

Faxed



Julian Burke
Interim CEO

February 10, 1998

Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority

One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA
90012-2932

TO: DIRECTOR JENNY OROPEZA

FROM: JULIAN BURKE

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**SUBJECT: BOARD REPORT REGARDING METRO INFORMATION
SUNDAY SERVICE OPTIONS**

Attached is a copy of a Board report regarding Metro Information Sunday Service options.

This item will be presented to the Operations Committee for consideration on February 18, 1998.

I wanted to provide you with a preview of the report prior to the meeting. If you have questions regarding the report or would like to visit Metro Information operations, please let me know.

Attachment



OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
February 18, 1998

Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority

SUBJECT: METRO INFORMATION CALL CENTER SERVICE

ACTION: CONSIDER SUNDAY SERVICE OPTIONS

One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA
90012-2932

(213) 922-2000

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Metro Information Call Center's current days of operation, Monday through Saturday, remain unchanged.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

No financial impact if recommendation is adopted.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

1. Restore Sunday service in early March. Approval of this recommendation also increases Metro Information staff by 8.5 FTE (17 part-time) Customer Information Agents and 1 Communications Supervisor but restores Sunday information beginning March 8, 1998. To maintain the current level of service during the new employee hiring and training process, existing employees on overtime will be utilized to staff Sunday operations. The total FY98 cost of this option is \$95,000, with \$40,000 of the additional expense coming from overtime pay.

Staff thoroughly reviewed the projects budgeted this year for Customer Services and Communications, including automated improvements (Attachment A), to see if there were funds available to cover the cost of resuming Sunday service. Staff has identified \$90,000 that was budgeted for MTA to sponsor its second annual national Customer First Conference this spring, but staff had already decided to use these monies to balance this year's operating deficit, in lieu of holding this conference. The Customer First Conference, held for the first time last year, aimed at fostering a customer first culture in the public transit industry. Executives from the public transit agencies throughout the nation joined their counterparts from MTA at the two-day conference held at Gateway. Plans for repeating the conference have not been finalized and none of the \$90,000 budgeted has been spent.

In FY99, a \$255,000 operating budget increase is required to continue Sunday

telephone information service. Presently, 25 percent of all Metro Information transactions involve carriers other than the MTA (Attachment B). In the 1980s these agencies shared a portion of the operating expense with the former Los Angeles County Transportation Commission. Staff has held informal discussions regarding expense sharing with the municipal and Prop. A carriers. If alternative 1 or 2 is adopted by the Board, formal negotiations with these carriers will commence to determine their reasonable fair share cost of supporting Metro Information operations.

2. Restore Sunday service in late April. Metro Information staff will be increased by 8.5 FTE (17 part-time) Customer Information Agents and 1 FTE Communications Supervisor. Total FY98 cost is \$55,000. This alternative initiates Sunday service on April 26, the scheduled date for the next departmental shake-up, allowing time for new employees to be recruited, selected and trained. This alternative would obviate the need for the extensive overtime pay needed to *immediately* resume Sunday service and maintain service levels (The overtime cost required to meet an earlier implementation date is approximately \$5,000 per week). Staff had planned to use funds budgeted for the second annual Customer First Conference this spring to offset MTA's operating deficit this year, but the Board could opt instead to use the funds to resume Sunday telephone information service. However, in FY 99 a \$255,000 operating budget increase would be required to continue Sunday service. As mentioned above, if alternative 1 or 2 is adopted by the Board, negotiations with the municipal and Prop. A carriers will commence to determine their fair share cost of supporting Metro Information Call Center service on Sundays.
3. Subcontracting was evaluated but is not considered cost-effective at this time. The current labor agreement with the TCU does not permit the subcontracting of work performed by current TCU-represented employees. Even if a new labor agreement was negotiated to protect current union jobs while permitting subcontracting of Sunday service, the savings would be minimal because there would be initial training and other expenses. Less experienced operators are not as efficient as seasoned operators so more staff might be needed at the outset. There also is higher attrition among private operators due to lower salaries.

DISCUSSION:

At the Board meeting of January 28, 1998 staff was directed to prepare a report which examined a plan to restore Sunday service and possible subcontracting opportunities.

MTA is the only entity in Los Angeles County that provides telephone customer service giving information about all the different regional public transit options. The municipal and Prop. A carriers only dispense information about their individual service. All other calls are referred to MTA. With the exception of Foothill, Long Beach, Montebello, Santa Fe Springs and Norwalk Transit, none of the carriers offer phone service on Sundays. The small carriers use bus operators to provide Sunday service and the level of service is dependent on their availability. MTA has tried to fill the information gap. In recent years, various technological improvements have been

made to Metro Information that increase the efficiency of our current staff. For example, development and implementation of detailed Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) statistical reports and automated voice response features (Attachment B provides a more inclusive list). Despite these efficiencies, customer demand for transit information continues to grow, with the result that our wait times had also grown to an unacceptable level of 12 minutes. To address this problem, while recognizing that the MTA will be facing operating deficits in both FY 98 and FY 99, we looked for a solution that would not result in adding costs.

We examined our staffing plan to determine how we could most efficiently re-deploy our 95-person staff to better serve more of our customers. Because our current labor agreement precludes our hiring part-time employees unless we maintain a full-time staff of 95 employees and because there was no budget allocation to hire new part-time employees, all of our current employees are full-time. Therefore, the only way to achieve acceptable wait times with the current staffing level was to re-deploy existing staff to support service during the peak days of the week, Monday through Saturday.

The accompanying graph (Attachment C) illustrates that the move was successful in reducing the customer waiting interval to 4 -5 minutes from the previous 9 - 11 minute range. One measure of customer acceptance of change is complaints. Subsequent to the December 14 service change, there has been a significant decrease in the number of complaints relating to excessive wait time (reduced from 10 in December to 2 in January). With regards to the Sunday closure, only 9 complaints were received during the month of December and none during January. This indicates minimal disruption, which we believe is acceptable in a period of budget constraints.

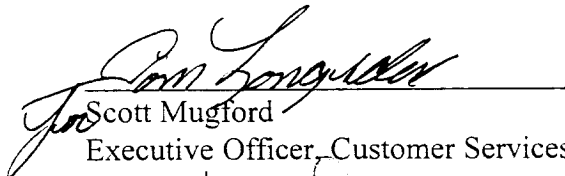
We recognize our ridership's continuing need for system information. To fulfill this requirement, the MTA has a long-standing commitment to provide free dissemination of transit system information through a variety of media, from timetables placed on buses or mailed to customers on request, to personalized routing information made available over the telephone or by fax. These methods have traditionally attempted to reach a mass audience. With the revolution in electronic media and information transfer, we are moving towards new, more individually focused methods of distributing information such as internet access and interactive kiosks. While these newer information formats reach a smaller audience, in conjunction with our traditional methods they widen the options available to the public and potentially slow the need for future growth in centralized information sources such as Metro Information by giving customers an alternative.

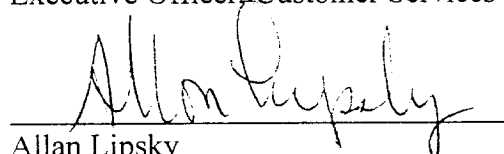
Use of part-time employees

As long as MTA maintains a telephone information staff of 95 full-time operators, part-time employees could be used for the first time under the present labor agreement negotiated with the Transportation Communications Union (TCU). This would enable the department to more effectively schedule staff and better respond to incoming call patterns. As shown on the attached chart (Attachment D), weekday call volumes fluctuate throughout the day and staffing is broadly designed to meet this demand. Using non-full-time employees would be an effective way to fine-tune staffing to meet shifting call demand. Restoration of Sunday service on March 8, 1998

would require the use of overtime until part-time employees are recruited, hired, trained and placed in service. It is anticipated that new hire staffing could be completed in late April.

Prepared by: Tom Longsdon
Communications Manager, Metro Information


Scott Mugford
Executive Officer, Customer Services and Communications


Allan Lipsky
Office of the Chief Executive Officer

Attachments:

- A - Graph illustrating MTA/other carriers' share of transit information service activity
- B - Bullet point text highlighting Metro Information enhancements
- C - Graph illustrating daily average wait times pre- and post-Sunday closure
- D - Graph illustrating daily calls received/answered volume fluctuations



The Customer Perspective

Metro Information

Improvements and Enhancements

- Voice Response
 - Enables automated selection of English or Spanish language operator.
 - “Speaks” simple itineraries to the customer; time saving feature allows operators to handle more calls.
 - A future enhancement will allow callers to select a secondary itinerary and change some travel parameters.

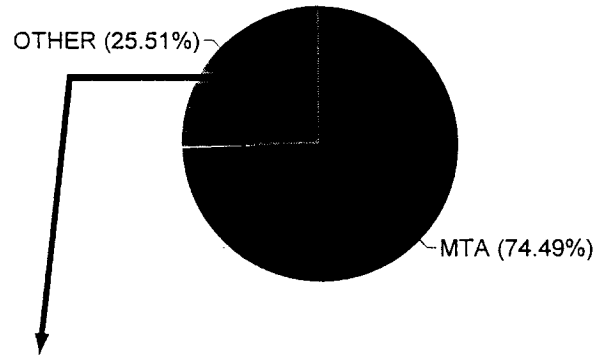
- Wait time announcements inform callers how long the wait for an operator will be.

- Fax-on-Demand itineraries.

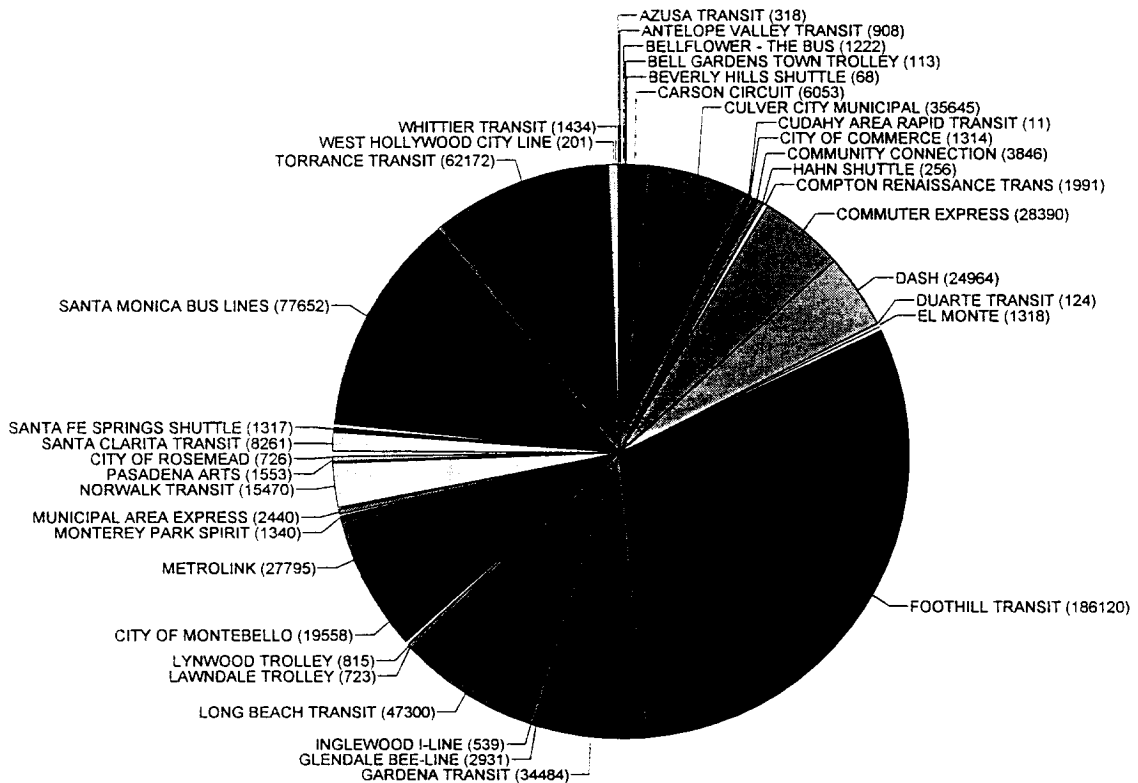
- Transit code directory-allows customers to enter codes which identify locations and obtain an itinerary without operator assistance.

METRO INFORMATION TRANSACTION DETAIL

2,342,960 Total Transactions



**Municipal and Prop A Local Return Carriers
Represent 25.1% of All Transactions
The Pie Chart Below Provides Detail
Regarding the Number Of Transactions
For Each Carrier**



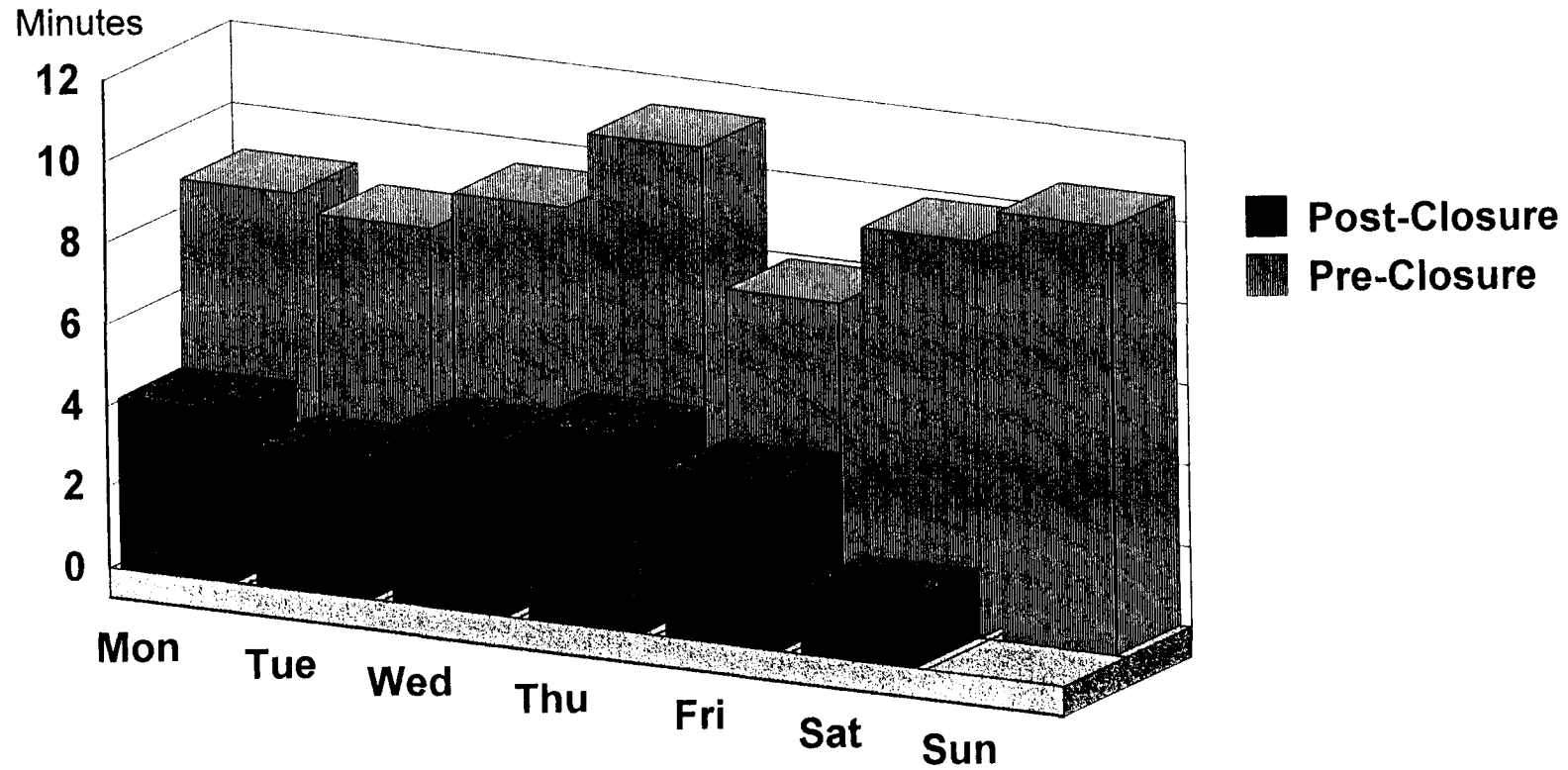
July - December 1997



The Customer Perspective

Metro Information

Customer Wait Time Comparison Pre- and Post-Sunday Closure



minutes:seconds	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Pre-Closure	8:53	8:25	9:23	11:16	7:52	9:48	10:36
Post-Closure	4:13	3:30	4:21	4:52	4:10	1:43	



The Customer Perspective

Metro Information

Typical Weekday Call Volumes

