

Valley-Westside express bus is a go

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Metro soon will be starting express bus service from the San Fernando Valley to the Westside.

Taking advantage of those brand-new 405 carpool lanes, Metro later this year will launch an express bus through the Sepulveda Pass, offering transit riders on both sides of the hill a speedier way through one of L.A.'s gnarliest commuting challenges.

On December 15, Line 788 will begin offering express nonstop service from UCLA in Westwood to the Orange Line in the San Fernando Valley. It then will continue north on Van Nuys Boulevard, stopping at major intersections on its way to Panorama City. Because it will connect to the [Orange Line](#) rapid transit busway, the line will give people in places like North Hollywood, Woodland Hills and Chatsworth a faster path to the Westside.

According to Jon Hillmer, Metro's executive officer in charge of bus service planning and scheduling, the new line is projected to save a lot of time for commuters now riding other lines.

"We're being very conservative, but from end to end we are looking at 20 minute time savings in each direction," he said.

Service through the Sepulveda Pass currently is offered via [Line 761](#), but the buses are infamously slow, having to navigate traffic and wait for stoplights along Sepulveda Boulevard. It currently takes more than an hour to get from one side of the hill to the other in normal traffic.

Initially, express buses will depart every 20 minutes on weekdays during peak traffic periods—from 5:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Hillmer believes the line will draw a lot of riders in short order. If that's the case, the frequency of buses will be increased and more daytime hours will be added. "If this gets to be very popular and we

have overloads, we will add service very quickly,” Hillmer said.

The line could prove particularly useful for UCLA students, who qualify for [reduced fares](#) from Metro. The university also subsidizes at least 50% of transit costs with six local agencies for students and employees.

Using the [405 Project](#)’s carpool lanes for buses was first suggested last fall at two [Local Service Councils](#)—appointed bodies that give Metro a regional perspective during the annual process of adjusting bus routes.

“The public was very supportive of the idea,” Hillmer said. “It was virtually unanimous that there was a need for nonstop service between the Valley and the Westside.”

Then Metro’s Board of Directors in May [requested](#) that the agency prepare the studies and tests needed to launch the service. One potential roadblock was whether buses could maintain highway speeds while climbing the steep hill that separates the Valley and the Westside. Fortunately, Hillmer said, Metro’s 45-foot coaches—which are built with lightweight composite sides—proved able to maintain speeds of at least 55 miles per hour in each direction.

Further down the road, Metro plans to extend the express line south to the Sepulveda station of the [Expo Line](#) when the final phase of the light rail project opens in January, 2016. That will give people another option to reach destinations such as Santa Monica without having to deal with driving, not to mention the city’s [notoriously difficult](#) parking.

Line 788 may soon get a catchier name. Today, at Metro’s Executive Management Committee meeting, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and his Metro board colleagues Paul Krekorian and Pam O’Connor introduced a motion to begin promoting the line as the “Valley-Westside Express.” That proposal will go before the agency’s full Board of Directors next Thursday, September 25.

Whatever it’s called, Hillmer said the line will give residents of a broad area a new way to get from the Valley to the Westside—and vice versa.

“This will be a very attractive service because it’s fast and easy to use,” Hillmer said. “Because it interfaces easily with the Orange Line, people who have destinations on either side of the 405 will have faster access over the hill.”



The bus line will roll through the Sepulveda Pass via the new carpool lanes. Photo/Metro's The Source

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