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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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Participants in the early morning ride along included, from left, Gateway Cities Governance Councilmember Wally Shidler, Vice-chair Cheri Kelley, Chairperson Jo Ann Eros-Delgado and Council Member Larry Nelson. Jose Gomez, Division 1 bus operator, sits in the background.

Photo by Dave Hershenson



Early Morning Ride Along Eye Opening for Gateway Cities Governance Council

- Information gathering exercise began at 1:30 a.m.

(April 2, 2008) Approximately twice a month, Line Ride Alongs gather Gateway Cities Sector staff and Governance Council members to ride one of the sector's bus lines. On Friday, February 29, this information-gathering exercise began at 1:30 a.m.

As is often the case, the line selected for the ride along was being considered for modification. Sector staff had recommended that a portion of the 60 Owl Line, which runs between downtown Long Beach and Artesia Boulevard, be eliminated in the late night/early morning hours.

Metro Gateway Cities General Manager Alex Clifford and staff decided to conduct the early morning trip on the 60 Owl Line so that staff and council members could evaluate ridership firsthand before making a final decision on that service. The Line Ride Along participants—including four Governance Council Members—met at the Gateway Cities Sector office at midnight before boarding the line.

What they found surprised them. Some buses carried only a few people, and a couple of buses were crowded. The group observed that a large number of the passengers were riding the bus to stay off the streets. Many passengers left the bus at the end of the line, for example, and

then re-boarded when the layover was complete and the bus began a return trip.

Clifford joined the council members, as did Hassan Fakhro, scheduling manager; Mike Sieckert, planning manager and Dan Dryden, assistant manager. The group made four one-way trips, ended their fact-finding around 3:30 a.m.

Of the service changes proposed by the Gateway Cities Sector, cancellation of a portion of the 60 Owl line prompted the most discussion. The discussion included whether a bus line that sometimes carries a large number of customers not headed for any particular destination—many of them trying to keep warm and off the street—should continue in light of Metro's need to spend its resources on productive lines.

The result of the early morning observation? The Governance Council voted to keep the current service levels on the 60 Owl line for the time being. The council also asked sector staff to work with Los Angeles County social agencies to seek assistance in providing late night/early morning customers an alternative way to stay off the streets at night. -- *From Dave Hershenson*

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