

## Catoe Sees MTA Beginning Shift to 'Hub and Spoke' in Mid-2004

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 19, 2003) Beginning in mid-2004 and continuing for the next several years, Metro Bus service will experience a transformation. A radical change not only for MTA, but also for other transit agencies in Los Angeles County.

The vision, as outlined by Deputy CEO John Catoe, is a future in which MTA routes its buses through a network of 15 to 18 regional transit "hubs" – including Metro Rail stations – connected by "spokes" of express service lines.



Deputy CEO John Catoe at Patsaouras Plaza of the Gateway Transit Center.

Hubs would be located in major shopping or employment centers and in other traffic-generating areas. Municipal buses or city-owned shuttles would coordinate service with Metro Bus schedules to transport passengers to local destinations between the hubs.

"The hub and spoke system will maximize MTA's resources and minimize duplication with the munis," says Catoe. "It will put the right buses in place for the right services and get people to their destinations quicker and on time."

Possible locations of hubs include Warner Center, Westwood, Wilshire/Western, Union Station, the El Monte Transit Center, the Long Beach Transit Center and the Pico/Rimpau bus terminal. Some already act as transfer points between MTA-operated buses and those operated by other transit agencies.

### Replace the 'grid system'

The hub and spoke network would largely replace MTA's current "grid system" which has bus lines – some 20 or more miles long – laid out in a checkerboard pattern across the county.

"Ours is a system based upon what the area looked like two or three decades ago," says Catoe. "We've made changes in headways and adjusted a few things, but we haven't basically restructured our service."

A proposal for converting Metro Bus service to a hub and spoke network will be presented to the MTA Board in January. Catoe expects to see the first changes – perhaps in El Monte, the San Fernando Valley and Westside/Central – beginning in June 2004.

"I can guarantee you that whatever we do, we're going to have to adjust," says Catoe. "What's planned and what is reality are two different things."

In an interview with *metro.net*, Catoe also commented on other aspects of the hub and spoke concept:

**Do you have a sense of how many hubs a patron would go through on an average ride?**

I don't envision them going to different hubs. An average customer travels only three to four miles. That means they would go through only one hub.

**In a hub and spoke system, how do customers get to destinations between the hubs?**

We will do destination studies to determine whether we should have smaller buses taking people to those destinations or whether we should take them to a rail station so they can continue their trip.

**What capital investments will be required for the hub and spoke system?**

In the future, it will require facilities at the hubs. They could be public/private partnerships with housing, retail, government offices and a transportation center. At the federal building in Westwood, for example, there's an outdoor facility, but nothing more. Over time, we would put a facility there – parking, small retail and a waiting area for customers.

Two studies are underway. One is for the routes we'd put into a hub and spoke system and the other is what capital facilities we'll need. The capital facilities are going to lag the services themselves.

**What role do you see the municipal operators playing?**

A major role. They're one-fourth of the transit capacity in this county. We're going to do what we've talked about doing for over a decade and that is, let's stop duplicating muni services. They'll pick up more people with their existing resources, although in a couple of cases, they may have to buy more buses. Some money already has been made available for that. Two years ago, we began providing \$15 million to the municipal operators as a fair share to expand their services. Each operator gets a share.

The other group that will play a big role is the city operators. There are hundreds of buses that we've never fit into the plan. They provide valuable shuttle services within their cities and we need to integrate those into MTA services.

**Have the munis indicated a willingness to take on this role?**

I believe the munis will support this as we convince elected officials that this is the best way to use transit dollars. The muni operators will work with us and we intend to include them in the entire process, but this will take a regional agreement by elected and public transit officials.

**MTA has said for several years that our system will continue to grow. Will that continue to be true under the hub and spoke concept?**

Our system will maintain itself and will grow, collectively, with rail and bus. But, to say that we're going to have a 4,000-bus system is not realistic. Will MTA be the biggest operator in this county? No question about it, but we're not the only operator in this county. Our

past practice has been to operate everywhere despite the munis. We will continue to be the major regional operator, but we will work with the munis and their resources to make us more effective.

**Will it take more buses to operate a hub and spoke system?**

In some locations, yes, and different types of vehicles. But, in other locations, we might use fewer buses. One intent of the hub and spoke system is to increase ridership. And, if you increase ridership, you'll need that capacity. This is not an attempt to cut the size of the MTA. This is an attempt to design it to face a new reality.

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