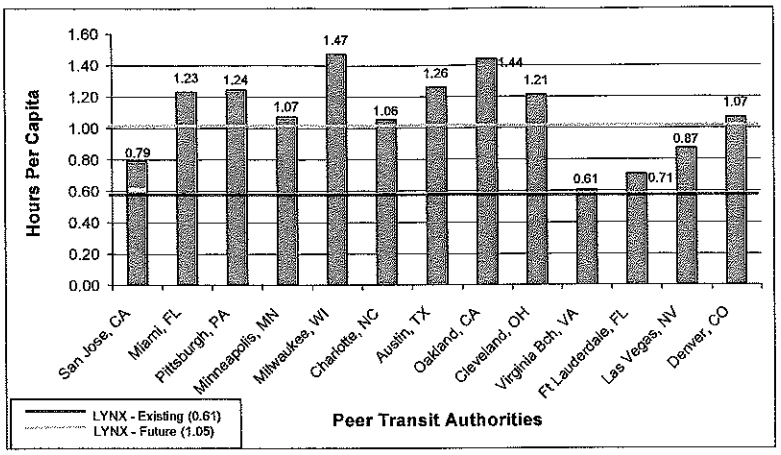
LYNX is the business name for the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority, the agency responsible for providing public transportation in Orange, Osceola and Seminole counties. We serve a resident population of 1.8 million people in a 2,500 square mile service area. When you consider the 50 million annual tourists that visit our area and the cars they rent while there, our traffic congestion and time lost in traffic increases every day.

LYNX provides transportation service to this large urban area with only 290 buses, which is well below the number of buses used in peer cities (see below).

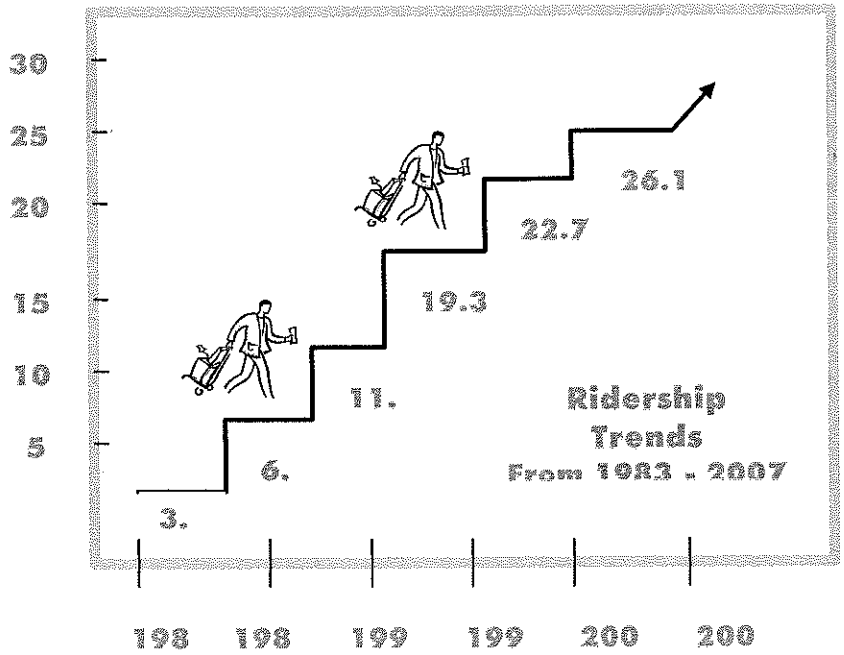
PEER SYSTEM COMPARISON

SYSTEM	# of BUSES	SERVICE AREA
LYNX	290	2,500 sq. mi.
Charlotte	368	445 sq. mi.
Las Vegas	383	280 sq. mi.
Miami	506	285 sq. mi.
Phoenix	709	799 sq. mi.

A burden the lack of buses forces on us is that 90% of our routes operate on 30 minute or longer frequency. This is occurring while our customers are standing at one of our 5,000 bus stops of which only about 500 have bus shelters. It is extremely difficult to talk people out of their cars when the best alternative you can present is a wait of an hour or more for the next bus (see chart below).



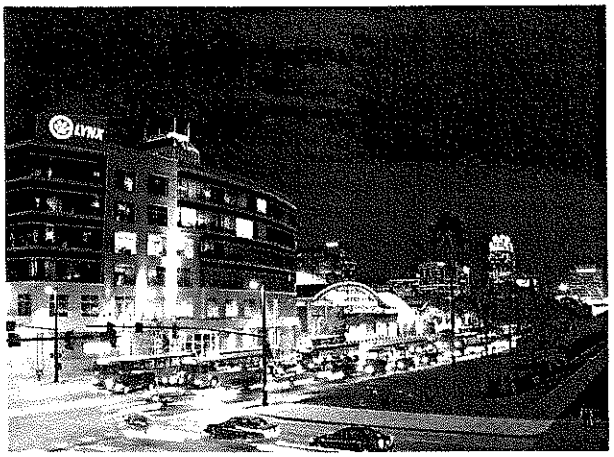
Despite the small fleet we operate, the infrequent service and the lack of shelter from the intense Florida sun, LYNX has seen ridership increase 24 of the last 25 years; the only exception to this occurred the year after September 11 (see chart below). Ridership is up 7% for the first four months of 2008 despite a 17% fare increase implemented in January.



Central Florida's population will double from 3.5 to 7.2 million by 2050. The State of Florida will soon pass New York to become the nation's third largest state. Our transit system in Central Florida as well as other systems in the State are woefully unprepared to provide the transportation necessary to get our workers to work and keep our economy moving. And if we are unprepared to move our citizens within our communities, how are we prepared to compete globally and remain the superpower that we are today?

FEDERAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Federal funds have been essential in building our capital program including a downtown 24-bay transfer station and office tower, a 250-bus maintenance garage and four super stops. What we have been unable to do is maintain these facilities. This is where a policy change is needed to help bus only systems build the systems of tomorrow.



As you know, rail systems have a "rail modernization" formula funding program which allows them to be able to rely on a consistent, annual source of funding to keep their systems safe, secure and clean. This allows them to not only contain operating costs but enhance the transit trip for their customers. On the other hand, our 13 year old super stops need repairs and improved lighting and security. Although we can use our federal formula funding for preventive maintenance, we have the tough decision to make about whether to use this funding to replace buses or maintain and improve facilities. A separate fund for maintenance and preventive maintenance would improve this.

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

As America competes in the 21st century, the nation's policy makers have to create a new strategy – a new foundation – for keeping the United States the driving force in the global economy.

A well-planned, highly-coordinated rapid transit system can be that foundation.

Just as public policy in the 1950s pushed America toward a car-centered transportation system, public policy in the new millennium can push America toward a transit-centered transportation system.

With that in mind, I would like to recommend consideration of the following public policies:

1. Create a separate formula funding category for bus maintenance similar to the rail modernization formula program. This would allow systems to maintain their fleets and facilities without competing with capital needs.

2. Dramatically increase capital funding for transit to stimulate the development of a national and local rapid transit system. The vision for this rapid transit system should be one that connects major cities as seamlessly as the current highway system does. The local transit system should be a combination of rail and bus that removes the need for a car when in an urban area.

3. Create funding incentives that force local governments to develop smart-growth plans such as high-density development around multi-modal transit systems.

4. Fund bus-only lanes on both interstate highways and major transit corridors in metropolitan areas.

5. Increase funding for 5316 -- Job Access and Reverse Commute. As fuel prices continue to rise, the population attempting to return to and stay in the workforce is further reliant on public transportation service.

6. Increase funding for 5317 -- New Freedom Program. America's population is aging. Gas prices are soaring. That can be a lethal combination for a segment of the population that is used to being mobile.

It seems obvious that the car-centered transportation system that worked so well in the last half of the 20th century is failing us now. We have to find an effective way to deal with soaring fuel prices, time-consuming congestion in every metropolitan area and non-stop pollution of our environment.

Transit *is* the solution in the 21st century.

It will take bold policy decisions to get people out of their cars, but it was bold policy decisions in the 1950s that got them into cars in the first place.

China spends 9% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on infrastructure and India spends 8%. The United States is heading in the opposite direction, spending only 0.93% of GDP and we have a multi-trillion dollar backlog in deferred transportation infrastructure needs.

Perhaps a more balanced funding of highways and transit would give people a *REAL* choice and at the same time reduce congestion, reduce pollution to the environment and reduce our addiction to the automobile.

Thank you.