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What if a migrant bus exits here

BY ERIC FISHER
PUBLISHER

What if a bus carrying migrants bound for Chicago got off Interstate 55 at Highway 113 and left its passengers at one of Diamond's two fuel stops. What would the village do?

It's a scenario Village of Diamond Mayor Terry Kernc was preparing for on Friday as she spoke with Will County EMA officials, operators of the gas stations, the nearby Christian Life Assembly church and Hope for Help pantry in Coal City.

Kernc, who learned 10 years ago after a tornado hit the village that you can never be too prepared, has put together a plan she hopes the village will never have to implement.

"But it could happen here," Kernc said. "It's a very fluid situation right now that has become a horrible position to be put in. The last thing we need would be a bus dropping these poor migrants off here in the middle of the night. It's a humanitarian issue too. They'd need to be kept warm, be given warm clothing and fed before we'd send them on their way."

Since August of 2022 and estimated 28,000 migrants

have been sent from Texas to Chicago. With Chicago declared as a sanctuary city, it has a landing zone where buses are allowed to drop off migrants during designated times and with advanced notification.

But that hasn't been the case with all bus operators. Chicago reported Monday that since Dec. 19 as many as 75 buses have dropped off migrants near outlying Metra stations, telling them to hop on the trains the rest of the way to Chicago. One such bus visited the Village of Manhattan in the late evening and tried to offload. Once the driver was told there were no more trains scheduled that night, the bus left with everyone still onboard.

Kernc said Friday while on the phone with Will County EMA there were 11 buses destined for the Chicago drop zone but one had gone rogue and was unaccounted for. It could be that bus could end up just about anywhere off the interstate.

"I was told that these bus operators have become more familiar with the train routes leading into the city," Kernc said. "They're giving these migrants Metra tickets, pulling up to a station and telling them to take the train. It seems so

inhumane to do that to these people who have little to nothing."

The mayor said if migrants were dropped at either Diamond gas station the village would provide as much assistance as possible to continue them on their way. The first thing that should be done is call 9-1-1.

Kernc said with Pastor Adam's permission Christian Life could be used as a warming center until a new bus arrives. The mayor already has arrangements with a bus company for \$944 per charter for up to 56 passengers. While waiting she would ask Hope for Help to bring warm clothing and anything they have.

If the church is unavailable passengers would stay at the station long enough for a second bus.

"Our plan is to minimize the disruption for businesses and for the people of our community," Kernc said. "It's a very concerning situation because there would be no forewarning. One way or another we would deal with it and see that these people would reach their destination in Chicago."

Chicago presently has 14,585 migrants staying at 27 city shelters and it's likely there are more on the way.



Courtesy photo

GRUNDY COUNTY last week placed "NO MIGRANT BUSES THIS EXIT" in the northbound lanes of Interstate 55 before Dwight and Gardner in response to reports of buses from Texas dropping migrants in other communities surrounding Chicago. The county recently passes a resolution declaring it a "non-sanctuary county for immigration."



Photo by Amy Walker

DOUBLE TEAM—Lady Coalers Makayla Henline (13) and Abby Gagliardo (12) corner a Plano guard during the Lisle Holiday Tournament. The Coal City girls team is on an impressive run, losing only their second game as they pass the halfway mark of the season. For more and details on the tournament turn to sports.

Communities addressing potential migrant bus drops

STAFF REPORT

The recent arrival in the region of unscheduled busses carrying undocumented migrants from Texas to Chicago has prompted several local municipalities to pass measures to deal with the issue.

Buses made unscheduled stops in the week before Christmas in Kankakee and Manhattan, apparently looking to drop off those migrants at Metra train stations. Will County officials noted that due to a lack of information from the State of Texas, there is no clear indication of the number of buses that might be arriving in Will County in the near future.

This week, the Wilmington City Council was expected to approve a measure creating rules and regulations around those unscheduled buses, including creating an application process and fines for those buses that break the local rules, which will be enforced by the Wilmington Police Department.

The measure applies to unscheduled intercity buses, defined as "any bus used for the transportation of persons between the City of Wilmington and locations out-

side of the Chicago-Naperville-Joliet area" that does not have authorization of the Chief of Police.

Per the ordinance, operators of any unscheduled intercity bus must make an application for approval to arrive and load/unload passengers at least five days prior to requested arrival.

Those buses, if approved, would only be able to unload passengers between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays, and only at locations approved by the Chief of Police. Buses will also be required to carry a passenger list.

Any loading or unloading of passengers outside of this scheduled window will result in a \$750 fine per passenger to the operator.

The ordinance also authorized the police chief to pursue criminal charges against any operator, bus drivers, or employees who are charged with the oversight of the passengers when those attempts to drop off those riders endanger the health, safety, or welfare of passengers. Deciding factors on whether to pursue such charges will include weather conditions, whether any of the passengers are children, and time of day.

The city of Braidwood has not passed any measures as of yet similar to Wilmington's

ordinance, but city leaders said last week that they have been in touch with Will County EMA as well as local civic organizations regarding the potential drop off of migrants in or near the city, particularly should busses pull off of I-55 to unload.

City Administrator Tony Altieri said the city is coordinating with local churches should the need to shelter migrants arrive.

"We need to remember, these are people. These are human beings," Mayor Karen Hart added.

The city of Braidwood is expected to pass a similar ordinance regarding the unscheduled buses during its Jan. 9 regular City Council meeting.

An official landing zone for asylum-seekers is being operated by the City of Chicago Office of Emergency Management and Communication at 800 S. Des Plaines Avenue, where the City is coordinating with the State of Illinois to provide shelter while working to identify permanent placement.

The increase in bus operators arriving in collar counties followed a City of Chicago ordinance adopted on Dec. 13 that impounds unscheduled buses that arrive at certain times.

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