

BULLETIN BOARD

SO.CA.TA Meeting Notes

At our Dec. 10 meeting elections will be held for 2006 officers and Directors-at-Large.

Directors-at-Large (3 positions):

- * Armando Avalos
- * Paul Castillo
- * Joseph Dunn
- * Hank Fung
- * Samuel James
- * Michael Milroy
- * Ken Ruben

Treasurer

- * Craig Barnes

Recording Secretary

- * Edmund Buckley

Executive Secretary

- * Dana Gabbard

Vice President

- * Hank Fung
- * Lionel Jones

President

- * Lionel Jones
- * Mark Strickert

The Election Committee, chosen from members who will not be on the 2006 ballot: Woody Rosner (chair), John Ulloth, Nate Zablén

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

Armando Avalos – Director at Large

I am Armando Avalos. I am running for the position of Director-at-large.

I bring many years of transit experience to SOCATA. I would like to continue to do for 2006.

SOCATA would be nothing if not for people who are knowledgeable about transit politics and issues. Each of us brings our own type of expertise to the table.

I urge members to help elect a team of capable people, with a balanced knowledge base. I urge you to re-elect me for Director-at-large.

Ken Ruben – Director-at-Large

Dear SOCATA Member:

My name is "Ken" Ruben and I'm a candidate for re-election to the SOCATA Board and I ask for your vote.

For the past year, I feel I have represented our organization well:

- * Organized our Orange Line Preview Tour that attracted 53 riders
- * Represented SOCATA at most MTA Westside Sector Meetings and prepared Sector Reports for the Newsletter
- * Attended most MTA Citizens Advisory Council Meetings
- * Testified for the Expo Line at Culver City Council Meetings

In 2006, I will try my best to represent SOCATA and assist with future events.

Mark Strickert – President

It is great to see members taking active part in SOCATA activities! One of my goals as president was to make our board of directors mean something again. We have met quarterly the past two years, and this needs to continue. Many members spoke or wrote to MTA regarding the many bizarre service change proposals last summer. Many of you have contributed news and photos to the newsletter since I became editor. I thank you all, and urge continued action and vigilance in 2006.

After the main meeting, we will make our way to the Original Pantry Cafe (9th and Figueroa) for our annual holiday banquet. Cost is \$25 per person for full meals with a choice of three entrees (Salmon, Beef or Chicken) plus vegetarian alternative. The event starts at 5:30 PM. 🚌

TRANSIT UPDATES

HOLIDAY TRANSIT SERVICE

We are compiling information on transit services and special events during the holiday season. We will be adding to the list on the SO.CA.TA website as more agencies announce holiday plans. If you have news or corrections, please e-mail Dana Gabbard at dgabbard@hotmail.com.

Christmas: Noel, and No Bus Either

(# - off New Year's Day too):

ANTELOPE VALLEY TRANSIT AUTHORITY #

CAMARILLO AREA TRANSIT #

CARSON CIRCUIT #

GLENDALE BEELINE #

METROLINK

MONTEREY PARK SPIRIT #

MOORPARK CITY TRANSIT #

OJAI TROLLEY #

OMNITRANS

SANTA FE SPRINGS TRAM #

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA TRANSIT AUTHORITY #

RIVERSIDE TRANSIT AGENCY (RTA)

SANTA CLARITA TRANSIT

SIMI VALLEY TRANSIT #

SOUTH COAST AREA TRANSIT #

TORRANCE TRANSIT

VISTA #

Schedule Reductions & Special Service:

CULVER CITYBUS - weekend service on Christmas and New Year's Days.

DOWNEYLINK - operating Saturdays through 12/24, from 8:45 AM to 8:30 PM.

FOOTHILL TRANSIT - On Christmas Eve (Dec. 24), Christmas Day observed (Dec. 26), New Year's Eve (Dec. 31), New Year's Day Observed (Jan. 2) the following lines will operate Sunday schedule: 178, 187, 187, 190, 191, 193, 195, 269, 272, 274, 280, 281, 283, 284, 285, 289, 291, 292, 480, 482, 486, 488, 492

LONG BEACH TRANSIT - Sunday schedule on Christmas and New Year's Days.

METROLINK - limited service on Monday, January 2, and then only on Orange County and San Bernardino lines. Reduced service On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monday January 16 (no trips with "X" on schedule)

MONTEBELLO BUS LINES - Sunday schedules on Christmas and New Year's Days, except for lines 50 and 60 which will operate on a Saturday schedule. All Montebello Bus Lines routes will operate on a regular schedule for Christmas Eve (Saturday, December 24) and New Year's Eve (Saturday, Dec. 31)

NORWALK TRANSIT - On Christmas (12/25), weekend service is operated on Routes 1, 2, 3, & 4. Sunday service on Route 5. Schedule subject to change. Verify hours of operation with Customer Service (562) 929-5550.

OMNITRANS - buses run regular schedules, but offices are closed, on Christmas Eve (observed December 23) and Christmas Day (observed December 26).

ORANGE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY (OCTA) - Sunday schedules on Christmas and New Year's Days, and on Mondays 12/26/05 and 1/2/06. Bus service will be free from Dec. 31 at 6 PM until Jan. 1, 2006 at 4 AM

RIVERSIDE TRANSIT - the annual free Corona/Norco Holiday Trolley operates the weekends of Dec. 10/11 and 17/18.

SANTA MONICA'S BIG BLUE BUS - will operate on Sunday/Holiday schedule on Sunday December 25, Monday December 26, Sunday January 1, 2006, and Monday January 2. Big Blue Bus will operate on Saturday schedule on Saturdays December 24 and 31. SUPER 12 which will not operate at all between December 19, 2005 and January 2, 2006

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ATSAC TOUR - Dana Gabbard

When we board a bus or train, how many of us ever think of what goes into operating fixed route public transit service? We see an operator behind the wheel, but behind them stand mechanics, service attendants, planners, schedulers, managers, and others whose efforts all help make the transit service we enjoy possible.

Similarly, how many of us ever think about everything that goes into the operation of the traffic control system? Behind the traffic lights and controls we see is an entire infrastructure. Often, while standing at Wilshire and Normandie, I would notice the camera on a tall pole watching the intersection. I knew it was a small link in the traffic system of Los Angeles but had only a vague idea of how that system worked.

Then fortuitously, last year at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Gold Line Eastside Extension, I met Kartik Patel, who works for LADOT's traffic control section. I mentioned my interest in their operation and he offered to give our group a tour. We exchanged business cards. After some procrastination, I followed up and arranged for a tour at 5 p.m. on Aug. 23.

On that date the following members assembled in the lobby of City Hall East in downtown Los Angeles: Henryka Maslowski, Perias Pillay (& guest), Hank Fung, Kent Landfield and Dana Gabbard. Because Kartik was on paternity leave, Mr. Gordon Kam of LADOT greeted us and escorted our small group into the bowels of the building.

We took an elevator down to where the traffic control center is located, four floors beneath City Hall East. After making our way through corridors and past several doors (one of which was a formidable looking blast

door), we arrived at the ATSAC control room.

We were introduced to Quan Tran of LADOT, who was to make the presentation. He stood before a bank of TV monitors as we settled into some chairs arrayed in front of him. Tran began by explaining that the Automated Traffic Surveillance and Control (ATSAC) System controls traffic flow by coordinating timing of traffic signals using information gathered from induction coils in the pavement, augmented with cameras to monitor key intersections. The system was introduced in the Coliseum area during the 1984 Olympic Games. It proved so successful that the city of Los Angeles decided to expand it citywide. To date, ATSAC has been implemented at 3,100 of the 4,300 signalized intersections in Los Angeles, with another 157 being designed and 133 under construction this year. The gaps include some areas of the San Fernando Valley and the I-5 corridor.

He then indicated the monitors behind him and noted they provide visual information on key intersections. As we named major locales about the city, he punched some buttons and - voila! - we were looking at the location itself. Soon we were watching live video of Rapid Buses at the intersection of Wilshire and Westwood.

We asked if he could show us the contraflow bus lane on Spring Street in front of City Hall, but we couldn't locate an appropriate intersection to facilitate such a view. With the impending opening of the Orange Line, we were curious how it would interact with the traffic system. In moments we were looking at the intersection where the line crosses Reseda Blvd. And when questions arose regarding rail service, soon we were watching the Blue Line running along Wash-

ington Blvd. and Gold Line trains arriving at and departing from a station.

Besides the camera displays, there was also screens displaying information from the transponders on the Rapid Buses. These buses were represented by green and red icons, the latter color indicating vehicles that were behind schedule. Perias was disappointed to learn that only Rapid Buses that are running behind schedule, not all of them, get signal priority. He also inquired regarding the light rail trains and was told that all of them get priority all the time.

The information gathered from the coils directs changes to the timing of street signals to improve traffic flow. New software currently being installed will be more flexible in responding to conditions.

Los Angeles is on the cutting edge of traffic control. Tran explained only a few major metropolitan areas around the U.S. have begun to undertake similar systems for their

traffic. Surprisingly New York has barely started launching theirs.

We were then shown another of the latest innovations - optical cable. These light-weight strands can carry thousands of signals linking the ATSC system. By comparison we were shown a bulky heavy bundle of metal wires that the optical cable supplanted; as Henryka noted, the difference between the two was pretty striking.

Also we learned about plans to make real-time traffic information available to the public, which is already happening to some extent via the site <http://trafficinfo.lacity.org/>

As the presentation concluded, we all expressed appreciation for the opportunity to see this modern marvel. Ours thanks to LADOT for their hospitality and forbearance of our many questions.

[Thanks to Henryka Maslowski and Perias Piliay for suggestions and additional details to round-out this report] 🚗

TRANSIT UPDATES cont'd from pg. 3

THOUSAND OAKS TRANSIT - weekend bus service for the holiday season. On Saturdays 12/10 and 12/17, the transit service will operate from 10 AM. to 6 PM. On Sundays 12/11 and 12/18, it will run from noon to 6 PM.

TORRANCE TRANSIT - Saturday schedules Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve

Some Changes to Note:

MTA METRO - With the December schedule change the San Pedro - Wilmington - Carson - Artesia Transit Center - Harbor Transitway - Los Angeles buses will operate middays only between San Pedro and the Artesia Transit Center. Riders are advised on the timetable that there will be a 5 - 10 minute wait to transfer to a 444 or 445 between the

Artesia Transit Center and Los Angeles. If the 444, 445, 446, and 447 routes remain the same in Los Angeles riders during the midday shortline hours will be puzzled which streets to wait for southbound Transitway. This is because buses since 445 operates on different streets than the 444, 446, and 447.

Whenever one sees suspicious items or behavior on any MTA bus or train [including to report tagging], contact the Transit Service Bureau of the L.A. Sheriff's office (contracted to police MTA services) 24 hours a day via its public access phone numbers: (323) 563-5000 or (888) 950-7233. For ongoing non-emergency problems e-mail the Transit Service Bureau at MetroSheriff@lasd.org

Well, the consent decree is starting to wind down now that Donald Bliss has rejected the Bus Riders Union's ludicrous freeway bus plan. And I think the conditions Bliss placed on the Metro Rapid plan MTA submitted are only reasonable to ensure these services are able to fulfill their potential. Though frankly I wonder where MTA will be able to scrape up the money to make good on their promises.

I bet every bus driver in L.A. had a good laugh at the breathless way the media dealt with the first few collisions on the Orange Line caused by auto drivers ignoring red lights. Heck, anyone who rides the bus is familiar with how crazy and reckless the behavior often is among the automobile drivers in this area.

My friend Kym Richards shared with me the news she heard via a communication of California Transit Association Executive Director Joshua Shaw that long-time Senate Transportation Committee consultants Steve Schnaidt and Randal Henry are retiring this year and long-time Assembly Transportation Committee consultant Andrew Antwih has taken a new job with the city of Los Angeles. These consultants are the institutional memory of the legislature and I am wondering if we should be worried at this brain drain occurring just as transportation is heating up as a topic of interest.

No surprise that Los Angeles is essentially abandoning the Riordan/Hahn LAX expansion/rehabilitation plan. The technocrats at the airport were just plain flat footed and arrogant. They had their clock cleaned politically by the locals. Now we can look forward to several years of drafting a new plan and spending further millions. Oh, well... I have to agree with the observation of San

Fernando Sector Governance Council Vice-Chair Kym Richards that the annual Mobility 21 Countywide Transportation Summit more and more resembles a dog and pony show. Further that it is the quarterly meeting the Coalition is holding in various parts of the county that are proving most helpful at building regional consensus. Comments made at the Summit just held in Long Beach indicate the annual affair next year likely will expand to include adjacent regions. Which just might reinvigorate the Summit and provide it with a useful purpose.

Transportation ("infrastructure investment") is again the political flavor of the month. I have posted on the front page of our website links to various articles on the proposed bond and other components of what is a as yet unsettled initiative. Rest assured we are monitoring the situation and plan to have a seat at the table when serious consultations commence.

Quote of the month: "In recent years with tight public transit budgets, there has been a trend for local agencies to abandon their dial-a-ride and other paratransit service thereby casting the riders who otherwise qualify onto ASI's service. This often creates additional cost and greater inefficiencies especially for certain types of trips. When this happens, ASI is met with unanticipated demand that may require further funding to meet. However, ASI's funding is set annually. Accordingly advance notice is important so as to be able to obtain necessary additional funds. Member agencies, as a condition of membership should agree to continue to maintain their current efforts with respect to local paratransit they operate"

(Access Services Board of Directors meeting Oct. 24, 2005--item #12).

The Southern California Association of Governments is adopting an obscure provision of the new SAFETEA-LU federal funding bill that allows 4 years instead of three for the drafting of the next Regional Transportation Plan. Is this a good thing? SCAG says it aligns the RTP with the State Implementation Plan renewal cycle for air quality planning. So I guess it is a good thing.

Earlier this year member Richard Parker moved from Santa Clarita to Portland, Oregon. He recently shared with us his perspectives on our transportation situation, which we present with Richard's kind permission.

"The Los Angeles area deserves much better transit than it has. It's not a matter of MTA lacking the money. It's a matter of political will. It's a matter of where we as a society choose to commit our resources. New York, London, and Tokyo seem to be able to find the money to make their transit systems work right.

"Los Angeles would rather build an empty car pool lane along the 405 freeway than build a light rail line from Santa Clarita to LAX that like the Blue Line would fill with riders. Los Angeles would rather rip up existing tracks in the San Fernando Valley to run a bus, than provide service along those tracks. "Bus Rapid Transit" is an oxymoron.

Even if you paint the bus red, it is still a bus.

"MTA deserves the Bus Riders Union. It deserves three or four of them. Gasoline in Los Angeles has reached \$2.50 a gallon and continues to rise. What is MTA's response? Service cutbacks! Like the RTD that preceded MTA, and the MTA that preceded RTD, it is business as usual.

"Page 2 of the June newsletter describes this round of MTA chipping away at the already inadequate bus service. We don't close down the freeways between Midnight and 5 AM because of low traffic. We don't turn off electricity, gas and water at night due to low usage. Police and fire services are available 24/7. Transit should be likewise. Every neighborhood ought to have transit access and there should always be a way home. MTA continues to fail us."

I'll conclude this month by joining AVTA in expressing thanks to bus operator Nina Young, an employee of contractor MV Transportation. Ms. Young recently assisted a passenger who was lost and did not speak English. Bus Operator Young stayed with the passenger until a relative was contacted, although her shift was over. That is truly outstanding customer service worthy of praise. 🚌

TRANSIT UPDATES cont'd from pg. 5

METROLINK – effective 1/3/06:
Inland Empire-Orange County Line – adding two trip each way Riverside-Oceanside, and extending 2 existing Riverside-Irvine runs south to San Juan Capistrano

SOUTH WHITTIER SHUTTLE – per Los Angeles County Public Works website:
"The entire South Whittier community is invited to celebrate the launch of the ser-

vice during a Community Transit Fair, January 21, 2006, beginning at 9 a.m. at the Community Resource Center, 10750 Laurel Avenue. Admission is free and there will be fun to participate in the County's survey on South Whittier community transportation issues, coming in spring 2006."

[compiled largely thanks to JK Drummond and Dana Gabbard] 🚌

CONTRACT LINES STUDY TOUR

On Sept. 17 we undertook a study tour of MTA bus lines operated by contractors. In the past statistics revealed these lines as having substantially more customer complaints than any service out of the MTA yards whose employees belong to the three unions with collective bargaining agreements with the agency (UTU/ATU/TCU). Lionel Jones kindly volunteered to plan the trip so we would have a chance to ride buses operated by all three major contractors for MTA.

At 9 a.m. that we assembled at the fish tank in the East Portal building adjacent to the Gateway Transit Center. While the fish slumbered in the dark tank, the roar of buses rounding the oval of the Center could be heard from above along with a strange recording emanating from near the escalator leading up to the Transit Center playing over and over again jungle noises and a "Tarzan" yell. People briskly walked through the area, some lingering at the schedule rack opposite the fish tank before continuing on their way.

Members present were Ken Ruben, Armando Avalos, Kent Landfield, Lionel Jones, Dana Gabbard and Carlos Oscuna. We adjusted our initial plan as it became clear we hadn't allowed sufficient time to get from Union Station to where we would catch our first bus. We made our way to Vignes and Cesar Chavez to catch the MTA line 79, a low floor NABI #7644, at 9:17 a.m. Riding through downtown we marveled at the beautiful summer weather before arriving at Grand/Washington at 9:26 a.m. Meeting us there joining the tour was Alan Michelson.

The bus stop was absolutely filthy and we were glad indeed when the first bus of our study tour, line 603 (operated by Transportation Concepts), arrived at 9:51 a.m. It was an EZ Rider #12566 with 2 passengers at

departure (all ride counts exclude trip participants). We made our way along residential backways (23rd Street), then turned onto Hoover. At Hoover/Washington we had 5 passengers, at Hoover/Pico 10 passengers. Hoover is a vibrant commercial street lined with businesses and schools which before this line started operating was unserved between Venice and 7th Street. By Hoover/8th we had 20 passengers.

While normally we would have proceeded east along 7th Street we instead were detoured onto 8th Street due to street closures around MacArthur Park. About 7-8 disembarked at our Westlake stop adjacent to the Wilshire/Alvarado Red Line station. As can be imagined the street closures caused chaos and gridlock for street traffic. Adding to the congestion were two fire trucks and a paramedic truck working their way through the intersection of 6th Street and Westlake. At 6th and Alvarado we had 22 passengers. This rose to 28 passengers by the time we were at Coronado (a residential street) and Sunset. All through this stretch we had standing loads including clusters of kids riding with their parents. Amidst all this Ken Ruben made his weekly phone call to the web-based Let's Talk Trains, having to call twice on his cell phone due to drop outs.

We made our way along Glendale Blvd., and turned at Allesandro paralleling the Golden State Freeway along Riverside. Making our way on San Fernando Road we passed through an industrial area, then entered the downtown business district of Glendale before being dropped off at the last stop on the backside of the Glendale Galleria mall.

We walked a few blocks to Central/Broadway to catch the bus that would take us to our next contracted line. MTA route 180, a NABI low floor #7156. We had 23 passengers and went eastbound toward Pasadena past a

Borders Books, a number of Armenian shops and the mall formerly known as Eagle Rock Plaza. When nearing Pasadena we did a short freeway jaunt to bypass the historic Colorado Street Bridge (which has a weight limit). Soon we were passing through Old Town Pasadena, past the famed Norton Simon Museum and the recently completed Paseo Colorado open-air shopping complex. We arrived at Lake/Colorado at 11:58 a.m. A Kinko's at that corner provided a chance to do a quick check of e-mails, use the restroom or purchase refreshments before the next contracted bus arrived.

At 12:20 p.m. we caught MTA rt.256, operated by Southland, a National/El Dorado #12520 with 3 passengers. To our delight this smaller bus set off by crossing the Colorado Street Bridge we had so recently seen from afar. Soon we passed San Rafael Park and were winding along through hills. At Figueroa/York we had 6 persons board. Continuing we passed through the residential area known as El Sereno. One business had a sign proclaiming "Hermon est. 1905". Next we passed the layover for the 45/252 at Monterey/Huntington which appeared a nice place to sit and contemplate.

Much to our surprise we spotted the 3rd bus at a rail crossing with gates down suddenly pull around the gates to cross. At 1:20 p.m. we arrived at the end of the route at the Cal State University-Los Angeles bus terminal, which has pull-ins and benches plus an information kiosk on local bus service. Via overpass and elevator we made our way to the Cal State station on the El Monte busway. This location had cement benches and a coke machine. At 1:35 p.m. we piled onto an already packed MTA rt.490 (NABI low floor #7669) for the 3 minute trip to the USC County Hospital busway station. Via elevator and overpass we made our way to the adja-

cent barren stretch of road from which we would catch our next bus.

This is the layover of MTA r254, adjacent to a parking structure. We boarded another El Dorado/National, #12511. As with the 256, this is operated by Southland. At the County Hospital transit center we had 2 boardings (amenities at this location included shade, benches and newspaper racks). We continued through the Hospital complex, followed by more hills and then an industrial area (signified by razor wire protecting some of the buildings). Ken Ruben waxed a bit nostalgic as these were some of his old stomping grounds from his youth. We continued through a residential area and passed the Garfield Community Adult School. Much of the route duplicates that of the El Sereno/City Terrace DASH. We spotted an MTA rtr.30 bus going to its layover at terminal 44 (also used by shortline rt.68 trips). Mid-route we hopped off to take a lunch break.

At 3:40 p.m. we caught another southbound rt.254, an El Dorado #12503. By Lorena/Whittier it had 7 passengers. Lorena is lined with businesses and churches; at one point a sign was spotted announcing en español an AA meeting. As we continued south we entered the industrial city of Vernon. Then we entered Huntington Park, passing residences along Gage. At Gage/Pacific 8 passengers boarded. We continued along Santa Fe through a commercial district. We were also shadowing the Blue Line and several times crossed the alignment from one side to the other. Our driver surprised us when she suddenly pulled over and ducked into a small mart for a snack. We were running on secondary streets through residential areas before arriving at Imperial/Wilmington-Rosa Parks station at 4:20 p.m. At this point Carlos departed. the rest of us made our

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MEMBERS IN ACTION

In last month's column we omitted from the list of attendees to the annual TRAC membership meeting Raymond Ahearn, Kirk Schneider, and Nate Zablen. Our apologies.

From Mark Strickert: "At its November 10th meeting, The MTA Gateway Sector council briefly discussed the possibility of changing its starting time from 2:00 PM to something a bit more public-friendly. A new council member was disturbed by the lack of public, but another pointed at me as a 'public' that does show up. In my comments, I had to point out what a struggle it was to get there as often as I do."

Ken Ruben attended the Culver City Council Meeting on November 21, where approval for the Expo Line EIR was approved. Ken testified briefly in favor of the EIR on behalf of SOCATA. Ken also attended the MTA Citizens Advisory Council Meeting on November 30.

Participants in the Day After Thanksgiving trip on November 25 were Armando Avalos, Dana Gabbard, Lionel Jones, Russ Jones, Michael Milroy, Andy Novak, and Ken Ruben.

Juanita Dellomes and Michael Milroy were candidates for the Executive Committees in the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter's Central and Long Beach Regional Groups, respectively. 🚗

CONTRACT TOUR cont'd from Pg. 9

way up to the Green Line platform for an eastbound train (#215A) at 4:25 p.m. which arrived at the Norwalk terminal at 4:38 p.m.

The Norwalk station transit center has some benches, some shade, and newspaper racks. After a lengthy wait we caught the last contracted bus of the tour, MTA 125, operated by First Transit, at 5:10 PM. It was an Orion 6 low floor #11022 with a busted stop requests cord. The bus had 6 passengers and left 20 minutes late (the driver spent some time talking shop with a fellow operator after pulling into the transit center). Along the Rosecrans commercial district we started to pick up passengers and soon had a seated load of 25. We passed parks, schools, industrial areas and some residences. Ridership in this segment was quite healthy. We passed the Compton Transit center. We also passed the First Transit yard at Central/Rosecrans. The mid-segment (between the Blue Line and Vermont) had much less ridership. But the bus moved along at a fast clip. By Crenshaw/Rosecrans we were down to 2

passengers. The only memorable incident during this part of the trip was some idiot pulled his car in front of us and forced the operator to make an abrupt stop. Soon we were in El Segundo running seaside, past refineries and power plants to the end of the route. By then the bus was empty except for us.

We caught a RTS (#1300) running downtown bound on the MTA rt.439 with 5 passengers. Alan Michelson hopped off at LAX Transit Center, Ken Ruben departed at Fox Hills Mall Transit Center, Dana caught a MTA 217 from West L.A. Transit center, while others continued to downtown.

Probably only the last operator (by making us late while he idly chatted) made a bad impression. Otherwise the service was fairly good and on schedule. But any conclusions regarding contracted service probably would call for us to undertake further rides to have a more representative sample of the service to base any such opinions upon. Should we do a follow-up tour in 2006? 🚗