

Duxbury



"Duxbury's Hometown Newspaper
for 47 years"

Clipper

Vol. XLVII No. 21

Wednesday, October 1, 1997

Duxbury, MA 02331

Price 75¢

All Aboard



Selectman Friend Weiler and John McCluskey of Duxbury stand on the front engine of the new Old Colony Railroad following the train's inaugural first run from Kingston to South Station last Friday. Commuter service began Monday.

Photo by Deni Johnson

Old Colony Railroad Inaugural Run Signals South Shore Return

By PAULA MAXWELL

Last Friday's inaugural run of the new Old Colony Railroad with all its fanfare and celebration was an historic ride for all aboard, signaling the return of commuter rail service to the South Shore after a nearly 40-year hiatus.

During a formal ceremony at South Station following the train ride from Kingston, Governor Paul Cellucci said, "Today is an important part of Massachusetts history. I am proud to lead the South Shore into the next century with the start of this vital commuter rail service. The severed link that once joined the South Shore with Boston has now been mended."

At the South Station ceremony, State Transportation Secretary Patrick Moynihan called out
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each stop on the route and a local official from each community placed a placard with their specific station name on a lighted route map. When the final stop at Boston's South Station was designated by Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, the 2 new purple engines on Tracks 6 and 7 which originated their respective routes in Kingston and Middleboro, blew whistles 10 times to celebrate the occasion.

Federal officials praised the environmental benefits of the new rail service in remarks at South Station while Moynihan summed up the impact of the new Old Colony line noting, "It will provide the critical social and economic link between the South Shore and Boston."

Following ribbon cutting ceremonies at South Station, Ned Kirby, a former state senator from Whitman and a long time proponent of restoration of the Old Colony Railroad, presented Gov. Cellucci with 4 bronzed railroad spikes from the original Old Colony railroad while a Dixieland band played tunes including "I've Been Working on the Railroad" and "Pennsylvania Six 5000".

Local festivities began earlier in a decorated Kingston station with the Silver Lake High School marching band on hand to mark the occasion. The first commuter train from Kingston rolled out of the new station about 8:15 am Friday following remarks by state and local dignitaries. The train was loaded with hundreds of South Shore residents, local officials, legislators, transportation officials, train enthusiasts, and a carload of press and media people. Young and old aboard waved enthusiastically at the crowds who gathered at crossings at the 7 stations along the route to take pictures, cheer and applaud. In Abington, hundreds of schoolchildren lined up along a chain link fence near a crossing, waving enthusiastically to those on the train.

Many on board expressed surprise at the smoothness of the ride, enabling those partaking in the catered breakfast buffet in each car to return to their seats without spilling a drop of coffee along the way.

MBTA General Manager Robert Prince explained that the tracks are as noiseless as possible due in part to the installation of large sections of welded track. The MBTA spared no expense to increase safety and decrease noise, he said.

The trains, which will initially run 4 times inbound and 4 times outbound daily during rush hour, are expected to transport 10,000 passengers a day and remove 7,600 cars from feeder and main roads to Boston. Full service - 12 inbound and 12 outbound trains on each branch, starts Dec. 1.

Passengers rode for free on Monday and Tuesday of this week to encourage ridership. Some 675 passengers boarded the first 3 trains in Kingston which picked up dozens of more passengers along the route to South Station. Regular commuters will pay an average \$6 round trip for the 65 minute trip.

The \$537 million Old Colony line has 2 branches in operation, one starting in Kingston and the other in Middleboro. The lines meet in Braintree before heading to Boston.

The Braintree to Kingston branch is 27 miles long and has a spur to Plymouth for non rush hour service.

Weekend service and service to Plymouth will begin Nov. 29 with 7 inbound and 7 outbound trips.

Inaugural train passengers were given special commemorative pins and tie tacks, banners and hats. Among the inaugural train passengers were many retired Old Colony employees who roared the new train, clearly proud of its return and eager to share memories of days gone by.

Richard Prone of Duxbury, who is both an Old Colony train engineer and a member of the ad hoc advisory committee which helped to restore commuter service to the South Shore, relished the first train's run noting that the train will change the transportation habits of South Shore commuters for the better.

It was also a banner day for many state and local officials who lobbied for many years to see the Old Colony line commuter service finally restored.

Officials from towns along the way mingled on the train with state and federal dignitaries and ordinary citizens who were all in agreement: "It was a great day for the South Shore."