



NEWS

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FURTHER EXPANSION OF MTA BUS FLEET, IMPROVED SERVICE, HALLMARK OF FISCAL YEAR '98 BUDGET APPROVED BY MTA BOARD

The fiscal year 1998 budget approved today by the MTA Board calls for major improvements in bus service, including the purchase of 223 buses, continued construction of the Metro Red Line subway, and funding for numerous traffic improvement projects throughout Los Angeles County.

The \$2.8 billion spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1997 is \$24 million less than the current year's budget. Service expansion and other improvements will be accomplished by reducing operating expenses.

Without increasing fares, the MTA will again expand its bus fleet in mid-September when 50 demonstration buses are deployed. The added service will focus on providing transit dependent individuals with a means of reaching jobs, schools and health care facilities. This action follows the assignment of 53 buses to the MTA's regular service in December and 53 more scheduled during service expansion on June 29.

On the rail side, the budget will enable for work to soon be completed on the Metro Red Line subway extension to Hollywood, continuation of subway construction in North Hollywood and the beginning of subway construction in East Los Angeles.

In addition, numerous traffic improvement projects such as freeway carpool lanes, major street widening, traffic synchronization, transit centers and regional bikeways also are slated to receive funding.

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"This is probably the most important budget our organization has ever produced since it reflects both short and long-term thinking and meets current transportation needs," said Interim MTA CEO Linda Bohlinger. "This document will enable the MTA to accomplish many of the goals this agency established for itself when it was created in 1993, and that is to create a multi-modal transportation system that reduces traffic congestion, improves the quality of life and stimulates economic growth throughout Los Angeles County."

The funding plan calls for the elimination of 192 staff positions. These will be attained by voluntary retirements and attrition though there may be some layoffs. Funds appropriated for salaries and wages during the fiscal year will be reduced by \$28 million as a result of the staffing cutbacks. Bus Division 12 in Long Beach, one of a dozen Metro bus operating divisions, will be downscaled to a light maintenance and storage facility.

In addition, the budget calls for the restructuring of some "owl service," MTA bus service operated between midnight and 4 a.m. The service is poorly utilized with many buses running with just a handful of passengers.

Much of the cost reduction is being driven by declining operating revenues. Funding from local, state and federal sources also is expected to hold steady or be less than the current year.

"This budget took its final shape only after we thoroughly reviewed the total spectrum of services offered, in other words, what seems to be working best, as well as each and every project in progress or in the wings," said MTA Board Chairman Larry Zarian. "Special consideration was given to the nearly 700,000 people whose very lifeline is our bus system. They should be very pleased. Overall, there's something in this budget for everyone."

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Zarian noted that the MTA is the major public transportation service provider in the region as well as the lead transportation planning agency for the county. The MTA also is responsible for the construction of the rail system that includes the Metro Red, Blue and Green lines.

Areas of primary allocation include: \$674 million for bus and rail operations; \$1.1 billion for bus and rail asset maintenance projects, bus procurements and major rail construction; and \$667 million for transportation planning which includes the awarding of \$595 million in subsidies to other cities and agencies throughout Los Angeles County, including municipal bus operators, and \$170 million in Call for Projects funds.

Every two years, during the MTA's Call for Projects program, 88 cities, Los Angeles County and other agencies apply for transportation improvement monies distributed by the agency. Projects to be funded include freeway carpool lanes, major street widening, freeway ramps, traffic synchronization, bus system improvements, ridesharing incentives, transit centers and park-n-ride lots and regional bikeways.

Funds equaling approximately \$128 million in operating and capital funds will be distributed next year to the following municipal bus operators: Arcadia (\$688,000), Claremont (\$135,000); Commerce (\$1.04 million); Culver City (\$10 million); Foothill (\$33 million); Gardena (\$7.4 million); La Mirada (\$468,000); Long Beach (\$30 million); Montebello (\$8 million); Norwalk (\$2.3 million); Redondo Beach (\$121,000); Santa Monica (\$26 million); Torrance (\$9.4 million); Antelope Valley (\$4 million); the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (\$8 million); and Santa Clarita (\$4.7 million).

In rail construction, the budget allocates \$783 million in capital funding for the following Metro Red Line subway projects under construction: \$180 million to

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Segment 2, Wilshire Boulevard/Vermont Avenue to Hollywood Boulevard/Vine Street, and \$320 million to Segment 3, North Hollywood to Hollywood Boulevard/Highland Avenue.

In addition, another \$145 million in subway funds is appropriated to Segment 3, Union Station in downtown Los Angeles to East Los Angeles (construction will begin in 1998), \$7.5 million for studying extending the subway to Mid City and \$4 million to study extending Metro Rail across the San Fernando Valley. The budget also sets aside \$47 million to support improvements and upgrades to the Metro Red Line and light rail Metro Blue and Green lines. The budget also includes \$76 million in construction funds to extend the Metro Blue Line to Pasadena.

Also slated to receive funding: \$53 million for Metrolink, Southern California's commuter rail line, \$30 million for the Alameda Corridor project, a 20-mile rail development program that speeds the transport of freight from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to downtown Los Angeles and \$1.2 million for an MTA anti graffiti program.

Additionally, \$30 million is keyed for paratransit services, a program that helps disabled individuals access public transit; \$31 million to the Metro Freeway Service Patrol for continuation of the successful emergency tow truck service and \$14 million for freeway call boxes throughout Los Angeles County.

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