

BRT QUARTERLY

Spring 2003

Transit professionals visit LA's Metro Rapid

On March 4, Los Angeles Metro Rapid, the BRT system of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), hosted 16 guests interested in the agency's bus rapid transit applications. Participants on the tour included representatives from the Florida Department of Transportation; the Hillsborough Area Regional Transit system in Tampa, Florida; the Greater Cleveland Regional Transportation Authority; Wilbur Smith Associates; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the USF Center for Urban Transportation Research.



Participants toured the control center, where the monitoring of Metro Rapid is conducted. Three screens were displayed as part of the system, one of which showed live images along the corridors, Wilshire Boulevard and Vermont Avenue; the other two each displayed the locations of buses as recorded through the signal priority system. Also demonstrated were the software capabilities associated with the signal priority system used to manage buses while on the BRT corridors.

The group traveled aboard Metro Rail to the Wilshire/Western Station to view the

BRT project manager Rex Gephart discussed system characteristics and provided background information of the project. Specific issues addressed included current station design and planned modifications to future structures, the use of traffic signal priority, present bus characteristics and interests in bus models for future use, plans for other corridors, and ADA requirements for the "Talking Bus" system the Metro Rapid uses to display bus arrival times at stations.

Wilshire corridor, including station stops and information kiosks. Each station included a shelter, a "Talking Bus" monitor, and lean bars. The buses had high ridership, with only standing room available for the majority of tour participants.

Following the tour was a presentation by Timothy Papandreou, Transportation Planning Manager for the Westside Area, in which he discussed the history and future of the system, enhancements, and planning issues related to the system's implementation. He emphasized the need to consider many unanticipated facets related to system implementation, such as the roadway structure and the negative impacts it may have on a bus fleet. He also reviewed opportunities the system has for transit-oriented development, pointing out specific locations that may provide the opportunity for development or economic benefits.

Dennis Albrecht, Project Manager of the Euclid Corridor Transportation Project in Cleveland, remarked,

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White House budget proposal considers Bus Rapid Transit

In February, the Bush Administration proposed to Congress in its FY 2004 budget \$7.226 billion for public transportation (excluding funding for TEA 21 reauthorization), the same amount allotted for the FY 2003 budget. Under the proposal, however, long-term structural changes would occur, eliminating the discretionary bus and bus facilities program (\$607 million) and reallocating funding towards other programs, including a 25% increase for the New Starts program (\$300 million) but with a decrease in the federal match for these transit projects from 80% to 50%.

The Federal Transit Administration's New Starts Program is the primary financial resource for supporting locally-planned, implemented, and operated transit "guideway" capital investments. Currently, the program has assisted in creating many bus rapid transit systems that use fixed guideway systems. Under the FTA's proposal, New Starts would provide funding for new fixed guideway systems, extensions to existing fixed guideway systems, and new non-fixed guideway corridors, ultimately increasing the number of bus rapid transit projects eligible for funding.

Jim Jarzab, BRT Program Manager for the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), stated, "The Administration's proposal to allow

Federal New Start funding participation in BRT projects that don't require exclusive rights-of-way is a tremendous boost for ITS implementation. Probably 90% of planned BRT projects can't secure and/or don't need separate guideways to function effectively, given recent advances in transit signal priority and real-time passenger information systems. It opens a program previously viewed as the exclusive reserve of rail properties, and allows small- and medium-sized metro areas to develop highly reliable premium transit service. For VTA, changing the New Start criteria has the potential to accelerate the tailoring of transit service to meet customer expectations while efficiently using capital and operating resources." VTA's planned BRT corridor is 27 miles and will not operate on an exclusive right-of-way. To decrease travel time among mixed traffic, queue jumpers, bus bulbs at specific stations, and traffic signal priority will be used.

After the budget proposal was announced, APTA issued a press release expressing "disappointment that the proposed budget does not address growing investment needs," since the funding remains static from FY 2003. APTA also stated that the federal match for public transportation New Starts projects should remain at the current funding level and not decrease from the current 80% to 50%.

With this decrease, local decision making for new public transportation projects may not be equally balanced with highway projects which will continue to receive a federal match of 80%.

According to FTA Administrator Jennifer Dorn, the FY 2004 budget proposal:

- promotes common sense transit solutions;
- encourages A+ performance;
- keeps transit commitments; and
- champions independence and opportunity.

"With today's technology—particularly bus rapid transit—the presence of a fixed guideway is not always required to create a cost-effective major new or expanded corridor system," said Dorn regarding the New Starts program. "There will be ample opportunity for discussion with all of our stakeholders to ensure that we make room for these cost-effective non-fixed guideway solutions, without compromising the intent of the program."

For updated information on BRT and to subscribe to the BRT Quarterly newsletter, visit the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute (NBRTI) website at www.nbrti.org



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Our Mission

The mission of the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute is to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and innovation for increasing the speed, efficiency, and reliability of high-capacity bus service through the implementation of BRT systems in the United States.

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FTA administrator Dorn visits Oregon BRT corridor

Federal Transit Administrator Jennifer Dorn visited Lane Transit District (LTD) in Eugene, Oregon, in late February while traveling through her home state. During her visit she took a tour of the first BRT corridor planned for the area. Phase I of LTD's BRT system is a four-mile corridor that connects the downtowns of Eugene and Springfield, providing a link to LTD's two major transit hubs. Buses will travel in exclusive lanes located along the median and will be given priority at signalized intersections.

The system will have 10 stations, the majority being center platform. The vehicle that will be used, Phileas, accommodates stations with single-sided road access by providing doors on both sides. Ticket machines and amenities such as shelters, benches, infor-

mation displays, and bike storage will be available at each station. Construction for Phase I is estimated to cost \$15 million and is scheduled to begin in 2003. Service is planned to begin in late 2004 or early 2005.

Dorn addressed community leaders concerning the Bush Administration's FY 2004 budget, discussing the proposed changes to the transit capital investments program.

According to Stefano Viggiano, Planning Development Manager for LTD, "Administrator Dorn expressed her strong support for BRT efforts such as LTD's, which will provide significant improvements in transit service and travel time." Dorn also expressed her appreciation for local leaders who support improved tran-



Pictured (l to r): Hillary Wylie, LTD Board Chair; Pat Hocken, LTD Board; Rick Krochalis, FTA Region X; Mayor Sid Leiken of Springfield, Oregon; Jennifer L. Dorn, FTA Administrator; Jeff Hamm, Salem Area Transit General Manager; Ken Hamm, Lane Transit District General Manager; Martin Loring, Manager, Public Transit Division, Oregon Department of Transportation.

sit through the LTD's Bus Rapid Transit project, stating that "Patience and foresight are the key ingredients for creating the major changes for improved transit."

TECH CORNER—ITS America's Transit Signal Priority Workshop

The Transit Signal Priority Research Needs Assessment Workshop conducted by ITS America was held on February 26 in Washington, D.C. Transit Signal Priority (TSP) is a cost-effective technology used to improve transit vehicle reliability and travel times. It is increasingly included as a key element of regional ITS developments and is an important aspect of Bus Rapid Transit systems.

Thirty participants attended the workshop, including university researchers, transportation consultants, transit agency staff, city/county transportation engineers, vendors, and FTA staff. The key focus was on BRT applications,

technology transfer, and improving TSP algorithms.

Signal priority is used to assist in schedule adherence, reduced travel times, and better quality of service by changing the normal traffic signal process to better accommodate transit vehicles. It can be implemented in a number of ways, including early green, green extension, and passive priority. The type of signal priority system used should be dependent upon each system's characteristics.

- Early green—Upon transit vehicle detection, other phases of the light are shortened so that the signal returns to green at a quicker rate.

- Green extension—Extends the duration of a green signal for approaching transit vehicles.
- Passive priority—Signal continuously operates and does not require a detection system; this is most efficient for intersections with low traffic and high transit frequencies.

Many of the research needs identified during the workshop will be available online, at <http://www.itsa.org/tsp.html>

Future workshops are planned in April (Tucson), June (Chicago), and July (Hartford, CT). Additional information may be found on the ITS America's Transit Signal Priority website at <http://www.itsa.org/tsp.html>.

TRB annual meeting features BRT sessions

Session 230, "Latest Developments in Bus Rapid Transit"

Bert Arrillaga of FTA discussed the potential for scheduling conferences and workshops specifically related to BRT. **Joseph Calabrese**, Chief Executive Officer/General Manager of GCRTA, discussed Cleveland's BRT Euclid Avenue Corridor Demonstration Project, which is expected to have final design complete in July and constructing beginning in January 2004. He also discussed APTA's BRT Task Force, established in the summer of 2001, which meets periodically to facilitate the flow of information on the BRT industry. **Dennis Hinebaugh** of CUTR introduced the National Bus Rapid Transit Institute and reviewed current activities of the Institute, including the evaluation of the Miami-Dade Busway and Orlando's LYNX Lymmo BRT projects, the provision of BRT "Peer-2-Peer" technical assistance, organizing workshops, and maintaining a BRT website. **Sam Zimmerman and Herb Levinson** of DMJM provided an update of TCRP A-23 Project, Bus Rapid Transit Implementation Guidelines, which resulted in a BRT planning and implementation guidelines manual, case studies of 26 international BRT projects, an on-line video library, a BRT bibliography, and a brochure.

Session 301, "Current BRT Activities and Models"

Timothy Papandreou, Transportation Planning Manager for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, discussed MTA's Wilshire Bus Rapid Transit, including articulated vehicles, enhanced stations, and signal priority and the agency's ability to provide increased

Wednesday, April 23, 2003—

Transit Signal Priority Workshop, Hilton El Conquistador Hotel and Resort, Tucson, Arizona. For more information, contact Hallie Smith, rhsmith@mindspring.com, (404) 467-9297. (Future dates tentatively scheduled for June in Chicago and July in Hartford, CT.)

Sunday, May 4 - Thursday, May 8, 2003—

American Public Transportation (APTA) Bus and Paratransit Conference, Hyatt Regency and Hilton, Milwaukee. For more information, contact Jerry Trotter, (202) 496-4887.

service to meet underlying travel demands. **Dr. Tunde Balvanyos** of the University of California's Partners for Advanced Transit and Highways (PATH), presented "SmartBRT: A New Simulation Tool to Assess Bus Rapid Transit Systems," including the development of computer software that may be used to analyze the possible implementation of a BRT system through simulation. **Michael Baltes** of the National BRT Institute at CUTR presented "Statistical Estimation of the Importance Customers Place on Specific Service Characteristics of Bus Rapid Transit," including the results of on-board surveys conducted in Miami and Orlando that indicate that customers focus on reliability, comfort, speed, safety and frequency. **Herb Levinson and Sam Zimmerman** of DMJM presented case studies related to the operations and features of BRT systems, including the importance of vehicle and station design, service patterns, ridership, and policy issues.

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"It was exciting to see the incredible benefits that merely 6 of the 13 key BRT attributes provided to LA's transit system. "This is great news for Cleveland's Euclid Corridor BRT project," said Albrecht, "since we are implementing several additional key attributes not yet used in LA."

Larry Blackstad, Community Works Division Manager of Hennepin County, echoed Albrecht's remarks, commenting that the tour "provided a number of new ideas to be considered in the planning of our BRT system. LA demonstrated a cost-effective integration of vehicles and ITS technology to ensure frequency of service."

To view tour photographs and videos, visit NBRTI's Media link at www.nbrti.org.

