

*LANTA reports ridership surge; Fallout: Official says high gas prices push Valley residents to take the bus. Morning Call (Allentown, Pennsylvania) July 9, 2008 Wednesday*

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**HEADLINE:** LANTA reports ridership surge;  
Fallout: Official says high gas prices push Valley residents to take the bus.

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**BODY:**

Rising gas prices are driving some Lehigh Valley residents to leave their cars at home and hop on the bus.

**Officials from the Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority Tuesday reported bus ridership has increased steadily since March and in June spiked with a 14.7 percent increase. About 470,000 riders used LANTA last month.**

Ridership had declined earlier in the year in what the authority's Executive Director Armando Greco said he thought was a reaction to a fare hike from the year before. But after gas prices started picking up in March, he said ridership numbers started picking up too.

And now that gas has eclipsed \$4 a gallon, Greco said he doesn't see that trend stopping.

"This is just so dramatic a turnaround that it's very clear that prices are affecting people's habits," he said. "We always like to say four months doesn't make a trend, but I think we can expect strong growth over the year."

Giselle Rodriguez, a 17-year-old Allentown woman, said she sees more riders when she takes the bus to her job in North Whitehall.

When Rodriguez started her job four months ago, the G Bus she rode was silent, with only a handful of passengers on the average day. On Tuesday, it was standing room only by the time

she got off.

And the quiet bus ride she once enjoyed?

"It's hectic, she said. "It's like being at school, or a job. ... Everybody talks so much you can't even hear yourself."

**Greco said Allentown is one of the stops that's seen the highest ridership increase. Stops at the industrial park in Fogelsville, the Lehigh Valley Airport and the Route 512 Corridor in Bethlehem have also seen high ridership upturns, he said.**

**Greco said there were a total of 5.2 million riders from July 2007 through June.**

LANTA officials are working on a long-term plan to keep up with changing demands, but Greco said the authority likely won't finish it until March.

Until then, the authority has five spare buses in its garage. In September, Greco said the authority will choose some of its busiest routes and use those buses for extra lines.

"It's going to be reactionary to some degree," he said. "We're going to try to work with those situations as they develop rather than develop programs, which we're hoping will come out of the [long-term] plan."

Virginia Miller of the American Public Transportation Association said LANTA's ridership upturn is high even by national standards.

**Since March, LANTA's ridership has increased 7 percent, while in the average bus system its size, ridership only increased 2.5 percent.**

But LANTA's ridership increase hasn't been all good news.

Although Greco said he was happy to see more people taking the bus, more buses on the street means more gas.

And he said the higher ridership hasn't yet offset gas prices that rose 42 percent in the last fiscal year.

Still, as more people in the Lehigh Valley get in the habit of riding buses, he predicted the fares they'd pay would soon counteract fuel costs.

"If we look at this year, we got hammered, but if we see this through over the next five, 10 years, I think we're going to see a balance," he said.

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## RIDING THE BUS

Ridership on Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority buses increased 14.7 percent in June. LANTA Executive Director Armando Greco said these stops have seen highest ridership upturns:

Allentown

Fogelsville

Route 512 Corridor

Lehigh Valley Airport

**GRAPHIC:** \*\*1. Juan Rodriguez, a bus driver from Allentown, talks about the public transportation system. \*\*2. DANIELLE McFADDEN of Hanover Twp., on Tuesday waits for a bus at the LANTA station on Sixth Street in Allentown.;2 Photos By Joe Webb, The Morning Call and

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Terms: **bus and (ridership increases) or (increasing ridership or increased commuters) and not Asia and not Europe and not India and not China and not Mexico and date(geq (June 18, 2008) and leq (August 18, 2008))** ([Edit Search](#) | [Suggest Terms for My Search](#))

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