

THE TRANSIT ADVOCATE

**Newsletter of the Southern California Transit Advocates
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*Metro reminds us to "Travel Safe"
Kenny Uong photo*

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Transit Updates

Note: For the latest in transit service changes related to COVID-19, visit <https://socata.net/covid19/>

METRO

For information on the latest service changes, and the new Metro Micro service, see page 4

METROLINK

The San Bernardino Line Express train (#) has returned, eff. Nov 16. Train #381 leaves the San Bernardino Depot (not the downtown station!) at 6:15 AM on weekdays, arriving at LA Union Station. Train #382 leaves LA Union Station at 5:26 PM weekdays.

Also, Metrolink schedules have been adjusted on all lines to serve as many passengers as possible, while continuing to operate reduced service.

SANTA MONICA BIG BLUE BUS

Rapid 7 returns to service, eff. September 27.

TORRANCE TRANSIT

All services have returned to their regular schedules, eff. Oct 19

GLENDALE BEELINE

The following changes went into effect Nov #1 and #2 - these two routes on Brand/Central have been replaced with new Line #1, serving Central Av. Other than the commuter Line #11, Glendale Beeline no longer serves the length of Brand Bl

Line #4 - extended via Chevy Chase and Central to serve Glendale Transportation Center

Line #5 - new loop on the south end - Colora-

do, Central, Chevy Chase, San Fernando to Pacific.

New Line #8 connects Glendale Transportation Center and Glendale College via Glendale Bl.

Line #11 provides peak-hour service along Brand Bl. to the Glendale Transportation Center.

ANTELOPE VALLEY TRANSIT

Eff. October 19, service on all routes (except #96, #97, #98, #747, #788) returns to regular levels.

A pilot microtransit service is being provided along the following routes: #50 (Lancaster-Lake Los Angeles), #51 (Palmdale-Lake Los Angeles) and #52 (Palmdale-Pearblossom). In addition to the current fixed routes, small vans will pick up and drop off passengers within a mile of these routes. For more details, visit <https://www.avta.com/onrequest-ride-service.php>

OMNITRANS

Changes effective September 8.

The following routes are cancelled: #5, 7, 20, 80, 86, OmniGo 308/309/310 and

OmniGo 325. Line #1 is rerouted to use Del Rosa, instead of Golden, in its north terminal loop. New Line #6 replaces the CSUSB/40th St portion of #5 and the Sierra Av. portion of #7

Line #12 and #29 are now Line #312 and #329, operated with cutaway buses (con'td on pg. 11)

COVID-19 and its Effect on Public Transit

By Charles P. Hobbs

In December 2019, reports came out about a mysterious viral disease in Wuhan, China. By mid-March 2020, this disease, now known as COVID-19 (COronaVirus Disease 2019), had spread around the world. A global pandemic was declared. Workplaces and schools were shuttered, and people were asked to stay home in an effort to control the spread of the virus.

The shutdown caused an immediate effect on public transit systems throughout the United States. Ridership, already trending downward due to several factors, fell by about 80 percent as former riders complied with the shutdown orders given by local and state governments.

Transit agencies implemented various procedures to keep riders and drivers safe. To minimize contact with the driver, passengers (except disabled people) were asked to board and leave buses from the rear door. The area near the driver was blocked off, as were several seats in order to allow for social distancing. Fare collection was temporarily suspended. Later, a few transit systems placed transparent barriers near the driver's area, allowing front-door boarding and fare collection to resume.

COVID-19 put the transit agencies in the odd position of actively discouraging ridership, in order to allow those traveling for essential functions--shopping for groceries, accessing medical services, or working at certain businesses deemed "essential"-- to ride without fear of overcrowding. Some agencies limited the number of passengers allowed on a bus, again, to allow for social distancing between

passengers. And, in compliance with statewide orders, riders and drivers were required to wear face masks.

What might transit look like, post-COVID?

Transit agencies generally provide two types of service:

Local buses on major arterial streets are most frequent (every 10 minutes or so) near downtown, or in inner city areas where residents historically lacked transportation. Buses tend to be less frequent (every 30 minutes, every hour, or even less frequent) in suburbs where there is a longer walk to the bus stops, and most residents have cars. Local buses also make frequent stops, perhaps every other block, slowing service for those passengers traveling longer distances.

Commuter express-type buses make a few stops in the suburbs, perhaps at a Park-and-Ride lot, then take freeways to their destination (usually downtown). This type of service, while attractive to suburbanites who would otherwise drive, is far more expensive for a transit agency to provide. Unlike a local bus, these buses pick up no fares along their express-running segments, and their routes may be too long to make multiple trips during the rush hour possible. Commuter express buses, with a few exceptions, run to downtown in the morning and back to the suburbs in the afternoon, making them useless for an inner-city resident needing to commute to a suburban job. Commuter express ridership is typically more affluent, and less ethnically diverse, than local bus ridership; this has brought up questions of equity.
(cont'd on Pg. 10)

NextGen Bus

Metro has not made any extensive changes to its bus system in 25 years. During that time, ridership has decreased, as formerly “transit dependent” riders found other means of transportation. In response, Metro devised a bus service improvement plan, dubbed “NextGen,” which will improve bus frequency and access.

Currently 16 Metro bus lines have a service frequency of every 10-minutes or better; under the full NextGen plan, there will be 29 high-frequency bus routes.

While NextGen will improve frequency on the busiest bus routes, certain low-ridership bus lines will be transferred to municipal operators, cancelled, or replaced with new “Metro Micro” demand response service.

Speed of local buses will also be improved, via reducing the number of stops (stop consolidation), traffic signal pre-emption (changing lights to green as buses approach) and bus-only lanes. Under the NextGen plan, the vast majority of limited-stop and Rapid lines will be replaced by improved local service.

The Metro Board approved the NextGen service plan on October 22, 2020. The first of the NextGen service changes will go into effect December 13, with additional changes slated for June and December 2021.

More details about the proposed changes can be read at <https://socata.net/nextgen-bus-meetings/>

December 13, 2020 Service Changes

Rapid lines #705, 710, 728, 740, 745, 751, 760, and 762, as well as Limited lines #302, 312, 316, 330, 351, 353, 355, 358, 364, and 378, will be replaced with more frequent local service. The number of stops along the local lines will be reduced to help speed service.

Lines #20 and 60 rerouted in DTLA to use the new 5th St/6th St bus lanes. (7th St. will still be served by Lines #51/52)

Line #55 will no longer serve the Firestone station, and will no longer provide owl service south of Willowbrook Station.

Line #60 Owl will no longer serve the Compton Station

Line #76 will no longer serve El Monte Metrolink

Line #106 will resume weekday service

Line #126 will be discontinued due to low ridership

Line #210 will serve the Wilshire/Western station on all trips

Line #217 service south of the Expo Line will be discontinued, as well as Line #254

Line #258 will serve the South Pasadena station, York/Figueroa and Floral St; it will no longer serve Oak Knoll in San Marino

Line #442 will be discontinued; use #115 and transfer to the Silver Line

Lines #487/489 will terminate near 7th/Metro

Center during peak hours, and at Union Station otherwise.

Line #534 service to Pt. Dume, and owl service on #601 (Warner Center Shuttle) will be discontinued

Shuttle Lines #607, 612, and 625 will be discontinued,

Trips will be added to busier lines systemwide in order to accommodate increasing ridership and to aid social distancing on the buses. 🚌

Metro Micro—What Is It?

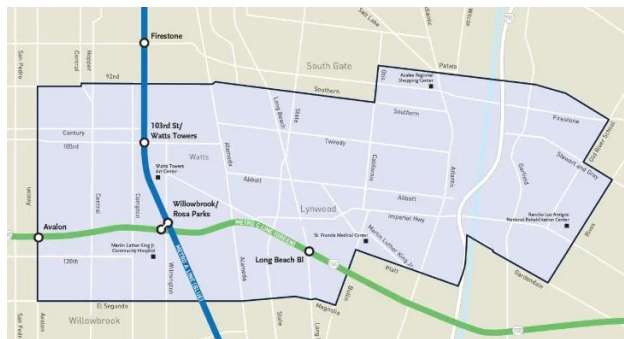
Metro has entered the market of app-driven, demand transit, with its new service, Metro Micro

As part of the NextGen Blus Plan, Metro Micro is intended to provide transit service to areas impractical to serve with a full-size bus.

The first two Metro Micro service areas will be in Watts/Willowbrook/Lynwood and Inglewood/LAX. Service to the Northwestern San Fernando Valley, Highland Park/Eagle Rock/Glendale, Altadena/Pasadena/Sierra Madre, and UCLA/Westwood/Century City, will start next June.

Metro Micro vehicles may be requested by using a smartphone app (available on both the Apple and Android platforms) the website, book.metro-micro.net, or calling . Fare is \$1 (payable through the app or via TAP card) for the first six months.

For more information on Metro Micro, visit <https://www.metro-lacampaigns.net/>



SO.CA.TA NextGen Committee's Response

Dear Metro staff:

The following are comments from the Southern California Transit Advocates Next Gen Study Committee on proposed service changes to be implemented by Metro beginning December 2020 or later.

Our overriding recommendation is to delay the NextGen process until the pandemic is over for several reasons:

1. Travel patterns will change due to elimination of jobs and working from home.
2. Not all riders can participate online, being deprived of seeing staff presentations.
3. Riders can't ask staff questions individually at virtual hearings to clarify their understanding before speaking for public comment.
4. Riders can't interact with each other at virtual hearings.

We recommend that NextGen restart once government agencies feel comfortable inviting people to workshops and public meetings, and the general public can freely attend and give public comment at bodies of elected officials such as the Metro Board, County Board of Supervisors, and Los Angeles City Council. This is a good benchmark for determining if the pandemic is over, without necessarily waiting for a vaccine or for large concerts or sporting events to resume.

In the interim, Metro may make minor modifications of the existing system as needed.

We do not recommend Metro implement radical changes such as the disconnection of routes in Altadena and North Pasadena with the rest of the network, or the piecing together of multiple disparate line segments such as the Line 2/200 and Line 182 proposals. We also oppose cancellation of segments of lines which provide key regional connectivity, or would require multiple transfers or significant out of direction travel in order to bridge a cancelled segment. Examples of these include Line 90 between Sunland and Olive View Hospital, Line 222 between Burbank and Hollywood, and Line 258 between South Pasadena and Pasadena.

Metro should also not transfer lines of regional significance. This includes routes like Line 130 (also discussed further in this document). We also do not support elimination of Rapid bus routes which serve populations which make longer trips than the system average.

Once NextGen restarts, here are principles NextGen should implement:

1. Increase service hours 20% from 7-9.4 million, instead of cutting post-pandemic service by 8%. This was what was advertised to riders at the initiation of the NextGen process. At the minimum, service hours should return to 100% of the December 2019 levels once the pandemic is over (as defined above).
2. More bus lanes and signal priority.
3. Retain more of the Rapid network for long-distance trips with stops only every mile.
4. Align feeder bus headways with Metro Rail service.
5. Wider, 1/2 mile local stop spacing in suburban San Fernando Valley and San Gabriel Valley areas, eliminating lightly used stops with no mobility-impaired riders. This would be similar to Foothill Transit's policy of no stops without a crosswalk.

Service Change Comments in Metro regions
In the **San Fernando Valley**,

1. Restore the initial Line 153 proposal at a 30 minute headway, rather than the revised 60 minute headway, as this is a reduction in service to an area with many apartment buildings and businesses.
2. Save Rapid 750 on peak from Reseda Station to Universal, separate from the consolidated Line 240, due to the number of longer distance trips.
3. NextGen proposes to consolidate Lines 237 and 239 from Louise/Chatsworth on Louise to Louise/Rinaldi to Woodley/Rinaldi. This area mainly consists of low-density single-family housing with almost no riders. By contrast, continuing from Louise/Chatsworth on Chatsworth to Hayvenhurst/

Chatsworth would serve a denser corridor with multi-story multi-family housing and connect a public library and a public recreation center with Kennedy High School.

Thus, Metro should route the new Line 237 from Louise/Chatsworth on Chatsworth to Hayvenhurst/Chatsworth to Hayvenhurst and either San Fernando Mission or Rinaldi, then on either San Fernando Mission or Rinaldi to Woodley to provide service to Kennedy High School, and continue on Woodley south along the route proposed by NextGen. This would be considered an interim service change under the guidelines listed above.

4. In the Sepulveda Pass, reallocate some of the existing 788 trips to the new 761. Currently 788 has 3 peak trips/hour & 734 has 4 trips/hour. NextGen proposes that the new 761 would have only 4 trips/hour. This corridor will suffer a reduction from 7 to 4 peak trips/hour. Given the frequent disruptions to schedules due to traffic congestion, this will create big service gaps at peak. Metro should have 10 minute headways of 6 peak trips/hour to ensure that riders won't have gaps of greater than 20 minute wait times. With 761 frequency increased from 4 to 6 trips/hours, the proposed frequency of 233 could be decreased from 8 to 6 trips/hour to retain the same number of trips/hour on Van Nuys overall.

In the South Bay and Gateway Cities Area,

Shifting Line 130 to Torrance Transit will create equity issues because the largest proportion of Line 130 riders transferring from other lines between the Harbor Gateway transit center and the west terminus come from Metro buses, not Torrance Transit. This will impose an additional Metro-to-Muni transfer on populations protected by Title VI, as identified by Metro Gateway Cities Service Councilmember Wally Shidler. Line 130 is the only route from predominantly Black and Latino areas of the Harbor Gateway, Willowbrook, Compton, and North Long Beach to the Beach Cities of Redondo Beach and Hermosa Beach.

Since Line 125 was terminated at Sepulveda Boulevard many years ago, there is no direct service to the Beach Cities from South Los Angeles without an additional fare on a municipal operator. (Line 126 is proposed to be eliminated under Next Gen due to low ridership.)

With the advent of Metro's Equity Platform, the equity issues of terminating Metro bus service away from beaches needs to be addressed. Line 108 and Line 115 will no longer provide service to relatively uncrowded beaches of south Venice, Marina Del Rey, and Playa Del Rey. While Metro will continue to have frequent service to Santa Monica, Venice (Muscle Beach), San Pedro, and Long Beach, either these beaches are extremely crowded during the summer, or are of lower quality due to the presence of the breakwater. Continuing to operate these routes during summer will enable residents of lower income, Black and Latino communities to access beaches easily without multiple transfers.

Interim service cuts

In the interest of providing constructive feedback on areas beyond the Metro proposal where service reductions could be made until Next Gen can be restarted with proper public input, we offer the following suggestions:

1. Interline Rapid 720 and Rapid 754 at Wilshire/Vermont to eliminate segments paralleling the Red Line subway so the revenue service hours can be reallocated to other lines, as an interim service reduction.
2. Suspend Line 550, and ask USC to have its shuttles wait at 37th St Station to pick up Silver Line passengers, as an interim service reduction.

Finally, we appreciate Metro's reconsideration of the elimination of Line 79, Line 96, Line 218, and the disconnection of Line 78 with Foothill Transit Line 492. (cont'd on pg. 11)

A History of SO.CA.TA's Day After Thanksgiving Trips

By Charles P. Hobbs

Sometime in the early 1990s, I started taking transit trips on the Day After Thanksgiving (DAT). Although many people were off work that day, most transit agencies still operated a weekday schedule on DAT. This allowed me to ride commuter-oriented buses (like Foothill's #690 or LADOT's #549, etc.) that would not operate on weekends.

After SO.CA.TA's first study tour (San Diego via Camp Pendleton) in Spring 1995, I brought up the idea of having a study tour on the day after Thanksgiving.

Since SO.CA.TA will not have a 2020 DAT trip for obvious reasons, instead we'll go back in history and recall the DAT trips we have taken in years past. Instead of a straight year-by-year chronology, let's group them by geographic area.

Venturing into Ventura

Our first trip (1995) was to Ventura County. In Downtown LA, we boarded Metro #425 (which handily changed to a #161 upon leaving the Valley) and explored Thousand Oaks Transit, VISTA, and SCAT routes before heading home through Simi Valley. In 1998 we took Greyhound to Santa Barbara, then visited Goleta, UC Santa Barbara, and Carpinteria via various SBMTD routes, including their famous electric shuttles. We returned to Ventura County in 2000, this time ending up on SCAT #16 to Ojai and a ride on the Ojai Trolley. 2005 marked the 10th anniversary of the DAT trips. with an-

other trip to Ventura County, This time the focus was on the east county, with Thousand Oaks Transit and Simi Valley Transit of particular interest. Our last trip to Ventura County was in 2008. After exploring Pt Hueneme, Oxnard and Ventura, our group took the VISTA Coastal Express to Santa Barbara, for some MTD route exploration. Return to Los Angeles was via Amtrak, from the Carpinteria station.

Inland Empire Adventures

On our second DAT trip (1996), we rode to Banning, using Metrolink and new RTA #35, then we used Banning Transit to the out mall in Cabazon, Return to Yucaipa and via RTA #36 and Omnitrans #14. 2002 took us into Palm Springs, via Sunlink (ex-OCTD tractor-trailer bus). Our group braved the desert wind and rain to travel as far as Indio and Mecca on the Sunline bus system. While 2003's DAT was initially a debate over Ventura County. vs Blythe(!) we decided to try RTA's new Commuterlink bus routes, on a huge loop via Montclair, Riverside, Hemet, Temecula and Oceanside, returning via Amtrak.

Our next trip to the IE was nine years later. On 2012's DAT trip, we investigated Omnitrans West Valley service, from Chino to Chaffey College's new transit center. Member Andy Novak even made a special brochure commemorating the trip.

2013 brought us to the Victor Valley, using VVTA's new Line #15 between Fontana and Victorville. While it rained most of the day, we thoroughly enjoyed riding VVTA, and

having lunch with Craig Barnes (formerly of Western Transit magazine). Our 20th anniversary trip in 2015, took us from San Bernardino to Loma Linda, Calimesa, Beaumont, Banning, then back to San Bernardino for a ride on Omnitrans sbX BRT system.

San Diego Dealings

San Diego was also a popular area for SO.CA.TA DAT trips, although the distance from Los Angeles required the use of Amtrak (or Greyhound). In 1997 we went to San Diego and rode buses and trolleys as far as Santee, finishing with a night-time trip across the Coronado Bridge. Trips in 2004, 2006, and 2011 explored the more suburban and rural parts of the county, passing through places such as Lemon Grove, Poway, Alpine, the Viejas Reservation (and Casino!) and Ramona.

Turning Around Kern

A few DAT excursions visited Kern County (Bakersfield and environs). To get to Bakersfield, we preferred Amtrak Thruway over Greyhound because of easier connections at Union Station, among other issues. To get around the state law requiring that Amtrak Thruway rides be sold in conjunction with a train ticket, we used the "Wasco Trick" --buy a ticket to Wasco, then ride to/from Bakersfield only. For the 1999 and 2007 DAT trips, we used this method to get to Bakersfield, spend all day exploring GET, have dinner at Lorene's Ranch House Restaurant, then catch the Thruway bus back to LA.

On the 2001 excursion we took Metrolink and Santa Clarita Transit to Lancaster, then Kern Transit to Bakersfield, with a transfer in Mojave. No GET riding this trip. Don't forget the Medevac helicopter on the 58!

The Metrolink Marathon

But by far, our most ambitious DAT excursion was the "Metrolink Marathon" of 2009. This excursion, which attracted a small amount of media coverage, involved riding as many Metrolink lines as possible. We utilized all except the Riverside Line, and rode from Union Station to Orange County, San Bernardino, Moorpark and Lancaster in one day!

Other Trips, and the Road Not Taken

The last known DAT trip was in 2016. From Pasadena, via the Metro Gold Line, #501 to N. Hollywood, Red and Expo Lines to Santa Monica, lunch at a nice burger place, then BBB #18 (Montana Ave) to Westwood. We wanted to take the LADOT #534 back, but apparently they don't run on DAT, so we used the #720 instead. Fun trip!

There was no DAT trip in 2010, 2017, or 2018. There may have been one in 2014, but no writeup exists in the *Transit Advocate*. In 2019, Kern Transit had extended its Line #130 to Santa Clarita, and SO.CA.TA proposed a DAT trip to Bakersfield via this route. Severe weather forced its postponement, and no suitable replacement date was found.

So, when the COVID-19 pandemic is over and it's prudent to take an excursion again, where shall we go? 🚌

COVID-19 and Transit-Continued

Transit ridership had been dropping even before the COVID-19 emergency, due to so-called “transit-dependent” riders now having increased access to cars. As interest rates have dropped, financing an automobile has become easier for low-income individuals. Undocumented aliens can now get drivers’ licenses in California, and “rideshare” services, such as Uber and Lyft have gained in popularity. Slow local buses now have serious competition.

During the emergency, transit ridership is noticeably less “peaked.” Pre-COVID, transit usage was concentrated in the morning and afternoon, as most riders were commuting to and from traditional 8-5 jobs. Now, the demand curve is flatter, with those commuters mostly working from home. The journeys of current riders take place throughout the day: jobs with odd shifts, such as retail and warehouse jobs, essential shopping, and medical trips.

To adapt to this “new normal,” transit agencies are contemplating the following service modifications:

Enhancing the service provided in the central city, and nearby inner-city neighborhoods. Buses can be made to operate faster by removing stops, implementing signal preemption (automatically turning traffic lights green when a bus approaches), providing bus-only lanes, and allowing passengers to board at any bus door. To further speed service, buses would no longer have fareboxes; instead, fares

would either be purchased from ticket machines located at stops (similar to those at Metro stations) or at retail stores. There is even the possibility of fareless transit--passengers board for free. Passenger comfort and security would be improved by providing additional bus shelters and digital schedule displays.

Commuter express services will undergo changes. Since many more people will be working from home, there will be less need for large fleets of buses to run into the central city in the morning, and back out in the afternoon. Instead, a network of express bus routes will run during the day, in all directions. Other destinations besides the central city will be offered, providing faster service for people working multiple jobs.

In less dense suburban areas, infrequent bus service may be replaced by “microtransit”--small vans that pick up passengers on request (via smartphone app, similar to Uber or Lyft). Pilot microtransit programs have already been implemented in parts of Los Angeles and Orange Counties.

On November 11, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use. While the COVID-19 pandemic will end, the disease has made an indelible mark on public transit, as well as on society in general. 🚌

SO.CA.TA NextGen Committee's Response—Cont'd

We reiterate that the Next Gen bus study, once restarted should evaluate points in our previous letter about express fares, bus lanes/bus signal priority, coordinating fares and service changes with municipal operators, and lines where service may be increased.

The Southern California Transit Advocates is a non-profit organization established in 1990 dedicated to the promotion, development and improvement of public transportation in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

Sincerely,
Hank Fung, Chair, Next Gen Study Committee,
Southern California Transit Advocates

Members participating in this letter:

John Andoh
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Transit Updates Continued

Line #81 will now terminate at the Ontario East Metrolink Station and no longer serve Riverside Dr. or downtown Chino. Neither will it serve Foothill, Aspen and Red Oak.

Line #82 uses Citrus, not Sierra, south of Fontana Metrolink

The north terminal of Line #84 is now Montclair Plaza, not Upland Colonies Crossroads

New Line #87 combines sections of former #80 and 86. It will extend south into Eastvale (Riverside County) serving the Amazon warehouse and connecting with RTA routes #3 and #29.

New Line #305 operates along the Waterman Bl. portion of former #5, then takes the route of former #325 to Grand Terrace

New Route #319 replaces OmniGo #309/310 in Yucaipa.

Line #290 (express between Montclair and San Bernardino) has returned, providing peak-hour weekday service

OmniRide, a new microtransit service, will serve much of the area of former Route 365 in Chino and Chino Hills. Fare is \$4 per ride.
<https://omnitrans.org/promotions/omniride/>

VICTOR VALLEY TRANSIT

Effective Dec 17, the following VVTA routes will run every two hours: #33, 40, 42, 47, 54; Lines #31 and 43 will run every hour.

MOUNTAIN TRANSIT

Route #4 (Arrowhead-Running Springs) runs Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays (eff. Nov 23), while Route #5 (Big Bear Off-The Mountain) runs Fridays only (eff. Dec 14), until further notice.

Mountain Transit offers a shuttle service for passengers flying into Big Bear Airport. Fare is \$5: visit <http://mountaintransit.org/airport-transport/> for details 📧

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