

738-8307

The Williamsport Bureau of Transportation is a department of city government in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and provides public transit service under the name of "City Bus" to a service area including the City of Williamsport, the boroughs of Montoursville, South Williamsport, and Duboistown, as well as suburbanized portions of Loyalsock and Old Lycoming Townships. This service area has a population of approximately 70,000 and has one of the highest per capita transit trip generation rates among all the smaller and medium size urbanized areas in the Commonwealth.

The Blizzard of '96 and subsequent snow storms followed by the Flood of '96 proved to be the ultimate test for City Bus and its complement of 40 employees during the month of January. City Bus maintained transit service without interruption throughout the Blizzard of '96 and its aftermath to ensure that the citizens of the Williamsport area were guaranteed essential mobility and at the same time helping the traffic situation tremendously. A ban on non-essential auto use issued by the Governor Thomas Ridge meant that City Bus was the only transportation choice for Williamsport area residents who needed to go anywhere. The Flood of '96 proved to be different type of challenge. Without question, Lycoming County was one of the hardest hit areas in the state with several deaths, millions of dollars of damage to the transportation infrastructure and the total devastation to several hundred homes and businesses. City Bus service was interrupted in many of the flooded areas of the County on January 19th; however, several communities called on City Bus to assist in evacuation efforts during the flood event. City Bus remained in operation throughout the day and evening hours and was involved in the rescue and evacuation of several hundred citizens. A letter to the editor best represented the community effort during this devastating event as follows:

"On Jan! 19, our father, James N. Laurrell, was on the Stroehmann's roof after being caught in the flood. The Pennsylvania State Police, the Old Lycoming Township Police, helicopter operators, Williamsport City Bus and Curtin Middle School volunteers and others helped rescue our father from a potentially dangerous situation and lead him to safety. We appreciate everyone's time and efforts."

In the wake of the Blizzard and Flood events, thousands of dollars in added costs for overtime and clean-up were incurred to maintain a vital transit service and to assist many communities in their emergency situations. It appears that FEMA will be reimbursing the various municipalities for the emergency transit services they received during the flood event. This means that City Bus will eventually be reimbursed for their costs incurred and this is certainly appreciated. Reimbursement for the added costs related to the Blizzard is another story. To quote a FEMA official - "No dough for snow".

The narrowly defined declaration made in relation to the Blizzard event is unfair and fails to recognize the importance of public transit as part of the transportation network. In other words, FEMA has declared that it is more important to ensure the mobility of cars instead of people. Extraordinary costs incurred by transit systems as they relate to the snow disaster should and must be reimbursable. FEMA and PEMA officials need to take a balanced approach when they assess an event of this magnitude. Keeping transit in operation is just as important as keeping roads open for the single occupant vehicle. Thank you for considering these comments.