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## 2005's Events Ended an 'OK' Year; CEO Says 2006 Will Be 'a Great Year'

- Orange Line, Eastside and Expo Line among outstanding 2005 accomplishments

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Dec. 20, 2005) Although he cited a number of outstanding Metro accomplishments during the latter part of 2005, CEO Roger Snoble gave the year only an "OK" rating at Monday morning's staff meeting. But 2006, he predicted, will be "a great year," even though it will present some big challenges for the agency.

On the plus side of 2005, Snoble placed increases in ridership, new Metro Rapid and Express bus service, the opening of the Metro Orange Line in October, progress on construction of the Eastside Extension and Board approval of the Exposition Line environmental report.

He also noted that a panel of experts agreed that extending the subway along Wilshire Boulevard would be feasible and safe – a fact that encouraged Congressman Henry Waxman, last Friday, to introduce legislation to drop a federal ban on tunneling on the Westside.

On the negative side, Snoble mentioned the budget deficit his staff has wrestled with all year. A huge budget shortfall – amounting to between \$125 million and \$150 million – looms in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

"For the last four years, we've overcome some substantial deficits, but none that big," he said. "It will take concentrated Board of Directors and staff work to reduce the structural deficit, but if it can be resolved, we have a really bright future."

### 'Resist reductions in force'

Asked in the Q & A session about the possibility of non-contract layoffs in 2006, Snoble said, "We're going to try to resist any additional reductions in force."

Adding that current staff levels are lower than he would like, he said, "We'll take a pretty hard stand in this budget year that we can't solve the structural deficit on the backs of our non-contract employees."

Deputy CEO John Catoe noted that labor contracts with Metro's largest unions – the UTU, ATU and TCU – expire June 30. He hopes to have agreements with all three in place by July 1, 2006.

Catoe plans to change the format of labor negotiations, this year, from one in which the parties stake out hard and fast positions to "interest-based" bargaining in which the agency and its unions have such

common goals as a stable work force and reasonable pay and benefits.

"We want contracts that are beneficial to our employees," Catoe said, "so that the union can say this is a good contract and Metro can meet our economic needs...."

Snoble noted with relief that the 10-year federal Consent Decree ends Oct. 29, 2006 – "314 more days to go!" – and said Judge Donald Bliss has indicated he won't continue as special master.

**'Riders deserve the best'**

Nevertheless, Snoble said that when the consent decree ends, "We'll continue to work as hard as we can to provide quality service to our customers...our riders deserve the best service they possibly can get and we need to be mindful of serving them."

Catoe reported on the status of Metro Connections, an agency initiative aimed at making regional bus service more effective and efficient by working closely with the municipal transit agencies to avoid duplicating routes and service.

Metro Connections envisions a network of strategically located transit centers linked by major routes served by Metro buses. Municipal buses and shuttles would serve many of the smaller lines radiating out from the transit centers.

A master plan of routes is to be completed by May 2006, with the first phase of implementation scheduled in December 2006 and full implementation continuing into 2009.

Catoe pointed out that the 450X express line on the Harbor Transitway and the 577X that began service, Monday, between El Monte and Long Beach, are elements of Metro Connections.

"It's underway," said Catoe. "It's going to be an improvement in our system. A lot of excitement and energy are being put into it."