

# *A Vision for the MTA*

*by Franklin White, Chief Executive Officer*

DESPITE OUR MANY INCENTIVES PROMOTING BUS AND RAIL, CAR AND VANPOOLING, THE FACT OF THIS NEW YEAR is that more commuters are driving by themselves, alone in their cars on their way to work, than ever before.

The statistics are staggering. In the last five years, ridership on buses—here and across the country—has dropped sharply. Unless we Angelenos change our behavior, we will strangle on our own congestion. In the decades ahead, driving alone in rush hours must become as politically incorrect as smoking in a hospital ward.

Traffic congestion is worsening, fast approaching gridlock. In the year 2015, peak-hour traffic speed on major freeways, assuming current trends, will drop below 10 miles per hour. This will occur because people who moved out of the city have longer commutes and because there will be more people in Los Angeles County.

We know people will use public transportation if it is safe, convenient, clean, on time and affordable. Attitudes will change as the systems we build and operate demonstrate they meet these criteria.

## CHALLENGES

MTA is the public agency charged with developing a transportation system that will:

- increase mobility
- reduce congestion
- improve the quality of our air.

We at the MTA are facing these challenges and making progress to meet the needs of all Los Angeles County citizens.

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The MTA was created in 1993, in part, to provide transportation alternatives to driving alone and to provide services for the transit-dependent. No amount of funding, however, will allow us to manage Los Angeles County's future traffic problems without an effective and clearly-stated long-range strategic plan. This plan will be the catalyst for building consensus as we move forward to resolve the mobility problems we face.

## 20-YEAR PLAN

We propose, therefore, over the next 20 years, to invest more than \$60 billion to fund our operational needs and build new transportation systems. The greatest share of these funds will be used to maintain and improve service levels throughout the county and buy new buses.

The original long-range plan incorporated some far-reaching ideas that just aren't attainable, due largely to its overly ambitious nature and the unanticipated scaled-down economic environment unexpectedly forced upon us by the deep and long-lasting recession.

We are now in the final preparation of our new 20-year plan. Our long-range plan will be the blueprint for transportation solutions and improvements for decades to come. This plan is more economically realistic. We have included projections that we believe are far more sound than in the earlier long-range plan. We also have reduced the scope of the plan to make sure it stays realistic and achievable. One thing is certain. The plan is designed to get people out of their cars and into buses, trains, and vans, so they can reach their destinations more quickly, with less cost and less strain.

The MTA will fulfill its mandate to help Los Angeles become a better place to live and work.

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## TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

Here is a preview of the 20-year plan. It takes into account our new fiscal situation, and offers reasonable, workable solutions to solve the problems we face.

### *Provide Quality Transportation*

- **Work with Los Angeles' leaders** to develop innovative strategies that control transportation demand and maximize transportation system improvements. This will include strategies that may make it more expensive for people to drive alone, as well as new parking strategies that will encourage the use of transit. We also will increase the number of HOV lanes on freeways and major streets, look at moving buses faster with preemptive signals, encourage the use of bicycles by providing more bike paths, and test alternative delivery services such as Smart Shuttles and Community-Based Transit.
- **Continue developing Los Angeles County's rail network.** Prepare to open the Metro Green Line system in mid-1995; build the Pasadena Line, resolving all outstanding funding issues; build a rail line in the San Fernando Valley and complete East and West extensions to the Red Line.
- **Improve bus interface with Metrolink trains** as new service becomes available.
- **Reconsider MTA's role as a regional carrier,** striving to reduce costs without reducing services by contracting out and streamlining the way we operate. Create financial allowances to fund flexible transit options such as vans, neighborhood collectors and shared taxis for off-peak service in the inner city and alternative service delivery in suburban areas.
- **Participate as a financial partner in the Alameda Corridor.** We recognize the importance of the movement of goods to the economic success of our region. We must keep our major sea ports competitive.

- Pursue technologies that make using public transportation easier, such as modern fare collection and vehicle locator systems, new technology alternatives for rail corridors such as the use of “rail buses” — self-propelled vehicles that run on fixed rail.
- Continue pursuing alternate fuel technologies to improve air quality. This includes obtaining additional funding for the Advanced Technology Transit Bus (ATTB) program, to help create a new lightweight transit vehicle that will revolutionize the manufacture of buses in the future and create thousands of jobs for Southern California’s struggling defense industry.
- Further improve MTA’s service and communication to customers by:
  - Installing video monitors in rail stations that inform MTA patrons of other MTA programs and services.
  - Improving telephone communications with customers by using pre-recorded information while customers are on hold.
  - Using car cards inside buses to introduce bus operators and to provide useful information.

## MTA MANAGEMENT GOALS

These are the major elements of our long-range plan. But, alone they will not be enough. As a government entity, we know that we must create a productive, well-managed organization. We have goals to accomplish this. Meeting these goals will create an agency that can make our long-range goals and objectives become a reality. Here are actions we shall undertake:

### *The MTA Organization*

- Increase employee productivity by pushing responsibility and authority down into the organization, by creating responsibility-centered policies and programs and appropriate training and support.

- **Continue development of an internal Total Quality Management program** that rewards excellence and teamwork, and instills in all staff the awareness that there is always room for improvement.
- **Complete the management conversion program** at all Operating Divisions to a single-manager concept, which will:
  - Increase efficiency and communications by shifting from two managers to a single manager at each operating division.
  - Empower the division manager with more authority and other resources, and more accountability for results.
  - Make a single division manager responsible for rolling out the buses, maintaining them, and improving the financial performance of the division.
- **Allow the manager more input into the selection of staff.**

By doing this, we shall create significant cost savings, reduce worker's compensation costs, and improve the management of spare parts. For the first time, we are stressing performance measures in our maintenance operation.

- **Push responsibility and accountability down to managers** with a new Financial Information System that provides the tools they need to better track budgets, expenses, and contract performance by vendors.
- **Seek new sources of revenue** and encourage new business development in and around MTA facilities.

## OUR MANDATE

The MTA was created by the State Legislature to merge two competing transportation agencies, eliminate duplication, and set a course for the future of transportation in Los Angeles County. From its inception, the MTA was forced to attend to a succession of controversial matters, including budget shortfalls and rail construction quality and safety issues.

These issues, along with the continuing recession, a devastating earthquake and a nine-day transit workers strike, consumed management and staff time — time that could have been spent merging two very different agencies into one united organization.

Most of these controversies are now behind us, or soon will be. This gives the MTA the opportunity to move beyond the merger process, to address the pressing problems of transportation today and tomorrow.

### *The Future*

It is time to stop wasting energy on the bus-versus-rail debate. Because of worsening congestion, a bus and van system alone would be incapable of meeting the transit demands of the future. We need both improved bus services *and* extensions to our rail lines.

The bus will remain the backbone of our public transportation system many years into the future. It will help link our expanding rail system to the destinations of our passengers. As the rail system grows, the bus system will be reformed to serve new rail stations, so that more people can travel farther and more conveniently.

That's why, notwithstanding the high construction costs, we must continue to invest in our rail network. Besides improving our transportation infrastructure, investing in rail provides other benefits to our region. Last year alone we:

- Spent \$525 million for rail construction locally, with 98% of all rail project dollars flowing to U.S. producers for products and services.
- Created 15,000 jobs.

We must not forget that when the construction process is complete, Los Angeles will reap the full benefits of this new rail network — thousands will leave their cars at home to ride public transit to work, to the market, to recreational sites, schools, and hospitals.

Again, people will use public transportation if it is safe, convenient, clean, on time, and affordable. We intend to make sure our systems are all of these.

## THE FIRST 21 MONTHS

Significant milestones were achieved in the agency's first 21 months. We are proud of our accomplishments. In addition to our task of transporting about 400 million annual bus and train riders, MTA has:

- **Eliminated 515 positions**, including about 14% of the non-represented work force; successfully negotiated new labor contracts with MTA's three principal unions, reducing labor contract costs from previous contracts.
- **Abolished the Rail Construction Corporation**, returning to the MTA Board full responsibility for our construction program, and creating new management structures to assure accountability and quality control.
- **Maintained virtually all regular bus and train service following the January 17, 1994 earthquake**, added new service where needed and responded to more than 100 requests for emergency assistance from hospitals, police, and schools.
- **Provided substantial bus and train service during the nine-day transit strike** last summer. The MTA is the only U.S. transportation agency that operated a multi-modal transit system during a strike.
- **Funded municipal transit operations throughout the county**, including demand responsive services such as Dial-A-Ride and specialized taxi service, park-and-ride lots, and regional bikeways.
- **Worked with other transportation agencies and municipalities**, funded numerous pilot projects to study transportation demand.
- **Continued to coordinate all anti-traffic congestion efforts** throughout the county.
- **Launched a new region-wide program to increase accessibility** of public transportation for the disabled.

- **Decided to build a single MTA headquarters building** at the hub of the burgeoning transportation system of the future. Its central location near Union Station will make it easily accessible to the public. MTA ownership of its headquarters' building will save millions of taxpayer dollars that otherwise would have been paid in rent.
- **Reduced costs** by assigning all current and future transit security responsibilities to the MTA Transit Police Department.
- **Assisted more than 250,000 motorists** via MTA's Freeway Service Patrol.

These are significant accomplishments during a very difficult merger process. They reflect the dedication of the MTA Board of Directors and staff.

## CONCLUSION

The blueprint for the MTA's future will be established when the MTA Board adopts its new 20-year plan. The plan will spell out how the MTA intends to provide better transportation solutions and services throughout our region. Fulfilling this mission will require an agency that is flexible, resourceful, responsive and well-managed. The MTA is committed to providing the leadership to accomplish this.

As we fulfill our mission, we will help make Los Angeles a better place to live, a place where an economy can expand and grow, a place where the air will be healthier to breathe. Achieving our goals will make Los Angeles more attractive to business, provide our residents a better lifestyle, and improve mobility for generations to come.