

**A START ON RAPID TRANSIT IN LOS ANGELES:
Interagency Planning Processes**

by
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Abstract

For decades, the Los Angeles area has debated where, when and how to build rapid transit. Although one agency has the legislative mandate to implement rapid transit here, it is apparent that only a consensus of many public agencies can expedite the job. These agencies have never been closer to agreement than they currently are. The processes of continuing, coordinated and cooperative planning that have led to this point are the subject of this paper.

1. INTRODUCTION

Concern for building a rapid transit system in Los Angeles is not new. It extends as far back as anyone can remember, indeed to the days when the PE operated a widespread network reaching as far as San Bernardino and Balboa, while the L. A. Railway Company operated local service in the central portion of the Los Angeles area.

These systems contributed in the early decades of this century to the widespread development of the region, which was also affected by the increasing popularity of the automobile.

In the 1920's, motor coach services began to be placed into operation both to increase accessibility to new areas not served by the rail lines and to assist in making the rail lines more attractive for a larger number of trips.

Then, for a number of reasons, the motor coach began to replace the rail service. This trend continued until 1957, at which time only nine street-car lines were in operation.

2. EARLY RAPID TRANSIT EFFORTS

In 1951, the state legislature evidenced its concern for the development of a rapid transit sys-

problem, with the area of concern defined as the San Fernando Valley west of the west boundary of the City of Glendale, and within four miles on each side of the main channel of the Los Angeles River from the San Fernando Valley to the mouth of the river at Long Beach, by means of suspended overhead monorail. Although given this responsibility, no public funds were provided by the legislature to carry out the work.

With the assistance of a one-time appropriation from the County of Los Angeles, the MTA engaged consultants to proceed on the limited study assignment. In 1954, the Authority received reports from consultants on the feasibility of a monorail line between San Fernando and Long Beach within the limits defined in the Act. The consultants concluded that a public agency was required to implement a major rapid transit improvement program such as that under study. They also recommended that economic and engineering features of a modern elevated rapid transit system be given comparative study. The consultants concluded that, provided appropriate legislative action was taken and further reports were completed, the development of a mass rapid transit system by monorail for Los Angeles appeared feasible.

The Authority in fact found it impossible to secure either the broadened powers or the financing to carry the project to a successful conclusion. As it had become apparent that the Authority, as

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then constituted, was unable to proceed with the development of a rapid transit system, substantial changes were made in the enabling legislation by the 1957 session of the State Legislature.

In line with the findings of the studies which had been made, the Authority was granted exemption from taxes on its property and from regulation by the State Public Utilities Commission in matters other than safety standards. Further, the limited area within which the Authority was empowered to act was enlarged to cover all of Los Angeles County, and the definition of "mass rapid transit" was broadened to include all forms of service, elevated or subway passenger transportation. Again, however, no taxing authority or public fund assistance was provided the new agency with which to purchase equipment or pay operating expenses.

Acting under these new powers, the Authority did succeed in acquiring the properties and operations of the two principal mass transit agencies in the County.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority, in meeting its responsibility for developing a feasible rapid transit plan, prepared a study that surveyed the movement of people by all modes of travel in the Los Angeles area and identified eight corridors, or major streams of travel. Of these corridors, four were chosen for initial study of rapid transit routing, appropriate type of facility, and economic feasibility. These four corridors extended from Santa Monica through Beverly Hills, the Wilshire district and downtown Los Angeles to Covina in the San Gabriel Valley, to Long Beach on the south, and to Reseda in the San Fernando Valley.

It was in the area of system financing that the efforts to develop needed rapid transit facilities for the region failed, and it was deemed that this failure was due to the inadequate fund raising powers of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority.

From 1958 until the present, MTA and the SCRTD have substantially expanded the bus system. Operations were extended into areas previously without service and many communities threatened with the loss of public transit as the result of financial failure of private operators have been assured of continued service by integration into the present system.

However, grave doubts appeared over the feasibility of constructing rapid transit facilities within the MTA's limited financing powers -- that is solely from anticipated fare revenues. When it became apparent that this could not be

accomplished, the legislature in 1964 created a new agency, the Southern California Rapid Transit District, as the successor to the MTA.

3. SCRTD UNDERTAKES THE TASK

Governed by a board appointed by elected local governmental officials, the District was given the power to develop a rapid transit program for submission to the electorate for approval of tax supported capital financing.

While given authority to go to the voters for general obligation bond authority for capital construction purposes, the new public agency was again denied any form of tax dollar help to operate the existing bus system or to pay for the necessary rapid transit engineering and planning work. While rapid transit planning and preliminary engineering studies had been conducted by the District's predecessor, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, prior to 1964, major additional work was necessary to satisfy the new, stringent requirements the Legislature had placed in the District Act to provide a fully documented proposal for submission to the electorate in a bond election. It was clear that the District, having no resources other than riders' fares, did not have sufficient funds to complete the required planning and preliminary engineering.

The funds provided by 1966 legislation enabled the District to begin work toward this objective when an engineering and planning program was undertaken to prepare a rapid transit plan for submission to the electorate. A group of highly qualified consulting firms assisted the District in producing in May, 1968, the report required by the District Act. The Final Report recommended an 89-mile rapid transit system at a cost of \$2.5 billion. Negative reaction to property tax financing during the public hearing process resulted in a proposal to meet debt service on the required bond issue from the proceeds of 1/2% general sales tax. Legislation to permit the submission of such a proposal to the electorate was signed by the Governor only three months prior to the anticipated November, 1968 election date. In spite of the shortness of time, the program was submitted to the voters of the District on that basis in the November general election.

Although an influential and tireless group of prominent Los Angeles County citizens worked for the passage of the ballot measure, it failed to garner the necessary 60 percent vote. Even in defeat, however, there were encouraging signs of a growing awareness of the need for a modern

rapid transit system as over one million voters (45 percent) of those casting ballots were willing to tax themselves to pay for rapid transit. It should be remembered that this proposition called for the local taxpayers to shoulder the full burden of the cost of the system, since there was not significant federal funding programs available at that time.

4. BUILDING PUBLIC CONSENSUS

That the seeds of a local consensus on the need for rapid transit had been sown became increasingly apparent through the years following 1968. California voters went to the polls in November of 1970 to consider a ballot measure to divert a portion of the State Highway Gas Tax fund for the financial support of rapid transit systems. Even though 2.7 million voters statewide supported the proposition, a well financed campaign by the opposition contributed to the defeat of the ballot measure.

The significance of the 1970 vote was in signaling that the public, state-wide, as well as in Los Angeles, had accepted the need for rapid transit. This consensus matured during 1971, as once again the Legislature responded to the call for assistance for public transit and in October, 1971, Senate Bill 325 passed. This landmark piece of transit legislation provided transit operators with funds needed to not only maintain service but to expand and improve their systems, including through rapid transit. SB 325 broadened the sales tax base by extending the sales tax to the retail sale of gasoline and increased the local sales tax rate from 1 percent to 1-1/4 percent with the 1/4 percent increase being earmarked for public transportation within metropolitan counties.

Soon after the enactment of SB 325, the District perceived the opportunity to use part of the funds generated by that legislation to build a starter rapid transit line. Over time, District personnel had learned a great deal about transit demand along several corridors and the costs of providing for it. They knew also, for example, that the South Central Corridor had a high transit demand coupled with a high transit dependency. Additionally, this line coincided with the plans of the cities of Los Angeles and Compton.

For all of these reasons, the District, in December, 1971, by resolution, asked the City of Los Angeles and the County to pledge part of their SB 325 revenues to construct the South Central Corridor.

In December, 1971, the Los Angeles City Council established its own ad hoc committee on rapid

transit. Late in December, the County Supervisors agreed in principle with the District's proposal.

However, when the Los Angeles City Council was unable to agree with the District's proposal, it became apparent that a new effort would have to be launched to develop consensus on where to start building rapid transit.

Furthermore, a disproportionate share of the District's SB 325 funds had to be used to meet operating costs rather than be devoted to capital improvement programs -- because the District had no other local tax assistance. Nearly all other transit properties in California have a local property tax at their disposal. In spite of this constraint, the District was able to put up about \$5 million to match federal contribution to build the El Monte - to - Los Angeles Busway -- in reality the region's first true rapid transit line.

Hence, when on March 3, 1972, the Los Angeles City Council requested SCRTD to submit a grant application to UMTA to study the financing and priorities of initial routes, the District set about areawide analyses of needs and options for where to start rapid transit.

These analyses led to study reports released in the Spring of 1974 that stated that no single mode of transportation or one-dimensional program could satisfy the broad range of regional goals and objectives, but that a regional transit improvement program would have to integrate a mix of activities designed to accommodate the individual requirements of an area as diverse as Greater Los Angeles. As a result, eight program elements were defined in the study conclusions, including a multi-billion dollar master plan.

Unfortunately, the two years of considering where to start failed in building sufficient public support and in setting priorities. Although the defeat of the county-wide sales tax measure (Prop. A) in November, 1974, precluded the immediate commitment to building a comprehensive regional fixed guideway system as part of a long-range transit improvement program, many short term improvements have already been adopted by the District and are presently operating.

However, it is extremely significant to note that over 53% of the voters in the cities of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica and Compton approved rapid transit. The lack of a majority vote county-wide was not interpreted as public opposition to rapid transit, but a vote against increased taxation during a period of severe economic recession combined with unparalleled inflation. (Again, as might

be expected, the outer areas of the county which would not see this service for many years voted it down, probably also because they felt that in voting permission to use some of the gas tax, they'd solve the matter without any new tax.) In June of 1974, the same Los Angeles County voters had approved amending the constitution to permit the use of state gasoline tax funds for rapid transit construction, making substantial local funding available. This "Proposition 5" has caused a reorientation of thinking from the "do it all at once" philosophy to a more pragmatic "starter line" concept. This concept is included in the Regional Transportation Plan adopted by the Southern California Association of Governments. In addition, this "building block" approach to full system completion has been endorsed by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration as a proper method of implementation for regional fixed guideway transportation plans.

Concurrent with the developing local consensus on starting rapid transit incrementally has been a new activism on the part of the federal government relative to major urban mass transportation investment. The National Mass Transportation Assistance Act of 1974 provides for about \$6.5 billion through 1980 for long-term commitment to such investment.

Today we have arrived at unmistakable local support for starting a rapid transit system; we have official consensus on the first priority corridor -- the same one within which MTA was intended to start rapid transit in 1951. Undoubtedly, much of this agreement can be attributed to the guarantees we have of continuing funding for rapid transit construction -- at both the local and federal levels.

The District has the legal mandate to move forward from here. UMTA is willing to assist the local area in getting rapid transit underway in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, none of the continuing local funding available for rapid transit flows directly to RTD, but instead comes to the State, County and cities within the County. Due to the relatively modest amounts of Proposition 5 money available to this area, it appears that assembling the necessary local funding to start work on the region's rapid transit system has become dependent upon the politics of routing the initial line.

5. RAPID TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RTAC)

In March, 1975, the Southern California Rapid Transit District created a Rapid Transit Advisory Committee (RTAC).

The purpose of the RTAC is to analyze the data

developed by the aforementioned studies for the corridors of the adopted Transit Master Plan and make recommendations as to the corridors best suited for a starter line project.

The Committee is chaired by Richard Gallagher, Manager, Rapid Transit Department of SCRTD, and is composed of representatives of agencies who will supply the local share of the cost, as well as representatives of other interested citizen groups. RTAC membership includes: Cal Trans, the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles (staff and council offices), Southern California Rapid Transit District, Orange County Transit District, the Incorporated Cities of: Burbank, Glendale, Long Beach, Compton and Carson; the League of California Cities and the Southern California Association of Governments.

The composition of the RTAC was designed to facilitate full participation at every step of the corridor recommendation process, including the selection of evaluation criteria. This concept was decided upon in order to accomplish a methodology for consensus building.

The SCRTD's function in this group is to assemble and furnish technical data and assist the groups in the analysis and in arriving at conclusions.

The initial task undertaken by the RTAC was the selection of corridor alternatives and the basic evaluation criteria to be applied to these alternatives throughout the selection process. Several dozen possible alternatives available were considered with 11 finally being chosen for in-depth analysis. These were composed of portions of the basic corridors, which were adopted by SCRTD and SCAG as a result of the Transit Alternatives Study. The eleven are:

- (1) 60-mile light rail system proposed by Supervisor Baxter Ward,
- (2) Wilshire Blvd. from the Los Angeles CBD to Mid-Wilshire area,
- (2A) Wilshire Blvd. from the CBD to Santa Monica,
- (2B) CBD to Airport via Wilshire Blvd. ,
- (3) North Hollywood to Compton through Glendale/Burbank and the CBD,
- (3A) Van Nuys to Compton through Glendale/Burbank and the CBD,
- (3B) North Hollywood to Compton (Alt. 3) and the Orange County Line from So. Central L. A. ,
- (3C) Canoga Park to Long Beach through Glendale/Burbank, the CBD and So. Central L. A. ,

- (4) The CBD to Long Beach through So. Central L. A. and East-West links to Torrance and Orange County,
- (5) North Hollywood to Compton through Hollywood, Wilshire Blvd. and the CBD,
- (6) North Hollywood to City of Commerce through Glendale/Burbank and the CBD.

Once the eleven primary corridor alternatives were agreed upon, out of a list of 17 criteria, the Committee decided to use eight basic evaluative criteria in making the "first cut"; it also formed two working sub-committees, Planning & Engineering, to gather, analyze, and submit data to the entire committee membership for consideration and review:

The Planning Sub-committee was assigned the responsibility of analyzing three of these key criteria, (1) patronage, (2) conformance to community and regional planning goals, and (3) community support.

The Engineering Sub-committee was assigned the duties of addressing the issues of (1) costs, (2) usable segments, and (3) speed of implementation.

The seventh criteria, "funding constraints", was left to the Committee as a whole for consideration.

6. RATIONALE FOR EVALUATION CRITERIA

SCRTD Staff and RTAC Members programmed the evaluation process. A number of factors had to be considered in selecting the basic evaluative criteria. A list of participating agency transportation goals were prepared, enabling the Committee to select those criteria deemed most critical for an initial alternative corridor elimination process. Once the majority of the alternatives had been eliminated, the other less significant, yet meaningful, criteria could then be applied in a more thorough evaluation. The eight basic feasibility criteria and rationale for their utilization are as follows:

- (1) Costs -- includes capital, operating and maintenance costs as well as associated feeder/distribution costs.
- (2) Community and Regional Planning Objectives -- transportation and land usages are significantly inter-related; therefore, any major new facility must be compatible with community and regional objectives for planned urban development.

- (3) Community Support -- considerations of citizen acceptability are, and will continue to be, a basic criteria for major public works projects.
- (4) Patronage -- included within this category are considerations of passengers served, trip types, service to transit dependents, accessibility to major centers, and the level of service.
- (5) Usable Segment -- is a basic requirement for starter line to be an effective service if no additional segments were to be built. Moreover, the starter line must be a part of the Regional Transportation Plan the region has adopted to facilitate coordination and realize a comprehensive transportation system comprising both line-haul and local circulation elements.
- (6) Speed of Implementation -- considers the time involved with planning, preliminary engineering and final construction, as well as coordination with other short and long-term transportation improvements.
- (7) Financial Feasibility -- is dependent upon adequate funds being available to cover the cost of the construction of the system and purchase of rolling stock and other necessary equipment, including necessary provisions for contingencies and escalation over the period of construction. Proposition 5 funds (gas tax diversion) from the City and County of Los Angeles, the State of California, and other municipalities, in particular Long Beach, have been tentatively pledged to the project. These could be the local share of funds to be combined with Federal participation through UMTA on an 80-20 matching basis. Other funds perhaps from the Local Transportation Fund (SB 325), special assessment districts, a temporary local sales tax, or local government bonds, would be required to pay for rolling stock and costs of operation. The Proposition 5 funds may be used only for facilities construction. The current Federal program, which runs through 1980, could be expected to provide up to \$800 million -- if the local area produces \$200 million over this period -- toward a \$1 billion project.

If the Federal program is extended by Congress beyond 1980 and the appropriations increase, as Administration

officials have indicated they will recommend, the total Federal funds available for the Los Angeles area could be much higher. For example, if a 10-year project period were used and the local area continued its maximum regular Proposition 5 commitment, this area could pledge approximately \$400 million to match \$1.6 billion in Federal funds for a \$2 billion project over the next 10 years. In any case, UMTA has indicated that planning at the local level should be directed toward developing the most effective transit proposal with the understanding that staged funding and construction would probably be necessary.

- (8) Environmental Impact -- is recognition of potential effects of starter line operations upon air quality, neighborhood noise-vibration levels, localized traffic congestion, the visual environment, community life-style and economics, and energy and physical resources. It is virtually impossible to predict environmental impact problems, the amount of potential project disruption, delay, and cost increase inherent in each. Experience in this area, e.g., the Century Freeway, and with other rapid transit projects, e.g., Atlanta, indicates project delays for unanticipated environmental problems can involve many months and significant cost escalation beyond that normally anticipated in the past.

7. RESULTS OF FIRST PHASE OF RTAC EVALUATION

In the months since being established, the RTAC has been able to narrow the field from a multitude of alternatives down to three. It has held a dozen 3 to 4 hour meetings, and in addition, its two sub-committees have held a total of eleven 3 to 4 hour meetings.

Resolutions in support of a starter line effort have been passed by the County of Los Angeles, the City of Los Angeles, the City of Long Beach, the State Senate, the State Assembly, the City of Glendale, the City of Burbank, and the City of Compton. Three local agencies have pledged their Prop. 5 funds for 6 years provided they can come to agreement on the corridor and mode for the region's rapid transit starter line.

It was clearly set forth at the start of these meetings that the function to be played by the District's

rapid transit technical staff was to furnish information and backup data to the other agencies to assist them in evaluating the various alternatives. It has not been the job of the District's staff to make any specific recommendations on its own, but rather to endeavor to assist the technical and administrative staffs of the other agencies in arriving at a consensus.

At its June 20 meeting, RTAC was able to establish three top candidates. The RTAC further requested District staff to prepare additional data on certain modifications and extensions.

All three alternatives connect the San Fernando Valley, the Los Angeles CBD and the South-Central portion of the County. It is possible to connect these areas by two corridor combinations, one traversing Burbank and Glendale, the other penetrating Hollywood and the Wilshire area.

One alternative capitalizes on the opportunity to use existing rail rights-of-way through Burbank and Glendale in order to reinstitute "streetcar type" service between the San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles CBD, as well as between Long Beach and Los Angeles CBD -- a total of 53 miles.

Another alternative would more directly serve the major centers of population and employment in the region. Providing the level of service usually thought of as rapid transit and required in these areas would entail largely grade-separated configurations from the San Fernando Valley through Hollywood, Wilshire, Los Angeles CBD, South Los Angeles and on to Long Beach.

A third alternative entails provision of more nearly rapid transit type service within essentially those corridors served by lower speed facilities in the first alternative above by considerable use of grade-separations in direct routing through the Burbank and Glendale activity centers.

On June 27, RTAC reached the following consensus:

- (1) The Starter Line Corridor should connect the San Fernando Valley, the Los Angeles CBD and the South Central portion of the County.
- (2) It is possible to connect these areas by two corridor combinations which evolve into three basic alternatives described above.
- (3) The choice among the alternatives depends upon the policy weighting of key criteria; i. e., the importance the policy

bodies assign to the factors of project cost, use of existing rights-of-way, speed of implementation, ridership, serving only the central area vs. extending out into the suburban communities in the San Fernando Valley and Harbor areas, as well as the matter of grade-separated vs. at-grade transit service. Each of the finalist starter line alternatives meets these criteria in different ways.

The RTAC considered the required policy weighting, as set forth in Item 3 above, to be beyond the scope of its assigned responsibilities. They recommend that the above conclusions be transmitted by the District Board to the funding agencies and that an early decision be requested, as called for by U. S. Secretary of Transportation, William T. Coleman. Last May 15, Coleman, while attending a Transportation Week luncheon here in Los Angeles, spoke of the need for a local commitment of funds as early as possible this fiscal year so that a federal grant could be "seriously reviewed" this fiscal year. This commitment is seen as necessary to trigger the flow of federal funds pursuant to the current federal/local funds matching formula requirements; the present formula requires one local dollar for every four federal requested. Informal discussions with UMTA staff before and after Secretary Coleman's statements indicate that the currently estimated project ceiling is within the ability of UMTA to fund.

With regard to other funding possibilities, appreciable funding assistance is possible by the use of Special Assessment Districts to defray all or part of the costs of rapid transit station facilities in commercial areas -- especially along subway sections.

The grant process leading towards operation of a rapid transit system involves several stages. RTD has completed the development of plans and their refinement. Preliminary engineering and final design precede actual construction. Upon the completion of preliminary engineering, RTD can prepare a capital grant request for final design and construction.

Alternatives and cost/benefit analyses also must precede preliminary engineering and capital grant award. Some of this work has already been accomplished. RTAC is currently reviewing the adequacy of the previous studies' results relative to addressing issues raised by UMTA and SCAG. Furthermore, a cooperative interagency effort is in process to define guidelines, work statements, schedule and funding documentation and report structure of technical reports to assure

documentation of the development of rapid transit as required by UMTA before it will participate in Los Angeles' rapid transit starter line project.

8. CONCLUSIONS TO DATE

At the completion of the first phase of the Rapid Transit Advisory Committee work, the generalized corridor shown below has been endorsed by the SCRTD Board of Directors, the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles, et al.

Agreement by these bodies on specific alignments has yet to be reached. Mode and configuration considerations are also undecided, but will be greatly influenced by recommendations resulting from a "Medium Capacity Transit Systems Study" presently being conducted by the SCRTD and a consulting firm. These issues will be the subject of RTAC consideration over the coming months.

Once agreement has been reached by all participating jurisdictions as to whether the starter line will pass through Glendale/Burbank or through the Hollywood/Wilshire area, SCRTD's preliminary engineering grant application with all supportive data accompanying the application, will be submitted to UMTA for approval. At that point, actual implementation of rapid transit in Los Angeles will have begun.

BIOGRAPHY

Paul C. Taylor serves as Planner in the Rapid Transit Department of the Southern California Rapid Transit District. Previously he had been manager of Southern California operations for a national transportation and urban planning firm. As a consultant, he held project management responsibilities on the recent major transit planning efforts of SCRTD and Orange County Transit District. With both MS and BS degrees in Civil Engineering from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Taylor is an Associate Member of ASCE.

