



Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Statement of:
Linda Bohlinger
Interim, Chief Executive Officer
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Before the
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation and Related Agencies
United States House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, on behalf of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), we appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to present testimony in support of surface transportation programs and projects which are vital to the social and economic needs of Los Angeles residents and the business community. I am pleased to join our panel to request funding for Los Angeles County transportation programs and projects for the 1998 Fiscal Year.

I want to express to Congress the necessity of continued federal investment in surface transportation programs and projects for Southern California. The MTA accepts the leadership challenge to provide a comprehensive transportation network for a better quality of life where all Angelenos can travel quickly, economically, and safely in a clean environment. We urge Congress to continue to partner with us to provide the needed investment in transportation infrastructure.

We are honored to have the leadership and support of our congressional delegation from Southern California. The MTA has had an unprecedented level of cooperation with local, state and federal governments to fund the necessary investments in transportation projects like Metro Rail. I am delighted to be joined by Representatives Julian Dixon and David Dreier, including subcommittee members Esteban Torres and Ron Packard. In 1996, the MTA provided over 15,000 jobs through Metro Rail construction while providing transportation services to millions of Southern Californians. This would not be possible without the delegation's support.

My testimony will address the multifaceted transportation funding issues which still affect Los Angeles County, including, the Metro Rail Red Line, the Advanced Technology Transit Bus (ATTB) project, and funding programs for capital and operating assistance as authorized in the ISTEA.

METRO RAIL RED LINE

The Red Line is the backbone of urban rail transit in Los Angeles. The 23-mile, \$5.8 billion Metro Rail Red line project is planned in Segments for federal funding purposes. The 4.4-mile, 5 station line in downtown Los Angeles, known as Segment 1, opened for revenue service in January 1993. Segment 2 provides for two extensions of the Red Line: a 2.1-mile, 3 station extension along Wilshire Boulevard which opened in July, 1996; and an additional 4.6-mile, 5 station extension to Hollywood, which is currently under construction, slated to open in late-1998. Currently, our Metro Rail rail network is performing better than expected, with over 100,000 boardings a day.

The Metro Rail Red Line has enjoyed strong financial support from the Los Angeles

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region and the State of California. The California Transportation Commission has committed \$645 million for the project. To date, 87 percent, or \$560 million of those funds have been allocated to the Red Line project.

The investment by all levels of government, as well as the private sector, combined with the commitment shown by Los Angeles County taxpayers who twice approved a one-half cent sales tax – which generates approximately \$800 million annually – demonstrates the tremendous priority placed on an integrated, multi-modal Metro System.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), our region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), supports the Metro Rail Red Line and included the project as part of the Regional Transportation Plan, the Air Quality Management Plan and the Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

Presently underway, Segment 3 of the Red Line was authorized by Congress in ISTEA of 1991 and will extend Metro Rail to:

North Hollywood, enabling residents of the San Fernando Valley to commute quickly to Hollywood and downtown; to

East Los Angeles, providing much needed rail transit for the first time to communities that have long supported and used public transit; and to

the Mid-City area, ensuring that Metro Rail has an effective interim terminus at Pico/San Vicente that can serve the Westside until Metro Rail is extended farther west.

In December 1994, the MTA executed a Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) for Segment 3 with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), amending the May 1993 FFGA to reflect the scope and financial plan of the initial line of the East Los Angeles extension. At that time, the next phase of the 3-mile, 3 station East Los Angeles extension received environmental clearance and preliminary engineering was completed for the total 7-mile extension to Whittier and Atlantic Boulevards. The North Hollywood extension of Segment 3, a 6.3-mile, three-station extension is under construction and constitutes the majority of the FY 1998 funding request. The funds will be spent to continue this project which is scheduled for an on-time May 2000 opening.

The FFGA, for FY 1998, contractually commits the federal government to an allocation of \$179.9 million for the continued final design and construction on the three extensions of Segment 3.

In late-1996, the MTA Board of Directors was faced with a short-term cash shortage for the Segment 3 project. Some factors that led to this issue were: diminished levels of appropriated federal funds; a greater emphasis on transit operations; and local sales tax revenue growing slower than planned. In January 1997, the MTA adopted a Recovery Plan for the Metro Red Line Segment 3 extensions to East Los Angeles and the Mid-City area. The Recovery Plan, which was submitted to the FTA for approval, adopts new project budgets and schedules which reflect the balance needed to create and operate a comprehensive and integrated Metro system for Los Angeles County.

The Administration's FY 1998 funding request submitted to Congress for the Red Line Segment 3 project is \$99 million, is consistent with the \$100 million projected in the MTA's Recovery Plan. I want to make it clear to the committee, that if the MTA received the full allocation of federal funds as committed in the FFGA, we could deliver the projects in a more timely manner. The bottom line remains, without the near-term cash, we must stretch-out project schedules, thereby increasing costs.

The MTA continues to urge Congress to allocate the \$179.9 million committed in the FFGA for FY 1998. However, in light of clear signals from Congress and the Administration regarding balancing the federal budget, we respectfully urge your support of the \$100 million in Section 3 New Start funds as outlined in the MTA's Recovery Plan and supported by the FY 1998 Administration budget request.

To date, all federal funds appropriated to Segment 3 through FY 1996 have been obligated. Our FY 1997 grant application was submitted to the FTA in late-1996 and is awaiting approval. Mr. Chairman, members, the MTA continues to be concerned with language in the FY 1997 Appropriations Act making Red Line funding contingent on City of Los Angeles airport issues. In a letter dated October 4, 1996, MTA Chairman Zarian expressed our concern of being caught in the crossfire of this issue with no power to resolve it. We urge you and the committee to not tie MTA funds to City of Los Angeles airport issues.

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TRANSIT BUS

A key defense technology reinvestment project on which the future of domestic bus manufacturing may hinge is MTA's Advanced Technology Transit Bus (ATTB), also known as the "Stealth Bus." It earned this 'title' because the lightweight, composite

material used in the prototype vehicles, is the same used in the B-2 Stealth Bomber made by the Northrop Grumman Corporation.

The ATTB is a national project with representatives from numerous agencies like New York, New Jersey, Chicago, Houston, Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia and others. All participate in a Rapid Transit Review Board to ensure continuous input from the transit provider, the customer of this lighter, cleaner and more efficient bus.

The ATTB program is presently in the prototype manufacturing and field testing phases. In October, 1996, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Federico Peña and numerous elected officials presented the first prototype bus, ATTB One, to the public. Additionally, ATTB One has passed inspection by the California Highway Patrol and been approved for road testing. Northrop-Grumman is holding discussions with a number of manufacturers, notably General Motors and Volvo, who have expressed interest in manufacturing the bus.

A total of six prototype buses are scheduled for completion by the end of 1998. With the leadership of Congress and the Administration, the project has been funded by Section 26 Planning and Research funds and Section 3 Bus discretionary funds from FTA since FY 1993. The MTA's FY 1998 total funding request is \$10 million, which is consistent with the Administration's FY 1998 funding proposal. All funds appropriated to the ATTB project have been committed.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S COMMITMENT TO MASS TRANSIT AND FEDERAL CAPITAL AND OPERATING ASSISTANCE

The role the MTA plays as both regional transportation planner as well as primary service provider for Los Angeles County is unlike that of any other agency in the country. In addition to being the region's largest provider of public transportation, MTA is the coordinator for allocating transit funds to 16 of the region's Municipal Bus Operators. Collectively, MTA and these municipal bus operators provide 425 million passenger trips annually throughout the region.

MTA is one of the largest public transit operators in the United States, providing over 250,000 miles of revenue service daily. MTA has over 340 million boardings annually on 185 routes with over 18,000 bus stops, covering a 1,442 square mile service area. The MTA continues to operate some of the most crowded buses in the country, with approximately 55 boardings per bus per hour. For example, two of our buses carry more than 40,000 passengers a day.

The 16 Municipal Operators are either solely owned and operated by a municipality or owned and governed by a group of municipalities through a joint powers authority. Over fifty cities benefit from the combined 724 peak fleet buses provided by the Municipal Operators. In addition, many cities provide local circulators and paratransit services that are funded through the local sales tax based on policies developed by the MTA. The MTA leads the country in the development of alternatively fueled public transit vehicles. We are among the few operators to successfully place alternatively fueled buses

in revenue service. Our commitment puts Los Angeles on the cutting edge of technology. One-half of all the alternatively fueled public transit vehicles in the country are in service on the streets of Los Angeles.

The MTA does not intend to rest on its achievements in this area. It will continue to look to the future with its team of alternative fuels experts who operate without pre-conditioned prejudices toward any technology. This team is the envy of the public transportation industry. Energy and environmental experts from throughout the world have come to the MTA to observe its testing facilities and programs.

In addition to the bus service, the MTA operates the expanding rail service network – with over 100,000 daily boardings. On a typical weekday, the Metro Red Line carries about 32,000 passengers, approximately 9 million boardings occur each year. In operation since July 1990, the locally funded 22-mile Metro Blue Line to Long Beach has carried more than 60 million passengers. The light-rail line averages approximately 44,000 passengers each day.

The locally funded Metro Green Line from Norwalk to El Segundo opened for operation in August 1995. The Green Line, is composed of 14 stations and stretches 16.5 miles in the median of the new I-105/Glenn Anderson Freeway/Transitway with an additional 3.5-mile aerial segment that serves the El Segundo Employment Center. Green Line ridership is higher than expected and is currently averaging 17,000 riders a day.

The MTA is the largest funding partner of Metrolink, the area's first commuter train service, which opened in October 1992. Currently, Metrolink trains carry over 26,000 riders daily on over 404 miles of track, with 91 daily trains on six separate routes that parallel significant freeways. The newest route has the distinction of being the nation's first suburb-to-suburb line originating from the Inland Empire to Orange County. When fully operational, the system will be nearly 500 miles in length with more than 60 stations in six counties.

FEDERAL CAPITAL AND OPERATING ASSISTANCE

Although the Administration's budget proposal eliminates federal operating assistance for transit systems in larger metropolitan areas, like Los Angeles, the new flexibility provisions should help mitigate the impacts of the elimination of operating assistance. The new flexibility provisions can not alone address the growing need for transportation services. We urge Congress and the Administration to support legislation to use all gas

tax revenue now collected – including the 4.3 cent per gallon that now is diverted to the General Fund – for investment in transportation infrastructure.

We are requesting the Congress to continue to fund the Capital Formula Program at the highest amount possible. Additionally, we seek proposals that would lower urban transit costs by providing regulatory relief that helps us operate more efficiently. Mr. Chairman, your efforts to repeal section 13(c) of the Transit Act was one such example.

CONCLUSION

Funding the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's request in FY 1998 will continue our partnership and further Los Angeles' strong commitment to support the mandates set forth by Congress while creating thousands of jobs, both locally and nation wide. Funding for the MTA's Metro system, including Metro Rail will ensure that Los Angeles proceeds with its ambitious program to enhance mobility and make significant air quality improvements.

The MTA's funding requests are as follows:

- Metro Rail Red Line;
- Advanced Technology Transit Bus; and
- Highest amount possible for the Formula Grants Program.

Congress must continue its critical role as a partner with Los Angeles in the effort to develop one of the most efficient transportation networks in the country.

Transit funding is a wise investment, returning benefits directly to local communities. These benefits include: access to jobs, services and schools for millions each day; retail and housing development; and relief of urban and suburban traffic congestion that delay people and goods and causes air pollution. In 1996 the MTA provided over 15,000 jobs through Metro Rail construction while providing transportation services to millions of Southern Californians. Investment in transit makes social and economic sense.

Thank you.