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Celebrating its rank among the nation's transit systems, Metro displayed a giant numeral "1" from the Gateway Building the weekend of Oct. 14-15. APTA presented its 2006 Outstanding Transportation System Achievement Award Oct. 10, naming Metro the number one transit system throughout North America. Here, the number 1 illuminates the sides of Metro Headquarters facing downtown Los Angeles and the 101 Freeway. Volunteers coordinated lights and window blinds in more than 800 windows to create this tribute to Metro excellence. Photo by Deniz Durmus.



Top Stories of 2006: Metro Set Blistering Pace of Activity and Achievement

- Metro capped the year with APTA's highest honor

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Jan. 4, 2007) Metro kept up a blistering pace of activity and achievement in 2006. The agency made big news on a number of fronts – increased ridership, labor relations and system expansion among them – and capped off the year by being named America's best transit agency.

The year began with a difficult, but ultimately successful Rose Parade/Rose Bowl rail and bus operation and ended with high-profile shuttle service for mourners attending former President Gerald Ford's memorial in Palm Desert.

As 2006 progressed, we saw the Expo Line begin to take shape with the selection of a CEO, approval of a construction budget and a groundbreaking. Across town, tunneling began and was completed on the Metro Gold Line's Eastside Extension, whose workers set an unprecedented safety record.

Meanwhile, bus and rail ridership saw steady increases as the public reacted to higher gasoline prices and Metro opened new service. The Metro Orange Line, in particular, achieved increased patronage from Valley riders.



Getting into the celebratory moment are, from left, the UTU's Goldy Norton, Deputy Mayor Jaime de la Vega, APTA President William Millar, Board Member Pam O'Connor, CEO Roger Snoble, Board Chair Gloria Molina and Deputy CEO John Catoe. Photo by Gary Leonard.

Industry's highest honor

Metro received the transit industry's highest honor at the APTA Annual Meeting in October when it was named Outstanding Public Transportation System for 2006.

Metro averted labor strife, thanks to a new negotiating strategy, when management and leaders of its three major unions reached agreements prior to contract expiration. The 10-year-old federal Consent Decree also came to an end, although the Bus Riders Union continued to file court appeals.

Saddening the year, however, was the death in April of Metro's venerable Arthur Winston, the 100-year-old patriarch of his namesake Division 5.

Here's a month-by-month look back at Metro's Top Stories of 2006:

January

Although high winds and driving rains pushed a huge construction scaffold into the Metro Gold Line right-of-way just as spectators were leaving the Tournament of Roses Parade, Jan. 2, the Metro bus and rail team managed to transport the crowds by noon. The weather was better and service was much smoother, Jan. 4, when some 13,000 Rose Bowl fans rode the Gold Line or Metro Buses to and from the USC-Texas game.

Metro opened a new bus terminal, Jan. 11, at Pico/Rimpau to serve downtown LA, mid-city and Santa Monica. The terminal is a prototype of Metro Connections facilities.

The Exposition Metro Line Authority Construction Board approved a \$640 million construction project budget and the FY 2006 staffing plan.

February

Seventy-five San Gabriel Valley Metro operators, maintainers and administrative staff turned out, Feb. 3, for a groundbreaking ceremony at the site of a new building to house Division 9 transportation and service sector offices.

The Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority Board selected Metro Construction Chief Rick Thorpe as the Authority's permanent chief executive officer during its Feb. 2 meeting.

Tunneling on the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension began, Feb. 23, when "Lola" – a 2 million-pound tunnel boring machine – started her march through 1.7 miles of earth under Boyle Heights. Twin sister "Vicki" stood ready to begin excavation on her side of the tunnels.

March

The Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority's Board of Directors voted to approve a \$420.2 million design/build contract, marking the official start of the Expo Line project.

The Los Angeles Council of Engineers and Scientists named the Metro Orange Line as the winner of a Project Achievement Award for 2006.

A media event marked the debut, March 15, of the FlyAway Airport Shuttle, a direct, nonstop service from Union Station Patsaouras Plaza to LAX.

With sirens blaring, a "Happy 100th" special bus carried centenarian Arthur Winston to a birthday celebration at his namesake Division 5, March 22, as more than 150 co-workers and Metro executives, family members, friends, public officials and media representatives applauded.

APRIL



Tiger Team members, from left, rear, are Dave Kubicek, Ron Dupuis, Ted Montoya and Larry Kelsey. From left, front row are Elizabeth Bennett, Milo Victoria, Tiger Team leader Bruce Feerer, M3 Users group chairman Pat Astredo, and John Roberts. Not shown is team member Pat Lane-Goodson. Photo by Bill Heard.

M3 Implementation Team had a "Tiger by the Tail"

CEO Roger Snoble, center rear, commended members of Metro's M3 Tiger Team for their work in coordinating the monumental job of implementing the computer-based Maintenance and Material Management System.



Arthur Winston, at his retirement celebration held at Metro Headquarters, March 23, 2006. Photo by Gary Leonard.

Arthur Winston, who retired March 22, 2006, as Metro’s most senior employee, died April 13 at age 100. Respected for his integrity, dedication to service and unfailing good nature, he inspired his co-workers and in many ways symbolized the spirit of the agency.

Metro completed installation of new L.E.D. “TRAIN” signs at all 59 left-turn lanes in the Metro Blue Line corridor.

MAY



At the 7th and Metro station, the demonstrators boarded westbound trains to reach the rally sites on Wilshire. Shelburne estimates the Metro Red Line were transporting more than 20,000 passengers per hour, at peak. About half that number rode the

trains eastbound after the demonstrations. Photo by Gayle Anderson.

Demonstrators en route to the May 1 immigrants' rights rallies on Wilshire Boulevard crowded onto Metro Blue Line trains. Service Development Manager Bruce Shelburne estimated the Blue Line transported some 8,400 northbound passengers per hour, while the Metro Red Line carried more than 20,000 passengers per hour, at peak.

Placing high-capacity buses where they were needed most, Metro phased in 60-foot articulated buses on Metro Rapid Line 720 on heavily congested Wilshire Boulevard.

The Board of Directors adopted a \$3.029 billion budget for FY 2007, but voted to meet within 30 days to consider budget cuts of \$10 million to offset a \$110 million structural deficit.

JUNE

Weekday ridership on the Metro Orange Line averaged 21,828 boardings, a milestone the Environmental Impact Report predicted wouldn't be reached until 2020.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa presided over his final meeting as chairman of the 13-member panel. The incoming chair for FY 2007, Supervisor Gloria Molina, said Los Angeles is at a "quality-of-life crossroads, facing a multitude of challenges."

Metro reached tentative agreements with its three largest labor unions, the UTU, ATU and TCU, following a bargaining period that marked what was called "a better way to approach negotiations in the City of Los Angeles." It was the first time in at least 18 years that agreements were reached before current union contracts expired.

JULY



Division 10 Service Attendant Betty Williams had been sitting in her black Saturn only minutes before this Line 304 bus careened into it. She was not injured. Photo courtesy of Transportation Manager Karl Downs.

A Metro employee was arrested and held on \$1 million bail after he damaged five buses and 18 other vehicles during an incident that created a path of destruction at Gateway Division 10. Jose Martinez was accused of causing damages conservatively estimated at \$100,000 or more.

Workers building the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension set a record that astonished long-time construction safety executives – they had no lost-time injuries in the one million work-hours they had spent on the job since July 2004.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa’s dream of a “subway to the sea” took a step toward becoming reality when the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure adopted a bill to lift a federal ban on extending the Metro Red Line west of Western Avenue on Wilshire Boulevard.

AUGUST



At the conclusion of the “topping out” celebration for the new Division 9 transportation building, San Gabriel Valley General Manager Jack Gabig, center right, is joined by, from left, Governance Council member Harry Baldwin, Transportation Manager Mike Greenwood, Project Manager Tim Lindholm, Administrative Analyst Jill Smith, Maintenance Manager John McBryan, Governance Council member Bruce Heard, Metro staff members, Sheriff’s Transit Services Bureau deputies and representatives of W.E. O’Neill Contractors. Photo by Bill Heard.

Gripping bright yellow markers, officials from the San Gabriel Valley Service Sector lined up, Aug. 22, to celebrate the “topping out” of the new Division 9 transportation building by autographing the steel skeleton of the three-story building.

Metro agreed to sell the 5.05-acre Division 12 property to the City of Long Beach, which plans to convert the site to park land and create a greenbelt along the Los Angeles River. Metro’s Board of Directors had earlier approved the \$3.95 million sale.

SEPTEMBER

Metro announced a program offering \$300 to employees who successfully recruit bus operators to fill the almost 300 operator vacancies.

The Board of Directors signed a contract with CEO Roger Snoble that extends his term of office by two years to October 2008.



Transit officials break ground, Sept. 29, to mark official start of construction of the the 8.5-mile Exposition Light Rail Line. Photo by Juan Ocampo.

The Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority Board officially broke ground, Sept. 29, on the 8.5-mile Exposition Light Rail Line. Scheduled to open in 2010, it will link downtown LA and Culver City.

OCTOBER



Central City Division Maintenance staff, with Maintenance Manager Hector Rojas, center left, gather around APTA President William Millar at official celebration held on the grounds of Central City Division. Photo by Gary Leonard.

Amid a standing ovation from some 2,000 transit professionals, Oct. 10, Metro officials claimed the industry's most prestigious honor – the 2006 Outstanding Public Transportation System Achievement Award – during the APTA Annual Meeting in San Jose. A day later, some 400 employees, elected officials and Board members, gathered beneath a large tent at Central City Division 1 for the official presentation of the award by APTA President William Millar.

With Metro's receipt of its first APTA award adding an extra glow, the agency honored 153 of its best Transit Operations employees during the annual "Night of Stars" banquet in Marina del Rey.

The Metro Orange Line marked its first anniversary of service, Oct. 29. Following its opening, ridership on the line rose nearly every month, with an average of 21,000 average weekday boardings recorded in September, nearly three times what agency planners had expected.

After almost 10 years of federal court oversight of LA County's public transit system, the Consent Decree was allowed to expire as scheduled on Sunday, Oct. 29. Metro compiled a record of achievement that not only earned the agency the transit industry's highest honor in 2006, but also won praise from the special master overseeing the agreement.

NOVEMBER

The Board of Directors approved \$5 million for a new solar generation project at Division 18 in Carson and directed the agency to start a comprehensive three-year plan to install solar panels at every bus and rail facility.

Metro completed installation of 24 photo enforcement cameras at 12 intersections along the Metro Orange Line. The Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau issued 3,446 citations along the Orange Line, as of Nov. 3.

With every one of its 11 bus divisions at or above capacity, Metro moved forward with plans to build a new operating facility – currently named the Union Division – across from the Gateway Building, adjacent to the Regional Rebuild Center. Construction is to begin in May 2008, with an opening expected in November 2009.

Deputy CEO John Catoe was chosen as general manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. He was to assume leadership of WMATA in January 2007. CEO Roger Snoble selected Carolyn Flowers, executive officer for Operations Administration, to serve as acting Chief Operating Officer following that announcement.

U.S. District Judge Terry Hatter denied a motion by the Bus Riders Union to amend a court order and extend portions of the federal Consent Decree.

DECEMBER

Metro construction crews completed excavation of the twin 1.7-mile tunnels for the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension on Dec. 9.

One of the most comprehensive traffic information services ever offered to the public debuted on the Internet at www.metro.net. The Metro "Real Time Traffic" feature provides free 24/7 traffic updates on freeways in Los Angeles and Ventura counties as well as for major streets in the City of Los Angeles.



Metro celebrants at award presentation held at Central City Division. Photo by Ned Racine.

The Bus Riders Union petitioned the Ninth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals to overturn two District Court rulings that effectively released Metro from the federal Consent Decree.

Officials celebrated the official opening of the new Metro Orange Line Canoga station and park/ride facility in Canoga Park. The project is a one-third mile extension from Variel Avenue to Canoga Avenue.



Metro buses transport mourners lining up at the Indian Wells Tennis Gardens to memorial services in Palm Desert for President Gerald R. Ford. Photo by Gayle Anderson.

Metro and three other regional transit agencies provided overnight shuttle service for mourners paying their respects to former President Gerald Ford who died Dec. 26 in Rancho Mirage. The president lay in repose at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Palm Desert.