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WEST SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

FOCUS GROUPS

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA  
RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND METHOD

Two locations in the west San Fernando Valley area are under consideration as possible Park 'n Ride sites. The Planning Department requested a study to measure public reaction to these proposed sites.

In order to maximize input of in-depth data, as well as to provide such data in the short time frame required, a focus group format was adopted. Four focus group interview sessions were conducted by Earl Wilson & Associates, an independent research firm, in Woodland Hills. All sessions were attended by Jackline Matosian. These interviews were conducted on April 25 and April 27, 1977 at 6 and 8 p.m. Each session lasted approximately 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

## II. RESPONDENTS

The total of 42 respondents were residents of the area bounded by Winnetka on the east, Roscoe on the north and Woodland Hills on the south and west. Additionally, respondents were screened to include only those adults who make at least two round trips per week into the Los Angeles CBD or mid-Wilshire.

There were a total of 28 males and 14 females participating in the groups. Ages ranged from 20 to 66, with most respondents being between 30 and 50 years of age. Occupationally, there were all levels from the professional, managerial categories as well as the skilled craftsmen and protective services groups. The student/housewife/retired group and the sales and clerical areas were also represented.

### III. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the focus groups was to gauge public interest in the two proposed Park 'n Ride locations. In addition, peripheral information, indicative of likelihood of using the service was explored. These included:

- Incidence of travel to the CBD or mid-Wilshire
- Attitudes toward bus riding in general and Park 'n Ride in particular
- Perception of what is a bus rider

A secondary objective, getting a generalized measure of advertising awareness and recall, is the topic of a separate paper.

#### IV. TRAVEL PATTERNS

By definition respondents had to be selected from persons making at least two round trips per week to the Los Angeles CBD or mid-Wilshire areas. Actually, respondents, on the average, made at least four such trips a week.

They are not bus riders -- most have not been on a bus for years. A few had used a bus in an emergency, e.g. their car broke down, etc. and their experiences did not leave impressions encouraging them to ride again.

"I didn't know how to ride the bus - like where to put the money. The driver was really mean to me. That's the first and last time I rode a bus."

"I rode for a couple of months when my car was stolen. I didn't enjoy it. It was primarily the transfers."

"Drivers have gone to Bob Newhart's school for bus drivers -- not courteous at all. But that's probably true all over."

## V. LOCATIONS

Three specific locations were discussed in turn. After that participants were asked to define or describe an "ideal" Park 'n Ride location.

Canoga Park Drive-In (Existing location):

- Only a couple of respondents knew about the existing location.
- Upon being told of the site, there was considerable surprise...

"I drive by there often and I never noticed it!"

"Never knew there was a Park and Ride there."

- There was a consensus that it is not convenient to residents of Woodland Hills or western Canoga Park. They would have to backtrack to get to it.

"To me (lives in Woodland Hills) it's going in the wrong direction."

"You have to drive in the opposite direction that you want to go."

- There was also the feeling that since they didn't now know about it then somehow it can't be an attention getting location.

Topanga Canyon off Ventura Freeway:

- Most favorably received site. Respondents like its central accessibility and proximity to the freeway. They did wonder if it would affect the freeway ramps nearby.

"I personally think Topanga Canyon has access to more people."

"Closer to freeway."

"I think location (of Park 'n Ride) should be changed to Topanga Canyon from the Drive-In Theatre."

"Will it clog up Topanga Canyon on ramp?"

DeSoto-Burbank:

- Only those who live very near this site favored it. For the most part it was felt to be out of the way. It was suggested as a pick-up point rather than a parking facility.

"No easy access to DeSoto."

"Not as convenient as Topanga Canyon."

"Topanga Canyon serves better."

"DeSoto and Ventura would be better, Burbank is too residential."

- One person remarked that people in the area are protesting this site.

"Ideal" location:

The one consideration on which there was general agreement was that the location be near to a freeway access. Another idea with some appeal was the use of a shopping center. However, the pitfalls of this concept were quickly perceived. As one respondent summed it up, "The shopping center would never allow all those people to park in their lot all day. Besides, the customers (of the shopping center) would be really (irate) at not finding a place to park."

While only one person out of the 42 knew or had heard of any controversy concerning the proposed sites, there was a general agreement that, "we don't want it on our block--want it in an industrial area." Most frequently suggested locations included Fallbrook and Ventura and Valley Circle.

#### Location Summary

Of the three specific locations discussed (Canoga Drive-In, Topanga Boulevard near Ventura freeway and DeSoto and Burbank), the Topanga Boulevard site was most favorably perceived. Only one respondent made a negative comment about the DeSoto location:

"Already there's been a lot of noise about the DeSoto location. Objections to it by the people who live in the area."

Other than that all three locations are acceptable to respondents. They want the facility in an industrial/shopping area rather than a residential area.



VI. LIKELIHOOD OF PARK 'n RIDE USAGE

These respondents identify bus riding with the young and with the old -- not themselves personally. (Who rides the bus?)

"Students."

"Senior citizens."

"Older and younger ride -- nothing in the middle."

"People that have leisure time. If they don't have to rush they can take a bus."

Few of them even know any bus riders. (Do you know anyone who regularly takes the bus?)

"A friend from Agoura (rides bus). Feels it's cheaper in the long run -- no parking problems."

"I have a neighbor that takes the bus -- only has one car -- it's convenient for them."

Less than half have heard the term "Park 'n Ride." No one believed, at the beginning of the discussion, that they were a prospective Park 'n Ride user.

After the discussion there was more interest -- because of the additional knowledge acquired during the discussion and the prospect of more accessible parking facilities.

For people who go from place to place during the day - e.g. salesmen, bus riding is impossible to comprehend. Most people who commute to the same location see some advantages to bus riding. But they also visualize the disadvantages -- the additional time, extra walking, uncertainty (hassle) of transfers, etc., and (mentally) turn back to their cars.

The Park 'n Ride concept probably has less of the real or imagined disadvantages they cite as reasons for not riding. For this reason, most respondents are amenable to using it.

"I'd take it if I was assured that if I missed that bus, there would be another one an hour later."

"I don't mind walking a few blocks. I'd just as soon leave a car at work -- park it there and take the bus back and forth. But not when it takes two to three hours plus a couple of transfers and standing on the corner for 20 minutes -- because this idiot (bus driver) missed all the transfers. If I could get to work, I wouldn't mind 2-3 or even 6 or 7 stops if I could get reasonably close to work. I need to walk a few blocks -- I'd do it. I don't get that much charge out of driving."

"Yes. If I could walk to the bus."

"If I could get to Wilshire, I would take the bus rather than drive my car."

"Definitely. Love to not have to take the car all the time."

When all the excuses have been eliminated, there still remains a hard-core non-user group who just will not ride a bus:

"Even if I could, I don't think I would. Because when I get in that car it's like sound proof. I turn the radio on -- listen to news and a couple of sports shows. I get that all out of the way before I get home."

"I don't want to be on the Freeway on a bus and watch all those cars pass me up. I've never seen a bus pass a car. After a while, it would get to me -- I'd go back to my car."