

# **TRANSIT UPDATES** *Have anything to report? Call 213 388 2364*

It's official: The North Hollywood extension of the Metro Red Line will open to the public on June 24.

As of February 27, MTA route #305 has been extended from its western terminal of Sunset and Beverly Drive another 2.5 miles to UCLA Bus Terminal. According to MTA report our Frank Schroder says this will add 10-12 minutes to the schedule and would add one more bus to the route. Neighbors have been complaining of noise of the buses at the layover even though SCRTD had a layover there at the same location 15 years ago. (Member Charles Powell)

MTA will transfer operation of line #104 to Montebello Bus Lines on April 3. Then on April 10 operation of line #177 between downtown Glendale and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory will be transferred to the City of Glendale. Both are to have lower fares as part of Montebello Bus and Glendale Beeline yet will honor MTA passes and tokens.

The pilot program for increasing the span of service for Metro Rail has been extended to the end of September. At that point analysis of the ridership experienced during the later hours of service will determine if they continue.

The LADOT Smart Shuttle program, which runs small, flexible-routed vans in the San Fernando Valley, South-Central LA and Koreatown, is in danger of losing much of its funding. Service could be cut back by June 30 if the current funding level is not maintained.

Santa Monica Big Blue Bus changes that were suppose to go into effect March 19 have been pushed back to April 2, so all changes that were suppose to go into effect on March 19 will go into effect now on April 2 instead. (Mark Panitz)

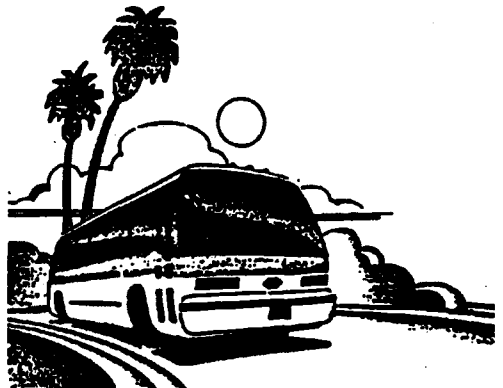
88 new low-floor buses (manufacturer currently unknown, but probably Gillig) will be going into service on Foothill Transit routes within the next month. Four of these will be hybrid diesel-electric vehicles.

According to the November issue of Western Transit, Alhambra Community Transit began Saturday service on its Green Line between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. starting Oct. 1.

The proposed OCTA restructuring, scheduled for June, has been postponed. There was a considerable outcry over all the additional transfers that would be required if the bus routes were broken apart, or if service was pulled out of the Santa Ana Transit Terminal.

New RTA #38 connects Jurupa and Norco, primarily via Jurupa, Limonite, Hamner and Third. The service runs every 50-minutes on weekdays only.

A new transit center is being built in Victorville. It will serve local VVTA buses, Amtrak, Greyhound, and two new commuter bus routes to San Bernardino and Rancho Cucamonga (Metrolink connection). The transit center is to be completed by the end of March, while the commuter bus service should be in place by November.



# BULLETIN BOARD

We were gratified despite the rainy weather that many friends of founder Pat Moser attended our March 4 memorial to him. Besides the warm reminiscences of friends and acquaintances remarks were made by Congressman Xavier Becerra, L.A. Councilman Nick Pacheco and Helen Ortiz of MTA. The Councilman read a Los Angeles proclamation honoring Pat and Ms. Ortiz presented a plaque of appreciation from MTA Operations. Our thanks to Executive Secretary Gabbard, Treasurer Juanita Dellomes, President Kris Sharp and newsletter editor Charles Hobbs for putting together this special event. Also thanks to Helen Ortiz for coordinating the city proclamation process.

At our April 8 meeting Edward Simburger will premiere his new video of the festivities and crowds for the Red Line Hollywood extension opening weekend.

Possible changes to the bylaws to be discussed at our next member meeting:

Amend the preamble to our by-laws (article 2): "Southern California Transit Advocates is an organization created to discuss issues, disseminate information, advocate, support and encourage all measures and policies deemed necessary for the creation of a truly adequate transit system chiefly throughout the five county Los Angeles metropolitan region."

Also to add the newsletter editor as a member of the Executive Committee the following changes are proposed:

section 3: add "a newsletter editor appointed by the Executive Committee"

section 3.4.5: add "plus a newsletter editor as an ex-officio who shall vote only to break ties"

section 4: add "the newsletter editor shall serve at the convenience of the Executive Committee"

Upcoming events we will have booths at include the opening of the Newhall Metrolink station March 18 and the Fullerton Railroad Days May 13-14. Members who wish to volunteer to help staff the booths should contact Public Affairs Committee chair Gabbard: (213) 388-2364 or dgabbard@hotmail.com

Western Transit, the monthly newsletter edited by honorary SO.CA.TA member Edmund Buckley, raised its subscription rate as of Jan. 1 to \$25 (two years for \$45). Many of our members subscribe to it and find it any invaluable resource for keeping up on the latest transit service and equipment news: 11112 Ivanhoe St., Garden Grove CA 92840-1133 (make check payable to "Edmund Buckley") <http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/Flats/1185/WesternTransit/>

News from the Feb. issue of the California Futures Network e-newsletter Land Use Lines: "Planning Communities for the 21st Century," a guidebook containing an evaluation of the planning statutes in all 50 states and a report card on the types of planning and land use legislation considered and a report card on the types of planning and land use legislation considered and enacted by state legislatures in recent years was recently issued by the the American Planning Association. For more information: <http://www.planning.org/plnginfo/GROWSMAR/gindex.html>.

Friday March 17 the Westside Urban Forum is sponsoring a panel discussion on transportation issues, Which Way West L.A. Panelists include Allen Alexander, John Given, Carole Inge (of MTA) and Mike Bohlke (Supervisor/MTA Board Chair Yvonne Burke's transportation deputy). The event will be from 7 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. at 10800 Wilshire Blvd. (17th Fl). Cost is \$45 for WUF members and \$50 for non-member. For more information: (310) 394-0253

California High-Speed Rail Authority is holding workshops around the state seeking input for its recently released draft business plan (a copy of which we'll have at our meeting this month). (to pg. 5)

The whole MTA corridor alternatives process leaves me stumped. Why at this late date does the Board worry the Wilshire corridor Full Funding Grant Agreement would be endangered if the feds were asked to switch it to the Exposition Blvd. corridor? Is this just a ploy to assuage Cheviot Hills NIMBYs? But does the Board intend to select a busway on Wilshire? Wouldn't that would set up a firestorm from the Miracle Mile crowd? And does Jaime de la Vega want to ignore strong opposition to an eastside busway? Looming is the hardest question of all: where will the local matching funds come from?

Now north L.A. county is talking about not getting their "fair share" and about possibly breaking away from MTA to form its own Transportation District. Words fail me.

question of the month: does MTA engage legal fee auditors to go over bills from outside law firms? RTD routinely tossed out tens of thousands of dollars of legal fees after such audits.

Charles J. Thomas mentions me and Kymberleigh Richards as people he would like to see on an elected MTA Board in his March 3 Daily News op-ed piece "Bus System Needs Independent, Elected Board". I am flattered. And agree with him an elected Board offers a chance for real reform.

Speaking of the Daily News, Douglas Haberman, who used to cover MTA for it, is now with the Inland Valley Our Times in Ontario. While transportation is no longer his main beat he does cover transportation issues effecting the Inland Empire, like a recent excellent article on the Alameda Corridor East project.

question I wish someone would ask Assemblyman Tom McClintock (a.k.a. Mr. Freeway Builder): "How do you propose Southern California

overcome federal barriers to freeway construction due to air quality non-conformity?"

L.A. County's Municipal Operators are disputing MTA's use of the Prop C 40% funding pool for bus service improvements to comply with the consent decree. As when they sponsored legislation to freeze the formula for allocation of operating funds (SB 1755), the munis are sharing the cost of a lobbyist in Sacramento to seek relief.

In other muni news, both Foothill Transit and ACTA recently hired Nelson/Nygaard to do consulting work. AVTA has commissioned a transit needs assessment while Foothill wants a new Comprehensive Operational Analysis.

trivia fact: the L.A.T.L. line 5 between Hawthorne and Eagle Rock was 21.94 miles, the longest L.A. Railways line.

Members Jane Reifer, Kirk Schneider and Phil Capo put together our position on the OCTA "straightening" restructuring proposal, expressing concern at some aspects of it (e.g. pulling out of most transit centers). The overwhelming public outcry from residents seems to bear out our analysis the proposal needs rethought to minimize the impact of changes on patrons.

Forsythe & Associates, the firm that manages Foothill Transit, was recently acquired by the English firm National Express Group (thru its American subsidiary Nexus Investment).

I was gratified to read the Year 2000 Strategic and Short-Term Business Plan of Access Services, Inc. ASI is the ADA paratransit coordination agency for Los Angeles county and has faced a demand for service far beyond what was anticipated. This has presented some difficulties, given budgetary realities. The Plan outlines several strategies for

ASI, MTA and other fixed route operators to address this situation. Their proactive approach (under some prodding from the MTA Board) in meeting these challenges is laudable.

Transportation issues are really heating up California politics. Gone are the days when it was an obscure backwater. Just read this interview with State Senator John Burton:

<http://www.mtc.ca.gov/publications/transactions/ta1299-0100/burton.htm>. Coalition possibilities are emerging. And we are poised to participate in this new age (more details as things solidify).

Member Joseph Drummond shared with me an article the Oct. 1999 issue of "The Main Channel", newsletter of the Port of Los Angeles, on the historic Red Car revival project in San Pedro. Plans are to have it up and running by the end of this year! YEOW!

The Sprawl masters are at it again! Sprawl Watch Volume 2, Number 1 (<http://www.sprawlwatch.org/newsletter.html>) notes that USC Professors Peter Gordon and Harry W. Richardson have produced for the CATO Institute "Critiquing Sprawl's Critics": <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-365es.html>

The Philadelphia Inquirer in a Feb. 13 article detailed how even small community vanpool providers using welfare to work funding must meet stringent federal regulations that apply to transit agencies, creating delays all over the country. ASI had a similar experience when it transitioned to using federal funds. This is why the munis routinely swap federal funds with MTA for state and local funds. ■

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*(Bulletin Board, from pg. 3)*

To find out the latest news on possible workshops in your area check the authority's website: [http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/public\\_workshops/index.html](http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/public_workshops/index.html)

"Inequalities of Transportation Systems in California" is a new Planning and Conservation League report advocating reprioritization of transportation spending. It can be viewed at <http://www.pcl.org/zev/inequalities.html> or request a free copy from PCL: 926 J St., Suite 612, Sacramento CA 95814

The National Association of Railroad Passengers is urging members of the public to support 3 measures to save and expand passenger rail in America (including S.1900 for high speed rail bonds and S.1144 for flexibility in spending federal dollars on intercity passenger rail): <http://www.nartrail.org/act.htm>

VPSI is a private statewide vanpool operator with a current fleet of over 1,800 vans in Southern California. Information: 800 825-7433.

As always, *The Transit Advocate* needs articles, letters, Transit Tips, photographs and research (newspaper clippings, etc.) from all members and interested non-members. All materials should be sent to **3010 Wilshire #362, Los Angeles, CA 90010**. (or e-mailed to [transit@lerami.lerctr.org](mailto:transit@lerami.lerctr.org)). Material for publication should be received two weeks before the scheduled SO.CA.TA meeting date. ■

## **BAKERSFIELD EXCURSION** *Michael Ludwig/Dana Gabbard*

On Friday Nov. 26 around 7am, various members of Southern California Transit Advocates gathered at Union Station in Downtown Los Angeles for our annual Day After Thanksgiving trip. This year the service chosen for exploration was the Golden Empire Transit District (GET) that operates in Bakersfield. Gathered for the trip were Dana Gabbard, Joe Dunn, Woody Rosner, Kymberleigh Richards, Russ Jones, Edmund Buckley, Jaime Alcoba, and Armando Avalos. The first order of business was boarding an Amtrak Thruway bus for Bakersfield that departed at 7:35. We went out to Mission Road through an industrial area east of the railroad station and even passed MTA's Division 10 bus yard. Soon we were flying down I-5 northward, past Taylor Yard and the Burbank Metrolink station. The bus was only about 2/3 full so we had no problem sitting together, passing the time with sight-seeing and transit gossip. Recent rains had left the hillsides green. We crossed the California Aqueduct, and saw agricultural pursuits as varied as cattle herds and grapes adjacent to the freeway after crossing the Grapevine. The prior week, Ed Buckley had e-mailed a possible itinerary; Michael Ludwig (a Bay Area member who was joining us in Bakersfield) had e-mailed some concepts. Dana and Woody decided to hash out Mr. Ludwig's ideas to prepare an alternative while passing out copies of Mr. Buckley's plan for consideration.

At 9:25 we arrived at the Bakersfield Amtrak station and met up with Michael. Some in the party began exploring the station (really just a trailer with a small ticket counter, a few chairs, and some information racks). Others availed themselves of the food truck in the parking lot. Due to too much time getting organized, we missed the GET bus that runs on a nearby street (line 8) that would have taken us to the Downtown Transit Center. Russ's uncle and aunt (with whom he was

going to spend the night after the trip) met Russ at the station to make sure he had arrived safely. They generously ferried us in their car (three trips!). A little while later, we were gathered at GET's Downtown Transit Center.

The center resembles the LAX Transportation Center, although it's twice as large. It has a horseshoe-like shape with a narrow one-way bus-only roadway on one side. The two islands in between have bus pull-in bays. There are covered (but not enclosed) waiting areas on the islands. The seats are the narrow fold-down variety that discourage people from lying down on them. An information window sells tickets and hands out schedules. There are bathrooms and snack machines. Utilitarian but a graceful design.

To get the members to gather around and decide which of the two plans to use, Dana blew a whistle he carries for safety. It did the job. Initially the vote was tied between the two plans. But when Dana conceded the plan he and Woody had prepared had many tight connections, the deciding vote went for Ed's itinerary. Now the time had arrived to start bus riding!

At 10:21 we boarded line 14, a 1986 Gillig Phantom #8612 (all equipment identification information courtesy of Russ Jones). There were two passengers (ride counts for this report exclude So.Ca.TA members). Among the sights we passed were a street called Buck Owens Blvd. and a multitude of oil derricks. Dana examined the back of his transfer closely and noted that (like Santa Monica) GET's rules are picky about where transfers are accepted ("honored only at established transfer points"). But one also has to wonder if the drivers strictly enforce all those rules. Across a dusty field from a small shopping center, we stopped for several minutes (along with the #14

bus in the other direction) to make a timed transfer with line 18. This bus stop had a cylinder similar to what Culver City recently installed at its stops. It included a list of times buses stop there and a GET system map. We pulled out with no passengers and traveled through mostly rural areas with some sprawl development to California State University-Bakersfield. Michael noted that we had to take our experiences on these Thanksgiving Friday excursions as not being indicative of what these lines are like during regular service days. Indeed, this line might have high usage when school is in session. The end of the line is on the inside edge of a parking lot which we reached at 10:55. There was a covered, somewhat-open waiting area (which resembled the one at UCSB in Santa Barbara we encountered during our '98 DAT trip), plus a couple of vending machines nearby. One of them dispensed chilled candy bars, something we had never seen before. It was pointed out during hot Central Valley summers this may be needed to ensure the candy doesn't melt in the machine.

At 11:01am we boarded line 11, which had two passengers. It was Gillig #8603 (we noticed GET bus equipment numbers are formatted to where the year of acquisition is the first two digits and sequence of receipt is indicated by the last two). One of the passengers deboarded on the other side of the small campus loop and took a bike off the rack. We wound around to the next arterial street south of the campus, with varied suburban surroundings. It was noted the bus stop signs have space for route numbers on them but most do not. And most of the interior ads in the bus were public relations notices for GET. On Ming near New Stine 10 passengers boarded. They stayed until we reached the SouthWest Transit Center.

At first sight, this transit center resembles the one we used last year in Downtown Santa Barbara. A small square building is inside the multi-sided bus loop. Later we would have a better chance to

see this facility up close. For now we continued on the #11 across town (the winding route is among the longest in the GET system) to Bakersfield College. While a few bus lines serve this location, it doesn't really count as a transit center. The only amenities are a bus shelter with system map and an emergency phone nearby.

At 12:30pm we boarded line 17, an Orion #9008. This is the freeway express route added about a year ago. Oddly, its number wasn't displayed on the headsign, which simply said "CX Express". There were two passengers (including one in a wheelchair). We noticed that, like the other buses we had ridden, this one had an on-board camera. We went non-stop to the Downtown Transit Center, arriving at 12:45. Nine passengers boarded and we continued to the Southwest Transit Center non-stop. The stop for line 17 there is on Wible Road adjacent to the transit center instead of in it.

Some of us took the opportunity to thoroughly explore this facility. It quickly became clear this is a major point for changing from one line to another, often with 10-12 people waiting for particular routes after arriving on a different route. Its amenities include soda and candy dispensers, a change machine, video games, a drinking fountain, pay telephones, and restrooms; there's also a phone to get transit information for free. We now availed ourselves of Valley Plaza (across a parking lot from SWTC) to have lunch. All the usual suspects were in the food court (Sbarro, Taco Bell, etc.). As it was the traditional start of the Christmas Shopping Season, conditions were crowded. After this break we were eager to get back to the transit center for the next bus.

At 1:57 we boarded line 10, bus #8626, yet another Gillig. Ten passengers were on board for its departure, including one in a wheelchair. We noticed among the ads on the bus was one for the twice-monthly meetings of the GET (*to pg. 8*)

(from pg. 7) Board of Directors. And were amazed to note it guaranteed a ride home for attendees if meetings ran late and they had no other means to get home (GET service ends in the early evening). At Pacheco and Hughes we had 6 passengers on board. The area we traveled through was outlying suburban - new developments, empty fields, warehouses, strip malls. This bus had a lot of riders boarding and alighting and it stayed full throughout its run.

On our return to the Southwest Transit Center Dana noticed the overhead cross beams in the structure had plastic spikes atop them to keep pigeons away, just like the Hollywood/Vine Red Line station in Hollywood. He also noticed the birds had learned how to navigate around the spikes. In addition, it became apparent the transit center is a defacto teen hangout. But a security guard patrols the site and the kids usually behave, Dana was assured by one of the adult GET patrons he spoke to about it. A younger patron (about 18-20 years old) stated that GET service doesn't run late enough. While waiting for our next bus we saw a deboarding wheelchair passenger, the third we had seen that day.

At 2:50 we boarded line 15, an Orion #9110, with our first male bus operator. This bus had a slightly different interior arrangement from the norm, with perimeter-style seating on the driver side (much like New York subway cars). And it had real seat cushions! We had 18 passengers and traveled through yet more suburban/strip mall/commercial areas. In a business park we passed a few more oil derricks. A little bit of adventure occurred when the window next to Joe Dunn suddenly popped open (it is only to be used for emergencies). We closed it and soon at a stop the driver came back to double-check that it was well closed. The bus had mostly emptied out before we again reached the Southwest Transit Center at 3:30.

This trip we were leaving the SWTC for good, which had become our home base for much of the

excursion, so we figuratively waved goodbye when leaving on line 8 at 3:45. This was an Orion #9006 with three passengers. We wound our way through town and even boarded another wheelchair patron. There was some trouble using the securing latch, so a seatbelt was used to secure the wheelchair. Dana observed the seatbelt is situated such that it tends to block the latch. A few more people boarded along the first part of the route, and many additional passengers boarded at the Downtown Transit Center at 4:15, giving us a fully-seated load. The route goes through a commercial/industrial area east of downtown and impressed us with its strong ridership. We had 12 passengers on a section of Niles St., and then the ridership began to dwindle as people deboarded in residential areas. The line ends in the outskirts of Bakersfield, alongside fields of tumbleweeds near Foothill High School.

We arrived at 4:56. Michael had noticed line 9 has the same layover zone and with luck we could ride it back and see a different corridor (the original plan was to go back on line 8). We were able to transfer to the #9 bus right behind the #8 and catch its 5pm departure. It was relatively late when we did this: sunset was already occurring. Like all other buses, this one had a handset (to call dispatch) on the farebox and a holder for garbage bags. We had 4 passengers. This route, like line 8, explores the outskirts of Bakersfield. One bizarre line 9 deviation is a spur, with u-turn at the end, to serve an adult school. A passenger noted no stop is located on the turnaround street and to reach the school you are dropped off some distance away and have to walk back along Mt. Vernon Ave. (south of Highway 58). Which begs the question: why not have a bus stop on the turnaround street?

Normally, line 9 enters Downtown Bakersfield by crossing the railroad tracks on Q Street. But due to a construction project to make it an underpass, the route is on a long-term detour via N Street. However, a freight train started across that grade

crossing just as we approached it, so the driver wound around on some side streets to reach Chester Ave. (the only existing undercrossing in the area). After successfully going under the tracks, we doubled back to catch a passenger on a section of street we had missed due to the freight train. We applauded the operator's actions to make sure no one had been stranded (especially at such a late hour).

We arrived at the Downtown Transit Center at 5:42 to a lineup of most of the bus routes still operating. Our impression was for many of them this was their final run and care was being taken that riders made their connections. For dinner we tried a coffee shop one block from the transit center recommended by Russ's aunt and uncle. Lorene's Ranch House turned out to have fair prices, excellent food, and friendly service. A great meal to cap a great day.

Now Russ needed to catch line 2 to where he was spending the night. Michael kindly accompanied the rest of us as we hurriedly walked the 1/2 mile or so to the Amtrak station to catch our bus. We thanked Michael for coming down before climbing on board. The Thruway bus departed at about 7:25 and by 9:45pm we were back in Los Angeles.

It was worth noting that we made all our planned connections. And that several of the routes had substantial ridership (especially as the day wore on). Overall it was fun and educational. We had a great time, and discussion is already taking place regarding where we should go the day after Thanksgiving this year (Sunline via Metrolink/SunLink? SCAT/Ojai Trolley via LADOT Commuter Express 422/Conejo Connection?). ■



GET Gillig #8616 (W. Rosner photo)



On board. . . (W. Rosner photo)



# SAN JACINTO METROLINK

Just call it "The Metrolink Line That Time Forgot".

In the early 1990's, when planning for the Metrolink commuter rail system was just getting started, a proposed route between Riverside and Hemet/San Jacinto, with stops at UC Riverside, Moreno Valley and Perris, was on all the maps. In fact, the Riverside County Transportation Commission purchased the San Jacinto Branch right-of-way in 1992 from Santa Fe, for commuter rail purposes. (Santa Fe, now BNSF, still operates freight service along the line).

The track is in bad shape, only fit to run 10-20 m.p.h freight trains. Although occasional Orange Empire Railway Museum passenger "specials" have operated along the line as far north as March Air Force Base, considerable upgrading of the trackage would be required for an attractive Metrolink schedule.

Lack of funding (including the failure of two statewide bond measures in 1992 and 1994, and the reprogramming of state funds to other projects) has prevented much work on the San Jacinto Branch.

But RCTC is applying for federal funding, to be used with local sales tax funds, to upgrade the track and start commuter service.

Recently, RCTC commissioned a study of a basic commuter service utilizing the San Jacinto Branch Line. The proposed service would have at least three, commuter-oriented round trips between Perris and Los Angeles, via Riverside and Fullerton. There would also be one midday round trip along the same route. Transfers to the existing Riverside and Inland Empire-Orange County lines would be possible at the Downtown Riverside station.

The current study, which just looks at long distance trips from Riverside County to points in Orange or Los Angeles Counties, estimates that 2,613 riders (boardings) would use the Perris-Los Angeles service if it were started in 2005. This number would rise to 3,863 by 2020. Most riders would use the service to Los Angeles, with others transferring to the Inland Empire-Orange County line. A handful might even transfer in Riverside to the existing Riverside Line. ■

