

DATTCO VP Responds to Community Outrage Via Facebook Comment

The following was posted this morning as comment on State Rep. Tony Cabral's Facebook page. It was made by the official DATTCO Facebook page and signed by Dennis Lyons, Vice President / Coach & Tour Group. As we reported yesterday DATTCO is planning on discontinuing service in less than one month to the Greater New Bedford area leaving hundreds of commuters without options.

DATTCO's decision to end commuter bus service in South Coastal Massachusetts is rooted in transportation policy that dates back over three decades.

I began my career in transportation in 1988 with Fairhaven-based American Eagle Motor Coach and the discussions of commuter rail from New Bedford to Boston were ongoing at that time. American Eagle was operating 12 daily round trips from New Bedford and transporting approximately 450 roundtrip passengers daily. By the mid-nineties, service to the Galleria Mall had been added and the ridership had grown to more than 550. American Eagle provided a safe, reliable, and economic transportation solution for the region.

From that time, ridership began a slow decline as commuter rail service became available in Lakeville, downtown employers moved west out of Boston, and workers associated with the Big Dig completed that project and began new ones in other areas. By the time DATTCO purchased American Eagle in 2004, ridership was below 300. Prior to the COVID pandemic, that number had fallen to barely 200 on 10 daily round trips, and DATTCO had been operating the service at a loss for over two years. We cut service to a single daily round trip in March 2020 as the

pandemic set in, but we never stopped operating. In June, we expanded to three daily round trips in an attempt to better meet work schedules, but ridership was down to just 45 people. We operated throughout the pandemic implementing cost cuts to enable us to continue operating in hopes that riders would return. Now, three years later, we transport a maximum of 65 roundtrip passengers with most days hovering between 55 and 60. The work-from-home movement has decimated the commuter bus business not only here in New England but across the world. As a final option, we looked at increasing fares. In our analysis, even doubling the fare for commuters cannot offset the loss.

In five years, DATTCO has lost more than \$ 1 Million operating the service. We are losing \$ 30,000 per month post-pandemic. This is despite capital assistance from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's BusPlus program and their sharing of COVID relief funds in 2020 and 2021, both very much appreciated.

Last Fall, we had a conversation with MassDOT about helping to provide a bridge until commuter rail started with Phase I late this year. It was our mutual feeling that our current riders, and any more that returned, would be better served if we kept them together and transitioned them to the commuter rail at that time. Unfortunately, they responded recently that they do not have a funding source for this assistance. We admittedly did not engage the office of Mayor Jon Mitchell in New Bedford prior to making the decision, however, through the past 35 years, I have sat in countless meetings with transportation and political officials at the State, regional, and local levels and one thing has always been abundantly clear – they want, “they deserve” commuter rail and have shown no interest in engaging with private bus operators.

So, last Friday, March 17 DATTCO submitted the required 30-day notice to the Department of Public Utilities to end service. This notice was also posted on board our buses and at our

ticket counter in Boston. Should the Mayor's office, or any other agency in the Commonwealth, wish to come to the table with a solution, we are open to that discussion. The Commonwealth is willing to spend billions of dollars building a commuter railroad and millions more each year to operate it, but they won't spend a few hundred thousand on a bus bridge. Maybe they don't deserve that bus after all.

Dennis Lyons

Vice President / Coach & Tour Group

DATTCO, Inc.