

TRANSIT UPDATES

Foothill Transit changes, effective February 27:

Line #497 will be extended from Diamond Bar to serve a new transit center in downtown Chino. This transit center will also be served by Omnitrans #63, #65 and #72

Line #699 will be modified to provide direct, non-stop service between Fairplex and Downtown LA, saving 12 minutes per trip. Passengers destined to West Covina should use #498; those going to Via Verde can take #499.

For the month of March, both #497 and #699 will be fare-free

On Line #187 the current Saturday schedule will also be used on Sundays and holidays.

Pasadena ARTS buses are on a new schedule, with a new route (#70) in Southeast Pasadena, more weekday service and better connections to Metro Gold Line stations.

Burbank Local Transit is running a new peak hour shuttle between the North Hollywood Red Line station to the Media Center area. Fare is \$1, or an MTA pass or Metro-link ticket.

In the Antelope Valley, changes to AVTA service (effective this month) include a new transfer point at Palmdale Transit Center, additional late night service (until 11 p.m. on weekdays) and a new line #8 providing shuttle service between the Palmdale Transit Center and the AV Mall.

OCTA officials are recommending that the Centerline, a proposed light rail service between Downtown Santa Ana and Costa Mesa, be dropped in favor of a "rapid bus" service along the same route...

New Riverside Transit Agency fares, effective April 3:

Cash Fares:

General \$1.25*

Youth \$1.25*

(* \$2.25 for Commuterlink routes #202, 204, 206 and 208)

Senior/Disabled \$.60

Child \$.25 (Child is anyone 46" tall or less.

All children must pay a fare)

1-Day Passes:

General \$3.75

Youth \$3.75

Senior/Disabled \$1.85

31-Day Passes:

General \$43.00

Youth \$32.00

Senior/Disabled \$21.00

Current 1-Ride tickets (\$1.00, \$.75, \$.50) will not be valid after May 3, 2005. Use all 1-Ride tickets before May 4, 2005. All current 31-day passes cannot be used after May 3, 2005.

Because of a ruptured natural gas line in the Ventura area, SCAT buses will operate on a Saturday schedule, using borrowed diesel buses, until further notice.

A number of Greyhound stops will lose service as of April 3, due to very low ridership. Stops losing service in Southern California include: Santa Monica, Pt. Mugu, Malibu Beach, Carpinteria, Newhall, Buellton and Lompoc. ■

BULLETIN BOARD

At our March 12 meeting we will have a discussion on outreach, including plans for our booth at Fullerton Railroad Days (May 7-8 this year).

OCTA is seeking applicants for its Citizens Advisory Committee - deadline for submittal is April 11. The application can be downloaded at http://www.octa.net/octa/community/cac_app.pdf

The San Diego Trolley Mission Valley East extension is tentatively set for Saturday

July 9th. We may have a booth at the opening.

The National Association of Railroad Passengers Region 12 annual meeting will be held Saturday April 9 at The Rail Restaurant in Fullerton (across the parking lot from the Amtrak Station) from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Further details: vonnordeck-ed@sbcglobal.net

Save the date: Torrance City Yard open house is scheduled for Saturday June 4. ■

MEMBERS IN ACTION

Congratulations to Isa-Kae Meksin on being appointed to the Community Advisory Committee for Access Services, Inc.

Ken Ruben attended the Feb. 28 public hearing held by the Long Beach Transit Board of Directors on the proposed bus fare increase. He also was among those at Rail-PAC's informal regional meeting held March 5 at Fullerton Amtrak station.

Ruben and Kevin Devlin attended the Feb. 9 MTA Westside/Central Service Sector Governance Council public hearing and the Sector Council's March 3 meeting.

Attending the Feb. 22 MTA South Bay Ser-

vice Sector Governance Council public hearing were Ruben, Craig Weingarten, J.K. Drummond, Phil Capo, Lionel Jones and John Ulloth.

Attending the March 2 MTA San Fernando Valley Service Sector Governance Council public hearing were Charles Hobbs, Mike Baron, Robert Meinert, Bart Reed, Dana Gabbard, Lionel Jones, Ken Ruben and John Ulloth

Ruben and Dana Gabbard attended the Feb. 23 MTA Citizens' Advisory Council meeting. Kudos to Edmund Buckley, chosen by OCTA as its Administrative Employee of the Year for 2004. Way to go, Ed!

■

I neglected to give a citation to the L.A. Business Journal article I mentioned last month: "MTA to Give Companies Discounts if Workers Use Mass Transit", Jan. 10, 2005.

Turns out MTA considers the 2005 Long Range Transportation Plan it is preparing "a minor update". Public input will only occur at the end of the process in early 2006 after the draft plan is readied. Given past experience (the drafting of past plans entailed lot of meetings with stakeholders which resulted in little or no impact on what the final plan contained) perhaps this is no great loss.

Karen Rubin of the San Gabriel Valley Tribune quoted me in her Feb. 22 article "Foothill Reroutes Two Commuter Bus Lines" about the closure of park and ride lots and its impact on attracting riders: "Political leadership should try to step in and help out ... It's very hard for a bus line to service directly into neighborhoods. The park-and-ride creates a means for people within a one- to three-mile radius the option to drive their car and then catch a bus. It's disappointing [to have park and ride lots closing]."

Speaking of the Tribune, its coverage of the Gold Line Foothill Extension makes clear some folks in that corridor have begun to grasp the reality of the challenges this project faces (especially if it aspires to federal funding) while others still cling to the notion that if you caterwaul enough things will move your way. At least some officials now concede that making plans based on a groundbreaking happening in the next year

or so isn't prudent or realistic.

As I conjectured last month practical considerations of timing resulted in consideration of contracting out the Orange Line not getting any farther than an MTA staff power point presentation (only some of which was displayed at the Feb. MTA Operations Committee meeting before Boardmember Fasana declared the issue dead and the presentation ground to a halt).

Personally I think comprehensive status reports by MTA staff for the Board are needed on contracting and also the Metro Rapid program. Both deserve a closer look at pros and cons and what unresolved issues need addressed. Unfortunately at the moment instead of taking a forward look MTA seems to be on cruise control.

question of the month: the Dec. Metro Operations Performance Report summary submitted to the MTA Operations Committee Feb. 17 meeting concludes "This is the last month this report will be distributed to the Board". Does anyone know why this is happening?

Matthew Barrett of the MTA Library gave an impressive presentation at the Feb. 23 MTA Citizens' Advisory Council meeting. The library is gradually placing on its section of the MTA website digitized historic photos and documents from the library's collection. Hard to imagine a few years ago it was in danger of being closed--thankfully the powers that be came to appreciate what a treasure the library is and quietly dropped the idea of closing it.

quote of the month: "I'll back you up. I'll give you political cover ... I'll take the heat for this." Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky at the Feb. meeting of the Westside Cities Council of Governments on placing a bus-only lane on Wilshire during rush hour. [as quoted in the Feb. 18 Santa Monica Daily Press: <http://www.smdp.com/archives/021805.pdf>]

In its quest to improve the anemic ridership on the CommuterLink route 202 (Murrieta - Temecula - Oceanside Transit Center) the Riverside Transit Agency has struck on an interesting idea: install satellite TV and wireless fidelity (WIFI) internet service on the buses for a 12 month pilot program. Maybe that will raise ridership to sustainable levels (even a fare cut to \$1 has fallen short of achieving that).

fact of the month: Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District General Manager Sherrie Fisher's salary as of Jan. 28 has been raised 5% to \$120,750 per the minutes of the MTD Board meeting held that day.

Talk about a hard luck life: Araceli Lopez, Transit Stores Operations Manager for Foothill Transit, at the Jan. 28 meeting of the Foothill Executive Board explained why average hold time for the information line

increased during the second quarter of the fiscal year (Oct.-Dec. 2004) : "... electrical outages and flooding in the El Monte Transit Store, phone system malfunctions in the West Covina Transit Stores, and several changes in personnel resulting in a staff shortage". OY!

Hugh Hallenberg in the minutes of the Feb. 17 meeting of the Quality Services Subcommittee for the Access Services, Inc. Community Advisory Committee is quoted as asking Joe King of ASI staff why a release form for the certification process had not first been brought to the CAC and QSS for review. The minutes notes that in response, "Mr. King stated that it is not the responsibility of the advisory committees to micromanage the daily operations of ASI. Staff is empowered to operate business and take actions to run the operations".

I'll conclude this month by noting the ending with the Feb. 28 edition of the weekly e-newsletter Land Use Lines after six(+) years of covering growth and development issues in California. This was the last extant remnant of the California Futures Network (although the new Better California Campaign to some extent is a successor to CFN). ■

FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING Steve Crosmer

While President Bush recently released his budget proposal for fiscal year 2006, which starts October 1st, it may mean the end of the line for some Amtrak and Greyhound services, and numerous cutbacks and fare increases in public transit systems. The Bush administration continues to push privatization of airline security personnel, as well as Congress, principally led by Congressman John Mica (R-FL), who also is pushing for eliminating Amtrak and reducing public transit funds.

Part of this problem stems from whom Bush chose to be his transportation coordinator, Wendell Cox, who is a Libertarian Party activist favoring egotistical elitist extremists. If the Libertarians had their way, our only source of public transportation would be cut-throat taxi cab service. The Libertarians claim "the automobile is an American symbol of freedom". Freedom from what? Road rage?

Traffic Jams? Parking shortages and paying an arm and a leg to park? High insurance costs? And most of all, the never-ending roller coaster ride on the coast of gas?

Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-TN) was asked by the Owner Operators Independent Drivers (OOIDA) president Todd Spencer on what to do to give the truckers and transportation relief on traffic congestion in the Sept/Oct issue of Landline Magazine, and all Hunter elaborated on was on the supply and costs of fuel, which was irrelevant to the question. All the gas in the world is not going to get us out of a traffic jam. And the longer engines idle, the more polluted air we are going to breathe. Engine idling is one of the leading causes of wasting resources and money.

Privatizing air traffic controllers is a bad

idea, too. It hurts small town airports the most and small commuter carriers who are then forced to cut service and then that increases congestion at the larger airports. Note the contrasts between Burbank and LAX. Since a lot of small towns have no bus or rail service, let alone even a single taxi cab, those folks are forced to drive. Until the Transport Security Administration (TSA) started doing screening, private companies were contracted out who paid screeners minimum and pocketed the money they should have been using to train and pay the screeners a decent wage. As a result of lax security from private screeners, 9/11 happened. When that happened, with the airline industry shut down for a week Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta did absolutely nothing to suggest taking alternate modes of transportation to the automobile to avoid congestion on the nation's highways.

As a result of 9/11, some business travelers have decided to drive instead of fly for fear of another hijack, thinking they can "beat the clock" driving overnight. The highways which used to belong to the big trucks at night are no longer theirs. More lane restrictions are being imposed on commercial vehicles, which in some areas does include buses. Cramming buses and trucks into the two extreme outside lanes makes it harder for all motorists to get on/off the highway due to increased traffic volume in those two lanes. Split speed limits are imposed as well, increasing time lengths of bus rides which will discourage ridership, and upsets the even flow of the rhythm of traffic in general. A very bad example of this is the I-285 loop around Atlanta, GA, that truckers refer to as "Suicide Circle".

Recently, President Bush announced he was going to zero out numerous public

projects. Cuts loom for public transit, the days of paying change for a bus fare may become a thing of the past. Several smaller communities have already cut service to other nearby communities. At Ann Arbor, MI, their bus company just cut service recently to Saline and Chelsea. Some rail lines are under threat in Philadelphia, which has the one of the highest public transit fares in the nation and were the first to go over a dollar back in 1980 for a base fare. Public transit fares should not cost more than the same price of a gallon of gas.

Alphabetically, Amtrak is probably at the top of the list. Amtrak had a record year for ridership last year with almost 25 million passengers on their trains despite a shrinking national system on the map. The president could take a lesson from what happened to Greyhound last year. Greyhound cut several routes and service to several small cities in the west last July, and ridership has fallen to a low of just over 22.5 million riders on their buses last year, and more routes are being planned to be cut later this year as well. Greyhound carried as many as 60 million people on their buses when their service hits its peak in 1969. Gone are services to small towns that serve popular national tourists places like Pigeon Forge, TN was gateway at one time on Greyhound for teh Smoky Mountains or Livingston, MT was once a gateway on Amtrak to Yellowstone. Unlike California, though, which supports bus and rail, look at Merced being a gateway with bus service directly to the campgrounds at Yosemite.

Amtrak and Greyhound are good sources of transportation for senior citizens, groups of children, persons who physically disabled or mentally unfit to drive, or ofr those who just don't simply want to drive or can't afford a car.

Since Congress repealed the federal speed

limit of 55 Miles-per-hour, gasoline consumption has gone up, and rolling back the 4.3 cents-per-gallon gas tax enacted in 1993 has left less money for road maintenance and repairs, needless to say got us into budget problems.

On security, where is the security of our nation's highways? Although some places have started placing TV cameras on our bridges, tunnels, overpasses, signs, and lamp posts, vehicles themselves aren't being checked. What if a car bomb went off in the middle of a busy interchange during the heart of rush hour and did extensive damage similar to an earthquake? Or is the president afraid to scare everybody out of driving their cars, too? No system is completely immune!

The most wasteful transportation project that President Bush could approve of won't even help us on this planet. That is the plans for a space flight to Mars and setting up a space station on the moon to serve as the Earth's "Space Terminal" The mission to Mars is going to cost over half a trillion dollars and won't get us quicker across town.

The proposed budget cuts the president wants cut won't even make a dent in the budget deficit, for they only account for less than 1.5% of the entire deficit.

Now if the deficit alone is close to a half-trillion this year alone, how are they going to get the money to get us on another planet ? The president and Congress really have no business pouring billions into a new space program or even new mega-million highways with a bulging budget deficit. What good is it to shut down Amtrak, Greyhound, and public transit just to build a few miles of new highway in a single remote area of the nation?

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For the past few years our summer study tour has been an exploration of late night/owl service. One idea proposed has been Charles Powell's idea for a trip that would explore Foothill service during these hours plus a unique timed transfer in the wee hours. For 2004 we decided to do the Powell trip and set Saturday August 28, 2004 as the date we would do it. Sadly a family obligation precluded Mr. Powell's participation.

Woody Rosner and I rendezvoused at the Wilshire/Western Denny's to share a repast before embarking on our adventure.

Quickly we discovered our choice of date fortuitously meant there would be a full moon to ride by. We also ogled a yummy looking slice of lemon pie a nearby patron was indulging in. And we discovered yet another sign of the times: one now needed to request a token to use the restroom in the restaurant.

After our meal we crossed Wilshire and caught a Red Line train (car #513) at 9:20 p.m. which brought us to Union Station by 9:40 p.m. We then made our way to the Gold Line and met up with the others joining us for the late evening/early morning jaunt: Ken Ruben, Chaffee Yiu and Chaffee's cousin plus bus fan Danny Elliott. Ruben informed me he had spotted several private cars on the Surfliner standing at the platform including Tioga Pass, Scottish Thistle and Colonial Craft. The Gold Line at night runs single car consists (we were on #235) and left Union Station with a standing load. Deboarding didn't begin until we reached Mission/South Pasadena station. There was more deboarding at Del Mar.

Then a mass exodus at Memorial Park and we ran virtually empty for the remainder of the trip along the median of the 210 freeway.

We got off at Sierra Madre Villa where Charles Hobbs joined our party. We crossed over to the adjacent parking structure and took an elevator to the ground floor to catch the last eastbound trip on Foothill Transit line 187, which came at 11:04 p.m. (#F1039) driven by Tim L. per the nameplate above the front windshield. We departed with 4 passengers (all ride counts do not include trip participants). Hobbs explained he had come from La Verne via an inbound line 187. He was in La Verne visiting family and was riding with us only that far. At the intersection of Foothill and Rosemead we spotted the last line 266 (#1128) of the night. We also paused a while at this location since we were running ahead of schedule (aka "running hot").

While running on Colorado we had two boarding at Rosemead and two more boarding at Michillinda. The pair at Rosemead were real characters--they had taken a bus to buy dinner to go at an eatery yet boarded pleading poverty and claiming they had no money. Yeah, right. At Baldwin we spotted a 187 on the way to Pasadena carrying 5-6 passengers.

Soon we passed Santa Anita Racetrack and turned onto Huntington Drive, which in Arcadia is lined with auto dealers and some bars. But generally the city closes up after dark. At this point we passed our second Starbucks and a lot of upscale eateries in a

cluster of the kind I have taken to dubbing a 'fast food gulch' from spotting same during past bus trips (the purveyors of fine dining included Mimi's, Outback, Black Angus and Claimjumper). We also passed some slumbering shopping centers. The only activity happening was property owners taking advantage of the cool night to water the grass with sprinklers. Some de-boarding happened during this part of the trip.

In Monrovia even the liquor stores were closed. After running thru a business district the route passed thru a residential area. In Duarte we were down to 3 passengers and upon entering Irwindale found the surroundings emptied into wide open spaces and darkness. We were now on Foothill Blvd. and soon were once again in a business district and even spotted a rail track overpass.

In Azusa we turned on Citrus while passing Azusa Pacific University and Citrus College. A Jack in the Box outlet was even spotted with the drive up window still open. And the last westbound line 187 bus passed carrying 3 passengers. Soon we passed another Starbucks plus an outlet of The Hat, famed for its pastrami.

In Glendora we were now on route 66 passing thru a business district with the usual complement of car dealers. Some shops were actually still open! Spotted was a place called Gameroom Goodies, and another that proclaimed itself Cigarette Depot. Plus an outlet of the Pinnacle Peak steakhouse chain. Continuing into San Dimas we spotted a Denny's "Classic", an In N Out burger plus yet another Starbucks. YEOW!

We had now reached La Verne. Charles Hobbs deboarded where he had parked his car so he could continue visiting his family after his sojourn with us. We bid him a fond farewell and continued through yet another auto mall. At Foothill and Garey we actually had someone board. Also spotted was an open liquor store and some actual night life.

We reached the end of the route at the Montclair Transcenter at 12:24 a.m. At that time of night drifters hang around. We were none too pleased to join the 6 passengers boarding Foothill line 480 (#F1151) at 12:34 a.m. The following week we would have had to wait an hour in Montclair to make this connection due to changes in the schedule Foothill was about to undertake. But thankfully we didn't have to wait an hour at this dismal place.

We passed Montclair Plaza and its environs, then made our way along the deserted streets of Claremont. I spotted a BC Cafe (closed for the night), famed for their massive breakfasts. There was even an open liquor store/market spotted in a strip mall. We had one boarding, then another while running along Indian Hill. At Indian Hill/Holt we passed the moribund mall. At the Pomona Transcenter we had 3 boardings, giving us a total of 11 passengers. We continued through a residential area and passed Cal Poly Pomona.

Now we started freeway running. At Via Verde 1 deboarded. We blazed past Eastland Center and West Covina Parkway until we reached the El Monte station at 1:58 a.m. and deboarded. After a short wait in the mostly deserted facility we boarded at 2:11 a.m. MTA line 70 (to pg. 10)

(Owl Trip, from page 9) (#7363), a NABI low floor with 2 passengers. Soon we had two boardings at Santa Anita/Garvey as we went along the Garvey business corridor with many Chinese and Vietnamese characters decorating the front windows. From time to time we passed thru a more industrial area before retuning to the land of auto malls, car auctions, etc. (and a boarded up McDonald's). Monterey Park is well known for its Chinese expatriate community (with some of the best restaurants this side of Hong Kong).

The route became serpentine as we crawled thru City Terrace. We deboarded at Marengo/Soto, at 2:42 a.m. and walked a short distance to the bus stop for our connecting service. We were on an overpass above the San Bernardino Freeway (which even at that hour had traffic roaring along it) near a 24 hour Mobil station. At about 2:48 a.m. MTA line 251 turned off Marengo onto Soto and picked us up. We were the only passengers until someone boarded at Cesar Chavez (and got off at Whittier to catch MTA line 18). The area was residen-

tial but as we continued we spotted some open businesses selling gas and food.

We passed the old eastside Sears and had one boarding at Washington and another at Vernon as we ran thru an industrial area. Now we were in Huntington Park on the famed commercial district along Pacific. At Florence our headsign changed to line 111 and we turned westward on Florence, which was mostly lined with small businesses. At Vermont one boarded and one deboarded. Also spotted was a 24 hour drive up window open at a Jack in the Box along with some running thru residential districts before we got off at Florence/Crenshaw, the end of the line, at 3:30 a.m.

We crossed Crenshaw and in a few minutes at 3:37 a.m. caught MTA line 40 (#6359) a Neoplan with 8 passengers. We made our way thru the Crenshaw district, past Crenshaw Plaza and had 2 boards/2 deboardings at MLK Blvd. Soon we were streaking past the Coliseum and into downtown where we dispersed. ■

(Federal Funding, from pg. 7)
If the space program to Mars was spun off into the orbit of privatization, that half-trillion would be more than enough to give our whole nation a first-class transportation we could all use be it buses, trains, highways, planes, boats or bikes and create lots of jobs with good paying steady employment. Another wasteful project is toll roads. People don't like to pay toll, unless if they are wealthy, affluent, and need to cure their gas pedal blues. Lane restrictions are open door for road rage. Borrowing to build toll roads will bloat budget deficits even further since most of the money collected for toll roads barely meets the interest payments.

Finally, in as much as President espouses moral values, cutting these programs that help create good paying, long-term jobs, and replacing public transit with toll roads that bloat deficits to be passed on to future generations of all families is immoral. Does Bush know the Libertarian Party, of which Wendell Cox is a member of, could care less about moral values and also are oppsed to the kind of big government that Bush is creating with this new Homeland Security Department? 9/11 happened because somebody failed or was willing to accept responsibility, but that should be no reason why our current forms of transportation should be the sacrificial cow to provide more security. ■