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Mass Transit Ridership soars to 52-year Record High

By Rich Martin

Metro is riding the wave of increased public transit use, gaining an estimated 2.39 percent during the fourth quarter of 2008 over the same quarter in 2007 after a 7.53 percent gain from 3Q 2008 over 3Q 2007.

The American Public Transportation Association released figures Monday that showed that mass transit ridership across the country rose 4 percent last year, hitting a 52-year record high.

About 10.7 billion trips were taken on public transportation in 2008, a 4 percent increase from 2007. More than 10.4 billion rides were taken in 1957, the APTA said.

Overall, rail ridership rose an estimated 13.66 percent during the third quarter of 2008 compared with the same quarter in 2007, and increased 7.15 percent in the fourth quarter of 2008 over the same quarter in 2007.

Systemwide bus ridership – not counting the Orange Line, which is counted separately – gained an estimated 6.52 percent in the third quarter of 2008 compared with the same period in 2007, and 1.35 percent in the fourth quarter of last year over the previous year.

Metro's latest estimated monthly figures show the effect of the recent economic downturn.

Overall bus and rail boardings dipped 4.7 percent in February to 35,593,649 from 37,343,078 the same month in 2008. The figure was 37,961,130 in February 2007.

Director of Service Performance and Analysis Dan Nguyen said, "Metro's ridership corresponds with national trends of increased usage in the last two calendar quarters of 2008. Unfortunately, Metro has felt the impact of the economy on ridership starting January 2009 with decreased bus ridership."

Estimated systemwide bus boardings totaled 28,260,396 in February, a



Red Line boardings, which include the Purple Line, rose 4.2 percent to 3,502,293 in February from 3,361,425 the previous year.

6.1 percent drop from 30,093,689 in February 2008. The number was 31,161,456 in February 2007.

Orange Line boardings totaled 518,520 in February, down 9.6 percent from 573,630 the previous February. The figure was 520,535 in February 2007.

Total estimated calendar month rail boardings were 6,814,733 in February, up 2.1 percent from 6,675,759 the same month in 2008. A total of 6,279,139 boarded in February 2007.

Red Line boardings, which include the Purple Line, rose 4.2 percent to 3,502,293 in February from 3,361,425 in February 2008. The figure was 3,097,693 in February 2007.

Boardings on the Blue Line rose 0.27 percent from 1,917,664 in February from 1,912,432 in the same month in 2008. The number was 1,873,672 in February 2007.

Estimated Green Line ridership saw a 4 percent decrease, with 848,650 boardings in February after 900,230 the same month in 2008. Ridership totaled 865,645 in February 2007.

Gold Line ridership increased 8.9 percent to 546,125 boardings in February from 501,672 the same month in 2008. The figure was 442,129 in February 2007.

Other local transit agencies saw a spike in ridership. The Orange County Transportation Association – overseen by incoming Metro CEO Art Leahy -- saw a gain of 5 percent last year, and Metrolink ridership rose 9.1 percent.

Mass transit use in the U.S. peaked in 1946 with almost 23.5 billion rides and then began a long descent, bottoming in 1972 with about 6.6 billion rides. Transit use then began to rise again.