

COTA bus may ride rails

By Lee Stratton
Dispatch Staff Reporter

Commuters to Columbus may be able to hop aboard a railbus in the Linworth area and zip Downtown in 14 minutes on a railroad track this summer.

Central Ohio Transit Authority officials want to test a British-made railbus on Chessie System tracks paralleling Rt. 315 between Downtown and Rt. 161. It would run for three or four months beginning in May.

The diesel-powered railbus, a cross between a bus and commuter train, travels up to 70 mph.

COTA's assistant general manager, Tom Jones, said Monday the railbus might be a cheaper alternative to the electric light-rail commuter trains COTA wants to establish

between Downtown and the Far North Side.

The British manufacturer, BRE-Leyland, has offered to provide the vehicle for a demonstration. COTA is negotiating with the Chessie System for the use of its track between Spring St. and Linworth.

The experiment, if approved, is expected to cost about \$195,000. COTA is applying for federal and state money that would cover two-thirds of the cost.

COTA would operate the vehicle twice each morning and twice each evening. The ticket price would be about \$1.

The railbus has seats for 40 passengers. Because there is a driver's seat at each end, it

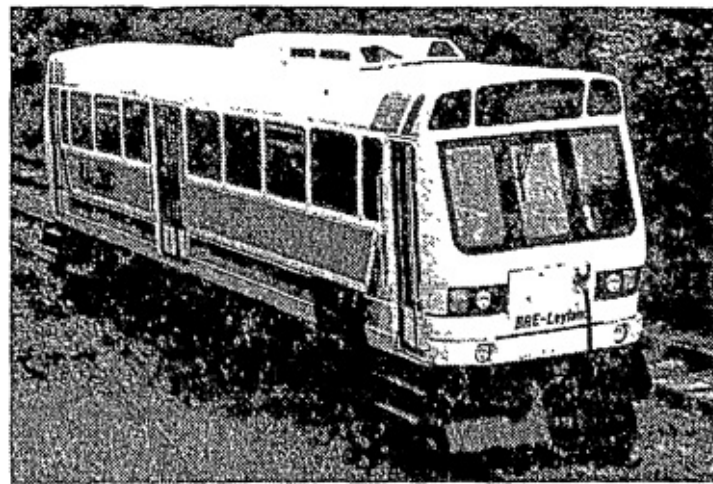
doesn't require turnaround facilities.

Jones said the Chessie track is in excellent condition and safe for speeds up to 70 mph. All but one street crossing is protected either by a gate or an overpass, he said.

"Is there any danger of our guys tooling down the track and running into a freight train?" board President G. Chester Heffner asked during a planning committee meeting.

"It is our understanding there will be no trains using the track during that time," Jones replied. He said the COTA drivers will be in radio contact with the Chessie yard on Parsons Ave.

Jones said the railbus could replace the light-rail system



Summer commuters may see railbus

COTA has been planning. The cost of a 40-passenger bus is \$300,000. It's \$600,000 for a 128-seat model.

A 130-seat light-rail car would cost about \$1.5 million,

Jones said, and would require an overhead electric line to provide the power.

He said the railbuses are more noisy than the light-rail systems.