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CEO Proposes \$3.121 Billion Metro Budget for FY 2007-08

- ‘This is a no-frills budget,’ Snoble says. One-time revenues will be needed to subsidize bus and rail operations.
- Slight increase in bus service with eight new Metro Rapid Lines.
- Proposed budget includes fare increases.

By MARC LITTMAN

CEO Roger Snoble is proposing a \$3.121 billion budget for FY 2007-08 that is only \$85 million – or approximately 2.7 percent – more than the current Metro budget.

A hearing is scheduled in the Board Room at 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 20, to take public comment on the proposed budget. The Board will consider adopting the budget at its meeting on Thursday, June 28. The fiscal year begins July 1.

“This is a no-frills budget,” said Snoble. “Despite the fare increase, we will still need to use approximately \$40 million of one-time revenues next year to subsidize bus and rail operations. That means we have to aggressively pursue other revenue sources including state spillover gas taxes that Sacramento is banking on in the wake of high gas prices.”

“Metro must continue to work to operate more efficiently,” he added. “The expansion of Metro Rapid, phasing in Metro Connections to serve major transit hubs, and the purchase of new high-capacity buses are a step in that direction.”

The increase in the proposed budget is largely due to additional transportation subsidies planned for the county and cities, higher operating costs for Metro bus and rail service, funding for municipal bus operators, paratransit service for the disabled and ongoing construction for the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and the first phase of the Exposition Line to Culver City.

There will be a slight increase in bus service hours spread throughout Los Angeles County, including the Metro Orange Line. The quality of service will improve as Metro launches eight new Metro Rapid lines in FY08 and purchases up to 100 new 60-foot articulated buses.

For only the second time in 12 years, Metro fares will be raised starting July 1, however, the current \$1.25 cash fare will stay the same for the next two years. The Metro Day Pass will go up from \$3 to \$5; the cost of a monthly pass will be \$62, up \$10. Modest increases in discount fares for seniors, disabled and students will go into effect July 1, but Metro will offer a new 25 cent fare for disabled and seniors.

Bus service top priority

The draft FY 2008 budget calls for spending \$1.392 billion or 44.6 percent of the total budget on bus operating and capital for Metro and the municipal bus operators in Los Angeles County and for paratransit programs for the disabled who cannot use regular service.

Metro will increase bus service by 21,213 operating hours next year for a total of 7.8 million revenue service hours. In FY 2008, Metro will continue implementing the popular Metro Rapid program.

By June 2008, 500 Metro Rapid buses will serve 28 transit corridors covering 420 route miles and 35 cities throughout the county. Besides Metro, Santa Monica, Torrance and Culver City also will provide this special service.

Eight Metro Rapid lines will debut in FY 2008. In the next fiscal year Metro also will receive and put into service up to 100 60-foot articulated buses. It also will test a 65-foot prototype bus on the Metro Orange Line. To bolster security, Metro will install additional security cameras at Metro bus yards and the Gateway Center.

Metro Rail to expand

The draft spending plan earmarks \$742 million or 23.8 percent for countywide rail, including Metro Rail operating and capital costs and the \$58.5 million subsidy for Metrolink.

No significant changes to Metro rail service hours (651,000) are budgeted in FY 2008 but Metro expects to receive 24 new rail cars next year and begin the procurement process for an additional 50 light rail cars.

Streets and highway projects

The budget proposes \$592 million or 19 percent for highway and other regional transportation programs such as construction of freeway carpool lanes, better traffic signal coordination, grade separations at railroad crossings, bikeways and other transportation programs. Funding also is included for the Metro Freeway Service Patrol.

Some of the major highway projects that will be under construction in FY 08 include carpool lanes on the 405 and 5 freeways and on Rt. 60. Work also will be done on the 405/US 101 interchange and to realign the 101.

Little change in debt service

Metro's debt service next year will be \$308.5 million – 9.9 percent of the budget. It is up \$3 million from this year's debt service on bonds issued for various transportation projects.

Rounding out the FY08 draft Metro budget are expenditures for other governmental programs such as transportation planning, legal and other expenses. These total \$86 million or 2.8 percent of the budget.

Highlighting these governmental programs is the array of planning studies for critical new highway and public transportation projects that will be underway in the next fiscal year. Some examples include:

Environmental document work and preliminary engineering for the Canoga North/South Metro Orange Line extension and the Crenshaw-Prairie Transit Corridor projects and awarding a contract to prepare the EIR/EIS environmental documents for the I-710 corridor.

In FY 2008, Metro also will be completing a Multi-County Goods Movement Action Plan that addresses the burgeoning truck and rail traffic moving goods from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach.

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