

[Home](#)[CEO Hotline](#)[Viewpoint](#)[Classified Ads](#)[Archives](#)[Metro.net](#) (web)

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](#)

Metro Info

- ▶ [30/10 Initiative](#)
- ▶ [Policies](#)
- ▶ [Training](#)
- ▶ [Help Desk](#)
- ▶ [Intranet Policy](#)

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Board Chair Pam O'Connor Sets Next Internet Chat for Dec. 12

- Board Chair responds to 32 follow-up questions, comments from October online session

In this report:

- [LA should share bikes as in Paris](#)
- [Gold Line Montclair extension](#)
- [Train service to LAX](#)
- [Routing of Expo Phase 2?](#)
- [Clean Metro buses daily](#)
- [Metro Red Line parking](#)
- [Light rail, busways on freeways](#)
- [Crowding at NoHo Station](#)
- [Graffiti and vandalism](#)
- [Speed up the Gold Line](#)
- [Train from the Valley to the Westside?](#)

(Nov. 21, 2007) With one live, Internet chat session successfully completed October 18, Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor will resume her live, online chats at noon, Wednesday, Dec. 12.

Accessed at metro.net/chat, her next topic will be the impact of Southern California traffic on the environment.

Questions from the public during the October online chat included such subjects as what Metro is doing to ease traffic congestion and the future of subways in Los Angeles. At one point, 115 Internet users from across LA County were signed onto the chat.

"Thanks for all the questions and the cogent observations and suggestions that accompanied them," O'Connor wrote in a document posted today on the metro.net web site. "...(W)e look forward to our next Live Chat in December.

O'Connor provided answers to many of the questions submitted by the public, but 32 more e-mails were received following the hour-long session. Following are the questions and comments and O'Connor's responses.

Paul: Why can't we set up fee-collecting stations for traffic control and raising funds for more complete and fast building of the light rail network?

Pam O'Connor: Paul, I assume you're referring to congestion pricing like freeway toll roads or charging motorists to enter the Central Business District like in London and other cities. Metro is actively seeking ways that we can better price the use of the transportation infrastructure to make it operate more efficiently. In addition, revenues generated by pricing options would be applied to more public transit and road projects. One method is through congestion pricing which also reduces congestion by giving commuters and others an economic incentive to share a ride. Look for some pilot projects to be implemented within about two years. It is a different approach, but our traffic congestion and mobility needs for the new century are going to require new thinking....thinking about "new mobility."

Richard: Subway to the Sea: for pity's sake, don't let a few short-sighted NIMBYs cripple yet another transit project. The subway extension must go down Wilshire. If necessary, mollify the NIMBYs by excavating a space for a station at Crenshaw, but defer construction of a station in that space until the NIMBYs die off.

Pam O'Connor: Richard...Metro is legally required under state and federal environmental regulations to study all reasonable transit alternatives to serve the Westside, not just a "Subway to the Sea" or a Wilshire Boulevard alignment. Metro staff also is gathering public input on subway, above ground rail, Bus Rapid Transit and a non-build scenario to ensure that all alternatives are considered and so that we meet requirements for grant funding in order to recommend the most cost-effective, locally preferred alternative to the Metro Board of Directors next year.

LA should share bikes as in Paris

Lois: Hi Pam, I'm wondering how you feel about having the Velib system come to LA's Metro stations. I expect there would be a lot of help from various CRA Redevelopment areas if the Metro Board supported this concept. Thanks for considering. Best, Lois

Pam O'Connor: Lois, I was recently in Paris and saw how popular bike-riding has become thanks to the Velib system where more than 20,000 rental bicycles are available throughout the city and anyone can borrow one at little cost for short-term rides and connections. Part of its success in Paris is that it is part of a set of mobility options, including dedicated bus lanes. And the rules of the road for bicyclists and motorists are strictly enforced!

Bicycling is a great way for traveling and it doesn't pollute. Here in Los Angeles County, Metro is a strong supporter of bike programs. We have spent more than \$150 million funding such projects as the Long Beach Bikestation, bike paths, bike lockers and racks at Metro Rail and Metrolink stations and other public facilities to encouraging commuting by bike. Our buses also have bike racks in the front. No extra charge. You can also take bikes on Metro Rail though there are restrictions during rush hours since the trains may be crowded.

I think something like the Velib program has potential for implementation at a subregional level such as with the Westside Cities (that includes portions of Los Angeles). I know the program has been

successful in Lyon and adjacent cities in France and here in the U.S. New York has begun a smaller program and I understand Chicago and other U.S. cities are looking into it. And we need to support cities' efforts to create safe bike path networks. Good suggestion. Thanks.

Victor: Last year I was hearing rumors about Line 460 being terminated at Norwalk Green Line Station. I was wondering why not put Commuter Express to operate a line from Disneyland to Union Station via Fullerton Park and Ride.

Pam O'Connor: There are no plans at this time to change Metro Bus Line 460, which operates between Los Angeles and Disneyland. Any major changes to this route would be subject to a public hearing, so you would have an opportunity at that time to offer your suggestions. Metro subsidizes municipal operators such as LADOT, which oversees Commuter Express, but Metro has no say over their operations. So, Victor, is Disneyland the "happiest place on earth?"

Gold Line Montclair extension

Tony: What is the status on the Gold Line Montclair extension? The former Santa Fe Railroad right-of-way is there; what are the plans on extending the Gold Line East? I feel that this should be a priority; the 210-freeway corridor is getting more and more traffic. There is no mass transit using the 210, other than one Foothill Transit Line (690) that uses that corridor. We need the Gold Line to be extended east as far as Montclair. When will construction start, and in what phases will the project be completed?

Pam O'Connor: Tony...A possible Metro Gold Line extension to Montclair is one of dozens of critical highway and transit projects that the Metro Board of Directors will consider when it adopts the Long Range Transportation Plan that prioritizes projects and available resources for transportation projects in Los Angeles County through the year 2030. A draft plan should be presented to the public for review and comment by next spring before being considered by Metro directors.

The bottom line, however, is that there are many more meritorious projects, like the Metro Gold Line extension, than there is money available from the state and federal governments. So at Metro we're looking at new and different ways to provide transit funding. Many of the new ideas will require public support. We'll talk about the possibilities in a future Live Chat.

Richard: Dear Pam, I almost always drive a car by myself, when commuting to work or running errands. As far as public transit, I rarely take it, unless my car is in the repair shop. I really would like to take public transportation more, but the main problems are 1.) buses are rarely on time, 2.) rail is not close enough to my destinations, and 3.) it takes me at least twice as much time using public transit. What are your plans to address these issues? On another note, why do I only hear about light rail, subways or busways, but never about monorails?

By the way, I for one am in favor of adding a gas tax to subsidize public transportation. Gasoline consumption is directly related to usage of the road infrastructure as well as directly impacting the environment. To offset the impact on lower-income people and to promote public transportation usage, I would like to see free public

transportation, entirely paid by a gas tax.

One of the inconveniences of using public transportation is coming up with the exact fare. Most people I know don't like the bus because you never know how long you may have to wait for the next bus. You might get more affluent people onto public transportation by making it easier to predict when the next bus will come.

I also looked at the system map of Metro and realized that there were some gaps which could address the transportation concerns of a large number of people. If there were some sort of rail (or monorail!) service in two corridors, it could alleviate some heavily traveled roads. 1.) There is a significant North/South gap in the San Gabriel Valley area. If a rail line were implemented between the Sierra Madre Villa Gold Line station and the Norwalk Green Line Station, possibly along the Rosemead Boulevard alignment, it could take many cars off of the currently crowded 605 and 710 freeways, in addition to alleviating the increasingly crowded North/South surface street traffic. 2.) On the Westside of town, there is a gap which could be closed between the Sepulveda Boulevard Orange Line station and the Aviation/LAX (or Mariposa) Green Line stations. This could take a major amount of traffic off of the gridlocked 405. Granted, this would be more difficult, since it is more densely built in this area, but it would be a huge benefit to commuters, as well as those who want access to the airport via this route. I hope my suggestions will prove helpful and receive some serious study and consideration.

I wish you success in your quest to improve public transit in Los Angeles and thank you for soliciting my input.

Pam O'Connor: Whew, Richard, that's a list! You're right, speed and convenience are two major considerations for commuters and others who are considering public transit. But saving money and helping the environment in an era of rising gas prices and rising parking costs and global warming also should be weighed. Metro is working to speed up the bus system with an expansion of Metro Rapid. By June 2008, 500 Metro Rapid buses will serve 28 transit corridors covering 420 miles and 35 cities throughout Los Angeles County. We also are offering new Metro Express bus service that takes advantage of freeway carpool lanes, and our new Metro Connections program will streamline service to major transit hubs. And I hope we can encourage cities to work with Metro to make the Rapid Bus system a real Rapid Bus by developing a network of dedicated bus lanes so they can move faster.

Metro is making it easier to use the system. You can purchase Metro passes so you don't have to worry about exact fare, and we will continue to work to make that pass seamless and easy to use.

Soon we also will debut a new web feature that allows you to see when the next bus is coming.

Monorails have been considered for L.A. County but they haven't fared well against light rail and subway because of limited passenger capacity and some operational and construction challenges.

The gasoline tax hasn't been raised in more than a decade, so this is one option that is being looked at for raising more revenue for critically needed highway and public transit projects. As noted in another answer, Metro is looking at a variety of options to fund transit improvements but it will take public support to choose and implement

the best options.

I'll pass on your comments about ways to close gaps in the transportation system to our planners. Thanks for sharing.

Train service to LAX

Jonathan: Why doesn't Metro operate shorter trains that run more frequently? Once or twice a week, I commute via train from Northeast LA to LAX area. I take the Gold, Red/Purple, Blue, and Green Lines (all of them). The timing of the trains and the wait time to transfer makes the commute up to 30 to 40 minutes longer than it needs to be. Why not run shorter trains every 6 - 10 minutes even during non rush hour times. The wait time at Rosa Parks station is way too long AND NOISY! It seems as though the Blue line almost always arrives right after the Green Line leaves making a wait time of often 15 to 20 minutes on a noisy platform in the middle of the 105. Aside from shorter wait times, could some noise shields be installed on Green and Gold line freeway stations? It is impossible to even hear the public address announcements that are made from time to time. Thanks.

Pam O'Connor: Using shorter trains and running every 6-10 minutes during off-peak periods has reasonable merit in terms of service, but it has to be balanced with operating costs which would increase because of additional staffing requirements. For example, if we were to schedule Green Line mid-day service to a one car train every 7-8 minutes (the same as the peak headway), we would use the same number of cars currently in service during the same period (running every 15 minutes), only with twice as many train operators required to provide the service as is currently necessary. That being said...

Jonathan, you make an excellent point regarding the timing of trains. For example, during weekday peak periods, the Blue Line runs every 5-6 minutes, while the Green Line runs every 7-8 minutes. While both lines are running frequently, there are times when a customer will just miss a train. The same goes for the mid-day service period.

At this time, we are in the initial phases of developing an overall system service plan that will improve connections by adjusting service delivery (that is, trains traveling) on the Metro Green and Blue Lines to compatible headways or times between trains. We're working on getting the funding and new vehicles so that we can get these improvements going.

The noise at freeway stations on the Green Line and Gold Line is definitely an issue. I've forwarded your request to appropriate staff to look at possible solutions.

Clarence: Rapid bus service is badly needed on Venice Boulevard. Lines 333 and 33 are always crowded and buses are filthy on Manchester Bus Line 115 and Vermont Bus Line 204. Some buses have not been cleaned in over a month. I see bus passes on the floor of the bus from last month. Help.

Pam O'Connor: Clarence...Our South Bay Sector General Manager has shared your concerns about bus conditions with the Metro Maintenance Department. We make every effort to clean each bus on a daily basis. It is a challenge where there are occasions when resources are limited, but that's no excuse. We need to keep working to make sure our vehicles are clean. Now, during the time the bus is in operation, it's up

to our passengers to do their part to keep our vehicles clean. Keep us posted on the cleanliness, and we will continue to work hard to make your next bus ride and every bus ride better.

Routing of Expo Phase 2?

Theodoric: What is the routing of Expo Line Phase 2? When are you going to have a disabled tap card? When will the tap card replace the EZ Pass?

Pam O'Connor: Theodoric...Phase 1 of the Expo Light Rail Line from downtown Los Angeles to Culver City is currently under construction. Phase 2 is in the environmental review stage in which the merits and impacts of possible alignments will be studied. The decision about an alignment will be considered after these analyses are completed. Check out www.buildexpo.org for periodic updates and schedule information about important milestones (release of the Environmental Review document, meeting dates, etc.)

There will be a Transit Access Pass (TAP) card for disabled persons when the TAP program is rolled out for the general public next year, and plans call for TAP to be used on Metro and other public transit carriers in Los Angeles County, but Metro hasn't finalized a date for TAP's general public debut.

Joseph: In light of global warming, increasing gas prices, the economic impact of traffic congestion, isn't it time to reconsider the restrictions on bikes and the rail system? By not allowing bikes on at the very time they would most likely need to be on, you are denying an entire type of commuter. The bike commuter's option increases enormously if you allow them to use the rails without restrictions. Please consider removing this ban. I want to leave my car at home, but the limited transit options make car-less commuting very difficult if you don't allow me to take my bike at rush hour.

Pam O'Connor: Joseph, I agree with you that commuting by bike is an eco-friendly program that Metro must support and it does in a big way. Metro has invested more than \$150 million in bike facilities and education programs. Our buses are equipped with bike racks and bikes are allowed on the trains, however, due to the fact that some trains are crowded during weekday rush hours, Metro doesn't allow bikes on trains from 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. and from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. unless trains are moving in a direction opposite the peak hour flow of commuter traffic on the Metro Blue, Green and Gold lines. On the Metro Red and Purple Line subway trains, bikes are not allowed in either direction during peak hours from Union Station to Wilshire/Vermont only. No other restrictions apply. I'll ask our Operations staff to review these restrictions in the hopes of encouraging more commuters to bike with Metro. In addition, check out a chat question about the Velib program in Paris, a system where many convenient bike stations are available for folks to take a bike for use for a segment of their commute. And you can find out more about the Paris program by "Googling" Velib.

Gloria: I regularly ride Metro Line 256 from Highland Pk to Pasadena. Why is there no other public transportation available from the ELA/EI Sereno/Monterey Hills area to the Gold Line station in Highland Park? The #256 runs every 40 min. or so and that's if we are lucky that it runs at all. It is not a reliable service. Many of us in Monterey Hills work in Pasadena or Downtown LA and the Gold Line is so close to us

that it would make sense to make it more convenient for those of us in that area and the eastside to be able to take advantage of that station. If we have to wait 40-50 minutes for a bus to take us 5 minutes away from home, you won't get us out of our cars to help support the reduction of the carbon footprint and reduce gas consumption. What do we need to do in order to get that line to run more frequently or how can we get a DASH line to run from the El Sereno/Monterey Hills area up the Highland Park Gold line station? Although many of us in Monterey Hills are working professionals, there are many retired senior citizens and those who are not financially able to afford cars and gas so public transportation is their sole means to get to and from work. (Currently there is a city ride bus that shuttles from Huntington Drive up through Monterey Hills to Figueroa and Ave 60. Too bad it doesn't run longer hours during the work week and nothing at all during the weekend. I am being selfish but what an idea! I could stay late at work, have dinner in Old Town, and not worry about hailing a taxi or my safety if I walk home late at night on my hillside. I guess I'll keep on dreaming).

Pam O'Connor: Gloria....There are several bus lines from East LA and the El Sereno areas that do connect with the Gold Line but not in Highland Park. Metro Lines 68, 70, 71, 78 and 79, for example. From Monterey Hills, Line 256 provides this service.

As you probably know, bus service levels are based primarily on ridership demand. In the case of Line 256, the average peak load per bus is about 13 passengers. This is about one third of a fully seated load. The present service levels of about 33 minutes during the morning rush hours and 45 minutes at other times, is adequate to accommodate this passenger demand.

That being said, the power of information technology providing real time information can help. Although the buses are on a schedule, we all know about the vagaries of traffic congestion in our county. Real time information is, especially, important for use of buses with long periods of time in-between buses. Metro is working on a feature that provides real time bus information via the Internet...Metro staff is working on developing a system and I hope it rolls out soon!

The DASH system is a very good community-based shuttle system that is planned and funded by the City of Los Angeles. The Councilperson for the Monterey Hills area is Jose Huizar. Metro staff would be very willing to work with the City to expand DASH service where needed.

As you also note, the backbone rail lines need good connectivity to neighborhoods to work for a wider range of people.

Jennifer: I bought a pass online on the 11th of this month. Will I get a pass for December?

Pam O'Connor: Jennifer....Yes! If you purchased your pass on Metro's e-commerce site on Nov. 11, we will mail out your December pass around Nov. 21, so you should have it in plenty of time for the start of December. Let us know how it works for you.

Clean Metro buses daily

Geraldine: Can you please have all the buses cleaned on a daily basis? There are dust, debris, stains, and bad odors on them? The price increase to \$5 for a day pass (Regular cash fares remain \$1.25)

is not just due to politics, gas hikes and all the added features like the ongoing cooking recipes, news, what's new on Metro, etc. Also, people who rely on the bus 24-7-365 have struggles with their groceries, strollers, bags from arriving and or to their destinations - people walk-in and bump into one another - block the walkway and really make it hard. I have not seen any design or changes by Metro to accommodate the reality of the people. Honestly, the TV screen-monitor is not necessary but the above mentioned importance are very real and when you decide to do a survey, 99% of the people will surely say that it is a need more than a want. Also, it will prevent a hazard when it comes to an emergency or any sort. Cleanliness and space is very very apparent and immense on the people who commute throughout Southern California. Thank you for taking the time to read this e-mail. On a closing statement, Metro drivers have a very kind, well-mannered attitude is extremely helpful. Not only do they wait for the elderly running to catch the bus, but, are conscientious when it comes to the awareness of the riders who are in their watch. Great job on hiring them! P.S. For the Christmas season, will you guys have something for Angelenos to be able to watch the Light Festival in Los Feliz (for those who don't have cars?) Thank you!

Pam O'Connor: Actually, Geraldine, Metro works hard to accommodate bus riders, particularly senior citizens. More than 2,000 new buses have been purchased and placed in service during the past few years and most of these are low-floor buses that are easier for the disabled and senior citizens to board and exit. We also have several hundred high-capacity buses in our fleet so there are more seats. It's good to hear that our bus operators are doing a good job. I'm often impressed with my fellow riders, the younger people who offer a seat to an older person and other kind gestures among riders.

And Metro has expanded the network of Metro Rapid buses so you can get to your destination faster. Metro buses are cleaned at least daily but, due to heavy use, some buses might get dirty during the day. I'll have our Maintenance staff look into the cleanliness issues. Sorry, Metro has no plans to serve the Los Feliz light festival.

Jerry: As a daily Metro rider, it seems to me like Metro does not understand one simple concept that could increase their ridership dramatically without spending millions of advertising dollars: faster transit. Even riding the Gold Line is slower than driving in traffic - even the express trains barely average 30 MPH (regular trains average 25 MPH). I can drive from my home to work in 35 minutes, but taking the Gold Line and the Red Line takes an hour and fifteen minutes. For many people it's not worth the inconvenience AND the additional time. I wish MTA would concentrate more on making mass transit faster than sitting in your car in traffic. Diverting the money wasted on HOV lanes to improving grade crossings like Gloria Molina's debacle in Highland Park would go a long way.

Pam O'Connor: Jerry...Speed counts and Metro is working to speed up our system both on the rail and bus side. Harnessing technology, Metro has shaved minutes off the Metro Gold Line runs and Metro Rapid buses are about 25 percent faster than local buses. Metro Express buses that take advantage of freeway carpool lanes and the Metro Red and Purple Lines that travel underground are often faster than solo drivers. I think we need dedicated bus lanes then you'd really see transit moving faster. But the reality is public transit will rarely beat a car in a race.

Even if speed is the prime consideration, that equation changes when other factors such as cost are entered. Factoring in the cost of parking and gasoline, insurance, the cost of buying a car and depreciation and maintenance should enter the equation. Also the time spent looking for parking. And we are all going to have to figure out what we can do to minimize our carbon emissions. There are choices to be made.

Other options to transit include rideshare which is cheaper and more relaxing than driving yourself. And by carpooling or vanpooling, you reduce your carbon footprint.

As far as HOV or freeway carpool lanes are concerned, in Los Angeles County today, there are about 480 miles of freeway carpool lanes. On an average weekday, more than 800,000 people take advantage of the carpool lanes. During peak hours, a carpool lane carries about 1,400 vehicles or 3,300 people compared to 1,200 vehicles and an estimated 1,800 people in adjacent mixed flow freeway lanes. Carpoolers save about a minute per mile traveled in the carpool lane compared to solo drivers.

Metro Red Line parking

Ngan: Two questions relating to Metro Red Line parking. Hope you can answer both! 1. Universal and NBC has decided to build where the current Red Line parking is located at Universal City. They stated that the parking structure would allow parking for Metro patrons. Currently, the parking lot is free. With the new multi-level structure, will Metro patrons be required to pay for parking? 2. Can you address the parking issue at the NoHo station? With all the new housing and business construction, I fear that you have to get to the station by 6 a.m. to get any parking space. Will Metro build a parking structure (multi-level) to accommodate the increase number of cars? Single level lots just don't solve the problem. Thank you.

Pam O'Connor: Ngan...As part of any joint development deal around the Metro Rail stations in North Hollywood or Universal City, Metro will insist on securing substantial increases in parking for transit users. For example, we envision a 1,500 space parking garage at North Hollywood to replace the 956 parking spaces we currently have. There are no plans at this time to charge for parking. (Though, frankly, I personally think that parking needs to be priced; right now people are not paying the real price of driving alone. However, I'm not speaking for the Metro Board here.)

Please note that numerous Metro bus lines also serve the Metro Rail stations and there are also bike lockers at the stations.

Carlos: I am currently living in Valencia / Saugus area and work in Downtown L.A. Prior to that I lived in Burbank and grew up close to Downtown L.A. I have worked and driven to many locations in addition to working on the field.

I have a lot of experience with driving many roads and surface streets. I have several Ideas that might help reduce the traffic congestions on our highways. One Idea for our freeways is to make the number 1 lane into an express lane that would be open to all drivers. I believe the number 1 lane is the lane closest to the center divider,

And then use the second lane for carpool use and only sharing the carpool lane with single riders when merging on or off the express

lane. It would be used for traveling long distances between freeway interchanges and can only be entered or exited several miles before or after Freeway transitions.

For example: one automobile traveling from Valencia to L.A.X. Today the driver would take interstate 5 and transition to interstate 405 then transition to interstate 105 then exit on Sepulveda and take century to the L.A.X terminal. If the express lane would be in place this individual would be able to merge onto the carpool lane using the special colored lines allowing single drivers to share carpool lane and then merge onto the express lane prior to the first interchange.

The driver would only be allowed to exit or merge on the following transitions.

- (1) 405 and the 118 interstates.
- (2) 405 and the 101 interstates.
- (3) 405 and the 10 interstates.
- (4) 405 and the 105 interstates.

The major advantage to the express lane is the elimination of merging with traffic that will only be using part of the roadway span and slow traffic down due to merging. I think the logistics of building this type of intersection is partially in use at the carpool ramp traveling South on the 110 transitioning to the West 105. The same ramp is used for East 105 to North 110 I believe.

Another Idea is to have flex bus lines that can be adjusted according to the needs of the users. This idea is kind of like a van pool.

Pam O'Connor: Whew, Carlos, you are on a roll there! Thanks for your suggestions. I'm forwarding these to Metro's Planning staff for consideration.

Light rail, busways on freeways

Jonathan: Has there ever been any thought about putting light rail or exclusive transit busways near (or in the middle of) all existing freeways? These are existing routes that people are used to traveling. What if this was coupled with smaller buses that ran neighborhood circuits from major stops along freeway routes rather than so many long bus routes that make travel across town slow and cumbersome (many time-consuming transfers). Such a system would better duplicate people's current driving habits and would more likely get them out of their cars and into public transportation. Imagine sitting in stand still bumper to bumper traffic on the 405 and you see light rail trains quickly buzzing up and down the middle of the freeway. That would be a powerful advertisement for public transportation. Now if trains were equipped with wireless internet connection, people could also be productive during their commute rather than wasting hour upon hour in traffic every day. Now that is value added! It is disgusting to me that they are wasting so much \$ building a carpool lane on the 405. That is going to do NOTHING to solve the terrible gridlock on the Westside. We need quick, efficient, public transportation.

Pam O'Connor: Jonathan...since most of our freeways in Los Angeles County are way over capacity and there's little room to widen them, it's just not practical to remove existing lanes to construct and operate light rail in the median. There are exceptions. The Metro Green Line on

the Century Freeway was incorporated when the freeway was built. Also, the Metro Gold Line travels in the median of the 210 Freeway for a short distance in Pasadena but it's on a former Santa Fe Railroad right-of-way, which had been preserved. Metro does own about 200 miles of former railroad right-of-way throughout the county and we're looking at converting segments into light rail and busways.

Carpool lanes do provide some value on the 405 freeway. The southbound lane has been a great benefit to commuters who rideshare. Carpoolers save a minute per mile in travel time compared to solo drivers, and Metro buses also have access to these lanes so there's added incentive to use public transit.

In Los Angeles County today, there are about 480 miles of freeway carpool lanes. On an average weekday, more than 800,000 people take advantage of the carpool lanes. During peak hours, a carpool lane carries about 1,400 vehicles or 3,300 people compared to 1,200 vehicles and an estimated 1,800 people in adjacent mixed flow freeway lanes.

Adrian: I live in the San Fernando Valley. The worst bus service is on Winnetka Ave, Desoto Ave., Tampa Ave., Topanga Canyon Blvd. and the waiting is 25 minutes to one hour for the buses. Why aren't there buses through Canoga Avenue and Parthenia Street?

Pam O'Connor: In October 2005, the frequency of weekday bus service on Winnetka Ave., De Soto Ave., Tampa Ave. and Topanga Canyon Blvd. was improved to 30 minutes or less during peak periods and 50 minutes during off-peak periods. The objective was to provide more convenient connections with Metro Orange Line and other Metro services. Whenever possible staff schedules connections between bus lines and train service to minimize wait time between trips. According to recent observations, the current level of service provided is sufficient to accommodate passenger demand.

Adrian...Currently, Canoga Avenue is being studied as a potential transit corridor and a possible extension of the Metro Orange Line. A segment of Parthenia St. (from Corbin Ave. to Reseda Blvd.) is served by LADOT's Northridge Dash Shuttle Bus Route. Requests to expand service along this corridor should be made to the Los Angeles Department of Transportation.

The ongoing struggle is always how to find funding to enhance services, especially, a problem today when Metro finances are strained and resources are limited due to increased costs and the State of California diverting transit funds to other, non-transit uses.

Prema: Why can't you extend Reseda and Devonshire Bus #240 to Reseda and Rinaldi?

Pam O'Connor: Prema...Metro Staff will consider your request to extend Line 240 service north on Reseda Blvd. to Rinaldi St. as a part of its Metro Connections Line Restructuring Study. Your request will be considered along with other proposals for future action. The proposed extension would require additional finances and resources. Unfortunately, Metro's current operating budget shortfall will likely hinder our ability to fulfill this request at this time.

Crowding at NoHo station?

Jason: As I read about the planned development surrounding the North Hollywood Station, I just found myself wondering whether there has been a study of the current usage of the station. I commute and exit North Hollywood Station in the morning on my way to work and it has not been designed to handle the number of users that utilize that station. Frequently, either the elevator and escalator malfunctions which create a traffic nightmare as far as exiting the station goes. Additionally using the stairs is difficult for many people, especially, during the summer months when the temperature reaches over 100 degrees. Additionally, the "reverse-commute" bus service along Lankershim has been severely cut back in recent months. Going north in the AM on the line 224 seems to be a recipe for a headache because you never know when the bus is actually going to come (and for me the experience is repeated when I wait for the 164). Additionally, I have a concern about metro.net. Why is it that when I enter the directions to get to my home from North Hollywood I am not given an option to use the Red Line which in most cases does help me get home 25-40 minutes quicker than the selected options on Metro.net.

Pam O'Connor: Jason...Metro staff is looking into your complaints about the elevators and escalators (an especially critical element of the system for people with limitations on mobility) as well as about the Metro.net trip planner. Regarding bus service, according to recent observations, the 5 to 10 minute service frequencies provided on Line 224 (Lankershim Blvd.) are sufficient to accommodate passenger demand. In addition, Lines 353, 363 provide four additional trips/hour during morning and afternoon peaks. Anyone traveling between North Hollywood Station and Lankershim and Victory can use any of the northbound buses departing the station (Lines 224, 353 and 363).

Also, new Metro Rapid Line 724 (Lankershim - San Fernando) will be implemented in June 2008 and will provide 10 minute peak and 20 minute off-peak service in this corridor.

Ryan: The Santa Clarita Valley is severely underserved by rapid transit. Metrolink is the only option to get into Los Angeles, and there are very limited mid-day trips. City of Santa Clarita Transit is making small strides to connect LA with the SCV, but funding is simply not available for any type of rail. What can Metro do to connect the rest of LA with Santa Clarita?

Pam O'Connor: Ryan...Metro and Santa Clarita Transit are working together to jointly fund Line 8 which operates seven days per week between Santa Clarita Transit Center and the Sylmar Metrolink Station. In addition, Santa Clarita Transit provides weekday peak bus services to Warner Center, Century City, downtown Los Angeles, Sylmar, Westwood, Van Nuys and Sherman Oaks. I hope to make a field trip, by transit, out to Santa Clarita in the next few months! Any suggestions on where to get a good lunch and interesting destinations?

Therese: When are we getting back our stop on Sherman Way between Laurel Canyon Blvd. and Whitsett? It was taken away without any advance notice and we who live at the apts. near there were never consulted. Some of us are senior citizens, others have children and I have seen people rushing to catch the bus in the morning who run across the street recklessly with children in tow because they might have time to get to a nearby stop carefully but don't have time to go to the corner without taking great risks with their lives and that of their children...we have enough problems with jaywalking without

compounding the problem by making those jaywalkers into "jayrunners". 2. Why does it take so long to move the benches when a stop is moved? Those of us who have heavy loads such as grocery shopping would appreciate speedier fixes. Why can't the same people who move the signs also be able to move the benches?

Pam O'Connor: Therese....Line 163 bus stops on Sherman Way between Laurel Canyon and Whitsett were abandoned on 6/28/06 in response to operator complaints that the stops were difficult to serve since there were neither traffic controls nor crosswalks at the stops. Traffic controls and crosswalks are under the City of Los Angeles jurisdiction.

Bus stops need to be good places themselves with at least one bus bench and, when possible, some shade/rain protection. Not having a bench can be a barrier to use of transit. Regarding your specific questions about the bus benches...within the City of Los Angeles, advertising bus benches are placed and maintained by Norman Bench under an exclusive, revenue-sharing franchise. Requests for placement or relocation of these benches should be placed with the City of LA's Bureau of Street Services at (800) 996-CITY or via their website at <http://www.lacity.org/BOSS/Administration/service.htm>

Graffiti and vandalism

Mark: I am tired of seeing graffiti and other vandalism on the busses. Post the images of the "Ten Most Wanted" taggers on TransitTV and have the passengers anonymously identify these taggers. Should this identification lead to a conviction, that passenger will receive as a reward, a monthly pass for six months or a year.

Pam O'Connor: Mark, I share your frustration with taggers. Vandalism costs Metro about \$12 million a year, money that could be much better spent adding more service (and you can see from many of the chat questions, folks have suggestions for more service). Thanks for suggesting the idea for a reward incentive. I've passed it on to our security staff for consideration. Keep those good ideas coming in!

Delia: Hi Pam, A year ago I started taking Metro. And I'm pretty satisfied but when I have trouble with some drivers and e-mail it to Customer Relations, does it really get looked into? Sometimes coming home I have drivers pass me and others up for just no good reason.

Pam O'Connor: Hi, Delia. I know that one bad experience can sometimes overshadow the many positive ones! Metro responds each month to more than 5,000 calls and e-mails from customers such as yourself who have questions or complaints about the service. This is in addition to those asking for basic route information. Yes, we do respond to every inquiry and alert the Operations managers if problems are reported. And it would be helpful if you could tell us the time, date, location and the number of the bus when you report a problem either by calling Customer Relations at (213) 922-6235 or e-mail customerrelations@metro.net.

Rob: Is it too much to expect from you that the ticket kiosks be kept in working order? There have been problems at the Gold Line at Union Station for the past month! This is ridiculous!

Pam O'Connor: Rob....Sorry for the inconvenience. Metro regularly services all its ticket vending machines at the Metro Rail stations,

however, I've asked our Revenue staff to double-check the ticket machines at the Gold Line at Union Station.

Brock: I have noticed that there has lately been a good deal of money put into advertising, but rather little into marketing and market research. For instance, there is no easy information about taking Metro to the Rose Bowl (not on the Metro site OR on the Rose Bowl site). And yet, riding the Gold Line to the UCLA game two weekends ago, I was quite impressed with how much more pleasant it was than driving. This would be an easy way to capitalize on would-be commuters and introduce a vast array of car-loving Angelenos to give public transit a try. I am sure there are other examples of places to "Go Metro" that people just don't know. Perhaps an examination of venues that are difficult to drive to/from may be an interesting place to look for new ridership.

Pam O'Connor: You're on target, Brock. A good way to attract new riders is get them to try Metro instead of hassling with traffic and parking to major events such as the Tournament of Roses in Pasadena or the Marathon, the Hollywood Santa Parade, Fiesta Broadway, and major sporting and cultural events. If they have a positive experience like you did, perhaps they would opt for Metro for their commuting needs, at least once a week. The good news is that Metro actively promotes riding public transit to major events. We have cross-promotions with Staples Center and many partners from Ringling Bros. and the Harlem Globe Trotters to the play Wicked at the Pantages Theater across from the Metro Red Line station at Hollywood and Vine. Often Metro riders enjoy substantial discounts to these events plus they save on gas and parking. Check our Destination Discounts on metro.net. The Tournament of Roses is one Metro's biggest success stories.

Each year more than 30,000 parade and Rose Bowl fans ride the Metro Gold Line to Pasadena. Metro does press events with the Rose Queen and her court, advertises, produces brochures and other materials to promote the New Year's service, but we'll look into other ways to do even more to spread the word. Next season, GO METRO to GO BRUINS football!

Speed up the Gold Line

Harry: The Metro Gold Line is very slow between Southwest Museum and Highland Park. Is Metro considering doing something about it? Sound barrier or going underground? It would definitely help to go faster, especially, the express line. Also, I'm hoping for the regional connector between the Gold Line and the Blue Line to be an actual project soon. Keep up the good work and make L.A. a transit system city like Boston and NYC

Pam O'Connor: Harry....Currently there are no plans for operational changes on Marmion Way, between Avenue 50 and Avenue 57 in Highland Park. Trains operate 20 miles per hour in "Street Run", with movement governed by the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation Traffic Control System. The narrow right-of-way, with driveways and parallel streets, preclude significantly higher speeds.

It should be noted that the Gold Line Express service will be ending on December 14, with those trips being converted to "all-stop" local trips. Trains will run every 7-8 minutes during peak periods. This is being done to provide increased service to Transit Oriented Developments at

non-Express stations (Lincoln Heights, Fillmore as examples) either recently completed or under construction.

As I mentioned to Jerry, that there are other considerations besides speed that appeal to many users. The places around stations are becoming great places for people providing housing and services. When one takes their multi-ton personal vehicle with them, one spends time to find a place to park it, and has to pay to park it, and then has to go back to the specific location where the vehicle was left to sit. So, if one wants to be free of the vehicle for a trip, to sit back and relax while someone else is doing the driving and you're reducing your carbon footprint the trade-off is a few more minutes when the train is in "Street Run" mode.

A Regional Connector Alternatives Analysis Study, along with various other project Alternative Analysis Studies (Eastside II Extension, Westside, Canoga, Crenshaw, Harbor Sub-Division), is currently underway.

Raj: Metro Bus Line 130 going east used to go to La Mirada and was very useful for many residents on the way. This has now been cut down to only Cerritos Mall and so those of us living east of Cerritos Mall have no service. Please extend the route 130 E to La Mirada again. Thank you.

Pam O'Connor: Raj, while we'd like everyone to be close to a bus stop, the real constraints of living within a budget means that we have to look at how many people bus routes serve. The route of this line east of Cerritos was shortened in December 2003 to end at the Los Cerritos Shopping Center in Cerritos. Metro took this action because ridership demand was very low east of the mall. While some impacted riders found the former route to be convenient, it was not cost-effective to continue to operate, and we at Metro had to make some tough decisions such as cutting Line 130 back in order to ensure a prudent use of public subsidy.

Braj: Metro Bus Line 275 has such a circuitous and long route that the service is practically useless for regular commuters. There is no connection to the Metro Green Line or Blue line stations for most residents of Cerritos if they can not go to Cerritos Mall. Please streamline Line 275 so it provides fast service connecting Cerritos to the Metro Green Line station. Thank you.

Pam O'Connor: Metro discontinued operation of Line 275 in June 2007 due to low ridership. While it was unfortunate Metro had to take this action, the folks who operate Norwalk Transit agreed to continue to operate this line, so now it's managed exclusively by that agency. You can find them at: <http://www.ci.norwalk.ca.us/transportation.asp> . Your suggestions to restructure the service to serve the Metro Blue or Green Lines should be forwarded to Norwalk Transit for further consideration.

Jason: The current marquee display on the bus now is too "multitasking". I have these suggestions: To tell the passengers stop has been requested, put a red light right next to but separate from the display. The red light will be on when the cord is pulled by a passenger, and it is off when the rear door is opened. I notice that because the "STOP REQUESTED" display is temporarily off when the next stop announcing is in process, some unaware passengers will continuously pull the cord even if a stop has already been requested.

This causes excessive AND unnecessary damage to the cords. The next stop street name or location name should be marquee'd every few seconds instead of only once (because it is quite easily missed), and continue until the stop is reached or passed. Ideally, announce one stop at a time instead of using "followed by". The date and time display should be: 1. placed separately from the bus stop announcing display, or 2. displayed as marquee alternatively with the next stop street name.

Pam O'Connor: Good suggestions, Jason. I was just in Paris and I took the bus almost exclusively...you see more from the bus! Just like you mention, they keep the "stop requested" (don't remember what it was in French, but it wasn't hard to figure out) on which did provide me with some assurance that the bus would stop at the stop I needed. Also, it marquee'd the name of the current stop and the "prochaine" (next) stop which was also very helpful in way finding. And the name was also on each of the bus stops which helped to confirm that one was in the right place. I'll share your comments, and my experiences, with Metro Operations.

Train from the Valley to the Westside?

James: When will there be a train from the Valley to the Westside of Los Angeles? If that is not planned, is there a reason? Thank you

Pam O'Connor: James...Metro has no plans to build a rail line from the Valley to the Westside at this time. We do operate Metro Rail service from North Hollywood to Hollywood and downtown with rail connections to Long Beach, Pasadena, Norwalk, El Segundo and other cities. Metro is studying a variety of rail extension options including providing more service to the East Los Angeles, the Westside and San Gabriel Valley and a regional connector that will make fluid connections with the Metro Blue, Gold and Expo lines, but there are limited resources. The Valley is not getting shortchanged, however. A northbound HOV lane on the 405 Freeway is in the works and that can be serviced by Metro Express buses as well as carpoolers.

RB: I just have a comment about the need to expand and accelerate rail construction. First of all, it's cooler to ride a train than a bus. LA and Metro can make all the bus lanes they want and it still won't be as cool or fun or as metropolitan as riding a train. World travelers never talk about how great a city's bus system is when they return, they gloat about the subway systems and the high speed train networks. It's easier to get around on a train/subway/light rail than a bus. At least rail stations have maps and signs and information so you can plan your entire trip from start to finish, which is a lot less stressful. Sure you can plan a bus trip ahead of time if you have an Internet connection, etc. But that only works if you know where you want to go. Rail allows riders the freedom to travel without a destination in mind. Having a rail system isn't just about getting from home to work. It's about being able to explore the city, visit other areas, etc. A train system gives people the ability to go to new and different places without the fear of getting lost, turned around, etc. There's something comforting about seeing that big Metro sign near the subway stations. That Metro sign beckons to travelers and commuters alike. It says that no matter how far away they are from home, they can always get back. Maybe Metro can start adding this angle in with the rest of their arguments for expanded rail service

Pam O'Connor: RB, I must say "au contraire!" Riding buses can be

cool, too. As I was telling Jason, I rode the bus for all my trips in Paris, except one. Frankly, many of the Paris subway stations take a bit of navigating and aren't the easiest to use. And the buses in Paris were an incredible way to explore that City. But, mon ami, one need not go to Paris to explore world class cities...there are 88 in Los Angeles County alone! So, try exploring Sunset Boulevard from the Pacific Ocean to downtown L.A. via Metro Bus Line 2 or ride the Metro Orange Line across the San Fernando Valley. With a day pass, you can jump off to explore a new place, have a cup of coffee and continue the route on another bus, until you see the next place to explore, all day long.

Buses will remain the backbone of public transit for decades to come (and I hope that there will be lanes dedicated to buses) but an expanding rail network complements the bus system. Rail doesn't make sense everywhere but there are corridors where buses can't handle the passenger demand so rail is the most efficient way to go. The right tool for the right job. We continue to work on ways to help riders better navigate the Metro Bus system including web improvements and new bus stop signs to give passengers more information. Thanks for your comments.

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