

Study of Alternative Transit Corridors and Systems

Prepared for Southern California Rapid Transit District

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Technical Report, Part III

Background of Study

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Southern California Rapid Transit District

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BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The effort to develop an adequate rapid transit system in the Los Angeles area has been pursued by concerned local interests for many years. A major study aimed at this goal was undertaken in 1925 by Kelker De Leuw Co. In 1948, the Rapid Transit Action Group, sponsored by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, developed a plan for the construction of rapid transit as a part of the emerging freeway program. The absence of any governmental agency with responsibility for developing or improving public transportation caused both efforts to fail.

Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority

In 1957 the State Legislature took cognizance of the need for rapid transit by establishing the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority. LAMTA was charged with two basic responsibilities: the consolidation of surface transit operations under public agency management and the construction of a rapid transit system. The first was accomplished in 1958 through acquisition of the major privately-owned transit systems by revenue bond financing.

The transit systems acquired by LAMTA were Los Angeles Transit Lines, Metropolitan Coach Lines and its subsidiary Asbury Rapid Transit. LATL and MCL were successors respectively of Los Angeles Railway Company and Pacific Electric Railway, two major electric railway systems organized in 1911. Both systems were in the final stages of complete conversion to motor bus operation in 1958.

In the same year major studies were initiated to define the rapid transit needs of the area. LAMTA developed a major data base for transit planning and produced plans for a county-wide four corridor system and for a shortened two-corridor Backbone Route. Efforts to finance construction failed because the agency had only revenue-secured borrowing power and had recourse to no source of public funds for either operating support or capital investment.

In the fall of 1963 a State Assembly Interim Committee on Transportation and Commerce conducted searching hearings in Los Angeles with the objective of drafting legislation which would clear the way for financing construction of rapid transit to meet the ever increasing need for more adequate transportation.

Southern California Rapid Transit District

As a result of these hearings and the subsequent consideration of the issues, the State Legislature in 1964 Session created the Southern California Rapid Transit District, superseding the Metropolitan Transit Authority. The District governed by a board appointed by elected local governmental officials was given the power to develop a rapid transit program for submission to the electorate for approval of tax supported capital financing. The District assumed the Authority's properties, obligations and transit operations on November 5, 1964.

The District law specified in detail a process of planning, reports and hearings by which the issue of rapid transit financing was to be developed and placed before the electorate. Aided by funds provided by the State

Legislature and by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, the requirements for adoption of a plan were satisfied and a proposal for an 89-mile rapid transit system, to be financed by levy of a 1/2% sales tax, was placed on the ballot in November 1968. Although the proposition received more than one million votes, it failed of passage with a vote of approximately 45%. The election was one in which heated controversy over two competing property tax relief measures left the voters in a mood which resulted in the loss of every proposition on the ballot.

El Monte Busway

After the election the District conceived a program for the development of an express busway in the San Gabriel Valley, the potential for which had been demonstrated in the rapid transit system studies. The busway project, an example of major inter-agency cooperation involving the District, the State Department of Public Works, the Federal Highway Administration, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, the Cities of Los Angeles and El Monte, and the Southern Pacific Railroad, is now in final stages of construction and will bring the first modern expedited public transit facility to the Los Angeles area.

Public Financial Aid for Transit

By 1969 virtually every other major urban area in the United States was either providing some form of financial assistance for public transportation or actively considering such action. The pattern of federal support had been established and several major states were developing statewide programs.

The District asked the 1969 Legislature to provide aid to permit holding the line on fares, to maintain the full level of service and to continue instituting needed improvements. This request was based on the principle, as set forth in the report of the Governor's Task Force on Transportation, that the provision of adequate mass transit service in our heavily populated urban regions is a compelling social obligation, and that a means of providing the necessary financial support must be found.

Because of the urgency of the situation the Legislature adopted Assembly Bill 2136 (Lanterman) as a temporary measure, authorizing the District to levy a 1/2% general sales tax for six months to provide the necessary funding until a longer range program of support could be developed. In legislative hearings on the bill it was estimated that the temporary relief provided by AB 2136 would meet the needs for a maximum of two and one-half years. The tax authorized was levied for the period July 1 to December 30, 1970 and yielded approximately \$30.6 million to the District. The funds, administered by the State Business and Transportation Agency, permitted the District and the eight municipal transit systems in Los Angeles County to meet the cost of maintaining full service at no increase in fares in 1969 and 1970.

In 1971 the transit industry in this State was faced with rapidly escalating costs, as were all labor intensive industries, coupled with a relatively constant revenue source in the form of passenger fares. Once again the Legislature responded to the call for assistance for public transit and in

October 1971, Senate Bill 325 (Mills, Alquist and Deddeh) 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. 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.

Rapid Transit Planning

Upon the resolution of the issue of public fund support for transit the District, the County of Los Angeles and the City of Los Angeles again initiated action to develop an adequate rapid transit system. Both County and City designated department-head level ad hoc committees to work with the District in preparing a program. In order to provide a thoroughly integrated effort, the District created a Technical Advisory Committee which has worked with the District throughout the planning program, participating in the writing of the initial study outline, and all phases of the work from that point forward. In addition to the County and City ad hoc committees, the TAC includes the Southern California Association of Governments, the State Department of Transportation, the League of California Cities, Orange County Transit District and the Los Angeles Regional Transportation Study.

With the recommendation of both the County of Los Angeles and the City of Los Angeles, the planning study developed in conjunction with the TAC was incorporated in the Fiscal 1972-73 work program of the Southern California Association of Governments.