

TRANSIT UPDATES

If you currently hold a Metrolink pass, did you know that:

- It is now valid on the entire Metro Rail system (including the Blue Line all the way to Long Beach)
- Soon (no fixed date yet, but probably in January 2004), Metrolink passes will be regarded as "EZ-Passes", valid as local fare on any MTA or municipal bus in LA County.
- From now until November 16, any Metrolink monthly pass is valid for travel on the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner between L.A. and San Luis Obispo.
- Also until November 16, any Metrolink monthly pass is good for free weekend travel on the San Bernardino Line.
- Sunday service on #254 and #270 would be eliminated
- #471 between La Puente and Beach Blvd will be replaced by Foothill Transit service early next year.
- #608 will run hourly on weekends and lose Saturday service
- #625 and #626 would be combined and run peak hours only. Also, service north of the World Way West loop (I.e. Playa Del Rey, etc.) would be cancelled)
- #646 (owl service shuttle in San Pedro) would be cancelled
- A new rapid bus line #751, primarily serving the Ave 26/Soto St corridor, would be implimented.

MTA will reduce service on several of its contractor-operated routes, effective Oct 26:

- Line #58 will run peak hours only, along Alameda St. (midday and weekend service, along with all service on Los Angeles St will be cancelled)
- #96 will run hourly on Sundays, and some evening service will be cancelled
- #119-126 will run peak hours only
- Service on #125 east of the Norwalk Station will be transferred to Norwalk #5
- Service on #130 east of Cerritos Mall will be cancelled
- Selected late night trips on #167 and #218 would be cancelled. In addition, #218 would run every 45-minutes on weekends.
- The portion of #177 between Old Town Pasadena and JPL would be cancelled (replaced by expanded Pasadena ARTS and Glendale Beeline services)
- #225 and #226 would run as a combined peak hour loop, with school trippers as needed. No more Saturday service, or service along Aviation Bl.
- #250 and #253 would be cancelled in favor of expanded service on #620
- Line #4 has been extended to Santa Monica's Civic Center, pending construction completion on Olympic Drive
- #5 buses will run on 26th, not Stewart, between Olympic and Colorado.
- The "UCLA Ackerman Commuter" route is now called "Super 12". Service has also been extended to National and Venice via National, Overland, Palms and National.
- #7 and #12 have been modified to improve schedule adherence. #12 also has later night service from UCLA (last bus leaves at 11 p.m.)
- The Bruin Card now requires an additional payment of \$.25 (or a Bruin GO Flash Pass). See <http://www.bigbluebus.com/home/index.asp?noticeid=16> for details.

Santa Monica Big Blue Bus changes, effective September 7:

The following changes took place in Riverside, effective Sept 21:

The RTA Route #23 loop through eastern Murrieta will be expanded to serve medical facilities on Hancock Ave. and government offices on Los Alamos. (cont'd on pg. 5)

BULLETIN BOARD

Our thanks to Rick Peterson of Amtrak Thruway for his excellent presentation at our Sept. 13 meeting.

At our Oct. 11 meeting Sina Zarifi, Senior Transportation Planner for the Southern California Association of Governments, will make a presentation on SCAG's 2004 Regional Transportation Plan. Also we will have further discussions of our day after Thanksgiving study tour.

Upcoming speakers: Nov. 8-- Lt. Michael J. Parker of L.A. Sheriff's Dept. will discuss security on the Red and Gold rail lines. Jan. 10, 2004--Ed Clifford and Haim Geffen of MTA will be making a presentation on MTA's hub and spoke proposal.

Our next study tour is of the Compton and Carson local transit circulator systems on Saturday Oct. 18. Details will be provided at our Oct. 11 meeting.

The Congressional Budget Office has published "The Past and Future of U.S. Passenger Rail Service", which reviews past policies toward Amtrak and the fundamental economics of passenger rail service. Requests for a free copy of the report can be sent to: CBO Publications Office, Ford House Office Building, Second and D Streets, SW, Washington, DC 20515 or call (202) 226-2809.

The Center for Transportation Excellence is sponsoring a conference on "Transit Initiatives in Communities" Dec. 7-9 in Tempe Arizona. The focus is sharing with grass roots groups tools and methods to

successfully pass transit ballot measures. Further information:
<http://www.cfte.org/events.asp>

Saturday November 1, the Train Riders Association of California and the California Rail Foundation are holding their annual Rail Conference & Membership Meeting at the Sheraton Pasadena, 303 East Cordova Street (one block from the new Gold Line Del Mar station). Registration begins at 9:00 a.m. with speakers and panels beginning at 10:00 a.m. (plus there will be a meet and greet wine and cheese reception the night before, location to be noted on confirmation form). Speakers include Roger Snoble (CEO of MTA), Tom Larwin (General Manager of the Metropolitan Transit Development Board), Dan Bullock (Project Manager of the NCTD Oceanside-Escondido Line) and Chris Quint (Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition). Panel topics include Amtrak, High Speed Rail, and L.A. rail. Among the panelists are Jim Seal (President, MTA Citizens Advisory Council), Mike McGinley (Chief Engineer, Metrolink) and TRAC VP (and SO.CA.TA member) Roger Christensen. Cost for TRAC members is \$50, non-members \$75 (includes lunch for those who reserve in advance); \$20 surcharge for day-of-event sign-ups [no mail-in registrations after Oct. 22]. Make checks payable to The California Rail Foundation (CRF), 926 J Street #612, Sacramento, CA 95814

Write "Conference" in the check memo; further information: (916) 557-1667 or trac@omsoft.com ■

Will there be a strike against MTA? Who knows? Latest word is memos from the UTU (representing operators) to its members indicate contract talks are slowly progressing and they expect to soon present the rank and file with a new collective bargaining agreement to vote on. Meanwhile this week the ATU (representing mechanics and service attendants) are about to have their first talks with the agency in some time. The best place for the latest word is the member board of our website, as members share media reports and other information resources. (PS. - I don't own a car so my fingers are crossed agreements with all three unions are reached without a walkout).

I was glad to see the latest version of the MTA's land swap deal for Division 6 (item 26, MTA Board Sept. 25 meeting) specified terms for the environmental remediation of the Venice site (which I felt were not adequately addressed in the initial draft document).

Kudos to MTA staff for preparing a policy for grade separations in planning light rail lines (item 7, MTA Board Sept. 25 meeting). Hopefully this means rational standards instead of overheated rhetoric will be the basis for all future project plans. And also one can hope this will prevent politicians from trying to kill projects under the guise of improving them by demanding costly grade separations at every crossing.

At the Sept. 18 MTA operations Committee meeting item 21 (service sectors) include a presentation on the proposal for a Transit Village at the El Monte busway site. Will it happen? I gingerly asked Robert Arthur of Foothill

Transit who is overseeing their renovation of the El Monte station his impression and he diplomatically allowed that they were making sure the work being done now doesn't preclude the grand plan if it comes off later. And essentially he shrugged his shoulders as to whether or not the large project will come off. Which to me seems a fair assessment at this juncture...

Remember the Independent Citizen Advisory and Oversight Committee? It was created in 1998 by passage of Zev Yaroslavsky's anti-subway measure. Evidently Zev has soured on his progeny as he gave a cold shoulder to the ICAOC's Chair when she tried to present their audit at the Sept. 25 MTA Board meeting (item 40). Kym Richards tells me Zev grumbled to the ICAOC Chair "We don't need to hear this. We can read the report if we want to". Talk about rejecting your own offspring!

But reading the ICAOC letter accompanying the audit provided some interesting tidbits. On April 7 the ICAOC held its public hearing but no one from the public attended. This is termed "puzzling" in the letter. But I am not surprised since there is no useful purpose served by the ICAOC. Other processes already exist that monitor how MTA spends the sales tax proceeds. The Committee was included in the measure simply to add a gloss of good government to a naked exercise in political grandstanding. Despite the measure easily passing Zev seems to have gotten no credit for being the proponent; no one mentions it except as an explanation for why subway extension anytime soon are unlikely. No wonder he acts like he'd just as soon forget it exists...

Also the letter laments the ICAOC Board is one member short since "Unfortunately the seat for the appointee from Mayor Hahn's office remains vacant. the Board would appreciate having this position filled before our next meeting in January 2004". I wouldn't hold my breath on that deadline being met. But when and if the Mayor's office gets around to dealing with this, perhaps they could at the same time finally produce the names of L.A.'s nominees for the MTA Westside/Central Sector Governance Council? No one seems to know why months after the other councils have begun meeting the Westside/Central one continues to be left in limbo by inaction on the part of the city of Los Angeles (the westsidel cities settled on their list of nominees last January!). In fact the lack of such a Council is why proposed changes to MTA lines 58 and 218 were voted on by the MTA Board while the other proposals went before the existing Councils. Why must residents of the Westside/Central Sector continued to be disenfranchised? My already rather tepid opinion of Mayor Hahn has nosedived as his inaction in producing a list of nominees has stretched on for month after month. This dereliction of duty is unconscionable!

I couldn't believe my eyes--bona fide NIMBYs expressing satisfaction with the response to their complaints (albeit with small side comments that further actions were still needed). This love fest occurred at the Sept. 24 MTA Citizens' Advisory Council as several folks from Mt. Washington who have long and loudly been critics of the Gold Line attended and expressed general satisfaction at actions taken by MTA to

address noise and other concerns. Also present was Gerald Francis, General Manager of MTA Rail Operations, plus several of his subordinates. Francis and his team forthrightly dealt with some of the shortcomings experienced since the Gold Line became operational and what they are doing to address them. Other issues were also discussed--Neil Bjornsen quizzed what actions were being taken to make sure the new order of Breda light rail cars avoided the travails experienced with the Siemens P-2000 L.A. Standard Cars. Turns out a Project Team has been created to closely monitor compliance with contract specifications. This isn't a trivial action to undertake but reflects a truly grim example of (to use MTA speak) lessons learned. The generally light atmosphere of the proceedings became noticeably tense when I posed the simple question has MTA yet accepted delivery of the P2000 cars (and I specified not conditional delivery)? Mr. Francis' reactions was interesting as his lips visibly pressed tight and the silence lingered for seconds; finally underling Dave Kubicek (Director of Rail Services) ventured the terse response that "a few" vehicles had been accepted. The stillness after this admission spoke volumes for what a touchy subject this is. To be fair Francis and his crew are simply cleaning up the mistakes of folks who have long since departed the MTA. And I don't envy the thankless task Francis et al have taken on.

Per the Sept. Metro Investment Report there is a split in the ranks among the airlines serving LAX regarding Mayor Hahn's LAX modernization proposal (known as Alternative D):
(cont'd on pg. 9)

For some time prominent among the list of study tours we have contemplated undertaking was an exploration of Laguna Beach Transit. This small system is unique as the only municipal transit system to exist in Orange County. It was to satisfy our curiosity about this singular entity that we set Saturday May 31 as the day when we would finally explore Laguna Beach Transit. Mark Strickert kindly volunteered to act as trip planner and prepared his usual meticulous itinerary.

Members in the L.A. area utilizing Amtrak for the first part of the trip rendezvoused at Union Station and took the southbound Pacific Surfliner 566, departing at 8:30 a.m. Members and guests riding the train included Kymberleigh Richards, Ken Ruben, John Ulloth, Woody Rosner, Art Tomlin and Ed Gills. At Fullerton Mark Strickert joined us. Kym shared her new breakfast treat, milk and cereal bars, which she found more appealing than the Chex Morning Mix she used to share out. At 9:24 a.m. we arrived at the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center. After taking advantage of the facilities therein we made our way thru the parking lot to reach the bus stop near the intersection of Santa Ana Blvd. and Santiago.

At 9:53 a.m. we boarded OCTA route 205, #5364 a low floor New Flyer, which had 24 passengers (all ride counts exclude trip participants) - a seated load! This bus lived up to its express status as it whizzed onto the 5 freeway and zoomed southward. We found already aboard the bus snug in the back Ed Buckley, Lionel Jones and Andy

Novak. We debarked at El Toro and Valencia near Paseo de Valencia. This was your typical suburban shopping area with a Longs Drugs and (of course) a Starbucks. Kym noted the bus shelter we waited at was maintained by a division of Clear Channel, whose radio empire she openly derides.

10:32 a.m. we boarded OCTA route 89, #5377 another low floor New Flyer, with 9 passengers. 7 more boarded at the next stop adjacent to Leisure World (aka Laguna Woods). Sighted along the roadside: a Golf Cart crossing warning. For the next few stops there was steady activity with passengers boarding and disembarking. Now we entered Laguna Canyon, green from recent rains. Among the sights: a traffic officer on a motorcycle placed strategically to catch speeding drivers. At 10:55 a.m. we arrived at Laguna Beach Transit Center.

A quick reconnoiter of the Transit Center revealed many favorable features: it was in the center of downtown from which one could easily walk to much of the shopping district plus the local post office and public library. The OCTA buses had ample bays for their layovers. There were numerous benches for the weary awaiting a bus plus a shelter that offered protection from the elements. Around the corner was a shop to purchase refreshments and munchies. Plus restrooms and public telephones mere steps away.

At this point Jan Hawkes came up and introduced herself. Ms. Hawkes oversees

the transit system and when Mark contacted her about our plans was intrigued enough to come on a Saturday to meet us and share insights gained during her 12 years with the system. Her suggestion was we ride with driver Ron Ruhman, who she assured us is their best vehicle operator. To reduce driver fatigue the three routes are interlined, taking advantage of timed transfers that have the three routes meet at the Transit Center. So we could ride the entire system with the same driver and vehicle (#110, El Dorado National). Ms. Hawkes informed us the fleet consists of 6 mini-buses plus 10 trolleys used during the tourist season. The minibuses seat 22 passengers and the routes are 10-14 miles in length. Also they accept OCTA day passes as transfer fare, so most of us flashed the day passes we bought earlier and boarded.

The first route we rode was the Red, which mostly operates along Pacific Coast Highway. We passed a variety of shops that lined PCH. Passengers greeted each other as they boarded. Soon we caught our first sight of the Sea. This bus actually filled up and had some standees for part of the trip (of the three routes this one was the most heavily used one we rode). Our first deviation from PCH was to go through the parking lot of a Shopping Center. As two ladies de-boarded to shop we warned them due to operator's upcoming lunch break they needed to catch us on our return trip in about 20 minutes or wait 2 hours for the next bus.

Our next deviation was along a narrow

residential street to serve the entrance of South Coast Medical Center. We then continued along PCH until we reached the famous Ritz Carlton, at which we went through a loop and retraced our route along PCH. Happily we picked up both ladies at the Shopping Center (as one put it "I couldn't stay on my feet for two hours waiting!"). Upon our arrival at the Transit Center Mr. Ruhman announced he was going on his lunch break. It sounded like a good idea and we followed him to a nearby food court which obviously is a favorite of the locals. The choices included Sammy's (a hamburger place), Taco Mesa and Chinese Combo. The consensus after the repast was overall the food was good and reasonably priced.

Next we rode the Grey route. This brought us into residential neighborhoods and winding narrow streets that climbed upward toward what is known as "Top of the World". We passed multi-million dollar houses precariously perched on the hilltop and caught sight of the spectacular vista that had led people to desire an abode in such a dizzying location - Laguna far below with the sea as an awe inspiring backdrop stretching to the horizon. One imagined at night it would be an awesome sight. After returning to downtown we climbed more hills, passing heritage houses that had been designated by the city and had plaques proclaiming the year they had been built. Another highlight was going down the steep grade (24%) at Viejo Street. Then we wound along the beach, catching sight of a crowded basketball court, on our trip back to downtown. (to pg. 8)

(Laguna Beach, from pg. 7)

After a brief respite at the Transit Center we started on the last route to explore: the Blue. This one had many ups and downs. Mr. Ruhman pointed our Moss Point, at which luminaries like President Roosevelt once relaxed, just before we began a long climb up a steep 20% grade. Again we were crawling along hilltops with spectacular views and houses whose worth was only exceeded by the ridiculous way they clung to the hillside, often held up by stilts while perched in mid-air. At one point vehicles were parked on both sides of the street leaving only a narrow space between them. Mr. Ruhman skillfully made it

thru with hardly 1/2" clearance. And then we were back at the Transit Center. We bid Mr., Ruhman a fond farewell, and joined the crowd waiting for the next OCTA route 89 bus.

This was #5339 a low floor New Flyer with a standing load. After arriving at Laguna Hills Transportation Center we caught OCTA route 205, #5364 a New Flyer with 34 passengers. Some got off at Santa Ana Transit Station to take Amtrak back. Ed Buckley and Mark Strickert dropped off at their respective connection points to continue home via transit or auto. The rest of us went to the East Shuttle area at Disneyland and caught MTA line 460 with a broken farebox, #7476 a NABI to downtown or the Green Line. ■

(Transit Updates, from pg. 2)

#23 will also be extended into Old Town Temecula via Ynez, Overland and Jefferson, with a loop along Moreno and Mercedes.

On Route #24, New service will be added to Redhawk via Wolf Valley Road, Vail Ranch Parkway, Nighthawk Pass, Butterfield Stage Road, De Portola Road and Redhawk. In addition, service to neighborhoods around Temecula Middle School will be extended.

Route #27 will be rerouted from I215 and Hwy 74 in Romoland via Ethanac, Sherman, Jackson, and Palomar to provide safer transfers and better access to passengers on Jackson. In addition, the route has been rerouted to operate on Tyler between the Galleria at Tyler and Hwy 91. Service on Magnolia and La Sierra will be

discontinued to improve on time performance and eliminate duplication of service on Magnolia.

Schedules on #1 and #10 have been adjusted to improve punctuality.

Amtrak is offering a 5% discount when you book online at www.amtrak.com from now thru Dec. 13 for travel thru April 30, 2004 (except for some blackout days). Promotional Code to book is H345. ■

(Public and Legis Affairs, from pg. 5)
United is supportive while the other major carriers through the Los Angeles Airlines Airport Affairs Committee (a trade group) have expressed concerns.

Mystery of the month: what are the "unresolved technical issues" that prevent Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus from implementing the free fare program for Access Service riders?

Because the OCTA Centerline project is a Transportation Control Measure for meeting air quality targets the recent shortening of the route meant the agency had to come up with new TCM that meet the same schedule (i.e. start by 2010) as the original project. Besides the shortened rail project this includes new bus services in the corridor that the Centerline abandoned (Irvine Transportation Center to John Wayne airport) running weekdays 5 a.m. to midnight, Saturday 7 a.m. to midnight and Sunday 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. along with intercounty rail services along the Metrolink corridor between Laguna Niguel and Fullerton operating on a 30 minutes headway between 5 a.m. and midnight.

Alma Hudson, an AVTA user, in public comments at the Aug. 25 AVTA Board meeting noted the bus her daughter and several other students ride home from school on has the last stop where they can de-board in front of a liquor store. The minutes quotes her "...when her daughter exits the bus she is followed home by men that are waiting at the liquor store". Ms. Hudson asked the stop be moved and presented a petition from parents in the neighborhood requesting the change. Randy Floyd, AVTA Planning Manager promised to come out and speak with the residents. Director Rick

Norris also asked Mr. Floyd to arrange for LA County off duty Sheriffs' Deputies ride the route to provide security until a resolution was reached.

At the Aug. 22 Foothill Transit Executive Board meeting member John Fasana expressed concerns about customer complaints regarding rude bus operators. Executive Director Doran Barnes per the minutes responded "... the staff's priority will be excellent customer service and a high standard for daily operations to ensure Foothill Transit's continued delivery of premiere transit services".

Well, Congress has sent the President a 5 month stop gap measure to keep transportation funding flowing in the interim as talks continue regarding TEA21 renewal. Just like 6 years ago the road lobby is trying to undo a lot of the flexibility that has been the hallmark of ISTEA and TEA21. And since their failure last time they have stepped up their level of campaign contributions to key players in hopes of winning this go-round. But the proponents of flexibility are organized and making it hard for Congress to move in the direction the road lobby wants it to go. So the road lobby has stalled the process but seems to lack the means of actually winning. This is also what happened 6 years ago and eventually the road lobby accepted political realities. I am hopefully that is what will happen again.

I'll conclude by noting Faithful Reader quizzed me why last month's column seemed short (by which was meant not full of juicy items). Well, what can I say? Some months there just isn't a lot of juicy stuff going on. Hope this one met expectations. ■

MEMBERS IN ACTION

Paul Castillo also attended the San Gabriel valley service change meeting last month.

Nate Zablen had a letter ("Improve Valley Mobility") in the Sept. 5 Daily News.

Hank Fung, June Jordan and J. K. Drummond attended the South Bay sector public hearing on MTA's proposed service changes held Sept. 9. Fung also attended the Sept. 11 Gateway Cities sector public hearing. Dana Gabbard, Ken Ruben, Russ Jones, Alan Michelson and Lionel Jones attended the Sept. 11 Westside/Central sector public hearing.

Ken Ruben, Kymberleigh Richards and John Ulloth attended the Sept. 13 San Diego-Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency workshop.

Members in attendance at the Sept. 18 Friends 4 Expo Transit meeting at Hamilton High School included Ken Ruben, Bart Reed, Anthony Loui, Ken Strumple, Lionel Jones, John Ulloth, Robert Meinert and Dana Gabbard.

J.K. Drummond had a letter ("Cutting bus routes hurts everyone") in the Sept. 25 Daily Breeze on the MTA South Bay sector public hearing he attended.

Craig Weingarten attended the Sept. 25 meeting of the South Bay Council of Governments board meeting.

Kymberleigh Richards was quoted in the Oct. 2 Daily News article "MTA reducing two Valley bus lines"

Michael Divindo attended the Oct. 3 Ventura County Transportation Commission board meeting.

Isa Meksin has been appointed by the L.A. 1st City Council District office to the Highway 101 task force for the downtown to Echo Park segment.

We would like to recognize two members who volunteer to make available transit information at their local libraries. Michael Baron keeps the Glendale Central Branch Library stocked with MTA timetables for his area. Kymberleigh Richards has a multi-agency transit information display at Mid-Valley Regional Library in North Hills that includes MTA, LADOT, Metrolink, and Amtrak California schedules and information plus flyers on SO.CA.TA membership, Transit Guide, bike transit, etc.

Chris Flescher has a byline in the latest issue of Western Rail Passenger Review.