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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MTA SET TO EMBARK ON NEW ERA OF SEAMLESS TRANSIT FARE

Shortly before the stroke of the new year, LA County transit providers will embark on an experiment that marks the dawning of a new age in seamless public transit travel which could one day replace the need for tokens, cash and monthly passes as we currently know these fare media today.

Within several years, MTA will introduce a plastic, wallet-sized Smart Card that is embedded with a computer chip capable of "carrying" cash, tokens passes and more. The changeover to this new fare system will not take place until customers become acquainted with the benefits of the new fare technology.

In the meantime, on December 30, the first step to such future transitions will be taken toward developing a seamless bus and rail transit services system in LA County that, in essence, will allow all providers of public transit, including MTA, municipal operators, paratransit and Metrolink to accept one form of payment — the key component of the universal fare system (UFS).

Albeit a basic form of UFS, Montebello Bus Lines will become the first municipal bus operator in LA County to partner up with MTA by accepting MTA transit passes on all its bus lines. In several years, when UFS is fully implemented, the paper pass, like all other passes in the county, will become transparent to all customers in the form of one regional transit Smart Card.

Besides the benefit of hassle-free travel to passengers, it is estimated

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that the advent of the Smart Card, already used in other parts of the country, will save MTA close to \$158 million from fraud during an 11- to 15-year period.

Since Smart Cards utilize radio frequencies that communicate between the card and fare reading equipment, there is no need to remove a card from a purse or jacket to pay a fare, which will speed up the boarding.

"The immediate goal of the MTA is to develop a countywide transit pass as a precursor to a Smart Card. This will make it much easier for people to transfer from one transit provider to another," said MTA CEO Roger Snoble. "If we can make the public transportation system as attractive as possible, people who currently depend on the automobile, and not only the transit dependent, will be drawn to this pass. The ultimate goal of all LA County transit providers is to increase public transit ridership, relieve traffic congestion and improve air quality. These new technologies including the Smart Card clearly firmly set us upon this path."

The Smart Cards, embedded with miniature computer chips, can be programmed to hold more than just cash equivalents for use on transit. Among the numerous potential prospects are partnerships with other government entities, schools, convention centers, parking lots and retailers with businesses near transit stops and rail stations. For example, with the Smart Card, people today pay for soft drinks in vending machines at the transit stations in Sydney, Australia or for clothing in Hong Kong. The Smart Card also provides the opportunity for employer transit benefits to be directly added to the card each month — all the customer has to do is validate a card at a ticket vending machine or a stand-alone validator.

Imagine a tourist coming to Los Angeles and being provided a Smart Card to use on public transit to access local tourist destination points during their stay. Or, being a daily transit rider who currently purchases coffee regularly upon de-boarding. A commuter could conceivably avoid the hassle

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of digging for cash for this daily transaction as retailers offer transit riders the convenience of waving their Smart Cards no differently than when paying for their fares on bus and rail systems.

The MTA is scheduled to award a contract for the manufacture and implementation of the Smart Cards in February 2002, with a full year of pilot testing projected to begin in 2003, according to Jane Matsumoto, MTA's UFS project manager.

"Bus fare boxes will be manufactured first for a pilot program, and rail ticket vending machines will follow a bit thereafter," said Matsumoto, who envisions partnering closely with local municipal operators, paratransit and Metrolink to help implement this project at a countywide level.

The UFS contract will include the design, manufacture, testing, delivery, installation, and support of ticket vending machines (TVMs), stand-alone validators (SAVs), validating bus fare boxes, revenue collection equipment, ancillary equipment, spare parts, services and associated software.

"The objectives of UFS coalesce with the goals of the MTA's successful Accelerated Bus Procurement Program," said MTA Board Chairman John Fasana. "The 1,500 compressed natural gas buses the MTA has received since 1998 have improved on-time performance and reliability. When implemented, the UFS will build upon those gains with faster boardings at bus stops and faster trips. It will also reduce the MTA's exposure to fare fraud and counterfeiting, and promote seamless and increased use of transit services provided by MTA and municipal operators in L.A. County as well as the Metrolink commuter rail network."

Since 1990, when the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, now MTA, first issued a Request for Proposal for a UFS consultant, five Los Angeles County municipal operators have implemented magnetic-based fare collection systems.

In the next several years, MTA and other regional operators will procure and operate compatible systems as a regional initiative to improve transit

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travel speeds, increase transit ridership and increase fare revenues.

"Our goal would be to get a Smart Card into everybody's hands in Los Angeles County and partner up with as many different agencies and entities as possible," said Jim McLaughlin, an MTA transit planning director.

In September of this year, the MTA Board of Directors approved the FY 02 Service Changes Program that included the cancellation of MTA line 262 (Garfield Avenue). Effective Dec. 30, Montebello Bus Lines will begin to offer transit service along Garfield Avenue and also honor valid MTA passes on all of the eight fixed route bus lines that Montebello Bus Line operates.

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