

MEMBERS IN ACTION

Congratulations to Bart Reed and Kymberleigh Richards for being nominated to serve on the MTA San Fernando Valley Service Sector Council by the City of Los Angeles. Way to go!

Roger Christensen was quoted in the Jan. 30 Daily News article "Subway Hopes fading".

The Jan. 28 L.A. Times Orange County edition piece "OCTA to Focus on Improving Bus Service" deals with the the "Putting Customers First" plan based in part of recommendations made by Jane Reifer. Reifer's evaluation included 10 major recommendations to improve service and more than 80 suggestions for implementation. She is quoted stating "Three years ago, who'd have thought that people at OCTA would be accepting these recommendations rather than discounting them? There is good potential for many of these things to become policy."

Paul Castillo in response to the notice in the last newsletter donated various materials of the defunct Los Angeles County Transportation Commission to MTA's Library.

Bart Reed was quoted in the Jan. 11 L.A.

Times article "Input Sought on Plans to Change Valley Bus Lines" and two pieces in the Jan. 13 Daily News: "Bus service control stalls over veto power" and "Northeast Valley bus routes sought".

Tom Rubin was quoted in the Jan. 7 L.A. Times article "Rail System Is Growing but Still a Minor Player"

Attendees of the Jan. 15 San Fernando Valley Service Sector Public Hearing in Van Nuys included Kymberleigh Richards, John Ulloth, Nate Zablen, Bart Reed, Russ Jones, Lionel Jones and Frank Schroder. Robert Meinert and James Gusky attended the San Gabriel Sector meeting Jan. 25 in Pasadena.

Kymberleigh Richards attended the Jan. 16 meeting of the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments and gave public comments on the Service Sector Council selection process.

Attending the Feb. 1 Big Blue Bus meeting in Santa Monica were Dana Gabbard, Ken Ruben, Alan Michelson, Paul Castillo, Mark Panitz and Kent Strumple.

RailPAC held an informal gathering to discuss rail transit issues Feb. 1 at Union Station. Ken Ruben, Russ Jones, Paul Castillo and Barry Christensen were among those participating.■

TRANSIT TRIVIA

Last month's question was:

Name four of the eight revenue-service funiculars that have operated in LA County

The answer: Angels Flight, Mt Lowe, Los Angeles and Mount Washington Railway, Court Flight, Santa Catalina Island Incline Railway (2), Industry Hills Incline and the Playa del Rey Incline Railway. ■

BULLETIN BOARD

Due to logistics Mr. Bob Huddy's presentation will be rescheduled for a future meeting. At our March 8 meeting a representative of OCTA will make a presentation on the Bus Rapid Transit program.

Jane Reifer has kindly consented to be our delegate on the COMPASS Citizen's Advisory Committee. This is the growth visioning project sponsored by the Southern California Association of Governments. We are in need of a volunteer to participate in the monthly meetings of the California Alliance for Transportation Choices, which deals with state legislative advocacy. And occasional meetings of the California Futures Network, a smart growth advocacy coalition. If interested please contact the Executive Secretary.

The Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension Review Advisory Committee is meeting Thursday Feb. 13 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Edward Roybal Plaza Building, Community Room, 2130 E. First St. on the first floor (rear) in Los Angeles. Further information: (213) 922-3023.

Our thanks to the members who collaborated on our comments to the San Fernando Valley Service Sector responding to its service change proposals.

The next study tour will likely be in April or May. Suggestions for where we should go are welcome.

Caltrans is holding public workshops on its draft California Transportation Plan (CTP), a statewide, long-range transportation plan that will guide transportation decisions and investments in the 21st Century. It

proposes a vision for transportation in year 2025 and beyond, and sets goals, policies, and strategies to achieve this vision. It gives broad strategic direction for transportation system improvements based on a continuing planning process. The CTP does not recommend individual projects; rather, it provides guidance in the selection of strategies that will meet statewide targets for performance of the transportation system. Once completed, regional action plans will be collaboratively developed to implement the strategies presented in the CTP. Contact: Betty Alivio, (949) 724-2035, or <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/osp/ctp.htm>

Foundation for the Future: A Summit on Los Angeles County Infrastructure will be held Wednesday, February 12; registration begins at 8 a.m., the program runs from 9 to 11:30 a.m. This will be at USC Davidson Conference Center, 3415 S. Figueroa Street (the SW corner of Figueroa and Jefferson). Admission is Free; for reservations call 714-505-8151 or e-mail: gkoon@associationplanet.com

Amtrak continues to be the subject of struggles over its budget, while a conference committee meets to determine its Fiscal Year 2003 allotment the administration in its just released proposed FY 2004 budget talks of eliminating some (or all?) of the long distance trains.

As always, The Transit Advocate needs articles, letters, Transit Tips, photographs and research 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). Material for publication should be received two weeks before the scheduled SO.CA.TA meeting. ■

PUBLIC & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

Dana Gabbard
(dgabbard@hotmail.com)

Did I put my foot in it? Evidently while many are grumbling about Mayor Hahn's record on transportation issues I was the only one willing to go on the record about it to L.A. Times reporter Kurt Streeter: "The mayor has been absent on transportation. When people ask me what he feels, I tell them, 'I don't know. His silence has been glaring.'" ["Hahn Urged to Focus on MTA Role" Los Angeles Times Jan. 14]. Frankly I hope in the coming months the Mayor proves me wrong by taking a decisive role in dealing with the current transportation funding crisis.

"A lot of trouble" is how Norm King, Executive Director of the San Bernardino Associated Governments, describes the aforementioned crisis. The best summary of the situation I've come across is in the opening pages of the 2002 Annual Report of the California Transportation Commission [http://www.catc.ca.gov/reports/2002_Annual_Report_Final.pdf]. One problem is Caltrans assumed a 20% growth in federal transportation funding when TEA21 was reauthorized. That appears unlikely at the moment [although House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Don Young has floated the notion of a substantial increase in funding by boosting the federal gasoline tax two cents a year for six years]. Also the Governor's Transportation Congestion projects were

essentially defunded by budget shifts to close the deficit. These orphans are now competing with Transportation Plan projects for scarce transportation funding, harbingering hard choices for local transportation commissions. One bright spot amidst all this gloom is the news Representative Gary Miller (Republican) of the 41st district representing Pomona, Anaheim, Yorba Linda and Montclair has been selected to sit on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. At last Juanita Millender-McDonald will not be the sole voice for Southern California on the Committee.

Seemingly unnoticed amid the budgetary tumult was a proposal by the Governor to consolidate the High Speed Rail Authority with Caltrans. The 9 member Authority Board would continue its functions but would rely on Caltrans for administrative support. The budget does include funds for the Authority to complete the environmental documents for the project. We'll see how this proposal fares in the legislature.

Kym Richards broke the San Gabriel Valley Service Sector Council stalemate with comments at the Jan. 16 San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments meeting noting what a thankless position his colleagues had placed John Fasana by requiring him to advocate for an all politician council. The COG saw the light, voted to give Mr. Fasana flexibility, we faxed letters to the MTA Board members endorsing the new COG position (5 officials, 2 COG public member appointees and 2 County Supervisor public member appointees). And by gosh that did the trick, being easily passed at the Feb. 27 MTA Board meeting. Sometimes the right thing happens for the right reason.

tidbit of the month: as part of a plea bargain relating to bribery/influence peddling by some elected officials in Carson former councilmember Manuel Ontal admitted that he accepted a \$5,000 bribe in exchange for making a motion and then voting in favor of the proposal to extend a contract with Transportation Concepts, a company that provided Carson Circuit bus service for the City of Carson. P.S. -

Transportation Concepts, which still has the contract, had no comment when contacted by the L.A. Times. (a tip of the hat to member J.K. Drummond for bringing this to my attention)

It was with growing disquiet that I read Access Services' Fiscal Year 2003/04 Paratransit Plan. This lays out the reforms they hope will address their own budget crisis. My feeling is the content is shaped by a desire to justify the plan however flawed it is. At one point a next day only service model is criticized as flawed because of the danger of people being stranded. But surely procedures can be put in place for waving the advance call requirement for stranded riders. Instead the Plan justifies expensive same day service as the solution. Plus the same day service confusingly is composed of two separate types: contractor provided and a subsidy program.

Too many details of how this all will work are vague, will be worked out later or based on assumptions that I am less than confident will hold up. To me the entire Plan reads of wishful thinking and a conscious attempt to avoid hard choices in the face of user resistance to change. The only good news I can see is the Plan includes a Fall 2002 statement of the Federal Transit Administration Office of

Civil Rights reversing its previous stand that non-ADA compliant services must comply with ADA regulations regarding fare, etc. Thank goodness for small favors!

So what is with the proposal to have the I-710 in a tunnel under South Pasadena? One knowledgeable observer who attended the South Pasadena City Council meeting at which Roger Snoble of MTA and Mark Pisano of SCAG trotted out this idea noted they referred to the highway as being a federal interstate. This coupled with all the noise made about using "new" European tunneling methods makes my source suspicious that demonstration funding in TEA21 reauthorization is motivating this proposal. Which might constitute an end run of usual funding processes. You can be sure opponents will intensely monitor the situation.

Well, the Jan. 22 Mobility-21 Coalition meeting was well attended for being held on a weekday at 8 a.m. Besides myself Bart Reed and Craig Weingarten attended. I can't fault the presentations, which touched on funding issues vis a vis Washington, D.C. and Sacramento. But I wish the attendees exhibited more breadth (it is still dominated by the usual suspects). Also the entire affair has a downtown L.A.-centricism in its priorities that may well be a problem. Frankly we need to build bridges with adjacent counties to mount a joint advocacy effort (much as the Riverside Transportation Commission and San Bernardino Associated Governments have done the past few years).

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OCTA OWL TRIP REPORT

by Dana Gabbard

When OCTA announced it was initiating owl service Sept. 8, 2002 on 4 lines (#43, 50, 57 and 60) it was decided this would be the subject of our fall study tour. Saturday Sept. 21 was the date set for the event, with the Long Beach Transit Mall as our starting point. Gathered at stop "G" were: Armando Avalos, Andy Novak, Woody Rosner, Lionel Jones, Charles Hobbs, Frank Schroeder, Dana Gabbard and trip planner Mark Strickert. At 8:03 p.m. we caught our first bus - an OCTA line 60, #5016 New Flyer. When boarding most purchased a day pass (\$2.50) and thankfully Mr. Strickert distributed pass holders supplied to him by OCTA to protect the flimsy things. As we passed the massive Long Beach Recreation Park there were about 14 passengers (all ride counts exclude trip participants). While initially going thru a commercial district soon the surroundings became more residential. By 8:20 p.m. we had arrived at Cal State Long Beach and deboarded.

Here we met up with Tina Erickson, who had arrived there after undertaking something of a pre-owl tour of her own. After a short wait we boarded line 50, #2119 NABI low-floor along with two passengers. This bus had an annunciator that called out (some) stops and an internal message board. We made our way along Katella's commercial corridor and passed Los Alamitos Race Track. At Beach we had 6 passengers (including one fella who had imbibed a little too much joy juice and spent time with the busfans in the back of the bus). In Garden Grove a soda machine was spotted placed alongside a bus stop (a welcome convenience for

waiting riders). Also a former Taco Bell had undergone a facelift to being "Pizza Plus". Other highlights included a wheelchair boarding at Euclid and the crew from the Convention Center taking advantage of the new later service. At Harbor T.J. Stiller joined our merry band.

Only we soon were less than merry, as our trip plan was fatally wounded by an unforeseen detour in Orange at Shaffer/Katella. We jumped off to catch the 50 going in the opposite direction (#2344, a NABI low floor) and asked the driver to call ahead and ask the 57 to wait for us. Sadly the bus had departed by the time we reached State College Blvd. So we continued on to Harbor/Katella near Disneyland. Mark furiously worked out a new trip plan while the rest of us visited a 7-11 on the northwest corner for goodies or engaged in bus watching as the Anaheim Transit buses (some Santa Barbara-style electric buses, and some fake trolleys, all operated by Coach USA) plied up and down Harbor.

At 10:20 p.m. we boarded line 43 northbound, #2235. This had a seated load. The street is residential in nature until past La Palma. Also we passed the Anaheim Civic Center, a low-key affair consisting of their City Hall and Main Library. At Lincoln/Harbor we hopped off, and soon thereafter caught a 43 bus going southbound, #2233 a NABI low floor. Along Harbor there was constant boarding and deboarding of passengers. The street (to use a phrase I originated a few years ago during a prior study tour) is your classic fast food gulch - McDonalds, Wendys, etc. At Twintree Tina took her leave, calling it a night (we also ran up on the curve here).

We made the timed transfer at Westminster/ Harbor and boarded a waiting 60 bus (#5024, New Flyer high floor D40) at 11 p.m. We rode eastbound to the end of the line in Tustin, arriving at 11:20 p.m. While starting with 9 passengers by the end the bus had only one rider. At 11:45 p.m. we caught the same bus westbound at a rather desolate stop and in 10 minutes deboarded at Bristol and 17th. At this location John Snyder joined us. We caught line 57 northbound around midnight, #2105 NABI. The vehicle had 6 passengers (including two in wheel-chairs). At Katella and State College John Snyder deboarded and then Charles Powell boarded and joined our group. We rode all the way to the end of the line, at the Brea Mall. There were hopes of eating at The Hat, one of a local chain famed for its pastrami sandwiches and chili dogs, but sadly it closed just before our arrival. So we caught a return trip on line 57 southbound from State College/Imperial Highway at 1:16 a.m. For most of the trip there was only 1 passenger. At 1:42 a.m. we deboarded at State College and Katella to eat (and use the facilities) at the Denny's there.

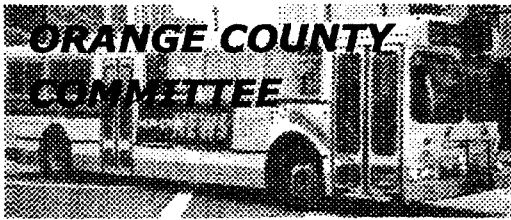
The place was mobbed with noisy twentyish post-bar hopping trendoids. In fact we were the only ones (besides the wait staff) over the age of 25 in the entire establishment. At 3:42 a.m. we caught a southbound line 57 bus, #5358 New Flyer low floor, with 1 passenger. Since day passes expire at 3 a.m. most of the group bought new ones. We rode all the way to the end of the line in Newport Beach, arriving at 4:25 a.m. For most of the trip the bus was empty. While at the Newport Transportation Center we ate some Halloween candy Dana had brought. Soon

we caught a northbound line 57, #2272 a NABI low floor. Passengers never exceeded 2-3 at any point of this trip. At 5:40 a.m. we deboarded at 17th/ Bristol.

Our last bus was line 60 westbound, #5016, with 8 passengers. We picked up one bike rider (who constituted the sole use of the bike racks we witnessed during the entire trip). Also we passed thru the naval weapons reservation near Seal Beach. At no time did the bus have more than 10 passengers. At 6:50 a.m. we arrived back at the Long Beach Transit Mall and all went our separate ways (many via the Blue Line).

The impression gained from the trip was that the later evening service (9:30 p.m. to midnight) was serving people from late shifts and others out and about that time of night. Ridership was impressive considering this was service begun only weeks before. Obviously this was filling a need. The actual owl service (midnight to 4 a.m.) had much lighter ridership, which is to be expected. Obviously the owl service is still in the early stages of developing patronage. We hope this fall to do a follow-up OCTA owl exploration to see what ridership patterns have emerged.

A big thank you to Mark Strickert for planning the trip and reworking it mid-trip in response to adverse circumstances. This narrative drew upon postings about the trip made by Charles Hobbs and Tina Erickson on the member only section of our website.■



TRANSIT ADVOCATES OF ORANGE COUNTY - Mark Strickert and Jane Reifer - 866-476-2282 ext.4, or zineland@yahoo.com

Putting Bus Riders First

Re-written from the OCTA board meeting notes of 1/27/03: "OCTA staff presented the Board with a new customer service plan titled "Taking the Initiative - Putting Customers First." The plan is loosely based on recommendations given to staff by two noted transit advocates who had been brought in as consultants, Jane Reifer and Robert Holland. The report includes plans for additional bus service, more reliable schedules, better data collection and real-time control of buses, expanded hours of operation at the Customer Information Center, more comprehensive information about bus schedules and transit options, and an increased emphasis on customer service. "The Board praised staff for bringing in outside transit experts to examine current policies and procedures in an effort to further improve service on OCTA's rapidly-growing bus system. Staff will return to the Board next month to request mid-year budget adjustments to fund some of the recommended changes."

Two-Wheeled Transit

A report from our Man on the Street, Roy Shahbazian: Do you feel safe commuting by bicycle in Orange County? Do motorists treat you like a legitimate road user? Would it be nice to have some more bike

lanes? Cyclists in Orange are putting pressure on the city council to stripe bike lanes. The Bikeways Master Plan was adopted by the City in 1995, but almost no progress has been made towards implementing it. We need your help to show that the residents want bike lanes. Please consider writing a letter urging the council to make bike lanes a priority.

To: CityCouncil@cityoforange.org
Cc: bike@bettercommute.org
City Council
300 E Chapman Ave
Orange CA 92866
714.744.2211

Include your address so they know what city you live in and respond to your request. We hope to expand this bicycle effort to other cities. Tell us your city of interest and we'll let you know when we have enough interest to have an organized effort in your city. Write to bike@bettercommute.org or leave a message at 866.4SOCATA x4

Doing a 460

The MTA is planning more changes to Line 460. If approved, starting in June 2003 the 460 will run as-is from Disneyland to the Norwalk Green Line station, then via freeway HOV lanes to downtown Los Angeles, using stops on the I-110 Harbor Transitway and on I-105 via some as-yet unspecified method. The current routing north of the Green Line station will thus be bypassed, meaning a faster trip from Orange County to downtown LA, but people going to and from Downey and East Los Angeles will have to find other routes. Comments can be made to customerrelations@mta.net or (213) 922-6235. The MTA board will vote on final approval soon.

Speaking of Meetings

Due to a quirk of the calendar, the next two Transit Advocates of Orange County meetings will be held after SO.CA.TA's. The TAOC sessions will be on the 2nd Wednesday of each month for the foreseeable future, with the next two being on February 12th and March 12th. As of press time, we were still seeking a useful, centralized meeting place. Please call ahead for the location!

All the Poop Fit to Snoop

TAOC has expanded its coverage of transit news in and around the county. TAOC and its sister RAOC have been sending news via e-mail all along, but now thanks to the APTA grant and some extra weekend work, both e-mails and lots more have been combined into a newsletter. Beginning last month, the newsletter has been available both on a website and in printed form for those still beyond the internet's grasp. The January edition can be seen at <http://socata.lerctr.org/taoc/taoc0103.htm>, and the February issue will soon be at <http://socata.lerctr.org/taoc/taoc0203.htm>. Send us your e-mail address and we'll put you on or notification list for when they are ready. If you still lack any web access, a sample copy can be sent by mail from TAOC, PO Box 813, Fullerton CA 92834. Donations and written articles are greatly appreciated!

Rail Advocates News Headlines, with Barry Christensen

Santa Ana OKs Double-Tracking
The Santa Ana City Council voted on Monday evening, January 6th, to approve a settlement with Metrolink for a planned double tracking of the segment between the Santa Ana and Orange train stations. The settlement includes the added

enhancements previously agreed upon. There was no public comment for or against the vote, but media reports included only angry neighbors' views.

Transit Oriented, in Irvine?

The Irvine City Council unveiled their plan for reuse of the former El Toro Marine Base with a presentation in their January 24th session. The Great Park Plan includes a transit oriented development proposal for the area near the Irvine train station. Check out www.ci.irvine.ca.us for details.

Sound Barrier to Quiet War of Words
US Rep. Gary Miller (R-Diamond Bar) is assisting in a compromise over a sound wall along the BNSF Railway line between Imperial Hwy and Weir Canyon Road. This will hopefully end a lawsuit over the issue between Anaheim and Yorba Linda, whose common border parallels the line. This lawsuit over the sound wall has affected Metrolink station planning for that area.

Another Amtrak to Capitol Hill
Amtrak is again in a funding battle and need letters and phone calls of support to members of the House of Representatives in Washington, DC. Please contact your congressperson at 202.224.3121 and encourage her or him to press the House-Senate Conference Committee for full funding for Amtrak.

Metrolink Links With Alternate Operator
Metrolink has contracted with RailAmerica to operate their commuter trains if Amtrak is forced to shut down this year. A monthly fee is being paid to retain the services of RailAmerica, a large national operator of short line freight railroads and industrial switching services.■

[Public Affairs, from Page 5]

Since SO.CA.TA has been selected to be on the Coalition's Steering Committee I'll be in a position to raise these concerns and not be ignored.

By the way the Dec./Jan. issue of Metro Investment Report printed my response to their e-mail seeking comment on infrastructure challenges. I took the opportunity to make the case for regional consensus on transportation funding priorities.

The Jan. 9 Stockton Record reports Caltrans has a consultant studying whether Amtrak should continue operating the three state supported inter-city rail lines (the Capitols, San Joaquin and Pacific Surfliner). A representative of Herzog is quoted almost salivating over the prospect of their gaining the three contracts. Study results are due later this year.

You should take with a grain of salt the heralding of Martha Welborn as the fountainhead from which sprang Metro Rapid ("She Gave the Push that Got Rapid Bus Rolling", Jan. 24 Los Angeles Times). The first time I heard about the Metro Rapid concept was at an MTA westside restructuring meeting in the Miracle Mile in early 1997 when Welborne wasn't even a blip on the radar screen. I also find it odd she wants to take credit for Metro Rapid (which only adapts some elements of the Curitiba model) but as best I can tell isn't involved with the only true busway proposal in the region: the Chandler east/west project in the San Fernando Valley. Also Welborne as a elitist did none of the heavy lifting by confining her advocacy to junkets

and presentations aimed at big shots. Her unfamiliarity with street realities is made clear when at the end of the profile Welborne advocates building giant parking structures near major shopping districts to alleviate the loss of parking caused by having dedicated bus-only lanes to improve the performance of Metro Rapid. Obviously Welborne has never attended a local community association or she'd realize how impractical her proposal is. Oh well, Welborne is now preoccupied with her new role guiding a non-profit advocating revitalization of downtown L.A.

Here is the scoop on the maglev line in Shanghai, courtesy of an Associated Press report: It is 19 miles long and cost \$1.2 billion (which comes out to \$65 million per mile). The Germans got the contract by providing free rolling stock and sharing technology. Chinese Premier Zhu in remarks noted their desire to soon be able to build the trains in China (and maybe the Germans will have to settle for licensing fees after investing billions on the technology). The Chinese have also not thus far committed to build any further maglev lines.

I'll conclude this month by saying how glad I was to learn highly regarded recently termed-out legislator Fred Keeley has accepted the position of Executive Director of the Planning and Conservation League and its Foundation. We look forward to collaborating with Mr. Keeley on issues of common concern. ■