



Photo by Bill Wack

Orient Express driver Jeanne Allen takes son Nick on a ride through the downtown mall.

Bike-taxis debut in city

Calling themselves "innovators of future transportation," two Eugene men unveiled a new "bike taxi" service last week — a business alternative to gas-powered transportation.

And Brent Duering and Dave Cox, the owners of the "Orient Express" taxi service, say they plan to shut down Eugene's conventional taxi system in the coming years.

"We'll actually be replacing the current taxi service," Duering claims.

He says the new service offers an economical, non-polluting ride.

"And our prices are way lower."

Duering is immodest, if a little defensive, in his challenges. His taxis will beat a "regular taxi" from the mall to the Valley River Center, he boasts.

"We can go anywhere in town in a 30-minute span."

Although city riding in a bike taxi is more pleasant than in a car, the owners say rides along Eugene's bike paths will be their most popular service. They offer specialty rides such as the "Bridge-to-bridge" route or "Mall-to-mall" route for special rates.

Both rides run through the parks bordering the Willamette River.

Duering first encountered bike taxis in the military while stationed in Thailand.

"This was the way I got around all the time I was there," he says. "I got used to it and I liked it."

Many cities in the United States and Europe have had bike taxis for years, Duering says. After returning to Eugene and seeing how "bike-oriented" it had become, he decided to introduce his pedal-powered taxis.

Since the bikes were put out on the street July 20, interest has been high, and Duering says he foresees even greater interest.

"The first time people see them, they think they look kind of funny. As gas goes up over two dollars a gallon, I think a lot more people will be switching over. Soon you'll be seeing a lot more of these bikes around."

How does it feel to actually push a fully loaded bike around? Driver Larry LaMotte says it's not much different from a normal bike. The taxi, he explains, is geared for hills and loads up to 1500 pounds.

"It's something you've got to get used to, but all in all it handles pretty well."

The passenger carriage is built with safety and comfort in mind. All the taxis are equipped with a full signal system, roll protectors and a full canopy for rainy weather.

Orient Express bike taxi stations will be located at 8th and Olive, Valley River Center, the 5th Street Public Market and Saturday Market. Passengers can also call the Orient Express at 343-1532 and have a taxi meet them anywhere in Eugene at a half-hour's notice.

The cost of a ride is determined by a zone system: \$3.00 for the first zone and \$2.00 for every zone thereafter. Specialty rides are available for \$5.00 and up, depending on the route.

"The whole idea behind this type of bike is to make a non-polluting family vehicle," Duering says.

"You can add another carriage onto the first one, add canopies... the possibilities are endless."

LTD reduces fares to bolster ridership

By HEIDI SWILLINGER
Of the Emerald

The Lane Transit District Board implemented a refreshing change in the rising cost-of-living trend when it voted last Tuesday to reduce bus fares from 60 cents to 50 cents.

Paul Shinn, director of administrative services for LTD, says he hopes the dime reduction will re-establish ridership that began a dramatic decline last June when LTD raised fares from 35 cents to 60 cents.

He says that although LTD gained 18 percent in fare revenues, ridership dropped by more than 1 million passengers.

Shinn puts most of the blame for the drop on last year's fare increase.

But he says the rest can be attributed to more stable gas prices and the high unemployment rate in Lane County.

"Our best ridership comes when gas prices go up," he says. However, fuel prices leveled off during 1980 and 1981. In addition, he says that fewer people working resulted in fewer people riding the bus to get to work.

But the new fare, which goes into effect Sept. 27, may be raised back up to 60 cents in June of 1982.

"We think by that time we will have re-established most of the ridership we lost," Shinn says, adding that LTD will probably continue to raise fare prices a little at a time over the next few years.

Shinn says the vote to reduce fares was not unanimous.

"There were three board members who basically don't feel the fare increase was responsible for the (ridership) drop," he says.

Board member Bob Loomis, who cast one of the three dissenting votes, says he believes the primary reason for the drop is inflation.

"I see no evidence that a decrease will do anything but decrease revenue," Loomis says. He calls the reduction a "ploy" to get more riders, and he says it ultimately will result in service cuts.

"It's a never-ending circle downwards," he says.

Shinn disagrees.

"The ridership drop started the day we raised the fares," he says.

"I can't prove the fares did it, but I feel I can disprove any non-fare reasons."

Shinn doesn't foresee any service cuts in the near future but he says that in September, LTD will begin a route change that will serve 5 percent fewer miles.

Loomis says the fare reduction will cause a gap between LTD's revenues and operating costs — a gap he says the business community will have to fill.

Local payroll taxes, currently at an all-time low because of unemployment, would have to supply 70 percent of LTD's budget after the reduction, he says.

"The tax is not keeping up with LTD," he says.

"You just can't run a giveaway program and expect only a portion of the community to support it."

Computer science gains PhD program

A doctoral program in computer and information science cleared its final hurdle Friday, and University computer science professors are breathing a little easier.

The Oregon Educational Coordinating Commission voted unanimously to approve the program, putting an end to months of lobbying by computer science faculty.

"We held our breath," says computer science professor George Struble.

Doctoral computer science students will be recruited for fall term, Struble says, and the department expects to accept three students for the upcoming school year. Within five years, the department hopes to have 15 doctoral students, he says.

The State Board of Higher Education rejected the doctoral degree proposal at a March meeting because it hesitated to approve what might be considered a duplicate program.

Oregon State University also has a doctoral computer science program.

But the board later reconsidered the proposal at the request of computer science department head Steve Hedetniemi, approving the proposal in April without discussion.

The commission wasn't worried about duplicate programs, says OECC assistant director Barbara Mitchell. Even with the University program and another one approved Friday for the Oregon Graduate Center in Portland, demand will far exceed the number of graduates, she says.

Only 200 doctoral graduates are available nationwide each year to fill 400 industrial and academic positions, Struble says.

The new doctoral degree will attract better Master's degree students and faculty, he says, because both tend to go to schools with PhD programs.