

DAILY CLIPPINGS

OCTA News
Keep Up With What's Moving

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2010



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1. Bus Riders Worry About Service Cuts

By Alejandra Molina
Orange County Register

With new cuts in bus service three weeks away, Yvonne Tobin, 49, and other avid bus riders are wondering how they will be getting to their destinations.

"I'm completely dependent on public transportation," said Tobin, a Santa Ana resident, as she was waiting for her bus to arrive at Santa Ana Boulevard and Santiago Street. "Right now we're going to the library. We need to get on the computer for job search."

"What am I going to do now?" Tobin said was her initial reaction to the cuts. "I'm going to have to get a bicycle."

Tobin has been using Route 62, which provides service to the Santa Ana Civic center and the county courthouse, for about five years now. It is slated for elimination next month.

Bus service cuts go into effect March 14, with deeper cuts in store if state transportation funding does not become available.

In November, the Orange County Transportation Authority approved a plan to cut 150,000 hours of service annually from the bus schedule – a smaller cut than the 300,000 hours that had been expected. The plan eliminates about 8 percent of the county's bus service.

At Monday's Orange County Transportation Authority meeting, Chief Executive Officer Will Kempton said officials have and will continue to work with the state to look for revenue sources to prevent further cuts.

The March service cuts include route eliminations, frequency reductions, and route restructuring. Seven routes will be eliminated on weekdays, six on Saturday, and eight on Sunday.

"It's going to be harder for job search because I'll be dependent on the bus to get jobs," Tobin said. "As it was, I was having to trek about a half a mile to get to some of my jobs because the bus system is limited."

Since the bus service cuts were approved in November, OCTA officials have met with representatives from cities, schools, and the Transit Advocates of Orange County – an all-volunteer group that works to improve bus, rail, biking and walking in the county.

What came out of those meetings were changes to some of the routes set to be restructured and options for those who use the Access service for riders with disabilities.

Some of the changes include:

- Route 29 will end at Beach and La Habra boulevards instead of the Buena Park Metrolink Station as originally proposed.
- Route 57 will not be changed to end at State College Boulevard and Orangethorpe Avenue, but will continue to operate on its current route to the Brea Mall, directly serving Cal State University Fullerton students.
- Route 59 will be modified to continue service to the Anaheim Canyon Industrial Area instead of ending at the Orange Transportation Center as originally approved.
- Routes 71 and 82 were added to the frequency-reduction plan to offset the modifications to other routes.

Regarding Access service, it is estimated that two riders on weekdays, 33 riders on Saturdays, and 69 riders on Sundays will be affected in some areas due to route eliminations, according to OCTA. Officials recommend its Same-Day Taxi Service – a taxi service available for those with Access eligibility – as an option.

"It's going to take a lot longer to get places," Tobin said. "...One of my neighbors said something about, 'We're going to be a country of bicycles.' With unemployment the way it is right now. It's really bad."

2. New Bill Could Generate 6,000 Local Transportation Jobs

Assemblyman Solorio's measure passes in state Legislatures

By Kristen Schott
OC Metro

The California Legislature this week passed a bill that could generate more than 6,000 transportation jobs in Orange County. The measure will now go to Governor Schwarzenegger for approval.

Sponsored by Assemblyman Jose Solorio, who worked on the measure on behalf of the Orange County Transportation Authority, AB 11 X8 would allow the California Transportation Commission to sign \$410 million in deals for local projects that could seek state reimbursement in the future.

A number of OCTA's shovel-ready infrastructure improvements have been halted because of the state's inability to sell bonds, according to a statement from Solorio. Though the agency does have the required amounts to begin construction, it can't move forward until the state also can pay its share.

But the new legislation would allow OCTA and other agencies across the state to move ahead with projects and be eligible for reimbursement once the bonds are

sold.

"OCTA stands ready to nearly triple the state's investment in infrastructure," says Jerry Amante, the organization's chairman of the board. "We are thrilled to partner with the state to keep projects moving and jumpstart the economy."

Among the local improvements that could serve to benefit from the bill: track expansion and grade crossing improvements for the Metrolink, totaling about \$183 million. That alone could add 2,754 workers in the county. Other developments include the Fullerton Transportation Center parking structure – a \$42 million project that's projected to generate 522 jobs – and the Sand Canyon Avenue grade separation, which totals about \$55 million and could create 828 new positions.

The developments stem from Prop. 116, which allotted about \$2 billion in bond funding for transportation infrastructure projects across the state. The city of Irvine last year also reallocated \$121.3 million of its unused funds to O.C. commuter rail projects, further supporting infrastructure developments in the region.

"This legislation is one creative idea among many that is going to get California back on its feet," says Solorio. "It all comes down to having confidence in the future and being proactive to create jobs."

3. Solorio-Backed Bill Will Create 6,000 New Orange County Transportation Jobs

New Santa Ana.com

The California Legislature passed Solorio-sponsored legislation (AB 11 X8) that allows the California Transportation Commission to sign \$410 million in agreements with local transportation agencies allowing them to seek state reimbursement later for projects they jumpstart today. The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) asked Assemblyman Solorio to work on the bill in the Assembly while senators Bob Huff and Lou Correa advocated for AB 11 X8 in the Senate. The bill passed with broad, bipartisan support.

"This legislation means California's shaky relationship with Wall Street is not going to delay funding for Orange County transportation projects ready and waiting to get started," Assemblyman Solorio says.

The State's current inability to sell bonds has delayed construction of several OCTA "shovel-ready" transportation projects. While OCTA has local funding to advance these projects, current law prevents them from proceeding without the State committing to pay its share. Now, if OCTA wishes to front the funding, the California Transportation Commission will have legal authority to issue a "letter of no prejudice," which will allow OCTA to be eligible for reimbursement later, once the bonds are sold.

“OCTA stands ready to nearly triple the state’s investment in infrastructure and deliver \$410 million in projects that will create more than 6,000 jobs as a result of the Legislature’s action today,” says Jerry Amante, OCTA’s chairman of the board of directors. “We are thrilled to partner with the state to keep projects moving and jumpstart the economy, and we appreciate the Legislature and Governor’s efforts to fast-track this bill.”

Bob Balgenorth, president of the California Building and Construction Trades Council agrees. “Our workers are willing, able and ready. It has been a tough few years for building trades workers, and the pain continues today. But now we have Assemblymember Solorio and other members in the Legislature acting boldly to stop the bleeding. This bill sets in place a course of action that will get us back to work.” California voters approved Proposition 116 in 1990, which authorized \$1.99 billion in bond funding for public transit infrastructure. In Orange County, projects totaling \$410 million have cleared their environmental phase and are pending allocation of that funding. These projects are ready to begin construction this year.

“This legislation is one creative idea among many that is going to get California back on its feet,” Solorio says. “It all comes down to having confidence in the future and being proactive to create jobs. Obviously, OCTA believes in California.”

In February 2009, the City of Irvine partnered with OCTA to reallocate its \$121.3 million in unused Proposition 116 funding to intercity/commuter rail projects in Orange County. The chart below highlights the eligible projects and the number of jobs that they will create

State Assemblyman Jose Solorio is the Chair of the Assembly Insurance Committee and serves on the Assembly Education, Transportation, and Appropriations committees. He represents the Sixty-Ninth Assembly District, which includes the cities of Anaheim, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana. For more information about Assemblyman Solorio, visit www.assembly.ca.gov/solorio.

4. Doc, Are The Traffic Signals Really Synchronized?

By David Rizzo
Orange County Register

Q. How are the lights synchronized on Lincoln Avenue in Anaheim? If you head west on Lincoln and get caught at Rio Vista Street, you will most likely have to stop at 99 percent of the lights on the way to the Santa Ana (I-5) Freeway. Can't this be fixed?
– Don Maxey, Anaheim

A. So seriously did Anaheim's engineering department take this inquiry, that they went out and verified their timing operations?

"Based on our field checks for Lincoln, between Kingsley and Clementine streets, we have confirmed that the signals still performed as coordination was implemented in October 2007," says John Thai, Anaheim's principal traffic engineer.

"As designed, Lincoln synchronization favors westbound traffic during the morning rush-hours and eastbound during the evening," Thai continues. "Our before-and-after study showed that westbound travel time was reduced by 152 seconds, while eastbound travel time was reduced by 17 seconds during the morning peak period. "In the afternoon, eastbound travel time was reduced by 186 seconds, while westbound travel time was reduced by 69 seconds."

Motorists can take advantage of most directional timing schemes by starting on an "early green" at a major intersection, as engineers usually start the "green band" timing at key intersections, which Rio Vista is not. Instead, State College Boulevard represents a good place to begin when heading west on Lincoln. I've been known to pull over and wait for such an opportunity rather than run behind the curve and catch all of the reds.

Q. Imperial Highway now goes over the train tracks, which is great. However, more people now turn right from Imperial onto La Palma Avenue to access Fairmont Boulevard. This creates a huge backup on northbound Imperial. There is enough room to have two lanes turning right at La Palma, so why haven't they allowed for that?

—Janie Anderson, Anaheim Hills

A. In response to this question, Caltrans sent out a team to check on the situation. "Following an investigation by our Caltrans Traffic Operations-South Division, field observations did not record more people turning right on La Palma to get to Orangethorpe (Avenue) via Fairmont," says Caltrans' Alex Valdez.

Restated in technical terms, Valdez said, "Field observations did not detect any problems regarding vehicular storage on the right turn lane on northbound Imperial to La Palma."

5. Transition Road From West 10 Freeway To North 57 Freeway Out Indefinitely

By Daniel Tedford
Whittier Daily News

SAN DIMAS - Caltrans officials said Monday that two highly traveled transition roads connecting to the north 57 Freeway will remain closed indefinitely because of last week's landslide.

The transitions from the westbound 10 Freeway to the northbound 57 and from the northbound 71 Freeway to the northbound 57 are affected by the closure.

"We worked all weekend to stabilize the slope and assess the damage," Caltrans spokeswoman Maria Raptis said. "What we are going to have to start is to get a design for stabilization."

A portion of a hillside near the freeway collapsed onto the transition road during the morning commute Thursday. No one was hurt.

Giant mounds of dirt still cover the road next to what is now an unstable hillside, officials said.

Crews have begun to clean up the site, hauling away 11,000 cubic yards of loose dirt and rock, Raptis said. Crews also laid down 80,000 square feet of plastic to cover the slope to prevent additional damage from rain, Raptis said.

Officials hope a concrete rail could be placed near the hillside to help open up a lane of traffic once the area is deemed safe, Raptis said.

But no projected date was given for when the road will reopen.

Crews will need to make the slope less steep and figure out a drainage system, said Cal Poly Pomona geology professor Jonathan Nourse.

"The first thing to do is to lower the angle of the slope," Nourse said.

Nourse said recent rain probably helped to bring about the hill's collapse. Water likely rested within the hillside. When it didn't drain it eventually formed a crack, and that crack likely brought about the slide, he said.

Now, Caltrans will not only have to clean up what has happened, but also make plans to prevent future landslides, Nourse said.

In terms of dealing with the water-soaked hills, Caltrans has few options, Nourse said.

"Right now it is probably pretty wet," Nourse said. "Over the summer, it is going to dry out."

The state also could put up retaining walls, which are effective but more costly, Nourse said.

6. Two Bike Transit Centers To Open Wednesday In L.A. County

By Ching-Ching Ni

Los Angeles Times

The cities of Claremont and Covina are scheduled to celebrate the grand opening Wednesday of two new bike stations that organizers say mark a significant step toward building alternative transit in greater Los Angeles.

The bike transit centers are located along the San Bernardino Metrolink train line and will provide indoor bike parking, restrooms, accessory sales, bike repairs and rental services, organizers say.

“Bikestation bike transit centers make biking to and from public transportation safe and convenient, addressing the common concerns people have about riding bikes ... and enabling more people to use alternative transit more often,” Andrea White-Kjoss, president and chief executive officer of Mobis/Bikestation, said in a statement. The company helped develop the new bike system.

Ribbon-cutting ceremonies are scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. Wednesday at the Claremont Depot, 200 W. 1st St., and 11 a.m. at the Covina Metrolink station, 600 N. Citrus Ave. Festivities include food, music and group bike-riding.

7. Man Killed In I-5 Crash Identified

By Andrew Galvin
Orange County Register

The driver of a Cadillac was killed Monday when he lost control of the vehicle and slammed into a freeway sound wall, police said.

The accident on the eastbound Culver Drive on-ramp to the southbound I-5 freeway was reported to the California Highway Patrol at 10:35 a.m.

An initial investigation indicated that the Cadillac SRX was traveling at a high rate of speed southbound in the carpool lane when the driver lost control, veered across all lanes and struck the sound wall along the on-ramp, said officer Denise Quesada of the CHP.

When the Cadillac hit the wall, it apparently became airborne and landed on its roof, Quesada said. The driver was ejected and was declared dead at the scene, she said.

The dead man was identified as John Avinger, 21, of Dana Point, the coroner's office said.

A passenger, Brandon Baker, 20, of Diamond Bar, was taken to Western Medical Center in Santa Ana with moderate facial trauma and lacerations, CHP officer Devon Boatman said.

One of the Cadillac's wheels came off the vehicle and rolled back onto the freeway, striking a Toyota Tundra, Boatman said. The Tundra was able to drive from the scene, Boatman said.

The cause of the accident remains under investigation, Boatman said. The on-ramp was reopened shortly before 1:00 p.m.

8. Van Buren Bridge Project Under Way

By Sandra Stokley
Riverside Press-Enterprise

RIVERSIDE - As thousands of cars and trucks whiz overhead on the Van Buren Boulevard bridges, workers in the Santa Ana River bed are drilling deep into the earth to set the pilings for replacement bridges.

Construction on the \$25 million project began in September and is scheduled to be completed in May 2012, said Riverside County transportation director Juan Perez. Federal and state funds for seismic safety retrofitting will pay more than 75 percent of the cost with the remainder coming from gas tax money and the Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fee regional funds.

A California Department of Transportation assessment concluded that the bridges -- portions of which date to 1939 -- needed to be replaced because of the potential for collapse during a major earthquake.

Traffic heavy, too

The bridges also have been deemed inadequate to accommodate the amount of traffic carried by Van Buren Boulevard.

Perez estimated that 35,000 vehicles travel on the boulevard every day. "It's one of the busiest thoroughfares in western Riverside County," he said. It is also a major connector road between the unincorporated Jurupa area and the city of Riverside.

Engineer Gabriel Muñoz, who is overseeing construction, said the project is being built in two phases so that traffic is disrupted as little as possible.

The existing north- and southbound bridges are separated by 50 feet and the southbound portion of the new span is being built in that space.

When the new southbound bridge is completed, northbound traffic will be shifted onto the new lanes so that the northbound portion of the new span can be built, Muñoz said.

The construction contract was awarded in early May, but work did not start until September because of the least Bell's vireo, a federally protected songbird. "It was their nesting season," Muñoz said. When it is completed, the project will provide standard shoulders, adequate bridge width for a future third lane in each direction and sidewalks on the bridges.

Improvements to street signals, lighting and landscaping will be made to the portion of Van Buren Boulevard approaching the bridges.

This is the second major bridge replacement project undertaken by Riverside County in a year's time. In January 2009, construction started on a \$35 million project to replacing the aging River Road Bridge.

9. Light-Rail Meetings Scheduled Today; Three More Planned For This Week

Whittier Daily News

The first of four meetings to discuss a proposed light-rail line East Los Angeles to either Whittier or South El Monte will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. today at the Pio Pico Women's Center, 9214 Mines Ave., Pico Rivera.

Information will be provided about the project and the public will be allowed to provide input on the alternatives and the evaluation process used to identify and mitigate environmental impacts.

Meetings also are scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at the South El Monte Senior Center, 1556 Central Ave., South El Monte; 6 to 8 p.m.; Thursday at the Senior Center at City Park, 115 S. Taylor Ave., Montebello; and 10 a.m. to noon Saturday at the Salvation Army, 12000 E. Washington Blvd., Whittier.

If members of the public are unable to attend any of the scoping meetings, they may submit comments by mail, fax or e-mail. The comments must be received by April 14.

Information about the project is available at www.metro.net/projects/eastside_phase2.

For information, contact Kimberly Yu, Metro planning project manager, Metro Planning, One Gateway Plaza, Mail Stop 99-22-2, Los Angeles, CA 90012, call her at 213-922-7910 or e-mail yuki@metro.net

10. Orange Grove: Obama's Surge In Government Jobs

By Gary Jason

Orange County Register (opinion)

President Barack Obama has been crowing that his colossal stimulus spending binge has saved us from depression and led to a miraculous economic boom, with millions of jobs "saved or created." The nation is spending its way to a Keynesian paradise!

Of course, with unemployment nationally at nearly 10 percent, most of the rest of the country is not quite as pleased with this "economic miracle." But some figures about the prosperous state of public employees explains this amazing disconnect between Obama and the rest of the country. It turns out that while the public sector is still hemorrhaging jobs (7 million jobs lost since the recession started), government workers are flourishing like never before.

The Obama boom is essentially a government employee boom.

Consider the federal government, now completely controlled by the Obama administration. This year, we will have officially the largest federal workforce in the country's history. It will reach 2.15 million – and that doesn't count nearly 650,000 postal workers, who, technically, work for a separate "corporation."

The biggest flock of new federal employees is civilian. From 1981-2008, the last year of the Bush presidency, the number of civilian workers bounced between 1.1 and 1.2 million. But Obama's first year saw a surge to nearly 1.3 million civilian workers. And this year we have added yet another 153,000 new employees, reaching an historical total of 1.43 million. Obama promises that the total will drop next year – but who but the non compos mentus now believe what he promises?

Obama's administration is not only exploding the number of civilian employees, it is jacking up federal worker compensation to obscene levels. From the onset of this recession, in December 2007, to June of last year, the federal payroll metastasized by 10 percent. Moreover, Obama is promising them a 1.4 percent raise across the board. He is giving this largess while wages in the private sector continue to stagnate.

In fact, the average federal salary is \$71,000, more than 75 percent higher than the average salary in the private sector. Federal workers also get vastly more lavish bonuses, overtime compensation and benefits packages than most private-sector workers.

More amazing still, during this recession, the percentage of federal workers earning \$100,000 or more a year has exploded from 14 percent to 19 percent. Nearly one in five federal workers now earn six-figure salaries, and please note that figure doesn't include bonuses and overtime!

Let's look at just two departments. Between December 2007 (the onset of the recession) and June 2009, the number of civilian employees at the Defense Department earning \$150,000 or more a year went up by 500 percent, from less than 2,000 to more than 10,000. In the Transportation Department, the number of employees pulling in \$170,000 a year or more went from one to nearly 1,700.

What is the driving force behind this federal employee bonanza? Public employee unions. Recent statistics regarding public employee unions help shed light on the growth of the number and compensation of federal workers. As of January, private-sector union membership had dropped to 7.2 percent of workers, from its all-time high of 36 percent, in 1953. But Union membership is growing among government workers, hitting a high of 37.4 percent.

In fact, 2009 marked a milestone: For the first time in this nation's history, a majority of all unionized workers – 51.4 percent – are government employees. And there's the rub. We now have a vicious cycle: Unions shovel money at candidates, elect them, and then those officials sit across the bargaining table from unions to "negotiate" compensation packages. It is a travesty of labor relations. The solution is simple, but difficult to achieve. We need a constitutional amendment that would ban outright federal employee unions as agents for bargaining contracts. With the growing economic crisis, that goal may just be achievable.

11. Will Bridge Tolls Kill The Casual Car Pool?

By Lance Williams
California Watch

The practice of "casual carpooling" across the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge sprang up during a BART strike, perhaps in the 1970s. No government bureaucrat was involved.

Motorists, dreading a bridge clogged beyond gridlock by thousands of BART commuters forced to drive to work, began trolling AC Transit bus stops in Berkeley and Oakland, looking for riders bound for San Francisco.

With passengers, they could drive to work on the bridge's HOV lane. By and large, riders were happy to take a free ride with a stranger: AC was struggling to accommodate the surge of demand caused by the strike, and there were no guarantees you could even get onto one of the miserably crowded buses. After the strike was settled, the casual carpool continued, because it was so convenient.

For drivers, picking up a couple of riders transformed a commute that might be a grim 90 minutes of stop-and-go driving into a 30 minute trip, door to door. For riders, the casual car pool offered complete flexibility: a free ride to work in a nice car that left exactly when you wanted.

In the beginning, the transit agencies hassled the casual car pools, occasionally ticketing motorists for blocking bus zones or moving the pickup sites without warning.

But that stopped years ago. Today there are more than 40 pickup points around the East Bay, and thousands of commuters rely on the system.

Business deals, friendships and romances have begun in the carpools. During my years as a newspaper reporter in San Francisco, I was tipped to five page-one stories by people I met in the carpool.

Then came the huge Bay Bridge reconstruction project, and the massive cost overruns, and the recession. To transportation planners, the environmental advantages of getting all those people out of their cars fell away in the face of financial concerns.

Last month, as it was jacking up the trans-Bay bridge toll for single motorists to \$6 (it was \$1 before the construction got underway) the cash-strapped Bay Area Toll Bridge Authority also voted to impose a \$2.50 toll on the more than 10,000 car pool vehicles that head into San Francisco during each morning's commute.

There's real concern that the tolls will kill the casual car pool as it now exists. It almost certainly will reduce the incentive for motorists to stop for riders.

In the meantime, carpoolers who assume the institution will survive are locked in debate: Who's supposed to pay the toll? There's no obvious answer, and \$2.50 is an oddball amount, as Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates pointed out in his vain attempt to talk the toll authority out of imposing it.

Much of the debate has been conducted on a message board for casual carpoolers. They're divided on whether riders should pay the driver \$1, or 83 1/3 cents – anybody got change of a penny? – or nothing.

The Chronicle, in its report on the issue, consulted the great-great-grandson of Emily Post, arbiter of etiquette for generations of Americans. He suggested "candid and honest" discussion.