

2000 Was a 'Banner Year,' Says CEO Burke, Who Looks Ahead with Confidence at 2001



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CEO Julian Burke has selected a recruiting firm and has the Board's approval to begin the search for a new CEO. [Click here.](#)

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Jan. 8) "In 2000, I felt as though we - for the first time - turned the corner to looking forward rather than trying to cure the past," said CEO Julian Burke, in an interview with *MTA Report* during which he looked at the year past and the year ahead. "We really built up a head of steam as a result of the work we did the previous two years."

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**Statement
from
Supervisor
Yvonne
Brathwaite
Burke.**

Despite last fall's strike, a host of accomplishments that included the extension of subway service to North Hollywood made 2000 a "banner year" for the MTA, Burke believes. He also sees the agency moving confidently ahead on a number of important transportation projects in 2001.

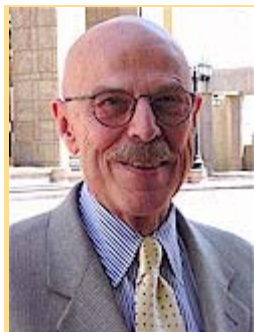
These and other topics he intends to address during an all-staff meeting, Jan. 30.

In a wide-ranging interview, Burke said rebuilding a stronger relationship with the MTA's unions and restoring growth in transit ridership are focal points for the year. And, he pointed to the Metro Rapid bus program and other service improvements, the agency's strengthened financial status, along with improved budget making and procurement processes as achievements in 2000.

MTA employees, the CEO said "should be proud of our accomplishments during the year 2000." He expects that employee confidence in the agency and pride in its progress will continue to grow throughout the year.

Goals for 2001

Among his goals for 2001, the CEO included updating the Long-Range Transportation Plan, moving forward on plans for the three



CEO Julian Burke

transportation corridors, new "smart bus" and rail car purchases and improving relations with MTA unions.

The CEO wants to continue to improve the MTA's relationships with its customers, with state legislators, funding partners and with congressional leaders. "I believe we have a credibility base now from which to do that," he said.

Revising the Long-Range Transportation Plan is "very, very important," he said. "There's no doubt that with up to three and a half million people coming to Los Angeles County in the next 25 years we'll need to improve mobility – more transit service, better streets and highways."

The Plan will propose a range of options that include more HOV lanes, countywide traffic signal coordination, better management of truck traffic, more ridesharing, new busways, a countywide grid of Metro Rapid buses and extending the Metro Green Line to LAX.

The CEO expects to hand the draft Plan to the Board soon, so it can begin a 45-day public review period before it is considered for final adoption in the spring. The MTA must recommend projects to SCAG by April for inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan and to be eligible for state and federal funding.

Labor Relations

"Burke also plans to give labor relations a high priority this year. "One of our challenges for 2001 is to actively focus on improving our relationships with our unions and their leaders," he said. "After being involved in the recent labor negotiations, I've come to believe that this should be a very important focus for me now."

He welcomed the "statesmanlike remarks" by UTU General Chairman James Williams at the November Board meeting when the union chief stressed the importance of the MTA and UTU working together as a team.

Transportation Corridors

In 2001, the MTA should expect to move ahead on projects in the three major transportation corridors. Projects on the Eastside, Mid-City and the San Fernando Valley will be going through preliminary engineering and environmental approval processes.

Noting that these are long-term projects that will come on-line in the next three to seven years, Burke said, "There's a lot of work to be done between now and then, but we're much more confident about our ability to manage the processes, including the construction that will be involved. I look forward to moving those projects along this year."

Transportation Zones

The San Fernando Valley Transportation Zone is likely to make a go or no-go decision this year, Burke predicted, and the San Gabriel Valley may have a continuing interest in launching a zone, although it has taken no formal steps toward that end. The MTA's zone guidelines require that both the MTA and any new zone must come out ahead,

but he said a lot of work will be needed to achieve that result.

He noted that state legislation signed by Governor Davis last October – along with the MTA's own zone guidelines and the state's public utilities code - all provide protections for employees affected by implementation of a transit zone.

Consent Decree

Although the MTA is awaiting a court ruling from the U.S. Court of Appeals, Burke said the agency continues to be in substantial compliance with the Consent Decree.

The MTA has taken delivery of more than 1,100 new buses and 500 more will be delivered this year. In 2000, the MTA also delivered a record number of bus service hours.

"I'm pleased that we're seeing more growth in our bus system," Burke said. "It has grown significantly in the past year and we will continue to grow it."

'Smart Bus' Procurements

During 2001, the MTA will continue to upgrade its bus fleet to include such "smart bus" options as automatic passenger counters, automatic systems to announce bus stops and universal fare equipment. Adding Global Positioning System equipment will track the location of buses and help ensure schedule compliance.

"We're doing everything we can to make our buses more reliable, more predictable, more comfortable, cleaner and safer," Burke said. "This will have an effect, not only on better service for our current riders, but also will attract additional riders out of their cars."

Call for Projects

Over the next six years, the MTA expects to fund some \$850 million in transportation projects, primarily highway projects, through its 2001 Call for Projects, Burke said.

Funding marks in eight transportation categories will be presented to the Board this month. Applications are due from local agencies in February. The process should be completed in June or July.

Pasadena Blue Line

Burke expects, at the present rate of progress, that the Pasadena Blue Line will be ready for operation by the MTA in the spring of 2003. Planning for that service includes purchasing new light-rail cars -including cars for the proposed rail line in East LA - ticket vending machines and other operating equipment. The "heavy work," he said, will come in late 2002 when Rail Operations begins testing the new system.

Search for a CEO

During the interview with *MTA Report*, Burke revealed for the first time that he has selected a recruiting firm and has the Board's approval to begin the search for a new chief executive officer – a search that will be thorough and may require some time in order to ensure that the agency finds the right match for a CEO.

"I dearly love this job," said Burke, who has held the office since August, 1997, "but I really think we need someone – the right someone - to carry the MTA to new heights now."

The CEO anticipates that a number of experienced transportation executives - who "could have a long and substantial career here" -

will be interested in the job. A position he thinks will be much more attractive now that the MTA is on a more even keel.

Lead the MTA for years to come

He said the new CEO should plan to lead the agency for many years to come and to guide the implementation of important transit corridor projects and the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

Burke noted that the Board and MTA management staff have a better working relationship now, a fact he believes provides a great measure of stability that will allow the new CEO to lead the agency with more confidence than earlier chief executives had.

He said the transition to the new CEO should come as "a normal course of our business" in which he would be available, for as long as needed, to serve as an advisor. In the period ahead, he'll continue his work to move the agency forward and ready it for his successor.

"I'm not going to be a lame duck," he emphasized. "I'm going to run this organization 'til the day I hand the keys to someone else. I have a lot of my self in it."

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