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Resources

[Safety](#)[Pressroom \(web\)](#)[Ask the CEO](#)[CEO Forum](#)[Employee Recognition](#)[Employee Activities](#)[Metro Projects](#)[Facts at a Glance \(web\)](#)[Archives](#)[Events Calendar](#)[Research Center/Library](#)[Metro Classifieds](#)[Bazaar](#)

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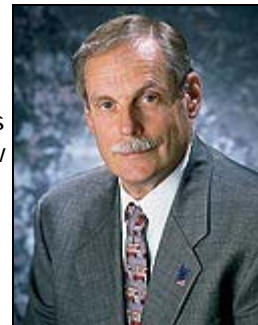
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Making Metro go from red to black

By ROGER SNOBLE

Over the past four years the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) has made great strides in serving the people of the Los Angeles region with system improvements and new services. Here in the San Fernando Valley the Metro Orange Line has seen unprecedented success, and is expected to continue to see increasing ridership.



CEO Roger Snoble

For nearly a decade Metro has achieved or exceeded targets for easing overcrowding, expanding service, reducing fares and increasing the number, quality and environmental efficiency of buses in service.

Metro today operates the newest, cleanest and most modern bus fleet in the country. Ridership is up (4.7%) and fare box revenues are up (9%) from a year ago.

A recent customer survey revealed overwhelming satisfaction (84%) with Metro's service and agreement that service is markedly better than just a year ago. Not surprisingly, customer complaints are at an all time low.

By adding 300 Metro Rapid buses and 30 Metro Liners, we are about halfway to achieving our goal of deploying a 700-vehicle, 28-line Bus Rapid Transit network that will be by far the largest in the country by 2008. In addition, we have increased customer mobility by adding Metro Express lines between major transit hubs.

Meanwhile, 260,000 men and women, including students, ride Metro Rail Red, Gold, Green and Blue Lines daily to and from their destinations in safety and comfort. The Gold Line Eastside Light Rail Extension is now under construction and will begin service in 2009. Additionally the Exposition Light Rail Line will start construction this year and begin operations in 2010.

Despite our success, we have a structural operating deficit and are very much aware that in the near future the people of Los Angeles will be profoundly affected by the looming financial crisis this agency faces unless corrective action is taken and new revenue sources are found. This is why we are continually looking for ways to generate more revenue or reduce costs.

Over the last four years Metro has cut 545 positions within the agency. Today Metro has one of the leanest operations in the country,

particularly when you take into consideration that we have far more responsibilities than the typical transit agency.

With a meager 10% of our cost being administrative, we have turned to streamlining operating costs and worked hard to cut unnecessary expenditures to ensure that we operate an efficient system that provides 1.5 million passenger trips per weekday.

Metro's operating costs per hour, even with a 117% rise in fuel costs, have increased less than the rate of inflation over the last four years. In 2004 we modified our fare structure and increased passenger revenues.

However, today we are only recovering 26% of our costs from the fare box. Other similar transit agencies across the nation and even in California typically recover 40 to 60% of their operating dollars from the fare box. Even with these disparities, I plan to submit a balanced budget for Metro as we enter a new fiscal year.

Under the strong leadership of the Metro Board of Directors, we've made progress toward achieving our long-term mobility goals for the county.

But to secure the gains we've made, and further our progress, we must face the challenge of eliminating the structural deficit by reducing costs and growing revenue. It's just good business sense. The people of Los Angeles will suffer the consequences of our not acting responsibly to resolve the financial challenges this agency faces.
