



NEWS

July 27, 2001

CONTACT: ED SCANNELL/MARC LITTMAN
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2703/922-2700
WWW.MTA.NET/PRESS/PRESSROOM
E-MAIL: mediarelations@mta.net

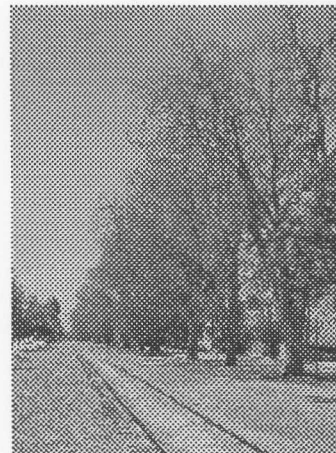
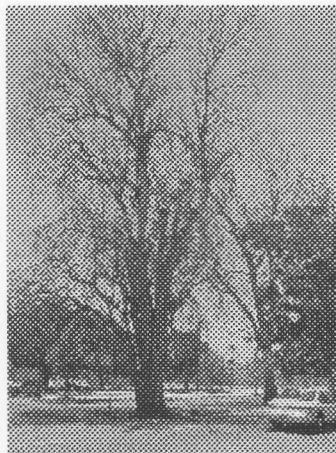
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TREES WILL BE REMOVED IN INTEREST OF PUBLIC SAFETY

STATEWIDE INSECT INFESTATION HITS HOME; MTA TO REMOVE 119 DYING EUCALYPTUS TREES ALONG BURBANK-CHANDLER RIGHT-OF-WAY

A tiny Australian insect that has caused the deaths of thousands of eucalyptus trees around the state, is forcing the MTA, in the interest of public safety, to remove 119 dead or dying eucalyptus trees on an MTA-owned rail right-of-way in the San Fernando Valley. The MTA will begin the removal on August 6.

The trees, some of which are nearly 50 years old, are located on two sections of the Burbank-Chandler right-of-way on the Chandler Boulevard median, between Tujunga Avenue and Laurel Canyon Boulevard, and between Bellingham Avenue and Corteen Place. Based on advice from two professional arborists, MTA will remove the trees to protect passing motorists and pedestrians from limbs and pieces of bark that could fall from trees weakened by the infestation.



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The trees on the Chandler Boulevard median are among a dozen varieties of eucalyptus trees threatened by the current infestation. Their nemesis is the redgum lerp psyllid.

About the size of a pin head, the redgum lerp psyllid was first seen in California in Monterey in 1991. It was discovered in Southern California in El Monte in 1998. Since then, efforts to control the pest with pesticides and predator insects, including lady bugs and an Australian wasp species, have proven relatively ineffective and cost prohibitive, leaving removal as the only effective option.

The redgum lerp psyllid uses the trees as a food source and as a nest for its eggs. It damages the leaves of the eucalyptus trees by drawing sap, which causes defoliation to the trees. It also secretes a sticky substance on the leaves, the surrounding landscape, cars and sidewalks.

Safety, however, is the issue of greatest concern. As eucalyptus trees die, they begin to dry out and limbs and heavy pieces of bark can fall, sometimes from considerable heights given the size of some of the older trees. Experts estimate that more than 80 percent of the 119 trees already are dead and the rest are dying.

It will cost MTA approximately \$56,000 to remove the 119 trees. The work by Travers Tree Service of Palos Verdes Peninsula is expected to be completed in about three weeks and will be done Monday through Friday between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Crews will begin the removal at Tujunga Avenue and proceed west. Various pieces of heavy equipment will be used and some lane closures on Chandler Boulevard will be necessary when the larger trees are removed, but the closures will occur only during non-peak hours between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Traffic control will consist of appropriate signage and flagmen.

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With a combined length of approximately 1 ½ miles, the two work areas are located within a 14-mile section of the Burbank-Chandler right-of-way, which has been under consideration by the MTA Board for development of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, or "busway." Yesterday, the Board selected BRT as the locally preferred transit alternative for this east-west corridor.

The removal of the trees is not linked to the busway project, however, MTA will develop an appropriate replanting plan for the affected areas in conjunction with landscaping plans for the entire length of the busway. Due to the serious safety concerns, it is not possible to delay removal of the infested trees until the landscaping plan for the busway is developed.

MTA is only one of several local government agencies forced to remove thousands of trees on public property at considerable cost. The Los Angeles City Department of Recreation and Parks anticipates it will cost at least \$2 million to \$3 million to remove as many as 6,000 infected trees in the city's parks that could perish by the end of summer. To date, the department has removed about 300 trees in the vicinity of Griffith Park, Valley Village Park, Lincoln Park and Rancho Park.

Teresa Prosewicz, the department's principal forester, says another 20,000 trees on the hillsides of Griffith Park and Elysian Park near Dodger Stadium likely will die but probably will not be removed due to lack of funds. She says the trees do not pose an immediate safety hazard because they are located in areas not frequented by the public.

The Los Angeles City Department of Public Works has removed 200 eucalyptus trees from streets in Woodland Hills and Toluca Lake. George Gonzalez, the department's chief forester, anticipates that the number of dead trees will climb by another 200 to 300, mostly in Woodland Hills.

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In addition to the work it will perform for MTA, Travers Tree Service recently removed approximately 40 large eucalyptus trees from the UCLA campus.

Native to Australia, eucalyptus trees were first introduced to California in the 1850s.

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