

A quicker ride over the hill

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For the first time in two decades, Metro buses could be running on the 405 through the Sepulveda Pass.

When the \$1 billion-plus [405 Project](#) wraps up later this year, its new carpool lane will be the star attraction—and maybe not just for cars.

Metro is considering running a new express bus between the San Fernando Valley and the Westside, taking advantage of the new lane. It would be the first time in two decades that Metro buses have driven the 405 Freeway through the Sepulveda Pass.

The buses would offer a nonstop ride to UCLA and Westwood from Victory Boulevard and the Orange Line. They would also make stops along Van Nuys Boulevard to Nordhoff Street as far north as Panorama City.

Funding still must be identified, but, acting on a [motion](#) by Supervisor and Metro Director Zev Yaroslavsky, the agency's board today directed staff to get moving on the studies, tests and analyses that would be required to launch the proposed new [Line 588](#).

That includes looking at one potential major concern: whether the agency's buses have the horsepower to maintain high speeds uphill in the fast lane. "The last thing anyone wants is to slow down traffic," said Jon Hillmer, Metro's director of service councils.

Express service in the carpool lanes was first suggested last fall by two [Local Service Councils](#)—appointed bodies that provide Metro with a regional perspective during the annual process of adjusting bus routes.

Metro's staff then looked into the proposal, and the line has been taking shape ever since. Earlier this month, the Westside/Central and San Fernando Valley councils held public hearings on service changes and both

recommended adding the express service, Hillmer said.

The public was supportive, too, with about 20 people speaking in favor of Line 588 at the Valley meeting.

“That usually doesn’t happen unless we are cancelling bus lines,” Hillmer said. “There is very broad support for this express bus.”

When [Phase 2 of the Expo Line](#) opens in 2016, the bus line would have another important connection; it would extend south to meet the light rail line, creating a new pathway to Santa Monica and, heading in the other direction, to downtown L.A.

Before any of that can happen, however, the bus line must be funded. Even after fares are collected, it will take at least \$1.65 million to operate it—something the board could authorize as soon as April, when [all of the proposed service changes](#) come before it.

In the meantime, for Metro’s operations staff, the approval of Yaroslavsky’s motion means that Line 588 can be further studied and fine-tuned.

Because of increasing congestion, Metro’s buses haven’t taken the 405 freeway through the Sepulveda Pass for 20 years, Hillmer said. Metro [Line 761](#) currently goes through the pass, but it travels on Sepulveda Boulevard, making several stops. (The Los Angeles Department of Transportation does have a bus that runs on the freeway, however—the [Commuter Express Line 574](#), from Encino to LAX.)

Better transit connections between the Valley and the Westside have been on L.A.’s wish list for years. In 2008, voters approved \$1 billion for a much larger undertaking that could include tunneling and rail, but that project is on hold as Metro [seeks additional funding and project acceleration](#) by partnering with private companies. In the meantime, Line 588 could start service as soon as the 405 lanes open this summer, Hillmer said.

Initially, the bus would be limited to weekday rush hours. But if enough people ride, Hillmer said, it could be expanded to include weekend service—opening a path to new destinations for entertainment, food and shopping for residents on both sides of the hill.

“They are huge economic engines,” Hillmer said of the Valley and Westside. “This opens up all kinds of wonderful opportunities.”

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