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### Fixing Los Angeles Transportation

Ever since the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Los Angeles has been well known for its traffic and congestion.<sup>1</sup> The 405 and 10 freeways, two of LA's main major freeways, each have roughly 300,000 drivers on them day, resulting in huge slowing, which affects both residents and commuters, and it must be resolved now.<sup>2</sup> According to an article by US News, Los Angeles is the worst city in the nation for traffic with a stellar 63 hours of delays per driver per year.<sup>3</sup> As population grows, there will be more urban sprawl and more people hoping to work in the ever growing Los Angeles area, and the problem will get worse and worse.

To solve this problem of congestion, the next question is, how can people get around the city without a car? And the answer is: public transportation. Public transportation in the County of Los Angeles is run by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA), commonly known and branded as Metro. In their 30-Year Integrated Transportation Plan, last published in 1992, Metro vowed to improve the city's methods of transit, to improve the Highway, the Buses, and Rail, and use Transit Demand Management strategies in order to create "a transportation system that works."<sup>4</sup> Nineteen years later, Los Angeles still does not have a transportation system that works. While there have been many major developments in the

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Reiff's W5 Lectures, Fall 2010

<sup>2</sup> "2009 Traffic Volumes on the California State Highway System," California Department of Transportation, accessed February 2, 2011, <http://traffic-counts.dot.ca.gov/2009all/2009TrafficVolumes.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Danielle Kurtzleben, "The 10 Best Cities for Public Transportation," *US News*, accessed February 20, 2011, <http://www.usnews.com/news/slideshows/the-10-best-cities-for-public-transportation/5>.

<sup>4</sup> Los Angeles County Transportation Commission. "30-Year Integrated Transportation Plan." Adopted April 1992.

past two decades, such as the creation of five commuter rail lines and a vanpooling program in 2007,<sup>5</sup> Metro still has more work to do.

Therefore, to solve the issue of congestion, Metro must improve the quality, accessibility, and usability of its bus/rail services, which will attract and allow many more drivers to convert into riders. Through marketing efforts and careful planning, Metro will be able to serve both constituencies who have no other means of transportation, as well as discretionary riders who chose to ride transit over other available transportation.

Increasing the connectivity of Metro fleet of buses and rail is crucial in getting more people to use public transportation as their primary mode of transportation. According to a Los Angeles survey, “72 percent of RTD riders and 54 percent of nonriders...called for more service—in the form of greater frequencies, new routes, or extended operating hours.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, lack of accessibility and connectivity in Los Angeles rail is apparent when it is compared with Switzerland’s system, which boasted 350 million train journeys in 2008.<sup>7</sup> There is one unified timetable and ticketing system for the country of Switzerland, yet in Southern California there are three different providers of rail service. Paul Dyson, president of the Rail Passengers Association of California and Nevada, Dyson echoes the thoughts of many when he complains that, “as a taxpayer, I am paying for trains that don't connect and for bureaucrats that don't cooperate well with each other.”<sup>8</sup> In Los Angeles, many Metro rail stops have less than ten connecting bus services,<sup>9</sup> and there are additional and confusing fees when changing from

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<sup>5</sup> “Los Angeles Metro Launches New Metro Vanpool Program to Save Commuters Money, Improve Regional Mobility,” Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, last modified June 24, 2010, <http://www.metro.net/around/vanpool/new-metro-vanpool-program/>.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Richmond, *Transportation of Delight: The Mythical Conception of Rail Transit in Los Angeles* (The University of Akron Press, 2005), 53.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Dyson, “So many rail agencies, so little service,” Los Angeles Times, October 1, 2009, accessed February 10, 2011, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/opinionla/la-oe-dyson2-2009oct02,0,3540275.story>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> “Go Metro Connections,” Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, accessed March 3, 2011,

different rails and to buses. While there are stops that do have many connections, these are stops that are in already central locations such as Union Station or Chinatown. Metro should increase bus-rail connectivity in areas in which rail is less utilized, such as throughout the Green Line. Also, new methods of analysis should be used to determine areas of real transit need, and appropriate investment made to serve those areas. In “Gap Analysis of Public Transport Needs,” Graham Currie discusses ways to assess need and how well public transportation serves those needs.<sup>10</sup> Any change in bus routes and frequency by Metro should consider first those who have no other means of transportation, because they need help the most.

Once Metro has made necessary improvements to infrastructure to make riding transit a viable option for LA County residents, they must then get new riders informed about how to ride and improve the experience of in order to get those riders hooked. In fact, Metro itself realizes that marketing its services is crucial to gaining more discretionary riders. According to Metro's new creative director, Michael Lejeune, "[the] goal is to employ design to attract discretionary riders--those who have a choice--by giving Metro a distinct style... At the same time, we're giving those who are transit-dependent--those who don't have a choice--a system they can be proud of."<sup>11</sup> Metro's branding has been an issue for years, but in the past decade Metro has made great strides by rebranding its fleet of vehicles and creating a marketing department which has run successful campaigns to encourage ridership for Metro.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Metro Los Angeles won a “Best of Award” from Rebrand in 2008 for their new improvements.<sup>13</sup> And even more important

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[http://www.metro.net/news\\_info/publications/images/rail\\_connections.pdf](http://www.metro.net/news_info/publications/images/rail_connections.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Graham Currie, “Gap Analysis of Public Transport Needs,” *Transit Planning and Analysis* (2004): 137.

<sup>11</sup> Alissa Walker, “L.A. Goes Public,” *Fast Company*, February 1, 2007, accessed 03/03/11, <http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/112/features-lagoespublic.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Ethan Arpi, “Transit Agencies Need to Invest in Marketing: A Lesson from Los Angeles,” *The City Fix*, December 8, 2009, accessed 03/03/11, <http://thecityfix.com/transit-agencies-need-to-invest-in-marketing-a-lesson-from-los-angeles/>.

<sup>13</sup> Rebrand.com, “Metro Los Angeles,” accessed 03/03/11, <http://www.rebrand.com/2008-best-metro-los-angeles>.

than this award was the fact that discretionary ridership increased from 22% to 29%.<sup>14</sup> The more work Metro puts into advertising, the more riders they will have, and therefore the more money being made to pay for more advertising and improvements. Keep up the good work, Metro!

Apart from work that Metro is doing to advertise, other groups such as cities, neighborhoods, and employers should also encourage people to use transit. Information about local and regional bus routes should also be pushed to people through community newsletters and work bulletins. And then, when people know they can take buses near them to useful places, such as, work, entertainment, and restaurants, they need to have a pleasant first experience riding—from their first arrival at their local bus stop to their departure back home. Now, for both new and current riders alike, the bus stop is the most crucial node of transportation, and this is why Metro needs to upgrade their stops to the quality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Bus Bench Blog is a website which reports on and reviews the quality of Metro bus and rail stops, with many complaints.<sup>15</sup> Metro should take serious note about this site and others like it where transit riders are making complaints.

Actually, starting early in the 2000's, Metro did develop a new bus stop design, which is the design that Metro implemented for their Rapid bus program.<sup>16</sup> This stop design has “distinctive color-coded bus stops,” as well as “transit information, lighting, canopies and ‘Next Bus’ displays.”<sup>17</sup> According to a study by Adina Ringler, “safety and security” as well as “connection and reliability” were the two most important improvements to transit users.<sup>18</sup> Two of the other most important station attributes were “‘I feel safe here at night’ and ‘My bus/train is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “The Bus Bench,” The Bus Bench, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.thebusbench.com>.

<sup>16</sup> Richmond, *Transportation of Delight*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> “Metro Rapid,” Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, accessed March 3, 2011, <http://www.metro.net/projects/rapid/>.

<sup>18</sup> Adina Ringler, “Passenger Perceptions of Intermodal Connectivity,” (Masters Project., UCLA, 2007).

usually on time’.”<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it makes a lot of sense for Metro to invest into making these kinds of stops available everywhere, and not just for their new Rapid line. Having convenient access to bus information available *at the stop itself* will make the transition for new users seamlessly easy—which is just what Metro needs. And Metro should make a big deal about the rollout of these new stops, with a ribbon cutting ceremony attended by the mayor and accompanying news coverage. People pay attention to sound bites on the news, and if all of the local stations are reporting about how much Metro has improved itself recently, people will believe and want to ride.

Once Metro makes these improvements to the bus stops, they should next work on improving customer service relations between riders and bus drivers. The bus drivers are the face of Metro, and so they are an extremely important part of the bus riding experience. I personally have run into more than a few uncooperative, uninformed bus drivers, which made routine trips turn into miserable trips. While information about Metro’s hiring or employee training practices were not readily available, Metro can certainly do more to hire and train higher quality drivers. All of the work in marketing and improving the Metro brand is not effective if new riders are constantly turned off to the system by rude and obstructive bus drivers. An extreme incident of bus driver ignorance is discussed in a report from LAist.<sup>20</sup> A cyclist in the number 2 lane was honked at and grazed by a passing Metro bus, and when the cyclist tried to report the driver to the police, the cyclist himself was arrested. It turned out that the bus driver was in the wrong the entire time, and was ignorant of what to do when passing by a cyclist in the road. A new rider who was on the bus operated by that driver would likely never want to ride Metro again. On the other hand, new riders who are satisfied with their trips may be more likely to tell their friends

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Box, Stephen, “Hollywood Bus Driver Attacks Cyclist, LAPD Handcuff Cyclist (and Wife!),” *LAist*, September 24, 2007, accessed 03/03/11 [http://laist.com/2007/09/24/hollywood\\_bus\\_d.php](http://laist.com/2007/09/24/hollywood_bus_d.php)

and family about their positive experiences, generating word of mouth advertising for Metro. Metro needs to convince people that rather than drive around themselves in traffic, putting themselves into stressful situations, that instead they should allow themselves to be driven around by “public chauffeurs” – Metro drivers. If Metro successfully implements all of these recommendations; there will be many positive consequences for the city for years to come.

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