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Staff Meeting: CEO Gives Frank Assessment of Metro's Future

- Suggests some may want to look at early retirement
- Expects budget woes until FY 2007

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Feb. 1, 2005) Although he pointed out several bright spots in the current fiscal year and in FY 2006 during last week's staff meeting, CEO Roger Snoble gave a straight-forward assessment of Metro's immediate future – which he expects will include a staff reduction.

In fact, Snoble suggested that some employees might want to think about taking early retirement or accepting a retirement package.

"Talk to us about it and we'll see what we can do," he said. "We're thinking about going to the Board and seeing if there's something the Board might authorize us to do to make it easier."

Asked later in the meeting about the current job freeze, Snoble said, "It probably will continue through the rest of this fiscal year and perhaps most of next year." He might authorize filling some critical positions on a case-by-case basis, "...but, I'd rather not fill a position today and then lay off a position months from now."

Exposition Line work

In answer to a question about Metro Construction layoffs following completion of the Metro Orange Line, next fall, he said work on the Exposition Line, which is now in preliminary engineering, would begin soon afterward and that some Construction employees might be needed to staff that project.

A \$40 million deficit for the remainder of FY 2005 and perhaps an even larger one next fiscal year are at the heart of Metro's budget woes – a "real dilemma that we're working very hard...to patch up..." he said.

Management anticipates that the 290,000 bus service hours added this year to fulfill Consent Decree orders will mean a \$75 million increase in operating costs, but – because ridership is flat – Metro can expect to get only about \$20 million more from the farebox.

Shoble does not foresee a fare hike any time soon – at least not until the Universal Fare System with its new TAP fareboxes is fully deployed in the Metro Bus fleet.



CEO Roger Snoble addresses all-staff meeting Jan. 25.



CEO Roger Snoble: "Transportation dollars are zeroed out in the state budget."

Proposition 42 funding

The CEO noted that, for the third year, Proposition 42 funds earmarked for transportation projects will be used to balance the state's budget. "Transportation dollars are zeroed out in the state budget," he said.

And, while he'll go to Washington, D.C., in February in an effort to ensure some \$100 million in federal funding this year for buses, local transit service and the Eastside Extension project, Snoble indicated there's little hope of receiving similar funding over the next four years.

Despite these challenges, the CEO was upbeat about a number of things – new 45-foot Compo Buses joining the fleet, the opening later this year of the Metro Orange Line with its new 60-foot Metro Liners, a 25 percent reduction in Workers' Compensation claims, and even the prospects of a balanced budget for FY 2006.

But, he cautioned that things might not get a lot better for Metro until FY 2007.

In the meantime, he said, "Hang on. Work hard and we'll get through it all."