

Service Sector Plan Gets Favorable Hearing from Committees

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 26, 2002) CEO Roger Snoble received a favorable hearing from the Board's Operations and Executive Management committees, last week, when he laid out details of the MTA's new service sector concept and the agency-wide reorganization that will accompany it.

Stressing that the primary objective of the plan is to improve bus service and "be more responsive to our bus customers," Snoble also described a pared-down Headquarters staff, but illustrated how employees, funds and other resources would be shifted to the service sectors – a move he said would "flatten" the organization.

The CEO also indicated that the Board will play a key role by determining how much authority to give to local "councils" that will advise the sector general managers. The list of alternatives he mentioned included conducting public hearings, establishing bus service standards and approving some service changes, among others.

Snoble said he and Deputy CEO John Catoe plan to implement service sectors in the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, July 1. He asked that the Board reach a decision on the sector councils in May, or at least no later than June. The MTA also will seek advice on sector issues from elected officials and community leaders.

Los Angeles City Councilman Hal Bernson, Operations Committee chairman, and Board Chairman John Fasana, who heads the Executive Management Committee, expressed strong support for some elements of the concept. Supervisor Yvonne Burke, among other members, questioned how funding and other resources would be fairly allocated among the five sectors.

Opportunity for input

After hearing Snoble's presentation to the Operations Committee, Bernson said, "If we do this and do it properly, it gives people an opportunity to have input and to be a part of the picture."

During the Executive Management Committee meeting, Fasana expressed doubt about the feasibility of a transit zone in the San Gabriel Valley, but found much to admire in the MTA's proposed service sector plan.

He said accountability would be "closer to services being delivered," and that sectors could develop "quicker decision-making and responsiveness." He liked those aspects of the plan that would give sectors more authority and the ability to "produce a better product."

During the Executive Management Committee meeting, Burke noted differences in the tentative budget figures for some of the sectors. She questioned why one sector – Gateway Cities – with more annual boardings than two others would have a smaller operating budget.

Snoble explained that budgets had been tentatively allocated to the sectors by how much money currently is spent in each area. Such factors as operating and personnel costs, speed along the routes and per-passenger subsidies often dictate the amount of operating funds required.

Adequate sector resources

Earlier, at the Operations Committee meeting, Snoble said, "We're trying to make sure that every sector has adequate resources to provide the

services they're providing now. The better they do that, the more money they'll have for expanding services...."

Snoble told Burke he plans no changes in the capital improvement budget and bus procurement budgets. He said funds from other parts of the budget might be used to improve operating facilities. "Our facilities really need some attention and we have to get serious about that."

The CEO said that, although some staff functions would be moved to the service sectors, many will remain at Headquarters. Among those, he listed jobs in Countywide Planning, Metro Construction, administrative services, finance, ITS, management audit, customer information, marketing, government relations, county counsel, procurement and others.

Snoble said that, although the MTA is heavily involved in improving the county's transportation system, "If we don't do the bus part right, that takes away from our other responsibilities...all can be jeopardized if we aren't (operating) our bus service very well."

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