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Jan. 25, 2010



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It would not be surprising if voters who read the latest report of California's High Speed Rail Authority feel more than a little bit bait-and-switched.

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1. Freeway Lanes Will Be Closed For Construction

By Alejandra Molina

Orange County Register (1/24/10)

Nighttime construction work will continue next week on the northbound and southbound I-5 freeway in Buena Park from the 91 freeway to Artesia Boulevard, closing all lanes.

Lane closures are from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. on Sunday through Saturday, Jan. 30. The northbound and southbound I-5 will be fully closed overnight between 11:30 p.m. and 4 a.m.

Dates and times may change depending on weather conditions.

Motorists traveling northbound can get around the closure by taking the westbound 91 to the northbound I-605 to the northbound I-5. Southbound traffic can exit Artesia Boulevard toward Knott Avenue and travel south to the eastbound 91 to the southbound I-5.

The \$325-million I-5 Gateway project is adding two lanes in each direction, reconstructing bridges and on- and off-ramps in a two-mile stretch between the 91 and the county line. The project is scheduled for completion by fall 2010. When completed, the I-5 Gateway project will help ease congestion on the stretch of freeway traveled by an average of 172,000 vehicles a day. Traffic is expected to grow to more than 300,000 average daily vehicles by 2020.

2. Devices Used To Slow Down Drivers

By David Rizzo

Orange County Register (1/25/10)

Q. Why did Anaheim install chicanes in the center divider along Lincoln Avenue, between Knott Avenue and Euclid Street? As you drive down Lincoln the center divider forces you toward the curb for no apparent reason. There are a lot of tire marks on the center-divider curb because of this.

– Bob Griffith, Anaheim

A. Anyone can drive fast in a straight line, but automotive race-track designers have often employed chicanes to challenge race-car drivers to bend their cars around slight curves that force them to slow down at least a little. Municipal traffic engineers often use the same tactic.

"By definition, a chicane is an S-shaped curve in the vehicle driving path," says Taher Jalai, the principal traffic engineer for Anaheim. "It can also be called a deviation, reversing curve or twist. Chicanes are traffic-calming measures used to slow cars, usually on residential streets."

Something to keep in mind for those of us trying to keep up with the Joneses – Parnelli Jones, that is – as we drive to and fro on the streets of Anaheim.

Q. I am curious as to what Caltrans plans to do about the connector from the eastbound Garden Grove (22) Freeway to the northbound Orange (57) Freeway. They spent millions of dollars on the reconfiguration, but only made it worse. Whoever it was that approved that configuration needs to be terminated!

– Rick Geller, Orange

A. Are you suggesting that our governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, reprise his role as the Terminator machine? I didn't think so.

According to Joel Zlotnik, an Orange County Transportation Authority spokesman, traffic engineers faced a daunting challenge because of the presence of three on-ramps, two off-ramps and two interchanges within a very short span, along with the geographical constraints of having the Santa Ana River on one side and the MainPlace shopping center on the other.

Straightforward solutions to ease the congestion would have involved the taking of a good deal of private property, and/or closing down some of the previously-existing off-ramps. Yet, opposition surfaced to both of these options.

Do not despair, though, as OCTA and Caltrans have not given up on easing traffic congestion at this bottleneck better known as the "Orange Crush."

"It's being included as part of the Central County Corridor Major Investment study," Zlotnik says.

Fact of the week: Commuters traversing the 241 Toll Road might notice the 105-foot structure adjacent to the Windy Ridge Toll Plaza.

Not by accident does it appear to be an old rusted oil derrick or water tower, as the architect wanted it to blend into the environment.

It is, of course, one of four new communication towers of similar design. They not only improve cell phone reception along the toll roads, but also within the Nature Conservancy Area and in Irvine Regional Park.

3. L.A. County Transit Agency Projects Historic Budget Shortfall

A broad array of options is on the table for bridging the gap, which is blamed on cuts in state funding and a drop in ridership. Major expansion projects are unlikely to be severely affected.

By Ari B. Bloomekatz
Los Angeles Times (1/22/10)

.A. County transit officials are forecasting the largest operating deficit in their history, prompting them to consider cuts to bus and rail service as well as fare increases.

The shortfall, caused by cuts in state funding as well as an 8% decline in ridership over the last year, could be more bad news for L.A. riders, who have long complained about crowded buses and limited services.

"The issue is coming to a head, that they're a quarter-billion dollars short on operating. . . . Your usual options are to cut service or raise fares," said Bart Reed, executive director of the nonprofit Transit Coalition, which monitors service at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and other agencies. "It's a really hideous situation. Riders are going to feel the pain."

The MTA says it is unlikely there will be major cuts to its ambitious rail expansion projects because most of that money comes from grants and dedicated funding sources, including the half-cent-on-the-dollar sales tax that voters approved in 2008.

Transit officials are committed to extending the Expo Line to Santa Monica and building an extension of the Gold Line east from Pasadena. They also want to build the Westside subway and a new Crenshaw Boulevard light-rail line as well as a new line through downtown.

The MTA faces a projected shortfall in operating funds of at least \$251.3 million at the end of the 2011 fiscal year.

"If we act in a prudent fashion earlier in the process, we can soften the impact on passengers and employees," said MTA Chief Executive Art Leahy. "We're not talking about catastrophic changes; we're not talking about shutting down the bus company."

A fare increase -- from \$1.25 per ride to \$1.50 -- is already planned to begin in July, but officials said that they factored that into the shortfall projections and that another increase could be necessary. How much that could be remains unclear.

There are no firm proposals yet for service cuts, but they might involve reducing hours on lines with low ridership, officials said.

Terry Matsumoto, the MTA's chief financial services officer and treasurer, said ridership was down 6.3% from July to December over the same period the previous year. Officials said ridership was down a total of 8% in the last year and was continuing to decline. Fare revenues decreased to \$155 million from about \$170 million over the same period, a problem that Matsumoto attributed to the continuing poor economy and high levels of unemployment.

Sales tax revenues are also significantly lower, and many reserve funding sources were depleted to maintain operations and service in recent years, he said.

But Matsumoto and other MTA officials said the main problem facing the budget was that politicians in Sacramento, trying to cope with the state's overall budget shortfalls, withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in transportation funds slated for operating expenses.

When the MTA board adopted the agency's 2009 budget, it included a projected \$227 million from State Transit Assistance funds, but only \$77 million of that money came in, Matsumoto said. He said MTA officials were predicting the shortfall through fiscal 2011 under the assumption that those moneys would not be provided.

The MTA's total budget for 2010 was approved at \$3.9 billion, and \$1.2 billion of that is dedicated to bus and rail operations, including salaries, wages and related benefits. Matsumoto said that it was too early to tell if there would be recommendations to slash jobs or reduce hours but that those could be options.

The cuts could affect municipal bus lines in places like Torrance and Santa Monica

because the MTA provides subsidies to those agencies, among dozens of others around the county.

MTA board members and other officials said it was unlikely that any major capital projects would be severely affected by the budget cuts. The recently started \$1-billion widening of the 405 Freeway, for example, is mostly covered by grants. The Exposition Line from downtown to Santa Monica is in a similar situation, and many projects such as the Crenshaw Line are funded through Measure R, the 2008 sales tax increase, Matsumoto said.

That means the brunt of the cuts could fall on commuters who rely on bus and train service as their primary form of transportation. Matsumoto said the agency will probably begin looking at how it can restructure existing service to save money without slashing riders' access.

MTA board member and L.A. City Councilman Richard Katz said he and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa want service cuts and fare increases to be "an absolute last option."

Manuel Criollo, an organizer with the Bus Riders Union advocacy group, said he wasn't surprised that the MTA's budget woes could be balanced on the backs of riders.

"When tough times come, the only people who feel the pain, or the people who they put the pain on, are bus riders and transit riders," Criollo said.

FOR THE RECORD:

MTA budget: An article in Saturday's Section A about the Metropolitan Transportation Authority forecasting a historic operating deficit referred to MTA board member Richard Katz as a Los Angeles city councilman. He has never served on the City Council. —

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MTA budget: An article in Saturday's Section A about the Metropolitan Transportation Authority forecasting a historic operating deficit incorrectly referred to MTA board member Richard Katz as a Los Angeles city councilman.

4. Marketing Campaign Hasn't Delivered Hoped-For Jumps In RABA Ridership

By Scott Mobley
Redding.com (1/24/10)

The Redding Area Bus Authority is not getting the hoped-for ridership boost out of a \$250,000 marketing campaign launched last February and set to expire this June.

RABA had bet a wavy new logo, cobalt blue buses, youth passes, free ride days for seniors, upgraded brochures and a snazzy new Web site would entice 200 more people to ride the bus each day in 2009 than in 2008. That's an 8 percent ridership bump.

RABA ridership was up in 2009 compared to the year before - by a modest 1 percent.

Yet RABA officials are happy with any increase. Many comparable transit agencies have seen ridership declines of 5 to 15 percent over the past year, said Chuck Aukland, the assistant city engineer for Redding who also oversees Shasta County's public bus system.

"People (are) not working," Aukland said. "So they are staying home." An independent review of bus ridership trends partially confirms Aukland's assessment.

Transit systems in most of California's major metropolitan areas reported fewer bus riders last year through September than the year before. Orange County Transportation Authority saw a 16 percent ridership drop, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority was down more than 6 percent, San Diego Transit Corporation was down 3.5 percent and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority reported 2.5 percent fewer riders, according to the American Public Transportation Association.

Ridership in the nation's 30 largest metropolitan areas overall was down 5 percent last year.

Yet some of the smaller transit agencies RABA compares itself to saw more riders in 2009 than 2008. Bus ridership was up 8 percent in Davis and 4 percent in Chico. Santa Maria and Visalia also reported more bus riders last year, and Merced County Transit boasted an all-time ridership high.

The RABA marketing campaign, proposed by Bellevue, Wash.-based Ilium Associates Inc., is a centerpiece of a five-year plan to shore up long-sagging fare box revenues for the Shasta County transit agency.

The bus system has seen precipitous ridership declines since 2002, when it carried an average of 72,162 passengers a month on its fixed routes.

Ridership through the last half of 2009 averaged 55,219 passengers each month. That's down 30 percent from the 2002 peak, but up 1.7 percent from 2006 and 2007, when average monthly ridership apparently bottomed out.

RABA last hiked fares in 2005 to help make up for revenue shortfalls. Transit managers have since looked for other ways to bring in more money at the fare box.

The RABA board in early 2008 cut times between buses from one hour to 30 minutes in the morning and afternoon on Route 7, which serves northeast Redding and loops out to Shasta College.

The bus authority has also offered a number of ride discounts and free rides as part of the ongoing marketing campaign. These promotions debuted in August with a fare-free spin aboard a new 40-foot, sky blue, low-floor bus purchased with federal economic stimulus funds. RABA plans to add two more new blue buses paid for with part of its \$1.36 million stimulus allotment.

In October, McDonald's sponsored free ride days for seniors and youths ages 6 to 17. Sierra Oaks Senior Living and Wendy's also have sponsored free ride days on RABA.

The transit system now seeks corporate sponsors for a Valentine's Day rider discount aimed at lower-income families. A firm may buy 100 tickets for \$100, or a 50 percent discount, and donate them to a favored social service agency which would hand them out to disadvantaged riders.

The RABA board today will consider using the transit system to offer tours of Stillwater Business Park to leaders of the Economic Development Corp. of Shasta County, along with city and county officials. The tours could help RABA establish an Airport Road route to serve prospective Stillwater-based employers and other firms in the area, according to a report.

Each two-hour tour would cost \$160. The RABA budget contains enough money for multiple tours as long as they're not charter service, according to the report.

Reporter Scott Mobley can be reached at 225-8220 or at smobley@redding.com.

RABA riders

Here are the annual average monthly RABA ridership numbers for the past 12 fiscal years. The fiscal year starts July 1 and ends June 30:

1998-1999: 68,657.

1999-2000: 70,783.

2000-2001: 71,581.

2001-2002: 72,162.

2002-2003: 63,453.

2003-2004: 59,497.

2004-2005: 58,361.

2005-2006: 56,910.

2006-2007: 54,377.

2007-2008: 54,608.

2008-2009: 55,342.

2009-2010: 55,219 (through Dec. 31).

5. Traffic Safety: San Clemente (no link attached)

By Fred Swegles

Orange County Register (1/23/10)

Calle Frontera, a residential street that doubles as a thoroughfare, will get a no-parking zone northbound from Avenida Vista Hermosa to 40 feet past Camino del Faro. The City Council decided this week that it's needed to provide better traffic clearance and safer arrival and departure at an OCTA bus stop. Information: 949-361-8200.

6. Cycling Safety: Newport Beach (no link attached)

By Jeff Overley

Orange County Register (1/25/10)

The Cycling Safety Task Force meets at 4:30 p.m. today at 3300 Newport Blvd. to discuss various issues, including the addition to city streets of "sharrows," which are markings used to indicate shared lanes in areas frequented by cyclists that are too narrow for bike lanes. Bike racks and trouble spots for road sharing around town will also be discussed

7. Downed Power Lines Cleared Off Freeway

By Vik Jolly

Orange County Register (1/24/10)

Southern California Edison has removed downed power lines from the 91 freeway, where eastbound lanes between Brookhurst Street and Euclid Avenue were closed for more than two hours this morning, the California Highway Patrol said.

A vehicle struck a utility pole at about 8 a.m. near the eastbound 91 at Euclid Avenue, Anaheim police said. No other details of the accident are immediately available.

The CHP diverted traffic from the eastbound 91 to the southbound I-5 and the both the Euclid and Brookhurst onramps to the eastbound 91 were shut down, the CHP said.

No power outages were reported, with the exception of a traffic signal being out at Euclid and Orangethorpe Avenue in Fullerton, police there said. Edison crews removed the downed lines and all lanes were reopened at 10:26 a.m., the CHP said.

8. Rigonomics: Some Background On Assembly Race

By Jim Righeimer
Daily Pilot (1/23/10)

I met with Costa Mesa Mayor Allan Mansoor this week over a cup of coffee, and we talked a lot about issues affecting the city and his primary race for the 68th Assembly District against Assemblyman Van Tran. Full disclosure: I consider Allan a friend, and I would support him in anything he does.

With that out of the way, let me give you a little background about the 68th Assembly District. It encompasses all of Costa Mesa and Fountain Valley, 83% of Stanton, 70% of Westminster, 65% of Garden Grove and 10% of Anaheim and Newport Beach. Costa Mesa encompasses the largest part of the district.

The district is 42% Republican, 33% Democrat and 21% decline to state; which means it is considered a safe Republican seat. Therefore, the real race will be in the GOP primary. Of course, after this week in Massachusetts, party affiliation is becoming less important.

So far, Mansoor seems to be the favorite for the Republican primary. He has only one declared opponent that, as of now, has done little if anything to win the June primary, which is five months away.

Orange County Board of Education Trustee Long Pham, who has declared his candidacy for the 68th Assembly District seat, showed nothing in his last campaign report, while Mansoor reported about \$135,000 on hand. Year-end fundraising reports will be released during the first week of February, and it might be different then; but with the economy the way it is, raising money is nearly impossible.

Politically, Mansoor has been on the Costa Mesa City Council for seven years, three of those as mayor.

Pham was elected to the board of education in 2008. Part of his district is in Fountain Valley and Garden Grove.

He will have a lot to do to catch up with Mansoor in fundraising, so unless something changes pretty soon, Mansoor has effectively cleared the field for the Republican primary.

I was a bit surprised when I asked Mansoor how he was going to handle campaigning and working full time as an Orange County sheriff's deputy. He said that he was no longer a deputy; his resignation took effect Dec 31. After spilling my coffee, I asked him why he would do such a thing.

He went through all the commitments and obligations with me that he has as mayor, as well as his position on the Orange County Transportation Authority. He came to the conclusion that he could not keep all his commitments and still run a good campaign. He later e-mailed me this statement.

“I am very grateful to the county and the Sheriff’s Department for all the opportunities that they have given to me during the last 16 years. The department has been very good to me, and I am appreciative of that. It is just time for me to take on new challenges.”

He also said he would spend the remainder of his term focusing on his duties as mayor and on the Assembly race.

However things turn out in June, I want to wish him luck on this new chapter in his life.

On another note, last month I asked Daily Pilot readers to drop me a line about any new businesses or projects that are starting up in the area. One call I received was to let me know about the opening of the Meat House at Newport Boulevard and 17th Street, behind Denny’s in the same center as Growers Direct.

The Meat House describes themselves as “Your Neighborhood Butcher.” The 3,500-square-foot store is an epicurean delight. Their selection goes from ground round to Kobe beef and everything in between. The store also carries an assortment of fine wine, cheeses and fresh breads. Walk over to Growers Direct for the vegetables, and you have a great meal for the barbecue. The store just opened, and owners Robert Hogopian and Brian Smith are already giving back to the community. They are sponsoring a hole at the Costa Mesa United’s fifth annual Mesa Verde Golf Classic, which, because of the rain this week, has been rescheduled to March 29.

Finally, I want to give a shout out and thanks to another local business owner who is always giving back to the community. Tim DeCinces, founder and manager of Beach Pit BBQ on Tustin Avenue at 17th Street, gave all the store’s proceeds from meal sales Thursday to Peace Relief, a local organization leaving this week on a humanitarian mission to Haiti. DeCinces was inspired by his 9-year-old daughter, Delaney, who raised \$97 from a bake sale for relief efforts in Haiti. DeCinces expected to raise \$18,000 at his three locations. We’re blessed to have these businesses in the community that are always giving back.

9. Is Another High-Speed Rail Vote Needed?

It would not be surprising if voters who read the latest report of California's High Speed Rail Authority feel bait-and-switched.

By Thomas Elias

Long Beach Press Telegram (1/23/10)

It would not be surprising if voters who read the latest report of California's High Speed Rail Authority feel more than a little bit bait-and-switched.

Let's look at the ways [this report](#) differs from the way Proposition 1A was hyped in November 2008, when \$9.95 billion worth of state bonds for high speed rail passed by a narrow 52-48 percent margin.

Even then, the bonds were expected to cover less than one-fourth of the cost of this system, which aims by 2035 to carry more than 120,000 riders per day at speeds topping 200 mph. The rest of the money is to come from federal funds, private investors and possible revenue bonds that would be paid off with money from fares. Less than 18 months after voters approved the high speed rail system, it's tentatively planned to run from San Diego to Los Angeles to San Francisco via Pacheco Pass and San Jose, with an eventual spur line to Sacramento and stops in places as disparate as Anaheim, the Inland Empire east of Los Angeles, the Antelope Valley and Bakersfield.

Higher fares, fewer riders

Most of that was envisioned in the proposition voters approved. But the latest fare forecast was not. As presented in 2008, fares were to run about \$55 one-way between Los Angeles and San Francisco, designed to be competitive with airfares that now often hover just under \$60, even though cheaper ones can occasionally be found.

But the new plan calls for a one-way charge of \$105, about 83 percent of the \$125 the rail authority predicts airfares will run in 2035. That near-doubling of prospective fares would reduce expected ridership by almost one-third. In short, as much fun as high speed trains are to ride, they would probably never be affordable for vast numbers of Californians.

Meanwhile, no change is anticipated in the \$647 million annual cost of repaying interest and principal on the bonds. That money that will be paid not just by riders and residents of areas the project might serve, but also by non-riders and residents of the vast portions of California who would have to travel as much as several hundred miles just to glimpse a high-speed train zip past. From the moment the first of the bonds are issued, repaying them will become a higher priority for the next 30 years than any state program except public schools.

And then there are the environmental questions. Cities like Menlo Park and Atherton are already fighting a plan for an above-ground line dividing their cities along the route between San Jose and San Francisco, where 31,000 riders daily are expected to enjoy commute times of 31 minutes or less. At the time of the vote, the route was known; not the notion of a 15-foot divider splitting many cities on the San Francisco

Peninsula. The need to widen existing rail rights of way, spawning likely eminent domain takeovers of an as-yet-unknown number of homes, was also not advertised. Anyone who's ridden the high speed trains of France, Spain, Belgium, England and Japan knows how comfortable and convenient and enjoyable they can be. But given the revised fare structure and accompanying ridership estimates, it's fair to wonder whether they should be partially funded in California by tax money from millions of people who may never ride them.

Another question is whether all this is worth it in order to get the flashy transport system that would result and the approximately 600,000 high-paid new jobs the new report says bullet trains would create. Those issues will hang over this plan from now until the system actually opens.

Give voters a second chance

All of which means it might be wise for the Legislature, which put last year's Proposition 1A on the ballot, to submit the plan revisions to another statewide vote. That's never before been done with any bond issue. Once passed, every bond approved by California voters has eventually been sold, one reason the state (not counting local governments) now has a total bond debt of \$89 billion and makes yearly debt payments of about \$10 billion.

There's no question in anyone's mind that having high speed rail would be good for California, taking traffic off freeways, offering a spectacular new tourist attraction and speeding travel for millions of riders yearly.

The question is whether Californians feel the system now planned is the one they voted to pay for and whether they still believe it's worthwhile after two years of budget problems like no American state has ever endured.

The only way to answer that fairly is to stage another vote. But legislators usually frown on re-dos, so don't hold your breath waiting for one.