

BULLETIN BOARD

A new year, a new look! Starting with this issue, expect to see the following:

- A new calendar format, designed to provide more information in less space
- A new feature; "Transit Center Of The Month" in addition to "Route Of The Month".

Each month, either a specific route or transit center will be described for your enlightenment.

- New computer equipment and techniques to provide you with clearer and more understandable text and graphics.

Many of these improvements were made in response to the SO.CA.TA member survey distributed last year (it's still not too late to complete it, and mail it to SO.CA.TA, if you haven't done so already.)

A reminder, all organizations currently exchanging newsletters with SO.CA.TA should return the yellow card sent with the December issue, and let us know whether you are still interested in exchanging newsletters. (Alternatively, a call to 213-388-2364 will suffice).

Our Transit Guide will be available this month; they cost \$5 (\$4 to all SO.CA.TA members and anyone visiting us at our monthly meetings). We are also glad to distribute Kirk Schneider's *California By Train, Bus and Ferry* (see ad on pg. 5—please send orders for this book to the specific address in the ad.) SO.CA.TA does get part of the proceeds from any sales made through us.

And finally, a word of congratulations is in order for Michael Ludwig, our new vice president, and Steven Scheel, our newest Director-At-Large. (Steven will also take an active role in the production of this newsletter.)

As always, *The Transit Advocate* needs articles, letters, photographs and research (newspaper clippings, etc.) from all members and interested non-members. If you see an interesting, transit-related article in the newspaper, consider sending a copy (preferably two copies) of the article to **3010 Wilshire #362, Los Angeles, CA 90010**. Material for publication should be received two weeks before the scheduled SO.CA.TA meeting date.

-Charles P. Hobbs, President/Newsletter Editor

MTA BUS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM *Dana Gabbard*

Public & Legislative Affairs Committee Report #3 — January 1996

The MTA Board is now acknowledging the need to address the problems of the bus system. A Bus System Improvement Plan was on its agenda for December but other matters prevented its consideration. Due to the improved economy, monies are available to address some of the problems of the system. The Plan proposes to:

1. Reduce overcrowding and increase service for buses in the most transit dependent areas.
2. Establish Transit Improvement Councils for the various areas with members drawn from community organizations plus other groups and interested parties. A Forum with members drawn from the various Councils would give MTA input on proposals for the whole system.
3. Increase MTA police presence on buses in high crime areas.
4. Improve interior bus appearance.
5. Make funds available for purchase of benches and shelters.
6. Expedite purchase of 206 new vehicles.

* * * * *

It is intended that these initiatives be coordinated with the ongoing restructuring studies and other projects. This is a step in the right direction. We should encourage this process and make sure that this becomes more than words on paper.

The 20-year plan included something called the mobility allowance. I attempted to get clarification of what this was, as the written description was awfully vague. A request for mobility allowance demonstration projects was also bumped from the December agenda. I am still somewhat in the dark after reading it.

Evidently it is predicated on the notion many areas have too low a demand for full-sized fixed route service. Off-peak demand in many areas is also too low. Having alternative transit (jitneys, circulators, etc.) would save monies, especially if the service was operated by local jurisdictions (avoiding MTA's operator contract).

Six candidate areas identified are mostly in the LAX/South Bay region, Palos Verdes peninsula and Westlake Village area. This is still being given the once-over and may change.

One concern is what effect this would have on regional mobility. How would a person go to or from such areas? Cost savings for the MTA cannot be the sole criteria for determining whether the pilot projects are successful. Needless to say, we will keep you posted as these plans go forward. Perhaps SO.CA.TA members in LA County should start considering whether they'd be interested in participating in the Transit Improvement Councils.

TRANSIT UPDATES

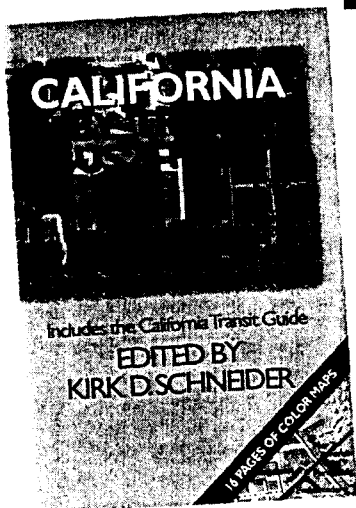
There are several recent MTA bus route changes:

- Peak-hour, limited stop service is now provided between Los Angeles and Pacific Palisades by new line #302. A limited-stop version of #2
- Line #166 and #167 have been rerouted to serve the Chatsworth Metrolink station. In addition, #166 now travels south along the Lankershim route of #228; #167 via the Coldwater Canyon route of #228. #228 has been cancelled. Due to public demand, #169 (Saticoy Bl) has been rerouted along Chase between Woodman Av., and Van Nuys (this segment was formerly served by #167)
- Lines #251,252,265 and 275 have been rerouted to serve Metro Green Line stations along their routes
- Due to last-minute construction at the Union

Station Gateway Plaza, lines #33, 55 and 60 will not stop there, but will continue on their current routes. Also, new line #58 (shuttle between Union Station and Washington Blue Line station via Alameda) will not begin service at least until Gateway construction is completed.

- MTA bus route #305 (the "City Connector" operating between Imperial Station and West Hollywood) was cancelled effective Jan 1, 96. This service was provided under contract to MTA via ATE, a private operator, since july). MTA's bus operator union disputed MTA's ability to operate this route, and won an arbitration proceeding.
- Certain El Monte Busway elevators may be closed until mid-February; passengers destined to Cal State LA or County Hospital, who are unable to climb stairs, should use MTA #70, rather than Busway services.

A new Amtrak station has opened in Van Nuys, providing ticket sales and inside seating.



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VENTURA COUNTY EXCURSION *Michael Ludwig*

On Friday, November 24, 1995, between 6:00 and 6:15am, Steve Scheel, Charles Powell, Charles Hobbs, Dana Gabbard, and I all met at a bus stop near Broadway & 7th in Downtown Los Angeles. Less than a half hour later, Alan Michelson joined us, and before the morning was over, Chris Flescher made us a group of seven. Were we meeting to discuss what to do about dwindling MTA bus service? Were we swapping stories about Thanksgiving dinner the night before? Were we having a contest to see who could stay awake the longest at that early hour?

No. We met because we all wanted to travel on several different bus routes around Ventura County. To get there, the initial five of us boarded an MTA route 425 bus at about 6:20. Alan joined us at one of the Hollywood Fwy. bus stops to travel on this somewhat-crowded bus to Ventura & Topanga Canyon in Warner Center. Then this bus turned into a route 161 trip. It remained crowded until near the end of the line in Westlake Village. Most of the way up this initial leg of our journey, we noticed that the driver was obviously enjoying the music that he was listening to on his headphones (he pumped his head and arms several times).

At 8:15 at Agoura & Village Glen, we transferred to TOT (Thousand Oaks Transit) route 4. The six of us accounted for almost half the total passengers of this large van-bus as it traveled around its turnaround loop then up its route to the Oaks Mall in Downtown Thousand Oaks. This vehicle had a simple type of manual farebox that is fairly common on small transit vehicles (a cylinder divided in two parts: the upper part where the driver can see the money paid and a removable vault to securely hold the money when it is taken to the workers who count it).

Chris met us at the Oaks Mall. When a

large bus with commuter seating (all passenger seats facing the front of the bus—common on intercity carriers like Greyhound) pulled up to start a trip on the VISTA Hwy. 101 route, we boarded it. We paid our fares into a small, simple metal box with a slit on the top. We comprised a little under half of the ridership as we traveled to Carmen Plaza in Camarillo. Because we had almost a half hour before our next bus, we went into either a Winchell's or a gas station Mini-Mart that were both in the shopping center (which one depended on personal preference); this was the closest thing we got to having breakfast on the trip.

Some of us knew that the type of bus we rode on for VISTA's Hwy. 101 route used to be on all four routes of that system. But at 10am, we found out that was no longer true. A small van-bus picked us up for VISTA's Central County route; with the three or so other passengers, we fell barely short of needing someone to be a standee. Neither this vehicle nor the other VISTA van-bus we rode later that day had a farebox (the drivers stored the fare money in a pocket on the dashboard until their return to the bus yard). This route travels through several miles of farmland that is a pleasant change of pace for people who spend 99% of their time in a city like Los Angeles. After sitting at Oxnard College for 15 minutes (two months before, VISTA schedules had been changed, including dropping stops at entrance gates to Point Mugu Naval Air Station and a nearby National Guard site from most trips of the Central County route; yet the total travel time had not been changed), the van-bus dropped us off at the Centerpoint Mall Transfer Center on C Street in Oxnard.

Next, we rode SCAT, the bus system in Oxnard and Ventura. Our first trip on this system consisted of taking route 1 from the Centerpoint Mall Transfer Center, all the way

around its large one-way loop through Port Hueneme, back to the Centerpoint Mall Transfer Center, then up to the Oxnard Transportation Center at the Amtrak station. Even though we did all that without getting off the bus, the driver made each of us pay two fares instead of just one fare each. The bus was very crowded almost the whole time we were on it (only after passing the Centerpoint Mall Transfer Center headed towards the Oxnard Transportation Center did the passenger load lighten).

Then we boarded the SCAT route 6A bus leaving the Oxnard Transportation Center at noon. Route 6 (which has two branches, 6A and 6B) is the only SCAT route connecting Oxnard and Ventura, and it was pretty busy, though not as busy as SCAT route 1. After passing through northern Oxnard and parts of southern and eastern Ventura, we deboarded the bus when it reached the Buena Ventura Mall. Since we had about 15 minutes before the next bus we wanted to take, we decided to go into the mall; several of us bought some food at its food court, which was lunch for the day.

Our next bus was SCAT route 12, a route operated by only one bus between Buena Ventura Mall and Ventura Harbor. We comprised about half the total ridership for the whole round trip down to the harbor and back to the mall (and that counts two teenage girls who begged for a free ride that the driver let on). The driver explained to us that low ridership is normal for route 12, and that SCAT had even tried to cancel this route once or twice; the regular riders had protested enough that SCAT relented. The driver also mentioned a few ways in which the SCAT system is poorly managed and operated, and I got the impression that a lot of his complaints were valid (as opposed to being exaggerations of a disgruntled employee). When we were sitting on the bus during the few minutes it has scheduled at the Ventura Harbor Turnaround, we noticed the huge waves (over five feet high) crashing onto the beach right next to us. (SCAT route 1 does not

provide a good view of the beach at Port Hueneme, but SCAT route 12 provides a great view of the beach at Ventura Harbor.)

After getting back to the Buena Ventura Mall, we headed east on VISTA's Hwy. 101 route. There were a couple more passengers on board than on our earlier trip on this route. We noticed we had the same driver that had taken us westbound on this route earlier in the day. He told us that he was assigned to drive that bus for the whole day that it does the VISTA Hwy. 101 route, from about 6am until after 7pm; besides layovers of up to a quarter hour at each end of the route, the one break he got was a two-hour lunch (between the two times that we rode with him). He took us back to the Oaks Mall, where Chris left us. The other six of us remained there to catch the next northbound trip of VISTA's East County route. This was scheduled to be from 3:00 to 3:30pm, but due to both of those VISTA buses being late, our time waiting for that transfer was more like 3:20 to 3:40.

The East County route was the other VISTA route we took that uses van-buses. None of VISTA's van-buses have any headsign built into the vehicle, and I never saw any dashboard sign that the driver could put in a window, so the only way to be sure one of these vehicles is doing the route and direction you want is to ask the driver. (The buses used on VISTA's Hwy. 101 route have the same type of headsign that most Greyhound buses have. These headsigns had been correctly displaying route number and direction when I had seen them several months earlier on multiple VISTA routes. However, the VISTA Hwy. 101 bus that we rode that day had a blank headsign; I don't know whether that was just one broken headsign or all those drivers not doing headsigns at all anymore.) There were only a couple other passengers on the VISTA East County vehicle as we rode it to Madera & Los Angeles near the western edge of Simi Valley.

The Simi Valley Transit route A bus stop at that intersection is northbound (*cont'd on pg.8*)

(cont'd from p. 7) on Madera just before (near side) Los Angeles. Yet the northbound VISTA East County route, which passes straight through the intersection on Madera, stops just past (far side) Los Angeles. So after crossing the street and waiting a couple minutes, we caught Simi Valley Transit route A to go to the eastern side of Simi Valley (we made this close connection only because the VISTA East County van-bus had caught up enough to be almost on time at Madera & Los Angeles). Simi Valley Transit is the only system in Ventura County besides SCAT to run city-style transit buses; those two are also the only systems we rode that day (besides MTA) that have city-style fareboxes. Speaking of fareboxes, Simi Valley Transit charges 40¢ for a local transfer, which is the highest rate for a transfer of all transit bus systems that I've ridden (I only count transfers that cost less than the fare of the next bus). The route A bus took us across the northern part of Simi Valley before dropping us off at Los Angeles & Yosemite.

Since we had about a half hour before the next Simi Valley Transit route C trip would leave (at 5:05), we went into the Carl's Jr. at that corner to eat dinner. In addition to the base fare (which our transfers from route A took care of), Simi Valley Transit route C has a zone charge because it goes to Chatsworth; those of us who didn't have an MTA pass also picked up an interagency transfer (at no charge, it costs less than a local transfer, which is also unique out of all the transit bus systems I've ridden). As the bus took a medium-sized passenger load (including the six of us) up the Cal. 118 freeway towards Santa Susana Pass, we looked back over Simi Valley and noticed that the sun was setting over the mountains south of Simi Valley: the sky was mostly red, but there was a little each of orange, purple, and yellow, as well as several small clouds. This beautiful scene was a perfect setting for our departure from Ventura County.

But even though we were in the San Fernando Valley (whose lights were also pretty as we came down from the pass), our trip wasn't over yet. After getting off the Simi Valley Transit bus at Topanga Canyon & Devonshire, we boarded an MTA route 245 bus to travel straight down to Topanga Canyon & Ventura. Then we boarded MTA route 424 (unfortunately, the last limited stop route 425 bus had left three-quarters of an hour earlier). Both of these buses had medium-to high ridership. Finally, after the 424 bus got to Downtown Los Angeles a little after 7:15pm, we all split up, taking home nothing but memories from Ventura County (well, some of us took home some souvenir bus schedules).

One of my memories from the trip is of the relatively high amount of money required to do it. I had an MTA local bus pass, which meant I paid less than some others in our group who had to pay MTA base fares and transfer charges. But due mostly to only being able to use transfers twice in all of Ventura County (the only interagency transfer that any Ventura County system is involved in is the one between Simi Valley Transit and some systems in Los Angeles County, and VISTA doesn't even have any transfers within its system), I had to pay \$11.65 in bus fares on our 13-bus trip. We also had to contend with infrequent bus routes on the TOT and VISTA systems. This required not only careful planning beforehand, but also making sure to keep on schedule. For example, at the beginning of our transfer time at Carmen Plaza, someone asked me when the next bus was after the 10:00 one that we took when we left there (he was wondering if we could extend our time there enough to eat at a sit-down restaurant). I heard a gasp of amazement after I replied "two hours latera. But even though the trip seemed quite hectic, I enjoyed it so much that I would definitely still go on it if I had that day to do over again.

IN DEFENSE OF RAIL *Pat Moser*

A new myth of political correctness is being heard that only buses are good for the poor, rail is good for the rich, and that rail construction denies the poor adequate bus service.

THE FACTS:

1. When the Metro Blue Line opened July 14, 1990 (Bastille Day), new bus lines were created to serve the Blue Line stations. When the Metro Green Line opened August 12, 1995, more bus lines were created to serve these stations.

2. It would be economically prohibitive for MTA and other transit operators to provide enough buses to serve all the rail passengers, i.e., the cutback of the Bellflower Pacific Electric service.

3. The Metro Blue and Green Lines serve poor people as well as people of color, not rich white people, while MTA subsidizes bus service for rich suburbanites operated by Antelope and Santa Clarita Valleys, as well as Palos Verdes Transportation Authority.

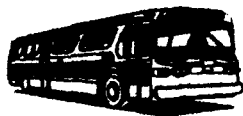
4. Spending more for slow buses, stuck in heavy traffic, does nothing to improve the travel time of low-income, disabled senior riders. An unimpeded right-of-way, such as provided by rail transit, is needed to give poor and transit-dependent people a swifter and more efficient ride.

5. Every transit agency that has started rail service has increased bus patronage, e.g., St. Louis and Washington DC.

6. Most rail construction money is dedicated for rail construction only — it can't be legally re-allocated for any other purpose.

7. The real transportation boondoggle is freeway construction, e.g., the more than one billion dollar extension for the Long Beach Freeway (I-710) between El Sereno and Pasadena.

BUS POEM



Mark Panitz

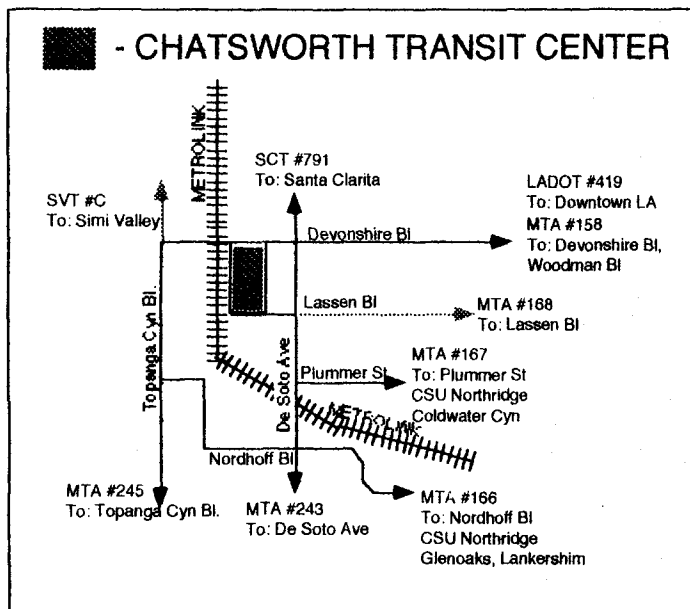
*'Sometimes its fun to ride the bus,
sometimes its a must to ride the bus.
There is a bus driver I know of whose name is Gus
who usally drives the #8 bus,
but just don't be late for the eight
otherwise you will fuss and cuss,
cause you missed the bus!'*

TRANSIT CENTER OF THE MONTH

LOCATION: 21510
Devonshire, Chatsworth
(west of Owensmouth, between
Devonshire and Lassen)

TRANSIT ROUTES:
Metrolink Ventura County Line
(to Los Angeles, Moorpark/
Oxnard)

Bus Routes (at station bus stop):
MTA #166
(Nordhoff/ Glenoaks/Lankershim)
MTA #167
(Plummer St/Coldwater Cyn)
MTA #243
(De Soto Avenue)
MTA #245
(Topanga Cyn Bl, Valley Circle)



Bus Routes (On Devonshire):
MTA #158
(Devonshire Bl/Woodman Av.)
Simi Valley Transit #C
(Simi Valley)

Bus Routes (On Lassen):
#168 (Lassen Bl)

OTHER FEATURES:

- Amtrak service
- Commuter parking and bike lockers
- Chatsworth Depot retail and childcare (opening soon)

TRANSIT TRIVIA *Michael Ludwig*

Last month's Transit Trivia question was:

What is the only transit system in Ventura County to not connect with VISTA?

The answer:

Ojai Trolley (a local shuttle service in and around the City of Ojai)

This month's Transit Trivia question:

Out of all the stations on the Red Line, Blue Line, and Green Line, which is the only one to not be served by an MTA bus route?

(The answer will be in next month's Transit Advocate, and announced at the January SO.CA.TA meeting!)