

BULLETIN BOARD

SO.CA.TA NEWS

Anne Karna of Metro staff will be speaking at our July 12th meeting, with a presentation on the status of implementation of the 511 Motorist Aid and Traveler Information System for Southern California. The presentation is scheduled to begin at 2:15 PM.

We have a booth at the City of South Pasadena's 2nd Annual Clean-Air Car Show and Film Festival, being held Sunday July 20th from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM, at Fair Oaks Ave. and El Centro St. The event is free, and will be served by a shuttle from the Mission Street Gold Line station. Let us know if you'd like to help out with our outreach at the event. Further details: http://www.ci.south-pasadena.ca.us/whatsnew/PDFs/CAS_flyerfinal.pdf

SO.CA.TA's summer study tour will likely be the OC Flyers, on Saturday August 2nd. Further details will be posted on our member board and discussed at the July meeting.

MTA board chair Pam O'Connor will speak at SO.CA.TA's August 9th meeting.

Doran Barnes, Executive Director of Foothill Transit, will be the speaker at our September 13th meeting. The day before, SO.CA.TA will be exploring the Silver Streak and line 480, as our fall study tour. The discussion will in part center on what we found when we explored the two lines.

Other upcoming SO.CA.TA activities include the Alt. Car Expo, in Santa Monica September 26-27, and perhaps a visit to the triennial APTA International Expo, October 6-8 at the San Diego Convention Center. Expo is free, but registration is required at <http://>

apta.ntpshowsites.com/registration.html.

Our Executive Board has decided to test Approval voting this year for the selection of the subject of our annual Day-After-Thanksgiving trip and the holiday banquet. These will likely be discussed at our September meeting.

We are in need of bus pictures for the Los Angeles County DPW shuttles used during last fall's study tour, to be included with the trip report scheduled to run in the August '08 *Transit Advocate*. E-mail pix to busnrail@yahoo.com.

IN OTHER NEWS

The Wilshire Corridor Forum III will be held at the El Rey Theater, 5515 Wilshire Blvd., on Friday July 18th from 11:00 AM to 1:30 PM. Cost is \$20 for participating organization members and \$25 for guests. RSVP by July 15th: 323.964.5454 or info@miraclemilechamber.org

"Building L.A.'s Future: Ending Gridlock in Los Angeles" is a new organization of business leaders devoted to improving mobility in our region: <http://www.endinggridlock.org/>

California Transportation & Logistics Institute (CaTLI) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) formed in 2007 by the LAEDC in partnership with the California Community College (CCC) and the California State University (CSU) Systems to promote the growth of careers in the Transportation & Logistics (T&L) Industry in California and address the rapidly growing need for skilled workers seeking living wage jobs. Their website is <http://www.catli.org/>

Three politicians most in need of being con-

tacted regarding the proposed transportation sales tax measure for L.A. County are:

Long Beach Councilwoman Bonnie Lowenthal - <http://www.longbeach.gov/district1/>

Council Supervisor Don Knabe - <http://knabe.com/staff.html>

Council Supervisor Gloria Molina - <http://molina.lacounty.gov/>

A brief, polite call or e-mail urging they support the measure would be most helpful.

We recently noticed the Ventura County Transportation Commission website has had its VISTA link disappear, and that the website of Gold Coast Transit has no links to its

timetables from the front page. Upon inquiry we learned "Unfortunately, VCTC was hit by a hacker who DESTROYED the entire site about 3 weeks ago. We are rebuilding it, and hope to have it 100% back soon. In the meantime, about a week ago, we lost power 3 times in a day, the last time frying our server. The new priority became getting the e-mails back up (at this time, about half the office has e-mails and calendars). That slowed down our website rebuilding efforts. But our IT folks are working at it. Gold Coast is in the process of unveiling a new web site. They have the beta up and are playing with it. In the near future, I expect to see it up, and I think everyone will be pretty excited." 🚌

MEMBERS IN ACTION

John Ulloth and his co-workers were given Metro TAP cards as official contractors for the Green West event held at the Los Angeles Convention Center May 20-22. Sponsored by Green Media Enterprises, the Exposition showcased sustainable, resource-efficient architectural and interior products and building techniques. Organizers wanted vendors and attendees to arrive by transit.

Among those participating in the Pacific Bus Museum June 21st Santa Barbara MTD tour were Paul Castillo, Dana Gabbard, Andy Novak, Charles Powell, Woody Rosner, and Mark Strickert. Novak also organized the event and was the trip leader.

June 22nd the Amtrak's Coast Starlight traveled through the Tehachapi loop. Among the large group of rail fans who rode the train were Charles Hobbs and spouse, and Ken Ruben.

Ken Ruben also attended the Expo Public Utilities Commission Workshop July 2nd, the MTA Citizens Advisory Committee June 25th, what he called "the very well attended Metro Board Meeting" June 26th, and the Metrolink Board Meeting June 27th. He also attended the Metro Westside/Central Sector Governance Council meeting on June 11th, where they brought up possible changes to Line 33...however, "no decisions on this yet. Line 33 is one of my 'home lines' and I am real interested in any changes and frankly, I am satisfied more or less with the current operations."

Alexander Friedman also attended nearly every Westside Corridor Study public meeting and besides offering comments in support of Westside subway corridor developments also subsequently stopped by the office of Mr. David Mieger, director of Metro's Westside Extension study, and brought Mieger a 2-foot wide map of Friedman's proposal for Metro-rail expansion. 🚌

The L.A. County proposed sales taxes for transportation is now in play. I think a lot of what is being said is simply posturing. In the end reasonable compromises will happen, but first some electeds and stakeholders have to put on a public display so they can boast later they fought the good fight. Almost all involved are aware of the simple equation 100% of 0% equals zero. Nobody wins if the tax doesn't appear on the ballot.

I've had my first report from one of our members about the impact of the headway widening Metro implemented at the June shakeup. This was part of the Board action to reduce costs while canceling the proposed June service changes. Metro Rapid 704 on Santa Monica Blvd. during rush hour has I'm told "severe overcrowding, VERY long wait times". It is interesting when John Walsh at the June Metro Citizens' Advisory Council meeting tried to make much of the cancellation of the June changes, I pointed out since the widening had just been implemented that his comments might be premature. His response? He turned on his heel and walked away. Essentially the Metro Board has sacrificed service frequency on the heaviest used lines to avoid fare increases and line eliminations. Long term this isn't sustainable and they are just avoiding the inevitable need to make hard choices. Which has often in the past been their modus operandi: why do today what you can put off until tomorrow?

Another consequence of the Board action is it has angered some Sector Councils

members, who feel like they were hung out to dry when after an onerous process the Board *deus ex machina* cancelled the proposed service cuts. Gateway Council member Wally Shidler termed it a "slap in the face" to Governance Councils [http://www.metro.net/board/Items/2008/06_June/20080612OtherSectorGAT_Item5.pdf (pg. 5)]. I wonder if next time Sectors will be as willing to be involved in something politically unpopular, preferring to dump it on the Board to avoid being the scapegoats when the Board institutes some miracle solution. And who could blame them?

As many of you are aware, MTA for various reasons cannot install Compressed Natural Gas fueling at its historic Division 6 in the Venice area. The plan was for Metro to retire its aging diesel RTS buses with 50 gasoline-hybrid vehicles as part of its present order from NABI for compo buses. Now in a report heard at the April 17 Metro Board Operations Committee meeting (agenda item #36) it was announced hybrids won't be coming anytime soon to replace the RTS buses. "During the review of proposals for hybrid vehicles, it was determined that the proposed technologies are not fully developed and tested ... By deferring the purchase of hybrids, it will allow for more time for hybrid technologies to be refined, tested and integrated into transit vehicles." [http://www.metro.net/board/Items/2008/04_April/20080417OP_Item36Revised.pdf]

The high speed train bonds on the November ballot includes \$950 million for feeder rail routes. The June 20th Coast Rail Cor-

minating Council agenda (item C) provided the first breakdown I have seen detailing how that money would be split: \$740 million would go to urban rail (BART, Metro Rail, Metrolink, Caltrain, etc.) and about \$190 million would go to intercity rail (Pacific Surfliner, San Joaquins, and Capitol Corridor).

In reading the comments of Maryland Senator Ben Cardin about the importance of public transit, especially during the recent spiking of gasoline prices [<http://la.streetsblog.org/2008/07/01/maryland-senator-ben-cardin-america-needs-transit-now/#comment-1344>], I reflected that for some time I have pondered how current public transit operations in the U.S. are structured to fill a rather limited role. The funding, facilities, etc. cater to transit dependent, peak suburban to city center commuters, etc. A mode shift of even a few

percent would create chaos, especially for bus operations. This is a situation that money allow won't solve. An useful history lesson is the period in the early 1980s when Prop A subsidized a 50 cent fare on RTD. Some anti-rail advocates rhapsodize about this period, citing statistics about ridership growth, etc. and decrying the eventual shift of those funds to rail construction. But my sources tell me for riders it was a near free for all - overcrowded, dirty buses that were unreliable.

I'll conclude by noting the retirement on June 30 of Bob Huddy from the Southern California Association of Governments. I invariably found his perspectives informative and often providing an invaluable historic context from his years of involvement with regional transit issues. My best wishes, whatever he does next. 🚌



Combined reports from Dana Gabbard, Andy Novak, and Mark Strickert

[Continued from the June 2008 Transit Advocate -ed.]

The GET 11 arrived at Southwest Transit Center at 9:18 AM, just as the eastbound 6 (# 0505, a New Flyer C40LF) was beginning to load for its 9:20 departure. Mark hopped off to join its 7 passengers. Five of them got off at Brundage/Madison. The 6 makes an oddball U-turn on Belle Terrace. The only place along that street east of Cottonwood is a county community center, which they should be able to serve just as easily with a stop on Cottonwood. When turning north on Mount Vernon, Mark saw a bus a few blocks behind...the westbound 9, and if the rest of the SO.CA.TA group was making as good time as Powell was, they would certainly be catching this particular run of the 9 at Truxton/Q.

Mark got off the 6 at Mount Vernon/Virginia, and caught that 9 (# 9701, an Orion 5) on Virginia. This was the first, and perhaps only operator, to announce connections and major cross-streets. There were 4 passengers at Mount Vernon, and had about 12 when the bus reached Truxton/Q at 10:00 AM. There were indeed several SO.CA.TA people at this stop, but also a few who were still on the other side of the intersection. The operator considered waiting, but most of the passengers were not happy about the delay, so the operator thought it best to continue west. Mark thought about getting off here, but happened to remember a store he needed to stop at near the Downtown Transit Center. The 9 reached Downtown

at 10:09 AM, and the next 9 arrived at 10:35 AM.

The Main Event

For the main part of the group, the first GET bus of the day was an Orion CNG high floor, #9922 (an Orion 5) on Route 9 from Truxtun up to the Downtown Transit Center. Aboard the bus was a sign announcing a \$50 reward if you make positive ID of anyone vandalizing a bus if it leads to conviction. Also the GET Board meeting day and time was advertised while noting transportation for attendees is provided to get home (as the meetings in some cases run after the last trips of some GET routes has occurred). The bus just missed several connecting routes, so we decided to take our lunch break early, with the options of Sonic Burger and Jack in the Box within walking distance of the transit center. Mark Strickert joined us at this point and now our group was 9 strong. While leaving the transit center a Kern Regional Transit Bus to Delano was spotted,



with one going to Lancaster right behind it.

After a brief and adequate lunch break, at 11:40 AM we boarded #9707 (an Orion 5) on Route 2 for the trip to the north end of GET service district in the unincorporated town of Oildale. Among the 15 passengers was one person in a wheelchair with a dog (in the role of service animal?). There was a lot of people getting on and off as we made our way along the route. At one point a bridge took us over a dry wash, then along a stretch of street lined with fast food outlets. A couple businesses we passed in Oildale stood out, one was called "Oildale's Finest" with no clue as to what they were finest at and right next door was "Jesus Name House of Worship." Slowly the bus began unloading as we approached one of the loops the route has at both ends. At some point, the northbound turned into a southbound with no layover, and we stayed on the same bus for the return run back downtown. When the bus paused at a stop we had enough time to notice the bench carried a notice that it was made of recycled materials, and paid for with a grant from the California Dept. of Conservation. It looked to be something like molded plastic but a shade of grey that looked un-natural. We continued making our way through a residential area with mobile homes, then a slightly more commercial area with small businesses, mini-marts, etc. Continuing southbound the bus began to reload, exhibiting the classic demographic of non-car owning transit dependent users. A museum we passed had an old Southern Pacific Daylight Coach on display...maybe it was a salute to the glorious 70s? We arrived back at the transit center at 12:23 PM.

We noticed that when more than 2 or 3 people tried to board, the GET drivers tended to place their hand over the farebox slot, indicate that flashing the pass was sufficient, and wave riders aboard. It was learned they did this to speed up loading. This certainly would undermine any hopes of the passes providing accurate statistics on ridership patterns. For those of us in MTA land, monitoring the implementation of the somewhat similar TAP card gives us another reason for disquiet.

Seems like many of the GET routes that pass through Downtown Transit Center and/or Southwest Transit Center use one or both as de facto layover/break areas. Just as well, as many route-ends did not seem to have any facilities for operator breaks, and there is some padding built into the schedules for most routes from the time-check point just before those major transit centers. Just not for the 2, such a busy route that it used all its allotted time and then some. The amenities at the transit center include very uncomfortable seats, a bathroom, water fountain, pay phones and a mini mart/deli next door. No vending machines...an alcove they used to be in was



locked up.

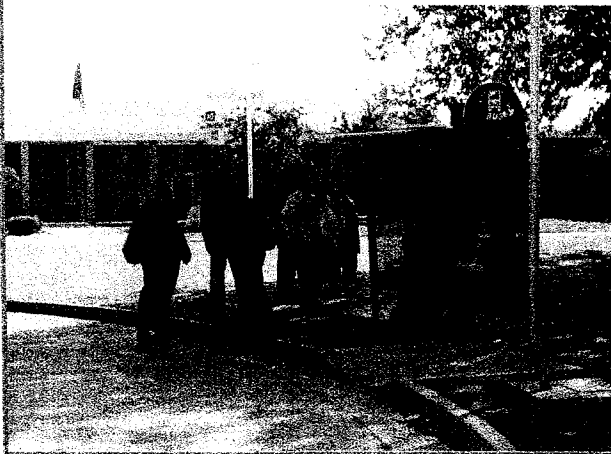
After a short layover at 12:47 PM, we boarded Route 4 another Orion 5, #9916, with 13 passengers. John Andoh joined up with us after riding south on Amtrak, and we were now 10 strong. Rt. 4 took us north through a business/industrial district, then a working class residential area. We arrived at Bakersfield College and their small transit center loop at 1:10 PM. This is a rather desolate location with shelters, benches and not much else (evidently there are vending machines in some of the nearby college buildings). GET has announced plans to upgrade the location. One of the waiting riders, a former teacher, described how, due to a poor layout, buses often get blocked during school days by autos dropping off passengers, trying to park, etc. Also, the sports stadium for the school seats 20,000 and on game days the surrounding streets can be crowded and chaotic.

We did not have too long to wait at Bakersfield College before #0600 (an Orion 7) arrived at 1:30 PM. Route 17, the "Crosstown Express" did not pull into the bus turnaround, but stayed on the campus

drive, so we had to scramble over to it along with the

6 passengers boarding there. The Cross town Express runs from Bakersfield College to Southwest Transit Center (Valley Plaza) just off the 99 Freeway and State Route 178. The only other #17 stops are inside the Downtown Transit Center and on Wible Rd. just up the street from Southwest Transit Center. The freeway was empty and exalted in the splendidly beautiful fall weather. The bus carried a notice "This bus equipped with a security camera system".

By 2:04 PM, we had arrived at the Southwest Transit Center, a small terminal located next to the Valley Plaza shopping mall (which like most malls is surrounded by acres of parking, all full that day due to the start of the holiday shopping season). The center has modest amenities...some vending machines, bathrooms, seating and a phone line for transit information. We waited a couple minutes before boarding New Flyer c40FL #0511 on Route 13 along with 14 passengers. Route 13 left a couple minutes late at 2:16 PM, no doubt having been hung up in Black Friday traffic to/from the Valley Mall adjacent to Southwest. We rode the 13 south, through suburbs and past numerous shopping centers (plus the site of a shopping center to be) to the end of the line in the community of Greenfield. Route 13 travels to the southern end of the GET service area, so now we had been to both the north and south ends of the system. The GET Bus Book route map gives the impression the connection to Route 2 is to be made at Panama/S. Union, except there is no stop for the 2 at that intersection. We got off the 13 at the next stop west on Panama at 3 PM, after Mark Strickert spotted





the eastbound bus stop sign across the street.

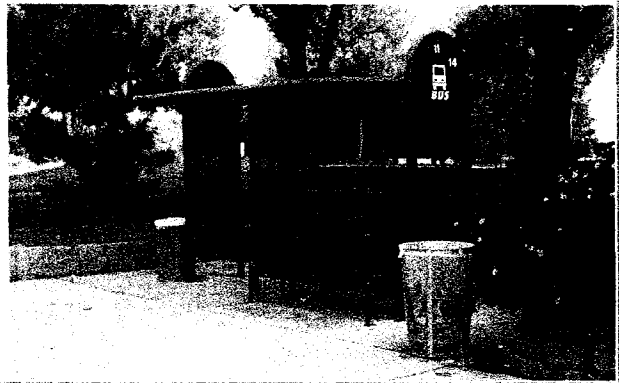
During our five-minute wait for the 2, several of us compared impressions on GET, especially its bus stops. They recently had an aggressive program

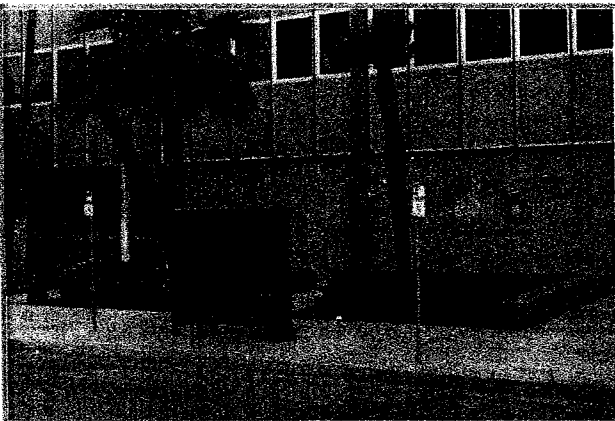
to place sign-posts at nearly all their stops... some stops in the recent past were marked only with "Bus Stop" painted on the curb. We noticed, however, the signs were not totally ADA compliant for font size, and they had a different contact phone number from what was in the Bus Book. We called the number on the sign, but got no answer. This and a few other bus stop signs had no route numbers, causing us to wonder if we had to throw someone in front of the #2 to get it to stop.

The 2 (an Orion 5 # 9908) did stop (initially with 3 passengers), and had standees most of the way north to Downtown Transit Center. It was a bumpy ride much of the way due to uneven pavement as we passed through an upscale community. The 2 has to be the busiest line of the GET system. Riding it along Chester, Bakersfield's main drag, had been one of the chief aims of our trip...we didn't ride the street in 1999, which is like coming to Los Angeles and never riding on Wilshire! We were certainly glad we covered the entire route in two parts, instead of end-to-end in one long ride.

Back at the Downtown Transit Center, we boarded what for most of the group was the last GET ride of the day, a round-trip on the 3 (# 0211, an Orion 7) departing at 4:18 PM with 4 passengers. We rode out Buck Owens Blvd., past Buck Owens' own Crystal Palace, up to the Meadows Field Airport where the bus serves the old airport terminal. Looks like a hike to the new terminal! We stayed on, down a frontage street for freeway-adjacent hotels, gas stations and fast food outlets before passing through a residential area with marts and churches. We returned back to the Downtown Transit Center at 5:08 PM, after the sun went down.

We now took our dinner break and walked over to Lorene's Ranch House which is a block north of the Transit Center. This has become the official place to eat after SO.CA.TA trips, first in 1999 and then again in 2001. We all had a great dinner and it was here that group members began to split off. John left first, getting his dinner to go to make his northbound Amtrak train. Ken, Woody and Kymberleigh returned to Los Angeles on Amtrak after dinner and the rest of us decided to take Airport Bus of Bakersfield (ABOB), a Coach America Company, back to LAX.

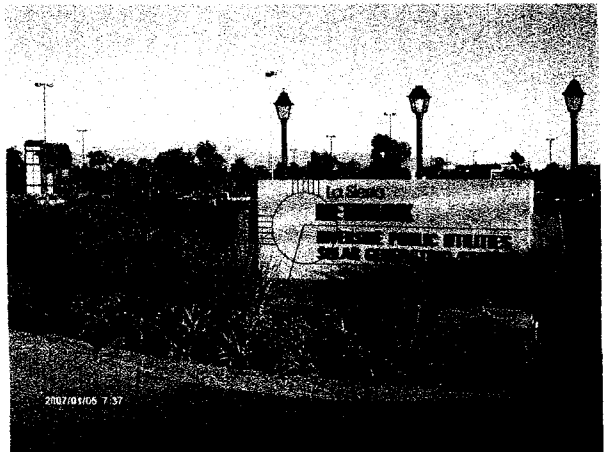




Those of us opting to ride ABOB back made our way over to the transit center at 6:30 PM and boarded Orion 9703 (an Orion 5) on Route 12 for the trip up to the ABOB terminal at Golden State and F Street. On our way to the terminal we got to go past both the Coach America yard and the GET yard. Our driver on the GET bus pointed out the ABOB terminal to us as we were not 100% sure where it was. The ABOB terminal is in a shopping center in the shadow of a large building known as the Golden State Mall

(which is located in a now shuttered Montgomery Ward). We walked into the office, checked in with the ticket agent, and then began waiting for the 8:00 PM bus for LAX. While waiting, we all bought ice cream from the vending machine in the terminal just to watch the machine work. It is one of those ice cream vending machines that use a vacuum to pull the ice cream out of the cooler and dispense it. Other customers would do the same.

Shortly before 8:00 we boarded Coach America Prevost H3-41 69614 for the trip over the Grapevine to LAX. Traffic was light on the freeway and we had an nice conversation with our driver Jesus. We arrived at LAX shortly after 10:00 and from there everyone began splitting off. Lionel took the LAX G Shuttle to the Green Line while Dana opted for the Westwood Flyaway. Andy, Armando, Charles, and Mark boarded MCI 102DL3 (#67125) on the Union Station Flyaway at about 10:30 PM. We made it to Union Station around 11:15 PM and thus another great trip ended. 🚌



Transit Camera found its way out to the La Sierra Metrolink station in Riverside — Mark Strickert photos