

TRANSIT UPDATES

Coaster (Oceanside-San Diego commuter rail) may be joining the Rail-2-Rail program on a six-month demonstration basis. This would allow Coaster passholders to ride Amtrak trains (similar to the current agreement between Amtrak and Metrolink). More to follow.

Another demonstration project, this time in Los Angeles County, will be a peak hour bus only lane on Wilshire between Federal and Centinela. The lane, to be used by MTA #20, 720 and Santa Monica #2, will be in effect weekdays between 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Long Beach Transit's controversial transfer policy has been rescinded. Formerly, Muni-to-Metro transfers issued from rail ticket vending machines were only valid with MTA Metro Rail tickets. As of now, though, they are valid with any MTA pass.

Also in Long Beach: The Passport #C has been rerouted to serve the new developments at Pike and Camden Harbor View on Seaside Way.

Effective February 16, 2004: Eastbound, trips were added on Foothill #493 leaving 9th and Figueroa at 2:10, 4:10, and 4:50. The last trip at 7:00 has been deleted.

Westbound, trips leaving Nogales and Colima have been added at 5:55 and 6:25. On the #497, the 6:50 trip leaving 9th and Figueroa has been deleted due to lack of interest.

Omnitrans changed its Line #65 schedule to drop the section serving Peyton and Los Serranos. All buses will now follow the same route in Los Serranos, similar to what it was before January, including 30 minute service to the prison at Chino.

Ridership on the VVTA commuter routes (Victor Valley to San Bernardino and to Rancho Cucamonga) has been lower than predicted, calling into question the future of the service. Under consideration is service directly between Victorville and Los Angeles, without a transfer to Metrolink. Stay tuned....

TRANSIT TIP

Print your name and phone number on your Foothill Transit 31 day pass. If the pass gets stuck in the farebox ask the operator for a pass retrieval form. Only passes with name and phone number written on them can be returned

BULLETIN BOARD

At our March 13 meeting Nancy Michali of MTA will provide an update on the Metro Connections program (aka hub and spoke). Questions will be submitted in writing to aid Ms. Michali in documenting the concerns of stakeholders which she hopes to share with MTA Board members and others involved in the process. We will be in the auditorium adjacent to our usual meeting place.

We have been put on probation by Angelus Plaza after we failed to put the the furniture in the the room we used last month back the way we found it. Profuse apologies by Executive Secretary Gabbard and Treasurer Dellomes averted our being banned from the facility. But in the future similar failures to restore the room the way it originally was will result in our room access being suspended for one month. We ask members to bear in mind we are guests when using the facilities of Angelus Plaza and to act accordingly.

To better coordinate our response to MTA service change proposals coming from the various sectors Coordinators have been appointed for each service area to take the lead in drafting our positions regarding the proposals made by their sector.

South Bay--Lionel Jones
Westside/Central--Ken Ruben
Gateway--Mark Strickert
San Gabriel Valley--Paul Castillo
San Fernando Valley--Nate Zablent

The membership ratified the bylaws change published in last month's newsletter with the amendment adding to the final sentence the phrase "at an Executive Committee meeting". Our Executive Committee has appointed Kris Sharp as Emeritus President.

Saturday March 27 the Metro South Bay Sector Governance Council is holding a meeting at the Arthur Winston Bus Division (aka Division 5) from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. This will be followed by an open house from 11a.m. to 3 p.m. The Division is located at 5425 Van Ness Ave. in Los Angeles, and is served by MTA lines 107 and 209. Further information: (310) 225-6040

Also on March 27th from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM MTA Metro San Fernando Valley service sector and the LA County Transit Services Bureau are holding an open house for the new sheriff's facility in the San Fernando sector office complex at 9760 Topanga Canyon Boulevard in Chatsworth This location is served by MTA lines 166 and 245.

The California High Speed Rail Authority and Federal Railroad Administration will host public hearings to present the Draft Program environmental documents and to receive public comments. Two hearings are scheduled to be held in Southern California: *(to pg 9)*

I chatted with Michael Turner of MTA at the March 3 Mobilty 21 event in Carson about the funding situation in Sacramento. Evidently one idea being floated is to have some of the just passed \$15 billion bond repay past loans of transportation funds made to balance the state budget. But it is all tentative, with no one sure where the Governor stands.

Meanwhile TEA3 reauthorization is at near stalemate, with President Bush threatening to veto any bill whose funding exceeds his proposal (aka SAFETEA). There are whispers that the administration might be willing to go a bit higher but still far short of what many Congresspersons want. There is even talk of passing a two year bill, with the hope that the economic climate in 24 months will a be more conducive to a boost in funding levels (plus leap-frog the election).

The new MTA day pass is proving popular, with about 50,000 being sold each week-day. January, the first month for the new fare media, MTA experienced an increase in fare box collections of about \$1 million.

Remember MTA promised any surplus produced by the strike would be used to benefit the passengers? Per a report to the Feb. 19 MTA Board Executive Management and Audit Committee meeting (item #9) the \$7.4 million surplus is bring set aside while the financial impacts of the recent Special Master ruling are determined. Staff state "If any strike-related savings remain" that at a later date a list of possible customer-enhancement programs will be presented for consideration. Does that mean

they may use some or all of the surplus to pay consent-decree related costs?

MTA bus procurement update--the 45 foot compo-buses from NABI should start arriving in May; the "pilot" of the order of NABI 60 foot low-floor CNG articulated buses is currently being manufactured with the first 30 due for delivery by June 2005. (Feb. 19 MTA Operations Committee meeting, agenda item #25).

MTA Deputy CEO John Catoe in his report to the Feb. Operations Committee meeting (agenda item #23) announced the tagger TRIBAL was arrested Feb. 12 and that "Evidence recovered from the subject's room will assist in solving 70+ vandalism cases".

Saints preserve us! MTA is embarking on an update to its Long Range Transportation Plan. I have acted as SO.CA.TA's representative sitting on stakeholder input groups for the last 2 1/2 LRTPs. I may write a letter to the Chair of MTA's Planning and Programming Committee outlining my "lessons learned" (to use MTA speak).

Mere months after a less than amicable parting of the ways with AVTA Bud Budlong has turned up in Tucson as the new Assistant General Manager at Suntran. Talk about landing on your feet!

The proposed ASI Foundation has hit a snag--disability activists have pushed to have it be autonomous of ASI despite ASI's Board providing the seed funding (thus far \$25,000) to help launch the Foundation. Another

\$50,000 is to be spent on a consultant. Plus anticipated annual \$100,000+ administrative costs. Meanwhile it may be 2-3 years will elapse before the Foundation begins to generate an income. No wonder ASI General Counsel James Jones supports some level of control of the Foundation by ASI's Board, noting an autonomous relationship could run afoul of laws prohibiting gifts of public funds.

Mr. Jones also in his analysis notes ASI itself is a tax-exempt organization that can receive tax-deductible donations directly. So why all the cost and bother of creating a separated Foundation for fund-raising? Jones notes simply the Paratransit Plan adopted by the ASI Board mandated creating the Foundation. A Plan that Jones describes as having "terms and provisions vetted [by] members of the disability community who provided detailed input." Could this have been an attempt by some to create a fiefdom, with ASI footing the bill?

Remember Operation Jumpstart, the Southern California Association of Government's ambitious initiative to jumpstart the local economy with big ticket transportation projects with mostly private financing? [<http://www.scag.ca.gov/jumpstart/>] Local politicians have pressured SCAG to decouple Jumpstart from the draft Regional Transportation Plan. I guess while trying to be diplomatic the officials are treating

Jumpstart like a Ralph Kramden style scheme that eventually will fizzle...

SCAG is still wandering around with a tin cup seeking matching funds for its federal maglev grants. Sadly the L.A. City Council Transportation Committee ignored their staff's recommendation and voted to support giving SCAGLEV \$300,000! Meanwhile the March issue of Wheel Clicks, newsletter of the Pacific Railroad Society, reports technical issues delayed the opening of the \$1 billion German-built 19 mile Shanghai maglev line. And China has firmly said no to any other maglev lines.

Francine Oschin, longtime aide to former L. A. Councilman Hal Bernson, has started Oschin Partners--a transportation and government affairs consulting firm. Francine always impressed me as one of the few transportation deputies to have true savvy. I bet when the word spreads that she has now put out a shingle that prospective clients will start lining up.

I'll conclude by noting it turns out a news item in a past column about the demise of the Committee for Better Transit was premature. It is good to know CBT continues its 40+ years of working on behalf of transit users in Gotham and environs. ■

DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING TRIP 2003 Dana Gabbard

There were some travails encountered in settling on a destination for our annual day after Thanksgiving trip for 2003. Miscommunication and confusion shrouded the process. Until like a ray of sunshine Andrew Novak offered a proposal whose excellence was readily apparent (even among those with competing ideas). And thus the gloom that had enveloped the process was dispelled.

Andrew's plan was to explore two of the new RTA CommuterLink routes plus various RTA services. Transport to the Inland Empire was to be via Metrolink #300 on the San Bernardino line to Montclair, departing L.A. Union Station at 6:17 a.m. Nov. 28, 2003 the following members gathered on that early morning train: John Ulloth, Kymberleigh Richards, Lionel Jones, Frank Schroeder, Woody Rosner, Andrew Novak, Charles Powell and Dana Gabbard. The departure was amidst the twilight before dawn, with red tingeing the horizon. As usual we were soon moving amidst the sort of industrial sites that line most urban railroad right-of-ways. Kym handed out milk and cereal bars, which were judged superior to the chex mix breakfast meal munched during previous trips. We arrived at Montclair Transcenter at about 7:20 a.m. and found Hank Fung and Charles Hobbs waiting there to join us.

Montclair Transcenter is your basic regional hub, situated where the service areas of Omnitrans and Foothill Transit connect (albeit one Omnitrans bus now operates as far as Pomona). While lacking much in the way of amenities (except an Andy Gump

style outdoor potty) it features numerous places to sit (although one wishes the shelters had sides).

At 7:43 a.m. we boarded our first CommuterLink bus--route 204 (Montclair to downtown Riverside). The coach was a Thomas SLF 30C #300, a low floor charter-style vehicle with stuffed seats, tray tables, even 12V power outlets for plugging in laptops! There were zero passengers (all ride counts exclude study-tour participants). The bus sported a red and white paint job as part of the branding of the new service, along with "CommuterLink" logos on the side. Most of us purchased day passes, which were destined to get a workout!

Down the 10 freeway we rode, passing Ontario Airport. We swung by the Ontario Mills Mall (connecting with several Omnitrans lines) and picked up one passenger. Soon we were whizzing down the 60 freeway passing billboards for Farmer Boys (an mostly inland empire chain of eateries) and gazing at snow covered peaks in the distance. Charles Powell confirmed the section just forward of the back door had seats that folded up to make room for wheelchair passengers. We made a quick detour through the park and ride adjacent to County Village (no boardings) and continued past a landscape dotted with suburban bedroom communities. Passing Fairmount Park we caught sight of an old UP locomotive on display.

We arrived at the Terminal in downtown Riverside at 8:31 a.m. where Armando Avalos was waiting to join us. This transit

center once had an indoor waiting area but that building now houses Riverside Fire Dept. offices. But those in need of facilities can find them at nearby eateries. Also in the afternoon a hot dog vendor sets up at the bus plaza. While waiting we noted the different strategies used to discourage loitering by the Montclair Transcenter (gaps separating seats) and the Riverside terminal (humps dividing the benches).

At 8:50 a.m. we boarded RTA line 1 with a flag wrap decorating its exterior. #2143, it was a NABI low floor with 11 passengers. Also the bus automatically announced stops, transfer points, landmarks, connecting transit services for riders inside. Plus boarding passengers were told the destination of the bus and its route number. This entails a near constant refrain of "stop requested" every time someone signals for a stop. We made our way past Magnolia Town Center and the business district. One of the corridors we passed is slated for Bus Rapid Transit service which RTA hopes to implement soon. At the Park View Hospital we had six boardings.

At 9:28 a.m. we deboarded at the Galleria at Tyler, a mall. Among our first discoveries was a Inland Empire Connection rt.149 sign that still had the destination as "Anaheim" (it was truncated at Mall of Orange in the mid-90s) and a OCTD logo! Several members dashed into a nearby Macy's to use the facilities while we waited. Many buses serve this location, which is nothing more than a glorified bus stop (with two shelters for sitting).

At 9:45 a.m. we boarded RTA line 27, #2243 another NABI low floor with 4 passengers. Soon we passed a drive in theater actually showing first run movies (plus hosting a swap meet on weekends) and an orange grove. There were boardings and deboardings as we passed through a low density business and residential area before continuing via the 215 freeway to Parris. There we stopped at another shopping center transfer point (aka bus shelter) before hopping back on the freeway to Sun City. A retirement community (the tip off was a sign designating "golf cart route") Lionel marveled that a Rite Aid and Walgreen abutted each other. We made our way along narrow rural roads and desolate scenery to arrive at the Hemet Valley Mall at about 11:30 a.m.

Some took advantage of the facilities in a nearby Sears Auto Center before we boarded the LadyBug Shuttle, RTA line 33, at 11:50 a.m. This was a cutaway that serves a circuitous route around Hemet. We soon found ourselves winding through 50's style neighborhoods and trailer parks. We picked up 1 passenger en-route. The driver was very talkative and informed us the bus carries on average 6 riders during his 6 hour shift. Having a bus load was a treat he had to brag about to the Dispatcher over the radio. By a vote of 6 to 4 we decided the seats were very comfortable (versus just comfortable). Around 1 p.m. we arrived back at the Mall, at which point Charles Hobbs bid farewell as he had plans for the rest of the day. (to pg. 8)

(from pg. 7) Meanwhile our group split up to try various nearby eateries for lunch.

At 2:45 p.m. we boarded RTA line 79, another cutaway #22-18 with zero passengers. We traveled thru rural open spaces and past farms. A sign advertising "tackle/bait" reflected the recent opening of Diamond Valley Lake, a reservoir designed to hold a year's worth of water against a future drought. As we continued past tract development the driver informed us this line generally has decent ridership-- obviously the empty bus was due to it being the day after Thanksgiving. As we approached Temecula we passed mall after mall, tract development at the outskirts plus the Rancho California business park. Around 3:45 p.m. we arrived at the Promenade Mall.

Because of congestion at the Mall due to it being the day after Thanksgiving the stop for buses had been moved to the adjacent arterial. We were dropped off at an intersection with the driver stating the stop was half a block or so down the cross street. It actually turned out to be about 3 blocks (although several availed themselves of an adjacent Cold Stone creamery for cones and shakes).

Cell phones were used to call the transit agency to verify we were at the right stop. And happily at 4:15 p.m. the last bus of the day, RTA line 202 (Promenade Mall to Oceanside), pulled up. It was another Thomas deluxe coach, #3007 with 1 passenger (in a wheelchair no less), and a GFI farebox. This route does not accept the day pass and the fare is a flat \$4 one-way (no discount for senior/disabled/youth).

After passing through the business parks of Temecula we hopped on the 15 freeway. The landscape at first consisted of boulers, great hills of them! As twilight fell we saw hills covered with green from recent rains. To serve a park and ride lot we got off at Old Highway 395. Next to the lot was a small burger stand, swarming with people. The driver described the fare it serves as "awesome" when asked about it. We continued the trip along highway 76, which initially was a narrow winding road before widening to 4 lanes. Soon we were once again passing mall after mall. As night fell and the sky darkened we could only make out dim shapes and looming hills covered with small points of light. At 5:15 p.m. we arrived at the Oceanside Transit Center.

Oceanside Transit Center is a magnificent facility--served by intercity rail (Amtrak), commuter rail (Coaster and Metrolink) plus NCTD local bus service and Greyhound regional/national buses. Amenities include restrooms, a mini-Burger King, snack shop and places to sit! It has staffed stations for Greyhound and Amtrak plus NCTD has an information center at which one can buy passes, ask questions and obtain bus books.

Kym and John learned their Amtrak tickets were messed up by the Quik-Tik machine, so they took Greyhound. Lionel saw the rest of us off on the Surfliner train just after 6 p.m. before he also caught "the dog". And so ended an enlightening day of bus riding.

So, where should we go this year? ■

(Bulletin Board, from Page 3)

Los Angeles

Tuesday, April 13, 2004

3:00 - 8:00 PM

Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Board Room, 3rd Floor
1 Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles, CA

San Diego

Tuesday, April 20, 2004

3:00 - 8:00 PM

San Diego Association of Governments
Board Room, 401 B St, Suite 800, San
Diego, CA

The Orange County Transportation Au-
thority is holding a public hearing on
proposed service changes Friday, March
12, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. in the County of
Orange Planning Commission Hearing
Room Hall of Administration, 10 Civic
Center Plaza in Santa Ana.

The subcommittee on transportation of
the State Senate Budget Committee The
subcommittee on transportation of the
State Senate Budget Committee and the
Senate Transportation Committee are
holding a joint public hearing on trans-
portation funding in Los Angeles Friday

March 26, starting at 2 p.m. in the MTA
Headquarters Building near Union Station
in downtown Los Angeles. For further in-
formation: (916) 445-5831 [ask for
Ronda Paschal]. A similar meeting in Or-
ange County is slated for Friday April 2--
final arrangements are being made, con-
tact Ms. Paschal for details.

Eric Mann, head honcho of the Bus Riders
Union, now has a weekly talk show on
KPFK-FM (90.7) Mondays at 4 p.m.

Save the date: May 1st the Pacific Bus
Museum will have an excursion in Orange
County using OCTA's restored Flexible
#1201.

The Southern California Association of
Governments Regional Transit Task
Force is setting up subgroups on commu-
nication, education and transit/land use
coordination. These will meet weekdays
at SCAG's offices in downtown Los Ange-
les. Let us know if you'd like to be our
representative for one of these. ■

MEMBERS IN ACTION

Hank Fung, Charles Hobbs, Paul Castillo and Robert Meinert attended the Feb. 10 San Gabriel Valley Sector public hearing.

Paul Castillo was quoted in the Feb. 12 San Gabriel Valley Tribune ("MTA Ponders Changes That Would Impact San Gabriel Valley Lines")

Chriss Flescher attended the Feb. 12 meeting of a pedestrian and bicycle advisory committee for the city of Monterey.

Flescher also had a letter published in the "action line" column in the March 1st San Jose Mercury News regarding parked cars blocking sidewalks.

Hank Fung received a form letter from the Governor in response to a letter Fung wrote on transportation funding.

J.K. Drummond and Chaffee Yiu attended the Feb. 23 Long Beach Transit Board of Di-

rectors meeting. Drummond gave public comment opposing the recent LBT policy to not accept Metro to Muni transfers purchased at rail station ticket machines by MTA pass holders.

Those attending the Feb. 26 Westside/Central Service Sector Governance Council meeting included Bart Reed, Ken Ruben, Woody Rosner, Lionel Jones, Dana Gabbard, Hank Fung and John Ulloth.

Mark Strickert attended a March 4 meeting on the Norwalk/Santa Fe Spring Metrolink station.

Michael Divindo attended the March 5 Ventura County Transportation Commission meeting. ■