

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

MTA new bus news: New Flyer is having a number of manufacturing problems, and as of Nov. 1 only seven buses had been turned over to Operations for revenue service. New Flyer faces penalties for every bus delivered after Jan. 1. Meanwhile NABI is on schedule for its buses to be delivered beginning early next year. Also an option from NABI to purchase 215 additional buses has been extended to Jan. 31, 2000.

For millennium celebrants MTA will offer free rides on Metro Bus and Rail beginning at 11 a.m. on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1999 through 5 a.m. New Year's Day. For this night only service hours on the Metro Rail system will be extended to 2 a.m. During Christmas Eve, MTA also will offer free rides on Metro Buses and Metro Rail from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. but Metro Rail service hours will not be extended past its normal operating time. Also service on 33 MTA bus lines will be augmented with additional late night service to accommodate transit users.

Member Kym Richards reports that MTA will expand weekday service on Line 236 with the December 5 shakeup. Service on Balboa will now start 17 minutes earlier, and also now operates an hour later to/from Sherman Oaks in the evening. Additional midday service has been extended to Sherman Oaks. All trips now make the "Midwood loop" on Balboa north of Rinaldi. Weekend service is unchanged.

MTA is purchasing 550 more bicycle racks. All buses in its fleet will have racks within a year

The Division 5 CNG fuelling facility will be completed by the end of Jan. And Division 7's is scheduled for Feb. This will give MTA the flexibility to use CNG buses on its more of its crowded routes (such as Vermont line 204).

The Oct. Metrolink Matters gives these dates for the opening of new stations for the Antelope Valley Line (Newhall, early 2000 and Sun Valley, mid-2000), Riverside Line (Downtown Pomona, late 2000), Ventura Line (Ventura, possibly mid-2000) and the Orange County Line (Laguna Niguel and Tustin, mid-2000).

Director Armando Avalos informs us "Torrance Transit will discontinue its Cyberkey program as of February 1, 2000. Apparently, one of the

companies that supplies parts to the Cyberkey machines is going out of business, thus the machines can no longer be maintained. No new Cyberkeys will be issued, but they will recharge existing ones until December 31, 1999. The last day to use the Cyberkey on all Torrance and MAX busses will be January 31, 2000."

Torrance Transit lines 1 and 2 began serving Patsaoras Transit Plaza at Union Station effective Oct. 10.

TRUST (Torrance Residents United to Save Transit) is opposing cutbacks of service by Torrance Transit. Further information: (310) 519-2911.

The Oct. Western Transit notes that Montebello line 70 discontinued Saturday service on July 17. Also that OCTA has retired the remainder of its Super Buses: three are destined for Sunline Transit in the Coachella valley and the other three will be auctioned.

AVTA (Antelope Valley) is adding a bus to trunk lines 1/2/3 to improve operational efficiency. Ridership has increased substantially during the past year, especially of students.

MARTA will have new schedules for both the Off-The-Mountain and Big Bear fixed route service that will be effective January 3, 2000. One fixed route trip will be extended to Erwin Lake and Sugar Loaf. OTM service will be modified to provide two round trips between Big Bear and San Bernardino each weekday and four round trips between Lake Arrowhead, Crestline, and San Bernardino. Two round trips will operate Mon-Sat between Big Bear, Lake Arrowhead, Crestline, and San Bernardino. An additional two round trips will operate M-F from Lake Arrowhead, Crestline, and San Bernardino. This schedule will result in four trips daily between Lake Arrowhead, Crestline, and San Bernardino. 2/3 of the OTM ridership is in the west end of the mountains.

VISTA (Ventura County) has been very happy with ridership on its two new routes to Cal State-Channel Islands. 450 students (out of a total of 1700) daily use either the Oxnard or Camarillo route to the campus.

BULLETIN BOARD

Kristina Egan of the California Transit Association is our guest speaker this month. Instead of an agenda this month's meeting will involve strategizing for the coming year and discussion of recent news. We will then caravan via the Red and Blue lines to Colonial Buffet in Long Beach. Or participants can meet us there at 5 p.m. The address is 355 E 1st St (one-half block east of the 1st Street Blue Line station). Cost of the meal is \$13. Join us for food, fun and trinkets!

Nominations were taken at the November meeting of candidates for officers and Directors during 2000. These include:

Directors (3) - Armando Avalos, Kymberleigh Richards, Perias Pillay, Joe Dunn, Charles Powell, Henryka Maslowski, Dana Gabbard and Charles Hobbs

Treasurer - Juanita Dellomes

Corresponding Secretary - Dana Gabbard

Recording Secretary - Pat Moser

Parliamentarian - vacant

Vice President - Anthony Loui, Charles Hobbs, Kymberleigh Richards

President - Kris Sharp, Kymberleigh Richards

The election committee is chaired by Woody Rosner, assisted by Joseph Drummond and Frank Roldan.

Election Committee chair Rosner asks each candidate in their statement before the election address two questions: What do you intend to do if elected? What do you see as the chief goals of SO.CA.TA in the year 2000?

Rosner also wishes to remind members that you can vote for someone in as many different positions as you wish. If elected to two offices the electee will then decide which position to accept.

At our November meeting an increase in annual dues was approved: \$18 (regular) and \$7.20 (limited income). Your prompt renewal for 2000 will insure we can continue our efforts to improve public transit.

Larry Rosenman, who kindly donates space for our website, has asked if we could make a donation to defray some of his expenses. We are including a line on the membership renewal form for those who wish to express their appreciation to Mr. Rosenman's generosity.

It is anticipated in January we will have an Executive Board meeting to review the current by-laws. Also a work party will be held for the mass mailing to publicize the Transit Guide to libraries and media outlets.

SO.CA.TA was given time equal to the Bus Riders Union at the Nov. 13 MTA Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2000 Proposed Service Changes. Kymberleigh Richards presented our statement (posted on our website), which was mentioned by the LA Times in its coverage of the event ("Proposed Cuts in Popular Valley Bus Lines Protested at MTA Hearing", Nov. 14).

Wednesday Dec. 15 at 1 p.m. there will be a special MTA Board workshop at the MTA Gateway Building on the status of the Universal Fare System, electronic transfer machines, and Ticket Vending Machines. This is the process that eventually will involve the instituting of a countywide fare medium a la Metrocard. (to pg. 10)

It was always clear the consent decree owed a great deal to the plaintiff's luck in drawing Judge Terry Hatter, whose politics are to the left of Tom Hayden. The recent preliminary stay issued by the Ninth Circuit of Hatter's Sept. 23 order might merely mean the financial limits of the decree are finally to be explored. Regardless, MTA faces years of BRU browbeating and a huge investment in bus operations (the decree continues until Oct. 2003).

Copies of the agenda for the BRU's Nov. 20 meeting were on the reverse of a flyer left at the downtown Los Angeles Central Library. Among the items of interest is a campaign for the new service provision of the consent decree, dubbed "the next big-ticket item". Are they going to continue to press their freeway based regional bus network plan? Even the Special Master said it exceeded the language in the decree.

Interesting historical fact: 20 years ago the RTD abandoned freeway flyer routes in favor of limited service on arterials partly due to congestion on freeways.

Zev Yaroslavsky in the Nov. Metro Investment Reports speaks of "high-speed" busways on railroad right-of-ways like Burbank Chandler and Exposition Blvd. And even expanding the median strip of the San Bernardino Freeway to include "local high-speed rail or bus service". Meanwhile MTA is getting a lukewarm reception to its proposals for the valley/eastside/mid-city corridors. And then comes word Caltrans is asking Transportation Commissions to prepare wish lists of projects that can be environmentally cleared by Dec. 2001. These might be placed in the budget by Governor Davis to spend the projected \$3 billion surplus. And then what?

I truly enjoyed blasting Richard Katz's op-ed on the proposed Valley Transit Zone in my letter that appeared in the Nov. 7 Valley edition of the Los Angeles Times. Especially satisfying was the concluding summary: "This Zone in my letter that appeared in the Nov. 7 Valley edition of the Los Angeles Times. Especially satisfying was the concluding summary: "This process should proceed based on reality, not sound bites and rhetorical flourishes".

In other zone news, an alliance has been announced

between zone boosters in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys ("Transit Concerns Provoke Alliance", Daily News Nov. 10). This was a development I had long been predicting, especially as both areas have similar political cultures of insider power plays, "fair share" demands, etc.

Tom Wetzel in a recent usenet posting brought up an interesting slice of the Valley zone discussion that hasn't been noted: subsidy per boarding is much higher in the Valley (\$1.22) versus the urban core (76 cents). Wetzel asserts "Central L.A. is cross-subsidizing Valley bus service".

By the numbers: the Blue Line's ridership is at an all time high: 56,125!. Meanwhile the Red Line has stubbornly hovered at the 59,000 level, about what it has carried since the Hollywood extension opened. And Metrolink is at 27,843 (all figures are Sept. weekday averages, researched by Tom Nelson and Dick Finley from the Dec. "Wheel Clicks").

Already rumors are flying as to who will be the next CEO when Julian Burke steps down. Burke has bluntly noted in public pronouncements that he hadn't intended to be at MTA as long as he has. With the North Hollywood extension opening, Burke will have achieved his key goals: restore confidence of funding partners, finish the North Hollywood extension and reform the budget process. I have long suspected the opening would be the logical point for Burke to end his tenure. But the question remains: who in their right mind would want the job?

The Los Angeles Standard Light Rail Vehicle (aka the P-2000) assembled by Siemens in Carson is three years late and costing twice as much as comparable Blue Line cars. Activist John Walsh says project delivery was lengthened to accommodate budgetary problems. When I brought this issue to the attention of the MTA Board all they could offer was a weak explanation: "We asked for a report on that some time ago". Board oversight certainly seems lacking in this instance.

The favorable coverage of rapid bus in the Los Angeles Times ("Will Tripping the Lights Be Fantastic?", Nov. 28) was heartening. And I suspect the BRU arguments that limited stop bus service shouldn't be folded into rapid bus is part of their strategy (that keeps the grant money flowing) to

only grudgingly concede any progress is occurring with MTA bus service.

I sent a letter to the MTA Board expressing our support of the Yaroslavsky motion to have MTA staff by January prepare a financial and operational plan to extend rail hours to serve Staples Center and the Music Center (agenda item #55, Dec. 2 MTA Board meeting). And by February staff are to prepare plans for extending service hours when the Red Line extension opens to North Hollywood next year.

Pray Y2K doesn't knock out the power grid. MTA staff at a recent MTA Citizen Advisory Council meeting stated generators at Divisions can't supply enough power to operate CNG fuelling. Which would leave us only with our dwindling diesel fleet until power is restored P.S. - how about if an earthquake strikes and knocks the power out? Same result!

Trouble ahead? "Transit Unions, MTA's Cost Cutters Face Tough Talks" by Douglas Shuit in the Nov. 30 LA Times outlines the different positions being staked out for impending labor negotiations at the agency. MTA's management seems keen on expanding the contracting of service. And of course the UTU union considers that unacceptable. Probably a lot of this is just public posturing. My prediction: BDOF instead of contracting will be expanded.

My latest salvo against smart shuttle appeared in the Dec. 1 Ventura County edition of the LA Times. This responded to a smart shuttle contract operator's claim about its lower cost compared to MTA service. I pointed out likely he was comparing hourly bus wages, not cost per passenger mile by which smart shuttle is grossly cost inefficient. And my tagline? "The only benefit Smart Shuttle has produced so far is to the bottom line of the contractors who operate it".

Recently someone declared the Southern California Intercity Rail Group all but dead. This because it had backed away from what originally it was created to do: take over operation of the San Diegan. But SCIRG is providing an invaluable service by involving the entire region in advocating coordination of the commuter and intercity rail systems. As a watchdog and funder of analyses it could prove invaluable.

Funny snafu of the month: Access Service Inc. (LA County's coordinated paratransit provider) recently had a grant held up by the Federal Transit Administration due to a geographic misunderstanding about where ASI's service area is. The FTA mistook Santa Clara County for Santa Clarita! A six Administration due to a geographic misunderstanding about where ASI's service area is. The FTA mistook Santa Clara County for Santa Clarita! A six foot map of LA County with ASI's service boundaries on it quickly cleared things up.

Speaking of ASI, they have begun the process of having Santa Clarita Transit and AVTA's paratransit double as the ADA provider under a direct subsidy arrangement. This will reduce duplication and confusion to users. Thumbs up to ASI for being proactive in its approach.

Question of the month: when will the Daily News assign a new reporter to the MTA beat? How can they neglect what has been such a rich source of headlines and scoops?

OCTA's proposed Centerline light rail project recently hit a buzzsaw of local opposition as the City Councils of Orange and Santa Ana voted to oppose it. Hastily the agency scaled back its plans to include only the Southern half of the proposed alignment between Costa Mesa and Irvine, linking South Coast Plaza shopping center, the Irvine Spectrum, UC Irvine and the Irvine Transportation Center. Ironically this means the \$125 million I mentioned last month will now be included in the project budget since all conditions of the city of Irvine will be met. Member John Ulloth wonders at the editorial intent of the LA Times' murderous language in headlining its Nov. 21 article "Orange County to Slash Length of Planned Rail Line". Also why said article was buried on the bottom of an obituary page, wrapped around an ad for Hollywood Funeral Home.

The Nov. issue of "California Corridors" breaks the story of a rumored \$2 billion bond issue for transit the Planning and Conservation League is currently shopping to insiders. PCL is credible to undertake such an effort given its history, including sponsorship of Proposition 116 in 1990 which provided \$1.99 billion in state bond funds for passenger trains and transit. Overall the situation in the Capital regarding infrastructure is volatile. (to pg. 6)

(from pg. 5) The High Speed Rail Authority is getting cold feet due to growing political discord over the price tag of the proposed system. It proposes to spend two years undertaking more environmental studies instead of recommending a \$25+ billion bond issue for the Nov. 2000 ballot as had originally been anticipated. John Shields of Californians for High Speed Passenger Rail (<http://www.speedtrain.org/>) spoke at the Authority's Nov. 17 meeting in Los Angeles, expressing concern at the delay. Shields hopes to mount a major promotional effort for high speed rail with substantial private funding when a ballot measure is put forward, which he hopes will be sooner rather than later.

Hardly noticed was the recent resignation of Federal Transit Administrator Gordon Linton, the longest serving head of the Federal Transit Program since it began in 1961. I will always appreciate Linton's role in forcing MTA to finally come clean about the infeasibility of its rail construction plans. FTA Acting Administrator is Nuria Fernandez.

The Nov. 4 Downtown News published my letter lauding LADOT interim general manager Frances Banerjee for helping initiate rapid bus. And I sincerely meant it!

I attended the Dec. 2 meeting of the Echo Park Community Action Committee. They currently are providing oversight to improvements in the Glendale Blvd. corridor funded by a grant from MTA. This only after tenaciously fighting to a standstill LADOT traffic engineers who wanted to facilitate throughput of cars accessing downtown Los Angeles from the stub of the Glendale Freeway via the Blvd. In the end the Committee prevailed in having a community orientation instead take precedence. More information: (323) 663-6767 or jayebea@earthlink.net

What was the only other media outlet besides this newsletter to note Zev's contradictory votes on MTA funds for Playa Vista? The Southern Sierran ("MTA Won't Reconsider \$30 million Giveaway" by Martin Schlageter in the December issue), which is the monthly newspaper of the Angeles chapter of the Sierra Club. If any of our members also belong to the Angeles chapter (which covers Los Angeles and Orange counties) that might want to check out its new transportation committee: (818) 506-8731 or jkidw@aol.com.

What was he thinking? Palmdale councilman Joe Davies also serves as Chair of the AVTA Board of Directors. The minutes of the Oct. 25 meeting quotes him regarding standees on buses, "[Davies] asked if we should consider cutting back on advertising temporarily to control the increase in ridership." A fellow board member responded with the opinion that instead of trying to reduce demand the agency should evaluate the possible need to increase service.

Delaware Valley Rail Passenger" reports the German Maglev project is on the verge of collapse due to high cost. What does this mean for SCAG's hopes of a regional maglev network?

The American Institute of Architects recently sponsored the first survey of state and local officials on livability issues. Key finding: more than two-thirds of responding policy makers believe these issues are of growing concern. <http://www.earchitect.com/gov/livcomsurvey/home.htm>

Ever wonder how much money the W. Alton Jones Foundation gave for the campaign to promote Curitiba-style busways for Los Angeles? \$286,000. Plus \$100,000 to the Environmental Defense Fund to build community support for a busway system.

The Nov. 19 California Corridors in the monthly Tracking the Rails column has a write-up on SO.CA.TA under the headline "They also serve, for no pay". Columnist Bud Lembke in three paragraphs outlines our mission and quotes me on a few issues such as bus vs. rail. As a result already we have had one inquiry from a possible new member.

I conclude this month with a fond farewell to the humorous Santa Monica Bank ads that have decorated the back of Big Blue Bus vehicles for 20 years (<http://www.smbank.com/BusSign/index.html>). The campaign is another victim of consolidation in the banking industry (Santa Monica Bank is being absorbed by US Bank). And the text of the final ad? "After 20 Years on the Bus We've Reached our Stop".■

RESPONSE TO NOV. PLAC REPORT *Tom Rubin*

Re: compliance with the TDA farebox recovery requirements -- no one has ever lost any funding due to this. In fact, MTA has been out of compliance for years. In the rare events where it actually gets close to any agency losing funds, a local legislator puts in an exception bill, and it is passed. Legally, you're right; practically, there is no penalty for non-compliance.

The lower fare would be the best thing that ever happened as far as increasing ridership in the County. The problem, of course, is where the money is going to come from? It isn't the loss of fare revenue that's the issue as is the increased number of buses that would have to be purchased and operated. Did I give you a copy of my analysis of what the costs would be?

You are absolutely right about the decline in the number of ridechecks and pointchecks, but you don't have the full story. In the "good old days," MTA did three full ridechecks each year for each family of bus lines (one weekday, one Saturday, one Sunday), as well as doing pointchecks on a regular basis and a lot of other things as required. Then, as a cost-savings measure, MTA reduced the size of the checker staff by over half and pushed the counts back to one every fifteen months, then every eighteen months, and pretty much eliminated the weekend counts. Then the Consent Decree hit with the requirements to do RIDECHECKS. MTA never staffed up the counter staff, so something had to give. Even though the CD is very clear as to performing ridechecks, MTA has only done pointchecks. MTA hasn't done any regular ridechecks since the Summer of '97.

What MTA is trying to do is convert to Automatic Passenger Count to eliminate a lot of the need for manual checks. The problem is the reliability of the equipment and the precision. MTA is having a hard time getting to 90% accuracy of counts, which is just not good enough in this environment -- if the maximum load is 56, then MTA is OK, but if it is 59, it is in violation -- and that's a 5% difference. Even if there is APC, there are still a lot of things that humans have to do -- including make sure that the APC is halfway accurate. The problem is far less the CD counting requirements than it is MTA's failure to replace the counting staff that it should have never cut in the first place -- as well as totally failing to meet the CD requirements, which has caused the "pointcheck" requirements to stay high.

As to Eric saying that MTA could come up with the buses that same way that the Atlanta bus fleet was increased for the Olympics, I really don't think that this is out of line. MTA would have to call in some favors from other agencies, but it could be done. However, the interesting thing is that buses are not really the problem in meeting the CD requirements. In fact, MTA could meet Chief Judge Hatter's Order without getting one additional bus over and above what it already has coming in. This would mean keeping golden oldies around a bit longer, but what else is new? MTA has so many buses that it is in the process of retiring right now, it would only have to keep about half of the them in service. This is not what Chief Judge Hatter told them to do, but since when has this has been a consideration with MTA?

Of course, even though the Order is real clear and MTA is supposed to get 248 additional buses and operate them by early January, MTA has convinced itself that it only has to procure 195 and operate 88 -- don't ask, it doesn't make any sense to anyone who doesn't work for MTA. (Why would Chief Judge Hatter order MTA to procure 195 buses, but only operate 88? Sure, that makes sense.)

I've been looking around and I see absolutely no problem with MTA getting the buses. The bigger problem is operators and mechanics. I don't know if MTA could get all they would need by January for 248 buses, but for 88 -- should not be a problem at all even though MTA claims otherwise.

As to Lines 58, 214, 530, and 577 -- these are all operated by contractors now, which is legal under the terms of the UTU contract, so replacing the contractor is not that much of an issue. The thing that is a bit disappointing is that, under the terms of the UTU contract, MTA could elect to use BDOF operators at \$10 per hour with far lower employee benefits. I think that there is a reasonable chance that, if MTA itself bid for this line with BDOF operators, it could win. What has MTA to lose from trying, other than the time to prepare the proposal? MTA would have a lot of advantages that are perfectly fair and legal, such as not having to pay for operating yards because it already has what it needs.

RIVERSIDE EXCURSION *Dana Gabbard*

At about 8:15 a.m. on Saturday Oct. 30 a small group gathered at Los Angeles Union Station to participate in SO.CA.TA's study tour/exploration of the Riverside Transit Agency system. Our principle goal was to see first hand the changes that occurred on April 18 due to RTA's restructuring. The group included myself, Director Armando Avalos, members Russ Jones, Joe Dunn and Woody Rosner plus *Western Transit* editor Edmund Buckley. Our first order of business was to purchase tickets for the Metrolink train #380 departing LAUS at 8:30 a.m. on the San Bernardino line. The train trip was uneventful and we passed the time trading transit gossip plus gawking at the many pictures of transit equipment brought by Russ. Three possible itineraries (prepared by Vice President Charles Powell, who unfortunately was unable to go on the trip) were distributed for evaluation. It was our good fortune that this particular weekend Metrolink was running service to the new NASCAR racetrack near Fontana. It was the first time any of us had ridden the spur used to access the Metrolink station adjacent to the track.

On Saturday most of the San Bernardino trains continue to Riverside via the trackage used by the Inland Empire/Orange County weekday Metrolink line. This is primarily single track and goes through rather stark industrial areas. We spent a few minutes stopped while freights on crossing tracks passed yet still arrived at the Riverside station early (10:28 a.m. versus the scheduled 10:40 a.m.). Since our first bus connection was tight we were glad to have the extra time. By then "Alternative #1" had been chosen as our itinerary, consisting mostly of local lines in Moreno Valley and Riverside. Deboarding we encountered Madeleine, a Metrolink Ambassador, handing out schedules and answering questions. Amtrak timetables for the "San Joaquin" were prominent in the schedule rack adjacent to her (the station is served by Amtrak Thruway buses that connect with that train in Bakersfield). We hastily made our way to nearby University Avenue to catch our first bus, #16. RTA recently instituted new bus stop signs consisting of an arrow on top of the pole pointing down with the legend "The Bus Stops Here". Very eye-catching and hard to miss. It turned out a air show was

going on downtown (we saw planes overhead in maneuvers) and several streets were blocked off. Our bus turned off Lime Street on a detour onto University, at 10:54 a.m. By great good luck this is the stop where we were waiting to catch it. We climbed aboard and were on our way. Ridership was decent - about 21 passengers (all ride counts include the 6 in our group). The vehicle was a TMC RTS, #9207 (all equipment descriptions courtesy of Russ Jones). As we wound thru the campus of the University of California-Riverside there was a decent amount of boarding and deboarding. We continued thru a commercial and residential district. While travelling on Canyon Crest we sighted a sign for the Highlander Hauler Shuttle, which operates for UCR students between campus and nearby apartment districts. Construction on Box Springs forced another detour, this one for a short distance on the 60 freeway. Now we had a chance to see first hand one of the route restructurings. Rt. 16 previously wound thru Moreno Valley before ending at the Moreno Valley Mall. Part of its route was transferred to rt.17 to facilitate a more direct link between the Mall and Riverside. We deboarded at the Mall about 11:20 a.m. and went inside to have lunch at the food court.

Food courts from one Mall to the next are barely distinguishable, so I will merely state everyone seemed happy with the food procured and the break time provided in the itinerary to rest a bit before continuing the trip.

At 12:32 p.m. we boarded rt.18 (another restructured route) at the Mall. It was a Flexible CNG #9506 with an inoperative headsign and about 15 passengers. Near the Mall we saw horse rides for kids and a booth selling pumpkins (due to Halloween). About 10 riders got off along Ironwood, after which ridership was light thru a mostly suburban area. Upon reaching JFK and Kitching (a tight turn we applauded) our group constituted the only ones on board. We arrived at Riverside Community College's Moreno Valley branch at about 1:10 p.m. It was a desolate area, except for the college consisting of empty dusty fields. And while not hot the weather definitely had

warmed up since our initial departure. The school was set well back from the street. Before crossing the street we rested on the wrong side, enjoying the sole shelter at the location. During this time a rt.19 bus arrived for its layover. This was the first bus we found on the trip to have RTA schedules. But only after Armando found them (hidden?) under a passenger seat at the front. The driver recognized Woody, explaining that he was a former RTD driver.

We finally crossed the street to catch rt.17 (which as previously mentioned had a segment added from rt.16). To our delight the vehicle turned out to be one of only three New Flyer C40LF low-floor buses that RTA has in its fleet currently (#9703). Along with one other rider we departed at 1:30 p.m. The air conditioning was welcomed after our time outdoors, although soon it began feeling too chilly. The route wound through outlying suburbs, somewhat rural, and unsurprisingly had light ridership. We got off at Allesandro and Ellsworth, near the end of the route, to catch rt.20.

While waiting, a former RTD bus (#7728, a 1980 Grumman) passed. Russ Jones informed me it is owned by A. Scott Richards who lives in Perris and has a collection of buses. Our bus came at about 2:32 p.m. (a TMC RTS #9220) with two bikes in its rack. This segment had about 14 passengers and mostly went by gated communities (with tall walls). We arrived about 2:50 p.m. at Riverside Valley Plaza, whose main bus stop is a multi-line transfer point.

At 3:03 p.m. (running about 8 minutes down, the only truly late bus that day) we caught rt.13, a 1993 Flx Metro #9308 with about 19 passengers. We only stayed on for a short hop to Colorado and Van Buriem to connect with rt.21, deboarding about 3:15 p.m.

At 3:24 p.m. we caught our last RTA bus. It was a 1995 CNG Flx Metro #9511 with an interior display headsign. Ridership numbered 12 passengers, not bad for a route that runs through mostly rural areas. Interestingly during the swing thru Pedley Metrolink station (a route segment added during the restructuring) one bike rider placed his bike on the rack and boarded. At about 4 p.m. we arrived at Country Village.

Country Village is a retirement community near the border between Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Its location makes it a logical transfer point for crossing from the RTA to Omnitrans service area, just as we were doing. And thankfully near the bus stop are restroom facilities and a small market.

At 4:35 p.m. we boarded the last bus of the trip, Omnitrans rt.21 with a 1992 TMC RTS. Along with our driver Lisa there were 7 passengers. The route varies between suburban, rural and industrial. The bike rack was used and boarding/deboarding was active. By 5:02 p.m. the passenger count had increased to 18. At 5:19 p.m. we arrived at Metrolink's Fontana station. During the time we waited for the train back to Los Angeles we watched the myriad Omnitrans bus lines that serve this location. A rt.66 in particular caught our attention as it pulled out packed with people. It turned out to be the last trip for that route, which is strange since other routes run later but seemed to not have demand equal to the 66. About that time a Metrolink racetrack special passed bound for Oceanside via San Bernardino. By now a small crowd had gathered waiting for trains going in both directions. We boarded train #391 a little after 6:30 p.m. and arrived at Union Station a few minutes late at 7:50 p.m.

Overall we were impressed that with one small exception all the buses were solidly on time and we had no glitches in moving from route to route. Obviously the restructuring accomplished its main goal of improving connectivity and service reliability. One hardship we noted was the hard to decipher system map in the RTA busbook. It uses color coding to distinguish routes. Which leaves you wondering "which shade of grey is this one?" We suggest they adopt Omnitrans' practice of augmenting colors with the actual numbers to distinguish the various routes. Russ Jones also felt individual route maps should indicate all major cross streets to aid getting your bearings as you travel. Too often only streets with connecting service were labeled.

My thanks to the participants for their good humor and relaxed manner.

So, where should we go next? ■

Tuesday Jan. 18 MTA will hold a public hearing (also at the Gateway Building) at 10 a.m. to hear comments on allowing Montebello Bus Lines operate line 104. Current service frequency would be continued and MTA fare media would be honored if this is implemented. If approved the transfer likely would occur April 3, 2000.

Director Anthony Loui and Corresponding Secretary Kris Sharp are submitting on our behalf a grant proposal for a Better Transit Services forum to the American Public Transit Association's Local Transit Coalition Program. The forum would be held in March or April and involve the latest transit improvements to be rolled out in 2000 including the Wilshire Boulevard Metro Rapid Bus Project along with transit oriented urban design projects happening in the Mid-City and Westside region. Research and presentation on future rail studies and other transit items will be involved. This forum will be geared toward public education and information to advocate better transit services for the Mid-City and Westside. Also the forum will be linked to urban design projects so that the public will have an understanding of how transit can contribute to a "livable community". Our thanks to Anthony and Kris for undertaking this exciting initiative!

Members in the news: Tom Rubin responded to MTA Deputy CEO Allan Lipsky regarding Bus vs. Rail in a letter ("Bus Service") published in the Valley edition of the Los Angeles Times Nov. 28. Rubin was also quoted in a Nov. 15 LA times article on the Blue Line ("When Rapid Transit Means Constant Risk"). Roger Christensen had a letter in the Nov. 22 Downtown News on connecting the two Blue Lines and denounced as "the phoniest of issues" the proposed San Fernando Valley Transit Zone in a letter published in the Nov. 7 edition of the Valley edition of the Los Angeles Times. SO.CA.TA's presence at a Pasadena Blue Line Authority meeting was noted in the Oct. issue of the Boulevard Sentinel (a Eagle Rock community newspaper).

The California Futures Network hopes to undertake aggressive lobbying in Sacramento next year on behalf of smart growth principles. The draft statement of the program will be circulated at our December meeting for comments.

Co-founder Steve Crosmer while in the LA area recently had a chance to ride the local rail lines. He was especially impressed with the refinishing of Metrolink's passenger cars by Goodwill and the design of the Hollywood/Vine Red Line station.

Member Joseph Markham wrote us regarding his frustration at the continued closure of the information center at El Monte station.

We recently contact MTA regarding a situation at the Norwalk Green Line station first brought to our attention by member Mike Baron. Eastbound MTA line 121, which connects the station with the Norwalk civic center, is scheduled to leave the station at 6:08 a.m. This also happens to be exactly when a Green Line train arrives at the station. Usually passengers are unable to get from the train platform to the bus stop in time. 4 minutes later a 2nd Green Line train is scheduled to arrive. Since the next 121 isn't scheduled under 6:38, all those bound for the Civic Center from two trains must use Norwalk line 4 (which comes at 6:25 a.m.). Since this is operated with a mini-bus, the conditions are quite crowded. MTA in response informs us, "There will be some schedule adjustments effective with the operator shake-up on December 5, 1999. The Line 120-121 will operate three minutes later at 6:11 a.m. eastbound from the I-605/I105 Norwalk Station. We have also decided to add a connection note". We hope this will help address the situation.

The MTA's Southeast Area Bus Transit Restructuring Study is currently underway. For more information contact Jimmy Tokeshi of the consulting firm Lang & Murkawa at LMOfc@aol.com or (213) 239 6688. The final recommendations are due in April or May.

Hotline for MTA's Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Study: (310) 366-6443.
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VIEW FROM THE BACK OF THE BUS *Van Ajemian*

Will surprises never end? What would you do if the driver of a bus, a friend, asked you for fifty cents when you boarded?

Well, this driver did. I thought that he was borrowing money, but while I was still somewhat nonplussed, he told me to deposit the remainder in the fare box. He then turned to a woman sitting in front and gave her the fifty cents because she had overpaid.

'Wow,' I thought. If only there were some way to put the word out about gestures like that. How do you put the word out?

But, on the other hand, on the same bus route, a different driver one day asked over the public-address system that passengers not call the transit agency with their complaints; rather, that the passengers talk with her.

'Hmm', I pondered. Having spoken with several drivers of this agency, I knew that relations among many drivers and management needed improvement, that a team spirit was lacking. This driver's request demonstrated this problem.

So, can a passenger do anything to improve driver-management relations? And if not that, to at least let drivers know that passengers are not the enemy? (Sounds funny? Not if you are passed up by a stressed or angry driver while you are waiting at a bus stop.)■

LINE OF SEPARATION FOR THE SEVERAL SECTIONS OF THE JOURNAL
(from p. 10) Recent awards to local transit agencies include Big Blue Bus being ranked #1 for a second year in a row by the University of North Carolina's survey of urban transit systems for cost-effective performance. Meanwhile Montebello and Omnitrans snagged honors in their classes for "outstanding achievement"

from the American Public Transit Association. Way to go!

New webpages for transit agencies include LADOT at <http://www.ladottransit.com> and El Monte Trolley at <http://www.elmonte.org/transp.html>. The Pacific Bus Museum has new website and e-mail addresses: <http://www.pacbus.org> and pbmbuses@pacbus.org

Ed Simburger's Yerba Seca Publications continues to add to its catalog of books and videos on rail travel. Its latest production (ready for holiday giving) is a video on the opening weekend of the Red Line extension to Hollywood. For details write P.O. Box 975 Agoura CA 91376 or <http://www.trainweb.com/yerbaseca/> or yerbaseca@earthlink.net

Videotapes of the Nov. 6 Big Blue Bus public hearing can be purchased from the CityTV (cable channel 16 of Santa Monica) for \$20. Further information: (310) 458-8590.

"For the Love of Trains" is a new video documenting 50 years of railroad adventuring by members of the Pacific Railroad Society. Cost is \$19.95 to: Pacific Railroad Museum, attn: Video, 210 W. Bonita Ave., San Dimas CA 91773.

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. ■