

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT

RESPONSE TO McCONE COMMISSION INQUIRY
RE BUS SERVICE IN THE WATTS AREA

Recent inquiries from the McCone Commission regarding public transportation in the Watts area indicate that important segments of the community leadership do not have a clear picture of the legal powers and functions and the limitations on the Southern California Rapid Transit District in providing bus transportation for the citizens of the District. Furthermore, the problems cited in connection with the Watts area, including fares, frequency and convenience of service, and inter-company co-ordination, are not confined to the Watts area alone. Any proposed solution must consider the District as a whole.

Recognizing these facts, we have been asked to summarize the present organizational structure of bus operations within the District, review the specific problems, particularly as they relate to Watts, and to "put on our public hat" and suggest ways to improve service to the public even though these improvements may be beyond the present powers and resources of the District.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT - POWERS AND LIMITATIONS

The Southern California Rapid Transit District was organized in November, 1964 as a public corporation for the purpose of providing mass transportation service in a District which includes all of Los Angeles County south of the San Gabriel Mountains. It is a successor to

and replaces the former Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority which had existed as a public corporation with similar responsibilities since 1951 and had operated the principal local mass transportation services from March 3, 1958.

Section 30001 of the District Act found that the LAMTA, with its limited powers, was unable to solve the transit problems of the Southern California area and stated the purpose "to establish such transit district governed by representatives of the governmental agencies in the Southern California area so that there will be sufficient power and authority to solve the transportation problems in the Southern California area and to provide the needed mass rapid transit system."

Rapid transit is broadly defined in Section 30005 and includes all means of transporting passengers and their incidental baggage by means other than by charter bus, sightseeing bus, taxi or any other motor vehicle not on an individual fare paying basis.

While the District Board is empowered to supervise and regulate every transit facility owned and operated by the District (Section 30256), these powers must be exercised within limits set forth in other sections of the District Act. One of the limitations which is pertinent to the Watts problem is contained in Section 30637 which prohibits the District from establishing transit facilities in competition with any publicly owned or privately owned public utility without the consent of the affected utility. Conversely, it prohibits other publicly owned public utilities from competing with District operations. Privately owned public utilities are similarly restricted by the State Public Utilities Commission.

It is intended that the District operations be self-supporting insofar as practical (Section 30638). The District may levy taxes for capital improvements such as building a rapid transit system and to pay the principal and interest on any bonds issued for such purposes, provided, an appropriate proposition has been approved by the voters of the District. Section 30806 clearly states that no taxes are to be levied to pay operating expenses of the District. Such funds would have to come from the State or an appropriate local agency (County or City) which has taxing powers for this purpose.

In summary: While it is the expressed intention of the District Law that the District concern itself with the transportation problems of the District, any action to solve these problems must recognize the rights of other transportation operators within the District and must be essentially self-supporting as far as operating expenses are concerned unless financial assistance is received from the State or an appropriate local agency.

DISTRICT'S PRESENT FINANCIAL SITUATION AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

The District is the principal operator of local and interurban bus service in the Los Angeles area. These operations were purchased from their private operators, Los Angeles Transit Lines, Metropolitan Coach Lines, and Asbury Rapid Transit System, by the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority on March 3, 1958. A \$40 million Revenue Bond issue was sold to provide for the purchase. These bonds are a lien on the revenues of the system under terms and conditions set forth in a Trust Indenture. The Trust Indenture is a lengthy document but the principal conditions are fairly simple. It requires that the Authority (now the District) provide revenues sufficient at all times to meet the operating expenses of the bus system, to provide funds for payment of principal and interest on the bonds,

and to provide for the purchase of new equipment and facilities. Lacking any tax support at this time, the District is in fact a non-tax supported transit operation.

The typical business cycle of a non-tax supported transit operation is as follows: Expenses increase due to wage increases and increases in cost of supplies. Fares must be increased to offset cost increases. Some riding is lost due to increases in fares. Service is decreased to compensate for losses in riding which may result in some additional loss in riding. If there are no other factors to complicate the problem, the cycle repeats on a three to five year interval with a period of fairly stable conditions in between. A larger increase in fare extends the interval between such increases but has a greater impact on the volume of riding. Any other action which causes a shift away from bus riding, such as a strike, strike threat, opening of a highly competitive freeway route and, more recently, the Watts Riot, shortens the interval between fare increases.

The question might be asked as to why the problem is so pressing at this time, not only in Los Angeles but in every major city in the country. Simply stated, the problem is one of dealing with a business in which labor costs are the principal item of expense (over 60%) and where the benefits of labor saving devices and automation are very limited. In a period of rapidly rising wage levels and more restrictive working conditions, this produces a serious problem. Management has been able to offset the effects of much of the wage increase from the end of World War II to date by such measures as changing from 2-man to 1-man operation on all vehicles, Conversion from streetcar operation on tracks maintained by the company to bus operation on public streets and highways, purchase of larger vehicles,

and tailoring or eliminating sub-marginal services or services which became sub-marginal with changes in working conditions.

These remedies have all been exhausted and short of taking the major step of building an automated system which is also more competitive with today's traffic conditions, i.e. a grade separated rapid transit system, public policy must recognize that a non-tax supported operation can only decrease in importance and public expenditures must increase on other parts of the total transportation system, particularly on freeways, arterial streets, and parking facilities to handle the same person in private vehicles who are now riding buses.

The bus operations of the District have been a financial success to date and up to the present time all of the requirements of the Trust Indenture have been satisfied. However, our best estimate is that the revenues for 1965 will be barely adequate to cover the expenses for the year and that revenues for 1966 will be \$1 million short of meeting expenses just to maintain the present level of service. This figure would grow in succeeding years as wages continue to increase. It is obvious that the District will have to make a choice sometime in 1966 between increasing fares or seeking some form of subsidy.

In Summary: District policy must recognize the obligations under the Trust Indenture for the \$40 million Bond Issue which requires that revenues be adequate to meet expenses at all times. Operations to date have been successful from a financial standpoint. Projections for the balance of 1965, however, indicate that the District will barely break even and a \$1 million deficit is forecast for 1966 if present levels of service and fares are continued. Either a fare increase or some form of subsidy will be required to offset the deficit.

COMMENTS REGARDING SERVICE IN THE WATTS AREA

The following comments cover most of the points which have come to our attention through the news media and in conferences with representatives of the McCone Commission:

1. In terms of coverage (the number of streets having bus service) and frequency, no other area in Los Angeles with the possible exception of the near West Side is as well served as the South Central Avenue and Watts area. Map No. 1 attached shows the public transit services of all carriers operating in the curfew area. Map No. 2 shows the routing of the individual lines of the District and the Atkinson system in the Watts area. A tabulation accompanying this report shows the approximate frequency of service, in minutes, of the District's lines which operate in the Watts area or provide connections with the Atkinson system. Line 7, which connects with three Atkinson system lines, offers a particularly good rush hour service for those who travel toward or beyond the Central Business District. This line provides a frequent express or "Flyer" service north from Manchester Avenue via Broadway, Florence Avenue and the Harbor Freeway to the Central Business District. Lines of the Atkinson system generally provide a less frequent service than the District lines shown on the tabulation.
2. Service within the area is provided principally by the Southern California Rapid Transit District, South Los

Los Angeles Transportation Company and Atkinson Transportation Company. South Los Angeles and Atkinson are under common ownership and are frequently referred to by the latter name. Torrance Municipal and Gardena Municipal Bus Lines each operate a route along the western fringe of the Watts area.

3. Services are not co-ordinated. The basic pattern of routes was established many years ago when the Atkinson-South Los Angeles lines were developed to feed the ends of three streetcar lines and the main interurban station and shopping area in Watts. Services on the streetcar and interurban lines were frequent enough so that transfers were convenient. This pattern is still reasonably satisfactory today for persons traveling toward the center of Los Angeles but trips in other directions do become complex.
4. Because of the conflicting operating rights among the bus operators involved certain bus lines cannot stop in certain areas along their routes even though the bus would provide a more direct trip for the passenger. The Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority revised the service pattern in the Watts area when the rail services to Watts and Long Beach were converted to bus operation. At that time all possible changes in routing, pick-up area and fare privileges were made to increase the usefulness of

the new services. These changes, of necessity, had to recognize the pre-existing rights of other operators. This is a particular problem on RTD Route 33 which offers an express type service via Avalon Boulevard and 103rd Street but cannot serve any points not previously served by the rail line.

5. Fares are even more complex. The simplest fare system is used on the Atkinson-South Los Angeles lines where the fare is 15¢ and free transfers are permitted within the system but not to any of the other bus systems. Gardena and Torrance, to the extent they serve the area, use zoned fare systems where the fare is roughly proportioned to the distance traveled. Transfers are not offered between their lines and any other bus system. Southern California Rapid Transit District lines use two separate fare systems in the area. Most of the lines are included in the local zoned fare system (minimum fare is 25¢) and offer transfers to all other local lines but not to the interurban system. Three of the SCRTD lines are part of the interurban system and use a zoned fare system but do not offer transfers between either the local fare system or other lines on the interurban system except at a few specified points.

The investigations which followed the Watts Riots only served to focus attention on a complex problem which has existed for some years.

It should be noted that there have been a number of discussions between representatives of the Atkinson-South Los Angeles system and Metropolitan Coach Lines, Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority and Southern California Rapid Transit District representatives over the past ten years or so with the idea of selling the Atkinson-South Los Angeles lines to the larger system. At no time did these discussions result in any reasonable offer for such a sale. Atkinson in the meantime had opposed the substitution of buses for the local rail service on the interurban line to Watts on the grounds that a bus route one-half block west of the rail right-of-way on Maie Avenue would divert business from his line on Compton Avenue.

It is only fair to state that from the District's point of view any change in service in the Watts area which represented a departure from present system-wide principles of relating service levels and area coverage to volume of riding would have to be reflected throughout the system. Likewise, any changes in fares or transfer privileges should be consistently applied throughout the system. At the present time the District is not in a financial position to absorb the immediate losses growing out of a more liberal system-wide transfer arrangement and the cost of acquiring and operating marginal local bus operations.

Recent checks show a decline of 4.7 percent in riding on District lines in the curfew area in comparison to a system-wide decline of only 1.1 percent during the past year. This disproportionate loss makes it difficult for the District to maintain the present level of service.

In addition to the financial problems there have been a number of operating problems in the Watts-South Central Avenue area which are important to any study. The principal problem is one of hold-ups of operators.

There have been 174 hold-ups of District operators from January 1, 1965 through November 21, 1965. Ninety-five (95) of these, or 54.6%, occurred in the area bounded by Alameda Street, Washington Blvd., Harbor Freeway and Imperial Highway. The total for the larger curfew area was 126, or 72.4%, of the total. Losses to the District totaled \$10,704.97, of which \$5,528.87 was lost in the Watts-South Central Ave. area and \$7,478.28 in the entire curfew area. These figures do not include any loss of personal property of the operator.

These hold-ups, the general civil unrest and the removal of many stores have contributed to the reduction in bus riding in the area.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In order to solve the specific problems raised in connection with the Watts area and the general problems affecting all of the operations of the District the programs which follow are suggested after considering ideas which range all the way from maintaining the "status quo" to charging a 25¢ fare for a ride anywhere, any time, with unlimited transfer privileges. There are two sections to the program, one dealing with the Watts problem specifically and the other with the general problems which would benefit the entire Community including Watts.

A. Watts Area

For the reasons previously described including costs, restrictions and equity to riders throughout the system, it is difficult for the District to make any large contribution to solving the entire transportation problem in the Watts-South Central Avenue area. The District intends to continue to provide the best service possible and stands ready to improve the frequency of service wherever there is a reasonable probability of recovering the cost of running the additional buses.

There is one significant change in service pattern which can be made. This change would provide a through service on Central Avenue by extending District Route No. 3 from its present south terminal at 58th and Central to the terminal now used by District Route No. 29 at 85th and Central (an off-street terminal just north of Manchester-Firestone). This extended route would close a one-half mile gap on Central Avenue from 58th Street to Gage Avenue and replace the Route No. 29 service from Gage to 85th Street.

This change is now possible since buses have replaced the former streetcar and trolley coach services on these routes. The change would tie together all of the interests along Central Avenue and provide a convenient one transfer connection to many other parts of the area to the east, west and south of the terminal. This change is shown in red on Map No. 3 attached.

It would also be highly desirable to add a study of the overall transportation problem to the other studies being made in the Watts area, particularly if Federal Emergency funds can be made available for this purpose.

B. Entire System

There is a need for additional funds in the amount of \$4 to \$5 million per year to maintain and where needs exist to improve the overall level of transportation service.

Such a program would:

- (a) Permit the District to maintain at least present basic levels of fares and service in the face of inflationary pressures.
- (b) Provide free transfer between all District lines within at least the boundaries of the District (District lines also extend into Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties).
- (c) Provide funds to solve problems such as Watts, including replacing Atkinson-South Los Angeles operations, with District operations if this proves to be the answer.
- (d) Provide for modest adjustments in zone fares in Watts and other parts of the District where the zone patterns do not fit current patterns of travel

or community development.

- (e) Provide for needed additions to present route patterns or additional service on existing routes.

Such a program would be a major step forward toward providing a comprehensive transportation system within the Los Angeles Area. The Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District has been following such a program since October 1960 and has succeeded in increasing the patronage on its system in each successive year.

Substantial sums are available from Federal Transportation and Housing programs to assist in the purchase of new equipment, construction of major facilities such as shops and garages, development of new services and transportation studies of various types. In all cases (except the preliminary engineering of a rapid transit system for which funds are available on a loan basis) these Federal funds are available on a matching basis requiring local tax money for one-third of the cost before the two-thirds is provided by the Federal Government. It is expected that these programs will be continued and the amount of money appropriated increased in the future. However, the District cannot participate in any of these programs until local tax support is available.

It may not be obvious from reading this program but such a program requires a much higher level of inter-governmental cooperation than now exists and may well require changes in the various laws relating to the District. At the present time the District has the responsi-

bility for transportation and no tax resources. Other governmental agencies have the tax resources but no responsibility for the provision of public transportation.

In summary: Extension of the Central Avenue Line (eliminating the missing link between 58th Street and Gage Avenue) and maintaining present frequency of service represents the maximum contribution the District can make under present circumstances. The decline in traffic on many of the lines in the Watts area would actually justify a reduction in service if system-wide standards are followed. However, because of the public interest in helping the Watts area, the District will maintain present levels of service at this time.

The general problem of trying to modernize and improve service where there are problems of co-ordination between separate companies and where none of the operators have sufficient financial resources, while it is acute in the Watts area, is typical of a number of other areas within the Southern California Rapid Transit District. It is a problem which the District itself faces, so long as it has to balance service against declining farebox revenues and increasing costs resulting either in deficits or a reduction in service to the public.

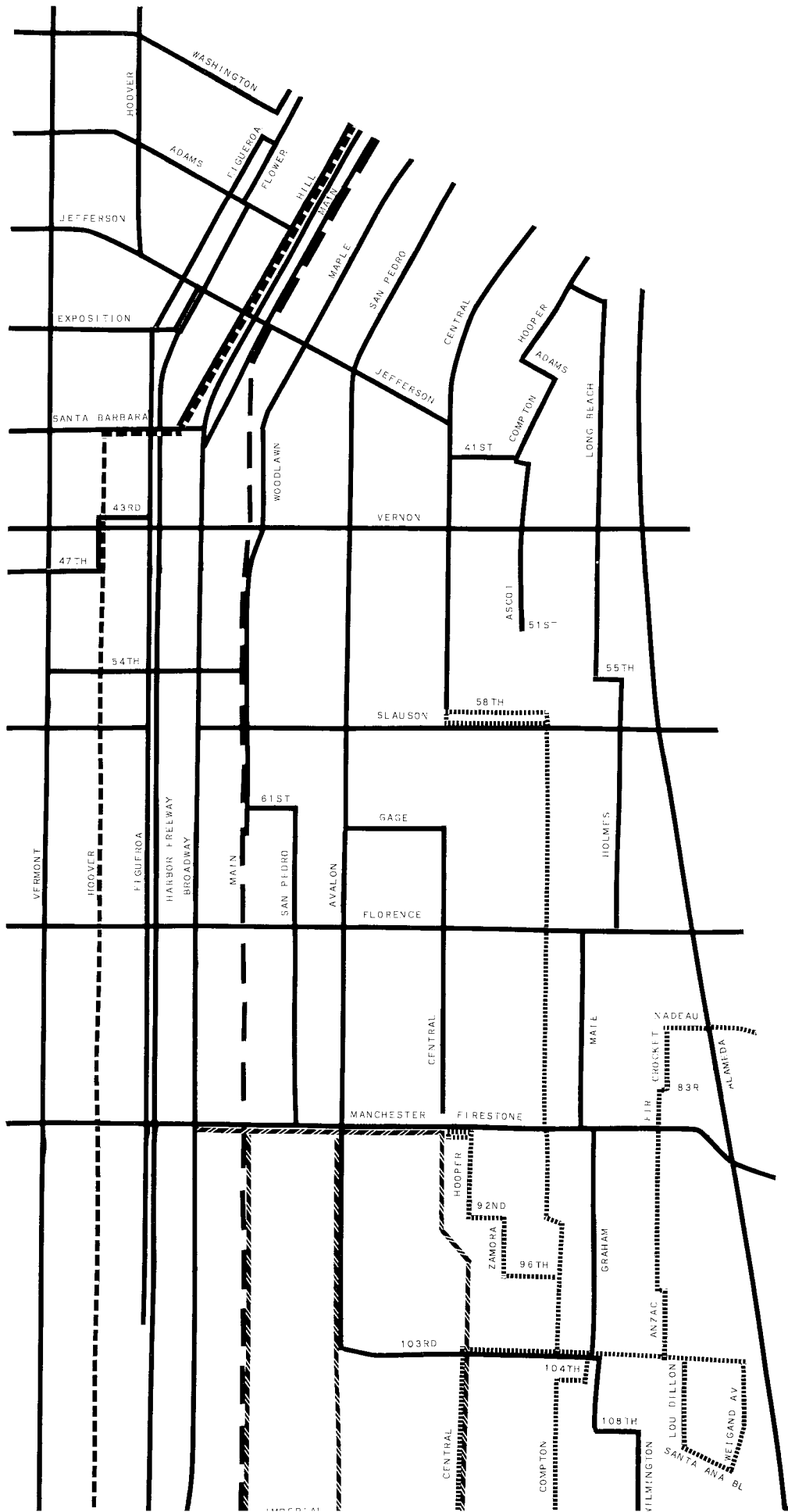
SOUTHERN CALIF. A RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT

Approximate Service Frequency
Lines Serving Southeast Los Angeles Area

	WEEKDAY			SATURDAY		SUNDAY		
	A.M.(1)	Day	P.M.(1)	Nite(2)	Day	Nite	Day	Nite
<u>Direct or Connecting Through Lines</u>								
Line 3 - Central to 58th St.	7"	15"	8"	20"	20"	20"	20"	20"
Line 6 - Vermont to 120th St.	5"	10"	5"	30"	15"	30"	30"	30"
Line 7 - Broadway at Manchester	3-1/3"	12"	3-3/4"	20"	12"	20"	30"	30"
(3) Line 7 - Athens Way at 116th St.	7"	12"	7"	20"	12"	20"	30"	30"
Line 29 - Central to Manchester	6"	12"	6"	25"	15"	25"	30"	30"
(4) Line 33 - Wilmington, 103rd, Avalon	15"	30"	15"	60"	60"	60"	60"	60"
Line 49 - South Figueroa to Century	10"	20"	10"	30"	20"	30"	30"	30"
Line 49 - San Pedro to Manchester	8"	20"	8"	30"	20"	30"	30"	30"
Line 92 - Graham to 103rd	8"	20"	8"	45"	30"	45"	40"	45"
<u>Crosstown Lines</u>								
Line 50 - Florence Ave.	8"	20"	12"	30"	20"	30"	30"	30"
Line 54 - Manchester-Firestone	15"	20"	15"	30"	30"	30"	30"	30"
Line 115 - Imperial	60"	60"	60"	--	60"	--	--	--

- (1) Rush period average frequency.
- (2) Generally more frequent service evenings.
- (3) All rush period trips operate "express" north of Manchester Ave.
- (4) North of 103rd and Graham, stops only at Slauson Ave. and Vernon Ave., to discharge northbound or pick up southbound passengers.

All Lines have full transfer privileges among all other SCRTD Local Lines except Lines 33 and 115.



● ● ● Route of Line 3 if extended via Central Avenue from 58th Street to Manchester Avenue. Line 3 originates at Third Street and Fairfax Avenue.

