

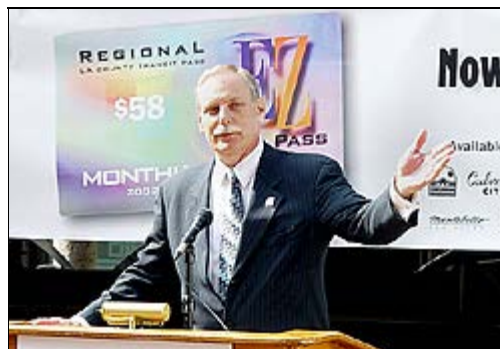
EDITOR'S NOTE: A CEO all-staff meeting is scheduled from 10 a.m. until noon, Monday, Oct. 14, in the Board room. TV coverage of the meeting will be provided in the Union Station conference room and the cafeteria. The meeting also will be broadcast on office intercoms.

PHOTO: LISA HUYNH

CEO Roger Snoble's First Year:

A Not-So-Quiet Revolution

By BILL HEARD, Editor



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(Oct. 10, 2002) When Roger Snoble assumed the mantle of leadership at MTA a year ago this month, he had big plans. Plans that amounted to no less than a revolution for an agency whose responsibilities touch virtually every person, business and industry in Los Angeles County.

Snoble wanted to bring MTA service closer to the customer. He saw a need to improve bus service, while expanding the types of services offered. He hoped to form constructive partnerships with the area's municipal operators. And he wanted to reduce employee accidents and lower workers' compensation costs. Along the way, he expected to enhance the agency's public image.

The chair in his 25th floor office was barely warm before he and his new deputy CEO, John Catoe, set to work changing things – and making heads spin.

The initiatives included launching five service sectors, an emphasis on better maintenance of buses, cleanliness and on-time rollouts, upgrading rail operations, developing a better relationship with muni operators and strong backing for the Safety's First campaign.

"Overall, I'm very pleased with the past year," Snoble told *metro.net* in an anniversary interview. "We're probably a lot further along in my plan than I dreamed we'd be after the first year. Things have come together so much better than I had anticipated."

Support from the Board

He expressed appreciation for the support of the MTA Board whose members "have shown every month since I've been here that they're really focused on providing greater mobility to the Los Angeles area. They're committed to making this agency work."

Among the initiatives that have received Board support has been the development of service sectors. In addition to approving the concept earlier this year, the Board in September approved a policy and a set of bylaws for the governance councils that will give residents of the five geographical areas a strong voice in deciding public transit issues.

"Our challenge for next year," Snoble says, "is to make those councils really effective."

The CEO credited a talented and hard-working MTA staff – from those at Headquarters to those in the operating divisions – with responding "so positively to the things we're trying to do. Much of my challenge has been to give good direction."

He also was quick to give recognition to the "multi-talented, multi-departmental task force" that put the service sector plan together.

"We could have hired a consultant to write a report, but they wouldn't have done as good a job," he says, "and we wouldn't be where we are today."

Improving customer service

Much of the focus of the service sectors is on improving customer service – on-time rollouts, upgrading maintenance and improving the appearance of the buses.

And, although the service sectors have only been in business a very short time, Snoble says they've "done a great job of responding to the goal of providing high-quality customer service. Everyone has said, 'We're ready for this. Let's do it!'"

That's some of the feedback Snoble has received from operating division employees during his monthly safety inspections. The inspections – also performed by John Catoe and Chief Financial Officer Richard Brumbaugh – are an important element of the Safety's First program.

Signing up for the program was one of the very first acts of the CEO's tenure in October 2001. Since that time, the Safety's First program has been introduced at all work locations, more than 2,400 employees have received safety training and local safety committees have been established.

MTA also has begun making headway toward reviving the safety culture that once flourished at SCRTD and is seeing some improvements, Snoble says. "The whole focus on maintaining a safe environment has to be recaptured. Our Safety's First program is a huge initiative and I'm glad we have DuPont with us."

Working with the munis

Perhaps Snoble's greatest coup has been bridging the gap – and overcoming years of mistrust – between MTA and the region's municipal operators. An effort that paid off in August with the introduction of the Regional EZPass.

Twelve munis have joined with MTA to promote the multi-agency monthly pass, a precursor to the Universal Fare System that's now under development and is expected in future years to provide

commuters seamless travel on transit systems across the region.

Snoble downplays his own role in the growing relationship with municipal operators. In fact, he credits San Gabriel Valley General Manager Jack Gabig with breaking the ice when he headed Montebello Transit. After the two agencies agree to recognize each other's monthly passes, things began to fall in line with the other munis.

"We need to use the strengths of the munis and the strengths of MTA to reorient service to our customers," Snoble says.

He cites studies showing that eliminating duplicate service could save as much as \$9 million. "I'm not talking about them growing at our expense, or us growing at their expense," he says. "I'm talking about us all growing to serve our customers."

Past year's highlights

Looking back over the past 12 months, the CEO highlights the following among many staff accomplishments:

- Completing preliminary engineering for the Eastside rail line
- Gaining federal approval of the Eastside line final environmental report
- Completing the final environmental impact report for the East-West Busway in the San Fernando Valley
- Opening HOV lanes on I-405 and State Road 14
- Gaining Board approval for Metro Rapid expansion of 24 lines
- Settling the AFSCME contract
- Taking delivery of 350 new CNG buses

"It's been a great year," Snoble says. "It makes me think we can accomplish even more next year and in the years to come. We've got what it takes in this agency to make a significant difference. We just need to stay focused and understand that our challenge is to create greater mobility for Los Angeles County."

CEO Roger Snoble also responded to the following questions during his anniversary interview with *metro.net*:

Metro.net: I think you pointed to settling the AFSCME contract as an accomplishment this past year.

Roger Snoble: We're very excited about bringing the supervisors into a more prominent role. I don't know how we can operate a quality transit system without road supervisors or radio dispatchers. As we expand the Metro Rapid system, it becomes more important because that system is controlled on the ground by the supervisors. They play a very big role and that's why we're glad we have a seven-year contract so we can really begin to develop their role to a much more meaningful level.

The AFSCME contract was settled just in time to start another

round of labor negotiations.

Yes. We're in contract talks now with the ATU – in fact, we have placed an excellent offer on the bargaining table. We hope the union will respond positively. The ATU has given us a notice of contract termination effective Jan. 15, 2003, but we hope we can reach a mutually favorable agreement before the year is out.

Then, in the spring we expect to begin bargaining talks with UTU. There again, we hope those negotiations can be conducted in a manner that will bring about an agreement that is favorable to both parties. And that the agreement can be reached relatively quickly.

The past year has been a whirlwind of activity. Do you see things settling down?

I'm not big on reorganization for reorganization's sake. I have people in whom I have confidence in the right positions and I think we can move forward. I'd rather have our time focused on getting the job done and making MTA an outstanding organization, rather than having people worry about whether they'll be moved around.

You've just come back from APTA. How is MTA perceived these days by its peer agencies?

If you had taken a survey among APTA members a year ago about which are the top transit properties, MTA wouldn't have shown up. Long Beach, Santa Monica, Foothill would have. But, at this APTA meeting, there was a whole different view of MTA. A lot of APTA members are looking at MTA as an agency they can learn from.

Looking to the near future. What's coming up?

In the very near future, we'll be opening two Metro Rapid lines on Vermont and South Broadway. They're going to be instantly successful. We'll be starting construction on the East-West Busway in the Valley. We'll build a pedestrian underpass at Universal City station and start tunnel work on the Eastside line. We're negotiating the federal full-funding grant agreement for that. And we're working like crazy on the federal transportation reauthorization bill, which will be a very high priority for us.

We're also working on Mobility 21, a big conference we're planning in November to draw in people from around the region who are involved in many phases of transportation, from public transit to hauling freight and to air transport. Hopefully, Mobility 21 will result in a task force that will meet annually and will work to improve the total transportation picture here in Los Angeles County.

There's talk again about extending the Metro Red Line out past Wilshire/Western. What's the straight word on that?

From a simple transportation viewpoint, we have a subway that goes only as far down Wilshire as to Western Avenue. We have a rapid bus system that continues on out that corridor and carries more passengers every day than most rail systems and, yet, we're far from providing enough transit for potential users. We need to improve mobility there and the extension in one shape or form of the Metro Red Line is probably something that's going to have to be done.

You don't see Metro Rapid or dedicated busways as being the final answer?

No. It's just a Band-Aid. Metro Rapid has been highly successful, but the fact is that if we could provide more capacity and greater speed on that corridor, we could carry lots more people. Having lived and traveled in that area, I can tell you it's miserable to drive there.

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