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VIEW FROM THE 25th FLOOR

Riding Metro with the Mayor: An Opportunity for Transit

By CEO ROGER SNOBLE

• **And Good Luck to our Metro Bus Rodeo Team!**



CEO Roger Snoble

Deputy CEO John Catoe and I were privileged, last week, to join Mayor Villaraigosa and five Board members in riding the Metro Gold Line from the Southwest Museum Station into Union Station.

At the end of our trip, the mayor spoke with local media, urging citizens to “ride Metro with the Mayor” at least a couple of days each week to reduce traffic and to save money. As the price of gasoline and other fuels continue their precipitous climb, Mayor Villaraigosa and Board members Gloria Molina, John Fasana, Pam O’Connor, Richard Katz, Bernard Parks and David Fleming were out in front, setting a good example.

The event provided an opportunity for us to point out that using public transit, carpooling or vanpooling instead of commuting alone can save a commuter between \$5,000 and almost \$5,500 a year.

The effort to promote transit, when combined with fuel prices, appears to be paying off in transit ridership increases. In the past year, July 2004 to July 2005, Metro Rail average daily ridership was up some 30,000 boardings, while Metro Bus daily boardings rose by almost 40,000. Since the gasoline crisis of 1974, when it often was impossible even to buy gas, I haven’t seen such a diversion from cars to public transit.

We have the capacity

The difference back then was that our transit systems couldn’t handle the crowds. Now, here in Los Angeles, we have the capacity for a sizeable increase in riders.

Still, the situation is a double-edged sword for Metro, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that our FY 2006 budget already is being hit hard by escalating fuel costs. If prices continue to rise at the current rate, we could spend \$4.8 million more than we budgeted for diesel fuel, \$1.15 million more for CNG and \$416,000 more for gasoline.

These costs add even more to an already substantial structural deficit

in our FY 2006 operating budget. We can't sustain these costs and our current level of service without generating more revenue – and how we're going to do that is a question we will be grappling with for some time to come. Stay tuned.

The other side of the sword, however, is – as I noted above – the increased bus and rail ridership and the opportunity it affords us to demonstrate to Los Angelenos that public transit is a safe, affordable, convenient and efficient way to get to get around.

Let's be good 'hosts'

Let's make the most of this opportunity by being good "hosts" and welcoming these new riders to our great transit system.

I want to close by wishing our Metro Bus Rodeo team the best of luck in two important competitions scheduled next month – the Southern California Regional Bus Rodeo, Sept. 10, in Irvine and the APTA International Finals, Sept. 24, in Dallas.

We'll all be rooting for Operator Sam Morales of Central City Division 1 and his maintenance teammates, Andrew Warren Jr., Rommel Vargas and Frank Forde of Arthur Winston Division 5. All four are experienced competitors who can be expected to give the maximum. I wish them all well – they're the best of the best!

August 30, 2005