

## **BULLETIN BOARD**

Our guest speaker at the August 13<sup>th</sup> meeting will be Victor Franco, Senior Vice President of Governmental Affairs for the Central City Association, making a presentation on the proposal to bring back streetcars in downtown Los Angeles. The meeting starts at 1:00 pm with the presentation to follow at 2:15 pm. After the brief presentation there will be time for questions and answers. We will be in room 422 at Angelus Plaza, 255 S. Hill Street.

Also at our August 13 meeting, we will have discussions about our fall study tour of MTA contracted service.

We will also consider presentations made of candidate venues for our holiday banquet. The holiday banquet was brought up at the July SO.CA.TA meeting. There was an obvious a preference for returning to the Colonial Buffet in Long Beach. However, the Colonial is still "Closed For Remodeling", for so long now that we have to sincerely doubt it will ever return. Members were instructed to collect information for banquet locations they like, to bring to the membership at the August 2005 meeting. Information needed includes:

- \* Availability of private or semi-private room on the evening of Saturday, December 10th, 2005
- \* If not a buffet or cafeteria, a menu of what persons in our party can order that evening
- \* Per-person cost
- \* Amount and time limit of deposit, if any
- \* Can members get there on public transit from downtown, and home from there.

All viable candidates will be voted on by members in attendance at the August meeting. Members will be allowed to vote for every restaurant they like, and there

will be a run-off between the top two.

After the regular meeting, the Detour Committee expects to meet. Per Detour Committee co-chair Edmund Buckley:

*"We are trying to reactivate the Committee and are seeking possible members who are asked to develop a list of the types of items of greatest concern to them. The Committee co-chairs (John Ulloth and Edmund Buckley) are collecting, where available, copies of transit agency practices regarding detours."*

Access Services, Inc. is holding daylong Strategic Workshops open to the public including material on ASI's policies and procedures, the current Rider's Guide and Americans with Disabilities regulations. The workshop for the Transportation Professionals Advisory Committee (August 11) and the Community Advisory Committee (Sept. 11) will be held at the Huntington Library in San Marino. The ASI Board of Directors' workshop will be held Oct. 19 at the AON Center, 707 Wilshire Bl., downtown Los Angeles in the 6th floor training room.

Caltrans is offering Transportation Planning Grants in various categories. Details and application are at <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/grants.htm>. Deadline is Oct. 14.

Eye on Infrastructure is a free e-newsletter produced by the California Infrastructure Coalition. Subscribe via the form at <http://www.calinfrastructure.org/index.php>.

The online California Budget Challenge is a educational exercise that allows citizens a chance to make their own budgets and experience the challenges our state faces during the next 10 years: <http://www.next-ten.org>. ■

# San Diego Gets More Buses, Trains

John Jay Ulloth

*Dateline: San Diego*

## **JUNE 25th, THE "SNEAK PEEK"**

San Diego Electric Railway Association (SDERA) chartered an excursion over MTS "Trolley's" new Green Line, previewing some of southern California's most dramatic new rail engineering to 4 new stations through east Mission Valley, interconnecting to the Orange Line at Grossmont Transit Center, and running to end of track at Santee. Since SO.CA.TA.'s study tour there, Santee Town Center has grown into a big outdoor shopping mall surrounding the tracks, with some odd and unnecessary car crossings between parts of the parking lot! But because of single track capacity, the northbound Orange Line now terminates at Gillespie Field instead of Santee.

Over 100 attendees (including Ken Ruben) parted with about \$40 each for the privilege, allowed SDERA to charter a 2nd new Siemens low floor car, helping MTS test multiple unit (MU) operation. Rumored by attendees to be troublesome even between new cars; and hinted at by our tour guide that MU was virtually impossible between new and older cars, the number of computers on the new cars (some said 38, some said 10) was blamed; at least 1 Siemens engineer is on the premises all summer to make sure the new cars work.

SDERA's trip began with a wide-ranging shop tour just steps from the 12th & Imperial Orange-Blue Line transfer station. Our tour guide, train operator, and all staff seemed delighted to be there and talk to us. They showed us the wheel-truing machine, yard switch operation, ran a railcar through the car wash for us, we took a

look at Austrian streetcars (MTS was going to use for an historic tram, but is now giving to SDERA). Though everyone wanted to stay longer, we boarded, following Blue Line track north to get to the Green Line's west end, at Old Town Transit Center. Surprisingly, the new low-floor, streamlined cars running through Blue Line stations caused no stir among MTS patrons. Turning east onto the Green Line (new total length 19 miles) we soon reached the highly-elevated Grantville station 40 feet in the air above the I-8 freeway for "photo run-bys" on or off the train. Crawling steeply up a slot cut on the south edge of the freeway embankment (ruling grade 4.4%), we entered the west portal for San Diego State University (SDSU) Transit Center, turned sharply, flanges squealing, around the 4,000 foot tunnel's sharp curves, into the most breathtaking (where most of the money went) Green Line station--the Trolley's first subway.

A pedestrian walkover inside exits onto a sunken grassy campus amphitheatre facing the north side of the station. Elevators connect both levels to the on-campus bus plaza, an on-street operation right above the tracks. Artfully decorated by neon, glass handrails, reflective & screen panels, SDSU compares well with LACMTA's Red Line stations (not as rich as Hollywood's, but less utilitarian than say City College); windows that let in light from the amphitheatre side are a great improvement over MTA's subway stations.

## **JULY 8<sup>TH</sup>**

SO.CA.TA Vice President Lionel Jones & Director Hank Fung were attending the agency debut of the line for officials on Friday; I tried to reach Hank's cell phone thinking they might have stayed over for

the public's opening day (the hotel room less than an Amtrak round trip), but they'd traveled by bus, and did not stay over.

## **JULY 9<sup>TH</sup>, OPENING DAY**

Free-ride hours were limited to the Green Line, and lasted only from 10a.m.-3p.m., though I saw no fare enforcement sweeps at 3p.m. Little surprise then trains were packed like sardine cans. I arrived early at SDSU chatting with a very cool, frank MTS Planner about what's next, the cost of features on the Green Line, prospects for widespread transit ridership & stopping sprawl, instead of building freeways. I gave him a copy of our newsletter, invited him to meet with us or make a presentation if he had one ready. He said input transit advocates could offer is "welcome", and "MTS is very open to constructive criticism..." Just another part of the MTS' exemplary can-do, pro-customer attitude another agency we know about seems chronically short of. Websters can reach him at [mark.thomsen@sdmts.com](mailto:mark.thomsen@sdmts.com).

Going downstairs for a train, I spotted a familiar ponytail, belonging to Director Armando Avalos, inspecting Cubic System's new Smart-Card-capable fare machine; touring the line along with member Johnny Adel (Benicia Transit)--what coincidence! We hadn't really seen the Alvarado Medical Center station- extremely convenient to its namesake's doors- before, so we squeezed into a train and got there for the opening. Like MTA, all stations had artists; Roman De Salvo cast letters spelling out a riddle into the poured concrete retaining wall holding back I-8 freeway traffic above... his contribution to the health care theme- to get you to walk the length of the station to solve the riddle! Likewise, I hadn't seen 70<sup>th</sup> Street station, but it seemed

to be little more than a bus stop and Park-n-Ride (130 spaces) in a narrow gap between the freeway and the bottom of a cliff.

We went to lunch at Santee; after lunch, Armando & Johnny went to ride buses. Because trains weren't the only new transit event on Green Line's opening; July 9 was picked as the official debut of 47 new low-floor busses with the new MTS logo & paint- that keeps the eye busy- reminiscent of 1960's Op-Art - significant improvement over the uninspired red, white, & blue blocks. MTS routes that have changed due to the Green Line include: 1 & 936 now end at 70<sup>th</sup> Street station, 13 connects to Grantville & SDSU, 14 & 18 (both new) stop at Grantville and Fashion Valley or Rio Vista, with added local service between. Route 40 goes out of local- into express-service to downtown S.D. after the Grantville stop. Route 81 was canceled; the Green line replaced it entirely. For more, call 1(800) COMMUTE; websters can download route information & updated schedules at <http://www.sdcommute.com>.

MTS is expecting great productivity out of this line- 11,000 daily riders (4,300 of these projected from SDSU alone), and it should- Half a Billion dollars were spent to go 5.8 miles that doesn't lead to anywhere particularly new. Revenue service began July 10; time will tell.

## **JULY 16 TRAC MEETING AT SDERA**

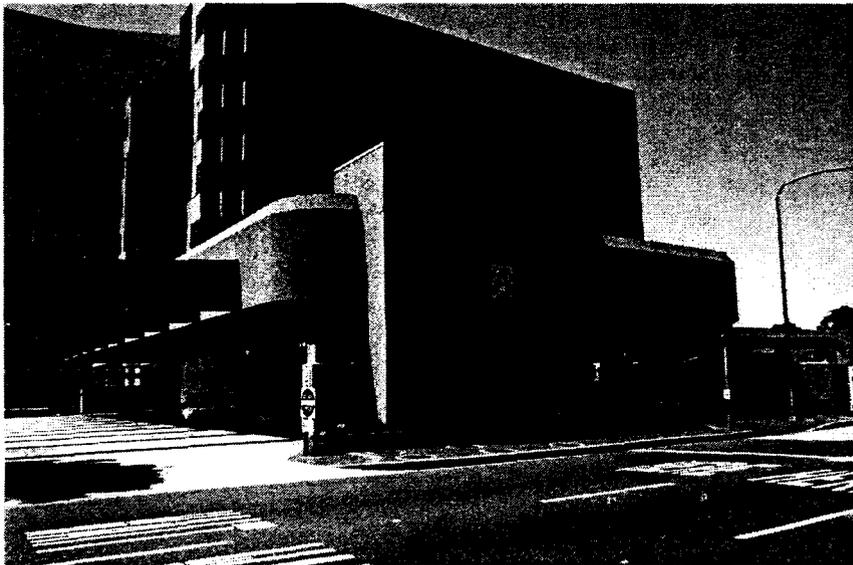
Due to complete meltdown of the I-5 freeway \*\*, I arrived massively late at Train Riders Association of California's (TRAC) public meeting that began at SDERA at 1p.m. But not late enough to miss a great presentation on east-west lines through Mexico that could run (freight) around Union Pacific. Or the Q&A

## **SAN DIEGO TROLLEY *contd from pg 4***

period, asking former State Senator Jim Mills (currently a TRAC board member) whether there had been any plans to give the Green Line somewhere to go- namely a destination to layover right inside San Diego's airport, straight west from the Blue Line's Middletown station. Mills replied there have been suggestions San Diego's airport may not stay at Lindbergh Field, but if it does, he would see the advantage of an airport line, but would be in favor of a route branching west from a point on the Blue Line further north. A clever woman in the audience suggested "using the car rental office" (National, I believe) next door to the Middletown platform, whose free bus you could catch right to the airport, then catch the train instead of renting a car! I also attempted to ask Mills whether the possibility of pulling a self-propelled railcar behind a Coaster train, then switching it off at Oceanside for a 1-seat ride from Santa Fe station to Escondido had entered the thinking of its planners. He answered the

Sprinter isn't F.R.A.-crashworthy, which missed (or dodged?) the point of the question. After the meeting, I went out with TRAC's Executive Director Alan Miller, board member Mike Dickerson, his wife, and a couple visitors from Escondido to ride the Green Line- we were not lucky enough to ride the new equipment, but we were impressed with early evening ridership.

**[\*\* LATE TO SAN DIEGO? DRIVING: CHEAP BUT STUPID; A TALE OF 3 WEEKENDS**  
*After \$700 in car repairs, I didn't feel I had \$70 for Amtrak, so drove the first 2 weekends, leaving Mission Hills before 7a.m. into San Diego at 9:30am: 2+1/2 hours elapsed. July 16th, I'd left at 9a.m. for the 1p.m. TRAC meeting. But still crawling through the middle of Camp Pendleton at 12:30, I ditched my car for a Surfliner in Oceanside, and MTS' Blue Line to 24th Street, a 3 block walk west to SDERA's restored National City Depot. A whopping 5+3/4 hours elapsed! Exhausting! The freeway is truly no longer viable.] ■*

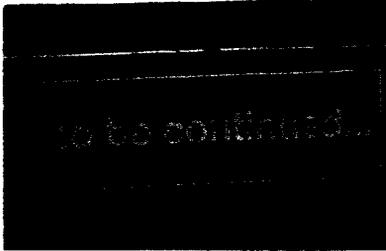


## **SANTA ANA TRANSIT TERMINAL CLOSING**

OCTA is making plans to sell and move its buses out of SATT, at an as-yet unannounced date in the near future. Stops and layovers will be shifted to Flower St. (the main transfer point prior to SATT), Civic Center, Ross, and Main. Details to follow.

*Mark Strickert photo*

# NEW MTS Trolley Green Lin



PROMISE MADE...

...PROMISE KEPT!

An edge-of-campus sign advertises multimodal service to S.D.S.U.



New Green Line cars meet an older Gold Line train at Santee.



Over 100 signed up for the sneak preview of the extension that started with a yard tour just steps from the 12th & Imperial station

an elevator tower connects bus lines at-grade above (left), to the Trolley's campus subway station off the plaza below (right)



SoCaTA Director-At-Large Ken Ruben poses on a new el station in Mission Valley

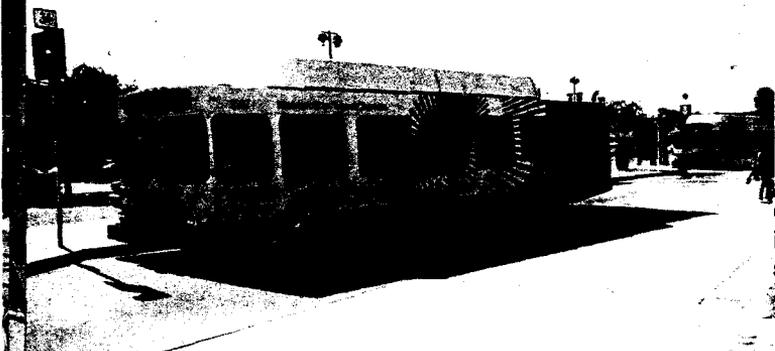
le

Grantville Station  
13, 40

SDSU Transit Center  
1, 11, 13, 936, 115, 955

Alvarado Medical Center Station  
936

70th Street Station  
959\*Proposed



Old Town San Diego- the Transfer Center that has it all! Bus bays on both sides of the tracks, staffed snack shop, toilets, "Old Town Trolley Tours"...

The new logo and red & white color scheme is still rare on busses.



... the MTS Trolley arrives just across the street from Old Town San Diego State Historic Park...

An MTS trolley arrives to exchange passengers with an Amtrak Surfliner at San Diego's historic Santa Fe Station



A dual-plated bus arrives on the U.S. side of the border, with MTS bus bays & Trolley (in mid-ground). Tour busses stop at a parking lot before entering Mexico (near top, below freight cars)



...an easy cross-platform transfer to Coaster, Amtrak, & a pedestrian tunnel to bike boxes and a Park & Ride lot!

## **PUBLIC AND LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS**

Dana Gabbard

It has been a busy month. A compromise federal transportation funding reauthorization bill finally emerged from conference and should soon be signed by the President. Also a Bay Bridge funding deal was reached between the Governor and legislative leaders. One would almost be tempted to start singing "Everything's Coming Up Roses" except our recent campaign on behalf of the Spring Street contra-flow bus only lanes ended in failure, with the L.A. City Council adopting the recommendations of the L.A. Dept. of Transportation (LADOT). We are at work on some recommendations of our own we will shortly be submitting to LADOT in hopes of mitigating the adverse impact on transit users.

At our July 16 meeting we adopted a position that MTA after the recent closure of two Customer Centers explore replacement facilities plus expansion in areas that lack Centers. As a first step we submitted a letter of support for San Fernando Valley Service Sector Governance Council Vice Chair Kymberleigh Richards' motion to have MTA staff report on the feasibility of having the renovated Lankershim Depot (at the terminus of the Orange Line across the street from the North Hollywood Red Line station) include a Customer center. The text of the letter is posted on the front page of our website: <http://www.socata.net>. Amazing fact: Foothill Transit now has more Customer Centers than MTA!

Richard Harris in his letter "Take the A Train" in the Aug. 4 CityBeat does a far better job than I could responding to the railbashing comments so-called Urbanist Joel Kotkin made in the July 21 edition.

Here is an excerpt: "It's been obvious for a while that Joel Kotkin is an ass, and his comments on light rail serve to firmly establish his asininity [3rd Degree, July 21]. 'I think the light-rail is proving not to really have the ridership. It really is not appropriate to this area.' ... 35,000,000 riders annually on the Red Line. 22,000,000 riders annually on the Blue Line. The Blue Line is the second-busiest light rail line in the country. This is 'proving [to] not really have the ridership?' As has been proven as it's expanded -- the farther it goes, the more the rail system is used."

Another sign MTA's financial troubles are real can be found in these comments by ASI Director of Finance and Administration Jacqueline Horak in the May 2005 Financial Report Recap in the July 6 Board Box (item #5): "In the past, at the beginning of each fiscal year, LACMTA provided a significant portion of the annual Proposition C funds allocated to ASI for that year so that ASI would have sufficient funds available to pay its expenses until the federal grant money became available. Due to current financial constraints, LACMTA can no longer do so." [ASI is now bridging its budget gap by carrying over from the prior fiscal year unexpended funds].

Frank Gruber, who writes the "What I Say" column for the on-line LookOut notes the remarks of newly elected Los Angeles City Council Member Bill Rosendahl in making a courtesy call on the Santa Monica City Council "Shook everyone up when he said that he would "vet" three routes for the Exposition light rail line west of Culver City including one route -- down Venice Boulevard -- that wouldn't terminate in Santa Monica. He wondered whether the line would serve enough people if it ran through

Santa Monica's light industrial area instead of, say, to Venice. He floated a whole new idea of running a connecting line on Lincoln Boulevard from Santa Monica to a new Green Line terminus at LAX." One insider noted to me that while Rosendahl's comments on Venice Blvd. took everyone aback, the Lincoln Blvd. alignment shouldn't have as Villaraigosa spoke of it a lot in his campaign, and a multi-community task force proposed it a couple of years ago. Also, I am told Rosendahl's staff indicates the councilman continues to support both accelerating Expo to Santa Monica and studying rail to serve other Westside areas. Despite the reassurances above, one can understand why Gruber concluded "Yikes. Years ago Santa Monica, thinking ahead, instigated the purchase of the Exposition right of way to hold for future light rail use. Ever since then Santa Monicans have assumed the Expo line would come here. ... Beneath Council Member Rosendahl's affability lurked a challenge. The question is, was the council member's challenge one to Santa Monica's regional role, or one to its lack of regional consciousness?"

I was surprised at finding myself nodding agreement while reading Richard Tolmach's article "Every Hour Trains: Why Note Here?" in the June-July issue of California Rail News. I have in the past found at times Tolmach a bit bombastic but felt he made a strong case in this instance for clock-work service. Bold thinking like Tolmach's is what we will need if there is any hope of our achieving Mayor Villaraigosa's goal of residents carpooling or using transit at least once a week to reduce congestion. If the Mayor is serious, this is not merely about spending and bus equipment

deployment but reconceiving our way of thinking about urban living.

While most old transit buses are sold at auction, sometimes they have a more noble fate. Two recent examples: Riverside Transit is donating a surplus Superbus to the Riverside County Community Health Agency Dept. of Animal Services. And the Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District has sold one of its old Gilligs to American Medical Response, which plans to convert the vehicle into a mobile treatment center for use during large disasters, multi-casualty incidents and public health emergencies within Santa Barbara County.

I'll conclude this month by offering my thanks to Edmund Buckley of Western Transit for bringing to my attention this eye-opening paragraph buried in the minutes of the June 14 meeting of the Bus Operations Subcommittee: "The General Managers met on June 8. The primary item of discussion was a study that MTA has initiated with Booz Allen Hamilton to look at sweeping changes to how funding is distributed through the formula, how specific bus lines might be transferred from the MTA to munis, and how fares might become more standardized region wide. The material presented was broad and a bit confusing. The response from the GM was constrained. Booz Allen Hamilton has promised a written summary of their work to everyone by month's end. The munis informed MTA management that they too were working on an FAP proposal to be brought forward soon as part of this discussion. Shortly, the MTA and muni executive oversight committee will likely meet to review these proposals". Oh, boy!

## MEMBERS IN ACTION

Dave Snowden and Ken Ruben attended the July 8 South Bay Service Sector Governance Council meeting.

Mike Barron and Nate Zablen attended the August 3rd meeting of the SF Valley Service Sector Governance Council meeting. Nate addressed the Council and commented on the lack of follow up notification to a couple of his complaints about bus service. He also suggested that the Council members ride the Orange Line after opening day to determine if the bus-rail connections are synchronized and that there is no prolonged waiting for transferring between modes.

Vice President Lionel Jones and Director Hank Fung attended the dedication of the San Diego Trolley Mission Valley extension July 8th. Ken Ruben and John Ulloth were at the San Diego Electric Railway Association's preview June 25th. Ulloth and Armando Avalos were among the SO.CA.TA members at the public preview July 9th.

John Ulloth was in San Diego again July 16th, for the Train Riders Association of California's (TRAC) public meeting.

Roger Christensen, Dana Gabbard, Charles Powell, Ken Ruben, and Mark Strickert attended the July 27 MTA Citizens Advisory Council meeting. [*Roger asked if he was the first SO.CA.TA member to also chair the MTA's CAC? - Mark*]

Mark Strickert also attended the July 14 Gateway Sector public meeting, where their December 2005 service change proposals were explained to the sector council by staff. "Metro Connections" was invoked 3 times, about 3 times too often, in explaining adjustments to some routes.

Joining Mr. Strickert at the Foothill Transit rodeo July 9th was Carlos Oscuna.

Ruben and Mike Barron attended the August 2 San Gabriel Valley Service Sector community meeting in Glendale. Ruben spoke at the Aug. 5 Pacific Railroad Society meeting regarding our interest in visiting the PRS Museum in San Dimas some Saturday morning this fall.

Ruben was mentioned twice in the Culver City Observer about the upcoming proposed changes on lines 220 and 439 and the upcoming MTA hearings. The second mention was a correction (the first article referred to him as being Henry instead of Ken). In mid-July Ruben spoke before the Culver City Council about the aforementioned hearings, emphasizing the lines affecting Culver City (MTA lines 439 and 220). Ruben also attended the July 25 Culver City Council meeting, where Expo outreach and budgeting was discussed and voted on.

Kirk Schneider attended the California High Speed Rail Authority EIR meeting held August 3 at OCTA headquarters in Orange. ■



**ATSAC!**

Our tour of the City of Los Angeles Automated Traffic Surveillance and Control

(ATSAC) center will take place on Tuesday, August 23rd, starting at 5:00 pm. The ATSAC is at City Hall West, across from the Main St. side of City Hall. ■