



NEWS

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Bus Spending Biggest Slice

**MTA ADOPTS FY 2001 BUDGET THAT DELIVERS
RECORD BUS, RAIL SERVICE PLUS HIGHWAY AND OTHER
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS**

(LOS ANGELES) In the fiscal year that starts July 1, 2000, MTA will deliver a record amount of bus and rail service, fund highway and other regional transportation programs and move forward with new bus and rail projects and still manage to balance the budget while spending about the same as the current year's adopted budget. That's the upshot of the FY 2001 MTA budget adopted today by the MTA Board of Directors.

The adopted FY 2001 budget is \$2.552 billion which is less than 1 percent greater than the \$2.536 billion FY 2000 adopted budget.

"This budget marks another turning point for the MTA," said MTA CEO Julian Burke. "For the past three years we have focused on putting our house in order. Having substantially accomplished that we can now concentrate on delivering and expanding programs and services that will improve mobility for our public transit customers and everyone else in Los Angeles County who depend on MTA for regional mobility."

Buses will remain the highest budget priority in FY 2001. MTA will spend 46 percent of its budget (\$1.161 billion) on MTA bus operating and capital and municipal bus operator subsidies compared to 44 percent (\$1.119 billion) in the current fiscal year.

The MTA and its contract bus lines will offer a record amount of bus service in FY 2001, eclipsing the previous record set in the mid-1980's by MTA's predecessor agency, the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD).

The adopted MTA budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1, 2000 calls for deploying at least 2,012 buses during weekday rush hours and 7,271,125 annual bus revenue service hours between MTA and its contract carriers. More...

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This compares to 2,009 peak hour buses deployed by SCRTD in FY 1985 and 7,257,000 annual bus revenue service hours in FY 1987. The MTA record is even more impressive considering that 20 of the San Gabriel Valley bus lines operated by SCRTD in the 1980's are now operated by independent Foothill Transit and are not counted in the MTA service totals. Likewise, 10 other former SCRTD bus lines have been assumed by the 15 other municipal bus operators in Los Angeles County. Moreover, Metro Rail service didn't start until the Metro Blue Line debuted in July 1990.

More buses, newer buses, and a different way of deploying about 100 of those buses will be featured in the coming fiscal year. New Metro Rapid bus service debuts June 24, 2000 along Ventura Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley from Warner Center to the new Universal City Metro Rail Station and along the Wilshire/Whittier corridor from Santa Monica to Montebello.

These special red and white painted, low floor buses will be equipped with transmitters to extend green lights and they will make fewer stops. Test runs so far indicate Metro Rapid will save about 25 percent travel time compared to regular local Metro Bus service.

Going a step further, MTA is exploring options for running Metro Rapid buses on exclusive busways in the San Fernando Valley, Eastside and Mid-City/Westside corridors. These are among half a dozen new busway and light rail options undergoing environmental analysis which should be completed this calendar year.

Metro Bus and contracted service will be expanded by 200,000 service hours in FY 2001 to 7.27 million, a 3 percent improvement compared to FY 2000. The buses also will be newer, cleaner and more reliable. MTA plans to take delivery of 502 new compressed natural gas (CNG) buses next year compared to 418 new buses in FY 2000. By the end of the next fiscal year, more than half of MTA's fleet will be CNG buses under 6-years-old, the largest alternative bus fleet in the nation.

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The second largest portion of the budget -- \$532 million or 21 percent of the budget -- is for highway and other regional transportation programs. These improvements and services include new freeway carpool lane construction, sound walls, street and freeway gap closures, grade separations at railroad crossings, street widening, traffic light coordination and funding for the Metro Freeway Service Patrol to help stranded motorists.

These programs are critical for the region's mobility as underscored by the fact that about 97 percent of all trips made in Los Angeles County are made by private vehicles not public transit.

Next year's spending plan earmarks \$247 million for Metro Rail construction which is \$45 million less than in FY 2000 because the rail construction program is nearing completion. Metro Rail operating costs will increase \$11 million to \$132 million because Metro Rail service is being expanded. The Metrolink commuter rail service will receive \$36 million or 1.4 percent of next year's total funding.

Complementing the improved Metro Bus system, Metro Rail will give commuters a serious option for saving time and money starting June 24, 2000 when three new subway stations open at Hollywood/Highland, Universal City and North Hollywood. Rain or shine, no matter how clogged the surface streets or freeways, Valley residents can get downtown via Metro Rail in less than half an hour.

Metro Red Line vehicle service hours will increase 10 percent in Fiscal Year 2001 while Metro Blue and Green Line hours will expand by 20 percent. Moreover, the Metro Green Line will start running two car trains next year. Construction of longer station platforms for the Metro Blue Line will proceed next year in advance of running three car trains starting in Fiscal Year 2002.

The importance of this expansion of Metro Rail service stands out in sharp relief considering that, for the first time, in FY 2001 MTA's cost per passenger mile will be less on light rail than the bus: 32 cents versus 50 cents. It is projected to cost 79 cents per passenger mile on the subway but that cost will decline as ridership builds.

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Rounding out the MTA FY 2001 spending plan is debt service. MTA's debt service next year will be \$343 million compared to \$327 million this fiscal year. It is up slightly as additional bonding is required to complete Metro Rail construction activities.

Although the budget does not indicate a fare increase, Burke said that may still be necessary if MTA operating costs rise or if projected transit sales tax growth falls short.

MTA funding comes from the farebox, local, state and federal governments and other sources such as lease rentals, investment income, and advertising revenue from bus ads.

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