

MOTION by Councilmember Richards

On December 14, 2009 Metro began operating Line 902 between Pacoima and North Hollywood Station as a "demonstration project", primarily using resources from the reduction of peak-hour service on Line 233.

On March 3, 2010, the Governance Council voted to continue the operation of Line 902 as a demonstration line for six additional months. The motion approved by the Council called for reevaluation at the December 2010 Service Change Program of whether the demonstration line should be made permanent based upon whether or not ridership levels increase to at least a .50 load factor at North Hollywood Station.

Ridership figures from the automated passenger counting system, provided to the Council as part of that motion, show that Line 902 ridership to and from North Hollywood Station has not been able to improve substantially in the eight months of operation, with an average load of 8.5 passengers per trip leaving the station and 11.4 passengers per trip arriving at the station. This equates to a load factor of between .15 and .25, which is far below the number the Council expected when it agreed to continue the line's operation for six additional months.

The ridership figures match those from three independent monitors by Southern California Transit Advocates in January, May, and July, which would appear to indicate there are no errors in the Metro passenger counting system. There has been no appreciable improvement in those numbers; they have remained consistently low since the first month of Line 902's operation.

The staff recommendation is therefore flawed, because the performance index of 1.08 includes ridership between points along Van Nuys Blvd., which are trips that would have been made using Line 233 had its service not been reduced to fund Line 902's operation. Those passengers were forced onto Line 902 by our actions and we therefore cannot count them for purposes of discussing the viability of Line 902.

Metro has a severe operating deficit, brought on by lower sales tax revenues as a result of the economic decline, as well as by the loss of State Transit Assistance funding. Therefore, elimination of non-productive service is a necessity in order to balance the bus operating deficit. The Line 902 unique (and non-productive) segment requires approximately 15 revenue service hours per day, or 3,900 annual revenue service hours.

In addition, Line 902 operates with vehicles that have a 20% lower passenger carrying capacity than those used on Line 233, so it is entirely likely that fewer Line 233 trips would be needed to provide the same passenger carrying capacity along Van Nuys Blvd.; if every five Line 902 trips were replaced by four Line 233 trips, an additional 1,500 revenue service hours would be saved annually. Therefore, more than 5,000 service hours could be removed from Metro's deficit by canceling Line 902 and improving service levels on Line 233.

In addition, the continued operation of Line 902 would appear to violate one of the goals of service restructuring, by not consolidating local service lines in the Van Nuys Blvd. corridor, the single highest-ridership corridor in the San Fernando Valley service region, with ridership that exceeds even that of the Orange Line.

Therefore, based upon the need to maximize the use of scarce operating resources and the need to streamline service in the Van Nuys Blvd. corridor, I move that:

1. Line 902 be canceled, effective with the December 12, 2010 service change program; and
2. An appropriate level of Line 233 service be scheduled between Pacoima and Van Nuys Station as a replacement for the canceled local service segment of Line 902.