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## CEO UpDate

### Examining the Draft 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan

- Plan shows employees and customers Metro's future path



By CEO ROGER SNOBLE

Last week the Metro Board approved the Draft 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan for circulation for public comment. The 45-day comment period begins Mar. 12. This gives the cities, Caltrans, the County and all the other agencies and interested parties an opportunity to comment on it.

Then Metro staff will review those comments and come back with a final recommendation. The Board will probably not adopt a final plan until May or June.

CEO Roger Snoble

The Long Range Transportation Plan is an important document for all of Metro because it enables us to know what we're going to be working on and spending money on. It's also a document that we submit to the Southern California Association of Governments for our official plan; it goes to the state and to the federal government.

The Long Range Transportation Plan is also a legal document. When we pursue federal money through the New Starts program or even the Small Starts program, one of the first things the evaluators look at is the long range plan. They want to know not only that you can afford to build the project and come up with the local share, but they need to know we can afford to operate it for the next 20 years; so we would not be eligible for federal funding without this plan.

The last Long Range Transportation Plan was approved in 2001. It should be updated more often, but, of course, that's been very difficult because of the instability of the funding sources—primarily at the state and federal levels.

Because of escalating construction costs and fluctuations in our funding, the 2008 plan, unfortunately, really only enables us to complete the main projects in the 2001 plan. Even with adding five more years of funding to the plan, we must delay some projects and borrow more money than we currently allow ourselves to borrow to be able to fit everything in.

Because the long range plan doesn't add anything new, it puts more pressure on what we've always called the Strategic Plan—those projects we would like to build if the money would appear. We need to

make the Strategic Plan more of a real strategic plan by identifying a group of highly productive projects ready to go in the near term. We should be ready to use those projects as the basis for finding new funding sources, such as an increase in the sales tax or an increase in the fuel tax or another revenue source. To do that, we have to present a vision of what projects would make a difference from a congestion standpoint and an air quality standpoint. That way we could go to the voters or to the legislators and say "Here's what we would like to do. Let us do it."

While the long range plan's discussion of new projects grabs the headlines, most of the money in the plan goes to operations. Only that amount over and above operating our system is available for building new projects. It's sexier to build a new project rather than allocate resources to operate it, but it doesn't make sense to build a project if you can't run it.

In fact, funding sources are pretty much fixed in terms of operating funds; they come from Prop A and Prop C. Besides a quarter of a cent through the Transportation Development Act, we don't receive direct operating money from the state. So most of the Prop A and Prop C money actually goes to operations.

Also often lost in the headlines is the need to reinvest in our system. We have to keep buying new buses. We need to buy new rail cars. We need to keep the tracks and the right-of-way up to standards. We have to update the facilities that maintain those buses and rail cars. The building we built at Division 9 for the San Gabriel Sector, for example, is the first new building this agency has built for operations in the last 25 years.

Every new transit project, of course, requires funding to maintain it. Many people choose to ignore that. Our customers understand it. They understand what it means when the buses or rail cars start getting old and unreliable. And they have certainly seen that. More than 10 years ago this system was the poster child for neglect. Six or seven years ago, there were 300 buses a day that were scheduled to be on the road but never got off the lot. That is a terrible level of service. Today, the reliability is much better.

So the Long Range Transportation Plan is really important to anyone who is an employee or customer of Metro. For Metro employees, they can see the path for the future. To ensure this being a viable agency decades into the future, we need to be doing the proper planning now. And we are.

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February 5, 2008