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2005: One of the Most Astounding Years in Recent Memory

By BILL HEARD, Editor



October 28, 2005 - The inaugural Metro Liner, bearing Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, CEO Roger Snoble and other elected and community leaders, bursts through an orange banner and showers of confetti at the Balboa Station to signify the opening of the Metro Orange Line. Photo by Gary Leonard.

In this report: The Year's Top Stories

January	February	March	April	May	June
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(Jan. 12, 2006) The year 2005 was one of the most astounding in recent memory.

It was a year in which Mother Nature played havoc with Metro construction projects and with the rail and bus systems. But, it also was a year that saw the agency shine with the opening of the Metro Orange Line and significant progress on the Eastside Extension and the Exposition Line.

Metro received new buses and new rail cars, along with a favorable report from the Special Master overseeing the Consent Decree and assurances from a panel of experts that tunneling farther along Wilshire could be done safely.

The agency responded to heightened concern over security, following the terror attacks in London, with the installation of new high-tech surveillance equipment. The agency also launched two new Metro Express lines – 450X and 577X – and a welter of new Metro Rapid lines.

As CEO Roger Snoble noted in his December column, it was "a year of beginnings."

Here's a month-by-month replay of Metro's Top Stories of 2005:

January

Three trees broke loose from a rain-soaked hillside and fell across Metro Gold Line electrical wires in South Pasadena, Jan. 10, halting service for 10 hours while Metro wayside crews struggled to clear the tracks.

Eleven people died and nearly 200 were injured, Jan. 26, when two Metrolink trains collided after one hit an SUV parked on the tracks. Among the injured passengers were Metro employees Donna Blanchard, Brenda Aguilar, Russ Murry and Charlie Fitzsimmons.

The Board adopted the Draft Final Report on the I-710 Major Corridor Study, Jan. 27. The report outlined a \$5.5 billion Locally Preferred Strategy to overhaul the heavily congested freeway and parallel roads to handle future growth and improve safety and air quality.

Jan. 10, 2005 - Metro Rail officials in orange vests assess damage to Metro Gold Line overhead electrical wires while members of a contractor's crew, in yellow slickers, consider how to remove fallen trees from the right-of-way.

Photo by José Ubaldo



February

A San Fernando Valley group opposed to construction of the Metro Orange Line dropped its lawsuit, clearing the way for the project to proceed without further court delays.

Metro Rail Operations spent a wild, wet Presidents' Day weekend coping with lightning-sparked electrical outages, rainwater damage and mudslides that affected service on all four Metro Rail lines. A few days later, a massive mudslide that blocked the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu cut Metro Bus service to homes, businesses and schools and forced transit users to walk two miles through the slide area to reach their destinations.

The California Public Utilities Commission approved a legal settlement that

allowed improvements to the South Pasadena section of the Metro Gold Line. Conditions of the agreement included the volume of crossing bells, constructing some 1,030 feet of additional sound walls and installation of two rail lubricators.

February 14, 2005 - Mark Clifford's spectacular photograph captured Metro's Valentine's Day display against the downtown L.A. cityscape.



Photography by Mark Clifford

March

The Board approved a new Metro bus transportation operating facility – The West Los Angeles Transportation Facility – and certified the project's final environmental impact report. The new facility, which will replace Venice Division 6, will be designed for up to 150 CNG buses that will serve Central and West Los Angeles.

Construction workers preparing the site for an expansion of the Metro Gold Line rail yard near Chinatown, March 25, partially uncovered a 100-foot section of the Zanja Madre, an historic conduit that once served as the main water supply for Los Angeles. The "Mother Ditch" had probably been buried for at least 100 years below what is now North Broadway.

Metro Environmental Specialist Carl Ripaldi examines an exposed section of the Zanja Madre located just north of the Chinatown station. *Photo by Luis Inzunza*



April

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that Metro and two regional transit agencies would receive \$6.9 million this year for transit security programs.

Metro marked Earth Day, April 15, by taking delivery of its 2,000th CNG transit vehicle.

The Special Master issued a Consent Decree order, April 14, requiring Metro to add at least 134 buses to the Metro Rapid fleet and to have all 28 proposed Metro Rapid lines in service by Dec. 31, 2008.

Almost 1,500 employees, family members and guests crowded into the Universal Amphitheater, April 16, for food and fun during Metro Family Day at Universal Studios.

The Board approved a \$640 million full funding plan, April 28, for construction of the Exposition Light Rail Transit Project, which will operate between Los Angeles and Culver City, when completed in 2010.



April 15, 2005 - Deputy CEO John Catoe takes delivery of Metro's 2000th Clean Air Bus at Earth Day ceremony with the support of Chung Liu, at center, Deputy Executive Officer of Technology Advancement for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, and Darrell Clarke, right, Chair of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter Transportation Committee. *Photos by Luis Inzunza*



May

Having gone 940 days without a lost-time injury, the Revenue Equipment Maintenance Department of Central Maintenance celebrated the milestone with a luncheon barbecue.

The Board of Directors adopted a \$2.86 billion budget for FY 2006. The spending plan is \$153 million less than the FY 2005 amended budget,

despite rising fuel, insurance, security, Worker's Compensation and other costs.

The Special Master overseeing the federal Consent Decree issued a new order requiring Metro to revise its Transit Service Policy and to submit a report describing the changes and showing how they will benefit transit-dependent riders.

Ridership on the Metro Blue Line reached a record in May, with more than 76,000 average weekday boardings, the highest month of ridership since the 22-mile rail line opened in 1990.

PHOTO: AJITH PEIRIS



May 10, 2005 - Solar panels installed at Division 15, like these shown on the roof of the transportation building, will provide 20 percent of the division's power needs.

June

A Russian-built cargo plane delivered Metro's first 2550 rail car to LAX following a 6,300-mile flight from Pisa, Italy, via Reykjavik, Iceland, to California. CEO Roger Snoble welcomed the 90-foot, 54-ton rail car to Los Angeles.

Metro inaugurated a new express bus line between the South Bay and Downtown Los Angeles. Metro Express Line 450X travels between the Artesia Transit Center and LA's Financial District in less than 30 minutes.

Metro marked the half-way point of the planned 28-line Metro Rapid program with the debut, June 27, of three new lines -- Fairfax Metro Rapid Line 717, Beverly Metro Rapid Line 714 and Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus Rapid 3 line on Lincoln Boulevard.

A Carson man accused of two sexual assaults and an attempted assault on women at Union Station in 2004 was sentenced, June 17, to four life terms in prison.



June 14, 2005 - With Metro's new 2550 Light-Rail Vehicle on board, an Antonov AN-124 cargo jet touched down just before 9 a.m., June 11, at LAX. The 2550 vehicle was transported the following Tuesday to the Metro Gold Line yard. *Photo by Juan Ocampo.*

July

The reaction in Los Angeles to the July 7 terrorist attack in London was swift as city leaders, law enforcement personnel and transit officials gathered at Parker Center for a news conference called by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. The mayor noted that no specific threat to the Los Angeles transit system was evident. Following the news conference, the mayor took reporters and officials on the Metro Red Line for a safety-emphasizing trip to the Hollywood/Highland station.

Metro officials and executives from Italian rail car manufacturer AnsaldoBreda, Inc. officially welcomed the new 2550 light rail vehicle during an event at Union Station. The rail car is the first of 50 Metro has ordered from the manufacturer at a cost of \$2.9 million each. They will be placed into service on the Metro Gold Line and on the Eastside Extension when it opens in December 2009.

Mayor Villaraigosa, taking up the Board of Directors gavel, outlined transportation priorities for his term as chairman – emphasizing commitments to transit security, maintaining “a first-class bus system” and “investment in new rail lines.” Declaring that Metro has “substantially improved bus service over the past decade,” the mayor said the agency “must maintain its commitment to a first-class bus system.”

Operator Sam Morales and mechanics Andrew Warren Jr., Rommel Vargas and Frank Forde hit a triple when they won the 2005 Metro Bus Rodeo, July 30. They'll carry the agency's flag at not one, but three bus competitions over the next eight months.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa is surrounded by his appointees during a Wednesday morning news conference. From left, they are: former Assembly Speaker Richard Katz, Los Angeles City Councilman Bernard Parks, attorney David Fleming and new Deputy Mayor for Transportation Jaime de la Vega. *Photo by Luis Inzunza*



August

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa joined key members of Congress and local and state officials in detailing Los Angeles County's success in securing an estimated \$4.5 billion in federal funding for highway and transit programs and projects. This includes \$833 million for specific projects and highway and transit formula funds programmed by Metro.

Deputy Executive Officer Carol Inge was named interim chief planning officer while an outside search firm conducts a recruitment for a permanent replacement for Chief Planning Officer Jim de la Loza, who resigned the post, effective Aug. 19, to take a job in private industry.

Metro began the first steps in a highly accelerated plan to vastly upgrade technology and other security measures on Metro Rail lines and at all Metro facilities. The overall program, expected to cost about \$7 million, is seen as a quantum leap that before this fiscal year is over will push Metro's security technology well past that of any other U.S. transit agency.

The Board set a \$3 million budget for surveillance systems and personnel to upgrade Metro Rail security. It authorized the CEO to spend \$2.2 million for installation of surveillance cameras on Metro Rail cars. Using this funding, Metro plans to install surveillance cameras on all subway and light rail platforms.

August 16, 2005 - Metro Liners pass on the 26-foot-wide transitway of the Metro Orange Line near Laurel Canyon Station during test ride for officials and media August 2. *Photo by Juan Ocampo*



September

Metro's bus maintenance team – mechanics Andrew Warren Jr., Rommel Vargas and Frank Forde – took top honors, Sept. 10, in the Southern California Regional Bus Roadeo.

Some 80 Metro volunteers joined with volunteers from the El Monte Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's and Fire departments to raise almost \$70,000 for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Metro honored its 134 very best Transit Operations employees during the annual "Night of Stars" banquet at the Westin Bonaventure in downtown LA.

The Board authorized the purchase of 200 new buses, all but six of them high-capacity CNG vehicles that will be assigned to the busiest bus lines. The new bus procurements include 94 articulated buses – the 60-foot Metro Liners – and 100 45-foot buses. In addition, Metro is purchasing six hybrid 40-foot coaches that will run on gasoline and electricity.

September 13, 2005 - Arthur Winston Division Mechanics Team - from left, Andrew Warren Jr., Rommel Vargas and Frank Forde - advance to international competition after regional win.



October

In an effort to quickly reduce traffic congestion resulting from breakdowns of big rig trucks traveling along the Long Beach Freeway, Metro introduced the Metro Freeway Service Patrol Big Rig Tow Service.

Mayor Villaraigosa announced that an independent peer review panel had been formed to investigate the feasibility of subway tunneling under Wilshire Boulevard west of Western Avenue.

Metro's Universal Fare System project moved into high gear with new TAP ticket vending machines, validators and fareboxes all scheduled to be installed throughout the system by spring 2006. And, by the end of June 2007, TAP equipment should be ready for operation on most municipal transit buses.

Metro and the Los Angeles Unified School District partnered to deliver safety presentations to more than 100 schools within a 1.5-mile radius of the Metro Orange Line, bringing the agency's "Safety 1st" message to thousands of Valley school students, teachers and parents.

Gathered under a huge white tent at the Balboa station in the heart of the San Fernando Valley, Oct. 29, scores of city and county leaders were joined by Metro officials for ceremonies marking the official opening of the Metro Orange Line. "We begin a new era in the San Fernando Valley today," Mayor Villaraigosa declared, "one that's been long-awaited and long-deserved." A total of 83,000 rode the Metro Orange Line on opening weekend.

October 29, 2005 - An estimated 83,000 rode the Orange Line on opening weekend.



Photo by Gary Leonard

November

Extra precautions were added to already stringent safety measures on the new Metro Orange Line after two collisions between cars and 60-ft Metro Liner buses at traffic-jammed intersections of the alignment. Within minutes of the first accident, San Fernando Valley General Manager Richard Hunt issued an order for all Orange Line bus operators to increase caution and reduce speed at intersections.

The Mobility 21 Coalition announced plans to take a broader role in 2006 by joining forces with transportation advocates in neighboring counties to seek state and federal funding for the region. At the 4th annual meeting, several speakers mentioned the need for the Coalition to assume a wider role in Southern California.

After more than a year's delay while Metro and the UTU went to court and then to arbitration, the safety rule requiring bus operators to wear seat belts while behind the wheel took effect immediately.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa urges transportation advocates attending fourth annual Mobility 21 summit to "work together as a region to secure funding." Joining him at the speakers' podium are, from left, CEO Roger Snoble, Long Beach Councilwoman Bonnie Lowenthal, Los Angeles Area of Commerce Executive Vice President Ron Gastelum and Los Angeles City Councilwoman Wendy Greuel. *Photo by Juan Ocampo*



December

CEO Roger Snoble presided over the unveiling of the new Rosa Parks commemorative posters. The bus cards were featured in every coach in Metro's fleet. Snoble said the cards were meant to commemorate Parks' courage and an "immense amount of change because of one person on a bus."

The special master for the federal Consent Decree released a decision, Nov. 30, approving Metro's New Service Plan and complimenting the agency for adding "a new dimension of bus service to Los Angeles County" with implementation of the Metro Rapid program.

With a full month of data available, weekday boardings on the Metro Orange Line for November were estimated at 16,360 – three times what the agency expected.

Construction crews were assembling the two earth pressure balance machines that soon will begin drilling twin, 1.8-mile tunnels for the Metro Gold Line's Eastside Extension.

Metro launched Metro Express Line 577X, Dec. 19, between El Monte and Long Beach.

The Special Master overseeing the federal Consent Decree gave conditional approval, Dec. 9, to Metro's revised Transit Service Policy and to service changes implemented on 13 bus lines between June 2003 and June 2005.

The panel of experts examining the safety of tunneling along the Wilshire Corridor submitted its final report, concluding that it is possible to both safely tunnel and safely operate a subway beyond Wilshire/Western. The American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) Peer Review panel unanimously agreed that the work could be done safely "by following proper procedures and using appropriate technologies...."

The Board certified the Exposition Line's environmental impact documents, a significant step that paves the way for the start of construction in 2006. "Today's approval by the Board signals the start of a much-needed transportation project that will serve thousands of Westside residents," said Mayor Villaraigosa.

The Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau deputies who helped rescue two children from a burning building, early Tuesday, will be nominated for the department's prestigious Lifesaving Award. Deputy Annmarie Matusik beat back flames with a fire extinguisher, allowing Deputy Jeff Kim to catch two children who could have been trapped in a second-floor apartment.

December 9, 2005 - Tunnel boring machine is about to be lowered at Mariachi Plaza Station construction site. Photo by Juan Ocampo



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