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Congressman Brad Sherman, joined by Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor, CEO Roger Snoble, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and Board members Yvonne Burke and Zev Yaroslavsky, welcomes the new 65-foot Metro Liner into service on the Metro Orange Line.



Photo by Ned Racine

Officials Welcome 65-foot Bus Prototype for Orange Line

- Articulated bus is 'longest transit vehicle in the United States'

By JIMMY STROUP

(Aug. 28, 2007) City, county and federal dignitaries wished a newly constructed 65-foot articulated bus well on its first day of service, Monday, on the Metro Orange Line. The new bus is the "longest transit vehicle in the United States," said Richard Hunt, general manager, San Fernando Valley sector.

Speaking at a news event in North Hollywood, Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor, Congressman Brad Sherman, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Board members Yvonne Burke and Zev Yaroslavsky, and CEO Roger Snoble each detailed what makes the new artic so special.

At five feet longer than the current articulated buses, the new Metro Liners could be the future of coaches that run along the Orange Line. Though longer, the CNG bus is quieter during operation than its 60-foot predecessors and weighs the same.

"This is a world-class bus in a world-class city and county," Snoble said. "We really have the neighborhood in mind as we manufacture these buses."

With the Orange Line running at 25,000 weekday boardings, the extra five

feet of bus equates to nine more seats and increases the passenger limit by 16 people to 100 – a necessary addition, Snoble said, as the ridership grows.

Photo by Ned Racine



Escorted by Sheriff's deputies, the new 65-foot-long Metro Liner follows a 60-footer as they head west from the North Hollywood station. The new model seats nine more riders than current Metro Liners. Richard Hunt, general manager, San Fernando Valley sector, called the new bus "the longest transit vehicle in the United States."

The future of bus transit

O'Connor was the first to speak, praising the Orange Line's huge success in the wake of passing the 10 million-passenger mark. She said these longer buses are what the city's looking forward to for bus technology in the future.

"It's the first of its kind and leading the way in transit bus innovation," she said. "It's a bigger and better bus than the originals – and the originals have worked fabulously for us."

Built by North American Bus Industries (NABI), the new bus features larger, tinted windows that are crafted into the side of the bus structure, adding support, Snoble said, and giving a smooth look to the coach. It also has wheel covers over the front wheels, adding to safety.

"This new 65-footer is the future of public transportation," Villaraigosa said. "When it comes to traveling across the San Fernando Valley, size matters. And bigger is better."

The mayor also thanked state senators Jose Padilla and Lloyd Levine for their work to get the vehicle codes altered so the long bus – which is currently operating on an exemption from CalTrans due to its length – can run along the Orange Line.

Congressman Sherman was positive on the changes made to the new liner, predicting that the success of the Orange Line east and west through the San Fernando Valley would equate to future lines running north and south.

Burke thanked Metro for its dedication to improving the technology of its transit lines, and for its dedication to environmentally-sound vehicles. She specifically thanked Vehicle Acquisition Manager John Drayton and Hunt for his work on the Orange Line.

Drives like a 60-footer

Operators certified to drive the longer model report that it drives very similar to the 60-foot version, Hunt said.

"It drives pretty much the same," said Bettye Hall, a 25-year Metro veteran who was scheduled to drive the new bus in service, Monday. "If you can drive a 60-foot bus, you can definitely drive this one."

The new coach was pulled from service early in its run, Monday, due to false engine readings and door problems, according to Division 8 Maintenance Manager Pat Orr. Serviced by crews overnight, it was back on the Orange Line shortly before 4 a.m., Tuesday – "out there making money for us," Orr said.

Hunt said the bus will undergo a one-year test period, during which the new liner will be evaluated for technical and practical use on the Orange Line.

"We're going to evaluate and hopefully it will prove as we anticipate," he said. "Clearly, the passenger demand shows that they'd be useful."