

TRANSIT UPDATES *Have anything to report? Call 213 388 2364*

The Red Line extension to Hollywood will likely not open for revenue service until late February next year. The target date for opening had been Dec. 31 but work is far behind schedule (12 months for the Vermont/Sunset station!).

In mid-January an articulated bus on loan from Metro of Houston was evaluated by MTA. It was driven along Vermont (line 204), Santa Monica Blvd. (line 4) and Wilshire Blvd. (line 20). Turns, bus stops and layover areas were among the concerns being examined. Other area agencies considering the purchase of articulated equipment for heavily used lines are OCTA and Santa Monica Municipal Bus Lines.

Hollywood Bowl shuttles will again operate this summer from various park and ride lots. For further information call (213) 850-2000.

Long Beach Transit is offering special service to the new Getty Museum, Tuesday through Saturday. One round trip per day will be offered, and tickets must be purchased in advance, at the Transit Information Center at the Transit Mall in Downtown Long Beach. Call (562) 591-2301 for more information.

Several OCTA routes will be modified this month. Many of the major changes involve service near Disneyland; due to construction, OCTA routes #39,43,46,50, and 205 have been rerouted (generally, staying on their major streets instead of looping around Disneyland). Additional service

(better frequency) during peak hours is provided on #29, 38, 42, 47, 50, 53,54,60 and 61. Also, new Saturday service will be provided on #99 (Laguna Hills-Dana Point)

According to figures from the American Public Transit Association, OCTA is the fastest growing system in the nation. Growth in the first nine months of 1997 was 9.66%, from 34.3 million to 37.6 million.

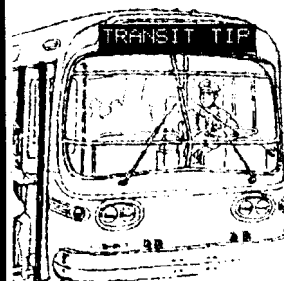
Growth rates in other areas of California:

- San Jose 6.5%
- San Francisco 1.6%
- LA 1.5%
- San Diego -1.3%

RTA has received the first three of its order of CNG fueled New Flyer low-floor buses. These will eventually replace the ADB (Advance Design Buses) the agency has had for the past 15 years.

While at the San Bernardino Metrolink station member Chris Flescher recently spotted a bus stop sign for MARTA [which operates to Big Bear and Lake Arrowhead]. It is unknown if the Off-the-Mountain service regularly uses this stop or only upon special request.

The recent flooding has severely disrupted Amtrak service, especially north of Los Angeles. Call 1-800-USA-RAIL for current status. Metrolink, on the other hand, has added additional cars to trains to handle more riders.



Need transit information while in the East Portal building at the Gateway Transit Plaza (adjacent to Union Station in downtown Los Angeles)?

Opposite the schedule rack (around the corner from the end of the aquarium) are two phone receivers that are direct lines to 800-COMMUTE.

BULLETIN BOARD

Our thanks to all the members who have renewed so promptly. Your vote of confidence means you agree we are on the right track!

Members should remember that our website is in a constant state of being upgraded and updated. The list of agency meetings is especially often having new events added to it as we become aware of them. And don't forget the lively discussion in the members only area. So peek in often for the latest: <http://socata.lerctr.org>

OCTA is sponsoring a Transportation Forum Saturday May 2 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Irvine Valley College in Irvine. Called "FastForward to the Future", it will include booths, displays, panel discussions and exhibits of prototype transportation technology. We hope to at least attend if not participate.

LADOT and MTA are at work on a study of pedestrian linkages in the Crenshaw Corridor. This includes how to make it easier to use transit. To make comments call the project's hotline: (213) 922-3500.

Sometime this month the Planning and Land Use Management Committee of the Los Angeles City Council is due to consider the draft transportation element of the general plan. To get specifics as to the day, time and place this will occur contact Michael Davies of the Dept. of City Planning: (213) 473-3775.

Our next excursion is to the Antelope Valley on April 25. We'll get there via Metrolink and spend the day riding bus routes that serve the area.

Pacific Transit Review, a pictorial/news magazine for the transit fan, recently came to our attention. One year (4 issues) is \$15, sent to: Pacific Transit Publications, 3706 Gladstone Drive, Pittsburg CA 94565-7016.

Work on the Glendale Transportation Center renovation should start this month with the completion slated for early next year. Besides historic restoration of the station, the platforms will be extended along with other improvements:

Speaking of the Glendale station, George Shelly (a member of the Pacific Railroad Society) has prepared a sheet listing times, origin & destination, train number, frequency, etc. for all Amtrak and Metrolink trains that serve the station. For a copy send a self-address stamped envelope to: George Shelly 709 Micheltoarena St., Los Angeles CA 90026-3624.

Metrolink's upgraded web site now has a message board and informative materials along with schedules and fares: <http://www.metrolink-sccra.com/> Also Metrolink is reverting to a 800 number for information: 800-371-LINK (the local 808 number resulted sometimes in callers being charged local toll rates and Metrolink had intended it to be a free call). (to Page 9)

The MTA Board, as expected, suspended work on rail projects except for the Red Line to North Hollywood. It should be borne in mind that this action was taken under duress. L.A. Mayor Richard Riordan tries to create the impression that he drove the process. But actually it was the Federal Transit Administration threatening federal funding that deserves the credit. Until recently the MTA Board was poised to adopt yet another phony long range plan. Thanks to the FTA that was no longer acceptable.

How bad are finances at the agency? MTA Review, the agency's newsletter for public consumption, has been merged with Metro Family which is aimed at MTA's employees. Also Customer Relations has indicated the long anticipated new system map is now cancelled.

The race is on among board members to find a new scapegoat for their woes (now that the alternates are gone). In the midst of this blame game boardmembers John Fasana and Jenny Oropeza have requested a study of divesting MTA bus service to regional zones. Cost and responsiveness is the claimed benefit (see Edmund Buckley's guest editorial in this issue). It plays on the class snobbery toward bus operators as allegedly being overpaid high school graduates. Who is surprised morale at MTA is at an all time low?

Ellen Levine, head of Operations, at the January 21st meeting of the MTA Citizen Advisory Council, made the point that comparisons between Foothill and MTA should

take into account differences in funding, service area, type of service operated, etc. Having this process lead to balkanization or skimming the suburbs off while sticking the heavy inner city routes on the remnants of MTA would not be acceptable.

Members Roger Christensen and Kymberleigh Richards are on the front lines of the discussion of forming a San Fernando Valley transit zone. Christensen attended a meeting Richard Alarcon (who chairs and LA city council Transportation Committee and whose district is in the east valley) held seeking community input. Roger asked serious questions about the possible impact, and was quoted in the LA Times and Daily News. Alarcon has directed the city Dept. of Transportation to form a citizen advisory group to give transit users a venue to provide input as the zone concept is studied. Richards is part of a panel of valley heavy hitters that is keeping an eye on developments. Our thanks to both for making sure the debate includes knowledgeable voices.

Not wanting to miss out on the fun the California Transportation Commission is weighing in on the subject of MTA and its troubles. The Commission's 1997 Annual Report states further STIP funding is contingent on the receipt of a 20 year plan with the same fiscal restraint that the Federal Transit Administration is requiring in the Recovery Plan MTA is presently drafting. Commissioner David Fleming has even claimed there is a danger construction funds might be mis-spent on operations and has demanded all MTA Board members sign a statement (under penalty of perjury) that such

has not occurred. That'll really make relations between the two bodies frosty.

The Major Investment Study of the Crenshaw rail line is being converted to a technical report which will be filed away to gather dust. Everyone knew this project was never going to be built. But the study served political needs. That it is finally being shelved proves the political climate has shifted. But for the better?

MTA's troubles don't end there. The ACLU has filed a suit under the Americans with Disabilities Act claiming the ATE contracted lines have chronic wheelchair lift failures. And Standard & Poor's downgraded to double A minus its rating for MTA bonds partly due to worries about the fare increase restrictions imposed by the consent decree!

Another blow - the much vaunted conversion of methanol fueled buses to ethanol has been a disaster. Ethanol actually causes the engines to need rebuilding every 25,000 miles! (as opposed to every 75,000 for methanol) So the engines are being reprogrammed to again run on methanol. OUCH!

The Bus Riders Union is preparing its load counts of overcrowding to present to special master Donald Bliss. If he rules that more buses must be added to the system, what will happen to MTA's recovery plan?

There is some consternation among legislators (state and federal) and Transportation Commissioners of MTA's use of the power SB-45 conferred on it to funnel funds to the North Hollywood extension to keep it on schedule.

In funding the extension mention is made that

MTA is exploring the leasing or selling excess rail rights of way as potential source of revenue.

Oropeza's motion to restore Sunday service on 800-COMMUTE got caught in byzantine maneuvering that gives the appearance of acting while probably shunting it to oblivion.

The board is so beleaguered they now require public speakers sign a statement agreeing to rules barring disruptive behavior. Or your request to speak will not be honored. This is almost surely illegal.

I have requested from County Counsel David Kelsey a copy of that office's advice to Mayor Riordan about appointing a second council-member to the MTA board.

And member Kymberleigh Richards at the December MTA Board meeting raised an interesting question: why were the Passenger Advisory Councils the agency has formed not given an opportunity to comment on the cuts in night and owl service? As a member of the West Valley PAC Richards queried why MTA did not avail itself of this source of feedback regarding an action that impacts its customers. Nobody seemed to have an answer.

Meanwhile OCTA recently was happy to have FTA head Gordon Linton make laudatory comments about their proposed light rail line: "I was very impressed with the plans, and I embrace what you're doing".

The park and ride lot nearest the Covina Metrolink station now charges commuters to use it (25 cents a day for Covina residents, 50 cents a day for all others). *(cont'd on Page 6)*

(from pg. 5) It is claimed this money is needed to pay for a security guard (who strangely also guards a free lot further from the station). Users of the lot are mounting a campaign to have the for a security guard (who strangely also guards a free lot further from the station). Users of the lot are mounting a campaign to have the charges discontinued.

Into the fray about the future of our transportation system has stepped Assembly-member Tom McClintock (Tom.McClintock@assembly.ca.gov). A member of the Assembly Transportation Committee, he has gained notoriety (most recently with a Jan. 18 op-ed piece in the San Fernando Valley edition of the Los Angeles Times, "Mass Transit Without Masses") by calling for the resumption of freeway construction in the metropolitan area, specifically citing unbuilt portions of 1950s master plan (<http://www.tmn.com/masterplan2.html/>).

Happily the Valley edition on Feb. 1 printed my letter musing what will happen if and when people start to realize his proposal could place their neighborhood in the path of the Reseda Freeway, Whitnall Freeway or Pacific Coast Freeway?

Jim Seal of the MTA Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) presented at their Jan. 21st meeting a draft statement on performance standards that may be worth a serious look. But it is unclear whether the MTA board's interest in this is serious or if it is doomed to languish and die in committee.

Stanley Hart, member of the CAC and chair of the Transportation Committee of the local chapter of the Sierra Club, attended a recent meeting of Reduce Emissions and Congestion on Highways (REACH), which exists under the aegis of SCAG. He was dumbfounded at their exertions to prioritize HOV lane construction and explore toll

roads (see the Nov. 28, 1997 LA Times article "Could L.A. Be Headed Toward Toll Roads?" by Richard Simon). Hart cites recent research that such measures can never match the latent demand suppressed by insufficient capacity. Bluntly, we can't build our way out of congestion and until that truth sinks in the body politic and general public are living in denial. Contact Debra Redman of SCAG to learn more about REACH - (213) 236-1928.

The statewide high speed rail proposal continues apace - you can see meeting agendas for the Authority preparing the final plan at <http://www.transitinfo.org/HSR/>. The High Speed Ground Transportation Association is boosting the idea [<http://www.hsgt.org>]. Member Roger Christensen attended the Authority's recent meetings in Marina del Rey. Roger tells me the consultants hired to assess the prospects for selling this project to the public were blunt about how difficult a task that will be. They indicated MTA's problems have tainted the image of rail in Southern California. It is widely thought the failure a few years ago of the two statewide rail bond proposals can be traced to the MTA factor.

LAX says their new Master Plan will be ready for submission to the FAA and City Council later this year. And that is probably when the fireworks really begin!

Sarah Catz, the new Chair of OCTA, was the subject of a Jan. 11 LA Times profile. She is a lawyer and long-time advocate for public transportation, and is proponent of the aforementioned proposed light rail line. She exemplifies our hopes of over time encouraging emergence of knowledgeable leaders on transportation issues. → → →

Editor's Note: This article was reprinted from the January 1998 issue of Western Transit. It represents the opinion of the author, and does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Southern California Transit Advocates.

Reviewing all of the newspaper articles on the issue of breaking apart MTA, transit zones and lowering costs, there is no mention of how, or if, the institutional changes would benefit passengers.

There are many references to local control and decision making. Does this only suggest that a different set of politicians and bureaucrats would make the decisions?

Transit trips, just like auto trips, are made without regard to political boundaries. Decisions affecting transit need to be made by looking at the "big picture". While financial decisions are important, if present users are expected to remain on board and auto drivers

are ever going to be persuaded to use alternative means, the means must function as one entity - seamless is the current jargon - what has happened to what is now the Inland Empire Connection for the sake of local control and/or saving money is an example of what should not happen. Fares and fare paying mechanisms are just as important as routes and schedules in helping to convince people to use transit.

In southern San Diego county, MTDB is the pass thru agency for transit money and with those funds comes a set of operating practices which does allow likely the most seamless transit in Southern California, perhaps in the entire state. While the initial thrust for allowing cities to provide their own transit was money, thoughtful planning with the customer in mind did eventually surface. Perhaps others could use the San Diego experiences as a model for their behavior. ■

The San Bernardino Associated Governments participated in a "physics alternative" study for SCAG which concludes that the Regional Transportation Plan has assumptions that are untenable, such as growth of traffic beyond capacity in some corridors. It raises serious issues about the relation of land use and transportation at the regional level, something that is always touchy given the general desire to retain local control.

lines (with the heaviest passenger loads) whose schedules, bus stop locations and layover zones are adapted to the characteristics of the larger buses.

While recently speaking with a Metrolink staffer she mentioned that most of their staff ride Metrolink to work. What an idea! If the people who oversee transit services rode it themselves more often they would gain an insight into customer needs and concerns (seat of the pants knowledge).

The MTA borrowing an articulated bus from Houston Metro was the motivation for an interesting conversation I recently had with Edmund Buckley, publisher of Western Transit, about the conditions under which such equipment can operate effectively. Having them interspersed with regular 40 foot coaches would be counter-productive. They should be designated for specific

The Federal Highway Administration has a site to compare the provisions of various proposals to renew the federal transportation program: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reauthorization/compt10-5.thm>. ■

SAN PEDRO TRANSIT CENTER *J.K. Drummond*

Part of a San Pedro revitalization citizens' committee proposal is a transit center for buses on Gaffey St. with light rail in the canyon under the Gaffey St. Bridge. It will be part of a general proposal discussed to upgrade the Pacific Ave. Corridor, San Pedro's main street. The committee was appointed by the councilman and has expanded its purview to almost all of San Pedro.

The Southwest corner of Gaffey and Sepulveda Sts. is the site proposed for a two-level bus terminal with 2 level parking (not clear yet if parking is for cars or buses) west to Marshall St. In the canyon below the bridge at Marshall and Oliver Sts. light rail would connect to existing

Harbor Rail to Banning Landing in Wilmington and to Cabrillo Marina, Ports O'Call Village, 6th st., World Cruise Center, and Channel St. via existing rail and light rail extensions.

CRA (Community Redevelopment Agency) bonds would fund construction and incremental tax increases pay off the bonds. If the councilman approves the report and the city council approves it it would go to CRA.

About 670 weekday commuters use buses between San Pedro and Downtown Los Angeles. ■

BDOF *Charles P. Hobbs*

The BDOF is MTA's Business Development Operating Facility. It was initially designed as a low-cost way to introduce new bus service. But due to MTA's financial difficulties, several existing MTA lines are to be operated by the BDOF.

Unlike private bus operators, BDOF drivers are MTA employees and United Transportation Union (UTU) members. However, their starting rate of pay is less than that of regular MTA drivers (although higher than most private contractor drivers). This provides the low-cost advantages of contracting, while keeping the routes under MTA (and UTU) control.

BDOF drivers use the same MTA divisions and buses as do the regular drivers, although they operate from separate facilities in the yards.

In the past, BDOF operated demonstration projects, such as the federally funded shuttles that operated in El Segundo, Monterey Park, and Sylmar for a short time in 1994.

Currently, the following lines are being operated by BDOF drivers: #168, 236, 426, 462, 466, 576 and new line #550.

On March 15, the following lines will be transferred to BDOF: #220, 265/275, 489, and 497

Lines #439, 444, and 445 will be transferred as of April 19.

There is also some discussion about BDOF taking over the ATE/Charterways-operated routes when those contracts expire. ■

(from pg. 3) <http://www.statelocal.gov> is a very user friendly gateway to information on federal programs, including those for transportation.

The Feb. Wheel Clicks reports the U.S. Dept. of Transportation now has subscriptions to receive news releases via e-mail. Subscribe by sending a message to dotnews-request@relay.dot.gov. In the body of the message type "subscribe". To unsubscribe follow the above procedure except the message should be "unsubscribe".

Thursday January 15 President Gabbard met with Yamamoto Hiromi from the General Planning Department of Hokkaido Prefectural Government. Mr. Hiromi had requested the meeting as part of his study of transportation in the Los Angeles area. Hokkaido is the northern Japanese island and they face many of the same transportation problems that plague our region. By studying our successes and failures the government there hopes to gain insights that will aid their efforts. It was a frank and wide-ranging exchange that lasted over 90 minutes. Our thanks to Mr. Hirom for his interest and we hope the interview will prove helpful.

The President attended the Jan. 27 Santa Monica City Council meeting to make comments supporting Big Blue Bus plans for better service on line 3. This occasion also provided an opportunity to present Mayor Pro Tem Pamela O'Connor her Transit Advocate of the Year award.

President Gabbard has been invited to attend a technical workshop on the draft Regional Transportation Plan of the Southern California Association of Governments to be held February 25th. He welcomes concerns, suggestions and comments in preparing a written statement for the event.

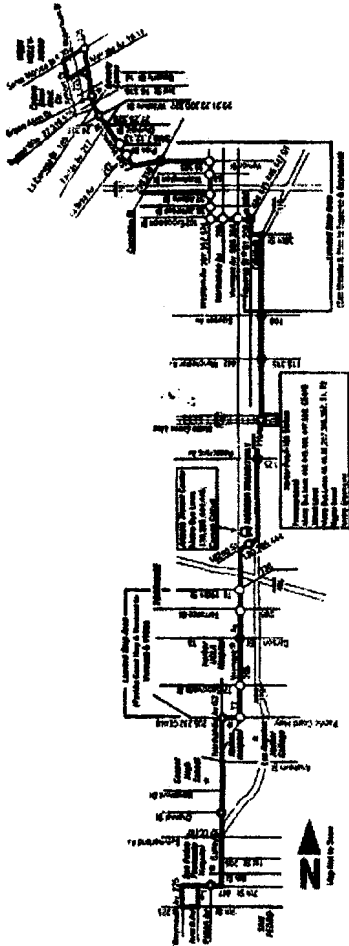
Member Anthony Loui at our January 10th meeting indicated the Westside restructuring study is almost ready for public review. One element still being mulled is the possible relocation of the West Los Angeles Transit Center (presently it is on Fairfax Avenue beneath the Santa Monica Freeway). An option being looked at is moving it nearby to downtown Culver City.

January 19th there was a meeting of the Special Projects Committee. Joining Chair Chris Ledermuller were President Gabbard, Vice President Charles Powell, Newsletter editor Charles Hobbs, Director Pat Moser plus members Armando Avalos and Woody Rosner. We reviewed possible changes to the new edition of our Transit Guide. The marketing plan and a letter to agencies seeking information were also gone over. The goal is to enhance the Guide's clarity and ease of use while making it even more informative. Our hope is to have it ready for distribution in the next few months. A more complete report on what was discussed has been posted on our member only board.

Vice President Powell is readying his proposal for marketing Santa Monica bus 10 (the express route to downtown Los Angeles). We hope to foster a public/private partnership similar to that funding the Tide Shuttle. Suggestions and volunteers are welcome.

As always, *The Transit Advocate* needs articles, letters, Transit Tips, photographs and research (newspaper clippings, etc.) from all members and interested non-members. All materials should be sent to 3010 Wilshire #362, Los Angeles, CA 90010. (or e-mailed to transit@lerami.lerctr.org). Material for publication should be received two weeks before the scheduled SO.CA.TA meeting date. ■

ROUTE OF THE MONTH *Chris Ledermuller*



Route of the Month: MTA 550

Where does it go: West Hollywood Library, Beverly Center, USC/Exposition Park, Harbor Transitway, and San Pedro Library. It also serves the following hospitals: Cedars Sinai, Midway, Harbor/UCLA, Kaiser Hospital (San Pedro), and San Pedro Peninsula Hospital.

Limited stops: Between San Vicente/Pico and PCH/Normandie (including the Harbor Freeway Transitway), Line #550 stops only at designated limited stops. Outside of these areas, Line #550 makes all local stops.

How much does it cost: \$1.35 locally, up to \$2.85 on the Transitway. (For the rest of February, the route will be free.)

Whom to call: 1-800-COMMUTE

TRANSIT TRIVIA *Chris Ledermuller/*

Last month's question was: Timewise, what is the longest route beginning and ending within L.A. County?

The answer: Foothill Transit 482. From its peak-hour extension Downtown, it takes 2.5 hours to get to Holt & Indian Hill.

This month's question: Which LADOT Commuter Express route charges a local fare for freeway travel?

(Answer will be announced at the February SO.CA.TA meeting, and printed in the March *Transit Advocate!*)