

Wednesday, November 8, 2006

5:00-7:00 PM

MINUTES

Westside/Central Service Sector
Governance Council

Regular Meeting

La Cienega Tennis Center
325 S. La Cienega Blvd.
Beverly Hills, CA 90211

Call to Order at 5:05 p.m.

Council Members present:

Brad Robinson Chair
Jerard Wright, Vice Chair
Peter Capone-Newton
Greg Fischer
Joyce Perkins
Glenn Rosten
Anny Semonco

Officers:

Mark Maloney, General Manager
Michele Jackson, Council Secretary

1. Public Comment for items not on the agenda

Ken Ruben, Culver City Resident – attended Federal Court hearing for the Consent Decree.

Responding to a question from Representative Perkins, staff explained that the portion of the consent decree that remains in effect is the New Service Plan which includes implementation of Rapid Bus and service that is based on the number of seats instead of the number of hours. This oversight is no longer tied to the Bus Riders' Union, only the court itself.

2. APPROVED Minutes from October 11, 2006

3. RECEIVED report from Council Representatives on their line rides

Representative Semonco commented that Line 705 buses take a long time to show up between 4:15 and 5 p.m., and that there is occasional bunching of the 780's. She also asked that drivers be made more knowledgeable about major attractions in L.A., e.g. tourists don't know where the Hollywood sign is.

Representative Rosten noted that the 720's are still bunching and provide very little information on where the line is going or what time the next bus is coming.

4. RECEIVED General Managers Report

Mark Maloney reported on September performance data. Workers' Compensation and complaint categories are doing very well. Miles between mechanical failures showed improvement in September. The numbers suffered in July and August due to the heat and drivers becoming accustomed to the articulated buses. In service on time performance will continue to be measured with the old data collection system in September and October. November will be the first month using the new system which will check every time point. Then staff will be able to access information to address problems with a specific line. Still struggling with the number of accidents, especially on Line 720. A lot of mirrors are being knocked off buses in the layover area. Reflective material is being added to that side of the buses. October numbers are improving.

Mr. Maloney announced that data from the Sector Evaluation forms will come to the Council next month before it goes back to the Board, as will the 10-year forecast presentation.

Mr. Maloney introduced, Mike Greenwood, new Deputy Executive Officer of Transportation Contract Services.

5. RECEIVED report on FY07 YTD September Financials, Michael Davis, Administration and Finance Manager

Michael Davis reported a current underrun of the FY07 budget in the amount of \$881,000, mostly due to under-expenditures in workers' compensation, allocated fringes, fuel & lubricants, parts for revenue equipment, non-contract salaries, and taxes.

Contract wages are over budget by \$22,000 due to the ongoing operator shortage, and overtime required by mechanics working on the new articulated buses.

Mr. Davis noted that last month he indicated that warranty parts were included in the "Applied Other" category. This category actually contains monies associated with CNG fuel reimbursements. The agency pays for the fuel to run the pumps and is then reimbursed for those costs.

Fuel and lubricants budget is being underrun by \$487,000. CNG is budgeted at \$1.01/therm and the average year-to-date cost is 73 cents/therm.

Mr. Davis reminded Council Representatives that they had been sent Sector Evaluation Forms in order to rate the Sector's performance and make recommendations. He requested that the questionnaires be returned by next week.

Responding to a question from Chair Robinson regarding decentralization, Mark Maloney said that when the sectors were formed, there were guidelines of what they should be responsible for. Some of those things were not actually given to the sectors, e.g. budget. Human Resources and Workers' Compensation were given to the sectors and then taken back or decentralized.

Chair Robinson expressed the opinion that making the sectors entirely responsible for their own bottom line would be a very positive change allowing them to make changes and do what they want as long as the bottom line was met.

Representative Perkins noted that the Council Representatives have never really had a candid conversation with the sector administration on how these items work for them or what might work better. Mark Maloney indicated that he would email some information to the Representatives. He also noted that the Westside Sector mimics all the other sectors in terms of staffing despite the fact that it is the largest sector.

6. RECEIVED report on Metro's Marketing Campaign for the America's Best Award, Jody Litvak, Regional Communications Manager

Jody Litvak reported that newspaper ads ran last month and this month and America's Best logos will be on the website and buses for one year. There are also radio spots, on-hold messages, bus operator uniform patches, bus and rail car cards, banners and congratulatory posters at the divisions.

Representative Rosten noted that it seems that a lot of money is being spent on institutional advertising. Ms. Litvak responded that the MTA used to be a beleaguered agency and she feels that anything that makes the general public think better of the agency is good.

Chair Robinson requested a report on the marketing campaign.

Representative Rosten said he thinks it best to tell the public what Metro can do for them, e.g. the ease with which people can get from West L.A. to downtown on the 720 without having to change buses.

Representative Semonco expressed the opinion that the campaign gives the city of L.A. a better image to promote to other cities; noting that the best way to get more people onto the bus is by training drivers to be as nice and as knowledgeable as they can be. If first-time riders have a good experience, they are a lot more likely to continue to ride.

7. RECEIVED report on Revised Timeline for June 07 Service Change and Establish Public Hearing Date, Rogelio Gandara, Service Development Manager

Mr. Gandara said that the preliminary timeline which was provided last month is highly subject to change. Staff is trying to accommodate the other sectors and make up one public hearing notice.

On December 13, 2006 preliminary recommendations and the public hearing notice will come to the Council to allow for publication of the notice by January 7, 2007. At the January 10, 2007 Council Meeting staff will be able to address comments and questions from the prior month and be ready to hold the public hearing on February 14, 2007.

APPROVED motion to set February 14, 2007 as the public hearing date.

8. RECEIVED report on Super Rapid, Stephen Fox, Transportation Planning Manager IV

Stephen Fox reported on plans to implement a pilot “Super Rapid Express” program on Wilshire. No other Super Rapids will begin until this line has been put into successful operation. The program would utilize the same buses as the Rapid Line. Staff is considering having some type of color card and signage to indicate which stops service the Super Rapids.

Candidate corridors should have an average passenger trip length of more than 4.6 miles; the Rapid Express route should cover the portion of the underlying Rapid route with at least 50% of the passenger activity; a 15-20% speed improvement should be realized; proposed stops should have at least 5-10% of boardings and alightings; and average stop spacing should be at least two times the average stop spacing of .7 miles.

The Wilshire Super Rapid Express would run expedited service from the Vermont/Wilshire Red Line Station to downtown Santa Monica during peak hours in both directions with limited stops and a 5- to 10 minute frequency. Implementation is planned for June 2007 and will be cost neutral through existing Line 720 reallocation.

Chair Robinson suggested putting an ad in the Beverly Hills Courier, which has a very large readership.

Responding to a question from Representative Capone Newton, Mr. Fox said staff has done a thorough assessment of the 720 Line’s current performance so that an accurate comparison can be made between the Rapid and the Super Rapid Express.

9. RECEIVED report on Wilshire Bus Lane, Jody Litvak, Regional Communications Manager

Jody Litvak reported that the Wilshire Bus Lane began with a one-mile segment in March 2003. Curb parking was eliminated during am/pm peak hours. After a six-month trial, Metro deemed it a success and asked the City of L.A. to continue the program. The Los Angeles City Council made the peak period bus lane permanent and directed LADOT and Metro to extend the lane.

The City Council subsequently suspended the lane between Barrington and Federal and said no further segments would be removed. They further directed that the Barrington Federal portion would be automatically restored when the lane was extended into the Veterans’ Administration property.

Councilman Rosendahl made a motion in committee to suspend the bus lane entirely and reinstate parking on one side of Wilshire in the morning and on

the other side in the evening. That motion will go to the full Council. The segment of Wilshire Blvd. that goes through Federal property is operated by the County. Traffic increases on approaches to the 405 freeway. Metro is working to extend the lane from Federal eastward to Bonsall, by the VA hospital and just before the freeway on-ramp. Metro has further identified some additional mixed-flow improvements that would benefit transit, e.g. sidewalk equalization, relocating the center median and lengthening the left-turn lane. We are also in discussions with Caltrans regarding relocation of ramp meters.

Metro and L.A. County and Public Works have an MOU and are preparing engineering and design to make those changes. That should be completed in one year or less. At that time Metro staff will return to the Board to seek funding.

Los Angeles City Councilman Weiss is agreeable to working with Metro to put a bus lane segment on Wilshire in his district, in cooperation with Beverly Hills. Beverly Hills is also supportive, and work is proceeding on adding a segment from Doheny to Fairfax across the boundary between the cities. Things are moving slowly as LADOT is gathering data requested by the Council offices and Mayor Villaraigosa. The City has requested a lot of data from the Department of Transportation. The data provided indicated that the bus lane would result in increased congestion in their portion and significant changes would be required. Mayor Villaraigosa has also gotten involved and asked both Metro and LADOT to look at Wilshire as a corridor rather than segment by segment.

The segment from Doheny to Fairfax is in two jurisdictions. Beverly Hills wants a bus lane, but that will be contingent upon the participation of L.A. City to the east. Bus signal priority has been installed in Beverly Hills on all streets that have or will have Rapid service. There have been some technical difficulties with start-up, but it should be completely operational soon.

Santa Monica is in discussions with Metro about installing bus signal priority on Wilshire within their jurisdiction, but still does not have signal priority. The City Council has, however, approved a bus lane on Lincoln.

Representative Rosten commented that it still sounds like we are looking at segments. Ms. Litvak responded that staff has been asked to look at the corridor to identify the areas where speed is lost during rush hour and figure out what could be done to improve that.

Representative Capone Newton asked about the possibility of a center lane or putting one lane in a single direction during peak periods. He noted that between Beverly and Fairfax there are no stops, so there is no need to get to the curb at La Cienega or Robertson.

Jody Litvak responded that when the subway was stopped, what evolved was the Wilshire Rapid Bus Program. This was supposed to go down the middle of the street. It was much more chancy and expensive.

Representative Capone Newton asked for clarification from Ms. Litvak as to whether she was saying this will never be evaluated again or that it was a bad idea. Ms. Litvak stated that the funding for a full Wilshire BRT, which did incorporate a center-lane approach, was not going to be available for many years. We are doing what can be done in the meantime, including considering queue jumpers and additional right turn lanes.

Representative Wright asked if staff has considered having people at the stations taking passes in order to speed up the boarding process. Ms. Litvak said staff is considering pre-payment of fares. That would work at the Orange Line or at rail stations. There are some challenges to doing that on sidewalks. Mark Maloney added that this is being considered on the Super Rapids.

Chair Robinson asked if staff would continue to work in the areas where people are willing to work with them or would the Los Angeles City Council action restrict the City from doing any lanes anywhere. Jody Litvak responded that Councilman Rosendahl's motion, which only relates to the West L.A. bus lane, has not yet been acted on by the full City Council. Further, Councilman Jose Huizar would like MTA to do a bus lane on streets in his area.

Representative Wright asked about the possibility of building parking structures to replace parking that is removed from the street to allow for a bus lane. Jody Litvak said the City asked staff to study the parking in the West L.A. area before permitting the bus lane segment where the bus lane was planned. Staff looked at how the curb lane was being utilized. Every space was not used during rush hour. Staff also looked at where there was adjacent parking, in most cases on side streets, as well as a good amount of off-street private parking.

10. RECEIVED update on Bus and Rail Security, Sgt. Estrada, LA County Sheriff's Department

Sgt. Estrada reported that motor units have been directed to step up parking enforcement on the Wilshire corridor in morning and afternoon hours, between 8 and 10 a.m. and 4 and 6 p.m. It has been determined that most collisions occur after 8 a.m. Four hundred citations were written in the first 8 days, with the most common being for parking during the wrong hours.

We have also encountered people using counterfeit bus and rail passes, especially in the Mac Arthur Park area. An undercover operation netted three arrests and information as to where the passes were being made. One person arrested actually had legitimate passes from the MTA.

Representative Capone Newton commented that he has spoken to operators about the TAP cards. His card beeps, but some people have been boarding with passes that don't beep. Sgt. Estrada said the counterfeit passes look very good except that the colors are not as bright and they are a little flimsier.

Buses in the Fairfax/La Cienega area are being vandalized by high school students who are kicking out windows and using markers and paints. School deputies read the monikers on the graffiti and identified some of the people. Search warrants are scheduled from that operation.

Sgt. Estrada emphasized the fact that he does not encourage people to try to detain the taggers. Drivers should call so that officers can take pictures of the graffiti. Sometimes teachers are able to identify the students from their monikers.

Representative Semonco asked about homeless people boarding the buses. Sgt. Estrada said the LASD "Edward" unit will come out and help homeless and mentally disturbed people on buses. Deputies have been asked to attend operator meetings at the divisions to share intelligence and information and hear firsthand from the operators what the problems are.

The Red Line has experienced a spike in robberies around Hollywood/North Hollywood. We have been unable to establish any pattern. They appear to be crimes of opportunity.

Two new tools will be deployed next week. Bomb detection dogs with their handlers will be on the buses and trains and going to community outreach meetings. Additionally, one patrol car will be replaced with a motorcycle in order to decrease response times.

Responding to a question from Chair Robinson, Sgt. Estrada said current response times are 15 minutes for routine calls and 6 minutes for emergencies.

Public Comment

Ken Ruben – last train leaving Fullerton was running late. He got a ride to the Artesia Blue Line Station, and then had a friend pick him up because he felt unsafe. Requested more deputies on the Blue Line at night.

11. Chair's Remarks

Reminded of Ethics training tomorrow at 2:30 p.m. at Gateway. Training must be completed by December 1, 2007.

Adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Mehila Jackson
