



NEWS

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CONTACT: GARY WOSK/JIM SMART
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2712/922-2700
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MTA PLANNERS LAUNCH FULL COURT PRESS IN EVALUATING INVENTIVE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS; \$600 MILLION ON LINE

Never ones to *sit on the bench*, the transportation planners at the MTA view the Call for Projects as the NBA finals. For them, to merely watch our streets and highways deteriorate even further as traffic congestion in Los Angeles County increases 2 percent each year would be like fouling out.

Since the program's inception in 1991, the MTA has allocated nearly \$1.4 billion for such projects as freeway carpool lanes, major street widenings, freeway ramps, traffic signal synchronization, bus system improvements such as bus lanes, ridesharing incentives, transit centers and park-n-ride lots and regional bikeways. Funds also are available for Tele Villages, a new concept where local residents use mass transit to reach a transit station where they work and take advantage of the Internet and other technological advances. There is a Call for Projects every two years.

"Without improvements to the region's transportation infrastructure, the average vehicle speed in the year 2020 on Los Angeles County streets and freeways will be about 10 mph," said Interim CEO Linda Bohlinger. "Just to sustain today's level of Metro bus service to more than 1 million transit dependent people would require 25 percent more Metro buses at a cost of \$200 million."

Starting this month MTA planning staff will begin reviewing mountains of Call for Project applications received from city, county and state agencies vying for more than \$600 million in transportation funds. The enormous heap

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of proposals, all good ones according to MTA planners, will eventually produce improvements that directly or indirectly affect the entire regional transportation system. In 1995, the MTA received 426 applications with a value of \$1.9 billion. About one-fourth, or \$500 million was funded.

Some of the projects that MTA has helped provide funding for range from a Los Angeles River bike path/bridge; shuttle services in South Central Los Angeles; widening of Magic Mountain Parkway in Valencia; extending the Route 30 Freeway in La Verne by 6.2 miles; synchronization of traffic signals on the Westside and in the South Bay; rail freight improvements along the Alameda Corridor; and placing bike racks on buses in the San Gabriel Valley, to name a few.

A little more than 50 percent of the funding comes from monies raised from Proposition C (the Los Angeles County one-half cent sales tax), the balance mainly from the state and some from the federal government.

To be eligible, a public entity generally must provide transportation services such as build streets and highways or operate a public transit system.

"Increased congestion will result in a serious decline in travel speed," Bohlinger said. "Against a backdrop of limited resources, investing in ways to make better use of our streets and highways through such programs as Call For Projects has never been more important.

"Everyone usually thinks of the MTA as the agency that funds the buses and trains, yet we are responsible for so much more," she added.

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"The objective criteria the MTA uses in evaluating applications include determining regional significance and project benefit, cost effectiveness (and local funding match), land use and environmental compatibility, project need, project readiness, and benefits to the overall transit system," said Executive Officer James de la Loza, Regional Transportation and Development.

"In most categories, public agencies may ask for funds for up to four years in advance of the construction date."

What some would find to be a daunting task - reading hundreds of applications in less than a month - is not a problem for MTA staff members, who form teams representing different geographic areas. Their main task: score each project using previously agreed upon criteria and recommend to the MTA Board which projects should be funded.

In June, final recommendations will be made to the MTA Board. Preliminary recommendations are made in April.

"The Call for Projects is really exciting," de la Loza said. "It enables MTA to help provide wide ranging solutions to moving people and goods faster and more cost efficiently."

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