

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

The "Limited Stop Zones" on MTA Lines #4 and #20 west of Sepulveda Bl are no more; all the former MTA stops on Wilshire and Santa Monica Blvds. have been restored.

MTA, in conjunction with the Long Beach Redevelopment agency and a local developer, has opened a 700-space parking structure near the Willow Blue Line station in Long Beach. This parking structure is intended for both Blue Line commuters and patrons of a nearby shopping center.

Long Beach Transit will introduce a new service called "Zap" on March 1. The route will be a limited stop version of Line 94 (between Downtown Long Beach and Cal State University Long Beach only), and will run bidirectionally during peak hours on a 13 minute headway.

Foothill Transit will change routes in the Eastland Center area because of unanticipated construction along Workman Ave. by the city of Covina. The new transfer point will be on Barranca midblock between Workman and North Garvey (on both sides of the street), near the Foothill Transit building. Affected lines are #274, 276, 480, 481, 488, 498, and 699:

- 274: via Rowland, Citrus, I-10, Barranca, Rowland, and Second
- 276: via Rowland, Citrus, I-10, and Barranca
- *480: via I-10, Citrus, Rowland, Barranca, and I-10
- 481: via I-10 and Barranca (will not use Citrus, also stops at the opposite direction of 480 stops (pickup bus to Downtown on west side of street)
- 488: via Citrus, I-10, Barranca, and Rowland
- 498: via Rowland, Barranca, I-10
- 699: via Citrus, Rowland, Barranca, I-10 (only clockwise service)
- MTA 490: via Citrus, I-10, and Barranca (will not serve temporary Eastland Transfer Point)

Reroutes will be in effect until mid-April. New bus stop signs have been posted at various places, and old stops are displaying detour information. Eastland Center is still served by the midblock stop between Workman and Garvey on I-10.

There are also changes to the 498/499/699 schedule. 699 will now stop at Eastland Transcenter, as well as at Fairplex Park/Ride.

The Duarte Shuttle recently changed its schedules. Certain stops have been removed, and service has been extended. Now, Duarte service operates between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. on both routes, with service on the Green route on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Also, service now runs every hour, instead of every 65 minutes.

The West Valley Smart Shuttle program will terminate on March 1, if alternative funding cannot be found to support it. (Service may still be available, but at a much higher fare). The other three Smart Shuttle operations in the City of Los Angeles (East Valley, Koreatown and Southside) will be scaled back somewhat on March 1. (Costs of providing this type of service were higher than expected)



BULLETIN BOARD

Stanley Hart, a former SO.CA.TA member, chair of the local Sierra Club chapter's Transportation Committee and a longtime member of the MTA Citizen Advisory Committee died in January. His was a voice of reason and insight that will be much missed.

Kymberleigh Richard's donation of a complete set of the MTA Review as a door prize for our holiday banquet was omitted from the list of donors in last month's Bulletin Board.

Jan. 24 MTA discontinued regional stops and resumed serving all stops along its routes 4 (Santa Monica Blvd.) and 20 (Wilshire Blvd.). We are heartened by this action, which we have long advocated, and hope to eventually get similar restrictions on other MTA lines lifted.

Jan. 23 President Gabbard, Director Anthony Loui and members Robert Richmond and Woody Rosner were among those who attended the Future of Rail Service in Southern California at the Fullerton Old Spaghetti Factory (next to the Amtrak station). The presentations by Dan Levitt of the High-Speed Rail Authority and Dinah Minter from OCTA were informative. Pictures from the event can be viewed at <http://www.trainweb.com/events/990123.html> [click the photo set links]. Our thanks to RailPAC and Flimsies Magazine for co-sponsoring this event.

Saturday Feb. 6 Santa Monica Municipal Bus Lines held a public meeting to review its Service Improvement Plan recommendations for FY 1999-2002. President Gabbard, Directors Anthony Loui and Armando Avalos and member Joseph Dunn were among those in attendance (nearly 30 members of the public attended!). We appreciate the proactive public outreach effort Big Blue Bus has undertaken, which we hope will become a model for the industry.

Members in the news: Chris Flescher had a letter in the Jan. 8 *OC Weekly* responding to articles and previous letters opposing the proposed Orange County light rail line; Kymberleigh Richard had an op-ed piece on smart shuttle ("Failure's a Given When Solution Doesn't Fit a Problem") in the Jan. 24 San Fernando Valley edition of the *Los Angeles Times*; Chris Ledermuller had a letter on whether a Curitiba Brazil style busway is an appropriate model for Los Angeles read during the Feb. 5 broadcast of KCET's *Life and Times* and a similar missive in the Jan. 24 *LA Times* plus Ledermuller in the Feb. 2 *Daily News* debunked a Jan. 29 *Daily News* editorial that whined about inadequate public transportation service for the proposed revitalized Coliseum.

Saturday Feb. 27 the SO.CA.TA Executive Committee will meet at Eagle Rock City Hall (on Colorado Blvd. just east of Eagle Rock Blvd.). This is a session to discuss our plans for the coming year. All members are encourage to attend. This location can be reached via MTA lines 81, 83, 84, 180 and 181. The session will begin at 1 p.m. Our thanks to founder Pat Moser for arranging for this site.

Saturday March 6 at 10 AM MTA will hold a public hearing on service changes implemented as part of the Consent Decree Pilot Program and service modifications to bus service proposed as part of the MOS-2B Metro Red Line interface plan. This will be held in the MTA Headquarters service modifications to bus service proposed as part of the MOS-2B Metro Red Line (*to page 10*)

PLAC REPORT Dana Gabbard (dgabbard@hotmail.com)

An MTA Report I picked up at the MTA Library had the news that James Reichert left MTA Operations at the end of January. But while Reichert had stated that it was his intention to help choose his replacement as head of Operations, I have heard nothing regarding his successor. Whoever it will be, they'll have a tough road to hoe continuing the task of overcoming agency inertia and improving service.

Kudos to MTA Marketing for its new orange cover Guide to MTA service. Long overdue and thankfully unlike the last effort this one fits in bus and rail vehicle "take one" dispensers.

The race card has always been Eric Mann's #1 weapon - his entire career has been built on it. And when going against an entity like MTA that no one has an investment in he has had relatively easy sailing. Mann has avoided targets that might shoot back or have him come off as the heavy. Which is why I surmise the BRU never followed through on its threats to go after the munis. It would be dicey to have people from Montebello, Santa Monica, Long Beach and Torrance going after him for attacking "their" bus system.

But now Mann is playing the race card against the Pasadena Blue Line. He should be careful - Kevin Murray got burned when he tried that. How will Mann react if a grassroot movement targets him in the same way that he has done to others in the past? He can dish it out, but can he take it? We may soon know the answer.

Keith Killough of MTA Countywide Planning and Development gave a presentation on "Vision of Future Transit in L.A. County" at the Jan. 27 MTA Citizen Advisory Council meeting. He announced (as has been rumored for some time) that MTA is restarting the process of drafting a Long Range Plan. By September they hope to have their first round of Forums that will provide input from stakeholders. I attended meetings in 1997 (for a stillborn plan) that sound similar to this process. Maybe we should sponsor with MTA an open house at that time to provide a venue for members of the public to be involved? Julian Burke in a rare interview published in the Jan. 22 issue of *California Corridors* indicated his support for drafting a revised LRP, stating "This should've been done a year and a half ago".

LADOT has supplied me with detailed statistics for its smart shuttle demonstrators. A copy will be available at our Feb. 13 meeting for members to review.

Anthony Loui, the head of our new Rapid Bus Committee, recommends people read the article on the concept, which seems more feasible for Los Angeles than the Curitiba style of busway, in the Dec. '98/Jan. '99 issue of *Mass Transit*. This piece also will be available at our Feb. meeting for perusal.

Had an interesting conversation recently with a South Gate city staffer. Their dial-a-ride has heavy ridership. But at this time no plans are in the works for starting a fixed route circulator to take the load off the dial-a-ride and reduce costs. Even with a grant for the shuttle as a demonstration the local match

would divert limited transportation monies (Proposition A & C local return) from popular programs (such as DAR and subsidized MTA passes). Understandably this is politically sensitive. After city council elections next month this issue may be revisited.

RCTC now has representatives from every city in the county. Including all the County Supervisors, this means the full membership is an unwieldy 29. Already an Executive Committee is being created to try and winnow issues down to the few contentious ones that need airing before this overgrown monster. As one longtime transit industry observer noted, it says something for regional relations in Riverside County for such an extreme measure to be undertaken. P.S. - now VCTC (Ventura County) is contemplating a similar mutation.

In the Dec./Jan. issue of the California Rail News a travelogue of the tour of European high speed rail facilities by members of the governing board of the High Speed Rail Authority has revealing comments by tour participants on the Transrapid mag lev system being a hard sell to California voters as a new untried technology. Meanwhile a provision in TEA21 that Congress will award \$950 million to a demonstrator mag lev system has created mag lev mania in many parts of the United States. A prominent example is our own Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Southern California Association of Governments, which last June released a report on "Inter-Regional Maglev for the Next Millennium". SCAG is hot to get the money Congress is dangling and has put together a bizarre

proposal (mag lev down the middle of freeways) which they claim can be mostly built with private funds. In 1991 SCAG's own survey of attempted domestic high speed rail projects to that time noted how proposals that counted on private funding inevitably falter due to the untried nature of the technology. What was true in 1991 is I believe true today. SCAG is chasing a mirage with their RFP for a system to travel between March AFB and LAX. All I wonder is how far along this process will get before smashing against its unrealistic expectations?

James Mills, father of the San Diego trolley, is the latest appointee to the High-Speed Rail Authority. His knowledge of how to sell a public infrastructure investment should prove invaluable as the HSRA begins trying to raise public awareness of its proposal.

Transit anecdote of the month: since July 1999, AVTA has had security cameras on its buses to combat vandalism. But these have also helped apprehend individuals engaged in other criminal activities. According to a Dec. 21, 1998 AVTA Board agenda report this included passengers overheard bragging about having committed a robbery. AVTA staff pulled the videotape of the bus this occurred on, located the individuals, and made copies of the tape available to the County Sheriffs' Dept. With this visual aid Deputies were able to apprehend the perpetrators. Way to go, AVTA!
(cont'd on pg. 9)

SANTA BARBARA EXCURSION *Dana Gabbard/Michael Ludwig*

Our members this year decided to have our traditional day after Thanksgiving excursion in Santa Barbara, exploring the Metropolitan Transit District (MTD) system. It was decided that Greyhound would be our best option to get there (Amtrak service northwest of Los Angeles has been unreliable these past few months due to rail and signal equipment work). So on Nov. 27 at about 7:40 am, 5 members rendezvoused at the Greyhound the ride was Western Transit editor Edmund Buckley. The station was quite busy for such an early hour with many boarding buses to points all over.

The bus was an express to Santa Barbara, after which it would continue on to the Bay Area with many intervening stops. Interestingly, only about half the seats were taken. Also worth noting is the UTU sticker above the windshield. This is the union that represents Greyhound's drivers. One topic during our uneventful and smooth trip northwest was the recent announcement that Laidlaw plans to acquire Greyhound. How this would affect the industry was hard to pinpoint.

Chris Ledermuller, planner for the trip, huddled with Armando as they finalized our initial trip plans. We arrived on schedule at 9:35. Less than 5 minutes earlier, member Kymberleigh Richards had arrived on the Greyhound local she had taken from Ventura. Also at the station to greet the party was member Michael Ludwig of the Bay Area, who had come down on Amtrak the day before expressly to join the excursion. The Greyhound Station is a barebones affair - a ticket counter, a few indoor seats, and a

small shop that sells pre-packaged food and drinks.

Next door was MTD's Downtown Transit Center. If you can imagine the El Monte Station at street level, right next to a downtown street, with a slightly smaller (passenger waiting) area inside a roadway loop twice as wide, and half the buses loading/unloading on the outside part of this roadway, you have a pretty good picture of this facility. However, it had an impressive building inside the loop, with indoor benches, restrooms, and a machine to sell tokens. Also, customer service representatives sell tickets and answer questions. At curbside, drivers were at hand to assist passengers and answer questions (one was even sweeping up the area!).

MTD has no passes (though the agency does have transfers). Tokens and ten-ride ticket books are sold for convenience, but they provide no discount. The token machine sold 5 tokens for 5 dollars. If you needed change, it would change a dollar into 4 quarters.

At 10 am, we caught our first line, #12 - Goleta Express. Some of the members had gone across the street to find decent coffee. So we had a few hair raising moments making sure everyone boarded before we pulled out. The Gillig Phantom we rode was in good shape. MTD was the first agency to take delivery of Phantoms, and these have been stalwart carriers for some years. After winding a little through downtown, we hit the 101 freeway and sprinted to Goleta. On this segment, there were about 11 riders

(excluding the So. Ca. TA members). The driver showed knowledge of the system and answered passenger questions with ease. By the time we had begun going through Goleta, ridership dipped down to 9. We continued to the end of the line at UCSB North Hall.

UCSB has a transit center that includes a covered (but not enclosed) set of benches. From here you can catch a shuttle around the campus and Isla Vista that MTD operates for the student body association. Sadly, the shuttle doesn't run weekends.

We next caught line 25 - Ellwood. This was operated with a Nova low floor, which most of us had not seen before. The line goes through some almost rural areas. Very little ridership was apparent. This route is interlined with line 23, Winchester Canyon. Its routing was short segments on many different suburban residential streets (including a few turns that the driver took at a relatively high speed) and was similarly holding a light load (at least until we hit Abrego, when 8 teens crowded on the bus).

Exploring the Nova bus, a few features caught our attention. The back door had a sensor for opening; all you had to do was wave your hand at about chest level to make it open. Like all low floors, its seating was crammed into the compartment. Right behind the driver was a seat that was high and behind an opaque panel. One wonders how you would know when you reach your destination sitting there. One seat toward the rear even faced the back. And the seats in the back were up a step from the low floor (like the OCTA and Long Beach ones).

The driver's 11 year old son was riding with his father. Basically with no school being held that day it was one way to have cheap babysitting. The son really knew the MTD system and said he got a lot of use out of his pass riding along with his dad from time to time (obviously he was referring to a pass issued only to employees and their dependents). The kid was quite interested that a group of people from L.A. had come just to ride buses.

A slight wrinkle in planning the excursion had come about because we had found out only a few days earlier that MTD operates a Saturday schedule on the day after Thanksgiving. The biggest complication was about our hope to transfer a little later in the day to line 10 - Cathedral Oaks. The schedule stated it operates "school days" and "non school days". The driver asked dispatch if that meant it was running. It wasn't. Quickly Chris and Michael consulted and decided when the bus brought us back to UCSB we would stay on it as it changed to line 11 (UCSB via State/Hollister) and continue on to the Downtown Transit Center. At UCSB we saw a nearly full line 24 (UCSB Express) pull out.

Line 11 (which has the best overall level of service in the MTD system) slowly added passengers until it was almost full as we reached downtown. We spent 1 3/4 hours continuously riding the Nova Bus! And we paid only one fare doing it.
(cont'd on pg 8)

(Santa Barbara, from pg. 7) Due to the lighter traffic, many of the buses we rode ran hot - sometimes up to 10 minutes ahead of schedule. But at least MTD has liberal policies regarding buses holding for a transfer (drivers will even radio ahead).

Next we rode line 20 - Carpinteria. This route is the closest the system gets to Ventura County (it turns around a bit short of the county line in an area that looks similar to the south end of San Clemente on OCTA line 91). The Gillig Phantom had high ridership almost to the end of the line. It serves a touristy shopping district and many residential areas. Even the return trip on the same bus filled up quickly. If ridership grows, service improvement may be called for.

Shortly before arriving back at the Downtown Transit Center at 2:30 pm, the decision had been made to try line 22 - Old Mission. This route has an irregular schedule (especially on weekdays) and serves Mission Santa Barbara and the semi-famous Museum of Natural History. The bus was a Stewart & Stephenson 30 foot mini-bus. The initial 5 or 6 passengers got off before we reached the Mission. The route goes through hilly winding narrow streets and includes two loops. Only 1 person boarded on the return trip.

With about an hour left before the return Greyhound trip, it was decided to hop on the State Street electric shuttle and try it out on the way to finding a quick lunch. This is an open air trolley style bus that runs up and down the main downtown

street, with perimeter seating. It was packed with passengers and the streets were clogged with holiday shoppers. A bit of local color was a demonstration by anti-fur activists. It started to lightly rain as we waited for the return trip. By then the group was anxious about getting back in time. But after being passed up by a full trolley, a less crowded one came along shortly, although it soon also was packed.

We got off at a hamburger place near the Greyhound Station and quickly had a bite. We lucked out, as the food was good. And through the back door it was a short walk to the station!

At 4:35, most of us piled into the Greyhound bus for the express trip home. Kymberleigh was on another local, this time to North Hollywood. Michael was spending the night, then taking an Amtrak trip the next day back to the Bay Area. Once back in Los Angeles we quickly said our goodbyes and dispersed.

It was interesting to see a system that has to contend with such complicated geography. Santa Barbara and nearby environs stretch along the coast, hemmed in by mountains. A grid isn't feasible in such circumstances. Overall the agency seems to have logically placed service, supplemented by a number of expresses to connect far-flung points. The riders seemed very happy with the service and a customer orientation is apparent in MTD's operations.

So, where should we go next year? ■

(PLAC Report, from pg. 5)

"An Analysis of Ridership Forecasts for the Los Angeles Metro Red Line, Alternative Strategies and Future Transit Improvements" is a 33 page manuscript sent to me by member Leroy W. Demery of the Seattle area. I am just beginning to try and digest the very well reasoned arguments contained within. Members interested in obtaining a copy to analyze for themselves can send me \$3 and I'll send it along. Or look at the copy I'll pass around at our Feb. meeting.

As of March Richard Simon, after several years on the MTA beat for the LA Times, is transferring to its Washington Bureau. The transition has been occurring for some time

as Jeffrey Rabin has been doing the bulk of MTA reporting while learning the ropes. My best wishes to Simon in his future endeavors.

I couldn't resist - when the Daily News in an editorial ended with a comment about reforming the membership of the MTA board I had to write a letter which appeared in the Jan. 28 DN. Besides pointing out the shortcomings of Mayor Riordan's plan for appointees (or puppets), I stated my view that while no magic bullet an elected board would at least bring a measure of accountability. Which is what we do not have now. ■



Santa Barbara Excursion Photos:
(All by Chris Ledermuller)

1. Rear of Nova Bus (At UCSB)
2. Nova Bus (also at UCSB)
3. MTD Waterfront Electric Shuttle

ROUTE OF THE MONTH *Chris Ledermuller*

DASH Lincoln Heights/Chinatown

Where does it go: Union Station, County/USC Medical Center, Lincoln High School, Lincoln Heights Library, Downey Recreation Center, and Cathedral High School.

How often does it run: Every 30 minutes, Monday through Saturday.

How much is it: 25 cents (MTA senior/disabled passes accepted)

For more information: 808-2273 (any area code) ■

(*Bulletin Board*, from pg. 3) interface plan. This will be held in the MTA Headquarters Building, off the Gateway Plaza, on the third floor. [Originally the meeting was to be held Wednesday March 3 but BRU Organizer Martin Hernandez rightly complained to the MTA Board about it being difficult for working bus patrons to attend daytime meetings].

Saturday March 20 the National Association of Railway Passengers will be having its Annual Meeting for Region 12. This will include a tour of the Amtrak Reservation Call Center in Riverside, after which there will be a lasagna lunch at the Spaghetti Factory. Transportation and lunch are included in the cost. The rendezvous will be at the downtown Riverside Metrolink station after train 380 (from Los Angeles via San Bernardino) arrives, around 10:20 a.m. Cost is \$27 [if postmarked by March 10] or \$31, include self-addressed stamped #9 or #10 business envelope for return of tickets. Order received after March 14 will be held for pickup. Check made payable to NARP Region 12. Mail to: NARP Region 12, P.O. Box 2858 Riverside CA 92516 or fax to (909) 684-7458. E-mail for questions - letstrn@pe.net

Wednesday Mar. 31 Congresswoman Juanita Millender-McDonald (who serves on the Surface Transportation Subcommittee of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure) is sponsoring a Transportation Summit at the Omni Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Details are unavailable at press time and may be obtained by contacting her field office - (310) 538-1190.

May 1 & 2 Fullerton is holding Railroad Days, a celebration of its transportation heritage. We hope to arrange to have a booth at the event as part of our outreach efforts.

"Blue Line News" is the new newsletter of the Pasadena Blue Line Corridor Committee. To get on the mailing list contact Luis Sahagun at (626) 793-9335.

<http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov> is the new website for the California High-Speed Rail Authority.

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.